

County working to update land preservation 'blueprint'

By KEVIN LECHISKI
Staff Writer

WHITE TWP. — The Warren County Planning Board is asking the Freeholders to approve an updated "blueprint" for maximizing public open space preservation efforts countywide.

The proposed 2008 Warren County Open Space Plan — which the planning board is hoping to have ready in time to hold a tentatively scheduled June 30 public hearing — calls for the hiring of an open space coordinator within the Department of Land Preservation.

According to the proposed open space plan, which is updating the previously adopted 1999 plan, the coordinator's responsibilities would be to "coordinate and supervise maintenance, development, and other activities of county, private and non-profit groups on county lands. The coordinator could facilitate and coordinate these groups and others that may be interested in county lands in the future."

The position would also be responsible for various other functions, including completing required yearly inspections of preserved farm properties.

The proposed open space plan goes in-depth in priori-

tizing lands for acquisition by categorizing them in multiple tiers. Among the areas prioritized for acquisition are properties in and around "tier one greenways" that include the Morris Canal, Warren Trail, Ridge & Valley Trail and Jenny Jump-Paulinskill Trail Connection. The proposed plan calls for the establishment a five-year acquisition program "to guide the Department of Land Preservation and Board of Recreation Commissioners in the selection of properties and the allocation of financial and staff resources."

The planning board, in the proposed open space plan, asks the freeholders to "approve of the plan and charge the Department of Land Preservation, Board of Recreation Commissioners, Planning Board, Morris Canal Committee and Planning Department with the directive to carry it out."

Using what the planning board refers to as a "balanced land use method" in determining land preservation needs, it is estimated there should be about 47,000 acres of public open space in the county. Currently, more than 44,000 acres have been acquired for open space, about three-quarters of which are owned by federal and state agen-

cies.

"The analysis shows the central and southern regions (of the county) are lacking in the amount of preserved public open space while the northern region has a surplus," it is stated in the executive summary of the proposed 2008 open space plan. "The balanced land use method calculations reveal that there should be 9,790 acres of open space in county ownership, while the county owns 1,624 acres currently. It is noted that while there may be an overabundance of state and federal lands in one region, it should not preclude the county from acquiring additional lands in that particular region."

The proposed open space plan discusses specific preservation projects, including "special attention" to properties containing or adjacent to the historic Morris Canal. The plan backs efforts to have the Morris Canal and Musconetcong River designated as a National Heritage Corridor by Congress to further protect and promote the corridor's natural, cultural, historic and recreational resources.

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County wants input on open space

PLANNING BOARD'S PROPOSAL would add position of coordinator and rank potential land buys.

BY SARA K. SATULLO
The Express-Times

Warren County is looking for public feedback on an updated open space plan that calls for hiring an open space coordinator and ranking pos-

sible land acquisitions.

The county planning board met Monday night and invited local officials and boards to offer comment. County planner David Dech said a handful of people turned out and the plan

is now available online for comment until May 6.

The comments will be reviewed by the planning board's open space sub-committee and the goal is to have any changes finalized by the board's May 19 meeting, he said. A public hearing on the plan is tentatively scheduled

for June 30.

Under the proposed updates to the 1999 plan, the county would aggressively pursue land to add to the Morris Canal and the Warren Trail, known as tier-one properties.

"That's where the county

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will be more proactive," Dech said.

If properties categorized as tier-two came up for sale, the county would buy them, but it won't necessarily be making unsolicited offers, he said.

The plan suggests a county

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open space plan can be
found at: co.warren.nj.us.

open space coordinator be hired to help streamline the system. A coordinator would integrate and supervise the maintenance of county land, development and the activi-

ties of other groups. A coordinator could facilitate and try to attract more groups to manage lands like the Nature Conservancy at White Lake in Hardwick Township.

The new position could help all three of the county's open space trust fund programs by conducting the required annual farm inspection, inspecting and patrolling open space sites and issuing hunting permits.