

*Minutes of:
Hudson County Open Space Advisory Board
November 15, 2004
Lincoln Park Administration Building*

Attendees:

Brian Buckley
Neil Caroll
Sarah Crew
Tom DeGise
Jacob DeLemos
Javier Inclan

Jim Kennelly
Janet Larwa
Joe Liccardo
Stephen Marks
Thomas McCann
Eva Mehos

Bobbie Morgan
Diane Morgan
Greg Remaud
Henry Sanchez
Mariano Vega

The meeting began at 11:20 a.m. with a welcome by Hudson County Executive Thomas DeGise. Mr. DeGise stated that the meeting couldn't start officially till everyone was sworn in by Javier Inclan who was on his way. The County Executive expressed his thanks to the group serving on the commission stating how important the commission is to him personally and to the County, and to the people of Hudson County. He appointed a lot of people to boards on different County levels and this one along with the Hudson County Improvement Authority is probably the one that is closest to him, the one that's most important, and the one that he wants to identify with his administration.

Mr. DeGise said that when he was running for election and then re-election that he told people he would establish this. It could only have been established through a vote or referendum of the people. All the towns approved that referendum. "We made a pledge that if people would do that and pay a little bit more money in their taxes they'd get more recreational opportunities. We've been collecting it now over the last half of year that we would make a pledge that we would double the size of Open Space and Parks in Hudson County over a period of 10 years. The people bought that promise and they gave us the vote and now this commission is going to be charged with doing that. I think that in many ways what you'll be asked to do and what you'll be doing here will be fun, this will be something that will put smiles on peoples faces, there will be a new parks, new Open Space, maybe even a golf course, maybe tennis courts, maybe ball fields around here, maybe green ways, trail ways that Director Vega is big on and wild life sanctuaries. They'll be partnering with towns that you live in and some of the other towns and trying to help them do this."

The County Executive said that he found out when he came to the county government that one of the things that the County does right is take care of the parks. "We take care of them really well, and I think the nicest parks in the county are the County Parks. This will give us the chance to do what we do well a little bit more of, it's going to be a great board. We have some great ideas, you were picked because you were recommended, you represent a certain constituency."

Mr. DeGise explained the qualifications of board members: historical preservation, recreation, business, etc. He wished the board luck. "I want you to know how important it is to me, how committed I am to making this board work, and that at the end of the day I think that each year we'll be able to point to something that we'll very proud of, something that long after I'm gone and you're gone off this commission that we'll be able to point to something and say 'I helped do

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that, I helped build that park.” He wished everyone luck and said that if he can do anything to make their lives a little bit easier, then call.

The County Executive said he created the Division of Planning and put Stephen in charge of it not just for trust not for that purpose alone but principally for the purpose of making sure that we had a capable person in charge of helping the board.

Director Mariano Vega spoke about the revolution that we’re embarking upon of doubling park space in 10 years. The last county park that was built was Laurel Hill and the one before that was 75 years earlier, so we’re entering a revolution of acquiring major improvements to our parks and start preservation in a short period of time if you consider the History of Hudson County. “I was walking in this wonderful building which was built to be new and I came across this sign that said ‘Vision is not seeing things as they are but seeing them as they will be.’ That’s what you’re embarking upon, seeing the possibilities that can exist in Hudson County. Our Open Space Plan which you need to approve is essentially to acquire open space, to make capital improvements, and to preserve historic sites. Right now the County is in the process of looking at the PJP landfill. That was a the landfill that was smoking years ago causing pollution in our area, and we can get to the point to acquire an additional 50 to 80 acres of land on the westside of Jersey City budding the Hackensack River.”

Mariano Vega spoke about the East Coast Greenway, 80% of this trail is off road from Florida to Maine. “They just had their national conference here, Stephen Marks led a discussion of how we can make this happen. The East Coast Green Way goes through two County Parks they designated a half a mile of Jersey City, Hudson River Waterfront that’s going to be part of this trail. We’re in discussion now of seeing how we might make pieces happen without the Open Space. The Bayonne bike trail from Bayonne to Danforth Ave. begins closer to Society Hill and makes that walkway alive. There’s a concept of the Hackensack River Green Way of how we can get from Bayonne to Secaucus through a trail that’s to be designed, developed and ultimately will be in the process of acquisition. As the Hudson River Green Way gets done, the Hackensack and Passaic River Greenways come into focus.”

Mr. Vega stated that the County leases a piece of Lincoln Park West. “There’s discussions going on now of how we can get out of the lease and look at a golf/soccer conversion. There’s unused fields that are out there that we can treat, act of recreation so if we do that step maybe the open space can find a way to make major improvements, together with green acres. The County’s embarking upon few million dollar improvements to all of our tennis players, make them international standards, create a center court and we’ll have a thousand people of interest in this. We have a lot of coverage on tv about what we’re doing here in Hudson County, so the revolution is on and your part of that revolution.”

Director Vega said historic preservation is a major issue and the Brennan Court House, the jewel of Hudson County, has already obtained 3/4 of a million dollar grant to do historic preservation for lights, brass chandeliers, the one’s that are missing, bring them up to code. The County’s

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going to match it with a total of \$1.5 million dollars to make this revolution happen as well. “Right now Tom DeGise has gone a step further, he will be establishing and executive order shortly dedicating 1% of all capital construction dollars that are County funded toward parks are in the parks are in building the grounds to make what we do even better. So we’re in the beginnings of this revolution, you’re a part of it. We know you’ll serve us well, because of the diverse interest that you represent and I am very confident that the leadership we have of this mission and the leadership of Stephen Marks. One of our principal planners in the county, who created from an office of planning to a division of planning, it’s much higher in the higharchy of the government of services, allowing him and his staff to do what they need to do, but we can’t do it alone. Someone in America invented volunteerism and God bless who ever invented it because it’s a very empowering process that you bring to us and you bring back to your communities and you make these things happen. So I want to thank you for agreeing to serve. We’ll be at this for a long, long time and hopefully your fingerprints will be seen on major improvements in Hudson County.”

Stephen Marks said that until everyone was sworn that he recommended skipping ahead in the program. “Everybody should have a copy of the agenda and also on the side table there are copies of the policies and procedure program statement for the open space trust fund and also a copy of the open draft, open space plan. If I can just briefly describe what’s in each, the board of Chosen Freeholders along with the County Executive adopted the policy and procedure program statement for the Hudson County Open Space Trust Fund on May 13, 2004. It is through the program statement that the open space advisory committee was created. We would go over all the features, but essentially this establishes and creates the trust fund itself of which the county adopted a 1 cent tax per 100 dollars of equalized valuation. It also establishes the kinds of projects which are eligible for funding. So, in your spare time look at it. It’s going to take some time to actually digest all this information, but this is probably the first and foremost, most important document as a board member to take a look at. This is County policy. This is what is going to govern the future of this Advisory Board and it’s basically up to the Advisory Board to implement this program statement.”

Mr. Marks stated that the second item is the Open Space plan. “The county had hired the firm of Heyer Gruel and Associates which is a planning firm out of New Brunswick. They had prepared our master plan, our strategic plan for the state planning commission and the latest thing that Heyer and Gruel prepared was the Open Space plan which is in draft format. Let me just clarify one thing, the advisory board is just that, an advisory board. The Advisory Board will make applications available to the County Parks department, Municipal Parks and Recreation Departments, historic preservation groups, non-profits and other eligible organizations for funding. The Advisory Board goes through all the applications basically scores and ranks the applications and then makes a recommendation to the County Executive and the Freeholder Board which projects on an annual basis should be funded. So this committee has advisory capacity that’s not binding. The Freeholders and the County Executive could accept it or they could reject it. But the County Executive and the Freeholder Board are putting their faith and trust in you to act judiciously and diligently.”

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Stephen Marks explained that the recommendations should be consistent with the Open Space Plan. The plan was put into a draft format but has not been formally introduced. It would have to be depending upon the recommendation of the committee adopted and sent to the planning board and Freeholder Board with a 30 day, 60 day, 90 day, or even 120 day public comment process, whatever you feel comfortable with. It is a thick document, it will take some time going over, but at the same time the municipalities are going to be knocking on our door saying when will the money become available. So it's just a balancing act. In your off time after you have gone through the program statement I would recommend that you take a look at the Open Space plan because this should be the real document that drives, this establishes the parameters and this is actually the plan that applications should be consistent with. So, those are the two things that I would ask everyone to review before the next meeting. It could be adopted or supported by this committee and then passed on to the County Planning Board and the County Freeholder Board for official enactment."

Paul Gleitz stated that the draft was completed in April it was prior to adoption of the program statement. The document is designed to meet the requirements of the state Green Acres, Open Space Program, that would enable the county to partner up with the State. "As you go through the contents it has several key elements and it tries to come up with an implementation program for moving forward, so there's an introduction which is like an Executive Summary, a statement of the plans main findings. The introduction goes on to describe what is open space, how do we think about open space, what are the positive benefits of open space. Then there's a vision statement which is kind of like a look you took to the future as to what parks and recreations will look like in Hudson County in twenty to thirty years. Then there is a series of goals and objectives which I hope the committee will look out closely and make sure that we are all in agreement that these are in fact the goals and objectives of the plan. It goes into the goals that are kind of broad base talking mostly about quality of life and completion and meeting certain acquisition goals and then the objectives go into further detail as they are broken down into different types, quality of life, recreation, green spaces, water front walkways, acquisition, critical resources, watersheds."

Mr. Gleitz said the plan goes on to summarize the findings of the public participation citizen survey which drives along with state open space and recreation plan. "The needs, what do we have? what do we need? what do the citizens say? and what is important to them? Then there is a detail statement of the relationship to other plans that are affective of state, local, county and federal plans that affect the area and what the different plans are for Open Space. How they all relate back to our plan. Then there's the main body of the report and the center is existing Open Space Resources, we go through the recreation Open Space inventory, which is maintained by the State to determine what is the open space inventory for each town, city and the county itself."

Paul Gleitz said the plan also has some photos of the County Parks themselves. "We go town by town and look at parks and their size. Then there is a second section that talks about recreation facilities which many of you might recognize from the Open Space handout, the map has a listing of the parks with recreational menu. Then there is a section concerning natural resources and

existing Open Space recreation infrastructure. Then our natural resources, what are other areas that might want to be included in open space protection. It looks at wetlands, flooded main areas, natural species habitat, the waterways. We just had a discussion on the water quality of the waterways. There's a pretty comprehensive listing of the historical resources. Then we go into the needs assessment: one of them is just a gross acreage of need. We've already heard members of the county administration talk about their goal of doubling those acres. Then we go into bi-recreation types, go through the survey and through the numbers, what kind of facility not acres but what types of facilities the public likes to see such as, pools, golf courses, gardens, those types of things. Then we go through and we dissected what the citizen survey showed to be important. We look at current programs that we can build upon. So we talked about the waterfront walkway, the East Coast Greenway, the Liberty Watergap trail."

Mr. Gleitz described the next section. "One thing I think the commission should think about is that the program statement has a weighted methodology to weigh applications into your program funding. The feeling of the draft open space plan is that any vacant land right now should be considered potential. In fact to meet Green Acres requirements we need to have a listing of such, and different jurisdictions look at that requirement of Green Acres for a listing of parcels, two different ways. They are either very inclusive meaning they include every parcel that's imaginable and they probably have parcel as a potential and other ones look at that very narrow and they only submit 10-15 high priority acquisitions that they are going to focus on so if the board feels it's important so we can include the entire vacant land survey as potential and allow the towns different non profit groups to identify which vacant lands they think are important to their local communities, and they'll come before you folks for a approval or other partnership opportunities to move forward."

Mr. Gleitz focused on the constraints. "We talk about land cost, and we just did a thumb nail sketch looking at properties in the area that were about an acre, you can see the disparity in the value of an acre through out the different towns. No matter what it's going to be pretty expensive so it's important for the board to utilize their program statement. Now we look at brownfields as both an opportunity and a constraint and so we included that a lot of great open space can be achieved through remediating brownfields we've included sources both local and national funding sources for remediation of brownfields and a map showing all the opportunities out there for brownfields in the area. Then we have an implementation plan, an action plan which will drive this program, which I hope the group will look at very closely to make sure that there in an agreement with it."

Mr. Gleitz spoke about open space acquisitions. "There was a list of 15 properties that we're going to short-list it as key priorities, combine that with a vacant land survey and any other property that the board feels are important on the list and that would be your first draft of your acquisition priorities that you would share with state and with all the other counties and municipalities so they know what the city goals for open space are. We strongly recommend coordination, working with the town, the state, federal governments, with non profits. It's better to bring 3-4 partners to the table to really effectively protect and share resources and that's how

you're going to achieve success.”

Mr. Gleitz talked about an implementation table. “It breaks down each of the goals, what has to be done to achieve those goals, who should be in charge of moving forward with it and what is a basic rough scale time line. We haven't put days and weeks to it but we thought talked about in terms of 6-18 months 18-3 years 3-5 years what are the time lines we should be moving forward with. So that's the extent, then at the very end there's implementation tools which is basically a listing of funding sources out there so where else can this committee go besides your own funds where are the other partners out there, how can we identify other funding sources to partner with for achieving your vision of doubling your acres for ten years.”

II. Swearing-In of Commissioners by County Clerk Javier Inclan

Hudson County Clerk Javier Inclan swore in seven commissioners individually: Bobbie Morgan, Jacob DeLemos, Henry Sanchez, Sarah Crew, Joseph Liccardo, Thomas McCann, and Stephen Marks.

Brian Buckley from Hudson County Dept. Of Finance gave an update on finances of the Open Space Trust Fund.

The committee discussed who would be the best qualified for the position of chair and vice chair. The floor was opened the for recommendations and nominations.

Tom McCann recommended Steve Marks for chairman. Mr. Marks declined. He recommended it to be a public member, a private citizen. There are four county employees, including himself, Tom McCann, Bill LaRosa, and Jacob DeLemos. He explained that the chair should set the tone for the Board and the meetings. The chair should be a third party who could objectively bring recommendations to the Freeholder Board without being thought of as somehow biased.

The committee members described themselves and their backgrounds. Sarah Crew of Weehawken, a recent retiree, was willing to take the chairmanship only if she had the strong support of the county staff and fellow board members. She was elected unanimously. Next, Bobbie Morgan agreed to serve as vice-chair under the same conditions. He was elected as vice-chairman.

The committee agreed that it should meet monthly beginning in January after the holidays. The last Wednesday of each month at 11:00 am was preferred by all members. The next meeting was established for Wednesday January 26, 2005 in the Lincoln Park Administration Building.

The meeting adjourned at 12:50 p.m.