

SPECIAL MEETING READINGTON TOWNSHIP COMMITTEE

AUGUST 18, 2009

Mayor Allen *called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.* announcing that all laws governing Open Public Meetings Act have been met and that this meeting has been duly advertised.

PRESENT: Mayor J. Allen, Mr. F. Gatti, Mrs. B. Muir, Mr. G. Shamey

ABSENT: Mr. T. Auriemma

ALSO PRESENT: Administrator Mekovetz

Mayor Allen led those present in the *Salute to the Flag*.

OLD BUSINESS

1. ***Amendment to Resolution to Place Question on November Ballot – Open Space Tax Levy***

The following resolution was offered for consideration:

#R-2009-101

***TOWNSHIP OF READINGTON
RESOLUTION TO AMEND RESOLUTION #R-2009-100***

WHEREAS, the Township of Readington (hereinafter “Township”), in 1995, upon approval of the voters of the Township, instituted a conservation tax in the amount of \$.02/\$100 for the purpose of creating an Open Space Trust Fund to preserve “Greenways and Open Space in the Township including fee simple acquisitions and conservation easements to meet certain goals as stated in the Township’s Master Plan, specifically: to conserve and preserve natural areas, critical environmental features, farmland, and land to be used for recreational purposes within the Township; and

WHEREAS, in 1997, the State of New Jersey adopted legislation authorizing municipalities in New Jersey to establish, upon referendum and voter approval, an open space tax to create a “Municipal Open Space, Recreation and Farmland Historic Preservation Trust Fund”, as one of the various means by which a municipality could raise funds for open space, conservation, recreation, farmland and historic preservation purposes; and

WHEREAS, the aforementioned legislation, found at N.J.S.A. 40:12-15.7, et seq., supplanted all previous funds created by municipalities for such purposes and further mandated that the voters of the original municipal proposition were deemed to have approved any prior municipal conservation tax for any or all of the same purpose outlined in the State’s legislation; and

WHEREAS, N.J.S.A. 40:12-15.7 provides that the governing body of a municipality may submit a proposition to the voters of the municipality amending or supplementing a referendum previously submitted, approved or implemented with respect to the open space tax and resulting trust fund that either : 1) changes the amount or rate of the annual levy; or 2) adds or removes the purpose for which the levy may be expended, and further provides that, if the voters approve the proposition that the governing body shall implement it in the same manner as set forth in the Act for implementation of the original proposition; and

WHEREAS, the initial \$.02/\$100 tax rate for the open space has remained the same for the past fifteen years, yet the prices for real estate have continued to escalate since that time and, only recently, have begun to decrease; and

WHEREAS, in the past other Hunterdon County Townships have increased their rates to keep up with inflation, an increase from \$.02/\$100 to \$.04/\$100 will make Readington Township’s Open Space tax rate more consistent with other Hunterdon County Township’s Open Space tax rates, and

WHEREAS, increasing the Open Space tax for the continued preservation of farmland and open space would allow the Township to take advantage of the current economic downturn by preserving properties that would not otherwise be available and preserve properties at a lower cost; and

Resolution #R-2009-101 cont'd:

WHEREAS, increasing the Open Space tax would allow the Township to take advantage of funding opportunities for land preservation available through federal, State and County government programs, which require local matching funds, and

WHEREAS, increasing the Open Space tax would help Readington Township meet its farmland preservation and open space goals as described in the Township's Master Plan, including preservation of land for continued agricultural use and for natural resources protection, including water resources, native species habitat and ecologically sensitive areas and to further the goal of preserving the Township's rural character by protecting the lands of scenic, historic and cultural value.

NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED by the Township Committee of the Township of Readington as follows:

1. To determine whether or not there is public support for increasing the conservation tax by \$.02/\$100 to supplement and sustain the previously instituted Open Space/Conservation Trust Fund, the following questions shall be placed on the November 3, 2009 election ballot as a binding referendum:

Do you support a two-cent increase in the Open Space Tax levy, from \$.02 to \$.04/\$100, in order to supplement the Open Space Trust Fund for the purpose of purchasing land within Readington Township for open space, farmland, and conservation purposes, including the conservation of drinking water resources?

Interpretive Statement:

If this question is approved, the Township of Readington may increase the annual open space trust fund levy by two cents per one hundred dollars of assessed valuation and the average house assessed at \$400,000 would pay an additional \$80.00 per year in property taxes. An increase would allow the Township to take advantage of current land preservation opportunities as well as State and County matching funds for preservation in order to protect the Township's rural character, including its drinking water resources and remaining green spaces. The money raised shall be deposited into the Township's "Open Space Trust Fund" and be used exclusively for acquiring and preserving lands for open space, farmland and conservation purposes; and for payment of debit service on same.

2. The Township Administrator/Clerk is hereby directed to forward a certified copy of this resolution to Mary Melfi, County Clerk, prior to August 21, 2009 for inclusion on the ballot.

A MOTION was made by Mr. Gatti to adopt this amended resolution, seconded by Mr. Shamey and on Roll Call vote the following was recorded:

Mr. Gatti - Aye
Mrs. Muir - Aye
Mr. Shamey - Aye
Mayor Allen - Aye

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

There were none.

COMMENTS FROM THE GOVERNING BODY

There were none.

As there was no further business, a motion was made by Mr. Shamey at 7:50 p.m., seconded by Mrs. Muir with a vote of ayes all, nays none recorded.

Respectfully Submitted:

Vita Mekovetz, RMC/MMC/RPPO
Administrator/Municipal Clerk