

MEDFORD TOWNSHIP PLANNING BOARD MEETING
October 27, 2021 --7:00 pm
Public Safety Building, 91 Union St. & Zoom On-Line Conference

Chairman Hartwig called the Planning Board Meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. and read the Statement of Conformance with the Open Public Meetings Act and the Municipal Land Use Law.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Present:	Bielec, Czekay, Herman, Kornick, Ross, Watson, Hartwig
Absent:	Braatz, Juliano, Devlin, Perks
Professional Staff:	Attorney Anthony Drollas, Engineer Christopher Noll, Planner Michelle Taylor, Secretary Kimberly Moore, Recording Secretary Beth Portocalis

MINUTES:

September 22, 2021 Regular Meeting Minutes:

Mayor Watson made a motion to adopt the minutes. Councilman Czekay seconded the motion. Ms. Bielec and Mr. Ross abstained. A voice vote of all other Board members in favor of adoption was unanimous.

CORRESPONDENCE: None

REPORTS: Chairman Hartwig reported that insufficient escrow balances over 6 months will continue to be listed on the monthly agenda. He acknowledged that there are the same four escrow balances, which may never be collected. This is unfair to the professionals who are not compensated for services rendered, but thanked Mrs. Moore for her continued efforts to collect the arrears.

MEMORIALIZATIONS: None

PUBLIC HEARING – RECREATION & OPEN SPACE ELEMENT TO THE MASTER PLAN

Mr. Hartwig opened the hearing by introducing Michelle Taylor, the Township Planner.

Mrs. Taylor started her comments by explaining that under the NJ Municipal Land Use Laws (MLUL), every municipality is required to have a Master Plan. The required elements of that plan are a Land Use Plan and a Housing Element Plan. A Recreation & Open Space Plan is not required, except for municipalities that participate in the NJDEP Green Acres Program. Medford is in the Planning Incentive Grant Program, so the Township must adopt a new Open Space & Recreation Plan every ten (10) years.

Medford first adopted a Recreation & Open Space element of the Master Plan in 1966. A second plan was adopted in 1974, and the most recent plan was adopted in 1994.

This plan guides open space preservation and development for both active recreation (such as Hartford Crossing Park with ballfields and multi-purpose fields) and passive recreation. (such as Freedom Park with trails, community gardens, fishing & paddling opportunities, and picnic areas)

This plan also includes a Recreation & Open Space Inventory (ROSI), a listing of all dedicated open space and recreation areas, which are deed restricted by Green Acres so as to remain as open space in perpetuity. The plan also includes a community needs section, based on resident input and standards as established by the National Recreation & Park Association. For example, a community with Medford's population would need to have one tennis court for every 5,000 residents. The overall goal of the Plan is to provide for and improve the quality of life to which the residents of Medford have expressed their preferences and priorities.

The process for this proposed Master Plan update began in October of 2019 with two public meetings. In December of 2019, a draft of this plan was submitted to Green Acres, who gave it excellent reviews. This was due in part to Medford's success in open space (and farmland) preservation since the adoption of the 1994 plan and its goals which were realized through the efforts of the Township Council and staff. These goals included the consolidation and development of centrally located recreational facilities, and the development of several major parks in the Township, including Bob Bende Park, Bob Meyer Park, Hartford Crossing Park, Freedom Park, and most recently Cow Pointe.

Mrs. Taylor specifically referenced tables within the draft Plan, and drew the Board's attention to the Table that quantified all of the dedicated open space areas in Medford, which total over 25,000 acres. This equals close to 45% of Medford land areas being preserved either through open space preservation, dedicated wetlands and buffers, and water bodies.

Mrs. Taylor continued that the required Land Development regulations have been in place since 1992, and there is no need to update since they are still consistent with the Pinelands Commission requirements. The Land Development regulations have guided residential development since that time, and Medford has been successful in open space preservation by allowing for clustered development, whereby dwellings can be built on smaller sized lots in return for much larger areas being dedicated as open space within the subdivision. The Township's Land Development regulations also require mandatory set asides for recreation areas; or "in lieu of" payments into a Recreation Trust fund which can only be used for acquisition or development of recreation areas.

During the 2019 public meetings, residents expressed interest in pickleball courts, in a fenced-in dog run area within the Freedom Park Dog Park, and walking and bicycling access and connectivity. Based upon these meetings, the Township Council and administration have already constructed the fenced in dog run, and funded the construction of new pickleball courts in Freedom Park, which are currently in design and are expected to be built in 2022.

Mrs. Taylor had three display maps, and described each; one being the Green Acres ROSI map, one being the natural resources map, and one being the bikeway and pedestrian map from the 1994 Master Plan which was updated last in 2002. Being this is the last expressed priority goal in the plan, Mrs. Taylor pointed out numerous improvements made, including federally and state granted bike paths and lanes along Dixontown Road, Himmelein Road, Taunton Boulevard and in Cow Pointe.

Mr. Noll added that Medford has applied for numerous grants for biking and pedestrian access over the past 20 years; including a bridge over Birchwood Lake parallel to Jackson Road, in Medford Village, along Church & Hartford Roads, and most recently a Safe Routes to School grant also in the Village to facilitate access to Allen Haines & Memorial Middle Schools. It was noted by both Mrs. Taylor and Mr. Noll that other connectivity projects may not be feasible due to the presence of wetlands (Hartford Road north of Route 70) or other Pinelands Commission restrictions. (requirements for drainage swales along Branin Road)

Board members asked several questions, mainly about the bike and pedestrian plan. Several neighborhood trails were mentioned, but Mrs. Taylor noted the challenges to include these in the updated plan since they are not official trails as approved on the site plan by the Planning Board.

Chairman Hartwig then opened the hearing to the public.

PUBLIC:

Jonathan Reuther: 26 Bretshire Court. He stated that there was insufficient public notice, but he did prepare written comments. He stated he has been working with the Township's Environmental Affairs Advisory Committee (EAAC) to create more biking and pedestrian opportunities. As such, he supports the goals and the conservation plan goal to reduce vehicular use. But he does not believe this draft plan is strong enough on connectivity, especially in identifying regional connection opportunities. He also asked why the positive elements of the 2002 Bike Network Plan are not in this plan.

Kevin Sparkman: 128 Bracken Road. He wanted to first thank the staff, the Board and Board professionals for all their work on the draft plan. He too has been involved in the EAAC meetings. He questioned why the Township targeted the Medford Village County Club on the ROSI targeted acquisition list. He also asked if the Township involved the County Ag Board in the Cow Pointe acquisition. He questioned what the future plans were for the other parcel across the street from Cow Pointe—was it going to be farmland. He also wanted to know why the Trollinger Farm was not on the targeted preservation list.

Mr. Sparkman also noted the Tamarac Lakes are keyed in green on the map; rather than blue as water bodies.

He continued by expressing his hope that the EAAC will continue to work towards a "Complete Streets" and bike plan that will continue to evolve, and will not be written in stone.

He continued by stating there are inconsistencies in the messaging—it was stated that due to wetlands Hartford Road north of Route 70 cannot be expanded to add a bike lane, yet bike lanes have been added to other wetlands areas in the Pinelands. He recommended that Jennings Road be incorporated into any plan for the north side of the Township.

Mr. Sparkman concluded his remarks that the regional plans of the Cross County Connection and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission should be included; and that the plan should include what public access is afforded to residents at YMCA Camp of the Pines (formerly Camp Ockanickon) as the required public access has been severely reduced by the Camp since the onset of the COVID pandemic and the addition of the Sudbury School.

Sean Kilpatrick-11 Trimble Street: Mr. Kilpatrick concurred with the comments of the other two members of the public. He asked if the display maps would be available online, to which Mrs. Taylor responded yes. He also suggested a crosswalk at Mill Street and Trimble Street to facilitate pedestrian and bike access to Bunning Field, Medford Park and Freedom Park. He also asked if the Township could identify more lands for preservation. He also asked about maintenance of the parks and open space areas, as this is not addressed in the Plan or the Board's discussion. He suggested offering sponsorship opportunities to raise funds to offset the costs to taxpayers.

Deborah Evans – 21 Heron Court: Ms. Evans also thanked those involved in the preparation of the draft Plan for their efforts on this project. She is a member of the EAAC and is very supportive of the Township's efforts on open space preservation and recreation development, including bicycling and pedestrian facilities.

Mayor Watson made a motion to close the public portion. Councilman Czekay seconded the motion.

In response to the public comments; the Board members and professionals offered the following rebuttals:

Chairman Hartwig noted that the Public Hearing was publicized in the newspaper, on the Township Bulletin Board as required, plus posted to the Township's website and Facebook pages. He also reiterated that the Master Plan is the Township Council's vision for the municipality, and the Council ensures residents have ample opportunities to offer commentary.

Mr. Noll noted that a crosswalk across Mill Street at Trimble Street is included in the Safe Routes to School grant application.

Mrs. Taylor stated that this Master Plan element is a vision plan with goals and objectives consistent with Green Acres requirements. She stated emphatically that it is not a circulation plan. The 2002 Bike Network Plan was not a Master Plan element however, the bikeway and pedestrian plans from 1994 and 2001 will be updated further as delineated as one of the goals in the draft Master Plan.

For instance, she mentioned in the long-range bikeway plan, developed in collaboration with Burlington County officials and Resource Conservation staff include the dedication of the Pennsylvania Railroad abandoned line as a "Rail to Trail" to connect the existing portion in Medford Leas through Medford headed north into Lumberton, Mount Holly and terminating at the Delaware River. While this is in the bikeway plan, it does not need to be specified in the Master Plan element.

Mrs. Taylor also mentioned that the Township Council has a longstanding agreement in place with the Medford Youth Athletic Association (MYAA) for them to maintain the parks and athletic fields they utilize. In addition, the Township has for many years collaborated with the Medford Public Schools to share and cross utilize both indoor and outdoor facilities.

Mr. Noll commented that the parcel across from Cow Pointe and behind Cornerstone Bank will be dedicated to the Township as open space and placed on the ROSI. Farming of open space is permitted under Green Acres rules, and also saves the Township money by relieving the Township's maintenance obligations, which are instead transferred to the farmer under a lease agreement.

In regards to Jennings Road, Mr. Noll stated there is barely enough road width for two cars to pass. Since the farm is preserved under the NJ & County Farmland Preservation Program, there is no opportunity to take a portion of the right-of-way to widen the road for a bike lane or sidewalks. That being said, the closed portion of Jennings Road is heavily used by walkers and bikers already.

Both Mr. Noll and Mrs. Taylor acknowledged that the Medford Village County Club was added to targeted acquisition list over 25 years ago; which would have allowed the Township to use Green Acres funds to preserve it should the Club have wanted to sell it for a new housing development. The site also contains multiple recreational facilities, including golf and tennis courts.

In regards to the Trollinger farm, the Township and the County have attempted to add it to the ROSI or as preserved farmland, but the owners for over 20 years have resisted. The State Green Acres program also attempted to purchase the property to add to the Dr. Still historic & State Park property, but the owners declined that offer as well.

Board members asked several questions about the Green Acres Program and the ROSI, and Mrs. Taylor explained the relationship of the ROSI to the Open Space & Recreation Master Plan.

Chairman Hartwig called for a brief recess from 8:30-8:45 pm. When the meeting resumed, Mrs. Taylor concluded her comments that a couple of minor corrections to the Plan and maps are required, but are not substantive and do not affect the goals and intent of the draft Plan document. Should the Board approve the Plan this evening; a Resolution of Memorialization will be on the November meeting Agenda and the final draft of the Plan and maps will be ready to be transmitted to Council; who will vote to concur with the Plan element.

Mayor Watson made a motion to approve the Recreation and Open Space Master Plan element. Mr. Ross seconded the motion.

Recorded Vote:

Ayes: Bielec, Czekay, Herman, Kornick, Ross, Watson, Hartwig
Nays: None
Abstentions: None
Motion carried: 7 - 0 - 0

GENERAL PUBLIC: None present or on Zoom

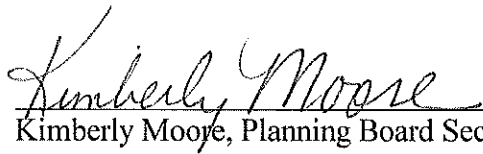
Councilman Czekay made a motion to close the public portion of the meeting; Mayor Watson seconded. The voice vote was unanimous in favor.

ADJOURNMENT:

Councilman Czekay made a motion to adjourn the October 28, 2021 Planning Board Meeting at 8:44 pm. Mayor Watson seconded. A unanimous voice vote in favor carried the motion.



Beth Portocalis, Recording Secretary



Kimberly Moore, Planning Board Secretary