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## County of Sussex

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### SUSSEX COUNTY OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE

#### MINUTES

February 26, 2026

The meeting was called to order at 7:32p.m. by Chairperson Lisa Chammings. The meeting is being held remotely in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act (PL Chapter 231). Proper notice has been sent to the local newspapers, County website and posted on the bulletin board at the County Administrative Center, 1 Spring Street Newton, New Jersey 07860.

#### **ROLL CALL:**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Lisa Chammings, Chair  
R. Michael Dolan, Vice Chair  
Bill DeBoer  
Stephen Skellenger  
Marie Springer

**STAFF PRESENT:**

Joel Penkala, Ag. Resource Specialist  
Corey Minnick, Recording Secretary

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Alan Henderson, Commissioner Liaison to the OSC

#### **MINUTES:**

A motion was made by Marie Springer to approve the Minutes of December 18, 2025 as presented. The motion was seconded by Mike Dolan. A roll-call vote was taken. Results were as follow: Lisa Chammings-Yes; Mike Dolan-Yes; Bill DeBoer-Yes; and Marie Springer-Yes. Motion carried.

#### **CORRESPONDENCE:**

A. Potential Acquisition - Franklin Borough

Joel Penkala briefed the OSC members on a potential acquisition in Franklin Borough. He noted that he had spoken to OSC counsel and Autumn Sylvester regarding this potential acquisition. Planning received a request with limited detail from the New Jersey Conservation Foundation. They came to Sussex County because the County participates in the New Jersey Appalachians Coalition and they were put in touch or had been contacted by a realtor. The County received email correspondence as well as some aerial photos of the piece of property. He described the

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property as a 19-acre parcel, almost entirely wetlands and containing a C1 stream, it is shaped like a triangle coming into Franklin Borough from the NJ Route 94 side. Mr. Penkala stated that it is landlocked and on the southeast side there is an active railway as well as an inactive railway, so it is bordered on the east side by two rail lines. There are other private properties around it, and there is a very small point which touches the road to the north. We are bringing this request to the attention of the OSC to see if there is any interest in pursuing this acquisition and to determine if we should send this request along to the BCC. Mr. Penkala added that historically the County has not held land for the sole purpose of OS.

Chairperson Chamblings asked if there were any thoughts on this.

Stephen Skellenger preferred to not comment on this since it is in Franklin.

Mike Dolan stated that this is the area around Susquehanna Avenue underneath the Littell Bridge and is a wet piece of property. Anytime there are railroads there could be environmental concerns and the costs to the County in terms of doing environmental assessments in addition to appraisals. Mr. Dolan does not see any public use for this property at all. He stated some of the history of the site and why it has not been developed to this point. He gave his opinion that somebody probably bought this as distressed property at a tax sale auction and didn't know what they were buying and now wants to get rid of it.

Mr. Penkala confirmed that it was purchased at tax sale from Franklin and was owned by a realty company.

Marie Springer stated that she will look at it and see if the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and see if they will take it.

### **MOTION**

A motion was made by Mike Dolan to not to pursue the Potential Acquisition in Franklin Borough and to send a letter back to the owner that the Sussex County Open Space Committee does not have any interest in this property. The motion was seconded by Marie Springer. A roll-call vote was taken. Results were as follow: Lisa Chamblings-Yes; Mike Dolan-Yes; Bill DeBoer-Yes; Stephen Skellenger-Abstain; and Marie Springer-Yes. All were in favor, with an abstention from Stephen Skellenger. Motion carried.

### **B. Cranberry Lake Foot Bridge Update**

Mr. Penkala updated the OSC members on the Cranberry Lake Foot Bridge. He stated that this came before the OSC in 2024, seeking support of the restoration of the Cranberry Lake Footbridge. It is a historic landmark that connects across Cranberry Lake, portions of the rail trail run are adjacent. They provided an update, they received a transportation grant to do a feasibility study of restoration of the footbridge. In speaking with Mike Francois they determined that the footings and the metal structure of the bridge are reasonable and salvageable, and so they are pursuing the restoration of the wooden portions of the bridge. They are seeking another letter of support from the County OSC for the project.

There was some discussion between the OSC members and Mr. Penkala about the footbridge. The OSC decided to send out a new letter reflecting the OSC support for the project. Mr. Penkala will share with the OSC before sending. Chairperson Chamblings stated to the OSC members

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that they should review the minutes and materials related to this project. Mr. Penkala stated that he would furnish those minutes via email.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

- A. 2026 Grant Project Notice Sheet, Announcement and Webinar
- B. Open Space Trust Fund Administration Discussion

Mr. Penkala updated the OSC on the 2026 Grant Project Notice Sheet, Announcement and Webinar. He highlighted that the program officially launched in December. In January the information was posted to the Sussex County website under the OS. He initially sent notifications to everyone via mail and email. Mr. Penkala then sent request for applications via email to OSC members, municipalities, township clerks, and to anyone who he thought would or might be able to bring this to the attention of the municipalities. On February 4th, there was the grant webinar. The grant webinar went well and there were 33 participants in the grant webinar and at least 25 or more interested parties that were on that call. They had a good question and answer session primarily focused on what is eligible and what is ineligible for grant funding.

Mr. Penkala briefed the OSC members on the Open Space Trust Fund Administration. He highlighted eligible applicants which have primarily been from municipalities or agents of municipalities who reached out to the County. He received one communication from an elementary school that asked about funding for a trail project and Sussex County Community College has an idea for an ADA-accessible trail on their grounds around the pond. Mr. Penkala stated that the property must be freely open to the public at all times, and that's one of the stipulations for the grant funding.

There was some discussion among the OSC members about the Sussex County Community College application and being accessed by the public.

Mr. Penkala informed the OSC that the next two meetings will most likely will be held in person to present applications.

**OLD BUSINESS:**

None

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

Chairperson Chamings asked for a motion to open the meeting to the public at 8:02p.m. A motion was made by Stephen Skellenger to open to the public for comment. The motion was seconded by Marie Springer and carried unanimously.

No public was present.

Commissioner Alan Henderson discussed the parking situation at Sussex County Community College. He stated that he never had a permit for parking, but is not sure if the students are issued a parking permit in the parking lot there. He stated that it is something County would need to look at. He also stated that he agrees about the property in Franklin Borough, it is just wetlands.

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Chairperson Chamblings closed the meeting to the public at 8:03 p.m.

There was some discussion between Mr. Penkala and the OSC members about the applications that are coming in this year.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

All business having been completed, a motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mike Dolan. The motion was seconded by Bill DeBoer and carried unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 8:08p.m.