

Hunterdon County Democrat

Thursday, December 29, 2005

Living-History Farm Is Pitched To County

By Deb Dawson

DELAWARE TWP. – Township committeeman David Bond wants the freeholders to buy 66 acres of the Kean estate and turn it into a living history farm of the 20th century – specifically for the late 1940s and 1950s. Freeholder reaction ranged from enthusiasm to willingness to consider the idea.

The price of the land is \$4million.

Mr. Bond appeared before the Freeholders at their Tuesday meeting with several color display boards depicting the farm. “It’s adjacent to our park. We’re trying to save it from being developed. We have an opportunity to buy it. We missed our first opportunity. We have an opportunity to purchase it now. It’s a working farm and the buildings are in good shape.” He credited township resident Joe Wiley with the living history farm idea.

“The county could just buy it and do it themselves,” he said.

Committeewoman-elect Kristen McCarthy was also there to champion the concept. “We both really would like to see it happen. Not only do we want to see history, it would help our kids get actively involved in farming.”

If the Freeholders don’t go for that idea, Mr. Bond and Ms. McCarthy were also willing to talk about partnering with the county. Mr. Bond said he thought the township could get about \$1 million back from the state, and the property could be preserved and sold for farming.

Mr. Bond said he knows county Open Space Coordinator Kevin Richardson that the county sometimes contributes 25%, but said “maybe you could do 50%.” Ms. McCarthy suggested a 50-50 or 75-25 partnership.

The township is having an appraisal done. According to Mr. Bond, the owner’s appraisal for the 66 acres came in at \$5.8 million. Joseph Grano Jr. purchased the entire 120 acres of the Kean estate in May for \$4 million. As part of the deal the township has made with the owner, Mr. Grano would be able to keep 55 acres at the back of the property and cut it into five lots.

Freeholder George Muller was enthusiastic. “You’ve done a great job in being able to come this far. Your living-history farm could be a great teaching tool for young people and a place to visit. The Ag Board and Rutgers may be interested; 4-H may be interested. No one else has come forward with this kind of consideration.”

Freeholder Director George Melick said, “It looks nice, possibly doable, but it could be precedent-setting,” and that’s something the Freeholders have to be careful about.

Freeholders Marcia Karrow and Nancy Palladino said they would like to walk the property. Ms. Karrow indicated she would be interested in sharing the cost of the purchase and had ideas for other ways to fund the farm if it “goes historical.” Ms. Palladino questioned whether residents of the township really want to preserve farmland after they voted down the open-space tax.

Mr. Bond said, “It was for open space and recreation, and it was a 4 cent jump. It wasn’t really labeled farmland.”

Mr. Bond said there is a “word of mouth” agreement to close on the property in June.

Although it is not a working farm, the Holcombe-Jimison Farmstead Museum is in the township near Lambertville. A few miles away in Hopewell Township, the Mercer County parks system operates the Howell Living History Farm, which recreates farm life of 1900.