

## **Freeholders Hear Mayors' Concerns On New NJDEP Restrictions**

Mayors and other officials, both Democratic and Republican, told the Hunterdon County Freeholder Board, at the May 21<sup>st</sup> meeting, that the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's (NJDEP) proposed environmental restrictions in Hunterdon County are too far reaching and must balance the environment with economic impacts.

Raritan Township Mayor Jeff Kuhl told the Board, "It is estimated that 20% of the properties in Raritan Township will be affected by the proposed DEP rules, including commercial, industrial and residential properties. Many of these properties will not be able to expand or be redeveloped and their overall value will drop.

The Tax Assessor estimates there could be \$900 million in property tax appeals, as a result of the new rules."

In further statements to the Board, the Town of Clinton Mayor Janice Kovach and Flemington Borough Mayor Betsy Driver also explained the proposed rules' potential economic ramifications in their communities, as did Raritan Township Deputy Mayor Lou Reiner. A number of residents spoke about their concerns also.

The Freeholders approved a resolution at the meeting that authorizes the submission of comments and urges the NJDEP to extend the comment period for an additional 30 days to give all interested parties time to understand the extent of the regulations.

In developing the County's response to the NJDEP's new restrictions, the Freeholders heard from many residents who support the regulatory restrictions at the May 6<sup>th</sup> meeting. Additionally, the Freeholders have received correspondence from Readington Township in support of the C-1 stream designation for waterways in Readington.

Freeholder Director Suzanne Lagay and Freeholder Shaun Van Doren also met with Raritan Headwaters Association Executive Director Cindy Ehrenclou and Director of Policy Bill Kibler, who are proponents of the NJDEP proposal, to discuss its merits.

Mr. Kibler spoke in support of the regulations at both the May 6<sup>th</sup> and May 21<sup>st</sup> Freeholder meetings.

Freeholder Lagay stated, "The Hunterdon County Freeholder Board has a long and strong environmental record dedicated to protecting the County's rural character, farmlands, open spaces and woodlands, environment, and our water ways.

"The Freeholder Board also has a responsibility to protect the County's economic sustainability. These two ideas are not mutually exclusive. We must, and have, balanced both over the years."

The Freeholders' resolution called on the NJDEP to hold an additional stakeholder meeting 'to meet the spirit of the Governor's Executive Order #63, that directs state agencies, including the NJDEP, to better engage with and gather information from the regulated communities in advance of formulating a proposed rule.'

Lagay said, "The concerns raised by our municipalities is that the NJDEP has not provided adequate data for the affected parties to review, to determine if their proposed C-1 stream designations go further than they should, and potentially interfere with economic sustainability."

Lagay added, "The County will be submitting comments on the proposed rules prior to the June 3, 2019 deadline. Those comments will be made available on the County website for public review."