

PRESS RELEASE

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Let the Voters Decide, Not the Politicians

Responding to reports in today's Star-Ledger that Governor Corzine and Speaker Roberts intend to stop legislation (ACR10) that would have asked voters to renew and strengthen the state's open space program in November, leaders of the Keep It Green Campaign said "Put it on the ballot – let the people of New Jersey decide!"

The Ledger reports that the Governor wants to wait to reauthorize the Garden State Preservation Trust (GSPT) until he is able to monetize state assets. However, Keep It Green, a coalition of over 90 environmental, historic, and community organizations working to renewing the GSPT, say with funding for open space, farmland, and historic preservation running out and New Jersey heading into an open space crisis, we cannot afford to wait.

The Keep It Green Campaign is deeply concerned about the time it will take for asset monetization to happen. Since there is not even a report out, we have no idea what any such legislation might look like, let alone if and when it might actually pass into law. If we have to wait, there may or may not be any monetization, but in the meantime, the bulldozers are not stopping.

Yesterday the Assembly Environment and Solid Waste Committee released ACR10 in a unanimous vote and amended it in a compromise rejected by the Governor to permit other revenue sources, including potentially asset monetization, to pay for it. The bill was supposed to then be sent to the Assembly Appropriations Committee for a vote, but it is currently not on the agenda for the committee's May 17 meeting.

It is imperative that this legislation must be posted for a vote in the Appropriations Committee as soon as possible. If it is not released from that committee by the end of the first week of June, we will lose any opportunity to put GSPT renewal on the ballot this year and the voters of New Jersey will lose the opportunity to make the decision for themselves about how their tax dollars should be spent.

Over the past two years, Governor Corzine has repeatedly committed to putting renewal of the GSPT on the ballot in 2007:

- In the 2007 State of the State address, Governor Corzine said, “I know we need to protect our open space and create more urban parks, particularly in light of the need in 2007 to ask voters to renew the Garden State Preservation Trust.”
- In a November 15, 2006 Bergen Record article entitled “Open space at risks, activists warn,” Governor Corzine through a spokesman stated, “The governor remains wholeheartedly committed to replenishing the funds in the Garden State Preservation Trust so that future generations can enjoy open space and farmland. He supports efforts to put an initiative for addition funding on the ballot in 2007.”

We ask the governor now to keep to his commitment.

Almost a year ago, the Governor assembled a task force of cabinet members and legislators to come up with a plan to renew the GSPT. That group has met only once and there is still no plan. Instead, the governor is actively working to make sure that GSPT renewal does not make it onto the ballot this November.

Again, we ask the governor to keep to his commitment.

It was reported in the papers that instead of moving ACR10, Governor Corzine plans to temporarily prop up the GSPT with \$30 million to bridge the gap in funding until 2009. \$30 million is not nearly enough to fill the funding gap:

- GSPT has been spending more than \$225 million a year on average over the past decade (peaking in 2005 at \$344 million)
- After the upcoming round of appropriations, there will be no money for the farmland preservation program or for non-profit matching grants, only \$45 million remaining for the Green Acres Program, and only a small amount of money left for local government grants.

The Keep It Green Campaign and the people of New Jersey ask Speaker Roberts to please post ACR10 for a vote in the Appropriations Committee before time runs out to get this measure on the ballot this November. We know you are committed to preserving open space, urban parks, and our state’s history. Don’t let time and money run out – please give your members the opportunity to vote!

ACR10 enjoys overwhelming bipartisan support in the Assembly. In addition, more than 128 municipalities and 10 counties across the state have passed resolutions in support of putting this measure on the ballot in 2007. Further, there are 266 municipalities and 21 counties in New Jersey that have passed open space taxes and are counting on matching grants from the state. If the state does not have the funds to provide these matching dollars, local governments will have to raise property taxes in order to buy open space, putting an unwarranted burden on local tax payers and municipalities who want to preserve open space in their communities.

Open space is a critical component in providing a high quality of life to all New Jerseyans, but the state continues to lose more than 50 acres a day to development. Once we lose these acres, we can never get them back. We cannot afford to take the risk of holding up renewal of the

Trust. To do this is to risk the future health and safety of the people of New Jersey.

Don't let politics decide the future. Open space and farmland preservation is above that.

LET THE PEOPLE DECIDE!