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## Final parcel in Freneau acquisition in the works

By NICOLE ANTONUCCI  
Staff Writer

ABERDEEN — The township is in the process of negotiating the acquisition of an additional 88-acre parcel of open space in the Freneau section of Aberdeen for preservation.

If acquired, the parcel would be the third and largest subsection of the 183.5 acres that will be preserved to create a large recreational park.

“We are in the process of working very closely with the NY/NJ Baykeeper and Monmouth County Conservation Foundation and the Port Authority of NY/NJ in purchasing property in the Freneau section ... to make the northernmost area a Monmouth County park,” Deputy Mayor Margaret Montone announced at a recent Township Council meeting.

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“It’s a beautiful piece of property.”

According to Greg Remaud, deputy director for the Baykeeper, negotiations are ongoing among the parties for the parcel.

“There has been a division of labor to acquire this,” Remaud said.

“Everybody has worked very well together. I don’t think it would happen otherwise if everyone were not invested in preserving this property.”

The Baykeeper has been interested in the preservation of the Freneau tract since 2003 when the site was slated for development as residential housing.

In September 2003, the Aberdeen Planning Board adopted a general redevelopment plan for the 183.5-acre tract of land, including three subsections — two to be developed with age-restricted, market-rate housing, and one to be developed with affordable housing, according to the township’s fair-share housing plan.

However, several residents filed suit against the township in 2003 when developers proposed major residential developments on the land. The lawsuits were ultimately dismissed.

“We, along with many local residents, had opposed that development and thought that the site should be preserved because of the natural features on the property,” Remaud said.

“The only thing that saved the property was an economic downturn.”

The site was then identified by the New York-New Jersey Harbor Estuary Program (HEP) as a priority for protection due to its location in the headwaters area of the Matawan Creek, which flows approximately four miles before emptying into Raritan Bay.

Its diverse habitat includes woodlands, wetlands, vernal ponds and a variety of wildlife, he said.

“It’s one of the last remaining natural gems around the Raritan, Bayshore and the New York Harbor area,” Remaud said.

In recent years, the Baykeeper has played a supportive role in locating funding sources for the acquisition of the other two parcels.

The Monmouth County Park System received approval from the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders in May to acquire an approximately 66-acre parcel of Freneau land, which borders Marlboro and Aberdeen Township. According to Karen Livingstone, spokeswoman for the park system, the county acquired the property at a cost of \$2.93 million through the Monmouth County Open Space Fund.

The county is interested in the land, she said, due to its location and size.

“The land in that area is located in a place where there really are no county parks,” Livingstone said.

Last year, Aberdeen acquired the smallest of the three parcels — 22 acres located on Greenwood Road and known as the Hauser Farm — at a cost of \$950,000. The land was sold by the Fiorini family.

The purchase was made through a combination of public and private funding sources, including \$250,000 from the Monmouth County Municipal Open Space program, \$316,250 from the state Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres program, \$130,000 from the DEP Office of Natural Resource Restoration, and \$153,750 from the Trust for Public Land.

The township also contributed \$100,000 from its open space fund, Township Manager Holly Reycraft has said.

[Return to top](#)



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