

OCEAN COUNTY

Ocean County and Brick to spend \$8.5M to scrap controversial development, preserve land

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TOMS RIVER - A total of \$8.5 million in public funds will be spent to preserve more than 30 acres in the Breton Woods neighborhood of Brick that a developer had planned to build 59 single-family homes on.

The Ocean County Board of Commissioners announced the agreement with the builder — D.R. Horton of Mount Laurel — on Wednesday and said that a public hearing would be scheduled at the commission's regular meeting on March 1.

The issue had become a controversial one for Brick's municipal government, which faced strong opposition to the new development of four-to-five bedroom houses — “The Havens at Metedeconk” across 31 forested acres between Mantoloking and Drum Point roads — from residents and environmental groups alike.

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Save Barnegat Bay had argued that the new construction would lead to more pollution draining into the bay from the Metedeconk River and the destruction of local wildlife.

County Commissioner Virginia E. Haines, liaison to the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Advisory Committee, said the site consisted of more than 30 acres of mature, upland, oak and pine forest.

Additionally, the state Department of Environmental Protection had identified the land as an area of special concern for the Eastern Box Turtle and as an “important migratory bird habitat,” Haines said.

Carlos Rodrigues, an urban planner and owner of Design Solutions for a Crowded Planet, had testified before the Brick Planning Board in October that clear cutting Breton Woods would be the carbon-emitting equivalent of driving a gasoline-powered motor vehicle between 7.4 million to 9.9 million miles.

“We are very pleased that this parcel of land in Brick Township could now remain as open space,” Haines said. “This property meets the requirements of the county’s open space program and will be a benefit to the residents of Brick Township and Ocean County.”

In 1997, Ocean County voters approved the creation of the Ocean County Natural Lands Trust Program — a 1.2 cent dedicated tax that provides the county government with the funds to acquire privately-owned lands for permanent conservation as open space. Since its inception a quarter of a century ago, more than 25,000 acres of land in Ocean County has been preserved.

Under the agreement, the property owner, D.R. Horton of Mount Laurel, has accepted a negotiated offer of \$8,550,000.

The county government would pay \$6,840,000 of the purchase price and Brick would cover the remaining \$1,710,000, according to county officials.

Both the county and municipal governments also intend to seek grant funding from New Jersey’s Green Acres Program.

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The township wants to use about six acres of the site, adjacent to the Osbornville Elementary School, as a recreational site.

Under a maintenance agreement between the county and the township, the municipal government would be responsible for the perpetual upkeep of the entire parcel, all according to county officials.

“Ocean County appreciates Brick Township’s interest in partnering with us on this acquisition,” said county commission Director Joseph H. Vicari. “We are pleased that we can purchase the property and keep it as open space forever. I appreciate the efforts of Brick Township to develop six acres to benefit the local school children. Certainly, this purchase answers the concerns of the many residents that encouraged the preservation of the land.”

The public hearing is scheduled for 4 p.m. March 1 in the first floor meeting room at the Ocean County Administration Building at 101 Hooper Ave. in downtown Toms River.

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