

Public asks Pinelands Commission for stricter rules, fewer deals

Upcoming meetings

The Pinelands Commission will hold two more public meetings for input on recommendations for its Comprehensive Management Plan.

The meetings will be held at 11 a.m. Sept. 14 and 7 p.m. Sept. 24 at the Richard J. Sullivan Center, 15 Springfield Road, Pemberton, Burlington County.

Public comments will be accepted through Sept. 28. Comments can be sent by email to info@njpines.state.nj.us or mailed to P.O. Box 359, New Lisbon, NJ 08064.

Posted: Wednesday, August 22, 2012 9:54 pm | Updated: 12:01 am, Thu Aug 23, 2012.

Public asks Pinelands Commission for stricter rules, fewer deals By JOEL LANDAU Staff Writer

HAMILTON TOWNSHIP — A public hearing Wednesday on the state's management plan for the Pinelands National Reserve drew a mix of hopes for tighter rules on development as well as for greater cooperation between the Pinelands Commission and the towns that lie within the sprawling preserve.

About 20 people pressed their concerns to the commission, which held the hearing at the municipal building as part of a review done every 10 years on the commission's plan that regulates development within the 1.1 million-acre forested region that spans practically all of South Jersey and is home to about 700,000 people.

The comments ranged from a need to crack down on compliance with management plan regulations to rejecting development that is inconsistent with mission for the Pinelands.

Fred Akers of Buena Vista faulted the commission for what he said were too many deals made with local towns on development projects that did not comply with the Comprehensive Management Plan.

"What I have seen over the last 10 years is strict compliance to the plan works pretty well, but I'm not seeing strict compliance anymore," Akers said.

Mark Demitroff, another Buena Vista resident, asked the members for new regulations to close loopholes for redevelopment with the Pinelands. Demitroff said redevelopment zones designated by municipalities allow for more development in the area than would normally be

allowed. The Pinelands Commission should have jurisdiction over any development in the area and not approve plans that do not meet its mission, he said.

Estell Manor Mayor Joe Venizia spoke against a proposal to bring sewers through the township.

“I think it would be appropriate to get a resolution (working with the township) instead of (the township) saying, ‘This is what we’ll do and you have to live with it,’” he said.

This is the fourth review the Pineland Commission has made to its plan in the 32-year history of the Pinelands National Reserve. The commission will accept feedback from the public through Sept. 28. After all the comments are collected, it will decide what changes are to be made to the management plan.

More than 700,000 people live in the pinelands, which covers parts of Atlantic, Burlington, Camden, Cape May, Cumberland, Gloucester and Ocean counties.

Municipal officials often criticize the commission for its restrictions to development, but the sentiment among the residents who spoke Wednesday was to continue to preserve the area.

“The concern is when people (like us) who want to keep quality of life conflict with people who want to make money, we will lose,” said Mary Hunt, a resident of Elwood section in Mullica Township. “The plan is a way to protect us. I look to you, Pinelands Commission, to protect us so we can continue to live the way we hope to live.”

Acting commission chairperson Candace Ashmun said usually during this process, they hear from people who are supportive of the plan.

“People are afraid the Comprehensive Management Plan will be watered down in some way,” she said. “These are people who have been following the plan. They agree with it.”

Richard Colby, political chair for the South Jersey chapter of the Sierra Club, said he wanted the commission to perform studies to make sure there is sufficient water to handle additional expansion in the Pinelands.

“I really think you should consider water supply in the management plan that considers a build-out of the Pinelands area,” the Egg Harbor City resident said. “I hope eventually (that) water supply can be considered in the process.”

Trevan Houser, president of Land Resource Solutions in Moorestown, whose firm is cleaning up former landfills in Hamilton Township and in Estell Manor, was the one member of the public who addressed development in the Pinelands. He said there will be redevelopment

opportunities once the landfills are cleaned up and asked the commission to accommodate those potential projects.

“Many of these sites, if they are to be redeveloped for some use, will need some sort of soil grading for this type of development,” he said. “I ask you to look for opportunities for flexibility. Crack the door open to use materials in a beneficial way.”

Contact Joel Landau: 609-272-7215 JLandau@pressofac.com