



**PUBLIC MEETING
COX HALL CREEK RESTORATION
SATURDAY, JANUARY 25, 2003
9:00 a.m. at
Property Owners Association of Cape May Beach
201 Clubhouse Drive
No. Cape May, NJ 08204**

Saturday, January 25, 2003 at 9:00 a.m. the Property Owners Association of Cape May Beach will host a public meeting regarding the restoration of Cox Hall Creek. The Cox Hall Creek Focus Group and the County Planning Department have received a \$100,000 grant from the Department of Environmental Protection to study options for restoration of the Cox Hall Creek wetland area.

The focus group is in the process of hiring a consultant to assess the feasibility of restoring the wetland to either a fresh-water or salt-water environment. "We want to hear from area residents about their concerns and also the kinds of options they think should be considered," said Tony McMahan, Chairman of the focus group.

Even if you are not able to come to the meeting, you can still participate. Send your thoughts, concerns, ideas no later than Friday, January 24, to Claire Nagel, Secretary of the focus group, at shoredr101@aol.com or via snail mail to 101 Shore Drive, No. Cape May, NJ 08204. A report of the meeting will be available early in March. If you would like a copy, be sure to include your name and address.

Refreshments available at 8:30 a.m.
Meeting starts promptly at 9:00 a.m.

**REPORT OF
PUBLIC MEETING
COX HALL CREEK
RESTORATION**

January 25, 2003

Cox Hall Creek Focus Group

On January 25, 2003, beginning at 9:00 AM, the Cox Hall Creek Focus Group conducted a public meeting at the Cape May Beach Property Owners Association clubhouse located at 101 Shore Drive, North Cape May. The purpose of this report use to summarize that meeting.

Background

The Cox Hall Creek Focus Group and the Cape May County Planning Department have received a \$100,000.00 grant from the New Jersey Department of Environment Protection to study options for restoration of the Cox Hall Creek wetland area. The grant is being used to fund the following five elements:

1. A physiographic analysis and report to include detailed elevation is of the Cox Hall Creek wetlands and surrounding area.
2. An analysis and report of the hydrogeologic framework of the lower reaches of the estuary to be performed by the United States Geologic Survey (USGS).
3. A report containing the analysis of restoration scenarios including salt water restoration, freshwater restoration options and a no-action option, and their potential impacts, including input from the USGS.
4. A public education program, including two public meetings, one of which is the subject of this report.
5. A report of additional environmental sampling analysis.

Cox Hall Creek is a complex drainage system with several tributaries in Lower Township, Cape May County. The flow from the Cox Hall Creek drainage system empties, by being mechanically pumped, into the Delaware Bay. The water quality and estuary environment has been impacted by development surrounding its perimeter. The common reed (*Phragmites australis*) dominates the lower reaches of the wetland area although a buffer of freshwater vegetation (various mature trees, bushes, etc) borders the estuary.

There are at least ten storm water outfall pipes that discharge into the creek. In addition, from 1969 to 1990, Cox hall Creek received treated effluent from the Lower Township MUA sewage treatment plant. In 1971, the pumping station was installed and all flow from the creek was mechanically discharged through a pipe installed under the dunes and beach and into the bay. Several hundred feet east of the pumping station, the drainage basin is divided by Clubhouse Road.

Most of the residential properties that surround Cox Hall Creek rely on the shallow surface aquifer for their potable water supply. The homes in one subdivision have individual septic systems. Local residents and visitors use the adjacent Delaware Bay beaches for swimming, boating and other recreational activities. Each spring, horseshoe crabs use the beaches for annual nesting and the area is on the seasonal flyway for numerous migrating birds. The standing freshwaters within the drainage basin become eutrophic. The current conditions are believed to contribute to flooding of the adjacent residential properties. In short, the Cox Hall Creek drainage basin is a stressed aquatic

ecosystem that is having an adverse impact on the surrounding natural and human environments.

In 1999, a wild fire engulfed the lower estuary. Numerous homes were threatened by the burning *Phragmites*. The fire was particularly troublesome because there is no public water supply and no fire hydrants to provide water the fire personnel needed to extinguish the fire.

The Cox Hall Creek Focus Group (CHC) was established as a sub-group to the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) of the Area 16 Watershed Management Program. The CHC and the Cape May County Planning Department, which will administer the grant, have been working closely in an effort to examine the environmental quality of Cox Hall Creek, its potential impact on the Delaware Bay and possible restoration scenarios.

An agreement has been negotiated with the USGS under which the USGS will evaluate the groundwater framework below Cox Hall Creek described in 1. above. The Cape May County Planning Department issued a request for proposal soliciting proposals for items 2. and 3. above, the elevation study and the alternatives analysis respectively. The county has issued a contract for these items.

Purpose of the meeting

The purpose of the meeting was twofold. First the meeting was intended to provide an opportunity for members of the public to express their concerns about possible restoration

scenarios of Cox Hall Creek. Second, members of the public were asked to be creative and to identify what their preferred recreational ideas were for the future use of Cox Hall Creek.

Publicity in advance of the meeting was distributed in several ways. First, an article was developed for the property owners association newsletter describing the status of activities concerning the Cox Hall Creek focus group and announcing the public meeting and its purpose. Flyers were also developed and delivered to homes in the neighborhoods surrounding Cox Hall Creek. Finally, newspaper advertisements were commissioned for the Cape May County Gazette and Herald. Refreshments (coffee and doughnuts) were provided at the meeting. A survey form was also developed, printed and distributed at the meeting. A copy is attached.

Summary of the meeting

Ms. Claire Nagel, secretary of the property owners association, called the meeting to order at approximately 9:10 AM. Persons entering the meeting hall were asked to sign in and nametags were provided. A total of 81 individuals attended the meeting. After her introductory remarks, she introduced Mr. Anthony McMahon, chairman of the CHC. Mr. McMahon provided a 30-45 minute slide presentation summarizing the CHC's efforts to characterize the environment and condition of the estuary, including sampling results, and outlining the status of restoration efforts. A copy of Mr. McMahon's slides is attached. A number of questions from members of the audience were handled during the presentation.

Mr. McMahon pointed out that he would respond to questions immediately during the presentation so that any areas of confusion can be clarified in context.

Mr. McMahon ended the presentation by charging the attendees with two questions: "What are your concerns about either the saltwater or the freshwater restoration option?", and "How would you prefer to use the area if it were restored with either freshwater or saltwater?" Members of the public were invited to raise their hands to be recognized. Two individuals, Ms. Nagel and Ms. Mary Ellen Spruell, captured the concerns and ideas on large note pads on easels that were placed in front of the audience.

Several individuals provided detailed comments on the history of this area of Lower Township and Mayor Starner stood up and offered his support for the efforts of the CHC.

Summary of Public Comment

Areas of concern identified by the meeting participants include:

What role will the MUA play in restoration, will they fund long-term maintenance?

Flooding, in particular for the saltwater option.

Will the mosquito population be reduced if the fresh water option is chosen?

How will we control the *phragmites* if the freshwater option is chosen?

If the freshwater option is implemented, what about ice and the backup of ice flow?

I'm concerned about maintenance costs of the freshwater option.

Will Canadian geese be a problem and cause contamination and if a freshwater lake is created?

Where would we put parking if the area were open to public recreational use?

If public recreation were allowed, traffic in the area would increase.

What about Clubhouse Road? Under either option will the road be under water?

Will a bridge be needed?

If the existing property owners donate their land or make it available for restoration, how can we ensure that the land use will be restricted?

If the area were open to public access, who would provide security?

If the freshwater option were chosen, will there be sufficient water flow in times of drought?

Under either restoration scenario, who would own Cox Hall Creek? Who will pay for the long-term maintenance?

If this is a fresh water lake, we can not allow jet skis.

You should look at Green Creek and Pond Creek for of impact on wildlife.

It is imperative that we protect the dunes along the bay.

What will be the price of federal involvement in restoration?

The meeting attendees suggested the following possible ideas for use of Cox Hall Creek when restored:

The area should be fully excavated to depths of at least 4 ft.

A fresh water reservoir (lake) should be created with the depth of 7 to 8 ft.

The area should be available for use for fishing.

We would like to see swimming in a freshwater lake.

Small boating should be allowed.

Since we are on the number of bird migration routes, bird watching would be an excellent use.

If restored to freshwater, this would help to replenish wells.

If a freshwater lake were created would there be a waterfall?

We would love to see walking paths around the perimeter of the wetlands.

If he areas open to public use, parking areas would be needed.

The area should be kept wild-we should not allow public access-we must minimize traffic.

It is important that we maintain the quiet quality of our lives.

Leave it as it is.

Keep it as natural as possible.

Can only go back to the way it was?

A fresh water options would hope to conserve our water.

Perhaps the greatest area of consensus was that the wetland should not be turned into a public recreation area. The local area residents felt strongly that the quiet, small town atmosphere of that is currently reflected in Town Bank and Cape May Beach should be maintained.

This report was finalized and approved at the CHC meeting on March 17, 2003.

For the Cox Hall Focus Group

-----{ORIGINAL SIGNED BY}-----

Anthony J. McMahon, Chairman, CHC

COX HALL CREEK FOCUS GROUP

PUBLIC MEETING JANUARY 25, 2003

INFORMATION SURVEY

The Cox Hall Focus Group has been awarded a grant to measure ground level elevations and to evaluate options for restoring the Cox Hall Creek wetland. Both salt-water and fresh-water restoration options will be considered. Please help us to make the best decisions by completing the following:

1. If the Study indicates that restoration to a salt-water environment is the best option and you didn't have to worry about consequences, please tell us your top 5 ideas for use of the estuary (example-bird watching, hiking, etc.):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

2. If the Study indicates that restoration to a salt-water environment is the best option, please tell us your 5 greatest concerns about this option (example-flooding):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

3. If the Study indicates that restoration to a fresh-water environment is the best option, please tell us your top 5 ideas for use of the area:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

4. If the Study indicates that restoration to a fresh-water environment is the best option, please tell us your 5 greatest concerns about this option:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

5. Other Comments _____

_____.