

Letter to Editor

No communication!

Nov. 9, 2000

To the editor:

About a month ago, with no apparent warning, a section of Jacob's Creek Road between Route 579 and the section of Bear Tavern Road that leads to I-95, was closed. The only work that seems to have been done was done at the very outset: the top layer of blacktop was scraped off a portion of the road.

The only information provided by the Mercer County Highway Department (which seems to be in charge of this project) was the perplexing sign "Bridge Out" and various detour signs.

What was perplexing about the "Bridge Out " signs was that the bridge, or at least what I think of as the bridge (that rickety old metal and wood structure that spans Jacob's Creek), wasn't "out" at all. After a week or two, a sign having a depressingly permanent look appeared on the southbound side of Route 579 at Washington Crossing-Pennington Road, warning of the "Bridge Out" ahead. I wonder how many people turned right or left when they saw that sign, thinking that they could not reach Jacob's Creek Road at all when, in fact, they could cross the bridge and make a left on Jacob's Creek.

After a few weeks of no visible progress, I called the county highway people. They told me that the road would be closed for another three-six weeks. And-they informed me - the "bridge" that is said to be out is in fact (unbeknownst to me) along Jacob's Creek Road. What I think of as the "bridge" is actually (according to the highway people) a "trestle." But I have seen no sign of any work on Jacob's Creek Road for weeks.

Having Jacob's Creek Road closed is obviously quite inconvenient to those of us who live nearby. It must also be a nuisance for those traveling between I-95 in Pennsylvania and points north on Route 579.

It would have been wonderful if the highway department could have done this repair over a brief interval, rather than starting it and then it dragging out through all of autumn. It would be most helpful if they could have communicated with those affected by the work, both before it started and with clear signs while the job is in progress. And it would be most appreciated if they would finish the work and reopen the road at the earliest possible time.

Roy H. Wepner, Titusville

Hopewell Township wants to save 19th-century Jacob's Creek bridge

Township officials want to help Mercer make decisions

By:John Tredrea

Mar. 8, 2001

One of the two remaining cast iron bridges on public roadways in Hopewell Township is scheduled to be replaced by Mercer County within the next 18 months or so, but township officials hope upcoming talks with the county will produce a plan to save the bridge.

The span, which is 110 or more years old, crosses Jacob's Creek on Route 579, or Bear Tavern Road, near its junction with Maddock Road in the southwestern part of the township.

The county's current intention is "to try to replace the bridge with a structure that meets the approval of everyone, including township officials," county engineer David Stem said Friday. He said the job would cost about \$1 million. Included in that tab would be the cost of moving the existing bridge to a new location in the township, also over Jacob's Creek, along a footpath on land accessible to the public.

He said the design for the new bridge for Route 579 most favored by the county at this point is a steel truss structure, resembling the iron truss bridge now in place.

Mr. Stem added that the county's capital improvements plan also includes a proposed renovation of the township's other cast iron bridge on a public roadway. That bridge crosses Stony Brook on Mine Road, just east of Route 31 in the north-central part of the township. "That bridge would get a new deck, railings and paint," Mr. Stem said. "The basic structure itself would remain. It's a restoration, not a replacement project."

During the March 1 township meeting, Deputy Mayor Jon Edwards said the township "wants to be part of the process" of deciding whether the bridge over Jacob's Creek must be replaced. Mr. Stem and county transportation director Berta Scott both said the county has had, for many months, every intention of including the township. "Including the township in the dialogue is part of the basic process under which we handle projects like this," Ms. Scott said.

"These bridges add to the rustic, rural character of Hopewell Township that we're trying to preserve," township Committeewoman Kathy Bird said during the March 1 meeting. Like Mr. Edwards, Mayor Marylou Ferrara and Committeeman Robert Higgins, she said she hoped a plan could be devised under which the bridge could be saved.

Township resident William Schoelwer wondered if the Jacob's Creek span is salvageable. "Cast iron, by its very nature, tends to shatter, not break," he said, adding that he would "hate to see a catastrophe involving a loss of life" should the bridge collapse.

Mayor Ferrara replied that, while safety is of course the paramount concern, all township officials are seeking is investigation of the possibility of developing a plan under which the bridge could be saved, at a reasonable cost, without jeopardizing those who cross it.

David Blackwell, chairman of the township's Historic Preservation Commission, said: "Basically, we're asking the county engineer to rethink the specifications for the bridge (such as what its weight limit would be) and work from that." Mr. Blackwell and the commission he chairs want to save the bridge if at all possible. He said the two cast iron bridges still in the township are significant historic sites — in his words, they are "exceptional examples of something that's almost disappeared from our landscape."

The current posted weight limit of the Jacob's Creek bridge is 3 tons.

Township approves \$192K for sewer improvements

The Hopewell Township Committee has approved spending \$192,000 for improvements to the sewage collection system of the 122-home Princeton Farms development, which has been plagued by leaky pipes for years

By: John Tredrea

April 26, 2001

The Hopewell Township Committee has approved spending \$192,000 for improvements to the sewage collection system of the 122-home Princeton Farms development, which has been plagued by leaky pipes for years.

The ordinance, which was unanimously approved April 19, authorizes the issuance of \$182,400 in bonds to pay for the first phase of the sewer improvement project. Officials estimate the entire project will require several hundred thousand dollars more to complete.

Princeton Farms, which was built in the late 1960s and early 1970s, is located north of Pennington-Rocky Hill Road in the east-central section of the township.

Township engineer Paul Pogorzelski, who is overseeing the improvement project, said it involves inserting new sewer pipes inside the existing ones at Princeton Farms. This is a much less expensive alternative, he said, to replacing the leaky pipes with new ones. The leakiest sections of the sewer system will be dealt with first, Mr. Pogorzelski said.

Also at its April 19 meeting, the committee voted unanimously to adopt a \$2,196,400 bond ordinance that will pay for a series of capital improvements, including work on many township roads during the next year. Among the roads covered by the ordinance are Aunt Molly, Goat Hill, Pleasant Valley, Hopewell-Amwell, Mine, Stony Brook, Valley, Van Dyke, Wargo, Church, Fiddler's Creek, Mountain Church and Bayberry roads and Minnietown and Dunwald lanes.

Another ordinance, also adopted by a unanimous committee vote, authorizes spending \$125,000 for equipment, including office and computer gear and a pickup truck to be used by the township zoning officer.

A proposed ordinance was also introduced that would place the Jacob's Creek Bridge located on Route 579 near Maddock Road on the township's official list of historic places.

The iron truss bridge dates to the late 19th century. The township's Historic Sites Preservation Commission, created by township government about a year ago, already has voted in favor of putting the bridge on the local historic register.

David Blackwell, chairman of the Historic Sites Preservation Commission, said he expects the commission will cast a similar vote soon on the other iron truss bridge in the township, which crosses Stony Brook on Mine Road. That bridge is also over 100 years old, and, along with the Jacob's Creek span, may be one of only six iron truss bridges left in the state, Mr. Blackwell said.

As is required by the state land-use law, the proposed ordinance on the Jacob's Creek Bridge will be reviewed by the township Planning Board before the Township Committee casts an adoption vote on it. As with any ordinance, a public hearing will be required.

Also introduced April 19 was a proposed ordinance that would establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee, for farmland preservation.

The five members of the advisory committee would be appointed by the mayor. The committee would assist with the preparation of a farmland preservation element of the township Master Plan; advise the Township Committee and Planning Board on what state grants to apply for; and identify areas of the township in which farmland preservation should be a goal.

Bridge, agriculture proposals on township's agenda tonight

Jacob's Creek bridge and Agricultural Advisory Committee are major topics

By: John Tredrea

May 3, 2001

A proposed ordinance that would place the Jacob's Creek Bridge on the township's official list of historic places is scheduled for a public hearing and adoption vote at tonight's Hopewell Township Committee meeting.

The ordinance was introduced by a unanimous committee vote April 19.

The iron truss bridge, which crosses Jacob's Creek on county Route 579 near Maddock Road, dates to the late 19th century. The township's Historic Sites Preservation Commission, created by township government about a year ago, already has voted in favor of putting the bridge on the local historic register.

David Blackwell, chairman of the preservation commission, said during the April 19 committee meeting that he expects the commission to cast a similar vote soon on the other iron truss bridge in the township, which crosses Stony Brook on Mine Road. That bridge is also over 100 years old, and, along with the Jacob's Creek span, may be one of only six iron truss bridges left in the state, Mr. Blackwell said.

Also scheduled for a public hearing and adoption vote tonight is an ordinance, introduced by a unanimous committee vote on April 19, that would establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee, for the purpose of farmland preservation. Creation of the advisory committee is needed if the township is to be eligible for state grants that would be used to help plan farmland preservation efforts.

The five members of the advisory committee would be appointed by the mayor. The committee would assist with the preparation of a farmland preservation element of the township master plan; advise the township committee and planning board on what state grants to apply for; and identify areas of the township in which farmland preservation should be a goal.

Township adopts two ordinances

By: John Tredrea

May 10, 2001

The Jacob's Creek bridge was placed on Hopewell Township's official register of historic places under an ordinance unanimously approved by the Township Committee May 3.

The iron truss bridge, which crosses Jacob's Creek on county Route 579 near Maddock Road, dates to the late 19th century. The township's Historic Sites Preservation Commission, created by township government about a year ago, voted weeks ago in favor of putting the bridge on the local historic register.

The first site put on the register was the Mt. Rose Distillery, or "Whisky House," off the southern side of Pennington-Rocky Hill Road in the east-central township.

David Blackwell, chairman of the Historic Sites Preservation Commission, said during the April 19 Township Committee meeting that he expects the commission to vote soon in favor of putting the other iron truss bridge in the township, which crosses Stony Brook on Mine Road, on the township register. That bridge, also over 100 years old and, along with the Jacob's Creek span, may be one of only six iron truss bridges left in the state, Mr. Blackwell said.

Also adopted by unanimous committee vote May 3 was an ordinance that establishes a township Agricultural Advisory Committee, for the purpose of farmland preservation. Creation of the advisory committee was needed for the township to be eligible for state grants that would be used to help plan farmland preservation efforts.

The committee would assist with the preparation of a farmland preservation element of the township Master Plan; advise the Township Committee and Planning Board on what state grants to apply for; and identify areas of the township in which farmland preservation should be a goal.

Expected to be introduced by the committee soon is an amendment to the ordinance. The amendment will provide specifics on the membership requirements of the Agricultural Advisory Committee.

Janssen officials want to be included in future Jacob's Creek Bridge talks

"As you can guess, Janssen has a great interest in the future of the bridge and a concern about its ability to handle future and present traffic," Janssen attorney Mark Solomon told the Township Committee Aug. 2

By: John Tredrea

Aug. 9, 2001

Janssen Pharmaceutica has become a public participant in the debate over what the future of the Jacob's Creek Bridge should be.

Built in the late 19th century, the iron truss bridge is on the southern end of Bear Tavern Road, in southwestern Hopewell Township. Janssen has a large pharmaceutical research facility on that road, about a quarter-mile north of the bridge.

"As you can guess, Janssen has a great interest in the future of the bridge and a concern about its ability to handle future and present traffic," Janssen attorney Mark Solomon told the Township Committee Aug. 2.

"Closure of that bridge would be extremely disruptive to Janssen and the Maddock Road neighborhood ... frankly, we are skeptical that leaving that bridge in place is a long-term solution, but we'll keep our minds open and would like to be included in talks on the future of the bridge."

Maddock Road runs west to Route 29 off Bear Tavern Road just north of the bridge.

Talks on the future of the bridge have been ongoing between the township and Mercer County for months. The Township Committee is united in its wish to keep the bridge if that can be done safely. If it can't be, the committee would like to see the bridge moved to a walking trail over the creek.

Kicking off the discussion of the bridge at the Aug. 2 Township Committee session was Mayor Marylou Ferrara's mention of a recent letter to the township from County Engineer David Stem.

In his letter, Mr. Stem reiterates the county's already publicly stated concerns about the safety of the bridge and said the county will be forced to close the bridge if it learns that its posted 3-ton weight limit is being violated consistently.

"We should investigate whether the bridge can be made stronger without increasing its weight limit," Mayor Ferrara said in response to Mr. Stem's letter.

"We want (township engineer) Paul Pogorzelski involved in all future examinations of the bridge" pertaining to its structural integrity, added Deputy Mayor Jon Edwards.

Because Bear Tavern Road is a county road —Route 579 — the Jacob's Creek Bridge is under county jurisdiction.

Valley traffic task force issues progress report

In a half-hour presentation Oct. 18, Joseph Kowalski, chairman of the Mayors' Task Force on Traffic and Trucking, discussed accomplishments and goals

By: John Tredrea

October 25, 2001

Truck traffic on Route 31 has declined more than 25 percent since 1999 when the state banned 102-inch-wide trucks from using Route 31 and similar roads to make interstate runs, according to Joseph Kowalski, chairman of the Valley's Mayors' Task Force on Traffic and Trucking.

This was one of several things Mr. Kowalski told the Hopewell Township Committee Oct. 18 when he gave leaders a task force progress report.

Created about five years ago, the task force has sought to make life on local roads better, especially in terms of safety, Mr. Kowalski told the township governing body.

In a half-hour presentation on the task force's accomplishments to date and goals for the future, Mr. Kowalski said the state ban of 102-inch-wide trucks on interstate runs from Route 31 and similar roads is a key accomplishment. The ban, first declared on July 15, 1999, by then-Gov. Christie Whitman in Hopewell Borough, has been in place a little over two years. Along with residents and officials of neighboring towns along Route 31, the task force pressed the state vigorously to institute that ban, and continues to press for inclusion of 96-inch-wide trucks in the ban.

Mr. Kowalski said an electronic counting device, placed on Route 31 just north of the Route 518 junction, shows a decline of more than one-fourth in the volume of truck traffic on Route 31 since the ban went into effect.

Dramatically increased enforcement of motor vehicle laws on trucks has occurred during the same time span, Mr. Kowalski said. In 1997, Hopewell Township police officers issued 87 traffic summonses to truck drivers. It was up to 1,100 summonses last year.

Another highlight, he said, was the state's decision to ban all tractor-trailers, except those making local deliveries, from Route 29 — from its intersection with I-95 in Mercer County to its northern terminus at Route 12 in Hunterdon County.

The ban came after several fatal accidents involving large trucks. The ban on Route 29 "is an amazing accomplishment ... we worked very hard with West Amwell on that," Mr. Kowalski said. Route 29 passes through West Amwell north of Hopewell Township.

The task force, which meets once every two months, has responded regularly to residents' concerns about speed limits and other traffic regulations on local roads. In response to recommendations from the task force, which includes township Deputy Mayor Jon Edwards and which consults regularly with the township police, speed limits on many local roads have been lowered and signs on roads made "more consistent," Mr. Kowalski said.

He also said the success of the task force to date stems largely from the support it has received from the community, the police department and township government; the task force's commitment to researching thoroughly the issues it confronts; and its regional approach. We have "regular contact with eight other communities, including East and West Amwell, Lawrenceville, Princeton, Kingston, Rocky Hill, South Brunswick and Lambertville," Mr. Kowalski said.

He added that, as a result of the task force's efforts, the volume of truck traffic on Route 518 has decreased and gate hours at Trap Rock's two quarries in the township have been reduced, thus reducing early-morning truck noise near the quarries.

Mr. Kowalski, who lived on Route 518 in northeastern Hopewell Township for 25 years before moving to Montgomery recently, said the task force wasn't trying to hurt local businesses.

"We don't want to discourage local commerce, not at all, but only to have the right vehicles on the right roads," he said.

Key goals for the task force, he said, include: expanding the state ban on tractor trailers from Route 31 and similar roads to include 96-inch-wide trucks; giving local police the authority to enforce the ban; getting more consistent weight limits on county roads; and preserving the Jacob's Creek and Mine Road bridges, both over 100 years old, in Hopewell Township.

Hopewell Township may add three historic sites

At the recommendation of David Blackwell, chairman of the township's Historic Sites Preservation Commission, the Township Committee voted unanimously Dec. 6 to introduce the ordinances that would add the three sites to the local historic register

By: John Tredrea

Dec. 13, 2001

A Revolutionary War-era cemetery, an 18th-century iron truss bridge and a farmstead once owned by the man credited with giving Hopewell Township its name soon could be added to the township's register of historic places.

At the recommendation of David Blackwell, chairman of the township's Historic Sites Preservation Commission, the Township Committee voted unanimously Dec. 6 to introduce the ordinances that would add the three sites to the local historic register.

As is required by the state Municipal Land Use Law, the three ordinances must be reviewed by the township Planning Board before the Township Committee takes final action. The Planning Board review is expected to take place in time for the committee to take an adoption vote on the ordinances at its next regularly scheduled meeting Dec. 20.

The cemetery covered by the first of the three historic site measures is known locally as the Old Methodist Cemetery. It is located off the northern side of Pennington-Titusville Road, just east of Scotch Road. The cemetery will be buffered by woodlands from a complex of athletic fields the school district will build on 48 acres on the western end of the grounds of Timberlane Middle School. For many years, Mr. Blackwell told the Township Committee, the cemetery has been maintained by the United Methodist Church of Pennington. The cemetery originally was run by a Presbyterian church, which stood near the cemetery and was taken down decades ago.

Bette Davis of United Methodist told the committee the cemetery was active from 1744 to 1935. Six veterans of the American Revolution and four Civil War veterans are among the 229 or more people buried there, she said. Members of families prominent in this area for more than 200 years are buried there — the "Fiddlers, Lannings and Harts" among them, Ms. Davis said.

The Mine Road iron truss bridge will be designated a historic site if the second of the three measures is adopted. The bridge, built in 1885, crosses Stony Brook on the short stretch of Mine Road that runs steeply downhill, east from Route 31 to Stony Brook Road.

"The setting is important," Mr. Blackwell. "The wonderful little Valley this bridge sits in is one of the most beautiful scenes we have in the township." He added that the bridge is one of the six iron truss bridges left in the state. Another one of the six, put on the township historic sites register about a year ago, crosses Jacob's Creek on Bear Tavern Road.

The third measure covers what is locally known as the "Hunt-Woodward Farm," currently owned by Mercer County. The 130-tract has 15 buildings, 10 of which are historically significant, Mr. Blackwell said. He described the place, located off Woodsville Road about a mile west of Route 31 in the as "an incredible farmstead ... the number of historical associations it has are incredible."

The Smith family was one of the first to live on this farm, Mr. Blackwell said. "Some people credit Andrew Smith with the naming of our township," he added. The Hart family, which included a signer of the Declaration

of Independence, John Hart, lived on the farm for four generations. Another member of that clan, Wilson Hart, was "a prominent entrepreneur in Hopewell and Lawrence townships," Mr. Blackwell said.

Part of the peach orchard started on the farm in 1832 by Benjamin Stout Hill can still be seen, Mr. Blackwell said. He said the residence on the farm is of a type known as a "bank house." This stone structure is literally built into a bank in a way that causes it to appear to be a one-story structure when viewed from one side and a two-story when viewed from another.

Also on the farm, Mr. Blackwell said, are "a wonderful 1858 stone barn, a stone-walled cow yard and a two-story spring house."

He added that the farm is owned by Mercer County, which is expected to auction it to a private owner soon.

He said including the farm on the township historic register would mean the new owner would not be able to alter structures on the property until it obtained approval, in the form of a Certificate of Appropriateness, from the Historic Sites Preservation Commission.

Township Committee designates three historic sites

The ordinances all came to Township Committee at the recommendation of the township Historic Sites Preservation Commission and with the endorsement of the township Planning Board.

By: John Tredrea

Dec 27, 2001

Three sites were added to Hopewell Township's register of historic sites under a trio ordinances adopted unanimously by the Township Committee Dec. 20.

Already on the register under similar ordinances adopted within the past year are the Jacob's Creek Bridge and Mt. Rose Distillery, also known as the "Whisky House."

A cemetery where six veterans of the American Revolution are buried, a late-18th century bridge that is one of only six iron truss spans left in the state, and a 130-acre farmstead that was home to the man who reputedly gave Hopewell Township its name in the 18th century will go on the historic register under the ordinances just adopted.

The ordinances all came to Township Committee at the recommendation of the township Historic Sites Preservation Commission and with the endorsement of the township Planning Board.

The cemetery covered by the first of the three historic site ordinances is known locally as the Old Methodist Cemetery. It is located off the northern side of Pennington-Titusville Road, just east of Scotch Road. For many years, said David Blackwell, chairman of the township Historic Sites Preservation Commission, the cemetery has been maintained by the United Methodist Church of Pennington.

The cemetery originally was run by a Presbyterian church, which stood near the cemetery and was taken down decades ago. That church was created during the early 18th century during a worldwide schism in the Presbyterian faith known as The Great Awakening. The founding of Princeton University (under another name: The College of New Jersey) was another direct result of the Great Awakening, Mr. Blackwell told the Township Committee Dec. 20.

In addition to six veterans of the American Revolution, four veterans of the Civil War are among the 229 or more people buried in the Old Methodist Cemetery. Members of families prominent in this area for over 200 years are buried there — the Fiddlers, Lannings and Harts among them. Renowned ministers from America and England are associated with the cemetery, Mr. Blackwell said.

The Mine Road iron truss bridge has been designated a historic site under the second of the three ordinances adopted Dec. 20. The bridge, built in 1885, crosses Stony Brook on the short stretch of Mine Road that runs, steeply downhill, east from state Route 31 to Stony Brook Road in the north-central township.

"The setting is important," Mr. Blackwell said. "The wonderful little valley this bridge sits in is one of the most beautiful scenes we have in the township."

The bridge, like many other iron spans around the country, was built by a family business: King Bridge Manufacturers of Cleveland, Ohio. It was put across the Stony Brook under the aegis of Mercer County, Mr. Blackwell said, although Mine Road is a municipal, not a county, road.

He said putting the bridge on the local historic register will "enable the township to be in a dialogue with the county on the bridge's future ... it's a beautiful little structure that hopefully will be around a long time."

The third ordinance covers what is locally known as the "Hunt-Woodward Farm." The 130-tract has 15 buildings, "10 of which are historically significant," Mr. Blackwell said. He described the place, located off Woodsville Road about a mile west of state Route 31 in the north-central township as "an incredible farmstead ... the number of historical associations it has are incredible."

The Smith family was one of the first to live on this farm, Mr. Blackwell said. "Some people credit Andrew Smith with the naming of our township," he added. The Hart family, which included a signer of the Declaration of Independence, John Hart, lived on the farm for four generations. Another member of that clan, Wilson Hart, was "a prominent entrepreneur in Hopewell and Lawrence townships," Mr. Blackwell said.

He said the residence on the farm is of a type known as a "bank house." This stone structure is literally built into a bank in a way that causes it to appear to be a one-story structure when viewed from one side and a two-story when viewed from another.

Also on the farm, Mr. Blackwell said, are "a wonderful 1858 stone barn, a stone-walled cow yard and a two-story spring house."

Mr. Blackwell said that Wilson Price Hunt, who lived on the farm about 200 years ago, "was commissioned by John Jacob Aster to cross the Rockies to establish a fur-trading post on the West Coast. Mr. Hunt followed basically the same route as Lewis and Clark, three years after they returned."

He said including the farm on the township historic register would mean an owner would not be able to alter structures on the property until it obtained the go-ahead, in the form of a Certificate of Appropriateness, from the Historic Sites Preservation Commission.

Township officials to get historic properties report

May 1 presentation will review 45 properties under consideration for inclusion on Hopewell Township's local register of historic places.

May 1, 2003

A recent survey of some of Hopewell Township's most historic properties will be presented at the May 1 meeting of the Township Committee.

The presentation by preservation consultant Robert J. Wise Jr. will review 45 properties under consideration for inclusion on Hopewell Township's local register of historic places.

Mr. Wise's survey, begun in 2001 and concluded earlier this year, is an intensive review of 22 individual properties and 23 more located within the historic districts of Pleasant Valley and Harbourton. All but 11 already are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Wise Preservation Planning, a Paoli, Pa. firm with experience in historic site survey work, was hired to revisit the properties, some of which had not been examined in detail since a township-wide survey in 1985-86, in order to provide current condition information and a professional opinion to the township Historic Preservation Commission.

The commission is charged with nominating sites to the local historic register, which was created in 2000 to recognize and protect historically significant elements of the Hopewell landscape. So far, five properties or structures have been named to the list: the circa-1860 Mount Rose Distillery, the 1882 Jacobs Creek bridge, the 1885 Mine Road bridge, the early 18th century Smith/Hunt/Hill Farm (also known as the Woodward Farm, on Marshalls Corner-Woodsville Road) and the 1744 Old Methodist Cemetery on Pennington-Titusville Road.

Commission members plan to use the Wise report as they consider additional listings to the register.

Mr. Wise's report recommends minor reconfigurations of both the Pleasant Valley and Harbourton districts, changes designed to preserve historic settings by including more open space and removing properties severely compromised by modern changes.

In determining eligibility, Mr. Wise used criteria developed by the township Historic Preservation Commission and modeled on the four criteria used by the National Park Service when considering properties for the national register: an association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; an association with the lives of persons significant in our past; the possession of distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction, including the work of a master, or the possession of information important in prehistory or history.

Funded by a \$28,120 grant from the National Park Service, the project was monitored by the New Jersey Office of Historic Preservation.

Copies of Mr. Wise's report are available for public inspection during business hours at the township municipal building. Information is also available online at www.hopewelltp.org.

Task force to study Titusville's Jacobs Creek Bridge

Key issues to be addressed are safety and historical significance.

By John Tredrea

March 18, 2004

A task force comprised of local, county and state officials, as well as two Hopewell Township residents, will address the future of the Jacobs Creek Bridge, a 120-year-old, 17-foot wide span with a 3-ton weight limit in the western section of the township.

The key issues to be addressed by the task force are safety and historical significance.

Because the bridge is on a Mercer County road, Route 579, it is the responsibility of county government. "We don't think the bridge is unsafe or that there is any imminent danger," said Mary Caffrey, spokeswoman for county executive Brian Hughes Wednesday afternoon. "But the county executive believes now is the time to bring the issue of the bridge to resolution. Obviously it's in the county's interest to make sure the bridge is safe, and that its historical value is preserved as much as possible, and we look forward to working with the task force on this matter."

The bridge is one of only two steel truss structures left in the county. The other, also in Hopewell Township, crosses Stony Brook on Mine Road. That bridge also dates to the late 19th century.

Hopewell Township Mayor Vanessa Sandom said Wednesday: "the Jacobs Creek bridge represents one of those complex issues that can only be addressed successfully by involving different levels of government. The state, the county and Hopewell Township all have an interest in determining a satisfactory resolution to the fate of the Jacobs Creek Bridge. When people get a clear look at the facts, it's not so difficult to come to a consensus decision."

The mayor said the task force's goal will be to make a recommendation on the bridge's future to local, county and state government.

Selected so far to serve on the task force, Mayor Sandom said, have been Andrea Tingey of the state historical preservation commission, John Subacus of Janssen Pharmaceutica — Janssen's Hopewell Township facility is on county Route 579 just north of the bridge — and township residents Robin Fogel and Peter Birthingham. The county engineering department and state Department of Transportation also are expected to be represented on the task force, the mayor said, as is the Hopewell Valley Mayors' Task Force on Traffic and Trucking.

Letter to Editor

Jacobs Creek bridge

June 10, 2004

To the editor:

There have been several articles in the local press in recent weeks concerning the future of the Bear Tavern Road bridge over Jacobs Creek. Many of these pieces cast the debate over this bridge as a polarized conflict between proponents of safety and historic preservation. We believe this to be a simplistic and ultimately unhelpful way in which to approach a complex issue.

By all means let us address safety first. No sane or self-respecting preservationist would seriously seek to keep in service an unsafe bridge, and this is not the position of the Hopewell Township Historic Preservation Commission, a legally constituted organ of local government of which we are the five regular voting members. If this structure is currently unsafe, as might be construed from a recently publicized engineer's verdict that the bridge is "functionally obsolete" and "structurally deficient," then Mercer County should consider closing it to traffic, while appropriate engineering solutions for this crossing are pursued.

Purported violation of the posted 3-ton limit is certainly also a safety issue. However, as with the problem of speeding along Route 29 north of Calhoun Street in Trenton, unlawful use of a roadway should not be used as an argument for, in the case of Route 29, installing New Jersey barriers along the median, or, in the case of the Jacobs Creek span, replacing the bridge.

Officials from Janssen, a company that has every interest in seeing the bridge replaced with a larger structure to facilitate increasing traffic flow to and from its soon-to-expand campus, have repeatedly drawn attention to violation of the 3-ton limit, even going so far as to raise the specter of school buses crossing the present bridge and plunging into the creek below. Let's be honest here, the bridge is off limits to school buses, a fact our school district and its school bus drivers are well aware of. If, heaven forbid, such a tragedy were to occur, is this really the fault of the bridge?

Regarding the historic aspect of the Jacobs Creek bridge, the Hopewell Township Historic Preservation Commission has issued an April 20 position statement in support of what we hope will transpire to be the rehabilitation rather than replacement of this structure. This statement has been furnished to Mayor Vanessa Sandom's Jacobs Creek Bridge Task Force, a body whose mission we wholeheartedly support, and offers, in our view, a fair and realistic historic preservation perspective as to how the future of the bridge might be addressed. This is no rabid, "preserve-at-all-costs" manifesto from a bunch of old bridge huggers, but a measured request that reasonable preservation-sensitive options for rehabilitation be considered.

This particular request, along with a suggestion that a qualified historic bridge engineer be hired to study the various options, was formally made, and apparently agreed to, more than two-and-a-half years ago and, for whatever reason, the prior county administration steadfastly refused to act upon it. Instead of working proactively to resolve the future of the bridge, the county has let the bridge further deteriorate, and now seems to be sitting back and letting a municipally-appointed task force embark upon what should be the county's conceptual design deliberations, to be completed within a 90-day (make that now 45-day) time frame. Let's face it, deciding how to proceed with this bridge is going to take more than 45 to 90 days — but perhaps within that period the county could finally retain the services of a qualified historic bridge engineer and manage to accomplish the useful task of applying a coat of paint to the span on the assumption that somehow the structure might be preservable.

The history and historical value of the bridge are well-documented. Erected in 1882, it is one of two surviving structures in New Jersey known to have been built by the King Iron Bridge and Manufacturing Company of Cleveland. It is listed in the township's local register of historic places and has been declared by the state as eligible for inclusion in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. It comfortably straddles Jacobs Creek in a still largely unspoiled wooded rural setting. The Historic Preservation Commission's position statement focuses principally on the bridge itself and remains silent on the historical qualities of the setting, a topic we wish to briefly expand upon here.

The Bear Tavern Road crossing of Jacobs Creek occupies a pinch point in the natural landscape and it was along this route that Washington's troops struggled into Trenton early in the morning on the day after Christmas in 1776. The challenge of fording Jacobs Creek in the wake of a nor'easter is vividly described by David Hackett Fischer in his best-selling new book, "Washington's Crossing." Indeed, Mr. Fischer devotes a chapter subtitled the "Ordeal at Jacob's Creek" to this episode, emphasizing what a critical spot in the landscape this was. Many communities in central New Jersey are now banding together to preserve some semblance of the historic landscape of the Revolutionary War through the proposed creation of the Crossroads of the American Revolution National Heritage Area. Area newspapers have editorially endorsed this concept. In this broader context of heritage tourism, it is important that the deliberations over the Jacobs Creek bridge give careful attention not only to the 1882 span but also to the rich historical associations of its surroundings.

In venturing into the subject of the bridge's setting, another important underlying issue for the Mayor's Task Force rises to the surface. What is at stake here is not only the need to fix a potentially unsafe and noisy old bridge (who would disagree with this?), but the long-term future of County Route 579, the larger entity of which Bear Tavern Road is merely a part. This route, in Hopewell Township at least, still clings to the belief that it is a rural highway. The Township, County and State, private landowners and non-profit organizations have combined to put several blocks of land along this corridor into open space and farmland preservation – a laudable example of public-private partnering. The road passes by Washington Crossing State Park and through the idyllic village of Harbourton, two of the township's choicest clusters of historic sites. Truck through-traffic is banned.

And yet the volume of vehicles on county Route 579 continues to swell, the result of near and distant corporate expansions, residential development, and commuters looking to avoid the rigors of Routes 29 and 31. The county has obligingly reconfigured the intersection of Bear Tavern and Pennington-Washington Crossing roads, arguably improving the traffic flow at this spot, but putting pressure on other surrounding road junctions. So the choice is this: should county Route 579 follow this inexorable track toward becoming another Route 31 or Route 29, and function primarily as a funnel for commuters, or should it consciously resist expansion, stay small and slow and scenic, and serve first the local community? In either context, it is important to recognize that the existing Jacobs Creek bridge serves a valuable role as a traffic-calming device on an exceedingly well-traveled road.

There is, of course, the important matter of ensuring accessibility of emergency vehicles to homes and businesses in the area around the Jacobs Creek bridge, particularly the Forrest streets and the Janssen campus on the north side of the creek, and the Hopewell Ridge development to the south. In the case of the former, a much larger bridge may offer an additional route, but most emergency vehicles would proceed via Route 29 and Maddock Road or via Pennington-Washington Crossing Road and Bear Tavern Road (north of the creek). For Hopewell Ridge, vehicles approaching from the municipal complex and the promised new fire station on the Merrill Lynch campus would not need to cross the Jacobs Creek bridge. We wonder also if there might be opportunities for cooperation with neighboring Ewing Township, or even Mercer County Airport, concerning the provision of emergency services for Hopewell Ridge.

Historic preservation is certainly not the only factor to be considered in deciding the fate of the Jacobs Creek bridge, nor should it necessarily outweigh all other concerns, but preservation options do deserve a full hearing

and should not merely be dismissed as irrelevant. A "context-sensitive" rehabilitation of this bridge could even prove to be less costly than erecting a new structure. Such an approach to the repair of historic truss bridges is nothing new. Many spans across the state have been successfully rehabilitated and kept in service without substantially altering their historic character.

We urge County Executive Brian Hughes, a strong advocate of historic preservation who has inherited some awkward preservation issues from the preceding administration, to involve the county Historic Preservation Commission in this debate. We urge the Hopewell Township Committee to honor its Resolution #01-79 of March 1, 2001 in which, by unanimous vote, it went on record as "favoring the rehabilitation and preservation of the bridge in place." And we note in closing the image of the Jacobs Creek bridge that dominates the township's Web site home page (www.hopewelltp.org), a sure sign that this span is emblematic of so much of our rural history that we Hopewell residents hold dear.

Richard Hunter, Titusville; David Blackwell, Skillman; Pamela J. Crabtree, Hopewell Township; Marilou Ehrler, Titusville; Maximillian Hayden III, Hopewell Township

Task force calls for rehabilitation of historic Jacobs Creek Bridge

Built in 1882, the iron truss Jacobs Creek Bridge is one of the six spans of its type still in use in New Jersey.

By John Tredrea

November 11, 2004

A task force including officials of Hopewell Township and Mercer County along with several township residents has recommended rehabilitating the historic Jacobs Creek Bridge instead of replacing it.

The task force's report was the subject of a presentation by one of its members, township Engineer Paul Pogorzelski, during Monday night's Township Committee meeting.

The report will be forwarded to the county administration, which has control over the bridge's future. The county owns the bridge, which crosses the creek on county Route 579, in the southwestern section of the township.

Built in 1882, the iron truss Jacobs Creek Bridge is one of the six spans of its type still in use in New Jersey. It was designated a historic site by the township in 2001.

The fundamental issue facing the task force was how to ensure that the bridge will be safe while preserving as much of its historic character and visual appeal as possible.

The task force's highest ranked alternative, Mr. Pogorzelski said, is to rehabilitate the bridge. This would, he said, eliminate the risk of structural collapse, permit passage of all emergency service vehicles and school buses and retain the scenic value of the existing bridge and its rural surroundings. The job would entail widening the bridge, increasing the height of its overhead girders and provide new structural underpinning.

IN OTHER BUSINESS during Monday night's meeting, the committee voted 3-2 to adopt an ordinance containing 22 amendments to the township zoning code. Voting yes were Mayor Vanessa Sandom, Deputy Mayor David Sandahl and Committeewoman Arlene Kemp. Voting no were committee members Jon Edwards and Marylou Ferrara, who focused their concerns on the sixth of the 22 amendments, which Mr. Edwards said he fears "could lead to lawsuits."

That amendment changes, from 40,000 square feet to 80,000 square feet, the minimum lot size of homes in the R-100 district served by wells and/or septic systems. This amendment has no effect on lots on which homes already have been built, officials said. They said the amendment also would have no effect on the sale of those homes. The amendment only affects undeveloped lots in the R-100 district, which is scattered in pockets throughout the 58-square mile township.

Letters to the Editor

Preserve the bridge!

November 18, 2004

To the editor:

David Hackett Fischer in his most recent book, "Washington's Crossing," devotes an entire chapter to Jacobs Creek. This area of the Hopewell Valley has played an important role in New Jersey history since the American Revolution. The Bear Tavern iron truss bridge, constructed in 1882 by the King Iron Bridge and Manufacturing Company, is a vital part of the history locally and of the New Jersey landscape.

The Hopewell Valley Historical Society strongly supports rehabilitating, in place, the existing Bear Tavern Bridge so as to bring it into compliance with the Secretary of Interior's standards for historic bridges. This bridge was determined in 1991 to be eligible for listing in the New Jersey and the National Registers of Historic Places. In May of 2001, the Bear Tavern Bridge was designated as a historic landmark by Hopewell Township.

The Hopewell Valley Historical Society feels it is both necessary and worthy to preserve important elements of our past for the future. History dictates that the Bear Tavern Bridge over Jacobs Creek deserves special consideration.

Susan L. Porcella, president, Hopewell Valley Historical Society

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP: Historic bridge might move to Alliger tract

Plan is to place bridge, now over Jacob's Creek, over Woolsey Creek as part of a trail running between the Delaware River and Pennington Borough

By John Tredrea, Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, February 26, 2009

A 125-year-old steel truss bridge over Jacob's Creek in southwestern Hopewell Township would be moved a few miles to a tract of open space and replaced by a new one, if township and county officials are able to finalize plans soon.

When moved, the old bridge would give pedestrians and mounted horses a passage over Woolsey Creek, which passes through the Alliger tract. The bridge currently crosses Jacob's Creek on Route 579 (Bear Tavern Road), a short distance south of Janssen Pharmaceutica.

The plan is to put the bridge over Woolsey Creek as part of a trail running between the Delaware River and Pennington Borough.

Because the bridge is on a county road, Mercer County has jurisdiction over it. For years, county officials have been saying the bridge should be replaced because it is not strong enough to handle modern traffic. Local opponents of replacing the bridge have said it is a historic structure that needs to be preserved.

Township Mayor Vanessa Sandom said Tuesday the bridge would be moved to the 167-acre Alliger tract, which has been preserved as open space. The tract is located near the township's administration and public works buildings, off Route 546 and Scotch Road.

"The bridge is certainly one of the Valley's historic treasures, which makes this decision all the more difficult for both the township and the county," the mayor said. "I'm glad we've taken the proper time to consider all the alternatives, and that in collaboration with the county we've come up with what appears to be a super compromise solution."

"The decision that still needs to be made is what kind of bridge will replace the one now on Jacob's Creek," she said. "The township Historic Sites Preservation Commission would rather have something that blends into the landscape than an attempt to make a new bridge look 'historic.'"

The mayor said the commission is expected to make a written recommendation to the Township Committee soon about the character of the new bridge over Jacob's Creek. The committee is expected to act on that recommendation at its March 9 meeting.

The mayor said the federal government's economic stimulus package is a factor in the decision to act now on the bridge. "The county says they want to hear from us about this by March 15," she said. "They want to know by then because of the possibility of applying for stimulus funding."

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP: Officials OK county's bridge plan

Jacobs Creek Bridge to go to Alliger Park

By John Tredrea, Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, March 12, 2009

On Monday, the Hopewell Township Committee endorsed, but with reluctance, Mercer County's plan to replace the Jacobs Creek Bridge with a modern structure.

The county plan calls for moving the existing bridge, well over 100 years old, to the Alliger tract, a 160-plus acre parcel of open space near the township Public Works building.

On the Alliger tract, which is permanently deed-restricted against development and open to the public, the historic steel truss bridge would give pedestrians, cyclists and horseback riders a means to cross Woolsey Creek.

History buffs have been trying for decades to save the old bridge, while county engineering officials have been saying the structure is not adequate to handle the demands of modern traffic. The bridge has a 3-ton weight limit.

"We routinely see violations of that limit," township Administrator/Engineer Paul Pogorzelski said Monday.

Mayor Vanessa Sandom called removal of the existing bridge "heartbreaking."

Committeeman David Sandahl prefaced his vote endorsing the county plan by saying he cast that vote "with reluctance."

Mr. Pogorzelski said township and county officials investigated thoroughly the issue of restoring the existing bridge.

"In order to modify the bridge sufficiently to make it safe, you would have to obliterate the historic nature of it," he said.

Mayor Sandom and other officials have said federal economic stimulus money may pay for the bridge project.

As part of the project, the county is investigating speed limit reductions and traffic calming measures in the vicinity of the bridge, which is on Bear Tavern Road (Route 579) near Maddock and Jacobs Creek roads. The county has jurisdiction over the bridge because it is on a county road.

Letters to the Editor

'Super bridge' impact

Thursday, June 11, 2009

Morris Cohen, Robin Fogel, Titusville

In early May, along with more than 100 concerned neighbors, we attended an information session held by Mayor Vanessa Sandom, to tell us about Mercer County's plans to replace the bridge over Jacob's Creek. The existing bridge has great historical value and has a significant and necessary calming effect on traffic.

We live off of Maddock Road and along with nearly all of our neighbors have been in traffic accidents or know someone who has been hit as drivers ignore posted speed limits as they approach and leave the bridge.

The proposed replacement bridge and lessening the curvature of Bear Tavern Road will have two notable effects — even faster traffic and much heavier trucks as drivers use that road as a shortcut between I-95 and Route 31.

Anyone turning from Maddock will be taking his/her life into his/her hands to an even greater extent than today as cars and trucks speed up and down Bear Tavern Road. Accidents will likely occur with greater frequency and sadly, greater severity.

We urge area residents and anyone interested in historical preservation and traffic safety to express your concerns in writing to Brian Hughes and the Mercer County Freeholders.

If you can, attend a meeting on June 24 at the Hopewell Township Municipal Building when the county comes to discuss its plans with residents. It's not often that such large numbers turn out as they did on May 5 — it's because we are concerned about the impact that the new "super bridge" will have on our neighborhoods.

Letters to the Editor

Highway 579

Thursday, June 11, 2009

Kim Robinson, Hopewell Township

Bear Tavern. The name itself conjures up a country feeling. When I was a Bear Tavern student, the road had as much of a country feel as the school itself. Not anymore.

Today, the road on which our elementary school sits is a busy thoroughfare. A cut through from both I-95 and Route 29 to Route 31, Route 579 has become a dangerous road, especially in the area of Bear Tavern School.

When the light is not flashing, the speed limit is 50 mph. A passing zone directly in front of the school makes the recipe for disaster complete.

Bear Tavern families take their lives in their hands when they park along the road to attend school events. Just last week, a friend of mine was almost hit head-on by passing cars as he approached the school to drop off his children.

The situation is bad; it is about to get worse. As we have read in this paper, the historic Jacob's Creek Bridge is being replaced.

What many do not know is that the new bridge will have no weight or height restrictions, and the county's plan is to redesign the roadway at the bridge into a sweeping curve, eliminating the T-intersection and stop sign that currently force motorists to at least slow down, if not come to a stop.

Once this project is completed, a higher volume of vehicles, large trucks now included, will be barreling past the school, passing each other at 50 mph. It will be a death trap.

A group of area residents, including me, would like the township and the county to work together on a holistic analysis of Route 579 in relation to this project.

We are asking that the entire length of roadway be studied, and that an overall plan be devised that will ensure the safety of our motorists, residents, and the school community. The analysis would examine issues such as speed, volume, and passing zones, as well as the protection of our historic areas and the roadway itself.

The resulting plan may include speed limit reductions, relocated passing zones, traffic appeasements, and possibly even a new entrance/exit for Janssen Pharmaceutica on Route 29. To this end, we have written a petition asking for such an analysis to be performed. \

If you are a Hopewell Township resident, and someone asks you to sign this petition, please do. If you wish to obtain your own copy of the petition for signature collection, please e-mail jacobscreek2009@hotmail.com and a copy will be sent to you.

All completed petitions should be dropped off at the mayor's office by June 22. I realize that my girls will not have the exact same experience that I did at Bear Tavern, but if they could maybe not attend school on a highway, that would be good.

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP: County sets Jacobs Creek Bridge session

Time is 7 p.m. June 24 in auditorium of the township Municipal Building, Route 546 and Scotch Road

By John Tredrea, Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, June 18, 2009

Mercer County officials will take questions and comments from residents about a plan to replace the Jacobs Creek Bridge, in western Hopewell Township, at a public meeting set for 7 p.m. June 24 in the auditorium of the township Municipal Building, Route 546 and Scotch Road.

The current bridge, a steel truss structure built in the late 19th century, crosses the creek on Bear Tavern Road (Route 579), just north of Jacobs Creek Road.

After decades of debate on the still-controversial issue, the county decided several months ago that the bridge will be replaced with a modern structure.

The county says the job needs to be done for reasons of safety. The current bridge has a three-ton weight limit that sometimes is violated, county and municipal officials say.

As a result of negotiations with those who wanted the current bridge preserved because of its historic status, the county will move the span to a 167-acre parcel of land that has been preserved as open space and is open to the public.

That land, known locally as the Alliger tract, is off the northern side of Pennington-Washington Crossing Road (Route 546), near the township Public Works Building.

On the Alliger tract, the bridge would go over a creek and be used by walkers and cyclists.

The plan for a new bridge has some residents concerned about traffic changes that could result.

Some of those residents are circulating a petition calling on the county to do an analysis of the portion of Bear Tavern Road that runs through Hopewell Township.

The residents are concerned that a new bridge would result in a higher volume of traffic, including truck traffic, and speeding.

Bear Tavern Elementary School is on the road, the residents note, along with many residences.

HOPEWELL: New bridge's impact on traffic worries residents

by John Tredrea, Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, July 2, 2009

Well over a century old and looking every bit of it, the Jacobs Creek Bridge in southwestern Hopewell Township is going to be replaced within the next few years.

What has scores of residents who live near the bridge worried is the impact on traffic the new bridge will have.

The current bridge has a 3-ton weight limit. It has a 15-mile-per-hour speed limit and is just wide enough for two small or midsize vehicles to go over it at the same time.

The bridge that will replace it will have no weight limit and will be big enough for tractor-trailers. Residents fear that change will bring an increase in traffic, including truck traffic, in an area already plagued, the residents say, by constant motor vehicle speeding.

About 50 residents attended a June 24 meeting on the bridge and related traffic issues, held in the auditorium of the township municipal building. On hand were Chief County Engineer Gregory Sandusky and other traffic and engineering officials of Mercer County, which has jurisdiction over the bridge.

The bridge goes over Jacobs Creek on county Route 579, also known as Bear Tavern Road. Kim Robinson, one of the residents who attended the meeting, said more than 175 people have signed a petition calling on the county to do a thorough traffic analysis of Route 579, from the bridge north to the Hunterdon County line.

The petition said the analysis should result “in an all-encompassing plan, addressing, but not limited to, speed control, appropriate location of passing zones, trucking limits and traffic appeasements that will ensure the safety of residents, motorists and the school community. . .”

The school the petition refers to is Bear Tavern Elementary, located on Bear Tavern Road about three-quarters of a mile north of the bridge. Based on comments made by Mr. Sandusky’s team at the June 24 meeting, it appears one of the residents’ concerns will be addressed to their satisfaction.

That concern is the existence of a passing zone in front of the school. The existence of that zone is “totally inappropriate,” said George Fallat, a county engineer who was with Mr. Sandusky.

Mr. Sandusky indicated the county is willing to “close that passing zone.”

In order for the county to make that change, he said, it would need a written resolution requesting it from Hopewell Township. The county then could pass a law eliminating the passing zone, he said.

The bridge, which the county says needs to be replaced for reasons of safety, is to be moved to a township park where it will give walkers and cyclists a way across Woolsey Creek. That park is Alliger Park, located off county Route 546, or Washington Crossing Road.

This fate for the current bridge resulted in large part from decades of pleas from local history buffs to save it.

More than the bridge is slated for replacement. The T-intersection of Bear Tavern Road with Jacobs Creek Road, south of the bridge, is to be replaced by a merging of the roads into one another. Some residents feel this will be less safe — because, they say, it will increase speeding and bad driving in general — than having the stop sign that is in place now.

Speed limits on the road form another big point of contention with the residents. As one comes off the bridge, headed north on Bear Tavern Road, the current posted limit is 35 mph. It stays that way for about a quarter mile.

Then, near the entrance of Janssen Pharmaceutica, which has a large office-research campus, the limit goes up to 50 mph and stays there until one comes to Bear Tavern School about a half mile north of Janssen.

Signs near the school, which are equipped with flashers, say the limit is 35 mph when children are present.

Many residents at the meeting said the limits should be lowered. Chris French, for example, said all speed limits should be 25 mph within a mile and a half of the school. A woman suggested speed bumps. Mr. Fallat answered that one right away, saying those bumps won't be used on a county road.

A thread running through most of the residents' comments is that a speeding problem that already is very bad will get a lot worse once the new bridge is put in and the traffic flow just south of it re-aligned. The residents fear these "improvements" will increase the volume of traffic and the overall speed of the traffic.

"If we build it, they will come, and they will come like crazy," one man said.

"I would hate to see one of our kids killed by someone racing to work or on a shortcut," another man added, eliciting loud applause from his neighbors.

The county officials stressed they are studying the road and conferring with township officials about it. However, they said they could not commit now to lowering speed limits. The road must be studied first, they said.

Mr. Fallat said many traffic studies have shown artificially-low speed limits make roads less safe than they would be otherwise. One reason for this is speed limits that are too low have been shown to result in some motorists attempting to pass other vehicles when they definitely should not.

Addressing the concern the changes will result in much more heavy truck traffic, Paul Pogorzelski, township administrator and engineer, said Bear Tavern Road has a 4-ton limit north of Washington Crossing Road, which is a short distance north of Bear Tavern School. There is no weight limit on Bear Tavern south of Washington Crossing Road.

"Trucks can't violate specific bridge limits, but, otherwise, they are allowed anywhere they have to go in order to make a local delivery," Mr. Pogorzelski said. "Truckers have Constitutional rights."

Lt. Lance Maloney, of the township police, attended the meeting. He said while township police can write a trucker a ticket for violating a bridge's weight limit, only State Police can pull over trucks to weigh them and inspect them.

"You do need enforcement," Lt. Maloney said to the residents upset about speeding. "But we do have 60 square miles to cover."

Mayor Vanessa Sandom, who moderated the meeting, added, "Every neighborhood in the township" has problems with speeding similar to those voiced at the meeting. She said the township cannot afford the expense of increasing the size of its Police Department.

Mr. Sandusky said the design of the new bridge is still in the conceptual stage.

"We looked at 17 alternatives," he said.

The mayor said several times the replacement of the bridge is a done deal.

”That decision has been made” at the municipal, county and state levels of government, she said.

”But a lot of decisions still need to be made that will impact traffic volume and speed,” she said.

County officials say the new bridge will cost between \$2 million and \$5 million, with the state covering the full cost. No date has been set for the start of the project, but the county says the job will take 18 months to do.

Use of the current bridge can continue for all but four or five of those months, the county says.

Over the years, township police and officials have occasionally said they have seen trucks, some of them well over 3 tons, violate the limit on the current Jacobs Creek Bridge. Some of those trucks literally have gotten stuck on the bridge, the mayor said last week.

HOPEWELL VALLEY: School board asks Mercer County to address Route 579 safety

Resolution requests elimination of passing zone and decrease in speed limit

By Reem Nasrm Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, July 23, 2009

The Hopewell Valley Regional Board of Education passed a resolution Monday aimed at the elimination of the passing zone and a decrease in the speed limit on Route 579 in the area of Bear Tavern Elementary School.

The resolution asks the Mercer County Department of Transportation to lower the current speed limit of 35 mph on Route 579, also known as Bear Tavern Road. No suggestion for a replacement speed limit is noted in the resolution.

Bear Tavern is located at 1162 Bear Tavern Road and houses about 553 students between the ages of 3 and 11. The current speed limit is considered too high by the board. The resolution aims at creating a safer atmosphere for the students.

The passing zone is located directly in front of the school and is considered unsafe, especially during arrival and dismissal times.

The resolution calls for an examination by county transportation officials of the speed limit and passing zone to determine their safety and impact on the school.

All board members were in favor of this resolution.

THE BEAR TAVERN ROAD issue is not new, having been a topic at the June 24 meeting of the Hopewell Township Committee.

About 50 residents attended that session at which the possible impacts, including traffic, of the planned replacement of the historic Jacobs Creek Bridge, at the southern end of Bear Tavern Road, were discussed.

The existing bridge has a 3-ton weight limit and a 15-mile-per-hour speed limit and is just wide enough for two small or mid-size vehicles to go over it at the same time. Many residents who live near the bridge are worried about the impact on traffic the new bridge might have.

On hand that night were Chief County Engineer Gregory Sandusky and other traffic and engineering officials of Mercer County, which has jurisdiction over the bridge.

Township resident Kim Robinson, who attended that meeting, said more than 175 people had signed a petition calling on the county to do a thorough traffic analysis of Route 579, from the bridge north to the Hunterdon County line.

The petition said the analysis should result “in an all-encompassing plan, addressing, but not limited to, speed control, appropriate location of passing zones, trucking limits and traffic appeasements that will ensure the safety of residents, motorists and the (Bear Tavern) school community. . .”

That night, George Fallat, a county engineer who accompanied Mr. Sandusky, said the existence of the passing zone in front of Bear Tavern School is “totally inappropriate.”

Mr. Sandusky indicated the county was willing to “close that passing zone.”

In order for the county to make that change, he said, it would need a written resolution requesting it from Hopewell Township. The county then could pass a law eliminating the passing zone, he said.

Mayor Vanessa Sandom said Tuesday that the committee is expected to adopt the necessary resolution at a meeting of the Hopewell Township Committee in August.

The bridge itself is to be moved to Alliger Park, where it will give walkers and cyclists a way to cross Woolsey Creek. That park is located off Route 546.

More than the bridge is slated for replacement. The T-intersection of Bear Tavern Road with Jacob's Creek Road, south of the bridge, is to be replaced by a merging of the roads into one another. Some residents feel this would be less safe — because, they say, it would increase speeding and bad driving in general — than having the stop sign that is in place now.

Speed limits on Bear Tavern Road are another concern for area residents. As one comes off the bridge, headed north on Bear Tavern, the posted limit is 35 mph. It stays that way for about a quarter mile.

Then, near the entrance of Janssen Pharmaceutica, which has a large office-research campus, the limit goes up to 50 mph and stays that way until one approaches Bear Tavern School about a half mile north of Janssen.

Signs near the school, which are equipped with flashers, say the limit is 35 mph when children are present.

Many residents at the meeting said the limits should be lowered. Resident Chris French, for example, said all speed limits should be 25 mph within a mile and a half of the school.

Most residents who spoke said a speeding problem that already is very bad would get a lot worse once the new bridge is put in and the traffic flow just south of it realigned. The residents fear these "improvements" would increase the volume of traffic and the overall speed of the traffic.

County officials said they were studying the road and conferring with township officials about it. However, they said they could not commit then to lowering speed limits. The road must be studied first, they noted.

IN OTHER BUSINESS, the school board OK'd agreements between the school district and the Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association. In a "green" initiative, the district is switching from the traditional cardboard milk carton to a plastic milk bottle — allowing the district to recycle the containers, which was previously impossible because of the waxy coating on the cardboard cartons.

The Mid-Atlantic Dairy Association also will provide a \$9,286 grant to promote the use of bottles.

A School Milk Pilot test conducted by the National Dairy Council showed that when milk is served in plastic bottles and attractively merchandised, more children were likely to drink it. Currently, about 77 percent of children between 9 and 19 do not meet the recommended daily intake of three dairy servings a day. The move by the district to change milk vendors is an effort to increase milk consumption in schools.

According to board Secretary Robert Colavita, the grant will be used to purchase new coolers for the milk and a more attractive recycling bin.

The money also will enable the district to purchase a new computer checkout system for the lunchroom. The grant allows the school to become more green and environmentally friendly.

"This enables us to do all that with no cost to the district," said Mr. Colavita.

Letter to Editor

Jacob's Creek Bridge

Thursday, August 6, 2009

Kim Robinson, Hopewell Township

We all know what the plan entails: the removal of the historic Jacob's Creek Bridge; the installation of a much wider bridge that has no weight or height restrictions; and the redesign of the roadway to eliminate the traffic-calming T-intersection and stop sign.

We all know what effects the plan will have: increased traffic, increased speed, 18-wheeler trucks, dangerous conditions for school children and families, and quickly deteriorating roads.

But how many know how this plan came to be? What was the impetus for the plan to remove the bridge and create a highway in front of our elementary school? Why did the county reject our Bridge Task Force's recommendations, all of which kept the traffic-calming intersection? Why can't the bridge be repaired and made safe? Is the bridge unsafe now? How do Janssen's business plans fit into the county's decision? How does state funding affect the decision? And what can be done at this point?

If you would like to find out more, I encourage you to attend two upcoming meetings. The first, hosted by Hopewell Township (Ewing residents welcome), will be held on Aug. 18 at 6:30 p.m. in the Hopewell Township Municipal Building. The second, hosted by Ewing Township (Hopewell Township residents welcome), will be held the following night, Aug. 19, at 7 p.m. in the Ewing Council room.

Note: County representatives have been invited to make a presentation and answer questions at the Ewing meeting.

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP: Officials seek Route 579 traffic-calming measures

One is elimination of passing zone in front of Bear Tavern Elementary School

By John Tredrea, Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, August 13

A passing zone on Bear Tavern Road (Route 579) in front of Bear Tavern Elementary School is expected to be replaced with a no passing zone.

The Hopewell Township Committee voted unanimously Monday night in favor of a resolution asking Mercer County to make that change.

County traffic and engineering officials already have told township officials they would make the change if the township formally asked for it.

Many residents opposed to the replacement of Jacob's Creek Bridge (see separate story) have told township and county officials that the passing zone in front of the school should be eliminated. The resolution adopted Monday says the township will work with the county to try to have the no passing zone in place before the beginning of the school year, which officially begins Sept. 9.

The resolution also asks the county to institute other traffic-calming measures for Bear Tavern Road. Area residents fear a major increase in traffic volume and speeding when the bridge is replaced.

The traffic-calming measures sought in the resolution include dropping the road's speed limit to 35 mph from the Janssen Pharmaceutica driveway, just north of the bridge, to 2,000 feet north of Church Road. This is a distance of several miles. The speed limit in most of this stretch is now 50 mph.

Other traffic-calming measures sought in the resolution are:

— A reduction from 50 mph to 45 mph of the speed limit from a point 2,000 feet north of Church Road to Harbourton-Woodsville Road.

— A reduction of the speed limit in front of the school to 25 mph from 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. and putting in new flashers that would remain operative for that entire time period. The current limit is 35 mph when the flashers are operative. The current flashers are not operative for as long a time period as the proposed flashers.

— A "Farm Vehicle Crossing" at the Kerr Farm on Bear Tavern Road. Members of the Kerr family have said that using their farm vehicles on the road, as they sometimes must do, has become dangerous.

— A pedestrian crosswalk in front of the school.

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP: Uproar continues over Jacob's Creek Bridge plan

Neighbors fear dramatic increase in speeding and traffic

By John Tredrea, Staff Writer

Posted: Thursday, August 13, 2009

The months-old public outcry against the impending replacement of the Jacob's Creek Bridge in southwestern Hopewell Township continued for hours at Monday night's Township Committee meeting.

The bridge crosses the creek on Bear Tavern Road (Route 579), just north of its intersection with Jacob's Creek Road.

Mercer County, which owns the bridge, has decided to replace it, saying the job must be done for reasons of safety. The township has no jurisdiction over the bridge. The replacement won't be completed for two years or more, and no work on it has begun, but the job is a done deal, county and township officials have said.

State money will cover the cost, estimated at \$6 million.

Many township residents who live near the bridge, or who have children attending Bear Tavern Elementary School on Bear Tavern Road, are up in arms because the new bridge would have no weight limit. The neighbors fear a dramatic increase in speeding and traffic, including tractor trailers, which cannot use the 125-year-old bridge now in place because that span has a 3-ton limit.

Another point of contention with the neighbors is that the new bridge would bring elimination of Bear Tavern Road's T-intersection with Jacob's Creek Road and replace it with a merging traffic pattern. The proximity of the school, about a mile north of the bridge, is a key point in the residents' concern.

Residents also say the county did not give enough weight to comments from the township's Task Force on Jacob's Creek Bridge. Among that task force's recommendations was the possibility of "slicing and dicing" the bridge. This would entail cutting it up and rebuilding it in an enlarged, safer form. But the state Historic Preservation Commission nixed that plan, the mayor noted. The commission felt slicing and dicing would kill the historic character of the bridge.

The existing bridge will not be demolished when the county replaces it. Instead, it will be moved to Alliger Park, off Pennington-Washington Crossing Road, for use as a bridge over Woolsey Creek for hikers and cyclers.

Resident Jim O'Rourke told the committee Monday night that the county's current plan is "unsafe." He urged officials to work hard to have the plan changed. Many other residents made similar statements, often generating loud applause and cheers.

Kim Robinson asked the committee "to revisit its endorsement of the county's plan for Jacob's Creek Bridge."

Township Mayor Vanessa Sandom said Tuesday morning state law prohibits construction of a new bridge with a weight limit.

Township Administrator/Engineer Paul Pogorzelski said during the meeting that "the new bridge will be safer." He added that the existing iron truss bridge, built in the late 19th century, has been rated the least safe bridge in Mercer County by county officials. He said the bridge has been rated at 6 in a safety scale in which the top rating is 100, adding the state recommends replacing a bridge with a rating of less than 50.

He also addressed the fact that the bridge is made of iron rather than steel. “Steel fails very slowly. When iron fails, it snaps,” he said.