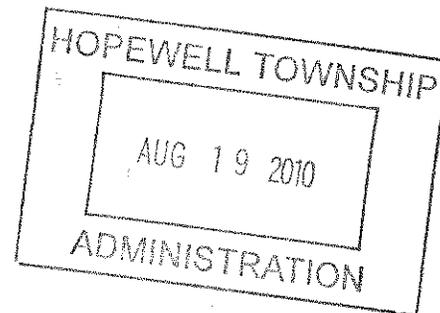




COUNTY OF MERCER

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County Administrator

Hon. Bob Martin
Commissioner
New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection
401 East State St.
7th Floor, East Wing
P.O. Box 402
Trenton, NJ 08625

August 13, 2010

Honorable Commissioner Martin,

Thank you for meeting with me on August 6 to discuss various issues regarding the proposal to construct a new bridge over Jacobs Creek and realign County Route 579 in Hopewell Township. I found the conversation with you, your Chief of Staff, Magdalena Padilla, the Acting Administrator of the Historic Preservation Office, Dan Saunders, Press Director, Larry Ragonese, and Hopewell Township Mayor Michael Markulec to be very productive.

As we discussed, Mercer County's goal has been from the beginning and continues to be to provide a safe road alignment and to construct a bridge that will ensure the safety of the students attending the Bear Tavern Elementary School, safely accommodate traffic demand, and allow emergency vehicles, school buses and delivery vehicles to travel through the area, while doing so at a responsible cost to the taxpayers.

We remain committed to Alternative 5A/5B-Modified 3, which calls for the construction of a new single span bridge and the rehabilitation and relocation of the existing historic truss bridge to a local park for use as a pedestrian bridge. This option was granted the full support of Mr. Saunders and the State Historic Preservation Office in May 2009 as SHPO concurred that it would "minimize adverse effects to identified historic properties." This proposal also allows Mercer County to take advantage of state funding earmarked for this project.

In a letter to NJDEP Assistant Commissioner Amy Cradic on May 5, 2010, my administration outlined three variations of 5A/5B with a fourth option to keep the bridge closed:

- Rehabilitate the existing truss bridge for pedestrian use and retain at the current location. The floor beams would be replaced and the deck replaced with new stringers with a new deck. The existing stone masonry abutments would be rehabilitated. This area and the existing truss bridge would be closed to vehicular traffic and could be considered an overlook for pedestrians and bicyclists. A new, single-span bridge of conventional construction would be built on the new alignment to carry two-way traffic with 12-foot-wide lanes and shoulders.
- The existing truss bridge would be relocated and rehabilitated for pedestrian use at Alliger Park in Hopewell Township. The floor beams would be replaced and the deck would be replaced with new stringers and a new deck. New abutments and wing walls would be constructed using the stone from the existing abutments at the new location for the relocated existing truss. A new single-span bridge of conventional construction would be constructed on the new alignment to carry two-way traffic with 12-foot-wide lanes and shoulders.
- The existing truss would be removed and rehabilitated. A new single-span bridge would replace the structural element of the crossing on the new alignment to carry two-way traffic with 12-foot-wide lanes and shoulders. The rehabilitated truss would then be “sliced” to accommodate the new width and height. The non-functioning trusses would be refurbished and replaced as a facade to the replacement bridge on the new alignment.
- Leave Jacobs Creek Bridge closed.

During our meeting on August 6, I presented a fifth option: to deed to Hopewell Township both Jacobs Creek Bridge and the portion of County Route 579 from the Ewing Township line to Washington Crossing Road (County Route 546).

Mercer County has conducted extensive studies to determine the viability and the safety of the existing bridge. It was concluded the existing bridge would not be able to sustain the repetitive overloads that were occurring. Therefore, the decision to close Jacobs Creek Bridge was made in September 2009. At this time, Mercer County is not willing to reopen Jacobs Creek Bridge in its current condition. However, if Hopewell Township wishes to reopen the bridge and retain the current road alignment, the County would be willing to transfer jurisdiction of Bear Tavern Road from the Ewing Township line to Washington Crossing Road, including Jacobs Creek Bridge, to Hopewell Township. The County views this as a reasonable alternative in which Hopewell would be free to determine the future of the bridge as well as undertake roadway treatments in front of Bear Tavern Elementary School.

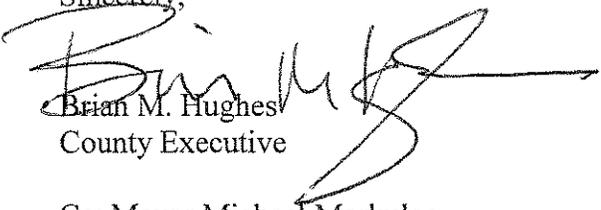
The situation as it presently stands is unacceptable to Mercer County and unfair to our hardworking taxpayers and responsible corporate entities. The children who attend Bear Tavern Elementary School deserve a safe environment around their school. Emergency vehicles are forced to travel longer routes to respond to emergency calls. Residents are forced to make long, arduous daily commutes due to the closure of the bridge.

Since 2004, Mercer County has exhibited patience, carefully considered residents' concerns, attended numerous public meetings in Hopewell Township, and has complied fully with NJDEP regulations and requirements. To date, Mercer County has spent more than \$100,000 to prepare a Historic Bridge Alternative Analysis, a Phase 1A Archeological Survey, and a Phase 1B Archeological Survey. As a result of the bridge closure and resulting change in traffic patterns, Mercer County was also required to install and maintain a temporary traffic signal at Jacobs Creek Road and Washington Crossing Road. Finally, countless staff hours and resources have been diverted from other pressing needs within the county. Yet, despite these efforts, we find that we are no closer to NJDEP reaching a final decision on how to move forward.

The County has done everything in its power to achieve a resolution. We believe our taxpayers deserve a decision by NJDEP on whether we can expect environmental permits at this site.

I look forward to taking part in an upcoming meeting you suggested holding with you and your staff, representatives of the County, and representatives from Janssen Pharmaceutica. I hope that will be scheduled in the near future, perhaps by mid-September.

Sincerely,



Brian M. Hughes
County Executive

Cc: Mayor Michael Markulec
Paul Pogorzelski, Township Administrator