

## **Transcription of Mayor Dave Fried's comments at the Sept. 8, 2022 Township Council meeting regarding the "Thompson Tract"**

"When people especially on social media see a proposal, they automatically assume it's a done deal and that couldn't be further from the truth. The Administration's job is to bring things to the Council. The Council's job is to evaluate things and they have to do it impartially. They have these public meetings so they can listen to everyone. But I can tell you nine times out of 10 I don't know what Council is going to do. They absolutely do care; they absolutely do listen, and they want to hear all of the information. But just because they listen to a proposal that doesn't mean they are going to do it. Between Administration and Council probably 90 percent of the proposals that come before us we don't do. This is the second or third time we have looked at the proposal of the Thompson property, and it's the second or third time – I can assure you – and I'll only speak for the Administration side, there's no desire to develop the entire property.

We will continue to work with the school district for a couple of reasons. This (proposed Recreation) building, for the school district, will not only be good for them but also good for the residents. They have shortages for their sports and shortages when it comes to facilities. If we can find a way to share resources, it saves everybody money and having everything in one place just makes a whole lot of sense. That is why we decided to take a hard look at the school district. As we looked at it, we realized we would be taking some of their space (for the building). IF we take some of their space, IF there is a need, we'd like to be able to replace that space. IF we do that it would be on property adjacent to the school. It would not disturb any wildlife, it would not have any lights, it would not have any impervious surfaces. As of right now we really haven't gotten the information we need from the district to make any decisions. Until we do it's really, really hard for us to tell you what we want to do until we know what their needs are and how much property we would displace regarding where we're going to put that building. So, it's very much up in the air, it is absolutely not a done deal, we are absolutely looking at it but the idea that we are going to do a wholesale development of that property I would say is off the table. I will speak only for the Administration side but that's not something we're considering. It's not going to happen. Yes, we looked at it, but it doesn't work. The traffic doesn't work, the residents don't want it and I can go through a host of reasons why it doesn't work, but it just doesn't. I know I keep repeating myself, but I know tomorrow I'm going to forget to say one thing, and someone will say "well, what about this?" The answer is probably no. If something changes, we will absolutely let everyone know. We've tried really hard to be as transparent as we could. We've held public meetings, we put it on social media, we put it on the Township website. I don't know what more we could have done to let people know that we were considering something. That's just us trying to be transparent. The truth of the matter is we want to work with the school district, we have a good relationship with the school district and, remember, the school district has the ability to do taking. They can condemn property, which means it can wind

up somewhere else. That's why we have to be sure, when it comes to our Open Space programs, that we work together. If we can conserve property, we are absolutely going to do it.

Robbinsville has the most aggressive Open Space program in all of Mercer County. It's the only (aspect) where I'm proud we have the highest tax in Mercer County. We preserve more acres than any town in Mercer County and we are going to try and continue to do that because at the end of the day, once we develop that (Thompson Tract) property, it's gone. I know it's a burden, and I'm probably going to ask people to increase the Open Space Tax again (on the November 8 ballot). However, when you think about the property we are saving, every house that we don't build typically generates two kids per house. It's roughly \$15,000 per child for school. So, just for school, that's \$30,000 per household. It then costs us roughly \$6,000-\$7,000 for municipal services. That burden needs to be made up by the rest of us. So, we lose money on every house that we build, so every acre we preserve over the long haul saves us money. It also creates more greenspace, wildlife and all the other benefits. I want to be clear: we take (land preservation) very seriously. We don't use preservation willy nilly, and when we do preserve something, we think long and hard about it. The last piece I'd say, and people always ask me, is why are we using Open Space for Recreation? That is the only way we do Recreation. Every park we have is done through open space. It's how we buy it. It's how we preserve it. It's how we maintain it. Miry Run is a great example. Last time (Open Space was on the election ballot) we went out to the voters and asked them to preserve Washington Woods (across from RHS), which is conservation, and at the same time we did Miry Run, which is a park. So, we used Open Space for two things at the exact same time. I want to be very clear when we do Open Space, we do it for Recreation and we do it for conservation and we do it for farmland. When we use (State of New Jersey) Green Acres money like we did for Thompson land we prefer to use for Recreation or conservation. Right now, we are using it for farmland.

We are trying really hard to maintain farmland. It's part of our tradition, it's part of our heritage, and anyone that's been to the grocery store recently knows why we need to keep and maintain our working farms in the Township. Sometimes these things take a lot longer than people like, but I wanted to explain it in more detail. We do take Open Space very seriously and if I can quell the Thompson thing again: We ARE NOT considering a wholesale development of the Thompson property. It was a bad idea. We've now looked at it twice and it doesn't work for just about every reason anyone can think of. I also want to thank the residents for a minute. We really do read your emails, and it really does help us to formulate our thoughts. I can't tell you how many letters we've gotten from residents that actually came up with things that I didn't think of. I want you to know you are heard and it really is helpful because we learn as well. I really do appreciate when residents send us stuff. Keep them coming. We try to respond on social media as much as we can but it's tough sometimes (to answer complicated questions) in little snippets and once I've written more than one paragraph most people have tuned out, so that's the best that we can do. Thank you for indulging me a little bit tonight as I've tried to explain this as best we could."