



17 North Main Street • Medford • NJ 08055 • 609/654-2608

www.medfordtownship.com

MAIN FAX 609/953-4087

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As a lifelong resident of Medford, I personally appreciate what Woodford's Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge does for our community and the region. I believe I can speak for the rest of Medford's council members when I say that I know they feel the same.

Medford will collect \$731,157.00 from the open space tax levy in 2020. Medford has annual obligations and will spend \$1,105,371.00 from the open space tax fund in 2020. These annual obligations consist mainly of debt service related to prior open space acquisitions. Medford also has a reserve in the open space fund of approximately \$3.3M. The reason for the reserve is to bridge the gap of \$400K between the open space tax collected and the obligations to be paid from the fund every year. Without the reserve we would have to raise the open space tax rate to meet our annual obligations.

In addition to the annual obligations that are paid from the open space fund the remainder of the reserve is allocated to other open space needs that will have a long-term positive impact on Medford as well as maintenance of our existing recreation facilities and parks. There is a bigger picture that must be considered when deciding to expend open space funds. It isn't always about numbers on a financial statement or the balance in an account. It is the Township's long-term obligations, plans, and goals that must be taken into account. Medford's Town Council takes very seriously the obligation to manage the finances entrusted to us by our residents.

In 1997 the Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge was paid \$900,492 by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection for a Deed of Conservation Restriction. The Deed of Conservation Restriction provides that the property must be maintained in a natural state and can only be used for conservation and recreation purposes, including the wildlife refuge, in perpetuity. It should also be noted that Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge is exempt from all local property taxes.

Last week the township's solicitor was asked to review the request made for open space funds by Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge. His legal opinion is that open space funds collected by the Township can only be used to acquire or maintain property that the Township will own or has a right to acquire. The State of New Jersey has already purchased the rights to the property owned by the Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge. Since the rights to the property have already been acquired by the State of New Jersey, the Township cannot use open space funds to acquire the property by either purchase or acquiring the rights to the property by deed restriction. Furthermore, open space funds are not permitted to be donated to a third party nor can the funds be used for operating expenses of a third party. The Township cannot donate taxpayer funded open space funds to a nonprofit organization for operating expenses. I reached out yesterday to Cedar Run's Executive Director, Dennis Miranda, and discussed this legal opinion with him.

Cedar Run, as well as most of Medford's organizations and businesses, are struggling as we wade through these uncharted times. We all hope that you will consider supporting our amazing non-profits, like Cedar Run, as well as shopping local to support our businesses.

Chuck Watson
Mayor, Medford Township