

## **ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES REGARDING THE FEASIBILITY OF ROADWAY CONSTRUCTION IN THE STUDY AREA**

As part of its deliberative process of formulating the roadway improvement plan to alleviate traffic congestion at the Route 206/Route 518 intersection and to provide an integrated road network for access to the existing and future development in the vicinity of the intersection, the Transportation Advisory Committee (TAC) considered a number of alternatives.

The three (3) principal alternatives which were considered by the TAC included the following, each of which would have to pass through portions of an eighty-three (83) acre forested wetland complex that comprises the headwaters of Van Horne Brook and Cherry Brook:

- A northerly extension of Linton Drive directly through the wetland complex, passing to the west of the Princeton Airport and proceeding north to Route 518;
- A road proceeding from Cherry Valley Road in a northerly direction, east of the "Woods Edge" development, that would intersect with the western end of Applegate Road, and then proceed westwardly through a portion of the wetlands before turning north, past the western end of the Princeton Airport, to an intersection with Route 518; and
- A road proceeding from Cherry Valley Road in a northerly direction, west of the "Yorkshire Woods" development, through portions of the wetlands before turning north to an intersection with Route 518.

In order to determine the viability of the three (3) alternative roadway alignments, Montgomery Township requested TRC Omni Environmental Corporation (TRC Omni) to investigate the environmental feasibility of constructing roadways through the very high quality wetlands, which are defined as "exceptional" because of the presence of threatened and endangered species in the area.

TRC Omni issued an April 3, 2002 report which is attached to this document as Addendum III. As summarily concluded by the environmental consultants on page 5 of their report: "In our opinion, the likelihood of obtaining an Individual Freshwater Wetlands Permit to disturb these Exceptional Resource Value wetlands is low." Therefore, the Traffic Advisory Committee has determined that the construction of any of the three (3) alternative roadway alignments is not feasible.

TRC Omni also offered the suggestion that Montgomery Township investigate the possibility of "permanently preserving the Exceptional Resource Value wetlands in order to obtain mitigation credits that could be use to offset wetlands impacts elsewhere within Montgomery Township."

As described TRC Omni on pages 5 & 6 of their April 3, 2002 report:

"Under the provisions of NJAC 7:7A-15, the Wetlands Mitigation Council may accept permanent protection of property from future development as mitigation for other wetland impacts. Among the criteria they use to evaluate this option are size, location relative to other preserved open space, habitat value, and interaction with other resources. The presence of critical habitat for threatened or endangered species is specifically cited as an example of when this option might be approved. If approved, the mitigation credit is generally calculated at a nominal 27:1 ratio, i.e., preservation of 27 acres would be accepted as mitigation for destruction of one acre. If the entire 83-acre tract were preserved, Montgomery Township could potentially acquire over 3 acres of mitigation credits that could be used to offset wetland losses on other Township projects."

A second report was prepared by TRC Omni regarding the environmental feasibility of constructing the proposed connector road between Route 518 and Orchard Road. The report, which is noted to be preliminary and which is dated June 3, 2002, is attached to this document as Addendum IV.

As concluded by the environmental consultants on page 6 of the June 3, 2002 report: "It is our professional opinion that, unless NJDEP believes there are threatened or endangered species in this vicinity, it will be possible to obtain permits to construct this connector road without too much difficulty."

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Planning Board agrees with the conclusions of the Transportation Advisory Committee that the proposed new roadways at the Route 206/Route 518 intersection and at the Route 206 intersection with Cherry Valley Road and Princeton Avenue, together with the related Route 206 corridor improvements, offer a viable means of improving the capacity and safety of the subject intersections, and endorses the proposed new roadways and improvements as an amendment to the Montgomery Township "Traffic Circulation Plan Element".

The Planning Board recognizes that the location of the new roadways shown on the maps within this document are not intended to indicate precise alignments, and that the road alignments may be moved to a reasonable extent in order to accommodate the needs of the affected property owners, provided that an appropriate alignment and design can be achieved to effectuate the proposed function of the proposed roadways.

Additionally, the Planning Board recommends that the Township's "Land Development Ordinance" provisions be appropriately amended to clearly indicate that the conveyance of land to Montgomery Township for the rights-of-way of any proposed new roadway or for the proposed improvement of any existing roadway in the Township shall not result in the reduction of the otherwise zoned development rights of the subject property, including the square footage of building construction and the total impervious surface coverage of the property.