

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FRIENDS OF HOLLAND HIGHLANDS!

FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2005

THE STAR-LEDGER

Land sale ends dispute on mountain development

BY JOE TYRRELL
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

With the help of the courts, the state and area environmentalists, a Holland Township residents group yesterday announced the peaceful resolution of a long battle to block development on Musconetcong Mountain.

One day after developer William Scopetto sold the 90-acre Highlands tract to the township, the Friends of Holland Highlands announced it is dropping its lawsuit against him and the local planning board.

But Michael Keady, president of the citizens group, said Holland officials "should be making fundamental reforms in our township's land-use law and its enforcement."

In 2001, Scopetto's Genesis Building Inc. applied to Holland's planning board to build 15 homes off Shire Road. About 150 residents organized to oppose the application, saying steep slopes, rocky soil and the presence of a trout habitat stream made the property unsuitable for development.

The planning board approved the project in October 2002. Keady

said residents felt board members "had made up their minds to approve it long before the public hearings."

The residents approached the Phillipsburg Riverview Organization, which agreed to apply \$500,000 in state Green Acres funds to buy the tract from Genesis. Hunterdon County set aside another \$250,000, which the township agreed to match.

But purchase negotiations stalled, so the residents sued. In January 2004 Superior Court Judge John Coyle ruled the application

was incomplete and the board had not insisted on required proof for the technique used to establish lot sizes.

At the same time, the state Department of Environmental Protection established "very helpful" stormwater management rules, which meant the developer could not rely on a detention basin feeding into the stream, Keady said.

Talks were revived, and on Wednesday, Scopetto sold the land to the township for the \$1 million, Keady said. Scopetto did not respond to a request for comment.

Seem familiar? There are striking similarities to the Village Grande Project & property. The land has steep slopes & a C-1 trout stream (Lubber's Run). Hopatcong has by law just instituted it's Storm Water Management Program with DEP guidelines. Unfortunately, if the property is spared from development little to no money is available from our Open Space Tax Referendum (1 cent of every \$100 tax dollars collected). All of the nearly \$500,000 collected from it's inception to the end of 2004 has gone to recreation. None to conservation.....ZERO!