

Farm preservation deal under way

By: **CHRISTOPHER RUVO** (Wed, Mar/21/2007)

With its stone houses, sleepy farm fields and narrow roadways, Tinicum can still lay claim to being, as the township Web site proudly proclaims, a place with a "strong agricultural history (that) remains characteristically rural."

Officials know folks here want to keep it that way and on Tuesday, the board of supervisors approved a resolution detailing a plan to preserve a 114-acre farm on Municipal Road.

While the deal hasn't been finalized, the township aims to buy the development rights on the Balitsaris family's Come Along Farm for \$514,000.

"Preservation of this property will benefit the future residents of Tinicum Township in many ways," said Supervisor Nicholas Forte. "Besides providing rural vistas and protection against congestion and all its ills, this property's protection will ensure groundwater recharge in an area where well protection is of utmost importance."

Forte said the deal still needs to be reviewed by the township solicitor and open space committee. Residents can comment on the proposal during the next two weeks and at the board's April 3 meeting when supervisors could approve it.

The money for the purchase will come from the township's open space fund, which is fed by a local 0.25 percent earned income tax.

Township Manager Linda McNeill said that the Balitsaris family will retain ownership of the farm but the township will hold the development rights, allowing the land to be conserved. The owners could possibly build one additional house on the property, which features barns, stables and a home, she said.

Officials could not say at the meeting how much preserved farmland and open space is within the 30.2 square mile township, which borders the Delaware River.

McNeill said officials recently approved buying a conservation easement on 26 acres on Hollow Horn Road for \$51,450, but the deal hasn't been settled yet.

A Tinicum couple, the Zavetas, made headlines in February by donating the \$2 million development rights on their 146-acre farm to Bucks County to preserve as open space. It was the largest donation of development rights in county history, officials said.

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