

Princeton Packet

Princeton bill-signing by Gov. Corzine

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Staff photo by Mark Czajkowski

Gov. Jon Corzine holds up the Garden State Preservation Trust funding bill after its signing outside the Johnson Education Center at the D&R Greenway Land Trust in Princeton.

At D&R Greenway Land Trust ceremony, the way cleared for November vote on \$200 million land trust fund. Gov. Jon Corzine signed legislation in Princeton Township on Tuesday authorizing a Nov. 6 ballot question asking voters to approve \$200 million in general obligation bonds to fund Garden State Preservation Trust programs for one year. Those programs provide funding to preserve open space, farmland and historic sites and also purchase land in flood-prone areas.

Gov. Corzine signed the Green Acres, Farmland, Blue Acres & Historic Preservation Act at the D&R Greenway Land Trust, a nonprofit land preservation organization, while flanked by a bipartisan group of legislators who joined him in calling for voter approval of the bonds. He said he hopes residents in what he called "the most densely populated state in the nation" support the preservation initiative. "We are the Garden State. And we want to be 'Jersey fresh,' and make sure we retain our heritage there," he said, citing the state's many historical sites. "We face critical challenges in the years ahead to ensure that we continue to offer this stewardship."

D&R Greenway Executive Director Linda Mead said the programs funded by Garden State Preservation Trust have allowed her organization to preserve 178 properties and more than 10,000 acres of land.

This time, the proposed funding would be divided into \$109 million for land acquisition, \$73 million for farmland preservation, \$12 million for the Blue Acres program, which purchases flood-prone properties, and \$6 million for historic preservation.

Charles Richman, the acting commissioner of the state Department of Community Affairs, said the historic funds could be used for "adaptive reuse" projects similar to the recent project that converted a more than 100-year-old barn near Rosedale Road on the former Edgerstoune estate into office space for the D&R Greenway's Johnson Education Center, where Tuesday's signing was held.

Ms. Mead said she expects voters to approve the referendum. "We know that, given a choice, voters have overwhelmingly approved every open space question to date," she said.

Sen. Leonard Lance (R-Flemington), who sponsored the bill in the Senate with Sen. Stephen Sweeney (D-Salem), cited 11 occasions when voters have approved bonds to fund Green Acres programs, and predicted "overwhelming" approval of the ballot question. Sen. Sweeney agreed. "We hope the voters see this as we do," he said. "This is our chance to create the life that we want here in the state of New Jersey."

In the coming months, the Keep It Green Campaign, a coalition of more than 90 groups from across the state, will work to generate voter support of the proposed funding, and will work with Gov. Corzine and legislators to secure long-term funding for the Garden State Preservation Trust.

Gov. Corzine said he supports the idea of a permanent funding source. "Now it's our job to go out and make sure the public knows that it's their responsibility to invest in the future of the great state of New Jersey," he said.