



Great Swamp Watershed Association

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Municipal Cooperation, Information Sharing Focus of New Regional Alliance

Great Swamp Upper Passaic Municipal Alliance helps local governments work together on environment, planning, zoning, and other common interests.

Morristown, NJ—On Wednesday, April 16, the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA) convened the first meeting of a new municipal advisory group known as the Great Swamp Upper Passaic Municipal Alliance (GSUPMA). The Alliance provides a voluntary, no-cost way for municipalities located along the upper reaches of the Passaic River and around New Jersey's Great Swamp to coordinate efforts leading to local environmental, planning, and zoning improvements.

"We want the Alliance to provide a forum for holding a conversation among municipalities and their officials," said GSWA Executive Director Sally Rubin, "Our communities face a lot of the same environmental and planning issues, and sometimes coordinating solutions together, on a regional basis, is going to be more effective and more economical."



Attendees at the inaugural meeting of the Great Swamp Upper Passaic Municipal Alliance discuss shifting demographic trends that are changing old approaches to municipal land-use planning. Pictured (l to r): Steven K. Warner (Partner, Ventura, Miesowicz, Keough & Warner); Carol Bianchi (Member, Bernards Township Committee); Thomas S. Russo, Jr. (Town Manager, Town of Newton); Christine Marion (Planning Director, Division of Preservation and Planning, Morris County Department of Planning & Public Works). Credit: S. Reynolds/GSWA.

Representatives from ten New Jersey municipalities joined Rubin at the offices of The Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation in Morristown for a presentation by noted municipal planning consultant Frank Banisch. Banisch, who is the founder and president of Flemington-based Banisch Associates, Inc., discussed the current demographic trends that are driving renewed interest in living in walkable, more-urban downtowns, and are resulting in high vacancy rates for New Jersey's suburban office space. These same trends are prompting many municipalities to re-examine old approaches town planning.

"We used to think that business as usual meant that we would always continue to prefer suburban places," Banisch said, "but we were wrong." "Twenty-five percent of New Jersey's suburban office space is no longer needed," he continued, "and there is heightened demand for smaller, more affordable residences, often in more urban areas where jobs and amenities are easily accessed."

While municipal land-use planning provided the kernel for discussion at the first meeting of the GSUPMA, other issues of shared concern among the participating municipalities will take center stage at future meetings. Topics for upcoming meetings will include deer management policy and municipal options for reducing damage and speeding recovery from floods. Alliance organizers also anticipate developing conversations around other important local issues such as wastewater and stormwater management, open space management, and the development of green infrastructure and improvements in low-impact development strategies.

“The Alliance offers municipalities an opportunity to get out in front of these issues and take advantage of the best opportunities,” said Frank Banisch. “[Municipalities] have tremendous power in New Jersey,” he said, “and as soon as two of them work together to do something in the public interest—like when they engage in regional planning—they cannot be beaten.”

Area municipalities represented at the inaugural meeting of the GSUPMA included Bernards Township, Bernardsville Borough, Chatham Township, Harding Township, Long Hill Township, Mendham Borough, Morris Township, the Town of Newton, the Town of Morristown, and Washington Township. Planning Director Christine Marion, with the Division of Preservation and Planning at the Morris County Department of Planning & Public Works, was also among those in attendance.

“Everyone was impressed by Mr. Banisch's presentation, which provided valuable information for municipal officials to consider when evaluating...their land use policies in light of current demographic and market trends," Marion said, "A regional forum [like this] will allow municipalities to share ideas, and will serve as a focus group to help identify and solve specific issues within the watershed.”

“I really look forward to doing this again,” said Sally Rubin. “The questions and comments after Frank’s presentation really spoke to the need for a group like this,” she said, “and I think the information and expertise that was shared got a lot of people thinking about how their towns could benefit from some new perspectives and by cooperating with their neighbors.”

For more information about the Great Swamp Upper Passaic Municipal Alliance (GSUPMA) please visit the Great Swamp Watershed Association online at *GreatSwamp.org* or call the organization at (973) 538-3500.

A video recording of Frank Banisch’s presentation to the GSUPMA is available online at *YouTube.com/GreatSwampWatershed*.

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About the Great Swamp Watershed Association. Founded in 1981, the Great Swamp Watershed Association (GSWA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to preserving and protecting the water and land of New Jersey's 36,000-acre Great Swamp Watershed region. GSWA works with stakeholders in Morris County and Somerset County municipalities to maintain the health and beauty of open spaces; to educate the public about regional environmental issues; and to monitor and safeguard the five headwater streams—Loantaka Brook, Great Brook, Primrose Brook, Black Brook, and the Upper Passaic—that feed the Great Swamp and the Passaic River.