



## ***Advocacy Tools For Land Use Issues***

**By: Julia Somers, Executive Director  
Great Swamp Watershed Association**

**NLN Watershed Watch Article, Dec 2002**

*“Beginning as an energetic and passionate volunteer, Julia Somers quickly grew the Great Swamp Watershed Association into a well-respected, premier model that other civic organizations can emulate.”*  
*George Hawkins, Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association*

Julia Somers, Executive Director of the Great Swamp Watershed Association, has led a two-year struggle to preserve a rural area from a significant development, known as the Delbarton Project. In summary, the parcel is located in an environmentally sensitive area (PA5), with pristine streams and the presence of threatened and endangered species (Category 1), adjacent to the Jockey Hollow National Park (first in the nation), and in an area with restricted sewer use.

The strategies undertaken to preserve this parcel are highlighted below in order to encourage other civic groups to address environmental concerns in their communities.

### **Local Tools**

#### **I. Organizing**

- Identify and connect with local people and organizations who share your concerns, such as neighborhood associations, local watershed associations, Garden Clubs, etc.
- Raising funds may be necessary. Incorporate as a tax-exempt, non-profit organization (501c3) and solicit funds and membership using letters and personal appeals. (View info on 501c3 groups at [www.thewatershedinstitute.org](http://www.thewatershedinstitute.org)).
- Communication is key. Schedule meetings, setup a website, mail newsletters and flyers, and use email.

- Attend and participate in all county and municipal meetings for the town committee, planning board, environmental commission, and technical advisory committees. Videotape these proceedings.
- Contact local representatives, senators, and assemblypersons.

## **II. Regulatory/Legal Tools**

- Review project for consistency with the goals of the State Plan, County and municipal Master Plans. Also review regional infrastructure plans such as Water Quality Management Plans, Wastewater Amendments, Watershed Strategy Plan, and Transportation plans.
- Testify to Planning Boards and Town Committees, and county offices.
  - ✓ Organize testimony so all issues are covered by varied parties, particularly when time may be limited.
  - ✓ Provide Expert Witnesses such as a planner, engineer, or attorney.
  - ✓ Provide written summaries of your concerns, questions or testimony.
- Establish a record for potential future legal challenges.
- Petition (collect signatures) for super majority votes, whereby a 2/3 majority is required for approvals. File petition with Township one week before the first hearing.
- File legal challenges on issues such as, spot zoning, wetlands permits, the need for a Environmental Impact Study, impacts to historic structures under the 106 Review.

## **III. Publicity**

- Create flyers and mail to all local residents.
- Submit Media Advisories, Press Releases and /or Letters to the Editor to the local weekly papers or larger daily newspapers.
- Whenever testifying provide additional copies of your prepared statement to the press.
- Advertise in local weekly papers. Consider radio ads.
- Organize a meeting with newspaper Editorial Boards.
- Organize a demonstration at the Trenton State House.

## **Statewide Tools**

### **I. Organizing**

- Identify and connect with statewide groups who share your concerns: ANJEC, For Our Future, other watershed associations, NJEF, NJ Future, Sierra Club, NJPIRG, National Park Service, NJSLOM, etc. Ask their advice and assistance letter writing to DEP and Governor.
- Arrange for and meet with NJDEP (Commissioner and staff) and Governor's Offices. Prepare a written summary of your concerns - MAKE IT SIMPLE!
- Action Alert email services provided by NJSLOM and Sierra Club can provide your members easy access to email and fax prepared messages to representatives.

## II. Regulatory/Legal

- Engage in constant legal review and discussion of statewide issues in-house/in-group.
- Write letters explaining legal positions and arguments for NJDEP.
- Conduct massive letter-writing campaign to NJDEP indicating intense public interest
- Testify when appropriate to the NJDEP, NJDOT, and State Planning Commission.

Energetic, enthusiastic, passionate, and inspiring easily describe Julia Somers. In her eleven years as the Executive Director of the Great Swamp Watershed Association, in New Vernon NJ, Julia has become a familiar face to many environmental organizations, municipal and State government officials, as well as developers. [www.greatswamp.org](http://www.greatswamp.org)

### Useful Regional Websites:

*Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association* [www.thewatershed.org](http://www.thewatershed.org)

*Advisory Council on Historic Preservation* [www.achp.gov/news.html](http://www.achp.gov/news.html)

*D&R Canal Commission* [www.dandrcanal.com](http://www.dandrcanal.com)

*Federal Emergency Management Agency Historic Preservation* [www.fema.gov/hp/hpnews](http://www.fema.gov/hp/hpnews).

*Great Swamp Watershed* [www.greatswamp.org](http://www.greatswamp.org)

*Isles, Inc.* [www.isles.org](http://www.isles.org)

*National Park Service* [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov)

*New Jersey Future* [www.njfuture.org/](http://www.njfuture.org/)

*NJ State Dept. of Community Affairs* [www.state.nj.us/dca/](http://www.state.nj.us/dca/)

*NJ Dept. of Environmental Protection* [www.state.nj.us/dep/](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/)

*NJ Historic Preservation Office* [www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/](http://www.state.nj.us/dep/hpo/)

*NJ Office of State Planning* [www.nj.stateplan.com](http://www.nj.stateplan.com)

*Preservation NJ, Inc.* [www.preservationnj.org](http://www.preservationnj.org)

*The GIS Center* [www.GISCenter.org](http://www.GISCenter.org)