

Office of the Governor

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NEWS RELEASE

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Governor Whitman Visits Hopewell, Signs Farmland Preservation Legislation

During a visit to Hopewell Borough, Gov. Christie Whitman today signed legislation making it easier for local governments to fund farmland preservation and presented a check to help fund the renovations of the Hopewell Train Station.

A-1768, sponsored by Assembly Members Connie Myers (R-Warren/Hunterdon/Mercer) and Gerald Luongo (R-Camden/Gloucester) and Senators John Bennett (R-Monmouth) and Robert Martin (R-Essex/Morris/Passaic), allows state and local governments to purchase farmland development easements through installment purchase agreements. Currently, when purchasing development easements, government bodies must set aside in reserve the entire purchase price in the first year. The new law will allow the money to be set aside year-to-year.

"By safeguarding our farmland, we are protecting an almost \$800 million industry and a way of life for generations of New Jersey families," Gov. Whitman said during a visit to Hopewell Park. "Open space and farmland preservation adds to everyone's quality of life by protecting watersheds, controlling sprawl, and encouraging growth where it makes the most sense."

Gov. Whitman said the recent implementation of the state's historic Garden State Preservation Trust will preserve 1 million acres of farmland and open space over the next decade. Voters last year overwhelmingly supported dedicating \$98 million each year to purchase development rights.

When completed, the Governor's initiative will result in the permanent preservation of 40 percent of the state's total land mass. The program will preserve 500,000 acres of farmland, 200,000 acres of parkland, 200,000 acres of greenways, and 100,000 acres for watershed protection.

"Not only is this an investment in the quality of life in our state, but it's also the most ambitious program of its kind in the entire country," Gov. Whitman said. "As significant an accomplishment as this is, we are committed to doing even more to help our towns and counties reach their land preservation goals."

The Governor applauded the efforts of Hopewell officials and residents for their commitment to open space, farmland and historic preservation.

Hopewell Park was purchased in the late 1980s through a public-private partnership including an anonymous donator who contributed \$250,000 to purchase the land, nearly \$500,000 to construct the gazebo band stand, and additional funds for cast iron light fixtures.

In addition, a consortium led by the Friends of Hopewell Valley recently purchased a 65-acre tract adjacent to the park with help from \$3 million in state Green Acres funding. Individual donors raised \$260,000, which was then matched by an anonymous donor.

The land purchase by Hopewell Borough and Hopewell Township also included the development rights to Ruggieri Farms, a 96-acre farm which sells produce at its own farm market.

Gov. Whitman also visited the Hopewell Train Station, which is receiving a renovation with help from a \$586,050 grant from the New Jersey Historic Trust.

This 1876 Second Empire-style railroad station is one of two surviving stations along the former Delaware and Bound Brook Railroad and is one of a few surviving examples of high Victorian styled railway stations in the U.S. The station is currently listed on both the state and federal registers of historic places.

Once restoration is complete, the station will house community facilities and private office space on the second floor which will be rented out. The interior work is being managed by Kevin Kirby, an eagle scout who is managing the interior restoration as his eagle scout project.

