



SUSSEX COUNTY
D E L A W A R E

Eyes on County Council – June 2, 2026

HIGHLIGHT EVENTS:

- McCormick Taylor was awarded the consulting contract for the Sussex County Comprehensive Plan. Not all Council members voted in favor.
- County staff presented proposals for two of the ordinances introduced as a result of the Land Use Reform Working Group. In a disappointing move, the proposal included only minor changes to chapter 99-9 of the county code, despite extensive testimony and many recommendations by the public.
- Council struggled with the ordinance related to affordable housing unit's criteria, specifically the formulas for a tiered approach to the amount of available units at a variety of income levels. Council debated different scenarios with no clear solution. Issue was how to create the sweet spot to incentivize the builders while creating a sufficient number of affordable units.

Public Comment

Lisa Rice, of Middletown, spoke about land conservation policies and their impact on farm families. She said that higher housing density increases property values, while density restrictions reduces them. She argued that preserving open space should be a community responsibility, rather than "placing the burden on landowners", and urged Council to respect farmers' contributions and family legacies when making land-use and conservation decisions.

Presentations

Patti Grimes, Executive Director, Joshua M. Freeman Foundation

Ms. Grimes presented an update on the Foundation and said that the Foundation:

- Has been existence since 2007.
- Has a mission to advance arts access for all, through performance, education, and advocacy.

- Provides the arts through the Freeman Arts Pavilion, which seats over 3500 people; last year more than 108,000 people attended events there.
- Sponsors an Arts Access Initiative, which provided art programs for over 29,000 children last year as well as a community access to more than 4,900 people.
- Has an annual economic of \$25.5 million and nearly \$176 million since 2008.
- Will open a new pavilion on July 8, 2026, which increase the capacity; 150,000 people are expected to attend concerts and other art programs by 2029.
- will have well-known artists performing this season, including Mean Girls, James Taylor, and Marshall Tucker Band

Ring Lardner, Board Chair, Sussex County Land Trust

Mr. Lardner presented SCLT's annual update. Mackenzie Sindelar, a trustee, Executive Director Sarah Bluhm, and Stewardship Manager Eric Williams were also present.

Mr. Lardner said that SCLT's mission is to safeguard the land and resources that make Sussex County special, and noted that stewardship, sustainability, community, preservation and cooperation are foundational values.

SCLT's portfolio includes nearly 1400 acres of land throughout Sussex County. The properties are a mix of natural areas, agricultural lands, historic sites, parks, trails and conservation lands. More than 800 acres are open or will open to the public through trails, parks, educational opportunities and passive recreation. More than 560 acres are owned by the county and managed by SCLT.

Major project updates included:

- Hopkins Reserve
- Forest of the Broadkill
- Nutter Park and the Cannery House
- Williams-Litchford House
- Negron Property Acquisition
- Ard Na Greine

Mr. Lardner emphasized SCLT's network of partnerships, which helped leverage nearly \$10 million in conservation, recreation, and preservation investments.

Organizationally, the Land Trust:

- Hired its first full-time stewardship manager.
- Completed its first independent financial audit.
- Adopted its first three-year strategic plan.

- Improved governance, budgeting, fundraising, communications, and donor management systems.
- Joined the Land Trust Alliance to connect with national conservation best practices.

Future priorities include:

- Building sustainable revenue sources.
- Strengthening organizational capacity and systems.
- Opening more conserved lands to public access.
- Expanding partnerships and community support.
- Balancing stewardship of existing properties with future conservation opportunities.

Council discussion and comments:

Jane Gruenebaum said that her understanding is that one of SCLT's major initiatives now is to focus more on maintenance or developing the parks that we already have; she asked Mr. Lardner to comment on whether it is easier to raise funds for acquisition than for maintenance. Mr. Lardner said that it is a bit easier to raise funds for acquisition, due to various programs that are available. He said there has been some success with private partnerships for maintaining existing properties.

John Rieley noted that he favors endowment money for maintaining existing properties. He then spoke about the work that the Executive Director, Sarah Bluhm has done to develop the trust over the past five years, and credited her vision and skills with helping transform SCLT into what it is today.

Matt Lloyd asked whether the \$9.6 million figure quoted for Ard Na Greine included the value of the land. Mr. Lardner confirmed that it was the purchase price, and said that without the National Resources Conservation Service, the project would not have succeeded.

Mr. Rieley emphasized the importance of additional funding sources in preserving land in Sussex County.

Mr. Lloyd noted that these type of partnerships allow Sussex to save taxpayer dollars because they are resources that people benefit from but were not paid for with Sussex County funds.

Mr. Rieley said the SCLT operates with the motto "public money, public access".

County Infrastructure items:

- U.S. Tank Painting was awarded a \$2,171,000 contract to paint the Dewey Beach water tank.

- A-Del Construction was awarded a \$634,000 contract for modifications to the Business Park water tank.
- Christiana Excavating was awarded a \$63,518 contract for repairs to the shared use path which was damaged during the Kings Highway utilities relocation project.

2028 Comprehensive Plan Consulting Firm:

Todd Lawson said that county staff was recommending **McCormick Taylor** as the consulting firm for the Sussex County 2028 Comprehensive Plan. McCormick Taylor was the consultant for the 2018 plan and the 2025 Land Use Reform Working Group, and has a long relationship with county officials.

Council votes on retaining McCormick Taylor: McCarron, Lloyd, Hudson, Rieley: **YES**, Gruenebaum **ABSTAIN**

Old Business

County Attorney **Vince Robertson** and County Administrator **Todd Lawson** presented proposals for changes to two ordinances: ORD 26-01 to amend the Sussex County Rental Program (SCRP) and ORD 26-03 to amend County code chapter 99-9 regarding preliminary plat requirements for subdivision applications.

Ordinance 26-01, to amend the Sussex County Rental Program:

Mr. Lawson and Mr. Robertson started with a summary of what they proposed to amend. The first four changes increase density.

1. Increase the limit on building height to 60 feet
2. Remove building length restrictions
3. Adjust setbacks according to neighboring property uses
4. Reduce required separation distance between buildings
5. Rents – Adjust Limits

Council discussion around the first four points:

Jane Gruenebaum expressed concern about NO limits on building length, and asked if it was possible to loosen the restriction without removing it entirely.

Matt Lloyd pushed back on this: he noted that this is the third time that a change has been made to the SCR program, so restrictions should be removed in order to incentivize.

Steve McCarron noted that Council should not just pick a number out of the sky, and said that the Fire Marshall's office would consider the safety of any building length. This would shift responsibility to consider the impact of building length to groups other than the County Council.

The more complicated change that Mr. Lawson and Mr. Robertson proposed was to the rents and percentage of rental units required for a SCRP development. Their proposal was:

- Change Average Median Income (AMI) limits to a range: 60%-80%
- Keep the number of required SCRP units at 25% of total units
- Create a tiered approach with multipliers to allow flexibility
- Use the number of required SCRP units as a threshold value
- Total Value number must meet or exceed threshold to qualify

AMI Levels	No. of Units	Multiplier	Value
60%		1.67	
70%		1.25	
80%		1.00	
Totals			

The following example was used to illustrate. In this example, a 200-unit SCRP development would have a requirement of 50 rent-controlled units. The developer could adjust the number of rent-controlled units actually provided, by building units for different AMI levels, as long as the total “Value” number meets or exceeds the threshold of 50.

200 units x 25% = 50 SCRP units

AMI Levels	No. of Units	Multiplier	Value
60%	12	1.67	20.04
70%	10	1.25	12.5
80%	18	1.00	18
Totals	40		50.54

Exceeds Threshold of 50

Council discussion around rental units:

Matt Lloyd questioned leaving the required percentage at 25%, and said he would rather see it at 15%.

Jane Gruenebaum asked whether Council understands the hole it’s trying to plug. Is there any data on where the housing gap is?

Mr. Lloyd responded that multiple entities – the LURWG, housing advocates, developers – worked together to come up with the proposal.

Ms. Gruenebaum noted that currently, there is a waiting list of applicants in the 60% AMI range. If most units are built for the 80% range, then the 60% is left behind. The higher the multiple, the harder it is for developers to get financing.

Steve McCarron said that the four changes related to density are substantial and should change the math for developers.

John Rieley noted that there is more demand than this program will ever satisfy. He said there will probably be more units at the 80% AMI level under this scheme.

Mr. Lawson said that this proposal reflects conversations with the development community and what they say will incentivize them to build.

Ordinance 26-01, to amend chapters 99-9 and 115 of the County code, regarding preliminary plat approval and design criteria for subdivisions:

Mr. Roberston and Mr. Lawson proposed that only minor changes to the County should be made, despite the many changes recommended by Sussex Preservation Coalition and members of the public.

The recommended changes were:

- Add references to applicable County Code
- Clarify interconnectivity requirements so that language indicates it must be designed, as opposed to being fully built.

Comments on the ordinance include significant changes requested by members of the public and SPC but which were not included in the recommended changes were:

- Provide assurances that the area shall be served by adequate infrastructure.
- Instead of notifying the school district of a new development, the school district must certify it has adequate capacity to handle the additional students brought by the development.
- Current DelDot Level of Service to be maintained in a defined Area of Impact; County shall impose conditions regarding phasing and the timing of building permits concurrent with necessary roadway improvements.
- Require all lots to be located outside of the most environmentally sensitive areas of the tract.
- The entire parcel shall be mapped with tree lines, scenic views, historic buildings, and prime farmland (as opposed to only mapping the sections deemed “worthy of preservation”).
- Many members of the public commented and requested that instances of “should” or “may” be replaced with “shall” or “must” in order that the ordinance be enforceable and give clear direction to developers.

Public Hearings

- **Conditional Use #2563** – to grant a Conditional Use in an AR-1 Agricultural Residential district for a mini-storage business with 31 40x60 single storage units and 62 parking areas for boat and RV storage, on 13.48 acres southeast of Dagsboro, near Route 20. Rich Polk, Vista Design, presented for the applicant, Mr. Herker. He said that 80% of the trees on the property would be preserved, that a buffer would be installed along the property edges, and that the designated wetland on the property would be left undisturbed. Council voted unanimously to approve the C/U, subject to the thirteen conditions placed by Planning and Zoning.
- **Conditional Use #2631** – to grant a Conditional Use in an AR-1 Agricultural Residential district for a storage, warehouse and car wash on 29.55 acres in Frankford. The applicant did not appear for the hearing, so this was deferred.
- **Conditional Use #2551** – to grant a Conditional Use in an AR-1 Agricultural Residential district for an events venue on 8.45 acres adjoining Broad Creek, near Laurel. The owner of the property presented her proposal to use part of her 8.45 acres property as an events venue for weddings and special occasions. The owner's ex-mother-in-law gave testimony in opposition. During the discussion Councilman Lloyd said that the fencing condition placed by P&Z seemed unnecessary. Council voted unanimously to approve the C/U, subject to the conditions placed by P&Z, but without the fence requirement.

Council Meeting Schedule: Tuesdays – check agenda for timing and location

- June 9
- June 16
- June 23

Council Meeting Broadcast

[County Council Meeting - June 02, 2026](#)

Related Articles:

[Sussex County Council to vote on affordable housing reforms](#)

[Proposed changes to little-used Sussex rental program ...](#)

[Delaware Supreme Court upholds offshore wind substation decision | News | coasttv.com](#)

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