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GARDEN STATE PRESS

NJN Spells It Out

A Call to End Urban Sprawl

By JACK SMYTH

Every day New Jerseyans are playing roles in a drama few are aware of that will eventually shape their lives.

New Jersey Public Network called it "The Race for Open Space" in a program on Channel 23.

With little advance publicity, the program enumerated effects of urban sprawl that are radically changing the landscape.

New Jersey, already the most densely populated state with more people per square mile than even Japan and India, "expects to see 1 million more people in the next 20 years," according to Barbara Lawrence, executive director of New Jersey Future.

"Where are they going to live?" she asked.

A study by Rutgers University has found that in the next 40 to 60 years the state will be the first in the country to run out of land to build houses.

Rowan University Professor John Hasse said between 16,000 and 18,000 acres of land are being lost to development yearly.

"That's 40 football fields of urban growth every day," Hasse said.

Houses, malls, and office complexes, other experts reported, are gobbling up farm land at a rate so that New Jersey will no longer be known as the Garden State.

At the end of the 1980s, 2 million acres, or 40 percent of the land was being farmed according to Maureen Ogden, chairman of Green State Preservation Trust. "Today, we're down to 800,000 acres," she said.

Every county in the state is out of compliance with ground level ozone levels as the result of overdevelopment, said Jeff Tittel, executive director of New Jersey Sierra Club.

The state is second in the nation in pedestrian deaths, Tittel said, "because you can't walk anywhere in safety."

Cape May was cited in the program as a community which has acted to limit development pressures.

Councilman Edward J. Mahaney Jr., said

the city approved a \$16-million bond issue to buy 100 acres of land east of Pittsburgh Avenue to preserve it.

"If that land were developed, there is no question the city infrastructure would be taxed to the point we couldn't provide adequate public safety and water supply,"

Mahaney said. "The quality of life would deteriorate to where we would no longer be a tourist designation."

Cape May's construction of a desalination plant (the first in the state) is another example of excessive building depleting underground water supplies so that an alternative source had to be found, the program said.

The state's attempts to preserve open space were mentioned including the Green Acres funding and adoption of Smart Growth concepts in the 1985 state plan.

Ogden, however, questioned the state plan's effectiveness.

"There is no teeth in it," she said. "Why? Because it would never have passed if it was really strong. There was too much opposition from home rule proponents."

Ogden said too many communities hate sprawl, but are reluctant to give up local control over planning and zoning.

Gov. James McGreevey put himself behind smart growth efforts in a speech when he said, "If you want to develop in an over-developed area, we will do everything in our power to stop you."

But it was noted such efforts face opposition from the \$10-\$12 billion home building industry which employs 300,000 people.

Michelle Byers, of New Jersey Conservation Trust, said the push for tax ratables is another factor.

"It's a fallacy because most residential development costs more than what it brings in," Byers said.

"It's not too late," Byers said, echoing what others said of the need to be aware of what is happening, and to change attitudes.

"We're at a cross roads," she said.

