News from
SALEM COUNTY
Office of Public Information

Mr. Robin B. Weinstein, Public Information Officer
Office Phone: (856) 935-7510 ext. 8202
After Hours: (856) 297-5433

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: August 15, 2007

SALEM COUNTY FREEHOLDERS TO STUDY SPACE NEEDS FOR THE COUNTY

(SALEM, NJ)—Freeholder Director Lee Ware announced at the regular meeting of the Board of Chosen Freeholders that the plans for moving the County Health Department and related divisions will be placed on hold while a full study of space needs and available space in the County is conducted. This decision comes after the County received an appraised cost of $1.3 million to purchase the facility in Mannington Township.

"We believe that the cost of purchasing the facility is much too high," said Director Ware. "We have short term and long term space needs for the County and we want to ensure that our actions are fiscally responsible and prudent. Accordingly, I have directed the Administration and Public Works Departments to study the space needs of the County and to develop a strategic plan that will be grounded on fiscal responsibility and centered of efficiency and effectiveness. This plan will be presented to the Freeholders by December of this year."

The County entered into a lease agreement for the former Acme Building in Mannington Township after the County was awarded funding to renovate the Old Courthouse which currently houses 14 Health Department employees and technology. Additionally, the Freeholders justified the move by citing concerns that have been raised regarding the accessibility and privacy in the current Health Department facilities which houses the Office on Aging, Office for the Disabled, Mental Health Office, and Interagency Council, along with other related programs. The Prosecutor's Office has also requested additional space.

"After we received word from the owner of the property that he was unable to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy from Mannington Township we began to discuss purchasing the building rather than leasing," said Director Ware. "When we received the appraisal, we knew that we had to go back and develop a comprehensive plan to justify a move of any kind. We are taking nothing off the table and all options are open. We do know that something will need to be done because of the privacy and accessibility issues needed for these offices. Whatever we decide to do will be done with the best interest of tax payers in mind and with full disclosure."

The County is currently exploring options to move the 14 health department employees and their equipment to a temporary location until the plan for a long term move has been completed. Additionally, research will be conducted for the best place for the Records Center, which the County has been awarded funds to create from the State, and the Disaster Recovery Center. Both of these centers need to be located out of the City of Salem in case of emergencies.

The County Solicitor has been directed to inform the owner of the property that the County will be discontinuing the lease due to him being unable to obtain a Certificate of Occupancy and is demanding paid lease money to be returned. The County stopped payment immediately after it was informed that the Certificate of Occupancy had not been obtained.

"This has been a step by step process and we have been very open to suggestions and critiques because we are more concerned with doing what is right than being right," said Director Ware.

--30--