

# Readington requests \$1.3 million from county for land near airport

By **BRANDON LAUSCH**  
Staff Writer

**READINGTON** — Township officials have asked Hunterdon County to consider giving the township approximately \$1.3 million to fund the acquisition of two parcels of open space near Solberg-Hunterdon Airport, said Kevin Richardson, the county's Open Space Trust Fund Program director.

If approved, the aid would likely go toward an estimated \$21.7 million bill the township will have to pay to condemn the airport through eminent domain.

But Richardson, who is drafting a plan that would set limits for county contributions to high-profile acquisitions such as Readington's, said he hasn't formally reviewed the township's proposal.

"At this point, I haven't formed any opinion, I haven't

really evaluated their proposal, nor have I made any overt recommendation or presentation that it's something we should fund ... or that it's something that is not consistent with the draft policies or the reasons the county is articulating" to cap contributions, Richardson said Wednesday.

Richardson presented two funding scenarios last month to the county's Board of Chosen Freeholders, which would fall under a new contribution policy if adopted by the board.

The first would place a 20 percent limit on the county's contribution to the total price of a municipal acquisition of open space. The aid under that scenario, Richardson said, would not exceed \$1 million. The proposal would apply during unilateral municipal action, or when a town pursues a preservation project without the county's knowledge and only asks for

financial help later, Richardson told the board.

A second scenario would apply when a town is considering a project and approaches the freeholders before taking action, fully involving the county in planning for the potential acquisition. The county's contribution in that circumstance, Richardson said, could be up to half of the acquisition cost, not exceeding \$2 million. Richardson said there are as many as nine potential sites in Hunterdon County that could qualify under the "high-profile" designation. That poses a problem for the county's preservation program, he said, because Hunterdon's total open space budget for this year is \$5.3 million.

The county "doesn't have nearly the amount of money to fulfill each and every one of those requests," Richardson said.