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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE CLOSES ON HISTORIC MAHWAH SCHOOLHOUSE AND MAKES PLANS FOR NEW HEADQUARTERS**

MAHWAH, NJ--The New York-New Jersey Trail Conference has ambitious plans for rehabilitating a long vacant, historic landmark as its future headquarters in Mahwah, NJ. The start of the design and fundraising phases of the Darlington Schoolhouse renovation were announced on Friday, following the purchase of the historic building and the 2.8 surrounding acres located on Route 202 at the intersection of Darlington Avenue.

"In addition to being a community landmark, this building is important statewide," said Edward Goodell, executive director of the Trail Conference. "The New Jersey State Historic Preservation Office has called it New Jersey's 'most architecturally significant schoolhouse' and is set to list it on the National Register of Historic Places. We plan to respect the integrity of its architecture and history even as we renovate the building to meet our organization's requirements and 21st century standards."

Thursday's closing was the culmination of a four-year effort to acquire the schoolhouse for rehabilitation by five parties--NJDEP Green Acres, Bergen County, Mahwah Township, the Morris Land Conservancy (MLC) and the Trail Conference. The \$550,000 purchase price came from the the Bergen County Open Space Trust Fund and the NJDEP Green Acres Program. In January, the Morris Land Conservancy made the initial purchase on behalf of the partnership. On Thursday, the Trail Conference and Mahwah Township jointly assumed title to the site from Morris Land Conservancy.

"Morris Land Conservancy was delighted to help facilitate the permanent preservation of this Highlands treasure," said Conservancy Chairman C. Graydon Rogers. "Converting the building into the Trail Conference's headquarters will ensure that it remains a landmark in Mahwah into the future."

"We are very grateful to all of our partners for their support of this project," Goodell said. "This has been a very fruitful private-public partnership from the start. That collaboration will continue and be reflected as we move ahead, raising money for stabilization and renovation of the building and developing plans for welcoming the public to the property. Our purchase of this site included a guarantee of public access to the open space by deeding a conservation easement to Bergen County and Green Acres," Goodell noted.

Goodell anticipated that marked trails will eventually connect the Darlington site to the Ramapo Reservation and contiguous open space on both sides of the New York-New Jersey state line.

"It is a huge honor and responsibility to take ownership of this wonderful building and property with the Township," Goodell said. "Clearly, getting title to Darlington Schoolhouse signals a beginning more than an end. We have a lot to do before we can move in and invite the general public to visit."

"It's going to be expensive to renovate and rehabilitate a 1890 structure that's been vacant for over 20 years," Goodell added. "But we're committed to doing it right and doing it green. We will restore it as a working, active part of the community, as it once was. We will be good stewards of the building just as we are good stewards of the open space that surrounds us."

Goodell noted that requests for architectural proposals would be released in December and major fundraising will begin immediately. Goodell has set his sights on starting construction in the first half of 2008.

Founded in 1920, the 501(c)3 Trail Conference has over 2,000 members in Bergen County and 10,000 regionwide. Trail Conference volunteers maintain 1,700 miles of public trails in the region and more than 80 miles in Bergen County parks, including trails adjacent to the schoolhouse property in the Ramapo Valley County Reservation.

For more information or to volunteer and/or donate to the Darlington Schoolhouse rehabilitation, contact the Trail Conference at 201-512-9348 x10 or online at <http://www.darlingtonschoolhouse.org>.

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*FACT SHEET*

*More info and photos at [www.darlingtonschoolhouse.org](http://www.darlingtonschoolhouse.org)*

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### Property

- Situated at the gateway to the NY-NJ Highlands and Ramapo Valley Reservation, this 2.8 acre property is bisected by Darlington Brook and is **wholly within the Preservation Area of the NJ Highlands.**
- According to the NJ State Historic Preservation Office, **the Darlington Schoolhouse "is the State's most architecturally significant schoolhouse."**
- The Schoolhouse was built and donated to the town of Mahwah for use as a schoolhouse and community meeting hall. After it was no longer used as a school, it served as a dance studio before being vacant for over 20 years.

### Stakeholders

- **Bergen County** has long sought to preserve the Darlington Schoolhouse and awarded the **Trail Conference a \$250,000 grant** in 2005 from the Bergen County Open Space Trust to purchase the property with the Green Acres match.
- **Bergen County transferred a \$300,000 NJDEP Green Acres Program grant** to the Town of Mahwah to jointly acquire the property with the Trail Conference.
- The Town of Mahwah owns the property from Ramapo Valley Road up to, and including part of, the schoolhouse footprint. The Mahwah Town Council passed a unanimous resolution to **provide an easement to the Trail Conference.**

### Preservation/Rehabilitation Costs

- A Preservation Plan prepared by Trail Conference architects estimates **complete preservation will cost at least \$1,000,000.**
- The **Bergen County Historic Preservation Trust Fund granted \$200,000** in rehabilitation funds in the 2007 grant round.
- On November 26, 2007, **NJ Historic Trust announced a grant of \$50,000** to the Trail Conference for the Darlington Schoolhouse rehabilitation.
- Additional rehabilitation funds are being sought from the Mahwah community and institutional/corporate sources.

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