

CHAPTER 6

REGIONAL COMPARISON

“He who knows what sweets and virtues are in the ground, the waters, the plants, the heavens, and how to come at these enchantments, is the rich and royal man.”

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Why Compare to Other Municipalities and Montgomery County?

This Open Space Plan is intended to further the actions taken by the Township over the last 5 – 10 years to create additional open space areas, park facilities, greenways, interconnecting multi-use trails, and farmland preservation. Overall, the goal of the Plan is to create an interconnected preserved open space system that will add to the quality of life of the Township and the region.

In planning for open space within the Township, it is important to consider the actions of the surrounding municipalities and Montgomery County in terms of their proposed open space programs. In particular, where there is a similar interest in open space preservation, working jointly would reduce the needed local match funding, and also create a more cohesive purchase/acquisition process.

Goals of Adjacent Municipalities

Plymouth Township

1. Pursue the establishment of a regional Agricultural Security Area (ASA).
2. Protect natural resources. Enhance riparian buffers and stabilize stream banks, monitor and remove invasive species, protect significant natural resources.

3. Explore a partnership with the Colonial School District regarding environmental education.
4. Coordinate with Montgomery County Parks and Heritage Services.
5. Develop a comprehensive greenway and trail system throughout the municipality and linking regionally.

Upper Dublin Township

1. Establish additional pedestrian links from the Wissahickon Watershed Green Ribbon Trail to Ambler Borough.

Conshohocken Borough

1. Develop a Schuylkill River greenway system along the Borough’s riverfront.
2. Provide riverfront amenities for river recreational activities / Integrate the riverfront with Borough life.
3. Support the development of the Cross County Trail and access linkages.
4. Develop a natural resource protection ordinance.

Lower Merion Township

1. Create an Emerald Necklace of open spaces along the Schuylkill River from Philadelphia to West Conshohocken connecting many of the Township’s largest and most important open spaces, natural features, and historic resources with a network of recreational trails.
2. Work with neighboring municipalities to create riparian management plans for the Schuylkill River and Indian Creek.

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Springfield Township

1. Create trail network- Link existing internal (Township) and external open space.
2. Obtain Institutional Easements - The Township would like to look into requesting easements on the golf course properties including Whitmarsh Valley Country Club, Sandy Run Country Club, and North Hills Country Club.
3. Support FEEA's Bethlehem Pike Vision Plan.
4. County Trail Connections - The development of an interconnected trail and pathway system in Montgomery County will enhance pedestrian and cyclist mobility and provide increased recreation opportunities. Springfield Township proposes a Wissahickon Trail Link, and a Wissahickon Green Ribbon Trail Connector.

Whitpain Township

A request for access to their Open Space Plan has been put in. No response has been received as of 2/6.

City of Philadelphia

Recent Philadelphia Open Space activities that may relate to open space planning in Whitmarsh include:

1. Developed an inter-agency working group in 2001 to coordinate the City's open space efforts.
2. Completed the Bridge to the Future, a Fairmount Park Commission Strategic Plan
3. Launched the New River City initiative, aimed at focusing resources on redeveloping Philadelphia's waterfronts for improved public access and use
4. Philadelphia Water Department is investigating methods for restoring urban watershed using decentralized water resource management.

Montgomery County Open Space, Natural Features, and Cultural Resources Plan

The Montgomery County Open Space Plan calls out 8 of the 48 Vision Plan – Shaping Our Future goals as being open-space-oriented goals. The County document states that these goals will “...help connect open space and greenways while preserving natural, historic, and agricultural resources” by involving many players including local governments, developers, farmers, landowners and conservation and preservation organizations.

The goals from the Montgomery County Plan listed below are followed by the related goals and action items that are being proposed by Whitmarsh Township. This format is intended to provide a quick view of how the policies of the County Plan relate to the goals, objectives and actions that the Township intends to pursue as part of the Green Fields/Green Towns initiative.

Montgomery County Plan Goal 11: Preserve Large Interconnected Areas of Significant Open Space:

This overarching open-space goal will be achieved through a variety of actions working in unison, including the following:

- Purchasing land and development rights for perpetual preservation.
- Encouraging the donation of land and development rights.
- Adopting zoning regulations, including cluster zoning, transfer of development rights, and resource protection ordinances.
- Reducing the demand for development in open areas by limiting sewer and water extensions, directing transportation improvements to design-

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nated growth areas, and refraining from rezoning these open areas to higher-intensity uses.

- Improving cooperation among all the various people and organizations involved in open space preservation, including federal, state, county and municipal government, conservation organizations, farmers, property owners and developers.
- Creating open space plans, comprehensive plans and other plans that show the larger pattern of open space that should be preserved.
- Encouraging owners of corporate campuses, large industrial properties, golf courses, camps, schools and other temporarily open land to consider permanent preservation of this land.

Recommendations Related to this County Goal:

- Township Recommendation TW-1: Provide the maximum amount of protection possible for natural resources located within the Township.
- Township Recommendation TW-2: Provide a comprehensive network of on-street and off-street trails throughout the Township, linking residents to recreational, commercial and natural resources.
- Township Recommendation TW-3: With the Montgomery County Planning Commission, develop a toolkit of preservation strategy options for consideration and possible implementation by golf clubs.
- Township Recommendation TW-7: Urge the Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) to develop countywide strategies that will advance municipalities' open space preservation efforts.
- Central District Recommendation: The Township should do everything possible to ensure that

the 183-acre Green Valley Country Club, 39-acre open space from Butler Pike to Hector Street, and the Whitemarsh portion of the 41-acre Tecce property remain as open space.

- Miquon District Recommendation: The Township should do everything possible to ensure that the 265-acre ACE Country Club remains as open space.

Montgomery County Plan Goal 12: Protect and Manage Wetlands, Streams, Steep Slopes, Woodlands, and Natural Habitats.

This goal will be achieved through careful planning of future development. The following specific actions will help fulfill this goal:

- Showing wetlands on plans, with development set back from the edge of these wetlands.
- Prohibiting development within flood plains, except for the development of elevated and flood-proofed buildings on brownfield sites in redevelopment areas encouraging economic revitalization.
- Adopting riparian corridor ordinances that require setbacks from streams and preservation of riparian woodlands.
- Encouraging the enactment of steep slope preservation efforts.
- Adopting landscaping ordinances that encourage the preservation of existing trees and replacement of trees that are destroyed during the land development process.
- Considering the exclusion of environmentally sensitive land from the portion of tracts that can be developed or counted towards lot area.
- Properly enforcing erosion and sedimentation control measures.

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- Encouraging and promoting conservation easements on environmentally sensitive land.
- Moving portions of development that will disturb the land away from environmentally sensitive land, through techniques such as clustering, flexible lotting, and transfer of development rights.

Recommendations Related to this County Goal:

- Township Recommendation TW-1: Provide the maximum amount of protection possible for natural resources located within the Township.
- Township Recommendation TW-1: Adopt the pending Growing Greener Zoning and Subdivision Land Development Ordinances, which will serve as a critical regulatory tool for preserving open space and creating greenways.
- Township Recommendation TW-1: Develop a map of conservation features identifying important natural features, storm water retention areas and greenways, as well as wildlife habitats and migratory pathways, and establish a policy that this map be used to inform all future preservation and land development decisions, as well as implementation of the proposed Growing Greener Ordinances.
- Township Recommendation TW-4: Promote the enhancement of healthy habitats and ecological functions within the Township.
- Central District Recommendation: Do everything possible to preserve the environmental integrity of Bubbling Springs.
- Riverfront District Recommendation: Create a natural buffer, with a walking trail or promenade, along the river between Conshohocken Borough and Spring Mill Park.

Montgomery County Plan Goal 13: Create a Greenway System Along Rivers, Creeks and Other Sensitive Natural and Historic Features.

This goal will be achieved through the following actions:

- Using flood plain, riparian corridor, wetland, steep slope, and woodland preservation ordinances to keep greenways in their natural state.
- Adopting cluster zoning, flexible zoning, or transfer of development rights to move development away from important greenways.
- Purchasing land or development rights along critical greenways.
- Connecting open space on abutting tracts of land along greenways.
- Encouraging public access.
- Enhancing existing riparian corridor woodlands.

Recommendations Related to this County Goal:

- Township Recommendation TW-2: Provide a comprehensive network of on-street and off-street trails throughout the Township, linking residents to recreational, commercial and natural resources.
- Township Recommendation TW-4: Promote the enhancement of healthy habitats and ecological functions within the Township.
- Riverfront District Recommendation: Explore opportunities to preserve Ashford Farms as permanently protected open space.
- Riverfront District Recommendation: Create a natural buffer, with a walking trail or promenade, along the river between Conshohocken Borough and Spring Mill Park.

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Montgomery County Plan Goal 14: Develop a Countywide Network of Interconnected Trails.

This goal will be achieved through the following actions:

- Building county trails along major corridors.
- Encouraging local municipalities to create their own smaller-scale trail networks that connect to the county system.
- Interconnecting trail systems within abutting municipalities and counties.
- Working with state, regional, and federal entities to connect their trails with the county-wide system.
- Using state and federal transportation funds to build trails, in addition to other funding sources.
- Building trails parallel to any new highways that are built.
- Providing trail connections from new developments to county and local trails.
- Connecting off-road trails with local sidewalks and on-road bicycle lanes.
- Requiring new public facilities, such as bridges and train stations, to include trails.
- Working cooperatively with many individuals and groups to create trails, including farmers, other property owners, businesses and institutions.

Recommendations Related to this County Goal:

- Township Recommendation TW-2: Provide a comprehensive network of on-street and off-street trails throughout the Township, linking residents to recreational, commercial and natural resources.
- Township Recommendation TW-7: Urge the Montgomery County Planning Commission (MCPC) to develop countywide strategies that

will advance municipalities' open space preservation efforts.

- Central District Recommendation: Create Silt Basin Trail through Kline Park linking the Schuylkill River Trail and Cedar Grove Park bike path with Miles Park and the Joshua Road trail.
- Riverfront District Recommendation: Explore opportunities to preserve Ashford Farms as permanently protected open space.
- Riverfront District Recommendation: In cooperation with Montgomery County, pursue acquisition of the scrap yard property that links the two parts of the County-owned Spring Mill Park
- Riverfront District Recommendation: Create a natural buffer, with a walking trail or promenade, along the river between Conshohocken Borough and Spring Mill Park.

Montgomery County Plan Goal 15: Provide Park Facilities to Meet the Public's Recreation Needs.

With more organized sports activities and an increasing population, the demand for active recreation facilities, particularly ballfields, will continue to grow. These facilities should be placed as close to population centers as possible, preferably within growth areas, with convenient road access and proper setbacks from sensitive natural land.

This goal will be achieved through the following actions:

- Adopting zoning that requires open space and requires a portion of this open space to be usable for playing fields and courts.
- Creating ordinances that require the dedication of open space or the payment of a fee in lieu of such open space.

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- Encouraging developers to build recreation facilities within their developments or giving a bonus for the construction of these facilities.
- Purchasing land in growth areas for future use as a park.
- Encouraging schools to allow the general public to use their facilities and playing fields.
- Allowing private recreation facilities in appropriate locations in designated growth areas.
- Providing sidewalk and trail access to recreation facilities and parks.
- Recognizing and encouraging the diverse and wide variety of recreational activities that exist, ranging from bird watching to baseball, from skateboarding to golf.

Recommendations Related to this County Goal:

- Township Recommendation TW-2: Provide a comprehensive network of on-street and off-street trails throughout the Township, linking residents to recreational, commercial and natural resources.
- Central District Recommendations: Where acquisition opportunities arise in underserved areas, create recreation spaces or storm water management buffers.

Montgomery County Goal 16: Preserve Farmland and Farming.

Although most preserved farms will be in the county's rural resource areas, some may also end up in designated growth areas. Preserved farms within designated growth areas can provide local produce, flowers, pumpkins, and other products directly to their many neighbors.

Farmland will be permanently preserved through the following actions:

- Encouraging farmers to sell their development rights (agricultural easements) to the County, State or local municipality.
- Adopting zoning provisions that create large tracts of preserved land, such as cluster zoning, transfer of development rights and true agricultural zoning.

Active farming can be preserved through the following actions:

- Encouraging farmers to join agricultural security areas, which provide some protection from nuisance ordinances and eminent domain takings.
- Encouraging farmers to take advantage of the Act 319 program, which reduces real estate taxes
- Allowing farmers markets.
- Encouraging farmers to explore alternative products and approaches, such as produce, flowers and Christmas trees.
- Amending zoning ordinances in rural resource areas that unnecessarily limit farm operations through large setbacks, limited uses or other provisions.
- Encouraging the State to enact tax reform that will reduce the real estate tax burden on farmers
- Encouraging the state to enact tax reform that will reduce the real estate tax burden on farmers
- Recognizing the changing nature of agriculture.

Recommendations Related to this County Goal:

- Township Recommendation TW-1: Pursue formation of a multimunicipal Agricultural Security Area with neighboring municipalities.

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- Stenton/Wissahickon District: Preserve 100% of Erdenheim Farm, the Township's only remaining working farm.

Montgomery County Goal 17: Protect Scenic Roads, Vistas and Viewsheds.

This goal will be achieved through the following actions:

- Permitting clustering that can move homes away from roads or behind ridgelines and woodlands.
- Using transfer of development rights ordinances to transfer development from areas with scenic views or roads.
- Enacting scenic corridor ordinances that control the type, intensity, and character of new development.
- Encouraging donations of land, development rights, and scenic easements to local municipalities or land conservation groups.
- Encouraging tree protection, buffering between incompatible uses, and street trees.
- Constructing narrower streets and adding street improvements that have a rural character.
- Creating an inventory of scenic views and roads and using this inventory whenever plans are created or developments reviewed.
- Adopting ordinances to protect the character of villages and hamlets in rural areas.
- Encouraging owners of corporate campuses, large industrial properties, golf courses, camps, schools and other temporarily protected land to permanently preserve views and rural character.

Recommendations Related to this County Goal:

- Township Recommendation TW-1: Update Township ordinances as needed to ensure they

are consistent with the Township's open space vision and goals and support the preservation of open space, viewsheds, woodlands, trees, and native species.

- Township Recommendation TW-1: Pursue formation of a multimunicipal Agricultural Security Area with neighboring municipalities.
- Stenton/Wissahickon District Recommendation: Preserve 100% of Erdenheim Farm, the Township's only remaining working farm.

Montgomery County Goal 18: Protect Historic Resources and Cultural Landscapes

This goal will be achieved through the following actions:

- Adopting village commercial ordinances that either require preservation of buildings for more intense uses or give significant bonuses for preserving these buildings.
- Enacting historic preservation ordinances that:
 - » Allow additional uses to go into historic buildings.
 - » Delay the demolition of historic buildings so alternative preservation options can be explored.
- Planning for historic resources during the subdivision and land development process.
- Encouraging adaptive reuse of historic buildings.
- Creating historic districts with strong regulations and an architectural review board.
- Using cluster zoning, transfer of development rights, agricultural zoning, and farmland preservation to preserve cultural landscapes.
- Purchasing important historic structures.
- Using façade grant and loan programs to improve façades in Main Street areas.

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- Creating an inventory of historic buildings and structures.
- Encouraging federal and state governments to expand the tax benefits of preserving historic properties.
- Improving cooperation among all the various people and organizations involved in historic preservation, including federal, state, county and municipal governments, nonprofits, businesses, property owners and developers.

Recommendations Related to this County Goal:

- Township Recommendation TW-1: Adopt the pending Growing Greener Zoning and Subdivision Land Development Ordinances, which will serve as a critical regulatory tool for preserving open space and creating greenways.
- Township Recommendation TW-1: Pursue formation of a multimunicipal Agricultural Security Area with neighboring municipalities.
- Stenton/Wissahickon District Recommendation: Preserve 100% of Erdenheim Farm, the Township's only remaining working farm.