

Open Space Program in the Township of Morris

“Open space can provide beauty, privacy, and variety; moderate temperature; and create a sense of spaciousness and scale.”

-- Council on Environmental Quality, 1973

Preservation of open space must be planned just as any municipal infrastructure. The development of an Open Space and Recreation Plan, and the Township governing body's commitment to implement the Plan, are essential in maintaining a community's character, and to preserve and improve the quality of life for its residents.

Goals of the Open Space Program

The *Goals Section* of the *Open Space and Recreation Plan* acts as a guide for Morris Township to preserve open space and create recreation areas for residents. Morris Township's goals focus on preserving environmentally sensitive land, protecting water resources, and creating additional recreation areas for both passive and active recreation.

The goals and policies of the Open Space and Recreation Plan are based upon the 1997 Open Space and Recreation Plan, the Public Hearing on the Open Space Plan held on November 12, 2003, the 1994 Master Plan and its 2000 Reexamination Report, and the recommendations of the Morris Township Open Space Committee. A summary of the comments heard at the November Public Hearing can be found in the *Appendix*.

Based upon the above documentation and public comment, the following goals guide the recommendations of the Open Space and Recreation Plan:

- Protection of water recharge areas and water supply lands (*see Groundwater Recharge Map*);
- Protection of environmentally sensitive areas;
- Encourage preservation of the Township's remaining farmland;
- Identification and protection of scenic views and vistas in the Township;
- Acquisition of lands for both passive and active recreation;
- Incorporation of innovative maintenance and management of current recreational facilities to maximize field usage; and
- Creation of an interconnected trail and greenway system in the Township, including Morris County's Patriots' Path.

Over the last several years the Township has acquired additional open space for preservation in accordance with the Township's 1997 Open Space and Recreation Plan and 1994 and 2000 Master Plans. The Township's 2000 Master Plan Reexamination Report reaffirmed the goals and objectives of the 1994 Master Plan with heightened emphasis on environmental protection and maintenance of quality of life for residents (*2000 Master Plan Reexamination, pages 57 and 58*). Goals specific to open space and recreation include:

- Preservation of residential and open space character of the community.
- Preservation and enhancement of historic sites and recreational facilities for public enjoyment.

Morris Township currently falls within several Planning Areas as designated by the *State Development and Redevelopment Plan* (SDRP). These include: Metropolitan Planning Area (PA1); Fringe Planning Area (PA3); Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas (PA5); and the Parks and Natural Areas. The Township's ecological diversity and its close proximity to Morristown lends itself to the multiple designations. The Township is currently working with the county as part of the 2004 cross-acceptance process to update the mapping and designations within the State Plan.

The principles of the county's open space program are delineated in the Morris County Open Space Element (*page 4*). These are to:

- Enhance the quality of life in Morris County;
- Protect the environment; and
- Expand recreational opportunities.

In particular, the county supports the preservation of unique natural features, especially those that protect water supply sources – a priority for Morris Township as well. Washington Valley in the Township is now permanently protected by Morris County as a natural area for water quality conservation and preservation.

The Township of Morris' open space acquisition program is consistent with the goals of its Master Plan, State Plan, and the Morris County Open Space Element.

History of the Open Space Program

“Since adoption of the 1994 Master Plan the Township has moved aggressively on several fronts to analyze, prioritize and acquire additional open space for permanent protection.”

--Township of Morris Reexamination Report 2000 (page 46)

Since the institution of the Open Space Trust Fund, the Township has preserved **214 acres** of parkland. The Township has preserved properties to serve as buffers between wetlands and developed areas, refuges for wildlife, public water supply lands, and to create opportunities for new recreational facilities.

The first acquisition using the Township's Trust Fund was to purchase forested property along Fanok Road in 1994. Following this, the Township purchased Jones Woods, located behind Villa Walsh School. Jones Woods is a mature forest containing streams, springs, an 8-acre earthen-dammed reservoir, wetlands of exceptional resource value, and water recharge soils (see *Groundwater Recharge Map*). Preserved by the Township in 1995, 17 acres of this property are held solely for passive recreation and natural resource protection.

The West Hanover Avenue property, the largest undeveloped parcel remaining in Morris Township, was owned and unused by the State of New Jersey. Acquisition of the 27-acre property was completed in 1998 for future Township athletic fields and hiking trails.

In 2000, Morris Township and Mendham Townships purchased a 46-acre forested property from Jerry Bojczuk. Eighteen acres of this tract are located within Morris Township. The property contains significant wetlands and a stream and is now part of 700 acres of public land in Washington Valley. This was purchased in partnership with the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority.

Blue Gate Farm, 14 acres, was purchased from Herbert Blanchard in 2001. It has a magnificent eighteenth century home, with barns, farm fields and a stream. The Township subdivided the home from the remaining open lands, to preserve the fields and stream.

In 2001 and 2002 Morris Township purchased two tracts along Mount Kemble Avenue totaling 81 acres from Jockey Hollow Top VI, LLC and Deer Haven, LLC. One of these forested properties was acquired in partnership with the Great Swamp Watershed Association to preserve the headwaters of the Great Swamp and forested slopes. Close to the Morristown National Historic Park, these properties create an opportunity for the Township to connect local neighborhoods via hiking trails with the national park. They also preserve a steeply sloped forest, protecting the habitat of a nationally significant wildlife refuge.

Recently the Township purchased and preserved two properties on the edges of Washington Valley. The first is an 8-acre parcel along Mendham Road and the second is a 17-acre property on Washington Valley Road. Both acquisitions prevent encroachment into Washington Valley and protect its scenic beauty and rich wildlife habitat.

Table 1 details the open space properties purchased by the Township since the inception of its Open Space Trust Fund. The Township has purchased 214 acres of land leveraging its Open Space Trust Fund with NJ Green Acres and grants from the Morris County Open Space Trust Fund.

Table 1. Morris Township Open Space Acquisitions utilizing the Township Open Space Trust Fund.

| Year | Resource Value | Block/Lot | Property Name | Size (acres) |
|-------------|---------------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------|
| 1994 | Forested land | 7304/2, 18, 19, 20 | Fanok Road | 1.38 |
| 1995 | Wildlife haven | 4101/3.01, 7 | Jones Woods | 17.40 |
| 1998 | Stream protection Forested land | 901/1 and 8 | School House Woods (Jean Street) | 30 |
| 1998 | Water recharge Recreation fields | 1803/13 | Morris Meadows (West Hanover Avenue) | 26.9 |
| 2000 | Watershed land Washington Valley | 3203/18 | Washington Valley Addition | 18 |
| 2001 | Great Swamp Steep slopes | 5101/1 | Jockey Hollow Top (VI) | 58.21 |
| 2001 | Community landmark | 9701/1.01 | Blue Gate Farms | 14 |
| 2002 | Great Swamp Steep slopes | 5004/9 | Deer Haven | 23.32 |
| 2003 | Water recharge | 3601/12.01 | Washington Valley Road | 17 |
| 2003 | Access to trails Washington Valley | 3703/2 and 5 | Washington Valley View | 7.84 |
| | | | TOTAL PRESERVED: | 214 |

Morris Township Open Space Trust Fund

In November 1991, the voters of Morris Township approved a referendum which established a dedicated tax of one cent per \$100 of assessed property valuation to acquire and preserve open space. Two thirds (66%) of the voters approved this non-binding referendum.

The ordinance creating the Township Trust Fund was passed by the Township Committee on March 3, 1992 (*Appendix*). As noted in the Ordinance: “The funds accumulated within the Trust Fund may be utilized for acquisition of land or development rights in land or as a down payment for the issuance of bonds for the same purposes at the discretion of the Township Committee.” The ordinance also establishes an Open Space Committee with membership that includes the Planning Board Chairman, Board of Adjustment Chairman, Member of Environmental Commission, Mayor, Township Committee Member, and four citizens.

The Township Committee authorized the increase of this local Open Space Trust Fund in 2000 to two cents and again in 2001 to three cents per \$100 of assessed property value. In 2004 the Township Committee authorized the Trust Fund to be set at one cent per \$100 of assessed value and will generate approximately \$391,000 per year.

A key to a successful open space acquisition program is leveraging local open space dollars with matching funds. In 1996, the Township hired Morris Land Conservancy to develop an Open Space and Recreation Plan, a requirement for eligibility in the Green Acres Planning Incentive grant program. The Township has received grants from both the Morris County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund and NJ Green Acres through its Planning Incentive Grant program for land acquisition. Morris Land Conservancy has helped Morris Township implement its open space program since 1997.

Morris County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund grants:

The Township has received a total of \$2,920,000 in grant funds from the Morris County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund towards the following projects:

- 1996: \$470,000 for the purchase of the 46-acre project purchased with the Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority (former Bojczuk property) in Morris and Mendham Townships
- 1997: \$200,000 for the acquisition of Morris Meadows (West Hanover Avenue) from the State of New Jersey
- 1998: \$350,000 for the purchase of the Park Avenue (Blue Gate Farms) Tract
- 2001: \$700,000 for the purchase of the former Deer Haven property.
- 2002: \$400,000 towards the purchase of the Washington Valley View property along Mendham Road (the former Lupo property)
- 2003: \$800,000 to purchase the 17-acre parcel on Washington Valley Road (the former Spence parcel)

Green Acres Grant Funds:

The Township has received a total of \$2,065,000 in Planning Incentive funds from NJ Green Acres for land acquisition. The Township has applied these funds towards the purchase of the Jockey Hollow Top VI property, Blue Gate Farm, and the Deer Haven tract.

- 1998: \$1,265,000
- 2002: \$ 400,000
- 2003: \$ 400,000

The Great Swamp Watershed Association contributed \$500,000 towards the acquisition of the Jockey Hollow tract from their own Green Acres nonprofit land acquisition account.

National and County Parklands in the Township of Morris

Morris Township residents enjoy national and county parklands that spread across several municipalities. The wooded rolling hills of Jockey Hollow are bound to local and national history by the activities of the American Continental Army during the icy winters of 1777 and 1779-1780. General George Washington choose Jockey Hollow as the location of his encampment due to its strategic location, including proximity to New York City, defensible terrain, important communication routes, access to critical

resources, and supportive community. Morristown National Historical Park was designated the nation's first on March 2, 1933. The national park consists of four non-contiguous units: Washington's Headquarters with the Ford Mansion and Headquarters Museum, the Fort Nonsense Unit, the Jockey Hollow Unit, and the New Jersey Brigade Area. The Jockey Hollow Unit includes the Wick house (headquarters of General Arthur St. Clair), five reconstructed soldier huts, and approximately 27 miles of walking trails (*National Park Service, Morristown*). Seventy-four acres of the National Historic Park are located within Morris Township.

Lewis Morris Park was named for Lewis Morris the first governor of New Jersey. It consists of 1,154 acres of forest and parkland. The park was dedicated as a county park in March 1958, and it marked the beginning of the Morris County Park System. Today Township residents and others who live throughout the county visit the park every year to take advantage of the swimming, hiking, cross-country skiing, boating, fishing, picnicking and camping opportunities. There are many other activities to enjoy in the park, everything from music events to ball fields and 100 acres of Lewis Morris Park are in Morris Township. (*Morris County Park Commission – Lewis Morris Park*)

Located entirely within Morris Township, Fosterfields (208 acres) is an historical farm. Farming at Fosterfields is done using the tools and techniques found at the turn of the ninetieth century. The farm was bequeathed to the Morris County Park system by Caroline Foster who lived there for 98 of her 102 years. Fosterfields serves as a learning tool for all those who visit and demonstrates the hardships early residents of the Township endured and the ingenuity used to overcome the difficulties of life on a farm. (*Morris County Park Commission – Fosterfields*)

Loantaka Brook Reservation became a part of the Morris County Park System in December 1957. The reservation encompasses more than 570 acres in three municipalities (134 acres are in Morris Township) and offers almost five miles of trails for hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, cross-country skiing and has three ball fields. Efforts to preserve the Loantaka Moraine, wetlands and other sensitive areas adjacent to the Reservation are under way. These parcels will form a greenway to protect Loantaka Brook and to connect the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge with the Reservation. (*Morris County Park Commission – Loantaka Brook Reservation*)

Patriots' Path winds through fields, over hills, and along streams linking federal, state, county and municipal parks, watershed lands, historic sites and other points of interest across Morris County. The path is used everyday for running, walking, biking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing after a snowfall. The Traction Line Trail also runs through the Township and is a heavily used path by local and county residents. Both multi-use trails are managed by the Morris County Park Commission and travel nearly 6 miles through Morris Township.

An indoor facility managed by the Morris County Park Commission, the William G. Mennen Sports Arena opened on January 12, 1975 and featured one ice surface with a seating capacity of 2,500. The facility has been expanded to three ice surfaces operating

year round. The arena offers public sessions, ice skating lessons, hockey clinics, figure skating clubs, and group party packages. Visitors can experience everything from hockey games to the Annual Shrine Circus to conventions. The Arena is situated on 23 acres in Morris Township along Hanover Avenue.

Morris Township Recreational Parks and Facilities

Morris Township owns and manages a diversity of recreational sites and facilities for Township residents. Outdoor basketball courts, football fields, soccer fields, multi-use fields, tennis courts and pools are a sampling of the facilities open to residents. Park facilities are located throughout the Township. Below are several tables detailing the facilities available at each of the Township recreational areas. *Table 2* identifies the outdoor sports facilities available at the Township parks and *Table 3* identifies the water and picnic facilities in the Township.

Morris Township has 15 baseball/softball fields in 11 parks; 8 basketball courts in 8 parks; 1 football field; 12 soccer fields in 10 parks; 10 open playing fields in 10 parks; and 5 tennis courts. Morris Township has two Township pools, open to residents and non-residents. Both facilities are actively used and offer swim lessons, family programming, and swim teams. At the fall meeting on the Open Space and Recreation Plan, coaches and volunteers for the various athletic programs expressed concern about the heavy use of existing fields and suggested the Township investigate new methods of field rotation and field usage to minimize the damage to existing field space and allow them time to “rest” between seasons. Of the total municipal parkland, 128 acres, or 30% of municipal parkland, is dedicated to active recreational use.

Table 2. Outdoor Sports Facilities

| Baseball/Softball Fields | | Basketball Courts | | Football Fields | | Open Play Fields | | Soccer Fields | |
|--------------------------|----------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-----------------|---------------|------------------|----------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| 1 | Kiwanis Field | 1 | Children's Park | 1 | Cornine Field | 1 | Kiwanis Field | 1 | Kiwanis Field |
| 1 | Veteran's Field | 1 | Elmer Saunders Park | | | 1 | Butterworth Field | 1 | Veteran's Field |
| 1 | La Rue Field | 1 | Edward Hayward Park | | | 1 | Children's Park | 1 | La Rue Field |
| 2 | Butterworth Field | 1 | Donald Delpho Park | | | 1 | Elmer Saunders Park | 1 | Ketch Road (leased) |
| 1 | Elmer Saunders Park | 1 | Ginty Field | | | 1 | Ginty Field | 2 | Butterworth Field |
| 1 | Donald Delpho Park | 1 | Harlan Green Park | | | 1 | Blekicki Field | 1 | Elmer Saunders Park |
| 3 | Ginty Field | 1 | Collinsville Park | | | 1 | Frelinghuysen Park | 1 | Ginty Field |
| 2 | Frelinghuysen Park | | | | | 1 | Harlan Green Park | 1 | Frelinghuysen Park |
| 1 | Harlan Green Park | | | | | 1 | Beatrice Tucker Park | 1 | Harlan Green Park |
| 1 | Beatrice Tucker Park | | | | | 1 | Collinsville Park | | |

| Bocce Shuffleboard Courts | | Hockey Court (street) | | Tennis Courts | | Volleyball Courts | |
|---------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------|---------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | Edward Hayward Park | 1 | Blekicki Field | 4 | Ginty Field | 1 | Ginty Field |
| | | | | 1 | Collinsville Park | 1 | Ginty Pool |
| | | | | | | 1 | Collinsville Park |

Table 3. Water and Picnic Facilities

| Swimming Pools | | Spray Pools | | Picnic Areas | |
|-----------------------|---------------|--------------------|-------------------|---------------------|---------------|
| 1 | Streeter Park | 1 | Collinsville Park | 1 | Streeter Park |
| 1 | Ginty Pool | | | 1 | Cornine Field |
| | | | | 1 | Ginty Pool |