

## Introduction

This Greenway plan has been prepared by Whitemarsh Township to help guide future conservation and development efforts within the township, resulting in a community which is both environmentally sustainable and economically vibrant. The vision and recommendations found in this plan were created based on the following set of guiding principles:



- Understanding where not to develop is the most important first step to creating a sustainable and prosperous community.
- Placing development in the correct location will lower economic and environmental costs, resulting in overall increased economic return and a healthier environment.
- The vision proposed in this document can only be achieved through the combined, collaborative efforts of non-profit organizations, government agencies, private businesses, and local residents. These groups must work together in a cooperative manner in order for the vision to come to fruition.
- Providing outdoor recreational amenities, an attractive suburban community character, a healthy environment, and a vibrant economy are all important ingredients for obtaining a high quality of life for the people living in the area.

One may ask themselves, “*Why develop a Greenway plan?*” or even “*What is a Greenway?*” Simply put, a greenway plan identifies the places where development should not occur, suggests the locations where outdoor recreation facilities should be placed, and generally identifies the places community members would like to save. Without developing a plan these places are often not well-defined, and the list of places is often incomplete, only discovered when an important asset is unintentionally lost. Developing a greenway plan is the way to tell the world what it is you cherish about your community.

Greenways may include both public and private property, but including these properties does not necessarily mean they must be open for public access. Some greenways provide for recreational activity or scenic beauty, while others function almost exclusively for environmental protection and are not designed for human passage. Greenways may follow old railways or canals, to help us remember our industrial heritage. They may follow ridge tops or stream corridors, shorelines or wetlands to help protect our drinking water quality. Greenways differ in their location and function, but overall a greenway will protect natural, cultural and scenic resources, provide recreational benefits, stimulate economic development opportunities, and enhance the quality of life for people.

In November 2006, Whitemarsh Township asked voters to answer the following ballot question:

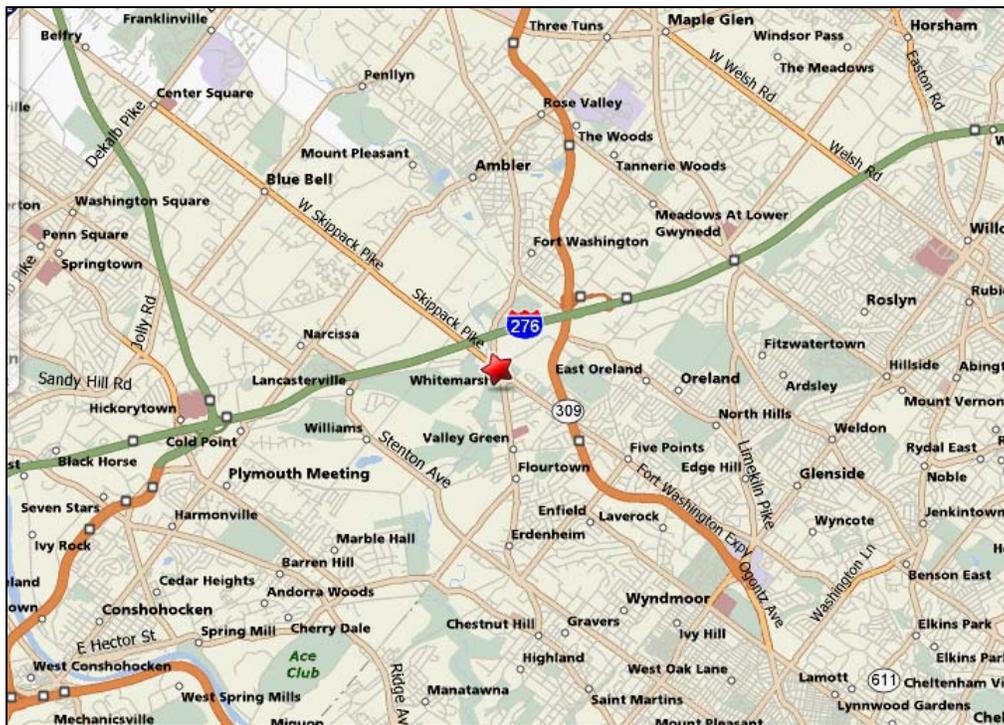
*Do you favor the imposition of an increase to the township's existing earned income tax of .25% for residents of Whitemarsh Township, to be used for financing the acquisition of*

## The Whitemarsh Township Greenway Plan

*land or interests in land for open space; for the purpose of acquiring recreation or historic lands; and for the purpose of acquiring agricultural conservation easements?*

Township residents voted heavily in favor of the increase, with 62.2% of voters responding favorably to the question. The majority opinion in favor of a tax increase for open space preservation underscores the importance of open space, agricultural, and recreation resource protection and expansion to Township residents. The purpose of this Greenway Plan is to build upon and dovetail with the Whitemarsh Open Space and Recreation Plan, identify and protect important natural and historic features, and link these resources to existing open space areas to create a seamless greenway system for Whitemarsh Township.

**Figure 1: Regional Location Map**



### *Study Area Setting*

#### *Regional Setting*

Whitemarsh Township is a 14.5-square mile municipality located in southern Montgomery County. It is bordered by Philadelphia and Springfield Township to the east, Lower Merion Township and Conshohocken to the south, Upper Dublin Township to the north, and Whitpain and Plymouth Townships to the west. The Schuylkill River creates the border between Lower Merion and Whitemarsh Township, and the Wissahickon Creek flows through the northern portion of the Township. Whitemarsh Township's major highway routes include the Pennsylvania Turnpike (Interstate Route 276) and State Route 309. SEPTA's R5 and R6 rail lines also travel

through the Township and provide direct connection to Philadelphia. Major collector roads include Butler Pike, Ridge Pike, and Germantown Pike.

### *Township Character*

Roughly the northern half of the Township contains significant areas of open space, including Fort Washington State Park and the Wissahickon Green Ribbon Preserve, and private homes on larger tracts of land. The southern portion of Whitemarsh Township is more heavily developed, and includes more compact forms of residential and commercial development, as well as several golf and country clubs. Smaller tracts of public open space are located throughout the Township. Significant private recreation areas include the Philadelphia Cricket Club, Sunnybrook Golf Club, Whitemarsh Valley Country Club, ACE Country Club, and Green Valley Country Club tracts. Plymouth-Whitemarsh High School and a large tract owned by Germantown Academy are also located in the Township.

Whitemarsh Township's rich history and expansive parks and open spaces set it apart from the surrounding urban areas of Philadelphia, Ambler, Conshohocken, Norristown and Blue Bell. The Township was established in the early 1700's, and General Washington made a temporary camp in the Township in 1777. In the 1800's and early 1900's, portions of the Township provided a summer respite for Philadelphia's industrial elite. The history and natural areas continue to define the Township today, complementing the adjacent urban character of Philadelphia and Conshohocken to the South. Whitemarsh wishes to continue its historical and conservation heritage by expanding and improving its open space infrastructure by establishing a Township-wide greenway system. The first step in that process is the identification of existing resources and the preparation of this Township Greenway Plan.

### *Benefits of Greenways*

Establishment of an organized greenway system through Whitemarsh Township will provide benefits to the community and the surrounding environment. The benefits of greenways are wide-reaching and include improvement in quality of life, enhanced economic development, and the conservation of natural resource. Developing a comprehensive list of the benefits of greenways would be exhausting, but the following examples are included:

#### *Community Benefits of Greenways*

The benefits of greenways to communities are numerous, and all relate to the health, safety, and prosperity of people. Greenways have been the catalyst in revitalizing distressed communities and improving overall quality of life.

#### *Recreation and Health*

Greenway development provides recreational and human health improvement opportunities. Many greenways contain trail systems that provide



recreation, entertainment and health benefits for users. Many people feel safer walking, jogging or biking on off-road trails that are separated from traffic areas, and so they participate in these physical activities more frequently, helping to keep them healthy. These benefits also include developing a stronger sense of community.

#### *Transportation Enhancement and Safety Benefits*

Greenways that contain trails provide an alternative to automobile use, which reduces air and noise pollution and helps reduce traffic congestion. Trails also provide areas for exercise and recreation in a setting away from traffic, decreasing the potential for conflicts between cars and pedestrians or bicyclists. All of these issues lead to a less stressful life; thus, improving quality of life.

#### *Economic Benefits*

Recreation areas, trails, and historical and cultural sites, all greenway components, attract visitors. These visitors patronize local shops, restaurants, and businesses, which enhances the local economy and promotes tourism. Communities with well-developed trails and greenways tend to attract businesses requiring highly educated employees. Business leaders understand that highly skilled employees demand communities with excellent greenway amenities as attractive places to live and work, and so they locate in areas providing such amenities.

#### *Historic and Scenic Resource Preservation*

Greenways facilitate the enhancement and preservation of historic and scenic sites by providing increased exposure and access. Many historic but abandoned or obsolete resources find new life as key cultural location within a greenway system, spurring economic development through their restoration and use. Trails that link these resources may include signage, information kiosks or visitors centers which interpret historic resources, generating pride in the citizenry that live in the community.

#### *Conservation of local Rural and Farmland Legacy*

Greenways are one method to maintain important open spaces and agricultural areas that form the community's rural character. Greenway development preserves open space and agricultural land helping to protect the rural legacy of the state. This protection facilitates environmental preservation and education, provides recreational facilities, shapes development and generates opportunities for economic benefits.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most importantly in Whitemarsh Township, greenways can help to maintain the rural community character that residents have come to know and cherish.

#### *Creation of Educational Opportunities*

Greenways provide people with the opportunity for direct contact with the natural environment and cultural and historic places. Many greenways have signs and brochures to inform people about natural or historic features, and schools or other civic groups often use greenways as "outdoor classrooms" for field trips and special events. Greenways provide an opportunity to educate people about historic sites, the protection of natural

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<sup>1</sup> *Pennsylvania Greenways*, [pagreenways.org](http://pagreenways.org), excerpted from *Benefits of Greenways: A Pennsylvania Study*, 2000.

resources, environmental and scientific topics, health benefits, and promote the interaction of people with nature.<sup>2</sup>

### *Building Partnerships*

Greenways enhance the sense of place in a community or region. Greenways have many stakeholders and beneficiaries. The planning and development of greenways naturally lead to the formation of broad-based partnerships, bringing together civic groups, regional planners, community leaders, educators, business owners and others. The partnership approach not only provides resources but also builds public support or "community capital" and consensus for more community investment.<sup>3</sup>

### *Promotion of Sustainable Development and Sound Land Use*

Many people living in southeast Pennsylvania acknowledge that the quality of life and character of their communities are under pressure from suburban sprawl and unplanned development. Greenways present a significant opportunity to guide land use to help ensure that as communities grow, green space and recreational opportunities are built into their futures. Further, greenway development can be a redevelopment tool to help reuse and improve brownfields and underutilized urban areas, ultimately saving more open space.<sup>4</sup>

### *Environmental Benefits of Greenways*

The environmental benefits of greenways range from locally to globally important. Greenways can help protect the quality of land, water, air, and our climate. The list of environmental benefits is so extensive and interconnected that they are often undervalued due to the complexity of trying to figure out their overall value. Several forms of environmental pollution are neutralized within greenways, including noise, water, thermal and air pollution.

### *Water Quality Protection*

Greenways help to keep our drinking water clean by acting as a filter for many forms of pollution. Additionally, greenways within floodplain areas serve a flood protection function and help to keep our streams and lakes clean. Streamside trees, also known as forested riparian buffers, help to cool the local air and water temperatures along streams and rivers. Greenways help to keep our drinking water clean, and our lakes and streams attractive places in which to recreate.



### *Habitat Protection*

Greenways, particularly those within established conservation areas and riparian buffers, provide significant habitat to plant and animals. Greenways

<sup>2</sup> Pennsylvania Greenways, [pagreenways.org](http://pagreenways.org), excerpted from *Benefits of Greenways: A Pennsylvania Study*, 2000.

<sup>3</sup> Pennsylvania Greenways, [pagreenways.org](http://pagreenways.org), excerpted from *Benefits of Greenways: A Pennsylvania Study*, 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Pennsylvania Greenways, [pagreenways.org](http://pagreenways.org), excerpted from *Benefits of Greenways: A Pennsylvania Study*, 2000.

with woodland areas provide cover and feeding areas for birds and mammals. Greenways which contain waterways provide watering areas for animal species and nesting areas for waterfowl. Streams and rivers within greenways benefit from decreased adjacent land development which improves habitat for fish, amphibians and reptiles.

*Air Quality Protection*

Greenways help to keep the air we breathe clean, and people healthy. Air pollution is occurring in cities and urban centers that lack of green infrastructure that provides natural air cleaning processes. Human health is declining in places that lack trees, have no recreation facilities, and are overpopulated as the rates of breathing related disease in humans, specifically related to poor air quality, are at all time highs. Developing greenways to protect air quality is a significant benefit to both the environment and people.

*Global Climate Change*

Global climate change is occurring. A majority of scientists, worldwide, agree that Earth's climate is warming, and experiencing increased extreme weather episodes. The natural process for combating global warming is the trapping of greenhouse gases in vegetation, particularly trees. One of the main purposes of greenway plans is to protect beneficial natural processes that help to moderate and control Earth's climate.