

OPEN SPACE PLAN

INTRODUCTION

“Treat the earth well: it was not given to you by your parents, it was loaned to you by your children. We do not inherit the Earth from our Ancestors, we borrow it from our Children.”

—Ancient Native American Proverb

Whitemarsh Township is unique among its neighboring municipalities, distinguished by its town-and-country character, special natural features and large areas of undeveloped open space. With the support and assistance of Montgomery County, Whitemarsh Township intends to protect its natural habitats and a major portion of its remaining open space, provide opportunities for recreation, create trail and greenway linkages, and preserve its scenic beauty for the benefit of the residents of Whitemarsh and neighboring municipalities.

Whitemarsh has many special features that make it an important resource for the region. It contains: a major portion of the 2000-acre Wissahickon riparian corridor that stretches from Fairmount Park in Philadelphia to Four Mills Nature Preserve in Upper Dublin; important sections of three major County trails; over two miles of Schuylkill riverfront largely free from commercial and residential development; the steep slopes, wild streams, and rustic woodlands of Miquon, which borders Springfield Township and Philadelphia; and the large country estates and wooded parcels of Broad Axe, which lies adjacent to Whitpain and Upper Dublin Townships. The protection and preservation of these diverse features is of critical importance, not only to Whitemarsh, but to



Natural Area at Cedar Grove Park

our neighboring municipalities and Montgomery County as well.

Looking ahead 20 years, Whitemarsh envisions itself as an oasis of green amid the predominant suburban development of southeastern Montgomery County. The Township will be appreciated for its high quality of life—the result of its large expanses of open space and comprehensive network of trails and greenways connecting the region’s parks, recreation facilities, natural areas, and social and cultural resources. The open spaces of Whitemarsh will serve as a critical natural buffer for the region, helping to protect residents from additional flooding, traffic congestion and pollution—the inevitable byproducts of development.

The 2006 Open Space Plan builds on the strong foundation provided by the 1996 Plan and sets in place the strategies to achieve its ambitious vision. A principal goal of the Plan is to protect and preserve at least 75% of the remaining undeveloped land, while directing higher-density development to locations

INTRODUCTION

where it will have the least impact. In addition, the Plan calls for the creation of a comprehensive network of trails and greenways to improve pedestrian, and, where appropriate, bicycle access to parks, recreation areas, shopping districts, and riparian corridors both within and beyond the Township.

These goals and objectives will be achieved through:

- Implementation of *state-of-the-art zoning and land use regulations* incorporating current Growing Greener principles.
- *Development of environmental maps* identifying critical natural features, wildlife habitats, and potential greenways to help guide future decision making and growth.
- *Strategic partnerships* with local, state and federal entities established and founded around land preservation initiatives.
- *Public education* to heighten awareness of Township goals and the importance of open space preservation.
- Implementation of *state-of-the-art land stewardship policies* based on best management practices, and intended to ensure the long-term preservation of natural habitats and native species, and improvement of storm water management.
- *Acquisition of undeveloped land*, in partnership with conservation organizations, adjacent municipalities and private landowners, and funded by a diversity of public and private sources, including the Township's Open Space Fund, which will be supported by a substantial dedicated revenue source.

While all of the recommendations presented in this updated Plan are important to the Township's long-term vision and goals and should be pursued, some are

necessarily more important than others by virtue of their urgency and/or potential impact. The Township has identified seven action items from the recommendations that should be considered of priority importance and acted upon at the first opportunity. These are:

- Ensure that all zoning ordinances support, protect and comply with the Township's open space vision and goals. Specifically, approve the Growing Greener Ordinance and the Riverfront Redevelopment Ordinance to control future land development in the Township.
- Establish a permanent, substantial dedicated funding stream, in the order of \$500,000 per year, to support the Township's open space initiatives.
- Create a permanent Township staff position ("Open Space Steward") responsible for overseeing and helping to implement the recommendations of this Plan.
- Ensure the permanent preservation of Erdenheim Farm, the Township's only remaining working farm.
- In collaboration with the Montgomery County Planning Commission and golf club owners, develop a long-term strategy for achieving maximum preservation of the Township's golf courses as permanently protected open space.
- Create a network of Township trails, including a core trail along Joshua Road, that supplements and connects with the County's trails and links residents throughout the Township to the area's recreational, natural and commercial areas.
- Create a map of conservation features identifying important natural features, storm water retention areas and greenways, as well as wildlife

INTRODUCTION

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.

Why is protecting open space so important?

If we are not successful in preserving the land and natural features that remain, we will lose the essence of Whitemarsh as we know it, as well as our environmental safety net.

If we do not preserve our remaining open space, we will experience more severe flooding and increased

pressures on our roadways and infrastructure as a result of development.

If we do not preserve our woodlands, fields and waterways, we will lose a significant part of the fragile ecosystem that helps sustain the critical diversity of life.

If we do not meet our land preservation and stewardship responsibilities, we will become yet another built-out inner ring suburb, devoid of character and disconnected from the peaceful rhythms and restorative gifts that only nature offers—and on which our physical, mental and spiritual health so much depends.

“Now I truly believe that we in this generation must come to terms with nature, and I think we’re challenged, as mankind has never been challenged before, to prove our maturity and our mastery, not of nature but of ourselves.”

—Rachel Carson, Silent Spring