

CHAPTER 3 · COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

EXISTING PROTECTED LANDS



Victory Fields and McCarthy Park

Types of Protected Land in the Township

Whitemarsh has a substantial amount of protected land throughout the Township. Protected land consists of land that has been established as open space in perpetuity, through one of many different types of protection, including but not limited to farmland easements, conservation easements, outright purchase and ownership by the municipality, a not-for-profit organization or the state or federal government. The bulk of this land has been protected in the form of parkland, mostly State-owned, with additional acreage owned by the County and Township. There is also open space owned or protected by private conservation organizations such as the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, the Natural Lands Trust, and the Montgomery County Lands Trust. Large country estates in the vicinity of the Broad Axe area, a major portion of the wooded valleys of the Miquon area, and large portions of Erdenheim Farm are still under private control and currently have no form of protection.

Municipal Parkland and Open Space Township Parks and Open Space

Whitemarsh Township has a significant amount of municipally owned open space located in the southern portions of the Township. There are six municipal parks located within the Township including:

Miles Park · (Central District - See #5 on Map #17 Central District Relevant Parcels) This is a 25-acre park located at the intersection of Joshua Road and Germantown Pike. The Valley Green Country Club is located directly across Germantown Pike from the Park. The park includes five baseball fields, two softball fields, a soccer field, picnic pavilion, a 5/8th mile walking/jogging path and fitness stations. A new playground was installed in the summer of 2000 and a new tot lot was installed in the spring of 2001, with funding assistance from the Patrons of Whitemarsh Parks.

Cedar Grove Park · (Central District - See #8 on Map #17 Central District Relevant Parcels) Cedar Grove Park is a 25-acre park located on Cedar Grove Road

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near Spring Mill Road. This park contains both the Whitemarsh Community Arts Center and the Cedar Grove Barn, as well as t-ball fields, a baseball/softball field, a basketball court, and a new playground area. An adjacent parcel, known as ‘Parcel C’ has recently been approved for development of a townhouse community. As a stipulation of approval of the land development application, the developer agreed to donate the 11.75 acres of currently leased land to the Township. This portion of the future park extension could be developed for either passive or active recreation uses. This parcel also provides excellent opportunities for a connection to Kline Park.

*“The wild places are where we begin.
When they end, so do we”*

—David Brower

Leeland Park · (Central District - See #9 on Map # 17 Central District Relevant Parcels) Leeland Park is a 3-acre park located at North Lane and Jones Street, near the Cedar Heights portion of the Township. It features a t-ball/softball field, two basketball courts and picnic tables. It received a new playground structure and swing set in the summer of 2000. Located in an older and dense neighborhood, activity in Leeland Park often conflicts with adjacent residential properties.

Kline Park (Silt Basin Property) · (Central District - See #7 on Map #17 Central District Relevant Parcels) Approximately one-half of the 109-acre property, about 54 acres, was donated to the Township by National Label Company, which purchased the property from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. There are 290 homes proposed for the remainder of the land, with an additional 50% of this land potentially set aside in an easement or outright transfer of development rights. In total, 75% of this site is expected to be preserved. Kline Park is located

between Joshua Road and Ridge Pike and is adjacent to Cedar Grove Park. This park was acquired on the recommendation of the 1996 Open Space Plan. The community vision for this parkland is to have it remain as a largely wooded and undeveloped passive park. A walking trail would connect the community of Lafayette Hill with Cedar Grove Park through this park.

McCarthy Park (former WFIL Radio Tower Property) · (Central District - See #3 on Map # 17

Central District Relevant Parcels) This 17-acre site was purchased by the Township in 1999, with \$1,032,815 of grant funding from

the Montgomery County Open Space Program. An additional adjacent 29-acre area was purchased by the Colonial School District for use as athletic fields. McCarthy Park, located south of Flourtown Road and west of Joshua Road, provides a valuable open space and is connected by a multi-use trail to the William Jeanes Library and Whitemarsh Elementary School.

Valley Green Park · Valley Green Park is an 8-acre park located on the eastern edge of the Township, on Church Road at the intersection of East Valley Green Road. It is surrounded mostly by single family detached housing. The park features a softball field, two half basketball courts, a picnic pavilion and playground equipment. Renovations occurred in the Fall of 2000 and ended with the installation of a new playground structure in 2001. The southern portion

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of the park serves as a valuable stormwater retention area.

County Parks and Open Space Land

Montgomery County owns and maintains a significant portion of flood plain along the banks of the Wissahickon Creek and also owns two parcels comprising Spring Mill Park in the southern portion of the Township along the Schuylkill River.

Wissahickon Valley Park · (Stenton/Wissahickon District - See #4 on Map # 18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) The Wissahickon Valley Park is comprised of several parcels located along the Wissahickon Creek stretching from Lafayette Road, in the north, to Valley Green Road, in the south. Several large portions of the park are adjacent to Fort Washington State Park.

Spring Mill Park · (Riverfront District - See #1 on Map #17 Central District Relevant Parcels) Spring Mill Park is a County-owned park comprised of two parcels of 5 and 15 acres located in the southern portion of the Township. It is located at the southern terminus of the PECO right-of-way, just below Cedar

Grove and River Roads. Both parcels parallel the River, yet are separated from it by the railroad right-of-way. The County’s Comprehensive Park Plan proposes to develop a master plan for this park.

State Parks and Open Space Land

Whitemarsh Township benefits from a significant amount of State-owned, permanently preserved land. The majority of this land is found in Fort Washington State Park and the remainder is surrounding the Highlands and the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission (PHMC) site, Hope Lodge.

Fort Washington State Park · (Stenton/Wissahickon District - See #1a-d on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) The 483-acre Fort Washington State Park honors George Washington and 12,000 of his soldiers who camped at this location in the fall of 1777. The park is located along both sides of Joshua Road, along Militia Hill Road. It is less than two miles from Exit 339 of the Pennsylvania Turnpike. Another significant portion of the park is located adjacent to the Philadelphia Cricket Club, along the Township’s border with Springfield Township. Two smaller parts of the park, the Fort Hill and Sandy Run Areas, are located north of the Pennsylvania Turnpike, along both sides of Bethlehem Pike. Most of the land in the park is dedicated to passive open space; however, the park still has many amenities to offer to the public, such as fishing in the Wissahickon Creek, hiking, bird watching, picnicking and multi-purpose grass fields.

The Wissahickon Creek serves as the boundary for several portions of the Park, and flows directly through its southern portion until it crosses Stenton Avenue. This part of the park also contains the con-

EXISTING PROTECTED OPEN SPACE	
Open Space	Acres
Township Open Space	
Miles Park	25 Acres
Cedar Grove Park	25 Acres, 11.75 leased
Leeland Park	3 Acres
Valley Green Park	8 Acres
Silt Basin Property	54 Acres
Whitemarsh Woods	17 Acres
Victory Fields and McCarthy Park	17 Acres
Montgomery County Open Space	
Wissahickon Valley Park	143 Acres
Spring Mill Park	38 Acres
State of Pennsylvania Open Space	
Fort Washington State Park	483 Acres
TOTAL: 813 Acres	

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fluence of Lorraine Run and the Wissahickon Creek. Large portions of the park are located within the 100-year flood plain.

Hope Lodge · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #3 on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) This is a two-and-a-half-story Georgian Country Mansion situated on 32 acres of land located west of Bethlehem Pike and south of the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

Mather's Mill · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #5 on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) The Mill, also called Farmer's Mill, was built in 1820 and is located approximately one block from Hope Lodge. The building is used for meetings and special programs throughout the year.

The Highlands · Broad Axe District (See #1 on Map #16 Broad Axe District Relevant Parcels) This 44-acre historic site includes a late 18th century Georgian mansion and a two-acre formal garden. It was donated to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in 1957. In 1975, the Highlands Historical Society was formed to ensure the "restoration, preservation and interpretation" of the historic mansion and grounds.

Watershed Association/ Conservancy Lands

Willow Lake Farm · Broad Axe District (See #2 on Map #16 Broad Axe District Relevant Parcels) The Willow Lake Farm is a 110-acre tract currently owned and operated by the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, headquartered just north of the Township in Upper Dublin. Willow Lake is located along Skippack Pike and Butler Pike. Large parcels of undeveloped land are adjacent to this land and sev-



ACE Country Club

eral country residences (large lots with a single family home) are located to the east and south. This property contains the headwaters of two small tributaries of the Wissahickon Creek.

Green Ribbon Preserve · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #8 on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) This property is managed by the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association.

Permanently Protected Farmland

NLT Lands

The Natural Lands Trust holds future ownership to approximately 105 acres of land between Stenton Avenue, Flourtown Road, Thomas Road and the Whitemarsh Valley Country Club, under the auspices of a living will. The farm parcel is bisected by the Wissahickon Creek and surrounds the home-estate of Erdenheim Farm.

Agricultural Security Areas

The first step toward eligibility for farmland preservation is for a farm to join an Agricultural Security Area (ASA). This step provides the farm with certain minimal protections, for example, from ordinances imposed by a municipality in an attempt to curb odors deemed objectionable by adjacent landowners. This step does not provide tax breaks or prohibit future development of the land. Participating in an

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ASA is the first step in gaining eligibility for funding under the Farmland Preservation Program.

The Farmland Preservation Program in Montgomery County is a voluntary program staffed by the Montgomery County Planning Commission. The Planning Commission and Montgomery County Farm Board are tasked with the job of prioritizing and making decisions about which properties in an Agricultural Security Area are the most important for preservation in a given year. Preservation of properties occurs through the purchase of agricultural easement. When the rights are sold, the owner keeps the land for farm use but cannot develop it. In exchange for the money paid for the easement, the land must remain actively farmed in perpetuity. A farmer may sell the land, but the new owner must continue to grow productive crops or pasture on it.

Funding for this program typically comes from both the county and the state, though a municipality can also be involved in funding to preserve a farm within its own boundaries. Funding from Montgomery County is approved yearly by the County Commissioners. The remainder of the funding comes from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania through cigarette taxes, the Growing Greener program, and various other sources. The program has been very popular in Montgomery County. According to the Montgomery County Farmland Preservation website, as of January 2006, 101 farms have been approved for Agricultural Conservation Easements, for a total of 6,643 acres of county farmland that will never be developed.

In Whitemarsh Township there are currently no permanently preserved farms. In order to develop an

Agricultural Security Area in Whitemarsh Township, it will likely be necessary to include adjacent municipalities to attain the minimum necessary acreage to create the ASA.

Whitemarsh Township is currently exploring the formation of a multimunicipal ASA with Plymouth, Whitpain, and Springfield Townships.

Easements and Civic Association Land

There are numerous easements and small open space set-asides that exist as a result of the land development approval process. A few easements were identified through the open space planning process; however, others are believed to exist. No centralized database of easements in the Township currently exists.

Manor Road Easements – Riverfront District – See #6 and #7 on Map # 19 Miquon/Riverfront District Relevant Parcels) A series of easements and small open space parcels exist along Manor Road as a result of residential subdivisions.

Whitemarsh Woods · (Central District - See #11 on Map #17 Central District Relevant Parcels) This open space comprises three separate areas mostly used as passive neighborhood parks: Woodbine Road Open Space (10 acres), Wild Flower Road Open Space (6 acres), and Buttercup Lane Open Space (1 acre).

“Let us permit nature to have her way; she understands her business better than we do.”

—Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592)