

# Chapter 5

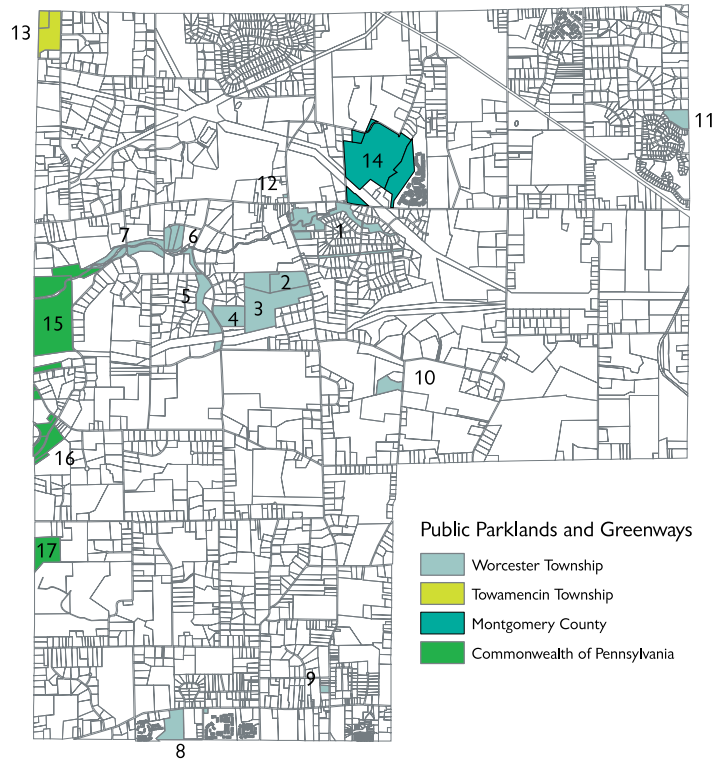
## Parklands and other Open Space

This chapter of the Worcester Township Comprehensive Plan identifies the Township’s intentions for parklands and a variety of other valuable open space and natural resource features. It provides a summary of recommendations contained in the 2006 Worcester Township Open Space Plan with an emphasis on Township parklands. The Township’s Open Space Plan proposes a variety of recommendations aimed at preservation of agriculture and rural character, protection of natural resources, and provision of sufficient parklands to serve the needs of residents.

### Existing Public Parklands

The variety of existing public parklands in Worcester Township includes parts of Evansburg State Park, Montgomery County’s Peter Wentz Historic Farmstead, Worcester Township’s parklands, and a large part of Towamencin Township’s Fischer Park. These lands are shown and identified in Figure 5 - 1 and the table in Figure 5 - 2.

**Figure 5-1**  
**Public Parklands**



**Figure 5-2**  
**Public Park Lands**

Map#	Identity	Owner	Acres	Features
1	Valley Green OS	Worcester Township	27.8	Zacharias Creek
2, 3	Heebner Park	Worcester Township	88.6	Active & Passive Recreation and Township Building
4	Lenhart Tract	Worcester Township	14.0	Undeveloped
5	Fawn Creek OS	Worcester Township	22.0	Tributary to Zacharias Creek
6	Hollow Road OS	Worcester Township	17.7	Zacharias Creek
7	Markel Tract OS	Worcester Township	22.4	Zacharias Creek
8	Mt. Kirk Park	Worcester Township	17.6	Neighborhood Park
9	Community Hall	Worcester Township	2.0	Historic Meeting Hall
10	Nike Park	Worcester Township	9.2	Undeveloped
11	Sunnybrook Estates	Worcester Township	9.1	Active Recreation
12	Farmers Union Hall	Worcester Township	0.5	Historic Meeting Hall
13	Fisher Park	Towamencin Township	27.0	Active & Passive Recreation
14	Peter Wentz Farmstead	Montgomery County	88.0	Historic Farmstead
15, 16, 17	Evansburg State Park	Commonwealth of PA	143.6	Passive Recreation and Zacharias Creek

Total Publicly Owned Land = 470.5 acres  
 Total Owned by Worcester Township = 230.8 acres

## Future Public Parkland Needs

### Evaluating open space needs

Since the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), published its **Recreation, Park and Open Space Standards and Guidelines** in 1983, many communities in Montgomery County have used those standards to calculate parkland needs. Those standards suggest that a municipal park system have 6.25 to 10.5 acres of park and recreation land per 1,000 residents.

In 1996, the NRPA and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration published **Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines**. The publication provides guidance to help individual communities determine the amount of each type of open space they need. It uses a systems approach to park, recreation, open space, and greenway planning that focuses on local values and needs rather than strict formulas.

The systems approach looks at the level of service provided to the users of the facilities rather than the size of the facilities based upon population. It reflects the dual function of municipal parkland for recreation and protection of important natural features. Under these guidelines, a fully developed five-acre municipal park with few significant natural features may provide the same level of service as a 35-acre park that has active recreation and also protects woodlands, wetlands, and other natural amenities. The difference hinges upon the individual goals of the municipality and not a per capita acreage figure.

However, to conduct a meaningful level of service analysis, the Township would need to compile detailed user surveys and facilities inventories. While this detailed study would be a key element for a township recreation plan, it is not necessary to evaluate the general recreation opportunities within Worcester Township. Therefore, the 2006 Worcester Township Open Space Plan used the per capita acreage figures of the 1983 guidelines simply to confirm whether the Township has at least the minimum acreage needed for active parkland. Both the low and high ratios were used to create a range for evaluating existing conditions.

Under the per capita standards, Worcester should have between 56 and 93 acres of parkland that is not intended primarily for natural resource protection. The Township currently has 72 acres of such active and passive recreation parkland (Heebner, 46 acres; Nike, 9.2 acres; Mt Kirk, 7.6 acres; Sunnybrook Estates, 9.1 acres).

In addition to considering acreage amounts, the Township should consider if the parks are sufficient for their intended purposes and if they are in appropriate locations. Some parks may need to be expanded, or new parks might

be needed in underserved areas of the township. In some areas, valuable natural resources should be protected and corridors should be created for trails and wildlife benefits. Since there are no formulas to determine the size of these kinds of parks, the 2006 Open Space Plan has identified natural resources and trail linkages to guide preservation activities.

### Park Types

The 2006 Open Space Plan classifies the Township's parks and open space in three generally accepted categories based upon the acreage, recreation potential, and natural resources of each park.

#### Neighborhood Parks

- Generally include recreation lands between 1 and 15 acres with a service area up to ½ mile.
- Usually provide playground equipment, basketball courts, or tot lots, but may also contain a larger area for athletic fields to allow for both informal and organized recreation.
- Primarily serve nearby residents for spontaneous or daily recreation.
- Convenient pedestrian and bicycle access are perhaps more important than parking facilities.
- Organized leagues are not commonly users of these parks.

Mount Kirk Park, with 7.6 acres, most closely fits in this classification. While this property does not yet contain a full range of neighborhood park facilities, its location and size are suitable for neighborhood park purposes. The 9.2-acre Nike Park is not developed for use by sports leagues and is not well located or well connected for use by nearby residents. The property currently contains remnants of the former Nike Missile installation, with some lawn areas and trees. Therefore, it is neither a neighborhood park nor a natural preserve, but its location along the proposed cross-township trail would make it a good location as a trail head. In addition, it could include historical educational information about the former missile installation. The 9.1-acre area in Sunnybrook Estates has been developed with active recreation facilities and would be considered a good neighborhood park, although it is located less than optimally on the edge of the neighborhood and could be better connected to the rest of the neighborhood.

#### Community Parks

- Generally include parks of 5 acres or more in size that serve multiple neighborhoods within a two-mile service area.

- Generally contain numerous athletic fields or hard courts for a variety of sports, serve as a center of active recreation in the community, and provide a central gathering place for special events.
- Parking facilities are needed for users from distant parts of the parks' service areas.

The 46-acre Heebner Park is significantly larger than most community parks. It contains all the necessary active recreation facilities and adjacent land includes the Township's office building and maintenance facilities. It abuts a recently acquired 14-acre parcel to the northwest (Lenhart) that could at some future time be used for additional active recreation and/or for trail connections.

### Passive Recreation and Protection of Natural Resources

- Generally intended to protect valuable natural resources and serve as nodes and corridors of passive open space within the township-wide and county-wide greenway system.
- Other uses may include passive recreation such as hiking, bird watching, or kite flying.

These lands total more than 150 acres and include the Zacharias Creek lands, other Township-owned lands, and State Park lands.

## Recreation Land Needs

The 2006 Open Space Plan uses the 1983 NRPA acreage standards to determine a minimum acreage standard for active recreation land, as listed in Figure 5 - 3. Using the Township's estimated 2005 population of 8,900, the Township is currently below the middle of the range of recommended acreage for active recreation with its 72 acres at Heebner, Mt. Kirk, Nike, and Sunnybrook Parks (NRPA recommended acreage of 56 to 93 acres). Looking ahead 25 years to 2030, the projected population of 15,000 would require 94 to 157 total acres of recreation parkland. The Township may need from 22 to 85 additional acres of active recreation land for that population.

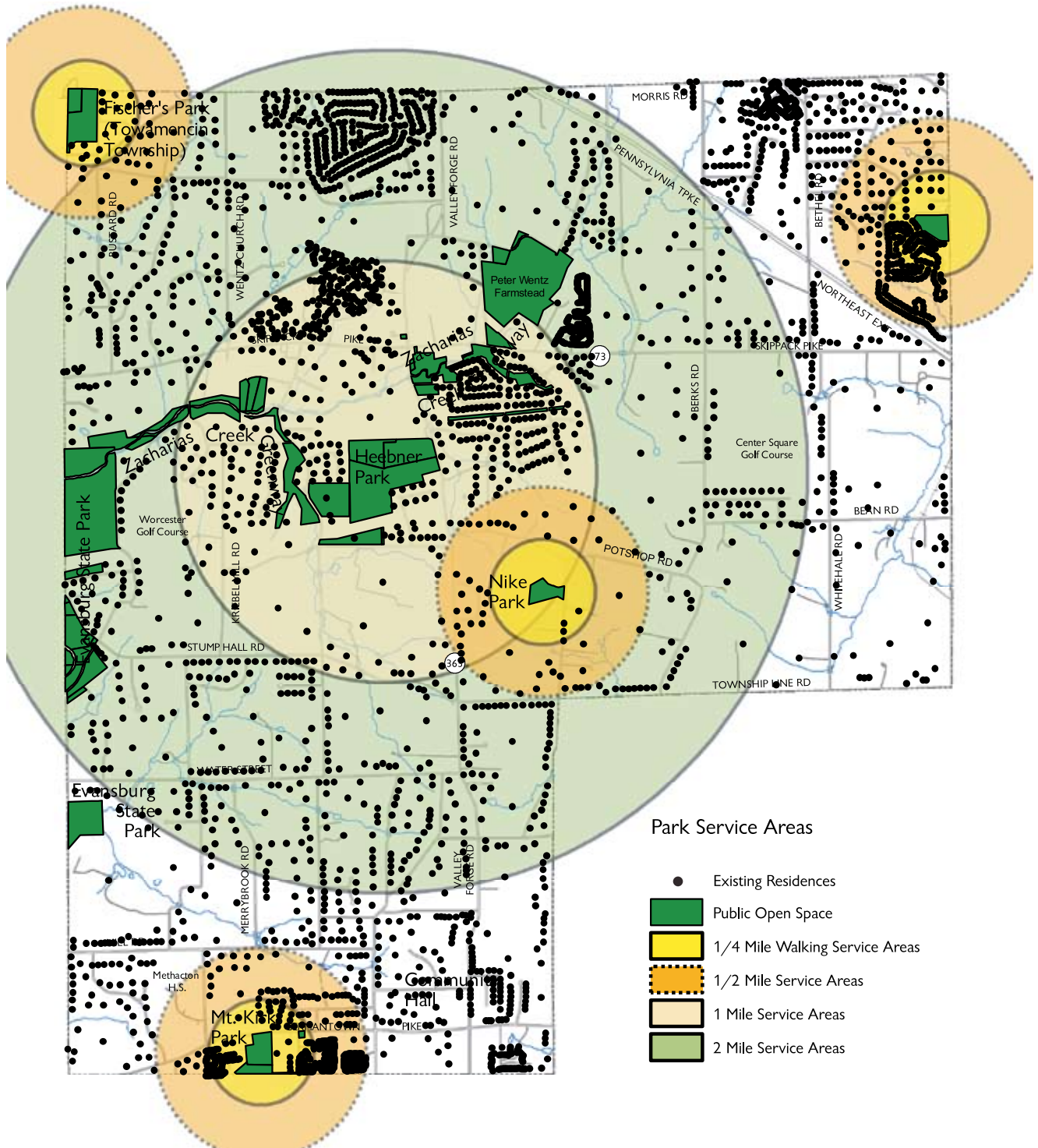
With only 7.6 acres at Mt. Kirk Park, the Township appears to be about 3 to 11 acres short on current minimum neighborhood parkland (11 to 19 acres recommended). The need for 2030 (19 to 31 total acres) would require adding almost 7 to 24 more acres of neighborhood parkland. There may also be a need for additional neighborhood parkland at locations that are currently not served by nearby facilities. Additional neighborhood parks could be acquired and developed via the development process as new residential development takes place. The 9.1 acres in the Sunnybrook Estates development would reduce this potential deficit.

The suggested minimum standards are not a guarantee that the Township will have sufficient recreation lands. The

**Figure 5-3**  
**1983 NRPA Standards Calculations for Minimum Recreation Acreage**

<b>Total Recreation Parkland</b>				
	Population	Range of recommended total recreation park area	Current total recreation parkland area	Needed amount of total recreation parkland area
2005	8,900	56 to 93 acres	72 acres (Heebner, Nike, Mt. Kirk, Sunnybrook)	0 to 21 acres
2030	15,000	94 to 157 acres		22 to 85 acres
<b>Neighborhood Parks (1 to 10 acres in size)</b>				
	Population	Minimum recommended neighborhood recreation park area	Current total neighborhood recreation parkland area	Needed amount of total neighborhood recreation parkland area
2005	8,900	11 to 19 acres	16.7 acres (Mt. Kirk, Sunnybrook)	0 to 2.3 acres
2030	15,000	19 to 31 acres		2.3 to 14.3 acres
<b>Community Parks (over 5 acres)</b>				
	Population	Minimum recommended total recreation park area	Current total recreation parkland area	Needed amount of total recreation parkland area
2005	8,900	44 to 74 acres	46 acres (Heebner)	0 to 28 acres
2030	15,000	75 to 126 acres		29 to 80 acres
<b>Natural Preservation Lands</b>				
	Population	Potential natural preservation area	Current natural preservation area	Potential additional natural preservation area
2005	N/A	500 acres	150 acres	350 acres

Figure 5-4  
Park Service Areas



Park Service Areas

- Existing Residences
- Public Open Space
- 1/4 Mile Walking Service Areas
- 1/2 Mile Service Areas
- 1 Mile Service Areas
- 2 Mile Service Areas

**MCPC** Montgomery  
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0 1,600 3,200 6,400 Feet  
Base map prepared December 2002

This map is based on 2000 ortho photography and official sources. Property lines were compiled from individual block maps from the Montgomery County Board of Assessment Appeals, with no verification from the deed. This map is not meant to be used as a legal definition of properties or for engineering purposes.

Township should continue to look for opportunities to create new parks and expand existing parks with a diversity of recreation opportunities. For example, new park land along the creek corridors and other areas may not provide active recreation facilities, but will provide pedestrian and/or bike trails through important areas of the township, as recommended in the Township's Open Space Plan.

## Locational needs

Both the 1983 and 1996 guidelines recognize the need to provide open space within a recommended proximity of all residents. The map in Figure 5 - 4 identifies those areas of the township within and outside the basic service areas of existing park land. This map may help to identify areas that are underserved in terms of access to open space, particularly for active recreation.

Overall, the service area analysis indicates that most residents are not within a reasonable proximity to neighborhood parks. However, many residents live within the 2-mile radius service area for the community park and the remainder are not far outside that radius. Since most trips to Heebner Park will be made by car, the additional travel distance is not a major deterrent. As the Township's trail system expands, alternative access to Heebner Park will become available as well.

Given the township's current population, it is not unreasonable for the Township to have a single centrally located community park. However, the Township should consider potential opportunities for creation of a community park for the underserved areas in the eastern and southwestern areas of the township, especially as the population in those areas increases.

Towamencin Township's Fischer's Park is located in the northern corner of Worcester where it serves Worcester's residents. This interdependent relationship could perhaps be the basis for a partnership between the two Townships for service to residents of both townships.

## Greenways, Trails and Natural Resources

Worcester has previously identified preservation of sensitive natural features, open space, and farmland as overall Township goals. Related goals include the preservation of unique natural resources, conservation and protection of surface and sub-surface water resources, protection of floodplains and other sensitive natural areas, and interconnection, through greenway development, of regional open space and habitat areas. These goals were identified in the Township's 1995 Comprehensive Plan, the 1994 Open Space Plan, the 2004 Greenway Plan, and the 2006 Open Space Plan.

Maintaining rural character is a quality of life concept that enables residents to: continue to farm large areas of land; to raise large animals on their property; to enjoy scenic views of farms, country roads, historic buildings and few other buildings, and much vegetation; and to enjoy informal passive and active recreational activities in quiet, undisturbed woodlands and other natural areas. Although the Township cannot expect to protect all of its sensitive natural features and open space, it would be desirable to protect as much as of its environmental, cultural, and heritage resources as possible.

Park and recreation guidelines do not provide acreage standards for greenways that provide passive recreation or for protection of sensitive natural resources, such as wildlife or riparian corridors. The physical characteristics of communities can vary greatly, as can the quality of environmental resources. Consequently, resource protection goals are very difficult to quantify.

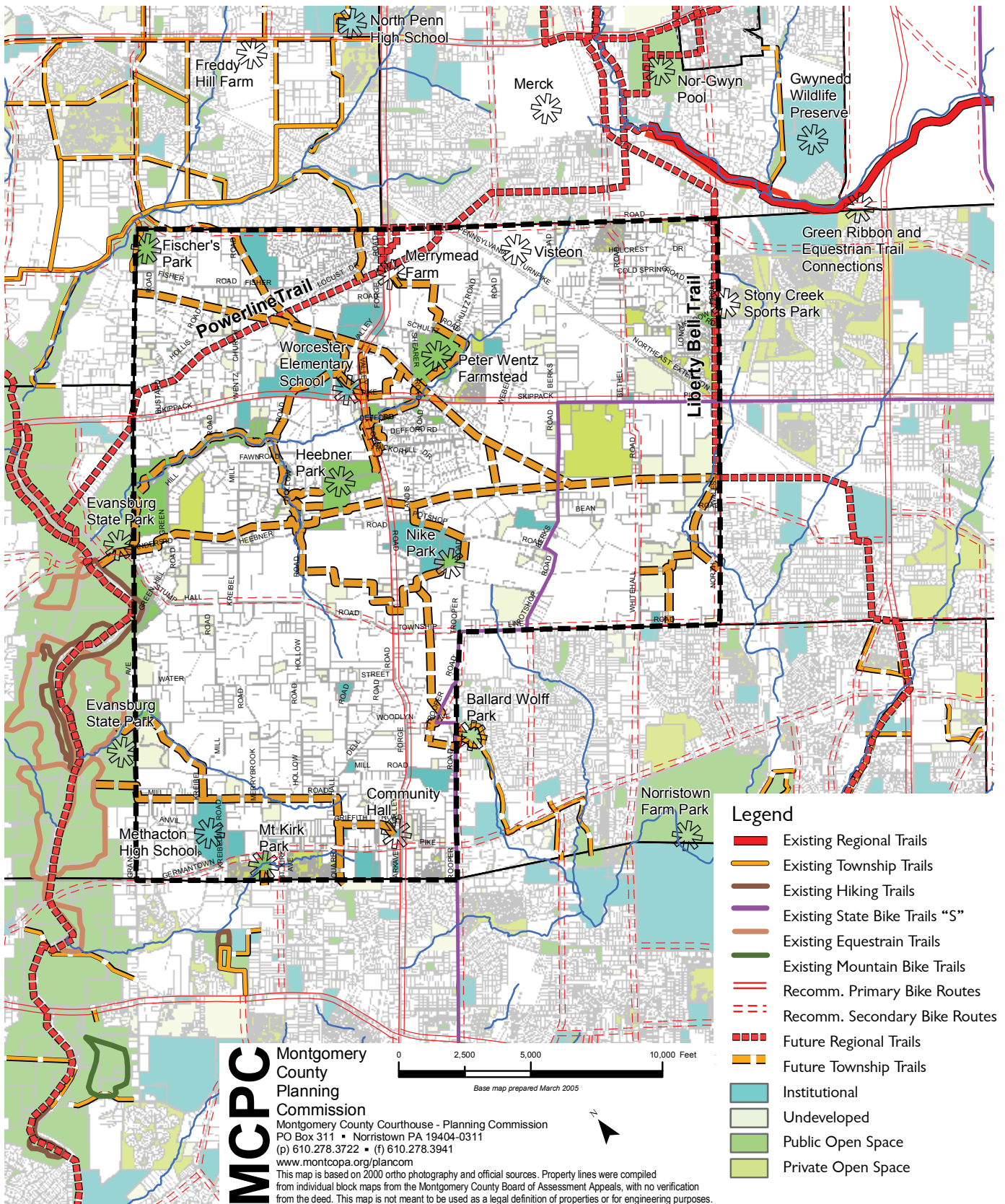
Greenways should ultimately connect regional natural resources and recreational sites, such as Evansburg State Park, Heebner Park, Peter Wentz Farmstead, Fischer's Park, regional trails and other natural resource preserves and recreation sites. Greenways can also provide movement corridors essential for the life cycle and survival of many species. Coordination with adjoining municipalities and regional plans is important for both resource protection and greenway design. The Township's Zacharias Creek lands protect an important stream corridor. This and the County's Powerline and Liberty Bell Trails, and the PECO lands that crisscross the township, can become the central features of the township's greenway network linking the township's residents to a multitude of regional resources.

## Parkland, Greenways, and Trail Additions

The following sections identify parkland, greenway, and trail linkages and expansion priorities proposed in the Worcester Township Open Space Plan (see Figure 5 - 5):

- The Fairview Village area, which has a significant concentration of the township's population, has no centrally located, pedestrian-accessible parkland. The Township would like to acquire and develop one or more new parks in this area.
- Nike Park has been underused and could serve as the basis of a larger Township park and as an important link in cross-township trails. The Township would like to acquire land or rights to lands to the north and west of the property that have not only the potential to provide for passive and active recreation opportunities within the Township, but might be valuable for future pathway connections.

**Figure 5-5**  
**Parkland, Greenways and Trail Additions**



- The Township will continue to accept land offered for donation and to be used for public active or passive recreation. These donations may often be offered by developers as part of the land development process, which makes sense since in larger developments there is usually a need for neighborhood park facilities.
- Existing Township parkland might have some expansion opportunities. If such expansion were to occur, this would provide additional lands for active recreation and natural resource protection.
- The Cold Spring area needs new parkland and the Township would like to satisfy that need with one or more new parks in this area.
- The Township would like to provide one or two new park areas accessible to the Milestone subdivision along Morris Road and the nearby area.
- The Township would like to pursue the trails and greenway land acquisitions recommended in the Greenways study and the 2006 Open Space Plan.
- Any remaining easements or land purchases necessary to complete the pedestrian and equestrian route from the Evansburg Trail in Evansburg State Park to Heebner Park.
- Any remaining easements or land purchases necessary to complete the pedestrian and equestrian route from Heebner Park to Nike Park.
- Upon completion of a feasibility study of a trail from Heebner Park to Peter Wentz Farmstead, acquire any easements or land necessary to complete the trail as recommended in the feasibility study.
- Pursuit of license agreements for trail use and construction on PECO lands that coincide with the trail network shown in Figure 5 - 5, followed by construction of various segments of the pathway network on PECO lands.
- Accepting donations of land or easements for use as part of the trail network. These donations might often be offered by developers to connect their new subdivision to the Township—or county-wide network.
- After working with local landowners and the County, to determine the best location for the Liberty Bell and Powerline Trails and to acquire the necessary easements or land, which would then be followed by construction of the trails.
- Providing public improvements to facilitate equestrian activities in the township.
- Any remaining easements or land purchases necessary to complete the following portions of the pedestrian and equestrian routes:
  - From Ballard Wolff Park in East Norriton to Nike Park,
  - From Township Line Road to the Liberty Bell Trail, and
  - From Fairview Village to Evansburg State Park.
- Any remaining easements or land purchases necessary to complete the remaining portions of the pedestrian and equestrian routes throughout the township.

## Historic Preservation

Many properties in Worcester are valuable for historic preservation. It is important to note that many of the properties with identified historic resources are also important natural resource and agricultural lands. There are a variety of methods to preserve a historic resource, and the method of preservation will vary based on the owners goals and resources available. Preservation for historic value can often best be done via land use controls or acquisition if the parcel serves multiple purposes.

Considering overall value and immediate threat, and remembering that acquisition can include easements or other methods, the most immediate acquisition actions by the Township or others should be the following:

- Properties adjacent to other existing historic properties, especially those which would expand or buffer those historic properties.
- Any of the resources shown on the map of historic resources in the Township's Open Space Plan that are threatened by demolition or collapse.
- Any resource listed on or eligible for the National Register.
- Any of the resources shown on the map of historic resources in the Township's Open Space Plan that cannot be preserved by a non-acquisition method.



*A multi/equestrian combination trail in Washington.*

Piercetrails.org

- Any historic resources, especially any of the resources shown on the map of historic resources in the Township's Open Space Plan that are located on a property being considered for preservation for other purposes (i.e. a farm, a natural preserve).
- As more specific information becomes available about certain properties and their potential historic value, the Township or others may decide that preservation is desired for a resource that is not already mentioned here.



*Kriebel Mill barn is along the Zacharias Creek greenway and trail corridor as well as being one of the largest stone barns in the area.*

Laura Caughlan

## Scenic Resources

Figure 2 - 7 in Chapter 2 of this comprehensive plan highlights some of the most scenic resources in the township. The Township would like to use non-acquisition methods as well as acquisitions to protect these resources:

- View easements over land along the view to downtown Philadelphia.
- View easements over land along the view to the Skippack Creek valley and the Perkiomen Creek valley.
- Scenic easements on properties along scenic roads in the township.
- Acquire land or development rights to preserve scenic resources.

## Natural Resource Protection

Preserving ecologically important lands protects waterways and stream quality, conserves plant and animal habitat, and provides areas for groundwater recharge. It also helps preserve the township's rural character. Worcester Township intends to protect all of these lands via land use controls, similar to the current riparian corridor protection



*Willison Smith farmhouse.*

Laura Caughlan

ordinances. In addition, larger blocks of natural resource-rich lands should be preserved for public access and greater control over land management wherever possible. The Township's Open Space Plan identifies its acquisition strategy for natural resource protection to focus upon the areas shown in Chapter 6 of the Open Space Plan.

These areas are intended to be preserved as much as possible using a combination of methods including, acquisition of these key resource areas. Other non-acquisition methods the Township intends to investigate and/or use are outlined in the Open Space Plan.

## Agricultural Preservation

From its earliest days, Worcester has been a community dominated by farming. A combination of excellent agricultural soils, stable family-run farms, and preservation-minded local officials resulted in Worcester entering the 21st century with many of its large farms still intact. In addition, many smaller farm parcels (5 to 50 acres) have become horse farms.

The public meeting held in November 2004 identified at least one dozen large farms (greater than 50 acres) and almost 50 smaller ones. However, the pressure of development is daily taking its toll on these farms. Worcester has about 350 acres of preserved farmland, but hundreds of additional acres could be preserved if funding were available. With this background in mind, Worcester is focusing on agricultural resources as one of the significant preservation goals of its open space program. In fact, as this plan is being written, over 250 additional acres of agricultural land have either been added to this total or are in the process of being preserved.

Land preserved for agricultural purposes should continue to be farmed and most often will remain in private ownership. The following are the Township's recommendations for farmland preservation easements or other acquisitions:



*The Smith pioneer house was acquired by the Township.*

Laura Caughlan

- All farmland shown on the map in the Township's Open Space Plan, Figure 10 - 3.
- In order to spread the Township's resources as far as possible, County and State money should be used as often as possible to preserve properties that qualify and rank highly in the State and County programs. Worcester has a history of successful partnerships with the state and county to preserve such farms.
- When preserving a farm, whether with or without state and county funds, unfarmed portions of the farm should be evaluated for their potential to meet other Township goals such as natural preservation, historic preservation, scenic views, or trail and greenway connections. Even portions of farmed land could, in some instances, be evaluated and preserved for those other purposes.

The Township has, since 1999, had a volunteer Open Space Coordinator who works with the County and/or land preservation organizations to ensure land owners understand the acquisition opportunities for land preservation and the Township intends to keep someone in this capacity.

