

# Worcester Open Space Referendum

Putting the Question of Funding  
Open Space Before the Voters



## Worcester: A Community with Rural Character and Historic Heritage

- 2006 WORCESTER OPEN SPACE PLAN —

“Early in the county’s history, Worcester Township established a reputation for superior farming. To-day, Worcester contains the largest expanse of the best farming land in the county.”

(Page 2, Worcester Township 2006 Open Space Plan)



A Worcester farm

Photo: MCPC

(Page 2, Worcester Township 2006 Open Space Plan)

<https://www.worcestertwp.com/media/1530/open-space-plan-part-1.pdf>

## Abundant Notable Features

- Creeks - Zacharias, Skippack, and Stony Creek
- Distinct woodlands - Moran Property, Evansburg
- Historic sites - Peter Wentz Farmstead, historic homes, barns, churches and other structures
- Vibrant agricultural and equestrian community, scenic views



**Grange Avenue - Skippack Creek**

## Legacy of Preservation

- State, County, Township and private partners have worked together for decades to preserve Worcester's special features and open spaces



**Moran Property**



**Peter Wentz Farmstead**

## Community Benefits from Open Space

- Provides recreational opportunities for residents
- Helps with stormwater management
- Supports the eco-systems that we depend on
- Saves money
  - Worcester “Return On Environment Study”
    - Provides cost savings from natural resources
    - Raises property values
- Controls demand for Municipal Services
  - Township police, fire department, etc
  - Reduces traffic
  - Downward pressure on schools and taxes
- Makes Worcester an attractive place to live

### Worcester Township Return on Environment Study

An Approach to Develop a Sustainable Environment and Economy



Bean Road  
Photograph by Kristi Brennan

Keystone Conservation Trust November 2019

Worcester Township's Return on Environment Study | 2

(2019 “Worcester Return on Environment Study” Cover Page, Keystone Conservation Trust)

# Township Perspective: Open Space is an Asset- Saves Money

- **“The theme of ‘Keep Worcester Green’ has been heard for decades in our municipality. Preserving open space is a core initiative in Worcester”**
- **“Through gifts, outright purchases of property, or acquisition of development rights, Worcester has preserved tracts of land which otherwise would be developed into homes.”**
- **“In the long run, it is more advantageous to preserve land than to pay the costs development brings; educational, infrastructure, and support services.”**

worcestertwp.com/departments/parks-recreation/open-space/



WORCESTER  
TOWNSHIP

Departments Living Ho

Home / Departments / Parks & Recreation

## Open Space



The theme of “Keep Worcester Green” has been heard for decades in our municipality. Preserving open space is a core initiative in Worcester, reflected in the types of development one sees when traveling through the Township. Through gifts, outright purchases of property, or acquisition of development rights, Worcester has preserved tracts of land which otherwise would be developed into homes. In the long run, it is more advantageous to preserve land than to pay the costs development brings; educational, infrastructure, and support services.

In 2003, Montgomery County voters voiced their support for a new county Open Space Program by approving a \$150 million program called Green Fields-Green Towns. This money is earmarked to natural and water resource areas offering towns and boroughs options for “re-greening” their communities, and preserving open space and farmland over the next ten years.

The preservation of properties in Worcester enhances our living environment while producing some very practical results. Neighboring open space makes our community a more desirable place in which to live, work, own a home, and retire. Residents and business owners who stay in such communities help maintain tax bases and reduce the pressures of sprawl. Strategic, planned growth in general reduces traffic problems and mitigates the burdensome effect of development on local school districts and municipalities. Open space also assists in maintaining a stable tax base because it requires minimal infrastructure and few support services.

(“Open Space” sub-tab of “Parks and Recreation” Section, Worcester Township Website)

<https://worcestertwp.com/departments/parks-recreation/open-space/>

# Township Perspective: Open Space IS an Asset- Saves Money (Continued)

worcestertwp.com/departments/parks-recreation/open-space/



Home Departments Parks & Recreation

## Open Space



("Open Space" sub-tab of "Parks and Recreation" Section, Worcester Township Website)

The preservation of properties in Worcester enhances our living environment while producing some very practical results. Neighboring open space makes our community a more desirable place in which to live, work, own a home, and retire. Residents and business owners who stay in such communities help maintain tax bases and reduce the pressures of sprawl. Strategic, planned growth in general reduces traffic problems and mitigates the burdensome effect of development on local school districts and municipalities. Open space also assists in maintaining a stable tax base because it requires minimal infrastructure and few support services.

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- **"Strategic, planned growth in general reduces traffic problems and mitigates the burdensome effect of development on local school districts and municipalities"**
- **"Open Space also assists in maintaining a stable tax base, because it requires minimal infrastructure and few support services"**

<https://worcestertwp.com/departments/parks-recreation/open-space/>

## COVID-19: A Reminder of the Value of Open Space - and Funding It

- Unprecedented use of parks, walking trails and open space during the pandemic
- Residents realizing the value of prioritizing open space
- Township continuing to treat open space and trails as an asset - investing in it
  - Skippack-Worcester-State Partnership: Zacharias-Evansburg Trail Network



Home / Living Here / News

### Coming Soon: Zacharias Trail Extension



(Worcester Township Website: "Living Here"- "News"-  
November 13th, 2020:  
<https://www.worcestertwp.com/living-here/news/article/?id=2519>)



# Voter Approved Open Space Funds in Action- Worcester

- In 2003 Worcester's voters joined neighboring communities in approving a Montgomery County Open Space Program
- This brought open space \$ to Worcester, with tangible benefits
  - Examples: Heyser Field, Heebner Park
- This brought Worcester significant \$ savings - Matching grants

Green Fields/Green Towns Update: Fall 2009  
*Worcester Township Heyser Property Acquisition*  
2009 • 5.1 acres



*Project location: Griffith Road off Route 363 Fairview Village; located behind Worcester Community Hall  
Public pedestrian access from Community Hall or Griffith Road; parking at Community Hall*



*Above - Woodland edge*

*Left - Worcester Community Hall*

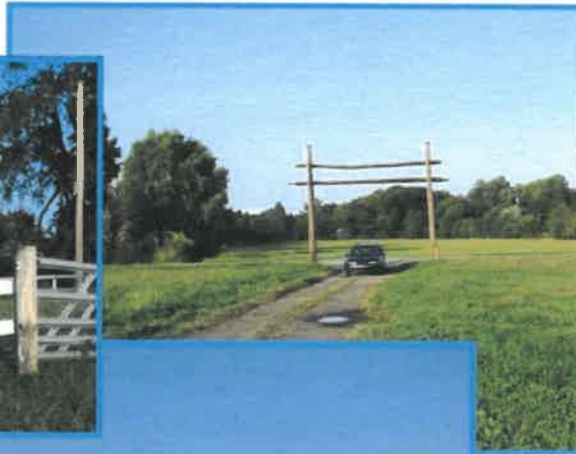
(Montgomery County Open Space Program -  
Municipal Open Space Grant Projects)  
[https://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/1423/Worcester\\_Heyser?bidId=](https://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/1423/Worcester_Heyser?bidId=)

# Voter Approved Open Space Funds in Action- Worcester

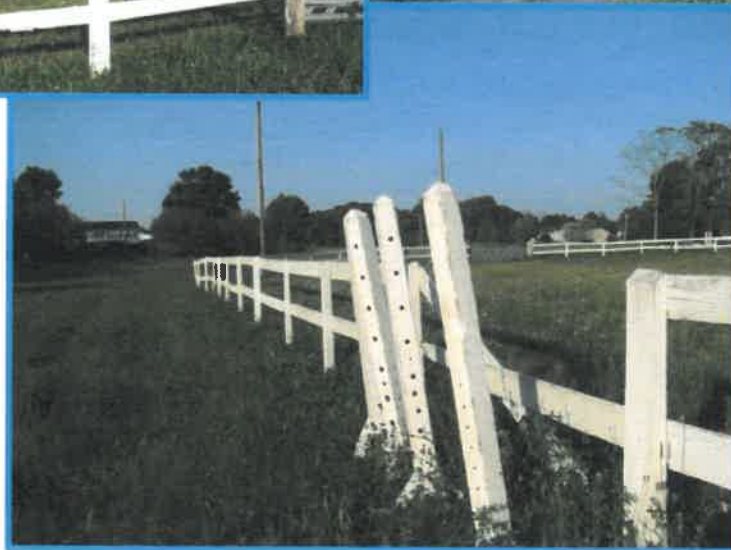
Green Fields/Green Towns Update: Fall 2009  
*Worcester Township Heyser Property Acquisition*  
2009 • 5.1 acres



*Above Left -  
View of  
Community  
Hall across  
riding ring*



*Above Right -  
Existing  
driveway  
from  
Griffith Road*



*Bottom -  
Open fields  
and horse  
show area*

**GF/GT Acquisition Grant:** • **Total Project Cost:** \$521,856  
• **County Grant:** \$417,485 • **Matching Funds:** \$104,371 Township  
• **Appraised Value:** \$584,895  
• **Note:** Additional Township funds expended for purchase of adjoining future road corridor

**Property Description:**

- Open field to be improved as future town center green; woodlands at edge; access to property from Griffith Road
- Existing riding ring is site of yearly horse show; property otherwise unimproved
- Nearby Township Community Hall parking area connected by public access easement

(Montgomery County Open Space Program - Municipal Open Space Grant Projects)  
[https://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/1423/Worcester Heyser?bidId=](https://www.montcopa.org/DocumentCenter/View/1423/WorcesterHeyser?bidId=)

## An Open Space Referendum for Worcester

- PA's Act 153 of 1996: Municipalities can put Open Space Referendum Question before voters
- Gives residents a chance to decide: Do we want to setup a dedicated fund for open space?
- An Open Space Referendum for Worcester creates a resource for future open space projects and needs

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ORDINANCE NO. 2021 . XXXX

AN ORDINANCE AUTHORIZING A REFERENDUM PURSUANT TO THE OPEN SPACE  
LANDS ACQUISITION AND PRESERVATION ACT AS AMENDED BY ACT 153 OF 1996

IN THE CITY OF WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS

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## “The Right Time is Now”

- A Comprehensive Plan Update and Supervisor Election are occurring in 2021
- Residents are being asked to think about Worcester’s future

ERECTED INTO A TOWNSHIP IN 1733  
**TOWNSHIP OF WORCESTER**  
AT THE CENTER POINT OF MONTGOMERY COUNTY  
1721 Valley Forge Road, Post Office Box 767 Worcester, PA 19490

### **Worcester Township is updating its Comprehensive Plan... and we need your help!**

The Comprehensive Plan is our community’s most important planning guide. When completed the Comprehensive Plan will help the Township to better manage growth, to decide where to build new parks and trails, to prioritize road improvements, and much, much more!

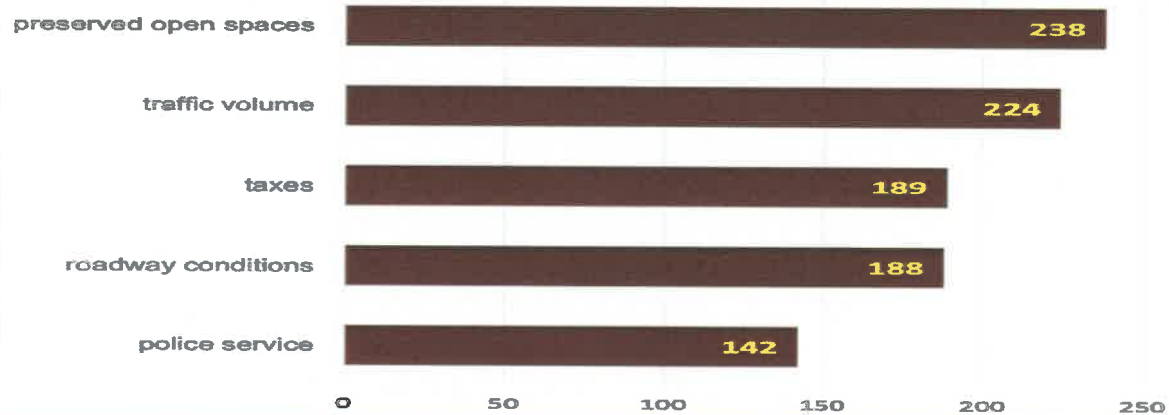
And because we want our Comprehensive Plan to reflect the things that matter most to our residents, we want to know what you think matters most!

(Worcester Township Comprehensive Plan Survey Cover Letter)  
<https://www.worcestertwp.com/media/1807/comprehensive-plan-survey-cover-letter.pdf>

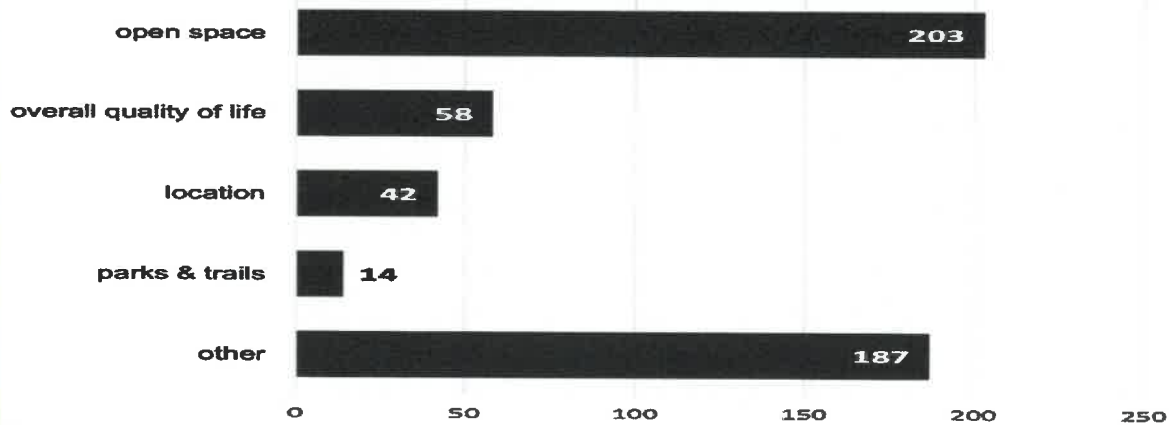


## Comprehensive Plan Update: Resident Survey Responses

### What are the FIVE MOST IMPORTANT issues in Worcester Township today?



### What do you like MOST ABOUT LIVING/WORKING in Worcester Township?



(Page 5 of Worcester Township Fall 2020 Newsletter)

<https://www.worcestertwp.com/media/1830/worcester-township-newsletter-fall-2020.pdf>

## Worcester - A Changing Landscape

- 2006 WORCESTER OPEN SPACE PLAN -

“ ... development from surrounding townships is spilling into Worcester, and increasing regional development pressure has resulted in more housing and traffic. This development threatens to forever change the township, an area filled with history as well as agriculture, large open spaces, expansive views, pristine riparian corridors, and recreation opportunities. ”

**Former Center Square  
Golf Course**

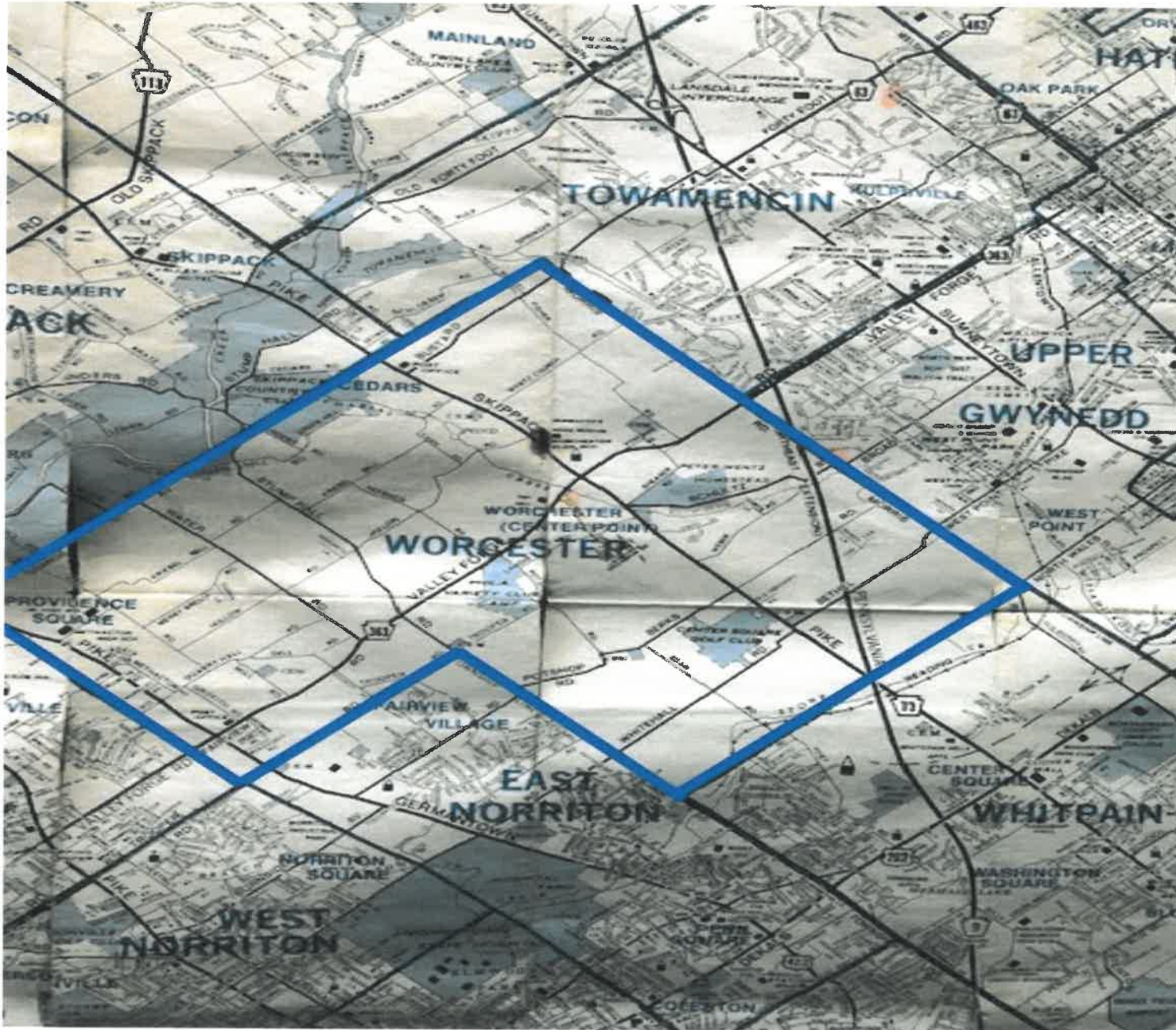
(Page 2, 2006 Worcester Open Space Plan)

<https://www.worcestertwp.com/media/1530/open-space-plan-part-1.pdf>

- Worcester is at a crossroads
- A unique and special rural community facing decades of increased growth pressures

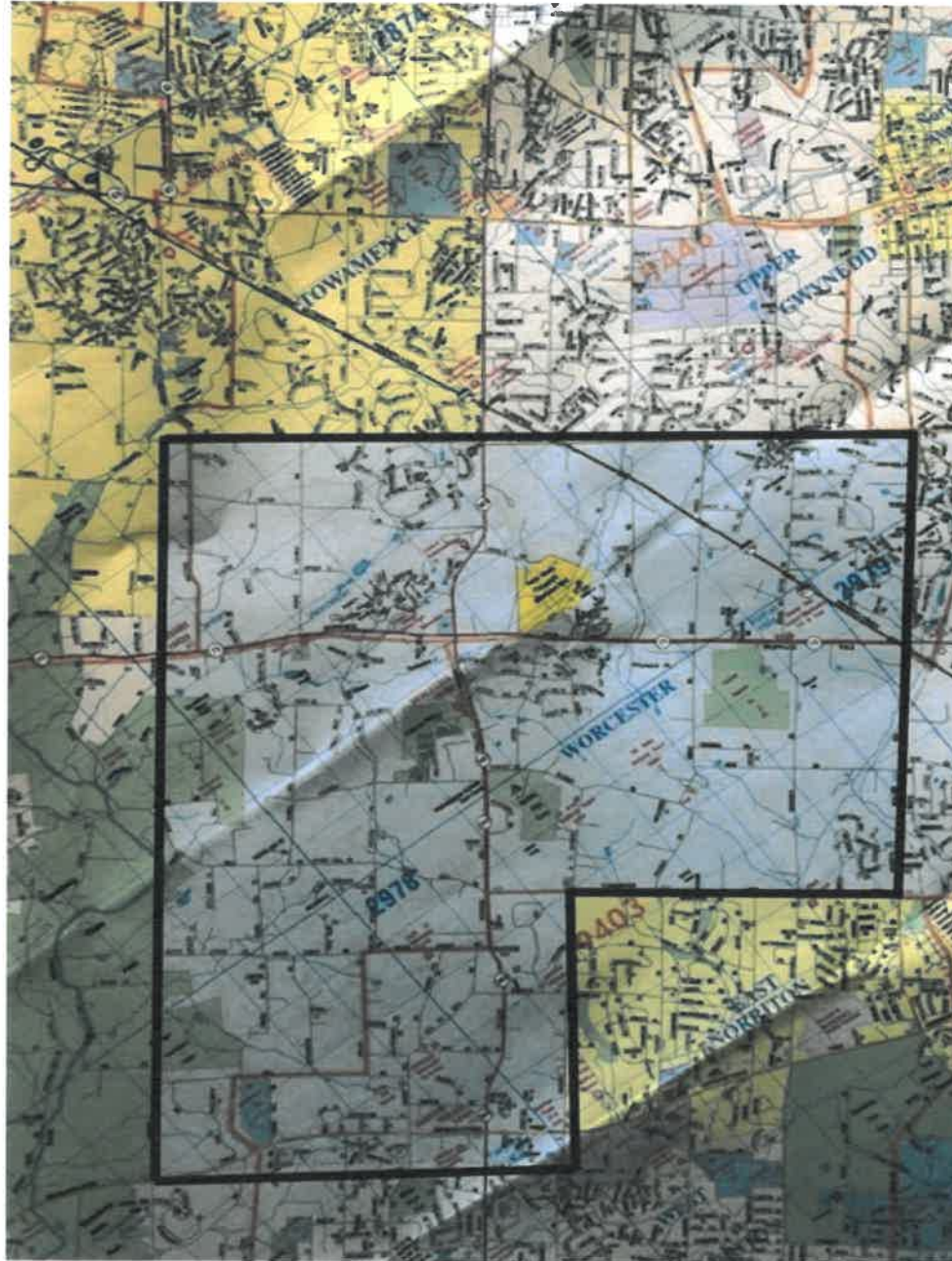


## Worcester - A Changing Landscape



Worcester  
in 1979

# Worcester - A Changing Landscape

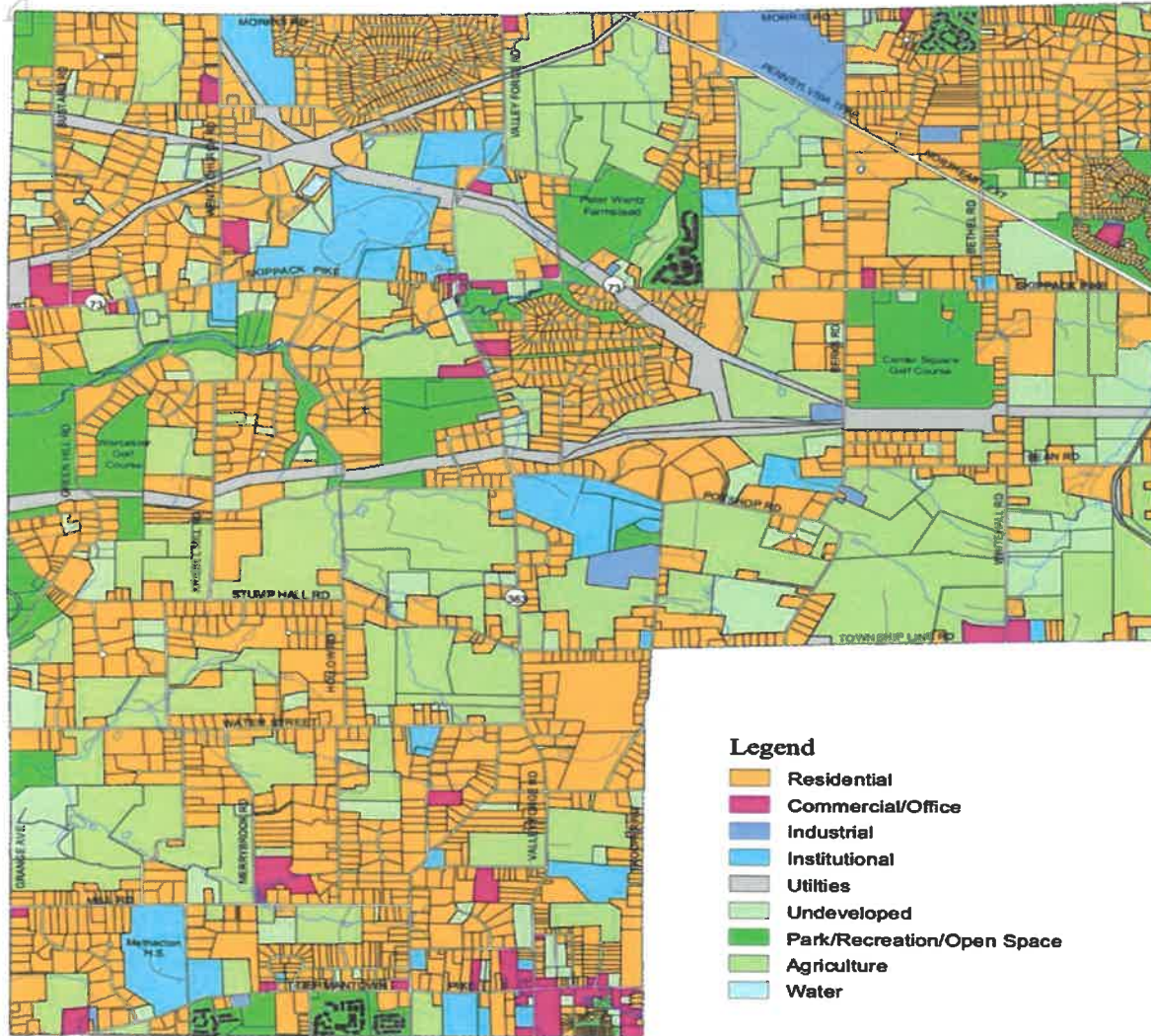


2015



# Worcester 2005 Land Use

Figure 1 - 2  
Existing Land Uses



## Legend

- Residential
- Commercial/Office
- Industrial
- Institutional
- Utilities
- Undeveloped
- Park/Recreation/Open Space
- Agriculture
- Water

**MCPC** Montgomery County Planning Commission  
 Montgomery County Courthouse - Planning Commission  
 PO Box 211 • Norristown PA 19404-0211  
 (610) 278-3722 • (610) 278-3941  
 www.montcopa.org/planning

0 1,600 3,200 6,400 Feet  
 Base map prepared March 2005

This map is based on 2000 aerial 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 street. This map is not meant to be used as a legal definition of properties or for engineering purposes.

# Worcester 2020 Land Use

## Worcester Township Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Applewood Estates  
8 Lots

Reserve at Center Square-  
250 Homes

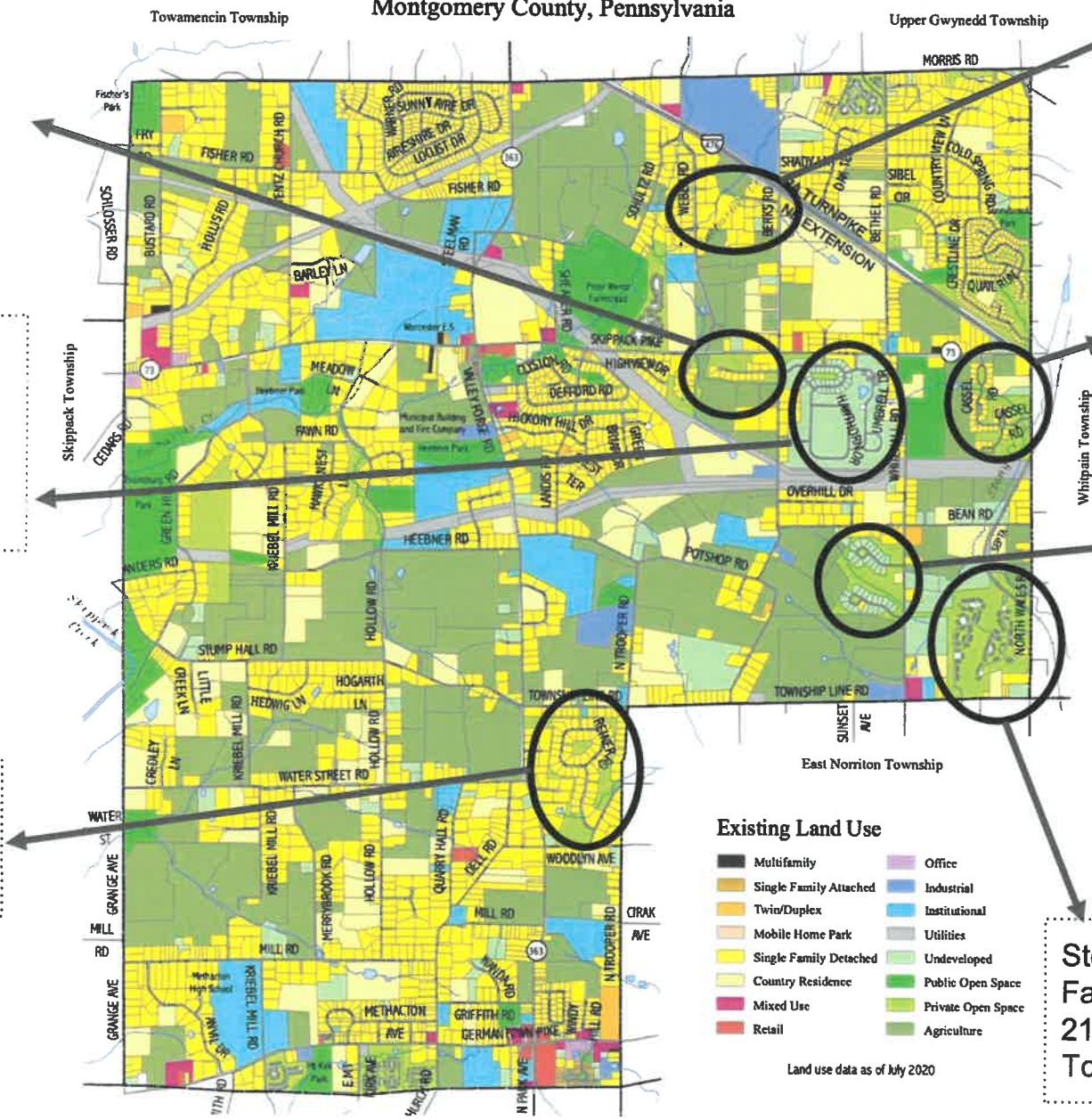
The Stables-  
47 lots

Kibblehouse Farms -  
15 homes

Preserve at Worcester -  
39 Homes

Whitehall Estates -  
39 homes

Stony Creek Farms -  
219  
Townhomes



**Existing Land Use**

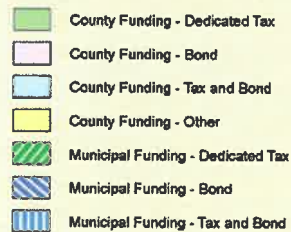
Multifamily	Office
Single Family Attached	Industrial
Twin/Duplex	Institutional
Mobile Home Park	Utilities
Single Family Detached	Undeveloped
Country Residence	Public Open Space
Mixed Use	Private Open Space
Retail	Agriculture

Land use data as of July 2020

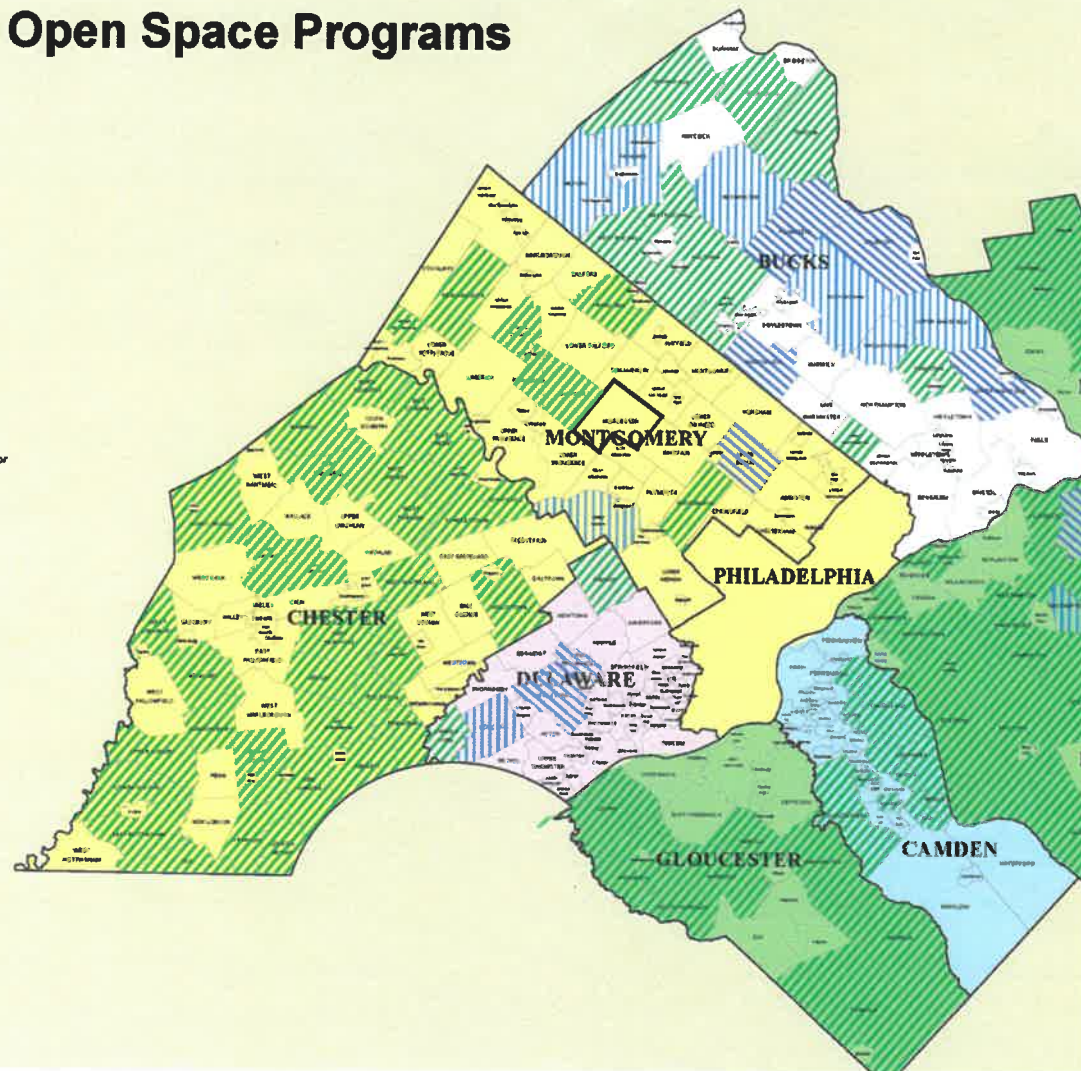
# Open Space Referendums Across the Region

## Locally Funded Open Space Programs

2020 Active Programs



*Note: Municipalities that previously issued bonds dedicated for open space and exhausted the funds are not shown.*



(Delaware Valley  
Regional Planning  
Commission)  
[https://www.dvrpc.org/  
openspace/local](https://www.dvrpc.org/openspace/local)

- Municipalities have voted on Open Space Referendums while there's still open space left in their community



# Precedent in a "Local" Election Year

## Montgomery Cty. Votes for Open Space Funds (PA)

November 5, 2003  
Pennsylvania

NORRISTOWN, PA - Montgomery County voters have made their views regarding open space known: they want more of it protected and are willing to pay. Today, county voters approved by an overwhelming 78 percent margin the \$150 million County Open Space Referendum, continuing the county's successful land conservation program.



### VOTER SERVICES

**General 2001**

**November 6, 2001**

**Subdivision Report**

**Montgomery County, Pennsylvania**

	<b>Total...</b>	<b>1,356</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Skippack Open Space Question</b>		<b>2/2</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Yes</b>		<b>792</b>	<b>57.27%</b>
<b>Skippack</b>			
<b>Skippack Open Space Question</b>		<b>2/2</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>No</b>		<b>591</b>	<b>42.73%</b>
	<b>Total...</b>	<b>1,383</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

(From Montgomery County Voter Services "Archived Elections - Past General Election Results"  
<https://montcopa.org/1652/Past-Election-Results>)

## Continued Leadership-Looking to the Future

- Worcester residents enjoy a high quality of life because of the Township's longstanding commitment and leadership to open space
- Let's discuss how to make the same investments in the future
- Give residents a chance to weigh in now, on a funding mechanism for open space



**Mt. Kirk Park sign**

**Zacharias Trail near Green Hill Road**

## In Summary

- We've discussed Worcester's rural roots, and ongoing commitment to open space
- We've documented the financial and community value of open space and natural resources
- In the 2020 Township survey, residents rated open space as their #1 priority.
- We've documented accelerated growth and development in the last 2 decades, reducing available open space
- We've shown that neighboring townships have passed referendums during municipal election years
- If approved, Worcester would have rapid access to dedicated funds for open space projects



**Give Worcester residents a chance to vote on an Open Space Referendum in the 2021 General Election.**

**Thank You!**



© Friends of Worcester, 2021



## How Can Funds Generated From An Open Space Referendum Be Used?

- **Outright land purchase and acquisition costs:**
  - Property is owned by the **township** but a deed restriction has been placed on the property which restricts it from future development in perpetuity.
  - Ex. Parks, trails, natural resource protection
  - Benefits: Public access.
  
- **Purchase of development rights or conservation easement:**
  - Property is owned by the **landowner** but a deed restriction has been purchased which restricts it from future development in perpetuity.
  - In addition to restricting development an easement can be structured to allow for trail use or the owner can reserve an area for possible future development.
  - Ex. Farmland preservation, trails, natural resource protection
  - Benefits: Property remains in private ownership and care.

## How Can Funds Generated From An Open Space Referendum Be Used? (Continued)

- **Hybrid: Prior to land purchase or purchase of conservation easement:**
  - Property is subdivided.
  - Part of the property is purchased by the **township** or remains owned by the **landowner** and a deed restriction is placed on the property which restricts it from future development in perpetuity.
  - The remaining part can be sold for development.
  
- **Improvements and Maintenance of open space acquired with dedicated Open Space Fund**
  - PA Act 115 of 2013 updated state open space law to allow municipalities to:
    - Develop, improve, design, engineer and maintain open space acquired with dedicated open space taxes in order to provide open space benefits.\* (Up to 25% of open space taxes may be used for this purpose.)
    - Prepare the resource, recreation or land use plan needed to acquire open space under the law.

## How Much Can a Voter Approved Open Space Fund Generate?

### Local Open Space Funding Programs

Montgomery County

Local Government	Bond	Current Tax Rate	Estimated Annual Tax Revenue	Year Approved
Montgomery County	Yearly budget allocation		Variable	No referendum
Franconia Township		0.25%	\$425,000	2001
Lower Frederick Township		0.05%	\$80,000	2020
New Hanover Township		0.15%	\$150,000	2006
Perkiomen Township		0.125%	\$250,000	2004
Skippack Township		0.25%	\$448,000	2001
Upper Dublin Township	\$30,000,000			2006
	\$30,000,000			2008
Upper Merion Township	\$5,000,000			2006
		\$0.00095	\$320,000	2005
Upper Pottsgrove Township		0.25%	\$136,000	2006
Whitemarsh Township		0.25%	\$1,000,000	2006
<b>Totals</b>	<b>\$65,000,000</b>		<b>\$2,809,000</b>	

[Chart provided by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) ]  
<https://www.dvrpc.org/openspace/local>

# By the Numbers: Skippack Township

- In 2001 Skippack Township residents voted to increase the Township's earned income tax by 0.25% for the purpose of preserving open space
- This dedicated Open Space Fund has been in place for 20 years
- At the 0.25% earned income tax rate, Skippack generates an estimated \$448,000 annually into its Open Space Fund
  - For an individual resident, this amounts to \$2.50 of every \$1,000 earned
  - \$250 of every \$100,000 earned

**What has this money been used for?**  
Example: 2018 purchase of 32 acres  
on Skippack Pike, as a recreation area

(Page 1, Spring/Summer 2018  
Skippack Township Newsletter)  
[https://www.skippacktownship.org/w  
p-  
content/uploads/2018/05/Skipack  
SpringSummer2018\\_web.pdf](https://www.skippacktownship.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Skipack_SpringSummer2018_web.pdf)



**SKIPPACK TOWNSHIP**  
*Montgomery County, Pennsylvania*  
SPRING/SUMMER 2018 [www.SkippackTownship.org](http://www.SkippackTownship.org)



### Open Space Acquisition

In the beginning of 2018, the Township completed the acquisition of approximately 32 acres of open space for recreational purposes. The property is located right off of Skippack Pike before the bridge over the Perkiomen Creek to PA Route 29. The property formerly had a horse statue at the driveway entrance. The Township is currently working on plans to turn the property into a recreation area with trails and other recreation space. More information will be presented as the plans are finalized.

### Master Trail Plan

At their March meeting, the Board of Supervisors voted unanimously to authorize the creation of a Master Trail Plan for the Township. Township Staff will be working alongside the Park Board to create a Master Trail Plan. The Plan will be used to evaluate our current trail network, as well as identify opportunities to extend our trail and to make connections to other local trails. The Board of Supervisors are dedicated to improving the Township's existing trail network and extending the network where possible. The Plan will be presented at a later meeting of the Board of Supervisors.

