



Report of the Bucks County Open Space Task Force



June 20, 2007

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Bucks County Board of Commissioners

Charles H. Martin, Chairman

James F. Cawley, Esquire

Sandra A. Miller

Dear Commissioners:

Since 1997, more than 15,000 acres have been permanently protected through the Bucks County Open Space Program. Yet, the county faces ongoing challenges of population growth, rising land values, and increasing pressures to convert farmland, open space, and wildlife habitat. Recognizing the need for continued open space preservation in the county, the Bucks County Commissioners empanelled an Open Space Task Force in August 2006 to: 1) evaluate the performance of the current program, 2) identify present and future program needs, and 3) recommend a course of action.

This Task Force (from here on referred to as the 2007 Task Force) has determined that the existing Open Space Program successfully completed the goals set under the original program guidelines. The program has helped to increase public awareness of the benefits of open space preservation and promote municipal open space initiatives. Overall, the structure and objectives of the existing Open Space Program components: Agricultural Land Preservation, County Parks, Natural Areas and the Municipal Program remain viable.

Accordingly, the 2007 Task Force recommends that the County should, through a referendum and borrowing of funds, commit \$87 million toward the continuation of the Open Space Program, with the overall funding being divided among the four existing components, as well as the addition of two new program areas focusing on Historic Preservation and the Delaware Riverfront. The 2007 Task Force has also identified additional areas whereby the program can be improved:

1. Create a Historic Preservation component administered under the County Parks Program.
2. Create a Delaware Riverfront component administered under the Municipal Program.
3. Modify the Municipal Open Space Program to allow consideration of improvement projects to enhance public access and enjoyment of existing open space in communities where there are limited amounts of open space to acquire.
4. Create a subcommittee of representatives from the Agricultural Preservation, Parks and Recreation, and Open Space Review boards to promote cooperation among the individual components and help achieve the overall goals of the Bucks County Open Space Program.
5. Provide education and technical assistance to individual municipalities regarding the need, benefits, and methods of land preservation.
6. Provide a mechanism for promoting and insuring stewardship of preserved properties.

The 2007 Open Space Task Force respectfully submits the following report and recommendations for consideration by the Bucks County Commissioners. The Task Force strongly advocates that a referendum be presented to the citizenry of the county in November 2007 to fund the Bucks County Open Space Program for an additional ten years. With a renewed commitment to the Open Space Program, many more successes are yet to come.

Anthony Belfield, Chairman

2007 Open Space Task Force

County of Bucks

Board of Commissioners

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2007 Open Space Task Force Members

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William Wert, *Newtown*

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Bucks County
Open Space Task Force

June 20, 2007

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Introduction

In its most basic form, open space is land that has not been developed for intensive human use; it has no (or very few) buildings, roads, or other structures. Open space can also perform many important ecological, economic, aesthetic, recreational, and agricultural functions.

The abundance of open space is one of Bucks County's most attractive features. In fact, the farms, scenic vistas, parks, rolling hillsides, and stream valleys that we in Bucks County hold most dear are the very same qualities that attract individuals, families, and businesses to locate here. To maintain the quality of life that so many in Bucks County enjoy, a balance between development and preserved open space must be achieved.

In 1995, the Bucks County Commissioners appointed an Open Space Task Force to develop a practical plan to protect natural resource areas and farmlands deemed essential to maintain the unique character of Bucks County.

The original Open Space Task Force identified three broad goals to be accomplished through the program:

1. Preserve Open Space for the purpose of protecting natural areas, farmland, and providing for park and recreation areas.
2. Encourage and support municipal efforts to identify and meet open space needs.
3. Design a program that will coordinate open space preservation efforts among municipal, state, and federal governments, as well as private organizations, and individuals.

In May 1997, voters overwhelmingly approved a \$59 million bond referendum to fund a 10-year Open Space Program, which was divided into four components:

▪ Farmland Preservation	\$13.5 million
▪ County Parkland	\$16.5 million
▪ Municipal Open Space	\$20.0 million
▪ Natural Areas	\$9.0 million

Structured according to the recommendations of the 1996 Task Force, the Bucks County Open Space Program has been a success in both the quantity and quality of open space preserved. The County's investment of \$59 million leveraged approximately \$80 million in additional funding (primarily through state and local matches) resulting in a total of \$140 million dedicated to the permanent preservation of more than 15,000 acres.

Desiring to maintain the current momentum of the program and realizing the continuing need for open space preservation, the Bucks County Commissioners appointed a second Open Space Task Force in August 2006 to formulate a plan for the county's next phase of open space preservation. Over a seven-month period, the 2007 Open Space Task Force evaluated current programming, identified new priorities that have emerged since 1997, and developed recommendations for the continuation of the Bucks County Open Space Program. The following findings were discussed at length by the 2007 Task Force and determined to be key elements in moving forward. The strengths and weakness in current efforts are identified in this report and form the basis for a set of recommendations.

Farms Preserved through the Bucks County Agricultural Land Preservation Program

	LANDOWNER(S)	MUNICIPALITY
1.	Leonard E. and Elizabeth M. Crooke	Buckingham
2.	John Frederick	Buckingham
3.	Kenneth W. and Judith Bupp	Bedminster
4.	Glenn A. Wismer	Bedminster
5.	Gregory Pisarek	Buckingham
6.	Warren and Ray Detweiler	Bedminster
7.	William E. Bradley	Buckingham
8.	Howard Lewis	Tinicum
9.	Gerald Ulmer	Durham
10.	Anna C. Simons	Buckingham
11.	Delaware Valley College	Doylestown
12.	Phillip and Flora Gayman	Plumstead
13.	John Daniels	Buckingham/Wrightstown
14.	Michael and Cynthia Lewis	New Britain
15.	Daniels/Ruth	Buckingham
16.	Kevin and Cindy Bishop	Hilltown
17.	Leroy and Lillian Shull	Plumstead
18.	Harold and Tom Haldeman	Plumstead
19.	William and Eleanor Gunser	Upper Makefield
20.	Walter Wurster	Bedminster/Tinicum
21.	Kenneth and Janet Beer	Hilltown
22.	James and Nancy Hallowell	Tinicum
23.	Julia Duane	Bedminster
24.	Mary and Galen Leatherman	Bedminster
25.	Dean Overholt	Bedminster
26.	William and Eleanor Gunser	Upper Makefield
27.	Richard Smith	Buckingham
28.	John Natali	Bedminster
29.	William H. and John H. Yerkes	Buckingham
30.	Charles W. Kirk	Buckingham
31.	Kenneth and Janet Beer	Hilltown
32.	David and Sharon Bishop	Plumstead
33.	Leroy Jr. and Kathleen Herstine	Bedminster/Tinicum
34.	Douglas and Wendy Kale	Solebury
35.	Charles Livezey	Buckingham
36.	Middletown Township(Styers)	Middletown
37.	William H. and Rosemary Garges	Warrington
38.	Richard O. and Victoria Smith	Buckingham
39.	Sara Froehlich	Buckingham
40.	Bradshaw Estate	Solebury
41.	Wilmer Mood	Milford
42.	Robert and Jane Nichol	Milford
43.	Raymond Gross	Plumstead
44.	Manfred / Manfred W. Marschewski	Durham
45.	Jules and Arlene Siegel	Upper Makefield
46.	Robert Thorpe	Upper Makefield
47.	Vivian Goldenberg	Bedminster
48.	Alice Ritter	Warwick
49.	Trauger/Kressman Farm	Durham
50.	Henry Rosenberger	Hilltown
51.	Alfons Kautsch	Bedminster
52.	Alvin and Anna Detweiler	Plumstead
53.	Kenneth and Patricia Worthington	Plumstead

	LANDOWNER(S)	MUNICIPALITY
54.	Emil Schmidt	Bedminster
55.	Clarence and Paul Berger	Springfield/Nockamixon
56.	Christine Shaffer	Buckingham
57.	Edward and Jane McArdle	Buckingham
58.	Gerald and Carole Ulmer #2	Durham
59.	Howard Fleishman	Springfield
60.	J. Howard and Dorothy S. Roth	Nockamixon
61.	David and Sharon Bishop #2	Plumstead
62.	Aurthur E. Imperatore	Solebury
63.	Paul V. and Ingeborg Schleyer	Upper Makefield
64.	William Henze Jr.	Solebury
65.	Johannes and Lucy Jarka-Sellers	New Britain Twp.
66.	Roland and Philip Hall	Bedminster
67.	Theodore and Kathleen Czupich	Plumstead
68.	Harold and Ruth Steeley	Tinicum/Bedminster
69.	David & Walter Wolfinger	Nockamixon
70.	Elfrieda Holzhauser	Bedminster
71.	Steven Neubert	Tinicum
72.	Matt Millen	Durham
73.	Trauger Family	Plumstead
74.	Thomas C. Wisler	Bedminster
75.	Terry and Agnes Keim	Plumstead
76.	Michael and Christine Welch	Solebury
77.	Webster Jr. and Nancy Singer	Springfield
78.	Robert E. and M. Jean Heacock	Plumstead
79.	Richard M. and Norma Moyer	Bedminster
80.	John and Barbara Lukens	Bedminster
81.	Eric and Bernadette Schaffhausen	Bedminster
82.	Catherine Rapuano Estate	Upper Makefield
83.	Jeanne Trivellini	Wrightstown
84.	Helen DeLong	Warrington
85.	Walter J. Schneiderwind	Tinicum
86.	William Garges #2	Warrington
87.	Goldenberg Brothers	Bedminster
88.	Ruth Wright	Lower Makefield
89.	Robert Zisko	Springfield
90.	James and Dolores Keller	Springfield
91.	Earl Myers	Milford
92.	James Stitzinger	Plumstead
93.	Elizabeth Haring	Plumstead
94.	Freeh Estate	Springfield
95.	Carl Slack	Upper Makefield
96.	Warren and Lois Buckman	Bedminster
97.	Robert and Alice Cressman	Springfield
98.	John and Joan Quinby	Tinicum
99.	Laura Ulrich	Bedminster
100.	Dana Stott Cohen	Wrightstown
101.	Richard and Madeline Zaveta	Tinicum
102.	Charles and William Haring	Hilltown
103.	John and Patricia Shannon	Bedminster
104.	Benjamin Haskey	Solebury
105.	Henry and Charlotte Rosenberger	Hilltown
106.	Benjamin Haskey, III and Elaine F	Solebury

SOURCE: Bucks County Agricultural Land Preservation Program

2007 Task Force Findings

1. The Existing Open Space Program provides a Solid Foundation to Build Upon.

Early on, the 2007 Task Force reviewed the goals and organization of the county's current Open Space Program. Members concurred that the success of the program was due in large part to its simplicity and focus on land acquisition through the existing four components.

AGRICULTURAL LAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM

Established in 1988, the Bucks County Agricultural Land Preservation Program is regulated by the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Farmland Preservation and governed by Pennsylvania Act 43 as well as county program guidelines. The program utilizes funds from state, county, and local governments to purchase conservation easements on productive farmland. Farms considered for preservation are prioritized according to soil quality, location, conservation practices, and threat of development.

In 2006, Bucks County celebrated the preservation of its 100th farm and is on schedule to meet its goal to protect 10,000 acres by the end of 2007. Bucks County ranks 18th out of Pennsylvania's 67 counties in agricultural production and generates over \$60 million in agricultural products each year. Helping to expand and strengthen the industry, many traditional farms (crop and dairy) have diversified to include vegetable, horticultural, and specialty crops as well as pick-your-own produce operations. Today, Bucks County is home to 917 farms comprising 76,831 acres. The program's current waiting list includes 61 farms totaling 3,824 acres. In 2006, the program received a record 20 applications. These statistics are a testament to the county's resilient farming community and indicative of a viable economic sector.

In addition to supporting the agricultural economy, preservation of farmland provides a sense of identity and offers ecological benefits. Open fields, grazing livestock, and historic barns and outbuildings represent our history and continue to define the character of Bucks County. Meadows, fields, streambeds, and woodlands associated agricultural lands provide groundwater recharge, help purify air, and offer areas for natural habitats.

COUNTY PARKLAND ACQUISITION

Totaling over 8,500 acres, the Bucks County park system represents the county's longest standing commitment to open space preservation. Since the mid 1960s, all county-owned parkland has been protected by covenant held by the Park Preservation Board. Additions to the county park system using the 1997 Open Space Program funds involved the purchase of 55 parcels totaling 900 acres, featuring stream banks along designated greenways and in-fill parcels within existing county parks. These lands contribute to the overall vision for a linked park system connecting publicly accessible county and municipal open space areas and facilities.

State, county, and municipal greenway plans have identified linkages as a top priority. Aimed at connecting recreational sites, natural landscapes, scenic, and historic amenities, linkages can be provided by natural parklands, greenways, and multi-use trails. The Parks Department's long-standing and ongoing land acquisition program along the Neshaminy Creek forms the backbone of the County's linked park and greenway plan. The goal of the county plan is to establish an open space network of parks, open space, trails, and recreational opportunities that responds to the unique ecology of Bucks County and serves the needs of a population that is diverse in culture, age, and interests. The 2007 Open Space Task Force supports the update of the countywide greenway and trail plan.

2007 Task Force Findings

NATURAL AREAS PROGRAM

Created under the 1997 Open Space Program and funded solely through the 1997 bond issue, the Natural Areas component was designed to protect the county's most critical ecosystems and unique natural features. In 1999, Morris Arboretum of the University of Pennsylvania completed the *Natural Areas Inventory of Bucks County* (NAI) that prioritized a list of 115 significant natural areas in the county for preservation. The NAI serves as the primary means of establishing a site's eligibility for funding through the Natural Areas Program. Municipalities and nonprofit land conservation organizations are eligible to apply for Natural Areas funding, which is awarded through a competitive grant program. Applicants may be eligible to receive a grant up to 50 percent of the property's appraised value or \$500,000, whichever is less.

As identified in the NAI, Bucks County contains natural resources of local, state, and national significance including stream corridors, continuous forests, unusual geologic formations, as well as rare plant and animal species. Together, these resources function as a complete network, providing important ecological services such as air purification, stormwater absorption, streambank stabilization, aquifer recharge, and fish and wildlife habitats. The loss or impairment of one component can threaten the performance of the whole system. The Natural Areas Program has successfully completed 58 projects resulting in the acquisition of 2,379 acres in an effort to protect a critical mass of these resources. By the end of 2006, grant requests to the program exceeded available funding by more than \$1.5 million.

MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE PROGRAM

Also introduced under the 1997 bond, the Municipal component of the Open Space Program was created to provide financial assistance to municipalities for open space planning and acquisition. Upon completion and adoption of a local open space plan, municipalities became eligible to receive grants to acquire land in fee simple or through conservation easement to permanently protect natural areas, farmland, or park and recreation areas. The maximum grant available under the program is 75 percent of the property's appraised value.

In accordance with the program guidelines, each of the county's 54 municipalities created an open space plan outlining conservation priorities within their communities. These local plans have guided the funding and acquisition of more than 2,500 acres among 94 projects for the purposes of agricultural preservation (930 acres), natural resource protection (998 acres), and parks and recreation (649 acres). In addition to prioritizing local efforts, these plans also represent a collective plan for open space preservation throughout the county.

The Municipal component was intentionally designed to offer townships and boroughs greater flexibility in the use of funds, allowing local officials and residents to identify projects according to their individual open space plans. The program encouraged multi-municipal projects by enabling municipalities to pool funding and submit joint grant applications. Municipalities were also provided with the option of transferring funds to other municipalities. Three boroughs transferred a portion or all of their municipal open space allocation to neighboring townships.

2007 Task Force Findings

The 2007 Open Space Task Force reaffirms and incorporates here the existing goals of the Bucks County Open Space Program:

Agricultural Land Preservation Program

- Preserve family farms.
- Conserve prime agricultural soils.
- Provide an estate planning tool allowing farmers to pass on family lands to the next generation.
- Provide working capital to help farmers achieve financial stability.

County Parkland Acquisition

- Provide recreational opportunities for all residents.
- Coordinate with other agencies to plan for and provide parkland and recreation facilities.
- Preserve significant and representative examples of Bucks County's natural features, scenic landscapes, and historic sites.
- Protect and maintain the environmental quality of the land and water resources in County parks.
- Maintain stream corridors to increase infiltration, groundwater recharge, and stormwater absorption.
- Supplement--not supplant or compete with--private and semi-private recreation activities.

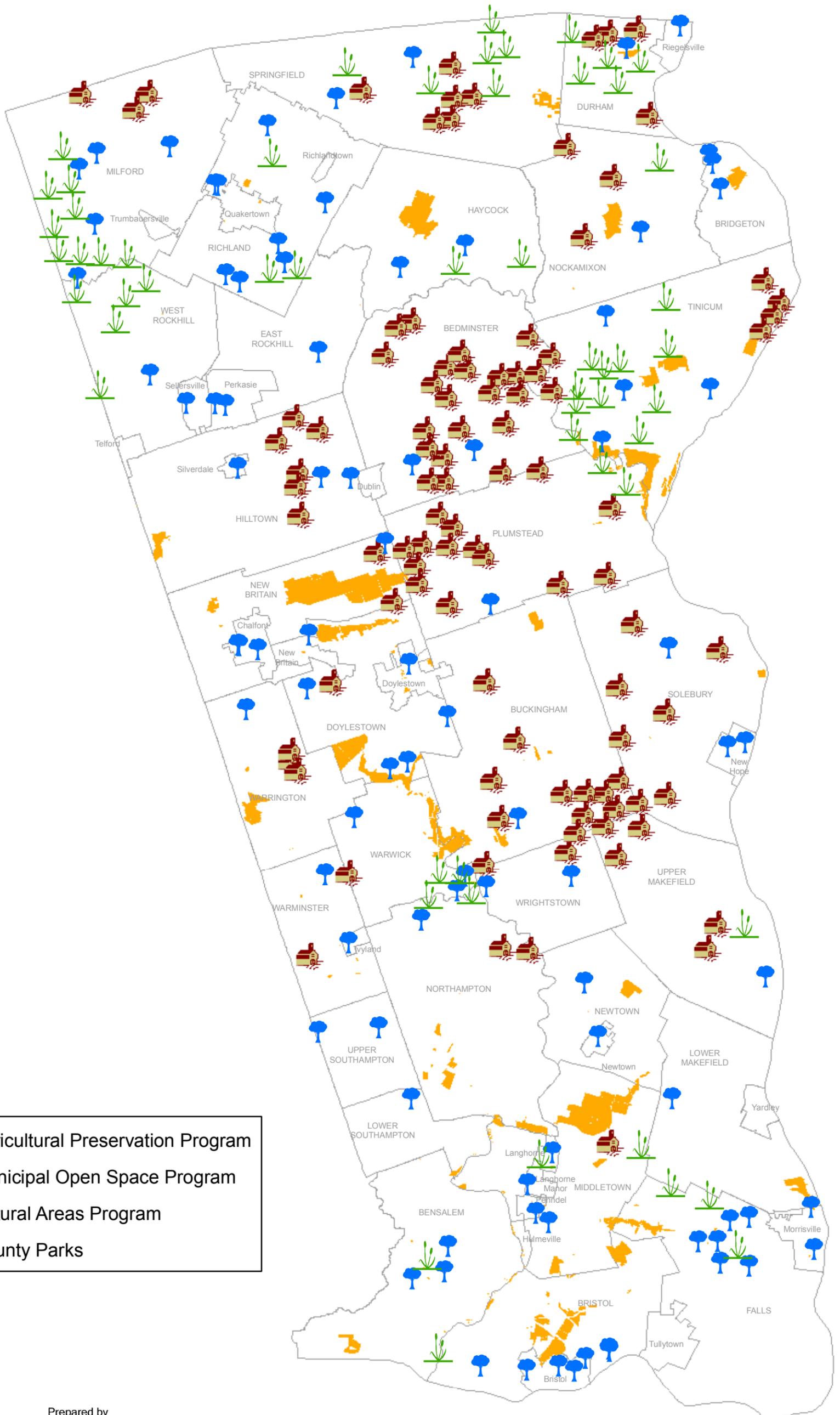
Natural Areas Program

- Preserve biological diversity by protecting the natural habitat of plants and animals.
- Preserve important examples of Bucks County's natural heritage.
- Preserve significant geological features.
- Maintain the natural ecological functions that sustain all life such as purification of air and water, decomposition of wastes, and recycling of materials.
- Provide citizens an opportunity to experience and learn about the county's unique natural features.
- Protect the natural and scenic beauty of Bucks County.

Municipal Open Space Program

- Provide resources to address local open space needs.
- Facilitate local open space planning efforts that consider protection of farmland, parks and recreation, and natural areas.
- Augment local funding programs.

Bucks County Preserved Open Space



	Agricultural Preservation Program
	Municipal Open Space Program
	Natural Areas Program
	County Parks



2007 Task Force Findings

2. Collaboration is the Cornerstone of the Bucks County Open Space Program.

Public/private partnerships have proven to be an essential facet of the Open Space Program. On every project, the county works cooperatively with a variety of entities including private property owners, land trusts, municipalities, and state agencies. Not only are such partnerships necessary for identifying preservation opportunities, but they are also needed for obtaining additional funding through private and government sources. Implementation of the county program requires substantial funding from other sources including municipal, state, and federal grant programs. Given competing demands on public and private dollars, the cost of land preservation far exceeds available funding from one source. By working together, Bucks County and its partners in the land conservation community are able to leverage limited preservation dollars. As a result, a greater number of projects are completed and more acres are preserved.

3. Revitalizing Existing Neighborhoods will help Counter Sprawl.

The character of Bucks County is as much defined by its quaint villages and boroughs as the open space that surrounds them. These communities are irreplaceable resources that contribute architectural, historic, and cultural significance to the county. They represent distinct, compact and pedestrian-friendly settlement patterns of mixed housing types and land uses that consume far less land than their suburban counterparts. On-going investment in existing communities not only keeps special villages and historic places alive, but also helps relieve development pressures on fertile green fields. The more these neighborhoods provide opportunities for redevelopment and accommodate growth, the less outlying open space is converted and lost forever. Likewise, green infrastructure projects create new open spaces by transforming unused, blighted property (e.g. brownfields) into vibrant public places.

4. Public Support for Bucks County's Open Space Program Continues to Grow.

Bucks County residents are becoming increasingly aware of the important benefits that protected open space contributes to their daily experiences and overall quality of life. Moreover, residents are willing to support additional public spending on open space acquisition. Throughout Bucks County, local open space measures have enjoyed overwhelming support. Voters in 20 municipalities have passed numerous local funding initiatives to raise approximately \$200 million for the protection of farmland, parks, and open space. The average passage rate of 71 percent demonstrates the commitment of Bucks County residents to open space preservation.

2007 Task Force Findings

LOCAL OPEN SPACE FUNDING INITIATIVES IN BUCKS COUNTY

Bond Referendums and Budget Appropriations

Municipality	Amount	Bond	Year Approved
Bedminster Township	2.5 million	✓	1997
Bedminster Township	2.5 million	✓	2002
Bedminster Township	2.5 million	✓	2005
Buckingham Township	4.0 million	✓	1995
Buckingham Township	9.5 million	✓	1999
Doylestown Township	3.75 million	✓	1991
Lower Makefield Township	7.5 million	✓	1998
Middletown Township	0.325 million	✓	1998
New Britain Township	2.5 million	✓	1996
Newtown Township	1.1 million		1998
Newtown Township	1.65 million		1998
Northampton Township	5.0 million	✓	1998
Plumstead Township	6.0 million	✓	2001
Plumstead Township	10.0 million	✓	2005
Richland Township	4.0 million	✓	2002
Solebury Township	4.0 million	✓	1996
Solebury Township	10.0 million	✓	1999
Solebury Township	12.0 million	✓	2002
Solebury Township	18.0 million	✓	2005
Springfield Township	5.0 million	✓	2006
Tinicum Township	5.0 million	✓	2002
Upper Makefield Township	6.0 million	✓	1996
Upper Makefield Township	15.0 million	✓	2000
Upper Makefield Township	10.0 million	✓	2005
Upper Southampton Township	2.0 million	✓	2002
Warrington Township	2.1 million	✓	1995
Warwick Township	5.0 million		2003
Warwick Township	7.0 million	✓	2006
Wrightstown Township	1.5 million	✓	1995
Wrightstown Township	1.5 million	✓	2002
Wrightstown Township	1.5 million	✓	2006

Source: Heritage Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land, *LandVote*® 2006.

LOCAL OPEN SPACE FUNDING INITIATIVES IN BUCKS COUNTY

Other Tax Measures - Earned Income and Real Estate

Municipality / Measure	Year Passed
Bedminster Township 0.25% Earned Income Tax estimated to produce \$280,000 per year.	2005
East Rockhill Township 0.125% Earned Income Tax estimated to produce \$80,000 per year. 0.125% Earned Income Tax – produces about \$300,000 per year.	1999 2006
Hilltown Township 0.25% Earned Income Tax estimated to produce \$640,000 per year.	2000
Milford Township 2 mills real estate tax estimated to produce \$42,000 to \$44,000 per year.	1997
New Britain Township 0.125% Earned Income Tax estimated to produce \$345,000 per year.	2000
Nockamixon Township 0.25% Earned Income Tax estimated to produce \$180,000 per year.	2004
Richland Township 0.10% Earned Income Tax.	2002
Springfield Township 0.25% Earned Income Tax estimated to produce \$232,500 per year.	2000
Tinicum Township 0.25% Earned Income Tax and a 2 mill real estate tax.	2002
West Rockhill Township 0.125% Earned Income Tax estimated to produce \$130,000 per year. 0.25% Earned Income Tax estimated to produce \$250,00 per year.	2000 2004
Wrightstown Township 0.15% Earned Income Tax in conjunction with a bond.	2002

Source: Heritage Conservancy and The Trust for Public Land, *LandVote*® 2006.

2007 Task Force Findings

5. Open Space Provides Economic Benefits to Individuals and Local Governments alike.

- **Cost of Services**—Farmland and open space impose significantly fewer costs on local governments than other land uses. Numerous studies demonstrate that the cost of providing local governmental services (e.g. sewer, water, streets, refuse collection, etc.) and public education to residential land uses are greater than the tax revenues they generate. Meanwhile, owners of farms and open land pay more in local taxes than they require in community services. Even with preferential assessment, farmland has been shown to subsidize educational costs of residential land uses.
- **Property Values**—Properties near preserved open space are often desirable because they offer natural beauty, protected views, and an added sense of privacy. These amenities create an enhancement value that has been shown to increase property values. In fact, the real estate market consistently demonstrates that buyers are willing to pay more for property located close to parks and open space areas than for a home that does not offer this amenity.¹
- **Tourism**—Bucks County has long enjoyed a national reputation as a popular tourist destination. Whether destinations themselves or admired landscapes along the way, protected farms, county parks, and natural areas enhance the travel experience for many guests to Bucks County. Visitor surveys revealed that the most popular activities among tourists include: driving/sightseeing, parks, and experiencing the outdoors/nature. Tourism is Pennsylvania's second-largest industry - responsible for nearly 600,000 jobs and attracting more than \$25 billion a year in visitor spending. In 2004, total tourism expenditures in Bucks County exceeded \$800 million, generating enough sales tax to save each taxpaying household an average of \$338. With approximately 135 million visitors annually, Pennsylvania is the fourth most visited state in the country, tied with New York.²

6. Continued Growth Outpaces Land Preservation Efforts.

Steady population growth and development continue to transform the Bucks County landscape. With an estimated population of 621,342 residents, Bucks County is the third most populous county in the Delaware Valley region.³ The County experienced strong population gains during the 1990s, with growth rates of 10 percent. Similar growth rates are expected to continue over the next ten years resulting in a forecasted population of 710,000 by 2020, an increase of 88,658 people.⁴

A larger population will demand more housing, roads, schools, shopping and employment centers. Housing projections alone estimate a 26 percent increase in units by 2020 – nearly 60,000 additional units than in 2000. According to the Bucks County Planning Commission, an estimated 2,200 acres of farmland are proposed for new development each year.⁵ At this rate, over a ten-year period, 22,000 acres, or 1/3 of the county's unprotected farmland, would be lost to development.

¹ *Impact of Parks and Open Space on Property Values and the Property Tax Base*, National Recreation and Park Association, 2000.

² Randall Travel Marketing, 2006.

³ 1990 and 2000 US Census

⁴ Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

⁵ 2000 - 2007 Annual Reports, Bucks County Planning Commission

2007 Task Force Findings

7. Continual Monitoring and Stewardship is Needed.

If land protection is to be meaningful, it must stand the test of time. While certainly an accomplishment, the signing and recording of an easement are just the beginning of a lasting agreement to safeguard the land and its conservation values. When Bucks County accepts a conservation easement, it agrees to uphold the intent of the agreement forever and ensure the long-term protection of the land. To protect these and future investments, it is essential that the County strengthen its requirements for annual monitoring, record keeping, and landowner notification to make sure the land is being used according to easement terms. Equally important is the requirement that applicants are able to demonstrate the ability to monitor and enforce conservation easements.

8. On-Road Bicycle Routes can provide Linkages to Protected Open Space.

The Task Force recognizes the value of a dedicated bikeway network as part of a balanced transportation system. Every trip that can be made by bicycle rather than motorized vehicle improves air quality, lessens congestion, and reduces runoff pollutants. However, on-road bike lanes are a transportation issue and beyond the scope of the Open Space Task Force.

9. The Delaware River is a Significant Resource to all of Bucks County.

The Delaware River is by far Bucks County's largest natural resource. Beginning at Riegelsville Borough, the river's character varies dramatically as it flows 60 miles to Bensalem Township.

The upper river valley possesses exceptional natural, recreational, historical, and cultural resources. Steep wooded slopes, stream valleys, floodplains, and islands create an important habitat corridor for resident wildlife, rare plant species and migratory birds. In addition to over 1,000 acres of state gamelands, the area boasts numerous parks including the Delaware Canal, Washington Crossing State Park, and Tinicum Park. The green corridor along the river is sporadically interrupted by quaint villages developed during the canal era and the earlier log rafting period. In 2000, this 40-mile section of the Delaware River was designated a National Wild and Scenic River.

From the Fall Line at Morrisville to the mouth of the Poquessing Creek, the river is part of the Delaware Estuary. This tidal portion of the Delaware River features very rare areas of fresh water tidal marsh that provide nursery areas for fish, harbor rare plant species, and filter pollution. These fragile yet highly productive habitats have been nearly eliminated by riverfront development where the county's manufacturing and industrial legacy has left communities disconnected from the water and large tracts of vacant, underutilized lands.

The connection between Bucks County and the Delaware River reaches far beyond the shoreline. The majority of Bucks County's land surface drains into the Delaware River through tributaries including Cooks, Tinicum, Tohickon, Paunacussing, Neshaminy, and Poquessing Creeks. Recurrent flooding of the Delaware River has caused millions of dollars in property damage and has equally placed a strain on families, businesses, emergency responders, service organizations, and all levels of government. The impact of these flood events underscores the need for better protection of this significant resource.

2007 Task Force Findings

Fortunately, a renewed commitment to improve and protect the health and beauty of the Delaware River has emerged. Much work has already been accomplished in identifying opportunities within past and present land uses to enhance public access to the river, incorporate parks and greenways within new developments, and restore impaired habitats and ecosystems throughout the Delaware River corridor. Revitalization studies (e.g. *Bucks County Waterfront Redevelopment Plan*), the *Natural Areas Inventory*, and regional initiatives such as the East Coast Greenway, support these concepts.

Whether protecting headwaters in Upper Bucks or introducing plazas, parks, and trails to the waterfronts of Lower Bucks, there is great opportunity for the Bucks County Open Space Program to assist in the revitalization of the Delaware River.

BUCKS COUNTY'S RIVERFRONT CORRIDOR

Rediscovering a hidden treasure

At 330 miles in length, the Delaware River supplies 700 million gallons of water every day to 15 million people and boasts an abundant variety of ecological, cultural, and historic resources. The Delaware River forms the eastern and southern boundaries of Bucks County. The 17 municipalities located along the river corridor occupy more than 60 miles of shoreline and comprise approximately 40 percent of the County's total population.

Much of Bucks County's history is tied to the Delaware River. Long before the first European settlers arrived, the Delaware River corridor was home to the Lenni Lenape Native Americans. William Penn's first home in the new world is located on its shores. On Christmas Night 1776, Washington and his troops crossed the river to rescue a faltering revolution. The development of the Delaware Canal along the river corridor in the early 19th century heralded the arrival of America's Industrial Revolution.

The once fertile lands of Lower Bucks were drastically transformed into a booming industrial and manufacturing hub during World War II and by the mid 1950s, Levitt and Sons had introduced over 17,500 homes to the area. Between them, these two catalysts brought nearly 70,000 new residents to Bucks County and a degree of economic prosperity that sustained the area until the last half of the 20th Century.

Recommendations

Formulated over seven months of study and discussion, the following recommendations set forth a renewed agenda for the Bucks County Open Space Program. The 2007 Task Force reaffirms the goals established in 1996 and seeks to strengthen future endeavors that result in careful and lasting public investment. The 2007 Task Force also recommends that the current boards and respective county staff prepare supplemental reports detailing program implementation guidelines.

RECOMMENDATION 1:

Borrow \$87 million over a 10-year period to fund the Bucks County Open Space Program divided among six areas: Farmland Preservation, County Parkland Acquisition, Natural Areas, Municipal Open Space, Historic Preservation, and the Delaware Riverfront.

Although Bucks County and its 54 municipalities have endorsed and supported sustainable land use policy, Pennsylvania law does not permit local governments to prohibit development. As a result, thousands of acres are left vulnerable to development. It is critical that a dedicated funding source at the County level be instated to lead an enduring commitment to open space preservation efforts. The recommended budget positions open space preservation among the county's highest priorities.

The 2007 Task Force proposes the continuation of the four existing programs: Agricultural Land Preservation, County Parkland Acquisition, Natural Areas, and Municipal Open Space with modifications, as well as the addition of two new components focusing on Historic Preservation and the Delaware Riverfront. (Individual program areas and associated funding levels are described further in subsequent recommendations.) Funding for each component has been allocated according to the following percentages of the overall \$87 million budget: Farmland Preservation - 29 percent, Municipal Open Space - 30 percent, County Parkland Acquisition - 20 percent, Natural Areas - 13 percent, and Delaware Riverfront - 8 percent.

The advocated spending represents a 47 percent increase above the 1997 bond. The 2007 Task Force asserts this budget to be a conservative estimate in order to cover rising costs of land as well as the addition of two new program components. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the 1997 \$59 million bond adjusted to 2007 dollars is equal to approximately \$75 million.⁶ The additional \$12 million would be partially allocated to new programming and help meet the growing demand for existing programs. The anticipated yearly cost of the \$87 million budget to the residents of Bucks County would be approximately \$30 per household – less than 10 cents a day. Furthermore, it is expected that the county investment would leverage and estimated \$120 million in supplementary funding from other sources.

⁶ "Consumer Price Index," U.S. Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov/cpi.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 2:

Allocate \$25 million to the Agricultural Land Preservation Program.

The Agricultural Land Preservation Program is responsible for acquiring more than half of the total acres preserved through the County's Open Space Program since 1997. With a current waiting list of 61 applications totaling 3,824 acres, the program stands in great position to repeat this achievement. The Task Force has determined that an investment of \$25 million will be required to preserve an additional 7,500 acres within the next ten years. This target is consistent with the goals of the Bucks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board.

In 1997, the county's average per acre cost of a conservation easement on farmland was \$5,539. Over the past ten years, the average cost has nearly doubled to \$10,094 per acre. For preservation to remain a competitive alternative to mounting development pressures, in 2006 the Bucks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board raised the per acre cap for the first time in the program's history to \$12,000, up from \$10,000. The higher cap will amplify the program's overall funding needs, accounting for a portion of the \$13.5 million increase. The recommended funding also incorporates annual county appropriations that have been made to the Agricultural Program above the 1997 bond allocation. Since 1997, an additional \$8 million in county funds have been added to match available state funding and ensure the program's continued operation.

State matching grants and municipal contributions have in large part enabled the success of the Bucks County Agricultural Land Preservation Program. Since 1997, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture has matched the county's \$13.5 million allocation with \$33 million in state funds. Similarly, over \$22 million has been provided by local municipalities. While hopeful that comparable levels of funding from these sources will continue in the future, the Task Force stresses that they are not guaranteed.

RECOMMENDATION 3:

Allocate \$11 million to the Natural Areas Program.

Renewed funding will allow continuation of the Natural Areas Program, which was initiated under the 1997 bond issue. Since the first grant was issued in 2000, the program has averaged six projects a year. In 2006, a total of 16 applications were received. Given the current momentum of the program, it is anticipated that a second ten-year phase could garner a significant increase in the amount of applications received and projects eligible for funding. The Task Force asserts that the recommended level of funding would enable the preservation of an additional 2,000 acres under the Natural Areas Program. Supplements to County funds will continue to be required through a 50 percent match from other sponsoring agencies.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 4:

Allocate \$18 million to County Parks and Recreation.

Parkland Acquisition: Allocate \$17 million to help fund Parkland Acquisition.

With a steady increase in County population, more park and recreational land will be needed to ensure the opportunity for all citizens to lead healthy, active lifestyles. The majority of funding to County Parks, \$17 million, will be directed to help implement the County's Park and Recreation Plan, which targets lands for fee-simple acquisition to provide open space and connect existing parklands with trail systems. The goal of this component is to preserve an additional 900 acres.

Historic Properties Program: Allocate \$1 million to help fund Historic Preservation.

In 2000, the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code was amended to include a mandate for county, municipal, and multi-municipal governments to plan and zone to protect their historic resources. Planning tools such as adaptive reuse ordinances and historic overlay zones have been effectively implemented in many Bucks County communities.

The 2007 Task Force recognizes historic preservation as a fundamental reinvestment strategy for communities. Historic preservation efforts not only enhance existing neighborhoods, but may also help relieve growth pressures on the unbuilt environment. Accordingly, the 2007 Task Force has identified opportunities within the Open Space Program to support preservation projects that reflect county policy to promote sustainability and focus spending on existing infrastructure. The Historic Properties Program would be designed to encourage historic preservation efforts at the local level by providing seed money for planning and restoration projects and help local governments compete for limited historic preservation dollars. The Historic Properties Program would be administered under the Historic Properties Division of the County's Park and Recreation Department.

Since 1975, the Historic Properties Division of the County's Park and Recreation Department has administered regular maintenance and restoration of three historic sites – the Moravian Pottery and Tile Works, the Stover-Myers Mill, and the Erwin-Stover House. The mission of the county's Historic Properties Division is to preserve the historic integrity of these properties for the public's benefit. Under the care of the Historic Properties Division, each site shall be preserved in perpetuity and operated as historic interpretive museums, offering tours and educational programs.

Potential Historic Preservation Factors to be considered:

- Preservation of the existing historic resources or culturally significant areas in county ownership through proper maintenance and code-mandated upgrades for public access. If a historic property is listed on, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Places, the Secretary of the U.S. Department of the Interior's Guidelines for Historic Preservation, as well as Pennsylvania Historic & Museum Commission Guidelines will apply.
- Preservation of the existing historic resources or culturally significant areas in municipal ownership through proper maintenance and code-mandated upgrades for public access, in accordance with the guidelines aforementioned.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 5:

Allocate \$26 million to the Municipal Open Space Program.

The 2007 Task Force recommends that renewed funding be assigned to municipalities for both open space planning and acquisition of parks, natural resources, and farmland. The primary goal of Municipal Open Space Program shall remain land acquisition – via fee-simple purchase or conservation easement. However, the Task Force acknowledges the inability of all municipalities to utilize their share of funding under the 1997 bond.

In addition to raising the base allocation that every municipality receives from \$110,000 to \$200,000, the 2007 Task Force recognizes the need to broaden the scope of eligible projects under the Municipal Open Space Program. For those municipalities where available open space is limited, funds may be used for improvements that enhance public access, utilization, and enjoyment of open space. Improvements must not diminish or replace the conservation values of the land. Requests for improvement funding shall be evaluated by Open Space Review Board on a case by case basis. Any open space or parkland improved with grant monies shall be placed under deed restriction to preserve land in perpetuity.

Although increased flexibility in the use of funds has been incorporated to assist municipalities with the implementation of local open space priorities, all acquisitions must implement the goals and recommendations of the local municipality's adopted open space plan. To that end, up to \$10,000 of each municipality's allotment may be applied toward the update of its local open space plan. To become eligible to receive funding for open space acquisition or improvement projects, municipalities will be required to revise their open space plans, documenting the following:

- Completed open space projects and implemented recommendations of the current plan.
- Status of available open space remaining in the municipality
- Prioritization of acquisition projects
- Prioritization of any improvement projects
- Consideration of open space linkages (e.g. trails, greenways, etc.) with adjoining municipalities and county initiatives in support of Bucks County's ongoing greenway planning.

In addition to a base allotment of \$200,000, municipalities would receive an adjusted share based on land area and percent of total County population. Each municipality would be required to contribute matching funds equal to 25 percent of a project's cost. It is a goal of the 2007 Task Force that every municipality will be able to fully utilize its open space allocation.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 6:

Allocate \$7 million to the Delaware Riverfront.

Recognizing the unique influence of the Delaware River upon all of Bucks County, the 2007 Task Force recommends that a sub-category under the Municipal Open Space Program be developed for funding open space projects along the Delaware River corridor. In addition to the general Municipal Open Space allocation, each of the 17 riverfront communities that border the Delaware River would be eligible to participate in this competitive grant program.

Consistent with the overriding guidelines of the Municipal Open Space Program, funds available under the Delaware Riverfront component would be eligible to acquire land or conservation easements for recreation, natural resource, and farmland conservation purposes. The Delaware Riverfront component would fund projects that implement the goals and recommendations of the municipality's adopted open space plan as well as meet the following conditions:

- Municipal allotment cannot be used as a match for the Delaware River Communities grant.
- Project must include public access to the Delaware River and preservation of riverfront land, where possible.

Funding for improvements shall be considered on a limited case-by-case basis by the Open Space Review Board. Individual municipalities shall not be limited in the number of applications submitted or total funding received under the Delaware Riverfront grant program.

Riverfront Municipalities:

Bensalem Township
Bridgeton Township
Bristol Borough
Bristol Township
Durham Township
Falls Township

Lower Makefield Township
Morrisville Borough
New Hope Borough
Nockamixon Township
Plumstead Township
Riegelsville Borough

Solebury Township
Tinicum Township
Tullytown Borough
Upper Makefield Township
Yardley Borough

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 7:

Restrict all Land Preserved by the County Open Space Program from future development.

The Open Space Program is designed to protect *in perpetuity* the unique and valuable open space which has for so long defined the character of Bucks County. All lands purchased with program funds shall be subject to a deed restriction or conservation easement that permanently prohibits the property from being developed or used for anything except eligible open space purposes.

RECOMMENDATION 8:

Continue Monitoring and Stewardship Practices.

The County and all grantees assume a perpetual stewardship responsibility each time an easement is acquired. This includes a duty to monitor and enforce the easement terms. Unfortunately, stewardship has not kept pace with the acquisition of easements. Failure to adequately monitor and enforce conservation easements will result in failure to achieve the intended public and conservation purposes associated with land preservation. To resolve current difficulties with monitoring and enforcement and prevent future problems, the 2007 Task Force recommends a comprehensive review of the County's easement responsibilities and establish a set policy to conduct future monitoring and enforcement duties. Equally important is the requirement that applicants are able to demonstrate the ability to monitor and enforce conservation easements. Stewardship must have equal priority to conserving unprotected land.

RECOMMENDATION 9:

Encourage multi-municipal cooperation to protect open space.

Each municipality shall be required to include within its open space plan, consideration of the open space needs and preservation opportunities neighboring municipalities. Communities are strongly encouraged to work together during the open space planning and acquisition process to foster a regional perspective toward natural resource preservation. As an incentive for municipalities to look beyond their borders, the Task Force recommends that multi-municipal applications be eligible to receive funding from more than one program (e.g. Natural Areas Program and/or Agricultural Land Preservation and/or Municipal Open Space) to help fund adjoining projects. Each application must demonstrate that the proposed project complies with individual program guidelines.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 10:

Strengthen Public Outreach and Education.

The recommendations contained in this plan call for the voters of Bucks County to make substantial investment on behalf of land preservation. Aware that Bucks County citizens are regularly asked to fund important infrastructure projects such as libraries, schools, fire stations, etc., the 2007 Task Force is both hopeful and optimistic that Bucks County citizens will similarly support continued expenditures for parks, natural areas, and farmland protection. This will require an on-going effort to keep individuals informed so that they understand the role of open space in Bucks County. To that end, the County should:

- Develop community education programs to keep people informed about the significance of natural resources, open space, and recreation facilities in their lives.
- Create educational materials on the goals and programs of the Open Space Program.
- Educate landowners, community leaders and general public about the importance of land preservation and the available tools for protecting natural resources within Bucks County.
- Facilitate information exchange between local land trusts and municipalities.
- Assist local groups and governments to understand, promote, and preserve open space.

Appendix - 2007 Open Space Task Force Members

Kenneth Beer — Farmer and owner of Ken-Jan Farm, Inc. – a 195-acre farm in Hilltown Township. Member of Hilltown Township Planning Commission for 20 years and past member of the Bucks County Agricultural Land Preservation Board.

Anthony Belfield — Chairman of the Bucks County Open Space Review Board since its inception, member of the 1997 Bucks County Open Space Task Force, and member of Bensalem Township Environmental Advisory Committee.

Peter Boor — Member of the League of American Bicyclists, Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals, Chair of local bicycle club advocacy committee, and member of Doylestown Borough/Township Bike/Hike Committee.

Susanne Curran — President of Curran Realty Advisors, specializing in open space and farm preservation acquisitions and easement valuation. Former planner with Bucks County Planning Commission. Member of Lower Makefield Township Historic Commission, Bucks County Business and Professional Women's Association, Yardley Business Association, and Anchor Yacht Club, Bristol 100 Year Anniversary Committee.

Daren Eppley — Practicing environmental lawyer with the New Jersey Attorney General and Governor's Office. Member of the Upper Southampton Watershed Association. Previous member of the Warminster Township Park and Recreation Board and Open Space Committee.

Jim Ewing — Active member of Churchville Nature Center, Nature Conservancy, SIERRA Club and Audubon, and Bensalem Township Shade Tree Commission.

Nicholas Forte — Tincum Township Supervisor for 17 years. Instrumental in establishing the criteria and direction of the Tincum Open Space Program.

Michael P. Fournier — Director of the Bucks County Penn State Extension. Member of the 1997 Bucks County Open Space Task Force. Experience working with Bucks County farmers for 29 years.

Frank P. Froio — Chairman of the Plumstead Township Board of Supervisors. Previous chair of the Plumstead Township Environmental Advisory Committee. Involved in Plumstead Township open space initiatives for 9 years, including the recently passed \$8 million Open Space Bond.

Frederick S. Groshens — Member of the Bucks County Open Space Review Board and New Britain Township Zoning Hearing Board. Former Director of the Bucks County Conservation District and deputy administrator to Bucks County Commissioners. Coordinated public outreach program for 1997 Bucks County Open Space Bond Referendum. Initiated campaign for the 1996 New Britain Township Open Space Bond referendum.

Susanne W. Hewitt — Retired public information officer of the Bucks County Free Library. Community service includes former Wrightstown Township representative on the Joint Municipal Planning Commission, past president of the Bucks County League of Women Voters. Currently co-executive producer for the League's "Let's Talk" series.

Appendix A - 2007 Open Space Task Force Members

Marilyn Jacobson — Member of Chalfont Borough Council and the Bucks County Open Space Review Board. Municipal service includes: Chalfont Open Space Committee, Chalfont Park Committee, Borough representative for the Route 202 Task Force, Central Bucks Land Use & Transportation Regional Planning, and the Bucks County Recreation Council.

Nancy Keenan — Former Perkasio Borough Councilwoman for 14 years and Public Information Officer for Pennridge School District. Member of the Bucks County Area Agency on Aging Advisory Board, Pennsylvania Council on Aging, Attorney General's Task Force for the Protection of Older Pennsylvanians, Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare Advisory Board. Received Governor Ridge's 1999 Award for Promoting the Quality of Life of Older Pennsylvanians.

George Kiriakidi — President, Prime Properties, Inc. Involved in all aspects of real estate development including site selection, cost analysis, design, construction, marketing and sales. Member of the Warrington Township Economic Development Advisory Board and Member/Director of the Pennsylvania Home Builder's Association.

Jorden P. Krauss — More than 25 years experience in public/private community and economic development initiatives, including the PA Main Street and PA Enterprise Zone programs. Served as Chief of Staff to Congressman James Greenwood and Chairman of the Bucks County Economic Development Task Force.

Barbara N. Lyons, Esquire — Doylestown Township Supervisor since 2002. Member of the Doylestown Township Open Space and Agricultural Board, Central Bucks Land Use and Transportation Committee and the Doylestown Borough - Doylestown Township Joint Park and Recreation and Open Space Planning Committee. Former Director of the Doylestown Borough Revitalization Board and Doylestown Township Public Information Board.

Norman A. MacArthur — Member of the Tinicum Township Open Space Commission and Tinicum Conservancy. Authored Tinicum Township Open Space Plan, assisted in the campaign for passing Tinicum Township's \$5 million Open Space bond issue, and has worked with numerous landowners in the preservation of over 2,000 acres through the township.

Jane Brinker Magne — Vice Chair of Wrightstown Township Board of Supervisors. Community service includes: Bucks County Foodshed Alliance Board of Directors, Wrightstown Township representative for the Regional Traffic Planning Task Force, and Central Bucks Traffic and Transportation Task Force, Wrightstown Township Environmental Advisory Council, Newtown Area Joint Zoning Council and Active member of the Wrightstown Township Civic Association.

Jeffrey L. Marshall — Vice President of Resource Protection, Heritage Conservancy. Serves on the Board of Directors for Preservation Action, Washington D.C.; USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service's Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program Advisory Committee; Newtown Historic Association Board of Directors, and Historic Preservation Department Advisory Board for Bucks County Community College. Recipient of the Bucks County Preservation Legacy Award.

Appendix A - 2007 Open Space Task Force Members

Honorable William Hart Rufe III — Retired Bucks County Court of Common Pleas Judge. Member of the Bucks County Open Space Review Board. Served as president/chairman of Heritage Conservancy for 32 years, president of the Bucks County Audubon Society; president of the Honey Hollow Watershed Association and president of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club.

Michelle Smyser — Chair of the Bucks County Parks and Recreation Board and the Bucks County Parks Preservation Foundation. Member of the 1997 Bucks County Open Space Task Force. Served 15 years on the Solebury Township Board of Parks and Recreation. Past member of the Bucks County Open Review Board and New Hope-Lambertville Winter Festival Committee.

James Walsh — Active member of the Upper Perkiomen Watershed Coalition, Upper Perkiomen Conservation Alliance, Milford Township Open Space Advisory Committee, Unami Creek Protection Project, and Butter Creek Corridor Preservation Project.

Honorable Katherine M. Watson — 144th Legislative District Representative. Serves on the House Transportation, State Government, Aging and Older Adult Services, and Health and Human Services committees. Member of the House Majority Policy Committee. Previously a Warrington Township supervisor, member of the Central Bucks School Board, director of the Bucks County Highway Safety Program, Director of Public Information and Deputy Administrator for the County of Bucks.

Bill Wert — Director of Parks and Recreation for Newtown Township. Serves on New Britain Township Planning Commission and Parks and Recreation Initiative Committee. Member of International Association of Lions Club, Newtown. Professional affiliations include: National Recreation & Park Association, Pennsylvania Recreation & Park Society and Bucks County Recreation Council.