

OPEN SPACE & LAND PRESERVATION PLANS

TECHNICAL BULLETIN

Effective community growth and change requires thoughtful planning that focuses on protecting, preserving, and enhancing special lands, such as historic sites, natural areas, farmlands, greenways, and recreation spaces. These areas contribute to a community's appeal, attracting residents and businesses. Land protection requires thorough planning, which includes evaluating resources, setting goals, identifying opportunities and challenges, and working with municipal boards and the public. Cooperation with neighboring municipalities is also essential for success.

Implementation of open space and land preservation plans often involves a variety of strategies including creating regulatory requirements to safeguard sensitive areas or ensure open space in the land development process. It could also include raising funds to purchase land for public use or compensating farmers for conservation easements. Stewardship of these lands requires establishing baseline information, preparing management plans, and regularly monitoring the properties to ensure their protection and proper care.

TYPES OF PLANS

Comprehensive Plan

- Open space and land preservation can be the focus of a chapter within the Comprehensive Plan.
- Must sufficiently analyze open space preservation goals under Act 153.
- Led by Task Force comprised of municipal representatives from boards, commissions and committees.

Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan

- Included as amendment or addendum to Comprehensive Plan.
- Provides a deeper analysis of open space, recreation, cultural and historic resources and trail priorities.
- Led by Task Force comprised of municipal representatives from boards, commissions and committees.

Land Preservation Plan

- Can be accepted as a plan or study or adopted as an addendum to the Comprehensive Plan.
- Focused strictly on land preservation and prioritization. Typically, this plan doesn't address cultural or recreational resources.
- Led by Open Space or Land Preservation Committee.
- Simple planning process can be updated more frequently.

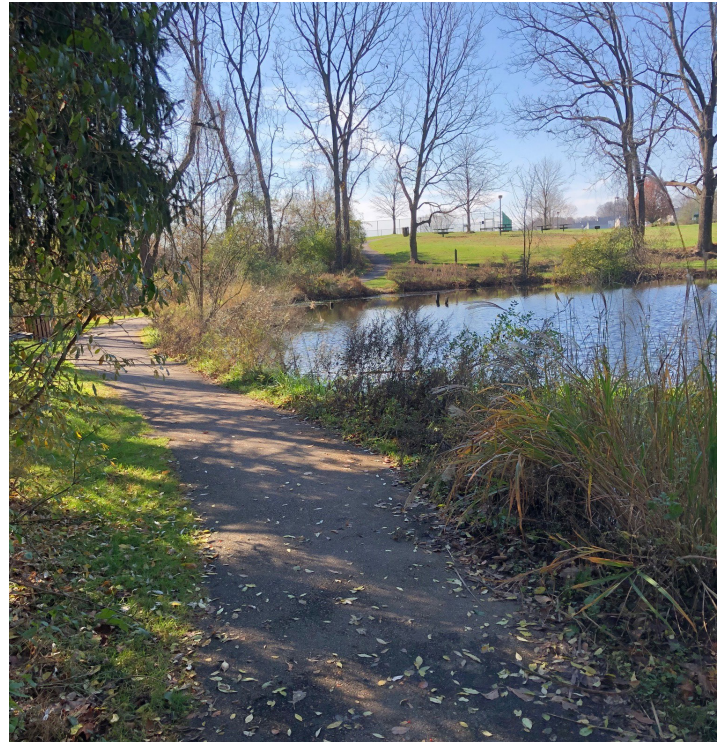


Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan (CRPOS)

- Guides the development, improvement, and maintenance of park, recreation, and open space systems at the local, regional, or county level.
- The CPROSP or similar recreation plan is required for municipalities and counties to be eligible for DCNR grants for park and recreation projects.
- The plan is designed to help communities assess their current park, recreation, and open space resources, identify needs, and plan for future improvements.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- Think in terms of open space systems: Interconnected open spaces and agricultural lands (Greenways and Open Space Networks) are more effective and appreciated than isolated areas.
- Tailor the plan to the community's needs: The goals for open space should reflect the unique assets, priorities, and concerns of the community. The plan should be adjusted as needed and focus on local interests, not external preferences.
- Public participation is crucial: Engaging the community is essential for building support, especially when local funding is involved. Methods such as public forums, surveys, stakeholder interviews and focus groups help gather input and resolve conflicts.
- Involve key organizations and stakeholders: Work with local groups, government agencies, and experts to identify important resources and opportunities for greenways and open space.
- Publicize the planning process: Distribute information widely, including maps and summaries of community feedback, to ensure transparency and broad involvement.
- Leverage funding opportunities: Include procedures and information in the plan to



Opens Space, Recreation and Envirnmental Resource Plans include recommendations for municipal parks and trails.

qualify for public or private funding to stretch locally raised money for greenways and open space projects.

ENABLING LEGISLATION

Act 153 (1996), an amendment to the Pennsylvania Conservation and Land Development Act, allows local governments to acquire real property interests, including development rights, for purposes such as recreation, scenic, historic, and natural resource conservation. These acquisitions must be identified in a plan approved by the local governing body or county planning commission.

Act 138 (1998) amended the Agricultural Area Security Law to allow local governments to purchase agricultural conservation easements to protect farmland, provided the land is within an agricultural security area. This act permits municipalities to incur debt for these purchases and collaborate with counties or the state. School districts cannot raise or spend money for these purposes.

DEVELOPMENT AND ADOPTION

Preliminary Steps

- Identify the Team
 - Local Representative: Determine the municipal representative that will oversee the preparation of the Plan. In many cases this can be assigned to an existing Open Space Committee or Environmental Advisory Committee.
 - Professional Planners: Although a planner is typically hired to handle the data collection and document writing, their work should be carried out under the guidance and supervision of a committee selected by the elected officials.
 - Elected official involvement: While the appointed committee and consultant handle the preparation work, the final responsibility for adopting the open space plan lies with the elected officials, ensuring it aligns with the community's needs and desires.

Content

The key to a successful Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan or similar plan is a simple but straightforward planning process that excites residents and others as to future open space and recreational opportunities. A municipal

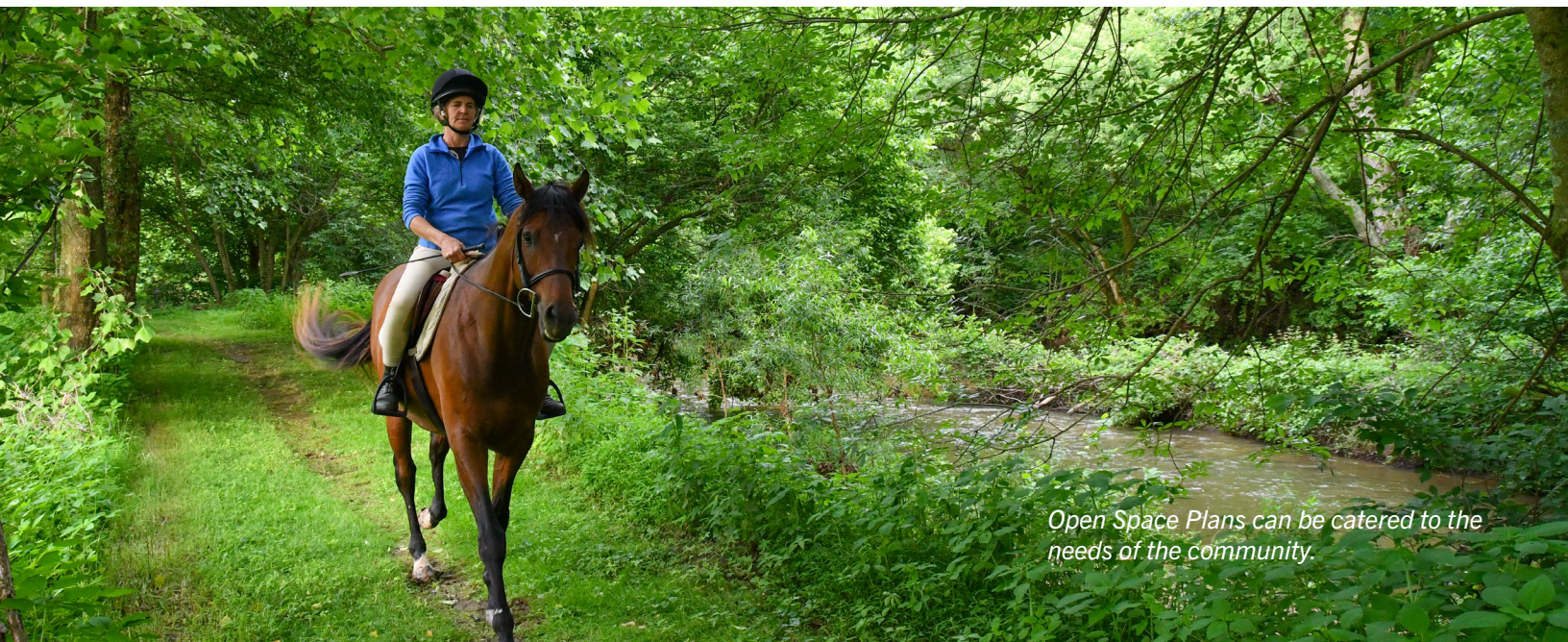
open space plan should be designed to align with the community's goals, as well as the requirements of funding programs that reflect the community's interests. The following summary of plan elements was compiled in the guide, *Implementing a Municipal Open Space Program: A Guide for Pennsylvania's Municipalities*, by Michael Frank from the Heritage Conservancy. These elements have been derived from DCNR's guidelines for greenways and open space network plans, as well as from open space plans funded under programs in Bucks, Chester, Monroe, and Montgomery counties.

For communities seeking land for parking and recreation purposes, additional factors to consider include costs for facilities, equipment, maintenance, programs, and personnel.

Background and Setting

A. Community Background – Regional Setting

- History of the Community:
 - Date of settlement and incorporation
 - Key milestones, events, and developments
 - Notable historical features or landmarks
- Governmental Organization:
 - Type of municipality (e.g., city, township, or borough)
 - Elected and appointed officials, boards, and commissions
 - Overview of departments and employees
 - Budget and financial information



Open Space Plans can be catered to the needs of the community.

- Physical Conditions:
 - Existing land use patterns (residential, commercial, etc.)
 - Public amenities (schools, parks, playgrounds)
 - Water and sewer services
 - Transportation infrastructure (roads, facilities)
 - Maps showing land use and key features
- Demographics:
 - Population size, age, gender, education, and income
 - Housing data (number, type, age of units)
 - Projections for 10-20 years
 - Employment and economic health
- Current Policies:
 - Zoning and land development regulations
 - Plans for parks, recreation, open space, and natural resource protection
- Regional Setting:
 - Location relative to urban centers and transportation facilities
 - Proximity to regional parks, colleges, and natural resources
 - Growth corridors and regional development pressures

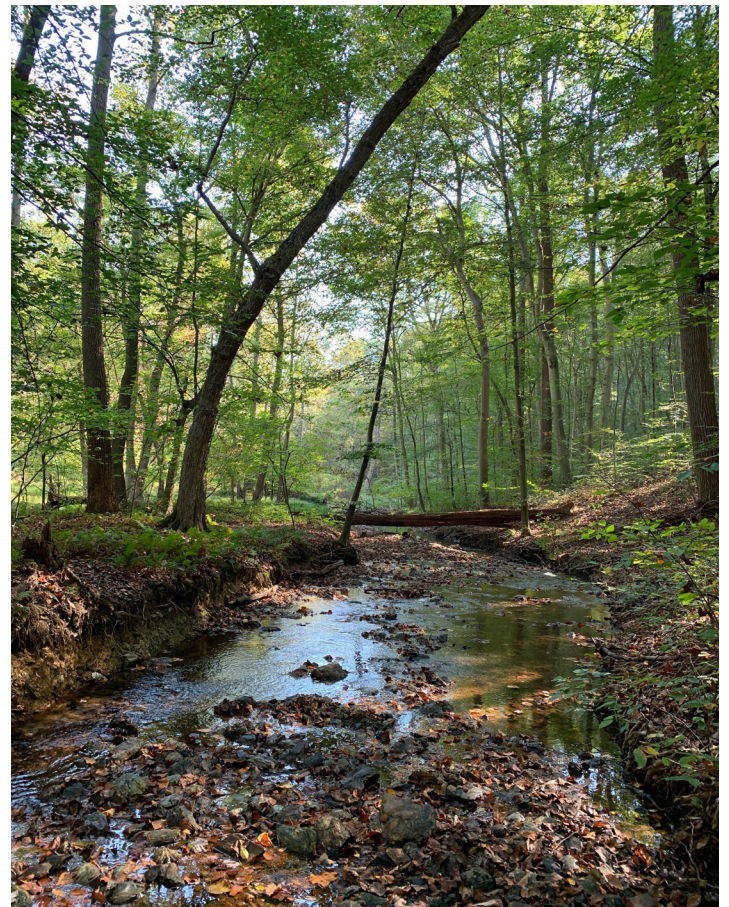
B. Goals and Objectives

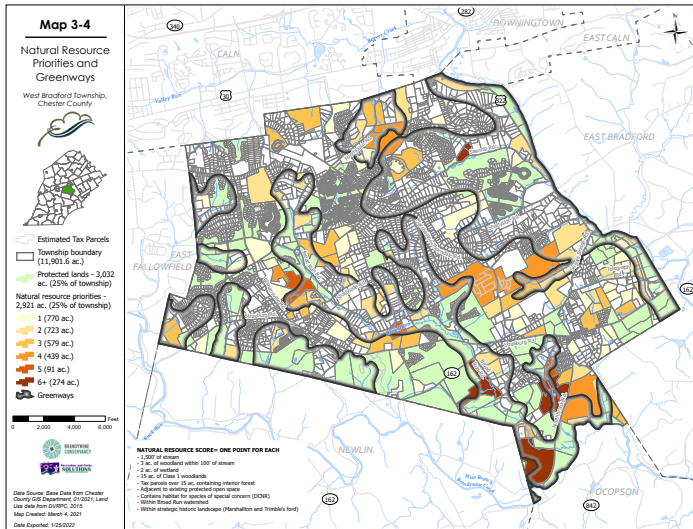
- Goals:
 - Statements of community aspirations and desired outcomes
 - Expressed in subjective, qualitative terms (e.g., improve quality of life, protect natural resources)
- Objectives:
 - Actions or projects to achieve the goals
 - Quantifiable, measurable, reasonable, achievable, and implementable
- Timeframes:
 - Short-term goals: 1 to 5 years
 - Long-term goals: 5 to 10 or 20 years
- Focus Areas:
 - Development, greenways, open space, natural resource protection, farmland preservation, and recreation needs
- Open Space Uses:
 - Active and passive recreation
 - Pedestrian paths, bicycle trails, equestrian paths
 - Village gateways, green belts, wildlife

- habitats
 - Farmland and historic site preservation, scenic vistas
 - Public parks, natural resource protection, watershed protection
- Plan Development Process:
 - Goals and objectives guide data collection, analysis, and implementation strategies
 - Goals may evolve during the planning process
- Public Participation:
 - Engage municipal officials, boards, and the public for input
 - Methods: public meetings, surveys, interviews, focus groups
 - Summarize findings and foster public understanding and support for preservation efforts

C. Inventory of Currently Protected Lands

- Mapping and Description: Identify and map areas currently protected by various means.
- Types of Protected Lands:
 - Permanently protected:
 - Federal, state, county, and municipal parks.





Natural resource and greenway prioritizations are highlighted on this map from the West Bradford Township Open Space, Recreational and Environmental Resources Plan.

- Lands held by conservation organizations, watershed associations, and homeowners associations.
- Properties with conservation easements or farmland preservation rights.
- Temporarily protected:
 - Agricultural security areas or lands under Act 319 or Act 515 preferential tax assessment.
 - Golf courses, private recreational lands, large institutional holdings.
- Focus on Connections: Emphasis on preserving lands near existing protected areas and creating links between new and existing open spaces.

D. Inventory of Natural Resources

- Identification and Mapping: Identify and map natural resources and linear greenway corridors within and surrounding the community.
- Areas to Focus On: based on municipal assets and priorities.
 - Farming Resources: Actively farmed areas, types of farming, and prime agricultural soils (Classes I, II, and III).
 - Scenic Resources: Scenic roadways, ridge tops, viewsheds, and vistas.
 - Natural Resources:
 - Geology: Unique or hazardous geological features (sinkholes, aquifers, limestone).
 - Topography: Steep slopes, watershed boundaries, and drainage areas.

- Surface Waters: Streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, floodplains, and water quality data.
- Soils: Hydric, floodplain, and seasonally high-water table soils.
- Vegetation and Wildlife: Forests, wildlife habitats, and locally important vegetation.
- Critical Habitats: Areas supporting rare, threatened, or endangered species, migration corridors, and ecological communities.
- Greenway Corridors: Existing trails and greenway corridors within and beyond the community.

E. Inventory of Manmade Resources

- Identification and Mapping: Identify and map manmade resources and linear corridors, both within the community and the surrounding areas.
- Areas to Focus On:
 - Transportation and Utility Corridors: Canals, abandoned rail lines, utility rights-of-way, bike lanes, pedestrian walkways, park-and-ride lots, bus/train terminals.
 - Recreation Facilities: Public recreation facilities, parks, bikeways, walking/hiking paths, waterfront access areas, fitness trails.
 - Cultural and Historic Sites: Museums, historic districts, memorial sites, tourism attractions, National Register properties, archaeological sites.
 - Population Centers and Destinations: Residential, commercial, and industrial areas, community centers, schools, libraries, business parks, shopping centers, brownfield redevelopment sites.
 - Future Development Areas: Proposed areas for residential, industrial, or commercial development.

F. Inventory of Other Relevant Plans

- Review of Plans: Review greenways, open space plans, and other relevant plans from adjoining municipalities, counties, and regional agencies to identify coordination opportunities and address potential conflicts.

SAMPLE OUTLINES

Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resource Plan Outline	Land Preservation Plan Outline
<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background • Vision, Goals and Objectives • Regional Context • Planning Process and Timeline • Stakeholder and Public Involvement <p>Setting</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background Document Review • Existing Conditions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Recreational Facilities • Protected Lands • Existing Land Use • Water Resources • Natural Resources • Agricultural Resources • Protected and Developed Lands • Roadways and Utilities • Community Survey, public meeting, and stakeholder interview results <p>Open Space and Natural Resources Plan Bicycle and Pedestrian Network Plan Parks and Recreation Plan Action Plan</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Open Space Referendum • Land Preservation Efforts to Date in West Bradford • Precedents • Benefits to Preserving Land <p>The Plan</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Priority Areas for Land Preservation • Prioritization Plan • Using the Prioritization Map • Responding to Opportunities as They Arise <p>The Implementation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntary Landowner Actions • Township Regulatory Action • Outreach and Education in West Bradford • The Preservation Process • Partnerships for Preservation • Financing Open Space Preservation

- **Coordination and Conflict Resolution:**
 - Identify opportunities for collaboration.
 - Discuss methods to resolve conflicts and inconsistencies.

H. Analysis of All Resources

- **Combining and Analyzing Data:** The collected information on protected and vulnerable resources, along with potential open space linkages, should be analyzed together.
- **Identifying Important Resources:** Based on the community's goals and objectives, the most important resources should be identified. This includes understanding interrelationships between areas and establishing priorities for protection.
- **Vulnerability Assessment:** Analyze existing and projected land uses to determine which resources may be more vulnerable. Resources in areas with growth pressures, such as near

highways or sewer lines, may be more at risk than those in less developed areas.

- **Adjusting Goals and Objectives:** The analysis may confirm that the goals and objectives are realistic, or it may suggest that they need to be adjusted for feasibility.
- **Public Involvement:** After the analysis, hold a public meeting to present the findings and gather feedback. This helps ensure that the plan is realistic and garners community support. It also allows those who may oppose the plan to voice their concerns.



J. Prepare Plan Recommendations

- **Focus on Protection Priorities:** Based on the collected information and community goals, the plan should prioritize properties and resources that require protection.
- **Active Recreation Guidelines:** Refer to the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) or local/regional guidelines to determine appropriate acreage and facilities for open space, considering the population size and community needs.
- **Distribution and Diversity:** Ensure a balance in the location, distribution, and diversity of open space types that meet community needs. Plan for internal linkages and connections to external areas.
- **Preliminary Recommendations:** Prepare recommendations for public discussion. Act 153 mandates designating properties suitable for open space and creating a rating system to assess their relative desirability.
- **Property Designation and Ranking:** The ranking system helps prioritize which properties should be pursued for acquisition, considering their importance and vulnerability to development. Address acquisition priorities and sequence, e.g., a highly important land may not be under immediate threat, while a lower-priority property may be at risk soon.
- **Multiple Priority Levels:** Include properties across different priority levels to prevent price inflation on specific parcels. Negotiating with multiple owners ensures reasonable prices.
- **Appraisal and Purchase Process:** Acquisitions funded by government dollars require appraisals to determine the fair purchase price. Act 153 necessitates adopting a mechanism to establish the price, typically through two or more appraisals.
- **Alternative Protection Methods:** Consider methods other than outright purchase (e.g., conservation easements) for certain types of open space, which may be more cost-effective or appropriate for specific land uses.

K. Analyze Various Methods to Protect Open Space

- **Regulatory Methods:** Use zoning ordinance amendments to lower densities, increase lot area requirements, or allow cluster subdivisions



in areas with vulnerable resources. Resource protection standards can prevent development in floodplains, wetlands, and steep slopes, or limit land alterations in areas like prime agricultural soils.

- **Transferable Development Rights:** Allow development to be shifted voluntarily to more suitable locations through transferable development rights provisions.
- **Mandatory Open Space Dedication:** State law allows for mandatory dedication of open space or fees-in-lieu for areas that cannot be developed.
- **Comprehensive Plan Amendments:** Amend individual or multi-municipal comprehensive plans to designate growth and rural resource areas, relieving pressure on protected areas. Publicly funded services may be restricted to growth areas.
- **Agricultural Security Areas:** Expand or establish agricultural security areas to protect farmed properties and make them eligible for the sale of development rights through county and state programs.
- **Landowner Incentives:** Encourage property

owners to donate land or easements to preservation programs to achieve conservation goals or avoid taxes. Community education programs can help landowners understand these options.

L. Develop an Action Plan

To ensure effective implementation of the plan, the following steps should be taken:

1. **Create an Action Matrix:** Outline specific next steps and prioritize them for short, medium, and long-term timelines.
2. **Define Plan Duration:** Specify the plan's life, such as ten years, to align with other planning initiatives (e.g., the municipal comprehensive plan).
3. **Assign Roles and Responsibilities:** Clearly identify the responsible parties for each action step.
4. **Estimate Costs and Resources:** Determine the financial and resource needs for each action, along with potential funding options.
5. **Pilot Projects:** Identify greenway corridor segments that can serve as early projects to build momentum for the plan's implementation.
6. **Review Ordinances and Regulations:** Recommend changes or new land development regulations to support the plan, such as riparian

buffer standards or conservation-focused development designs.

7. **Advisory Groups:** Utilize advisory bodies, like Environmental Advisory Councils or Parks and Recreation Boards, as champions for the greenways network.
8. **Official Map for Long-Term Protection:** Use an official map to secure long-term protection for identified corridors and hubs in the greenways network.
9. **Coordinate with Stakeholders:** Establish ongoing coordination with municipalities, counties, regional agencies, landowners, and other stakeholders.
10. **Partnerships:** Seek partnerships with private organizations, conservancies, land trusts, and corporations to support the development and protection of the greenways network.

Public Review and Input

Successful municipal open space plans are guided by public input. Extensive public input can be achieved through:

- Public meetings and visioning sessions
- Community Survey
- Stakeholder and landowner interviews

Public Hearing

Prior to adoption, a public hearing is necessary to present the plan to the community and provide the opportunity for input.

Adoption

- The Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources encourages municipalities to follow the same adoption procedures outlined in the MPC section 302.
- After the public hearing, if no substantial changes are recommended, the governing body can move to adopt the plan. The plan could either amend the municipality's comprehensive plan or be a standalone document.



Public and landowner input is essential for an effective Open Space Plan.

Next Steps

Landowner Outreach

- Begin outreach to landowners with priority properties
- Consider sending out letters, hosting informational meetings about land preservation.
- Coordinate with local land trusts on landowner outreach

Regular review and reference

- Ensure that the plan is regularly reviewed and referenced during the decision making process by providing the final plan to all relevant committee and board members.
- Make the plan available on the municipal website.

Public engagement

- **Public Feedback:** Continuously engage the community to obtain feedback on the new and existing parks and recreation services.
- **Grand Openings and Events:** Hold celebrations or grand openings for newly developed or renovated parks and open spaces. This can generate excitement and foster community involvement.
- **Annual Reports:** Provide the community with annual or periodic reports on the progress and successes of the open space initiatives, including accomplishments, challenges, and future plans.

Seek funding for implementation:

- **State and Federal Grants:** Apply for grants such as those offered by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), and other state or federal programs that support park development and open space initiatives.
- **Local Funding:** Explore local funding sources such as municipal bonds, property taxes, or park user fees. Some communities may also implement impact fees on developers to help fund new parks.
- **Private Donations and Sponsorships:** Seek partnerships with private donors, nonprofits, or businesses that might be willing to sponsor projects, such as park improvements, trail development, or community events.
- **Crowdfunding:** For specific projects or community-driven initiatives, crowdfunding through platforms like GoFundMe or Kickstarter may be an option.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- *PA Municipalities Planning Code (MPC)*
- *Implementing a Municipal Open Space Program: A Guide for Pennsylvania's Municipalities (by Michael Frank)*
 - *Developed by Heritage Conservancy and DCNR*



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