

OPEN SPACE PLANNING AND PRIORITIZATION

INTRODUCTION

When a property hits the open market, it can take weeks or months for municipal leaders to assess its potential for public benefit, or they may not learn of it until after it's sold. To effectively conserve open space, municipalities need a preservation plan that sets clear goals and priorities, allowing them to focus resources on high-impact projects. When an open space tax is enacted through the open space referendum, Act 153, it requires an open space plan.

Open Space Planning and Prioritization Plans

- Land Preservation Plan
 - Natural Resource Protection.
 - Agricultural Preservation.
 - Identifies priority properties for preservation.
- Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan
 - Natural Resource Protection.
 - Agricultural Preservation.
 - Cultural Resource Preservation.
 - Planned Recreation/Trails.
 - Identifies priority properties for preservation.
 - An Open Space Plan must identify priorities for acquisition of conservation interests or lands in fee and the plan also may establish/develop a rationale to support grant funding.
- Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan
 - Parks and recreation
 - Open space and greenway networks
 - Identifies park and recreation improvement projects
 - Identifies open space and greenway connection



APPLICABILITY

Open space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan

1. **Recreation:** It can be used to prioritize land for acquisition to be use as public parks and trails and define goals for park and recreation enhancements.
2. **Conservation:** It can also be used to identify land as a conservation priority.
3. **Water quality:** If that land includes riparian areas, conserving it can protect and improve water quality.
4. **Transportation:** Open space plans can be used to identify a plan for transportation including multi-use trail corridors, as well as to improve the street network.
5. **Cultural Resources:** Open space plans can prioritize the preservation of historic and cultural sites and landscapes.



IMPLEMENTATION

- **Land Preservation Plan:** is a simplified plan that focuses on open space and land preservation by prioritizing land based on agricultural, natural and historic resources.
- **Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resource Plan:** is a plan that takes a holistic approach to balance the open space and recreational needs of the community with the environmental resource protections needed to support a healthy environment.
- **Comprehensive Recreation, Park and Open Space Plan:** is a strategic document that provides a framework for the planning, development, and management of recreational, park, and open space areas within a community. It outlines the community's goals, needs, and priorities regarding outdoor recreation, park facilities, and open space conservation.



SUCCESSFUL CASE STUDIES

All municipalities with an Open Space tax are required to have a plan to prioritize open space.

- **West Bradford Township, Chester County**
 - *Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan Adopted in 2022 and amended in 2024, as an addendum to the West Bradford Comprehensive Plan (2020).*
 - *Land Preservation Plan (2020)*
- **Honey Brook Township, Chester County**
 - *Land Preservation Plans (2007, 2012, 2019 and 2025)*
- **East Marlborough Township, Chester County**
 - *Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan adopted in 2021, as an addendum to the Unionville Regional Comprehensive Plan (2011).*

For more information on open space plans see the expanded technical bulletin included in this toolkit.