

## **CHAPTER 9            OPEN SPACE PLAN**

### Introduction

In the early 1990's, East Pikeland Township engaged the firm of Robert E. Bartmann, AICP, to prepare an Open Space Plan. On July 20, 1993, the Township adopted the Plan, entitled The East Pikeland Township Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan. The Open Space Plan is a thorough and comprehensive document that should be considered as part of the Comprehensive Plan. It is the intent of this Chapter to summarize the content of that study, and, where necessary, provide supplemental information. Each chapter of the Open Space Plan will be summarized. The reader is referred to that document for descriptive maps, charts and tables, as well as detailed narrative.

### Summary of 1993 Plan

#### Chapter 1. A Brief History of East Pikeland Township.

The Open Space Plan includes a concise history of the Township and copies of several historic maps depicting the original roads, place names, and early parcel maps with ownership. As in this Comprehensive Plan, the history of the area is a significant element that frames the current and future plans proposed elsewhere.

#### Chapter 2. The Regional Setting.

Similar to the History chapter, the Regional Setting provides the context for the Township as one of many municipalities in northern Chester County. Data and maps are included which show the relationship of the Township geographically to others in the area. Comparisons are made to nearby townships and boroughs regarding population and housing, transportation and other regional influences. It is important to recognize the relationship between the Township and nearby municipalities as influences in one can readily have an impact on the other. Regional concerns are transportation, land use patterns, and regional services.

#### Chapter 3. Community Characteristics.

This Chapter addresses the community demographics, such as past trends, population distribution, and implications for recreational planning. Economic characteristics are discussed as they relate to demands the population makes on the municipality for recreational services. Also included in the chapter is a discussion of the Township's governmental organization, financial structure, employment distribution, and educational levels.

#### Chapter 4. Cultural and Historic Resources.

A concise history beginning with the Native Americans 12,000 years ago is presented, leading up to factors responsible for settlement of the area during the Colonial period. Preservation of architectural sites exemplifying the various historical periods is discussed. A 1980 survey noted 156 sites having architectural significance, with various styles being represented. The Federal style is found, for instance, throughout the Township, while the Queen Ann style is represented by only one structure. A map depicting the locations of cultural and historic resources is included. This information is important as a key factor in the character of the Township. On going efforts to preserve historic sites should be maintained and encouraged.

Factors influencing topography, such as land forms, slopes, and hydrology are discussed. These are significant as determinants of developable lands, including agricultural areas. Surface waters play a recreational role in the Township, as well as providing stormwater controls and great scenic value. Geology and groundwater are factors affecting the ability to supply well water, and soil characteristics have a major role in agricultural production and habitat, and stability of roads, utilities and foundations. Biotic resources are an essential part of this chapter, forming much of what is the Township's landscape. All of these resources make up the scenic character of the area that is a valuable resource in itself. Preservation of environmental resources is a high priority in this Comprehensive Plan, not only for scenic values, but also for functional reasons. This chapter contains mapping of many elements of the environmental resources.

#### Chapter 6. Environmental Resource Goals and Objectives.

Of all the physical and cultural characteristics described in Chapter 5, 50 were identified as being highly significant. This chapter develops goals and objectives for the characteristics and suggests priorities. The highest ranking goal reflected the desire to preserve the rural character of the Township. It was realized that the goal was strongly related to the preservation of open space. The second ranked goal was the concern for groundwater and surface water resources. From the goals, objectives and priorities evolved a composite map, which demonstrated that the most environmentally sensitive areas are those found along stream valleys. These areas are where factors affecting water resources and scenic resources often coincide. The entire list of objectives was applied to the goals in a matrix which identified the degree to which one supported the other.

#### Chapter 7. Recreational Resources and Needs.

This chapter essentially inventories the available lands and facilities providing both outdoor and indoor recreational opportunities to the residents. In some cases the land or facility is outside the boundaries of the Township and not within the control or responsibility of the Township. In other cases, a facility may be in private ownership, and, therefore, outside the Township jurisdiction. Standards are available that have been proposed by nationally recognized organizations which suggest the quantity of a particular type of recreation needed to satisfy a given number of population. Typically these standards are expressed in terms of quantity per population, travel time to facility, geographic area served, and physical size of facility. Comparing the inventory of existing facilities to the standards found to be desirable, yields a program to expand the system over a period of time.

#### Chapter 8. Plan for Recreational Lands and Facilities.

Goals and objectives are developed to implement a plan to enhance the community's open space preservation, recreational planning, and natural resources conservation. Emphasis is given to proposed parkland that is distributed geographically so as to provide all residents with reasonable access to the system. Attention is given to utilizing the natural features of the Township, links between parks and other regional locations, and unique cultural and historic sites.

#### Chapter 9. Site and Facility Development.

A case is made in this chapter for well considered location and maintenance of parkland, as well as emphasizing efficiency of design. Parkland and open space located in the Township so as to be accessible to most of the population will be far more used than a parcel which might have been inexpensive to purchase or found to be undevelopable by builders. The use of lighting, fencing and landscaping can enhance the facilities as well, by allowing reduced development to function more efficiently. Included is an inventory of facilities for different classes of parks, from the field and court games of a community park to the type of access and trail development necessary for an area of passive open space. Cost estimates for the various proposed parks are also detailed.

#### Chapter 10. Recreation Programs.

East Pikeland Township has a variety of recreation programming, in many cases occurring jointly with programs in Phoenixville. These programs take the form of both publicly and privately sponsored, with a variety of organizations involved. The Township, for instance, has a joint agreement with the Phoenixville Recreation Board which allows residents the use of facilities in the Borough. Other organizations, such as the Phoenixville YMCA, the Phoenixville Area School District, and the Senior Center of Phoenixville all provide services which are available to Township residents. From the athletic perspective,

groups such as the Kimberton Youth Athletic League, the Phoenixville-Merion Youth League, Phoenixville Soccer, Phoenixville Babe Ruth, Phoenixville American Legion Baseball and Kimberton Fish and Game Association provide organized recreation programming in many sports. The American Association for Retired Persons (AARP) and the Charlestown Nature Center each organize events and have programs related to their own interests. Two private business, Chester Springs Studio and Water World provide rather different services to the Township through art classes and display space, and the availability of water oriented recreation and swimming lessons. Besides this valuable inventory of providers, the strongest point made by the Chapter is the current and future needs of the Township. In general, it suggests better communication between groups to avoid duplications of effort, and the need to provide more neighborhood oriented facilities. While the population ages as demographics project, emphasis should be placed on activities appropriate to such age groups, as well as to younger age groups to whom recreation is traditionally targeted.

#### Chapter 11. Park Maintenance.

This chapter speaks to topics such as design and construction factors having an influence on required maintenance levels. Other factors are level of use and frequency of maintenance. The importance of maintenance should carry over to the Township budget process and should be factored into the cost of parkland along with acquisition and operating costs. Estimated costs are suggested for the proposed parks outlined in earlier chapters of the Open Space Plan, along with equipment and facilities.

#### Chapter 12. Proposed Overall Strategy.

This chapter has a high correlation to the Comprehensive Plan, with recommended strategies for the preservation of open space and protection of environmental characteristics. One method of preservation is the conservation easement, a means for an owner to permanently restrict development on a given area of land. Such a method assumes that the Township is not in a position to acquire all lands found to be worthy of preservation. The advantage to the land owner is through decreased property taxes and possibly reduced estate inheritance taxes.

This Comprehensive Plan offers an opportunity to guide and direct growth in ways that protect and preserve significant lands. As growth occurs through the planning and plan review process, the Township should utilize all available techniques to enhance the rural character of the community. Open space requirements for new plans may yield fees in lieu of land that would allow for the acquisition of other areas. Coordination of new plans should occur, so that individual parcels might be consolidated to produce a park of greater

usefulness. Zoning regulations should protect significant environmental features with strong overlay zones. Incentives to protect such areas can be created by the creation of higher density in exchange for preservation.

The goals and objectives of this Comprehensive Plan should incorporate those of the Open Space, Recreation and Environmental Resources Plan. Implementation techniques should further refine the ways in which the goals can be accomplished. Emphasis is placed on the need to plan for the acquisition of open space and recreation lands in a manner which is economical for the Township and timely for the needs of the residents.

### Chapter 13. Implementing the Plan.

A variety of actions and techniques are recommended in the chapter, the most prominent of which is the updating of the Comprehensive Plan. While this a very important element, the updating and revision of the Subdivision and Land Development Regulations to provide a mechanism for the contribution of land and/or fees by developers should be emphasized. A third recommendation is a similar revision to the Zoning Ordinance to provide for the protection of environmentally sensitive areas that may be subject to development. The Open Space Plan considers these three items to be the most important implementation strategies. Others that are recommended include coordination of various bodies within the government of the Township, adoption of budget strategies to fund future plans and maintenance, and the establishment of a Park Code governing park usage.

Defining the responsibilities of the boards involved, such as the Board of Supervisors and the Park and Recreation Board, is essential to the process of implementing the goals and objectives of both the Open Space Plan and the Comprehensive Plan. As the lands and programs devoted to recreation increase in time, it is imperative that all advisory and governing bodies clearly understand their roles. As other boards are found to be necessary they should be defined and provided with the authority to function.

Considerable emphasis is placed on the process of developing parks and recreation lands, programs, funding, and maintenance. Tools and procedures helpful to those involved in each area are provided. One theme throughout is the need to forecast and plan in order to be able to provide the community with recreational lands and services, and also to effectively protect environmentally sensitive areas. To this end, a five year capital program is developed, projecting expenditures relative to the park recommendations made in earlier chapters. There is also a corresponding budget for the maintenance of the same facilities and the programming of each site. It is worth noting that the chapters devoted to Environmental Resources and Plan Implementation are the

two longest and most complex in the Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan.

### Discussion.

The Open Space Plan prepared by Bartmann is an exhaustive and thorough document portraying the status of lands having qualities worthy of preservation and the natural features that make them significant. Further, it examines the whole range of recreations needs, standards, financing, development, and maintenance. Accompanying the detailed text are numerous maps which delineate the various natural resources.

Of particular interest and importance is Chapter 5, Physical Characteristics and Environmental Resources, a chapter which contains detailed narrative and mapping of the many resources which combine to designate certain lands suitable for conservation and preservation. A map entitled "Biotic Resources", coupled with "Existing Land Use" and "Protected and Restricted Lands" yields a map entitled "Composite of Primary Environmental Resources". In a simplistic sense, East Pikeland Township lies between and perpendicular to the Schuylkill River to the north and Pickering Creek to the south. Bisecting the township is the French Creek. Separating the three water bodies are two highlands. Significant biotic resources are found in the stream valleys, particularly that of Pickering Creek. These areas are characterized by floodplains, wetlands, and steep slopes. The higher lands between the stream valleys are notable for having views and vistas across the landscape.

Lands which are protected or restricted from development are discussed and mapped in Chapter 5 of the Open Space Plan. These areas are significant because they possess varying degrees of restriction from development and will remain in a natural state. While being lands that are often highly suitable for passive recreation, they also are responsible for the rural visual character that attracts many visitors and residents. With some exceptions, most of the protected lands are in the stream valleys, with floodplains being the underlying layer of protection. In the case of Pickering Creek, the municipality owns Pickering Creek Reserve near the creek along Route 113, Pike Springs Road. The lands near French Creek offer a more complex pattern of protection, with the floodplain being reinforced with municipal and non-municipal lands, as well as local historic district protection. Area adjacent to the Schuylkill River contains a corresponding floodplain, Northeast Park, and a variety of utility easements, including a PECO electric transmission line, a petroleum pipeline, and a railroad line. In the central portion of the Township there are several large parcels in institutional use, between Kimberton Road and Pike Spring Road, including the Kimberton Fire Company and Community Park, as well as

residential development open space, Hunt Field Reserve, protected by covenant near Western Road.

One notable omission from the list of protective measures is that of agricultural security areas. The Agricultural Securities Program offers up to a 25 year period during which relief from some potential financial burdens can be achieved. The program provides a temporary relief and may be useful in protecting farms that are experiencing acquisition threats from development. It is thought of as a means to preserve farmland until a more permanent means can be found. Such a program could be of benefit to East Pikeland Township and its farm community

### Open Space Plan.

The Bartmann Plan makes a case for there being a deficit of recreation and open space lands for the current population, suggesting that there need to be techniques applied that would preserve lands for these purposes. The dedication of lands or the receipt of fees in lieu of land both presume that some other land is subject to development. This process increases the demand for open space in itself and is not a reliable mechanism for making up a deficit. The imposition of covenants restricting development on lands is a means of preserving lands, typically natural features and passive recreation areas. However, what is needed are increased areas within the Township where a variety of recreational pursuits can occur, from foxhunting to basketball. The location of such areas needs to be determined in concert with the projected population growth and the future land use plan. The timing of land acquisitions is important so as to be able to acquire land while it is still available, pay a reasonable price, and have it located where growth is expected to occur. The ability of the Township to purchase the lands needed for recreation is limited, given the range of expenditures typical to any municipality. Means other than fee simple purchase should be explored and the Township needs to be constantly aware of the availability of parcels of land.

Insuring the availability of land for open space and recreation is essential, since opportunities to acquire land may not reoccur. Even if development of the site is in the distant future, either because of lack of funds or lack of a development program, lands needed can be preserved. Plans for site development need to be made carefully so as to insure the most effective use of the land for the residents. Care should be taken regarding the development of facilities at great expense based on a recreation trend that may be short lived. The preparation of an overall Master Plan for a park system, as well as park master plans for individual sites, should consider the location and timing of open space and recreation needs. Individual site improvements should be based upon the

communities needs, accepted standards and the ability of the municipality to budget funds for the design, construction, programming and maintenance of facilities. It should be remembered that even the least developed passive recreation area requires some level of development, even if it consists only of access and parking. Maintenance of such areas is often an area that is under estimated and needs to be forecast into future year's operating budgets.

The Open Space Plan proposes specific sites to satisfy the projected needs for open space and recreational lands into the Township's future. Chapter 8 contains an outline of the sites by name, location, type, function and size. They have been chosen on the basis of meeting existing unmet needs and the availability of land. Also assumed is a projection of growth made at the time of the Plan preparation. While they appear to represent a reasonable array of sites and functions (active parkland to passive trail systems), the list should be compared to the updated population forecasts for the Township, based upon the Year 2000 Census when it becomes available. The sites are graphically depicted on a plan entitled "Recreation Lands and Facilities" and included are conservation lands (habitat, environment and view shed), passive recreation parklands, active recreation (community park, neighborhood park, school park), and future active recreation sites.

### Priorities

Knowing where and when there will be a need for open space and recreation lands and facilities requires the prioritization of many factors. The Open Space Plan adopted by the Township has stated that the availability of lands suitable for open space diminishes as growth occurs. This essentially puts the Township into competition with the development community for tracts of land that are needed for future recreational purposes. If the Township relies only on the dedication process to acquire lands, the result will be less than ideal parcels, disjointed from each other, and of insufficient size to meet many of the projected open space needs. While that process should not be discounted entirely, since there are some benefits from the dedication of lands through the land development process, it should not be relied upon solely to provide sufficient open space to satisfy future needs. Unfortunately, the same parcels that have the best qualities for residential growth often are the ones that make the best open space lands to serve recreational needs in the future. Those that are under the greatest development pressure should be the first evaluated by the Township. That factor is key to the site priorities which follow.

Kimberton Park has been designated as having the highest priority among sites within the Township. Its central location and ownership pattern make it a primary choice for a community park that can meet many of the recreational

needs of the East Pikeland Township. The 1993 Open Space Plan methodology assigned the highest priority to Kimberton Park, based on the following set of criteria:

- Need (pent-up demand) for facility.
- Site Reservation (under threat of development or loss of opportunity)
- Site Acquisition (under threat of development)
- Site Planning (need for advance planning)
- Site Improvement (need for some or complete improvement)

Points were assigned on the basis of 1 (one) through 5 (five), 5 (five) being the highest priority. Kimberton Park scored 24 (twenty-four) points, the 1 (one) from the maximum of 25 (twenty-five) being a 4 (four) for Site Acquisition, reflecting the municipal and fire company ownership of much of the site. In total, 18 (eighteen) sites were prioritized for potential parkland purposes and an additional 7 (seven) decorative sites, small areas which provide visual benefit to the community, such as areas near key road intersections. Of the sites evaluated, the following represent the first five sites in the prioritization list:

1. Kimberton Park
2. Springer Park
2. Powder Mill Creek Park (tie)
3. Seven Stars Park
4. Merlin Park
5. Snyder's Mill Park

The entire list of proposed parks and decorative areas can be viewed on the accompanying map, Figure 9.1, Proposed Parks and Recreation Facilities Map. The distribution of the sites represents a very reasonable approach, given the known development patterns when the Open Space Plan was prepared. As in all aspects of the Comprehensive Plan, constant evaluation and modification of assumptions and strategies should occur. The adoption of this Comprehensive Plan may occur a decade after the preparation of the Open Space Plan. With the availability of revised population statistics and projections and corresponding development pressures, adjustments to the Open Space Plan should be made.

### Summary

As has been stated earlier, it is not the intention of this Comprehensive Plan to restate the adopted Open Space Plan, but to embrace its philosophy and concepts. Its recommendations and implementation techniques should be subject to on-going review, relative to the current pattern and trends of

development in the Township. Development activities within the adjacent townships should also be kept in view as the process of open space planning evolves. East Pikeland Township has the opportunity to preserve lands today to meet the needs of the future. The preservation of lands for open space purposes should acknowledge the need for natural features and passive recreation opportunities as well as unconstrained lands ideal for active recreation. The current population and future residents need the ability to recreate within the community. These lands also serve the function of preserving the rural, open space character that is representative of East Pikeland Township.