
APPENDIX E

COUNTY REVIEW AND TOWNSHIP RESPONSE



MONTGOMERY COUNTY OPEN SPACE BOARD

COMMISSIONERS: Thomas Jay Ellis, Esq., Chairman • James R. Matthews • Ruth S. Damsker

May 23, 2006

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Mr. Christopher VandeVelde, Manager
Whitemarsh Township
616 Germantown Pike
Lafayette Hills, PA 19444-0821

WHITEMARSH TOWNSHIP
RECEIVED

MAY 30 2006

OFFICE OF THE TWP. MANAGER

Subject: Whitemarsh Township Open Space Plan

Dear Mr. VandeVelde:

The Open Space Board has reviewed the Whitemarsh Township Open Space Plan as presented at the April 11 meeting. The Board understands that the plan was prepared in order to meet the Montgomery County Green Fields/ Green Towns program requirements. This review addresses how well the plan conforms to specific open space planning guidelines developed by the county and how the recommendations in it address the needs of your municipality.

Composite Recommendation Map: The plan recommendations would be clearer if they were all summarized on one recommendation map.

Role of Open Space Steward: The Board was extremely pleased to hear of the township's interest in developing the Open Space Steward position. The duties of this position should be generally described in the implementation chapter within the plan.

Trail Issues/ PECO Property Use: Similar to other municipalities, Whitemarsh intends to utilize rights-of-way along PECO power lines for the location of trails. We urge the township to obtain easements from PECO along these rights-of-way to ensure their long time use.

Public Process: The Township should be commended for a very thoughtful and involved plan development process throughout which many citizens in Whitemarsh Township were given a voice in shaping the plan. Details of the public process should be included in the plan.

Education: The plan contains recommendations regarding education. The township may wish to consider partnering with the Montgomery County Lands Trust's Green Futures Program to better address the education needs of township personnel, volunteers and the major land owners.

Overall, the Board and the planning commission staff were very pleased with the open space plan. Please amend the plan as noted above, and resubmit your materials to this Board for final review.

The planning commission staff is available to meet with you about this planning update. If you have any questions about our comments, please feel free to contact Beth Pilling (610.278.3738) or Michael Stokes (610. 278.3729).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Elkins Wetherill", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

 Elkins Wetherill
Chairman, Open Space Board



Whitemarsh TOWNSHIP

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August 2006

Montgomery County Open Space Board
Montgomery County Planning Commission
P.O. Box 311
Norristown, PA 19404-0311

At their regularly scheduled public meeting of June 26, 2006, the Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee considered the Montgomery County Open Space Board review letter dated May 23, 2006. The Committee is grateful for the positive comments from the Board and resubmits, for final review, this response including an appropriately amended Whitemarsh Township Open Space Plan dated August 2006.

Composite Recommendation Map: The district-specific recommendations and four [4] District Maps in the plan have been restructured for clarification. The district-specific recommendations more clearly identify the distinctly unique areas located within the township.

Role of Open Space Steward: As part of the township's implementation agenda, a staff position should be created "to oversee, coordinate, communicate and execute the township's open space initiatives." This new staff position, tentatively entitled "Open Space Steward," will be someone with a working knowledge of open space preservation issues and strategies as well as familiarity with and the ability to cultivate potential funding sources.

In addition, this person will need to be of sufficient maturity and character to be able to cultivate and sustain the necessary relationships and support within the community that will help ensure the plan's long-term success. This network of relationships would encompass large landowners, residents, local businesses and institutions, township staff, non-profit environmental organizations, and county-level officials.

Specifically, the Open Space Steward's responsibilities would include:

- Serving as a primary public advocate for open space and related issues.
- Conducting and maintaining an inventory of the township's open space assets.
- Working with appropriate township staff (e.g., Parks and Recreation) to ensure that land stewardship policies and best land management practices are in place and being implemented.
- Cultivating positive relationships with entities who own, control or may influence the status of open space within the township, for example, landowners, golf clubs, estate planners, and land trusts. (The Steward will not have authority to bind or commit the township, except as authorized in advance by the appropriate governing bodies.)

- Developing partnerships, as appropriate, with adjacent municipalities, the County Planning Commission, and local conservation organizations with a view to advancing the township's open space goals.
- Serving as the internal liaison to township Boards, Commissions, departments and staff concerning the Open Space Plan and its recommendations with a view to sustaining the township's focus on, and momentum and support for, the plan's implementation.
- Leading or participating in fundraising activities that support the goals of the Open Space Plan.
- Helping to develop and oversee execution of the public education components of the plan.

The township has budgeted funding for a part-time Open Space Steward position; however, it is currently exploring the possibility of cost sharing with other municipalities in order to be able to offer a full-time position that would be more likely to attract and hold someone with a higher degree of experience.

Trail Issues/PECO Property Use: The Comprehensive Sidewalks, Trails and Greenways Master Plan identified in *Chapter 5 Recommendations, Township-Wide Policy Recommendations, TW-2*, will consider easements from PECO to utilize rights-of-way along PECO power lines for the locations of trails.

Public Process: Ensuring a strong degree of public involvement in the planning process has been a goal of the Open Space Committee from its inception. The selection of the township's Open Space Plan Consultant was predicated on the organization's strong track record in organizing and soliciting public input.

Rather than public presentations, the Open Space Committee held informal open houses to share its thinking and progress with Whitemarsh residents. The Committee felt that open houses would provide a greater opportunity for individual interaction among residents, consultants and Committee members and a more extended timeframe that would accommodate residents' differing schedules.

Two open houses were held during the planning process, one early on, to gather residents' input on their open space priorities, and one later, to solicit feedback on the plan's draft recommendations. Invitations to both events were sent to every household in Whitemarsh. These were reinforced by advertisements in the local papers and, in the case of the second open house, an article preceding the event highlighting aspects of the draft recommendations.

Public response to these efforts was enthusiastic, drawing as many as 60 residents to one of the events. Many open house attendees expressed appreciation for being given an opportunity to share their ideas and provide input. Feedback from the first open house indicated strong support for preserving open space (for both passive and active uses), controlling development, protecting wildlife and waterways, and ensuring ready access to open space amenities, such as trails. Many of the recommendations in the final Open Space Plan, from approving the Growing Greener Ordinances to constructing a township-wide trail system and improving access to the river amenities, reflect residents' desires and concerns. Public input at the second open house was very supportive of the recommendations, especially the township's plans to partner with other municipalities, nonprofit organizations and landowners, preserve golf course land, and create an Open Space Steward position.

In addition to involving Whitemarsh residents in the planning process, the Open Space Committee reached out to neighboring municipalities as well, establishing relationships with members of their Open Space Committees. This led to several visits to each other's planning meetings and other ongoing communications, which has helped to clarify mutual interests/concerns and lay the foundations for future cooperation as plans are implemented.

Education: The Open Space Committee also recommends the township consider partnering with the Montgomery County Land Trust's Green Futures Program to better address the education needs of township personnel, volunteers and the major land owners.

Sincerely,
The Whitemarsh Township Open Space Committee