

CHAPTER 3 · COMMUNITY BACKGROUND

UNPROTECTED RESOURCES

Analysis of Unprotected Resources

There are significant undeveloped areas within Whitemarsh Township, many of which are rich with natural resources. It is extremely important for the Township to protect as much undeveloped natural resource land as possible now since any remaining parcels will be subject to increasing development pressures.

There are several types of unprotected resources in the Township. One of the most important and vulnerable are the stream valleys of the Wissahickon and Sandy Run Creeks. There are also a significant number of large farms and country residences located throughout the Township, some of which are protected through local private and not-for-profit preservation groups.

Whitemarsh Township also contains significant areas with steep, wooded slopes located along the banks of the Schuylkill River. There are several sections of the Township that have major stands of trees and many locations that have scenic and natural vistas.

Large, privately held and unprotected land holdings exist throughout the Township. A majority of these lands are golf courses or are owned by private clubs. All of the golf courses in the Township are currently zoned to allow for residential development.

All of the unprotected resources of Whitemarsh Township should be preserved, either because of their resource value alone or because of the benefits they provide for other resources they encompass or affect. The following unprotected resources have been identified as those which meet Township criteria for preservation and are those seen to be most threatened by the pressures of development.

Unprotected Resources

Remaining Unprotected Areas of the Wissahickon Creek and Sandy Run Corridors

The Wissahickon Creek Corridor is a unique and regionally valuable natural resource located within the Stenton/Wissahickon District of Whitemarsh Township. Part

of its uniqueness stems from the level of protection it has along the majority of its course through the Township. Unprotected parcels of land can be found along various portions of the Wissahickon Creek. As it enters the Township it passes through the center of the Germantown Academy campus. South of the campus, the creek flows through several large privately owned country residences and undeveloped parcels, before entering the heart of Fort Washington State Park. The southern reaches of the creek flow through other significant unprotected resources, in-

"We won't have a society if we destroy the environment"

—Margaret Mead

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cluding Erdenheim Farm and the Whitemarsh Valley Country Club, both significantly large tracts of privately owned land susceptible to development.

The portion of the Sandy Run Creek within Whitemarsh is also located in the Stenton/Wissahickon District but is much more limited than that of the Wissahickon Creek. The majority of this water body is located within the Sandy Run Area of Fort Washington State Park. No portion of the Sandy Run Creek located north of the SEPTA R5 rail line is currently protected, most likely due to the fact that this area is occupied mainly by light commercial and industrial development. Below the Sandy Run Area, small portions of the creek are bordered by various institutional uses.

Summary Analysis of Unprotected Resources

- 1. Concentration of Resources** · A sizable portion of the parks within the Township lies along or near these water bodies, as do a number of trails, with more proposed in the future. The permanent protection of these remaining unprotected parcels would create a concentrated ribbon of land and resources traversing the Township.
- 2. Environmental Protection Function** · By nature, stream and creek corridors are centers for environmental dynamics. When healthy, they provide relief from flooding, filter and reduce runoff, and promote healthy aquatic life. Portions of both watercourses are already the sites of extensive flooding problems. Preservation of the remaining parcels in this area would stop existing flooding problems from worsening and create opportunities for the mitigation of existing problems.
- 3. Compatibility with Community Goals** · The continued preservation of properties along the Wissahickon and Sandy Run Creeks works toward the fulfillment of a number of goals set forth in this Open Space Plan. Specifically, preservation efforts would help to forward Goal #3 - Preserve and protect the Township's natural resources and their ecological systems, and Goal #4 - Provide every community with a means of access to open space.
- 4. Contribution to Community Identity or Cultural Heritage** · Completion of the Wissahickon Creek greenway would be a regional attraction and model for techniques to preserve the function and character of water bodies within the region. This would further promote Whitemarsh as an environmentally aware and responsible municipality.

Protection of the Steep Wooded Slopes of the Miquon and the Riverfront Districts

As the landform of Whitemarsh Township nears the Schuylkill River, the terrain becomes very steep. The severity of the slopes located in this area make it a less attractive site for development. As the region consumes available land, however, those areas previously not considered for development are being reconsidered. Large portions of this area are currently the site of offices and institutional establishments, however several large parcels located in the southwestern portion of the Township could face development pressure in the near future.

- 1. Environmental Protection Function** · The steep slopes in this area are extremely susceptible to

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degradation from any form of disturbance. Small changes in the existing vegetation could quickly cause significant erosion and stability problems. Permanent preservation of available parcels would help to lessen the impacts caused as development encroaches on the River.

2. *Compatibility with Community Goals* · The preservation of properties located on the steep slopes descending to the Schuylkill River would fulfill a number of goals set forth by Whitemarsh Township. Goal #1 addresses the preservation of undeveloped land and natural features within the Township. Goal #3 is concerned with the general protection of existing natural resources in Whitemarsh. Goal #4 addresses the ability of Township residents to access the Schuylkill River. Any increase in the preservation of this area would create opportunities to enhance River access. The steep wooded slopes descending to the River in this section of the Township offer some of the most dramatic views found throughout. Additional preservation of these views would also satisfy Goal #2, to protect and enhance the important viewsheds of the Township.

3. *Contribution to Community Identity or Cultural Heritage* · Although Whitemarsh Township shares its entire southern border with the Schuylkill River, most residents don't associate the amenities of the river with their Township. Preservation and promotion of the resources along the Schuylkill would help to give Whitemarsh an identity as a "riverfront" community.

Erdenheim Farm

Erdenheim Farm is composed of four separate parcels totaling approximately 450 acres in size and is located in the Stenton/Wissahickon District. The Angus Tract is located south of Flourtown and Thomas Roads. The Sheep Tract is bordered by Stenton Avenue, Flourtown Road and the Quarry Hole #2. The Equestrian Tract is bordered by Stenton Avenue, West Mill Road, the Carson Valley School and Northwestern Avenue and is partially located in Springfield Township. The Natural Lands Trust tract is bordered by Stenton Avenue and Flourtown and Thomas Roads. The total acreage encompassed by these three parcels represents a significant expanse of undeveloped land that is extremely susceptible to development.

1. *Environmental Protection Function* · The location of these parcels adjacent to the Wissahickon Creek gives them an extreme level of environmental significance. Their current level of development contributes minimal amount of runoff and stormwater to the Wissahickon Creek during rain events. Any development occurring here would vastly increase the amounts of impervious surface and in turn increase runoff rates and downstream flooding. Permanent protection of these parcels would allow them to be maintained as a natural area helping to infiltrate storm water from the surrounding residential areas, thereby preventing future problems as well as mitigating existing problems.

2. *Compatibility with Community Goals* · Erdenheim Farm is the largest tract to be directly threatened by development in Whitemarsh Township. Preservation of the Farm would satis-

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fy a significant number of community goals. The loss of these parcels would represent a significant loss of agricultural land and open space, both of which contribute to the scenic character of the Township. Their preservation would help to satisfy Open Space Plan Goals #1, #2, and #3. These goals specifically address preservation of undeveloped land and agricultural uses and protection and enhancement of the Township's aesthetic and scenic character.

- 3. *Contribution to Community Identity or Cultural Heritage*** · Whitemarsh Township is recognized as a relatively rural and agrarian Township, within suburban Philadelphia. Since Erdenheim Farm is the largest remaining agricultural parcel within Whitemarsh, its preservation would help to maintain the Township's rural character.

Highway Materials, Inc. Quarry

The Quarry owned by Highway Materials, Inc. is a complex comprised of three separate "pits" located on approximately 298 acres of land south of the intersections of Joshua Road and Stenton Avenue in the Stenton/Wissahickon District. The middle of the three pits, bound between Joshua Road and Stenton Avenue, is filled with water. Bordering the Quarry's southeast side is the Erdenheim Sheep Tract. The Conrail freight line passes to the north. When completed, the Cross County Trail will converge with the freight line at Joshua Road and follow it along the northwestern border of the Quarry. The Whitemarsh Township 2003 Comprehensive Plan proposes an on-street sidewalk pathway to extend the length of Joshua Road, which bisects a portion of the Quarry. Additionally, a spur of the Wissahickon Trail traverses

the property along Stenton Avenue, from Erdenheim Farm to where it joins the Cross County Trail at Joshua Road.

- 1. *Concentration of Resources*** · The central portion of Whitemarsh Township, where the Quarry is located, is the location of considerable amounts of presently preserved and potential open space. Adjacent to the Quarry are the Sunnybrook Golf Club, the Philadelphia Cricket Club, and Erdenheim Sheep Farm. In close proximity to the Quarry are a significant number of additional areas of potential and presently preserved open space, including the remainder of the Erdenheim Tract, Fort Washington State Park and Wissahickon Valley Park. The preservation of the Quarry would create a core network of open space located in the center of Whitemarsh and exceeding 1,500 acres.

- 2. *Compatibility with Community Goals*** · The sprawling expanse and lake in the Quarry site create the potential for expansive vistas since the property stretches along miles of scenic roadway. Protection of the aesthetic and scenic character of the Township is the intent of Goal #25 set forth by the Open Space Plan.

Large Undeveloped/Underdeveloped Parcels North of the Pennsylvania Turnpike in the Broad Axe District

The northwestern portion of Whitemarsh Township, north of the Pennsylvania Turnpike and west of the Wissahickon Creek is primarily composed of large country estates/residences, other large residential parcels, and significant parcels of land along

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the Wissahickon Creek. The country estate/residences are parcels averaging 12 acres in size, 40 acres or more. These parcels create a pastoral gateway to Whitemarsh from the surrounding Townships. Currently these parcels are unprotected. As regional development pressures and land values increase, it will become increasingly difficult for these land owners to resist selling these properties, despite their desire to maintain them as large estates.

- 1. Concentration of Resources** · The concentrated arrangement of these parcels creates a unique opportunity for the creation of an agricultural or country residence district within Whitemarsh. There is already a significant amount of preserved open space along the Wissahickon Creek. It is rare to find such a concentration of protected land and undeveloped parcels in the Philadelphia Region.
- 2. Compatibility with Community Goals** · Permanent protection of these country residences is at the core of Whitemarsh Township's Open Space Preservation goals. Goal #1 states the Township's intent to work with large landowners to preserve remaining significant tracts of open space. Goal #2 supports the preservation of agricultural lands and important viewsheds, both prevalent in this area.
- 3. Contribution to Community Identity or Cultural Heritage** · These large land parcels serve as a gateway to Township visitors. It is their first introduction to the distinctive character of the Township. Preserving the area's current land uses will help

sustain the rural nature for which Whitemarsh is so widely appreciated.

Additional Unprotected Resources for Potential Acquisition and Protection

Within Whitemarsh Township a considerable amount of additional unprotected resources exists. Though many of these parcels are smaller in size and are not directly addressed in the goals of this Open Space Plan, they are worthy of consideration for preservation. These parcels were identified in the 1996 Open Space and Environmental Resource Protection Plan and the 2003 Whitemarsh Township Comprehensive Plan. Additional information pertaining to these properties was gleaned from audits of the aforementioned plans, which occurred in the beginning stages of this planning process. These additional unprotected resources are listed below.

Privately Held Significant Land Holdings

There are 75 significant institutionally-owned land holdings within the Township that represent an impressive 682 acres. Privately owned open space includes 48 land holdings encompassing 1,427 acres, and 11 tracts of agricultural lands total 426 acres. One of the largest privately held land types in the Township are golf courses. None of these properties have development protections or deed restrictions. Some of the larger privately owned significant land holdings in the Township include:

ACE Country Club · Miquon District (See #M2 on Map #19 Miquon/Riverfront District Relevant Parcels) This 265-acre parcel is located east of Harts Lane and Barren Hill Roads and south of Ridge Pike, near the border with Springfield Township and the City

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of Philadelphia. An unnamed tributary of the Manor Creek flows from the north to the south along the central axis of the property. A significant portion of the golf course is located in the flood plains associated with this unnamed creek and the Manor Creek. The land form in the southern portion of the property contains areas of steep slopes, many over 25%, and a pristine spring-fed marsh. This property is extremely important to the future flood control of these creeks and the land downstream from this location.

Carson Valley School · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S4 on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) This school is located on the border of Springfield Township and Whitemarsh Townships.

Erdenheim Farm (Angus) · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S1a on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) The 97-acre parcel lies at the intersection of Flourtown and Thomas Roads.

Erdenheim Farm Tract (Sheep Tract) · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S1b on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) The farm owns 104 acres of land located along Stenton Avenue.

Colonial Elementary School · Central District (See #1 on Map #17 Central District Relevant Parcels) The School District owns 26 acres adjacent to the Plymouth Whitemarsh High School.

George Washington Memorial Cemetery · Stenton/Wissahickon District The Cemetery owns 90 acres of

land south of Stenton Avenue and west of the Pennsylvania Turnpike.

Germantown Academy · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S12 on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) The Academy owns 110 acres of land at the corner of Sheaff Lane and Morris Road. A portion of this property includes large undeveloped wooded area.

Green Valley Country Club · Central District (See #C7 on Map #17 Central District Relevant Parcels) This 183-acre parcel is situated between Germantown Pike, Ridge Pike and Joshua Road in the south central portion of the Township. It is located across Germantown Pike from Miles Park and just north of Kline Park. The Tower Fields parcel is located adjacent to the course's northeast boundary. The Spring Mill Creek crosses through the center of this property.

Highway Materials Inc. Quarry (Hole #1, Hole #2, and Hole #3) · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S3a, S3b and S3c on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) The Quarry comprises approximately 298 acres of land around Flourtown Road and Stenton Avenue.

Hill at Whitemarsh (CCRC) · Stenton/Wissahickon District The Hill at Whitemarsh owns 94 acres of land west of Thomas Road and south of the Erdenheim Angus farm.

Masonic Home · Central District The Masonic Home owns 22 acres on Ridge Pike adjacent to Springfield Township.

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McNeil Pharmaceuticals · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S9 on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) This property consists of 111 acres of land located between Camp Hill and Valley Green Roads.

Philadelphia Cricket Club · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S6a and #S6b on Map # 18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) This 312-acre club consists of two golf courses separated by the Conrail railroad line and associated right-of-way. Both parcels are located just north of Stenton Avenue and east of Joshua Road. Hole #1 of the Quarry is located between the southern portion of the two halves. The north is bordered by Fort Washington State park and an area of single family detached housing. The State Park also wraps around, and forms the eastern edge of, one of the golf courses. The Erdenheim Farm Sheep Tract, as well as single family detached housing, makes up the southern border. Lorraine Run traverses directly across the center of both parcels, before its confluence with the Wissahickon Creek in Fort Washington State Park. At least one-half of the total property is located within the 100-year flood plain.

Plymouth Whitemarsh High School · Central District (See #1 on Map # 17 Central District Relevant Parcels) The school owns 104 acres located along Stenton Avenue. The School District owns 65 acres located on Germantown Pike, east of Butler Pike.

St. Thomas Church · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S15 on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) The church owns approximately 40

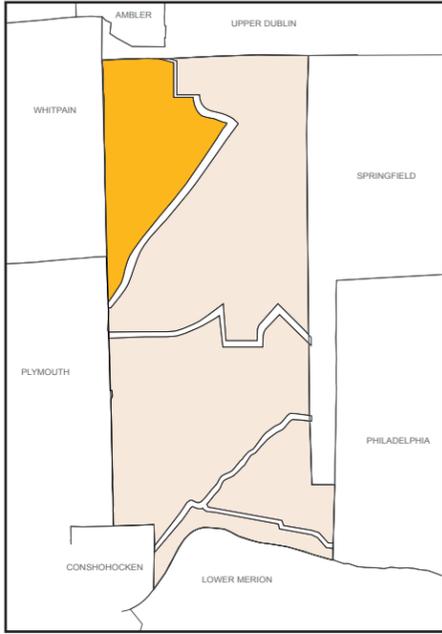
acres of land located at the corner of Bethlehem Pike and Camp Hill Road

Sunnybrook Golf Club · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S7 on Map #18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) This 215-acre golf club is located along Stenton Avenue at its intersection with Joshua Road and stretches to the south and west, just north of the Conrail railroad line. Most of the surrounding land consists of single-family detached housing and a limited amount of office space, except for the Quarry Hole #3, a significant land parcel on the other side of the Conrail railroad line to the south. A small portion of the club, in this area, is located within the Lorraine Run's flood plain.

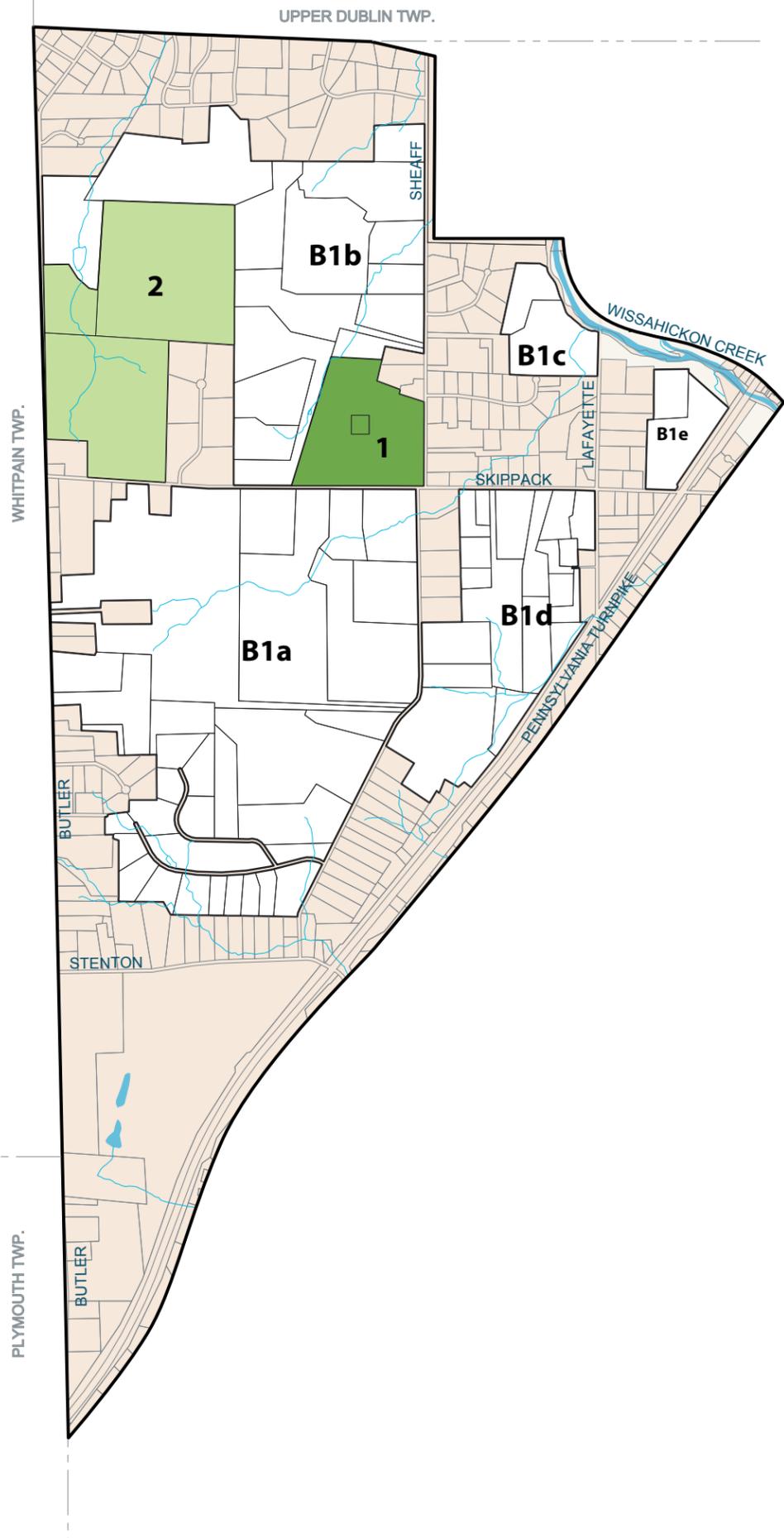
Whitemarsh Elementary School · Central District (See #4 on Map #17 Central District Relevant Parcels) The school encompasses 15 acres on Joshua Road, south of Flourtown Road.

Whitemarsh Valley Country Club · Stenton/Wissahickon District (See #S5 on Map # 18 Stenton/Wissahickon District Relevant Parcels) This 236-acre golf club occupies an area between Thomas Road, Springfield Township and the Wissahickon Creek on Whitemarsh's eastern border. The course is both bordered and traversed by significant portions of the Wissahickon Creek and almost all of the parcel is located within this creek's 100-year flood plain. The north end of the Country Club is bordered by Erdenheim Farm. This property's location makes it an important part of the undeveloped corridor protecting the creek as it passes through Whitemarsh.

MAP #16 BROAD AXE DISTRICT RELEVANT PARCELS



Context Map



Map Key:

Existing Public Open Space Areas

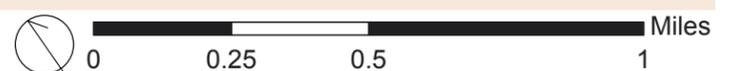
1 The Highlands

Other Protected Open Space Areas

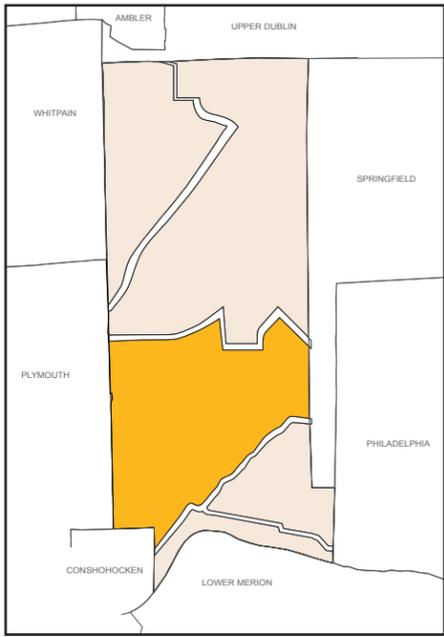
2 Willow Lake Farms - (Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association)

Unprotected Relevant Parcels

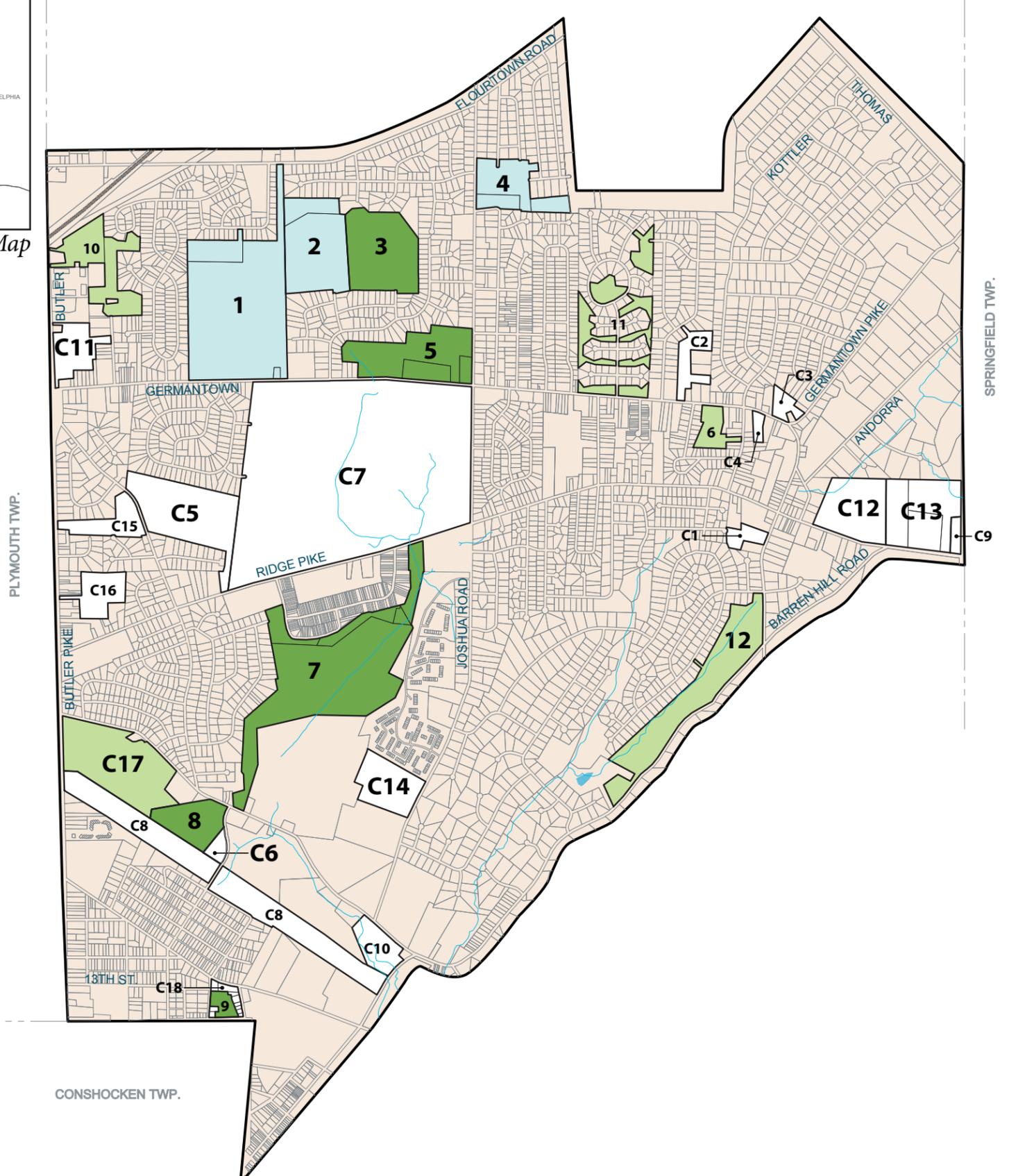
B1a - B1e Country Estate Property Clusters



MAP #17 CENTRAL DISTRICT RELEVANT PARCELS



Context Map



Map Key:

Existing Public Open Space Areas

- 1 Plymouth Whitmarsh School Complex
- 2 Victory Fields Athletic School Complex
- 3 McCarthy Park - (Whitemarsh Township)
- 4 Whitemarsh Elementary School
- 5 Miles Park - (Whitemarsh Township)
- 6 Whitemarsh Township Municipal Complex
- 7 Kline Park - (Whitemarsh Township)
- 8 Cedar Grove Park - (Whitemarsh Township)
- 9 Leeland Park - (Whitemarsh Township)

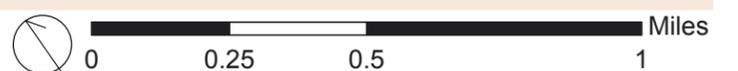
Other Protected Open Space Areas

- 10 Plymouth Meeting Association
- 11 Whitemarsh Woods
- 12 The Preserve

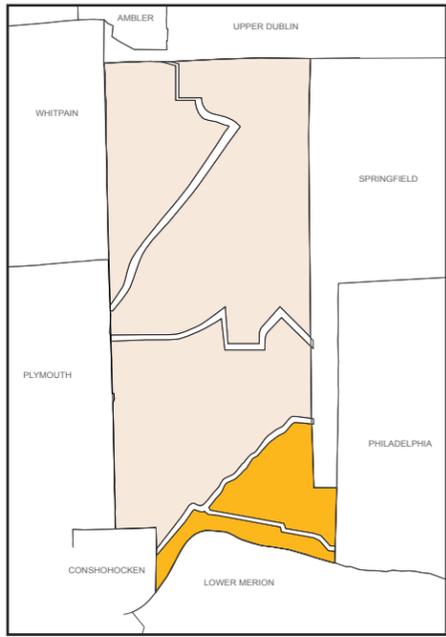
Unprotected Relevant Parcels

- C1 Tree Farm Property - 2389-2391 Harts Lane

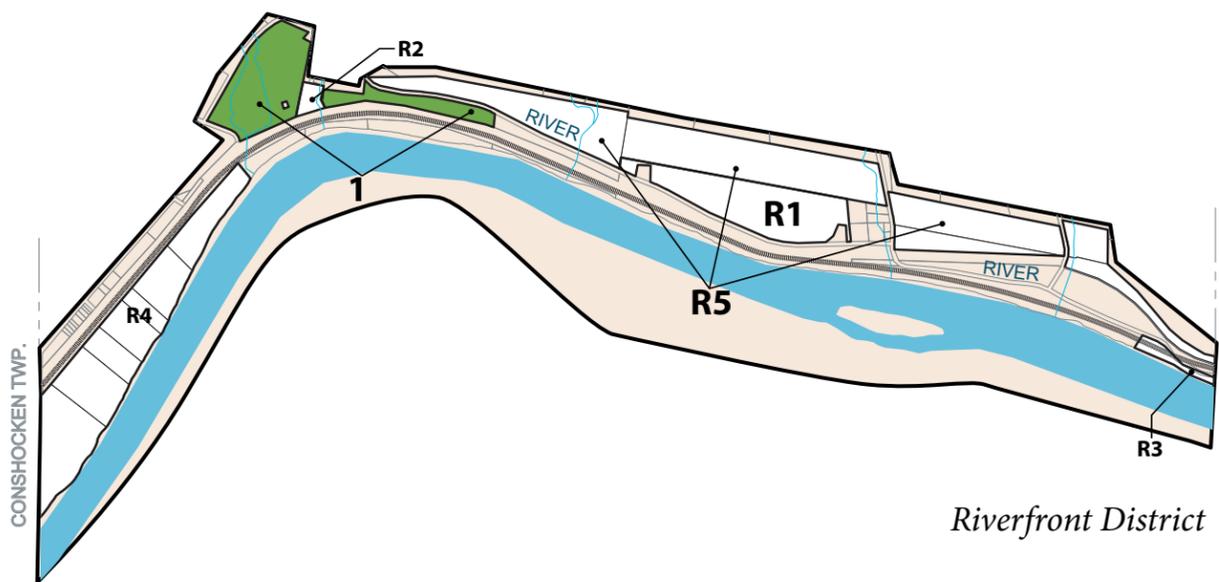
- C2 Nolen Property
- C3 Barren Hill Firehouse - 647 Germantown Pike
- C4 - 634 Germantown Road
- C5 WZZD - Radio Tower Site
- C6 Gambone Property
- C7 Green Valley Country Club - 201 Ridge Pike
- C8 PECO Right of Way
- C9 Teece Property - 9303 Ridge Pike
- C10 Aqua PA Bubbling Springs Property
- C11 Abolition Hall - 4006 Butler Pike
- C12 - 717 Ridge Pike
- C13 - 801 Ridge Pike
- C14 Zaid Property
- C15 Alan Corson House
- C16 Ply-Mar Swim Club
- C17 Sherry Lake - 1801 Butler Pike
- C18 Leeland Park Properties



MAP #18 MIQUON / RIVERFRONT DISTRICTS RELEVANT PARCELS



Context Map



Riverfront District

Map Key:

Existing Public Open Space Areas

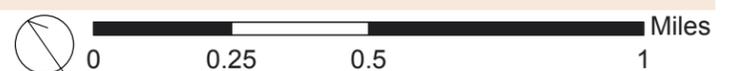
- 1** Spring Mill Park - (Montgomery County)
- 2** Fairmont Park Commission - 1200 River Road (City of Philadelphia)

Other Protected Open Space Areas

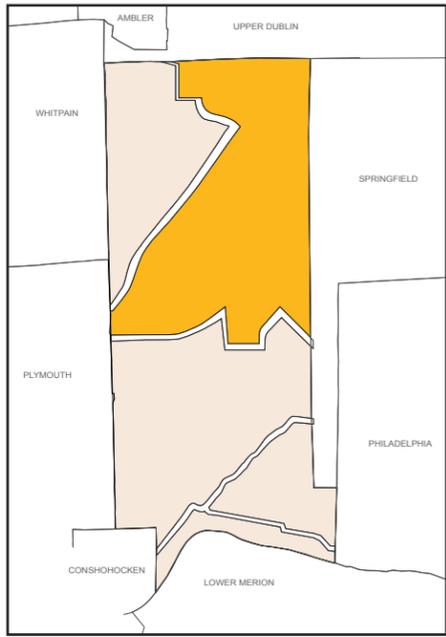
- 3** Girl Scout Property - 2101 Manor Road
- 4** Restrictive Covenants
- 5** Whitmarsh Township
- 6** Easements

Unprotected Relevant Parcels

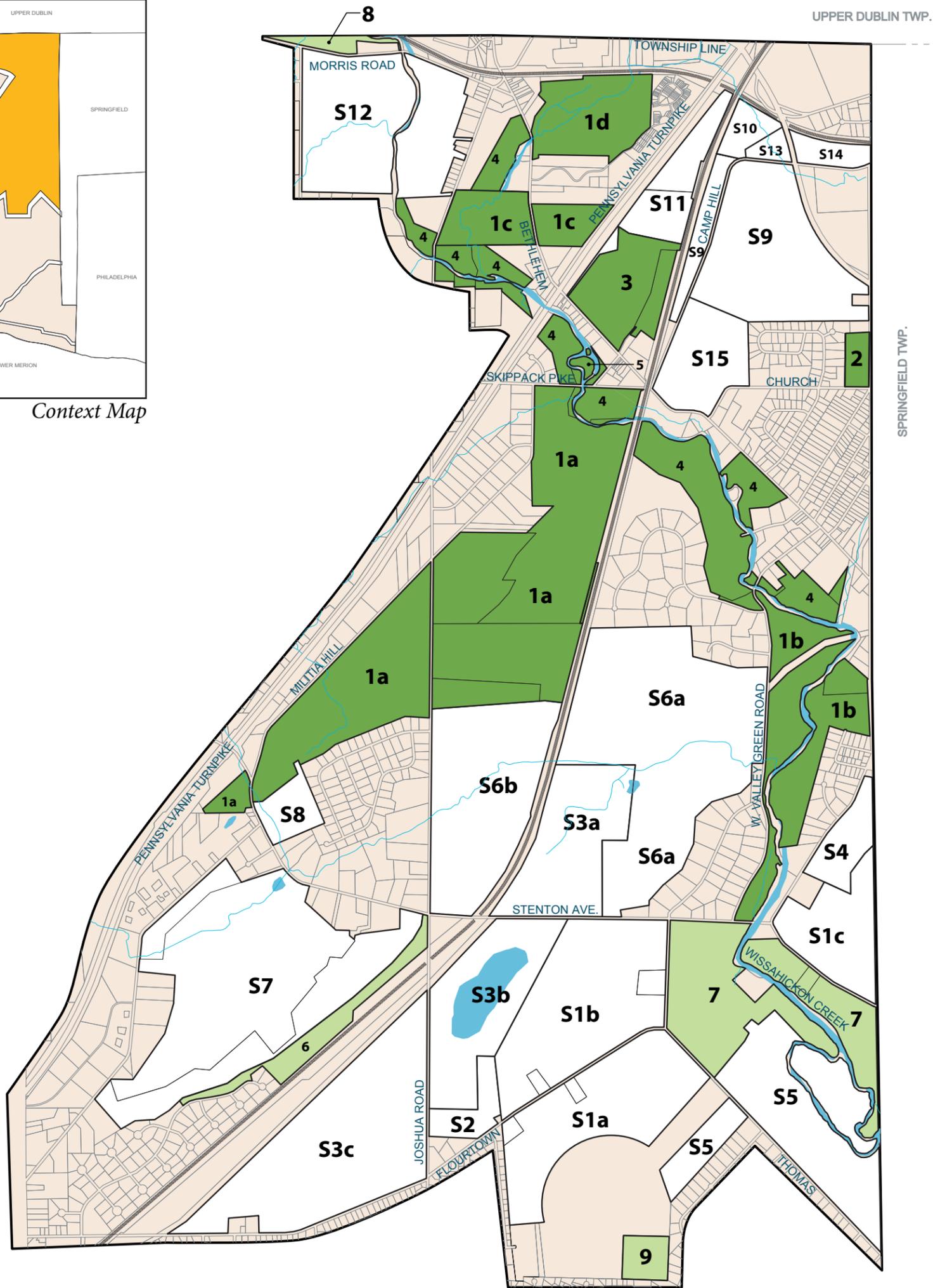
- R1** Ashford Farms
- R2** - 200 Center Street
- R3** River's Edge Properties
- R4** Riverfront Redevelopment Zone
- R5** PECO Right of Way
- M1** East 33 Property
- M2** Ace Country Club
- M3** Slawek Property - 2065 Harts Lane
- M4** Miquon School - 2025 Harts Lane



MAP #19 STENTON/ WISSAHICKON DISTRICT RELEVANT PARCELS



Context Map



Map Key:

Existing Public Open Space Areas

- 1a** Fort Washington State Park - Militia Hill
- 1b** Fort Washington State Park - Flourtown Area
- 1c** Fort Washington State Park - Fort Hill
- 1d** Fort Washington State Park - Sandy Run Area
- 2** Valley Green Park - (Whitemarsh Township)
- 3** Hope Lodge - (State)
- 4** Wissahickon Valley Park - (Montgomery County)
- 5** Mather's Mill - (State)

Other Protected Open Space Areas

- 6** Sunnybrook Golf Club Easement
- 7** Erdenheim Farm Estate Parcel - 667 Thomas Road
- 8** Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association - 12 Morris Road
- 9** Woodland Easement

Unprotected Relevant Parcels

- S1a** Erdenheim Farm Angus Tract - 504-548 Flourtown Road
- S1b** Erdenheim Farm Sheep Tract - 5051 Flourtown Road
- S1c** Erdenheim Farm Horse Tract - Stenton Avenue

- S2** KYW Radio Tower Site - 5006 Joshua Road
- S3a** Quarry Hole #1
- S3b** Quarry Hole #2
- S3c** Quarry Hole #3
- S4** Carson Valley School
- S5** Whitemarsh Country Club - 815 Thomas Road
- S6a** Philadelphia Cricket Club Golf Course #1 - 6025 W. Valley Green Road
- S6b** Philadelphia Cricket Club - Golf Course #2
- S7** Sunnybrook Golf Club - 398 Stenton Avenue
- S8** Burke Property - 252 Stenton Avenue
- S9** McNeil Undeveloped Lands
- S10** McNeil Undeveloped Lands
- S11** PECO Maintenance Yard
- S12** Germantown Academy Undeveloped Lands
- S13** Solomon Tract
- S14** SEPTA
- S15** St. Thomas Church

