

CHAPTER 9
OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN

“Open space” is a general term that refers broadly to agricultural, recreational, and natural lands. These lands often collectively form a rural atmosphere and a backdrop to a township that provide scenic, economic, and environmental benefits that are sometimes taken for granted. As the area develops, it becomes clear that unprotected open space is vulnerable to being lost, primarily to new residential subdivisions. Therefore, the goal of an open space plan must be to establish *protected* open space. Legally protecting open space requires considerable planning as well as financial resources, and generally involves a landowner and general public education and outreach program, since it is virtually always conducted on a voluntary basis with landowners with broad community support.

This chapter describes the important attributes of Franklin’s open space resources; and discusses how to protect them. It strives to achieve the policies and management approaches set forth in Chester County’s Open Space Plan, *Linking Landscapes* (2001). That document may be referred to for in-depth discussions of the subject matters presented in this chapter.

Properties can be protected through easements – both conservation and agricultural easements – and through fee simple ownership, whether purchase or donated. Deed restrictions are not generally considered enforceable enough, and zoning restrictions and limitations alone can be subject to change. Even municipal lands, including parks, are sometimes subject to re-use, though that rarely happens.

The goal of an open space plan should include a discussion of how protected open space can fit into a community’s goals for its future. Protected open space, to maximize its benefits and effectiveness, should be linked into a network or a system whereby the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A natural greenway corridor is one example; a recreational trail system is another; and a viable farming community is a third. Additionally, the plan should lay the groundwork for meeting the future recreational needs of the Township.

BACKGROUND

Franklin Township has a relatively small amount of protected land to date, and no lands protected as agricultural lands. The largest single piece of protected land is the Township’s Crossan Park, 130.5 acres located along the West Branch of the White Clay Creek in the eastern portion of the Township. Additionally, Natural Lands Trust, a land conservation group, owns a piece of mostly wooded property called the Foote Farm. Other than that, the only protected lands are those set aside as part of the development process. One of these sites includes an approximately 50-acre wooded area held under conservation easement to the Brandywine Conservancy. There are no County or State lands in Franklin Township.

In all, currently (2005) protected land includes:

- Township lands: Crossan Park 130.5 acres
- Natural Lands Trust owned: Foote Farm 60.2 acres

- Brandywine Conservancy eased: Stonegate 129.9 acres
- Other HOA lands: 21 parcels 104.3 acres.

This total of 424.9 acres represents approximately 5% of the Township's 8,282 acres. However, no discussion of Franklin Township's Open space resources is complete without mention of Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area, located in Maryland along Franklin's entire southern border. This public park is about 5,600 acres in size (two-thirds the size of all of Franklin Township), and contains many nature-oriented and recreational facilities, including a large portion of Big Elk Creek and many trails. It is a well-known destination for horse-riders.

Additionally, one private (unprotected) recreational area occurs in the Township - Chisel Creek Golf Course, which is 107 acres in size.

Many opportunities still remain for significant open space preservation in Franklin, however. For example, there are 4,764 acres of land in the Township on parcels greater than 10 acres in size. Franklin residents approved an open space referendum in the fall of 2002 by about a 70-30 margin. This referendum, held under the terms of Act 153, asked residents if they wished to levy a new property tax on themselves at the rate of \$0.05 per \$100 assessed property valuation for open space preservation purposes. The Board of Supervisors enacted the tax after the vote, and the Township now earns approximately \$125,000 per year in open space preservation funds.

To better implement the Township's open space preservation goals, the Board formed an Open Space Committee, which is currently very active. The Committee meets twice per month and has educated itself about preservation techniques and opportunities. With assistance from the Brandywine Conservancy, the Committee has developed a set of priority natural resource and agricultural parcels for preservation, as well as a conceptual greenways plan, which is discussed in Chapter 3, and a trails plan, which is presented here. Armed with new training and priority parcel information, the Committee has begun contacting landowners with whom the Township wishes to engage in dialogue about the future of their properties.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION

With strong support from a Community Values Survey undertaken for the Township in 2003-04, the Committee and the Township in general has a new enthusiasm for preserving farmland in the Township. Farmland with prime agricultural soils is also specifically identified in the Municipalities Planning Code (MPC) as a natural resource worthy of protection (see pages 1-2 and 1-3). Indeed, Chester County's plan for protecting open space, *Linking Landscapes*, makes the argument that Chester County contains some of the most productive non-irrigated farmland soils in the country.

Although the Township has lost hundreds of farmed acres to development, much in recent years, there are still thousands of farmed acres left. There are approximately 938 acres of Agricultural Security Areas (ASAs) in Franklin, for example, which appears to include less than half of the actual farmed acreage. ASAs are voluntary, and confer no protective status to a farm as a property can relatively easily drop out of the program. Properties under Pennsylvania's Act 319 and Act 515, both of which assess a property based on its agricultural rather than its "fair

market” value, are more numerous, totaling 3,957 acres in Act 319 and 171 acres in Act 515, for a total of 4,128 acres (almost exactly half of the Township) enrolled in both programs. Again, neither of these programs confers long-term protection to farmland, although they do show that a large amount of the Township is still actively farmed.

There is an annual combined County-State grant program available to purchase agricultural easements on farmed properties that meet certain criteria. This is a very competitive program, however, and obviously farmers must be willing to apply. For that to occur, farmers must believe in the future of farming in Franklin Township, and they must be prepared to accept less than full residential market value. The County-State grant program can offer no more than \$12,000 per acre for an agricultural easement, which is less than what developers can pay on most properties. With its own funds, however, Franklin Township can make the offer more competitive. Moreover, with its own funds, Franklin Township can participate in a new County-wide agricultural easement grant challenge program with Chester County. Under the terms of this program, the County will pay half up to \$12,000 per acre for an agricultural easement with matching Township funds.

One of the important aspects of a farmland preservation program is to ensure the long-term viability of farming as a business. This can involve retaining a certain “critical mass” of farms in an area, and has ramifications beyond the borders of Franklin alone. To date, not one single farm has been permanently preserved in Franklin Township, although the Strawbridge tract, the southern most property in Franklin Township adjoining Fair Hill, is a worthy candidate. Most of the townships to the east and north of Franklin are not remaining heavily in farming, and even those to the west are questionable. Yet all of those surrounding townships do contain farms that are preserved as farms.

However, immediately south of and adjacent to the privately owned portion of Fair Hill in Franklin Township is the Fair Hill Rural Legacy Area, a 16,045-acre area in northern Cecil County, Maryland (also known as the Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area). Maryland’s Rural Legacy Program was created in 1997 to protect large, contiguous tracts of the State’s valued cultural and natural resource lands through grants made to local applicants. Described on the program website (www.dnr.state.md.us/rurallegacy/rlprogram/allrurallegacyareas.html) as “Cecil County’s most productive and economically important agricultural region,” the goal of the Area “is to improve water quality in the Big and Little Elk Creek watersheds and buffering and expanding the state-owned Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area, a landscape indicative of Cecil County’s rural and natural heritage.”

Two forms of agricultural use that seem to be remaining strong in the Franklin area are the mushroom industry, which needs a steady supply of hay as a mushroom-growing substrate, and the equine industry, including the breeding, boarding, and riding of horses. In addition to that, there are a small but growing number of specialty farms in the area, including a vineyard, a native plant nursery, and an ostrich farm. Collectively these agricultural uses are worthy of preservation and conservation. (See Goals & Objectives on page 2-7.)

NATURAL RESOURCES PRESERVATION

Natural resources in Franklin have been described and discussed above in Chapter 3. To summarize, Franklin Township has over 2,000 acres of woodlands, including 24 individual woodlands that have been proposed herein as woodlands of higher value, or Class I and II woodlands. There are also about 100 acres of wetlands, including one over 20 acres in size, and over 50 miles of streams, including many miles of the nationally-designated Wild and Scenic White Clay Creek. There are a handful of rare and endangered plant and animal species in the township, including the federally-threatened bog turtle. There are resources well-worth protection and proper management.

As mentioned above, a set of priority natural resource (and agricultural) parcels for preservation have been identified through the work of the Open Space Committee. These resources largely come together in the proposed greenways plan, which is a set of natural resource and wildlife corridors that tie the Township's natural resources into one larger whole, a system that is designed to be larger than the sum of its parts. The proposed greenways are described in detail in Chapter 3.

As with agricultural lands, there are County and State grant programs that can help fund preservation work. These programs are not as well funded as agricultural preservation programs, however.

One additional factor, however, is that in *Linking Landscapes*, a lack of County parks in the Franklin Township area was identified (see Figure 4.8: County Park 7.5-Mile Service Areas). County parks are described as "sub-regional," and are to reach between 400 and 999 acres in size, according to Chester County park standards. County parks are designed primarily to provide passive recreational uses, focusing on wildlife and natural resources. Due to limited land availability, instead of one large 400-999-acre facility, however, the County expects that "future County parks may consist of a small number of nearby parcels linked by trails or wildlife corridors, all of which total 400-600 acres" (*Linking Landscapes*, p. 4-18). Although Franklin Township might provide such a combination of sites, an initial investigation into the willingness of the County to acquire lands has led to the conclusion that a new County park here or elsewhere is not likely in the near future.

A TRAILS NETWORK

The only existing trail in Franklin Township is located within the Township Park, Crossan Park. Yet with all the residential development in the Township, and with trail destinations located both inside and outside of the Township, a trails system could be very popular. The most common form of recreation participated in by respondents to the 2004 Community Values Survey was "walking, hiking, or jogging," and that by a sizeable margin (71% versus 51% for the next highest response). Walking, hiking, or jogging was also selected as that activity which most respondents would support Township action to facilitate.

A proposed trails plan was developed under the auspices of the Open Space Committee that includes approximately 19.6 miles, identifies 10 "destinations," 5 regional trail corridors (that cross into adjacent municipalities), and roughly 5 local trail corridors (that are primarily within

Franklin Township). Figure 9-1, *Recreational Resources Plan*, depicts trail opportunities, along with other open space and recreation opportunities. One goal of the network would be to connect all residential communities to a trail. Another is to provide for equestrian, but not motorized recreational, uses.

Trail destinations include two locations within the Township – Crossan Park and the Village of Kemblesville, though of course scenic areas and fishing spots along the White Clay Creek and elsewhere are also destinations, though difficult to pinpoint.

The eight trail destinations located outside of Franklin Township are generally connected by a regional trail, which is, by definition a trail that involves multi-municipal jurisdictions and efforts. Five such regional trails are proposed and discussed below:

- 1) Along the East Branch, White Clay Creek
- 2) Along the Middle Branch, White Clay Creek
- 3) Along the West Branch, White Clay Creek, including a PECO powerline corridor
- 4) Along and parallel to Big Elk Creek
- 5) Along the southern boundary of the Township

The East Branch, White Clay Creek flows between London Grove and New Garden Townships through the far northeast corner of Franklin Township on just one tax parcel. A trail along that branch could eventually connect Avondale Borough, located about 1.5 miles to the north, and White Clay Creek State Park, located about 1.5 miles to the south. Both other Townships are working on protecting properties and constructing trails on their portions of the stream corridor. All three White Clay Creek corridors are seasonal trout fishing streams.

The Middle Branch, White Clay Creek flows about 2.8 miles across northern Franklin Township within a largely rural landscape that includes four historic structures and properties and one scenic vista point. State route 841 parallels the stream part of the distance, after which the stream flows to the east before taking an almost right-angle turn to the south. Here it enters a deep wooded glen, which it largely maintains, with the exception of the Chesterville Road crossing, until it exits the Township. A trail along this branch could connect West Grove Borough, located about 1.5 miles to the north, with White Clay Creek State Park, located about one mile to the southeast. London Grove Township is actively establishing a trail along their portion of this corridor.

The West Branch, White Clay Creek flows about 2.5 miles across central Franklin Township through a mostly wet and wooded corridor, including a 23-acre wetland, the largest in Franklin Township and the largest in the Pennsylvania portion of the White Clay watershed. The stream exits the Township within Crossan Park. The western end of the stream corridor is wet and wooded within the immediate stream corridor, with houses nearby. Here it is thought best to move away from the stream and utilize an existing PECO powerline corridor. This trail could connect from the Avon Grove Middle and Elementary schools, located about 3.5 miles to the northwest, and White Clay Creek State Park, located about one mile to the east.

The trail corridor along Big Elk Creek includes a trail under development in Elk Township along Springlawn Road (which parallels the creek for about 1.8 miles). There are three historic structures located near the Big Elk on Strickersville Road. From there it's less than one mile and only across one property to Fair Hill NRMA, Maryland.

The regional trail corridor proposed along the southern boundary of the Township (and the Commonwealth) follows the historic Mason-Dixon Line and could connect to a trail by the same name under development in London Britain Township. That trail, in turn, is designed to connect to White Clay Creek State Park.

There are also roughly (5) local trail corridors proposed, depending how you count them. These corridors serve to connect local residents to the regional trails, as well as having their own accents and points of interest.

One trail corridor parallels Appleton Road, connecting Kemblesville Village to Fair Hill NRMA. This trail will pass through a new development underway. A second trail corridor follows the unpaved Mount Olivet Road from the Big Elk Creek where it splits into two branches. The western branch crosses the Foote Farm and continues on to Route 841 and a scenic vista there. The eastern branch follows Franklin Road, and weaves through existing developments to Kemblesville.

Going north from Kemblesville are two proposed trails, both of which lead to the West Branch of the White Clay Creek, one at Crossan Park. Another proposed trail connects the West Branch trail to the Middle Branch trail primarily by following School House Lane, which affords several scenic overlooks of the West Branch and Middle Branch landscapes and other surrounding areas. Finally, a trail corridor is proposed that connects the Middle Branch trail to the East Branch trail along Church Hill Road.

This conceptual trails plan would benefit from further detailed site-specific analysis. Many of the trails can be established or provided for during the development process. There are County and State trail planning, acquisition, and construction grants. Additionally, there are two small private local grants administered through SECCRA (Southern Chester County Refuse Authority) and PECO that may be able to provide funding for trail planning work.

The overall trails plan is consistent with “Linking Landscapes”, the Open Space Element of the Chester County Comprehensive Plan. More information on Linking Landscapes can be obtained through the Chester County Planning Commission. The Linking Landscape Plan, adopted February 2002 and subtitled “A Plan for the Protected Open Space Network in Chester County, PA” includes numerous policies to which this plan is consistent. The Goals, Objective and Policies of Linking Landscapes are included in Appendix B.

RECREATIONAL FACILITIES

The Chester County Planning Commission, in the “Linking Landscapes” component of its comprehensive plan, provide standards for parks as follows:

Table 9-1: Recreation Park Standards (Chester County Planning Commission)

Type of Recreational Park	Service Radius	Minimum Acreage Standard	Maximum Population	Size of Recreational Park
Regional Park	30 miles (Equal to a 60 minute drive)	20 acres per 1,000 people	None	1,000 acres or more

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Sub-regional Park	7.5 miles (Equal to a 15 minute drive)	8.5 acres per 1,000 people	100,000	400 acres to 999 acres
Community Park	2.5 miles (Equal to a 5 minute drive or a 30 minute walk)	3.0 to 6.0 acres per 1,000 people	25,000	20 acres to 399 acres
Neighborhood Park	0.5 miles (Equal to a 15 minute walk)	2.5 to 3.5 acres per 1,000 people	5,000	0.5 acre to 19.9 acres
Mini Park	0.25 miles (Equal to an 8 minute walk)	0.25 acres per 1,000 people	2,000	0.01 acre to 0.49 acre

Franklin Township has ample service for regional parks, both inside and outside of Pennsylvania. Of Chester County's four state parks (White Clay Creek, Ridley Creek, Marsh Creek, and French Creek), Franklin lies within the service area of all but French Creek. Additionally, several state parks in Delaware (Brandywine Creek, Lums Pond, and Delaware portions of White Clay Creek) and Maryland (Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Areas) are also providing many recreation activities for regionally scaled parks. Fair Hill, in particular, offers a great opportunity to Township residents, with its 5,613 acres directly adjacent to the Township. White Clay Creek State Park, located approximately three miles southeast of Kemblesville is closest to Franklin Township. In 2005, the State of Delaware purchased a 125 acre golf course (the former Deerfield Golf & Tennis Club) to add to White Clay Creek State Park.

Sub-regional parks, generally provided in the form of County Parks, are less accessible to residents. At present, the nearest county parks are at least 10 miles from the Township. These parks often fill the gap between larger parks oriented towards passive recreation, and smaller, local parks with greater focus on active recreation. This absence goes beyond Franklin, and extends over much of the portions of Chester County near the PA-DE-MD line.

At present, Franklin Township has good access to community and neighborhood parks. Elwood Crossan Park is the principal park in the Township open for public use. The park, occupying 125 acres, has a number of facilities for active recreation, including tennis courts, 2 baseball diamonds, a basketball court, pavilions, picnic areas, gardens, a playground, walking trails, and a general purpose field. The Township is in the process of removing a defunct skateboard park, adapting the location to other uses.

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The Kemblesville Elementary School grounds provide a secondary area for active recreation. Though the school is no longer in active use, the grounds still have a multi-purpose athletic field, playground equipment, and a small trail.

A number of municipal parks are located outside of the Township. A survey of area facilities showed Franklin Township has more per capita facilities for active recreation than a majority of its neighboring municipalities.

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Table 9-2: Area Sports Facilities (Franklin Township)

Municipality / Borough	Athletic Fields (current)	Athletic Fields (pipeline)	Population
New Garden Township	1 soccer 1 baseball 1 beach volleyball	7 soccer fields Southern Chester County Soccer Association has approval to build 7 soccer fields on land jointly bought (or to be bought) by them and the Township. – Date not yet known.	9,083 (2002 census)
East Nottingham Township	0	Oxford Area Recreation Authority is in the Preliminary Stages – Number not known yet.	5,000
New London Township	1 (used for baseball, football practice and soccer practice)	0	5,000
Avondale Borough	2 softball	0	1,108
West Grove Borough	3 baseball 1 soccer 2 football	0	2,652
London Grove Township	0	Beginning stages of a master plan for an 80 acre park, will have athletic fields of some kind. Date not yet known.	6,500
London Britain Township (Nichols Park under Expansion)	1 baseball / soccer (outfield)	0	3,054
Penn Township	0	0	2,812 (2000 census)

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Elk Township	0	0	1,485
Kennett Township	Various Sports – No Concrete Numbers	0	7,100

RECREATIONAL NEEDS

In general, the citizens of Franklin Township are quite satisfied with the state of recreation within the Township. Of the 406 respondents to the “Community Values Survey,” 287 individuals (71%) felt the Township’s facilities were adequate to meet the needs of local residents. That was the greatest response affirming adequate facilities of any of the areas in question 4 of the survey. This is compared with only 58 respondents (14%) who felt there were inadequate opportunities for parks and recreation areas. An additional 61 respondents (15%) had no opinion on the matter.

The public indicated a gravity towards passive recreation. At the top of their preferences was “Walking/hiking/jogging”, with 289 (71%) persons currently participating in the activity. This was followed by the “Nature enjoyment/study” (208 respondents or 51%) and “Sight-seeing or pleasure driving” (189 respondents or 47%). These pursuits are only minimally dependent upon dedicated facilities, making them ideal for a rural township such as Franklin. The interest in these activities was followed by Bicycling (126 respondents or 31%), Fishing (95 respondents or 23%) and Swimming (92 respondents or 23%). Like the top three responses, these again indicate activities (with the exception of swimming) minimally dependent upon the provision of facilities by the Township.

FUTURE NEEDS

The “Linking Landscapes” component of the Chester County Comprehensive Plan assessed Franklin Township’s recreational needs as of 2000 and also projected them into the future. The County estimates the current community park needs at 23.1 acres, with no need for neighborhood or mini-parks. This need is met sufficiently by Elwood Crossan Park. By 2025, the County estimates this need to increase to 39.2 acres (an increase of roughly 70%), with the additional need of a neighborhood park. Though the Township would still have sufficient acreage, the neighborhood park would provide access to residents who may be on the opposite ends of the Township from Crossan Park. Additions to parkland adjacent to Township in London Britain Township would provide some service to Franklin residents, and may factor into the location of any future neighborhood park. Were this park to be created, at a current cost for park development of \$100,000/acre, this additional park space would cost nearly \$4 million to develop (not including the cost for land acquisition).

A vocal group representing athletic leagues within the Avon Grove School District expressed its desire for a number of facilities within Franklin Township for organized sporting activities. These facilities were centered primarily around athletic playing fields, and ancillary facilities such as parking lots and other amenities to support league play. However, despite a dedicated

lobby, these interests were not reflected by respondents to the survey, and there was no indication that residents desire expansion of these facilities.

This juxtaposition of wide interest in passive recreation, but less interest in Township action to facilitate these activities narrows the opportunities for Franklin, but also helps to define them. In particular, the Township can take advantage of gearing their facilities towards passive recreation. In addition, many of the most popular activities (walking, hiking, jogging, bicycling, etc.) would be well served by a trail system. Such a system would have the benefits of providing recreational opportunities, while fully leveraging existing park and recreational space.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Township should provide continued support for all kinds of open space preservation, and should initiate a special farmland preservation effort focused on prime agricultural land.
2. The Open Space Committee, in coordination with the Board of Supervisors, should continue to train and educate its members concerning open space preservation issues and practices, and take the lead on open space planning, landowner cultivation, and grant writing.
3. Township efforts should be uniform and integrated through all staff, and all consultants, Committees, Commissions, and the Board, with appropriately open lines of communication.
4. The Township should explore partnerships with Chester County regarding protection, development, and management of new open space lands.
5. The Township should be prepared to eventually own and manage a set of nature preserves or natural areas.
6. Natural resource areas that become protected should have natural area restoration plans developed for them that address invasive species issues and the lack of healthy populations of native plants and healthy natural areas (see page 3-21, *Recommendations for Chapter 3, Natural Resources*, as well).
7. Township park personnel should become more familiar with these concepts and practices.
8. Open Space Management Plans written for Homeowner Associations should also address these biological management issues. New turfed areas/ lawns should be minimized in Open Space Management Plans. Mechanisms for funding natural area restoration on HOA lands by developers should be explored.
9. A more detailed Township trails plan and feasibility study should be completed. A more detailed and refined trails plan should be incorporated into an Official Map of the Township.

10. Meanwhile, the Planning Commission and Township Engineer in particular should become more familiar with the trails plan, and work to incorporate trails and/or trail options into development proposals. The Township should be prepared to be the leading organization implementing the trails plan in Franklin Township.
11. The Township should explore the formation of a local Land Trust. The Land Trust could own and facilitate the management of small pieces of land that no other conservation entity may wish to own. The Land Trust should ease significant lands owned by Homeowner Associations created through the development process.
12. The Township should explore future sites for a new neighborhood park. The park between 0.5 and 19.9 acres would be sufficient for the purpose. Additionally, the park should be situated to provide recreational access to residents living outside of range of other parks.
13. Future park planning should be focused towards passive recreation opportunities. This is especially important given the lack of a county facility to provide these services.
14. The Township should leverage mandatory dedication of land for recreation and open space purposes with new development, to meet any new recreational and open space needs. This could be especially advantageous with the addition of any new neighborhood park. Incentives should be provided to offer connectivity between dedicated open space and existing park infrastructure.
15. The Township should coordinate with neighboring municipalities on future park needs to prevent redundant facilities. This could include intermunicipal park considerations at Elwood Crossan Park, possibly integrating it with facilities in London Britain Township. This would have the added benefit of helping minimize the effects of the lack of a County park at present.