

OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN

HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP Cumberland County, New Jersey



Prepared by:

**Hopewell Township
Environmental Commission**

**Final
October 2011**



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PUBLIC MEETINGS

All regular meetings of the Hopewell Township Environmental Commission and are open to the public. This Open Space and Recreation Plan (“OSRP”) was discussed at numerous Environmental Commission meetings beginning in October 2009 and continuing through October 2011. The original draft OSRP and all subsequent revised versions of the OSRP have been available for public review and comment on the Hopewell Township website throughout the review process.

An advertised public meeting was held in conjunction with the Hopewell Township Planning Board meeting on July 21, 2010, during which the draft OSRP was presented and public input was sought (Draft #1). The Action Plan items in the OSRP were discussed during the Planning Board meeting on August 18, 2010 and revisions to the Action Plan items were suggested by the Planning Board. A revised version of the OSRP Executive Summary (including the Action Plan items) was distributed to the Planning Board Plan prior to the September 15, 2010 meeting (Draft #2). Approximately 20 public participants attended the September 15, 2010 meeting and provided further input and suggestions.

A complete revision of the OSRP addressing all prior comments and suggestions was distributed to the Planning Board prior to the October 20, 2010 meeting (Draft #3). Several members of the public provided additional comments at the October 20th Planning Board meeting, mostly reiterating comments previously provided since they had not reviewed the prior incorporated revisions.

The two most vocal public participants provided marked-up pages and suggested deletions to a member of the Township Committee in mid-January 2011. Although these specific written comments may not represent the majority of Township residents, the Environmental Commission reviewed these comments and incorporated a number of revisions into the April 2011 revised draft OSRP (Draft #4). A written response to the formal comments was prepared and distributed with Draft #4 of the OSRP.

A second advertised public meeting was held in conjunction with the Hopewell Township Planning Board meeting on September 21, 2011, during which the revised draft OSRP (Draft #4) was presented and public input was again sought. Minor editorial comments were provided by a couple members of the Planning Board. Several public participants again raised questions regarding potential impacts of the OSRP and its recommendations for preservation/protection of critical environmental resources on farming operations within the Township. The Planning Board reiterated for public participants that the Township Master Plan clearly recognizes the importance of farming within the Township and that any future development ordinances potentially impacting farming operations would be subject to public review and comment in accordance with New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (NJSA 40:55D-1 et. seq.).



Final revisions to the OSRP suggested at the September 2011 public meeting were incorporated into the document by the Environmental Commission and the revised document posted to the Township website in early October 2011. Following the public notices required by Municipal Law Use Law (NJSA 40:55D-13), a final public meeting was held on October 19, 2011. This Open Space and Recreation Plan was subsequently adopted by the Hopewell Township Planning Board as an element of the Township's Master Plan on October 19, 2011.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
SECTION 2: COMMUNITY RESOURCES	7
2.1 INTRODUCTION	7
2.2 NATURAL RESOURCES	8
2.3 HISTORICAL RESOURCES	11
2.4 DEMOGRAPHICS AND ZONING	12
SECTION 3: GOALS OF THE OSRP.....	15
3.1 GOALS AND POLICES.....	15
3.2 MUNICIPAL, COUNTY, REGIONAL & STATE PLAN CONSISTENCY	16
SECTION 4: INVENTORY OF OPEN SPACE RESOURCES	19
4.1 PUBLIC LAND	19
4.2 PRIVATE LAND.....	22
4.3 PRESERVED LAND SUMMARY	26
4.4 ACTIVE RECREATION AREA SUMMARY	27
4.5 INVENTORY OF POTENTIALLY AVAILABLE LAND	27
SECTION 5: NEEDS ANALYSIS	29
5.1 ACTIVE RECREATION ANALYSIS	29
5.2 OPEN SPACE AND PASSIVE RECREATION ANALYSIS	31
5.3 OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION NEEDS SUMMARY	33
SECTION 6: RECOMMENDATIONS/ACTION PLAN	35
6.1 ACTIVE RECREATION RECOMMENDATIONS	35
6.2 OPEN SPACE AND OUTDOOR RECREATION RECOMMENDATIONS	37
6.3 ACTION PLAN	47
SECTION 7: REFERENCES	51
FIGURES.....	53
FIG. 1 AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF HOPEWELL TOWNSHIP	53
FIG. 2 1995 LAND USE/LAND COVER.....	54
FIG. 3 GROUND WATER RECHARGE	55
FIG. 4 WETLANDS, STREAMS & VERNAL POOLS	56
FIG. 5 PRESERVED LANDS	57
FIG. 6 TDR RECEIVING AREA OPEN SPACE PLAN	58
APPENDIX A: HOPEWELL TWP. TAX RECORD INFORMATION	A-1

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SECTION 1: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Hopewell Township, Cumberland County, is a large municipality, 30 square miles of principally farmland, with a medium density residential area adjacent to the City of Bridgeton. It is bounded on its' eastern border by the Cohansey River, and the western border by Mounce Creek watershed, the border with Greenwich, and by Shiloh Borough and Stow Creek Township. Like many other rural, New Jersey towns, Hopewell Township is experiencing increased pressure for residential and commercial development. Hopewell Township has been successful at maintaining a rural, undeveloped character because of its strong agricultural base, current zoning, remote location, its relative distance from employment centers, and the lack of development pressure in the region. Since 2006, however, the Township has witnessed several surges in development activity. Development of an Open Space and Recreation Plan ("OSRP") is essential to maintain the community's character and to preserve and improve the quality of life for its residents. A comprehensive, proactive approach is necessary to protect the Township's environmentally sensitive areas and provide parks and recreation for Township residents.

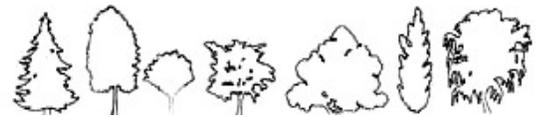
Of the almost 19,000 acres in the township, 75% are qualified farmland. Of the 14,000+ acres of farmland, 3,312 acres are permanently preserved. Residences occupy 10% of the acreage. Wetlands associated with the tidal portion of the Cohansey River are approximately 5% of acreage. Various public and exempt properties are 6%. By any standard, Hopewell Township is an area whose primary characteristic is one of farms and open areas. All residents value that characteristic and would like it to remain dominant.

The Hopewell Township Environmental Resource Inventory ("ERI) describes, in maps and text, the environment of the Township's land, water, life forms, and atmosphere. The majority of land in Hopewell Township has been cleared for agricultural use and less than 10% of the Township remains as forest habitat. Forested areas and trees are, therefore, one of the most precious natural resources in the Township.

Hopewell Township lies completely within the watershed of the Cohansey River. The Cohansey River Corridor is exceptionally important for fish and other aquatic organisms, birds including bald eagles, wildlife, water supply and human recreation. Preservation/protection of the wetlands and stream corridors associated with the Cohansey River and its tributaries is critically important to protect water quality, remaining forest, and valuable wildlife habitat.

The southern portion of the Township also contains an environmentally sensitive and ecologically important area known as the Burden Hill Forest Complex. This Complex is important for protection of groundwater resources and preservation of the forested habitat is critically important for many species of threatened birds and plants.

This OSRP for Hopewell Township outlines open space and recreational goals that are consistent with other county, state and regional plans; inventories open space and recreational resources; assesses open space and recreational needs; makes recommendations on priorities for additional preservation/protection; and establishes a list of actions necessary to meet Township goals. A



summary of the open space and recreation needs is provided in Section 5.3.

The inventory of active recreation area and facilities indicates that there are currently three parks in Hopewell Township, two of which border the City of Bridgeton boundary – Mary Elmer Lake and Piney Point. Both parks are located partially in the City of Bridgeton and are entirely managed and operated by the City. The third park is Bostwick Lake Park, which is located primarily in Upper Deerfield Township. The only publicly-owned recreational facilities are located at Hopewell Crest School and are available only during non-school hours.

The active recreation needs analysis indicates that, although Hopewell residents may use facilities in adjacent municipalities at Cumberland Regional High School or within the City of Bridgeton, to provide for the present and expected population growth within Hopewell Township, additional and improved recreational facilities are required. The existing facilities are also underutilized and could benefit from increased support.

As indicated by the inventory of open space resources, approximately 4,975 acres of Hopewell Township, or 26.5 percent, is “preserved” through public ownership or by deed restrictions. Excluding those parcels that are tidal marsh and only accessible by boat, only about 790 acres (4.2%) of the upland property within the Township is available for active recreational or outdoor use by the public. The majority of this publicly accessible upland is state-owned wildlife management area without any public access improvements.

The open space and passive recreation analysis indicates that the portion of preserved lands and recreation open space should be increased to maintain and improve the quality of life for Township residents. There is a significant lack of publicly-accessible areas and facilities to allow passive recreational activities such as hiking, bird watching, or enjoyment of the Cohansey River scenic vistas. In addition, many of the environmentally sensitive areas so critically important to maintenance of water quality in tributaries to the Cohansey River, protection of groundwater resources, preservation of remaining forest cover, and protection of wildlife resources remain unprotected and vulnerable to future development pressure. This OSRP recommends that Hopewell Township increase the availability of land open for passive recreational activities and, in conjunction with these efforts, focus on preservation and protection of environmentally sensitive areas that can made accessible to the public for enjoyment of the Township’s ecological treasures.

Section 6 of this OSRP contains specific recommendations and actions to address the deficiencies identified by the inventory and needs assessment. Based on public input and professional guidance, the Hopewell Township Recreational Committee recommends that the Township pursue development of additional recreational facilities including a walking/running trail, baseball fields, softball fields, soccer fields, a volleyball court, tennis courts, and field hockey fields. It is estimated that approximately 13 acres of additional land will be required for this facilities (excluding the linear trail). Recommended target areas and potential locations for these additional active recreation facilities are provided in Section 6.1.

Section 6.2 contains specific recommendations to address the identified open space and outdoor recreation needs. General recommendations for Hopewell Township include adoption of this



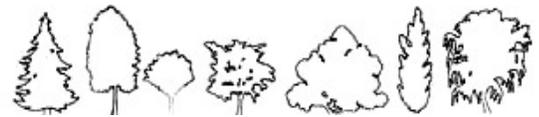
OSRP as an element of the Hopewell Township Master Plan to establish planning objectives and to serve as a guide for future planning decisions within the Township.

It is also recommended that the Township consider establishment of a Local Purpose Tax dedicated to open space, farmland preservation, environmental, and recreational purposes. A Local Purpose Tax would provide a stable source of funding to match other grants.

Many of the open space and recreation needs have overlapping objectives, and preservation/protection of the environmentally sensitive “Target Areas” will satisfy multiple needs. A detailed discussion of the priority Target Areas and how the preservation/protection of these areas will satisfy Hopewell Township needs is provided in Section 6.2 of this OSRP. Identified Target Areas include: the Barretts Run Corridor, the Cohansey River Access Target Area, the Upper Cohansey River Corridor, the Mounce Creek Corridor, the Elk Lake-Sheppard’s Mill Pond Area, Other Cohansey River Tributary Corridors, and the Burden Hill Forest Area. Discussions of these Target Areas generally include a list of tax parcels within the identified area that should be considered to satisfy the stated objective.

Section 6.3 contains an Action Plan that Hopewell Township should pursue to implement this OSRP and satisfy Hopewell Township’s open space and recreation needs. The Action Plan items are listed again below for ease of reference:

NOTE: THE PRESENCE OF A PARTICULAR PROPERTY ON LISTS IN THIS OSRP INDICATES ONLY THAT THE PROPERTY FALLS WITHIN THE RECOMMENDED AREA, AND THAT THERE ARE SOME ENVIRONMENTAL OBJECTIVES RELATIVE TO THE PROPERTY. SUCH OBJECTIVES CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH A VARIETY OF METHODS, INCLUDING DIRECT ACQUISITION, CONSERVATION EASEMENTS, LAND ORDINANCES, AND/OR GOOD STEWARDSHIP BY LANDOWNERS. ANY ACQUISITION WOULD REQUIRE A WILLING SELLER.



ACTION PLAN

First Year

- A. Adopt the Open Space and Recreation Plan as an Element of the Hopewell Township Master Plan.
- B. Submit the OSRP to the Cumberland County Department of Planning and Economic Development as source material for their development of an OSRP for the County.
- C. Submit the final OSRP to the New Jersey Green Acres Program for participation in the state's Planning Incentive Program.

Within Three Years

- D. Hopewell Township Committee and representatives to consider options for enhancing use of existing open space and recreational areas (e.g, Elk Lake Wildlife Management Area, West Cumberland Little League, and etc.)
- E. Consider a ballot item for voter approval establishing a local purpose tax dedicated to open space, farmland preservation, historic preservation, and recreation. Work with the Environmental Commission, Recreation Committee, and the Agricultural Advisory Board to educate residents on the need for and benefits of such a tax, including the financial benefits.
- F. Hopewell Township Recreation Committee to develop and present formal recommendations for consideration by the Township Committee for the additional recreational facilities recommended by this OSRP.

Within Five Years

- G. Hopewell Township Environmental Commission to develop and present formal recommendations for consideration by the Township Committee regarding additional development ordinances to protect the Upper Cohansey River Corridor and the Burden Hill Forest Complex.
- H. Hopewell Township Environmental Commission to develop and present formal recommendations for consideration by the Township Committee regarding the feasibility of a walking trail within the Barretts Run Corridor.
- I. Consider opportunities for improved public access to the Upper Cohansey River Corridor. As opportunities arise, the Hopewell Township Committee and representatives should work with Upper Deerfield Township, Cumberland County, New Jersey's Green Acres program, private developers, and other interested parties to develop improved and maintained public access points for fishing, canoeing and kayaking.
- J. Hopewell Township Committee to consider the recommendations of the Hopewell Township Recreation Committee regarding the additional recreational facilities recommended by this OSRP.



Ongoing

- K. Hopewell Township Agricultural Advisory Board to consider special environmental attributes and Target Areas identified in this OSRP in decisions regarding priority for farmland preservation funding.
- L. Hopewell Township Committee and representatives to consider working with the New Jersey Green Acres Program and other non-profit land preservation organizations to secure public access to the Cohansey River within the designated Target Area. Hopewell Township should take advantage of any other opportunities that may arise during future development proposals to secure public access and pursue grant money or other sources of funding to develop public access facilities (e.g. parking, trails, observation platforms, and etc.).
- M. Hopewell Township Committee and representatives to consider working with the NJDEP to expand the Cohansey River WMA and preserving additional parcels within the Mounce Creek Corridor for proper protection of this important habitat.
- N. Consider targeting the Elk Lake - Sheppard's Mill Pond Area for additional preservation and protection. Hopewell Township Committee and representatives should work with Greenwich Township, the NJDEP, the Girl Scouts, and other non-profit land preservation organizations to explore opportunities to preserve the area as a multiple-use recreation area available to the public.
- O. Hopewell Township Committee and representatives to consider concentrating additional open space preservation/protection efforts within the stream corridors throughout the Township that should be protected for water quality, wildlife habitat, rural character, and recreational uses.
- P. Hopewell Township Committee and representatives to consider coordinating with the New Jersey Green Acres Program and other conservation organizations interested in protecting or preserving parcels within the Burden Hill Forest Complex.