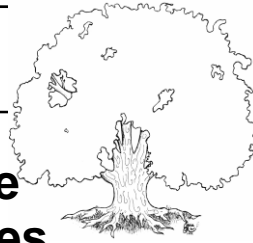


THE FRIENDS OF WORCESTER

P.O. Box 545, Worcester, PA 19490
www.friendsofworcester.org
email: info@friendsofworcester.org

Spring 2010



Preserving Open Space in Tough Economic Times

Friends of Worcester's mission has consistently focused on preserving open space in our township. Now, we are in the midst one of the worst economic crisis in most of our lifetimes. How should this impact our approach to land preservation?

One consequence of the present economic situation is that land prices have fallen dramatically in the last few years. This presents opportunities as well as problems. Land is usually preserved not by outright purchase or donation of the property itself, but by purchase or donation of future development rights for the property through conservation or agricultural easements. The value of those development rights depends on the appraised value of the property for development. So, when property values fall, so does the cost of purchasing development rights. That's the good news.

The bad news is that less money is available for purchasing development rights even at depressed values. The economic crisis has forced governments at all levels to cut budgets and reallocate funds. The Montgomery County Open Space Program spent about \$8M in 2008, but only about \$3.8M in 2009, and it has allocated about \$3.8M for 2010. The Montgomery County Farmland Preservation budget was \$9.2M in 2008, \$6.1M in 2009, but only \$2.9M for 2010.

Changes in tax laws have had an impact on property owners who wish to preserve their land. When property owners sell or donate development rights on qualified land, they can receive tax benefits based on the difference in value between what they were paid for the development rights (up to 100% of the value of the donation) and the appraised value of the property if it were able to be developed. Property owners have been able to use the value of their donation to reduce their adjusted gross income (AGI) for federal tax purposes by 50% per year for up to 16 years, until the value of the donation was used up. As of 2010, the donated value can be used to reduce AGI by only 30% per year, spread over only 6 years.

How should we respond to current economic realities? It is more important than ever for FOW to retain our focus on preserving open space. What is certain about the future is that the current economic crisis will pass. When that happens, there will be intense pressure from builders to acquire land for residential development before land prices

soar. Not only will this destroy open space in Worcester, but new homes will inevitably produce even more upward pressure on property taxes to support a growing school-age population in our community.

We are fortunate that Worcester Township's current Board of Supervisors supports land preservation. Our Township's finances have been managed prudently so that we have some funds available to take advantage of opportunities to protect land.

We can let our elected officials know that we continue to support programs to preserve Worcester's open spaces for both aesthetic and practical economic reasons. It is widely recognized that preserving land reduces pressure on property taxes and minimizes the need for more public services that will also raise taxes.

We need to encourage our elected officials to pursue innovative strategies such as the transfer of development rights (TDRs) which allow builders to purchase development rights from undeveloped rural land and transfer them to appropriate locations in Worcester's existing villages. This has the potential to augment public funds with private funds to preserve land. In addition, townships in Pennsylvania can (and do) purchase TDRs with public funds for future resale to developers. Given Worcester's favorable financial situation, this might be an especially effective strategy to employ while land values are relatively low.

The natural impulse in tough times is to pull back and cut back. A better response may be to look at the opportunities that this situation provides and find a responsible way to work now to ensure ongoing benefits of preserving open space for the future. 🌱

Once it's gone, it's gone forever!

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Farmland Preservation in Worcester

by Elizabeth Emlen

Montgomery County Farmland Preservation Program

Have you heard of the Montgomery County Farmland Preservation Program? Several years ago Montgomery County chose to take part in this successful state program. Worcester Township, as well as other nearby townships, participates actively in the program. Farmland preservation is one branch of the Montgomery County Open Space Program, but it differs somewhat from other open space initiatives. Let's review how it works.

Farmland preservation follows the rules of state law Act 43 of 1981, and is administered by each participating county. This voluntary program is a way for landowners to keep their land in farming. In exchange for making the permanent commitment to keep the land in production agriculture and never allow non-farm development, the owner receives compensation approximately equal to what a residential developer would pay for the land. Hence, many people call the process "sale of development rights." The right to develop the land for non-farm use is extinguished. Technically, the owner sells an "agricultural conservation easement," giving up the right to sell for non-farm development, but not giving up ownership of the land. The farmer continues to operate whatever farm business he or she chooses, and can sell the land to anyone else willing to follow the same rules. The agricultural easement stays on the land in perpetuity. The rules require commercial production agriculture, including horse boarding, and adherence to a soil conservation plan for the farm.

This initial description may appear to benefit only a few who sell an agricultural easement. However, there are important benefits for all residents. For example, everyone eats food! Local farms not only produce healthier, fresher food products, they contribute many items that are unique to the area. Additionally, many residents have been attracted to the township because they enjoy the semi-rural setting that includes farmland in their neighborhoods. The beautiful views of land, crops and livestock provide a peaceful environment in an otherwise turbulent world. Farming businesses contribute to our vibrant economy, through direct product sales, employees to help operate the farm business, and more. Possibly the



Belted Galloway cattle grazing on a preserved farm in Worcester Township.

best advantage is that it costs less for the township to provide services to a farm than to houses which could have been built on that farm had it sold for residential development. More development means more services like road maintenance, police protection, trash removal, and the biggest, school taxes! Farmland preservation ultimately benefits all taxpayers.

In Worcester, 329 acres on seven different farms have been preserved so far through our program. In all of Montgomery County, 7,902 acres of farmland has been preserved on 127 farms, including the seven in Worcester. Preserved Worcester farms include businesses producing beef, feed crops, horses, organic fruits & vegetables, and more. There are still eight more Worcester farms

representing 310 acres on the waiting list and we are accepting new applications at any time.

Funding for agricultural conservation easements comes from the Commonwealth and the County, a worthwhile investment equaling several million dollars per year in Montgomery County. Sometimes townships contribute too, as they recognize the advantages of saving farmland.

Worcester Twp. has helped fund all seven of its existing agricultural conservation easements. Our program is grateful to Worcester for taking this visionary step, a great idea for this and future generations. Citizens of Worcester should be proud to live in a community with so many active, productive farms, with leadership that supports this program as well as other open space opportunities for recreation.

For more information, contact the Farmland Preservation Program by phone at 610-278-3754 or by e-mail to eemlen@montcopa.org.

The Worcester Township Planning Commission Wants Your Ideas!

The Worcester Township Planning Commission is in the process of examining the future growth in the township's villages and hamlets. Their goal is to develop a plan that will foster more livable, community-oriented places that retain their rural village character. For the past year the Planning Commission has been assessing the existing conditions and the potential development of Fairview Village, the township's largest village (at the intersection of Valley Forge Road and Germantown Pike). The

Township's recent acquisition of Heyser Field (behind Worcester Township Community Hall) for permanent public open space has provided an incentive to look at ways to improve Fairview Village's public access and its development as a viable community center.

The Planning Commission continues to hold public meetings to give residents and business owners a chance to offer suggestions and opinions toward the preparation of a community vision for Fairview Village.

Think about these issues:

- What services or public facilities do you use today or would like to see expanded in Fairview Village?
- What types of residential or commercial uses would best serve a village scale?
- Would you walk or bike to Fairview Village if sidewalks, paths or improved public open spaces were provided?
- Do you support the Planning Commission's emphasis on historic structure preservation and adaptive reuse of old buildings?

The village planning goals are detailed in the Worcester Township Comprehensive Plan Update (2008), available for review at the Township office or online at www.worcestertwp.com. Residents can also sign up for the Township's "E-news" to receive email updates about future meetings.

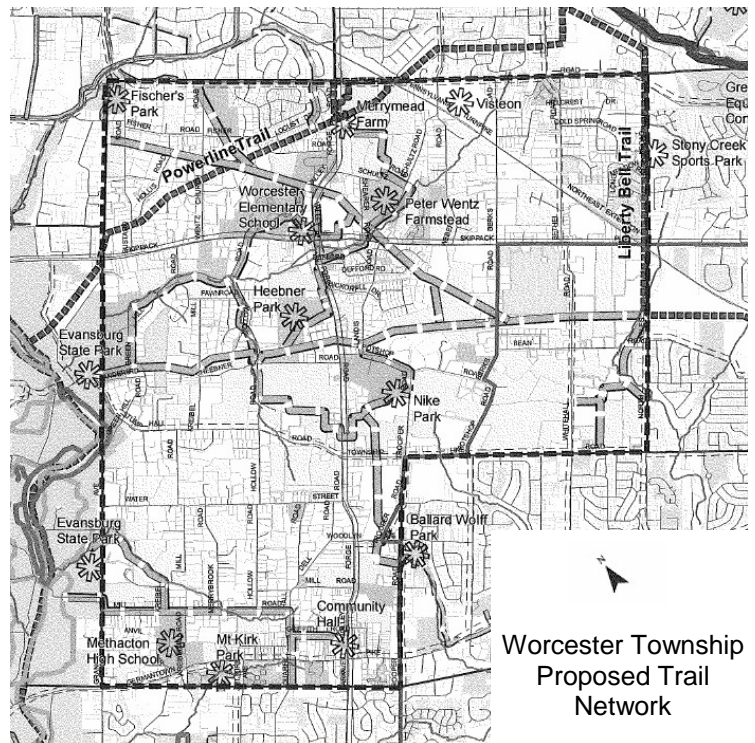
Don't miss this opportunity to have a voice in the future of your community. Plan to attend the Planning Commission's next village planning meeting. Look for the date and time on the Township's website www.worcestertwp.com.

Our Growing Trail System

Most Worcester residents are aware of the many open space projects that have helped preserve over 1400 acres (about 13%) of the Township's area over the past decade or so. But few people are aware of the efforts that have been made to provide an extensive trail network that will extend into most parts of the Township with connections to other trails in the region. Both open space and trail projects are usually funded by the state and county with a small percentage of each project funded by the Township.

In 2004 a Greenway Study was completed for Worcester Township. The study assessed our current situation, identified needs as well as opportunities for the future. It laid out a vision for a trail network that will serve our recreational and transportation needs for many years to come. The proposed trails, once implemented, will span the Township from North Wales Road to Evansburg State Park,

and from Peter Wentz Farmstead to East Norriton Township. Other proposed trails will connect Heebner Park, Methacton High School and Meadowood Retirement Community. The Evansburg State Park connection will lead travelers through Skippack Township to the Perkiomen Trail, and from there to the Schuylkill Trail and Philadelphia.



Worcester Township
Proposed Trail
Network

In a recent survey of Worcester residents by the Worcester Park and Recreation Committee, trails were seen, by a wide margin, as their most desired recreational facility. Most of the proposed trails will eventually be open to pedestrian, bicycle and equestrian users.

At this stage, most of the Township's efforts have gone into the acquisition of trail easements (the right to build a trail). These will be added to the existing trail from Hollow Road to Greenhill Road which was completed in 2007. An application for an 80% funding grant for the sections from Greenhill Road to Evansburg State Park and from Hollow Road to Valley Forge Road was submitted to the Montgomery County Open Space Board, and awaits approval from the County Commissioners. Further construction of additional segments of trails will continue as funding becomes available.

Similar to open space, a trail network through the Township represents a large part of the quality of life that Worcester residents seem to want most. By keeping our focus on this important goal, we can continue to make a series of small steps that will one day make Worcester's trail network the best in the area.

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Margaret Mead

Why Install a Rain Garden?

Worcester Township is in the process of applying for a grant to install a rain garden behind the Township building to handle the runoff from the adjacent parking lot. Friends of Worcester is pleased to support the Township's grant application.

A **rain garden** is a shallow, constructed depression that is planted with deep-rooted native plants and grasses. It is designed to receive runoff from hard surfaces such as a roof, sidewalk, driveway, or parking lot. Rain gardens slow down the rush of water from these hard surfaces, hold the water for a short period of time, and allow it to naturally infiltrate into the ground. A rain garden can be thought of as a small water quality system because it filters the runoff from these hard surfaces and recharges the groundwater.



After a rain storm, runoff from parking lots, roads, lawns, and fields picks up pollutants like oil, salt, fertilizer, pesticides, pet waste, transportation chemicals, and sediment. Traditionally, this stormwater would be collected and piped into a large, centralized basin, and then sent on its way downstream. When this untreated runoff is discharged directly into streams, it damages important habitat, degrades our recreational waters, contaminates our drinking water supply, and leads to costly municipal improvements to treat this stormwater. By reducing stormwater runoff, rain gardens can be a valuable part of changing these trends.

Federal and state regulations now require municipalities and developers to manage stormwater as a resource instead of as a problem. Various techniques are used to prevent run-off from polluting our streams and causing flooding and erosion of stream banks. An important part of this new approach is to allow rainwater to infiltrate back into the ground. This recharges our underground aquifers, which supply many of us with our drinking water, removes contaminants from the water, and helps to control flooding.

Rain gardens are one means of capturing, filtering, and purifying stormwater. They are landscaped areas around a home or business which are filled with flowers and other native vegetation that soak up rain water. After a rain storm, the water that is channeled into the rain garden from gutters and driveways slowly filters into the ground rather than running off to a storm drain. Compared to a conventional patch of lawn, a rain garden allows about 30 percent more water to soak into the ground.

Rain gardens are an effective way for homeowners, businesses, and municipalities to reuse stormwater as a resource. They also enhance the beauty of yards and neighborhoods, as well as providing valuable habitat for birds, butterflies, and many beneficial insects. While an individual rain garden may seem like a small thing, collectively they produce substantial neighborhood and community environmental benefits. Worcester Township's rain garden will serve as a working example for residents to see stormwater control that will benefit the community. For more information about rain gardens, check the FOW website, www.friendsofworcester.org.

Eyes on the Issues



FOW continues to keep an eye on the issues in the township which can affect open space and our rural heritage. Many of these issues are updated regularly on our website, www.friendsofworcester.org. Proposals for most subdivisions and land development activities (both commercial and residential) are shown on the "Township Maps" page of our website.

Pennsylvania Turnpike Expansion

Proposal: Widen the 10.5-mile section of the Northeast Extension between Lansdale and the Mid-County Interchange from four to six lanes, plus a 26-foot median.

In early May, the bridge over the turnpike at Morris Road was closed for reconstruction. Completion is scheduled for late November. Traffic is being detoured along Valley Forge Road, Skippack Pike, and Berks Road. Turnpike officials met with Township representatives earlier this spring to discuss how to handle the expected volume increase on Skippack Pike as well as Worcester's local roads. Temporary traffic signals and left-turn lanes were installed along Skippack Pike. The township expects to install additional traffic controls as needed.

PECO Generating Substation

Proposal: Build an electricity routing substation, including two "ring buses" (a rectangular cluster of poles 20 to 30 feet high), three transformers (three-sided enclosures with approximately 30-foot-high concrete walls), clusters of circuit breakers (approximately 20 feet high), a control building, and four to six lightning masts (approximately 60 feet high), on a 9-acre parcel owned by PECO south of Fisher Road. A security fence will surround this equipment.

The Resident Advisory Committee is working with PECO representatives on a design for walls to screen the view of the transformers, which were installed last winter. The substation is scheduled to be ready to go in the summer of 2011.

Farmers' Union Horse Show Celebrates 70th Anniversary

A local institution for decades, the Farmers' Union Horse Show will celebrate 70 continuous years in Worcester on Saturday, June 5, 2010. The Farmers' Union Horse Company for the Recovery of Stolen Horses and Detecting the Thieves was founded and chartered in 1834 by farmers as a cooperative insurance company to protect their valuable horses. Each year, on the first Saturday of June, area farmers drove their horses to Fairview Village to be inspected and insured for the following year.

As horses gradually were replaced in farming operations, the group reorganized as a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting the interests of equine owners and supporting horse-related organizations. In 1940, several local families started a parade and horse show that captured the spirit of the annual event. The parade was eliminated in 2000, but the horse show remains the oldest such event in Montgomery County.

In recent years, the horse show has seen the addition a drawing for prizes donated by area businesses, and a refreshment stand operated by the Friends of Worcester. Come on out to see a unique Worcester event. This year the horse show will take place June 5 at Heyser Field, Valley Forge and Griffith Roads in Fairview Village, beginning at 8:00 a.m.

Fall show: Saturday, October 2, 2010 – “Just for Fun” Horse Show, Heyser Field, 9:00 a.m. For more information, visit www.farmersunionhorsecompany.org, or call 610-222-0171.

Worcester Elementary School Received Regional Water Quality Award

Worcester Elementary School has been awarded the Schuylkill Action Network's 2010 Drinking Water Scholastic Award for the school's efforts to improve water quality on school grounds. Parent and environmental consultant *Ciro Tornambe* was instrumental in applying for the grant to restore approximately 200 feet of stream corridor behind the school. With the help of the school's Environmental Club and Worcester residents *Drew Welsh* and *Craig Eberbach*, 50 trees were planted last fall. A meadow of native grasses and wildflowers is being planted this spring. Friends of Worcester and the Meadowood Retirement Community partnered with the school to provide financial support and volunteers for the project. The students were honored by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency at an awards ceremony during National Drinking Water Week in early May.

Arbor Day at Worcester Elementary School

Friends of Worcester sponsored two Arbor Day programs at Worcester Elementary School on April 30. Kindergarten through 2nd graders read “The Giving Tree” by *Shel Silverstein* and 3rd-5th grade classes watched the video, “Arbor Day: The Holiday That Makes a Difference.” All of the children received a small evergreen tree and a fun booklet about Arbor Day. The children enjoyed both programs. This day was made possible by volunteers from Friends of Worcester and Meadowood, and by the parents and staff at Worcester Elementary School.

SUPPORT FRIENDS OF WORCESTER

FRIENDS OF WORCESTER is a non-profit organization made up of new and long-time residents of the township. All involved residents share an appreciation for the rural quality of Worcester and a common concern for its future. FOW seeks to influence that future. All funds received are used to support our efforts to preserve open space, maintain the rural lifestyle of the community and keep our neighbors informed through our minutes and newsletters. All contributors receive our monthly agenda and minutes as well as notification of important township events.

Friend - \$30

Partner - \$50

Benefactor - \$100

Other

NAME: _____

ADDRESS: _____

PHONE: _____

E-MAIL: _____

All residents, contributing or not, are always welcome at FOW monthly meetings.

Please send your tax-deductible contributions to:

**FRIENDS OF WORCESTER
P.O. BOX 545
WORCESTER, PA 19490**

The official registration and financial information of The Friends of Worcester may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling toll-free, within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

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- In addition to these practices we are always doing our best to reduce our impact on the environment while encouraging others to do the same.

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Rob Hayes - Vice President (610-584-0371)
Wini Hayes - Treasurer (610-584-0371)
Barbara McMonagle - Secretary (215-257-1436)

Join us at these upcoming meetings and events

Meetings: Wednesdays, 7:30 pm
September 8, October 13, November 10
Check website for locations

Horse Show: Saturday, June 5
8:00 a.m., Heyser Field, behind Worcester
Township Community Hall, Fairview Village

FOW Invites You To Get Involved!

- **Open Space Committee:** Land preservation, village planning, Open Space Fund
- **Education & Outreach Committee:** Community activities, newsletter, website, community partnerships
- **Organizational Advancement Committee:** Membership recruitment and development, operational fundraising

Contact FOW at info@friendsofworcester.org or
call Wini Hayes at 610-584-0371

Worcester Township Public Meetings

Community Hall, 1031 Valley Forge Rd, Fairview Village

Board of Supervisors

1st Monday of the month, 8:00 am
3rd Wednesday of the month, 7:30 pm

Planning Commission

2nd & 4th Thursday of the month, 7:30 pm

Zoning Hearing Board

4th Tuesday of the month, 6:30 pm

Supervisors/Planning Commission Joint Meeting

Monday, 9:30 am: June 7, Aug 2, Oct 4, Dec 6