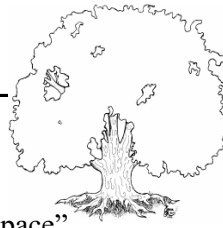


THE FRIENDS OF WORCESTER

P.O. Box 545, Worcester, PA 19490
www.friendsofworcester.org
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Winter–Spring 2023



For Landowners: Preserve Open Space Workshop

In September 2022, FOW hosted a “Preserve Open Space” educational workshop at Community Hall. Steve Zbyszinski, Senior Farmland Preservation Planner at the Montgomery County Planning Commission, and Kris Kern, Director of Resource Protection at Heritage Conservancy, gave informative presentations about options that landowners have for preserving their land to more than twenty residents in attendance.

We learned from Steve that the Montgomery County Farmland Preservation Program began in 1990. Since that time, more than 10,000 acres of productive farmland in the county has been permanently preserved through the program, including nine farms right here in Worcester.

Kris Kern talked about the work of Heritage Conservancy, a non-profit land trust, whose mission is: “to preserve and protect our natural and historic heritage”. Heritage Conservancy works directly with landowners in both Bucks and Montgomery Counties to help preserve open spaces and historic structures.

While the Montgomery County’s Agricultural Preservation Program is targeted toward farms, Kris noted that Heritage Conservancy has preserved a range of open space types: agricultural properties, as well as woodlands, stream corridors, open fields not used for farming, and scenic vistas. Heritage Conservancy has also permanently preserved open space in Worcester.

By choosing to sell or donate a conservation easement, land owners can permanently protect their land and be assured no future development will occur. Being able to unlock some of the value of their land to use for whatever they want and still retain ownership of their property can be a wonderful option for landowners. Some landowners have used the funds received from selling an easement to stay in their home, fund retirement, make repairs, and/or leave a legacy to their heirs and their community.

If you are a landowner who would like more information about land preservation options, please contact us at info@friendsofworcester.org, FOW can help guide you to the correct organization depending on your needs & goals. 🌱

Palmer Challenge Update

The ongoing Palmer legal challenge against Worcester’s zoning code continues into 2023.

For most of 2022, the attorney representing the Palmers had Seth Shapiro, an Urban Design Consultant, testifying on their behalf several times before the Worcester Zoning Hearing Board and interested residents. During that time,

Worcester’s zoning was scrutinized by the Palmer representatives who began making their arguments. They claimed the township’s zoning code is overly restrictive around certain commercial uses. They argued as part of their case that this should be remedied by having the Palmer property rezoned to allow for hotels, supermarkets, department stores, research facilities, clinics, and indoor recreation facilities.

Bob Brant, the township solicitor, and attorney Marc Jonas, who is representing some neighboring residents close to the Palmer property, worked

collaboratively by cross examining Seth Shapiro after he completed his testimony. Their effective questioning cast doubt on the claim from the Palmer side that Worcester’s zoning is unlawfully restrictive, especially based on the reliability of Mr. Shapiro’s testimony. The Zoning Hearing Board also expressed some skepticism about Mr. Shapiro’s expertise and credibility as a land use witness for this legal challenge on the Palmer property. As this challenge enters into its third year, the attorney for the Palmer’s is putting forth another land use planner as their next witness, who will testify over the coming months.

As the process continues to draw out, the stakes are still very significant. If successful, the Palmer’s will get their 55-acre property rezoned from the present mix of limited commercial and low density residential, to 100% large scale commercial uses. This will negatively impact Center Point and Worcester at large, undermining the current zoning

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Preserve Open Space Workshop September 2022



Steve Zbyszinski from Montgomery County and Kris Kern from Heritage Conservancy spoke to residents about land preservation.

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our supervisors have crafted to maintain Worcester’s rural character.

Neighbors from across Worcester have attended the zoning hearing meetings over these last two years. A number of residents who live in close proximity to the intersection of Valley Forge Road and Skippack Pike have successfully sought “party status” so that they can be a part of the proceedings before the Zoning Hearing Board. It gives those with “party status” the ability to present evidence, ask questions, and express how their quality of life will be negatively impacted if the Palmer property is rezoned.

We are grateful for all the residents who are taking time out of their busy schedules to speak out, both of the attorneys who are working to defend Worcester Township’s current zoning ordinance at these zoning hearings, those who have contributed to help fund legal costs, and residents who put up signs on their property expressing opposition to this Palmer challenge. Lastly, the community’s commitment to preserving the special rural character of Worcester.

Please visit www.loveworchesterpa.com to help support the efforts to oppose the Palmer challenge, and follow the Friends of Worcester emails & social media updates on what is taking place at the zoning hearing meeting. As always, feel free to contact us at any time as well by emailing info@friendsofworchester.org.

“Once It’s Gone, It’s Gone Forever”

Friends of Worcester Officers

- Burt Hynes - President (610-584-1926)
- Rob Hayes - Vice President (610-659-4714)
- Barb McMonagle - Treasurer (215-257-1436)
- Greg Gogates - Secretary (484-744-1811)
- Wini Hayes - Board Member (215-450-4233)
- Kim David - Board Member (610-584-1805)

Join us for an upcoming meeting

2nd Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m.

September through May

visit friendsofworchester.org for details

“Preserving 40 acres—a First Step”

In August 2022, Worcester Township purchased a picturesque 40 acre farm on Fisher Road. The property will be preserved for eventual use by township residents. The township fully funded the \$2,045,000 purchase price via a loan from People’s Bank and Trust Company of Doylestown, PA at an unspecified rate favorable to the township.



Worcester’s first open space purchase at 3335 Fisher Road under the newly created Worcester Township Open Space Preservation Program. The goal is to preserve 300 acres by 2033.

The farm is located at 3335 Fisher Road, and the existing structures include a partially restored bank barn, an old house, and several outbuildings—all located at the end of a tree-lined gravel driveway, and surrounded by level to gently rolling fields. While no specific plans for the future use of the property have been determined, its location and topography are ideal for trails or a

wide range of recreational uses.

The acquisition of this property is a giant first step in a long-term stated goal of our supervisors to preserve 300 acres of township land by the 300th anniversary of Worcester’s founding in 1733. That leaves another 260 acres to be preserved by 2033. To place themselves in the best financial position to purchase future desirable open space when it becomes available, the township has opted to hold on to their cash reserves and used a bank loan to finance this property.

It may take some time for the future use of the 3335 Fisher Road property to come into clear focus. However, as we envision the future of our township, it is reassuring to know that 40 acres on Fisher Road has been preserved for the enjoyment of current and future residents.

In order to have adequate funds available for the acquisition and maintenance of land that has been or will be preserved as open space in the future, our supervisors initiated a voluntary contribution program last year. As 2023 begins, a thoughtful donation to Worcester’s voluntary open space preservation fund will increase the likelihood that we will meet the goal of preserving 300 acres by 2033. To increase the impact of all donations specified for Worcester’s open space preservation fund, the township will match all donations to this fund—up to \$300,000 a year. Widespread support of this initiative has the potential to ensure that the township will have the fiscal resources to preserve the additional 260 acres needed to achieve the visionary goal by 2033.