Center Point Village — 
**URGENT CALL TO ACTION!**

After several years of considering zoning changes, the township is nearing a decision regarding Center Point Village zoning. This decision will impact the quality of life we have now and for future generations.

The original goal was to create a zoning ordinance that would allow the development of a small-scale, walkable village that would be compatible with the existing village. The township received input from several professional planning groups, as well as from residents and from the Palmer family. The Palmers, who own the 55-acre farm at the corner of Skippack Pike and Valley Forge Road, want to develop the property for commercial and residential use.

Residents consistently raised their concerns and objections to the proposed ordinance change:

- Increased traffic congestion and safety issues
- Big box stores
- High-density housing
- Losing our rural village
- Losing the view north on Valley Forge Road

What residents said they want is:

- Convenience store in the village
- Small-scale shops and offices
- Architectural standards for new homes and businesses, compatible with the historic village
- Preserve open space, create common gathering areas, build paths and trails

The professional planners told us that higher residential density would be needed in order to support small-scale shops in a walkable village. The supervisors seemed willing to consider more housing in return for creating a walkable village with small-scale shops to serve residents. However, at a meeting earlier this year, representatives of the Palmer family told the township that they are not interested in building small-scale village shops. Instead, they want to build a convenience store with 12 gas pumps, a chain drugstore, and almost 100 townhouses on their 55-acre farm.

It has become obvious that the township’s original goal of a small-scale, walkable village will not work. Under the proposed plan for the Palmer farm, no village shops will be built, and the higher residential density will add even more cars to the already congested traffic in the village. If the township cannot get the small village shops we want, there is no reason to allow high-density housing that will create even more traffic in the village. We have an elementary school just down the road from the Palmer farm. Commuters and parents know how difficult the traffic already is on Skippack Pike.

The proposed re-zoning of the entire village will more than double the currently allowed residential density on larger lots in the village. The re-zoning will not just apply to the Palmer farm. It will allow high-density residential development on every property in the village. This could result in over 300 new townhouses being built just on the currently undeveloped land in the village!
The township’s independent planning consultant recommended that the residential density in the village remain unchanged — AGR for large lots, and R-100 for smaller lots — and allow more homes only by using transferable development rights (TDRs). Using TDRs in a voluntary program would allow rural areas of the township to be preserved without increasing the overall density in the township. This would hold down school taxes as much as possible.

AGR zoning would result in about 75 new single-family homes on undeveloped land in the village. Under the proposed re-zoning, approximately 325 townhouses could be built on the same land! THE TOWNSHIP SHOULD NOT GIVE AWAY DENSITY — THIS IS NOT IN THE TOWNSHIP’S BEST INTEREST.

If you don’t want to see these changes to Center Point Village, attend the next two township meetings —

- Board of Supervisors meeting, Wed., Nov. 14, 7:30 pm
- Public Hearing, Wed., Dec. 12, 7:00 pm

Meetings are held in Fairview Village Community Hall. It’s time to speak up and let your supervisors know that residents care about our community! Tell them to leave the current ordinances in place!

The Palmers can already build a convenience store with gas under the current ordinance. They don’t need re-zoning for that, but they do need it for high-density townhouses.

IF THE TOWNSHIP CANNOT ACHIEVE ITS GOAL OF A WALKABLE VILLAGE, WHY WOULD WE RE-ZONE THE VILLAGE TO ADD HIGH-DENSITY HOUSING AND BIG-BOX COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT?

It is critical that you express your position ASAP! Write or email the township supervisors (please copy us at info@friendsofworcester.org), come to the next two township meetings on November 14 and December 12, and talk to your supervisors:

- Rick DeLello rdellello@worcestertwp.com
- Susan Caughlan scaughlan@worcestertwp.com
- Steve Quigley squigley@worcestertwp.com

Meeting dates and agendas are posted on the Township’s website at worcestertwp.com. Now is the time to speak up to preserve what we have in Center Point Village. Remember, re-zoning will impact all of the village properties, with all the traffic that will accompany high-density development!

“Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever.”

Three Meadow Lane Lots for Sale?

In July, the Board of Supervisors considered hiring an auctioneer to sell three township-owned properties on Meadow Lane (see map) to be developed for residential housing. FOW researched the issue and found that the lots are designated as public open space in several township planning documents. As an advocate for the preservation of open space, FOW issued an alert to residents to make them aware of the proposal to sell and develop these township-owned properties.

Thanks to so many concerned residents who came out for the meeting! It was standing room only and was one of the most well attended township meetings in a long time. So many residents voiced their opposition to this proposal that the discussion lasted more than 2½ hours. After many public comments in opposition to the sale, the Board of Supervisors did not vote on the proposal.

While this was a victory for public open space, this is NOT over! The sale could be put on the agenda again and voted on at any time. We all need to pay attention to township meeting agendas and to what’s going on at these meetings. FOW will monitor the issue and will keep you posted, so please be sure to sign up for our email alerts. Email us at info@friendsofworcester.org to

A proposed development plan for the Palmer tract shows 87 townhouses, a chain drugstore, and a convenience store with 12 gas pumps.
be added to the alert list. We will also post updates on our website at friendsofworcester.org.

⇒ Why is it so important that these parcels not be developed?

1. These parcels have become township open space by virtue of their location next to the Zacharias Trail. They form an impressive and unobstructed natural scenic view across the large meadow and up the wooded hillside from the trail. Views like these are the reason residents enjoy the trail so much. “I can walk along the trail and feel my stress level going down,” said one resident. Getting away from the press of everyday life is one of the health benefits provided by open space.

If the properties were developed into housing, the majority of the trees on the wooded hillside could be cut down to build three large houses, along with their accessory structures (pools, sheds, garages, and even tennis courts). “Why would I want to look at other peoples’ back yards when I’m walking along the trail? I can see those from my house,” commented another resident.

2. These three township-owned properties are listed in the Worcester Township Comprehensive Plan and the Township Open Space Plan as “Public Open Space” (shown on Figure 8-1 below) and on the Township Zoning Map as a “Township Park.” Unfortunately, these three properties and many others that are thought to be protected open space are not legally protected from development. If the sale of the Meadow Lane lots is approved, the precedent it sets could potentially result in the sale and development of other unprotected open space in the township.

3. Given their location along the Zacharias Creek greenway, these parcels serve a critical ecological function by acting as a buffer between the developed upstream areas and the heavily eroded Zacharias Creek. Surface runoff from as far away as Milestone and Meadowood flows downhill and ends up in the Zacharias Creek after crossing these lots. As shown in the township’s Open Space Plan, these properties include steep slopes and hydric soils, which may indicate the existence of wetlands. These are considered to be ecologically sensitive areas that require special protection. Removing the current natural buffer zone of trees and shrubs and building three large houses, with all of their impervious surfaces (e.g., roof tops, driveways, walkways, patios, pools), could have a significant negative impact on these ecologically sensitive areas and worsen the erosion along the Zacharias Creek.

⇒ Why does the township keep calling these parcels building lots?

When the township purchased these three parcels in 1986, the large tract that is now Meadow Lane had already been subdivided into almost a dozen building lots of several acres each. According to a supervisor at the time, the property owner approached the township and suggested that Worcester buy these three lots closest to the creek. The supervisors were already interested in owning the land along the creek for a future trail. The Zacharias Trail is now a reality, thanks to the vision of those supervisors, and the three lots purchased in 1986 preserve a beautiful view and provide an effective stormwater buffer for the rest of the Meadow Lane development. It makes no difference that these parcels were once subdivided as building lots, or that in 2006 the township re-subdivided the land in preparation for selling three building lots along Meadow Lane. This land is an important part of the public viewed from the trail. Destroying this view by selling three lots for development would be a huge disservice to all Worcester residents.

⇒ The township website says if the lots are sold, the money can be used to buy more open space.

The township is not a real estate developer that buys and sells property. Land that was bought to benefit township residents is not an investment to be liquidated when the market is hot. This land was purchased to preserve sensitive areas along the creek. It provides a peaceful, scenic view to trail users. These are economic benefits of open space that should not be traded like shares of stock. This land is a resource for all township residents. The supervisors in 1986 were looking ahead to the day when a trail would run along the Zacharias Creek. Today we have that trail. Let’s hold onto what those supervisors bought for us.

Thanks to ALL who sent emails, signed petitions, posted yard signs and attended the Board of Supervisors meeting in July! You ALL most definitely made a difference at the meeting!
How Can We Protect Our Public Open Space?

What do Mt. Kirk Park, Defford Park, the Lenhart Farm, and parts of the Zacharias greenway have in common? They are all owned by the township and used (or could be used) for public recreation, but they are not protected from sale or development. This summer, township officials proposed selling three lots along the Zacharias Trail for development, catching residents by surprise.

How could this happen? Are townships allowed to sell publicly owned property for development? Isn’t land owned by the township protected from development? The answers aren’t simple. To clarify, we’re talking about township property that was purchased on the open market, not property that was condemned for public use.

Isn’t the township just like any other buyer – once they own the property, they can sell it later on, as long as the decision is made at a public meeting and the sale is conducted according to state law? Not so fast – state law and the Pennsylvania Constitution have something to say about whether a township can sell land that it owns. Several years ago, the Borough of Downington voted to sell part of its public park to a private developer for economic redevelopment. The council’s justification was that the borough needed the additional revenue.

Neighbors sued the council, and the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania ruled that the public had an interest in seeing that township parks are protected. Under the requirements of the Donated or Dedicated Property Act, if the land was dedicated to public use, the court determined that borough held the land in trust for the benefit of its residents, and the borough would need the approval of Orphans’ Court (which oversees trusts) before it could sell the land.

What does “dedicated to public use” mean? In the Downingtown case, the borough had made improvements to the park for years, and residents used the park frequently. The court determined that the land had been dedicated to public use when the borough developed it as a park, and the borough could not sell it without the approval of Orphans’ Court.

This decision under the Donated and Dedicated Property Act might protect Worcester’s Mt. Kirk Park and Defford Park (soon to become a real park with the help of a state grant) from being sold without the oversight of Orphans’ Court, but what about township-owned property that hasn’t been developed as park land yet? Specifically, what about the three lots along the Zacharias Trail that were almost sold this summer?

In 1971 the Pennsylvania legislature unanimously passed, and the voters of the Commonwealth overwhelmingly ratified, an Environmental Rights Amendment to the state constitution guaranteeing the people’s right to clean air, pure water, and the preservation of Pennsylvania’s natural resources.

The amendment declares that the Commonwealth is the trustee of our public natural resources for the benefit of all residents, including future generations.

Under that rationale, public agencies, including townships, must act as a trustee in dealing with publicly owned resources, including the lots adjacent to the Zacharias Trail. A trustee cannot simply sell property in a trust because it could make money by doing so. The trustee is bound by the purpose of the trust – in this case, conserving and maintaining Pennsylvania’s public natural resources for the benefit of residents and future generations.

Approximately a third of the land along the Zacharias Trail is wetland – the plants growing there thrive only where the soil stays wet. Just as important as these wetlands are the slopes above them, where the woods have grown up since the township bought the property in 1986. The trees and shrubs there both absorb all of the stormwater that flows downhill from all of the residential developments across Skippack Pike, all the way from Milestone and through Meadowood, to the lowest point, the creek bed.

On its way, this water collects excess fertilizer from lawns and farm fields, as well as pollutants from roads and parking lots. The soil on the upper part of the property, anchored by tree roots, filters out these pollutants before they reach the creek. The wetlands at the bottom keep the water from entering the creek too quickly, which prevents the creek’s banks from being even more eroded than they are, and keeps a lot of sediment out of the water.

The township is already required to reduce sediment and nutrient pollution (nitrogen and phosphorus) in the Zacharias Creek. These requirements are part of the Clean Water Act, which protects our drinking water and insures that our rivers are clean enough to swim and fish in. How much more contaminated would the Zacharias Creek be without the benefit of the natural water filter provided by these three lots? Would the township be acting as a good trustee of these public natural resources if it sold those lots so that three new homes could be built? In July, residents told the supervisors — NO, NO THANK YOU, and NO AGAIN!
Please welcome our new Social Media and Communications Coordinator, Scott Berman. He will be working on the FOW website, Facebook page, emails, and newsletters.

For the last three years Scott has been an advocate for open space conservation in Montgomery County. Scott is an Open Space and Trails Assistant with the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Assoc. (WVWA), a local land trust in Ambler. In this capacity, he identifies and prioritizes open space for conservation, and helps develop trail connection plans for the 15 suburban communities that make up the Wissahickon watershed, including Worcester.

Scott conducted a survey of open space across parts of Montgomery County during 2016-2017. As part of that project, he made multiple field visits to our township and completed an inventory of Worcester’s open space, including the remaining undeveloped high-priority sites on the Township’s 2006 Open Space Plan.

Scott is a lifelong resident of Montgomery County. He grew up in nearby Lower Gwynedd. He is a 2012 graduate of American University in Washington, D.C., with a background in history and environmental policy. He is looking forward to getting to know the Worcester community and assisting FOW in our efforts to protect our open spaces. FOW is excited to have Scott as a new member of our team and appreciates the expertise he brings to our organization!

What about the impact of three new homes on scenic views from the trail? The Environmental Rights Amendment protects the “natural, scenic, historic, and aesthetic values of the environment.” People walk on the Zacharias Trail to enjoy the scenic views of the woods and creek, not the back yards of more houses.

Even the Environmental Rights Amendment can’t prevent the township from selling property if it is acting as a good trustee of the public natural resources. Is there any other way to protect township-owned property from being sold for development? Yes – a township can place a conservation easement on land that it owns, insuring that the natural resources on the property will be protected for residents forever, even if the land is later sold. Some township-owned property is already protected by conservation easements – 46 acres of Heebner Park, 5 acres of Heyser Field, and about half of the Zacharias Trail. But only 73 acres are protected, out of 272 acres of open space owned by the township.

**FOW Welcomes Social Media and Communications Coordinator**

Please welcome our new Social Media and Communications Coordinator, Scott Berman. He will be working on the FOW website, Facebook page, emails, and newsletters.

**Candlelight at Peter Wentz Farmstead**

**URGENT ALERTS** — FOW works to keep you, our friends and neighbors, informed about issues that will forever change Worcester Township. Send us your email at info@friendsofworcester.org to stay up to date on the issues in this newsletter and on items that can come up at a moment’s notice. Thank you!
Friends of Worcester was proud to be part of Worcester Day at Heebner Park on Sat., September 22. We had a vendor table and also sponsored a family photo scavenger hunt on the Heebner Park trails that connect to the Zacharias Trail. Many families decided to accept this challenge and ventured out on the trail in search of some good photos.

We had 5 lucky prize winners who won gift cards from local businesses — Zacharias Creekside Café, O & F Farms, Merrymead Farm, and Dunkin’ Donuts — as well as an Amazon Echo. FOW purchased these gift cards locally, in support of our local small businesses. Also, A HUGE thanks to FOW volunteers who made this event possible!

Friends of Worcester also had a vendor table where we were able to meet new residents and catch up with old friends. Everyone enjoyed talking to us about the importance of preserving open space like Heebner Park, where 46 acres are permanently preserved. This happened through the county open space program which allows residents to enjoy many outdoor activities.

Residents shared their concerns about several current issues in the township, which are covered in this newsletter — the proposed re-zoning of Center Point Village and the threatened sale of three open space lots near the Zacharias Trail. Both of these issues will forever impact our daily lives in Worcester. FOW urges residents to get out and voice their opinion at the upcoming Board of Supervisors meeting and public hearing on the Center Point village ordinance:

- Wednesday, November 14, 7:30 p.m.
- Wednesday, December 12, 7:00 p.m.

Both meetings will be held at Fairview Village Community Hall. We need ALL of you to voice your concerns now!

To all the residents who stopped by the FOW table, participated in the photo contest, and enjoyed the day, we thank you for supporting your community!
Thank you for supporting our advertisers!

Lawler Heating & Air Conditioning

Tune Up Special $80.00
Gas, Electric and Heat Pumps only
Call or Email to schedule an appointment
610-584-8741 or 215-412-COOL
heatnair@comcast.net
We also service:
- Air Conditioners » Central and Ductless Split
- Humidifiers and Water Heaters
We provide FREE estimates for new installations

Haskins
2064 Shearer Rd
Lansdale, PA 19446
www.evergreenirrigationofpa.com
e: chris@evergreenirrigationofpa.com
p: 215-527-7711

Halligan & Keaton Law Offices
Over 45 Years of Experience
Wills, Trusts, Living Wills, Powers of Attorney
Probate/Estate Administration
Estate Planning
325 Sentry Parkway Bldg. 5
21 West Front Street
W. Ste. 200 · Blue Bell
Media
610-566-6030
www.halligankeatonlaw.com

Isn't It Time for Peace of Mind?

Home Improvements
by Toby Gourley
610-222-0696
Worcester
Fully Insured — Free Estimates
Since 1991
Lic. # PA035962

Long & Foster
“YOU MAKE THE CALL...I'LL DO THE REST”
I am a full-time Agent committed to full time service.
I understand the home selling process and will design a Customized
Marketing System to assist you in differentiating your home from
others in your marketing area.
My mission when selling your home is simple:
- Prepare your home for sale
- Market your home to sell
- Keep you up-to-date throughout the process
- Get you to the settlement table with the best possible price

Paul Greco
REALTOR®
Office: 215.641.9500
Cell: 610.212.1474
Paul.Greco@LFN.com
www.LongandFoster.com

Paul Greco
ACCRREDITED LUXURY HOMES SPECIALIST (ALHS)
SENIORS REAL ESTATE SPECIALIST (SRES)

David Brothers Landscape Services
Timeless Landscapes
with Sustainable Design

Quality service with courtesy
and reliability.

Whitehall and Bean Roads
P.O. Box 123
Worcester, PA 19490
215.247.2992 ~ 610.584.1550
www.davidbrothers.com
Friends of Worcester Officers
Kim David - President (610-584-1805)
Rob Hayes - Vice President (610-584-0371)
Barb McMonagle - Treasurer (215-257-1436)
Greg Gogates - Secretary (484-744-1811)
Wini Hayes - Board Member (610-584-0371)
Paula Wiley - Board Member (610-724-1633)

Join us for an upcoming meeting
2nd Wednesdays, 7:30 pm
September through May
Visit friendsofworcester.org for details
Sign up to receive updates on current issues

Worcester Township Public Meetings
Community Hall, 1031 Valley Forge Rd, Fairview Village

Board of Supervisors
3rd Wednesday of the month, work session, 6:30 p.m.
regular meeting, 7:30 p.m.

Planning Commission
4th Thursday, 7:30 pm

Zoning Hearing Board
4th Tuesday, 6:30 pm
Check worcestertwp.com for meeting date changes or cancellations.