For many years, Friends of Worcester has worked to promote the preservation of open space and farmland in our community. However, during these difficult economic times, funding for traditional approaches, such as purchasing easements, is increasingly hard to find. We must find innovative ways to help property owners preserve their undeveloped land. One useful tool is transferable development rights (TDRs). TDRs allow property owners to sell the rights to future development of their property while retaining their land. The property can still be sold or left to heirs, but the restrictions on future development cannot be overridden. Unlike some other kinds of conservation transactions, property owners do not have to provide public access to their property.

For Worcester, the most obvious application of TDRs is to protect undeveloped land and farmland in our residential areas by transferring development rights to our existing villages – Cedars, Center Point, and Fairview. These development rights can be applied in our villages under an ordinance that would allow more retail or office buildings on a parcel using TDRs than would otherwise be allowed. It is also possible for the Township to buy TDRs. These rights can be sold in the future or held indefinitely and "retired." This approach to land preservation makes sense when, as is currently the case, land prices (and therefore the price of TDRs) are relatively low compared to what they have been in the past.

Currently, Worcester has an ordinance that allows TDRs to be transferred from one parcel to another, but only for residential development when all parcels are owned by the same entity. Currently, there is no provision for transferring TDRs from one owner to another. It is also not possible to transfer residential TDRs to allow additional village-scale retail and office development. This limitation restricts the potential uses of TDRs. Worcester's Board of Supervisors is now reviewing a proposed ordinance that would address both of these issues.

An ordinance that would allow landowners in Worcester's agricultural districts to sell their available development rights could preserve hundreds of acres of woods, fields and farmland forever. TDRs are another way that we can support the preservation of open space in our community while allowing property owners to realize the development value of their land. Since 1991, Warwick Township in Lancaster County, PA, has preserved 21 farms comprising more than 1337 acres. FOW supports this effort to expand the use of TDRs and provide more flexibility for landowners while benefiting the entire community.

**North Penn U.S. Army Reserve Center**

The 19-acre Army Reserve base located on Berks Road is on track to be closed by the U.S. Army at the end of September, as required under the Base Realignment and Closure Act of 2005.

As part of the base closure process, Worcester Township applied to acquire the property under the Federal Lands to Parks Program. This program will transfer the land to Worcester sometime in 2012 at no cost to the Township, provided the property is used solely for public recreational purposes. The Army is still completing its environmental reports on the property. The Township will review these reports to ensure that the property is clean before taking title.

The Township proposes to convert the existing Army Reserve Center building into a community center and to use the network of internal roads as a loop trail system for walking, jogging, bicycling, and horseback riding. The Methacton Community Theater has expressed interest in working with the Township to refurbish the building’s large drill hall for use as a community theater.

Once the Township has acquired the property, the first step will be to determine how to handle the building. One recommendation is to demolish one wing of the building in order to make the facility more manageable. Upgrades to meet the standards of the Americans with Disabilities Act and safety issues will also be necessary.

"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

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Worcester Continues On Pace Preserving Open Space

When it comes to preserving open space, the Township of Worcester excels. An area that many of us associate with leaving the suburbs behind have already gotten out into the countryside, this Township is home to 2,897 acres of public parks and open space, and some amazing views all the way from the center of Montgomery County to the skyline of Philadelphia. Several groups have been actively working together to protect this beautiful countryside. As of December 2010, they have succeeded in preserving 854 acres. It is especially remarkable, since the Township only has a population of 9,750 per the 2010 census, and an area of 16.2 square miles (10,368 acres).

The Township website states, “The theme of ‘Keep Worcester Green’ has been heard for decades in our municipality. Preserving open space is a core initiative in Worcester, reflected in the types of development one sees when traveling through the Township.” The need to preserve open space is due in part to all the people who would like to live there. Population growth has come in waves to the Township, peaking at over 60% per decade increase in 1950 to 1960, and 1990 to 2000. It is likely that watching farms and woods become home sites was on people’s minds when, in 2003, Montgomery County voters approved $150 million for an open space preservation program called Green Fields-Green Towns. This money, available through 2013, helps Townships preserve open space and farmland. To take advantage of this program Worcester Township completed the Worcester Township Community Greenway Plan in 2004, which identified trails, riparian buffers, and greenways that the Township wanted to protect. Going further, in 2006 the Township adopted an innovative transferable development rights option. Also in 2006, the current Open Space Plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors. In 2008 the Worcester Township Comprehensive Plan was revised and more was included regarding rural preservation, environmental protection, parkland, growth, development and infrastructure.

The development of plans and funding provides the framework. The rest is hard work and some very good will. Land has been preserved through gifts, outright purchases of property, and acquisition of development rights. Using the Montgomery County Agricultural Lands Preservation Program, the Township has preserved nine farms totaling 387 acres with $2.5 million in funding from both county and state. As of December 2010, a total of nineteen properties have been preserved, totaling 854 acres.

One recent example is the Moran property. Adjacent to Evansburg State Park, this site has mature woodlands that connect to the Pennsylvania Highlands Region. The property also has nationally significant wetlands, a tributary to Skippack Creek, stream buffers, and meadows. In flood mitigation alone, this property is a high-value site. At the end of last year an agreement was signed by the Moran family to protect 81 acres. Financial backing of $337,000 came from the Township, which leveraged $800,000 from Montgomery County and $700,000 from Pennsylvania’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The funds were used by the Montgomery County Lands Trust to purchase the development rights so that the property will be preserved. The agreement stipulates that a trail can be built through the property, which will connect nearby Methacton High School with the trails in Evansburg State Park.

Another recent example is the D’Lauro property. Frank and Dorothy D’Lauro owned 104 acres along Valley Forge and Stump Hall Rd, called Long Lane Farm. Frank made provisions in his will for his land to be preserved, so after his death in 2007, the process began to protect the land. Sixty acres have been donated to the Natural Lands Trust, which will own and manage them. Frank’s cousin will live on the rest of the acreage. The entire 104 acres will have a conservation easement held and enforced by the Montgomery County Lands Trust, which will limit development on the site. This gift will preserve the beautiful 20-mile vistas along Valley Forge Road for years to come.

It might seem that enough has been done. But the Open Space Plan shows many unique Worcester properties that are not yet protected. Friends of Worcester sums up the work to be done in their “Our Point of View” column on their website:

Worcester Township is at a crossroads. The farms and woodlands that make our community unique are also the magnets that attract developers. We are one of the last remaining municipalities within a 40-mile radius of Philadelphia that is still green. We are in this position because of the strong leadership and foresight of the supervisors who served our community for many decades. Slow, deliberate decision making was appropriate in the past. But in the last decade, Worcester has almost doubled in population, among the fastest growing municipalities in Montgomery County.

The time to preserve Worcester is now. Our historic houses, our farms, and our scenic roads will not be here much longer if we do not act to protect them. By using available Township funds, we can act now to preserve open space. We need to take advantage of the funds available from county and state land preservation programs. In addition, Worcester needs an historic protection ordinance that encourages developers to preserve re-use historic houses, not tear them down. We need a commercial ordinance that requires developers to build villages, not big box stores and strip development. We need residential development to be planned for the benefit of the entire Township, not just the developer.

The various partners in preservation have accomplished a tremendous amount already in Worcester Township. Their hard work will pay dividends to residents in the future who can let nature provide free stormwater treatment services, while they enjoy the beauty of the open space around them.
As a young boy, Drew Smith had no idea what the future would hold for him. Growing up on a farm in Worcester, he learned the value and enjoyment of growing your own food. From that experience grew his love for the land. The aspiring young farmer had a dream to share that love with others in the community.

When the Smith family purchased 138 acres on Stump Hall Road (between Hollow and Kriebel Mill Roads) from the Heebner family in 2002, they knew they were purchasing more than just a farm. They were buying a piece of Worcester’s farming heritage. The Heebner farm had been in continuous agricultural use since 1754.

From the beginning, the Smiths were interested in land preservation. They were committed to keeping the land in farming and knew of the Farmland Preservation Program. By selling an agricultural conservation easement on the farm, they would be required to continue farming and the land would never be developed. It took several years to negotiate an agricultural conservation easement for 100 acres of their farm plus a trail easement along Hollow Road. In 2007, the farm was permanently preserved with funding from the state-county Farmland Preservation Programs and Worcester Township. By selling the easement, they were able to recover the development value of their land and continue to use the land for farming and use the proceeds as they wished.

The Smiths’ vision for their farm included a market on the property where people could have the “farm experience.” This included a high quality fresh food market, pick-your-own fruits and vegetables, hands-on workshops, and events for families. In 2004, their farm became Montgomery County’s first USDA Certified Organic produce farm, a process that took 3 years to complete.

In 2010, the Smiths made the difficult decision to close the farm market. They needed someone to continue their stewardship vision for the land. They were familiar with Greener Partners, a non-profit organization that seeks to connect communities through food, farms, and education. When approached by the Smiths, Greener Partners thought Willow Creek Orchards was an incredible opportunity and platform for their mission. Greener Partners now has a long-term lease with Willow Creek Orchards.

In March 2011, Green Partners reopened the farm with a new name, The Longview Center for Agriculture. They farm 90 acres of crops and the orchard and continue the organic practices started by the Smiths. They aim to continue the legacy of Willow Creek Orchards’ unique farm experience.

Connecting people to the land through their programs is what makes The Longview Center for Agriculture different. Their onsite educational programs provide workshops for adults and children to learn something new from season to season. Their calendar is full of weekly programs and special events. This past summer’s From the Ground Up Farm Tours, Farm Eats cooking demonstrations with freshly harvested foods, Kids Can Cook, Mater & Tater Festival are a few examples of the special programs offered at the farm.

Green Partners also presents off-site programs for kids. Their “Seed to Snack” programs at local elementary schools uses foods grown on the farm to show the students how to make healthy and tasty snacks. The children are exposed to different foods and the cycle of growing that food.

For a more adventurous gardener or future farmer who wants to join the sustainable agriculture movement, start an agricultural business or take over operations of an existing farm, the Longview Center will offer The First Generation Farmers Program. This two-year apprenticeship/training program, set to start next spring, will provide hands-on farming experience of what it takes to succeed in farming.

Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever!
Marcellus Shale: Local Impact Fees vs. Severance Tax

Local Impact Fees

Governor Corbett recently unveiled his proposal to charge a “local impact fee” on the Marcellus Shale natural gas drilling industry in Pennsylvania, as recommended by the Marcellus Shale Advisory Commission appointed Spring 2011. The impact fee would be accessed by counties where the drilling is being conducted and will be used only by those counties and local governments as well as a limited number of state agencies to mitigate the impact of Marcellus Shale gas exploration. It is anticipated that the fee would generate $120 million in the first year and $200 million within six years for local communities hosting drilling in the Marcellus Shale region.

The locally-generated revenue would be used for infrastructure repair (including roads and sewers), affordable housing, social services, and for municipal planning. The state portion of the revenue would be divided among the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA), the Office of the State Fire Commissioner, the Department of Health, the Public Utility Commission (PUC), the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) and the Department of Transportation (PennDOT) but would be used only for public safety, training, education and infrastructure repairs in counties with Marcellus Shale development.

It is worth noting that the Governor’s proposed impact fee would not generate funds specifically to renew Growing Greener, which has been an important source of funding for open space and farmland preservation, nor would it provide any funds for southeastern Pennsylvania or those impacted in the Delaware River watershed by drilling.

Severance Tax Proposal

One of several current House bills supporting a severance tax on drillers of natural gas is House Bill 33 of 2011, which would provide for a severance tax on all Marcellus Shale natural gas drilling companies. The rate of the tax would be less than what is assessed in neighboring West Virginia, where Marcellus Shale is also present. This tax assessment would be passed on to the consumer, affecting natural gas rates throughout the state. It is anticipated that House Bill 33 would generate $203 million immediately in 2011 and close to $700 million by 2015.

Following is a breakdown of how the funds would be distributed:

- General Fund Distribution – 33.3%
- Environmental Distribution – 33.4% (renewing Growing Greener)
- Local Government Distribution – 33.3%

Similar to Governor Corbett’s proposal, House Bill 33 would require funding distributions for local governments and counties with producing sites to prioritize funding for reconstruction, repair and maintenance of county roads and bridges, preservation of water supply, maintenance of wastewater and sewer systems and preservation of surface waters. Another 10 percent would be dedicated to the Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency (PEMA) for fire and ambulance services in counties with producing sites. What is the difference between local impact fees and a severance tax for Montgomery County?

Currently, the Governor’s proposal provides no funding for communities outside of the Marcellus Shale region or any new funding for environmental conservation and open space or farmland preservation projects throughout the Commonwealth. Because Governor Corbett has taken a “no tax” pledge during his term in office, his proposals are strictly limited to communities directly affected by drilling and tied only to currently known impacts of Marcellus Shale drilling.

Conversely, severance tax bills typically take a more holistic look at environmental protection and take into account current and potential future impacts of drilling in local communities as well as the impacts on watersheds throughout the Commonwealth. In addition, the current Marcellus Shale severance tax proposals provide additional statewide funding for the Environmental Stewardship Fund and an extension of Growing Greener in conjunction with funding to help local communities mitigate the impact of drilling on their communities.

Montgomery County and residents of Worcester Township have traditionally been very successful in leveraging state Growing Greener and Environmental Stewardship Funds for environmental protection, conservation projects and farmland preservation programs. Investing in protecting our environment is essential to our quality of life. Current funding for Growing Greener II has been reduced from $150 million per year to only $27 million in the current 2011-2012 budget, an 82% decrease. The need to continue funding these projects is critical if we are going to be able to continue investing in our natural resources and special places.

The state Legislature has reconvened its Session and is expected to have significant debate on this matter in the coming weeks. Let’s hope a bipartisan agreement can be reached to benefit us all.

Eyes on the Issues

Pennsylvania Turnpike Updates: Morris Road Bridge Project

This project was completed and the bridge was re-opened to traffic on May 2, 2011.

Northeastern Extension Total Reconstruction and Widening Project – Southern Section

In March 2011, construction began on the first 6 miles of the Turnpike’s total reconstruction and widening project on the Northeastern Extension (I-476), located between Mid-County and Berks Road (milepost A20-A26). Initial work includes tree and shrub removal, installing erosion and sedimentation controls, and excavating soil and rock, mostly within the Turnpike’s right-of-way. Additionally, seven turnpike mainline bridges will be widened to accommodate the future roadway alignment.

When the project is completed in late 2013, there will be three 12-foot travel lanes north and southbound, 12-foot shoulders, a 26-foot median with a 52-inch concrete median barrier, retaining walls, sound barriers and stormwater basins. For more information about the project, visit: www.paturnpike.com/constructiprojects/mpA20toA30.

Montgomery County and residents of Worcester Township have traditionally been very successful in leveraging state Growing Greener and Environmental Stewardship Funds for environmental protection, conservation projects and farmland preservation programs. Investing in protecting our environment is essential to our quality of life. Current funding for Growing Greener II has been reduced from $150 million per year to only $27 million in the current 2011-2012 budget, an 82% decrease. The need to continue funding these projects is critical if we are going to be able to continue investing in our natural resources and special places.

The completed rain garden at the Worcester Township Administration building was funded through a Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection grant.

Worcester Township Village Planning

The Worcester Township Planning Commission continues to work on Fairview Village and Cedars Village planning. This effort focuses on the long-term future growth of these locations. This has been an extensive project for the Planning Commission. Residents and business owners have attended meetings to discuss issues and to offer suggestions and comments.

The first product of this project will be a draft ordinance for Cedars Village which the Planning Commission will review and forward to the Supervisors for their consideration. The agenda for the Planning Commission is posted on the Township website. Meetings are the second and fourth Thursday of the month. Public comments are welcome.

Election Day November 8, 2011

Cast your vote

You make a difference

Polls are open from 7:00 am - 8:00 pm

Worcester Township polling locations:

- Community Hall - Fairview Village
- Bethel United Methodist Church
- Variety Club Camp
- Central Schwenkfelder Church

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

Winter Golf Rates

(starting November 7th)

Unlimited Play

Walk - $13
Ride - $18

Winter Hours: Daily 9am-dark

Worcester Golf Club
1600 Green Hill Road
Collegeville, PA 19426
610-222-0200

Indoor Winter Golf

- Simulates real golf play
- Bring your own clubs or use ours
- Discounted parties for you and up to 7 friends
- Reasonably priced, custom made golf clubs
- Call Adam for tee times and custom club pricing
- Bring this coupon for a free indoor golf demonstration

Movie Night!

Worcester Township Community Hall
1031 Valley Forge Road
Fairview Village

Wednesday, November 9, 7:00 pm

Join Friends of Worcester and Montgomery County Lands Trust

See the premier screening of The Moran Conservation Project: A Vision Realized exploring the history and path to preservation of one of the largest conservation projects undertaken in Worcester Township in recent years. Learn about the “how” and “why” of land conservation from project partners and others in the community. Enjoy popcorn, homemade baked goods, and apple cider.

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

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Ride - $18

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