Dear Friends:

Friends of Worcester is embarking on yet another exciting initiative. As we continue to expand our strategies to preserve open space in Worcester Township, I take great pride in announcing a partnership that Friends of Worcester has formed with Montgomery County Lands Trust to establish a dedicated fund, administered by Montgomery County Lands Trust for the sole purpose of open space preservation in Worcester Township. Friends of Worcester and Montgomery County Lands Trust will work in concert to raise money and bring these funds to key conservation projects in Worcester.

This collaboration is the first of its kind in which a larger, county wide, non-profit combines forces with a local, smaller, non-profit to achieve common goals. Friends of Worcester is honored to be a leader in land preservation, initiating a model that may well be a new trend in land preservation. Federal, State and County funds for open space projects are dwindling due to our current stressed economic situation. This new initiative may become a necessary strategy to continue open space preservation.

As we move forward with this project, we will keep you informed of our progress. The potential for sustaining Worcester’s rural character is here. With the support of Montgomery County Lands Trust and the residents of Worcester who share the vision of Worcester as a suburban agricultural community, we can continue to achieve our open space goals.

Kim David

“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
Your Say: Land Preservation Still Matters in Montco

Reprinted with permission of State Rep Kate Harper, R-61st.

Monday, January 9, 2012

Two large properties are for sale in my neighborhood. Together, they represent about 250 acres. The development of either or both has the potential to radically change our community.

My neighbors are worried - they have grown used to the lovely vistas of fields and forests they can see from the upstairs windows or from the backyard; the wildlife that threatens their gardens but is nonetheless a part of our natural habitat; and the trails around the edges where we can walk dogs, pick wildflowers or scrounge for pinecones for wintry decorating. Neighbors a mile or so downstream are oblivious to the beneficial effects of these open fields and the forests for storm water management and air quality, but they benefit, too, whether they know it or not.

No one blames the landowners - they raised their families here, they kept the land open, and now a big house and a farm are just too much to take care of alone. The neighbors pause along the trail, or in the supermarket, or after church, to ask, "Have you heard? It's for sale! What will happen next? Who will buy the land? What will be built there?"

They know every piece of land is zoned for something and every landowner has a right to develop in accordance with the zoning. They understand that the house and the land are the landowners' retirement accounts, and do not begrudge their neighbors' asking prices. Still they worry.

They are not unlike those Americans surveyed by the National Association for Realtors (NAR) last summer, while the recession depressed housing, development and real estate in general, and "suburban sprawl" was no longer a topic of discussion at local government meetings.

According to the NAR magazine, "Nevertheless, a strong anti-sprawl sentiment emerged when people were asked to prioritize a list of housing and community issues facing their state governments. Preserving farms and open spaces was the number one issue with 53% of the people saying it was a high or extremely high priority. Creating new developments was dead last at 24%.

This is not to say, of course, that development itself is a bad thing - that's how my neighborhood got built, of course, and it could not exist without nearby shopping and commercial business locations and employment opportunities. Instead, what it indicates is that every well-developed community has a variety of factors that include housing developments, commercial, industrial and office development that offer employment opportunities (and also function as a varied and stable tax base to fund the schools), but also some open spaces, natural areas, trails and recreation spaces. Lucky communities still host a farm or two for nearby local produce. As the survey pointed out, people value communities that have all of these things, and they include farms, parks, trails and open spaces as a priority.

In America, open land is part of our DNA. We have a gut reaction to it, quite apart from its value to the community for many tangible reasons. In Winter, open land provides natural areas for "stopping by the woods on a snowy evening," like Robert Frost; in the Spring, its ability to let the rain fall gently and infiltrate the fields helps manage storm water; in the Summer, the land provides a place for the crack of a bat to herald the Little League season, or to grow corn and fresh vegetables; and in the Fall, the harvest includes hay rides, soccer games, and a free fall foliage show to delight the senses.

So of course my neighbors are worried. But they needn't be. Luckily for us, both of these families, generously working with local land trusts, conservancies and watershed associations, as well as supportive county and state government programs, made the decision to preserve the land in its open and natural state "in perpetuity" several years ago. Under the watchful eyes of the conservancies, the houses and part of the land will be sold, but not developed. Ever.

Open space programs can be viewed as a "frill" in hard times like the ones we are experiencing now. Land trusts can be viewed as less deserving of private and foundation support than other charitable organizations. And yet, the work of preserving the land that should be saved continues.

Properties come on the market for all sorts of reasons, and we need to be ready to preserve the land that should be kept open, and to make sure the promises of the conservation or farmland preservation easements are kept by new owners. Our communities need these open lands, and they are counting on us. If land trusts and conservation organizations did not exist, much of what we value in our communities would be irrevocably lost.

State Rep. Kate Harper, R-61st, Montgomery, chairs the Board of Directors of the Montgomery County Lands Trust, a nationally accredited 501(c)(3) nonprofit conservancy that works every day to preserve the land that should be saved in Montgomery County.

URL:
http://www.thereporteronline.com/articles/2012/01/10/opinion/doc4f0b75519539e002552984.prt
As a 10-year-old girl, Dee Dee Derr had no idea what the future would bring. It happened by accident – or was it fate? Her love for horses began with a visit to her aunt in Maine. When her aunt arranged for her to go riding for the first time, that’s all it took, she was hooked!

Dee Dee grew up just inside Philadelphia, near the Bala train station on City Line Avenue, about a mile from Fairmount Stables. When other girls were babysitting, she was earning her spending money cooling out horses at the polo games. After school she would hang out with friends at the stable, help out with the horses and ride whenever possible.

Always looking for opportunities to ride, at 15 years old she persuaded a teenage boy, Bill McGrane, to let her try his horse. And the rest is history. When she was 19, they were married.

In 1959, the McGranes made settlement on their Worcester farm and moved to the country to raise their family and keep their horses. In 1960 they began a breeding farm and registered many foals over the years. Dee Dee showed horses for many years including at Worcester’s own Farmers’ Union Horse Show. For almost 30 years, Dee Dee judged Horse Shows in 17 states and Canada. She is still an Honorary Vice President of the American Quarter Horse Association, member of their board, past president of the PA Quarter Horse Association and an active member of Farmers’ Union Horse Company.

From Stump Hall Road it is hard to see the special features of the McGrane 16.6-acre farm. Within there are beautiful views, a spring-fed frog pond, seven different fields and almost a mile of fences, not to mention the spectacular horses and other animals.

Dee Dee first learned about the Farmland Preservation Program while serving on the Worcester Township Open Space Committee. She realized from the start that preserving her farm could benefit her as well as the community. Current Supervisor Susan Caughlan, Worcester’s Open Space Coordinator at the time, helped Dee Dee with her application to the Farm Board.

In order to qualify for state funding through the Montgomery County Farmland Preservation Program (http://planning.montcopa.org/planning/cwp/view.a.3.q.1856.asp), a farm must be at least 35 acres, or at least 10 acres if it is adjacent to another permanently preserved property. It also must be in an Agricultural Security Area (ASA), have a Soil Conservation Plan and conduct an approved farming activity. Each application is ranked according to specific criteria using a point system. The Farm Board makes offers yearly to preserve the highest ranked farms as funding permits. Once a farm is preserved, it must remain in farming forever. The farmer may continue to live there or sell the farm in the future.

From Dee Dee’ first application to the Montgomery County Farmland Preservation Program, it took several years to complete her farm preservation. Today Dee Dee boards horses, which is one of the many approved uses. Dee Dee never wanted to see her farm developed. By selling the development rights of her farm and placing a permanent deed restriction, called an agricultural conservation easement, on the property, Dee Dee was able to receive payment for the development value of her property. She now has peace of mind. The land will remain a farm forever and she will be able to use the proceeds to make improvements to the property. Her first investment was to go solar, which is saving her more than 80% of the cost of electricity for the farm and house.

Although state law does not allow preserved farmland to be open to the public, Worcester was able to purchase a separate trail easement along the edge of the property for a section of the Worcester Township trail network, which is planned to extend from Evansburg State Park to Nike Park. With only 16.6 acres, Dee Dee was able to qualify because it is contiguous with the already preserved Schierenbeck farm. After the McGrane property was preserved, the 19-acre property owned by Mrs. Graham was able to qualify and has since been preserved with a separate trail easement as well.

Dee Dee is happy to talk with others about preserving their properties. Her passion about Worcester runs deep: “Keep Worcester Green! Keep it the special place it is. We have been able to maintain our unique character and rural beauty. I would like our grandchildren to be able to enjoy it, as we have.” 🌱

Once it’s gone, it’s gone forever!
Transferable Development Rights Program Grows in Worcester

For the past 20 years, communities have successfully used state and county open space funding to purchase open space as well as conservation easements on many properties. The goal has been to preserve large tracts of land for habitat, open space, and farming. Today, however, public funds have become extremely limited. Communities must develop innovative ways to continue open space programs and to assist property owners who want to preserve their undeveloped land. One such tool is transferable development rights (TDRs).

A TDR program allows owners of larger properties to sell or donate the right to develop their property in the future, while retaining ownership of their land. The property can still be sold or left to heirs, but the restrictions on future development cannot be overridden. The program is completely optional for landowners.

TDR programs are active in many municipalities across the country. Since 2006, Worcester has had a limited TDR program, as part of our conservation subdivision ordinance when larger tracts are developed for homes. In February, the Supervisors approved a TDR ordinance that allows property owners in certain zoning districts to obtain an official certificate for the number of TDRs on their property, regardless of whether they want to sell their property for development. A landowner may keep these TDRs, leave them to heirs, donate them to the township or to a land trust, or sell them. In general, properties of at least 30 acres in the AGR and LPD districts may apply to certify their TDRs.

The TDR program is controlled by the township, which certifies the number of TDRs (development rights) that are available to each property owner who apply to the program. The property owner can then choose to keep the TDRs, sell or retire them. Once these TDRs are sold or donated, the property from which they originated will be restricted from development forever, using a Covenant that will be filed with the Recorder of Deeds.

This program offers a way for the township to preserve open space and farmland without spending money to buy easements or land. For landowners, it offers the ability to protect their land in a different way than a traditional conservation easement. It also offers them the opportunity to separate the development value of their property from the land itself. This gives landowners increased flexibility for financial and estate planning purposes.

The next step will be to enact ordinances allowing TDRs to be used in certain areas in the township, called “receiving areas.” The first proposed receiving area is Cedars village. Property owners will be allowed to increase the commercial square footage or impervious coverage, up to a certain limit in the ordinance, if they buy the required number of TDRs. These increases are proposed only for commercial uses, such as retail or office space. The real estate market will determine the value of the TDRs.

In the future, TDRs may also be used to allow more homes to be built on a property than would otherwise be allowed by zoning. This is not the same as rezoning a parcel to allow more density. A property owner in a receiving area would be allowed to build additional homes only by buying the required number of TDRs from elsewhere in the township.

An effective residential TDR program will allow increased density only where it makes sense to have more homes – in areas that have access to public water and sewer, major roads, and businesses that serve local needs.

The Board of Supervisors will hold a public hearing to establish the first of the TDR receiving districts as part of a Cedars Village Overlay on Wednesday, May 16 at 7:30 pm at Community Hall. FOW encourages interested residents to attend the meeting and support Worcester’s growing TDR program as part of our continued commitment to preserving open space and the rural heritage of our township. Interested residents may also visit our website for a link to a petition supporting the Cedars Village Overlay ordinance.

An Arbor Day Tradition at Worcester Elementary School

The Friends of Worcester were proud to sponsor an Arbor Day presentation and provide a tree seedling to each of the students, Kindergarten through 4th grade, at Worcester Elementary School on Friday, April 27.

The students learned about the history of Arbor Day, the value of planting trees, and the contribution these trees make toward preserving the quality of open space in Worcester. As part of the presentation, the students were able to view wonderful photos of some of the historic trees of Worcester that are 250 to 300+ years old, hear Arbor Day tree stories, and receive some fun educational materials along with their tree. The students were encouraged to plant and chart the growth of their trees to help provide future historical data.

Friends of Worcester would like to thank our friends at The Longview Center for Agriculture for their support of this year’s event.

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/development, fundraising

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

PECO Substation Project Update

In 2007, PECO began communicating with residents in Worcester Township, including FOW members, about construction of a new substation needed to maintain electrical reliability in the area. After including input from residents in their plans, PECO began construction of the substation in 2009, completed it, and put it into service in May 2011. After the substation was put in service, some residents began to notice a low frequency hum emanating from the transformers at the site. PECO agreed to consider additional work to address this low frequency sound, gathered additional input from residents on possible remedies, and is currently in the process of building a sound-absorbing wall to mitigate the issue. Weather permitting, this work is expected to be completed in the spring.

North Penn Army Reserve Base

Last fall, the Army transferred its remaining Reserve units to their new Willow Grove facility, and the Army Reserve Base on Berks Road was finally closed. The township is still on track to receive the 19-acre property at no cost to use for a public park and community center, provided the environmental issues can be worked out. Our township manager has been in touch with representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) regarding the township’s concern with the environmental condition of the property. However, funding cuts at both the federal and state levels resulted in little satisfaction for the township from either the Army or the DEP. Earlier this spring, the Board of Supervisors hired the environmental law firm Manko, Gold, Katcher & Fox to review the environmental situation at the property and assist with getting the federal and state agencies to address the township’s concerns. The firm’s report is expected later this spring.

Worcester Historical Society
Annual Flea Market
Saturday, May 12
8:00 am to 4:00 pm  Rain or Shine
Worcester Twp. Community Hall
1031 Valley Forge Rd, Fairview Village

Featuring a presentation on bees and beekeeping by local expert James Bobb at 11:00 am

Spring Program, Monday, May 14
“Mr. Schweiker Goes to Washington”
7:30 pm, Farmers’ Union Hall
2011 Valley Forge Rd., Center Point
Light refreshments served

The Moran Conservation Project Video

Friends of Worcester and Montgomery County Lands Trust joined on November 9, 2011 at Worcester Township Community Hall for the premier viewing of the Montgomery County Lands Trust video “The Moran Conservation Project: A Vision Realized” followed by a group discussion about open space preservation. The video explains the ins and outs of preserving the Moran property, 81 unique acres in Worcester, adjacent to Evansburg State Park. If you missed the video, find the link to it on our website, www.friendsofworcester.org.

72nd Annual Farmers’ Union Horse Show
Saturday, June 2

Heyser Field, 8:00 am
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behind Worcester Township Community Hall

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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 by either email or US mail.

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

Board of Supervisors
1st Monday of the month, 9:00 am
3rd Wednesday of the month, 7:30 pm

Planning Commission
2nd & 4th Thursday, 7:30 pm

Zoning Hearing Board
4th Tuesday, 6:30 pm

Check worcestertwp.com to meeting date changes or cancellations.

Friends of Worcester Officers
Kim David - President (610-584-1805)
Rob Hayes - Vice President (610-584-0371)
Wini Hayes - Treasurer (610-584-0371)
Barbara McMonagle - Secretary (215-257-1436)

Join us for an upcoming meeting
2nd Wednesdays, 7:30 pm,
September through May

Check friendsofworcester.org for details.