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DELAWARE COUNTY COUNCIL PARTNERS WITH MUNICIPALITIES TO PRESERVE OPEN SPACE

Green acres... That's what Delaware County Council is dedicated to provide for its residents through an active, ongoing open space program.

As part of its Open Space Initiative, Delaware County Council works with local municipalities toward the purchase and preservation of land. There are multiple benefits to land preservation including keeping our watersheds clean, providing sites for active and passive recreation, minimizing congestion that pollutes the air and water, and contributing to the overall quality of life in Delaware County.

The Open Space Initiative was launched by County Council in 2000, when Council appointed an open space and environmental resources task force, comprised of local citizens, to develop a comprehensive plan for the preservation of open space.

Council enlisted the help of the Natural Lands Trust Inc., a land conservation organization based in Marple, to develop a mapping program for each municipality. The result is that each municipality has a series of geographic information system (GIS) maps to assist in identifying all natural resources, including open space, watersheds and even historic districts.

It was up to each municipality, with the assistance of the Natural Lands Trust, to then determine the property they deemed important to acquire and preserve. In turn, the county committed to contributing five percent of the purchase price.

"Municipalities are really struggling to preserve open space in the face of increasing development," said Councilwoman Christine Fizzano Cannon, Council's liaison to the county Planning Department. "We want to partner with each township and borough to help develop a plan and then, to make it a reality.

In 2006, an Open Space celebration was held at the historic Smedley tract, a parcel of land acquired through the program by Middletown Township.

The Middletown tract was one of five Open Space grants announced at that celebration. That event marked the acquisition of 159 acres of open space in Concord, Middletown, Thornbury and Upper Chichester townships and Rose Valley Borough.

Delaware County allocated a total of \$820,000, which represents a 5 percent commitment toward the total value of over \$16 million.

"According to the experts at the Natural Lands Trust, every hour, another acre of this region's remaining open space is lost," said Mrs. Fizzano Cannon.

"By partnering with municipalities, we are helping communities protect open space, which in turn, protects our water sources, provides recreational space, protects our home values and makes the county more attractive to employers. We recognize that land preservation and economic success go hand-in-hand and this project is an investment in the county's future, both environmentally and economically."

"The benefits of open space are countless... open space enhances our air and water quality, it reduces the impact of floods, provides habitat for our wildlife, and offsets the congestion that can burden our natural resources," Mrs. Fizzano Cannon said.

And the process is continuing. County Council, through the Planning Department, continues to work with municipalities to identify open space for acquisition.

Open Space and Revitalization

The Open Space Initiative complements the county's Revitalization Program, aimed at revitalizing more developed communities in the eastern end of the county.

Under the Revitalization Program, funds are earmarked for five designated regions that include 29 municipalities in the eastern region. Since 2003, the county has allocated \$3.2 million of Revitalization funds for projects in eastern communities.

The goal of the Revitalization Program is to help the inner ring suburbs become more attractive, livable and economically viable through a process of strategic planning and financial assistance. That assistance is targeted at stabilizing, revitalizing and rebuilding areas most in need of assistance.

The 20 remaining communities in the western region are being assisted with smart development initiatives and open space preservation.