

HARRISON TOWNSHIP

MASTER PLAN

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

PUBLIC HEARING

MARCH 21, 2002

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Harrison Township is one of the fastest growing townships in the state of New Jersey. The 1990 census showed a population of 4,715. By the year 2000, the population had increased to 8,788, a growth of 86.4%.

This rapid growth has resulted in roads becoming congested, recreational needs being strained, and schools that are rapidly expanding. While striving to preserve the farmland and historic nature of Harrison Township, we are also striving to meet the increased needs of the growing population in terms of recreational programs and areas.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Harrison Township was recently identified as the third fastest growing township in New Jersey. The very nature of Harrison Township has changed from a farming community to a bedroom community for Philadelphia, Wilmington and New York City. With the increasing population, come the increased need for services including public works, police and fire protection, larger schools and more recreational facilities. The population expects all of this, while at the same time, they want to preserve the historic areas and open space and farmland that are the very reason they chose to live here in the first place.

Protection and preservation of open space comes in many varieties, including, farm land preservation, historical preservation and active and passive recreation spaces. Open space protection is a valuable element within our community. In fact, open space is an integral part of the desired high quality of life that defines Harrison Township.

2.0 GOALS AND POLICIES

The Township of Harrison shall be guided in its open space and recreational procedures by the following goals or principles:

- Ensure that open space planning is an important role in the development of the Township of Harrison;
- Promote protection of open space, wetland and farmlands;
- Support active recreational opportunities on an equal and accessible basis for all township residents;
- Protect surface water and drinking water quality;
- Preserve historical parcels identified in our township;
- Encourage farm land owners to preserve their lands in the 8-year and permanent farmland preservation programs;
- Obtain an annual review of recreational facilities and needs from the Recreation Commission;
- Support the community's needs relative to a safe pedestrian circulation.

3.0 INVENTORY

Harrison Township currently has two active recreation areas and two passive recreation areas.

The two active recreation areas are Ella Harris Park and Pleasant Valley Park. Ella Harris Park facilities include soccer fields, baseball fields, tennis courts, a picnic pavilion, basketball courts, a playground for small children, barbecue grills, parking areas, a concession stand and a walking trail. Restroom facilities are available and are in the process of having heating installed to extend the use to a longer season. A total of about 26 acres make up Ella Harris Park which is located between Bridgeton Pike and Commissioners Road, at the southern part of town.

Pleasant Valley Park is only a few years old. The area is currently about 30 acres and consists of soccer and football fields. Parking facilities are under construction and will be completed by the spring of 2002. Pleasant Valley Park is located at the north end of the township, next to the Pleasant Valley School.

The township obtained the Mullica Hill Pond Recreation area and adjacent land through the Stewart Trust. This is a passive recreation area and does not have any active recreational facilities.

The Township purchased approximately 30 acres of wooded land on the east side of Route 55. This land currently does not have any recreational facilities.

Recreational facilities are detailed in the following table:

RECREATION FACILITIES			
Ella Harris Park	Block 56	Lots 1, 1.02	Active Recreation
Pleasant Valley Park	Block 38	Lot 6	Active Recreation
Mullica Hill Pond	Block 58 Block 73	Lot 1, 2 Lot 3, 4	Passive Recreation
Route 55 land	Block 4	Lot 1	Passive Recreation

Farmland Preserved lands are detailed in the following table:

STATE 8-YEAR PRESERVATION PROGRAM			
Eachus, Ella	Block 56	Lots 5, 6	160 acres approximately
MUNICIPAL 8-YEAR PRESERVATION PROGRAM			
Katinos, John	Block 33	Lot 7	18 acres approximately
Visalli, Joseph & Grace	Block 45	Lot 16	64.5 acres approximately
Grasso, Lucy, Alfio and Rosario	Block 45	Lot 11	99 acres approximately
STATE PERMANENT EASEMENT PURCHASE PROGRAM			
Butler Farms, Gardiner	Block 53	Lot 2	46 acres approximately
Butler Farms, Gardiner	Block 51	Lots 1, 2	107 acres approximately
Bramell	Block 54	Lots 11.01, 12	163 acres approximately

Sorbello, Sam & Rose	Block 54	Lots 6, 8, 9.01	20 acres approximately
Visalli, Sam	Block 55	Lot 7	16 acres approximately
Pennell, Howard	Block 57	Lot 7	66 acres approximately
Eachus, Willard	Block 36	Lot 4	45 acres approximately
Jones, Margaret	Block 5	Lots 4, 17	76 acres approximately

4.0 NEEDS ANALYSIS

The Harrison Township Recreation Commission recently presented a report to The Township Committee on future recreational needs. The currently utilized fields and facilities are grossly overtaxed. Over the next 25 years, the Commission would like to add sufficient acreage to the current recreational facilities to satisfy future needs of the community.

During the year 2000, 783 students were enrolled in the soccer program. The Clearview Soccer Fields were utilized to allow an additional 270 students to play soccer. The Little League Program had over 750 students enrolled as of summer 2001. The Pleasant Valley Panthers Football Club had over 100 students registered to play football in the fall of 2001.

The recreational facilities are used on a daily basis for tennis, walking, basketball, picnics, and play areas, as well as organized sporting activities.

The Commission foresees a need for:

- 5 new baseball fields
- 5 new soccer fields
- New Picnic areas
- Walking trails
- Bike trails
- Increased Parking areas
- Additional Restroom facilities

In total, the Recreation Commission will need approximately 77 additional acres over the next 25 years to accommodate the growing needs of Harrison Township. These needs must, of course, be balanced with the fiscal reality of obtaining these acres.

5.0 RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

Harrison Township still has large areas of active farmland, as well as land that is not being farmed and may be available for development. Realizing this, as well as the need for acquisition of land, the Township Committee has identified six properties for acquisition:

PROPOSED RECREATION SITES (MAPS-APPENDIX A)			
Walters Road, Mullica Hill	Block 34	Lot 49	47.7 acres
Walters Road, Mullica Hill	Block 34	Lot 53	27.22 acres
Walters Road, Mullica Hill	Block 34	Lot 2	17.87 acres
Richwood Road, Ewan	Block 6	Lot 1	50.22 acres
South Main Street, Mullica Hill	Block 73	Lot 29	01.81 acres
South Main Street, Mullica Hill	Block 73	Lot 5	14.22 acres

The needs of the Township will be reassessed every year by the Recreation Commission and every 6 years by the Master Plan Review.

6.0 ACTION PLAN

Based on the parcel evaluations and the overall assessment of open space and recreational facilities currently available, the following recommendations for action, and future action, are presented to guide township officials in the future development of Harrison Township.

6.1 RECREATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Baseball

Baseball fields, which include spectator areas of at least 300 x 300 each, must be considered. Five new fields ultimately will be required to meet the population needs, based upon projected population figures for the next 25 years. Two of the fields should have lighting to allow for playing earlier in the spring, and later in the fall, when the evenings become shorter.

The need for 5 additional fields is forecast. Since each field requires approximately 3 acres, without support facilities, this equals a total of 15 additional acres for baseball.

Soccer

Soccer fields are an important part of the recreation program. Each site, including spectator areas, consumes at least 3 acres. The projected need is for 5 additional fields, for a total of 15 additional acres.

Football

The football program utilizes the Pleasant Valley Park. Since the participation in this program is likely to increase, a need is seen for additional football fields.

Tennis

Tennis courts are currently available at Ella Harris Park and at Clearview Regional High School. The courts at Ella Harris Park are not lit and are, therefore, only used during daylight hours. The courts at Clearview are lit from April to October and are available for public use before and after school hours and during weekends. As the population grows, so will the need for more tennis courts.

Walking areas

Much of the population does not participate in organized sporting activities, but still enjoys outdoor activity. Walking trails and other natural areas are seen as an important part of the township's recreational plan. Therefore, additional land is needed for both walking trails, and biking trails, in different locations throughout the township. It is seen that these areas would be adjacent to wetland areas to enable appreciation for the need to preserve these areas.

New Sports

As the population grows, so will the need and interest in sports facilities not currently available in Harrison Township. Consideration should be given to softball fields, swimming facilities, outdoor theatre, lacrosse fields, golf driving ranges, and tot playgrounds.

Taking into consideration all of these recommendations, a need is forecast for a total of at least 77 acres within the next 25 years. This includes parking areas for cars and bikes, and drainage and detention facilities, which may or may not be part of walking trails and other natural areas. This does not take into consideration a Senior Citizen Facility, the need for which is contemplated.

6.2 FUNDING SOURCES

There are numerous funding sources available for the purchase of open space, easements and development rights. Township Officials shall investigate all potential funding sources, including the following:

- **ISTEA Funds** – Federal program administered by the New Jersey Department of Transportation for projects related to bike paths and hiking trails.
- **NJDEP Green Acres Bond Funds and Planning Incentive Program** – state programs offering grants and low interest loans to acquire land for conservation/recreational purposes.
- **New Jersey Farmland Preservation Program** – state funds available for easement purchases of critical farmland.
- **Gloucester County Farmland & Open Space Fund** – County funding program designed to assist in the purchase of farmland easements and fee simple acquisition of open space in Gloucester County.
- **Stewart Trust Fund** – funds available for municipal acquisitions provided the property is bordered or crossed by a watercourse, and the community maintains the property after acquisition.
- **Recreation Contribution** – fee collected from developers for each house constructed and placed in the Recreation Trust Fund to support the expansion of recreational facilities and programs.
- **Farmland Preservation Assistance Trust** – funded by a one cent (\$.01) per one hundred dollars (\$100.00) of assessed valuation on the tax rate to be used to encourage retention of farmland and open space.
- **Corporate Sources** – local corporations may wish to contribute to the purchase of open space as a gesture of community support.

6.3 PUBLIC EDUCATION

Harrison Township publishes a quarterly newsletter which is used to inform the residents about the activities relating to preserving open space and farmland, and acquisitions of new recreation areas. Information on recreation facilities and programs could be published in this newsletter as well.

As the township acquires land for recreation, a sign would be placed on the property, informing the public that the township has now acquired this land, how the purchase was funded, and the recreation facilities being proposed for the land.

6.4 ORDINANCE REVISIONS AND PARCEL REZONING

All of the areas proposed for acquisition should be reviewed by the Master Plan Review Committee to determine if the current zoning is appropriate for the proposed use. Recommendations should be made to the Planning Board and Township Committee, if it is determined that zoning changes may be necessary. In addition, consideration should be given to amending the farmland preservation ordinance to include funding for open space land.

Furthermore, the Master Plan Review Committee should consider a proposal to tighten the tree protection ordinance. It is noted here that the Township Committee recently adopted a riparian buffer ordinance to protect the steep slopes and expand stream buffers within the sewer service area.

7.0 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Since the public is notified of Master Plan Hearings, they have the opportunity to participate in the process of creating a Master Plan. The public also has the opportunity to participate through the Recreation Commission and by volunteering to serve on the many boards that operate all of the organized sporting activities.