

**Harrison Township  
Master Plan**

**Open Space & Recreation Plan Amendments**

**February 2015**

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This document is an update to the 2002 Open Space Master Plan, and seeks to evaluate:

- The validity of goals and objectives.
- Progress in attaining/implementing recommendations.
- The validity of recommendations that have not been attained/implemented.
- Current recommendations for 2014 going forward.

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%. The 2010 census shows a population of 12,417, an increase of approximately 41%, despite the impacts of the recession that began in 2007.

This pattern of sustained 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 Township;
- Support the community's needs relative to a safe pedestrian circulation.

Through evaluation, it has been determined that the above goals and objectives remain valid.

### **3.0 INVENTORY**

At the time of the 2002 Open Space Master Plan, Harrison Township had 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's 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 was only a few years old at the time of the 2002 Open Space Master Plan. The area is currently about 30 acres and consists of lacrosse and football fields. Pleasant Valley Park is located at the north end of the township, next to the Pleasant Valley School.

The Mullica Hill Pond Recreation area is a passive recreation area and does not currently 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.

The William Wilt Soccer Complex is the most recent addition to Harrison Township's recreational inventory. Constructed toward the end of the last decade, the complex offers 13 soccer fields, play structures for children age 2-12, a gazebo and passive seating, a jogging trail, a concession stand with restrooms, and handicap accessible swings. Also at William Wilt is a Veteran's Monument, a spacious area with engraved pavers and passive seating.

The table on the following page denotes the block, lot, acreage, and current known status of Harrison Township's open space inventory. This data is based on GIS databases updated by the Township in 2013 and mapped as shown on Figure 1: Open Space Plan, and verified with Township officials for accuracy:

**Block and lots contained within the 2002 Open Space Master Plan Inventory**

Block	Lot	Acres	Status
5	4	65.9	Permanently Preserved Farmland
5	17	8.3	Permanently Preserved Farmland
33	7	17.0	Permanently Preserved Farmland
36	4	38.7	Permanently Preserved Farmland
51	1	96.8	Permanently Preserved Farmland
53	2	39.4	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	6	6.5	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	8	8.2	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	9.01	5.8	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	11.01	122.8	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	12	37.1	Permanently Preserved Farmland
55	7	15.4	Permanently Preserved Farmland
56	6	60.4	Permanently Preserved Farmland
57	7	108.3	Permanently Preserved Farmland
4	1	28.3	***Recreation Facilities
38	6	19.1	***Recreation Facilities
56	1	16.2	***Recreation Facilities
56	1.02	7.8	***Recreation Facilities
58	1	15.4	***Recreation Facilities
58	2	2.4	***Recreation Facilities
73	3	0.8	Recreation Facilities
73	4	3.2	***Recreation Facilities

\*\*\*denotes parcels listed under the Green Acres Program

**Block and lots listed within the 2002 Open Space Master Plan Inventory that were acquired or preserved**

34	49	44.0	***Recreation Facilities
34	53	27.7	Township Owned Open Space

\*\*\*denotes parcels listed under the Green Acres Program

**Additional block and lots acquired or preserved since the 2002 Open Space Master Plan**

44	2	43.7	8 Year Farmland Preservation Program
44	2.01	2.7	8 Year Farmland Preservation Program
5	5	28.3	Permanently Preserved Farmland
9	1	15.4	Permanently Preserved Farmland
9	4.01	21.3	Permanently Preserved Farmland
10	1	12.7	Permanently Preserved Farmland
10	8	60.6	Permanently Preserved Farmland
18	1	128.0	Permanently Preserved Farmland
20	1	39.2	Permanently Preserved Farmland
33	5.01	6.2	Permanently Preserved Farmland
33	6	46.6	Permanently Preserved Farmland
33	15	58.1	Permanently Preserved Farmland
34	27	33.0	Permanently Preserved Farmland
34	29	2.6	Permanently Preserved Farmland
34	30	2.0	Permanently Preserved Farmland
34	33	0.9	Permanently Preserved Farmland
34	37	11.2	Permanently Preserved Farmland
36	16.02	28.2	Permanently Preserved Farmland
44	1	17.4	Permanently Preserved Farmland
45	10	21.7	Permanently Preserved Farmland
45.28	2	14.3	Permanently Preserved Farmland
46	1	61.0	Permanently Preserved Farmland
49	6	90.1	Permanently Preserved Farmland
50	4	19.0	Permanently Preserved Farmland
51	3	8.7	Permanently Preserved Farmland
51	8	40.8	Permanently Preserved Farmland
53	3	35.3	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	7	5.2	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	7.01	3.9	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	9	5.9	Permanently Preserved Farmland
54	11	29.7	Permanently Preserved Farmland
57	27	15.5	Permanently Preserved Farmland
38	6.02	42.9	Recreation Facilities
34	45	30.0	Township Owned Open Space
37	3.01	63.4	Township Owned Open Space
37	6	8.1	Township Owned Open Space
37	8	5.1	Township Owned Open Space
37.07	1	0.6	Township Owned Open Space
56	3	70.0	Township Owned Open Space
59	2	5.4	Township Owned Open Space
59	5.01	20.5	Township Owned Open Space
59	10	0.3	Township Owned Open Space
59	12	1.2	Township Owned Open Space
59	16	2.4	Township Owned Open Space
59	21	4.8	Township Owned Open Space
62	35	0.5	Township Owned Open Space
34	2	17.87	Unkown
6	1	50.22	Unkown
73	29	1.81	Unkown
73	5	14.22	Unkown

\*\*\*denotes parcels listed under the Green Acres Program

## 4.0 NEEDS ANALYSIS

In 2002, The Harrison Township presented a report to The Township Committee on future recreational needs. The fields and facilities utilized at that time were grossly overused. Over the next 25 years, the Commission desired 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 in 2002 were found to be used on a daily basis for tennis, walking, basketball, picnics, and play areas, as well as organized sporting activities.

In 2002, the Commission foresaw a need for:

- 5 new baseball fields. PROGRESS SINCE 2002: **2 have been completed.**
- 5 new soccer fields. PROGRESS SINCE 2002: **13 have been completed.**
- New Picnic areas
- Walking trails. PROGRESS SINCE 2002: A Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Element has been completed and adopted. **5 new walking trails have been completed at the William Wilt Soccer Complex.**
- Bike trails. PROGRESS SINCE 2002: **A Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan Element has been completed and adopted.**
- Increased Parking areas
- Additional Restroom facilities. PROGRESS SINCE 2002: **1 new facility has been completed, with a second facility in the planning stages.**

Based on interviews with Township officials, the current open space and recreational needs for the Township going forward include:

- A community center
- Dog Parks
- Additional Walking Trails
- Additional Bike Paths
- Additional Parking
- Tot Lots
- Possible ice rink for winter use
- Picnic areas
- Fishing at Mullica Hill Pond
- Canoe Launches at Mullica Hill Pond

## 5.0 RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

Mullica Hill Pond is a passive recreational asset that can be improved through expansion and improved access. Realizing this, as well as the need for acquisition of land, the Township Committee has identified nine properties for acquisition:

Proposed Recreation Sites		
Block 6	Lot 1	45.5 acres
Block 34	Lot 2	16.5 acres
Block 58	Lot 2.01	1.08 acres
Block 58	Lot 3	0.34 acres
Block 58	Lot 4	1.21 acres
Block 58	Lot 5	1.87 acres
Block 59	Lot 6	1.43 acres
Block 59	Lot 7	0.31 acres
Block 59	Lot 17.01	0.93 acres
Block 73	Lot 5	1.55 acres
Block 73	Lot 29	1.23 acres
Block 73	32	0.64 acres
Block 73	35.01	1.03 acres

The needs of the Township will be reassessed every year by the Township and every 10 years by the Master Plan Review.

## **6.0 ACTION PLAN**

Since the 2002 Master Plan, the following improvements have been implemented:

- 13 soccer fields have been completed at the William Wilt Soccer Complex.
- 6 dedicated lacrosse fields by the William Wilt Soccer Complex.
- Field Hockey facilities at Clearview.
- Soccer, baseball and football facilities have been provided with night lighting.

In addition to actions that have been completed, the following recommended improvements for the future include:

- Renovations and upgrades to the two football fields at Pleasant Valley Park.
- Add possible tennis courts at Pleasant Valley Park.
- A community center with an all-purpose indoor room.
- As the population grows, so will the need and interest in sports and activity facilities not currently available in Harrison Township. Consideration should be given to additional or new facilities on a regular basis.

The following actions are also recommended, as identified in the needs analysis portion of this report. As such, consideration should be given to additional or new:

- An additional community center
- Dog Parks
- Additional Walking Trails
- Additional Bike Paths
- Additional Parking
- Tot Lots
- Ice Rink for winter use
- Picnic areas
- Fishing at Mullica Hill Pond
- Canoe Launches at Mullica Hill Pond

## **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:

- ISTEAs 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 Joint Land Use Board and Township, 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.

Tot lots should be considered as additions at one or more of the existing park facilities.

The Township should consider amending the zoning ordinance in order to require tot lots for residential subdivisions. Tot lots are recommended to be a minimum of 6,000 square feet and provided at a ratio of one tot lot per 50 units, with a minimum of one tot lot per development. Tot lots should be centrally located in neighborhoods and be easily viewed and accessible from nearby homes. Tot lots should be designed to facilitate both passive uses, such as sitting, and active uses such as play areas.

## **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 Township and by volunteering to serve on the many boards that operate all of the organized sporting activities.



**Legend**

- Completed Bike/Ped Path
- - - Proposed Bike/Ped Path
- ..... Proposed County Bike/Ped Path

**Harrison Open Space Parcels**

**Status**

- Green Acres Program Listed
- Parcels for Open Space Acquisition
- 8 Year Farmland Preservation Program
- Permanently Preserved Farmland
- Recreation Facilities
- Township Owned Open Space

Harrison Township, Gloucester County

**FIGURE 1: OPEN SPACE PLAN**