

## Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI)

In November 2018, the Franklin Township Environmental Commission came before the township committee to ask the township to preserve a list of township owned properties for recreation and open space, by adding them to the ROSI (The recreation and open space inventory). By adding properties to the ROSI they will be deed restricted as a group. This method of preservation avoids the costly problem of deed restricting individual properties, but can only be done while we have an open application with the state Green Acres Grant program. It is an opportunity that may not come again in our lifetime.

The list of properties we are asking the township to preserve seems like a large number but in reality most of the properties are very small. We asked the township committee to work with us to review the list property by property to discuss any concerns regarding addition of any specific properties being recommended for preservation. If the township committee is not able to do so we ask that they defer to the Environmental Commission expertise and accept our recommendation.

Our township Environmental Commission members who vetted these properties for preservation have decades of professional experience in planning, land preservation, site plan review and environmental health. We have lived here in Franklin Township for more than 3 decades and are qualified to assess the open space preservation needs of our community.

### **The properties that were chosen for preservation fall under one or more of the following criteria**

- 1) The first cluster of parcels in the recommended ROSI list are those that are already Township parks, recreation facilities (such as the Community Center), tot lots, drainage basins, deed restricted lots, or important access points. For example, 6602/14 is an access to the Piney Hollow Natural Area from Unexpected Road. Obviously the Township should retain this parcel as a way into the Natural Area, especially for emergency vehicles.
- 2) Those parcels marked "GA" in the left-most column were suggested for inclusion on the ROSI by Green Acres, in the letter from Bruce Bechtloff of August 25, 2017.
- 3) Parcels that are known to be too wet for any other use are listed under "Wetlands." Many other parcels may also be entirely covered by wetlands but are included based on other criteria.
- 4) Parcels that have high-tension power lines running through them are listed for retention because they are not developable, and often have valuable plant populations within them.
- 5) Any parcel that has a stream running through it or that has a stream as one of its boundaries is included on the list. In addition to there being a high probability that

wetlands are present on the parcel, the parcel itself is by definition part of the Greenway for that stream.

A Greenway is the area adjacent to a waterway. Greenways protect stream and lake water quality by buffering it from encroaching development and storm water runoff. They provide corridors for wildlife, which allow for movement of wildlife across a fragmented landscape. They also have the potential to accommodate multi-use trails that can connect parks, wildlife management areas, school grounds, and municipal sites.

- 6) Greenways are specifically mentioned in the Franklin Township Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) as properties we need to preserve for water quality, wildlife habitat, recreational trails and the health of our residents. The OSRP is part of the Master Plan. The Master plan was created based on input from Franklin Township residents. The majority of residents want to retain the rural character of Franklin Township. The Master Plan is mandated by the state in order to assure planning decisions made by the Township are protective of the health and welfare of the residents. It is a guidance document for both growth and preservation in our Township.

Those parcels that fall within a particular Greenway are listed by block and lot in the OSRP. Because the Township already has ownership of these parcels, we do not need to purchase them. Instead, our open space funds can be utilized to acquire other important parts of the Greenways. Thus, parcels within the Malaga Lake, Scotland Run, Iona Lake, Still Run, Little Ease, and Marsh Lake Branch Greenways are recommended for retention and as part of the ROSI.

- 7) It is generally recommended by scientists that Greenways be designed at least 300 feet in width from stream or lake bank. This dimension serves to provide adequate buffering, good corridor width for wildlife passage, and sufficient size for possible trails. To that end, the parcels within 300 feet of Malaga Lake are listed as priorities for retention. Everyone would like to have a house on a lake but retaining the undeveloped areas that still exist around our lakes is critical to their continued health. The construction of housing with lawns running to the water's edge is a sure way to reduce water quality, as most lakes in New Jersey demonstrate. Malaga Lake still has high quality water that requires continued protection.
- 8) An objective in land conservation is to preserve regions of land, rather than random, individual, isolated properties. This enables an area of preserved lands to support healthier wildlife populations, to provide seed banks for forest and plant regeneration, to protect farming areas, and to enable connections that serve recreational uses. For this reason, Franklin-owned parcels that are adjacent to already preserved land have a high priority for retention. That is reflected in the recommended ROSI listing of parcels

that are adjacent to Nature Conservancy-owned lands, or contiguous with preserved farmland, or adjacent to the White Oak Wildlife Management Area.

- 9) Many parcels have “highest” or “high” priority in the Conservation Blueprint (CB) mapping, available through [NJ Map 2](#). This mapping is a product of collaboration between the NJ Conservation Foundation, The Nature Conservancy, Rowan University, and a consortium of 21 conservation groups, both governmental and nonprofit, to develop a shared, living blueprint of lands to be protected in the next few decades. The CB evaluations were made over several years. These conservation priorities are based on their wetlands, their ecological value, or their water quality. Although not every listed Franklin parcel has been checked for Conservation Blueprint value, several have been and that information is given in the Notes.
- 10) Properties located in the area in or near a former Township landfill near Route 55. Preservation of these lots makes certain they will not be developed. Development of these properties not only presents a potential risk to public health but places liability for future lawsuits on the Township/ taxpayers. There is already a history of selling properties located in this area of the Township which resulted in a costly legal battle over possible well water quality/ health issues. These lots are on paper streets. Adding more streets adds to our taxpayer maintenance costs. Will future township leaders remember why we need to avoid selling these properties for development? Inclusion in the ROSI protects both the township and the residents.
- 11) Some parcels, such as those listed for “Newfield Terrace,” are included for their potential recreational value. Those listed are contiguous with the Community Center there and are all on undeveloped, paper streets. The existing and future development density of this area needs to be offset by preservation in order to preserve drinking water quality and air quality in the Malaga area. This area already has drinking water quality issues. Many areas of Malaga are now dealing with air quality issues and noise pollution from loss of forested lands.
- 12) In general, recreational planning promotes the development of green spaces within walking distance of every home. This enables residents to take a walk, enjoy the out-of-doors, and encounter the natural world. It is now recognized that such experiences reduce stress and anxiety and improve individual health. Planning such areas is important for Franklin Township’s residents even though we think of our community as having lots of “nature.” Open Space must be planned with the future in mind, just as much as other infrastructure. Specific benefits of open space include:
  - a) Reducing flooding from storm water runoff. Keeping our lakes and streams clean. Storm water pollution is the number one source of water pollution.
  - b) Maintaining/improving air quality

- c) Keeping air temperatures lower during the summer heat/ providing energy savings
- d) Maintaining healthy wildlife habitat
- e) Providing mental and physical health benefits to residents
- f) Increasing property values
- g) Protecting drinking water quality and quantity

Land preservation keeps taxes low. Businesses will not lower or keep taxes as low. Preserved land requires no services, no increase in schools, no mandated affordable housing burden, and in most cases little or no cost to the Township. Preservation of properties avoids expensive problems that will cost taxpayers to fix. Nature can do much to protect our air, water and health if we save enough of it. No one wants a future of expensive and less than effective water filters that cannot remove all contaminants from our drinking water, or a future of having to build expensive infrastructure on the taxpayers' dime.

Placing these properties on the ROSI costs the Township nothing because they are already owned by the Township. It ensures that a small amount of the Township is permanently saved from the economic, health and environmental effects of deforestation and development.

In the past the township has had concerns from the auditor regarding retaining too many properties. By placing these properties in preservation this concern will be eliminated. Land left in a natural state does not pose a liability to the township. Last month a superior court judge in NJ cited the New Jersey Tort Claims Act granting immunity to governments from injuries occurring on unimproved public property, or land that is in its natural condition. Dismissing a case where a man died in a shore sinkhole. He was not the first person to die in this manner on this beach.

These are just two of the concerns we have been asked regarding township owned properties and their preservation.

We will be happy to research and address any other concerns brought to our attention.

It will not take long for the township to reach total build out. Total build out is the state of development in an area that has been developed to the maximum extent possible or allowable by law. New Jersey will be one of the first states to reach total build out. Last year Suzanne McCarthy, Vice Chairperson of the Franklin Township Environmental Commission, asked Rowan University to include Franklin Township in a mapping program (<https://www.njmap2.com/buildout/>) that looks at the effects of total build out on water quality. It is a visual aid that shows us we need to preserve more and change our zoning density or face a future of water quality problems. This is just a measure of one factor that will degrade

our environment if we choose to do nothing going forward. It is our resolve to educate and work with the township committee to make sure the future of Franklin township is one of abundant clean drinking water, good air quality, nature replacing the need for expensive infrastructure and a quality of life we can be proud of.

We want to address all concerns and will make the time to be available to the township officials and residents to discuss this further. If you have any questions and concerns or just want to be involved please feel free to come to the next Environmental Commission meeting on January 28<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm in the conference room of the building where court is held.