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Open Space and Recreation

GOAL

Advance the protection of open space through the continued preservation and stewardship of agricultural lands and unprotected open spaces, while fostering recreational opportunities in Township owned parks and open spaces.



Objectives

- a.** Encourage the preservation of agricultural lands and unprotected open spaces within the Township.
- b.** Continue to work cooperatively with land conservation organizations, state and county governments, and other entities to permanently protect priority open spaces in the Township.
- c.** Enhance the recreation options, amenities, and natural resource value provided by Township-owned parks and open spaces.
- d.** Create strong working relationships with owners of non-public open spaces and recreation providers in the Township.
- e.** Support industries that contribute to open spaces in the Township.
- f.** Ensure regulatory controls support the development, conservation, and stewardship of open space and recreational facilities.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION 2.1 **Continue to support the permanent preservation of priority unprotected open spaces and farmlands.**

Conservation easements are a permanent method to preserving open spaces and farmlands in the Township. While approximately 20% of the Township's lands (or 1,346 acres) is currently under conservation easement, further preservation efforts could target high priority unprotected open space and agricultural properties. Preserving targeted properties can direct growth away from prime rural and agricultural areas to areas with infrastructure more appropriate for development.

Continue to coordinate with property owners, land conservancies, and the Chester County Department of Parks and Preservation to promote and facilitate open space preservation projects. Methods include:

ACTIONS

- 2.1.A Township Liaison.** Act as a liaison between the Township and residents on issues pertaining to open space preservation. This includes assistance with resident inquiries, directing residents to appropriate entities that can help them achieve their preservation goals, and identifying possible land conservation opportunities and resources.



- 2.1.B Work with Conservation Partner Agencies.** Collaborate and communicate with local land trusts and Chester County about potential preservation opportunities. A list of land trusts active in Chester County can be found in the References and Resources section in Chapter 7.
- 2.1.C Establish Open Space Preservation Priorities.** Preservation metrics could be established to rank preservation priorities to ensure West Sadsbury is competitive in leveraging as much funding for land conservation as possible. This could include working with landowners to preserve the most vulnerable and sensitive environmental and agricultural landscapes as well as lands that provide linkages with other protected lands to form a larger interconnected network.
- 2.1.D Resident Outreach.** Host a community event that educates Township residents about land preservation programs and provide an opportunity to create an open dialogue about land conservation needs, possibilities, and ongoing efforts in and around the Township.



Conservation easements permanently protect land while allowing private landowners to maintain ownership and control of their land.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2

Support the ongoing viability of the agricultural industry.

Implement measures to ensure agriculture remains viable in the Township, which can help preserve the historic agricultural landscape of the Township.

Ensuring agricultural operations remain viable can encourage the ongoing use of farms in the Township, even if these farms are not part of a formal conservation easement. Addressing potential barriers to farming and remaining up to date with modern agriculture practices and concerns can help to ensure this use and associated open spaces remains viable.

A number of non-conservation easement methods can be used to ensure that farming remains viable in West Sadsbury. Specific methods include:

ACTIONS

2.2.A Analyze Ordinances. Review regulatory ordinances and consider amendments to further support agriculture. Potential ordinance amendments could address the following:

1. Ensure the Township's zoning ordinance supports agriculture as a land use within legally permitted parameters, including where and what types of agricultural uses are permitted, supplemental use regulations, potential for continued agricultural operations in residential developments (such as in conservation and cluster residential developments as described in Recommendation 2.3.C), and continued small farming uses, and consideration of formal agricultural zoning. The ordinance review should consider if and how secondary agricultural businesses (such as horse boarding or farm shops) are permitted, since secondary agricultural businesses can supplement revenue of the primary farming operation and promote awareness of the importance of agriculture in the community.
2. Review the Township's subdivision and land development ordinance to determine if there are unnecessarily limiting provisions on agricultural operations. For example, some municipalities exempt agricultural buildings under a specified maximum square footage from required land development plans since this requirement may be problematic for farmers interested in constructing small agricultural buildings.

3. In the zoning ordinance and the subdivision and land development ordinance, consider defining and permitting agritourism and agritainment uses, which could include corn mazes, farm tours, wine tastings, on-the-farm days, hayrides, or pick-your-own produce, which can help to provide supplemental revenue to existing agricultural operations.



Agriculture is a significant part of West Sadsbury's heritage, culture, and landscape.



Tools such as the Township's Zoning ordinance can permit and encourage diverse agricultural uses, such as secondary farm businesses.

2.2.B Communicate with Farmers. An annual or biannual listening session with the agricultural community could be held in the Township to foster communication on current industry practices and potential concerns.

RECOMMENDATION
2.3

Maintain and enhance Township owned parks and open spaces. Continue to maintain the West Sadsbury Park and the Jim Landis Woodland Preserve while exploring feasible additions and stewardship enhancements to meet active and passive recreation needs of current and future residents.

West Sadsbury Park is the main recreation facility in the Township, while the Jim Landis Woodland Preserve has potential to offer additional passive recreation opportunities. These Township owned facilities directly impact the quality of life for residents. As parks and their equipment age, and as trends and demands in recreation change, it is important to proactively respond to evolving recreation needs in the community.

Continue to maintain Township owned open spaces and consider potential amenities for active or passive recreation that could enhance existing Township owned facilities. Appropriate grant opportunities should be leveraged to supplement existing Township expenditures as it relates to long-term maintenance, expansion, and upgrades of equipment and amenities of the parks system. Specific actions can include:

ACTIONS

2.3.A West Sadsbury Park. Consider upgrades to the West Sadsbury Park which enhance recreational offerings for Township residents. This may include addressing passive recreation opportunities such as walking trails, or addressing active recreation needs as identified by the community. Any potential proposed upgrades should:

1. Solicit resident feedback regarding desired recreation amenities, which could be gathered through a community survey or charette.
2. Support the implementation of universally designed facilities to accommodate recreation for people of all ages and abilities.
3. Seek grant opportunities to implement targeted parks upgrades.



West Sadsbury Park contains picnic pavilions, a children's playground, and baseball fields.

2.3.B Jim Landis Woodland Preserve. Located off of Zion Hill Road and consisting of approximately 30 wooded acres, the Jim Landis Woodland Preserve presents an opportunity for passive recreation in the Township. Specific actions may include:

1. Development of a master plan to establish an overall vision for the passive recreational use of the preserve. A potential master plan may include potential internal trails, passive recreation areas, picnic facilities, and wayfinding signage for easier navigation of the preserve. A master plan can incentivize community interest in the property and may serve as a foundation for possible grant funding.
2. Identify a long-term funding and maintenance strategy for the preserve. This can also potentially address methods and timelines to gradually expand passive recreational opportunities within the property.
3. Partner with local community groups such as local scouting and school organizations in order to coordinate potential service projects which may be appropriate for the preserve. This can include actions such as the clearing of invasive vegetation, trails construction, or the construction of benches or pavilions to enhance the preserve.



The Jim Landis Woodland Preserve offers passive recreation opportunities for Township residents.

2.3.C Evaluate Policy Plans and Regulatory Ordinances to Preserve and Enhance Open Space. Consider methods to implement and/or update Township policy plans and regulatory ordinances to encourage priority open space preservation efforts.

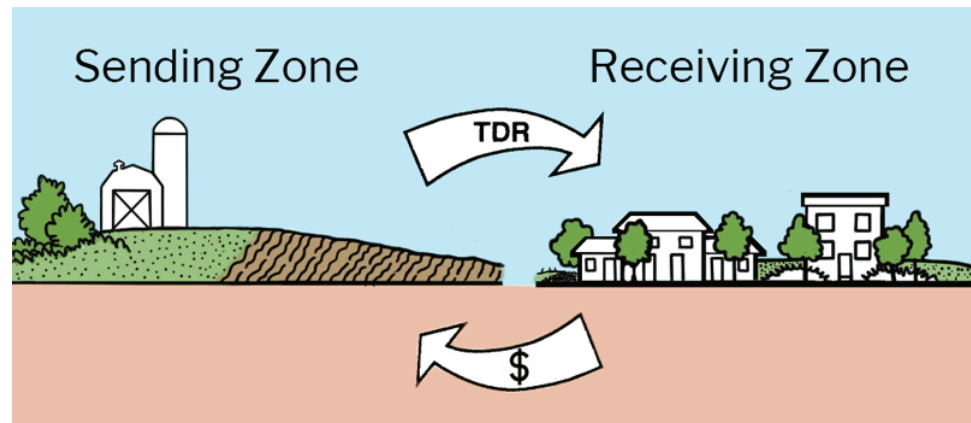
There are a number of tools that the Township can use to encourage and/or require (depending on the specific tool used) ongoing preservation and enhancement of open space. These tools can be particularly effective in balancing future growth in the Township with specific methods to preserve the rural landscape of West Sadsbury.

The following represent policy plans (such as the Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan) and regulatory ordinances (such as potential amendments to the Township's zoning ordinance and subdivision and land development ordinance) which could be considered individually to protect open space. Specific actions can include:

1. **Transferable Development Rights (TDR) Program.** A TDR program is a zoning tool that separates development rights from a parcel of land (the sending parcel) and transfers them to a parcel of land more appropriate for development (the receiving parcel). Through this process, the sending parcel is permanently preserved from development and the receiving parcel is granted a density bonus above what is allowed by its by-right zoning designation. The exchange of rights occurs between private landowners who sell their development rights to developers who have projects located in municipal designated receiving parcels. Neighboring Highland Township and nearby Honey Brook Township (among other Chester County municipalities) have had success with a TDR program.

A TDR program may work well for West Sadsbury, by preserving rural properties in the central and northern portions of the Township and by transferring their development rights to the established commercial and industrial corridors in the Township. Since West Sadsbury is located in the Octorara Region, the Township is in a unique position to establish a multi-municipal TDR program with regional municipalities to preserve lands in rural West Sadsbury, while transferring development rights to municipalities with established infrastructure to accommodate development (this could be accomplished through a joint zoning ordinance or written agreement between municipalities). Growth areas in the Octorara Region that could be consulted as it relates to a multi-municipal TDR program are Atglen and Parkesburg Boroughs.

Transferable Development Rights programs direct growth the areas more suitable for development while preserving rural and agricultural lands.



2. Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan.

Originally adopted in 1993, the Township's Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan identified deficit areas in the Township for community parks and contained a number of recommendations to advance its implementation. An update to this plan could focus on updates to parks and open space facilities in the Township, potential trail locations and alignments, and priority rankings for open space preservation. CCPC's Vision Partnership Program can be leveraged for grant funding to advance an update of this plan.

3. **Conservation or Cluster Development Regulations.** Conservation or cluster developments are implemented through the zoning and subdivision and land development ordinances and contain design regulations to accommodate development, while preserving significant open space areas and natural features. Depending on the type of design and the regulations that apply to the conservation or cluster development, up to 75% or more of a site's land area can be preserved in permanent open space using a cluster design. Preserved open spaces in these developments are typically designed around natural and historic resources, woodlands, recreational facilities, and agricultural activities, which can be highly effective in providing for development while preserving sensitive features in the Township.



Conservation developments protect open spaces and natural resources while allowing for residential development and associated amenities.

D. **Subdivision and Land Development Recreation Requirements.**

Through the subdivision and land development ordinance, West Sadsbury can require the dedication of public open space and/or payment of a fee from developers to provide adequate park and recreational opportunities. Specific items that the subdivision and land development ordinance should address include:

1. **Recreation Land Dedication.** The Township's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance contains provisions for required dedication of recreation lands for residential developments. Under this ordinance, dedicated recreation land should be usable public or common open space near each development unit, and not consisting of floodplain, steep slopes, or wetlands. These required recreational areas should be discussed with the Township during the design stage of subdivision and land development, when design flexibility is potentially the greatest. The existing subdivision and land development provisions could be analyzed to see if refinements should be made to the definition, calculation, and design of dedicated recreational land to best implement Township recreational goals.
2. **Fee in Lieu of Recreation.** The Township's Subdivision and Land Development Ordinance contains a provision which allows for a fee in lieu of reserving areas for recreation (calculated on the number of proposed lots or units), when approved by the Board of Supervisors. This fee should then be used in accordance with the Pennsylvania Municipalities Planning Code and the Township's Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan to enhance recreation offerings in Township owned recreational properties. This type of provision can be effective in areas where dedicated land may not be practical or available. Specific actions may include analyzing these provisions to see if they should only apply to a certain number of units or less (ensuring larger residential subdivisions require community open space), and should be analyzed to identify if these standards could be further enhanced to achieve Township open space and recreation goals.