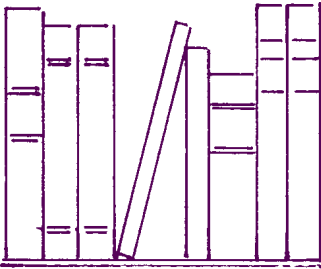


RESOURCE PAPER



ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY
ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONS

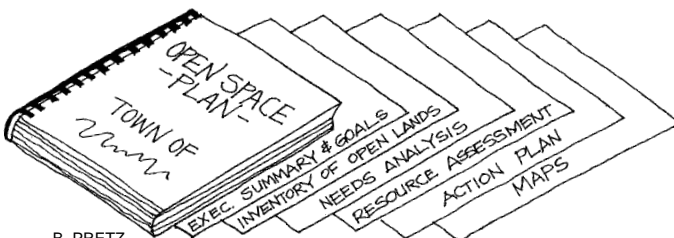
P.O. Box 157, Mendham, NJ 07945 • Tel: 973-539-7547 • Website: www.anjec.org • Email: info@anjec.org

Open Space Plan

What is an Open Space Plan?

An open space plan is a comprehensive document that serves as a guide for open space protection and preservation in a municipality, a county or some other defined region like a watershed. The plan tells why and how open space will be protected there. Because open space preservation is generally pursued over a long period of time, through many successive administrations, it is imperative that a comprehensive plan be in place to assure continuity and policy consistency.

Ideally, an open space plan contains text, maps, tables, aerial photos and other materials. A plan examines a community's needs and goals, analyzes all open spaces (both preserved and unpreserved) in the project area, and then lays out a set of priorities and strategies for preservation. An open space plan is the tool that will enable a community to pursue open space preservation in a systematic, cost-effective manner that best meets its social needs and protects natural resources. It is also a "wish list" that articulates the community's vision of its future in terms of open space.



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Benefits of an Open Space Plan

An open space plan is a big undertaking. Volunteers from an environmental commission or open space committee can easily spend a year or more doing the necessary research and writing. Even if volunteers do most of the legwork, there will be costs for acquiring maps and data, and for layout and printing when the plan is finished. It is not unusual for a town to pay an environmental consultant over \$10,000 to put together its open space plan. Is it worth it?

In addition to helping to gain access to grant funding, the biggest payback on the investment of time and money in an open space plan will be orderly, cost-efficient and ongoing preservation of open space. The money spent is miniscule compared to the cost of just one parcel of land in a high-priced state like New Jersey. With a comprehensive open space plan in place, a municipality is more likely to spend its precious dollars on the land that offers the most benefits to the community and the environment. It will not waste money on hasty purchases made in response to a development proposal or political pressures. By the same token, crucial lands (for example, those with special environmental characteristics or in strategic locations that make them particularly desirable to preserve) are less likely to “fall through the cracks” if they are included in a municipal open space plan. With specific parcels targeted for preservation, the environmental commission and the open space committee will be more likely to be ready with the necessary funding before a specific development proposal threatens the land.

The very process of collecting and evaluating the information for an open space plan helps focus community attention on the issue. This can result in greater support for open space spending or for establishing an open space tax. Contacts with large landowners can lead to donations of land or easements to the town or a land trust. And involving interested citizens in the process can turn up creative ideas for identifying, preserving and maintaining open space.

Parcels identified for preservation on a municipality's official map or master plan have some protections against development under the *Municipal Land Use Law* (N.J.S.A 40:55D-44). However, the municipality must acquire the parcel at fair market value and, if the acquisition doesn't take place, must compensate the landowner for the loss of use of the property for the one year stay of development during which the town was to finalize the acquisition.

Towns and counties with an open space tax (or other dedicated funding source) and an approved Open Space and Recreation Plan are eligible for larger NJ Green Acres acquisition grants (50% of the purchase price instead of 25%) under the Planning Incentive Program. Once a town meets the Planning Incentive criteria, it receives funds in the form of a special block grant, similar to a credit line, that can be used for any parcel listed in its approved OSRP. The block grant enables a municipality to react quickly when a market opportunity arises, instead of waiting to see if an individual grant will be approved for a given parcel.

The Department of Agriculture, in its administration of the state's Farmland Preservation Program, offers similar Planning Incentive Grants

(called "PIGs") for agricultural open space planning. Hopefully, through comprehensive planning, municipalities will carry out local farmland preservation in a manner that will not only preserve open areas, but also help to sustain agriculture as an industry in New Jersey.

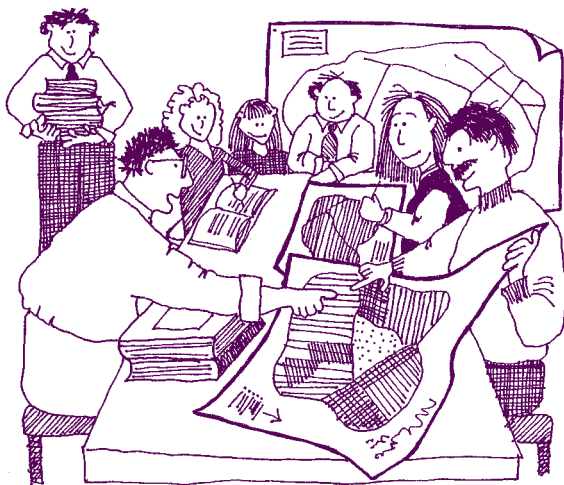
Having an official open space plan also facilitates good regional planning. Neighboring communities can plan their open spaces to work in concert with each other. For example, if a town knows that its neighbor plans to preserve a greenway or other block of open space on its border, it may get more open space value for its money by purchasing adjoining lands. One long greenway or large tract of preserved land may provide more natural resource and recreation value than two smaller, unconnected tracts. Research for the plan should also include an examination of the county's open space plan, if one exists, to see how the local preservation efforts can fit into or capitalize on county preservation efforts.

Who Creates the Open Space Plan?

Environmental commissions and open space committees have important roles to play in developing municipal open space plans, especially if the town is interested in qualifying for State funding through the Green Acres or Department of Agriculture Planning Incentive Programs. In some towns, the environmental commission serves as the open space committee, but many towns have a separate open space committee with one or more representatives from the environmental commission. Whatever the case, the environmental commission should participate fully in the open space planning process.

Open space preservation is a primary environmental commission responsibility. The State enabling legislation requires commissions to "...keep an index of open areas..." and authorizes them to "...recommend to the planning board... plans and programs [pertaining to open areas] for inclusion in a municipal master plan, and the development and use of such areas..." (N.J.S.A. 40:56A).

Most environmental commissions have developed an environmental resource inventory (ERI), also called a natural resource inventory (NRI). Based on data from aerial photography and scientific reports, these documents use maps, text, charts and graphs to identify and describe a community's important natural resources such as



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wetlands, water bodies, habitat, forested areas and steep slopes. The ERI provides the basis for evaluating which lands should be preserved for their natural resource value.

Members of the open space committee and/or environmental commission, depending on their skills, may choose to do all of the work on the open space plan (research, community outreach, mapping and writing). Or, with financial support from the governing body, they may assign some tasks to the municipal planner or other staff, or they may hire an environmental consultant. In any case, the plan should be formulated with participation from residents, municipal officials, boards, commissions and staff, county park or open space representatives, local land trusts and watershed associations. Any local boards with an interest in open space and recreational lands, such as the parks and recreation commission, board of education and planning board, should be consulted and kept informed. It is important to build consensus throughout the process so that residents and local officials will support the plan's adoption into the master plan.

Funding the Open Space Plan

Towns may seek grant funding from private sources, and/or use municipal budget funds to cover the cost. Some towns allocate money from their local open space trust fund (generated by the town's open space tax) to help create the OSRP, which will ultimately guide the use of those funds.

Elements of an Open Space Plan

The NJDEP's Green Acres Program requires specific categories of information in an *Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)* to qualify for the Planning Incentive Program. (OSRP Guidelines

document available at www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres.) The open space plan format outlined below and detailed in the following pages covers the category headings and information required by Green Acres.

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
- GOALS & POLICIES
- INVENTORY OF OPEN LANDS
- NEEDS ANALYSIS
- RESOURCE ASSESSMENT
(EVALUATION OF OPEN LANDS)
- ACTION PLAN/RECOMMENDATIONS
- OPEN SPACE SYSTEM MAP
- DISCUSSION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION
- STATEMENT OF PLANNING BOARD ADOPTION

Executive Summary

An open space plan, like any other comprehensive plan, should begin with a description of its origin and purpose. It should provide the reader with a brief overview of the project and the way it was carried out, including a description of public involvement in the process. The executive summary should briefly present the plan's significant findings relative to recreation and open space needs, and the actions proposed by the plan.

Providing Context

Because a municipal or county open space plan is a long-term plan, the document will serve as an official reference long after it is written. Some or most of its authors may no longer be available to provide institutional memory. Therefore, it is worth the effort to include background and introductory materials that will give future users insight into the document. It is also a good idea to include the names and titles of the individuals who worked on the plan, the roles they played (research, mapping, community outreach), the span of time over which the work was done, and data sources.

Some towns preface their open space plans with a brief history of the community *relative to its land use*, relating environmental, historic, cultural or recreational trends that have affected or will affect the town's open space needs and goals.

Goals and Policies

This section should present the principles, assumptions, goals and policies that are the basis for the open space plan. These are necessary to “get everyone on the same page.” They also establish that federal, state and local tax money spent to carry out the open space plan will be used for proper public purposes.

Appropriate goals or principles can reflect the community’s desire to:

- provide adequate active and passive recreational opportunities on an equal and accessible basis for all citizens;
- protect the quantity and quality of surface and groundwater;
- protect sensitive environmental features such as wetlands, steep slopes and critical habitats;
- link community resources and support the community’s need for safe, multi-modal circulation through a system of greenways and trails;
- protect historic areas;
- maintain plant and animal biodiversity;
- minimize erosion or damage from flooding;
- maintain rural character;
- coordinate programs with local boards and surrounding communities;
- maintain consistency with State land use plans.

The goals and principles stated in the plan should correlate closely with and reference those in the master plan. If they do not, this is a signal that a re-examination of either the master plan or the open space plan is in order, to bring it in line with the community’s current views. The ultimate goal is to have the open space plan adopted into the master plan, and the two must be in agreement in order to provide a clear roadmap for local officials. As a land use planning document, the local open space plan should also be consistent with the county open space, conservation, recreation and farmland preservation plans and the *State Development and Redevelopment Plan*.

Inventory of Open Lands

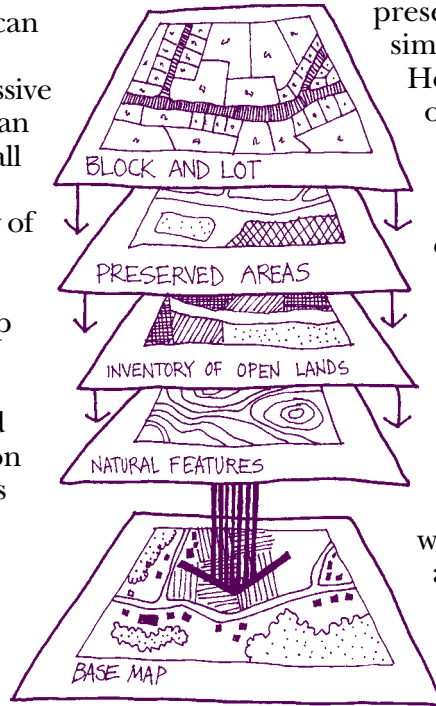
This section should include a listing of every parcel of vacant, recreational, or undeveloped land, public or private, within the municipality. For each parcel, collect information on type, size, location (lot and block, street address, directions as needed), facilities, use, degree of current protection (conservation easement, deed restriction, etc.,

or lack thereof), form of ownership or control, owner, recreation opportunities and natural resource characteristics.

Occasionally, communities opt to include in their open space plans a parcel that has a structure on it. For land that is particularly valuable in an environmental, historic or strategic way (say, for access or buffering), the possibility of

preservation should not be ruled out simply because a parcel is not vacant.

However, Green Acres funding can only be applied for properties with structures that will either be demolished to create open space, or that will support outdoor recreation or conservation, or be preserved as a historic site. (See *Resources* for information on funding for historic preservation.)



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GETTING STARTED

You can pursue information on open lands in several ways. First, you will need access to up-to-date tax data and maps. *Before beginning any research, you should consult with the local tax assessor.* He or she is intimately familiar with the tax records and maps of your town, and will be able to advise you of the most

efficient way to approach the search. The assessor also may be able to provide anecdotal information about certain parcels or property owners that could prove helpful in evaluating the potential to preserve specific properties.

In small, developed municipalities, most open spaces and vacant parcels are probably known, or can be identified through a “windshield survey.” They can then be identified by block and lot numbers using the tax map. Large municipalities and rural towns require more research because property boundaries may not be obvious, and much of the land cannot be seen from a roadway.

If your town has a GIS or other digital database that includes block and lot information, producing maps of open land parcels identified by block and lot and by use class/status will be relatively easy.

If your town does not have GIS parcel data but has computerized its tax data, ask the tax assessor to help you sort properties by class to identify vacant lands and agricultural lands. Note that county planning departments also maintain municipal tax and block and lot information that is usually free to the municipality upon request. This can be a good starting point for your compilation.

If your town is still on a manual system of tax records, you may need to look at tax maps to identify block and lot numbers within open areas, then look up individual property listings in the tax assessor's field book(s) to determine ownership and other information.

If your municipality has an "official map" (most towns do not), obtain a copy. If not, find the largest, most complete map available that shows your municipality all on one sheet, because each paper tax map will probably show only a small slice of the municipality. Orienting and referencing the individual maps can be a challenge.

The NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) provides digital and web-based aerial and other natural resource maps of the entire state. Aerials provide a "big picture" view that may help you locate open space. (Note that it takes DEP several years to digitize aerial photos, so the most current aerial maps may not reflect very recent land changes.) Along with natural resource maps, aerials show the natural features and patterns (surface waters, vegetation, green corridors, etc.) that will be the foundation of an open space preservation plan. These natural features maps also exist in an ERI.

ORGANIZING THE DATA

For inventory purposes, open areas can be organized in a variety of ways: by location or region (such as a watershed); by natural features; or by category of ownership. A list organized by type of ownership would be broken down into:

- **Public lands** (municipal, county, state, federal): parks, trails, natural areas, school grounds, sports and recreation areas, public land leased for farming, reservoirs, military reservations, capped municipal or county landfills;
- **Private lands owned by nonprofit organizations:** camps, trails, natural areas, recreational/sports areas, private school grounds, historic sites, lakes;
- **Private lands owned by individuals or corporations:** agricultural, utility-owned (such as railroad or power line corridors), undeveloped real estate purchased on speculation; corporate campuses; oversized developed parcels that have the potential to be subdivided; homeowners' association-controlled dedicated open space; recreational lands (camps, rifle ranges, private lakes, ski trails, etc.); natural areas (tourism, eco-tourism); capped private landfills;
- **Lands already preserved through purchase of development easements** by state/local governments or non-profits (land trusts).

Tax records will indicate which lands are farmland-assessed. Consult the town's Farmland Preservation Plan (if one exists) and check with your county Agricultural Development Board or Farmland Preservation Coordinator to confirm which agricultural lands are protected by easements. You will also need to identify vacant lands with approved development plans. These and properties with pending applications may be out of reach, although development plans do, on occasion, fall through.

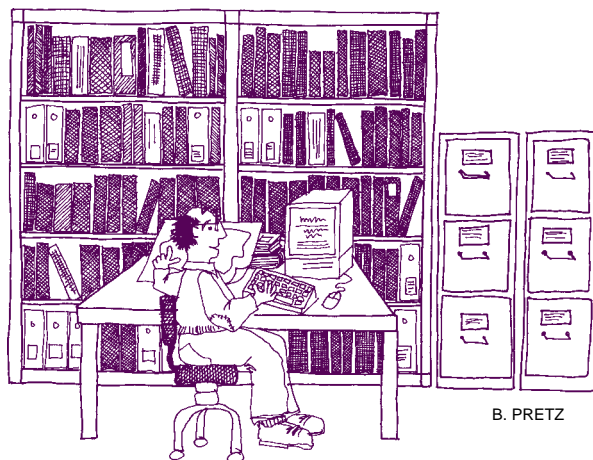
Ideally, information about each parcel on the open space inventory should be entered into a spreadsheet database. This will make it easy to collate and print the data in a table or report, and will also allow you to update information (for example, changes in ownership or use) as time passes.

In addition to listing parcels by block and lot number, you should show the inventory of open spaces on a map or series of maps. If you do not have access to GIS maps, paper tax maps shaded manually with different colors (or with colored acetate overlays) showing various types of uses and ownership will work.

THE ROSI:

If a town obtains Green Acres funding, it must list all properties funded by Green Acres and all lands already held and dedicated by the town for recreation and conservation purposes on a *Recreation and Open Space Inventory*. This is referred to as a ROSI (pronounced "Rossi"). If a town has a ROSI, it should be included in the OSRP. Properties on the ROSI cannot be removed or converted to uses other than recreation or conservation without NJ State House Commission approval, which is difficult to obtain.

The town may own other properties, including tax lien properties, which are not included on the ROSI. Some of those properties may have high



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environmental values or may be adjacent to other preserved properties. These properties should be reviewed for possible permanent preservation as open space. Because the town owns them, no funding will be needed for their acquisition.

UPDATING OPEN SPACE INVENTORIES

Once an open space plan is completed, it is important for the open space committee or a designated staff member to keep the town's inventory of preserved properties and easements current. Town acquisitions and open lands held by homeowners associations as a result of development plans should be recorded as they occur. Counties generally update their preservation lists annually, as do Green Acres and the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC). These sources should be checked because the information isn't automatically passed along to the municipality. Also obtain updates from local and regional land trusts/nonprofits, and request that they always notify the municipality of their preservation projects. A review of the open space priority list, if one exists, should also be conducted annually. The open space committee and staff can utilize the updated open space inventory information as a working list, but the planning board will not necessarily incorporate the updates each time/year into the adopted open space plan.

Needs Analysis

The completed inventory and map(s) will give an accurate picture of the existing open space network of active recreational, passive recreational and natural resource lands. For a needs analysis, you will examine the amounts and types of preserved open space, and determine the extent to which these lands satisfy present and projected needs in each category. These determinations should be made with input from public officials, municipal staff, community leaders, stakeholders and the public.

Although various categories of public and private lands make up the existing open space network, for purposes of an OSRP the Green Acres Program advises that you focus your plan on the need for facilities and open spaces for which the local government will assume primary responsibility. The status of private open space, even if open to the public (such as a campground, ski resort or nature preserve), is not necessarily permanent. If private lands do not have deed restrictions, they may at some point be sold for development. Even public lands with no covenants

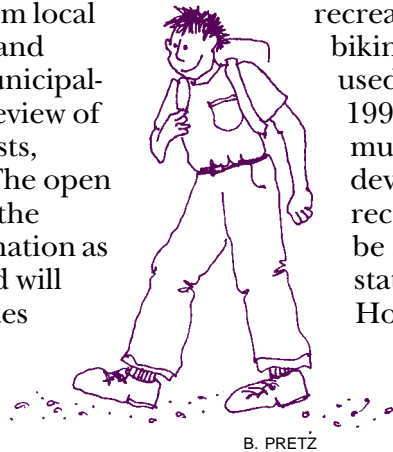
can be sold off for development. However, other levels of government, and private, non-profit organizations such as land trusts, watershed and conservation associations can play a significant role in protecting land for natural resource purposes and can be important partners. Although open space is vital for passive and active recreation, it is equally important for the protection of water resources, wildlife, vegetation and other natural features that society often takes for granted.

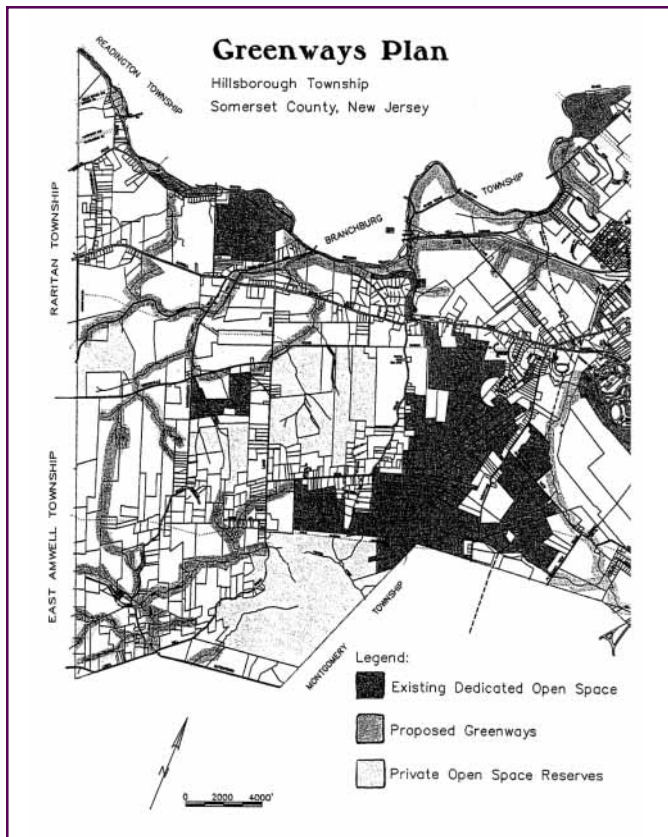
STANDARDS FOR DETERMINING NEED

To determine your municipality's future needs for recreational lands, you will need to establish the minimum acceptable standards for recreation for your community. You may choose to use a standard land-per-population formula or you may decide to be very specific, setting individual standards for numerous individual categories of recreational activity (specific sports, hiking, biking, etc.). The NJ Green Acres Program used "balanced land use" guidelines for its 1999 recommendation that individual municipalities should set aside 3% of their developed and developable area for recreation. The guidelines also suggest 7% be set aside by each county, 10% by the state, and 4% by the federal government. However, a one-size-fits-all approach may not be sufficient to deal with a community's unique needs. The recreation or parks agency and the organizations that conduct active recreation programs should be consulted about these needs. They often have very specific recommendations that can be obtained best through direct conversations. A recreation needs assessment may already exist.

Once you have settled on a minimum or desired level of facilities, you can examine current activity levels and participation patterns, and project demographic trends (population, age structure, leisure time, income, etc.) that will impact recreation demand in the future. Make sure to factor in the condition of existing facilities and barriers to participation, such as user fees, crowding, or special needs access.

Setting guidelines for natural features is not as straightforward a process as for recreation, because the natural resources of each municipality are so varied. Although *all* natural resources are important, the most unique or critical are not distributed evenly among municipalities. It will not be easy to set a standardized figure, such as acres per population or percentage of land area, of natural resource land that should be protected. You will need to





know what you have (surface and subsurface waters, soils and bedrock, wildlife, vegetation, steep slopes, ridgelines and other natural characteristics) in order to decide how much will be a reasonable amount to protect. Likely, you will set natural resource lands preservation goals based on selected areas, rather than a specific formula or amount.

Resource Assessment

Once you have compiled a complete list and map of open space parcels, the next task is to establish a system for analyzing and evaluating those parcels to determine their value and relative importance as candidates for preservation. The recreation and open space needs and objectives should be distilled into a set of guidelines or a ranking system for evaluating parcels for preservation, as properties and funding become available.

Any ranking system must reflect the unique priorities and existing resources of the town or project area. A densely populated and growing municipality with few remaining open spaces will probably put a high priority on lands that are suitable for recreation. In a rural area, the preservation of prime agricultural lands may be high on the list of objectives. Towns that rely heavily on recreational industries (ecotourism, beach activities, etc.) might wish to insure the preservation of open lands that support those industries. And towns with unique natural features such as limestone aquifers or forested wildlife habitat may assign greater value to

those areas. Water protection is considered a high priority in almost any community.

In rural areas with a lot of undeveloped land, some municipalities limit their open space purchases to parcels of a certain minimum size, for example, five acres, or even more. Obviously, this is not a strategy for more developed areas and cities, where space is limited and neighborhood and pocket parks are a primary form of open space. Even in rural areas, limiting consideration of smaller parcels could result in a missed opportunity. A modest parcel might be important as part of a greenway corridor, or might provide access to, or buffering for, a stream or lake.

Towns that have been successful in preserving the larger open spaces targeted in their OSRP often go back to revisit and “fine tune” their plans some years later, to identify pivotal smaller or connecting parcels that will fill in spatial, resource protection and usage gaps.

PRINCIPLES OF PRESERVATION

Although each municipality has different needs, some general principles apply to all communities pursuing open space. For example, it is generally better for both natural resource protection and recreational purposes to preserve a large, contiguous area of open space (such as a greenway) than to preserve many small, scattered parcels. It is also generally true that the more development pressure on a parcel targeted for preservation, the more quickly the town will want to act. An open space ranking system should assign more weight to lands that are ripe for development.

Another common theme of open space preservation is the cost/benefit ratio. Although some municipalities have shelled out top dollar for small, strategic open space parcels, generally all strive to get the most land for the amount of money they have to spend. Therefore, a ranking system must consider relative cost. Of course, not all parcels must be purchased outright to be preserved. Some lands, particularly agricultural lands, can be preserved through the purchase of development rights. In other cases, a property owner may opt to donate a portion of the sale price, and then reap tax benefits from the contribution. Towns also must consider what they will save in services (schools, sewers, roads, etc.) over the long run by purchasing land that would otherwise be developed.

A comprehensive ERI (environmental resources inventory), usually compiled by the environmental commission and adopted into the master plan by the planning board, will be a municipality’s pri-

FACTORS FOR RANKING LANDS FOR PRESERVATION

WATER QUALITY:

- Has or abuts surface waters (lake, stream, reservoir, etc.)
- Has or abuts high quality (C1, trout production) streams or headwaters
- Groundwater recharge area
- Wellhead area
- Wetland buffer area
- Steep slopes (greater than 15%, 25%)

CONSERVATION:

- Plant and wildlife habitat
- Threatened species habitat
- Contiguous acres of desirable vegetative cover (mature hardwood, etc.)

DEVELOPMENT PRESSURES:

- Development application filed
- Land is for sale
- Zoning
- Farmer-owner approaching retirement
- Proximity to other developed areas
- Sewer/septic potential

COST:

- Purchase price
- Alternative methods of protection
- Costs of services avoided by preservation

POTENTIAL FOR LINKAGES:

- Linear recreation (trails, bike paths)
- Greenways
- Other similar/preserved contiguous parcels

QUALITY OF LIFE/CULTURAL:

- Buffering land uses
- Development-limiting
- Scenic or distinctive landscape, ridgeline
- Floodplain
- Rural ambiance
- Farmland protection
- Historic

AGRICULTURE:

- Quality of soils
- Drainage
- Proximity to other farmland
- Proximity to conflicting land uses
- Proximity to agricultural support

RECREATIONAL/CULTURAL:

- User Accessibility
- Topography suitable for athletic activities
- Absence of environmental constraints
- Public access to coastal or inland water
- Potential for buffering between neighboring use (if level of recreational use would require it)

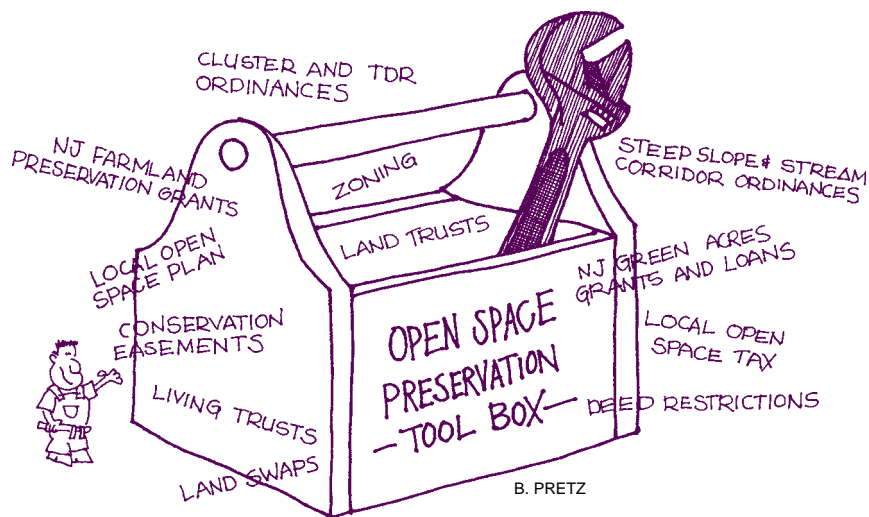
mary guide for evaluating natural and environmental features of potential open space lands. One of the most important reasons to preserve open space is to protect water quality and supply. The ERI describes and maps the location of surface and ground waters (streams, lakes, rivers, aquifers) that need buffering, as well as sensitive features – steep slopes (where development causes erosion and results in sedimentation), floodplains, wetlands, groundwater recharge areas and wellhead areas. The ERI should contain information on soil types (also a factor in determining a parcel's value as preserved farmland), vegetation and species habitat. If possible, consult with the people who gathered the ERI information, to benefit from their firsthand knowledge of local terrain and natural systems.

If there is no ERI, you can utilize NJDEP's web-based maps of the town to see the location of wetlands, surface waters, soils and elevations/slopes, and many other environmentally-significant features. (See *Resources* section on NJ GeoWeb, and also ANJEC's publication *The Environmental Resource Inventory* for information on obtaining natural resources data and creating an ERI.)

Open space committees and planners across New Jersey have approached open space ranking systems in a variety of ways, from descriptions of four or five general priorities in a matrix, to mathematical formulas. The most common approach comprises a list of characteristics, giving a check or a point value for each, depending on the degree to which a parcel contributes to the community's open space objectives. Desirable characteristics are sometimes grouped into categories like recreational/cultural, agricultural, historic, cost, development-limiting potential, hazard reduction, linkages, conservation and protection of water quality. The scores in each category are weighted and/or averaged, then the averages are totaled to yield a final numerical rating for a parcel.

The open space plan should include the ranking methodology. It will be the basis for the open space committee to prioritize actions to implement the plan and also for developing a priority list of properties, if one is desired. However, it is not common practice to include the numerical ratings of specific properties in the open space plan; doing so could inflate the prices of the parcels that are high on the priority list. Still, the information is public, and must be provided to any individual who requests it.

Instead of creating a priority list, many towns take a more conceptual approach to identifying potential open space lands, highlighting broader areas or swaths of priority that would contribute to the open space network, and then listing all parcels within those areas. The properties are not ranked;



rather, individual properties are evaluated (using the ranking system) as funding and parcels become available. Clusters of properties, greenways, and connectors within the conceptual areas can be listed by block and lot, current owner and address, location, and current status. This makes the OSRP more comprehensive and doesn't limit funding to a small set of properties whose owners may or may not be interested in preservation. It also delineates areas that would never be preserved based on their individual merits (for example, because they are too small or are built upon) but which are part of a greenway and important to the health of the water body at the center of the greenway. An education campaign for landowners in the priority areas can be highly beneficial. Either way, it is important for the committee to use a defined ranking approach as the primary guide for deciding how to spend open space funds.

Action Plan/Recommendations

This section should present an action plan for achieving the orderly and coordinated execution of the open space and recreation plan. The Green Acres Program requests a five-year time frame for an OSRP, with periodic review and updates. The action plan can range from general recommendations in a "menu" type of format, to very specific recommendations for each parcel.

The action plan should include a discussion and recommendations on:

- **Preservation techniques:** purchase; donation; conservation easement; deed restriction; lease-purchase; liens/bankruptcies; purchase by state or federal agency; land swaps (i.e.; trade of a donated or publicly-owned parcel not suitable for open space for a parcel that is suitable); ordinances; preserved common open space as part of planned unit developments (PUDs); transfer of development rights (TDR); zoning and subdivision

changes such as clustering or conservation design; protection of sensitive environmental features.

- **Funding sources:** Green Acres Program grants and low-interest loans; local open space tax; county open space tax; non-profit organizations (land trusts, conservation organizations, watershed associations); private donations of land, easements, or funds; NJ Environmental Infrastructure Financing Program loans; NJ Department of Agriculture farmland preservation grants; and NJ Historic Preservation Trust loans. (See Resources section for information on funding sources for natural resource, recreational or agricultural lands, and historic preservation.)
- **Monitoring systems:** early-notice-of-sale agreements with owners of large undeveloped tracts; a system of communication with owners of priority parcels to keep abreast of possible changes in ownership or use (i.e.; intention to file development applications); process for tax collector to inform the committee of all new tax liens or other status changes for parcels in the open space plan, such as entering or withdrawing from the farmland assessment program; notices of application for a Letter of Interpretation delineating wetlands on a property, which can alert the open space committee to potential future building or development applications.
- **Public education:** promoting public knowledge and appreciation of recreation and open space values or needs of the community.
- **Maintenance and management of preserved open space:** In most municipalities, active recreational open space is managed by a parks commission and maintained by the

town's department of public works or a separate parks department.

The maintenance of town-owned natural areas is another issue, especially when the town owns a significant amount of that kind of open space. Woods, swamps and meadows do not lend themselves to easy inspection or access by vehicles, and require a different sort of upkeep and monitoring than the public works crew may be willing or able to provide.

In some towns, environmental commissions take responsibility for monitoring and maintaining trails in natural areas. "Friends" organizations can be established for the same purpose, or a town may decide to contract with an existing nonprofit conservation organization to carry out that function.

In cases where a conservation easement is in place, the property owner will likely be responsible for maintenance. However, municipal officials or volunteers should monitor all easement properties, visiting the sites at least once a year to make sure that the terms of the easements are being honored. The open space plan should recommend a system for monitoring easements and dedicated private open space, or list the creation of such a system as one of the plan's goals.



- **Timetable:** The open space plan should suggest an action timetable that would correspond to the "Goals" section. Any timetable must be general and flexible, but timeframes are necessary to keep the program moving and to have some basis for evaluating the plan and its execution. The plan should also contain recommendations, as needed, concerning open space taxes and the establishment or restructuring of the committee or other entity that will be responsible for implementing the open space plan.

RESOURCES

WITHIN THE TOWN

The municipal tax collector, town engineer, town planner, environmental commission, planning board, park/recreation agencies and park maintenance/DPW staff have a wealth of local data and information. The municipal master plan will contain base mapping and demographic and growth management information. The ERI contains natural resource information and mapping.

SPECIAL REGIONAL BODIES

The Pinelands Commission, Highlands Council or NJ Meadowlands Commission (if your town is in one of those regions) can be a resource for maps and data.

www.njmeadowlands.gov
www.highlands.state.nj.us
www.state.nj.us/pinelands

If the municipality is subject to catastrophic flooding, there may be a regional flood control commission for the area that can provide useful information.

COUNTY AND LOCAL

County planning departments, open space committees, environmental commissions and parks departments have data, maps and plans. Review the county's open space, farmland preservation, trails or greenway plans, as well as plans from adjacent municipalities.

County Soil Conservation Districts, NJ Department of Agriculture. Call the NJ Soil Conservation Service at (609) 292-5540 to locate your District office. Soils maps/data are available through NJDEP's GeoWeb and also at NRCS Web Soil Survey <http://websoilsurvey.nrcs.usda.gov/app/>.

STATE / FEDERAL

NJ GeoWeb

www.nj.gov/dep/gis/geoweb splash.htm

A web-based environmental mapping tool that allows the public to search, view and print extensive GIS data compiled by the State.

NJ DEP Green Acres Program

(609) 984-0500 www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres

Grant and loan programs for land acquisition and preservation (including "Blue Acres" shoreline parcels), and technical assistance for open space planning and land assessment.

NJ Environmental Infrastructure Trust

(609) 219-8600 www.njeit.org

Low-interest loans for land acquisition that complements water quality initiatives by creating buffer areas around stream corridors.

NJ Department of Agriculture, SADC

Farmland Preservation Program

(609) 984-2504 www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc

Grant and loan programs for agricultural land preservation, and technical assistance for planning and assessment.

- **Ordinances:** The plan should recommend any local ordinances that the town could adopt to further the goals of the open space program. For example, a clustering or conservation design ordinance encourages developers to condense lot sizes and leave parts of a tract undeveloped, dedicated as common open space or retained for agriculture. A lot-size averaging ordinance allows some concentration of development in appropriate areas, with more environmentally sensitive land left open. Clustering and lot-size averaging result in preserved open space at no cost to the municipality. Changes in zoning density or buildable lot area restrictions can also help to retain more open space.

Ordinances that protect water quality and environmentally sensitive features can limit development of open lands. Many municipalities have adopted ordinances to restrict development on steep slopes and along stream corridors and ridgelines.

Open Space System Map

The System Map shows the location and configuration of all existing recreation and open space sites listed on the inventory, as well as all proposed parkland, greenways and open space of conservation and recreation interest contained in the OSRP. If the Plan contains a priority list for

acquisition, those specific properties will be identified on the system map. If the Plan utilizes the conceptual approach to acquisition, the system map will show swaths of color encompassing all of the potential open space properties plus greenways and connecting linkages. Note that it is important to define a “greenway” clearly so that landowners do not confuse it with a trail. Trails, including on-road bicycle trails and those on public land, can be included in the OSRP System Map, but it is not appropriate to depict proposed trails running across private property when landowners have not agreed to such a use.

The Green Acres Program suggests that municipalities combine the Executive Summary and the System Map into one document that can be reproduced or posted on the town website as a public education tool.

Additional Materials

A summary or the complete text of open space ordinances, such as the ordinance that creates the open space committee and the one that establishes an open space tax and/or trust fund, should be included in the open space plan, either within a specific section or as an appendix. Include or summarize other open space documents, such as a greenways plan or a management plan for a special area such as a lake or reservoir, and explain how they will relate to your overall plan for open space.

continued on page 12

RESOURCES *continued*

NJ Historic Trust
(609) 984-0473 www.state.nj.us/dca/njht/programs
Grants for historic preservation, restoration, acquisition.

NJDEP NJ Geological Survey
(609) 292-2576 www.state.nj.us/dep/njgs
Mapping and data on geology and groundwater resources.

NJ Office of Planning Advocacy
(609) 292-7156 <http://nj.gov/state/planning>
Information about the NJ State Development & Redevelopment Plan and statewide planning areas.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)
(877) 336-2627 www.fema.gov/hazard/map/flood.shtm
Federal floodplain maps.

NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Association of NJ Environmental Commissions (ANJEC)
(973) 539-7547 www.anjec.org
Digital and paper copies of dozens of Open Space & Recreation Plans and ERIs from NJ municipalities, and a database of environmental ordinances.

Conservation Resources, Inc.
(908) 879-7942 www.conservationresourcesinc.org
Assistance in planning for, acquiring, and managing open space; landowner negotiations; and land stewardship.

NJ Audubon Society
(609) 861-1651 www.njaudubon.org
Information on NJ birds, their habitats and breeding sites.

The Land Conservancy of NJ
(973) 541-1010 www.tlc-nj.org
Nonprofit land trust that provides open space planning, preservation and stewardship information and services.

NJ Conservation Foundation
(908) 234-1225 www.njconservation.org
A statewide land trust organization that protects natural areas and farmland through acquisition and stewardship.

Preservation New Jersey
(609) 392-6409 www.preservationnj.org
Technical assistance and information on historic preservation.

Local Land Trusts and Watershed Organizations

GETTING THE PUBLIC INVOLVED

Green Acres requires an OSRP to describe the public participation process that was used to gather citizen input and assess community open space and recreation needs. (A summary of this process is required in the Executive Summary.) Two well-advertised public meetings are mandatory, but the local government is free to use any method it believes is most effective for public participation. It is a good idea to include transcripts or summaries of the public meetings, documenting the public's comments and recommendations.

To qualify for the Green Acres Planning Incentive Program, the OSRP must be adopted by the Planning Board as part of the municipal master

plan. Although only two public meetings are mandatory, it is wise to incorporate a high degree of community input and public education into the open space planning process. As the environmental commission and/or open space committee proceeds, its members should look for opportunities to make informal presentations, for example, to the PTA, seniors groups and other community organizations, and to keep the public updated through releases to the local press. When residents learn the benefits of open space preservation and understand the process for selecting parcels to preserve, they will be more likely to "buy in" to the open space plan, to fund it, and to support it through the implementation phase.



The **ANJEC RESOURCE CENTER** offers the following services to all citizens:

- reference collection of more than 7,000 books, pamphlets, documents and government publications ranging from academic texts to Environmental/Natural Resource Inventories;
- more than 1,200 material files covering topics from acid rain to zoning;
- extensive materials on state and federal laws including current legislation and regulations;
- extensive file of municipal and model ordinances on topics such as light and noise pollution, critical areas protection and stormwater management;
- response and referral for information requests and questions on local, state and national environmental issues, problems and projects.

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ANJEC is a statewide non-profit organization that informs and assists environmental commissioners and interested citizens in preserving and protecting New Jersey's environment.

For further information, contact ANJEC at
P.O. Box 157, Mendham, NJ 07945, Tel. 973-539-7547, Fax 973-539-7713

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MIMI UPMEYER RESOURCE PAPER COLLECTION



ANJEC dedicates its collection of Resource Papers to Mimi Upmeyer, who worked for ANJEC for 10 years and later served as a board trustee. As our State Plan project director, she worked with environmental commissioners and local officials in towns across New Jersey and provided them with information and contacts to help implement good land use planning and zoning. To help local officials deal with these issues, she conceived the idea for ANJEC's Resource Papers - and wrote the first three. Packed with concise, practical information on specific topics for local environmental protection, ANJEC's ever expanding stock of Resource Papers has become a standard element of our educational program. For a list of all our

Resource Papers, contact ANJEC at 973-539-7547 or visit the Publications page on www.anjec.org.