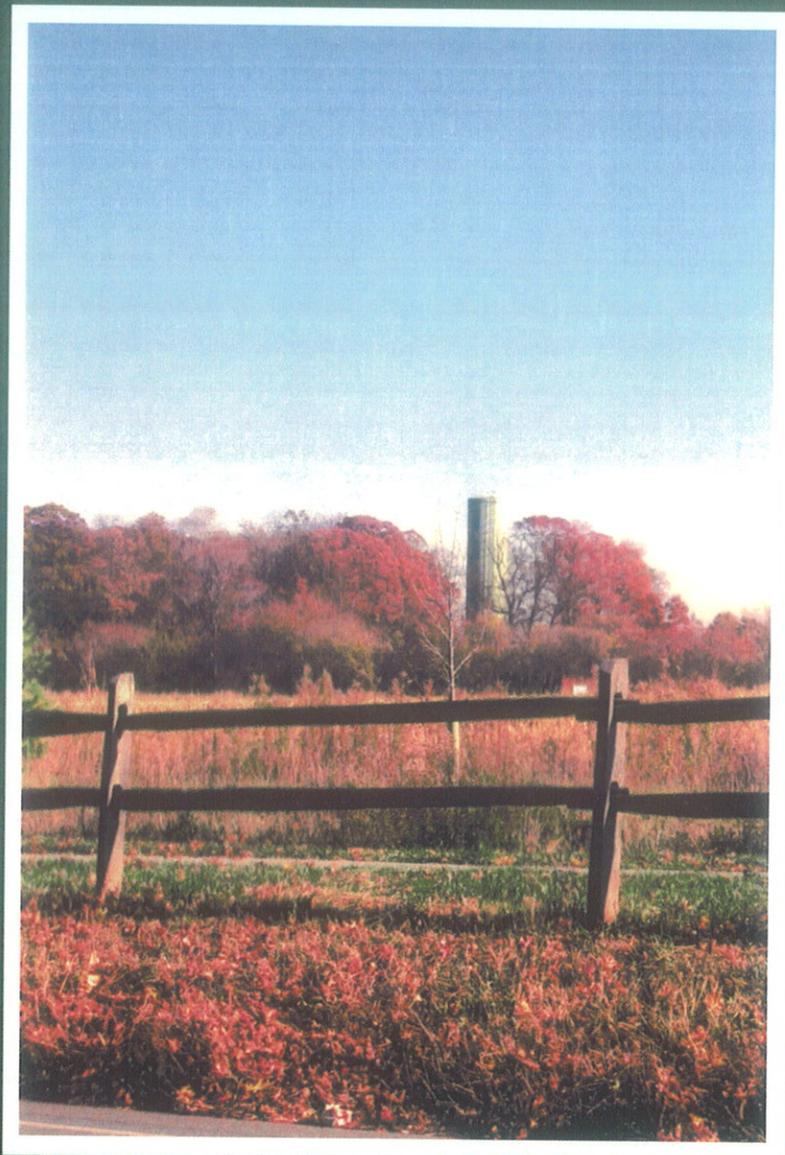




West Norriton Township  
**Open Space Preservation Plan**  
**2006 Update**

Montgomery County, Pennsylvania



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The preparation and evaluation of the West Norriton Township Open Space Preservation Plan 2006 Update was a joint effort including the following municipal individuals and consultants:

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February 16, 2006

March 20, 2006

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## INTRODUCTION

This Open Space Preservation Plan is prepared as an update to the Open Space Preservation Plan adopted by the West Norriton Township in 1995. This report follows the program established in December 2003 by the Green Fields/Green Towns Open Space Task Force. The task force established a County goal of requiring municipalities to update their original municipal Open Space and Environmental Resource Protection Plan pursuant to the requirements of the Montgomery County Open Space Program, which establishes plan elements and guidelines to help the municipality and its Open Space Committee to thoroughly reevaluate the existing Open Space Plan.

### Goals of the Program

Open space includes land and water areas that are undeveloped or predominantly undeveloped and permanently set aside or reserved in a natural state for public or private use and enjoyment. Preservation purposes include:

- Providing recreation opportunities including trails.
- Conserving natural features.
- Preserving historic or cultural landscapes.
- Maintaining scenic quality.
- Protecting water resources.
- Stimulating the revitalization of developed communities with green infrastructure.
- Shaping the form of land use and development.
- Preserving agricultural land.

The Township Open Space Committee with the assistance of Township staff and representatives from Montgomery County Planning Commission have met on a regular basis at public meetings and discussed various preservation and recreation opportunities as well as receiving input from the public in attendance.

In addition, the Planning Consultant has coordinated with adjoining municipalities and their consultants in order to identify relationships and areas of mutual concern that should be included in the Plan. The maps in this report identify the inventory of priority properties recommended for preservation and include a master plan for local and regional trails, including interconnections with adjacent municipalities.

The chapters that follow include information identified in the Green Fields/Green Towns recommendations as appropriate and necessary for the Open Space Preservation Plan Update.

### Audit of 1995 Open Space Plan Recommendations

West Norriton Township completed two significant acquisitions as well as participating in the tree planting grant:

1. Approximately 4.5 acres of the Grow property were acquired. This land is contiguous to the fields adjacent to the former Burnside Elementary School and has been used for public play fields.
2. VanLandeghem property (15.1 acres) was acquired for passive park use; it had been previously used for agricultural use. This was a Priority I property which was preserved as part of a joint purchase agreement with East Norriton Township which simultaneously purchased that portion (19.53 acres) in East Norriton Township.

# Chapter 1

## Community Background

### Introduction

The municipality of West Norriton is a small township consisting of only 5.9 square miles in size and is located adjacent to Norristown Borough in the central portion of Montgomery County. West Norriton Township is a member of the Norristown Area School District. The Township is adjacent to Montgomery County's most important waterway, the Schuylkill River, which flows along the entire southerly border of the Township.

The Township is traversed by major roads including Main Street which becomes Ridge Pike west of the Township in an east/west direction and Trooper Road (Route 363) along its entire westerly boundary line adjacent to Lower Providence Township. Route 363 connects with the Route 422 Expressway at Betzwood in the Township and thence runs north through East Norriton, Worcester, and Upper Gwynedd Townships to Lansdale Borough and Hatfield Township to the north. The Route 422 Expressway is a major commuter corridor connecting Route 202 and the Pennsylvania Turnpike in King of Prussia to Pottstown and beyond that Reading. Egypt Road is another primary road that connects Jeffersonville to the villages of Audubon in Lower Providence Township and Oaks in Upper Providence Township and then on to Phoenixville in Chester County.

The former township of Norriton created in 1730 was the origin of three present-day municipalities: Norristown, East Norriton, and West Norriton.

The Montgomery County Court of Quarter Sessions officially established West Norriton Township on March 13, 1909. West Norriton became a first class township on November 15, 1924, when its population exceeded the required density of 300 persons per square mile.

The 2000 Census of Population indicated 14,901 persons resided within the Township. This yields a density of 2,526 persons per square mile.

## Development Trends

Before 1920 West Norriton Township was primarily agricultural with the exception of a strip of commercial and residential development along Ridge Pike between Burnside and Schuylkill Avenues. Until the end of World War II, most people moving into West Norriton migrated from Norristown and nearly all of its residents worked in the immediate Norristown area. The first significant residential neighborhood, which grew up adjacent to Norristown Borough, is known as Jeffersonville.

West Norriton is largely residential today, due in part to the fact that the Schuylkill River had steep slopes which rendered this section of the river unusable for industry. Thus, when nearby communities in Norristown, Bridgeport, Plymouth, Conshohocken, and West Conshohocken were evolving into a strong industrial base in the nineteenth century, much of the area in West Norriton remained agricultural with the exception of the Betzwood area. The Township saw its greatest increases in population during the period from 1960 to 1980, when the population increased by 5,692 people or 68.2%. In 1990 the percentage of population change from 1980 grew at a rate of 8.4%, which was higher than any adjoining municipality and higher than the County average of 5.4%. Between 1990 and 2000, the Township saw a slight decrease in population of 2%. However, this reflects an overall decrease in size of household. During the same period, the Township added 322 housing units which was an increase of 4.8%.

Approximately 69% of all housing units in 2000 were owner occupied. The vacancy rate was slightly higher than the County average, while the median value of an owner occupied unit of \$132,900 was substantially lower than the median value for Montgomery County. The highest percentage of housing type is single family detached, followed closely by single family attached (townhouses).

The median age of housing stock in West Norriton was constructed in 1971, which is twelve years newer than the County average. More recently, since 1995 infill development has consisted of single family development and townhouses on small sites. Two noteworthy new developments have occurred in the southerly section of the Township:

1. Valley Forge Marketplace, consisting of more than 400,000 square feet of retail space at the intersection of Egypt Road and Trooper Road (Route 363); and
2. RiverView, a major mixed use development comprised of more than 600 residential units, office/retail space, a hotel and the reclaimed Lubin Studios for office use. This development is currently under construction and constitutes a revitalization/redevelopment of a site previously used for industrial purposes (a.k.a. Synthane Taylor).

The Norristown Area School District Campus has expanded its facilities with the construction of the Whitehall Elementary School.

### Existing Land Use

Figure 1-1 lists the major land use categories followed by the acreage and percent of the Township devoted to each. Single family detached accounts for the largest single category at 41.7%. All sections of the Township feature single family neighborhoods at generally a medium density. The older neighborhoods are in Census Tract 1 and the easterly portion of Census Tract 3. Newer development for both single family and townhouses has occurred in the westerly sections of Census Tract 3 and most of Census Tract 2.

The second largest land use category is park and recreation land use, which accounts for 18.3% of the total Township. This category is largely influenced by the Farm Park portion of the State Hospital grounds and the two 18-hole golf courses (Jeffersonville Golf Club which is a public course owned by West Norriton Township and Westover Country Club which is privately owned but is open to the public while maintaining private membership play as well).

All other categories of land use are single digit percentages, with institutional land uses ranking as the third largest land use group. The vacant, agricultural and conservation category has been reduced by 87 acres since the 1995 Open Space Plan. 19.6 acres has been preserved for public open space and the balance has been subdivided and developed largely for residential land use.

As can be seen from the land use analysis, very little of the Township can be characterized as vacant or agricultural land use.

Figure 1-1 reveals in many respects West Norriton Township is a largely built out community with a well established land use base. The greatest change in percentage from the 1995 Open Space Plan, however, indicates a reduction in vacant, agricultural and conservation land use which now equals 6.2% of the total. However, during the same time there was a slight increase in park and recreational land use and West Norriton boasts a very high 18.3% due to the acquisition of two properties for permanent park and recreation purposes.

Development trends include rehabilitation/redevelopment of the commercial corridor along West Main Street, although this particular change is not reflected in land use statistics. However, the Valley Forge Marketplace has been largely completed since 1995 and has resulted in a significant increase in acreage within the Township devoted to commercial/retail.

During the same time, industrial land use and zoning have significantly been reduced: First, in part due to the conversion of industrial zoning to the aforementioned Valley Forge Marketplace; and secondly, due to the conversion of industrial zoning for the RiverView community currently under construction in the Betzwood area. RiverView is currently proposed for approximately 20 acres of apartment residential consisting of both rental and condominium multi-family apartments and the balance proposed for office/hotel/mixed use development. It should be noted the plan for RiverView has included the preservation of a "river walk" adjacent to the Schuylkill River. See recommendations relative to a local interest walkway parallel to the regional Schuylkill Bike Trail. Over half of the land area of West Norriton Township is now devoted to residential categories of land use (50.4% in 2005).

Figure 1-1 - Existing Land Use

<u>Land Use</u>	<u>2005 Acres</u>	<u>% Of Total 2005</u>	<u>% Of Total 1995</u>	<u>% Change 1995 To 2005</u>
Single Family Detached	1,573	41.7%	40.8%	0.9%
Single Family Attached	181	4.8%	4.8%	0.0%
Multi-Family Apartments	146	3.9%	3.3%	0.6%
Government	16	0.4%	0.4%	0.0%
Office	301	8.0%	7.4%	0.6%
Commercial	139.5	3.7%	2.1%	1.6%
Industrial	164	4.3%	6.1%	( 1.8%)
Park and Recreational <sup>1</sup>	691.6	18.3%	17.8%	0.5%
Institutional <sup>2</sup>	331	8.8%	8.8%	0.0%
Vacant, Agricultural & Conservation	233	6.2%	8.5%	( 2.3%)
TOTAL	3,776	100.0%	100.0%	

Note: Road rights-of-way are proportionately allocated to each land use classification.

<sup>1</sup>Public and private recreational, including golf courses and driving ranges (includes 260 acres of Norristown Farm Park).

<sup>2</sup>Institutional includes churches, cemeteries, hospitals and schools (includes 40 acres of Norristown Hospital).

Figure 1-2: Population, 1950-2000 West Norriton Township, West Norriton Region and Montgomery County

Municipality	1950		1960		1970		1980		Percent Change		Percent Change	
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1970-1980	1980-1990	1990	1980-1990	2000	1990-2000		
<i>West Norriton Township</i>	3,778	8,342	12,456	14,034	12.7%	8.4%	15,209	8.4%	14,901	-2.0%		
East Norriton Township	2,987	7,773	11,837	12,711	7.4%	4.8%	13,324	4.8%	13,211	-0.8%		
Lower Providence Township	5,887	9,955	15,169	18,945	24.9%	2.1%	19,351	2.1%	22,390	15.7%		
Norristown Borough	38,126	38,925	38,169	34,684	-9.1%	-11.3%	30,749	-11.3%	31,282	1.7%		
Plymouth Township	5,118	11,430	15,911	17,168	7.9%	-7.0%	15,958	-7.0%	16,045	0.5%		
Upper Merion Township							25,722		26,863	4.4%		
Worcester Township	1,939	3,250	4,243	4,661	9.9%	0.5%	4,686	0.5%	7,789	66.2%		
<i>West Norriton Region</i>							124,999		132,481	6.0%		
<b>Montgomery County</b>	<b>353,068</b>	<b>516,682</b>	<b>624,080</b>	<b>643,621</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>678,111</b>	<b>5.4%</b>	<b>750,097</b>	<b>10.6%</b>		

Sources:

Demographic Analysis, 1950-1980 in East Norriton Township Comprehensive Plan, 1994

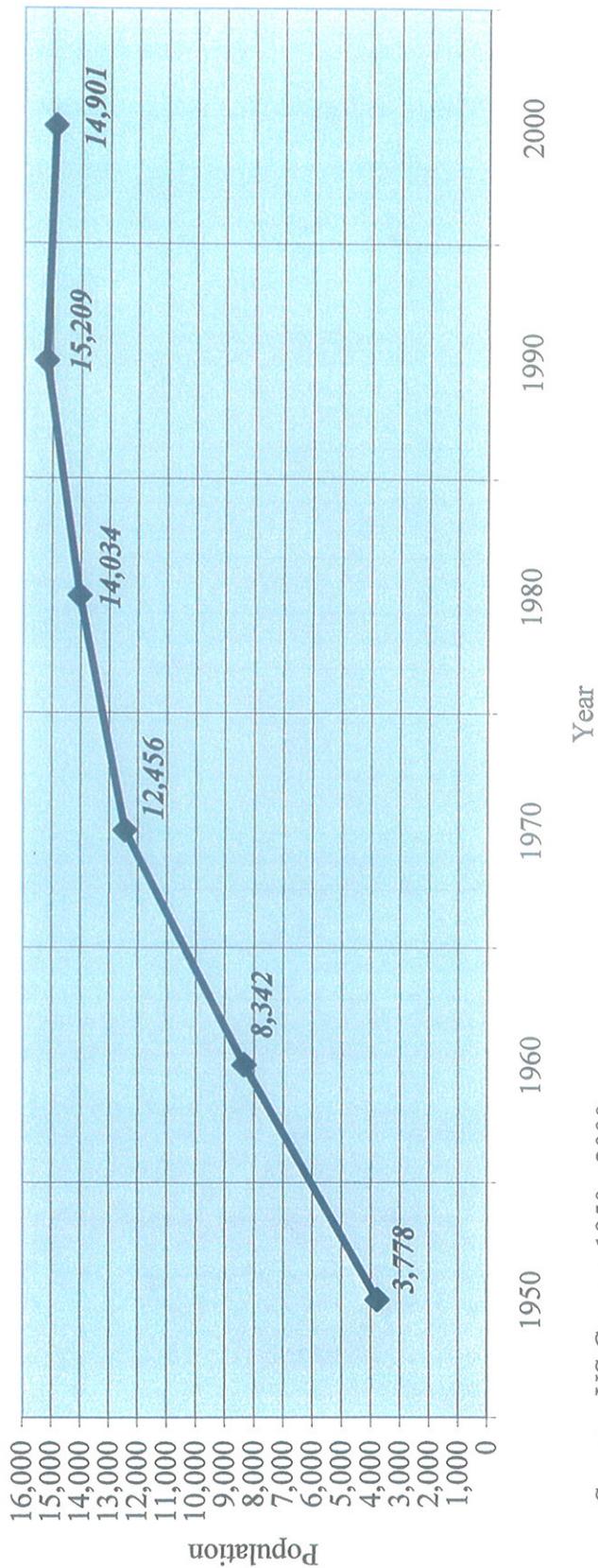
U.S. Census, 1990 and 2000

Figure 1-3: Population by Age Cohorts, 1990-2000 W. Norriton Township, W. Norriton Region and Montgomery Co.

	<i>West Norriton Township</i>			<i>West Norriton Region</i>			<i>Montgomery County</i>		
	1990	2000	Change 1990- 2000 %	1990	2000	Change 1990- 2000 %	1990	2000	Change 1990- 2000 %
0-4 years	977	850	-13.0%	8075	7,930	-1.8%	46,040	47,290	2.7%
5-17 years	1,975	1,980	0.3%	18235	21,434	17.5%	106,692	133,855	25.5%
18-24 years	1,168	1,005	-14.0%	11590	10,192	-12.1%	59,695	53,089	-11.1%
25-34 years	3,774	2,631	-30.3%	24370	20,671	-15.2%	117,207	100,931	-13.9%
35-44 years	2,412	2,588	7.3%	18997	22,200	16.9%	104,978	127,953	21.9%
45-54 years	1,435	2,155	50.2%	13237	18,082	36.6%	74,341	106,735	43.6%
55-64 years	1,416	1,377	-2.8%	13438	12,569	-6.5%	67,182	68,447	1.9%
65-74 years	1,344	1,195	-11.1%	10879	10,579	-2.8%	59,243	55,562	-6.2%
75-84 years	580	928	60.0%	4671	6,941	48.6%	32,193	41,518	29.0%
85+ years	128	192	50.0%	1469	1,883	28.2%	10,540	14,717	39.6%
TOTAL	15,209	14,901	-2.0%	124,961	132,481	6.0%	678,111	750,097	10.6%

Source: US Census 1990, 2000

Figure 1-4: Population Growth, 1950-2000: West Norriton Township

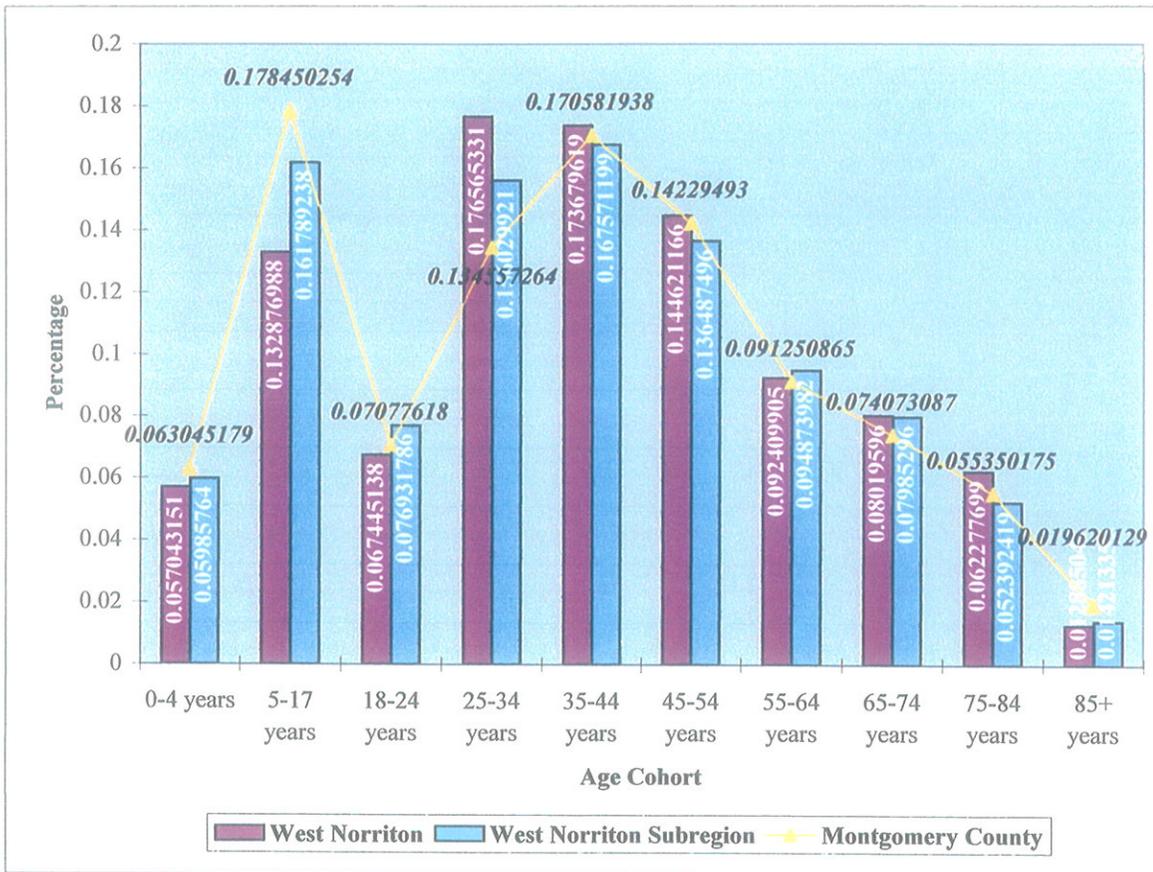


Source: US Census, 1950 - 2000

**Figure 1-5: Population by Age Cohorts, 2000**  
**W. Norriton Township, W. Norriton Subregion, and Montgomery Co.**

	West Norriton		West Norriton Subregion		Montgomery County	
	number	percentage	number	percentage	number	percentage
0-4 years	850	5.7%	7,930	6.0%	47,290	6.3%
5-17 years	1,980	13.3%	21,434	16.2%	133,855	17.8%
18-24 years	1,005	6.7%	10,192	7.7%	53,089	7.1%
25-34 years	2,631	17.7%	20,671	15.6%	100,931	13.5%
35-44 years	2,588	17.4%	22,200	16.8%	127,953	17.1%
45-54 years	2,155	14.5%	18,082	13.6%	106,735	14.2%
55-64 years	1,377	9.2%	12,569	9.5%	68,447	9.1%
65-74 years	1,195	8.0%	10,579	8.0%	55,562	7.4%
75-84 years	928	6.2%	6,941	5.2%	41,518	5.5%
85+ years	192	1.3%	1,883	1.4%	14,717	2.0%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14,901</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>132,481</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>750,097</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Source: US Census, 2000



It should be noted the age cohorts for West Norriton Township have generally been parallel to the County average with two notable exceptions:

1. Age Cohort 5-17 Years: West Norriton is significantly below the County average.
2. Age Cohort 25-34 Years: West Norriton is significantly above the County average.

Figure I-6: Population, Population Estimates and Population Forecasts, 1990-2025:

West Norriton Township, Area Municipalities, and Montgomery County

Municipality	Census	DVRPC	Census	Final	Final	Final	Final	Final	Final
	1990	1997	2000	2000	2005	2010	2015	2020	2025
<i>West Norriton Twp.</i>	15,209	14,963	14,901	15,100	15,100	15,050	15,050	15,050	15,000
East Norriton Twp.	13,324	13,135	13,211	13,200	13,150	13,150	13,100	13,050	13,000
Lower Providence Twp.	19,351	20,815	22,390	21,350	23,200	24,250	25,050	25,800	26,450
Norristown Borough	30,749	30,008	31,282	29,650	29,250	29,100	28,750	28,450	28,250
Plymouth Twp.	15,958	16,028	16,045	16,050	16,000	15,850	15,550	15,300	15,150
Upper Merion Twp.	25,722	26,290	26,863	27,100	28,000	28,100	28,250	28,400	28,500
Worcester Twp.	4,686	5,876	7,789	6,300	7,200	7,750	8,450	9,250	9,950
<b>Montgomery County</b>	<b>678,111</b>	<b>713,971</b>	<b>750,097</b>	<b>730,900</b>	<b>756,450</b>	<b>777,550</b>	<b>797,300</b>	<b>817,250</b>	<b>835,100</b>

Source: DVRPC and 2025 MCD Montgomery County Final Population Forecasts by MCPC (<http://www.montcopa.org/plancom/dip-popproj.htm>)

Figure 1-7: Housing Units, 1980-2000

West Norriton Township and Area Municipalities, West Norriton Region, and Montgomery County

Municipality	Housing Units						
	2000	1990	#	%	1980	#	%
			Change 1990- 2000	Change 1990- 2000		Change 1980- 1990	Change 1980- 1990
<i>West Norriton Twp</i>	6,890	6,568	322	4.9%	4,904	1,664	33.9%
East Norriton Twp	5,310	5,201	109	2.1%	4,443	758	17.1%
Lower Providence Twp	7,690	6,826	864	12.7%	6,315	511	8.1%
Norristown Boro	13,531	13,080	451	3.4%	13,233	-153	-1.2%
Plymouth Twp	6,703	6,392	311	4.9%	6,037	355	5.9%
Upper Merion Twp	12,151	11,202	949	8.5%	9,594	1,608	16.8%
Worcester Twp	3,026	1,832	1,194	65.2%	1,596	236	14.8%
<i>West Norriton Region</i>	<i>55,301</i>	<i>51,101</i>	<i>4,200</i>	<i>8.2%</i>	<i>46,122</i>	<i>4,979</i>	<i>10.8%</i>
<b>Montgomery County</b>	<b>297,434</b>	<b>265,858</b>	<b>31,576</b>	<b>11.9%</b>	<b>232,569</b>	<b>33,289</b>	<b>14.3%</b>

Sources:

1990 and 2000 Data: U.S. Census

1980 Data: Mont. Co. Planning Commission (PA State Data Center, U.S. Census)

Figure 1-8: Housing Characteristics 1990-2000

West Norriton Township and Montgomery County

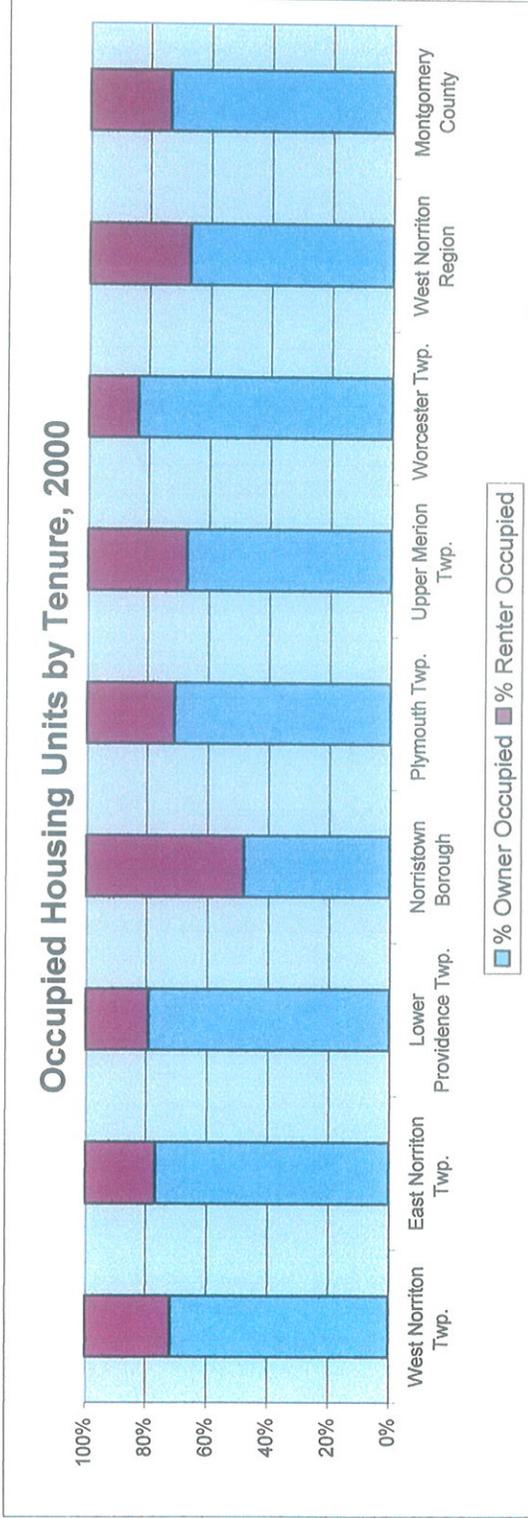
	West Norriton Township				Montgomery County			
	2000		Change 1990-2000		2000		Change 1990-2000	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Housing Units	6,890		322	4.9%	297,434		31,578	11.9%
Occupied Units	6,614		280	4.4%	286,098		31,103	12.2%
Owner-Occupied Units	4,759		57	1.2%	210,233		25,916	14.1%
Renter-Occupied Units	1,855		223	13.7%	75,865		5,187	7.3%
Vacant Units	276		42	17.9%	11,336		475	4.4%
Vacancy Rate	4.0%		3.6%		3.8%		4.1%	
Housing Type:								
1-unit Detached	3,071		-12	-0.40%	166,543		19,119	13%
1-unit Attached	1,960		158	8.80%	55,745		9,812	21.40%
2 to 4 units	462		91	24.50%	23,107		2,991	14.90%
5 to 9 units	263		29	12.40%	9,641		1,383	16.70%
10 or more units	1,118		139	14.20%	39,680		906	2.30%
Mobile Home, Other	6		-93	-93.90%	2,627		-2724	-50.90%

Sources: U.S. Census, 1990 and 2000

**Figure 1-9: Occupied Housing Units by Tenure, 2000**  
**West Norriton Township and Area Municipalities, West Norriton Region, and Montgomery County**

Municipality	Total # Occupied Units		Owner Occupied		Renter Occupied	
	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
<i>West Norriton Twp.</i>	6,614	72.0%	4,759	72.0%	1,855	28.0%
East Norriton Twp.	5,156	76.9%	3,963	76.9%	1,193	23.1%
Lower Providence Twp.	7,446	79.3%	5,904	79.3%	1,542	20.7%
Norristown Borough	12,028	48.1%	5,786	48.1%	6,242	51.9%
Plymouth Twp.	6,512	71.2%	4,638	71.2%	1,874	28.8%
Upper Merion Twp.	11,575	67.4%	7,798	67.4%	3,777	32.6%
Worcester Twp.	2,896	83.6%	2,421	83.6%	475	16.4%
<b>West Norriton Region</b>	<b>52,227</b>	<b>67.5%</b>	<b>35,269</b>	<b>67.5%</b>	<b>16,958</b>	<b>32.5%</b>
<b>Montgomery County</b>	<b>286,098</b>	<b>73.5%</b>	<b>210,233</b>	<b>73.5%</b>	<b>75,865</b>	<b>26.5%</b>

Source: U.S. Census 2000



**Figure 1-10: Housing Units by Occupancy Status  
West Norriton Twp., W. Norriton Region, and Mont. Co., 2000**

Municipality	Total #	Occupied		Vacant	
	Housing Units	Number	% of Total	Number	% of Total
<i>West Norriton Twp.</i>	6,890	6,614	96.0%	276	4.0%
East Norriton Twp.	5,310	5,156	97.1%	154	2.9%
Lower Providence Twp.	7,690	7,446	96.8%	244	3.2%
Norristown Borough	13,531	12,028	88.9%	1,503	11.1%
Plymouth Twp.	6,703	6,512	97.2%	191	2.8%
Upper Merion Twp.	12,151	11,575	95.3%	576	4.7%
Worcester Twp.	3,026	2,896	95.7%	130	4.3%
<i>West Norriton Region</i>	<i>55,301</i>	<i>52,227</i>	<i>94.4%</i>	<i>3,074</i>	<i>5.6%</i>
Montgomery County	297,434	286,098	96.2%	11,336	3.8%

Source: U.S. Census 2000

Figure 1-11: Housing Values/Rents, 1990-2000: West Norriton Township and Montgomery County

	W. Norriton Township			Montgomery County		
	2000	1990	% Change	2000	1990	% Change
Median Value - Owner Occupied	\$132,900	\$ 127,300	4.40%	\$160,700	\$ 143,400	12.10%
Median Rent - Renter Occupied	\$835	\$ 567	47.30%	\$757	\$ 521	45.30%

Sources:  
1990 and 2000 Data: U.S. Census

Figure 1-12: Jobs, 1990 - 2025

West Norriton Township, Area Municipalities, and Montgomery County

	Census 1990	DVRPC 1997 <sup>[1]</sup>	Final 2000 <sup>[2]</sup>	Final 2005 <sup>[2]</sup>	Final 2010 <sup>[2]</sup>	Final 2015 <sup>[2]</sup>	Final 2020 <sup>[2]</sup>	Final 2025 <sup>[2]</sup>
<i>West Norriton Twp.</i>	6,856	6,925	7,000	7,100	7,250	7,400	7,600	7,750
East Norriton Twp.	7,737	7,255	7,400	7,700	7,950	8,200	8,500	8,750
L. Providence Twp.	10,366	10,502	11,000	11,350	11,650	12,150	12,550	13,000
Norristown Borough	16,559	15,922	15,300	15,100	15,000	14,800	14,600	14,500
Plymouth Twp.	19,460	22,399	22,850	24,500	26,500	28,000	30,000	32,000
Upper Merion Twp.	46,428	49,738	50,600	52,500	53,400	56,000	57,800	60,250
Worcester Twp.	2,649	3,272	3,250	3,300	3,450	3,500	3,600	3,750
<i>Montgomery Co.</i>	<i>457,501</i>	<i>485,435</i>	<i>491,200</i>	<i>505,350</i>	<i>520,250</i>	<i>535,900</i>	<i>551,450</i>	<i>567,700</i>

Source: Montgomery County Planning Commission Final Jobs Forecasts (<http://www.montcopa.org/plancom/dip-emplst.htm>)

[1] DVRPC Estimate

[2] DVRPC Forecast

## Employment

According to the 2000 census, 8,513 West Norriton Township residents (age 16 and over) are in the labor force.

Figure 1-13 - Labor Force by Occupation

<u>Occupation</u>	<u>2000</u>		<u>2000 Rank</u>	
	<u>Number</u>	<u>% Total</u>	<u>Township</u>	<u>County</u>
Professional	2,153	25.3%	1	1
Clerical/Office	1,636	19.2%	2	3
Management	1,580	18.6%	3	2
Services	1,034	12.1%	4	5
Sales	1,032	12.1%	5	4
Production/Transportation	569	6.7%	6	6
Construction, Extraction & Maintenance	509	6.0%	7	7
Farming	0	0.0%	8	8
Total	8,513	100.0%		

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000 Census.

As seen in Figure 1-13, Township employment characteristics match the County in the top category but differ from the total for the County in the categories of Clerical/Office, Management, Services, and Sales.

West Norriton is the home of a number of public sector employers, including the Norristown Area High School and Administration building along North Whitehall Road and Norristown State Hospital along Sterigere Street, as well as the Pathway School and the Montgomery County Youth Center.

## Chapter 2 Goals and Objectives

### Plan Goals

To ensure that this plan addresses the local priorities for recreation, park and open space, goals that expand upon the policies of the Township governing body and Park and Recreation Board and to coordinate with adjacent municipalities and plans proposed by Montgomery County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The recommendations of this document are intended to achieve the following goals:

1. To maintain a low to medium density suburban character within the Township.
  - a. To promote the retention of the few agricultural lands remaining.
  - b. To preserve environmentally sensitive and ecologically fragile lands.
  - c. To conserve historic sites and structures which are assets to the community.
  - d. To protect significant scenic views from the encroachment of development.
  - e. To retain major physiographic features such as stream valleys and wooded hillsides through careful review during the subdivision and land development process.
  
2. To discourage typical suburban development which consumes open space and "hides" distinctive characteristics of the Township.
  - a. To encourage private development to respect environmental features which contribute to the overall scenic and visual quality of the Township.
  - b. To coordinate the location and development of open spaces with other existing and projected land uses so that they enhance one another.
  - c. To promote creative development and good, responsible design techniques, i.e., cluster development and planned residential development; to create a desirable living and working environment.

3. To plan for the optimum use of land for recreation, parks and open spaces.
  - a. To ensure an adequate system of open space for public use.
  - b. To set aside open space to accommodate both the current and future needs of Township residents.
  - c. To locate open space close to established and developing residential areas.
  - d. To centrally locate recreational open space within population centers to provide safe, easy access for the age groups the sites are designed to serve.
  
4. To contribute to the healthy physical, cultural, and social growth and development of Township residents by providing recreation opportunities within the open space system.
  - a. To develop a diversified system of parks which are intended to satisfy the needs and interests of all sectors of the citizen population.
  - b. To select park sites based on land suitability and proximity to areas of greatest population.
  - c. To provide major public recreation areas accessible to the residents of all geographic areas of the Township.
  - d. To provide facilities for a wide variety of recreation activities.
  - e. To reflect local variations in recreation preferences in the development of close-to-home parks.
  - f. To preserve existing recreational facilities that are essential to serve the citizens of the Township, particularly key recreation sites which are associated with existing elementary school sites.
  - g. To establish a system of interconnecting open space areas with trail opportunities for pedestrians and bicyclists. Provide links to regional trails and with neighboring municipalities where practicable.
  - h. To foster the involvement of all public, quasi-public and private groups in the provision of open space and recreational opportunities.

5. To provide for the revitalization of properties and installation of walkways along Main Streets:
  - a. Provide a continuous link from Norristown Borough to Lower Providence Township.
  - b. Rebuild/construct new sidewalks along Main Street and Egypt Road.
  - c. Encourage the revitalization of obsolete and underused properties to provide a cultural center.
  - d. Install street trees, pedestrian furniture, and crosswalks along Main Street. Protect historical and noteworthy period architecture.

## Chapter 3

### Identification of Existing Protected Lands

Inventory Of Existing Parks And Open Space Land identifies three categories of open space: Existing public and private permanent open space, temporary open space, and vacant land.

I. Existing public and private permanent open space would fall into the following forms of ownership:

Municipal Property

This is land that is owned and used by West Norriton Township or one of its authorities. Properties consist of developed and vacant park land, as well as small pockets of open space devoted to retention basins and stormwater management. These properties include:

Theodore Wenzel Park: 1.1 acres along Hillside Drive. (Acquired from O'Neill Properties and previously known as the Betzwood Park.)

Fire House Recreation Site: A site of 7 acres to the rear of the West Norriton Fire House. Site situated School Lane just south of Egypt Road.

Burnside Oakland Park: 6.75 acres situate at the intersection of Oakland Drive and Burnside Avenue.

Municipal Building Complex: Approximately 4 acres, net of buildings and parking.

Jeffersonville Golf Club: 140 acres. (Open to public for golf use and for group picnics and outings on an approved basis.) Consists of protected riparian corridors along the southwesterly edges of the property.

Grow Property: 4.5 acres used for public play fields acquired pursuant to the 1995 Round I Open Space grants.

VanLandeghem Property: 15.1 acres used as passive park acquired pursuant to the 1995 Round I Open Space grants. This area joins 19.53 acres in East Norriton Township, also permanently preserved via a joint acquisition.

School District Property

Norristown Area High School, including Whitehall Elementary School and School District Administration Building: 90 acres.<sup>3\*</sup>

Private Recreation Lands (Zoning Restricted)

Westover Country Club: 137 acres.<sup>4</sup>

Lands of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Norristown State Hospital/Norristown Farm Park: 300 acres\* (situated within West Norriton Township).

\*Acreage denotes entire property. Not all the acreage is open space due to buildings and parking lots.

2. Temporary protected open space identifies four additional land use categories of properties that are protected for open space, recreation, or institutional use for both short and long term periods.

School District Property

Former Burnside Elementary School: 8.5 acres.<sup>5</sup>

Marshall Street Elementary School: 11 acres.<sup>6</sup>

Surplus land of Norristown Area High School: 15 acres (see footnote 3).

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<sup>3</sup> Norristown Area School District is an active school district, and the high school and adjoining sports facilities as well as a new elementary school and the administration building are so key to serving the constituents of the school district and the student population on a long term basis that they are considered permanent school district properties for the foreseeable future. Of this, approximately 15 acres situated in the southerly area of the campus behind Shepherd Lane and Brookside Road are considered surplus vacant land.

<sup>4</sup> This property is permanently preserved for open space pursuant to a deed restriction filed in favor of the Township which permits the proposed adult/retirement community approved for this site to occupy a portion of the existing golf course.

<sup>5</sup> Acreage refers to open space, play fields and recreation components portion of the total school property.

<sup>6</sup> Acreage refers to open space, play fields and recreation components portion of the total school property.

Since these properties serve local neighborhoods and the student service needs may change over time, while the school district has significant investment in the elementary schools there is less certainty about their long term uses for school district purposes due to the vagaries of demographic characteristics within individual neighborhoods.

### Private Recreation Land

Markley Swim Club: 10 acres.

### Institutional Land

St. Teresa of Avilla: 5.6 acres.

St. Sophia: 7.8 acres.

Montgomery County Youth Center: 32.6 acres.\*

Pathway School: 13.7 acres.\*

Riverside/Montgomery Cemetery Properties: 73 acres.\*

Visitation B.V.M. Church and School: 16 acres.\*

First Baptist Church: 22 acres (surplus land only).

Charity Lodge: 1.4 acres (surplus land only).

Smaller institutional uses on small sites with little open space: Jeffersonville Presbyterian Church, Reformed Church of the Ascension, Montgomery County Intermediate Unit.

\*Acreage denotes entire property. Not all the acreage is open space due to buildings and parking lots.

### Act 319 Lands

Markley Farm: 46 acres (the area not devoted to the Markley Swim Club).

3. Vacant land, including country estates 10 acres or greater:

St. Teresa surplus land situate along Parkview Drive east of St. Teresa: 10.4 acres.

N/L W. Wilson: 7.5 acres situate south of St. Teresa along Trooper Road.

Dorsky property situate 351 Burnside Avenue and the land situate adjacent to Burnside Oakland Park: 17.5 acres.

Markley Swim Club: 10.0 acres (area not devoted to Act 319 agricultural preservation).

## Chapter 4

### Inventories of Potentially Vulnerable Resources

The following is from the 1995 West Norriton Township Open Space Plan.

#### Land Forms and Natural Features

Topography and land forms help shape the manner in which a community develops. These land forms, along with the soil characteristics and geology such as steep slopes, wetlands, ponds and lakes, and floodplains also establish the pattern of natural features.

For West Norriton Township, an overview of these features begins with a recognition that West Norriton Township is positioned along the northerly side of the Schuylkill River which influences two major land forms within the Township:

1. Lowland and floodprone areas immediately adjacent to the Schuylkill River Valley.
2. Broad upland, nearly level topography generally on both sides of Ridge Pike in the upper two-thirds of the Township.

The Schuylkill River flows the entire 40 mile length of Montgomery County and has played a leading role in the development of eastern Pennsylvania. The Schuylkill River has its beginnings in Schuylkill County and flows for 139 miles, including the formation of the southwestern boundary of Montgomery County through Philadelphia and joining the Delaware River.

According to the book Montgomery County The Second Hundred Years, Volume 2, 1983, the Schuylkill River has had a long list of valuable uses: First, as both a transportation route and a major source of fish for food; as a source of ice; and as a source of energy to power early mills. It provided continuous water supplies for the river towns and industries, and during the summer and winter gave residents, young and old, a place to boat, fish, and ice skate . . . those who have known the Schuylkill best have variously referred to it as a "life line for millions" and "a working river", and it was and continues to do both.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Montgomery County The Second Hundred Years, Volume 2. Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983, page 584.

The Schuylkill is also a source of drinking water for many Montgomery County communities and numerous municipal water companies withdraw water. In addition, manufacturing industries with water needs in Montgomery County along the Schuylkill have included food, paper, chemicals, petroleum, rubber, and primary metals.

The Schuylkill has been used for recreation, fishing, and boating since the 1800s. Barbadoes Island was one well known recreation center, first as a two-mile race course and later providing bathing establishments and oak tree shaded picnic grounds. Eventually, the Barbadoes electric generating station was built there. This facility is now owned by Philadelphia Electric Company.

The magnificent vistas found along the Schuylkill prompted the establishment of cemeteries overlooking the river. In West Norriton these include the Montgomery Cemetery and Riverside Cemetery adjacent to Norristown Borough.

During the Industrial Age from the 1880s through the late 1930s the Schuylkill had become polluted and laden with culm. By the late 1970s, however, two significant developments caused the rebirth of recreation along the Schuylkill. First, a gigantic pollution control effort by the state of Pennsylvania and federal anti-pollution programs; the second was the energy crisis, which meant long recreation trips to far away camping and park sites became too expensive. The close proximity of the Schuylkill made it attractive to be used again for fishing, boating and water skiing. Until recently, the Port Indian Regatta was an annual event and boat launches, fishing piers and primary homes which have grown out of recreation cottages are dotted along the West Norriton frontage of the Schuylkill River.

### Geology

Bedrock geology, along with the hydrologic cycle, is responsible for the changes in elevation, steep slopes, location of water courses, and orientation of the land forms of an area. The bedrock material has a great influence on the type of soil formed. Montgomery County is located in the Triassic Lowland and Piedmont Upland section of the Piedmont Physiographic Province of the Appalachian Highlands.

The formations<sup>8</sup> underlying West Norriton Township are described below:

1. Stockton Arkosic Sandstone, Conglomerate, and Shale formation underlies 90% of the Township. This formation occurs in a band about 4 miles wide across the south-central part of the County. The Stockton formation consists of light-gray or buff, coarse grained arkosic sandstone and conglomerate of red and brown sandstone and red shale. In the past, some sand and gravel were quarried in this area but only a small amount is produced at present. As a rule, the Stockton formation is soft and highly weathered near the surface. The ground water resources in this formation are the best of any formation - a fact which has aided the rapid development of the area.
2. Lockatong, Argillite and Shale formation underlies the northern tip of the Township. This is part of a larger band, several miles wide, which runs from the Mont Clare area to the Montgomery/Horsham Township border. Resistant to weathering, these rocks form the prominent ridge which runs between Lower Providence and East Norriton Townships to the north. In former years, building stone was quarried in this area but now crushed stone is quarried extensively at operations such as the Gill Quarry in nearby East Norriton Township and is used for constructing roads.

There are four soil associations which characterize West Norriton Township's surface geology.<sup>9</sup>

1. The area along the Schuylkill River valley is identified as Rowland-Birdsboro-Raritan Association: Deep, well drained to somewhat poorly drained soils formed in old alluvial deposits; on floodplains and terraces.
2. Much of the area south of Ridge Pike is characterized by the Lansdale-Penn-Readington Association: Deep and moderately deep, well drained and moderately well drained soils underlain by shale and sandstone; on rolling uplands.
3. The northerly edge of the Township is identified as Lawrenceville-Chalfont-Doylestown Association: Deep, moderately well drained to poorly drained soils formed in windblown silt deposits; on undulating uplands.

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<sup>8</sup> Soil Survey of Montgomery County, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1967.

<sup>9</sup> Soil Survey of Montgomery County, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1967.

4. The westerly edge of the Township, generally bounded by Ridge Pike and Egypt Road, including the Jeffersonville Golf Club, is identified as Reaville-Penn-Klinesville Association: Shallow to moderately deep, well drained to somewhat poorly drained soils underlain by shale; soils on rolling uplands.

#### Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI)

There are significant natural areas in Montgomery County which provide benefits to the residents of the County by purifying groundwater, controlling erosion, maintaining plant and animal diversity, providing educational opportunities, and containing scenic vistas. In order to plan for the wise use of these natural areas, and the important resources they contain, the Pennsylvania Natural Diversity Inventory (PNDI) was established in 1982 as a joint venture of The Nature Conservancy, the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources, and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. The PNDI has become Pennsylvania's chief storehouse of information on outstanding natural habitat types, sensitive plant and animal species, and other noteworthy natural features.

#### PNDI Sites In West Norriton Township

The PNDI specifically identifies the best natural areas and the locations of all known animal and plant species of special concern (i.e., endangered, threatened, or rare). Currently, West Norriton Township does not contain any sites listed on the PNDI.

However, the Nature Conservancy is currently conducting a systematic search of the County, as part of a Natural Areas Inventory (NAI). The NAI will supplement the current PNDI listings, provide a summary of the highest quality sites, and suggest protection and conservation options for all sites. Therefore, the NAI, when completed, will be considered an addendum to this portion of the West Norriton Township Open Space and Environmental Resource Protection Plan.

#### Surface Waters and Floodplains

As previously discussed, the Schuylkill River runs along the entire southwesterly boundary line of the Township. This river valley results in a significant floodplain which ranges in width from 400 feet to 1,000 feet and generally is defined by the now abandoned Conrail line which runs generally parallel to the Schuylkill River.

One of two secondary creek valleys drains a large portion of the Township south of Ridge Pike and is identified as the Indian Creek, the upper reaches of which start just east of Trooper Road and meander along both sides of Port Indian Road to its ultimate confluence with the Schuylkill River. This floodplain is relatively narrow and typically between 150 and 200 feet in width but has relatively steep creek banks that define the edges of some of the steeper slope conditions within the Township.

A second watershed generally north of Ridge Pike is drained by the West Branch of the Stony Creek which flows in a generally easterly direction, has an approximate 100 Year Flood boundary ranging from 200 to 400 feet in width, and meets with the main branch of the Stony Creek in the very easterly edge of the Township in the property owned by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania currently known as the Norristown State Hospital grounds.

The Stony Creek watershed is now regulated by a regional storm water management ordinance which includes stringent detention requirements in order to help reduce storm water runoff and thus reduce potential for flooding.

### Wetlands

Wetlands have value and are worthy of protection due to a number of characteristics. However, it is easier to discuss the benefits of wetlands than it is to delineate the wetland itself. Some wetlands are easily recognizable by most people because the presence or influence of water is obvious. However, many wetlands are subject only to seasonal flooding. For much of the year, surface water may not be present. Still other wetlands develop in areas where the soil is saturated for long periods, but never flooded.

The Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers have defined wetlands as: "Those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions".

Depending on where they are located, wetlands may serve one or more beneficial functions. Almost all wetlands provide habitat for birds, amphibians, and fish. These in turn support other wildlife. Wetlands also mitigate flooding, by holding back floodwater and slowing stream velocity. Wetlands improve water quality too. As water flows through a wetland, it slows and drops much of its sediment load. In addition, nutrients that can cause algae blooms and other pollution problems are taken up by wetland vegetation. Wetlands located in depressions often encourage infiltration of stormwater, contributing to groundwater recharge.

West Norriton Township has a slight amount of wetlands, based on the National Wetlands Inventory (NWI), prepared by the U.S. Department of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife Service. Most of these are located along either the creek valleys that adjoin the Indian Creek or West Branch of the Stony Creek manifest as small ponds or within isolated wooded areas. Wetlands are also located within areas identified as 100 Year Floodplain. The NWI offers a broad based, generalized overview of wetlands; other wetlands may exist in West Norriton Township. Hydric soils, primarily Bowmansville, Croton, Doylestown, Hatboro and Watchung soils, may also indicate the presence of wetlands. The Army Corps of Engineers or a qualified consultant should be enlisted for a final determination where wetlands are suspected to be present.

Wetlands in West Norriton Township are of the Palustrine Ecological System and are typically of the following sub classes:

The most prevalent class is described as:

Forested, broad-leaved deciduous, non-tidal temporary; Other classes include:

Open water, non-tidal intermittently exposed/permanent, excavated or diked;  
or

Emergent, narrow-leaved persistent, non-tidal seasonal or seasonal saturated.

### Steep Slopes

Steep slopes are natural features of the landscape which cause limitations to development and provide community character. Steep slopes are also environmentally sensitive areas.

The slope and soils present on steep slopes are in balance with vegetation, underlying geology, and precipitation levels. Maintaining this equilibrium reduces the danger to public health and safety posed by unstable hillsides. The Soil Conservation Service Soil Survey for Montgomery County has four classifications for slopes: 0 to 3%, 3 to 8%, 8 to 15%, and 15 to 35%. Not all sloping areas fit neatly into these four classes of slopes, and slopes do not always exhibit the same characteristics. Generally speaking, as the slope increases the depth of topsoil and the ability of the soil to support structures usually decreases.

Steep slopes (in excess of 15%) often have a combination of vegetation, climate, soil and underlying geology that differs from the surrounding area. Frequently, this means that the environmental sensitivity of the steep slope is different as well. Susceptibility to erosion and mass movement may be greater than the surrounding area, especially if vegetation is removed. Increased runoff and sedimentation from disturbed slopes require increased public expenditure for flood control and stormwater management. Also, different species of plants and the associated wildlife that depends on these plants may be present only on the slopes, creating unique recreation opportunities.

The USGS Topographic Quadrangles show that West Norriton Township has a slight amount of steep slopes principally associated with the edges along the water courses in creek valleys of the Indian Creek and Schuylkill River. In other sections of the Township slope changes are gradual and at their steepest gradient are typically within the 5 to 10% slope range, which is considered moderate undulating terrain.

### Woodlands and Scenic Resources

Natural wooded areas account for approximately 8% of the Township. These areas are identified on Figure 4-3 in this chapter. In addition, those areas of woodland vegetation situated on steep slopes in excess of 15% are identified as well.

Natural woodland vegetation is principally found in the two watershed areas that characterize West Norriton Township. First, woodland vegetation is associated with the relatively steep side slopes of the creek valley which is formed by Indian Creek and is most predominant between Egypt Road and the Schuylkill River, particularly along Port Indian Road. Port Indian Road, because of its narrow and curvaceous alignment, can be considered an attractive and scenic roadway.

Large woodland masses form the edge of the Schuylkill River floodplain, both in the Betzwood area and the heavily wooded tributaries that serve the Schuylkill River and encircle the Halford tract, which includes Rittenhouse Boulevard and Beaver Hollow Road.

Secondly, the largest wooded areas north and east of Main Street are generally associated with tributaries of the West Branch of the Stony Creek, including a particularly large woodland consisting of approximately 25 acres in the block bounded by Main Street, Potts Avenue, and Chestnut Avenue.

A second large area of approximately 20 acres is situated along the border with East Norriton Township. Both these large, generally level, wooded areas are situated on properties that are largely vacant and unprotected.

Because of their relative large size in a township that has relatively limited woodland resources, these areas would be considered of high scenic value.

Other areas of scenic importance would include views to the Markley Pond and Farm area, generally along Oakland Drive, and West Indian Lane and South Schuylkill Avenue, which parallel the Schuylkill River and provide attractive vistas to the Schuylkill at points where the river is at its widest along Montgomery County.

### Historic Resources

Historic resources include structures and sites of architectural significance and those associated with important events or people that shaped the history of the community, region, state or nation. Their preservation can contribute to community character. The Montgomery County Planning Commission prepared a county-wide listing of historic sites and structures in 1973, updated in 1976. This is the only inventory for West Norriton Township known to have been conducted.

That study identified two properties, both ranked Priority II for preservation:

1. Norris Hall, which was built in 1809 by Charles Norris, grandson of Isaac Norris, and was further enlarged in 1912, making it a showplace. The most recent owners vacated Norris Hall in 1970. The structure had become a nonrestorable, uninhabitable ruins because of fires and vandalism. The structure was demolished in the early 1980s to make room for the Trent Manor townhouse development.
2. The Montgomery Cemetery, which was established in 1848 as a public, non-sectarian cemetery. Montgomery Cemetery was founded before the concept of perpetual care, and parts of the cemetery, including the mausoleum of General Winfield S. Hancock, had become overgrown. The cemetery contains about 30 acres and has mausoleums and grave sites with stone markers. Among five Civil War generals buried there are Winfield S. Hancock and John F. Hartranft, who died in 1886 and 1889 respectively. Both generals were active in national and state politics after the war. Hartranft was elected Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for two terms.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Montgomery County The Second Hundred Years, Volume 2. Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983.

Other important landmarks within the Township include:

1. The Riverside Cemetery, 200 South Montgomery Avenue, 75 acres. This cemetery company was chartered April 18, 1894. This large nondenominational, nonsectarian cemetery has always included perpetual care in its services and has several large family mausoleums on the grounds. In 1955 a memorial section was established.<sup>11</sup>
2. The West Norriton War Memorial Plot at Main Street and Prospect Avenue, dedicated on Memorial Day, 1923 to all Township residents who served in the Armed Forces.
3. The oldest eating establishment under continual operation in West Norriton is a local diner built in the 1930s, the Gateway Diner. Much older restaurants and inns, such as the Jeffersonville Inn at the corner of Main Street and the Bungalow Inn located on West Main Street, are no longer in operation, the former being razed in 1939 and the latter, having been converted a number of times for more modern restaurant use, was subsequently destroyed by fire. At the time of this writing, the Gateway Diner is closed due to the recent death of its owner. Future plans are uncertain.

#### Farms and Areas of Prime Agricultural Soils

At one time farms, including agricultural produce and livestock, flourished in West Norriton Township. Most of the larger farms have been developed for residential subdivisions or industrial parks. Only one farm remains, and is currently known as the Markley Farm, which began as 55 acres along Chestnut Avenue in 1871. Approximately 30 acres are now used to grow hay, while the balance of the property is used as the Markley Farm Swim Club and Recreation Center, which includes four pools, three tennis courts, two playgrounds, and a wooded picnic area.

From the turn of the century through the 1950s, three large dairy farms provided both wholesale and retail milk business which processed and bottled milk from local farms and served the greater Norristown area with milk delivery.

At one time, the George W. Middleton & Sons pigeon farm became the third largest pigeon farm in the world, selling as many as 100,000 squabs a year while also maintaining over 2,500 chickens for egg sales. This farm was situated at Whitehall Road and Marshall Street.

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<sup>11</sup>Montgomery County The Second Hundred Years, Volume 2. Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983.

The largest and most spectacular farm in West Norriton was the Lucerne Farm which occupied 350 acres on South Schuylkill Avenue below Ridge Pike. This farm was used for chickens and cattle, as well as apple and peach orchards. This land was gradually sold off in the 1950s and became known as the Westover area of West Norriton Township, which included single family residential subdivisions and an area now known as Westover Golf Club.<sup>12</sup>

The most extensive farming operation in the area continues to be run by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania as a part of the Norristown State Hospital, which occupies approximately 300 acres in West Norriton Township and also includes portions of Norristown Borough and East Norriton Township.

The adjacent hospital continues to serve as many as 1,000 patients. This portion is located partly in West Norriton but mostly in adjoining Norristown Borough.

The entire site consists of 690 acres and belongs to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and is administered by the Department of Environmental Resources, Bureau of State Parks. Montgomery County has assumed the responsibility for the improvement, maintenance, and operation and administration of the Farm Park through a ten year lease agreement with an option to buy from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Currently the County has proposed the Norristown Farm Park, which would blend recreation opportunities and agricultural activities on one site, as a regional park in a pastoral setting. Facilities will be provided for typical passive activities, including walking, jogging, biking, picnicking, fishing, nature study, bird watching, and other educational pursuits.

The Park is designed to provide two types of recreation facilities: A linear element and concentrated activity areas. The linear recreation element, the trails and paths, will wind its way through the wooded creek valley, follow old farm roads, and run through the upland fields, connecting all areas to the site. The trail network is expected to receive the heaviest year round use. The activity areas will be nestled on upland slopes adjacent to wooded areas and the creek, in most cases. The following activity areas will be developed in the Farm Park: Playground, farm center, picnic area, nature trails, multi-use field, and hill ponds.

The following components are of particular importance to West Norriton Township since they are located within that portion of the Farm Park situated within the Township:

- Happy Hollow Cottage.

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<sup>12</sup> Montgomery County The Second Hundred Years, Volume 2. Montgomery County Federation of Historical Societies, 1983.

- Farm Pond.
- Hay Barn.
- SCA Trout Nursery.

A copy of the proposed Master Plan is appended to this report for ready reference.

The following two components are of particular importance to West Norriton Township since they are located within that portion of the Farm Park situated within the Township:

1. Hill Ponds. The hill ponds will be the most passive and quiet activity area. This area will be accessible from the main trail and foot paths; it will not be accessible by vehicles. This use is situated in the southwesterly portion of the property. Site improvements include a 2.4 acre pond, an arbor and small pavilion, sculptural gates announcing the entrances to the site, an overlook terrace, and 20 picnic tables and benches. This is a secluded area, offering vistas of the park and to nearby farm ponds.

This activity area will be a place for bicyclers and pedestrians to stop and rest, have a secluded picnic, or get a good view of the Farm Park. Fishing will also be permitted in these two ponds.

2. Relocation of the P.A.L. Ball Field. The Police Athletic League of Norristown will be allocated a new location for a ball field, which will now be situated adjacent to Sterigere Street next to the State Hospital grounds. The entrance to the site will be opposite Colonial Avenue along Sterigere Street. This is a 6 acre site with parking for 70 cars, a small clubhouse, and bleachers. This field has been renamed the Kevin W. Walsh Memorial Field. Construction has begun in spring 2006.

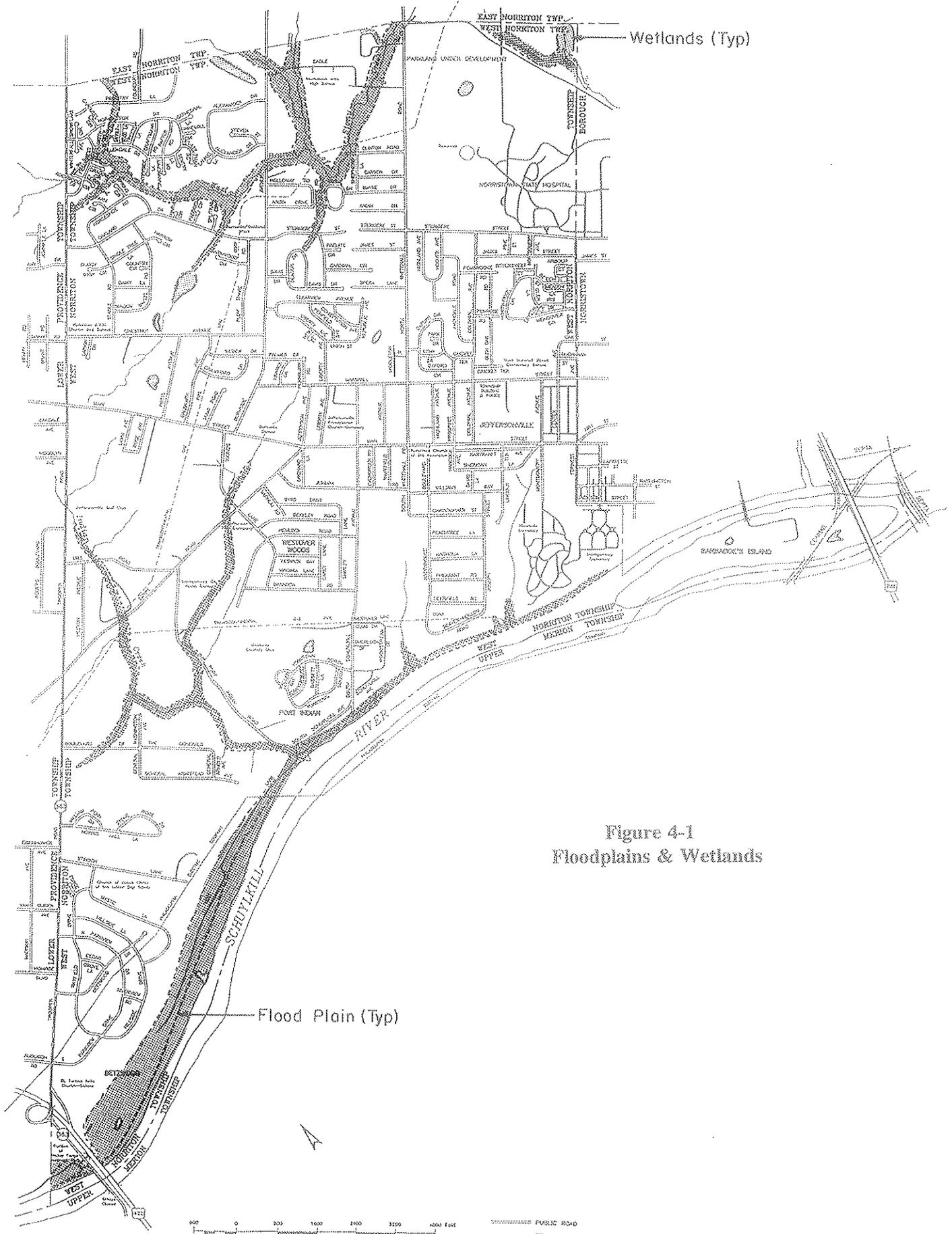
## Significant Natural Areas

*The Open Space, Natural Features, and Cultural Resources Plan* elements from the *Comprehensive Plan Montgomery County* (September 2004) identifies natural areas of significance at Figure 13 of the report. Significant natural areas in West Norriton consist of:

1. Areas of hydrological and terrestrial convergence – these are areas where steep slopes merge with floodplains and wetlands and are usually moderately to heavily wooded; and
2. Hydrologic features. There are two particular categories:
  - a. Floodplains adjoining the West Branch of the Stony Creek in the north-northeasterly section of the Township. A very significant portion of this hydrology is currently associated with the Norristown Area School District lands, the currently preserved VanLandeghem Park, and tributaries along the Stony Creek Railroad which are permanently preserved as a part of the Norristown Farm Park.
  - b. A second area of hydrological impact consists of the 100 Year Floodplain running parallel along the northerly edge of the Schuylkill River and including the narrow riparian corridor of steep slopes and heavy woods just west of Port Indian Road running along properties between the Boulevard of the Generals, Valley Forge Marketplace, and Port Indian Road. The northerly edge of the Indian Creek is protected and drains lands along the southwesterly edge of the Jeffersonville Golf Club.

# WEST NORRITON TOWNSHIP

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA



BASIC MAP PREPARED BY THE  
 MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
 NORRITON, PA  
 FEBRUARY 1965  
 REVISED OCTOBER 1969  
 REVISED SEPTEMBER 1991

# WEST NORRITON TOWNSHIP MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA

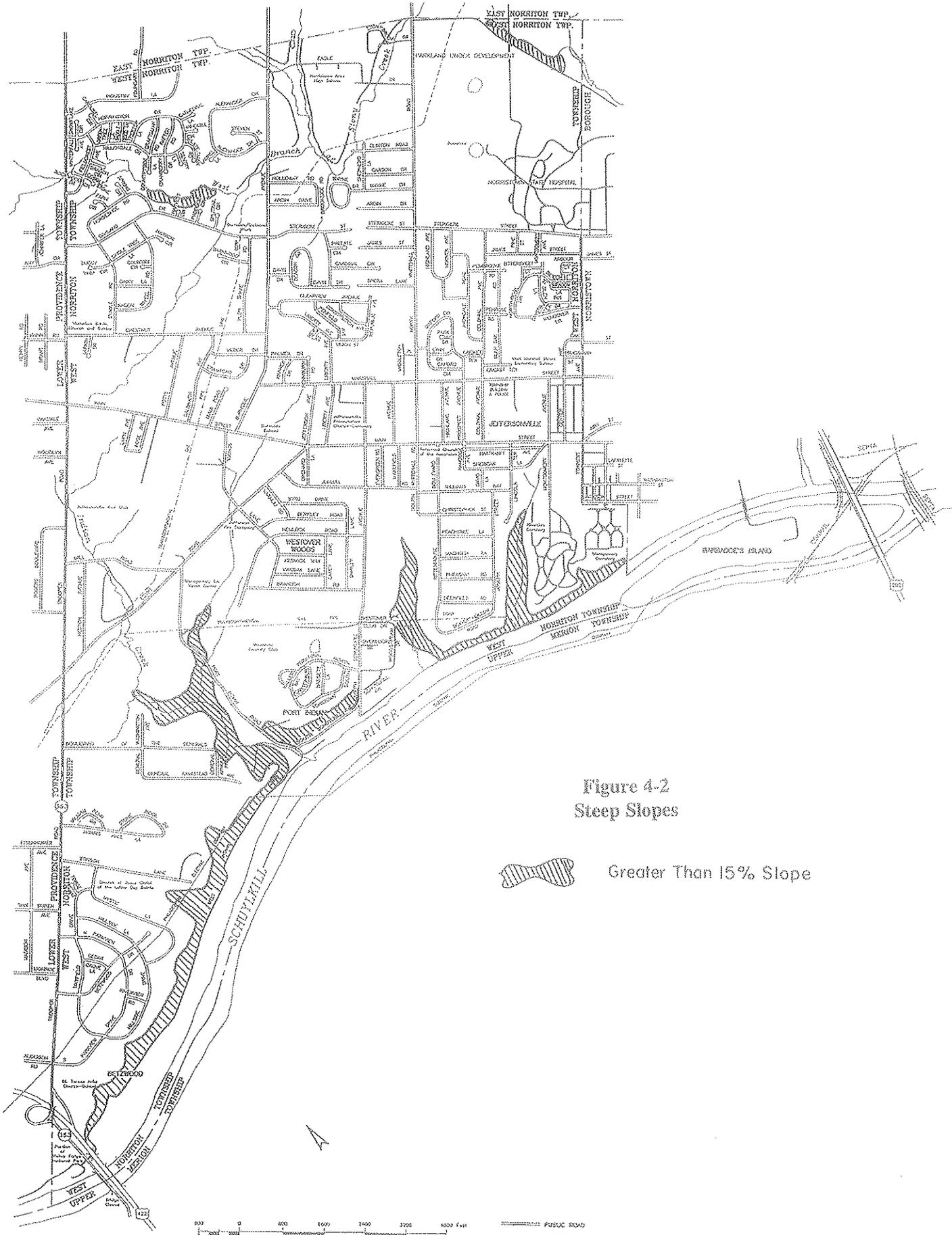


Figure 4-2  
Step Slopes

Greater Than 15% Slope



## Chapter 5

### Potential Open Space Linkages

Due to its size and location, West Norriton does not interface easily in a southerly or westerly direction. The Schuylkill River and adjoining river valley are contiguous along the entire southerly boundary of the Township which separates West Norriton from Upper Merion Township. Route 363, Trooper Road, runs along the entire westerly boundary of the Township which separates West Norriton from Lower Providence Township. This section south of West Main Street (Ridge Pike) is a four lane, major collector highway and not easily crossed for pedestrian or biking purposes. However, connection in the direction of East Norriton and the Borough of Norristown is more feasible due to the nature of the road system as well as existing or possible future corridors of open space which could be interconnected.

The abandoned rail line which runs parallel to the Schuylkill River through the Township has been converted to the "Philadelphia to Valley Forge Bikeway" and is a part of an existing bike system known as the Schuylkill Trail which runs along the Schuylkill River through the municipalities of Lower Providence and West Norriton Townships, Norristown Borough, Plymouth Township, Conshohocken Borough and Whitemarsh Township for a length of almost 13 miles, and then enters the city of Philadelphia and ultimately connects to the Wissahickon Trail which runs generally along the Wissahickon Creek.

This trail is at the foot of steep embankments which form the side slopes of the Schuylkill River floodway in this portion of the County. However, there is an opportunity for an at grade connection between the bikeway and Port Indian Road or South Schuylkill Avenue just south of the Westover Country Club. Port Indian Road, in particular, offers the possibility of a mini trail which could traverse along and through many large parcels which are either public or private permanent open space or institutional in nature. Mini trails would ultimately connect the Norristown Farm Park via the Norristown Area High School in the direction of the Schuylkill Trail.

Figure 5-1, Proposed Primary Trail Network, excerpted from the *Open Space, Natural Resources, and Cultural Resources Plan* prepared by Montgomery County Planning Commission 2004 identifies major primary trail network for the County. West Norriton is greatly influenced by two of these:

1. The Schuylkill River Trail currently complete from the Philadelphia boundary through to Lower Providence Township along the northerly side of the Schuylkill River, providing a bicycle and walking trail; and

2. The future Stony Creek Trail, generally parallel to the Liberty Bell Trail from Norristown to Whitpain Township along the main branch of the Stony Creek which is parallel to the Stony Creek Railroad. This trail traverses the easterly corner of West Norriton Township through the Norristown Farm Park.

The following additional potential inter-municipal connections have been identified:

1. Lower Providence Township -- Numerous interconnections into Lower Providence Township have been shown on the Lower Providence Township Master Trail Plan, which follows.
  - a. North of Ridge Pike where both communities share low to moderate density residential development is considered very practicable in the area of Oakland Drive. Such an interconnection would be an on road walking and bicycle trail, thence along the preserved riparian corridor southeastwardly to Burnside Oakland Park.
  - b. The Township Master Trail Plan identifies three areas, one along Main Street extending from Ridge Pike eastwardly into West Norriton Township, at which point a connection is proposed at Jeffersonville Golf Club.
    - (1) A mini trail could function as either a bike trail or walking path, and in many cases because of the natural resources which are immediately adjacent would also function as a wildlife corridor as well, particularly between Jeffersonville Golf Club and the Schuylkill River in the southwesterly portion of the Township
    - (2) In addition, instituting the Main Street Walk along Main Street and Egypt Road will help connect various businesses to each other and connect into Lower Providence Township as well.
  - c. An extension from the large residential area along Woodland Avenue to connect into West Norriton Township just south of Jeffersonville Golf Club, at which point secondary trails would be established in a south-southeast direction following tributaries of the Indian Creek toward the Schuylkill River.

- d. A major connection from the new Shannondell residential retirement community, which will ultimately consist of 1,500 dwelling units plus nursing and convalescent care, will extend adjacent to the Audubon Shopping Center via Shannondell Boulevard to the Boulevard of the Generals and a sidewalk/trail system presently in place along the easterly side of Valley Forge Road (Route 363). Ultimately, a connection via the Boulevard of the Generals to the residential/office community of RiverView and connect to both the regional Schuylkill Bike Trail as well as a local interest river walk trail at RiverView and westwardly under the Route 422 Betzwood Bridge into Valley Forge Park will be facilitated.
2. Norristown Borough - No direct connection along Borough streets is contemplated. However, the Borough plan calls for a trail to link portions of the Borough into the Norristown Farm Park generally in the vicinity of the Stony Creek and Harding Boulevard. An internal walking trail connecting portions of the Norristown Farm Park situate in East and West Norriton and the Borough of Norristown is contemplated as a part of the development Master Plan proposed by Montgomery County Planning Commission. The "Main Street Walk" proposal along West Main Street would provide a direct sidewalk connection to Norristown Borough.
3. The East Norriton Township Open Space Preservation Plan 2005 Update proposes the possibility of a walking trail that could connect from the Norristown Area High School through vacant and municipal properties in a northerly direction toward the Paul Fly Elementary School situate at the intersection of Potshop Road and Germantown Pike. A second corridor along Eagle Drive would connect to the Norristown Farm Park at Whitehall Road.

Public comment received during the preparation of the Township Open Space Plan suggested an additional walking only trail along the Stony Creek between the Farm Park and Burnside/Oakland Park to include an interconnection over the Norristown Area High School. This trail would connect the neighborhoods west of the School property via a natural walk area to the Norristown Farm Park. See major sidewalk links and proposed trail between Burnside Oakland Park and Norristown Area High School property.

## Chapter 6

### Analysis of Unprotected Resources

Inventory Of Existing Parks And Open Space Land identifies vacant land which are parcels of one acre and larger or country estates greater than ten acres on which there is surplus property that could be considered subdividable in the future. These properties, as well as certain lands previously identified as temporarily protected properties such as Act 319/515 or institutional lands, should be considered particularly vulnerable to future development. See rear pocket of this report for Protected Lands Map.

#### Composite Map of Environmentally Sensitive Areas

Figure 6-1, Environmentally Sensitive Areas, presents a composite map of the environmentally sensitive areas discussed in this chapter, which include: 100 Year Floodplain, wetlands, areas of wooded vegetation, areas having slopes in excess of 15%, areas where woodland is situated on a steep slope, and two areas of high scenic value (the Markley Farm and the area of the proposed Norristown Farm Park) which also provide agricultural activities. Both of these sites contain Capability Classification II type soils, which are usually considered quite suitable for most kinds of farming. This classification is also referred to as soils including "prime agricultural soils", including: LeA Lawrenceville Silt Loam, 0-3% slopes; LeB2 Lawrenceville Silt Loam, 3-8% slopes; ReB2 Raritan Silt Loam, 3-8% slopes. These soils are well suited to corn, soybean, vegetables, spring grains, hay and pasture. Some of these soils need supplemental drainage for best yields of tilled crops.

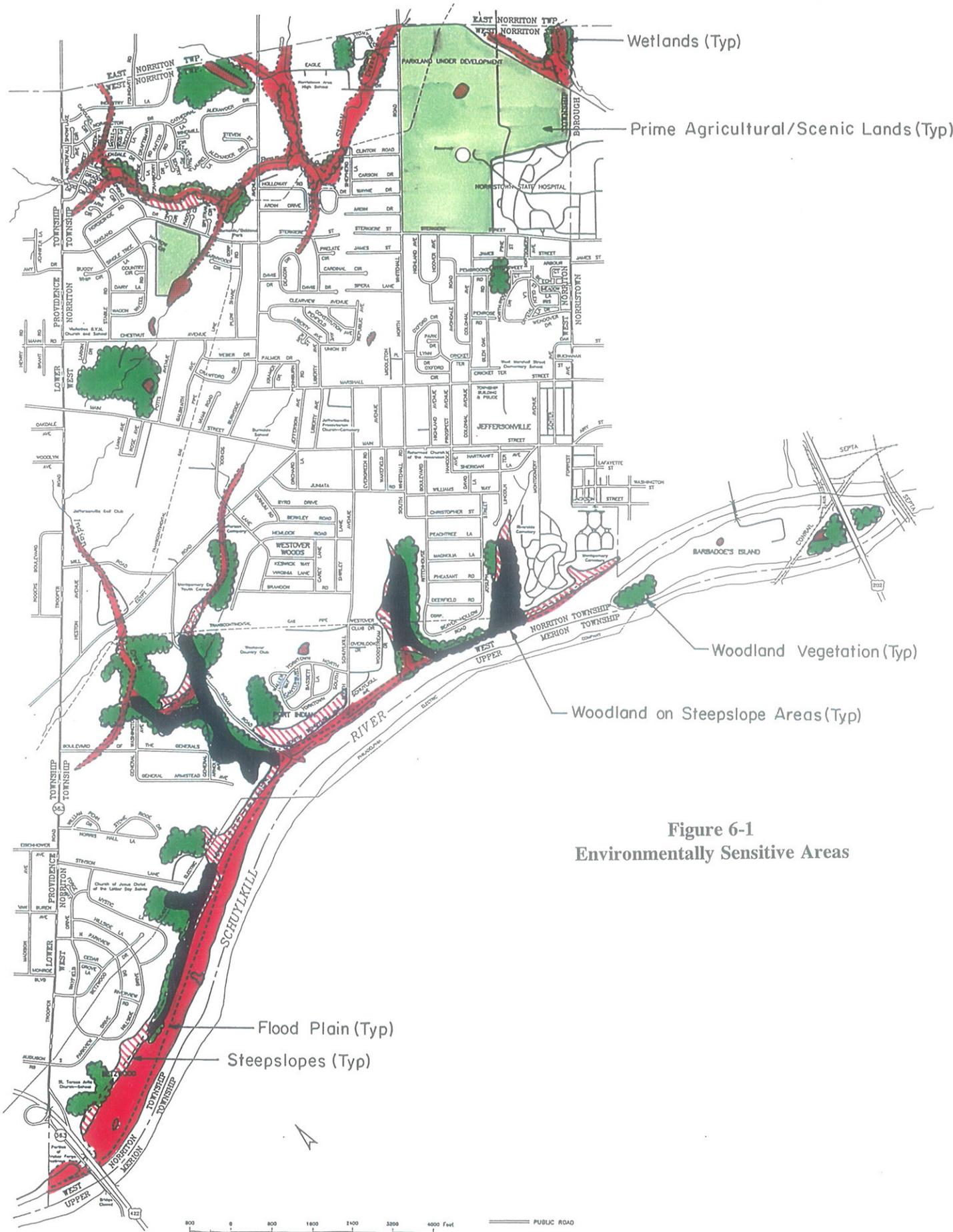
Portions of both sites are also characterized by the Chalfont Silt Loam series, which is a Capability Class III identified as soils suited for limited cultivation for hay or pasture and only fair for such cultivated crops such as corn or soybeans.<sup>13</sup>

The most significant unprotected resources are combined floodplain, steep slopes and woodlands along riparian corridors: Stony Creek, Indian Creek and the Schuylkill River.

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<sup>13</sup> Soil Survey of Montgomery County, U.S. Department of Agriculture and Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture, 1967.

# WEST NORRITON TOWNSHIP MONTGOMERY COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA



Wetlands (Typ)

Prime Agricultural/Scenic Lands (Typ)

Woodland Vegetation (Typ)

Woodland on Steepslope Areas (Typ)

Flood Plain (Typ)

Steepslopes (Typ)

Figure 6-1  
Environmentally Sensitive Areas

0 800 1600 2400 3200 4000 Feet

BASE MAP PREPARED BY THE  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION  
NORRISTOWN, PA

FEBRUARY 1983  
REVISED OCTOBER 1990  
REVISED SEPTEMBER 1991

— PUBLIC ROAD  
— PRIVATE ROAD  
○ 62 PENNSYLVANIA ROUTE  
□ 122 U.S. ROUTE

The vacant land properties fall into two categories

Category 1:

This category of vacant land properties consists of large properties zoned either industrial or residential. These properties are inventoried below:

N/L W. Wilson property situate Trooper Road and the exit ramp of the 422 Expressway. 7.5 acres.

SmithKline Bioscience situate Egypt Road. A portion of the SmithKline Beecham Clinical Laboratories for the purposes of this study is considered vacant land having frontage to Port Indian Road. 9.0 acres.

Dorsky property, 17.5 acres includes a residence with limited frontage along the west side of Burnside Avenue.

Category 2:

The vacant land discussed above, as well as properties identified as Temporary Open Space on the Protected Lands Map (rear pocket) will be the focus of initial acquisition/preservation plans for both future recreation and conservation purposes. In addition, linear natural features along creek valleys – principally the Stony Creek and Indian Creek – form the foundation for numerous trail links, both local and intermunicipal (see Chapter 9, Recommendations).

Inventory Of Existing Recreation Facilities includes existing recreation facilities on both public and private lands within the Township. These recreation facilities are inventoried to provide an analysis of existing recreation which are part of both Township parks, Norristown Area School District properties, and private recreation facilities which are a part of institutional uses or tied to residential developments. Facilities with the capability of baseball fields and soccer fields are carefully evaluated per individual neighborhood to determine the value to Township residents, particularly within walking distance of each site.

It should be observed that recreation components associated with institutional uses, such as St. Teresa of Avilla in the Betzwood section and Visitation B.V.M. Church and School at Trooper Road and Chestnut Avenue, provide an important source of recreation opportunity to nearby residents. School facilities such as the former Burnside Elementary School and the Marshall Street Elementary School are equally important in providing ballfields and tot lots for a wide range of ages for youth within the immediate neighborhoods.

The presence of the Norristown Area High School in the northerly portion of the Township provides a very large array of active recreation that serves virtually as a community park, with the proviso that public school students would have priority use of these facilities on a seasonal basis.

Finally, the Norristown Farm Park provides over 260 acres of passive recreation opportunity for Township and County residents alike, as well as a location for proposed P.A.L. ballfields to serve youth within the greater Norristown area.

Fortunately, the Norristown Farm Park, now under the auspices of Montgomery County, and the Norristown Area High School, a central feature of the School District, are considered permanent open space components within the Township which will provide significant contributions of both open space for conservation and recreation purposes.

This plan includes a figure which identifies the most environmentally sensitive areas within the Township and indicates the general concentrations of wetlands, floodplains, woodlands, farm land, and areas of steep slopes in excess of 15%.

#### Concentrations of Environmentally Sensitive Areas

A broad central band of the Township is generally free of substantial environmentally sensitive areas, with the notable exception of a site of approximately 10 acres of mature woodland with unclassified wetlands situated between West Main Street and Chestnut Avenue. This site constitutes the upper reach of the West Branch of the Stony Creek, which as it meanders easterly through the north and east section of the Township consists of a concentration of areas of floodplain, steep slope, and woodland edges on or adjacent to the floodplain.

A portion of these environmentally sensitive areas are presently protected on the Norristown Area High School property, the adjoining Stony Creek townhouse development, and the Norristown Farm Park property.

Three large tracts of unprotected environmentally sensitive areas include:

- The surplus land of the First Baptist Church adjacent to East Norriton Township along the west side of Burnside Avenue.
- The Dorsky property (17.5 acres) situate contiguous to Burnside Oakland Park.
- The Markley property (56 acres), including the swim club portion and the farm land portion.

The second concentration of environmentally sensitive areas occurs along the Indian Creek stream valley and other steep depressions that drain toward the Schuylkill River. Predominant features in this portion of the Township include woodlands on steep slopes which form steep sides of the adjoining floodplain and pockets of mature woodland vegetation. Jeffersonville Golf Course at its southwest corner includes a low wooded wetland area of preserved riparian corridor associated with the Indian Creek.

The Indian Creek watershed traverses through properties that are zoned or used for institutional, recreational, and industrial purposes. Very few residential properties are included in the Indian Creek watershed. However, nearly all of the properties immediately adjacent to the Schuylkill River and adjoining floodplain which align the steep slopes which overlook the floodplain are zoned and used for residential purposes.

Very little river frontage remains uncommitted. To the contrary, the river frontage along the Schuylkill in West Norriton is devoted to institutional uses controlled by the Riverside and Montgomery Cemetery properties and residential uses on bluffs which overlook the River, or in lowland areas such as West Indian Lane where many of the properties are located on the immediate edge or in some cases within the limits of the 100 Year Floodplain boundary. Concentrations of wooded steep slopes pierced by narrow floodplains are protected on lands currently used by the east sector of the Westover Country Club and the Riverside Cemetery property.

Given the relative scarcity of vacant land suitable for active recreation, it can also be concluded that the active recreation components associated with unprotected properties of the Markley Swim Club, the Burnside Elementary School, and the Marshall Street Elementary School are very significant and at least some of this property should be considered for permanent preservation.

## Chapter 7

### Evaluation of Growth Areas Needed for New Development Through Year 2025

#### Projections

Montgomery County Planning Commission population forecasts estimate that the population for West Norriton Township will increase from 14,901 in 2000 to 16,170 in the year 2010. In 2025, the population is projected to increase slightly to 16,720. No doubt the relative static population growth has to do with both the continuing decrease in median family size and the limited amount of vacant land remaining in the Township that is zoned and developable for residential purposes. Unforeseen changes to large temporarily protected properties are not anticipated during the near future for the following reasons:

- The largest vacant open space lands within the Township are permanently preserved for public or private purposes.
- Temporarily preserved open space includes institutions which are either fully supported by the nearby community, such as the existing churches, or protected by way of County government, such as the Montgomery County Youth Center. It is unlikely that the Markley Swim Club facility will be developed in the near future due to the very strong membership this facility receives during the summer months.

Using the 2000 average household size of 2.23 persons for West Norriton Township, the projected population expansion of 1,819 persons would require the addition of 816 dwelling units (or more if age restricted units are factored into the mix).

It must also be remembered that the continuing decline in family size could result in a change to dwelling units to population correlation. The development of RiverView, which is under construction and nearly complete at this time, for 610 apartment dwelling units would account for 75% of the anticipated projected dwelling units required to satisfy anticipated population growth. It would require the development of virtually all of the other vacant residentially zoned properties in the next twenty year period to account for the balance of the dwelling units that would be required to support the population growth projected by the Montgomery County Planning Commission for the Township.

All but a very few isolated edges of the Township are accessible to public sewer and public water. Therefore, land use decisions in the future will deal more with select in-fill issues, such as whether to allow small sites with extensive road frontage to be converted from residential to low impact office uses or whether or not to sustain the moderate density single family approach in the broad central and northern sections of the Township or allow selected cluster housing options such as small lot singles, twins or townhouses. These decisions, while being important to the local neighborhoods, will have a very minor impact on long range housing and population trends since these will relate to properties that are generally less than 10 acres in size.

Figure 7-1, Zoning Classifications of Vacant Land, identifies vacant land in two basic categories. The estimated yield is calculated based on existing zoning constraints, and in the case of Residential is indicated as lots or dwelling units and in the case of Non-Residential is indicated as gross floor area.

**Figure 7-1**  
**Zoning Classifications of Vacant Land**

<u>Residential</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Estimated Yield (Subsequent to 2000)</u>
R-A District	57.8	44 lots
R-1 District	30.0	30 lots
R-2 District	25.8	44 lots
R-2 Townhouse Option	15.0	90 units
Retirement Community	<u>12.0</u>	157 units (last phase of Greens at Westover)
	140.6	
 <u>Non-Residential<sup>14</sup></u>		
Commercial In-Fill	15.0	90,000 sq. ft.
BP District	12.0	100,000 sq. ft.
LC-I District	60.0	1,170,000 sq. ft.*
RE District	<u>16.0</u>	<u>0</u>
	103.0	1,360,000 sq. ft.

\* Consisting of 690,000 square feet RiverView, 40,000 square feet Valley Forge Marketplace final phase, potential office/research 200,000 square feet, miscellaneous in-fill 240,000 square feet from the Land Use Assumptions Map, April 2002.

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<sup>14</sup>      BP      Business Professional  
           LC-I    Limited Industrial  
           RE      Recreational

The estimated yield of lots and dwelling units from Figure 7-1 results in the following projected population:

$$\begin{array}{r} 157 \times 1.8 \text{ persons/unit} = 283 \\ 208 \times 2.23 \text{ persons/lot} = \underline{464} \\ \hline 747 \end{array}$$

Thus, when this projected population from future development is added to the residential component of RiverView, the maximum anticipated Township population at build out would equal:

2000 Population	14,901
RiverView Population	915
Figure 7-1 Population	<u>747</u>
	16,563

As can be seen from this analysis, the Township population is expected to attain the estimated increase during the twenty-five year period 2000 to 2025, to 16,680.

#### Non-Residential Growth Expected To Be Added By The Year 2025

The most likely areas for development have been identified in Figure 7-1 and consist of either BP - Business Professional or Commercial in-fill and the LC-I Limited Industrial Zoning Districts. While there is no certainty how these properties will actually be developed, assumptions for floor area ratios can be utilized to project a distribution from the BP and Commercial Districts using a .20 floor area ratio and from the LC-I District utilizing a .30 floor area ratio. The data listed is from the Land Use Assumptions Map 2002 and revised to reflect recent building permits.

Using DVPRC statistics on employment yield per thousand square feet of office/industrial development (2.4 employees/1,000 square feet gross floor area), this yields the potential for an additional 3,264 employees to be added to the work force in West Norriton Township during the next twenty year period to 2025. This is very significantly greater than the additional 750 published in the DVPRC Employment Forecasts February 2000.

## Chapter 8

### Evaluation of Open Space Needs

The following is from the 1995 West Norriton Township Open Space Plan has been updated with 2000 census data.

This chapter examines the Township's overall needs for open space as determined by community standards for neighborhood and community park land.

#### Park Standards Analysis

The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) has developed guidelines for resident recreation needs based on the size of population. The DVRPC recommends four types of local parks for a municipality equivalent to the size and make up of West Norriton Township. Figure 8-1 shows the types and acreages of parks appropriate for the Township, based on population for 2000 and projected population estimates over the next twenty-five years to the year 2025. These are standards that have been developed to establish park and recreation needs, based on how many acres of each park should be provided per 1,000 population.

Figure 8-1  
Park Standards Analysis

<u>Park Type</u>	<u>PRS*</u>	<u>Population**</u>	
		<u>2000</u>	<u>2025</u>
Community Park Acreage	2.5	37.3	41.7
Community Play Field Acreage	2.0	29.8	33.4
Neighborhood Park Acreage	2.0	29.8	33.4
Neighborhood Playground Acreage	1.5	22.4	25.0
Total	8.0	119.3 Ac.	133.5 Ac.

\*Park and recreation standard per 1,000 population. \*\*2000 population = 14,901  
2025 population = 16,680 estimated population at build out.

DVRPC divides local parks into two categories: Neighborhood and community parks. Neighborhood parks serve the immediate neighborhood, usually within one-quarter mile radius, with tot lots and small playgrounds, and should be accessible by walking or by bicycling. Small naturalistic areas are included in this category.

Community parks are larger than neighborhood parks and serve a larger population area, typically a one to two mile radius. These parks should be centrally located within the community and provide larger facilities and in greater numbers, such as sports fields, walking trails, and parking for residents who will need to drive to the park.

According to the Parks Standards Analysis, West Norriton Township should have approximately 119.3 acres of community and neighborhood parks and playgrounds in 2000. In the year 2025, the Township should have 133.5 acres. These are the facilities that local governments are expected to provide which are closest to home. At present, the Township currently has 52.6 acres, not including any of the sports fields associated with the Norristown Area School District but including 8 acres for the Kevin W. Walsh Memorial Field (long term lease with the Norristown Farm Park) and 10 acres for the picnic and free play area of Jeffersonville Golf Club. Thus, it can be seen based on an acreage analysis alone that the Township currently has a deficit in the minimum requirements estimated by DVRPC.

For the purposes of this calculation, golf courses, private swim clubs, and country clubs were separately enumerated and were not considered as currently available to serve the needs of the population. The main reason for this decision is that these recreation areas either utilize vast acreages or serve only a limited clientele. Large tracts, such as a golf course, could easily skew the results of a deficiency calculation based on acreage. In addition, public and private school grounds were not considered to be available to satisfy a municipality's demand for recreation. Of course, the importance of Jeffersonville Golf Club which provides an oasis of 140 acres in an area otherwise of moderate to high density and is open to the public, including residents of West Norriton, for a reasonable fee for golf and passive activities associated with picnicking adjacent to the Club's banquet facilities must be considered.

The standards developed by DVPRC specifically exclude schools. These facilities may not be available, particularly during the school year, and restrictions on the use of sports fields could limit Township activities. However, the presence of three Norristown Area School District facilities at geographically important sections within the Township cannot be ignored. The Marshall Street Elementary School and the former Burnside play fields serve the residential neighborhoods nearby, and the Norristown Area High School property provides a vast array of sports fields, tennis courts, and walking/running trails and courses which could provide an important recreation component for the Township. The one notable limitation to the high school property is the fact that it is not centrally located within the residential neighborhoods of West Norriton Township.

As previously discussed, institutional uses and public school facilities do satisfy a portion of the recreation needs that would be generated by Township residents. In addition, the proposed Norristown Farm Park will most certainly provide opportunities for passive recreation and outdoor activities such as walking for pleasure, picnicking, sightseeing, and bicycling. With the growing popularity of soccer and softball for both boys and girls, West Norriton will need to identify sites for active recreation, which could include acquisition of vacant lands or preservation of existing properties that provide the resources for active recreation.

### Township Population By Census Tract\*

Census Tract 1 (2034.01), which consists of only 20% of the Township land area but contains a significant percentage of the Township population. This census tract is bounded by Burnside Avenue, Main Street and the Norristown Farm Park. This census tract contains an elementary school, the Norristown Area High School, and the recreation components associated with the Forest Park apartments. However, there is no Township park property in this census tract. The priorities for future acquisition should consider the addition of a Township controlled local or neighborhood park to serve the population in this census tract, the most dense of the three census tracts within the Township. Due to its strategic central location within the Township and accessibility by the large residential population in Census Tract 1, the existing recreational components of the former Burnside Elementary School are considered of particular importance as a neighborhood recreational component within the Township. In addition, the Township has just commenced with the construction of the Kevin W. Walsh Memorial Field along Sterigere Street on lands of the Norristown Farm Park. This field provides approximately 8 acres of active recreation for Township use.

Census Tract 2 (2034.02), is the largest census tract and has been by far the fastest growing census tract within the Township and because of its unique configuration occupies the entire westerly strip of the Township extending from the Schuylkill River north to East Norriton Township. This westerly edge of the Township is the last to develop and contains residential neighborhoods of both single family detached, townhouse and apartment type dwelling units; as well as the Valley Forge Marketplace and the West Norriton Business Park. This census tract contains the largest municipally owned property in the Township, that is the regulation 18 hole Jeffersonville Golf Club with banquet facilities and picnic area. In addition, the northerly tier contains the Burnside Oakland Park obtained from a developer's donation during the development of what was previously known as "Oakland Farms PRD".

\*See Appendix for census tract configuration. The census tract which reflects the Norristown Farm Park is not included in this examination.

This census tract is also fortunate to have two substantial institutional properties, the Visitation B.V.M. Church and School containing over 16 acres which provides recreation opportunity to residents generally north of West Main Street and St. Teresa of Avila which provides recreation opportunity to the many residents of the Betzwood area of the Township. Two additional churches: St. Sophia and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, both on Stinson Lane, contain acreage large enough that they too could provide a source of active recreation in the near future.

Census Tract 3 (2034.03) contains some of the first residential development west of Norristown in West Norriton Township and the newer communities of the Halford Tract, consisting of single family lots, and Westover, consisting of both single family, townhouses, and condominium apartments. The census tract is bounded by West Main Street, Egypt Road, Port Indian Road and the Schuylkill River. The Westover area is also home of an adult community of 300 dwelling units for senior citizens on a portion of the Westover Country Club. This census tract is served by the Fire House recreation site adjacent to Egypt Road and School Lane and is for the most part characterized by the presence of spacious institutional and private recreation open space: Westover Country Club, Montgomery Youth Center, Pathway School, and Riverside/Montgomery Cemetery. This census tract is virtually built out with little opportunity for new residential development. Some revitalization is expected and encouraged for older commercial properties along West Main Street.

## Chapter 9 Recommendations

Advertised meetings were held during the winter and spring of 2006. The West Norriton Open Space Committee, Township Director of Parks Jonathan Dzedzy, Township Manager Joseph Hein, Assistant Manager Karen Madden, Planning Commission Chairman Bruce Shoupe, and Planning Consultant E. Van Rieker met to finalize a list of priorities regarding acquisition and preservation of open space properties and trail plans. Each site was visited by members of the Committee.

The Township was evaluated by census tract in order to determine need versus availability for active and passive recreation in the hopes that new open space could be preserved close to the concentrations of population which could best benefit from the recreation facilities. The sites were then evaluated using the following priority system:

- Priority I: High - These are the most important properties which should be secured for permanent open space by fee simple acquisition, easement, or long term lease. These include remaining priority sites from the 1995 Open Space Plan.
- Priority II: Medium - These are sites that are only slightly less important than Priority I. Not all Priority II sites would necessarily be preserved for permanent open space.

Not all Priority properties would necessarily be purchased by the Township. However, these are sites that should be preserved, at least in part, either by purchase by the Township or dedication during the process of subdivision and land development, or perhaps acquired by some other party such as a local conservancy, the School District, or via conservation easements.

### Priority I - High Preservation Properties

- Properties that provide a vital link to complete a trail connection or serve as a necessary link in a future trail connection.

- Preservation of natural features and habitats that preserve vital areas including the following: rare old growth forests, areas considered to be the most important natural habitats in a region, places of large specimens of valued vegetation, such as Red Maple, Sweet Gum, Black Gum, Sweet Bay Magnolia, Red or White Oaks and American Holly. Places where rare and valued animals live and birds roost are also considered vital priorities, especially a high quality wildlife refuge.
- Preservation of historic or cultural landscapes, especially if identified on the National Register of Historic Places.
- Properties that maintain scenic qualities, especially if identified in Township documents including the Comprehensive Plan or Open Space Plan as preserving a scenic viewscape.
- Properties that protect water resources, especially floodplain areas, riparian buffers, streams, creeks, waterways and which generally contribute to watershed quality. These priorities shall be especially significant if the preservation area also serves as a current or future trail connection including properties that are part of greenways, either streamside or contiguous to wooded areas.
- Properties that preserve significant agricultural land that is threatened by development.
- Properties that are contiguous to existing private or public open space.

Priority II - Medium Preservation Properties

- Properties that complete a trail or sidewalk connection or may complete a future connection.
- Preservation of natural features and habitats that preserve natural areas including the following: forests, areas of considerable vegetation, and greenway connectors where wildlife congregate.
- Preservation of locally important historic or cultural landscapes as determined by the Township.
- Properties that maintain scenic qualities.

- Properties that protect water resources, especially floodplain areas, riparian buffers, streams, creeks, and waterways.
- Properties that serve as pocket parks or address recreational needs of a specific demographic area of the Township's residents.

The Recommendations Plan (located in the rear pocket of this report) identifies the properties which are the subject of recommendations which are discussed below.

### Census Tract 1

1. Burnside Play Fields (8.5 acres). This consists of the acreage of play fields and recreation components to the rear of the former school building along Burnside Avenue and Marshall Street. Size, location, and the fact that there are existing recreation facilities in place rank this site among the very highest within the Township for permanent open space.
  - a. Previously, the West Norriton Open Space Planning Committee met with the Norristown Area School Board in order to discuss the high ranking and the proposed preservation of this playground area. It was indicated that the Township would like to acquire a conservation easement over the property or fee simple title in the event that the property would be disposed of by the School Board. In either event, the West Norriton Open Space Planning Committee believes the permanent preservation of this property should be considered among the most important recommendations of the Open Space Plan.
  - b. It was also indicated by the Township that should the School Board indicate the Burnside play fields would be kept as open space in perpetuity, then the Township could assist with the maintenance and construction of new facilities in exchange for a promise of perpetual open space.
  - c. Recommended Priority 1.
2. Marshall Street Elementary School (11 acres). This consists of the surplus open space, play fields and recreation components to the rear of the Marshall Street Elementary School situated between Marshall Street and Forest Park apartments.

- a. This is an example of an important school facility that due to its configuration and location plays a valuable role in providing open space recreation to the neighborhoods nearby. In addition, the site is located in close proximity to the Township building and because of efficiency in administration as well as existing sports fields it is recommended that this facility be preserved in the event that Norristown Area School Board would ever elect to dispose of the property.
  - b. Recommended Priority I.
3. Surplus land of Norristown Area High School (15 acres). This land is situate behind Shepherd Land and Brookside Road with frontage to Burnside Avenue.
- a. The site is partially wooded and traversed by two significant tributaries of the Stony Creek. The site provides an area for natural groundwater recharge and is at the toe of slope from the neighborhoods built along Whitehall Road and thus provides a natural stormwater discharge area as well. This area plays an important part in the environmental integrity of this section of the Township and could also provide a trail link from the above mentioned riparian corridor through to the Norristown Area High School property and thence via Eagle Drive to the Norristown Farm Park.
  - b. Recommended Priority II.

Census Tract 2

1. Portion of Markley Farm (46 acres).
- a. This would be a portion of the Markley Farm consisting of the Oakland Drive frontage, most of which contains topography of under 5% slope which would be ideal for sports fields which could work in conjunction with the Burnside Oakland Park which is adjacent to the site.
- The central portion of the Markley Farm property, which is traversed by a tributary of the Stony Creek including adjoining floodplain and some limited wetlands. This is an important agricultural site which, in conjunction with the Oakland Drive frontage discussed above, could evolve into a park of sufficient size and scope as to qualify as a community park for the Township.
- b. Recommended Priority I.

2. Markley Swim Club (10 acres).
  - a. This property contains the Markley pond, a swim club with pool facilities, tot lots, and basketball and tennis courts. This is currently a commercially successful private recreation component.
  - b. This is a facility that is perhaps not manageable at a township level and ideally would continue in perpetuity as a commercial venture. An option would be to create a Pool Authority that could be sponsored by a number of public and private groups that could maintain a membership of families in say one or more municipalities and continue to function on a user fee basis.
  - c. Recommended Priority II.
3. Dorsky property (17.5 acres).
  - a. This site is situate along a tributary of the Stony Creek and would help form a connection between existing preserved riparian woodlands to the west and the Burnside Oakland Park immediately contiguous to the south. In addition, the tributary feeds under Burnside Avenue toward surplus lands of the Norristown Area High School.
  - b. The Recommended Preservation and Trails Map (see rear pocket) identifies this as an important local trail and an inter-municipal trail link which has the potential of connecting residential neighborhoods from Lower Providence Township through West Norriton Township to Norristown Area High School property and thence further to the east to the Norristown Farm Park and a system of trails currently in place, or to the north to the Paul Fly Elementary School and the Ballard Wolffe passive park in East Norriton Township.
  - c. Recommended Priority II.

4. First Baptist Church (22 acres).
  - a. This is the surplus land situated at the very northeasterly edge of the Township behind the Charity Lodge and adjacent to the East Norriton Township line. The site is predominantly wooded and would serve as a natural buffer between adjoining residential and industrial subdivisions. At minimum a portion should be preserved as a scenic/natural open space buffer.
  - b. Recommended Priority II.
5. Visitation BVM Church play fields (approximately 6 acres net of church buildings and parking).
  - a. Provides active play facilities for church congregation and nearby neighborhoods.
  - b. Recommended Priority II.

### Census Tract 3

1. Lands adjacent to Fire House Park (4.0 acres). These lands are part of the southeasterly edge of the Pathway School and Montgomery County Youth Center, are predominantly wooded, and form a hillside adjacent to a tributary of the Indian Creek.
  - a. This property provides an important backdrop to the one of two neighborhood parks under the jurisdiction of West Norriton Township. Any expansion plans of this park for active and passive purposes would require additional land in the direction observed.
  - b. Recommended Priority II.
2. St. Teresa of Avila (9.6 acres). This consists of the open space property which is a portion of the St. Teresa of Avila Church and School situate along Park View Drive.
  - a. Because of its relative isolated location the site is not suitable for a township-wide park. However, its location adjacent to the residential community of Betzwood would nevertheless provide an important recreation component within that section of Census Tract 2 and should be preserved if practicable.

- b. Recommended Priority I.
3. W. Wilson property (7.5 acres).
- a. Isolated hillside with limited access to adjoining roads.
  - b. Frontage useful for proposed trail to Schuylkill River Trail and River Walk adjacent to RiverView development.
  - c. Recommended Priority II.

### Special Study Areas

1. Revitalization and Traffic Management Overlay District.
- a. This special planning area extends along both sides of West Main Street and Egypt Road (to the Valley Forge Marketplace). The goals include improved walkability, streetscape, business and site plan revitalization, and improved traffic management through reduced curb cuts and shared driveways along with marginal access circulation between properties where practicable.
  - b. Figure 9-1 identifies the properties included in the overlay. See also Recommended Trails Map (rear pocket) for “Proposed Main Street Walk” and local sidewalks and trails.
2. Barbadoes Island (80 acres).
- a. This property is currently owned by PECO (a division of Exelon) and is neither vacant nor surplus institutional land. However, its unique location in the middle of the Schuylkill River, having a length of over one mile and consisting of some woodland and wetlands environmental sensitive areas suggests that this site should be carefully monitored for possible future protection.

- b. The site is accessible via a private roadway emanating from Norristown Borough. Consultations with Mr. Nels Sandberg, Borough Planning Consultant, have indicated that the Borough is suggesting that this site be the subject of a subsequent special study. West Norriton Township agrees and suggests that the County undertake a special study to determine the availability and prospective uses of Barbadoes Island for active or passive recreation or as a wildlife refuge once current activities come to an end. Such a special study is beyond the scope of the Open Space Planning Study prepared for the Township and would need to be coordinated with current owners.

The Township is committed to working with the Borough of Norristown and Montgomery County in support of such a cooperative study.

West Norriton Township Open Space Plan 2006 Update  
Proposed Preservation Areas

Land Use Code:

- S = School Property
- P = Property
- T = Trail

	<u>Description</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
S	Burnside Play Fields (8.5 acres). This consists of the acreage of play fields and recreation components to the rear of the former school building along Burnside Avenue and Marshall Street.	Community Park - Active	I	Year 1
S	Marshall Street Elementary School (11 acres). This consists of the surplus open space, play fields and recreation components to the rear of the Marshall Street Elementary School situated between Marshall Street and Forest Park Apartments.	Community Park - Active	I	If School District terminates
P, T	Surplus land of Norritown Area High School (15 acres). This land could provide a trail link from the riparian corridor through to the Norritown Area High School property and thence via Eagle Drive to the Norritown Farm Park.	Local Trail	II	Year 2 to 5 Acquire easements
P	Portion of Markley Farm (46 acres). This would be a portion of the Markley Farm consisting of the Oakland Drive frontage and the central portion of the Markley Farm property.	Agricultural Conservation	I	Year 2 to 5
P	Markley Swim Club (10 acres).	Community Park	II	Year 2 to 5, if owner terminates
P, T	Dorsky Property (17.5 acres). This site is situated along a tributary of the Stony Creek and would help form a connection between existing preserved riparian woodlands to the west and the Burnside Oakland Park immediately contiguous to the south.	Local Trail Local Park - Passive	II	Year 2 to 5 - excluding existing residence

West Norriton Township Open Space Plan 2006 Update  
Proposed Preservation Areas

Land Use Code:  
 S = School Property  
 P = Property  
 T = Trail

<u>Description</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
P First Baptist Church (22 acres). This is the surplus land situated at the very northeasterly edge of the Township. The site is predominantly wooded and would serve as a natural buffer and should be preserved as a scenic/natural open space preserve.	Buffer Lands	II	At time of future development
P Visitation BVM Church play fields (approximately 6 acres). Provides active play facilities for church congregation.	Local Park - Active	II	If Church decides land is surplus
P Lands adjacent to Fire House Park (4.0 acres).	Passive - Preserve natural resources	II	Year 2 to 5
P St. Teresa of Avila (9.6 acres). This consists of the open space property which is a portion of the St. Teresa of Avila Church and School situate along Parkview Drive.	Local Park - Active and Passive	I	If Church decides land is surplus
T W. Wilson property (7.5 acres). Frontage useful for proposed trail to Schuylkill River Trail and River Walk adjacent to RiverView.	Trail Link	II	Year 2 to 5

West Norriton Township Open Space Plan 2006 Update  
Proposed Preservation Areas

Land Use Code:

- S = School Property
- P = Property
- T = Trail

<u>Description</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
T Major sidewalk links.			
(1) Sidewalk corridors, most existing, and some in need of repair or improvement to provide links along Whitehall Road and Marshall Street and provide connections to Norristown Farm Park.	Local	II	As opportunity arises
(2) Along Burnside Avenue, Oakland Drive, and Chestnut Avenue linking institutional and open space uses with each other and to the Norristown Area High School.	Local		
(3) School Avenue from Marshall Street south across West Main Street to Westover Golf Course and thence to the regional Schuylkill River Bike Trail.	Local, Regional Link		
(4) Proposed Main Street Walk. Provide continuous trail link along one or both sides of West Main Street and Egypt Road.	Main Street, local, intermunicipal		

West Norriton Township Open Space Plan 2006 Update  
Proposed Preservation Areas

Land Use Code:  
 S = School Property  
 P = Property  
 T = Trail

<u>Description</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
T Existing sidewalk trail - Trooper Road.			
(1) An important sidewalk trail link exists along the easterly side of Trooper Road for a length of over one mile, providing a connection from the Valley Forge Marketplace to St. Teresa of Avila at Parkview Drive. This trail provides a spine for secondary trails that would extend westwardly to the Schuylkill River Bike Trail at RiverView and a proposed inter-municipal trail via Shammondell Boulevard into Lower Providence Township.	Local and intermunicipal	I	As opportunity arises
T Proposed interconnection to East Norriton Township.*	Intermunicipal	II	As opportunity arises

There are two proposed links:

- (1) A new trail into VanLandeghem Park which links to active/passive activities in both West and East Norriton Townships, and
- (2) A sidewalk extension to existing trail links to Paul Fly Elementary School and then via future trails to Ballard Wolfe Park (situate Trooper and Woodlyn Roads).

\*Note the Farm Park trails also facilitate interconnections to East Norriton at Whitehall Road, North Wales Road, and East Norriton Township Municipal building.

West Norriton Township Open Space Plan 2006 Update  
Proposed Preservation Areas

Land Use Code:

S = School Property

P = Property

T = Trail

<u>Description</u>	<u>Type</u>	<u>Priority</u>	<u>Time Frame</u>
T Local interest trails to the Schuylkill River Trail:	Local to regional	II	As opportunity arises
(1) Local spur to the Riverside/Montgomery Cemeteries via either Forest Avenue or Montgomery Avenue.			
(2) Local spur via Port Indian Road to Egypt Road and two golf courses (Jeffersonville and Westover).			
(3) Local spur along the River Walk in Betzwood to Valley Forge National Park.			
(4) Local spur along the proposed extension of RiverView Boulevard which is proposed to extend to General Armistead Boulevard; and thence via a new sidewalk system through the industrial park to points north such as Valley Forge Marketplace (in West Norriton) and via Shannondell Boulevard to trail connections in Lower Providence Township.			
T Trail to Lower Providence Township from Burnside Oakland Park. Includes part of Dorsky (see above) and provides natural trail along existing preserved stream valley to residential neighborhoods between Trooper Road and Route 363 (Park Avenue).	Intermunicipal	II	As opportunity arises

## CHAPTER 10

### COMPARISON TO COUNTY AND ABUTTING MUNICIPALITIES

West Norriton Township's recommended plan is compared to the Montgomery County Comprehensive Plan and adjoining municipal plans. It should be noted that during the course of preparation of the West Norriton Plan numerous contacts have been made with adjoining municipalities in an effort to identify conflicts, consistencies, or opportunities and address how issues of compatibility can be achieved.

#### Comparison to County and Abutting Municipal Plans

A municipality's open space plan, to be totally effective and implemented, should compare favorably with the County's comprehensive plan and should be compatible with abutting municipalities' open space plans. West Norriton Township's Open Space Preservation Plan's main goals are aimed at achieving a consensus with the Montgomery County's goals for land use, aesthetics, environmental sensitivity, and community identity.

#### Montgomery County's Comprehensive Plan

*The Montgomery County Vision Plan, Shaping Our Future, A Comprehensive Plan For Montgomery County 2004* was adopted by the Montgomery County Board of Commissioners on September 9, 2004 and represents an updated guide dealing with the growth of housing, transportation, economic development, community facilities, and natural and cultural resource management.

The Vision Plan does identify numerous significant local or rural features such as natural areas inventory sites and contiguous woodlands greater than one thousand acres in the Township.

The southerly portion of West Norriton Township is identified as an important employment center (in combination with the Lower Providence and Upper Merion Townships) and contributes to Montgomery County's status as a leader in total jobs, second only to Philadelphia in southeastern Pennsylvania. West Norriton Township contributes to the diversity of employment which includes pharmaceuticals and health care, mutual fund and insurance business, services, parts and products to other businesses.

The 2025 Growth and Preservation Plan identifies Norristown Farm Park and the Jeffersonville Golf Club as significant “existing preserved open space. In addition, proposed open space is identified along two major stream valleys that traverse the Township and preservation of this resource is consistent with current proposals of the Township.

The Vision Plan identifies West Norriton Township as a mature suburb and includes the following key land use concerns:

- Require compatible in-fill development.
- Keep neighborhood open space.
- Enhance mixed-use downtown areas.

An important proposed interconnected County-wide regional trail system is also identified in a east-west direction through the Township. This trail is the completed Schuylkill River Trail which is included as a specific open space and trail recommendation on the Recommendations Map of this report.

The most important potential major road improvement identified for West Norriton Township is the expanded highway capacity and future widening of Route 422 and the potential new bridge over the Schuylkill River near Betzwood. It should be noted the Historic Properties – National Register on Figure 44 of the Open Space, Natural Features and Cultural Resources Plan identifies a portion of the Norristown Hospital as an Historic District and the Montgomery Cemetery as eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

The Open Space, Natural Features and Cultural Resources Plan (Chapter 4 of the Vision Plan) identifies numerous goals which are included in both the 1995 and current 2005 Open Space Preservation Plan Update for West Norriton Township.

These are briefly summarized below:

- Goal 11, Preserve large interconnected areas of significant open space.

Action:

West Norriton has pursued preservation and joint use of the Norristown Farm Park along with the development of a trail system to the Norristown Area High School and VanLandeghem Park and destinations west.

The Township has adopted cluster zoning and resource protection ordinances dealing with natural resource protection.

- Goal 12, Protect and manage wetlands, streams, steep slopes, woodlands and natural habitats.

Action: These characteristics have been considered a priority in determining and selecting sites that should be preserved and incorporated into permanently protected open space. The joint effort to permanently preserve the VanLandeghem property (in concert with East Norriton Township) and support for the continued passive and agricultural use of the Norristown Farm Park serve as examples of achieving this goal.

- Goal 13, Create a greenway system along rivers, creeks and other sensitive and historic features.

Action:

West Norriton Township has adopted a cluster zoning concept to permit flexible residential development which helps to protect and avoid development in sensitive areas.

This concept has been implemented using properties preserved by cluster development and for actively acquired properties (VanLandeghem) to form an important link along the riparian corridor also to the Norristown Area High School.

- Goal 14, Develop a County-wide network of interconnected trails.

Action: The 1995 and Open Space Preservation Plan 2006 Update embrace a comprehensive and detailed trail plan which represents regional and local interests and needs. It should be noted in working with East Norriton and Lower Providence Townships the trails are committed to interconnecting with abutting municipalities. The 2006 Recommendations Plan (Chapter 9) and Map (rear pocket) considers the connections to the Schuylkill River Trail of prime importance.

- Goal 15, Provide park facilities to meet the public's recreation needs.

Action: The 1995 Open Space Plan and Open Space Preservation Plan 2006 Update provide a detailed inventory and analysis of existing and future recreation facilities to meet the public's recreation needs.

- Goal 16, Preserve farm land and farming.

Action: West Norriton Township supports a continued passive and agricultural use of the Norristown Farm Park and ranks the preservation of Markley Farm as a Priority I recommendation.

- Goal 17, Protect scenic roads, vistas and viewsheds.

Action: The Open Space Preservation Plan 2006 Update includes important scenic roads and their vistas and viewsheds when considering the identification of Priority I and II properties.

- Goal 18, Protect historic resources and cultural landscapes.

Action: The Open Space Plans have identified important historic buildings and sites.

The Township should consider creating a "West Norriton Township Historical Advisory Commission" to advise the Township and prepare a list of historic resources which will add to the understanding of the history of the Township and resources worthy of preservation.

### Norristown Borough

The future update of the Master Plan of Norristown Farm Park would be of mutual interest to Norristown Borough and West Norriton Township regarding open space and recreational facilities. According to Norristown's current Open Space Plan "of particular interest are the connection to the State Farm Park, the recreation fields (football, softball, soccer) and the future of Building 17".

The Open Space Plan includes the following policies which concern land in West Norriton:

- Dialogue Concerning Barbadoes Island – Norristown should continue to participate in the recently re-activated dialogue with West Norriton and PECO regarding Barbadoes Island.
- Montgomery Cemetery Enhancements – Explore the possibility of working with the Montgomery County Historical Society to enhance the Montgomery Cemetery. Although the cemetery itself is located in West Norriton, it can only be accessed through Norristown. Additional efforts should be made to connect this historic site to amenities at the Schuylkill River via Hamilton Street.

### Lower Providence Township

The Open Space Preservation Plan 2005 Update is complete. See extensive discussion in Chapter 5, Potential Open Space Linkages. The four recommended links to West Norriton (in the Lower Providence Plan) are also identified in the West Norriton Open Space Plan Update.

### East Norriton Township

At the time of this writing East Norriton Township is in the process of completing their 2006 Open Space Plan. No joint acquisitions have been identified at this time, but the best option would include a trail connection in the direction of the Norristown Area High School through the jointly owned Van Landeghem property. West Norriton officials have indicated a willingness to take over Eagle Drive from the School District. A sidewalk trail along Eagle Drive would facilitate a walking connection to the Norristown Farm Park at the Whitehall Road entrance.

## Chapter 11

### Policies and Methods for Protecting Open Space Other Than Through Acquisition

There are a number of techniques that communities can use to preserve open space without actually taking title to the land in fee simple. These options are listed below:

#### 1. Zoning Techniques.

**Cluster residential development:** This is a zoning technique which allows the subdivider to cluster the location of homes on the buildable portions of a property while reserving vulnerable natural resources and land suitable for active or passive recreation into common open space. Common open space can be held by a homeowners' association or in total or in part offered for dedication to the township. This technique usually results in little or no additional dwelling units nor does it result in a change in the required single family detached lot, but rather allows the lot size and width to be reduced in exchange for open space.

**Township action:** The Township has adopted planned residential options to govern the development of large tracts of land and is considering the adoption of a cluster concept for smaller sites which would preserve open space at the same density as presently authorized. West Norriton has been successful in preserving open space for park purposes in the past, which includes Squirecroft and Burnside Park as well as preservation of the bulk of Westover Golf Course in perpetuity.

**Institutional Zoning District:** Spacious institutions such as hospitals, places of worship, colleges and universities, and convalescent and retirement homes normally require relatively large sites with low percentages of building coverage and impervious surfaces. Special regulations such as generous setbacks for property lines and street frontages and control of proposed vehicular access can often result in attractive development plans at a relatively low intensity of use.

**Township action:** Township will consider the adoption of an Institutional District or in the alternative zone these properties low density residential.

**Recreational Zoning District:** Protect existing recreation facilities by adopting a restrictive REC District.

**Township action:** Done and applicable to Westover Country Club, Jeffersonville Golf Club, and Markley Swim Club.

**Residential Golf Course Community District:** This is a technique that has gained recent popularity in suburban townships which allows basically a planned residential development permitting a mix of single family and attached houses at a moderate density while also requiring a substantial amount of open space in the form of active and passive recreation. The active recreation component would include a regulation 18 hole golf course. This is a method by which interest in land planning can be achieved through the mix of mixed residential housing types and permanent open space to be used and maintained as active recreation.

**Township action:** Adopted RR - Residential Retirement Community to permit development of a small portion of Westover Country Club subject to a deed restriction to protect the balance in perpetuity.

**Floodplain Conservation District:** This is a district modeled after requirements of the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which requires the protection and avoidance of development within floodplain areas defined by hydrologic studies or defined alluvial soils which represent 100 Year Floodplains. This regulation normally precludes most types of intensive development and permits subtle or benign activities within the floodplain and carefully controls the nature of grading and filling within these areas. For municipalities such as West Norriton, such a zoning overlay can result in long green belt linkages of protected and undeveloped open space areas, which protect both vulnerable natural resources such as stream banks, woodland edges, wetlands, and wildlife habitats, but also result in protection of the health and safety of the residents by avoiding development in floodprone areas and reducing downstream impacts from new development.

**Township action:** West Norriton Township has enacted a Floodplain Conservation District to provide for very careful regulation of development and by and large the preservation of areas within the 100 Year Floodplain.

**Transfer Development Rights:** This is a zoning procedure authorized by the 1991 amendments to the Municipalities Planning Code which provides for the attaching of development rights to specified lands which are desired by a municipality to be kept undeveloped, but permitting those rights to be transferred from those lands so that the development potential which they represent may occur on other lands within the municipality where more intense development is deemed by the municipality to be appropriate. Article VI of the Municipalities Planning Code permits provisions for regulating transferable development rights, on a voluntary basis, in accordance with express standards and criteria set forth within the Ordinance.

**Township action:** Due to the limited number of vacant parcels remaining in the Township and the difficulty in establishing sending or receiving zones since the Township is so small, this approach does not appear viable for West Norriton.

## 2. **Agricultural Security Area.**

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania allows groups of farmers subject to municipal approval to create Agricultural Security Districts. These districts must comprise at least 500 acres, although all the farms and agricultural land need not be contiguous. Farms located in agricultural security areas are protected from new ordinances and nuisance regulations that would restrict normal farming operations. Once created, condemnation of land in an agricultural security area is more difficult such as would be associated with municipal authorities, school boards, and other purposes as may be deemed appropriate by the governing body. Once created, farmers may be willing to sell their development rights or participate in the agricultural easement program, either with Montgomery County or in a transferable development rights with the township. Such a program would permanently preserve farmland for agricultural purposes, creating permanent but privately owned open space.

**Township Action:** The Township will support a joint Agricultural Security Area with Worcester Township for its last remaining privately-owned farm: The Markley Century Farm. West Norriton supports preferential tax assessments and sale of development rights for this property.

3. **Subdivision And Land Development Ordinance.**

**Woodland protection and landscaping regulations:** This is a natural feature protection ordinance which requires that a certain percentage of woodlands be preserved and requires further that new development avoid areas of existing trees and heavy woods. Where protection is not practicable, then tree replacement is required, typically along the perimeter of properties or in other open spaces preserved as a part of the development process.

**Township action:** The Township has not adopted a stringent Landscape Ordinance which includes protection and replacement provisions.

**Require developments to dedicate open space or pay a fee in lieu of dedication.** This is a procedure typically following the preparation of a Recreation and Open Space Plan, wherein the developer of a property is required to reserve a certain percentage of the property for permanent open space or, in the alternative, pay a fee to the township which would be used to acquire or improve open space situated elsewhere within the township.

**Township action:** West Norriton Township may consider enacting a mandatory dedication of payment of a fee in lieu of for the preservation of open space. The size and location of open space to be dedicated is subject to the review and approval of the Township Park and Recreation Board.

4. **Establish a local land trust or environmental advisory council.** This is an agency that would be appointed by Township Commissioners and function as an intermediary in terms of working with the Planning Commission and Park and Recreation Board for the specific purposes of advising techniques and standards for the protection of the environment and providing an agency that could receive and manage open space properties dedicated to the Township through cluster development, mandatory open space dedication, or donated by nonprofit or charitable trusts.

**Township action:** Upon completion of the Open Space Plan, the Township will consider the creation of a local land trust/environmental advisory council. This council would also interface with local and County watershed associations and conservation groups.

5. **Meet and consult with landowners of large, undeveloped properties, including public and private schools and institutions as well as vacant and agricultural properties, in order to encourage the preservation of portions of the land which are environmentally sensitive such as wetlands, woodlands, and floodplains or areas of unique historic or cultural value on a voluntary basis. One method would be to acquire a conservation easement in lieu of actual fee simple acquisition.**
6. **Comprehensive Planning:** The Municipal Comprehensive Plan prepared in the 1960s is currently being updated to define growth areas and identify key policies to preserve and enhance future properties for park, recreation, and preservation purposes.
7. **Methods of acquisition, including variations on fee simple approach:**

**Installment Buying.**

Installment buying is an acquisition method whereby the government agrees to purchase a set number of acres annually until the full parcel is acquired. In return, the full site is removed from the tax rolls when the initial agreement is signed. The owner may choose to remain on his land until it is completely sold and paid for. The advantage of this method is that benefits accrue to both government and the landowner. To the public agency with limited funds, installment buying spreads the costs over a period of years. The owner is relieved of real property responsibilities when the agreement is signed.

**Long Term Lease with Option to Buy.**

Long term lease with option to buy involves the negotiation of a lease price with a property owner and includes conditions for use and possible purchase of the property. The primary advantage of this method is that it permits flexibility. In the future, if the property is not needed for open space/recreation purposes it returns to the owner.

**Purchase and Lease-Back.**

Purchase and lease-back is the practice of buying land and leasing it back to the owner in accordance with agreed-upon policies for the use and protection of the land. Its chief advantage is that it permits purchase of property before prices rise or before the property is lost to development. It also permits flexibility, in that once purchased the land can be used for another public purpose, sold, or exchanged for another parcel.

### **Purchase and Resale.**

Purchase and resale is similar to the above method, except that the parcel is purchased with the sole intent of reselling the property under conditions or restrictive covenants. If the property is obtained at a low cost, the resulting profits help repay initial purchase costs and can be used to acquire additional land. Another advantage is that after resale the government is relieved of ownership and maintenance responsibilities and the land is taxable.

### **Leasing.**

Leasing is a popular, relatively inexpensive way to acquire recreation areas, especially if the land is not likely to be developed (i.e., reservoirs and utility lands). The term of the lease usually ranges from 20 to 50 years. A period should be established which is long enough to finance capital improvements. The owner of the leased property prescribes conditions and terms under which the property can be used and the lessee is required to carry liability insurance covering bodily injury and property damage.

### **Easements.**

Easements are a successful way to save public funds, yet receive open space/recreation benefits. An easement is a limited right over land owned by another person. Legally, a person has the right to use his property subject to zoning laws, subdivision regulations, etc., however, he may sell to the government his right to use the land in specific ways.

The costs of easements vary with the type acquired. Easements can be affirmative or negative. Affirmative easements grant limited rights to the public to use land for public purposes, such as hiking, fishing, or riding. Negative easements do not allow public access, but restrict the owner in his use of the property. A scenic easement requires the owner to preserve the "openness" or natural beauty of a site, for example.

Use of easements is generally more limited and complicated than land acquisition, but it can retard or prevent destruction and premature development of scenic areas. Easements should be selectively used and tailored to fit the requirements of each particular situation. Affirmative easements can be used effectively to obtain public use of private lands for trails and access to water-based recreation facilities. Negative easements should be used along many of the municipality's visually attractive rural roads.

## **Donations.**

Donations of land for open space and park purposes should be encouraged. A resident may be willing, even eager to donate property, but may hesitate unless approached by public officials. Land donations can be encouraged by granting lifetime occupancy rights and by pointing out certain tax advantages to the owner.

Not all land that may be offered for dedication is suitable for park purposes. Some sites may be inaccessible, or inappropriately located, or maintenance costs may be prohibitive. Land unsuitable for open space and park purposes that is accepted can be sold or exchanged for more desirable sites.

## **Land Trust and Conservancies.**

Land trusts and conservancies are private, nonprofit, tax exempt trusts, usually organized by a citizen supported, nonprofit agency. Their funds can be used to provide future park lands and facilities and protect stream valleys and other important natural areas. Administration and management of the lands are the responsibility of the service agency.

Private nonprofits have an advantage in that they can often move faster to acquire property than a government agency can. Frequently a public-private partnership is formed in which the private agency acquires land and then resells it to a government agency at a later date.

8. **Tax exemptions, deferrals, and rebates as a method of preserving open space and natural features through tax relief.** Listed below are brief explanations of various tax mechanisms:

### **Tax Exemption.**

Tax exemption is sometimes given to privately-owned land that is open to the public. In New Jersey, land that provides public benefit, such as historic places, hunting and fishing areas, or forest preserves, and that remains undeveloped and available for public use, is granted tax exemption.

A statute like this does not exist in Pennsylvania, but if it did perhaps additional public benefits could be obtained without acquiring land. There has been talk in the General Assembly of modifying Pennsylvania's law to allow a similar tax exemption to publicly-owned private land where usage fees are not charged, and the municipality should be supportive of such legislation.

## **Deferral of Taxes.**

Deferred taxation is applied to a landowner's property if the landowner is willing not to develop the property as it is presently zoned. The local taxing bodies and the owner of the land agree that land which is designated as open space, farmland, woodlands, or other similar uses in the comprehensive plan will be kept in its present use for a long period of time (10+ years) and that it will be assessed at its current value. The taxes will, therefore, be lower because the owner is being taxed on the present use and not the future potential use.

This is a fiscal policy that should be explored by the municipality because it does not lose money in the long run. When the landowner wishes to develop the property, the difference between the controlled rate and the normal rate, plus an agreed upon interest rate, must be paid back to the taxing bodies. Another advantage of deferred taxation is that it is not only applicable to farmland, but can be used to preserve existing recreation facilities (stables, rod and gun clubs, shooting ranges, or ski areas) that are likely candidates for development.

## **Preferential Assessment.**

Preferential assessment is similar to the above tax concept except that it applies to selected land uses: agriculture, forestry, recreation, water supply, and the like. In this approach, land is assessed at its limited use value in order to remove tax pressures on the owners to sell at a speculative price for profit. Time constraints are usually assigned to the preferential assessment. Two acts are available for use in the municipality.

Act 515 - Allows counties to covenant with landowners for preservation of land in farm, forest, water supply, and open space uses. The covenant runs for a period of ten years and the real property tax assessment reflects the fair market value of the land as restricted by the covenant. The covenant can be renewed and terminated under conditions set forth in the Act.

Act 319 - Allows an owner of farmland or forest land, ten acres or greater (2 acres where it is showing an income), the benefit of having the land valued for tax purposes at its current use value. The Act provides for the payment of rollback taxes when the use of the land is changed. The program differs from Act 515 in that the applicant does not have to have permission from the local taxing bodies for the potentially reduced assessments.

## Chapter 12 Implementation

The following are the implementation priorities for 2006 and beyond.

Upon the completion of the 2006 Open Space Preservation Plan Update, the Township will endeavor to do the following:

1. Institute the Open Space Board on a permanent basis. The major functions of the Board will be to:
  - a. Meet and monitor the progress of the acquisitions outlined in the Open Space Plan.
  - b. Interface with Township Supervisors, Township Planning Commission and County Planning Commission on open space matters.
  - c. Maintain and revise the plan as may be necessary.
  - d. Establish subcommittees to focus on special projects. These include:
    - (1) Barbadoes Island.
    - (2) Norristown Farm Park.
    - (3) Regional trails and local trails.
    - (4) Main Street revitalization.
    - (5) Markley Farm future disposition.
2. For years 2006 to 2008, the Township will be active in the following tasks (see Implementation Chart in Chapter 9 for details):
  - a. Secure Priority I properties.
    - (1) Attempt to acquire long term leases or easements from landowners (including institutional uses) who are willing and agreeable for those properties already devoted to park and recreation uses, particularly in the area designated as Census Tract 1.

- b. Upon the completion of the above, attempt to acquire fee simple interest in other Priority I properties which rank high for future parks and recreation, particularly in areas adjacent to existing parks.
  - c. Acquire Priority I properties through eminent domain only in the event negotiated acquisition is unsuccessful.
  - d. Upon the completion of the acquisition of Priority I properties or in the event some Priority I properties are difficult or impossible to acquire on a friendly basis, secure those Priority II properties from landowners who are willing and agreeable to a sale at a reasonable price in an expeditious manner.
  - e. Pursue preservation of vital trail links and natural open space areas during the review of proposed subdivision and land development plans.
  - f. Pursue land donations from existing landowners who desire to dedicate their properties, who desire special treatment on inheritance taxes, or which may be a part of a benevolent or a charitable nonprofit group.
  - g. The Township will use every effort to utilize the County Open Space Grant for the acquisition and preservation of additional open space.
3. Historic Preservation.
- a. The Board of Commissioners may consider the adoption of an Historic Preservation Overlay which would encourage preservation of noteworthy buildings and sites.
4. Pursue funding options for special projects as highlighted in 1 (above) and preservation projects.
5. 2008 and beyond.
- a. Continue to monitor and update the Township Open Space Plan as necessary.
  - b. Important Priority I, Priority II or subsequent properties deemed of high priority by the Open Space Planning Committee will be acquired utilizing Round Two funds as may be made available by the County Open Space Board.
  - c. Acquire donations/dedications of land from developers as a part of cluster residential development. Acquire fee in lieu dedication to be used toward future preservation and improvement of existing parks.

*APPENDIX*

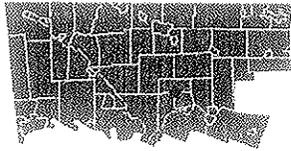
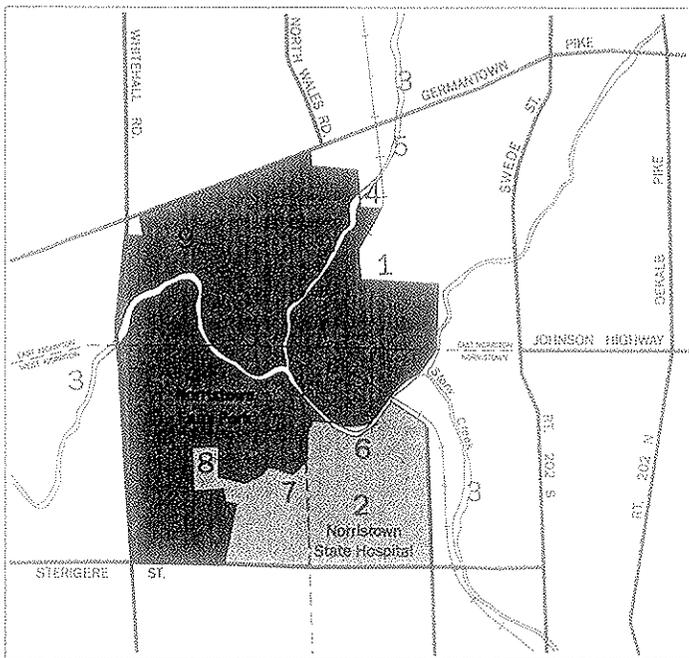


Figure 23  
NORRISTOWN FARM PARK



### Norristown Farm Park

*Location:* West Germantown Pike and Whitehall Road, East Norriton and West Norriton Townships and Norristown Borough.

*Acreage:* 690 acres. The county leases this site from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The state and county both contribute funding for park improvement, maintenance, operation, and administration.

*Description:* The park contains 100 acres of woodland, 450 acres of farm fields leased for agriculture, a large dairy barn with associated buildings, a separate hay barn, and six houses. Two branches of the Stony Creek converge at the site. A visitors center, a long paved loop trail with trailheads located at the park headquarters and along Whitehall Road across from Norristown Area High School, picnicking pavilions, nature study paths, and a trout nursery maintained by Stony Creek Anglers are some of the recreational opportunities provided at the park. Fishing ponds and wetlands are interspersed among agricultural fields that provide a demonstration of farming techniques in an urbanized area.

*Opportunities:* Norristown Farm Park provides a large reservoir of open space in one of the most populated areas of the county. It is unique not only for its size but also as a snapshot of the rural farming landscape common in the earlier part of the century. It must carefully integrate the development of traditional park activities into this agricultural landscape that has been enjoyed by local community residents. A stewardship organization, the Farm Park Preservation Association, has begun to sponsor events, raise funds and awareness of the park's significance, and generally advocate for permanent protection of the

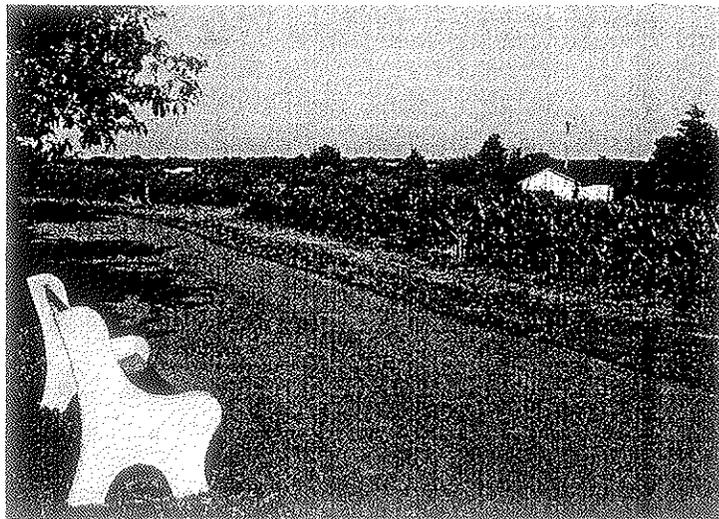
Source: *Open Space, Natural Features and Cultural Resources Plan Shaping Our Future - A Comprehensive Plan for Montgomery County Draft* September 2004 Chapter Three, Pages 106 and 107

landscape in its current form. This volunteer support is an excellent model for future friends organizations at other county parks. Because this property is still under the ownership of the Commonwealth, its permanent preservation is not necessarily guaranteed. This causes significant challenges in long term planning and funding of park improvements. The status of the property and its potential ownership and preservation must be clarified.

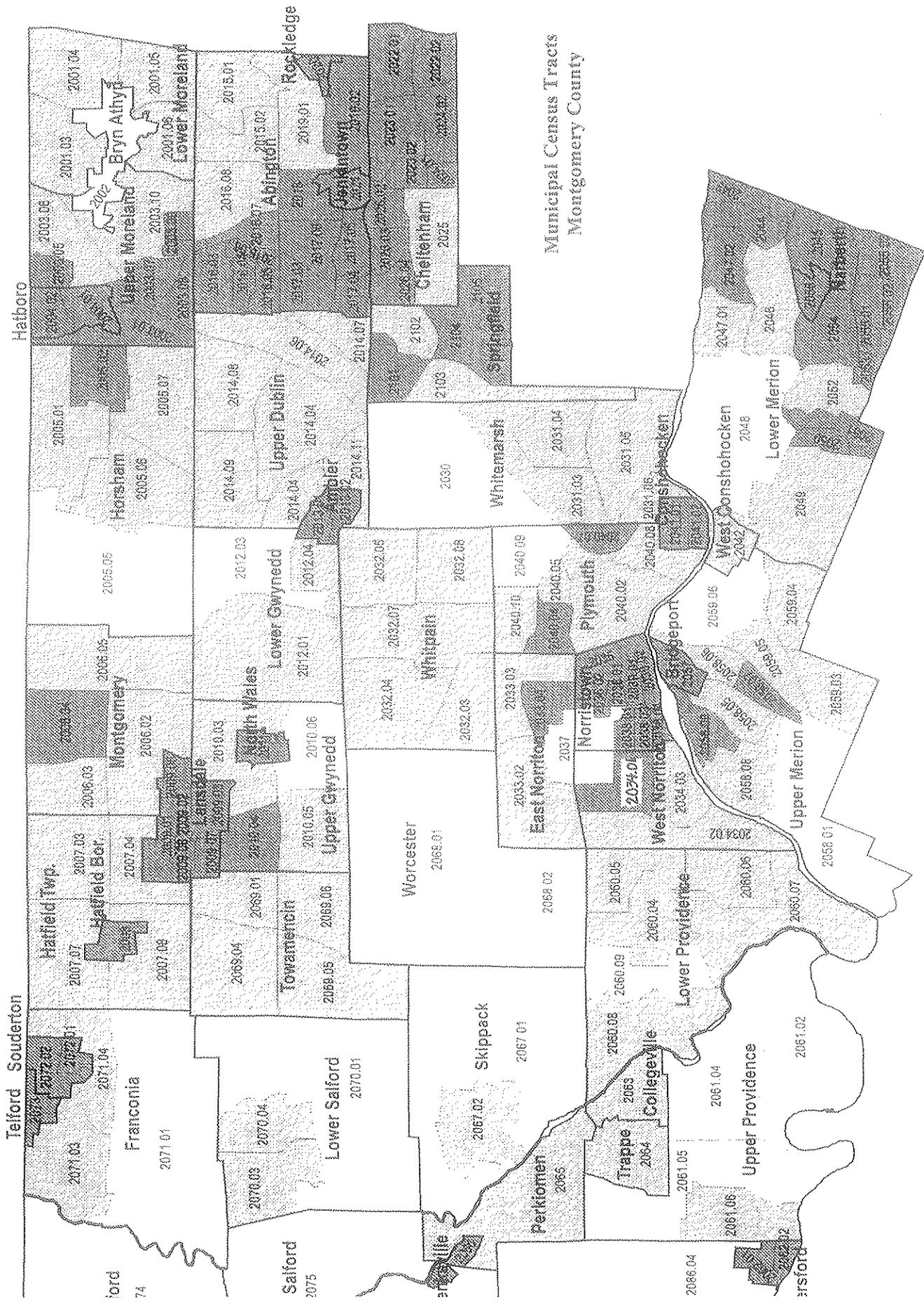
The park encompasses sufficient area to accommodate the public use areas proposed in the park master plan without undue pressure on its natural resources. Busy public roads border the park on two sides. Some parcels of land along the East Norriton park boundaries (1) should be added to the park when available. Any changes to the status and use of Norristown State Hospital (2) will create both additional open space opportunities and potential threats to the park's landscape. The county should participate in ongoing discussions and decisions about any future use of the hospital property.

The lands along the Stony Creek (3) are of primary importance and are part of a potential greenway beginning in Norristown Borough and extending through East Norriton Township into Worcester and Whitmarsh Townships. Protection of the stream corridor is important for water quality and flood control. Lands that are essential to the integrity of this stream corridor include a 4.5-acre piece of stream corridor (4) at the northeast corner of the park, a 38.5-acre property (5) at the east side of the farm park, and a linear area along the creek (6), which is part of the Norristown State Hospital grounds. Each of these properties is vital to the health of the stream corridor and should become permanently preserved as part of Norristown Farm Park.

Additional perimeter parcels important to the park include a 16.5-acre farmstead site (7) on the grounds of the state hospital and a 3.7-acre beech woodland (8) adjoining the defunct state hospital reservoir. The reservoir should be evaluated along with the woodland for future consideration. Four out-parcels along Whitehall Road and Germantown Pike (9), which are owned by the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare, are historically part of the farm landscape and should be incorporated back into the farm park.



Norristown Farm Park includes long vistas across an agricultural landscape.

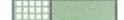
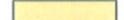
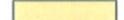


Municipal Census Tracts  
Montgomery County

# WEST NORRITON TOWNSHIP

Potential Build Out Analysis  
Open Space Plan Update  
2006

## LEGEND

-  MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY
  -  ROADWAY
  -  PARCEL LINE
  -  WATERWAYS
  -  DEVELOPED AS OF 2005
  -  PERMANENTLY PROTECTED LANDS
  -  INSTITUTIONAL LANDS
  -  RESIDENTIAL
  -  COMMERCIAL, RETAIL, HOTELS
  -  OFFICE/INDUSTRIAL
- | ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL YIELD  |                    |
|---|--------------------|
|  | 208 dwelling units |
|  | 90,000 sq. ft.     |
|  | 1,360,000 sq. ft.  |
| sq. ft. = square feet of gross floor area   |                    |

Potential Build Out Analysis  
Open Space Plan Update  
2006  
Figure 7-2

West Norriton Township  
Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Prepared By:  
E. Van Fleker, AICP  
215 Old Church Road  
North Wales, PA 19454

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Mapping by Kolfish Design

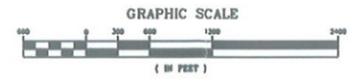
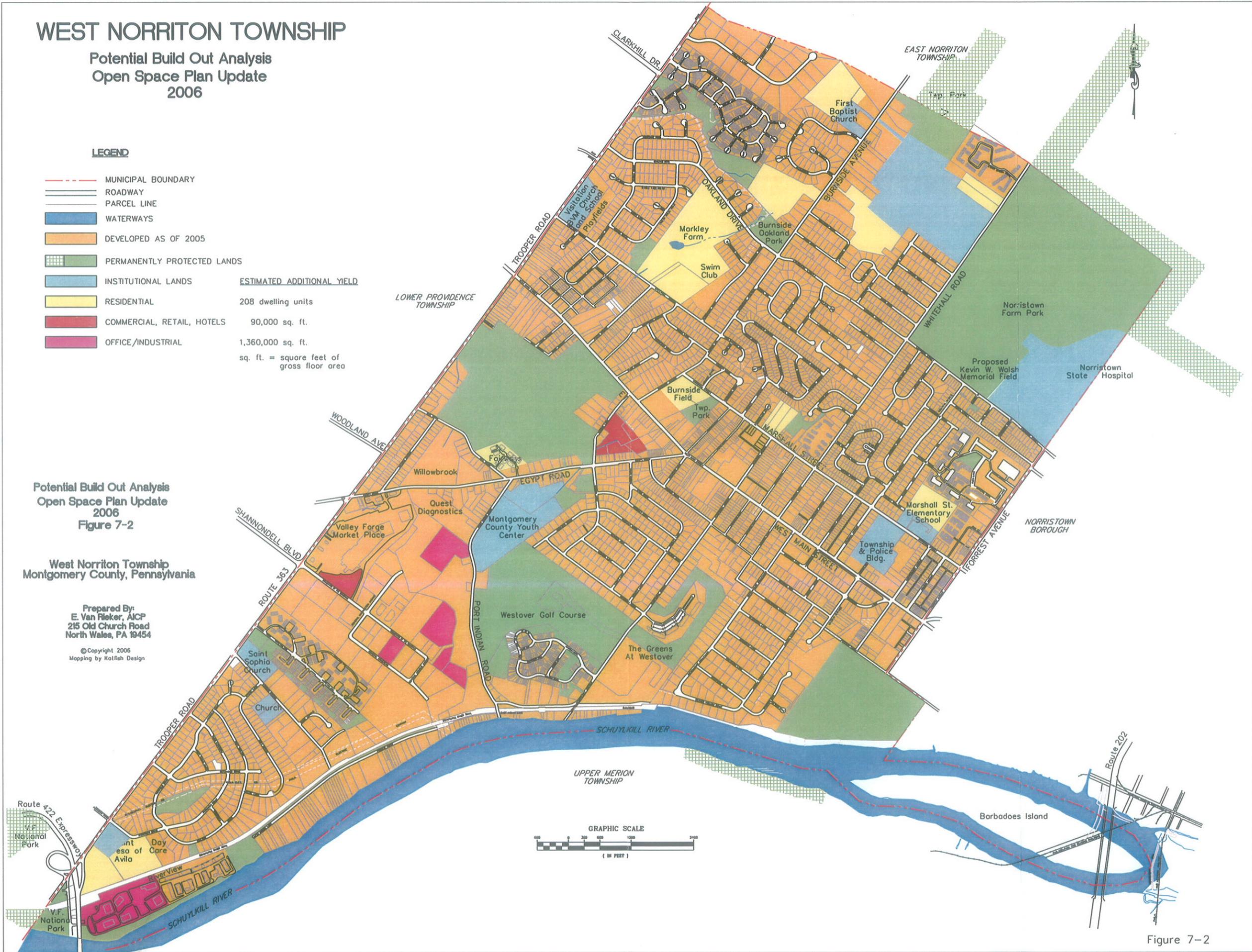
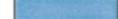


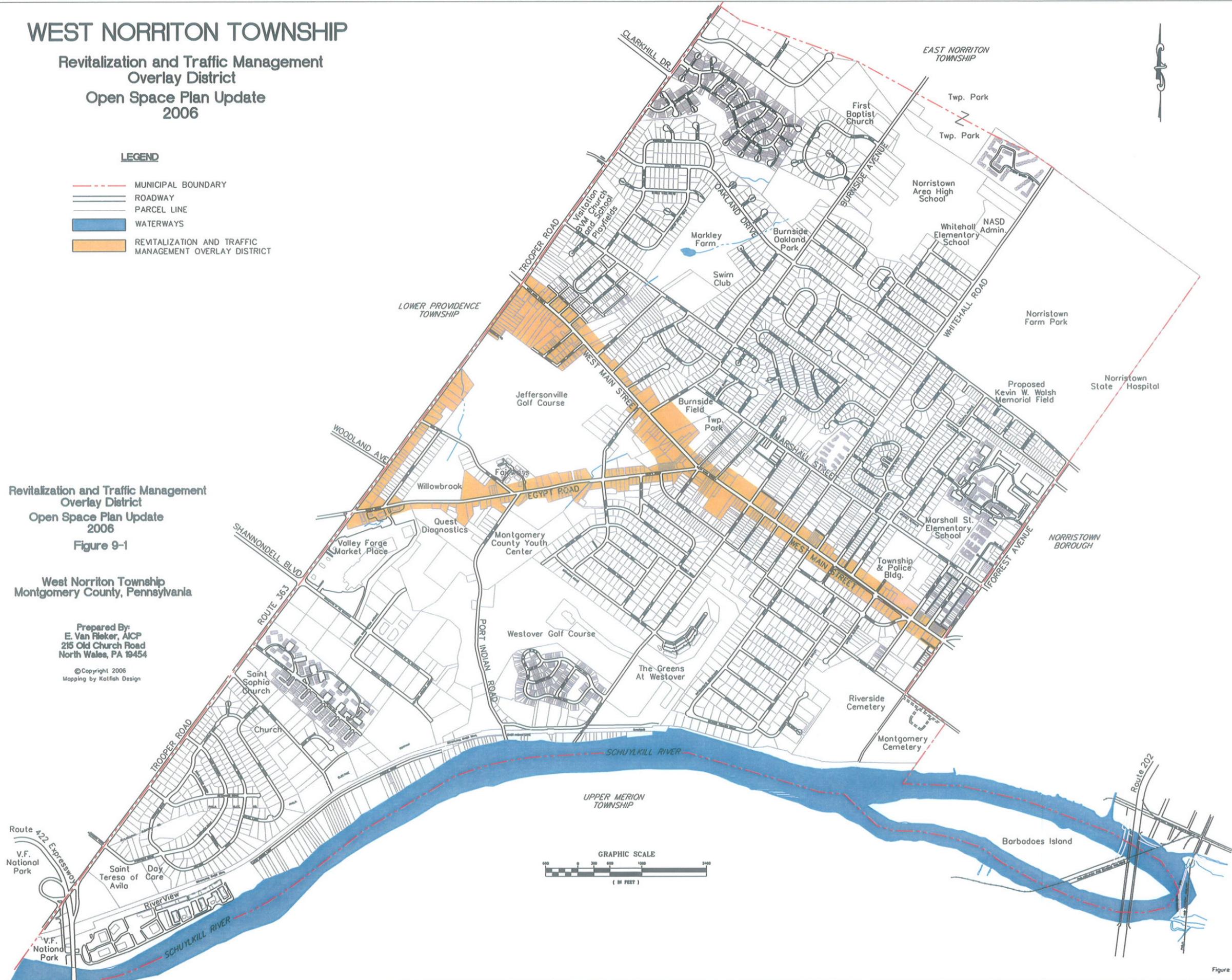
Figure 7-2

# WEST NORRITON TOWNSHIP

Revitalization and Traffic Management  
Overlay District  
Open Space Plan Update  
2006

## LEGEND

-  MUNICIPAL BOUNDARY
-  ROADWAY
-  PARCEL LINE
-  WATERWAYS
-  REVITALIZATION AND TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT OVERLAY DISTRICT

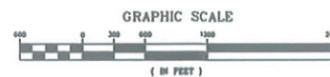


Revitalization and Traffic Management  
Overlay District  
Open Space Plan Update  
2006  
Figure 9-1

West Norriton Township  
Montgomery County, Pennsylvania

Prepared By:  
E. Van Fleker, AICP  
215 Old Church Road  
North Wales, PA 19454

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Mapping by Kotfish Design

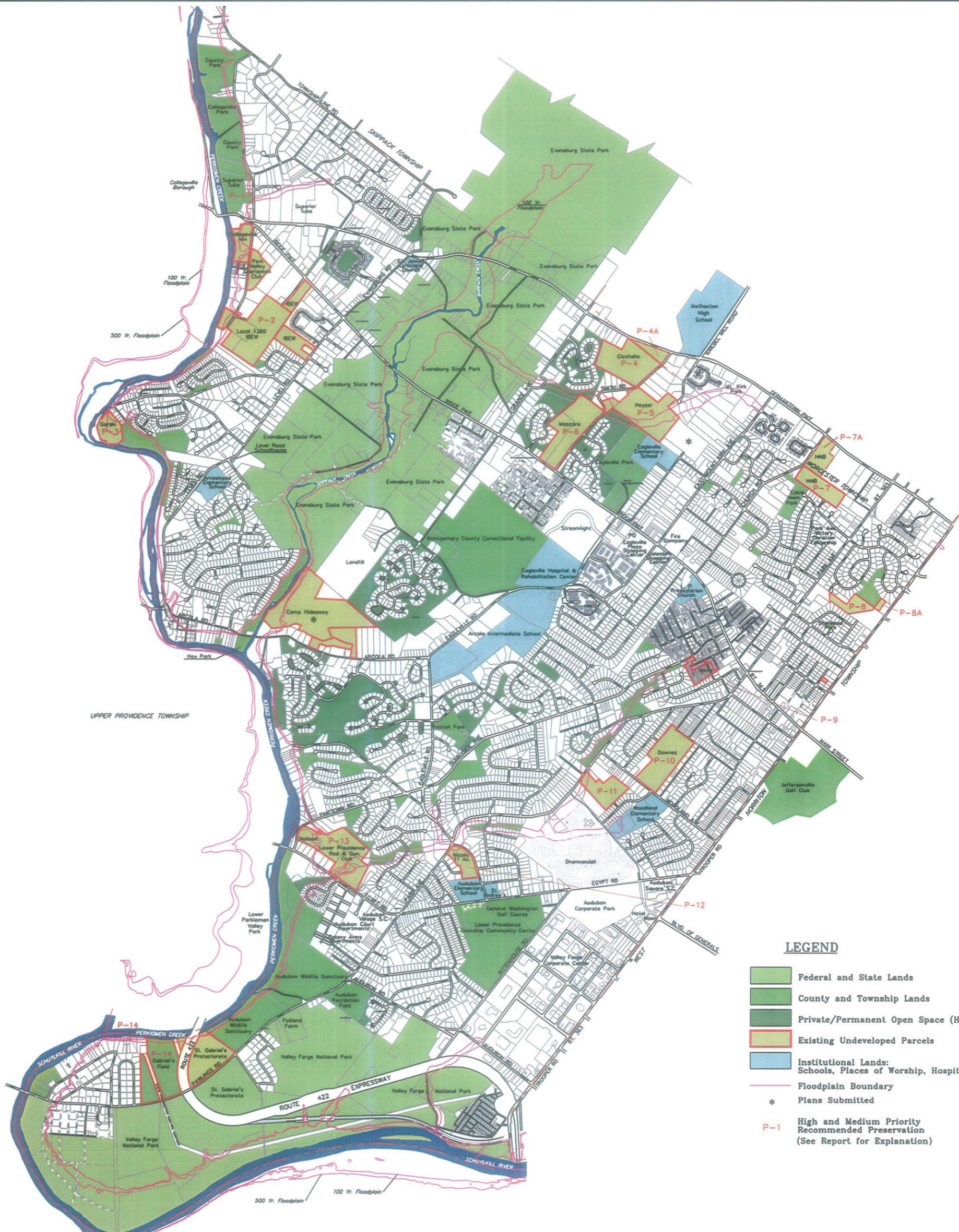


# Norristown Farm Park



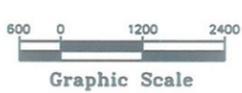
- ← Entrance
- == Park Road
- Paved Trail
- Building
- Woodlands
- Stony Creek
- Farm Fields
- - - Park Boundary
- Nature Trail
- Riparian Buffer





**LEGEND**

- Federal and State Lands
- County and Township Lands
- Private/Permanent Open Space (HOA)
- Existing Undeveloped Parcels
- Institutional Lands: Schools, Places of Worship, Hospital
- Floodplain Boundary
- Plans Submitted
- P-1 High and Medium Priority Recommended Preservation (See Report for Explanation)



**LOWER PROVIDENCE TOWNSHIP  
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PA**

**Figure 5-2  
Open Space Plan  
With Floodplain Overlay**

July 2005  
Revised: February 2006

Prepared By:  
E. Van Rieker, AICP  
215 Old Church Road  
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Mapping Prepared by Kolfish Design

