**PENNINGTON BOROUGH OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION**

**Fact Sheet**

**PENNINGTON OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION BACKGROUND**

Suburban development in the 20th century led Pennington Borough to seek ways to retain its “village” identity and the semi-rural character of the surrounding area. In 1999, Pennington voters approved, by 77%, creation of an open space tax of 1 cent/$100 dollars of assessed value, and an Open Space Committee to advise Borough Council regarding preservation of properties within and near the Borough. Council adopted an ordinance to that effect, which allows the Borough to receive County and State funding to cover most of the cost of preserving open land.

**USE OF OPEN SPACE TAX FUNDS**

Open space tax revenue is to be used to acquire, develop, and maintain vacant land, easements and development rights for recreation and conservation purposes. Preserved open space, and restoration of natural values in some cases, can help improve air quality, reduce flooding and mitigate extreme temperatures, protect vital habitats, and sequester carbon – all goals of increasing importance as our climate changes.

To inform the use of these funds, the Planning Board adopted, and then in 2015 updated, an [Open Space and Recreation Plan](file:///C:\Users\AlanH\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\LU3F9K8K\So%20there%20was%20a%20discussion%20in%20the%20Budget%20session%20about%20the%20enhanced%20public%20participation%20that%20we%20witnessed%20will%20meeting%20virtually.%20The%20Council%20discussed%20three%20options:). The plan calls for creating a permanent greenbelt around the Borough and greenway “corridors” along roads leading into the Borough. The plan encourages increasing passive recreational opportunities (e.g. hiking, birdwatching) on protected open space adjacent to or near the Borough. On open space in the Borough, funds can also help improve recreational facilities.

**THE OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE**

The Open Space Committee includes the Mayor or a delegated Council member, delegates from the Environmental Commission, Planning Board, and Economic Development Commission, two Borough residents and two alternate members. The Committee develops and applies criteria to analyze properties for possible preservation. Borough Council makes all final decisions regarding property preservation.

**PARTNERING FOR PRESERVATION**

The Borough typically preserves open space in partnership with others. Funding from Mercer County and the NJ Green Acres program usually covers 90% of land costs. Partnering with non-profit organizations and/or Hopewell Township can lower Borough costs to 5% or less. Once land is preserved by such a partnership, it may be owned by Pennington Borough or one of its partners in the project. Two members of Pennington’s Open Space Committee serve on the three-municipality Hopewell Valley Open Space Advisory Committee to facilitate partnerships.

**FINDING PRESERVATION OPPORTUNITIES**

Vacant land available for preservation is mainly outside the Borough. As noted in the Open Space and Recreation Plan, preserved lands outside the Borough create a greenbelt and maintain Pennington’s traditional village character. Opportunities to preserve open space inside the Borough are rare. Preserved lands around the Borough contribute to recreational opportunities for Borough residents, support business by providing attractive pedestrian access, and can help reduce flooding and protect water quality and natural habitats. These are benefits not only for Pennington residents but residents of the entire Hopewell Valley.

Sometimes opportunities within the Borough arise. In 2021, for example, the Borough used open space funds for a buffer for the historic African Cemetery, and to protect land that will be part of the Pennington Arboretum behind Toll Gate Elementary School. Funds can be and have been used to improve equipment and facilities in Borough parks.

Because confidentiality and privacy are essential in negotiations with property owners, the Borough can only reveal details about properties when agreements have been reached with sellers.