BOROUGH OF PENNINGTON

MERCER COUNTY
NEW JERSEY

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

REVISED, MARCH, 2015

AS A SUPPLEMENT TO THE MASTER PLAN

ADOPTED MARCH 11, 2015

BOROUGH OF PENNINGTON

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

Executive Summary

Open Space Preservation:

To retain the "village" identity of Pennington and the semi-rural character of nearby surrounding areas, the Borough of Pennington plans to work in collaboration with Hopewell Township, non-profit land preservation organizations, Mercer County, and the State to permanently protect open space around the Borough and open space along greenway corridors along roads leading to and from the Borough.

Recreation:

The Borough of Pennington is committed to providing recreational space and facilities for its residents. Within the Borough of Pennington publically accessible recreational facilities consist of two Borough-owned parks and outdoor recreational facilities at the Toll Gate Elementary School and The Pennington School. In addition, there are trails adjacent to the Borough which provide access to much larger areas of open space and recreational facilities in Hopewell Township. Bicycling on Borough streets and outside the Borough is also an important recreational activity.

Process for Adoption:

This plan revises the Borough's first Open Space and Recreation Plan, adopted in 2000, which was prepared in accordance with guidelines of the NJ Green Acres Program. The initial draft of the 2015 plan was prepared by the Borough's Open Space Committee. A proposed draft for adoption by the Borough Planning Board was the subject of two public meetings of the Board with final adoption following an advertised public hearing held in March, 2015.

GOALS AND POLICIES

The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Borough's 1998 Master Plan related to open space preservation. The Master Plan establishes as one of its six goals the maintenance of Pennington as a primarily residential community, and elaborates that open space and recreational areas, both public and private, should be preserved and enhanced, with linkages to nearby preserved areas. The Master Plan statement of goals also emphasizes that the Borough should work with "public and private agencies" such as non-profit organizations to preserve open space areas surrounding the Borough, with the aim of preserving natural breaks in development around the Borough that contribute (heavily) to its distinctive historic village character. The OSRP Plan elaborates on these Master Plan goals as a vehicle for soliciting public input on how those goals should be realized. Residents of the Borough supported the idea that open space preservation and the recreation it offers are important by voting to adopt an open space tax in 1998. Subsequent to that vote, the Borough Council created by ordinance the Open Space Committee and an Open Space Trust Fund in 1999. Citizen input on the OSRP will help guide how those and other resources can be used to most effect.

Open Space Preservation:

The specific goals of the Borough's OSRP are to advance the broader Master Plan by acting in concert with Hopewell Township, Mercer County, the State of New Jersey, and local non-profit land preservation organizations to:

1. Create, expand, and maintain a permanently protected greenbelt of open space around the Borough, to the maximum extent possible, by preserving additional land that can create a more complete and extensive greenbelt and land that can create greenway corridors emanating from the Borough.

2. Preserve the historic village character of Pennington, which depends on the maintenance of a rural landscape on the Borough's boundaries and along roads leading to and from the Borough.

3. Increase the range of passive recreational opportunities on permanently protected tracts of contiguous open space adjacent to or near the Borough.

Open Space and Recreational Enhancements:

The specific objectives of the Borough's OSRP related to open space and recreational activity are:

1. Create and enhance linkages that allow pedestrian access to open space and recreational opportunities from multiple points within the Borough.

2. Create and enhance linkages that allow bicycle access to open space outside the Borough. Provide bicycle racks at Borough parks and in commercial areas.

3. Enhance recreational facilities in Kunkel and Sked Street parks.

4. Through the site plan approval process for residential development at the Capital Health site on W. Franklin Avenue, ensure that open space is set aside for recreational use.

5. Preserve wooded areas along steam corridors within the Borough such as the Lewis Brook, the Stony Brook along King George Road and a tributary to the Stony Brook in Kunkel Park.

6. Preserve wooded areas on Borough owned sites including the public works garage site in Hopewell Township and within the Borough at Kunkel Park and at the end of Reading Street.

7. Preserve wooded areas on non-Borough owned sites such as on Green Street south of the Lewis Brook and on E. Curlis Ave. at the rear of the Toll Gate School property.

INVENTORY OF OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL RESOURCES

Within the Borough of Pennington there are just two parcels of permanently protected open space totaling 8.65 acres. Kunkel Park (7.59 acres) lies in the northeast corner of the Borough and offers playground equipment, a sand box and a pavilion for picnics and other functions, as well as a link to open space outside the Borough via the Pennington Loop Trail. The park also features a fine stand of mature hardwoods. The Sked Street mini-park (1.06 acres) offers a quiet spot for families and small children to play safely outdoors. Both parks are included in the Borough's Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI) which is on file with the Green Acres Program. Neither park by itself offers extensive open space for the kind of exercise and relaxation that long country walks make possible, nor can they provide a wide range of recreational facilities.

By virtue of the Borough's location near existing open space lands, however, there are many opportunities to expand the open space and recreation opportunities available from within the Borough. For example, Kunkel Park can be linked along the Stony Brook to the protected lands of the Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association, and ultimately connected by footpaths to Hopewell Borough. The Pennington Loop Trail already provides access from Kunkel Park to the State's Fish and Wildlife Preserve at Baldwin Lake from which a trail could be extended on trail easements and County-owned land along the Stony Brook.

Preserved lands just outside the southern border of the Borough now allow access from South Main Street to Mercer County Park lands, and footpath access to Curlis Lake, the County Equestrian Center, and from there to the Rosedale Park. The Pennington Connection to the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail (LHT) provides a pedestrian/bicycle connection from King George Road to the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed property and to Rosedale Park and other sections of Mercer Meadows.

School Property:

Local school properties include a substantial amount of open space and recreational facilities. To the rear of the Toll Gate Grammar School, the cleared area of 2.6 acres includes a playground, baseball/soccer fields, and a large wooded area. Over half of the 27 acres of The Pennington School property south of W. Delaware Avenue is open space, including athletic fields and a pond, as well as a large lawn area in front of Old Main on W. Delaware Avenue which features some of the Borough's largest trees. On the north side of W. Delaware Avenue is another 5 acres of open space where 5 tennis courts and soccer fields are located. The Pennington School permits the public to make use of its campus and athletic fields.

To the rear of the Hopewell Valley Regional School District administrative offices on S. Main Street there are approximately 2 acres of mowed grass which is used primarily by the YMCA for baseball and soccer games. Use of the area is by permit.

Wooded Areas:

There are four existing woodland sites within the Borough and two Borough owned sites just outside the Borough:

1. 12 acres owned by Capital Health along W. Franklin Avenue. This is by far the largest wooded area in the Borough. A residential development is planned for the site. Some open space near the intersection of W. Franklin Avenue and Knowles Avenue is planned.

2. 2.8 acres at the rear of the Toll Gate School site on E. Curlis Avenue. The area includes a small stream and a trail from Curlis Avenue to Welling Avenue used mostly by school children. A portion of the trail is on a Borough right-of-way extending from Baldwin Street.

3. 3.2 acres on the east side of Green Street owned by The Pennington School. This site borders the south side of Lewis Brook.

4. Approximately three quarter acre at the end of Reading Street owned by the Borough. This area is along the north side of the Senior Citizen Center site and just beyond the detention basin.

5. Just north of the Borough in Hopewell Township, there is an approximately 14 acre wooded area to the rear of the Borough's Public Works garage. Crossing the site from Route 31 to the railroad tracks is Baldwin Brook which feeds Baldwin Lake. The stream is designated as having a high natural resource value by NJ DEP (C-1) which requires a 300 foot wide buffer on either side.

6. Also in Hopewell Township, the Borough also owns a 4 acre former dam site on the Stony Brook just west of Old Mill Road. The WPA built dam from the 1930's has been mostly destroyed by flood waters through the years going back to the 1973 flood. The breach in the approximately 5 ft. high deteriorated stone dam is over 100 feet wide.

Landfill Site:

The Borough's approximately 3 acre abandoned, grass covered landfill along W. Delaware Avenue could be considered open space. Although it is not clear whether it offers any recreational potential, a citizen's committee appointed by the mayor in 2013 recommended that the landfill be considered for recreational use.

Howe Commons:

The privately owned courtyard area in the center of the Howe Commons office complex on S. Main Street is a highly valued oasis of open space in the Borough. In addition to its esthetic quality, this open space is used for special public events. Under a license agreement signed by the owner and the Borough in January, 2005, the courtyard area can be used without

charge for "community events" such as "Pennington Day, Christmas caroling and summer band concerts" for at least 25 years.

Trails and Bike Routes:

The Borough is fortunate to having direct pedestrian access to hiking trails from its borders to two large open space preserves: the County's Curlis Lake Woods and land north of the Borough extending to Baldwin Lake via the Pennington Loop Trail. This land includes property owned and maintained by the NJ Division of Fish and Wildlife and D&R Greenway Land Trust.

The Borough also enjoys direct access to the multi-purpose Lawrence-Hopewell Trail (LHT) via the Pennington Connection, completed in 2014. The LHT is a 22-mile loop trail suitable for biking which extends through sections of Hopewell Township and Lawrence Township. Of particular benefit to Pennington is the trail's connection to the County's Rosedale Park and other sections of Mercer Meadows. See Appendix A for a map showing entrance points to the LHT and hiking trails.

Just south of the Borough, Lawrenceville-Pennington Road has been widened by Mercer County to provide bike lanes. This improves safety for bicyclists riding from Pennington to the Twin Pines recreational fields and residential areas along County Route 546 road, including Brandon Farms. Bicyclists can extend their ride from the Twin Pines recreational fields to Mercer Meadows on the east side of Federal City Road and further east to Village Park and the Johnson Trolley Line in Lawrenceville.

Mercer County also has plans to designate CR 546 from Washington Crossing State Park to Lawrenceville as a bikeway. The route includes Washington Crossing-Pennington Road to the west of Pennington and Lawrenceville-Pennington Road to the east of Pennington with Pennington being at the mid-point of the 8 mile bikeway (see map in Appendix B). The plan calls for the bike route to detour around the Pennington Circle via Ingleside Avenue and South Main Street with a pedestrian activated light at the Route 31-Ingleside Avenue intersection. At its western end, this bike route would provide access to roads within Washington Crossing State Park and to the Delaware &Raritan Canal State Park towpath, a 30 mile long bikeway extending from Trenton to Frenchtown. At the eastern end, the route would connect to the Johnson Trolley Line and the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail in Lawrence Township.

As part of the downtown improvement project, in 2014 the Borough installed three posts for bicycle storage on the west side of S. Main Street near W. Delaware Avenue.

RECREATIONAL NEEDS ANALYSIS

The Borough's existing open space within its boundaries clearly cannot on its own provide for expansion of open space recreation. The only feasible strategy is for the Borough to work with other agencies and non-profit groups to expand permanently protected and preserved open space outside the Borough for recreational use.

RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

A broad band of undeveloped land, some already preserved and much of it not preserved, extends around Pennington Borough and offers substantial opportunities for progress towards the OSRP goals. Specific parcels of land will be identified as potential preservation opportunities through communications with landowners who have an interest. Analysis of tax maps suggests possible preservation opportunities that would expand preserved open space in various directions: To the east, there is substantial amount of vacant land opposite Mercer Meadows along Federal City Road; to the southeast, there are large parcels along Lawrenceville-Pennington Road; to the northeast, there is substantial farmland on the Bristol-Myers Squibb site along Pennington-Rocky hill Road in the corridor leading towards Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association lands; to the north, there is a 12 acre parcel on Route 31 adjacent to Borough owned land; and to the west, open space corridors are being created by Hopewell Township and other entities toward the Delaware River along Pennington-Titusville Road and Washington Crossing-Pennington Road. Expansion of open space preservation in each of these areas would advance the OSRP goals.

Criteria for preserving land outside the Borough should be based on several factors including (in no order of priority):

1. Proximity to the Borough
2. Whether adjacent to preserved land
3. Natural resource value, including woodlands and stream corridors
4. Potential for passive recreational use
5. Viewshed from adjacent roads
6. Potential for linkages to other preserved land
7. Risk of potential development
8. Price per acre

The Borough's one cent Open Space Tax is an important source of revenue for open space acquisition and for enhancing recreational facilities within the Borough. A relatively small amount of funding has been spent, however. For open space acquisition, the Borough has instead taken advantage of NJ Green Acres grants and Mercer County Municipal Assistance grants without having to provide required matching funds. This practice has allowed the Borough to build up its open space fund. The Borough should consider this fund as a strategic asset that can be used to leverage State and County funds and funds available from non-profit partners.

ACTION PLAN

Open Space Acquisition

The Borough's strategy will be to work in concert with Hopewell Valley partners already actively identifying land preservation opportunities and with interested landowners to negotiate terms and financial arrangements that can satisfy the public's interest in land preservation and landowners' legitimate interest in realizing a fair return for their land. The Borough will work closely with Hopewell Township, the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open space, D&R Greenway

Land Trust, Mercer County, the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and the State of New Jersey. The Borough will be open to participating in transactions that might entail purchase of land in fee simple from owners, as well as transactions in which land is preserved through the conveyance of conservation easements. It expects that land preservation transactions will typically involve a combination of resources contributed by the Borough and these partners.

Rather than identify specific parcels that would be targets of preservation, the Borough prefers to follow up on opportunities that are consistent with the overall goals of the OSRP. Identifying specific parcels would be unrealistic, since the voluntary interest of landowners in the area must first be engaged. Moreover, identifying specific parcels in the absence of landowner's expressions of interest could be perceived as coercive or alternatively might weaken the bargaining position of the partners who are negotiating preservation deals.

The plan of action for open space acquisition will be guided by the accompanying Open Space Map showing the proposed Greenbelt and nearby greenway corridor roads. This map provides a broad guideline for determining whether land preservation opportunities will contribute to the overall OSRP goals. The Borough also will take into account the Hopewell Township Open Space Plan, much of which relates to lands in the vicinity of the Borough.

The proposed Greenbelt as shown on the Open Space Map which follows is important to preserving the identity of Pennington as a separate and distinct small town. The Greenbelt is similar to that shown in Hopewell Township's Open Space Plan. The Greenbelt includes a substantial amount of undeveloped land especially to the west and east of the Borough. The eastern boundary extends to Mercer Meadows along Federal City Road and the western boundary extends to the relatively undeveloped Scotch Road. The northern boundary extends to Yard Road and the southern boundary extends to the Pennington Circle and Blackwell Road.

The other major element in preserving open space as shown on the Open Space Map consists of nearby "greenway corridor roads" which emanate from the Borough or the nearby Pennington Circle. As entrance roads to the Borough and as links to major state, county and municipal parks, it is especially important to preserve the scenic quality of these roads. Each of these roads retains a substantial amount of open space, much of which is already preserved.

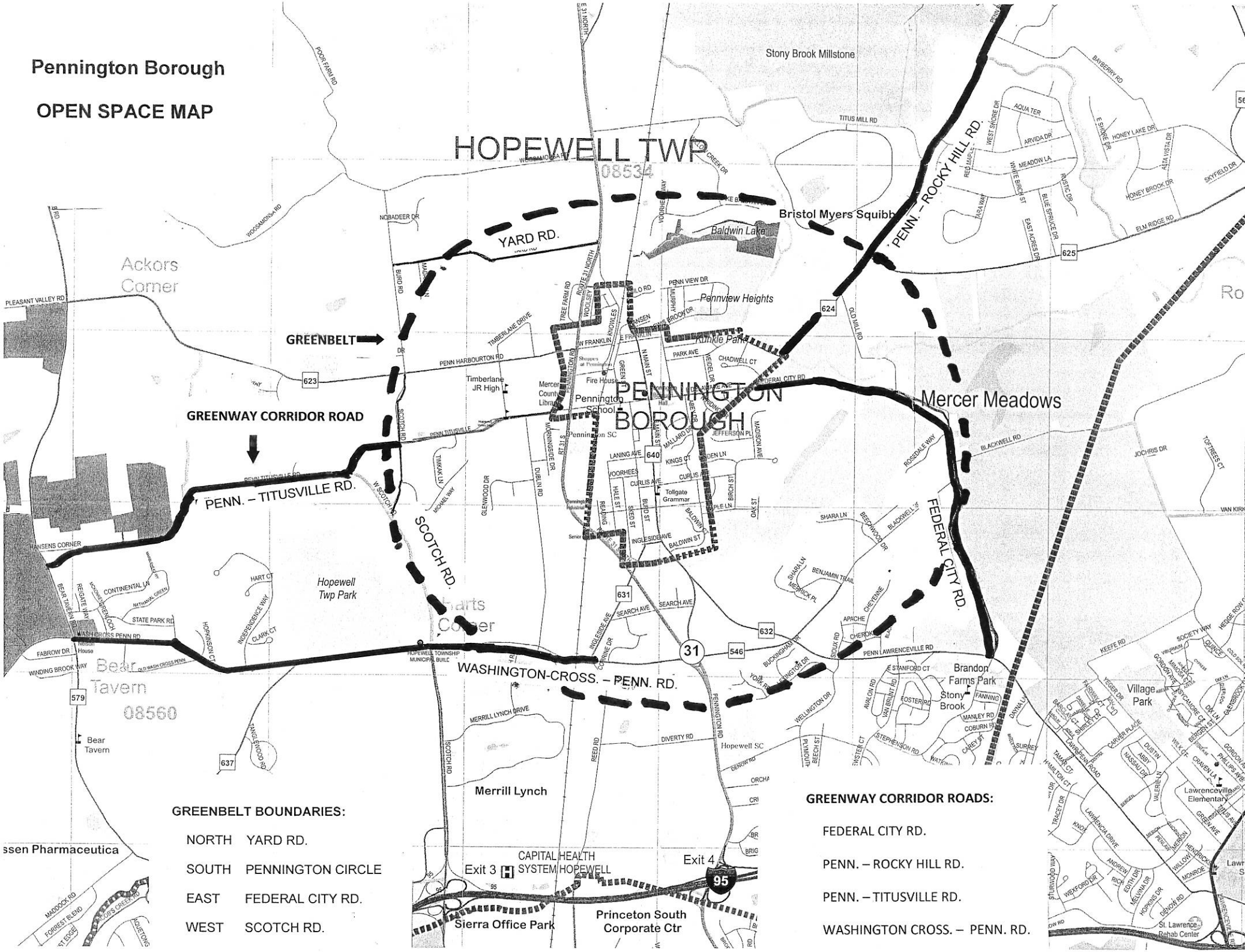
The proposed "greenway corridor roads" are as follows: 1) To the west of Pennington, Washington Crossing-Pennington Road and Pennington-Titusville Road, both of which extend to Hopewell Township's Alliger Park and Washington Crossing State Park; 2) To the east, Federal City Road, which leads to Rosedale Park and the County's Mercer Meadows; 3) To the northwest, Pennington-Rocky Hill Road, which includes the Bristol-Myers Squibb site with its 200 acres of farmland. Priority for preservation should be given to sites on these roads within two miles of the Borough.

Preservation of Open Space at Bristol-Myers Squibb Site

Hopewell Township's zoning for the 442 acre Bristol-Myers Squibb (BMS) site along Pennington-Rocky Hill Road permits intensive office space development which can increase from the existing one million square feet to 2.8 million square feet, or almost triple that amount.

Pennington Borough

OPEN SPACE MAP



GREENBELT BOUNDARIES:

NORTH	YARD RD.
SOUTH	PENNINGTON CIRCLE
EAST	FEDERAL CITY RD.
WEST	SCOTCH RD.

GREENWAY CORRIDOR ROADS:

- FEDERAL CITY RD.
- PENN. – ROCKY HILL RD.
- PENN. – TITUSVILLE RD.
- WASHINGTON CROSS. – PENN. RD.

Although the current 20 year term General Development Plan (GDP), as proposed by BMS in 2005, allows for the preservation of 200 acres of farmland on the southern part of the site, the underlining zoning does not contain any such restriction which leaves open the possibility that BMS or a subsequent owner could terminate the GDP or allow it to expire.

To provide greater long term protection of the 200 acres of farmland, the Borough should encourage the Township to re-zone the existing farmland for agricultural use or acquire the development rights consistent with the Township's Open Space Plan. Preserving the southern section of the site as open space complements the preserved open space on the east side of Pennington-Rocky Hill Road and is critical to retaining a significant part of the Borough's Greenbelt.

Preservation of Wooded Areas in Pennington and Owned by the Borough

The Borough should work with the Hopewell Valley Regional School District and The Pennington School to place a conservation easement on wooded areas along E. Curlis Avenue and Green Street for permanent preservation. Preserving these areas in their natural state provides an oasis of nature within the Borough.
Borough Sites:

The entire wooded area to the rear of the Borough's Public Works garage should be preserved and retained by the Borough. Since the area is isolated from residential areas in the Borough, no trails are proposed. The area along N. Main Street in front of the Public Works garage should be left in a natural state.

No action is needed to preserve the Borough's dam site as open space due to wetland and stream corridor restrictions imposed by NJ DEP. Future recreational use of the site is doubtful given extensive wetlands on the site, limited access from Old Mill Road, and the unlikely reconstruction of the dam given DEP permitting issues and cost. Subdivision and sale of the site to adjacent homeowners on either side of the Stony Brook should be considered.

Recreational Enhancements

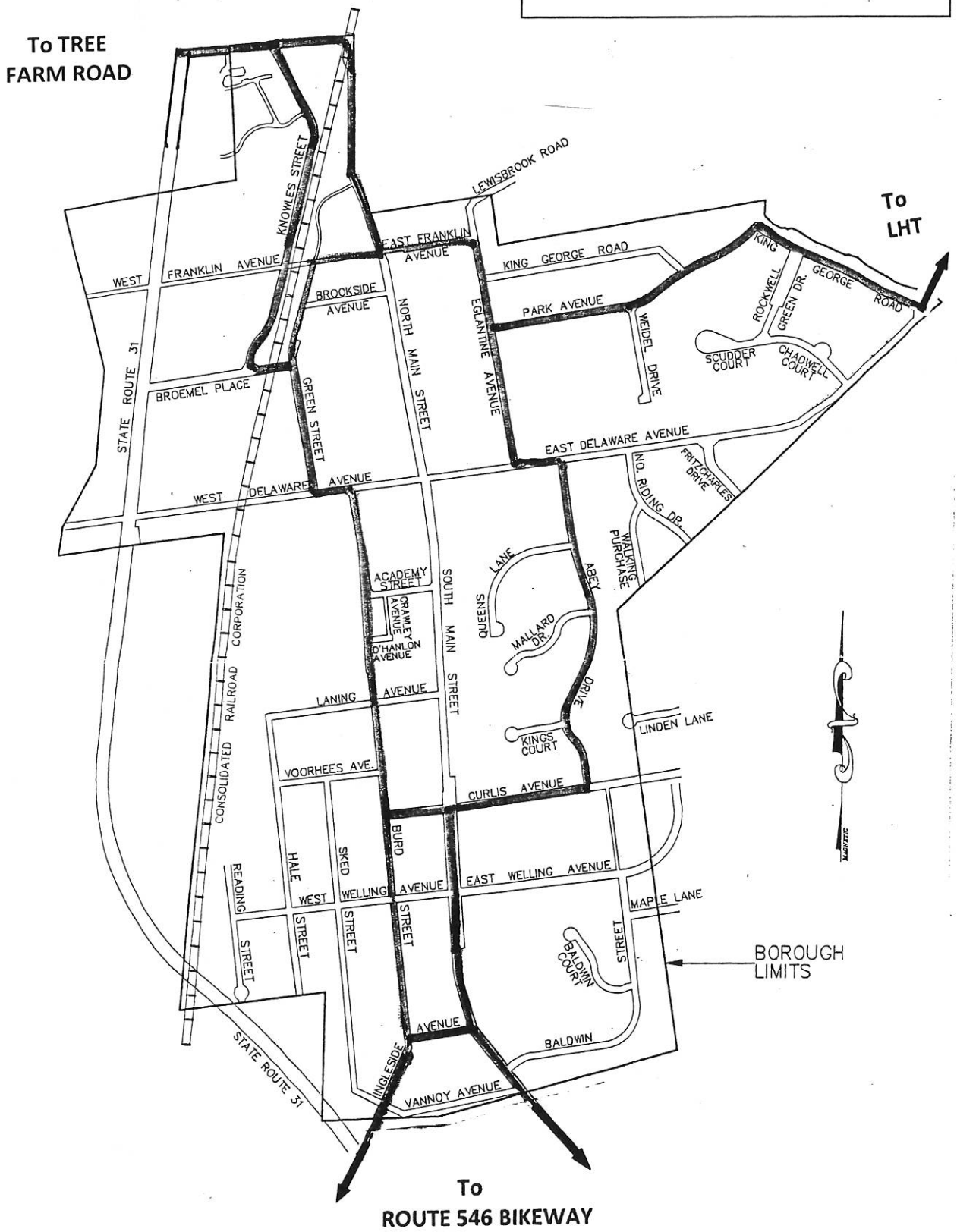
Biking:

The safety of bicyclists within the Borough should be enhanced by the installation of bike route signs on certain streets which are best suited for bicycles and which provide connections to bike routes outside the Borough – see Proposed Bike Route map on the following page.

Signage in particular should be considered for streets most suitable for bike riding through the Borough on an east-west and north-south axis. The east to west route shown takes advantage of bike lanes on lower King George Road which lead to the Pennington Connection to the Lawrence-Hopewell Trail. As part of the resurfacing of Park Avenue, bike lanes should be continued up to Eglantine Street consistent with the attached Bicycle Route map.

PROPOSED BICYCLE ROUTES in and through Pennington

(East-West and North-South)



At the southern end of the Borough, proposed bike routes extend to Ingleside Avenue and S. Main Street which provide access to County Route 546 and the proposed Route 546 Bikeway as shown in Appendix B. The Borough should urge Mercer County to enhance the safety of this route for bicyclists consistent with its consultant's report for the bikeway.

A bike rack should be placed in Kunkel Park and property owners in the Route 31 commercial corridor should be encouraged to provide bike racks on their sites.

Many students attending the Toll Gate school ride bicycles to school on the 4 ft. wide sidewalk along the south side of E. Curlis Avenue leading to bicycle racks near the playground. The sidewalk is, of course, also used by students walking to and from school and by students who are dropped off and picked up by their parents who park along E. Curlis Avenue. Since the sidewalk is adjacent to the curb, open car doors extend over the sidewalk. The 4 foot width, unusually narrow for a Borough sidewalk, is inadequate for both bicycle and pedestrian use and hazardous due to its proximity to parked cars. To address this hazard and make bicycling to the school safer, a separate bike path as part of the Borough's "complete streets" policy should be constructed running approximately 300 feet east from the school driveway. Alternatively, the sidewalk could be widened.

Pedestrian Trails:

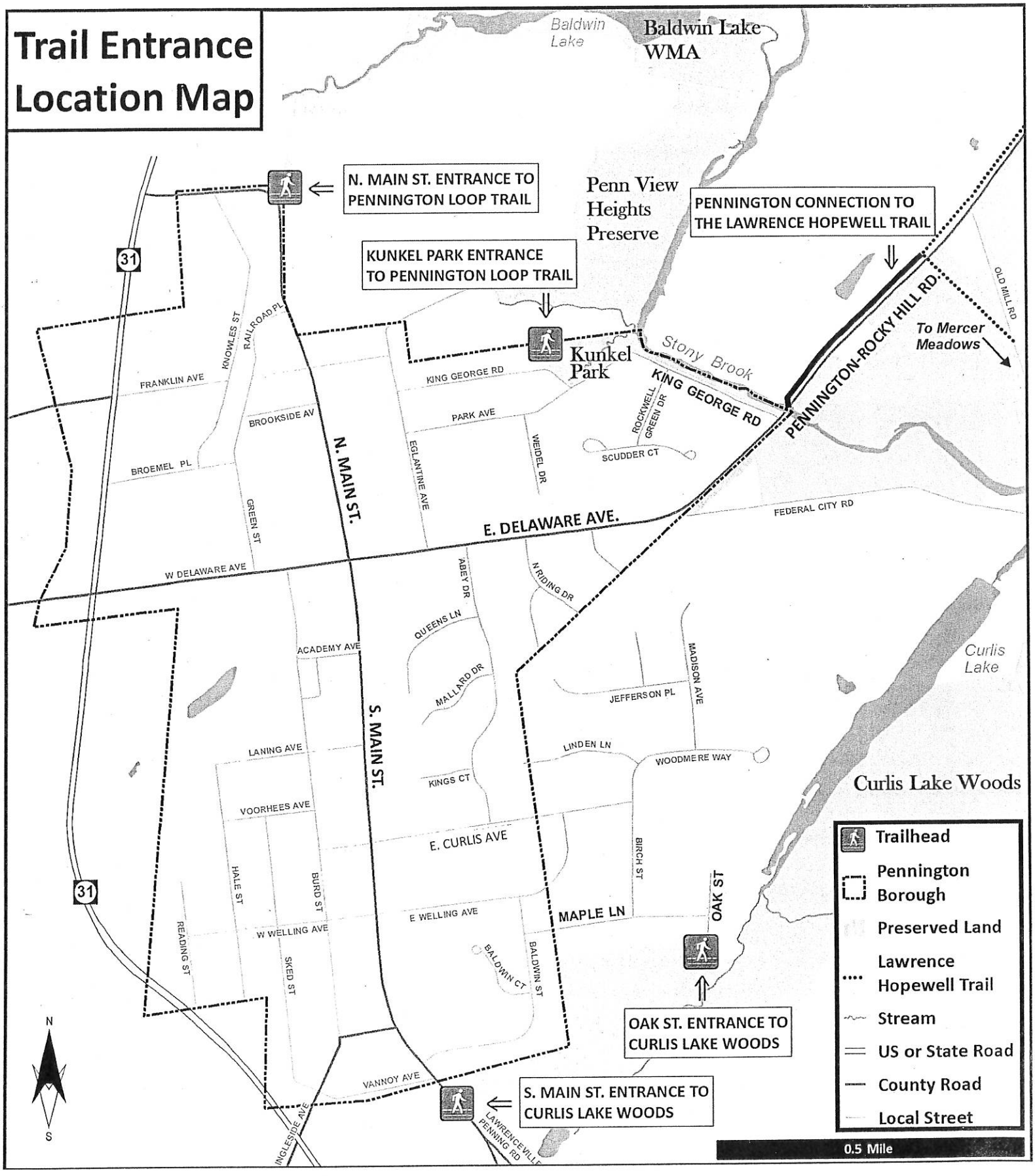
The Pennington Loop Trail should be extended north of Baldwin Lake along the west side of the Stony Brook to Titus Mill Road and then to the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association land on the east side of the Stony Brook. Trail easements and land acquisition by Mercer County have made this possible.

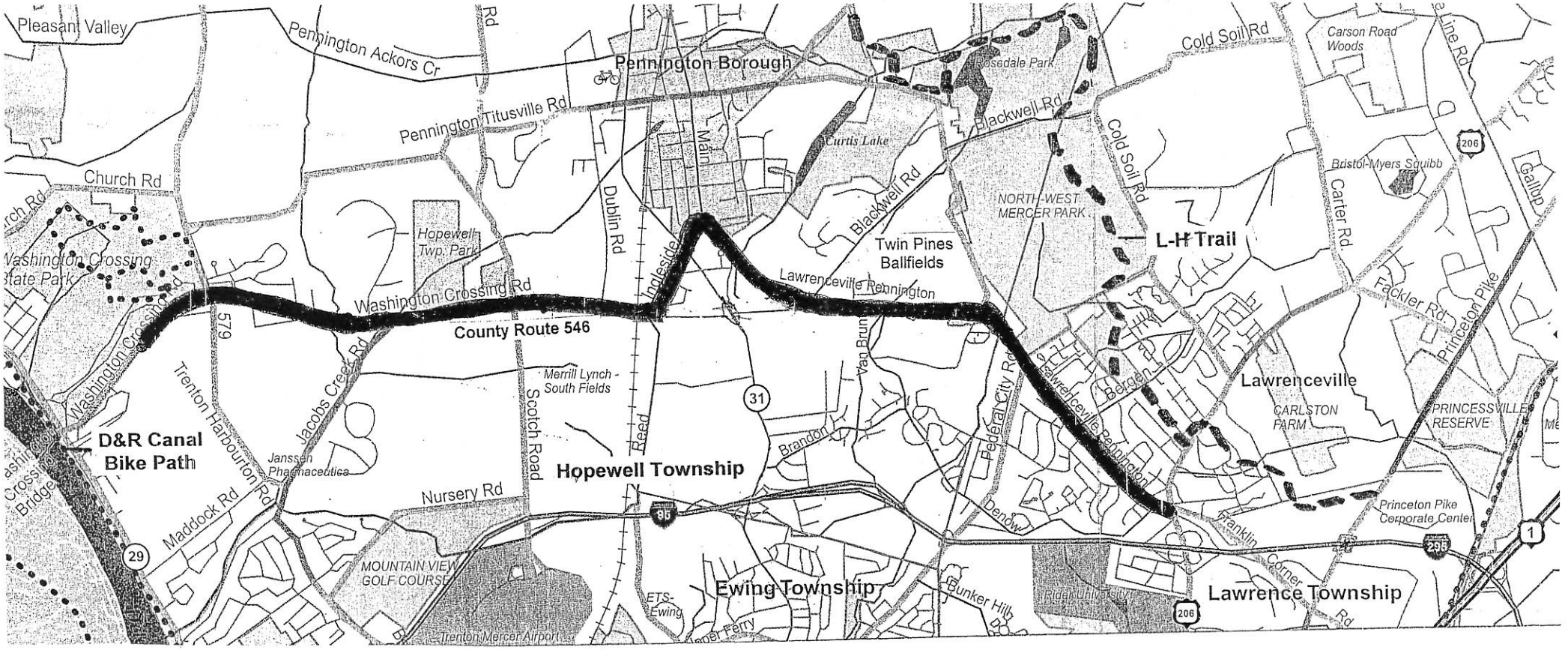
The Borough-owned stream bank overlooking the Stony Brook along lower King George Road is perhaps the most scenic spot within Pennington. Consideration should be given to creating a short walking trail from Rockwell Green Drive down to the Stony Brook bridge. A crosswalk on King George Road from the sidewalk at the Rockwell Green Drive intersection should be marked to provide safe access to the parkland along the Stony Brook.

If land and/or easements are acquired to preserve open space along the south side of the Lewis Brook between S. Main Street and Green Street, a trail along the brook in this mostly wooded area should be considered.

The Borough should urge the School District to maintain and improve the pedestrian trail from E. Curlis Avenue to Baldwin Street through the woods at the rear of the Toll Gate School.

To provide pedestrian access from the Borough to the Pennington Loop Trail entrance on N. Main Street, the Borough should urge Hopewell Township or Mercer County to construct a pathway along the east side of N. Main Street from Silo Road to the trail entrance going behind the existing guiderail.


Trail Entrance Location Map
Baldwin Lake
Baldwin Lake WMA
N. MAIN ST. ENTRANCE TO PENNINGTON LOOP TRAIL
Penn View Heights Preserve
PENNINGTON CONNECTION TO THE LAWRENCE HOPEWELL TRAIL
KUNKEL PARK ENTRANCE TO PENNINGTON LOOP TRAIL
Kunkel Park
Stony Brook
PENNINGTON-ROCKY HILL RD.
To Mercer Meadows
OLD MILL RD
KING GEORGE RD
FRANKLIN AVE
KNOWLES ST
RAILROAD PL
BROOKSIDE AV
BROEMEL PL
GREEN ST
PARK AVE
EGLANTINE AVE
WEIDEL DR
ROCKWELL GREEN DR
SCUDDER CT
N. MAIN ST.
E. DELAWARE AVE.
FEDERAL CITY RD
W DELAWARE AVE
ABEY DR
N RIDING DR
QUEENS LN
ACADEMY AVE
MALLARD DR
JEFFERSON PL
MADISON AVE
Curlis Lake
LANING AVE
S. MAIN ST.
LINDEN LN
WOODMERE WAY
KINGS CT
Curlis Lake Woods
VOORHEES AVE
E. CURLIS AVE
HALE ST
BURD ST
BIRCH ST
OAK ST
READING ST
E WELLING AVE
W WELLING AVE
MAPLE LN
SKED ST
BALDWIN CT
BALDWIN ST
OAK ST. ENTRANCE TO CURLIS LAKE WOODS
VANNOY AVE
S. MAIN ST. ENTRANCE TO CURLIS LAKE WOODS
INGLESIDE AVE
LAWRENCEVILLE PENNING RD
31
N
S
Trailhead
Pennington Borough
Preserved Land
Lawrence Hopewell Trail
Stream
US or State Road
County Road
Local Street
0.5 Mile



Proposed

ROUTE 546 BIKEWAY

Along Washington Crossing-Pennington Road and Lawrenceville-Pennington Road
with a connection to Pennington Boro via Ingleside Ave. (Rt. 631) and S. Main St. (Rt. 640)

Featuring connections to Washington Crossing State Park, Rosedale Park and Mercer Meadows, Alliger Park, "Twin Pines" soccer fields, Lawrenceville's Village Park and Johnson Trolley Line, and linking the 20 mile Lawrence-Hopewell Trail to the 30 mile D&R Canal Tow Path.

APPENDIX B