

**RARITAN TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE PLAN**

**I. Existing Raritan Township Parkland/Open Space**

There are currently 2,436 acres of parkland/open space in Raritan Township including lands owned by the State, Hunterdon County, Raritan Township and Non-Profit Land Trusts. These lands are available for public enjoyment. There are also 1,360 acres of privately owned preserved farmland in Raritan Township. The township encompasses approximately 38.6 square miles; therefore parkland/open space encompasses approximately 9.9 of the Township and preserved farmland encompasses an additional 5.5%. Existing public (Township, County and State owned) and non-profit owned open space and a summary of site amenities for major Township Parklands are shown on the **Raritan Township Open Space Map**. The official **Raritan Township Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI) map** depicts all Township owned parkland.

**Table 1**

**Public and Non-Profit Owned Parkland/Open Space as of 1/7/18**

<u>Ownership</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Sq. Mi.</u>	<u>%</u>
Raritan Township Owned	1,130 acres	1.766 sq. mi.	4.6
Hunterdon County Owned	767 acres	1.198 sq. mi.	3.1
NJ State Owned	352 acres	0.55 sq. mi.	1.4
<u>Non-Profit Land Trust</u>	<u>187 acres</u>	<u>0.292 sq. mil</u>	<u>0.8</u>
Total Public and Non-Profit Parkland/Open Space	2,436 acres	3.8375 sq. mi.	9.9%
<b>Preserved Farmland</b> as of 8/20/17	1,360 acres	2.125 sq. mi	5.5%

Municipally owned parkland includes lands with active recreation fields, playgrounds, pavilions and walking paths, conservation lands that include maintained walking trails, and conservation lands with primitive trails or no maintained trails. The major municipally owned parklands are described below. Parklands that offer active recreation presented in Section A – Municipal Parkland - Active Recreation, and parklands that offer passive recreation and open space benefits presented in Section B - Passive Recreation and Open Space. Several of the undeveloped parklands are currently designated deer management areas. Table 2 summarizes the major municipal parklands and their amenities.

Table 2 Existing Raritan Township Parkland and Amenities

EXISTING RARITAN TOWNSHIP PARKLAND				AMENITIES			
Map #	NAME	LOCATION ACCESS	ACRES	TRAILS	PICNIC AREA	REC FIELDS/ PLAY AREA	PARKING
1	Raritan Estates	William Barnes Rd & DeMott Rd	32.3	YES			
2	Lone Cedar Park	Old Clinton Rd/Packers Island Ln	62.7	YES			YES
3	Cherryville Hollow Rd Preserve*	Cherryville Hollow Rd	17.8				
4	Urbach Farm*	CR 617 / Klinsville Rd	108.2	YES			YES
5	Walnut Brook Preserve (Barton)*	Barton Hollow Road	45.1				
6	Walnut Brook Preserve (Levico)*	Thatchers Hill Rd	45.7				
7	Thatcher Hill Preserve	Edwards Drive	12.5				
8	Bushkill Brook Tributary Preserve*	List Road & Lowry Lane	21.0				
9	Hardscrabble Road Preserve	Hardscrabble Road	66.2				
10	Morales Park	Capner Street	52.1	YES			YES
11	Mine Brook Park	Croton Rd & Capner St	15.8	YES	YES	YES	YES
12	Dvoor Circle Properties	Dvoor Circle	7.0				
13	Plum Brook Preserve*	Plum Brook Road	75.7				
14	Neshanic Preserve Lands*	Harmony School Rd	161.3				
15	Thomason Preserve*	County Road 523	25.0				
16	Lenape Park	County Road 523	80.1	YES		YES	YES
18	Micek Farm Park	Johanna Farms Rd	94.3	YES			YES
19	Clover Hill Park	Clover Hill Road	18.6	YES		YES	YES
20	Everitt Road Preserve	Everitt Road	14.6				
21	Blackwell Park	Everitt Rd & Lavada Ln	27.6	YES	YES	YES	YES
22	Erich/Salamon Preserve*	Haas Road	98.4				

\* Deer Management Area

**A. Municipal - Active Recreation**

**11. Mine Brook Park (Block 49, Lot 2.01):** This park of 15.8 acres contains a softball field, soccer field, walking/jogging track, picnic pavilion and children's playground. The park is located at the intersection of Croton Road and Capner Street. The Walnut Brook flows through the park and exploring in the brook is enjoyed by visitors in summer months. There is a trail to access the park that extends from Shields Avenue along the border of the Hunterdon Land Trust Dvoor Farm. Dvoor Farm lands also border the park to the south.

**16. Lenape Park (Block 63, Lot 1):** This facility of 80.1 acres is located on County Road 523 and provides 6 soccer fields, 4 little league fields, 3 girls softball fields, 2 major league baseball fields, 4 basketball courts and a children's play area. The southern portion of the park is forested. **Block 63 Lot 78.** 11.3 acres. (Pizzo) Forested floodplain and wetlands donated to the Township. Land abuts Lenape Park. Block 63, Lot 33.07. 5.03 acres - Located on Autumn Leaf Blvd this property contains forested lands donated to Township as part of Hunterdon Estates development. Provides a connection from Autumn Leaf Blvd (opposite Frost Court) to Lenape Park.

**19. Clover Hill Park (Block 75 Lot 7.01):** 18.6 acres. This park located on Clover Hill Road east of Voorhees County Route 613/Old York Road includes a public access playground and two soccer fields maintained by the Greater Flemington Soccer Club. Clover Hill Park abuts the former Merck property now owned by Hunterdon County and the NJDEP South Branch Wildlife Management Area which are managed as habitat for grassland birds.

**21. Blackwell Park (Block 87, Lot 11):** 27.6 acres. This park, located on Everitt Road and Lavada Lane, is a small neighborhood park with a field, pavilion, playground, basketball courts and a walking trail. A variety of native trees have been planted throughout the park through a grant from NJDEP.

#### **B. Municipal - Passive Recreation and Open Space**

**1. Raritan Estates parklands (Block 5, Lot 17.13 and Block 5.01 Lot 5.09):** The 32.3 acre property offers walking trails and extends from Old Clinton Road to Cherryville Stanton Road with additional access from DeMott Road. Lot 5.09 is located along northeast of William Barnes Road.

**2. Lone Cedar Park (Block 4, Lot 11):** 62.74 acres. Predominantly open grasslands with a portion of the property heavily wooded and contains a stream corridor. The existing house on the property was subdivided off and sold to a private party. A walking trail and sitting area have been added to the property. Access is from a parking area on Old Clinton Road and from Packers Island Lane. Trail connects to Hunterdon County park trails along the South Branch of the Raritan River.

**3. Cherryville Hollow Road Preserve (Block 6.13, Lot 51):** 17.8 acres. This predominantly forested land is located between Copper Penny Road and Cherryville Hollow Road. Contains relatively steep slopes. This land is directly across Cherryville Hollow Road from the Township's Urbach Farm Park.

**4. Urbach Farm (Block 7 Lot 13):** 108.23 acres of fields and forest habitat between Klinessville Road (continuation of Sand Hill Road) and Cherryville Hollow Road. A trail head and parking area is located on County Route 617 Klinessville Road, west of Quail Ridge Drive. Two other parking areas are located further west on the property. Trails follow the border between the fields and forests. Assiscong Creek is located along the northern property boundary near Cherryville Hollow Road. There are scenic views from the portion of the property along Klinessville Road.

**5. Walnut Brook Preserve (Barton Hollow) (Block 13, Lot 7):** 45.122 Acres. Barton Hollow Road between Oak Grove Road and Klinesville Road. Forest habitat bisected tributaries of the Walnut Brook. Access is from Barton Hollow Road.

**5A. Walnut Brook Preserve (Oak Grove) - Block 14, Lot 1.32.** 3.08 acres. Located on the corner of Barton Road and Oak Grove. Walnut Brook forms the western border. The Native trees were planted through a NJDEP Grant.

**6. Walnut Brook Preserve - Block 25, Lot 1.** (Levico) 45.7 acres. Located between Thatchers Hill and Barton Hollow Roads. Access off of Thatchers Hill Road. Predominantly forest habitat. Contains Walnut Brook adjacent to Barton Hollow Road and a primitive trail accessed from Thatchers Hill Road. Borders homes on Turtle Court.

**7. Thatchers Hill Preserve- Block 15, Lot 19.16** (Britton) 12.47 acres. Supports mature oak forest and old field. Located near the top of Thatchers Hill. Scenic views. Access from cul de sac on Edwards Drive via easement. Borders Britton Drive.

**8. Bushkill Brook Tributary Preserve.** List Road & Lowry Lane (**Block 15, Lots 59, 64, 92 and 93**): 21.04 Acres. Wooded with extensive wetlands. Access is from Lowry Lane.

**9. Hardscrabble Road Preserve (Block 44, Lots 5.01 and 6):** 66.18 Acres. This forested land is located south of Hard Scrabble Road between Hinkly Road and Croton Road.

**10. Morales Park (Block 25, Lot 25):** 52.09 acres. Located between Capner Street and Old Croton Road. Walnut Brook traverses the property. Well maintained trails traverse this forested land with trail head in parking lot on Capner Street. Trails connect to the adjacent Hunterdon County Uplands Park. Mine Brook Park is located across Capner Street from Morales Park.

**12. Dvoor Circle Properties (Block 52, Lot 1 -4 acres and Block 53 Lot 1.58 - 3 acres):** 7 Acres total. Two properties fronting on the Dvoor Circle. Lot 1 is located between Mine Street and Route 12 and borders the Walnut Brook. Block 1.58 is located east of Sergeantsville-Flemington Road (CR 523) and borders Route 12.

**13. Plum Brook Preserve – Block 43 Lots 3&4 –** 75.7 acres. 55 and 77 Plum Brook Road. Mature forested property located south of Plum Brook Road with additional access from cul de sac at end of Michele Crossing and the cul-de-sac at the end of Alexander Drive. The picturesque Plum Brook traverses the property. Primitive trail is located along the brook.

**14. Neshanic River Preserve -** Harmony School Road Lands - Total 161.271 acres. Driveway access from Harmony School Road. **Block 43 Lot 20** (53.821 acres) **Block 43 Lot 24** (63.1 acres) and **Block 43 Lot 46** (4.76 acres) are located north of Harmony School Road. **Block 59 Lots 5** (12 acres) and **Block 8.01** (27.59 acres) are located south of Harmony School Road. These lands are located on both sides of Harmony School Road and support primarily forest habitat and evergreen plantations. Lands south of Harmony School Road straddle the Second Neshanic River.

**15. Thomason Preserve. Block 63, Lot 41.** 25 Acres. Supports field and forest habitat. Access is from CR 523. Borders forested lands in Lenape Park. Contains existing vacant house and barns. Block 63, Lot 40. Mueller. 4.42 Acres. Located adjacent to Thomason property. Contains vacant existing house.

**18. Micek Farm Park. Block 63, Lot 36.** 94.29 Acres. Mowed walking trails accessible from the parking lot on Johanna Farms Road. Open Fields with forested stream corridors - tributaries of the Second Neshanic River. Access from Johanna Farms Road just south of the sharp bend in the road and from cul de sacs on Robin Hill Way, Wisteria Court and Buckeye Lane. A disc golf course is being installed.

**20. Everitts Road – Block 7.01 Lot 13.708** –14.6 acres. Existing farm field located south of Everitts Road and west of Blackwell Park. Access is from Everitts Road. PSEG right of way traverses the property.

**22. Erich/Salamon Back Brook Preserve - Block 85, Lot 15.01.** 98.43 acres. Wooded and bisected by a tributary of the Back Brook. Contains easements, a stream and some wetlands. The property can be accessed from Haas Drive off of County Route 514 (Old York Road). Parking available off end of Haas Drive cul-de-sac, in area mowed by Township.

**Jointly owned with Hunterdon County:**

**Green Valley. Block 74, Lot 2.** 82.507 acres. Acquired through joint purchase with County this property contains fields and forests. The property has access from Old York Road and Dory Dilts Road.

## II. Raritan Township Open Space Plan

### A. Identifying New Properties for Public Open Space and Farmland Preservation

The primary objective of the Raritan Township Open Space Advisory Committee is to identify and assist in the acquisition of properties in the township to be preserved as open space. To satisfy this mandate the Open Space Advisory Committee has developed this Open Space Plan for Raritan Township. A

In accordance with the Township Master Plan the following goals are used to develop the open space plan, in order of importance:

1. Limit Residential Growth/Farmland Preservation
2. Protect environmental resources and vistas - Greenways
3. Provide linkages to existing open space
4. Provide area for future active and passive recreation.

1. Limit Residential Growth – this was established to reduce municipal costs associated with increased services associated with residential development and control tax increases. This goal can be accomplished through acquisition of large tracts of residentially zoned land and is most efficiently accomplished through the preservation of farmland. Criteria applied to assist in ranking these properties include:

- a. Existing funding partner – The preservation of the farm already has County Agricultural Development Board (CADB) or State Agricultural Development Committee (SADC\_ preliminary approval
- b. High density residential zoning – preservation of the property would result in more effective limiting of residential growth
- c. Large Farm - Preservation of the property would result in more effective limiting of residential growth and also contributes to the continuing viability of farming in the township and preserves scenic rural vistas
- d. Contiguous to existing farms - Contributes to the continuing viability of farming in the township and preserves scenic rural vistas

2. Protect Environmental resources – Environmental Resources targeted for protection through open space preservation in accordance with the Master Plan Conservation Element include protection of water resources, and protection of aquifer recharge and wellhead protection areas. Environmental resources identified as important for water resources protection include the following and are presented in order of significance to be used in ranking properties for acquisition:

- a. Stream corridors - Category 1 streams including the Wickechoke Creek and Plum Brook are highlighted as especially important for watershed protection. Protection of Category 2 waters is also important. Category 2 streams include the South Branch Raritan River and its tributaries: Neshanic River, Walnut Brook, Assiscong Creek and Bushkill Brook
- b. Forests
- c. Habitat for rare, threatened and endangered plant or animal species

- d. Wetlands
  - e. Floodplains
  - f. Steep slopes
3. Linkages to Existing Open Space – Adjacency to existing open space increases the value to the public and creates opportunities for trail connections. Examples of park linkage opportunities in the Township include:
    - Lenape Park linkage
    - JP Case Middle School Linkage
  4. Future Active and Passive Recreation – Active recreation may include trails, picnic areas, playgrounds, and athletic fields. In addition, river access is a Future Active Recreation Site Goal in the 2008 Master Plan which states (page 27) “the township along with the County should continue to pursue acquisitions along the South Branch of the Raritan River with the ultimate goal to provide additional access to the river for recreational purposes.
  5. Historic Resources – The master plan also encourages protection of historic resources. Several Historic Districts are identified in the Master Plan including the South Branch Historic District that includes lands along the South Branch of the Raritan River and lands along River Road.

Based on these goals the Raritan Township Open Space Advisory Committee has identified potential properties for acquisition and farmland preservation. Properties that are being advanced by funding partners with willing sellers should be given high priority as this will increase the probability of harnessing the necessary funding resources to achieve land acquisition.

The Farmland Preservation Plan currently being finalized by the Township identifies a list of Farms target areas for preservation in accordance with the Master Plan Farmland Preservation Element. Preservation of farmland can also satisfy the open space plan goals as described above. Farmland is therefore included in the list of priority lands for preservation.

The Master Plan notes that “the open space program is a fluid program which must adapt to the availability of land. The open space program is largely dependent upon the landowners being willing to sell. Further the Master Plan notes that “it is always possible that an un-identified parcel will come up that was not previously discussed. In those cases, the matter will be forwarded to the Open Space Committee for their recommendation.”

## **B. Funding Sources**

- Raritan Township Open Space Tax - The Open Space Tax is an integral part of the Township’s Open Space fund and can be a significant source for funding property acquisitions. In November 1996 Raritan Township residents approved a non-binding referendum to establish an open space fund using taxes on property owners. The passing of the referendum was a directive to the Township

to establish a \$0.02 cent tax for the purposes of funding open space and farmland preservation within Raritan Township. This tax is sometimes expressed as 2 cents per \$100 of assessed value. The open space tax provides significant benefits for Raritan Township residents at very low cost. For a typical home owner for a home assessed at \$350,000 the tax authorized to be collected is \$70 per year  $[(\$350,000 / \$100) \times \$.02]$ . Owners of commercial and industrial properties also pay their fair share of the open space tax. The Township Committee has in recent years not authorized the full 2 cents per \$100 of assessed value tax.

- NJDEP Green Acres - Raritan Township Planning Incentive Grant (PIG) funds (the Open Space Committee recently applied for and received \$550K in additional Green Acres funds). These funds can only be used to match up to 50% of open space/parkland acquisition projects. Funds cannot be used for parkland development. To apply for and receive funds from Green Acres, the County and other sources, the Township must have an Open Space Tax in place.
- Hunterdon County Open Space funds including the Municipal Grant Program, Non-profit Grant Program and Cooperative Open Space Acquisition Assistance Program. The Non-profit and Cooperative Open Space Acquisition Assistance Programs are competitive programs and the funds may only be used for open space/parkland acquisition. The County Municipal Grant Program currently is funded by 10% of the funds the Township residents pay in the Hunterdon County Open Space taxes. These funds may be used for both open space/parkland acquisition and farmland preservation
- Hunterdon County Farmland Preservation Program – Hunterdon County can contribute 20% of the costs of farmland preservation.
- State Agricultural Development Committee has funds available through the Garden State Preservation Trust for farmland preservation.
- The US Department of Agricultural, through the Farm Bill has federal funds available for farmland preservation.
- Private Land Trusts - New Jersey Conservation Foundation (NJCF), Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance (HLTA), D&R Greenway (D&R), Raritan Headwaters Association (RHA), NJ Audubon Society and others are examples of not for profit organizations who have partnered with Raritan Township to preserve parkland and open space and have utilized Hunterdon County non-profit grant program funds and/or utilize their own allocated Green Acres funds.
- NJ Water Supply Authority – Recently the NJWSA has made funds available for payment of 50% of “soft costs” such as appraisals, surveys, and preliminary assessments on lands that are important for water supply protection, including lands within the Plum Brook and the Wickechoke Creek watersheds, particular forested lands, that drain to the D&R Canal, an important drinking water source. In the past NJWSA also providing funding for land acquisition using NJ Environmental Infrastructure Trust funds.
- Land owner donations - Landowners may donate land outright or sell land for less than its appraised value.

The Open Space Advisory Committee continually tracks funds available from the Township Open Space Tax Fund, County Municipal Open Space Municipal Grant Program, the Green Acres Planning Incentive



Grant and State and County Farmland Preservation funds in order to assess our capacity to support property acquisitions as lands become available.