

TOWNSHIP OF HAMILTON OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

**PREPARED BY:
HAMILTON TOWNSHIP
DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY PLANNING AND COMPLIANCE
ROBERT C. POPPERT, PP, AICP, PRINCIPAL PLANNER**

**ENDORSED BY THE HAMILTON TOWNSHIP PLANNING BOARD
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Andrew Cosentino, Member of The Hamilton Township Historic Commission
Department of Health, Recreation, Senior and Veterans Services

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Township of Hamilton has long demonstrated a major concern for fulfilling the open space, recreation, and historic preservation needs of its residents. This concern, evident in the numerous existing municipal parks, historic sites, and the extensive recreational programs and facilities sponsored by the Township, is a response to a wide range of recreational needs and interests of Hamilton Township residents.

The Hamilton Township Open Space and Recreation Plan was initiated as a result of the need, recognized by Township officials, to reserve and develop a supply of open space and recreation resources to serve the current and future population. The background of existing recreation facilities and policies in Hamilton provided a basic reference point for plan preparation, while the continuing rapid development of remaining vacant land in the Township lent an urgency to the planning effort. This plan articulates the local government's vision of open space for the community.

The general goals of the open space and recreation are the acquisition of undeveloped land and the preservation of farmland in order to:

- address the diverse interests expressed by Township residents and officials
- accommodate projected population growth
- make best use of the considerable natural resources of the Township

The Township of Hamilton has developed this Open Space and Recreation Plan to articulate the local government's vision of open space and recreation for the community.

This plan is also necessary for Hamilton Township's full participation in the Green Trust Planning Incentive category of the State Green Acres Program. To this end, the Township has already passed a bond ordinance providing \$5 million for the issuance of bonds to acquire open space. This bond will provide a stable source of funding for open space and recreation acquisition. The funds established by this bond can be combined with State, County, private, and non-profit programs to properly implement the open space and recreation needs of the community in concert with other land development goals.

The plan is to be used as a guide for fulfilling the open space and recreational needs of the Township. This is a long term plan which we would project to be implemented over a 20 year period of time. It is unrealistic to expect that this plan be implemented at once.

Hamilton Township by far has one of the most extensive park systems and recreational facilities within Mercer County and the State. With a total of 21 Township owned parks and 522 developed park acres, few municipalities can match this extensive system which ranges from active parks to passive gardens and arboretums. This park system includes such notable parks as Veterans Park, Sayen Gardens, and Kuser Farm. The facilities at these parks include traditional active sporting fields such as soccer and baseball fields as well as more specialized facilities such as our new skateboard park and street hockey court.

Hamilton Township has actively pursued the acquisition of stream corridors. The plan also recommends the preservation of 20 miles of stream corridors that lie within Hamilton. Preservation of stream corridors helps to preserve water quality and also allows for the opportunity to create hiking and/or biking trails.

The Action Plan (section VI) proposes both acquisition and development projects. Acquisition is proposed for almost 250 acres of land to be used to create parks for active and passive recreational uses. Farmland is also proposed to be included in the Farmland Preservation Program.

There are approximately 2,916 acres of undeveloped land in the Township. The goal of this open space plan is directed towards preserving the majority of this land where possible.

Based upon our analysis of standards suggested by the National Parks and Recreation Association, we find that approximately 400 acres of additional park land may be needed to continue this fine recreational tradition. This would enhance the approximately 1647 acres of undeveloped open space which is made up of wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes, irregular parcels, and small lots.

II. GOALS AND POLICIES

The aim of this proposal is to promote the highest quality of life for our residents, especially our youth, by providing ample recreational fields and facilities for our diverse recreational youth leagues, parks for our families to enjoy, with access by all age and user groups, farms to preserve the more rural areas of our community and open space that provides preserves of natural habitat areas, with walking and hiking trails for the enjoyment of our residents and the preservation of nature.

GOAL ONE: To preserve adequate open space for the future.

Objectives:

- A. Acquire land which would help meet perceived needs for future recreational opportunities.
- B. Acquire lands for environmental protection and to satisfy open space objectives such as farmland and/or rural preservation. Lands in need of environmental protection would be wetlands, steep slopes, stream corridors, floodplain, floodways, aquifer recharge areas, and the like.
- C. Acquire as much open space as possible in the near future, while such open space is still largely undeveloped.
- D. Foster the acquisition of open space by private donations.
- E. Supplement Hamilton Township Municipal Open Space Funding with other funding sources such as State, County, and non-profit programs including but not limited to: State Green Acres Program; Mercer County Trust Fund Tax Acquisitions; and the State Farmland Preservation Program; the Infrastructure Trust Monies for stream corridor acquisition; and non-profit agencies.
- F. Explore the potential to integrate Township farmland with State and County preservation efforts.

GOAL TWO: To develop adequate open space and recreational facilities to meet the needs of Hamilton Township now and in the future.

Objectives:

- A. Expand park lands with active recreational facilities to meet the present and future needs of Hamilton Township. Develop linear linkages between parks, historic properties, and from residential neighborhoods which promote alternative transportation.
- B. Promote recreational activity with appropriate and adequate access by all age and user groups throughout the Township.

- C. Foster continued cooperative use of facilities and open space with the Hamilton Township Board of Education.
- D. Foster continued and expanded cooperation with private commercial landowners and residential communities to utilize open space for shared recreational activities.
- E. Periodically review and update the recreation inventory and needs analysis to evaluate and provide for Estimated needs.
- F. Explore modifications of the Township Open Space Plan to achieve symbiosis with State, County, non-profit groups, and adjacent Community Greenway Plans, and to include passive recreational activities (i.e. limited public access, nature trails, picnicking).

GOAL THREE: To preserve and enhance the social and ecological environment for the inhabitants of Hamilton Township.

Objectives:

- A. Preserve Township critical lands to maintain the remaining limited sustainable natural ecosystems.
- B. Preserve farmland.
- C. Acquire land for recreational facilities for both active and passive activities and all user age groups to maximize social interaction, community pride, and leisure activities.
- D. Minimize the clearing of woodland and trees for recreational development by situating facilities in open areas and incorporating woodlands into the design.
- E. Integrate and connect historic sites with the various networks of recreational and natural open space.
- F. Encourage the acquisition of historically significant properties for preservation.

GOAL FOUR: To balance the provision of open space with other land uses.

Objectives:

- A. Reinforce the planning efforts of the Township, County, and State Master Plans.
- B. Balance open space and recreational facilities throughout the Township relative to neighborhoods to provide adequate access and opportunity to all people of the Township, and enhance the welfare of residents.
- C. Foster cooperative efforts to preserve regionally significant areas with the State, County, and adjacent municipalities.
- D. Promote the development of mini-parks within neighborhoods.

III. INVENTORY

The following chart provides a detailed analysis of the present status of open space and recreational areas available in Hamilton Township:

Hamilton Township Open Space & Recreation Inventory
Gross Acreage by Ownership & Use
Hamilton Township Total Acreage = 25,600 Total Acres

Owner/Designation	Acreage (Approx.)	Percentage of Total Township Acreage
State of New Jersey	264	1.00%
Mercer County	855	3.00%
Township Parks (Developed)	526	2.00%
Township Open Space (Township owned or deed restricted as Greenbelt, Farmland or Open Space.)	1647	6.00%
Farmland Preservation	1,223	5.00%
Total	4514	17.00%

It should be noted that the Township is in the process of preparing an inventory of historic structures and sites. An appendix has been attached which provides a detailed inventory of recreational areas in the Township. These include Township, Board of Education, and private properties.

IV. NEEDS ANALYSIS

The table below was developed in coordination with the Township’s Department of Health, Recreation and Senior Citizens. This table provides an inventory of existing recreational facilities as well as an estimate of facilities which may be needed to accommodate the future growth of the Township over the next 20 years.

A. Active Recreation

The following table provides a list of the existing and needed recreational facilities, and the amount of land needed to accommodate these facilities including areas for seating and off street parking:

TABLE I

The land area includes both areas for seating and off-street parking.

	Name	Existing Township Owned Facilities	Existing Board of Education Owned Facilities*	Existing Private Facilities *	Future Needs	Square Feet Required Per Facility	Total Area in Square Feet	Total Seating/ Surrounding Area in Square Feet	Additional Acreage Needed in Acres
1	Softball	3	4	1	6	90,000	540,000	960000	34
2	Small soccer fields	0	0	0	8	45,000	360,000	1040000	32
3	Full Sized Soccer fields	4	26	8	6	117,000	702,000	1068000	41
4	Indoor Soccer (Full sized fields)	0	0	2	2	117,000	234,000	356000	14
5	Football fields	1	9	0	8	93,600	748,800	1400000	49
6	Baseball fields	2	10	0	5	129,600	648,000	920000	36
7	Swimming pool complex								
	Indoor	0	3	5	1	24,562	24,562		1
	Outdoor	0	0	4	1	3,750	3,750	16400	1
8	Lacrosse	1	0	0	2	130,000	260,000	277200	12
9	Skateboard Park	1	0	0	1	14,400	14,400	13760	1
10	Track (For track and field events)	0	3	0	1	320,652	320,652		7
11	Full Basketball court- Outdoor	14	12	1	6	6,000	96,000	168000	6
12	8 Sets of 2 Tennis courts	48	0	7	0	7,200	115,200	184000	7
13	Quoit Courts	4	0	4	4	2,000	32,000	124000	4

14	Outdoor Volleyball court	4	0	2	4	4,000	32,000	72000	2
15	Picnic groves with pavilion and outdoor cooking	14	8	6	0	185,555	742,220		17
16	Ice skating rink	0	0	2 (indoor)	1				6

	Name	Existing Township Owned Facilities	Existing Board of Education Owned Facilities*	Existing Private Facilities *	Future Needs	Square Feet Required Per Facility	Total Area in Square Feet	Seating/ Surrounding Area	Additional Acreage Needed
17	Street hockey rink	2	0	0	0				
18	Field Hockey	0	1	0	0				
19	Half Court Basketball	4	14	0	0				
20	Little League Baseball	15	0	2	4	90,000	360,000	640,000	
21	Baseball/Softball	3	4	1	0				
22	Practice Football	0	2	0	3	93,650	280,800	170,000	
23	Playground	30	17	1	0				
24	Fishing	2	0	0	0				
25	Lawn Bowling	2	0	0	0				
26	Bocce	3	0	6	0				
27	Shuffleboard	2	0	3	0				
28	Miniature Golf	1	0	0	0			TOTAL	289

We also note that the National Parks and Recreation Association (NPRA) recommends that a park system be composed of a core system of up to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 population.

The 2000 census showed that the Township had a population of 87,109. From the residential growth experienced with new retirement communities, handicapped housing, and senior housing miscellaneous development and our initial work for the 2010 census, we would estimate the township population to be approximately 91,000. Using the NRPA recommendations, a total of up to 956 acres of lands developed for recreational use would be recommended.

The Township currently has approximately 526 acres of lands developed for recreation, leaving us with a projected need for 419 acres of land for recreational use (this would include the 285 acres of projected needs suggested in Table I).

B. Passive Recreation

Passive recreation generally includes activities that do not require developed playing fields. Included but not limited in this category are walking, jogging, hiking, picnicking, boating, fishing, hunting, kite flying, horseshoe throwing, informal bocce, and pass and catch activities such as baseball, Frisbee™, lacrosse, football, and the like.

Many of these activities can be pursued at existing facilities, including those that are provided in County and State parks, in addition to the Township facilities.

C. Environmental Education

There are numerous natural features within Hamilton Township that few of our citizens use or know about. These areas include the Great Bear Swamp, the Hamilton Marsh, Crosswicks Creek, the wetlands restoration on Duck Island, and the Delaware River to mention but a few. It is believed by many that an Environmental Education Center and/or Programs should be established to help teach our residents about the flora and fauna of these areas as well as their history.

D. Greenways

Greenways and pedestrian/bicycle trails, linkages, trails, and stream corridors effectively tie the park system together to form a continuous park environment. The areas could be developed for one or more modes of recreational travel, i.e. walking and canoeing. Greenway trails offer tremendous opportunity for alternative means of transportation to and from parks and neighborhoods, for integrating historic sites into the park system, and for significant local and regional recreation. Greenway areas often include lands that preserve natural resources.

In viewing the Township, it may be seen that it is traversed by approximately 44 miles of streams and creeks. Many of these run through undeveloped areas while some are within more developed areas.

These streams provide an excellent opportunity to establish trails. In doing this, the Open Space and Recreation Plan seeks to promote the creation of greenways along most creeks and streams in the Township. The protection of stream corridors would serve a dual purpose: 1. They would help maintain water quality by filtering water run-off entering the streams and helping to maintain moderate temperatures in those waters. 2. They would provide areas to hike and/or bike and essentially enjoy the outdoors in a passive setting. Moreover, these stream greenways will afford the Township the ability to preserve historic properties and structures which often were developed along streams.

To this end, we have set a goal of acquiring approximately 21 miles of corridors along our streams. With an average width of 200 feet, these corridors would occupy approximately 500 acres of land.

The Township, County and State control 23 miles along stream corridors in Hamilton. This equates to approximately 1,806 acres.

E. Farmland Preservation

The value of farmland to the community at large can be categorized in three ways: environmental, economic, and aesthetic. Farmland reduces the storm water runoff associated with residential or commercial development, provides wildlife habitat, reduces traffic congestion, interrupts the monotony of urban sprawl, and typically returns more in tax revenue than the cost of services provided. The State of New Jersey has sponsored and funded a program of farmland preservation for several decades. This program has thus far succeeded in establishing a farmland base that constitutes roughly 5% percent of the State's present agricultural land. State purchase of development rights to farmland properties is expected to accelerate rapidly as a result of the open space referendum that was adopted in November, 1998.

Hamilton Township has a significant amount of farmland, a vast majority of which is located primarily in the southern portion of the Township east of Route 130. All farmland encompasses approximately 3,340 acres, of which only 1,223 acres have been placed in Farmland Preservation. This represents 37% of the total farmland. There is a need to continue this preservation process.

V. RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

Hamilton Township has been active in its efforts to preserve and develop open space for recreation. The preceding inventory and analysis have articulated the need to continue to promote these efforts. The following is a brief discussion of those public and private land and water resources that have potential for providing open space or recreation opportunities to address these deficiencies.

Presently there are 2,916 acres of private undeveloped land in Hamilton Township. Our needs analysis identified that at least 419 acres of land are recommended for active recreation. It also identified that at least another 500 acres of land is recommended to establish greenways along our twenty (20) miles of creeks and streams.

Given the vacant land noted, it is quite clear that there is presently sufficient land remaining in the Township that can supply the needed acreage identified in the needs analysis.

A considerable amount of vacant land is still available along our 20 miles of waterways. Much of the land that could be developed for active recreation may be found on various parcels throughout the Township. Land for farmland preservation is primarily found between Route 130 and the Crosswicks Creek, which forms the borders between Hamilton and towns in Burlington County.

Many of the vacant parcels are situated over aquifers, so that obtaining such lands for recreational use will serve a dual purpose in providing both recreation and protecting our water supply. Similarly, lands purchased as part of greenways will help protect both streams and rivers, and also preserve forest lands and historic sites.

The Township has significant natural features such as the Great Bear Swamp and the Hamilton Marsh, and is adjacent to the Delaware River, Assunpink Creek, and the Crosswicks Creek. Therefore, the potential exists for obtaining lands that will give us greater access to these areas and develop an environmental education center.

There are some parcels within the Township that are currently shown as developed on the inventory that are partially developed or are currently in a land use that may be consistent with protection as open space (one example are nurseries). Under a redevelopment or subdivision scenario, some or all of these parcels may be of high potential for protection as open space. The Township includes these parcels in the plan by reference.

VI. ACTION PLAN

This section identifies land parcels that would significantly address our Open Space and Recreation needs and goals based upon the opportunities presented and fiscal constraints for the time period from 2002 to 2022. Actions are divided into the general categories utilized throughout this report, and estimated costs are given. The letters in parentheses key to parcel location on the Green Acres/Open Space Inventory Map.

A. Active Recreation

1. Purchase of Block 2169, Lot 265 (known as the Braghelli Tract; formerly Reichard Spruce Farms) (AR-1)

Location: Kuser Road at Veterans Park - Hamilton Square

This parcel consists of approximately 84 acres of which approximately 40 acres are in wetland. Due to its strategic location adjacent to Veterans Park, this property would serve for the expansion of active recreational facilities.

The estimated cost is \$9,500,000.

This farm was purchased via a joint cooperative by Mercer County and Hamilton Township in 2005. The property is denoted as #135 on the Open Space and Recreation Plan map.

2. Purchase of Block 2726, Lot 15 (15 acres) (AR-2)

Location: Mill Street

This property, located just off Mill Street in the North Crosswicks area, may be used for both active and passive recreation. It forms part of the Crosswicks Creek Linear Path System and is home to a historic mill and dam site. It therefore would create a unique recreational corridor along the Creek.

The estimated cost to purchase this property is \$65,000.

3. Purchase of Block 2606, Lot 98 (AR-3)

This 14.54 acre lot is located off of Pleasant Drive/Elton Avenue in Yardville.

This property is located adjacent to Sunnybrae Park and active recreational fields could be developed in the open field area. The wooded area along the stream (Back Creek) would be part of a linear park system.

The estimated cost of this is \$25,000.

4. Purchase of Block 2712, Lot 151 (42.22 acres); Lot 154 (8.77 acres); Lot 155 (22.4 acres) and Lot 156 (53.77 acres) (AR-4)

These parcels are adjacent to Papp's Village in Yardville with access along Crosswicks-Hamilton Square Road and via the end of Timber Wolf Drive.

This would be a combination of active and passive recreational pursuits given the area of wetlands along Back Creek. It will also serve as part of a linear park system.

The estimated cost of this is \$2,102,560.

5. Purchase of Block 2730, Lot 3 and 9 (120 Acres) (AR-5)

These parcels along Sawmill Road in the North Crosswicks area may be used for both active and passive recreation. It forms part of the Crosswicks Creek Linear Path System and is adjacent to the Hamilton YMCA day camp. It therefore would create a unique recreational corridor along the Creek.

The estimated cost of this is \$1,984,200.

6. Purchase of Block 1722, Lot 6 (6.75 acres) (AR-6)

Location: 201 Hughes Drive

This property borders Township owned Sayen Gardens to the north, and would serve as an excellent addition to this unique botanical garden. This property would serve for the expansion of passive recreational facilities as well as an extension to the gardens.

The estimated cost to purchase this property is \$600,000.

B. Passive/Environmental Education

1. Purchase of Block 2661, Lot 1 (P/E E-1)

This lot is located along Main Street and The Crosswicks Creek in historic Groveville.

It can serve as a trail head for the Crosswicks Creek Linear Park. The building on site may be converted to an environmental education center. The parcel consists of 1.17 acres.

The estimated cost of this is \$60,000.

This property was acquired by Hamilton Township in 2003. The property is denoted as #32 on the Open Space and Recreation Plan map.

2. Purchase of part of Block 2405, Lot 1 (a.k.a. Moser property) (P/E E-2)

This property is located at the end of Bunting and Deutz Avenues in Deutzville.

The County is purchasing the rear portion of it which will eventually merge with Roebing Park. The front area consisting of approximately 2.5 acres would serve for active recreation. Roebing Park is basically a passive park. That is why this front portion of the lot, which is devoid of significant features should be developed for active recreation and as a westerly entrance to the marshes which are contained in Roebing Park.

The estimated cost of this is \$225,000.

3. Purchase of Block 2405, Lot 2 (P/E E-3)

This property is located at the end of Bunting Avenue in Deutzville.

This lot, which is to the east of Lot 1, is a missing link needed to create a continuous greenway that will connect to the historic Bowhill Mansion and further onto Roebbling Park. The property consists of 9.52 acres.

The estimated cost of this is \$160,000.

4. Purchase of Block 1656, Lot 6 (51.57 acres), Lot 65 (4.7 acres), Lot 67 (9.9 acres), Lot 1 (10.47 acres), and Lot 5 (13.49 acres) (P/E E-4)

These parcels front on Klockner Road, East State Street, and Nebraska Avenue.

This area is traversed by Burnt Swamp Ditch and is highly environmentally sensitive with wetlands, floodplains and woodlands. These properties are also adjacent to George Dick Field. A linear park could be created along this stream as well as picnic areas and walking trails.

This property was purchased by Hamilton Township in 2006. The property is denoted as #136 on the Open Space and Recreation Plan map.

5. Purchase of Block 1913, Lot 15 (15.07 acres) (P/E E-5)

This property is located along Cypress Lane and is adjacent to the new Hamilton Township Senior Citizen Center.

This property could serve as a logical extension to this center and provide a passive park and picnic area as well as room for parking and potential additions to the center.

The estimated cost of this is \$250,000.

C. Farmland Preservation

1. Purchase of Block 2739, Lot 87 (FP-1)

Acreage: 180 acres

Ownership: Donna Schisler

This property was purchased by Woodcliff, Inc. and they have received final approval to construct 19 single family residential homes. Construction is well underway.

2. Purchase of Block 2739, Lot 89 (FP-2)

Acreage: 91.95 acres

Ownership: Walter & Nancy Ellis

This farm was purchased by Hamilton Township in 2004. The property is denoted as #12 on the Open Space and Recreation Plan map.

3. Purchase of Block 2739, Lot 3.01 (FP-3)
Acreage: 148.61 acres
Ownership: Princeton Research Lands, Inc.
Estimated cost: \$4,457,266
4. Purchase of Block 2739, Lot 91 (FP-4)
Acreage: 31.81 acres
Ownership: B & I Chowdhury
Estimated cost: \$525,978
5. Purchase of Block 2739, Lot 1 (FP-5)
Acreage: 32.96 acres
Ownership: Anthony & Anna Zimbicki
Estimated cost: \$544,993
6. Purchase of Block 2739, Lot 4.02 (FP-6)
Acreage: 19.24 acres
Ownership: Elma Katz
Estimated cost: \$318,133
7. Purchase of Block 2739, Lot 5 (FP-7)
Acreage: 123.26 acres
Ownership: Dorothy Yates & Susan Giancola

This property was purchased by Orleans Home Builders and they have received final approval to construct 19 single family residential homes. Construction is well underway.

8. Purchase of Block 2739, Lot 9 (FP-8)
Acreage: 49.93 acres
Ownership: Slivonik V., Ossowski G. & E.
Estimated cost: \$825,592
9. Purchase of Block 2745, Lot 3.02 (FP-9)
Acreage: 81 acres
Ownership: Allentown Tree Farm c/o Princeton Nursery
Estimated cost: \$1,339,335
10. Purchase of Block 2745, Lot 2 (FP-10)
Acreage: 11.25 acres
Ownership: Frank Taylor
Estimated cost: \$186,018
11. Purchase of Block 2745, Lot 1 (FP-11)
Acreage: 5.16 acres
Ownership: William Flemer Sons, c/o Princeton Nursery
Estimated cost: \$85,320

12. Purchase of Block 2743, Lot 20 (FP-12)

Acreage: 11.53 acres

Ownership: Baird, Horace & Garetta

Estimated cost: \$190,648

13. Purchase of Block 2743, Lot 22 (FP-13)

Acreage: 56.20 acres

Ownership: Allentown Tree Farm c/o Princeton Nursery

Estimated cost: \$929,267

14. Purchase of Block 2738, Lot 21 (FP-14)

Acreage: 8.5 acres

Ownership: Richard & Patricia Nami

This property was purchased by Mercer County in 2005.

15. Purchase of Block 2738, Lot 23 (FP-15)

Acreage: 103.89 acres

Ownership: Dorothy Yates & Susan Giancola

This property was purchased by Orleans Home Builders and they have received final approval to construct 24 single family residential homes. Construction is well underway.