

Westampton Township Open Space Trust Fund

Recreation Complex August 2008

History

Westampton Township began its pursuit of Open Space in 1999. The township put a question on the ballot in November 1999 to create an Open Space, Recreation and Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund so that it could take advantage of New Jersey State Green Acres Funds and the County Open Space Program Funds.

The ballot question was approved and in July 2000, the township began collecting money for the Open Space Trust Fund in the amount of 2 cents per \$100 of assessed value. An additional 2 cents per \$100 was approved in November 2005.

The ballot question was:

“Shall the Township of Westampton establish, for a period of not to exceed twenty (20) years, a “Municipal Open Space, Recreation and Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund” and annually levy at a rate of two cents per hundred dollars (\$0.02 per \$100.00) of assessed real property valuation for the acquisition of lands for conservation and/or recreation, including the maintenance or improvement of such acquired lands, or for farmland acquisition and preservation or for historic property preservation or improvement, or for the payment of debt service for such acquisition or improvement purposes, and annually appropriate that revenue for these purposes?”

The Township Committee formed an Open Space Committee and followed the requirements outlined by the State to begin to acquire property in the township.

The main requirement was to prepare an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). We used the guidelines provided by the Department of Environmental Protection. Their definition of an OSRP is as follows:

“An OSRP articulates a local government’s vision of open space and recreation. It should establish a philosophical and practical justification for the protection and preservation of open space and recreation opportunities. The purpose of an OSRP is to provide a framework for implementation. Through an OSRP you identify and examine open space and recreation resources important to you and lay out ways to protect and enjoy them.”

“Without planning, the appearance of a community, the quality of life of its residents and of its natural resources can be dramatically altered in a short period of time due to random changes in land use. No one wants to live in a community that does not have parks or recreation areas. In order to provide these for residents, a local government must plan for them. Open space and recreation should be considered as part of the public infrastructure, just like roads, schools and utilities.”

Westampton Township Open Space and Recreation Plan

The Westampton Township OSRP was adopted in 2002 after a series of meetings with the County, Land Development Board, Recreation Committee, Open Space Committee, and the Township Planner. In addition, surveys were distributed and two public hearings were held. The final plan was amended and adopted in 2004. An excerpt from our plan is as follows:

“During the past two decades the Township has experienced rapid residential growth with the total population more than doubling from 1980 to 2000. With the Township continuing to experience rapid residential growth, the need to provide additional open space and recreational opportunities for Township residents has become more critical.”

Some of the goals and objectives of our plan are to:

- Establish and enhance recreational lands and public open space.
- Assess and provide opportunities for active and passive recreation to meet the needs of all citizens.
- Continue to work with surrounding communities to develop a regional recreation plan.

The plan found that the township had 19.73 acres of recreation and open space to provide recreation opportunities. With the size of the township and its population, the State’s Balance Land Use Method determined that the township needed an additional 114.67 acres to meet the minimum standard of open space for recreational activities.

The Township Committee moved forward. We applied for Green Acres funding and were approved for three \$400,000 grants. The first piece of property we hoped to acquire was the Gaye Shore Rogers farm on the corner of Kings Road and Woodlane Road. We were outbid by a developer and now have Westampton Woods.

We were successful in acquiring our second target – 36 acres of land belonging to the Friend’s Academy on Bridge Street and Rancocas Road for \$2,050,000. This purchase included 28 acres on the south side of Rancocas Road and 8 acres on the north side. We are responsible for 25% of the total cost of the property. The State Green Acres program pays 50% and the County Open Space Program pays 25%.

Recreation Complex Plan

The basic plan that the township decided on included 4 baseball/softball fields, a large open area that could support three all-purpose fields, playground, rest rooms, concession stand, storage, garage, a walking path, and parking for approximately 200 cars. The first concept plan to include all of this was developed on the 28-acre parcel of land in September 2005. The plan was discussed at township meetings and minor changes were made to the plan over the next 3 years. Although the property has access from Rancocas Road, the township worked to secure an easement to either Bridge Street or Highland Drive so that cars could enter and exit the Complex at a traffic

signal. The final concept plan was drawn up in July 2008 with an entrance off Bridge Street.

Over the past year, plans to fund the project have been proposed and discussed. The final decision is a three-phase plan with future miscellaneous considerations. The total cost is estimated to be \$1,600,000. This financially responsible plan includes:

1. First Phase in 2008: Bid awarded in the amount of \$919,889
 - a. Grading entire lot; seeding in outfields and all-purpose fields
 - b. Storm drain system
 - c. 4 baseball fields with fencing, backstops, infield mix, pads for benches
 - d. 3 all-purpose fields, seeded
 - e. Parking lot for approximately 200 cars
 - f. Entrance road from Bridge Street
 - g. Electric for parking lot lights
 - h. \$180,000 for beginning construction of concession/bathroom/storage building

2. Second Phase in 2009:
 - a. Completion of building
 - b. Finish installing electric, water, and sewer to site
 - c. Fence along Rancocas Road
 - d. Benches and pads for bleachers
 - e. Purchase parking lot lights

3. Third Phase in 2010:
 - a. Complete purchase of necessary bleachers
 - b. Athletic field lighting

4. Miscellaneous:
 - a. Walking Path – Will apply for a Community Development Block Grant to construct
 - b. Playground – Will work on fundraising to build
 - c. Landscaping – Will work on a plan with township groups and Public Works to develop and install landscaping
 - d. Irrigation – No decision on installing

Financing

The cost of the project is estimated at \$1,600,000. We have a Green Acres Loan in the amount of \$250,000 and will borrow notes in the amount of \$900,000 to begin the project in September 2008. We anticipate receiving Green Acres Loans in the same amount for the next several years so that the entire \$1,600,000 will be in 2% interest rate Green Acre Loans. The repayment of the loans will be approximately \$88,000 a

year for the next 20 years. This is approximately 30% of the amount we currently collect in the Open Space Account annually. As Recreation builds programs, the amount coming from the Open Space Account will be reduced over time. We will generate funds from programs and from the concession stand sales. The maintenance of the site, approximately \$18,000.00 annually, will come from the funds we generate, some of which will be available to go toward the repayment of the loans.

Timeline

November 1999	Ballot question for two-cent open space tax
November 2, 2000	Memo to gather information for a field and sport inventory
April 2002	Open Space and Recreation Plan adopted
August 2004	Purchased Friend's Academy land
August 2004	Amended Open Space and Recreation Plan adopted
September 2005	First Engineers' Plan of Sports Complex
November 2005	Ballot question for additional two-cent open space tax
May 2007	Alternate plan of Sports Complex, moving entrance
September 18, 2007	First memo on development of Sports Complex
September 25, 2007	Public Hearing on Project during Twp. Committee meeting
October 4, 2007	Second memo on development of Complex
October 2007	Apply for Green Acres Loan for development of Complex
January 2008	Awarded \$250,000 Green Acres Loan
March 19, 2008	Third memo on development of Complex
March 28, 2008	Resolution to go out to bid for Complex
April 3, 2008	Fourth memo on development of Complex
April 10, 2008	Fifth memo on development of Complex
July 2008	Final Engineer's plan for construction of Complex in phases
July 22, 2008	Bid opening for Complex
July 30, 2008	Sixth memo on development of Complex
August 2008	Site maintenance memo
August 7, 2008	Engineer's memo on bid
August 12, 2008	Bid awarded by Township Committee for the first phase development of the Complex in the amount of \$919,889

Construction of the complex should begin in September 2008 with the first fields available for use in the fall of 2009.