

2008 Supplement to the
New Britain Township
2000 Open Space Plan

- ✚ **Updating key provisions of the 2000 New Britain Township Open Space Plan as required for**
 - ✚ **funding eligibility in the 2008 Bucks County Open Space Program**



The 87-acre Shelly farm, along Route 313 in the northeast region of New Britain Township, is one of two township farms preserved partially through funding from Bucks County's Open Space Program and Township taxpayer's Open Space Funding.

April 2008

2008 New Britain Twp. Open Space Supplement Summary

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RESOLUTION NO. 2008-04

A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF NEW BRITAIN TOWNSHIP, BUCKS COUNTY, PENNSLVANIA, AMENDING THE NEW BRITAIN TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE PLAN, DATED JANAURY 24, 2000.

WHEREAS, the Board of Supervisors of the Township of New Britain, Bucks County, recognizes that the Township contains open space, farmland, and natural areas that contribute greatly to the quality of life and economic health of our community which are worthy of preservation; and

WHEREAS, the Bucks County Commissioners have established the Bucks County Open Space Program through a referendum overwhelmingly passed by Bucks County Voters on May 20, 1997. On November 6, 2007, Bucks County Voters overwhelmingly supported an \$87 million Open Space Initiative, the purpose of which is to continue the Open Space Program for an additional ten years.

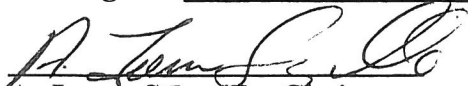
WHEREAS, the Bucks County Open Space Program provides an allocation of funding for protection and development of open space resources by municipalities - provided that the municipality first prepares and subsequently updates an approved Municipal Open Space Plan; and

WHEREAS, the Township of New Britain wishes to continue as a leader in the protection of Bucks County open space, farmland and natural resources through participation in the Bucks County Open Space Program.

NOW, THEREFORE, the Board of Supervisors of the Township of New Britain, Bucks County, Pennsylvania, hereby resolves that the New Britain Township Open Space Plan, dated January 24, 2000 and amended April 14, 2008 prepared in compliance with the Municipal Open Space Guidelines and distributed by the Bucks County Commissioners, has been discussed at a public meeting and is hereby adopted in its entirety in the form attached hereto, as the official Open Space Plan of the Township of New Britain; and

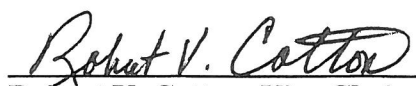
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Township Manager shall attach a copy of this Resolution to the Open Space Plan, and furthermore, that the Township of New Britain intends to take actions as appropriate to implement the goals of the Open Space Plan in support of which a copy of this Resolution and the attached Open Space Plan amendment shall be forwarded to the Bucks County Commissioners.

This Resolution has been duly prepared and adopted by the Board of Supervisors of New Britain Township, Bucks County, Pennsylvania in a public meeting held 4-14-08.


A. James Scanzillo, Chairman


John A. Bodden


William B. Jones


Robert V. Cotton, Vice Chairman


Helen B. Haun

A Strong Commitment to Land Preservation

In order to become eligible for land preservation funding under Bucks County's 1997, \$59 million open space program, each of its 54 municipalities was required to prepare and publish an Open Space Master Plan.

Compliance with this requirement made each of the County's municipal governments eligible for grants to acquire municipal open space and participate in the protection of significant natural areas. Upon completion and approval of its Plan, New Britain Township was awarded \$405,000. These municipal grants were based on each municipality's size and population.

In New Britain Township, the bulk of this funding was used to protect an 87-acre farm in the northwest region of the township with extensive highway frontage and development potential.

A key provision in the County's new \$87 million Open Space Program requires each municipal government to update its original Open Space Plan to reflect the changing demographic, economic and environmental conditions that occurred during that period. New Britain Township's Open Space Plan was adopted by the Board of Supervisors and published in early 2000.

New Britain Township is unique among its Central Bucks neighbors. Primarily, the Township is home to all but a few acres of the 1,500 acre Peace Valley Park and its 350-acre Lake Galena. The presence of the largest of Bucks County's parks graces the Township with its magnificent scenery, abundant and varied wildlife and is a focal point of regional environmental awareness.

Essentially, New Britain Township remains much the same in 2008 as when the 2000 Open Space Plan was published; its pace of residential and commercial development has been modest and its economic stability remains strong.

As we look forward through 2008 and beyond, priority properties that were not able to be protected since 2000 retain their priority status.

This brief supplement to the 2000 Open Space Plan adequately, yet clearly, sets forth the Township's Open Space vision for the 10 year life of the County's new Open Space Program.

While this supplement complies with Bucks County guidelines for funding under its municipal grants program, far more of the funding spent to pursue land preservation in New Britain Township will be borne by township residents in the form of the real estate and earned income taxes specifically allocated for Open Space Preservation. The Township Supervisors, and all residents, salute the Bucks County leadership in this vital mission. However, Land Preservation remains an important Township responsibility and demonstrates our commitment to the future.

New Britain Township and Taxpayers Were Early Open Space Champions

New Britain's visionary commitment to open space began about 12 years ago when the Township Board of Supervisors created a committee to study ways to best preserve disappearing farmland, other large tracts and vestiges of its once rural character.

After the committee presented concepts and a means of funding preservation efforts, the Supervisors embraced the proposals and asked residents to vote in support of this new concept on Election Day 1996. The vote was a resounding 85 percent in favor of the concept, plus approval to borrow \$2.5 million to begin funding the program.

This all occurred a full six months before the Bucks County Commissioners, in May 1997, asked county voters to vote for or against their proposal for a \$59 million open space program. This ballot question received 74% voter approval, which ignited the County's highly successful 10-year Open Space Program.

In efforts to avert long-range debt, the Township Supervisors elected to fund open space acquisitions through current taxation. Early open space successes include the acquisition of a small farm. Despite its size, its location effectively blocked the extension of public sewer lines to a region that speculators had been attempting to purchase for housing development.

In the ensuing years, Township Supervisors have continued to protect and preserve the few remaining farms and large open space tracts through participation in the County Open Space Program as well as separate Township taxpayer-funded initiatives, and creative land and zoning uses concepts designed to protect environmentally sensitive regions.

A substantial portion of our township taxes is now dedicated to open space preservation, a temporary investment expected to save many more tax dollars in our future.

How Does Land Preservation Help All Township Residents?

From time to time, we are asked how Land Preservation in the rural part of the township helps our residents in the more populated areas. This is a question that the Supervisors must consider each time a property is reviewed.

Land Preservation (or Open Space) means different things to many different people. To some, it means only farmland, a pristine forest or meadow, or land free from any other human use or regular intrusion of any kind. To some, it could also be active parklands, recreation fields, or a golf course. Yet, to others, it could include undeveloped land of any sort, including land between houses in a subdivision.

The perceived benefit of open space also means different things to different people. To some, it is strictly environmental in nature; to recharge groundwater, to give the birds and the bees a place to live, or to provide air cleansing by providing a place for mature forests and their natural revitalization. To others, open space is recreational and visual; a place to walk or hike, to allow space for kite flying or a little league sports team, or just let us look at trees on the hillside - instead of rooftops. Others simply wish to prevent development near their homes, or use open space to block the intrusion of water and sewer lines, which might facilitate development. No opinion is necessarily right, or wrong.

We believe that the townships open space plan should be implemented in support of our varied opinions, as well as our comprehensive plan and zoning ordinances.

Preservation of Open Space throughout the township, and especially around Lake Galena works in support of many of these objectives, as follows;

- *At one time Peace Valley Park served as a natural barrier to the extension of public water and sewer lines, which existed primarily only east of the Park, in Chalfont, Warrington or Doylestown. Well, no longer. Both public water and sewer is now available close to our borders in both Hilltown and Plumstead Township. A legally enforceable Open Space plan can prevent this intrusion and help this area of the township to remain rural in character.*
- *Lake Galena also serves as a source of drinking water for many residents of our community. The waters from Lake Galena discharge into the North Branch of the Neshaminy Creek, and the Forest Park Water Treatment Plan. Most of our more highly populated areas of the township receive their water from this facility, as well as our fire fighters depending upon this source.*
- *Both Lake Galena, and the Barry Road Dam are instrumental in flood control to the more populated sections of our community. Many long term residents might recall the flooding that occurred in our community before these facilities were*

built, including floodwaters so high that the bridge on Route 202 in Chalfont Borough was actually under water.

- *Recreational Opportunities also avail themselves because of our Open Space Plan and the Open Space requirements of our Zoning. These regulations have resulted in the acquisition of the Highlands, West Branch, North Branch, Line Lexington, and more recently the Parks being planned behind the Vertis Industrial Building and New Britain Walk.*

Our Land Preservation program has proven it can serve many masters. It is helping to keep development in designated areas, protect our drinking water, provide space for flood control, protect scenic vistas, forests, streams and other environmentally sensitive areas. It has provided recreational opportunities in various areas of the township, and has reduced the density and impact of development upon existing residents by the strategic placement of new Open Space lands.

In summary, we believe that Land Preservation, regardless of where located, can benefit every resident and taxpayer in some form or manner.

We will continue our efforts to balance these competing interests, varied opinions, and diverse objectives, as we add new sites, and as we guide our Land Preservation over the next months, and years.

New Britain Township Board of Supervisors

A. James Scanzillo, Chairman

John A. Bodden, Sr.

Robert V. Cotton

Helen B. Haun

William B. Jones

Farms and Important Open Space Are Being Saved

Land Preservation efforts initiated by the Board of Supervisors since the publication of the Township's 2000 Open Space Plan have met with remarkable success. Funded primarily with Township tax dollars and significant grants from Bucks County and the State Farmland Preservation Program, more than 400 acres have been preserved in New Britain Township.

Among these properties are seven of the 25 priority properties listed in the 2000 Open Space Plan. These are the Nowakowski and Shelly farms, land along the PECO power lines in the northwest portion of the township, and the rural Gaynor/Goldman, Garges, Hovsepian and Nehoda tracts.

Other properties, including several that link an area immediately west of Peace Valley Park are candidates for preservation. These parcels have been identified because they would serve to block further development of this sensitive environmental region of New Britain.

In total, of the 25 parcels targeted as critical in the 2000 Open Space Plan, seven have been acquired in whole or in part. Six other properties are no longer available having been lost to housing development.

The goal of the 2008 supplement is to continue efforts to preserve as many as possible of the remaining high priority properties remaining on the original list from 2000. This effort is dependent upon availability of the same funding sources; township taxpayers, municipal allocation of Bucks County's \$87 million Open Space Initiative and State Farmland Grants.

The list of remaining high priority properties appears on page 15 of this supplement to the 2000 Open Space Plan.

Township Acquires Additional Sites

(In addition to the lands preserved through the Open Space Program, the Township has also preserved additional open space or park and recreation properties through zoning, negotiations or other acquisition programs.) These include:

A 12-acre parcel across Schoolhouse Road and West Branch Park has been acquired by the Township Supervisors as a much needed active recreation site.

The Supervisors were able to negotiate in the acquisition with representatives of Vertis, a major employer, for the acreage in connection with the firm's building expansion project. Plans include the development of multiple lighted playing fields, a full concession stand, restrooms, parking facilities and a walking path around the site.

Township representatives have been meeting with local athletic organizations to determine their long term needs for additional playing fields. The development of this facility is expected to significantly reduce demands on existing playing fields.

At the eastern end of Schoolhouse Road, Supervisor's discussions with the developer of New Britain Walk concluded with the acquisition of 12 acres to be used for a variety of open space purposes.

This site, near Simon Butler Elementary School, was selected to provide some buffering for nearby residents as well as possible school use for recreational purposes.

Plans call for the leveling of fields, which also will be used for a natural science walkway near the Stoler Heights development. It will be suitable for use by students and area residents (primarily those in New Britain Walk) as a mini-nature area. These fields will be maintained by the Central Bucks School District.

These acquisitions were completed at no cost to the township residents – or use of any Open Space Funds.

Watershed Zoning Helps Protect Water Supply

With an ever growing concern for the future of the region's public water supply, nearly five years ago the New Britain Township Board of Supervisors crafted a new zoning district designed to provide the greatest possible zoning protection to Lake Galena in Peace Valley Park.

Known as the Watershed Zoning District, this protective cover includes nearly two-thirds of the entire Township. This portion of the Township drains downward through Peace Valley Park into Lake Galena. In addition to its value for recreational purposes, Lake Galena is the critical source of public water that is treated for public consumption at the nearby Forest Park treatment plant along Park Avenue in Chalfont. Water from there serves thousands of Township residents as well as those from adjoining communities in Bucks and Montgomery counties.

The Watershed District includes valuable natural resources such as woodlands, agricultural soils, floodplains, wetlands, aquifer recharge areas and steep slopes. This zoning concept replaces several former zoning districts that would have permitted more intense – and more varied – types of development.

Watershed Zoning allows maximum opportunities for open space in order to protect natural resources, specifically, 350-acre Lake Galena. Nearly 40 years ago, this lake was created as one of a number of flood control impoundments along the Neshaminy Creek, but was also designed to ultimately serve as a reservoir.

Watershed Zoning permits single family detached housing and watershed conservation sub-divisions. A provision within this zoning requires that sewage disposal methods must replenish the water table in accordance with the Township's sewage facilities plan and sewage management ordinances. Additional design criteria are also required in order to lessen the impact of point and non-point discharges in the watershed.

In addition, the concept and layout of open space, storm water management facilities and buildable areas must be designed to achieve best management practices (BMPs) and be compatible with other uses within the Watershed Zoning District.

While the zoning district will surely be subject to technical amendments over the coming years, its intent, to preserve the rural characteristics of that portion of the township, and our water resources, is unlikely to change.

Trails a Priority for Township & Neighboring Boroughs

The development of an extensive system of trails, a priority of the County's new Open Space Program, is an important aspect of New Britain Township's open space initiative.

The Township, along with Chalfont and New Britain Boroughs, are the recipients of an \$80,000 state grant that has provided a conceptual plan which establishes a series of plans that will link the three municipalities. The plan also has the potential to link up with existing and future trails in adjacent townships and boroughs.

The grant was obtained by the municipalities through the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources. The conceptual map was produced by CKS Engineers, Chalfont Borough's Engineering Consultant.

A committee consisting of three representatives of each municipality is meeting on a regular basis to review proposed trails that ultimately will be presented to elected officials in each municipality for required approvals. Matching grants in the amount \$11,000 from New Britain Township, \$4,000 from Chalfont and \$2,500 from New Britain Borough have been provided. Also, consultants representing each municipality will participate in the study.

New Britain Township representatives to the master trails plan committee include a member of the Board of Supervisors and two members of the Planning Commission. In addition, public input will be solicited prior to formal adoption of the final version.

Separately, Chalfont has obtained a state Department of Transportation grant for transit enhancement that will include the design and construction of three bridges. One of these will link the Lindenfield development (including 700 feet of new trails) in the borough with New Britain Township's North Branch Park over a branch of the Neshaminy Creek.

Comprehensive Plan Focus on Open Space

New Britain Township's Comprehensive Plan, adopted in 2005, addressed a number of open space related issues designed to effectively preserve its remaining rural characteristics, assist in stabilizing its tax base, protect its environment and provide additional recreational opportunities.

In support of the policies detailed in the 2005 Comprehensive Plan, the Township continues through the implementation of those goals and objectives to effectively strive to preserve important parcels of open space.

- The Land Preservation and Environmental Committee continue to evaluate properties listed in the 2000-2008 Open Space Plan and Supplement as well as to recommend additional parcels for incorporation into the Plan.**
- The Planning Commission and Board of Supervisors encourage open space set-asides in new developments primarily those located along stream corridors.**
- The Township has continued to purchase agricultural easements to preserve the remaining working farmland located throughout the Township.**
- The Township will continue to utilize Township and Bucks County Open Space Bond funding to purchase open space parcels.**
- The Township has continued discussion with property owners for access rights to land that have been identified as attractive for preservation.**
- The Township will continue to purchase development rights and conservation easements that allow property owners to continue to live upon their property while agreeing never to develop the land.**

The Board of Supervisors and the residents of New Britain Township have consistently made it clear that the preservation and protection of open space remains important to them. Through the adoption of the Comprehensive Plan and regular updates to the Open Space Plan, New Britain Township will renew its commitment to Open Space Preservation.

Development Approaches from a Different Direction

Until about 15 months ago, it was fully anticipated that developmental pressures in New Britain Township would continue northward from Chalfont/Warrington and Warminster from the east.

Not any longer.

Historically, housing and commercial development in New Britain was focused in its southeast region. The township's northern and western regions (once mostly farms) were protected from the mixed bag of development by the creation more than 30 years ago of the 1,500-acre Peace Valley County Park.

Recent development activity in the eastern edge of neighboring Hilltown Township, however, has forced New Britain officials to look with concern toward their western border. The imposing Hilltown Ridge housing project, along with its brand new sewer treatment plan, sits ominously only a few hundred feet from our Township.

Probably not tomorrow, but not too many years in the future, the presence of that facility, or similar facilities, may pose too much of a temptation for a New Britain property owner and/or developer to resist going to court in an attempt to force Hilltown to make that facility available to serve development in New Britain. It could very easily happen; it has happened before in other municipalities.

Early in 2008 that region of Hilltown was also identified as a site of a new 1,100 student educational institution.

Further north along the Hilltown-New Britain border, another developer has received approval for a 51 acre housing project in Hilltown, across Upper Stump Road from the Cassell greenhouses. Fortunately, this development will not be served by public sewers. But it is yet another open area along that unprotected corridor that will be lost with the inevitable resurgence of the home building industry.

And, as open and attractive as that region of New Britain has remained, the scenario described above will be tempting and economically worth the risk to many developers.

Township population has remained stable since 2000.

Unlike many of our neighbors, New Britain's population has remained relatively stable since the publication of the township's original 2000 Open Space Plan. According to Census Bureau data, the population today is approximated at just over 11,000.

We Need to Look Anew at our Own History

Other than a History of New Britain Township, compiled and published in 1973 as the Township celebrated the 250th anniversary of the arrival of its first European settlers in 1723, unfortunately, insufficient attention has been paid to its history.

This history was updated at the time of the Township's 275th anniversary in 1998. But, other than some recent photos, articles concerning new developments and some items gleaned from the Bucks County Historical Society, little of substance were new in this publication.

Not surprisingly, few of the Township 250th history books have survived house cleanings and yard sales as families prepared to moved to new locations and long-time residents passed on. And, a decade after publication of the 1998 update, not many of them remain on family bookshelves.

It is the intent of this portion of the 2008 supplement to the 2000 Open Space Plan to attempt to rekindle public attention, interest – and hopefully action – toward the preservation of what remains of our origins and history down through the centuries. This, of course, would focus on homes, barns, churches and other structures that have survived.

Bucks County's new \$87 million bond issue wisely provides \$1 million within the county parks allocation to provide exploratory and start-up funding for both public and private efforts designed to identify and stimulate action toward historic preservation. We encourage such action in New Britain Township.



The over 200 year old Hovsepian homestead on Upper Stump Road that the Township has acquired. The 37.5 acre property, south of Route 313, will eventually be used for environmental purposes and passive recreation.

New Open Space Program: Flexibility & Responsibility

The 2007 Task Force that crafted Bucks County's new \$87 million program has significantly expanded participating agencies flexibility and responsibility under the new program. These changes include:

- Encouraging municipal governments to collaborate in the preparation, execution and funding that would benefit each participating township or borough.**
- Permitting municipal governments to apply to more than a single funding program if conditions are warranted – such as seeking funds under both farmland and natural areas – if a project involves these physical features.**
- Allocating \$1 million in the county parkland funding category for historic preservation startup costs. The Parks Department has long been responsible for the acquisition, care and management of county-owned historic properties.**
- Giving municipal governments, primarily boroughs that have no opportunity to acquire open space, the opportunity to apply through the County Open Space Review Board for funding for the improvement of existing park and recreation facilities.**
- Providing educational and technical assistance to municipalities and other participants regarding the benefits and methods of land preservation.**
- Creating a committee composed of representatives of each of the five County open space programs, as well as the Open Space Review Board, to promote cooperation among open space agencies to maximize land preservation.**
- Requiring increased commitment for permanent monitoring and stewardship of all lands acquired through this bond issue.**

Use of County Open Space Funds to Require Monitoring

Both New Britain Township farms preserved with Bucks County open space funds have been monitored at least annually by township staff. Because both farms have visibility along Route 313, the view of the farms and thus the monitoring process is relatively unobstructed.

Several years ago, however, unacceptable amounts of debris and mechanical equipment were observed at the rear of the Shelly farm. Township staff brought the problem to the farm owner's attention. He promptly removed the materials and no further problems have been observed.

Under the new \$87 million county open space program monitoring of all properties acquired with bond issue funds will be required of all participating townships and boroughs. The monitoring process assures that easements on preserved properties are not violated.

New Britain Township Priority Land Preservation Sites

From among 70 parcels of 20 acres or more evaluated in Appendix A of the original 2000 Open Space Plan and identified by the Land Preservation Advisory Committee, (25) were identified as priority sites. Over the ensuing years, seven have been preserved, in whole or in part, and six were lost to development.

Smaller parcels, under 20 acres, are not included in this priority selection, although they may be of high priority to support open space objectives such as stream corridor protection, greenway preservation, etc.

The list below contains 12 priority sites remaining from the original list.

<u>TMP #</u>	<u>Owner</u>	<u>Acreage</u>
1-71	Jasin	48.43
4-30	Schuman	36.1
5-28	Pitera/Szablewski	20.4
4-30-1	Keller	21.76
3-101	Teich	26.93
3-59	Crabtree	53.38
1-99	Stewart	32.46
1-99-1	Stewart	23.58
4-63	Weinman	32.6
4-10	Gilmore	37.8
3-25	Cuce	20.8
4-07	Kohler	49.76

Tax parcel numbers of preserved properties (Bucks County Open Space Program requirement). Referenced on page 5: Nowakowski, 26-1-123; Shelly, 26-4-24; PECO, 26-4-35; Gaynor/ Goldman, 26-4-62, 26-4-104, 26-4-44-1, 26-4-106; Garges, 26-3-62; Hovsepian, 26-4-16; Nehoda, 26-11-46, 26-11-46-1, 26-11-48. Containing a conservation easement, but not referenced in this supplement is the Detweiler tract, 26-1-111. Referenced on page 8: Vertis, 26-5-2; New Britain Walk Park, 26-5-54.

Accompanying Maps

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