

THE CAMDEN COUNTY OPEN SPACE AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN: A VISION FOR THE FUTURE

In November 1998, voters overwhelmingly supported a referendum to create the Camden County Open Space, Recreation and Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund. In December of 1999 the Camden County Freeholder Board adopted the Camden County Open Space and Recreation Plan which was updated in 2004 and renamed the Camden County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Plan. The stated goal of this plan is "to support the development of a public system of open spaces which forever preserves the valued environmental, cultural, historic and scenic features of Camden County and provides sufficient lands to accommodate a variety of active and passive recreational activities".

In working toward this goal, certain economic benefits will also be realized including new business opportunities; increased property values; avoided tax increases; and a sustainable agriculture industry.

The Camden County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Plan has four components which are briefly discussed below.

Open Space Preservation

Imagine hopping on a bike in Gloucester Township or Haddonfield or Winslow and riding to the Camden Waterfront or the Barnegat Bay. Along the way you marvel at lush green forests and listen to the sound of water rushing down a small stream. Occasionally you stop at one of several local, County or State parks to rest.

This image may one day be reality in Camden County. While Camden County may be the most highly developed County in South Jersey, opportunities exist to create a system of greenways that will link all corners of the County to one another and to greenways in other counties and beyond.

The Camden County Board of Freeholders, working with the County's Open Space Preservation Trust Fund Advisory Committee has purchased, or assisted in the purchase of over 975 acres of open space since the year 2000. Included in this total are properties such as the Stafford Farm in Voorhees Township, the MacArthur Tract, now known as Saddler's Woods, in Haddon Township, Lake Worth in the Borough of Lindenwold and Slim's Ranch in Gloucester Township

The acquisition of these properties, along with several adjoining properties, has led to the emergence of the proposed greenway system mentioned above. Already, the possibility exists for a trail linking publicly owned properties along the North Branch of Big Timber Creek, from Laurel Road in the Borough of Lindenwold to Chews Landing and Somerdale Roads in Gloucester Township at Slim's Ranch - a span of greater than two miles.

Working with local and state officials, the County's greenway system would incorporate local and inter-county initiatives now underway, to provide necessary links with the County's open space and expand the system's reach to other areas of the County and the State.

For example:

- Camden Greenways Inc. is working toward the completion of a greenway along the Delaware River, Cooper River and Newton Creek in the City of Camden. Once completed, this greenway would link Camden County's Cooper River Park to the revitalized Camden Waterfront and the Battleship New Jersey, Adventure Aquarium and Campbell's Field.
- The Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit land conservancy organization, seeks to create the River-to-Bay Greenway linking the Delaware River at Camden City to the Barnegat Bay. This initiative involves the acquisition of properties in Camden County as well as Burlington and Ocean Counties.
- Several municipalities are supporting the development of the East Atlantic Bikeway, a walking and biking trail which would link more than a dozen municipalities from Clementon to Oaklyn along East Atlantic Ave.
- With the redevelopment of the Camden and Pennsauken waterfronts, an opportunity exists to link these areas to the proposed Delaware River Heritage Trail in Palmyra, Burlington County. This in turn, provides a possible link between the Camden County greenway system and the City of Trenton.
- From the Camden Waterfront, it is a short hop across the Ben Franklin Bridge to the City of Philadelphia and the East Coast Greenway, Camden County continues to pursue the acquisition of properties lying within the greenway system that are under the greatest threat of development, while also negotiating with owners of smaller, less threatened adjoining lands to "build" the greenway. These negotiations could involve outright purchase of the property; the purchase of a development easement, or the donation of property to the County or a local municipality.

Farmland Preservation

While working to build the Greenway, Camden County has also become increasingly active in the area of farmland preservation. While the number of farms in Camden County has dropped dramatically in the last 35 years, opportunities do exist to preserve farmland in municipalities like Waterford and Winslow Townships and, in the process, protect the future of the agricultural industry in both the County and the State. Some 27,000 acres of farmland are contained within the County's designated Agriculture Development Areas (ADA), some of which stand in the path of development.

Camden County is working with municipalities to identify those farm properties which are most threatened by development and which the municipality would like to see preserved through the purchase of development easements. Working with the County Agriculture Development Board, local farmers and municipal and State officials, Camden County hopes to preserve thousands of acres of farmland.

At the same time, the Plan's Farmland Preservation component recommends ways in which the County can coordinate its efforts with other partners to promote farming in Camden County and do its part to keep the "garden" in the Garden State.

Recreation Facility Enhancement Projects and Historic Preservation

Since its inception, the Camden County Open Space Preservation Program has supported the rehabilitation and expanded use of neighborhood parks throughout the County. New

soccer goals in the City of Camden, a walking trail in Barrington, rehabilitated basketball courts in Somerdale, and upgraded football fields in Winslow Township are just a few of the projects which have benefited from the Recreation Facility Enhancement Program. (See page 8 for a complete list of funded Recreation Facility Enhancement projects.)

Also, historic preservation projects, ranging from the Collings-Knight House in Collingswood to the Peter Mott House in Lawnside to the Tomlinson House in Pine Hill and the Quaker Store and Berlin Hotel in Stratford and Berlin Borough respectively, have received funding from the County Open Space Preservation Program in order to preserve pieces of Camden County's heritage for present and future generations (A list of funded Historic Preservation Projects can be found on page 5). Many of these structures are within, adjacent to, or nearby the proposed greenway system and will become "points of interest" along the Greenway.

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