

## **Elk Township's Open Space Program: Many Steps Forward in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century!**

Elk Township's 2009 "Open Space Program: Update" (see separate link on the Township's website) tells the story of how Township residents value Elk's wooded, agricultural, and water-oriented landscapes, especially since they voted to increase their own taxes to permanently protect these lands – where their owners are willing to participate in such an effort. It is worth noting – again – that the Township's open spaces hold significant value for their owners, as well as for other appreciate residents. These lands produce feed and food crops on some of the best soil in the country for agriculture; filter the water that replenishes both our drinking water wells and the fisheries of the Chesapeake Bay; and, supply endless pleasure in terms of aesthetics, trail usage, and history appreciation.

In both 2009 and 2010, the Township's Board of Supervisors and Open Space Committee collaborated with the Brandywine Conservancy (a non-profit land trust in Chadds Ford) to speak with the owners of the most valuable of our farms and other open spaces, and to other interested citizens, in an informal public meeting format. As a result of the trust and collaboration created during these meetings, two landowners have filed what turned out to be highly-ranked applications to two separate Chester County land preservation programs. Both these County programs require up to 50 percent match from an outside source; i.e., the open space tax approved by Elk's voters. These lands would not even qualify for the respective grant programs without the open space tax! Every dollar of your local taxes leverages an equal amount of County funding in these cases, keeping both your local and County (and in some funding scenarios, state) tax dollars right here in Elk Township.

It is also notable that without expenditure of any local open space tax revenue, over 250 acres of the Delaware Trust Company lands adjoining the Fair Hill Natural Resource Management Area and the Big Elk Creek have been permanently protected. Thanks to the outlays of only and highly competitive state and county funds, these publicly-accessible lands are the keystone for future land preservation efforts in eastern parts of Elk Township and throughout the region.

As Elk Township becomes more green, as it retains its rural character, and as it provides food, water, and shelter for both humans and wildlife, what is the status of your property? Would you like our "Open Space Protection Opportunities" map (see separate link on the Township's website) to show your lands as green?

If so, please contact Melanie Hesse, Chair of the Open Space Committee, to discuss with her, and others, the options you may have to permanently protect your property, while retaining ownership and recovering some of its economic value. Melanie can be reached at 610/932-6776 or at [melanie@lemonhill.cc](mailto:melanie@lemonhill.cc).

**Elk Township Open Space Committee**

**Melanie Hesse, Chair**

**Tina Durborow**

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