

Elk Township's Open Space Program: Update

In late 2005, over 90 percent of respondents to a Township-wide survey indicated their support of permanent protection of Elk's fields, woods, stream valleys, and trails. Collectively, these open spaces have significant value to both their owners and to the general public. For example, our farms produce economically-viable food and/or feed crops on some of the best soils in the country. These fields, and our pastures, meadows, and woodlands, filter water that



both replenishes our drinking water wells and flows to the Chesapeake Bay – another natural resource of national significance. And the history represented by these lands spans generations, as do some of the trails that traverse these properties. Clearly, the respondents to the survey recognized these values and the importance of permanently protecting them.



With direction from the Board of Supervisors, the Elk Township Open Space Committee has worked closely with the Brandywine Conservancy (a non-profit land trust in Chadds Ford) to identify the most valuable of our farms and other open spaces. The first round of owners of identified properties were contacted late last year, and the Committee has begun discussions with some of them regarding the future of their lands. The revenue generated by the 2006 open space referendum (65 percent voter approval) can support the permanent preservation of lands whose owners are interested in this option. This dedicated funding source creates significant leverage for the Committee's efforts: several County and State land preservation programs require 50 percent "match," typically from municipal funds. This means that every dollar spent on permanent open space protection leverages another County or State land preservation dollar, doubling each Elk taxpayer's open space contribution, and keeps that taxpayer's County or State tax dollar right here in Elk Township. Finally, the value of permanently protecting open

space is supported by the “Cost of Community Services” study for Elk (Brandywine Conservancy, 2005). This study showed that residential development costs \$1.04 in services for every \$1 in revenue that it generates, while farmland produces a \$0.96 surplus – i.e., farmland requires only \$0.04 in services for every \$1 in revenue it generates.

We hope this information is useful. Please also watch for announcement of a public meeting this spring so everyone can learn more about these valuable resources and land preservation options. In the meantime, you are welcome to contact Melanie Hesse, Chair of the Open Space Committee, through the Township offices at 610/255-0634 or via email at elktownship@comcast.net, if you have any questions or need additional information. In the meantime, we all hope to see you at our forthcoming open space forum!

Elk Township Open Space Committee

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