

Amendment to the Master Plan
TOWNSHIP OF READINGTON

GOALS AND POLICIES
♦
PARKS, RECREATION & OPEN SPACE
♦
CIRCULATION

PLANNING BOARD
TOWNSHIP OF READINGTON
HUNTERDON COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

July 9, 2001

CLARKE ♦ CATON ♦ HINTZ
A Professional Corporation

Amendment to the Master Plan
TOWNSHIP OF READINGTON

Prepared pursuant to *N.J.S.A. 40:55D-28*,
of the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law

Adopted by the Readington Township Planning Board
July 9, 2001



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**TOWNSHIP OF READINGTON
509 COUNTY ROUTE 523
WHITEHOUSE STATION, NEW JERSEY 08889**

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	i
<hr/>	
GOALS AND POLICIES	II
<hr/>	
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION	II-1
CIRCULATION	II-1
<hr/>	
PARKS, RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE	VIII
<hr/>	
HISTORY OF PRESERVATION	VIII-1
NEW JERSEY POLICIES	VIII-4
HUNTERDON COUNTY POLICIES	VIII-19
RELEVANT LITERATURE	VIII-22
MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE PLANNING	VIII-23
GEOGRAPHIC SUB -AREAS	VIII-30
IMPLEMENTATION	VIII-39
<hr/>	
CIRCULATION	X
<hr/>	
AIRPORT	X-1
STATE PLAN	X-2
RECOMMENDATIONS	X-5
<hr/>	
MAPS	
<hr/>	
OPEN SPACE	VIII-3
PRESERVED FARMLAND	VIII-8
ACTIVE OPEN SPACE	VIII-40
OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION PRIORITY AREAS	VIII-47
PROSPECTIVE OPEN SPACE	VIII-51

INTRODUCTION

This amendment to the Master Plan of Readington Township consists of an update of the 1990 Goals and Policies, a Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Element, which replaces the 1998 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Element and a Circulation Plan Element, which amends, but does not replace, the 1990 Circulation Plan Element.

This Master Plan update incorporates significant works that have been prepared by the Environmental Commission, including Flora and Fauna of Readington Township, Critical Habitats in Readington Township, Water Quality Report, Report of the Open Space Committee and the comprehensive Environmental Resources Inventory, that was produced by Princeton Hydro. It also incorporates the findings of a report entitled Evaluation of Block 48 Lot 23, Block 55 Lot 33, Block 56 Lots 1, 3, 6 & 8 and Block 67 Lot 2 For Municipal Acquisition, which was prepared by this office to examine the Solberg lands for possible acquisition by Readington Township.

II. GOALS AND POLICIES

The following policies relating to critical habitat and the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport are hereby added to the 1990 Goals & Policies Plan Element:

2. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Policy: Actively conserve and protect critical wildlife habitats, such as mature woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and stream corridors, through various mechanisms of open space preservation, including land acquisition.

Policy: Lands identified as critical wildlife habitats and Natural Heritage Priority Sites should be considered the highest priority sites for preservation.

5. CIRCULATION

Policy: Ensure preservation of the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport as a public aviation facility.

VIII. PARKS RECREATION AND OPEN SPACE

OPEN SPACE

This open space section replaces the 1998 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Element, which amended the 1990 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Element. It does not replace the 1990 element. The inspiration for this update lies with several recent documents, produced by the Environmental Commission, that have addressed natural resources within the Township. These include the Readington Township *Environmental Resource Inventory*, April 2001, *Critical Habitats in Readington Township*, *Flora and Fauna of Readington Township* and *Water Quality Report*. These documents contain inventory, analyses and recommendations relating to open space and natural resources within Readington that provide specific direction for the formulation of municipal land use policies. The findings and recommendations within these documents emphasize the relationship between open space preservation and conservation objectives: Conservation of critical wildlife habitat, mature woodlands, stream corridors, and water quality can be advanced through the preservation and conservation of open space. Readington's Open Space Committee, a group that has evolved from the Greenways Work group of the 1990's, has utilized these recent documents to formulate a strategic report that targets specific tracts for open space preservation. These recommendations are contained within the *Report of the Open Space Committee* and are also incorporated within this plan element.

This amendment contains an updated history of open space preservation efforts thus far and an updated inventory of open space and recreational lands. Recognizing that farmland is also a component of an open space network, an updated inventory of preserved farmland is included. The inventory is followed by a series of open space preservation goals derived from the documents described, and referenced, herein. Finally, specific parcels are identified for preservation in order to meet the goals.

HISTORY OF OPEN SPACE AND FARMLAND PRESERVATION IN READINGTON

The Township has a strong history of open space preservation beginning in the 1970's. In 1978 the Open Space Advisory Committee was created to study and formulate recommendations to effectuate open space preservation in Readington. Based on Committee recommendation, a public referendum was held to determine whether Township residents were willing to dedicate \$1,000,000.00 for open space preservation. The voters approved the ballot

question in the first municipal open space referendum in Hunterdon County. The Open Space Advisory Committee authored the Open Space Master Plan to guide Township decisions with respect to preservation.

Since the adoption of the Open Space Master Plan the Township has continuously employed two of the strategies recommended in the that plan, zoning cluster development and purchase of land, among other mechanisms. Public preference for open space preservation was documented in a 1992 Readington Township Environmental Commission survey of Township residents, wherein 83 percent of respondents strongly favored strict open space protection and strong preservation actions. Also in 1992, the Greenways Work Group (an ad hoc Committee of the Environmental Commission) concluded that contiguous parcels of open space configured or assembled to make corridors of undeveloped land should be used to preserve the Township's natural resources in the context of new development. The work of this committee resulted in the creation of the Readington Township Greenways Plan in 1995, which was adopted by the Planning Board as an addendum to the Master Plan. The plan sought to create a meaningful open space network that would be accessible to all residents and would preserve the character of the Township.

In November of 1994, Township voters passed a referendum that set aside \$.02 for every \$100 of taxpayer money for the purchase of open space.

In 1995 the Readington Township Open Space Inventory and Recommendations for Preservation was prepared to identify and prioritize key properties for preservation. It was adopted as part of the 1996 Reexamination Report.

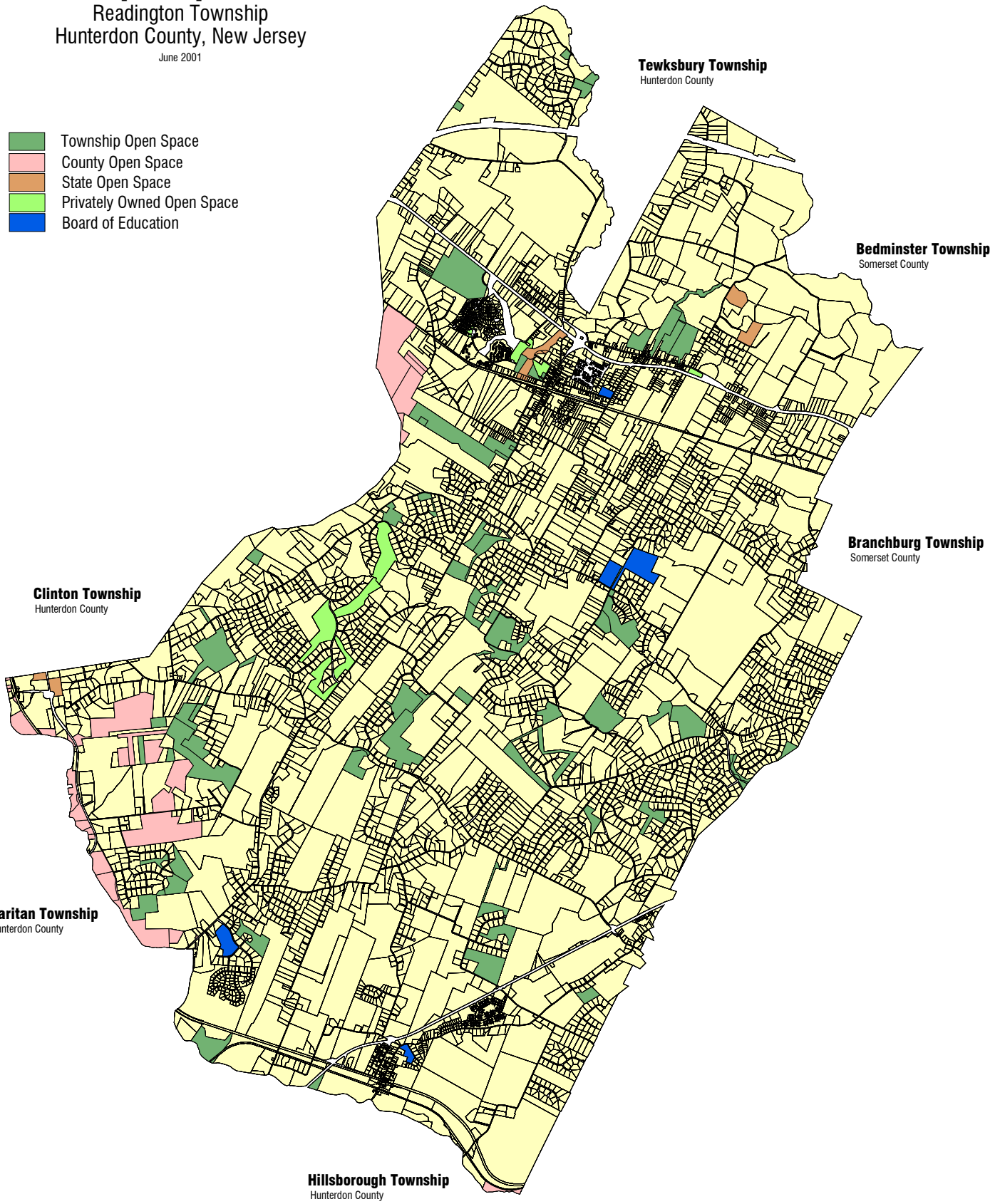
In October of 1996 Readington Township submitted an application for a Green Trust Planning Incentive Project Grant. The grant application summarized Readington's Greenways and Open Space Preservation Goals and included both a systems map and an "Action Plan" map that set priorities for implementation. A grant of \$3 million was awarded and, in 1997, Readington Township's open space planning and preservation efforts were recognized by a Hunterdon County Planning Design Award.

In 1998 Readington updated portions of its Master Plan, including Goals and Policies; Land Use; Conservation, Natural Resources & Agriculture; Parks, Recreation & Open Space; and a Statement of Planning Consistency. This series of amendments contained policy recommendations intended to strengthen the ability of the Township to preserve large contiguous tracts of open space and farmland by adding a new land use designation, AR Agricultural Residential. This designation requires that developers in the heart of the Township set aside 70% of a development tract for open space. In December of 1998, the Township

Open Space

Readington Township
Hunterdon County, New Jersey
June 2001

- Township Open Space
- County Open Space
- State Open Space
- Privately Owned Open Space
- Board of Education



Tewksbury Township
Hunterdon County

Bedminster Township
Somerset County

Branchburg Township
Somerset County

Clinton Township
Hunterdon County

Raritan Township
Hunterdon County

Hillsborough Township
Hunterdon County



0 1,450 2,900 5,800 8,700 11,600
Feet

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Committee adopted an ordinance enacting the recommendations contained within the Master Plan amendment and creating the AR Agricultural Residential zone. In 1999 the Master Plan amendment was honored with an Achievement in Planning Award from the New Jersey Planning Officials.

In 1999, Readington applied to the office of NJ Green Acres requesting \$3.0 million in order supplement a 1996 Green Trust Planning Incentive Grant application. The Township was awarded a \$1 million grant and \$1 million loan. This application included an overall plan, that was approved by the Township Committee and Planning Board, that indicated the locations of preserved farmland, preserved open space and prospective open space/farmland preservation sites.

Also in 1999, Readington was awarded \$3.18 million through the NJ State Agriculture Development Committee/Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board in Planning Incentive Grants for farmland preservation.

Readington was successful in supplementing their 1996 Green Trust grant again in 2000, receiving an additional \$0.5 million for open space preservation.

As of June 2001, there were approximately 16,000 acres of undeveloped land in Readington. 2,378 acres (~18%) of that was protected by farmland preservation easements and 1,350 acres (~8%) had been preserved through various related mechanisms for open space and conservation purposes.¹

NEW JERSEY'S OPEN SPACE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

Readington's open space policies are consistent with those of New Jersey.

Municipal Land Use Law 40:55D-2

The intents and purposes of the Municipal Land Use Law provides the basis for open space planning and preservation:

- c. To provide adequate light, air and open space;*
- e. To promote the establishment of appropriate population densities and concentrations that will contribute to the well-being of persons, neighborhoods, communities and regions and preservation of the environment;*

¹ Readington Township Open Space Committee. June 2001. *Report of the Open Space Committee*

- g. To provide for sufficient space in appropriate locations for a variety of agricultural, residential, recreational, commercial and industrial uses and open space, both public and private, according to meet the needs of all New Jersey residents;*
- i. To promote a desirable visual environment through creative development techniques and good civic design and arrangements;*
- j. To promote conservation of historic sites and districts, open space, energy resources and valuable natural resources in the State and to prevent urban sprawl and degradation of the environment through improper use of land;*

1998 Governor's Commission on New Jersey Outdoors

This report served as the basis for the statewide open space funding referendum in 1998. The referendum, which has begun the funding of approximately \$1.5 billion in open space acquisitions, passed by a two-thirds majority of New Jersey voters. The following findings and recommendations that were included in the report support open space preservation:

Open Space

People want to be able to visit beautiful, interesting, affordable, educational, and enjoyable parks and open spaces... all manner of outdoor recreation pursuits, by all manner of able and disabled persons, are in demand and the supply is inadequate.

The Governor's Council agrees that more recreational areas are needed in all areas of New Jersey and recommends preserving 200,000 acres of open space for outdoor recreation.

Greenways

Greenways, or connecting pathways and waterways between open spaces, give the opportunity for people to travel longer distances among changing landscapes and habitat types...Wildlife need corridors too...It is not enough to preserve isolated parcels of unconnected open spaces. New Jersey's open spaces should be woven together to preserve the natural links upon which both plant and animal species rely.

The Council recommends that 200,000 acres of greenway linkages be created through preservation of open space or purchase of easements and rights-of-way throughout the state.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan or SDRP)

In 1986, the New Jersey Legislature passed the New Jersey State Planning Act, which created the State Planning Commission and required the preparation and adoption of the SDRP. The first SDRP, adopted in 1992, was the product of a statewide planning process, which involved counties and municipalities, which formulated a series of policies intended on shaping growth within New Jersey. The first major update and revision of the 1992 SDRP was initiated in 1997 and culminated in the adoption of the second SDRP on March 1, 2001. The policies and objectives set forth in the SDRP include recommendations regarding environmental protection, rural areas, open space and farmland preservation. Readington's open space plan is consistent with the vision, goals, policies and strategies of the 1986 State Planning Act and the SDRP.

Statewide Policies of the State Plan: Open Space & Farmland Preservation

The State Plan contains a series of statewide goals, strategies and policies that are supportive of the Township's effort to preserve farmland and open space, specifically:

7. Preserve & Enhance Areas with Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Value

Strategy

Enhance, preserve and use historic, cultural, scenic and recreational assets by collaborative planning, design, investment and management techniques. Locate and design development and redevelopment and supporting infrastructure to improve access to and protect these sites. Support the important role of the arts in contributing to community life and civic beauty. P.67

As part of the discussion of this statewide goal and strategy, the State Plan articulates a statewide vision of open space and scenic resources for the year 2020:

Vision of New Jersey in the Year 2020

Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Resources

Children in all the State's cities and older towns can walk to playgrounds in their neighborhoods. The goal, established by Governor Whitman and affirmed by the voters at the turn of the century, has been achieved. One million acres of open space and farmland have been preserved. State, local and private funding has helped build a multi-purpose regional system of facilities integrating recreation and open space planning with land use and other infrastructure planning. Like the trail system, development of new open space and recreation facilities is planned to reinforce other goals, especially urban revitalization and beneficial economic growth.

The value that New Jersey places on everyday vistas can be seen from roads and sidewalks all over the State. Billboards have been controlled; wildflowers have replaced grass; and the jumble of signs, entrances and parking lots along the State's highways have been redesigned to become more attractive, as well as safer, for motorists and businesses. P.68

Preservation of farmland contributes to the creation of large contiguous open lands, thereby supporting the preservation of scenic corridors, greenways and wildlife habitat. The State Plan contains the following statewide policies regarding agriculture:

15. Agriculture

Promote and preserve the agricultural industry and retain farmland by coordinating planning and innovative land conservation techniques to protect agricultural viability while accommodating beneficial development and economic growth necessary to enhance agricultural vitality and by educating residents on the benefits and the special needs of agriculture. P. 129

Policy 1 Agricultural Land Retention Program Priorities

Funds for farmland retention should be given priority in the following order, unless a county or municipal farmland preservation plan has been prepared and approved by the State Agriculture Development Committee (in which case, priority shall be based on said plan):

- (1) Rural Planning Area;*
- (2) Fringe and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas;*
- (3) Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas. P. 129*

Preserved Farmland

Readington Township
Hunterdon County, New Jersey

June 2001

- Preserved Farmland
- Farmland Preservation (Contract Pending)
- Farmland Preservation (Under Negotiation)

Tewksbury Township
Hunterdon County

Bedminster Township
Somerset County

Branchburg Township
Somerset County

Clinton Township
Hunterdon County

Raritan Township
Hunterdon County

Hillsborough Township
Hunterdon County



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Base Map Source: Thomas L. Yager & Associates., June, 2001.

Policy 2 Preservation of the Agricultural Land Base

Consider the expenditure of public funds for preservation of farmland as an investment in public infrastructure and thereby emphasize the public's interest in maintaining long-term agricultural viability. P. 130

Policy 3 Coordinated Planning

Coordinate planning efforts of all levels of government to ensure that policies and programs promote agriculture. P. 130

Policy 4 New Development

Plan and locate new development to avoid negative impacts on agriculture. P. 130

Policy 5 Innovative Planning and Design Techniques

Encourage creative land planning and design through tools such as clustering, phasing and density transfers, purchase and donation of development rights, agricultural enterprise zones and districts and the provision of self-contained community wastewater treatment systems to serve Centers, to accommodate future growth in ways that maintain the viability of agriculture as an industry, while avoiding conflict with agricultural uses. P. 130

The State Plan has identified priorities for the acquisition of open space. These include critical environmental lands, greenways, land containing areas of significant agricultural value, recreational value, scenic value or with environmentally sensitive features and land in agricultural production that achieves other open space goals. Readington's open space plan is consistent with the acquisition priorities of the State Plan, as excerpted below:

12. Open Lands and Natural Systems***Policy 1 Open Space Acquisition Priorities***

Funds for the acquisition of open space and farmland retention, should be used for the following features (not listed in order of priority):

- ◆ *Critical Environmental Sites;*
- ◆ *greenbelts that define Centers;*
- ◆ *greenways;*

- ◆ *land containing areas of significant agricultural value, recreational value, scenic value or with environmentally sensitive features;*
- ◆ *land in agricultural production that achieves other open space goals;*
- ◆ *land needed to meet existing and future needs for active recreation; and*
- ◆ *parks, plazas and public spaces in urban areas that enhance community character and support redevelopment efforts. P. 123*

Statewide Policies of the State Plan: Natural Resource Protection

The State Plan contains a compelling vision for natural resource and environmental protection that is coupled with a series of policies, goals and strategies. Readington's open space plan echoes these themes.

2. Conserve the State's Natural Resources and Systems

Strategy

Conserve the State's natural systems and resources as capital assets of the public by promoting ecologically sound development and redevelopment in the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas, accommodating environmentally designed development in Centers in the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas, and by restoring the integrity of natural systems in areas where they have been degraded or damaged. Plan, design, invest in and manage the development of Centers and the use of land, water, soil, plant and animal resources to maintain biodiversity and the viability of ecological systems. Maximize the ability of natural systems to control runoff and flooding, and to improve air and water quality and supply. P. 31

4. Protect the Environment, Prevent and Clean Up Pollution

Strategy

Develop standards of performance and create incentives to prevent and reduce pollution and toxic emissions at the source, in order to conserve resources and protect public health. Promote the development of businesses that provide goods and services that eliminate pollution and toxic emissions or reduce resource depletion. Actively pursue public/private partnerships, the latest technology and strict enforcement to prevent toxic emissions and clean up polluted air, land and water without shifting pollutants from one medium to another, from one geographic

location to another, or from one generation to another. Promote ecologically designed development and redevelopment in the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas and accommodate ecologically designed development in Centers in the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas, to reduce automobile usage, land, water and energy consumption, and to minimize impacts on public health and biological systems, water and air quality. Plant and maintain trees and native vegetation. Reduce waste and reuse and recycle materials through demanufacturing and remanufacturing. p.46

11. Water Resources

Protect and enhance water resources through coordinated planning efforts aimed at reducing sources of pollution and other adverse effects of development, encouraging designs in hazard-free areas that will protect the natural function of stream and wetland systems, and optimizing sustainable resource use. P. 118

Policy 18 Stream Corridor Protection and Management

Protect, establish and maintain appropriately vegetated buffers along streams, rivers, wetlands, reservoirs and scenic waterways to protect the natural functions and quality of surface water resources. p.120

The Environs are the preferred areas for the protection of Large Contiguous Areas, including the preservation of farmland, open space and large forest tracts. The Policy Objectives for the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas specifically call for protection of the Environs from development. Strategies for preserving the Environs include density transfers into Centers, purchasing or donating easements, restricting the extension of capital facilities and adopting ordinances that limit development. P. 226

1. Linkages Within the Environs

Greenways – regionwide linear corridors of permanently preserved public or private land linking New Jersey’s urban, suburban and rural areas – can be an important part of the Environs. P. 226

Strategies for capital facilities and services in the Environs should follow the Planning Area Policy Objectives to ensure beneficial growth in Centers and the protection of the Environs. P. 226

New development that cannot be transferred to Centers should be sensitive to the prevailing local conditions and should not compromise local character. P. 226

Design and planning techniques should be used to ensure that any new development enhances the character of the area by preserving open space, retaining scenic vistas, and maintaining natural systems. P. 226-227

Statewide Policies: Habitat Preservation

Open space planning is intertwined with the goals of habitat preservation. Coordination of open space policies with habitat preservation strategies can advance the maintenance of biodiversity, preservation of critical habitats and wildlife corridors. The State Plan indicates specific policies to effectuate the preservation of wildlife and their habitats that may also serve as a guide in open space planning.

Biological Diversity

Policy 16 Contiguous Open Space

Preserve and restore the functional integrity of natural systems, including large contiguous tracts of forest, grasslands and other natural land, to protect biological diversity. P. 124

Policy 17 Corridors

Connect large contiguous tracts of forest, grasslands and other natural lands with stream and river corridors by corridors and greenways so as to enhance their functional integrity for biological diversity. P. 124

Policy 18 Critical Habitats²

Identify Critical Habitats during the preparation of municipal plans to ensure coordination of planning efforts and to support State and local resource-protection efforts. P. 125

² *Critical Habitat* means areas that are critical to maintaining New Jersey's *Biodiversity*, including those containing: (1) habitats of endangered or threatened plant or animal species, as determined by DEP and USEPA, (2) pristine waters designated by DEP as Category 1 waters and their watersheds within and above their pristine water segment, and trout production and trout maintenance waters and their watersheds, as designated by DEP (N.J.A.C. 7:9 et seq.), (3) coastal and freshwater wetlands as defined by DEP (N.J.A.C. 7:7A-1.4 and N.J.A.C. 7:7E-3.27) (4) prime forested areas, including mature stands of native species, (5) ridgelines, gorges and ravines, (6) grasslands, and (7) staging areas for migratory species., NJSDRP

Policy 19 Resident and Migratory Threatened and Endangered Species

Identify and protect the habitats of resident and migratory threatened and endangered species. Manage the character, location and magnitude of growth and development in and adjacent to such habitats to avoid direct or indirect negative impacts on threatened or endangered species or their habitat. P. 125

Statewide Policies: Scenic and Historic Resources

Statewide and design policies within the State Plan also support the preservation of scenic and historic resources, which may be accomplished through open space planning. Readington's open space plan incorporates these policies:

9. Historic, Cultural and Scenic Resources

Protect, enhance, and where appropriate rehabilitate historic, cultural and scenic resources by identifying, evaluating and registering significant historic, cultural and scenic landscapes, districts, structures, buildings, objects and sites, and ensuring that new growth and development is compatible with historic, cultural and scenic values. (p.116)

Policy 11 Development Patterns and Design to Support Scenic and Historic Values

Manage development and redevelopment to maintain, complement and enhance scenic and historic values within identified and delineated scenic and historic corridors. (p.117)

Policy 12 Protection and Preservation of Scenic and Historic Corridors

Protect scenic and historic corridors by appropriate means and preserve them by using easement purchase, density transfers, fee simple purchase and other innovative and effective mechanisms. (p.117)

Policy 10 Respecting Local Context and its Vernacular

Acknowledge and incorporate local history, climate, ecology, topography, building materials, building practices and local scale into the design of the built environment and the protection of the natural environment, where practicable and cost-effective. (p145)

Policy 17 Managing Corridors

Design corridors, including rivers, greenways, transit and roadways, to connect communities in ways that preserve rights of way, protect viewsheds, and encourage gateways and distinct transitions between communities. (p.146)

State Plan PA-4 Rural Planning Area: Open Space & Farmland Preservation

The Rural Planning Area extends over 31% of Readington Township. Within the Rural Planning area the State Plan expresses a distinct preference for the retention of farmland and open space for the purpose of retaining rural character and promoting agriculture as a viable business:

In the Rural Planning Area, the State Plan's intention is to:

Maintain the Environs as large contiguous areas of farmland and other lands;

Revitalize cities and towns;

Accommodate growth in Centers;

Promote a viable agricultural industry;

Protect the character of existing, stable communities; and

Confine programmed sewers and public water services to Centers. P.176-177

The State Plan recommends protecting the rural character of the area by encouraging a pattern of development that promotes a stronger rural economy in the future while meeting the immediate needs of rural residents, and by identifying and preserving farmland and other open lands. P. 177

Specific policies recommended for the Rural Planning Area are intended to effectuate farmland and open space preservation:

*(1) **Land Use:** Enhance economic and agricultural viability and rural character by guiding development and redevelopment into Centers. In the Environs, maintain and enhance agricultural uses, and preserve agricultural and other lands to form large contiguous areas and greenbelts around Centers. Development and redevelopment should use creative land use and design techniques to ensure that it does not conflict with agricultural operations, does not exceed the capacity of natural and built*

systems and protects areas where public investments in farmland preservation have been made. Development in the Environs should maintain or enhance the character of the area. P. 178

*(5) **Natural Resource Conservation:** Minimize potential conflicts between development, agricultural practices and sensitive environmental resources. Promote agricultural management practices and other agricultural conservation techniques to protect soil and water resources. Protect and preserve large, contiguous tracts and corridors of recreation, forest or other open space land that protect natural systems and natural resources. P.178*

*(6) **Agriculture and Farmland Preservation:** Guide development to ensure the viability of agriculture and the retention of farmland in agricultural areas. Encourage farmland retention and minimize conflicts between agricultural practices and the location of Centers. Ensure the availability of adequate water resources and large, contiguous tracts of land with minimal land use conflicts. Actively promote more intensive, new-crop agricultural enterprises and meet the needs of agricultural industry for intensive packaging, processing, value-added operations, marketing, exporting and other shipping through development and redevelopment. P. 178-179*

*(7) **Recreation:** Provide maximum active and passive recreational and tourism opportunities at the neighborhood and local levels by targeting the acquisition and development of neighborhood and municipal parkland within Centers. Provide regional recreation and tourism opportunities by targeting parkland acquisitions and improvements that enhance large contiguous open space systems and by facilitating alternative recreational and tourism uses of farmland. P. 179*

Implementation Strategy

Maintaining and enhancing the rural character of Planning Area 4 will require considerable attention by all levels of government, as well as the private and non-profit sectors. With significant market pressures, the Rural Planning Area is often viewed as prime real estate for new development. P 179-180

Even techniques like larger lot zoning and lot size averaging, while beneficial in some aspects, have the effect of destroying the large contiguous areas of farmland and habitat that are so vital to the sustainability of rural areas and may consume land at a faster rate. P. 180

Use investment tools, such as: a long-term capital plan; density transfer strategies including transfer of development rights where appropriate; public land banking to acquire sites for future growth and density transfers; acquisition of targeted farmland and other open spaces; agricultural enterprise districts, use assessment and inheritance and transfer tax relief; purchase of development rights programs; permanent and stable source of funding for land and capital assets on the municipal, county and State levels; privately coordinated multi-tract development; development rights bank; impact fees; rehabilitation or revitalization grants or loans; special improvement district; community wastewater utility and pre-approved designs for localized stand alone wastewater treatment systems to bring down the cost and ensure a limited number of new hookups compatible with maintaining the rural character; and expanded, reactivated or new public transportation systems within and between Centers. P. 182

State Plan PA-3 Fringe Planning Area: Open Space & Farmland Preservation

25% of Readington Township lies within the Fringe Planning Area. The intents and policies of the Fringe Planning Area support open space and farmland preservation. This designation includes much of the environs around the existing villages of Whitehouse Station and Readington. Both are existing centers depicted on the State Plan Policy Map. Readington's open space plan is consistent with the policies of the Fringe Planning Area:

In the Fringe Planning Area, the State Plan's intention is to:

*Accommodate growth in Centers;
Protect the Environs as open lands;
Revitalize cities and towns;
Protect the character of existing stable communities;
Protect natural resources;
Provide a buffer between more developed Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas and less developed Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas; and
Confine programmed sewers and public water services to Centers. P. 169*

In the Environs, (those areas outside of centers) the landscape should contain limited free-standing residential, commercial and industrial development, including activities that may be required to meet the needs of the region and which cannot meet acceptable performance standards for Centers. All such development should be designed to enhance the

character of the area by preserving open land, retaining scenic vistas and maintaining natural systems. P. 169

In addition, uncontrolled development in these areas will exacerbate conflicts with agricultural and environmental resources. P. 169-170

Policy Objectives

*(1) **Land Use:** Focus development and redevelopment in appropriately located and designed Centers to accommodate growth that would otherwise occur in the Environs. Protect the Environs primarily as open lands. Development and redevelopment in the Environs should not exceed the carrying capacity of natural or built systems and should maintain or enhance the character of the Environs. P. 170*

*(5) **Natural Resource Conservation:** Strategically acquire open space to define Centers and to maintain contiguous open space corridors that link to other Planning Areas and Centers. P.171*

*(6) **Agriculture:** Guide development to ensure the viability of agriculture and the retention of productive farmland in strategically located agricultural areas and in other adjacent Planning Areas. Encourage farmland retention and minimize conflicts between agricultural practices and the location of Centers. Actively promote more intensive, new-crop agricultural enterprises and meet the needs of agricultural industry for intensive packaging, processing, value-added operations, marketing, exporting and other shipping through development and redevelopment. P.171*

Prepare a targeted open space and/or farmland preservation program in cooperation with the county and/or county agricultural development board and the SADC and/or Green Acres. P.172

NJ Natural Heritage

Readington's Environmental Resource Inventory³ identifies several threatened and endangered species that have been sighted within the Township. These include birds, reptiles and plants. The inventory references the New Jersey

³ Readington Township Environmental Commission. 2001. *The Readington Township Natural Resource Inventory*. Princeton Hydro, LLC.

Natural Heritage Database, which has specifically identified the site of the Solberg airport as a priority site for conservation and protection of rare and endangered species and natural communities. The Office of Natural Lands Management (ONLM), within the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, has classified 389 sites in New Jersey that are critically important to the conservation of biological diversity within the State. The purpose of cataloguing these areas is to provide a resource for developers, local officials and conservation agencies to utilize in making decisions regarding such sites. *Natural Heritage Priority Sites* represent some of the best remaining habitat for rare species and exemplary natural habitats in the State. The ONLM expresses a clear policy recommendation for the disposition of Natural Heritage Priority Sites:

*These areas should be considered the top priorities for the preservation of biological diversity in New Jersey. If these sites become degraded or destroyed, we may lose some of the unique components of our natural heritage.*⁴

The majority of the lands associated with Solberg Airport (Block 56 Lots 1, 3 & 6 & Block 67 Lot 2) are identified as a *Natural Heritage Priority Site*.⁵ These should be considered as an open space preservation priority.

The Landscape Project

The New Jersey Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife has undertaken a new approach, which addresses a more comprehensive view of the landscape, in order to facilitate the preservation of rare species and wildlife habitats. This 1994 initiative is known as the *Landscape Project*. In addressing species and habitat issues from a large-scale viewpoint, the goal of the Landscape Project is:

*“...to protect New Jersey’s biological diversity by maintaining and enhancing rare wildlife populations within healthy, functioning ecosystems.”*⁶

⁴ New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry, Office of Natural Lands Management, *Frequently Asked Questions About Natural Heritage Priority Sites*, informational flyer, no date

⁵ Thomas F. Breden, Supervisor, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry, Office of Natural Lands Management. September 21, 2000. letter and attachments to Suzanne Forbes (Princeton Hydro, LLC),

⁶ New Jersey Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife. *The Landscape Project*. Trenton, NJ. webpage@ <http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/lndscpe.htm>. Accessed on March 16, 2001.

The Landscape Project was designed to provide a sound basis for planning and land management at the State, County and local government levels.

In order to achieve this goal, the Landscape Project has focused on the larger “landscapes”, or unique regions within the State (Readington lies within the “Skylands” region). Within each of these regions, a series of three land cover types were mapped. These were forests, wetlands and grasslands. Specifically, the project envisions that mapped information may be used to:

- ◆ Prioritize conservation acquisitions
- ◆ Guide regulators and planners
- ◆ Provide citizens with conservation tools
- ◆ Guide stewardship of already-conserved areas⁷

The Environmental Resources Inventory includes mapping from the Landscape Project that indicates the existence of *critical habitat areas* within the Readington. Areas of critical habitat are lands that support rare species in the State and that are adjacent to critical habitats that have already been preserved.

Benefits that are anticipated to be realized through the preservation of such lands, according to the New Jersey Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife, include provision of habitat for the conservation of rare species, provision of more open space for outdoor recreation, reduction in the potential for flooding, biodegradation of contaminants and ground water recharge. Readington’s open space plan seeks to incorporate the information derived from the Landscape Project for open space planning and preservation.

HUNTERDON COUNTY OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION POLICIES

Hunterdon County has established a clear vision for open space preservation. Through documents produced by the Hunterdon County Planning Board, it has committed to educating residents about the benefits of open space preservation and encouraging proactive planning to preserve open space. Readington’s open space plan is consistent with the County’s vision for open space preservation.

⁷Niles L.J., Myers, J., Valent, M. No date. *The Landscape Project*. NJDEP. Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife. NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Program.

Strategies for Managing Growth⁸

This report was initiated in 1996 when the Hunterdon County Planning Board assembled four *task forces* that included members from both the public and private sectors. The task forces identified the most important planning issues in relation to four distinct elements affected by growth in the County:

Rural character and the environment
Residential development and housing
Transportation
Commercial, office and industrial development

The findings of the task forces were summarized in a published document entitled *A State of the County Assessment*. In 1997 the task forces were expanded to include local officials. At that point the task forces began the process of preparing recommendations in response to the issues raised in the *State of the County Assessment*. These recommendations have been compiled into *Strategies for Managing Growth in Hunterdon County*, which was finalized in 1998.

This compendium contains recommendations that are particularly relevant to Readington, supporting the historic and present actions of the Township in pursuing acquisition of private lands to ensure preservation of those lands in perpetuity.

Open Space Preservation

The continued preservation of open space and appropriate land development patterns are critical to the retention of Hunterdon County's rural character. The Task Force recommends a combination of open space zoning and open space planning efforts to help achieve these goals. New development must be designed to complement existing rural features rather than dominate them. Municipalities and the County should be more proactive and progressive in establishing open space programs. p.2

Farmland Preservation

Hunterdon County has more land in the New Jersey farmland assessment program than any other county in the State. The County continues to be a leader in the statewide farmland preservation program. However, the

⁸ Hunterdon County Growth Management Task Forces. 1998. *Strategies for Managing Growth in Hunterdon County*

absence of adequate planning policies and programs that support agriculture will threaten farming in Hunterdon County. Municipalities and the County are active in the statewide easement purchase program, but lack a much-needed comprehensive approach to farmland preservation. A comprehensive approach would include policies and regulations that accommodate the needs of the farmer and are responsive to changes in the agricultural industry. A variety of programs should be developed that will help preserve farmland while simultaneously protecting the land equity of its farmers. p.2

Recommendations

The following strategies are recommended to help preserve open space and maintain Hunterdon County's rural character:

- ♦ *Municipalities and the County need to be more proactive in identifying and preserving lands as open space. Specific areas to be preserved should be identified before land development applications are submitted. This will preclude the loss of valuable open space to development.*
- ♦ *To reduce the dependence on open space zoning, municipalities should rely more on open space programs, such as fee simple/easement acquisitions. p.8*

Community Character in Hunterdon County⁹

In 1998 the Hunterdon County Planning Board held a design workshop to address many of the *quality of life* concerns of the residents that had surfaced during a process of gathering public input since 1992. The purpose of the workshop was to explore methods of incorporating community character protection into new residential and commercial development. The design handbook includes planning tools and techniques that were explored at the workshop.

While not all of the techniques discussed in the handbook are relevant to open space planning, the following objectives that do relate to open space support Readington's open space plan:

⁹ Hunterdon County Planning Board. 1999. *Preserving Community Character in Hunterdon County: A Community Design Handbook*

1. ***Open space should be designed and located to protect the most important natural features of site identified in the municipal open space plan.*** *Open space preservation should protect the most critical natural features of a site. These may include prime agricultural soils, steep slopes, ridgelines, scenic vistas, stream corridors, woodlands, significant land forms (such as rock outcrops, limestone areas, etc.) and important habitats. P.38*

2. ***Large contiguous areas of open space should be preserved. Open space parcels less than three acres in size are discouraged unless they are designed specifically for recreational purposes or connect to other adjoining open spaces.*** *Large contiguous areas of open space provide multiple community and environmental benefits, including active recreational areas, important habitats, soil erosion control, and scenic views. Generally, isolated pockets of open space that are scattered randomly within a site have less ecological value, are more difficult to maintained manage, are inaccessible and fail to provide important linkages to other open space areas. Large areas of open space should be preserved. P.38*

Hunterdon County Park and Recreation Master Plan¹⁰

Completed in 2000, this plan contains an analysis of prior County Park planning efforts, an examination of current trends in recreation and park issues, an inventory of parkland and implementation strategies. Among the goals that support Readington's open space plan the following is the most direct:

Goal: Protect lands in the County of critical environmental importance, high scenic quality, and unique cultural historic value. P.31

RELEVANT LITERATURE

Current literature speaks to the interrelationship between habitat preservation and open space planning. For example, the methodologies advanced by the American Planning Association (APA) regarding maintenance of biodiversity are consistent with the approach of the Landscape Project and with the policies of the New Jersey State Plan. The APA has compiled a guidebook¹¹ on the preservation of species habitat. This text includes a discussion of the benefits of

¹⁰ Board of Recreation Commissioners & John Madden & Associates. 2000. *The Hunterdon County Park and Recreation Master Plan*

¹¹ American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service. 1997. *Habitat Protection Planning: Where the Wild Things Are.*

habitat protection, identifies threats to habitat conservation and describes steps that public agencies may take to effectuate meaningful habitat protection. Included among the discussion is a list of principles for habitat protection at the landscape scale:

1. *Maintain large intact patches of native vegetation by preventing fragmentation of those patches by development.*
2. *Establish priorities for species protection and protect habitats that constrain the distribution and abundance of those species.*
3. *Protect rare landscape elements. Guide development toward areas of landscape containing "common" features.*
4. *Maintain connections among wildlife habitats by identifying and protecting corridors for movement.*
5. *Maintain significant ecological processes in protected areas.*
6. *Contribute toward the regional persistence of rare species by protecting some of their habitat locally.*
7. *Balance the opportunity for recreation by the public with the habitat needs of wildlife. P.11*

Readington's Open Space plan incorporates these principles.

MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE PLANNING

Greenways Plan of 1995

The Greenways Plan served as the foundation of the 1998 Parks, Recreation and Open Space element and has been used to guide the funding and acquisition of open space since it was adopted. In order to facilitate an understanding of the diverse characteristics and open space needs of the Township, the Greenways Plan divided the Township into a number of geographic regions, known as geographic sub areas. These regions were based on unique natural and cultural features. In addition to providing descriptions of these sub-areas, the plan contains several Open Space Goals formulated to guide open space preservation and stewardship of the sub-areas and natural resources. These continue to provide valid guidance to Readington's open space planning and preservation efforts:

Open Space Goals

Maximize buffer areas along river and stream corridors, including the Lamington River, the Rockaway Creek, Chamber's Brook, Holland's Brook, the Pleasant Run, and the South Branch of the Raritan River.

Protect and preserve historic districts and villages in the Township, including East Whitehouse, Readington, Stanton, Three Bridges and the Pleasant Run Historic District. Ensure the integrity of these areas through greenbelting.

Protect and preserve remaining mature woodlands and steep slopes to augment protection of wetlands and floodplains in the Township.

Complement existing farmland preservation program, trying to link open areas and buffer agriculture from encroaching development.

Protect and preserve scenic vistas or other unique areas.

Create open space linkages between natural, cultural, and recreational resources and promote connections with other Township, county, and state open or preserved lands.

Provide opportunities for active and passive recreation where appropriate.

Open Space Plan, 1999

This document is a master plan for open space preservation in Readington. It served as the basis for a 1999 application to New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Green Acres Local Assistance Program through which Readington was awarded \$2 million in preservation funds.¹² The plan indicates preserved farmland and open space, farmland and open space that is under contract for acquisition and open space that has been targeted for acquisition. The Township Committee and the Planning Board approved this plan in 1999. Priorities for acquisition within the plan include critical stream corridor lands - along the Rockaway Creek, Chambers Brook, Holland Brook, Pleasant Run and the South Branch Raritan River - and steep slope areas. The plan also contains many existing farms and open space areas.

This plan graphically depicts specific parcels that are prospective lands for open space and farmland preservation. Although it was approved by both the Planning Board and the Township Committee, the plan has not been incorporated into the Master Plan. It is appropriate at this time to integrate this prospective information regarding open space and farmland preservation within that plan into this plan element.

¹²Township Committee of Readington Township. October 4, 1999. Resolution R-99-88

Environmental Resource Inventory, April 2001

This document is a comprehensive update to the 1974 Natural Resource Inventory, containing a series of maps with accompanying text. The Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) was commissioned in order to provide documentation of the significant natural resources within the Township and to serve as a tool with which to plan for the preservation and conservation of remaining resources. It contains a summary of current resource protection information, an inventory of resources and a resource protection plan. Findings regarding threats to resources are paired with recommendations to reduce threats. On April 23, 2001 the Planning Board adopted the ERI as a supplement to the Master Plan. It is incorporated by reference herein.

The recommendations contained within the ERI correlate well with open space planning policies. Since the ERI has been appended to the Master Plan, all information addressed within the ERI will not be repeated here. However, the following findings and recommendations are particularly relevant to decisions regarding open space and farmland preservation and are now included as part of this element.

Findings (p. 6)

The headwater areas of Readington's streams and tributaries have experienced quite a bit of development since 1986. In fact, a significant amount of Holland Brook headwater areas and land adjacent to Holland Brook were developed between 1986 and 1997 (NJDEP, 2001). Similar trends were found in the land areas adjacent to Lake Cushetunk and the main stem of the Rockaway and Lamington Creeks.

A total of seven protected bird species, two protected amphibian species, one protected plant species, and a Natural Heritage Priority Site (Solberg-Hunterdon Airport) have been formally documented (NJ Natural Heritage Database), while several more species have been noted by environmental professionals but have not been formally documented.

Readington Township contains 3, 888 acres of priority grassland habitat, 3, 987 acres of priority forested habitat, and 818 acres of priority wetlands (NJDEP, Landscapes Program).

All streams and tributaries within the Township are classified as category two, freshwater waterways (FW-2), and water quality must be maintained within the state water quality standards.

The one-hundred foot riparian corridors in the Township are fairly well buffered, however agricultural uses along some waterways are not as well-buffered.

Guiding Principles & Primary Resource Preservation Goals (P. 7)

Maintain large, intact patches of native vegetation and prevent fragmentation by development.

Establish and implement priorities for species and habitat protection.

Maintain connections among habitat by protecting corridors for movement.

Maintain significant ecological processes in protected areas.

Contribute to the regional persistence of rare species by protecting their habitat locally.

Primary Resource Protection Action Items (p.7)

Work with developers, homeowners, and others to maximize buffer areas along river and stream corridors.

Develop riparian corridor greenways fostering conservation of riparian buffers and passive recreation and implementing programs recommended by the Readington Township Greenways Work Group.

Utilize funding from governments and private foundations to continue preserving historic districts and villages in the Township, including East Whitehouse, Readington, Stanton, Three Bridges and the Pleasant Run Historic District. Ensure the integrity of these areas through green belting.

Continue to obtain additional funding to purchase and maintain open space areas identified as valuable habitat and those areas addressing the biological principles stated above.

Opportunities to preserve diminishing farmland should continue to be actively pursued.

Involvement in county easement purchase program, state fee simple program, and township easement purchase/option program should continue.

Balance the opportunity for recreation by the public with the habitat needs of wildlife.

Consider habitat restoration activities on existing recreational land in the Township.

Implement a habitat conservation education program linking farmers with habitat restoration funding programs.

Development in areas with excessive slopes, particularly those above 15% should be limited.

To the extent possible, steeply sloping land should be left in its natural condition or maintained in grass or tree cover.

Proper steps should be taken to ensure that residential or commercial development does not jeopardize the aquifer's ability to recharge and supply the Township with the necessary potable water.

The township should consider additional development standards to restrict and eliminate disturbance in all critical/vulnerable areas (e.g., most erosive soils, steepest slopes, state designated grassland, wetland, and forest habitats).

Additional open space set asides should be considered, particularly in vulnerable areas noted in the ERI.

Characteristic Flora and Fauna, April 2001

This report, prepared by the Readington Township Environmental Commission, contains an inventory of the wildlife species within Readington. It is organized according to habitats, containing a profile of the species that are associated with each habitat, including mature forest, agricultural landscapes, grasslands, wetlands, streams, rivers, and successional and suburban habitats. The Planning Board appended this report to the Master Plan on May 14, 2001, and it is incorporated by reference herein. This inventory complements the report entitled *Critical Habitats of Readington Township*.

Critical Habitats of Readington Township, April 2001

This report, prepared by the Readington Township Environmental Commission, addresses the importance of the various of habitats within Readington and emphasizes the need to preserve those habitats in order to facilitate the conservation of wildlife species. It contains maps and photographs describing a range of critical habitats, including mature forest, agricultural landscapes, grasslands, wetlands, streams, rivers, and successional and suburban habitats. The Planning Board appended this report to the Master Plan on May 14, 2001, and it is incorporated by reference herein. *Critical Habitats* identifies threats to habitat and recommends strategies to reduce those threats. These are useful in formulating open space planning priorities and strategies, and are therefore incorporated within this plan element:

Mature Forest

Threat: Loss and fragmentation of remaining forest habitat through development

Possible Solutions: Make a township priority of conserving remaining areas of mature forest habitat through (1) deed restriction (purchase of conservation easements). (2) offering tax incentives for woodland conservation management, and (3) fee purchase of larger parcels for Township open-space. P.4

Agricultural Landscape

Threat: Loss and fragmentation of remaining agricultural landscape through development

Possible Solutions: Continue (and, if possible, accelerate) township efforts to preserve remaining agricultural landscapes, especially large pieces and those contiguous to already-preserved farmland. P.8

Grassland Habitat

Threat: Loss and fragmentation of remaining grassland habitat through development

Possible Solutions: Continue and, in fact, accelerate township efforts to preserve remaining high-quality grassland habitats, (i.e. especially large contiguous pieces, or those contiguous to already-preserved agricultural

land...Two very significant tracts, of a contiguous mass large enough to function as significant grassland habitat that still offer the opportunity for grassland habitat protection in Readington Township are the Ilva Saronno tract and the lands of Solberg Aviation. P.11

Threat: Agricultural practices unfavorable to grassland fauna.

Possible solutions: The best solution is to make acquisition of large contiguous tracts that are suitable for grassland habitat a Township priority for open space acquisition. This priority is made ever more pressing by reports that grassland species are the most threatened species nationwide. ... Alternatively, the township may subsidize farmers for practicing less-lucrative grassland-friendly farming methods.P.11

Lowland Habitats (wetlands, streams and rivers)

Threat: Fragmentation and associated physical disturbances

Possible solutions: ...continued (and accelerated) efforts should be made to preserve contiguous stretches of riparian corridor, utilizing Township, County, State and private funding.P.15

Threat: Degradation of surrounding upland habitats

Possible solutions: ...significant buffers of surrounding uplands should be included in the preservation of wetlands and riparian stream corridors. These should be more extensive (probably several times wider) than the current wetland- and stream-corridor buffer zones currently utilized by the Township.P.15

Successional Vegetation

Threat: Fragmentation by suburban development

Possible solutions: Continue and accelerate Township efforts to preserve open space-particularly larger areas contiguous to existing open space. P.19

Suburban Wildlife Habitat

Threat: Build-out under current zoning

Possible solutions: Continue efforts to preserve open-space, while tightening zoning restrictions on remaining Township land containing important wildlife habitat..P.15

GEOGRAPHIC SUB -AREAS

The Greenways Plan of 1995 designated geographic sub-areas, containing lands that share common characteristics, to serve as the basis for open space planning goals and actions. Since that time, Readington has made progress in conserving open space within each of these locales. However, implementation of the Greenways goals has not yet been fully realized. Together with the renewed focus on environmental resource conservation and wildlife habitat protection, these remain as valid themes with which to organize open space planning efforts.

Lamington River /Rockaway Creek Watershed and the Village of East Whitehouse

This area is rich with historic features, such as Taylor's Mill, and the Village of East Whitehouse. In addition, it contains pristine stream corridors, such as the Lamington and Rockaway Rivers. Rolling farmland predominates in this area. Active designation of historic sites has been accomplished in several areas in this block.

Future success at preserving land along the Rockaway and the Lamington are especially critical because of the Township's desire to maintain the quality on these streams. The Township has been actively working with the Trust for Public Lands and landowners in this area to gain some public access to the Rockaway Creek north east of East Whitehouse. These efforts, and efforts to greenbelt the village of East Whitehouse are ongoing.

Recent open space preservation efforts have lead to the preservation of the following tracts in this sub-area:

North Branch of the Rockaway:

Renda Family Donation: 12 acres, Block 3 Lot 3. This substantially wooded property comprised of uplands, wetlands, and floodplain serves to protect one of Readington's only trout production streams. The water quality in the North Branch of the Rockaway is still substantially non-impaired. The piece is contiguous to the Whitimore Nature Preserve in Tewksbury.

Main stem, Rockaway Creek:

Rockaway Creek Preserve, Renda parcel, public owned open space: 15 acres, Block 13 Lot 57.03. This parcel worked toward the preservation of a larger Greenway protection effort started a number of years ago. Seven public owned parcels now total 150 acres. The parcels are predominately wooded and protect floodplain and wetlands, as well as uplands.

Rockaway Creek Preserve, Renda Family Farm, easement purchase: 75 acres, Block 13 Lot 57. The conservation easement purchased on this farm restricts the future use of the farm to its present predominantly open and wooded condition, and therefore provides important protection for the Rockaway's riparian corridor.

Schley Family Farms, Farmland Preservation easement purchase and easement donations: five farm parcels, total of 405 acres preserved. This farmland preservation project which included the largest donation to date in the states Farmland Preservation Program, protects not only the Rockaway but also a large section of the Lamington River as well. A 10 % impervious coverage restriction in the deed helps to protect the Riparian corridors. In their existing use, that is hay and pastureland, these farms also provide important grassland habitat.

South Branch of the Rockaway Creek, Chamber's Brook, Whitehouse Station

There is a large concentration of population in the section of the Township bounded by Route 22 to the north, which includes the watershed areas of the South Branch of the Rockaway and the Chambers Brook. The South Branch of the Rockaway is designated as trout maintenance, so particular efforts should be made to protect the land adjacent to it. There are a number of large parcels adjacent to the Chambers Brook so the opportunity still exists to preserve land along it. In this area it would be worthwhile to preserve the opportunity for small neighborhood parks and localized wildlife and conservation areas.

Recent open space preservation efforts have lead to the acquisition of the following tracts in this sub-area:

South Branch of the Rockaway:

P. Lomar Nature Preserve: 100 acres, Block 21, Lots 12, 13, and 30: These predominately wooded parcels offer important protection to one of Readington's few trout maintenance streams. The acquisition serves to protect important

wetlands, floodplain, and habitat for such species as the Wood Turtle, the Great Blue Heron and the Wood Duck.

Lake Cushetunk Senior Walkway: 10 acres, Block 21.12 Lots 34 and 34.02: These ten acres, acquired primarily to provide a walkway connection between Lake Cushetunk Lake Development and the village of Whitehouse Station also serves to protect important woodlands, wetlands, and wildlife habitat adjacent to the South Branch of the Rockaway Creek below Lake Cushetunk. The walkway will connect a development with close to 10% of Readington Township's population with the Little league fields and the shopping opportunities in the village of Whitehouse Station.

Chambers Brook:

Bruce Wales, 66 acres, Block 48 Lot 24. This parcel, is a part of the open space greenway which includes the lands of Solberg Aviation and it is also contiguous to the Holland Brook School. Its preservation will serve to protect the headwaters of the Chambers Brook. It includes open field agriculture and successional woodland, as well as riparian areas. The property has been appraised and negotiations are being finalized.

Cushetunk Mountain

This area includes the entire side of Cushetunk Mountain and a significant block of farmland at the mountain's base in Block 25. It is bounded by the railroad to the north, Round Valley Reservoir Preserve to the west, Dreahook Road and Route 523 to the east and stretches south to Stanton.

The mountainous area is contiguous to both Cushetunk Mountain Preserve and the State lands known as Round Valley Reservoir. It contains a very significant, mature stand of unbroken woodland forest and environmentally sensitive steep slopes. The farmland is a block of more than 300 acres of prime soils and is contiguous to both the Cushetunk Mountain and to Round Valley Reservoir lands and to Pickell Park. It continues to be a priority for Readington Township to preserve as much land as possible on the side of Cushetunk Mountain. The 300 acre area of farmland at the foot of the mountain is a priority area for passive recreation because of its proximity to the population center of Whitehouse Station and its potential for creating a linkage between Pickell park and the Cushetunk Mountain preserve and the State lands of Round Valley.

Recent open space preservation efforts have lead to the acquisition of the following tracts in this sub-area:

Bertrand, 31 acres, Block 44 Lot 6. This parcel, which fronts on Dreahook Road and includes a portion of the side of Cushetunk Mountain, begins to protect one of the most valuable mature woodland areas of Readington. The parcel is almost contiguous, at the top of the mountain, with the Round Valley State Recreation Lands. Since woodland provides the best protection for aquifer recharge and water quality, the proximity of this piece to the headwaters of the Holland Brook is also significant.

Vislockey, 82 acres, Block 25 Lots 19 and 20. This parcel, which provides the potential for future active recreation because its proximity to Pickell Park, protects a portion of the side of Cushetunk Mountain. It is contiguous to the County-owned Cushetunk Mountain Preserve. Readington Township purchased the land in fee in February of 2001. As with the Bertrand parcel, this piece protects important mature woodland habitat.

Stanton Place, 106 acres, Block 25 Lot 50. This open space parcel was dedicated as a result of an adjoining cluster development. It is almost entirely mature woodland, and is contiguous to both the state Round Valley Lands and the County's Cushetunk Mountain Preserve. It contributes to the protection of the vulnerable steep slopes on the side of the mountain. Its overall contribution to the goal of the preservation of the unique habitat of of Cushetunk Mountain makes this an important acquisition

Holland Brook

The Holland Brook Stream Corridor traverses the entire center of the Township from east to west. Its headwaters begin just east of Dreahook Road and run through the Village of Readington to the west. There has been a credible beginning towards creation of a Holland Brook Greenway. Preservation of land along this major stream corridor includes three open space parcels donated to the town as a result of cluster developments. It includes the preserved Wallendjack and Moore farms and the Scanlon Farm. Green Acres acquisitions along the Brook are the Lachenmayr tract and will soon include the Knocke farm. In addition, the active recreation site known as Hillcrest Park is included in this Greenway. The potential for continued preservation along the stream is great since the majority of the land along the stream remains undeveloped.

Recent open space preservation efforts have lead to the acquisition of the following tracts in this sub-area:

Bertrand, 47.5 acres, Block 45 Lot 26.06 in fee, 7 acres, Lot 26.07, easement only. These parcels serve to protect the headwaters of the Holland Brook. Readington is under contract to purchase the larger parcel using a grant from the NJ Environmental Infrastructure Trust and will close on both properties in July of this year. Two tributaries intersect on this property to form the main stem of the Holland Brook. It provides typical agricultural habitat, that is a mix of appurtenant woodland, open fields and riparian areas.

Wachendorf Farm, 103 acres, Block 46, Lot 20, farmland preservation. Readington has received final approval for a Planning Incentive Grant that will fund the Farmland Preservation Easement on this farm, and Readington Township has appraised the property. This farm has frontage on the Holland Brook.

Pine Brook Farms Open Space, 18 acres, Block 66 Lot 49. This wooded open space parcel includes important frontage along the Holland Brook, as well as protection for the preserved Wallendjack farm, which is contiguous. It was conveyed to the Township as a result of an eight-lot subdivision.

Scanlon Farms, 42 and 45 acres, Block 55 Lots 17 and 17.02. These recently preserved farms serve an important open space role in the protection of a significant amount of the Holland Brook riparian corridor.

Knocke Farm, 15 acres, fee, and 25 acres, easement, Block 55 Lots 21.02 and Lot 21. The 15 acres preserved in fee includes another important section of the Holland Brook riparian corridor contiguous to Hillcrest Park. It is an environmentally important combination of woodland and floodplain. The contiguous preserved farm of 25 acres protects a broader area of the stream corridor. The property was preserved in 2000 with the help of a Green Acres grant awarded to the Trust for Public Land for preserving Greenways in Readington Township.

Readington Village / Natural Heritage Priority Area

Readington Village is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Although it sits just to the west and the north of large blocks of totally developed land, it maintains its traditional historic and rural character. This is due, in part, because it is buffered by the open space along the Holland Brook and by the open land associated with the Solberg Airport. The existence of the airport stabilizes over 700 acres of open space adjacent to Readington and thus serves as a greenbelt. It is a goal of Readington Township to maintain as much remaining land around Readington Village as possible in order to better protect this greenbelt.

The New Jersey Office of Natural Land Management identifies the majority of the Solberg Airport lands as a *Natural Heritage Priority Site*. Due to their size and the extent of critical wildlife habitat, the Solberg Airport lands are an open space preservation priority.

Round Mountain

This area includes Round Mountain and the rolling farmland at its base. The mountain is rich with mature--100 year old and older--climax woodlands containing beech and other valuable varieties, and is ecologically fragile. It comprises one of the largest unbroken mature forests in the County. The tree and vegetative cover is necessary to protect steep slopes from erosion. The preservation of this area is under way via County and Township acquisition efforts, but these efforts must be stepped up or the opportunity to save this very significant area or it will be lost.

The Village of Stanton

This village is virtually unspoiled and is surrounded on all sides by beautiful vistas. It is one of the most scenic villages in Hunterdon County and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It contains mature woodlands, historic homes, and open tracts of land. State and Local preservation of the Dobozyński farm, the Stickney farm, and soon the Burgher Farm are important steps towards green belting Stanton, but there are a number of additional open parcels that are important to the village, which should be preserved.

Recent open space preservation efforts have lead to the acquisition of the following tract in this sub-area:

Luckett, 8 acres, Block 63 Lot 49. Although small, this acquisition, when completed will be significant in its protection of the historic character of the village of Stanton. It includes the open field and woods directly across from the historic church and general store.

Pleasant Run Corridor

This corridor is a prime area for preservation. It's integrity is maintained by large farmland parcels fronting on Pleasant Run Road. Four large parcels lie north and south of Pleasant Run Road between Route 523 and Barley Sheaf. Two of these parcels, the Bauer Farm and the Lane Farm have been preserved and the

Hruebesh farm has been selected for preservation by the County farmland preservation program. The south side of Pleasant Run Road, between Locust Road and 202 contains approximately 800 acres of contiguous farmland, an unspoiled stream corridor, and one of the Township's nicest views. Preservation of the large parcels along this corridor should continue using a variety of preservation strategies. Public access to the creek should be obtained where possible.

Recent open space preservation efforts have lead to the acquisition of the following tracts in this sub-area:

Burgher/Garfield Farm, 4.2 acres, fee and 23 acres easement, Block 50 Lots 14.01 and Lot 14. The preservation of this farm helps, along with the formerly preserved Stickney Farm, to preserve the headwaters of the Pleasant Run.

Hrubesh Farm, 80 acres, Block 52 Lot 10. This farm is being preserved under the state Farmland Preservation Program. Readington optioned the easement in 1999, and the County will be closing on the entire easement this summer. Its preservation, along with the previous preservation of the Bauer Farm provide important stream corridor protection purposes.

Romano Farm, 72 acres, fee and 110 acres, Block 52.01 Lot14, farmland preservation easement. The preservation of this property, which went to closing with Readington Township in January of 1999, was an important milestone in protecting the Pleasant Run stream corridor. A tributary to the main stem of the Pleasant Run traverses a wooded section of the 72 acres retained in fee. The preservation also protects an impressive wetland area, as well as typical agricultural habitat.

Jones Farm, 52 acres, Block 75 Lots 35 and 40, farmland preservation easement. The easement on this farm was optioned by Readington Township in the early nineties. Readington now has purchased the entire easement and received approval for state funding.

Lane Farm, 49 acres and 5 acres, Block 75 Lot 32, easement purchase, Block 75 Lot 32.03, fee purchase. The Trust for Public Land purchased this farm, which includes a significant section of the Pleasant Run, in June of 1998. Readington Township bought the easement on a 49-acre portion and a five-acre parcel in fee approximately one year later with the help of Green Acres. The farm protects typical riparian and agricultural habitats, as well as an historical and scenic element of the area.

Rica parcel, 39 acres, Block 75 Lot 19.01, fee purchase. Readington has a contract pending to purchase this 39-acre parcel in fee. It is contiguous to the Lane Farm and also protects a significant stretch of the riparian corridor for the Pleasant Run, with significant wetlands and floodplain as well as upland areas presently in a meadow condition.

KCR, 6 acres and 34 acres, Block 76 Lot 3.01 and a portion of Lot 3. Six acres of this tract, which is adjacent to the Pleasant Run and includes a significant tributary to the stream is under contract to be purchased by the Township. A 34-acre portion contiguous to it will be dedicated to the Township shortly as the open space set aside from a development cluster. The resulting 40 acres of open space will provide protection for both successional and riparian habitat.

Three Bridges Village

Agriculture remains very viable in the Three Bridges area. This village is totally surrounded by large blocks of farmland to the north, east, and west and the South Branch of the Raritan River to the South. Preservation of a portion of the Burjan farm, the Mason farm and the Kanach farm have resulted in 575 acres permanently deed restricted to agriculture. An additional farmland preservation project is underway. The need for active recreation opportunities in the area is being satisfied with the development of a 48 acre parcel on Summer Road not far away. A small neighborhood park within walking distance of the village has been an agreed on goal for many years but not yet realized.

Recent open space preservation efforts have lead to the acquisition of the following tract in this sub-area:

Burjan Farm, 128 acres, Block 93 Lot 28, farmland preservation. The view across this farm, the adjacent preserved farms, and the valley of the South Branch of the Raritan River is one of the beautiful views that have historically been enjoyed and loved by all the residents of Hunterdon County. The recent preservation of this farm protects this view, and completes a green belt around the historic village of Three Bridges.

South Branch of the Raritan River Corridor

The South Branch of the Raritan River forms the Southern most boundary of our Township. State Green Acres efforts have resulted in public ownership of almost all of the land adjacent to the river from Stanton Station to Dart's Mill. For the section of frontage that runs from Darts Mill to Route 202, Township efforts have

resulted in the preservation of the Brokaw tract, with one section of this in Township ownership. From Route 202 to the Somerset County line, the river frontage is made up of small parcels sandwiched between the railroad and the river. Continued efforts should be made to preserve lands along this river, which is the major river corridor for the region. Also efforts should be continued to acquire public access to the river frontage.

Recent open space preservation efforts have lead to the acquisition of the following tracts in this sub-area:

Bartles Farm, 87 acres, Block 72 Lot 5, farmland preservation. The easement on this farm is now owned by Readington Township and Readington has received final approval for state funding. Its location makes it significant to the preservation of the river corridor.

Kanach/Illva Saronno Farm, 87 acres, easement purchase. This farm is under contract to be purchased as a part of the larger Illva Saronno tract. Readington will deed restrict the property for open space, conservation, and historic preservation and sell the farm at auction. Although the easement will be funded by Green Acres money, the property will remain available for agriculture. In addition, it protects valuable riparian lands along the Lazy Brook, and enhances grasslands habitat on the adjoining future public land.

Raritan River Preserve, Illva Sarrono Tract, 344 acres, Block 74 Lot 7, Block 79 Lots 2 and 3, fee purchase. Readington is under contract to purchase this land from Illva Sarranno, and also under contract to immediately resell the land to the State Natural Lands Trust. The Division of Fish and Wildlife will manage the Land for habitat and watershed protection. The uplands portion of this tract will be provide rare and valuable habitat for threatened and endangered grassland birds.

Raritan River Preserve, Fallone, 140 acres, Block 73 Lot 27, Block 74 Lots 8, 9, and 11 and Block 79 Lot 4. This open land is under contract for purchase by the municipality and this tract also will be purchased shortly afterwards by the Division of Fish and Wildlife. The entire Raritan River Preserve will total close to 500 acres of land managed for habitat and watershed protection. The large size of the tract assures the continued health and diversity of the existing high quality ecosystem.

IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the goals, objectives and policies within this plan element should balance open space acquisition priorities, the various mechanisms of maintaining open space and the resources available to acquire open space. There is not a single formula that will work for all cases, but the methods described herein provide a suitable menu of current tools for achieving open space preservation goals. Although this plan identifies priorities for preservation, there should be flexibility in the application of these priorities to reflect the opportunities to preserve open space as they arise.

Open Space Preservation Mechanisms

The following tools have been used in the designation of open space within Readington. It is recommended that the Township continue to employ these mechanisms as appropriate.

Active Recreation Purchases

Readington has made three land purchases for active recreation without the benefit of Green Acres Funds. Since siting of active recreation is often difficult because of neighborhood concerns and the need for level land for playing fields, Readington reacted quickly when appropriate pieces became available at a reasonable price. The Township has purchased three separate sites that total 121 acres designated specifically for active recreation. These are the approximately 20-acre Pickell Park, the 54-acre Hillcrest Park, and the 48-acre Summer Road Park.

Green Acres Grants

Readington has applied for and received 4 Green Acres grants. The four properties were selected to implement a portion of Readington's Open Space Plan.

Open Space Cluster Ordinance

Readington's open space cluster ordinance has resulted in over 500 acres of land being donated to the Township, as part of the subdivision process. The majority of this land is held for conservation and passive recreation purposes. A 14-acre parcel near Readington School is being used for active recreation, with two

Insert Active open space map here

baseball fields that have been constructed on it. Some of these open space parcels are being leased to area farmers to be used for agricultural purposes. Some are leased for hunting purposes where appropriate. A number of parcels have been left in their natural, undisturbed condition so as to contribute to the preservation of local wildlife habitat. When combined with other acquisitions, these parcels serve as an area that is available for passive recreation, (as components of larger Greenways) or in some instances as a buffer for preserved agricultural land. In the future it is anticipated that some open space parcels may serve as local parks, where appropriate.

The cluster ordinance may be used to effectively preserve large tracts of land in areas designated as desirable by the Open Space Plan. It may be necessary to work with the developer at the time of Planning Board review to assure the proposed design is consistent with the open space goals. Experience to date has shown that the cluster provisions in the RR zone are often not effective in preserving meaningful open space parcels. It can result in relatively small areas that meander around newly created lots and which don't contribute appreciably to implementing the Township's open space goals. Although the area of RR zone was reduced significantly in 1998 with the creation of the AR zone, the lands within the remaining RR zone may warrant reexamination to determine if the regulations should be modified to permit more meaningful open space preservation.

State Green Acres Greenways Planning Incentive Grant

Readington Township was approved for a \$3 million Green Acres Grant for acquisition of Open Space under a special program, known as the Planning Incentive Grant Program, in 1996. The basis of the successful application was the Open Space Plan presented in the Report of the Readington Township Greenways Work Group, dated October 1995. Readington was awarded an additional \$2.0 million in 1999 under this program. The Planning Incentive Grants are available only to municipalities that have a dedicated tax and an Open Space Plan. Readington should continue to seek extensions of Planning Incentive Grant funds as appropriate. Green Acres funds can also be accessed by private non-profit land trusts on behalf of the Township. In the event this method of funding is used, Readington will have paid for the 50% matching funds with money from its Open Space Trust Fund. The result for either method of purchase is Township owned land held for recreation or conservation purposes.

Work with Private Land Trusts

The Trust for Public Land has received Green Acres Approval for a project known as “Readington Greenways” that will work to preserve land along the three major stream corridors. Readington will fund 50% of the cost. The Trust has presently completed one project on the Pleasant Run and is actively working on a second on the Holland Brook.

Outright Donations

Readington has accepted at least three outright donations of Open Space Land. Two of these are adjacent to the Raritan River and total 40 acres and one is a three-acre wood lot on Dreahook Road in the area of Cushetunk Mountain. It is necessary to educate potential landowners about this opportunity, and possibly provide technical assistance with the crafting of an easement or by paying for soft costs such as surveys.

Farmland Preservation Program

Where appropriate, farmland preservation is an excellent method of contributing to open space preservation by preserving natural vistas and providing a buffer for other preserved areas. Farmland preservation results in larger parcels of appropriate size, location, and soil quality being dedicated to agricultural use. Readington should continue to participate with the Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board and the NJ State Agriculture Development Committee to plan and seek means to preserve agricultural lands.

Purchase of Land in Fee

When land comes up for sale at a reasonable price, fee simple acquisition by the Township should be considered. A larger portion of the parcel can be deed restricted for agriculture and resold into private ownership. The farmland preservation easement on a larger farm parcel would be held by the Township for resale to the Hunterdon County Agricultural Development Board, the farm which has been deed restricted to agriculture could be sold back into private ownership, and the smaller portion of the parcel in appropriate locations, for instance along a stream corridor, could be retained by the Township for conservation purposes or passive recreation purposes.

Purchase of a Conservation Easement

In some instances, the purchase of an easement on some portion of a privately owned parcel in a key location is desirable, for instance, in an area that would be critical to a Greenway or would help to protect a stream or river corridor. This strategy would be particularly appropriate for small parcels that would not be eligible for major subdivisions or for farmland preservation.

Protection of Environmentally Sensitive Features by Regulation

Sensitive features include steep slopes, flood plain, wetlands, and state open waters. Township ordinances have been reviewed as part of the Environmental Resources Inventory (ERI) to determine if they are giving these environmentally sensitive features adequate protection. The recommendations within the ERI should be implemented. Where possible, the lands including sensitive features should be subject to a conservation easement, either at the time they are included in an Open Space acquisition or inclusive of a parcel undergoing major subdivision or site plan.

Preservation Priorities¹³

One of the consequences of development and suburbanization in rural areas is the loss and degradation of critically important wildlife habitats and the fragmentation and isolation of any habitats that remain. Many rare species require large contiguous blocks of habitat to survive. We need to protect large contiguous blocks of grasslands, forest and wetlands to assure the survival, over the long term, of diverse, healthy ecosystems and rare species. Many animal and plant populations, which are presently considered common in an area such as Readington Township, actually require large expanses of natural habitat for their survival. Readington is fortunate to still have remaining areas consisting of contiguous open space of more than one thousand acres. These areas are severely threatened by the intense development pressures in this Township. Renewed efforts to preserve these areas must be made soon, or the opportunity to do so will be lost.

Readington Village / Natural Heritage Priority Area

This open space area, made up of a number large of open parcels to the northwest of the village of Readington, is one of the largest remaining open

¹³ This component of the plan has been largely based on information from the Readington Township Open Space Committee, in their *Report of the Open Space Committee*, dated June 2001.

space areas in the Township. The Office of Natural Lands Management, which is a division of the NJDEP's Division of Parks and Forestry, has designated this area as a Natural Heritage Priority Site because it represents one of the best habitats for rare species and exemplary natural communities in New Jersey. Sites, so designated, are considered top priority for preservation of biological diversity. Among other characteristics, the extensive grasslands of this area make it unique. Here is a summary of presently unpreserved parcels that make up this area, and a brief discussion of open space characteristics of interest:

Block 48 Lot 25, 14.3 acres. This undeveloped parcel totally incorporates a significant parcel of impressive mature woodland.

Block 48 Lot 25, 65.66 acres. This farm is a mix of mature forest, successional woodland, a meadow, and a significant riparian area. Readington has appraised this property, negotiated with the landowner, and is working toward acquisition.

Solberg Airport lands. Over the past year, Readington has been evaluating the lands that include the Solberg- Hunterdon Airport to determine the feasibility of municipal acquisition. As part of that study, a report¹⁴ has been prepared to examine the potential benefits of municipal ownership of those lands. This report identified several unique attributes on the tract, including the existing airport, agricultural fields, stream corridors, wetlands, open space and woodlands. It highlighted the designation of a majority of the tract as a Natural Heritage Priority Site, a designation placed upon lands by the State of New Jersey that have unique, threatened wildlife habitat. In the case of the Solberg Airport lands, this designation is linked to the grassland habitat. The report also indicated that New Jersey's Landscape Project had identified critical woodland and wetland habitats, in addition to the grasslands. Much of the parcel is assessed as farmland and contains agricultural soils. The existing open space around the airport contributes to the greenbelt around the historic village of Readington and the Holland Brook corridor. The potential for limited active recreation on portions of the site is complemented by an enormous potential for passive recreation, including greenways trails and bird watching. Given these unique and diverse characteristics, the report concluded that myriad benefits could be realized through municipal acquisition:

Municipal acquisition of the Study Area would result in an interwoven series of benefits that could be greater than the sum of the individual parts. Under municipal ownership, Readington could act as a comprehensive land steward for this extraordinarily large and diverse parcel. This role

¹⁴ Clarke Caton Hintz. June 28,2001. Evaluation of Block 48 Lot 23, Block 55 Lot 33, Block 56 Lots 1, 3, 6 & 8 and Block 67 Lot 2 for Municipal Acquisition

would entail balancing ecological, commercial, transportation, open space, historic preservation and recreational purposes. Commercial uses, such as agriculture and the airport, could be managed to reduce or eliminate conflicts with wildlife habitat areas and other environmentally sensitive areas. Similarly, the development of passive or active recreational facilities could also be directed to the most appropriate locations, based on the extent of critical natural features and the location of facilities necessary for the continued operation of the airport. Through acquisition of the Study Area, Readington could ensure that all of these various public interests are balanced while effecting and managing a set of land uses that, when considered as a whole, will confer a unique benefit to the public.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that the most effective way to preserve and manage the unique environmental resources and open space on these tracts be through acquisition by the Township. The following are specific descriptions of the Solberg lands:

Block 56 Lot 1, 64.65 acres. This property protects a significant wetland and riparian area associated with the major tributary of the Chambers Brook that traverses the property. The mix of open grasslands and successional woodland make an important contribution to the agricultural and grassland habitat of the area.

Block 48 Lot 23, 72.6 acres. This property, along with the Bruce Wales property to the north protects the headwaters of the Chambers Brook. The western portion incorporates a mature hardwood forest and abuts the Holland Brook School property. The largest section of the property is open grasslands, and significant grassland habitat.

Block 56 Lot 8, 29.9 acres. This property protects a portion of the grassland habitat and wetland habitat of the larger parcel adjoining it. Its most important purpose as open space, however, would be the protection of the airport itself. It is important for the safe operation of the airport that areas adjacent to runways be maintained as open space.

Block 56 Lot 3, 427.7 acres. This property is noteworthy for preservation for a number of reasons. First of all it is the single largest open space parcel in the Township. Secondly, its preservation would help assure that the Solberg Airport, which is included in it, would be appropriately buffered and allowed to operate without interference from the encroachment of

inappropriate and incompatible development. In addition, the parcel is central to an area listed as a Natural Heritage Priority Site, so designated because of the unique habitat it provides for threatened and endangered grassland birds. The property includes a mix of wetlands, a riparian area, successional woodland, and open fields, all of which collectively make up a valuable habitat for local flora and fauna, particularly because of the uniquely expansive area that remains in its natural state. Further development or fragmentation of this large contiguous area would greatly reduce its value in protecting the health of the local ecosystem.

Block 56 Lot 6, 70.66 acres. This property, along with other lands of Solberg Aviation, serves to provide an open space greenbelt for the historic village of Readington. It also serves as an integral part of the Holland Brook stream corridor, protecting both a steep slope and wooded areas and a major tributary of the brook, which runs through the parcel. The upper portion contributes valuable grassland habitat when combined with the larger Lot 3. The preservation of this parcel for open space also provides an essential buffer for the airport operations. The main runway lies just to the north.

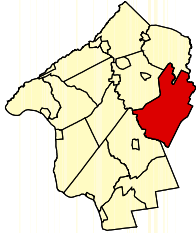
Block 55 Lot 33, 20.95 acres. This parcel is made up almost entirely of wetlands, floodplain, and steep slope areas. A major tributary of the Holland Brook joins the main stem of the brook on this site. It is contiguous both to the Hillcrest Park and the Holland Brook Nature Preserve. This parcel would make a valuable addition to this nature preserve.

Block 67 Lot 2, 36.77 acres. This predominately open and level property, adjacent to an established neighborhood, would provide a much-needed future recreation site for the growing township. This future use would have to be balanced, through proper management, so as not to interfere with its contribution to the grassland habitat of the larger area.

Block 56 Lot 5, 5.6 acres, Block 55 Lot 34, 21 acres,. This historic farmstead still looks essentially as it did when the Village of Readington was the hub of an agricultural community more than a hundred years ago. Readington should make the preservation of this farm a priority for its contribution to the historic character of the area, as well as its contribution to the protection of the Holland Brook stream corridor.

Open Space Preservation Priority Areas

Readington Township
Hunterdon County, New Jersey
June 2001



Tewksbury Township
Hunterdon County

Bedminster Township
Somerset County

Rockaway/Lamington
River Watershed

Cushetunk
Mountain

Clinton Township
Hunterdon County

Branchburg Township
Somerset County

Readington Village/
Natural Heritage Priority

Pleasant Run Corridor

Raritan Township
Hunterdon County

Hillsborough Township
Hunterdon County



2000 0 2000 4000 6000 8000 Feet



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Base Map Source: Thomas L. Yager & Associates., June, 2001.

Block 48 Lot 22.03, 50 acres. This property is developed as a horse farm, and the preservation of this property should most likely be through the Farmland Preservation Program.

Pleasant Run Corridor

The natural and historic character of the Pleasant Run Corridor is one of the major areas of the Township that contribute to the Readington's "sense of place". Preservation of the large properties along the stream and the Pleasant Run Road is essential to maintaining this character. Although some very significant properties have been preserved along this stretch, there are still a number of properties that should be preserved if the existing character is to be retained.

Block 62 Lot 1, 34 acres. This farm, in its present open condition, protects a classic, historic view of the countryside, including over 200 acres of preserved farmland. It, along with several other farms along Pleasant Run Road, serves to protect the historic integrity of the village of Stanton.

Block 50 Lot 13, 21.45 acres. This small-undeveloped property, if preserved, would provide a key link to the preserved open space on two sides of it, the Stickney farm and the Burgher/Garfield Farm. It also protects historic views and the historic integrity of Stanton.

Properties along the headwaters of the Pleasant Run, 22, 18.6, and 19 acres, Block 50 Lots 35, 16, and 31. Preservation of a portion of each of these properties along the creek would continue protection of an impressive natural area already started with the fee acquisition of a portion of the Burgher/Garfield Farm and could eventually form a greenways connection between Springtown Road and Pleasant Run Road.

Block 64 Lot 40, 150.48 acres. This property is unique because it is one of largest remaining contiguous wooded parcels in the area. It is equally as significant for habitat protection as it is for protection of the Pleasant Run stream corridor. It is contiguous to a preserved farm (to the west) and to Green Acres land. The preservation of this parcel would help secure a significantly large block of open space and provide valuable protection for the water quality in the Pleasant Run.

Properties along the Pleasant Run : Block 65, 23, 17, 26, and 15 acres respectively, Block 65 Lots 7, 12, 23, and 18.02. Open land associated with four small farms through which the Pleasant Run traverses help to protect the stream corridor and significant riparian area.

Block 66, Lot 13, 65 acres. This parcel, entirely wooded, and undeveloped is adjacent to two other properties being preserved under the Farmland Preservation Program. Because of its size and location, it is important to the Pleasant Run corridor for watershed and habitat protection.

Block 75 Lot 33, 118 acres. This farm, if preserved, would secure a key piece between 3 other preserved farms, helping to protect a large contiguous area along the Pleasant Run Corridor. It is made up predominately of soils of prime and statewide importance and would enjoy a high score in the competitive State Farmland Preservation Program.

Block 75 Lot 30, 151.7 acres. This well developed horse farm would also score high in the State Farmland Preservation program. Its preservation would also serve to protect the stream corridor, and some portion of the property, if purchased fee simple, would provide a greenway connection to an adjacent publicly owned parcels.

Block 75 Lot 30.02, 110 acres. The preservation of this undeveloped parcel would provide important riparian protection. It is approximately 40% wooded and contains extensive frontage along the Pleasant Run.

Block 70 Lot 38. 02, 94 acres. This property includes a major tributary to the Pleasant Run and with a mix of woodland and open farmland would be appropriate for either farmland preservation or habitat and watershed protection.

Block 96 Lot 18, 113 acres. Preservation of this property would protect both an impressive stand of mature woodland along the Pleasant Run and prime farmland in proximity to other preserved farms.

Rockaway/Lamington River Watershed Area

The watershed area for the main stem of the Rockaway and the Lamington River, located in the northwestern area of the Township includes two golf courses and a large contiguous area of farmland and open space. Readington has made significant progress in the preservation of land in this area. Many of these properties are designated as priority for this area, particularly because they are judged to be the most threatened by development at this time.

Block 15 Lot 29, 78.67 acres. This undeveloped parcel, located at the confluence of the main stem of the Rockaway and the Lamington Rivers is approximately 60% wooded with an extensive wetland area that is shown to extend across the entire northern end of the property. This, and the importance of the parcel to the

riparian areas of the two watercourses on which it fronts, makes this a very valuable piece to preserve from an environmental standpoint.

Block 15 Lot 27, 105 acres. This property was formerly developed as a horse farm, but is presently abandoned and has fallen into disrepair. Nevertheless, it would be a property of interest for farmland preservation. Approximately one third of the property is woodland, with some wooded wetlands. This portion of the property would be of interest for conservation purposes. The property is contiguous to the recently preserved Schley Farms.

Block 15 Lot 5, 44 acres,. This undeveloped property is entirely wooded, and when combined with the two other properties above, and the preserved Schley property that is also contiguous, this property becomes an important property for conservation purposes. It adds important wooded habitat to a large contiguous mass of open space.

Cushetunk Mountain

The portion of Cushetunk Mountain that lies in Readington Township is part of the largest mature hardwood forest in the area. The Readington Township line runs along the top of the mountain and is also the boundary line for the Round Valley State Recreation Area. In the northern most section, a large portion of the side of the mountain has been preserved. Much more of the mountain needs to be preserved, particularly to the South of Round Valley Road. Many of the parcels are small and landlocked. Due to the high number of parcels, they are not specified here.

Prospective Open Space

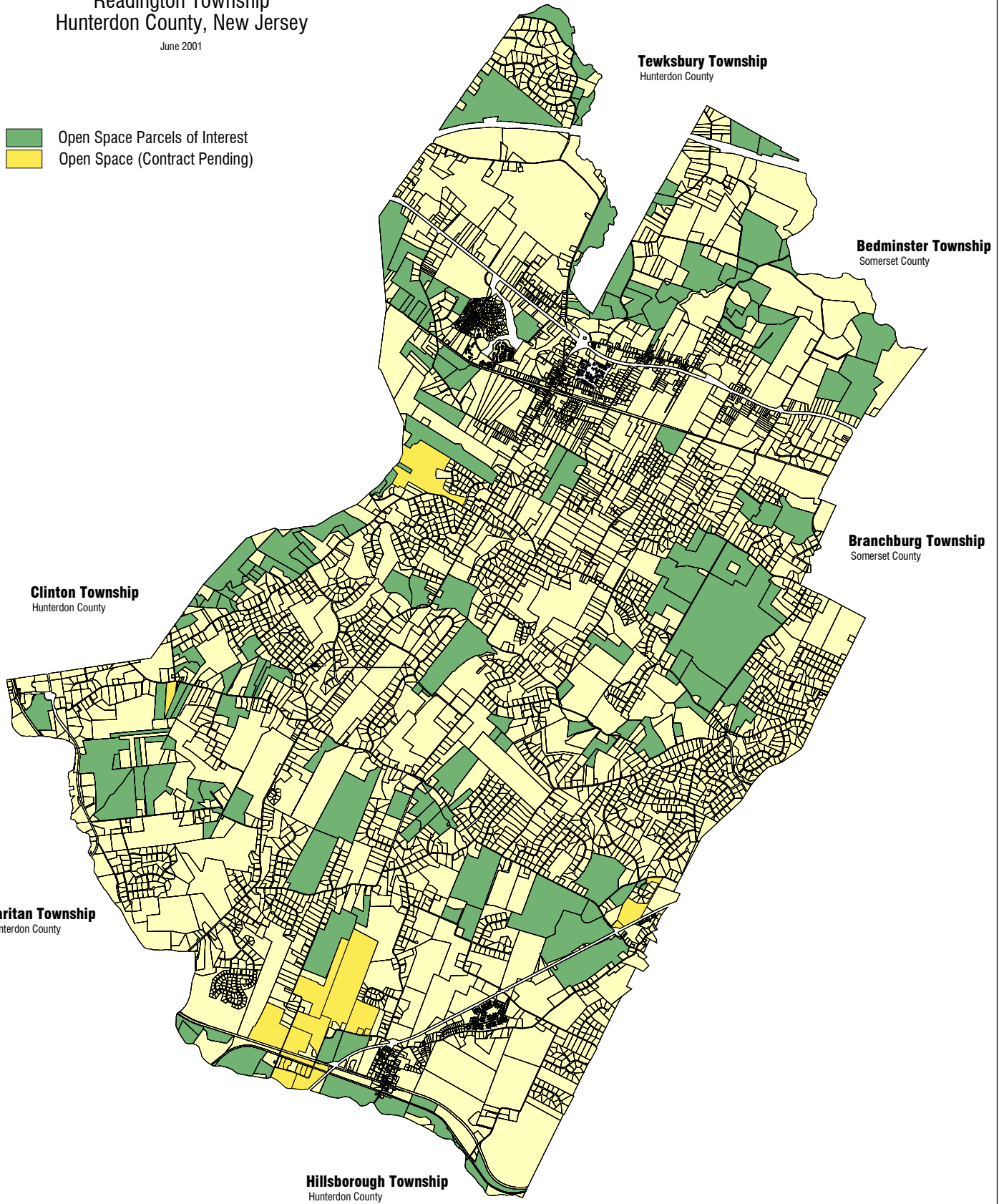
Readington has identified specific tracts that would facilitate implementation of the goals and objectives for open space preservation contained herein. It should be noted that this constellation of sites represents an ideal vision for open space preservation in Readington Township, and that it may be altered as situations evolve without amending this entire element.

Prospective Open Space

Readington Township
Hunterdon County, New Jersey

June 2001

- Open Space Parcels of Interest
- Open Space (Contract Pending)



0 1,450 2,900 5,800 8,700 11,600
Feet

Base Map Source: Thomas L. Yager & Associates., June, 2001.

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X. CIRCULATION

This amendment is an update to the 1990 Circulation Plan Element. It does not replace that plan element in its entirety, but replaces the section entitled "Airport".

AIRPORT

Solberg-Hunterdon airport is located in the northeastern quadrant of Readington Township and is generally bordered by Pulaski Road to the north, Lightfield Road to the west, Readington Road to the south and Thor Solberg Road to the east. It is a small level 3 airfield that is privately-owned. Users of Solberg-Hunterdon include single & light twin-engine planes, piston craft, turbo-prop, turbo jet, sailplanes and hot air balloons. There is no helicopter pad. The paved runway is designed for 12,500 lb aircraft with single-wheel landing gear. The airport contains the following elements¹⁵:

- ◆ One (1) Paved runway that is 3,735 feet long x 183 feet wide (paved area is 3,000' x 50')
- ◆ One (1) turf crosswind runway, 2,456' x 160'
- ◆ One (1) turf crosswind runway, 3,440' x 200'
- ◆ One (1) turf restricted runway / Glider, 2,000' x 250'
- ◆ Taxiway parallel to paved runway
- ◆ Two-story terminal of 5,000 sf
- ◆ Paved parking area for 80 vehicles
- ◆ Community hangar for 20 airplanes
- ◆ Maintenance hangar that is 90' x 50'
- ◆ six (6) paved transient plane parking spaces
- ◆ six (6) turf transient plane parking spaces
- ◆ 50 paved tie-down spaces
- ◆ 65 turf parking spaces
- ◆ 2-10,000 gallon underground fuel tanks
- ◆ VORTAC navigational aid

Recent trends indicate that small, privately-owned general aviation airports are succumbing to development pressure. This has been documented in the 1998 study by the General Aviation Study Commission¹⁶ that was commissioned by the legislature in 1993, which identified threats to the continued operation of

¹⁵ D&Z Transportation Services. 1997. Solberg-Hunterdon Airport Master Plan.

¹⁶ State of New Jersey. 1998. Report of the New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission

private, general use airports in New Jersey. The study found that no new airports had been established in New Jersey in 20 years and that many airports had closed. It also found that host communities did not provide financial support to airports and that airports were not generating sufficient revenue to ensure maintenance of air facilities. Increasing land values associated with residential development were found to put pressure upon airport owners to convert their operations from marginal public airports to extremely more profitable residential developments. The report went on to state that the historic rate of airport closures is bound to continue, unless there is intervention to support these facilities. Given these findings, the report recommends that there be a statewide airport preservation program to support private airports.

A technical report prepared for the New Jersey Office of Aviation contains a specific recommendation regarding the measures that should be taken to preserve Level 3 airports:

The threatened loss of privately owned Level 3 airports would require that the purchase of that facility by a public sector entity should take place unless the facility could be replaced by expanding another airport.¹⁷

As a public entity, the acquisition of the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport by Readington would be consistent with this recommendation.

An independent evaluation¹⁸ of the benefits that would be derived through municipal ownership and operation of the airport was commissioned by the Township. This report is included as an appendix to the Circulation Plan Element. The conclusions of that report indicate that municipal ownership of the airport would:

Benefit adjacent residents through operation that is consistent within the matrix of all community interests

Provide financial support to a somewhat unprofitable facility that will ensure its continued operation for airport users

Provide suitable resources for safety measures

Better balance environmental concerns with airport operations

¹⁷ Office of Aviation, New Jersey Department of Transportation. No Date (1991-1992?). New Jersey State Aviation System Plan: Final Technical Report. EMJ/McFarland-Johnson Engineers, Inc. in association with Proctor/Davis/Ray Engineers Inc. and R.A. Wiedemann & Associates. P.4

¹⁸ GRA Associates. June 27, 2001. Analysis of the Benefits of Readington Township's Ownership of Solberg Airport.

Ensure long-term operation of the facility are consistent with the findings herein and are incorporated as an appendix item.

Municipal ownership and control of airport facilities is specifically authorized by the New Jersey Constitution and several state statutes in order to accomplish the benefits of municipal ownership and control of airport facilities¹⁹:

N.J.S.A.40:8-1. (Authorizing acquisition of lands for airports and leases to airport operators)

N.J.S.A.40:8-2. (Authorizing acquisition and ownership of municipal airports)

N.J.S.A.40:8-4 and N.J.S.A.40:8-5 (authorizing airport acquisitions)

N.J.S.A.6:1-89 *et seq.* (contemplating municipal acquisition of airports)

N.J.S.A. 6:1-90 (authorizing airport preservation through acquisition)

N.J.S.A.40: 81, et seq. (establishing authority for municipal acquisition, ownership, operation, leasing, and joint ownership with other municipalities of airport facilities).

NEW JERSEY STATE PLAN (SDRP)²⁰

The New Jersey State Plan also contains statewide policies regarding the preservation and operation of transportation and air facilities in New Jersey. These policies include recommendations for protection of aviation facilities, but also encourage integration of land use planning with transportation facilities. It also seeks to ensure that natural and scenic resources are protected during any improvements to transportation facilities.

Statewide Policies

8. Transportation

Policy 1 Transportation Maintenance and Repair

¹⁹Clarke Caton Hintz. June 28, 2001. *Evaluation of Block 48 Lot 23, Block 55 Lot 33, Block 56 Lots 1, 3, 6 & 8 and Block 67 Lot 2 For Municipal Acquisition*

²⁰New Jersey State Planning Commission. 2001. *New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan*. Trenton, N.J.

The maintenance and repair of the existing transportation network is the highest transportation priority. p. 112

Policy 4 Integration of Land Use and Transportation Planning

Establish a working partnership between transportation agencies, municipal, county and regional governments and the private development community to strengthen the linkages between land use planning and transportation planning for all modes of transportation including mass transit, highways, rail, aviation, passenger ferry service and port facilities. Transportation system improvements and good land use planning practices must be mutually supportive. p. 113

Policy 5 Transportation and Environmental Resource Protection

Coordinate transportation planning and project development with environmental planning through a capital planning process. Before programming for construction, evaluate the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of installing transportation improvements and of the development that these improvements may support or induce to ensure that they accommodate and protect sensitive environmental resources. p. 113

Policy 8 Transportation and Aesthetics

Incorporate aesthetic values in capital planning, design and maintenance of transportation systems and corridors. p. 113

Policy 9 Transportation and Context Sensitive Design

Promote flexible transportation design standards and flexible application of standards which take into consideration the needs of people and the design and natural characteristics of adjacent areas. p. 114

Policy 11 Aviation Facilities

Preserve and protect New Jersey's public use aeronautical facilities to maintain statewide access to the global air transportation network. Enhance those facilities for goods and people to maintain the viability of the airport to meet its role in the transportation system and where appropriate to act as a stimulus for the regional economy. Provide adequate land use management for those areas immediately surrounding public use airports through air safety zones, master plans, capital plans, official maps and development regulations. p. 114

PA-4 Rural Planning Area

The Solberg-Hunterdon Airport is located within the PA-4 Rural Planning Area.

(4) Transportation: Maintain and enhance a rural transportation system that links Centers to each other and to the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas. Provide appropriate access of agricultural products to markets, accommodating the size and weight of modern agricultural equipment. In Centers, emphasize the use of public transportation systems and alternatives to private cars where appropriate and feasible, and maximize circulation and mobility options throughout. Support the preservation of general aviation airports as integral parts of the State's transportation system. p. 178

RECOMMENDATIONS

Airport Acquisition

Solberg-Hunterdon Airport is categorized among the general aviation airports that are most threatened within New Jersey. Preservation of the airport is consistent with the recommendations of the General Aviation Study Commission report and with the policies of the New Jersey State Plan. Over the past year, Readington has been evaluating the lands that include the Solberg Airport to determine the feasibility of municipal acquisition. As part of that study, a report²¹ has been prepared to examine the potential benefits of municipal ownership of those lands. This report identifies the State policies that would be advanced through such an acquisition, but also catalogs myriad other benefits that would also result due to the unique environmental attributes of the lands upon which the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport is located. These include open space preservation, critical habitat preservation, farmland preservation and historic preservation. The report concludes that to achieve the goal of preserving Solberg- Hunterdon Airport as a local recreational airport, as well as other Township open space objectives, it may be necessary and desirable for the Township to acquire the airport and to operate it as a municipal facility open to the public. That report is included as an appendix to this master plan amendment.

²¹ Clarke Caton Hintz. June 28, 2001. *Evaluation of Block 48 Lot 23, Block 55 Lot 33, Block 56 Lots 1, 3, 6 & 8 and Block 67 Lot 2 for Municipal Acquisition*

Airport Safety Zones

Pursuant to the Air Safety and Zoning Act of 1983, municipalities that have existing airports are required to enact an ordinance or ordinances incorporating the standards of Chapter 62 *Air Safety and Zoning* to delineate airport safety zones, set bulk requirements and use regulations. In cases where the airport is a non-conforming use, as is the case with Readington, the ordinance is to be amended to make the use conforming. It is recommended that Readington implement the recommendations of Chapter 62 *Air Safety and Zoning*.