

GREEN ACRES PROGRAM

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection



OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN GUIDELINES

for Participation in the Green Acres Planning Incentive Program

Green Acres Mission Statement

To achieve, in partnership with others, a system of interconnected open spaces whose protection will preserve and enhance New Jersey's natural environment and its historic, scenic, and recreational resources for public use and enjoyment.

GREEN ACRES PROGRAM

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of *Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines* is to provide assistance to local governments in preparing an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). The Guidelines outline the OSRP items that are needed to participate in the Green Acres Planning Incentive (PI) funding category. The PI category awards 50% matching grants to local governments to preserve lands identified in its OSRP. **Please be advised that the PI program only funds land acquisition for recreation and conservation purposes. In addition to collecting an open space tax, local governments must have a Green Acres approved OSRP to be eligible for PI funding.**

The PI and these guidelines are intended to assist local governments with the development and implementation of an OSRP. Given the individual open space and recreation needs of each local government, Green Acres will be flexible in its review of an OSRP.

Advantages to a local government that passes an open space tax and participates in the PI category are:

1. Once an OSRP has been approved by the Green Acres Program, a local government can acquire lands identified in its OSRP without making multiple individual, site-specific applications for Green Acres funding to acquire those lands.
2. An OSRP provides a way to protect open space and recreation resources important to the local government.
3. An open space tax is a fiscally superior method to fund open space preservation.
4. Open space and recreation planning is more efficient and cost effective when supported by a stable source of funding like a tax and an OSRP.

REQUIREMENTS FOR QUALIFICATION

A qualifying local government must have established, and be collecting an open space tax, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:12-15.7d.. Under this law, counties and municipalities may assess a tax, approved by voter referendum, for the following purposes, or any combination of these purposes, as determined by the local government:

- (a) Acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation purposes,
- (b) Development of lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes,
- (c) Maintenance of lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes,
- (d) Acquisition of farmland for farmland preservation purposes,
- (e) Preservation of historic properties, including the acquisition of such properties for historic preservation purposes, or
- (f) Payment of debt service on indebtedness issued or incurred by a local government for any of the purposes stated in (a), (b), (d) or (e).

In addition, the Garden State Preservation Trust Act provides the same funding formula for local governments

that have adopted, through a governing body resolution, a Green Acres approved alternative source of funding for acquisition; the funding must be stable and equivalent in effect to an annual open space and recreation tax levy of at least 1 cent per \$100 of assessed value for a ten year period. Please contact the Green Acres Program to determine if an existing or proposed alternative means meets the intent of the Garden State Preservation Act.

As of March 2009, all 21 counties and 238 municipalities in New Jersey have passed an open space tax by voter referendum. That many of these referendums have passed with large pluralities is a testament to the public support open space and recreation enjoy and the importance New Jerseyans place on them. While the decision to assess an open space tax and develop an OSRP is a local one, the Green Acres Program encourages all New Jersey local governments to explore this option as a way to preserve natural resources to meet their current and future open space and recreation needs.

GARDEN STATE GREENWAYS (GSG)

Open space and recreation planners now have a powerful new tool available to aid them in protecting important natural, recreational, and historic resources in their communities. Garden State Greenways, created by the New Jersey Conservation Foundation, is an interactive map based system that provides a statewide vision for land preservation in New Jersey. With funding and technical support from Rutgers University, the Green Acres Program, and several foundations, GSG provides a wide array of map data on natural resources that is essential for open space and recreation planning. Several of the Green Acres OSRP requirements can be researched and prepared through the use of GSG. By using GSG, local governments can identify potential greenways to connect existing public lands. Camden County and Salem County have used GSG to prepare their open space plans. Visit www.gardenstategreenways.org to take a tutorial on how to use GSG interactive maps and the various applications of GSG for greenway and open space and recreation planning.

THE OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLANNING PROCESS

Before you begin to prepare your OSRP, you may ask yourself, what is an OSRP and why should we prepare one? These are good questions and need to be answered.

What is an OSRP? An OSRP articulates a local government's vision of open space and recreation. It should establish a philosophical and practical justification for the protection and preservation of open space and recreation opportunities. The purpose of an OSRP is to provide a framework for implementation. Through an OSRP, you identify and examine open space and recreation resources important to you and lay out ways to protect and enjoy them.

Why is it important to plan for open space and recreation? Without planning, the appearance of a community, the quality of life enjoyed by residents, and the community's natural resources can all be dramatically altered in a short period of time due to random changes in land use. We all know of areas that have been suburbanized and the associated impacts these areas have experienced. No one wants to live in a community that does not have parks or recreation areas. Yet, in order to provide these for residents, a local government must plan for them. Open space and recreation should be considered as part of the public infrastructure, just like roads, schools and utilities. No community would build a road without establishing the need for it and planning where it should go. The same is true for open space and recreation.

You also need to consider how the OSRP will be prepared. How you do this is your decision; four common approaches are outlined below:

1. ***Agency Centered:*** The planning is directed by a single agency. The agency may have a network of citizen advisors, but the authority to make decisions concerning program agenda, direction and selection among proposals is retained by the agency.

2. **Agency-Advisory Committee:** An agency sets up an advisory committee to actually do the planning, empowering the committee with at least some autonomy regarding how they will do it.
3. **Interagency Task Force:** A number of agencies join as equals to carry out a specific planning task which involves them all and runs its own show.
4. **Citizen Advisory Committee:** An organization structured outside of local government, though possibly including officials among its members and possibly receiving financial and staff assistance from the local government.

Open space and recreation planning employs a broad brush approach that touches many topics such as land use, natural resources, finances, politics and demographics. It is vital that whichever way you choose to develop and implement your OSRP, be sure there is a multi-discipline focus. Some points to consider:

1. ***Is the range of planning topics broader than that of any single agency?*** One agency cannot make effective plans within another agency's political domain or turf. If the planning is placed squarely within one agency, the effective planning scope may be no wider than that agency's range.
2. ***Do they have enough time to do the job?*** An intensive planning project may constitute an overload for the entity taking it on. Can and will members spend the time required for the project?
3. ***Can adequate resources be devoted to the project?*** Preparation of an OSRP requires staff and funding. People preparing the OSRP will need these and you will need to budget accordingly.

Another point to remember is that preparing an OSRP is hardly a revolutionary idea. The Municipal Land Use Law at 40:55D-28 discusses the contents of a municipal master plan. Included in this discussion is the inclusion of recreation and conservation plan elements that contain many of the components of an OSRP. Counties are also empowered to prepare a master plan that includes open space and recreation considerations under the New Jersey County and Regional Planning Act, N.J.S.A. 40:27-2 et seq.

The local master plan is intended to be a comprehensive treatment of various issues facing the community. Open space, and the role it plays in defining the character of the community should be an integral component of the master planning effort. The master plan sets forth goals and policies adopted by the community for managing growth. These goals and policies will affect the preservation and maintenance of open space and recreation resources in a community.

For these reasons, Green Acres requires the local unit's Planning Board to adopt their OSRP as part of their master plan.

You should also remember that you have an important ally in your OSRP efforts: your environmental commission. The commission is empowered by statute to conduct many of the activities needed for preparing an OSRP such as developing an open space inventory or researching the use of open lands in your community.

The planning process should seek out the involvement of individuals, agencies and organizations in the community who have responsibility for, or an interest in, the current and future provision of recreation opportunities and the protection of open space resources.

These include the following:

- officials having responsibility for decisions affecting open space and recreation in the community;

- officials having responsibility for education, public works and water supply with which coordination is needed for effective operation of a local open space and recreation program;
- representatives of conservation groups, private recreation providers and recreation users.

Most importantly, you need public participation as a part of your planning process. After all, the OSRP is supposed to say what are the open space and recreation needs of local residents. How are you going to know what these are if you do not ask them? Public participation should be sought in both the preparation and implementation of the OSRP. The methods for encouraging citizen participation, while left to the choice of the local government, should insure that all segments of the population are provided opportunities to present their views on open space and recreation concerns.

The OSRP should seek consistency with the appropriate open space and recreation policies of the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan). The State Plan contains several open space and recreation policies that pertain to local governments. Municipalities who seek consistency with State Plan policies are required to examine their open space and recreation resources.

The planning process can include a regional approach where appropriate. Since natural resources, which form the basis of an open space system, transcend political boundaries, it is important to look beyond your own borders. Rivers, forests and mountains are rarely the domain of one local government. Coordinating your OSRP with neighboring local governments, where possible, can assist in accomplishing your goals and be more cost effective.

The planning process should use current and accurate natural resource, population, socio-economic, recreation participation and demand data. It is recognized that data may not be readily available or that supplementary data may be needed. Communities are encouraged to develop locally needed data that is unavailable from other sources.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

Green Acres requires the following items in an Open Space and Recreation Plan. The organization of the OSRP and level of detail given to each item are at the discretion of the local government.

1. **Executive Summary:** a summary of the plan's origin, purpose, planning processes and findings, major goals it establishes, and actions it proposes.
2. **Goals and Policies:** the local government's goals and policies should be clearly stated and relate to the applicant's philosophy of open space and recreation.
3. **Inventory:** documentation of existing public and private open space and recreation resources and opportunities. The inventory is to include the size, location, ownership, and usage.
4. **Needs Analysis:** an analysis of the adequacy of the current open space and recreation system, as documented in the Inventory, to satisfy present and future needs.
5. **Resource Assessment:** the assessment of lands with open space and recreation potential and interest, and this lands ability and opportunity to meet the public's needs.
6. **Action Plan:** a program of actions to guide the orderly and coordinated execution of a plan's goals and policies.
7. **General Open Space System Map:** a map of the open space and recreation system showing the location and general configuration of all existing public and private open space and recreation resources and sites

identified as having open space and recreation potential.

- 8. Additional Parcel Data Requirements:** data required to maintain a statewide map of existing and planned open space.
- 9. Public Participation:** a discussion of the public participation process.
- 10. Plan Adoption:** plan adoption by the local government's Planning Board as an element of the local master plan is required. A statement of planning board adoption is to be included in the OSRP. The local unit must review and update the OSRP as part of its master plan reexamination process

The remainder of this section describes suggested topics to be considered under each OSRP item.

1. Executive Summary

This should include a concise summary of the plan's significant findings as they relate to recreation and open space needs and the actions proposed in the plan. The executive summary should also include a discussion of the planning and public participation processes used to prepare the OSRP as well as the origin and purpose of the OSRP.

2. Goals And Policies

Goals and policies established in the plan should clearly state the community's philosophy of open space and recreation and be responsive to identified needs.

Goals should state the community's decisions on the:

- public purposes it will pursue in providing recreation opportunities and protecting open space resources;
- obligation it has to provide open space and recreation opportunities on an equal and accessible basis for all citizens; and
- responsibilities it accepts for providing recreational opportunities and facilities and for preserving open space.

The plan should also present policies that address identified needs and achieve the community's goals for the open space system. Policies may be general or specific, short or long term, and broadly or narrowly focused depending on the complexity of the need to be addressed and the nature of planning information available. Policies may include recommendations for action and may be directed to the community, other governmental entities, private groups or the public.

3. Inventory

The plan should document the public and private resources that provide existing recreation and open space opportunities for the community. The inventory should present a catalog of the public and private land and water areas available for recreation or presently protected as open space and of recreation facilities. Consult Garden State Greenways (www.gardenstategreenways.org) for information to complete this portion of your OSRP.

The inventory considers the type, size, location, facilities, degree of protection, form of ownership, and other information for areas which are significant recreation and the conservation resources valued by the community. Such areas include:

- public and private land and water areas available for active and passive recreation;
- public and private land and water areas maintained as conservation areas dedicated to the preservation of natural and cultural resources; and
- lands that provide access to coastal and inland water bodies.

4. Needs Analysis

The OSRP should include an analysis of the adequacy of the current open space and recreation system to satisfy present and projected public recreational needs for open space as established by the local government through the planning process. The needs analysis looks at those components of the open space system for which the local government assumes primary responsibility.

The needs analysis can address these topics:

- A description of current recreation activity levels and participation patterns and trends likely to affect these in the future,
- A statement of minimum standards of acceptable recreation service by the community for its citizens. Service standards should be based on geographic distribution of facilities relative to population, quantities of land and facilities of various types available and adequate protection of natural resources,
- A discussion of the condition of existing recreation facilities,
- A description of changes which will affect recreation and open space provision such as in number of residents, age structure, land use, leisure time and income, which form the basis for forecasts of future open space and recreation needs,
- A determination of the additional land and water areas and new or rehabilitated facilities necessary to meet the current and future needs of the community for recreational opportunities and to protect open space resources valued by the community.

The public participation process and the analysis of inventory and assessment data, compared with your goals, will determine what your open space and recreation needs are. These needs must, of course, be balanced with fiscal reality.

The National Recreation and Park Association and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration have published *Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines*, which is available for purchase (see Sources of Information and Assistance section for details). This document is an excellent reference on assessing needs and open space and recreation planning.

5. Resource Assessment

The plan should provide an assessment of those public and private land and water resources that have potential for providing open space or recreation opportunities. Consult Garden State Greenways (www.gardenstategreenways.org) for information to complete this portion of your OSRP.

The resource assessment should examine, where applicable, opportunities for:

- Creation of linear recreation and open space facilities such as trails, bicycle paths, and greenways which link existing recreation and open space sites in an integrated system;

- Supporting conservation objectives such as water supply protection, wildlife habitat protection, protection of rivers, streams and forest lands, farmland preservation and historic preservation;
- Supporting community objectives for development and land use, including open space which buffers or defines developed areas, open space which preserves scenic or distinctive landscape features, and open space with development-limiting characteristics such as floodplains and steep slopes;
- Additional public access to coastal and inland waters; and
- The development of recreation facilities such as ballfields, playgrounds, court sports, swimming pools and golf courses.

6. Action Plan

An action plan provides direction for the orderly and coordinated execution of the OSRP. Actions should relate to the needs identified in the OSRP and should be based upon its policies. The Action Plan represents the local government's decisions for addressing OSRP needs and goals based on the abilities of the community and fiscal constraints. The Action Plan should encompass a five-year period and should be updated to report on progress, make adjustments, and include any proposals for new actions. The OSRP is not a static document and can be amended at the discretion of the community.

The Action Plan should provide details on the location, relative priority and anticipated cost of all proposed land protection and recreation facility development projects.

The level of detail that can be provided on proposed projects depends upon a number of factors. For acquisition projects, the community may be unable to specify target sites. Acquisition goals can be specified in terms of recreation or resource protection needs.

Information can also be provided on other initiatives such as:

- Zoning and subdivision regulations, ordinances for protecting open space resources;
- Planning and technical assistance initiatives;
- Programmatic adjustments to manage public use of the open space and recreation system;
- Financial initiatives aimed at increasing the resources available for open space protection; and
- Educational efforts to promote public knowledge and appreciation of recreation and open space values or needs of the community.

7. General Open Space System Map

Green Acres **requires** a hard copy open space system map as part of the Planning Incentive document. The intent of this map is to provide a general overview of the applicants vision of the future open space character of the community or project area by depicting the existing and proposed parkland, greenways and related open space of conservation and recreation interests. Consult Garden State Greenways (www.gardenstategreenways.org) for information to complete this portion of your OSRP.

Communities are encouraged to consider combining the Executive Summary of the OSRP and the system map into one document which can be distributed as a tool for conveying the local government's vision for the open space and recreation system.

8. Additional Parcel Data Requirements

To coordinate efficient open space planning in New Jersey, all plans will be entered into the Green Acres

Program GIS which utilizes Environmental System Research Institute's (ESRI) ArcGis Software. In order to conduct such a statewide effort Green Acres **requires** the applicant to provide, **in addition** to the general system map, the following data requested in paragraphs a) and b) below using one or a combination of the three delineation options presented below.

- a) Existing preserved open space sites documented in the plan's inventory (Recreation and Open Space Inventory) delineated at the block and lot level.
- b) Potential open space and greenway areas identified in the same detail outlined in the plan's resource assessment. Delineation may range from individual block and lot to physical or cultural boundaries defined by roads, waterways, farm fields, etc.

Delineation Options

In order to obtain compatible GIS data, the mapped information must be submitted consistent with one of the data format options presented below. All digital data should be supplied on diskettes, CDs or Iomega zip disks. All digital files should be georeferenced and registered in New Jersey State Plane Coordinates NAD 1983 in feet. If a contractor was employed in the development or maintenance of the open space plan, the digital file should be easily obtainable in the formats requested.

- Applicants using GIS technology to develop their open space and recreation plan should submit a digital copy of the ArcInfo coverages or shapefiles of the existing and proposed open space parcels and greenway corridors.
- Applicants using CAD technology should submit linework (**not the complete drawing file**) of the existing and proposed open space parcels and greenway corridors in .dxf digital format.
- Applicants not able to supply the digital data as requested above must submit the requested data on either copies of municipal tax maps or original USGS 7.5 minute Quadrangles.

9. Public Participation

The OSRP is to include a discussion of the public participation process that was used to gather citizen input and to assess community open space and recreation needs. The local government can use any method it believes provides the best avenue for public participation, but is required to hold at least two noticed public meetings.

10. Plan Adoption

The Planning Board must adopt the OSRP as an element of the local master plan. The OSRP must also be adopted when updated and as part of the master plan reexamination process.

UPDATING YOUR PLAN

As with any planning document an OSRP needs to be reviewed and updated to remain a current and accurate assessment of a community's open space and recreation needs. Green Acres requires that a local government review and update its OSRP as part of the reexamination of the master plan as required every six years under the Municipal Land Use Law. Updates are to forward to your Green Acres project manager.

Counties should also update their OSRP's and submit updated plans or plan elements to their Green Acres project manager.

SOURCES OF INFORMATION AND ASSISTANCE

All New Jersey municipalities and counties are required to prepare a master plan. The master plan will contain much of the information needed for an OSRP such as population, income, growth projections, infrastructure and environmentally sensitive areas. Many local governments have also prepared a Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) that includes detailed information on steep slopes, soils, vegetation and water resources. Both of these documents should provide base data for the OSRP.

Each local government should review and consider the applicable Landscape Project maps and reports, developed by the Department's Division of Fish and Wildlife, during the formulation of its open space preservation, recreation, and planning goals, and as part of its preparation of a Green Acres application and the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Information about the Landscape Project can be found at www.nj.gov/dep/fgw/ensp/landscape or by writing to the Division of Fish & Wildlife, P.O. Box 400, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0400.

Municipal and county planning boards can also provide information on current growth management, fiscal and demographic data that may not be contained in a master plan. Counties often conduct special studies that may also be useful.

The **National Recreation and Park Association**, Publications Center, 22377 Belmont Ridge Road, Asburn, Virginia 20148, (703) 858-0784, www.nrpa.org, has a variety of publications of open space and recreation planning interest.

The **Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions**, P. O. Box 157, Mendham, New Jersey 07945, (973) 539-7547, www.anjec.org, maintains a resource center which has much useful information for an OSRP.

There are many nonprofit conservation organizations active in New Jersey. Some of them have prepared regional studies that should be part of a local OSRP where appropriate. For further information call:

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, The ACP Building, 190 North Independence Mall West, 8th floor, Philadelphia, PA 19406-2515, (215) 592-1800, www.dvrpc.org

Garden State Greenways (www.gardenstategreenways.org), New Jersey Conservation Foundation (908)234-1225.

New Jersey Conservation Foundation, 170 Long View Road, Far Hills, New Jersey 07931-2626, (908) 234-1225, www.njconservation.org

The Land Conservancy of New Jersey, 19 Boonton Avenue, Boonton, NJ 07005, (973) 541-1010, www.morrislandconservancy.org

Trust for Public Land, 20 Community Place, Morristown, New Jersey 07960, (973) 292-1100, www.tpl.org

The New Jersey Office of State Planning, 33 West State Street, P.O. Box 204, Trenton, New Jersey 08625, (609) 292-7156, www.state.nj.us/osp, can provide information on applicable State Plan policies.

Information on farmland preservation is available from **the State Agriculture Development Committee, New Jersey Department of Agriculture**, P.O.Box 330, Trenton, New Jersey 08625, (609) 984-2504, www.nj.gov/agriculture/sadc/sadc

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Office of Environmental Services, 401 East State Street, P.O. Box 402, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0402, (609) 984-0828, www.state.nj.us/dep/esp, can provide matching grants (up to \$2,500) to environmental commissions for the preparation of an OSRP.

The **Green Acres Program**, P.O. Box 412, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0412, (609) 984-0570, can provide technical assistance on the preparation of an OSRP and open space and recreation planning issues. www.state.nj.us/dep/greenacres.

References:

A Handbook for Public Financing of Open Space in New Jersey, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, 2001.

Implementing a Municipal Open Space Program, Heritage Conservancy, www.heritageconservancy.org, 2003.

Open Space Planners Workbook, Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, www.mass.gov/envir/des/pdf/openspaceplanners.pdf

Keeping Our Garden State Green: Local Government Guide for Greenway and Open Space Planning, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions, 1989.

Park, Recreation, Open Space and Greenway Guidelines, National Recreation and Park Association and the American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration, 1995.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Much of Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines was reprinted from or based on the following:

Open Space and Recreation Plan Requirements, Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services, 2001.

Standards for Local Recreation, Conservation and Open Space Plans, Rhode Island State Planning Council, 1989.

Open Space Planners Workbook, Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, Division of Conservation Services, 2001.

The *Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines* was prepared by the Green Acres Bureau of Planning and Information Management.