



ROUTE 57
CORRIDOR PLAN

LAND ACQUISITION & SCENIC EASEMENTS

The goal of protecting the scenic quality of Route 57 can be accomplished in a number of ways. Local master planning and conservation zoning may be used to steer future growth away from sensitive viewsheds. Design guidelines, such as those provided in this Toolkit, may be used to encourage compact community forms and attractive building types that harmonize with the surrounding landscape. Scenic overlay zoning may also help municipalities limit visual disturbances, by regulating such elements as building heights, parking, and commercial signs.

In some cases, certain views may be so highly valued by community residents that consideration can also be given to the outright acquisition of land for preservation purposes. Alternatively, landowners may be willing to grant scenic easements that protect views while allowing current activities to continue on a parcel.

Public sector programs that may assist with the acquisition of specific parcels of land along Route 57 include NJDEP's Green Acres Program and Warren County's Department of Land Preservation. Private land trusts are another resource. Resources for acquiring preservation easements include the State Agriculture Development Committee's "Planning Incentive Grants" (PIGs), which target active farmland. Some of these programs require that the land in question be part of a municipal open space or farmland preservation plan.

NJDEP GREEN ACRES

The mission of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program is:

"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."

The Green Acres program seeks to acquire land that creates open space corridors by linking existing protected lands. Since its inception in 1961, the program has preserved more than 390,000 acres statewide. The program has also



The Great Swamp Watershed Association owns this 23-acre conservation area in Harding Township, Morris County.

helped to develop public parks and recreational areas.

The NJDEP Green Acres program provides funding assistance for the acquisition of municipal parks and recreation areas listed in the municipality's open space and recreation plan. Municipalities with a dedicated funding source for conservation and recreation purposes (such as funds from an open space tax) and an Open Space and Recreation Plan are eligible to receive Planning Incentive Grant monies, which cover up to 50% of land acquisition costs for a specific tract. Low-interest loans are also available for acquisition of open space for conservation as well as recreation.

NJDOT/WARREN COUNTY PARTNERSHIP

NJDOT sponsored a study to identify the scenic views and their priorities for acquisition based on factors such as the proximity to Route 57, other preserved parcels, and historically or culturally intrinsic qualities. The parcel can be kept in agricultural production. The first purchase under the partnership was an 80 acre site in Franklin and Greenwich Townships. The parcel contains a segment of the original Morris Canal route, approximately 0.3 miles in length. The parcel will be kept in agricultural production.

OPEN SPACE PLANS

Open Space Plans provide a comprehensive picture for land use planning by identifying special natural attributes in order to propose areas which may be suitable for preservation efforts and funding. Common elements in open space plans include an inventory of preserved and potentially preserved land, a comprehensive action plan to meet stated open space goals, analysis of the landscape, and an inventory of natural features such as forests, wetlands, farmland, and wildlife. Open space plans may include an additional recreation plan or farmland preservation plan element. Preparation of a combined Open Space and Recreation Plan helps a municipality to qualify for funding from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres program. Guidelines on the preparation of these plans are available from Green Acres. Information is also available through the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC), as local environmental commissions are often instrumental in preparing these plans.

The majority of the municipalities in the Route 57 corridor have now completed or are in the process of developing open space plans. Although an open space plan is an optional element of a community Master Plan, many municipalities choose to create open space plans in order to receive funding and guidance from state and national agencies. Some state programs administered by the Department of Environmental Protection and Department of Agriculture require communities to have an open space plan before agreeing to aid in local land conservation efforts. Most state and federal grant programs require a dedicated source of funding from the municipality, if not an open space plan. The adoption of open space plans aids communities in securing these land acquisition funds by identifying or adopting sources of local aid, whether through an open space tax or non-profit preservation commission. Additionally, adoption of an open space plan demonstrates the commitment of the community to preserving land—another important element in securing federal, state, and non-governmental funding.

PRIVATE LAND TRUSTS

A private land trust is a nonprofit organization that assists landowners and agencies with land preservation. Land trusts aim to work with landowners to preserve land through donations, easements, and sales. They seek to protect existing open space from potentially undesirable future uses, or simply to preserve land for specific purposes, including parks, farmland, or as open space. Private land trusts active in New Jersey include the Morris Land Conservancy, Ridge and Valley Conservancy, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, Heritage Conservancy, and the Trust for Public Land, among others.

SCENIC AND CONSERVATION EASEMENTS

A conservation easement is a legal agreement between a land owner and a qualified land trust, government entity, or conservation organization with the purpose of protecting natural resources. Through this voluntary deed restriction, the land owner retains ownership, but some control—such as water rights or the right to develop or subdivide the land—is given to the partner organization. An easement may qualify as a federal tax-deductible charitable donation and reduce property taxes for the landowner, while restricting development, protecting habitat, and conserving land for the future.

If an easement's primary goal is preserving the scenic qualities of a specific parcel of land or viewshed, it is often referred to as a scenic easement. The acquisition of scenic easements to preserve viewsheds along highways is an eligible category for transportation enhancement funding under NJDOT's Local Aid program. (The acquisition of scenic or historic sites qualifies, as well.) Under this program, NJDOT seeks to "promote the protection of scenic and historic values through acquisition of scenic easements and historical sites adjacent to a scenic highway."

Where the property in question is farmland, the Planning Incentive Grant (PIGs) program of the NJ State Agriculture Development Committee is another potential resource. PIGs are available for the purchase of development easements to permanently protect large tracts of contiguous farmland. Municipalities seeking these grants must have adopted a Farmland Preservation Plan element in their local master plan. The Farmland



This farmland vista along Route 57 is characteristic of the landscapes that NJDOT, NJDEP, environmental groups, and other local partners hope to preserve for future generations.

Preservation Plan may be part of a municipality's greater open space plan, or it may be a separate element. It should be noted that farmland preservation and scenic preservation do not always coincide. For instance, the owners of preserved farm properties may have the right to construct additional farm buildings or to grow tall crops, including tree farms, that could potentially obscure existing views.

RESOURCES

Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions
<http://www.anjec.org>

Heritage Conservancy
<http://heritageconservancy.org/>

Morris Land Conservancy
<http://www.morrislandconservancy.org>

New Jersey Conservation Foundation
<http://www.njconservation.org/>

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Green Acres Program
<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/greenacres/>

New Jersey Department of Transportation Local Aid and Economic Development
<http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/business/localaid/>

New Jersey State Agriculture Development Committee, Planning Incentive Grant (PIG) Program
<http://www.state.nj.us/agriculture/sadc/pigprogram.htm>

Ridge and Valley Conservancy
<http://www.rvclandtrust.org>

Scenic America
<http://www.scenic.org/>

Trust for Public Land
<http://www.trustforpublicland.org>

Warren County Department of Land Preservation
 Bob Resker, Director
 Ph: (908) 453-3252
 Email: rresker@co.warren.nj.us