

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Long Hill Township affirms that the protection of and investment in its open space resources as well as its recreational amenities and programming are of paramount importance to the health and well-being of all its residents. The Township's history of passionate advocacy has expressed itself throughout the years through the generous contributions of its residents and vigilant efforts to preserve open spaces and natural assets. Throughout the years, the Township has also enjoyed access to expansive resources maintained by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, the State of New Jersey and Morris County whose parks and preserved natural areas have extensive footprints within Long Hill Township, requiring a unique degree of intergovernmental cooperation to maintain and improve. This Open Space and Recreation Element is meant to serve as a practical guide for these aims. It provides an assessment of existing conditions in the Township, and offers a wide-ranging set of recommendations for the preservation of valued natural and recreational resources, their enhanced utility and resident access to them.

This Element is prepared in a format that is consistent with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Green Acres program requirements to ensure that it may be utilized for applications for County, State and other funding sources for open space acquisitions and improvements. It is organized in two sections, Open Space, and Parks and Recreation. The open space section examines the full spectrum of open spaces that help define the Township's semi-rural character, recommendations to protect the health of the Township's ecosystem and how to increase public appreciation for these natural spaces in a safe and responsible manner. The parks and recreation section provides a detailed

overview of the Township's active and passive recreational resources and an action plan to prioritize Township investment in areas where there is unmet demand or where resident access can be improved. Taken together with the other Elements of the plan, they offer a wholistic picture of issues that are inherent to the overall quality of life within the Township.

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

## OPEN SPACE

### Introduction

Approximately 55% of the Township consists of open space areas, most of which is public parkland. This abundance of open space is a key resource of the Township and favorably distinguishes the Township from other, more-developed suburban communities in the region.

The Township's open space areas are fundamental to the Township's semi-rural and scenic character, the preservation of which is a key objective of this Master Plan. These open space areas also provide recreational opportunities including walking and hiking, kayaking and canoeing, birdwatching, fishing and hunting. In addition, these open space areas provide important environmental benefits, including groundwater protection, flood control, soil stabilization, pollution reduction and wildlife habitat.

The Township has made open space preservation a priority in order to maintain and fully realize these benefits. The Township's commitment to open space preservation is demonstrated by the Township Open Space Trust Fund, the Township Master Plan and this Open Space and Recreation Element.

The following section of the Element is an integral component of Long Hill Township's Master Plan and is consistent with, and supportive of, the Land Use Element and other Elements of the Master Plan.

It is intended to support future applications by the Township for New Jersey Green Acres program funding in the Planning Incentive funding category as well as other governmental and private funding sources. Finally, the goals and action plan contained herein are meant to serve as a practical guide for the Township as it makes

decisions on how to improve residents' access to these natural assets through the strategic acquisition of new spaces or improvements to those within their existing inventory.

### Planning Process

There have been extensive planning and public engagement efforts to ensure that open space planning is truly reflective of Township resident's priorities and desires. These efforts were coordinated between two Township Committees, the Master Plan Committee and the Open Space Advisory Committee. These committees consist of resident volunteers that advise the Township Committee and the Planning Board. Under their direction, residents were engaged in two rounds of outreach, with surveys and public meetings that sought to capture public sentiment. The first of these surveys, conducted by former Long Hill resident E. Thomas Behr in the spring of 2016, revealed that residents held the preservation and enhancement of their open spaces as a high priority. 93% of respondents indicated that the green "look and feel" of open spaces was important to them. Respondents raised several issues, including the value of safe access to the Passaic River, and improving connectivity of the Township's open spaces to its various residential neighborhoods. The results of the survey and the preparation of this element's first draft were undertaken and discussed at the November 2018 Planning Board meeting. In the following years, this content was revised by these committees and in May 2020, another round of public engagement was conducted by the planning firm, Topology. The assessment put forth more specific concepts for various sections of the Township, and found the public to be in favor of the inclusion of open spaces in civic and commercial centers as well as a desire to improve pedestrian access to such destinations.

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

Taken together with prior outreach, the results endorsed the set of recommendations contained herein.

## Review of Prior Policy

The 2020 Open Space Element re-endorses the goals expressed in the 2013 Open Space Element which include:

- The expansion of preserved open spaces in environmentally sensitive areas
- The expansion of a network of greenways that can offer more connectivity to the Township's open spaces
- Accessibility improvements to the Passaic River

This plan builds upon these goals, and reflects changes in conditions such the acquisition of the Central Park property which offer new opportunities for both active and passive recreation. While this plan maintains the 2013 Open Space Element's emphasis on utilizing contiguous parcels to improve access to existing open spaces, this plan also discusses the value of transforming various Township-owned properties such as the Cornish Tract, Heritage Road, and Shawnee Path tracts to green spaces that can cater to their local neighborhoods. Finally, while concurring with the prior goal of increasing access to the Passaic River, this plan is firmly grounded in the practical maintenance and safety concerns that will accompany such access and encourages steps to proactively address them.

## Needs Analysis

Long Hill Township occupies an important space ecologically as it is bound on two of its borders by the Passaic River. This requires a special degree of attention to how the preservation of open spaces can be used as a tool to protect against developments with higher degrees of impervious coverage and thus a greater likelihood of run-off pollution, flooding and other disruptions. Additionally, the extensive presence of the Passaic River presents opportunities for more recreational access, while presenting the challenge of keeping visitors safe.

While the Township contains many open spaces, they are not all easily accessible. Areas without pedestrian infrastructure such as paths or sidewalks are of particular concern. Overall access may in some cases be inhibited by a lack of clearly defined park entrances, or the presence of physical barriers such as the NJ Transit rail line which dissects the Township.

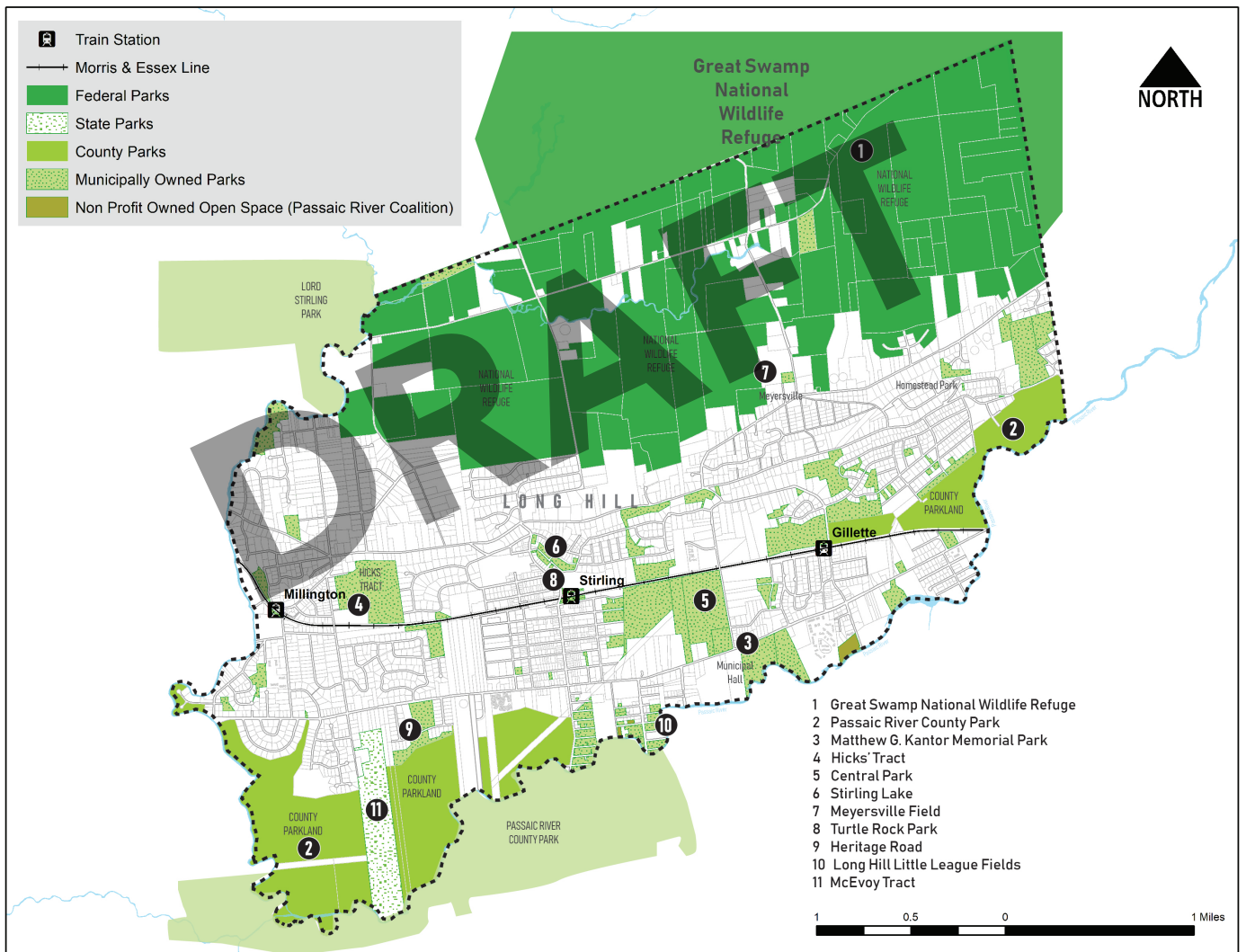
Finally, realizing the full potential of Long Hill's open spaces requires consistent communication and coordination with officials from the US Fish & Wildlife Service, State, and County governments. Policy decisions made on any of the lands within the Township by any of these entities could have immediate repercussions on Township residents and their open space goals.

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

## Resource Assessment

The following inventory is a selected list of significant open space properties in the Township that are publicly-owned or owned by private conservation groups. (See Appendix \_ to the Master Plan for a map showing the location of these properties.) This inventory does not list all of the publicly-owned open space properties in the Township, but rather focuses on properties that are more significant in terms of

size, recreational potential and located in a proposed greenway area. For reference, the list of parcels within the Township that are included in the New Jersey Green Acres Program Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI) database as of April 13, 2020 is attached as Appendix \_ to the Master Plan.



# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

- **Federally-Owned Open Space (Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge).** The Township's largest area of open space consists of more than 2,400 acres that lie within the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is a defining feature of the Township and contributes significantly to the Township's semi-rural character. The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge encompasses a large portion of the Township's northeastern quadrant and extends into neighboring Harding and Chatham Townships. It is anticipated that the land area of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge will marginally increase in the future through incremental acquisitions of adjacent properties. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, which manages the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, maintains the western half of the Refuge (to the west of New Vernon Road) as a wildlife management area with public access restricted to designated areas, and maintains the eastern half of the Refuge (to the east of New Vernon Road) as a wilderness area, with hiking permitted throughout, including on maintained hiking trails. The land within the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge consists of a mixture of wetlands, wooded areas and open fields. The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge enjoys substantial local community support, including through local organizations such as the Great Swamp Watershed Association and the Friends of the Great Swamp.
- **State-Owned Open Space (McEvoy State Game Preserve)** The State of New Jersey owns the McEvoy State Game Preserve, which is an approximately 95.2 acre open space area containing woodlands and environmentally-

sensitive natural features such as wetlands and floodway/floodplains. The McEvoy State Game Preserve is located in the southwest quadrant of the Township between Valley Road and the Passaic River, and is bounded on the east and west by lands within the Passaic River County Park. The McEvoy State Game Preserve, when combined with the neighboring Passaic River County Park lands, provides a large, unbroken open space area bordering the Passaic River providing flood control benefits and having potential for passive recreation uses.

- **Morris County-Owned Open Space (Passaic River County Park).** Morris County owns the Passaic River County Park, which includes approximately 706.4 acres within the Township. These lands can be grouped into two parts, one located along the Passaic River in the southwestern quadrant of the Township (on either side of the McEvoy Game Preserve), and the other located along the Passaic River in the east end of the Township and continuing into Chatham Township. These lands provide flood control benefits and have potential for passive recreation uses.
- **Township-Owned Open Space (Various Properties).** As of November 2018, the Township and the Long Hill Township Board of Education own approximately 523 acres of open space land. The following lists a selection of significant Township-owned open space properties (acreages are approximate):

\* Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park – 23 acres of park and open space adjacent to the Municipal Complex on Valley Road, including athletic fields and courts, playground and picnic areas and trails.

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

- \* Hicks' Tract – 59.2 acres of wooded open space located between Millington and Stirling. The southwest corner of Hicks' Tract abuts Millington School property. Hicks' Tract includes a paved walking/bike path between Knollandale Road and Largo Lane, as well as unpaved hiking trails.
  - \* Central Park – 71.3 acres of undeveloped open space land located across from the Township municipal complex on Valley Road. The Central Park land was acquired by the Township and is under consideration for active and/or passive recreational development.
  - \* Stirling Lake – 7 acre park, including swimming lake with beach, fishing pond and a playground/picnic area.
  - \* Meyersville Field – 2.1 acres, including athletic field, basketball and tennis courts and playground area.
  - \* Turtle Rock Park – 1.2 acre pocket park at the Stirling train station.
  - \* Cornish Tract/ Cottage Place – approximately 45 acres of undeveloped open space located in 2 parcels to the east and west of Mountain Avenue, north of the NJ Transit tracks. These parcels abut Passaic County Park lands to the south and east and may serve as a link in the proposed Central Greenway described below.
  - \* Stirling Open Space – 44.6 acres of undeveloped open space, bordered on the east by Central Park and on the west by smaller Township-owned parcels and paper streets that provide access to neighborhoods in Stirling. This land is a key link for a proposed future walking/bike path between Stirling and the Municipal Complex, via Central Park.
  - \* Shawnee Path – 14.2 acres of undeveloped open space in the northwestern section of Millington, between Shawnee Path cul-de-sac and the Passaic River. This land has potential as a river access point.
  - \* Heritage Road – 20.1 acres of undeveloped open space spread over two parcels to the north and south of Heritage Road in Millington.
  - \* Long Hill Ridge – 44.5 acres of undeveloped open space along the Long Hill ridge at the eastern end of the Township, spread over 3 parcels between the Jodi Lane neighborhood and Long Hill Road.
  - \* Fenview/ Deer Path – 5 acres of undeveloped open space in the eastern end of the Township, between the Fenview Road/Deer Path neighborhood and the Preston Drive/Magna Drive neighborhood.
  - \* Long Hill Baseball/Softball Fields – 15.2 acres, 10.4 of which contain 3 ball fields, parking areas, a concession stand and storage buildings, a small playground/picnic area with the remaining 4.8 acres preserved as undeveloped wet woodlands located at the end of Poplar Drive in Stirling.
- **Passaic River Coalition Open Space.** The Passaic River Coalition is a private conservation group that owns approximately 7 acres spread across three parcels near the Passaic River in Gillette and Stirling.



# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

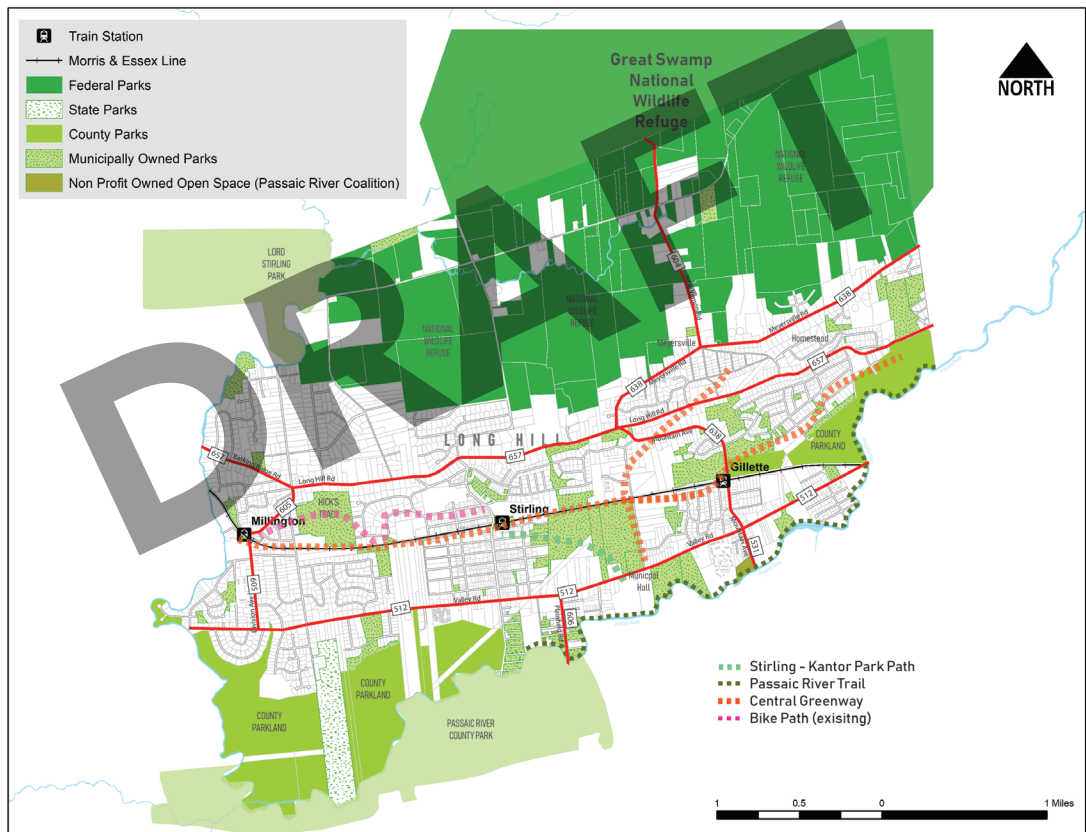
## GOALS AND POLICIES

This Open Space Element establishes the following overarching goals to guide the future preservation and use of open space in the Township:

1. Develop open space accessibility and recreational opportunities for the benefit of all Township residents. The Township's open space should be generally accessible to Township residents for walking, hiking, biking, non-motorized boating and other appropriate recreational uses. In support of this goal, this Open Space Element recognizes the following specific objectives:
  - i. Develop a network of trails, pedestrian walkways and bike paths, both within open space areas and to connect residential neighborhoods to parks and open space.
  - ii. Improve Passaic River access for non-motorized watercraft, fishing and other recreational purposes. The over 12

scenic and mostly undeveloped miles of the Passaic River that border the Township are an underutilized recreational resource.

- iii. Encourage use of existing scattered Township-owned open space tracts for surrounding neighborhood passive recreation purposes.
2. Evaluate opportunities for future open space acquisitions by the Township, with a focus on rights -of-way and parcels that are contiguous to existing open space parcels.
  - i. Primary consideration for future open space acquisitions should be given to rights of way and parcels that are contiguous to existing parkland, with a particular focus on the development of trail networks and to establish the following Township "greenways."



# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

- a. Passaic River Greenway – The proposed Passaic River Greenway is envisioned as a green corridor of preserved open space land and public rights of way spanning the length of the Township along the Passaic River. The Passaic River Greenway would fit within a larger regional complex of open space parkland along the Passaic River via connections to parkland in Chatham Township to the east, Bernards Township to the west and Berkeley Heights and Warren Township to the south. Several large tracts that would serve as the backbone of the Passaic River Greenway are already preserved open space, including the Passaic River County Park lands on the eastern and western ends of the Township, Kantor Park, Passaic River Coalition lands and the McEvoy State Game Preserve. In addition to the active recreation facilities currently located at Kantor Park, the Passaic River Greenway would provide trails and other facilities for passive recreation (including hiking, wildlife observation and bird watching), as well as river access.
  - b. Central Greenway – The Central Greenway is proposed to run north from the Municipal Complex through Central Park property on Valley Road, and then turning east parallel to the NJ transit tracks, and then northeast roughly along the path of the PSE&G utility corridor, merging with the Passaic River Greenway in the Passaic River County Park lands along the Long Hill and Berkeley Heights municipal boundary. A second leg of the Central Greenway is proposed to run northeast from the Central Park property along the PSE&G utility corridor towards the Great Swamp.
  - ii. Consideration for future open space acquisitions should also be given to (1) environmentally-constrained parcels, including those with environmentally-sensitive/critical natural features (including areas with wetlands, floodway/floodplain, steep slopes and woodlands), (2) where needed to maintain and protect water quality and groundwater recharge areas, (3) to prevent and minimize damage from flooding and soil erosion in areas of flood plains and steep slopes, and (4) where needed to preserve the Township’s semi-rural character by maintaining scenic landscapes, natural areas and wooded corridors and ridgelines.
3. **Coordinate open space planning with adjacent municipalities, Morris, Somerset, and Union Counties, the State of New Jersey, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and non-profit organizations, using available funding programs wherever possible.**

## **ACTION PLAN**

### **Open Space Acquisition and Recreational Development Projects:**

1. Procure land and access easements to connect existing open space parcels as needed to complete contiguous Passaic River and Central Greenways, using County, State, and other outside funding sources wherever possible.
2. Develop the “Central Park” property on Valley Road for active and/or passive recreational purposes.
3. Encourage use of existing scattered Township-owned open space tracts for surrounding neighborhood passive recreation purposes. Candidates for such neighborhood uses include the Heritage Road, Shawnee Path, and Cornish Tract/Cottage Place properties.



# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

## Open Space Trail Development Projects:

1. Develop pedestrian walkway/bike path connection between Stirling and the Township Municipal Complex/Kantor Park via Township-owned open space properties (i.e., the Central Park property and the Stirling Open Space property to the east of Central Park). This path would link to the Township's existing signed bike route which connects Stirling to Millington Train Station vis Hicks' Tract.
2. Extend the Passaic River Trail to span the Township from east to west along the Passaic River utilizing open space properties as part of the Passaic River Greenway
3. Improve walkability in the Township through the use of pedestrian connections between or within neighborhoods via "paper streets" where possible (including, for example, paper street connections near the Gillette train station) with benches and exercising stations
4. Pursue opportunities for providing trail linkages with neighboring municipalities

## Passaic River Access Development:

1. Create one or more Passaic River kayak/canoe launch areas in the Township (in addition to the Fisherman's Parking Lot in Bernards Township off White Bridge Road)
2. Coordinate with appropriate government entities to continue river de-snagging efforts to improve Passaic River accessibility for kayaking/canoeing

## General/Administrative Action Items:

1. Encourage Morris County and the State of New Jersey to build trails and make other appropriate recreational improvements to the open space lands that they own.
2. Use County, State and Federal funding sources, wherever possible, for future open space

acquisitions and recreational improvements to open space properties. Potential funding sources include (1) Morris County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Trust Fund, (2) Morris County Trail Construction Grant Program, (3) New Jersey Green Acres program, (4) New Jersey Blue Acres program and (5) Federal Emergency Management Agency.

3. Partner with non-governmental organizations, where practical, to obtain funding and grants for open space projects. Possible partners may include, the Great Swamp Watershed Association, Passaic River Coalition, Trust for Public Land, Morris County Farmland Conservancy, Nature Conservancy, among others.
4. Pursue professional and governmental resources to assist the Township with open space and conservation issues, such as trail development.
5. Review the Township's zoning ordinance on a regular basis and recommend revisions necessary to encourage proper land stewardship, open space, and sustainability.
6. Coordinate open space and recreation planning with land use planning, community facilities improvements, and transportation network expansion.
7. Encourage volunteer stewardship and community activism by developing an adopt-a-park or adopt-an-open space program.
8. Review the inventory of open lands on a regular basis and recommend properties for possible acquisition based upon available funding.
9. Develop outreach materials to encourage public awareness of open space resources and passive recreation opportunities within the Township. This could include the development of publicly available GIS mapping of open space properties with layers including historic and ecologic information.

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

## PARKS AND RECREATION

### Introduction

Recreational activities are an important consideration in Long Hill Township where there is strong community involvement from local sports leagues, community groups, and resident volunteers.

The National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) recommends that a park system be comprised of a range of 6.25 acres to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 residents. According to this equation, Long Hill Township should have between 54.37 and 91.35 acres of developed open space. Long Hill Township does meet this recommendation with 103 acres currently developed for active and passive recreation (which are not mutually exclusive), located as follows:

- Hicks' Tract –59.2 acres
- Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park –23 acres
- Long Hill Baseball and Softball Stirling Complex –10.4 acres
- Stirling Lake Park –7 acres
- Meyersville Field/ Complex –2.15 acres
- Turtlerock Park –1.26 acres

Recreational planning is a continuous process that adapts to new social values and changing life-style patterns while meeting the recreational needs of all residents.

The Long Hill Township Parks and Recreation Department provides a variety of active and passive activities for residents of all ages while maintaining the Township's parks and facilities to the highest safety and aesthetic standards. Maintenance and improvements to current facilities are managed through the Public Works Department.

### Planning Process

The preliminary content of this section was initiated by the Township's Parks and Recreation Committee, a group of community volunteers appointed by the Mayor who make recommendations for programming and events, coordinate with independent recreational sports leagues that serve Township residents, and monitor the condition of recreational facilities. Such hands-on working knowledge made this group uniquely qualified to draft a thorough overview of the Township's recreational assets, and to develop an initial set of recommendations for this plan. This content was further refined by careful reviews by the Township Parks & Recreation Department, the Master Plan Steering Committee and the general public who were invited to provide feedback on content posted to the Long Hill municipal website.

### Review of Prior Policy

#### Active Recreation

The 1996 Master Plan's Overall Goals, re-endorsed in subsequent Reevaluation Reports in 2003 and 2013, contained the following goal for active recreation:

"To augment existing recreational facilities with the development of additional facilities, including ballfields, soccer fields, trails and other facilities designed for the benefit of all segments of the Township population."

Long Hill Township Parks and Recreation Department run many active recreational programs throughout the year that fully utilize the townships recreational assets, as well as the Long Hill Board of Education facilities. Space is also rented from a local church for a pre-school program.

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

By employing many residents as seasonal employees, the Parks and Recreation Department is able to support a wide range of local activities, including Travel and Recreation Basketball (Youth & Adult), a Summer Recreation Camp and swimming at Stirling Lake.

In addition to Township orchestrated recreational activities there are a number of associations operating within Long Hill who use recreational facilities.

- Long Hill Baseball and Softball Association (LHBSA) operate:
  - 3 fields at the LHBSA Stirling Complex
  - 1 field at the Meyerville Complex
  - Fields at 3 local public schools
- Watchung Hills Soccer Association use 2 fields at Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park.
- The Hills Lacrosse Club uses 1 field at Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park.

This plan endorses the goal of the prior Master Plans to seek suitable locations for additional active recreational facilities where demand exists.

## Passive Recreation

The 1996 Master Plan's Overall Goals, re-endorsed in subsequent Reevaluation Reports in 2003 and 2013, contained the following goal for passive recreation:

"To develop a trail system throughout the Township that will provide circulatory links to the Township's residential, business, recreational, and open spaces areas and enhance local appreciation of, and recreation in, the Township's many natural resources."

This plan continues to endorse that goal where residents are provided an opportunity to walk, relax or otherwise enjoy passive recreation in natural or man-made environments such as (See Map X1):

- Hicks' Tract (Millington).
- Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park (Gillette).
- Stirling Lake Park (Stirling).
- Turtlerock Park (Stirling).
- And other areas as identified in the Open Space Element.

## Needs Analysis

### Indoor Recreation

The LHT Recreation Department has identified opportunities to run additional indoor programs for the community, but with limited access to indoor recreation space, they are unable to do so. The LHT Recreation Department has tried to run programs utilizing the Community Room in the Library but have found scheduling issues to be difficult.

Additional recreation programs could be considered with access to indoor recreation space. The LHT Recreation Department are fortunate that they are able to use the public-school gyms for basketball programs and volleyball clinics during the school year and also utilize the facilities in the summer to run a summer camp (grades K -8). However, the Long Hill Recreation Department still faces constraints with programming given available space and program demand. The LHT Recreation Department still rents space at a local church to house the successful pre-K summer camp program.

Long Hill has a private, non-profit Community Center built by 330 volunteers in 1970. The center provides space for community and private functions, including indoor space for recreational use. It runs year round community volleyball programs, aerobics programs, and indoor soccer programs as well as a year round tennis program. During the winter months space is rented to the Little League for indoor practice

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

## Swimming Pool

Although Long Hill has Stirling Lake for aquatic recreation and swimming, there are still other residents who request a swimming pool. Having a pool as an alternative to Stirling Lake for swimming in Long Hill could be considered in the future.

However, the priority of a Swimming Pool will depend upon the economics of building and the ongoing annual operating cost in a location that can support such a complex. In addition, with surrounding towns with swimming pools and private recreation clubs, the need may be met elsewhere.

## Multi-Age Playground

An additional multi-age playground should also be considered. With more than 25% of Township's population under the age of 18, the Township should offer opportunities for young residents to stay active.

Increased emphasis on child health and childhood obesity issues are an important consideration for future playground planning.

## Local Access to Active Recreation

Active Recreational facilities are located in Stirling and Meyersville. Residents of Millington and Gillette have limited active recreation opportunities within walking distance.

## Local Access to Passive Recreation

Long Hill Township builds on a strong foundation of passive recreational infrastructure, particularly when the federal and state open spaces are taken into consideration. Despite these assets, adding to these opportunities is a priority to residents. A survey taken for this Master Plan effort revealed approximately 81% level of support for additional passive recreational amenities such as walking or biking trails.

## Dog Park

Long Hill Township currently does not have a dog park and by default, many residents walk their dogs in the Hicks' Tract and Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park. The Parks and Recreation Department has received numerous requests from dog owners for a separate dog park where they can let their dogs run and exercise. While dog walkers use Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park to exercise their dogs, dogs are not permitted on the playing fields. There are issues controlling dogs where they are permitted and getting dog owners to clean up after their dogs. As of July 2013, there were 890 dogs licensed to homeowners living in Long Hill Township. In 2015, a total of 727 licenses were issued. A survey issued to registered dog owners in April of 2019 revealed a level of support for a specifically dedicated dog park by well over half of those surveyed.

## Resource Assessment

Long Hill Township offers a variety of different recreational programming overseen by the Parks and Recreation Department. Such programming includes yoga instruction, summer camps, youth dances and family-oriented activities such as bingo nights. In addition, the Township participates in the TryCAN collaborative to avail Long Hill residents with special needs to a variety of recreational programs and events. Along with this programming, the Township maintains recreational facilities that offer residents a diverse set of amenities. Those Township owned recreational facilities and their features are detailed in the following tables.

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

## Features and Amenities of Township Recreational Facilities

	Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park	Stirling Lake Park	Meyersville Field/ Complex	LHBSA Stirling Complex	Hicks' Tract	Turtlerock Park
<b>Acres</b>	23	7	2.15	10.4	59.2	1.26
<b>Active Recreation</b>						
<b>Tennis Court (78 feet)</b>	3		1			
<b>Multi-Purpose Grass Field</b>	2					
<b>Basketball Court</b>	1		1			
<b>Baseball/ Softball Field 46x60</b>				2		
<b>Baseball/ Softball Field 50x70/46x60</b>			1			
<b>Batting Cage</b>			1	Yes		
<b>Field(s) with Lights</b>			1	1		
<b>Swimming Lake/Beach</b>		Yes				
<b>Beach Volleyball Court</b>		1				
<b>Playground</b>	Yes (ages 5-12)	Yes (ages 5-12)	Yes (ages 2-5)			
<b>Bike Path</b>					Yes	
<b>Passive Recreation</b>						
<b>Bocci Ball</b>	2					
<b>Horseshoe Pit</b>	1					
<b>Boat Launch</b>	Yes (canoe/ kayak)					
<b>Fishing Pond</b>		Yes				
<b>Walking Path</b>	Yes	Yes				
<b>Walking Trail</b>					Yes (5)	

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

Features and Amenities of Township Recreational Facilities						
	Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park	Stirling Lake Park	Meyersville Field/ Complex	LHBSA Stirling Complex	Hicks' Tract	Turtlerock Park
<b>Facilities</b>						
<b>Restroom</b>	Yes	Yes		Yes		
<b>Food and Beverage</b>				Yes		
<b>Covered Picnic Area</b>	Yes	Yes				
<b>Open Picnic Area</b>			Yes	Yes		
<b>Barbecue Grill</b>		Yes				
<b>Bench Seating</b>						Yes
<b>Dogs Permitted</b>	Yes (except playing fields and courts)	No			Yes	
<b>Parking</b>	200 spaces	40 spaces	XX spaces	XX spaces	No	Street parking only
<b>Handicap Parking</b>		4 spaces				
<b>Other Points of Interest</b>						Historical Artifacts

**Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park** (formerly known as Riverside Park) is located next to the Municipal Complex. This is an active park which caters to a lot of different activities including tennis, basketball, and a variety of field sports. There are quite a few dog walkers that visit the park daily.

There are several walking paths within the park. The main contiguous path which encircles Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park Field #1, measures 1,590 feet (slightly longer than ¼ mile). There are additional paved pathways around Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park Field #2. Many walkers visit Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park daily.

Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park Field #1 is a multi-purpose regulation sized turf field and lined for soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey. Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park Field #2 is also a multi-purpose grass field typically utilized and lined for soccer, girls' lacrosse, and field hockey. The fields are utilized by residents as well as local sports associations" WHSA (Soccer), Hills Lacrosse, Long Hill Girls' Lacrosse, Long Hill Field Hockey, and others. An outside building houses rest rooms, a storage closet for sports equipment and sprinkler system controls.



# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

**Stirling Lake Park** is located adjacent to residential streets. The property was deeded to the Township by the local homeowners' association with the stipulation that it had to remain as recreational property. A swimming lake is staffed and operated through the Parks and Recreation Department and is open during the summer season. Seasonal membership or a daily pass is required, and the lake is staffed by certified lifeguards during regular business hours. (Swimming is prohibited when not staffed by lifeguards.)

The swimming lake is spring-fed by two pumps which run constantly during the summer season ensuring a constant flow of fresh water. Water overflow runs into a tributary which leads into the Passaic River. In addition, there is a system of aerators which run continuously to maintain needed water movement and circulation. The facility is tested weekly, and samples are sent to an outside contracted lab. Results are submitted to the Parks and Recreation Department and the local Board of Health. In addition, an outside company is contracted to treat the water for algae. The lake is a non-chlorinated, spring-fed, body of water.

The Stirling Lake provides an excellent venue for swim lessons as well as outdoor events such as: Family Fun Day; the annual Parks and Recreation Department and the Recreation Advisory Committee sponsored Summer Kick-Off Concert; lake dances for middle school students, and movies on the beach.

Kayaks are available to the members along with paddleboards, and an inflatable aquatic obstacle course. A floating dock system has been installed that improved the swim lane area, provided better accessibility and safety of the facility, and included a water slide.

The fishing pond is stocked annually just before the Local PBA Fishing Derby in April. Fishing is permitted in the pond, with NJ State fishing license, when the park is open.

**Meyersville Field/Complex** sits on land that was deeded to the Township in 1961 by Mr. & Mrs. Baily Brower and Mr. & Mrs. John Noe for the expressed purposes that the land be used exclusively for a public park and playground. There are no restroom facilities, but a port-o-john is at the location. There is limited parking available which can be insufficient depending upon events taking place at the location. This facility is bordered by wetlands. Because there are lights for the baseball/softball field, play is allowed on the field until 10 pm nightly.

Currently, this field is used by LHBSA teams, Fall Ball teams, a women's softball league with two (2) Long Hill teams that play against teams from neighboring towns, township residents, local schools, and by local club teams.

This field gets a lot of use, and there are different opinions as to the purpose of this field stemming from disagreements over the original purpose of this field.

Baseball players want to see this field as a 50x70 field with a pitching mound (higher than what exists today), while softball players want to see this field remain as a softball only field. This field also has the added attraction because of the lights. Currently, the field can accommodate two different measurements for two different groups – a 50x70 field for 11 years to High School age, and a 46x60 field for under 11 years players.

**Long Hill Baseball Softball Association Stirling Complex** is located at the end of Poplar Drive. The complex is located right next to wetlands, borders the Passaic River and is subject to periodic flooding. The complex is leased by the town to the Long Hill Township Baseball/Softball Association. Most routine maintenance for the complex is covered by the Association, and many volunteer hours are given. The complex is stretched to meet demands for field time, and the LHBSA Teams do utilize the

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

Meyersville Field often. The complex does not have any softball only fields (Softball fields have dirt infields – unlike baseball which have grass infields).

There are lights on what is called “The American Field” while the two other fields, “National Field” (46 x 60) and “Senior Field” (60x90) do not.

**Hicks’ Tract** is a tract of land located between Millington and Stirling. This 59+ acre piece of wooded property was purchased by the Township with an Open Space grant in 1963 from Mr. & Mrs. Halsey Hicks. Hicks’ Tract is accessible by road from Knollandale Road in Millington and from Largo Lane in Stirling. There are also walking trails that lead into the area behind Millington School. Hicks’ Tract is a wooded area with several walking/hiking trails that have been developed and maintained by the Public Works Department along with local Boy Scout troops. There are five (5) trails in the area delineated as: blue, red, orange, white, and yellow.

There is a paved pathway that provides emergency vehicle access through the property and allows for bicyclists to cross through the park plus pedestrian traffic. The park is open sunrise to sundown.

During Super Storm Sandy (October 2012), the park sustained significant damage with many uprooted trees. Due to concerns that the normally heavily shaded forest floor covered with pine needles would become a fire hazard, a concerted effort was made to remove fallen trees, clear trails, and re-plant new trees. Today, the work continues to restore the trails and the trail markings. Over the years, many local Boy Scouts have taken on improvement projects (including Eagle Scout projects) in the park such as the Fall 2014 project to clear and blaze trails.

**Turtlerock Park** is a small park located next to the Stirling Train Station. This park is an area designated for passive recreation with several park benches and planted gardens.





# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

## Board of Education Playing Fields

The Long Hill Township Public Schools also have playing fields behind their facilities. The school inventory is shown in the chart below.

School	Playground	Baseball/Softball	Soccer	Outdoor Basketball
<b>Gillette School</b>	Yes	One Baseball/One Softball	No	No
<b>Millington School</b>	Yes	One Softball	Yes	One hoop
<b>Central School</b>	No	One 60x90 Baseball	Practice Only	Yes

None of the three school buildings have a running track. The Middle School (Central School) sponsors both a fall Cross Country Team and a spring Track & Field Team. The school teams come to Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park to run on a paved path, and they run Cross Country meets across the fields and on the perimeter of Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park. Once a year, the local schools attend a Track Meet at the local High School (Watchung Hills Regional HS) to compete with sister sending district schools.

Additional local school sports teams also utilize the town facilities. The Central Middle School soccer teams occasionally uses Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park for soccer tournament games.

The Board of Education manages the school athletic facilities/fields, and permits are needed to reserve time. The lack of access to restrooms at the facilities makes use of these fields limited.

The Parks and Recreation Department pays a fee each year to the Board of Education to cover additional janitorial expenses incurred to run programs in the schools. Both Millington and Central Schools are used to run the following programs: Basketball (Oct- May), Volleyball clinics, and Summer Recreation Camp (6 weeks).

## Long Hill Township Sports Programs

The Long Hill Township youth sports programs are popular outlets for residents under the age of 18 (particularly, residents ages 5-14). The Long Hill Parks and Recreation Department organizes sports programs for youth and adult basketball, as well as girl's lacrosse and field hockey. In addition to the sports programs, the Parks and Recreation Department also organizes clinics throughout the year in lacrosse, field hockey, and volleyball.

### Affiliated Sports Programs

The Parks and Recreation Department also works with several local sports clubs such as the Warren Hills Soccer Association and Hills Lacrosse. Through partnership agreements with these organizations, which are organized along regional sending district lines (Long Hill, Warren, Watchung, Green Brook), Long Hill Township lends its fields to these programs at no charge. Oratory Prep also uses the turf field for practice under a lease agreement. The Long Hill Township Baseball Softball Association (LHBSA) operates from the Baseball and Softball Fields located

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

at the end of the Poplar Drive in Stirling. The Township owns this property and leases it to the association. In addition, the LHBSA also books additional time at Meyersville Field. Residents and non-residents can rent the fields/facilities for events such as birthday parties.

## GOALS AND POLICIES

Recreation activities cover a wide range of interests and purposes that have a major impact on land use within Long Hill Township. To fully realize the recommendations set forth, a great deal of co-operation by landowners and governmental agencies will be required to ensure all residents have easy access to recreation that is dispersed throughout the Township.

1. Encourage development of new recreation opportunities through partnerships with private and public entities:
  - a. Property developers to provide, where feasible, common open space with public recreation opportunities.
  - b. Explore opportunities with NJ Transit Railroad.
    - Example "Rails with Trails" to connect the 3 NJ Train Stations with a safe paved trail.
  - c. Develop opportunities with Public Utilities.
  - d. Develop opportunities with the Passaic River Coalition.
  - e. Develop opportunities with the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and the Great Swamp Watershed Association.
  - f. Develop opportunities with Morris County and neighboring Counties and Towns especially where shared use of the Passaic River and common public recreational areas are available.
2. Explore opportunities, as they arise, to use environmentally constrained lands in and around the Downtown Valley Business Zone for possible recreation uses and leisure activities and pedestrian and bike access in partnership with land owners.

3. Explore recreational opportunities that the Passaic River could offer as it is currently an underutilized asset for Long Hill Township provided appropriate safety measures are in place.
4. Recreation covers a wide range of activities, many of which are under the oversight of the Township, Township Committees or Commissions, therefore, the following should be, in part, responsible for the future success of this Element:
  - a. Long Hill Township Parks and Recreation Department.
  - b. Open Space Advisory Committee.
  - c. Central Park Vision Committee.

## ACTION PLAN

### Active Recreation Recommendations

- Expand the trail system suitable for hiking, bicycle, cross country skiing and pedestrian use throughout the township that will provide circulatory links to the township's neighborhoods, commercial centers and open spaces areas. Trails should be a mix of paved and natural/wood chipped pathways. See Map xx– Open Space Element
- Consider the addition of a multi-purpose lighted turf field (soccer, lacrosse, football) field with 400m track in a location where neighboring uses would not be burdened by excessive light spillover and there is a minimal risk of flood damage.
- Consider the creation of a total of 4 lighted tennis courts in close proximity to each other to support USTA sanctioned competitions where a suitable location can be identified that does not burden neighboring uses with excessive light spillover.
- Provide a residents-only dog park to exercise their licensed dogs.
- Consider building a Swimming Pool Complex (Outdoor) if economically viable, with consideration of current facilities located at Stirling Lake Park.

# OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

- Continually update existing playgrounds as improved safety equipment is developed and needs change.
- Add and/or fully utilize any existing Indoor Recreation Space to support programs that cover a wide range of activities that are suitable for residents for all ages.
- Encourage ecotourism and promote river, hiking and biking leisure activities where appropriate in the Township.
- Increase recreational opportunities along the Passaic River notably in creating access points for non-motorized watercraft where access and usage of the river is safe.
- Create paved and/or unpaved walking paths that encourage residents to actively exercise through walking in a looped circuit with stretching and exercising stations. For example, the pathways around the playing fields at Matthew G. Kantor Memorial Park.

## Passive Recreation Recommendations

- Explore the development of a rail-with-trail system of easements along the New Jersey Transit rail line to link with other parts of the Long Hill Township trail system as well as providing a unique opportunity for connecting non-motorized transportation with public transportation, such as when a trail leads to a train station.
- Encourage establishment of an outdoor open area to use for dining, local art, music and other events.
- Develop pocket parks, where practical.
- Build an open air Amphitheatre for Performing Arts, such as theatre and music, near the large scale Township facilities such as the Municipal Complex, Central Park and Community Center.

- Create a Community Garden/Greenhouse to be operated and funded by a local group of residents that could be built upon open space that is either private or public land. The facility may produce fruit, vegetables, and/or ornamental flowers.
- Build bird hides, or other such structures, along the Passaic River for nature observation.

