

MONTGOMERY AWARDS

Planning Advocate
2018 Award Winner



Upper Pottsgrove Township Open Space & Recreation Board Upper Pottsgrove Township

The Upper Pottsgrove Township Open Space & Recreation Board, a dedicated volunteer group, received the 2018 Planning Advocate Award in recognition of its community vision, sustained commitment to conservation of natural resources, and successful open space preservation and trail development achievements. Over nearly three decades, the past and present members of the board have created an enviable record of accomplishments, furthering the vision and goals of the township.

Community Vision

An important goal of the township was a desire to preserve the natural elements of its community character. Through the years, faced with mounting suburban development pressure on its farmlands and rural landscape, the township established a vision for retaining its valuable natural resources. In the early 1990s, these efforts were led primarily by a grassroots citizen group, which educated itself about environmental stewardship





and land preservation. In 2004, this group was formalized as the township's open space committee, and in 2010 the committee merged with the township recreation board, becoming the Upper Pottsgrove Township Open Space & Recreation Board. The Montgomery County Lands Trust was enlisted early on to help guide the visioning, growth management, and open space preservation process. The effort from this volunteer group has resulted in 322 acres of dedicated public lands and trails, including seven parks, three trail systems, privately protected lands, and an outdoor environmental education center.

Commitment to Conservation

Recognizing the opportunity provided by public open space funds, the township updated its 1996 open space plan. The new plan, adopted in September 2006, identified the need for new financial strategies to protect open space and provide both consistent and reliable funds. This led to a township ballot measure for a bond referendum on open space, which offered a new strategy for open space preservation by creating a dedicated source of funding through an increase in the earned income tax.

With this 0.25 percent increase, the township was able to leverage revenue for open space acquisitions and began to pursue the goal of a network of parks and open spaces connected by trails. In 2009, the township used a \$714,000 grant from the Montgomery County Green Fields/Green Towns Program and new funding from the referendum to purchase two 20-acre tracts, dramatically increasing its open space network. The township, through the dedicated efforts of the members of the open space and recreation board, continues to fund open space preservation and environmental education and initiatives. One of these successful collaborations is the public-private partnership with GreenAllies, which developed and now manages Althouse Arboretum, an outdoor environmental education center located on 17 acres of township open space. In 2017, GreenAllies offered 50 outdoor

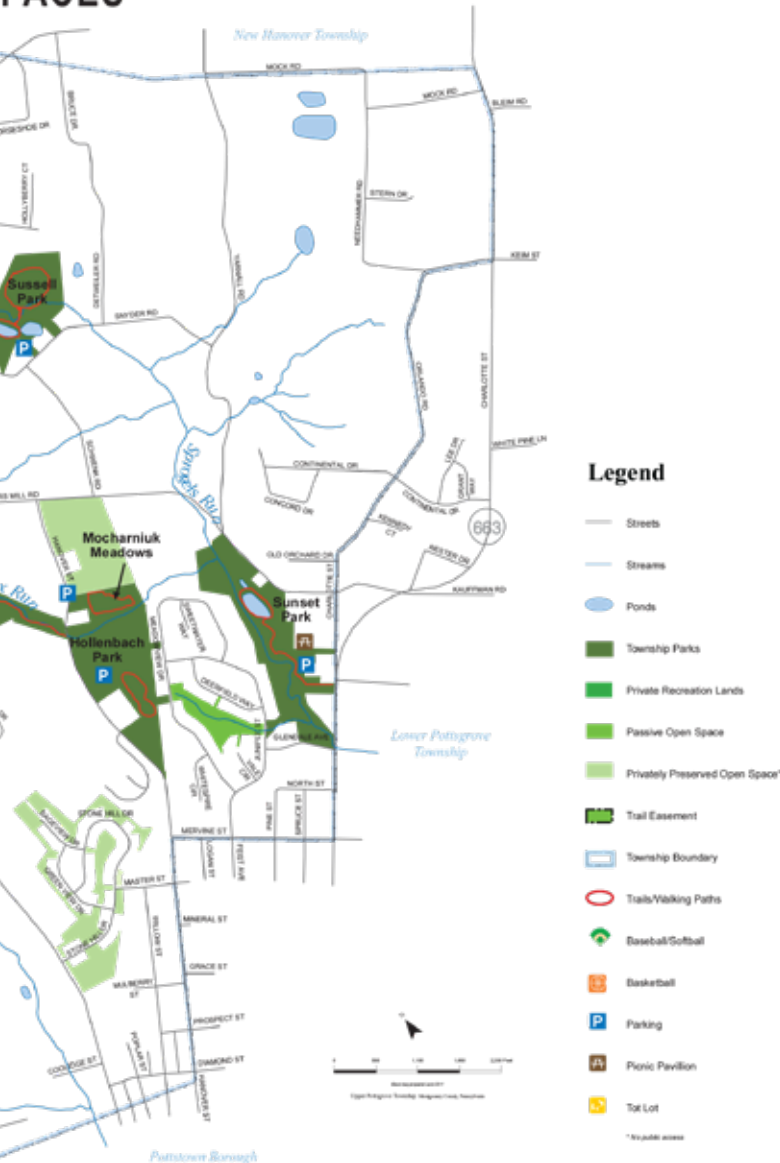
UPPER POTTSGROVE PARKS AND OPEN S

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programs to the community. All of the township parks have well-designed and coordinated signage at entrances and trailheads, which reminds residents how their generous funding has contributed to the quality of life.

Open Space Preservation and Trail Development

Working to implement the goals of the open space plan, the township and board initiated many efforts to preserve open space, develop parks, and promote a connected and unfragmented greenway throughout the township. The efforts ranged from developing subdivision ordinances, encouraging public awareness, and building relationships with land owners to further the conversation on future opportunities for prospective parks, trails, and greenway corridors. Upper Pottsgrove Township is part of the Pottstown Area Regional Recreation Committee (PARRC), which is working to develop a tri-county trail system connecting Montgomery, Chester, and Berks Counties with the Schuylkill River Trail and with the participating municipalities. Recognizing that planning is always critical, the board is currently updating the open space plan to further its open space initiatives.

The Upper Pottsgrove Township Open Space & Recreation Board has been an outstanding leader, achieving an impressive portfolio of open space preservation, recreational facilities, and trail development. The board continues to build on its successful collaboration with the township and community partners to create a legacy of appealing open spaces and parks, neighborhood connections through trails, and environmental education.

Achievements

- Created a dedicated source of open space funding through a voter-approved referendum, which increased the earned income tax by 0.25 percent to 1.25 percent. The increase generated over \$250,000 annually for dedicated open space funding, enabling the township to leverage this annual revenue for investing in open space preservation.
- Planned and developed an extensive trail network throughout the township with over 4.25 miles constructed and more than 5 miles of trails planned. This significant development provides needed off-road connections to the parklands and preserved areas and connections to nearby regional trails and amenities in neighboring municipalities.
- Used land development and subdivision regulations and the development approval process to aid in the implementation of the township's open space plan. Examples include using open space corridors from residential subdivisions to connect with township trails, such as Sprogels Run Trail and Goose Run Trail.
- Used dedicated open space funding to acquire and develop open space lands, which the township otherwise would not have been able to conserve using only county and state funds. These include the 20-acre Prince-Austerberry tract and the 20.9-acre Stauffer tract.
- Preserved 322 acres of trails, greenways, and open space lands and leveraged over \$4.4 million in local revenue to amass an impressive portfolio of preserved lands in three decades. These accomplishments, which began with a 2.5-acre park in the 1990s, now include seven parks, three trail systems, and private protected lands.
- Proactively acquired over 132 acres of open space lands between 2007–2010, seizing the opportunity afforded by the Great Recession of 2007–2009 to use local revenue to acquire identified lands at a significantly reduced price.



Public input opportunity at 2018 Upper Pottsgrove Community Day

The annual Montgomery Awards recognize the best in planning, design, and advocacy in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

The program acknowledges the high-quality work and commitment of communities, organizations, and professionals.

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