

SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP OPEN SPACE COMMITTEE REPORT. Summer of 2017



Fellow Springfield Township Residents and Landowners:

Springfield Township has been blessed with prime agricultural land and unique natural resources, many associated with the Cooks Creek Watershed, which covers nearly 80% of the Township. The Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection has designated Cooks Creek and its tributaries an Exceptional Value Watershed, one of very few such stream systems in southeastern Pennsylvania.



Recognizing the importance of preserving the natural resources present in the Township, previous Boards of Supervisors, working with residents, enacted land preservation activities in 2001 and 2006. The initial effort resulted in a voter-approved referendum that provided a 0.25% Earned Income Tax directed to acquisition of Open Space. The

second effort, a referendum overwhelmingly approved by the voters, involved issuance of debt through a General Obligation Bond, funded by the prior EIT approval, to accelerate the preservation process.

Preservation of land is accomplished by different means. The most typical method involves the purchase or donation of a “conservation easement”, which is a legal agreement that restricts or prohibits future development (subdivision) of the property, even as the landowners retain full ownership and use of their land. The placement of a Conservation Easement on a property also protects the “natural state of the land” by limiting not only development but managing the land with “best practices” and certain restrictions.

It has been ten years since the bond referendum was approved and the Township borrowed \$5 million dollars for acquisition of open space. This report details what the Open Space Committee (OSC), working in conjunction with the Board of Supervisors (BOS), has accomplished since January of 2008, during the second phase of Open Space preservation.

Highlights since 2008:

1. The Township has added over 2600 acres (51 parcels) to the previous inventory of 1500 acres of preserved land.
2. In 2012 the BOS refinanced the original bond issue and saved approximately \$800,000, which was used to preserve additional acreage.
3. The Township utilized matching funds from the Bucks County Natural Areas and Bucks County Agricultural programs on 26% of the properties preserved, thereby stretching our financial resources.
4. The Township had 16 properties preserved directly through the Bucks County Agricultural program at minimal or no cost to the Township.
5. The Township, utilizing Open Space Funding, was able to receive a matching grant from the state for \$111,000 to open Peppermint Park.
6. The Township received Federal Highlands Grant monies to preserve properties in the Township.
7. The Township fully utilized its allocation of \$626,000 from the county Municipal Open Space Program and preserved 4 properties.
8. The Township spent 85% of its open space funds to purchase conservation easements. The remaining 15% was used for land preservation costs including appraisals, legal fees, survey costs, and other miscellaneous expenses.
9. The Township benefitted significantly from the design of the Open Space program AND from the many landowners who willingly made full or partial donations to the program, while preserving their land.



History of the Current Program (2008-2017):

Prior to 2008, the Township had preserved approximately 1550 acres of open space through various donations, County programs and the 0.25% Earned Income Tax enacted in 2001, which was earmarked for Open Space Preservation.

A new Open Space Committee (OSC) was selected by the Board of Supervisors in 2006 and their duties were outlined in Township Ordinance #134. The charter of the ordinance is to “advise the Board of Supervisors on matters relating to the protection, conservation, management, promotion, acquisition and use of open space resources.” The Committee, comprised of seven to nine volunteer members, was appointed annually by the BOS with each member having various terms.

Open Space Committee Members since 2006

Jeff Lindtner	Kristy Aller-Hoffman
Jim Nilsen*	Kelly Burland
Cindy McCurdy	Tom Craig
Dave Long*	Robert Cressman
Nevada Mease	Robert Morris
Pete Sleeman*	Bill Pomante
Hans Reimann*	Grant Reed
Rob Zisko	Sue Ziegler*

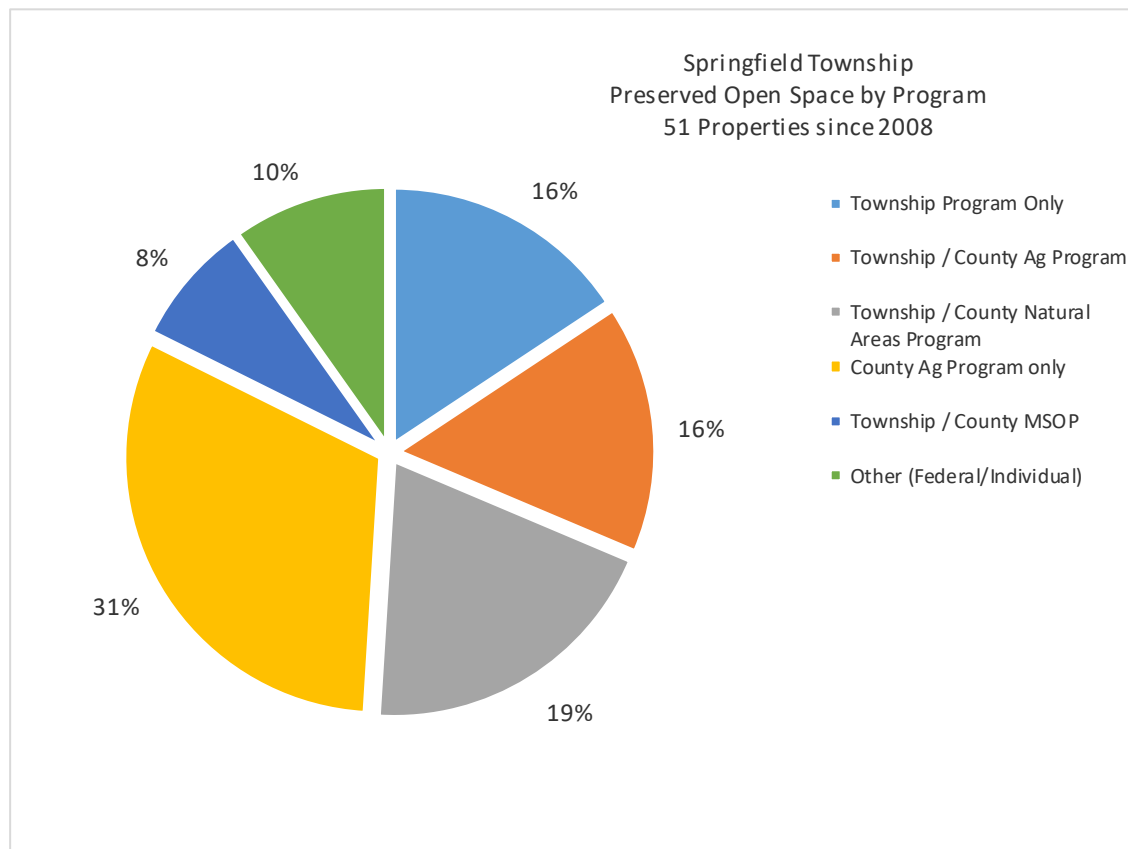
*Current member

The Committee spent the first 18 months developing procedures, an evaluation process, policies, and practices to fairly evaluate and rank Township properties with potential for open space preservation. As a result of these policies, the Open Space Program was based upon voluntary applications from landowners who were interested in preserving their land.

Each member who volunteered for this committee devoted countless hours to preserving our rural and agricultural community. None of them have asked for recognition, but the impact of what they accomplished has been nothing short of astonishing. Springfield Township's program has been described by many people familiar with this endeavor as, "one of the best ever seen". The committee was successful in attracting County, State and Federal matching funds on almost 85% of the properties preserved, and in several circumstances partnered with adjoining Townships to preserve properties that crossed township lines. Financially, the program was extremely efficient, with 85% of the financial resources going directly to purchasing conservation easements.

From 2008 to mid-2017, we have added 51 additional properties (2612 acres) to the inventory of preserved land. Combine this total with the previous inventory brings the total preserved acreage to an astounding 4174 acres, approximately 21% of the total acreage in the Township. (Which is to say, one fifth of the township (more than 6.5 square miles) is not under conservation easements

An analysis of the funding sources and programs for the various properties preserved since 2008 is shown in the pie chart below.



The OSC commends and thanks the landowners who participated in these efforts and programs. They have significantly aided in maintaining the rural and natural character of the Township.

The magnitude of the effort becomes much clearer when depicted graphically. The Township map (below) delineates properties on which open space easements have been obtained over the two phases (pre-2008 and 2008-2017) of the program.

As you can see, we have succeeded not only in protecting and adding individual parcels, but also in creating large blocks of preserved space, whereby hundreds of contiguous acres are preserved. These larger groupings not only provide lasting viewsapes, they also afford greenways and extensive natural habitats for native flora and wildlife species.

In order to ensure the long-term success of the Open Space Program, the Committee sought out a reputable partner to co-hold the easements with the Township. This arrangement ensures that the conservation easements are upheld and monitored *in perpetuity*. After a careful evaluation of several potential partners, including The Natural Lands Trust, Bedminster Conservancy, and Heritage Conservancy, the OSC (in consultation with the BOS) selected Heritage Conservancy from Doylestown PA. The Heritage Conservancy has and will provide resources, documentation, monitoring, and legal resources on behalf of the Township as needed. Heritage Conservancy will, on an annual basis, monitor each property to ensure that the restrictions of the conservation easement are upheld and they will provide a report to the Township of their findings. In addition, those properties that were preserved via county programs only, will be monitored by the county to maintain compliance with the terms of the easements.

In all cases, we would like to thank the members of Heritage Conservancy, including Ms. Laura Baird, Ms. Kris Kern and Mr. Jeff Marshall for their efforts, and Mr. Rich Harvey from the Bucks County Agricultural Preservation Program for his assistance. In addition thanks also go to Mr. Terry Clemons, our township solicitor and Mr. Bob Wynn and Mr. Curt Genner, our township engineers for their assistance. Without their help, the process would have been much more difficult.

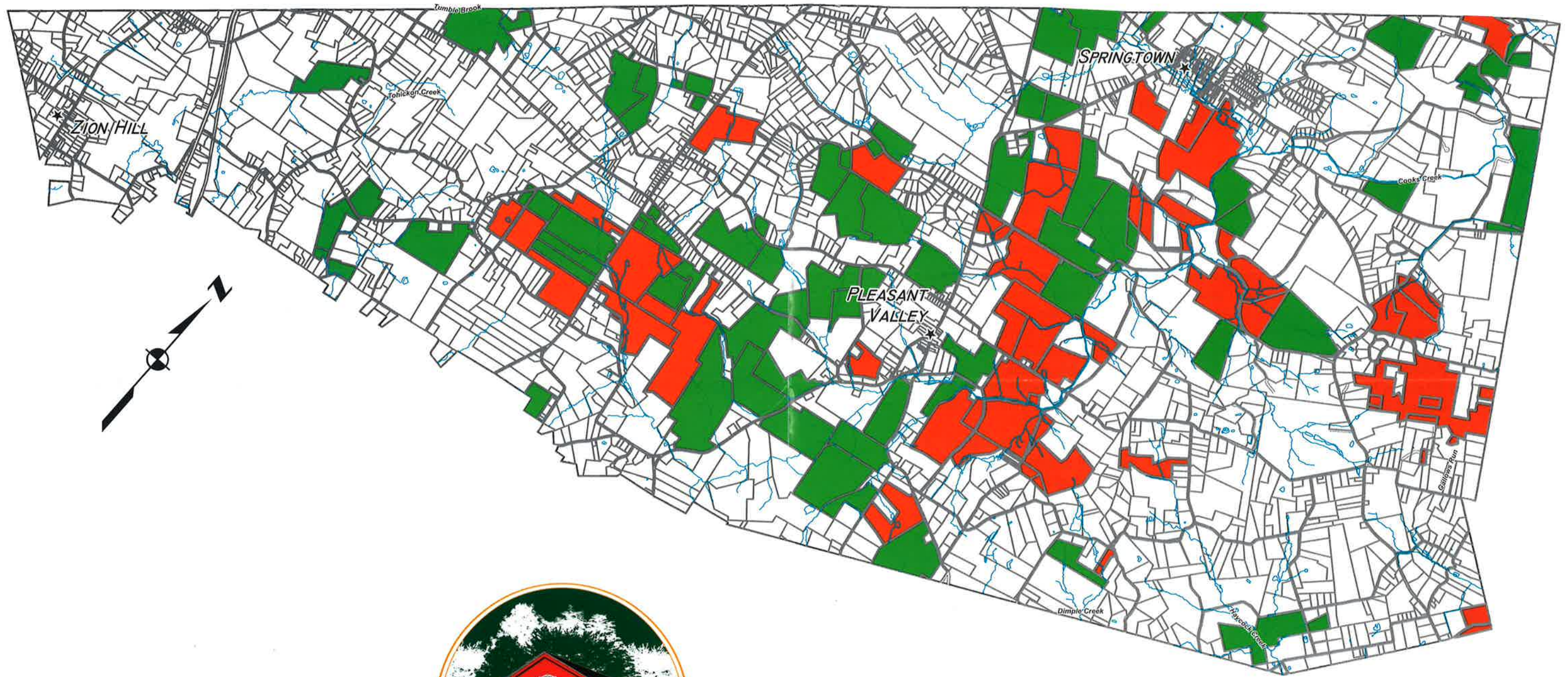
Costs:

We believe that the Open Space Committee and the Board of Supervisors have prudently spent the monies associated with the Open Space Program funded by your taxes and the General Obligation Bond.






Of the 70 applications received since 2008, we have evaluated, ranked, and closed on 51 properties. Preference has been given to several landowners who were willing to fully donate their conservation easement, or to donate at least 25-30% of the value of the easement to the Township or program. This preference means the Township preserves more acres of land at a significantly reduced cost. In addition, each property preserved by the Township is preserved, by design, at less than the full appraised value of the easement. Preference also has been given to properties that qualify for various county, state or

Springfield Township Preserved Farmland & Open Space

Total Acreage Under Easement = 4174
as of 6/1/2017



LEGEND:

-  Pre-2008 Preserved Parcels
-  Post-2008 Preserved Parcels
-  Municipal Boundary
-  Parcels
-  Hydrology

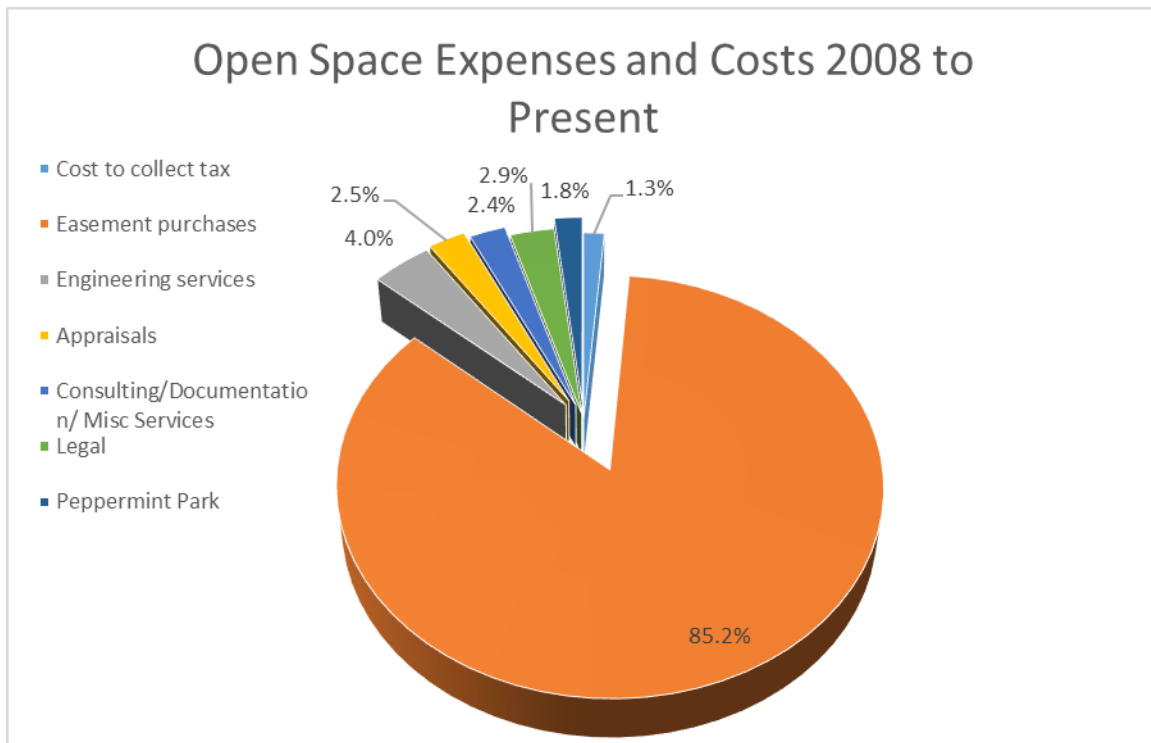


SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP
OSP PARCEL PRESERVATION MAP

federal programs that provide matching funds, thus allowing the Township to further stretch its financial resources.

The \$5 million in General Obligation Bonds purchased in 2007 are being paid back by the 0.25% EIT tax presently in place. The BOS refinanced the existing Bonds in 2012, reducing the interest rate the Township pays but maintaining the repayment term at 20 years. This refinance resulted in a savings of approximately \$800,000 over the term of the bonds, which was used to acquire more easements. The current bond repayment program is still being funded by the 0.25% EIT and will last to 2032.

Below is a diagram of \$6.7 million in expenditures incurred since January 1, 2008. We believe these costs are incredibly favorable for a complicated program, as 85% have been applied directly to easement purchases. The remaining 15% is split among various necessary aspects of land preservation.



In order to put these costs into perspective, one can compare the monies spent to the value obtained. The Committee uses a performance metric that is “cost per acre” value. Of the 2600 acres preserved since 2008, 1376 involved Township financing. The combined appraised value of the easements on these 1376 acres was \$14.5 million or \$10,500 per acre. Based upon spending to date, the cost to the Township has been approximately \$3900 an acre. This means that, on average, the Township spent approximately 37% of the easement value for the properties acquired to date. This expenditure does not include the monies that were “matched” or provided by other county/federal programs (and so does not reflect that actual purchase price per acre).

If one calculates the combined total acreage preserved by all programs, regardless of the funding source, versus the amount of money spent by the Township, the cost per acre is approximately \$2200/acre. Talk about value!

During this time frame and for additional comparison, the County Agricultural Preservation Program funded easements at a cost of \$9000 to \$12,000 per acre for properties accepted into that program. A cost well above the average \$3900 /acre the Township typically spent.

The State Legislature passed Act 115 in 2014 to allow the use of Open Space funds for both the acquisition and *development* of park facilities. The Board of Supervisors authorized a portion of the Open Space assets (\$122,000) to develop and open Peppermint Park. The Township received a grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania in the amount of \$111,000. These combined funds were used to design, engineer, and construct the Park. The park is now open to residents of the Township and is considered a “passive recreation park”.

Future Steps:

As of mid-2017 the committee is working on 3 properties presently in the application queue, which will essentially exhaust all available Township funding. These properties could potentially contribute an additional 135-150 acres to the total preserved open space, with an expectation that most will be completed by 2018.

We continue to solicit and coordinate applications to support the continued preservation of property within the Township. Funds may be derived from the Bucks County Agricultural Preservation Program, Federal Highlands Grants, and DCNR Grants to maximize the existing programs from the County/State and Federal agencies Hence, if you are a landowner considering preservation of your land (or know of someone considering preservation), please contact the Township by calling 610-346-6700 Extension 12 and leave a message to have someone from the Open Space Committee get in touch with you.

As we will have basically committed all available Township resources this year, the Open Space Committee is considering a recommendation to the Board of Supervisors in support of another voter referendum. That referendum would seek additional funding to continue open space preservation efforts within the Township.

In the Springfield Township Comprehensive Plan Survey that will be sent out this summer, we will ask whether or not you favor continuing the program, We still have a number of applications to the Township program, which if approved, would add an

additional 500 to 1000 acres of preserved land. However, we cannot proceed on these applications without additional funding, nor can we proceed with any new applications.

Respectfully,

**Springfield Township Open Space Committee and the
Springfield Township Board of Supervisors.**



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www.springfieldbucks.org

