

**EVALUATION OF
BLOCK 48 LOT 23, BLOCK 55 LOT 33,
BLOCK 56 LOTS 1, 3, 6 & 8
AND BLOCK 67 LOT 2
FOR MUNICIPAL ACQUISITION**

Readington Township, Hunterdon County,
New Jersey

June 28, 2001
Updated May, 2006

Clarke Caton Hintz



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AND BLOCK 67 LOT 2
FOR MUNICIPAL ACQUISITION**

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
STUDY AREA.....	2
OPEN SPACE & FARMLAND PRESERVATION	7
RECREATION	39
NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION	45
WILDLIFE	62
HISTORIC PRESERVATION	71
AIRPORT PRESERVATION	75
COMMUNITY CHARACTER	86
SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	89

Exhibits

Study Area Location.....	5
2002 Aerial Photo	6
Open Space & Preserved Farmland.....	12
Vegetative Cover	46
Freshwater Wetlands.....	54
Streams	58
Agricultural Soils	60
Grassland Habitat	64
Forested Habitat.....	65
Emergent/Forested Wetlands Habitat.....	66
Readington Village.....	72

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to examine certain lands, in the present ownership of Solberg and Hromoho (the “Study Area”), in connection with Open Space Acquisitions and to determine whether the public interest would be advanced through the acquisition, ownership and control of the Study Area by Readington Township. Although the Open Space attributes of the properties are readily apparent, this evaluation concludes that in addition to Open Space objectives, the Study Area presents numerous interrelated additional features that suggest the advisability of municipal acquisition.

The Study Area is located on the northeastern edge of Readington Township and contains a small existing airport, agricultural fields, stream corridors, wetlands, open space and woodlands. Given these unique and diverse characteristics, it is the conclusion of this report that myriad public benefits would be realized through municipal ownership of the Study Area. These purposes include:

- Open space and farmland preservation**
- Provision of Recreation**
- Conservation of natural resources**
- Wetlands protection**
- Water Quality**
- Preservation of critical wildlife habitat**
- Historic preservation**
- Airport preservation**
- Municipal ownership and control of airport**
- Preservation of community character**

This report contains a description of the Study Area and an analysis of the relevant municipal, County and State policies and purposes in relation to how Township ownership of the Study Area would advance those public policies and purposes.

The report was originally issued on June 28, 2001. The current report has been updated to address recently adopted local and State policy documents including the July 2001 Master Plan Amendment, December 2001 Master Plan Reexamination Report, new State water quality and stormwater management rules (published in February 2004), and the April 2004 Preliminary State Plan. Additionally, the report has been revised to reflect current data regarding preserved farmland and open space, farmland assessment acreage, population estimates, and average residential home sales prices within the Township and the region. The report now includes more detailed mapping and discussion of critical habitat areas pursuant to the NJDEP Landscape Project.

THE STUDY AREA

Description of the Subject Property

The Study Area is located in the northeastern portion of the Township of Readington, Hunterdon County. Readington lies on the eastern edge of Hunterdon County, adjacent to Somerset County. The Study Area extends from Pulaski Road on the north, to just south of Readington Road (Hunterdon County Route 620) on the south. Portions of the properties extend across Thor Solberg Road to the east and across Lightfield Road to the west. The properties are shown in detail on the survey entitled “*Environmental Inventory Plan for Solberg Properties*” dated December 28, 2000, revised March 20, 2001, consisting of 6 sheets.¹ Four tracts make up the Study Area:

Tax Block/Lot	Survey Acreage
Block 48 Lot 23	72.615
Block 55 Lot 33	20.955
Block 56 Lots 1, 3, 6 & 8	596.087
Block 67 Lot 2	36.774
Total	726.431

General Tract Descriptions

The tracts that comprise the Study Area contain a variety of developed and undeveloped conditions on over 726 acres. These include a small airport, farmland, open fields, woodlands, wetlands and stream corridors.



¹ Thomas L. Yager & Associates. *Environmental Inventory Plan for Solberg Properties*, dated December 28, 2000, revised March 20, 2001. The acreage of the Study Area has also been confirmed in a survey map dated March 3, 2005 prepared by H. Clay McEldowney, PE, PLS for the Township’s Chambers Brook & Holland Brook Greenway.

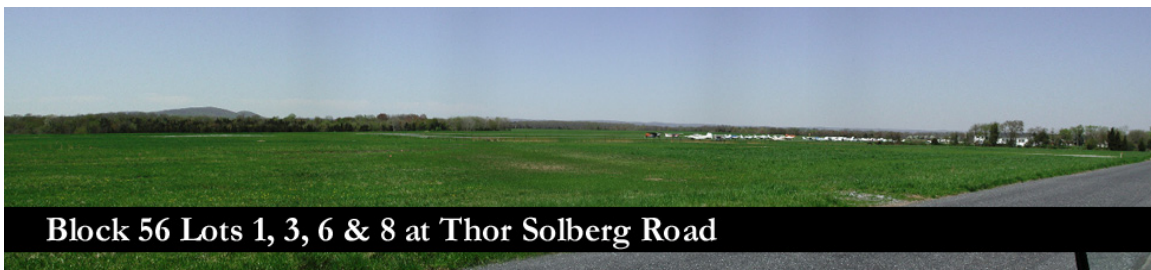
Block 48 Lot 23

This 72.615+/- tract is located to the west of the main tract, across Lightfield Road. It is undeveloped, with cultivated agricultural fields and some wooded areas. A stream channel is located in the northeast portion of the tract. The zoning designation of this tract is RR -Rural Residential, which permits agriculture and single-family residential dwellings at a density of one dwelling unit for every three acres.



Block 55 Lot 33

This 20.955 +/- tract is located to the south of the main tract, across Readington Road (CR 620). It is undeveloped, containing a portion of the Holland Brook and forested wetlands associated with the stream corridor. The property is relatively flat. The zoning designation of this tract is AR -Agricultural Residential, which permits agriculture and single-family residential dwellings at a density of one dwelling unit for every six acres.



Block 56 Lots 1, 3, 6 & 8

This 596.087 tract represents the core of the Study Area. It is the site of the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport, a small Level 3² airfield. In addition to the airport facilities, there are open fields, fields in agricultural production, streams, wetlands and wooded areas. The wildlife habitat present on-site have resulted in the tract being designated as a Natural Heritage Priority Site by the NJ DEP's Office of Natural Lands Management. The topography of the tract is comprised of gentle slopes. The open character of the site permits unobstructed views to Cushetunk Mountain. The zoning designation of this tract is AR -Agricultural Residential, which generally permits residential dwellings at a density of one dwelling unit for every 5-6 acres.



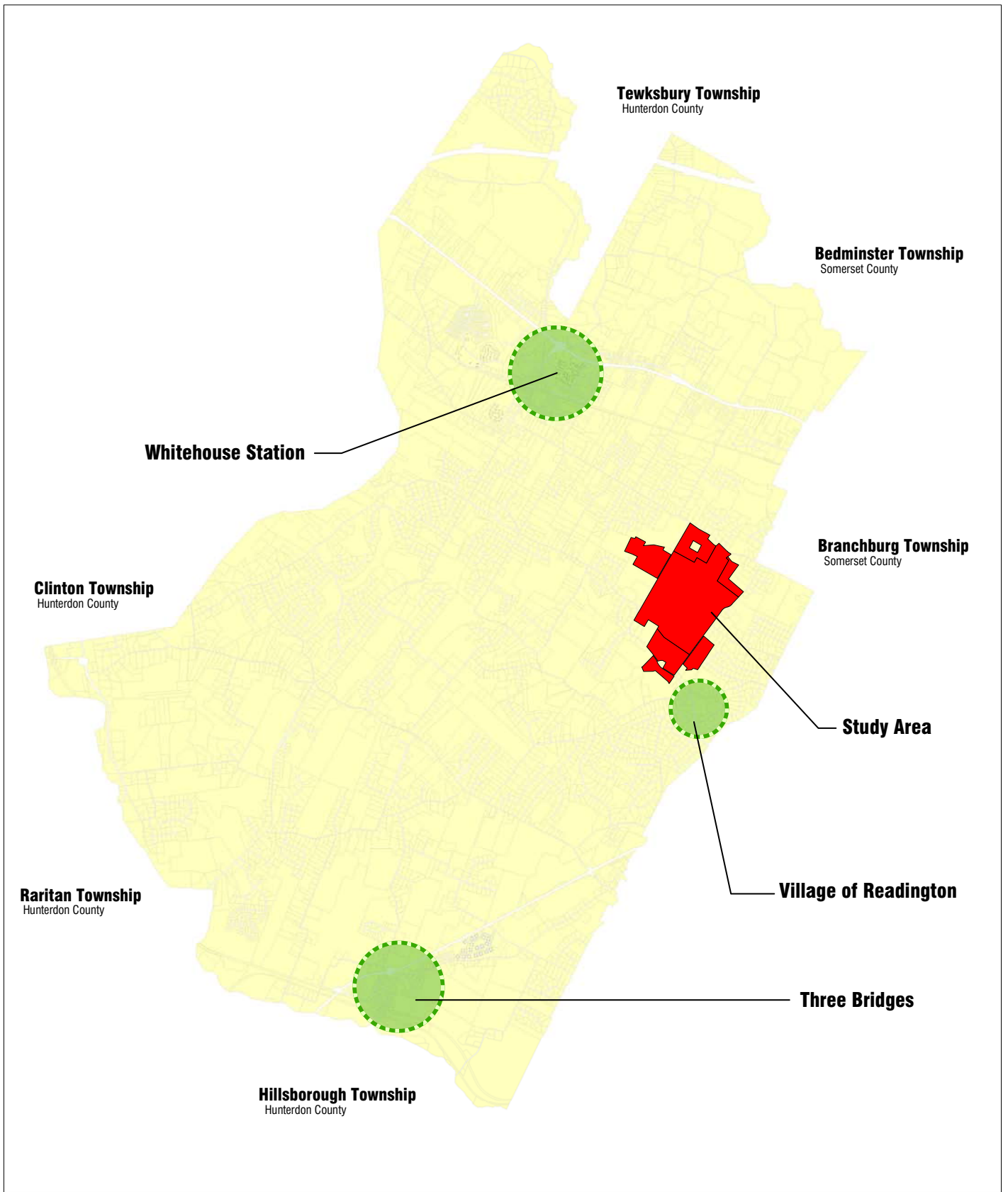
Block 67 Lot 2

This 36.774 +/- tract is located to the east of the main tract, across Thor Solberg Road. It is undeveloped, with cultivated agricultural fields and some wooded areas. It has been used to accommodate occasional parking along the road frontage. It abuts adjacent single family residential neighborhoods to the east. The zoning designation of this tract is RR –Rural Residential.

Adjacent Uses

Adjacent uses to the Study Area include single-family detached residences, the Holland Brook School, Readington Middle School and Readington's Hillcrest Park. The village of Readington is situated to the southeast, at the intersection of Readington Road and Hillcrest Road.

² New Jersey Department of Transportation, Office of Aviation. no date. *New Jersey State Aviation System Plan: Final Technical Report*, EMJ/McFarland-Johnson Engineers, Inc.



Source:
Base Map Source: Studer and McEldowney,
PA 120 West Main St. Clinton, NJ 08809.
April 26, 2005



Clarke Caton Hintz

Architecture

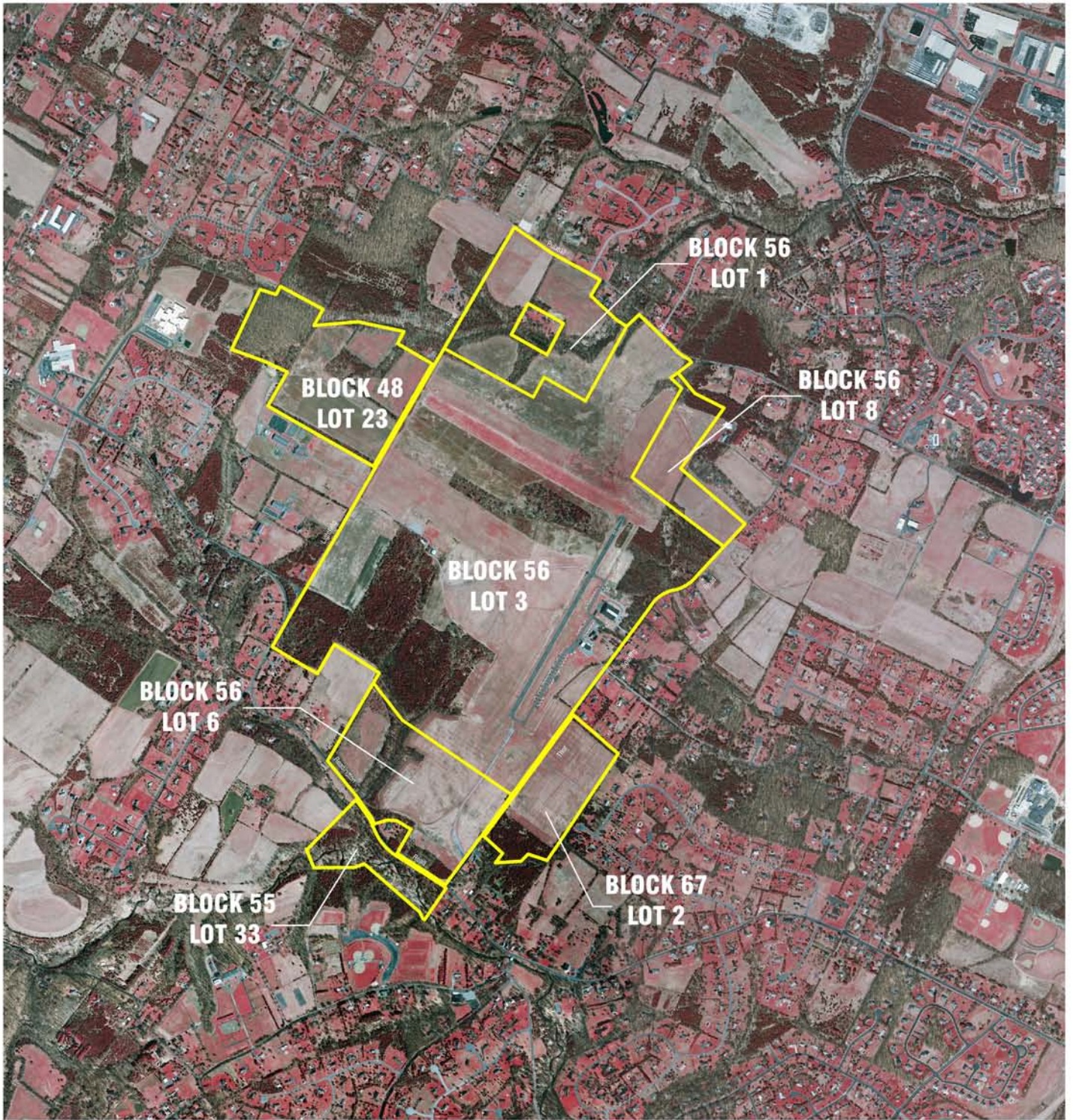
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Study Area Location

Readington Township, Hunterdon County, NJ March 2006



STUDY AREA

2002 Aerial Photo

Readington Township, Hunterdon County, NJ April 2006

Aerial Photo Source: State of New Jersey, Office of Information Technology New Jersey 2002 High Resolution Orthophotography captured during February-April, 2002



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OPEN SPACE & FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Open Space & Farmland in the Study Area

As previously described, the Study Area contains a large amount of open space and farmland. Of the total 726 acres, 668 acres are assessed as agricultural lands.³ The agricultural lands include croplands, wooded hedgerows, streams and wetlands and represents 92% of the total 726 acre area within the Study Area. The Study Area is adjacent to several components of the Readington Township open space network, including Hillcrest Park and the Holland Brook corridor. Acquisition of the Study Area by Readington would ensure that the open space and farmland in the Study Area would be permanently preserved.

Benefits of Open Space

As state, county and local legislation and policies increasingly acknowledge, substantial benefits are derived from the preservation of the State's open space. These benefits are accorded to the ecological systems that are within, and connected to, open space lands and the organisms that depend on open space for habitat. Additionally, open space provides psychological and physiological benefits to human beings.

Forests, wetlands, grasslands and streams, each a distinct habitat, accommodate a great diversity of native and indigenous plant and animal species. Forests, wetlands and grasslands serve as pollutant filters, reducing the amount of contaminants that in overland stormwater runoff prior to reaching streams and other bodies of water. Wetlands are home to nearly 33% of the State's threatened and endangered species⁴. Forests, in addition to reducing stormwater runoff and preventing soil erosion, also reduce the amount of pollutants in the air by absorbing carbon dioxide and releasing oxygen. These actions are beneficial to the health and well being of wildlife and humans.

The benefit derived from open space by humans has been underscored by research that indicates peoples' exposure to verdant, natural landscapes reduces stress and anxiety.⁵ Research has also shown that people moving through a natural area, when compared to those who had walked through an urban area, exhibited a more positive emotional state.⁶ Studies have even shown that medical patients that have been exposed to natural surroundings demonstrate a faster rate of recovery and a more optimistic attitude. Open space also provides an opportunity for exercise, which improves people in a physical manner.

³ Roberta Housel, Readington Township Tax Assessor's Office. Telecopy dated April 3, 2006.

⁴ The Great Swamp Watershed Association, Ed. L. W. Hamilton, 1997. *The Benefits of Open Space*, 13

⁵ *The Benefits of Open Space*, 21

⁶ *The Benefits of Open Space*, 22

The benefits of open space have been recognized locally as well. In 1979 a report on open space preservation⁷ was delivered to the Readington Township Planning Board in order to summarize the findings of a Citizens Advisory Committee with respect to farmland and open space preservation. It contained a rationale for local governmental action to preserve farmland and open space, a summary of preservation efforts underway at that time, future prospects for preservation and technical appendices in support of the discussion.

Benefits of preservation anticipated for Township residents that were cited in the report include the maintenance of the *pleasant rural atmosphere that residents of Readington now enjoy (p.1)*, the stabilization of tax rates and higher real estate values associated with lands that are near permanent open space and parks. Regional benefits cited in the report include the ability to help maintain a higher air and water quality in the face of continued degradation in New Jersey, stemming the progression of urban sprawl from the east, preservation of important species habitat and the provision of lands for recreation.

Similarly, in 1979, Readington's *Open Space Master Plan*⁸ identified several environmental benefits that would result from the preservation of open lands. Specifically, these were protection of air and groundwater quality, preservation of woodlands, preservation of valuable agricultural land and businesses and scenic and historic protection of *Readington's special character*⁹

Benefits of open space have been acknowledged through the development of land use policies that support the preservation of open space. Readington Township, Hunterdon County and the State of New Jersey have all developed policies to effectuate meaningful preservation of open space.

Decline in Farmland

Data for Readington Township, Hunterdon County and the municipalities in the immediate vicinity of the Study Area indicate that farmland being converted (developed) to non-farm uses at a considerable rate. The decline of farmland in Somerset and Hunterdon Counties illustrates the manner in which development is progressing; farmland and open space are under severe development pressure in Somerset and eastern Hunterdon County.

The data summarized below illustrates the degree to which farmland has been declining on the western edge of Somerset County and the eastern edge of Hunterdon County. Somerset County lost 38.3% of its farmland between 1980 and 2005. Branchburg lost 54.0% of its farmland, which constituted 13.5% of the County loss. During the same period Hunterdon County lost 20.1% of its farmland. Raritan and Readington Townships, on the eastern front of the County, lost 43.49% and 23.2% of their farmland, respectively. This represents 29.7% of the total farmland loss in Hunterdon County.

⁷ Readington Township Citizens Advisory Committee, 1979. *Open Space Preservation*.

⁸ Planning Board Citizens Advisory Committee, Recreation Commission, Environmental Commission. 1979. *Open Space Master Plan for Readington Township*

⁹ *Open Space Master Plan*, 8.

Farmland as a Percentage of Total County or Municipal Acreage: 1980 -2005							
	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	% Decline
Somerset County	36%	35%	31%	29%	26%	22%	14%
Branchburg	52%	50%	40%	35%	28%	24%	28%
Hunterdon County	58%	58%	54%	53%	50%	46%	12%
Raritan	54%	53%	47%	45%	38%	30%	24%
Readington	55%	53%	48%	47%	45%	40%	15%

Source: Report of Data from FA-1 Forms, NJ Division of Taxation

Decline in Farmland Acreage: 1980 -2005							
	1980	1985	1990	1995	2000	2005	Net Loss
Somerset County	69,799	68,782	61,475	56,507	50,170	43,045	26,754
Branchburg	6,704	6,422	5,108	4,566	3,657	3,082	3,622
Hunterdon County	161,612	162,145	150,033	149,161	139,693	129,113	32,499
Raritan	13,266	12,963	11,502	11,104	9,226	7,514	5,752
Readington	16,840	16,145	14,795	14,476	13,812	12,933	3,907

Source: Report of Data from FA-1 Forms, NJ Division of Taxation; all figures in acres

In percentage terms, Somerset County lost 14% of its farmland, whereas Hunterdon lost 12% of its farmland. In terms of acreage, Hunterdon and Somerset experienced losses of 32,499 acres and 26,754 acres respectively. Branchburg, Readington’s neighbor on Somerset County’s western edge, lost 54% of its farmland, compared to Readington’s 23.2%. The high percentage of farmland loss in Somerset County, particularly Branchburg, appears to be a manifestation of the tremendous development pressures that exist there and are progressing westward. The westward expansion of the New York/New Jersey metropolitan area is focused squarely upon this eastern front. Therefore, the need to preserve farmland in this area remains a prominent land use policy matter for Readington Township, Hunterdon County and the State of New Jersey.

Readington Township’s History of Open Space and Farmland Preservation

The Township has a strong history of open space preservation beginning in the 1970’s. In 1978 the Open Space Advisory Committee was created to study and formulate recommendations to effectuate open space preservation in Readington. Based on Committee recommendation, a public referendum was held to determine whether Township residents were willing to dedicate \$1,000,000.00 for open space preservation. The voters approved the ballot question in the first municipal open space referendum in Hunterdon County. The Open Space Advisory Committee authored the *Open Space Master Plan* to guide Township decisions with respect to preservation.

Since the adoption of the Open Space Master Plan the Township has continuously employed two of the strategies recommended in the that plan, zoning cluster development and purchase of land, among other mechanisms. Public preference for open space preservation was documented in a 1992 Readington Township Environmental Commission survey of Township residents, wherein 83 percent of respondents strongly favored strict open space protection and strong preservation actions. Also in 1992, the Greenways Work Group (an ad hoc Committee of the Environmental Commission) concluded that contiguous parcels of open space configured or assembled to make corridors of undeveloped land should be used to preserve the Township's natural resources in the context of new development. The work of this committee resulted in the creation of the *Readington Township Draft Greenways Plan* in 1993, which was adopted by the Planning Board as an addendum to the Master Plan. The plan sought to create a meaningful open space network that would be accessible to all residents and would preserve the character of the township

In November of 1994, Township voters passed a referendum that set aside \$.02 for every \$100 of taxpayer money for the purchase of open space.

In 1995 the *Readington Township Open Space Inventory and Recommendations for Preservation* was prepared to identify and prioritize key properties for preservation. It was adopted as part of the 1996 Reexamination Report.

In October of 1996 Readington Township submitted an application for a Green Trust Planning Incentive Project Grant. The grant application summarized Readington's Greenways and Open Space Preservation Goals and included both a systems map and an "Action Plan" map that set priorities for implementation. A grant of \$3 million was awarded and, in 1997, Readington Township's open space planning and preservation efforts were recognized by a Hunterdon County Planning Design Award.

In 1998 Readington updated portions of its Master Plan, including Goals and Policies; Land Use; Conservation, Natural Resources & Agriculture; Parks, Recreation & Open Space; and a Statement of Planning Consistency. This series of amendments contained policy recommendations intended to strengthen the ability of the Township to preserve large contiguous tracts of open space and farmland by adding a new land use designation, AR Agricultural Residential. This designation requires that developers in the heart of the Township set aside 70% of a development tract for open space. In December of 1998, the Township Committee adopted an ordinance enacting the recommendations contained within the Master Plan amendment and creating the AR Agricultural Residential zone. In 1999 the Master Plan amendment was honored with an Achievement in Planning Award from the New Jersey Planning Officials.

In 1999, Readington applied to the office of NJ Green Acres requesting \$3.0 million in order supplement a 1996 Green Trust Planning Incentive Grant application. The Township was awarded a \$1 million grant and \$1 million loan. This application included an overall plan, that was approved by the Township Committee and Planning Board, that indicated the locations of preserved farmland, preserved open space and prospective open space/farmland preservation sites. The Study Area is identified on the Green Acres open space acquisition plan as a prospect for preservation.

Also in 1999, Readington was awarded \$3.18 million through the NJ State Agriculture Development Committee/Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board in Planning Incentive Grants for farmland preservation. Readington was successful in supplementing their 1996 Green Trust grant again in 2000, receiving an additional \$0.5 million for open space preservation.

As of January, 2006, there were 3,931 acres of preserved farmland in Readington, including properties under contract for preservation¹⁰. This equates to almost 25% of the 16,038 acres of farmland currently preserved within in Hunterdon County¹¹. As of January 11, 2006, Readington had preserved 3,320 acres of open space, including 2,142 acres of municipal open space, 681 acres of County owned open space, and 497 acres of State owned open space. While data regarding the total amount of municipal open space preserved within the County as of 2006 is not available, data from 2002 indicate that 4,355 acres of municipal open space had been preserved within Hunterdon County as of January 4, 2002.¹² Readington's 2,142 acres of municipal open space represents approximately 49% of the 2002 County municipal open space total. As indicated by these figures, Readington is a leader among Hunterdon County municipalities with respect to land preservation.

To this day Readington continues to actively acquire undeveloped tracts for open space and farmland preservation, with particular attention to those tracts that impact critical environmental resources. Mechanisms employed by the Township include fee simple purchase, purchase of development rights, donations and preservation of open space through the cluster subdivision provisions. Readington supports these activities through tax revenue and through partnerships with the State of New Jersey Green Acres, the Trust for Public Land and Hunterdon County.

Acquisition of the Study Area for the purpose of preserving the open space and farmland therein is consistent with the Township's longstanding history of land preservation. The 668 acres¹³ of un-preserved open space contained in the Study Area represents 20% of the total 3,320 acres preserved open space in Readington as of January 2006.¹⁴ Acquisition of the Study Area presents a unique opportunity to preserve a very large tract of open space that is contiguous to other open space, farmland and recreational lands and, thereby, advance Township policies regarding open space.

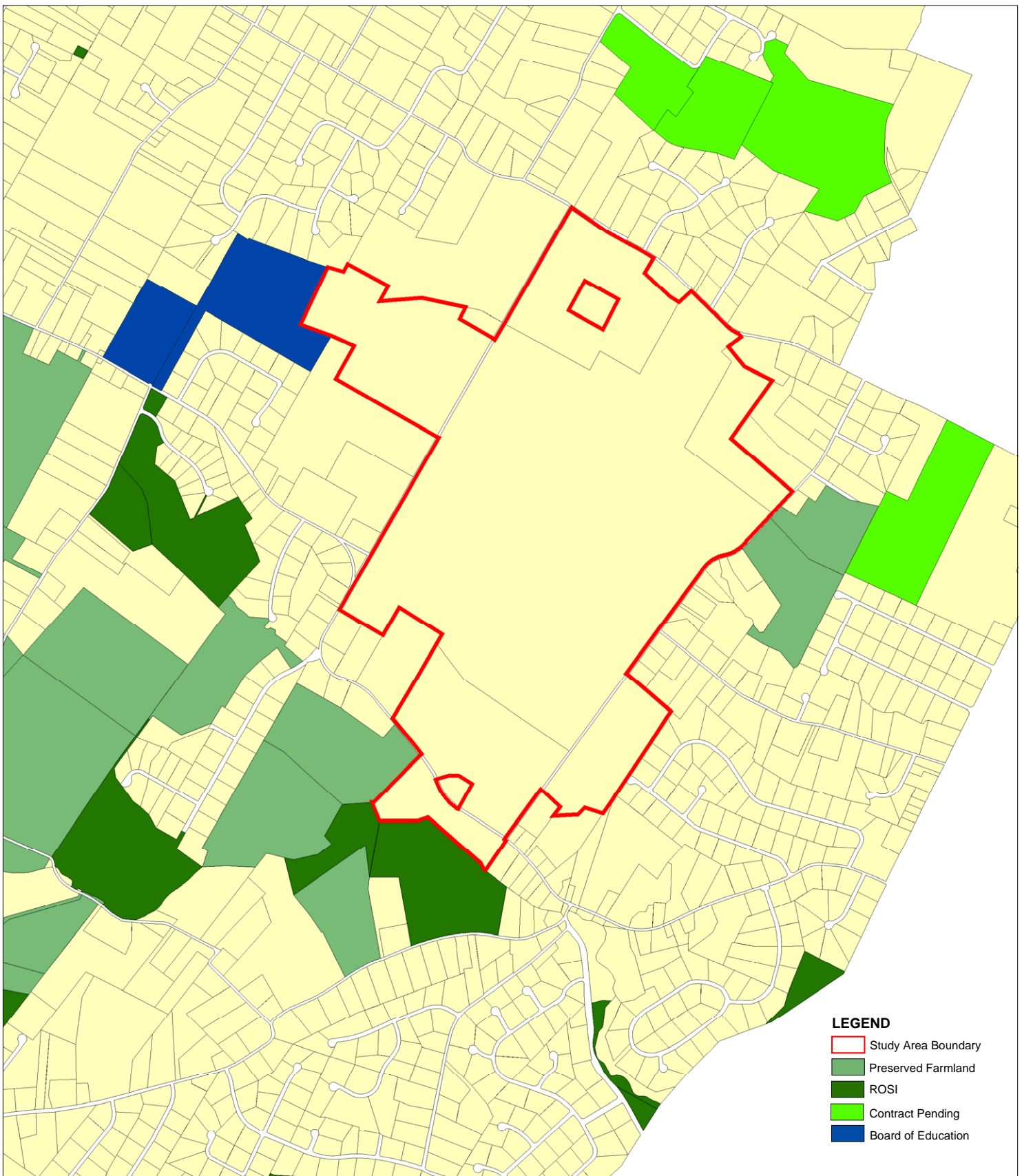
¹⁰ Julia Allen, Readington Township Committee member. Email dated January 11, 2006.






¹¹ Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board Web Site, List of Permanently Preserved Farms, updated September 15, 2005 (http://www.co.hunterdon.nj.us/cadb/forms/Table_1permanent.pdf). Accessed April 18, 2006.

¹² Kevin Richardson, Open Space Program Coordinator, Hunterdon County Planning Board. Email dated January 4, 2002.

¹³ Roberta Housel, Readington Township Tax Assessor's Office. Telecopy dated April 3, 2006.

¹⁴ Julia Allen, Readington Township Committee member. Email dated January 11, 2006



- LEGEND**
-  Study Area Boundary
 -  Preserved Farmland
 -  ROSI
 -  Contract Pending
 -  Board of Education



Base Map Source: Studer and McEldowney,
 PA 120 West Main St. Clinton, NJ 08809.
 April 26, 2005
 Information Source: Readington Township 2005



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Open Space & Preserved Farmland

Readington Township, Hunterdon County, NJ May 2006

Preserved Farmland and Open Space in Study Area Vicinity			
Block	Lot	Description	Acreage
39	14	Contract	23.86
39	14.01	Contract	28.53
39	49	Contract	63.05
43	30	Readington OS Inv	0.48
48	20	Board of Education	21.74
48	21.01	Board of Education	47.08
53	9	Preserved Farmland	21.41
53	22	Preserved Farmland	131.54
55	1.90	Readington OS Inv	1.62
55	1.91	Readington OS Inv	12.85
55	1.92	Readington OS Inv	43.77
55	8	Preserved Farmland	50.98
55	9	Preserved Farmland	2.95
55	12	Preserved Farmland	85.78
55	13	Preserved Farmland	33.35
55	13.51	Readington OS Inv	50.01
55	15	Preserved Farmland	0.20
55	17	Preserved Farmland	41.95
55	17.02	Preserved Farmland	44.86
55	21	Preserved Farmland	25.43
55	21.02	Readington OS Inv	15.17
55	23.03	Readington OS Inv	46.04
57	2	Preserved Farmland	21.26
57	2.05	Preserved Farmland	30.15
57	13.01	Contract	50.07
66	25.90	Readington OS Inv	46.17
66	45	Preserved Farmland	47.27
66	45.01	Preserved Farmland	20.63
66	48	Preserved Farmland	10.32
68	3	Readington OS Inv	3.71
68	4	Readington OS Inv	7.27
68	13.44	Readington OS Inv	2.37
		Total	1031.87

Source: Readington Township, 2005

Readington Township's Open Space and Farmland Preservation Policies

Readington's policies regarding open space preservation have been chronicled through the municipal master plan and associated documents:

Readington Township Open Space Master Plan, 1979¹⁵

Within this plan Readington documented the extent of the burgeoning urban sprawl that had begun to eat away at the character of the Township and formulated a plan to respond to the threatened loss of open space and farmland. That plan included three elements: Agricultural Open Space, Environmental Open Space and Recreational Open Space. Building on the information contained in the open space report, it identified priorities for preservation in each of the three categories. Preservation priorities included steep slopes, stream corridors, woodlands, flood plain and flood fringe areas, prime agricultural soils and soils of statewide importance. Maps within the plan graphically depict the elements targeted for preservation. In particular, most of the Study Area is shown on the Farmland Preservation Element plan as farmland that is a preservation priority. Specific considerations were listed as a guide for assessing lands for open space and farmland preservation as follows:

- ◆ *Inclusion in a large block of contiguous farmland*
- ◆ *Proximity to working farms that need to be protected and which need leasable land nearby*
- ◆ *Existence of good soils*
- ◆ *Proximity to extra environmental resources that need protection*
- ◆ *Compliance with County and State Land Use Plans*
- ◆ *Effectiveness in shaping and containing development*
- ◆ *Protection of the integrity of historic areas*
- ◆ *Compliance with the County Open Space Master Plan*
- ◆ *Inclusion of an active recreation site that the town would be interested in subdividing*
- ◆ *Inclusion of a segment of trail element that could be set-aside at the time of acquisition*
- ◆ *Inclusion of a particularly interesting wooded area that could be set aside for environmental reasons and passive recreation*
- ◆ *Existence of exceptional scenic qualities*

The Study Area has several of the attributes described above that were set forth as priorities for the inclusion of a parcel in the plan for farmland preservation: it is a large block of contiguous farmland; it has prime agricultural soils/soils of statewide importance; it contains other environmental resources (streams, wetlands, grassland habitat) that need protection; preservation of the Study Area would be consistent with County and State policies regarding farmland and

¹⁵ Planning Board Citizens Advisory Committee, Recreation Commission, Environmental Commission. 1979. *Open Space Master Plan for Readington Township*.

open space protection; the Study Area possesses exceptional scenic qualities (documented by the Greenways Work Group resident survey in 1992).

Report on Open Space Preservation, 1979¹⁶

As previously described, this report was delivered to the Planning Board in order to summarize the findings of a Citizens Advisory Committee with respect to farmland and open space preservation. It contained rationale for local governmental action to preserve farmland and open space, a summary of preservation efforts underway at that time, future prospects for preservation and technical appendices in support of the discussion. The report suggested several mechanisms for the preservation of farmland and open space. These included transfer of development rights, clustering, land donations and municipal acquisition.

1990 Master Plan¹⁷

This plan included specific policies regarding farmland and open space preservation that were used in the development of the Land Development Ordinance:

Farmland Preservation

Encourage retention of farmland as an agricultural business, to the extent practical, adding diversity to the Township's economic and local job base. Investigate creation of "farmettes", agricultural districting or other techniques to accomplish this policy. p.7

Open Space

Promote the development of a Township-wide "greenbelt" network which includes major environmentally sensitive areas and enables creation of natural buffers and linkages between existing and future development areas as well as parks and public facilities. p.8

Greenways Plan 1995¹⁸

This report was developed to articulate goals and objectives for the development and preservation of greenways within Readington. A greenway is defined as a linear corridor of undeveloped land. Functions of greenways include protection of stream corridors, conservation and linkage of critical environmental sites and habitats, facilitation of the movement of wildlife, provision of passive recreation and preservation of open space. The Greenways plan represents one of the

¹⁶ Citizens Advisory Committee. 1979. *Report on Open Space Preservation*.

¹⁷ Readington Township Planning Board. *Master Plan and Reexamination Report*. Adopted January 22, 1990

¹⁸ Readington Township Environmental Commission and the Greenways Work Group. 1995. *Readington Township Greenways Plan*.

tools that Readington has developed in the ongoing practice of open space preservation. Specific objectives of the plan include:

Maximize buffer areas along all stream corridors, including South Branch, Lamington River, Rockaway Creek, Pleasant Run, Holland Brook. p. 6

Complement existing farmland preservation program, trying to link open areas. p. 6

Protect and preserve scenic vistas or other unique areas...that are generally agreed upon to represent a unique Township area that adds significantly to the Township's "sense of place" p. 6

Unique resources in need of protection were documented in the responses to a questionnaire posed by the Environmental Commission¹⁹ in the fall of 1992. These included:

*Stream running on the south to easterly area of Solberg Airport
All streams
Multi-generational farms
Trees and farmland*

The Study Area exhibits many of the characteristics that are identified in this document as worthy of conservation and protection. Farmland, trees and streams are located on the properties. The Study Area is within the Holland Brook watershed and contains a tributary to the stream itself. This is the stream that is specifically identified as a unique resource. Therefore, the acquisition and preservation of the Study Area would be consistent with the findings and recommendations of the Greenways Plan.

1998 Master Plan Amendments²⁰

The 1998 Master Plan amendments reflected the policies of the Township that were evolving in response to the threats to open space and farmland preservation posed by increased development pressures. This update strengthened Readington's preservation and conservation agenda by increasing minimum lot sizes and open space set-asides in the majority of the Township lands. The policy basis for the changes in the land use plan, and strategies for implementation, are illustrated in the following excerpts:

Goals & Policies

Agricultural Preservation

¹⁹ Readington Township Open Space Questionnaire, 1992

²⁰ Readington Township Planning Board. *Amendment to the Master Plan*. Adopted on November 23, 1998.

Goal: Preserve farmlands and encourage their continued use recognizing that farming is an important component of the economy of the township, the region, and the state, and that agricultural lands are an irreplaceable natural resource and a key element of the Township's rural character.

Policies: Coordinate local agricultural land use preservation efforts with those of the state and the county and with those of adjoining municipalities.

Preserve large agricultural areas free from the intrusion of residential and other uses by zoning for appropriate intensity of use, requiring that new residential units in agricultural areas be clustered and by acquiring development rights and open space in agricultural areas. p. II-1

Conservation, Natural Resources & Agriculture

Opportunities to preserve diminishing farmland should continue to be actively pursued. Hunterdon County is the second fastest growing county in the state, with a population growth rate of 23.4% between 1980 and 1990, which has been continuing through the 1990's. Readington's population increased at a comparable rate over the same ten years, to a population of 13,400 in 1990. Moreover, Readington has seen it's population growth through the latter part of the decade exceed projections made as recently as 1990. It is estimated that the population today is greater than 17,000. Building permits issued in the four-year period from 1990 through 1993, inclusive, total 282. Building permits for the four-year period from 1994-1997, inclusive, totaled 808. With this accelerated growth comes the accelerated loss of valuable farmland. P. V-26

Consequently, over the past 16 years Readington Township has been losing farmland at a rate 40% higher than that of Hunterdon County. This is not surprising considering Readington's location at the eastern edge of the County and its convenient accessibility to the metropolitan areas to the east via I-78, NJ Route 22 and I-202. Residential Development pressure has been more pronounced in Readington than in most other Hunterdon County Municipalities. P.V-27

Data from the 2000 Census indicates that the population of Readington grew 17.9% from 13,400 in 1990 to 15,803 in 2000. The growth rate exceeded that of Hunterdon County, which had the third highest rate of population growth (13%) from 1990-2000 among New Jersey counties. Since 2000, population projections from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) indicate a slowing of population growth for both the County and Readington Township, with a 3.3% increase in population to 16,330 persons for Readington and a 7.1 % increase for Hunterdon County. Even with slowing population growth, however, there has not been a corresponding decrease in the loss of farmland within Readington and surrounding municipalities as discussed previously in this report.

Parks, Recreation & Open Space

This plan element of the master plan identifies several strategies for preserving open space and farmland. These include:

Farmland Preservation Program

Where appropriate, farmland preservation is an excellent method of contributing to open space preservation by preserving natural vistas and providing a buffer for other preserved areas. Farmland preservation results in larger parcels of appropriate size, location, and soil quality being dedicated to agricultural use. P. VIII-15

Purchase of Land in Fee

When land comes up for sale at a reasonable price, fee simple acquisition by the Township should be considered. A larger portion of the parcel can be deed restricted for agriculture and resold into private ownership. The farmland preservation easement on a larger farm parcel would be held by the Township for resale to the Hunterdon County Agricultural Development Board, the farm which has been deed restricted to agriculture could be sold back into private ownership, and the smaller portion of the parcel in appropriate locations, for instance along a stream corridor, could be retained by the Township for conservation purposes or passive recreation purposes. P. VIII-15

1999 Open Space Plan

This document is a master plan for open space and recreation lands in Readington. This was the basis for a 1999 application to New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Green Acres Local Assistance Program through which Readington was awarded \$3 million in preservation funds.²¹ The plan indicates preserved farmland and open space, farmland and open space that is under contract for acquisition and open space that has been targeted for acquisition. The Township Committee and the Planning Board approved this plan in 1999. Priorities for acquisition within the plan include critical stream corridor lands - along the Rockaway Creek, Chambers Brook, Holland Brook, Pleasant Run and the South Branch Raritan River – and steep slope areas. The plan also contains many existing farms and open space areas. **The Study Area is included among those farms and open space lands slated for future municipal acquisition.**

²¹Township Committee of Readington Township. *Resolution R-99-88*. October 4, 1999.

2000 Supplement to the Master Plan: Photographic Tour of the AR Zone.

Readington has a highly desirable character that is often described as rural, natural or agricultural. While this character has been acknowledged in the Township's planning documents, no visual record of those elements had been produced. In July, 2006, the Planning Board adopted a supplement to the Master Plan, a Photographic Tour of the AR Zone, to provide documentation of the rural and agricultural elements that embody a sense of place that is experienced throughout the Township. This inventory contains a series of photographs, with descriptions, that are linked to street maps depicting a "tour route". The visual inventory is intended to be used to plan for the preservation of the various elements shown in the photographs and will be the basis for future land use and site development decisions.

The Photographic Tour of the AR Zone includes several photos along Readington Road, which crosses the southern portion of the Study Area. More generally, the Study Area features several of the attributes identified in the Photographic Tour as visual resources that embody the rural and agricultural character of the Township. These include views of stream corridors, forested wetlands, and cultivated fields and pasturelands. As such, acquisition and preservation of the Study Area would be consistent with the 2000 Supplement to the Master Plan.

2001 Supplement to the Master Plan – Environmental Resource Inventory

The Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) was prepared by the Readington Township Environmental Commission in April 2001 as a comprehensive update to the Township's 1974 Natural Resource Inventory. The Planning Board adopted the ERI as a supplement to the Master Plan on April 23, 2001. The ERI contains a summary of current resource protection information, an inventory of resources and a resource protection plan. The following findings and recommendations from the ERI, which were reiterated in the 2001 Master Plan Amendment discussed below, are particularly relevant to the Study Area:

Findings²²

A total of seven protected bird species, two protected amphibian species, one protected plant species, and a Natural Heritage Priority Site (Solberg-Hunterdon Airport) have been formally documented (NJ Natural Heritage Database), while several more species have been noted by environmental professionals but have not been formally documented.

Readington Township contains 3,888 acres of priority grassland habitat, 3,987 acres of priority forested habitat, and 818 acres of priority wetlands. (NJDEP, Landscapes Program).

²² Readington Township Planning Board. 2001 Master Plan Amendment. Adopted July 9, 2001. VIII-25-27.

Guiding Principles & Primary Resource Preservation Goals²³

Maintain large, intact patches of native vegetation and prevent fragmentation by development.

Establish and implement priorities for species and habitat protection.

Maintain connections among habitat by protecting corridors for movement.

Maintain significant ecological processes in protected areas.

Contribute to the regional persistence of rare species by protecting their habitat locally.

Continue to obtain additional funding to purchase and maintain open space areas identified as valuable habitat and those areas addressing the biological principles stated above.

Opportunities to preserve diminishing farmland should continue to be actively pursued.

The township should consider additional development standards to restrict and eliminate disturbance in all critical/vulnerable areas (e.g., most erosive soils, steepest slopes, state designated grassland, wetland, and forest habitats).

Additional open space set asides should be considered, particularly in vulnerable areas noted in the ERI.

2001 Amendment to the Master Plan

The 2001 Amendment to the Master Plan, adopted on July 9, 2001, consisted of an update of the 1990 Goals and Policies, a Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Element (replacing the 1998 Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Element) and an update of the 1990 Circulation Plan Element. The Goals and Policies update was specifically intended to add policies relating to critical habitat and the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport as follows:

2 ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

Policy: Actively conserve and protect critical wildlife habitats, such as mature woodlands, grasslands, wetlands and stream corridors through various mechanisms of open space preservation, including land acquisition.

Policy: Lands identified as critical wildlife habitats and Natural Heritage Priority Sites should be considered the highest priority sites for preservation.

²³ 2001 Master Plan Amendment, VIII-25-27.

5 CIRCULATION

*Policy: Ensure preservation of the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport as a public aviation facility.*²⁴

In addition to including findings from the 2001 Environmental Resource Inventory, the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan Element of the 2001 Master Plan Amendment recommends preservation of the open space associated with airport, identified as the Readington Village/Natural Heritage Priority Area. As set forth in the Element, the rationale for preserving this area is that it constitutes one of the largest remaining open space areas in the Township. Additionally,

*“The Office of Natural Lands Management, which is a division of the NJDEP’s Division of Parks and Forestry, has designated this area as a Natural Heritage Priority Site because it represents one of the best habitats for rare species and exemplary natural communities in New Jersey. Sites, so designated, are considered top priority for preservation of biological diversity. Among other characteristics, the extensive grasslands of this area make it unique.”*²⁵

The Circulation Element of the 2001 Master Plan Amendment notes that the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport is categorized among the general aviation airports that are most threatened within New Jersey. The Element further recommends preservation of the airport as consistent with the recommendations of the General Aviation Study Commission report and the policies of the New Jersey State Plan.

2001 Master Plan Reexamination Report

In December, 2001 the Planning Board adopted a Reexamination of the Master Plan. As noted in the report introduction, no major changes in direction for the Township were proposed in the 2001 Reexamination Report. Instead, the report contains recommendations for the evaluation and refinement of the individual components of Readington’s planning documents and implementing ordinances, “in order to strengthen the established rural preservation policies of the Township.”²⁶

2002 Master Plan Amendment

In May of 2002, the Planning Board adopted an amendment to the Master Plan to expand the AR land use category and recommending a zone change to the Township Committee. The 2002 Master Plan Amendment also added a new policy under the Master Plan’s Goals and Policies plan element:

²⁴ 2001 Master Plan Amendment, II-1

²⁵ 2001 Master Plan Amendment, VIII-44

²⁶ Readington Township Planning Board. 2001 Reexamination of the Master Plan. Adopted December 10, 2001. 2.

“Policy: Protect and preserve the scenic viewsheds and scenic edges of public thoroughfares through the classification, location and configuration of land uses.”²⁷

As illustrated at the beginning of this report, the agricultural lands and natural resources of the Study Area are visible along public thoroughfares including Thor Solberg Road and Readington Road. Acquisition and preservation of the Study Area would thus be consistent with the new policy regarding scenic resources put forth in the 2002 Master Plan Amendment.

Hunterdon County Open Space and Farmland Preservation Policies

Readington Township is not alone in its efforts to preserve and protect undeveloped open spaces. Hunterdon County has also been a leader in open space preservation within NJ. In 1980, the County passed a ballot question that earmarked \$2.2 million for agricultural preservation. While Hunterdon County has primarily employed capital expenditures in the preservation of lands, it has significantly broadened its available resources. In 1999 County voters approved, by a two-to-one margin, a referendum which created a trust fund (with revenue from a tax of \$0.03/\$100.00 of total County equalized property value) that would be designated for the purchase of “...lands for recreation, conservation, general open space, farmland preservation and historic preservation...”. Known as *The County Open Space, Recreation, Farmland Preservation and Historic Trust Fund*, this funding source supplemented existing resources until December 31, 2004. On November 2, 2004, Hunterdon County voters approved a **second** County Question to continue the Open Space, Farmland and Historic preservation Trust Fund, again for \$0.03 and limited to a five (5) year period commencing January 1, 2005 and expiring December 31, 2009. Between 1973 and 2004, the County has spent over \$23.5 million on parkland and open space acquisitions, resulting in 7,819 acres of recreation and open space areas. Further as of June 30, 2006, Hunterdon County has spent \$15.6 million to preserve 17,196 acres of farmland.²⁸ The land use policy documents of Hunterdon County illustrate the desire of the residents to preserve open space throughout the County.

***Quality of Life Concerns and Planning Issues in Hunterdon County, 1994*²⁹**

This report contains a summary of public sentiment gathered through a series of surveys and public meetings intended to chart a course for the update of the County’s 1986 Growth Management Plan. It examines existing development trends and the response of residents to those trends. The report also identifies conflicts between lifestyle preferences and preferred development patterns. From these examinations a group of four fundamental planning priorities were distilled and a series of suggested actions was developed to effectuate each.

²⁷ Readington Township Planning Board. *2002 Amendment to the Master Plan*. Adopted May 13, 2002. Goals and Policies.

²⁸ Hunterdon County Planning Board. 2006. *Hunterdon County Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund Plan*, 9.

²⁹ Hunterdon County Planning Board. 1994. *Quality of Life Concerns and Planning Issues in Hunterdon County*, 6

The rapid suburbanization of Hunterdon County is acknowledged within the report as a threat to the community character, which is described by residents as a "...clean, natural environment, farmland and open space..." It indicated that the general sentiment of Hunterdon County residents is that no one is doing a particularly good job of preserving community character. To illustrate the will of Hunterdon County residents with respect to open space, the following major points have been excerpted from the report:

Hunterdon County residents and local officials alike want to see community character maintained and preserved. P. 6

Large lot development is not a panacea for protecting community character. P.6

Residents and local officials express strong support for farmland and open space preservation. P 12

...residents feel that open space and farmland are among the most important amenities in Hunterdon County. P. 12

Local officials also show strong support for open space preservation. P. 12

In addition to providing a chronicle of the public attitude towards preservation of community character and preservation issues, this document also acknowledges that large-lot zoning cannot be used, solely, to successfully protect community character. Readington, while employing large-lot and cluster zoning, has historically used acquisition and preservation of open space and farmland to facilitate protection of community character.

Strategies for Managing Growth in Hunterdon County³⁰

This report was initiated in 1996 when the Hunterdon County Planning Board assembled four *task forces* that included members from both the public and private sectors. The task forces identified the most important planning issues in relation to four distinct elements affected by growth in the County:

Rural character and the environment
Residential development and housing
Transportation
Commercial, office and industrial development

The findings of the task forces were summarized in a published document entitled *A State of the County Assessment*. In 1997 the task forces were expanded to include local officials. At that point

³⁰ Hunterdon County Growth Management Task Forces. 1998. *Strategies for Managing Growth in Hunterdon County*.

the task forces began the process of preparing recommendations in response to the issues raised in the *State of the County Assessment*. These recommendations have been compiled into *Strategies for Managing Growth in Hunterdon County*, which was finalized in 1998.

This compendium contains recommendations that are particularly relevant to Readington, supporting the historic and present actions of the Township in pursuing acquisition of private lands to ensure preservation of those lands in perpetuity.

Open Space Preservation

The continued preservation of open space and appropriate land development patterns are critical to the retention of Hunterdon County's rural character. The Task Force recommends a combination of open space zoning and open space planning efforts to help achieve these goals. New development must be designed to complement existing rural features rather than dominate them. Municipalities and the County should be more proactive and progressive in establishing open space programs. p.2

Farmland Preservation

Hunterdon County has more land in the New Jersey farmland assessment program than any other county in the State. The County continues to be a leader in the statewide farmland preservation program. However, the absence of adequate planning policies and programs that support agriculture will threaten farming in Hunterdon County. Municipalities and the County are active in the statewide easement purchase program, but lack a much-needed comprehensive approach to farmland preservation. A comprehensive approach would include policies and regulations that accommodate the needs of the farmer and are responsive to changes in the agricultural industry. A variety of programs should be developed that will help preserve farmland while simultaneously protecting the land equity of its farmers. p.2

Recommendations

The following strategies are recommended to help preserve open space and maintain Hunterdon County's rural character:

- ♦ *Municipalities and the County need to be more proactive in identifying and preserving lands as open space. Specific areas to be preserved should be identified before land development applications are submitted. This will preclude the loss of valuable open space to development.*
- ♦ *To reduce the dependence on open space zoning, municipalities should rely more on open space programs, such as fee simple/easement acquisitions.*
p.8

The acquisition of the Study Area is consistent with the strategies for open space and farmland preservation endorsed by Hunterdon County within this report.

*Preserving Community Character in Hunterdon County: A Community Design Handbook*³¹

In 1998 the Hunterdon County Planning Board held a design workshop to address many of the *quality of life* concerns of the residents that had surfaced during a process of gathering public input since 1992. The purpose of the workshop was to explore methods of incorporating community character protection into new residential and commercial development. The design handbook includes planning tools and techniques that were explored at the workshop.

While not all of the techniques discussed in the handbook are relevant to the Study Area analysis, the following objectives that relate to open space configuration support the preservation of the Study Area:

1. *Open space should be designed and located to protect the most important natural features of site identified in the municipal open space plan. Open space preservation should protect the most critical natural features of a site. These may include prime agricultural soils, steep slopes, ridgelines, scenic vistas, stream corridors, woodlands, significant land forms (such as rock outcrops, limestone areas, etc.) and important habitats. p.38*

The non-commercial areas of the Study Area contain critical environmental resources, including, prime agricultural soils, scenic vistas, stream corridors, woodlands and wetlands.

2. *Large contiguous areas of open space should be preserved. Open space parcels less than three acres in size are discouraged unless they are designed specifically for recreational purposes or connect to other adjoining open spaces. Large contiguous areas of open space provide multiple community and environmental benefits, including active recreational areas, important habitats, soil erosion control, and scenic views. Generally, isolated pockets of open space that are scattered randomly within a site have less ecological value, are more difficult to maintained manage, are inaccessible and fail to provide important linkages to other open space areas. Large areas of open space should be preserved. p. 38*

Acquisition of the Study Area would result in the preservation of approximately 668 acres of contiguous open space and farmland. These lands are adjacent to other preserved lands that would result in an even greater degree of contiguity within the Readington Township network of open space and farmland.

³¹ Hunterdon County Planning Board. 1999. *Preserving Community Character in Hunterdon County: A Community Design Handbook*.

Hunterdon County Park and Recreation Master Plan³²

Completed in 2000, this plan contains an analysis of prior County Park planning efforts, an examination of current trends in recreation and park issues, an inventory of parkland and implementation strategies. Among the goals that support the acquisition and preservation of the Study Area the following is the most direct:

Goal: Protect lands in the County of critical environmental importance, high scenic quality, and unique cultural historic value. p.31

As has been established, the Study Area contains, or is adjacent to, critical environmental resources and possesses an open, scenic quality that embodies the historic character of the Township and the County. Although public access to the airport facilities (i.e. buildings, runways, parking areas, etc.) within the Study Area must be limited for safety and operational purposes, preservation of the Study Area is substantially consistent with the priorities of the County Park and Recreation Plan with respect to environmental resources and viewshed protection.

Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund Plan³³

The County's *Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund Plan*, prepared by the Hunterdon County Planning Board in June 2000, offers strategic recommendations to guide County spending on land acquisition and other efforts to help preserve open space, farmland and historic resources. The *Trust Fund Plan* incorporates recommendations from other County plans, including the July 2000 Farmland Preservation Plan and the 2000 Draft Park and Recreation Plan. Preservation initiatives of the State, non-profit organizations, and the municipalities within Hunterdon County are also addressed within the *Trust Fund Plan*.

The goals and recommendations of the Trust Fund Plan focus on supporting existing State, County, municipal and non-profit preservation initiatives as well as enhancing coordination among the various preservation initiatives or areas of preservation interest within the County. The Trust Fund Plan identifies several such initiatives or areas of preservation interest within Readington. Of particular relevance to the Study Area is the identification of lands in the vicinity of Study Area as a *Natural Heritage Priority Site* on the map showing "Areas of Preservation Interest – State Perspective" that is attached to the Trust Fund Plan. As noted in the Trust Fund Plan, Natural Heritage Priority Sites are designated by the NJDEP's Office of Natural Lands Management and are considered top priorities for preservation of biological diversity. (See additional discussion regarding the designation of a majority of the Study Area as a Natural Heritage Priority Site designation under *Wildlife*, page 62)

³² Board of Recreation Commissioners & John Madden & Associates. 2000. *The Hunterdon County Park and Recreation Master Plan*.

³³ *Hunterdon County Open Space, Recreation, Farmland Preservation and Historic Trust Fund Plan*, 2000.

Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Area (ADA)

New Jersey requires the delineation of Agriculture Development Areas within each county to serve as a guide to the channeling of farmland preservation funding. The initial identification of ADA's took place in the 1980's. The Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board (CADB) set forth criteria for the establishment of an ADA as:

1. A minimum of 250 acres of contiguous land
2. The land is comprised, primarily, of prime farmland or farmland soils of statewide important
3. The land is reasonably free of non-farm development
4. The land is outside of a public sewer service area

The County ADA in Readington is coterminous with the AR Agricultural Residential zone district that was created in 1998. Nearly all of the Study Area is located within the ADA. Recently, The CADB identified a series of *Preservation Priority Areas* within and outside of the ADA that are recommended for active pursuit of farmland preservation. These are identified within The County's *Trust Fund Plan*, discussed above, and are graphically depicted on *Map 1: ADA's and Farmland Preservation Priority Areas*. The majority of the Study Area is shown as a priority site for farmland preservation. The criteria established for these targeted farmlands are:

1. Farms equal to or greater than 40 acres
2. Land must be assessed as farmland
3. At least a portion of the property must contain prime farmland soils
4. At least 50% of the farm is tillable

In comparing the Study Area to these criteria, the following details emerge:

1. The Study Area exceeds 726 acres.
2. The farmland-assessed acreage of the Study Area is 668 acres³⁴
3. 397.776 acres of the Study Area contains prime farmland soils³⁵
4. Of the 668 acres assessed as farmland, 393.9 acres (59%) are tillable cropland (this represents 54.2% of the total area of the Study Area)³⁶

The Study Area fulfills the above criteria and is included among Hunterdon County's farmland preservation priority lands.

³⁴ Roberta Housel, Readington Township Assessor's Office. Telecopy dated April 3, 2006.

³⁵ CCH calculation based on NJDEP GIS digital data.

³⁶ Roberta Housel, Readington Township Assessor's Office. Telecopy dated April 3, 2006.

*Farmland Preservation Plan*³⁷

The Farmland Preservation Plan was developed to provide a description of the County's farmland preservation program, to suggest actions for improving the current program and recommend future preservation strategies. The adoption of the plan also satisfied a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection requirement that the County should adopt such a plan in order to be eligible for preservation funding.

The County Agriculture Development Board (CADB) adopted a mission statement and program objectives to provide consistent guidance throughout their agricultural preservation efforts:

Hunterdon CADB Mission Statement

"Promote the present and future of Hunterdon County agriculture by preserving agricultural and by promoting public education and agricultural viability."

Program Objectives

Create critical masses of preserved farmland

Preserve farms characterized by soils of prime and statewide importance

Give priority to farms with implemented soil conservation plans

Coordinate CADB preservation efforts with State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), municipal, and nonprofit organization farmland preservation efforts

Promote the education of farmers, government officials, and the public about farmland preservation, the Right to Farm Act, and other pertinent agricultural matters

Work with municipal, county, and state agencies and nonprofit organizations to encourage tourism

Promote agribusiness opportunities through education and advocacy

Promote soil and water stewardship and preserved farms by requiring an implemented soil conservation plan that is periodically updated. p. 10

The Study Area contains 668 acres³⁸ that are assessed as agriculture. Of that total, 393.9 acres

³⁷ Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board. 2001. *Hunterdon County Farmland Preservation Plan*, 2000.

are cropland. This represents a *critical mass* of farmland as envisioned by the CADB. Additionally, the Study Area is classified with, predominantly, prime farmland soils. Therefore, the preservation of these lands would advance the program objectives of the CADB Farmland Preservation Plan.

New Jersey's Open Space and Farmland Preservation Policies

While Readington Township and Hunterdon County have been regional leaders in open space and farmland preservation, the State of New Jersey has a strong series of policies in support of land preservation.

At the State level, New Jersey has maintained a vigilance for protecting farming for over 30 years, beginning with the 1964 Farmland Assessment Act, which has provided substantial property tax reductions for qualifying farmland ever since. The New Jersey Agricultural Retention and Development Act (1983) promoted agriculture through the creation of the State Agricultural Development Committee, County Agricultural Development Boards, the Municipally Approved Farmland Preservation (8 year) Program and the purchase of development rights. The Right to Farm Act (1982) was passed to protect farmers from over-regulation and nuisance suits; and empowered the State Agricultural Development Committee to support essential farming practices by adopting agricultural management practices.

Between 1981 and 1998, the State dedicated \$200,000,000 toward the preservation of agricultural land and activities through the Farmland Preservation Bond Act of 1981, and three subsequent bond acts. The Garden State Preservation Trust Act of 1998 created a stable source of funding to replace the uncertainties of repeated bonding and dedicated approximately \$50,000,000 per year through leveraging the NJ Sales Tax to protect farmland. These sources of revenue have retired the development rights to over 145,280 acres of farmland³⁹ in New Jersey. The costs of this program have been shared in part by county and municipal contributions.

In order for New Jersey to sustain its ability to generate agricultural products for regional markets, a critical mass of production capacity and farmland has to be maintained in appropriate areas. For these reasons in the 1998 *Governor's Council on New Jersey Outdoors* established the goal of preserving 500,000 acres of farmland in the next 10 years. That goal has been embraced by the Governor, the Legislature, the Department of Agriculture and the citizens of New Jersey by virtue of their overwhelming vote, by a 2-to-1 margin, on November 3, 1998 to fund the farmland purchase program. ⁴⁰

³⁸ Roberta Housel, Readington Township Assessor's Office. Telecopy dated April 3, 2006

³⁹ State Agriculture Development Committee, April 19, 2006.

⁴⁰ 1998 *Master Plan Amendment*, V-22.

New Jersey Farmland Assessment Act

This 1964 Act aided in the retention of farmland by substantially reducing the tax burden on real property utilized for farming operations. It set the minimum acreage for farmland assessment purposes at five (5) acres. This effectively requires six (6) acres when a dwelling is also located on the lot, given that the house is typically considered to be occupying one acre.

The State Planning Act

In 1986, the New Jersey Legislature passed the New Jersey State Planning Act, which created the State Planning Commission and set the framework for the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP, or State Plan)⁴¹, which was adopted March 1, 2001. The Act itself recommends the use of planning tools, such as clustering and purchase of development rights, to maintain agricultural uses and rural character. The State Planning Act was based on six (6) principles. The following principle supports the preservation of open space and farmland on the Study Area:

6. *The conservation of natural resources and the protection of environmental qualities are vital to the quality of life and economic prosperity of New Jersey. P.4*

Specifically, the State Planning Act seeks to:

...encourage development, redevelopment and economic growth in locations that are well situated with respect to present or anticipated public services and facilities, giving appropriate priority to the redevelopment, repair, rehabilitation or replacement of existing facilities and to discourage development where it may impair or destroy natural resources or environmental qualities that are vital to the health and well-being of the present and future citizens of the State. (N.J.S.A. 52:18A-196 (d))

...identify areas for growth, agriculture, open space conservation and other appropriate areas. (N.J.S.A. 52:18A-199 (a))

...coordinate planning activities and establish Statewide planning objectives in the following areas: land use, housing, transportation, natural resource conservation, agriculture and farmland retention, recreation... (N.J.S.A. 52:18A-200 (f))

⁴¹New Jersey State Planning Commission. *The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan*, adopted March 1, 2001.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan

The first State Plan, adopted in 1992, was the product of a statewide planning process, which involved counties and municipalities, that formulated a series of policies intended on shaping growth within New Jersey. The first major update and revision of the 1992 State Plan was initiated in 1997 and culminated in the adoption of the second SDRP on March 1, 2001. The policies and objectives set forth in the State Plan include recommendations regarding environmental protection, rural areas, open space and farmland preservation. In acquiring and preserving the Study Area, Readington would be carrying out a program that is consistent with the vision, goals, policies and strategies of the 1986 State Planning Act and the State Plan.

The State Plan contains a series of statewide goals, strategies and policies that are supportive of the Township's effort to preserve farmland and open space and environmental features, specifically:

State Planning Goals and Strategies

7. Preserve & Enhance Areas with Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Value

Strategy

Enhance, preserve and use historic, cultural, scenic and recreational assets by collaborative planning, design, investment and management techniques. Locate and design development and redevelopment and supporting infrastructure to improve access to and protect these sites. Support the important role of the arts in contributing to community life and civic beauty.⁴²

As part of the discussion of this statewide goal and strategy, the State Plan articulates a statewide vision of open space and scenic resources for the year 2020:

Vision of New Jersey in the Year 2020

Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Resources

Children in all the State's cities and older towns can walk to playgrounds in their neighborhoods. The goal, established by Governor Whitman and affirmed by the voters at the turn of the century, has been achieved. One million acres of open space and farmland have been preserved. State, local and private funding has helped build a multi-purpose regional system of facilities integrating recreation and open space planning with land use and other infrastructure planning. Like the trail system, development of new open space and recreation facilities is planned to reinforce other goals, especially urban revitalization and beneficial economic growth.

⁴² 2001 State Plan, 87.

The value that New Jersey places on everyday vistas can be seen from roads and sidewalks all over the State. Billboards have been controlled; wildflowers have replaced grass; and the jumble of signs, entrances and parking lots along the State's highways have been redesigned to become more attractive, as well as safer, for motorists and businesses.⁴³

The State Plan contains the following statewide policies regarding agriculture:

15. Agriculture⁴⁴

Promote and preserve the agricultural industry and retain farmland by coordinating planning and innovative land conservation techniques to protect agricultural viability while accommodating beneficial development and economic growth necessary to enhance agricultural vitality and by educating residents on the benefits and the special needs of agriculture.⁴⁵

Policy 1 Agricultural Land Retention Program Priorities

Funds for farmland retention should be given priority in the following order, unless a county or municipal farmland preservation plan has been prepared and approved by the State Agriculture Development Committee (in which case, priority shall be based on said plan):

- (1) Rural Planning Area;*
- (2) Fringe and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas;*
- (3) Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas.*

Policy 2 Preservation of the Agricultural Land Base

Consider the expenditure of public funds for preservation of farmland as an investment in public infrastructure and thereby emphasize the public's interest in maintaining long-term agricultural viability.

Policy 3 Coordinated Planning

Coordinate planning efforts of all levels of government to ensure that policies and programs promote agriculture.

Policy 4 New Development

Plan and locate new development to avoid negative impacts on agriculture.

⁴³ 2001 State Plan, 88.

⁴⁴ 2001 State Plan, 159 - 162

⁴⁵ 2001 State Plan, 159.

Policy 5 Creative Planning and Design Techniques

Encourage creative land planning and design through tools such as clustering, phasing and density transfers, purchase and donation of development rights, agricultural enterprise zones and districts and the provision of self-contained community wastewater treatment systems to serve Centers, to accommodate future growth in ways that maintain the viability of agriculture as an industry, while avoiding conflict with agricultural uses.

The Study Area constitutes farmland, scenic and open space assets that are worthy of preservation and are a component of the State's future vision of New Jersey. The State Plan advocates purchase of development rights along with other preservation tools. Through municipal acquisition, preservation and sensitive management, Readington would be moving towards the fulfillment of the State Plan in a manner consistent with the techniques that area recommended by the State Plan.

The State Plan has identified priorities for the acquisition of open space. Several of the characteristics used in this prioritization scheme are shared by the Study Area. These include the presence of critical environmental lands, greenways, land containing areas of significant agricultural value, recreational value, scenic value or with environmentally sensitive features and land in agricultural production that achieves other open space goals. Acquisition of the study Area would be consistent with the acquisition priorities of the State Plan, as excerpted below:

12. Open Lands & Natural Systems⁴⁶

Policy 1 Open Space Acquisition Priorities

Funds for the acquisition of open space and farmland retention, should be used for the following features (not listed in order of priority):

- ◆ *Critical Environmental Sites;*
- ◆ *greenbelts that define Centers;*
- ◆ *greenways;*
- ◆ *land containing areas of significant agricultural value, recreational value, scenic value or with environmentally sensitive features;*
- ◆ *land in agricultural production that achieves other open space goals;*
- ◆ *land needed to meet existing and future needs for active recreation; and*
- ◆ *parks, plazas and public spaces in urban areas that enhance community character and support redevelopment efforts.*

SDRP Planning Areas

⁴⁶ 2001 State Plan, 151

The SDRP delineates a series of *planning areas* that are based on the natural and built characteristics of sub-areas within New Jersey. The planning areas are:

- PA-1 Metropolitan Planning Area
- PA-2 Suburban Planning Area
- PA-3 Fringe Planning Area
- PA-4 Rural Planning Area
- PA-5 Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area

Planning Sub areas include:

- PA-4B Rural/Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area
- PA-5B Environmentally Sensitive/Barrier Islands Planning Area

The designations are listed in descending order from the most developed condition to the least developed conditions. They also reflect the State's vision for the future development of those areas. In addition to policies that are applicable to the entire State, the SDRP contains policies that are specific to each of the planning areas. The Study Area is predominantly located within the PA-4 Rural planning area, having 689 acres within PA-4. Block 67 lot 2 (36+/- acres), which is located on the east side of Thor Solberg Road, is located in the PA-3 Fringe planning area.

The following policies are relevant to the preservation of farmland and open space on the Study Area:

PA-4 Rural Planning Area⁴⁷: Open Space and Farmland Preservation

Within the Rural Planning Area the State Plan expresses a distinct preference for the retention of farmland and open space for the purpose of retaining rural character and promoting agriculture as a viable business:

In the Rural Planning Area, the State Plan's intention is to:

- Maintain the Environs as large contiguous areas of farmland and other lands;*
- Revitalize cities and towns;*
- Accommodate growth in Centers;*
- Promote a viable agricultural industry;*
- Protect the character of existing, stable communities; and*
- Confine programmed sewers and public water services to Centers.*

The State Plan recommends protecting the rural character of the area by encouraging a pattern of development that promotes a stronger rural economy in the future while

⁴⁷ 2001 State Plan, 205 – 210.

meeting the immediate needs of rural residents, and by identifying and preserving farmland and other open lands.

Specific policies recommended for the Rural Planning Area are intended to effectuate farmland and open space preservation:

*(1) **Land Use:** Enhance economic and agricultural viability and rural character by guiding development and redevelopment into Centers. In the Environs, maintain and enhance agricultural uses, and preserve agricultural and other lands to form large contiguous areas and greenbelts around Centers. Development and redevelopment should use creative land use and design techniques to ensure that it does not conflict with agricultural operations, does not exceed the capacity of natural and built systems and protects areas where public investments in farmland preservation have been made. Development in the Environs should maintain or enhance the character of the area.*

*(5) **Natural Resource Conservation:** Minimize potential conflicts between development, agricultural practices and sensitive environmental resources. Promote agricultural management practices and other agricultural conservation techniques to protect soil and water resources. Protect and preserve large, contiguous tracts and corridors of recreation, forest or other open space land that protect natural systems and natural resources.*

*(6) **Agriculture and Farmland Preservation:** Guide development to ensure the viability of agriculture and the retention of farmland in agricultural areas. Encourage farmland retention and minimize conflicts between agricultural practices and the location of Centers. Ensure the availability of adequate water resources and large, contiguous tracts of land with minimal land use conflicts. Actively promote more intensive, new-crop agricultural enterprises and meet the needs of agricultural industry for intensive packaging, processing, value-added operations, marketing, exporting and other shipping through development and redevelopment.*

*(7) **Recreation:** Provide maximum active and passive recreational and tourism opportunities at the neighborhood and local levels by targeting the acquisition and development of neighborhood and municipal parkland within Centers. Provide regional recreation and tourism opportunities by targeting parkland acquisitions and improvements that enhance large contiguous open space systems and by facilitating alternative recreational and tourism uses of farmland.*

Implementation Strategy

Maintaining and enhancing the rural character of Planning Area 4 will require considerable attention by all levels of government, as well as the private and non-profit sectors. With significant market pressures, the Rural Planning Area is often viewed as prime real estate for new development.

Even techniques like larger lot zoning and lot size averaging, while beneficial in some aspects, have the effect of destroying the large contiguous areas of farmland and habitat that are so vital to the sustainability of rural areas and may consume land at a faster rate.

*Use investment tools, such as: a long-term capital plan; density transfer strategies including transfer of development rights where appropriate; public land banking to acquire sites for future growth and density transfers; **acquisition of targeted farmland and other open spaces; (emphasis added)** agricultural enterprise districts, use assessment and inheritance and transfer tax relief; purchase of development rights programs; permanent and stable source of funding for land and capital assets on the municipal, county and State levels; privately coordinated multi-tract development; development rights bank; impact fees; rehabilitation or revitalization grants or loans; special improvement district; community wastewater utility and pre-approved designs for localized stand alone wastewater treatment systems to bring down the cost and ensure a limited number of new hookups compatible with maintaining the rural character; and expanded, reactivated or new public transportation systems within and between Centers.*

PA-3 Fringe Planning Area⁴⁸: Open Space and Farmland Preservation

The intents and policies of the Fringe Planning Area, which affects the 36.7-acre portion of the Study Area known as block 67 lot 2, also indicates open space and farmland preservation. In assessing the relationship of the Study Area to these policies, it is important to note that the Study Area forms a significant part of the agricultural environs around the existing villages of Whitehouse Station and Readington. Both are existing centers depicted on the State Plan Policy Map. Relevant SDRP language regarding the Fringe Planning Area includes:

In the Fringe Planning Area, the State Plan's intention is to:

Accommodate growth in Centers;

Protect the Environs as open lands;

Revitalize cities and towns;

Protect the character of existing stable communities;

Protect natural resources;

Provide a buffer between more developed Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas and less developed Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas; and

Confine programmed sewers and public water services to Centers.

In the Environs, (those areas outside of centers) the landscape should contain limited free-standing residential, commercial and industrial development, including activities

⁴⁸ 2001 State Plan, 200 – 204.

that may be required to meet the needs of the region and which cannot meet acceptable performance standards for Centers. All such development should be designed to enhance the character of the area by preserving open land, retaining scenic vistas and maintaining natural systems.

In addition, uncontrolled development in these areas will exacerbate conflicts with agricultural and environmental resources.

Policy Objectives

*(1) **Land Use:** Focus development and redevelopment in appropriately located and designed Centers to accommodate growth that would otherwise occur in the Environs. Protect the Environs primarily as open lands. Development and redevelopment in the Environs should not exceed the carrying capacity of natural or built systems and should maintain or enhance the character of the Environs.*

*(5) **Natural Resource Conservation:** Strategically acquire open space to define Centers and to maintain contiguous open space corridors that link to other Planning Areas and Centers.*

*(6) **Agriculture:** Guide development to ensure the viability of agriculture and the retention of productive farmland in strategically located agricultural areas and in other adjacent Planning Areas. Encourage farmland retention and minimize conflicts between agricultural practices and the location of Centers. Actively promote more intensive, new-crop agricultural enterprises and meet the needs of agricultural industry for intensive packaging, processing, value-added operations, marketing, exporting and other shipping through development and redevelopment.*

Prepare a targeted open space and/or farmland preservation program in cooperation with the county and/or county agricultural development board and the SADC and/or Green Acres.

Acquisition of the Study Area would be consistent with the farmland and open space preservation policies of the Fringe Planning Area.

The Municipal Land Use Law⁴⁹

New Jersey's Municipal Land Use Law is the basis of all municipal land use regulations in the State. It contains a series of purposes that are the essential rationale for regulating land use in New Jersey. Among those purposes is specific language that supports the preservation of open space and farmland. Readington's acquisition and preservation of the Study Area would advance several purposes of the Municipal Land Use Law.

⁴⁹ New Jersey. 1975. Chapter 55D Planning, Zoning, Etc. *NJSA 40:55D-2. Purpose of the Act.*

- a. *To encourage municipal action to guide the appropriate use or development of all lands in this State, in a manner which will promote the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare;*

As open space and farmland are beneficial to the public health, safety, morals and general welfare, preservation of the Study Area would advance this purpose.

- c. *To provide adequate light, air and open space;*

The acquisition of the Study Area would permanently preserve 652 acres of open space and farmland

- f. *To encourage the appropriate and efficient expenditure of public funds by the coordination of public development with land use policies;*

Readington has identified the Study Area in its open space acquisition plan, which has been drafted to serve as a focus for NJ Green Acres preservation funding. The acquisition and preservation of the Study Area is consistent with municipal, county and state land use policies.

- g. *To provide sufficient space in appropriate locations for a variety of agricultural, residential, recreational, commercial and industrial uses and open space, both public and private, according to their respective environmental requirements in order to meet the needs of all New Jersey citizens;*

The acquisition and preservation of the Study Area will provide a large area of open space and farmland in a rural context that has prime agricultural soils and critical environmental resources.

- i. *To promote a desirable visual environment through creative development techniques and good civic design and arrangements;*

The permanent preservation of the Study Area will promote a desirable visual environment. Open space within the Study Area has been identified as a valuable scenic resource. Readington has documented the scenic environment of its agricultural districts in the *Photographic Tour of the AR Zone*, which captured in a highly visual manner the essence of Readington's historic cultural and natural character.

- j. *To promote the conservation of historic sites and districts, open space, energy resources and valuable natural resources in the State and to prevent urban sprawl and degradation of the environment through improper use of land;*

The acquisition of the Study Area will conserve open space, natural resources and will prevent degradation of the environment. By removing the land from the crosshairs of land developers, energy will be conserved and sprawl will be curbed.

RECREATION

The study area is comprised of four contiguous tracts, separated by public roads. Of these, three are poorly suited to active recreation, but seem suited to varying types of passive recreation. One tract is highly suitable for active or passive recreational development.

Block 48 Lot 23 contains 72 acres with a variety of conditions, including grasslands, woodlands, wetlands, and agricultural fields. The proximity to the Holland Brook School, on the adjacent parcel to the west, makes this site a logical candidate for expansion of school-related recreational fields. However, although the upland areas may be suitable for recreational facility development, the fields are identified as critical wildlife habitat in the New Jersey Natural Heritage database. This means that the site contains elements (grasslands) that support threatened or endangered species. While agricultural uses and those uses not requiring turf management (i.e. frequent mowing, pesticide/fungicide applications, irrigation) may be able to be managed to avoid conflicts with breeding populations of wildlife, the development of active recreational facilities would most certainly conflict with wildlife needs. Passive recreational development (i.e. hiking or interpretive trails) may be viable here, but this tract appears to be unsuitable for active recreational use.

Block 55 Lot 33 contains 21 acres and is located to the south of the main tract, across Readington Road (CR 620). It is undeveloped, containing a portion of the Holland Brook and forested wetlands associated with the stream corridor. This site has significant constraints to development due to the wetlands and stream. Passive recreational development may be viable here, but this tract is unsuitable for active recreational use.

Block 56 Lots 1, 3, 6 & 8 contains 596 acres. It is the site of the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport and also contains large expanses of open fields, agricultural lands, streams, wetlands and wooded areas. The grasslands (fields) on this site have been identified as a critical habitat by New Jersey Natural Heritage and the entire site is classified as a Natural Heritage Priority Site for preservation. At the present time there is a major annual recreational event, which is held on the site each July, known as the *balloon festival*. Should Readington acquire the site, there is a potential to hold other large recreational or cultural events at this site. However, event programming and scheduling would have to be done in conjunction with proper airport management practices and with sufficient management of the grasslands to ensure that no conflicts with nesting bird species occur. Therefore, this tract appears to be somewhat suited to more passive recreational activities and events, but does not appear to be suitable for active recreational facility development.

Block 67 Lot 2 is a 36-acre tract is located to the east of the main tract, across Thor Solberg Road. It is undeveloped, predominantly covered in fields, with some wooded areas. No wetlands or streams are indicated on this site. The slopes of the site are relatively gentle. The site is adjacent to a residential neighborhood to the east. Access to the neighborhood may be feasible through Shepherds Lane, which terminates at the eastern border of the site. Given the lack of constraining natural conditions or habitats, the proximity of the adjacent residential neighborhood and the accessibility of the site from Thor Solberg Road, this site seems highly suitable for active recreational development. In consideration of any future development of this

site, concerns regarding any potential disturbances to the adjacent neighborhood regarding field lighting, traffic or visual screening should be addressed.

The following policies of the State of New Jersey support the provision of recreational lands and facilities:

State Development and Redevelopment Plan

The State Plan contains a series of statewide goals, strategies and policies that are supportive of the Township's effort to provide for recreation:

Vision of New Jersey in the Year 2020

Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Resources

*Children in all the State's cities and older towns can walk to playgrounds in their neighborhoods. The goal, established by Governor Whitman and affirmed by the voters at the turn of the century, has been achieved. One million acres of open space and farmland have been preserved. State, local and private funding has helped build a multi-purpose regional system of facilities integrating recreation and open space planning with land use and other infrastructure planning. Like the trail system, **development of new open space and recreation facilities is planned to reinforce other goals, especially urban revitalization and beneficial economic growth.** (emphasis added)*

State Planning Goals and Strategies

7. *Preserve & Enhance Areas with Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Value*

Strategy

*Enhance, preserve and use historic, cultural, scenic and **recreational assets** (emphasis added) by collaborative planning, design, investment and management techniques. Locate and design development and redevelopment and supporting infrastructure to improve access to and protect these sites. Support the important role of the arts in contributing to community life and civic beauty.⁵⁰*

⁵⁰ 2001 State Plan, 87.

12. Open Lands & Natural Systems⁵¹

Policy 1 Open Space Acquisition Priorities

Funds for the acquisition of open space and farmland retention, should be used for the following features (not listed in order of priority):

- ◆ *Critical Environmental Sites;*
- ◆ *greenbelts that define Centers;*
- ◆ *greenways;*
- ◆ *land containing areas of significant agricultural value, recreational value, scenic value or with environmentally sensitive features;*
- ◆ *land in agricultural production that achieves other open space goals;*
- ◆ ***land needed to meet existing and future needs for active recreation;*** (emphasis added) *and*
- ◆ *parks, plazas and public spaces in urban areas that enhance community character and support redevelopment efforts.*

Policy 5 Adequate Recreational Facilities

Ensure that there are adequate indoor and outdoor recreational facilities where appropriate for the year-round enjoyment and health of residents and tourists.

Policy 8 Trails, Greenways and Blueways as Public Open Space Linkages

Implement the New Jersey Trails Plan for a statewide network of open space corridors (greenways) and waterway corridors (blueways) that link recreational and open space land by way of corridors, paths, river and stream corridors, migratory routes, hiking and biking trails, beaches, abandoned railroad rights-of-way, scenic trails and outlooks, historic areas and other resources and public open spaces, through the cooperation of State, regional and local government as well as private groups and property owners.

Policy 13 Location of Recreational Facilities and Open Space

Locate recreational facilities and open space as close as possible to the populations they serve, taking into account the nature of the recreational facility or open space.

⁵¹ 2001 State Plan, 151

PA-3 Fringe Planning Area⁵²: Recreation

The intents and policies of the Fringe Planning Area cover the 36.7-acre portion of the Study Area known as block 67 lot 2. Relevant State Plan language regarding the Fringe Planning Area includes:

In the Fringe Planning Area, the State Plan's intention is to:

Accommodate growth in Centers;

Protect the Environs as open lands;

Revitalize cities and towns;

Protect the character of existing stable communities;

Protect natural resources;

Provide a buffer between more developed Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas and less developed Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas; and

Confine programmed sewers and public water services to Centers.

In the Environs, (those areas outside of centers) the landscape should contain limited free-standing residential, commercial and industrial development, including activities that may be required to meet the needs of the region and which cannot meet acceptable performance standards for Centers. All such development should be designed to enhance the character of the area by preserving open land, retaining scenic vistas and maintaining natural systems.

*(7) **Recreation:** Provide maximum active and passive recreational opportunities and facilities at neighborhood and local levels by targeting the acquisition and development of neighborhood and municipal parkland within Centers. Provide regional recreation opportunities by targeting parkland acquisitions and improvements that enhance large contiguous open space systems.*

The Municipal Land Use Law⁵³

Readington's development of recreational facilities within the Study Area would advance the following purpose of the Municipal Land Use Law:

- g. To provide sufficient space in appropriate locations for a variety of agricultural, residential, **recreational**, (emphasis added) commercial and industrial uses and open space, both public and private, according to their respective environmental requirements in order to meet the needs of all New Jersey citizens;*

⁵² 2001 State Plan, 200 – 204.

⁵³ New Jersey. 1975. Chapter 55D Planning, Zoning, Etc. *N/SA 40:55D-2. Purpose of the Act*

*New Jersey's Common Ground*⁵⁴

Prepared by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program, this plan is the state's official document for guiding the expenditure of state and federal funds for open space preservation and the development of recreational facilities. More generally, the goal of the plan is to provide guidance to the various levels of government in acquiring, developing, maintaining and protecting outdoor recreation resources throughout the state.

In addition to preserving sufficient amounts of open space for current and future public use, utilizing the environmental protection amenities of open space to protect important natural and historic resources is a key objective of the plan. The plan notes that the connection among open space, recreation, a strong economy and quality of life has gained a wide acceptance in New Jersey and that "*the preservation of distinctive natural, recreational and historic resources which influenced the growth of the state remains a paramount concern to all New Jerseyans.*" (p. 5)

The plan utilizes the Balanced Land Use Concept to calculate long-term goals for public recreation land acquisition based on the extent of New Jersey's developed, developable and undeveloped land resources, and the need to accommodate other land uses, such as housing. Statewide, there is an existing deficit of 271,561 acres in the amount of dedicated public recreation open space. Of this amount, 180,086 acres represent a deficit in municipal and county supplied open space. According to the report, municipalities in Hunterdon County currently have the largest open space deficit (5,721 acres) in the state, and Hunterdon County itself has the third largest open space deficit (12,521 acres) in the state.

The plan notes that the figures derived by the Balanced Land Use method represent the minimum amount of land that should be permanently dedicated as public open space and available for recreational uses; open space that is protected for environmental or agricultural purposes is not considered part of the public recreation land supply.

In summarizing New Jersey's recreation resource needs, the report emphasizes, "*...the availability of suitable land resources is the single most important factor in providing opportunities for all outdoor recreation activities.*" (p.16)

Specific policy statements in the plan include the following:

- ♦ preserve and protect through fee simple acquisition or other means, an additional 271,561 acres of publicly owned open space recreation land
- ♦ encourage the protection of natural and recreational features of appropriate private lands
- ♦ Continue the preservation of farmland

⁵⁴ NJ Green Acres Bureau of Planning. New Jersey's Common Ground: 1994-1999 New Jersey Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Plan Summary.

- ♦ identify the state's historic and natural features and to coordinate efforts to protect them through acquisition, rehabilitation and other methods

Acquisition of the Study Area would serve to preserve a large amount of open space. These lands could be developed for both passive and active recreational uses, depending on the physical characteristics as described herein. Provision of recreational uses within the Study Area lands would be consistent with local and state policies regarding public recreation.

NATURAL RESOURCE PROTECTION

Natural resources and environmentally sensitive features within the Study Area

In addition to the commercial airport use, which occupies an approximately 57 acre⁵⁵ portion of the site, the Study Area contains large areas of agricultural lands, wetlands, streams, forests and grasslands. By quantifying the environmental conditions found on the Study Area, the extent of these of natural resources may be considered with respect to the policies that address their conservation and preservation:

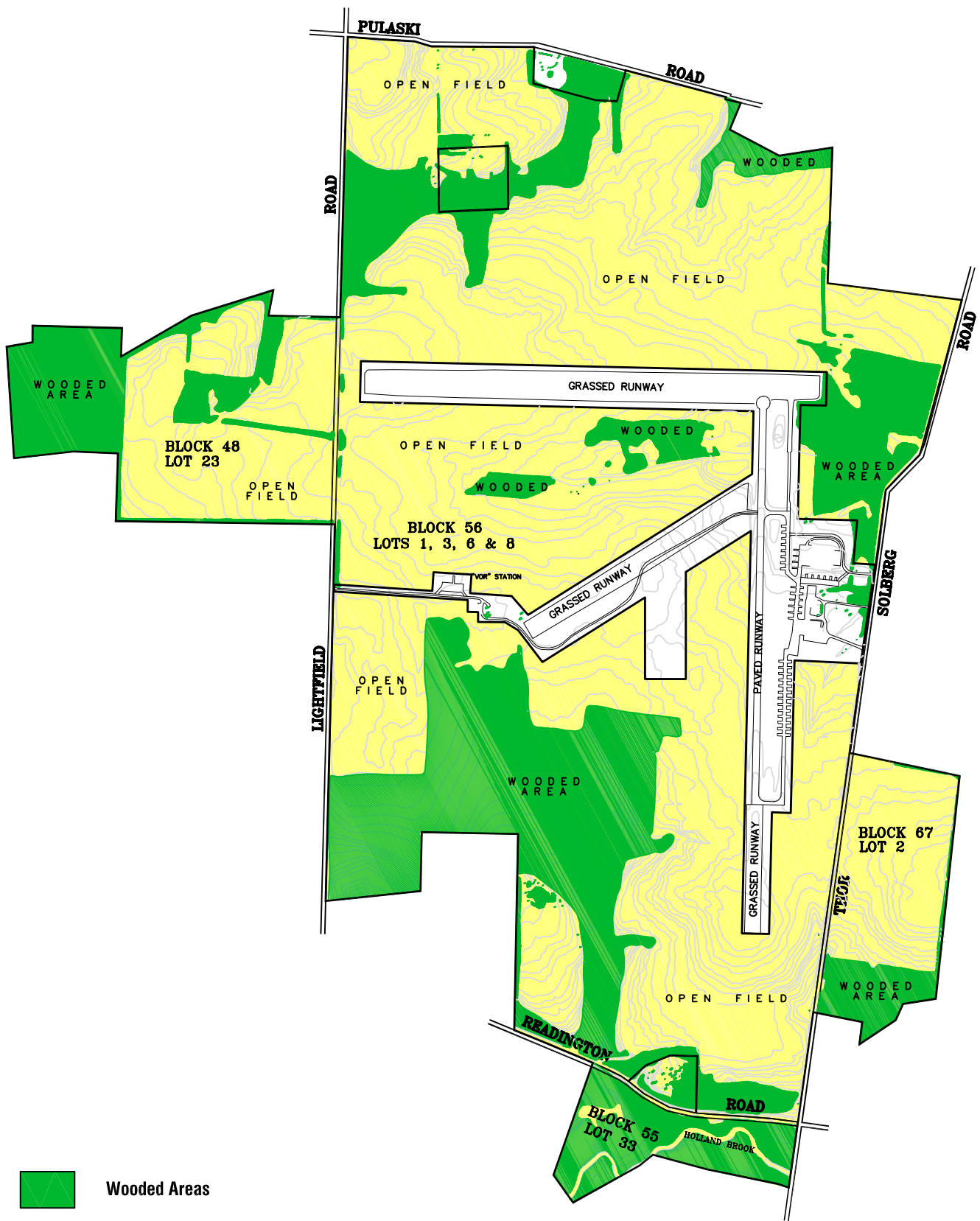
Natural Resources and Environmentally Sensitive Features		
<i>Feature</i>	<i>Acreage</i>	<i>Percentage of Study Area</i>
Woodlands	194.967	26.0%
Agricultural lands	449.585	60.0%
Wetlands / wetland transition areas (assumes intermediate value wetlands)	77.857	10%
Waterways (streams)	0.77	0.1%
Floodplain	17.14	2.4%
Prime farmland soils	397.776	54.8%
Farmland soils of statewide importance	276.375	37.7%
Moderate Slopes (15%-25%)	15.065	2.1%
Steep Slopes (25% and above)	5.105	0.7%
<i>1. The acreage and percentages of each feature are not exclusive and may overlap with one or more other features. 2. All information, except for farmland soils, taken from Thomas L. Yager and Associates. December 28, 2000, revised March 20, 2001. Environmental Inventory Plan for Solberg Properties, sheets 1-6</i>		

Natural resources, such as those on the Study Area, are recognized as valuable assets by Readington Township, Hunterdon County and the State of New Jersey. The land use policies of those jurisdictions reflect that value and firmly support the preservation of natural resources. The following information demonstrates that the acquisition and preservation of natural resources on the Study Area would be consistent with those policies.

Readington Township's Policies on Natural Resource Protection and Preservation

Readington has a body of land use policies that address the preservation of natural resources, including streams, woodlands, wetlands, grasslands and prime agricultural soils. The history of natural resources awareness and protection mirrors that of Readington's open space and farmland preservation track record.

⁵⁵ Roberta Housel, Readington Township Assessor's Office. Telecopy dated April 19, 2006.



Survey and vegetation information from Thomas L. Yager & Associates., March 20, 2001.
 ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY FOR SOLBERG PROPERTIES.

STUDY AREA

Vegetative Cover

Readington Township Hunterdon County, NJ March 2006

400 0 400 800 1600 Feet



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*Readington Township Open Space Master Plan, 1979*⁵⁶

This report specifically identified Readington's concern for its critical environmental features and created a framework of planning policies, illustrated through text and maps, to protect those features through open space preservation strategies. The Township found that steep slopes, stream corridors and woodlands should be protected in order to maintain water quality levels, to provide linkages between open spaces for passive recreation and wildlife movement and to promote the retention of scenic vistas that help define the character of Readington.

Among those streams cited, both the Chambers Brook and the Holland Brook, or their tributaries, are located on portions of the Study Area. These form natural conduits to other areas of permanent open space. The Study Area also contains a series of open fields bordered by woodlands that typify Readington's scenic character, as described in the Plan.

*Readington Township Master Plan, 1990*⁵⁷

Parks, Recreation and Open Space

Promote the development of a Township-wide "greenbelt" network which includes major environmentally sensitive areas and enables creation of natural buffers and linkages between existing and future development areas as well as parks and public facilities. p.8

With this goal as a guide, Readington went on to prioritize recreational lands for acquisition within the Conservation Element of the 1990 Master Plan. Among five targeted stream corridors, the Township identified floodplain lands along the Holland Brook and Chambers Brook as targets for acquisition. These stream corridors, and tributary streams, run through the Study Area. The acquisition of these environmentally sensitive lands is consistent with the Readington's natural resources protection policies as expressed in the 1990 Master Plan.

Critical Areas

In the 1990 Master Plan, the Township identified areas that were to be designated as *critical environmental impact areas*. These consisted of steep slopes (15% and greater), flood hazard areas and wetlands. The Plan also acknowledged the lack of mature woodlands in the Township, and recommended that development should be arranged in such a manner as to preserve woodlands. The rationale behind the designations was expressed thusly:

*It is important to identify and protect these sites, for they offer natural protection from soil erosion, excessive flooding, poor air quality and depletion of wildlife habitat.
P 82*

⁵⁶ *Open Space Master Plan for Readington Township*

⁵⁷ *Township of Readington. 1990 Master Plan*

The critical areas were graphically depicted on three maps, which clearly indicate the presence of floodplains, steep slopes and wetlands on the Study Area. Readington Township continues to maintain a Land Development Ordinance (LDO) that contains provisions for the protection and preservation of these critical areas. These are contained within §503 *Critical Areas* of the LDO.

1998 Master Plan Amendments⁵⁸

This series of updates to Readington's planning policies included discussions of critical environmental features within the Township, including steep slopes, groundwater resources, prime and significant agricultural soils and wetlands. Specific attention was given to a capacity-based analysis of the ability of the land to absorb the effluent of individual septic disposal fields. Based on the analysis (as well as cumulative factors relating to agricultural soils and open space preservation) the amendment concluded that a new zoning classification was necessary which raised the effective minimum lot size to 5/6 acres in nearly half of the Township. Concerns over threats to ground water quality were expressed:

The Township's major concern regarding future water supply relates to the quality of ground water resources. This is true for both future uses which continue to rely on individual wells and those for whom the Elizabethtown Water Company or other water supply company provides services using deep production wells or surface water. In any case, proper steps must be taken to insure that residential or commercial development does not jeopardize the aquifer's ability to recharge and supply the Township with the necessary potable water. P.V-4

Groundwater drawn from wells continues to be the primary source of potable water for residents of Readington. The principal threat to Readington's groundwater quality is the contamination that can occur from nitrates contained in effluent from septic disposal fields. High concentration of nitrates may lead to eutrophication of lakes and estuaries. Extremely high concentrations may cause illness, especially in infants. Future development should ensure that groundwater supplies are not subject to degradation by nitrate contamination. P.V-4

The 1998 amendments also identify the prime farmland soils and farmland soils of statewide importance for continued conservation in order to help preserve agricultural uses within the township.

⁵⁸ Readington Township Planning Board. 1998. *Amendment to the Master Plan*.

The protection of stream corridors and flood hazard areas is addressed in a manner consistent with previous planning policies of the Township:

The flood hazard areas of the Township are defined as the combination of the flood plains and the adjacent flood fringe areas which, during inundation of the normal stream channel, helps to carry the excessive water. The Township drains primarily into the South Branch of the Raritan River. The southern two-thirds drain through Pleasant Run and Holland Brook into the South Branch. The northern third uses the North Branch as its drainage basin being drained by the North and South Branch of Rockaway Creek, the Lamington River and Chambers Brook. These flood plains occupy approximately 322,094 acres (about 15%) of Township land, as depicted on Plate 8 of the 1990 Master Plan. In the past, all the Township's flood plains have experienced damage due to flooding, particularly those adjacent to the Rockaway Creek and the South Branch of the Raritan River. For this reason it is necessary to place controls on development in these areas. Development should be located on higher ground, well outside of these flood hazard areas to protect future residents from serious loss. Equally important is the preservation of the environmentally sensitive aquatic communities which exist in these stream corridor and flood hazard areas. These communities are often the first link in the food chain of the aquatic as well as other ecosystems. Control of development in these areas is also important in preserving the flood carrying capacity of the stream corridors. P. V-19

As has been indicated, Chambers Brook and Holland's Brook (or tributaries thereof) are located within the Study Area.

New Jersey's Policies on Natural Resource Protection

State Development and Redevelopment Plan

The State Plan contains a compelling vision for natural resource and environmental protection that is coupled with a series of policies, goals and strategies. Municipal control of the Study Area would ensure that transportation policies are balanced with environmental land use policies to protect the natural systems within the immediate area, the Township and the State:

State Planning Goals and Strategies⁵⁹

2. Conserve the State's Natural Resources and Systems

Strategy

Conserve the State's natural systems and resources as capital assets of the public by promoting ecologically sound development and redevelopment in the Metropolitan

⁵⁹ 2001 State Plan, 23.

and Suburban Planning Areas, accommodating environmentally designed development in Centers in the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas, and by restoring the integrity of natural systems in areas where they have been degraded or damaged. Plan, design, invest in and manage the development of Centers and the use of land, water, soil, plant and animal resources to maintain biodiversity and the viability of ecological systems. Maximize the ability of natural systems to control runoff and flooding, and to improve air and water quality and supply.

4. Protect the Environment, Prevent and Clean Up Pollution

Strategy

Develop standards of performance and create incentives to prevent and reduce pollution and toxic emissions at the source, in order to conserve resources and protect public health. Promote the development of businesses that provide goods and services that eliminate pollution and toxic emissions or reduce resource depletion. Actively pursue public/private partnerships, the latest technology and strict enforcement to prevent toxic emissions and clean up polluted air, land and water without shifting pollutants from one medium to another, from one geographic location to another, or from one generation to another. Promote ecologically designed development and redevelopment in the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas and accommodate ecologically designed development in Centers in the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas, to reduce automobile usage, land, water and energy consumption, and to minimize impacts on public health and biological systems, water and air quality. Plant and maintain trees and native vegetation. Reduce waste and reuse and recycle materials through demanufacturing and remanufacturing. p.46

Statewide Policies

11. Water Resources

Protect and enhance water resources through coordinated planning efforts aimed at reducing sources of pollution and other adverse effects of development, encouraging designs in hazard-free areas that will protect the natural function of stream and wetland systems, and optimizing sustainable resource use. P. 118

Policy 18 Stream Corridor Protection and Management

Protect, establish and maintain appropriately vegetated buffers along streams, rivers, wetlands, reservoirs and scenic waterways to protect the natural functions and quality of surface water resources. p.120

The SDRP recognizes the capacity for elements of transportation systems to have negative impacts on the environment and on fragile natural resources. With respect to the Study Area, which contains many acres of sensitive environmental features, modifications to the commercial airport could result in negative impacts upon wetlands, stream corridors, surface water quality and grassland bird species habitat. Township control of the lands and improvements therein would result in greater control over future impacts to these environmental features that would be more consistent with State, County and municipal policies regarding environmental resources.

8. Transportation

Policy 4 Integration of Land Use and Transportation Planning

Establish a working partnership between transportation agencies, municipal, county and regional governments and the private development community to strengthen the linkages between landuse planning and transportation planning for all modes of transportation including mass transit, highways, rail, aviation, passenger ferry service and port facilities. Transportation system improvements and good land use planning practices must be mutually supportive. Coordinate and harmonize local, State and regional infrastructure investment plans and programs with local landuse plans to achieve the following objectives:

*reduce consumption of land and increase the efficiency of infrastructure;
support public transportation systems and other alternatives to the automobile;
reduce total vehicle miles of travel; and
reduce the overall consumption of energy resources for transportation purposes.*

Policy 5 Transportation and Environmental Resource Protection

Coordinate transportation planning and project development with environment planning through a capital planning process. Before programming for construction, evaluate the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of installing transportation improvements and of the development that these improvements may support or induce to ensure that they accommodate and protect sensitive environmental resources. p.113

Environs and Centers

The SDRP describes the relationship between higher-density, mixed-use nodes of developed land and the relatively open, undeveloped areas surrounding the node as that of a *center* to its *environs*. During cross-acceptance⁶⁰, Readington proposed two amendments to the State Plan that would identify Whitehouse Station and Three Bridges as “*proposed centers*”, thus identifying them as compact, mixed-use areas where future growth is planned. The Study Area is not located within the proposed community development boundaries of the proposed village center of Whitehouse Station, but is located within the environs. It is also a critical component of the environs of the historic village of Readington, which is classified as an existing *hamlet* pursuant to the SDRP “taxonomy” for centers⁶¹. The following State policies regarding *environs* are relevant to the Study Area:

The Environs are the preferred areas for the protection of Large Contiguous Areas, including the preservation of farmland, open space and large forest tracts. The Policy Objectives for the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas specifically call for protection of the Environs from development. Strategies for preserving the Environs include density transfers into Centers, purchasing or donating easements, restricting the extension of capital facilities and adopting ordinances that limit development. P. 226

1. *Linkages Within the Environs*

Greenways — regionwide linear corridors of permanently preserved public or private land linking New Jersey’s urban, suburban and rural areas — can be an important part of the Environs. P. 226

Strategies for capital facilities and services in the Environs should follow the Planning Area Policy Objectives to ensure beneficial growth in Centers and the protection of the Environs. P. 226

New development that cannot be transferred to Centers should be sensitive to the prevailing local conditions and should not compromise local character. P. 226

Design and planning techniques should be used to ensure that any new development enhances the character of the area by preserving open space, retaining scenic vistas, and maintaining natural systems. P. 226-227

⁶⁰ Cross acceptance is the process of comparing the provisions and maps of local, county and regional plans to the State Plan and the ensuing dialogue between participants to achieve consistency between the plans.

⁶¹ The SDRP classifies centers from the largest and most dense to the smallest and least dense: Urban Center, Regional Center, Town Center, Village and Hamlet.

Acquisition of the Study Area by the Township would permit Readington to protect this large open space tract within the environs of Readington and Whitehouse Station from future development, would permit Readington to add this tract and the stream corridors that extend onto the lands to the existing network of open spaces, would ensure the preservation of the open space and scenic vistas that defined the character of this tract and the surrounding lands and would advance the preservation of the sensitive natural resources that exist on this tract.

Freshwater Wetlands

The Study Area contains 77.857 acres of wetlands and wetland transition areas, as shown on the *Environmental Inventory Plan* by Yager. This comprises 10% of the total tract area. Wetlands are usually characterized by marshes, swamps or boggy areas, but may also be forested lands. According to the New Jersey Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act, wetlands are defined as:

... an area that is inundated or saturated by surface water or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances does support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions, commonly known as hydrophytic vegetation; ...⁶²

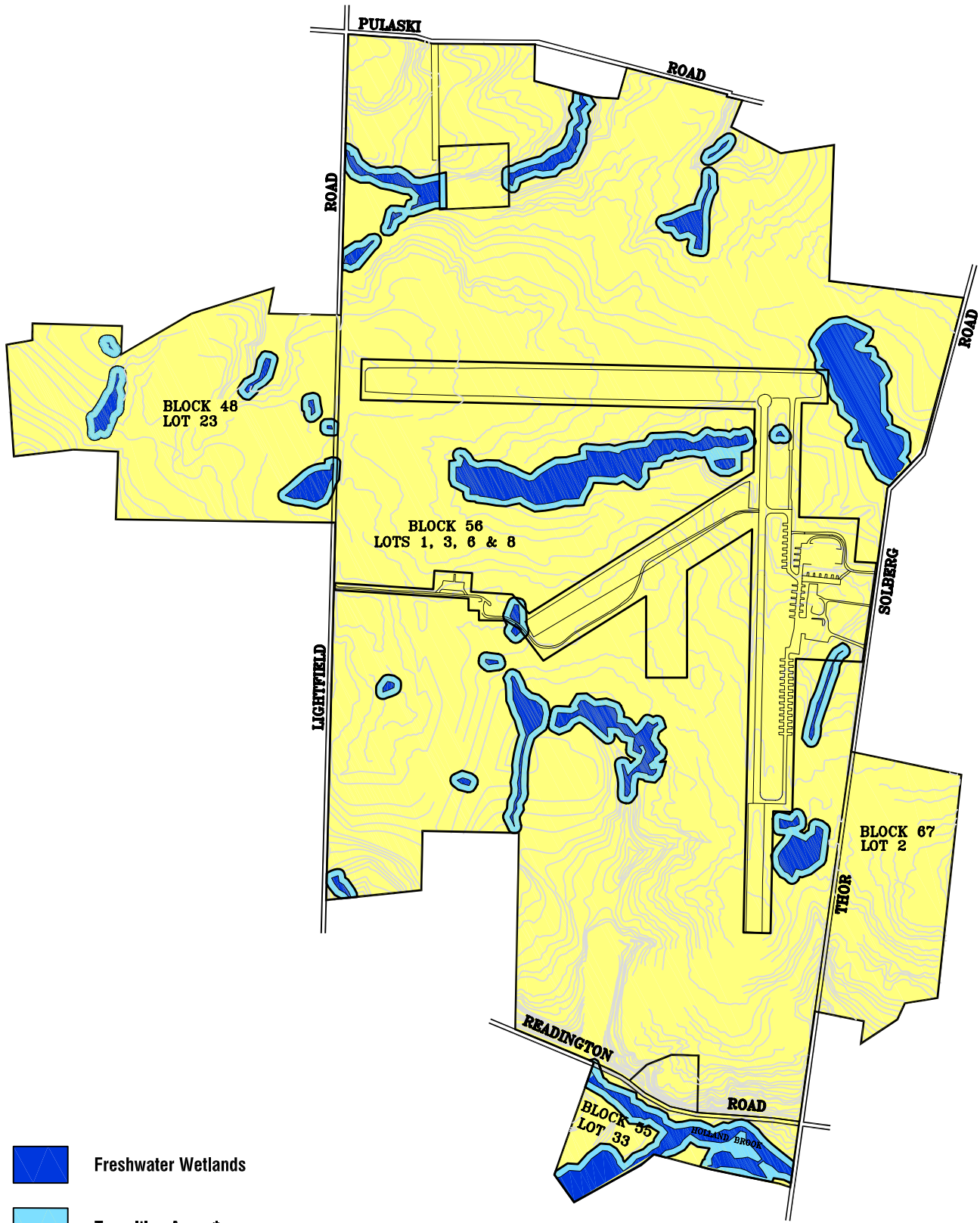
New Jersey has recognized the value of freshwater wetlands within its planning policies and has also created strict regulations to protect wetland resources in the state. The State has determined that wetlands are of such importance to the public welfare that the Freshwater Wetlands Act was passed to provide land use regulation of these natural resources. The act itself contains legislative rationale for the regulation of freshwater wetlands in New Jersey:



The Legislature finds and declares that freshwater wetlands protect and preserve drinking water supplies by serving to purify surface water and groundwater resources; that freshwater wetlands provide a natural means of flood and storm damage protection, and thereby prevent the loss of life and property through the absorption and storage of water during high runoff periods and the reduction of flood crests; that freshwater wetlands serve as a transition zone between dry land and water courses, thereby retarding soil erosion; that freshwater wetlands provide essential breeding, spawning, nesting, and wintering habitats for a major portion of the State's fish and wildlife, including migrating birds, endangered species, and commercially and recreationally important wildlife; and that freshwater wetlands maintain a critical baseflow to surface waters through the gradual release of stored flood waters and groundwater, particularly during drought periods.⁶³

Simply put, the public benefits afforded by wetlands include protection of drinking water, prevention of flood and storm damage, prevention of soil erosion, provision of essential wildlife habitat and maintenance of surface water flows.

⁶² New Jersey. *Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act*, NJSA 13:9B-3

⁶³ New Jersey. *Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act*, NJSA 13:9B-2

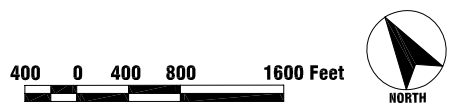


-  Freshwater Wetlands
-  Transition Areas*

* Transition areas are assumed to be 50 feet in width since no determination has been made by the NJDEP.

Survey and wetland information from Thomas L. Yager & Associates., March 20, 2001.
 ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY FOR SOLBERG PROPERTIES.

STUDY AREA
Freshwater Wetlands
 Readington Township Hunterdon County, NJ March 2006



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The Freshwater Wetlands Act resulted in the regulation of several activities within wetlands and in transition areas (commonly referred to as buffers). These are:

1. The removal, excavation, disturbance or dredging of soil, sand, gravel, or aggregate material of any kind;
2. The drainage or disturbance of the water level or water table;
3. The dumping, discharging or filling with any materials;
4. The driving of pilings;
5. The placing of obstructions;
6. The destruction of plant life which would alter the character of a freshwater wetland, including the cutting of trees;

Policies for the protection of wetlands were also included among the statewide policies the State Plan:

Policy 7 Wetlands

*Protect and enhance wetlands as a means of protecting and improving water quality, controlling floods and ensuring habitat diversity through watershed planning, local and regional land use planning, incentives, education and regulation.*⁶⁴

Some of the wetland and transition areas within the Study Area are in close proximity to airport improvements, including runways and vehicular use areas, ranging from 0 feet in some cases to 60 feet in others. Municipal acquisition and control of the Study Area would ensure that decisions regarding the use of, and improvements to, the lands within the Study Area are carried out in a manner that ensures protection of the existing wetlands and transition areas, thereby facilitating the public purposes as declared under the Freshwater Wetlands Act and the State Plan.

Water Quality

Water Quality Management Planning

New Jersey has initiated a bold proposal to strengthen the protection of water quality throughout the State. In 2000, a series of amendments were proposed by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection to the Statewide Water Quality Management and Planning Rules at NJAC 7:15-8. The intent of the amendments was to make the rules governing surface water quality more consistent with the expressed State goal of clean and plentiful water, as expressed in the State Plan. Among the major goals of the amendments were the restoration, maintenance and enhancement of water quality and ecosystem health, encouragement of development within existing sewer service areas and permitting development in non-sewered areas only when it is

⁶⁴ 2001 State Plan, 148.

proven that water and environmental quality will not be degraded. These regulations became effective March 20, 2001. These rules now require that projects or activities generating 2,000 gpd or more to ground water will require amendments to an area wide Water Quality Management Plan. Additionally, qualifying projects will be subject to the same level of environmental review as a development in a new or expanded sewer service area. Residential developments over five (5) dwelling units that rely on individual subsurface septic disposal systems are specifically included in this regulation.

Prior to the adoption of the new water quality regulations, in the interest of addressing the imminent threats to New Jersey's water quality, Governor Whitman directed that the NJ Department of Environmental Protection conduct enhanced analyses of wastewater management plans and amendments thereto prior to the adoption of the proposed water quality amendments. Within this executive order ⁶⁵ the Governor acknowledged the foundation of her mandate to protect water resources:

***WHEREAS**, clean and plentiful water is essential to the ecological, economic and social well-being of New Jersey; and*

***WHEREAS**, New Jersey's water resources provide drinking water for residents of the State as well as habitat for numerous species of fish and wildlife; and*

***WHEREAS**, New Jersey's water resources have been impacted by the fact that the State is both an industrial leader and the most densely populated State in the nation, and that these impacts will only become more acute as the population of the State grows by a projected 1 million people over the next 20 years; and*

***WHEREAS**, over the past three decades, New Jersey has experienced unprecedented development and sprawl, which has resulted in decreases in open lands, wetlands, farmland and other areas that previously served a variety of beneficial environmental functions, including the protection and restoration of the State's water resources; and which, if not properly managed, oppose a threat to the preservation and integrity of the water resources of the State by both increasing the volume of stormwater runoff that alters the stream hydrology and degrading the water quality; and*

***WHEREAS**, during 1999, New Jersey experienced significant drought and flood events that caused severe personal and economic hardship to many residents of the State which, to some degree, were exacerbated by the increasing demands placed on the environment by the extent of development which has occurred; and*

***WHEREAS**, it is likely that the State's vulnerability to similar events in the future will be increased unless development is properly managed; and*

⁶⁵ State of New Jersey Executive Department. January 11, 2000. Executive Order No. 109.

WHEREAS, land use decisions should consider and minimize any water resource or other environmental impacts and maximize the economic and social benefits to the State, its municipalities and its residents; and

WHEREAS, sound water resource management should include a holistic and comprehensive analysis of water resource issues within the various watersheds of the State, with the express purpose of restoration, maintenance and preservation of the quality of the waters of the State; and

The importance of water quality protection has been highlighted through the State's actions in Executive Order # 109 and through the proposed water quality amendments. The preservation of the Study Area is consistent with the foundations and the goals of those initiatives.

2004 Stormwater Rules

In February 2004, the NJDEP published two sets of new stormwater rules. The first set of rules is the Phase II New Jersey Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Stormwater Regulation Program Rules (N.J.A.C. 7:14A), which addresses the reduction of pollutants associated with existing stormwater runoff. The second set of rules, known as the Stormwater Management Rules (N.J.A.C. 7:8), sets forth the required components of regional and municipal stormwater management plans and establishes the stormwater management design and performance standards for new (proposed) development. Together the two sets of rules are intended to establish a comprehensive framework for addressing water quality impacts associated with existing and future stormwater discharges.⁶⁶

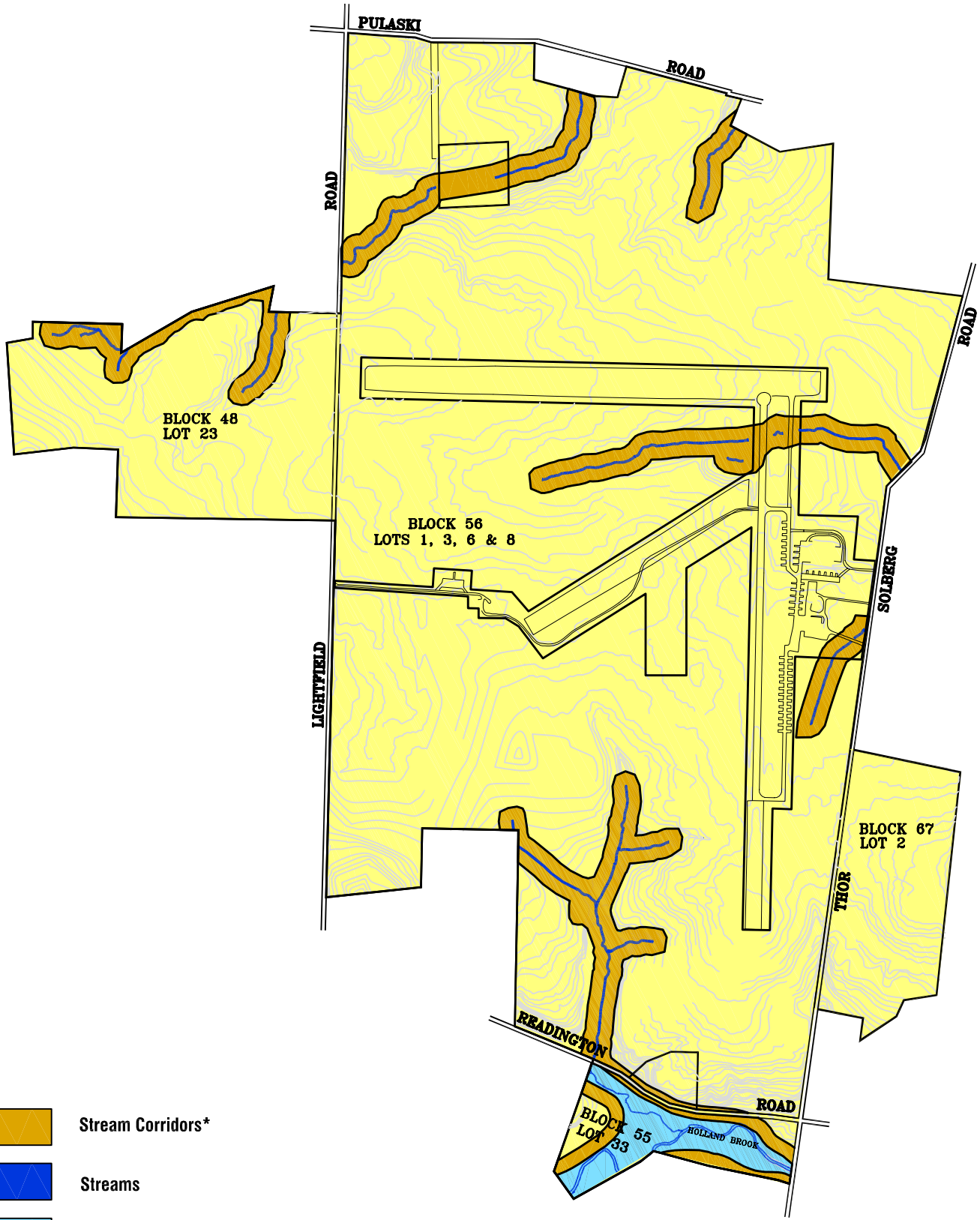
Water Quality Initiatives: Hunterdon County




Protection of water quality is discussed in the 1998 *Strategies for Managing Growth in Hunterdon County*:

Water is an essential part of our lives. But growth pressures, combined with an often-complacent attitude regarding individual responsibilities, will eventually lead to the deterioration of our water resources. However, water resources can be protected through adequate storm water management, stream corridor protection, regional planning and local education. In Hunterdon County, the most effective means of protecting water is through the County's four watershed associations, the County Health Department, municipal and County land use regulations and responsible actions by County residents who use their water resources wisely.⁶⁷ p.2

⁶⁶ Phase II New Jersey Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Stormwater Regulation Program Rules (N.J.A.C. 7:14A), and The New Jersey Stormwater Management Rules (N.J.A.C. 7:8)

⁶⁷ *Strategies for Managing Growth in Hunterdon County*, 2



-  Stream Corridors*
-  Streams
-  Flood Plains

* Pursuant to Section 503.2 of the Readington Township Land Development Ordinance.

This map based on Thomas L. Yager & Associates., March 20, 2001. ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY FOR SOLBERG PROPERTIES.



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STUDY AREA

Streams, Stream Corridors and Flood Plains

Readington Township Hunterdon County, NJ March 2006

Farmland Soils

The USDA classifies certain soils as being particularly well suited to agricultural uses. The two most prominent designations are *prime farmland soils* and *farmland soils of statewide importance*. Both of these classifications are well represented within the Study Area. According to the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service, prime farmland soil:

*... has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber and oilseed crops and is also available for these uses. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods, Prime Farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time, and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding.*⁶⁸

Farmland soils of statewide importance are described as:

*... those soils in land capability Class II and III that do not meet the criteria as Prime Farmland. These soils are nearly Prime Farmland and economically produce high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods, Some may produce yields as high as Prime Farmland if conditions are favorable.*⁶⁹

The following tables illustrate the extent and types of prime farmland soils and farmland soils of statewide importance on the Study Area:

Prime Farmland Soils on the Study Area			
Symbol	Name	Acreage	% of Study Area (726.431 total acres)
BuB	Bucks silt loam, 2- 6% slopes	86.725	11.9%
NoB	Norton loam, 2- 6% slopes	147.932	20.4%
PeB	Penn shaly silt loam, 2- 6% slopes	70.643	9.7%
PfB	Penn-Bucks complex, 2- 6% slopes	72.31	10%
RcB	Readington silt loam, 2- 6% slopes	20.166	2.8%
Total		397.776	54.8%
<small>Source: NJDEP. Bureau of Geographic Information & Analysis. Office of Information Resources Management. <i>GIS Resource Data</i>. CD-ROM. Series 1, Vol. 3. Trenton, NJ. March 7, 1996. This table was developed using NJDEP GIS digital data, but this secondary product has not been verified by the NJDEP and is not state-authorized.</small>			

⁶⁸ USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service. June 28, 1999. *Important Soils of New Jersey*. <<http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/soils/prime.html>> Accessed March 27, 2001.

⁶⁹ USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service. September 2, 1999. <<http://www.nj.nrcs.usda.gov/soils/importantstate.html>> Accessed March 27, 2001.



-  Prime Farmland Soils
-  Farmland Soils of Statewide Importance

Survey information from Thomas L. Yager & Associates., March 20, 2001.
 ENVIRONMENTAL INVENTORY FOR SOLBERG PROPERTIES.

This map was developed using New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Geographic Information System digital data, but this secondary product has not been verified by NJDEP and is not state-authorized.

STUDY AREA

Agricultural Soils

Readington Township Hunterdon County, NJ March 2006

400 0 400 800 1600 Feet



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Farmland Soils of Statewide Importance on the Study Area			
Symbol	Name	Acreage	% of Study Area (726.431 total acres)
AbA	Abbottstown silt loam, 0-2% slopes	2.373	0.3%
AbB	Abbottstown silt loam, 2-6% slopes	18.898	2.6%
BdC2	Birdsboro silt loam, 6-12% slopes	6.378	0.9%
LbB	Landsdowne silt loam, 0-6% slopes	65.984	9.1%
NoC2	Norton loam, 6-12% slopes	1.453	0.2%
PeC2	Penn shaly silt loam, 6-12% slopes	70.643	9.7%
PfC2	Penn-Bucks complex, 6-12% slopes	7.338	1.0%
ReB	Reaville silt loam, 2- 6% slopes	100.935	13.9%
Total		276.375	37.7%
<small>Source: NJDEP. Bureau of Geographic Information & Analysis. Office of Information Resources Management. <i>GIS Resource Data</i>. CD-ROM. Series 1, Vol. 3. Trenton, NJ. March 7, 1996. This table was developed using NJDEP GIS digital data, but this secondary product has not been verified by the NJDEP and is not state-authorized.</small>			

This data illustrates the extent to which the Study Area contains important agricultural soil resources. Over 54% of the Study Area contains prime farmland soils and over 37% of the lands contain statewide important soils. Combined, over 92% of the Study Area, 674 acres, is classified as important agricultural land.

The Municipal Land Use Law⁷⁰

Readington’s acquisition and preservation of the Study Area would advance the purposes of the Municipal Land Use Law, specifically regarding natural resource protection:

- j. To promote the conservation of historic sites and districts, open space, energy resources and valuable natural resources in the State and to prevent urban sprawl and degradation of the environment through improper use of land;*

⁷⁰ New Jersey. 1975. Chapter 55D Planning, Zoning, Etc. *NJSA 40:55D-2 Purpose of the act*

WILDLIFE

The Study Area exhibits several distinct habitats, including wetlands, forested areas, stream corridors and grasslands. Each of these contributes to the diversity of the biological populations of the Township. The unique natural attributes of the Study Area have been recognized by the State, County and local jurisdictions.

NJ Natural Heritage

Readington's Natural Resource Inventory⁷¹ identifies several threatened and endangered species that have been sighted within the Township. These include birds, reptiles and plants. The inventory references the New Jersey Natural Heritage Database, which has identified the Study Area, specifically, as a priority site for conservation and protection of rare and endangered species and natural communities. The Office of Natural Lands Management (ONLM), within the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, has classified 389 sites in New Jersey that are critically important to the conservation of biological diversity within the State. The purpose of cataloguing these areas is to provide a resource for developers, local officials and conservation agencies to utilize in making decisions regarding such sites. *Natural Heritage Priority Sites* represent some of the best remaining habitat for rare species and exemplary natural habitats in the State. The ONLM expresses a clear policy recommendation for the disposition of Natural Heritage Priority Sites:

*These areas should be considered the top priorities for the preservation of biological diversity in New Jersey. If these sites become degraded or destroyed, we may lose some of the unique components of our natural heritage.*⁷²

The majority of the Study Area (Block 56 Lots 1, 3 & 6 & Block 67 Lot 2) is identified as a *Natural Heritage Priority Site*.⁷³

The Landscape Project

The New Jersey Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife has undertaken a new approach, which addresses a more comprehensive view of the landscape, in order to facilitate the preservation of rare species and wildlife habitats. This 1994 initiative is known as the *Landscape Project*. In

⁷¹ Readington Township Environmental Commission. 2001. *The Readington Township Natural Resources Inventory*. Princeton Hydro, LLC.

⁷² New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry, Office of Natural Lands Management. No date. *Frequently Asked Questions About Natural Heritage Priority Sites* (informational flyer)

⁷³ Thomas F. Breden, Supervisor, New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Division of Parks and Forestry, Office of Natural Lands Management. September 21, 2000. Letter and attachments to Suzanne Forbes (Princeton Hydro, LLC),

addressing species and habitat issues from a large-scale viewpoint, the goal of the Landscape Project is:

“...to protect New Jersey’s biological diversity by maintaining and enhancing rare wildlife populations within healthy, functioning ecosystems.”⁷⁴

The Landscape Project was designed to provide a sound basis for planning and land management at the State, County and local government levels.

In order to achieve this goal, the Landscape Project has focused on the larger “landscapes”, or unique regions within the State (Readington lies within the “skylands” region). Within each of these regions, a series of three land cover types were mapped. These were forests, wetlands and grasslands. Specifically, the project envisions that mapped information may be used to:

- ◆ Prioritize conservation acquisitions
- ◆ Guide regulators and planners
- ◆ Provide citizens with conservation tools
- ◆ Guide stewardship of already-conserved areas⁷⁵

The Natural Resources Inventory includes mapping from the Landscape Project that indicates 94.90% of the Study Area is defined as *critical habitat areas*. Areas of critical habitat are lands that support rare species in the State and that are adjacent to critical habitats that have already been preserved. The preservation of these areas would maintain large, contiguous blocks of rare species habitat. Critical habitat areas are ranked in descending order from 5-1 by the status of imperiled species present.⁷⁶

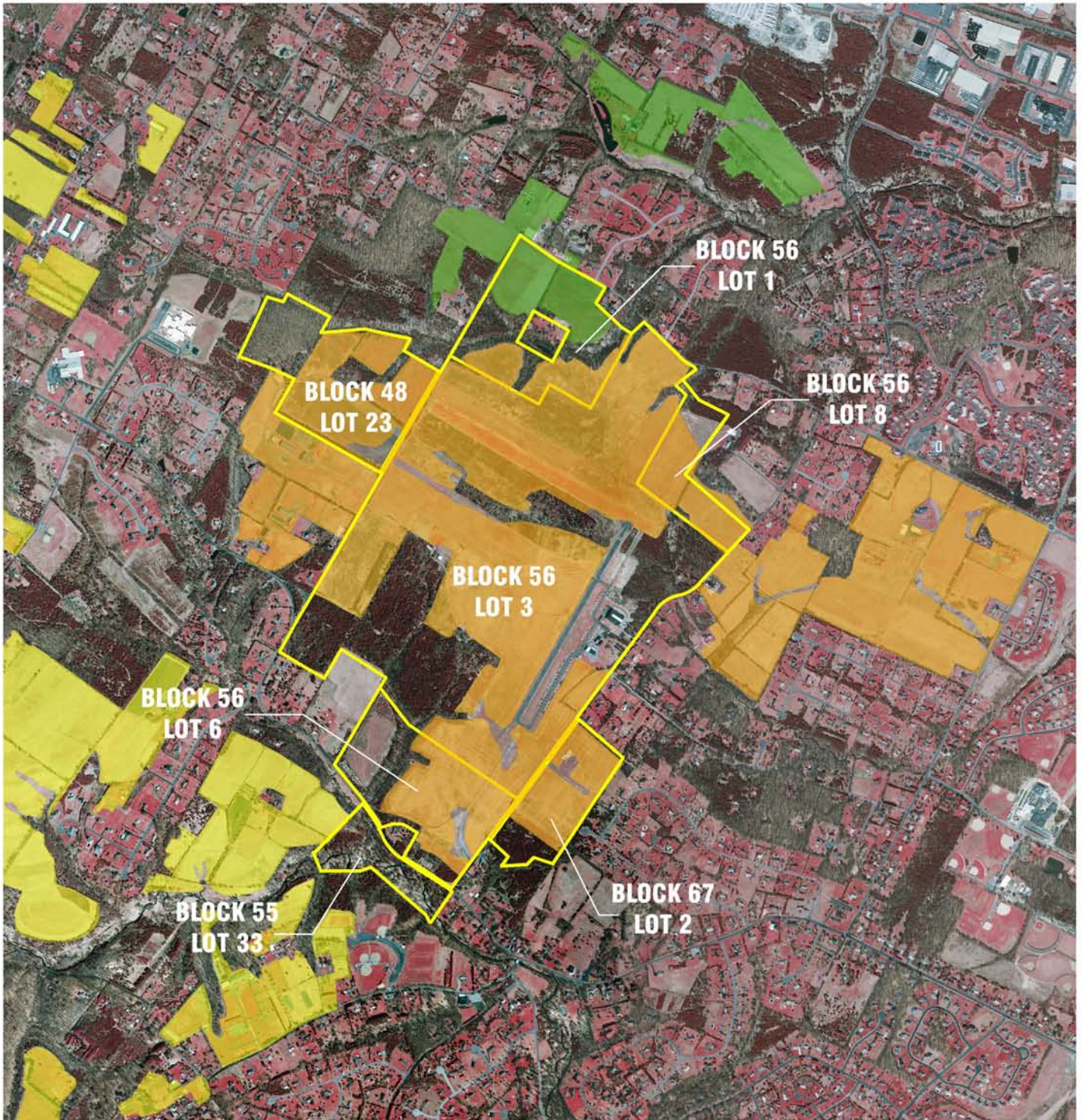
- ◆ Rank 5: One or more occurrences of at least one wildlife species listed as endangered or threatened on the Federal list of endangered and threatened species.
- ◆ Rank 4: One or more occurrences of at least one State endangered species.
- ◆ Rank 3: One or more occurrences of at least one State threatened species.
- ◆ Rank 2: One or more occurrences of at least one non-listed State priority species.
- ◆ Rank 1: Suitable habitat for threatened or priority wildlife species, no confirmed occurrences.

⁷⁴ New Jersey Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife. *The Landscape Project*.

<<http://www.state.nj.us/dep/fgw/lnandscape.htm>> Accessed on March 16, 2001.

⁷⁵ Niles L.J., Myers, J., Valent, M. No date. *The Landscape Project*. NJDEP. Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife. NJ Endangered and Nongame Species Program.

⁷⁶ New Jersey Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife. *The Landscape Project*.



Legend

- Suitable Habitat (Rank 1)
- Priority Concern (Rank 2)
- State Threatened Species (Rank 3)

Base Map Source: Studer and McEldowney,
PA 120 West Main St. Clinton, NJ 08809.
April 26, 2005

Information Source: New Jersey Department of
Environmental Protection (NJDEP), Division of Fish
Wildlife, Endangered Nongame Species Program



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Architecture

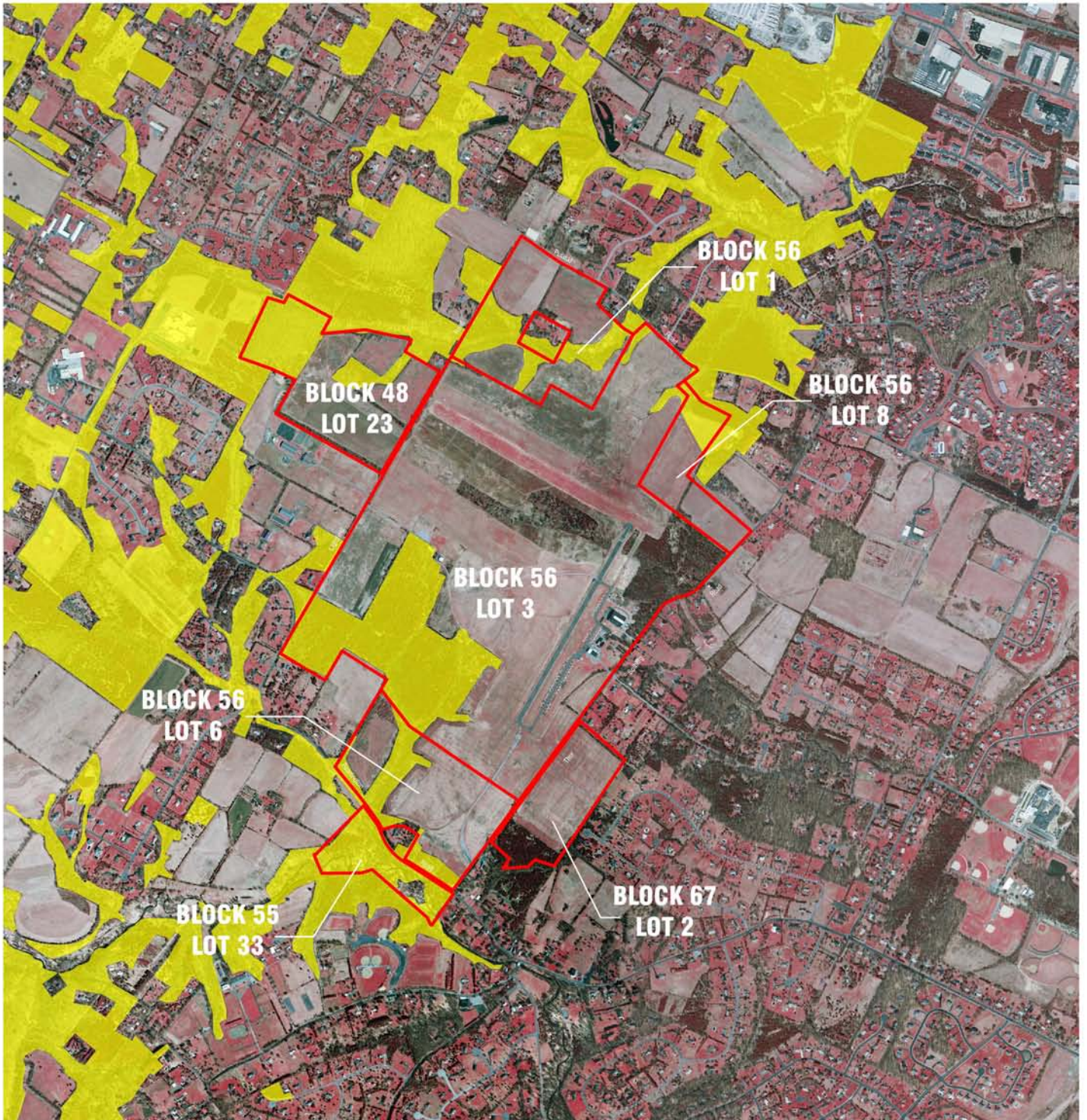
Planning

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Grasslands Habitat

Readington Township, Hunterdon County, NJ April 2006



Legend

 Priority Concern (Rank 2)

Base Map Source: Studer and McEldowney,
PA 120 West Main St. Clinton, NJ 08809,
April 26, 2005

Information Source: New Jersey Department of
Environmental Protection (NJDEP), Division of Fish
Wildlife, Endangered Nongame Species Program

0 250 500 1,000
Feet



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Architecture

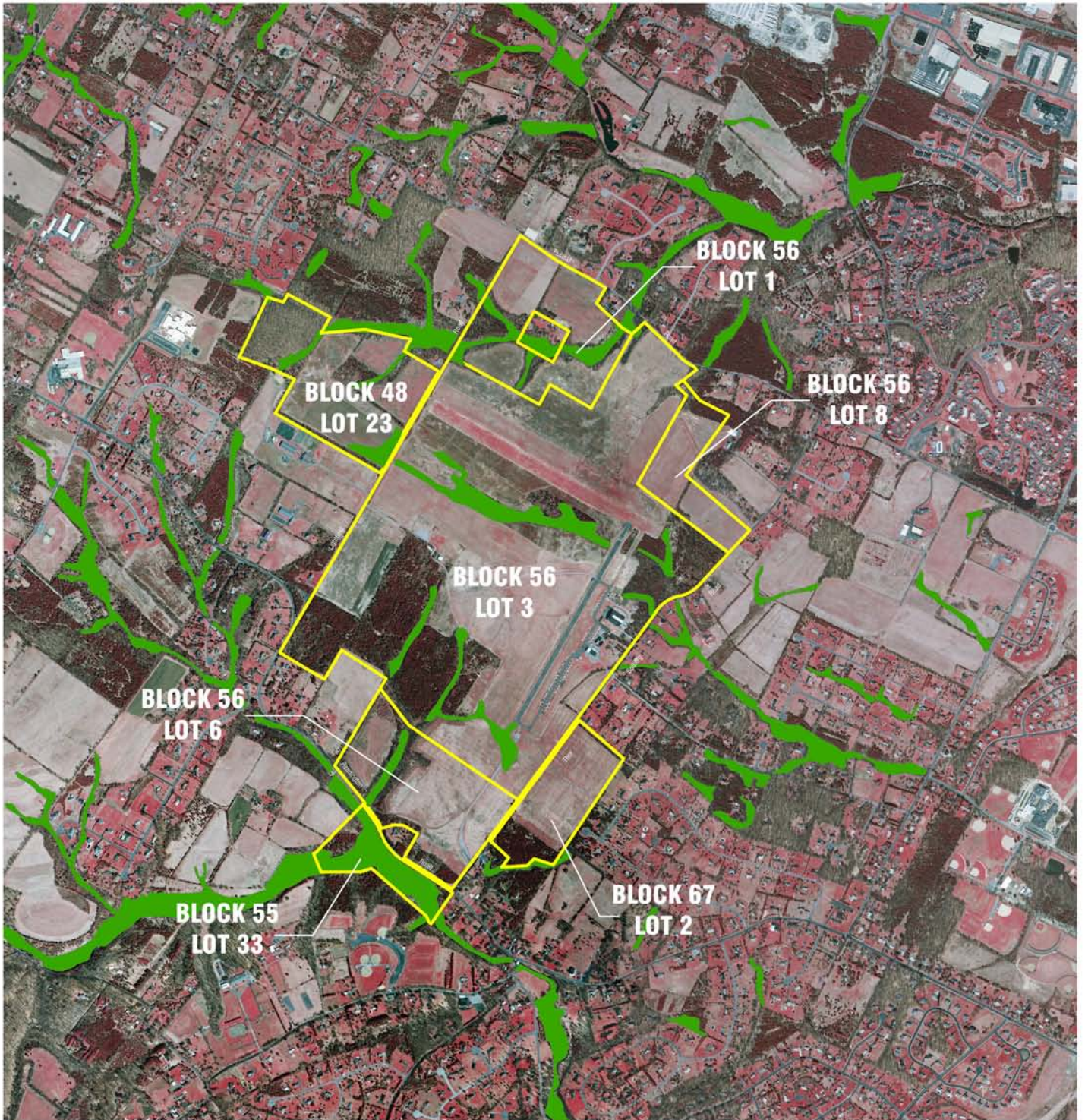
Planning

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Forested Habitat

Readington Township, Hunterdon County, NJ April 2006



Legend

 Suitable Habitat (Rank 1)

Base Map Source: Studer and McEldowney,
PA 120 West Main St. Clinton, NJ 08809.
April 26, 2005

Information Source: New Jersey Department of
Environmental Protection (NJDEP), Division of Fish
Wildlife, Endangered Nongame Species Program

500 250 0 500 1,000
Feet



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Emergent / Forested Wetlands Habitat

Readington Township, Hunterdon County, NJ April 2006

The Study Area includes 454.162 acres of Critical Grassland Habitat representing 62.52% of the total acreage. Rank 3 Grassland Habitat of high State priority is found within Block 48 Lot 23, Block 67 lot 2, Block 56 lot 6, Block 56 lot 3 and lot 8 which provides an important link to critical habitat out side the study area. Rank 2 critical Forested Habitat covers 155.588 acres, 21.42%, of the Study Area. Important links in the Critical Forested Habitat occur on Block 56 lot 1 and lot 6, and on Block 48 lot 23. Large Critical Forested patches occur on Block 56 lot 3 and Block 55 lot 33. Suitable wetland habitat including 66.32 acres of Critical Forested Wetland Habitat is interspersed throughout. An additional 13.307 acres of Emergent Wetlands Habitat is present which together with the Forested Wetlands represent 10.96% of the Study Area.

Benefits that are anticipated to be realized through the preservation of such lands, according to the New Jersey Division of Fish, Game & Wildlife, include provision of habitat for the conservation of rare species, provision of more open space for outdoor recreation, reduction in the potential for flooding, biodegradation of contaminants and ground water recharge.

Site Observations

In May and June of 2000 *Wander Ecological Consultants* (WEC) conducted a preliminary site investigation of the Study Area that consisted of a roadside survey and on-site observations on two occasions. The results of the surveys indicate that the Study Area “*support breeding populations of Bobolinks (T), Grasshopper Sparrows (T) and Savannah Sparrows.*” Going further, the report indicated “*the breeding population of Bobolinks is especially noteworthy as we have seldom encountered such a high density elsewhere in New Jersey.*”⁷⁷ In addition to identifying species that were on-site, WEC also noted that the habitat present on the site would also be suitable for the nesting of endangered species that were not directly or indirectly observed on-site. These endangered species include Upland Sandpiper, Henslow’s Sparrow and Vesper Sparrow.

Given the limited nature of WEC’s initial investigations, WEC has recommended that the properties be surveyed in a more comprehensive manner to detect threatened and endangered migrating species and for breeding and grassland species. A more detailed investigation has yet to be undertaken.

Threats to Habitat

Airport Operations

Lands surrounding airports are well suited to the lifestyles of many bird species, particularly grassland species. The areas around airport facilities are usually maintained in a mowed or field condition, to facilitate the safety of air transportation. These areas are also, usually, fairly flat. Relatively flat sites tend to pond water for periods that support insect populations and the feeding of birds. The combination of grasslands and ponding water is attractive to many species of birds.

⁷⁷ Wander Ecological Consultants. No date. *Survey for Threatened and Endangered Species of Grassland Birds at Solberg Airport, Readington Township, Hunterdon County, New Jersey.*, p. 2

Birds near an airport, however, are a threat to the safety of air transportation. Birds in flight can collide with aircraft, causing property damage or human casualties. In order to discourage the gathering of birds near and around airport facilities, certain measures may be implemented which are highly disruptive and environmentally damaging.

Examples of bird hazard mitigation techniques⁷⁸ used by one airport include the following:

- Aerial insecticide spraying to reduce insect populations that birds feed upon
- The firing of noise cannons in an intermittent cycle to frighten birds
- Removal of open water areas and wetlands
- Removal of roosting areas, such as groves of trees
- Planting and maintenance of species that are unattractive to birds
- Habitat manipulation to discourage use by birds

Such techniques are in opposition of public policies with respect to species habitat and wetlands. The practice of insecticide spraying may also contribute to the degradation of surface and subsurface water quality. Noise cannon emanations may exceed permitted noise levels. Public ownership of airport facilities can assure that responsible policies and practices, appropriate to the surrounding uses and consistent with applicable State and Federal airport regulations, are implemented.

Build-Out of the Study Area

Potential threats to the wildlife habitat within the Study Area would be realized in the case that the lands are converted from the airport use to another permitted use, such as a single-family residential development. Development pressures within this region have created a high demand for residential dwellings and have driven up the value of developable land (*see discussion under airport threats*). The open, relatively flat areas that predominate within the Study Area are extremely well suited to siting of homes and roads. These areas also contain the ecologically valuable grassland habitat. The development of a residential community on these lands would result in the removal and /or disturbance of the critical grassland habitat.

Habitat Preservation

In order to address the existing and potential threats to critical habitat within the Study Area, it is useful to survey policies of the State and methodologies that are recommended by the current planning literature. The State Plan⁷⁹ indicates specific policies to effectuate the preservation of wildlife and their habitats. These include:

⁷⁸ Hanna/Olin, Ltd. December 1988. *JFK Redevelopment Program: Investigational Studies*. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey,

⁷⁹ 2001 *State Plan*.

Biological Diversity

Policy 16 Contiguous Open Space

Preserve and restore the functional integrity of natural systems, including large contiguous tracts of forest, grasslands and other natural land, to protect biological diversity. P. 124

Policy 17 Corridors

Connect large contiguous tracts of forest, grasslands and other natural lands with stream and river corridors by corridors and greenways so as to enhance their functional integrity for biological diversity. P. 124

Policy 18 Critical Habitats⁸⁰

Identify Critical Habitats during the preparation of municipal plans to ensure coordination of planning efforts and to support State and local resource-protection efforts. P. 125

Policy 19 Resident and Migratory Threatened and Endangered Species

Identify and protect the habitats of resident and migratory threatened and endangered species. Manage the character, location and magnitude of growth and development in and adjacent to such habitats to avoid direct or indirect negative impacts on threatened or endangered species or their habitat. P. 125

The methodologies advanced by the American Planning Association (APA) regarding maintenance of biodiversity are consistent with the approach of the Landscape Project and with the policies of the New Jersey State Plan. The APA has compiled a guidebook on the preservation of species habitat. This text includes a discussion of the benefits of habitat protection, identifies threats to habitat conservation and describes steps that public agencies may take to effectuate meaningful habitat protection. Included among the discussion is a list of principles for habitat protection at the landscape scale:

⁸⁰ **Critical Habitat** means areas that are critical to maintaining New Jersey's **Biodiversity**, including those containing: (1) habitats of endangered or threatened plant or animal species, as determined by DEP and USEPA, (2) pristine waters designated by DEP as Category 1 waters and their watersheds within and above their pristine water segment, and trout production and trout maintenance waters and their watersheds, as designated by DEP (N.J.A.C. 7:9 et seq.), (3) coastal and freshwater wetlands as defined by DEP (N.J.A.C. 7:7A-1.4 and N.J.A.C. 7:7E-3.27) (4) prime forested areas, including mature stands of native species, (5) ridgelines, gorges and ravines, (6) grasslands, and (7) staging areas for migratory species., NJSDRP

1. *Maintain large intact patches of native vegetation by preventing fragmentation of those patches by development.*
2. *Establish priorities for species protection and protect habitats that constrain the distribution and abundance of those species.*
3. *Protect rare landscape elements. Guide development toward areas of landscape containing “common” features.*
4. *Maintain connections among wildlife habitats by identifying and protecting corridors for movement.*
5. *Maintain significant ecological processes in protected areas.*
6. *Contribute toward the regional persistence of rare species by protecting some of their habitat locally.*
7. *Balance the opportunity for recreation by the public with the habitat needs of wildlife.*⁸¹

The size of, and environmental conditions present on, the Study Area constitute a significant portion of the network of wildlife habitat and corridors within Readington and Hunterdon County. Sightings of threatened, and possibly endangered, species habitat on the Study Area suggests that Readington should be actively pursuing a habitat conservation objective on these lands. The Readington Township Natural Resource Inventory, the NJ Natural Heritage database and the mapping produced in New Jersey’s Landscape Project identify the Study Area as a critical wildlife habitat. Acquisition of land by a public agency is touted as one of the most effective ways to preserve wildlife habitat among several mechanisms contained in the American Planning Association report. Preservation of this habitat within the Study Area would be consistent with municipal, county and state policies regarding wildlife habitat protection.

⁸¹ American Planning Association Planning Advisory Service. 1997. *Habitat Protection Planning: Where the Wild Things Are*, II.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

Readington Village

The village of Readington sits at the southern corner of the Study Area, at the intersection of Readington Road and Hillcrest Road. It is a quaint hamlet characterized by colonial structures. Readington is listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is situated along the Holland Brook corridor. The open space associated with the Holland Brook and the Study Area comprise a green environs that frames the village's unique historical character. Readington Township's policies with respect to the relationship between the open spaces around Readington village were made clear in the 1998 Master Plan Amendment.⁸² Within the 1998 Master Plan, the Planning Board acknowledged that the maintenance of Readington village's historic character was, partially, attributed to the large expanses of adjacent open space associated with the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport. Going further, the Planning Board cited the preservation of this open space "greenbelt" around Readington Village as a Township land use goal.

Other Historic Sites

In addition to the village of Readington, there are three individual sites directly adjacent to the Study Area that are identified within the 1990 Master Plan as sites of historic interest. These are:

- | | | |
|----|------------------------------------|------------------|
| 1. | Farmstead, Readington Road | Block 56, Lot 4 |
| 2. | Stryker Farmstead, Readington Road | Block 56, Lot 5 |
| 3. | Farmstead, Pulaski Road | Block 39, Lot 21 |

Readington Township Master Plan, 1990⁸³

The 1990 Master Plan contains the following goals and policies with respect to the preservation of historic resources:

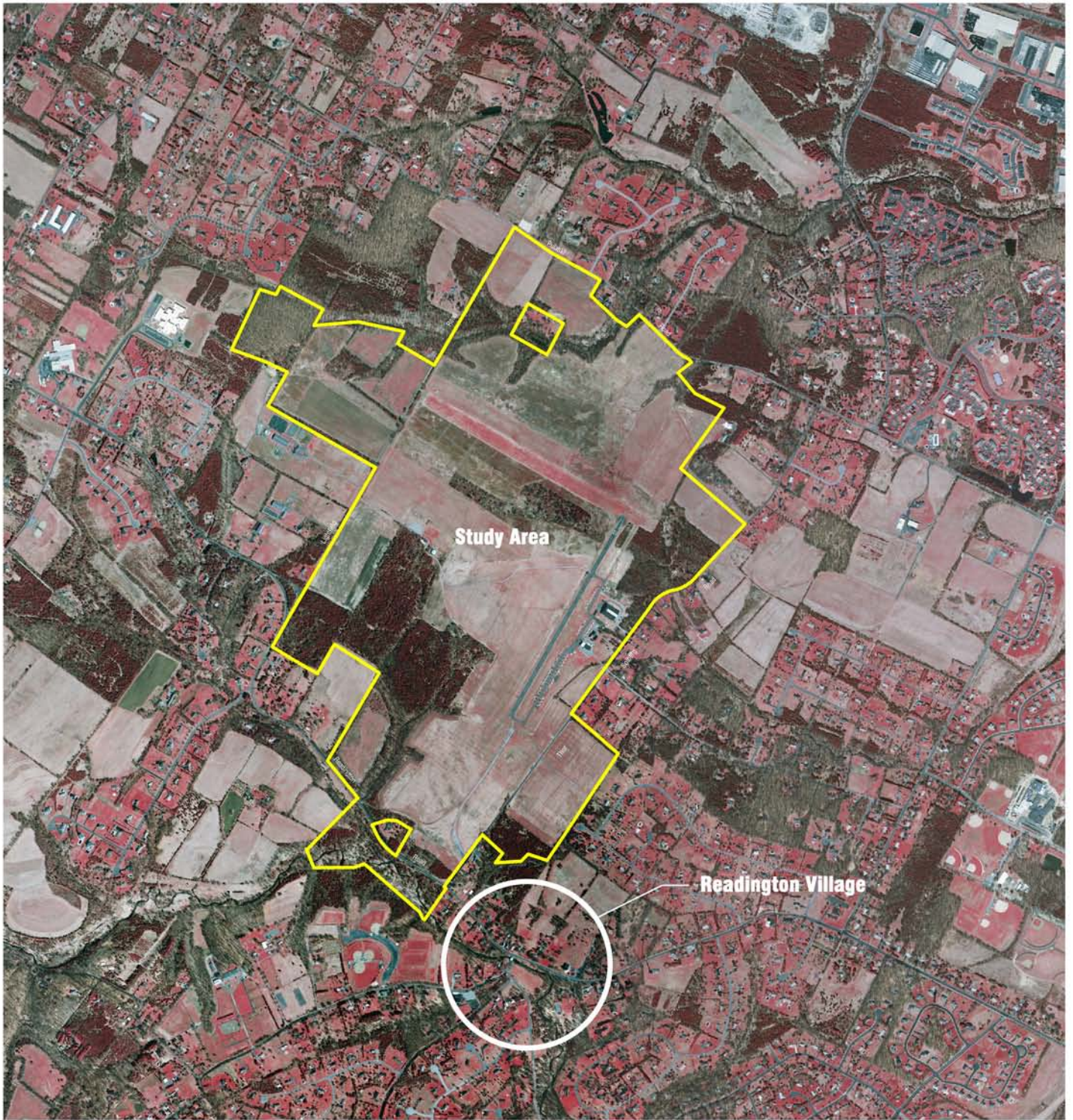
Historic Preservation

Goal: Preserve and protect sites and villages of significant historic interest for present and future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Policies: Encourage the preservation and restoration of structures and villages of significant historic interest. p. 8

⁸² Readington Township Planning Board, 1998. *Amendment to the Master Plan, Township of Readington, VIII-13*

⁸³ Township of Readington. 1990. *Master Plan*



STUDY AREA
Readington Village Location

Readington Township, Hunterdon County, NJ April 2006

Aerial Photo Source: State of New Jersey, Office of Information Technology New Jersey 2002 High Resolution Orthophotography captured during February-April, 2002

500 250 0 500 1,000
Feet



Clarke Caton Hintz

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Landscape Architecture

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Fax: (609) 875-9144
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*Nine areas of historic interest in Readington Township were identified by this study and the significant structures found in each area were identified by block and lot number and briefly described. These nine areas include Centerville, Pleasant Run, Potterstown, Reading Mills, **Readington Village**, Stanton, Three Bridges, Whitehouse and Whitehouse Station. P.109*

State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP)⁸⁴

The New Jersey State Plan provides support for historic preservation:

Statewide Goals and Strategies

7. Preserve and Enhance Areas with Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Value

Strategy

Enhance, preserve and use historic, cultural, scenic and recreational assets by collaborative planning, design, investment and management techniques. Locate and design development and redevelopment and supporting infrastructure to improve access to and protect these sites. Support the important role of the arts in contributing to community life and civic beauty. P 67

Statewide Policies

9. Historic, Cultural and Scenic Resources

Policy 6 Historic Resources and Infrastructure

Locate and design public and private capital improvements to protect historic resources and their settings from the immediate and cumulative effects of construction and maintenance of these improvements. P. 117

Policy 11 Development Patterns and Design to Support Scenic and Historic Values

Manage development and redevelopment to maintain, complement and enhance scenic and historic values within identified and delineated scenic and historic corridors. P. 117

⁸⁴ 2001 State Plan.

Policy 12 Protection and Preservation of Scenic and Historic Corridors

Protect scenic and historic corridors by appropriate means and preserve them by using easement purchase, density transfers, fee simple purchase and other innovative and effective mechanisms. P. 117

The Municipal Land Use Law⁸⁵

Readington's acquisition and preservation of the Study Area would advance the purposes of the Municipal Land Use Law regarding historic preservation:

- j. To promote the conservation of historic sites and districts, open space, energy resources and valuable natural resources in the State and to prevent urban sprawl and degradation of the environment through improper use of land;*

Historic preservation and open space policies of Readington and New Jersey support the stewardship of the historic village of Readington and the adjacent individual historic sites. It is clear from the 1990 Master Plan that the integrity of the historic character of Readington Village is dependent upon the maintenance of the relationship of the village to the contiguous open spaces. Municipal acquisition of the Study Area would ensure that such a relationship is maintained.

⁸⁵ New Jersey. 1975. Chapter 55D Planning, Zoning, Etc. *NJSA 40:55D-2 Purpose of the act*

AIRPORT PRESERVATION

Existing Airport Facilities

The largest tract within the Study Area contains Solberg-Hunterdon Airport, a level 3 general aviation facility. Users of Solberg-Hunterdon include single & light twin-engine planes, piston craft, turbo-prop, turbo jet, sailplanes and hot air balloons. There is no helicopter pad. The paved runway is designed for 12,500 lb aircraft with single-wheel landing gear. The airport contains the following elements⁸⁶:

- ◆ One (1) Paved runway that is 3,735 feet long x 183 feet wide (paved area is 3,000' x 50')
- ◆ One (1) turf crosswind runway, 2,456' x 160'
- ◆ One (1) turf crosswind runway, 3,440' x 200'
- ◆ One (1) turf restricted runway / Glider, 2,000' x 250'
- ◆ Taxiway parallel to paved runway
- ◆ Two-story terminal of 5,000 sf
- ◆ Paved parking area for 80 vehicles
- ◆ Community hangar for 20 airplanes
- ◆ Maintenance hangar that is 90' x 50'
- ◆ six (6) paved transient plane parking spaces
- ◆ six (6) turf transient plane parking spaces
- ◆ 50 paved tie-down spaces
- ◆ 65 turf parking spaces
- ◆ 2-10,000 gallon underground fuel tanks
- ◆ VORTAC navigational aid

Airport Threats

Recent trends indicate that small, privately-owned general aviation airports are succumbing to development pressure. This has been documented in the 1998 study by the General Aviation Study Commission⁸⁷ that was commissioned by the legislature in 1993, which identified threats to the continued operation of private, general use airports in New Jersey:

1. Reasons Why New Jersey's Airports Have Closed

a. Insufficient Net Income and Poor Return On Investment

-Low rate of return on the capital invested in the airport facility and insufficient net income. Factors causing low net income include: (1) high property taxes; (2)

⁸⁶ D&Z Transportation Services. 1997. *Solberg-Hunterdon Airport Master Plan*.

⁸⁷ State of New Jersey. 1998. *Report of the New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission*

significant costs associated with regulatory compliance; and (3) the inordinate expense and resistance of municipalities when attempting to expand or improve an airport. Inadequate return on investment is further substantiated by the fact that not a single new airport has been established in New Jersey in the last 20 years, while many airports have closed p.30

-The commission found no evidence of any community in New Jersey giving financial support to its privately owned public use airport, even though the benefits brought to the community by the airport outweigh the actual costs the community incurs from hosting the airport. Nor does the great economic benefit that the airport brings to the community provide a reciprocal economic benefit to the airport owner. Yet, it is the owner's personal business economic gains or losses that determine the long-term viability of an airport in a community. Private airport owners cannot continually endure the expense of providing airports that only benefit the public p.30

b. Increasing Land Values and Residential Development

-The available evidence strongly suggests that privately owned, public use general aviation facilities are closing because the owners receive a relatively low return on the large amount of capital tied up in the real estate. It is obvious that airport owners, earning less than five percent on their capital, can earn much greater net income by selling their real estate, paying capital gains taxes and reinvesting the balance in the public money markets. The majority of the airports that have closed in New Jersey since the 1950s became sites for new residential or industrial development. None of these airports has reverted to farm use or returned to wetlands or swamps from which they were claimed p.31

c. Burden of Real Estate Taxes

-Property taxes are related to, indeed a function of, the airport owner's high capital investment in land and improvements. While the owner's income from the airport is negligible, the land and improvements on it are quite valuable. The airport's land is appraised at its highest and best use. The taxing of improvements often discourages airport owners from planning any new improvements (31).

-Farmers, like airport owners, have seen the value of their property increase, too. When operating profits of farms, similar to airports, could not keep pace with these rising property values, New Jersey demonstrated its commitment to its farms, helping to preserve its limited open space through the enactment of the Farmland Preservation Act. Many of the airport owners that testified before the Commission strongly expressed that similar action was needed to prevent high property taxes from closing more of the State's general aviation airports p.32

Private airport owners identified the following problems as the rationale behind airport closures:

-The most common reasons given by private owners for why their airports might close are property taxes, municipal opposition and/or interference, financial considerations, pressure from neighboring residents and, in some instances, the age of the owner who is nearing retirement. p.89

The report goes on to summarize the conclusions of the Commission with respect to the prognosis for airports in New Jersey:

*The Problem*⁸⁸

New Jersey's 48 general aviation airports are in peril. New Jersey has irrevocably lost half of its aviation infrastructure, 53 airports, since the end of the Second World War. While New Jersey's sister states are expanding their general aviation infrastructure and attracting new businesses, today, there are only six airports in New Jersey that reasonably can be expected to support modern business aircraft. Each airport closing has significant economic, tourism and open-space preservation implications for the State. Currently, nearly 70,500 people are employed directly and indirectly because of the State's general aviation industry. Many of New Jersey's general aviation airports help preserve and protect the open space, woodlands and wetlands that they encompass. By contrast, there are now housing and commercial developments where airports once stood.

New Jersey has the highest number of people per airport in the nation. It has the second-largest percentage of privately owned public use airports in the United States. Its airports are of outdated design and are deteriorating after decades of State neglect. Despite recent increases, New Jersey continues to rank poorly compared to other states in expenditures for airport improvements. Private owners of public use airports - many of whom are second generation - are fighting a losing battle, dealing with often-conflicting regulatory oversight of State agencies and hostile municipalities. Too often, their profits are low or disappear due to high property taxes. They are continually tempted to close the airport, sell their greatly appreciated land to developers and earn greater income effortlessly by investing the proceeds in the public money markets. p.1

General Aviation Airport Closures

With reference to P.L. 1993, ch. 336 §1(b), the Legislature determined that nine general aviation facilities of regional significance had closed in recent years. Through its study, the Commission determined that 53 general aviation airports have closed in New Jersey since 1952. In 1952, 87 percent of the airports were privately owned. This attrition is a direct function of that private ownership. The leading cause of

⁸⁸ Report of the New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission

these airport closures are high property taxes, refusal of the host community to allow these businesses to evolve, and the growing temptation to sell airport land for non-airport uses due to increased real estate values. It can be anticipated that privately owned public use airports will continue to close at the historic rate. If allowed to continue, the closure of these general aviation facilities will ultimately result in an irreversible economic slowdown that will have far-reaching effects on the State's economy; irreversible because once airport land is lost to non-airport development and use, it is lost forever. p.9

Given these findings, the report recommends that there be a statewide airport preservation program to support private airports.

A technical report prepared for the New Jersey Office of Aviation contains a specific recommendation regarding the measures that should be taken to preserve Level 3 airports:

The threatened loss of privately owned Level 3 airports would require that the purchase of that facility by a public sector entity should take place unless the facility could be replaced by expanding another airport⁸⁹

As a public entity, the acquisition of the Solberg-Hunterdon airport by Readington would be consistent with this recommendation.

Development Pressure

The findings of the Commission are substantiated by data for Readington Township, Hunterdon County and the municipalities in the immediate vicinity of Solberg-Hunterdon Airport that indicate the amount of open space and farmland that has been converted to “urban use”, or, in other words, has been developed.

Open Space & Agricultural Lands Converted to Urban Use 1986-1995			
	Open Space Converted (acres)	Agricultural Lands Converted (acres)	Total Lands Converted (acres)
Hunterdon County	4,035	7,086	11,121
<i>Clinton Township</i>	400	723	1,123
<i>Raritan Township</i>	1,438	433	1,871
<i>Readington Township</i>	1,283	894	2,177
Somerset County	5,329	4,432	9,761
<i>Branchburg Township</i>	285	799	1,084

Source: NJ Department of Environmental Protection Geographic Information System. Exploring New Jersey's Watersheds . Mapping the Present to Protect the Future". Series 2, Vol. 2

⁸⁹ Office of Aviation, New Jersey Department of Transportation. No Date (1991-1992?). *New Jersey State Aviation System Plan: Final Technical Report*. EMJ/McFarland-Johnson Engineers, Inc. in association with Proctor/Davis/Ray Engineers Inc. and R.A. Wiedemann & Associates. P.4

Percentage of Open Space & Agricultural Lands Converted to Urban Use 1986-1995			
	Open Space Converted	Agricultural Lands Converted	Total Lands Converted
Hunterdon County	4 %	7.1%	5.6%
<i>Clinton Township</i>	5.3%	12.9%	8.5 %
<i>Raritan Township</i>	33.7 %	5.2 %	14.2 %
<i>Readington Township</i>	13.2 %	8.6 %	11 %
Somerset County	9.8 %	9.9%	9.9 %
<i>Branchburg Township</i>	12.2 %	18.1 %	16.1 %

Source: NJ Department of Environmental Protection Geographic Information System. *Exploring New Jersey's Watersheds . Mapping the Present to Protect the Future". Series 2, Vol. 2*

Data from the 2000 census and population projections through 2005 indicate that the population in the municipalities that are closest to the study area has been growing at a significant rate, thus increasing the pressure to create new housing in this area.

Population Change 1980-2005				
	1980 Census Persons	2000 Census Persons	2005 NJTPA Projections	Percent Change
Hunterdon County	87,361	121,989	130,700	+49.6 %
<i>Clinton Township</i>	7,345	12,957	14,630	+99.2 %
<i>Raritan Township</i>	8,292	19,809	23,130	+179 %
<i>Readington Township</i>	10,855	15,803	16,330	+50.4 %
Somerset County	203,129	297,490	315,900	+55.5 %
<i>Branchburg Township</i>	7,846	14,566	14,850	+89.2 %

Source: United States Bureau of the Census. 2001. *Population by Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin for New Jersey Municipalities: 1990 and 2000*. Washington, DC. Obtained through the New Jersey State Data web page@ <http://www.state.nj.us/labor/lra/njsdc.htm>. New Jersey Data. Accessed on March 21, 2001.
<http://wnjpin.state.nj.us/OneStopCareerCenter/LaborMarketInformation/lm101/pop8090.htm>. New Jersey Data. Accessed on May 9, 2001.
Source: NJTPA: North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority 2030 projections
http://www.njtpa.org/planning/forecasting_public_docs/FinalMCD_forecasts.PDF

The Study Area is located within north central New Jersey, an area that is on the edge of a westward advance of suburban sprawl emanating from the New York metropolitan core. Jobs emigrating from the older cities have been followed by homes and roads that are eating away at open space and farmland. Farmlands and open space are being transformed into suburban bedroom communities, seemingly overnight. With the surge in demand for new homes in Hunterdon County and Readington Township, the value of developable land has increased sharply. This increase in value exerts growing pressure on landowners to sell their property to developers seeking to convert land into residential subdivisions. The decline of vacant land, the increase in population and the growth in residential lots in Somerset and Hunterdon Counties

illustrate the manner in which development is progressing in the area surrounding Hunterdon-Solberg-Hunterdon Airport.

Home Sales: 1990 – 2004					
	1990 Average	1995 Average	2000 Average	2004 Average	1990-2004 percentage increase
Clinton Twp	\$237,451	\$232,322	\$254,723	\$374,325	57.6 %
Raritan Twp	\$184,816	\$191,197	\$217,621	\$326,094	76.4 %
Readington Twp	\$228,818	\$218,052	\$253,365	\$401,157	75.3 %
Branchburg Twp	\$214,642	\$196,786	\$255,053	\$370,231	72.5 %

Source: NJ Department of the Treasury. Division of Taxation. Usable Sales Data
(<http://www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/rpt/classzavgsales.htm>) Accessed March 21, 2006.

The Study Area represents a real potential for future residential development. Present zoning of the tract, AR Agricultural Residential and RR Rural Residential, permits the development of single-family residential housing at densities of 5 du/acre and 3 du/acre respectively. Physical characteristics of the Study Area include gently sloped open areas conducive to the development of a residential subdivision. Although there are areas of woodlands, streams and wetlands that pose environmental and practical constraints as shown on the Environmental Inventory Plan cited above, a substantial portion of the tract remains suited to residential construction.

Benefits of Airports

Although the Commission Report included research concerning the problems confronting the continued operation of airports and proposed some broad strategies for retaining airports in the State, the *Report of the New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission* in 1998 also summarized the public benefits of general aviation airports:

The Benefits of New Jersey's General Aviation Airports⁹⁰

With a total economic impact of \$1.7 billion to the State, individual general aviation airports have a substantial economic impact on their communities and contribute essential business-related services. Usually the community is unaware of its airport's economic contribution. New Jersey's airports are a significant factor in corporate relocation decisions for both small and large businesses. Companies such as AT&T, Lucent Technologies, Warner Lambert, Johnson & Johnson, Merck, AlliedSignal, BASF, Schering-Plough, Union Camp, American Home Products and many others rely on general aviation airports in the State.

⁹⁰ Report of the New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission

New Jersey's general aviation infrastructure also provides many health, welfare and social benefits. Members of the medical community, schools, fire and emergency services, law enforcement, tour operators (and other related travel services) and traffic surveillance also benefit from and utilize the State's general aviation airports. p.2

Role of Reliever Airports

With reference to P.L. 1993, ch. 336 §1(c), the Commission was charged with reviewing the role of reliever airports in New Jersey. Reliever airports in New Jersey are general aviation airports designated by the Administrator of the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) to relieve congestion at Newark and Philadelphia International airports. They are vital since they serve as alternative landing areas for general aviation traffic during inclement weather and help to ease crowded airspace situations. They are also eligible for certain Federal Airport Improvement Program (AIP) Funds.

Officials of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey testified that New Jersey's reliever airports are important and that they must be preserved and enhanced to handle the growth in the region's air traffic. The two leading obstacles to an integrated regional airspace system are airspace sharing and funding for ground infrastructure. Adequate funding mechanisms for both air carrier and reliever facilities are essential to support the growth of air commerce in the New York-New Jersey-Philadelphia region.

According to the Port Authority, the demands placed on the primary airports, Newark, JFK and La Guardia, often exceed the capacity of those airports. These three airports handle 5,000 flights per day, approximately one-tenth of the national total. Additionally, these airports are unable to accommodate general aviation aircraft without incurring expensive delays for commercial airlines and the traveling public. For every year but one since 1991, Newark International Airport has been the worst airport in the nation for delays in scheduled airline service, with six to nine percent of its flights delayed (28,454 flights arrived late because of congestion at Newark in 1996). In 1997, La Guardia ranked as the second worst in the nation and JFK ranked ninth. The delays at Newark inconvenienced approximately four million passengers in 1996. The Administrator of the FAA, speaking about delays at Newark, stated that "[people] are terribly upset about the delays. [They] have missed appointments, missed conferences and missed connections." It is estimated that delays cost the airlines more than a billion dollars annually. p.9

In addition to documenting the benefits derived from the service provided by airports, the Commission also found that more passive benefits could be realized through open space preservation:

Preservation of Open Space⁹¹

General aviation airfields give municipalities the opportunity to preserve open space, a problem becoming increasingly more pressing with the growth of the State. During the Commission's hearings, not one municipality indicated that it would prefer its airport to be a residential or commercial development. In the more rural municipalities, this benefit may not be appreciated fully since the areas surrounding the airports are typically farmland. However, the densely populated municipalities hosting an airport were unanimous in the desire to avoid another housing development. p.24

These findings from the executive summary of the report document the trends that are leading to the demise of general aviation airports in the State and some of the benefits associated with the existence of these facilities. A more detailed description of the factors leading to airport closings is also included within the report:

State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP)⁹²

The New Jersey State Plan also contains statewide policies regarding the preservation and operation of transportation and air facilities in New Jersey. These policies include recommendations for protection of aviation facilities, but also encourage integration of land use planning with transportation facilities. It also seeks to ensure that natural and scenic resources are protected during any improvements to transportation facilities.

8. Transportation

Policy 1 Transportation Maintenance and Repair

The maintenance and repair of the existing transportation network is the highest transportation priority. p. 112

Policy 4 Integration of Land Use and Transportation Planning

Establish a working partnership between transportation agencies, municipal, county and regional governments and the private development community to strengthen the linkages between land use planning and transportation planning for all modes of transportation including mass transit, highways, rail, aviation, passenger ferry service and port facilities. Transportation system improvements and good land use planning practices must be mutually supportive. p. 113

⁹¹ Report of the New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission

⁹² 2001 State Plan.

Policy 5 Transportation and Environmental Resource Protection

Coordinate transportation planning and project development with environmental planning through a capital planning process. Before programming for construction, evaluate the direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of installing transportation improvements and of the development that these improvements may support or induce to ensure that they accommodate and protect sensitive environmental resources. p. 113

Policy 8 Transportation and Aesthetics

Incorporate aesthetic values in capital planning, design and maintenance of transportation systems and corridors. p. 113

Policy 9 Transportation and Context Sensitive Design

Promote flexible transportation design standards and flexible application of standards which take into consideration the needs of people and the design and natural characteristics of adjacent areas. p. 114

Policy 11 Aviation Facilities

Preserve and protect New Jersey's public use aeronautical facilities to maintain statewide access to the global air transportation network. Enhance those facilities for goods and people to maintain the viability of the airport to meet its role in the transportation system and where appropriate to act as a stimulus for the regional economy. Provide adequate land use management for those areas immediately surrounding public use airports through air safety zones, master plans, capital plans, official maps and development regulations. p. 114

PA-4 Rural Planning Area

*(4) **Transportation:** Maintain and enhance a rural transportation system that links Centers to each other and to the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas. Provide appropriate access of agricultural products to markets, accommodating the size and weight of modern agricultural equipment. In Centers, emphasize the use of public transportation systems and alternatives to private cars where appropriate and feasible, and maximize circulation and mobility options throughout. Support the preservation of general aviation airports as integral parts of the State's transportation system. p. 178*

Public Ownership of Airports

Currently, there are eight (8) airports in the State that are under municipal ownership. These represent 15% of the 53 public use airports in New Jersey. Four of these are operated by their respective municipalities, with those remaining being operated by an agency other than the local government.

New Jersey Public Use Airports area Owned/Operated by Municipalities			
Airport	Owner	Operator	Location
Bader Field	Atlantic City	Atlantic City	Atlantic City, Atlantic County
Hammonton Municipal Airport	Hammonton	Hammonton	Hammonton, Atlantic County
Lakewood Airport	Lakewood	Lakewood	Lakewood, Ocean County
Linden Airport	Linden	Linden Airport Municipal Development Corporation	Linden, Union County
Millville Municipal Airport	Millville	Delaware River Bay Authority	Millville, Cumberland County
Morristown Municipal Airport	Morristown	D.M. Airport Developers, Inc.	Morristown, Morris County
Ocean City Municipal Airport	Ocean City	Ocean City	Ocean City, Cape May County
Woodbine Airport	Woodbine	Woodbine Port Authority	Woodbine, Cape May County

Given the suitability of the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport site for residential development, growing development pressures (as well as the marginal nature of such operations cited in the literature) threaten the continuing operation and existence of the Solberg - Hunterdon Airport. Recent trends indicate that owners of smaller privately owned general aviation airports are giving in to development pressure. Loss of farmland in the towns around the airport illustrates the effect of development pressure that raises land values and threatens the existence of small airports. These threats, and the public benefit derived from general aviation airports, have been documented within the *Report of the New Jersey General Aviation Study Commission*, and have been acknowledged through the New Jersey State Plan policies. Municipal acquisition of the airport would ensure its continued operation and, therefore, would advance the public purposes that have been described herein.

The Township has commissioned an independent evaluation by GRA Associates, airport consultants, regarding an analysis of benefits of municipal ownership of the airport operations proper in a report entitled *Analysis of the Benefits of Readington Township's Ownership of Solberg Airport*. The conclusions of that report are consistent with the findings herein and are incorporated as an appendix item.

Consistent with the policies and objectives discussed above, municipal ownership and control of airport facilities is specifically authorized by the New Jersey Constitution and several state statutes in order to accomplish the benefits of municipal ownership and control of airport facilities:

N.J.S.A.40:8-1. (Authorizing acquisition of lands for airports and leases to airport operators)

N.J.S.A.40:8-2. (Authorizing acquisition and ownership of municipal airports)

N.J.S.A.40:8-4 and *N.J.S.A.40:8-5* (authorizing airport acquisitions)

N.J.S.A.6:1-89 *et seq.* (contemplating municipal acquisition of airports)

N.J.S.A. 6:1-90 (authorizing airport preservation through acquisition)

N.J.S.A.40: 81, et seq. (establishing authority for municipal acquisition, ownership, operation, leasing, and joint ownership with other municipalities of airport facilities).

COMMUNITY CHARACTER

Readington's visual and spatial character is predominantly rural and agricultural-defined by extensive farmlands; narrow and winding lanes; one-lane bridges; wooded stream corridors; and sweeping views of the hills that mark the edge of the Highlands. The relatively dense villages of Whitehouse Station, Readington, Whitehouse, Three Bridges and Stanton punctuate this rural fabric with 18th and 19th century buildings organized around historical crossroads. The Study Area constitutes a representative component of this network of scenic open spaces and farmlands.

Throughout Readington's 20+ year history of open space and farmland preservation the supporting policy documents have recognized that preservation of the undeveloped lands preserves Readington's community character. The 1998 Master Plan Amendments and the 2000 Photographic Tour⁹³ acknowledge the value of protecting the *genius loci* (sense of place) that is expressed through the patterns of open space and farmland within the Township.

Hunterdon County has also developed land use policies to protect historic character, as indicated earlier within this report. (See *Open Space & Farmland Preservation*, p.3) In 1999 the Hunterdon County Planning Board went beyond the general policy language regarding preservation of the Hunterdon County's rural character, releasing a guidebook that contains a series of land use planning and site design approaches. This booklet, entitled *Preserving Community Character in Hunterdon County: A Community Design Handbook*, includes a framework for establishing a vision of community character and implementing that vision through design guidelines. The publication of this document underscores Hunterdon County's commitment to preservation of its character.



Statewide and design policies within the New Jersey State Plan also support the preservation of scenic resources:

⁹³ Readington Township Planning Board. 2000. *Photographic Tour of the Agricultural Residential Zone*.

9. Historic, Cultural and Scenic Resources

Protect, enhance, and where appropriate rehabilitate historic, cultural and scenic resources by identifying, evaluating and registering significant historic, cultural and scenic landscapes, districts, structures, buildings, objects and sites, and ensuring that new growth and development is compatible with historic, cultural and scenic values. (p.116)

Policy 11 Development Patterns and Design to Support Scenic and Historic Values

Manage development and redevelopment to maintain, complement and enhance scenic and historic values within identified and delineated scenic and historic corridors. (p.117)

Policy 12 Protection and Preservation of Scenic and Historic Corridors

Protect scenic and historic corridors by appropriate means and preserve them by using easement purchase, density transfers, fee simple purchase and other innovative and effective mechanisms. (p.117)

Policy 10 Respecting Local Context and its Vernacular

Acknowledge and incorporate local history, climate, ecology, topography, building materials, building practices and local scale into the design of the built environment and the protection of the natural environment, where practicable and cost-effective. (p145)

Policy 17 Managing Corridors

Design corridors, including rivers, greenways, transit and roadways, to connect communities in ways that preserve rights of way, protect viewsheds, and encourage gateways and distinct transitions between communities. (p146)

The Municipal Land Use Law⁹⁴

Included among the expressed purposes of the Municipal Land Use Law is the promotion of a desirable visual environment:

- i. To promote a desirable visual environment through creative development techniques and good civic design and arrangements;*

⁹⁴ New Jersey. 1975. *Municipal Land Use Law*, NJSA 40:55D-2

The character exhibited by the Study Area has been deemed to be desirable by the residents of Readington. Land use policies of the Township, Hunterdon County and the State of New Jersey support the preservation of the Study Area for the purpose of preserving community character. Municipal acquisition and preservation of the Study Area would advance the public purpose of preserving community character.

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Study Area contains a unique combination of physical characteristics bundled together on four tracts within the northeastern edge of Readington. These characteristics include: 726 acres of gross tract area; 668 acres of open space (agriculture, woodlands, wetlands, grasslands); a general use airport; critical wildlife habitat; large areas of highly suitable agricultural soils; and environmentally sensitive components (wetlands, streams, floodplains). Preservation of these elements would be consistent with the land use policies of Readington Township, Hunterdon County and New Jersey. Municipal acquisition of the Study Area would permit Readington to achieve those specific public benefits.

The Study area is extremely well suited for agriculture. The land is gently sloped. Prime farmland soils comprise 54.8% of the site and farmland soils of state importance comprise 37.7% of the site. 668 acres of the area is assessed as agriculture. Acquisition of the study area could ensure preservation of these lands as agriculture.

Solberg-Hunterdon Airport occupies 87 acres of the Study Area. While the actual airport facilities occupy only 11% of the Study Area, the open spaces around the airport are necessary, in large part, for safe operation of aircraft. New Jersey has declared that small, private airports are under increasing development pressures. Acquisition of the study area will ensure preservation of the airport in perpetuity.

Open space within the Study Area appears well suited to passive recreation, particularly within the wooded areas and stream corridors. A small portion (block 67 lot 2) appears suited to active recreation. Acquisition of the study area will permit the development of additional public recreational opportunities.

Readington Township has recognized the role that the open space within the Study Area plays in the maintenance of the historic character of Readington Village. The open space is an integral component of a greenbelt that envelops the historic village. Acquisition of the study area will ensure preservation of the open space environs of Readington Village, thereby strengthening the character of the historic village.

Readington's planning documents have continuously addressed the preservation of Township character as a goal of land use planning. Open space and farmland preservation has been considered to be synonymous with preservation of community character. The images that embody that character were memorialized in the *Photographic Tour of the Agricultural Residential Zone*, which is a visual supplement to the language of the master plan. These images include open fields, wooded lands, stream corridors and agricultural cropland. The Study Area contains several of those elements that have been deemed to be indicative of Readington's rural character. Acquisition of the study area will ensure preservation of those elements and, thereby, preservation of community character.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Office of Natural Lands Management has identified the majority of the Study Area as a natural heritage priority site for preservation. NJDEP's Landscape Project has also identified critical wildlife habitat areas within the study area. Acquisition of the study area will ensure preservation and sensitive management of these resources that are critically important to native wildlife species.

Municipal acquisition of the Study Area would result in an interwoven series of benefits that could be greater than the sum of the individual parts. Under municipal ownership, Readington can act as a comprehensive land steward for this extraordinarily large and diverse parcel. This role would entail balancing ecological, commercial, transportation, open space, historic preservation and recreational purposes. Commercial uses, such as agriculture and the airport, could be managed to reduce or eliminate conflicts with wildlife habitat areas and other environmentally sensitive areas. Similarly, the development of passive or active recreational facilities could also be directed to the most appropriate locations, based on the extent of critical natural features and the location of facilities necessary for the continued operation of the airport. Through acquisition of the Study Area, Readington will ensure that all of these various public interests are balanced while effecting and managing a set of land uses that, when considered as a whole, will confer a unique benefit to the public. It is clear from the analysis contained herein that the Study Area contains a unique set of attributes and that several public benefits would be realized through municipal acquisition of these lands.

