

# UPPER SAUCON TOWNSHIP

## Newsletter

### Natural Areas Referendum on Ballot November 4

Upper Saucon Township has faced a rapid rate of growth and development in recent years, resulting in fewer natural areas and farms in the Township. In order to facilitate preservation of the Township's farmland and open spaces, the Environmental Advisory Council has developed an Open Space Plan. The Plan targets prime areas to preserve by purchasing properties outright or through land preservation agreements called conservation easements, which allow interested property owners to preserve their land for future generations while still maintaining ownership and later receiving resale value.

To fund these efforts, a referendum question asking Upper Saucon Township voters if they favor a 0.25% increase in their Earned Income Tax will be placed on the ballot on November 4<sup>th</sup>. If passed, the Natural Areas Referendum will accumulate a total of \$1.2 million per year to protect the remnants of our natural areas and working farms.

#### Effects of EIT Increase per Income Level

Income Level	\$ per year	\$ per week
\$30,000	\$75	\$1.44
\$40,000	\$100	\$1.92
\$50,000	\$125	\$2.40
\$60,000	\$150	\$2.88
\$70,000	\$175	\$3.36

For income levels ranging from \$30,000 to \$70,000, the price per week to raise additional funds for preservation range from \$1.44 to \$3.36, which is equivalent to a cup of coffee or a candy bar each week.

Investing this small amount in open space preservation will result in future cost savings. Our investment in efforts to preserve these natural areas is critical as development pressures continue to rise. Preserving land benefits all members of the community, not only by stabilizing property taxes but by providing water, fresh air, wildlife habitat, and fresh, local foods from nearby farms.

*Whenever we make changes in our surroundings, we can too easily shortchange ourselves, by cutting ourselves off from some of the sights and sounds, the shapes or textures, or other information from a place that have helped mold our understanding and are now necessary for us to thrive. Overdevelopment and urban sprawl can damage our own lives as much as they damage our cities and countryside.*

*~Tony Hiss*



Why should we help fund preservation efforts? How will I benefit?

- *To Strengthen the Economy*

Throughout Pennsylvania, residential land generally costs more than what it generates in revenues by requiring additional infrastructure needs, such as sewer and water lines, new roads and road maintenance, as well as additional school costs for each new student (in the Southern Lehigh School District each additional student costs approximately \$13,400 to educate). Additional sprawl development in Upper Saucon Township will force property taxes to continually rise as a consequence of these costs incurred by the Township and the School District.

Penn State University developed a method called the Cost of Community Services Ratio for calculating the costs and revenues associated with each type of land (commercial, residential, agricultural and industrial). This analysis revealed that for every dollar Upper Saucon Township and Southern Lehigh School District received in revenue from residential land in 2007, it cost both entities \$1.04 to provide services, which generates a negative fiscal impact that is then passed on to the taxpayers.

The calculations below show the impact of one new home housing one new student on the Southern Lehigh School District:

### **Fiscal Impact of Residential Development on the Southern Lehigh School District**

**\$13,429 cost per student (2006-07 school year)**

\$7,665	property tax revenue from each new \$350,000 home
\$450	EIT revenue per new household
<u>\$0</u>	State funding (more State \$ may be received if total school district enrollment is increasing)
<b>\$8,115</b>	<b>Total revenue per new household</b>
<b>\$8,115</b>	<b>(Revenue) - \$13,429 (Cost) = \$5,314 annual shortfall per new household</b>

NOTE: Calculation performed using residential development fiscal impact analysis developed by Heritage Conservancy

If a 100 acre farm is developed into 80 new single family homes, with the assumption that each new home adds one new student to the district (80 new students x \$5,314 shortfall per student), the school district would have to manage an annual shortfall of \$425,120 from this one new development.

**U**nlike most residentially developed land, agricultural and open space lands within the Township generate a positive fiscal impact. For every dollar the Township and the School District received from agricultural land, it cost both entities only \$0.16; thus, making a profit for the Township and School District. These lands are beneficial to the taxpayers because they provide more revenue in taxes than they require in services.

Raising the EIT by 0.25% to preserve open space now will reduce potential dramatic tax increases caused by sprawl in the future.

Why not solve the problem through zoning?

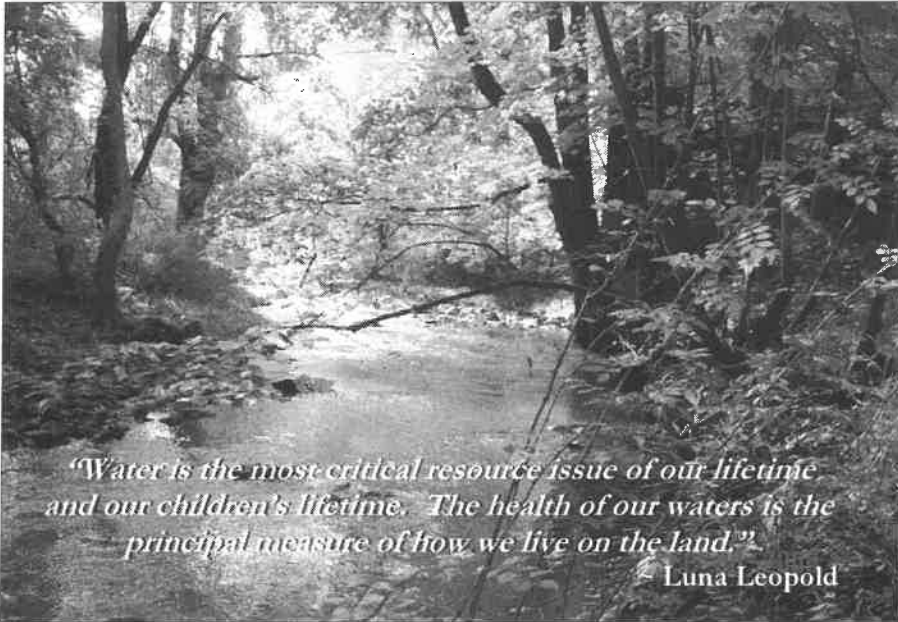
**Z**oning is only a temporary means of restricting development. Zoning regulations can change as elected officials change. Protecting land through land preservation agreements is the only way to ensure it remains undeveloped in perpetuity.

Don't the tax revenues from commercial and industrial land account for the costs of residential development?

**I**ndustrial and commercial lands yield results similar to agricultural land with costs of \$0.18 and \$0.28 for every dollar the Township and School District received in revenue, respectively. Despite the profit for the Township and School District, commercial and industrial development tends to attract residential development and also requires more township services than agricultural land. There are also pollution considerations and dwindling aesthetics of the community at stake with this kind of development.

- *To Protect Drinking Water*

A natural landscape plays a significant role in the quality of drinking water. With new contaminants emerging every day and an expanding infrastructure increasing threats of contamination, maintaining forest cover is crucial to ensure safe drinking water. **Protecting land permanently is the only way to maintain clean drinking water for the future.**



*"Water is the most critical resource issue of our lifetime and our children's lifetime. The health of our waters is the principal measure of how we live on the land."*  
 ~ Luna Leopold

Forests and wetlands filter out pollutants entering water supplies (our streams and groundwater wells). Development of these ecosystems not only compromises nature's filtering system, but creates a source of additional contaminants (i.e. septic systems, pesticides and fertilizers, gas stations, industrial activities, runoff from roads such as motor oil and road salts).

As a drinking water source degrades over time, the costs of treatment increase, which consequently increases water bills. Studies have shown that for every 10% increase in forest cover, treatment and chemical costs decreased by 20%; therefore, it is much cheaper to protect the headwaters and recharge areas of our drinking water supplies than to heavily treat our waters.

In addition to ensuring fresh water for human consumption, maintaining our natural ecosystems will also keep our streams fishable and swimmable. Aquatic organisms in the streams cannot survive in polluted conditions. Currently, 13 miles of the Saucon Creek, which flows through Upper Saucon Township, are considered to be impaired due to human influences.

- *To Preserve working farms and sources of fresh, local foods*

Most produce purchased in a grocery store has traveled 1,500-2,000 miles from the farm where it was grown, spending 7 to 10 days in transit. This transport not only adds carbon dioxide and other air pollutants to the atmosphere, but taxes our aging road systems and increases the cost of food as fuel prices rise. Buying food directly from a local farmer proves to be fresher, more nutritious, much easier on the environment and great for the local economy. Efforts to transition to a locally based food system are growing as environmental concerns escalate.

Currently, only 1.88% or 311.7 acres of the land in Upper Saucon Township has been preserved to remain in agriculture forever. According to a Cornell University study, a person with a diet of mostly fruits and vegetables and a small amount of meat and dairy requires 0.6 acres to support themselves per year; accordingly, the current acreage of preserved farmland could feed only 520 people out of a population of nearly 13,000. **Ensuring a sustainable source of fresh food for the future is a critical incentive to afford protection to the remaining acres of farmland in the Township.**

- *To Control and Prevent Hazardous Flooding*

The periodic flooding of rivers is a natural event that is tied to storms or snow melts. As more rain water drains into the stream, the stream eventually overflows its banks and spreads throughout the adjacent land area, called the floodplain. **This ability of a stream to access its floodplain is vital to both natural and human systems.** Floodplains play crucial roles in receiving and mitigating the rising flood waters, as well as providing numerous other ecological benefits. When the stream is able to spread floodwater across a broad floodplain with trees, shrubs and wildflowers, the velocity of the water decreases; this function reduces the amount of erosion and damage to structures downstream.

*Man - despite his artistic pretensions, his sophistication, and his many accomplishments - owes his existence to a six inch layer of topsoil and the fact that it rains.*

~ Author Unknown

*Children of a culture born in a water-rich environment, we have never really learned how important water is to us. We understand it, but we do not respect it.*

~ William Ashworth

As a predominantly forested watershed changes into a residential landscape, there are several consequences that occur. With more impervious surfaces (driveways, parking lots, roofs, and roads) covering the land, the soil can no longer infiltrate the rain water and causes a greater amount of water to run off the land into the streams at a faster rate. This produces more frequent and more intense floods that leave behind damaged homes and a severely eroded, polluted stream. **Preserving our floodplains in a natural state is essential to protect the integrity of our aquatic ecosystems and mitigate hazardous flood waters.**

- *To Provide Fish and Wildlife Habitat*

Upper Saucon Township is home to a variety of flora and fauna. Animals that populate the Township include salamanders, turtles, frogs, song birds, white-tailed deer, and trout, all requiring specific habitat conditions. Each species has an important role in the environment. For example, little brown bats keep the insect population in check by eating 1200 insects per hour. These are services provided by wildlife that we cannot replace, and they do this free of charge.

As development impedes the landscape and causes destruction and fragmentation of wildlife habitat, the risk of species extinction increases dramatically. **Maintaining contiguous, undisturbed corridors for fish and animal species is critical for their survival.** There are five important natural areas in Upper Saucon Township: Bauer Rock, Friedensville Quarry, Mest Marsh, Mill Road Wetlands, and the Robert Rodale Reserve. These habitats constitute a diverse array of geologic features, open marshes and maturing second growth forests as well as endangered plant and animal species. It is important that we maintain the integrity of these habitats.

- *To Protect Air Quality*

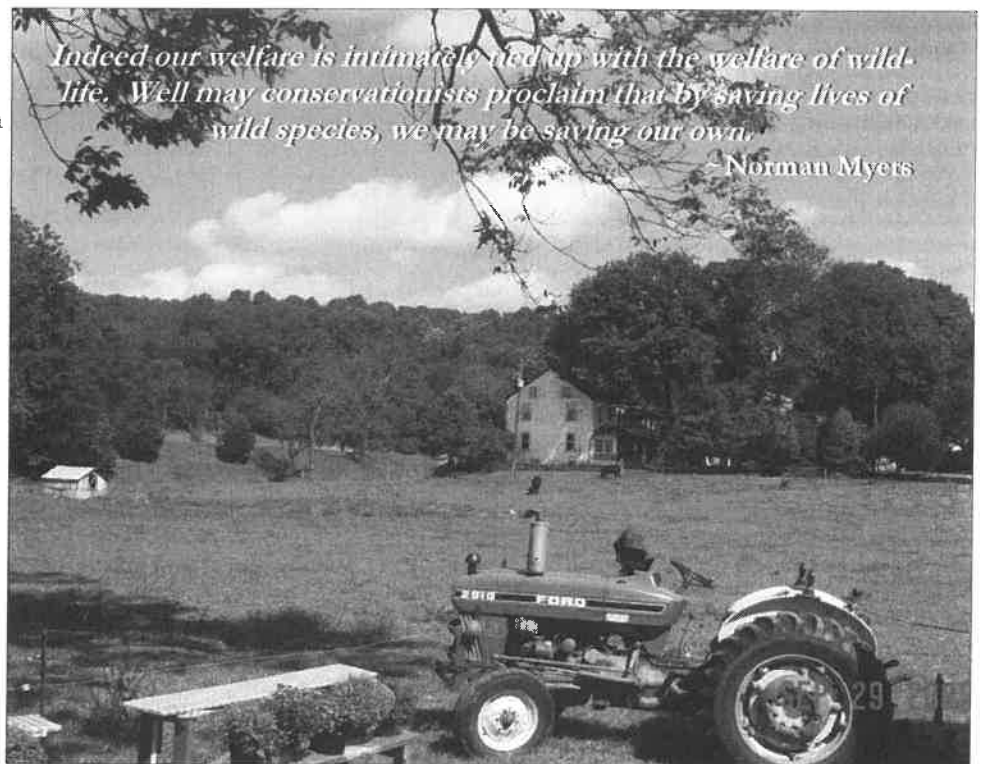
Additional sprawl development increases traffic congestion and air pollution. Automobiles release numerous air contaminants, such as ground level ozone, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxides, and carbon monoxide that can lead to health problems such as asthma and chronic bronchitis. Upper Saucon Township might not be situated in an intensely urbanized area with a horizon covered in smog; however, the Lehigh Valley had several days this past year at an air quality level unhealthy for children and the elderly. Increasing traffic will only elevate the problem; however, preserving one acre of trees will remove 122 pounds of air pollutants on an annual basis. Over a 50-year lifetime, just one tree provides \$62,000 worth of air pollution control.

- *To Support Community Health and Maintain Quality of Life*

*The influence of fine scenery, the presence of mountains, appeases our irritations and elevates our friendships.*

~Ralph Waldo Emerson

**T**he natural areas in the Township, such as South Mountain, serve as much more than a scenic backdrop; numerous studies have shown that simply looking at trees and plants reduces stress, lowers blood pressure, and relieves muscle tension. Adequate access to parks in addition to hiking, biking and walking trails throughout the community is also key in mitigating health problems by promoting physical activity. People that live near recreational facilities are two times more likely to get the recommended level of exercise each week than those without access. Additionally, neighborhood park and trail systems provide a safe place for children to play and discover nature.



*Indeed our welfare is intimately tied up with the welfare of wild-life. Well may conservationists proclaim that by saving lives of wild species, we may be saving our own.*

~Norman Myers

In general, there is a very strong correlation between the health of an individual and the health of the environment; thus, funding to support the preservation of greenways and the creation of parks and trails is integral to protect the wellbeing of both human and natural communities.

*Why must we act now?*

*We labor long and earnestly for peace, because war threatens the survival of man. It is time we labored with equal passion to defend our environment. A polluted stream can be as lethal as a bullet.*

~Senator Alan Bible

If we do not purchase and protect the natural and beautiful lands we have left, we may rob future generations of the remarkable natural heritage upon which our community was established. We need to maintain a healthy, sustainable community in which our children will be proud to call home. A future of beautiful neighborhood parks, hiking and biking trails meandering through natural settings and picturesque working farms within our community can be a reality, but only with your help. Your investment in efforts to preserve these natural areas is critical as development pressures continue to rise.

Without funding to preserve woodlands, stream valleys, wetlands, farmland, historic sites and parks, we risk our health, our economy and our quality of life. Through this referendum, we have the ability to preserve what remains of our vital natural features. By voting yes on November 4th, you can play an active role in saving our land and resources before they are gone forever.

*Where can I get more information?*

Upper Saucon Township office at 610-282-1171

Erin Frederick, Lehigh County Conservation District at 610-39-9583 ext. 25

Tom Gettings, Wildlands Conservancy at 610-965-4397 ext. 40

## Sources of Information

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

Pennsylvania State University <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/FreePubs/pdfs/ua327.pdf>

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection <http://www.depweb.state.pa.us/dep/site/default.asp>

United States Forest Service <http://www.fs.fed.us/>

## A young resident writes

I am a young person living in Upper Saucon Township. I graduated from college and have a full time job with the school district. There are a lot of comforts I can not afford by living here. For starters, I can't afford to have my own place in this township and neither can any of my friends. We all graduated from college and have full time jobs but are still living with our parents. However, the young people I know, those that can't even afford to live on their own, are all voting "yes" for the referendum. We know this is vital for the township's balance of development to save the open space. This referendum is not trying to pit young against old as recently suggested at the township meeting, but trying as fairly as possible to gain revenue for the easements. Maybe this tax is not fair to those of us who are earning money - but is it more fair to tax those who have lived here for ages and no longer are earning an income, or those who are out of a job in this harsh economy? Even more, most young people will be the ones enjoying the preservation for many more years.

Providing open space helps every one in the community. We benefit in countless ways from enjoying the aesthetic beauty to having fresh, local produce. It is not about young and old, rich and poor, it is about saving this community. It is about saving the balance. It is about looking to the future and being proactive about our choices today. It's about making the hard choice today to raise a tax - when we all seem to least afford it, so that we can enjoy the quality of life we were all attracted to by moving to Upper Saucon Township. The development of the Promenade Shops brought retailers to our back doors - now it's time to take the \$75 or \$100 we'd spend on a shopping trip and put it into something that doesn't change season to season. Please for all of us, vote "yes" on the referendum. It may seem like a hard thing to do today, but when in a few years you are able to bike or walk on paths your money helped create, you'll be happy.

-Joyce Parsons, Upper Saucon Township Resident



# UPPER SAUCON TOWNSHIP

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## board of supervisors

Miro A. Gutzmirtl, Chairman  
Stephen Wagner, Vice Chairman  
Joyce V. White  
Joseph M. Horvath  
John E. Gilda

## township manager

Thomas F. Beil

website: [www.uptersaucon.org](http://www.uptersaucon.org)

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## Special Natural Areas Referendum Issue!!



*Support*

Upper Saucon Township's  
Natural Areas Referendum  
by voting **YES** on November 4th