

**BURLINGTON COUNTY
PARKS AND OPEN SPACE MASTER PLAN**

AMENDMENT 2010-01

I. *BURLINGTON COUNTY OPEN SPACE, RECREATION, FARMLAND AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION TRUST FUND*

Burlington County voters overwhelming approved three (3) ballot questions that authorized the Board of Chosen Freeholders (the “Board” or “County”) to create the Open Space, Recreation, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund (“Trust Fund”) pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:12-15.1. Voters have authorized the Board to collect an annual levy of up to 4 cents per \$100 of assessed property value to deposit in the Trust Fund. The first question, put to the voters in 1996, authorized the collection of 2 cents and the second question, approved by referendum in 1998, increased the dedicated levy to 4cents. The 1996 and 1998 questions imposed a sunset on collection of the tax of 2011 and 2018, respectively. In 2006, a third ballot question was approved which extended the sunset provisions until 2036.

Revenues deposited in the Trust Fund may be used for all purposes allowed by law which include:

- acquisition of lands for recreation and conservation purposes;
- development of lands acquired for recreation and conservation purposes;
- maintenance of land acquired for recreation and conservation purposes;
- acquisition of farmland for farmland preservation purposes;
- preservation and acquisition of historic properties; and
- payment of debt service associated with acquisition and development.

The ballot questions did not specify how revenues were to be allocated between the approved uses of the Trust Fund. Therefore, the Board determines on an annual basis the amount to be raised and the allocation of revenues after conducting the public hearing required by N.J.S.A. 40:12-15.2.a.(2).

N.J.S.A. 40:12-15.2.d. requires that spending of Trust Fund revenues be guided by plans prepared and adopted by the county. In September 1998, the Board adopted the Burlington County Farmland Preservation Program Strategic Plan and Burlington County Open Space Preservation Program Strategic Plan (Resolution #666). In April 2001 these plans were revised and updated for the purpose of prioritizing the use of Trust Fund revenues (Resolution #272). In August 2002, recognizing the need for a more comprehensive plan to direct the acquisition of open space and development of parks, the Burlington County Parks and Open Space Master Plan was adopted by the Freeholder Board (Resolution #622). The Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan (2009-2018) was adopted by the Freeholder Board on December 30, 2008 (Resolution #1014).

The Freeholder Board has recently requested that staff conduct a review of the Parks and Open Space Master Plan (the “Plan”). A reexamination of the Plan reveals that the goals and objectives identified in 2002 continue to be fundamentally sound and represent current policy direction. However, in light of the current fiscal issues facing municipal governments and in order to assist in addressing the unmet needs of the Burlington County municipalities in regards to active and passive recreational opportunities, the Board has determined to make funding available for municipal park development through the Trust Fund. It is therefore necessary to amend the Plan to allow for use of the County’s Trust Fund for this purpose.

II. AMENDMENT 2010-1

The success of Burlington County’s land preservation programs is founded not only on the support these programs receive from the public, but upon the partnerships the County has forged with its municipalities. With few exceptions, municipalities share in the cost to preserve farmland and, through the Local Open Space Preservation Program, the County provides cost share funding to municipalities for acquisition of locally important open space.

The Burlington County Parks and Open Space Master Plan (the “Plan”) recognizes that such partnerships are equally as important when it comes to the development of land for recreational purposes. The Plan acknowledges that the resources of the County and its partners are not without limit and calls for effective and efficient use of available resources to ensure that both active and passive recreation needs are met. The Plan’s vision for the County parks system contemplates the development of passive recreational facilities, including hiking, biking and water trails, in concert with municipalities in order to provide diverse regional recreational opportunities. The Plan allocates to the municipalities the responsibility of providing active recreation facilities to its residents.

Recently, unprecedented economic conditions have placed severe burdens on the budgets of all governmental entities. Municipal resources have been particularly strained. Plans for improvements to existing recreational facilities or development of new facilities have been placed on hold. Opportunities for preservation of important farmland or open space are subject to extreme scrutiny and may be passed by. The continued support of the public and the ability of the County to attract State and Federal cost share funding have placed the County in a position in which it can assist its municipal partners. Towards that end, the Burlington County Board of Chosen Freeholders is proposing to amend the Plan to incorporate the Municipal Park Development Program and allow for allocation of funds from the Open Space, Recreation, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund (“Trust Fund”) for this purpose.

The Local Park Development Program County will provide grant funding to municipalities for capital costs associated with development and improvement of locally important park sites for outdoor passive and active public recreation. In addition, municipalities may apply to use grant funding to offset the local cost share required by the

County's Farmland Preservation Program or for additional financial assistance for acquisition of locally important open space in conjunction with the County Local Open Space Program. The duration of the program and the amount to be allocated from the Trust Fund shall be determined on an annual basis by the Board. The Board may terminate this program at any time if it finds that the resources of the Trust Fund are needed to support County land preservation or parks development activities.

Application and guidance documents shall be prepared by staff subject to the approval of the Board. The guidance documents shall identify eligible project costs, criteria for review and ranking of applications, distribution of grant funds and time frames for expenditure of grant funds. In accordance with N.J.S.A. 40:12-15.6, municipalities seeking funding from a county trust fund are required to submit a plan documenting the proposed use of these monies. A complete application shall constitute the required municipal plan. Schedules for receipt and review of applications and award of grants shall be established for each year that funds are allocation to the program. All grant recipients shall be required to execute grant agreements with the Board.

III. SCOPE

This Amendment is intended to modify only those portions of the approved Burlington County parks and Open Space Master Plan specifically addressed herein. All previously approved provisions which are not inconsistent with this Amendment shall remain in full force and effect.