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Subject: Comments-Warren County Open Space Acquisition (please get to formal location for comments received)

April 30, 2008

To: The Planning Board-Open Space Sub-Committee

Comments-Warren County Open Space Acquisition

Warren County would do well to redefine "Tier One" designations for acquisition to include more than just recreational considerations. It is important to entertain the thought that high value open space may not always lend full active recreational opportunities and may be more characteristically passive in value. High value acquisition lands may not always lie geographically in concert with the path of transportation and industry of our past.

Other benefits contributing to public health and quality of life for existing residents of the County are in need of consideration at this juncture of our existence. High priority acquisition should be expanded to include high priority consideration of lands critical to water and environmental stewardship whether or not large numbers of people want or have transportation access to the open space area. Consider that there are some important environmental areas which are most beneficial to people and wildlife when the least possible human disturbance is had. Remote and untouched can generate its own value in just being that.

I would like to see specific elements of the environment defined for Tier One inclusion.

- 1) karst limestone aquifers-vulnerable high value water quality and quantity
- 2) sole source aquifers-vulnerable high value water supply
- 3) vernal pools - natural role in flood management and species reproduction
- 4) important bird areas-grasslands, contiguous forest
- 5) streams-trout production

The Morris Canal and the Trail acquisition priorities alone may not sufficiently capture critical water areas located in outlying areas of our County. Such critical treasures need not be put at risk because they geographically lie outside the area of movement for men of history blazing transportation trails or building the shortest most efficient way to move goods to consumers in our historic past.

Parcel size may also not always be the best determiner of the highest value. Uniqueness is something that might also be considered in lieu of high acreage. The process should include a mechanism to waive size of a parcel when it can be demonstrated that the parcel is critical to public health or of unique critical environmental or historic significance. It has long been said that “Some of the best things in life come in small packages.”

Where development patterns are seen to be accelerated, such as they are currently in the Northern section of the County, careful scrutiny and priority of undisturbed critical areas available for acquisition should be given. To concentrate on acquiring open space in close proximity to high concentrations of human population could result in not being proactive to protect treasures still intact. A proactive acquisition perspective would minimize loss and lessen the need for restoration or remediation.

The process needs to have flexibility enough to identify and move individual applications through with speed commiserate with urgency of the specific acquisition. One speed does not fit all. Urgency should be more determined by high value and threat of destruction of the site rather than bureaucratic red-tape or political expediency but should never bypass quality markers in moving it forward.

In the creation of a paid position of coordinator for open space initiatives, it is imperative that the job description clearly define required credentials and seek a person with bonified expertise. It is essential that such a person possess expertise in environmental and cultural open space issues and be neutral in political wranglings inherent in any level of government. It would be a disservice to the people of Warren County if such a position turned out to be just one more political plum appointment to pluck for a friend or the well-connected, as can be so pervasive in our levels of Government today.

Respectfully submitted,
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