

CHAPTER 9

EVALUATION OF COUNTY AND ABUTTING MUNICIPAL PLANS

The preceding chapters investigate the resources, needs, and opportunities that exist within the municipal boundaries of Rockledge. With this information, recommendations can be made to effectively serve the Borough's residents. However, the land use decisions that Rockledge makes affect the larger region just as decisions made in neighboring municipalities affect the Borough. Therefore, this open space planning effort should not be performed exclusively within the Borough's borders, but should consider surrounding planning efforts as well.

This chapter compares the recommendations of this plan with those in the County comprehensive plan and the comprehensive, open space, and revitalization plans of abutting Boroughs/townships/counties. The intent is to prevent conflicts between plans and to encourage collaboration of efforts. By gaining an understanding of how Rockledge's plan will fit into the larger open space and trail linkage picture, partners can optimize both the quantity and quality of future open space preservation and management.

COMPARISON TO MONTGOMERY COUNTY LAND USE AND OPEN SPACE PLANS

In 2001, Montgomery County began updating its Comprehensive Plan. Although not yet complete, this plan will help guide the growth of housing; transportation; economic development; and natural and cultural resource management through 2025 and beyond. Each of these factors could potentially bear great significance on open space needs and opportunities in Rockledge.

Within this plan is the Vision of the County in 2025. This Vision sets up four issues as the highest priority for action:

- Controlling sprawl
- Controlling traffic congestion
- Preserving open space/natural areas
- Revitalizing older Boroughs and townships

Rockledge's Open Space Plan addresses all of these issues to varying degrees. It does so by increasing linkages and accessibility, preserving open space, and generally making the Borough a more attractive place in which to live, work and shop.

The draft version of the Comprehensive Plan lists 48 goals that describe and expand upon the Vision of the County in 2025. Several of these goals parallel those in this Open Space Plan, adding strength to the recommendations set forth here.

(CHAPTER 4 OF VISION PLAN)

- Guiding Vision
- Support Smart Growth and Preservation Efforts both Regionally and Locally
- Work Together to Identify and Resolve Problems and Concerns
- Implement Plans Effectively and Cooperatively

- Identify and Address Problems at the Most Appropriate Level - Local, Regional, Watershed, etc.

LAND USE

- Direct Development to Designated Growth Areas
- Enhance Older Developed Areas
- Preserve and Create Community Identity and a Sense of Place

OPEN SPACE, NATURAL FEATURES, AND CULTURAL RESOURCES

- Preserve Large Interconnected Areas of Significant Open Space
- Create a Greenway System along Rivers, Creeks, and Other Sensitive Natural and Historic Features
- Develop a Countywide Network of Interconnected Trails
- Provide Park Facilities to Meet the Public's Recreation Needs
- Protect Historic Resources and Cultural Landscapes

TRANSPORTATION

- Manage Traffic Congestion
- Improve Transportation Safety
- Increase Opportunities to Take Public Transit, Walk, Ride a Bike, or Other Nonautomotive Transportation Means

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Attract and Retain Business by Maintaining a High Quality of Life
- Retain a Skilled Workforce for County Businesses
- Revitalize the County's Downtowns and Main Streets

HOUSING

- Maintain and Conserve Existing Homes and Neighborhoods
- Promote Walkable and Well-Designed Residential Developments

At a site-specific level, the County's trail strategy identifies the former Newtown Branch of the Reading Railroad as the site of the County's planned Pennypack Trail. This trail would pass along the Borough's eastern edge and could connect to the Borough's own planned trail system. This would have the effect of enhancing the usability of the County trail and would better link the parks and open space in Rockledge and surrounding areas.

LORIMER PARK

Lorimer Park is a County Park containing more than 230 acres of woods, meadows and the Pennypack Creek corridor in Abington Township. This park virtually touches Rockledge near Shady Lane, and also connects to the City of Philadelphia's Pennypack Park and Fox Chase Farm Park. Lorimer offers hiking, horseback riding, picnicking, bird watching, fishing, and cross-country skiing.

The Park does not currently have a master plan but hopes to complete one within five years. The Park administration looks forward to the future development of the County's Pennypack Trail which would cross through it, and welcomes additional pedestrian connections to the Borough of Rockledge. There are existing unpaved (crushed stone) trails in the park which connect trails in adjacent Pennypack Park, including a 13-mile bikeway to the Delaware River.

Currently Lorimer Park is usually accessed by Rockledge residents by automobile since there are not provisions for safe pedestrian access from the Borough to the park at this time. There are two access points within walking distance of Rockledge: one on Shady Lane and one on Leona Drive. However,

both are difficult to walk to from Rockledge. In the case of Leona Drive, it is separated from the Borough by Shady Lane at a point where it is unsafe to cross due to traffic and short sight distances.

RELATION TO PLANS OF ABUTTING MUNICIPALITIES

Abington Township and the City of Philadelphia abut Rockledge. The current zoning map, open space policies and other pertinent information of each of those municipalities are summarized below. Adjacent, yet incompatible, land uses may result in conflicts while potential linkages could lead to cooperative partnerships between municipal neighbors.

ABINGTON TOWNSHIP

Based on the Montgomery County Open Space Program of 1993 (and completed shortly thereafter), Abington Township developed an Open Space Plan. In the past ten years since the last update of open space plans, parcels have been preserved, trails proposed and developed, and the needs of the community have changed. It is therefore vital that Rockledge keeps abreast of the continually evolving planning efforts of its neighbors and Montgomery County.

Abington Township adopted its Open Space Plan in 1995. Abington lies to the northeast, northwest, and southwest of the Borough, and shares a border of 2.4 miles with Rockledge.

AREAS FOR COOPERATION

Abington has constructed a paved path on Fox Chase Road extending west from the intersection of Fox Chase Road and Cedar Road. The township also constructed a path extending north on Cedar Road from the same intersection. This is important for Rockledge since this would be a logical place to connect the Borough's trail system with that of Abington's.

An area of potential cooperation between Rockledge and Abington involves the development of the County's proposed Pennypack Trail, and any short-term trail connection from Rockledge to Lorimer Park. Since Lorimer Park and approaches to it are located in Abington, Rockledge would welcome any cooperation with the Township in this regard. Such cooperation would lead to both Abington and Rockledge residents having improved access to Lorimer Park.

CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

HUNTINGDON PIKE REVITALIZATION PROJECT

Rockledge and the Fox Chase neighborhood of Philadelphia are currently conducting a joint revitalization project for Huntingdon Pike-Oxford Avenue (PA 232). This project is undertaking improvements to the road and streetscape to create a more attractive, safe, welcoming, and functional area with an improved image and revitalized business district. The two entities have also operated a combined business group for eight years (the Rockledge-Fox Chase Business Association).

TRAIL CONNECTIONS

Rockledge intends to cooperate with Philadelphia in the area of trail planning. This includes the proposed Pennypack Trail segment along the unused Newtown Branch of the Reading Railroad in Philadelphia. Rockledge also intends to cooperate with Philadelphia in planning for the Borough trail system.

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission has expressed interest in cooperating with Montgomery County on the construction of the portion of the proposed Pennypack Trail in Philadelphia (which would link Rockledge to Rhawn Street and the train station at Fox Chase. A trail extension to this area would meet Rhawn Street in an area where it is scheduled to undergo streetscape improvements. The construction of the Pennypack Trail and its connection to the R8 Regional Rail line could provide a safer, more direct way for bicyclists from Abington, Rockledge, Lower Moreland and

other municipalities along the trail to access the Fox Chase train station and help reduce automobile traffic on the region's roads.

FIVE-POINTS GATEWAY

Planning is currently underway for the construction of a war memorial at the Five Points intersection of Oxford Avenue, Cottman Avenue, and Rising Sun Avenue in nearby Philadelphia. This gateway, like the gateways for Rockledge and Fox Chase, would help give identity to the communities in the vicinity and improve their attractiveness and image. Recommendations have been made to improve the intersection so it serves as a more welcoming gateway to the Five Points neighborhood and City of Philadelphia.

OTHER PLANNING INITIATIVES

The Philadelphia City Council, City Planning Commission, and Mayor's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative has recently begun a special study and community planning process for 34 neighborhoods around the city, including Fox Chase, Burholme, and Lawnview.

FAIRMOUNT PARK SYSTEM

Consisting of 77 parks in 12 park complexes, the Fairmount Park system incorporates 9,204 acres and offers a variety of experiences including trails, gardens, woodlands, rivers and streams, day camps, ball fields and golf courses, picnic areas and playgrounds, historic homes, environmental and history centers, the Ben Franklin Parkway, the Robin Hood Dell, the Mann Center for the Performing Arts, the Zoo, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, the Water Works, and the Please Touch Museum.

Rockledge residents regularly access many of these facilities, and in fact the Borough is located within one-half of a mile of portions of this park system.

The Fairmount Park Commission released its latest Strategic Plan, "A Bridge to the Future," in July, 2004. The plan lays out more than 75 individual strategies for transforming and revitalizing the Park system. The Park Commission's mission is to:

- Preserve, protect, and maintain the open space, street trees, natural and cultural resources of Philadelphia’s parks for the recreation and enjoyment of residents and visitors;
- Educate the public on the environment, history, and use of the Fairmount Park system;
- Promote, celebrate, and enhance the uniqueness and value of the Fairmount park system and its economic impact to the City, region and state.

Planned improvements to the park system will benefit residents of Rockledge and other municipalities in Montgomery County, as well as residents of the City of Philadelphia.

PHILADELPHIA RECREATION DEPARTMENT

In addition to the Fairmount Park system—which mainly consists of passive, self-directed recreation; the Department of Recreation provides active recreation with emphasis on programmed activities and facilities.

TOOKANY CREEK WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Tookany Creek Watershed Management Plan was developed with the participation of Rockledge, Abington, Cheltenham, and Jenkintown and was adopted in 2003. This plan analyzes existing flooding, erosion and water quality issues in the Tookany Creek Watershed, which includes the southern half of Rockledge and parts of Abington including the Jenkintown creek (which originates just to the west of Rockledge). The plan recommends goals and management options for protecting the watershed. Funding was provided by the state’s Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR) and Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

