



Daily Local News

EDITORIAL

Trust's ordinance a model design for saving open space

The battle against suburban sprawl to preserve as much open space as possible in Chester County is a seemingly constant one in which many look specifically at the amount of money that local and county governments will pay to save their open space through direct purchase of land.

But taxpayers cannot be expected to compete with the deep pockets of developers in the race to keep as much of our county as green as possible. There is dire necessity for municipal officials to work assiduously within the admittedly clumsy framework of Pennsylvania's Municipal Planning Code to convince developers that the green way is the best way.

A model for accomplishing this worthy goal has been formulated by the Natural Lands Trust, the land preservation organization based outside Media that has been responsible for saving a host of properties in Chester County, most recently noted in the massive ChesLen project in Newlin.

According to a story written by Daily Local News staff writer Anne Pickering, the trust's Conservation By Design ordinance has been useful in helping two county townships accommodate development at the same time that it helps them hold on to valuable natural resources. As Ann Hutchinson – the trust's senior director of municipal services – said, the program "is a tool that lightens the footprint of development." We like that image; a developer treading ever so slightly on the land that is so precious to our lives here.

The ordinance – which any township in the county could work toward adopting – mixes the now not unusual model of clustering homes within a development with the notion of linking open-space parcels throughout a municipality. We are especially intrigued and supportive of the second half of this equation.

Imagine a township with a large amount of still-undeveloped land. Now, overlay a map with

the areas of land that make up the township's "greenway" section – those expanses of open fields, creek beds, farms and woodlands that comprise what the average citizens would see as open space worth protecting. Natural Lands Trust has devised a system by which municipal officials can see how those sections could interconnect between individual developments, rather than having an open field separated from acres of woodlands by a string of homes.

One municipality where the practice has been put into place successfully is London Grove. The township already has a natural resources inventory map for the whole township, its goal being to identify development parcels in such a way as to maintain the existing natural resources and provide natural greenways from one subdivision to another. The idea of converging open space exists between two developments – Stone Croft Preserve and Lamborn Hunt – where trails and a tributary of the White Clay Creek flow through the two neighboring projects.

Innovations such as this model ordinance, as put into place by forward-thinking municipal officials, will have to go hand in hand with the financial efforts of governments to secure public funding of open-space preservation if the goal of stopping sprawl is to be met. And we have the Natural Lands Trust to thank for helping to spur that innovation.