

## Warrington Township, PA

### Background

Founded in 1734, Warrington Township, Pennsylvania was originally comprised of four villages -- Warrington, Neshaminy, Tradesville, and Pleasantville. These villages since merged into a single township called Warrington, and known as 'The Gateway to Bucks County.' The once naturally wild landscape evolved over time into a bustling community. As of the time of the Environmental Finance Center's involvement in the community, the Township was home to approximately 25,000 people. There were 375 businesses and around 700 acres of open space within Warrington's 13.8 square miles.

A recent resurgence of development activity in the Township stood to impact the remaining open space in Warrington. Like so many communities across the country located outside of major cities, continued development pressures from Philadelphia were threatening the rich character, community charm, and unique sense of place that makes townships like Warrington so special. At the same time, the asphalt, concrete, and other impervious surfaces associated with continued development create stormwater runoff laden with oil, dirt and chemicals that ultimately end up in local waterways.



*Meeting with stakeholders in Warrington*

Since the Township passed its referendum, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 3 Office has provided resource mapping and prioritization support to help Warrington identify the parcels of land with the most ecological and environmental benefit to the community. Beyond this support, the EPA saw an opportunity to bring additional technical assistance to the Township and therefore enlisted the Environmental Finance Center (EFC) at the University of Maryland to work with Warrington to identify overlapping priorities within the Township, potential local partnership opportunities, and additional financing mechanisms that could be leveraged to stretch these funds further.

While the Township already served as a local and regional model for preserving open space, and its commitment to invest \$3 million to preserve open space by acquiring and improving public lands, trails, parks, and historic sites is significant, both EPA and EFC saw an opportunity to identify strategies that would help stretch the dollars committed by taking a green infrastructure approach to open space protection.

### HIGHLIGHTS

**Location:** Pennsylvania

**Jurisdiction Type:** Township

**Population:** 23,418 (2010)

**MS4 Permit:** Phase II

**Project Period:** 2013-2014

**Funder:** EPA Region 3

In 2012, the citizens of Warrington Township passed an Open Space Referendum, authorizing the Board of Supervisors to borrow up to \$3 million over 20 years to purchase and protect open space. This commitment demonstrated a clear demand for protecting the remaining open space and natural areas that, like many suburban communities outside major cities, have been increasingly impacted by development activities.

## Approach

The EFC recognized the need to adapt its approach to fit within the local context because each community is driven by its own identity and priorities and operates within its own political, social, and cultural landscape. This created a need to develop financing recommendations that reflect a sensitivity to the local landscape.

After the initial information gathering phase of the project, where the EFC project team learned firsthand the open space priorities of the Township, the project team quickly discovered many opportunities to integrate long-term goals into the open space decision-making process. Coupling these goals enables the Township to achieve more with less duplication of effort, improving the cost efficiency and effectiveness of the Township's investments. The EFC project team focused on three core opportunities for the Township to leverage its open space dollars:

- 1. Identify and prioritize funding sources.** The EFC project team identified and prioritized a host of federal, state, foundation and private sector funding opportunities that would be appropriate for various components of the community's established open space priorities.
- 2. Develop partnerships with existing local organizations.** The EFC project team conducted independent research to identify viable partners, and narrowed the field to two well-established land trusts whose service area includes Warrington. The project team facilitated initial communications and provided the Township decision-making support.
- 3. Integrate green infrastructure into land conservation planning and project site design.** The EFC provided financing recommendations based on the availability of Township-wide green infrastructure assessment information, and enlisted the assistance of a team from the University of Maryland's Plant Science & Landscape Architecture Department (PSLA) to develop concept-scale site designs for two sites that are already being planned in the Township.



*Green Infrastructure at the Warrington Township office*

The project team worked closely with Township staff and members of the Open Space Task Force (OSTF) and Environmental Advisory Council (EAC) to ensure the specific opportunities were aligned with the Township's goals and needs.

## Key Findings and Recommendations

As an organization that advocates for the efficient use of limited resources, the EFC often suggests a green infrastructure approach to both natural and financial resource management decisions. Because of its holistic vision, green infrastructure can create efficiencies and opportunities that contribute to the resilience of a local economy, environment, and way of life in a powerful way. It can also connect local efforts to resources and potential partners previously unavailable.

More specifically, the EFC identified the following three opportunities for Warrington to do this, which served as the core of its recommendations:

### Leveraging outside funding sources

The Township was in a unique position to leverage the \$3 million commitment to open space, enabling the community to accomplish more with these dollars, and to do so in a way that delivered additional benefits and reduced the burden to the municipality. The EFC project team developed a ranking system which helped prioritize funding opportunities in order to make Warrington attractive and competitive.

### Developing strategic partnerships

In an effort to expand the scale and reach of what the Township can accomplish with the voter approved open space funds, the EFC recommended the Township develop strategic partnerships with entities and organizations with a similar set of priorities that might be interested in working jointly on these efforts. Given the core desire to preserve open space, the most immediate opportunity seemed to lie with the land trust community, specifically with two land trusts whose service area included the Township: Heritage Conservancy and Natural Lands Trust (NLT).

The EFC project team facilitated initial discussions with the land trusts and the Township, and each entity submitted a proposal to the Township. Warrington's decision to work with one of the land trusts was ultimately determined by careful review by the Open Space Task Force, and a recommendation was made and approved by the Board of Supervisors to work with the Natural Lands Trust to help facilitate the open space protection program.

Looking longer term, there are additional opportunities to partner with neighboring municipalities that the Township should consider. This included engaging Doylestown Township, as Doylestown has been a leader in trail connections, stormwater management, wildlife habitat, and other priorities that align with Warrington's priorities.

### Integrating green infrastructure into land conservation planning and project design

Ultimately, the EFC project team recommended that the Township develop a robust green infrastructure network and incorporate a green infrastructure approach into its long-term planning. The benefits of this approach were that it allowed for strategic and technically defensible decision-making that put site-based activities in a broader context and incorporated the values of the community.

While this would take time, in the near-term, there were opportunities for the Township to integrate green infrastructure into its planning, from a Township-wide scale to a project-by-project scale. The EFC project team recommended that Warrington invest in demonstration projects that would generate awareness and show the community the benefits of using green infrastructure as a means of moving toward a holistic green infrastructure approach in the long term.

In order to demonstrate how the proposed green infrastructure approach could play out on parcels in the Township, the team of landscape architects developed a set of concept drawings that provided a visualization of the potential for two sites under open space protection consideration. The final designs reflected the landscape architect team's depiction of what it could look like to integrate green infrastructure, stormwater management, and quality of life improvements into an existing project, creating a sense of place for Warrington residents and visitors, and helping to meet multiple community priorities.

*For more information, please visit the [MOST Knowledge Center](#).*

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