

West Vincent Township...

...Grows Greener



Weatherstone, by the Hankin Group, Exton, PA combines conservation subdivision and traditional neighborhood design elements (Growing Greener Option 5). The 273 new homes, both single-family and townhouses, and associated commercial center are nestled within 190 acres of preserved open space featuring streamside forests, farm fields and a series of community greens for residents of the community. Of the 190 acres of open space, about 162 acres have been dedicated to the township, at no cost. Forest Park, above, is one of several greens developed for the enjoyment of Weatherstone residents.

“These ordinances have made a very significant difference for us.”

— Jim Wendelgass, Township Manager

West Vincent Township’s 3,200 residents enjoy a rural lifestyle—of the 40 miles of roads, 16 miles are unpaved! Yet, the township lies in the path of development, situated at the crossroads of state routes 100 and 401, the two most heavily traveled roads in Northern Chester County. In only eight years, developers have submitted plans for 1,036 new dwelling units, nearly doubling the number of residences. So, how has a township facing so much new development managed to maintain the woodlands, scenic views and agricultural lands that residents cherish?

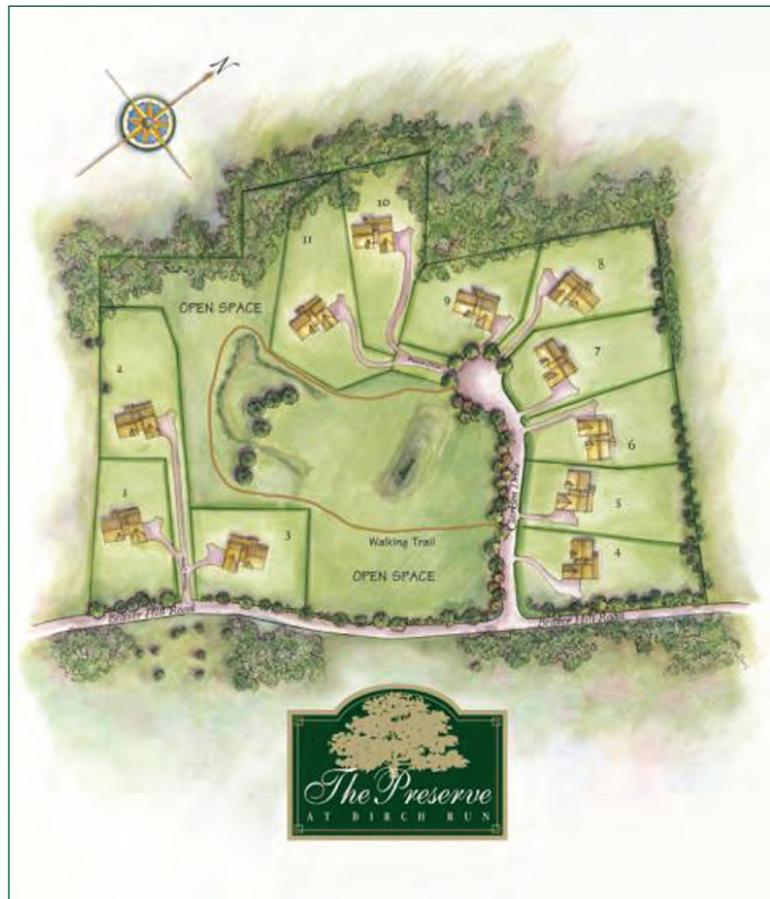
Land acquisition, enabled by two voter-approved open space referenda, and donation of conservation easements by generous landowners has played a key role in preserving land. The



township has also purchased transferable development rights (TDRs). These techniques have resulted in about 2,072 acres of land conserved by individuals and public money. However, township officials know that saving land with public money and landowner donations just won't go far enough in preserving their landscape. While their community is about 25% developed and 25% conserved, the neighboring township to the south is already 85% developed.

West Vincent Township worked with Natural Lands Trust planners, adopting *Growing Greener: Conservation by Design* ordinances in 1998. Catching the crest of the development wave, these ordinances have preserved 822 acres of open space out of the 1,307 acres subject to development. In other words, the township lightened the footprint of residential development by 63% by adopting regulations that generate open space each time a property is developed.

Open space in conservation subdivisions may be owned by individuals, homeowners' associations and the township. Lands preserved in these conservation subdivisions have preserved streamside trees that improve water quality, views of historic landscapes, agricultural lands, parkland and village greens. The township has received donations from developers, at no public cost, of 292 acres of permanently protected open space as a result of adopting the *Growing Greener* codes.



Illustrating how even a small site can have conservation benefits, the Preserve at Birch Run by Woodstone Homes, preserved a horse farm and wetlands on a 13.4 acre country property. The remaining 22.1 acres have been developed with 11 new homes, shown above, surrounding 7½ acres of permanently protected open space.

Facing development pressure of this magnitude is never easy. Township manager Jim Wendelgass says, "These ordinances have made a very significant difference for us, and every developer has open space in the marketing materials for their developments." West Vincent Township practices the art of land conservation through acquisition, outreach to landowners, and creative land use regulations that further preserve the rural landscape.

Growing Greener: Conservation by Design is a collaborative program of the PA DCNR, the Governor's Center for Local Government Services, Natural Lands Trust, and advisors from state and local agencies. The program helps municipalities use the development process to their advantage to protect interconnected open space networks. Communities that adopt these standards are preserving an average of 62% of land each time a property is developed.

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