

OPEN SPACE &

RECREATION PLAN
HUDSON COUNTY **December 2004**

DRAFT



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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|--|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | 5 |
| OPEN SPACE PLAN VISION AND INTENT | 9 |
| OPEN SPACE PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES | 12 |
| PUBLIC PARTICIPATION & CITIZEN SURVEY | 16 |
| RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS | 22 |
| EXISTING OPEN SPACE RESOURCES | 36 Designated Resources 77 Recreation Facilities 94 Natural Resources 107 Historic and Cultural Resources 135 Scenic Resources |
| OPEN SPACE NEEDS ASSESSMENT | 138 Parkland Deficits 142 Facilities Deficits |
| OPPORTUNITIES | 148 Existing Initiatives 152 Redevelopment 153 Vacant Land Survey |
| CONSTRAINTS | 154 |



| | | |
|--|-----|----------------------------------|
| BROWNFIELDS | 157 | |
| ACTION PLAN AND IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY | 164 | County Wide Priorities |
| | 180 | Parcel Data Requirements |
| COUNTY-WIDE IMPLEMENTATION PLAN TIMETABLE | 181 | |
| IMPLEMENTATION TOOLS | 189 | NJDEP Green Acres Matching Funds |



Executive Summary

The Hudson County Open Space and Recreation Plan is a well-organized program to identify, prioritize, enhance and preserve critical open space within the County. This plan will serve as the framework for moving forward with a proactive agenda for meeting all of the open space and recreational needs of Hudson County's citizens and will be another key element in the continuing application of Smart Growth principles guiding Hudson County.

There are a total of 4,008 acres of open space in Hudson County, 550 acres are in County Parks and 597 acres are in Municipal Parks. There are 1910 acres of Open Space in State ownership, 893 acres of habitat are managed by the NJMC and 58 acres are Federal lands in the County. While Hudson County has an impressive array of open space areas and recreation facilities, the County is lacking in open space acres when compared to acreage recommendations based on the total population of the County.

The New Jersey Open Space and Outdoor Recreation Plan recommends 3% of developable land in each Municipality be set aside for municipal open space and recommends that 7% of developable land in a County be used for County Parkland. Based on this, the municipalities in Hudson County have a total deficit of 620 acres and the County has a deficit of 1,902 acres. Coupling this with the feedback from the Citizen Survey, where over 95% reported that open spaces were important to them; it is obvious that more acquisition is necessary.

In support of these findings, most of the current county and local planning

documents have express goals of augmenting and increasing their open spaces and recreation facilities. The Hudson County Strategic Plan includes the objective to create more parks and open space through the creation of vest-pocket neighborhood parks on properties acquired through tax foreclosure; requiring parks, plazas and open space as new development occurs; and direct acquisition of key parcels, particularly along proposed waterfront walkways.

On June 26, 2003, the Hudson County Executive requested, and the Hudson County Board of Chosen Freeholders approved a resolution authorizing the placement of a public question (referendum) on the general election ballot for the establishment of a County Open Space Recreation & Historic Preservation Trust Fund. On November 4, 2003, the ballot question was approved by a two-to-one majority of County voter participants.

The Board of Chosen Freeholders, by resolution dated December 23, 2003, voted to establish a trust fund entitled "The Hudson County Open Space, Recreation & Historic Preservation Trust Fund". The Trust Fund is funded through a property tax assessment to be approved annually by the Board of Chosen Freeholders, at a rate not to exceed one cent (\$0.01) per \$100.00 of the Total County equalized real property valuation. These funds will become a dedicated trust fund to acquire land for conservation, open space purposes, recreational facility enhancements, and farmland and historic preservation.

The County and the municipalities agree that there is a deficit in open space, so

the question that remains is what to do about it. The first steps are to identify basic goals for the open space acquisition, examine potential sites for acquisition and then build strong partnerships with the municipalities, adjacent counties, the New Jersey Meadowlands Commission, the State Parks and Forestry and Green Acres Programs, the Federal government and perhaps most importantly, local, regional and national non-profits with programs or interests in Hudson County.

As there continues to be development and redevelopment along the Hudson River Waterfront, it is a priority for Hudson County to ensure that the mandated walkway is completed. Currently, there are still several “gap” sites (areas with no public walkway) along the waterfront that need to be addressed. The developing Hudson River Waterfront Walkway Implementation Plan identifies these gap areas and provides implementation for completion of these areas. Upon completion of the HRWW Implementation Plan, Hudson County should work with the affected municipalities to implement the strategies outlined to ensure that the gap areas are addressed. Furthermore the County needs to ensure that areas being developed by other entities are meeting the necessary standards.

Hudson County has an impressive array of recreational facilities in its county and municipal parks. However, there is plenty of room for improvement. There are certain types of facilities that are not as well represented in the County as others. The County should develop a capital

investment program to begin to address the needs identified in this plan’s recreation needs assessment. The Hudson County Park and Recreation Plan Master Plan of 1998 made recommendations for facilities improvements at eight county facilities and these improvements have been actively pursued. The remarkable results are obvious to anyone visiting the parks lately. Facilities have been updated, restored and resurfaced and the effects are impressive. The County Parks Department should ensure the completion of the 1998 Park and Recreation Plan recommendations for the existing facilities improvements.

While Hudson County is an urban, highly developed area it still has natural resources and natural lands worth protecting and conserving. The County should use the presence of natural lands or habitats as a deciding factor in whether to go forward with potential open space acquisitions. Those resources identified in this plan (wetlands, flood plains, species habitat, waterways and steep slopes) are all critical for the health and well-being of Hudson County residents and vital to the continued appreciation of natural areas.

Hudson County is rich in historical and cultural resources. There are numerous sites that are already on the State and National Registers and many more that have at least have a decision rendered from SHPO. To that end, the preservation of the Counties historic districts, places and structures of important historical significance must be a priority. There are several strategies that can be utilized to preserve these significant areas. First and

foremost is the creation of an inventory of significant areas with acquisition priorities

In setting the priority of creating and enhancing community connections for Hudson County, the Plan defines community connections in two ways. First, community connections are the physical network links of opens space and recreation areas. Secondly, community connections are the non-physical aspects of community involvement including educational programming. Network links are the physical connections that can be created (for those that don't exist) or enhanced upon (for those that do exist) to create a functional system that links open space and recreation areas and resources. A comprehensive Open Space and Recreation Plan also requires involvement on a community-based level by providing information, creating recreational and educational programs for residents to enjoy and partnering with local groups to respond to residents needs in term of open space.

