



# The Whitemarsh Vista

The Whitemarsh Township Residents Association Newsletter

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Keeping our promise to keep you informed

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## Shape the Future of Whitemarsh: Vote on November 4!

This week, Whitemarsh citizens will be electing three of the five Board of Supervisors – the highest leadership post in the Township. The WTRA encourages everyone to do their homework and use their vote wisely: Find out all you can about the candidates, then select the three who you think will serve the township most effectively.

To learn more about the candidates, their priorities and qualifications, visit the WTRA website at [www.WTRA.org](http://www.WTRA.org) and read the "Meet the Candidates" brochure. Then make your opinion count on Tuesday and help shape the future of Whitemarsh.

## Residents to Decide Fate of County's Open Space

This Wednesday, Whitemarsh residents will join other Montgomery County citizens in determining the future of open space in our county. The "Green Fields, Green Towns" referendum on the ballot will ask voters to support a \$150 million, 10-year open space initiative through an increase in property taxes. If approved, each municipality in the county would have access to between \$590,000 and \$3 million in the near term and a portion of another \$83 million over the next 10 years to fund the purchase of open space and farmland and to develop greenways, recreational trails, and parks. The initiative is projected to increase the average property owner's tax by about \$23 a year over the next 33 years. (Estimate based on a property assessed at \$160,000.)

Under the initial \$100 million open space program, approved by voters in 1993, the County was able to preserve more than 9,200 acres of farmland and open space. (During this same period, 40,000 acres were lost to development.) Here in Whitemarsh, the Township used County open space funds to help purchase the WFIL property and to plant more than 100 trees in local parks. If the new referendum is approved, a portion of the funds available to the Township would most likely be directed toward the purchase of important open space, such as portions of Erdenheim Farm.

"Over the past decade, the public has become better educated about the hidden costs of development and the economic benefits of preserving open space," says Kim Sheppard, WTRA President. "We have begun to appreciate the value of undeveloped land, not just for its aesthetic appeal, but also for its ability to keep down municipal costs — such as public education, emergency services, and road improvements."

The new initiative has garnered broad public and bipartisan support. A poll by the Montgomery County Lands Trust earlier this year indicated that 89% of respondents were in favor of a new open space program and that 73% would be willing to pay for it. In addition, the initiative has been endorsed by the County Commissioners of both parties, the Whitemarsh Township Board of Supervisors, and the *Philadelphia Inquirer*.



## Supervisors to Review Draft Comprehensive Plan

On Thursday, November 20, at 8 pm, the Board of Supervisors will consider adoption of an updated Comprehensive Plan ("Plan") setting the vision and objectives for future land use in the township. At that time, they hope to receive feedback from the public. A draft of the Plan is available at the Township offices and on the Township's website at [www.whitemarshwp.org](http://www.whitemarshwp.org).

The Township's Plan has not been updated since 1968. New state policies require plans to be updated every 10 years. At the urging of the WTRA and other community groups, the existing draft has been reworked to incorporate a stronger open space and smart growth focus.

Residents are encouraged to review the Plan and to come to the meeting on November 20 with their input and questions. Of particular interest are Chapter 6 (Goals and Objectives) and Chapter 7 (Proposed Land Use Plan), which set forth the overall vision for future land use in Whitemarsh and how it will be implemented.

## School Board Approves "Landmark" Plan to Help Finance Erdenheim Farm Preservation

At its October 17 meeting, the Colonial School Board gave its blessing to move forward with an innovative tax plan that will use a portion of future taxes generated by the Hill at



Whitemarsh to support the purchase of key tracts of Erdenheim Farm. (Read the *Philadelphia Inquirer's* article.)

This 20-year tax increment financing plan, known as a TIF, is traditionally used by municipalities to encourage development of blighted areas, but in this case it will be used to prevent development by helping to preserve up to 194 acres of farmland. This innovative land-for-taxes concept was introduced during the developer's negotiations with the

WTRA and other community groups and was endorsed by all parties to the Community Agreement as a cost-effective means to preserve what the School District has called "arguably the most beautiful open space in the district."

Under the TIF, the School District will dedicate \$11.6 million of the \$15 million it expects to receive from the Hill over the next 20 years toward the purchase of portions of Erdenheim Farm. If the Township and County agree to contribute 100% of their anticipated revenues, that will mean an additional \$5 million. The balance required to purchase the land will come from other public and private sources, such as the County's "Green Fields, Green Towns" open space program (if approved by residents on November 4) and monies raised by the Whitemarsh Foundation.

While the development of the Hill will generate significant additional revenues for the School District, Township and County, perhaps its greatest benefit will be not in what it generates, but in what it doesn't generate: By helping to preserve up to 194 acres from development, all of us in Whitemarsh will benefit from less traffic and a lower burden on our school system.

## Hill at Whitemarsh Preliminary Plan Receives Supervisors' Approval

On September 25, the Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the Preliminary Plan for the Hill at Whitemarsh, the continuing care retirement community to be built on a portion of Erdenheim Farm and the adjacent Eugenia Hospital property at Thomas and Flourtown Roads. In the next and final step, the developer will submit a Final Plan for approval. If approved and all permits and licenses are obtained, the developer can begin construction.

All of the developer's requested waivers were approved, which included an exemption from having to build sidewalks along Thomas Road. The only outstanding technical issue is the creation of a new township ordinance to govern structured (or underground) parking. Currently, the parking area beneath the Hill's main Congregate Building does not meet Township parking ordinance standards, which govern outdoor parking only. The new ordinance will address this gap in the codes and bring the Hill's parking area into compliance.

At the meeting, representatives of the three community groups most involved with this project, which includes the WTRA, expressed their support for the development plan.



Attorney Mike Clement presents Preliminary Plan to Planning Commission.

## Town Watch

### Upcoming Township Meetings & Events

All meetings are held in the Township Building at 616 Germantown Pike, Lafayette Hill unless otherwise noted.

#### Budget Hearings

Preliminary hearings: November 6 & 13; final hearings: December 4 & 11. 8 pm.

#### Comprehensive Plan Hearings

November 20, 8 pm.

#### Development Projects

##### Paone Development (Butler Pike & Flourtown Road)

Townhouse development. Preliminary Plan has been submitted for review. No meetings scheduled.

##### Highway Materials Quarry (Stenton Avenue near Flourtown Road)

Office complex development. Still in litigation. No meetings scheduled.

##### National Label (Cedar Grove Road at Joshua)

Retirement community development. Awaiting completion of traffic impact study and comments from Montco Planning Commission on proposed retirement community ordinance. No meetings scheduled.

##### Hill at Whitmarsh (Flourtown and Thomas Roads)

Continuing care retirement community development. Preliminary Plan approved. Township is awaiting submission of Final Plans. No meetings scheduled.

##### Greens at Whitmarsh (Wells Street and Cedar Grove Road)

Office development. Developer still in negotiations with community. No meetings scheduled.

## Township Seeks Interested Residents to Participate in Local Government

There are currently openings on the newly formed Open Space Committee, which will update the Township's Open Space Plan, and the Shade Tree Commission, which is responsible for protecting the Township's trees and reviewing proposed plantings for new developments.

Residents interested in participating in these committees or on any other Township boards or commissions are encouraged to stop by the Township Building and fill out an application. The Township keeps all applications on file and when an opening occurs, residents are contacted for interviews.

## Whitpain Group Seeks Support from Whitmarsh Residents

The WTRA has received a request for help from a group of Whitpain residents opposing the proposed expansion of Wings Field to allow landings by jets and larger planes. While this is not a focus of the WTRA's efforts, individual Whitmarsh residents who want to learn more about the potential impact of this expansion or to get involved should contact Burt Stein at 610-825-0990.

## Candidate Forums Offer Voters First-Hand Perspective

During October, Whitmarsh residents had an opportunity to attend two pre-election forums sponsored by the WTRA where they heard directly from the candidates running for Board of Supervisors. In addition to hearing the candidates' responses to prepared questions, members of the audience were able to pose their own questions on topics ranging from taxes and budget to development and capital improvements. On both evenings,

candidates arrived early and stayed afterward to talk with residents informally.

"The WTRA would like to thank the candidates for their participation in the forums and more importantly, for their commitment to serve the township," says Kim Sheppard, WTRA President. "We'd also like to acknowledge the many residents who took time out of their busy schedules to become better informed. Public involvement in every aspect of local government is critical and here in Whitmarsh, it has been growing steadily. This can only mean good things for the future of our township."



### Whitmarsh Township Residents Association

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