



# The Whitemarsh Vista

The Whitemarsh Township Residents Association Newsletter

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Keeping our promise to keep you informed

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## Development Proposed in Panhandle Would Impact Miquon/Barren Hill Area

The Springfield Board of Commissioners will hold a public hearing this fall concerning a proposed development on 41 acres of open space near Ridge Pike and Manor Road. If constructed, this project would impact neighboring residents in Whitemarsh and erase one of the largest remaining open space tracts in that area.

The property, known as the Tecce tract, spans both Whitemarsh and Springfield Townships. The larger portion, lying in Springfield, has been slated for development as age-restricted housing. In order to do this however, the property would need to be exempted from Springfield's recently passed AAA residential zoning overlay for that area. AAA zoning would permit only about 45 single family detached homes on this tract.

The owners, Fred Tecce and his sister, have requested that the property be considered under the prior CRD zoning, which would permit a far denser development. Their development plans call for 3 four-story condominium buildings (96 units) at Ridge and Manor with one-story parking underneath and either single-family homes (65+) or town homes (110+) behind. The public hearing on the zoning variance request has been scheduled for late September.

In addition to its potential impact on traffic and the environment, a development of this magnitude could put additional strains on Whitemarsh Township's emergency services, which provide 'first response' to the Springfield Panhandle.

A group of local residents opposed to the requested zoning variance have formed the **Friends of the Springfield Panhandle (FOSP)** to mobilize concerned neighbors and provide information. They propose that the Township consider this property as a potential park and trail connector between Fairmount Park and the Schuylkill River Trail.

Residents of Whitemarsh are invited to become involved since this development would have an impact on area residents from both townships.

For more information, read the "Tecce Tract News" on the WTRA web site at [www.WTRA.org](http://www.WTRA.org) or contact Brennan Preine at [FOSP@comcast.net](mailto:FOSP@comcast.net).



## Valley Green Bridge Closing

During an annual inspection of the West Valley Green Road bridge over Wissahickon Creek, a crack was discovered in one of the supporting rods, requiring the bridge's temporary closure for repairs. Estimated time for repair is 6-8 weeks.

The repairs are intended to keep the bridge safe until it can be replaced sometime in the next few years. The head of the County's Department of Roads and Bridges stressed the importance of respecting the bridge's weight limit, which is 3 tons. Most cars fall under this limit but trucks do not.

*Working to preserve the special character of our communities*

## Township Open Space Committee Begins Work

The Township's newly formed Open Space Committee held its first meeting on May 25. Its task is to update the 1996 Open Space plan, aligning it with current realities and new goals. Committee members reflect a broad cross section of interests and experience. In addition to representatives from the Board of Supervisors, Planning Commission, Shade Tree Commission, Environmental Advisory Board, Parks and Recreation Department, and the Historic and Architectural Review Board, there are five members at large from the community. These members are affiliated with the Miquon Area Preservation Society (MAPS), the WTRA, the Nature Conservancy, the Whitemarsh Foundation and the Cedar Grove Neighborhood Association.

As part of their orientation, Committee members took a 'road tour' of the township to familiarize themselves with existing open space parcels. At their June meeting, they began an audit of the 1996 plan to evaluate what had been done and what still needs to be done. Over the next few months, the Committee will meet with key community stakeholders, such as County Planning Commission officials, local environmental groups, commercial entities with property holdings, and the School District, to discuss potential areas of synergy with regard to preserving open space.

Special meetings to solicit residents' input will be held at key points throughout the strategic planning process. All Committee meetings are open to the public. They are scheduled for the fourth Wednesday of the month at 7:30 pm at the Township Building.

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## County Trail System Grows

Over the next four years, the County plans to add 10 miles to its trail network running through Whitemarsh Township.

At a presentation before the Whitemarsh Board of Supervisors in May, John Wood, Chief of Open Space Planning for the County, presented an overview of

the County's trail expansion plans. In Whitemarsh, the County's plans are to expand the Wissahickon Green Ribbon Trail from the Stenton Avenue/Northwestern Avenue intersection to the Militia Hill area of Ft. Washington State Park. The lower portion of the Cross County Trail will be expanded from the Schuylkill River Trail to Bethlehem Pike

## New Member Joins WTRA Board

The WTRA is pleased to announce our newest board member, Jeffrey Warner, a resident of Lafayette Hill. Jeff is a public finance banker at PNC Bank with a background in urban finance. Before joining PNC, he served in a finance and treasury role with the School District of Philadelphia. Jeff also serves on the Young Friends Executive Board for the Children's Crisis Treatment Center and as a Team Hero Volunteer for City Year. He has a master's degree in Public Administration from the Graduate School of Public and International Affairs at the University of Pittsburgh.

in Ft. Washington and a connector trail will be constructed linking the lower Cross County and Green Ribbon trails.

Over the next four years, the County plans to add another 30 miles to its overall trail system, focusing mostly on the lower end of the county. A robust trail system serves several purposes: it preserves and connects open space and habitats, encourages bicycle commuting and passive recreation, and acts as an economic generator, attracting commercial enterprises that cater to hikers and cyclists.

Mr. Wood encouraged Whitemarsh officials to take advantage of available County funds to link local trails and open spaces to this larger network so as to optimize residents' mobility and recreational opportunities.

For more information on the trail plans for Whitemarsh, contact John Wood at [jwood@mail.montcopa.org](mailto:jwood@mail.montcopa.org) or 610-278-3736.



Railroad Bridge on spur of Wissahickon Green Ribbon Trail.

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## **Town Watch**

### ***Axe Wood Office Center (Butler and Skippack Pikes, Broad Axe area)***

Proposed Use: Office complex

Status: Applicant proposes to demolish a 1-story building next to the deserted gas station at corner of Butler and Skippack and to connect two of the other 3-story structures with a 3-story addition that would include an atrium lobby and elevator.

### ***Butler Pike Mini-Storage (Butler Pike, near Cedar Grove Road)***

Proposed use: Mini-storage facility

Status: The Zoning Hearing Board denied the public storage proposal and the applicant has appealed the decision to the County's Court of Common Pleas.

### ***Cold Point Manor (Flourtown Road and Butler Pike)***

Proposed use: Townhomes

Status: Developer is working to address Township staff feedback on plan before presenting formally to the Planning Commission. Plan could be slated for review this summer, at which time neighbors will be notified.

### ***Flourtown Shopping Center (Bethlehem Pike near Valley Green Road)***

Proposed Use: Retail

Status: Federal Realty Investment Trust has applied for rezoning of the 4.1 acre Whitemarsh portion of its 23.6 acre property (the rest falls in Springfield Township). The applicant would like the Whitemarsh portion, currently 'split zoned' as commercial and B-residential, to be zoned all commercial. Significant redevelopment is proposed for the site, including two buildings totaling approximately 17,000 sq. ft. for a bank and retail use in the Whitemarsh portion. The BOS must decide whether to consider the application, and if so, when to set a hearing date.

### ***Greens at Whitemarsh (Wells Street and Cedar Grove Road)***

Proposed use: Office space

Status: The WTRA and Cedar Grove Neighbors Association continue their negotiations with the developer regarding the proposed use of this property.

### ***Hill at Whitemarsh (Flourtown & Thomas Roads)***

Proposed use: Continuing Care Retirement Community

Status: In final stages of Final Plan approvals

With 70% of its units pre-sold, the Hill now qualifies for Phase 1 construction financing. At the closing of Phase 1 project financing, the developer will donate \$500,000 to the Whitemarsh Foundation toward the purchase and preservation of the Erdenheim Farm Angus Tract. Also upon financing, the option on this tract of land will be transferred to the Foundation.

### ***National Label (Cedar Grove Road)***

Proposed use: Age-restricted community

Status: In December, a zoning variance was permitted allowing age-restricted housing in the area behind the company, which was formerly slated for the company's business expansion. A sketch plan for the development has been approved but no preliminary plan has yet been submitted.

### ***Quarry Hole #1 (Stenton Avenue near Joshua Road)***

Proposed use: Office complex

Status: The Township has filed a motion to dismiss the civil rights case brought in federal court in Philadelphia by the developer, The DePaul Group.

### ***Stoddart Property (Church Road and Germantown Pike)***

Proposed use: Single family homes

Status: After agreeing to reduce the number of proposed homes from four to three, the developer pulled out of the agreement to purchase the property, citing economic infeasibility. Owner has now decided to divide property into two tracts, one two-acre parcel containing the property's existing home and another four-acre parcel to be developed with two homes.

## Local Volunteer Leaders Honored

Marking the halfway point of the township's tricentennial celebration, Whitemarsh honored its sixth resident as Citizen of the Month. Katherine (Kay) Speers was selected by Whitemarsh 300, the tricentennial committee, to receive its June award.

The honorees are chosen for their outstanding contributions to the community. Kay, who served as a district justice for eight years, was honored for her volunteer work with the blind and hearing impaired, and with veterans' families. Kay also helped start the first library at Lafayette Hill Consolidated School.

Other residents to receive Citizen of the Month are:

**January:** Charlie Hough, for his public service as former Zoning Board member and recently retired Planning Commissioner.

**February:** Madeline Moser, affectionately known as the 'Mayor of Lafayette Hill,' for her volunteer work with St. Phillip's, the local Girl Scouts, and other community organizations.

**March:** P. Bruce Ferguson, for his service on the William Jeanes Library board and Township Board of Supervisors and his involvement with St. Phillip in the Fields and SCORE.

**April:** Julia Cottrell for her efforts to develop the township's excellent arts education program at the Whitemarsh Community Art Center.

**May:** Sheldon Klein, for his dedication to improving public safety through his leadership as assistant chief of the Barren Hill Fire Department and Fire Company President.

The WTRA would like to add its congratulations and thanks to these extraordinary volunteers for their dedication and service to the community. You may read more about their contributions and the Whitemarsh 300's tricentennial celebration at [www.whitemarsh300.org/whitemarsh300/whitemarsh.asp](http://www.whitemarsh300.org/whitemarsh300/whitemarsh.asp).

### Want to Help the WTRA?

The WTRA is always looking for volunteers. Anyone with expertise in land use or environmental law, communications, civil engineering, land preservation or other areas related to our mission of preserving open space and advancing smart growth is encouraged to contact us at 610-828-5351 or [info@wtra.org](mailto:info@wtra.org).

## Search for Township's Heritage Trees

What is 75 years or older, has a waist size of 40" or more, and comes with a bit of history? The answer: a heritage tree.

As part of the township's 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary, citizens are being asked to help identify trees that might qualify for this designation to ensure that they receive full protection under the Tree Protection Ordinance. If there's a tree in your neighborhood, or even in your backyard, that you think might qualify, contact the township at 610-825-3535. Nominations must be received by August 18.

The list of heritage trees will be announced at the end of the year. At that time, each tree will be designated with a plaque, and a plaque listing all the trees will be posted in the Township Building.

Keeping Whitemarsh Green is more than just protecting open space; it's also protecting individual specimen trees that are part of the township's character and history.



## A Hidden Whitemarsh Treasure



In 2002, Jane O'Neal, a longtime Whitemarsh resident, deeded 110 acres of her Willow Lake Farm to the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association to be preserved permanently as open space. The property, which lies on the north side of Skippack Pike across from Karamoor Farm, is open to the public.

Entrance to the property lies at the back of the Axe Wood Office Center parking lot, near the intersection of Skippack and Butler Pikes, and is marked by a WVWA sign and trail marker. The trail through the property takes the stroller through shaded woods, across open pastures and beside horses grazing in their paddocks.

To learn more about this little known open space treasure, contact WVWA Properties Manager Bob Adams at 215-646-8866.



### Whitemarsh Township Residents Association

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