

Township Funds First Open Space Purchase

December, 2005

Londonderry Township Supervisors have agreed to participate with the Chester County Agricultural Preservation Board in the purchase of the Township's first agricultural conservation easement on a family farm. This decision was possible because of the funds that are available from our 0.25% Open-Space Earned Income tax.

The farm is the Stoltzfus property on Faggs Manor Road just north of the Faggs Manor Presbyterian Church. Mr. and Mrs. Stoltzfus are selling the rights to approximately 53 acres and are preserving another 22 acres along the Elk Creek through a gift to the Brandywine Conservancy. As part of the agreement, the Stoltzfus' agreed to place an additional impervious cover restriction on their property. This restriction should insure that future use will be restricted to conventional as opposed to "intensive" agriculture.

On behalf of Londonderry Township, the Open-Space Committee would like to thank the Stoltzfus family for their commitment to preserving this valuable piece of farmland. In order to make this work they have made concessions and donations that are more than double Londonderry Township's investment!

Supervisors Approve Second Open Space Purchase

October 2005

Last month, at a meeting of community members, a resident asked "How will these open space purchases benefit me in the next five years?" The township's recent agreement to purchase an agricultural conservation easement on the Laffey farm provides a perfect example: All but 9 acres of the Laffey farm are in neighboring Highland Township. Sixty-three acres of the farm are in the rural village district (high-density housing), and forty acres are in the industrial district. The Laffey's received an attractive offer from a developer who could have built about 400 units on the property, but they chose instead to "ease" their land through the Chester County Challenge Grant Program. In this program the county and the townships share the cost of paying the farmer for his "development rights" and the property remains a farm - forever.

Although only a small portion of the Laffey farm is in our township, and this acreage is not as valuable as the rest, it is part of the package. Londonderry had to participate in order for the property to qualify so we agreed to pay our share, which is \$54,000. Our Open Space Earned Income Tax of 0.25% will pay the bill, but is this a good investment?

Consider the impact of having 400 additional homes on our western border and the tax implications of having about 500 additional students attending our schools. The cost of the additional students, easily over \$5,000,000 per year, would be shared by all property owners in the Octorara Area School District, it would not fall to Highland Township alone. Londonderry residents' annual share of the increased school tax would easily exceed the one-time purchase price of \$54,000. Additionally, there are safety concerns. With 400 new homes, vehicular traffic would increase by several thousand trips per day. Many of the people headed east and south would travel on our narrowest rural roads to reach routes 41, 796, and 926.

Was this a good investment? I think so! You may never see these nine acres of open space, but you will benefit from their purchase for as long as you live here. Hopefully this will give you something to smile about the next time you open your school tax bill.

For more information about open space, contact Hank Detering, committee chairman, at 610-869-3631.