Open Space Plans

10 Points

Updated April 2021

The goal of this action is municipal preparation of an Open Space Plan and Recreation Plan and it's adoption by the Planning Board as an element of the local Master Plan. An Open Space and Recreation Plan, OSRP, (also referred to as the Open Space Plan, OSP) should follow the guidance provided by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), Green Acres Program. The Green Acres guidelines require a specific format and content for a municipal OSRP if a town wishes to participate in the Green Acres Planning Incentive Program for enhanced open space funding. The municipality establishes open space goals and policies in the OSRP, based on an inventory of existing and potential open space, an assessment of recreation needs, as well as conservation objectives and public access opportunities. The OSRP provides a framework and direction for achieving these goals by identify areas for preservation, improvement and maintenance.

In addition to addressing the 10 components outlined in the NJDEP – Green Acres Program – Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines, the OSRP needs to been completed or updated and adopted as part of the local Master Plan within the last 10 years.

For certified communities, this action can count toward Gold Stars in both Health and Water. See the Gold Star Standard section of this action for more information.

Why is it Important?

Open space is land predominantly in a natural state or if developed, for outdoor use and enjoyment. Corridors of green spaces along a stream, community gardens, parks and playgrounds, public plazas and vacant lots all contribute to the open space in a community. These varied places can serve as important amenities for passive and active recreation and enhance the beauty and environmental quality while defining the character of the community.

Additionally, there are many benefits to preserving and maintain open space including, but not limited to: increased property values for parcels with access to open space; improved drainage and stormwater management; increased revenues from nature-based tourism; purification of air, soil and waterways; preservation of habitat; improved health and reduced stress from increased access to outdoor activity; and equitable access to public land at no cost.

To capitalize on all the benefits that open space conservation brings, there is a national movement to conserve 30 percent of the county’s land and ocean waters by 2030, also known as the 30 x 30 goal and described as a “moon shot” or an ambitious goal for nature. More information on the 30 x 30 goal the multiple benefits of protecting open space as well as the need to consider equity in preserving open space can be found below in the Resources section of this action.

A completed Open Space and Recreation Plan, will provide a municipality with information to evaluate a particular parcel and the roles the property can play in adding to the open space in a community. An OSRP captures the municipality’s vision for open space and recreation to assist in spending its precious dollars on the land that offers the most benefits to the community and the environment. Without a comprehensive adopted OSRP in place, a community may purchase land in reaction to development or political pressures and miss opportunities to preserve key parcels for community or environmental protection purposes.

Further, a community with a Green Acres approved OSRP and a local open space tax (or other stable funding source) may qualify for larger Green Acres acquisition grants (50% of purchase price instead of 25%) under

the DEP's Green Acres Planning Incentive Program grants and loan funding. A municipality can find out more about eligibility and steps for applying for this assistance with the Planning Incentive Land Acquisition Application.

Who should lead and be involved with this action?

Typically, Environmental Commissions are involved or lead in the development of Open Space Plans as they are tasked in the municipal land use law with maintaining a list of open areas in the community as well as making recommendations on open space to the Planning Board for inclusion in the Master Plan. In addition, the municipality should engage the various committees involved in open space including but not limited to the governing body, Open Space Advisory Committee, Recreation Board, and Historical Commission. Working with the Planning Board is critical, as they will be asked to adopted the OSRP as an element of the Master Plan. Further, it is important to keep the public involved throughout the process from goal development to action planning to build support for the OSRP and ensure its implementation. Some municipalities may choose to have their Environmental Commission do all of the work or some of it. Others may hire a municipal planner or private consultant.

Timeframe

The timeframe can require up to 12 months or longer and depends on the type of funding and resources available for the project, as well as on whether it is done in-house or by a private consultant. Timing also depends on ensuring the Planning Board adopts the final product as an element of the municipality's Master Plan, to enhances land use consistency.

Project Costs and Resource Needs

Costs vary depending on who is preparing the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the scope of the plan, if it is a new or an update to an existing Plan. In most cases, the municipal governing body will need to allocate resources and funds to undertake the planning process. Preparing a Plan in-house with volunteers may help in reducing the cost of a consultant. If a municipality has an open space tax in place, it may be an allowable use of those funds to update or develop an OSRPs. When hiring a consultant, costs can range from $10,000 - $20,000 depending on the size of the municipality and how much background data and land information the municipality is able to supply to the consultant.

Note: New Jersey Highlands Municipalities participating in the Plan Conformance Grant Program may qualify for funding to assist in the preparation of an Open Space and Recreation Plan. Interested municipalities can reach out to Herbert August, Manager of Grants Administration for the Highlands Council at herbert.august@highlands.nj.gov or Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, Planning Manager at maryjude.haddock-weiler@highlands.nj.gov. https://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/

What to do and how to do it ("How to")

This section provides guidance and recommendations for implementing the action. A municipality does not need to follow this guidance exactly as long as it meets the requirements for earning points for this action.

Planning Process

The Environmental Commission is empowered by statute to conduct many of the activities needed for preparing an OSRP, such as developing an Open Space Inventory or researching the use of open lands in the community. The Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) has an excellent Resource paper – Open Space Plan: Charting a course for your town's green assets - on preparing an Open Space and Recreation Plan. Whether it's the Environmental Commission, Open Space Advisory Committee, and/or the Planning Board leading the development of the OSPR, the planning process should seek out the involvement of individuals, agencies, and organizations in the community who have responsibility for, or an interest in, the current and future provision of recreational opportunities and the protection of open space resources. In order to meet Sustainable Jersey and Green Acres' requirements, the planning process should include public participation. The planning process should also include contacting surrounding municipalities and the county which may have developed their own OSRP to assist in understand the regional context. Thinking regionally is important because natural resources, which form the basis of an open space system, transcend political boundaries.

Planning Resources

All New Jersey municipalities and counties are required to prepare a Master Plan. The Master Plan will contain

much of the information needed for an OSRP such as population, income, growth projections, infrastructure and environmentally sensitive areas. Many local governments have also prepared a Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) or sometimes called an Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) that includes detailed information on steep slopes, soils, vegetation and water resources. Both of these documents should provide base data for the OSRP. Further information can be found using the Conservation Blueprint - an interactive mapping tool that highlights for users the lands that are best suited for conservation.

What to Include in the Open Space Plan

The following should be included in an Open Space and Recreation Plan (or Open Space Plan). For additional guidance on developing an Open Space Plan please consult the NJDEP's Green Acres Program Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines. Variation of these sections will be allowed; however, the intent of each section should be addressed in the plan:

1. **Executive Summary**: a summary of the plan's purpose, description of the processes including public participation in the development of the plan, key findings, major goals it establishes, and actions it proposes.
2. **Goals and Policies**: the local government's goals and policies to answer the question on how it plans to provide open space and meet recreational needs in a fair and equitable manner in the community.
3. **Inventory**: documentation of existing public and private open space and recreation resources and opportunities. The inventory is to include the size, location, ownership, and usage of each parcel.
    - Public and private land and water areas available for active (baseball, soccer fields) and passive (trails, undeveloped open spaces) recreation;
    - Public and private land and water areas maintained as conservation areas dedicated to the preservation of natural and cultural resources; and
    - Lands that provide access to coastal and inland water bodies.
4. **Needs Analysis**: an analysis of the adequacy of the current open space and recreation system to satisfy present and future needs, as documented in the Inventory. This can identify the gaps in the recreation facilities, as well as potential connections, including trails that link residents to outdoor resources, protect migration corridors for flora and fauna, or riparian buffers along waterways with potential water access, and more.
5. **Resource Assessment**: an assessment of those public and private land and water resources that have potential for providing open space or recreation opportunities. This should include open space facilities such as trails, bicycle paths, and greenways that link existing recreation and open space sites in an integrated system. Additionally, the resource assessment should include information on supporting conservation objectives, such as water supply protection, access to water bodies, wildlife habitat protection, protection of rivers, streams, and forest lands, farmland preservation, and historic preservation.
6. **Action Plan**: a program of actions to guide the orderly and coordinated execution of a Plan's goals and policies. The Action Plan should include a targeted parcel list and/or target area(s)/resources list that the municipality is focused on acquiring to add to their open space inventory. Any management recommendations or development projects for facility-based land (ballparks, courts, developed facilities) and resource-based areas (hiking, camping, activities that rely on a healthy resource for public enjoyment) should be described. Stewardship and maintenance practices of recreation areas need to consider the impact on natural resources as well.
7. **General Open Space System Map**: a map of the open space and recreation system showing the location and general configuration of all existing public and private open space and recreation resources and sites identified as having open space and recreation potential. Conservation easements should be included on the map to the greatest extent possible.
8. **Additional Parcel Data Requirements**: In addition to the general open space system map, the following data is required:
    - **Existing** preserved open space sites documented in the Plan's Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI) delineated at the block and lot level. The ROSI is a list required by Green Acres to assist a municipality in keeping track of lands that have been preserved, held or dedicated for recreation and conservation purposes. The list will include all properties that have received Green Acres funds as well as any others set aside by the municipality as open space. Properties on the ROSI cannot be removed or converted to uses other than recreation or conservation without New Jersey State House Commission approval.
    - **Potential** open space and greenway areas identified in the same detail as outlined in the Plan's resource assessment. Delineation may range from individual block and lot to physical or areas defined by cultural boundaries such as roads, waterways, farm fields, etc.
9. **Public Participation**: a discussion of the public participation process. The adoption of the OSRP by the Planning Board into the Master Plan requires at least two public meetings and official notice. In addition, throughout every step of the planning process provide opportunities to engage local residents, for

example, seek out and provide an update on the plan, progress and next steps to interested groups such as the PTO, senior clubs, conservation groups, sports organizations, and other community groups. Implementation of the OSRP will need public support which often begins with public input in the plan development.

10. **Plan Adoption**: plan adoption by the local government's Planning Board as an element of the local Master Plan is required. A resolution from the Planning Board adopting the OSRP should be submitted.

What to submit to earn points for this action

To earn points for this action, the following documentation must be submitted as part of the online certification application in order to verify that the action requirements have been met.

- Description of Implementation – In the text box provided on the submission page for this action provide a short narrative (300 words or less) of what has been accomplished and the impact it has or will have on the community.
- Upload a current Open Space and Recreation Plan (ORSP) wad completed within the past 10 years (year applying for certification or nine previous years) and addresses the 10 components listed in the "What to Do" section.
- Upload a resolution or minutes from the Planning Board documenting that OSRP was adopted by the Planning Board as an element of the Master Plan.

OR if the OSRP is older than 10 years

- Upload an OSRP Update completed within the past 10 years (year applying for certification or nine previous years). At a minimum, the OSRP Update should include: a targeted parcel list that shows what the municipality is actively implementing or pursuing; a statement evaluating the Open Space Plan's goals and objectives; an updated map, and an explanation of any needs that have changed.
- Upload a resolution or minutes from the Planning Board meeting adopting the OSRP Update as an amendment to the OSRP Master Plan element.

Resubmission Requirements

For ORSP's older than 10 years - A OSRP Update including a targeted parcel list that shows what the municipality is actively implementing or pursuing; a statement evaluating the Open Space Plan's goals and objectives; an updated map, and an explanation of any needs that have changed must be completed and adopted by the Planning Board as an amendment to the ORSP Master Plan element.

Approved Action Expiration Date

Approved actions will be set to expire nine full calendar years after the OSRP or OSRP Update was adopted by the Planning Board. For example, if the plan was adopted by the Planning Board as an amendment to the Master Plan in April 2020, the action will be set to expire December 31, 2029.

IMPORTANT NOTES:

There is a limit of six uploaded documents per action and individual files must not exceed 50 MB. Excerpts of relevant information from large documents are recommended.

All action documentation is available for public viewing after an action is approved. Action submissions should not include any information or documents that are not intended to be viewed by the public.

Gold Star Standard

Health: Successful completion of this action will meet the requirement of an Additional action for earning a Gold Star in Health.

Water: Successful completion of this action at the 10-point level will meet the requirement of an Additional action for earning a Gold Star in Water.

For more information on earning a Gold Star in Health see the Gold Star Standards section of the website.

Spotlight: What NJ towns are doing

City of Camden, Camden County
The Camden Parks and Open Space Plan The Trust for Public Land and Cooper's Ferry Partnership, consultants

Readington Township, Hunterdon County
Open Space Element – Amended Master Plan, February 2018, Clarke Caton Hintz consultant

Lafayette Township, Sussex County
The Township with the assistance of The Land Conservancy of New Jersey completed an Open Space and Recreation Plan in June 2005 and updated it in July 2020.

Evesham Township, Burlington County
Open Space & Recreation Plan: Evesham Township, Burlington County 2013, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, consultant

Edison Township – Middlesex County – In 2018 the Township completed an update of their 2003 Open Space and Recreation Plan. The updated Open Space and Recreation Plan was adopted in 2018 as an amendment to the 2003 the Edison Master Plan, Land Conservancy of New Jersey, consultant. A link to the **Edison Planning Board Resolution**, adopting the OSRP as an update to the 2003 Master Plan can be found here A link to a copy of the **Edison Open Space and Recreation Plan** can be found here.

Lafayette Township, Sussex County
The Township with the assistance of The Land Conservancy of New Jersey completed an Open Space and Recreation Plan in June 2005 and updated it in July 2020.

Resources

Data and mapping tool
Conservation Blueprint – reliable, up-to-date, statewide information on land use to identify lands to be preserved (not developed) in New Jersey
https://www.njmap2.com/blueprint/

Guidance on preparing an Open Space and Recreation Plan
Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines – 2019, Green Acres Program, New Jersey Environmental Protection

Resource Paper: Open Space Plan: Charting a course for your town's green assets, 2021, Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions

https://anjec.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/OpenSpacePlan-2021.pdf

Benefits of open space and the 30 x 30 goal
Return on Environment - The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania , 2011, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

https://www.dvrpc.org/Products/11033B/

Resource Paper: Open Space is a Good Investment – 2014 Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions

https://anjec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/OpenSpaceGoodInvestment2014.pdf

Economic & Health Benefits, Trust for Public Land The Trust for Public Land conducts studies and produces reports that help advocates make the case for conservation

https://www.tpl.org/economic-health-benefits#:~:text=Proximity%20to%20parks%20and%20open,water%20up%20to%20ten%2Dfold.

Pew Charitable Trusts – 30 percent conservation commitment is good news for people too

https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/articles/2021/01/27/president-bidens-30-percent-conservation-commitment-is-good-news-for-people-too

https://www.tpl.org/media-room/trust-public-land-statement-governor-newsoms-ambitious-30x30-plan-address-climate-change

Center for American Progress - The Nature Gap: Confronting Racial and Economic Disparities in the Destruction and Protection of Nature in America

https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/green/reports/2020/07/21/487787/the-nature-gap/