

MEMO

Date: April 8, 2022

To: Board of Supervisors

From: Maggie Dobbs

Re: Consider Amending the 2019 Comprehensive Plan Update

For the Board to pursue a tax referendum under Act 153 to purchase Crebilly Farms, the Township must document in an official map or comprehensive plan that this property is recommended for acquisition. Our comprehensive plan does mention acquisition of “large parcels” over 5 acres as a priority implementation goal but does not specifically mention Crebilly Farm as being targeted for acquisition. Additionally, the future land use map shows Crebilly Farm as split land use between “open space” to the west of the site and “neighborhood conservation” to the east of the site. This would seem to indicate that the eastern portion has been identified for residential or commercial development. While this may have been true when the parcel was under conditional use review for the Toll development proposal, we now need to update this map to show all of Crebilly Farm as being targeted for open space in our future land use map. Minor modifications are also proposed in the Open Space chapter (Chapter 7) to more specifically call out the acquisition of Crebilly Farm for open space as a priority project. Language is also being included specifically referencing that the open space on the farm is intended to be used for trails and passive recreation. If and when we pursue grant funding for the engineering design and construction of a trail network, the comprehensive plan will already have identified that as a future priority project.

The Board is being asked to review the proposed amendments to the comprehensive plan text and future land use map, and authorize advertisement of the plan amendment. Staff will send the amendment to the County Planning Commission, all of the contiguous municipalities, and the West Chester Area School District for a 45 day comment period. The Planning Commission will review the amendment at an upcoming meeting as well during the comment period. After the 45 days, the BOS will hold a public hearing pursuant to public notice and the comp plan amendment can be adopted by resolution.

CHAPTER SEVEN: OPEN SPACE, PARKS, RECREATION AND TRAILS

Westtown Township is valued by residents and visitors for its rural features - the working farmlands, woodlands, and parkland nestled amidst the otherwise suburban landscape. However, the Township has been steadily losing these features to development.

Though the Township's previous Comprehensive Plan recommended several actions regarding land preservation, development has continued. With less than 8% of the Township land left undeveloped, the Township faces some key choices.

The Township adopted an Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources (OSRER) Plan Update in May of 2014. This plan was developed with significant public feedback regarding residents' views, which clearly indicated the importance of open space conservation, enhancing the park system, and providing opportunities for trails.

This Comprehensive Plan Update incorporates the goals, objectives and strategies of that Plan, reaffirming the findings and further prioritizing the strategies.

This chapter, in addition to providing a brief overview of the OSRER Plan, looks at the following topics:

- Agricultural Lands
- Protected Natural Features
- Municipal Parks & Open Spaces
- Schools
- Homeowners Association (HOA) Open Space
- Recreation
- Trails

Maps pertaining to this chapter are found after page 7-12.



Picnic area at Oakbourne Park, 2018

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Key Issues

Open space resources are also an important element of the local landscape, critically helping to endow the Township with its sense of place and even quality of life. Local planning that integrates and protects open space resources will encourage patterns of development, redevelopment, and neighborhood conservation that enhance Westtown's sense of place. Based on the more detailed analysis and inventories presented in the background discussion below, key issues regarding open space resources in Westtown are identified here.

Preserve Remaining Open Space

Why Is This Important?

Open spaces that define the character of the Township continue to be lost

In 1990, 45% of the Township was either agricultural or wooded (DVRPC). In 2010, that number was down to 32%, representing a loss of nearly 800 acres.

The development of agricultural and natural woodlands translates into more than additional housing units and traffic. It is an increase in stormwater runoff and loss of opportunities for trails and recreation, as well as alteration to the Township's character, beloved by many.

Throughout the development of this plan update, Westtown residents have consistently called for greater efforts toward open space preservation.

Pennsylvania Act 153 provides, via referendum, for municipalities to establish dedicated revenue for purchase of interests in open space, whether acquisition of lands in fee simple or through conservation easements:

- **Purchase – fee simple acquisition**

While this is the costliest option for the Township, it provides full control of the land and can be the best option for providing new parkland and trails for its residents.

- **Conservation Easements**

A conservation easement allows a property to remain under private ownership and control, while limiting the uses to those specified in the easement, such as agriculture or trails.

Conservation easements are commonly used to preserve farmland and enable the work to continue. Because the land remains in private ownership, the cost of purchasing the conservation easement is less than the cost of purchasing the property outright, and it spares the Township the need to manage the property.

Working farmland is particularly vulnerable

Working farms serve many purposes and provide benefits to the community at large including locally grown food, maintenance of scenic views, preservation of historic structures, providing for groundwater recharge, and contributing to the character of the township.

Additionally, agricultural lands demand fewer services from the Township than commercial or residential development,

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helping to maintain service levels and expenditures.

The largest remaining open spaces in the Township are actively farmed and under private ownership and in one case are part of a private boarding school. However, as farmers age and new recruits are more difficult to find, the Township should endeavor to build and maintain open lines of communication with these landowners in order to increase the chances of meeting the goals of both parties.

Enhance Connectivity of Open Spaces and Access to Them

Why Is This Important?

Existing open space lacks connectivity and non-motor-vehicular access

Open spaces and natural areas more effectively serve both the human and natural worlds when connected into continuous networks called greenways. Oftentimes, these networks follow a stream corridor or ridgeline, and they allow for wildlife migration, biodiversity, and the creation of trails for transportation and recreation. In Westtown the opportunities to connect existing open spaces and create such greenways are limited and running out.

There is clear demand for safe places to walk or bicycle

The majority of Westtown streets and neighborhoods do not have sidewalks or trails, making it difficult to access the many parks, schools, and other destinations in the Township without the use of a car. Better access to recreation opportunities and/or

new parkland is particularly absent in the eastern and western most areas of the Township.

The demand for more opportunities to walk, whether for recreation and exercise, or for daily tasks, is increasing across the County and the nation. In the Township, the results of the online survey and community forums, demonstrate a strong desire by many to create such opportunities going forward.



Open space at Oakbourne Park, 2018



Sidewalk along Skiles Blvd., 2018

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Enhance Recreational Value

Why Is This Important?

The OSRER Plan concluded that the Township's existing park system provides a solid foundation for recreation, but could better serve the community and strengthen Westtown's green image if planned and managed in a coordinated manner, with a single vision in mind.

Oakbourne Park, for example, is considered a community gem. A master plan for this specific park and for all Township parks could ensure that community needs, including trails, are planned for and met through planned capital expenditures and careful management by township staff.

While the Township is not large enough to justify a full-time Parks and Recreation Department, parks and recreation planning could be more formalized with a single point of contact who offers more consistent promotion, communication, as well as plans and executes consistent township sponsored events.

Expanded recreational programming is desirable to meet public needs

Current recreational offerings are heavily focused on youth sports, with current sports fields at capacity and demand on the rise. However, such facilities should be balanced with the recreational opportunities and demands from other segments of the current and future population, particularly older residents.



Soccer fields at Oakbourne Park, 2018



Tennis Courts at Oakbourne Park, 2018



Fire circle at Oakbourne Park, 2018

Future Action and Policy Considerations

Preserve and enhance open space and recreational resources

- **Consider initiation of a referendum** allowing Township residents to vote on whether to establish a dedicated tax for open space protection for remaining large parcels that may become available for sale, including Crebilly Farm.
- **Maintain strong relationships with large landowners** including Westtown School, the Stratton family, and the Stokes family in order to actively assist in keeping those open spaces undeveloped and actively farmed.
- **Evaluate the Township zoning ordinance** for potential barriers versus incentives for viable agricultural related businesses.
- **Seek and support collaborative efforts** with other agencies, conservation organizations, and owners of valuable open spaces to achieve permanent land conservation.
- **Develop best management practices for land stewardship** of Township-owned open spaces, to improve the ecological performance of these resources and to educate and inspire private land owners
- **Complete master park plans for all Township parks**, including

maintenance and management plans for all structures and facilities.

- **Evaluate opportunities to expand park, recreation and trail facilities** in the underserved areas of the Township (west of Route 202 and east of Route 352). At such point as In the event that development may occur at Crebilly Farm, ensure ~~that~~ the land development plan includes trails and unconstrained lands suitable for active and/or passive recreation/play fields. In the event that Crebilly Farm can be protected as open space through acquisition or conservation easements, the Township should develop a plan for trails and other suitable amenities throughout the site to increase resident access to passive recreation. Access to Crebilly Farm should prioritize existing trail networks and linking nearby residential neighborhoods via non-motorized trails or paths.
- **Evaluate ability to allocate a greater percentage of the Township budget** for parks and recreation and leverage this base amount with other funding sources (fees, grants, gifts, sponsorships, etc.).
- **Evaluate the ability of existing Township staffing and appointed Commissions and Committees** to support the goals and objectives of the OSRER Plan.

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Background Discussion

Existing Open Space Inventory

Agricultural Lands

The largest tracts of undeveloped land in the Township are the iconic 322-acre Crebilly Farm west of Route 202 and north of Route 926, the lands north and south of the Westtown School which are owned by the School, the Stokes Farm east of Shiloh Road, and the Stratton Farm in the south-eastern corner of the Township. Most of these lands are in agricultural use, with some woodland and other natural features.



Agricultural Lands along S. Concord Rd, 2018

Protected Natural Features

These include woodlands, hillsides, and surface waters that provide for stormwater recharge, flood control, passive recreation, and wildlife habitat. The developed nature of the Township makes these remaining resources all the more critical to preserve.

Natural area restoration is also needed to alleviate flooding, reduce erosion, and create better environments for people as

well as nature. Natural resources are mapped and discussed in more detail in the Natural Resources Section.

Municipal Parks and Open Space

Westtown Township owns and maintains its multiple parks and open spaces, containing approximately 318 acres as indicated on the [Parks and Open Spaces Map](#). The largest is the 90+ acre Oakbourne Park, which serves the entire community.

Open spaces within developments, such as the Plum Run Open Space along Spring Line Drive, provide residents with the opportunity to walk out their front doors and enjoy nature. Others, such as the Westwood Drive Open Space, are more hidden and difficult to access, making them useful only to a few residents.

Some of the parcels, such as the Cobblefield Open Space, are more utilitarian. Cobblefield holds a sewage pump station, while many others contain stormwater management facilities.



Playground at Tyson Park, 2018

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Schools

There are five public schools and three private schools that call Westtown “home.” Each of these have their own land and recreational facilities, which may be used by the public to varying degrees, but nonetheless contribute to the overall network of green spaces in Westtown Township.

Westtown School, the largest landowner in the Township, owns over 600 acres of land, containing myriad recreational fields and facilities, in addition to its working farmland.

Five additional schools, owned and operated by the West Chester Area School District, contain a total of 255 acres of land throughout the Township. There also are two parochial schools in the Township: St. Maximilian Kolbe and Saints Simon and Jude; these have limited open space and recreational facilities.

Homeowners Association (HOA) Open Space

Westtown Township has several HOAs, which collectively own approximately 70 acres of land. These HOA open spaces vary in size and are indicated on [the Parks and Open Spaces Map](#).

2014 Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources Plan Update

The Township adopted an Open Space, Recreation, and Environmental Resources (OSRER) Plan Update in May of 2014. This plan was developed with significant public feedback regarding residents’ views, one of which was the clear indication of the importance of open space preservation.

The OSRER Plan set forth three goals:

1. **Make Westtown “forever green” by preserving natural, historic, and scenic places.**

Objectives for this goal focus on enhancing water quality in the Chester and Goose Creeks, preserving remaining open spaces, and managing open spaces to enhance their health and environmental benefits.

2. **Foster fitness, wellness, and play with programs and facilities for Westtown Township residents.**

Objectives here hone in on making the best use of park facilities through master planning, engaging residents in park planning in order to enhance opportunities and health, and trail planning.

3. **Allocate financial and human resources that support the implementation of the plan.**

Objectives here focus on developing partnerships, engaging residents, recruiting volunteers, and building staff.

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Further, the plan provided the following priorities for which open space lands to protect:

“Large” Parcels

Saving the last large, remaining tracts, is a priority as they present the last opportunities to conserve these tracts from being subdivided into house lots and streets. Given the developed nature of the Township, five (5) acres constitutes a “large” parcel. The Protected & Unprotected Open Space Map indicates permanently protected lands and undeveloped lands over five acres in area. ~~Nearby-protected lands beyond the boundaries of Westtown are also indicated.~~

Specifically, the preservation of Crebilly Farm is a top priority. There are currently no farmland or open space protections on this property. The Township should seek to preserve this land through fee simple acquisition or conservation easements, as appropriate, to retain this land as open space and for passive recreation.

Connections

In public forums, meetings with stakeholder groups and in Open Space Task Force discussions, the importance of linking open space – both natural areas and trails, became evident. Therefore, parcels that connect to an existing open space system are of high priority for conservation.

Financial Leverage

The high cost of real estate in Westtown Township means that public funds could play a significant role in open space preservation.

Projects that involve private and non-profit partners who bring funding to the project; projects that can leverage County and State grant programs; and projects where the landowner is making a donation should be elevated to a high priority.

Green Infrastructure

“Green Infrastructure” uses natural processes to replace some, but not all, mechanical, chemical, or structural components.

For Westtown, green infrastructure could include tree planting, and restoration of degraded forests and stream banks. Such greening improves water quality, reduces stormwater runoff impacts such as flooding, and improves habitat for plants and animals. In the process, green infrastructure contributes to the quality of life for residents.

Making green infrastructure a priority could also be a design approach in new developments, such as adding rain gardens to commercial parking lots and using development open space for stormwater infiltration.



Bioswale at Tyson Park, 2015

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Township Parks, Recreation and Trails

While Township residents have access to many public, semi-public, and private park lands and recreation facilities within the region, this section examines parks and recreation within the Township.

The table below summarizes the Township's five (5) parks totaling 118 acres with their associated service areas and amenities, as recommended by the National Park and Recreation Association (NPRA).

The NPRA service area recommendation is a guideline intended to gauge the geographic area served by each type of park, as well as the adequacy of those services in relation to the size of the population. Overlaying the service areas for the individual parks highlights potential gaps in the system, and thus residents who may not have equal opportunity to recreational services in the township.

Within the OSRER Plan, each park is assessed individually and a list of recommended improvements as well as

maintenance needs is provided. Overall, the assessment observes the following:

- When analyzing park locations, it is notable that all parks are located between Route 202 and Route 352, leaving the eastern and western most areas of the township underserved.

The lack of facilities in these areas is exacerbated by the difficult access to existing facilities in the rest of the township. As discussed in other sections of this Plan, Route 202 is impassible unless riding in a vehicle. Crossing Route 352 on foot is less intimidating than Route 202, while the absence of sidewalks and shoulders along Route 926 make even a short distance on foot challenging.

- Existing parks lack the cohesive identity that could come from signage, branding, and complimentary equipment and amenities.

Unified planning of the parks as a system would better serve township residents, creating a sum greater than

Park Name	Acres	Park Type	Service Area	Uses
Oakbourne	90	Community Park	3 miles	Active and passive recreation
Pennwood	16.5	Neighborhood Park	½ mile	Passive recreation
Tyson	5	Mini Park	¼ mile	Active and passive recreation
Edgewood Chase	3.6	Mini Park	¼ mile	Passive recreation
Larchbourne	2	Neighborhood Park	½ mile	Active and passive recreation

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its parts, and thus strengthening the township's "forever green" image.

- Gaudenzia House, a privately owned facility that helps people affected by chemical dependency, mental illness and related conditions, is located in the center of Oakbourne Park. In the long run, this property should be acquired if it comes up for sale. In the near term, additional landscape buffering and possibly fencing could be used to better signal that it is a separate property.

Recreation

Active and passive recreation opportunities are important aspects of community life. As is common in Chester County, the Township's primary role in regards to recreation is to:

- **Facilitate recreation by enhancing facilities at existing parks;**
- **Support the efforts of other, third party organizations,** who coordinate scheduled programs for a wide variety of sporting activities; and
- **Promote Park and Recreation events** through the Township newsletter, website, and social media.

There are six main sports organizations that practice and play their games in Township parks, although none are organized in Westtown. When polled, all of these organizations reported increasing participation, lack of facilities, or overused fields. Additional facilities and programming are provided to specific groups through WCASD and Westtown School.

As the existing fields and facilities are currently booked, there are some options for non-league play. The multipurpose field at Oakbourne Park provides opportunities for non-league play, such as kickball, ultimate Frisbee, and flag football.

As the population ages, balancing the focus on youth sports programming with local options that better serve older residents, such as the Chester County Senior Centers, need to be considered.

When the residents of Westtown were surveyed during the OSRER Plan as well as the Comprehensive Plan, the top recreational interests cited were walking, biking, experiencing nature, and fitness and wellness, as well as the desire for annual township sponsored events such as Westtown Day and Summer Movie Nights.



Oakbourne Park entrance sign, 2018

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Trails

Many of the Township's open spaces feature trails of varying size, both existing and proposed. These are indicated on the Trails Map following Chapter Nine.

The most diverse is at Oakbourne Park where visitors can enjoy a trail system that connects active recreation areas, the historic Oakbourne Mansion, the playground, community garden, and the earthen trails in the natural areas.

At Bayard Rustin High School and adjacent Rustin Walk development, paved paths run along Shiloh Road and access the area with an assortment of routes and loops.

At the Westtown School, a combination of paved driveways, service roads and trails connect to unpaved, mowed grass trails, which weave through much of the area.

However, accessing these existing trail systems still requires arrival by car for all but those located immediately adjacent to the sites. The vast majority of streets in the township do not have sidewalks, while some have sidewalks on one side. The major roads, including South New Street, and Routes 202, 926 and 352, do not have pedestrian amenities. Without trails or sidewalks, pedestrians use the shoulders or walk in the roads, presenting the potential for conflicts with vehicles.

According to the OSRER Plan, the township parks provide the best and earliest opportunity for additional trails, as well as the potential to connect these trails on a greater scale.

At Oakbourne Park, trails could be provided along East Pleasant Grove Road, giving pedestrians and cyclists a safer, off road option. Where trails already exist in close proximity to the roads, additional spurs could be constructed to connect to the roads, allowing people to walk from the roads to the main trails.



Trail at Oakbourne Park, 2018



Community gathers for "Westtown Day" at Oakbourne Park, 2017

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West Chester
Borough

East Bradford
Township

West Goshen
Township

Future Land Use with Township and Institutional Properties

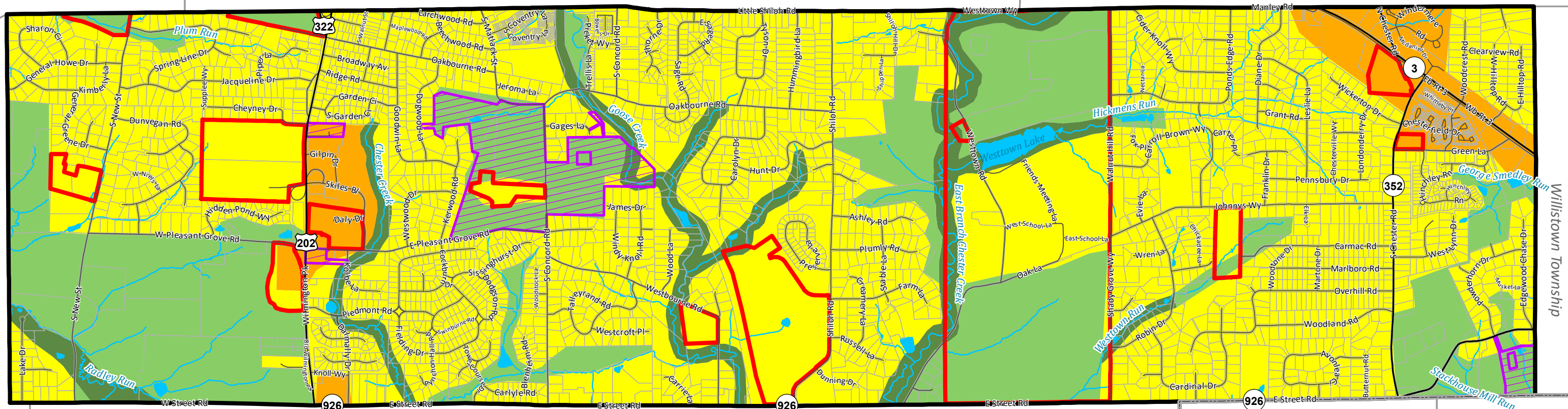
Westtown Township Chester County, Pennsylvania

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Miles



Disclaimer: This map is for illustrative purposes only and does not constitute a valid survey.
Map created: December 17, 2018
Last revised: April 8, 2022

East Goshen Township



Willistown Township

Thornbury Township
(Delaware County)

Edgmont
Township

Thornbury Township
(Chester County)

Thornbury Township
(Delaware County)

Birmingham
Township

DELAWARE COUNTY
CHESTER COUNTY

Legend

- County boundary
- Township boundary
- Adjacent municipalities
- Major roads
- Minor roads
- Tax parcels
- Streams
- Bodies of water
- Institutional properties
- T-District (Township Facilities)
- Foci**
- Greenway
- Open Space
- Neighborhood Conservation
- Mixed Use