

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

Borough of Oceanport

September 2012

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I. Executive Summary

As reflected in its name, Oceanport has historically been a water oriented community, even back to colonial days when it was an upriver port for packet and steamship traffic. Much of the land was low and marshy. When farming was a major activity, the marsh land had value, and colonial era deeds commonly included ownership or rights to acres of salt hay, which was important as animal feed and fertilizer. As farming diminished, wetlands came to be viewed as an obstacle and were filled or demucked to permit building. By the 1970's, however, Oceanport, like much of America, had become more environmentally aware. In 1974, the Master Plan included an objective to "acquire low and wooded land where possible for retention in natural state to ensure the environmental quality of the Borough". The 1982 Re-examination of the Master Plan states that attention to detail has resulted in the retention of the Borough's many inland waterways and waterfront properties in their natural state. The Borough's commitment to open space and environmental protection is strong. In 1999, by referendum, Oceanport voters approved a dedicated municipal open space tax of one cent per \$100 of property assessment. The Borough created the January 2001 Open Space and Recreation Plan, which was incorporated into the Master Plan. The dual benefits of open space for recreation and conservation are reconfirmed. The dedicated open space tax was subsequently raised to two cents.

Today Oceanport is a mostly residential community that is close to full development. Very little land eligible for development remains in private ownership. The community is relatively well endowed with open space, although opportunities for upgrade and infill are still to be pursued.

Two major tracts of publicly owned land, Fort Monmouth and Monmouth Park Racetrack, could significantly impact open space development in the Borough. Due to uncertainties involved, they are not incorporated in this Plan, but are discussed in the Appendix.

II. Introduction

The Open Space and Recreation Plan, a revision and update of the 2001 Plan, is intended to provide a comprehensive set of goals and objectives designed to identify and address both the short and long term needs of present and future residents of the Borough. This plan will consist of the following six primary categories:

1. A listing of the Plan's goals and objectives
2. A list of the Plan's policies and strategies
3. An inventory of existing park and recreation facilities
4. An analysis of existing and future needs for park and recreation facilities as well as open space.
5. An action plan describing the process of plan implementation and the use of funds earmarked for open space preservation.
6. An inventory of privately owned properties potentially suitable for acquisition and /or preservation.
7. Appendix

III. Plan Goals and Objectives

1. The establishment of realistic projections of the immediate and long term recreational needs of the residents of Oceanport.
2. The establishment of realistic projections of the immediate and long term open space preservation needs of the residents of Oceanport.
3. The establishment of policies, procedures and resources for the acquisition and/or preservation of land for open space, recreation and conservation purposes.
4. Preparation of a comprehensive plan which will address the wide variety of recreational needs of the residents of Oceanport.
5. The Plan will emphasize tracts for open space purposes that will contribute to and enhance the scenic and aesthetic quality of the Borough.
6. The Plan will encourage the development of smaller “pocket parks”. Such parks are intended to be accessed primarily by pedestrians and will service residents within given neighborhoods. Generally, “pocket parks” can range from 10,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet in size and may contain such facilities as a tot lot, swings, a basketball court, an open play area and benches.
7. In considering the acquisition of property, the Borough shall make every effort to negotiate an amicable and fair transaction. The use of condemnation and/or eminent domain shall be only applied as a last resort, where the land is considered to be of vital importance to accomplishing the goals of this Plan, and all reasonable efforts to reach a fair arrangement have been exhausted.

IV. Policies and Strategies

The implementation of Oceanport's Open Space and Recreation Plan shall be guided by policies and strategies designed to address the needs and interest of all residents of the Borough. Meeting the evolving needs of our diverse populace will be the key to the success of this Plan.

Policies

1. The residents of the Borough have voted to dedicate their tax dollars to open space acquisition and preservation. The Borough shall therefore ensure that the funds collected will be utilized to address the wide variety of interests amongst residents.
2. All of Oceanport's recreation facilities shall be open and accessible to the public. Maximum effort will be made to ensure that facilities are available to meet the needs of all our residents including youth, senior citizens and those with special needs.
3. All categories of Open Space acquisition shall be accommodated. It is recognized that sound and adequate recreation facilities are vital to a community. However, equally important is the acquisition and preservation of land for conservation purposes. The protection of environmentally sensitive lands is vital to the overall ecology of a community and a key factor in establishing a quality of life.
4. The Borough will continue to work with the Federal Government, the State of New Jersey, the County of Monmouth and the Oceanport Board of Education in efforts to preserve existing public holdings and provide recreational opportunities. In addition, the Borough will continue to work with private sector entities devoted to open space preservation, such as the Monmouth Conservation Foundation and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

Strategies

1. Public participation, input and support will also be sought for action taken in furtherance of the Plan. It is understood that opinions may differ as to specific actions to be taken. All viewpoints shall be considered before action is taken.
2. The Borough will work closely with the Federal Government and the State of New Jersey to permanently protect existing public holdings and to acquire new private sector holdings. The Borough understands that some properties will require a coordinated effort amongst various public and private entities if acquisition is to be a realistic goal. Lack of such coordination will reduce the effectiveness of this Plan and prevent the achievement of its goals.

3. Public information and awareness of the benefits of the gift of land will be included in Oceanport's overall approach to open space preservation. The Borough will provide the public with information on the wide array of methods which can be utilized to preserve land for future generations. Such methods can include:

- Outright donation
- Donation by will
- Donation with life rights
- Gifts
- Outright sale
- Bargain sale
- Installment sales
- Sale with life rights
- Conservation easements
- Deed restrictions
- Conditional transfers and reverter clauses
- Mutual covenants
- Leases
- Management agreements

V. Inventory of Existing Park and Recreation Facilities

There are presently ten (10) Borough owned and operated parks, totaling 76 acres, which provide a variety of recreational opportunities to the public. In addition, there is one Federal holding, one State holding and one County park, each of which supplements the open space and recreation needs of the Borough. Table I and Map I contain a listing of the Borough's Open Space Inventory. Table II contains a listing of other Borough owned properties.

Federal Land

U.S. Army Post Fort Monmouth is located partly in the Borough of Oceanport. The government closed this post as of September 15, 2011. Several recreational opportunities exist on the base, such as a fitness center, a bowling alley, and a marina, but most probably these facilities will end up in private hands. See Appendix for discussion.

State Land

The New Jersey Sports and Exhibition Authority (NJSEA) presently owns Monmouth Park Race Track, a 326.876 acre facility offering live thoroughbred racing in season and simulcast off track wagering year round. The track runs a financial deficit and the economic outlook for racetracks not coupled with a casino has been unfavorable. See Appendix for discussion.

County Parks

Monmouth County owns Wolf Hill Farm Recreation Area. This 95 acre tract, entirely within Oceanport, was once part of the race track. Plans for the area include sports facilities, passive recreation, and conservation, attuned to regional needs. To date, little of the concept plan has been developed, although a large fenced-in dog run has become popular.

Borough Parks

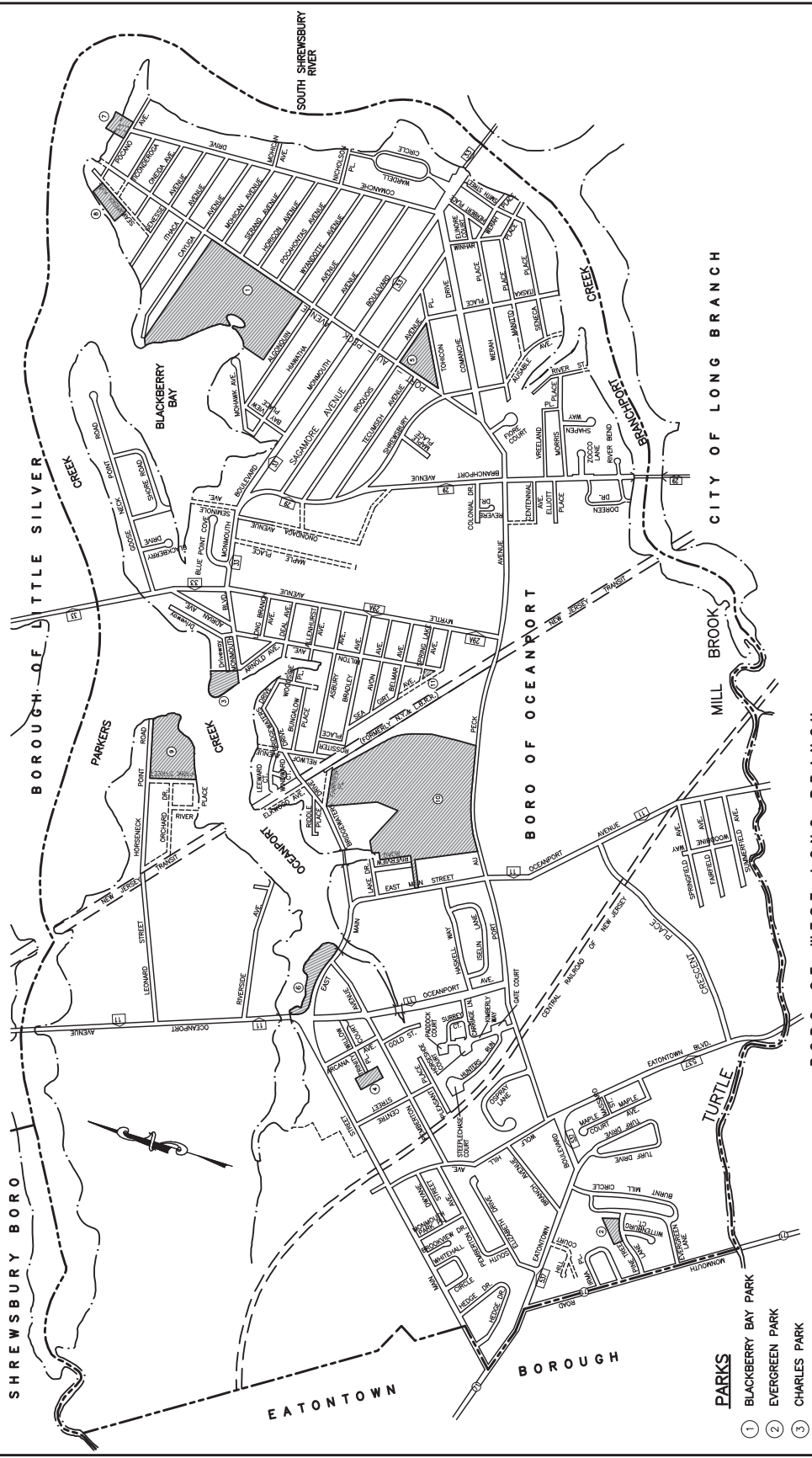
At this time there are ten (10) Borough parks totaling approximately 76 acres. Of these, eight are developed with recreation facilities and two remain as undeveloped wildlife preserves. In addition, there are two public schools in the Borough which also provide a variety of recreational opportunities.

Table I: Borough of Oceanport – Open Space Inventory / Public Parks

Open Space Inventory / Public Parks					
Name	Block	Lot	Location	Acreage	Uses
Blackberry Bay Park	20 21 25 27	1 1 1 6	Port Au Peck Ave	9.50 1.61 5.46 <u>1.87</u> 18.44	baseball, roller hockey, soccer, tennis, basketball, playground, boat launch, swim club and waterfront
Charles Park	76	21-23	Monmouth Blvd	1.97	playground and waterfront
Community Center Park	6	1	Port Au Peck Ave & Tohicon Place	3.34	Baseball, basketball, tennis, playgournd and community building
Evergreen Park	133	3	Pine Tree Lane	0.85	playground and basketball
Horseneck Preserve	107	2	Horseneck Point Rd	4.95	wildlife preserve
Maria Gatta Community Park	88	26.02	Port Au Peck Ave	39.865	soccer, walking trail
Old Wharf Park	103	1-2	315 E. Main Street	3.07	Bocci, community building, waterfront
Seawaneka Preserve	35	2	Seawaneka Ave	1.43	wildlife preserve
Sommers Park	39 38	1 7	Pocono Ave	0.16 <u>0.40</u> 0.56	passive recreation and waterfront
Trinity Park	115	13	Trinity Place	1.25	Playground, basketball, tennis

Table II: Borough of Oceanport – Other Owned

Block	Lot	Location	Uses
1	13	Ausable Avenue	vacant land
9	1	Monmouth Boulevard	vacant land
12	20	Monmouth Boulevard	vacant land
16	19	Hiawatha Avenue	vacant land
65	1	Myrtle Avenue	Borough Hall
65	2	Myrtle Avenue	Port Au Peck Ave Firehouse
66	8	Shrewsbury Avenue	vacant land
74	7	Gooseneck Point Road	vacant land
87	1	Spring Lake Avenue	vacant land
88	9.01	Bradley Avenue	vacant land
88	16.01	Relwolf Avenue	vacant land
88	19	Bridgewaters Drive	vacant land
93	4	Asbury Avenue	vacant land
105	8	Orchard Street	vacant land
105	10	Orchard Street	vacant land
108	10	Orchard Avenue	vacant land
108	13	Orchard Avenue	vacant land
113	2.02	Pemberton Avenue	vacant land
119	4	Oceanport Avenue	vacant land
119	5	Oceanport Avenue	vacant land
120	8	Pemberton Avenue	vacant land
136	52	Monmouth Road	Bird Sanctuary



PARKS

- 1 BLACKBERRY BAY PARK
- 2 EVERGREEN PARK
- 3 CHARLES PARK
- 4 TRINITY PLACE PARK
- 5 COMMUNITY CENTER PARK
- 6 OLD WHARF PARK
- 7 SOMMERS PARK
- 8 SEAWANEA PRESERVE
- 9 HORSENECK PRESERVE
- 10 MARIA GATTA COMMUNITY PARK
- 11 TRIANGLE PARK

LEGEND

	STATE HIGHWAY
	COUNTY HIGHWAY
	LOCAL ROADS - IMPROVED
	LOCAL ROADS - UNIMPROVED

MAP 1

OPEN SPACE INVENTORY

BOROUGH OF OCEANPORT
MONMOUTH COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

VI. Needs Analysis

Recreational needs are two dimensional: acquisition of land in suitable locations and capital improvements to accommodate the proposed uses. Environmental open space needs require ownership or easements to land, but little in the way of improvements.

Projected Recreation Needs

1. Pocket Parks:

Several areas of the Borough have a distance of a ½ mile or more to a park site. More pocket parks on lots between ¼ and 1 acre in size would serve this need.

2. Trails:

Trails within the Borough should be developed to accommodate varied uses – biking, walking and running. The abandoned railroad right-of-way in the western half of the Borough could be utilized for this purpose to increase access between Wolf Hill School and the County's Wolf Hill Park. The long range development plan for Maria Gatta Community Park includes a 1 mile hiking/nature trail.

3. Sport Courts and Athletic Fields:

There is a recognized need for additional facilities but here the limiting factor is not the need for additional land but rather the funding for the improvements. In 2008, the Borough adopted a Park Improvement Plan based on an analysis by T&M Associates. The Plan identifies needed and/or desired improvements for each of the 10 existing municipal parks. It does not address land acquisitions but deals only with improvements. If all of the recommended improvements could be accomplished, Oceanport would be richly endowed with recreation facilities of many types.

Maria Gatta Community Park, with some 40 acres, is largely unimproved and could accommodate an array of sports courts and athletic fields. The limiting factor is funding for those improvements. The 2008 Improvement Plan carried an estimated improvement cost of over \$4 million for full development of Maria Gatta Community Park.

4. Access to Waterways:

Additional public access to local waterways such as Blackberry Bay, Branchport Creek, Oceanport Creek and Pleasure Bay is needed. Besides acquiring additional waterfront properties, the existing dead end streets to navigable waterways could be improved to increase public access to local waterways.

5. Golf Facility:

Low priority need that might include a driving range or a small par-3 course. It should be noted that unofficially, a particular area in the County's Wolf Hill Park has been used as a practice area by golfers for many years.

6. Indoor Facilities:

Aquatics, ice hockey, basketball and tennis are just four areas where there is a need in the Borough as well as our region for these type facilities. However, these are regional needs and should be addressed by the County of Monmouth or State of New Jersey.

Projected Natural Area Preserve

1. Wetlands:

Substantial areas of wetlands are still privately owned throughout the Borough. These vital areas are crucial to maintaining bio-diversity within the region. While current State regulations limit disturbance of wetlands, little by little encroachment and filling sometimes occur. Efforts should be made to protect these areas against further disturbance. A significant portion of Maria Gatta Community Park is identified as wetlands.

2. Woodlands:

Much of the undeveloped portions of the Borough still remain wooded, holding substantial populations of wildlife. Such areas are of vital importance for protection, particularly due to their potential for erosion once disturbed and the potential impact on surface water quality and flooding.

3. Water Access:

One of Oceanport's most prominent features is its extensive waterfront. Literally two thirds of the Borough's perimeter adjoins major water bodies. Public access to the river is quite good given Oceanport's developed character. However, efforts should be made to expand public access to the river so it can be enjoyed by all since this is the Borough's strongest natural resource.

Summary

With the possible exception of a pocket park, additional land acquisition is a low priority for Oceanport. This would not, however, preclude the possibility of expanding the Borough's position through donation or grants of easement should such an opportunity arise.

VI. Action Plan

Oceanport has an open space tax of 2 cents per \$100 of assessed property value. This tax generates slightly over \$200,000 per year into a dedicated Open Space Trust Fund. Among other things, this money services an original loan of \$1,000,000 borrowed in the 2001 acquisition of the land for Maria Gatta Community Park. That loan matures in 2021. The remainder of the monies is available for other open space purposes at the discretion of the Borough Council. Most of the spending has gone for operating expenses at the parks, equipment purchases, and minor capital improvements. The constant revenue stream into the Trust Fund gives the Borough flexibility in managing its open space activities. Wherever possible, the Borough will attempt to extend its reach through joint ventures with the County of Monmouth and private sector entities such as the Monmouth County Conservation Foundation.

Target Accomplishments

For the intermediate future priority will be given to capital improvements in the existing parks. In 2008 the Borough adopted a Park Improvement Plan based on an analysis by T&M Associates. This Plan examined each park and identified needed and/or desired improvements. The estimated cost of all improvements over a 10-year period came to nearly \$8 million including \$4 million to fully build out Maria Gatta Community Park. Funding is scarce and bringing the existing parks to full utilization is likely to be a long term project. With the possible exception of pocket parks, additional land acquisition is not a recreational priority.

In terms of conservation, there is relatively little environmentally sensitive land this is not Department of Environmental Protection protected wetlands. The Borough will be vigilant in protecting such lands from encroachment. It should be noted that a significant portion of the Maria Gatta Community Park tract consists of wetlands/woodlands.

Section VIII lists properties that had been previously identified as potential open space acquisition. There are no estimates of acquisition costs. The Borough would be receptive to the possibilities of land donation and/or conservation easements.

VIII. Property Inventory

Table 3 and Map 2 contain a listing of potential target properties to be acquired for open space or recreational facilities. This listing is not intended to imply that there has been pre-determination to acquire any specific piece of property. Additionally, while the list is intended to be inclusive, it is by no means complete. There may from time to time be properties added to the list as the Borough becomes aware of them or as needs change. Accordingly, from time to time, properties may be removed from the list as they are developed or when there is a specific reason warranting their exclusion.

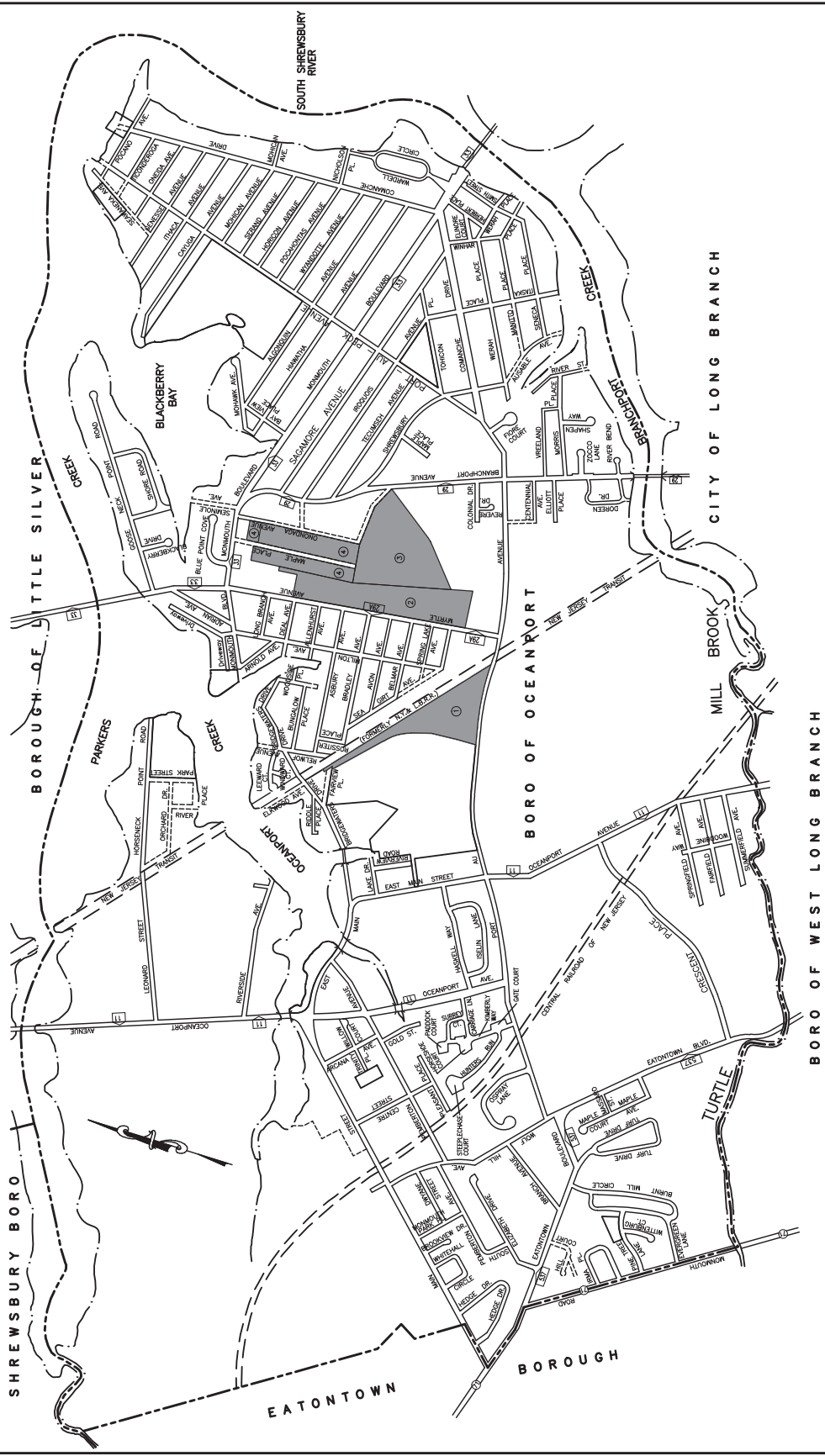
The properties listed in *Table 3* are categorized by park type and potential uses. The specific category selected is a generalization as to the type and use associated with each potential park. Some sites may be suitable, at least in part, for multiple uses or other uses than those specified. The categories are summarized below:

Recreation Area -	Park facilities devoted to physical activities such as athletic fields for soccer, baseball, basketball, tennis, softball, inline skating, football and open play fields.
Passive Recreation -	Activities generally not involving athletic fields, facilities or equipment. Activities may include hiking, bird watching, jogging, nature study, camping and fishing.
Pocket Park -	Typically smaller properties located within residential areas and most often visited by walkers. Such parks typically contain a basketball court and a playground area.
Mixed Use Park -	A park facility which is suitable for a combination of uses and activities. Some parks, for example, may have areas suitable for athletic fields while at the same time also containing natural areas for conservation.
Conservation Area -	Areas containing natural features such as woodland, wetlands, streams, etc. These areas should be preserved and remain in their natural state as wildlife preserves.

Table III: List of Possible Open Space & Recreation Sites

Block	Lot	Acres	Key Assets	Potential Use *
61	6	0.3	Waterfront access, well-maintained structure	PP
65	3.01	26.28	Mature woodland, predominantly freshwater wetlands	PR, CA
65	34	12.67	Partly wooded, abandoned reclamation facility, relatively flat, existing structures	RA, PR, MX
65	38, 43 & 44	8.95	Mature woodlands, some freshwater wetlands	PR, MX, CA
121	6, 7, 8 & 9	29.6	Open fields, mature woodland, freshwater wetlands, access to collector roads	RA, PR, MX, CA

* KEY	
	PARK TYPE
CA	Conservation Area
MX	Mixed Use Park
PP	Pocket Park
PR	Passive Recreation
RA	Recreation Area



OPEN SPACE LOTS

- ① BLOCK 88, LOT 26.03
- ② BLOCK 65, LOT 3.01
- ③ BLOCK 65, LOT 34
- ④ BLOCK 65, LOTS 38, 43 & 44

LEGEND

	STATE HIGHWAY
	COUNTY HIGHWAY
	LOCAL ROADS - IMPROVED
	LOCAL ROADS - UNIMPROVED

MAP 2
**POSSIBLE OPEN SPACE
AND RECREATION SITES**

BOROUGH OF OCEANPORT
MONMOUTH COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

BASEMAP PREPARED BY: MASER CONSULTING, P.A.

NOVEMBER 2011

APPENDIX

There are two developments, one certain the other just a possibility, that will or might have a major impact on open space in Oceanport. The first is the mandated closing of Fort Monmouth, and the second is the possibility of the closing or diminution of Monmouth Park Race Track. Due to the uncertainties involved neither situation is dealt with directly in this Open Space Plan revision. Each situation is summarized in the Appendix.

Fort Monmouth

Fort Monmouth has been closed. There are 419 acres of the Fort Monmouth property that lie in Oceanport with the remaining 706 acres in Eatontown and Tinton Falls. The Fort Monmouth Economic Revitalization Authority (FMERPA) was empowered to create a master plan for the development of the Fort's land. Its principal charge was to attract business and industry to replace the approximately 20,000 jobs being lost to the regional economy. The FMERPA planning process closely follows the New Jersey Smart Growth guidelines.

The Borough engaged a planning consultant (Clarke Caton Hintz) to develop a vision plan for the portion of land within the Borough's boundaries. One element of the vision is that natural features of the site including wetlands and waterfronts will be preserved and upgraded. The vision involves pedestrian paths woven through the open spaces, the incorporation of storm water management elements within the meadows to capture run off and plantings to blend the landforms into a series of rational elements to create a substantial stretch of wildlife habitat. The vision anticipates that active recreation would be provided within the lands identified in the Monmouth County Parks Department plans, plus active recreation on the grounds of the new school. The Borough adopted the Vision Statement and presented it to FMERPA.

In the FMERPA plan, approximately 229 acres of open space are planned in the Oceanport portion of the land. The major portion is the approximately 100 acres in the Historic District containing the parade grounds and historic housing. Most of the remainder is proposed to be developed as ecological buffers to Parkers and Oceanport creeks in keeping with New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Coastal Area Facilities Review Act regulations. The buffers will be critical to the protection of water quality and habitats along the creeks' edges. Residences proposed east of Oceanport Avenue are set back significantly from the water in response to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) mapped 100-year flood plain.

A successor agency, Fort Monmouth Economic Revitalization Authority, has been created to implement the plan and oversee development of the land. In the current economic and political climate considerable uncertainty exists as to when and how the various parts of the plan will be implemented. The expectation is that Oceanport will gain some 229 acres of open space. About 56% will be primarily for environmental protection, but would also be valuable in terms of quality of life and passive recreation. Additionally the parade grounds within the Historic District might be usable for active recreation and public events. The town has devoted much time and attention to the Fort Monmouth situation but with all the uncertainties (economic, financing, governmental, ability to attract buyers, timing, possible toxic wastes, etc.) it is premature at this time to include developmental specifics in the Open Space Plan update.

The three municipalities and Monmouth County have entered into a Memorandum of Understanding urging that all Fort Monmouth open space be preserved and protected, and accessible to the public at large. To the best of its ability, Oceanport will apply all of its stated policies and priorities to all land that comes under its direct control and will use its seat on FMERA to project the priorities onto FMERA actions.

Monmouth Park Race Track

The second element that might be significant to Oceanport relates to the race track owned by the New Jersey Sports and Exposition Authority (NJSEA). The State wishes to free itself from the operating deficits of the track. An agreement has been reached to lease the track to a private operator. The NJSEA owns 326.876 acres in Oceanport. In the event that things do not go according to plan, or that the planned operations prove to be economically unsuccessful, the operator could default and property come up for sale, which could present an opportunity for the Borough to acquire additional open space. This is, however, too remote and uncertain to factor into this Open Space Plan update.