

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nassau County Open Space Plan

The *Nassau County Open Space Plan* was adopted by the Nassau County Planning Commission on March 13, 2001 — after extensive input, meetings and coalition building amongst various groups, organizations, agencies, elected officials and residents. The Nassau County Open Space Project was started in mid-September 1999, upon authorization of the Nassau County Legislature. This Open Space Project is the first implementation strategy from the recently adopted *Nassau County Comprehensive Plan*¹ to be initiated by the County Planning Commission. One of the reasons for moving forward with the County Open Space Project is due to the broad based support received for the implementation strategy during the *Comprehensive Plan* public workshops and outreach efforts.

The *Nassau County Open Space Plan* provides the first comprehensive, detailed inventory of existing open space resources in the County. It also highlights and maps important natural resources; identifies recommendations, potential open space options, techniques and funding sources, as well as the process for evaluating possible open space properties; and summarizes relevant reports.

[*Note: Nassau County has never had a County-wide open space plan.*]

Many different resources were reviewed, analyzed and utilized by the consultants in preparation of the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*. Data and information came from local, County, State and Federal sources (refer to the Contacts and Bibliography in the Appendices of the report). Many of the agencies and organizations involved with environmental and open space projects were consulted in an effort to receive input about relevant issues, and to coordinate this project with other initiatives in Nassau County and Long Island. In addition, input was received during meetings with representatives from various municipalities, organizations, groups and residents.

The County Planning staff worked closely with the consultants on this project in providing information and participating in outreach meetings. In addition, the County Planning Commission provided direction and feedback throughout the process of developing the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*.

¹ The *Nassau County Comprehensive Plan* is a visionary policy document focusing on the current and long-range protection, enhancement, growth and development of the County. The *Comprehensive Plan* contains 22 Goals; 107 Policy Recommendations; and 332 Implementation Strategies relevant to: interagency planning and coordination, land use, environmental resources, transportation, housing, economy, culture and recreation, and community facilities and services. The *Nassau County Comprehensive Plan* was adopted by the County Planning Commission on December 15, 1998.

This Executive Summary is intended to provide an **overview** of the highlights from each of the chapters in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*. However, the individual chapters and maps in the *Plan* should be reviewed for more detailed descriptions and information.

A. EXISTING OPEN SPACE

One of the first tasks prepared was the compilation of a detailed inventory of **existing** open space resources since there was not one available for Nassau County. In addition, the detailed inventory and mapping of existing open space resources is useful to have as a reference when considering potential open spaces, environmental projects, buffers, trail connections and other activities.

Open space was defined as it applies to Nassau County (every community defines open space slightly different). Methodology was used to identify and classify different types of open space and natural resources in the County. Extensive data was collected and information analyzed for each resource classification. The Existing Open Space inventory for Nassau County consists of 21 categories and 15 features, as depicted on the Existing Open Space Map. The total land area for the open space categories are included in the table on the following page. **Descriptions of each of the existing open space categories and features are contained in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*.**

The Existing Open Space Map, along with information in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*, was revised many times based on input from outreach efforts and numerous meetings with municipalities, various groups, organizations and residents throughout the County. A great deal of input was also incorporated from County, State and regional departments/agencies.

There are also some open areas owned by private property owners and municipalities which may not be shown on the Existing Open Space Map because they did not fit into any of the categories or there was not local acceptance of including them in the inventory. However, the vacant or undeveloped parcels (which may have some open space character) are identified in the Potential Open Space chapter of the *Open Space Plan*.

The existing open space inventory and map can be updated by the County as new information becomes available or input is received from the public, municipalities and organizations regarding the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*.

Existing Open Space in Nassau County, November 2000

Open Space Category*	Acreage
County Park	3,655.11
County Preserve	3,022.80
State Park	5,282.75
State Preserve	5,366.57
Federal Park	86.02
Federal Preserve	45.28
Village/Town/City Park	4,217.74
Village/Town/City Preserve	3,751.08
Private or Semi-Public Park	118.52
Private or Semi-Public Preserve	563.77
Private or Semi-Public Club	556.92
Golf Course	6,738.19
Nursery	122.61
Equestrian Farm/Riding Stable (incomplete data)	276.97
College Campus	2,226.39
School Recreational Area	4,057.12
Cemetery	714.47
Estate (as classified by the Tax Assessor's Office)**	4,889.31
Hospital (with Open Space Character)	122.38
Recharge Basins	1,083.82
Major Road Rights-of-Way	6,010.63
<p>*The features identified with symbols on the map (no land area associated) are: marinas and yacht clubs, waterfronts and beaches, boat launches, fishing areas, camps, campgrounds, historic resources, cultural facilities and museums, bird sanctuaries, and trails (bike, equestrian and walking/hiking).</p> <p>**The Tax Assessor's office classifies estates as "residential properties of not less than 5 acres with a large and luxurious residence and auxiliary buildings."</p>	

Prepared by Frederick P. Clark Associates, Inc.

B. NATURAL RESOURCES

Updated inventories and descriptions of natural resources located in the County and region are included in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*. The natural resource information supplements the existing open space inventory and will be used for evaluating potential open space sites and areas.

Habitat areas which are necessary to support wildlife and plant species are identified in the *Open Space Plan*. Protection of these habitats is important (especially since the County has lost habitat areas due to impacts from development), not only for the wildlife and plants but also for their physical and aesthetic benefit; for recreational activities (birding, hiking, fishing); economic reasons; and tourism.

A variety of sources were used to map habitats identified as significant, or potentially containing significant habitat areas in Nassau County. Descriptions and mapping of **significant habitat areas** are provided in the report for:

- Preserves
- Important Bird Areas
- Oyster Bay & Cold Spring Harbor Outstanding Natural Coastal Area (ONCA)
- Significant Coastal Habitat Areas
- Forested Cover
- Rare Species (Natural Heritage Program data)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Coastal and Bight Watershed Habitats
- Wetlands and Watercourses

The following natural resources which perform ecosystem services or functions, such as: filtering out pollutants in water, recharging the groundwater, and storing then gradually releasing floodwaters were identified, described and mapped in the *Plan*:

- FEMA 100 Year Floodplains
- Special Groundwater Protection Areas
- Wetlands
- Recharge Basins
- Streams, Lakes, Ponds and Creeks
- Sites Which Need Ecological Restoration

Summaries of 11 environmental studies and plans relevant to Nassau County and Long Island have been provided in the *Open Space Plan*.

C. **POTENTIAL OPEN SPACE**

A variety of potential open space sites, areas, trails and bike paths, connections, buffers, and public access have been identified in the *Open Space Plan* from many sources.

- **Vacant or Undeveloped Land** — the vacant or undeveloped land 2 acres or more have been identified and mapped using the 1999 County Tax Assessor's data, which classifies vacant parcels as "property that is not in use, in temporary use, or without permanent improvement (i.e., residential, rural, commercial, industrial, and urban development)." The vacant classification includes undeveloped land which may be

approved for some type of development. The 2 acres or more threshold was used because the size of the vacant property database was quite extensive.

- **Overlays** — the estates (as classified by the Tax Assessor's office) and the vacant or undeveloped land 2 acres or more were set-up as separate layers in the computer GIS database. [*Note: the remaining estate properties have become a concern for local residents, municipalities and the County as more of them have been subdivided or developed over the years.*]

These vacant or undeveloped land 2 acres or more and estate properties were overlaid on top of some of the natural resource layers prepared for this project. Then, the properties were analyzed for their future open space potential in context with the existing open space resource layers to determine their proximity to these resources or possible connections to existing open spaces. The analysis of the vacant and estate properties resulted in Figure 15, Potential Open Space, contained in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*.

It is noted that a follow-up step to the potential open space process completed for the *Nassau County Open Space Plan* should include evaluation of some of the vacant or undeveloped parcels which are **less** than 2 acres for the southern and middle parts of the County. These smaller parcels may provide an open space element (passive or active open space, trail connections or buffers) within more developed areas. In addition, the area within the South Shore Estuary Reserve may contain smaller parcels less than 2 acres which can provide a vital natural resource function.

- **Municipalities** — a summary of the potential open space areas for parks, trails, connections or public access to waterfronts is provided in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan* for the City of Glen Cove, Villages of Freeport and Oyster Bay Cove, Towns of North Hempstead, Hempstead and Oyster Bay, and the hamlet of Glenwood Landing.

[*Note: voters in the Towns of North Hempstead and Oyster Bay overwhelmingly approved environmental bond referendums in November 2000. Both of the Towns have identified the eligible environmental and open space activities and are in the process of evaluating/recommending potential properties to the Town Boards.*]

- **Other Plans** — potential open space parcels and improvement projects were compiled from **11 other plans and reports**, such as: the *State Open Space Conservation Plan*, *Manhasset Bay Water Quality Improvement Plan* and *South Shore Estuary Reserve Open Space Preservation Study*.

[*Note: the project consultants assisted the County and local representatives in identifying, evaluating and recommending properties in Nassau County for inclusion in the updated State Open Space Plan and the South Shore Estuary Reserve Plan.*]

- **Trails and Bike Routes/Paths** — areas for potential trails and bike routes or paths have been identified in NYMTC's *Regional Transportation Plan*, as well as by municipalities, trail organizations and project consultants. In addition, there is potential for trails and/or connections to other open space and community resources by use of the LIRR and LIPA utility easements (although a more careful analysis of the easements is needed).
- **Waterfront Access and Recreation** — opportunities for new or improved public access to waterfronts and recreational areas are identified from information in several Local Waterfront Revitalization Programs and the *Long Island Sound Coastal Management Program*. Possible access for fishing and boating, access to parks and beaches, as well as greenways are summarized.
- **Historic, Archaeological and Cultural Resources** — the potential need for open space buffers around the historic, archaeological and cultural resources to protect their integrity has been identified. Potential open space parcels should also be considered which will provide connections (walking/biking) between these resources and parks, preserves, other open spaces or community facilities.

Most of the potential open space resources are shown in pink on the Potential Open Space map in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan* — although the estates which also have open space characteristics and should be considered part of the potential passive open space inventory, are shown in yellow. **There are more than 1,600 acres shown in pink as potential open space, along with over 4,500 acres of estates reflected on the Potential Open Space map** (Note: there is no acreage associated with the potential trails). However, several estates have been shown in pink as potential open space because they were identified by communities and evaluated for this *Nassau County Open Space Plan* as well as the update of the *State Open Space Conservation Plan*. In addition, a number of smaller estate properties are **not** specifically identified in pink on the map, but are **contained within two significant resource** areas which are identified as worthy of protection.

More potential open space parcels and areas should be added to the map by the County Open Space Committee (such as: County-owned land which is scheduled for sale; or vacant parcels less than 2 acres in the middle and southern parts of the County). In addition, once the Towns of North Hempstead and Oyster Bay have identified potential open space parcels and/or trails, these areas can be incorporated into the database/map. Similarly, if the Town of Hempstead, Cities of Long Beach and Glen Cove or villages in the County have input about potential open space parcels which are not reflected on the Potential Open Space map, this information can be added by the County.

D. TECHNIQUES AND FUNDING SOURCES

A wide variety of techniques and methods are described to preserve open space and protect significant resources, many of which have no costs associated with them. In addition, a summary of State and Federal programs with potential funding for open space, environmental, recreation, trails, and historic preservation projects is provided in the *Open Space Plan*.

The fiscal advantages of protecting open space resources are described in the *Open Space Plan*. Various techniques for protecting resources and achieving open space objectives are also described in the report.

There are many options available, in addition to public acquisition, which can be implemented by other public entities (local, State and Federal) besides the County as well as individual property owners, land trusts and non-profit organizations. The techniques, described in the *Plan*, include:

- Fee Simple Acquisition
- Installment Purchase Contracts
- Conservation Easements
- Purchase of Development Rights
- Charitable Donations and Gifts
- Land Trusts and Non-profits

The techniques are also incorporated in the report into the comparisons of development regulatory techniques, incentives, financing options, environmental review and growth control methods in New York and other states.

The various tools and regulations which municipalities can adopt are summarized in the *Plan*, including:

- Large Lot Zoning
- Setback and Landscaping Requirements
- Tree Preservation Ordinances
- Required Dedication of Land
- Park and Recreation Fees
- Conservation Subdivisions and Clustering
- Planned Unit Development (PUD)
- Bonus/Incentive Zoning
- Overlay Zones (viewshed, water supply etc.)
- Scenic Roads
- Greenways

Other creative approaches to protect open space resources and better utilize recreational facilities are described. The approaches include: public-private partnerships and

different types of legal agreements (joint-use agreements; management/conservation agreements; exchanges of land).

Several tax policies which benefit open space preservation efforts are identified in the report, including:

- Differential Tax Assessments
- Conservation Tax Credits
- Special Assessments
- Benefit Assessment Districts
- Dedicated Local Revenue Sources

Funding Sources — descriptions of Federal and State funding sources, along with foundations which target funding for open space, environmental, trails, recreation and historic preservation projects are included in the *Open Space Plan*. In addition, other possible funding options are also mentioned in the *Plan*, such as: corporate donations; corporate sponsorships; grants and loans from foundations; fees for naming rights; and targeted funding programs such as "adopt-a-foot" (donations for the actual cost of developing one foot of a proposed trail).

E. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The recommendations in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan* establish the framework for continuing the County's Open Space Program and the next steps to be taken to: start evaluating potential areas and parcels, work with property owner and municipalities, and apply for funding relevant to specific initiatives. A summary of the recommendations in the *Plan* follows:

- **Open Space Committee** — as recommended in the *Plan*, the former County Open Space Committee was formally established and restructured as a technical advisory committee. The Open Space Committee shall be an integral focal point in reviewing and evaluating open space and natural resources within Nassau County and recommending prioritization of potential open space parcels (for different purposes).

The *Plan* also describes how the County Planning Commission, based on input from the Open Space Committee, will provide feedback and recommendations to State, Federal, County, regional and local groups concerning open space and environmental matters, where possible.

- **Process for Evaluation** — as recommended in the *Plan*, a process is being used to evaluate, screen, rank and prioritize potential open space sites and areas. The evaluation methodology, field data forms, criteria and ranking system to be used by the Open Space Committee in evaluating various sites are described in the *Plan*. The process will be used to evaluate the potential open space properties, trails, waterfront

access, buffers and connections identified in the *Nassau County Open Space Plan*, as well as other sites/areas to be forwarded to the County for consideration.

- **Perpetual Preservation** — it is also recommended in the *Plan* that the Open Space Committee utilize the evaluation process to carry out the intent of the County's 1989 Land Preservation Law (purpose is to protect and preserve in perpetuity the natural, environmental, historical and scenic resources of the County). It is also recommended that the County go through the process of officially designating the rest of its preserves as "perpetually preserved lands" in order to protect these resources for current and future residents.

In addition, it is recommended that Nassau County establish a policy whereby any County-owned property which is being considered for sale or disposition be referred to the County Open Space Committee for evaluation prior to any final decision.

- **County Land Trust** — it is recommended in the *Plan* that a County Land Trust be formed to play a role in the County's Open Space Program. The County Land Trust could work directly with private landowners (especially owners of estates and properties with significant open space attributes) to educate them about the various techniques available for open space preservation and protection. The County Land Trust could also acquire conservation easements from the property owners to protect open space and undeveloped areas.

The County Land Trust would work directly with the County's Open Space Committee, municipalities, The Nature Conservancy, other land preservation groups and individuals on environmental and land planning efforts.

- **Interagency Coordination** — it is recommended that coordination and cooperation take place between the County, municipalities, Federal and State agencies and other organizations involved in open space preservation projects in order to leverage support for funding and maximize open space initiatives in Nassau County.

The *Nassau County Open Space Plan* also includes seven appendices with supporting information, listings of properties on the National and State Registers of Historic Places and locally designated landmarks, the County's recharge basin policy, contacts, bibliography and glossary.