

# the record

## Granville Township Open Space Acquisition Discussed

*This is the second in a series of Township newspaper articles and newsletters covering 5 areas of township government activities and open forums including:*

- *Taxation*
- *Open and Recreational Property Acquisition*
- *Strategies to Manage Growth and Assist Our Schools*
- *Partnering and Its Payoffs*
- *Overview of Township Government*

Note: The next Residents' Open Forum on Open Space Acquisition is scheduled for 7:00 p.m., June 2, 2004, at Granville Intermediate School, 2025 Burg St. All residents are encouraged to attend!

### Dear Granville Township Residents,

During the last election, Township officials received inquiries concerning its recreation and open space property acquisition program. In 1991, the Township began a deliberate program of purchasing property for community ownership. Since that time, the Township has acquired 753 acres of recreation and open space through outright property purchases and development easement purchases.

Funds for these purchases have come from several sources. They include unrestricted funds from our general account, Opera House settlement proceeds paid into our general account, and funds from two open space acquisition levies. Some community members have asked how the trustees have decided which properties to purchase. Others are simply interested in knowing where these properties are located. This article will address the history of the Township property acquisition program, its funding, and the community input functions which have guided this process.

### Insurance Proceeds Used

The Township received approximately \$500,000.00 of insurance and lawsuit proceeds for the fire loss of the opera house in 1989. The Township formed the Opera House Settlement Committee on December 20, 1989 consisting of 9 Village and Township residents to make recommendations for the use of those funds. That committee completed its

work and issued a report on July 5 1990. The report recommended, "purchase recreational land and areas of natural beauty/preservation of green space." The report further suggested that the Township seek Village and Township approval of a levy "...for the purchase of land for parks and for the preservation of some open spaces and attractive natural features." Thus was born the Granville Township recreational and open space acquisition program.

At the time, an area of property now known as Salt Run Park located between S.R. 16 and Silver Street was under threat of development. The first purchase of recreational property was completed in 1991. The second purchase of property is the property now known as Raccoon Valley Park.

The original joint comprehensive plan was completed in December 1990 and accepted by the Township and Village in 1991. That plan noted the severe shortage of recreational space in the community. The Ohio Legislature enacted Ohio Revised Code 5705.19(HH). This new law permitted Townships to pass real estate tax levies for the acquisition of open space through outright purchases of land and development easements. Unlike the Opera House Insurance Proceeds which are held in our general fund and are "unrestricted," open space levy proceeds are "restricted," in that these purchases are for preservation of open space and uses on these purchases are more restrictive and regulated by law.

Granville Township became the first Township in the state of Ohio to pass an open space levy. The 1.0 mill levy became effective in 1998. It was renewed by popular vote in 2001. After initial passage, the Township trustees appointed a broad community based citizen group which included a member of Village council (Dan Bellman), a Village planning member (Keith Myers), and former Township trustee Paul Treece.

The report of that committee recommended purchasing property of:

- *Natural or scenic beauty*
- *Unusual geological significance*
- *Old-growth woods*
- *Land and wetlands above the Raccoon Valley Aquifer*
- *Open vistas and strategic watersheds in general*

## Granville Township Open Space Acquisition Discussed (continued)

The initial open space 1.0 mill levy was intended to test the waters to determine the community's interest and acceptance of supporting an open space acquisition program funded through real estate tax levies. In 2000, the Township trustees were approached by a group of citizens who felt that the Township should become more aggressive in pursuing additional open space. This group recommended increasing the revenues raised to pursue those purchases.

The community passed its second open space acquisition levy of 2.5 mills in 2000 and collection of those revenues began in 2001. Again the Township trustees sought community input and guidance in shaping its open space strategy. A community-wide citizens group was formed that included a Village council member (Candi Moore) and other Village and Township residents.

That committee issued its final report to the Township trustees on April 25th, 2001. Its recommendations included 5 categories of property purchases:

- *Preservation of areas of scenic/natural beauty as well as areas of historical or unusual geological significance that may be subject to development;*
- *Preservation of the integrity of the comprehensive plan;*
- *Protection of agricultural lands;*
- *Preservation of Granville lands in danger of being annexed to other communities and/or high density development;*
- *Protection of edges and boundaries, Village entrances, buffers, open vistas, and view sheds.*

### List Remains Confidential

The specific properties that were recommended for purchase in the open space committee reports remain confidential and protected from public disclosure. If a list were to be made public it could cause the acquisition cost to increase. As acknowledged in these reports, it is impossible to fulfill each and every criteria.

Several factors and strategies have emerged as we have implemented this program. First, the Township Trustees can only purchase property that is voluntarily sold to us. We are prevented by law from using open space levy funds to make acquisitions through the power of eminent domain. Second, it has become apparent that, where possible, it makes sense to target property that is located adjacent to property owned by other public and charitable institutions. In this way, we can

work with others who have the broader community interest as their mission and, by combining our efforts, create aggregate blocks of community controlled real property. Finally, because we are a public political institution, we can structure transactions for owners who are interested in financing their sale of land to us in a manner that provides tax benefits not ordinarily available in private transactions. This gives us the opportunity to pay for property over time and gives us flexibility in stretching our resources. It also provides an additional inducement to sellers of property to work with us in exchange for tax benefits.

We have leveraged community resources through the application and receipt of public grants. In 1996, the Township Trustees and Clerk, by their own personal efforts, prepared and applied for an Ohio Nature Works Grant for improvement of Raccoon Valley Park. In 1997, Granville Township received a \$100,000 grant from the State of Ohio. Funds were used for the original construction of two soccer fields and four baseball diamonds, as well as adjacent access and parking. In 2002, the Granville Township Trustees and Clerk, through their own resources, prepared and applied for a State of Ohio grant designed to protect endangered habitat along a portion of Raccoon Creek. On May 28, 2003, Granville Township received \$49,242 from the State of Ohio for reimbursement of 75% of the purchase of the 21.3-acre Watts Property.

Since that time, we have aggressively applied for—but have been unsuccessful in our attempts to receive—further grants for farmland preservation, as well as extension of a bridge over Raccoon Creek to tie that park to the bike path at the location of the Schwarzkopf Farm.

In closing, we hope to see you at the next Township Residents Forum on Open Space Acquisition, 7:00 p.m., June 2, 2004, at Granville Intermediate School, 2025 Burg Street.

Sincerely,

Jim Havens, Lyle King and Wes Sargent

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