

Open Space Policy

The county has a major responsibility to preserve the quality of life in Westchester by protecting its scenic quality, environmental integrity and recreational opportunities. Land acquisition is not the sole means by which the county can achieve this goal. The county may serve as facilitator for protection/preservation actions which may be undertaken by the state, Westchester municipalities and private organizations (e.g. land trusts, foundations).

The County's open space system has two components:

- Definite Elements of Open Space—public or private lands permanently protected from development such as dedicated parkland, nature preserves, cemeteries, etc.
- Areas of Open Space Character—parcels not permanently protected from development (e.g. golf courses, campuses, private schools, estates or farmland and forests) which contribute to the open space character of an area.

In identifying lands to be acquired or otherwise protected the county will be guided by the following policies:

Policy 1. Open Space Character

It shall be the policy of the County to encourage preservation of open space as an important element in shaping Westchester's development pattern and in preserving its aesthetic and environmental quality.

Priorities: The county will give high priority to maintaining open space elements that:

- Define and separate concentrated centers and development corridors.
- Shape the direction of future land use patterns.
- Provide buffers between developed communities and limit urban sprawl.
- Protect unique environmental resources.
- Provide space for active and passive recreation.
- Protect scenic views and provide public access to the waterfront.

Policy 2. Recreation

It shall be the policy of Westchester to provide opportunities for active recreation (e.g.) athletic fields, swimming, golf, etc. as well as for passive recreation uses such as hiking and nature study.

Priorities: Within its spending constraints, the County will give high priority to properties that are close to concentrations of population and which provide appropriate recreational opportunities not otherwise available or accessible.

Policy 3. Linkages

It shall be the policy of the County to continue to provide open space linkages that form a connected system of parklands in the tradition of Westchester's major parks, parkways and regional railway system.

Priorities:

- Properties which create or enhance linkages or linear parks between communities, or serve as open space routes connecting state, county and municipal parks for pedestrians, bicyclists, or similar uses.
- Properties which connect state, county or local parks to each other.

Properties which allow for alternate means of transportation between centers.

Policy 4. Waterfront

It shall be the policy of the county to acquire or otherwise seek to protect suitably sized properties along the Hudson River and Long Island Sound shorelines for public access, public use and scenic enjoyment.

Priorities:

- Waterfront properties on Long Island Sound or the Hudson River that offer potential for public access, waterfront recreation or scenic vistas.
- Waterfront properties with deteriorating, substandard or incompatible development that can be reclaimed for open space or park use.
- Properties having unique natural features or which offer unusual recreational opportunities.

Properties which may foster local revitalization and economic development opportunities at or near the waterfront.

Policy 5. Environmental Resources

It shall be the policy of the County to facilitate the protection and preservation of properties that the county has identified as having special natural, scenic or environmental significance.

Priorities:

- Properties which protect water quality including groundwater supplies.
- Properties that lie along shorelines or reservoirs.
- Wetlands, floodplains and streamside buffers.
- Prime agricultural land.
- Properties that offer potential for reclaiming wetland and other environmentally sensitive lands that have already been altered or adversely affected.
- Properties which provide exceptional habitats for plants fish and wildlife species, provide critical habitat linkages or which can be reclaimed to provide for biodiversity or other environmental needs.

Policy 6. Historic Resources

It shall be the policy of the County to facilitate the protection or preservation of properties considered to be of historic significance.

Priorities:

- Properties which are of more than local significance and which may lose their historic significance and character if not protected.
- Properties which are on the New York State and National Register of Historic Places or on the County Inventory of Historic Places.

Strategies for Implementation:

- Direct purchase or first option to purchase.
- Cooperation with federal, state, municipal and private entities on the acquisition, protection, financing and management of parcels.
- Facilitating the protection/preservation action(s) to be taken by the State, by Westchester municipalities and by private organizations such as land trusts or foundations.
- Providing technical assistance to municipalities on the use of tools such as: Creating agricultural districts. deferred payment, life tenancy or leaseback agreements.
- Conservation or scenic easements.
- Official designation with development restrictions.
- Transfer of development rights.