



Return on Environment

The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in
Chester County, Pennsylvania

May, 2019



They say money doesn't grow on trees.

Perhaps not literally. But the parks, farms, and forests of Chester County account for millions of dollars each year in savings, earnings, and avoided costs.

Chester County's scenic views have inspired one of the country's most robust open space initiatives. As a result, more than 28 percent of its acreage is protected.

But the county's open spaces offer more than just pretty views. They are economic powerhouses that generate significant value for our region. Open space contributes to our local economies and property values and helps us save on everything from health care to recreation. It improves the air we breathe and the water we drink, reducing the cost of providing these basic services. And protecting open space avoids the increased taxes that would be needed if it were lost to development.



Parks and preserves drive higher home prices.

Home values in Chester County are a testament to residents' prioritizing quality of place. Homeowners are willing to pay a premium to live near parks, nature preserves, and other protected open spaces. As a result, in Chester County, protected open space adds to the overall value of its housing stock.

Houses located within a half-mile of protected open space are worth **\$11,000 more**, on average, than those that are not.

- **Open space adds \$1.65 billion to the value of Chester County's housing stock.**
- **Protected open space generates \$27.4 million annually in property tax revenues because it boosts home values.**

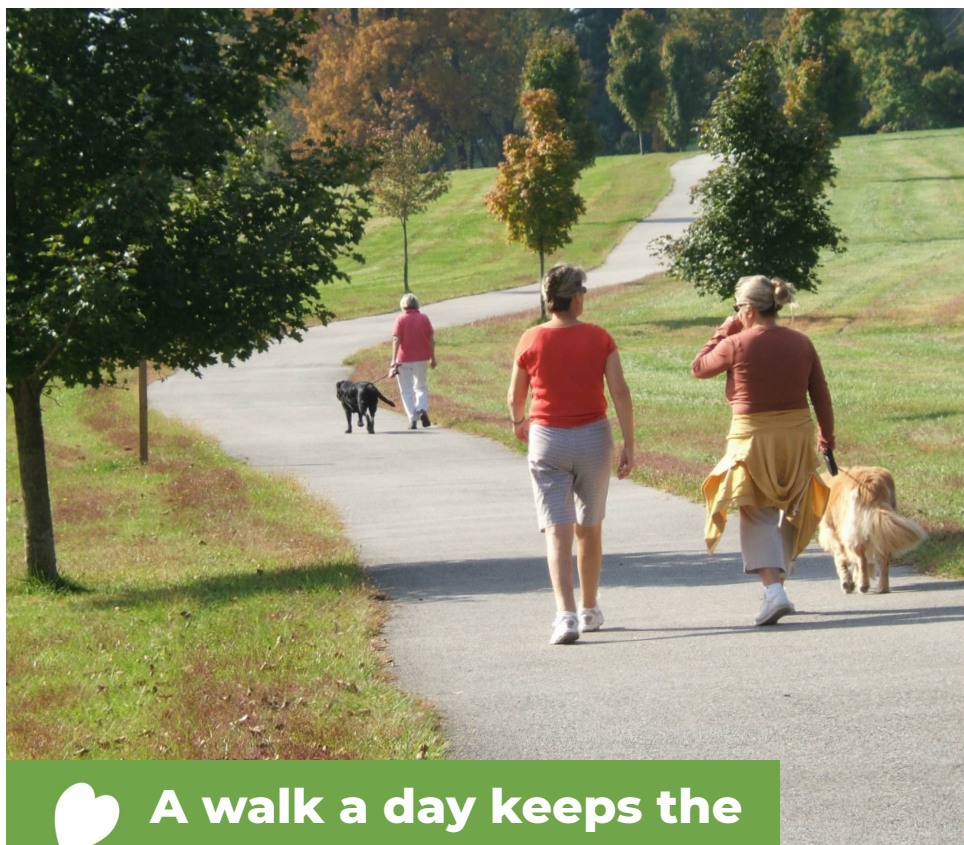


Mother Nature's filter and sponge.

Chester County's open spaces aren't just beautiful, they're hard working. Our fields and forests help filter our water, clean our air, reduce flooding, slow stormwater, and store carbon—every day, free of charge.

If our county's protected open spaces were lost to development, we would need to spend millions of dollars every year to replicate the vital environmental services they provide.

- **Protected open spaces contribute \$97 million in annual cost savings and economic gains through environmental services.**
- **If the carbon currently stored in trees on protected open space were released into the air, it would cost \$120 million to mitigate the increased emissions.**



A walk a day keeps the doctor away.

Chester County's protected open spaces invite exploration and enjoyment. They keep us fit, feeling good, and out of the doctor's office.

By helping us stay physically active, our county's trails, parks, and playgrounds help lower the incidence of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, depression, certain cancers, and obesity.

What's more, if we had to pay for the recreational opportunities that our county's open spaces provide free of charge, we'd spend millions to do so.

- **By serving as free places to exercise, protected open spaces save residents \$124 million annually.**
- **Every year, \$172 million in medical costs are avoided thanks to open spaces.**



Road trip-worthy destinations.

The secret is out. Chester County's preserves, farms, and trails are destinations that attract tourists who spend money when they visit.

Our county's agriculture industry is going strong thanks in part to protected farmland. The sale of farm products like feed crops, dairy products, and produce generates revenue, and both creates and sustains jobs.

- **Overall, spending that results from protected open space totals \$238 million.**
- **Protected open spaces contribute an estimated 1,800 jobs to the economy, which generate \$69 million in salaries.**



The hidden costs of development.

It's less expensive to preserve land than to develop it. When open space is turned into residential development, municipalities have to offer increased services such as police and fire protection, road maintenance, sewer systems, and new schools. These costs are avoided when land is instead protected as open space.

In contrast, farms and other protected open spaces provide more tax revenue for local governments than they require back in service expenditures.

- For every \$1 received from farmland and open space taxes, local governments spend 7 cents on services.
- For every \$1 received from residential developments through taxes, local governments spend \$1.11 on services.



It's simple, really. When we save our county's land, we all save money... in fact, we make money! What's more, we preserve a quality of life in which we all can grow and thrive. Balancing preservation with progress has helped Chester County flourish and become one of the most desirable counties in the state... and among the best places to live in the nation.

We can't afford not to protect our region's open space. These places are assets that are essential to our health, our economy, our identity, and our future.



Learn more about the Return on Environment and download the full Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Chester County study at chescoplanning.org/openspace/roe.cfm.

Partners

Brandywine Conservancy

Brandywine Red Clay Alliance

Chester County Agricultural Development Council

Chester County Association of Township Officials

Chester County Department of Open Space Preservation

Chester County Economic Development Council

Chester County Planning Commission

Chester County Water Resources Authority

County of Chester

Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission

EConsult Solutions, Inc.

French and Pickering Creeks Conservation Trust

Natural Lands

Stroud Water Research Center

The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County

Willistown Conservation Trust

