

HELPING TOWNS PRESERVE OPEN SPACE: MONMOUTH CONSERVATION FOUNDATION

Founded in 1977, the Monmouth Conservation Foundation (MCF) is a non-profit "Land Trust" dedicated to acquiring, holding and preserving open space in Monmouth County. To date, the Monmouth Conservation Foundation has helped preserve 49 properties throughout the county, ranging in size from 1 acre to 416 acres and totaling over 6000 acres.



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Open Spaces/Livable Places (OSLP) recently talked to Executive Director Adele Keller and Conservation Project Manager Fran Varacalli about the Foundation's work.

OSLP: Most people know MCF as a funding partner for land preservation for Monmouth County and its municipalities. What else does MCF do?

MCF: Over the years we've played a **large role in pro-open space initiatives**, including the statewide Keep It Green Coalition which advocates for a stable source of funding for the Garden State Preservation Fund, and the successful voter referendums on the dedicated County Open Space Tax. We are active in **educating people about preservation of open space and farmland**, including **serving on the steering committees** for the

MCF Can Help Municipalities...

In general:

- Answer basic questions about preserving land
- Help establish municipal open space taxes
- Identify State or County open space funds for local projects

More in-depth services, by contract:

- Prioritize possible acquisitions
- Negotiate with land owners
- Coordinate survey, appraisal, contract and environmental assessment work
- Work with potential funding sources
- Monitor easements
- Prepare grant applications

Monmouth County Greentable and the annual New Jersey Conservation Rally. And we provide **technical support** to Monmouth County and its municipalities both as a source of information and as a provider of **direct assistance in open space planning** and acquisition. The Foundation also holds **easements on over 300 acres** of open space and farmland which are monitored annually for compliance with the terms of the easement. Special projects have included the 2008 Great Places of Monmouth County, a Geographic Information System (GIS) inventory and methodology for defining land preservation priorities.



The Plum Tree and Aker Farms were preserved by the Township of Howell with the assistance of the Monmouth Conservation Foundation.



(l to r) Monmouth Conservation Foundation Director Adele Keller with Project Coordinator Jena Cosimo and Project Manager Fran Vacarelli.

OSLP: How do these services relate to MCF’s mission?

MCF: Anything that promotes funding for open space or enables municipalities to acquire open space advances the Foundation’s mission of preserving open space in Monmouth County.

OSLP: Can you tell us more about the municipal technical assistance services?

MCF: We routinely handle basic questions from towns and landowners on matters such as options for preserving land, establishing municipal open space taxes, and what State or County open space funds are available for local projects. More in-depth services available by contract include: prioritizing possible acquisitions; negotiating with land owners; coordinating survey, appraisal, contract and environmental assessment work; acting as a liaison with potential funding sources; monitoring easements; and preparing grant applications. We can tailor our services to meet the needs of the town for the particular project.

OSLP: Does MCF charge for the planning and acquisition services it offers to municipalities?

MCF: There is no charge for our basic informational services but we do have fees for the contract work. As a non-profit whose work is supported almost solely by donations, the modest fees we charge are critical to supporting the professional staff providing the services.

OSLP: What advantages are there for municipalities to use MCF for this work rather than doing it in-house?

MCF: This is what we do – our experience and specialization means we can perform these services quickly and efficiently. We have strong working relationships with other open space organizations and

we understand the often delicate nature of landowner negotiations.

OSLP: Can you give several examples of towns that you’ve assisted?

MCF: We’ve had contracts for technical assistance in twelve municipalities. These include Avon-by-the-Sea and Manasquan where single small, but important waterfront parcels were acquired and Howell where we assisted on the acquisition of approximately 30 farmland easements including landowner outreach and all due diligence (appraisals, surveys, contracts, etc.). We’ve been very active in Middletown and Upper Freehold on both park and farmland preservation.

OSLP: How do you choose towns to receive assistance?

MCF: We don’t choose towns, they choose us. For an open space plan or project to be successful, municipal leaders must be committed to the effort, and able to expend local funds. When a town is serious about a local preservation plan or project, the Foundation is ready to assist.

When a town is serious about a local preservation project, the Foundation is ready to help.

OSLP: If a town is interested in your services, who should they contact?

MCF: Towns may contact the Foundation by telephone at 732-671-7000 or by e-mail to either Akeller@monmouthconservation.org or Fvaracalli@monmouthconservation.org. We also encourage people to visit our website www.monmouthconservation.org.