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FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN

INTRODUCTION

Farmland preservation is essential to achieving the overriding goal of the Cranbury Township Master Plan, which is the preservation of the Township's rural character. Cranbury Township is characterized by rich agricultural land, with a long history of farmland operations. The Township has been actively involved in preserving its agricultural heritage by various mechanisms including purchase of development rights through the New Jersey Farmland Preservation Program, encouraging lot averaged development patterns and outright acquisition of key properties, such as the West property.

In June 1999, the New Jersey Legislature passed the "Garden State Preservation Trust Act" which establishes the framework for the annual distribution of a \$98 million trust fund for open space, farmland and historic resources. One of the new programs established in the Garden State Preservation Trust Act is the Planning Incentive Grant Program, which allows municipalities and counties to receive State grants to preserve a significant area of reasonably contiguous farmland. Municipalities that wish to participate in the Planning Incentive Grant Program must coordinate with the County Agriculture Development Board and prepare and adopt a Farmland Preservation Plan. This document has been prepared in accordance with the requirements of the Middlesex County Farmland Preservation Program and constitutes Cranbury Township's Farmland Preservation Plan. This Plan will be adopted as part of the Cranbury Township Master Plan.

SUMMARY OF OBJECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objectives of the Farmland Preservation Plan are as follows:

- 1) To maintain Cranbury Township's agricultural heritage through the preservation of large, contiguous areas of farmland.
- 2) To preserve the natural amenities that establish the Township's rural character, including scenic vistas, historic structures and farmland.
- 3) To protect and preserve environmentally sensitive areas.
- 4) To retain open space areas having important historical, cultural or locational significance.

INVENTORY OF FARM PROPERTIES

In 1992, over 5,720 acres of land was actively farmed in Cranbury Township, constituting over 66 percent of the Township's total land area. By 1999, total farmland acreage in Cranbury had declined to 5,184 acres, or only 60 percent of the Township's land area. The reduction in active farmland occurred because over 430 acres of land located on the east side of Route 130 have been developed for commercial and industrial uses and the remainder have been lost to residential development (Cranbury Greene) on the west side of Route 130.

Agricultural uses are particularly encouraged in the area west of Cranbury Village, where the Township, County and State have invested significant resources to preserve farmland. This area is referred to as the Farmland Preservation Area for purposes of the Farmland Preservation Plan and shown on Map 1. Table 1 provides a summary of the Township's agricultural properties (over 6 acres in size) in the area west of Cranbury Village. Overall, approximately 91 percent, or 3,110 acres of the total land in the Farmland Preservation Area is in agricultural use. The remaining properties are either vacant or contain residential uses. At present, over 2,004 acres of farmland have

been permanently preserved in this area, constituting over 54 percent of the total land area.

The majority of the land that has been preserved in the Farmland Preservation Area is located in the Farmland Preservation (A-100) zone, where over 68 percent of the active farmland in the zone is now permanently preserved. Approximately one-quarter of the farmland in the Residential – Light Impact (R-LI) zone is preserved. With the acquisition of the Wright properties, all of the active farmland in the Residential – Low Density 3 (RLD-3) zone is preserved.

The RLD-3 zone is the area adjacent to the northwestern corner of Cranbury Village and contains one of the farms most critical to preserving the rural features that characterize Cranbury Township; the 44-acre Wright South property, which consists of Lots 13 and 14.03 in Block 23. (Both properties are considered one tract for planning purposes since they are under the same ownership and are adjacent to each other). The Township has recently moved to acquire the 44 acres. Approximately 5 acres will be reserved for future municipal use and is not included in the Farmland Preservation Program.

Table 1: SUMMARY OF FARMLAND INVENTORY -
 AREA WEST OF CRANBURY VILLAGE
 Cranbury Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey

Zone	Acres in Agricultural Use	Acres Preserved	Percent Preserved
A-100	2,806	1,888	68.0 %
RLD-3	44	39	100.0 %
R-LI	264	77	26.2 %
TOTAL	3,114	2,004	64.5 %

A complete inventory of the agricultural properties that constitute the Cranbury Township Farmland Preservation Area is provided in Table 2 and illustrated on Map 1. As noted earlier, 2,004 acres in 26 lots are now permanently preserved for agriculture. These properties include three farms located at the northwest corner of Cranbury Village that have signed contracts for purchase. These new acquisitions include the Barclay South property (Block 23, Lot 12), Wright North property (Block 25, Lot 31) and the Barclay North property (Block 25, Lot 19). (Approximately 1.5 acres of the Barclay North property, fronting on Main Street and consisting of a dwelling, detached garage and barn, will be subdivided from the Farmland Preservation Land. See Appendix B.) The Township has also acquired the Wright South property, totaling over 43.88 acres. This property consists of Lots 13 and 14.03 in Block 23. As noted earlier, about 5 acres of this tract will be reserved for future municipal use and is not included in the Farmland Preservation Program.

These recent acquisitions are important properties because they help preserve the “hard edge” between the built environment in the Village and the surrounding land. This area is also a key gateway entrance into the Village and preserving the agricultural nature of this area is an important goal in Cranbury Township’s Master Plan.

The remaining farmland properties included in Table 2 are important to preserving the long-term viability of agriculture in Cranbury Township. Over 1,105 acres of land are identified in this category.

Table 2: INVENTORY OF FARM PROPERTIES
Township of Cranbury, Middlesex County, New Jersey

<u>BLOCK</u>	<u>LOT</u>	<u>ACREAGE</u>	<u>ZONE</u>
Permanently Preserved Farms			
21	6	210	A-100
21	8.19	28.7	A-100
22	1	18.99	A-100
22	2	79.18	A-100
22	3	119.8	A-100
22	4	56.2	A-100

<u>BLOCK</u>	<u>LOT</u>	<u>ACREAGE</u>	<u>ZONE</u>
22	6	133.38	A-100
22	8.01	70.87	A-100
22	14	68.4	A-100
23	1	53.59	A-100
23	3	182.61	A-100
23	11	185.91	A-100
23	12	130.00	A-100
23	13	19.55	RLD-3
23	14.03	19.33	RLD-3
23	99	78.5	A-100
23	100	43	A-100
23	103	19.52	A-100
24	1	133	A-100
24	2.011	19.7	A-100
24	9.01	8.6	A-100
25	3	69.55	R-LI
25	4	7.6	R-LI
25	19	60.00	A-100
25	31	83.00	A-100
25	40	105.04	A-100
Subtotal		<u>2004.02</u>	

Farmland Properties to be Preserved

21	1	36.40	A-100
21	4	50.30	RLD-3
22	5	11.25	A-100
22	7	88.14	A-100
22	10	49.90	A-100
22	11 – 13	38.82	A-100
23	2	124.60	A-100
23	8	41.15	A-100
23	97	38.53	A-100
23	98	19.06	A-100
23	102	150.00	A-100
23	104	38.00	A-100
23	108	64.00	A-100
23	120	15.86	A-100
23	141	13.10	A-100
24	4	59.55	A-100
25	1	74.90	R-LI
25	7	32.00	R-LI
25	8	49.40	R-LI
25	42.02	35.89	A-100
25	44.03	44.25	A-100
25	60.01	30.33	R-LI
Subtotal		<u>1105.43</u>	
TOTAL		3109.45	

MUNICIPAL SUPPORT FOR AGRICULTURE

As stated previously, Cranbury Township has been a strong supporter of agriculture preservation. The Township has been an active participant in the Farmland Preservation Program mandated through the Agriculture Retention and Development Act of 1983. At present, approximately 1,592 acres of active farmland have been preserved through the State farmland preservation program, another 100 acres have been deed restricted through other programs and 318 acres have been deed restricted directly by the Township.¹ Continued participation in the farmland preservation program is anticipated to maintain the open farmland areas in the Township. Finally, the Township has enacted a Right to Farm ordinance to provide further protection for agricultural operations and is actively participating with the Middlesex County Agricultural Development Board in establishing the local Agricultural Development Area and preserving farmland within this area. The Township intends to continue to work closely with Middlesex County, which is presently preparing its own Farmland Preservation Plan.

Zoning

The Township has established zone districts that encourage agricultural use for the properties west of Cranbury Village. The majority of the area is located in the A-100 zone, which has a minimum lot size of six acres and is intended to encourage continued agricultural uses in the area. Properties located north of Cedar Brook are zoned Residential – Light Impact (R-LI) which has a minimum lot size of four acres and is intended to minimize the impact of development to environmentally sensitive areas. Properties located immediately adjacent to Cranbury Village just south of Plainsboro Road are zoned Residential – Low Density 3 (RLD-3), which is intended to preserve open space and agricultural uses in order to maintain a “hard edge” to Cranbury Village. The RLD-3 zone has a minimum lot size of four acres for conventional development

¹ The Township is seeking additional funds from the Farmland Preservation Program to support these acquisitions.

and a maximum density of one unit per three acres for lot averaged development. Under the lot averaged development regulations, seventy percent of the land is preserved as permanent open space or farmland,

Lot Averaging

The lot averaging provisions of the Land Development Ordinance are starting to produce significant areas of land permanently preserved for agriculture. The Ordinance permits a density bonus of 25 percent if at least 70 percent of the land is permanently deed restricted for open space and/or agriculture. In the A-100 zone, for example, the maximum permitted density increases to 5 acres per dwelling unit instead of 6 acres per dwelling unit if the applicant chooses to lot average.

The Zaitz Farm (Block 21, Lot 6), consisting of 258 acres, was developed under the lot averaging provisions of the A-100 zone. Approximately 180 acres of land have been permanently preserved and are being farmed, with all housing clustered on the remaining 78 acres.

The Planning Board has recently received a proposed lot averaging plan for the Simonson property (Block 23, Lots 1, 2.02, 104 and 108) that all preserve approximately 136 acres of land for farming, or 73.6 percent of the entire tract. The proposed housing will be constructed on the remaining land.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION PLAN

Properties to Be Acquired

The Cranbury Township Farmland Preservation Plan relies on three tried-and-true mechanisms for farmland preservation; participation in the farmland preservation program, zoning and lot averaged development. The Plan is illustrated on Map 1, which identifies those additional farms that should be preserved to create a large, contiguous farmland area.

Program Cost

The appraised value of properties in Cranbury Township that have participated in the farmland preservation program has ranged between approximately \$12,500 and \$17,500 per acre. In the past, the Township has paid 16.67 percent of the cost of acquisition, with the County paying another 16.67 percent and the State paying the remaining 66.67 percent.

The cost to implement the Farmland Preservation Plan is shown in Table 3, using \$12,500 per acre as a low estimate and \$17,500 per acre as the high estimate, to establish a general order of magnitude for the cost. The total cost range between \$13.8 million and \$19.3 million, with the total municipal cost expected to range between \$2.3 million and \$3.2 million.

Table 3: FARMLAND PRESERVATION PROGRAM COST
Cranbury Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey

	<u>Total Cost</u>	<u>Municipal Cost</u>	<u>County Cost</u>	<u>State Cost</u>
Future Preserved Farms				
<i>Low Range</i>	\$13,817,875	\$2,303,439	\$2,303,439	\$9,212,377
<i>High Range</i>	\$19,345,025	\$3,224,815	\$3,224,815	\$12,897,328

Financing

The Township will continue to participate in the traditional State Farmland Preservation Program and may decide to participate in the new Planning Incentive Grant Program, which is part of the Garden State Preservation Trust Act. The Planning Incentive Grant Program provides grants to local governments to preserve a significant area of “reasonably contiguous farmland” rather than waiting for individual applications. The grants pay 60 to 80 percent of the costs for acquisition, development easements or fee simple titles. The requirements to participate in the Planning Incentive Grant Program are explained in more detail in Appendix A.

Cranbury Township has a proven track record in farmland preservation with 1,966 acres of farmland preserved. The Township has created an open space tax to help fund the municipal portion of the program. The tax, which is 3 cents for every \$100 dollars of assessed value, will generate between \$90,000 and \$100,000 annually. This fund can be used to pay for the acquisition of farmland for preservation purposes, as well as for the acquisition, development or maintenance of lands for recreation and conservation purposes.

Farm properties not preserved through the farmland preservation program will be preserved through appropriate zone and subdivision requirements. Cranbury Township has established zone districts in the Farmland Preservation Area that encourage continued agricultural use. The Township's Master Plan and Land Development Ordinance strongly encourage lot-averaged development in the A-100 and RLD-3 zones. The A-100 zone has a minimum lot size of 6 acres, while the RLD-3 zone has a minimum lot size of 4 acres. The Land Development Ordinance provides standards for lot-averaged development that results in large contiguous tracts of open space. Potential development areas are delineated in the Master Plan to preserve contiguous tracts of farmland, as well as scenic vistas, important open space areas, historic sites and districts and woodlands.

Administration

Purchases funded through the Planning Incentive Grant Program must be approved by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) and the Township, and if county funds are sought, by the County Agriculture Development Board. Easements will be held by the SADC, or by the CADB if county funds are involved. As required by the Planning Incentive Grant Program, Cranbury Township will establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee that will serve as the municipal overseeing agency for the program. The Mayor will appoint this Committee.

Action Program

1. Adopt the Farmland Preservation Plan as part of the Cranbury Township Master Plan.
2. Appoint an Agricultural Advisory Committee.
3. Submit the Farmland Preservation Plan to the Middlesex County Agriculture Development Board for approval.
4. Submit the Farmland Preservation Plan to the State Agriculture Development Committee for approval.
5. Submit letter to owners of Future Preserved Farms and offer assistance in applying to the Farmland Preservation Program.

APPENDIX A

Farmland Preservation and the Garden State Preservation Trust Act

The State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), which administers the State Farmland Preservation Program, expects to have up to \$60 million annually for up to 10 years because of the Garden State Preservation Trust Act. This \$60 million is about three times the funding level of past years and therefore affords more landowners an opportunity to be part of the Farmland Preservation Program. Money appropriated to the Farmland Preservation Trust will be used to provide grants for local governments to pay up to 80 percent of costs of acquisition and development easements or fee simple titles.

The State has created a new opportunity for farmland preservation easement purchase with the Planning Incentive Grant Program. Under this program, counties and municipalities may seek State grants to preserve a significant area of “reasonably contiguous farmland” rather than waiting for individual applications. The Planning Incentive Grant Program is in addition to the Development Easement Purchase Program.

The requirements to participate in the Planning Incentive Grant Program are as follows:

1. Multiple farms must be in an Agriculture Development Area (ADA) and must be reasonably contiguous (defined as within one-half mile of each other).
2. An Agricultural Advisory Committee appointed by the Mayor must serve as the municipal overseeing agency for the municipality.
3. A dedicated funding source must be established by the municipality, such as a dedicated tax, repeated bond indebtedness, repeated annual appropriation or another source of funding.

4. A Farmland Preservation Plan Element must be prepared and adopted by the municipality. The Farmland Preservation Plan Element must include the following:
 - An inventory of farm properties and a map illustrating significant areas of agricultural land;
 - A statement showing municipal ordinances support and promote agriculture as a business;
- A plan for preserving as much farmland as possible in the short term by leveraging monies made available by the Garden State Preservation Trust Act through a variety of mechanisms including, but not limited to, option agreements, installment purchases, and donations of permanent development easements.

APPENDIX B

The following maps show the location and the structures that now exist on the approximately 1.5 acres of land that will be subdivided from the Barclay North Farmland Preservation acquisition.