

**Borough of Oceanport**

**OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN**

**January 2001**

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## **I. Executive Summary**

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Oceanport experienced its most significant development and growth during the decades following WWII, and particularly after the extension of the Garden State Parkway. Most of the developed lands in the Borough's 3.1 square miles are devoted to residential use. Major factors influencing the character of Oceanport include the Borough's location along navigable waterways as well as the presence of U.S. military base Fort Monmouth and the Monmouth Park Race Track. In the past, the Shrewsbury River brought commerce to the Borough and it now offers recreational activities and desirable waterfront properties. Fort Monmouth and Monmouth Park Racetrack account for over one third of the Borough's land area. These two uses previously provided a stable economic and housing base and now represent the greatest opportunities for open spaces and public recreational facilities.

The Taxpayers of Oceanport spoke loudly in November 1999 in support of additional open space and enhanced recreational facilities when they approved by public referendum a dedicated municipal open space tax totaling one cent per \$100 of property assessment. By taxing itself for local open space purposes, Oceanport has advantageously positioned itself for a newly established State acquisition program. The Green Acres Planning Incentive Grant offers municipalities a multi-year block grant of matching funds combined with a 2 percent, 20 year low interest loan. To be eligible for this new funding, the Borough must submit an Open Space and Recreation Plan to Green Acres.

In recent years, the Borough has inaugurated its open space planning and acquisition objectives. Oceanport's community leaders understand that the current real estate market, in combination with the realities of New Jersey's land use laws, will require an exceptional effort to control growth and insure that a sufficient amount of open space and recreational opportunities are preserved.

The purpose of this document is to fulfill the Green Acres Planning Incentive Grant requirements. This plan will concentrate on acquiring land for active recreational facilities and open space preservation. The plan addresses various methods of land preservation including outright acquisition, easement acquisition, purchase of development rights, land donations, and conservation easements.

## **II. Introduction**

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The Open Space and Recreation Plan is intended to provide a comprehensive set of goals and objectives designed to identify and address both the short and long term needs of present and future residents of the Borough. This plan will consist of the following six primary categories:

1. A listing of the Plan's goals and objectives.
2. A listing of the Plan's policies and strategies.
3. An inventory of existing park and recreation facilities.
4. An analysis of existing and future needs for park and recreation facilities as well as open space.
5. An action plan describing the process of plan implementation and the use of funds earmarked for open space preservation.
6. An analysis and inventory of privately owned properties suitable for acquisition and or preservation.

### **III. Plan Goals and Objectives**

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1. The establishment of realistic projections of the immediate and long term recreational needs of the residents of Oceanport.
2. The establishment of realistic projections of the immediate and long term open space preservation needs of the residents of Oceanport.
3. The establishment of policies, procedures and resources for the acquisition and/or preservation of land for open space, recreation and conservation purposes.
4. Preparation of a comprehensive plan which will address the wide variety of recreational needs of the residents of Oceanport.
5. The Plan will emphasize the Borough's acquisition of existing State and Federal holdings to prevent these lands from being sold to the private sector.
6. The Plan will emphasize tracts for open space purposes that will contribute to and enhance the scenic and aesthetic quality of the Borough.
7. The Plan will emphasize tracts for active recreational purposes that are well suited for such development and where environmental disturbance will be kept to a minimum. Recreational uses which are presently unavailable or have limited availability within the Borough include but are not limited to inline skating rinks, public golf facilities, football fields, baseball fields and soccer fields.
8. The Plan will encourage the development of smaller "pocket parks." Such parks are intended to be accessed primarily by pedestrians and will service residents within given neighborhoods. Generally, "pocket parks" can range from 10,000 square feet to 40,000 square feet in size and may contain such facilities as a tot lot, swings, a basketball court, an open play area and benches.
9. In considering the acquisition of property, the Borough Council shall make every effort to negotiate an amicable and fair transaction. The use of condemnation and/or eminent domain shall be only applied as a last resort, where the land is considered to be of vital importance to accomplishing the goals of this Plan, and all reasonable efforts to reach a fair arrangement have been exhausted.

## **IV. Policies and Strategies**

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The implementation of Oceanport's Open Space and Recreation Plan shall be guided by policies and strategies designed to address the needs and interest of all residents of the Borough. Meeting the evolving needs of our diverse populace will be the key to the success of this Plan.

### ***Policies***

1. The residents of the Borough have voted to dedicate their tax dollars to open space acquisition and preservation. The Borough shall therefore ensure that the funds collected will be utilized to address the wide variety of interests amongst residents.
2. All of Oceanport's recreation facilities shall be open and accessible to the public. Maximum effort will be made to ensure that facilities are available to meet the needs of all of our residents including youth, senior citizens and those with special needs.
3. All categories of Open Space acquisition shall be accommodated. It is recognized that sound and adequate recreation facilities are vital to a community. However, equally important is the acquisition and preservation of land for conservation purposes. The protection of environmentally sensitive lands is vital to the overall ecology of a community and a key factor in establishing a quality of life.
4. The Borough will continue to work with the Federal Government, the State of New Jersey, the County of Monmouth and the Oceanport Board of Education in efforts to preserve existing public holdings and provide recreational opportunities. In addition, the Borough will continue to work with private sector entities devoted to open space preservation, such as the Monmouth Conservation Foundation and the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.

### ***Strategies***

1. Public participation, input and support will also be sought for every action taken in furtherance of the Plan. It is understood that opinions may differ as to specific actions to be taken. All viewpoints shall be considered before action is taken.
2. The Borough will work closely with the Federal Government and the State of New Jersey to permanently protect existing public holdings and to acquire new private sector holdings. The Borough understands that some properties will require a coordinated effort amongst various public and private entities if acquisition is to be a realistic goal. Lack of such coordination will reduce the effectiveness of this Plan and prevent the achievement of its goals.

3. Public information and awareness of the benefits of the gift of land will be included in Oceanport's overall approach to open space preservation. The Borough will provide the public with information on the wide array of methods which can be utilized to preserve land for future generations. Such methods will include:

- Outright donation
- Donation by will
- Donation with life rights
- Gifts
- Outright sale
- Bargain sale
- Installment sales
- Sale with life rights
- Conservation easements
- Deed restrictions
- Conditional transfers and reverter clauses
- Mutual covenants
- Leases
- Management agreements

## **V. Inventory of Existing Park and Recreation Facilities**

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There are presently 9 Borough owned and operated parks, totaling 35 acres, which provide a wide variety of recreational opportunities to the public. In addition, there is one (1) Federal holding, one (1) State holding and one (1) County Park, each of which supplements the open space and recreation needs of the Borough. *Table 1* and *Map 1* contain a listing of the Borough of Oceanport's Open Space Inventory that has been purchased with Green Acres and Blue Acres funds. *Table 2* contains a listing of other Borough owned properties.

### **Federal Land**

U.S. Army Post Fort Monmouth is located in both the Borough of Oceanport and the Borough of Eatontown. Once an active military institution, recent shifts in military philosophy have changed the primary purpose of this base from a military training center to a federal research and development facility. Several under-publicized recreational opportunities exist on the base with limited access to the general public. These recreational facilities include but are not limited to the following: marina, baseball fields, bowling alley, movie theater, soccer fields and football field. However, it should be noted that recent downsizing of the federal government has increased the probability that these lands will not be permanently protected and could be sold to private industry.

### **State Land**

The New Jersey Sports and Exhibition Authority has purchased Monmouth Park Race Track. This 525 acre facility hosts thoroughbred horse racing between Memorial Day and Labor Day. During the off-season simulcast betting of off-track racing is available. The racetrack also has soccer fields that are used by track employees as well as traveling soccer leagues. However, it should be noted that the State holds several vacant parcels which from time to time have been the discussion of potential land sales or high density residential development to gain additional State revenue.

### **County Parks**

The County of Monmouth has purchased Wolf Hill Farms from the New Jersey Sports and Exhibition Authority. This 94.7 acre tract was part of the original horse farm which supported the Monmouth Park Race Track when this facility was privately operated. The County's long term goal for Wolf Hill Farms is to provide an active recreation facility that serves regional recreational needs in an attractive setting. Preliminary plans for this park include the development of three baseball fields, four soccer fields, three tennis courts, basketball courts, an inline skating rink and support facilities. The County's concept plan also calls for several open play fields, trails and woodland restoration areas.

### **Borough Parks**

At this time, there are 9 Borough Parks totaling approximately 35 acres. Of these 9 parks, seven are developed with recreation facilities and two remain as undeveloped wildlife preserves. In addition, there are two public schools in the Borough which also provide a variety of recreational opportunities.

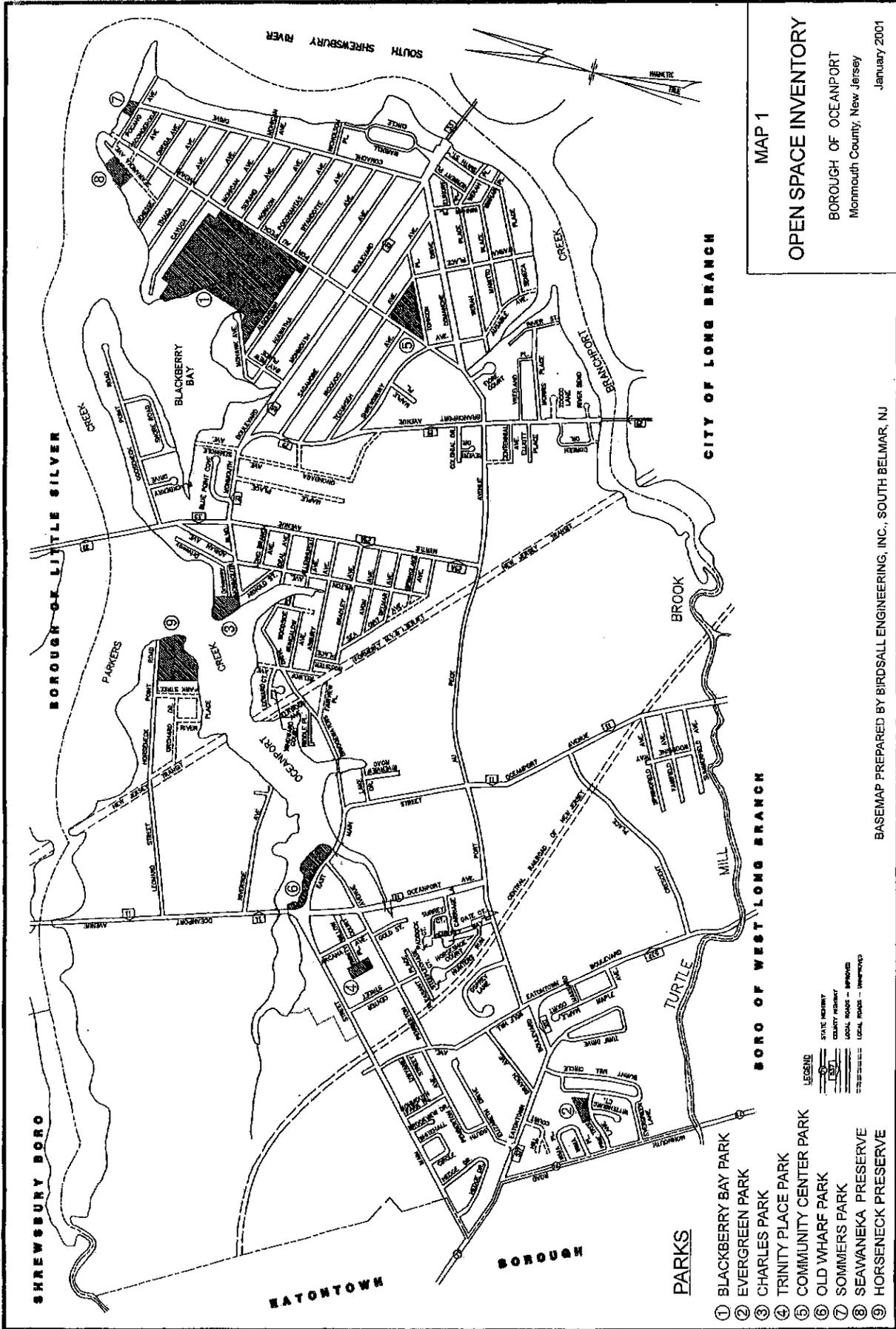
**Table 1: Borough of Oceanport's Public Land**

<b>Open Space Inventory/Public Parks</b>					
<b>Name</b>	<b>Block</b>	<b>Lot</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Acreage</b>	<b>Uses</b>
Blackberry Bay Park	20	1	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	9.5	baseball, roller hockey, soccer, tennis, basketball, playground, boat launch, swim club and waterfront
	21	1		1.61	
	25	1		5.46	
	27	6		1.87	
				total 18.44	
Evergreen Park	133	3	Pine Tree Ln.	0.85	playground and basketball
Charles Park	76	21-23	Monmouth Blvd.	1.97	playground, basketball and waterfront
Trinity Park	115	13	Trinity Pl.	1.25	playground, basketball and tennis
Community Center Park	6	1	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	3.34	baseball, playground, tennis and community building
Old Wharf Park	103	1 & 2	East Main St.	3.07	bocci, community building and waterfront
Sommers Park	39	1	Pocono Ave.	0.16	passive recreation and waterfront
	38	7		0.40	
				total 0.56	
Seawanka Preserve	35	2	Seawanka Ave.	1.43	wildlife preserve
Horseneck Preserve	107	2	Horseneck Point Rd.	4.95	wildlife preserve

Preserve					
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**Table 2: Other Borough Owned Property**

<b>Other Borough Owned Property Not on Open Space Inventory</b>			
<b>Block</b>	<b>Lot</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Uses</b>
1	13	Ausable Avenue	vacant land
12	20	Monmouth Blvd.	vacant land
16	19	Hiawatha Ave.	vacant land
18	1	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	vacant land
18	2	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	vacant land
18	3	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	vacant land
18	4	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	vacant land
18	5	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	vacant land
18	6	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	vacant land
18	7	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	vacant land
18	8	Port-Au-Peck Ave.	vacant land
9	1	Pocono Ave.	vacant land
65	1	Myrtle Ave.	Town Hall
65	2	Myrtle Ave.	Port-Au-Peck Fire House
66	8	Shrewsbury Ave.	vacant land
74	7	Gooseneck Point Rd.	vacant land
87	1	Spring Lake Ave.	vacant land
88	9.01	Bradley Ave.	vacant land
88	16.01	Relwof Ave.	vacant land
88	19	Bridgewater Dr.	vacant land
93	4	Asbury Ave.	vacant land
105	8	Orchard St.	vacant land
105	10	Orchard St.	vacant land
108	10	Orchard Ave.	vacant land
108	13	Orchard Ave.	vacant land
110	20	Main St.	Oceanport Hook & Ladder
113	2.02	Pemberton Ave.	vacant land
119	4	Oceanport Ave.	vacant land
119	5	Oceanport Ave.	vacant land
120	1	Pemberton Ave.	First Aid Squad
120	8	Pemberton Ave.	vacant land
136	52	Monmouth Rd.	bird sanctuary



**MAP 1**

**OPEN SPACE INVENTORY**

BOROUGH OF OCEANPORT  
 Monmouth County, New Jersey

January 2001

**CITY OF LONG BRANCH**

**BORO OF WEST LONG BRANCH**

BASEMAP PREPARED BY BIRDSALL ENGINEERING, INC., SOUTH BELMAR, NJ

**LEGEND**

STATE HIGHWAY

COUNTY HIGHWAY

LOCAL ROAD - IMPROVED

LOCAL ROAD - UNIMPROVED

- PARKS**
- ① BLACKBERRY BAY PARK
  - ② EVERGREEN PARK
  - ③ CHARLES PARK
  - ④ TRINITY PLACE PARK
  - ⑤ COMMUNITY CENTER PARK
  - ⑥ OLD WHARF PARK
  - ⑦ SOMMERS PARK
  - ⑧ SEAWANIEKA PRESERVE
  - ⑨ HORSENECK PRESERVE

## **VI. Needs Analysis**

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Many of the recreational needs specified by this Plan were recommended by the Oceanport Recreation Committee, Planning Board and Borough Council. In addition, open space protection, land conservation and the preservation of natural areas have been a longstanding policy of the Borough.

The needs analysis will also address non-recreational open space issues. While it is recognized that active recreational facilities are important, so too is the preservation of land in its natural state. Undeveloped natural areas and open spaces are vital to the overall well being and ambiance of a community. This is particularly true in communities where such areas exist but are at risk of being lost to development. Natural areas are important for maintenance of the local ecology and provide excellent educational opportunities for all.

### ***Projected Recreation Needs***

1. **Pocket Parks:**

Many areas of the Borough have a distance of a ½ mile or more to a park site. More pocket parks on lots between ¼ and 1 acre in size would serve this need.

2. **Trails:**

Trails within the Borough should be developed to accommodate varied uses – biking, walking and running. The abandoned railroad right-of-way in the western half of the Borough could be utilized for this purpose to increase access between Wolf Hill School and the County's Wolf Hill Park.

3. **Sport Courts:**

Additional court facilities with multipurpose use, such as basketball courts with the capability for volleyball, inline skating or ice skating, are warranted.

4. **Access to Waterways:**

Additional public access to local waterways such as Blackberry Bay, Branchport Creek, Oceanport Creek and Pleasure Bay is needed. Besides acquiring additional waterfront properties, the existing dead end streets to navigable waterways could be improved to increase public access to local waterways.

5. **Golf Facility:**

Golf is one of the fastest growing sports in the country. The need exists for additional public facilities for instruction, practice and play. These facilities could include a driving range or a small par-3 course.

6. **Indoor Facilities:**

Aquatics, ice hockey, basketball and tennis are just four areas where there is a need in the Borough as well as our region for these type facilities. However, these are regional needs and should be addressed by the County of Monmouth or State of New Jersey.

7. **Athletic Fields**

Additional athletic fields are needed for multipurpose use by residents of all ages. New fields for football, soccer and baseball should be explored. In addition, the Borough should investigate refurbishing the existing fields with improved drainage and grading as well as new sod.

***Projected Natural Area Preserve***

1. **Wetlands:**

Substantial areas of wetlands are still privately owned throughout the Borough. These vital areas are crucial to maintaining bio-diversity within the region. While current State regulations limit disturbance of wetlands, little by little encroachment and filling still occur. Efforts should be made to protect these areas against further disturbance.

2. **Woodlands:**

Much of the undeveloped portions of the Borough still remain wooded, holding substantial populations of wildlife. Such areas are of vital importance for protection, particularly due to their potential for erosion once disturbed and the potential impact on surface water quality and flooding.

3. **Water Access:**

One of Oceanport's most prominent features is its extensive waterfront. Literally two thirds of the Borough's perimeter adjoins major water bodies. Public access to the river is quite good given Oceanport's developed character. However, efforts should be made to expand public access to the river so it can be enjoyed by all since this is the Borough's strongest natural resource.

## **VII. Action Plan**

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In 1999, Oceanport's governing body adopted an Ordinance establishing a dedicated Open Space Tax of one cent per \$100 of assessed valuation. Collection of these funds began in 2000. The amount anticipated to be collected in the first year is approximately \$46,000. The Borough will seek to take maximum advantage of State funds available through the Green Acres and Blue Acres Grant Programs. In addition, the Borough will attempt to maximize its resources through joint ventures with the County of Monmouth and private sector entities such as the Monmouth County Conservation Foundation to gain additional revenue sources, thus allowing the preservation of larger tracts of land.

### ***Target Accomplishments***

The process of selecting properties for acquisition shall, of course, always remain a dynamic one. Numerous factors will influence the actual decision-making process, including site availability, owner willingness to sell, development pressure, funding availability, recreation needs and critical environmental issues.

Oceanport will seek to acquire or otherwise protect as many properties as possible. Although a variety of park types will be emphasized for acquisition, including active recreation, passive recreation, conservation and pocket parks, the main focus of the Borough's acquisition efforts will be directed towards permanently preserving excess race track properties which from time to time have received development pressure to gain additional State revenue.

### ***Capital Development Actions***

Upon full implementation of the Open Space Tax, Oceanport anticipates collecting approximately \$46,000 per year in tax revenue. Depending upon interest rates, the Borough could leverage this funding source and raise between \$700,000 to \$1,000,000 through public bonding alone. However, this allocation of the open space tax will totally exhaust the anticipated revenues received for the next twenty years.

To increase the amount of lands to be acquired, the Borough will submit a State of New Jersey Green Acres Program Planning Incentive Grant Application. This is a new program offered by the State and is only available to municipalities with a dedicated open space tax. The Green Acres Planning Incentive Grant Program offers municipalities enhanced funding through a 50% grant and a 50% low interest loan. The other main benefit of this program is that it is a constant funding source and the Borough will receive new grant allocations to acquire additional properties listed in this Plan each year without the need of submitting separate Green Acres Applications for each parcel.

The list of properties to be acquired by this Plan, provided in Section VIII, contains 11 properties totaling approximately 140 acres. These properties are, of course, quite diverse in character, location and condition, therefore determining values is somewhat difficult at this time. The Borough's ability to acquire property contained on the list will be directly correlated to the supplemental funding received by the State of New Jersey through the Green Acres Planning Incentive Grant Program.

## VIII. Property Inventory

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*Table 3* and *Map 2* contain a listing of properties to be acquired for open space or recreational facilities. This listing is not intended to imply that there has been pre-determination to acquire any specific piece of property. Additionally, while the list is intended to be inclusive, it is by no means complete. There may from time to time be properties added to the list as the Borough becomes aware of them or as needs change. Accordingly, from time to time, properties may be removed from the list as they are developed or when there is a specific reason warranting their exclusion.

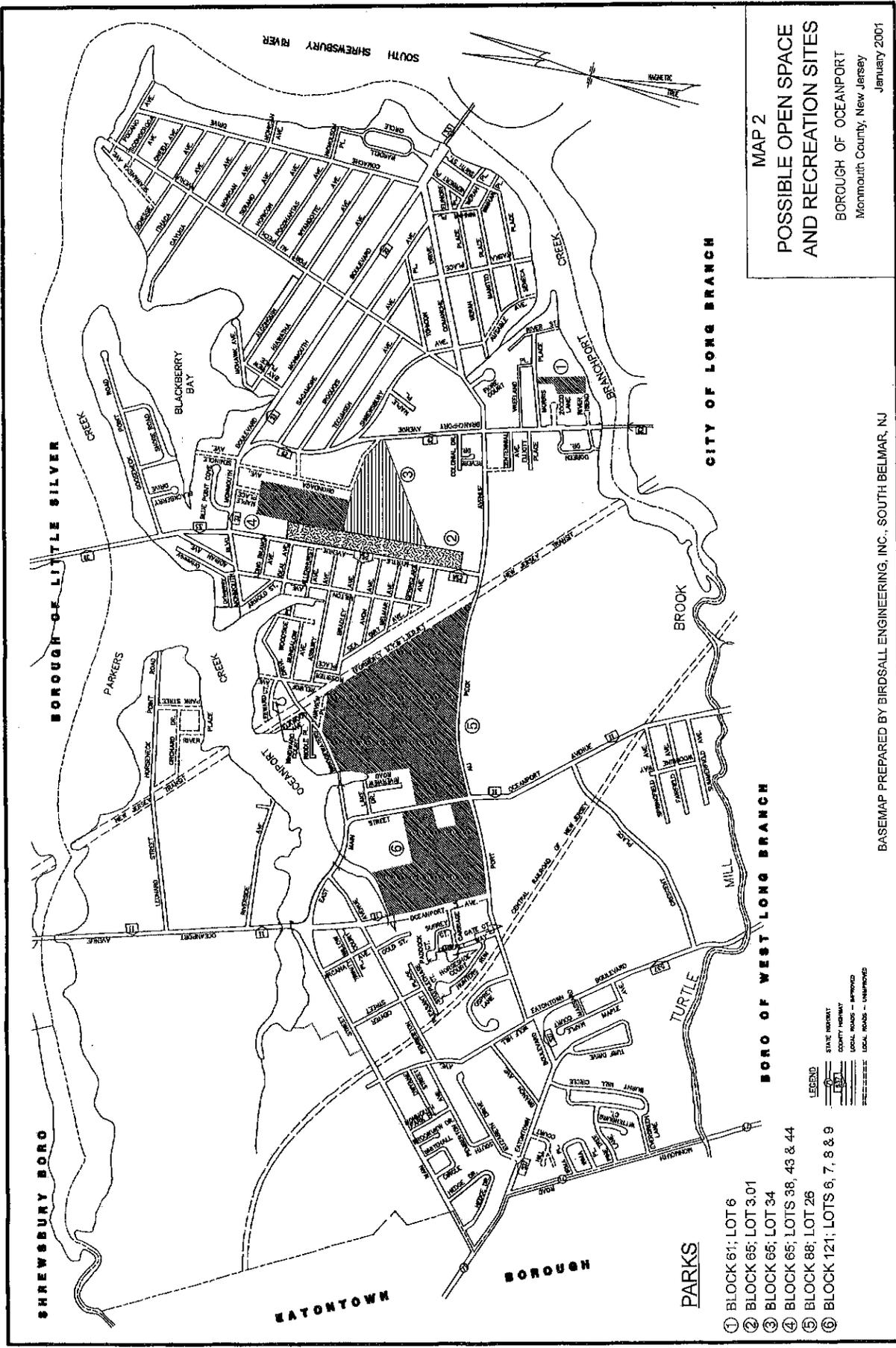
The properties listed in *Table 3* are categorized by park type and potential uses. The specific category selected is a generalization as to the type and use associated with each potential park. Some sites may be suitable, at least in part, for multiple uses or other uses than those specified. The categories are summarized below:

Recreation Area -	Park facilities devoted to physical activities such as athletic fields for soccer, baseball, basketball, tennis, softball, inline skating, football and open play fields.
Passive Recreation -	Activities generally not involving athletic fields, facilities or equipment. Activities may include hiking, bird watching, jogging, nature study, camping and fishing.
Pocket Park -	Typically smaller properties located within residential areas and most often visited by walkers. Such parks typically contain a basketball court and a playground area.
Mixed Use Park -	A park facility which is suitable for a combination of uses and activities. Some parks, for example, may have areas suitable for athletic fields while at the same time also containing natural areas for conservation.
Conservation Area -	Areas containing natural features such as woodland, wetlands, streams, etc. These areas should be preserved and remain in their natural state as wildlife preserves.

**Table 3: List of Possible Open Space & Recreation Sites**

Block	Lot	Acres	Key Assets	Potential Use *
61	6	0.3 AC	waterfront access, well-maintained structure	PP
65	3.01	26.28	mature woodland, predominantly freshwater wetlands	PR, CA
65	34	12.67	partly wooded, abandoned reclamation facility, relatively flat, existing structures	RA, PR, MX
65	38, 43, & 44	8.95	mature woodlands, some freshwater wetlands	PR, MX, CA
88	26	62.31	existing soccer fields, open fields, off-street parking, access to collector roads, freshwater wetlands	RA, PR, MX, CA
121	6, 7, 8, & 9	29.6	open fields, mature woodland, freshwater wetlands, access to collector roads	RA, PR, MX, CA

* KEY	
	PARK TYPE
CA	Conservation Area
MX	Mixed Use Park
PP	Pocket Park
PR	Passive Recreation
RA	Recreation Area



MAP 2  
**POSSIBLE OPEN SPACE  
 AND RECREATION SITES**  
 BOROUGH OF OCEANPORT  
 Monmouth County, New Jersey  
 January 2001

- ① BLOCK 61; LOT 6
- ② BLOCK 65; LOT 3,01
- ③ BLOCK 65; LOT 34
- ④ BLOCK 65; LOTS 38, 43 & 44
- ⑤ BLOCK 68; LOT 26
- ⑥ BLOCK 121; LOTS 6, 7, 8 & 9

LEGEND  
 STATE HIGHWAY  
 COUNTY HIGHWAY  
 LOCAL ROAD - IMPROVED  
 LOCAL ROAD - UNIMPROVED

BASEMAP PREPARED BY BIRDSALL ENGINEERING, INC., SOUTH BELMAR, NJ