

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

March 14, 2025

Chester Heights Borough Finalizes Acquisition of Powell Property for Public Park



CHESTER HEIGHTS, PA – In a landmark achievement for open space preservation, Chester Heights Borough has officially finalized the acquisition of the Powell Property on March 14, 2025, securing 40.2 acres of pristine land for public use, conservation, and recreation. This milestone represents years of negotiation, collaboration, and unwavering commitment to protecting one of the Borough's last remaining large open spaces.

The Borough extends its deepest gratitude to the Powell Family, who generously contributed \$340,000 worth of land to make this acquisition possible. The final settlement was executed by Borough Council President Marta Driscoll and Glen Powell, officially concluding the purchase.

A Landmark Victory for Open Space Preservation

The idea of preserving the Powell Property as open space was first introduced in January 2018, when then-Councilman Philip Block proposed acquiring the property for public use. At the time, the Powell Family, grieving the recent loss of their patriarch, Mr. Calvin Powell, was not yet ready to discuss options for the land's future. Glen Powell publicly stated that the property was not for sale.

As time passed, the conversation evolved. In December 2019, the Powell Family submitted a sketch plan for a 52-townhome development, signaling an interest in moving forward with residential development. The proposal intensified public concern, leading residents to unite in opposition and eventually hire an attorney to put pressure on Borough Council to consider alternatives.

Amid this growing movement, Fred Wood, who had been working with Natural Lands Trust (NLT) to preserve his own land, introduced the idea of the Borough partnering with NLT to protect the Powell Property. His vision laid the foundation for the successful conservation effort that would ultimately lead to the Borough's formal acceptance of preservation in 2023, following years of public engagement and mounting advocacy.

Private Donors and National Land Trust Play Key Roles



The success of this acquisition would not have been possible without the generous support of private donors, including a significant contribution from Mr. Fred Wood, whose family kindly requested that his name be recognized in appreciation of his early commitment to this effort.

Fred Wood's vision for conservation was instrumental in rallying support for this effort. His belief that *"land is the one thing we can't make more of"* inspired his family and other donors to step forward and help protect this open space.

Additionally, the National Land Trust (NLT) played a pivotal role. Robyn Jenney led the

coordination of funding and grant applications, ensuring the preservation effort stayed on track. When Robyn departed NLT, Jack Stufferud stepped in during the final stages and successfully guided the process to completion.

Overcoming Obstacles to Secure Preservation



The road to finalizing this acquisition was not without challenges. Land subdivision delays required the assistance of Pennsylvania State Senator John Kane and Representative Craig Williams, who helped secure environmental approvals from the PA Fish and Boat Commission, a critical step in recording the subdivision and moving the sale forward.

A major financial hurdle also emerged. Although the project was supported by generous grant funding, all public grants were awarded on a reimbursement basis—requiring the Borough to cover the full acquisition cost upfront before receiving any reimbursement.

To overcome this, the Borough developed a strategic funding plan:

- The largest grant, \$1.87 million from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) through DCNR, is being fronted through a bridge loan from The Nature Conservancy.
- The \$500,000 Delaware County Greenways Grant and the \$260,000 DCED Local Share Account (LSA) Grant are being temporarily funded through the Borough's unassigned cash reserves.
- Additionally, due to a delay in the disbursement of private donations, the Borough also advanced its full \$300,000 committed contribution at the time of settlement.

In total, Chester Heights Borough contributed approximately \$1 million at the settlement table, demonstrating both a strong fiscal commitment to open space preservation and confidence in its long-term financial strategy.

A Future Public Park for Chester Heights

With the acquisition finalized, the Borough is preparing to transform the Powell Property into a public park, ensuring long-term protection of its meadows, woodlands, and ecological features. The park is envisioned to offer:

- Recreational opportunities
- Walking trails
- Environmental education programs
- Permanent preservation of natural landscapes

“This is a tremendous victory for Chester Heights,” said Borough Council President Marta Driscoll. “Thanks to the generosity of private

donors, the support of Delaware County and state agencies, and the dedication of the National Land Trust, we’ve ensured this land will remain open for generations to come. It took years of effort, but we have made history for our community.”

The Borough invites all residents to participate in shaping the future of the new park. The next Park Planning Meeting will be held on:

📅 April 10, 2025

🕒 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM

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