



# Land Acquisition Decision: The Mermaid Lake Property

21 July 2020

Whitpain Township

# Mission

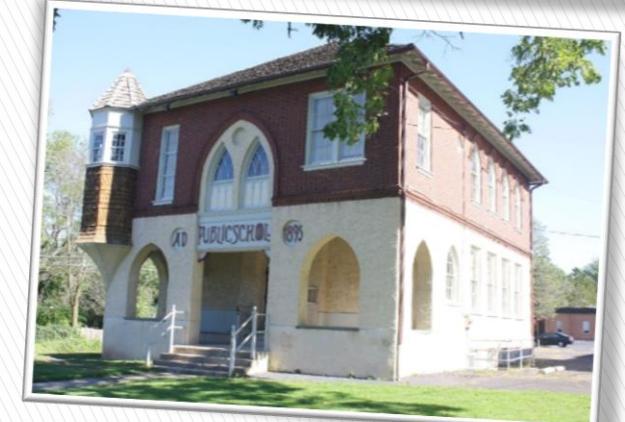
The mission of Whitpain Township Government is to efficiently, responsibly, and creatively provide the essential services that build value, enhance quality of life, and protect the health, safety and rights for all who live in, work in, and enjoy Whitpain.

# Vision

Whitpain Township is a community that embraces the future while cherishing our heritage. We will continue to be recognized for our diversity, **fiscal responsibility and leadership in resource conservation**. We shall never waver in our commitment to ensuring public safety and enhancing the quality of life of all of our fellow citizens.

# Values

- ✓ **Integrity** ~ *We follow moral and ethical principles as we conduct our work. We are consistent in our deeds, methods, and expectations.*
- ✓ **Stewardship** ~ *We value our natural, financial, and human resources and are diligent in protecting, preserving, and enhancing Whitpain.*
- ✓ **Responsiveness** ~ *We respond quickly but thoughtfully to individuals, situations, and events.*
- ✓ **Respect** ~ *We treat everyone with respect. Our actions and words will demonstrate consideration and appreciation of others.*
- ✓ **Partnership** ~ *We establish transparent, long-term relationships that are based on clarity, trust, shared goals and open communication with organizations that are committed to improving Whitpain Township.*



# Agenda...

- Context
- Background
- Developer's Plans
- Community Consensus
- Taking Unless Agreement of Sale Negotiated  
With Closing Within 30 Days of Resolution
- Phasing of Next Steps
- Tonight's Decisions
- Public Comment



*As to be presented at a virtual meeting of the  
Whitpain Township Board of Supervisors on  
Tuesday, 21 July 2020 at 8:00 PM.*

# Context: “Leadership in resource conservation...”

- 1963:** Whitpain acquires/cleans-up 18-acres of the BoRit site in West Ambler to create a park. Closed in 1984 due to asbestos concerns, **Wissahickon Park** reopens in **2021**.
- 1966:** Whitpain acquires 62-acre **Cook Farm** with funding from PA & Township (now **CSP**).
- 1980-90's:** Whitpain acquires land/develops Wentz Run Park and Stony Creek Sports Park.
- 1997:** Whitpain partners with **WVWA\*** to acquire/create 58-acre **Armentrout Preserve** for \$1M (connecting to 35-acre *Camp Woods Preserve* along scenic Morris Road).
- 1999:** Whitpain incurs \$8.9M in debt to acquire 82-acre **Thomson parcel** (now **PCP**).
- 2002:** Whitpain incurs \$4.5M in debt to acquire a 37-acre **St. Helena tract** (now **CSP**).
- 2006:** Whitpain partners with WVWA to purchase \$1M in easements connecting **PCP to Briar Hill Preserve** (now with 190-acres of permanently preserved open space).
- 2008:** Whitpain partners with the county to purchase a conservation easement on the 42-acre **Walbridge estate** for \$2M (abutting the 210-acre *Cedarbrook CC*).
- 2009:** Work begins on a Township-wide trail network to make Whitpain more walkable.
- 2011:** Whitpain contracts w/*Weddings by the Pond* in P3\* to transform the Manor House at PCP into premier venue; **\$5M+ improvements at no cost to taxpayers + \$200k/yr. for OS**.
- 2013:** Whitpain partners with Wings Aviation to construct/make connections to **Narcissa Trail at no cost to taxpayers** (on periphery of 219-acres of permanently preserved open space).
- 2014-15:** Whitpain negotiates extensively with Meadowlands CC to preserve 118-acres of open space; outcomes include **private owner buying/revitalizing as Bluestone CC**.
- 2015:** Whitpain opens 100-acre **CSP** complex with 7 sports field, dog park, trail and stormwater facilities delivered via innovative P3; **\$7M+ improvements at no cost to taxpayers**.
- 2017:** Whitpain begins planning/budgeting for preservation of **Mermaid Lake**.
- 2018:** Whitpain partners with WVWA and the county to preserve 8-acre **Cheston property** (across Lewis Ln. from historic Dawesfield, Washington's HQ in Oct. 1777).



**Cook Farm**



**The Manor House at Prophecy Creek Park\***



**Centre Square Park\***

# Mermaid Lake

- Originally it was part of the Zimmerman Farm.
- Around 1927, the Crowell Family acquired the parcel and began developing it as resort area.
  - The “lake” was never a naturally occurring body of water but rather a result of damming Mermaid Run, a tributary in the highly impaired Stoney Creek/Sawmill watershed.
  - In 1961, it became known as Mermaid Swim & Golf Club.
- In recent years, **little has been reinvested in the 63.5-acre property's aging structures, million-gallon pool, 9-hole golf course & open areas.**
  - The pool is entirely within the FEMA-designated floodplain.
  - Infrastructure and buildings are in various states of disrepair and/or need renovation to comply with current building codes and environmental regulations.

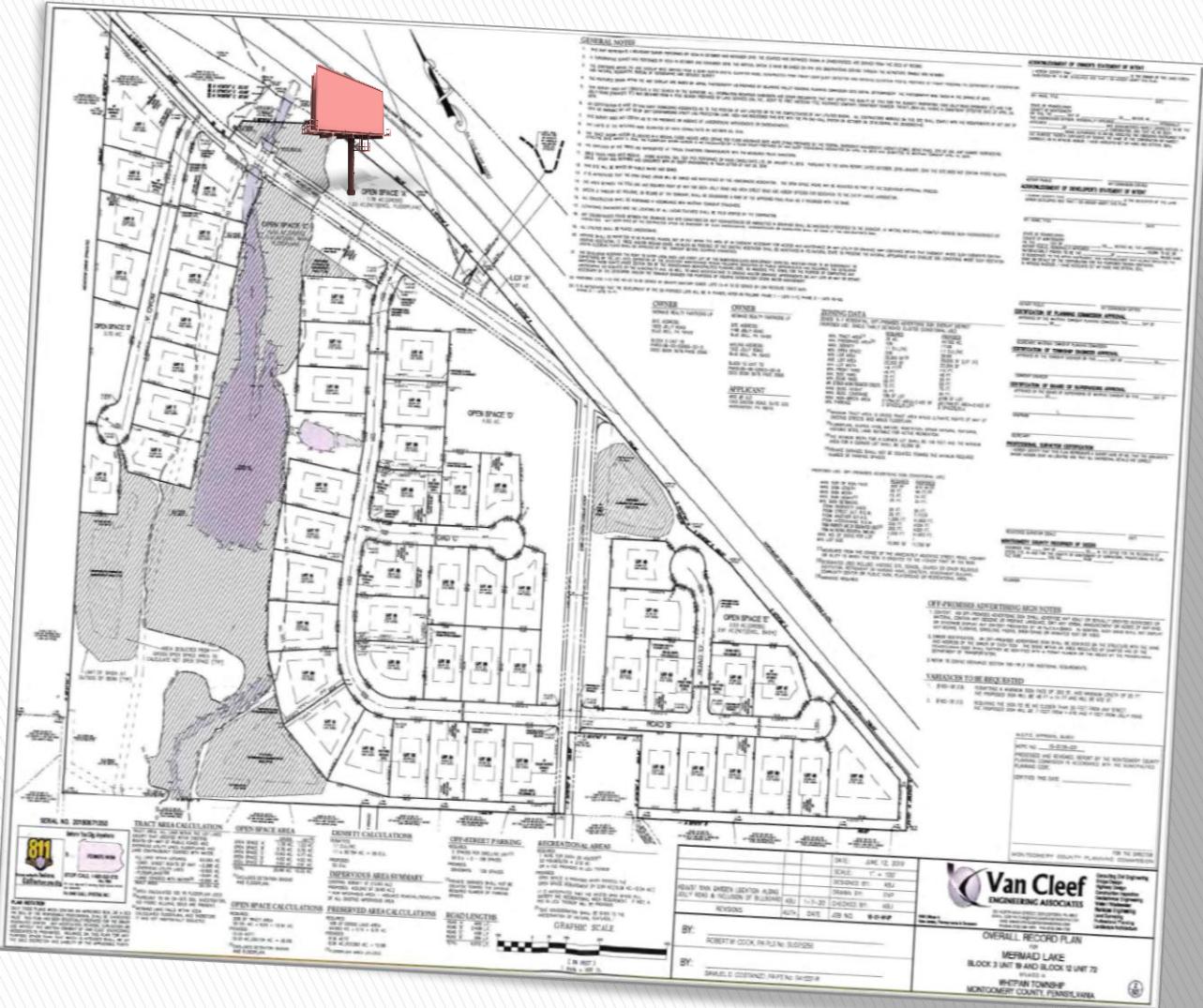


*The Zimmerman parcel as viewed from above Silver Lake Farm*



# Developer's Plans: Houses & Billboard

- Between 2017–19, Metropolitan Development Group presented a series of plans to the Township:
  - Early concepts would have sought variances & approvals for as many as 190 twins and townhouses.
  - Final plan sought approval for demolition of all existing facilities, subdivision of the property, and “by-right” construction of **53 single-family houses**.
- Metropolitan also sought approval to erect a **large billboard alongside the Northeast Extension** of PA Turnpike (*where the parking lot currently exists*).



# Consistent Consensus

- **Relevant events & Board of Supervisors action:**

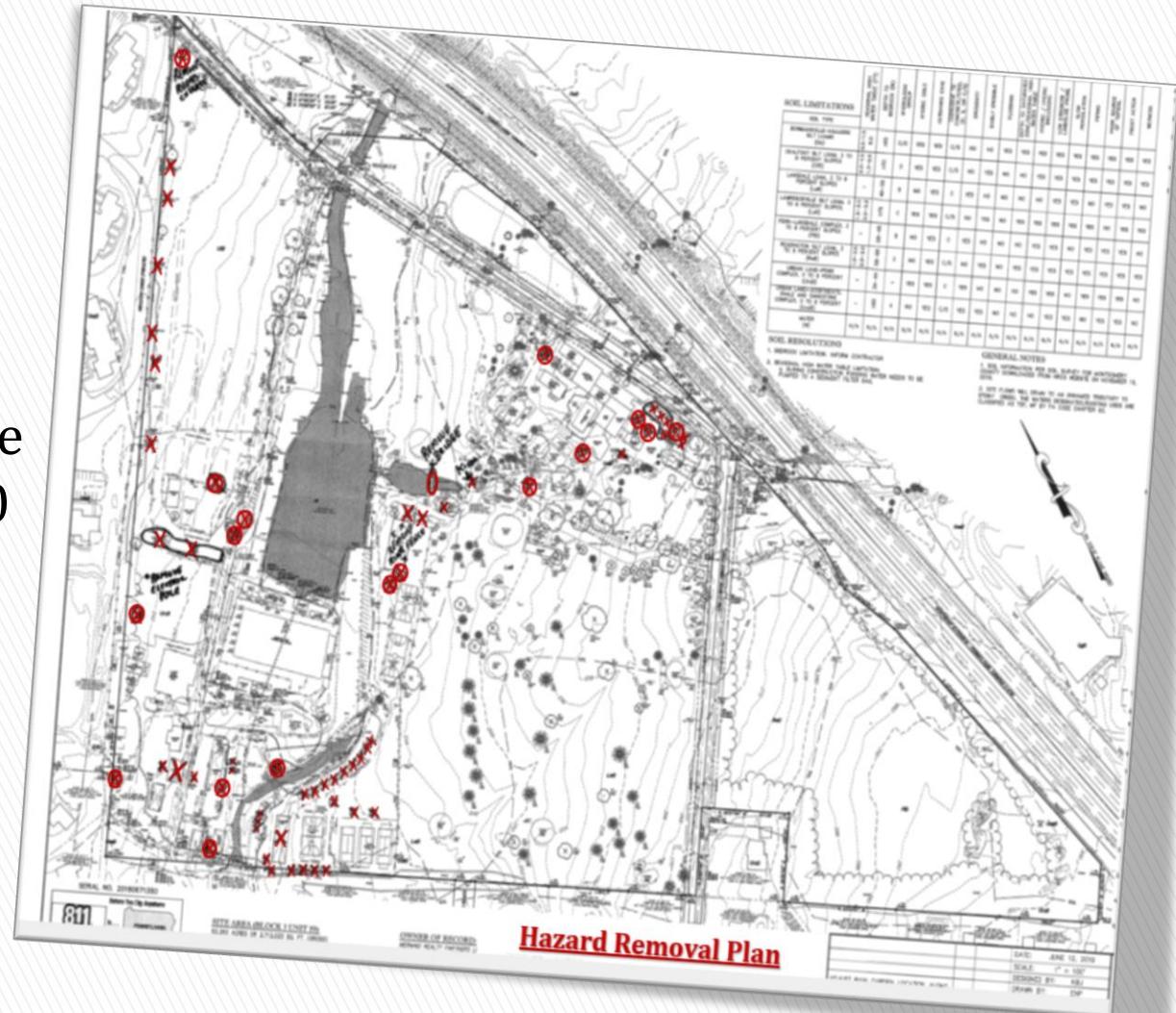
- **Sept. 1<sup>st</sup> 2017:** Metropolitan Development Group (“MDG 6 LLC”) becomes the equitable owner of all 4 remaining Mermaid tracts.
  - **June 11<sup>th</sup> 2019:** MDG completes purchase from former owners.
  - **June 18<sup>th</sup> 2019:** BoS publicly commits to preserving “*portions or all*” of the Mermaid property for recreational use.
  - **July '19 – June '20:**
    - BoS regularly/publicly repeats its intention to purchase all or a portion of the parcel and receives considerable public comment on that commitment.
    - BoS committees conduct thorough due-diligence on acquisition (*including multiple appraisals*), considers future-use options, and negotiates at length with MDG representatives.

- **Township due-diligence, planning and discussion with owner** – as significantly delayed by COVID-19 constraints – **concluded in July 2020.**



# Action Being Considered by Supervisors

- The Board of Supervisors will consider a Resolution to take the Mermaid Lake property by eminent domain at its meeting this Tuesday, July 21.
- The appropriate township officials will carry out the taking unless an agreement for purchase is entered into by the owner and the township with closing to take place within 30 days of the Tuesday meeting.
- The Board will also consider a subsequent motion to enter the bond market to acquire funds for the taking or a subsequent agreement for purchase.



# Phased Next Steps

## I. Stabilization & Sensing Phase (*Now-Dec 2020*)

- A. Stabilize.** Assume all ownership responsibilities including maintenance of the entire site and upkeep of remaining facilities, fencing and emergent meadows and trails
- B. Study I.** Consider recommendations from Park & Open Space subcommittee currently updating Whitpain's *Recreation, Park, Open Space & Trail Master Plan*
- C. Study II.** Engage land/environmental planners to assist with conservation analysis (*e.g., water quality credits, tree canopy, etc.*), course of action development and community outreach
- D. Source.** Assess levels of interest by public, private and non-profit organizations for viable public-private partnership (P3) options & fully develop all potential funding sources
- E. Sensing.** Systematically seek resident input at multiple forums including on-site meetings and guided tours

## II. Design & Preparation Phase (*Jan-Dec 2021*)

## III. Build & Operate Phase (*Jan 2022-Perpetuity*)



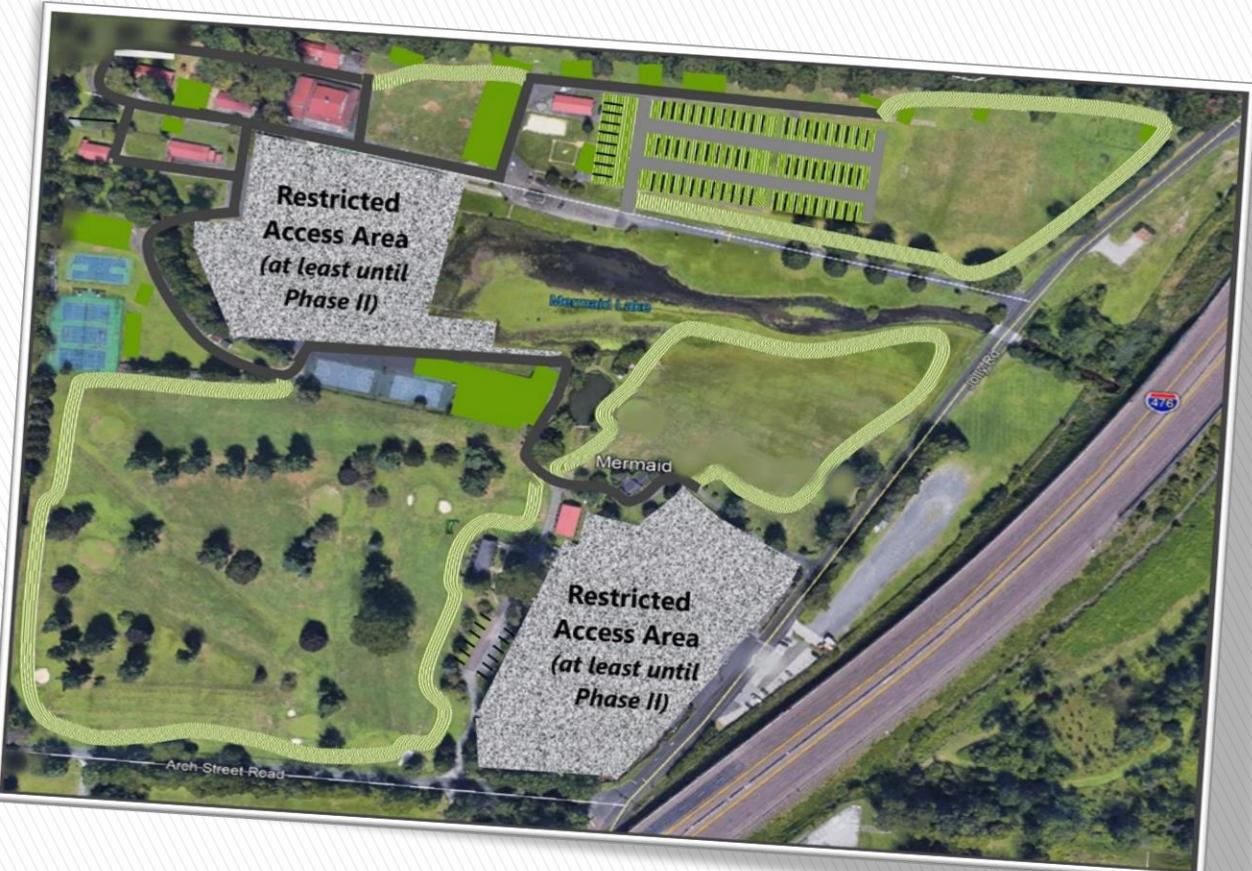
# Stabilized Site (*Now thru at least Jan. '21*)



 Mown trails

# Tonight's Decisions

- 1. Acquisition.** In accordance with Resolution 1375; a motion to authorize the taking of 1002 & 1198 Jolly Road, pursuant to the Township's powers of eminent domain, or to enter into an agreement of sale in lieu of taking.
- 2. Financing.** Supervisors to consider passage of Ordinance 384, to incur non-electoral indebtedness.
- 3. Financial Impact.** Based on current projections, the acquisition does not require a tax increase or delay any other capital improvement projects within the next 4 years.



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