

2011 ANJEC grants to help towns plan sustainably

By **Kerry Miller**, ANJEC Assistant Director

ANJEC has awarded 2011 Sustainable Land Use Planning Grants to 19 New Jersey towns with environmental commissions. The funding program, underwritten by the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation of Morristown and now in its tenth year, provides matching reimbursement grants to help cover the cost of planning projects that facilitate resource-based, sustainable land use. This year's grantees bring the total number of projects sponsored through the program to 222. More than one third of New Jersey's towns have received ANJEC grants since 2002!

Environmental Resource Inventories

Eight of the 2011 grants will help environmental commissions develop an Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI), a foundation document that provides a factual basis for municipal land use plans and policies. Some commissions will be creating their town's first ERI, sometimes known as a Natural Resource Inventory (NRI), and others will be updating an older ERI. While features like geology and soils don't change much over a few decades, other environmental features can change a lot due to development, land preservation and regulation. Because the State has made available so much new digital data, newer ERIs commonly contain 20 to 40 maps, and can include lot lines or show conservation easements, wellhead areas and other information that was not included in the past. GIS software now makes it possible to combine various features on one map, as desired.

Compiling an ERI is a core task for an environmental commission. The State

enabling legislation says that a commission should keep "...an index of all open areas... in order to obtain information on the proper use of such areas..." Once the commission prepares an ERI for the municipality, it is entitled to receive and comment on development applications. Equally important, through the process of working on an ERI, commission members learn a great deal about their town's natural features and systems, becoming even more qualified to give input on land use issues.

Envisioning the future

The commissions from Chester Township and Chester Borough will carry out a joint project – a trails plan that will connect significant open space, environmental, cultural, commercial and historic features in the two adjacent municipalities. The commissions were able to obtain contributions for the project from two local nonprofits, one historic and one environmental, in addition to matching funds from the towns' open space trusts. The project will yield more than just a network of trails. It also aims to incorporate historic, art, agricultural and other features. And by educating users about their communities' ecosystems, it may increase stewardship of natural resources.

Fairfield Township (Cumberland) received a 2009 ANJEC grant to conduct a buildout analysis. This study helped the community to envision what Fairfield would look like, and what impact future development would have on its resources, if the town reached buildout under its current zoning. The exercise was a bit of a wake-up call for the rural community. With

The 2011 Grantee Towns

Chatham Bor. (Morris) – complete streets plan
Chester Bor. and Twp. – bi-town trails plan
Cresskill Bor. (Bergen) – ERI
Fairfield Twp. (Cumberland) – master plan/zoning
Franklin Twp. (Gloucester) – ERI
Frelinghuysen Twp. (Warren) – ERI and open space update
Haworth Bor. (Bergen) – sustainability element
Hightstown (Mercer) – ERI
Kinnelon Twp. (Morris) – open space update
Leonia Bor. (Bergen) – sustainability plan
Medford Twp. (Burlington) – sustainability element
Mendham Twp. (Morris) – ERI
Millburn Twp. (Essex) – ERI
Montgomery Twp. (Somerset) – solar ordinance
Roseland Bor. (Essex) – ERI
Union Twp. (Hunterdon) – conservation easement inventory
Warren Twp. (Somerset) – ERI
Willingboro Twp. (Burlington) – sustainability element


additional funds from the William Penn Foundation, Fairfield's 2011 ANJEC grant will help them create a coordinated land use strategy (master plan/zoning) that includes conservation design zoning for rural and sensitive areas, and design guidelines for growth areas. Fairfield's Planning Board and Environmental Commission are committed to crafting sustainable land use ordinances that are consistent with the community's vision for the future.

Montgomery Township, like many other towns, has been grappling with the rapid expansion of solar energy generation. The Environmental Commission and Planning

Board want to encourage renewable energy, but also want to protect their sensitive lands and productive agricultural soils. With a 2011 ANJEC grant, the Township will develop a comprehensive energy facilities ordinance that prioritizes specific locations/criteria where solar facilities are appropriate, stressing reuse of developed surfaces for solar facilities, and discouraging solar facilities on critical slopes, stream corridors and floodplains.

Chatham Borough will use its grant to develop a municipal complete streets policy and plan. This project builds on previous programs carried out by the Borough and Board of


Education that encourage children to walk and bike to school. The project will yield new master plan components for the circulation element, performance standards, guidance documents for the land use boards and town staff, and educational materials for the public.

As in 2010, most of this year's grantee towns are first-time Sustainable Land Use Planning Grant recipients. All are participating in the Sustainable Jersey program. The towns' environmental commissions will either carry out the projects themselves, or serve on the project team. 

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