

SOMERSET COUNTY PRESERVATION PLAN



Somerset County Public Workshop #2 – Somerville, NJ

June 20, 2018

Image of Jacobus Vanderveer House courtesy
Friends of the Jacobus Vanderveer House

PRESENTATION



1. Overall direction for the Somerset County Preservation Plan
2. Somerset County's Cultural Landscape
3. Historic Preservation
4. Farmland Preservation
5. Open Space Preservation



Overall Direction –
“Making Vibrant Connections”

OVERALL DIRECTION

“Making Vibrant Connections”

- A highly desirable place to live:
Imagine living in beautiful towns and neighborhoods surrounded by active farmland, vigorous natural areas and parks, and robust historic sites, all connected by greenways and a dense network of trails.



OVERALL DIRECTION

“Making Vibrant Connections”

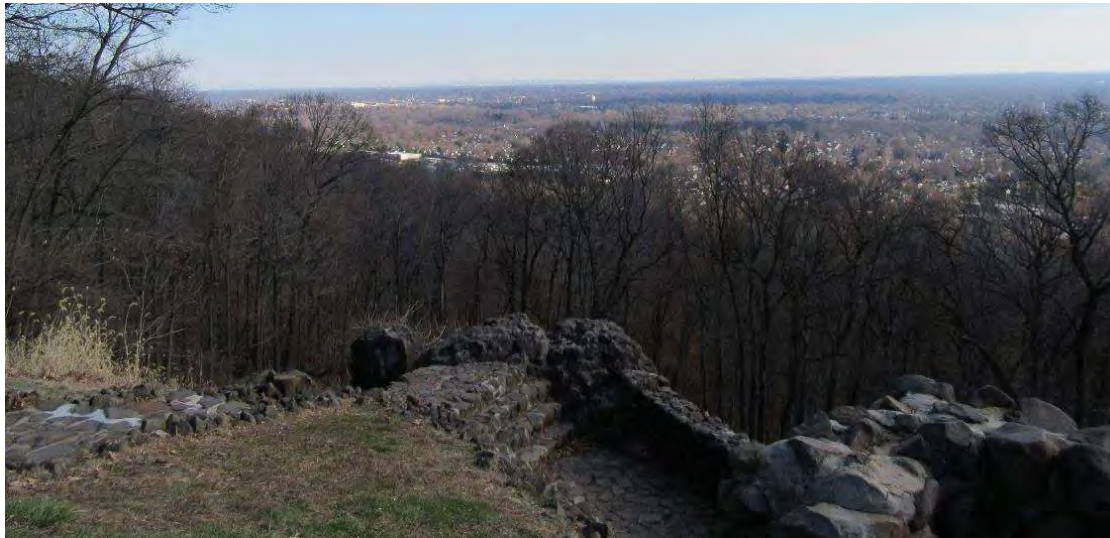
- **Build people into the system:** The result of the Preservation Plan should be healthy residents enjoying an ever-improving quality of life, defined as:
 - access to the outdoors;
 - local food;
 - a deep sense of history and connections to the community; and
 - a shared sense of meaning as Somerset residents with vibrant community gatherings and cultural resources.



OVERALL DIRECTION

“Making Vibrant Connections”

- A resilient and sustainable place to live: Careful attention to safety, healthy streams, and enduring landscapes that will maintain Somerset’s desirability will also sustain the local economy.



O V E R A L L D I R E C T I O N

“Making Vibrant Connections”

- **Critical infrastructure:** Open space (natural and recreation land, parks, and linkages), farmland and farms, and Somerset’s wide variety of historic resources are integral to the County’s Investment Framework and critical infrastructure for residents’ health and safety. (It’s not a choice – the people have voted for trust funding.)
- **What gets mapped gets saved. And stays saved.** A robust (and accessible, well-connected) GIS program is also critical infrastructure.

O V E R A L L D I R E C T I O N

“Making Vibrant Connections”

- **Comprehensive, coordinated planning:** This plan should support and foster the continued coordination of county and municipal planning decisions that strive to reinforce preservation of all three forms of resources.
- **Enhanced county-municipal partnerships:** relying on what each can do best, and striving for excellent collaboration. Deploy existing County staff and funds strategically to assist municipal planning, especially to see the Preservation Plan expressed in local land use regulation. (It’s not possible to buy it all.)

OVERALL DIRECTION

“Making Vibrant Connections”

- **Renewed determination (“Mission 2050”):** New Jersey as a whole has saved about one-third of its land, and has developed about one-third. The final third will be committed by 2050. Somerset County should aim for meaningful investment choices that translate into:
 - **More accessibility to parks, natural areas, farm markets, and local food;**
 - **No net loss of historic sites; and**
 - **A trail system that connects every community in the County.**



Image of Raritan headwaters stream courtesy Somerset County Park Commission



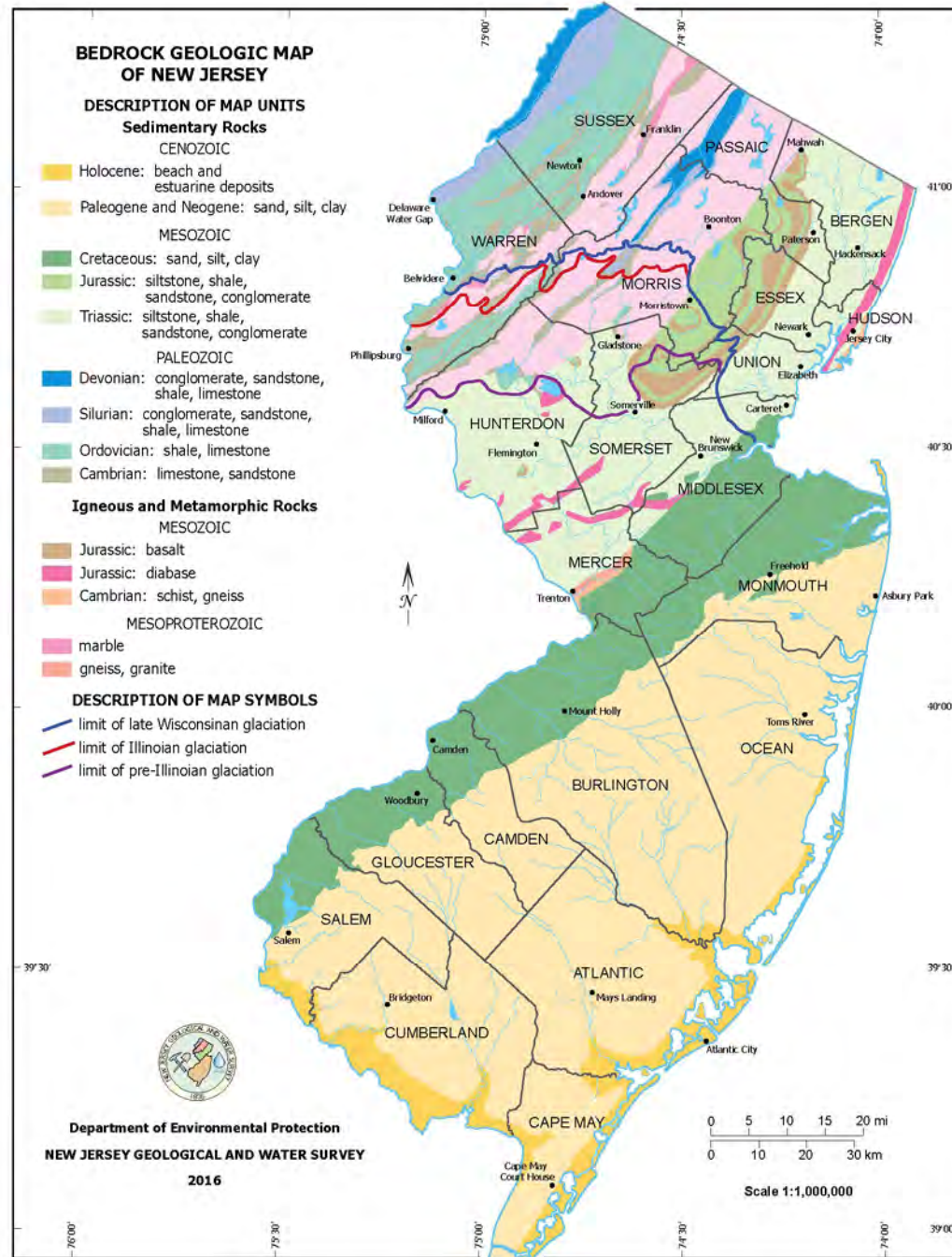
Somerset County's Cultural Landscape

CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Eras

1. The Native Landscape and Pre-Settlement
2. Settlement to Post-Revolution (1681-1781)
3. Early America (1782-1834)
4. The Railroad Revolution (1834-1879)
5. Arrival of Great Estates and Industry (1880-1911)
6. Early Twentieth Century Transition (1912-1951)
7. Suburbanization, Conservation, Cultural Attractions (1952-Present)

The Native Landscape and Pre-Settlement



The Native Landscape and Pre-Settlement



A Native American mortar (originally used for grinding corn), now located in front of the Dutch Reformed Church in Millstone, once stood in a nearby village and was probably found by 17th century settlers.



Settlement to Post-Revolution (1681-1781)





Early America (1782-1834)



The Railroad Revolution (1834-1879)



Arrival of Great Estates and Industry (1880-1911)



Early Twentieth Century Transition (1912-1951)



Suburbanization, Conservation, Cultural Attractions (1952-Present)





Historic Preservation Plan

HISTORIC PRESERVATION



HISTORIC PRESERVATION

- No preceding plan to emulate
- Great representation of the Colonial/American Revolution period, excellent public support and interpretation
- All historical periods can be “read” in the landscape – but this is the last generation where this is true unless more is done
- Most historic properties are privately owned – preservation is in the hands of many owners
- Long-range maintenance challenges and more interpretation for nonprofit & publicly owned sites
- Preservation happens most at the local level
 - Most have some form of local historic preservation action
 - Many ordinances and plans are outdated and need to be revised
- Some County-owned properties are in need of costly preservation measures



IMAGES: Van Doren House (ca. 1755) in Millstone Borough, where Washington stayed following the Battle of Princeton, January 3, 1777 (HABS images from 1937, courtesy Library of Congress)

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

(I) Understanding Historic Preservation in Somerset County



Public Stakeholder Interviews and Focus Groups:

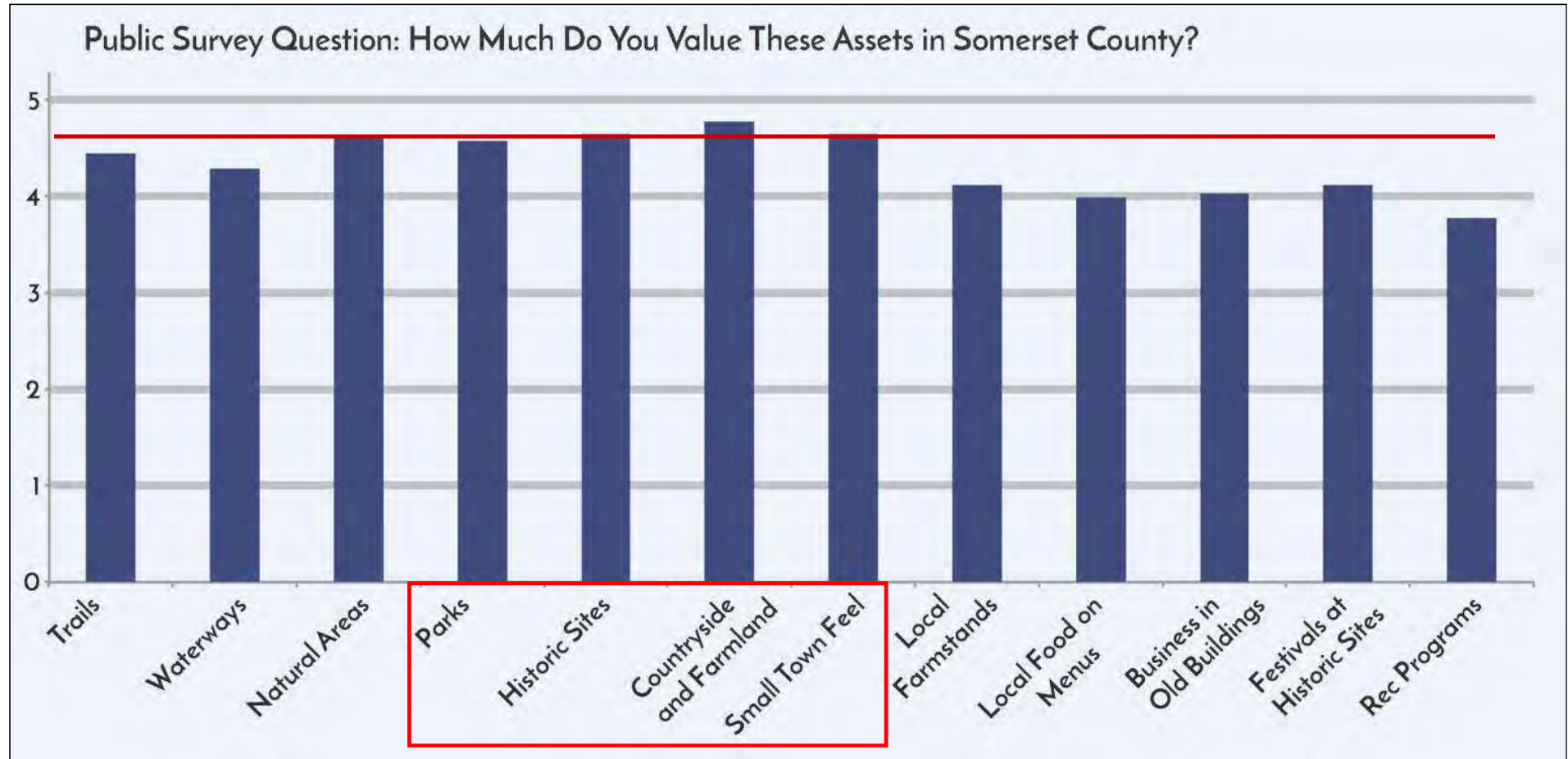
- 42 interviewed
- 3 focus groups held

Public Survey Results:

- 84 responses
- Countryside & Farmland is valued even higher than historic sites

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

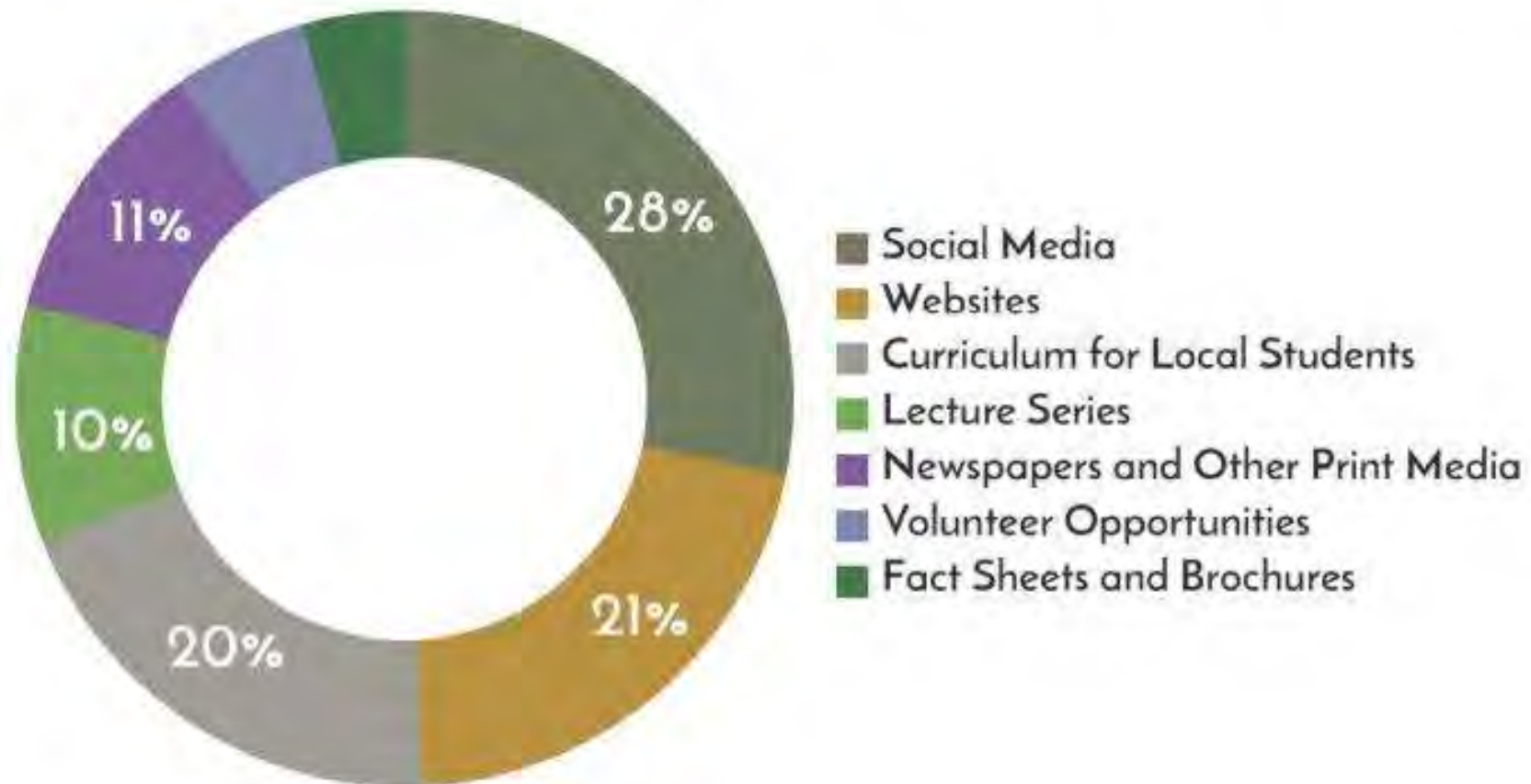
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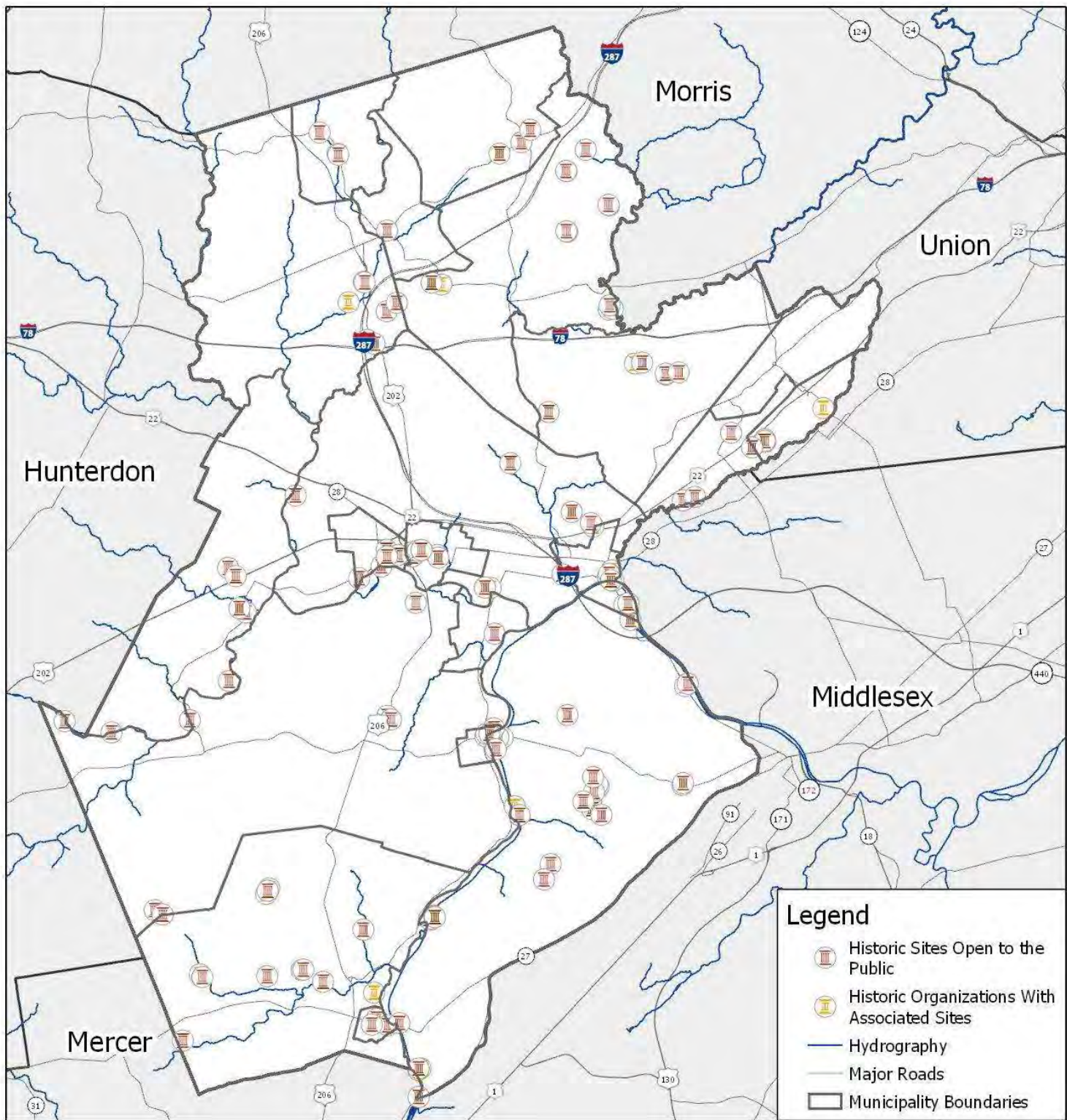


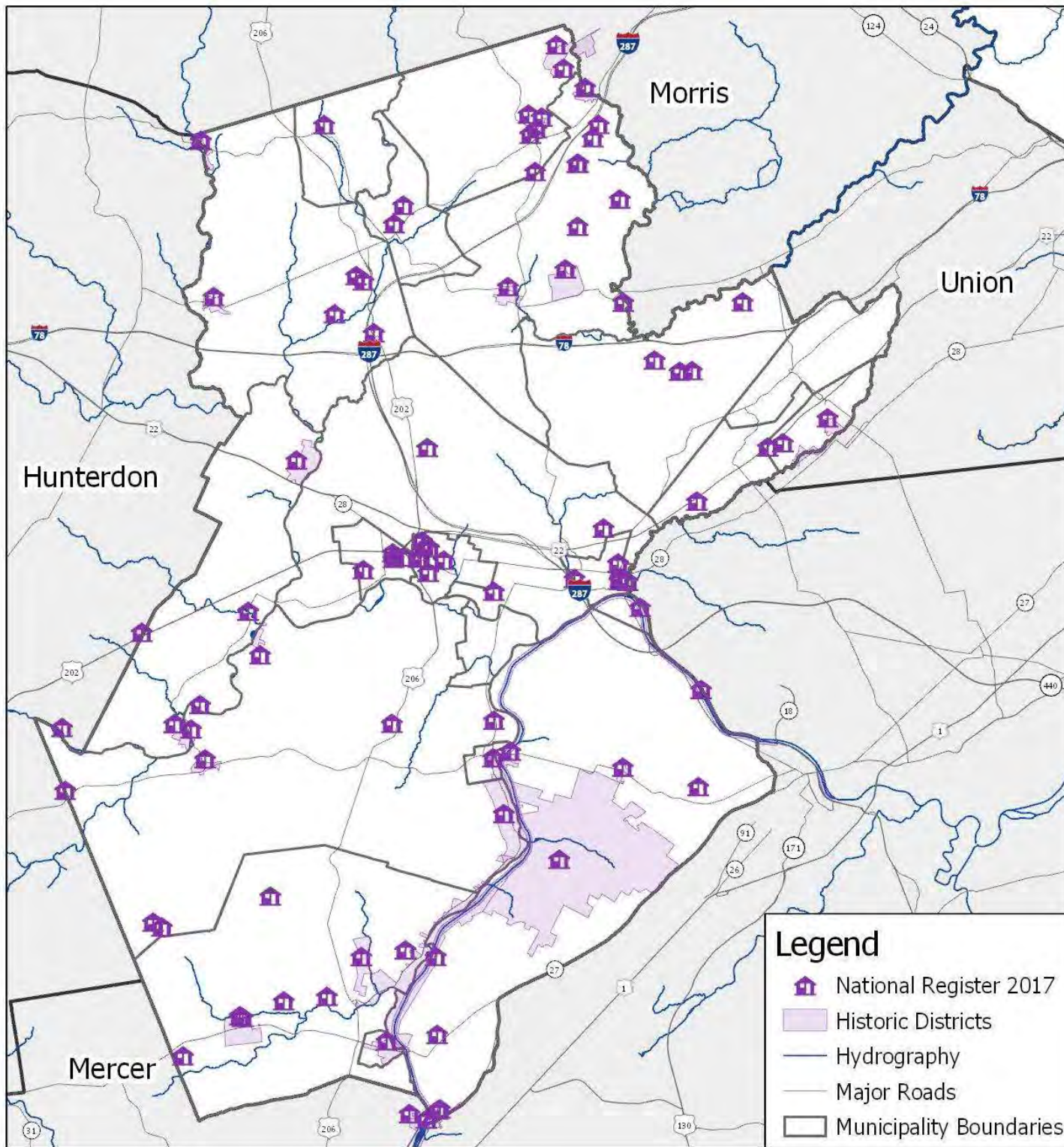
HISTORIC PRESERVATION

(I) Understanding Historic Preservation in Somerset County

Best Methods for Promoting Historic Sites in Somerset



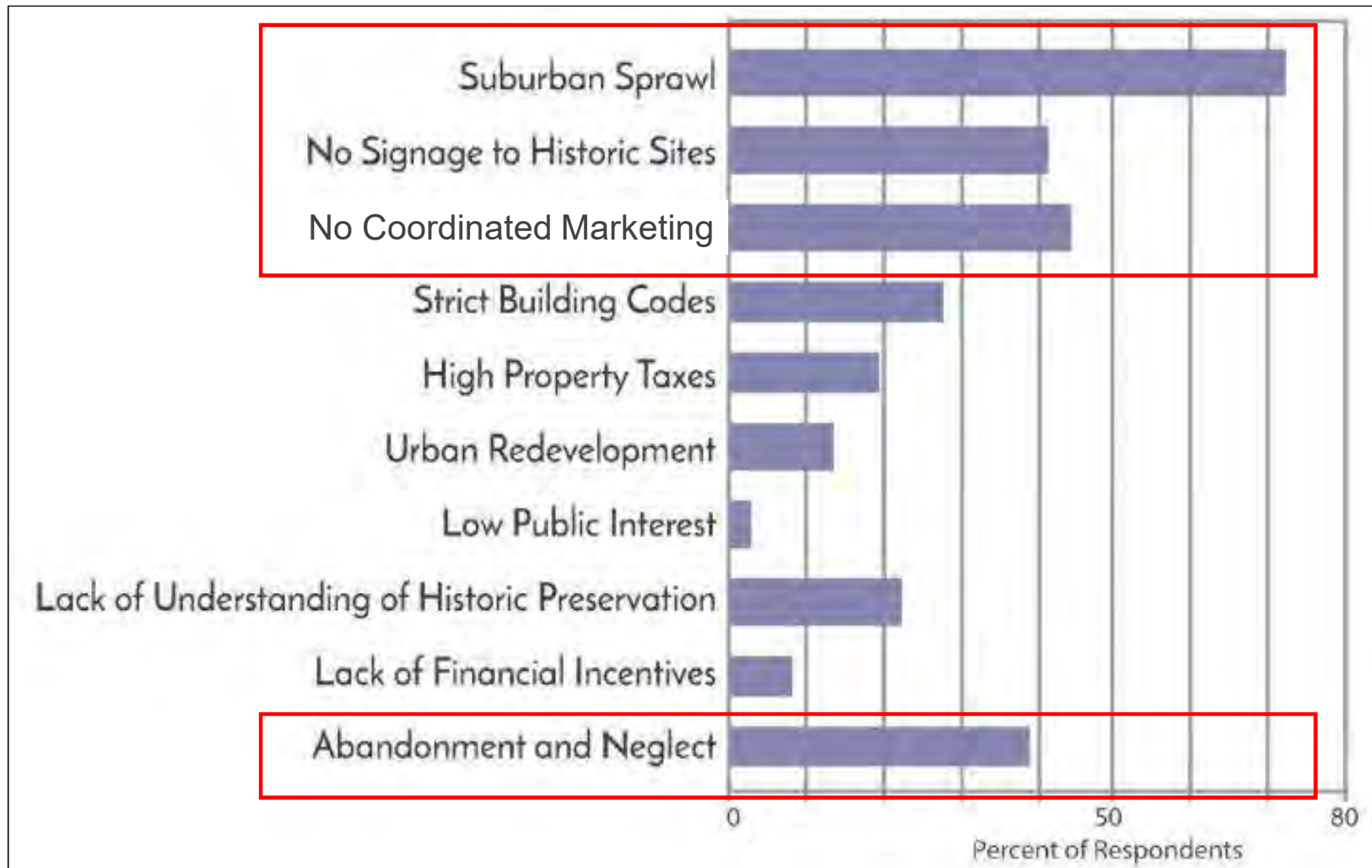




HISTORIC PRESERVATION

(2) Improving Historic Preservation in Somerset County

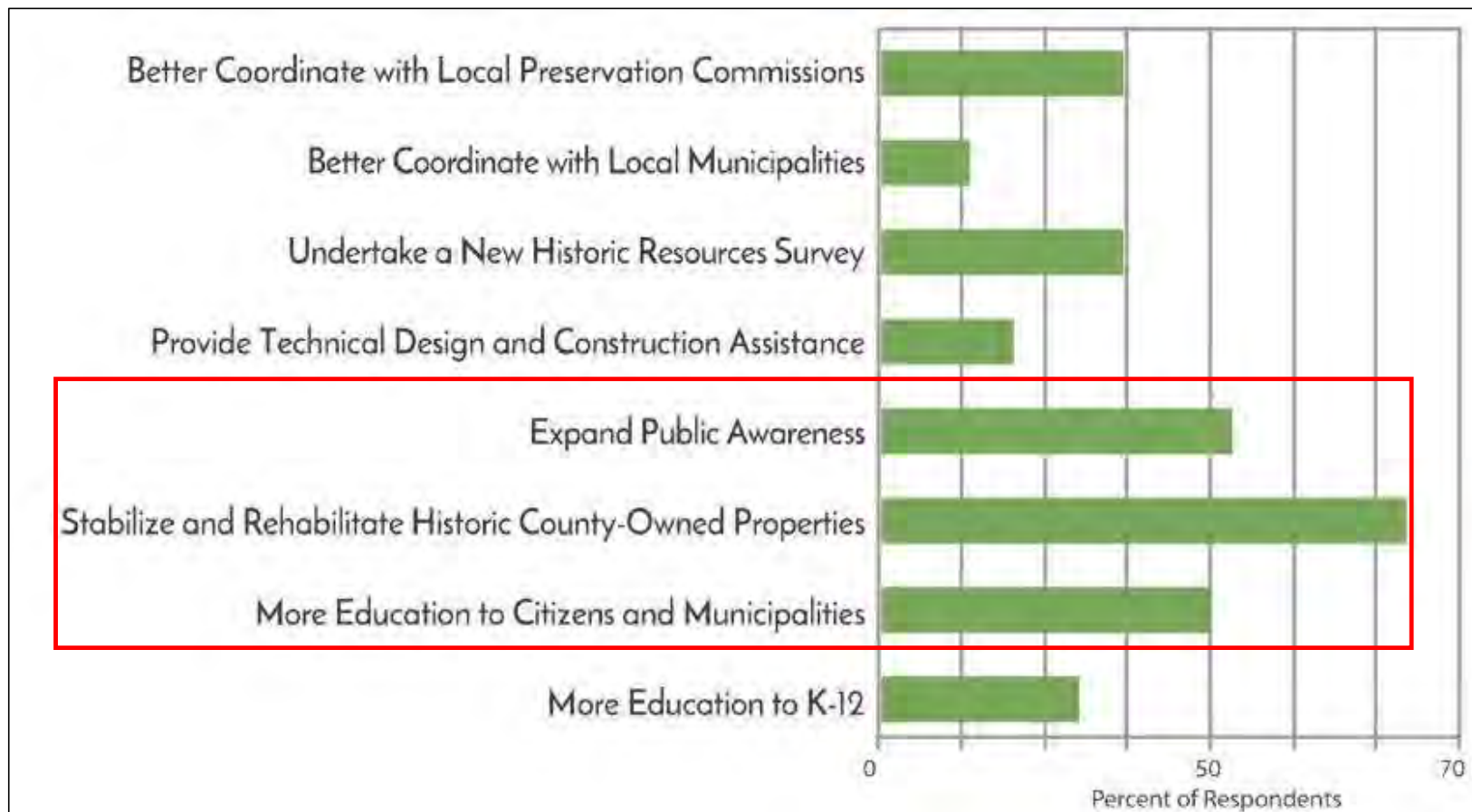
Greatest Threats to Historic Properties



HISTORIC PRESERVATION

(2) Improving Historic Preservation in Somerset County

Activities the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission Should Pursue

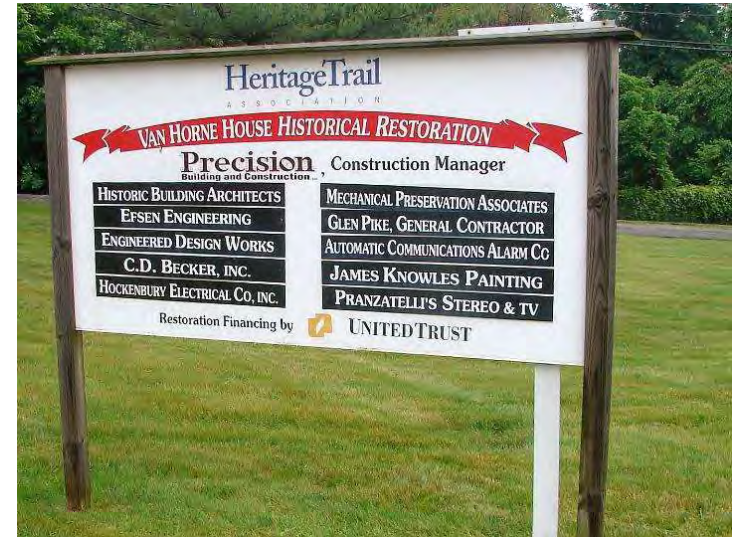


HISTORIC PRESERVATION

(2) Improving Historic Preservation in Somerset County

What can the County do for you? Survey answers:

- “promote important historic sites, especially Revolutionary War sites”
- “operating grants for local history organizations”
- “advocate for preserving historic downtowns”
- “provide more technical assistance to county organizations”
- “grants for historical organizations to help them continue to operate”
- “promote and support historic tourism”
- “grant funding to support local historic preservation organizations”
- “assisting historic organizations with information beneficial to historic preservation”



HISTORIC PRESERVATION



Potential Historic Preservation Plan Goals:

- Identify, protect, and promote Somerset County's unique heritage resources
- Pursue additional protection measures and incentive programs
- Promote coordination and consensus across the public, nonprofit, and private sectors
- Link economic opportunity, tourism, sustainability, and revitalization with conservation and preservation
- Provide technical assistance
- Educate citizens about their heritage and its value plus the variety of tools available

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

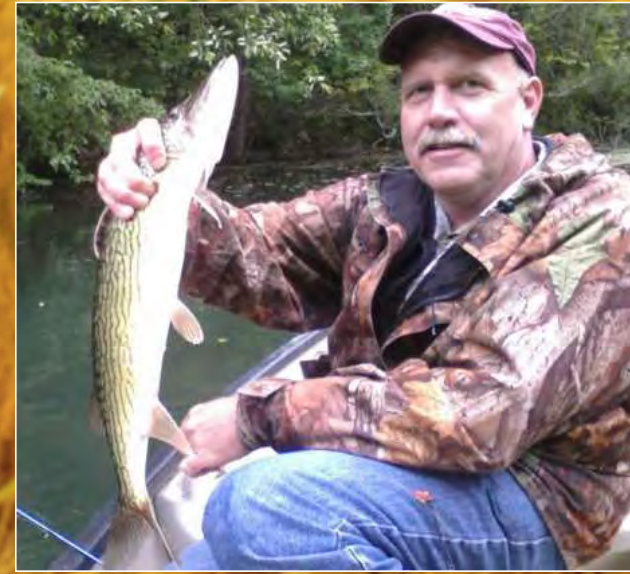
Potential Historic Preservation Plan Strategies :

- **Celebrate Somerset's County's Heritage** – work with Municipal Historians, enhance historical marker program and Weekend journey promotion, support a Heritage Tourism Interpretive Plan, add more interpretive and directional signage;
- **Build Preservation Partnerships and Develop Support Systems** – provide technical assistance (staff or consultant resources), commission workshops, surveying, historic sites consortium, grant preparation assistance, etc.;
- **Make New Friends** – explore open space & farmland overlapping opportunities – recreation, farmers' markets and historic tours together can be family fun!
- **Restore and Maintain County-owned Historic Resources** – earmark increased funding for historic properties; and
- **Strengthen the County's Role** – support a county archivist position (staff or volunteer) and establish a public research repository for historic documents; enhance planning staff, SCCHC grants & technical assistance, county survey, and policies and plans; enlist Freeholders and hold roundtables for municipal elected officials, historic preservation commission members, and nonprofit groups.



Farmland Preservation and Agricultural Development Plan

Food is an Ecosystem Service



(A G R I) C U L T U R A L L A N D S C A P E

Settlement to Post-Revolution
(1681-1781)

Independent and subsistence
farms (much food was traded).

Early America (1782-1832)

Cast iron moldboard plows (first
from NJ*) improved
productivity. Canals improve
farmers' access to markets.

The Railroad Revolution (1833-
1879)

Grain moves West but market
access accelerates, farmers grow
wealthy.

*Newbold, 1797; Peacock, 1807



(A G R I) C U L T U R A L L A N D S C A P E

Arrival of Great Estates and Industry(1880-1911)

Providing milk and perishable food for the towns and cities.

Early Twentieth Century Transition (1912-1951)

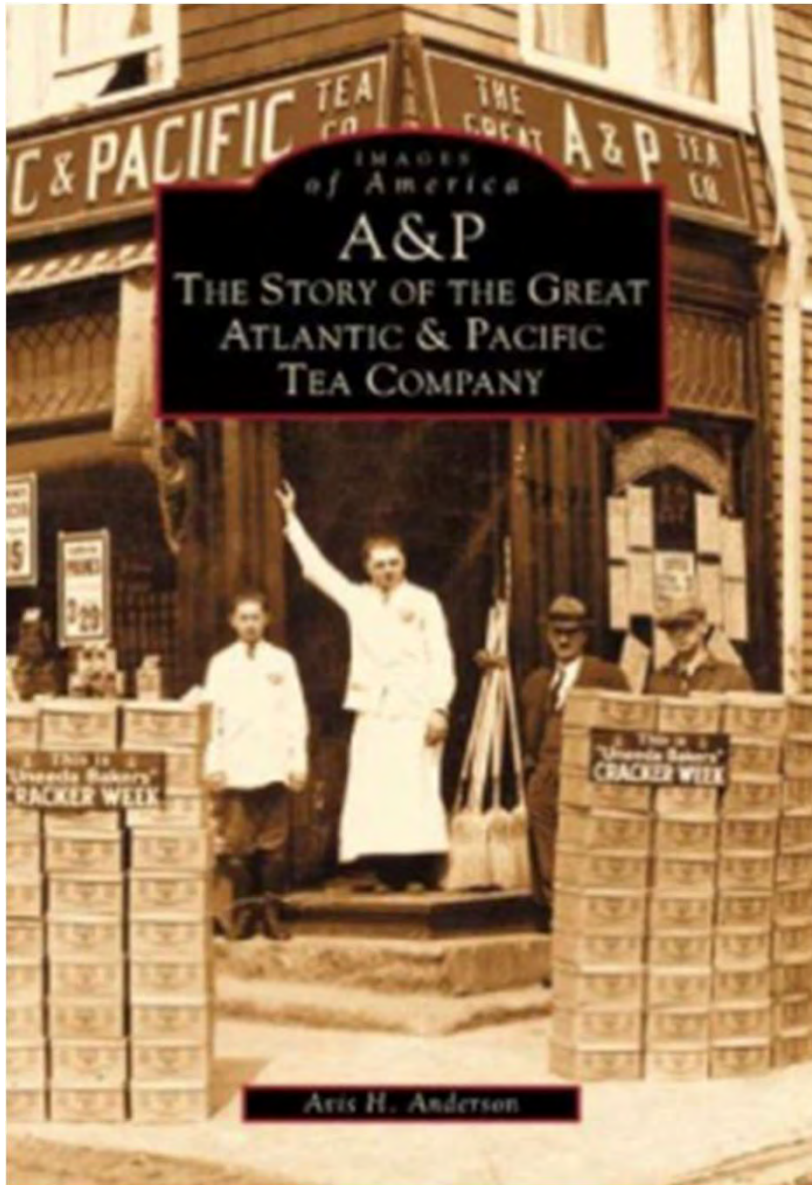
The beginning of grocery chains and modern equipment for agriculture. Farms begin to specialize.

Suburbanization, Conservation, Cultural Attractions (1952-Present) Farming in a suburban landscape.



Griggstown Farm, est. 1975

AGRICULTURAL TRENDS



Supermarket Chains

- Bigger
- More variety
- Cheaper
- Cleaner

AGRICULTURAL TRENDS

Model Zoning Ordinances in the 20th Century Separated Uses...

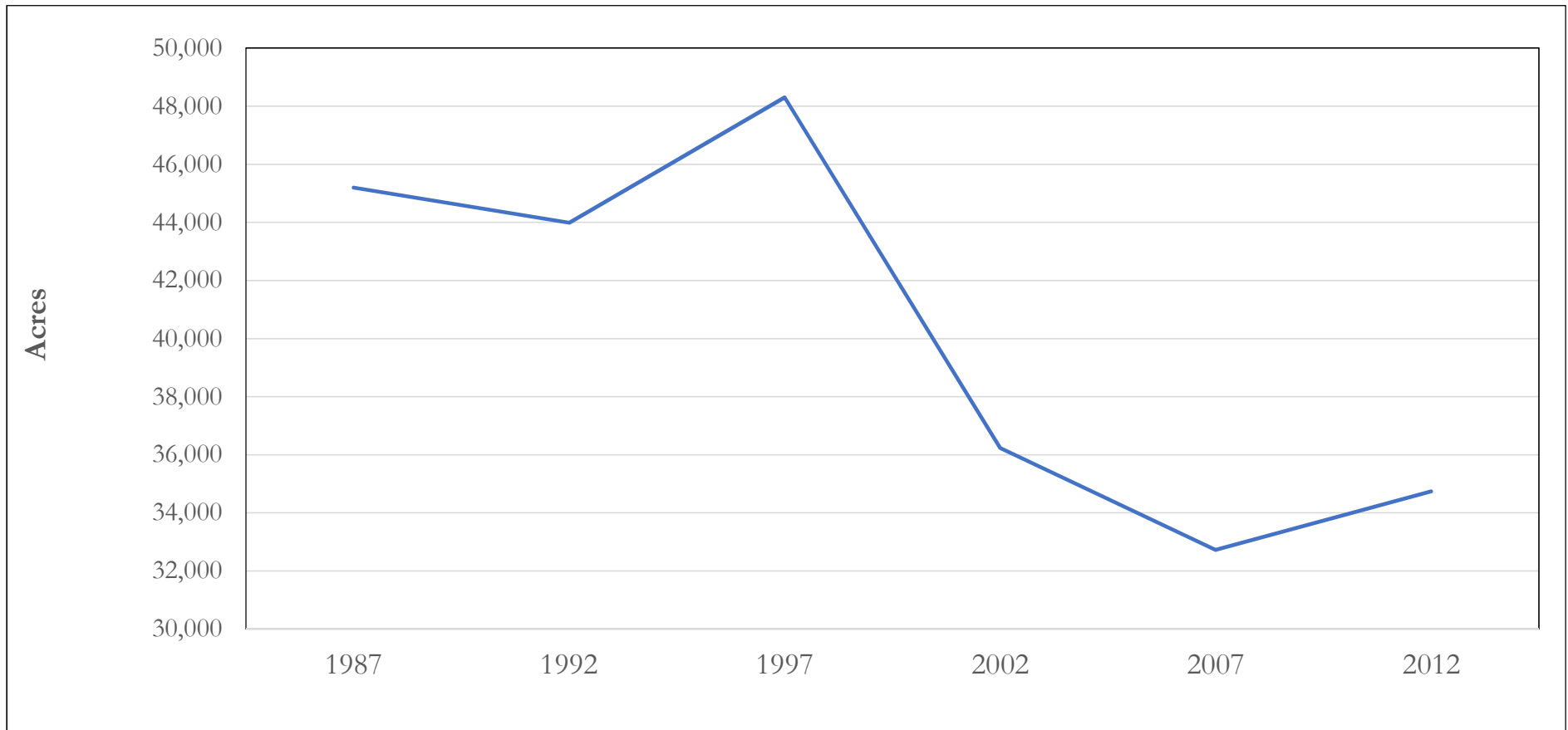
- Agricultural, Residential, Commercial and Industrial

...And They Separated Farm/Food Operations

- Food production from food packaging, sales and value-added production
- Vineyards from wineries
- Dairy farms from creameries

AGRICULTURAL FINDINGS

Somerset County's Agricultural Land Base



AGRICULTURAL FINDINGS

Somerset County's Agricultural Land Base

	1997	2015
Bedminster	11,049	9,170
Bernards	1,995	1,177
Bernardsville	1,450	1,806
Bound Brook	0	0
Branchburg	4,453	2,547
Bridgewater	738	455
Far Hills	1,055	1,383
Franklin	7,584	4,753
Green Brook	25	53
Hillsborough	15,402	10,280
Manville	50	0
Millstone	134	68
Montgomery	6,960	4,549
North Plainfield	0	0
Peapack-Gladstone	1,783	1,569
Raritan	0	0
Rocky Hill	30	10
Somerville	0	0
South Bound Brook	0	0
Warren	1,695	853
Watchung	14	43
Total Somerset County	54,417	38,715

- Of the agricultural land lost between 1997 and 2015, over 5,000 acres (one third) were located in Hillsborough Township.
- Significant losses were also seen in:
 - Franklin (2,831 acres),
 - Montgomery (2,411 acres), and
 - Branchburg (1,906).

AGRICULTURAL FINDINGS

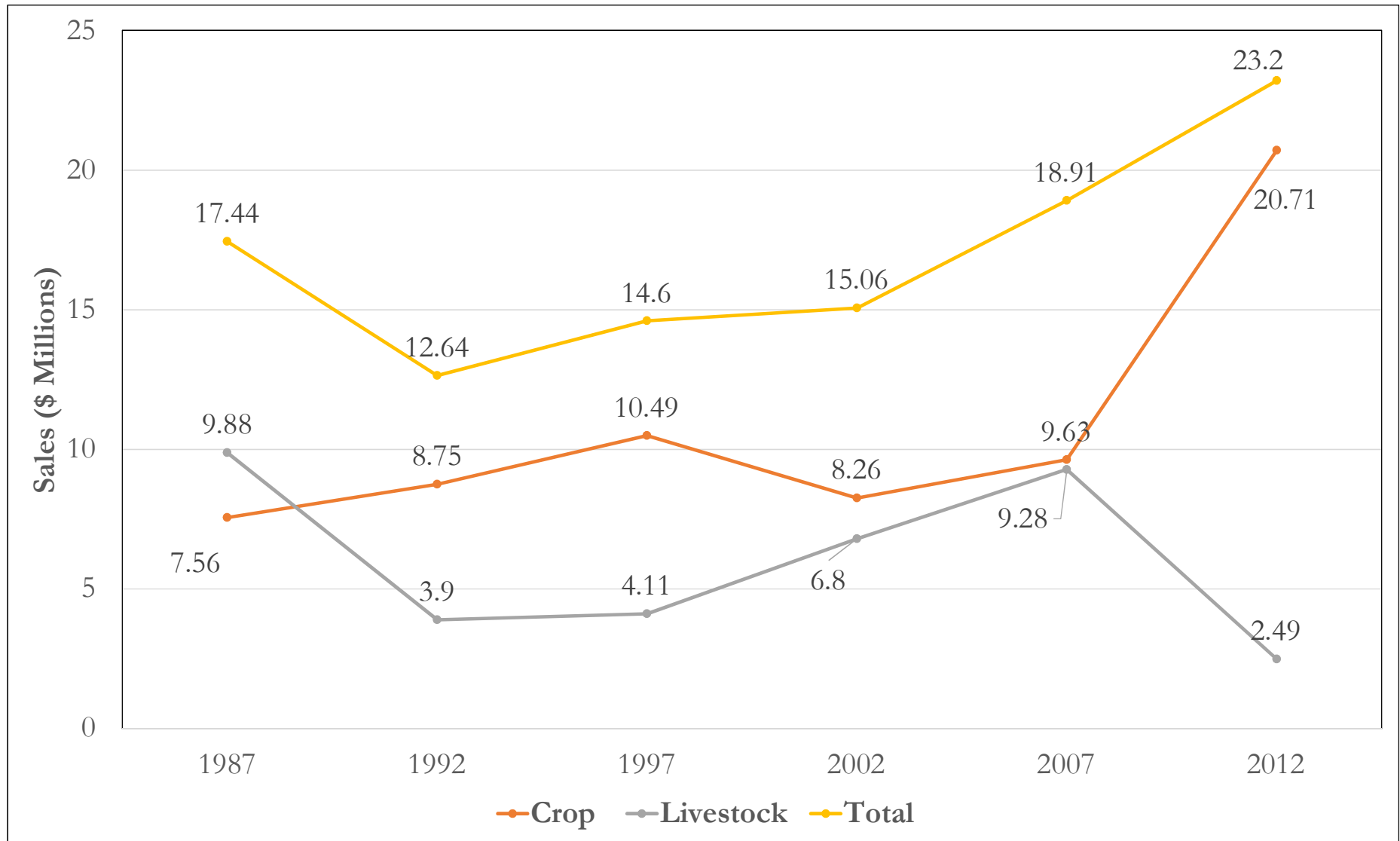
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- Significant losses were also seen in:
 - Franklin (2,831 acres),
 - Montgomery (2,411 acres), and
 - Branchburg (1,906).
- As of 2015, more than half of the agricultural land in Somerset County was located in two municipalities:
 - Bedminster (24 percent) and
 - Hillsborough (27 percent).
- Six municipalities have no farmland remaining, and another four have less than 100 acres in farmland.
- In general, the northern, southern, and western sections of the County maintain the most agricultural land, with the center and eastern sections being occupied by suburban development.

AGRICULTURAL FINDINGS

Somerset County Farming Industry Trends – Production Mix



AGRICULTURAL FINDINGS

Somerset County Farming Industry Trends – Profitability

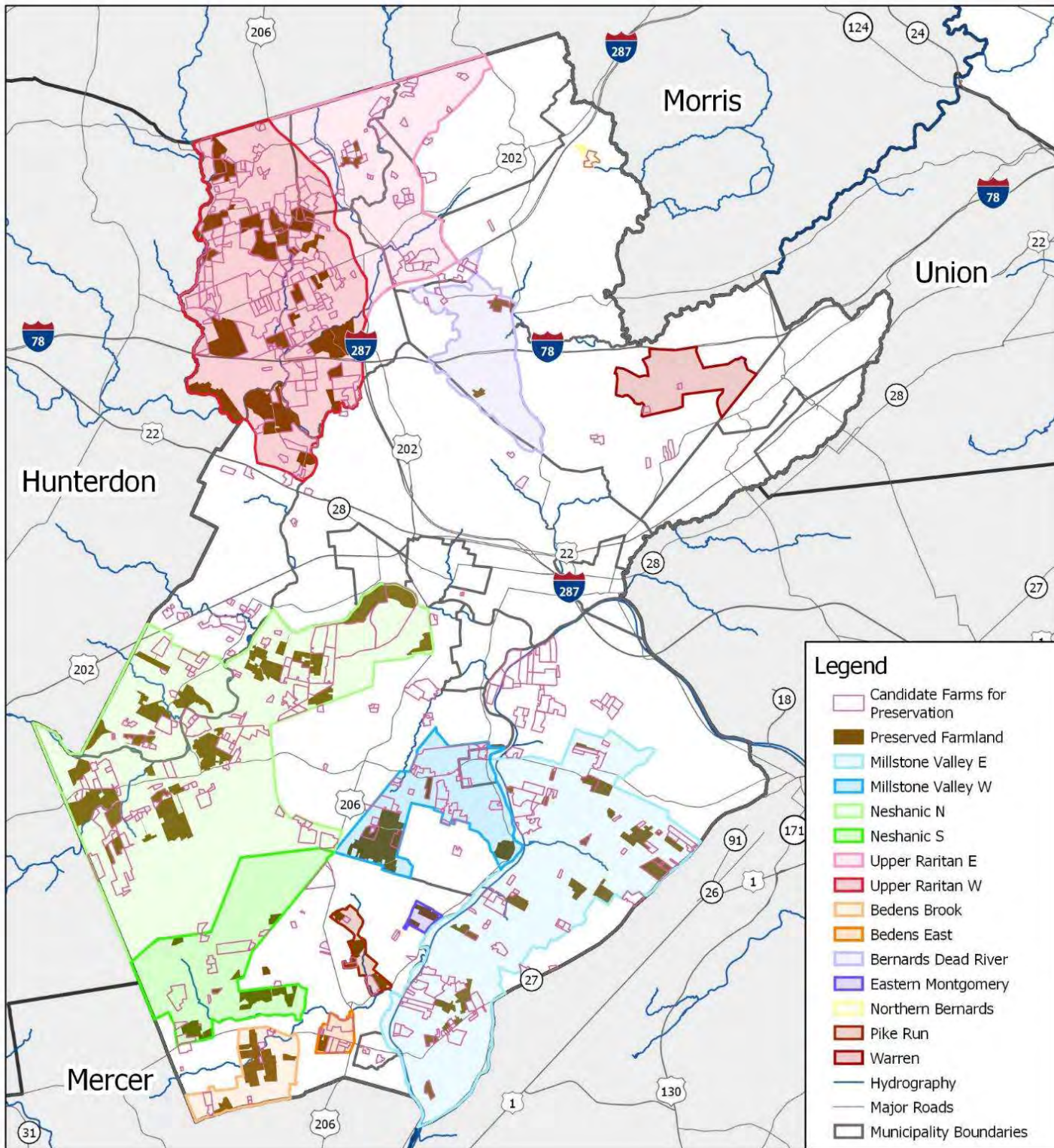
\$ Millions	1997	2002	2007	2012
Sales Totals	14.6	15.1	18.9	23.2
Expense Totals	12.8	14.2	20.6	28.4
Net profit	1.8	0.9	-1.66	-5.2

- Shows a strongly negative trend - over a fifteen-year period profits countywide declined from positive \$1.8 million to a loss of \$5.2 million.

AGRICULTURAL FINDINGS

Land Use Context

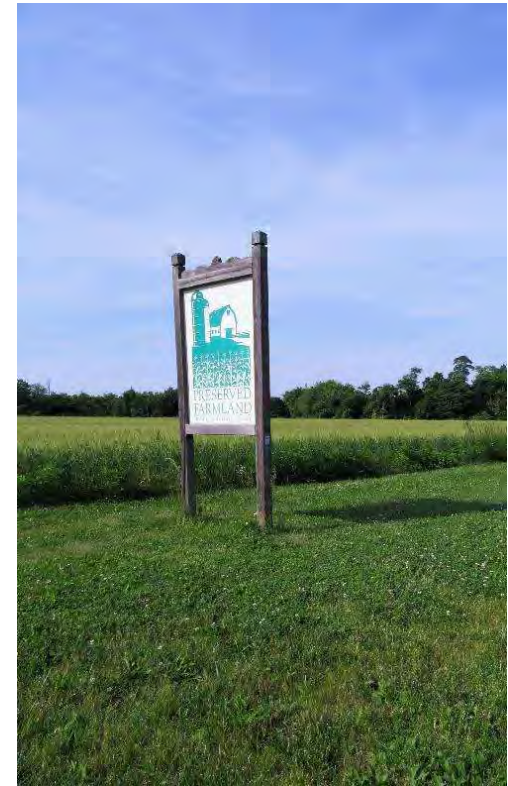
- County Master Plan (adopted 1987) – included agricultural preservation strategies:
 - Purchase agricultural easements
 - Discourage the construction/extension of centralized sewerage systems and water supply into rural areas
 - Adopt a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program
 - Encourage municipalities to employ clustering and other design techniques for new development in rural areas
 - Encourage municipalities to provide a favorable climate for agricultural operations through local planning and zoning



FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Progress Since 2008

- As of 2008, the County had preserved 6,710 acres*
- The 10-year goal was another 10,000 acres over 13 project areas.



*Does not include County-owned open space managed by the Park Commission and leased for farming

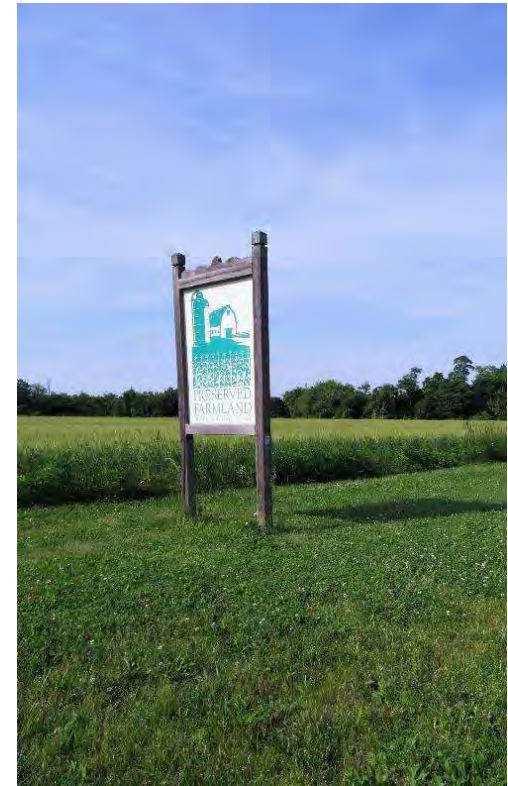
FARMLAND PRESERVATION

Progress Since 2008

- Preserved as of 2016 = well over 9,000 (8,381 acres with another 790 in process)

Early Assessment as to Reasons?

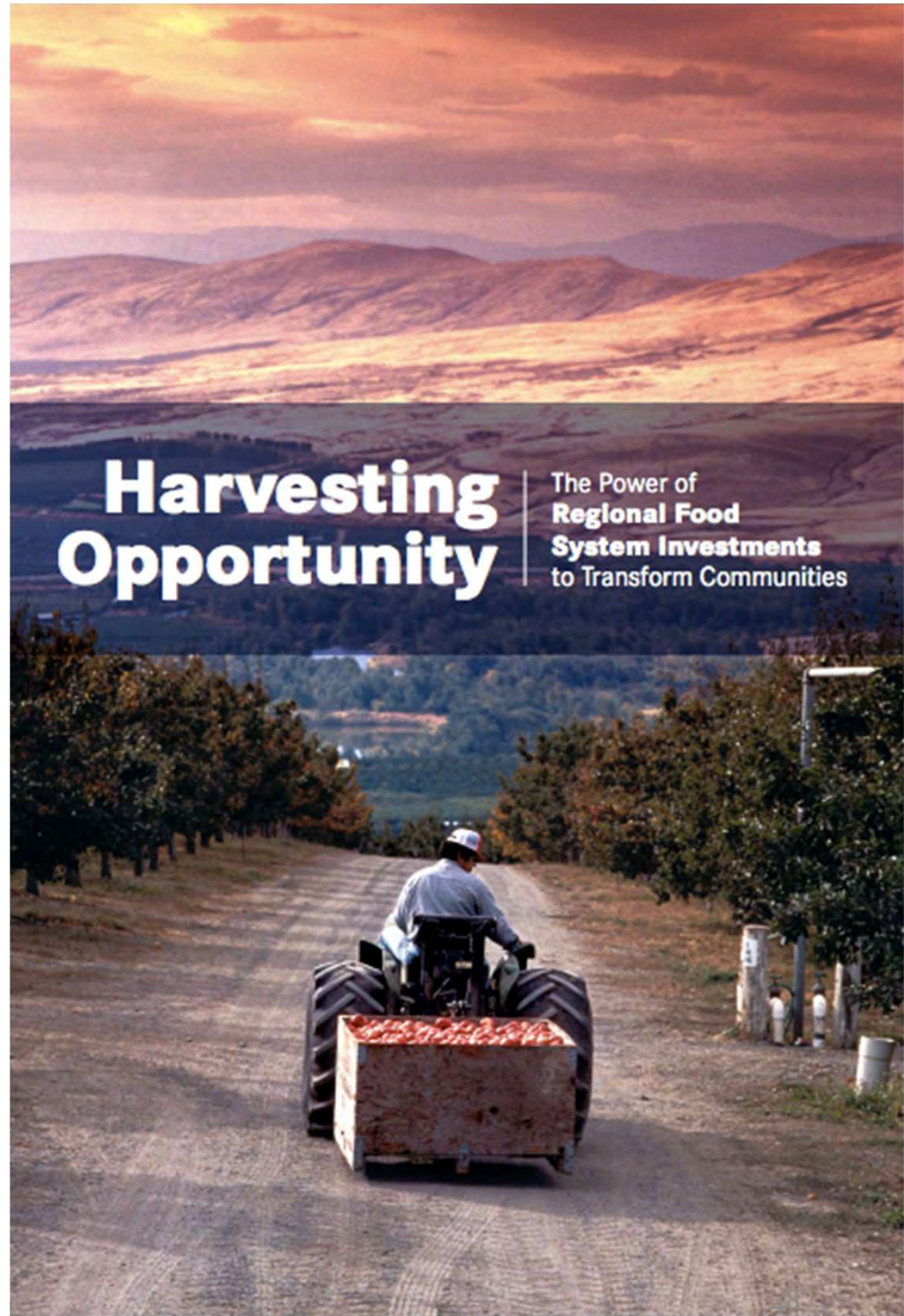
- Market pressures – high cost of land, competing non-farm buyers
- Aging workforce: without farmers there are no farms



Federal Reserve

“...regional food systems represent a promising avenue for economic growth for both rural and urban communities through the creation of new or the enhancement of existing jobs and businesses.” p. 11

“A matter of National Security” Chapter 6

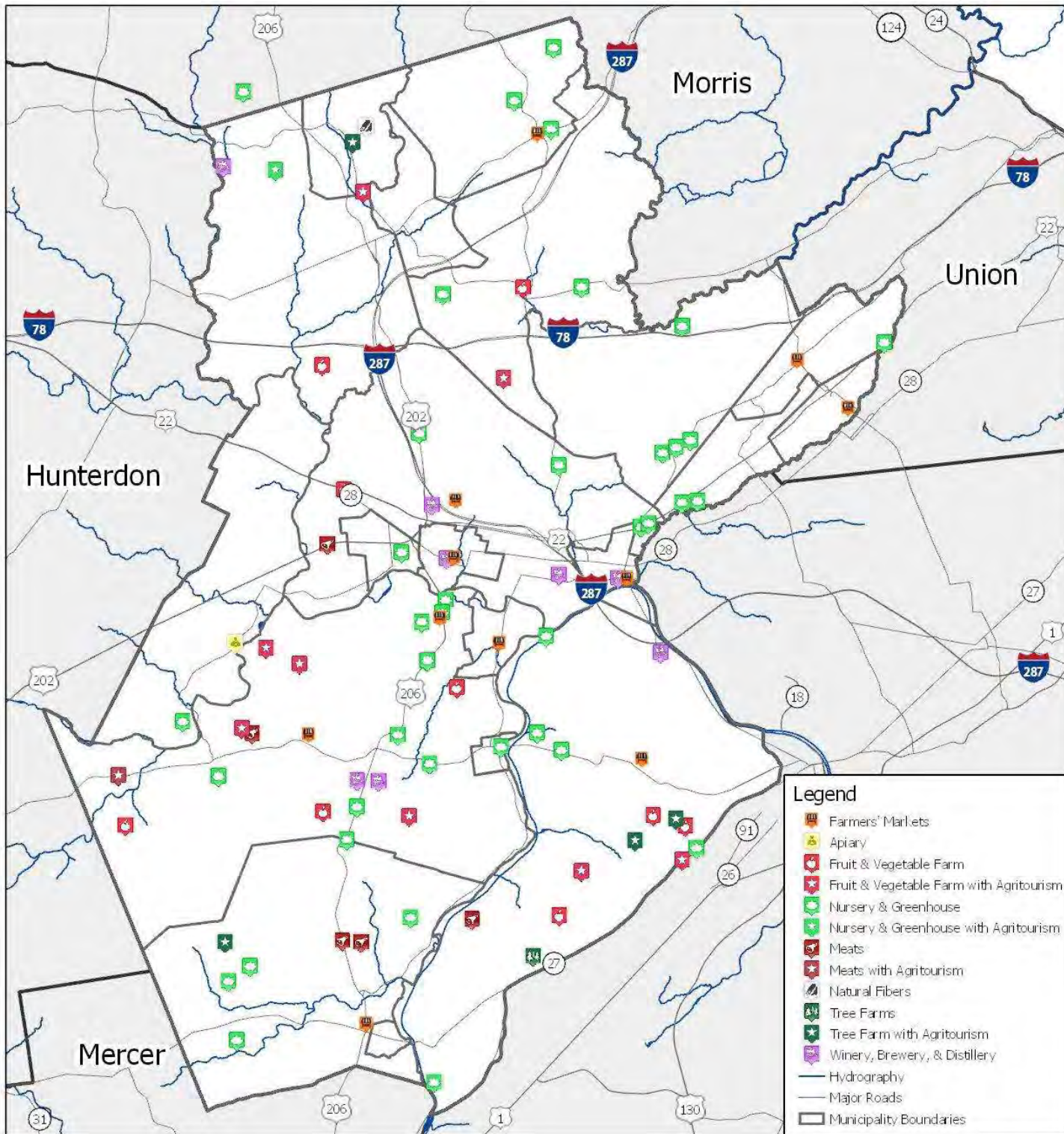


AGRICULTURAL TRENDS

New Trends – Direct Sales

- Selling directly to consumers enables farmers to keep a larger percentage of the revenue of their product and sell at a price that actually reflects the cost of production.
- One study found that moving to direct sales could increase a farm's production "from over 50 to 600 percent higher, depending on the products sold and individual farm practices."
- Farmers' markets are the most popular form of direct sales. Nationwide, there has been a 364% surge in farmers' markets since 1994. New Jersey's count grew from 12 in 1980 to 156 in 2012.
- Currently there are 28 farmers' markets in Somerset County or in nearby counties and accessed by Somerset farmers.





AGRICULTURAL TRENDS

Somerset County's Future in Agriculture

- Direct sales of food (meats, vegetables and even dairy)
- Wine and beer
- Agritourism
- Horticulture
- Equine
- Farms with a heritage, eco-tourism, and/or open space component



Griggstown Farm, est. 1975

PRESERVATION ACTIONS

Potential Goals for Farmland Preservation and Agricultural Development

- Retain the current goal of protecting 16,000 acres of farmland
- Continue coordination and consensus between the County, municipalities, and nonprofits (and New Jersey) for farmland preservation
- Enhance flexibility for protected farmland
- Recognize opportunities in collaborating on farmland preservation to protect open space and historic resources, and provide recreation and ecosystem services
- Link economic opportunity, tourism, and community resilience and sustainability with farmland preservation
- Increase residents' access to local food
- Increase residents' appreciation for farmland preservation

PRESERVATION ACTIONS

Potential Strategies

- Encourage innovative land preservation techniques that incorporate other Preservation Plan elements
- Support municipal programs for farmland preservation
- Focus on agricultural business development and support consistent with the County's Comprehensive Economic Development Plan
- Work within Somerset County's "foodshed" – collaborate with adjacent counties

PRESERVATION ACTIONS

Potential Land Preservation Strategies

- Encourage innovative preservation techniques that incorporate other Preservation Plan elements
 - Multi-Purpose Easements
 - Cooperation with Land Trusts
 - Multi-Purpose Open Space
 - Protection During Development – mandatory clustering with ag lease potential; “incentive lots” for protection of historic sites and environmental resources or creation of trails
- Support municipalities: Provide additional technical assistance as they pursue farmland protection measures and incentive programs

PRESERVATION ACTIONS

Potential Agricultural Business Strategies

- Focus on agricultural business development and support for farmers:
 - Product research
 - Product development skills
 - Marketing skills including social media
 - Agricultural Marketing Specialists
 - Planning and zoning assistance
- Develop Somerset County's "foodshed"
 - Undertake regional foodshed planning (multi-county)
 - Establish aggregation and distribution systems to increase local/regional consumption

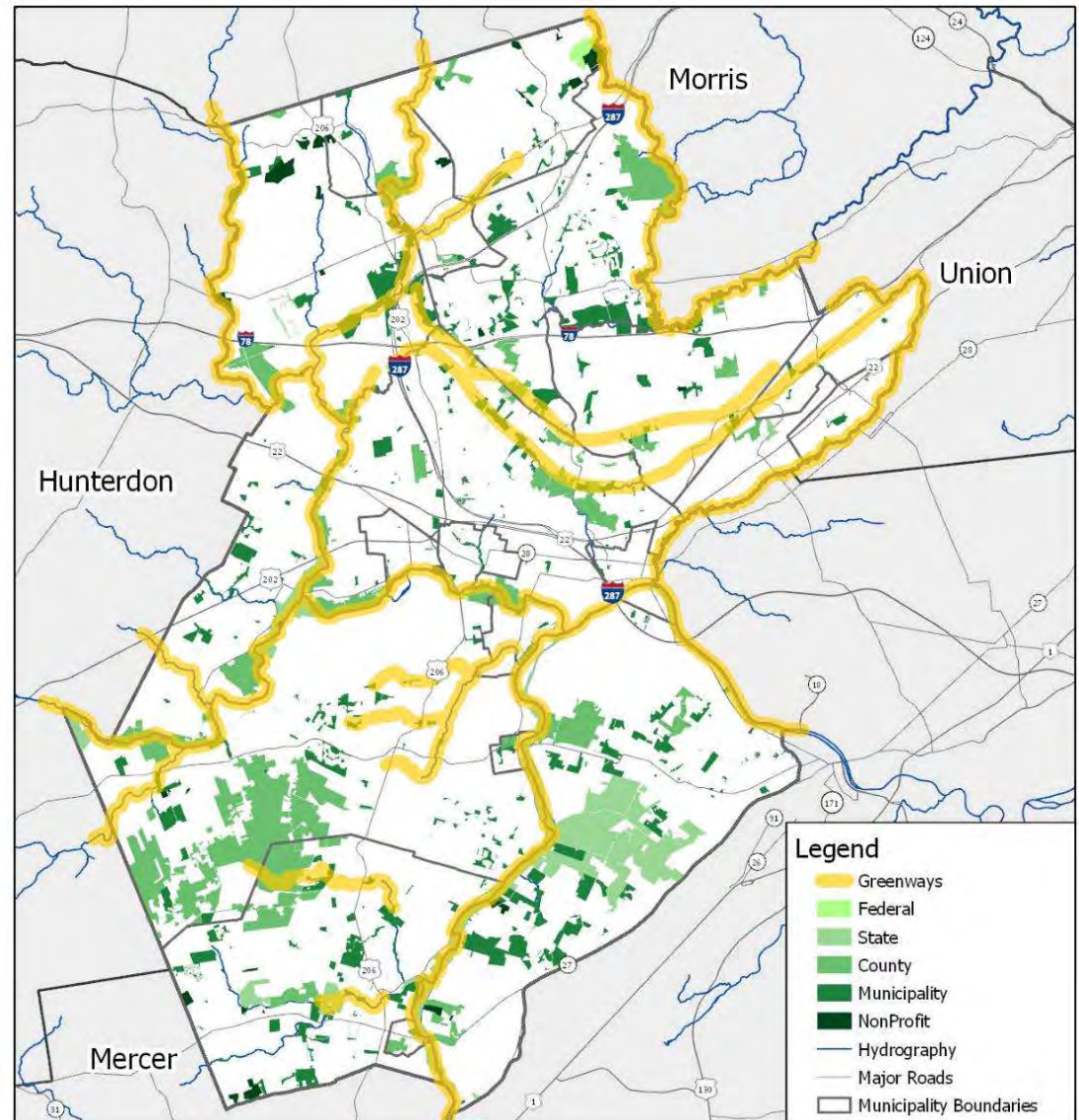


Open Space and Recreation Plan

OPEN SPACE FINDINGS

- Open Space and Recreation Plan update = Requirement for NJ Green Acres funding
- Land: 33,271 permanently preserved open-space acres (20% of Somerset County)
- Land ownership:
 - County: 13,850 acres
 - Municipalities: 10,675A
 - State: 6,588A
 - Nonprofits: 1,094A
 - Federal: 223A
- Funding 2018: \$41 million*
 - County: \$24M
 - State: \$2.65M + Blue Acres
 - Municipalities: \$14.5M

**minus debt service obligations (\$28M)*



OPEN SPACE FINDINGS

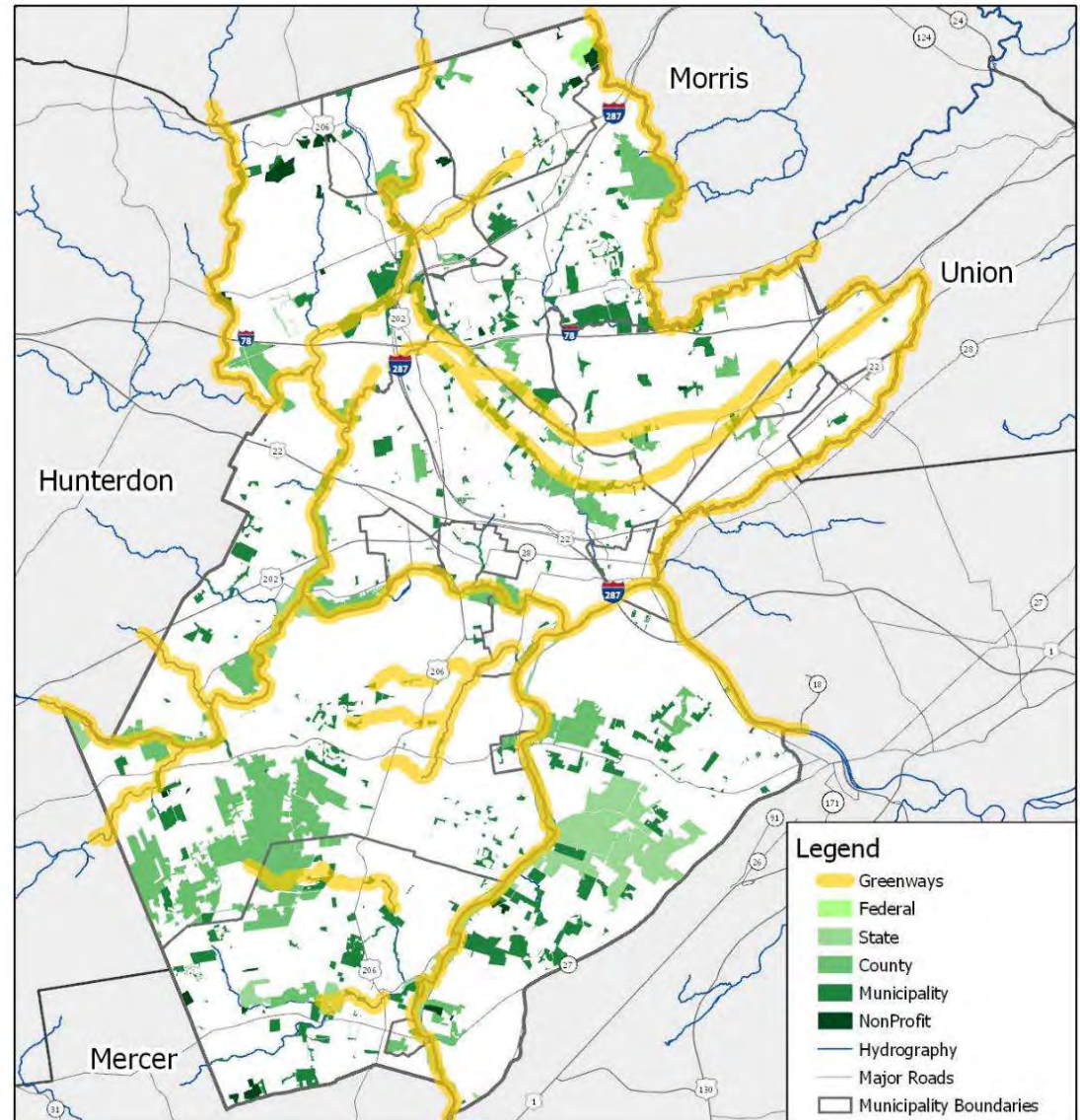
- Somerset County park growth:
 - 1994: 4,841 acres, 16 parks
 - 2000: 8,406 acres, 20 parks
 - 2018: 14,155.52 acres, 25 parks
- Recreation trends:
 - Multi-use sports fields/facilities
 - Bike & walk facilities
 - County as regional recreation service provider
 - Demand for recreation from active seniors



POTENTIAL GOALS

Goal

- Reexamine the existing goal of 20,500 acres of County parkland
- Maintain an open space system of county-wide significance
- Fill in gaps in the County-wide greenway system
- Support connections between greenways, historic sites and districts, and farm belts



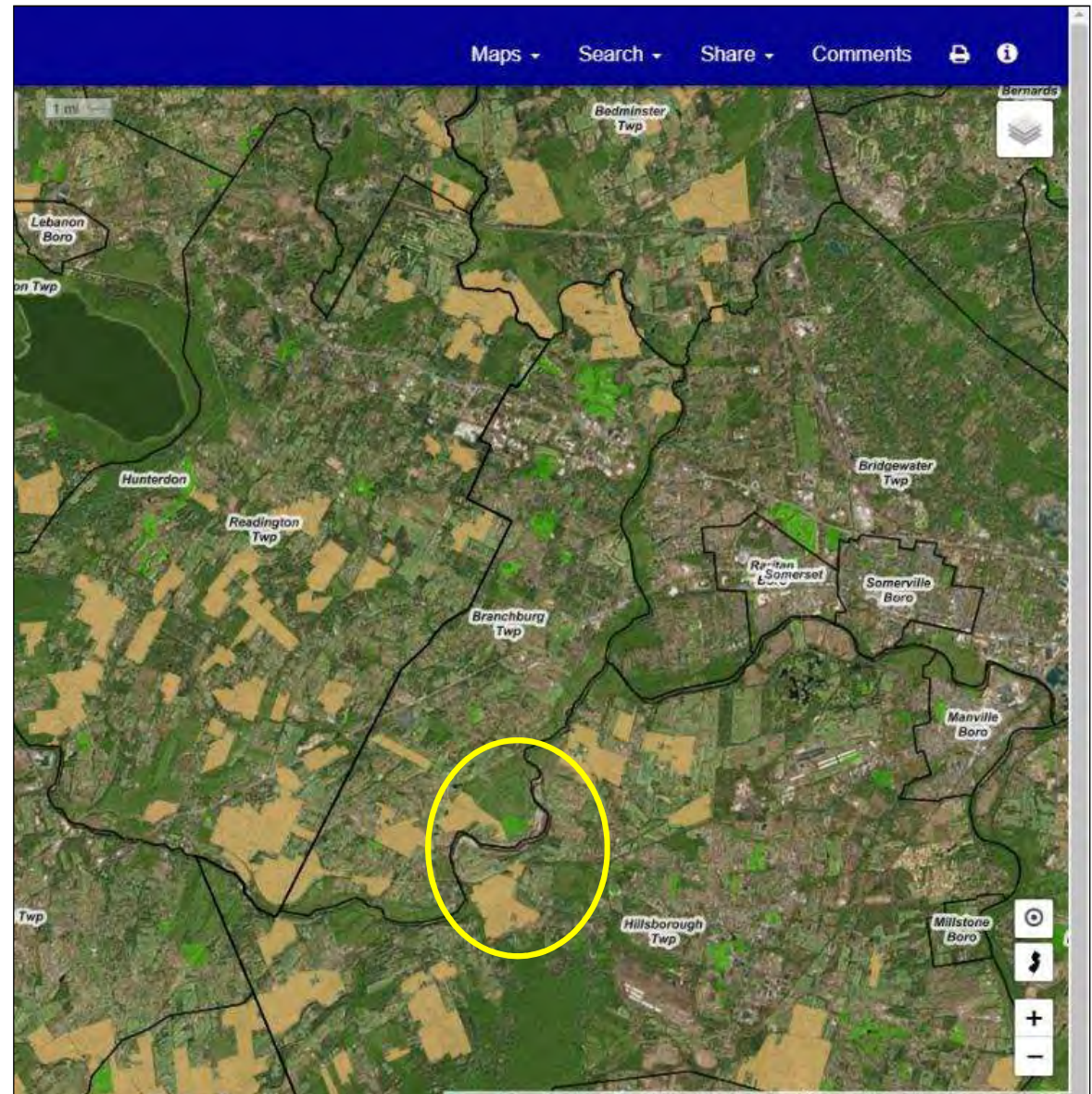
POTENTIAL GOALS

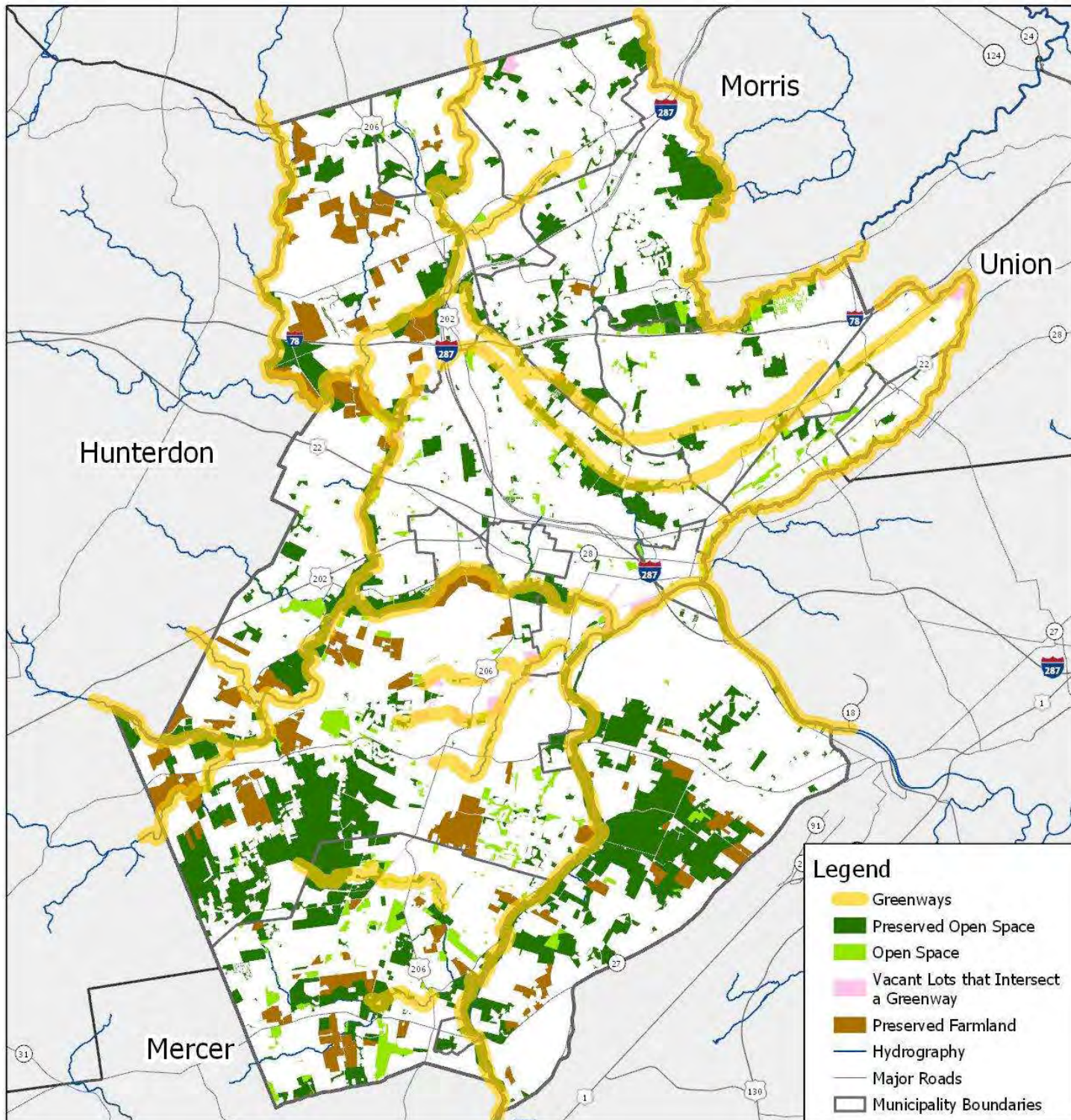
Goal

- Assure a mix of recreation experiences in the county park system

Strategies

- Improve physical access to public golf courses, other public lands, and farmland, including trails where feasible
- Improve river access associated with county assets, i.e., boat/kayak launch areas





POTENTIAL GOALS

Goal

- Protect environmental resources



TOP: Image of the Sourlands courtesy Somerset County

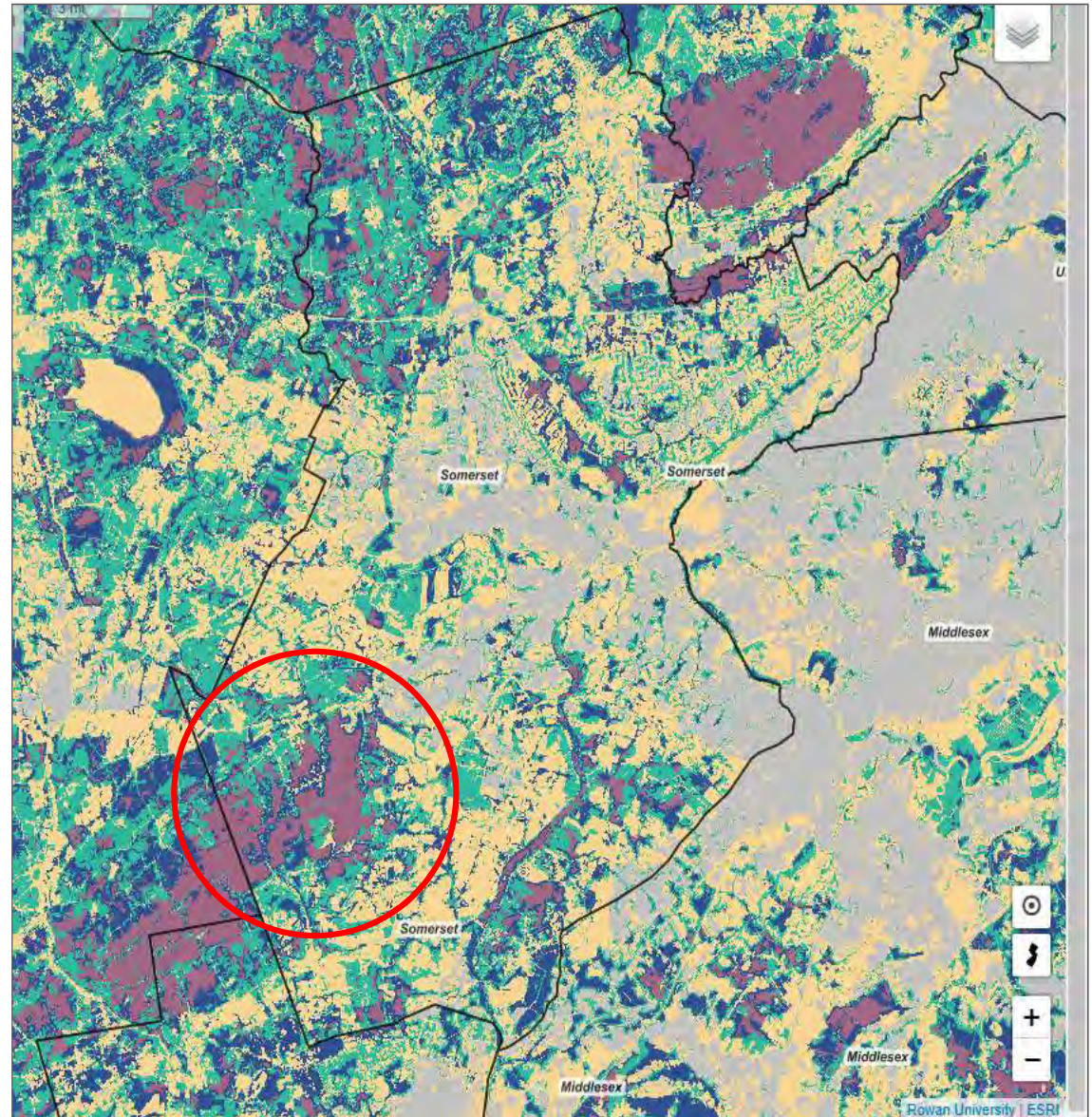
LEFT: Image of volunteers courtesy Somerset County Park Commission



POTENTIAL GOALS

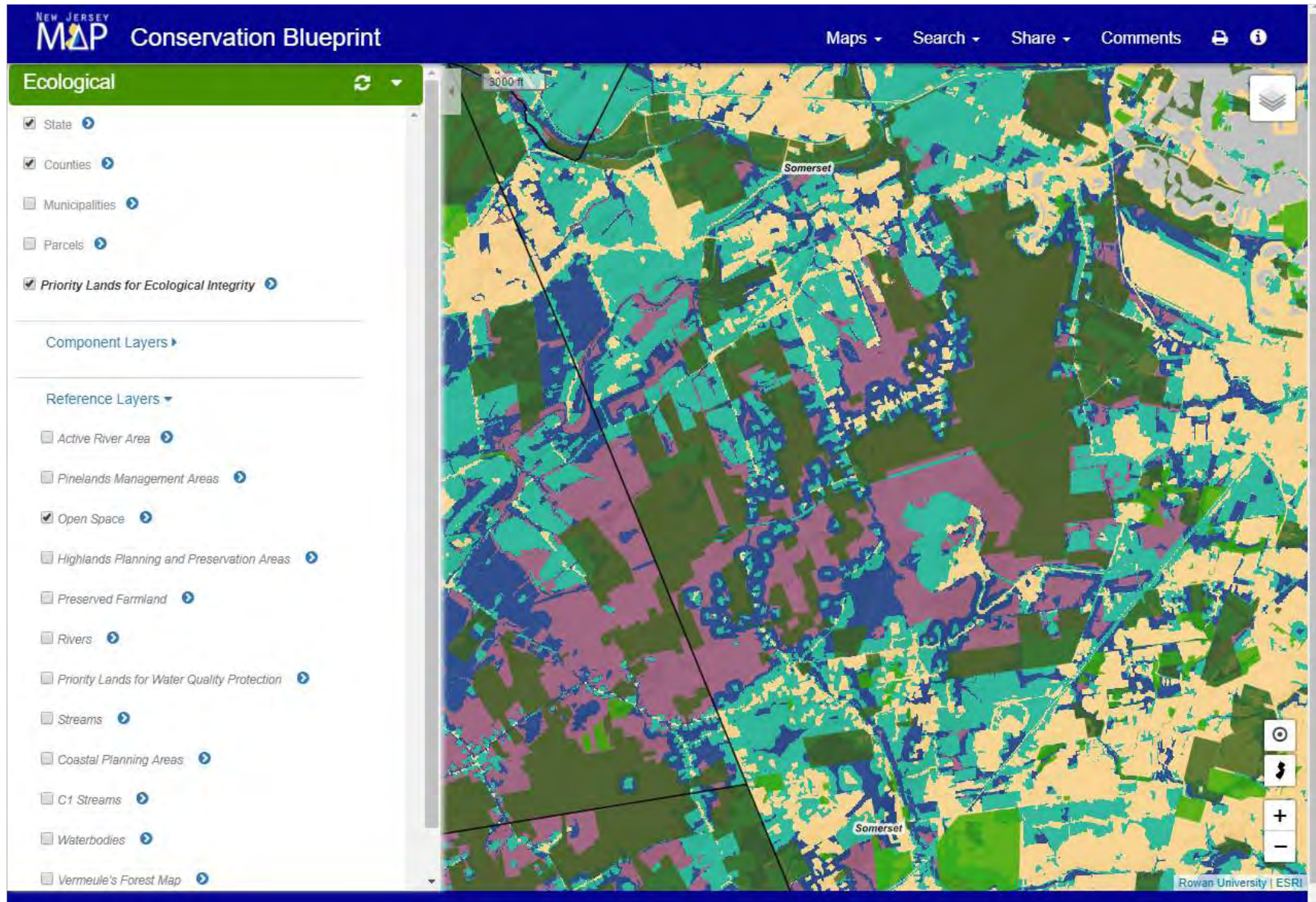
Strategy

- Preserve regional environmental resources by filling in the gaps with lands of high ecological value



POTENTIAL GOALS

Sourlands—Filling in the Gaps



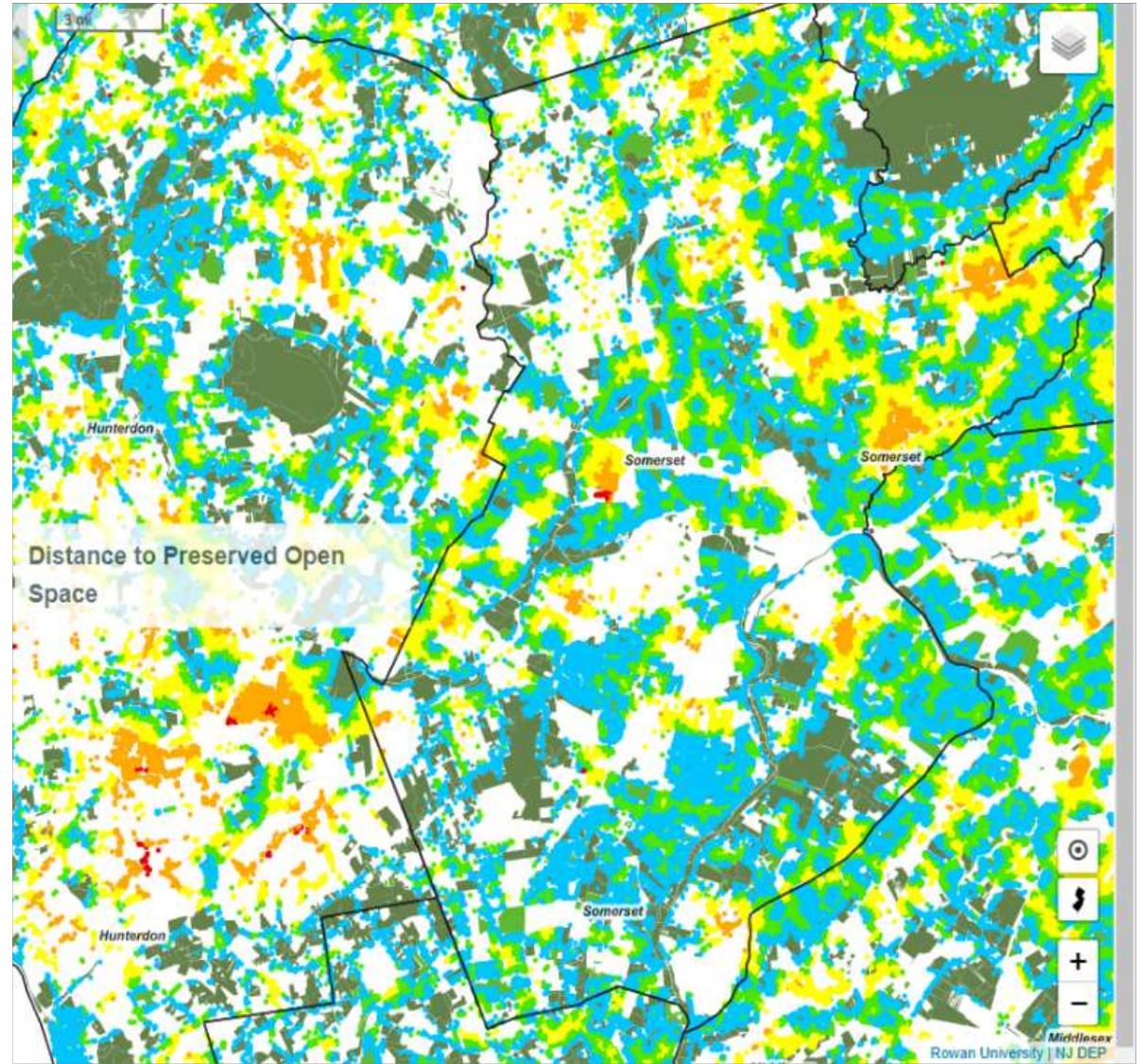
POTENTIAL GOALS

Goal

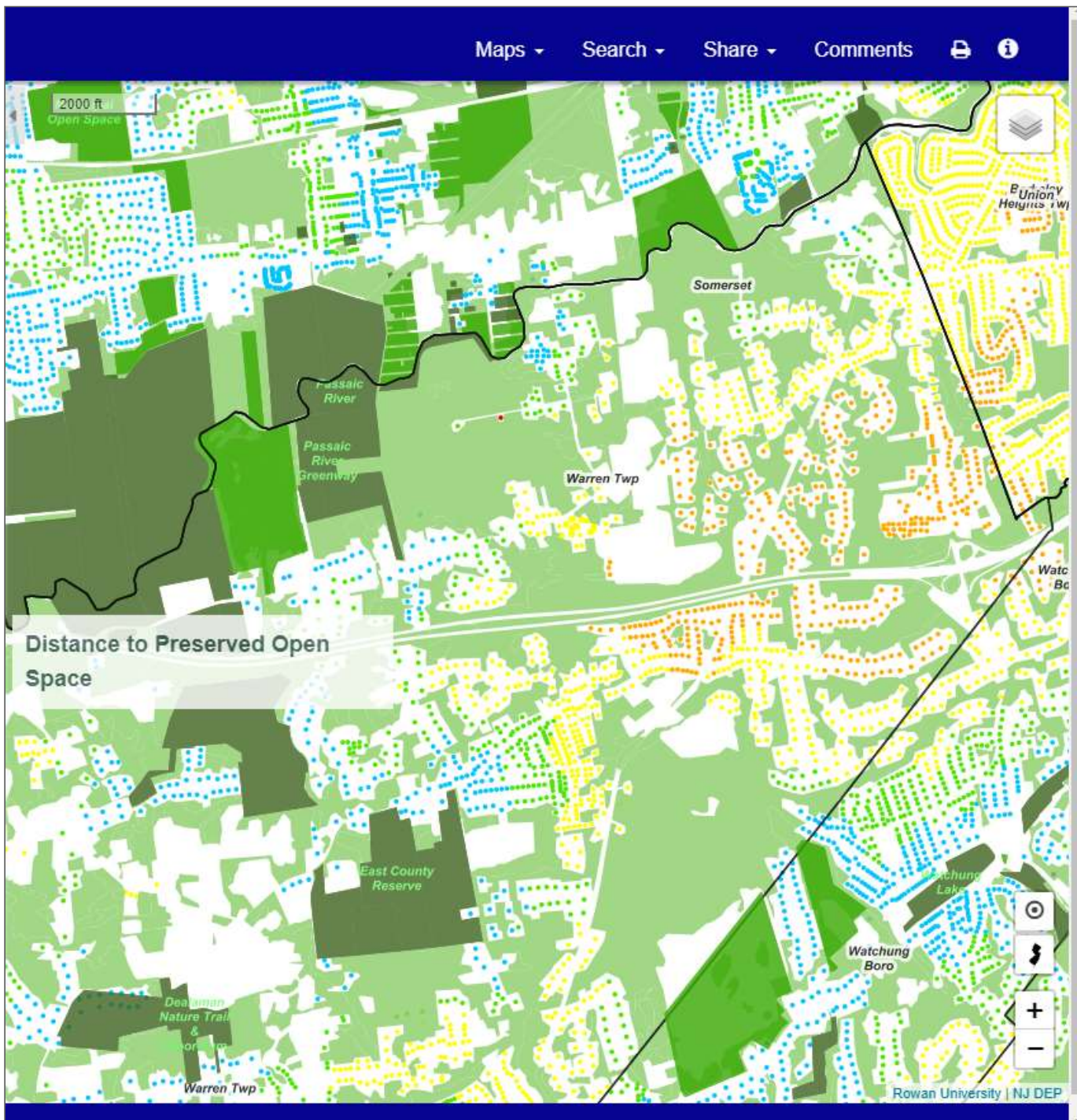
- County parks should serve a mix of population centers

Strategies

- Seek to provide access to preserved natural lands or parks within 1/2 mile of every resident
- Create a county-wide system of trails to facilitate access to natural and recreational areas and create connectivity among County park areas



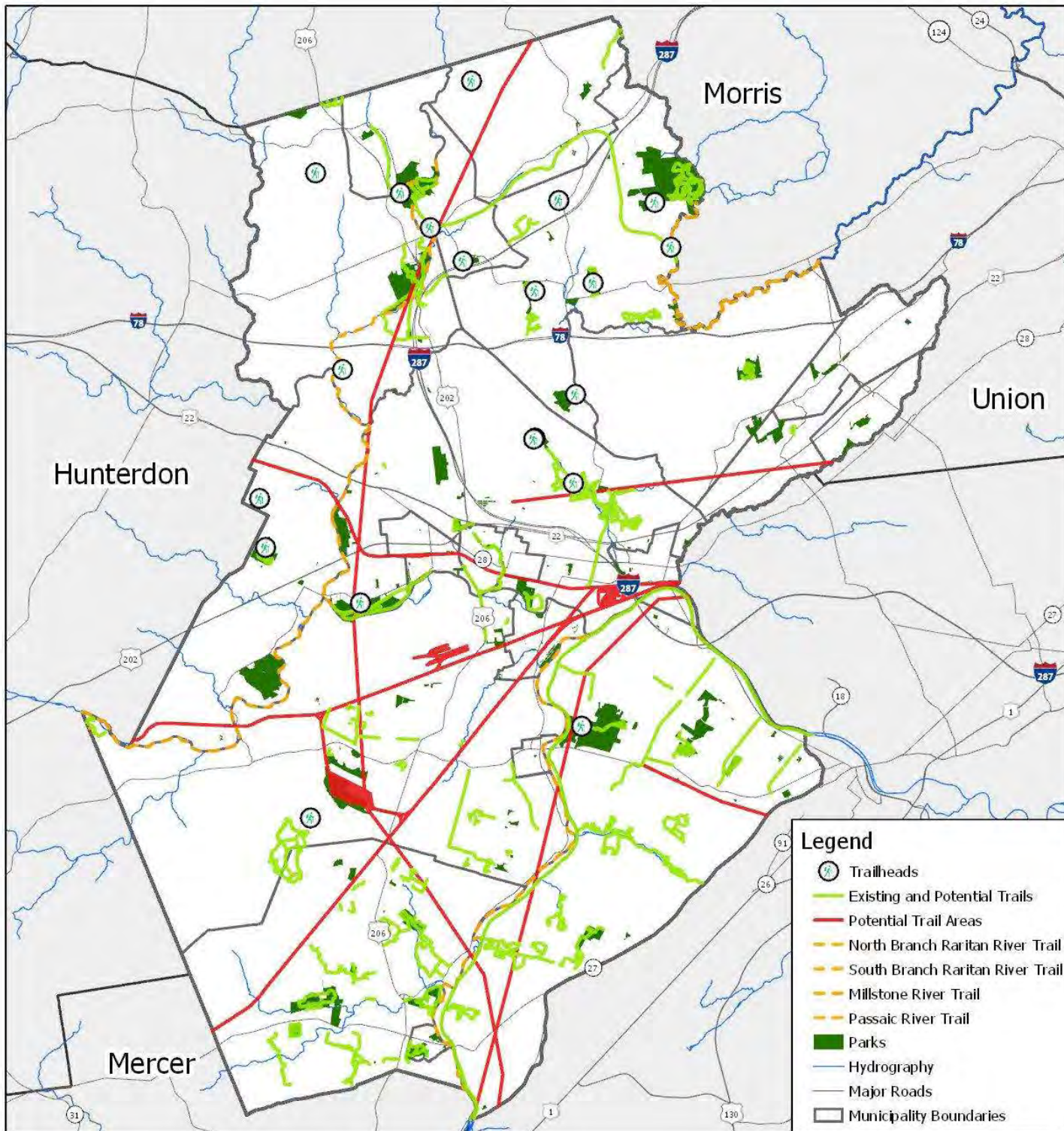
■ Areas not within 1/2 mile of preserved open space



Accomplishing Goals: adding to a greenway; close-to-home access to open space



From Warren Township Open Space Plan



POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Preserve Open Space to Achieve Infrastructure Goals:
 - Health
 - Safety
 - Transit
 - Drinking water supply
 - Community livability



POTENTIAL ACTIONS

- Continue to invest in existing county parks.
- Use county funding to leverage other funding.
- Protect what is already preserved.
- Continue to engage partnerships.
- Examine practices and policies to achieve goals, such as public access.



SOMERSET PRESERVATION PLAN

Questions/Comments?

- What would you like to see in this Plan?
- What will help you make informed decisions?

