

There is a Better Way - The Ambler Conservation Area

Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association



Ambler's hidden asset - time to pull it together

This autumn the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association (WVWA) expects to complete its acquisition of the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve, a 15-acre site on Maple Ave. three blocks from downtown Ambler. WVWA has been pursuing purchase of the Preserve because of its importance to the community in two areas.

1. It unites the Ambler Conservation Area - The Waterfowl Preserve is the keystone to the Ambler

Conservation Area, the open space and parkland that has been assembled along the Wissahickon Creek in three municipalities, Ambler, Upper Dublin and Whitpain.

2. It protects a sanctuary for waterfowl - The Preserve is an extraordinary gathering place for migrating waterfowl. It is so significant that it has been designated an "Important Bird Area" by the National Audubon Society.



Ambler Conservation Area - The pieces are in place

The protection of the Waterfowl Preserve will tie together, into one contiguous area of open space, nearly sixty acres of parkland and natural areas situated along the Wissahickon Creek between Butler Pike and Mt. Pleasant Ave. This core area, which the Watershed Association refers to as “The Ambler Conservation Area”, also connects

First, remediation of some sites within the Ambler Conservation Area must be carried out to ensure that they are safe from asbestos residue deposited decades ago by Keasby and Mattison Company, a manufacturer of asbestos containing products.

Whitpain’s Wissahickon Park, once a heavily used recreation area, has been closed for over

15 years because of asbestos contamination. Whitpain Township would like to remediate conditions at the park so that it can be reopened and safely serve the recreational needs of West Ambler and nearby communities. However, for this to happen it will be necessary for Whitpain to obtain outside funding.

The Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve itself needs to be cleaned up and asbestos-containing materials removed. These materials are almost entirely cement-asbestos products such as pieces of siding, water pipe and tiles. WVWA is presently working with Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection to develop a program for remediation of the

Preserve.

Once it takes title to the Waterfowl Preserve, the Watershed Association intends to make major enhancements to the Maple St. side of the property. In addition to cleaning up debris, WVWA envisions the construction of landscaped sitting areas along the street and a platform for viewing birds on the pond.

Second, adjoining land should be added to the Ambler Conservation Area. Next to the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve is a six-acre site that Keasby and Mattison, for years, used as a dumpsite for asbestos waste. This is also the site of a proposed zoning ordinance change in Ambler Borough to permit a 17-story condominium high-rise building. **The zoning change should be denied.** A 17 story building that is as wide



A view of the Waterfowl Preserve facing Maple Ave.

to parkland above Mt. Pleasant Ave. and to WVWA’s Four Mills Nature Reserve below Butler Pike.

However, just owning the various parcels of land that make up the Ambler Conservation Area is not sufficient for the locale to achieve its full potential as an asset for Ambler and surrounding communities. Before that can be achieved three things must happen.

A Green Heron on the Waterfowl Preserve. Green Herons breed in the preserve.



as the length of a football field would dominate the Ambler Conservation Area and in all likelihood so change the adjoining natural area that it would no longer function as habitat for the birds that now depend on it.

THERE IS A BETTER WAY. The community should work with the present owners of the six acres to acquire the land from them so that it can then be remediated and become part of the Ambler Conservation Area.

Third, all communities and citizens in and around Ambler need to work together to realize the full potential of the Ambler Conservation Area. Ambler Borough, Whitpain, Whitemarsh and Upper Dublin must work together with State and Federal legislators to find funds for remediation of parkland and acquisition of the additional



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land. Only if citizens and their representative government work together, can the Ambler Conservation Area reach its full potential as an asset to Ambler and our region.

A Hooded Merganser, who's numbers on the Waterfowl Preserve can exceed 75 from December through February.

Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve Gets Audubon Recognition

The Audubon Society, the world's foremost bird-conservation organization, has recognized the significance of the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve. Audubon has designated the Preserve as an Important Bird Area (IBA). In recognition of the fact that birds fly back and forth between safe sanctuaries, the Ambler site is part of the Fairmount Park IBA and ornithologically, an integral component of the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge near the Philadelphia airport. The Wissahickon Waterfowl

Preserve was awarded this status because of its high value as habitat for migratory birds and the exceptional population of wintering waterfowl. Among the wintering waterfowl that regularly visit the Preserve are Hooded Merganser, Ring-necked Duck, Common Merganser and Canvas-back.

"IBAs have a unique power to unite people, communities and organizations in pro-conservation, one place at a time."

Frank Gill, Emeritus Director of Science, National Audubon Society.

Upcoming Ambler Borough Council Public Hearings

The Borough of Ambler will be holding public hearings in September to consider the zoning change required for the 17-story high-rise.

The WVWA is opposed to this rezoning and believes "There is a Better Way". It is a creative vision that recognizes the values of this sensitive area and the potential to establish the Ambler Conservation Area – an area that will encompass public open spaces,

clean up contaminated sites, return despoiled parkland to the public, and create new recreational spaces.

The hearings will be held on the evenings of September 20th, 21st and 28th.

The WVWA encourages your attendance and participation at these hearings. Help us work towards this vision.

Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association

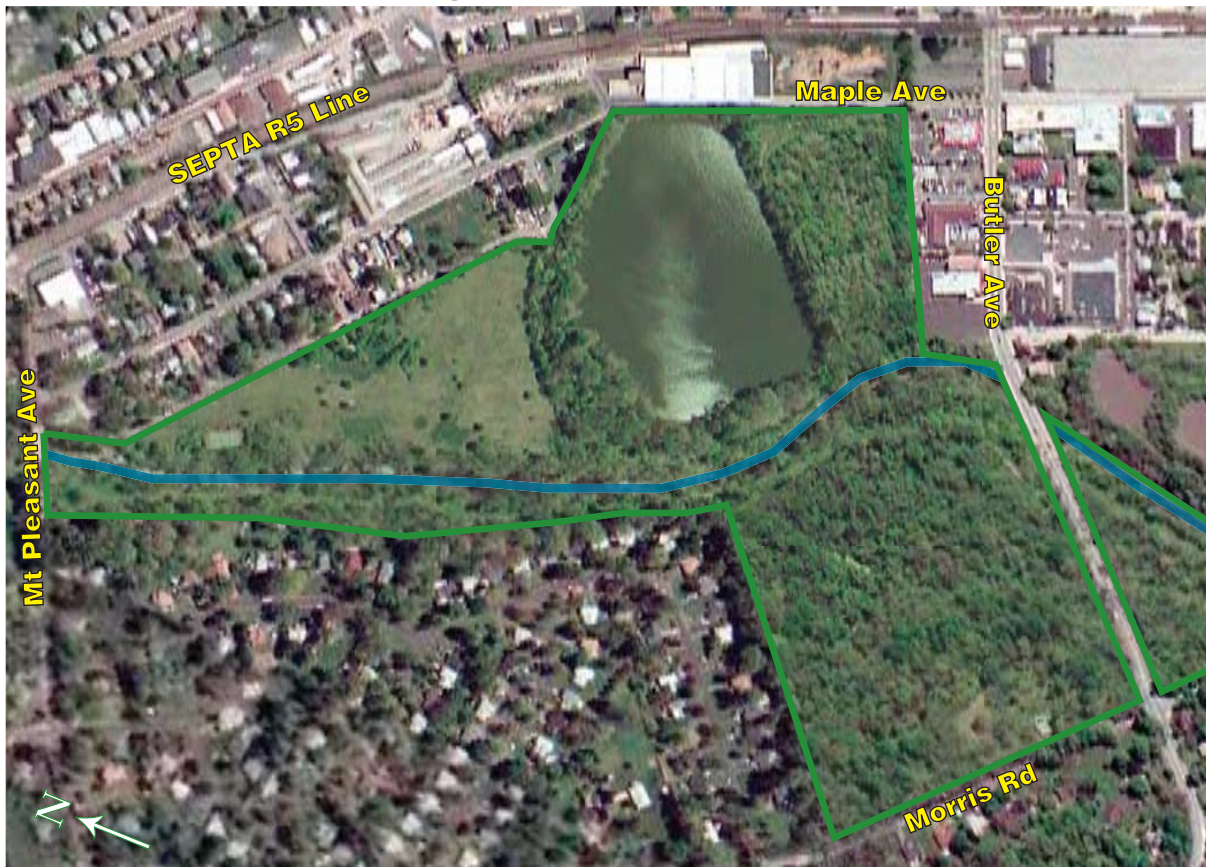
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*A Red-eared Pond Slider on the
Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve*

There is a Better Way -



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