

OPEN SPACE LIST, BOROUGH OF HIGHLAND PARK, NJ

Final State Approved by Environmental Commission 28 November 2001

Overview. Open and partly open space in Highland Park is listed here as coherent natural areas rather than in numerical order by block and lot number as on the Tax List and list of exempted properties. Such areas function together ecologically (woods, stream corridor, etc.) or by the kind of public use (minipark, county park, etc.). This arrangement encourages unified management of contiguous natural areas. Thus, for example, seven municipal lots on River Road are grouped as Native Plant Reserve, and 20+ municipal lots by Donaldson Park are grouped as "The Meadows" (their historic name). State law empowers environmental commissions to maintain such lists.

The definition of open space used here is a broad and pragmatic one, intended to identify properties both public and private that might deserve attention in future open space considerations. Some are wholly natural, some have natural portions, and some adjoin streams or other natural areas. The present list is thus effectively raw material for the open space section of the Master Plan, a separate Open Space Plan, a stream corridor protection plan, or attention during review of development applications. There is no attempt to list all municipal or quasi-public properties such as schools, fire stations, etc. (the book of tax lists has such a list of exempted properties), or to list all private vacant lots—only those likely to merit special consideration. During future planning, lists with narrower definitions of types of open space would be prepared from this heterogeneous list (Green Acres properties, miniparks, properties for rezoning, or properties supporting greenways and environmental education centers.

Two greenway systems cross in Highland Park and can support one another:

- The Highland Park Greenway (also known as Highland Park's section of the Middlesex County Greenway) links riverfront open space and adjoining uplands and is planned to have environmental education centers and perhaps a sculpture garden. Chief components discussed below are (from north to south): Johnson Park, Native Plant Reserve, Valley Place Ravine, Ayres Beach Natural Area (Red's Marina), Donaldson Park, wooded wetlands downstream of Donaldson Park ("The Meadows"), and at least the lower part of the Buck Woods Ravine.
- The East Coast Greenway is a national bikeway and hiking trail from Florida to Maine. In Highland Park this proposed coastal-plain companion to the upland Appalachian Trail comes from the Delaware & Raritan Canal towpath at Landing Lane across Johnson Park to a proposed Rutgers bikeway along Cedar Lane.

In sum, Highland Park is a community with an urban population density but the "feel" of a small town (and probably deserving of "town center" designation in the State Plan). This open space list helps guide the Borough in managing and making good use of its open space from the largest riverside woods to the smallest neighborhood pocket park or landscaped corner.

Organization of the Lists. Individual lots are grouped into contiguous natural areas and these natural areas then listed in five ownership and use categories:

1. *Municipal open space and parks (rented in the case of Veterans Park).* Some are already parks and tot lots zoned conservation/recreation or under Green Acres protection. Underutilized small open spaces already in municipal hands could be designated miniparks. The largest contiguous natural area in municipal hands ("The Meadows" below Buck Woods) should be rezoned conservation/recreation.
2. *Municipal paper streets, walkways, and rights of way.* These are often in de facto park use now, while others have potential use as pocket parks, pedestrian access routes, or preserved natural habitat. The exact status of some is in question, and some are underutilized because they blend with adjoining private property and are not recognized as public.
3. *Municipal buildings and grounds.* These are not full open space, but give opportunities, particularly at Borough Hall and the Library for landscaping—trees with berries for birds, butterfly gardens, benches, etc.
4. *Governmental other than municipal.* This category includes open or partly open space at Johnson and Donaldson Parks, Rutgers Ecological Preserve, school nature areas, certain PSE&G, etc.)
5. *Privately held open space.* Examples of full or partial open space are Ayres Beach (Red's Marina), Barwood Marsh, Buck Woods, Castle, Cenacle, and Midland–Ross/Grimes Aerospace.
6. *Stream Corridors.* To help visualize what properties might be affected by adoption of the Middlesex County Model Stream Corridor Protection Ordinance, this category shows the principal residences and other private property bordering streams (especially Mill Brook and Buell Brook). Such an overlay zone would not affect existing zoning but guide management of buffers within the stream corridor.

1. MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE AND PARKS.

The following municipally owned properties are either in natural unbuilt state or have open areas around a building or other use. Many of the smaller ones were found merely listed as "vacant," "Boro Land," or similar phrases on a list of municipal holdings (from 1975 but verified in many cases against the 2001 tax list). This open-space list excludes school grounds, playing fields, recreation centers, fire and police buildings, etc., except where their grounds have some particular feature of open space character (e.g., a display area of native plants as found as some schools or a special opportunity for landscaping or habitat preservation in a corner of the property, as areas around Borough Hall). Though omitted here, such "developed" properties, too, might merit improved landscaping.

CEDAR AVENUE (Tax Sheet 2)

B8 L7 vacant 0.0032 Cedar Ave.

Cedar Avenue Land-Locked Parcel. This tiny rectangle appears to be "land-locked" and inaccessible at the rear of private properties in the central spine of the block.

CLEVELAND AVENUE MUNICIPAL PROPERTY AT THE DEAD END OVERLOOKING MILL BROOK (Tax Sheets 30 & 31)

B192 L1 Streamside vacant land 0.0304 Wooded. Nominally Harrison Ave. in Tax Lists, but physically at the end of Cleveland Ave.

B154 L5 Utility substation 0.2164 Nominally 443 Cleveland Ave. but wooded except for the small fenced substation

Paper street (curved end beyond Cleveland) adjoining the above lots and crossing the stream, making a unit of the whole on both banks of Mill Brook

Mill Brook Municipal Property at Cleveland. The pumping substation lot B154 L5 is a small but wooded lot at the end of Cleveland Ave., to the left as one faces Mill Brook. It stands at the crest of the bank of Mill Brook, with a fine view and access to contiguous significant natural areas. The paper street crosses Mill Brook, and B192 L1 lies on the far (east) shore, creating a small unit of woods and stream too steep for most people to cross directly, but easily reached (at present) by circling toward the Amtrak embankment, over the Mill Brook culvert buried there, and back into the main woods. The Corps of Engineers plans to construct a concrete-and-rip/rap diversion structure with chain-link fencing in this area to take overflow floods from Mill Brook.

CROWELLS ROAD AND SOUTH ELEVENTH (Tax Sheet 3.06)

B66 L2 vacant 0.0394 Crowells & So. Eleventh Ave.

Crowells Road and South Eleventh. This is a narrow point of lawn and oak trees where Crowells Road meets South Eleventh at a sharp angle. It is currently attractive but indistinguishable from the broad lawns of the adjacent apartment complex and hence not used by the public.

FELTON AVENUE TOT LOT (Tax Sheet 5)

B24 L30.01 0.0918 Boro minipark, 226 Felton Ave.

Felton Avenue Tot Lot. Protected. This tiny parcel is on the Green Acres List. It provides small children with a useful play area within walking distance of many Southside homes.

GARDEN TRIANGLE, MADISON AND NORTH FOURTH AVENUES (Tax Sheet 29)

B149 L1 & 1.01 0.1034 Garden created (2000) on vacant municipal triangle between two avenues.

Garden Triangle, Madison and North Fourth Avenues. This odd-shaped and therefore undeveloped lot was transformed in 2000 by the addition of plantings, including a decorative ring of flowers.

KARSEY STREET PARK (Tax Sheet 12) ~0.9 ACRES TOTAL

B71 L18, 19-28 Karsey St. Park 0.4735 Hilton St.

B71 L31, 32-41 Karsey St. Park 0.4735 Karsey St.

Karsey Street Park. Protected and on Green Acres List. This popular neighborhood park is in the process of renovation (2001) under the Neighborhood Preservation Program.

MEDIAN STRIPS ("BOULEVARDS") IN STREETS

Lawrence Ave. island between North Second and Lincoln intersections (trees and shrubs)

Montgomery circle west of North Second (grassed)

North Eighth Ave. (rows of sycamore and magnolia trees)

River Road island north of tunnel through railroad embankment (a county road: grassed but potentially plantable with wildflowers as along many highways)

Median Strips. These small strips, often with trees and grass, are sometimes used as de facto parks by nearby residents (with, for instance, a child's swing tied to a limb or simple gatherings of neighbors under the trees). They are in any case patches of green that are on streets but not subject to the special planting restrictions that apply to street trees in narrow curbside strips. The list here may not be complete.

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NATIVE PLANT RESERVE ON RIVER ROAD (Tax Sheet 24) ~3 ACRES (NOTE: acreage on the engineering map is 3.082 acres; the Tax List totals differently.)

B186 L6-9	"Boro land" 1.3480	20-40 River Rd. (PROPOSED ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER SITE)
B186 L10	"House" 0.1377	48 River Rd. [HOUSE DEMOLISHED: TAX BOOK NEEDS UPDATING]
B186 L11	"Boro land garage" 0.1515	50 River Rd. [GARAGE DEMOLISHED: TAX BOOK NEEDS UPDATING]
B186 L12	"Vacant" 1.7364	River Rd. ORIGINAL NATIVE PLANT RESERVE

Native Plant Reserve. This riverside land is now protected on the Green Acres List. The original Native Plant Reserve was established in 1994 under the Urban Forestry Program. It was at first confined to the northern half of the municipal holdings along River Road south of Harrison Avenue. The remainder of the 3-acre site later received Green Acres protection in a land swap for lots on South Sixth.

NORTH ELEVENTH AVENUE (Tax Sheet 19)

B133 L49	Boro land, fronts on N 11 0.0671 No. Eleventh Ave.
B133 L54	Rear 0.0264 No. Eleventh Ave.

North Eleventh Avenue. Not readily distinguishable to the passerby, these two thin, noncontiguous plots on the east side of No. Eleventh Ave. south of Park Ave. are nonetheless listed as municipal in the 2001 Tax Book.

SOUTH SIXTH MUNICIPAL LAND AT THE HEAD OF BUCK WOODS (Tax Sheet 11)

B43 L3-5	0.0691	Boro land in dead end of So. Sixth Ave. Wooded, formerly by stream (now piped).
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South Sixth Municipal Land at the Head of Buck Woods. These three lots are wooded but zoned residential, as is an adjacent private lot B43 L2 that is classed as "VAC. LAND-W/SHED." As senior housing high-rises now occupy the land above this point, and there is an application for development of Buck Woods below, this strip of municipal and private land at the end of So. Sixth may become the one remnant of the former wooded stream corridor near seniors and Bartle School.

THE MEADOWS (INCLUDING SOUTHSIDE BIKEWAY AND FORMER MUNICIPAL LANDFILL) (Tax Sheet 3.04)

NOTE: This contiguous natural area covers multiple tax blocks and lots, listed below. The main single parcel (B75 L6) is 16 acres, but an area almost twice that is the actual ecological/open space unit. Contiguous woods, fields, streams, and wetlands cover also municipal blocks 47, 48, 49, B75 L7 (road), and part of B75 L9 (garage). A tidal marsh spreads across WCTC land (B75 L8) and a spur of Donaldson Park (B75 L11). Virtually all is former de facto municipal dump down almost to the river (as verified by residents who remember, by heavy trash still at the surface, and by test pits). The dump is therefore larger than the upland area officially designated as landfill on maps, a fact that should be remembered in any discussion of uses for "the landfill." Thus the historic term "The Meadows" is used here for the whole contiguous open space, with lots grouped for convenience as follows.

Block 47: Bikeway Lower Portion, Toward Fifth Avenue End, With Stream (None of these have buildings, despite the dummy addresses. L79-81 include west end of bikeway & native plantings.)

B47 L76	Boro land 0.2046	603 So. Sixth Ave. [paper street here] Lots 76-81 are the wooded lower end of the Buck Woods Ravine; bikeway crosses some diagonally.
B47 L77	Boro land 0.2728	609 So. Sixth Ave. [paper street here]
B47 L78	Boro land 0.2728	617 So. Sixth Ave. [paper street here]
B47 L79	vacant [Boro] 0.2728	703 So. Sixth Ave. [paper street here]
B47 L80	vacant [Boro] 0.2728	711 So. Sixth Ave. [paper street here]
B47 L81	vacant [Boro] 0.2728	711 So. Fifth Ave. Lots 80 & 81 are nearest Boro Garage, across So. Fifth, partly used for dumped materials.

SEE ALSO entry for privately owned B 47 L82, formerly Boro land adjacent to the above and possibly rating a wetland designation in whole or part.

Block 48: Bikeway Upper Portion, Toward Seventh Avenue End

B48 L30	Boro land 0.2296	So. Sixth Ave [paper street here], no address assigned. Woods uphill of bikeway.
B48 L31	Boro land 0.2296	So. Seventh Ave., no address assigned. Woods uphill of bikeway.
B48 L32	Boro land 0.2296	So. Sixth Ave. [paper street here], no address assigned. Woods uphill of bikeway.
B48 L33	Boro land 0.2296	So. Seventh Ave., no address assigned. Woods uphill of bikeway.

Plateau of Landfill (Lots East of Paper Sixth and Downhill of Donaldson) NOTE: This is the property loosely meant at times by "the landfill," but as noted above, it is merely one part of the dumped area, made more prominent by being covered with soil to a higher elevation. (Special attention to lots in this block that are directly contiguous to bikeway, stream, or woods: L41-43 on east portion of bikeway; L54-56 joining those to woods below; and 48 & 49 on stream by Crowells Road.)

B49 L41	0.2296	Donaldson St. [paper street here] Includes bikeway.
B49 L42	0.2296	Donaldson St. [paper street here] Includes bikeway.
B49 L43	0.2296	Donaldson St. At end of bikeway, and downhill of it.

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B49 L44	0.2296	Donaldson St. Lots 44–56 are fairly level and raised by fill over the trash to grade into the elevation of Donaldson Street.
B49 L45	0.2296	Donaldson St.
B49 L46	0.2296	Donaldson St.
B49 L47	0.2296	Donaldson St.
B49 L48	0.3719	Donaldson St.
B49 L49	0.2410	Valentine St.
B49 L50	0.2296	Valentine St.
B49 L51	0.2296	Valentine St.
B49 L52	0.2296	Valentine St.
B49 L53	0.2296	Valentine St.
B49 L54	0.2296	Valentine St.
B49 L55	0.2296	Valentine St.
B49 L56	0.2296	Valentine St.

Meadows Land Below the Landfill (Tax Sheet 3)

B75 L6 16.618 Woods and Wetlands below Paper Valentine.

This is the major part of The Meadows, and the wildest in wooded character. It is, in fact, the largest municipal lot of natural open space and wildlife habitat anywhere in Highland Park. The marshy WCTC lot (L 8) blends in, as does the lower portion of the marsh in what is now Donaldson Park (B75 L11), together with smaller bits of municipal land to the west (L7 is the road to WCTC; L9 has the DPW garage but also the stream corridor that feeds the marsh).

SEE ALSO separate listings in the section on private landholdings for the lots functioning ecologically as part of The Meadows:

- Buck Woods to the north in B47
- WCTC tower lot (B75 L8) with marsh
- Lot on South Fifth (B47 L82—zoned residential).

The Meadows. "The Meadows" is the historic term for orchards, farmland, and wetland along the river. Parts of it were later used as the municipal dump, closed in the early 1960s, and now reverted to woods, meadows, and marsh. It is by far the largest municipal holding of wooded habitat in Highland Park. The term is used here as the collective term for all the predominantly natural municipal land downstream of Donaldson Park, now well along in reversion to thick woodlands and wooded streams. As listed above, municipal lots in The Meadows cover the base of Buck Woods (blocks 47 and 48), the flatter upper plateau of the former municipal landfill (block 49), and rougher woods and wetlands below the landfill (block 75, lot 6). All of these are recommended to be incorporated into the Highland Park Greenway, with its contiguous natural areas and linked environmental education sites. Special habitats in the Meadows complex include springs in the lower (municipal) portion of the Buck Woods Ravine, a tidal marsh adjoining Donaldson Park (praised in the Natural Resource Inventory of 1992 for its ecological interest as a habitat type different from the freshwater wetlands elsewhere in Highland Park), a successional field atop the fill covering the former dump, and a deeply cut miniature gorge at the Crowells Road stream nearly on the Edison border. A biological survey is underway (2001), but the Natural Resource Inventory of 1992 has already established that these are among the finest wooded lands in Highland Park, surpassed only by the Rutgers Ecological Preserve. Plans for the Highland Park Greenway and environmental education centers depend on continuing natural status for this, the largest block of municipal land on the greenway.

VALLEY PLACE RAVINE (Tax Sheet 3.02)

B2 L15	vacant 0.5038	190 So. Adelaide.
B3 L2	vacant 0.1148	204 So. Adelaide.
B3 L39	vacant 1.1539	Donaldson Street (i.e., <i>paper</i> Donaldson extending from the curve of Elbert Court to the river).

Valley Place Ravine. This wooded stream corridor is on the Green Acres List. A pleasant footpath leads down to the Raritan River as a rare public access point to the river—the only one between the Native Plant Reserve and Donaldson Park except for the more difficult route of paper Donaldson Street off Elbert Court.

VETERANS PARK (Tax Sheet 13)

B87 L26 Lot dimensions 135.0 x 135.0 x 46.64 ft. Rented by the municipality for park at the triangle of Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues.

Veterans Park. This quite small point of land in the angle where two major roads meet has long been a park, with the "doughboy" statue, benches, and dense plantings of flowers, shrubs, and trees—a fine example of using small spaces. It is not, however, municipally owned but rented from TOSCO Marketing Co. of Phoenix, and is just a corner of the larger property housing a Mobil station.

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VOLKERT/SOUTH NINTH (Tax Sheet 11) POTENTIAL MINIPARK THROUGH TO SOUTH TENTH (Tax Sheet 12)

B61 L25	0.0876	So. Tenth Ave. These three contiguous municipal lots form open space sloping down from So. Ninth to Tenth.
B62 L4	0.2296	Rear vacant lot, Boro land So. Tenth Ave.
B62 L11	0.0574	Land-rear Benner St.

Volkert/South Ninth. This surprising municipal open space with large grassy area and grove of trees could well be a minipark and seems already to function that way for close neighbors. The only posted sign, however, is one forbidding sledding on the slope, so the entrance is uninviting and the space beyond is underutilized. Indeed, from one side it is almost invisible, since the entry from So. Ninth is a narrow grassy strip that passersby assume is only the lawn of the nearby house. It is not even drawn on the tax maps. Walking through, however, reveals the large grassy area with trees, extending through the block. The Tenth Ave. side is wider and more evident, but still the main grove is back toward the center of the three-lot complex and could well be mistaken for someone's back yard.

2. MUNICIPAL PAPER STREETS, WALKWAYS, AND RIGHTS OF WAY

The following list of municipally controlled paper streets and actual walkways suggests opportunities for linear open space. A few listed items have uncertain legal status where a transfer to private ownership was discussed at some time but with unknown outcome. Municipalities sometimes downplay the value of paper streets, considering only their potential to become paved streets, but many already fill de facto roles for pathways, linear parks, river access, links for connecting natural habitats, or sledding (if it can be done safely). Preserving them (rather than assigning them to adjacent property owners) can keep such options open for the future. Sidewalk rights of way are not included except for one (Cedar Lane), which is the planned route for the Rutgers Bikeway and national East Coast Greenway.

CEDAR LANE SIDEWALK RIGHT OF WAY (EAST COAST GREENWAY BIKE TRAIL)

Cedar Lane has no sidewalk on the north side and is currently planted with a wildflower/grass mix. This side borders either wholly wooded lots (blending into Kilmer Woods and the Rutgers Ecological Preserve) or else the wooded screening strips between apartment complexes and the roadway. Rutgers University plans to construct a bicycle path up this sidewalk right of way. This will also be designated a segment of the East Coast Greenway, a national hiking/biking trail.

CLEVELAND AVENUE (PAPER STREET ABOVE THE DEAD END, CURVING ACROSS MILL BROOK)

See the discussion of municipal lots at the end of Cleveland. The paper street carries at least nominal municipal control across the stream into woods that then blend into the larger Yeshiva woods and a wildlife corridor in lowlands along the Amtrak embankment.

DONALDSON STREET (SOUTH SIXTH TO SOUTH SEVENTH)

This paper street crosses municipal wooded lots just above the Southside Bikeway. *Actions:* Preserve in wooded state, possibly with a footpath into the woods.

GRAHAM STREET

Graham Street was formerly shown a paper street connecting all the way from South Fifth to South Seventh, but other maps show only the eastern half remaining, though no record has been found of actually ceding the western part to private ownership by an adjacent property owner.

HUBELI STREET (Tax Sheet 33, in the edge of Johnson Park below river road about opposite the Midland–Ross/Grimes Aerospace property)

This paper street runs down to the Raritan River from River Road. Though still a paper street, it was legally ceded to Middlesex County at the time several acres of municipal floodplain land were ceded to become the part of Johnson Park south of the railroad bridge.

LIVINGSTON MANOR WALKWAYS (Tax Sheet 27, crossing blocks 166, 167, and 168 at two points each)

Listed as "public walks" on the tax maps, these six walkways were created by Watson Whittlesey as pedestrian amenities for his planned development of Livingston Manor, and are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places as part of that district. Whittlesey hoped to make a more walkable community by providing midblock crossing points in the unusually long blocks. These walkways are in fact well used today. Too narrow for landscaping of their own, they are nonetheless effective garden walks by virtue of threading between the yards and gardens of adjoining properties.

PARKWAY (Tax Sheets 23, 24, and 25; Livingston Manor District)

This largely grassy or wooded strip, zoned conservation/recreation for at least some portions, extends as a paper street from North Second Avenue (opposite Wayne) downhill by a somewhat irregular course past condos and the Montgomery Apartments all the way to River Road. A portion above Lincoln Avenue is paved and called Montgomery on the street sign though Parkway on maps. It remains from the original planned development of the Livingston Manor District (eligible for the National Register of Historic Places). The Parkway was originally a stream valley that Watson Whittlesey apparently intended for use as a linear park and path to the river. A steep wooded slope runs alongside the lower (western) portions and may or may not be municipal. The lower portion (west of Lincoln) is in block 184 behind lots 1, 5-9, 14-17, and 19, with a spur up the steep slope to Lawrence from B184 L17 and running between L5 and L8 of B185. The history of the parkway and its relationship to adjacent properties is somewhat unclear, and some portions near North Second appear once to have been offered to adjacent property owners (who would then be taxed on them), but not accepted.

SOUTH FOURTH (DONALDSON TO VALENTINE)

This steep slope down from Donaldson Street to Valentine Street is a well used natural path for Southside Residents heading down toward Donaldson Park, grassy along the center but with trees at the edges. Winter sledding is common though prohibited and dangerous if sleds continue out into the street at the base of the slope. Although hay bales or other barriers might remedy this, the Borough historically has avoided for liability reasons any action seeming to condone sledding. Plantings of native shrubs could increase habitat value and attractiveness by buffering views of neighboring walls and perhaps setting the site off from the street.

SOUTH SIXTH AVENUE (FROM PAPER GRAHAM TO PAPER VALENTINE) (Tax Sheet 3.04)

Actual South Sixth Avenue dead-ends at the top of the Buck Woods Ravine, then is not shown on tax sheets even as a paper street through the privately owned portion of Bucks Woods, and reappears as a paper street in the municipally owned lower part of the Buck Woods Ravine, crossing the Southside Bikeway.

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VALENTINE STREET (EAST OF SOUTH FIFTH)

This paper street runs across most of The Meadows along the bottom of block 49 and is shown on some maps as the nominal lower boundary of the former municipal landfill (though in fact the dumping extended farther downhill toward the river). The paper street is relatively flat and smooth, lying along a "middle plateau" between the steeply raised plateau of filled land uphill of it and the rougher terrain downhill from it, though all this area is filled with soil over trash to some degree. It is a particularly interesting area for birders, with a mix of open fields and stands of trees and shrubs.

3. MUNICIPAL BUILDINGS AND GROUNDS

The following municipal lots are not fully open space but have buildings and land, hence an opportunity for landscape plantings or in some cases benches for passersby. Even "habitat" can be created in very small spaces by planting trees with berries for birds, or small butterfly gardens (with nectar flowers for the adults and food plants for the caterpillars).

SOUTH SIXTH AVENUE COMPLEX (BOROUGH HALL, RECREATION CENTER, AND SENIOR HOUSING) (Tax Sheet 11)

NOTE: Some lots have changed function and ownership recently (200/2001) as new senior housing is being built.

B42 L5-9	0.1791	Senior/Youth Center, 220 So. Sixth Ave.
B42 L30-37.01	0.9156	Boro Hall, 221 So. Fifth.
B42 L38	1.1465?	Senior citizen housing complex & Housing Authority, 242 So. Sixth Ave. Owner: Housing Authority of Highland Park. (Tax Sheet map 1.197A).
B42 L39-44	0.3444	Boro Hall parking, 221 So. Fifth.
B46 L3-11	1.3499	Low-income housing, 221 So. Sixth, Housing Authority of Highland Park.

South Sixth Avenue. This complex includes public buildings and senior housing, but also open grounds, some with plantings. *Actions:* Although the available open space is small, it is highly public. Visual and habitat value could be augmented by gradual landscaping improvements: removing invasive plants (Japanese Knotweed by Borough Hall); and planting native species (e.g., the redbud planted by Borough Hall for Arbor Day 2001). This complex was, not many years ago, a wooded stream corridor, now filled and built upon, with its stream in a pipe. A program of native plantings, butterfly gardens, etc., could be considered restoration.

VALENTINE STREET: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS GARAGE AND ADJACENT STREAM (Tax Sheet 3)

B75 L9	Garage & Land 2.6400	446 Valentine St.
B75 L7	Road to WCTC Tower	

Department of Public Works and Associated Open Space. The Public Works Garage occupies the main, western part of the large lot 9 at the corner of Donaldson Park below South Fifth and Valentine. The garage is, of course, not considered open space and is zoned community services, but the east end of the same lot has the stream descending from the Bucks Woods Ravine, with a narrow path to Donaldson Park on its western bank and its eastern bank occupied by a tongue of high fill material (seeded for a flowering meadow). East of this is the WCTC road (listed as lot 7, municipal). The Tax List, in fact, lumps lots 7 & 9 with the much larger wooded lot 6 to the east (24 acres total), constituting the bulk of "The Meadows" open space, though identified as Department of Public Works land (from its days as municipal dump?).

MISCELLANEOUS MUNICIPAL HOLDINGS

B22 L32.01, 33.01, & 20	0.7594	Community Center (former), 220 Raritan Ave. (Tax Sheet 4)
B31 L6	0.1722	Municipal parking lot serving business district, 17 So. Third Ave., 50x150 ft. (Tax Sheet 8)
B38 L39	1.3702	Police & Fire, 222 So. Fifth Ave. (Tax Sheet 9)
B91 L4-6	0.2480	First Aid Squad, McCallum Place & 128 So. Eleventh Ave. (Tax Sheet 14)
B95 L30	0.1030	Open space across from Irving School, 133 Woodbridge Ave. (Tax Sheet 14)
B142 L40	0.1543	Municipal parking lot serving library and business district, 10 No. Sixth Ave., 64x105-34x105 ft. (Tax Sheet 21)
B142 L34	0.6035	Library, 26 North Fifth Ave. (extends through to North Sixth) (Tax Sheet 28)

Miscellaneous Municipal Holdings. Highland Park has the power on these properties to set an example of attractive and ecologically valuable landscaping for public buildings and housing.

4. GOVERNMENTAL OTHER THAN MUNICIPAL

The largest open spaces in Highland Park are not owned or controlled by the municipality at all. These are the two county parks and the Rutgers Ecological Preserve (a part of Kilmer Woods, the other part being in private hands at the Castle). Much smaller open spaces also listed here are display gardens of native plants at Board of Education properties, and state-controlled land at the abutment of the Route 27 Raritan River Bridge. Continued cooperation with these other governmental units is essential if the many parts making up the totality of open space in Highland Park are to function well together.

DONALDSON PARK (Tax Sheet 3)

B75 L11 89.5 acres Middlesex County park.

Donaldson Park. This large and heavily used park is named for the Donaldson family, whose farm it once was. It is probably the park most used by Highland Park residents. This may be because it is tucked away entirely within the borough, where it can be reached on foot from most of town and is also not very visible to nonresidents, who tend to patronize instead the more obvious Johnson Park on busy River Road. Donaldson Park is characterized in the Natural Resource Inventory as a wetland of the "modified-lawn" type, that is, a filled wetland with playing fields, picnic areas, boat ramp, paths used by joggers and birdwatchers, etc. Middlesex County's plans for renovation, as announced in 2000, include reducing paved roadways and increasing natural plantings, particularly at the pond and adjacent southeast corner just across the stream from proposed nature trails in The Meadows. This work is expected to increase the habitat value of the park as a whole as well as provide a relatively concentrated natural area in the southeast corner.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

B38 L3-22, 389, 50 4.4000 Bartle School, Grove and Mansfield Streets. (Tax Sheet 11)
 B38 L48 0.1435 Bartle School, Grove Ave. 50x125 ft. (Tax Sheet 11)
 B93 L2-3 0.5785 Irving School, 121 So. Eleventh Ave. (Tax Sheet 14)
 B145 L18, 30.01; B148 L32, 32.01, 32.02 12.6600 Highland Park High School, No. Fifth and Wayne St. (Tax Sheet 28)

Board of Education Properties. Schools not only have grounds with landscaping, but have sometimes developed special gardens of native plants for environmental education. The High School has a grant-funded native-plant garden by the new cafeteria, designed by the Shade Tree Advisory Committee. Irving School also received a similar grant for a native-plant garden across the street (see separate entry). Actual creation of Irving's garden has been delayed so as to be coordinated with a general reconstruction planned (2001) for the playground area. This is expected also to incorporate native plantings. Native street tree additions are planned for spring 2002, so that when plantings are completed the school will offer small-scale but rich opportunities for environmental education all around the grounds. There has been some discussion of similar work at Bartle School, which has already some wooded property nearby. Grants are commonly offered each year for such projects.

JOHNSON PARK (Tax Sheets 33 and 34; approx. 49+ acres in Highland Park, approx. 473 acres total in Highland Park and Piscataway combined)

B186 L13 2.2626
 B186 L14-15 1.5868
 B187 L2 1.4626
 B187 L3 0.6139 B186 & 187 are South of the Amtrak embankment and include one stream (Tax Sheet 33)
 B188 L4-5 14.9000
 B188 L6-7 19.4600
 B188 L8-9 2.2700
 B188 L10-11 6.6500 B188 is North of the Amtrak embankment and includes two ponds plus streams (Tax Sheet 34)

Johnson Park. This Middlesex County Park runs a great distance upstream, but the Highland Park portion extends from our Harrison Avenue up to shortly before the park zoo. It includes playing fields and picnic areas as well as some fine natural habitat and the opportunity to restore more. The Mill Brook Pond and small swamp by the Amtrak embankment and railroad bridge is probably the most concentrated wildlife area anywhere in Highland Park, where nature lovers have reported seeing five species of heron/egret, the reclusive sora rail, and (in a single view at one time) 63 eastern painted turtles. The Buell Brook Pond to the north of that is at present less natural and less productive, but County plans for Johnson Park include increasing natural habitat here. The southernmost portion of the park, from the Mill Brook Pond down to our Native Plant Reserve has some wild habitat near a stream at Cleveland Avenue and along the river edge, but is otherwise currently managed as mowed lawn with a few groups of trees (planted in the 1990s in a joint project with the Highland Park Shade Tree Advisory Committee).

ROUTE 27 BRIDGE ABUTMENT AND ELECTRICAL EQUIPMENT T SITE (Tax Sheet 24)

B186 L16 0.0143 acres Electrical utility site (0.0143 acres) adjacent to the larger bridge-and-highway right of way.

Route 27 Bridge Area. A tiny lot between bridge and apartments is owned by PSE&G and houses a fenced electrical site with a small amount of greenery. The adjacent bridge and highway right of way is presumably under state control, with boundaries not clearly marked. In the past, the area beneath and alongside the bridge has been a spot for residents to fish, birdwatch, or just watch

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the river roll by. There was formerly access down the steep slope at the south edge of the bridge through a gate (locked now). Even earlier there was easy access via walkways to the river at the Meters-Rice mansion, also to the south. There is currently a somewhat difficult river access down the steep dirt embankment at the north edge of the bridge (made easier by steps someone cut in the dirt).

RUTGERS ECOLOGICAL PRESERVE/KILMER WOODS (Tax Sheet 34; Kilmer Woods)

B189 L9 68.048 acres in HP Kilmer Woods (Rutgers University): larger portions extend into Piscataway and Edison.

Rutgers Ecological Preserve/Kilmer Woods. Military restrictions at former Camp Kilmer preserved extensive woods and fields, though only a part appear to be included in the actual preserve. The Kilmer Woods is the largest and finest natural area within Highland Park, with woods, streams, meadows, and extensive lists of wildlife seen. Highland Park residents make repeated trips for birding and nature walks, and Rutgers University uses it as an outdoor study area. The East Coast Greenway (a national hiking and biking trail) will follow its edge (Cedar Lane and Livingston College roads), giving this natural area a supporting role for a national project. Zoning, however, is a complex compromise with uncertain implications for its natural character. The more southerly portions are C/R-Conservation & Recreation, but with a "Preserve" overlay on some but not all (near Buell Brook). The central area, however, is zoned RMT-E-Townhouses & Ecologic. Indeed, some 34 acres of tree-screened townhouses have already been carved from Kilmer Woods on the Cedar Lane side. (These constructed lots are Forest Glen on B189 L 8.01, still owned by Rutgers, and Treetop Apartments on B189 L 8.02, 8.03, and 8.04, privately owned.) Contiguous private lands are also ecologically Kilmer Woods, but with their own zonings. (These lots are a nursing home zoned QP-Quasi-Public on B189 L3, 7.36 acres, and a land-developer's headquarters at The Castle on B189 L4, 16.77 acres, with its own within-lot zoning split of RMT-H-Townhouses & Historic on the north and apparently C/R-Conservation/Recreation on the south—see entry for Castle.)

RUTGERS PROPERTY AT EDISON LINE FROM NEAR CEDAR LANE TO AMTRAK (Tax Sheet 34)

B190 L11 & 12 4.0400 + 0.2200 acres Open land on Edison border owned by Rutgers and adjacent to other small open or semi-open lots.

Edison Border Properties. This strip of land crosses a branch of Mill Brook and lies along the Edison border east of the apartments on Cedar Lane. It extends south to Amtrak property. The status and boundaries are not clear. The zoning map (1989 rev. 1994) shows a long property zoned CS-Community Services stretching all the way from Cedar Lane to the Amtrak property, while the 2001 Tax Map and List shows an ownership change just before Cedar Lane, where a piece of L10 (C.L.A. Management Co.) cuts off L11 & 12 (Rutgers); none are called municipal. Adjacent L13 is listed as Middlesex Water. There is, in any case, a narrow wooded strip running from Cedar Lane to the stream and Amtrak land outside the apartment fence. This has sometimes been mentioned for possible community services use (rescue squad), since that corner of town is hard to reach by emergency equipment based to the south of the rail line.

5. PRIVATELY HELD OPEN SPACE

The category of privately (not municipally) owned open space includes parts of the finest natural area in Highland Park, the Kilmer Woods, where much is the property of a land developer (though other parts of Kilmer Woods are discussed above under nonmunicipal public holdings—Rutgers). The properties listed below are sometimes fully open space (e.g., Buck Woods). Others have been partly built upon now or in the past (Castle, Midland—Ross/Grimes Aerospace) but retain important natural portions. Railroad properties are listed here, as they are well known as wildlife corridors because of their tendency to preserve unoccupied strips alongside, sometimes for many miles. This allows wildlife to move between larger areas such as raiiside parks and undeveloped woods, thus gaining effectively large habitat from the contiguity of several small parcels. Ordinary vacant lots are not usually listed here, but a few with special natural character or special location are. Some properties in this list are in process of acquisition as open space; others may eventually be developed for other purposes but with portions preserved natural.

AMTRAK MAIN LINE EMBANKMENT (Tax Sheet 34)

B190 L13	2.0000
B190 L14	0.5200
B191 L4	9.0810
B191 L5	9.1480
B191 L6	3.4200
B191.01 L7.01	1.4000

Amtrak Main Line Embankment. This extensive strip of land alongside the track alignment is owned by Amtrak corporation except for B191 L4 (Penn RR Co.). An effective wildlife corridor extends along the track embankment, made up of wooded and meadow-like areas along the tracks. It includes narrow but somewhat lengthy wetland strips in low areas (perhaps borrow pits created during construction). Herons, etc., have been seen using the area. Despite active rail use, this narrow strip of land functions as a valuable wildlife corridor down to the Raritan River. It runs alongside a stream (Mill Brook) and wetlands associated either with the stream or with borrow pits along the rail embankment itself. It functions as a link among several small natural open spaces at l'Ambiance, Cenacle, Mill Brook (including wooded municipal property at the end of Cleveland Ave.) and the woods of Rabbi Pesach Raymon Yeshiva. Preserving such linkages have become one of the special goals of modern environmental planning. By linking small areas they produce the ecological benefits of a much larger preserved area since wildlife can travel freely from area to area. This provides a feasible way to preserve an extent of functioning habitat even in urban areas where large unspoiled tracts are unavailable or unaffordable.

AYRES BEACH NATURAL AREA (Red's Marina and Barwood Properties: Portions of Tax Sheets 1, 3, 3.02)

NOTE: The historic name Ayres' Beach Natural Area is proposed for the complex of natural lands upstream of Donaldson Park, as listed below (Red's Marina, Barwood properties and marsh, private lot[s]). [An earlier colonial name for this river-bend area, as shown on the Manning map of 1790, was "Ye Devils Elbow."]

Ayres Beach Natural Area—Red's Marina (Tax Sheet 3)

B75 L16	0.2870	Wetland; river-front boat club Aqua Marine Dev., Inc.
B75 L17	2.000	Wetland; river front, Aqua Marine Dev., Inc.
B4 L2	0.3881	Uncertain status: recorded as "defect in land" in 1975 Tax List; Aqua Marine Dev., Inc.

Ayres' Beach, historically, was Highland Park's swimming area on the Raritan River, used into the twentieth century, with its main building still standing (2001) as part of Red's Marina. It was for many years a chief center of local recreation and social life. Today's facility on the site, Red's Marina, is an active but somewhat derelict-looking site of boat storage and launching piers, with probable site contamination. Middlesex County is considering acquiring Red's Marina and the adjacent marsh. This combined open space, which we suggest officially naming the historically appropriate "Ayres' Beach Natural Area," would abut the more lawn-like Donaldson Park but have a more natural character, particularly at the marsh (next entry). The Environmental Education Center Working Group expects to suggest a stone council circle, nature trail, or other nonstructural features for environmental education here, once ownership is established.

Ayres Beach Natural Area—Freshwater Marsh, Woods, and Open Land (Tax Sheet 3)

B75 L15.02	5.2 acres	Conservation memorandum between Planning Board and owner, Colonial Homes (Barwood Corporation). Possible County purchase.
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The property is listed in the 2001 Tax List as "Middlesex County Conservation Area" and known informally as the Barwood Marsh. This freshwater wetland is prime natural habitat for an urban area, with one of the largest known stands of a state-listed rare plant species. All land below the property line of homes on Skyview Terrace above is supposedly protected by a 1993 memorandum of the Highland Park Planning Board, written as a condition for home construction. The conserved property would include not just the marsh and woods but also a modest strip of land (former dirt road and field) lying above the woods and suitable for a greenway path (as estimated from the EIS map, which was, however, "approximate.") The exact point where protection begins was not staked, however, and so is difficult to identify in the field. Lying between Red's Marina and Donaldson Park, and more natural than either, this wetland is a necessary element for the Highland Park Greenway.

Ayres Beach Natural Area—Contiguous Paper Street and Private Lot (Tax Sheet 3.02)

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B4 L3 0.2529 privately owned riverside land
Paper Donaldson Street municipal paper street extending to the river from Elbert Court
These slivers of largely natural land intervene between Red's Marina to the south and the municipal/Green Acres property of Valley Place Ravine to the north.

BARWOOD MARSH—SEE AYRES BEACH NATURAL AREA, ABOVE

BUCK WOODS (Tax Sheet 3.04)

B47 L27-75 4.0849 Wooded ravine, formerly a stream corridor with the stream now piped. Various utility easements.

Buck Woods. These privately owned lands occupy most of the upper part of a steep-sided, wooded ravine carved out by a stream below the end of South Sixth Avenue. Residents remember it as a place where as children they went to play in the woods and find salamanders by the stream (now piped in the private land but open below in municipal land). The lower portion of the ravine is occupied by wooded municipal land with the remaining open stream, spring, numerous red-backed salamanders, and the Southside Bikeway. There has been considerable interest in town in acquiring also the upper portion as well to form a contiguous ecological unit and a continuous walking trail from the Bartle School/senior housing area down to the river and Donaldson Park. The Environmental Commission considers the ravine environmentally sensitive in the majority of its parts. It is mentioned in the Natural Resource Inventory (1992) as a potential spur trail of the riverside greenway.

CASTLE AND BUELL BROOK (Tax Sheet 34; Kilmer Woods)

B189 L4 16.77 acres Private land within Kilmer Woods.

The Castle. The headquarters of a land developer is now housed in "The Castle," an English-style mansion eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. This and other buildings remain from Johnson Family estates. The natural land here is extensive and of high quality, the equal of the contiguous Rutgers Ecological Preserve and in fact indistinguishable from it by anyone walking the wooded trails that meander back and forth across the nominal borders. The chief feature is Buell Brook (formerly Cedar Creek) flowing through a deep ravine here on its way from the Rutgers Ecological Preserve to the Raritan River in Johnson Park. It is surprisingly scenic and wild appearing as hikers look down into the ravine from the crest. For historical aspects, see discussions in the Cultural Resources Study (1993) and in earlier historical/archaeological surveys by Middlesex County. There is much historic interest and even tourist/visit potential in this combination of a castle-like mansion constructed of stones brought over from genuine old structures in England with a murder tale and other local history. Ecologically, the woods and stream are integral to the Kilmer Woods/Rutgers Ecological Preserve and give Highland Park some of the grandest scenery of all the Kilmer Woods complex. Continuity of the woods provides a wildlife corridor from the Kilmer Woods to Johnson Park and the Raritan River, as well as fine birding and nature study.

CENACLE RETREAT HOUSE (Tax Sheet 34)

B190 L4 (retreat house 9.6600 acres) and L4.1 (prayer garden 3.0000 acres) 44 River Road

Cenacle Retreat House. This former Johnson family mansion and grounds is now a religious retreat house for the Religious Order Our Lady of the Cenacle. Standing at 44 River Road, it lies opposite Johnson Park to the west and Kilmer Woods to the north, giving that intersection a wooded environment on all sides. Grounds are extensive and well tended, with many trees. The retreat house grounds provide a restful sense of open space even to those merely passing by. This is also valuable habitat that supports and connects the adjacent Rutgers Ecological Preserve, Johnson Park, and Mill Brook stream corridor. When the East Coast Greenway/Rutgers bicycle path is constructed along Kilmer Woods and up Cedar Lane (expected 2001/2), the wooded Cenacle property will give continuous wooded surroundings on the south as well as north as that national trail moves up into Highland Park from Johnson Park and the Delaware and Raritan Canal.

DAIRY DELUXE PROPERTY, 811 RARITAN AND NORTH NINTH—INCLUDING OPEN PORTIONS NEXT DOOR TO 16 NORTH NINTH (Tax Sheet 20)

B136 L20-24 No acreage listed 2001 Tax List Part is vacant, behind the Raritan Avenue Dairy Deluxe (owner: ENGA Corporation).

Dairy Deluxe Vacant Lot. The small vacant lot behind the shop's parking lot is edged by tall trees visible from Raritan Avenue as a living screen. For those living in the residential area beyond, these must be a welcome screen from the busy commercial avenue.

DEVONSHIRE ARMS APARTMENT GROUNDS (Tax Sheet 24)

B186 L4-5 0.3825 2 River Road. A 28-unit apartment house on a riverside lot.

Devonshire Arms Apartment Grounds. These riverside apartments were built right between the Route 27 bridge and what is now the Native Plant Reserve. The rear grounds are mostly asphalt parking area (possibly exceeding current residential allowances), but the tiny green bit along the riverbank should not be forgotten. The steep slope down to the river is environmentally sensitive (and collapsing from erosion—trees and fence posts lean already). The narrow strip between asphalt and top of bank is a potential path for greenway users from the Native Plant Reserve to the bridge, if this could be worked out.

L'AMBIANCE (Tax Sheet 34)

B190 L5.01 5+ acres? Condominium apartments with open space, especially along stream and contiguous with wooded railroad and Cenacle properties.

L'Ambiance. These condominiums were constructed in the 1990s on what had been open fields and woods along the stream corridor of Mill Brook, possibly the very route of the Native American Assunpink Trail. A Planning Board memorandum made it a condition for construction that the stream be protected with a landscaped buffer. This has been done, creating a quite attractive stroll along the stream with its rapids, early brick walls, and on the far side the wilder growth of trees and shrubs of the Amtrak embankment.

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LIVINGSTON-WALDRON HOUSE (Tax Sheet 33)

B180 L4 1.19 81 Harrison, mansion and grounds.

Livingston-Waldron House. This historic house is the gem of the Livingston Manor District, with large, landscaped grounds. It remains in use as a private home but with a protective easement on part of the property. Both house and district are eligible for the National Register of Historic Places.

MIDLAND-ROSS/GRIMES AEROSPACE (Tax Sheet 33)

B181 L25-30 6+ acres? Former industrial site behind Cleveland Ave. and adjacent to Amtrak embankment; under DEP cleanup program.

Midland-Ross/Grimes Aerospace. These lots behind the residences of Cleveland Avenue and along the rail line are of mixed character. Parts are impressively wooded by the river (lots 28-30 and perhaps part of 27) and again along both north and south boundaries. The center and east, however, is a concrete-covered former industrial site. It is currently (2001) a DEP remediation project, making "brownfields" designation a possibility. An apparently private road leads in from River Road about opposite paper Hubell St., but access here could be difficult because of traffic through the adjacent tunnel under the rail line. The main access is off Cleveland and North Second. The wooded character of the west end and the north and south edges provides habitat contiguous to Johnson Park and the Amtrak wildlife corridor, with many species reported by residents (some of whom moved there because of the bucolic back yards). It also gives a strong natural character to busy River Road along the park, since both roadsides are wooded.

RED'S MARINA—SEE AYRES BEACH NATURAL AREA

RIVER ROAD ENTRY PARK (Tax Sheet 24)

B183 L1 0.1372 Car lot in the V-intersection of River Road and Lincoln Avenue, seen from the bridge as the entryway to Highland Park

River Road Entry Park. This graveled car lot has stone walls and some landscaping to make it attractive, but nonetheless it gives a misleadingly commercial rather than residential impression of Highland Park to visitors who see it as the first thing when they cross the Route 27 bridge from New Brunswick. It is apparently no longer be needed by the owners, who have a new location elsewhere.

SOUTH EIGHTH AVENUE MINIPARK (PROPOSED) (Tax Sheet 11)

B57 L21-22 0.1466 Proposed minipark on small vacant lot in midblock next to apartment complex.

South Eighth Minipark. This small plot is currently (2001) zoned residential and abuts an apartment complex on the east side of the street between Benner and Eden. It is heavily used by children of that complex and the neighborhood for miniature softball (using a tennis ball and improvised bases) and for winter sledding by small children.

SOUTH FIFTH VACANT LOT BY BUCK WOODS & BIKEWAY (Tax Sheet 3.04)

B47 L82 0.2728 Wooded vacant lot (possible wetland) on Fifth at the base of Buck Woods, contiguous to municipal wooded lots.

South Fifth Vacant Lot. This lot on the wooded side of South Fifth above Valentine has a spring-fed stream at its back and is currently partly under water as the stream spreads into the lot. It was originally municipal land on the edge of the landfill and still has the same wooded character as the contiguous municipal land that the Environmental Commission recommends for conservation/recreation zoning. Salamanders found here indicate functioning streamside habitat. Owners are said to be considering "environmentally sensitive" home construction, but the combination of slope, woods, and wet areas is difficult. The shifting spread of the stream might bring a DEP wetland classification.

SOUTH SIXTH AND MANSFIELD LOT AT THE HEAD OF BUCK WOODS (Tax Sheet 11)

B43 L2 0.1138 Wooded land at the head of Buck Woods Ravine, listed in 2001 Tax List as "VAC.LAND-W/SHED."

South Sixth and Mansfield Lot at the Head of Buck Woods. This wooded lot is currently zoned residential, but the implications of calling it watershed ("W/SHED") are unclear.

WCTC TOWER. (Tax Sheet 3)

B75 L8 2+ acres Road, small building, boardwalk, and radio tower set in wetlands.

WCTC Tower. Though privately owned, these lands have been kept in predominantly natural state, particularly the marsh, which is bridged by a boardwalk to the tower and adjoins the remainder of the marsh over the border into Donaldson Park. This marsh has been categorized as a tidal wetland in the Natural Resource Inventory, where it is described as one of the most important natural sites in Highland Park. The road to the tower is listed as municipally owned lot 7 in the 2001 Tax Sheets.

WOODBIDGE AVENUE VACANT LOT (Tax Sheet 14)

B91 L11 0.1240

B91 L18 0.1240

Vacant land, both lots owned by Acme Motors and currently (2001) for sale.

Woodbridge Avenue Vacant Lot. Its position on a commercial street between a tavern and a filling station virtually assures an ultimate commercial use for this double lot. Nonetheless, the future design of this commercial site interacts with borough plans to change the character of Woodbridge Avenue. Now an almost pure strip of shops with asphalt in front, it has been the subject of borough proposals for relandscaping more in keeping with design goals from the design study done some years ago. That study recommended more pedestrian-friendly fronts with trees, benches, etc., all along Woodbridge Ave.

YESHIVA WOODS (Tax Sheet 34)

B191.01 L7.02 4.1000

Woods, parking lot, and playground owned by Rabbi Pesach Raymon Yeshiva.

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Yeshiva Woods. These woods lie above Mill Brook at a linking of two wildlife corridors: along the Amtrak embankment and along Mill Brook. Nearby residents report such wetland wildlife as egrets and herons, as well as deer, birds, small mammals, and salamanders. Near the Amtrak embankment is a well used de facto footpath for people passing between Edison and Highland Park, the same route taken by deer. To the northwest, the Corps of Engineers plans a fenced concrete flood-diversion ditch and second culvert under the embankment for a partial release of floodwaters backing into this area and nearby homes.

YMHA/YWHA (Tax Sheet 1)

B1 L1 4.2135 YMHA/YWHA of Highland Park.

YMHA/YWHA. The yard around the buildings serves as quasi-public open space and has many trees and good views. The wooded slope down to the river is steep and constitutes environmentally sensitive natural habitat. A utility easement at the river's edge preserves the extreme lower portion without, however, giving an incentive for natural restoration and anti-erosion plantings. The former Rice mansion at the corner overlooking the Raritan River and Route 27 bridge is one of the grand historic homes of early Highland Park. It is, however, marred at the front façade by a connection to the main Y building. This highland had significance in the Revolutionary War, and artifacts are said to turn up occasionally from the soil.

6. STREAM CORRIDORS

Geologically, *Highland Park* rises directly above the Raritan River so that rainfall (and glacial melt before that) has tended to head quickly down toward the river, cutting channels. This originally gave Highland Park many short streams radiating out from the highest points and falling toward the Raritan. This natural pattern is partly obscured today by the piping or straightening of several streams. The main remaining streams listed below are the ones likely to be given management guidelines if the Middlesex County Model Stream Corridor Protection Ordinance were adopted, as the county has recommended to municipalities. Some small streams, ditches, and drainage channels are omitted here, but many of these are within parks and other properties listed in the sections above.

AYRES BEACH STREAMS AND FRESHWATER MARSH (Tax Sheet 3.07)

Ayres Beach Streams and Marsh. It is not clear what remains of the natural drainage pattern of this area after some filling and construction of Red's Marina. There are streams (or at least drainage routes) at each end of the freshwater marsh. The one at the north end is not mapped, and may be less an actual stream than a complex of intermittent runoff channels and a constructed drainage swale required by DEP during residential construction uphill. The swale is deliberately designed so as not to shoot water directly and forcefully to the river (which would destroy riverside emergent vegetation of special value), but to diffuse runoff into the marsh. The stream at the south end is a well-defined straight channel separating the reed-filled marsh from Donaldson Park. Its lower end at least is tidal.

BUCK WOODS STREAM BELOW SOUTH SIXTH AVENUE (Partly piped; Tax Sheet 3)

Buck Woods Stream. This stream remains highly important ecologically in its lower reaches, running through The Meadows, even though it has been piped and filled over in its upper reaches. These now lie more or less beneath such structures as Borough Hall, the Senior/Youth Recreation Center, and senior-housing high-rises, as well as the upper part of Bucks Woods, where it could be opened up again if the land ever comes into public ownership. A set of springs in the side of the Buck Woods Ravine (on municipal property below paper Graham Street) must once have been only a side source of water for the long stream flowing from above. Today, the springs serve to originate a small surface stream that spreads out into a wetland on the back of a privately owned lot on South Fifth. When flows are higher, it also continues downhill through a channel to join the open portion remaining from the piped stream just below the Southside Bikeway. Red-backed salamanders abound under logs all around the springs and wetland. Below, the larger portion of the stream harbors muskrat, northern water snake, and other creatures whose presence indicates that flowing through a pipe in the upper reaches does not prevent a fairly high water quality and ecological value in the lower. It probably feeds some flow into the tidal marsh at and below the WCTC tower before entering the Raritan. Its mouth and lowest reaches are on land that has been ceded to Donaldson Park, though wilder in appearance so that many people assume the park ends before the stream.

BUELL BROOK IN KILMER WOODS AND JOHNSON PARK (Tax Sheet 34)

Buell Brook. Buell Brook (formerly Cedar Creek) flows through the whole breadth of Kilmer Woods in the north part of Highland Park, often in a deep-cut channel with a wilder look than anything one expects in so urban an area. Passing into Johnson Park (where it has only sparse streamside plantings), it feeds water to a riverside pond known for water birds and turtles before emptying over a spillway into the river

CLEVELAND AVENUE STREAM (UNNAMED) (Tax Sheet 33)

Cleveland Avenue Stream. This small stream (name unknown) is actually quite important environmentally despite its present degenerated state. The open stream begins at culverts beneath River Road carrying runoff from Midland-Ross/Grimes Aerospace and residences along Cleveland, but the small stretch from there to the river remains wooded and flows past the Native Plant Reserve and Johnson Park. It is legally within Johnson Park (on formerly municipal land ceded to the County), but is seen from the contiguous Native Plant Reserve as the next natural stopping point for visitors on their way toward the ponds farther into Johnson Park. This might be where children would go to take water samples safely. The bottom end is tidal. Birds flock to this small wooded oasis amid more open lawns. Deer and small mammals drink here, to judge by tracks, and salamanders can be found by turning logs.

CROWELLS ROAD STREAM (Tax Sheet 3)

Crowells Road Stream. Many Highland Park residents do not even know of the existence of this remarkable stream in the far southeast corner of town, with its gorge-like upper portion and meandering lower portion. One has to peer past the apartment-house trash bin and over the drop-off at the Crowells Road/Donaldson Street intersection to see the surprisingly wild sight of a stream many feet below, deeply cut through rock. The banks are spread, in April and early May, with pink and white spring beauty (*Claytonia virginica*).

JOHNSON PARK SMALL STREAMS/DITCHES(Tax Sheet 34 but not drawn on the map)

Johnson Park Small Stream(s). Johnson Park has "drainage ditches" that may once have been streams, but still have trees and a potential for further planting and naturalization.

MEADOWS INTERMITTENT STREAM AND WETLANDS (Tax Sheet 3)

Intermittent Stream in The Meadows. This unnamed intermittent stream and wetland at the edge of the Raritan is little known in Highland Park, buried as it is in the thick vegetation of the lower part of The Meadows at the bottom of the former dump. It is, however, clearly marked on DEP tidelands maps running up from the riverside about halfway between Donaldson Park and the Edison border. This wetland/tideland spur makes a valuable ecological niche, with its sudden array of wetland grasses and other low plants amidst woodland around it.

MILL BROOK (Tax Sheets 18, 19, 28, 30, 31, and especially 34)

NOTE: This forked stream corridor forms the border of Highland Park in its upper reaches, passes residences and Johnson Park, then empties into the Raritan River. Branches enter from the east (in blocks 156 and 190). It feeds the ecologically important Mill Brook Pond by the railroad bridge. Upper and lower portions are divided by the culvert under the Amtrak embankment. Adopting the Middlesex County Model Stream Corridor Protection Ordinance would provide for natural stream buffer zones while "grandfathering" most current uses on lots in the various blocks listed below.

Mill Brook Upper Portion , from Edison to Cleveland Avenue and Amtrak Culvert

Tax Sheet 18: B123, 125, 126, 129

Tax Sheet 19: B146, B139

Tax Sheet 28: B145 (tip only).

Tax Sheet 30: B155, B156, B157, and B147.

Tax Sheet 31: B151 B152, B153, and B154.

On the east end of its course through Highland Park, at Brookhill Avenue, the stream emerges from piping under Route 27. Here it is briefly a quite visible patch of greenery on busy Raritan Avenue at the entry to the borough (B123, L29 & perhaps part of 30, though 30 also has a structure). It then runs through the back yards of residences, but the public still gains value from seeing into these partly wooded areas from adjacent streets, and from the natural value of stream buffers preserving water quality and providing habitat.

Mill Brook, Lower Portion From Culvert near Cleveland Avenue to the River (Tax Sheet 34)

B188

B190

B191

From the dead end of Cleveland (municipal), Mill Brook flows by culvert under the Amtrak embankment (B191) and then in the open past Cedar Lane apartments and l'Ambiance condominiums (B190) to Johnson Park (B188) and the river. A branch enters from the east in B190 near the culvert outlet. Ownership and public access varies, and there are major utility easements.

At the l'Ambiance condominiums, the plan as approved by the Planning Board at the time of l'Ambiance construction shows a landscaped section of stream with almost the air of a mountain stream as it drops over rock shelves and past brick walls that seem the remains of mill or farm structures. The only easement for this area seems to be a blanket easement (sanitary sewer, potable water). No definite trace in this area seems known today of the Native American Assunpink Trail, but it is said to have passed here, following and crossing Mill Brook before heading toward the Delaware River by fording the Raritan or following it on what is now River Road. Johnson Pond (created by damming Mill Brook) no longer exists, though some maps still show it.

PARKWAY STREAM (PIPED THROUGH LIVINGSTON MANOR AND NATIVE PLANT RESERVE) (Tax Sheet 24)

Parkway Stream (Piped). Though now in a pipe, this stream once flowed along The Parkway (a planned pedestrian walk from Livingston Manor to the River in the original concept by Watson Whittlesey; see discussion above under The Parkway). Its "mouth" at the river is now a pipe, but it provides a continuous inflow of fresh water to the river and tends to be a spot at which belted kingfishers hang out. Leakage from the pipe seems to benefit at least one patch of vegetation in the Native Plant Reserve, supporting cattail and ferns.

RARITAN RIVER (Special Attention to Tax Sheets 1 and 3.02)

Raritan River. The riverside as a whole is largely either public property already or proposed for acquisition (Red's Marina). Between the Route 27 bridge and the Valley Place Ravine (blocks 1, 2, and 3), however, residences on the hill above have properties extending downhill to the Raritan River, where there is a utility easement.

VALLEY PLACE STREAM (Tax Sheet 3.02)

Valley Place Stream. This active stream runs in a steep gorge off South Adelaide Avenue opposite Valley Place. A path along its high bank gives attractive views and is an important public access point to the Raritan River, blocked elsewhere by private properties. The meeting of stream and river is a good birding spot.