The Burnham Park Association celebrates 75 years

By

Dr. Lynn L. Siebert, President
April 19, 2023
Thank you all for joining us in this kickoff celebration of our 75th anniversary. I also want to thank Rick and Paula for their fascinating presentations. My part of the evening will be to provide you with an overview of BPA’s work over the past decades.

Like many others who live in this neighborhood, I was drawn to its winding roads, its magnificent mature trees and its unique blend of a natural oasis so close to the busy heart of Morristown. All of us value “a touch of the wild” – whether it be watching the osprey dive into the pond at Burnham Park or seeing the dappled sunlight filtering through the trees of Jones Woods. We cannot help being renewed and inspired by the natural elements of our area.

With that understanding of our mutual connection, I wanted to share photos from the many decades of BPA’s work and illustrate why we should all take pride in what has been accomplished over the years.

Don and I moved here in 1977...and quickly became aware that much of what we valued in the area was potentially at risk. The BPA, at that time headed by Ken Allen, was especially involved with trying to protect Burnham Park from the degradation it was experiencing and here is where photos tell the story:
Conditions in the park before BPA, late 1970s and early 1980s – before BPA’s active involvement
Neglect and abuse were the norms...
Additional neglect
1970s-1980s:

- **1976** – Morristown cut down a large grove of oak trees in the wetlands area of the park adjacent to the current parking lot for the baseball field – to further potential additions of sports facilities to park.
- The Town approached the Burnham heirs to further amend the deed to allow more sports facilities in the park. The BPA reached out to the heirs who refused to amend the deed and reaffirmed the original intent with “preserving as much as possible its natural state as woodland”.
- **In early 1980s,** the Town used Burnham Park as a dump site - 85 truckloads worth of construction debris from the Ann Street garage construction were dumped in the park’s wetland area. Large piles of rusting wires, twisted metal, concrete chunks, macadam, broken glass, shards of ceramic and concrete pipes were left exposed – with no fencing or covering – ignoring concerns that BPA voiced for the safety of children (who climbed those piles) nor for the environmental degradation the debris and its runoff posed to the park’s ecosystem. BPA contacted NJDEP and threatened to share photos with the press...at which point (months later) the Town removed the debris.
- **1988** - The Town proposed adding a football field to BP despite deed restrictions. There were efforts to remove the deed restrictions altogether. The heirs once again supported preservation. Also BPA worked to find a more appropriate site (Sussex Ave/near Streeter Pool) and even contributed to the purchase of new football uniforms.
- **Late 1980’s** - BPA supported Town efforts to secure Community Block Grant for needed repairs to BP.
- **1988** - BPA secured and donated to the town a longterm landscape design plan created by landscape architect (and BPA member) Carolle Huber. That plan became the cornerstone for Phase II of the Park Beautification and which guided our planting efforts/Arbor Days (starting 1989) ever since.
BPA supports Morristown’s efforts to revitalize Burnham Park in summer, 1990
BPA steps up to identify problems and to help restore the park

Proposal to upgrade town park is approved

By CHRISTINE PEDENCO

MORRISTOWN — The council has adopted emergency ordnances and the town's final version of a BPA plan to renovate Burnham Park.

The plan is scheduled to go out for bids next week, and the work is expected to begin in the fall.

The board, headed by Washington Street and Burnham Park in the town's center, is used by residents of Morristown and Mattawa Township. According to the plans, the park will be expanded, and the walkways will be widened and the whole area will be revitalized.

More plans and new trees will be added, and walkways will be widened.

The council has approved the Burnham Park plan, which includes new trees and walkways around the park.

The park will be expanded and the walkways will be widened, and the whole area will be revitalized.

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BPA secures Carolle Huber’s longterm landscape/beautification plan (1988), supports Morristown’s block grant applications and initiates annual Arbor Days (1989) ...
In Oct. 1990, BPA replanted the entire lower pond island...
Playing (?!?) in the mud
BPA’s creativity was on display with our “float” for the Township’s 250th birthday celebration – Judy Perry and Barbara Klingsporn transformed Bill Claxton’s truck to portray our neighborhood - and our precision wheelbarrow team performed alongside the float in the Twp parade.
Beautification efforts continued...with Town/Township cleanups and Arbor Day plantings every year since 1989....
Annual Arbor Days
In 2000-2003, BPA collaborated with Morristown, the Morris Land Conservancy, the Whippany River Watershed Action Committee, OMNI Environmental and others to address the ever-expanding goose populations whose extensive waste degraded the water quality in the pond and the entire experience of visiting the park...the result: the Riparian Buffer Zone.
The Riparian Buffer Zone, 2000-03
Caring for the RBZ over the years: Removing invasives (with Rutgers Extension help, 2018)
The RBZ in 2020 – allowing native plants to flourish
Other BPA efforts in Burnham Park: Collaboration with Town Recreation Department on selecting playground, benches, etc. for the park: Playground dedication (June 2005)

BPA Bench Donation/Donation  (January 2007)

Worked with American Legion Post 59, Robert Tracey, and multiple veteran’s groups to plant the Herman Baldinger memorial river birch grove/bench (Sept. 27, 1998)

Collaborating with Morristown Rotary re. planting the “Liberty Elm Tree” (2009)
Celebrating 100 years of Burnham Park:

I am always inspired by Frederick Burnham’s visionary statement, addressed to then Mayor of Morristown, Arthur S. Pierson and published in the *Daily Record* on April 21, 1911:

“Dear Sir:
For some three or four years Mrs. Burnham and myself have been discussing the plan of giving a piece of ground, fitted for the purpose, to the Town of Morristown, for a Public Park. In our judgment this should be situated so near the green as to be within easy walking distance of the residences of our town, especially of those which have not much land surrounding them.

Our idea has been that this ground should be used not as a playground for the benefit of noisy ball games or such other games as are attended by noise and uproar, but rather as a place where tired families can, during the spring, summer and autumn days, obtain that refreshment which is only obtainable apart from the noise and confusion of a crowd.

We have thought that such a piece of ground should contain twenty-five or thirty acres available for walks, resting places, with cool spring water, ponds and streams, where the pleasures of fishing, and boating could be had, and fine trees under whose wide spreading branches mothers could take their children and find the rest and enjoyment which such a park would afford....”
Park Centennial Celebration (April 2011)
More activities/ collaborations: with AHNA, Rutgers, Arts by the People, and others:
Rainbarrel Workshops (2013,2014)

Chili Cookoff (Oct. 2014)
Addling efforts – with BPA’s donated inflatable boat(s)

Jon Darwell and Douglas Vorolieff

Don Siebert and Tom Bowmaster
Clean Communities work (Town and Township, Green Strip and Burnham Park)
Green Strip/Burnham Park/Jones Woods activities:

- Devined Cedars at base of Green Strip
- Assisted Twp in planting seedlings
- Hired Ecologist Jared Rosenbaum to advise on status of Green Strip after aggressive tree removal (2019)
- Removed invasive stilt grass in Jones Woods and on Green Strip, planted native meadow mix in both areas (Jan. 2022)
- Removed invasives in Burnham Park, March 2022 (during snow squall)

Paula Zimin (in red) and John Landau lop invasive vines in BP
John and Susan Landau prepare meadow mix, Don and Lynn Siebert and Rick Bye spread seeds
Environmental Activism, Advocacy
JONES WOODS

TIMELINE:
• 1981 – Morristown sells its “surplus” 38 acres in Jones Woods to developer John Cortese (little publicity for sale)
• 1984 (March) – Mt. Laurel zoning applied to Cortese property
• 1984-1987 – Planning Board hearings on Cortese development to build 198 condos in Jones Woods
  BPA organizes: hires multiple experts (Attorney Lou Rago, works with Quentin Schlieder [County Park Commission Director], Ed Rutsch [industrial archeologist], Ray Stein [former NJ State biologist, Director of Biostar], Staats Brokaw [stormwater mgt], and other experts) to help our case
  BPA experts document endangered and threatened species (wood turtle), reclassifying wetlands as “exceptional resource value” which required larger buffer zones, identified problems with stormwater management, the dam, and identified steep slopes, mature and contiguous woodlands, 7 declining bird species, and other environmentally sensitive factors (along with absence of infrastructure to support the development and substandard ingress/egress to site).
• September 29, 1987 – Planning Board rejects Cortese’s Site Plan
• 1989-90 – Cortese resubmits new plan, broken into phases
• May 4, 1992 – Township Planning Board formalizes its resolution to grant preliminary conditional approval for 157 units – subject to 30 conditions (sewers, water supply, water pressure, dam repair, etc.)
• 1992-1995 – Cortese goes bankrupt before building or selling, various banks foreclose on property and look for buyers
• December 28, 1995 – Twp Mayor Ostergaard purchases Jones Woods thanks to behind the scenes effort of BPA friend, attorney Tim Tweed...10 acres (including pond) bought with open space funds and preserved, 20 acres bought with Twp funds – and “reserved” for possible future affordable housing
Jones Woods organizing (before computers)

Township Mayor Sue Ostergaard purchases Jones Woods, Dec. 28, 1995

Jones Woods Reminder

**LAST DIO MEETING**

**DATE:** Sunday, September 21, 1987

**TIME:** 6 pm

**PLACE:** Assembly Hall, opposite Police Station
30 Roadend Ave.
Convent Station

Your presence will help us to continue the planning board. We cannot agree with our neighborhood and do not want an extra 300-400 cars coming and going from the neighborhood (and bringing extra traffic to surrounding streets).

WE NEED YOUR SUPPORT IN THESE LAST TWO MEETINGS! SHOW YOUR CONCERN AND COME!

Contributions will be gratefully accepted to meet the expenses we have incurred on our behalf. Checks should be payable to "The Burnham Park Association" for Jones Woods funds, and sent to: Call Out, Treasurer
3 Parkview Plaza
Northwatch, NJ 07960

If you are approximately $2,000 short and ask you to be generous. The expenses we have agreed to be an excellent, but they are not cheap.

Questions? Call Paul Charleworthy at 538-9892, Lynn Hubert at 540-2366, Nancy Lovett at 405-0440 or Stanton Pioce at 538-0430

Jones Woods to be developed.

- 199 units
- 42 Mt. Laurel low- & moderate-income units

Traffic flow undecided.

- Developer wants Picatinny Road as only access.
- Township planner supports Picatinny Road entrance.
- Members of Planning Board want full-use entrance onto Hillcrest Road.

Major safety concerns are voiced:

- Hillcrest PTA/schools worry that increased traffic will decrease children’s safety.
- Burnham Park Association supports developer’s desire to use Picatinny Road only.

Construction to begin soon.

- Developer plans Spring of 1986 start.
- Planning Board will decide on traffic flow during October or November.

Strong visible presence is essential.

- We need people to attend Planning Board meetings in October and November.
- We need 100% membership in the Burnham Park Association.

Will It Be Safe To Walk The Streets Of Burnham Park?

Stand Up and Be Counted

Proposed Development May Mean Busy, Unsafe Streets
JONES WOODS followups:

- **February 1999**: Hillcrest School wins $2,000 grant, “What is your ecological address?” from the Dodge Foundation to utilize Jones Woods as a living classroom for ecological Studies (with documentation and help from BPA)
- **2000’s** – BPA works with Lynn’s Drew colleague, Dr. Sara Webb, forest ecologist, to construct a deer exclosure in Jones Woods for her students to monitor the impact of preventing deer predation in forest environments
- **2010–18** – Tom Bowmaster assumes trail making duties and carves out trails in Jones Woods and on the Green Strip
- **2019 onward**: Rick Bye takes up the trailmaster mantle after Tom moves away...and, working with Bill Foelsch of the Township’s Parks and Recreation Dept, finalizes nearly 3 miles of blazed trails in Jones Woods along with an improved trail on the Green Strip. These trails became a refuge for all of us during the pandemic closures...and led to many more people “discovering” Jones Woods. It also led to the recognition of Jones Woods as a “Township of Morris Park Preserve”
Delbarton CCRC – an 11 year battle which preserved 188 additional acres as parkland and saved Washington Valley

• **1996** NJDEP’s Level 3 Environmental Review of Washington Valley results in tight restrictions of sewer service in the Washington Valley area (Agreed to by the State, Morris Township, Morris County and Delbarton

• **1997-98**: Delbarton proposes development of extensive Continuing Care Retirement Facility (CCRC) which would require removal of 3,500 trees, over 350,000 cubic yards of soil (to be trucked to unknown disposal site) and would significantly degrade the C-1 (most sensitive) stream, undermine the experience of history at Jockey Hollow, violate the state plan, violate the sewer service limits, degrade other sensitive natural and historic resources of Washington Valley and damage the habitat of the Indiana bat, a national and state endangered species.

• **July 26, 2006**: The NJDEP denies expansion of sewer service to Delbarton – killing the project

• **July 23, 2008**: The Trust for Public Land gathers $13,750,000 from multiple sources to purchase the 188 acres of Delbarton land slated for the CCRC ultimately conveys that to the Morris County Park Commission to amplify the adjacent Lewis Morris County Park. TPL is submitting an application this week for funding from the Morris County Open Space Trust Fund. Additional funding for the purchase is expected to come from the Morris County Park Commission, The Township of Morris Open Space Trust Fund, the Morris County Open Space Trust Fund, the Great Swamp Watershed Association, The Trust for Public Land, Morris County Municipal Utilities Commission and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program.
Decades of Environmental Advocacy, Stewardship in the community

BURNHAM PARK

Worked with Burnham heirs to reassert deed restrictions and prevent further tree removals and the expansion of sports facilities throughout the park (1976)

Stopped the use of Burnham Park as a dump for construction fill from the Ann Street garage (1985)

Stopped staging of noisy carnivals in Burnham Park (1970s)

Assisted the Town of Morristown in securing Community Block Grant funding for the beautification of Burnham Park (late 1980s)

Donated long-term landscape design for Burnham Park (courtesy of landscape architect, Carol Fletcher Huber) to the Town (1980s)

Worked with the Town Council and Police in planning July 4th fireworks - assisting in identifying and taping off safety hazards, sensitive areas and protecting area property (1980s)

Worked with the Town in replanting the island (1990)
Worked with the Town in rededicating Burnham Park on its 80th anniversary, 1991

Worked with Town and Little League to find alternate field for peewee football league - and contributed to the purchase of uniforms for the new Town/Township league at Sussex (1990s)

Initiated Annual Arbor Days in 1989 - an ongoing effort - donating money and labor for extensive planting, weeding, mulching, pruning and cleanup of the park by volunteers. To date - BPA has given many thousands of dollars and thousands of hours of labor to install over 3,500 plantings (more 150 of them trees) in Burnham Park

Recognized significant community spirit by donating, planting and dedicating trees to the Burnham family members, municipal officials, community activists (Dot Harvey, etc.), and multiple BPA members.

Worked with the Township Parks & Recreation department in constructing and maintaining trails through the Green Strip and Jones Woods (2016-present)

Developed and proposed trails for Burnham Park wild area (2017)

Provided a free movie night in BP (July 2019)
Contributed a tree to the Morristown High School Tree Planting Committee’s beautification effort (1990s)

Supported the formation of the Friends of Jones Woods (in 1990s-early 2000s) - to work cooperatively with municipalities to manage and care for open spaces

Contribute to Township T-ball team, Town/Township junior football league, the Hillside Hose Company and a variety of other civic groups

Donated money towards competition costs incurred by worthy BP area young people such as Olympic hopefuls Greg Klingsporn (rowing) and James Borin (fencing) as well as Miss Deaf New Jersey finalist, Elke Pieters

Participated in Morris Township’s 250th Year Anniversary Celebration with an elaborate float (Bill Claxton’s truck decorated by Judy Perry, Barbara Klingsporn) and the premiere performance by our very own Precision Marching Wheelbarrow team

Donated two inflatable boats for use by Addling Team to access goose nests on the island in the lower pond (2010s)
IN THE WIDER COMMUNITY:

Saved Jones Woods: Successfully fought a 14 year battle (1981-1995) to stop inappropriate development in Jones Woods - ultimately working with Morris Township to preserve it as Open Space.

Defeated the CCRC: Joined forces with the Washington Valley Association, the NJ Highlands Coalition, the National Park Service and other opponents of Delbarton’s proposed CCRC in an 11 year battle (1997-2006 – final resolution 2008) – resulting in the preservation of 188 acres which were conveyed to the Morris County Park Commission. Those acres became part of Lewis Morris Park. They were purchased from Delbarton/St. Mary’s Abbey for $13.75 million by the Trust for Public Land, and finalized on July 28, 2008.

Preserved Washington Valley: Joined forces with the Washington Valley Association, the Great Swamp Watershed Association, the Park Commission and others to successfully oppose other ill-conceived plans for this historic and environmentally sensitive area including a) extension of Rt. 24 highway to Washington Valley b) a large reservoir c) a psychiatric facility and d) the County jail. We also supported successful efforts to establish the Washington Valley as both a National and State Historic District.

Received international recognition: National Arbor Day Foundation Project Award: BPA was one of only five organizations in the world – and the only grassroots one - to win the prestigious National Arbor Day Foundation Project Award of 2005. BPA was nominated to complete the extensive application and was among five organizations selected worldwide that year: Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust (Seattle, WA), Tree Power (Washington DC), the International Olympic Committee (Switzerland) and OPPD Arboretum (Omaha, Nebraska).
Encouraged participation in area governance - Various members serve on Morristown and Morris Township Environmental Commissions, Open Space Commission, Recreation Advisory Board and Beautification Committee, Planning Board. Others regularly attended Town Council, Planning Board, Township Committee and other meetings to stay abreast of news which might have bearing on community.

Participated in Planning on local, county and state levels: community reviews of the Township Master Plan and the formulation of the Open Space and Recreation Plan and monitored State Development and Redevelopment plans (2000s) to protect sensitive natural and historical resources in our area. Follow current developments re. forest management plans.

Worked 10 years (1986-1996) to successfully limit expansion of sewer service into the Washington Valley – Securing a Level 3 Environmental Review by the NJDEP which recognized the potential for overdevelopment and degradation of critical natural resource (including vital water resources, recharge areas, C-1 streams, etc.) in Washington Valley. The result: the NJDEP imposed strict limits on adding sewer capacity – limiting sewers to the 110 homes then suffering septic system failures and setting strict limits on any new capacity assigned to Delbarton.
1994-Exposed illegal dumping at Western Ave. Reservoir - and raised awareness of the problem, working to develop effective strategies to combat the problem

Objected to improper dumping in the wetlands area of the Green Strip, obtaining an official warning from the NJDEP for the Township and JCP&L for doing that (2019-2020).

And in recent years:
Financially supported environmental education by the Whippany River Watershed Action Committee’s Bioblitz events - featuring educational booths, expert led invasives and nature walks (2022, 2023)

Donated additional trees in Burnham Park during Covid/Master Plan reviews...with two new trees around pool area and two additional ones near basketball court (2021, 2022).

Researched/ Advocated for treatment of three large ash trees in Burnham Park – which did receive Neem oil and then emamectin benzoate treatments in 2020 and 2022

Cleared invasives in Burnham Park, Jones Woods and the Green Strip (2019, 2022) and planted native species/pollinator mix of plants in JW (2022) and the Green Strip

Worked with Morristown on Revitalization plan for Burnham Park (1989-1990 and 2020-2023)

Lightened neighborhood spirits during the pandemic with Flamingo “Flocking” (July 2021)
Looking ahead

Plans to
a. Plant native species trees, plants, flowers, shrubs in Green Strip (The Township is planning to plant 6 new trees in the Green Strip: 2 white oaks, 2 red maples, 2 native flowering dogwoods this Spring!)
b. Hired expert Mike Van Clef to come out this spring, inventory and prepare priority plan for removing invasives in Jones Woods and Green Strip (over multiple years)
c. Ongoing work with Town of Morristown to revitalize Burnham Park according to new Master Plan
d. Working with Township on
   - installing curbing or barriers for ends of Green Strip
   - better marking for Green Strip trail
   - ongoing maintenance for Jones Woods

e. New ideas/projects as the board/community desires

With planting, cleaning and battling to preserve what we treasure, we have formed friendships and a community that is still “working” after 75 years! We owe it all to our BPA community members, past and present, who have given and continue to give so much of themselves to make BPA such a unique and truly special organization!!
Favorite photos