



# MTLC



## MIDDLETOWN TOWNSHIP LAND CONSERVANCY

Save Open Space

Newsletter

Winter 2004

PO Box 4103, Elwyn, PA 19063

www.mtlc.org

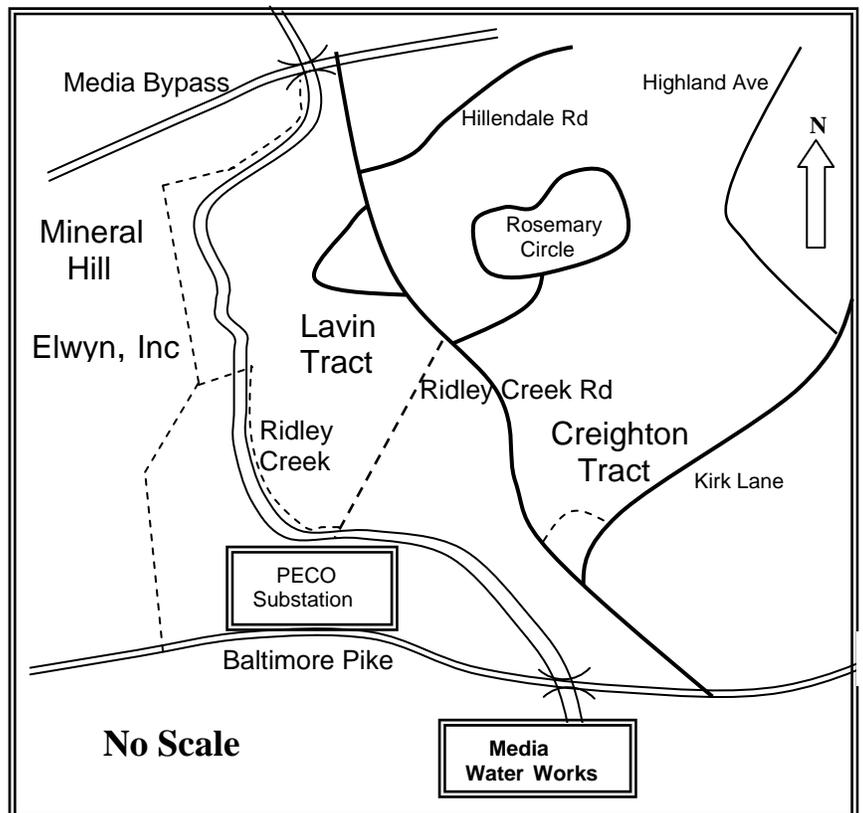
### MTLC NEEDS YOUR FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR TWO MAJOR PROJECTS: *Protecting Our Drinking Water & SEPTA R-3 Expansion*

#### **The Fight to Safeguard the Source of Our Drinking Water**

The superb quality of Ridley Creek and the integrity of our drinking water are threatened. Three major developments are planned on both sides of the Ridley just upstream from the water intake of the Philadelphia Suburban Water Company (now Aqua Pennsylvania) plant in Media.

**Mineral Hill Property** Since 1994, when Elwyn Institute, Inc. first announced plans to sell for development a portion of their property historically known as Mineral Hill, MTLC has battled to preserve this unique and sensitive area from development. This 79-acre parcel of land is bordered by Baltimore Pike, the Media Bypass and Ridley Creek. Mineral Hill is so named because it is one of three sites in the nation identified as rich in certain rare minerals and has been the site of mineral collection for almost two hundred years. (See Roger Mitchell's article on page 3)

In January of 2002, the Middletown Township Council unanimously approved the Henderson Group's preliminary subdivision and land development plan to build an office complex on the Elwyn Property. The current proposal for the site calls for three four-story buildings, totaling 375,000 square feet clustered at the top of the hill and surrounded by 1,600 parking spaces. The site slopes continuously, sometimes steeply, all the way to Ridley Creek. The top of the site, where most of the grading and impervious cover will occur, is a degraded serpentine barren, a naturally impervious surface which does not retain water well. Unfortunately, the natural water filtration and ground water rejuvenation system which nature has built up for thousands of years on the lower slopes will be severely damaged or lost entirely by the artificial storm water retention systems and grading "necessary" to support construction above.



**Lavin Tract** This 44-acre property located mostly in Upper Providence Township on Ridley Creek Road between Rosemary Circle and Hillendale Road was formerly the site of the Brookwood Home. A proposal for a town home development on the Upper Providence side galvanized the neighbors into organizing a conservation group, Upper

Lavin Tract (Continued from page 1)

Providence for Open Space (UPOS). The Lavin property was deemed to be by far the most environmentally sensitive piece of property in the township by the many residents who attended council meetings. UPOS urged the Upper Providence Township Council to put a question about open space spending to voters on the May 2003 ballot. By a 2 to 1 margin the residents of Upper Providence Township approved that the Township incur debt up to \$6,000,000 for the purpose of financing the acquisition of land for open space within the township.

It was with great disappointment, and some outrage, that the residents of Upper Providence learned that their council was not going forward with the condemnation process, stating that the ballot question was not about the Lavin Tract only, but about open space spending in general throughout the township. This decision by council cleared the way for the current developer, C. S. Properties, to move forward with their proposal for a clustered residential development of approximately two dozen single family homes.

**Creighton Tract** In May 2003, Upper Providence Council approved another development just down the road from the Lavin Tract. The Creighton Tract, 36 acres bordered by Ridley Creek Road, Kirk Lane and Highland Avenue is to be the site of 50 new homes. The clear-cutting and regrading of the upper steep slopes of the property will lead to greatly increased storm water run-off into Ridley Creek within a few hundred feet of the water company intake.

**MTLC's Position** MTLC is opposing each of these developments in an effort to force a regional approach in considering the combined impact on water quality, sedimentation and downstream erosion. Since all three developments have been approved by the respective township governments, it has been necessary to pursue alternative actions. For the first time in it's twenty-three year history, MTLC has hired an attorney to contest approvals by local township authorities for these development proposals. In addition, MTLC and other local environmental groups conducted a letter-writing campaign and persuaded the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to hold public hearings to consider the combined impact on the environment of all three developments prior to issuing DEP permits for construction for any of them. The hearing will take place this spring. The date, time and place are yet to be determined.

Since MTLC must be prepared to hire experts to testify at these hearings in the near future, we are asking for your financial support now. By joining or renewing your membership in MTLC and/or especially by making an additional contribution, you can help to ensure that we can move ahead in our effort to protect the quality of one of the most basic of our natural resources: the water we drink.

### **The SEPTA R-3 Train to West Chester: A Good Idea Whose Time Has Come - Again**

MTLC is interested, and we hope many of you are equally interested, in bringing back passenger train service to West Chester. MTLC believes there are good economic reasons for refurbishing the whole line now, in the process relieving the considerable traffic congestion on Baltimore Pike and on arteries near West Chester, as well as providing an alternate means of travel.

In 1984, after about one hundred years of service, and because of dwindling ridership on the line, SEPTA closed the West Chester Local and made the R-3 terminus at Elwyn. In the 19 years since, however, much development has occurred in and around the Borough of West Chester. It is now the hub of considerable commercial, industrial and educational activity. Further, West Chester University, Cheney University and Williamson School of Mechanical Trades are close to the rail line and Neumann College is just a short bus shuttle ride from the Glen Riddle Station.

The right of way and the track all the way to West Chester from Elwyn are still there, with 99% of the track still being used at least occasionally by the West Chester Historic Railroad, the Glen Mills Quarry, or by SEPTA itself, training engineers near Lenni. However, almost all of the rail stations—with the fine exception of Glen Mills—are gone or are in deplorable condition.

Delaware County Council, in 1997, asked SEPTA to do a feasibility study on bringing back the line to West Chester. SEPTA's consultant on this—Vollmer Associates—while producing some hopeful projections of ridership if the entire line to West Chester was rebuilt, in fact seriously studied only the three and one-half mile run from Elwyn to Wawa, with an intermediate stop at Glen Riddle. The Vollmer Report stated that more than 600 additional parking spots at Wawa and Glen Riddle would be created, but the total cost would be over \$40,000,000 and it probably won't be done until 2010.

SEPTA R-3 (Continued from page 2)

MTLC wishes to focus attention on the need, and demonstrate the demand for restoring train service **NOW** between Philadelphia and the ever-expanding western suburbs, by organizing a petition drive beginning in April. The petition will read:

**We the undersigned encourage SEPTA to actively explore the restoration of the R-3 line between Elwyn and its original terminus in West Chester. In that the restoration of service between Elwyn and Wawa has already been planned, we urge SEPTA to pursue the project as expeditiously as possible.**

We hope you will sign and help circulate the petitions, which MTLC plans to present to SEPTA and to County Council Members in Delaware and Chester Counties. We hope to obtain at least 5,000 signatures. If you wish to support MTLC on this issue, call Susan at 610 565-4903 or email her at [tgsg@erols.com](mailto:tgsg@erols.com). Donations to help fund this effort will be greatly appreciated.

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### **The Unique Geology of Mineral Hill**

Roger Mitchell, Curator of Mineralogy at The Delaware County Institute of Science, was the guest speaker at the MTLC 2003 Annual Members Meeting last April. Mr. Mitchell discussed the unique features of the unusual and world-renowned mineral deposits found at Mineral Hill in Middletown Township. The following are comments from Mr. Mitchell's talk.

Mineral Hill is the area north of Baltimore Pike between Ridley Creek and the Media By-Pass. It represents a small section of a larger body of rock known as serpentine, which is found sparingly throughout the northeastern U.S. What makes Mineral Hill unique are the minerals found within this body of serpentine. The serpentine itself has long been used as a beautiful green building stone and was quarried here until the late 1800's. Another feature of the serpentine was the presence of chromite, which was mined as placer deposits by local farmers during the mid 1800's.

Mineral Hill is home to more than thirty different mineral species and several varieties of each. A rock type known as pegmatite intruded this area and it is at the interface of these two rock types that the majority of minerals are found. Several of the minerals found here are perhaps the finest of their kind found anywhere. The beautiful blue microcline known as amazonite rivals the best from Colorado in its color. The green crystals of actinolite are among the finest also. Varieties of feldspar known as sunstone and moonstone have long been used to make jewelry. Every major private and museum collection in the country has specimens from Mineral Hill.

Mineral Hill is one of the last remaining areas of serpentine in the county. Any attempt to develop it should be discouraged. It should be preserved for what it is: a unique geologic occurrence in our own back yard.

(Mr. Mitchell has a B.S. in Geology and is an engineer with Boeing Company)

### **MTLC Now Has a Web Page**

Thanks to the efforts of Derek Kunz, son of MTLC board members Annette Richter and Bob Kunz, we now have our very own web page. You can learn about MTLC's history, past and current activities at [www.mtlc.org](http://www.mtlc.org)

### **What is MTLC?**

The Middletown Township Land Conservancy is a registered non profit environmental organization composed of a volunteer group of ever changing Middletown Township residents whose mission is "to promote and assist efforts to identify, preserve, and enhance the scenic, historical, open space and outdoor recreation values of the physical environment of the Middletown Township region of Delaware County...for the cultural, physical and spiritual benefit of township residents and visitors."

For twenty-three years MTLC has been the leading voice in this area supporting the concept of balancing this community's often expressed desire for preserving open space with the obvious need for responsible development. The Conservancy has studied many development proposals over the years in an attempt to project each proposal's overall long-range effect on the community and with the input of other civic groups and many individuals, made our best judgment as to whether they would be good for the community. In past years we have had a great deal of success in persuading local authorities to this view. Although the pressure of suburban sprawl and the desire to sustain economic growth during the last decade has made the protection of remaining undeveloped areas much more difficult, the continued preservation of local natural areas remains the focus of MTLC.

If you have ideas you wish to share or would like to become involved with one of our projects, please contact one of our Board Members:

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