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For Immediate Release

A Critical Moment for Montgomery County Voters

July 30, 2003, Lederach, PA -- In the upcoming November 4th, 2003 election, Montgomery County voters will have the opportunity to voice whether they support funding a new Montgomery County Open Space Program by answering an important county-wide ballot question. The proposed \$150 million program, called *Green Fields -- Green Towns*, would be used to preserve open space and farmland, re-green towns and boroughs, and protect natural and water resource areas.

Whether Montgomery County residents experience irritation caused by traffic congestion or enjoy exploring each new section of the Perkiomen Trail as it opens, they can look to the Open Space program to address both their concerns and their needs. These are just a few of the other issues addressed by the initiative:

- Protecting open space helps to protect the quality, availability, and management of water. Natural areas allow for the recharge of groundwater supplies that help maintain both the water table and well pressures in times of drought. During periods of excess rain, open spaces such as wetlands and riparian buffers absorb water and prevent flash flooding.
- Scenic views and the abundance of natural areas contribute to a high quality of life, property values, and a stable tax base. Studies conducted across Pennsylvania show that controlling development reins in the costs associated with it.

- Urban communities gain lasting benefits when they are enhanced through re-greening efforts such as tree planting, green gateways, and pocket parks.
- The protection of fragile wildlife areas helps maintain biodiversity while preserving natural areas in general helps maintain air quality.
- Montgomery County's rich farming heritage and the presence of high quality soil call for growth that is more strategic.
- Trails, natural areas, and parks – both urban and rural-- provide recreation for people of all ages and abilities.
- Because open space requires minimal infrastructure and few services, preserving it helps maintain a stable tax base. Uncontrolled growth, on the other hand, proves to have an adverse affect on local school districts and municipalities.

The previous and very successful ten-year Montgomery County Open Space Program expires at the end of 2003. The new initiative, if approved, promises to provide tremendous value for residents. Montgomery County's Open Space program of the last ten years preserved over 9,400 acres* of natural areas, parkland, and farmland, while also creating 23 miles of trails and providing each municipality with an open space plan. The County's \$60 million in grants used for these programs enabled groups to leverage over \$41 million in funding from sources outside of county funds.

The successes of the program show what can be done, while the County's rapidly changing landscapes underscore the need for continued action. As open land disappears, and as the pressures on what remains intensify, the call for more conservation and better planning increases. November's ballot question presents a perfect opportunity for Montgomery County voters to show how they feel about securing a green legacy for the future.

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**Figure reflects data collected July 2, 2003*