

Executive Summary:

An international wealth management corporation wanted to transform a multiple-acre arboretum in southeastern Pennsylvania into a sustainable asset that would both serve the community and generate revenue to cover its significant maintenance and staffing costs in perpetuity. Conservation Economics (CE) was engaged to provide an innovative and comprehensive long-term plan for management of this site.

Conservation Economics

- Performed a thorough assessment of the natural resources, historical and existing infrastructure, and community perspectives on the project
- Made recommendations for sustainable uses that aligned with the intent of the founder of the arboretum
- Recommended a business plan and long-term master plan

Client Challenge:

An arboretum established in the 1930s in southeastern Pennsylvania was dedicated to promoting the health, enjoyment and education of the public. Over the years, public visitation grew and use of the site expanded, but with this increased use came associated wear and tear. The fiscal steward of the estate sought to follow the intent of the founder by finding sources of revenue to support maintenance of the facilities for future generations.

The stewards of this property needed expertise that would help generate income for the property, while focusing on conservation and community needs. They needed a holistic approach that would take into account the combined environmental, social and fiscal aspects of this property, and design a solution that met the needs of all stakeholders.

Conservation Economics Solution:

Conservation Economics was engaged to assess the environmental, infrastructure and community needs of the property and recommend a long-term management plan.

In an extensive inventory, CE compiled:

- property maps (boundaries, zoning, topography, easements, etc.)
- information on ecosystem characteristics (geology, soils, hydrology, vegetation, etc.)
- infrastructure (buildings, roads, bridges, etc.)
- property history, uses, and related property issues
- interviews with park users and local community leaders

Further analysis by CE found that the land had the potential to become a vibrant community asset, home to educational programs, eco-events like weddings and camping trips, and community supported agriculture (CSA). However, the management needed to reconsider its strategic and operational course, and commit to funding a long-term plan in order to implement any of these solutions.

CE recommended two options:

- Develop a business and long-term master property plan and hire an experienced executive director to manage their implementation to successfully cultivate new and diversified revenue streams.
- Transfer the legal responsibility of the property to the township, an institute of higher education or a non-governmental organization (NGO) whose mission, strategic plan, financial strength and management aligns with those of the arboretum and can assume the management of the property while preserving and maintaining it in accordance with the intent of the founder.

Results:

Following CE's recommendations, the arboretum is held in trust and operated by an institution of higher education. It is open to the public throughout the year without charge for its on-going variety of uses and activities.