

Haymaker Forest

The 'Haymaker Forest' tract contains numerous small and one large parcel of private land in the Morgan District of Monongalia County on and immediately adjacent to the city's southern boundary, totaling approximately 40 acres. Lying immediately north of Oak Grove Cemetery East, south and east of Rosemarie Drive and Dorsey Ave., and west of the South Hills neighborhood (Figure 1), the tract is currently undeveloped and in a natural state commonly referred to by ecologists as 'early forest succession'. Extensively forested by a mix of 40 to 60 year-old deciduous trees (yellow poplar, maple, black cherry, locust, oak, and hickory, among others), the property stands in stark contrast to the surrounding residential areas on the backside of South Park. Because of its location and ecological characteristics, it is extremely well-suited for public acquisition and management as a high-quality greenspace.

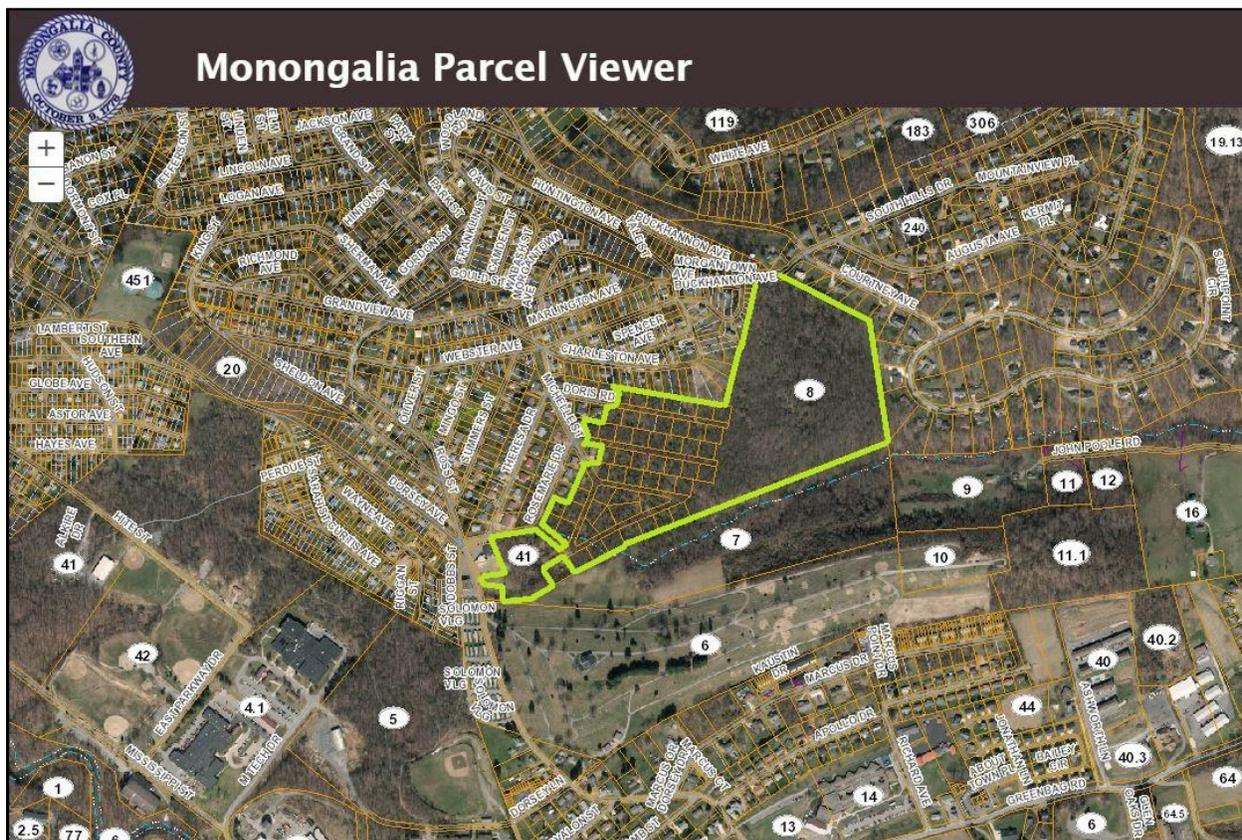


Figure 1. The *approximate* boundary of the 'Haymaker Forest' tract in light green, showing the large parcel ('8'), and the numerous small lots to the west of '8' and '41'. The property touches on the 1st, 2nd, and 6th Wards of Morgantown.

The forest itself represents one of the last large, intact, unfragmented forest stands near the City of Morgantown's southern boundary, in an area containing medium to high density residential development of mixed demographics. It is thus easily accessible to a diverse population of the City.

Lying in the headwaters of a tributary to Aaron's Creek, a sub-basin of the larger Deckers Creek watershed (which is being improved dramatically through the efforts of The Friends of Deckers Creek), the forest plays an important role in protecting downstream property from stormwater runoff and flash-

flooding events that are becoming increasingly common in our area (particularly in the lower Deckers Creek flood zone). Undeveloped closed-canopy forests intercept rainfall and allow precipitation to slowly infiltrate into underlying forest soils, greatly reducing the rate of surface runoff and subsequent sedimentation during heavy rainfall events. Not only does the intercepted water infiltrate the soil, allowing uptake by vegetation and more consistent in-stream flows, but it also recharges the subsoil and groundwater that eventually feed the springs and streams with pure, clean, cool water lower in the watershed. Once protected, the property will forever function as an effective pollution and runoff filter (Figure 2) for lower Aaron's Creek and the growing communities along its lower reaches and in Sabraton, saving millions of dollars over time in stormwater damages.

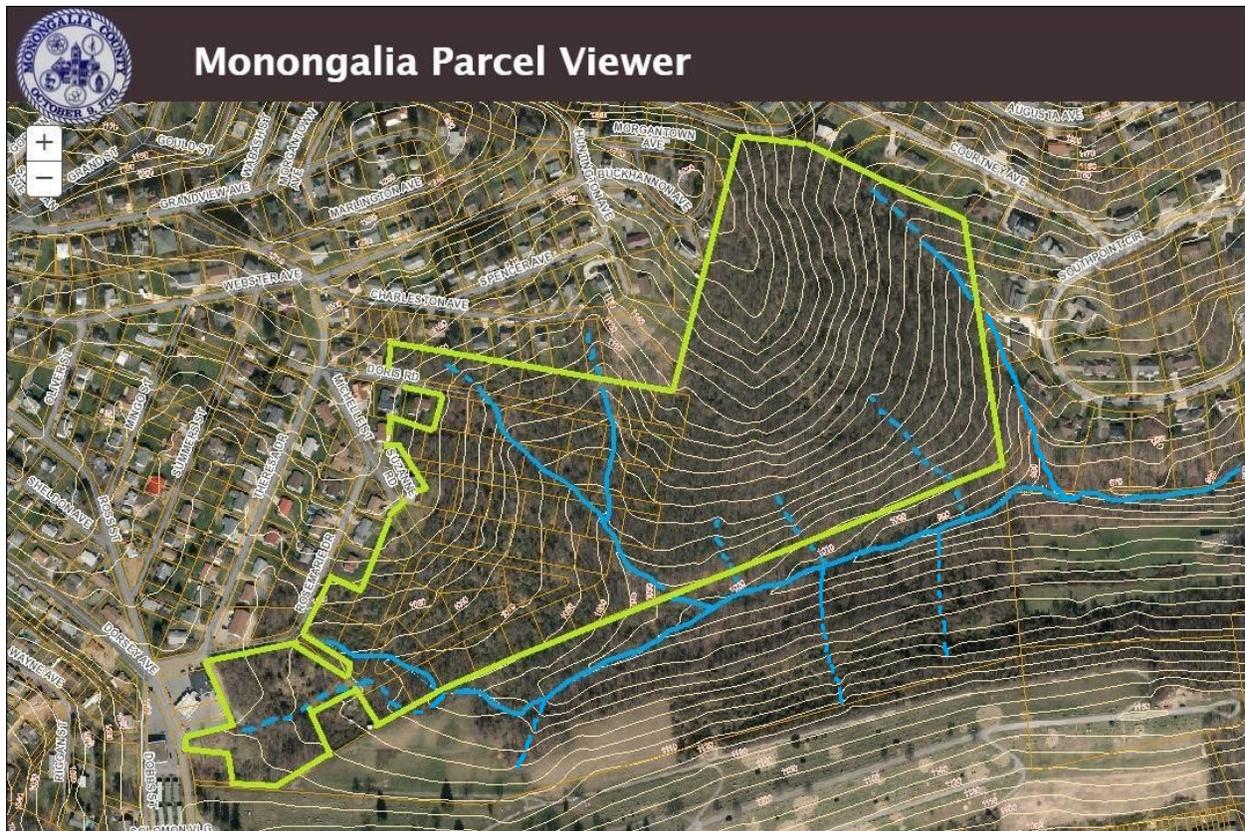


Figure 2. The property currently act as a natural water filter, slowing stormwater runoff in the Aaron's Creek watershed. If developed, this situation will essentially reverse, increasing the rate of runoff and taxing MUB's stormwater treatment system.

In a study published by the U.S. Forest Service (Nowak et al. 2004), seven researchers, including a WVU faculty member, calculated specific economic benefits of Morgantown's forested areas. Although the study focused on the entire city, the monetary benefits it highlighted apply to Haymaker Forest. Morgantown's forests, the study's abstract concludes, store "about 93,000 tons of carbon valued at \$1.9 million. In addition, these trees remove about 2,900 tons of carbon per year (\$60,000 per year), with trees and shrubs removing about 104 tons of air pollution per year (\$711,000 per year). Trees in Morgantown are estimated to reduce annual residential energy costs by \$380,000 per year. The structural, or compensatory, value is estimated at \$488 million."

The study cites the benefits of Morgantown's urban forests as the following: air pollution removal; air temperature reduction; reduced building energy use; absorption of ultraviolet radiation; improved water quality; reduced noise; improved human comfort; increased property values; improved physiological and psychological wellbeing; aesthetics; and community cohesion.

Beyond its obvious ecosystem services and natural values, one could argue that the most valuable contribution an undeveloped Haymaker Forest would bring to the Morgantown and Monongalia County area is 'recreational'. The property is well-suited to a stand-alone park, with a trail system accessible to the South Park, South Hills, and Dorsey Ave neighborhoods. Recreation, by itself, is sufficient to justify public acquisition and protection as a park, yet it only captures a fraction of the property's total recreation, leisure, and alternative transportation values. Given its location on the border of the City and proximity to White Park (and the Mon River Rail-Trail), Oak Grove East Cemetery, Greenbag Road, and north to Marilla Park and the Deckers Creek Rail-Trail, Haymaker Forest is a critical component of a larger southern greenbelt for Morgantown, a concept that has gained significant public interest in the past several years. A southern greenbelt, with Marilla Park, Haymaker Forest, and White Park as core components, all linked by a non-motorized multi-module route linked to the City's southern neighborhoods, would accomplish several extremely important goals of the City and its residents. Reduced traffic, better scenery, alternative transportation options, ecosystem services, more diverse recreational opportunities, and improved health and wellness are the most obvious community benefits of a greenbelt. Others include a more attractive area for relocation, better air quality, and higher home values and associated community benefits all stem from the development of a southern greenbelt.

In summary, the total value to the Morgantown and Monongalia County community of an undeveloped, protected Haymaker Forest greatly outweighs the value of development. Not only is this clear today, when Morgantown is growing rapidly and losing much of its natural qualities, but it will be even more obvious in coming years, when population and environmental pressures will be magnified due to climate change and human migration to water-rich areas. Securing the Haymaker Forest for public use and protection makes both short-term and long-term economic sense. Likewise, Morgantown and Mon County residents and visitors will enjoy its incalculable benefits—as a recreation area, as a place of refuge within a busy city—today, tomorrow, and forever.

References:

Nowak, David J.; Hoehn, Robert E. III; Crane, Daniel E.; Stevens, Jack C.; Cumming, Jonathan; Mohen, Sandhya; Cumming, Anne Buckelew. 2012. *Assessing Urban Forest Effects and Values: Morgantown's Urban Forest*. Resour. Bull. NRS-70. Newtown Square, PA: U.S. Department of Agriculture, Forest Service, Northern Research Station. 25 p.