

MORRIS TOWNSHIP FUTURE FORUM

SHAPING MORRIS TOWNSHIP'S FUTURE TOGETHER

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HAPPY ARBOR DAY? COUNTING TREES IN MORRIS TOWNSHIP

Morris Township Committeeman Bud Ravitz recently published the following post on Facebook claiming how actions taken by the Morris Township Committee have increased tree cover in Morris Township:

Bud Ravitz - Morris Twp Committee's Post

philosophy, doesn't etc.

1d Like Reply

Author

Bud Ravitz - Morris Twp Committee

Hi [User], Thanks for your comment.

I'm not exactly sure where you have gotten the 25% number, but I can tell you that:

A part of the taxes the Township collects goes towards the Open Space Trust Fund. those funds are used to replace trees that must be taken down because they are a hazard to public safety.

In addition, the Township also has a yearly program where we offer trees, free of charge, for homeowners to plant in their front yard.

That same Trust Fund is also used to acquire land which may then become either dedicated open space, or partially used for passive or active recreation for Township residents. The Township will often put acquired land, like Jones Woods, and then add it to our ROSI - Register of Open Space Inventory so that it cannot be developed.

The Township Committee passed a tree ordinance last year that outlines what homeowners can and cannot do with the tree canopies in their yards.

Every year, for the nearly six years I've been on the Township Committee, there is an Arbor Day celebration held at Ginty Field where the first graders at Woodland School come and help us plant a few new trees.

And on the Township Planning Board, on which I also serve, we count every tree on every application to ensure there is no net loss. In the cases where there must be a loss, the applicant pays into our Trust so that other trees are planted somewhere else to offset the loss.

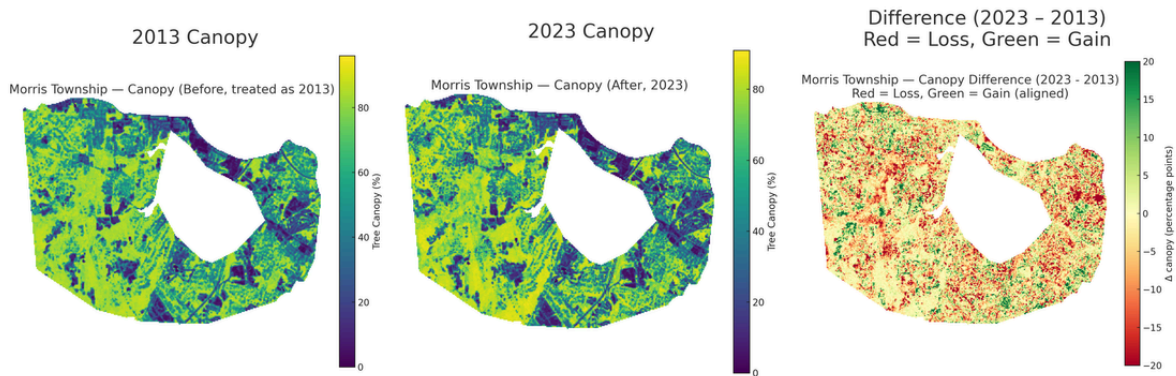
On the Township Committee, we don't just talk the talk. We walk the walk.



*Morris Township
Committeeman
William "Bud" Ravitz*

Sounds good but the net effect of these initiatives and policies has not made one bit of difference: In the period from 2013 - 2023, Morris Township has lost 250 ACRES of its tree canopy which is approximately 2.5% of the total land mass of Morris Township proven as follows:

Morris Township, NJ — Tree Canopy Change (2013 → 2023)



Township area: 10,120 acres
2013 canopy: 5,954 acres (58.83%)
2023 canopy: 5,704 acres (56.37%)
Net change: -250 acres (-2.47 percentage points)

The chart above confirms the tree loss. The first picture “2013 Canopy” is a map from the US Forest Service generated from satellite imagery depicting tree cover in Morris Township in 2013.

The second chart “2023 Canopy” is the identical map taken 10 years later. 2013 was chosen as a starting point so the impact of Hurricane Sandy in 2012 would not skew the results.

The final chart “Difference (2023-2013)” is a heat map generated by performing a pixel by pixel analysis of the 2013 and 2023 maps.

Green shows areas of increased tree canopy.

Yellow denotes areas where tree canopy remained more or less the same.

Red areas are those where there had been notable loss of trees.

The heaviest areas in red at approximately 3:00 on the map appear to align with Columbia Turnpike corridor where considerable development has taken place; this raises serious questions about the effectiveness of Mr. Ravitz's stated remedies.

This analysis used the U.S. Forest Service's National Land Cover Database tree canopy cover data for 2013 and 2023, clipped to the Morris Township municipal boundary (excluding Morristown).

The processing was performed in Python using the rasterio, geopandas, and numpy libraries.

The two rasters were aligned to a common grid using nearest-neighbor resampling, and per-pixel canopy area was calculated by multiplying each cell's canopy percentage by the cell area.

Total canopy acreage was summed for each year and compared.

The difference map shows pixel-by-pixel change between the two periods.

Hurricane Sandy (2012) was avoided as a baseline year to prevent skew from storm-related canopy loss.

A more detailed description of the methodology is available upon request.

Canopy Numbers Don't Lie: A Response to Committeeman Ravitz

Committeeman Ravitz lists a series of well-intentioned programs — tree giveaways, Arbor Day plantings, a tree ordinance, a "no net loss" Planning Board policy — and concludes that the Township Committee "walks the walk" on tree canopy. The data says otherwise.

The core problem is what the numbers actually show.

According to an analysis using the U.S. Forest Service's National Land Cover Database Tree Canopy Cover data — the same federal dataset used by land managers and planners nationwide — **Morris Township lost approximately 250 acres of tree canopy between 2013 and 2023, a decline from 58.8% to 56.4% cover.**

This is not an estimate based on eyeballing a map. It is a pixel-by-pixel calculation across every acre of the Township, with rasters carefully aligned and clipped to the Township's own municipal boundary (excluding Morristown proper), converting each 30-meter cell to acreage using standard methodology.

The programs Mr. Ravitz describes are real, but they are plainly insufficient. A few dozen trees planted at Ginty Field each Arbor Day and periodic free saplings for front yards do not offset 250 acres of net canopy loss over a decade. A sapling is not a canopy tree. It takes decades for a planted tree to contribute meaningfully to canopy cover. If the Township's replacement and offset programs were working, the canopy percentage would be stable or growing — not declining by 2.5 percentage points.



The "no net loss" Planning Board policy deserves particular scrutiny. Mr. Ravitz states that when development requires tree removal, applicants pay into the Trust Fund "so that other trees are planted somewhere else to offset the loss." But the NLCD data captures the cumulative real-world outcome of exactly those decisions across ten years. If the offsets were genuinely equivalent, the township-wide canopy total would not have fallen. Either the in-lieu payments are insufficient, the replacement plantings are not surviving, or the policy is not being applied comprehensively enough to cover all sources of canopy loss — including private removals on developed lots not subject to Planning Board review.

A diverging red-green difference map produced as part of this analysis further shows that canopy loss is not uniformly distributed — it is concentrated in specific areas of the Township, which raises additional questions about whether mitigation resources are being directed where loss is actually occurring.

Mr. Ravitz is right that programs exist. What he cannot credibly claim is that those programs are working. A decade of federal remote sensing data provides the audit that Township self-reporting does not. The Township is losing ground — literally — and the current suite of programs is not reversing that trend.



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

It's not all doom and gloom. There are a lot of public minded and committed residents who are working quietly behind the scenes to make Morris Township a better place to live. We would like to acknowledge their contributions to our hometown and thank them for their dedication and hard work.

Charlie Schachter, a dedicated member of the Morris Township Environmental Commission, has been a driving force behind local efforts to promote sustainable practices and protect the township's natural environment.

One of Charlie's standout contributions has been his leadership in community education. Earlier this year, he organized and facilitated the "Leave the Leaves" program—an exceptionally well-run public forum focused on sustainable landscaping practices. The event brought together five to six knowledgeable speakers and drew an audience of approximately 80 to 100 residents, reflecting both the strength of Charlie's outreach and the community's growing interest in environmental stewardship. Through this program, he helped residents better understand how simple changes in yard care can support pollinators, improve soil health, and reduce environmental impact.

Charlie has also been an active advocate for reducing the environmental and public health impacts of gas-powered lawn equipment. He has played a key role in raising awareness and spearheading a petition drive to limit the use of two-stroke engine equipment in Morris Township, encouraging a shift toward cleaner, quieter alternatives.

One of his most tangible and lasting contributions is the creation of the native pollinator garden in the Butterworth neighborhood. Charlie led the vision and development of this project over multiple years, helping transform community space into a thriving habitat for birds, bees, and butterflies, while also inspiring ongoing volunteer involvement.

Charlie's work reflects a deep commitment to education, sustainability, and community engagement. His leadership and dedication have made a meaningful and lasting impact on Morris Township, and his efforts continue to inspire others to take part in protecting the environment.

Thank you Charlie for all you do!

MAY 2026 CALENDAR

Morris Township Government Meetings

Monday, May 4, 7:00 PM — Planning Board Meeting Municipal Building, 50 Woodland Avenue

Monday, May 18, 7:00 PM — Board of Adjustment Meeting Municipal Building, 50 Woodland Avenue

Wednesday, May 20, 7:00 PM — Township Committee Regular Meeting Municipal Building, 50 Woodland Avenue (in-person and via Zoom) Public hearings scheduled on Ordinance No. 25-26 (Master Plan consultant appropriation, up to \$250,000) and on the ordinance appropriating \$437,000 from the Sewer Utility Capital Fund Balance for capital improvements.

Monday, May 25 — Memorial Day, Township offices closed

For meetings of other Township boards and commissions (Environmental Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Recreation Commission, Senior Citizen Advisory Committee, Open Space Committee, Transportation Advisory Committee, and others), see the full Township calendar at morristwp.com/calendar.aspx.

Important Dates for Residents

Friday, May 1 — Second-quarter property tax payment due

Thursday, May 14, 4:00 PM — Morris Township Annual Garage Sale registration deadline (register through Community Pass via the Township website at morristwp.com)

Monday, May 25 — Memorial Day; trash and recycling collection schedule adjusted (check your zone with DPW at morristwp.com/153/Collection-Services)

Monday, May 25 — Schools closed (Morris School District); refer to morrisschooldistrict.org for the full district calendar

Throughout May — Curbside Yard Waste Collection continues (refer to your zone schedule at morristwp.com/183/Yard-Waste). Residents may also bring grass clippings and light brush directly to the DPW Recycling Depot on Jane Way off West Hanover Avenue, weekdays 7:00 AM to 3:00 PM and Saturdays 6:00 AM to 1:45 PM.

Looking Ahead

Saturday, June 20, 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM — Morris County Household Hazardous Waste Drop-Off Event, Chatham High School, 255 Lafayette Avenue, Chatham Township. Open to all Morris County residents with proof of residency. (No HHW event is scheduled in May; the next opportunity after the April 25 event is June 20.) For full schedule and accepted materials, see mcmua.com/sw_hhw_events.asp.

Thursday, June 18 — Morris School District last day of school (high school graduation day)
[Pool opening date for Ginty and Streeter Pools to be confirmed; historical opening is early June. Refer to morristwp.com/461/Swim-Pool for current information.

Please let us know of any upcoming events for inclusion in future editions: mtwpff@gmail.com

CULTURAL AND RECREATIONAL VENUES

Morris Township and Morristown are home to many cultural, educational, and recreational institutions. Rather than reproduce their event listings here, we encourage residents to visit each venue's website directly for current programs, performances, and activities.

Library and Educational

Morristown & Morris Township Library — mmtlibrary.libcal.com/calendar/events-for-adults
— mmtlibrary.libcal.com/calendar/events-for-teens
— mmtlibrary.libcal.com/calendar/events-for-kids

Morris Museum — morrismuseum.org (live performances at morrismuseum.org/live-arts)

Performing Arts

Mayo Performing Arts Center — mayoarts.org/events

Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey — shakespearenj.org (2026 season at shakespearenj.org/events/the-2026-season; opens May 16 with Private Lives at the F.M. Kirby Shakespeare Theatre, Drew University, Madison)

Historical and Outdoor

Morristown National Historical Park (Jockey Hollow and Washington's Headquarters) — nps.gov/morr

Morris County Park Commission — morrisparks.net (events at morrisparks.net/events)

The Morris County Park Commission operates many parks and historical sites used by Morris Township and Morristown residents, including:

- [Lewis Morris County Park](#)
- [Central Park of Morris County](#)
- [Fosterfields Living Historical Farm](#)
- [Frelinghuysen Arboretum](#)
- [Loantaka Brook Reservation](#)
- [Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center](#)
- [Historic Speedwell](#)
- [Patriot's Path](#)

The Town of Morristown also maintains its own parks — townofmorristown.org/parks including:

- [Speedwell Lake Park](#)

MISSION STATEMENT



Morris Township Future Forum is a non-partisan citizen advocacy group committed to preserving the character of our community while supporting responsible, well-planned growth.

We believe Morris Township can grow without losing what makes it worth living in.

That means development that pays its fair share rather than being exempted through PILOT agreements that starve our schools of funding.

It means planning that accounts for the traffic, the infrastructure demands, and the public services that new construction will require.

It means a Township government that does its due diligence before it acts, follows the procedures the law imposes on it, and answers honestly to the residents who elected it.

We monitor the decisions of our Township Committee, Planning Board, and Zoning Board; we participate in public proceedings; and we keep our neighbors informed about the decisions being made on their behalf.

Our editorial and social media standards can be found [here](#).

We welcome your input and feedback. You can reach out via email: mtwpff@gmail.com

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED



Morris Township Future Forum could use your help. Volunteers are needed to help with research, proofreading, video editing, and social media content management. A couple of hours a month would be a great help.

Contact us at: mtwpff@gmail.com