



**PASSAIC COUNTY OPEN SPACE TRUST FUND
ADVISORY COMMITTEE
MINUTES OF A REGULAR MEETING
Thursday, May 19th, 2022
WebEx Meeting**

Chair Kahwaty opened the meeting at 6:35 PM and read the notice that the requirements of the Open Public Meeting Act had been met. She then proceeded to the roll call.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Pat Lepore, County Commissioner; Anne Kahwaty, Chair; Maria-Elena Grant, Vice Chair; Cindy Frank, Commissioner; Isabel Agudelo, Commissioner; Sandy Lawson, Commissioner; Bernard Vroom, Commissioner; Bhupendra Gadhavi, Commissioner; Alice Szepietowski, Commissioner; Robin Canetti, Commissioner; LauraLee Harding, Commissioner; Nordan Murphy, Engineering Department; Greg Moore, Parks Department; Isabella Costa (sitting for Kelly Ruffel, Director of Cultural and Historic Affairs)

OTHERS PRESENT: Marc Seemon, Deputy County Administrator; Jessie Summers, Open Space Coordinator; John Pogorelec, County Counsel

MINUTES: A motion to adopt the amended minutes of the March 24th, 2022 meeting was made by Commissioner Grant and seconded by Commissioner Lawson. The motion passed unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

Isabella Costa, representing Director of Cultural and Historic Affairs Kelly Ruffel, presented the 2022 Historic Preservation Applications Site Visit Reviews to the committee. The projects and funding requests were as follows:

- American Labor Museum/Botto House: Requesting \$30,000, funds will be used to restore the Grape Arbor area of the Botto House.
- Morris Canal Stabilization at Morris Canal Park & Nature Preserve (Clifton): Requesting \$100,000, funds will be used to make various improvements to stabilize and clean the portion of the Morris Canal Park and Nature Preserve in Clifton.
- Eastside Park Tennis Court Restoration Project (Paterson): Requesting \$250,000, funds will be used to park improvements to Eastside Park. Phase III improvements will include rehabilitation of the existing tennis courts.
- Eastside Park Historic Steps Renovation Project (Paterson): Requesting \$250,000, funds will be used to make improvements to the existing plaza steps.
- Restoration of Slate & Yankee Gutter System at Old Town Hall (Little Falls Historic Society): Requesting \$50,000, funds will be used to restore the Yankee Gutter System and slate roof.
- ADA Compliant Restrooms at Old Town Hall (Little Falls Historic Society): Requesting \$50,000, funds will be used to install three ADA restrooms at Old Town Hall.

- Rogers Locomotive Works Energy Efficiency Upgrades (NJCDC): Requesting \$50,000, funds will be used to make energy efficient upgrades at the Rogers Meeting Center.
- Rogers Locomotive Works Courtyard Lighting Restoration (NJCDC): Requesting \$50,000, funds will be used to repair and restore historic lampposts in the courtyard of the Rogers Building.

Commissioner Canetti asked if the City of Paterson had stated how they intend to prevent vandalism at the proposed tennis courts. Isabella Costa replied that there was not specific information regarding vandalism prevention mentioned in the application package. Commissioner Grant asked that the City of Paterson be asked if there are additional measures planned to address vandalism on site.

Commissioner Szepietowski asked for clarification regarding the maintenance aspect of the Morris Canal Stabilization project in Clifton. Isabella Costa responded that invasive species took over the canal due to maintenance challenges arising from the COVID-19 pandemic and staff shortages. Commissioner Frank asked if Clifton had a long-term strategy to keep the invasive species in the area in check. Isabella Costa responded that Clifton would be resuming its normal treatment of invasive species and that should be sufficient to keep them in check.

Site Visit Summary

Chair Kahway summarized the site visits to the board members that were not able to attend. Commissioners Grant, Szepietowski, and Canetti also added comments regarding the Highlands Natural Pool and the New Weis Center, noting the great use of the facilities to the area. Commissioner Szepietowski asked if Clifton had made mention of how the water from the splash pads at their park would impact the surrounding gardens. Open Space Coordinator Summers responded that from her experience spray equipment manufacturers typically incorporate a buffer zone from each spray feature to accommodate for overspray, but she will confirm with Clifton.

Applicant Updates

Open Space Coordinator Summers presented the following questions and answers regarding the presented grant applications:

- Could the Highlands Natural Pool receive FEMA funding for hurricane damage to the Highlands Natural Pool?
 - Jon Berry, Vice President for the Community Association of the Highlands (CAH), stated that the CAH did not apply for FEMA funds based on their understanding that they expect groups that provide “non-critical services” to first seek an SBA loan before FEMA would even consider a disaster grant.
- What will the use of the New Weis Center be based on the application for change of use?
 - The building use will remain the same, which includes business office space for the Highlands Nature Friends as well as instructional/educational space such as Scout Merit Badges, first aid training, home-school classes, environmental programs for the general public, etc.
- Is the existing gun range adjacent to the proposed Waks Memorial Park Pickle Ball Courts actively used? If not, what are the plans for the space?

- The gun range has been permanently decommissioned. The Township of Wayne plans to demolish the gun range in 2023 to add additional parking and passive green space.
- Where will the proposed playground at Ralph Valt Memorial Park be located?
 - The Township of Wayne has yet to establish a final site plan for Ralph Valt Memorial Park, as the Township Council may want to make changes to appease concerns of nearby neighbors.
- Does Wanaque have NJDOT approval for the proposed dog park, and what is the proposed material?
 - The Borough of Wanaque has supplied written correspondence from NJDOT that NJDOT is working on amendments to the existing lease that will allow the use of a dog park on the property.
 - The Borough of Wanaque is proposing pea gravel based on several considerations and based on safety, sanitary, and economic reasons. They have visited neighboring dog parks in Bloomingdale, Pompton Lakes, Oakland, Wayne, and Montville. The Borough also cited research from the Montville Dog Park Committee explaining how they determined pea gravel to be the most suitable material as opposed to dirt/grass or wood chips. It should be noted that Passaic County dog park facilities at Rifle Camp Park and Goffle Brook also use pea gravel.
- What is the status of local Open Space funds from the Township of Wayne for the Laurelwood Arboretum project?
 - The Township Council will be asked to pass a bond ordinance sometime after the County has made a decision on Open Space funding, and when the project bid has been received.

Commissioner Grant asked if there would be issues examining Ralph Valt Memorial Park due to the site not having a final site plan. Open Space Coordinator Summers clarified that there is a draft site plan, but that the Township of Wayne was working with adjacent residents to determine a suitable location for the playground, and that the final site plan would be established once the location was selected. The playground structure itself will remain the same size and scope regardless of placement.

Chair Kahwaty asked if the “Totowa Residents Only” sign will be removed from the proposed Riverview Park playground if the project is funded by the county. Open Space Coordinator Summers responded that this sign would have to be removed as a stipulation of receiving funding as it is prohibited in the Rules and Regulations.

Requests for Applicant Presentations

Open Space Coordinator Summers informed the committee that she had been in contact with the President of the Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum, and that they would be presenting their project to the board on June 1st. Deputy Administrator Seemon added that County staff had a meeting with the Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum (FOLA) to discuss presenting to the Committee, and that in the interest of fairness it would be appropriate for FOLA to have the

opportunity to defend their application just as members of the public have had the opportunity to voice their opposition at the previous meeting.

Deputy County Administrator Seemon informed the committee that he had met with the Borough of Wanaque to provide guidance on hosting a public hearing for their project, and to notice residents that live within 200 feet of the property. He also recommended that, from the Administrative perspective, the Borough be given an extension to hold a hearing with proper notice being that they only have one meeting per month. Open Space Coordinator Summers also added that by the time the Commissioners' award the grants, if awarded, the Borough will have more than enough time to have had this public hearing requirement satisfied and provide minutes.

Commissioner Vroom asked what would happen if the Township of Wayne was not able to gain the funding to complete their projects. Open Space Coordinator Summers responded that Wayne had funding in place to complete their submitted projects. The only application funding in question was for the Laurelwood Arboretum project, which is filed by FOLA, and clarified that the Township's award amount from its own Open Space funds towards the FOLA project will be based on the County's award amount. Commissioner Grant asked that Open Space Coordinator Summer reach out to Wayne to provide more information on their site plan for their Ralph Valt Playground application.

Preliminary Funding Recommendations

Open Space Coordinator Summers presented the preliminary funding recommendations to the committee. Please see the recommendations at the end of this document, labeled as Appendix B.

Commissioner Frank asked about the discrepancy in amount requested and amount recommended for some of the towns. Deputy County Administrator Seemon responded:

- Haledon's application is phase III of a project and has already received Open Space money in previous years.
- Hawthorne's application is lighting, and the recommendation is \$99,000 due to the smaller scope of the project. While the full funding will not be awarded, Deputy Administrator Seemon also added that the funds under the \$100,000 threshold do not have to go through a public hearing to be awarded so Hawthorne will receive the funds more quickly as well.

Commissioner Ghadavi asked if the City of Paterson would still receive an award this year before addressing the concerns of vandalism brought up by the Committee earlier in the meeting. Deputy County Administrator Seemon responded that he would reach out to the City of Paterson and feels that the City can properly address this question with a written response as was done for previous application questions and therefore would be eligible for funding.

Commissioner Grant asked why Clifton was not receiving funds for the Morris Canal Improvement project if time was of the essence for mitigating the invasive species. Deputy County Administrator Seemon responded that Clifton is being recommended funding for its first priority application at Tatarenko Park and has submitted three applications where a maximum of

two are allowed. He also stated that the County has put funding into the Morris Canal previously and feels that the obligation for maintenance should be on the City.

Commissioner Agudelo stated that she felt full funding should be provided to the Community Association of the Highlands since they are a smaller organization. Commissioner Canetti added that there are a lot of residents that use the Highlands Natural Pool. Commissioner Canetti also added that comparing the amount of people that would use improvements such as the Wanaque Dog Park may not be as many as use the Highlands Natural Pool given its unique amenities. Chair Kahwaty and other committee members expressed support for reallocating some proposed money from higher funded projects and add it to organizations like the Community Association of the Highlands and Highlands Nature Friends, if the Highlands Nature Friends are not able to receive funding through another avenue. Deputy Administrator Seemon stated that these requests will be taken into recommendation and can be further discussed at the next meeting.

County Commissioner Lepore asked if Community Development Block Grant funds were being looked into as a potential source for the New Weis Center project. Open Space Coordinator Summers stated that County staff would look into this potential, and County Commissioner Lepore added that this should be clarified before potentially allocating funds to the project and prior to the next meeting.

Commissioner Agudelo also requested more funding for Totowa's playground project than what is currently recommended. County Commissioner Lepore stated that Totowa is not providing any funding of any other source towards the project, and that there is some level of expectation for municipalities to match with additional funding to meet the total cost of the proposed project, and therefore he feels that the recommendation of \$99,000.00 is appropriate.

OLD BUSINESS

Commissioner Grant asked if the June 1st meeting would be online or in person. Open Space Coordinator Summers responded that the June 1st meeting would be held in person at the Public Safety Academy located at 300 Oldham Road, Wayne, NJ 07470. The Committee also discussed who would be presenting, and it was determined that the Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum would be the only presenters as the other applicants could confirm the remaining questions via written response.

PUBLIC PORTION: Commissioner Lawson made a motion to open the meeting to the public which was seconded by Commissioner Agudelo. The motion passed unanimously.

County Counsel Pogorelec informed residents that comments from the public are limited to three minutes each. Open Space Coordinator Summers stated that the public comments will go in order of hands raised in the Webex application. Below is a summary of the public comments.

- Christine Cantilli, located at 572 Pines Lake Drive West, expressed concern that the residents of the area were not involved in the project's application process. She also stated concerns that the Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum had not explored other options to control the deer and asked that the committee deny the application. Due to connection

issues, Ms. Cantilli's audio connection dropped during her comment and therefore she has provided a written version attached to the minutes as Appendix C.

- Fran Ritter, Councilwoman for Wayne's Fifth Ward and a former resident of the Pines Lake Community for over 2 years, expressed concerns from a public safety and public health standpoint. She is concerned that the deer fence would create a public safety hazard by routing deer closer to Pines Lake Drive and cause more collisions among a densely populated area. Councilwoman Ritter also expressed concern that the Ralph Valt Memorial Playground application was prematurely submitted to the Open Space Committee and stated for transparency that the project was tabled until the Parks and Recreation Department could come up with a design more amenable to the adjacent residents.
- Meghan Green, located at 517 Colfax Road, expressed concern that the deer fence would create a public safety hazard and that the local residents were not properly informed and represented in the application process, and that the notice to surrounding residents was last minute and vague in its description of the project. She also noted a fatal collision of a Wayne police officer with a deer and issues with Lyme disease, and that the deer fence rationale is purely aesthetic.
- Mary Linn Lombardo, Wayne resident, expressed concern that the deer fence would ruin the natural aesthetics of the park that are already under threat due to the Sculpture Trail and that residents should have been consulted in the application process. She stated that she runs a non-profit animal rescue and encourages the Committee to consider how the fence may negatively and harmfully affect wildlife.
- Jennifer Laurin, Wayne resident, expressed concern that Laurelwood Arboretum is losing its natural appeal and expresses concerns regarding the proximity of schools in the area that have issues with deer feces and feels that the fence will exacerbate these issues. She also stated that the park goers are unable to interact with the water and nature in the Arboretum.
- Tracy Rosky, Wayne resident, expressed concern that the difficulty of the project was being underestimated by the Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum due to various necessary approvals, and also that the deer park will be a public safety hazard by routing deer onto the road. She stated that the project has become divisive for the community, and that there are many residents who have voiced opposition.
- Marian Valdata, Wayne resident, expressed concern that the Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum did not have outreach to the community, and that the deer fence could also affect other wildlife, and that FOLA is adverse to talking to the community.
- Deputy Administrator Seemon read a comment from the chat section of the Webex application:
 - Raquel Casterano, located at 492 Pines Lake Drive East, also opposes the project for the reasons previously stated.

Deputy Administrator Seemon asked Open Space Coordinator Summers to provide the confirmation of public notice that was submitted with the FOLA application to have at the next meeting to confirm that the public was properly noticed per the Rules and Regulations. Commissioner Canetti made a motion to close the public portion that was seconded by Commissioner Lawson. The motion passed unanimously.

OPEN DISCUSSION

Commissioner Vroom asked if proposed pickleball courts in Wayne would be overlaid on top of the existing tennis courts, and Open Space Coordinator Summers responded that she would ask Wayne for clarification. County Commissioner Lepore asked if the Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum application would need local planning board approval for construction, and County Counsel Pogorelec responded that they would verify with Wayne. Commissioner Grant asked if there were any wetlands on the property, and Open Space Coordinator Summers responded that she would ask the applicant to verify.

Commissioner Canetti asked County Counsel Pogorelec if public members writing additional commentary on the open discussion in the chat feature of the Webex application was to be taken into consideration by the Committee. Deputy Administrator Seemon clarified that the public forum closes the public has had the opportunity to voice their comments, and County Counsel Pogorelec agreed.

Commissioner Vroom made a motion to cancel the June 2nd meeting and was seconded by Commissioner Szepietowski. The motion passed unanimously. The Committee unanimously agreed that the June 1st meeting will be sufficient for the FOLA presentation as well as the final recommendations, and that the time of the meeting could be at either 6 PM or 6:30 PM, pending confirmation and notice from Open Space Coordinator Summers.

ADJOURNMENT: A motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:07 PM was made by Commissioner Canetti and seconded by County Commissioner Lepore. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Salvatore Presti for



JESSIE SUMMERS

Appendix A: Historic Preservation Applications Presentation



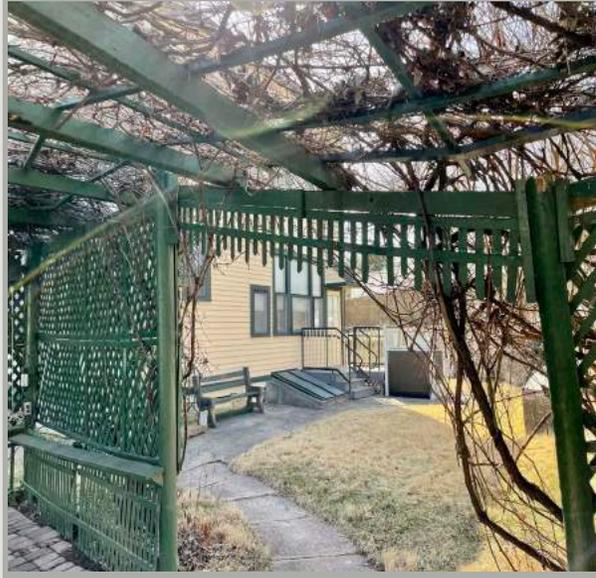
Passaic County Open Space, Farmland, & Historic Preservation Trust Fund

2022 HISTORIC PRESERVATION APPLICATIONS SITE VISIT REVIEWS





American Labor Museum / Botto House:
Grape Arbor Restoration



American Labor
Museum / Botto
House:

Grape Arbor Restoration

The American Labor Museum requests funds to restore their “Old World” Grape Arbor.

Requested amount: \$30,000



City of Clifton
Morris Canal
Stabilization at
Morris Canal Park
& Nature Preserve

City of Clifton: Morris Canal Restoration Project

The City of Clifton requests funds to make various improvements to stabilize and clean the portion of the canal in Morris Canal Park and Nature Preserve.

Request amount: \$100,000.00





City of Paterson
Eastside Park Tennis Court Restoration Project
(PRIORITY NO. 1)

City of Paterson: Eastside Park Improvements Phase 2 (PRIORITY NO.1)

The City of Paterson requests funds to make improvements to Eastside Park. Phase III improvements include the rehabilitation of the tennis courts.

Request amount: \$250,000



City of Paterson:
Eastside Park
Improvements Phase 3
(PRIORITY NO.2)

The City of Paterson requests funds to make improvements to Eastside Park. Phase II improvements include the restoration of the plaza steps that stretch from the Van Buren house to the lower ball playing fields.

Request amount: **\$250,000.00**





Little Falls Historic Society
Restoration of Old Town Hall Slate Roof & Yankee Gutter
(PRIORITY NO. 1)

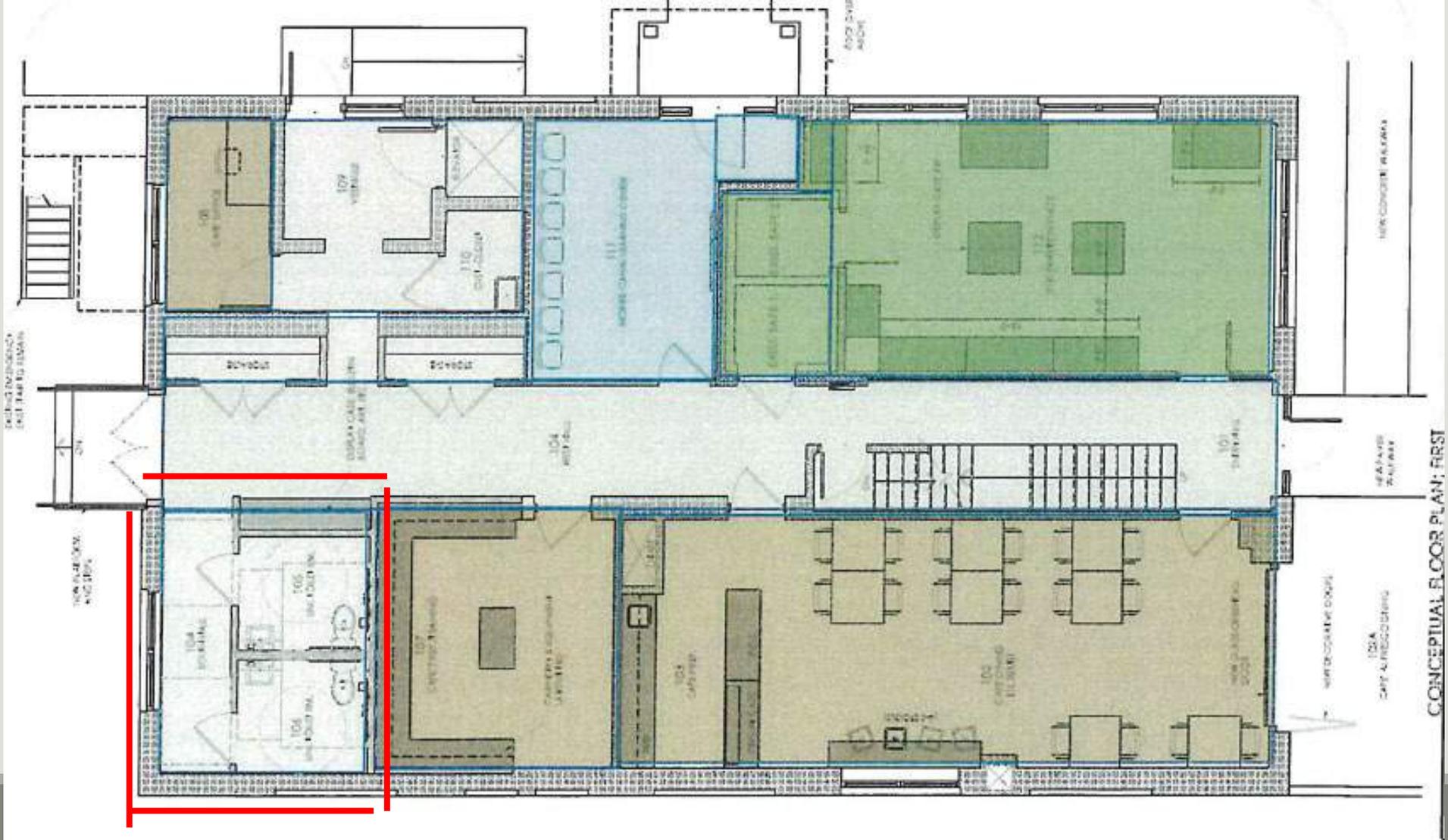


Little Falls Historic Society:
**Restoration of Slate &
Yankee Gutter System at
Old Town Hall**
(PRIORITY NO.1)

The Little Falls Historic Society is requesting funding to restore the Yankee Gutter System and slate roof.

Request amount: \$50,000.00



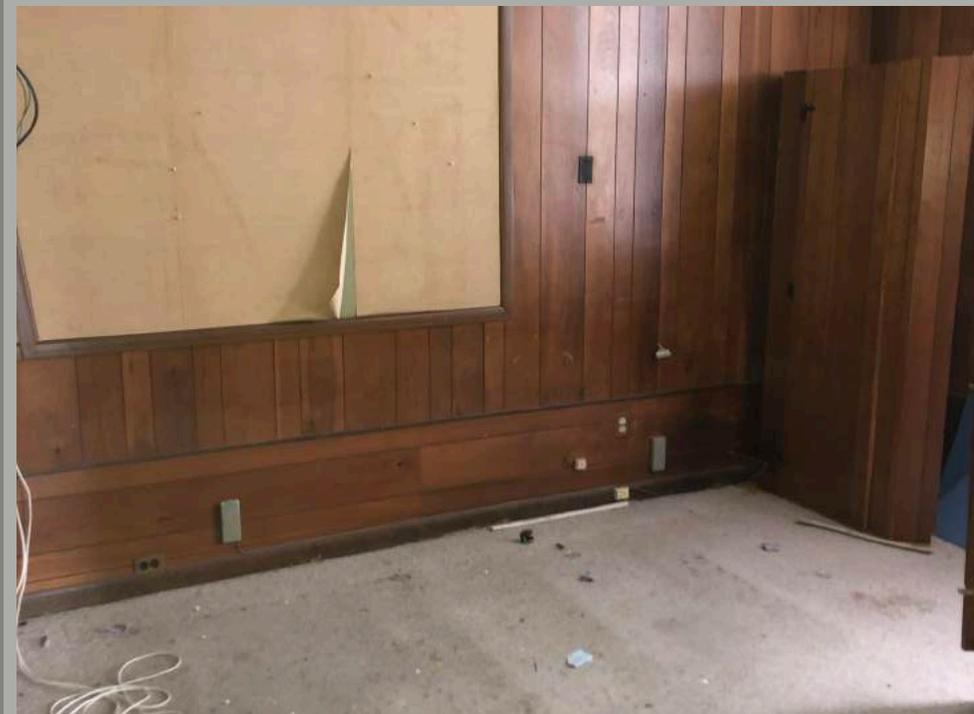


Little Falls Historic Society
ADA Compliant Restrooms at Old Town Hall
(PRIORITY NO. 2)

Little Falls Historic Society:
Three (3) ADA Compliant Bathrooms
(PRIORITY NO.2)

The Little Falls Historic Society is requesting funding to install three ADA restrooms at Old Town Hall.

Request amount: \$50,000.00





New Jersey Community Development Corp.
Rogers Locomotive Works Energy Efficiency Upgrades
(PRIORITY NO. 1)

New Jersey Community Development Corporation: Rogers Bld. Energy Efficiency Upgrades



New Jersey Community Development Corporation is requesting funding to make energy efficient upgrades at the Rogers Meeting Center.

Request amount: \$50,000.00



New Jersey Community Development Corp.
Rogers Locomotive Works Courtyard Lighting Restoration
(PRIORITY NO. 2)

New Jersey Community
Development Corporation:
**Rogers Bld. Courtyard
Lamp Post Restoration**

New Jersey Community
Development Corporation
requests funding to repair and
restore the historic lampposts in
the courtyard of Rogers Building.

Request amount: \$50,000.00



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS



Appendix B: Updates and Preliminary Recommendations



2022 GRANT APPLICATIONS

PRELIMINARY RECOMMENDATIONS

MAY 19TH, 2022



APPLICANT UPDATES



- **Could the Highlands Natural Pool receive FEMA funding for hurricane damage to the Highlands Natural Pool?**
 - Jon Berry, Vice President for the Community Association of the Highlands (CAH), stated that the CAH did not apply for FEMA funds based on their understanding that they expect groups that provide “non-critical services” to first seek an SBA loan before FEMA would even consider a disaster grant.
- **What will the use of the New Weis Center be based on the application for change of use?**
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- **Is the existing gun range adjacent to the proposed Waks Memorial Park Pickle Ball Courts actively used? If not, what are the plans for the space?**
 - The gun range has been permanently decommissioned. The Township of Wayne plans to demolish the gun range in 2023 to add additional parking and passive green space.

APPLICANT UPDATES



- **Where will the proposed playground at Ralph Valt Memorial Park be located?**
 - The Township of Wayne has yet to establish a final site plan for Ralph Valt Memorial Park, as the Township Council may want to make changes to appease concerns of nearby neighbors.
- **Does Wanaque have NJDOT approval for the proposed dog park, and what is the proposed material?**
 - The Borough of Wanaque has supplied written correspondence from NJDOT that NJDOT is working on amendments to the existing lease that will allow the use of a dog park on the property.
 - The Borough of Wanaque is proposing pea gravel based on several considerations and based on safety, sanitary, and economic reasons. They have visited neighboring dog parks in Bloomingdale, Pompton Lakes, Oakland, Wayne, and Montville. The Borough also cited research from the Montville Dog Park Committee explaining how they determined pea gravel to be the most suitable material as opposed to dirt/grass or wood chips. It should be noted that Passaic County dog park facilities at Rifle Camp Park and Goffle Brook also use pea gravel.
- **What is the status of local Open Space funds from the Township of Wayne for the Laurelwood Arboretum project?**
 - The Township Council will be asked to pass a bond ordinance sometime after the County has made a decision on Open Space funding, and when the project bid has been received.



PRELIMINARY FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Park Development



Municipality/Non-profit	Project	Total Cost	OSTF Request	Recommendation
Bloomingtondale	Bogue Pond Park	\$ 350,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 200,000.00
Clifton	Stefan Tatarenko Memorial Park Improvements	\$ 638,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 200,000.00
Clifton	Nash Park Improvements	\$ 511,500.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ -
Comm. Assoc. of the Highlands	Upgrade/Rehab of the Highlands Natural Pool	\$ 159,685.00	\$ 63,685.00	\$ 50,000.00
Friends of Laurelwood Arboretum	Deer Exclusion Fencing	\$ 252,700.00	\$ 99,000.00	\$ 75,000.00
Friends of Paterson Parks	Pennington Park	\$ 142,518.23	\$ 100,000.00	\$ -
Haledon	Tilt Street Park Improvements Phase III	\$ 478,130.00	\$ 229,130.00	\$ 150,000.00
Hawthorne	Franklin Field Lighting Project	\$ 800,000.00	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 99,000.00
Highlands Nature Friends	Ongoing Rehab/Upgrade New Weis Center	\$ 265,644.00	\$ 98,500.00	\$ -
Little Falls	Wilmore Park Improvements Phase II	\$ 388,454.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 200,000.00
Pompton Lakes	Hersfield Park Improvements Phase I	\$ 414,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 150,000.00
Prospect Park	Hofstra Park Playground	\$ 1,007,500.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 100,000.00
Totowa	Riverview Park	\$ 209,250.00	\$ 209,250.00	\$ 99,000.00
Wanaque	Wanaque Dog Park	\$ 363,612.50	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 150,000.00
Wayne	Waks Memorial Park Pickle Ball Courts	\$ 450,000.00	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00
Wayne	Ralph Valt Memorial Park Playground Improvements	\$ 200,000.00	\$ 99,000.00	\$ -
Wayne Little League	D1 Infield Turf Project	\$ 238,023.55	\$ 99,999.00	\$ 99,000.00
West Milford	Bubbling Springs Park	\$ 56,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Woodland Park	Diane Grimes Memorial Park Improvements Phase II	\$ 518,402.50	\$ 218,402.50	\$ 200,000.00
		SUBTOTAL	\$ 3,446,966.50	\$ 2,052,000.00



PRELIMINARY FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

Historic Preservation



Municipality/Non-profit	Project	Total Cost	OSTF Request	Recommendation
American Labor Museum	Grape Arbor Restoration Project	\$ 100,000.00	\$ 30,000.00	\$ 30,000.00
Clifton	Morris Canal Improvements	\$ 613,690.00	\$ 100,000.00	\$ -
Paterson	Eastside Park Improvements (Phase 3) - Tennis Courts	\$ 347,224.80	\$ 250,000.00	\$ 250,000.00
Paterson	Eastside Park Improvements (Phase 2) - Steps Restoration	\$ 259,930.32	\$ 250,000.00	\$ -
Little Falls Historical Society	Repair & Replacement of Slate Roof and Yankee Gutter System	\$ 87,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00
Little Falls Historical Society	Handicap Accessible Bathrooms Installation	\$ 72,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ -
NJCDC	Courtyard Improvements	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00	\$ 50,000.00
NJCDC	HVAC at Rogers Locomotive Boulevard	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 150,000.00	\$ 50,000.00
		SUBTOTAL	\$ 930,000.00	\$ 430,000.00

Appendix C: Written Statement from resident Christine Cantilli due to audio issues

My name is Christine Cantilli and I live at 572 Pines Lake Drive West in Wayne.

I previously shared with you that there is widespread community opposition to the Laurelwood fence project, including residents that attended and spoke at the Council meeting, and several hundred residents that signed our online petition in just the one week it was available. Our Council advanced this application in a split 5-3 vote, and I believe Councilwoman Ritter is in this meeting to expand on that.

No one is arguing that Laurelwood is a special place, or that the staff that works there have been fighting a losing battle against the deer. What the community is arguing is that the decision process under which this project was created is flawed and has not taken into consideration any impact this project might have on the neighborhood surrounding the park. There has been no study of the impact to all of the wildlife that migrate through the area. There has been no evaluation of the impact to the 3 main roadways that surround the park, and the potential hazard that would be created. There has been no consultation with a deer management company to determine if there are other ways to mitigate the deer impact that would cost less. There are also State DEP issues that could dramatically impact the scope of this project.

We have been told that this project has been developed for years. However, the forest health study that was commissioned was completed only last summer. Interestingly, the reference to a perimeter fence project was first publicized over a year earlier with regard to the installation of the sculpture trail. The residents are concerned that more effort seems to have gone into the planning for the funding of this project than researching the project itself. A perimeter fence is a one-dimensional solution that may be workable in more rural areas but has been applied to our densely populated residential neighborhood. Visitors spend a couple of hours in the park, but our community is going to have to live with the impact of this project 365 days a year, and long after the current FOLA board leaves.

You may have seen that the oldest rhododendrons in the park tower over the deer, and therefore do not need to be netted – or fenced. This is why the community is advocating for an interior smaller fenced section that would protect the more sensitive plantings concentrated on the north side of the park. Such an approach would cost less now to install and less to maintain in the future. I'm sure you saw on your site visit that there are vast sections of the park that do not need to be enclosed in a perimeter fence. Leaving a large section open would also allow the deer to continue to be a part of the park, which would be a popular solution to many of the visitors, especially families with children, for whom the deer are a main attraction.

The justification for enclosing the entire area is to attempt to restore the forest understory in years to come. This is not a forest, but a well-traveled public park that was deeded to the town with the express purpose of being a public park, and because of that, the taxpayer's opinion and use of this park matters. We, the taxpayers that live around this park, and whose local tax dollars fund the park each year, are being forgotten. We are asking you not to forget who funds this grant and to not enable this current proposal to move forward.

We ask the Committee to deny this grant, and encourage FOLA to come back with a more balanced proposal next year that considers the entire community and not just a segment of it. There are issues unique to this setting that are not being addressed. Please release this money to the other applications that are more straight-forward. Thank you.