



TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE

66 MAIN STREET, WEST ORANGE, N.J. 07052

Department of Planning and Development

ROBERT D. PARISI
Mayor

Tel: (973) 325-4110
Fax: (973) 325-6359
Email: planning@westorange.org

TO: Planning Board Members

FROM: Paul Grygiel, AICP, PP, Planning Director

DATE: September 2, 2022

RE: **PB-22-09C/County of Essex/Turtle Back Zoo/American Alligator & Komodo Dragon Exhibits**
Block: 163; Lot: 1; Zone: R-1
560 Northfield Avenue
Courtesy Review of Proposed Improvements

INTRODUCTION/LAND USE

The applicant is proposing to replace the existing Aquarium and the American Alligator Exhibit at the Turtle Back Zoo with a new American Alligator Exhibit and a Komodo Dragon Exhibit. The renovations will include two new buildings and outdoor habitat areas, walkways, seating and landscaping.

The site is located in the R-1 Zone and abuts South Mountain Reservation, which spans several municipalities. To the east of the site in West Orange is a residential neighborhood. There are commercial uses located on the north side of Northfield Avenue, with residential uses further north and to the west.

VARIANCES REQUIRED

None. The applicant is appearing before the Planning Board pursuant to the Municipal Land Use Law at N.J.S.A. 40:55D-31a, which requires public agencies expending public funds to refer



development proposals to the municipal planning board for its review and recommendation related to the municipal master plan.

SUBMISSIONS

<u>SUBMISSION ITEM</u>	<u>SIGNED BY</u>	<u>DATE/REVISION</u>
Aerial Map	Michael J. Piga, LLA, French & Parrello Associates	11/15/19
Landscape Plan	French & Parrello Associates (Unsigned)	8/1/22
Rendering	Comito Associates PC (Unsigned)	Not dated
Floor Plans	French & Parrello Associates and Comito Associates PC (Unsigned)	8/30/22

DISCUSSION

The applicant is proposing to replace the existing Aquarium and the American Alligator Exhibit located in the central section of the Zoo, just east of the Sea Lion Exhibit. The specific new facilities included in this proposal are:

- American Alligator building
- Komodo Dragon building
- Alligator outdoor exhibit
- Komodo Dragon outdoor area
- Entry sign
- Concrete walkways
- Pool equipment building
- Landscaped areas
- Fencing
- Rustic composite benches

The new buildings are one story in height, although exact building heights have not been provided.



The Planning Board's statutory duty pursuant to the Municipal Land Use Law at N.J.S.A. 40:55D-31a for applications of this type is for "review and recommendation" in conjunction with the West Orange Master Plan.

The Township's 2019 Master Plan Update provides an overview of changes to the Zoo and adjacent County facilities since 2010, as well as notes its continued increases in annual attendance.

A concern is raised in the Master Plan Update about maintaining a balance between preservation and recreation in South Mountain Reservation. While acknowledging the benefits to West Orange of the County's investment in this facility, the following is noted on page 61 of the December 2019 Master Plan Update:

However, there are concerns about the amount of development in the Reservation, and the transformation of formerly open areas into active recreation space and zoo facilities. The Township should continue to work with Essex County to allow for appropriate development without overwhelming what makes the South Mountain Reservation a special place.

The current proposal involves redevelopment of existing facilities within already an already developed area of the Zoo, and therefore would not result in expansion of the Zoo beyond its existing boundaries. Therefore, the proposal is not inconsistent with the Master Plan.

