

RESOLUTION
Of the
PLANNING BOARD OF THE TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE

Heard: July 5, 2023

Case No.PB-23-05C

County of Essex/Turtle Back
Zoo/Animal Wellness Center

WHEREAS, pursuant to Municipal Land Use Law §40:55D-31, the Board has heard a proposed capital improvement project by the County of Essex for construction of certain improvements at the Turtle Back Zoo, which is County-owned property located at 560 Northfield Avenue, West Orange, New Jersey, said premises being designated on the municipal tax map as Block 163, Lot 1, Zone R-1; and

WHEREAS, the Board having heard the presentation and having performed its review pursuant to Municipal Land Use Law §40:55D-31 hereby makes the following findings of fact and conclusions of law:

1. The Board accepted into evidence the following exhibits:

<u>SUBMISSION ITEM</u>	<u>SIGNED BY</u>	<u>DATE/REVISION</u>
Exterior Rendering	Gregory A. Comito, AIA, PP, Comito Associates PC	Not dated
Aerial Image	Gregory A. Comito, AIA, PP, Comito Associates PC	Not dated
Floor Plans	Gregory A. Comito, AIA, PP, Comito Associates PC	5/15/2023

Conceptual Site Plan	Gregory A. Comito, AIA, PP, Comito Associates PC	12/5/2022
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2. Mark Fleder, Esq. of the law firm Connell Foley, LLP represented the Applicant.
3. The Turtle Back Zoo is owned by the County of Essex.
4. Lorrie Sciabarsi-Harris, AIA, PP, of Comito Associates, Registered Landscape Architect with offices located at 23 Warren Street, Newark, New Jersey, Michael Piga, of Van Cleef Engineering, 4 AAA Drive, Suite 103 Hamilton, New Jersey and Jilian Fazio, Director of the Zoo, testified on behalf of the County.
5. Essex County seeks to replace the existing Wolf Exhibit at the Turtle Back Zoo with a new Animal Wellness Center.
6. The Planning Board's statutory duty pursuant to the Municipal Land Use Law §40:55D-31 for an application of this type is for "review and recommendation" in conjunction with the West Orange Master Plan.
7. 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 it continued increases in annual attendance.
8. A concern was 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:

[T]here 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.

9. The current proposal involves redevelopment of existing facilities within an already developed area of the Zoo, and therefore would not result in expansion of the Zoo beyond its existing boundaries.
7. The Board finds that the proposed project and capital improvement is not contrary to the Master Plan of the Township of West Orange.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED by the Planning Board of the Township of West Orange that it finds the proposed project and capital improvements are not inconsistent with the Township of West Orange Updated Master Plan.

Vote Action Taken by the Board on July 5, 2023:

Board Member	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
K. Alper			X			
J. Guarino			X			
L. Klein			X			
S. McCartney			X			
C. Morgan						---
P. Smeraldo			X			
W. Wilkes						---
T. Williams			X			
S. Jensen			X			
J. Cardoza			X			
R. Bagoff	X		X			

Vote on Memorialization on July 19, 2023:

Board Member	Motion	Second	Aye	Nay	Abstain	Absent
K. Alper						
J. Guarino						
L. Klein						
S. McCartney						---
C. Morgan					---	
P. Smeraldo						---
W. Wilkes						
T. Williams						---
S. Jensen						
J. Cardoza						
R. Bagoff						