

RESOLUTION
Of the
PLANNING BOARD OF THE TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE

Heard: February 5, 2025

Case No.PB-24-20

County of Essex/Turtle Back
Zoo

WHEREAS, pursuant to Municipal Land Use Law N.J.S.A.40:55D-31, the Board heard an application for 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 N.J.S.A.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>
Aerial Map for Lemur and Tortoise Exhibit,	French & Parrello Associates	11/15/2024
Conceptual Site Plan for Lemur Exhibit	Michael Pliga, LLA of Franch & Parrello Associates	5/20/2024
Perspective View 1-4 for Lemur Exhibit	French & Parello Associates	Undated

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. Michael Piga, LLA, of Franch & Parrello, testified on behalf of the County.
5. Essex County seeks to make renovations to the existing Sealion Exhibit Area to house lemurs and tortoises so that these animals may move freely and interact with the surrounding environment. The Sealions will be removed from the exhibit and placed at other zoos.
6. The proposal includes four visitor viewing areas with associated stainless steel netting system, educational signage, benches and trash receptacles while connecting to other existing active areas.
7. The Planning Board's statutory duty pursuant to the Municipal Land Use Law N.J.S.A.40:55D-31 for an application of this type is for "review and recommendation" in conjunction with the West Orange Master Plan.
8. 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.
9. 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.

10. 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.
11. 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.

ADOPTED:

Jamilet Baquerizo Vite
Planning Board Secretary

Vote Action Taken by the Board on February 5, 2025:

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

Vote on Memorialization on April 2, 2025:

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