

RESOLUTION
Of the
PLANNING BOARD OF THE TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE

Heard: August 6, 2025

Case No.PB-25-06

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 Renovations of Gibbons Exhibit,	French & Parrello Associates	11/15/2019
Conceptual Site Plan for Gibbons Exhibit Renovations	Franch & Parrello Associates	5/17/2025
Correspondence prepared by French & Parrello Associates	Michael J. Pliga, LLA	7/2/2025

2. Mark Fleder, Esq. of the law firm Connell Foley, LLP represented the Applicant.

3. The County of Essex owns the Turtle Back Zoo.
4. Michael Piga, LLA, of Franch & Parrello, testified on behalf of the County.
5. Essex County seeks to make renovations to the existing Gibbons Exhibit located within the zoo along the main pathway, across from the existing Asia Exhibit.
6. The proposal includes new viewing features, new brick pavers laid in a basketweave pattern, a new glass window wall, updated glass at the existing viewing wall, and informational signage complemented by bamboo fencing.
7. The new walkway and renovations will be ADA compliant and handicapped accessible.
8. Inside the Exhibit, two new three-tiered platforms will be installed for the gibbons to sit or play on- one measuring 10' x 10' and the other 6' x 6'. Both platforms will extend 18 feet above the finished grade.
9. At the top, each platform will feature an Asian-inspired open-roof structure with a powder-coated metal frame. The existing stainless-steel, black-oxidized netting will be replaced in kind.
10. The landscaping will be updated to enhance the exhibit and provide visitors with opportunities to view the gibbons from multiple locations.
11. The existing gibbon's habitat building will receive a small extension at the rear of the structure. The addition will measure 6' x 21', or approximately 125 square feet, and will provide additional den space and training area.
12. The addition does not meet the definition of Minor Development and is not subject to additional stormwater management measures, since the increase will be de-minimus.

13. Renovations to the building include raising the rear portion of the roof, installing a new ceiling with lighting and skylights, and adding new mesh panels and shift gates.
14. The winter holding space will receive new LED lighting to replace the outdated compact florescent fixtures.
15. 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.
16. 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.
17. 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.
18. 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.
19. 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 August 6, 2025:

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

Vote on Memorialization on _____, 2025:

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