



TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE

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

Department of Planning and Development

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TO: Planning Board Members

FROM: Paul Grygiel, AICP, PP, Planning Director

DATE: August 6, 2021

RE: **PB-21-07C/County of Essex/Turtle Back Zoo/Asia Exhibit**
Block: 163; Lot: 1; Zone: R-1
560 Northfield Avenue
Courtesy Review Site Plan for Renovations to Asia Exhibit

INTRODUCTION/LAND USE

The applicant is proposing to renovate the existing Asia Exhibit at the Turtle Back Zoo adjacent to the Gibbons Exhibit. The renovations will include a plaza area, a new habitat building, two outdoor habitat areas and a seating area.

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	Aerial image dated 3/20/21
Conceptual Site Plan	French & Parrello Associates and Comito Associates PC (Unsigned)	6/15/21
Conceptual Floor Plan	French & Parrello Associates and Comito Associates PC (Unsigned)	6/15/21
Rendering	Comito Associates PC and French & Parrello Associates (Unsigned)	Not dated

DISCUSSION

The applicant is proposing to renovate the existing Asia Exhibit located in the southeast portion of the zoo. The specific facilities included in this proposal are:

- A new clouded leopard exhibit
- Outdoor clouded leopard habitats
- Outdoor red panda habitats
- An ADA-compliant ramp to connect the clouded leopard and snow leopard exhibits
- A stamped concrete walkway and a stamped concrete zodiac wheel
- Concrete paver walkways
- Decorative concrete planters
- Decorative metal benches

The height of the new habitat areas will be up to 20 feet.

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 draft 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 appears to be limited to redevelopment within already an already developed area of the Zoo. The applicant should confirm whether the limits of disturbance extend the area of the Zoo.

On the Conceptual Site Plan, there is an unlabeled black and white dashed line that crosses the southern end of the proposed area of the development. The applicant should indicate what this line is.

