

**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
FOR
COMPLETELY INCLUSIVE PLAYGROUND
AT RIVERSIDE COUNTY PARK SOUTH**

**COUNTY OF BERGEN
NORTH ARLINGTON AND LYNDHURST NJ**

January 25, 2023

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

a. Existing Conditions & Proposed development project - The 48-acre Riverside County Park South, located on the banks of the Passaic River, is an example of a typical urban park in the Bergen County Parks system and contains a large variety of amenities. It has a balance between programmed and un-programmed spaces. Park uses range from baseball to track and field to tennis to a boat storage and launch. The subject of this grant application involves replacing a children's play area; essentially an outdated climbing station, with a new Completely Inclusive Playground and positioning it to a new location to provide better access and community focus. While the subject of this Green Acres grant involves the Completely Inclusive Playground, new park amenities will be developed for the park improving the overall park in which this new playground will be a central focal point. The larger said improvements, subject to a recent Green Acres Park Development Grant (0200-21-069) involve new adult areas, new pedestrian scale lighting and planting, expanding on the pedestrian pathway circulation to provide safer walking paths in the park.

b. The objectives of the project involve improving existing facilities for greater enjoyment and extended use. The Completely Inclusive Playground will be complemented with the newly constructed comfort station/bathroom facility (completion expected by April 2023) which contains many all-inclusive features and follows American with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards. On the opposite side of the comfort station will be a community amphitheater. This new facility will also provide all accessible access for all individuals with unique abilities being able to view a community concert, play, and performances. The community amphitheater will provide a new meeting space for people to enjoy more and diverse programs in the park. All improvements, including the proposed grant application, will reposition the park as a place to gather for athletic completion, social interactions with family, friends and neighbors.

c. The Department of Park's proposed park Master Plan action, via its 2021 park development grant (0200-21-069), involves an overall upgrade of the County Park. This first phase of the park Master Plan for Riverside County Park South calls for improvements not related to this grant application but will take advantage of this new park feature to be funded with the Green Acres' Jake's Law Playground Funding program grant. For example, the new comfort station being constructed by the Department of Parks replaces the underutilized and deficient comfort station located in the southern (North Arlington portion of the park) section of the park. The Jakes Law Playground improvement will provide for greater park access, enable park users to stay longer at the park and provide for different age groups – a 2–5-year-old focused play area and adjoining 5–12-year-old focused play area. The inclusive area will include such elements as proper safety surfaces, shading, fencing and a quiet play area. This new park feature will be supported with new pedestrian lighting, provide safer walking routes within the park, new pedestrian access points from the surrounding neighborhood, new parking facilities close to the new park features. All of these improvements will bring the large 48-acre park together as a cohesive park unit thus eliminating the feel the park now has with park features isolated.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

This County park includes athletic fields, pedestrian pathways, a children's playground, tennis courts and athletic fields (soccer, baseball, softball). The new Bergen County Rowing Center facility is located in this park along the Passaic River and boat docks to launch crew boats. This facility, also funded via a Green Acres park development grant (02-10-16) to the non-profit Passaic River Rowing Association, (PRRA) is an upgrade to former facilities with a new two-story rowing center dedicated in September 2022. The vegetation on the property is primarily large lawn spaces with mature trees throughout the park. The park is located along the Lower Passaic River that flows 17 miles from the Dundee Dam (City of Garfield to the north) to the Newark Bay. The river is tidal from its confluence with the Newark Bay upstream to the Dundee Dam. This 17 mile stretch of the river is the location of a federal Superfund site, caused by contamination in the 1950's and 1960's by Diamond Alkali and other corporations after the production of DDT and Agent Orange. Riverside County Park South is located within the upper 9 miles of the Lower Passaic River Study Area (LPRSA) by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Contaminated sediment of the Lower Passaic River and Newark Bay poses a significant threat to people's health and the health of wildlife that live in and along the river and bay. The primary risks are from eating contaminated fish and shellfish from the river. The Diamond Alkali Superfund site is considered "Human Exposure Not Under Control" because of the on-going ingestion of fish and shellfish caught from the Lower Passaic River and Newark Bay complex.¹

The lower Passaic River is an intensely urbanized ecosystem with severe constraints on plant and animal life. Dominant habitat types in the lower Passaic River are all urban in nature, and available intertidal foraging areas for birds are limited to the isolated intertidal flats. These flats represent the only truly functional habitat for aquatic birds in the lower Passaic River.

A review of the USGS Surficial Geology of the Orange Quadrangle (Essex, Passaic, Hudson, and Bergen Counties), New Jersey shows the elevation in the vicinity of the Site ranges from 50 feet above mean sea level (ft. amsl) to 0 ft. amsl. The Site is in the Piedmont Lowland physiographic province, on the eastern edge of the Newark basin. This basin was formed during the Late Triassic and Early Jurassic periods and extends locally from west of the first Watchung Mountain to the Hudson River. It is mainly underlain by slightly folded and faulted sedimentary rocks of Triassic and Jurassic age and igneous rocks of the Jurassic age.

The Late Triassic to Early Jurassic Newark Group deposits underlies most of the region. Locally, the Newark Group deposits are comprised of one igneous and three sedimentary formations. From oldest to youngest, the sedimentary formations are the Stockton, Lockatong, and Passaic Formations. These are comprised mostly of terrestrial shales, siltstones, and sandstones with lesser conglomerates and gray black mudstones. The upper sections of the sedimentary formations lay below glacial deposits of the Pleistocene Epoch and are often weathered consisting of rock fragments embedded in a clay, silt, and sand matrix derived from the bedrock.

According to the *Bedrock Geology Map of Northern New Jersey* (USGS 1996), and the NJDEP GeoWeb Map Viewer, the Site is underlain by the lower Jurassic and upper Triassic sandstones, siltstones, shales, and sandy mudstones from the Passaic Formation (Jtr) which consists

¹ Diamond Alkali Co., Newark, NJ, Health & Environment, <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.Healthenv&id=0200613>. Accessed 13 July 2021.

predominantly of interbedded grayish-red to brownish-red, medium to fine grained, medium to thick bedded sandstone and brownish to purplish red, coarse grained siltstone. Unit is planar to ripple cross laminated, fissile, locally calcareous, and contains desiccation cracks and root casts. Maximum thickness of formation is 1,100 meters.

According to the SSURGO data, prepared by the USDA NRCS website (Web Soil Survey), on-Site soils are characterized as loamy lateral spread deposits over organic material. According to the USGS Surficial Geology of the Orange Quadrangle, Essex, Passaic, Hudson, and Bergen Counties, New Jersey the on-Site soils are characterized as Holocene and late Pleistocene Alluvium (Qal) deposits comprised of sand, silt, pebble-to-cobble gravel, and minor clays up to twenty-five (25) feet thick overlain by artificial fill of varying colors, generally less than twenty (20) feet thick, and comprised of sand, gravel, silt, clay, and man-made materials including cinders, ash, brick, concrete, wood, slag, metal, glass, and trash. Historic Fill of the Orange Quadrangle Map (HFM-41) produced by NJDEP Land Use Management and New Jersey Geological Survey, and NJDEP GeoWeb online mapping tools, historic fill material is present throughout the Site.

Surface water runoff drains either to swales, to stormwater drainage piping, or directly overland to the Passaic River which borders the site to the west. The regional overland drainage appears to be directed in a predominantly westerly, towards the Passaic River.²

There are no known historic or archeological resources in the area of the site.

Access to the site is via Riverside Avenue/River Road in the Township of Lyndhurst and Borough of North Arlington. Park entrances are at Wilson Avenue and Jauncey Avenue. While most visitors to the park travel by automobile, walking access is feasible.

The North Arlington entrance to the park is approximately one-mile from the Lyndhurst Train Station, served by NJ Transit's Bergen County Line. The park is also a little over one mile from the Kingsland Train Station on the same line. The dense street grid of the communities provides ample sidewalk presence meaning it is easily walkable. The park is also approximately 2.7 miles from the Rutherford Train Station on the NJ Transit Main Line.

The park is also served by multiple NJ Transit bus routes: 13, 74, 76, and 192, the latter of which runs on Riverside Avenue adjacent to the park, and all of which have stops within walking distance of one mile or less.

Land to the north of the park is an automobile car dealership, rows of multi-family and single-family homes along the eastern boarder, and to the south are high-tension electrical towers.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION

The majority of the work will be combining the existing features of the park with new features that will yield an incredible variety of recreational amenities. Existing are three baseball/softball fields, three tennis courts and a pickle ball court, two soccer fields, one multi-use turf field, a running track, comfort station, children's playground and picnic grove. New items being constructed are the boathouse, the comfort station/amphitheater building along with a Department of Parks maintenance garage facilities. New items proposed under this grant funded project

² Site Investigation and Remedial Investigation Report, Riverside County Park Boathouse, Dresdner Robin, February 2021.

involves the children's playground to replace the existing playground, along with the addition of a spray play area. The picnic cove will be repositioned, a proposed new comfort station is being planned to replace the existing comfort station near the multi-use turf field, and an extended walkway system throughout the park. A new area within the park to attract adult users to the park featuring games such as bocce, corn hole and horseshoes as well as plenty of seating and tables for people to just sit gather and chit-chat at. This area will feature a large-scale piece of outdoor art, two new fitness areas located at each end of the park, Get-Down areas along the river, riverfront Overlook Decks, two pedestrian footbridges along the river and many new seating areas, and many new plantings, lawns, shrubs, and shade and ornamental trees.

A palette of native plants is incorporated in the park design to help define new park spaces, provide shade, enhance views within the park and frame views out to the Passaic River. While 110 trees have been identified to be removed making way for the extended walkway system and waterfront viewing points, an estimated 272 new trees will be planted. The native plants will provide habitat and food sources for local wildlife and pollinators. These native plants are accustomed to the region's climate and pests.

Short term impacts from the project will include a temporary closure of the park to visitors due to the construction. Common construction practices will be followed as outlined in the Standards for Soil Erosion and Sediment Control as directed by the Bergen County Soil Conservation District. These short-term impacts will be eliminated upon the completion of the project.

The internal vehicular movement will be improved with the project. Current vehicular access is at the two points leading into the park ending at parking lots which dead end. Motorists then need to turn around and exit via the entrance they came into the park. The proposed park improvement plan calls for a new park drive system allowing vehicles to circulate throughout the park. Along the new park drive will have improved parking opportunities, smaller pull off lots situated near park gathering areas such as adjacent to the new adult area, the inclusive children's playground and a spray play area, and the picnic grove. Accordingly, parking impacts on local streets are not anticipated for general daily activities

Lyndhurst and North Arlington are two of the most densely populated municipalities in the County, State, and region, with persons per square mile exceeding 8,000 and, in some tracts, 13,000. According to projections, many of the most densely populated areas of the County are expected to grow and will grow at a faster rate than other areas of the County.³ To the west of Riverside County Park South and across the Passaic River are the Essex County municipalities of Belleville and Nutley. As this area of the County is very underserved in of open space/parkland per resident, along with population density, the Department of Parks anticipates a significant increase in recreation demand and overall use of the site over time. The two new facilities, the amphitheater and the crew/rowing boathouse, is expected to generate outdoor stage/theater and concert performances and additional crew/rowing regatta events that could potentially bring additional events. Children's Spray Play is a new feature which will attract more families with small children to the park to cool off on the cool spray of the water feature.

Permits required for the work will be: Pending - Waterfront Development Individual Permit & Freshwater Wetlands General Permit for overall park improvements; Pending - Sanitary Connection Approval & Treatment Works Approval (TWA) for new buildings; Pending - Soil Erosion & Sediment Control Certification & 5G3 Construction Activity Stormwater (GP) for construction phases; Future - Minor Technical Modification for future comfort station.

³ Bergen County Department of Parks. (2019) Bergen County Parks Master Plan, p. 55

Riverside County Park South is an existing county park that has been previously disturbed; accordingly, a Natural Heritage Data Request Form is not necessary.

The park is adjacent to the Passaic River and is within the floodway/flood fringe. The improvements will be designed in accordance with NJDEP Land Use Regulations and standards.

4. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

- a. Riverside County Park South has been in existence since the Bergen County Park Commission. The densely developed region of Bergen County does not permit the relocation of this park, therefore an alternate site is not feasible. There are no reasonable, feasible, available and cost-effective alternative to the existing site.
- b. The park improvement program keeps the balance of the existing use of the park while adding expanded features consistent to what currently exists. An example of this is the walkway system that will be expanded to provide a longer and safer walkway system, a new children's playground that features elements for all children and abilities will replace an existing, outdated climbing station. There will be new features that are consistent with the social aspect of park use. A new focus will be on adults for leisure space as well as fitness stations geared to their wellbeing. A dramatic alternative to the proposed park development project could be the removal of all athletic fields, the planned walkway system, removal of all social gathering locations for the young and adults. An alternative could be developing a new forested ecosystem in its place. This could be a combination of native trees and plants planted. A wetlands system could be introduced that will provide much needed habitat along the Passaic River.
- c. While constructing a new forested park is a lofty goal for this region, it would reduce park amenities in an area of Bergen County that is densely populated, and facilities underserved for its residents. The amount of park space for recreation, fitness and socializing in this region is limited. For the Borough of North Arlington, the number of acres of municipal open space per 1,000 people is 2.13 acres. There are fourteen ballfields and six playgrounds in the Borough. The number of ball fields per 1,000 people is 0.91. In looking at the Township of Lyndhurst, the acres of municipal open space per 1,000 people is 13.95. The number of playgrounds is 1.7 while the number of ball fields per 1,000 people is 3.⁴ The loss of the recreational amenities and ballfields would have a significant negative impact on the municipalities where residents use the County park as their local park space. Replacing them would be cost prohibitive and represent a hardship as available open land is scarce. The environmental impact of the proposed park improvements are very minimal as new elements being introduced are consistent with facilities in place and does not introduce any elements that would be inconsistent with the existing facilities. While establishing a new forested ecosystems is laudable, it can only be accomplished with extensive earthwork within the park that is constrained by the floodway system of the Passaic River. The financial cost of the new forested park has not been calculated. It is presumed ecological restoration would be equal to or exceed the cost estimate of the current park improvement project.

5. MITIGATING MEASURES

While providing the recreational amenities that enrich the lives of its citizens, the County of Bergen strives to preserve and protect its natural resources. Construction activities

⁴ Bergen County Parks Maser Plan 2017, Municipal Open Space Analysis, pgs. 80-82 and 101 -102.

associated with the park improvement plan may have a temporary adverse impact on the park. However, these temporary impacts will be mitigated by new park facilities for greater use and enjoyment along with new plants and trees to restore the temporary effects of construction efforts.

6. Author and Qualifications

This analysis was prepared by Adam Strobel, Director, Division of Land Management, Bergen County Department of Parks. Master of Public Administration, Rutgers University, 1994.