

# Dam Site 21 Master Plan

## Frequently Asked Questions



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### **Q. Why Create a Park at Dam Site 21?**

A. Most of the land at Dam Site 21 was acquired in 1979 by Mercer County for the dual purpose of creating a recreational area and a flood control facility. The 1978 County application for acquisition funding from the New Jersey Green Acres Program stated that *"the County plans to develop this area for passive recreational use to complement the development of Mercer County Park."* Also, the Washington Township (now Robbinsville Township) Master Plan delineated this area as a proposed park / open space linked to a municipal linear park along Miry Run.

The 1978 acquisition application noted four (4) primary regional objectives in utilizing the land for Open Space and Recreation.

1. Acquire and maintain prime agricultural land that otherwise might have been lost to residential development.
2. Provide passive recreation to complement activities at Mercer County Park.
3. Link to the planned (at the time) municipal park in Robbinsville Township along the Miry Run.
4. Locate a park in an area that has a high concentration of development and which was planned to have additional areas of development.

### **Q. Why is the park being developed now, decades after Mercer County acquired the property and developed the dam?**

A. In 2017 Mercer County acquired 4.3 acres on Hughes Drive as an addition to Dam Site 21. Soon after, the County began to examine how the Hughes Drive property should be incorporated into the larger dam site and concluded that a comprehensive Master Plan for the entire Dam Site 21 property is needed. The dam site is currently being managed for flood control and dam safety, but it is not actively managed for public access. However, the neighborhood is actively using it as a passive park. A Master Plan is needed to assess how the site can safely accommodate current and future public use, while also protecting and enhancing the natural resources on the property.

### **Q. Dam Site 21 receives minimal maintenance today. How will it be managed after park improvements are made?**

Dam Site 21 has been actively maintained to support the site's function as a flood control facility. Agricultural portions of the property are leased to a local farmer for farming. Once further developed as a park, the site will require more management to preserve and enhance the habitats, water quality and natural systems in the park. As the park receives more use, it will also receive increased maintenance by the County, as well as increased surveillance by park rangers to discourage unwanted activities at the park. The master plan will include an in-depth evaluation of water quality and the condition and quality of the site's habitats. This baseline conditions assessment will allow the County to develop a maintenance program specifically suited to the conditions on this site. Additional visitors to the park will also create additional visibility for the park and additional support for maintaining the site's natural resources and habitats.

### **Q. Will park improvements include new security enhancements to the site?**

A. Yes, park improvements will include some or all the following measures designed to make the park safer for all users and to encourage use that is more respectful of neighbors who live near the park. These improvements and operational changes include:



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- Vehicular access gates that can be locked at night.
  - Security cameras in some locations.
  - Site access designed for Ranger patrols and emergency response.
  - More frequent surveillance by County park rangers.
  - Safety improvements in the area around the dam structure.

Increased use of the park by County residents will also create more “eyes and ears” in the park, adding to park user safety. The County will also seek to develop more active partnerships with the police from Robbinsville, West Windsor and Hamilton Townships in order to eliminate confusion about who to notify regarding any park issues (since the park land lies within all three municipalities).

**Q. When hiring a consultant to create the Master Plan for Dam Site 21, why did the Request for Proposal (RFP) list “public process” as one of the first items in the scope of work?**

A. The Mercer County Park Commission wants the Master Plan to reflect park improvements that address the goals and ideas of the County residents who will use the park. To ensure there is broad public input in the process, the RFP required firms to have expertise in facilitating public meetings.

The County Park Commission also recognizes that in any community, development of a park facility may be a concern to nearby residents. Thus the RFP noted that *“It is anticipated that the new park improvements will cause public concerns from neighbors threatened by increased public use. The ability to address public concerns and present the park as beneficial and desirable is of great importance to the design process.”* The County will seek to be a good neighbor to the park’s abutting and nearby residents by designing improvements that respect resident privacy and balance park use and resource protection.

The RFP also notes that *“The property has significant natural environments. The lake and its associated wetlands, woodlands and fields are habitat for a variety of plants and animals. All care must be taken to ensure that the health and protection of the habitat is not adversely affected by the park use.”* The Mercer County Park Commission remains focused on these goals.

**Q. When will park improvements be constructed?**

A. The master planning process will take place throughout 2019. Once the plan is complete and approved by the Park Commission, the next step will be to create detailed designs and construction drawings for the project, and to secure all necessary permits and approvals for construction. These steps will require one year or more to complete. Once permits and construction drawing are finished, and construction funding is identified and set aside, the Park Commission would then undertake a public bidding process to contract with a construction firm to complete on or more phases of the park improvements.



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