

## NOTICE

### MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION OPEN PUBLIC MEETING ACT, CHAPTER 231, P.L. 1975

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN THAT THE MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION WILL HOLD THEIR OCTOBER PUBLIC MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2023; TO BEGIN AT 5:30 PM; AT STRAWBERRY HILL MANSION AT BALDPATE MOUNTAIN, 28 FIDDLERS CREEK ROAD, PENNINGTON, NEW JERSEY 08560.

THE COMMISSION RESERVES THE RIGHT TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION REGARDING THE DISCLOSURE OF MATERIALS, REPORTS, AND RECORDS OF PERSONNEL, IN PARTICULAR, DISCLOSURE AND DISSEMINATION OF MATERIALS OF PUBLIC CONCERN, INVESTIGATIONS, MATTERS INVOLVING CONDITIONS OF EMPLOYMENT AND POSSIBLE VIOLATIONS OF LAW

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#### AGENDA

➤ **ROLL CALL:**

**The following Commissioners answered the Roll Call of the Secretary:**

- Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith.
- Commissioner Davis joined the meeting at 5:50pm

**The following Commissioners were absent:**

- Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

➤ **CALL TO ORDER:**

- Commissioner Forrester called the October 25, 2023 meeting of the Mercer County Park Commission to order at 5:36 pm at the Strawberry Hill Mansion at Baldpate Mountain, 28 Fiddlers Creek Road, Pennington, New Jersey 08560.

➤ **FLAG SALUTE:**

- Commissioner Forrester led the Pledge of Allegiance and the Salute to the Flag.

➤ **NOTICE OF MEETING:**

**In accordance with the Sunshine Law (Open Public Meetings Act Chapter 231, P.L. 1975), adequate notice of this meeting has been provided in that notification was given as follows: emailed to the Times, Trentonian, and posted to the Mercer County Website and Mercer County Park Commission Website; and sent via email blast through the County of Mercer and Mercer County Park Commission notification system.**

- **EMPLOYEE RECOGNITION:** *(Nominated by Golf Superintendent, Jay Long and Presented by Executive Director Aaron T. Watson)* - This month's Employee of the Month is Angel Rodriguez, Mechanic at Mercer Oaks Golf Course. Angel has been a standout employee with the Park Commission since 2012 and is a key component of the success of golf operation not only at Mercer Oaks, for all County golf courses.

➤ **COMMUNICATIONS:**

- No October Communications

➤ **OLD BUSINESS: (Presented by Deputy Director, Joe Pizza)**

– **In-House Operations:**

- In-House Carpenters and In-House Painters performed updates and repairs to the Hunt House Strawberry Hill Mansion buildings.

– **Golf Operations:**

- Aeration is on-going at all courses.
- The Annual, Mercer County Employee Outing” event took place this month with seventy (70) County Employees in attendance.
- Staff are preparing for the Annual, “Hardest Day of Golf” event in November.

– **Capital Projects:**

- **Dam Site 21/Miry Run Ponds** – The Park Commission received permitting to begin the first phase of the lake dredging project. Formal Notice to Proceed for the project will be issued on October 31.

- **Green Infrastructure Parking Lot Upgrades at Spring Lake Park** – The rain guard and topcoat have been applied; with the project on-schedule and anticipated to be substantially completed in the coming months

- **Moore Station Quarry Park Development** – Since assuming responsibility of the property, the Park Commission has implemented daily Park Ranger Patrols and staff are performing facility and road maintenance at the property.

*Commissioner Forrester asked if there have been any incidents at the site.*

*Deputy Director, Joe Pizza, confirmed that incidents of graffiti have been found at the site.*

*Executive Director Watson confirmed staff are currently reviewing quotes received for the purchase of additional security cameras at the site, at the recommendation of the County’s Risk Management Office.*

➤ **APPROVAL OF REGULAR MINUTES FROM THE SEPTEMBER 27, 2023 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION MEETING:**

- On Motion by Commissioner Schulz and seconded by Commissioner Martinez, by voice vote, the September 27, 2023 Mercer County Park Commission Meeting Minutes were approved as presented.

- **Ayes:** Davis, Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

➤ **APPROVAL OF SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2023 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION BILLS:**

- On Motion by Commissioner Smith and seconded by Commissioner Schulz, by voice vote, the September/October 2023 bills of the Mercer County Park Commission were approved as presented.

- **Ayes:** Davis, Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

- **SEPTEMBER 2023 REVENUE REPORT** (*Executive Director, Aaron T. Watson, provided a synopsis of the September 2023 Park Commission Revenue Report*)

*Commissioner Schulz noted that Hopewell Valley Golf Course Revenue is doing well.*

*Commissioner Schulz requested a detailed revenue report to be submitted every six (6) months, in addition to the monthly update. Additionally, Commissioner Smith and Commissioner Schulz suggested that we should engage in research to compare County Growth to MCPC Growth for the purpose of identifying future planning/needs.*

*Commissioner Davis suggested research on population-based need, in addition to asset-based need, will further assist the Commission identify areas for MCPC public programming and recreational resources to be directed.*

*Commissioner Smith suggested providing research showing MCPC Growth from FY2016 to current would accurately assist in showing significant overall growth trends for the Park Commission. (Financial ROI and Community enrichment ROI).*

*Commissioner Smith commended the Administration on the change of the, “Tone and Tenor” of the Park Commission in their initiatives and offerings since the change in Administration in 2016.*

*Executive Director Watson stated that he is proud of the diversification of the Stewardship, public programs, public offerings and staffing opportunities of the Mercer County Park Commission, since beginning his tenure as the Executive Director in 2016.*

- On Motion by Commissioner Schulz and seconded by Commissioner Martinez, by voice vote, the September 2023 Park Commission Revenue Reports were approved as presented.
- **Ayes:** Davis, Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

- **NEW BUSINESS:**

- RESOLUTIONS:

R-1 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION AUTHORIZES THE EARLY TERMINATION OF A COMPETITIVE CONTRACT WITH YISROEL TKATCH/DBA YT HORSESHOEING FOR FARRIER SERVICES AT THE MERCER COUNTY STABLES AND HOWELL LIVING HISTORY FARM FACILITIES. “TERMINATE CONTRACT DUE TO UNSATISFACTORY SERVICE LEVELS AS REQUIRED IN THE ORIGINAL PROPOSAL SPECIFICATIONS.” TERMINATION EFFECTIVE: OCTOBER 10, 2023 (CC2023-07)

- On Motion by Commissioner Forrester, seconded by Commissioner Smith.
- **Ayes:** Davis, Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

R-2 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION AUTHORIZES THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO EXECUTE A MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING AGREEMENT WITH THE CITY OF TRENTON, DEPARTMENT OF RECREATION, NATURAL RESOURCES AND CULTURE; TO ESTABLISH THE ROLES, DUTIES AND COMMITMENTS OF EACH PARTY FOR THE INSTALLATION AND MAINTENANCE OF DEER EXCLUSION FENCING, FOR THE PURPOSE OF HABITAT IMPROVEMENT AT CADWALADER PARK, CITY OF TRENTON. PERIOD: ADOPTION THROUGH DECEMBER 31, 2027

Commissioner Smith asked for which area of the park will work be performed.

*Executive Director Watson replied that work will take place in the area of the park near Stuyvesant and Parkside intersection in the City.*

*Commissioner Schulz asked if the placement of the deer exclosures leaves area for deer to be re-directed without causing a safety hazard.*

*Director of Stewardship Mike Long responded that the exclosure area is small and deer will have ample room to redirect without causing hazard.*

- On Motion by Commissioner Smith, seconded by Commissioner Forrester.
- **Ayes:** Davis, Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

R-3 THE MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION AUTHORIZES THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SUBMIT A REQUEST TO THE TEMPORARY CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER OF THE COUNTY OF MERCER TO APPLY FOR APPROVAL FROM THE DIRECTOR OF THE DIVISION OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT SERVICES FOR THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A DEDICATION BY RIDER TRUST, FOR THE PURPOSE OF DEPOSITING AND EXPENDING DONATIONS FOR PARK COMMISSION EVENTS, AS REQUIRED UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF [N.J.S.A. 40A: 5-29] AND [N.J.S.A. 40A:4-39]

*Commissioner Forrester asked for additional information regarding Item R-3.*

*Counsel Blake provided some historical context of the initiative, beginning in 2020. Additionally, Counsel Blake indicated that the DCA/DLGS denied the original Application sent by the County in 2020 for revisions and is requiring us to provide a new Resolution to clarify our request.*

*Commissioner Davis asked for an overview of the intent of the plan.*

*Executive Director Watson stated that the preliminary objective is to engage partners to sponsor Park Commission Events; with additional objectives for additional need-based sponsorship opportunities within the Park Commission.*

*Commissioner Davis requested the Executive Director to bring the finalized initial plan back to the Board for a vote prior to implementation and engagement of funds.*

*Commissioner Martinez stated that the establishment of a Trust must be for a specific intent.*

*Commissioner Schulz asked how large of a scope of the Park Commission's assets will be offered for sponsorship/advertisement/naming.*

*Commissioner Forrester asked if the Trenton Thunder Stadium would be included in the plan.*

*Deputy Director Pizza responded that the Trenton Thunder Stadium's sponsors are part of a separate Lease Agreement; and would not be included in the current plan.*

*Commissioner Smith asked for clarification on Naming Rights Vs. Sponsorship.*

*Executive Director Watson stated that Naming Rights are a different type of process that involve public bidding.*

*Counsel Blake stated that we modeled our Sponsorship Plan after the Camden County model.*

*Chair Forrester requested to Table Item R-3 for further discussion.*

*Counsel Blake recommended that the Board consider a vote, as the Resolution is an application in a multi-step process and not finite in setting policies or procedures.*

*Commissioner Davis asked if use of a trust would include funds for need-based programming.*

*Commissioner Schulz asked for detail on the two (2) applicable statutory provisions for the Park Commission to establish a specific trust account. 1) Donations; and the other 2) Reimbursement for program fees.*

*Executive Director Watson stated that Item R-3 is a Resolution asking the Board to give us permission to engage this on the County Commissioner's Agenda for approval for our Temporary CFO to submit the Resolution of application to DLCG/DCA for approval.*

*Executive Secretary/Executive Secretary, Heather Mauro provided the Board with an overview of the current status of the initiative and potential next steps for implementation.*

- On Motion by Commissioner Forrester, seconded by Commissioner Davis.
- **Ayes:** Davis, Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

R-4 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION AUTHORIZES THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR TO EXECUTE A PURCHASE AGREEMENT WITH MULTIPLE VENDORS FOR THE PURCHASE OF VARIOUS GOLF COURSE AND FACILITY MAINTENANCE EQUIPMENT THROUGH THE EDUCATIONAL SERVICES COMMISSION OF NEW JERSEY COOPERATIVE PRICING SYSTEM. VENDORS: CHERRY VALLEY TRACTOR SALES, TURF EQUIPMENT AND SUPPLY COMPANY. TOTAL AMOUNT: \$1,020,402.33 (ESCNJ BID NO. 22/23-12)

- On Motion by Commissioner Schulz, seconded by Commissioner Smith.
- **Ayes:** Davis, Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

R-5 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION AUTHORIZES THE ACCEPTANCE OF GRANT FUNDING AND THE SUBMITTAL OF SUBSEQUENT GRANT AWARD DOCUMENTS FROM THE STATE OF NEW JERSEY HISTORICAL COMMISSION FOR A FY2024 GENERAL OPERATING SUPPORT GRANT TO SUPPORT CURATORIAL AND RESEARCH OPERATIONS FOR HISTORICAL RESTORATION PROJECTS AND EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AT THE HOWELL LIVING HISTORY FARM. TOTAL AMOUNT: \$25,923.00 [\$25,923.00 - STATE FUNDS; \$77,769.00 – PARK COMMISSION MATCH, SATISFIED BY HOWELL LIVING HISTORY FARM GENERAL OPERATING EXPENSES]. PERIOD: JULY 1, 2023 TO JUNE 30, 2024. (GRANT NO: HC-GOS-2024-00038)

- On Motion by Commissioner Forrester, seconded by Commissioner Davis.
- **Ayes:** Davis, Forrester, Martinez, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Gardner, Horne, Koontz and Mooij.

➤ **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR’S REPORT** (*Presented by Executive Director, Aaron T. Watson*)

**GOLF:**

- Golf revenue continues at steady pace, with revenue expected to top \$7M for the 2023 Fiscal year.
- We have had a full schedule of Golf Outings for October, most notable:
  - o **Mountain View:**
    - October 19: Miracle League (150 golfers)
    - October 21: Special Olympics, Fall Championships (100 athletes)
  - o **Mercer Oaks:**
    - October 16: 43 OAK Foundation held a fund raiser to raise money to help finance hockey for underprivileged children.
    - October 10: NJSBGA Outing (144 golfers)
    - October 19: Stout Bus Transportation (134 golfers)

**TENNIS OPERATIONS:**

- **USTA Tennis on Campus Sectional Championships** – The Championship event was scheduled for two (2) weekends this month, featuring twenty-six (26) college club teams. The top four (4) finishers will receive bids to the National Championships in Rome, Georgia.

**RECREATION AND EVENTS:**

- **2023 Ropes Course participation to date** – Inclement weather has caused three (3) of our original dates to be rescheduled. Despite weather cancellations, to date, the Park Commission has had thirty-two (32) Patrons participate in our Ropes Course Offerings. Patrons can register on-line for one (1) of four (4) time slots. We can accommodate a maximum of eight (8) participants per time slot; Up to thirty-two (32) per day. 2023 Available dates have been rescheduled through November.

**MARKETING AND COMMUNITY OUTREACH:**

- **Park Commission-Wide Full Suite Marketing Services** – Draft specifications are in development to solicit proposals for a firm that would provide a full suite of Marketing Campaign services for Park Commission-wide Advertising needs.

**STEWARDSHIP DEPARTMENT:**

- **Deer Management** –As of October 17, forty-nine (49) deer have been harvested through our traditional deer management program at Baldpate, Mercer Meadows and Mercer County Park.
- **Eagle Scout Projects** – Stewardship is working with two (2) boy scouts to develop their Eagle Scout projects. The projects will include bluebird nest box and bat box installation and tree planting at Rosedale Park.
- **5,000 Native Plants in 2023** – Planting this week with TCNJ students and Boy Scouts will mark over 5,000 native plants installed in Mercer County parks in 2023! Other volunteer groups from NJ Watershed Ambassadors, ISLES Climate Corps, and Bank of America employees helped the Stewardship Department reach this milestone this year.
- **Dam Site 21 Grasslands** – Planning has begun to convert approximately 35 acres of cropland to meadow at Dam Site 21. Native grasses that provide valuable habitat for wildlife will replace the existing cornfield.

**ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION:**

- **ISLES Designing for a Green Future** - This month, the ISLES group performed a planting at Spring Lake to add native vegetation to the shoreline. Students used plants native to the marshlands, acquired with funds provided by the Stewardship Department.
- **7th Grade Field Study** - The Environmental Education Department is in the final planning stages to host 800 students from the West Windsor Township School District for a multi-day field study experience at Mercer County Park in May. Students will conduct water quality sampling, soil testing, and forest composition studies to determine habitat health at our popular park.

*Commissioner Forrester asked for elaboration on the field study.*

*Executive Director Watson provided further details regarding the open-lab field study. Additionally, the Executive Director stated that Hamilton Township Schools have reached out with interest for their 7<sup>th</sup> Grade Classes.*

*Commissioner Davis asked if the School Districts are charged for the use of the Park for their study.*

*Executive Director Watson stated that the fees for use are detailed in our published Rates and Rees.*

### **HOWELL FARM**

- **Corn Maze Attendance** – Despite the closure of the maze on Saturday due to rain, a total of 732 visitors attended the maze the weekend of October 20<sup>th</sup>.
- **Pleasant Valley Historic District Director Pete Watson** was the keynote speaker at the October 17-18 annual conference of the International Association of Agricultural Museums in Punjab, India. He spoke about the ways that traditions preserved at places like Howell Farm find their way into modern sustainable agriculture research.

### **CAPITAL CITY URBAN FARM:**

- **10/28/23 Fall Harvest Festival** - On Saturday, October 28th, from 12-4pm, Capital City Farm will host a Fall Harvest festival. The event is free to attend; with complimentary refreshments and activities, including: Games, educational exhibits, art demonstrations, a scarecrow contest, a scavenger hunt, and more.
- **Donation** –Several Hundred bales of straw and numerous fall decorations were donated to the Farm by the organization, Cross Community, Inc.; from a recent Autumn event they held in Newtown, PA. Capital City Farm will utilize the donated items for their upcoming Fall Harvest Festival.

### **MERCER COUNTY STABLES**

- **Hope, Heal, and Horses** – Our first, *Hope, Heal, and Horses* event took place Tuesday, October 11. Women in different stages of their breast cancer journey participated in the three (3) hour event. Participants learned about the Stables, groomed, led and rode horses, as well as shared their breast cancer stories. The new, *Hope, Heal, and Horses* program also ran on October 17 and October 24.
- **Mercer County Stables' Special Olympic** athletes participated in the Special Olympics NJ Fall Games Equestrian Competition this past weekend. Ribbons and medals will be awarded on November 1. Placements can't be announced prior to that date, but I can report from a reliable source that the Mercer Stables riders did very well! Stay tuned for a press release after the official awards are announced.



## **WILDLIFE CENTER**

- **Food Donation**– The Wildlife Center picked up a very large dog and cat frozen food donation from organization, Dogs and Cats Rule, located in Doylestown, PA. Donations have re-filled Wildlife Center food freezers, after being depleted this season.
  
- **New Patient Numbers:**
  - o January 1 through October 21, 2023 = 2,346
  - o January 1 through October 21, 2022 = 2,345

## ➤ **PUBLIC SESSION:**

- The Mercer County Park Commission welcomes the public’s participation and comments. If you wish to participate in the public comment section of our meeting you may do so via the Zoom messaging/chat feature or by the, “hand-raising” feature, where you will be prompted to speak to provide your public comment.
- The rules and guidelines for public comment may be found on the Commission’s website. Please be aware that individuals are limited to a maximum of three (3) minutes during their comment. However, the Commission may, at its option, extend time for certain individuals during the public comment period.
- Each member of the public who wishes to speak during the public comment period shall give the speaker’s full name, organization name (if applicable) and Municipality of Residence.
- Individuals may provide comments, or materials, by regular mail to the Mercer County Park Commission headquarters or via email to [Hmauro@mercercounty.org](mailto:Hmauro@mercercounty.org).
  
- **Public Comment:**  
No Public Comment was received.

## ➤ **NOVEMBER 20, 2023 PARK COMMISSION MEETING:**

- Tulpehaking Nature Center, 157 Westcott Avenue, Hamilton, New Jersey 08610.

## ➤ **ADJOURNMENT:**

- On motion by Commissioner Smith and seconded by Commissioner Forrester, by affirmative voice vote, Adjournment took place at 6:33 pm.

Heather B. Mauro

Executive Secretary  
Secretary to the Board  
Mercer County Park Commission