

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 FEBRUARY PUBLIC MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, FEBRUARY 28, 2024; TO BEGIN AT 5:30 PM; AT THE HOWELL LIVING HISTORY FARM VISITOR CENTER, 70 WOODENS LANE, HOPEWELL, NEW JERSEY 08530

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

AGENDA

➤ **ROLL CALL:**

The following Commissioners answered the Roll Call of the Secretary:

- Forrester, Horne, Koontz, Schulz and Smith.

The following Commissioners were absent:

- Davis, Martinez, Mooij, Gardner.

➤ **CALL TO ORDER:**

- At 5:43 p.m., Commissioner Schulz called the February 28, 2024, Public Meeting of the Mercer County Park Commission to Order; at the Howell Living History Farm Visitor Center, 70 Woodens Lane, Hopewell, New Jersey 08530.

➤ **FLAG SALUTE:**

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

➤ **NOTICE OF MEETING: *Board Secretary, H. Mauro***

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.

➤ **APPROVAL OF THE MEETING MINUTES OF THE JANUARY 31, 2023 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION MEETING:**

- On Motion by Commissioner Schulz and seconded by Commissioner Koontz, by voice vote, the January 31, 2024 Mercer County Park Commission Meeting Minutes were approved as presented.
- **Ayes:** Forrester, Horne, Koontz, Schulz and Smith. **Nays:** None. **Abstain:** None. **Absent:** Davis, Martinez, Mooij, Gardner.

➤ **APPROVAL OF MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION BILLS:**

- No Bills Were Presented for Approval.

➤ **JANUARY 2024 REVENUE REPORT - Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza provided a synopsis of the January 2024 Park Commission Revenue Report**

Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza commented that golf revenue is showing slightly down for January due to snow and inclement weather events; and the Wildlife Center's revenue is down \$2k for January, however, a donation was received in 2023 in the same amount, balancing the revenue deficit for January.

- On Motion by Commissioner Schulz and seconded by Commissioner Smith, by voice vote, the January 2024 Mercer County Park Commission Revenue Report was approved as presented.

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

➤ **EMPLOYEE OF THE MONTH - Nominated by Assistant Howell Farm Director, Kevin Watson and presented by Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza.**

- Michelle De Los Santos, Assistant Administrative Secretary, Hunt House Administration.

➤ **COMMUNICATIONS**

- C-1 – SOFT PUCK HOCKEY PROPOSAL:

As a response to public comment received at the January 31, 2024 Park Commission Meeting, requesting the Park Commission to consider offering a Soft-Puck Hockey amenity, Acting Executive Director Joseph Pizza and Skating Center Manager, William Howell presented a draft proposal to the Board for review.

Commissioner Smith asked if the program will be tracked for evaluation.

Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza confirmed that the program would be evaluated after one (1) year for sustainability.

Skating Center Manager, William Howell commented that new programs take time to be fully realized. The newly implemented Senior Skate offering is an example of a length of time from the initial offering to its current popularity.

Commissioner Smith asked how the advertising will be supported.

Commissioner Schulz stated that the program could serve as a good introduction to hockey for youth and encouraged outreach for promotion of the program within schools.

Commissioner Smith requested outreach for the program be directed to local YMCA Organizations.

Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza confirmed that the proposed new amenity is anticipated to be included in the Park Commission's 2025 Rates and Fees for Board approval and for implementation for the 2025 skating season.

Commissioner Horne suggested a press release be drafted focusing on the amenity being implemented as responsiveness to a public request; with the intent to further encourage the public to engage with the Park Commission with their needs and suggestions.

– C-2 – EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR VISION

As a response to a request from the Board, Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza included a synopsis of his vision for the Mercer County Park Commission.

Commissioner Horne thanked Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza for providing a synopsis of his vision and asked if he would further break down how the Board can engage and advise in-line with his vision statement.

Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza commented that the vision statement is a shared vision with the Board and the County Executive and that he looks forward to collaborating as a group.

➤ OLD BUSINESS:

– *Park Maintenance, Superintendent of Operations, Rob Doherty*

- Electricians – Retrofitting LED Lights at various locations
- Plumbers – De-Winterizing facilities to prepare for Spring operations
- Painters – Refreshing interiors of facilities
- Maintenance Shop – Preparing the Athletic fields and Campsites for use in the coming weeks; and opening Irrigation Systems to test in preparation of the upcoming season.
- Tree Crews – On-going clearing and maintenance

Commissioner Schulz asked how the removed trees are repurposed after removal.

Superintendent of Operations, Robert Doherty confirmed that removed trees are used at the Skating Rink, Campsites, and used as chips for various fill.

– *Golf Operations, Superintendent of Golf, Jay Long*

- 1,800 Rounds of Golf played in January
- 4,100 Rounds of Golf played in February
- Tee sheet is open for courses; beginning 3/1/24
- Courses were opened in the off-season during mild weather and to satisfy demand.
- Deliveries of new Leased Golf Carts are on-going in advance of season opening.
- Mowing, bunker preparations and pesticide applications are on-going in preparation of season opening.

Commissioner Schulz asked if aeration remains on the same schedule.

Golf Course Superintendent, Jay Long confirmed that the schedule is generally the first week of April, then, one (1) course per week for five (5) weeks.

– *Capital Project Updates, Superintendent of Parks, Anthony Cucchi*

- This year's regular Deer Management season has concluded, with results flat to previous year's results. A final report will be submitted to the Board to review.
- Community Based Deer Management will conclude at the end of March.

- The Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space have selected a new Executive Director, former Park Commission Stewardship Director, Ms. Jenn Rogers.
- The Prescribed burn at Mercer Meadows this month was successful.
- The Howell Farm is seeking a permit from the State to perform an emergency removal of the defunct Historic Hunter Road Bridge structure in order to preserve it from further damage and possible loss in a severe weather event.
- Dam Site 21 - Lake de-watering at the site is on-going. Phase I trail plans and permitting are awaiting Municipal Official signatures to proceed with NJDEP Permitting review.
- Spring Lake Parking Lot – The project has been completed; awaiting plantings to bloom with the milder weather.
- Rosedale Restroom – Awaiting the Certificate of Occupancy from the Township of West Windsor to close out the project.
- Turf Field Grant – The MCPC, Planning Department and the Finance Department are reviewing the terms of the Grant Agreement and Match requirement. Once ratified, specifications will be advertised for public bidding.
- Moores Station Quarry – Phase I Improvements will proceed with a Contract to develop a concept plan and a Contract to perform professional surveying services. Staff are monitoring the water level of the lakes and are assessing the budget to include for management of the water bodies in the upcoming years.
- Living Shoreline Restoration at Roebing Park – Additional delays in the project continue as Artifacts discussions/determinations continue between the Federal Army Corps of Engineers and the Federal and State Tribal Consultants.
- Trenton Wharf Park Improvements – NJDOT is re-designing the Flood Wall and we are moving forward with our plan submission to NJDEP/SHPO to assess a time for construction.

Commissioner Schulz asked what is being done with the sediment from the DS21 Lake Dredging.

Superintendent of Parks, Anthony Cucchi confirmed that spoils were tested as per a two (2) year NJDEP permitting review. The spoils will be utilized at the Farms and at various locations throughout the parks, as needed.

Superintendent Cucchi commented that recent floods as a result of significant rain weather events have had a significant impact at the Quarry; and trail improvements are anticipated to begin in 2026.

Commissioner Schulz asked if the property is defined on the 100-year flood plan.

Superintendent Cucchi confirmed that there is no risk on the flood plan to the property.

Acting Executive Director Pizza confirmed that the Park Commission is in the process of applying for a State Permit to discharge water at the site.

➤ **NEW BUSINESS:**

- RESOLUTIONS:

R-1 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION AUTHORIZES THE EARLY TERMINATION OF THE COMPETITIVE CONTRACT WITH SOUNDTRACKS PRODUCTION SERVICES, LLC, FOR SOUND PRODUCTION SERVICES FOR THE MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION. "TERMINATE CONTRACT UNDER THE TERMS THAT THE BUSINESS ENTITY HAS BEEN DISSOLVED AND THE PROVIDER CAN NO LONGER PERFORM SERVICES UNDER THE ORIGINAL TERMS OF THE CONTRACT" TERMINATION EFFECTIVE: FEBRUARY 14, 2024 (CC2022-05)

- On Motion by Commissioner Koontz, seconded by Commissioner Smith.

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

Commissioner Koontz asked if staff anticipate difficulty with interest when re-advertising for services.

Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza replied that although we had one (1) bidder previously, we do anticipate interest for bidding.

R-2 MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION AUTHORIZES COMPETITIVE CONTRACTING FOR SOUND PRODUCTION, LIGHTING AND EQUIPMENT SERVICES FOR THE MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION CONCERT SERIES, AT VARIOUS MERCER COUNTY PARK COMMISSION FACILITIES. PERIOD: ONE (1) YEAR WITH THREE (3) ONE-YEAR EXTENSION OPTIONS

- On Motion by Commissioner Schulz, seconded by Commissioner Smith.

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

➤ **EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

Presented by Acting Executive Director, Joseph Pizza

- **GOLF**

- All Golf Courses open for the season on 3/1/24

- **TENNIS**

- On 2/10, on-line Registration opened for Spring and Summer Adult and Jr. lessons. Currently, there are 910 lessons booked; with \$78k generated in revenue.
- Tennis won the USTA Middle states premier provider award for the twelfth consecutive year .

- **SKATING RINK**

- The Rink will be open until 3/10. The Skating Rink manager reported a good season, with increased public interest and new program offerings, particularly, "Senior Skate", to be successful.

– **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

- The Environmental Education Department Director and staff participated in the annual AWE meeting. Staff provided presentations for the, “Youth Art League” program. Art from youth participants will be on display at the Tulpehaking Nature Center through May 17, 2024.

– **HOWELL FARM**

- The farm saw 1k school visitors and 1k regular visits for the 2024, “Maple Sugaring” program.
- To date, approximately two (2) tons of food have been distributed to local food banks for this year’s, “Share the Harvest” program.

– **MERCER STABLES**

- All programs for March and April are booked
- Summer program registration will open on March 1, 2024.
- The Stables hosted two (2) sessions in Lawrence and Ewing Townships called, “Learn before Lunch”, a disability resource fair presenting Stables offerings and Volunteer opportunities with the Stables.

Commissioner Forrester expressed support for the outreach aimed at fostering involvement and team concepts for seniors, children and the disabled.

– **RECREATION AND EVENTS**

- Picnic reservations have generated \$39k in Revenue to date. We look to expand this offering in the future to additional locations.
- As a result of a public request, the Disc Golf Course was cleared and expanded by nine (9) holes. There were 8,890 rounds played in 2023. There is a large demand, with minimal cost to provide the amenity (@\$450 ea hole + labor).
- Commissioner Schulz asked if the clearing would keep the footprint of the area the same.
- Superintendent of Operations, Robert Doherty confirmed that the footprint would remain the same, with minimal labor to clear the wooded area of Invasive shrubs, which is beneficial to the existing trees and shrubs.

– **WILDLIFE CENTER**

- Wildlife Center Seasonal and Volunteer staff are in attendance at the National Wildlife Rehabilitator’s Conference in Omaha, Nebraska. The Wildlife Center Friends Organization sponsored their attendance.
- Veterinarian interns from the University of Pennsylvania are currently being hosted at the Wildlife Center.

Howell Farm Director, Pete Watson provided a synopsis of the History of the Howell Farm and the Visitors’ Center.

Commissioner Schulz thanked Director of Marketing and Communications, Wanda McNeill for praise he received of her partnership with the YMCA Organization.

Commissioner Schulz thanked the Golf Superintendent, Director and General Manager for their responsiveness to Patron needs.

Acting Executive Director Joseph Pizza thanked the Board for the support in his new role.

➤ **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.
- **Public Comment:**
 - Claire Ganley, Hampton, New Jersey, Children's' Futures, Healthy Kids 501(c)3 Organization.
 - Jenn Rogers, Hopewell, New Jersey Executive Director, Friends of Hopewell Valley Open 501(c)3 organization.

➤ **MARCH 27, 2024 PARK COMMISSION MEETING; TO TAKE PLACE AT 5:30PM AT:**

- Tennis Hall of Fame
Main Level
1638 Old Trenton Road
West Windsor, NJ 08550

➤ **ADJOURNMENT:**

- On motion by Commissioner Smith and seconded by Commissioner Koontz, by affirmative voice vote, Adjournment took place at 6:42 pm.

Heather B. Mauro

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Executive Secretary

Secretary to the Board

Mercer County Park Commission