

Mount Holly Township Environmental Assessment

DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED ACTION

a. Briefly describe the total development project

If successfully awarded funding from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's 2023 Urban Parks and Green Acre's Grant Program, the Township of Mount Holly will complete removal of the existing soccer/football field and replace it with new multi-purpose synthetic turf field at Iron Works Park and ADA- accessible ramp to access the park's concession stand. The proposed project also includes the installation of a canoe launch into the North Branch of the Rancocas Creek.

The Township will complete the proposed project while adhering to all appropriate site clearing and restoration requirements. The existing field and launches are in dire need of restoration due to excessive use and is not currently ADA-accessible to all our residents. The Iron Works Park Improvement Project will seek to address these barriers and improve the recreational opportunities afforded to our residents for the public enjoyment for all patrons.

b. State objectives of the project

The Township's primary goal is to offer a wide range of recreational activities for residents of all ages, abilities and provide a comprehensive park system of which contains both passive and recreational facilities. Furthermore, the Township understands the importance of identifying the evolving needs of residents and providing a variety of recreational amenities to help encourage healthy lifestyles. The Iron Works Park Improvement Project will not only enhance the overall quality of life for residents, but also provide barrier-free access to recreational opportunities for residents of all ages and background regardless of ability.

In particular, the proposed project is in alignment with the 2014 Mount Holly Open Space and Recreation Master Plan to improve the overall quality of life for all residents. This Master Plan further acknowledges that recreational amenities are a key quality of life issue that residents often face in general, and for these reasons remain a leading priority for the Township. As Mount Holly is identified as an urban and highly dense community, it is critical that our community residents are provided adequate open spaces for passive and active recreational opportunities and amenities. The Township Council and Department of Recreation have identified the need for the proposed Iron Works Parks improvements and are confident that this project will strengthen the Township's goals to achieve these efforts.

c. Fully describe multi-phase projects

This category is not applicable for this project.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Describe existing environmental features:

- a. vegetation
- b. wildlife
- c. geology, topography and soils

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- d. water resources/hydrology
- e. historic/archeological resources
- f. transportation/access to site
- g. adjacent land uses/description of the surrounding neighborhood

The North Branch of the Rancocas Creek runs through the entire Township of Mount Holly, and Iron Works Park is located along the southern portion of this watershed. Iron Works Park is a recreational park that encompasses Mount Holly's official launching point on the Rancocas Creek Canoe Trail. To date, it is the last point west along this 14-mile water trail as it moves east from Pemberton Township.

Iron Works Park encompasses three baseball fields, storage sheds, picnic benches, pedestrian paths, a football field, a concession stand, and an official boat launch, along with three unofficial launch sites: one of which is under the footbridge of the Mill Dam Park and several at the north and west ends of the park. In fact, tire tracks in the turf grass along the creek indicate a need for restoration and more official launch sites as visitors are currently driving across the turf grass and directly offloading boating and fishing equipment. The type of plant species within and around the circumference of Iron Works Park consists of many perennial plants' native to Southern Jersey. Wildlife in and around the project site demonstrate characteristics of southern New Jersey's species such rabbits, squirrels, and a variety of birds.

Iron Works Park remains one of the Township's primary public parks and is accessible to all residents and visitors of all ages and demographics of the Township. Currently, the park is less than 1 mile away from NJ Transit Bus Route Stations. Moreover, due to the Park's proximity to mass transit, Iron Works Park has become a convenient and frequent destination for residents and visitors. Iron Works Parks offers residents the opportunity to walk or bike to the park.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION

Impacts are defined as direct or indirect changes in the existing environment, whether beneficial or adverse, that are anticipated as a result of the proposed action or related future actions and uses. Any off-site impacts, such as increased traffic on neighborhood roads or increased noise levels in surrounding areas, should be described. Whenever possible, environmental impacts should be quantified (i.e., number of trees to be removed, cubic yards of cut/fill, etc.).

a. Discuss all affected resources and the significance of each impact

The project will complete the restoration of an existing soccer/football field and transform this field into a multi-purpose recreational turf field to steward a wide variety of, upgrade lighting and provide barrier-free access through the installation of an ADA-accessible ramp to the park's only concession stand. Natural grass that has visibly deteriorated from continuous use will be replaced with synthetic turf. The project will also include installing a canoe launch ramp. This will not disturb any native species in the project location.

b. Discuss short-term and long-term project impacts

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The Iron Works Park Improvement Project will have a positive impact on our community's quality of life by replacing an existing softball/football field also natural grass that has visibly deteriorated from continuous use with artificial turf and installing a safe canoe launch point.

Long-term impacts may include increased usage. However, the site is already used for soccer and football therefore the impact of increase usage is anticipated to be minimal. Lighting installation may impact surrounding residential neighborhoods however, the Township is committed to an open process which will allow for public input prior to project implementation. Additionally, the design and development of this project has been created to minimize additional need to clear trees and vegetation to the greatest extent possible. The proposed project site has become a leading area of concern for the Township Administration and identified by community members.

The Township of Mount Holly has been undergoing significant redevelopment, and the Township's investment in its open, public spaces and parks will only continue to attract new residents, more small businesses, and further investments in the Township's infrastructure. The proposed project will have long-lasting benefits that will meet the current and future needs of residents and generations for years to come.

c. Discuss anticipated increase in recreation and overall use of site over time

The project site is already utilized for football and soccer games therefore increase usage is anticipated to be minimal.

d. Identify adjacent environmental features that may be affected by the proposal

The surrounding area is parkland and forested wetlands. There are not anticipated impacts to surrounding features as a result of the proposed project.

e. List any permits required for project and brief status (i.e., waterfront development)

It is anticipated that the Townships will need permits pursuant to the Freshwater Wetlands Protection Act Rules (N.J.A.C.7:7A), Flood Hazard Area Control Act Rules (N.J.A.C.7:13), and Coastal Zone Management Rules (N.J.A.C.7:7). All necessary permits will be acquired in a timely manner.

f. For development that would impact an undisturbed portion of the project site, the local government must submit a Natural Heritage Data Request Form to the DEP's Office of Natural Lands Management (form available at www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/natural/heritage/datareq.html or by writing to Natural Heritage Program, PO Box 404, Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0404). Please attach and discuss the results of the search.

The Iron Works Park Improvement Project will not impact any undisturbed portions of the project site.

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g. *Discuss if/ how the project may be impacted by sea level rise and any related design considerations.*

The proposed canoe launch included in the project may be impact by future rise in sea level; however, the Township does not anticipate this as a major concern. The launch will be properly secured for all anticipated weather events.

4. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

a. *Identify alternate sites*

Iron Works Park is one of the primary public parks in Mount Holly Township for recreational activities such as football and soccer. In addition, its proximity to the North Branch of the Rancocas Creek is an ideal location for a canoe launch. Therefore, there are no alternative sites for the proposed project.

b. *Discuss alternate levels and types of development*

There are no alternatives to providing the proposed facility in Mont Holly. One alternative would be to construct a natural grass facility. However, the continuous wear and tear that this facility would incur would require significant maintenance and run counter to the goals of the project to increase access to soccer and football facilities in Mount Holly.

c. *Compare environmental impacts of each alternative*

The alternative would be to construct the field of natural grass. This would have a more natural impact on water filtration and drainage. However, the artificial turf surface will be permeable to allow for proper drainage of rainwater.

5. MITIGATING MEASURES

a. *Describe the measures that will be undertaken to mitigate adverse impacts*

The Township of Mount Holly has finalized the design and construction of the new synthetic multi-purpose turf field, design and construction of the canoe launch, and the development of an ADA accessible ramp to access one of the park's beloved features, the concession stand. The Township is prepared to continually provide regular maintenance for Iron Works Park. The Township will take all precautions necessary to the site/surrounding areas when implementing this project to ensure there are no adverse impacts to the environment in and around Iron Works Park.