



**ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT  
PARK DEVELOPMENT  
BRANCH BROOK PARK ALLIANCE**

**1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

*a. Briefly describe the total development project*

The proposed project will allow for necessary improvements to be made to Essex County Branch Brook Park, located in the City of Newark, New Jersey. The proposed scope of work includes improvements to the basketball courts and bathroom. These upgrades will allow for parkgoers to have safer and more durable facilities to use.

*b. State objectives of the project*

The objective of this project is to make necessary upgrades to Branch Brook Park, specifically the basketball courts, and the bathroom, which remain heavily used by the community, which include the children in the local public schools, youth athletic teams, adult sport leagues, and those looking for personal recreation and leisure. These improvements will create safer facilities that will enhance playability and the overall experience at the park, while increasing fitness and wellness within the community, and decrease the complaints about the current conditions.

*c. Fully describe multi-phase projects*

Not applicable because this project is not multi-phased.

**2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

*Describe existing environmental features:*

*a. Vegetation*

The site of the proposed project will take place in Branch Brook Park, which is a 360-acre park featured by a combination of open meadowland and small patches of woodland on gently rolling terrain. Branch Brook Park is known for its beautiful and diverse vegetation, which plays a vital role in the park's ecological and aesthetic appeal. The park features a mix of mature deciduous and evergreen trees, including iconic cherry trees, which make it a renowned location for seasonal cherry blossom displays. More than 4,000 cherry trees that blossom during April are greater both in variety and number than the famed Washington, D.C., displaying the result of a 1927 gift from Mrs. Felix Fuld family. At its height the Cherry Blossom Festival attracts over 10,000 people a day. Open grassy areas provide space for recreation and relaxation, while smaller shrubs and ornamental plantings add to the

*b. Wildlife, including State and federal threatened and endangered species and critical habitats*

Because of the City of Newark's urban landscape and environment, there is wildlife consistent with developed and highly dense areas, such as squirrels, skunks, chipmunks, and regional bird species.

*c. Geology, topography, and soils*

Branch Brook Park is located in the Newark Basin, a geological area made up of sedimentary rocks. The park's gently rolling terrain adds to its natural beauty and helps with water drainage throughout the area. These slight elevation changes make the park ideal for both recreational facilities and natural spaces. The park's soil is a mix of urban fill, loamy material, and sandy loams, which support its lush vegetation and recreational areas. During construction near the basketball courts and bathrooms, measures will be taken to prevent erosion and stabilize the soil, ensuring the park's features remain sustainable for years to come.

*d. Water resources/hydrology*

Branch Brook Park contains several water features, including ponds and streams, which play a significant role in the park's hydrology. These water resources support local wildlife and help manage stormwater runoff in the surrounding urban area. The park's sloping allows for natural drainage, directing rainwater toward the ponds and other low-lying areas. These water features act as natural retention basins, reducing the risk of flooding and helping to filter runoff before it reenters the local watershed.

While the proposed improvements to the basketball courts and bathrooms are unlikely to directly affect these water resources, measures will be taken during construction to prevent sedimentation or contamination of nearby water features. Proper stormwater management systems, such as erosion controls and drainage enhancements, will ensure that the park's hydrology remains balanced, and its water quality preserved. These efforts will maintain the health of the park's water resources and their essential role in the park's ecosystem.

*e. Historic/archeological resources*

Branch Brook Park holds significant historical and cultural value as the first county park in the United States, designed by the renowned Olmsted Brothers firm. Its design reflects the ideals of 19th-century urban park planning, emphasizing natural beauty and public recreation. The park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, highlighting its importance as a cultural and architectural landmark.

Key historical features include its iconic cherry trees, bridges, walking paths, and structures like pavilions and fountains, which contribute to the park's character. While no major archeological sites are documented within the park, its long history suggests the potential for uncovering artifacts during construction activities. The proposed improvements to the basketball courts and bathrooms will be carefully planned to preserve the park's historical integrity. Coordination with

local historic preservation authorities will ensure that construction does not disturb significant features. Any ground-disturbing activities will comply with regulations under the National Historic Preservation Act, protecting the park's rich cultural and historical heritage while allowing for necessary upgrades.

*f. Transportation/access to site*

Branch Brook Park is easily accessible due to its central location in Newark. The park is bordered by major roadways, including Bloomfield Avenue, Park Avenue, and Heller Parkway, which provide convenient access for vehicles. Designated parking areas are available within the park, offering ample space for visitors, including those accessing the basketball courts and bathrooms.

Additionally, public transportation options enhance accessibility, with NJ Transit bus routes and nearby train stations serving the area. These connections make the park accessible to residents and visitors from Newark and neighboring communities.

For pedestrians and cyclists, sidewalks and bike-friendly paths link the park to the surrounding neighborhoods. Entrances to the park are well-marked, ensuring safe and straightforward access for all visitors. During construction, temporary signage and rerouting measures will be implemented to maintain access to unaffected areas of the park. These efforts will ensure the park remains accessible while upgrades are underway and continue to serve as a welcoming destination for the community.

*g. Adjacent land uses/description of the surrounding neighborhood*

Branch Brook Park is located in a busy urban area of Newark. The park provides a green space for relaxation and recreation in this densely populated area, making it an important resource for the community. Its central location and access to public transportation and major roads make it easy for residents and visitors to enjoy. Branch Brook Park plays a key role as a recreational and community hub in the neighborhood.

### **3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION**

*a. Discuss all affected resources and the significant of each impact*

The proposed project consists of improving existing facilities within a fully developed park. For that reason, there are no affected resources expected in the project. No trees will be removed, and soil inspection and testing will be conducted, as well as soil erosion and sediment control measures.

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

There are no expected impacts, either short or long-term, from the proposed project. Any minor disturbances will be limited to the installation and improvements of the existing courts and bathroom. The long-term result of this project will provide a safer and more easily accessible

open space for the community, and the new materials and facilities used will be easily maintained to be used for a long time.

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

Many people flock to Branch Brook Park, given its highly residential and commercial environment. The current facilities still attract many people to the fields and area, so with the proposed improvements, the Essex County Parks Department and Branch Brook Park Alliance anticipate an increase in the park's use. Local sports teams, families, adult leagues, and more rely on this park, and with the proposed improvements, additional park goers will utilize the site for active and passive recreation.

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

No adjacent environmental features will be affected by the project.

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

A Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Permit is needed to complete the project.

*f. For development that would impact an undisturbed portion of the project site, the local government must submit a Natural Heritage Data Request Form*

Not Applicable

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

The proposed project is not anticipated to be impacted by sea level rise.

#### **4. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION**

*a. Identify alternative sites*

As the project proposes improvements to existing recreational amenities at an existing recreation site, alternative sites for the proposed improvements do not exist.

*b. Discuss alternate levels and types of development*

The proposed improvements are to be completed within the existing Riverfront Park site. There are no alternative sites or types of development.

*c. Compare environmental impacts of each alternative*

Not applicable

#### **5. MITIGATING MEASURES**

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

Mitigation of adverse impacts to Branch Brook Park or the surrounding environment are not necessary, as this project will be completed in the already existing developed park.

## **6. AUTHOR(S) AND QUALIFICATIONS**

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