ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

PARK DEVOLPMENT

ESSEX COUNTY PARKS FOUNDATION

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

a. Briefly describe the total development project

The Essex County Parks Foundation is requesting funding to make improvements to Essex County Mills Reservation. The proposed scope of work includes entrance improvements and trail improvements. The total development project at Mills Reservation focuses on enhancing accessibility and improving the visitor experience through entrance upgrades and trail renovations. These upgrades will modernize the Reservation's entry points, making them more inviting and functional, while the trail renovations will improve safety, durability, and usability for hikers, walkers, and other visitors. This project aims to preserve the natural beauty of Mills Reservation, strengthen its role as a cherished community resource, and ensure it remains an accessible and enjoyable destination for all.

b. State objectives of the project

The objective of this project is to enhance accessibility, improve trail safety, preserve environmental integrity, increase visitor engagement, and promote sustainability at Mills Reservation. These objectives will support the community that relies on Mills Reservation's facilities.

c. Fully describe multi-phase projects

Not applicable, as this project is not multi-phased.

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Describe existing environmental features:

a. Vegetation

Mills Reservation is characterized by a rich and diverse array of vegetation that contributes to its natural beauty and ecological value. The Reservation features a mix of trees, which form a dense canopy over much of the reservation. This canopy provides shade and supports the local ecosystem by offering habitat and food for various wildlife species. Open grassy areas and

meadows are scattered throughout the Reservation, offering spaces for relaxation and recreation. The Reservation's vegetation plays a critical role in preserving its natural character, supporting wildlife, preventing soil erosion, and improving air quality. It also enhances the overall visitor experience by creating a tranquil and scenic environment. Any upgrades to the Reservation will carefully preserve and integrate these natural features to maintain the unique ecological integrity of Mills Reservation.

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

While there are no known critical habitats or permanent populations of state or federally listed threatened and endangered species within Mills Reservation, the Reservation supports a variety of wildlife species, highlighting its role as a natural refuge within an urbanized region. Common species include small mammals such as squirrels, rabbits, and raccoons, as well as a range of birds such as woodpeckers, robins, and warblers. The Reservation's wooded areas and open spaces provide habitats for reptiles and amphibians, including frogs and turtles.

The proposed upgrades, including entrance improvements and trail renovations, will be designed to minimize disturbance to wildlife habitats. Measures such as preserving native vegetation, avoiding construction during sensitive seasons for wildlife, and implementing erosion control will help protect the ecological balance of the reservation. Continuous monitoring and adherence to environmental regulations will ensure that the Reservation remains a safe and thriving habitat for its diverse wildlife.

c. Geology, topography, and soils

Mills Reservation is part of the Watchung Mountains, with a foundation of basaltic rock that creates its rugged terrain and natural drainage patterns. The Reservation's rolling hills provide scenic views for visitors. The soil in the Reservation is a mix of loamy and rocky materials, which support its dense vegetation. While the soil drains well, areas with heavy foot traffic can become compacted, limiting plant growth and water absorption. Erosion is a concern on slopes and near trails but can be managed with proper trail maintenance and erosion control. The planned improvements will include measures to protect the Reservation's soil and terrain, ensuring its natural features are preserved while enhancing trails for safer and more enjoyable use.

d. Water resources/hydrology

Mills Reservation relies on natural drainage from its hilly terrain and well-draining soils. Rainwater flows down slopes and is absorbed by the ground, preventing flooding and supporting small seasonal streams during heavy rainfall. These natural systems help filter runoff and reduce erosion. The planned trail and entrance upgrades will include erosion controls and permeable materials to maintain the Reservation's natural water flow. These measures will protect the Reservation's hydrology while improving access and ensuring the trails remain safe and durable.

e. Historic/archeological resources

Not applicable, as Mills Reservation does not have any formally designated historic or archeological sites.

f. Transportation/access to site

Mills Reservation is easily accessible by local roadways, including Normal Avenue and Reservoir Drive, which provide entry points to the Reservation. There is limited parking available near the entrances, accommodating visitors arriving by car. Public transportation options enhance access to the Reservation. NJ Transit bus routes serve nearby areas, with stops within walking distance of the entrances, making it accessible for those without private vehicles. For pedestrians, the Reservation connects to nearby residential neighborhoods via sidewalks and trails, making it walkable for local residents. Cyclists can access the site via local roads, though dedicated bike lanes are limited in the surrounding area.

g. Adjacent land uses/description of the surrounding neighborhood

Mills Reservation is surrounded by residential neighborhoods with single-family homes and small apartment buildings, as well as Montclair State University and other community facilities. The Reservation serves as a peaceful green space for local residents, students, and visitors, offering opportunities for recreation and relaxation. Its proximity to homes makes it a convenient and popular destination for many. The planned entrance and trail improvements will enhance access and strengthen the Reservation's role as a vital resource for the surrounding community.

3. ENVRIONEMTNAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION

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

There may be minor environmental resources affected during this project. Vegetation, including small shrubs and groundcover near trail renovations or entrance improvements, may be disturbed or removed during construction. Trail renovations and entrance upgrades may disturb soil, increasing the risk of erosion in some areas. Temporary closures of trails or entrances may limit access for visitors during construction. To this end, the project's impacts are minimal and temporary, with effective mitigation measures planned to address potential disruptions created.

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

In the short time, there may be temporary disruptions to the Reservation's natural and recreational environment. Vegetation near work areas may be disturbed, and some wildlife could be disrupted by noise and activity. However, these short-term impacts will be mitigated when the proposed project is completed. More significantly are the long-term impacts, which will provide great benefits to the community that relies on the Mills Reservation. The renovated trails will be safer, more durable, and accessible for all visitors, encouraging greater use and enjoyment of the facility. Improved entrances will enhance accessibility, making the Reservation more welcoming and user-friendly. Overall, these upgrades will strengthen the Reservation's role as a vital

community resource, providing enhanced recreational opportunities and maintaining its ecological integrity.

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

The proposed entrance improvements and trail renovations at Mills Reservation are expected to significantly increase recreational use and overall visitation over time. By creating a safer, more accessible, and more welcoming Reservation, the upgrades will attract a broader range of visitors.

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

Not applicable, as no adjacent environmental features will be affected by this proposal.

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

It is expected that a Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Permit will be needed.

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, as this project does not impact an undisturbed portion of the project site.

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

Not applicable, as this project is not impacted by sea level rise.

4. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

a. *Identify alternative sites*

There are no alternative sites for this proposed project.

b. *Discuss alternate levels and types of development*

Because there are no alternative sites, there are also no alternative levels and 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*

To minimize adverse impacts during the improvements at Mills Reservation, several measures will be implemented. Native vegetation will be preserved wherever possible, and any disturbed areas will be replanted with native species to restore habitats and prevent erosion. These mitigating measures will ensure that the project minimizes temporary disruptions while

protecting the Reservation's natural beauty, wildlife, and visitor experience, delivering long-term benefits for the community.

6. AUTHOR(S) AND QUALIFICATIONS

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