



ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT
COUNTY OF ESSEX
URBAN PARKS- WEEQUAHIC PARK

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT

a. Briefly describe the total development project

The total development project at Essex County Weequahic Park in Newark, NJ, involves comprehensive upgrades to its recreational facilities. This includes the renovation and resurfacing of basketball courts (Building 92), improvements to athletic fields for football, soccer, and track activities, and the enhancement of accessibility features to comply with ADA standards. The project aims to create a modern, safe, and inclusive recreational environment for the residents of the City of Newark.

b. State objectives of the project

The primary objective of the proposed project is to enhance recreational facilities at Weequahic Park in Newark, NJ, through improvements to basketball courts (Building 92) and athletic fields (including football, soccer, and track facilities). These upgrades aim to provide modern, safe, and accessible amenities for community use while fostering recreational and athletic development.

c. Fully describe multi-phase projects

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

2. DESCRIPTION OF THE ENVIRONMENT

Describe existing environmental features:

a. Vegetation

Weequahic Park's vegetation includes a variety of mature maple, oak, and elm trees, which provide shade and contribute to the park's aesthetic appeal. Grassy open areas support recreational activities and gatherings. Along the pond's edge, native vegetation helps maintain water quality, control erosion, and provide habitat for local wildlife. Various plants and seasonal flowers enhance the visual appeal and ecological diversity of the park.

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

The wildlife at Weequahic Park is traditional of large urban green spaces in New Jersey, with a mix of common bird species, small mammals, reptiles, and aquatic life. Bird species such as robins, sparrows, and blue jays are frequently observed, and small mammals like squirrels and raccoons and reptiles such as turtles are common in the area. The pond provides a habitat for fish and frogs.

There are no known habitats for endangered or threatened species within Weequahic Park. Rarely, protected species, such as migratory birds on the federal list, appear in the park. Regular environmental assessments ensure that the Park's activities do not adversely affect such species or their potential habitats.

c. geology, topography, and soils

Weequahic Park lies within the Piedmont physiographic region of New Jersey, characterized by sedimentary rock formations, including sandstone, shale, and siltstone. The underlying geology consists of deposits from the Newark Basin, a prominent geological feature formed millions of years ago. The park has typical urban parkland terrain, as it is relatively flat, with a slight slope toward the pond, supporting natural water drainage. The topography supports diverse recreational and ecological uses, including sports fields and walking trails. The park's soil consists primarily of urban fill and loamy material, commonly modified due to previous construction and landscaping activities. Native soils in the region include well-drained loams and sandy loams, suitable for supporting the vegetation within and around the park. Erosion-prone areas, particularly near the pond, are mitigated by stabilizing vegetation and native planting strategies to maintain soil integrity.

d. water resources/hydrology

Weequahic Park has a pond centrally located, which is recognized as a key water resource within the park. This pond serves as a habitat for aquatic species, supports recreational activities such as fishing, and contributes to the park's overall aesthetic and ecological value. Additionally, the pond plays a role in stormwater retention and management for the surrounding area of Newark.

The hydrology of the park is influenced by its gentle slope, which allows for surface water runoff to be directed toward the pond, which functions as a natural catchment basin, further minimizing potential flooding in the adjacent areas. The water quality in the pond is influenced by runoff from the park and surrounding areas, while native vegetation buffers around the pond help reduce sedimentation and nutrient inflow, which allows for better water quality. The County of Essex provides regular monitoring of the park and its pond to ensure compliance with environmental standards and to mitigate impacts on aquatic habitats.

e. historic/archeological resources

Although there are no known archaeological sites within Weequahic Park, the park holds historical significance as part of the Essex County Parks system, which was designed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by the renowned landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted. The park's design reflects the era's emphasis on creating green spaces for public recreation and community well-being. The park is located in the City of Newark, an area with a rich historical and pre-historic past. All proposed improvements will ensure adherence to state and federal historic preservation laws, including Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), to protect the park's cultural and historical resources. Coordination with the NJHPO and local historical societies will ensure the protection of any identified resources.

f. transportation/access to site

Primely located in the City of Newark, Weequahic Park is easily accessible for all, through various modes of transportation including walking, biking, driving, and public transportation. The park's boundaries include access points from Meeker Avenue (to the north), Elizabeth Avenue (to the west), and Dayton Street (to the south). These roads provide convenient access for those who access the park with vehicles. Designated parking areas within Weequahic Park provide ample space for visitors arriving by car. These facilities are distributed strategically near major park entrances, including areas close to the basketball courts and athletic fields. Parking is available within the park.

Additionally, the park is served by nearby public transportation, including bus routes operated by NJ Transit, which run along Meeker Avenue and Elizabeth Avenue. These routes provide access for residents and visitors from Newark and neighboring communities, enhancing the park's accessibility for those without private vehicles. For park goers who wish to access the park by foot or bike, the park includes pedestrian entrances and pathways that connect to nearby neighborhoods, ensuring walkability for local residents. Dedicated sidewalks and crosswalks along adjacent streets provide safe pedestrian access to the park. Additionally, the park accommodates cyclists with paths suitable for biking, though bicycle lanes on surrounding roads are limited.

g. adjacent land uses/description of the surrounding neighborhood

Weequahic Park is surrounded by a rich, vibrant, and welcoming community that has a mix of single-family homes, apartment complexes, and townhouses, which are adjacent to nearby commercial corridors, such as those along Elizabeth Avenue and Lyons Avenue. These commercial areas include retail shops, small businesses, grocery stores, and restaurants. Additionally, the area surrounding the park includes several schools, places of worship, and community centers. These institutions often utilize the park for events, athletic programs, and outdoor education, fostering strong ties between the park and its community stakeholders. The park is a critical green space for the 304,000 residents of Newark that live within a densely urbanized area. The park's popularity emphasizes its importance as a resource for outdoor activities and community engagement in an otherwise built-up environment.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ANALYSIS OF PROPOSED ACTION

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

a. Vegetation:

- i. Affected Resource: Mature trees, grassy areas, and native vegetation around the pond
- ii. Impact: The proposed construction may result in the removal of a small number of mature trees and temporary disruption to grassy areas during grading and field improvements. Native vegetation near the pond is not expected to be significantly disturbed.

b. Wildlife:

- i. Affected Resource: Local bird species, small mammals, and animals in the pond
- ii. Impact: Temporary noise and activity during construction could disturb local wildlife. Aquatic habitats are not expected to be significantly affected.

c. Geology, Topography, and Soils:

- i. Affected Resource: Soil
- ii. Impact: Grading and construction may lead to erosion or soil erosion, especially in areas near the pond.

d. Water Resources/Hydrology:

- i. Affected Resource: The central pond and water runoff
- ii. Impact: Construction could result in minor sedimentation in the pond due to runoff. Changes to impervious surfaces may slightly alter hydrological patterns.

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

The proposed project at Weequahic Park will have both short-term and long-term impacts. During the construction phase, short-term impacts will primarily involve minor localized disruptions to vegetation, soil, and local wildlife that may experience temporary displacement caused by noise and human activity. These disruptions will be confined to the construction period and area, and wildlife is expected to return once activities conclude.

In the long term, the project is expected to deliver significant benefits. The upgraded recreational facilities, including modernized basketball courts and enhanced athletic fields, will provide the community with state-of-the-art amenities that encourage physical activity and social interaction. These improvements are anticipated to provide a safer facility, attract more visitors, and increase

the park's usage and its role as a community hub. The replanting of native vegetation will restore ecological balance, enhance the park's visual appeal, and improve wildlife habitats, contributing to environmental sustainability.

The minor disruptions during the project period are outweighed by the many proposed benefits.

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

The County of Essex anticipates that the proposed improvements to the recreational facilities at Weequahic Park will result in an increase in recreational activities and overall usage of the site. By modernizing the basketball courts and upgrading the athletic fields for football, soccer, and track events, the park will attract a broader range of users and will position the park as a premier destination for both casual recreation and structured athletic programs. The upgraded facilities will encourage greater participation in physical activities such as basketball, jogging, and soccer, fostering healthier lifestyles among park users.

Weequahic Park is a preferred venue for community events, youth sports leagues, and school athletic programs. The availability of high-quality facilities will create opportunities for partnerships with local organizations and schools, further integrating the park into the fabric of the community. The restoration of natural areas and the addition of amenities such as water stations and improved signage will also make the park more appealing for families, walkers, and nature enthusiasts.

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

The proposed improvements at Weequahic Park may have minor impacts on nearby environmental features during construction. The park's central pond and the vegetation surrounding it could be affected by soil disturbances and runoff, potentially increasing sedimentation. However, measures will be taken to restore its ecological balance. The park's grass areas near the project sites may also be impacted. Local wildlife, such as birds, small mammals, and reptiles, may experience temporary disruptions to their habitats due to construction noise and activity, but the effects are expected to be short-term, with wildlife returning once construction is complete and the environment is restored.

Overall, while the project may cause minor, temporary disruptions to nearby environmental features, the planned mitigation strategies and restoration efforts will ensure these areas are protected and enhanced in the long term.

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

A Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Permit is needed for 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, as this project is not being completed in an undisturbed portion of Weequahic Park.

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

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

4. ALTERNATIVES TO THE PROPOSED ACTION

- a. Identify alternative sites*

Weequahic Parks is an essential park in the community of Newark and is in need of improvements. If the County of Essex is unable to receive funding for the proposed project, the usability and the safety of the park will decline. For this reason, no alternative sites have been identified.

- b. Discuss alternate levels and types of development*

No alternative levels or types of development have been identified for the proposed recreational improvements.

- c. Compare environmental impacts of each alternative*

No alternative levels of development have been identified for the proposed project, and therefore, no alternatives are available to compare.

5. MITIGATING MEASURES

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

The County of Essex will take measures to mitigate any adverse impacts during the Weequahic Park improvement project. To manage air quality, dust suppression techniques like water spraying and covering materials will be used, and construction equipment will be kept up to emission standards. Noise impacts will be minimized by limiting construction to daytime hours, and additional noise-dampening measures will be implemented if needed. Traffic flow around the park will be managed with clear signage and traffic controls, while access to unaffected areas of the park will remain open. Historical features will be protected through careful planning and oversight in coordination with preservation authorities. Community engagement will include regular updates on project progress and open channels for feedback to address concerns promptly. These measures ensure that short-term impacts are effectively managed while the project delivers long-term environmental, recreational, and community benefits.

6. AUTHOR(S) AND QUALIFICATIONS

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