

Aquatic Park & Greenway Project



Pequannock Township
Morris County, New Jersey
FINAL DRAFT

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THE ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION OF PEQUANNOCK AND TOWNSHIP OF PEQUANNOCK WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE ASSOCIATION OF NEW JERSEY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSIONS AND THEIR SPONSORS FOR MAKING THIS PROJECT POSSIBLE THROUGH THEIR GENERIOUS GRANT AND TECHNICAL SUPPORT.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The master plan for the Aquatic Park and Greenway Project provides a blueprint for the enhancement of an underutilized open space resource located in Pequannock Township. The achievement of this plan will provide a significant open space amenity, afford linkages with regional open space and recreational resources, protect and enhance critical environments and habitats, and springboard further conservation and open space efforts.

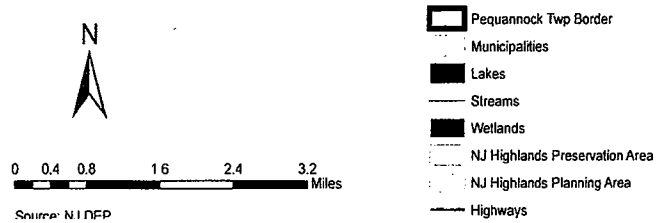
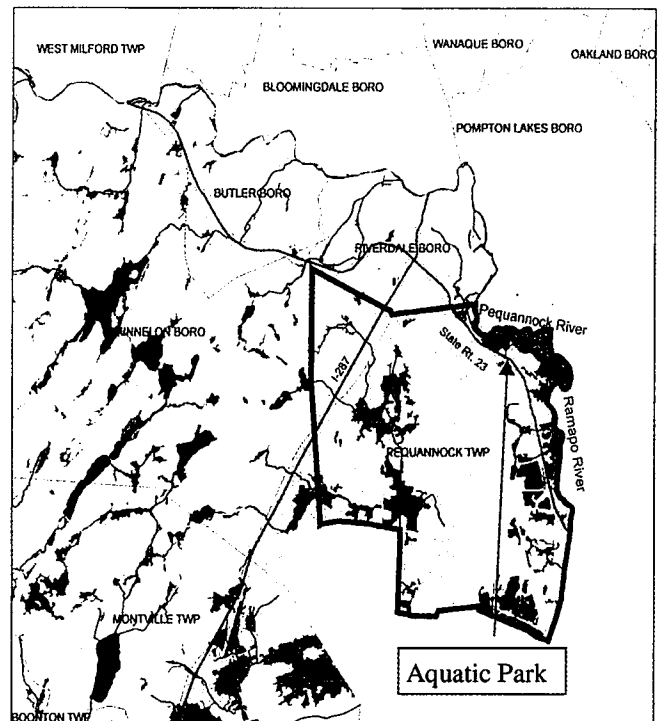
Most importantly, the actualization of this plan will inspire greater environmental awareness among park visitors. Through the transformation of a long-neglected and oft-forgotten municipal parcel into a regional open space amenity, local residents and park users are provided an outstanding opportunity to encourage the diversity and restoration of environmental resources. The park also serves as a tool to educate the public as to the natural resources and recreational opportunities located in their back yard. The intent of this project is to serve as the starting point for future conservation and open space initiatives.

Pequannock Township’s master plan seeks to actively protect existing environmental resources, expand open space and recreational opportunities, and link open space offerings to regional open space networks. As will be demonstrated throughout this plan, the proposed improvements to Aquatic Park and the riverfront will advance each of these goals and provide a valuable regional amenity. The hope is that its success will spur additional open space acquisitions, provide greater resource protection and encourage partnerships among the various groups, adjacent municipalities and counties for the benefit of the region.

II. PROJECT SUMMARY

In an effort to protect the river environment, expand Pequannock Township’s open space offerings and implement the open space and recreation goals of the Master Plan, the Township’s Environmental Commission pursued funding to develop a master plan for the area along the Pequannock River, identified as Aquatic Park. Aquatic Park is a little-known municipal property adjacent to the Pequannock River, consisting of approximately 40 acres of open space. While the assets of the area are well-acknowledged, Aquatic Park suffers from a number of barriers which have impeded the realization of its full potential. Without a formal plan and vision for the area, the “park” has languished for more than 30 years.

In accordance with the grant received from the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC), the Environmental Commission, with the support of the Township Administration, Open Space Committee and Department of Parks and Recreation, developed this master plan for Aquatic Park and riverfront to improve access for both educational and multi-purpose recreational use of this scenic area. The master plan is the result of the collaborative efforts involving multiple stakeholders and interested citizens. This plan intends to serve as a catalyst for the protection of the resources and the realization of the area as a regional open space amenity.



Regional Map of Park Location

III. REGIONAL SIGNIFICANCE AND RELATIONSHIP TO THE STATE AND LOCAL PLANS

Pequannock Township serves a critical role in the region. Situated in a plain at the base of the New Jersey Highlands, the township is strategically located at the confluence of the Pompton, Pequannock, and Ramapo Rivers. The area is environmentally significant for the flood plain and water resources it affords, as well as the extensive wetlands and wildlife habitat it provides. The community serves as an important transition area between rural Highlands communities to the west and suburban Passaic/Morris County communities to the east. The plan offers valuable linkages to the river and contains numerous opportunities for the expansion of regional greenways and linear open space features.

As stated previously, the Pequannock Aquatic Park Project is anticipated to serve as a springboard to initiate larger open space projects in the area. Although this project is seemingly small relative to the surrounding open space and its environs, its impact will be substantial. With increased use and inter-municipal access (via a bike path and the North Jersey District Water Supply Commission pipeline), the Aquatic Park plan and open space improvements will help effectuate similar projects in adjacent communities along this natural corridor.

The development of this plan, and the ensuing improvements to Aquatic Park and riverfront, will provide invaluable public awareness and exposure to this magnificent natural area. By advancing the community's awareness, it is hoped that the stakeholders will renew public interest in the protection of existing environmental assets and features, and trigger a greater desire to expand open spaces and/or pursue access easements to help preserve them.

Moreover, it is hoped that the increased awareness and visibility will afford greater protection and policing of adjacent properties. While the area adjacent to the river is zoned for highway commercial development, the remote nature of the area makes zoning enforcement difficult and intrusions are commonplace. Aquatic Park and other properties located along the river are constrained by floodplains, the 100 year floodway and wetlands.

Potential Links to Regional Open Space Resources:

North Jersey District Water Supply Commission Pipeline

Status: No formal access to date.

Linkages: Approx. 2 miles between Borough of Wanaque (Passaic County) and Little Falls.

Significance: Link to Highlands region

Morris County Bikeway

Status: Unknown

Significance: Local and regional connection.

Riverside Park

Location: Wayne Township

Significance: Open space adjacent to river to form linear connection & massing.

Passaic County Park

Location: Wayne Township

Significance: Open space adjacent to river.

and objectives of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, including the following:

- To conserve the State's natural resources and systems;
- To protect the environment, prevent and clean up pollution; and
- To ensure sound, integrated planning and implementation statewide.

More specifically, this plan directly advances the establishment of greenways, as discussed in the State Plan. (See inset at right.)

Lastly, this plan responds to and advances the recommendations contained in the township's 2003 reexamination report. The reexamination report speaks to the importance of the resources found in this region, and specifically states that the Township "must make it a priority to protect these areas, expand open space opportunities and provide essential linkages to Township and regional trails through improvements to Aquatic Park and along the river."

Greenways in the State Plan:

"Greenways are corridors of protected open space managed for conservation and recreation purposes. They often follow natural land and water features and link nature reserves, parks, cultural features and historic sites with each other and with populated areas.

...serve as a focus for redevelopment efforts in the state's river towns, including restoring existing parks and acquiring additional land along the waterways."



The remnants of the feeder canal of the Morris Canal on the Pompton River at Aquatic Park. (photo courtesy of Dr. Thomas Shivy)

IV. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Connect to existing and proposed open space resources in the region;
- Increase public awareness concerning the environmental assets of the area;
- Inspire environmental stewardship among park visitors, including school children;
- Provide unique recreational opportunities catering to a diverse demographic;
- Ensure the continued conservation of this sensitive area and prevent incompatible intrusions;
- Increase accessibility and visibility;
- Provide educational opportunities relating to habitats and environs;
- Provide opportunities for wildlife viewing;
- Catalyze future open space initiatives in the Township and the region;
- Examine and recommend ordinances that will support protection of the adjacent resources while addressing improved water quality and aesthetics.

