

RESOLUTION OF THE ESSEX COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION MAY 4, 2020

WHEREAS: The Essex County Board of Chosen Freeholders has authorized \$600,000 from the Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund to determine the feasibility of constructing a 500-seat amphitheater at the Turtle Back Zoo location (“proposed project”); and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would involve the removal of 1.5 acres of land from the South Mountain Reservation; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would involve the deforestation of much of that land; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would convert open land area, with attendant soil, plants and other means of minimizing stormwater runoff to developed land area; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would include and increase vehicle traffic and parking in the Zoo area; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would generate stormwater runoff in excess of present stormwater runoff volumes; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would entail automotive fluids and other pollutants entering that stormwater; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would generate construction and maintenance related pollutants that would enter the stormwater; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would entail that runoff, along with any attendant pollutants could impact towns within Rahway River watershed,

WHEREAS: This proposed project would remove from South Mountain Reservation land, vegetation, streams and animal habitats which are irreplaceable in location and kind; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would, if brought to fruition, cost the County and therefore its Townships and Municipalities \$8,600,000 at current estimates; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project would involve significant environmental impact on the Rahway River watershed,

WHEREAS: This proposed project would be inconsistent with the guidelines of environmental best practices, as well as the objectives of the State Master Plan; and

WHEREAS: This proposed project was drafted without public comment and has been funded with the expenditure of over \$400,000 without public referendum on the spending of such funds, let alone performing an independent Environmental Impact Study prior to spending such funds; and

WHEREAS: We are currently in a pandemic situation, social distancing will be the norm for the foreseeable future, and gatherings of large crowds will not be allowed;

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED THAT THE ESSEX COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION REQUESTS:

1. We recommend that the project should be dropped altogether, given the covid19 and budgetary realities;
2. That absent dropping the project altogether, we recommend that an Environmental Impact Study be performed by an accredited, independent licensed professional firm prior to such referendum, with said Study being made conspicuously available to the citizens of Essex County in general; and
3. That absent a finding from said Study that the proposed project will have a net neutral environmental impact on the water, air, lighting, groundwater pollution, surface pollution, carbon absorption, open space area and other related impacts, the proposed project be abandoned.

Respectfully submitted,

ESSEX COUNTY ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION