

2023

# ANNUAL REPORT



SOMERSET COUNTY

OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

JANUARY 2024

**SOMERSET COUNTY  
2023 BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**

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(L-R) PAUL DRAKE, DIRECTOR SHANEL Y. ROBINSON, DEPUTY DIRECTOR SARA SOOY, MELONIE MARANO AND DOUGLAS SINGLETERRY.

# Contents

Summary of Meetings	<b>2</b>
Open Space Preservation Highlights	<b>3</b>
ESTATE OF HERBERT PATULLO, BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP	4
DAVID & MICHELLE MADOVOY, HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP	6
ESTATE OF DONALD COGLAN, HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP	7
JOE & KATHLEEN LOCATELL, HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP	8
ESTATE OF CARMELLA GAGLIOTI, WARREN TOWNSHIP	9
Recreation Grant Program	<b>10</b>
LIBERTY PARK PLAYGROUND, PEAPACK & GLADSTONE BOROUGH	12
Recreation Grant Project Status	
COMPLETED PROJECTS AND PROJECTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION	<b>14</b>
BOUND BROOK POOL, BOUND BROOK BOROUGH	14
CAMP CROMWELL, BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP	15
MIKE MERDINGER MEMORIAL PAVILION, HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP	16
MICHAEL LEPP PARK POOL, SOMERVILLE BOROUGH	16
WARREN PAVILION, WARREN TOWNSHIP	17
2023 Open Space Annual Report Map	<b>19</b>
Open Space Preservation Sign Program	<b>21</b>
Somerset County Preservation Plan	<b>22</b>
Open Space, Trust Fund, Farmland, and Historic Preservation	<b>24</b>
2023 Commissioner Allocations, Expenditures and Awards	<b>25</b>
Moving Forward	<b>27</b>



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Helen Haines

Jeff Hammond

Randy Jones

Amber Murad

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POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Thomas Boccino, PP, LLA  
SUPERVISING PLANNER-PRESERVATION  
OFFICE OF PLANNING,  
POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Josephine Taranto  
PRESERVATION PLANNER  
OFFICE OF PLANNING,  
POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Katelyn Katzer  
PRINCIPAL PLANNER  
OFFICE OF PLANNING,  
POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Geoffrey Soriano  
DIRECTOR  
COUNTY PARK COMMISSION

.....  
**COUNSEL**

Joseph DeMarco, Esq.  
COUNTY COUNSEL

Sarah Fitzpatrick, Esq.  
DEPUTY COUNTY COUNSEL

SOMERSET COUNTY

**OPEN SPACE  
ADVISORY COMMITTEE**

**ANNUAL REPORT  
2023**

**Background & Membership**

The Open Space Advisory Committee was organized under and authorized to exercise the authority of the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders by resolution in May, 1991. The committee provides bi-partisan representation on recommendations to the Somerset County Board of County Commissioners for the expenditures of funds from the Somerset County Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund. This includes open space acquisition projects, acquisition grants through the Special Projects Grant Program and County Flood Mitigation Funding Program, and development grants through the County Recreation Grant Program. All acquisition and grant projects are evaluated based on consistency with the Somerset County Preservation Plan.

The Open Space Advisory Committee consists of ten voting members, one member and one citizen appointee each from the Board of County Commissioners, County Planning Board, and County Park Commission, and two citizen appointees each from the Democratic and Republican parties. The term of each voting member is one year. The Preservation Section within the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development oversees the administrative responsibilities of the committee.



## Summary of Meetings

The Open Space Advisory Committee met on three occasions in person at the Somerset County Administration Building and on the remaining occasions via Zoom and Telephone Conference.

### 2023 CALENDAR

January 18, 2023

February 8, 2023

March 8, 2023

April 12, 2023 (IN-PERSON)

May 10, 2023

June 10, 2023

July 14, 2023 (IN-PERSON)

August 12, 2023

September 13, 2023

October 11, 2023 (IN-PERSON)

November 8, 2023



## Open Space PRESERVATION HIGHLIGHTS

The County acquired parcels from four property owners totaling **39.24** acres. The total Open Space Inventory is now **14,962.19** acres.



VIEW FROM THE FIRST WATCHUNG RIDGE

## ESTATE OF HERBERT PATULLO BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP

A parcel totaling 1.41 acres located within the boundaries of Washington Valley Park in Bridgewater Township was acquired from the Estate of Herbert Patullo. The property has sweeping views of the Raritan Valley southwest to the Sourland Mountains from an existing overlook. The property is within the Wayne’s Brigade Encampment of 1777, a location along the 1st Watchung ridge whose views were of strategic value to the Continental Army as it vied for control of the New York-Philadelphia corridor during the Revolutionary War. Along with its proximity to the Washington Valley Park Hawk Watch, the property is an ideal location for historic and natural interpretive activities. The property contains a residence that Mr. Patullo used for gatherings and celebrations, and functioned as a small revolutionary War Museum, known as the Eagle’s Nest. Although the existing structures will not serve a public purpose, the County is developing plans for new improvements to accommodate gatherings, environmental education opportunities, and for historic interpretive functions for the upcoming Semiquincentennial. The County Commissioners hope that the redevelopment and uses of the property will honor Mr. Patullo’s patriotism and love of Revolutionary War history.

**ACQUISITION COST: \$680,000**



HERBERT PATULLO

OVERLOOK AT THE PATULLO PROPERTY



NESHANIC RIVER

## DAVID & MICHELLE MADOVOY HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP

A major goal of the Somerset County Open Space Preservation Plan is to create linkages between county park areas. The acquisition of 22.6 acres of land on Amwell Road in Hillsborough Township from David and Michelle Madovoy accomplishes this goal. The property has areas of open fields and woodland, and continues to make the connection between the South Branch Greenway and the northernmost portion of the Sourland Mountain Preserve along the Neshanic River. The acquisition preserved approximately 7,000 linear feet of Neshanic River frontage and provides more undeveloped area for flood storage. The existing residence and barn on the property have sustained damage from past flooding events and will be removed. The preservation of the property will eliminate risks to human safety from future flood events.

**ACQUISITION COST: \$371,000**



VIEW ACROSS MADOVOY PROPERTY



HUNTING CABIN

## ESTATE OF DONALD COGHLAN HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP

A smaller, but no less important parcel totaling 0.94 acres was acquired from the Estate of Donald R. Coghlan on Zion Road in Hillsborough Township. The property is adjacent to land owned by the County as part of the Sourland Mountain Preserve. The property is completely wooded and is developed with a small hunting cabin that will be demolished. The acquisition of the property

expands the road frontage for the Sourland Mountain Preserve that could serve as a trailhead for future trail development. The preservation also eliminates potential redevelopment of the property, thereby eliminating one more potable well and septic system on the mountain, and continues to preserve the contiguous tree cover on the Sourland Mountain.

**ACQUISITION COST: \$68,000**



BOULDER FIELD

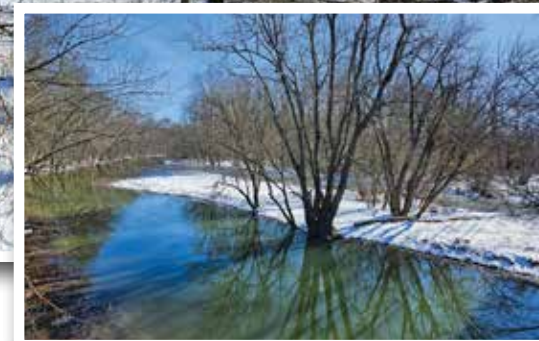
## JOE & KATHLEEN LOCATELL HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP

The property owned by Joe and Kathleen Locatell is a 13-acre parcel nestled in the heart of the 6,300-acre Sourland Mountain Preserve on Long Hill Road in Hillsborough Township. The County expressed an interest in acquiring the rear 8-acre portion of the property and when contacted, the owners were excited about the prospect of seeing a portion of their property preserved. Mr. Locatell passed away just prior to the closing, but the County Commissioners are pleased that they could honor Mr. Locatell's wish for the preservation of his property. The parcel is completely wooded, and the northern portion is traversed by a portion of Cattail Brook, a tributary to the Rock Brook which flows to Bedens Brook and ultimately the Millstone River. This acquisition continues the preservation of stream corridors and buffers that supply water to the waterbodies and aquifers that provide drinking water to County residents. Acquisitions of this size advance a new goal of the Somerset County Open Space Preservation Plan that begins to focus attention on the preservation of smaller parcels. These smaller parcels continue to fill gaps within the Sourland Mountain Preserve and continue to preserve contiguous areas of woodland essential to migratory birds and other wildlife.

**ACQUISITION COST: \$176,000**



MYSTERIOUS MARKER ON THE LOCATELL PROPERTY



VIEWS OF THE GAGLIOTI PROPERTY AND PASSAIC RIVER

## ESTATE OF CARMELLA GAGLIOTI WARREN TOWNSHIP

The 6.28-acre property owned by the Estate of Carmella Gaglioti is located off King George Road within the Passaic River Greenway in Warren Township. The property is vacant and completely wooded, with 1,500 linear feet of frontage on the Passaic River. The preservation of the property achieves several goals of the County Open Space Preservation Plan by preserving a buffer along

the Passaic River, serving as flood storage for the river, and continuing the Passaic River Greenway by interconnecting adjacent municipal and County open space. Ms. Gaglioti's son, Dino, wished to see the property preserved and donated the property to the County. The County Commissioners acknowledged and thanked the Gaglioti family for its generous donation.

**ACQUISITION COST: \$0**

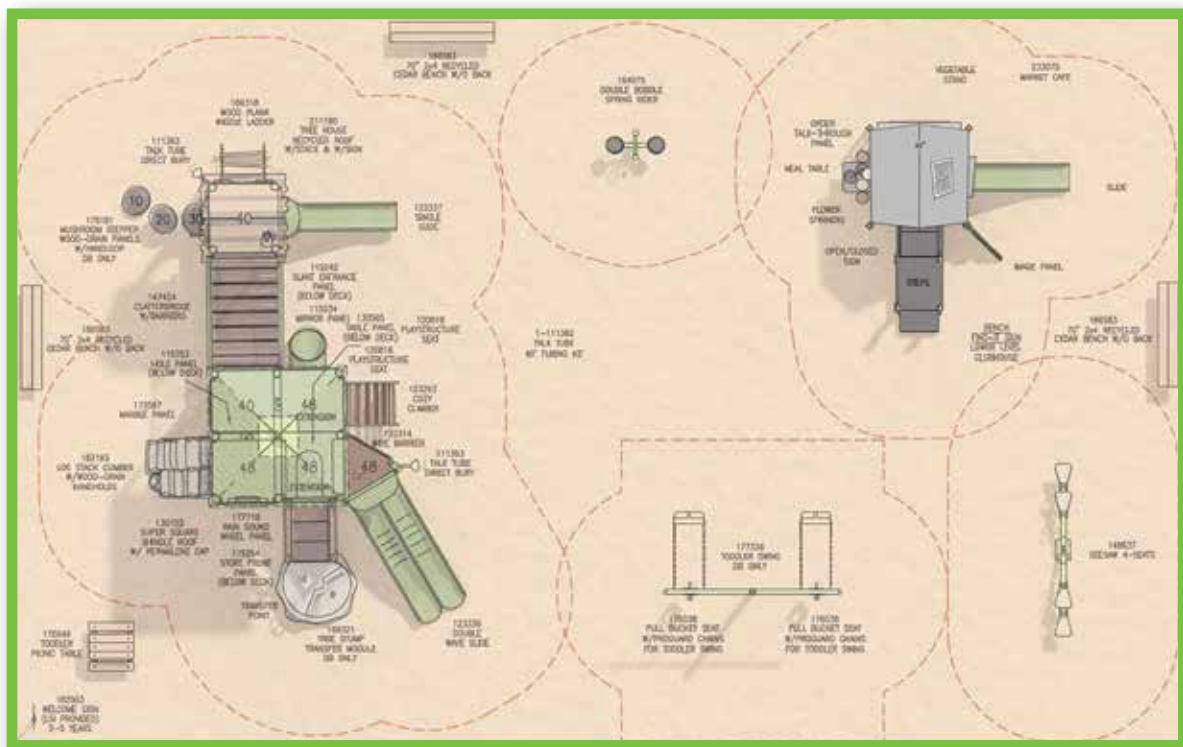


## Recreation Grant Program

The Recreation Grant Program provides funding from the Somerset County Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust to assist with the development of active and passive recreational facilities within municipal parks and open space. In 2023 the County awarded one grant to the Borough of Peapack and Gladstone in the amount of **\$160,000**. Since the inception of the Program the County has awarded a total of **\$3,750,000** to twelve municipalities.







LIBERTY PARK PLAYGROUND RENDERING

## LIBERTY PARK PLAYGROUND

### PEAPACK & GLADSTONE BOROUGH

Liberty Park is located in the center of the Borough of Peapack and Gladstone and features walking paths, a pond, picnic tables, benches, colorful gazebo, and a playground. The park was developed in 1919 and deeded to the Borough in 1927. To address signs of deterioration, the Borough began renovating the entire park in 2020 with one of the goals being that the entire park be fully accessible. This included the replacement

of the outdated and deteriorating playground with an accessible playground in the heart of the community.

The plan proposed to replace the playground within the existing footprint with a playground that consists of 28 components on an accessible surface. Features include a climbing structure



FARM STAND PLAY STRUCTURE

with ladders and slides which includes a transfer station resembling a tree stump, a spring rider, bucket seat swings, a seesaw, and a vegetable stand play structure. 15 of the components are accessible from the ground and 13 are elevated and accessible by transfer, exceeding the ADA requirements.

The playground proposal includes elements of all 3 County Preservation Programs: open space, farmland and historic preservation. The playground, a recreational use, is located within a historic park, and includes a farm stand play structure.

**GRANT AWARD – \$160,000.00**

# Recreation Grant Project Status

## COMPLETED PROJECTS AND PROJECTS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Construction was completed on three projects in 2023: Liberty Park Playground in Peapack/Gladstone Borough, Michael Lepp Park Pool in Somerville Borough, and the municipal pavilion in Warren Township.

The Bound Brook Park Pool in Bound Brook Borough, the trails at Camp Cromwell in Bridgewater Township, and the Mike Merdinger Memorial Pavilion in Hillsborough Township are currently under construction.

The Catalpa Park Playground in Franklin Township, the inclusive playground in Montgomery Township, the Community Garden in Bedminster Township, and the Lost Valley Nature Park in Manville Borough are currently in the design phase.



### BOUND BROOK POOL BOUND BROOK BOROUGH



OCTOBER 30, 2023 POOL GROUND BREAKING



### CAMP CROMWELL BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP

NEW IMPROVEMENTS AND TRAILS

**MIKE MERDINGER  
MEMORIAL PAVILION  
HILLSBOROUGH TOWNSHIP**



NEW PAVILION



NEW POOL AND SHADE STRUCTURE

**MICHAEL LEPP PARK POOL  
SOMERVILLE BOROUGH**



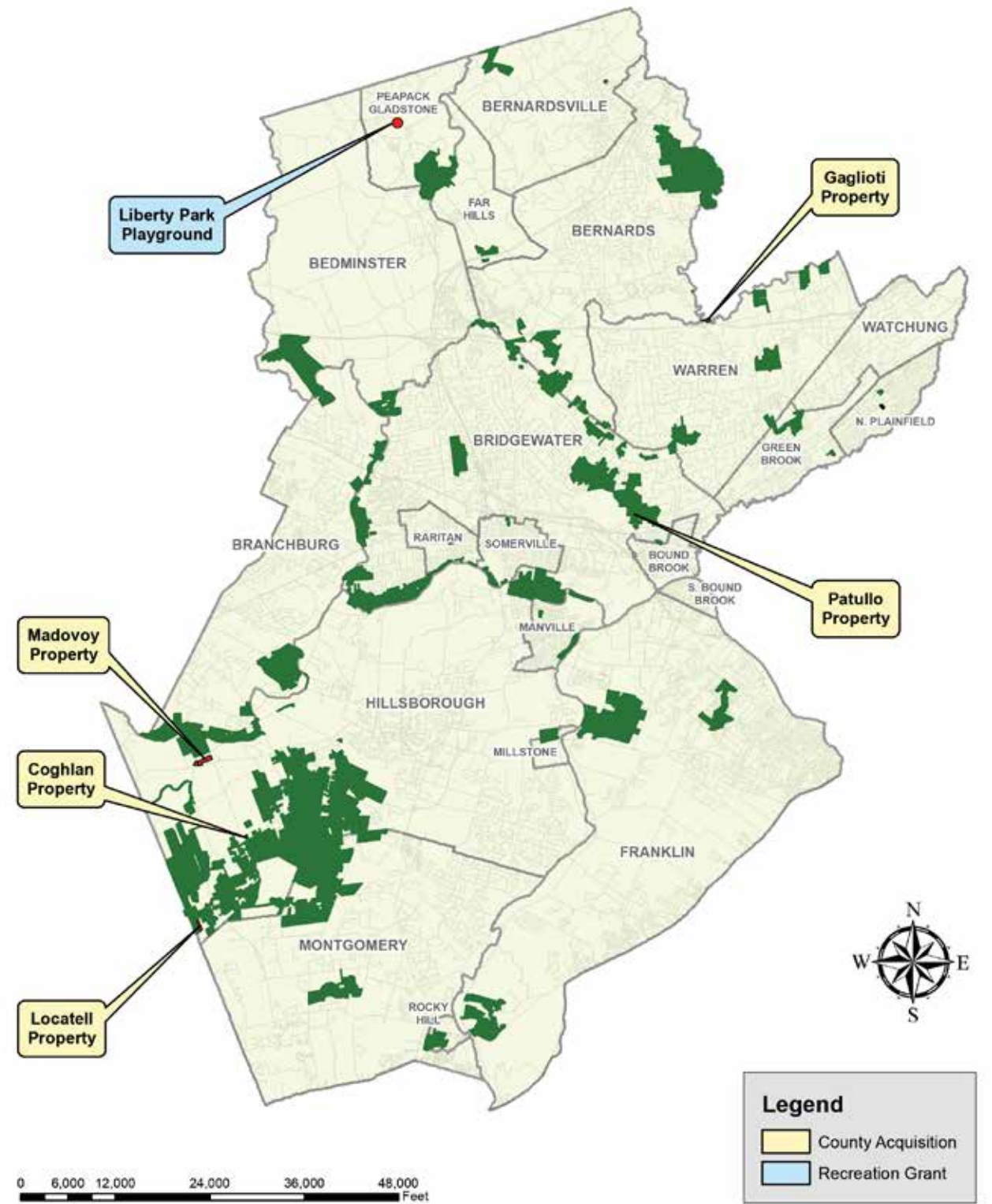
**WARREN PAVILION  
WARREN TOWNSHIP**



OCTOBER 19, 2023 PAVILION RIBBON CUTTING



## 2023 Acquisition and Grant Award Locations





NOVEMBER 22, 2023 OPEN SPACE SIGN DEDICATION  
 (L-R) PARK COMMISSION DIRECTOR GEORFFRY SORIANO, COUNTY COMMISSIONERS DOUGLAS SINGLETERRY AND MELAONIE MARANO, PARK COMMISSION PRESIDENT D.J. HUNSINGER

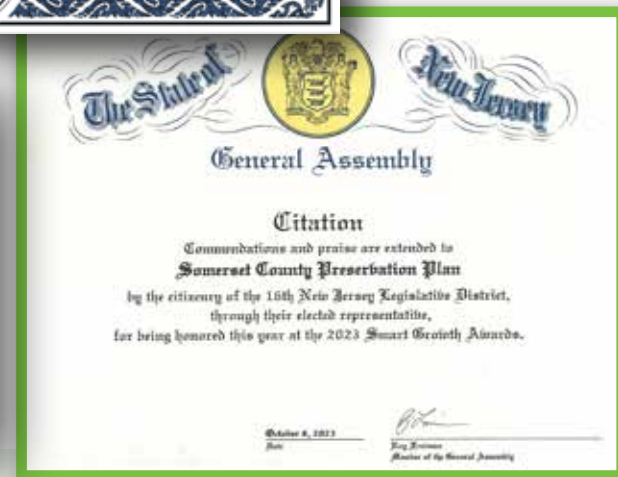
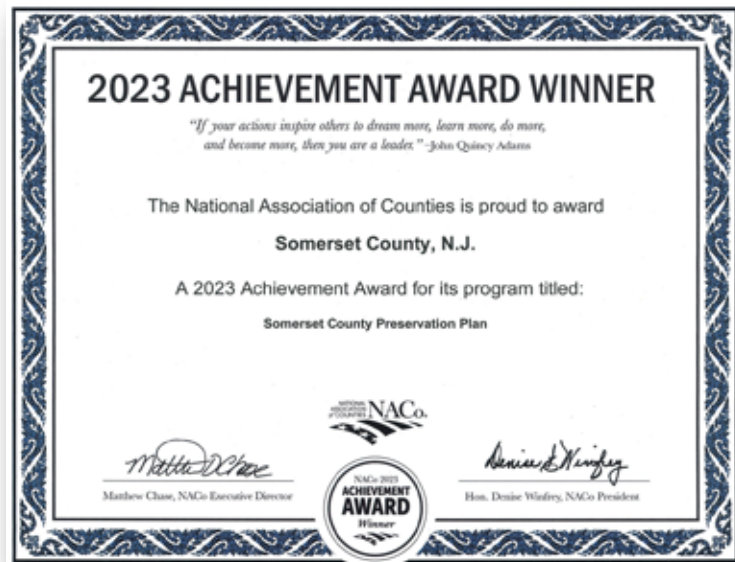


OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION SIGN

## Open Space PRESERVATION SIGN PROGRAM

Residents and visitors to Somerset County will begin to see new signage installed on county preserved open space. The signage program was a 2023 goal of County Commissioner and Open Space Advisory Committee liaison Melonie Marano. Commissioner Marano’s goal was to highlight the County’s extensive undeveloped open space network and show that the County Open Space tax dollars are being spent wisely. The initial phase of installations will be near the County boundaries to welcome the public to Somerset County and in some of the smaller municipalities. Signs will then appear at locations throughout the County to bring attention to land that has been preserved by Somerset County.

# Somerset County PRESERVATION PLAN



ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS AND OFFICE OF PLANNING, POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STAFF

The Somerset County Preservation Plan was completed and adopted by the County Planning Board in May, 2022. The Plan is believed to be the first of its kind in the state and possibly the nation for its unique and innovative approach to preservation planning by coordinating and incorporating the County's Open Space, Historic, and Farmland Preservation Programs into a single plan, while continuing to recommend specific goals for each program. Through the Plan, Somerset County continues its commitment to preservation. The County's open space inventory is approaching 15,000 acres with a new goal of 24,000 acres. The County also has close to 9,000 acres of farmland preserved with a new goal of 16,000 acres, carrying on the tradition of agriculture in New Jersey that

earned the nickname "The Garden State". The new Historic Preservation Plan recommends identifying, protecting, and promoting Somerset County's unique historic resources.

The Preservation Plan was again recognized at the local and national levels for its unique and innovative approach to preservation. In addition to receiving awards from Preservation NJ, and New Jersey Planning Officials in 2022, the Plan was recognized in 2023 by two additional organizations.

The County was honored by **New Jersey Future** with a **Smart Growth Award** which highlights New Jersey Future's mission to promote sensible

and equitable growth, redevelopment, and infrastructure investments to foster healthy, strong, and resilient communities. The Plan was recognized for how the preservation of open space, farmland, and historic resources promotes NJ Future's mission as well as how it implements techniques to address climate change, and promotes economic development through tourism.

**The National Association of Counties (NACo) Achievement Award** is an award recognizing innovative county government programs. The Preservation Plan received an Award in Planning for its approach to enhanced public outreach and participation in the Plan's preparation,

and facilitating effective public policy making through preservation, such as making recommendations on how preservation can help to address the effects of climate change. In July, 2023, County Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson attended the NACo Annual Conference and Exposition in Texas to accept the award.

TO VIEW THE  
Somerset County Preservation Plan

Scan the QR Code



[www.co.somerset.nj.us/PresPlan21](http://www.co.somerset.nj.us/PresPlan21)



## Open Space TRUST FUND, FARMLAND, AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

The County Commissioners continue to support the Open Space Preservation Program through the allocation of funds from the County Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund. Allocations are made for County open space acquisitions, funding for municipal and nonprofit preservation projects, funding for municipal acquisition of flood prone properties, and funding for municipal recreational development projects.

### 2023 COMMISSIONER *Allocations, Expenditures and Awards*

COUNTY OPEN SPACE ACQUISITION COSTS IN 2023 TOTALED **\$1,295,000**.

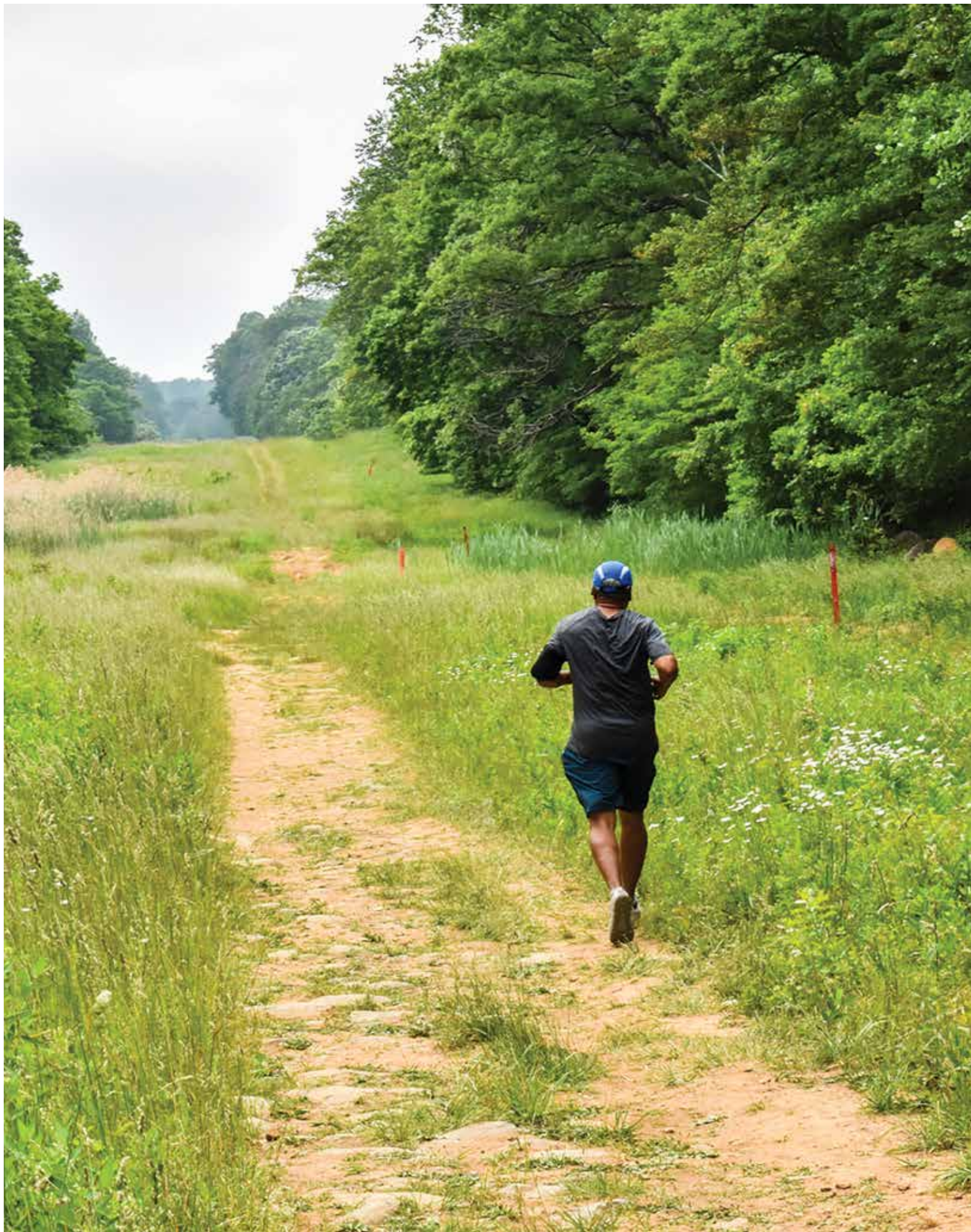
COUNTY RECREATION GRANT AWARDS TOTALED **\$160,000**.

COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ALLOCATED **\$3,000,000** TO THE COUNTY OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION PROGRAM, **\$1,000,000** TO FUND ALL ACTIVE RECREATION GRANT PROJECTS, AND MADE A NEW ALLOCATION OF **\$3,000,000** FOR THE PRESERVATION OF COUNTY-OWNED HISTORIC RESOURCES.

A YEAR-END BALANCE OF **\$9,080,670** WAS AVAILABLE FOR COUNTY OPEN SPACE ACQUISITIONS.

THE COUNTY IS CURRENTLY IN NEGOTIATIONS OR UNDER CONTRACT FOR APPROXIMATELY **465 ACRES** AT AN ESTIMATED VALUE OF **\$12,000,000**.





**2023 SOMERSET COUNTY  
PRESERVATION PARTNERS**

**COUNTY PARK COMMISSION**

**D.J. Hunsinger**  
PRESIDENT

**Joe Kempe**  
VICE PRESIDENT

**Mark Caliguire**  
**Nancy D'Andrea**

**Bill Foelsch**  
**Joe Kempe**

**Kevin McCallen**  
**Dan Hayes**

**Randy Jones**

**Paul M. Drake**  
COUNTY COMMISSIONER LIAISON

**COUNTY PLANNING BOARD**

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CHAIR

**Michael Giordano**  
VICE-CHAIR

**Albert Ellis**  
**Chris Kelly**

**Erika Inocencio**  
**Sami Shaban**

**Shanel Y. Robinson**  
COMMISSIONER DIRECTOR

**Paul M. Drake**  
COMMISSIONER

**Matthew Loper**  
SECRETARY, COUNTY ENGINEER

**Adam Slutsky**  
COUNTY ENGINEER ALTERNATE

**Ashok Rakhit**  
1ST ALTERNATE

**Vacant**  
2ND ALTERNATE

**2023 STATE  
PRESERVATION PARTNERS**

**NJDEP GREEN ACRES  
PROGRAM**

**NJDEP BLUE ACRES  
PROGRAM**

*Moving Forward ...*

As Somerset County has matured, the stewardship of County open space is also maturing beyond providing traditional regional-scale recreation opportunities. The opportunity now exists for the County to enhance its open space system and maximize benefits for its residents through creative planning, partnerships, and coordination with the County's Historic and Farmland Preservation Programs.

Stewardship and historic preservation continued to be a goal of the County and County Park Commission in 2023, with acquisitions focusing on land of high ecological, scenic, and historic value.

With the imminent acquisition of the 402-acre Thompson/Hillsborough Country Club properties in Hillsborough Township, an opportunity exists to examine and reimagine a once active golf course and polo ground into a natural, passive use area within the Sourland Mountain Preserve. Activities will include but will not be limited to restoration and reforestation with native species, environmental education, and other passive, low impact recreational uses appropriate for the Sourland Mountain region.

Somerset County is under contract to acquire a unique, 2.7-acre parcel in Bound Brook and Middlesex Boroughs that contains the historically significant stone arch bridge that was the location of the Battle of Bound Brook in 1777. The bridge is currently buried under an asphalt parking lot associated with a warehouse facility on the property. The acquisition of this property presents a once in a lifetime opportunity to expose and restore the bridge and highlight its significance in the battle for the nation's independence.

With the recommendations of the Open Space Advisory Committee and support of the County Commissioners, these acquisitions continue to advance the goals of the Preservation Plan and balance recreation, conservation, and historic preservation to create a well-rounded County Park System. With negotiations ongoing for approximately 465 acres and the continued support of the County Commissioners through allocations to the Open Space Trust Fund, the County envisions another successful preservation year in 2024.





A photograph of a body of water, likely a pond or lake, with green reeds and other aquatic plants growing in the foreground. The water is calm, and the plants are reflected in the surface. The background is a soft, out-of-focus blue sky.

**OFFICE OF PLANNING,  
POLICY & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

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