

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN REEXAMINATION REPORT

**Township of Middle
Cape May County, New Jersey**

September 2021



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Middle Township

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Open Space and Recreation Plan Re-Examination

September 2021

Township of Middle, Cape May County, New Jersey

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1.0 Summary

Middle Township is exceptionally positioned to be the hub of open space and recreation for Cape May County because it is centrally located, has a high number of recreation amenities and the Township development regulations strongly encourage the preservation of land. The Township has 22 recreation and open space facilities, including the nationally recognized Cape May County Zoo. The Township has diverse and distinct ecosystems, salt and freshwater wetlands, and access to the Delaware Bay. In addition, the Township is comprised of considerable Federal, State, County, Township, and non-profit preserved open space areas including 4,800 acres of the Cape May County National Wildlife Refuge.

Middle Township's Open Space and Recreation Plan (Plan) was adopted by the Planning Board on April 25, 2013. The Plan is an important part of the centers-based development policy adopted by the Township in 2010, and is addressed in the 2020 Master Plan Re-Examination Plan and relevant planning documents. Growth is consistently encouraged in Middle Township in areas of existing development and infrastructure while the surrounding environs are intended for open space, recreation, agriculture, and large residential lots. The public planning process for the 2013 Plan resulted in the conclusion that open space must be protected, and that the Township's recreation program should be a comprehensive and coordinated system offering diverse activities, programs and facilities for all ages and interests of the community.

The goal of the Plan is to provide information to promote responsible public recreation, preserve and enhance historic and cultural resources, conserve land for wildlife, enhance water quality, protect open space lands, and promote health and wellness. The re-examination of the Plan serves to aid in expanding partnerships with other governmental agencies and nonprofit organizations to implement open space and recreation facilities and programs. The purpose of this Plan Re-Examination is to provide information to the Governing Body and community stakeholders regarding the existing character and integrity of the community's facilities and open space.

2.0 Open Space

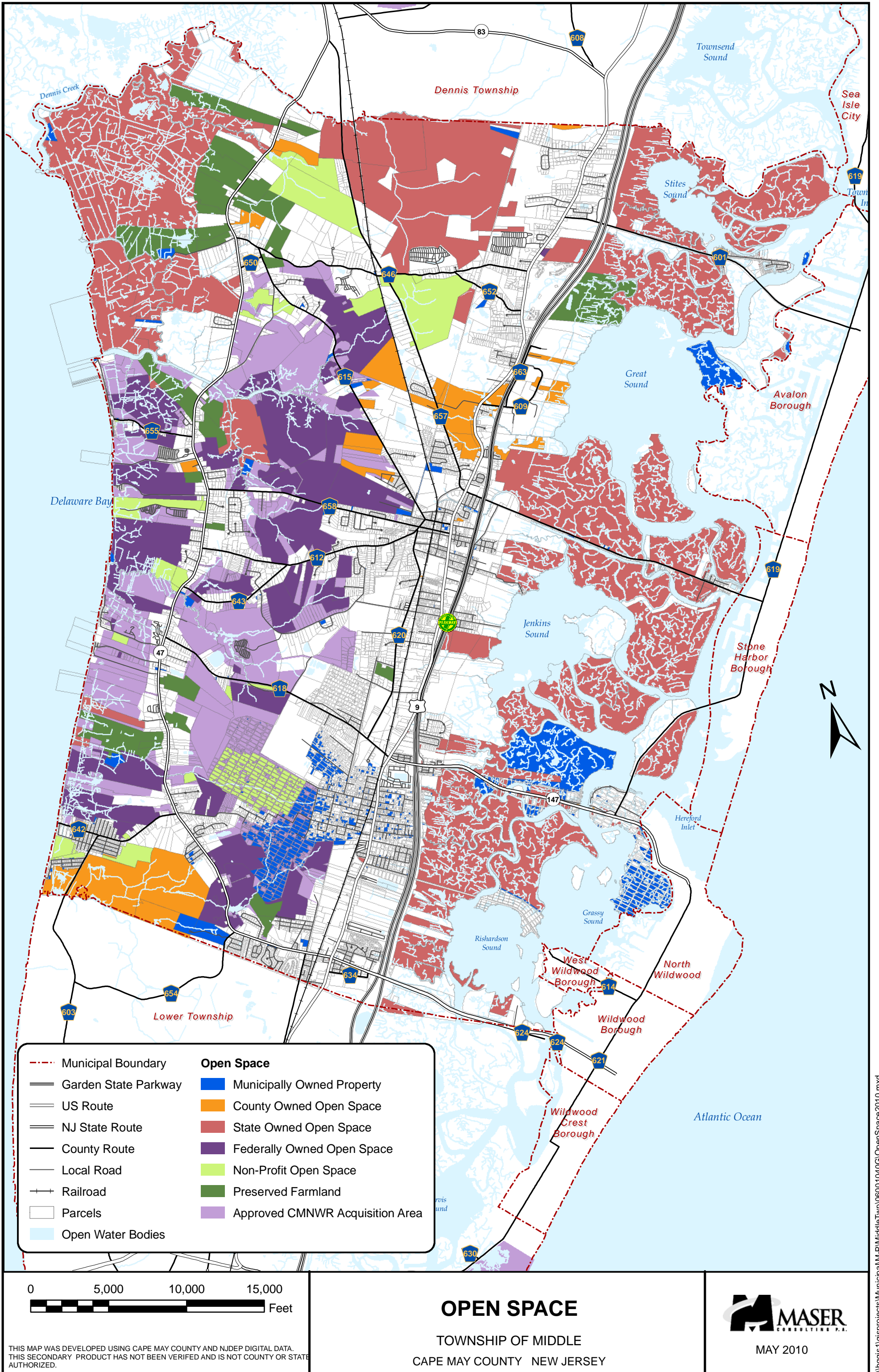
According to the Natural Resources Inventory prepared for the Township in July 2010, the following State Lands are in Middle Township:

TABLE 2.0 STATE LANDS IN MIDDLE TOWNSHIP	
Identified Land	Acreage
Beaver Swamp	1,819.30
Cape May Wetlands	7,393.91
Dennis Creek	3,068.76
Frye Preserve	211.58
Great Sound	81.95
Lizard Tail Swamp	41.53
Shorebird	22.02
Other	13.12

The “Open Space” Mapping prepared by Maser Associates in May 2010 shows the breakdown of existing open space areas located within Middle Township (refer to *Figure 1: Open Space Map*). This includes Federal, State, County and Municipal open space areas, as well as preserved farmland. Most of the open space consists of State-owned land. The Delaware Bay Division of the Cape May National Wildlife Refuge is in Middle Township along the Delaware Bay. This area contains wildlife habitats including salt marshes, forested uplands, forested wetlands, vernal pools, shrub/scrub vegetation and grasslands. Large concentrations of migrating shorebirds visit the Delaware Bay area each spring. The Delaware Bay Division attracts large numbers of waterfowl, marsh birds, raptors, songbirds, reptiles, and amphibians.

The Natural Resources Inventory serves to identify natural systems and to further the protection of existing natural areas through the appropriate development of vacant parcels and the re-development of developed lands. The State Office of Planning Advocacy endorsement of the Township’s Center, and the refinement of the Township’s zoning and land use ordinances have enhanced the protection of natural resources.

FIGURE 1



- | | |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| --- Municipal Boundary | Open Space |
| == Garden State Parkway | ■ Municipally Owned Property |
| == US Route | ■ County Owned Open Space |
| == NJ State Route | ■ State Owned Open Space |
| == County Route | ■ Federally Owned Open Space |
| == Local Road | ■ Non-Profit Open Space |
| + Railroad | ■ Preserved Farmland |
| □ Parcels | ■ Approved CMNWR Acquisition Area |
| ■ Open Water Bodies | |

0 5,000 10,000 15,000 Feet

OPEN SPACE
 TOWNSHIP OF MIDDLE
 CAPE MAY COUNTY NEW JERSEY



MAY 2010

THIS MAP WAS DEVELOPED USING CAPE MAY COUNTY AND NJDEP DIGITAL DATA. THIS SECONDARY PRODUCT HAS NOT BEEN VERIFIED AND IS NOT COUNTY OR STATE AUTHORIZED.

3.0 Township Recreational Facilities

Extensive mapping of Middle Township’s Recreational Facilities and Open Space was included in the 2013 Plan (refer to *Figure 2: Middle Township Recreational Facilities and Open Space Map*). The following Township Facilities were re-examined as discussed in detail in Section 7.0:

- 3.1 Robert “Ockie” Wisting Recreation Complex**
Block 466.01, Lot 47
7 Fulling Mill Road, Rio Grande
82 Acres

- 3.2 Clarence and Georgiana Davies Sports Complex and Baker Center**
Block 94, Lots 14.01, 16
626 Goshen Road, Cape May Court House
65 Acres

- 3.3 Martin Luther King Center**
Block 936, Lot 8
207 West Main Street, Whitesboro
6.86 Acres

- 3.4 Bike Path**
Cape May County Park and Zoo to Cold Spring at Seashore Road
8.9 miles

- 3.5 Railroad Avenue Park**
Block 1421, Lot 8
Railroad Avenue, Rio Grande
2.57 Acres

- 3.6 Carol Nicoletta Park**
Block 335.03, Lot 1
525 East Shellbay Avenue
3,264 square feet

- 3.6 Avalon Manor Fishing Pier**
Block 118-03, Lot 9
701 Avalon Boulevard, Avalon Manor

- 3.7 Bidwell Jetty at Reeds Beach**
Block 506, Lot 18.31
301 Beach Avenue, Cape May Court House

- 3.8 Norbury’s Landing**
Block 404, Lot 10
Millman Avenue at the Delaware Bay, Del Haven

3.9 Cooks Beach Road
Cooks Beach – Delaware Bay

3.10 Delaware Avenue
End of Delaware Avenue
Delaware Bay

3.11 Scotch Bonnet Crabbing Pier
Stone Harbor Boulevard
Scotch Bonnet waterway

4.0 2013 Plan Goals and Policies

The following were the major goals of the 2013 Plan:

- Maintain the character and integrity of each community within the Township
- Promote the preservation and management of land for wildlife habitat, to improve water quality and supply, and to provide for open space
- Development of public recreation facilities that meet the current and future needs of residents, and contribute to an improved quality of life

In addition to the above, the following specific goals and policies are outlined in the 2013 Plan:

- Support the centers-based development policy and ensure consistency with the Township’s Master Plan
- Develop public recreation facilities that meet the current and future needs of the residents, and contribute to an improved quality of life
- Support nature tourism and its positive effect on the local and regional economy
- Support private recreation facilities that contribute to the local economy, improve the quality of life for residents and provide alternative activities to typical shore recreation
- Develop public access points along the Delaware Bay to be more accommodating to visitors and residents, while maintaining the critical wildlife habitat
- Fund open space and recreation programs without fully depending on municipal taxes
- Prioritize connectivity of facilities and trails to enhance the recreation experience.
- Preserve and enhance the historic and cultural resources of the Township
- Continue and expand partnerships with other government agencies and nonprofit organizations to implement open space and recreation facilities and programs
- Support efforts which promote health and wellness

The Plan is consistent with the following planning documents:

- Middle Township’s 2020 Master Plan Re-Examination Plan
- Middle Township’s petition for State Plan Endorsement
- Middle Township’s 2010 Natural Resources Inventory
- Cape May County Comprehensive Plan
- Cape May County Open Space and Recreation Plan

FIGURE 2



5.0 Steering Committee

The Township established a Steering Committee (Committee) to provide input on the Re-Examination Plan. The Committee was made up of 14 members:

- Planning Board Chairman
- Environmental Committee Chairperson
- Green Team Member
- Recreation Committee Member
- Cape May County Representative
- Economic Development Council Chairman
- Cape May County Open Space Board Chairman
- Mayor
- Business Administrator
- Economic Development and Grants Director
- Athletic Director
- Deputy Athletic Director
- Board Secretary
- Township Engineer/Planner

Three meetings were held. It was established by the Committee that all the Goals and Policies outlined in the 2013 Plan remain important in determining the future of open space and recreation (refer to Section 4.0 *2013 Plan Goals and Policies*).

It was the Committee's consensus that the preservation of open space is essential for social, economic, and ecological benefits. Much of the tourism industry is based on open space preservation including beaches, dunes, and fishing areas. Wetlands attract birds for birdwatchers and habitat for commercial and sport fish species. Wetlands also act as a buffer to mitigate impacts of storm events and flooding and to remove pollutants from stormwater. To that end, the Committee determined that the local, state, and federal programs and regulations in place successfully protect environmental resources and the quality of life in Middle Township. These programs should be supported to ensure future preservation.

The focus of the Committee in their re-examination of the Plan was the Township-owned recreational facilities (refer to Section 3.0 *Township Recreation Facilities*). The Committee reviewed the recommendations and goals of the 2013 plan and provided input on recommended upgrades to each specific area based on the current needs of the Community. The Committee identified key issues, reviewed proposed findings, discussed solutions, and made recommendations (refer to Section 7.0 *Recommended Improvements to Existing Township Recreation Facilities*).

6.0 Community Feedback Survey

A ten-question community feedback survey was posted on the Township's website asking residents to choose their preferred uses of open space, such as recreation, agriculture, wildlife habitat and access to waterways to maintain the rural character of the Township. Residents were encouraged to share their vision for the future of shared open space and recreation.

Most of the survey respondents were between the ages of 41 and 60. Nearly all (99.57%) of the respondents confirmed that preserving open space in the Township is important.

The survey included a request for feedback regarding interest in a variety of programs which were suggested by the Steering Committee, including:

- Guided nature walks
- Guided kayak tours
- Challenge to walk, run, bike or hike all recreation sites within the Township
- Annual festivals to celebrate Delaware Bay resources and wildlife
- Volunteer to help threatened wildlife
- Runs, bike races and sports tournaments to benefit local organizations
- Tours of historic properties
- App for cellphone to provide upcoming Township events/locations
- Weekend shuttle service to wineries and breweries

The majority of the respondents were in favor of all the referenced activities. According to the survey results, the top six preferred activities are:

1. Walking/Hiking (74.36%)
2. Biking (56.41%)
3. Wildlife/Birdwatching. (52.56%)
4. Fishing/Crabbing (52.14%)
5. Canoeing/Kayaking (47.01%)
6. Swimming (46.58%)

According to the survey results, the top six preferred recreational needs are:

1. Bicycle Access/Spurs to Neighborhood and Town Centers (42.13%)
2. Trails – unpaved (42.13%)
3. Trails – paved (41.12 %)
4. Canoeing/Kayak Launch (40.16%)
5. Public Access Waterways (40.10 %)
6. Wildlife/Bird Viewing Areas (34.52%)

In response to a question regarding improvement of the Township facilities, residents would like to see additional security and lighting along the bike path, at the Martin Luther King Center and Railroad Avenue Park. In addition, recreational equipment at the Davies Sports Complex, the Martin Luther King Center and Ockie Wisting are improvements that are a priority to the community. Most of the respondents prefer funding of improvements through State and Federal Grants.

Upon review and discussion of the Community Feedback Survey the Steering Committee incorporated specific recommendations into the improvement of Township facilities and water access areas (refer to Section 7.0: *Recommended Improvements to Existing Township Recreation Facilities* and Section 8.0: *Recommended Activities and Facilities Throughout the Township*).

7.0 Recommended Improvements to Existing Township Recreation Facilities

Robert "Ockie" Wisting Recreation Complex – 7 Fulling Mill Road



2013 Plan Recommendations:

- Develop a series of trails
- Provide fitness stations
- Partnership with Cape Express Soccer Club to construct five fields, parking and lighting
- Build a wildlife observation deck and fishing pier on pond
- Build a gazebo and picnic area
- Provide a playground
- Create a demonstration garden for native species plants
- Build restrooms and possibly a police substation
- Build a stage for concerts and performances

A Conceptual Plan incorporating the recommended amenities was prepared.

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations:

Most of the recommended improvements were completed. The following are remaining and additional recommendations:

- Add fitness stations
- Add two additional soccer fields
- Create demonstration garden for native species plants
- Add lights to parking lot

Clarence and Georgiana Davies Complex and Baker Center 626 Goshen Road



2013 Plan Recommendations:

Short Term:

- Install traffic calming measures
- Construct/install second hockey rink
- Improve Maintenance

Long Term:

- Transform the complex into a state-of-the-art, well-maintained sports complex

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations:

- Add fitness stations
- Reconfigure the fields
- Add a softball field
- Reconfigure circulation and parking
- Refurbish skate park into basketball court
- Upgrade irrigation
- Revisit previously prepared Conceptual Plan for complex



Martin Luther King Center 207 West Main Street



2013 Plan Recommendations:

- Additional indoor basketball courts
- Workout and exercise equipment with showers
- Nature Park in undeveloped area behind the building
- Repair of tennis courts

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations:

- Upgrade indoor workout and exercise equipment
- Upgrade outdoor basketball courts
- Re-purpose ball field to meet needs of the neighborhood
- Upgrade outdoor amenities (i.e. gazebo areas, add pavilions)
- Construct a splash pad



Bike Path



2013 Plan Recommendations:

- Safe connections, preferably sidewalks, to residential neighborhoods, adjacent communities' bike paths, and recreational and other public facilities such as schools
- Identify opportunity for privately funded linkages (i.e. from campgrounds and neighborhoods)
- Improve parking at access points
- Consider naming the path to reflect the beauty, nature and opportunities for wildlife viewing

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations:

- Provide signage along bike path – identify points of interest and mileage identification.
- Work with the County to develop Q-codes for scanning on phones to identify point of interest and mileage identification
- Provide safe connections, preferably sidewalks, to residential neighborhoods, adjacent communities' bike paths and recreational and other public facilities such as schools
- Identify opportunities for privately funded linkages (i.e. from campgrounds and neighborhoods)
- Improve parking at access points.
- Construct spurs to neighborhoods in Rio Grande and Courthouse
- Improve parking at access points.
- Consider naming the path to reflect the beauty, nature, and opportunities for wildlife viewing
- Increase security to keep path safe, possibly adding security cameras

Railroad Avenue Park – Railroad Avenue (formerly Rio Grande Park)



2013 Plan Recommendations:

- Improve maintenance
- Continue to maintain baseball field to be used for tournaments
- Remove unused hockey rink
- Increase public information regarding site

* The park was extensively renovated in 2020 and re-named Railroad Avenue Park.

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations:

- Add bocce ball courts
- Add restroom facilities



Nicoletta Park – 525 East Shellbay Avenue



2013 Plan Recommendations:

- Increase public information regarding the site
- Improve maintenance

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations:

- Add picnic tables
- Provide access to waterway/kayak launch
- Add signage to increase public information regarding site
- Improve maintenance
- Provide more organized parking
- Control vandalism through remote security cameras and lighting

Bidwell Jetty at Reeds Beach – 301 Beach Avenue



2013 Plan Recommendations:

- Increase public information regarding the site
- Improve signage directing people to the site
- Add identification signage on site
- Develop a site plan that will identify locations and interpretive signage, maximize wildlife viewing and educational opportunities, improve parking and circulation, consideration of kayak, canoe launch
- Accommodate increased visits during shorebird migration period

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations

- Increase public information
- Improve signage
- Provide identification signage
- Develop a site plan that will identify locations and interpretive signage, maximize wildlife viewing and educational opportunities, improve parking and circulation, consideration of kayak, canoe launch
- Accommodate increased visits during shorebird migration period



Norbury's Landing – Millman Avenue



2013 Plan Recommendations:

- Increase public information
- Improve signage
- Add identification signage on site
- Develop a site plan that will identify locations and interpretive signage, maximize wildlife viewing and educational opportunities, improve parking and circulation, consideration of kayak, canoe launch
- Accommodate increased visits during shorebird migration period

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations

- Increase public information
- Improve signage
- Add identification signage
- Develop a site plan that will identify locations and interpretive signage, maximize wildlife viewing and educational opportunities, improve parking and circulation, consideration of kayak, canoe launch
- Accommodate increased visits during shorebird migration period
- Replace bulkhead, provide tables and benches

Cooks Beach Road



2013 Plan Recommendations:

Was not included in the 2013 Open Space and Recreation Plan

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations

- Upgrade access, walkways, and parking areas
- Increase public access to waterway
- Provide trash cans
- Build birding platform with signage



Delaware Avenue



2013 Plan Recommendations:

Was not included in the 2013 Open Space and Recreation Plan

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations

- Acquire Bill Hand property at southern end
- Provide parking
- Improve public access to waterway
- Provide kayak launching

Scotch Bonnet Crabbing Pier



2013 Plan Recommendations:

Was not included in the 2013 Open Space and Recreation Plan

2021 Re-Examination Plan Findings/Recommendations

- Demolish unsafe pier
- Construct a new walkway/pier over the water
- Provide signage describing history of site

8.0 Recommended Activities and Facilities Throughout the Township

Based on the Steering Committee's recommendations and the Community Feedback Survey, the Township should also consider the following improvements, activities, and facilities throughout the Township.

- Off-road bicycle trails – Rails to Trails (Jersey Off-Road Bike Association)
- Pocket parks and plazas at Route 9 and Route 47
- Additional organized sports
- Nature tourism
- Sports camps
- Agriculture and cultural tourism such as oyster fisheries, community gardens farm/winery education and tours
- Community clean up days
- Create new logo/tagline for Township recreation programs and facilities for use on signs, publications, and web-based information.
- Create user friendly maps of recreational facilities, sports complexes, trails, wildlife viewing locations, marinas, public access points, playgrounds, picnic areas, campgrounds, golf courses, restaurants, wineries, farm markets, historic properties, and CMC museum.
- Provide Identification signs at all waterbodies throughout the Township

9.0 Conclusion

The goals and policies defined in the 2013 Open Space and Recreation Plan remain important to the purpose of promoting responsible public recreation, preserving and enhancing historic and cultural resources, conserving land for wildlife, protecting water quality and open space lands, and ensuring the health and wellness of the community. A re-examination of the Plan by the Steering Committee found that the local, state, and federal regulations and programs in place serve to protect the existing open space areas for the future. The Township has consistently prioritized the funding of improvements to recreation facilities throughout the community. Recommendations for improvements to existing Township facilities, and for upgrades to areas with water access were made based on the Committee's input and the Community Feedback Survey. This process led to the conclusion that open space must be protected based on the significant benefits provided to the community's present and future well-being, and that the Township's recreation program should be structured to provide a variety of activities, programs and facilities for all ages and interests.