

SOMERSET COUNTY  
OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
**ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2021**

SOMERSET COUNTY BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

SHANEL Y. ROBINSON, DIRECTOR

MELONIE MARANO, DEPUTY DIRECTOR

SARA SOOY

PAUL DRAKE

DOUGLAS SINGLETERRY

JANUARY, 2022

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

## SOMERSET COUNTY OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE

### Background & Membership

The ten members of the Open Space Advisory Committee are chosen, two each by the Democratic Party, Republican Party, County Planning Board, County Park Commission and County Board of Commissioners. The Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development oversees the administrative responsibilities of the committee.

Nine individuals were appointed and served on the Committee in 2021 for a term of one year with one County Commissioner liaison also serving as a voting member. Officers were determined by election in accordance with adopted bylaws.

Chris Kelly, Chair  
Helen Haines, Vice Chair  
Melonie Marano, Commissioner  
Jennifer Bryson  
Kerry Haselton  
Randy Jones  
Gary LaSpisa  
Siva Mathusoodana  
Suzanne Ochse  
Walter Rusak

### Staff/Non-Voting

Thomas J. Boccino, PP, LLA, Supervising Planner, Office of Planning,  
Policy & Economic Development  
Walter C. Lane, PP, AICP, Director, Office of Planning, Policy &  
Economic Development  
Katelyn Katzer, Principal Planner, Office of Planning, Policy & Economic  
Development  
Geoffrey Soriano, Director, County Park Commission  
Adam Bloom, Principal Engineer, County Engineering Parks Section

### County Counsel

Joseph DeMarco, Esq., County Counsel  
Gregory Pasquale, Esq., Deputy County Counsel  
Sarah Fitzpatrick, Esq., Deputy County Counsel

## Summary of Meetings

The Open Space Advisory Committee met on ten occasions via Zoom Conference:

January 20, 2021

February 10, 2021

March 10, 2021

April 14, 2021

May 12, 2021

June 9, 2021

July 14, 2021

August 11, 2021

September 9, 2021

November 10, 2021

## 2021 Attendance

<b>Name</b>	<b>1/20</b>	<b>2/10</b>	<b>3/10</b>	<b>4/14</b>	<b>5/12</b>	<b>6/9</b>	<b>7/4</b>	<b>8/11</b>	<b>9/8</b>	<b>10/13</b>	<b>11/10</b>	<b>12/8</b>	<b>Total</b>
Jennifer Bryson	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Abs.	X	C	Abs.	C	<b>9</b>
Helen Haines	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	A	X	A	<b>10</b>
Kerry Haselton	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Abs.	X	N	X	N	<b>9</b>
Randy Jones	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	Abs.	C	X	C	<b>9</b>
Chris Kelly	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	E	X	E	<b>10</b>
Gary LaSpisa	X	X	X	X	Abs.	-	-	-	-	L	-	L	<b>4</b>
Melonie Marano	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	L	X	L	<b>10</b>
Siva Mathusoodana	X	X	X	X	X	Abs.	X	Abs.	Abs.	E	X	E	<b>7</b>
Suzanne Ochse	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	D	X	D	<b>10</b>
Walter Rusak	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		Abs.		<b>9</b>

## Open Space Preservation Highlights

- 1) The County acquired parcels from three property owners totaling **54.04** acres. The total Open Space Inventory is now **14,855.67** acres.
- 2) John and Keyko LeDoux own a long narrow parcel of land on Washington Valley Road in Bridgewater Township and expressed a desire to preserve a portion of the property on the slope of the Second Watchung Mountain. The County acquired a 1.92-acre easement of steep wooded land at the rear of the property for **\$42,100**. The land is critical in creating a link between two disconnected segments of the greenway. The County will continue to pursue the preservation of similar lots along the mountain slope with the goal of expanding the Second Watchung Greenway to the west.

- 3) The 48.37-acre parcel on Old Georgetown Road in Franklin Township acquired from Marcus Knowlton for **\$588,000** is the largest parcel preserved in 2021 (photo right). The property is located in the Millstone Valley (formerly known as the South Franklin Initiative) which focuses on land within the Millstone



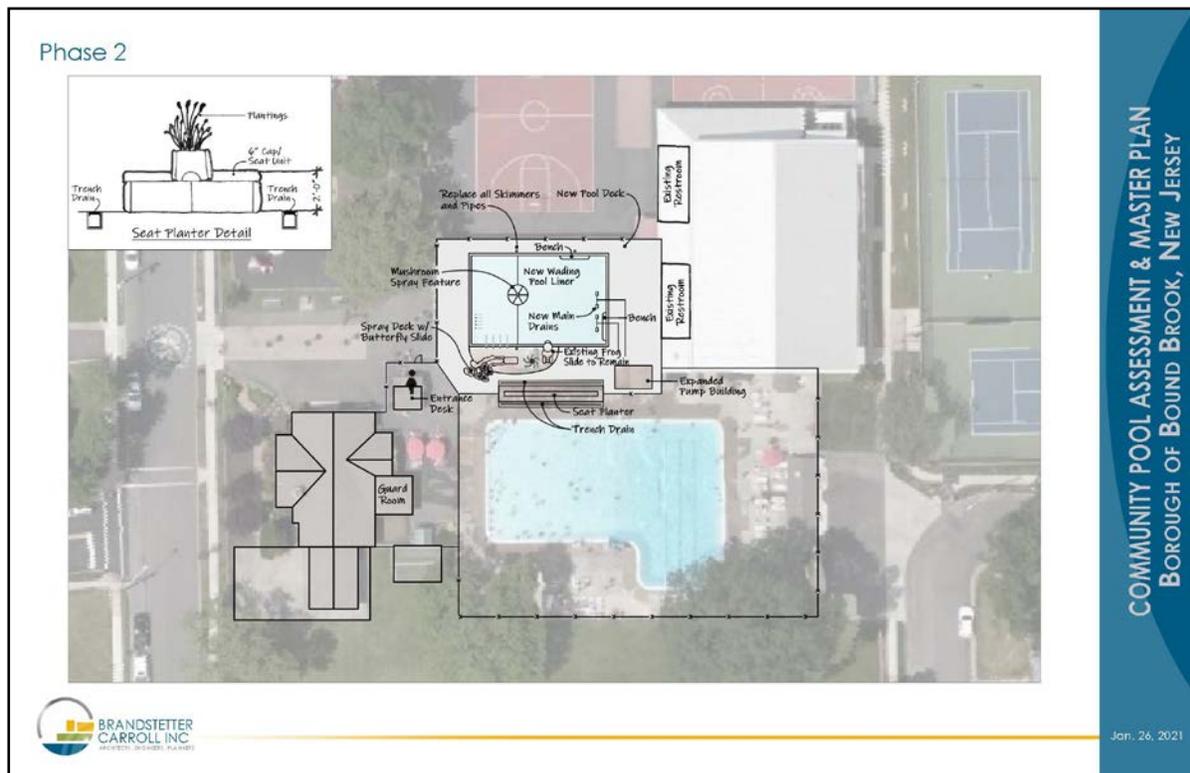
- River Valley that should be preserved for its rich geological, botanic, cultural, and historic significance. This acquisition will advance the expansion of the greenway by further facilitating the development of a network of trails that link to local and nonprofit preserved land and the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park.
- 4) The County acquired 3.75 acres of vacant wooded land from Debbie Orrigo located within the Sourland Mountain Preserve on Montgomery Road in Hillsborough Township for **\$190,000**. The property is surrounded on three sides by preserved county open space and satisfies the goal of creating large, contiguous areas of preserved open space by filling a gap in the over 6,000-acre preserve.

## Recreation Grant Program

The Recreation Grant Program was a huge success in 2021 with grants awarded to Bound Brook, Bridgewater, Franklin, Manville, South Bound Brook and Warren totaling **\$2,065,000**. New applications are being prepared by several municipalities for presentation in 2022.

### Bound Brook – Bound Brook Park Pool

The Borough proposed improvements to the wading pool at Bound Brook Park. The improvements include upgrading the pump and filtration system with more efficient equipment, replacing the pool liner, adding a zero-depth entry, new pool decking, new seating, native plantings, deck spray feature, butterfly slide and mushroom spray feature.

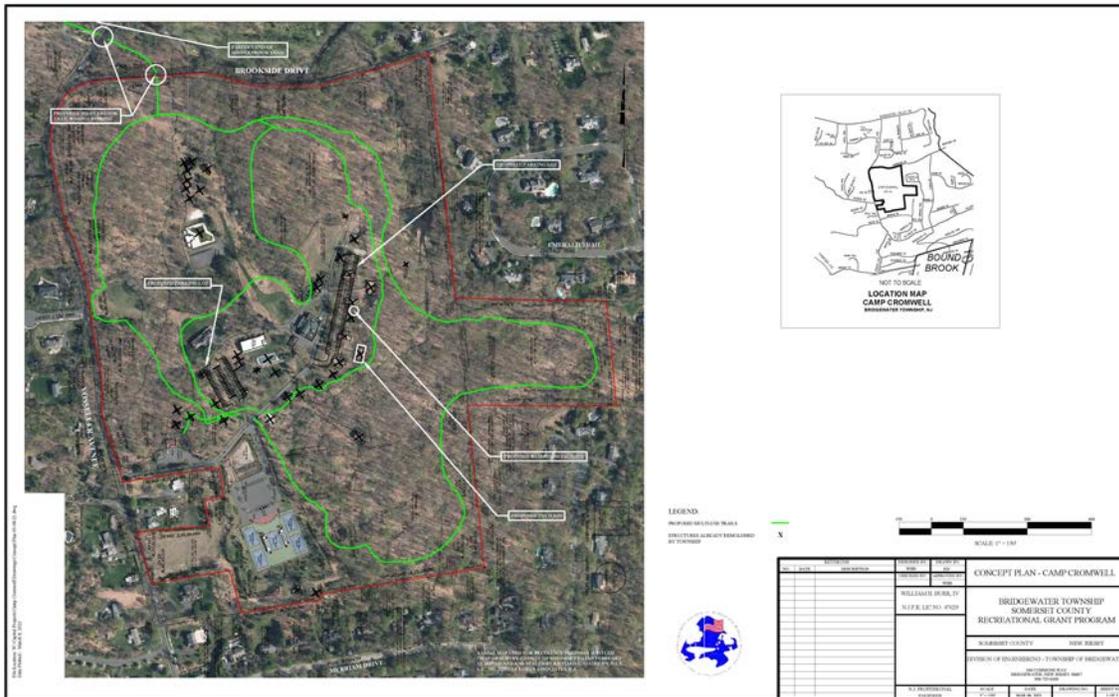


The park in which the pool is located is the center of all recreational activities in the Borough and includes tennis, basketball, improved soccer fields and a gymnasium. It's location in a residential neighborhood, two blocks from Route 28 (W. Union Ave.) services and one block from Middlebrook Park, makes the pool is accessible by foot for many of the Borough residents.

Grant Award - **\$455,000**

Bridgewater Township – Camp Cromwell Trail Development

The Township seeks to develop the property with trails and associated amenities including restrooms, pavilion, gravel parking and playground as well as finding adaptive reuses and possible concessionaires for the remaining buildings (welcome center building, performance center, dining facility). Green infrastructure such as reduction of impervious coverage, rain gardens and rain barrels will be utilized in the design. Funding was requested for the first phase of the development which includes development of a trail network, gravel parking area, kiosk, signage and mid-block crossings at Brookside Drive and Vosseller Avenue. The trail will connect to the much larger Middlebrook Trail network and Washington Valley Park. It is anticipated that the amenities on the property will be a destination that will draw visitors who will take advantage of surrounding businesses.



Grant Award - **\$350,000**

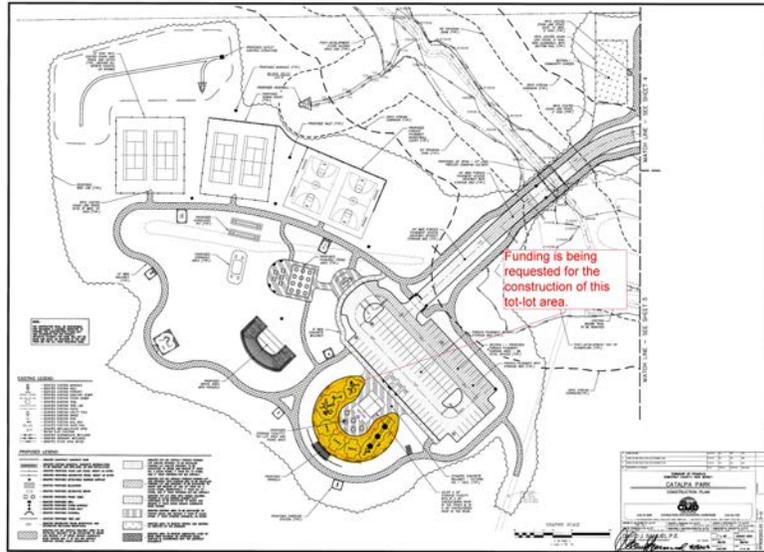
Franklin Township – Catalpa Park

The proposed Catalpa Park development consists of multi-use fields, community garden, pavilions, courts, playground, parking, and other ancillary uses. The Township requested funding for the construction of the playground which will be an inclusive facility consisting of a 2–5-year-old structure, 5–12-year-old structure and ADA compliant structure, swings and benches. The playground will be constructed with a permeable rubberized surface. There are small tot lots

within the adjacent multifamily development but they are restricted to the development residents. Another playground exists at Delar Park on Rt. 27 approximately 2 to 2 ½ miles from this park.

The Township has accessible components at its other playgrounds and is considering additional structures, but this will be the Township's most inclusive playground.

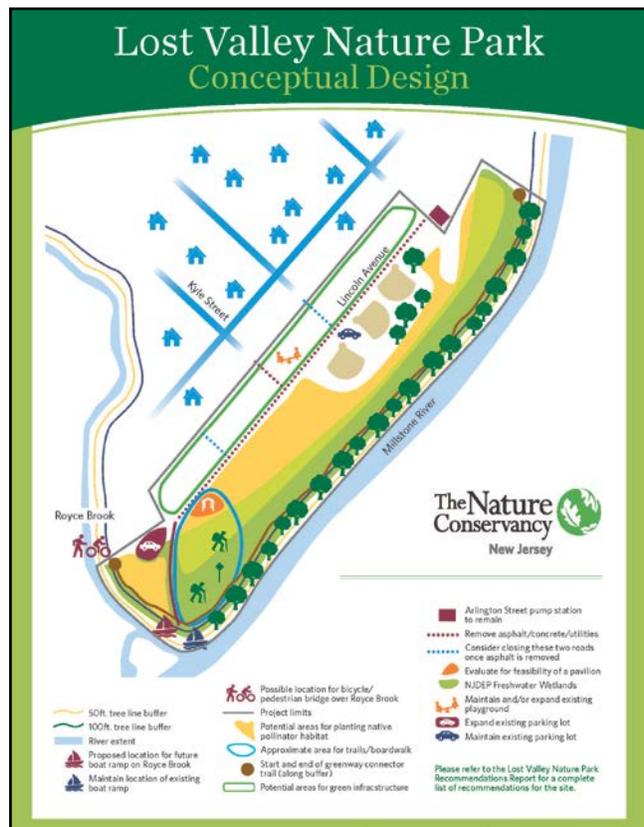
Grant Award - \$360,000



### Manville Borough – Lost Valley Nature Park

Manville Borough received a Transportation Alternatives Program (TAP) Grant, a State administered Federal grant for infrastructure removal associated with flood prone property buyouts in the Lost Valley section of the Borough. To date, more than 175 residences have been acquired and demolished as part of the program. The TAP Grant also includes the creation of the Lost Valley Nature Park which will include reforestation, pollinator plantings, trails, signage and boat launch.

The Borough requested funding for design assistance and non-reimbursable costs for construction, permitting and inspections. The project will draw the public into the nature park who will then utilize downtown businesses; connect to the County's Raritan River Greenway; providing flood control by removing impervious material and planting native vegetation; and provide leisure

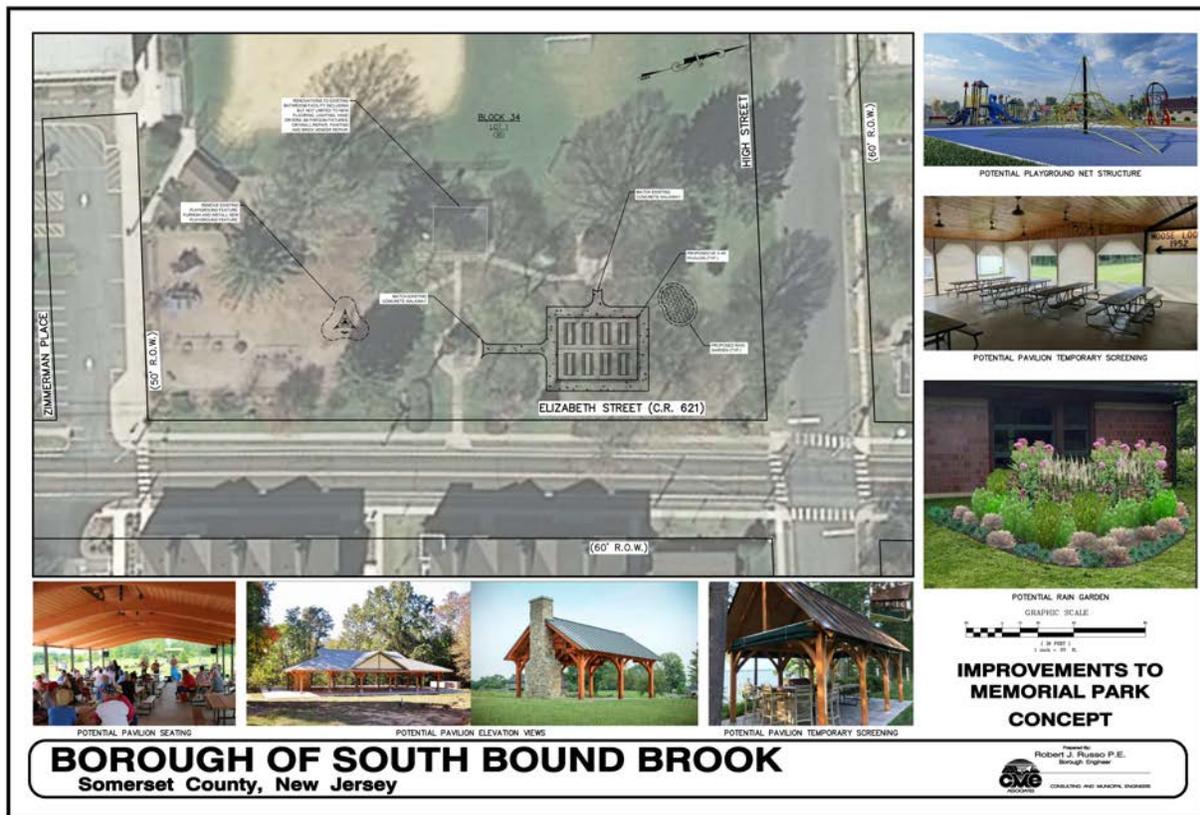


activities for residents of the Borough who have limited ability to travel. There are also sidewalks at the two access points to Lost Valley that will provide pedestrian access between the nature park and downtown Manville which is about a 1 ½ mile walk to the southern end of the downtown.

Grant Award - \$250,000

South Bound Brook – Memorial Park Pavilion

The proposal involves the construction of a 35’x45’ pavilion with seating, lighting, enclosures for extended seasonal use and possibly a fireplace as well as a new rope play structure, rain garden and improvements to the existing restroom facility.



The improvements are important since the Borough is not well equipped for outdoor activities, gatherings or meetings and the new pavilion would accommodate public meetings, school activities and classes, senior activities and other uses by the general public. The location of the park is ideal since it is in the center of a walkable community.

Grant Award - \$350,000

## Warren Township – Municipal Pavilion

The Municipal Pavilion proposal involves the construction of a new 7,000 s.f. +/- pavilion with storage, restrooms and open area for picnics, concerts, and other community events.



The existing pavilion was constructed in 1961 and is heavily used by seniors, youth organizations, residents, religious groups, sports organizations, local businesses and summer camps (up to 165 participants) but is in serious disrepair. The existing storage and restrooms are unusable. The development of the new pavilion will incorporate green infrastructure with recycled materials, rain garden, native plantings, brick paver paths which will serve as a fund-raising opportunity, and connection to public sewer. The pavilion is located within the municipal complex close to existing athletic fields, library, and town hall. It is also within walking distance to the town center.

Grant Award - **\$300,000**

The County Commissioners adopted the updated Recreation Grant Program Guidelines at their December 14, 2021 meeting based on questions and comments that were raised over the course of 2021 and review and recommendations by OSAC. Most of the changes were procedural with no substantive changes to the goals of the program. The updated guidelines were sent to all municipalities.

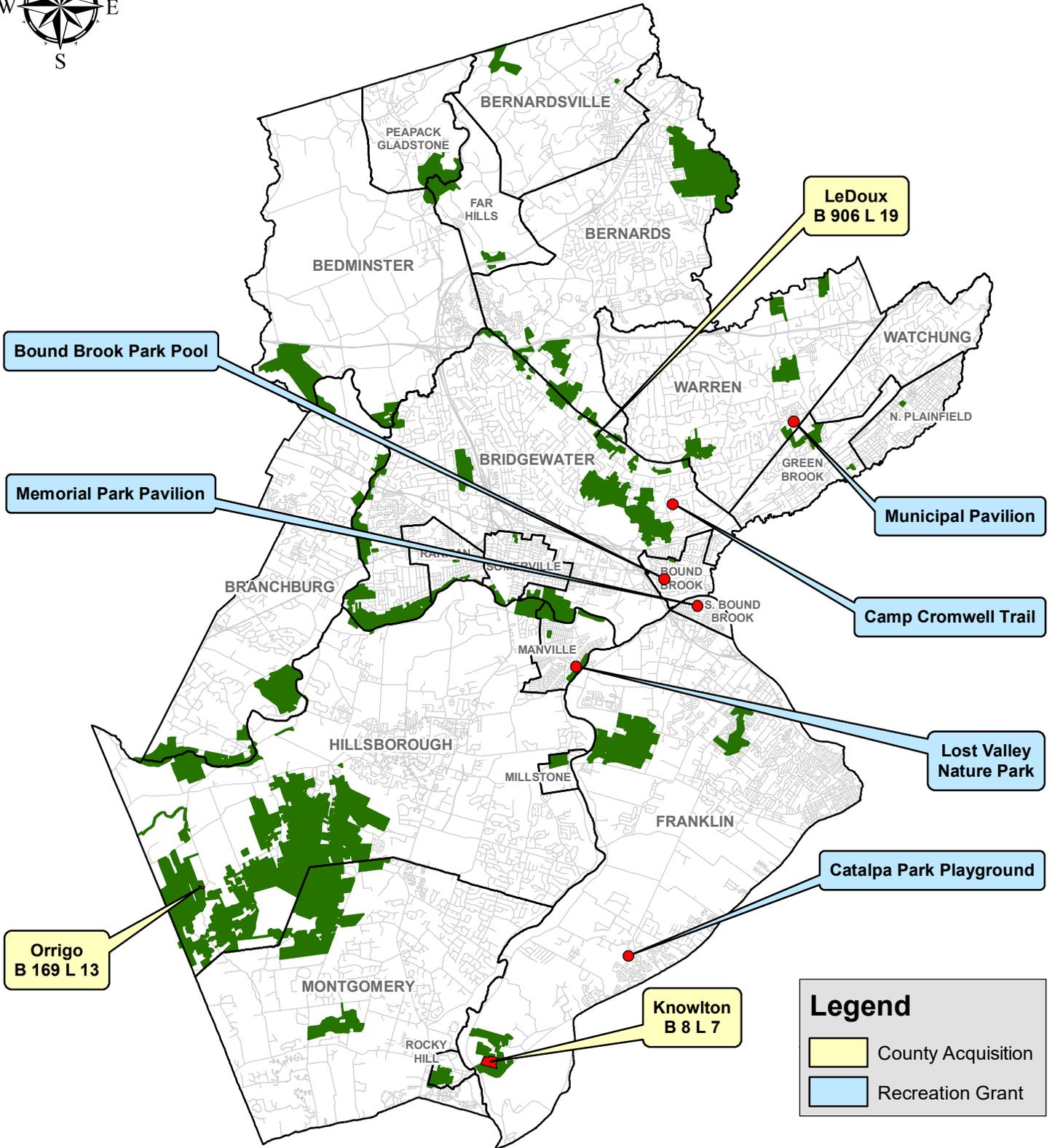
### **Somerset County Preservation Plan**

Heritage Strategies continues to work the Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Master Plans. A single document will be prepared that coordinates all programs as well as three stand-alone documents.

Four virtual public input meetings were held on September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, and October 5<sup>th</sup> and more than 100 comments were received for all plans. Planning staff has compiled all comments and will present them to the Steering Committee in February for final comments. The draft document and mapping will be edited and presented for final public comment prior to the anticipated adoption by the County Planning Board in Spring, 2022.

### **Open Space Trust Fund**

- County open space acquisition costs in 2021 totaled **\$820,100**.
- County Recreation Grant awards totaled **\$2,065,000**. All funds allocated for the program have been awarded. The County Commissioners are considering an allocation for 2022 to fund new projects already being submitted.
- As of December 31, 2021, a balance of **\$8,891,631** was available for County open space acquisitions.
- The 2021 County Commissioner allocation to the Trust Fund for the Open Space Program was **\$2,800,000**.
- NJDEP Green Acres Program announced the approval of a matching grant of **\$1,000,000** for the County Open Space Acquisition Program. These funds will be applied toward future open space acquisition projects.
- The County is currently in negotiations or under contract for approximately **180** acres at an estimated value of **\$6,000,000**.



# SOMERSET COUNTY OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE 2021 PRESERVATION & RECREATION GRANT PROJECTS

Somerset County  
Open Space Preservation Program

January, 2022

