

Environmental Impact Assessment

Montgomery Township Inclusive Playground



Prepared by: Lauren Wasilauski, Open Space & Stewardship Director

Montgomery Township

100 Community Drive

Skillman, NJ 08558

January 2024

I. Description of Proposed Project

Montgomery Township proposes to install an inclusive playground at the Municipal Complex located at 100 Community Drive Skillman, NJ 08558 (also known as block 20001 lot 10.05). The Municipal Complex is a 45-acre site that includes the administrative offices for the Township, the Police Department and a branch of the Somerset County Library System. The property is located at the northeast corner of the intersection of NJ State Route 206 and Orchard Road.

The Township entered into a lease-to-purchase agreement with the Somerset County Improvement Authority for the property. The Municipal Complex opened in June 2022. Future development of a 70-unit age-restricted housing complex is proposed at the west end of the site, anticipated to begin construction in the second half of 2024.

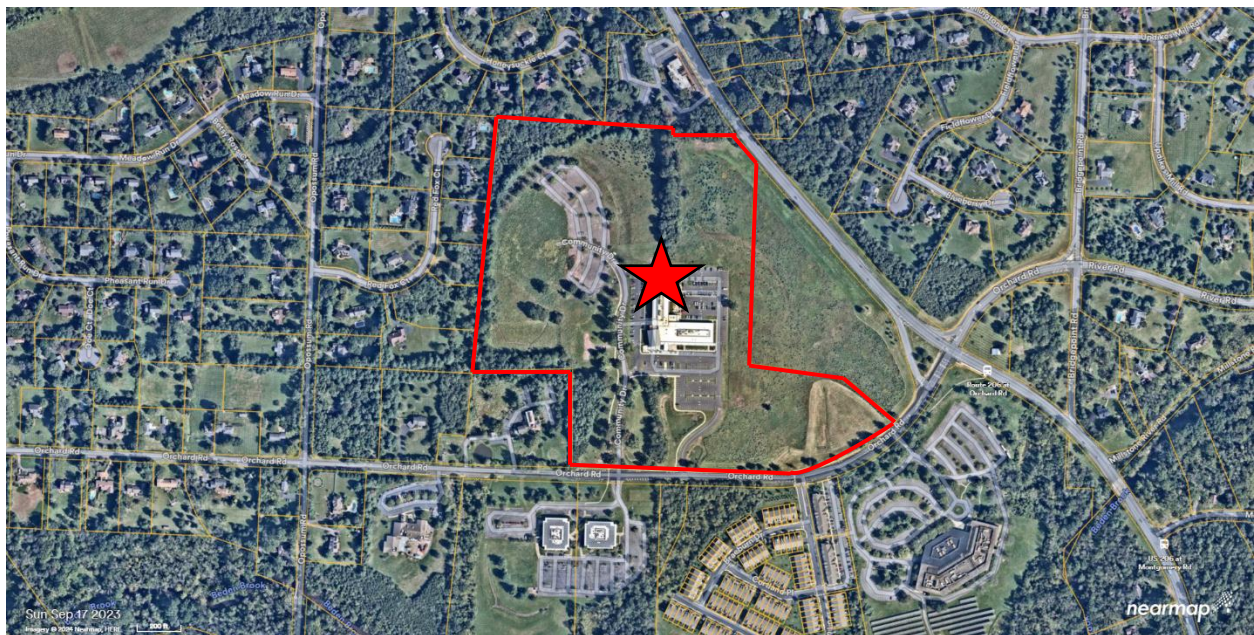


Figure 1: Overall project site

Montgomery Township is proposing to install an all-inclusive playground approximately 10,500 square feet in size with a barrier-free surface to contain two (2) large play structures – one (1) serving 2-5 year olds that is wheel-chair accessible and one (1) serving 5-12 year olds, as well as approximately eleven (11) freestanding play pieces including musical instruments, three (3) exercise stations, accessible swings, shade structures and benches.

The key features that make this an all-inclusive playground include a smooth, turf surface throughout that wheelchairs and other mobility devices can easily navigate, and is resilient to cushion a fall, ramps to play components, accessible swings with features such as high backs and harnesses to assist special-needs children, outdoor devices that make sound or music, and a safety fence enclosing the playground.

The playground is proposed to be situated on the south side of the Municipal Complex, with Orchard Road at the south, Community Drive along the west, an unnamed access driveway to the east and a parking area to the north. This location was selected because of the high volume of visitors to the Municipal Complex, particularly the library. The location allows for existing parking to be utilized, thereby creating no new impervious area for parking. The location is also proximate to public restrooms within the Municipal Complex.

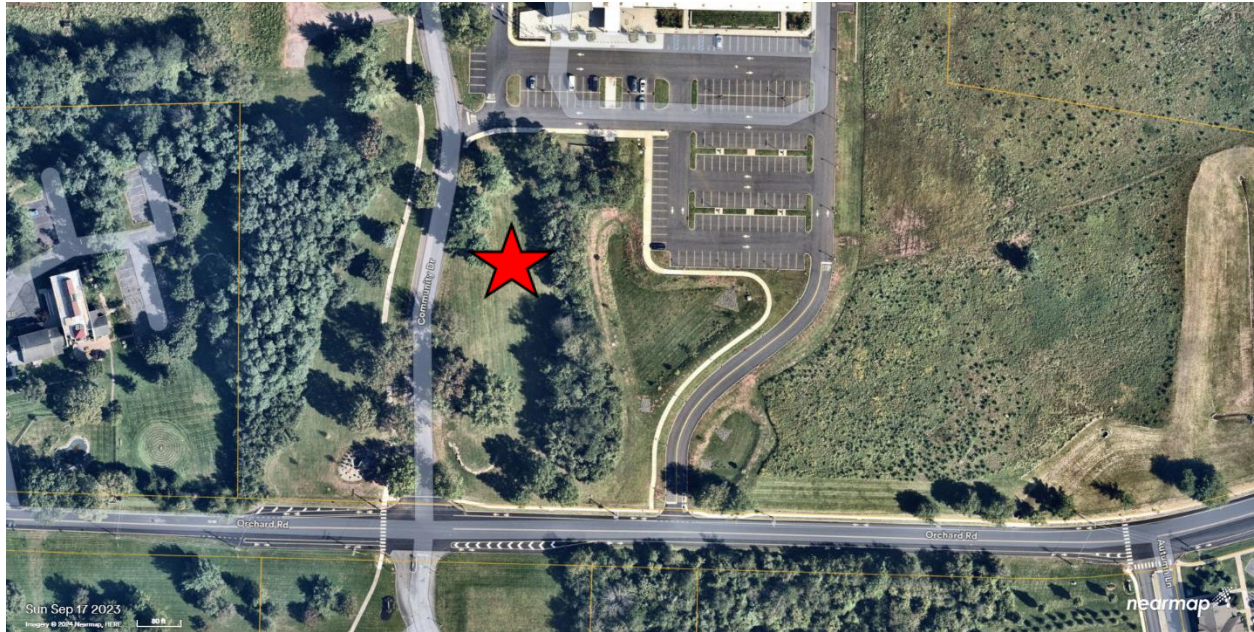


Figure 2: Approximate location of inclusive playground



Figure 3: Photo looking south at proposed project area, photo January 2024

II. Description of the Environment

A. Vegetation & Wildlife

The proposed area for the inclusive playground is currently mowed grass with mature tree cover (mixed deciduous and evergreen trees) to the north and east. The overall site includes a managed meadow area to the east along State Route 206. The subject property contains species of wildlife common to New Jersey including various types of birds, white-tailed deer, rodents, amphibians and reptiles. According to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Landscape Project version 3.3, there are no threatened or endangered species on the subject property.

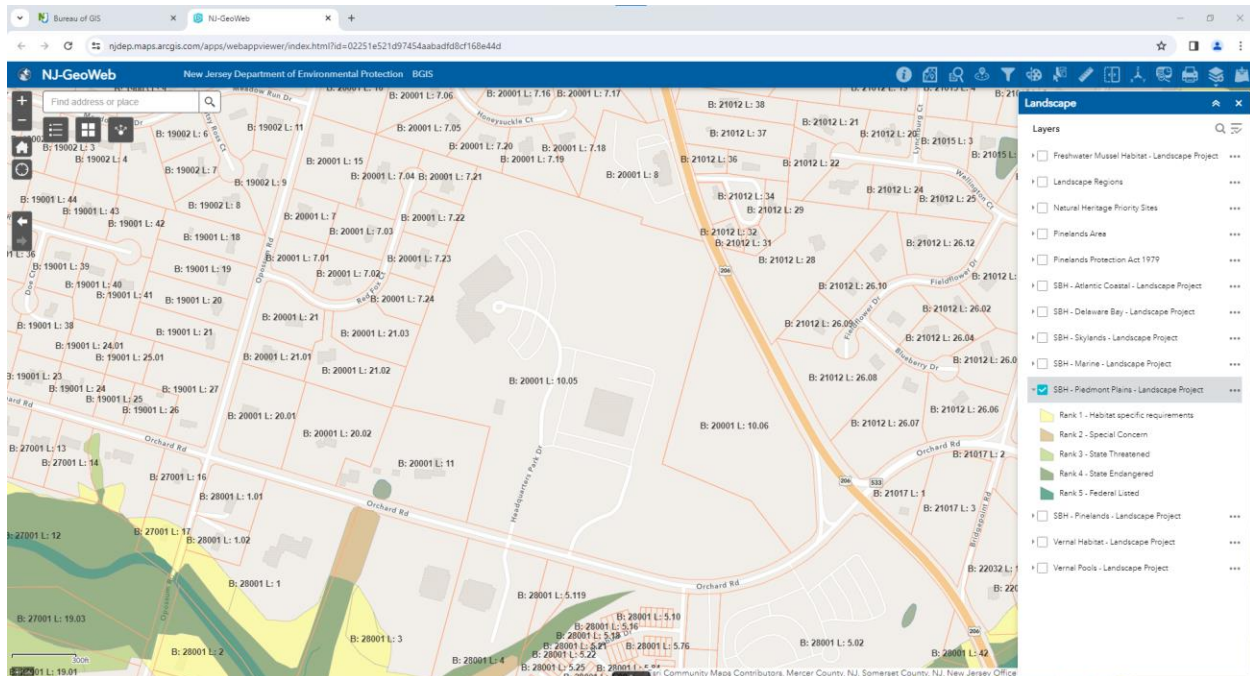


Figure 4: Screenshot of NJDEP GeoWeb Landscape Project indicating no threatened or endangered species on the project site

B. Geology, Topography and Soils

According to the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS) Web Soil Survey, the development area is entirely comprised of silty loam, specifically Penn channery silt loam (PeoB), which is classified as a well-drained soil comprised of noncalcareous reddish shale, siltstone and fine-grained sandstone, normally of the Triassic Age.

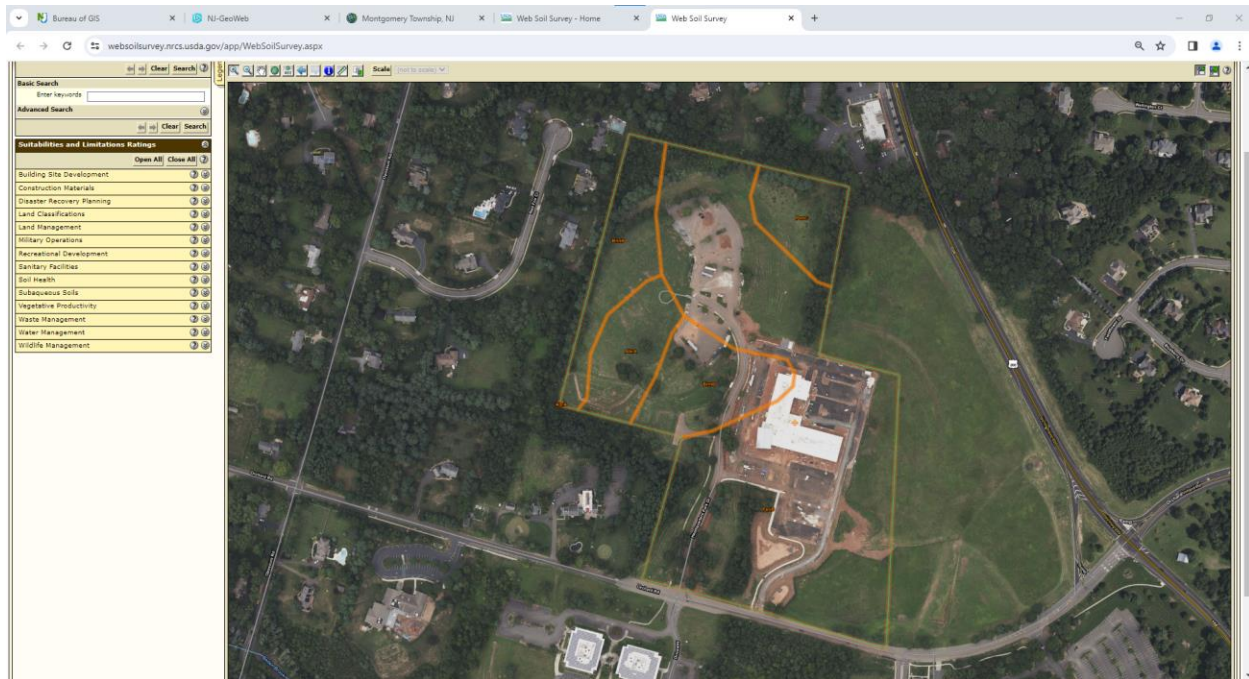


Figure 5: USDA NRCS Web Soil Survey

The development area is relatively flat, and generally slopes downward from northwest to southeast from a high area of 93 feet to 88 feet. The proposed playground will disturb very little existing topography and this location was partly selected due to the flat topography. The development of the playground will not generate any significant soil cut or fill, requiring little or no trucking of soils.

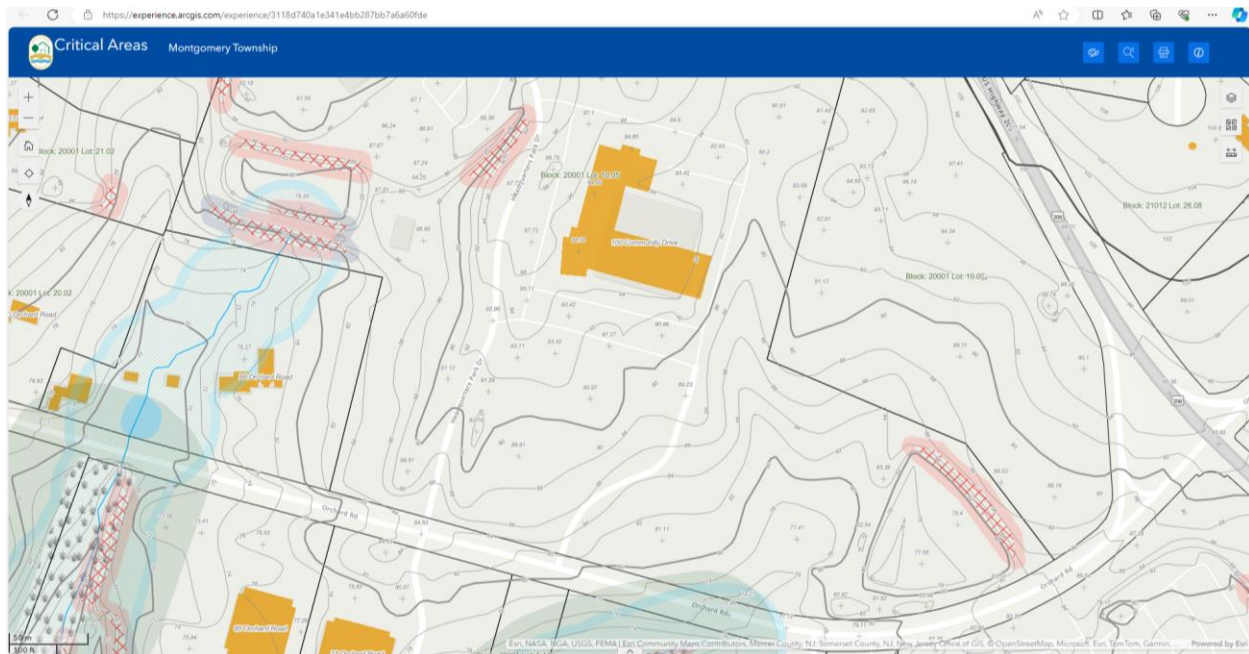


Figure 6: screen grab of Montgomery Township Web Map of site topography (source data: Montgomery Township 1996 Digital Elevation Model)

C. Water Resources & Hydrology

There are no surface water bodies within the proposed project site. The nearest stream, an unnamed tributary to Pike Brook is located more than 500' west of the development site. Portions of the overall site drain to a stormwater management basin while other portions drain overland to existing drainage infrastructure located within Orchard Road.

The project site is not located within a floodway nor a FEMA Flood Hazard Area.

D. Historic and Archeological Resources

The property was formerly developed as an office building and research space, with Community Drive formerly being known as Headquarters Park Drive. There are three (3) historic resources located within one mile of the site.

The Abraham Stryker burial ground is located on the property and immediately east of the proposed playground site. No disturbance to the cemetery is proposed as part of this project.



Figure 7: photo looking southeast at Abraham Stryker burial ground, adjacent to proposed project site, photo January 2024

Located at 88 Orchard Road, the Wyckoff-Stryker Farmstead, also known as the Abraham Stryker House, abuts the Municipal Complex property's western border. The New Jersey Historic Preservation Office indicates this property as ID #3529 and issued an opinion on 9/3/1986. A previous opinion was issued under the Abraham Stryker House on 6/28/1982.

The Bedens Brook Bridge, also known as the Opossum Road Bridge, is located on Opossum Road about 0.1 miles south of the interest with Orchard Road and approximately 0.5 miles from the site. The bridge is double-arch and random rubble stone construction, dating to 1822. The New Jersey Historic Preservation Office indicates this bridge as ID #2535 and issued an opinion on 6/23/1982. The property was entered into the State Register on 12/20/1993 and National Register on 2/17/1994 (NR Reference #94000010).

E. Transportation & Access to the Site

The Municipal Complex property is located at the northwest corner of the intersection of NJ State Route 206 and Orchard Road. The property is accessible by motor vehicle, with ample parking available. A bicycle rack is located outside the main entrance to the building. New sidewalks along Orchard Road were constructed by the municipality in Spring 2023 to connect the property to the east to the intersection with Route 206. Crosswalks to a residential neighborhood on Autumn Lane and an office complex on the south side of Orchard Road were also included as part of the project. The New Jersey Department of Transportation is scheduled to provide upgrades to the intersection of Route 206 and Orchard Road to provide crosswalks, pedestrian signal heads and other upgrades. NJ Transit bus route #605 includes several stops along Route 206 in Montgomery, with the final stop located at the southwest corner of the

intersection of Route 206 and Orchard Road. From the bus stop, individuals can use the sidewalk network to walk less than one-half mile to the playground site.

F. Adjacent Land Uses & Surrounding Neighborhood

The Municipal Complex property is bordered to the east by NJ State Route 206, the main thoroughfare of Montgomery Township. Beyond Route 206 to the east is single-family residential development, situated predominantly on lots of 1 acre or more.

To the south of the site are two office complexes, and a townhouse/apartment residential development with a mix of market rate and affordable units.

A small office building is located to the west of the property. Single-family residential development on lots of 1 acre are located to the west and north of the property. A restaurant, “Aja Asian Cuisine and Lounge”, borders the Municipal Complex property to the northeast.

III. Environmental Impact Analysis of Proposed Action

A. Affected Resources

Environmentally Sensitive Areas: As discussed earlier in this report, the proposed project area is currently managed as turf grass. No threatened or endangered species are indicated in the area, and there are no apparent critical areas (e.g. wetlands, steep slopes, streams). The proposed development does not pose a threat to any environmentally sensitive area.

Air Quality: There will be no emission or radiation, nor point source air emissions from the playground. Air emissions will be limited to exhaust from automobiles from any construction equipment, and from visitors to the Municipal Center. There will be a negligible impact to air quality at the site and in the surrounding area due to the project.

Noise Pollution: There will be higher noise levels during construction, which will be mitigated by allowable working hours established by the Township Code. The existing woodland buffer immediately east of the site, and the woodland buffer to the west will buffer noise to adjacent residential neighbors. Post-construction, noise generated from the site will be commonplace for a suburban setting. The playground is proposed about 750 feet from the closest residential property line and about 1,000 feet from the closest residence.

Hazardous Materials: None of the construction materials, nor soil from the site would be considered hazardous to the public health or environment. The generated waste materials will be handled and disposed of in proper fashion in accordance with any applicable Township ordinances, County or State regulations.

Construction: Construction activities may generate dust and noise through the operation of equipment and moving of materials. All measures on the Soil Erosion and Sediment Control

Plan, and any other conditions imposed by the Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District will be observed. Dust control will include watering of exposed soil, and seeding and stabilizing any disturbed areas at the conclusion of construction.

B. Short-Term and Long-Term Project Impacts

Short-Term Impacts: As discussed in Section III.A above, short-term impacts of construction will include increased noise and dust during construction.

Long-Term Impacts: As this is designed to be a destination playground, it is anticipated that the project will bring many people to the area and to local businesses.

C. Anticipated Increase in Recreation & Overall Site Use

The closest Township park with playground equipment is about 1.5 miles (as the crow flies) from the Municipal Complex. There are currently no all-inclusive playgrounds in Somerset County, so constructing the proposed playground would fulfill a gap in recreational programming for residents in the Township and the region.

D. Impact to Adjacent Environmental Features

The design is intended to keep all existing trees in the area.

There are no sensitive environmental features within the project area, nor immediately adjacent. The Abraham Stryker burying ground is located immediately east of the project site, and the Township hopes that visitors to the park will observe the burying ground and become increasingly interested in the Township's history.

E. Permits

The Township will need to obtain Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan certification from the Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District, as well as building permits.

F. Natural Heritage Data Request Form

Submitted by Township

G. Impact to Project of Sea Level Rise

There is no anticipated impact to the playground due to projected sea level rise. Montgomery Township is not a coastal community, and indeed Somerset County does not abut the coast. Even as sea level rise causes impacts upstream, the playground area is not projected to be

impacted due to its distance from any streams (over 500LF), floodways (over 1,200LF) and elevation change of over +30' from the floodway.

IV. Alternatives Analysis

In the course of determining a location for potential construction of the inclusive playground, Township staff, professionals, elected officials, members of the Recreation Committee, and other stakeholders assessed a few other possible locations that will be discussed here.

A. Municipal Complex – Meadow Area

The Municipal Complex is bordered to the east by a 10-acre property owned by the Township (dedicated in 2002). The property is currently managed as a meadow and includes signage (monument and electronic message board) for the Municipal Complex. The Township has no record of the property being improved with any structures other than a sign. The 1930 aerial imagery on the NJ GeoWeb indicates the property was in agriculture at the time, which is fitting of Montgomery's past as a predominantly agricultural community.

Construction of the inclusive playground in the meadow area was determined to be undesirable because if the existing parking lot was to be utilized, visitors to the playground would need to cross the busy driveway. This was determined to be not ideal as some visitors to the playground may have mobility challenges. If a separate parking area was constructed on the east side of the existing driveway, this would create more impervious coverage, necessitate implementation of stormwater management measures and increase the price of the project. Additional grading of the site would also be required. Furthermore, this location is farther from the main entrance to the Municipal Complex and public restroom facilities. Since the area is managed as meadow, there is no existing shade in this area for park users. Any landscaping planted would take a significant amount of time to mature and provide meaningful shade.

B. Mill Pond Park

Mill Pond Park is a 57-acre park, purchased by the Township in 1998 and developed with soccer fields shortly thereafter. There is an existing playground at the park that is approximately 12 years old. Mill Pond Park is situated in the northeast quadrant of the Township, and located immediately adjacent to Montgomery Veterans Park – the Township's 100-acre flagship park facility, which also contains a playground that was upgraded and expanded within the last 10

years. This area of the Township already contains significant recreation opportunities for residents.

C. No Build

The Township could opt to not construct the inclusive playground. There are 8 existing playgrounds in Township parks spread throughout the Township. There are no fully accessible playgrounds located within Somerset County as of the date of this report, and the Township desires to construct the playground to fulfill a need for not only Township residents, but residents of nearby towns and throughout the region. Furthermore, the library is a popular destination for families, with a multitude of programs for all ages offered at the library throughout the year. The residential neighborhoods nearby to the Municipal Complex are not currently within walking distance of a recreational resource, so the playground would provide a new opportunity for these residents.

D. Mitigating Measures

As discussed in Section III.A of this report, the Township will mitigate noise pollution by ensuring that the selected contractor(s) operates during established work hours. The existing vegetation on the property will help to attenuate noise for nearby residential neighbors. Dust control measures and silt fence will be installed in accordance with the approved Soil Erosion and Sediment Control Plan and as directed by the Somerset-Union Soil Conservation District.

E. Author Qualifications

LAUREN A. WASILAUSKI

EDUCATION: M.S. Environmental Studies
University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA

B.S. Biology
Ursinus College, Collegeville, PA

EXPERIENCE:

Ms. Wasilauski has been employed by Montgomery Township since 2006; her current position is as Open Space and Stewardship Director. In the course of her career with the Township, Ms. Wasilauski has gained extensive professional experience in land use, planning & zoning, reviewing development applications, as well as pursuing preservation of open space, parks and farmland.