

Sierra Club New Jersey Chapter Resolution
Objecting to the Essex County Parks Department
Proposed \$16 million Grizzly Bear Exhibit, an \$8 million amphitheater
And all future major development at the Turtle Back Zoo

Whereas, the South Mountain Reservation was created as a nature reserve for the purpose of passive recreation; and

Whereas, the Turtle Back Zoo had 900,000 visitors in 2017; and

Whereas increased vehicular traffic in the area of the Turtle Back Zoo and throughout the reservation causes inconvenience, traffic delays, higher emissions of air pollutants and green house gases affecting nearby residents and drivers and pedestrians on the local roads; and

Whereas said traffic will not be remediated by a third five story parking deck; and

Whereas Essex County has engaged in excessive tree cutting to create parking and exhibits; and

Whereas sixty-nine evergreen and deciduous trees were removed from the perimeter of the reservoir walking trail in the spring of 2019 because they were dead or dying; and

Whereas the Essex County Parks Department has not addressed the flooding in the South Mountain Reservation that is exacerbated by continued development; and

Whereas the Essex County Parks Department has been secretive in addressing public concerns; and

Whereas, The Essex County Parks Department has not provided a credible master plan, traffic study, nor environmental impact statement, for a proposed five story parking deck, amphitheater, and six acre grizzly bear exhibit and breeding area; and

Whereas on July 8, 2019 Parks Director Dan Salvante refused to allow the public to speak before taking a vote on the \$600,000 architectural fee for a proposed amphitheater; and

Whereas it was revealed at the July 10, 2019 Freeholders meeting that the architectural firm, French and Parrello who was hired to create the architectural drawings for the amphitheater made a \$5000 contribution to the County Executive, Joe DiVincenzo's election campaign fund; and

Whereas the Essex County Recreation and Open Space Advisory Board consists primarily of county employees and their families who are not trained to nor can they make impartial decisions regarding the spending of millions of dollars of open space trust fund money; and

Whereas the Turtle Back Zoo has been allocated a disproportionate amount of revenue from the Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund, and

Whereas, at public meetings on February 22, 2018, April 17, 2018, September 12, 2018, March 20, 2019, April, 10, 2019, July 8, 2019, and July 10, 2019, the public stated that it wants open space to be purchased instead of spending funds on more Zoo exhibits, and

Whereas, the public has stated they want climate change remediation; and

Whereas the South Mountain Conservancy has been advised that new picnic benches and maintenance work cannot be purchased because of a lack of available funds from the county;

Now therefore, be it resolved that:

The New Jersey Chapter of the Sierra Club opposes the allocation of Essex County Recreation and Open Space Trust Funds for the proposed grizzly bear exhibit, amphitheater and parking deck, and requests that the County rescind the allocation of \$600K for architectural fees for the amphitheater; and

The Club urges that no further development be implemented in South Mountain Reservation absent a publicly reviewed and approved Master Plan; and

The Club recommends that the Freeholders and County Executive take action to ensure that Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund be used primarily for restoration of all parks for passive recreation, acquisition of open space for wildlife habitat and stormwater control, and education of students in real study of the South Mountain Reservation as a world class eco-system.

A copy of this resolution will be sent to the Essex County Executive, the Essex County Board of Freeholders, New Jersey Green Acres and The Governor of New Jersey.

Adopted by the New Jersey Chapter Executive Committee: August 10, 2019