Environmental Assessment

For

Conversion of a Portion of James J. Braddock Park

Prepared for:	County of Hudson Township of North Bergen North Bergen Board of Education
In Consultation with:	Millennium Strategies LLC L+C Design Consultants PA
Dated:	November 2017

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Chapter 1 – Purpose, Need, Background

- **Introduction**

The proposed action is the conversion of 1.25 acres in James J. Braddock Park that is mapped in accordance with Section 6(f) of the Land and Water Conservation Fund regulations (Section 6, Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, as amended: Public Law 88-578; 16 U.S.C. 4601-4 et.seq, Section 1.4). The project also involves the substitution of 2.27 acres of land in Hudson County, New Jersey as replacement for the conversion of 1.25 acres of recreation land at Braddock Park as required by Section 6(f).

The subject of this conversion proposal is James J. Braddock Park (hereinafter referred to as "Braddock Park" and located at Boulevard East, North Bergen, NJ 07047 – Block 437.02, Lot 1). The need for a partial conversion of Section 6(f) parkland is rooted in the fact that portions of the 167-acre Braddock Park, a public open space property owned by the County of Hudson (County) and leased in part to the Township of North Bergen (Township), were adapted for temporary non-conforming use that exceed six months in duration. The non-conforming use included the placement of seventeen (17) Temporary Classroom Units (TCUs) within the Township's leasehold at Braddock Park. The TCUs currently house the North Bergen Board of Education's (the Board) Pre-Kindergarten program, an early childhood education program mandated in North Bergen and other low-income communities by the New Jersey Supreme Court in *Abbott v. Burke V* in 1998. Following the New Jersey Supreme Court's decision, the County; their lessee, the Township; and, the occupant of the parcel under consideration, the Board; agreed upon the placement of TCUs on 0.7% of the Braddock Park site (1.25 acres) with the intention of identifying a permanent location for the preschool program as soon as possible.

- **Background and Context**

During the spring of 2011 the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Green Acres Program (the state agency responsible for facilitating state assistance proposals submitted for National Park Service review and decision) began conversations with the County, Township and Board regarding the placement of TCUs at Braddock Park. Since 2011, and dating back as early as the original placement of TCUs in the park (2001), the Board and Township have been seeking a solution to relocate the preschool and to find a permanent home for the Pre-K program. A number of locations and methods of procurement have been pursued over the past 15 years, each confronting any number of obstacles.

In 2001, the Board was in the process of establishing a building program to house expansion of early childhood education, as per the new state mandates requiring the provision of full day Kindergarten and half-day Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) in low-income school districts. Prior to that time the District provided only half-day Kindergarten. In response to the new mandates, the Board began preparing plans for construction of room conversions and additions at existing elementary schools within the North Bergen School District. Multiple lots were acquired to support the construction of an Early Childhood Annex on Lincoln School at 64th Street in North Bergen, between Durham Street and Smith Street. When excavation began on a paved lot on the existing Lincoln School property, questionable sub grade conditions were encountered, which required environmental testing and base remediation. As a result, construction schedules for the new early childhood annex could not be maintained and the Board began exploring emergency solutions in order to meet the state mandate to provide Pre-K by the start of the 2001-2002 school year.

Subsequently, the decision was made to locate TCUs at an old municipal pool site in North Bergen on Tonnelle Avenue near 89th Street, on an emergency basis. When excavation for utility connections began in the paved parking area at the pool site, the trenches were filling with materials that indicated contamination from historic local industry, immediately necessitating further environmental testing. As a result of this testing, the municipal pool site had to be closed and vacated. A request was then made by the Board and Township to the County of Hudson for temporary occupancy for location of TCUs within the boundaries of the Township's leasehold at Braddock Park. With County approval, the Board made plans to place the TCUs at Braddock Park. Correspondence between the Board, the architect contracted by the Board, the Hudson County Department of Education, the New Jersey Department of Education, the North Bergen Zoning Board, and others stakeholders document this process.

From this moment on the Board has been working to identify alternative sites for the permanent placement of the North Bergen preschool program. Each identified or suggested site has been analyzed to determine whether it is a "feasible," "reasonable," or "available," alternative, as per the guidelines for diversion of Green Acres-encumbered properties promulgated by the State of New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program under NJAC 7:36-26.9(e). The alternatives have been evaluated based on their compatibility with the Board's operational capacity and locally developed educational standards, as well as compliance with relevant New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) codes and standards, specifically:

- NJAC 6A:13A, regarding "Elements of High Quality Preschool Programs";
- NJAC 6A:26 and NJAC 5:23, providing guidelines for "Preschool Facilities";
- NJSA 18A:35-7, defining school health and physical education requirements;
- "Preschool Teaching and Learning Standards"; and,
- "Preschool Implementation" guidelines

In 2008 the Board submitted schematics to the NJDOE for review and approval to construct a 32-classroom preschool facility at a Board-owned property on 64th Street in North Bergen (Block 205, Lot 30). The plans included community space in the new facility (for shared Township use) and improvements to gym space at the existing Rec Center, both to be shared by the new school and Township recreation programs under an inter-local agreement. Upon notice that the 64th Street site was encumbered by Green Acres funding and not available for construction, the property was removed from consideration as the site of a permanent preschool facility in North Bergen.

Subsequently, the Board completed site search and feasibility studies for construction of a new preschool at other sites: one near Franklin School and 53rd Street and another on 16th Street in the southern end of North Bergen. Another site was considered, Temple Beth El, and determined to not be a feasible or available location. Portions of the "Hudson News" properties were previously reviewed as potential sites for TCU placement; however, this was found to be not feasible as the usable flat area did not allow space for all TCUs and the site required substantial environmental remediation. These sites did not prove feasible, reasonable or available for a variety of reasons, and other options were pursued.

In May 2012, the Township and Board issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the lease of a full facility for preschool use, with joint use by a branch library, so that the TCUs could be vacated from Braddock Park. The responses received proposed leases at rates the Board deemed excessive. The Board began to pursue other options after attempting, unsuccessfully, to negotiate reduced lease pricing.

In the spring of 2013, notice was given that the 64th Street property was in fact not encumbered by Green Acres funding and the Board again considered use of Block 205, Lot 30. As was determined during the initial feasibility study of the 64th Street property, acquisition of adjacent properties was necessary in order to provide proper access to the facility, parking, and all requirements as per New Jersey Department of Education rules and regulations. The adjacent properties were no longer available and thus, the alternative was no longer an available option for the Board.

At this time, the ongoing search includes all property noted above, as well as ongoing research to identify other parcels and determine if such sites are feasible, reasonable, and available. The Board is conducting property searches, tax record reviews, aerial photography, and on-the-ground research to seek alternative sites for the relocation of preschool TCUs as well as for the permanent construction of a preschool facility. The Township and Board have also taken into consideration sites recommended by the public during a scoping hearing held on November 5, 2014, as well as sites recommended by representatives from the NJDEP Green Acres Program. The Township and Board have also assessed whether proposed replacement parcels and existing Board-owned school properties can fulfill the compelling public need for providing a temporary or permanent facility for the North Bergen preschool program.

- **Scope of the Environmental Review**

The purpose of this Environmental Assessment (EA) is to inform the interested and affected public about the County of Hudson's proposal to the National Parks Service, Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to convert a parcel of land located at James J. Braddock Park in North Bergen, New Jersey. As Braddock Park is mapped in accordance with Section 6(f) and temporary non-conforming use exceeded six months, the County is required to file this application for partial conversion with the National Parks Service and provide replacement property pursuant to Section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act. The EA will provide a framework for the National Park Service to evaluate the environmental consequences of the proposed action on the human environment and will include information to help the interested and affected public and decision makers understand the context for the proposed action.

An Environmental Assessment is needed as a result of the proposed action because the Land and Water Conservation Fund provides special protection for land acquired or developed with federal financial assistance provided by the Land and Water Conservation Fund. Specifically, Section 6(f) of the LWCF Act states that property improved or developed with Land and Water Conservation Fund financial assistance shall not be converted to any other use than public outdoor recreation without the approval of the Secretary of the Interior. Such approval is not granted unless the replacement property is of equal or greater fair market value and is of equivalent recreational usefulness as that being converted. All 167 acres of Braddock Park are mapped under Section 6(f) and therefore subject to the conversion provision of the LWCF Act. The partial conversion of 1.25 acres of Braddock Park is required as temporary non-conforming use of the Section 6(f)(3) property exceeded six months and requires the project sponsor to provide replacement property pursuant to Section 6(f)(3) of the LWCF Act.

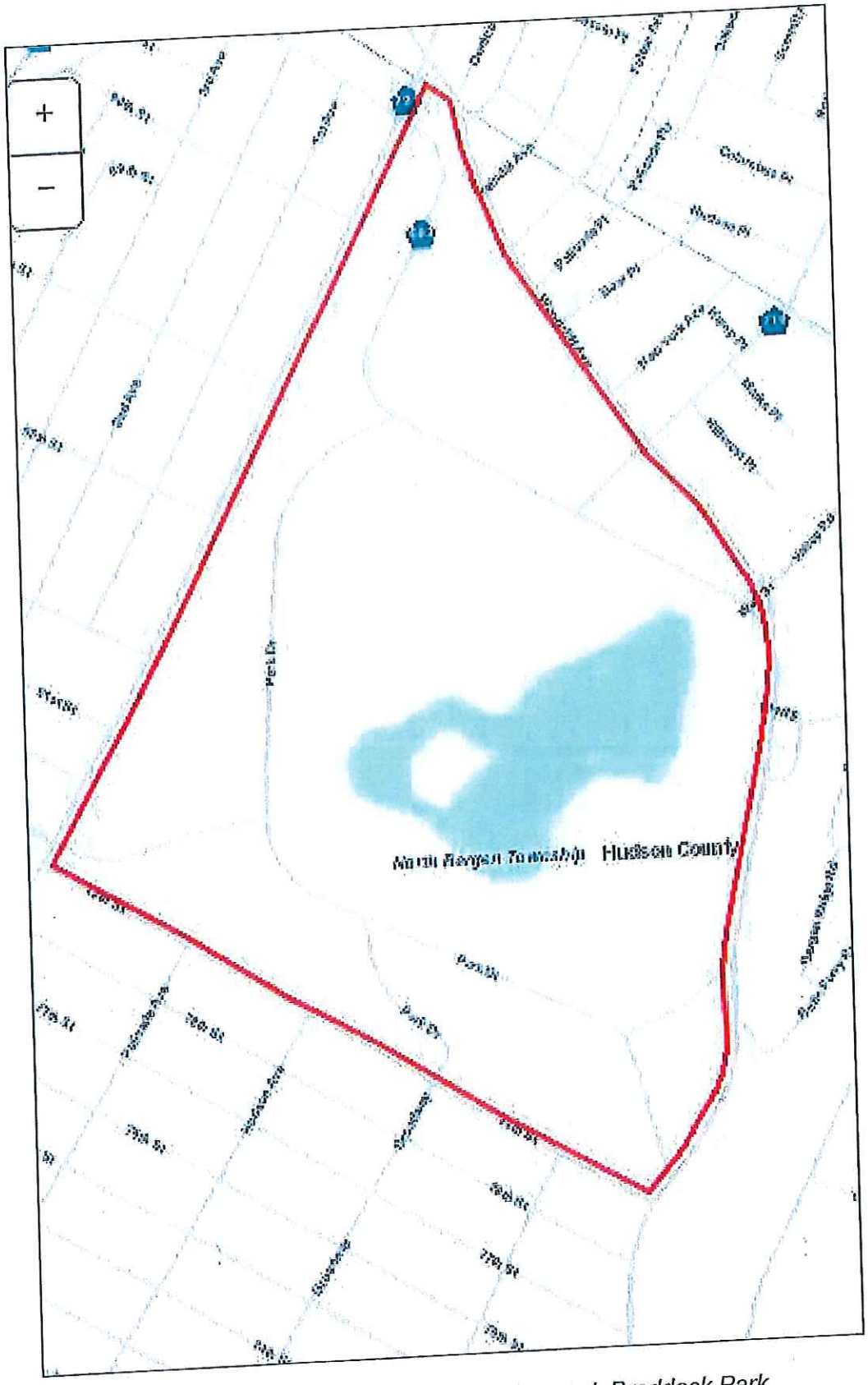

Figure 1. Existing 6(f) boundary at James J. Braddock Park

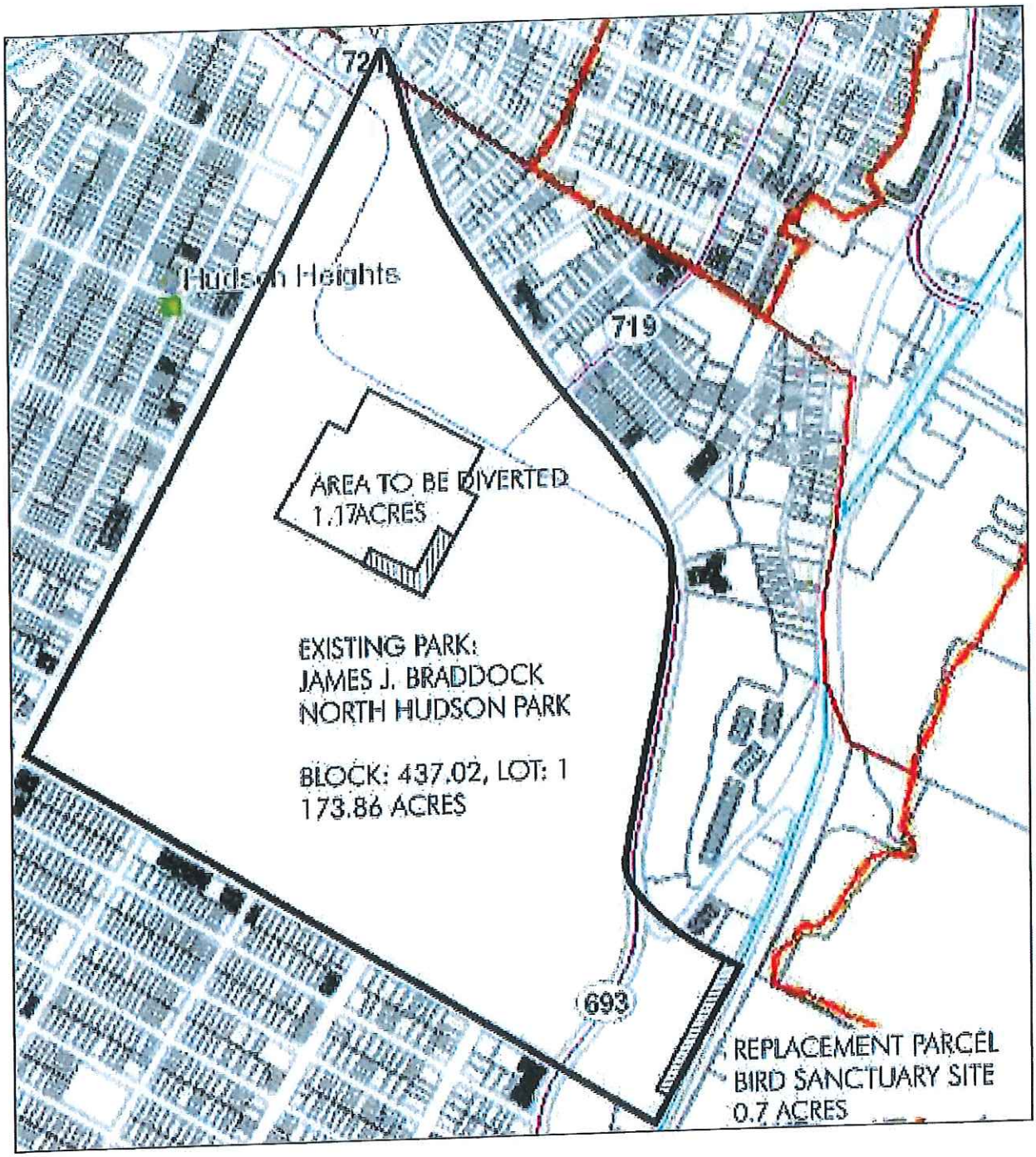

Figure 2. Conversion Parcel within Braddock Park

Note: The boundaries of the conversion parcel include only the "L" shaped striped area in the center of the image. The surrounding demarcated boundary outlines the Township's leasehold at Braddock Park. The striped area at the bottom right of the image outlines the replacement parcel on River Road. Although the map reads 1.17 acres, the actual size of the conversion parcel is 1.25 acres, which includes the footprint of the TCUs, adjacent tot lot, and portions of the access driveway serving the preschool.

Chapter 2 – Description of Alternatives

The proposed alternative is partial conversion encompassing 1.25 acres of parkland in Braddock Park and the provision of 2.27 acres of replacement land, comprised of two separate parcels totaling 2.27 acres. The proposed action is National Park Service approval of this project. There are two components to this project, the partial conversion of 1.25 acres of parkland in Braddock Park and the addition of substitute parkland in Hudson County. The relation of replacement parcels to the conversion parcel is highlighted in Figure 3.

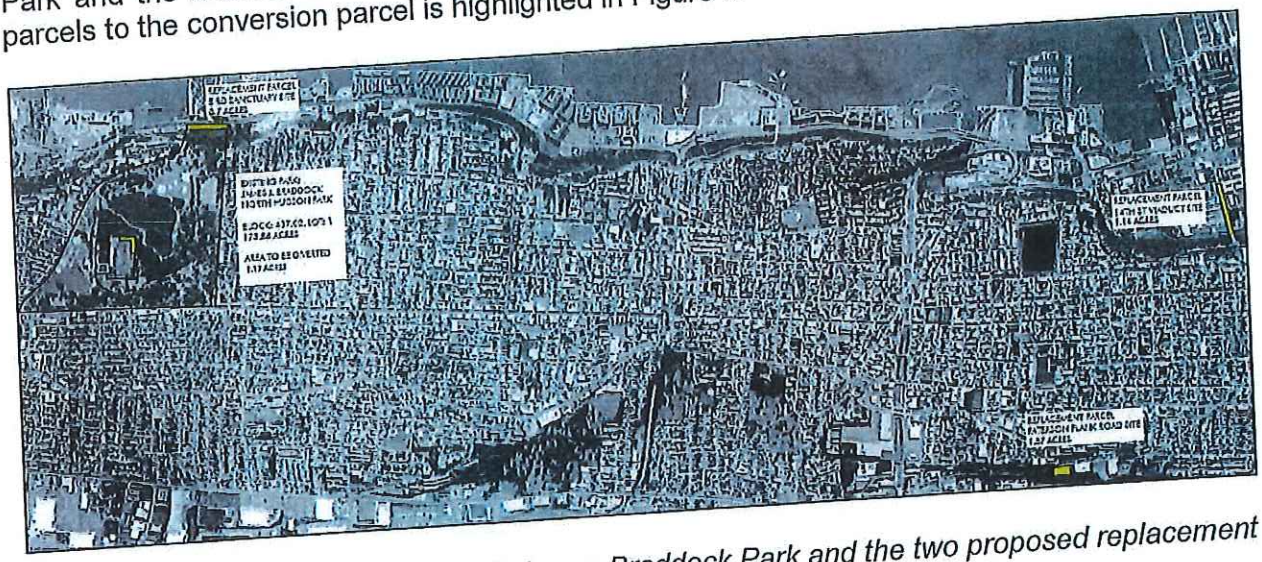

Figure 3. Map showing relationship between Braddock Park and the two proposed replacement parcels.

Note: A full size version is attached in the appendix.

Braddock Park: The proposed action involves partial conversion encompassing 1.25 acres of the 167-acre 6(f) mapped area of James J. Braddock Park in North Bergen, New Jersey (Hudson County). This alternative is required pursuant to Section 6(f) as temporary non-conforming use continued beyond six months, resulting in a conversion of use and the requirement that the project sponsor provide replacement property. Prior to temporary non-conforming use, the parcel proposed for conversion was available for recreational use as a practice softball field. The field was located within the Township of North Bergen's leasehold with the County of Hudson at Braddock Park, which included, and continues to include, a football field, soccer field, locker room building, dog run, nature trail, and driveways and parking areas. These recreational features within the leasehold have not been impacted by the temporary non-conforming use and will not be impacted by the proposed conversion. The 1.25 acre area of Braddock Park proposed for conversion currently includes the footprint of 17 Temporary Classroom Units and a paved access way located directly in front of the TCUs.

Figure 4. Rough outline (in red) of Conversion parcel within the Township's leasehold at Braddock Park.

Substitute Parcel – 1811 Paterson Plank Road: A 1.57 acre parcel located in North Bergen (Hudson County) is being proposed as one of two substitute parcels for the portion of Braddock Park being converted from outdoor recreational use. The property was acquired by the County of Hudson in September 2014 for the sum of $1.675 million, slightly less than the original appraised value of $1.888 million, as determined September 24, 2014. The site was reappraised on August 30, 2017 at a significantly higher value of $3.73 million. The appraised value of the site increased as, over the past three years, the fair market value for the highest and best use of the site has changed significantly, consistent with comparable real estate. Advancing redevelopment has thus nearly doubled the value of the site proposed for conversion. Previously, the site was privately-owned and used as a commercial car wash. It is intended that the Township of North Bergen will develop a park at the site and enter into a lease agreement with the County to provide for the continued maintenance of the property, with the Township assuming management and maintenance control. The proposed use of the replacement parcel is as a small urban park, with parking, children's play structures, a lawn area, a water feature, seating, and other passive recreational features. The elevated topography of the site provides views from the western slope of the Palisades across the Meadowlands. Additional information about this parcel and its recreational resources is included in Chapter 3.

Substitute Parcel – 7903-7909 River Road: A 0.7 acre parcel located in North Bergen (Hudson County), situated on two contiguous lots abutting Braddock Park, is being proposed as one of two substitute parcels for the portion of Braddock Park being converted from outdoor recreational use. When combined, the lots form a long, narrow property. River Road forms the 750 foot eastern boundary and Braddock Park is the western boundary, with the full depth measured at 40 feet. Much of the site is covered with trees and heavy undergrowth and the topography slopes upward steeply from the road to the park. The location of the parcel abuts a bird sanctuary in Braddock Park. As a replacement parcel, the site will increase the footprint of Braddock Park by 0.7 acres. The property was purchased by the County of Hudson in December 2015 for the sum of $730,000 (equivalent to the appraised value of the property). It was previously, and survives as, undeveloped land. As the plot is undevelopable, the proposed use of the replacement parcel is to expand the footprint of the bird sanctuary in perpetuity. Additional information about this parcel and its recreational resources is included in Chapter 3.

Value and Usefulness Equivalence of Replacement Land: The Land and Water Conservation Fund sets forth various requirements for a site that would be acceptable to substitute for the land being converted. The fair market value of the lands proposed for the substitution must be of equal or greater value than the lands being converted. The land to be substituted must also offer equivalent recreational usefulness and location, and meet the outdoor recreation needs as indicated in the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan. When combined, the two replacement parcels measure 2.27 acres, providing for a more than 1:1 ratio of substitute land for partial conversion of Section 6(f) property. The appraised market value of the two sites totals $4.46 million, compared to the appraised value of the conversion parcel of $2.99 million.

Relationship to SCORP and Reasonably Equivalent Usefulness: The 2013-2017 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP)[1] details six specific goals to guide the strategic planning of open space preservation and recreation projects. The proposed conversion is in accord with the two primary goals of the SCORP:

[1] New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, "2013-2017 New Jersey Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan," http://www.nj.gov/dep/greenacres/pdf/Public_Review_SCORP.pdf.

1. To preserve a sufficient amount of open space for current and future public recreational use and for the conservation of natural resources important to protecting New Jersey's biodiversity and quality of life

2. To provide close to home park and recreation opportunities for residents statewide

The acquisition and/or development of the two replacement parcels was/is being accomplished through the collaborative efforts of the County of Hudson, Township of North Bergen, and North Bergen Board of Education. Combined, the properties will significantly benefit the current and future public recreational needs of residents in one of the most densely populated areas of the state and the country.

According to the SCORP, Hudson County has the lowest percentage of preserved land, the second highest percentage of developed land, and the fifth lowest percentage of available land in the state. Further, Hudson County has the lowest total preserved acreage in the state – greater than 60% less than the next closest county region. Hudson County is the sixth most densely populated county in the United States with 14,610 residents per square mile of land area. There are significant limitations on available open space to develop into parkland. There are also historic industrial uses of properties throughout Hudson County, resulting in substantial environmental contamination challenges at most parcels of available land. Further, as part of the New York Metropolitan Area, the real estate market in Hudson County is highly competitive. These mitigating circumstances make the availability and affordability of land, in particular sites of equivalent location to the Section 6(f) parcel, extremely cumbersome. The substitute parcels, including one site adjoining and expanding the boundaries of the Section 6(f) property (River Road) and one site within the same community as the Section 6(f) property (Paterson Plank Road), represent the most viable replacement parcels that can be offered to comply with the requirements set forth by the Land and Water Conservation Fund.

Prior to the temporary non-conforming use at the partial conversion site measuring 1.25 acres, the parcel was available for use as a practice softball field, accessible by vehicle near the geographic center of Braddock Park. The field was considered obsolete and not heavily utilized or maintained in a state of good repair. The substitute properties are in close proximity to residential neighborhoods, create two new parks totaling 2.27 acres and expand local access to passive and active recreation opportunities through features such as playgrounds, walking paths, wildlife conservation areas, sport courts, a dog run, and lawns and plazas for community gathering.

Maintenance of the replacement properties will be assured through agreements between the County of Hudson and the Township of North Bergen and the City of Hoboken, respectively.

<u>No Action:</u> There is not a no action alternative available as temporary non-conforming use continued beyond six months and conversion and the provision of replacement property is required under Section 6(f). Further, the temporary non-conforming use fulfilled a compelling public need by providing space for the administration of preschool services in a low-income community. This activity was mandated by the New Jersey Department of Education in response to a verdict rendered by the New Jersey Supreme Court and the subject parcel was one of few options available at the time for the temporary placement of classroom units to be operational with half-day preschool by the State imposed deadline. The North Bergen Board of Education continues to research and assess the feasibility of available sites for the location of a permanent preschool facility, at which time it is possible that the conversion parcel can be restored to recreational usefulness.

Chapter 3 – Affected Environment

- ***North Bergen Preschool***

Figure 5. Aerial of Braddock Park.

Location: The North Bergen Preschool project site is located on 1.25 acres within the boundaries of the 167-acre James J. Braddock Park. Braddock Park is located in the northeast corner of Hudson County, New Jersey. The geographic footprint of the park falls entirely within the boundaries of the Township of North Bergen. Hudson County's border with Bergen County, New Jersey is a few blocks north of the park. Braddock Park is owned by the County of Hudson, which has a lease agreement with the Township of North Bergen for partial use of the site, inclusive of the conversion parcel. Braddock Park includes a 16-acre lake and 45 athletic facilities including 21 tennis courts, 3 basketball courts, 3 bocce courts, handball courts, 3 football fields, 6 volleyball courts, 7 little league/softball fields, and an exercise/cross country course. The location of the project area is shown in Figure 5 (marked with a red star) and includes 17 temporary classroom units within the footprint of the Township of North Bergen's leasehold at Braddock Park. The area to be converted is roughly in the center of the park, just to the northwest of the lake.

Geological Resources: The conversion site is open level land planted with grass. There are no trees or shrubs on the site, no streams on the site, and no notable geological features on the site. The conversion parcel is in an area of Greenbelt Loam. Soil characteristics show to entire Braddock Park to be mainly Greenbelt Loam, with smaller areas of Yalesville Loam and a 16 acre body of water. The park is surrounded mostly by urban, developed land.

Air Quality: Hudson County is designated by the US Environmental Protection Agency as a nonattainment area for the 2008 8hr. ozone national ambient air quality standards.

Sound (Noise Impacts): Existing noise levels at the park are low, primarily consisting of traffic, maintenance, and noise generated by special events and typical park use. Noise levels in proximity to the conversion parcel are typically higher during football, soccer and track matches held within the Township's leasehold, as well as pick-up/drop-off times when school is in session.

Water Quality: The park is serviced by municipal sewer operated and maintained by the North Hudson Sewerage Authority. The conversion site is serviced by a pump station wet well that is located directly to the west of the track oval, adjacent to the existing restroom structures which serve the soccer and football fields, track oval and exercise trail. The wet well is regularly

maintained by the North Bergen Department of Parks and Recreation. The station which receives park recreation as well as Pre-K sewage flow is directly connected to the municipal sewer on Bergenline Avenue along the western boundary of Braddock Park. When the level in the tank gets to a pre-set depth, a pump sends all flow out of a force main which extends from the field, across a parking lot, the park road, and a green area to discharge into the main on Bergenline Avenue. At no point in time is there any discharge into the soil or groundwater.

Land Use/Ownership Patterns: Braddock Park is owned in its entirety by the County of Hudson. The County has a lease agreement in place with the Township of North Bergen partial use of the park, inclusive of the conversion parcel.

Circulation and Transportation: Local traffic and traffic generated by park users traverses Braddock Park on interior park roads which are open at all times and restricted to a speed of 25 miles per hour. The paved access way in front of the TCUs, which is considered part of the conversion parcel, is monitored before, during and after school hours and is accessible by foot and by buses and emergency vehicles only. Parking is not permitted within the conversion parcel and is restricted to established parking areas within the Township's leasehold at Braddock Park. The site is within walking distance to major arterial local and county roads including Bergenline Avenue, John F. Kennedy Boulevard, and Palisade Avenue. These routes are served by bus lines which connect to multi-modal public transportation systems, including rail, light rail, subway, ferry, and bus services.

Recreation Resources: Prior to temporary non-conforming use, the parcel proposed for conversion was available for recreational use as the infield of a practice softball field. The field was located within the Township of North Bergen's leasehold with the County of Hudson at Braddock Park, which included, and continues to include, a football field, soccer field, locker room building, dog run, nature trail, and driveways and parking areas. The converted side currently consists of 17 temporary classroom units and a paved access way. Braddock Park includes a 16-acre lake, 8-miles of walking/running trails, and 45 athletic facilities including 21 tennis courts, 3 basketball courts, 3 bocce courts, handball courts, 3 football fields, 6 volleyball courts, 7 little league/softball fields, and an exercise/cross country course (see Figure 6). Other features include a dog run, an arboretum where visitors can learn about tree species in the park, a natural wildlife sanctuary (bird sanctuary), and playgrounds.

Accessibility: The site is accessible to populations with disabilities and is ADA compliant.

Overall Aesthetics: Braddock Park sits atop of the Palisades range and affords views of the Manhattan skyline from the New Jersey side of the Hudson River. The 167 acre park is by far the largest open space property in densely populated and heavily built Hudson County. Features such as the lake, dense tree canopy, bird sanctuary, and concentration of active recreation facilities are unique to Braddock Park within the boundaries of Hudson County.

Socioeconomics: The poverty rate for all people in North Bergen is 16 percent. There are 13,283 children in North Bergen, comprising about 21 percent of the population. Nearly 1 in 4 children live in poverty in North Bergen. The poverty rate for all people in Hudson County is 17 percent. There are 134,283 children in Hudson County, comprising about 20 percent of the population. More than 26 percent of children live in poverty in Hudson County.

Minority and Low-Income Populations: The resident population of North Bergen totals approximately 62,114 people. North Bergen is predominantly Hispanic/Latino, with 73 percent of residents identifying as Hispanic/Latino and the rest of the population identifying as 17 percent

White/Non-Hispanic, 6 percent Asian, 2 percent Black/African-American and 2 percent Other/Mixed-Race. The resident population of Hudson County totals approximately 654,878 people. Hudson County is highly diverse, with a population that is 43 percent Hispanic/Latino, 30 percent White/Non-Hispanic, 14 percent Asian, 11 percent Black/African-American and 2 percent Other/Mixed-Race.

Figure 6. Map of recreational features at Braddock Park.

- **1811 Paterson Plank Road**

Location: The replacement property is a 1.57 acre parcel located in North Bergen, New Jersey (Hudson County) on Paterson Plank Road (see Figure 7). The property is situated on the western side of the Palisade ridge, overlooking the Meadowlands. The parcel is within the boundaries of a C-2 Highway Business zone which runs to the north, with an Industrial zone to the south and a residential R-3 Moderate Density Zone to the east across Paterson Plank Road. The "Hudson News" site to the south (currently zoned Industrial) has been approved for development as moderate density housing, further increasing the residential population in an area of Hudson County with a limited number of parks and open space.

Geological Resources: The NJ DEP's NJ EMS program lists the parcel in the Hackensack River watershed. There are no streams on the site. There are no extreme geological conditions on the Replacement Parcel site; however, the western third of the parcel is a steep escarpment, dropping down to Tonnelle Avenue. The area is urban in a commercial zone, with industrial, commercial and mid density housing in proximity.

The roadway slopes past the site, and the parcel is relatively flat to gently sloping, paved land, with limited sloped and treed area along the western boundary. There is a non-operational car wash facility on the parcel. The site is nearly 50% paved (over the level areas) in its current condition.

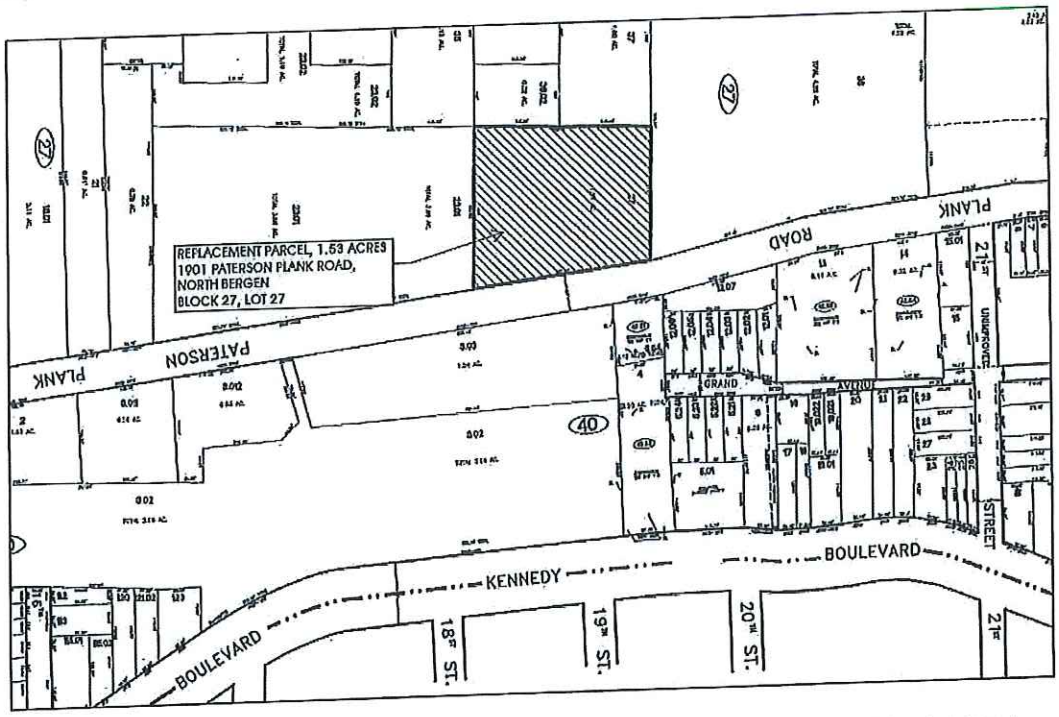

Figure 7. Location/Tax Map of Replacement Parcel at Paterson Plank Road.

Air Quality: Hudson County is designated by the US Environmental Protection Agency as a nonattainment area for the 2008 8hr. ozone national ambient air quality standards.

Sound (Noise Impacts): Paterson Plank Road is a high traffic county road, accommodating north/south traffic in a region where such roadway configurations are limited. The surrounding area is zoned for highway commercial and moderate density residential, with a new moderate density housing development of nearly 300 units approved for construction at adjoining sites.

Water Quality: The site is located in the center of Hudson County and is more than a mile from the Hudson and Hackensack Rivers that form the peninsula. The parcel does not contain or abut any water resources. Marine resources and wetlands do not occur in the project area.

Land Use/Ownership Patterns: The property was privately owned by a commercial entity, who operated the site as a car wash. The County of Hudson acquired the property in September 2014.

Circulation and Transportation: Paterson Plank Road (County Route 681) is a Minor Arterial roadway[2] dating to Colonial America that traverses North Bergen and passes through parts of Hudson, Bergen and Passaic Counties. The corridor runs parallel to US Route 1 at certain segments. Due to Hudson County's narrow configuration, north/south corridors are limited and

[2] According to the New Jersey Department of Transportation's Functional Classification system: http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/refdata/roadway/gismaps/Hudson.pdf

Paterson Plank Road is an important transportation route for local residential and commercial traffic.

Wildlife: NJ DFW Landscape Project Mapping and related documents indicate no critical habitats, and no State or Federal threatened or endangered species on the parcel site. There are no classified biological resources on the parcel.

Recreation Resources: There are no recreational resources currently at the site. The property is being converted from commercial to recreational use as preserved parkland. Planned improvements include a children's playground, spray park, lawn and seating areas, walking paths, and other passive recreational features.

Accessibility: There are no existing barriers to site accessibility for populations with disabilities.

Overall Aesthetics: The parcel is situated atop the Palisades ridge and overlooks the Meadowlands.

Historic/Cultural Resources: There are no historic or cultural resources at the site and the site is not within the boundaries of any designated historic or cultural district.

Socioeconomics: The poverty rate for all people in North Bergen is 16 percent. There are 13,283 children in North Bergen, comprising about 21 percent of the population. Nearly 1 in 4 children live in poverty in North Bergen. The poverty rate for all people in Hudson County is 17 percent. There are 134,283 children in Hudson County, comprising about 20 percent of the population. More than 26 percent of children live in poverty in Hudson County.

Minority and Low-Income Populations: The resident population of North Bergen totals approximately 62,114 people. North Bergen is predominantly Hispanic/Latino, with 73 percent of residents identifying as Hispanic/Latino and the rest of the population identifying as 17 percent White/Non-Hispanic, 6 percent Asian, 2 percent Black/African-American and 2 percent Other/Mixed-Race. The resident population of Hudson County totals approximately 654,878 people. Hudson County is highly diverse, with a population that is 43 percent Hispanic/Latino, 30 percent White/Non-Hispanic, 14 percent Asian, 11 percent Black/African-American and 2 percent Other/Mixed-Race.

Land Structures with a History of Contamination: Prior to acquisition the site was operational as a commercial car wash. In February 2015 a Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment, Asbestos Sampling Survey, and Geophysical Subsurface Investigation were conducted. The analytical results from the asbestos sampling revealed approximately 5,000 square feet of 4ft x 8ft white-painted Transite-type ceiling panels to be asbestos containing. Removal was conducted by a licensed contractor in July 2016. During the subsurface investigation, two (2) underground anomalies were observed on the subject property. These two subsurface features identified on the site were water and gas utility lines and a 25' x 16' rectangular area representative of a reinforced concrete slab, adjacent to the front bay garage door. The report detailed no areas of concern or evidence of environmental contamination at the property.

- **7903-7909 River Road**

Location: The replacement parcel is a 0.7 acre property comprised of two adjoining lots that are located at the base of the Palisades range on River Road in North Bergen, New Jersey (Hudson County). The site is contiguous to Braddock Park, the subject Section 6(f) property), and abuts an existing bird sanctuary.

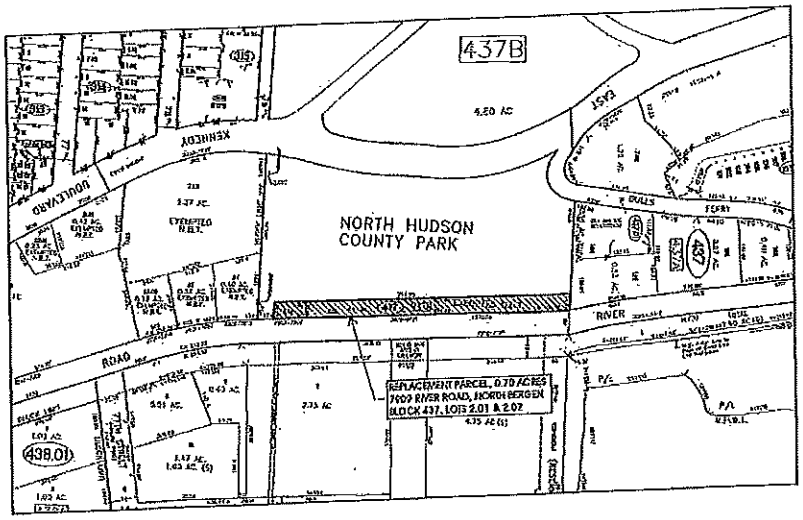

Figure 8. Location/Tax Map of Replacement Parcel at River Road.

Geological Resources: The site is an unused, undeveloped lot with heavy vegetation. The parcel is part of the Lower Hudson River Watershed. There is an overland flow on the site, near the southern boundary, which flows into a storm drain adjacent to River Road. There are no extreme geological conditions at the site. The parcel is stable, well drained land, which is moderate to steeply sloping up to Braddock Park.

Air Quality: Hudson County is designated by the US Environmental Protection Agency as a nonattainment area for the 2008 8hr. ozone national ambient air quality standards.

Sound (Noise Impacts): The site is located on an intercounty highway and is contiguous to Braddock Park, where the conversion parcel is located. Intended use of the site is preserved land as an extension of the existing bird sanctuary.

Water Quality: There is an overland flow on the site, near the southern boundary, which flows into a storm drain adjacent to River Road. Marine resources and wetlands do not occur in the project area.

Land Use/Ownership Patterns: The property was purchased by the County of Hudson in December 2015 for the sum of $730,000. It was previously under private ownership and maintained as undeveloped land.

Circulation and Transportation: The replacement parcel is on River Road, a Principal Arterial county roadway (County Route 505), that travels north through Bergen County to the New Jersey Stateline with New York. The site is accessible from directly off of River Road by either vehicle or via the paved concrete sidewalk.

Wildlife: NJ DFW Landscape Project Mapping and related documents indicate no critical habitats, and no State or Federal threatened or endangered species on the parcel site. There are no classified biological resources on the parcel.

Recreation Resources: There are no existing recreation resources on site. Hudson County intends to maintain the site in its current condition as an extension of the bird sanctuary in Braddock Park.

Accessibility: The site is accessible to populations with disabilities and is ADA compliant.

Overall Aesthetics: The site is steeply sloping land that rises up to the boundary with Braddock Park. The parcel is heavily vegetated with natural growth.

Historic/Cultural Resources: There are no historic or cultural resources at the site and the site is not within the boundaries of any designated historic or cultural district.

Socioeconomics: The poverty rate for all people in North Bergen is 16 percent. There are 13,283 children in North Bergen, comprising about 21 percent of the population. Nearly 1 in 4 children live in poverty in North Bergen. The poverty rate for all people in Hudson County is 17 percent. There are 134,283 children in Hudson County, comprising about 20 percent of the population. More than 26 percent of children live in poverty in Hudson County.

Minority and Low-Income Populations: The resident population of North Bergen totals approximately 62,114 people. North Bergen is predominantly Hispanic/Latino, with 73 percent of residents identifying as Hispanic/Latino and the rest of the population identifying as 17 percent White/Non-Hispanic, 6 percent Asian, 2 percent Black/African-American and 2 percent Other/Mixed-Race. The resident population of Hudson County totals approximately 654,878 people. Hudson County is highly diverse, with a population that is 43 percent Hispanic/Latino, 30 percent White/Non-Hispanic, 14 percent Asian, 11 percent Black/African-American and 2 percent Other/Mixed-Race.

Chapter 4 – Environmental Impacts

- ***North Bergen Preschool***

Geological Resources: Conversion of the 1.25 acres of parkland, about 0.7% of the total area of the park, will not result in any impacts to geological resources or soils in the park.

Air Quality: Conversion of the property will not result in any changes to air quality in the park.

Sound (Noise Impacts): The proposed conversion will result in minimal increases in noise due to pedestrian, vehicle and bus traffic resulting in pick-up/drop-off routines at the preschool, infrastructure systems such as HVAC at the temporary school, and children occupying the adjoining playground area during school hours. Noise impacts will only occur in the area surrounding the conversion parcel.

Water Quality: There are no natural water features on the site. The pump station wet well and main line connection will remain in place to service the existing athletic complex and temporary school.

Land Use/Ownership Patterns: The property will remain in the ownership of the County of Hudson. Conversion of the property will result in the continued placement of Temporary Classroom Units for the operation of a public preschool program until a suitable and permanent alternative can be identified. At that time, it is possible that the property can be restored to recreational use.

Circulation and Transportation: Conversion of the property will result in minimal changes to park circulation. Nearby parking areas supporting the athletic fields within the leasehold will be used for school staff parking and for pick-up/drop-off. These parking areas are already used by park visitors. The paved access way in front of the temporary school is restricted for bus and emergency vehicle use only. Overall park circulation and transportation will not be impacted beyond the area surrounding the conversion parcel.

Recreation Resources: The proposed conversion will replace a practice softball field with temporary classroom units until a suitable alternative can be identified for permanent location of the preschool. The softball field was obsolete and in a state of disrepair at the time the school was located at the conversion parcel. There remain more than 40 separate athletic facilities within the boundaries of Braddock Park that provide for a wide variety of active recreational uses. The football field, soccer field, and track will remain in their current state for use by youth athletic programs under the Township of North Bergen's leasehold with the County of Hudson. The proposed conversion will not impact other recreational resources in Braddock Park beyond the conversion parcel.

Accessibility: Conversion of the property will not result in changes to accessibility of the site, or Braddock Park as a whole, for individuals with disabilities.

Overall Aesthetics: There are 17 temporary classroom units on the conversion parcel. There is a paved access way that allows for buses and emergency vehicles to access the site, in accordance with New Jersey Department of Education standards for preschool facilities. Each classroom unit is approximately 15 feet in height. The units are only visible within the Township's leasehold and are shielded from other areas of the park by tree and other vegetative growth.

Many residents visiting the track and other areas of the leasehold have expressed positive feedback regarding the aesthetic impact of placing a temporary school at the site.

Socioeconomics: In 1998, through the verdict issued by *Abbott v. Burke V*, the New Jersey Supreme Court mandated that certain low-income school districts provide public preschool. The requirement outlined the compelling public need for public preschool in order to provide equal opportunity for New Jersey residents, including those of varying socioeconomic levels. The placement of the TCUs at the conversion parcel provides for this compelling public need while a suitable long-term alternative can be identified. The conversion of the parcel will ensure low-income families have access to public preschool services within their community and will not result in any adverse impacts.

Minority and Low-Income Populations: Data from the New Jersey Department of Education confirms that enrollment in the North Bergen preschool program is comprised of 87 percent minority populations. Conversion of the parcel may impact minority residents, but will not adversely affect them.

- **1811 Paterson Plank Road**

Geological Resources: The replacement parcel will be developed for passive recreational use, including walking and enjoying scenic views of the Meadowlands. Tentative plans include a children's playground and spray park to be constructed at the site. Development of the site for recreational use will result in minor disruption to geological resources in order to incorporate pavements and infrastructure needs as part of the park's development. The embankment will be stabilized and the sloped half of the parcel will remain heavily planted or plantings will be enhanced to increase the natural stabilization afforded by the trees and other plants.

Air Quality: Development of the property for recreational use will not result in any changes in air quality at the site.

Sound (Noise Impacts): Prior use of the site was a commercial car wash. Development of the parcel for recreational use will not result in adverse noise impacts.

Water Quality: Proposed conversion of the site from abandoned car wash to parkland will not impact the Meadowlands, Hudson River or other nearby water bodies. Existing impervious area (paved area) will be reduced by more than 11,000 square feet in the proposed park on the replacement parcel. The water from the proposed "spray" water feature will either be absorbed on site (due to increased permeable area), or will be collected in the storm water system. Irrigation has been proposed for proposed planting beds and proposed lawn.

Land Use/Ownership Patterns: The site was acquired by the County of Hudson from a private owner in September 2014. The County intends to lease the site to the Township of North Bergen for development and maintenance as parkland.

Circulation and Transportation: Development of the property for recreational use will require the creation of parking areas. Vehicle access points will be clearly demarcated and separated from play and recreation areas by physical barriers.

Wildlife: The sloping portion of the site will remain intact, providing undisturbed green space for wildlife.

Recreation Resources: Development of the site for recreational use will introduce new recreational features to the community, including a children's playground and spray park.

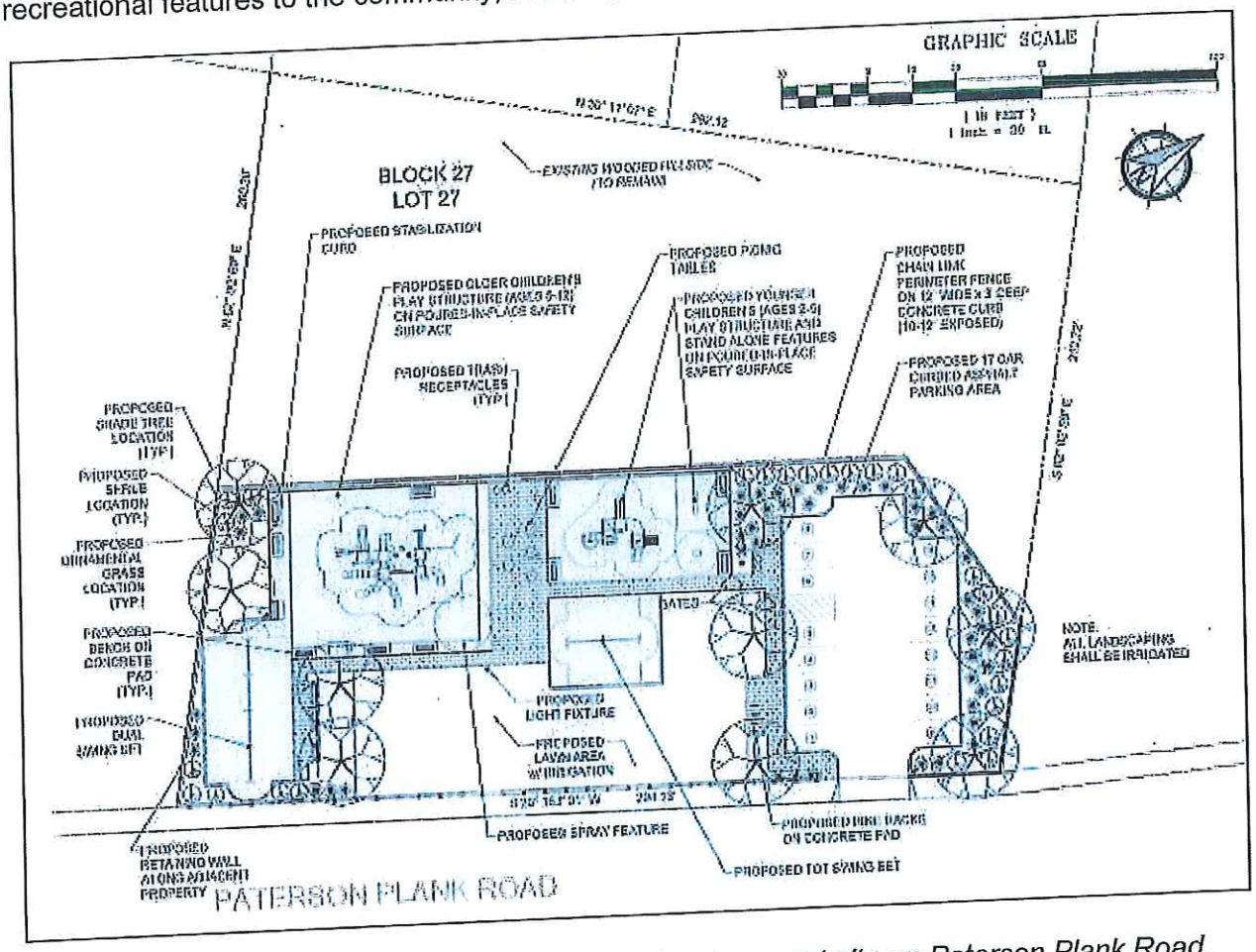

Figure 9. Conceptual plans for development of replacement site on Paterson Plank Road.

Accessibility: The site will remain accessible to populations with disabilities. All improvements will be made in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Overall Aesthetics: The site will be redevelopment from prior use as a commercial car wash (since abandoned) into a recreational and green space accommodating children and families with new passive recreation opportunities. Scenic views of the Meadowlands will be preserved.

Historic/Cultural Resources: There are no historic resources at the site.

Socioeconomics: It is not anticipated that use of the site for recreational purposes will have an adverse impact on socioeconomics of the neighborhood.

Minority and Low-Income Populations: The new park will expand neighborhood-level access to recreational opportunities for minority and low-income populations.

Land Structures with a History of Contamination: Asbestos tiles identified in the car wash structure on the site have been abated by certified professionals. No new structures are planned for the site.

- **7903-7909 River Road**

Geological Resources: The replacement parcel will be preserved in its current state as an expansion of the adjacent bird sanctuary within Braddock Park. There are no significant physical changes planned.

Air Quality: As the land will be preserved in its current state, no changes in air quality are anticipated.

Sound (Noise Impacts): As the land will be preserved in its current state, no changes in noise impacts are anticipated.

Water Quality: As the land will be preserved in its current state, no changes in water quality are anticipated.

Land Use/Ownership Patterns: The property was acquired by the County of Hudson in 2015 and will remain under public ownership as part of the footprint of Braddock Park.

Circulation and Transportation: Development of the property for recreational use will not result in any changes to park circulation or local transportation as only pedestrian access is planned.

Wildlife: There are no anticipated impacts to wildlife as a result of use of the site as a replacement parcel. Expansion of the bird sanctuary will provide additional habitat for birds and associated wildlife.

Figure 10. Existing conditions of replacement parcel on River Road.

Recreation Resources: The site will remain in its current state, extending the footprint of the bird sanctuary in Braddock Park. Pedestrian access will allow for limited passive recreation for bird watching.

Accessibility: The site will remain accessible to populations with disabilities.

Overall Aesthetics: The site will be preserved in its current state as conserved land. Conversion of the site to recreational use will expand natural habitat for birds and other wildlife within one of the most densely populated and developed regions of the country.

Historic/Cultural Resources: There are not historic resources at the site.

Socioeconomics: It is not anticipated that use of the site for recreational purposes will have an adverse impact on socioeconomics of the neighborhood.

Minority and Low-Income Populations: It is not anticipated that use of the site for recreational purposes will have an adverse impact on minority or low-income populations.

Chapter 5 – Coordination and Consultation

This document was jointly prepared by the County of Hudson, Township of North Bergen, and the North Bergen Board of Education in coordination with their hired consultants. Individuals involved in the process of preparing this Environmental Assessment are listed below, with their affiliations.

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George Solter, Superintendent of Schools – North Bergen Board of Education
Steven Somick, Business Administrator – North Bergen Board of Education
Chris Sprague, Director of Client Services – Millennium Strategies LLC
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NPS Form 10-902A (Rev. 09/2016)
National Park Service

Expiration Date 01/31/2020

AMENDMENT TO PROJECT AGREEMENT
Land and Water Conservation Fund

State: New Jersey

Project Amendment No. 1

THIS AMENDMENT to Project Agreement No. 34-00292 and 373 is hereby made and agreed upon by the United States of America, acting through the Director of the National Park Service and by the State of New Jersey pursuant to the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act of 1965, 78 Stat. 897 (1964).

The State and the United States, in mutual consideration of the promises made herein and in the agreement of which this is an amendment, do promise as follows:

That the above mentioned agreement is amended by adding the following: 1.25 acres of land in Braddock Park in North Bergen Township in Hudson County will be converted and replaced with .68 acre of land (29,612 square feet, two parcels) on River Road in North Bergen Township and 1.57 acres on Paterson Plank Road, also in North Bergen Township. Total replacement acreage is 2.25 acres. The Paterson Plank Road parcel will be developed into a park with a playground, tot lot, picnic tables, spray pad, landscaping and parking.

In all other respects the agreement of which this is an amendment, and the plans and specifications relevant thereto, shall remain in full force and effect. In witness thereof the parties hereto have executed this amendment as of the date entered below.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

By _____
(Signature)

_____
(Title)

National Park Service
United States Department of the Interior

STATE

By New Jersey
(State)

Martha S Sapp
(Signature)

Martha Sapp

RECORDS RETENTION - PERMANENT. Transfer all permanent records to NARA 15 years after closure. (NPS Records Schedule, National Assistance Programs (Item 8.A.2) (N1-79-08-7))