



March 20, 2014
Mayor Dwayne Warren, Esq.
City of Orange Township
29 N. Day Street
Orange, NJ 07080

Dear Mayor Warren,

I wish to thank the City of Orange for leasing the land around the Orange Reservoir to Essex County for 20 years in order to expand the South Mountain Recreational Complex. This opens up a long underutilized resource to the immediate and regional community who visit the adjoining facilities. By next year, it will allow access along paved paths to the out of doors that is not possible on the purposely more rugged trail system in the South Mountain Reservation.

Up to this point, the Conservancy has generally agreed with the development plans and their excellent execution by the County. Nonetheless, I am writing now to express the Conservancy's opposition to their proposed dog park near the dam on Orange property. We believe this project has several major problems, both environmental and planned usage of this area.

First, the environmental impact. The dog park will significantly reduce the dense evergreen forest and ecosystem in that area. The natural environment, especially the trees, is the *raison d'être* for the Reservation and a significant part of the attraction of the perimeter path. It will also exacerbate runoff problems and downstream flooding – problems the US Army Corps of Engineers and local towns are now planning to spend tens of millions of dollars to mitigate. For the dog park, and the planned playground just north, we have not seen plans that incorporate rain gardens or detention basins, nor are any visible way for the expanded Oakdale parking area just across Brookside Drive to slow runoff (unless it was surfaced in permeable asphalt). There is also a question as to whether runoff and the poor collection of dog feces will affect water quality. People do not pick up their dogs' waste and the slope of the soil will allow the runoff to contaminate the water and possibly the fish.

Second, a dog park does not fit in with the other uses of the area. A playground (though removing some five dozen pine trees) seems consistent with serving the young families coming from the Turtle Back Zoo, Codey Arena, Mini-Golf and McCloone's Boat House restaurant. To none of those functions, would – or could -- anyone bring a dog (save for a service animal). The dog park is therefore attempting to attract a completely different audience, which is already served by the dog park off Crest Drive only 2 ½ miles away. I don't know of any study to indicate that the existing South Mountain Dog Park is not meeting local needs.

Third, the planned dog park does not have nearby adequate parking. Dog owners would have to walk almost half a mile from the Oakdale Picnic area, the closest accessible area. We don't think that an Orange Reservoir site that requires a 10-minute walk is necessary when the dog park off Crest Drive has parking in the immediate vicinity. While not a direct matter for Orange, we fear that after such an investment, it would be underutilized, wasting taxpayer's money.

Letter to Mayor Warren of Orange regarding Opposition to the Proposed Reservoir Dog Park, 3/20/2014

Fourth, the County's funding structure provides money for new facilities, but insufficient money to maintain them due to a historically dwindling maintenance budget, now a fraction of what it was a decade or two ago. There have been problems at times with the maintenance of the dog park off Crest Drive in the Reservation that are slow to be addressed, delayed repair of forest regeneration site fences, and landscaping of an enormous mud hill near the Boy Scout area by dumping foundation mud from the construction of McCloone's restaurant years ago. The County has plans to address these problems, but the reality is their maintenance budget is limited. Another dog park will only exacerbate this problem.

Fifth, use of the reservoir. Is the dog park consistent with the use outlined in the lease arrangement with the County? Was it to remain in a generally natural state? While not privy to such documents, this is something your legal team may want to address. Just because the dog park can be squeezed into the space does not make it a proper use. We feel there should be a limit to the development in this area.

Sixth, traffic problems. The expanded dog park construction will likely obstruct traffic in the short-term, and overwhelm the Oakdale Picnic area parking in the long term. If people did go to the dog park, it would crowd out parking for the other amenities, the paddle boats, playground, to say nothing of the existing picnic area. The proposed second parking deck behind the arena is too far from the proposed dog park to alleviate this problem. In the near term, there are two projects that are already affecting local traffic: bridge reconstruction on Glen Avenue and a major, 27-month rebuilding of the S-curves along South Orange Avenue. The dog park will compound these traffic issues.

As stated above, the Conservancy generally feels that the leasing of the reservoir area from the Township of Orange has been an excellent development. The expanded complex now offers residents of Essex County and the region access to an area that could be barely seen, let alone experienced through:

- The paddle boat facility and picnic pavilion.
- The paved reservoir perimeter path allowing carriages and wheelchairs
- A playground consistent with the family audience attracted to the South Mountain Recreational Complex, and the only facility, save the natural park surroundings, that does not require payment. (We wonder, however, if some of the existing, mature pine trees that are slated to be removed in the current playground design can be maintained so there is more of the forest canopy in that area.)
- A 2.3-mile loop, developed by the Conservancy, that incorporates a third of the reservoir path and several hiking trails to create a soon-to-be blazed trail that circumnavigates the zoo.

In spite of these expanded recreational opportunities, for the reasons noted, we believe a dog park at the Orange Reservoir is ill advised. It would undermine the balance between the forest and active facilities, already in abundance; a naturalistic environment was the reason the Reservation was established in the first place. It is unnecessary given another dog park is nearby and it will change the character of the area. We hope the Township of Orange agrees with this position and will hold the County to its recent statements to the Conservancy to not only to suspend its construction and not build it at all.

Sincerely,



Dennis Percher and the Board of Trustees, South Mountain Conservancy

Cc: Christopher Mobley, Deputy Director, Dept. of Planning and Development, and Water Liaison