

**RESOLUTION**

**WHEREAS**, Essex County Turtle Back Zoo (the “Zoo”) opened in 1963; and

**WHEREAS**, before 2003, the largest annual attendance at Essex County Turtle Back Zoo was 165,000 visitors and a previous administration recommended the facility be closed; and

**WHEREAS**, Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr., then serving as Freeholder President, commissioned a Blue-Ribbon Panel to study the Zoo and the study identified the educational and recreational potential of the Zoo and recommended the Zoo be retained and developed; and

**WHEREAS**, Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. was elected as Essex County Executive in 2003 and since then has partnered with the Zoological Society of NJ, corporations, philanthropic organizations, community groups, individuals, the NJ Green Acres program and the Essex County Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund to modernize and revitalize Turtle Back Zoo; and

**WHEREAS**, under the County Executive’s leadership, over the last 17 years, new natural habitat-themed exhibits were updated or created for lions, hyenas, giraffes, penguins, wallabies, flamingoes, black bears, farm animals, cougars, leopards, alligators, otters, prairie dogs, Reptile House and sea lions and various amenities have been improved, including the Savannah Café, Carousel and two open air picnic pavilions; and

**WHEREAS**, Essex County is committed to providing the highest levels of animal care and promoting education and conservation initiatives. To further that initiative, Turtle Back has partnered with Sea Turtle Recovery to nurse rescued turtles back to health before they are returned to the wild. In addition, the zoo has earned accreditation from three well-respected agencies: Association of Zoos and Aquariums, Zoological Association of America and American Humane; and

**WHEREAS**, the various projects to update and introduce natural habitat-themed exhibits and amenities have been funded through contributions from the Zoological Society of NJ,

corporations, philanthropic organizations, community groups, individuals, the NJ Green Acres program and the Essex County Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund, which has resulted in no additional burden on the Essex County Operating or Capital Budgets, and the zoo has been a self-sufficient facility for the last 10 years, meaning its operating budget is covered by the money it generates from admissions and contributions; and

**WHEREAS**, Turtle Back Zoo is proposing to construct a new amphitheater to enhance its educational programming. The current amphitheater is not designed for animal presentations and is not used for that purpose. The zoo generally welcomes about 2,200 students per day but has the classroom space to offer programming for just 500 students. Having a new amphitheater would provide space to accommodate 1,500 students (with three presentations per day); and

**WHEREAS**, Turtle Back Zoo is an economic engine, utilizing a diverse group of vendors both within Essex County and beyond to care for the animals, support operations and maintain the infrastructure. In addition, having the Zoo and the surrounding amenities offered at the South Mountain Recreation Complex, offers West Orange, Essex and other residents from beyond with close to home opportunities for affordable, family-friendly activities; and

**WHEREAS**, Essex County regularly presents plans for improvements at Turtle Back Zoo and the South Mountain Recreation Complex during courtesy review hearings before the West Orange Planning Board, and the recommendations made by the Board are incorporated into final plans; and

**WHEREAS**, the West Orange Environmental Commission has urged the County to present a Master Plan for public review and consideration by the Planning Board along with a traffic study before any further development plans are presented. In addition to a long-term plan for the Zoo, the County needs to have a plan to invest in the South Mountain Reservation and preserve additional land for Open Space. The reservation is the jewel of the Essex County Park

system. It is under tremendous stress resulting from development on its fringes, climate change and invasive species – both flora and fauna.

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE TOWNSHIP COUNCIL OF THE TOWNSHIP OF WEST ORANGE,** that the County provide a Master Plan prior to any further development plans for the Turtle Back Zoo along with a traffic study and environmental impact study; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** that Essex County adhere to all DEP, soil conservation and other environmental protection and erosion guidelines when new exhibits and amenities are created at Turtle Back Zoo; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** that Turtle Back Zoo comply with all USDA accredited agency guidelines for animal care when new exhibits are created; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** that the County shall keep the West Orange Council or its designee informed of any ongoing efforts to strengthen the South Mountain forest and habitat; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** that the Township Clerk is directed to send a copy of this Resolution to County Executive of Essex County Joseph N. DiVincenzo, Jr. and the County of Essex Board of Chosen Freeholders; and be it further

**RESOLVED,** that a copy of this Resolution shall be made available in the Clerk’s office in accordance with applicable law.

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**Karen J. Carnevale, R.M.C.**  
**Municipal Clerk**

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**Jerry Guarino**  
**Council President**

**Adopted: September 10, 2019**