

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
BUREAU OF OUTDOOR RECREATION

Raritan Arsenal (Portion)
(161.03 acre parcel)
Edison Township, Middlesex County
New Jersey
GSA Control No. D-NJ-4400

REPORT ON APPLICATION

by

Middlesex County, State of New Jersey
For Transfer of Surplus Federal Property for

PARK AND RECREATION USE

Prepared by
Northeast Regional Office, Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
for
Region 2, General Services Administration

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GSA Control No. D-NJ-440 C
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Bureau of Outdoor Recreation
Northeast Regional Office

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AUTHORITY AND PURPOSE

Section 13 (h) of the Surplus Property Act of 1944, as amended, authorizes the disposal by the General Services Administration to States, political subdivisions, instrumentalities thereof and municipalities, of surplus real properties, together with surplus improvements and equipment located thereon, which have been determined by the Secretary of the Interior to be suitable and desirable for public park and recreation areas or as historical monuments for the benefit of the public.

This report is submitted in accordance with the authority to make the necessary determination which was delegated to the Director of the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation by the Secretary of the Interior on July 9, 1962 (27 F. R. 6719).

The purpose of this report is to evaluate the park and recreation potential of the property, to determine the applicant's ability to operate and maintain the property as set forth in the application, and to recommend a disposal determination.

APPLICATION

The County of Middlesex, New Jersey acting by and through Mr. Thomas H. Lee, Member of the Board of Chosen Freeholders of the County of Middlesex, is seeking by application dated February 11, 1964, to acquire 161.03 acres of land, with improvements, identified as Raritan Arsenal (Portion), Edison Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey (G.S.A. Control No. D-NJ-440 C), for public park and recreation purposes.

INVESTIGATION

An investigation of the applicant agency and a field inspection of the surplus tract were made on March 27, 1964. The application was reviewed and the county's plans were discussed with Mr. Douglas S. Powell, Director of the Middlesex County Planning Board. The property was also inspected in the company of Mr. Powell.

PROGRAM OF UTILIZATION

It is proposed to develop and maintain the property as a public park and recreation area under the jurisdiction of the Middlesex County Department of Public Parks. Facilities developed on the tract would include sites set aside for picnicking, athletic fields to support such activities as basketball, football, soccer, baseball,

softball, and tennis, and opportunities for aesthetic enjoyment. Wherever possible natural values will be preserved and maintained to enhance the recreation use of the site.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Location

The Raritan Arsenal consists of approximately 3200 acres of land situated in the central portion of Middlesex County, New Jersey. The portion which has been determined surplus government property, and is the subject of this report, consists of 161.03 acres of improved land located in the northwest portion of the Arsenal property. Its immediate boundaries are the Lehigh Valley Railroad on the north, the approximate centerline of Magazine Road No. 11 within the Arsenal property on the south; by lands now or formerly belonging to the Nixon Nitration Works on the west; and extending in an easterly direction from the Nitration Works for an average distance of about 1900 feet to an eastern boundary not marked by any physical delineation.

Access

The surplus portion of the Raritan Arsenal is readily accessible to the residents of Middlesex County and surrounding populations. The Arsenal is within one mile of the north-south trending U. S. Highway #1 and 2.5 miles from the juncture of the New Jersey Turnpike and the Garden State Parkway. Interstate Route #287 is less than two miles from the Arsenal and will provide an adequate route from an east-west direction. Direct access to the site will be provided by gates along the western boundary of the property. Access within the property is provided by a circumferential blacktop road and several parallel roads serving the warehouse and service facilities.

Population

The surplus tract is well within reach of an exceptionally large concentration of people residing in the metropolitan complex of northern New Jersey. The area within a 25 mile radius from the tract is one of extensive urban development including considerable industrial and retail activity. Within the 25 mile distance, an excess of 2.5 million people reside and represent over 40 percent of the total State population. Middlesex County had a 1960 population of 434,000 and is expected to exceed the 800,000 mark by 1975. In 1963 over 60 percent of the people lived in the northern half of the county in close proximity to the Raritan Arsenal.

Physical Description

The surplus tract consists of 161.03 acres of improved land and is, for the most part, low-lying and closely associated with marsh environments characteristic of much of the Arsenal lands. The terrain of the surplus portion has, however, undergone considerable modifications such as grading and filling in order to make the land more adaptable for arsenal purposes. The property has a maximum range in relief of 10-40 feet. The lowest elevation is located in the southeastern extremity. There are no established streams or permanent bodies of water located on the property, although certain sections of the property situated between the parallel roads are especially low and would tend to hold excess drainage from the higher elevated areas. It appeared that this could be corrected by grading fill into these areas. Vegetation on the site is relatively sparse, but does include a rather heavy cover of marsh grass with a few specific portions of the tract fairly well wooded with mixed groups of oak and birch trees.

Improvements

Physical improvements on the property include approximately 30 brick and glazed tile buildings formerly used for warehouse storage purposes, a service and feeder road system, an intricate rail network providing service to the Arsenal from the nearby Pennsylvania and Lehigh Railroad Lines, protective cyclone fencing,

a storm drainage system, and a complete utility system including electricity, water supply and sewage disposal facilities. It is anticipated that only a few of the brick warehouse structures and the sewage disposal plant, located in the central portion of the property, will be retained to support recreation use.

Existing Facilities

Presently, there are five established parks in Middlesex County comprising in excess of 1100 acres with another tract of 550 acres under various stages of acquisition. These areas are mostly developed with facilities for picnicking, athletic fields, tennis courts, or for the enjoyment of the natural setting. Plans for the 550 acre tract known as the East Brunswick Site, currently under acquisition, will include the development of an 18 hole public golf facility.

Proposed Administration

The Department of Parks, Middlesex County proposes to develop the property into a park and recreation facility closely oriented toward supplying the employees connected with the industrial development of the region, as well as the resident population, with an established recreation facility within a reasonable distance. Inasmuch as the type of disposal made on remaining sections of the Raritan Arsenal property would greatly influence the type and number of facilities needed on the adjacent park lands, it

should be stressed that a considerable amount of the 3200 acres of surplus land on the Arsenal is planned to be developed for industrial purposes. As a result, a large percentage of use expected to take place on the proposed park lands would be from employees of nearby industries during noon periods or off-duty hours. To prepare for this type of use the county plans to develop the property with facilities that provide group opportunities such as softball and baseball diamonds, volleyball, football, or basketball facilities depending upon the greatest needs at the time of development. Other portions of the 161 acre tract would contain opportunities for picnicking, various children activities or for general aesthetic enjoyment of the surrounding area.

The county proposes to utilize several of the existing improvements on the property in several ways. Only those roads within the property which would prove beneficial and adaptable for park and recreation use would be preserved and maintained. This would probably mean that only the circumferential and a few of the better hardsurfaced parallel roads would be retained. The majority of the warehouse buildings on the property will be demolished and used as fill to reclaim several marsh areas on the property. A few of the resulting concrete slabs upon which the buildings were constructed could perhaps be best utilized as parking facilities for visitors to the park. One of the first improvements the county proposes is to construct a cyclone fence completely enclosing the park

lands. Access to the park would be provided only along the western boundary.

The development of an 18 hole golf course was considered to be of prime importance during preliminary stages of planning for the property. Recently, however, due to proposals to incorporate a golf facility into development plans for the East Brunswick Park, currently under various stages of acquisition, it has been decided to develop the property into a general park and recreation facility. Immediate golfing needs of the New Brunswick area will at least be temporarily satisfied with the realization of the East Brunswick Park.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Middlesex County has a definite need in the vicinity of the Raritan Arsenal for additional recreation facilities of the type proposed.
2. The Middlesex County through its Department of Public Parks, is considered competent to plan, develop and administer the property according to the proposed use.
3. The surplus property is well located and generally well suited to serve the park and recreation uses proposed.

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RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings discussed herein and the information contained in the application and to be supplied, it is recommended that favorable consideration be given to the application of Middlesex County to acquire the surplus property identified as Raritan Arsenal (Portion), Edison Township, Middlesex County, New Jersey (D-NJ-440 C) for public park and recreation area purposes under the provisions of the Public Law 616, 80th Congress.

Our approval of this application is, however, contingent upon and subject to receipt of promised certifications from the applicant in a form of binding assurances and specific details concerning proposed utilization of the property. Without such assurances we consider the existing application unsatisfactory.

