



An Alternative to Development

Years in the making, Wardell Park comes to life

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In 2005, an 82-acre swath of environmentally sensitive land along Wardell Road in Tinton Falls had been approved by the Borough's Planning Board for development. The proposed development would have consisted of 270 townhomes.

Today, most of the land has been preserved and a new 4.5-acre park complete with playgrounds, basketball courts, tennis courts, and pickleball courts opened this summer — much to the delight of community residents.

The land that is now Wardell Park could have ended up being developed if not for a strong desire on the part of the Tinton Falls Borough Council to preserve the tract. In 2011, the Council began investigating ways it could purchase the land. The Borough engaged T&M Associates to assist in the process from acquisition to park opening.

Securing open space

A preliminary assessment report to identify various environmental areas of concern that required further investigation and completed surface water and soil sediment samples.

In 2013, the property owner cancelled their plans to sell the property to the developer and conveyed 73 acres to the Borough. About 46 acres were purchased by Tinton Falls. A conservation easement was established across the remaining 27 acres as a deed restriction to preserve the property as open space and prevent future development.



To offset the Borough's land acquisition cost, grant applications were prepared for \$1.1 million in state Green Acres funds and \$250,000 in Monmouth County Open Space grants.

Park Planning

With the land secured, planning for a park began. The first order of business was to seek public input. Many residents wanted a place where they could exercise and play not just in the summer months, but also in the winter months after work. (This would, years later, become an even more important priority with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.)

But there were certain requirements for the park. Most importantly, we did not want to disturb wetlands and other critical environmental areas. We also wanted green infrastructure to be used for stormwater management, which means meeting tough stormwater quantity, water quality, and groundwater recharge requirements—even before adopting an updated stormwater control ordinance.

The project also needed to come in at under a \$1.3 million budget.

Several studies identified wetlands, transition areas, and



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Alternative to Development



riparian buffers. An environmental due diligence report helped determine if the site had threatened or endangered species, historic resources, natural heritage sites or any other environmental constraints.

The park's improvements were set in a limited area that did not require any wetlands, transition area, or riparian buffer disturbance. The plan called for significant grading and design of the uplands area. Another benefit of not disturbing environmentally sensitive areas was avoiding the need for DEP permits, which saved the Borough time and money.

Pickleball Power

The Borough also wanted the park to include space for the new, up-and-coming sport of pickleball into the site design. A paddle sport that combines elements of tennis, table tennis, and badminton, the sport's popularity has exploded in recent years. While many park facilities provide tennis courts that can be converted to pickleball courts, the Borough wanted dedicated courts after determining that combined courts create long-term maintenance issues and that the actual play of each sport would be diminished by using combined courts.

Instead, separate dedicated courts were designed. As a result of the COVID shutdown of many indoor facilities, outdoor pickleball quickly became even more popular than originally expected.

A new electric service for the park includes LED lighting throughout all courts, the playground, and the parking lot so play can continue into the evening hours

In the early stages of construction, layout of the courts was quickly redesigned to provide two additional pickleball courts to meet the increasing demand for this sport, providing a total of six new courts. No other park in Monmouth County has as many pickleball specific dedicated courts as Wardell Park.



The design came with an estimated price tag of \$1.285 million and a contract was awarded to Shore Top Construction, which bid \$1.15 million on the project. The Borough secured \$200,000 in municipal open space grant funds from Monmouth County for park development.

The project was completed on time and under budget. On June 30, Borough, County, and State officials gathered to cut the ribbon on the new park.

The timing couldn't have been better, due to the increased demand for local outdoor recreational spaces during the



pandemic. Now, local residents have a place to exercise, breathe fresh air, and enjoy the great outdoors. 🏀

Thomas Fallon is the Acting Borough Administrator and CFO for Tinton Falls. Robert Keady, Senior VP and Municipal Practice Leader, and Thomas Neff, Group Manager, are with T&M Associates.

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The 30th Annual Mayors' Legislative Day

Friday, April 1, 2022

The State House Annex
Committee Room 4
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Additional details to follow.
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