



# SOMERSET COUNTY TRAILS GRANT PROGRAM GUIDELINES



The Somerset County Trails Grant Program was established by the Somerset County Board of County Commissioners to support its municipalities through its Open Space, Farmland, and Historic Preservation Trust Fund in designing and constructing a network of trails on publicly preserved land that will benefit the communities and enhance the quality of life of county residents. The Program supports the goals of the Somerset County Walk Bike Hike Plan and the Somerset County Open Space Preservation Plan by promoting new trail development, enhancing connections between existing trail networks, and identifying opportunities for additional trails and linkages beyond those specifically outlined in the Plans.

1. Any Somerset County municipality may make a request for funding to the Open Space Advisory Committee and will be requested to make a presentation to the Committee. All requests must be in writing and should contain at a minimum a description of the project, timeline, cost estimate, a list of all approvals needed, and at minimum, a conceptual plan. The request will be considered by the Open Space Advisory Committee and a recommendation will be made to the Board of County Commissioners. The review performed by OSAC shall be *advisory only*.
2. Funding requests will be accepted on a rolling basis.
3. The goals of the Trails Grant Program include:
  - a. Providing grant funding to municipalities to support the creation of recreational trails throughout Somerset County.
  - b. Enhancing quality of life for Somerset County residents.
  - c. Providing alternate means of transportation and support healthy lifestyles.
  - d. Increasing opportunities for recreational tourism in Somerset County.
  - e. Advance the recommendations of the County's Walk Bike Hike and Open Space Preservation Plans.
4. Eligible properties must be located within Somerset County and be permanently preserved land either through fee or easement and must be publicly accessible.
5. Eligible projects include the construction of new or upgrades to existing paved or unpaved trails. A trail is defined as a travel way established either through construction or use and is passable by at least one or more of the following, including but not limited to: foot traffic, bicycles, in-line skates, wheelchairs, and cross-country skis. Maintenance of existing trails is not considered an eligible project.
6. Improvements associated with the trail development or improvements are also eligible including, but not limited to, pedestrian bridges, shelters, benches, trailhead parking under 5,000 square feet, fencing, landscaping, and signage and kiosks.
7. Eligible project costs include design, consultant fees, permitting, construction and other associated costs deemed appropriate by the Board of Commissioners.

8. Ineligible uses of the funding include land acquisition and associated acquisition costs, master plan development, planning reports, sidewalk development within public rights-of-way, trail development on unencumbered land, municipal staff salaries, and general maintenance.
9. Reimbursement for completed projects under construction will not be considered. A funding request must be submitted to the County and deemed complete by County staff prior to the project being advertised for bidding.
10. A municipality may apply for more than one grant through the Trails Grant Program, however, those municipalities applying for funding for the first time will receive priority consideration. A municipality will be considered for funding for a new project only when the grant requirements for the prior project have been satisfied, construction has been completed, and the closeout of the previously awarded grant has been completed.
11. The criteria for determining whether a trails grant will be considered are as follows:
  - a) The maximum dollar amount of the Trails Grant shall be determined by the Board of County Commissioners on a case-by-case basis.
  - b) The property for which the funds are applied must be for recreation or conservation purposes and comply with Green Acres Regulations and the Open Space Preservation Statutes. Sidewalks within public rights of way or trails on unencumbered land will not be considered.
  - c) An agreement for participation in the funding of the project in the form approved by County Counsel must be executed between the County and municipality.
  - d) The proposed trail improvement must relate, in some way, to a local public open space plan or meet a municipal or regional recreational need. Projects that encourage economic development and tourism and green infrastructure are strongly encouraged and the benefits should be highlighted.
  - e) Trail development that advances the recommendations of the County's Walk Bike Hike Plan are strongly encouraged but are not required to be eligible for the Program. <https://www.somersetcountynj.gov/government/public-works/planning/walk-bike-hike-plan>
  - f) Consideration and priority shall be given as to whether the property or recreational improvement will be located within a municipality or an area in which there has not been a significant amount of County open space monies expended or the area is not conducive to the spending of open space monies because of the lack of available land.
  - g) Consideration and priority shall also be given as to whether other regional recreational facilities are located within the vicinity of the property on which the monies will be expended and whether those facilities provide connections.
  - h) The municipality must agree that it will permit Somerset County public entities or local recreation organizations that provide regional recreation opportunities to Somerset County residents to utilize the property for recreational purposes. Additionally, the municipality should indicate the public entities or other entities that are intended to utilize the facility.
  - i) If fees are to be charged for the use of a facility, the public entity must submit a fee schedule and plan indicating how the facilities will be made available to other groups at a reasonable and equitable charge. The public entity must acknowledge through the execution of an Agreement for Participation that the public entity will make the facilities available to the other groups at a reasonable and equitable charge and that if the agreement is breached that the public entity shall be subject to reimbursement of the funds provided in the recreational grant to the County. The Public entity must also present a plan that demonstrates that a portion of any fees collected will be dedicated to the maintenance and upkeep of the facility and not for general revenue of the entity.

- j) A match is not required; however, the municipalities are strongly encouraged to provide a contribution toward the project. Contributions can include municipal capital or open space funds, in-kind services and grants from other agencies.
12. Eligible projects will be reviewed internally by County Planning and Engineering staff for completeness and accuracy. The municipality will be notified if clarification or additional information is required prior to review by the Open Space Advisory Committee.
  13. The municipality should be prepared to attend a meeting of the Open Space Advisory Committee to address the request before the Committee and to present the elements of the request as well as answer questions of the Committee. Once a presentation has been made the Committee will review and discuss the grant request solely based on its recreation and conservation benefits for municipal and county residents and consistency with these guidelines. When all matters have been addressed to the satisfaction of the Open Space Advisory Committee, the Committee shall render a decision in the matter and a recommendation will be made to the Board of County Commissioners.
  14. If the request is denied, the Principal Preservation Planner will communicate to the County Board of Commissioners on behalf of the Open Space Advisory Committee indicating that the request has been denied. The matter will then be reviewed, *de novo*, by the County Board of Commissioners for a final determination.
  15. If the request is endorsed by the Open Space Advisory Committee, a recommendation will be forwarded to the Board of County Commissioners from the Principal Preservation Planner on behalf of the Open Space Advisory Committee. The matter will then be reviewed by the County Board of Commissioners for final determination.
  16. If and when a grant has been authorized by the County Board of Commissioners, a letter will be forwarded by the Principal Preservation Planner to the appropriate municipal representative acknowledging the Board of Commissioner authorization. The municipality will be required to enter into an Agreement to Participate in Property Development with the County which will set forth the responsibilities of the Parties related to the project.
  17. The municipality, if awarded funding, will agree that within eighteen (18) months of execution of an Agreement for Participation in Development of Property it will have awarded a contract for the construction of or commenced construction on the funded improvement(s). Should the contract for the construction of the funded improvement(s) not be awarded within eighteen (18) months of the effective date of the agreement, the municipality may request an extension of the grant funding. The County may extend the allotted time or withdraw the funds depending on the specific circumstances regarding the development of the Property and the reason for the delay in the project schedule.
  18. The municipality shall periodically communicate with the County on the status of the project. The County reserves the right to rescind any awarded grants upon reasonable notice to the municipality based upon a failure to timely implement the approved project.
  19. The municipality shall submit documents to the County for review, including but not limited to any award of contracts or receipts of bids, to ensure that the funds are expended in a manner consistent with the terms of the grant agreement.
  20. When the municipality satisfies the requirements of the grant agreement, a check will be issued by the County.

21. All correspondence shall be directed to:  
Larisa Paxton, Principal Planner-Preservation  
20 Grove St., P.O. Box 3000  
Somerville, NJ 08876  
(908) 231-7509  
[lpaxton@somersetcountynj.gov](mailto:lpaxton@somersetcountynj.gov)

Created: 3/20/25  
Revised: 4/7/25  
Revised: 2/20/26  
Adopted: 4/22/25 R25-855