



## **News from the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders**

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### **Recreational Grants to Fund Local Field Upgrades**

Somerville and North Plainfield are the first two school districts to take advantage of a new recreational grants program created in December by the Somerset County Board of Freeholders.

Smaller towns in Somerset County that have not benefited from the county's open space acquisitions now can apply for funding to upgrade their municipal and school recreational fields, under the new grant program.

"We wanted to level the playing field, both literally and figuratively, by offering this special Recreational Grants Program," said Freeholder Director Rick Fontana, who serves as county parks liaison. "Although this program is open to all 21 municipalities, priority will be given to applications from our smaller boroughs.

"These smaller towns don't have the potential for open space preservation that their larger neighbors do and have not benefited from most of the county's open space acquisitions to date," he said. "What they do have are playing fields – some owned by the town, some by the local school system – and most are in desperate need of upgrades."

A maximum of \$1 million per grant will be available. Any town or school district requesting funds through this grant program must agree to a recreational easement that will permanently designate the property in question for recreational use.

Also, the town or school district must agree to allow other public entities or organizations to use the property for recreational purposes.

In 2005, voters approved the expansion of the county's Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund to include the development or improvement of existing recreational facilities. The referendum also capped such uses at 25 percent of the trust fund.

Since its inception in 1990, the Open Space Trust Fund has collected close to \$168 million and allocated approximately \$97 million for open space acquisitions totaling about 5,500 acres. Most of those have been in larger townships that have undeveloped land.

Although residents of all municipalities have paid into the fund, open space acquisitions have been minimal or not possible in some towns.

Somerville plans to use its grant to refurbish Brooks Field as a turf field. North Plainfield will do the same for Krausche Field.

"The generous grant from the freeholders is a blessing for all current and future students at Somerville High School," said Somerville Schools Superintendent Dr. Carolyn Leary. "These monies will provide our students with equal opportunities to experience a state-of-the-art recreational facility which would not have been possible without this grant."

"For a number of years, the North Plainfield Education Foundation has been trying to raise the money needed for a turf field to replace the district's extremely 'tired' Krausche Field," said North Plainfield Schools Superintendent Dr. Marilyn Birnbaum. "Unfortunately, the education foundation has not been able to raise the amount of money necessary for such a project. I am absolutely thrilled that the Somerset County freeholders are considering North Plainfield's request to the Open Space Advisory Committee for a recreational grant in the amount of \$1 million."

**Rick Fontana, Freeholder Director \* Jack M. Ciattarelli, Freeholder Deputy Director  
Peter S. Palmer, Freeholder \* Robert Zaborowski, Freeholder \* Patricia L. Walsh, Freeholder**  
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