

2022 OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN ELEMENT – FINAL DRAFT

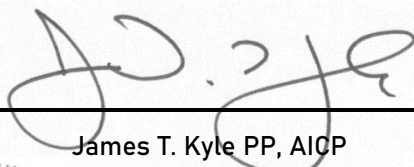
Borough of Califon
Hunterdon County, New Jersey

November 2, 2022

ADOPTED BY THE LAND USE BOARD ON

The original of this document was signed and sealed
in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-12

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POLICY
PLANNING
DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Borough of Califon is located in northern Hunterdon County, New Jersey, nestled between Tewksbury Township to the east and Lebanon Township to the west. Situated in the Highlands region, the entire Borough lies within the Preservation Area, largely based on the sensitivity of its natural resources which includes critical wildlife habitat, high integrity forest, critical slopes and two Category One waterways, the South Branch of the Raritan River and Frog Hollow Brook.

While home to parks and open space within its borders, the State and County maintain a significant inventory of parks and open space in close proximity to Califon. The Borough also contains a portion of the Columbia Trail, a former rail bed converted to a path which links open space along the South Branch of the Raritan River to the north and south and provides an excellent recreation resource for pedestrians and bicyclists. These publicly owned open spaces also provide access to the South Branch of the Raritan River for fishing and other water-related recreation endeavors.

Califon is a community of just under one square mile with a total population of 1,005 residents according to the 2020 Census. Lacking public water and sewer and subject to the conservation restrictions of the Preservation Area, the Borough has limited development potential and its current population is not expected to increase dramatically in the future. Based on nationally accepted standards for the provision of recreation and open space lands as well as consideration of actual active recreation needs, demand is currently met. The Borough's focus will be on preservation of open space to support conservation objectives and to provide better access to the South Branch of the Raritan River for recreation purposes.

This open space and recreation plan has been prepared to set forth the Borough's intentions for the future as it relates to policy and the actions needed to carry out that policy. Its preparation is guided by the Open Space and Recreation Plan Guidelines published by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres Program, and the intention is for this plan to conform to those requirements.

The Borough has a dedicated municipal open space tax of \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed value. Since its inception in 2001, the open space tax has generated funds that have been utilized for a variety of purposes related to activities outlined in the referendum establishing the tax. The current balance in the Open Space Trust Fund is \$81,268 and the tax generates roughly \$29,000 annually.

GOALS AND POLICIES

The goals and policies state Califon’s general philosophy towards open space and recreation. The following goals and policies were developed to respond to identified needs of the Borough.

- Provide passive and active recreation opportunities within the Borough to meet the needs of all residents
- Provide an open space network throughout the Borough that connects to open space in adjacent municipalities, where possible
- Utilize open space preservation as a means to protect the Borough’s valuable natural resources including ridgelines and steep slopes, scenic vistas, stream and river corridors, mature forest and critical wildlife habitat
- Preserve open space along the South Branch of the Raritan River to provide riparian buffers while allowing public access for recreation opportunities, including parking areas.
- Maximize use of the Borough’s open space tax by partnering with the State, Hunterdon County and local and regional land conservancies to preserve open space
- Provide appropriate public facilities within existing parks, where feasible
- Enhance open areas within existing parks to provide better habitat for native species and pollinators while managing invasive species
- Supplement the existing trail network to connect open space within the Borough to open space in adjacent municipalities
- Utilize abundant recreation opportunities within the Borough and the region to support tourism and local businesses

INVENTORY

As shown on the Open Space System Map in Appendix 1, the Borough contains a total of 96.6 acres of open space and recreation lands, representing 15.4% of total land area. Table 1, below, summarizes the acreage of currently preserved open space within the Borough by type.

Table 1 – Existing Open Space

Type	Total Acreage
Board of Education	3.96
Conservation Easements	1.0
County Parks and Open Space	27.29
Municipal Parks and Open Space	34.48
Non-Profit Conservation Lands	9.91
Preserved Farmland	7.79
State Parks and Open Space	12.17
Total	96.6

Califon Island Park, located in the northern portion of the Borough west of Bank Street, is a municipal park that contains all the Borough's active recreation facilities including a baseball field, a little league baseball field, a soccer field, a basketball court, a playground, a pavilion and a pond. A parking area is located along the eastern side of the park and there are passive recreation opportunities along the river and southwest of the playground. Figure 1, below, shows a 2020 aerial image of the park and identifies each of the components noted above.

Figure 1 – Califon Island Park



NEEDS ANALYSIS

Based on the 2022 NRPA Agency Performance Review (herein after the Review), communities that participate in the Park Metrics survey (without regard to community size) have a median of one park for every 2,323 people. It is important to note that the typical agency participating in Park Metrics serves a jurisdiction of over 44,000 people, significantly higher than Califon's population. Another important consideration explicitly stated in the 2022 NRPA Performance Agency Review is that the Review does not present "standards" for parks and recreation, but rather defines successful agencies as ones that meet the demands of all the members of their respective communities. The benchmark statistics provided in the Review can act as a guideline for communities, especially when compared to groups that are similar in size or location to the community that is being evaluated.

Based on the Review, for agencies that serve jurisdictions of less than 20,000 residents there is median of one park for every 1,233 residents. According to 2020 Census Data, Califon's population is 1,005 people. When comparing Califon to the metrics provided in the Review, specifically to a typical community with less than 20,000 residents, Califon surpasses this benchmark significantly. As highlighted in the Inventory section of the Plan, Califon has multiple parks.

Another important metric highlighted in the Review, is how many acres of parkland are available per 1,000 residents. For communities with less than 20,000 residents, there is typically 12.9-acres of parkland per 1,000 residents. As shown in the Inventory section of the Plan, Califon's parkland totals 34.48, with 12.33 acres of that being Califon Island Park, home to the Borough's active recreation facilities.

The Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) recommends that 3% of developed and developable lands within a community be dedicated as open space. As noted previously, roughly 15% of the Borough is permanently preserved by some means, so the Borough far exceeds the SCORP standard.

Califon's population has seen both growth and decline the last four decades, as counted in the US Census. In 1990, the population was 1,073 residents, which dipped to 1,055 residents in 2000. Total population rebounded to 1,076 residents in 2010 but shrunk to its current level of 1,005 residents as counted in the 2020 Census. Given the constraints of the Highlands Preservation Area, no significant residential growth is anticipated in the Borough for the foreseeable future, so population is not expected to fluctuate to any great degree. One potential avenue for growth is replacement of the baby boom generation, whose children are largely grown and out of the house. Many suburban communities have seen baby boomers retire and move out of the area and their homes purchased by younger adults wanting to start families. This is not expected to effect population growth to any great degree, however.

In assessing the open space and recreation resources available to Borough residents, one finds that most of the national recreation standards are far exceeded. Califon contains active recreation facilities for baseball, soccer and basketball, and also shares or makes use of sports facilities run by the Lebanon Township Athletic Association, of which the Borough is a part. There is also a practical matter of the availability of lands appropriate for development of active recreation facilities. Much of the land in the Borough that could be targeted for acquisition would not be appropriate for active recreation fields given environmental constraints.

RESOURCE ASSESSMENT

As noted, the Borough lies entirely within the Highlands Preservation Area and is subject to the land use restrictions implemented through the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection's Highlands Rules. As shown in the mapping in Appendix 2, much of the southern half of the Borough is designated as Protection Zone, the most restrictive land use capability class within the Preservation Area. The southern half of the Borough is characterized by significant areas of critical slopes, most of which are forested. Prime groundwater recharge areas and critical wildlife habitat also covers much of this area of Califon.

Given the developed nature of the Borough and the fact that much of the demand for active recreation is already met, the focus for the future will be on acquiring additional lands to create linkage between existing open space and the South Branch of the Raritan River. While the river is utilized by many for recreation, access to the river within the Borough is difficult, as much of the property on either bank is privately owned. There is a need for parking facilities and access through public lands. As depicted in Appendix 1, the Borough has identified acquisition priorities that include lands along the banks of the South Branch as well as others that will allow connection between the river and the Columbia Trail and may present limited opportunity for the creation of parking areas. Other acquisition priorities are focused on conservation objectives such as water supply protection, protection of critical wildlife habitat and forested areas and protection of critical slopes. Acquisition of lands along the river also achieves the important objective of preserving riparian areas, much of which is currently forested.

All of the acquisition priorities identified on the Open Space System and Acquisition Priorities map, located in Appendix 1, are designated as Protection Zone within the Highlands Preservation Area. Acquisition of these properties supports many goals and conservation objectives of the Highlands Regional Master Plan, as outlined below.

- Goal 1A: Protection of large areas of contiguous forested lands of the Highlands Region to the maximum extent possible.
- Goal 1B: Protection and enhancement of forests in the Highlands Region
- Goal 1D: Protection, restoration, and enhancement of Highlands open waters and riparian areas.
- Goal 1E: Protection and enhancement of the natural, scenic, and other resources of the Highlands Region by protection of steep slopes from inappropriate development and disturbance.
- Goal 1F: Protection and enhancement of critical wildlife habitats, significant natural areas, and vernal pools.
- Goal 1H: Protection of critical resources through land preservation and stewardship of open space throughout the Highlands Region.
- Goal 4B: Protection and enhancement of the scenic resources within the Highlands Region.
- Goal 6B: Preservation of the land and water resources and ecological function of the Highlands areas in the protection zone.
- Goal 6C: Limitation of development in the protection zone to development and redevelopment which does not adversely affect the natural resources of the Highlands Region ecosystem.
- Goal 8C: Expansion of compatible and sustainable tourism and recreation within the Highlands Region.

ACTION PLAN

As noted in discussion presented earlier in this plan, the Borough's primary focus is on acquisition of lands for the purposes of conservation and natural resource protection along with provision of access to the South Branch of the Raritan River for recreation purposes. Acquisition of targeted lands will also provide better connection between the Columbia Trail and the river. Table 2, on the following page, identifies properties targeted for acquisition and corresponds to the open space acquisition priorities identified on the Open Space System and Acquisition Priorities map, contained in Appendix 1. It should be noted these properties have been identified for potential acquisition because they meet the goals and objectives of this plan and does not obligate a property owner to sell their land. The Borough does not intend to condemn personal property for open space purposes and will only attempt to acquire land from willing sellers.

The Borough's 5-year action plan is focused on maximizing its limited Open Space Trust Fund monies through partnerships with State, County and regional land conservancies. In addition to seeking funding from the New Jersey Green Acres Program, the Borough will work with partner agencies and groups to identify additional funding opportunities. The NJDEP, New Jersey Water Supply Authority and County of Hunterdon have already worked with the Borough on acquisition of lands for conservation purposes, and this is anticipated to continue in the future.

Regional land conservancies and watershed groups will be consulted not only for funding partnerships, but to assist in educating residents on the benefits of open space preservation. Raritan Headwaters, formed by the 2011 merger of the Upper Raritan Watershed Association and the South Branch Watershed Association, is a non-profit organization focused on education and outreach, science initiatives and land preservation and stewardship. Given that the South Branch of the Raritan River is a key element of the greater watershed they are focused on, they are seen as a critical partner in both education and land preservation efforts.

The Borough will continue to collect open space tax revenue at the current \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed value, which generates approximately \$29,000 annually for the Open Space Trust Fund based on the current ratable base. It is noted the 2001 referendum authorized a tax of up to \$0.03 per \$100. While consideration of increasing the tax by a penny could generate an additional \$14,753 annually, the Borough's current general tax rate is already among the highest in the County, making such consideration delicate. As of the writing of this plan, the Open Space Trust Fund had a balance of \$81,268. Per the 2001 referendum, expenditures are designated solely for:

- a) Acquisition of lands for conservation, recreation and farmland preservation purposes;
- b) Maintenance and development of lands acquired for conservation, recreation and farmland purposes;
- c) Preservation of historic properties, including the acquisition of such properties for historic preservation purposes;
- d) Payment of debt service on indebtedness issued or incurred by a local government for any of the purposes listed above in a), b) or c).

Table 3, on page 11, identifies the actions to be taken over the next 5 years, along with the Borough group or agency responsible for implementation. The actions in the plan are seen as happening concurrently.

Table 2 – Open Space Acquisition Priorities

Block	Lot	Property Class	Owner Name	Acreage
11	1.03	1	UNKNOWN % BOROUGH OF CALIFON	0.32
14	1	3B	WIMMER, ROY E & EMILY P	0.09
14	1.01	3B	WIMMER, ROY & EMILY	0.46
14	1.02			0.31
14	2.01	1	JENSSEN, WARREN D. & DONNA M.	0.12
14	2.02	1	EHRlich RICHARD W / SHOEMAKER R	0.14
14	2.03	1	LUDWIG, DONALD J JR & MARIA ANDREA	0.17
14	2.04	3B	WIMMER, ROY A. & EMILY	0.36
14	3	1	WIMMER, ROY A. & EMILY	0.24
14	4	15C	N J WATER SUPPLY AUTHORITY ETALS	1.06
14	5	1	WIMMER, ROY A. & EMILY	0.18
14	5.01	1	GORACY KRISTEN	0.03
14	5.02	1	DUGAN, ROBERT L & CAROL L LORENZO	0.03
15	3	3B	WIMMER, ROY A & EMILY P	1.51
15	4.04	3B	WIMMER, ROY A & EMILY E	2.05
17	1	3B	WIMMER, ROY A & EMILY P	4.66
17	2	3B	WIMMER, ROY A & EMILY P	4.95
17	3			2.83
17	8	3B	WIMMER, ROY A & EMILY P	1.82
21	5.01			0.34
27	3	3B	CHANG, MING TA	12.59
31	2	1	REAVES, MICHAEL & ALYSSA	3.70
5	26	2	GILLING, LISA	0.14
5	26.01	2	WOODS, STANLEY & JILL	0.02
5	27	1	BANK OF AMERICA NA	0.02
5	28	1	UNKNOWN % BOROUGH OF CALIFON	0.03
5	29	1	IVAN, JUSTIN W	0.28
5	30	1	HAUT, STEPHEN M & MARIE	0.11
5	31	1	RUNGE, ROBERT L JR & KELLY GALLIGAN	0.06
5	32	1	DAHL, JEFFREY J & NICOLE	0.04
5	33			0.04
5	34			0.05
5	35			0.07
Total				38.83

Table 3 – 5-Year Action Plan

Action	Responsible Party
Conduct outreach to owners of property identified as priorities for acquisition to gauge interest in selling.	Borough Council and Open Space and Recreation Commission
Discuss acquisition of properties where owners are interested in selling with Green Acres, County, Raritan Headwaters and New Jersey Water Supply Authority	Borough Council and Open Space and Recreation Commission
Review utilizing Open Space Trust Funds to service debt incurred to acquire open space lands	Borough Council and CFO
Utilize information on the benefits of open space preservation and conservation developed by Raritan Headwaters to undertake public education and outreach	Borough Council and Planning Board
Continue discussions with County of Hunterdon on transfer of lands surrounding Califon Island Park to Borough	Borough Council
Review habitat restoration and pollinator garden at Califon Island Park; identify partner agencies to fund improvements	Environmental Commission
Review potential enhancements to existing facilities at Califon Island Park, adding amenities where feasible	Borough Council and Open Space and Recreation Commission
Establish link from Columbia Trail to Califon Island Park through Block 23, Lot 5.01; identify costs for trail improvements	Borough Council and Environmental Commission

GENERAL OPEN SPACE SYSTEM MAP

The map in Appendix 1 entitled “Open Space System Map and Acquisition Priorities” details all existing open space and recreation lands within the Borough along with properties targeted for acquisition. As noted, Califon’s main objective is to preserve additional lands for conservation purposes while linking open space to the river. Acquisition of lands along the river will help provide access to this important recreation resource through public property rather than through private property, as occurs now.

Appendix 3 shows the Borough’s Recreation and Open Space System (ROSI), including a map depicting encumbered properties along with the NJDEP Green Acres Program required ROSI form.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

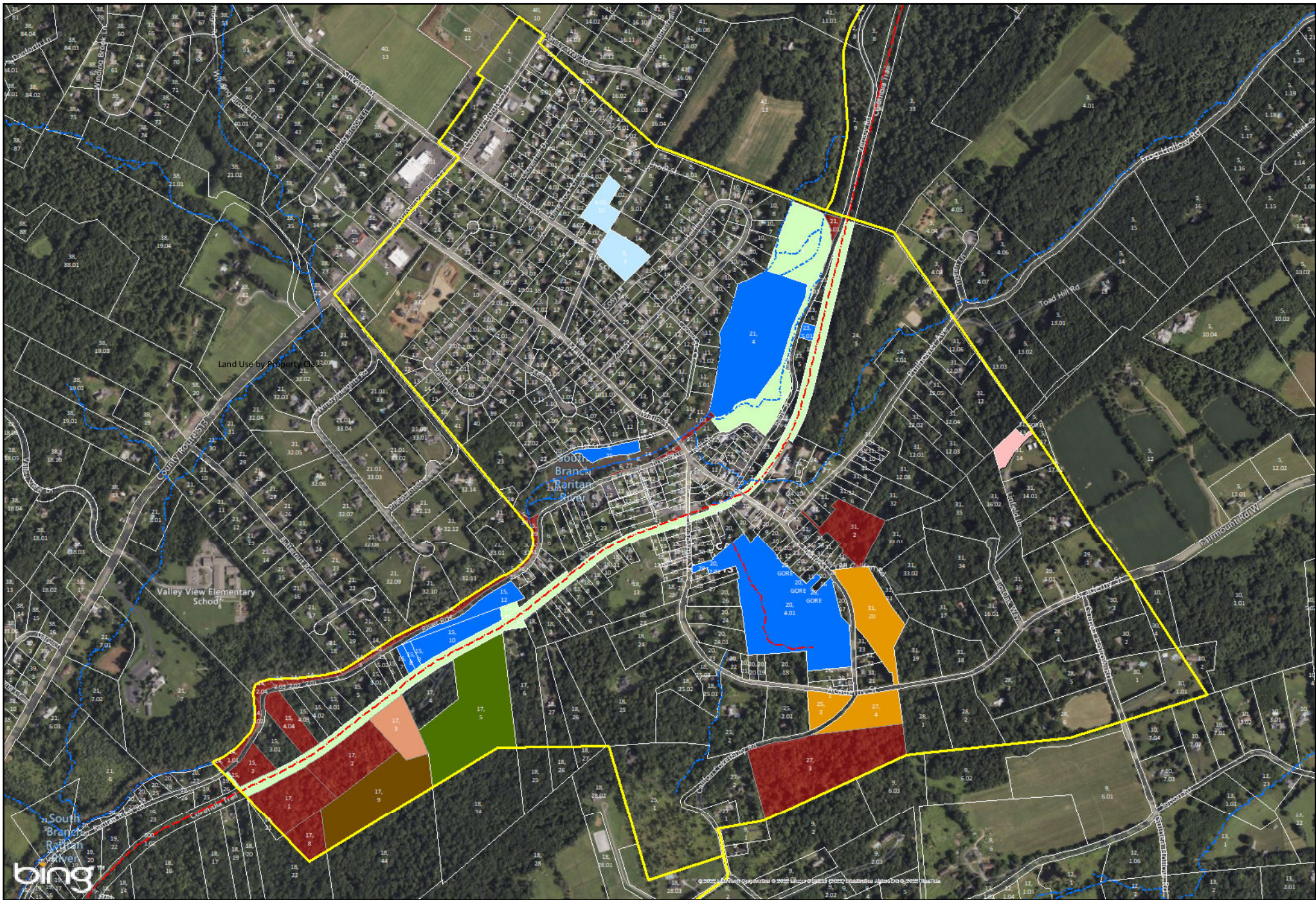
As part of its public participation process, the Borough’s Land Use Board conducted a workshop meeting on June 15, 2022. In addition to inviting members of the environmental commission and open space and recreation committee, the meeting was advertised to encourage public participation. This was achieved through the Borough’s website and social media channels. Residents who attended the workshop were particularly interested in acquisition targets along the South Branch of the Raritan River and based on public feedback on particular properties, certain acquisition priorities were removed from consideration. Members of the environmental commission in attendance expressed a desire to naturalize some areas of Califon Island Park to provide meadow and pollinator habitat. The need for bathrooms and additional seating at the park were also noted, and some expressed interest in a fire pit, warming station and ice skating at the pond as a form of active recreation.

Prior to considering adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, the Planning Board will hold a publicly noticed hearing on the final draft. Notice was published in a newspaper of general circulation prior to the meeting, currently scheduled for November 16th, and the draft plan was posted on the Borough website at least 10 days prior to the hearing for review by interested members of the public. The Board will entertain comments from the public and provide a final version of the Open Space and Recreation Plan, which will also be the subject of a public hearing meeting the requirements of the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law related to adoption of an element of the Borough Master Plan.

PLAN ADOPTION

The Planning Board will adopt the OSRP as an element of the Borough Master Plan at a public hearing as required by the provisions of the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law.

Appendix 1 – Open Space System Map and Acquisition Priorities

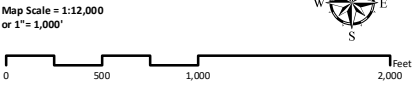


Open Space System and Acquisition Priorities

Borough of Calton
 Hunterdon County, NJ
 September 21, 2022

Legend

- Streams
- - - Statewide Trails
- Open Space Acquisition Priorities
- Preserved Farmland
- Conservation Easement
- Board of Education
- County Parks and Open Space
- Municipal Parks and Open Space
- Non-Profit Conservation Lands
- State Parks and Preserved Open Space



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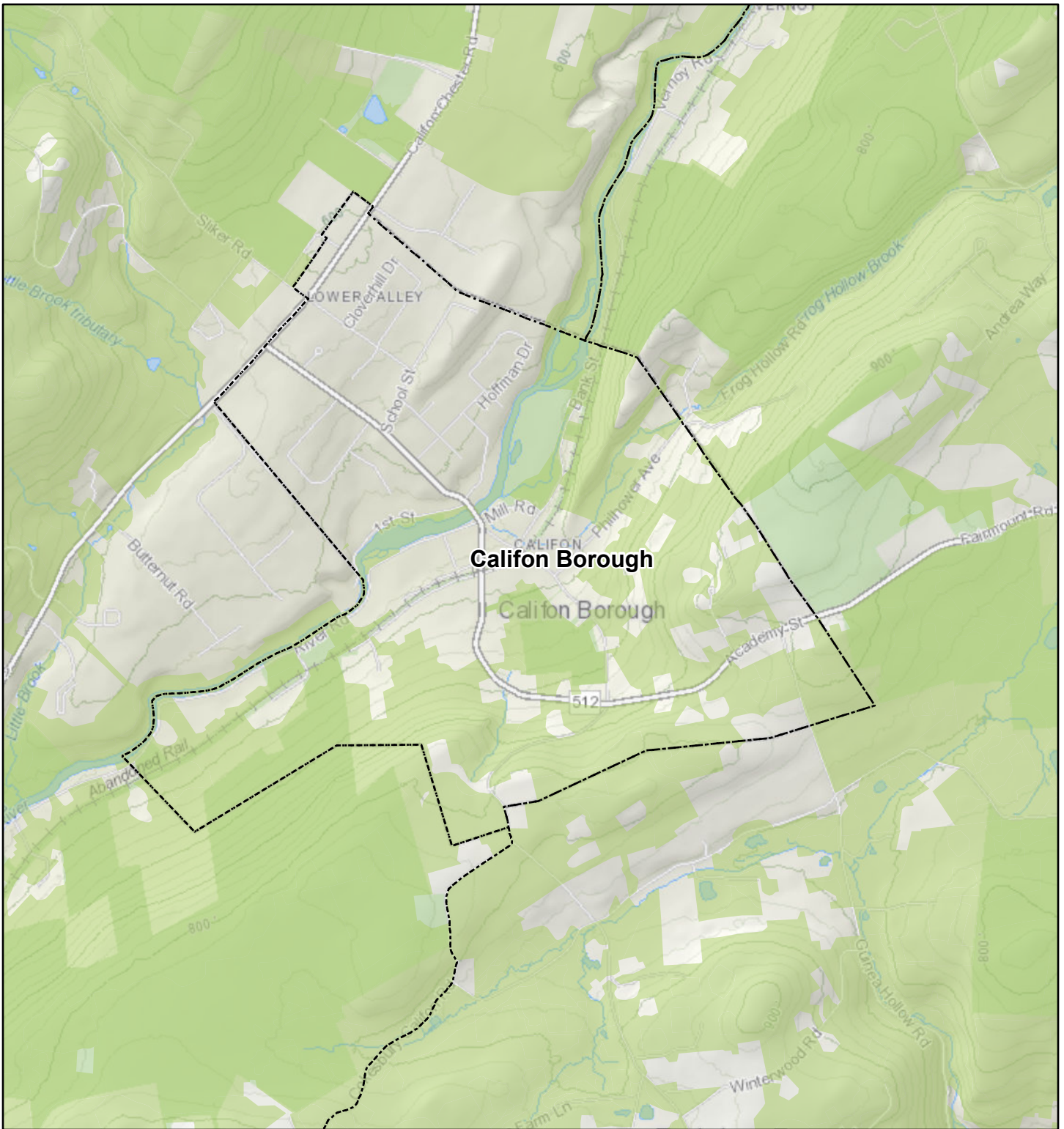
KMA
 KYLE + MCMANUS ASSOCIATES

Data Sources: NJOIT Office of Geographic Info. Services

POLICY PLANNING DESIGN

Appendix 2 – Highlands Resources Mapping

NJ Highlands Critical Wildlife Habitat

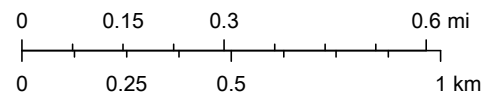


September 21, 2022

 Municipalities

 Critical Wildlife Habitat

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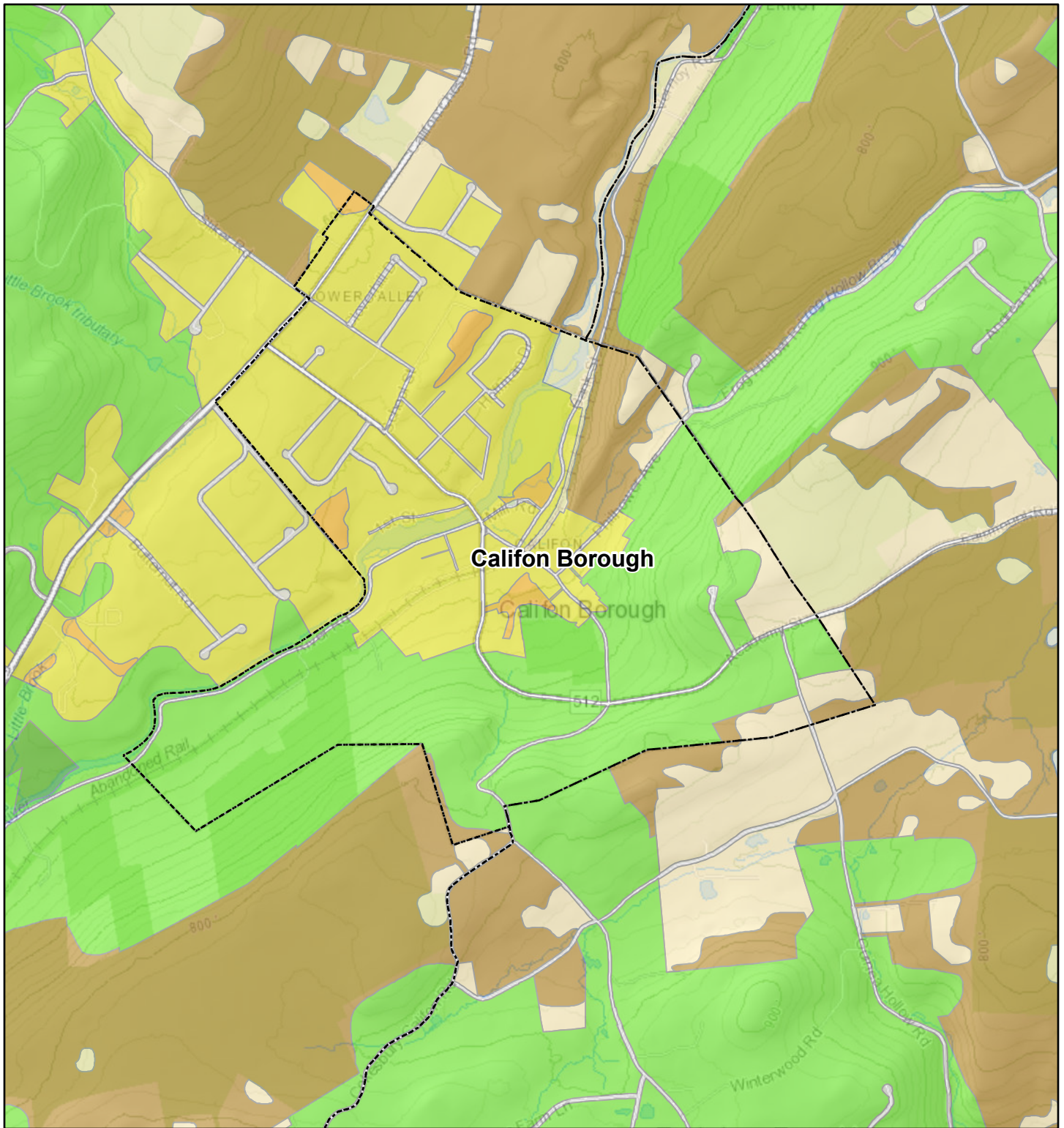


NJ Highlands Council

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NJ Highlands Land Use Capability



September 21, 2022

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--- Municipalities

Land Use Capability Zones

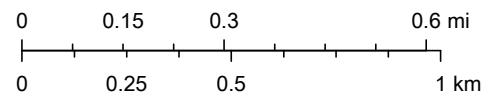
Protection Zone

Wildlife Management Area

Conservation Zone

Conservation Environmentally Constrained Subzone

Existing Community Zone

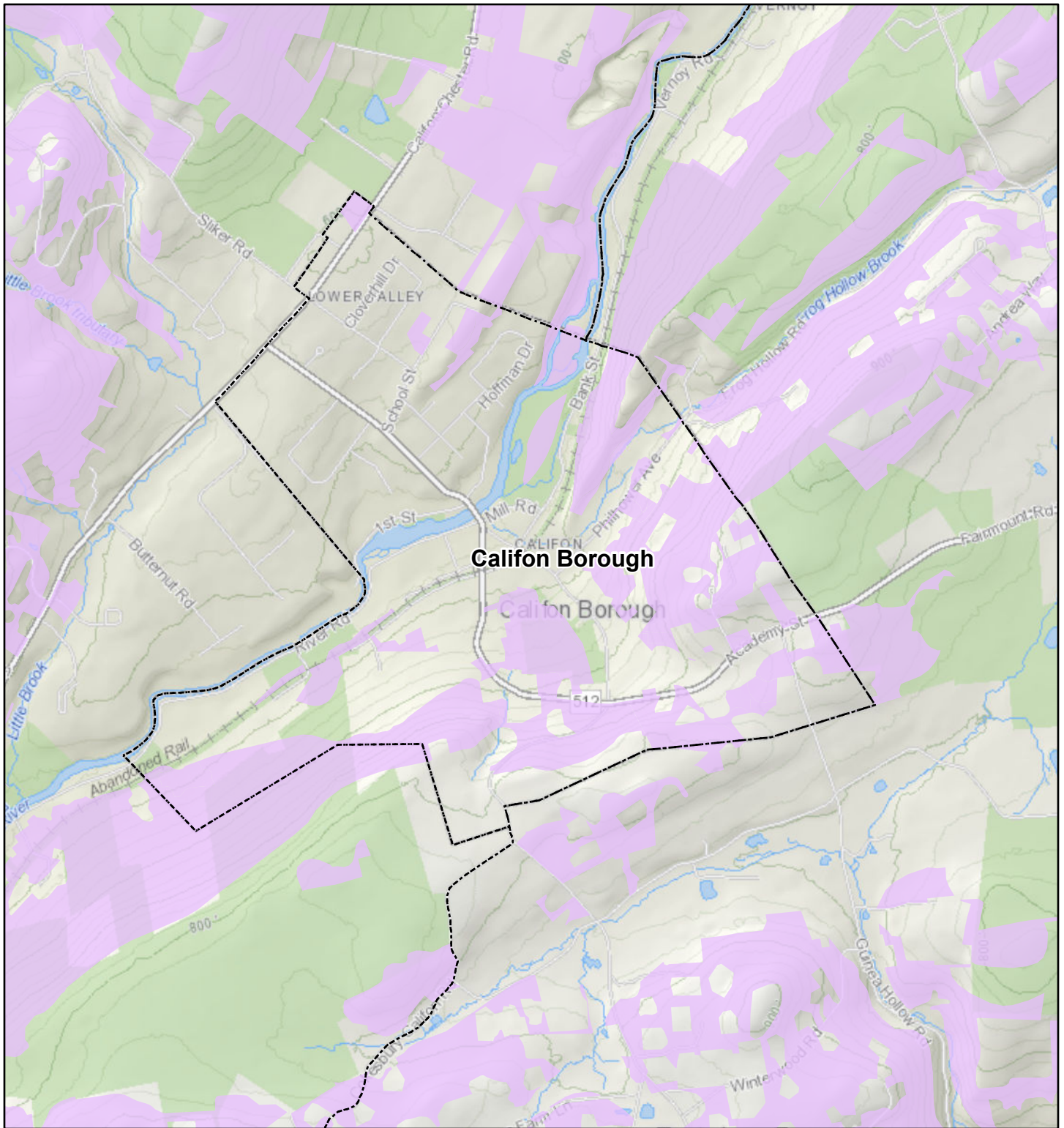


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NJ Highlands Prime Groundwater Recharge Areas

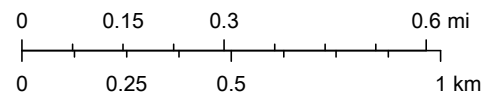


September 21, 2022

 Municipalities

 Prime Groundwater Recharge

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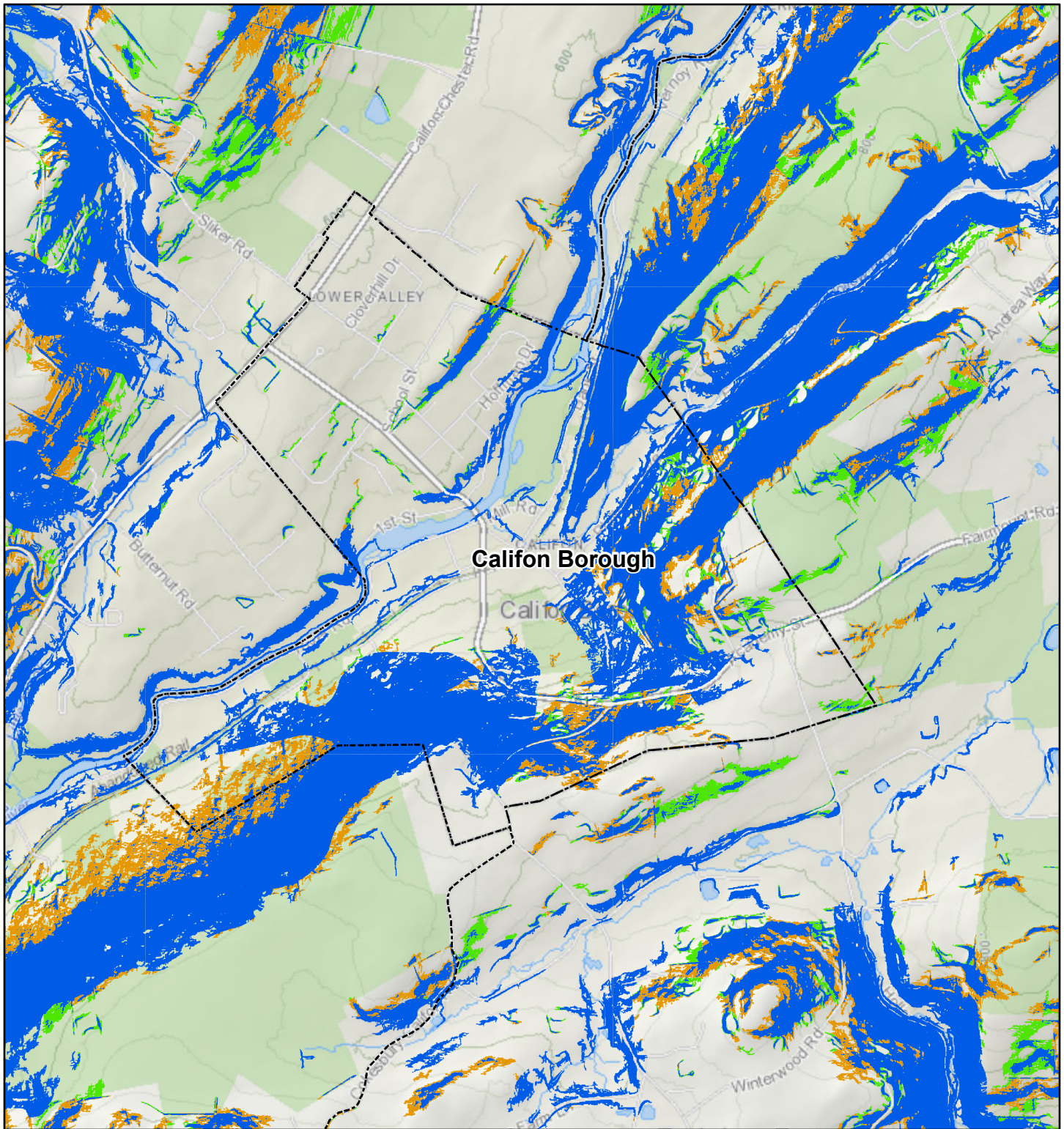


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NJ Highlands Steep Slope Protection Areas



September 21, 2022

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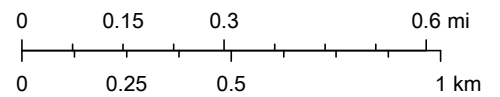
 Municipalities

 Moderately Constrained

 Steep Slope Protection Area

 Severely Constrained

 Limited and Constrained



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Appendix 3 – Recreation and Open Space Inventory

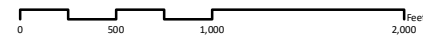


Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI)

Borough of Califon
 Hunterdon County, NJ
 November 2022

Legend
 Properties Listed on ROSI

Map Scale = 1:12,000
 or 1" = 1,000'



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