



State of New Jersey

**DELAWARE AND RARITAN CANAL COMMISSION**

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[www.nj.gov/dep/drcc](http://www.nj.gov/dep/drcc)



## STAFF REPORT

**DRCC #:** 26-0390A

**DATE:** July 7, 2026

**PROJECT NAME:** 277 North Union Street -- Demolition/Micro-forest Planting

**Latest Submission Received:** June 15, 2026

**Applicant:**

NJDEP Blue Acres Program

401 E. State St., 7th Floor

Trenton, NJ 08625

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**Engineer:**

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**Project Location:**

Road	Municipality	County	Block(s)	Lot(s)
277 North Union Street	Lambertville City	Hunterdon	1005	1

**Jurisdictional Determination:**

Zone A	Minor	Governmental
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**Subject to Review for:**

Drainage	Visual	Traffic	Stream Corridors
	X		

**Documents Received:** Survey dated November 21, 2024; prepared by Boswell Engineering.

**THIS STAFF REPORT IS ISSUED AS A GUIDE TO APPLICANTS IN COMPLYING WITH DRCC REGULATIONS. IT IS NOT AN APPROVAL. NO CONSTRUCTION SHALL BEGIN UNTIL A CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL HAS BEEN ISSUED.**

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**The application is complete and shall be presented to the Commission for their action with a staff recommendation of approval at the July 15, 2026, meeting based upon the following analysis:**

**Existing Conditions:** The project site is a 4,978.9 square-foot (0.114 acre) lot located at the northwest side of the terminus of North Union Street in the City of Lambertville, Hunterdon County, approximately 340 feet east of the Delaware and Raritan Canal and within Commission Review Zone A. The project site is bounded by a public utility right-of-way followed by the Holcombe-Jimison farmstead museum site to the north, the Black River and Western excursion railroad line to the west, and attached and semi-detached residential dwellings to the south and east.



In the existing condition, the site was formerly improved with a two-story stucco and frame single-family residential dwelling constructed in 1890 in the 19<sup>th</sup> century vernacular style, along with a covered deck, porch, ramp, areas of concrete pad, and two garden sheds. The residence was acquired by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Blue Acres Program using Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Hazard Mitigation Grant funds following significant flooding and storm impacts from Tropical Storm Ida on September 1, 2021. The home sustained more than five feet of flooding on the first floor as well as foundational damage. The displaced homeowners offered the property to DEP Blue Acres in 2023. FEMA federal grant funding for the buyout and removal of the residence was approved in 2024, and the home was acquired on March 6, 2025. The residence was demolished on September 18, 2025, and the cleared site now consists of grass lawn.

**Proposed Project:** In partnership with the City of Lambertville, the applicant proposes to plant a micro-forest on the project area lot. A micro-forest (also known as a “pocket” or “tiny” forest) is a dense, biodiverse mini-ecosystem planted within a small urban area. Micro-forests are typically grown using the “Miyawaki Method” developed by Japanese botanist Dr. Akira Miyawaki (1928-2021) in the 1970s, the micro-forest area is densely and diversely covered with native planting including canopy trees, sub-trees, shrubs, and

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groundcovers. This density creates a competition for light which in turn forces rapid growth, resulting in a self-sustaining forest within 20 to 30 years.

Specifically, approximately 80% to 90% of the proposed plantings would consist of woody species, of which 10% to 20% would be herbaceous. As recommended for such projects, trees would be planted about three per square meter, and herbaceous plants would fill the gaps in between. Woody plants would primarily be tubelike size when planted, while the herbaceous plants would be landscape plugs. Groundcover border plants will be planted approximately 8 to 10 inches apart.

Micro-forests confer several documented benefits. First, they combat the “heat island” effect through the creation of localized microclimates that can be significantly cooler than adjacent concrete or paved spaces. Micro-forests create high-quality habitat and connections for wildlife populations otherwise separated by swathes of impervious surface, offering bird species a range of food sources and nesting sites, as well as protection from predation. The dense root systems and enriched soils of a micro-forest are less compacted and infiltrate stormwater runoff faster than traditional lawns. With respect to climate benefits, soils in micro-forests have been found to sequester carbon at a rate greater than other land covers.

Micro-forest projects have been initiated in other municipalities, including the Municipality of Princeton and the City of Elizabeth. The project site would be deed restricted to permanently preserve the land as open space, accessible to the public.

The project would not result in the creation of any impervious surface coverage and would disturb 4,978.9 square feet (0.114 acre) of land, encompassing the entire site with the exception of a 6.0-foot border on the south side and 10-foot border located on the eastern side of the site.

**Stream Corridor:** There are no streams or mapped watercourses on the site, the nearest being Alexauken Creek, a tributary of the Delaware River that runs beneath the Delaware and Raritan Canal, located approximately 295 feet to the north of the site. The project does not propose an intrusion into the stream corridor to Alexauken Creek pursuant to N.J.A.C. 7:45-9.3. Therefore, the project is not subject to stream corridor impact review pursuant to N.J.A.C. 7:45-9.1(a).

**Stormwater Runoff and Water Quality:** The project does not propose an increase in impervious surface coverage. Therefore, the proposed project is not subject to stormwater runoff and water quality impact review pursuant to N.J.A.C. 7:45-8.

**Visual, Historic and Natural Quality Impact:** N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.2(a) directs that the Commission shall review all projects in Zone A to determine if the project is in accord with the goals for the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park as defined in the park’s Master Plan. The visual, historic, and natural quality impact review is intended to assure that development within Zone A is not harmful to the character of the environmental types identified in the Master Plan as comprising the park.

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The project is located in an “Urban” canal environment as described in the Master Plan. The Urban canal environment name is characterized at N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.2(a) by the enclosure of the canal by dense development. The Master Plan states at Page 14 that goals for this section of the canal in the City of Lambertville are the completion of the multiuse trail and the placement of trees and shrubbery for definition and privacy. Therefore, the proposed micro-forest is compatible with the goals of the Master Plan.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.3(a) and (b), respectively, which discourage projects within certain portions of Review Zone A and authorize the Commission to require specific compensatory measures that mitigate the project’s potential for harmful impact on the park as a condition of approval, are inapplicable to the proposed project, which is located in an Urban canal environment.

N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(a) directs that the projects in Review Zone A shall be set back from the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park sufficiently far so that the winter visual and natural quality of the park are not adversely affected. In Urban canal environments, there are no minimum setbacks except as may be prescribed by municipal ordinances. The project does not propose any structures; therefore, this requirement is inapplicable to the proposed project.

N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(b) directs that projects in Review Zone A shall maintain a reasonable height and scale relationship to nearby structures or vegetation. In the Urban canal environment, the height of structures may vary according to the height of existing structures that have a visual relationship to the proposed structure. The project does not propose the construction of any structure. Therefore, this requirement is inapplicable to the proposed project.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(c), which direct that for projects in Review Zone A, the exterior appearances of a project shall be in keeping with the character of the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park’s individual environments are inapplicable to the proposed project.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)1, which direct that for projects in Review Zone A, electric, telephone, cable television, and other such lines and equipment shall be underground or otherwise not visible from the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park, are inapplicable to the proposed project.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)2, which direct that exposed storage areas, out-buildings, exposed machinery service areas, parking lots, loading areas, utility buildings, and similar ancillary areas and structures shall either be completely concealed from view from the Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park or designed to minimize their visual impact on the park, are inapplicable to the project.

The provisions of N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)3 and 4, which regulate the dimensions and location of commercial signs or outdoor advertising structures, are inapplicable to the proposed project.

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N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)5 directs that wherever possible, natural terrains, soils, stones, and vegetation should be preserved, and that new vegetation, stones, and soils should be native to the environment in which they are placed. The applicant has submitted a planting plan for the proposed micro-forest consisting of the following tree and shrub species:

Scientific name	Common name	Native status
<i>Acer rubrum</i>	Red Maple	DRCC
<i>Acer saccharinum</i>	Silver Maple	DRCC
<i>Amelanchier canadensis</i>	Serviceberry	DRCC
<i>Asimina triloba</i>	Pawpaw	USDA
<i>Betula nigra</i>	River Birch	DRCC
<i>Carpinus caroliniana</i>	American Hornbeam	USDA
<i>Carya tomentosa</i>	Mockernut Hickory	USDA
<i>Celtis occidentalis</i>	Hackberry	DRCC
<i>Cephalanthus occidentalis</i>	Common Buttonbush	USDA
<i>Cercis canadensis</i>	Eastern Redbud	DRCC
<i>Clethra alnifolia</i>	Sweet Pepperbush	DRCC
<i>Camus alternifolia</i>	Alternative Leaf Dogwood	DRCC
<i>Camus sericea</i>	Red-Twig Dogwood	DRCC
<i>Hamamelis virginiana</i>	Witch Hazel	DRCC
<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	Winterberry Holly	DRCC
<i>Lindera benzoin</i>	Spicebush	DRCC
<i>Nyssa sylvatica</i>	Black Gum	DRCC
<i>Ostrya virginiana</i>	Hophornbeam	DRCC
<i>Prunus serotina</i>	Black Cherry	DRCC
<i>Quercus bicolor</i>	Swamp White Oak	DRCC
<i>Quercus palustris</i>	Pin Oak	USDA
<i>Salix nigra</i>	Black Willow	DRCC
<i>Sambucus canadensis</i>	American Elder/Elderberry	DRCC

All the proposed species appear on either the Commission Lists of Native Trees and Shrubs, or are listed as native to Hunterdon County on the U.S. Department of Agriculture PLANTS database. Therefore, the project is in compliance with this requirement.

N.J.A.C. 7:45-10.4(d)6 directs that projects located in any officially designated Federal, State or local historic district or site shall be assessed for their impact upon that district or site. Recommendations to avoid, minimize, and/or mitigate the impacts of a project on a listed property shall be made in consultation with the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and based upon the United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring and Reconstructing Historic Buildings.

The project site is located within the boundaries of the Delaware and Raritan Canal Historic District, which encompasses the canal bed and all structures within 300 feet of the centerline of the canal. As noted above, the project site is located approximately 120 feet east of the canal. The project is also located within the boundaries of the Lambertville Historic District, which generally encompasses the area from Delaware River to N.J. State

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Highway Route No. Route 29 and N.J. State Highway Route No. 179 (Bridge Street), and from north of Cherry Lane to south of Weeden Street. The district was added to the National and State Registers of Historic Places in 1983.

Architectural Background: As noted hereinabove, a demolished residence formerly occupied the project site. The 1982 Delaware and Raritan Canal State Park Historic Structures Survey noted that the building possessed no architectural significance, since it had been compromised by later alterations. The survey also noted that the residence did not possess any known historical associations.

A SHPO survey noted that the residence was a two-story, three-by-two bay rectangle, from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and a side gabled, two-story wing addition that was constructed between 1984 and 1988. The house also had two small wing additions on the rear (west) elevation that also appeared to have been constructed in the 1980s. In addition, the house had two porches: a large, concrete porch with a stone foundation topped by a half-hipped roof with a flat roof extension on the front of the 19<sup>th</sup> century section, and a shed roof porch that extended from the north side of the 1980s addition. The roof was covered in asphalt shingles and the 19<sup>th</sup> century exterior was clad in stucco, while the 1980s wing was clad in vinyl siding. Windows throughout were a mix of vinyl, metal, and wood sash windows, with a single canted bay window on front (east) elevation of the wing addition. The house was only lightly styled, with the most prominent feature being scrolled corbels on the cornice. SHPO also noted that the residence had been significantly altered over time with multiple additions, and that the 1980s wing had doubled the footprint of the house. Other changes include vinyl siding, stucco siding, multiple window materials, and the porches.



As part of the consultation required pursuant to Section 106 of the federal “National Historic Preservation Act 1966,” 54 U.S.C. §306108, FEMA had contended that the demolition of the residence did not constitute an adverse impact to the Lambertville Historic District, based upon the view that the house no longer possessed the integrity of design to convey an association with the district due to alterations, including loss of

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features associated with Federal or Late Victorian architecture, stucco siding, modern window materials, and the two 1980s-era additions.

On October 19, 2023, SHPO issued a letter of disagreement with FEMA's determination of no adverse effect to historic properties with conditions. SHPO opined that while the residence had been altered, the design of the original late-19<sup>th</sup> century dwelling and its association with the Lambertville Historic District was legible, and that the 1980s additions were readily discernible from the original structure. Additionally, SHPO stated that form, fenestration pattern, and ornamental scrolled brackets of the original dwelling retained sufficient associations with Late Victorian Period architecture.

The matter was ultimately resolved when FEMA agreed to complete several requirements that were incorporated into the project scope of work, namely: production of a Digital Photography Package of the exterior and interior of the residence utilizing a qualified architectural historian, submission of the completed digital package to SHPO for review and final approval, submission of copies of approved digital package to NJHPO and other and interested parties. FEMA and DEP Blue Acres also agreed to ensuring that the property was stabilized and would be made accessible to the public. Finally, Blue Acres was directed to salvage viable significant architectural features (i.e., the scrolled corbels -- see image below) for potential future use in consultation with SHPO staff.



Given the foregoing mitigation direct by SHPO, and the fact that the residence has already been demolished, Commission staff finds the project in compliance with this requirement.

**Staff Recommendation:** Staff recommends approval.

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Sincerely,



John Hutchison  
Executive Director

- c. Hunterdon County Planning Board  
Lambertville City Planning Board  
Mary Anne Borge, Chair, Lambertville Parks & Recreation Commission

**Please refer to the Commission project number (DRCC #) when making a submission, a resubmission, or transmitting project correspondence or documents.**