

The Gaslight

ISSUE 18
2025

SOUTH ORANGE
VILLAGE
ACCESS IT ALL

FALL
2025
SPECIAL
EDITION





Investing in South Orange's
Parks and Open Spaces:
Open Space and Historic Preservation
Trust Fund Referendum Explained



LETTER FROM
THE MAYOR



Dear Neighbors,

This November, South Orange voters will face many important choices on the general election ballot. One question, however, is unique to our village: whether to increase our Open Space and Historic Preservation Trust Fund levy from \$0.01 to \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed property value. The Village Council unanimously authorized placing this question on the ballot so that you, the residents, can decide. This edition of The Gaslight is dedicated to giving you the information you need to make that decision.

Our parks and open spaces are at the very heart of community life. They are where families gather after school, where neighbors enjoy concerts and festivals, and where children play their first games. The pandemic reminded us in the most powerful way just how essential these spaces are. Parks became our sanctuaries – supporting mental health, encouraging physical activity, and providing safe opportunities to connect.

Since 1999, the Open Space Trust Fund has made possible meaningful improvements – from the River Greenway Project studies that led to millions of dollars in federal investment to new LED field lighting to critical support for Connett Memorial Library renovations. Yet today, the needs are greater than ever. Rising construction costs, aging infrastructure, and expanding community demand mean our current levy is not sufficient to meet the needs of the community. With more than \$20 million in eligible projects identified – including Meadowland Park upgrades, Duck Pond restoration, Founders Park enhancements, Grove Park improvements, playing fields, and continued tree planting and stormwater mitigation – we need a stronger, dedicated funding mechanism to deliver results faster and more reliably.

By approving this referendum, the average homeowner with a property assessed at \$850,000 would contribute about \$85 more per year. To calculate your increase, simply multiply your property's assessed value by .0001. Every dollar raised will be legally earmarked for open space, parks, and historic preservation. This guarantees transparency, accountability, and the ability to leverage state and federal matching grants that multiply our local investment. Having shovel-ready plans and a secure down payment greatly improves our competitiveness, as demonstrated last year when we secured more than \$1 million in Green Acres funding for the Cameron Recreation Area – after more than 850 residents helped shape the redesign.

Over the past several years, we have worked hand in hand with neighborhoods, park conservancies, families, and volunteers to design thoughtful plans that reflect our shared priorities. This referendum is your opportunity to bring those plans to life – enhancing our quality of life today while leaving a legacy for generations to come.

With gratitude and excitement for our future,

Sheena Collum

Sheena C. Collum
Mayor



IN TOUCH WITH
VILLAGE GOVERNMENT

MAYOR
Sheena Collum
973.378.7715 x 2

VILLAGE COUNCIL
Bobby Brown
Jen Greenberg
Bill Haskins
Summer Jones
Olivia Lewis-Chang
Stephen Schnall
973.378.7715 x 2

ADMINISTRATION
Village Administrator
Julie Doran
973.378.7715 x 2

GENERAL INQUIRIES
973.378.7715
Clerk's Office, x 1
Building & Code, x 3
Tax Collector, x 4
Assessor, x 5
Finance, x 6
Engineering & Zoning, x 7
Parking Authority, x 2037
Health, x 7710
Water Service x 7760
Public Works
973.378.7741
Recreation & Cultural Affairs
973.378.7754
Fire Department
973.762.3200
Library
973.762.0230
Police, nonemergency
973.763.3000
Rescue Squad
973.762.5647
Animal Control
908.722.1271

PRESERVING & ENHANCING OUR PARKS: YOU DECIDE THIS NOVEMBER

This fall, South Orange voters will have an opportunity to vote on a referendum that could double South Orange's Open Space Trust Fund (OSTF) levy — from \$0.01 to \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed property value. The increase would support needed investments in our parks, recreation facilities, and open spaces.

What is the Open Space Trust Fund?

Established by South Orange voters in 1999, the OSTF supports the acquisition, development, and maintenance of open space, parks, and recreation areas. The fund also allows for the preservation of historic sites and environmental resources.

What is being asked of voters?

The current levy of \$0.01 per \$100 of assessed value raises approximately \$428,000 annually. The proposed increase would double that amount, to approximately \$856,000 annually. These funds would be directed toward critical upgrades and new initiatives in our park system and open spaces.

UNDERSTANDING THE REFERENDUM PROCESS

What is a referendum?

A referendum allows voters to decide directly on a specific public policy proposal.

When will I vote?

The question will appear on the November 5, 2025, general election ballot.

What happens if it passes?

The OSTF levy will increase from \$0.01 to \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed property value, starting in the next budget year.

Why now?

The levy has remained unchanged since the OSTF was created in 1999. Rising construction costs, aging infrastructure, and community demand for improved public spaces have prompted the Village to revisit the funding level. South Orange currently has more than \$20 million of planned and/or proposed projects — several of which are discussed in detail on the following pages — that qualify as OSTF eligible.

What is the cost to residents?

A homeowner with a property assessed at \$850,000 would see an annual increase of approximately \$85.

More information about the OSTF and its uses appears in this issue and on our website, southorange.org.



THE BALLOT QUESTION YOU'LL SEE IN THE VOTING BOOTH

Whether you vote early or you vote on election day, **the following question and explanatory statement will appear on your ballot exactly as shown.** This is the official language you will be asked to vote on:

BALLOT QUESTION

Shall South Orange Village increase the Open Space and Historic Preservation Trust Fund from \$0.01 to \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed property value to provide additional funding for the acquisition, improvement, and maintenance of parks, open spaces, conservation lands, and historic preservation? The fund is also allowed to accept donations and other sources of revenue.

__Yes__No

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

If approved, the fund would be supported by an increase not to exceed \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed property value. For example, a property assessed at \$850,000 would contribute an additional \$85 per year. All money raised will go directly toward protecting, enhancing, and maintaining local parks and fields, open spaces, the tree canopy, conservation lands, and historic properties — providing a source of dedicated funds for projects including, but not limited to, the River Greenway, Meadowland Park field improvements and LED lighting, Duck Pond restoration, Founders Park landscaping and improvements, Grove Park upgrades and tree planting, and Crest Drive playground upgrades.



INVESTING IN OUR PARKS, PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE

Since its creation in 1999, South Orange's OSTF has helped turn ideas into reality, funding projects that improve our parks, protect our natural environment, enhance recreation, and preserve historic landmarks.

PAST INITIATIVES

- **Field Lights at New Waterlands Park.**

These new Musco-brand LED lights reduce our energy costs while creating a more sustainable and environmentally friendly park for everyone to enjoy.



Image: Musco-brand LED lights prototype

- **Connett Memorial Library roof replacement and exterior renovation.**

The OSTF provided the required matching funds for a historic preservation grant for the exterior renovations of the Connett building; these renovations are the basis of the library Building Connections Project currently under construction.



Library Building Connections Project featuring the renovated Connett building



Image: River Greenway Project plan overview

- **Baird Community Center renovation.**

Feasibility study and partial debt payments on the recent renovation of the Baird Community Center.



Image: Baird Community Center renovation and expansion

- **River Greenway Project phases 1 and 2 studies and plan development.** This work paved the way for the \$4.2 million federal grant for construction of Phase 2 of the River Greenway Project. Since the early 2000s, South Orange has been working to create a greenway along the east branch of the Rahway River, running from West Montrose Avenue to Maplewood.

INVESTING IN OUR PARKS, PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE CONTINUED

CURRENT INITIATIVES

- **Cameron Recreation Area matching funds.** The Village was awarded a \$1.025 million grant from New Jersey's Green Acres Program for the renovation of the Cameron Field tennis courts. This grant requires matching funds, which are available through the OSTF.

The Cameron Recreation Area will transform the Cameron tennis courts site into a lively destination for play, fitness, and relaxation. Plans include pickleball and paddle tennis courts, basketball half-courts, outdoor fitness stations, and a shaded picnic grove with cafe-style seating and festival lighting. With new greenway paths, a rain garden, and a children's adventure garden, the space will blend recreation, nature, and community gathering for residents of all ages and create an important link to the downtown.



Image: Cameron Recreation Area adventure garden



Image: Cameron Recreation Area seating



Image: Cameron Recreation Area pickleball and paddle tennis courts

Scan the QR code for the full schematic design concept for the Cameron Recreation Area.



SCAN ME

- **Field lights at Meadowland Park.**

The installation of new LED lights on Meadowland fields 1, 2, and 4 will extend playing time, giving our community more opportunities to enjoy existing programs and create space for new ones. Environmentally friendly technology and remote-control timers will minimize energy use and ensure the lights are off at appropriate hours. These improvements will benefit all recreation-field users and support the continued growth of our programs.

- **Tree planting.** Each year, we plant new trees to replace those lost to storms, age, or disease, ensuring that our community continues to thrive under a healthy and resilient tree canopy. A strong canopy not only provides shade and beauty, but also improves air quality, supports wildlife, and protects against flooding and heat. These annual plantings are a vital investment in the long-term health and sustainability of our village.



Image: South Orange atree-planting efforts

INVESTING IN OUR PARKS, PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE CONTINUED

FUTURE INITIATIVES

• River Greenway Project, Phase 3.

The final phase of the long-planned River Greenway Project will provide a corridor connecting our parks and other open spaces to Maplewood Township, providing a place for car-free walking, biking, and scooter riding, while also protecting waterways and the natural habitat.



Image: River Greenway Project schematic

• Founders Park Master Plan implementation.

The Founders Park improvement plan reimagines the space as a vibrant community hub with features for all ages and abilities. Highlights include a new outdoor plaza, a pavilion, a rain garden, a rose garden, and a new play area with swings, musical play, and equipment designed for accessibility. Seniors, families, and neighbors will enjoy new gathering spaces, game tables, and shaded seating. The project ensures that the park will remain a welcoming destination for generations to come.



Image: Founders Park future 'front porch' and Founders Park new playground

Scan the QR code for more about the Founders Park plan.



Image: Founders Park concept aerial view

INVESTING IN OUR PARKS, PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE CONTINUED

- **Grove Park improvements.** Grove Park, established in 1908 after local citizens raised funds to purchase and landscape the land, has long been a treasured community green space. Originally designed by noted landscape architect John Brinley, whose work includes the New York Botanical Garden and the Morristown Green, the park reflects a proud legacy of civic action and design excellence. Building on that history, the Village now plans to address drainage issues while updating and restoring Grove Park, ensuring it continues to serve as a beautiful and welcoming gathering place while honoring its proud heritage.



Image: Grove Park Master Plan: Park improvements and tree planting

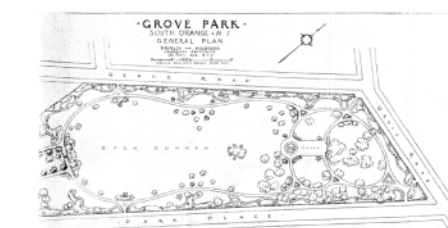


Image: Grove Park map: General plan by Brinley & Holbrook

Additional qualifying park and open-space improvements currently in need of funding for planning, potential grant awards, and construction include:

- Farrell Field park and court improvements
- Crest Drive (Firehouse) playground improvements
- New Waterlands playground replacements
- Duck Pond improvements, Phase 2
- Rahway River dredging
- Meadowland Park Master Plan implementation
- Chyzowych Field improvements
- New Waterlands and Meadowland Park field improvements
- Cameron Field LED-lighting upgrade
- ADA-compliant inclusive playground equipment



Image: An illustration of inclusive versus accessible playgrounds



Image: River dredging to meet DEP requirements and support the work of volunteers



Image: The Duck Pond area needs improved walkways and accessibility



INVESTING IN OUR PARKS, PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE CONTINUED

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED

We know residents may have questions about the proposed increase to South Orange's Open Space Trust Fund. In this section, we address the most common questions, discussing what the fund is, why an increase is being proposed, how it will affect property owners, and what kinds of projects it will support. Our goal is to make sure you have clear, straightforward information before you head to the polls.

1. What is an Open Space Trust Fund?

An Open Space Trust Fund (OSTF) is a dedicated source of public funding used by New Jersey municipalities and counties to acquire, preserve, and maintain open space, farmland, historic properties, and recreational facilities.

2. How is an Open Space Trust Fund created?

A municipality or county must:

- Propose a ballot question for voter approval
- Hold a referendum, usually during a general election
- If the referendum is approved, adopt a local ordinance establishing the fund and its parameters

3. How is the fund financed?

The OSTF is typically funded through a voter-approved property-tax levy, expressed in cents per \$100 of assessed property value.

4. What can the OSTF be used for?

Allowable uses include:

- Acquisition of open space and farmland
- Development or improvement of parks and recreational areas
- Historic preservation
- Maintenance of preserved land or facilities
- Capital debt funding or debt service related to these items

5. How much will the increased OSTF levy cost South Orange property owners?

The OSTF levy will increase from \$0.01 to \$0.02 per \$100 of assessed property value. This means that, for a property assessed at \$850,000, the proposed increase would cost an additional \$85 per year.

6. Why not use regular tax revenue for parks? Wouldn't it cost the same?

While raising the general tax rate could generate similar revenue, a dedicated OSTF ensures that funds are used exclusively for preserving and enhancing open space, parks, and historic assets.

It provides:

- Long-term planning ability. It ensures reliable funding for capital projects over time.
- Grant matching opportunities. It helps secure state/federal grants, such as Green Acres Program grants.
- Accountability and transparency. Funds are legally restricted to voter-approved purposes.
- Voter control. Residents have a direct say in how their money is used.
- Protection from budget cuts. Dedicated funds can't be reallocated during budget shortfalls.

INVESTING IN OUR PARKS, PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE CONTINUED

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED continued

7. Can OSTF money be used for non-open-space purposes?

No. Use of the funds is restricted by the ordinance and voter authorization.

8. What projects are currently being considered for OSTF funding?

Current eligible projects, which would cost more than \$20 million in total, include but are not limited to:

- River Greenway Project completion
- Meadowland Park field improvements and LED lighting
- Duck Pond restoration
- Founders Park landscaping and improvements
- Grove Park upgrades and tree planting
- Crest Drive playground upgrades and tree canopy replenishment

9. What is the Green Acres Program, and how is it related to the OSTF?

The NJ Green Acres Program offers state grants and loans for open space and parkland acquisition. Municipalities with an OSTF often use it to qualify for or match Green Acres funding —

such as with the Cameron

Recreation Area, currently in early development.

10. Do all towns in New Jersey have an OSTF?

No. Only towns that have passed a local referendum to establish one. However, many municipalities and nearly all counties in New Jersey have adopted some form of open-space funding mechanism.

11. Can an OSTF be repealed or ended?

Yes, but doing so requires either a formal ordinance repeal or a new voter referendum.

12. Has South Orange's population growth affected open-space needs?

Yes. Since the Master Plan was written (when the population was about 16,000), South Orange has grown by approximately 15 percent. Based on the current population of 18,150, the goal of eight open-space acres per 1,000 residents translates to a need for 145 acres of open space. The current open-space inventory is 86 acres, or 59 fewer acres than desired.

The Village administration believes that opportunities to add open space should be explored as they arise. Expanding the OSTF makes this more feasible, as land acquisition is costly. Meanwhile, improving existing parks for broader use is a top priority.



INVESTING IN OUR PARKS, PRESERVING OUR HERITAGE CONTINUED

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED continued

13. How is OSTF spending managed?

OSTF funds are managed in compliance with local public finance laws. Spending is overseen by:

- Licensed municipal staff, including the Village chief financial officer and a qualified purchasing agent
- The South Orange Finance Committee, which reviews expenditures and submits a bills list to the Village Council for approval

14. Are there spending principles for the OSTF?

Yes. Spending must align with the ordinance that established the OSTF and the purposes approved by voters.

15. Who manages the OSTF?

The fund is managed by the CFO and the Village Administrator.

16. Is OSTF spending reported to the public?

Yes. OSTF expenditures are reported during committee meetings and Village Council meetings, which are open to the public.

17. Has OSTF money been used for general maintenance in the past?

Yes. In the past, OSTF funds have been used for maintenance-related work, including but not limited to:

- Painting Tau, the Tony Smith sculpture

- Planting street trees
- Adding an accessibility ramp to the Baird Community Center

18. Will the Village commit to using OSTF money only for capital projects?

No. While capital projects are a major focus and the driving force behind the proposed increase, maintenance is also essential to delivering quality parks and open spaces. Some important projects, such as tree replacement after disease or storms, may not qualify as a capital expense under municipal finance law.

South Orange remains committed to meaningful capital improvements across its park system, as demonstrated by current investments in plan development and/or grant funding for projects such as:

- River Greenway Project
- Cameron Recreation Area
- Founders Park
- Grove Park
- Meadowland Park
- Carter Park

19. Is the OSTF permanent?

Yes, unless repealed by voter referendum or ordinance.

21. How will projects be selected?

An OSTF advisory committee will make recommendations to the Village Council.

VILLAGE HAPPENINGS

GET READY FOR LOCAL HAPPENINGS, ACTIVITIES, AND EXPERIENCES COMING SOON TO OUR VIBRANT COMMUNITY

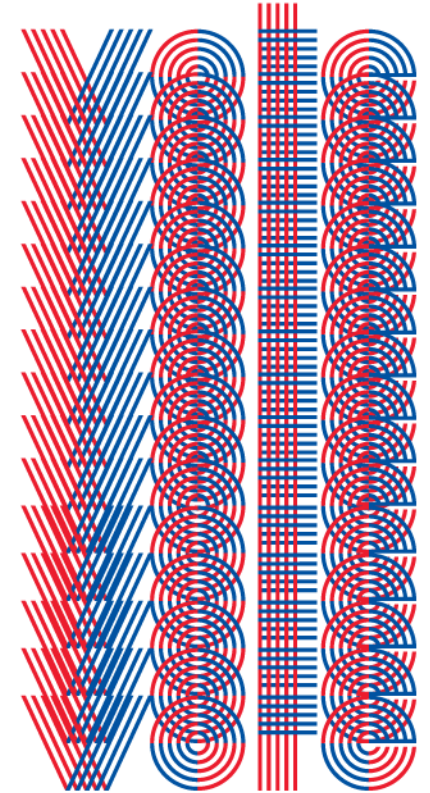


GENERAL ELECTION INFORMATION

Important dates for the upcoming election:

- **October 14.** Final day to register to vote. The clerk's office will be open until 9pm for late-night voter registration.
- **October 28.** Final day to apply by mail for a vote-by-mail ballot
- **November 4.** Election Day. Polls will be open from 6am to 8pm.

For more information, please contact the Clerk's office at 973.378.7715 x1.



creative in common

A 501(c)(3)

An adaptive studio space in the heart of downtown South Orange, designed to facilitate creativity, foster collaboration, and engage community

CO-WORKING • STUDIO • TOOL SHOP

For more information:  www.creativeincommon.org  info@creativeincommon.org

VILLAGE HAPPENINGS CONTINUED

MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR THESE EVENTS HAPPENING AROUND THE VILLAGE THIS FALL

WEDNESDAYS THROUGH OCTOBER 29:

South Orange Farmers Market,
1pm to 6pm, Sloan Street
Parking Lot

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 16:

Community Coalition on Race
presents **"Integration: Rooted in
History, Rising Toward Justice"**
at Orange Lawn Tennis Club,
7pm

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17:

**Seton Village Food Truck
Festival,** Irvington Avenue,
5pm to 9:30pm

ARTIST STUDIO TOUR: NOVEMBER 1&2:

Visit 100+ Artists in their studios,
homes and group venues in
South Orange & Maplewood, NJ.

SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 15 AND 16:

**The Friends of the South
Orange Public Library's holiday
jewelry sale** at the Baird
Community Center, Saturday,
10am to 5pm, and Sunday, 1pm
to 4pm

MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 2026:

**Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
Observance & Luminary
Lighting** hosted by the
Community Coalition on Race.
The coalition is seeking
neighborhood leaders to
volunteer for this event.

SOPAC'S 20TH ANNIVERSARY SEASON

SPOAC's 20th anniversary
season continues this fall with a
lineup as vibrant as the
community it serves. In the
months ahead, you can:

- Celebrate Holi with the
high-energy sounds of
Red Baraat on **October 10**.
- Experience the powerhouse
drumming and artistry of
Cindy Blackman Santana on
October 18.
- Relive rock history with the
Last Waltz Celebration on
November 14.
- Swing into the sizzling jazz
of the **Hot Sardines** on
November 16.
- Laugh out loud with the
hilarious **Ladies of Laughter**
comedy showcase
on **November 20**.



FRIDAY, OCTOBER 17
**Seton Village Food Truck
Festival,** Irvington Avenue,
5pm to 9:30pm

RED BARAAT

OCT 10 | 7:30PM

*"the best party
band in years"*
(NPR)



**BUY
TICKETS
TODAY!**

SOPACnow.org



**JOSHUA
RADIN**
OCT 16 | 7:30PM



**CINDY
BLACKMAN
SANTANA
GROUP**
OCT 18 | 7:30PM



**THE HOT
SARDINES**
NOV 16 | 7:30PM



**JOHN
SCOFIELD
TRIO**
NOV 21 | 7:30PM



**DIRTY
DEEDS**
DEC 6 | 7:30PM

Natalie Farrell *presents*

STUDIO TOUR SOMA

South Orange & Maplewood



**Saturday & Sunday,
November 1 & 2, 11am-5pm**

See where the magic happens as more than 100 artists in two historic New Jersey towns welcome visitors into their studios




SOPAC
SOUTH ORANGE
PERFORMING ARTS CENTER



RECREATION &
CULTURAL AFFAIRS
SOUTH ORANGE VILLAGE

NOMINATE A VILLAGER OF THE MONTH

Do you know someone who lives or works in South Orange who makes our community brighter and more vibrant?

Celebrate their contributions by nominating them as a Villager of the Month. Embracing diversity of all kinds, this award honors individuals who embody the qualities that make South Orange shine. To submit a nomination, visit southorange.org/756/Villager-of-the-Month and tell us why your nominee deserves this honor!

WATER SYSTEM SALE

The Village expects the sale of the water system to New Jersey American Water to be completed in early October. Watch your mailbox and southorange.org for information on billing transition, utility contact information, lead line replacement and more.



A Smarter Way to Grow Your Business in South Orange

Attn: Makers and Business Owners

Are you ready to move beyond one-off events and into a consistent retail presence without the high costs and daily grind? **The South Orange Collaborative Marketplace (The Co-Lab)** offers a smarter way to grow your business, and we are looking for new members! We understand the challenges small businesses face, from expensive one-day pop-ups to the daunting commitment of a long-term lease. That's why we've launched a new business model designed to help you succeed.

VENDORS WANTED


LOCAL MAKERS, WE WANT YOU!



Join a Community, Not Just a Space

As a member of The Co-Lab, you'll be part of a vibrant community of **over 40 local entrepreneurs**. Starting this fall, we'll be using a new model that allows us to offer more local businesses shelf space and brand awareness without the need for you to staff your own space on a day-to-day basis.

Instead of hosting another one-off pop-up weekend event that yields few sales, our members receive an average of **23 consistent days of exposure each month** in a prime, high-traffic location in South Orange.

We work together to drive foot traffic, amplify your brand through coordinated marketing and events, and offer more visibility than you could achieve on your own.

Ultimately, we offer the value of a full-time retail presence, ongoing brand exposure, and community support—all at a fraction of the cost and effort.

Stop paying for one-day events and start investing in your consistent growth.

Interested in learning more?
Apply Here to Become a Member Today!
<https://colabsouthorange.org/about/#vendor-interest> Or Email
info@colabsouthorange.com

Did you know?

- The Co-Lab at South Orange is governed by a 501(c) (3) nonprofit board and acts as an incubator space, creating growth opportunities for small businesses.
- We support local entrepreneurs and creatives launching their brick-and-mortar businesses in downtown South Orange.
- We help mitigate some of the cost hurdles involved for start-ups.
- We offer flexible options so you're not stuck in a long-term lease you can't afford.



DePaolis Design is a multi-disciplinary independent brand strategy, experience, and design company that helps start-ups and some of the world's most recognized brands bring their purpose to life through design innovation.

Interested in discussing a project, please contact me by email or phone.

@dianedepaolis f@depaolisdesigns | depaolisdesign@gmail.com



**BRANDING
& DESIGN**

**DEPAOLIS
DESIGN**

201 532 2733
depaolisdesign.com

**DIANE
DEPAOLIS**





GET INVOLVED & STAY INFORMED

PUBLIC INFO SESSION
TOWN HALL DISCUSSION:
October 8 at 7:30pm,
Baird Community Center



LEARN MORE:
southorange.org/OSTF
QUESTIONS?
Email
so@southorange.org
VOTE:
Tuesday, November 4

Presorted Standard Mail
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #1085
West Caldwell, NJ

Municipal Offices
76 South Orange Ave
Suite 302
South Orange
New Jersey 07079



SMART SELLERS START EARLY.

COMPASS



*YOU BRING THE HOME. WE BRING
THE STRATEGY. LET'S SELL IT RIGHT.*

NJFROMATOZ.COM | 917.751.0448



ALLISON ZIEFERT
REAL ESTATE GROUP