

2001
REEXAMINATION
OF THE
MASTER PLAN

Readington Township, Hunterdon County,
New Jersey



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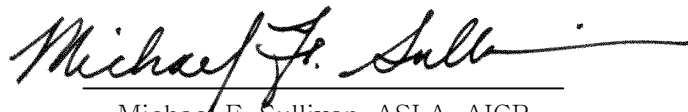
A Professional Corporation

*Planning Architecture Landscape Architecture Environmental Analysis
Affordable Housing Historic Preservation*

2001 REEXAMINATION OF THE MASTER PLAN

Adopted by the Readington Township Planning Board
December 10, 2001

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INTRODUCTION

The municipal Master Plan is a document, adopted by the Planning Board, which sets forth the policies for land use as envisioned by the municipality. The Master Plan is the principal document that addresses the manner and locations in which development, redevelopment, conservation or preservation occurs within a municipality. It is intended to guide the decisions made by public officials and those of private interests involving the use of land. Through its various elements, the Master Plan sets out a vision for the community in the coming years.

The Master Plan forms the legal foundation for the zoning ordinance and zoning map. New Jersey, among a handful of other states, specifically ties the planning of a community as embodied in the Master Plan with the zoning ordinance and zoning map. The zoning ordinance and map constitute the primary law governing the use of land at the local level. A zoning ordinance must be substantially consistent with the land use plan.

A Reexamination Report is a review of previously adopted master plans, amendments and local development regulations to determine whether the ideas and policy guidelines set forth therein are still applicable. The state land use law¹ requires that the Planning Board conduct a Reexamination at least every six years. Five specific topics are to be considered in the Reexamination Report. These are:

- a. *The major problems and objectives relating to land development in the municipality at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.*
- b. *The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.*
- c. *The extent to which there have been significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the master plan or development regulations as last revised, with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses, housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in state, county and municipal policies and objectives.*

¹ New Jersey. 1975. Chapter 55D. The Municipal Land Use Law, N.J.S.A. 40:55D-1 et. seq.

d. The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.

e. The recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law," P.L.1992, c.79 (C.40A:12A-1 et al.) into the land use plan element of the municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.²

This reexamination report addresses the first four of the required items. The last item is not relevant, since no redevelopment areas exist or are presently contemplated within the Township.



Readington Township has experienced no great shifts in the overall goals and objectives of its land use policies. The umbrella policy of rural preservation, which has its genesis in the 1979 report of the Open Space Committee, continues to provide the overall direction for the master plan and land development ordinances. The experience of over 20 years of development under this set of policies, and the incremental incorporation of new information, has led to the evolution of Readington's Master Plan and Land Development Ordinance as they exist today.

A reexamination of the master plan is an opportunity to evaluate the status of existing policies, in light of recent conditions, and to provide necessary direction for future planning efforts. This reexamination report does not propose any major changes in direction for the Township. Rather, it contains recommendations for the evaluation and refinement of the individual components of Readington's planning documents, and implementing ordinances, in order to strengthen the established rural preservation policies of the Township.

² N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89

PAST PLANNING EFFORTS

1989 Housing Element

The Housing Element was adopted in May of 1989 and was the basis upon which the New Jersey Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) granted substantive certification to Readington on June 26, 1989.

1990 Master Plan

The 1990 Master Plan, which (except for amendments) is currently in effect, was adopted by the Planning Board on January 22, 1990. Included within this document was a reexamination of the 1981 Master Plan and the following plan elements: Goals and Policies; Land Use; Housing; Conservation and Natural Resources; Agriculture; Community Facilities; Parks, Recreation and Open Space; Historic Preservation; Circulation; Utilities; Recycling; and a Statement of the Relationship to Other Planning Documents.

1995 Housing Element

In accordance with the COAH rules, which require housing elements to be certified every six years, Readington adopted a new Housing Element on June 19, 1995. A subsequent amendment to the Housing Element on June 24, 1996 was approved by COAH. On August 9, 1999, the Planning Board again amended the Housing Plan to effectuate some minor modifications. The Township Committee endorsed the Fair Share Plan that reflected those modifications on December 4, 2000, sending both documents to COAH for certification. As of January 22, 2001, the Housing Element and Fair Share Plan were still under review by COAH. In the summer of 2001, COAH notified Readington that the accessory apartment provisions should be removed from the plan and replaced with another form of housing that would have a higher likelihood of implementation. The housing element and fair share plan were subsequently amended to substitute units to be developed under a regional contribution agreement for those units formerly provided for under the accessory apartment provisions. The revised documents were submitted to COAH on November 1, 2001. It is anticipated that the revisions will be certified by COAH.

1995 Reexamination of the Master Plan

This Reexamination Report was prepared pursuant to the Municipal Land Use Law, which requires such a study to be undertaken no less than every six (6) years. The Planning Board adopted it on December 11, 1995.

1998 Amendments to the Master Plan

This document contained a series of amendments that updated or replaced some, but not all, elements of the 1990 Master Plan. The Goals and Policies element was updated to strengthen the policies related to farmland preservation and natural resources conservation. The Land Use plan element was updated, creating a new land use classification known as AR Agricultural Residential. A new element – Conservation, Natural Resources and Agriculture – was created, replacing the formerly separate Conservation and Natural Resources / Agriculture elements. The Parks, Recreation and Open Space element was also updated. A description of the relationship between Readington’s zoning and the zoning of adjacent municipalities, Hunterdon County land use policies and State planning policies was included. The Planning Board adopted this amendment package on November 23, 1998. This served as the basis for the creation of the AR Agricultural Residential Zone, which lowered the effective residential density in the majority of the Township to one dwelling unit for every 5 acres, in the case of a cluster development, or 6 acres, in the case of a conventional residential subdivision. The recommendations contained within the 1998 Master Plan amendments were implemented through the adoption of the AR zone, which was adopted by the Township Committee on December 22, 1998.

2000 Supplement to the Master Plan: Photographic Tour of the AR Zone

Readington has a highly desirable character that is often described as rural, natural or agricultural. While this character has been acknowledged in the Township’s planning documents, no visual record of those elements had been produced. This document was created in order to provide such documentation of the rural and agricultural elements that embody the sense of place that is experienced throughout the Township. This inventory contains a series of photographs, with descriptions, that are linked to street maps depicting a “tour route”. The location and direction of each of the photographs is indicated, so that one may be oriented with relative ease while viewing the document. It is anticipated that this visual inventory will be used to plan for the preservation of the various elements shown in the photographs and will be the basis for future land use and site development decisions. The Planning Board adopted this document on July 24, 2000.

2000 Amendment to the Master Plan: Senior Citizen Housing

This amendment was developed pursuant to recommendations contained within the 1995 Reexamination of the Master Plan, which called for the provision of additional senior citizen housing in appropriate locations within the Township. It examined potential sites with respect to several criteria, including proximity to the existing villages of Three Bridges and Whitehouse Station, proximity to sewer service areas, arterial roadway access and lot size. Recommendations were included for the location and type of senior citizen housing. The Planning Board adopted this amendment on September 11, 2000. This amendment served as the basis for the creation of new senior citizen zones that were adopted by the Township Committee on October 16, 2000.

2001 Amendment to the Master Plan: Parks, Recreation & Open Space; Circulation

This package of amendments was a direct result of a series of studies and reports that were produced in the spring of 2001. Coordinated by the Environmental Commission, these reports addressed critical wildlife habitat, local flora and fauna, water quality and open space and farmland preservation. Most prominently, a comprehensive Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI) was adopted which included many findings and recommendations regarding natural features within Readington. The amendments to the master plan brought renewed focus on open space preservation from the standpoint of habitat protection. It also documented a series of open space preservation priority areas and mapped those properties that should be targeted for preservation in the future. The series of reports, including the ERI, were adopted as appendices to the master plan.

On the circulation side, this update responded to recent data indicating that small, privately owned airports were under increasing pressure to convert to non-airport uses. The circulation element recommended that the Township seek to preserve Solberg-Hunterdon airport, through municipal acquisition if deemed necessary.

Major Problems and Objectives at the Time of the Adoption of the 1995 Reexamination Report and the Extent to which They Have Changed

Concern over the compatibility between highway commercial development on Route 202 and the existing agricultural character.

No major commercial development has been proposed along Route 202 since 1995. A Wawa was constructed at the intersection of Summer Road and Route 202. Adjacent residents in the Hunters Crossing community have complained about the idling of tractor-trailers in the parking lot. A proposed office development in Three Bridges was denied final approval due to the lapse of its preliminary approval and the subsequent zone change from RO-1, Research Office to SC-2, Senior Citizen. There remain stretches of Route 202 that are zoned for RO, Research Office that have not yet been developed. There are also older commercial sites that may be suitable for redevelopment. The PND zone, which exists along a portion Route 202, permits retail and business uses as conditional uses. Should the market support such activities, issues regarding the compatibility of commercial development and the agricultural environs remain valid.

Piecemeal development of individual lots along Route 22

The development and redevelopment of individual lots along Route 22 continues. Efforts to consolidate lots have not materialized. Many businesses located within the corridor display merchandise outdoors along the roadway edge, in violation of the Land Development Ordinance. While enhanced enforcement efforts have been underway, most of these businesses continue to operate in this manner. This issue remains valid.

PND and VR districts should be examined to determine whether they could accommodate additional growth

K. Hovnanian has begun construction of 98 age-restricted units on the former Calton Homes site, which was the largest remaining undeveloped PND tract. The PND zone only permits planned development on tracts that are 25 acres or greater. No tracts within the PND zone meet this minimum requirement. The VR district regulations govern all lots with in PND under 25 acres.

The Peck subdivision has been granted final approval by the Planning Board. Most of the larger lots within the VR zone have been identified as potential sites for senior citizen housing in the 2000 master plan update, although fully implementing ordinance(s) have not been adopted. If implemented, this leaves some small, isolated lots that may be developed.

Overcrowding of the municipal building

Construction of additional space in the municipal building is presently underway, with completion anticipated by fall 2001. This includes additional office space for the police and a new public meeting room. This matter requires no further consideration.

Elementary and middle school overcrowding

In the spring of 2001, the Board of Education conducted an analysis of population within Readington. This analysis included projections that school enrollment within the Township will increase 488 students or 23% by 2005.³ Based on this information, as well as some refinements to the projections this fall, the Board of Education is planning for the expansion of three schools, which has been estimated to cost \$29 million.

Vacant buildings/zoning along Route 22

Some of the vacant buildings along Route 22 have been the subjects of site plan applications. Nevertheless, there are some buildings on existing, undersized lots that remain. Little overall activity has been seen and the issue remains valid.

Agricultural preservation efforts have been enhanced

This remains true today, perhaps to an even greater degree. Preservation efforts statewide have been bolstered since 1998, when New Jersey voters approved a constitutional referendum intended to provide state funding for the preservation of 1 million acres of farmland and open space throughout New Jersey over the next ten years. The Garden State Preservation Trust was formed to implement this program. Readington has been taking full advantage of the opportunities created through the Trust in preserving open space and farmland throughout the Township. Nevertheless, lands remain within Readington that are currently farmed or suitable for agriculture that have not yet been preserved.

County preservation efforts are assisting Township's

This remains true, in that the County (along with the State) have been pursuing land acquisition along the South Branch Raritan River and the Round Valley reservoir. The County has completed a The Hunterdon County Farmland Preservation Plan in 2000 and has a plan for prioritizing open space and farmland preservation funds countywide.

³ Readington Board of Education. website. *Readington Township School Enrollments*.
<http://www.readington.k12.nj.us/boe/Demo-Space_Com/Enrollment/schoolenrollment.htm>
Accessed November 9, 2001.

Readington has no consistent policy for towers, given that recent court rulings have classified telecommunications towers as inherently beneficial uses

There have been several subsequent court rulings regarding cellular communications facilities. These have found that telecommunications towers are not necessarily inherently beneficial uses and have determined that negative visual and aesthetic impacts of towers may be a valid reason for the denial of an application to erect a tower. Readington has drafted specific ordinances to address wireless communications towers and antennas, in the face of evolving case law since 1998. The policies contained within the ordinance were also developed in cognizance of Readington's strong policies regarding preservation of rural character. Several applicants are now in the process of seeking approval for wireless facilities, consistent with the ordinance goal of co-location upon existing structures. The Township Engineer has prepared an inventory of possible sites where wireless communications antenna may be co-located.

Minimum residential lot sizes should be raised to 1.5 acres to permit the development of a septic disposal bed location and an alternative location

This adjustment to the minimum lot size has been made.

Specific actions recommended in the 1995 Reexamination Report were:

Update goals and objectives regarding conservation, open space and recreation to integrate open space preservation into the process of subdivision approval.

This issue was addressed in the 1998 Master Plan amendments, which updated preservation and conservation policies and created the AR Agricultural Residential land use classification. The AR classification, and the implementing AR zone, mandated that development on tracts 40 acres and greater should develop as a cluster subdivision with 70% of the tract set aside as open space or farmland.

The balance between residential and non-residential land uses should be reviewed in light of the changed economic conditions from 1990. The land use plan should be revised accordingly.

The land use plan was amended in 1998 to create the AR Agricultural Residential land use classification, reducing overall density within the core of the Township.

The Land Use Plan should be updated to include revisions as required by statute for the area surrounding Solberg airport.

Chapter 62 of the New Jersey Administrative Code Title 16, Air Safety and Zoning (specifically at NJAC 16:62-2.1) requires municipalities to delineate airport safety zones on the zoning map and to adopt a land use plan and zoning ordinance that is consistent with the chapter, including amendments to ensure that existing airports are permitted uses. This issue remains outstanding.

The master plan should identify potential locations for communications towers.

The Township Engineer has begun to identify potential locations where wireless antenna may be co-located on other structures. However, the master plan has not been amended to include these locations.

A new sub-plan element of the Conservation and Natural Resources Element be prepared devoted to the subject of a Greenways Network, including references to the Housing, Agriculture, Parks, Recreation, and Open Space, Historic Preservation and Circulation Elements as appropriate.

A Greenways plan was prepared and adopted with the last Master Plan Reexamination in 1995. Many of the elements of that plan have been incorporated within the Parks, Recreation and Open Space plan elements of the master plan.

The Land Use Element should be re-evaluated for providing an expanded range of senior citizen housing alternatives.

The Planning Board has addressed the provision of additional senior citizen housing through the 2000 amendment to the master plan, which identified the location of several senior citizen housing sites that should be zoned for such housing. Township Committee has already implemented the recommendations within that amendment on two sites. Action has not yet been taken to implement the remaining recommendations.

The Circulation Element should be reassessed with respect to the need and feasibility of retaining the alignment of the road extensions designated in the 1990 Master Plan.

This issue remains outstanding.

The Utilities Element should be amended to include the addition of the Hedgerow Estates parcel to the Raritan Township Municipal Utilities Authority service area and the status and projected capacity of the enlargement of the Readington - Lebanon Sewerage Authority treatment facility.

This issue remains valid.

The relationship of the Readington Township Master Plan to the final, official State Development and Redevelopment Plan should be addressed, along with a map which depicts the SDRP Planning Areas with the Township.

The 1998 Master Plan amendments did address the 1997 Interim State Plan, including a map depicting the planning areas. In 2000, the Office of State Planning (OSP) issued a formal consistency review of Readington's planning documents, pursuant to a petition from the Township. Readington's documents were found to be substantially consistent with the State Plan. However, OSP has made recommendations to address certain issues within the Township. The final State Plan was adopted on March 1, 2001. In October 2001, Readington was awarded \$66,400.00 as part of the Office of State Planning's Smart Growth Planning Grant Program in order to address the issue of commercial sprawl along Route 22/Whitehouse Station, pursuant to a recommendation within the consistency review.

Relevant Changes in Assumptions, Policies & Objectives at the Local, County and State Levels

Farmland Preservation

Congress declared farmland preservation of critical importance to the nation when it passed the 1996 Farm Bill, which authorized the USDA to establish a national Farmland Protection Program. The citizens of New Jersey voted, by a 2-to-1 margin, on November 3, 1998 to fund the farmland purchase program. This authorized \$1.5 billion in preservation funds over 10 years. In 1999, Readington was awarded \$3.18 million through the NJ State Agriculture Development Committee/Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board in Planning Incentive Grants for farmland preservation. Both the State and the County have become active supporters of farmland preservation. Readington has participated in their programs in order to maximize preservation efforts.

Open Space Preservation

As with farmland preservation, Readington has increased its efforts to obtain funding for open space preservation. In October of 1996 Readington Township submitted an application for a Green Trust Planning Incentive Project Grant. The grant application summarized Readington's Greenways and Open Space Preservation Goals and included both a systems map and an "Action Plan" map that set priorities for implementation.

In 1999, Readington applied to the office of NJ Green Acres requesting \$3.0 million in order supplement a 1996 Green Trust Planning Incentive Grant application. The Township was awarded a \$1 million grant and \$1 million loan

Readington was successful in supplementing their 1996 Green Trust grant again in 2000, receiving an additional \$0.5 million for open space preservation.

Several large tracts, with unique environmental attributes, have recently been preserved. Readington's open space preservation efforts, supported by Green Acres funding, are ongoing.

Hunterdon County Preservation funding

In 1999 County voters approved, by a two-to-one margin, a referendum that created a trust fund (with revenue from a tax of \$0.03/\$100.00 of total County equalized property value) that would be designated for the purchase of "*...lands for recreation, conservation, general open space, farmland preservation and historic preservation...*" Known as *The County Open Space, Recreation, Farmland Preservation and Historic Trust Fund*, this funding source will supplement existing resources until December 31, 2004.

Solberg-Hunterdon Airport Acquisition

In 2001 Readington Township commissioned a report that found several public purposes that would be advanced through the acquisition of the Solberg-Hunterdon Airport. These included preservation of airport operations, critical habitat preservation, farmland preservation and preservation of nearly 600 acres of open space. As discussed, the findings of this report were incorporated into the master plan in 2001. Nevertheless, the acquisition of the airport has become a high profile issue within the Township.

Hunterdon Central High School Expansion

Hunterdon Central High School is investigating sites within Readington for the construction of a new campus. While the exact details of this expansion are not known, this could have a significant impact upon the Township.

State Plan Consistency Review

In January of 2000, the Office of State Planning issued a report that compared Readington's planning documents to the State Plan, pursuant to a formal request from the Township. This report details several aspects of Readington's policies that are substantially consistent with the State Plan. It also identifies some elements that could be more consistent with the State Plan. This report can be used as a guide for future planning efforts within the Township. Recommendations within the consistency review include the following:

1. *The PA-2 area contains several large undeveloped parcels in a 6-acre residential district with sewer service, as well as large parcels in a 3-acre residential district. These boundary consistency issues should be re-examined. Similar ADA boundary consistency issues could be resolved in the Township's other planning areas.*

Office of State Planning (OSP) has based their delineation of the PA-2 Suburban planning area upon the existing sewer service area boundary. In their analysis of Readington's planning documents, they recognize that there are undeveloped areas within the sewer service area that are zoned for relatively low densities of 5/6 acres per dwelling (AR zone) and 3 acres per dwelling (RR zone). The intent of PA-2 is to provide for future suburban, commercial and retail growth on the outskirts of urban areas. Readington's low-density residential zoning scheme does not support the intent of PA-2. OSP suggests that Readington examine these areas to determine whether the zoning, and land use policies, should be modified to reflect the PA-2 designation or whether Readington should petition the OSP for a change in the mapping of the PA-2 area to reflect Readington's policies and other local factors.

2. *The proposed community development boundaries of Whitehouse Station Village Center are essentially the village's commercial core and should be considered for expansion to include the Village Residential, Planned Neighborhood Development, and Senior Citizen zones. Development of a transit and pedestrian-oriented village could be explored.*

In 1998, Readington identified Whitehouse station as a proposed village center, the *community development boundary*⁴ of the center being coterminous with the limits of the Village Commercial zone. Village centers, according to the SDRP, are primarily residential, with basic commercial services for nearby residents. OSP suggests that Readington consider expanding the community development boundary of Whitehouse Station to encompass surrounding residential areas, thereby becoming more consistent with village center policies.

OSP also suggests that Readington consider the development of transit and pedestrian-oriented facilities within Whitehouse Station. NJ Transit's Whitehouse Station is an existing focus of the village. Transit-oriented development would capitalize on this node and would seek to organize important civic and commercial uses and facilities around the station. According to NJ Transit's publication *Planning for Transit-Friendly Land Use* (1994) "transit friendly" means to *create an environment around a transit stop or station that supports pedestrian and transit use and to provide a mix of land uses in a safe, clean, vibrant and active place.*

Pedestrian-oriented development exhibits a scale that relates positively to the human scale and is connected to other uses through pedestrian pathways. A pedestrian-oriented environment contains a rich variety of physical elements that contribute to an overall experience that blends utilitarian needs with visual attractiveness and physical comfort.

While Readington's zoning does permit mixed-use development, the village development as conceived within the 1990 Master Plan has not yet materialized. The Township may want to review the land use policies determine if modifications are necessary.

3. *Transportation/transit, land use, and civic design integration of future development along the US 22 corridor with the existing mixed-used development in Whitehouse Station should be considered.*

OSP recognizes the existing patterns of isolated commercial strip development along Route 22 and suggests that future development along Route 22 should be more connected to Whitehouse Station. They suggest that Readington explore

⁴ The *Community Development Boundary* is required to separate a center from its environs and indicates the location of future development. The boundary is intended to reflect the location of physical features such as streets, streams, landforms and changes in the patterns of development.

providing for these connections through transportation /transit facilities improvements (pedestrian/bicycle paths, bus stop) and land use policies (mixed use development).

4. *The PA-3 area contains the Three Bridges village area, which is a small island of mixed-use development on sewer service, between the PA-4 and PA-4B areas. The proposed village center is the small commercial core and village residential district. The Three Bridges area should be considered for re-classification as a PA-4 area to further rural preservation goals, with the sewer service area as the proposed village center boundary.*

PA-3 is designated as the Fringe planning area in the SDRP. The PA-3 designation includes lands that are on the edges of the PA-2 Suburban planning area. These lands are characterized by isolated residential and commercial developments set within a predominantly rural landscape. Presently, Three Bridges is located within PA-3 and is proposed as a center. It is the opinion of OSP that the PA-3 designation may be inappropriate and that it may be more appropriate to designate Three Bridges as a village center within a PA-4 Rural planning area. The intent of PA-4 is more closely aligned with the policies of Readington with respect to preservation of agriculture and rural character.

Should Readington seek to designate Three Bridges as a village center, then OSP suggests that the community development boundary should be the limits of the existing sewer service area.

5. *The Township should consider including its critical historic and environmental sites⁵ on the Township's and the SDRP's Resource Management and Planning Map.*

Planning areas contained within the SDRP were based upon large areas containing similar characteristics. OSP recognizes that critical sites of relatively small size were not used as a basis for the delineation of the RPMM planning areas, given the broad-brush approach that was used, but that such sites may exist and deserve to be protected. For example, isolated critical sites may exist in PA-2 areas, where future growth is planned, but a critical site deserves a greater degree of protection from development pressures than the surrounding lands within PA-2. By adding critical sites to the RPMM, they may be protected in the same manner as areas that are included in the PA-5 Environmentally Sensitive planning area. It would be like having isolated areas of PA-5 within other

⁵ Critical Environmental/ Historic sites are defined in the SDRP as environmentally sensitive features of less than one square mile, such as wetlands, ponds, wellhead protection areas, ravines, endangered & threatened species habitats, stream corridors, steep slopes, historic sites and scenic vistas.

planning areas. Since location and identification of these sites is best performed locally, OSP suggests that Readington propose an amendment to the RPMM in order to identify any isolated critical sites.

6. *Future planning maps should consider including land use, environmental, and other features outside the municipal boundaries to provide a better regional perspective and to identify potential issues for intergovernmental or regional action.*

Readington's master plan mapping stops at the Township boundary, with the exception of zoning of the adjacent municipalities. OSP suggests that environmental elements and other features beyond the municipal boundary be examined.

7. *Readington's success with transportation development districts (TDDs) illustrates how local problems can be resolved on an inter-local or regional basis. The Township should consider incorporating future municipal planning efforts with local objectives and strategies to address issues that are typically perceived regional environmental issues, such as air and water quality, watershed management, and energy conservation.*

OSP suggests that Readington examine local means to address air quality, water quality, watershed management, energy conservation and other conservation matters that have not been addressed in the present planning efforts.

8. *An explanation of the septic system carrying capacity analyses for the rural and agricultural portion of the Township should be considered in a master plan appendix document.*

OSP suggests that Readington provide an appendix in the master plan that explains the methods used in determining carrying capacity in the RR - and AR - zoned areas of the Township. This would include a description of the modified Trela-Douglas nitrate dilution model that was provided to Readington by the NJGS during the analysis that lead to the recommendations contained within the 1998 Amendment to the Master Plan.

9. *Stormwater management and flooding issues should be considered for exploration in the master plan.*

The *Municipal Land Use Law*⁶ requires every municipality in the State to prepare a storm water management plan and an ordinance to implement the plan.

⁶ NJSA 40:55D-93 *Storm water management plan; implementing ordinance*

Although the Township's Land Development Ordinance (LDO) presently includes storm water management provisions, the master plan does not include an element to address storm water. OSP suggests that the master plan address storm water management and flood issues.

10. *The Township should consider including in the conservation, natural resources, and agriculture element performance standards for developing in steep slope areas and around agricultural lands.*

OSP suggests that the master plan elements addressing conservation, natural resources and agriculture go beyond lot size/density and land use recommendations to include recommendations for design standards that would govern the physical manifestation of permitted uses to ensure that degradation of existing environmental resources is minimized.

11. *Potential hazardous waste and environmental clean-up sites, as well as non-point source pollution, should be considered for exploration. The recycling and waste management element could be updated for current waste management measures.*

OSP suggests that Readington identify potentially contaminated sites and sources of non-point pollution and explore options for cleanup, redevelopment or conversion.

OSP suggests that Readington update the recycling element.

12. *The historic preservation element should be considered for re-examination to include a resource significance, integrity, and potential threat analysis. The findings of these analyses will provide better guidance for future historic preservation policy.*

OSP suggests that Readington update the historic preservation element to go beyond identification of resources and to develop strategies for preservation based on a hierarchy of resource significance and potential threats.

13. *The Township should consider exploring whether an expedited review process would be useful in promoting either its environmental protection or economic development goals.*

OSP suggests that Readington explore the impacts of expediting the review of development applications in order to facilitate environmental protection and economic development.

14. *In order to plan better fiscally for interim levels of anticipated growth, the Township should consider conducting capacity analyses for local water and sewer service areas, local roads, municipal facilities, schools, etc., based on existing trends, projected build-out, as well as interim time periods, such as 2010 and 2020. The Board of Education and water and sewer franchise providers should be involved in this analysis process.*

OSP suggests that Readington determine future demand for water service areas, sewer service areas, local roads, schools and other municipal facilities based upon the build out of the present zoning.

15. *The 1988 sewer and water service area maps should be updated in the next master plan re-examination. Infrastructure service lines should be considered for illustration, along with approved service delivery areas.*

OSP suggests updating the sewer and water service areas in the master plan and depicting the location of service lines on the maps.

16. *The Township should consider updating the Circulation element in light of the local transportation development district (TDD) program and prospective growth in the northern part of the Township. NJ Transit, NJDOT, and Hunterdon County should be involved in this process, as well. The Township should also explore full NJDOT approval of the local TTD program.*

OSP suggests that Readington consider an update of the circulation plan element.

17. *Airport safety zoning and planning concerns should be reconsidered, as recommended in 1995. Alternative transit issues, such as bus and train service, as well as freight rail service and pedestrian sidewalks and bikeways also should be given greater focus.*

OSP suggests that Readington consider addressing airport safety issues around Solberg Airport and consider more in-depth exploration of alternative transportation modes.

18. *The Township should consider initiating a visioning process to develop consensus on community design opportunities to integrate Whitehouse village with other development on US 22 and future corridor growth in a center-based concept.*

OSP suggests that the form and finish of future community design and development within the village of Whitehouse Station, and nearby US Route 22 development, be determined through a visioning process. Visioning is a process

where community stakeholders are brought together to imagine the future without the constraints of factors such as existing infrastructure and capital funding. Essentially, it is a series of brainstorming sessions intended to allow participants to visualize a picture of a future desired state and then let them work backward to develop a plan of how to achieve the vision. The outcomes of a visioning process represent a consensus of the participants.

19. *Resource capacity planning should be considered for the PA-2 area, where most of the intensive growth will be channeled, in order to address public infrastructure, roadway, public facility and service cost issues. Policies to encourage greater densities in the PA-2 area to absorb regional residential and non-residential growth demands should be explored. This process also should incorporate a re-examination of the basic one unit per acre residential density in the PA-2, in order to maximize local infrastructure and absorb regional growth demands from spreading into the region's PA-3, PA-4, and PA-5 areas.*

OSP recommends that Readington examine the capacity of existing primary infrastructure to support future growth in the PA-2 area, which flanks US Route 22. OSP suggests that Readington explore creating higher densities within the PA-2 area in order to absorb future growth.

20. *As part of its overall goal to create village centers in Whitehouse and Three Bridges, to redevelop uses along US 22, and to preserve the open spaces and vistas of the village's environs, the Township should consider adopting some of the community design-oriented policies in the SDRP Interim Plan. Some of these suggested design policies include; using special landscape design elements, reducing visual impacts of the automobile, redesigning sprawl, and redesigning corridor signage and lighting to reduce visual pollution.*

OSP suggests that Readington consider adopting community design policies outlined within the SDRP Interim Plan⁷ to facilitate development of aesthetically pleasing and spatially comfortable public areas in both Whitehouse village and Three Bridges. These recommendations are consistent with the 2001 State Plan.

21. *Future planning documents should include a description of the public participation process that was used to develop the plan.*

OSP suggests that the master plan and other documents include descriptions of the means in which the public participated in the development of the plans, such as visioning sessions and public hearings.

⁷ *The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan: Interim Plan, March 31,1999, pp 136-140*

22. *The Township should consider incorporating an implementation agenda, as well as indicators and targets so that the Township can monitor its community development progress.*

OSP suggests that Readington develop an agenda for the implementation of the goals, objectives, policies and recommendations contained within updated planning documents.

The 2001 State Plan

The Office of State Planning finalized the State Plan in March of 2001. This sets forth the official goals, policies and strategies for the spectrum of land use issues within New Jersey. Although the policies within the State Plan have changed little since the 1997 interim plan, this document will serve as a touchstone for Readington's future planning efforts.

Smart Growth Planning Grant

In October 2001, the Office of State Planning announced that Readington had been awarded \$66,400.00 for a study to check commercial sprawl on the Route 22 Corridor and Whitehouse Station Center. This grant was an outgrowth of recommendations in the OSP consistency review, which found that the Route 22 corridor had several issues relating to land use, transportation, utilities and physical design. The awarding of the grant will require Readington to address this matter in 2002.

Three Bridges Sewer Service Area

The Township has exceeded its allocation from the Raritan Township Municipal Utilities Authority (RTMUA). Additional service is not available in this area. The RTMUA is requiring that Readington perform a study to identify sources of infiltration and to undertake monitoring after any repairs are done to verify the flows.

Environmental Resources Inventory

Readington's Environmental Resource Inventory, completed in April 2001, punctuates an enhanced awareness of the natural systems and features that exists within the Township. This comprehensive inventory brings together information that can be used as a basis for future land use policies. The recommendations within this document highlight the need for active stewardship of the natural heritage of Readington.

Recommendations

Route 202

Route 202 in Readington has been identified as having retained a large amount of open farmland along its length, which contrasts to the manner in which it has been inundated with strip commercial development outside of the Township. Readington has maintained steady progress in farmland preservation within the heart of the Township, but the edges of the Township have not been addressed from a rural preservation standpoint. Along Route 202, the current zoning of RO ♦ Research Office, B♦ Business and PND ♦ Planned Neighborhood Development have the potential to transform the remaining rural character to that of a typical suburban corridor. The non-residential land use classifications along Route 202 should be re-visited to determine if they should be modified or replaced to ensure the preservation of the rural roadside character. These lands should also be examined in the context of land preservation objectives.

Route 22

The overall development pattern along Route 22 also contains random commercial and residential developments strung out along its length. The corridor exhibits many problems that are typical of older highway corridors: undersized lots, numerous private driveway intersections, deteriorating residential and commercial structures and intrusive commercial signage. The roadside landscape is, with a few exceptions, visually unappealing and functions poorly in terms of traffic flow, vehicular access and parking. The present land use pattern does not provide adequate pedestrian facilities or any connections with the existing natural environment. Constraints on development due to lot size and ownership patterns perpetuate isolated lot development. The public wastewater system is inadequate to serve the future build out of the corridor as envisioned in current Township planning and land use policies.

In response to this problematic area, the Office of State Planning has granted Readington a Smart Growth Planning Grant. This award of \$66,400.00 will provide the incentive for the Township to address, in a comprehensive manner, the numerous issues that are relevant to Route 22 and the village of Whitehouse Station. It is anticipated that the work on this planning study will begin in early 2002.

Stormwater Management Plan

The Municipal Land Use Law requires that each municipality prepare a storm water management plan and ordinance⁸. This is required to be integrated within the municipal master plan. Readington should prepare and adopt a stormwater management plan.

⁸ New Jersey. 1975. Chapter 55D Planning, Zoning, Etc. *NJSA 40:55D-93 Storm water management plan; implementing ordinance*

Sewer Service Areas

The relationship between zoning and sewer service areas in Whitehouse Station and Three Bridges should be examined. The zoning designations within these areas should be reevaluated to determine if changes should be made to better align land use regulations with the ability to provide public sanitary sewer service to developable sites.

AR ♦ Agricultural Residential Zone

The AR zone, which was adopted in 1998, was based, in part, on the location of the Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Area Boundary (ADA). Within the 1998 master plan update, it was acknowledged that areas outside of the ADA fit the criteria for inclusion within the AR zone. The AR zone should be reexamined to determine which of these additional areas should be included, and the zoning map should be updated accordingly.

SSR ♦ Steep Slope Residential Zone

The SSR zone is intended to permit single-family residential development while also preserving the wooded hillsides of Round Mountain and Cushetunk Mountain that mark the picturesque northwestern edge of the Township. The minimum lot size, under a conventional subdivision, is five (5) acres. In the case of a residential open space cluster development, the minimum lot size is two (2) acres. Renewed focus upon woodlands within the Township has highlighted the need for these wooded hillsides as critical wildlife habitat and for surface water quality. The Township has taken agriculture out of this zone as a permitted use in order to better facilitate woodland protection in the future. In order to ensure the preservation of the woodland resources within this zone, the minimum lot size should be increased and the residential cluster option should be reevaluated.

RR ♦ Rural Residential Zone

The RR zone permits conventional subdivisions on three (3) acre lots and cluster subdivisions with a 1.5 -acre minimum lot size. The Environmental Resource Inventory identified many critical areas of concern within the RR zone, including stream corridors, steep slopes, grasslands and woodland habitat. These areas should be examined to determine whether another zoning designation is appropriate or whether the minimum lot sizes within the RR zone should be increased.

RO ♦ Research Office Zone

The RO zone along Route 22 is adjacent to several areas of preserved farmland and open space. The consolidation of these lots into campuses has not progressed. In the case of the parcels to the north of the Ryland Inn, an approved office development remains dormant, with several extensions of the site plan approval. While it is anticipated that these tracts will be examined during the Route 22 Smart Growth Study, the zoning of these tracts should be evaluated to determine if a more appropriate designation is warranted. These areas should also be evaluated with respect to land preservation objectives.

Affordable Housing

The Lutheran Social Ministries site on Route 202 has not progressed in the fulfillment of the 30 low- and moderate- income apartments that are to be constructed. Lacking sewer capacity, it is not anticipated that this project will get underway in the near future. The Planning Board and the Township should facilitate a solution that would permit these units to be constructed. This could entail relocation of the project to another property.

Parking Lot Design

Parking lots have several environmental issues: heat generation, air pollutants, impervious cover, runoff water quality and downstream pollution. The LDO contains minimum parking standards, but does not contain maximum standards. Alternative, impervious, pavements, or reserve areas, are not permitted under the LDO. The parking lot standards should be redesigned to require more shade trees, put lower limits on impervious cover and permit the utilization of alternative pavements where appropriate.

Flora and Fauna

The Environmental Resource Inventory identifies several areas of critical wildlife habitat within Readington. The LDO should be revised to require protection of these habitats, possibly through the use of buffers or overlay zones.

Woodlands

Although the SSR district is intended to preserve woodlands, wooded areas are located within many other areas of the Township. The LDO should be revised to create better protection of woodlands throughout the Readington. Reforestation should also be addressed.

Tree Protection

The LDO has minimal standards for the retention of trees during development. While the ordinance requires a great deal of inventory, there is little direction given on what to do with trees. The LDO should be revised to include enhanced tree preservation and replacement standards.

Stream Corridors

The stream corridor regulations have been revised to remove many of the uses that would potentially result in damage to the corridor. However, the entire stream corridor ordinance should be examined to determine if any other modifications are necessary to strengthen stream protection.

Impervious Cover

The amount of impervious cover that is permitted within the non-residential zones should be reduced to the lowest amount possible to facilitate reductions in stormwater runoff and to increase surface water quality.

Scenic Resources

Readington is replete with rural vistas that largely define its scenic quality. There are no provisions in the LDO that protect scenic vistas or roadside views. Scenic resources within the Township should be identified and ordinances drafted to ensure the preservation of those resources.

B ♦ Business Zone

The B zone, which runs along Route 22, will be studied for as part of the Smart Growth Grant project. However, the portion of the B zone along Old Highway 28 in Whitehouse may require more immediate attention. In this area there are many residential dwellings within a stable, historic neighborhood. Several use variances have been obtained for renovations and additions to residences here. It is recommended that the zoning in this area be revised to reflect the existing residential neighborhood and to alleviate the burden to homeowners who are improving their dwellings.

Senior Citizen Housing

The Township has completed a senior citizen housing element of the master plan and has proceeded with some rezoning in accordance with that plan. Those efforts should

continue and, as individual opportunities arise, the Township should seek to fulfill the plan.

OSP Consistency Review

The recommendations within the 2000 consistency review from the Office of State Planning should be addressed as deemed necessary by the Planning Board.

Open Space and Farmland Preservation

Preservation efforts should continue, given the ongoing support of the State and Hunterdon County. The recently updated Parks, Recreation and Open Space Plan should be updated to reflect any changes in preservation priorities and opportunities as they arise, but no immediate changes are necessary to the master plan.

Historic Preservation Plan Element

The Historic Preservation Plan Element has not been updated since 1990. This element should be updated to contain design guidelines for historic structures and districts.

Recycling Plan Element

The Recycling Plan Element has not been updated since the 1990 master plan. This element should be updated.

Circulation Plan Element

This element should be updated to reflect some of the recent County road modifications and to identify roads that contribute to the rural character of the Township. Pedestrian and bicycle circulation should also be addressed. Interrelationships between various transportation modes and public transportation should be evaluated.

Community Facilities Plan Element

This element should be updated to address some of the recent improvements to the municipal building, recent school enrollment projections and public safety needs.

Residential Site Improvement Standards

The State has adopted statewide standards for site elements related to residential development, including streets, sidewalks and construction details. The Land Development Ordinance should be revised to include those standards and to remove any standards that are in conflict.

Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Area (ADA)

Readington continues to seek funds for the preservation of farmland, both within and outside of the ADA. The Township has also identified lands that appear to fit the criteria for inclusion within the ADA. The boundaries of the ADA should be examined to determine whether changes are appropriate. Changes in the ADA boundary may warrant revisions to the boundaries of zoning districts.