

# PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

## SOMERSET COUNTY INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK

### FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

February 2013

#### *What is the purpose of the County Investment Framework?*

Answer: For the past three (3) years, the Somerset County Planning Board has been working closely with municipal officials, planners and other stakeholders to complete the preparation of a series of GIS-based infrastructure, community and environmental asset maps and develop an objective method for applying these GIS tools for identifying priority growth and preservation areas countywide. The results are reflected in a new *County Investment Framework Map*, which will be incorporated into the updated “Sustainable Somerset: the Strategic Plan for Somerset County”, as well as provide the geographic framework for the identification of projects, programs and initiatives that support job creation and private sector investment as part of the Somerset County Business Partnership’s Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the County. It can also be used to:

- serve as the land use and infrastructure investment reference when addressing wastewater management plan amendments and updates;
- guide the development of the County’s Capital Transportation Improvement Program to better link land use and transportation decisions;
- coordinate the update of other county agency functional plans such as the Park, Recreation and Open Space Plan and Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan, and to target preservation funding;
- inform the location of affordable housing and special needs group homes;
- advance the economic competitiveness of the County’s Priority Investment Framework and linkages with the State’s Regional Innovation Clusters;
- communicate Somerset County’s priorities as part of the 13-county North Jersey “Together North Jersey” regional planning initiative;
- highlight areas in the County where various State Agency funding, programs and incentives should be invested;
- review and comment on local master plans, sub-plans and redevelopment plans to encourage consistency with the County Investment Framework and facilitate development of “local scorecards” under the State Strategic Plan; and
- make advisory positions known to local boards as part of the County Planning Board’s review authority to identify potential conflicts or areas of consistency presented by projects of regional significance.

#### *What is its relationship to state and local planning?*

Answer: The Somerset County Investment Framework customizes the criteria-based Priority Investment Area concepts described in the Draft Final State Strategic Plan (SSP), which was proposed for adoption and released for public review by the State Planning Commission (SPC) on October 9, 2012 and the Advance Notice of Rules released in February 2012, to reflect Somerset County’s unique regional and local characteristics and priorities. The SSP calls for “phasing out” the State Plan Policy Map adopted in 2001, and replacing it with a new

approach for identifying Priority Investment Areas. The SSP specifies the use of a criteria-based system for identifying areas for growth, limited growth, open space conservation and agriculture in accordance with the State Planning Act. State agencies will use the new SSP investment area designations as the basis for aligning State Agency functional plans, regulations, programs and operations as well as for focusing State investments. It will also be used to increase planning coordination among all levels of government. Somerset County and its municipalities have a long history of support for state planning. The lessons learned in developing the Investment Framework for Somerset County have been shared with the State Office for Planning Advocacy and have helped to shape the concepts contained in the SSP.

***What are the results to date?***

Answer: A Draft Final Somerset County Investment Framework Map that identifies the following land use categories has been prepared and endorsed by the Somerset County Planning Board: Priority Growth Investment Areas (PGIAs); Alternate Growth Investment Areas (AGIAs); Local Priority Areas (LPAs); Priority Preservation Investment Areas (PPIAs); and Limited Growth Investment Areas (LGIAs). Twenty-four (24) PGIAs and fifteen (15) LPAs are shown. In addition, nearly half of the County's land area (94,757 acres) has been categorized as PPIAs. These areas and their preliminary boundaries are subject to further refinement and endorsement by municipal planners and officials prior to adoption by the County. Once adopted, the County Investment Framework will be submitted to the State for designation, through which Somerset County and its municipalities will become eligible for State investments and incentives that support implementation.

***What are Regional Innovation Clusters (RICs)?***

Answer: To meet the "Targeted Economic Growth" goal in the SSP, Regional Innovation Clusters (RICs) have been identified. A RIC is defined in the SSP as "an area that includes an interrelated assemblage of businesses of statewide significance, along with suppliers, trade associations, and higher education/workforce training facilities with existing or planned infrastructure to support the expansion of existing business along with the recruitment of new businesses and other related development with a focus on adapting to new market opportunities." They tend not to follow geographic boundaries, occurring at a regional level, in close proximity to infrastructure and community assets. The SSP identifies the following existing industry clusters that already contribute significantly to the State's economy: Bio/Pharmaceuticals & Life Science, Transportation, Logistics & Distribution, Finance, Manufacturing, Technology and Health Care. The SSP identifies the following additional economic growth opportunities for the State: Green Energy; Tourism; Farming, Fishing and Food; and State and National Defense. The SSP calls for the identification of pilot RICs and what is needed to spur their growth. Economic growth within Priority Growth Investment Areas (PGIAs) that are aligned with the RICs that are present in the County is encouraged.

***What are Priority Growth Investment Areas (PGIAs)?***

Answer: PGIAs are places where more significant development and redevelopment is preferred, and where public and private investments and initiatives that support significant growth and redevelopment will be prioritized. Lands that comprise 1) Former State Plan Policy Map – Metropolitan Planning Areas (PA 1) and Nodes; 2) Unexpired State Planning Commission (SPC)-approved Centers, Urban Complexes and other areas designated for development or redevelopment as a result of the SPC formally endorsing municipal or county plans 3) State-identified Transfer of Development Rights "Receiving Areas" 4) Municipally Designated "Urban Enterprise Zones", 5) Municipally Designated "Areas in Need of Redevelopment" or "Areas in Need of

Rehabilitation”, 6) Approved Foreign Trade Zones, 7) Land within Higher Education Campuses suitable for development/redevelopment, 8) NJDOT Certified Transit Villages, 9) “Urban Transit Hubs” as defined by NJEDA’s Urban Transit Hub Tax Credit Program, 10) Land owned by the NJ Sports & Exposition Authority and 11) Highlands Council Designated Centers and Redevelopment Areas are eligible. Of these, Somerset County has areas that are represented on the former State Plan Policy Map as PA 1, 12 designated centers, 2 transit villages, one higher education facility (Raritan Valley Community College), several municipally-designated Redevelopment Areas and two closed military facilities. Counties, in coordination with municipalities, can identify additional PGAs based on County-specific criteria including appropriate local land use and zoning, access to public sewer and water service, availability of transportation and other infrastructure and proximity to community assets. PGAs must contain an appropriate amount of unconstrained land, (developed and/or undeveloped). Development and redevelopment activities within PGAs should capitalize upon and advance the existing business/community/workforce/infrastructure network and simultaneously enhance and restore existing historic and environmental assets. Municipal support will be required in order for eligible areas to be designated as PGAs.

***What is an Alternate Growth Investment Area (AGIA)?***

Answer: AGIAs are areas that have existing or planned infrastructure that will lead to development and redevelopment opportunities. State investments related to the efficient development and redevelopment of previously developed sites and optimization of existing settlement patterns should be encouraged, but to a lesser priority than PGAs. In Somerset County, lands that are within updated sanitary sewer service areas and that are not PGAs are identified as AGIAs. In Somerset County, AGIAs consist of established neighborhoods where public and private sector investments that enhance quality of life, strengthen community services and maintain and modernize existing infrastructure and facilities are supported. Environmentally sensitive areas within AGIAs should be protected through land stewardship best management practices.

***What is a Local Priority Area (LPA)?***

Answer: The LPAs that the County has identified in coordination with its municipalities are a subset of Alternate Growth Investment Areas (AGIAs). They are predominantly comprised of small, traditional villages and towns that meet the Core PGA Criteria. However, due to their small scale, unique historic and cultural characteristics, infrastructure and environmental constraints and community preferences, they are not suited for significant growth. A few LPAs are comprised of well-defined corporate development nodes within major highway corridors that have many of the characteristics of PGAs but are categorized as LPAs in accordance with municipal preferences. Public and private sector investments that strengthen the local economy by supporting community-oriented small business growth and retention, enhance quality of life and preserve community character are encouraged in these areas.

***What is a Priority Preservation Investment Areas (PPIA)?***

Answer: PPIAs are areas where land preservation, agricultural development and retention, historic preservation, environmental protection and stewardship are preferred and where investments that support these activities are encouraged. Large-scale State investment that may lead to additional development should not be prioritized in these areas. PPIAs are comprised of land permanently protected through public investment or density transfer, land targeted for preservation within the County Open Space Master Plan and the State Comprehensive

Outdoor Recreation Plan, and lands targeted for preservation by municipalities through approved Planning Incentive Grant applications. Counties, in coordination with municipalities, can identify additional PPIAs based on additional County-specific criteria. PPIAs comprised of existing preserved lands can exist within each land use category. PPIAs also include greenway linkages that traverse other land use categories such as PGAs and AGAs. They are places where the redevelopment and re-use of existing facilities and infrastructure together with environmental restoration and open space enhancements are simultaneously promoted.

***What is a Limited Growth Investment Area (LGIA)?***

Answer: LGIAs are areas that do not have existing or planned infrastructure that will lead to a significant degree of additional new development and redevelopment opportunities. Large scale investment that may lead to additional development should not be prioritized in these areas. Though to a lesser degree than PPIAs, State investments in land protection, and that support and enhance the agricultural and tourism industries will be encouraged. In Somerset County, LGIAs are generally comprised of low-density neighborhoods that are served by individual on-site septic systems and many contain significant environmentally sensitive areas. LGIAs retain some rural character although the landscape has become fragmented due to previous land use and development patterns. However, they continue to offer opportunities for environmental, agricultural and open space protection, primarily through land stewardship best management practices. Public and private sector investments that enhance quality of life, improve community services, maintain and modernize existing infrastructure, and complete greenway linkages are encouraged in LGIAs.

***Why coordinate state, county and local planning?***

Answer: Tactical alignment of land use planning at the state, county and local levels can enable effective resource allocation, coordination and cooperation among all jurisdictions and the private sector needed to achieve vibrant communities, economic revitalization and environmental protection. The alignment of adopted plans, policies and regulations, which are intended to guide land use and infrastructure investment decisions at each level of government, provides the highest level of certainty to property owners and investors regarding the preferred future use for a site. The County Investment Framework can serve as the over-arching geographic framework for identifying and prioritizing projects that will strengthen the region's resiliency and protect the County's community, infrastructure and environmental assets from disasters; and inform decisions regarding the use of short- and long-term recovery resources. An annual update process and ongoing amendment opportunities will enable updated information and changes in local planning priorities to be incorporated.

For more information, please visit the Somerset County Planning Board website:

<http://www.co.somerset.nj.us/planweb/sustainable/index.htm>

Or contact: Somerset County Planning Board

20 Grove St., P.O. Box 3000

Somerville, NJ 08876

Phone: (908) 231-7021

E-mail: [PlanningBd@co.somerset.nj.us](mailto:PlanningBd@co.somerset.nj.us)