

# PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

## SOMERSET COUNTY INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK

### SCREENING CRITERIA AND METHODOLOGY

February 2013

#### **I. BACKGROUND**

The Somerset County Planning Board embarked on the development of a County Investment Framework Map, which identifies areas targeted for growth and preservation, as part of the update of the “Sustainable Somerset: The Strategic Plan for Somerset County” . The County Investment Framework Map was developed using a series of computer-based Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapped datasets, which illustrate the County’s infrastructure, community and environmental assets. Some of the GIS datasets used for this initiative were developed, and are maintained by the County Planning Division, and others were developed and are maintained by the State and other entities. These datasets were used as screening tools for identifying areas in the County that are most suitable for growth, limited growth and preservation. The County Investment Framework and Asset Maps will be adopted as part of the updated Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan. The County Planning Board worked closely with municipal officials and planners to assure the County’s asset maps comprise the most current, accurate GIS-based information available. The County Planning Board also collaborated with local and regional stakeholders to determine the screening criteria and method through which the various GIS datasets were applied; and to refine the Draft County Investment Framework Map to better reflect existing conditions and local land use priorities.

#### **II. PURPOSE**

The County Investment Framework identifies areas that have been prioritized for growth and preservation, as well as areas where limited growth should occur. The County Investment Framework developed through this process is intended to provide the basis for coordinating public and private sector investments and initiatives. It will be used to align plans, policies and programs among all levels of government. It is anticipated that designation of the County’s Investment Framework by the State Planning Commission (SPC) will provide the County and its municipalities with priority access to State discretionary funding and State agency support for implementing the Plan.

#### **III. COORDINATION WITH THE STATE STRATEGIC PLAN**

The County collaborated with the NJ Office for Planning Advocacy (OPA) throughout the development of the County Investment Framework, resulting in the close coordination with the criteria-based priority investment area concepts in the State Strategic Plan (SSP), which was proposed for adoption and released for public review by the State Planning Commission on October 9, 2012. The County’s work began with the development of GIS-based asset maps and the identification of growth opportunity areas as part of the Sustainable Somerset Strategic Planning Process, and builds upon earlier versions of the Draft Final SSP and the Advance Notice of Rules (ANR): Priority Investment Area Criteria, 2-13-12. The County Planning Board aligned its County Investment Framework with the definitions and criteria found in the SSP and ANR to strengthen the coordination between the County and State Plans. At its October 2012 Meeting, the State Planning Commission postponed adoption of the SSP so that a new section could be added that guides Hurricane Sandy recovery efforts and advances a more comprehensive approach to hazard mitigation and resiliency planning. In December 2012, President Obama issued an executive order that established a task force to provide for the coordination necessary to support rebuilding. The order states that the “rebuilding process must address existing and future risks and vulnerabilities and promote the long-term sustainability of communities and ecosystems”. The County Planning Board

recognizes the importance of this topic and is including it in the County's own Strategic Plan. The County Investment Framework can serve as the over-arching geographic framework for planning and prioritizing projects that will strengthen the region's resiliency and protect the County's community, infrastructure and environmental assets. It can also help inform decisions regarding the use of federal, state and local short-and long-term recovery resources.

#### **IV. COLLABORATION WITH MUNICIPALITIES AND OTHER STAKEHOLDERS**

The October 2012 SSP states that "the new criteria-based system will support implementation of the strategic framework and will encourage connections with existing or new county/regional plans with the SSP. The State Planning Commission will work with Regional Planning Entities, counties and municipalities to ensure that current regional planning efforts are respected to the greatest degree possible". The November 2012 SSP also specifies that "the State Planning Commission (SPC) will adopt rules with requirements and an approval process for county requests. The rules to add new areas will require counties to work with municipalities to tailor criteria to individual circumstances/projects and identify solutions to resolve conflicts if any exist". This provision in the October 2012 SSP reinforces the bottom-up process the County Planning Board implemented over the past 3 years, through which the County Investment Framework was developed. The County Planning Board engaged municipal officials and planners, various state agencies, other county planners from throughout the State, members of New Jersey's professional planning community, regional planning organizations and various stakeholder groups. An overview of the County's stakeholder involvement process and other related information are available on the County Planning Board's website. The Somerset County Investment Framework is identified in the October 2012 SSP as a county plan that could be connected to the new SSP system, provided there is support from the affected municipalities.

The County Investment Framework builds upon the long history of support for state planning shared by Somerset County and its municipalities. The adopted Somerset County Master Plan, municipal master plans and zoning ordinances are substantially consistent with the 2001 State Development and Redevelopment Plan. Twelve (12) municipalities pursued and achieved center designation from the SPC, and Somerset County has the first tri-municipal regional center, designated by the SPC in 1999. The approach used by the County Planning Board for developing the County Investment Framework is intended to reflect and reinforce this long history of sound comprehensive planning and support for the principles of smart growth and sustainable development at the state, county and municipal levels. It also embraces the SSP's "Garden State Values" and the Vision, Guiding Principles and Objectives of the draft Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan.

#### **V. INVESTMENT AREAS**

Both the Somerset County Investment Framework and the SSP utilize the following four designations or land use categories to "identify areas for growth, agriculture, open space conservation and other appropriate designations" pursuant to the State Planning Act:

- Priority Growth Investment Areas
- Alternate Growth Investment Areas
- Limited Growth Investment Areas
- Priority Preservation Investment Areas

In Somerset County, an additional "Local Priority Area" category is used, which is a subset of Alternate Growth Investment Areas. Local Priority Areas meet the criteria for PGIA designation but PGIA designation for these areas is not supported at the local level. Each of these designation categories are described below:

## 1) PRIORITY GROWTH INVESTMENT AREAS (PGIA)

Both the October 2012 SSP and the County Planning Board define a **PGIA** as “an area where more significant development and redevelopment is preferred and where public and private investment to support such development and redevelopment will be prioritized. Areas that meet one or more of the following “Core” criteria are eligible:

- *Former State Plan Policy Map – Metropolitan Planning Areas (PA 1) and Nodes*
- *Unexpired Commission Approved Centers, Urban Complexes and other areas designated for development or redevelopment as a result of the Commission formally endorsing municipal or county plans*
- State Designated Transfer of Development Rights “Receiving Areas”
- Municipally Designated “Urban Enterprise Zones”
- *Municipally Designated “Areas in Need of Redevelopment” or Areas in Need of Rehabilitation”*
- Approved Foreign Trade Zones
- *Land within Higher Education Campuses suitable for development/redevelopment*
- *NJDOT Certified Transit Villages*
- “Urban Transit Hubs” as defined by EDA’s Urban Transit Hub Tax Credit Program
- Land owned by the NJ Sports & Exposition Authority
- Highlands Council Designated Centers and Redevelopment Areas

It is important to note that the core criteria that are present will vary from county-to-county and municipality-to-municipality, based on the unique features and planning histories that characterize the different areas of the State. Somerset County currently contains lands that meet the core eligibility criteria shown in *italic* above. The PGIAs in Somerset County are consistent with the SSP’s Garden State Values and the Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan’s Guiding Principles.

The October 2012 SSP specifies that “Commission-approved requests for addition areas, for example, sites that have been historically utilized for large-scale commercial, research or industrial uses, that meet Commission requirements may be submitted for inclusion by a county with the support of relevant municipalities, and if relevant, the advice and consent of a regional planning entity”. The October 2012 SSP further specifies that Areas that meet the PGIA Core criteria can be removed for technical reasons if designation as a PGIA is not supported by the municipality.

## 2) ALTERNATE GROWTH INVESTMENT AREAS (AGIA)

Both the SSP and the County Planning Board define an AGIA as an area that has 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 as a lesser priority than areas considered PGIAs. In Somerset County, lands that are within updated sanitary sewer service areas and that are not designated as PGIAs are identified as AGIAs. It is important to note that in Somerset County, there are a number of small historic and traditional villages and towns that meet the Core PGIA Criteria, but PGIA designation is not supported because investments that encourage significant growth are not consistent with municipal planning priorities and/or environmental and infrastructure constraints preclude more intense land uses. Most of these places are shown as **Local Priority Areas (LPAs)** on the County Investment Framework Map. The Somerset County Planning Board and its municipalities view LPAs as a subset of AGIAs. However, LPAs are unique in that many represent prime

examples compact, mixed-use centers and successful implementation of smart growth and sustainability principles, which can serve as models for other areas in the State.

### 3) **PRIORITY PRESERVATION INVESTMENT AREAS (PPIA)**

Both the SSP and County define a PPIA as “an area where land preservation, agricultural development and retention, historic preservation, environmental protection and stewardship is preferred and where investment to support land preservation, agricultural development and retention, historic preservation, environmental protection and stewardship is encouraged. Large-scale State investment that may lead to additional development should not be prioritized in these areas”. Lands that meet one or more of the following “Core” criteria are eligible:

- Agricultural Development Areas endorsed by County Agricultural Development Boards and certified by the SADC
- Land permanently preserved through easement, fee simple, or a density transfer/clustering mechanism authorized by a municipal or regional planning entity
- Land targeted for preservation by County Open Space Master Plans or the State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
- Land targeted for preservation by municipalities through approved Planning Incentive Grant applications
- Commission-approved requests for additional areas that meet the requirements set forth by the Commission that are made by a county with the support of impacted municipalities

The SSP and ANR allow regional entities such as counties to designate additional lands as PPIAs if they are supported by the municipality; are consistent with the municipal master plan; and comprise agriculture retention and development resources, open space and park resources, historic preservation resources, designated scenic byways, groundwater recharge, surface water protection and restoration, flood mitigation, wetlands protection, habitat protection and restoration areas.

### 4) **LIMITED GROWTH INVESTMENT AREAS (LGIA)**

The SSP and County define a LGIA as “an area that does 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 supporting and enhancing the agricultural or tourism industry will be encouraged”.

The vast majority of the County’s residents, businesses and industries; community facilities and services such as hospitals, schools and municipal buildings; as well as much of the county’s built infrastructure systems such transportation, power, sewer and water are located within Priority Growth Investment Areas (PGIAs) and Alternate Growth Investment Areas (AGIAs). Short-and long-term strategies focused on improving preparedness for hazardous events, improving public safety; reducing risks for property damage; adding resiliency to regional and local community and infrastructure systems; land use planning and zoning changes that will direct growth to safer areas; and enhanced construction standards that will make our buildings and facilities more durable and our communities more resistant to hazards caused by storms and other natural disasters should be prioritized within the County’s PGIAs and AGIAs. The identification and implementation of region-wide “back-up” strategies/delivery systems that will allow unmet utility and supply needs such as sanitary sewer and potable water caused by a

localized disaster in one area to be met on a short-term basis by other utility systems and supply sources nearby is recommended to help strengthen regional resiliency.

Priority Preservation Areas (PPIAs), PPIA Greenway Linkages and Limited Growth Investment Areas (LGIAs) include the majority of the County's "green infrastructure"/environmental systems (open space, streams, riparian corridors, forests, ecological habitats and productive farmland) that when performing optimally, can help reduce the impacts of storm-related flooding on the County's communities and built infrastructure. Land use policies and land stewardship best management practices that avoid development in flood plains and restore the capacity of our natural systems to reduce, filter and store stormwater runoff are a high priorities within these areas.

## VI. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The County Planning Board utilized a series of GIS datasets, representing each of the Core Criteria for PGIAs and PPIAs that are present in Somerset County and numerous supplemental criteria to create the Somerset County Investment Framework Map. Among the supplemental criteria used in the screening process, the recently updated Sanitary Sewer Service Areas and the County's transportation infrastructure assets are of primary importance. The County Investment Framework Map illustrates each of the above-described designation categories, and has been vetted with municipal officials and planners, the NJ Office of Planning Advocacy and other stakeholder groups. The latest version of the County Investment Framework Map and associated documents are available on the County Planning Board website. More than half of the County's municipalities have submitted written support for the County Investment Framework. It was endorsed by the Somerset County Planning Board via Resolution on October 16, 2012 for use as the geographic framework for the Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan, the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Somerset County, and other upcoming County planning initiatives.

The County Planning Board will seek municipal endorsement of the County Investment Framework as part of the process of adopting the Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan. It is anticipated that the County Investment Framework will be submitted to the State Planning Commission for designation after both the SSP and updated Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan are adopted. The SSP identifies a series of objectives and strategies through which the various state agencies will align their regulatory policies, investment resources, and day-to-day operations to connect to the implementation of the State's new priority investment framework. Through this designation process, the County's priority investment areas will become eligible for the State benefits described in the SSP.

The Investment Framework Map developed for Somerset County includes the following investment area categories, which were identified in close coordination with municipal officials, planners and other stakeholders:

- **Twenty-four (24) Priority Growth Investment Areas (PGIAs)**, totaling 22,595 acres and comprising 12% of the County have been identified. Investments that attract and retain primary businesses and industry by capitalizing on existing community, labor force, business and infrastructure assets are encouraged within the County's PGIAs.
- **Alternate Growth Investment Areas (AGIAs)** totaling 61,479 acres and 32% of the County have been identified. AGIAs are predominantly developed lands that are located within the County's updated Sanitary Sewer Service Areas. Investments that support development and redevelopment activities that optimize existing development patterns are desired in AGIAs. Fifteen (15) Local Priority Areas totaling 3,687 acres and comprising 2% of the County exist within the County's AGIAs. Most of the County's LPAs meet the PGIA core criteria, but designation as PGIAs is not supported due to their small scale, historic character, environmental and/or infrastructure constraints and other growth-limiting factors. LPAs are places where investments that support local businesses,

preserve community character and enhance quality of life are encouraged. AGIAs can be summarized as existing developed areas that are not designated as PGIAs or PPIAs, which are within updated Sanitary Sewer Service Areas associated with treatment plant facilities that discharge to surface water.

- **Priority Preservation Investment Areas (PPIAs)** totaling 94,757 acres and comprising 49% of the county have been identified. These are areas where investments that protect, preserve and enhance open space, recreational facilities, rural and historic landscapes, environmentally sensitive features, agricultural resources and the farming industry are desired. Lands categorized as PPIAs are both publically and privately owned. The voluntary use of environmental/agricultural land stewardship best management practices throughout PPIAs are encouraged and supported. In addition, PPIAs in Somerset County include linear greenways that traverse all other investment area categories. PPIA greenways represent areas where a regional system of linked open space and conservation areas along environmentally sensitive stream corridors and ridgelines is desired. In Somerset County, the preservation, protection and restoration of greenways will complement and support the revitalization of surrounding residential, commercial and industrial areas. Additional smaller greenways that link neighborhoods with the regional open space system are encouraged at the local level.
- **Limited Growth Investment Areas (LGIAs)** totaling 12,606 acres and comprising 6% of the county have been identified. These are predominantly low-density developed areas that are served by individual on-site septic systems. They are places where investments that enhance rural character and quality of life; preserve and protect environmental and agricultural resources; and that do not lead to development which is inconsistent with existing land use patterns are preferred. The voluntary use of environmental and agricultural land stewardship best management practices and strategies are also supported in LGIAs.

## VII. SOMERSET COUNTY'S METHOD FOR IDENTIFYING PRIORITY GROWTH INVESTMENT AREAS (PGIAs)

A three-step screening process using GIS datasets matched to the *Garden State Values* in the SSP was used to develop the initial set of areas that meet the eligibility requirements associated with PGIA designation. A table illustrating the results of the application of the screening criteria is available on the County Planning Board's website. The headings in the table columns correspond to the criteria described below. Somerset County's municipal officials and planners, OPA officials and representatives of various stakeholder groups were given the opportunity to review and provide feedback on the three levels of proposed screening criteria, the corresponding GIS datasets and how they were applied. Through this process, the criteria were customized to reflect Somerset County's unique regional and local characteristics and land use priorities.

### 1) Identification of Initial Priority Growth Investment Areas (PGIAs)

As the first step in the screening process, all areas meeting the Core PGIA Criteria applicable in Somerset County were identified and mapped by County planning staff using the best available GIS datasets as reference. Although these places are automatically eligible to be designated as PGIAs, staff applied the essential and supplemental criteria associated with the second and third steps in the screening process. By doing so, their suitability for accommodating primary economic growth was examined and substantiated, and their characteristics and assets were identified. The County Planning Board requires all PGIAs to be supported at the local level. As noted earlier, PGIA designation is not supported for some areas that meet the Core PGIA eligibility criteria due to their characteristics. Somerset County's Core PGIA Criteria align with the SSP's Garden State Values as well as the Draft Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan's Guiding Principles. **Somerset County's Core PGIA Criteria are as follows:**

- a) Former State Plan Policy Map Planning Area 1: All or portions of the municipalities of Bound Brook, Bridgewater, Franklin, Green Brook, Manville, North Plainfield, Raritan, Somerville and South Bound Brook are shown as Planning Area 1 on the 2001 adopted State Plan Policy Map. These communities have the highest population densities in the County and the highest concentrations of infrastructure and community facilities.
- b) Previously and/or currently Designated and Existing Centers: Centers within twelve (12) municipalities in Somerset County were previously designated by the SPC. Kingston Village, North Plainfield Town Center, Watchung Village Center, Warren Town Center, the tri-municipal Somerset Regional Center (comprised of Portions of Bridgewater and all of Raritan and Somerville), Bound Brook/South Bound Brook Joint Town Center, Manville Town Center, and Rocky Hill Village Center were designated by the State Planning Commission between 1999 and 2003. Their designations and original center boundaries were restored as a result of the NJ Permit Extension Act signed into law in October 2012. Downtown Bernardsville, Bedminster Village, Pluckemin and downtown Far Hills were also designated as centers by the SPC during that time-period but their designation status was nullified when the Highlands Regional Master Plan was adopted. The October 2012 Permit Extension Act also restored center designation status to previously designated centers within the Highlands Region based on their original boundary delineation. A few other municipalities have commenced the center designation process but have not yet completed it. For example, the Borough of Millstone is actively pursuing center designation at this time. The SPC is expected to act on the Borough's petition for plan endorsement, through which center designation will be achieved, in early 2012. Hillsborough Township adopted a Town Center Plan and ordinance consistent with the State's guidelines, although designation by the State Planning Commission has not yet been obtained. These and other existing communities that are characterized by traditional development patterns and are substantially consistent with the 2001 State Plan's center designation concepts were taken into consideration.
- c) Higher Education Facilities: Raritan Valley Community College (RVCC) located in Branchburg Township is currently the only higher education facility located within the County. RVCC serves both Hunterdon and Somerset Counties. 3,893 Full-time and 4,477 part-time students were enrolled at RVCC in 2010.
- d) Municipally-Designated Areas in Need of Redevelopment: A total of 19 municipally-designated redevelopment areas established pursuant to the NJ Redevelopment and Housing Act are located in Somerset County. Most are "nested" within the County's Centers, Transit Villages and Planning Area 1. They range significantly in character and scale. The smaller "stand-alone" redevelopment areas do not represent primary employment growth opportunities and therefore were not recommended for PGIA designation. The Weldon Quarry in Watchung is an example of a municipally-designated Area in Need of Redevelopment, which is not nested within an area that meets any of the other Core Criteria, for which PGIA designation is supported by the municipality.
- e) NJDOT Certified Transit Village: The NJ Department of Transportation certified the Boroughs of Bound Brook and Somerville as Transit Villages.
- f) Lands within Closed Military Facilities: There are two closed military facilities in Somerset County, both of which are located within the Township of Hillsborough. The Veterans Administration Supply Depot located on Route 206, the Lehigh Railroad and Roycefield Road has been identified as a freight-oriented logistics opportunity in the County Planning Board's 2007 Freight Study and its designation as a PGIA is supported by the Township. The former GSA Depot located on Pleasant View Road and Route 206 is currently owned by the County Improvement Authority and comprises a municipally-designated redevelopment area which is slated for active public recreation, with a portion set aside for office development. The GSA Depot is not shown as a PGIA at this time.

## 2) Identification of Additional Priority Growth Investment Areas (PGIAs)

Areas suitable for accommodating primary economic growth that do not meet the County's Core PGIA Criteria can still be designated as PGIAs if they meet each of the County's "Essential", and half of the County's "Supplemental" PGIA Criteria. As with areas that meet the Core PGIA Criteria, municipal support is also required for additional PGIAs that are designated by the County. County planning staff, in coordination with municipal officials and planners, identified additional PGIAs by applying these criteria, each of which is represented by a GIS dataset. Potential PGIA locations were compared with each criteria dataset "on-screen" using 2010 NAIP imagery and GIS Tax Parcel Datasets as references. As noted previously, the Essential and Supplemental PGIA screening criteria were also applied to places that meet the Core PGIA criteria. This exercise was valuable in that it demonstrated the suitability and appropriateness for these areas to accommodate growth.

### 3) Somerset County's "Essential Criteria" for Identifying Additional PGIAs

A number of characteristics were identified that were considered essential to an area's ability to accommodate substantial new economic development and redevelopment. In Somerset County, each of the following Essential Criteria should be present for an area that does not meet the Core PGIA Criteria if it is to be designated as a PGIA:

- a) Within an Updated Sewer Service Area: The County Planning Board, as the designated Wastewater Management Planning Agent for Somerset County, completed the updated sewer service area (SSA) boundaries countywide in coordination with municipal wastewater management planning committees, sewer authorities, NJ Department of Environmental Protection officials and other stakeholders, consistent with the Water Quality Management Planning Rules adopted July 2008 (N.J.A.C. 7:15) and P. L. c. 203 adopted January 17, 2012. The updated boundaries are illustrated on the County's Future Wastewater Service Areas Map, which comprises the County's Phase 1 Wastewater Management Plan application for an amendment to the Upper Raritan, Northeast and Lower Raritan/Middlesex County Water Quality Management Plan Areas. The updated sewer service area boundaries are currently proceeding through the adoption process, which is anticipated to conclude in early 2013. The Countywide Wastewater Management Plan and associated sewer service areas (SSAs) represent one of the most significant growth management initiatives at the State, County and municipal levels. The SSA boundary represents a clear demarcation between urban/suburban landscape areas. SSAs are characterized by development intensities that are dependent on the availability of sanitary sewers. In contrast, rural/low density landscape areas characterized by less-intense land uses that can be accommodated by on-site septic systems. Somerset County Planning Board's GIS "Future Wastewater Service Area" dataset was used for this analysis.
- b) Minimal Environmental Constraints (Includes Adequate Unconstrained Areas): All potential PGIAs were compared to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's (NJDEP) GIS datasets representing regulated environmental features, including Wetlands, Category 1 Water Bodies and associated Riparian Buffers, Natural Heritage Priority Sites, Landscape Study: Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat Ranks 3, 4 and 5 and Flood Plains to determine if they contain a reasonable amount of developed, and/or vacant buildable unconstrained land capable of accommodating primary economic growth.
- c) Contains or is Within ½ Mile of a Highway &/or Transit Corridor: Access to major highways and/or transit corridors is considered a key locational requirement of any area targeted for primary economic growth. All potential PGIAs were compared to GIS datasets representing 1) ½ mile radiuses of passenger rail stations, 2) ½ mile buffers around corridors served by regular bus service, 3) ½ mile buffers around state highways, 4) ½ mile radiuses around interstate highway interchanges and 5) ½ mile buffers around freight rail lines and sidings. This



“Essential” PGIA Criteria has been met if at least one of these five transportation-oriented features is present. Extra “points” can be gained if more than one of these features is present when they are applied individually as “Supplemental” Criteria. A combination of GIS datasets developed by the County Planning Board and the State, to which ½ mile buffers were applied, were used for this analysis.

- d) Zoned for Non-Residential or Mixed Uses: This criterion emphasizes the importance of appropriate municipal land use planning and zoning for achieving primary economic growth. Existing zoning districts and land use patterns that represent economic growth opportunities are also an important indication of municipal support. Municipal zoning guides the type and intensity of growth that can occur within PGIA's. The Somerset County Planning Board's GIS Municipal Zoning Dataset was used for this analysis.
- e) Within a Water Purveyor Service Area: The majority of the County is within a water purveyor service area. Economic growth is dependent on the availability of a safe, adequate, reliable potable water supply and areas targeted for economic growth should be well served. The majority of the County is not subject to significant water supply constraints at this time. However, a few potential HUC 14 deficit areas have been identified in the Highlands Regional Master Plan that must be taken into consideration during the site-specific development and redevelopment process. The NJDEP's GIS Water Purveyor Dataset was used for this analysis.

#### 4) Somerset County's “Supplemental” Criteria for Identifying Additional PGIA's

A number of additional characteristics were recognized that also contribute to an area's suitability for economic development and redevelopment. The presence of these characteristics improves an area's competitiveness and ability to attract and retain business and industry. In Somerset County, the presence of half of the following supplemental criteria is recommended in addition to meeting all of the above “essential criteria” in order for an area that does not meet the Core Criteria to be eligible for PGIA designation:

- a) Contains or is within ½ Mile of a Passenger Rail Station: Access to rail transit is available only at passenger rail stations, although the entire passenger rail network is an important regional infrastructure asset. A ½ mile distance from passenger rail stations is considered to be a reasonable walking distance for commuters. Access to train stations enhances an area's attractiveness and suitability for more intense land use patterns and economic growth. The County Planning Board's GIS Transit Dataset which contains the location of all rail stations in the County was used for this analysis, to which a ½ mile radius was applied.
- b) Contains or is within ½ Mile of Regular Bus Service: Roadways served by regular bus service are another important component of the County's transit system. Access to bus service can also boost an area's attractiveness and suitability for more intense land uses and economic growth. This transit venue is unique in terms of flexibility in that it can be added to other existing highway corridors when densities that support the provision of bus service are achieved. A ½ mile distance from roadways served by regular bus service is considered to be a reasonable walking distance for commuters. The County Planning Board's GIS Transit Dataset contains updated bus routes and service level information, and was utilized for this analysis.
- c) Contains or is within ½ Mile of a State Highway: Access to the major highway system is an essential infrastructure asset upon which virtually all forms of economic activity depend. A ½ mile distance from state highways is considered to be an appropriate proximity for most major economic activities. The ½ mile distance was applied along the length of the corridor, recognizing the greater flexibility in terms of access that is available in most state highway corridors as compared to interstate highways. The County's Major Roads GIS Dataset was utilized for this analysis, to which a ½ mile buffer was applied.

- d) Contains or is within ½ Mile of an Interstate Interchange: Access to the interstate highway system is highly desirable by many major businesses that depend on global and regional markets. The proximity of ½ mile to these interchanges is considered optimal by many of these types of companies. This proximity also minimizes commercial traffic through abutting residential neighborhoods. The County's Major Roads GIS Dataset was utilized for this analysis, to which a ½ mile radius was applied.
- e) Served by and/or is within ½ Mile of a Freight Rail System: This criteria recognizes the importance and value of access the regional freight rail system for certain types of industrial, manufacturing and warehousing activities. Freight-rail dependent economic activities need to be within ½ mile of existing rail sidings and spurs, or in locations along freight lines where the addition of sidings is feasible. The County Planning Board's GIS Railroad Dataset was utilized for this analysis.
- f) Contains Municipally-Designated Redevelopment and/or Planned Growth Areas: Most of the growth-oriented municipally-designated redevelopment areas in the County are located within other "Core" PGIA areas such as Centers and Planning Area 1. There are also a number of additional areas where redevelopment studies, economic development strategies and other planning initiatives are underway in order to attract economic growth. The presence of existing designated redevelopment areas as well as areas targeted for economic growth in studies, plans and other land use strategies reflects a high level of local support for economic growth and growth-inducing investments. The County Planning Board's GIS Redevelopment/Planned Growth Area Dataset was utilized for this analysis.
- g) Contains or is within ½ Mile of Substations Associated with 69 kV Electric Lines: Electric availability in areas served by 69 kV systems is more reliable, making areas served by 69 kV systems highly desirable for locating data centers, research and development facilities and other industries involving advanced technologies. Cost savings can result by locating firms in close proximity to existing 69 kV substations. Certain energy producers also require close proximity to electric substations. Dual power feed is another desirable feature of electric distribution systems required by industries where reliable service is essential to their operations. Maps dated 2010 showing the location of these features were provided by PSE&G along with maps contained in the County's Hazard Management Plan were used as the basis of the GIS dataset developed by County planning staff, which was utilized for this analysis.
- h) Served by Fiber Optics: Many high-technology industries, medical and higher education facilities and other institutions depend on access to high-speed telecommunications to support their operations and be economically competitive. County planning staff utilized the NJ Board of Public Utility's Broad Band Map illustrating areas served by fiber-optics for this analysis.
- i) Contains, Comprises or is within a 10-Mile Radius of a Higher Education Facility: A multitude of businesses and industries require access to a well-educated, highly skilled workforce. Locating near higher education institutions can help them strengthen networks, share ideas and increase creativity. The development of innovative technologies, products and services can be accelerated when collaboration among nearby universities and industries is promoted. Somerset County is home to Raritan Valley Community College, and virtually the entire County is within ten miles of several major universities, including Rutgers and Princeton. County Planning Staff created a GIS dataset illustrating the location of Higher Education Facilities and their proximity to Somerset County which was used for this analysis. A list of these facilities is posted on the County Planning Board's website.
- j) Contains or is within ½ Mile of a Concentration of Housing Opportunities, Retail and Civic Amenities: Locations that have access to a nearby, highly trained and skilled workforce, and retail and civic amenities in areas with multiple transportation choices including walking, biking, and transit are growing in popularity. The shift in employer preferences for locations within vibrant, mixed-use urban centers instead of suburban locations

represents a new trend that has made the County's centers more desirable as economic growth opportunity areas. County Planning Staff created GIS-based maps illustrating the County's municipal zoning dataset, housing densities based on the 2010 Census, and the County Planning Board's GIS Community Facilities dataset, which were used for this analysis.

## VI. SOMERSET COUNTY'S METHOD FOR IDENTIFYING PRIORITY PRESERVATION INVESTMENT AREAS (PPIAs)

A three-step screening process, using GIS datasets matched to the SSP's *Garden State Values and the Draft Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan's Guiding Principles* was used to develop the initial set of areas that meet the eligibility requirements associated with PPIA designation. The first step involves mapping the areas that represent the Core PPIA Criteria using the best available GIS datasets. A table summarizing the preliminary results derived from applying the Core PPIA Criteria is available on the County Planning Board's website. The next step involves the nomination of additional PPIAs by municipal stakeholders. Potential PPIAs that do not meet the Core PPIA Criteria must meet Somerset County's PPIA-specific essential and supplemental criteria identified in order to be eligible to be added as PPIAs. The Essential PPIA Criteria focuses on consistency with adopted plans, ordinances and land use patterns, and strengthening the existing open space and farmland network. The Supplemental PPIA Criteria incorporates the factors identified in the "Local Government Project Priority System – Acquisition and Development Projects" found in the 2007 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan, consistent with the ANR.

There are three types of PPIAs shown on the County Investment Framework Map. Permanently preserved PPIAs are distinguished from PPIAs that are in private ownership. PPIAs that comprise Greenway Linkages are also shown. These are located along major streams and ridgelines where the implementation of the County's Greenway Plan is actively being pursued in partnership with the County's municipalities through open space acquisition, conservation easements, waterfront restoration, trail development and other strategies.

### 1) Identification of Initial Priority Preservation Investment Areas (PPIAs)

As the first step in the process of identifying the County's PPIAs, all areas meeting the Core PPIA Criteria applicable in Somerset County were identified and mapped by County planning staff using the best available GIS datasets. Although these places meet the Core PPIA Criteria and are automatically eligible for PPIA designation, County planning staff applied the County's PPIA Essential and Supplemental Criteria, demonstrating their suitability as prime areas for preservation, protection and environmental/agricultural land stewardship best management practices. Areas meeting the Core PPIA Criteria represent significant public investments in open space and farmland preservation, as well as previously adopted Agricultural Development Plans and Special Resource Areas adopted at the County and municipal levels. Therefore, county and municipal support of these areas for PPIA designation is inherent. **Somerset County's Core PPIA Criteria are as follows:**

- a) Land Permanently Protected Through Public Investment or Density Transfer: The Somerset County Planning Board has created a highly accurate and updated GIS tax parcel-based dataset comprised of existing preserved lands in the County, which is organized by the following categories: 1) Local Preserved Lands (includes some permanently preserved private lands and major preservation easements of local importance), 2) County Preserved Lands, 3) State Preserved Lands (includes Water Supply Areas) and National Preserved Lands. Preserved Farms that have been permanently preserved through fee-simple acquisition or permanent deed restrictions through County and Municipal farmland preservation programs are also included. All existing preserved lands and farms are shown as PPIAs on the County Investment Framework Map.

- b) Land Targeted for Preservation within the County Open Space Master Plan: The County Planning Board prepared, in GIS Format, the Primary Greenways identified in the December 2000 “*Somerset County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan Update*” using a 600’ buffer from stream centerlines and ridgelines for mapping purposes. These areas define the PPIA Greenway Linkages illustrated on the County Investment Framework Map. They are shown as an “overlay” on the map because PPIA Greenway Linkages traverse each of the investment area categories. The purpose for distinguishing Greenway Linkages in this way is to recognize that in developed areas, greenway restoration and conservation efforts go hand-in-hand with economic and community revitalization efforts, and land use policies and programs, and public-private partnerships are needed to accomplish these mutually supportive goals. The Raritan River and its tributaries are examples of PPIA Greenways in Somerset County. The “Proposed County Parks and Suggested State Parks” identified in the County’s *Parks Recreation & Open Space Master Plan Update* were also prepared in GIS format by County planning staff and used to help identify PPIAs in conjunction with GIS tax parcel data and other information.
- c) Highlands Preservation Area, Protection and Conservation Zones: The 1,010-acre Highlands Preservation Area located in the northernmost portion of Bedminster Township (north of Pottersville Road) in Somerset County has been shown as a PPIA. The majority of the Highlands Protection Area within Somerset County is designated as the Highlands Protection Zone, Conservation Zone and Environmentally Constrained Conservation Zone on the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The two private schools located here are served by limited on-site wastewater management systems, and the area is intended to remain rural in character. The GIS Highlands Regional Master Plan datasets available from the Highlands Council were used for this analysis.
- d) County-designated Agricultural Areas/Project Areas: The Agricultural Development Areas (ADAs) identified in the County of Somerset Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan Update, November 2007 is represented in a GIS Dataset managed by the County Planning Board, and was used for identifying PPIAs. This dataset and associated “Candidate Farms” dataset are updated annually by the County Planning Board as needed, in coordination with the County’s municipalities.

## **2) Identification of Additional Priority Preservation Investment Areas (PPIAs)**

Additional areas can be designated as PPIAs that do not meet the Core PPIA Criteria if they meet each of the County’s Essential and half of the County’s Supplemental PPIA Criteria. Municipal support of additional PPIAs is required. A process for municipal nomination of additional PPIAs was developed and implemented by the County Planning Division in 2012. The Essential and Supplemental PPIA Criteria are matched to the SSP’s *Garden State Values* and are aligned with the Draft Sustainable Somerset Strategic Plan’s Guiding Principles. County planning staff, in coordination with municipal officials and planners, identified a few additional PPIAs by applying these criteria, each of which is represented by a GIS dataset. The *State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan* describes the State’s major preservation initiatives and mechanisms, and contains State and Local Government “Project Priority Systems” that the County Planning Board used to help define the County’s Supplemental PPIA Criteria. In Somerset County, only two areas targeted for preservation in Warren and Hillsborough Townships were identified as additional PPIAs.

## **3) Somerset County’s Essential Criteria for identifying Additional PPIAs**

A number of characteristics were identified that were considered essential to an area’s suitability for significant investments in environmental and/or agricultural preservation, protection and/or restoration. In Somerset County, each of the following Essential Criteria should be present for an area that does not meet the Core PPIA Criteria if it is to be designated as a PPIA:

- a) Lands Permanently Preserved through an Alternative Mechanism or Targeted for Preservation in a Regional or Municipal Plan: These may include conservation areas that are permanently protected through recorded easements and deed restrictions that “run with the land” or lands targeted for preservation in an adopted municipal plan or regional/county plan. (Please note that entities nominating easements or planned preservation areas for consideration as PPIAs are requested to provide the geographic boundaries in GIS format, and submit copies of filed plats, deeds, adopted plans or other appropriate documentation substantiating that this criteria has been met). The portion of the Duke Farm Foundation lands in Hillsborough Township, which includes a conservation easement of major importance and for which a GIS dataset was provided is an example of an additional PPIA in Somerset County that meets the criteria. In addition, the Sourland Mountain Special Resource Area which extends through western Hillsborough and Montgomery Townships; the Future Potable Water Supply Reservoir /State Park comprised of the Trap Rock Quarry in Franklin Township, and the Nationally-designated Millstone Valley Scenic Byway located primarily in Franklin and Hillsborough Townships meet this criterion and their boundaries have been mapped in GIS format. These areas have been used to define the PPIAs in Somerset County.
- b) Adjoins, potentially adjoins, or Links a Core PPIA and/or is Part of a Greenway: This criterion is consistent with the method used by the Somerset County Park Commission for prioritizing open space acquisitions. The provision of greenway linkages and the expansion of existing open space and agricultural areas are high local, regional and state planning priorities.
- c) Exhibits Appropriate Zoning and/or Land Use Patterns: This criterion emphasizes the importance of appropriate municipal land use planning and zoning for achieving preservation and conservation goals. Lands being considered for PPIA designation should realistically represent preservation opportunities through public sector investments and/or conservation through the application of environmental stewardship best management practices by public and private sectors and/or farmers.

#### 4) Somerset County’s Supplemental Criteria for identifying Additional PPIAs

A number of additional characteristics were recognized that also contribute to an area’s suitability for investments aimed at achieving environmental and/or agricultural preservation, protection and/or restoration goals. The presence of these criteria increases an area’s natural resource value. It is recognized that the presence of some of these environmentally sensitive features within PGAs, AGAs and LGAs is unavoidable, and as such, land use activities that could adversely impact them should be minimized. In Somerset County, the presence of half of the following supplemental criteria is recommended in addition to meeting all of the above “essential criteria” in order for an area that does not meet the Core Criteria to be eligible for PPIA designation:

- a) Protects Groundwater: The County utilized NJDEP’s GIS groundwater features including its Wellhead Protection Area and Groundwater Recharge Area Datasets for this analysis.
- b) Contains Regulated Environmental Features: The County Planning Board identified regulated environmental features by using the following NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) Datasets: Wetlands; Landscape Study - Threatened and Endangered Species Habitat Rank 3, 4 & 5; Category 1 (C1) Water bodies and associated Riparian Buffers; Natural Heritage Priority Sites; and Flood-Prone Areas. These GIS datasets were merged to simplify the screening process for determining consistency with this criterion.
- c) Protects Potable Water Supplies: This criterion emphasizes protection of areas within 1,500 feet upstream and 500 feet downstream of intakes, and lands that drain to a special surface water resource, or comprises or adjoins an

existing or future public water supply facility/site. In Somerset County, areas in the vicinity of the NJ American Water Works located on the Raritan and D&R Canal in Bridgewater and Franklin Townships are important from this perspective.

- d) Within Designated Scenic Byways and Adopted Scenic Roadway Corridors: Both the County and some municipalities have established scenic corridors that have been mapped in GIS format and used for this analysis.
- e) Former State Plan Policy Map, Planning Areas 4, 4B, 5, CES, HCS and SPECIAL RESOURCE AREAS: Somerset County and its municipalities have been long-time supporters of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan and both the County's Master Plan and most local master plans and land use ordinances are closely aligned with the 2001 Adopted State Plan Policy Map. The County used the GIS version of the 2001 State Plan Policy Map available through the NJ Office for Planning Advocacy for evaluating consistency with this criterion.
- f) Within a Local Conservation Zone (minimum lot size greater than 6 acres): Several municipalities have adopted zoning districts whose intent are to preserve the rural, agricultural and environmentally sensitive features in an area and promote land uses that have minimal impacts on rural landscapes. Substantially undeveloped sites within these zones, which are targeted for farmland or open space acquisition and where environmental stewardship best management practices should be applied, are consistent with this criterion. The County Planning Board's GIS Zoning dataset was used for determining consistency with this criterion.
- g) Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP): Conservation and/or Protection Zones: In the County's "Highlands Planning Area" municipalities, consistency with the Highlands RMP is voluntary. Within these municipalities (Bedminster, Bernards, Bernardsville, Far Hills and Peapack & Gladstone), existing land use patterns are generally consistent with the Highlands RMP Land Use Capability Zones although some site-specific RMP Zone inaccuracies have been identified. The GIS version of the Highlands Land Use Capability Map (LUCM), available through the NJ Highlands Council, was used for this analysis.

## VII. SOMERSET COUNTY'S METHOD FOR CREATING THE DRAFT FINAL COUNTY INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK MAP

The County Investment Framework Map builds upon the GIS Datasets that represent the Core PGIA and PPIA Criteria. The datasets representing the PPIA Core Criteria were applied directly to create the map. The PGIA and LPA dataset was derived from the datasets representing the PGIA Core Criteria. In recognition of the limited specificity of the boundaries associated with some of the GIS dataset features such as the Agricultural Development Areas, GIS features that are most current, parcel specific and developed based on comprehensive planning considerations generally took precedence over the more generalized datasets when deciding how the data layers were ordered. The presence of significant existing infrastructure investments within Sewer Service Areas was also an important consideration in the ordering of the datasets on the map. For example, sewer service areas discharging to surface water treatment plants took precedence over the ADA dataset, but not existing preserved lands. The following steps were followed by County Planning Staff in compiling the GIS-based draft Final County Investment Framework Map:

- 1) A separate GIS dataset comprised of the PGIA's and LPAs supported at the municipal level was created. The boundaries were based on previously delineated centers, jurisdictional boundaries, zoning districts and tax parcels. In general, tax parcels were not split when delineating PGIA's, except where very large parcels containing areas with significantly different characteristics and/or where tax parcels split by zoning boundaries were involved. Boundaries for PGIA's and LPAs were developed in close coordination with municipal officials and planners. The boundaries of previously designated centers, which comprise many of the PGIA's and LPAs, as well as zoning district boundaries were primarily used.

- 2) The first data layer applied when creating the County Investment Framework Map was the County Planning Board's GIS dataset representing the updated areas to be served by on-site septic systems derived from the updated GIS Future Wastewater Service Areas dataset.
- 3) The County Planning Board's GIS Datasets representing the County Agricultural Development Areas (ADAs), Future County Parks, The Sourland Mountain Special Resource Area (SRA), the Millstone Valley Scenic Byway, the future reservoir site in Franklin and the Highlands Preservation Area in Bedminster were used as the "PPIA Base" or starting point for mapping the PPIAs. The ADA boundaries are broad and generalized, encompassing large swaths of the County's rural landscape, and do not align with tax parcels or zone boundaries. The Future County Park areas are also non-parcel specific and were identified 12 years ago. The Highlands Preservation Area, Sourland Mountain SRA and Millstone Valley Scenic Byway are also relatively general in their delineation method. These comprised the second series of datasets applied when creating the County Investment Framework Map.
- 4) The County Planning Board's updated countywide sewer service areas (SSAs) associated with facilities that discharge to surface water represents the next GIS dataset applied to the PPIA base. Sewer service areas associated with facilities that discharge to groundwater primarily serve free-standing establishments such as churches, private schools and golf clubs, and were not applied when developing the County Investment Framework Map due to the rural context in which these establishments are located.
- 5) The County Planning Board's GIS dataset representing additional PPIAs that were identified in collaboration with the County's municipalities and other stakeholders was added to the PPIA Base. These areas include lands targeted for preservation in Warren and Hillsborough Townships.
- 6) The County Planning Board's GIS dataset representing the PGIA and LPAs was applied next.
- 7) The County Planning Board's updated Preserved Lands Dataset (which includes National, State, County and local preserved open space and farms) was applied on top of the above GIS data layers.
- 8) The County Planning Board's GIS dataset illustrating the PPIA Greenway Linkages represents the final GIS data layer and the last in the sequence of datasets that was applied to create the County Priority Investment Framework Map.

Please note that any remaining areas that are located within sanitary sewer service areas associated with facilities that discharge to surface water after the PGIA and PPIA datasets are applied become "Alternate Growth Investment Areas" (AGIAs). Any remaining areas that are located within areas served by on-site septic systems after the PGIA and PPIA datasets are applied become "Limited Growth Investment Areas" (LGIAs). AGIAs and LGIAs are essentially "default" categories comprised primarily of existing developed lands. In general, neighborhoods in AGIAs have minimum lot sizes that are less than 2 acres in size, and have densities that are supported by sanitary sewer service. Neighborhoods in LGIAs are served by on-site septic systems and usually have minimum lot sizes of 2 acres or greater.

## **VIII. SOMERSET COUNTY INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK UPDATE STRATEGY**

The County Planning Board will determine if any refinements to the Draft Final County Investment Framework map, criteria, methods and other associated documents are warranted upon the adoption of the Final State Strategic Plan, to reflect any refinements included in the adopted Plan. Appropriate changes will be made if needed at that time.

The County Planning Board will update the GIS Datasets that were used to prepare the County Investment Framework Map on an on-going basis. To the extent practical, maps illustrating the updated datasets will be provided to municipal officials and planners annually for review and comment. Depending on the volume of changes made to the datasets represented on the County Investment Framework Map, the Framework Map will be updated on a basis of every one to three years by County Planning Staff. A process that will enable ongoing site-specific amendments to the Framework

Map may also be established. The most current version of the County Investment Framework Map and related documents will be posted on the County Planning Board Website and provided in PDF electronic or paper format upon request. The update and amendment procedures and process will be coordinated with the NJ Office for Planning Advocacy, since it is the County's intent to submit the County Investment Framework for designation by the State Planning Commission and to maintain its SPC designation status. Designation by the State will give Somerset County and its municipalities' priority access to state funding, resources and programs for implementation as specified in the State Strategic Plan.

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

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

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