

**MINUTES OF THE APRIL 21, 2020
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
HELD AT 4:45PM
ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

This meeting was held as a virtual meeting. Information on how to join the meeting was posted on the County website and published in the newspapers. Deputy County Counsel Joseph DeMarco reported the meeting had been duly advertised in accordance with Open Public Meetings Act.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the April 21, 2020 meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board convened at 4:45pm. The meeting was held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act.

Pledge of Allegiance

Open Public Meetings Statement

The Roll was called and the following were in Attendance:

Bernie Navatto, Jr, Chairman
Christopher Kelly, Vice Chairman
Al Ellis, Member
John Schneider, Member
John Lindner, Member
Jeffrey Wright, Member
Matthew Loper, Secretary/County Engineer
William Zeigler, 1st Alternate
Ericka Inocencio, 2nd Alternate

Joseph DeMarco, Esq., Deputy County Counsel

Absent

Freeholder Director Robinson
Freeholder Deputy Director Sooy, Liaison

Also Present:

Walter Lane, Director of Planning
Anthony McCracken, Assistant Director
Cynthia Mellusi, Office Manager

Approval of February 18, 2020 Meeting Minutes

Chairman Navatto, asked for the motion to approve the Minutes of the February 18, 2020 Planning Board Meeting. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded by John Schneider. A Voice Vote was called and the motion moved unanimously.

ACTION ITEMS/ITEMS INFORMATION ITEMS:

Somerset County Planning Division Responses to COVID-19

Director of Planning Walter Lane provide an overview of the Planning Division's response to COVID-19. Starting the week of March 16th, Planning Division staff members were working split shift schedules where staff members were assigned to teams: Team A and Team B. Team A would report to the office for a week, while Team B worked remotely. During the following week, Team A would work remotely while Team B reported to the office. Each team was set up so that all the office functions could continue without interruption. Since March 23rd, the entire Planning Division has been working remotely.

He stated that he is extremely proud of the staffs' professionalism and dedication during these unsettled times. Over the last month, the entire Planning Division's staffs have continued to advance a wide range of planning efforts. The Land Development Section has twice a week conference calls to coordinate land development reviews and ensure all applications are being processed. Numerous other calls and video conference meetings are being held for all of planning projects and initiatives currently underway. Staff continues to provide technical assistance to many of our municipalities. Director Lane reported he instituted twice a week staff "social hours" via video conference to allow the staff to socialize and interact to maintain moral and team cohesion. He stated the calls have been very successful.

In addition, Director Lane reported he has been supporting the County Emergency Operations Plan by managing the operations of Emergency Support Function 14A: Infrastructure Restoration. He stated this function is changing into a Community Restoration effort rather than an infrastructure restoration initiative. As part of this effort he has been assisting Freeholder Deputy Director Sooy and the Somerset County Business Partnership to form the County's Economic Recovery Taskforce. Somerset County is the first County to form such a group. He also briefed the Board on his efforts as the President of the NJ County Planning Association. In this role, he has been working with various Counties and legislative leaders to address land development review issues created by COVID-19. Legislation is pending to extend local and county land development review deadlines.

At the end of the presentation he commended the Planning Division staff for their dedication to serve the residents of Somerset County and thanked the Planning Board and the Freeholder Board for their continued support.

March 2020 Land Development Report and Approval of the February 2020 First Time Submissions

Director of Planning Walter Lane provided a brief overview of the March Land Development Report which consisted of updates on the following projects: Sourland View, Information Update (Montgomery), Walters Group Project (Branchburg) and the New Jersey Center of Excellence (Bridgewater). No actions were taken on these projects.

Director Lane reported The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of February. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 26 submissions.

There were no new lots proposed and no new lots created. Of the site plans proposed during the month there was 23,955 square feet of non-residential building space and 40 multi-family units proposed. There was a total of \$111,960.00 in improvement value and \$2,880 in development review fees paid to the County Planning Board. Bernard V. Navatto, Jr. did not take any action on or participate in any discussion concerning the Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital – Somerset Family Practice site plan in Somerville. Since a quorum was not present at the scheduled meeting of the Land Development Committee, the full County Planning Board must approve the first time submissions for the month of February and acknowledge the receipt of the other information contained in the report since said report is only unofficial without a quorum.

Chairman Navatto asked for the motion to approve the March 2020 Development Report and Approval of the February 2020 First Time Submissions. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded by John Lindner. The Roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

April 2020 Land Development Report and Approval of the March First Time Submissions

Director of Planning Walter Lane stated since the April Land Development Committee meeting was cancelled, the full Planning Board must approve the first time submissions for the month of March and acknowledge the receipt of the other information contained in the report since said report is only unofficial without a quorum. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 22 submissions. There were three new lots proposed and eight new lots created. Of the site plans proposed during the month there was 448 square feet of non-residential building space proposed and 57 multi-family units proposed. There was \$3,060.00 in development review fees paid to the County Planning Board. Bernard Navatto, Jr. did not participate in any discussion or take any action on the Mo Grill and Sweets site plan and the Fernandez subdivision in Somerville.

Chairman Navatto asked for the motion to approve the April 2020 Development Report and Approval of the March 2020 First Time Submissions. The motion was made by Al Ellis and seconded by John Schneider. The Roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

2020 Census Update

Director Lane briefed the Board on the County's 2020 Census efforts. Due to COVID-19, all the public outreach events were canceled to ensure the public's safety. Since that time, work has started to develop virtual events to engage the public to highlight the importance of Census. The County Planning Division's GIS Section has been creating mapping and a weekly dashboard report of the County's Census response rates. This was done at the request of the US Census Bureau and Congressman Malinowski's office. As of today's, meeting, Somerset County had the highest self-response rate in the State.

A virtual Complete Count Committee meeting was held on April 9, 2020. Additional virtual Complete Count Committee meetings will be held in the coming weeks. Staff continues to work with representatives for the County's Public Information Office and the Census Bureau to promote awareness of the Census. Six short videos in several different languages were

developed to promote the Census. Director Lane also described the new timeline for the Census due to COVID-19.

State Plan Update

Director of Planning Walter Lane provided an update on the status of the State Plan. At the begin of March, the State Planning Commission adopted new guidelines to allow Counties to have Endorsed Plans. He reported that he had worked very closely with the Office for Planning Advocacy's Executive Director, Donna Rendiro, to develop the new guidelines. Currently there are thirteen Centers in the County with expiring center designations. The State Planning Commission also adopted a greatly shortened Municipal Self-Assessment document which should make the plan endorsement process more efficient.

At April's State Planning Commission meeting, the Commission voted to allow Centers with designations expiring on June 30, 2020 to remain valid until ninety (90) days after the State of Emergency Declaration has been rescinded. He reported that a few groups had expressed concerns with extending these deadlines. Director Lane stated he spoke in favor of the extension on behalf of Somerset County and the NJ County Planners Association.

Public Comments

Bernie Navatto opened the meeting to the public. There being no comments, the meeting was closed to the public.

Committee Reports

The Committee Reports were included in the meeting packet.

Next Meeting Date: May 19, 2020 @4:45pm

Adjournment:

There being no further business before the Board, Chairman Navatto asked for a motion to Adjourn. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded by Bill Ziegler. A Voice Vote was called and the motion moved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary