

**MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 18, 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. Chairman Navatto, Jr. reported the meeting had been duly advertised in accordance with Open Public Meetings Act.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance, the August 18, 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  
William Zeigler, 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate  
Matthew Loper, Secretary/County Engineer  
William Ziegler, 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate will be voting in place of Jeffrey Wright  
Marina Stinely, Esq. covering for Joseph DeMarco, Esq., Deputy County Counsel

**Absent**

Jeffrey Wright, Member  
Erika Inocencio, 2<sup>nd</sup> Alternate  
Freeholder Director Robinson  
Freeholder Deputy Director Sooy, Liaison

**Also Present:**

Walter Lane, Director of Planning  
Anthony McCracken, Assistant Director  
Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner  
Ken Wedeen, Supervising Transportation Planner  
Laurette Kratina, Chief of Strategic Planning  
James Ruggieri, Principal Community Planner  
Cynthia Mellusi, Office Manager

## **Approval of July 21, 2020 Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Navatto, asked for the motion to approve the Minutes of the July 21, 2020 Planning Board Meeting. The motion was made by Matt Loper and seconded by Chris Kelly. A Voice Vote was called and the motion moved unanimously.

## **Discussion/Presentation Items:**

Director of Planning Walter Lane introduced Chris Edwards, the new President and CEO of the Somerset County Business Partnership (SCBP) to the Planning Board and stated he asked Mr. Edwards to attend this meeting to provide overview of the SCBP's current initiatives.

Mr. Edwards provided a brief overview of the history of the SCBP. He then spoke about several of the SCBP's current work including an overview of all of ways his organization worked to support the business community as they dealt with the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic. The SCBP partnered with the Board of Chosen Freeholders to form a Long-Term Recovery Task Force. Somerset County was the first to form a taskforce to deal with this matter. Mr. Edwards detailed the Taskforce's efforts.

Mr. Edwards provided an overview of his vision for the Partnership. He highlighted the great, longstanding relationship between SCBP and the County Planning Board and noted that he and Director Lane speak daily. He highlighted the Partnership's diversity initiative and noted the Planning Division played a major role in helping to develop the Partnership's Diversity Report. The SCBP will be hosting a Diversity and Inclusion Summit on September 24<sup>th</sup>. He stated he envisions working with the Planning Division on many other projects in the coming months and years.

Mr. Edwards described how the business model of the Partnership will evolve in the coming years and move towards becoming a hub for training and technical assistance rather than having focus on networking opportunities. He spoke about the need to partner with the Planning Board to work together on business attraction and retention efforts. Chairman Navatto thanked Mr. Edwards and stated the Planning Board is looking forward to working with him and the SCBP.

## **Planning Director's Report**

Director of Planning Walter Lane provided an overview of work underway in the Planning Division. He reported staff has settled in well to the new routine of working in the office and remotely. He briefed the Board on the following items:

- Director Lane, as President of the NJ County Planners Association, held another Long-Term Recovery Working Group meeting to discuss how County Planning Boards could address the impacts of COVID-19. A final draft of the policy document developed by this group will be completed by the end of August. A meeting with NJDEP and the Wastewater Working Group will be held in early September to discuss how to advance the wastewater planning process in a collaborative manner.

- Work continues to assist Boroughs of Bound Brook and South Bound Brook on a tactical urbanism initiative.
- Director Lane was able to secure a commitment from the NJPTA to provide transportation modeling technical assistance for the Borough of Rocky Hill as part of their Plan Endorsement application.
- Director Lane and Supervising Planner Tom D'Amico participated in a meeting with Director and Assistant Director of Planning for Middlesex County to provide information on Somerset County's land development review process. Middlesex County will use this information as they update their own land development review process.
- Director Lane participated in a workshop on crime prevention through environmental design as part of Franklin Townships TNJ Technical Assistance Grant project.
- A Kickoff meeting for the AT&T Campus Land Use Study funded by the NJ Highlands Council will be held in early September.
- Director Lane and the Dina Healy from the Park Commission made a presentation on the Walk, Bike, Hike Study at the Park RX Program to over 20 Doctors as part of RWJ Barnabas Somerset's Grand Rounds Program.

#### **ACTION ITEMS/ITEMS INFORMATION ITEMS:**

##### **August 2020 Land Development Report and Approval of the July 2020 First Time Submissions**

Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner, referred to the report in the Planning Board Packets. At the August 12, 2020 meeting of the County Planning Board Land Development Committee the Committee reviewed a number of projects as well as the first-time submissions for the month of July 2020. The meeting was held via Zoom. It was noted that there was no quorum for the meeting. Therefore, there were no official actions taken at the August 12<sup>th</sup> meeting.

##### **Ridge Apartments at Bound Brook II Update**, Bound Brook

Supervising Planner Tom D'Amico stated that the Ridge Apartments at Bound Brook II project is a proposed 42-unit five-story apartment building located at the intersection of Mountain Avenue (County Route 527) and Second Street (a local road). The developers, De Mattheis Real Estate, requested to waive two requirements in the County Planning Board's land development review from March 2020. The first requires a master plan right-of-way 66 feet (33 feet from the centerline) along Mountain Avenue which is designated as a minor arterial in the Somerset County Road Functional Classification System. Second, the developers wish to waive the requirement that any new driveway be at least 35 feet from the county right-of-way line.

At the May meeting the Land Development Committee agreed to defer a decision until an investigation by the County Engineering Division of the master plan right-of-way along the entire County Route 527 corridor was completed. The investigation determined that we do not need a 66-foot right-of-way in this segment of the County Route 527 corridor to accomplish the goals of the Master Plan and that a 60-foot right-of-way would be necessary.

This information was transmitted to the developer and we subsequently had a conference call with the applicant. It was determined that a 50 foot right-of-way would be acceptable provided

parking was eliminated along this section of the corridor. The applicant subsequently submitted a concept plan which engineering staff has reviewed and given the applicant a few comments. The applicant has submitted several questions which staff is currently reviewing.

The Committee members in attendance agreed with the recommendation of the County Engineer and County Counsel that the County receive correspondence from the Bound Brook Planning Board that removing parking along this section of the corridor is acceptable. If the concept plan is revised and acceptable to the County Engineer and we receive the aforementioned correspondence from Bound Brook the Land Development Committee can waive the right-of-way requirement at the next meeting.

### **Life Sciences Building (Thor Equities), Bridgewater**

Principal Community Planner James Ruggieri presented the proposed Life Sciences Building which is within the New Jersey Center of Excellence R & D campus on Route 202-206 in Bridgewater. Located less than 1 mile south of I-78 the property is bounded by I-287 to the west. To the north is the Hindu temple and to the south existing residential uses. The entire site is approx. 100-acres and is the former Sanofi research and development campus. The existing site consists of lawn and walkways in front of an existing 3-story r and d building.

The applicant COE Bridgewater, LLC c/o Thor Equities is proposing a 3-story 55,127 square-foot life sciences building that will be adjacent to the existing 3-story r and d building. Most of the parking will be met by utilizing existing parking located nearby.

The campus has two different land use zoning categories. The easterly and southerly portions is zoned R-SEED (Redevelopment-Special Economic and Employment Development District). The R-SEED area consists of approximately 53 acres. The balance of the campus is zoned OR/D (Office and Research/Development) representing approx. 47 acres. The proposed Life Sciences Building is located in the OR/D. The tax parcel known as Lot 17 was converted into Condominium Units 1, 2 and 3 in 2019. In 2019 Thor Equities purchased and is now the owner of Condominium Units 2 and 3 where they will be building the Life Sciences Building. Condominium Unit 1 is owned by the developer of the R-SEED redevelopment project (Advance Realty). Thor Equities in their application to Bridgewater very clearly stated that their project is independent from the separate R-SEED redevelopment project and the proposed Life Sciences Building will in no way have any impact on the aforementioned R-SEED redevelopment project.

From the County's perspective, since it is not on a County road (U.S. Highway 202-206 is state highway) it appears that there are no road requirements. We are still reviewing the application for any possible stormwater management impact. It should be noted that the entire NJCOE campus is less than a mile from the intersection of Foothill Road (County Route 639) and U.S. Route 202-206 which is currently an unsignalized intersection. In December 2019 the Township Planning Board approved the R-SEED redevelopment project and the resolution was memorialized in February. The same NJCOE R-SEED development application does not have County Planning Board approval.

Both the NJCOE Redevelopment Plan and the Township's Planning Board's resolution approving the NJCOE R-SEED project specify that one of the traffic impact mitigation improvements to be

made includes installation of a traffic signal at 202-206 and Foothill Road subject to NJDOT determination that a signal is warranted. Because of this, County Planning Board Counsel has been working on preparing a draft development agreement to be executed between NJCOE (Advance Realty) and Somerset County. For this reason alone we have not granted approval to the NJCOE mixed-use R-SEED development project.

The Committee members in attendance recommended that Life Sciences Building project be handled separately from the Center of Excellence Project. County Counsel recommended that the County review report contain a comment that County approval is subject to any further conditions that may be required from Bridgewater Township.

### **First Time Submissions**

The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of July. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 23 submissions. There were 4 new lots proposed and no new lots created. Of the site plans proposed during the month there was 215,900 square feet of non-residential building space proposed. There was \$5,800 in improvement value and \$2,190 in development review fees paid to the County Planning Board.

As indicated earlier herein, 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 July 2020.

Chairman Navatto asked for the motion to approve the June 2020 First Time Submissions. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded by John Linder. The Roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Preservation Plan Update**

Tom D'Amico, Supervising Planner, stated that the County is undertaking an update of the County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, the Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan and the development of a new Historic Preservation Plan.

Mr. D'Amico reported he expects to receive the completed final draft of the Open Space Plan element of the Preservation Plan on this Friday and the completed draft of the Historic Preservation Plan element next week. All Historic Preservation Plan mapping comments were previously submitted to the consultants and we expect final drafts of the maps shortly. We hope to have a steering committee meeting in mid-September to discuss the draft elements that have been completed. The plan has coordinated with the County Investment Framework, the Walk, Bike, Hike Somerset County Connecting Vibrant Communities Plan and the County Hazard Mitigation Plan.

### **Hazard Mitigation Plan Update**

Chief of Strategic Planning Laurette Kratina, reported that work is underway on a 2020 Hazard Mitigation Plan Progress Report. It provides an update on the FEMA hazard mitigation policies and programs that have undergone changes since our current HMP was completed - specifically

the National Disaster Recovery and Response Act adopted in October 2018 and the new "Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program. The BRIC program replaces the Pre-Disaster Mitigation Program under which the current HMP was developed. The annual report includes a description of recent hazard events such as the March 2018 and 2019 snowstorms, Tropical Storm Isaias, the 2019 polar vortex and the COVID-19 Pandemic. It includes the latest information on how climate change is affecting New Jersey, and provides new information on naturally occurring radon, which is a topic that FEMA recommended be added to our HMP in the next update.

The report also describes the status of the mitigation projects and initiatives that are identified in the current Plan. FEMA worksheets were used to facilitate the reporting process. Despite the pandemic, half of our municipal hazard mitigation officers provided information in the form of completed worksheets. In addition, worksheets were completed for all the county-level projects listed in the Plan through a collaborative process led by the Office of Emergency Management Staff that involved several county divisions including Engineering, Planning and the GIS Coordinator under Finance. This annual report is intended to help to set the stage for the next update, which must be completed by mid-2025 so that the County and its municipalities can remain eligible for FEMA pre mitigation funding. FEMA has asked us to address man-made hazards in the next update and some information will be included in this annual report that begins the dialogue on what this new component can potentially consist of. An executive summary will be prepared for the benefit of the Board of Chosen Freeholders and this Board. The results will also be the topic of the first Plan Evaluation and Maintenance Meeting that is being planned for this Fall with our project management partners in the County Office of Emergency Management.

### **2020 Census Update**

Supervising Transportation Planner Ken Wedeen reported The Somerset County Complete Count Committee continues to meet bi-weekly and gets regular updates from the Census Bureau and New Jersey Complete Count Commission.

Somerset County Complete Count Committee has been working with the Census Bureau and various partners including the Zufall Health Center, Healthier Somerset, Bound Brook, South Bound Brook and North Plainfield Boroughs and Franklin Township providing census printed materials and census giveaways. The Committee has also been working with NJCCC coordinating the census billboard truck in Somerset County. The census bill board truck drove around the county on August 20th and will be driving around the county on August 29th.

The County Public Information Office has been putting out social media posts along with newspaper advertisements and the digital media advertising to low self-response areas and county wide. The committee will be promoting the census self-response and non-follow up response until September 30th the last day for both programs.

### **Somerset County Road Corridor Safety Analysis Sub-regional Study**

Supervising Transportation Planner Ken Wedeen reported the consultant team has completed a number of work products including a Public Involvement Plan, an Equity Analysis; creation of an

online mapping tool the public can use to identify locations on county roads where are safety concerns. County staff have launched of a project web site, created a project email address and press release promoting the study. The online mapping tool will be open through the end of August. The consultant has undertaken a safety management system analysis to identify the top 20 vehicles and pedestrian and bicycle crash locations in Somerset County. August 19th is the 1st TAC meeting at which the consultant will present an overview of the study.

The next steps include finalizing the five corridors for the road safety audits and the beginning of the traffic accident analysis for each corridor. The consultant will be meeting with county staff to plan the first public meeting to be held in late September.

#### **Wastewater Management Plan Update**

Director Lane provided a brief update on the status of the wastewater management plan. Planning Division staff work to incorporate the changes to the draft Septic Management Plan (SMP) based upon the comments received during the municipal review process. The SMP will be finalized for submission to NJDEP in the coming weeks. The municipalities continue to provide comments on the results of the draft build out analysis and the analysis is being revised. Several towns have asked for extra time to review the draft build out analysis. These towns will be allowed to submit their comments until the end of August. At the Environment and Utility Committee Meeting held earlier today, the Committee authorized Planning Staff to move forward with finalizing the draft build out analysis in the event some towns do not provide comments by the end of August.

#### **Public Comments**

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

#### **Committee Reports**

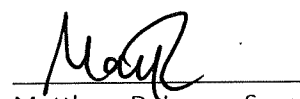
The Committee Reports were included in the meeting packet.

**Next Meeting Date:** September 15, 2020@4:45pm (virtual meeting)

#### **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 Matt Loper. A Voice Vote was called and the motion moved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary