

**MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 21, 2021
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
HELD AT 4:45 P.M.
ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

Call to Order

The September 21, 2021 meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board convened at 4:45 p.m. This meeting was held as a virtual meeting.

Pledge of Allegiance

Open Public Meetings Statement

Chairman Navatto, Jr. reported the meeting had been duly advertised in accordance with Open Public Meetings Act as follows:

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 *et seq.*, and the Emergency Remote Meeting Protocol for Local Public Bodies N.J.A.C. 5:39-1.1 through 1.7, adequate notice of this meeting has been provided. The date, time and virtual meeting information for this meeting was published in The Star-Ledger and the Courier News. The agenda and the virtual meeting information was also posted on the County Planning Board website.

Roll Call

The Roll was called, and the following were in Attendance:

Bernard V. Navatto, Jr., Chairman
Al Ellis, Member
Erika Inocencio, Member
Sami Shaban, Member
Commissioner Paul Drake
Matthew Loper, Secretary/County Engineer
Ashok Rakhit, 1st Alternate
Marina Stinely, Esq. covering for Joseph DeMarco, Esq., Deputy County Counsel

Absent

Chris Kelly, Vice-Chair
John Lindner, Member
Commissioner Director Robinson

Also Present from Staff:

Walter Lane, Director
Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner
Ken Wedeen, Supervising Transportation Planner
Adam Bradford, Senior Transportation Planner
James Ruggieri, Principal Community Planner
Tom Boccino, Principal Planner, Open Space Preservation
Kate Katzer, Principal Planner

Aarthy Sabesan, Manager, Office of County GIS Services
Michael Stepowyj, GIS Coordinator
Cynthia Mellusi, Office Manager

Approval of August 17, 2021 Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Chairman Navatto, Jr. asked for a motion to approve the minutes of August 17, 2021 Planning Board Meeting. The motion was made by Sami Shaban and seconded by Erika Inocencio. A Voice Vote was called, and the motion moved unanimously.

Discussion/Presentation Items

Cultural and Heritage Commission Long Range Plan Update

Director Walter Lane introduced Kaitlin Bundy, Manager of the Cultural & Heritage Commission to the Board and stated the Commission's Long Range Plan effort ties into many of the initiatives the Planning Board has underway. He stated once the Long-Range Plan has been completed and endorsed by the Cultural & Heritage Commission, staff will ask the Planning Board to adopt the Plan as part of the County Master Plan.

Kaitlin Bundy, Manager of Cultural & Heritage reported that the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission is currently undergoing an update of its long-range plan. The Commission has engaged consultant Mercer Planning Associates, a boutique land-use planning firm based in Jersey City, to oversee the project. To date, the project team has been reviewing a number of existing County plans, such as the Comprehensive Economic Development Plan, Walk, Bike, Hike and the draft Preservation Plan to help find potential areas for cross-sector collaborations. Throughout the summer, a number of public outreach opportunities (both virtual and in person) have been held, including nine (9) focus groups, a symposium, a virtual open house, seven (7) different popup booths as well as a survey and mapping tool. A set of guiding principles and four (4) transformational goals have been established to guide the team in its creation of a framework of strategies and action items for the plan. A draft of the plan is expected in early 2022.

Bedminster AT&T Land Use Study Update

Director Walter Lane provided an overview of the Bedminster AT&T Land Use Study project. Staff has been working with officials from Bedminster Township using grant funds from the New Jersey Highlands Council to advance the recommendations from the Supporting Priority Investment in Somerset County Study to ensure the campus remains an economic engine for the Township and the County.

Director Lane reviewed several slides from the presentation made to a joint meeting the Bedminster Township Committee and the Township Land Use Board. He highlighted the changes to major trends such as the move to multi-user campuses, remote work, increased demand for Life Science Research & Development uses. He then highlighted the some of the guiding principles used to share the development of studies recommendations such as maintaining opportunities for AT&T to stay and grow, emphasizing high value, high employment opportunities and provide flexible zoning to allow for emerging markets. There numerous outreach efforts undertaken as part of this study.

He then reviewed the two main scenarios for the future use of the site. The first concept was for a Life Science Innovation Hub to support the life science research and limited manufacturing activities. The second concept for the site is a High-Tech Hub building off of AT&T's long history of innovation. An alternative scenario identified potential mixed-use entertainment/retail uses to compliment current/new office uses on the site. The final report will be completed in the next two months and sent to Bedminster Township for final review and approval. Once the report is finalized, the County will continue to work with the Township to implement the report's recommendations. Director Lane stated the Township is very thankful for the County assistance and is very happy with the draft recommendations.

A discussion of the project ensued. Director Lane outlined how the new Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development can assist the Township to advance this project. He reported the Planning Division has been reorganized into the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development. Director Lane will lead the new Office and report directly to Colleen Mahr, the County's Administrator. The Board of County Commissioners made this change to ensure the County can assist our planning partners advance projects such as this and work to align all the County's efforts to support their smart growth, preservation, and economic development priorities. Director Lane outlined how the County would assist Bedminster and County to attract investment and grow the County's economy.

Planning Director's Report

Director of Planning Walter Lane provided an overview of work underway in the Planning Division. He briefed the Board on the following items:

- The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) provided an update on the review of the Septic Management Plan (SMP) and the other components of the Wastewater Management Plan (WMP). NJDEP has indicated they have additional comments of the SMP. Once they provide comments on the SMP, they will provide comments on the remaining components of the WMP. Once the comments are received from NJDEP, they will be reviewed with both the Master Plan and Environment and Utilities Committees.
- The next Planning Partners Forum held on September 22nd and will provide updates on the Cultural & Heritage Commission's Long-Range Plan, the Preservation Plan and the 2020 Census.
- The next Complete Count Committee 2.0 Meeting will be held on October 7th and feature a presentation by a representative from the US Census Bureau.
- Director Lane referred to a letter in the Board's packet regarding the elimination of the existing NJT 65 Bus Route serving Somerset County. Letter was reviewed and approved by the Transportation Committee for submission to NJ Transit.

Action Items/Informational Items

Resolution Conceptually Approving a Development Agreement Between North Branch Partners LLC: North Branch Land LLC and the County of Somerset County

Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner, presented the County Planning Board resolution conceptually approving the North Branch Walk development agreement. The applicants North

Branch Partners LLC and North Branch Land LLC propose to construct a project with 216 apartment units and 149 Townhouse units. Ninety-one units will be for affordable housing. The site is located on U.S. Route 202 and Meister Avenue in Branchburg Township. The site has direct access to Readington Road (County Route 637).

The agreement outlines the phasing of the project related the completion of the signalized intersection of "Road J" and U.S. Route 22 and the requirements for improvements to Readington Road. These include temporary restriping of Readington Road to install a northbound turn lane (within the existing right-of-way) and the payment of a contribution toward the permanent widening of Readington Road. The applicant has posted the contribution and County Council has approved the form of the agreement and resolution. The Land Development Committee recommends that the resolution be conceptually approved by the full Planning Board and transmitted to the Board of County Commissioners for their approval.

Chairman Navatto, Jr asked for a motion to approve the resolution conceptually approving a development agreement between North Branch Partners LLC: North Branch Land LLC and the County of Somerset. The motion was made by Al Ellis and seconded by Commissioner Drake. The Roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

September 2021 Land Development Report and Approval of the August 2021 First Time Submissions

Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner, referred to the land development report in the Planning Board Packet. The September 15, 2021 meeting of the County Planning Board Land Development Committee was held in the Engineering Conference Room, County Administration Building in Somerville at 8:15 a.m. The Committee reviewed several projects as well as the first-time submissions for the month of August 2021.

North Branch Walk, Branchburg

Thomas D'Amico presented the County Planning Board resolution conceptually approving the North Branch Walk project agreement in Branchburg Township. The applicants North Branch Partners LLC and North Branch Land LLC propose to construct a project with 216 apartment units and 149 Townhouse units. Ninety-one units will be for affordable housing. The site is located on U.S. Route 202 and Meister Avenue (a local road). The site has direct access to Readington Road (County Route 637).

The agreement outlines the phasing of the project related the completion of the signalized intersection of "Road J" and U.S. Route 22 and the requirements for improvements to Readington Road. These include temporary restriping of Readington Road to install a northbound turn lane (within the existing right-of-way) and the payment of a contribution toward the permanent widening of Readington Road. It was noted that the applicant has posted the contribution and that County Council has approved the form of the agreement and resolution. The Committee recommended that the agreement be conceptually approved by the full Planning Board and transmitted to the County Commissioners for their approval.

2021 Land Development and Planning Awards Program

Thomas D'Amico presented the 2021 Land Development and Planning Awards nominations. The applications include two land development nominations and three excellence in planning nomination. After considerable discussion the Committee agreed that the following projects should be recognized for outstanding land development and excellence in planning.

Office/Commercial

The Far Hills Center, 27 Route 202, Far Hills

Commercial

Carriage Farm, 2 Clerico Lane, Hillsborough

Excellence in Planning

Bound Brook Riverfront Access Plan 2015: Implementation Checklist 2020 & 5-Year Action Plan, Bound Brook

First Time Submissions

The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of August 2021. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 35 submissions. There were 27 new lots proposed. Of the site plans proposed during the month there was 189,845 square feet of non-residential building space proposed as well as 13 multi-family units. There was \$12,547.32 in improvement value and \$9,000 in development review fees paid to the County Planning Board.

Bernard Navatto, Jr., took no action and did not participate in any discussion concerning the ARC Development Group LLC project in Somerville. Chairman Navatto, Jr., asked for a motion to approve the September 2021 Land Development Report and approval of the August 2021 First Time Submissions. The motion was made by Al Ellis and seconded by Sami Shaban. The roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

Preservation Plan Update

Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner, reported the County is currently in the process of updating the County Open Space Preservation Plan, the Farmland Preservation Plan and developing a new historic preservation plan.

The final draft of the complete Preservation Plan, including all mapping, has been finished. The Plan has four volumes. The first is entitled the "Preservation Plan" which has information relating to all three major plans including a County Landscape Context and History, a Land Use Planning Context, a brief introduction to the three individual plans, a Public Outreach & Education chapter and a chapter on Tourism. The next three volumes are the Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation individual plans.

The plan is now on the county website and a hard copy is available for viewing at fifteen (15) public libraries throughout the county. On the county website and at the libraries are comment forms that can be sent electronically or mailed to the County. We have scheduled four virtual public meetings.

Wednesday September 22 at 10:00am
Tuesday, September 28 at 2:00 p.m.

Thursday, September 30 at 6:30 p.m.

Tuesday, October 5 at 6:30 p.m.

The public can register for the public meeting on the County website. In addition, to these public meetings, the County Planning Board will hold the appropriate public hearings so that the Plan can be adopted by the Board as an element of the County Master Plan.

Somerset County Road Corridor Safety Analysis Sub-regional Study

Kenneth Wedeen, Supervising Transportation Planner, stated since the last Planning Board meeting, planning and engineering staff, Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) members and stakeholder representatives reviewed the five draft RSA reports. Those comments were submitted to the consultant and the NJTPA.

Planning staff has been working with the consultant in preparing a meeting presentation and meeting agenda for the 2nd virtual Public Meeting scheduled for Wednesday, September 29th. The consultant has prepared a PowerPoint presentation summarizing the draft safety recommendations for each of the five RSA corridors. The public meeting will also include seven (7) breakout rooms in which attendees can provide their input and feedback on the draft safety recommendations for each RSA corridor as well as a Spanish language breakout room and general transportation breakout room. Somerset County, working with our Public Information Office and our consultant developed and distributed a meeting flyer, press release and social media posts promoting the public meeting on September 29th.

After the 2nd public meeting the consultant will prepare a list of comments that will be reviewed for inclusion in the draft RSA reports. The draft RSA reports will also be reviewed by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) staff and will also be included in the final draft. The final draft will be due to the NJTPA on October 30th with the final report due to the NJTPA by November 29th.

Somerset County Agriculture Development Board Update

Kate Katzer, Principal Planner, reported on September 14th the Somerset County Agriculture Development Board held their panel event entitled Influencing Agriculture: Women in Ag. The event started with a tour of the Duke Farms husbandry barn where participants learned more about the sustainable endeavors happening on the property and what Duke Farms hopes to accomplish through their stewardship initiatives.

That afternoon, Commissioner Drake and Commissioner Marano sat down with Margaret Waldock, Executive Director of Duke Farms; Lauren Salvatore, Sustainable Agriculture Coordinator for Duke Farms; Joanne Powell, Professor of Animal Sciences at Delaware Valley University; Debbie Norz, co-owner and co-operator of Norz Hill Farm and Market; and Erica Puskas, co-operator of the Middlebush Dairy Farm and co-owner of Big Cow Creamery who shared their stories, the changes they have seen in agriculture, and their thoughts on the future of the industry. The event was streamed on the County's Facebook page where panelists were able to answer questions from the virtual audience of two hundred (200) as well as the sixty (60) in-person guests. Since the video went live on the Facebook page, it has racked up nearly seven hundred fifty (750) views. Additionally, a recording of the event is being packaged to be placed

on YouTube and the Ag Board's webpage to continue to share the history of agriculture in our County.

Somerset County was named as a leader in the most female owned and operated farms in the State. The event was part of the County's recognition of the 100th anniversary of Women's Suffrage and was originally part of AG Day 2020 but unfortunately was cancelled just days before the event was to take place due to the pandemic. The SCADB unveiled trading cards showcasing the New Jersey Chapter of the Women's Land Army, a children's activity booklet with biographies about instrumental women in farming, an agricultural storymap designed and put together in collaboration with Mike Stepowj which highlighted the history of farming in Somerset County.

Women in Ag was the first in a series of outreach and education panels that will focus on a range of topics within the agriculture community – topics like generational farming, careers within agriculture, and AG education. Our recently released draft farmland preservation plan lays the groundwork for our new approach to education and outreach, and this panel allows us to begin that initiative. Staff hopes to hold this panel yearly during the Fall. Our education and outreach initiatives have been paying off, staff is happy to announce that the County currently has thirteen (13) projects in various stages in the preservation process with one project looking to close in the next few weeks. If all projects close, the County has the ability to add over 1,100 acres to the farmland preservation program. At a future Planning Board meeting staff will be bringing to the Board the Farmland Annual Report and sharing the SCADB's plans for our 40th anniversary of Farmland Preservation in 2023.

Public Comment

Chairman Navatto, Jr., opened the meeting to the Public. There being no comments, the meeting was closed to the Public.

Committee Reports

Committee Reports were included in the Packet.

Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, October 19, 2021 @4:45pm (virtual)

Adjournment

There being no further business before the Board, Chairman Navatto, Jr., asked for a motion to Adjourn. The motion was made by Commissioner Drake and seconded by Sami Shaban. A Voice Vote was called, and the motion moved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary