

**MINUTES OF THE NOVEMBER 16, 2021  
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD  
HELD AT 4:45 P.M.  
ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

**Call to Order**

The November 16, 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.

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

Bernard V. Navatto, Jr., Chairman  
Chris Kelly, Vice-Chair  
Al Ellis, Member  
John Lindner, Member  
Sami Shaban, Member  
Commissioner Paul Drake  
Ashok Rakhit, 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate  
Charissa Hammerman, Esq. covering for Joseph DeMarco, Esq., Deputy County Counsel

**Absent**

Erika Inocencio, Member  
Commissioner Director Robinson  
Matthew Loper, Secretary/County Engineer

**Also Present from Staff:**

Walter Lane, Director, Office of Planning Policy and Economic Development  
Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner  
Ken Wedeen, Supervising Transportation Planner  
Nora Fekete, Planner  
James Ruggieri, Principal Community Planner  
Tom Boccino, Principal Planner, Open Space Preservation  
Kate Katzer, Principal Planner  
Aarthy Sabesan, Manager, Office of GIS Services  
Michael Stepowyj, GIS Coordinator  
Patrice Brown, Administrative Assistant  
Cynthia Mellusi, Office Manager

### **Approval of October 19, 2021 Planning Board Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Navatto, Jr. asked for a motion to approve the minutes of October 19, 2021 Planning Board Meeting. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded by Al Ellis. A Voice Vote was called, and the motion moved unanimously.

### **Discussion/Presentation Items**

#### **NJ Highlands Council Highlands Region Economic Sustainability Plan**

Director Walter Lane provided an overview of the NJ Highlands Council Highlands Region Economic Sustainability Plan. The Highlands Council has been working on this effort for almost two (2) years. Director Lane reported he severed on the project's Steering Committee and attended numerous meetings during the course of the project.

The major goal of this project was to support a sustainable and prosperous economy in the Highlands region. There was an extensive public outreach process which included numerous meetings of the Steering Committee and the Technical Advisory Committee. The project team also met with Community Planning Center to gather feedback from the region's youth. Several online surveys were also conducted.

The NJ Highlands Council Highlands Region Economic Sustainability Plan has five (5) goals:

- Reinforce the Highlands Region as a center of natural resource protection, innovation and technology.
- Communicate the value of quality of life in the Highlands Region and evaluate how current assets meet, miss, or exceed market demand.
- Expand awareness and understanding of the New Jersey Highlands Council's purpose and impact on the business community.
- Strengthen the role of the New Jersey Highlands Council as leader in regional planning assistance.
- Support the Highlands Region's existing target industries and small businesses in their efforts to thrive and adapt in response to the new economy.

Each goal has numerous strategies and action items to advance the plan. The Plan also has numerous options for how the plan can be implement/advanced. These options include:

- New Regional Organization
- Highlands Council Takes Leadership Role
- County Coalition
- Individual Counties
- Consultant Coordinator
- Public/Private Partnership

Director Lane reviewed the draft letter contained in the Board's Meeting Packet. The letter commends the Highlands for undertaking this planning effort and highlighted how many of the goals and strategies are consistent with and supportive of the County's planning priorities and initiatives. The letter also expresses the County's desire for the County Coalition option to be the means to implement the Plan. Director Lane asked for the Board's approval to submit the

letter the Highlands Council. A short discussion ensued. After the discussion, the Board authorized Director Lane to submit the letter.

### **Planning Director's Report**

Director Walter Lane provided an overview of work underway in the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development. He briefed the Board on the following items:

- Director Lane briefed the Board on the work of the County's American Recovery Plan Working Group of which he is a member. He stated this funding will help the County advance many of the projects and programs developed by the Board.
- He reported staff continues to work with the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) regarding the review status of the various components of our Wastewater Management Plan (WMP). Changes are being made to the Septic Management Plan component.
- The County received the final draft of the AT&T® Land Use Study Final Report. The final draft will be shared with Bedminster Township for their review and comment.
- He reported Adam Bradford continues to advance implementation of the various EV grants he has received for the installation of charging stations. A grant request will be made to PSE&G for funding for necessary improvements to provide the infrastructure to provide power to the charging stations.
- Director Lane reported, with regret, two staffing changes. First, Mike Stepowij has resigned as he accepted a new position outside of the County. Director Lane thanked Mike for all he has done to support the Office during his tenure at the County and wished him much success in his future endeavors. The Board thanked Mike for his work.
- He also informed the Board that Ms. Cindy Mellusi would be retiring at the end of November. He thanked her for all her support and great work over the many years they have worked together. Several Board members thanked Cindy for all of her work and stated how she will be missed greatly.

### **Action Items/Informational Items**

#### **November 2021 Land Development Report and Approval of the October 2021 First Time Submissions**

Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner, referred to the report in the Planning Board Packet. The November 10, 2021 meeting of the County Planning Board Land Development Committee was held in the Second Floor Engineering Conference Room, County Administration Building in Somerville. The Committee reviewed one (1) waiver request as well as the first-time submissions for the month of October 2021.

#### **97 Main Street, South Bound Brook**

Thomas D'Amico presented the waiver request for the 97 Main Street project located at the intersection of Main Street (County Route 527) and Jackson Street in South Bound Brook. As noted during last month Committee meeting, the applicant is proposing nine (9) apartment units with nine (9) individual driveways on Jackson Avenue. The plan indicated that the proposed driveway closest to Main Street is 20 feet from the right-of-way line of Main Street. The Somerset County Planning Board review report for this project stated that since the

proposed site occupies a corner of two (2) intersecting roads, the plan must be revised so that no driveway entrance or exit is located within 35 feet of the extension of the right-of-way line.

The applicant's engineer requested a waiver from the above-mentioned County driveway setback requirement. After a thorough discussion the Land Development Committee agreed that the requested waiver should not be granted, since it would be contrary to long standing County policy and practice which had been developed to protect the interests of the County and the traveling public. In addition, the Committee also determined if the waiver was granted, a precedent would be set for projects in the future. Therefore, the County's position requiring no driveways within 35' of the proposed right-of-way line for Main Street, County Route 527, remains unchanged. This decision shall be transmitted to the applicant's engineer by the County professional staff.

### **First Time Submissions**

The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of October 2021. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 21 submissions. There were three (3) new lots proposed. Of the site plans proposed during the month there was 126,963 square feet of non-residential building spaces proposed as well as 143 multi-family units. There was \$38,471 in improvement value and \$3,080 in development review fees paid to the County Planning Board. It was noted that there has been 2,436 multi-family units proposed so far this year which is 945 more units than at this time last year.

Chairman Navatto, Jr., asked for a motion to approve the November 2021 Land Development Report and approval of the October 2021 First Time Submissions. The motion was made by Al Ellis and seconded by John Lindner. The roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Preservation Plan Update**

Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner, reported that 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.

As was mentioned at last month's meeting the final draft of the complete Preservation Plan, including all mapping, has been finished. A copy of the complete Plan has been available online and hard copies of the Plan are available at 15 County libraries. Comment sheets were available both online and at the 15 libraries. The County held four (4) virtual public meetings to discuss the plan. We had an estimated 70 people who attended the meetings and we received approximately 160 comments from both the virtual public meetings and from written comments submitted. We also received considerable comments from the State Agricultural Development Committee.

The County professional staff entered all comments into a data base and are currently reviewing these comments. Staff will make appropriate changes to the various plan elements based on the comments. The revised plans will be submitted to the Preservation Plan Steering Committee for their review and comment. After any recommended changes from the Steering Committee are incorporated into the Plan, the revised plan will be submitted to the County Park Commission, County Agricultural Development Board and the Cultural and Heritage Commission for their endorsement.

The final draft will be submitted to the County Planning Board for review and adoption as part of County Master Plan. We will be scheduling public meetings after all appropriate input has been incorporated into the plan.

#### **Census 2020 Redistricting Data – Report**

Aarthy Sabesan, Manager of Somerset County's Office of GIS Services, presented a summary report of the Census 2020 Redistricting Data. The report highlighted the 2020 population and demographic profiles of the county and its municipalities. By comparing this latest data against the 2010 data, the report quantified key population and demographic trends that's happened over the last 10 years. The report further dissected the population changes in terms of race and ethnicity, showing increases or decreases of certain races/ethnicity across the County and its municipalities.

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

Kenneth Wedeen, Supervising Transportation Planner, stated that since the October Planning Board meeting County Engineering, Planning and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's (NJTPA) staff have reviewed the five (5) draft RSA reports. County staff is waiting to review the final NJTPA revisions to be included in the final RSA report. Once the NJTPA comments have been reviewed the consultant will make one last set of revisions to the final RSA reports incorporating NJTPA and county staff comments. The final report document will be submitted to the NJTPA by November 30<sup>th</sup>.

#### **Somerset County Circulation Element Update**

Kenneth Wedeen, Supervising Transportation Planner reported on October 27<sup>th</sup> Somerset County submitted the draft Request for Proposals (RFP) to the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) for their review. Meanwhile on November 4<sup>th</sup> Cultural & Heritage, Planning and the Public Information Office staff met to begin developing branding strategies for the study including a study title, email address, logo and web page layout.

Once the NJTPA comments are reviewed and incorporated into the final RFP, County Planning staff working with Purchasing Department staff will release the RFP for at least a twenty (20) day response period. Any consultant responses will be reviewed and ranked by a consultant selection committee. The study should launch in February/March 2022 timeframe.

#### **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, December 21, 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 Chris Kelly and seconded by John Lindner. A Voice Vote was called, and the motion moved unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Matthew D. Loper, Secretary