

**MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 15, 2022
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
HELD AT 4:47 P.M.
ZOOM VIRTUAL MEETING**

Call to Order

The February 15, 2022 meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board convened at 4:47 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.

Swearing in of New and Reappointed Members

Marina Stinely read the oath and swore in Ashok Rakhit as the 1st Alternate Member of the Planning Board.

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

Bernard V. Navatto, Jr., Chair
Michael Giordano, Vice-Chair
Chris Kelly, Member
Al Ellis, Member
Erika Inocencio, Member
Sami Shaban, Member
Commissioner Director Shanel Robinson
Commissioner Paul Drake
Matthew Loper, Secretary/County Engineer
Ashok Rakhit, 1st Alternate
Maria Tapia Burch, 2nd Alternate
Marina Stinely, Esq. covering for Joseph DeMarco, Esq., County Counsel

Absent

Adam Slutsky, Alternate to the 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, Supervising Planner, Preservation
Kate Katzer, Principal Planner
Aarthy Sabesan, Manager, Office of GIS Services
Adam Bradford, Senior Planner
Sheli Daniels, Office Manager

Approval of January 18, 2021 Planning Board Meeting Minutes

Chairman Navatto, Jr. asked for a motion to approve the minutes of January 18, 2021 Planning Board Meeting. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded by Sami Shaban. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Discussion/Presentation Items

Preservation Plan Update

Thomas D’Amico 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. The County has contracted with Heritage Strategies to coordinate the report along with New Jersey Conservation Foundation to develop the Open Space Plan, Land Stewardship Solutions to develop the Farmland Preservation Plan and Barton Ross and Partners to develop the Historic Preservation Plan. The GIS mapping has been handled by Washington College with assistance from the County’s Office of GIS Services.

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. The County held four (4) virtual public meetings to discuss the plan. Approximately 70 people who attended the meetings and we have received approximately 160 comments from both the virtual public meetings and from written comments submitted to us. We have also received considerable comments from the State Agricultural Development Committee.

The County professional staff has reviewed and entered all comments into a database. Staff sent all the comments and recommended changes to the Preservation Plan Steering Committee. A Zoom meeting of the Steering Committee was held on February 4th to discuss the recommended changes and to receive their input. All of the recommended changes and steering committee comments have been sent to our consultants who are currently making the appropriate changes to all four volumes of the plan. Staff expects the final draft of the plan to be completed this week. After the recommended changes are incorporated into the Plan, the revised plan will be submitted to the County Planning Board for review and adoption as part of County Master Plan. The Plan will also be sent to all Municipalities in the County, consistent with the County Planning Act and to the County

Park Commission, County Agricultural Development Board and the County Cultural and Heritage Commission for their endorsement.

Walter Lane, Director, Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development discussed the next steps for the adoption of the Preservation Plan. He stated the current schedule calls for holding a public hearing at the March 15th Regular Planning Board Meeting. In case staff cannot provide more than the required 20-day notice for the public hearing, he asked the Board to approve holding a special Planning Board meeting on March 30th at 4:45pm. This still would allow the plan to be adopted at the May Regular Planning Board meeting and fulfill the 30-day public comment period following the required public hearing. He noted May is Preservation Month.

Chairman Navatto asked the Board if a March 30th Special Planning Board Meeting would be acceptable. The Board unanimously agreed to holding a Special Planning Board Meeting on March 30th at 4:45pm if needed to ensure the timely adoption of the Preservation Plan.

Planning Director's Report

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

- He introduced Sheli Daniels as the new Office Manager and stated Ms. Daniels is a great addition to the Office.
- Director Lane reported the County executed a contract with Rutgers University -Voorhees Transportation Center to update the County Investment Framework Map. In addition, another contract was executed with Rutgers University- NJ Travel Independence Program which provides technical assistance to advance our Age Friendly Planning efforts.
- The first quarterly meeting of the County's Complete Count Committee 2.0 will be in early March. He stated the group has been meeting on a regular basis since the Census was completed in 2020.
- He highlighted the Planning Partners Forums Save The Date Flyer in the Board's Packet. The Forum will be held virtually at 8am on the following dates: March 23, June 8, September 28 and December 8.
- Director Lane asked the Board if it was acceptable to distribute the Planning Board Packets on Fridays instead of Thursdays to ensure the Land Development Committee Reports can be included in the packet. The Land Development Committee meets on the Wednesdays of the week the packet is sent to the Board. The Board approved moving the distribution of the Board Packet to the Friday before the regular meeting.
- He stated he has been diligently working with Human Resources regarding the recruitment of candidates for the various vacant positions.
- Director Lane reported that Principal Community Planner James Ruggieri has indicated he will be retiring from the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development after fifteen (15) years of service to Somerset County. He thanked James for his excellent work and will say more at James last meeting in March.

Action Items/Informational Items

February 2022 Land Development Report and Approval of the January 2022 First Time Submissions

Thomas D'Amico, Supervising Planner, referred to the report in the Planning Board Packet. At the February 9, 2022 meeting of the County Planning Board Land Development Committee, the Committee reviewed one (1) waiver request as well the first time submissions for the month of January 2022. The meeting was held via Zoom.

490 Elizabeth Avenue, Franklin

Thomas D'Amico presented a waiver request by the applicants of a 48,000 square foot office/warehouse to be constructed at 490 Elizabeth Avenue (County Route 621). As noted in the Somerset County review letter dated September 16, 2021, *Clear Site Requirements*, the applicant submitted documents to fulfill the sightline easement requirement. As the five-foot setback area encroached onto the northerly adjacent property, the requirement was for the applicant to acquire the necessary sight easement area following the procedures set forth in the County's Land Development Review Resolution. In accordance with the acquisition process, a metes and bounds site distance easement map showing the area to be acquired from the adjacent lot, of approximately 121 square feet, was submitted. The applicant's agent had met with the adjacent lot owner's family and the offer for the site easement was rejected by the owner's daughter, during a conversation. The applicant's attorney then sent a written offer letter via certified mail. After receiving no response, the attorney sent another offer letter by certified mail to which no response was received. Pursuant to the above, the applicant then requested a waiver for the requirement be considered by the Land Development Committee at their regularly scheduled monthly meeting on February 9, 2022.

It was noted that the actual easement line encroached only a slight amount (approximately one foot) on to the adjacent property. Ken Yanga stated that since the actual sight line easement encroaches only by a foot there was not safety concern with granting the waiver. The Committee agreed that since all reasonable efforts to acquire the easement and the offset area were made by the applicant and since it does not present a safety concern the waiver as requested by the applicant is granted.

January First Time Submissions

The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of January. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 19 submissions. There were two new lots proposed. Of the site plans proposed during the month there was 279,591 square feet of non-residential building space proposed as well as 29 multi-family units. There was \$3,320 in development review fees paid to the County Planning Board. Bernard V. Navatto, Jr., did not participate in any discussion or take any action on the 205 Charis, LLC site plan project in Somerville.

Chairman Navatto, Jr., asked for a motion to approve the February 2022 Land Development Report and approval of the January 2022 First Time Submissions. The motion was made by Chris Kelly and seconded Michael Giordano. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Somerset County Circulation Plan Project Update

Supervising Planner Kenneth Wedeen reported staff has been working to address comments from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) received during January 2022 on the draft Somerset County Master Plan Circulation Element Update Request for Proposal. Staff emailed a set of revisions to the NJTPA on February 3rd. Planning staff is meeting with NJTPA staff on February 17th to discuss their comments and to finalize the Somerset County Master Plan Circulation Element Update RFP. Once the final RFP is approved by NJTPA staff, County Planning and Purchasing Department staff will work to advertise the RFP during late February/early March 2022.

Somerset County Road Corridor Safety Analysis Sub-Regional Study

Supervising Planner Kenneth Wedeen stated near the end of December 2021, Somerset County completed the Somerset County Roadway Corridor Safety Study. Somerset County staff submitted one (1) hard copy and one (1) electronic version of final Somerset County Roadway Corridor Safety study report to the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) to be posted on their web site.

Somerset County staff is preparing to post the full Somerset County Roadway Corridor Safety Study Final Report along with the five (5) separate Road Safety Audits on the study web page of the Somerset County Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development's web site. County staff will also be distributing a hard copy and electronic copies of the final report and five (5) road safety audits to the five Road safety audit municipalities.

Final 2022 Committee Assignments

Director Lane reported there were no requested changes to the 2022 Committee assignments and the list is now considered final.

State Plan Update

Director Lane reported he has been working with several towns who are seeking Plan Endorsement. Recently been working with the three Regional Center towns and with Bedminster Township to advance their efforts to receive plan endorsement. He also stated he has been having discussions with the Executive Director of the Office of Planning Advocacy regarding perusing County Plan endorsement. Issues related to the growing number of warehousing projects around the state have led to the State Planning Commission participating in discussions regarding this trend. Director Lane reported the Executive Director of the Office of Planning Advocacy reached out with to discuss various policy issues and strategies regarding the warehousing issue.

Wastewater Update

Director Lane reported staff has been working on completing the changes to the Septic Management Component requested by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). He stated this work has been delayed due to staffing issues and other work assignments. In regard to the status of the Future Sewer Service Area Map (FWSA) extension request made last summer, our NJDEP Staff liaison suggested Director Lane reach out to the Bureau Director for a status report on our request as he has not heard back from his superiors. An email was sent to the NJDEP Bureau Director

requesting a status update. NJDEP is currently reviewing the other components of our draft Wastewater Management Plan (WMP) that were submitted last summer.

Director Lane then reviewed the details of the Fox Hollow Project. The Board Packet contained information regarding the Fox Hollow Site-Specific WMP Amendment. He stated this project was previously discussed with the Board and referenced a letter detailing our concerns that was sent in July of 2020 in addition to the Somerset Raritan Valley Sewerage Authority's (SRVSA)s most recent letter. He reported he had spoken to the staff of the Hunterdon County Planning Department regarding this project. Hunterdon County staff have similar concerns as to those outlined in our original letter. Director Lane stated he would share the County Planning Board's comments with Hunterdon County after the February meeting. A meeting with the project's applicant has been tentatively scheduled later this week.

Director Lane stated the Board will have to take an action at the March Planning Board meeting to provide comments to the applicant and NJDEP. He suggested the Board adopt a strategy approach similar to the one taken with the Errico Acres project in the Borough of Far Hills. The Board asked Director Lane to reach out to Branchburg Township to ascertain their position on the project. Director Lane will develop a draft letter outlining the County's position on the project for consideration at the March 15th Planning Board meeting.

Public Comments

Chairman Navatto 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: March 15, 2022 @ 4:45PM (Virtual)

Adjournment: 5:25 pm

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 Michael Giordano. A Voice Vote was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary