

**MINUTES OF THE AUGUST 15, 2023
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
HELD AT 4:45 P.M.
IN PERSON MEETING**

Call to Order

The August 15, 2023 meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board convened at 4:47 p.m. This meeting was held in person.

Pledge of Allegiance

Open Public Meetings Statement

Chairman Bernard V. 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
Michael Giordano, Vice-Chair
Christopher Kelly, Member
Commissioner Paul Drake
Matt Loper, Recording Secretary

Absent

Albert Ellis, Member
Erika Inocencio, Member
Sami Shaban, Member
Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson
Ashok Rakhit, 1st Alternate

Also Present from Staff:

Walter Lane, Director, Office of Planning, Policy & Economic Development
Tom Boccino, Supervising Planner, Preservation
Ken Wedeen, Supervising Planner, Transportation
Aarthy Sabesan, Manager, Office of GIS Services
Jessica Paolini, Manager Economic Development
Kaitlin Bundy, Manager Culture & Heritage

Erika Phillips, Principal Community Planner
Jonathan Eagle, Senior Transportation Planner
Josephine Taranto, Preservation Planner
Nora Fekete, Planner, Land Development
Naghma Malik, GIS Services Coordinator
Stephanie Ladas, GIS Specialist
Sheli Daniels, Office Manager
Marina Stinely, Esq. covering for Joseph DeMarco, Esq., County Counsel

Approval of the Meeting Minutes

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the July 18, 2023 Planning Board Meeting Minutes. The motion was moved by Matt Loper and seconded by Michael Giordano. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION/PRESENTATION ITEMS

Presentation: “Transforming Utility Management: Enhancing Field Map Data Collection at Hillsborough Municipal Utility Authority”

Naghma Malik, GIS Coordinator of GIS Services presented a slide show of how we initiated a comprehensive solution that streamlined the workflow and brought precision and accuracy to utility management. Leveraging ESRI's ArcGIS Online and Field Maps Application, she constructed a digital framework that transformed their data collection process.

The Hillsborough Municipal Utilities Authority (HMUA) will now achieve heightened data accuracy and completeness, revolutionizing their decision-making processes. The Field Maps application introduced a user-friendly interface for streamlined data collection, while seamless data synchronization facilitates prompt analysis and reporting. The HMUA now has the ability to edit entries in the field improves the overall accuracy of the collected data. HMUA's case demonstrates how a meticulous approach to data management and advanced tools can transform utility management. With our data collection and management system now in place, the road to proactive management opens. Dashboards and advanced analyses become the compass, guiding utility managers towards efficient decision-making.

Ms. Malik concluded that the process we've unveiled here isn't limited to HMUA; it holds potential for broader implementation within the county and beyond with local partners.

Planning Director’s Report

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane reported Bedminster Township received Plan Endorsement from the State Planning Commission on August 2, 2023. Mayor Jacobs thanked Somerset County for supporting and assisting the Township over the last two years as the Township worked to secure this designation.

Staff has been leading a series of meetings of the NJ County Planners Association's State Plan and Smart Growth Working Group. Over the last several months, the group has been meeting with the Office of Planning Advocacy's Executive Director Donna Rendeiro to discuss the update of State Development and Redevelopment Plan, potential changes to the plan's definitions and potential changes to the State Plan Policy Map. Strategies on how to streamline the Cross Acceptance process were also discussed.

Director Lane was invited to serve on a panel regarding the update of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan at the upcoming League of Municipalities Conference. He was asked to speak about why the State Plan is important and how it can help planning and zoning board members make good land use decisions. Somerset County is viewed as a leader in regional planning and advancing the implementation of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

The next Planning Partners Forum will be on September 26th at 8am and held viz Zoom. The main speaker will be Jef Buehler from the NJ Business Action Center. His presentation will cover the resources the NJ Business Action Center has for small business and downtowns such as the Main Street NJ Program. The meeting announcement will be sent out later this week.

Director Lane reported staff had manned several tables at the 4H Fair last week. He thanked all of the staff for participating especially the ones who worked after normal business hours manning the tables. He thanked Josephine Taranto for overseeing the Office' efforts as well as Kaitlin Bundy for overseeing Cultural and Heritage's efforts at the 4H Fair.

The August 2023 Committee Report was accidently omitted from the Board Packet and was distributed to all the members at today's meeting.

ACTION/INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

August 2023 Land Development Report and Approval of the July 2023 First Time Submissions

Planner Nora Fekete reported that the Land Development Committee did not meet this month. Therefore, the full County Planning Board must approve the First Time Submissions for the month of July 2023. The First Time Submission information was in the Board's packet. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 29 submissions. There were 2 new lots proposed and zero lots created. Of the site plans proposed during the month there was 506,716 square feet of non-residential building space proposed as well as 112 multi-family units. There was \$1,760 in development review fees and \$0 in improvement value paid to the County Planning Board.

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the July, 2023 Land Development Committee report. The motion was moved by Chris Kelly and seconded by Michael Giordano. The roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

Circulation Plan Update

Supervising Transportation Planner Ken Wedeen reported that since the last Board meeting, planning and engineering staff have met with the consultant while reviewing a draft list of projects and strategy recommendations to be included in the draft Circulation Plan final report.

Planning staff also received and reviewed the draft land use, transportation and affordable housing technical memorandums. Planning staff and the consultant selected September 13th as the last TAC meeting and September 28th as the 2nd public meeting. The consultant has prepared social media, flyer and palm cards in English and Spanish promoting the September 28th public meeting. Planning staff and the consultant have agreed to host several pop-up events during October 2023 after the September 28th public meeting. Staff printed hard copies of the business card and public meeting flyer that were distributed at the 4-H fair.

Wastewater Management Plan Site Specific Amendments Consistency Letters

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane provided brief summaries of three proposed Site-Specific Amendments to the Somerset County Wastewater Management Plan. As part of the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's (NJDEP) wastewater management planning process, the County is requested to provide documentation stating the applicant has contacted the County to notify the County of the proposed amendment as well ask if the proposed amendment is consistent with the County's Master Plan. The three (3) draft consistency review letters included in the Board's packet that you are considering approval of at this meeting will satisfy the NJDEP's requirements.

The proposed site-specific Water Quality Management Plan (WQMP) amendments are:

- Cyzner Properties, Block 11, Lots 44, 44.01 and 44.03, Hillsborough Township
- Valley Industrial Partners, LLC, Block 143, Lot 3, Hillsborough Township
- Izzo/Sempre, Block 67 Lot 2 and the remaining lands of Block 67 Lot 3.04, Branchburg Township

Cyzner Properties, Block 11, Lots 44, 44.01 and 44.03, Hillsborough Township

Director Lane reported Cyzner Properties has proposed site-specific amendment to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) involving a proposal to provide public sanitary sewer service to Lots 44.04 and 44.03 to serve a single-family home on each lot. These lots are located in the County's Priority Preservation Investment Area in the 2014 County Investment Framework (CIF). The CIF defines PPIAs as "areas where agriculture and the preservation and restoration of environmentally sensitive natural resources are preferred and where investments aimed at resource restoration and protection, and farmland and open space preservation are preferred". The extension of sanitary sewers into the County's Priority Preservation Investment Areas is generally discouraged. This property is also located the Neshanic Valley Agricultural Development Area in the County Farmland Preservation Plan which as adopted in May of 2022 as part of the Somerset County Preservation Plan. The total area of the requested to be added to the sewer service area is 3.56 acres.

Based upon these facts, staff and the Master Plan Committee and Environment & Utilities Committee recommends the Somerset County Planning Board does not support the proposed amendment at this time for the reasons stated above. Director Lane asked the Board to approve the letter.

Valley Industrial Partners, LLC, Block 143, Lot 3, Hillsborough Township

Director Lane stated Valley Industrial Partners, LLC) has submitted an application specific amendment to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) involving a proposal to provide public sanitary sewer service to Block 143, Lot 3 to serve a 145,000 square foot warehouse facility. The subject property is located in the County's Priority Preservation Investment Area in the 2014 County Investment Framework (CIF). The CIF was adopted as part of the County Master Plan in April of 2014. The CIF defines PPIAs as "areas where agriculture and the preservation and restoration of environmentally sensitive natural resources are preferred and where investments aimed at resource restoration and protection, and farmland and open space preservation are preferred". The extension of sanitary sewers into the County's Priority Preservation Investment Areas is generally discouraged. This property is also located the Neshanic Valley Agricultural Development Area in the County Farmland Preservation Plan which as adopted in May of 2022 as part of the Somerset County Preservation Plan.

Based upon these facts, staff and the Master Plan Committee and Environment & Utilities Committee recommends the Somerset County Planning Board does not support the proposed amendment at this time for the reasons stated above. Director Lane spoke with Hillsborough Township about both amendments. The Township was supportive of the County's position on both projects. Director Lane asked the Board to approve the letter.

Izzo/Sempre, Block 67 Lot

Director Lane reported the Sempre Property Group has proposed site-specific amendment to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) involving a proposal to provide public sanitary sewer service to family dwelling located on Block 67, Lot 3.05 in Branchburg Township. The subject property is located in the County's Priority Preservation Investment Area, a designation created in the 2014 County Investment Framework (CIF). The CIF was adopted as part of the County Master Plan in April of 2014. The CIF defines PPIAs as "areas where agriculture and the preservation and restoration of environmentally sensitive natural resources are preferred and where investments aimed at resource restoration and protection, and farmland and open space preservation are preferred". The extension of sanitary sewers into the County's Priority Preservation Investment Areas is generally discouraged.

However, the Somerset County Planning Board considered the fact that this lot was created as part of a joint County/Township open space preservation project that subdivided Block 67, Lot 3.04 to create two lots (Lots 3.04 and 3.05). Lot 3.04 is now roughly 20 acres of permanently preserved open space. The project is in close proximity to existing sewer service and the subject property is surrounded by preserved open space therefore not allowing the further extension of the sewer service area. Based upon these facts, the Somerset County Planning Board supports the proposed amendment to add Lot 3.04 to the sewer service area at this time for the reasons stated above.

Director Lane reported he had received a letter from NJDEP on August 10, 2023 stating since this connection would not constitute a “sewer extension” an amendment to the wastewater management is not needed and asked the applicant to withdraw their application. On August 11, 2023, staff received an email from applicant’s engineer stating the Somerset Raritan Vally Sewerage Authority is requiring the lot be added to the sewer service area by the County. Staff contacted NJDEP for clarification. NJDEP indicated no action is needed at this time. Once the connection is made, a revision can be made to the sewer service area map, or the change can be made in the Wastewater Management Plan Update. Director Lane stated no action was needed for this project from the Board at this time.

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the letters. The motion was moved by Mike Giordano and seconded by Paul Drake. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

Wastewater Management Plan

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane summarized the status of the County’s wastewater planning efforts. In a recent update provided by staff from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), the Notice of Adoption for the approval of the Septic Management Plan is under review and should be posted in the NJ Register in the near future. NJDEP also reported initial comments on the draft Wastewater Management Plan, which was submitted to NJDEP in June 2021 and has been under review since that time, will be provided before the end of August 2023.

Public Comments

No members of the public were present.

Committee Reports


Committee Reports were included with the meeting packet.

Next meeting Date

September 19, 2023 @ 4:45 Regular In Person Meeting

There being no further business before the Board Chairman Navatto asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was moved by Mike Giordano and seconded by Paul Drake. A voice vote was called and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:14pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary