

**MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 19, 2023
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
HELD AT 4:45 P.M.
IN PERSON MEETING**

Call to Order

The September 19, 2023 meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board convened at 4:45 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, Chair
Michael Giordano, Vice-Chair
Albert Ellis, Member
Christopher Kelly, Member
Commissioner Paul Drake
Matt Loper, Secretary

Absent

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
Erika Phillips, Supervising Planner, Environmental & Resiliency
Jessica Paolini, Manager Economic Development
Kaitlin Bundy, Manager Culture & Heritage
Kate Katzer, Principal Planner, Farmland Preservation
Jonathan Eagle, Senior Transportation Planner

Josephine Taranto, Preservation Planner
Stephanie Ladas, GIS Specialist
Ben Nanna, Economic Development/Film Commission Specialist
Sheli Daniels, Office Manager
Marina Stinely, Esq. covering for Joseph DeMarco, Esq., Deputy County Counsel

Approval of the Meeting Minutes

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the August 15, 2023 Planning Board Meeting Minutes. The motion was moved by Chris Kelly and seconded by Michael Giordano. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION/PRESENTATION ITEMS

Cultural & Heritage Long Range Plan Update

Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission and Strategic Initiatives Manager, Kaitlin Bundy, provided an update on the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission's on-going 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. The project team reviewed existing county plans, such as the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS), Walk, Bike, Hike and the Preservation Plan to help find potential areas for cross-sector collaboration. A number of public outreach opportunities (both virtual and in-person) were held, including focus groups, a symposium, a virtual open house, and pop-up booths. A set of guiding principles and three transformational goals were established. Each goal is accompanied by numerous strategies that outline the direction in which Somerset County will move toward achieving each of the goals. Each strategy includes a series of actions that are designed to be specific, easily put to use, relevant, and measurable over time. The Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission expects to adopt the plan at the October 5, 2023 Cultural & Heritage Commission meeting. Shortly after, the Commission intends to bring the plan before the Somerset County Planning Board for consideration of adoption as part of the County's Master Plan.

Planning Director's Report

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane reported Bedminster Township received an Achievements in Planning Award from the NJ Planning Officials for the AT&T Land Use Study. This study was a joint effort between the County and the Township. Chairman Navatto and Director Lane will be attending the awards ceremony on September 29, 2023.

Director Lane reported the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development is working with the Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University as part of a graduate student studio class entitled "You Can Get There From Here: Reimagining Circulation in Somerset County, NJ." The studio being led by Tom Dallessio, is charged with exploring alternative transportation solutions and strategies such as but not limited to bike share, e-bike, e-scooters, ride-share services, and any other emerging technologies to help inform and help advance the vision and goals of the new Circulation

Master Plan. He spoke to the class last night and is currently working on arranging a tour of the County for the class. Ken Wedeen and Jonathan Eagle are also working with the class on this project.

The next Planning Partners Forum will be on September 26th at 8am and held via Zoom. The main speaker will be Jef Buehler from the NJ Business Action Center. So far over 20 attendees have registered for the meeting.

Director Lane announced Erika Phillips has been promoted and is now the Supervising Planner – Environmental and Resiliency. He stated Erika has a lot of great ideas on how the County can address the environmental and resiliency issues facing the County.

Director Lane reported that the office space that the Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development occupies is undergoing some renovations. The entire office space has been painted and new carpet is being installed throughout the office. He thanked the entire staff for still fulfilling their responsibilities while having to pack the contents of the office up to allow for the painting and recarpeting. He especially thanked Office Manager Sheli Daniels for managing the renovation effort.

ACTION/INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

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

Supervising Planner Erika Phillips reported that at the September 13, 2023 meeting of the County Planning Board Land Development Committee, the Committee reviewed two information items as well as the first time submissions for the month of August 2023. The meeting was held via Zoom. The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of August 2023. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 21 submissions. There were four (4) new lots proposed. Of the site plans proposed during the month, there were 24,750 square feet of non-residential building space proposed as well as 96 multi-family units. There was \$1,350.00 in development review fees and \$4,281.00 in improvement value paid to the County Planning Board.

Bernard Navatto, Jr., did not participate in any discussion or take any action on the 6 West Cliff Street, LLC site plan in Somerville.

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the August First Time Submissions. The motion was moved by Mike Giordano and seconded by Chris Kelly. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

Circulation Plan Update

Supervising Transportation Planner Kenneth Wedeen reported that since the August Planning Board meeting planning staff has been working with Engineering, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) and consultant team to finalize the final Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) committee meeting and public meeting dates and to develop the draft study recommendations.

The 3rd and last TAC committee meeting took place on September 13th at which the consultant team and Planning staff presented draft study recommendations to the TAC for their feedback. The TAC also has an additional seven (7) days to provide any comments on the draft study recommendations. Planning staff worked with the Public Information Office (PIO) and the NJTPA to develop the press release and public meeting flyer. The PIO generated a number of social media posts. Flyers were emailed to municipalities, planning partners and persons who participated in previous online survey and mapping exercise as well as to those who emailed comments to the study email address. The final public meeting will take place on Thursday September 28th. The meeting will be virtual and will include a PowerPoint presentation along with a series of breakout rooms to allow participants to provide comments regarding the draft study recommendations.

In October, the consultant and planning staff will be conducting several pop-up events to gain additional public comments on the draft study recommendations. The final report will be drafted and reviewed during October/November 2023 and prepared for adoption by the County Planning Board.

County Investment Framework Update

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane provided a brief report on the status the update of County Investment Framework. The County has engaged the Vorhees Transportation Center at Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University to update the 2014 County Investment Framework Map and draft an updated Land Use Element of the County Master Plan. The team from the Vorhees Transportation Center have addressed a few data issues associated with the 2014 version of the County Investment Framework Map as well used updated data such as open space and farmland preservation purchases to create an updated map. Staff are currently reviewing the updated map and review the new map with the Master Plan Committee in the near future. Once the Master Plan Committee has reviewed the updated map, staff will schedule meetings with all of the County's municipalities to gather feedback and identify potential revisions.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan Update

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane gave a brief update on the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The State Planning Commission (SPC) has started the process to update the 2001 State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The SPC has hired a team consisting of members of New Jersey Chapter of the American Planning Association to undertake a stakeholder outreach process and assist in draft an updated Preliminary State Plan. The SPC has also hired the Vorhees Transportation Center at Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy at Rutgers University to undertake the Infrastructure Assessment as required by the State Planning Statute.

In addition, Staff continues lead the meetings of the NJ County Planners Association's State Plan and Smart Growth Working Group. The group continues to meet with 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. The Cross Acceptance Process has been discussed in detail and the SPC envisions a streamlined version of the process.

Director Lane reported in addition to being on a panel regarding the update of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan at the upcoming League of Municipalities Conference, he was asked to present at a special meeting on the State Plan the League of Municipalities is holding on October 3, 2023. For both panels. 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. He was asked to speak about the collaborative work Somerset County has done with our municipalities and how we have helped implement the State Development and Redevelopment Plan at the county and municipal level. He stated the SPC Commission, and many others hold up Somerset County as the example of how good regional planning is done.

Wastewater Management Plan Site Specific Amendment Consistency Letter for Glen Gery, BK 183; L 38.02, BK 182; Lots 9, 10, & 11, and BK 183; Lots 45 & 46 – Hillsborough Township

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane provided a brief overview of the overview of the proposed Site-Specific Wastewater Management Plan Amendment for the Glen Gery Project located in Hillsborough Township. 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 Board had approved sending a letter in September of 2019 which stated the proposed amendment was not consistent with the County's Master Plan.

The project consists of 380 single-family detached residences that will generate projected wastewater flows of 114,000 GPD. Portions of the tract, located in the vicinity of the intersection of Hamilton and Sunnymeade Roads, are part of a former quarry operation. It is traversed by a roadway, streams, wetlands, a railroad line and a utility R.O.W. As shown on the Somerset County Master Plan County Investment Framework Map, the portion of the tract to the west of the railroad is within the Glen Gery Quarry/North Hillsborough Industrial Area Local Priority Area and is traversed by a Priority Preservation Investment Area - Greenway Linkage Overlay that generally corresponds to the Royce Brook Stream Corridor within which environmentally sensitive areas are located. A portion of the subject site on the east side of the railroad line includes environmental sensitive wetlands. This half of the tract is within the Priority Preservation Investment Area as shown on the Somerset County Master Plan County Investment Framework Map. The expansion of SRVSA's assigned sewer service area to include this portion of the tract is inconsistent with the County Master Plan County Investment Framework Map. He also noted this project is part of the Township's Fair Share Settlement agreement. As part of this agreement, the developer will construct roughly eighty eight units of affordable housing on another site in Hillsborough Township. In the past, the Board have supported site-specific wastewater management plan amendments that contained affordable housing units on the site of the proposed amendment that were inconsistent with the County Investment Framework. However, this proposal is different since the site that is the subject of the amendment does not have any proposed affordable housing units.

Based upon these facts, staff and the Master Plan Committee recommend the Somerset County Planning Board does not support the proposed amendment at this time for the reasons stated above. Director Lane asked the Board if they would like to change their position cited in the September of

2019 letter or support their original position and/or send a follow-up letter to their September 2019 letter.

After a brief discussion, a motion was made by Mike Giordano and seconded by Chris Kelly for Director Lane to prepare a letter reaffirming the Board's previous finding the proposed site-specific wastewater management plan amendment is not consistent with the County Master Plan. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

Wastewater Management Plan Update

Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane summarized the status of the County's wastewater planning efforts. Earlier today NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) provided a status update on the County's Wastewater Management Plan. NJDEP reported 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 coming weeks. 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 very soon.

Public Comments

No members of the public were present.

Committee Reports


Committee Reports were included with the meeting packet.

Next Meeting Date

October 17, 2023 @ 4:45pm 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 Matt Loper. A voice vote was called and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:17pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary