

**MINUTES OF THE FEBRUARY 20, 2024  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD  
HELD AT 4:45 P.M.  
IN PERSON MEETING**

**Call to Order**

The February 20, 2024 meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board convened at 4:49 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.

**Swearing in of New & Reappointed Members**

Ashok Rakhit was sworn in as a member of the Somerset County Planning Board by Marina Stinely, Esq.

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

Bernard V. Navatto, Jr, Chair  
Michael Giordano, Vice-Chair  
Commissioner Paul Drake  
Matthew Loper, Secretary  
Ashok Rakhit, 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate (arrived at 4:58pm)

**Absent**

Albert Ellis  
Christopher Kelly  
Erika Inocencio  
Sami Shaban  
Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson

**Also Present from Staff:**

Walter Lane, Director of Planning  
Kaitlin Bundy, Manager Culture & Heritage  
Robert Meyer, Culture & Heritage, Administrative Coordinator  
Katie Himics, Culture & Heritage, Program Coordinator  
Tom Boccino, Preservation Supervising Planner  
Josephine Taranto, Preservation Planner  
Sheli Daniels, Office Manager  
Marina Stinely, Esq. for Joe Demarco, County Council

**Approval of the January 30, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the January 30, 2024 Planning Board Meeting Minutes. The motion was moved by Matt Loper and seconded by Mike Giordano. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**DISCUSSION / PRESENTATION ITEMS:**

**Public Hearing: Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Long Range Plan**

Cultural & Heritage Commission Manager Kaitlin Bundy, Program Coordinator Katie Himics, and Administrative Coordinator Robert Meyer provided an overview of the Somerset County Cultural & Heritage Commission’s Long-Range Plan. The Commission engaged with 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 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 nine focus groups, a symposium, a virtual open house, seven different pop-up booths, and a survey and mapping tool. A set of guiding principles and three transformational goals were established. Each goal is accompanied by a number of 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 adopted the plan in October of 2023. Public Comment will remain open for 30 days. The public can provide comments to Kaitlin Bundy, Cultural & Heritage Manager, at PO Box 3000, 20 Grove Street, Somerville, NJ 08876 or by email at [CulturalHeritage@co.somerset.nj.us](mailto:CulturalHeritage@co.somerset.nj.us). The draft plan is available for review on the County website: [SoCoNJ.gov/LongRangePlan](http://SoCoNJ.gov/LongRangePlan). The plan will be presented for adoption into the County Master Plan at the April 16, 2024 Planning Board Meeting.

Chairman Navatto opened the floor to public comments. Olinda Young of Somerset County Historic Society stated that it is very exciting to see the meshing of history, culture and art with what is going on in the county and the Cultural & Heritage Commission should be very proud of the work they are doing. There being no other public comments, Chairman Navatto closed the floor to the public. 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate Ashok Rakhit mentioned the importance of economic development and attracting companies to relocate or expand in Somerset County. Director Lane summarized how the County’s planning

efforts have supported the County's economic development activities and cited the recent announcement that *Cellares* has chosen the County as the location of their new smart factory for the production of cell and gene therapy treatments.

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

Last week, the County created the new Department of Engineering and Planning headed by Matt Loper. All the previous functions of the Planning Office are part of the new Department with the exception of the Economic Development Office which will remain as part of the County Administrator's Office. We are excited to be part of this new Department and look forward to continuing our good work.

Planning Director Lane reported he was elected as a 2024 Planning Advisor to the NJ Planning Officials Board of Directors (NJPO). The NJPO is a non-profit, 501(c)3 tax-exempt organization. It provides educational services, support and information to municipal planning boards, zoning boards of adjustment and elected officials.

The NJ Highlands Council has released two amendments to the Highlands Regional Master Plan. The first amendment adds Policy Standards for Warehousing in the Highlands Region and the second amendment makes changes to the Land Use Capability Zone Map. Staff will review the amendments and discuss potential comments with the Master Plan Committee at their next committee meeting. Public comments on the proposed amendments are due on April 1, 2024.

Director Lane reported he was asked to serve on two potential panels at upcoming conferences. He was asked by Sustainable Jersey to serve on a panel at the joint American Planning Association-NJ Chapter/NJ Future Planning Conference to speak about Somerset County's energy and sustainability planning. Office of Planning Advocacy Executive Director Donna Rendeiro invited Director Lane to participate on a panel about the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP) at the NJ Association of Counties conference. This panel will highlight how the SDRP can be successfully implemented at the local level with Somerset County being highlighted as the model for other local governments to follow.

Finally, Director Lane stated he recently gave a presentation to a Creative Placemaking Class at the New Jersey Institute of Technology. He was asked to detail the collaborative planning work undertaken by Somerset County and how creative placemaking and community engagement strategies have been incorporated into our day-to-day planning work. The class instructor cited the County's planning work as the best in the State of New Jersey.

### **ACTION ITEMS / INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

#### **Final 2024 Committee Assignments**

Director of Planning Walter Lane reported there were no requests for changes to the draft 2024 Committee Assignments and the final list of committee assignments was included in the Board's meeting packet.

## **February 2024 Land Development Report and Approval of the January 2024 First Time Submissions**

Planning Director Walter Lane reported the Somerset County Planning Board Land Development Committee met on February 14, 2024 via Zoom.

The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of January 2024. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 21 submissions. There were no new lots proposed. Of the site plans proposed during the month, there were 80,742 square feet of non-residential building space proposed and 88 multi-family units were proposed. There was \$5,750.00 in development review fees and \$101,867.00 in improvement value paid to the County Planning Board. The Committee approved the January 2024 First Time Submissions at the February 14, 2024 Land Development Committee Meeting.

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the February 2024 Land Development Committee Report and the First Time Submissions for January 2024. The motion was moved by Mike Giordano and seconded by Paul Drake. A roll call vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Circulation Plan Update**

Planning Director Walter Lane provided a brief status report on the effort to update the Circulation Plan element of the County Master Plan. He stated the first round of revisions to the draft Circulation Plan was completed by the Michael Baker Inc. consultant team. County Staff has reviewed the revisions and have made additional comments. The County is now waiting on comments from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). Once the County receives the latest round of comments from the NJTPA, planning staff will meet with engineering staff to make the final round of revisions to the draft plan.

### **NJ State Agricultural Development Committee Draft Soil Protection Standards Rule Proposal Comment Letter**

Planning Director Walter Lane gave a brief summary of the proposed Soil Protection Standards released by the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC). In October of 2023, the Board approved submitting a letter to the SADC detailing the County's concerns regarding the proposed rules and their impact on the County's Farmland Preservation Program. In late October of 2023, staff attended a meeting hosted by the Somerset County Board of Agriculture where the SADC made a presentation on proposed rules. At this meeting, the SADC spoke at length about how the proposed rules are intended ensure the protection of topsoil on preserved farmland and the need to properly stockpile topsoil.

He referred to the draft letter which was included in the Board's Meeting Packet. The draft letter supports the Somerset County Agriculture Development Board's (SCADB) recent suggestion that, following a review by the SCADB, farmers be permitted to stockpile the topsoil, in accordance with Natural Resource Conservation Services and/or Soil Conservation District regulations. This would allow the topsoil to remain protected and available for future agricultural production while permitting farmers to develop areas of their land as needed for their agricultural operations.

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the NJ State Agricultural Development Committee Soil Protection Standards Rule Proposal Comment Letter. The motion was moved by Paul Drake and seconded by Mike Giordano. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

**Wastewater Management Plan Site-Specific Amendments Consistency Letters**

*Cyzner Properties, Block 11, Lots 44,44.01 & 44.03, Hillsborough Township*

Planning Director Lane provided a brief overview on the proposal to provide public sanitary sewer service to Lots 44.04 and 44.03 to serve a single-family home on each lot. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) determined a site-specific amendment to the County Wastewater management Plan was not needed since the applicant only needed to construct lateral service lines a short distance to connect to the existing sewer line located in front of their property.

The applicant has asked the County to provide a letter to the Somerset Raritan Valley Sewerage Authority stating the County approves this connection. This request and a draft response letter, included in the Board's meeting packet, were discussed at the February 15, 2024 Environment and Utilities Committee meeting. The draft letter states the proposed provision of public sanitary sewer service to Lots 44.04 and 44.03 to serve single-family homes on each lot is inconsistent with the County Master Plan but the County would not object to the proposed connection since NJDEP has approved the connection.

*Glen Gery, BK 183, L 38.02; BK 182, Lots 9, 10 & 11 and BK 183, Lots 45 & 46, Hillsborough Township*

Director of Planning Walter Lane briefly reviewed the proposed site-specific amendment to the County's Wastewater Management Plan for adding Block 183; Lot 38.02, Block 182; Lots 9, 10, & 11, and Block 183; Lots 45 & 46 in Hillsborough Township. The project consists of 380 single-family detached residences. In June of 2019, the County Planning Board determined the proposed site-specific amendment was inconsistent with the County Master Plan since the subject properties were located in the Priority Preservation Investment Area of the County Investment Framework.

On January 25, 2024, the Somerset County Planning Board received correspondence from Hillsborough Township's Planning Director David Kois requesting the designation of the subject properties be changed to one of the designated growth areas of the Somerset County Investment Framework Map based upon the Township's rezoning of this site to support the development of affordable housing within the Township and this site is part of the Township's overall affordable housing development plan. Staff prepared a draft letter which was included in the Board's meeting packet.

The draft letter states these the County will include the properties outlined in the proposed Site-Specific Wastewater Management Plan amendment in one of the growth area designations of the County Investment Framework Map. These properties will be added to either the Glen Gery Local Priority Area or to the Alternate Growth Area of the County Investment Framework Map during the next update of the map. The letter also states the Somerset County Planning Board supports the proposed Site-Specific Wastewater Management Plan amendment and will adopt a resolution of consent at the appropriate time.

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve both site-specific consistency letters. The motion was moved by Mike Giordano and seconded by Paul Drake. A roll call vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **State Development and Redevelopment Plan Update**

Planning Director Walter Lane gave a brief report on the update of the 2001 State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP). Over the past month he reported he has numerous meetings with Donna Rendeiro, Executive Director of the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) about the Cross Acceptance Process. Right now, Somerset County is scheduled to host the first public hearing on the draft SDRP. This public hearing is tentatively scheduled to be held in County Commissioners Meeting Room on Wednesday, June 12, 2024 from 6pm to 8pm.

In a recent meeting with the counties covered by the NJ Highlands Council Regional Master Plan, hosted by the NJ Highlands Council and OPA, the NJ Highlands Council said it is their intention to serve as the negotiating entity for the municipalities that are under the jurisdiction of the Highlands Council instead of the Counties. At this meeting, Director Lane indicated Somerset County and its municipalities may want the County to serve as the negotiating entity instead of the Highlands Council. Director Lane suggested the County may want to meet with our Highlands Council municipalities to identify who they would prefer to be their negotiating entity. He noted that the County cannot act on the resolution designating the County Planning Board as the negotiating entity until this issue is resolved.

Chairman Navatto asked if the Board approved of having Director Lane meet with the NJ Highlands Council municipalities to determine their preference as to who would serve as their negotiating entity and all the Board Members unanimously responded yes.

### **Wastewater Management Plan Update**

Director Walter Lane summarized the status of the County's wastewater planning efforts. The NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) has indicated that Notice of Adoption for the approval of the Septic Management Plan (SMP) should be in the NJ Register in the coming weeks. Director Lane reminded the Board that Middlesex County must approve Somerset County's SMP since part of the existing sewer service area in Somerset County is served by a wastewater treatment plant located in Middlesex County. He also reported the County has not received any initial comments on the draft Wastewater Management Plan, which was submitted to NJDEP in June 2021.

### **Public Comments**

No members of the public were present.

### **Committee Reports**

Committee Reports were included with the meeting packet.

**Next Meeting Date**

Tuesday, March 19, 2024 @ 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 Paul Drake. A voice vote was called and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:36pm.

Respectfully submitted,



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Matthew D. Loper, Secretary