

**MINUTES OF THE JUNE 18, 2024
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD
HELD AT 4:45 P.M.
IN PERSON MEETING**

Call to Order

The June 18, 2024 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

Vice Chairman Mike Giordano 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 associated regulations, adequate notice of this meeting has been provided. The date and time for this meeting was published in the Star Ledger and the Courier News. The agenda for this meeting was also posted on the County Planning Board website.

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

Michael Giordano, Vice-Chair
Albert Ellis, Member
Christopher Kelly, Member
Commissioner Paul Drake
Matthew Loper, Secretary

Absent

Bernard V. Navatto, Jr, Chair
Erika Inocencio, Member
Sami Shaban, Member
Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson
Ashok Rakhit, 1st Alternate

Also Present from Staff:

Walter Lane, Director of Planning,
Tom Boccino, Supervising Planner, Open Space Preservation
Erika Phillips, Supervising Planner, Environmental & Resiliency
Nora Fekete, Supervising Planner, Comprehensive Planning
Ken Wedeen, Supervising Planner, Transportation
Jonathan Eagle, Senior Planner
Samantha Quan, Planner
Josephine Taranto, Planner

Cyril Girgis, Principal Community Planner
Victoria Schulz, Planning Intern
Sheli Daniels, Office Manager
Marina Stinely, Esq. for Joseph Demarco, County Council

Approval of the May 21, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Vice Chairman Mike Giordano called for a motion to approve the May 21, 2024 Planning Board Meeting Minutes. The motion was moved by Chris Kelly and seconded by Paul Drake. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously.

DISCUSSION / PRESENTATION ITEMS

Circulation Plan Update

Supervising Planner Ken Wedeen and Senior Planner Jonathan Eagle presented a PowerPoint presentation for the Keep Somerset Moving: Transportation Plan 2045 Study.

Jonathan Eagle began the presentation stating that Somerset County has been working with consultant Michael Baker International, Inc. and Project Manager Peter Kremer to make revisions on the draft plan. The consultant is currently addressing the last round of revisions. He then described the study Goals and Objectives including Connected and Efficient: Maintain and Operate an efficient multimodal county transportation system/Work collaboratively with partners to improve mobility and connections; Equitable: Prioritize funding for projects that benefit underserved communities/Provide reliable and affordable multimodal transportation options; Safe: Enhance safety for all users with emphasis on the most vulnerable/Promote land use policies that provide safe and convenient access to housing, jobs, services, and amenities; Smart: Advanced electric, connected, and automated vehicle technologies/Monitor the performance of the transportation system and Sustainable and Resilient: Create a sustainable and resilient transportation system/Support economic development and access to opportunity. He then described the role the equity analysis played using ten equity factors to identify portions of municipalities that exhibited the highest level of needs based on equity criteria and the relationship of certain crash types that occur in these communities.

Supervising Planner Kenneth Wedeen noted that 70% or more than 415 of the 593 total pedestrian and bicycle crashes that occurred on Somerset County roads from 2016-2020 occurred in seven underserved communities in Somerset County. He stated that Somerset County Priority Roadway projects include sources such as projects carried over from the 2011 Making Connections Plan; new county projects; pavement maintenance; traffic congestion; safety projects and stakeholder comments. He further stated, of 32 priority Somerset County bridge projects, 9 bridge projects are under construction while 23 are currently under design. He stated some of the Circulation Plan's planning, policy and strategies recommendations include updating the County's 2016 complete streets policy to implement a complete and green streets framework; strengthening the land use transportation connection by improving public transit, bike and pedestrian connections to affordable housing locations.

Supervising Planner Wedeen stated that Planning staff highlighted one new potential county study as Reimagining Somerset County Public Transit. This study topic has grown in importance. Somerset County may work to develop a vision for future public transportation in Somerset County by developing and implementing a strategic transit plan with short medium- and long-term improvements. He noted several potential ways the county could strengthen the land use transportation connection include expanding mixed use and TOD districts; promoting creation of ADUs to densify municipalities; promoting infrastructure improvements in mixed used areas; working with NJDOT to implement State Access Management Plans and incorporating more green infrastructure into mixed use infrastructure planning. In addition, he noted that Planning staff stated Somerset County may work with NJDOT NJDEP, and NJTPA to advance potential study topics that could include an EV Readiness study; a Freight and Goods Movement Strategy study; U.S.206 North and South corridor studies; a NJ Route 28 corridor study and potentially a Somerset County River Crossings Resilience study

Finally, Supervising Planner Wedeen highlighted the next steps in the Circulation Plan approval process as Somerset County must send a copy of the draft plan to all municipalities 20 days prior to the date of a public hearing. Also, after the public hearing the public has a 30-day period to submit any comments. The public hearing should take place in August 2024 and the earliest adoption of the plan may take place in October 2024.

Director of Planning Walter Lane added the updated Circulation Plan incorporates a lot of the planning efforts and process established since the last Circulation Plan was adopted over ten years ago. Many the strategies and recommendations contained in the new plan have already been part of the County's ongoing efforts and the new Circulation Plan officially incorporates these strategies and projects as official County policy.

Planning Director's Report

Director of Planning Walter Lane informed the Board a Planning Partners Forum Meeting was on June 11th at 8am and will be held via Zoom. The agenda featured an overview of the NJ Department of Environmental Protection's Brownfield Development Area Program by Allan Miller. This presentation generated a good discussion. The status of the update to the State Development and Redevelopment Plan was also discussed. Over twenty people attended the June Planning Partners Forum.

Director Lane stated he participated in a panel discussion on housing/affordable housing needs in Somerset County at today's Healthier Somerset Meeting. He highlighted the various efforts the County has undertaken over the years to support the creation of more affordable housing in the County. In addition, he was asked to join an affordable housing policy group formed by the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA). The NJTPA is required by new federal regulations to address affordable housing in Long Range Transportation Plan as well as their other planning efforts. Somerset County's planning efforts as well as Somerset County being the only County to have a Housing Element as part of their County Master as an example for others to follow.

He also reported that numerous staff members attended the recent NJ Planning Conference hosted by APA-NJ and NJ Future. Somerset County's planning efforts and leadership were cited many times throughout the conference. It was stated numerous times, Somerset's regional planning efforts are a model for others to follow.

Director Lane introduced Kyrillos Girgis as the new Principal Community Planner. He is a recent graduate of Rutgers Bloustein and holds a Master's Degree in City and Regional Planning. He also introduced Victoria Schulz who is working as an intern for the Planning Division. She is a recent graduate of Rutgers University.

ACTION ITEMS / INFORMATIONAL ITEMS

June 2024 Land Development Report and Approval of the May 2024 First Time Submissions

Supervising Planner Nora Fekete reported that the Land Development Committee met on June 12, 2024 but did not have a quorum. There was one item on the agenda and the first-time submissions for the month of May 2024. The meeting was held in the Commissioners Meeting Room.

The Bonnie Burn Redevelopers waiver requests, presented at the May meeting, were the first item on the agenda. Due to the lack of a quorum, the Committee did not make its recommendation. Therefore, the Committee will make its recommendation at its next meeting on July 10th. The aforesaid recommendation will be presented to the full Planning Board at its July meeting.

The second item on the agenda was the May first time submissions. Since the Committee did not have a quorum, the full County Planning Board must approve the First Time Submissions for the month of May 2024. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 27 submissions. There were 21 new lots proposed. Of the site plans proposed during the month, there was 3,450 square feet of non-residential building space proposed and 23 multi-family units proposed. There was \$11,290.00 in development review fees and \$7,593.00 in improvement value paid to the County Planning Board.

Vice Chairman Mike Giordano called for a motion to approve the May, 2024 First Time Submissions and the June Land Development Committee Report. The motion was moved by Chris Kelly and seconded by Matt Loper. The roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan Update

Planning Director Walter Lane provided a brief update on the status of the update of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP). The new release date of preliminary SDRP has not been announced. It had been previously communicated that the draft plan would be released sometime in July. The SDRP was the focus of a panel at the recent NJ Planning Conference hosted by APA-NJ and NJ Future. At this session, it was communicated the draft release would be released as soon as the latest round of State Agency comments were resolved.

He also reported the status of the SDRP Cross-Acceptance process was a topic of the June 11, 2024 Planning Partners Forum. The Borough of Bernardsville has provided a letter to the State Planning Commission requesting the County Planning Board serve as the Borough's Negotiating Entity instead of the NJ Highlands Council. The two other NJ Highlands Council municipalities in the County have not responded regarding their preference. He said he is tentatively scheduled to attend the June 24, 2024 Far Hills Borough Council Meeting to discuss the Cross-Acceptance Process.

Draft New Jersey PACT/REAL Rule Proposal

Director of Planning Walter Lane provided an overview of the proposed NJ PACT REAL rules that were released on May 10, 2024. The proposed REAL (Resilient Environment and Landscapes) rules will comprehensively update the current land resource protection regulations to address the current and future impacts of climate change impacting New Jersey. The proposed rules would amend the following regulations:

- Flood hazard
- Stormwater
- Coastal zone
- Fresh Water Wetlands

He reported that staff is reviewing the proposed rules that are over 1000 pages in length. It is anticipated that the rule will be formally published in the NJ Register sometime in July of 2024. There will be three public hearings held to take comments on the proposed rules. The public comment period will last for ninety (90) days. Director Lane stated staff will present the results of the review of the draft rules at an upcoming Planning Board meeting.

Wastewater Management Plan (WMP) Update

Director of Planning Walter Lane reported the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) has published the notice to adopt the Septic management Plan (SMP) in the NJ Register on June 17, 2024. Staff has requested a meeting with NJDEP to review all the steps that need to be taken by both the County and our municipalities to ensure a smooth adoption process for the SMP. Since part of the County is served by the Middlesex County Utility Authority's wastewater treatment plant, Middlesex County has to approve the County's SMP. The Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners has scheduled a Public Hearing to approve the SMP for July 17, 2024.

He reported there was a slight delay in publishing the public notice in the County's officials due to unclear directions from NJDEP. The public notice was sent to both official newspapers in advance of the required notice period. Staff has inquired with NJDEP and Middlesex County if the delay in publication impacts the process but the responses to date have been vague. Staff will keep the Board posted as this process progresses.

Planning Director Walter Lane stated the County has not received any comments on the other draft components of the County Wastewater Management Plan from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). He said he would request a meeting with NJDEP to discuss the status of their review and request a timeline for when the County can expect to receive the NJDEP's initial review comments.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present.

Committee Reports

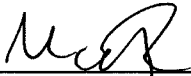
Committee Reports were included with the meeting packet.

Next Meeting Date

July 16, 2024 @ 4:45pm Regular In-Person Meeting

There being no further business before the Board Vice Chairman Giordano asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was moved by Chris Kelly and seconded by Paul Drake. A voice vote was taken and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:34pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary