

**MINUTES OF THE JULY 16, 2024  
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD  
HELD AT 4:45 P.M.  
IN PERSON MEETING**

**Call to Order**

The July 16, 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 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.

**Roll Call**

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

Bernard V. Navatto, Jr, Chair  
Michael Giordano, Vice-Chair  
Albert Ellis, Member  
Commissioner Paul Drake  
Matt Loper, Recording Secretary  
Ashok Rakhit, 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate, arrived at 4:58PM

**Absent**

Christopher Kelly, Member  
Erika Inocencio, Member  
Sami Shaban, Member  
Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson

**Also Present from Staff:**

Walter Lane, Director of Planning,  
Tom Boccino, Supervising Planner, Open Space Preservation  
Nora Fekete, Supervising Planner, Comprehensive Planning  
Ken Wedeen, Supervising Planner, Transportation  
Jonathan Eagle, Senior Planner  
Samantha Quan, Planner

Josephine Taranto, Preservation Planner  
Sheli Daniels, Office Manager  
Marina Stinely, Esq. for Joseph Demarco, County Council

**Approval of the June 18, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the June 18, 2024 Planning Board Meeting Minutes. The motion was moved by Mike Giordano and seconded by Matt Loper. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously with Chairman Bernard Navatto abstaining.

**Approval of Amended Meeting Minutes**

- January 30, 2024
- February 20, 2024
- March 19, 2024
- April 16, 2024
- May 21, 2024

Director of Planning Walter Lane stated there was incorrect language in the Open Public Meetings Act section for all of this year’s meeting minutes since there was wording which referenced virtual public meetings. The meeting information for the Board’s 2024 meetings was correctly published in the local newspapers. The revised wording reflects the correct information.

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the January through May, 2024 Amended 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:**

**2023 Open Space Annual Report**

Supervising Planner Tom Boccino presented the 2023 Open Space Advisory Committee Annual Report, which has been completed and is currently being distributed. The 2023 report highlights the County’s open space acquisitions, Recreation Grant Program, Open Space Preservation Sign Program, and the status of the Open Space Preservation Trust. He stated that in 2023, the County acquired a total of **39.24** acres from 4 property owners which brings the open space total to **14,962.19** acres. So far in 2024, the County has acquired an additional 13.6 acres. The Recreation Grant Program awarded one grant in 2023 to Peapack/Gladstone Borough in the amount of \$160,000.00 for the construction of a playground at Liberty Park. Since its inception, the Program has awarded a total of **\$3,750,000.00** to 12 municipalities. At the end of 2023, construction was completed on 3 projects, including the Liberty Park Playground in Peapack, but since then, an additional project was completed. There are currently 2 projects under construction, and the remaining 4 are in the design phase. Thanks to an initiative started by Commissioner Marano, signs identifying the County’s open space will be appearing throughout the County to highlight our extensive open space network and show how our County tax dollars are being spent.

Supervising Planner Tom Boccino stated that 2023 was another great year for the Preservation Plan. The county received two more awards for the groundbreaking Preservation Plan: a Smart Growth Award from NJ Future and an Achievement Award from the National Association of Counties. The County continues to work toward the Preservation Plan's goal of preserving or helping to preserve a total of 24,000 acres, and 2024 is expected to be another exceptional preservation year of working towards that goal, with the acquisition of the 407-acre Hillsborough Country Club and the 2.9-acre G&P Properties parcel which contains the Historic Stone Arch Bridge. This property is expected to close any day.

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

Director of Planning Walter Lane reported an Action Plan/Progress report that was submitted to AARP as part of the County's designation as an Age-Friendly County. He reminded the Board that Somerset County was the first County in New Jersey to receive this designation. He stated that he worked with the Office of Aging and Disability Services Director and Deputy Director to develop the Action Plan/Progress Report that detailed how age-friendly strategies and initiatives have been embedded in our plans and daily operations. He provided a few examples of how age-friendly strategies were being advanced.

He informed the Board that staff will be submitting the Long Range Cultural and Heritage Plan Element for NJ Planning Officials award. Somerset County is the only County to have this type of plan as an official element of a County Master Plan. Award applications are due on July 31, 2024 and the Awards Presentation will be held in September. He will inform the Board if the plan is selected for an award.

Director Lane stated the next Planning Partners Forum will be on September 24<sup>th</sup>. He anticipates the main agenda item will be the update of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. He asked the Board to email him any suggestions for additional discussion topics for the next Planning Partners Forum.

### **ACTION ITEMS / INFOMATIONAL ITEMS:**

#### **July 2024 Land Development Report and Approval of the June 2024 First Time Submissions**

Supervising Planner Nora Fekete reported that at the July 10, 2024 meeting of the County Planning Board Land Development Committee, the Committee reviewed one item on the agenda and the first-time submissions for the month of June 2024. The meeting was held in the Commissioners Meeting Room.

#### **Bonnie Burn Redevelopers Urban Renewal, LLC, Watchung – Waiver Request**

The first item on the agenda was the continuation of the waiver requests presented at the May meeting. Since the June meeting, the applicant has submitted a revised site plan and rescinded the waiver request regarding the full-width shoulders. The three (3) stormwater waiver requests were the only item considered by the Committee. Jonathan Blank recapped the three stormwater waivers. Regarding the aforementioned stormwater waivers, the office of the County Engineer reviewed the information presented before the Committee and also the documentation submitted in support of the

waivers. Pursuant to the foregoing, engineering staff concluded that they did not have any objection to the granting of the waivers. Director of Planning Walter Lane added that the driveway configuration is currently under review by the County Engineer's Office and a review letter would be forthcoming. County Consuel Joe DeMarco restated the formal withdrawal of the waiver regarding the roadway by the applicant and therefore the only item for the committee to vote on are the stormwater waivers which were reviewed by staff. The revised driveway configuration will be reviewed at the staff level as the applicant is not seeking any waivers for said driveway configuration. Therefore, the Committee made a motion to grant the three (3) stormwater waiver requests for Bonnie Burn Redevelopers, LLC.

### **June First Time Submissions**

The Committee reviewed all first-time submissions for the month of June 2024. During the month, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 25 submissions. There were no new lots proposed. Of the site plans proposed during the month, there was 40,331 square feet of non-residential building space proposed and 124 multi-family units proposed. There was \$1,800.00 in development review fees and \$41,514.00 in improvement value paid to the County Planning Board.

The attorney for Bonnie Burn Urban Renewal LLC, Kevin Coakley asked when the County Planning Board would approve the plans for this project. He stated that the applicant has been working on this project for over five (5) years and some of their permits from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection will be expiring soon. Director of Planning Walter Lane reiterated Supervising Planner Nora Fekete's report and stated that the three (3) stormwater waivers were approved by the Land Development Committee staff, and are reviewing the revised driveway plans submitted by the applicant. If the revised driveway plans are consistent with and conform to County standards, the approval process will begin. If the revised driveway plans are not consistent with and do not conform to County standards, a review letter will be issued that outlines the changes that must be made to the revised driveway plans. Chairman Navatto stated the County will work as quickly as possible on the review process.

Chairman Navatto called for a motion to approve the June, 2024 First Time Submissions. The motion was moved by Mike Giordano and seconded by Matt Loper. The roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Electric Vehicle Study Update**

Supervising Planner Kenneth Wedeen reported that since the June Planning Board meeting, planning staff continue to prepare the draft Somerset County EV Charging and Suitability Analysis Request for Proposal (RFP). Planning staff will prepare a draft version of the RFP for the Planning Director to review and then planning staff will make requested changes to finalize the RFP. The finalized RFP will be submitted to the NJTPA for their planning and finance and administration staff during August 2024.

### **Somerset County Investment Framework Update**

Director of Planning Walter Lane reported a meeting has been scheduled with Rutgers to resolve a few outstanding mapping policy issues for the update Somerset County Investment Framework Map. Once these issues are resolved, staff will schedule meetings with each municipality to discuss the changes made to the current map as well potential changes the municipalities like to make. He said he would

continue work with the Master Plan Committee to finalize the draft updated map and will keep the Board apprised of the progress made to complete the update of the Investment Framework Map.

### **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, but it may now be sometime in August. He reported the County Commissioners adopted a resolution last night appointing the Somerset County Planning Board as the County's Negotiating Entity. Director Lane said he is still waiting to hear from the Borough of Far Hills and the Borough of Peapack and Gladstone regarding their preference for having the County Planning Board serve as their Negotiating Entity instead of the NJ Highlands Council. The Committee directed him to reach out to both municipalities one more time and let the municipalities know if they do not respond by a set date, the Highlands Council will be their Negotiating Entity. This outreach will be done via letter or email. He is also working with the County's GIS Office to create a Survey123 App to allow the municipalities to submit State Plan Policy Map changes as well as complete their Cross Acceptance Response documents electronically. This will make it much easier to compile the County's Cross Acceptance report that we are required to submit to the State Planning Commission.

### **Wastewater Management Plan Update**

Director of Planning Walter Lane reported the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) published the notice to adopt the Septic management Plan (SMP) in the NJ Register on June 17, 2024. The Middlesex County Board of County Commissioners has scheduled a Public Hearing on the SMP for July 17, 2024. Staff published the required public notice and will be attending the July 17<sup>th</sup> Public Hearing. Letters have been sent to all of the County's municipalities asking for a resolution of consent for the adoption of the SMP. To date, three (3) municipalities have submitted resolutions supporting the adoption of the SMP.

He stated the County has still not received any comments on the other draft components of the County Wastewater Management Plan, which was submitted in June of 2021, from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP). He reported that he is working to schedule 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**

August 20, 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 Matt Loper. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:13pm.

Respectfully submitted,

  
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Matthew D. Loper, Secretary