



*Strategies for
Managing Growth
in Hunterdon County*



*Prepared by the
Hunterdon County
Growth Management
Task Forces:*



- ❖ *Rural Character and Environment*
- ❖ *Residential Development*
- ❖ *Transportation*
- ❖ *Commercial, Office and Industrial Development*

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Fall, 1998

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Introduction

S*trategies for Managing Growth* contains recommended planning actions to help tackle the tremendous challenges that accompany rapid growth and development in Hunterdon County. These planning actions will help sustain our communities as viable, attractive, livable places amidst continued growth and change.

Four Task Forces comprising local officials, county representatives, citizens and members of various interest groups in Hunterdon County developed the recommendations in this report last year. Together with the findings of previous public outreach efforts, they will help to form a regional vision and framework for a new County master plan.

These public outreach efforts - collectively called the Hunterdon County Growth Management Planning Process - began in 1993 as a way to elicit broad based public input on the most critical planning issues facing our County and on alternative, creative planning solutions. As facilitators of the process, the Hunterdon County Planning Board (HCPB) conducted a residents' survey (1993) and a municipal officials' survey (1993). Subsequently, the Planning Board held regional meetings with municipal planning board representatives to discuss survey findings and identify additional local perspectives (1994).

In 1995, a Municipal Advisory Committee (MAC) was created, consisting of mayors or mayoral appointments from each community. The MAC advised the County Planning Board on ways to structure its growth management planning process henceforth to ensure its continued utility for local officials and the general public.

In 1996, the County Planning Board convened four Task Forces, consisting of individuals representing a variety of public and private sector interests. Each was asked to identify the most critical planning issues concerning 1) rural character and environment, 2) residential

development and housing, 3) transportation and 4) commercial, office and industrial development respectively. Findings were published in a document entitled *A State of the County Assessment*.

Local officials joined the Task Forces in 1997. Each task force prepared a report in response to the issues presented in *A State of the County Assessment*. These were compiled into a draft version of *Strategies for Managing Growth*.

The four Task Forces met in the winter of 1998 to review the draft report. Summary comments are included in the Appendix.

How will four years of public input be utilized? The Hunterdon County Planning Board will take the recommendations that have emerged from the Growth Management Planning Process to the public in a variety of forums. The County is including recommendations in its "Cross-Acceptance Report" being submitted to the State Planning Commission. This report documents public comments on the State Development and Redevelopment Plan including relevant growth management recommendations made by the Task Forces. Additionally, the County will present various recommendations at municipal meetings at the request of planning boards, governing bodies and others. Also, the Planning Board will translate select recommendations into specific guidance materials and tools for municipalities to help implement programs and projects that support these recommendations.

Additional summary reports prepared during the Hunterdon County Growth Management Planning Process can be obtained by calling the HCPB at (908) 788-1490. A list of these documents is included at the end of this publication.

Executive Summary

The following is a summary of Growth Management Task Force recommendations, discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters.

Rural Character & Environment Task Force Recommendations¹

Open Space Preservation

The continued preservation of open space and appropriate land development patterns are critical to the retention of Hunterdon County's rural character. The Task Force recommends a combination of open space zoning and open space planning efforts to help achieve these goals. New development must be designed to complement existing rural features rather than dominate them. Municipalities and the County should be more proactive and progressive in establishing open space programs.

Site Design Guidelines and Standards

Design guidelines and standards can help preserve the appearance and character of the County's rural and historic communities. Proper design ensures that new development is compatible with the surrounding environment. Design standards are objective land use regulations that govern the visual impact of development based on planning and design principles. Design standards are an exciting way to achieve win-win results in the review of new development proposals. Local officials need guidance on the proper use of design standards, the range of options, and recommendations on how to work fairly and successfully with developers.

Farmland Preservation

Hunterdon County has more land in the New Jersey farmland assessment program than any other county in the State. The County continues



to be a leader in the statewide farmland preservation program. However, the absence of adequate planning policies and programs that support agriculture will threaten farming in Hunterdon County. Municipalities and the County are active in the statewide easement purchase program, but lack a much-needed comprehensive approach to farmland preservation. A comprehensive approach would include policies and regulations that accommodate the needs of the farmer and are responsive to changes in the agricultural industry. A variety of programs should be developed that will help preserve farmland while simultaneously protecting the land equity of its farmers.

Water Quality

Water is an essential part of our lives. But growth pressures, combined with an often-complacent attitude regarding individual responsibilities, will eventually lead to the deterioration of our water resources. However, water resources can be protected through adequate storm water management, stream corridor protection, regional planning and local education. In Hunterdon County, the most effective means of protecting water is through the County's four watershed associations, the County Health Department, municipal and County land use regulations and responsible actions by County residents who use their water resources wisely.

¹Recommendations regarding open space preservation and site design standards were developed jointly by the Rural Character and Environment Task Force and the Residential Development Task Force.

**Residential Development
Task Force Recommendations**

Housing Diversity

Municipalities can and should support more diverse and affordable housing options. The location, design and intensity of such development should not compromise rural character. Housing for seniors, for the County's diverse labor force, and for low and moderate-income households are all needed. Among other approaches, creative financing and partnerships should be advocated as means for providing affordable housing. Such programs help satisfy affordable housing obligations without creating the impacts associated with inclusionary development. A variety of specific housing options and implementation strategies are presented in the Residential Development Task Force Report.

Planned Towns, Villages and Hamlets

Small-scale mixed-use communities like hamlets and villages provide a broad range of housing types and a reduction in automobile dependency



by bringing homes closer to shopping, jobs and services. These hamlets and villages offer an attractive alternative to low density suburban sprawl. The Task Force report offers recommendations that address planned hamlets and villages and/or sensitive expansion of existing hamlets and villages.

**Transportation Task Force
Recommendations**

Transit

Land use patterns, population densities, high vehicle ownership rates and availability of free parking at work sites and shopping centers are among the factors that affect the prospects for transit in Hunterdon County. However, several strategies could be implemented to enhance existing rail and bus opportunities and to create new opportunities both for intra- and inter-county trips. Recommendations include provisions for commuter rail service, shuttle busses and new park and ride lots.

Regional Truck and Freight Movement

Recent developments in the statewide transportation system, coupled with rapid growth in Hunterdon and neighboring counties, have dramatically increased truck traffic on local, County, State and interstate roadway systems. Recommendations call for incentives and mandates to reduce truck traffic on local roads and on Route 31, as well as land use policies to help reduce growth of local truck traffic. Advancing the construction of the Route 31 Bypass and improving interchanges along Interstate 78 will ameliorate unsafe conditions and ease congestion on these thoroughfares.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation

Bicycling and walking should be promoted in Hunterdon County as viable, alternative forms of transportation. Bicycle and pedestrian facilities need to be expanded and connected to other existing transportation facilities. Additionally, municipalities should support alternative modes of transportation through master plans, development reviews and capital improvement planning.

Land Use and Transportation

Land use decisions directly influence the quality and variety of available transportation facilities. Low density housing, strip highway development, segregation of land uses all contribute to reliance on the car and create an

environment that is neither economically nor functionally supportive of transit. Local land use policies and regulations can support the goals of reducing congestion, encouraging compact development patterns, and promoting mixed-use development. Other strategies concerning home occupation ordinances, highway frontage roads, and purchase of open space and farmland preservation are also recommended.

Commercial, Office and Industrial Development Task Force Recommendations

Regional Planning

Land use decisions made in one municipality often have impacts that extend far beyond its boundaries. The County Planning Board should serve as a facilitator, bringing municipalities together to coordinate planning and to assess the regional impacts of major development applications.

Infrastructure

Existing and planned infrastructure in the County are major factors in determining the location of future growth. Future land use decisions must be driven by the location of existing infrastructure and places where new infrastructure can reasonably be provided. These decisions should also consider those future land uses which most effectively balances the mix of ratables comprising the municipal tax base.

Business Retention and Expansion

Flexibility is required in responding to the changing needs of businesses in the County. Existing businesses provide jobs, services and a needed balance to the residential component of the tax base. In order to retain existing businesses and allow them to grow, local ordinances should be reviewed to determine whether they hinder or promote these needed changes. Additionally, older buildings often define the character of communities. Once they are no longer suited for the purposes for which they had been constructed, flexible state and local codes are needed so that they can be adapted to new uses.

Revitalization of Existing Towns, Villages and Hamlets

Downtown areas need to be revitalized to remain healthy and competitive in today's economic climate. Local officials should work with the business community to encourage and support new uses that will complement the larger commercial development occurring today outside of traditional town centers.

Rural Character and Environment Task Force Report

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Rural Character and Environment Task Force Report

Introduction

In 1996, the Rural Character and Environment Task Force identified many pressing issues facing Hunterdon County in its efforts to preserve and protect the County's rural character and environment. One of the biggest concerns has been the past and current rate of growth in the County. The Task Force concluded in 1996, that as development in the County continues - and at such an alarming rate - major changes would be necessary on the part of local officials and planners to retain the County's rural character.

In 1997, the newly expanded Rural Character and Environment Task Force met on a bimonthly basis to brainstorm specific land use strategies that could help preserve the County's rural character and environment. These strategies are discussed below. It is important to note that this is not an exhaustive list of strategies, but, rather, an attempt to cover some of the most important issues within the 12-month time frame given the participants. Due to overlapping issues, the Rural Character and Environment Task Force joined the Residential Development Task Force for discussions on two topics: 1) open space and land development patterns and 2) site design standards.

Open Space and Land Development Patterns

Discussion

One of the most critical components of an environment characterized as "rural" is the predominance of open space - whether it is rolling, grassed hills or large stretches of cornfields, it is the absence of development. To effectively preserve open space requires a proactive approach to land use planning that combines a variety of planning tools with a comprehensive open space plan.

To begin the discussion about open space preservation, the Task Force identified the following goals:

- Preserve large areas of open space with natural vegetative buffers around developed areas
- Minimize intrusion on aquifers, natural vegetation, and habitats
- Preserve unique viewsheds, ridge lines, and stream corridors
- Provide passive and active recreational opportunities
- Preserve open space around historic areas and buildings to preserve their integrity
- Preserve large agricultural areas
- Minimize cost of infrastructure and services to municipalities and taxpayers
- Minimize adverse effects of growth, i.e. traffic and pollution
- Preserve limited/non-renewable natural resources, such as land, forests, and wetlands.

Task Force participants discussed at great length the various types of land development patterns that could achieve the above goals. Large lot zoning is low-density residential development that requires a large parcel of land for each dwelling. Such lots are at least one acre in size, but in Hunterdon County they are more typically three to 10 acres. Open space zoning, often referred to as "clustering," does not necessarily result in more houses than large lot zoning, but the lots are all smaller except for one, which is preserved as open space.



Village Square, an open space development in Union Township, NJ.

Large lot zoning and open space zoning can contribute to the preservation of open space, albeit to varying degrees. The Task Force felt that while large lot zoning minimizes the cost of infrastructure and services, as well as future traffic, it does not effectively preserve open space. It does not allow for preservation of large contiguous tracts of land and can consume large amounts of prime farmland, wooded areas, and other non-renewable natural resources. Furthermore, lots of two to three acres in size, as an example, do not give the visual appearance of open space. Although 10-acre lots may give the visual effect of open space, such zoning can be unpopular because of equity issues.

In summary, the Task Force felt that large lot zoning would be appropriate in the following situations:

- in areas of poor soils - so there is no risk of losing prime farmland;
- in areas where there is a desire for small private farmettes (six acres minimum); and
- in areas where groundwater is scarce so that the low density minimizes the usage of water.



To the left, rear, looking toward a preserved farm at Hedgerow Estates, an open space development in Readington Tp, NJ. To the right, a barn housing a community wastewater treatment plant at Village Square in Union Tp, NJ.

Open space zoning can effectively preserve open space. However, one of its major stumbling blocks has been the lack of any “model” developments that have been constructed in the County. By providing examples of well- designed, attractive open space subdivisions, many of the concerns that people have about “higher density” development, such as the unsightly look of large

homes on small lots and the lack of privacy on smaller lots, could be addressed.

Open space zoning is particularly important for farmland preservation, open space preservation, and maintenance of farmers' equity in their land. But there are issues regarding open space zoning that need to be resolved before many municipalities will feel totally comfortable with this type of land development pattern.

For example:

- Housing units surrounding farms can create conflicts between homeowners and farmers.
- There continues to be a question about the eventual ownership of open space and whether a municipality should be burdened with it.
- The long-term viability of community wastewater systems should be explored.
- Open space zoning developments need to provide a better sense of “community.”

Finally, the transfer of development rights (TDR) is another viable option to explore for preserving open space and farmland. An abridged version of TDR is the transfer of planned developments from one tract of land to another. This land use tool was recently permitted as an amendment to the Municipal Land Use Law. Its application is limited to transactions where non-contiguous tracts of land are either under the same ownership or different landowners contract together in pursuit of a single development project. Another constraint for implementing this type of development transfer is the fact that the areas that would “receive” all of the new development would be at a higher density than most new developments. This poses the same problem mentioned earlier about open space zoning, i.e. the concern about unsightly smaller lot sizes and high-density development.

Municipal and countywide TDR programs could be the most effective planning tool in preserving open space and farmland if they could overcome the many political and environmental obstacles. In addition to the

forementioned visual impact of small lots and/or high-density development in receiving areas, there are concerns about the viability of community wastewater systems, finding suitable land for the receiving areas, and determining the appropriate value of the development credits.

Recommendations

The following strategies are recommended to help preserve open space and maintain Hunterdon County's rural character:

- Municipalities and the County need to be more proactive in identifying and preserving lands as open space. Specific areas to be preserved should be identified before land development applications are submitted. This will preclude the loss of valuable open space to development.
- The County should research examples of well-designed open space zoning developments and share them with municipalities.
- Community wastewater systems should be permitted to help foster creative designs.
- To reduce the dependence on open space zoning, municipalities should rely more on open space programs, such as fee simple/easement acquisitions.
- Maintain a relatively low gross density for all housing developments.
- Do not permit housing bonuses in open space zoning developments.
- Require peripheral buffers around new housing developments along roadway corridors.
- Planning Boards should be proactive in the design of new developments and the location of open spaces.

Site Design Guidelines and Standards

Discussion

Design standards are objective land use regulations that govern the visual impact of development based on planning and design principles. They are not subjective, nor do they dictate aesthetics. The word "standard" is used when they are required by ordinance, and the

word "guideline" is used when they are recommendations - but not required by law. (Although the term "standard" is used throughout this section, it is for the sake of simplicity and does not imply that the standards are preferred over guidelines.)

Design standards can effectively preserve the appearance and character of our rural and historic communities by ensuring that new development is compatible with the built and unbuilt (rural) environment. Design standards should be very specific so that there is no question as to their meaning and interpretation. Design standards can be written to address the following:

- preserving existing trees, vegetation and historic buildings;
- requiring peripheral buffers around new development;
- requiring minimal street widths;
- reducing front yard setbacks in residential developments;
- requiring grassed/landscaped front yards for non-residential development;
- varying the footprints of homes in new developments;
- adopting an architectural theme for a given area, e.g. country/rural, Victorian, etc.



Courtesy of Randall Arendt.

Rural character is retained with appropriate landscaping, preservation of natural features, streetscapes and architectural styles. Lot sizes are approx. 1/3 acre.

In Hunterdon County, the master plans of all 26 municipalities articulate the local desire to preserve rural or historic character. For this reason, these same municipalities should

include design standards in their development regulations as a planning tool to help accomplish their goals. To work fairly for both the developer and the municipality, standards must be written clearly and objectively in the development ordinances. Some municipalities have effectively used photographs in their ordinances to convey the style, type and elements of design they want to see in new developments.

Task Force participants felt that design standards offer great potential for Hunterdon County municipalities. However, many municipalities do not currently use design standards. One reason is that municipalities do not want to pay the cost to hire professionals to draft the standards. Perhaps a more common reason is a general lack of knowledge about design standards, including what is legally permissible, the range of options, and how to work fairly and successfully with developers.



New construction in Sergeantsville, NJ.

Recommendations

The following strategies are recommended for increasing the use of design standards that would preserve the County's rural character:

- Local officials should be educated about the importance of design standards and the fact that, at a minimum, they *maintain* property values, but more often, they *increase* property values.
- Model ordinances with photographs should be encouraged because they take much of

the guess-work out of design standards and are more user friendly.

- The County Planning Board should conduct an outreach program to all municipalities informing them of the importance of design standards.
- A short video and/or publication giving examples of design standards and their potential application in Hunterdon County would help educate local planning boards and governing bodies.

Farmland Preservation

Discussion

Agriculture in Hunterdon County is marked by a few characteristics that have remained consistent over the past couple of decades, if not longer. The County's agriculture is diverse, ranging from traditional farms such as hay, corn, and dairies, to specialty crops and animals such as grapes, herbs and sheep. The farms in the County are, on the average, small to moderately sized farms. This is due to the large percentage of "part-time farmers," defined as people who rely on income from jobs other than farming. In fact, Hunterdon County has more part-time farmers than any other county in the State. Finally, although Hunterdon County is characterized by its diverse agriculture, it also ranks very high statewide in a few very specific areas. The County ranks number one in the number of farms, land in farmland assessment, the number of non-race horses, and the number of sheep and steer. It ranks number two in the number of farms with corn for grain.

The current trends in Hunterdon County's agriculture are likely to persist into the foreseeable future. Farms will continue to be relatively small with horses, hay, and high value/specialty crops and animals. The latter will be sold in nearby markets as well as the New York and Philadelphia metropolitan markets. The larger corn and dairy operations will continue to decline due to the loss of local feed mills, limited local markets and relatively low and unpredictable commodity prices. It is for these same reasons that the average farmer has not found farming to be lucrative. To

address this problem, farmers are relying upon new and innovative ways to supplement their farm income. This includes farm-related activities such as pick-your-own, hayride, and petting zoos. It also includes nonfarm-related businesses such as auto repair shops and excavating businesses.

Farmland preservation is well supported by the majority of County residents. Voters in nine Townships have approved referendums to assess taxes for farmland preservation (and open space) projects. The County and State Farmland preservation program continues to be very popular. Over the past five years, an average of 50 landowners have submitted easement purchase applications annually. Of these applications, only seven farms are selected by the State each year due to limited public monies. Some municipalities have acquired easements independent of the County/State program, while others have acquired partial easements and donations.

Farmland preservation is very important to Hunterdon County. It provides fresh, local agricultural products; supports and assists farmers in the agricultural industry; helps protect scenic vistas; stabilizes taxes; minimizes traffic and air pollution; preserves rural character; provides opportunities for farming in the future; and helps protect water supply/quality through aquifer recharge. But without adequate planning policies and programs that support agriculture, farming in Hunterdon County will be threatened.

Recommendations

The following strategies are recommended for preserving farmland:

Master plans

- Municipalities should take a comprehensive approach to farmland preservation by participating in county and State programs and adopting an agricultural master plan sub-element, as well as land use policies and ordinances which support farmers and the agricultural industry.
- An agricultural sub-element of the land use plan element should be included in the

municipal master plan to centralize recommended policies and programs regarding farmland preservation. The sub-element may include the following: specific areas targeted for farmland preservation, an overview of agriculture in the municipality, and a specific recommended action agenda for accomplishing farmland preservation goals.

- The municipal and county master planning processes should include aggressive outreach to the farming community as well as other individuals and groups.
- Agricultural advisory committees should be created and used as a sounding board during the master planning process.



Land use regulations

- Large lot zoning consumes large amounts of farmland for residential uses. It should only be the principal land use pattern in areas with prime soils and in areas where agriculture is the primary use if open space zoning is not an option.
- Open space zoning should be encouraged because it can be an effective tool in preserving farmland, particularly for municipalities facing development pressure.
- Whenever possible, residential units in an open space subdivision should be focused around existing villages, or “centers”, with the preserved farmland surrounding the village.
- Municipalities should require minimum buffers between residential developments and agricultural lands to reduce potential

nuisance complaints.

- TDR can be a very effective tool in preserving farmland and should be further explored by the County and municipalities.
- Agricultural zoning should be approached with caution because such zoning could significantly reduce a landowner's equity. For this reason, it may be appropriate in areas where the difference in the developmental value and farm value of land is minimal. The impact of such zoning should be fully evaluated before it is considered as a viable tool. (Agricultural zoning is a very low density zoning technique, typically one house per 15 to 50 acres, where agriculture is deemed the primary permitted use.)
- Equity insurance is a program where landowners are compensated for the loss of their land value through public funds - either through cash payment and/or annuities. This concept is new to New Jersey, but it may be an option for municipalities to address the potential equity loss in agricultural zoning.
- Municipalities should permit farm-related businesses such as farm stands and recreational uses to provide farmers with creative flexibility to generate additional income.
- Municipalities should allow small scale non-farm-related businesses such as auto repair and welding that do not adversely affect the agricultural operation and provide opportunities for farmers to remain on the farm and be available if needed for farm activities.
- Commercial and industrial zones should permit agricultural businesses. State and/or federal grants may be available to facilitate agricultural businesses and should be explored by municipalities.
- Municipalities should adopt a right to farm ordinance that will help protect farmers from nuisance complaints.

Municipal Farmland Preservation Programs

- Municipalities should consider the benefits of a dedicated property tax to preserve farmland. Tax monies could be particularly

important for preserving farmland that is under the threat of immediate development.

- Municipalities with dedicated taxes should prepare a detailed acquisition plan to direct the spending of open space tax funding.
- Municipalities should encourage landowners to participate in the "Municipally Approved Farmland Preservation Program" (MAFPP), a State/County program whereby landowners voluntarily deed restrict their farms solely to agriculture for eight years.
- Municipalities should encourage the Hunterdon County Agriculture Development Board (CADB) and the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) to provide greater County/State incentives for landowners to enroll in the eight-year program.
- Every municipality should have a designated CADB liaison that routinely attends meetings and workshops on the County's farmland preservation program.
- Municipalities that are interested in farmland preservation should designate at least one person responsible for understanding farmland preservation issues and informing and advising local officials accordingly. (This person might also be the CADB Liaison).
- Municipalities should consider investing rollback taxes and finding creative ways to spend the money on farmer assistance programs.
- Municipalities should lobby the State for a stable source of funding for the farmland preservation program.
- With the help of the municipal CADB liaison, each municipality should inform farmers of the CADB's annual application period and hold workshops or public forums as needed.
- Municipalities should seriously consider cost-sharing on easement purchase applications to increase the scoring of applications and the likelihood that a landowner is willing to enter the program.
- Municipalities should fully understand the criteria for the County/State purchase of development rights program (PDR) and learn how they can become competitive with

other municipalities.

- Municipalities should understand the fiscal benefits of farmland preservation and educate their constituents.

County Farmland Preservation Programs

- The County should encourage municipalities and farmers to participate in the County's PDR program.
- The County should evaluate the benefits of an installment purchase plan (payment over many years rather than one installment) to determine if it can reduce the cost of the PDR program and, at the same time, be beneficial to the landowner.
- Landowners that need to immediately sell their land should be encouraged to apply to the fee simple program.
- The County should lobby the SADC for increased funding for the fee simple program.
- The County should lobby the SADC for greater incentives for farmers to join the eight-year program.
- The County should promote the eight-year program by increasing public awareness of its benefits.



- An Agricultural Enterprise District (AED) is a new and complicated program, but it may offer tremendous possibilities to both farmers and local communities. The County should study the AED to determine if it (or parts thereof) could be beneficial to the farm community.
- Proposed legislative changes to the Right to Farm Act should be reviewed and determined how they may affect the farmland preservation program and the farming community.
- The County should consider an agricultural tourism program and its potential benefits to

farmers. Such a program would include the marketing of agricultural products and operations throughout the County.

- The CADB should forge partnerships with other countywide organizations, such as the Hunterdon Economic Partnership (HEP), the County Chamber of Commerce, the Hunterdon Land Trust Alliance and other land conservation groups to bolster farmland preservation efforts.
- The CADB should offer specific examples regarding MAFPP (eight-year program) incentives.
- The County Agriculture Development Board (CADB) should consider adopting a comprehensive county farmland preservation program - one that does not rely solely on easement acquisitions.

Water Resources

Discussion

Water is an essential part of our lives - at home, in businesses and industries, for farming, and for fish and wildlife. But growth pressures, combined with an often-complacent attitude about individual responsibilities, will eventually lead to the deterioration of our water resources without properly planning for their protection today. Water supply and quality in Hunterdon County is particularly important because of the dependence of so many homes on groundwater for drinking water. The protection of surface water is important because it provides numerous scenic and recreational opportunities, fish and wildlife habitats, and, in some cases, potable water supply.

There is a real threat to the continued quality and supply of water resources in Hunterdon County. The rapid pace of development has both singular and cumulative effects when storm water runoff is inadequately controlled. The dependence of County residents on septic systems threatens water quality when systems are not installed or maintained properly. Other activities, such as lawn fertilization and agricultural fertilization, cause what is referred to as "non-point source pollution" which

pollutes streams and eventually the rivers into which they drain. Without protecting our water resources against these threats, Hunterdon County's water supply and water quality will deteriorate and result in costly, if not irreparable, damage.

A variety of federal, state and local regulations contribute to water resource protection. Probably the most effective means of protection in Hunterdon County is through the County's four watershed associations, the County Health Department, municipal and county land use regulations, and with the help of responsible County residents who use their water resources wisely.

South Branch Watershed Association Volunteer Monitors take water samples from South Branch of Raritan River.

Recommendations

The following recommended strategies will help protect the future quality and supply of both groundwater and surface waters in Hunterdon County.

- Upgrade existing storm water facilities whenever possible to reduce water pollution to receiving streams (as determined by funding availability and type of receiving stream).
- Require a vegetated riparian buffer, having a minimum width of 75 feet, from the edge of each stream bank to mitigate the effect of polluted runoff.
- Develop an open space map and implementation plan that includes all stream corridors to facilitate their maximum protection.
- Require Best Management Practices (BMPs) for all new development, such as storm water ponds, storm water wetlands, infiltration practices, filtering practices, and open space channels.
- Develop municipal base maps that identify existing and potential hazardous waste generators to protect groundwater.
- Facilitate educational programs and materials for homeowner septic system management to help protect groundwater quality.



Courtesy of South Branch Watershed Association.

- Facilitate the use of alternative wastewater systems for new developments.
- Encourage wellhead protection ordinances to protect groundwater resources.
- Mitigate runoff impacts of new development by encouraging development practices that reduce impervious surfaces and facilitate groundwater recharge.
- Encourage regional planning efforts for subwatersheds to reduce new development's impacts on flooding.
- Solicit the assistance of watershed organizations, environmental commissions, and citizen groups to encourage regional planning efforts for subwatersheds to facilitate groundwater recharge.
- Consider the availability of groundwater in determining the density of development.
- Municipalities should use the best scientific information available to evaluate groundwater supply and quality.
- Local land use planning projects/efforts should include information based upon geology, aquifers and contaminated site data.
- Educational programs should be offered in schools to foster a better understanding of geology and groundwater system.

Residential Development Task Force Report

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Residential Development Task Force Report

Introduction

In 1997, the Residential Development Task Force developed a series of planning recommendations and strategies, to be advocated in a new County master plan, in response to a set of key issues previously raised by this Task Force and documented in *A State of the County Assessment* (1997). These issues were:

- housing development and the manner in which it occurs
- lack of housing options
- housing affordability

Over a 10-month period in 1997, the Residential Development Task Force met four times to tackle these issues. Three joint meetings were held with the Rural Character and Environment Task Force to discuss tools for encouraging appropriate land development patterns. In particular, they discussed open space planning and land development patterns in the context of large lot zoning, open space zoning, and transfer of development rights. In addition, the Task Forces evaluated site design guidelines for preserving community character. Discussion and recommendations regarding these topics are found on pages six through nine of this report.

During its final meeting, the Residential Development Task Force reviewed a variety of planning strategies to diversify housing options - both housing stock and prices - and discussed the potential merits of planning for new towns, villages and hamlets as an alternative to conventional large lot suburban development. Following presentations on these topics, Task Force members answered the following questions:

1) Regarding housing diversity and preserving community character:

- Should the strategies presented be included in a new County master plan?
 - Is anything inappropriate or missing from the list?
- 2) Regarding new towns, villages and hamlets:
- If a community in Hunterdon County wanted to accommodate some of its future growth in a new town, village or hamlet, what issues must be addressed?
 - Do you feel there is any merit in planning for these types of communities in Hunterdon County?

The following is a summary of the presentations made at the meeting and the recommendations discussed by the Task Force.



Courtesy of Randall Arendt.

Accessory Apartment at Kentlands, Gathersburg, MD

Diversifying Housing Options

Discussion

Municipalities can and should encourage and support more diverse and more affordable housing opportunities through land use planning tools currently available to them. In fact, many already do so, though their efforts should perhaps be augmented to help accomplish this important goal through their zoning ordinances. Ordinances should specify the types of housing permitted and appropriate locations for them.

accessory apartments - Where appropriate, accessory apartments can and should be permitted specifically for occupancy by low and

moderate income households in partial fulfillment of a community's affordable housing obligation. Alternatively, they can be permitted in general, to help increase rental opportunities.

An advantage of accessory dwellings is that they don't necessarily consume additional land because they can either involve conversion of surplus space in a primary dwelling or conversion of an outbuilding on the property.



ECHO unit in Three Bridges, Hunterdon County.

Elder Cottage Housing Opportunities or "ECHO units" are temporary small dwellings placed on the same lot as the primary dwelling in which a relative lives. Elderly and/or disabled relatives occupy the ECHO unit. When it is no longer in use, the structure must be removed. Both accessory apartments and ECHO units are versatile in that they can either be located on small lots served by a sewer system, or they can be served by a septic system in more rural areas. Despite what appears to be rather widespread acceptance of ECHO units, only a handful of municipalities in Hunterdon County permit them.

two-family homes - A key issue related to two-family homes is visual impact. Often, people associate them with sprawling high density, multi-family developments in the middle of farm fields. However, two family homes which are built according to clearly articulated design guidelines may be constructed at a more modest scale, mixed in with single family homes in towns or villages.

apartments in mixed use buildings - Apartments can be accommodated above office and/or retail uses, often found in town centers. One of the disincentives for builders to provide mixed use, either through renovation or new construction, is that it is often only achievable through the more difficult variance procedures, rather than as permitted or conditionally permitted uses.

self-help housing - Self-help housing serves low income populations. Families that qualify are actually involved in constructing the publicly-funded homes, with oversight and coordination by a nonprofit housing entity. This housing can help satisfy a community's affordable housing obligation without necessitating the volume of market rate units that would otherwise accompany affordable housing in an inclusionary development. However, it is probably not economically feasible in Hunterdon County due to high land prices.

senior shared living arrangements - Another option for helping to satisfy one's affordable housing obligation, senior shared living arrangements, are single family homes in which income-qualifying unrelated seniors reside. Nonprofit organizations such as Cooperative Housing Corporation in Somerset County build, own and manage such units. A nonprofit in Tewksbury Township has been working with the Township to build senior shared living units. Additionally, Delaware Township ordinances conditionally permit senior shared living arrangements.

senior rental units - Where municipalities choose to zone for senior rental units, they need not necessarily be constructed at a very large scale. For example, Readington Township is constructing 60 senior units outside of Whitehouse Station. The Township is also trying to obtain funding to construct a half-mile long pedestrian pathway to link the apartments to the Village of Whitehouse Station. This would provide ready access to shopping, services and entertainment.

assisted living - Assisted living and continuing care retirement communities are being

constructed in New Jersey to serve a growing elderly population. Due to the size and scale of these facilities, they would only be appropriate where the necessary infrastructure is in place, where conflicts with agriculture would be avoided, and where there is reasonable accessibility to shopping, conveniences and entertainment.

housing for farm labor - Rural municipalities can specifically permit permanent or seasonal dwellings for farm labor. In East Amwell Township, such dwellings are removed or converted to nonresidential space once the farm operation ceases. Alexandria permits accessory dwellings on a minimum of 40 acres for farm labor among other occupants.

group homes - One of the critical issues related to group homes is public concern and, sometimes, misconception about their impacts on safety and property values. Public education is important in dispelling unnecessary concerns.

Recommendations

- The County master plan should promote diversity in housing opportunities, with consideration given to the housing types and caveats mentioned above. Housing opportunities for labor force, affordable housing, and senior housing are all needed. At the same time, the master plan should acknowledge that the location, design, and intensity of housing must not compromise existing community character.
- Senior citizens should have access to housing that permits them to live in age-integrated neighborhoods. ECHO housing and accessory apartments are examples of housing types that can help accomplish this.

Municipally-Sponsored Construction and Partnering with Nonprofit Organizations

Discussion

Housing for low and moderate income residents can be constructed through creative funding and partnership mechanisms. Many communities sponsor rehabilitation of existing substandard

housing or fund new construction to help satisfy affordable housing obligations. This can be accomplished through developers' fees as well as other programs such as COAH's mortgage subsidy program whereby the community helps offset the cost. These types of programs are among the more favorable approaches to addressing affordable housing: they do not generate the volume and fiscal impacts that large scale inclusionary development brings.

Additionally, municipalities can help facilitate construction of affordable housing by supporting the efforts of nonprofit housing organizations. For example, the senior apartments in Readington Township are being constructed through a partnership between Readington Township, which is leasing property donated to it by a developer to Lutheran Social Ministries (LSM), an ecumenical builder. Self-help housing is being constructed in West Windsor Township through a partnership between the Township and Bootstraps, a nonprofit housing organization. Providing the land and streamlining review processes and/or fees are examples of ways that municipalities can support such projects.

Hunterdon County Housing Corporation provides administrative services to help municipalities implement housing rehabilitation programs. Through economies of scale, this can result in reduced costs to participating communities.

Recommendation

- Municipally-sponsored construction and municipal partnerships with nonprofit housing corporations should be advocated as ways to provide for affordable housing.

Planned Towns, Villages and Hamlets

Discussion

This year (1997) marked passage of the first neotraditional town center ordinance in New Jersey. Washington Township, Mercer County, which adopted such an ordinance, envisioned this concept over 10 years ago as a way to help preserve rural character. A new town center

was viewed as an attractive alternative to suburban large lot sprawl. When fully built out, the town center will accommodate approximately 1,300 residential units as well as 175,000 to 250,000 square feet of nonresidential uses on 350 acres.

The town center ordinance contains detailed site design and architectural standards. It encourages a variety of housing types including single family homes, duplexes, townhouses, apartments over shops, and affordable housing. The center will be made pedestrian and transit friendly through the layout of streets, siting of buildings with shallow front yard setbacks and by integrating homes, commercial, recreational, and cultural uses within walking distance of each other.

When built out, Washington Township anticipates that the new community will resemble and function like the more traditional towns and villages in the region. The town center is part of a larger municipal plan. The goal is to preserve open space and farmland in the hinterlands, create a greenbelt around the center, create a rail trail linking the town center to the existing Village of Windsor, and create a regional greenway extending through other municipalities as well, before terminating at the Delaware River. The town center ordinance also permits transfer of development credits with the goal of saving an additional several hundred acres of land.

The town center plan is viewed as economically viable by one of the major land holders. In addition, as a result of an exhaustive planning and public participation process, residents are generally supportive of the plan. Sewerage capacity is already available to support the town center. The municipality is currently working with NJDOT to locate a state highway bypass road around the center, thereby directing regional traffic away and enabling the existing state highway running through the heart of the future town center to function more like a Main Street.

Recommendations

- Planned hamlets and villages should be advocated as:
 - 1) an effective way to provide affordable housing and more generally, a broad mix of housing types to serve diverse populations including seniors, the labor force and others; and
 - 2) providing accessibility to goods and services without having to drive everywhere because of their compactness.
- In Hunterdon County, planned villages and hamlets should be advocated rather than large new towns, like that proposed in Washington Township.



New hamlet of Wyndcrest in Ashton, MD.

Courtesy of Montgomery County, MD
Dept. of Park & Planning.

- Issues regarding planned villages and hamlets that must be addressed are:
 - 1) the need for sewerage capacity to support the densities;
 - 2) the need for a workable transfer of development credits program;
 - 3) the need for public support for the concept: Whenever new housing is proposed within or adjacent to existing villages and hamlets, residents invariably oppose it. The same opposition is bound to occur whether they are proposed adjacent to existing communities or as planned new communities.
- The County should provide examples of successful, attractive new villages and hamlets, as well as attractive new development at the periphery of existing villages and hamlets.

Transportation Task Force Report

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Transportation Task Force Report

Introduction

Transit. Trucks. Trains. Trails. And, of course, Traffic. These items comprised the primary topics of discussion during the monthly meetings of the Transportation Task Force. Spanning a period of six months in 1997, these meetings led to the formulation of strategies responsive to the County's transportation dilemmas. The Task Force identified opportunities for enhancing the quality of life for Hunterdon County residents through various transportation policies and initiatives. Their recommendations, outlined in the following pages, were designed to guide the County in establishing the elements of the "ideal" transportation system defined in *A State of the County Assessment* (January 1997).

Transit

Discussion

Land use has directly affected the status of transit in Hunterdon County. Residential, commercial and industrial development patterns favor private automobile use for virtually every type of trip. Low-density land use creates trip origins and destinations which are spread out homogeneously over the landscape making multiple transit stops impractical and costly. Activities within the County are not concentrated enough to significantly expand conventional transit (e.g. local bus service, commuter rail or light rail). All forms of transit require a critical mass of population and workers to ensure adequate ridership levels. The minimum densities required for most forms of transit are barely met even in the most heavily populated areas of the County.

Other factors also affect the prospects for transit in the County. High vehicle ownership rates, coupled with the availability of free parking at work sites and shopping centers, continue to make transit less attractive than

private auto use. Thus, it is no wonder that Hunterdon, by comparison with other New Jersey counties, is so poorly served by conventional forms of transit. Alternative forms of transit that will be discussed later in this text may be readily adapted to the lifestyle and land use patterns of Hunterdon County.

According to 1990 US Census figures, only 1.3 percent of County residents use the bus or train to get to work. The majority of these transit users are accommodated by the express bus service that stops at park and ride lots off State Route 31 and Interstate 78. Almost all of these express bus riders are headed for New York City, and the same holds true for those residents using the Raritan Valley Line commuter rail. The Raritan Valley Line (RVL), which requires a transfer at Newark for New York-bound commuters, is less attractive than the one-seat express bus ride into New York offered by TransBridge. Of the estimated 940 County residents who work in New York City, almost 60 percent are using transit.



Recommendations

Commuter rail service on the RVL should be optimized to make the best use of existing facilities and to better accommodate current and future demand. For example, the maximum allowable speed of the RVL is 50 MPH. However, with equipment upgrades the top speed can be boosted to 79 MPH effectively reducing the commute time of riders. Improving

service frequency to Hunterdon County stations may be accomplished through the installation of rail sidings. The RVL in Hunterdon County consists of only one track for eastbound and westbound trains. Service frequency to Hunterdon stations is limited by the time it takes one train to travel from the first stop to the last and back again. Rail sidings, allowing opposing traffic to pass each other, could increase the number of eastbound and westbound trains. Demand may exist to justify the opening of new or unused stations along the RVL. Service to Hampton and Phillipsburg is suggested.

Discussion

Although New York-bound County residents can realize some benefit from improved rail service along the RVL, it is important to acknowledge that New York City is not a major work destination for County residents. The largest destination for County residents is Hunterdon County. Surprisingly, 42 percent of County residents are employed within the County boundaries. According to the 1990 Census, most of them, about 20,000 commuters, drive to work alone. Only nine percent carpool while an additional five percent walk to work. Less than one percent of our residents who work in the County use any form of transit for commuting. In light of these statistics, it seems obvious that there exists considerable opportunity for providing those workers who are also residents with some form of intracounty transit. Although one form of intracounty transit, the LINK, currently operates, less than one percent of residents use the LINK for commuting. Serving 143,000 trips per year, the LINK operates primarily as transportation for seniors and the handicapped. However, any County resident may use this transit.

Recommendations

The LINK shuttle service should be expanded or a new shuttle service should be established that would better serve the traveling public. These new and expanded services could match the characteristics of the Wheels shuttle routes that are operated by New Jersey Transit. These

shuttles function effectively when they connect higher density residential areas with clusters of mixed-use employment centers, that is, corporate and industrial office parks and/or shopping malls. To fill the gaps of service within the multi-modal transportation network, shuttles can connect train stations or park and ride lots with office parks. Shuttles can also provide transportation services for the shad and balloon festivals and other special events that generate an immense number of trips and traffic congestion. Increased use of the LINK would likely improve this system's cost recovery from the farebox. Currently, the actual cost per trip is about \$8.20, yet the top fare is only \$1.00. Hunterdon Area Rural Transit (HART), the County's transportation management association, should be an important facilitator in the establishment, maintenance and promotion of new transit facilities within the County.

Discussion

There also exists potential for enhancing intercounty transit. Approximately 34 percent of Hunterdon County residents work in the neighboring New Jersey counties. The second most popular work destination for County residents, after the County itself, is Somerset County. Almost 20 percent of Hunterdon County residents are employed at work sites in Somerset County. Another 6.3, 6.0, and 2 percent of Hunterdon residents work in the Counties of Mercer, Morris and Warren, respectively. Conversely, about 11 percent of those who work in Hunterdon County commute from Warren County. Another six and seven percent of the County's workers are from Somerset County NJ and Northampton County PA, respectively.

Recommendation

An intercounty, Wheels-type route, should be investigated for commuters that travel between Hunterdon and other counties. A route serving Hunterdon residents with work destinations in Somerset County appears especially feasible.

Discussion

Many commuters, though they may not work or live in Hunterdon County, use its roads and other facilities for access to other counties. Indeed it was estimated that almost 60 percent of the traffic on the major roads during the morning and evening peak periods is through traffic. When major roads become congested both locally-generated and through traffic are forced off major arterials onto local and county roads. Furthermore, county park and ride lots accommodate a considerable number of Pennsylvania commuters.



Park and ride lot in High Bridge.

Recommendations

More park and ride lots that are strategically located within the heavily traveled corridors of the County should be established. Hunterdon County should work with the counties of Warren (NJ) and Northampton (PA) to plan park and ride lots west of Hunterdon County. These lots would better serve outsiders who currently utilize Hunterdon's park and ride lots. A park and ride lot near a suggested Hampton train station stop, for example, would ease the traffic demand on Route 31 generated in Warren County. The investigation of a possible multi-modal station along the RVL is also recommended. Finally, a set of guidelines on transportation control measures (TCMs), techniques for alleviating traffic congestion, should be prepared and published along with a new County master plan for use by local planning boards.

Regional Truck and Freight Movement

Discussion

Locally generated truck traffic is obviously an economic and material necessity for Hunterdon County. But recent developments in the statewide transportation network as well as rapid growth in Hunterdon, Mercer and Bucks (PA) Counties have dramatically increased truck traffic.

With the completion of the I-287 "missing link" in North Jersey, a toll-free alternative to the NJ Turnpike was created. This alternative combines I-87 (NY State Thruway), I-287, I-295 (Trenton), and unfortunately, US Route 202 and State Route 31 in Hunterdon County. According to an origin and destination survey conducted by NJDOT both intrastate and interstate truckers have found this new route attractive. Twenty-four percent of the truck traffic on State Route 31 does not have an origin or destination anywhere in New Jersey, and clearly, should not be using this highway. However, it is also important to note that 40 percent of truck traffic is local, having a pickup or delivery in Hunterdon, Mercer or Bucks County.

Recommendations

The regulatory aspects concerning truck traffic on State and local roads requires further investigation. Local roads and rural thoroughfares should be off limits to all but local pickups and deliveries. A statewide congestion pricing initiative for trucks could help reduce freight movement on our roads. Under such a scheme, trucks with local deliveries would be assessed at a much lower rate than trucks with interstate origins and destinations. This system could be implemented through the use of a truck EZ Pass.

Discussion

Both safety and property have been impacted by increased truck traffic. Land values along Route 31 south of Ringoes have been

negatively affected by the increased trucks that utilize the rural, two-lane section of this highway. The highly commercial, traffic-light interrupted section of Route 31 north of the circle is also not designed for the heavy truck traffic it sustains. Although right-of-way for the Route 31 Flemington Bypass is being acquired, the funding for its construction remains uncertain. This project would serve to separate regional through movements, especially truck traffic, from local commuting and shopping trips.

Recommendation

Hunterdon County and the affected municipalities need to emphasize to the New Jersey Department of Transportation the conflicts caused by the increase trucks on Route 31. The Flemington Bypass must be funded in the next NJ State Transportation Improvement Program. In addition, the opening of a weigh station on State Route 31 would discourage overweight and unsafe trucks from using this highway.



Discussion

Truck traffic has also increased along Interstate 78 in Hunterdon County. This highway serves as a critical link for east-west freight movement. The increase in trucks on Interstate 78 is due to some degree to the ongoing development of the Allentown- Bethlehem-Easton metropolitan area in Pennsylvania. Currently, truck traffic accounts for about 20 percent of the flow on this highway. During the morning and evening peak hours, Interstate 78 in Hunterdon County is often at or near capacity. Accidents and non-vehicle related occurrences such as sun glare and poor weather easily bring traffic to a crawl. Horrifying accidents involving trucks and automobiles

have drawn increased attention to the conditions on this highway. Substandard interchange configurations exacerbate these conditions, causing accident rates near on and off ramps that greatly exceed statewide averages. Land use policies that could help reduce the growth of local truck traffic, such as zoning for industrial uses along rail lines, have not been recognized by Hunterdon County municipalities.

Recommendations

The outdated and substandard interchanges along Interstate 78 must be reconfigured. The County must persuade state and federal transportation agencies that improvements along I-78 are critical to safety and congestion relief.

Land along rail lines can be more practically utilized for economic development and reduction of truck traffic, instead of residential development. Municipalities with rail lines should be encouraged to use them more efficiently.

Bicycle and Pedestrian Accommodation

Discussion

The benefits of bicycle and pedestrian transportation have yet to be realized in New Jersey, particularly in Hunterdon and other rural counties. The gap between the potential benefits and the inadequate facilities for these modes may be bridged first through an understanding of the current physical, political and cultural realities involved.

The geometry, construction and topography of much of our road network present obvious challenges and difficulties for bicyclists and pedestrians. The narrow shoulders on most County and local roads are not conducive to safety. In addition, blind curves and tree-shadowed lanes pose additional deterrents. Attempts to widen roads for the purpose of improving line of sight and increasing shoulder width are usually met with local opposition.

The objection is that the proposed improvements will make the road more attractive to motor vehicles, resulting in increased traffic. Communities view destruction of trees and other foliage along the road associated with safety improvements as a degradation of rural character. Roads that are relatively safe to use may, because of their rolling nature and steep climbs, be too challenging to the average cyclist.



Although somewhat controversial, a bicycle trail is perceived as less threatening than a road-widening project. Unfortunately, most of the bicycle and pedestrian trails in the County are on public land. Although excellent for recreational pursuits, these trails do not, in general, connect centers of residential and business activity. These public trails cannot be expected to serve alone as a viable network for the accommodation of alternative modes. The lack of bridges and the cost of their installation are often an impediment to new trail development. However, increased federal funding as well as a sympathetic attitude at the administrative level towards alternative modes offer much encouragement for the prospect of new trail development. (The County Board of Recreation Commissioners succeeded in obtaining an ISTEA grant in the amount of \$600,000 to be used to improve the Landsdowne trail in Landsdowne, and a section from High Bridge to Tewksbury.) The potential

for securing funds from other grantors and the private sector may also aid trail development.

Habits and attitudes are as much an obstacle to accommodating alternative modes as are costs and insufficient facilities. An acceptance of the legitimacy, or perhaps, an acknowledgment of the practicality of alternative modes would be helpful to the establishment of trails in new developments. The Raritan Township Master Plan does, for example, contain an element that prescribes trails for new development. On the other hand, new trails through existing residential areas have been met with vehement opposition and controversy. The perception of increased liability and violation of privacy under these circumstances is difficult to discuss, let alone debate in a public forum. Hopefully, this dilemma may at some point turn on this finding of the task force: Transportation is not just a practical matter in Hunterdon County, it is a quality of life issue.

Recommendation

Bicycling and walking should be promoted in Hunterdon County. Such a policy decision must be complemented by a comprehensive and intermunicipal effort to establish a seamless, inter-modal transportation network. In other words, bicycle and pedestrian facilities must be connected to other transportation facilities, i.e., train stations, park and rides and the road network. The County should provide and support a network of trails utilizing public thoroughfares, public lands, preserved farmland and other preserved open spaces, but not private land. Where appropriate, the shoulder width of County roads should be increased to accommodate bicyclists and pedestrians. In addition, the Parks Department should be assisted in its application for transportation funds for suitable projects. A map of current trails should be developed for promoting alternative modes and to support countywide bicycle and pedestrian planning.

Recommendations

Every municipality should support alternative

modes of transportation during development reviews, capital improvement planning and master planning for circulation. Open space plans, as well as master plans, should contain a trail component. Intermunicipal planning for alternative modes may be facilitated by the County for the purpose of establishing bicycle routes. These routes, utilizing State, County and local roads, will undoubtedly cross municipal borders. Regarding residential developments, a regulatory approach is not the preferred means to achieve trail implementation. Access to or through open space should not be an additional exaction from a developer. Instead, a trail can be used as part of the total open space calculation.



Land Use and Transportation

Discussion

Land use controls the quality and variety of transportation facilities available to residents. Our highway corridors are being developed in a strip pattern that is not conducive to multi-modal transportation. Similarly, the low-density housing that predominates much of our landscape is not supportive of most forms of transit. Personal choices regarding lifestyle, housing preferences and commuting continue to drive the market toward low-density land uses. These uses are highly segregated, requiring the traversing of considerable distances between home and shopping and work.

The mixing of uses, on the other hand, would permit greater use of alternative modes such as bicycling and walking that are best suited for short trips. Cluster development could concentrate population sufficiently to enhance shuttle-type transit while ensuring the preservation of a portion of a given parcel as

deed-restricted open space. Some municipalities, however, view cluster ordinances negatively. The decision to cluster is affected largely by the concern over septic systems. Typically, the minimum required lot size for use of an individual septic system is one acre. Lot sizes that are less than one acre - high density by Hunterdon County standards - require a community wastewater treatment system in the absence of existing sewers. Community wastewater systems are viewed as invitations for more growth.



Cluster development, planned village development and growth in existing centers are generally considered unacceptable in this County. However, the continued low-density, sprawl development of the County which leaves little prospect for transit options will lead to even greater traffic congestion than is presently experienced.

County residents are also unwilling to accept capacity enhancements as a solution to congestion, while the New Jersey DOT is likewise resistant to new projects for widening the State or Interstate Highways.

Recommendations

Ordinances and municipal land use policy should reflect local and regional goals of reducing congestion and preserving open space. Open space (ie cluster) ordinances, if deemed acceptable by municipalities, should provide incentives for developers. Cluster schemes must be complemented by design ordinances prescribing environmentally and aesthetically sensitive architecture that blends into the surrounding area. Mixed-use development

should be encouraged where appropriate to decrease auto dependency. Home occupation ordinances should reflect changes in work habits, commuting patterns, and agricultural land uses. Highway frontage roads should be used as a means to channel traffic from major roadways as well as preserve the scenic quality of our remaining undeveloped highway corridors. Finally, the purchase of land for open space or farmland preservation, preventing new housing or commercial development, is one of the most effective means of reducing the growth of automobile trips and vehicle miles traveled.

Commercial, Office and Industrial Development Task Force Report

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Commercial, Office and Industrial Development Task Force Report

Introduction

After numerous work sessions in 1996, the Commercial, Office and Industrial Development Task Force determined that a more balanced mix of residential and nonresidential land uses will be necessary if Hunterdon County is to achieve and maintain a healthy economic base in the future. The Task Force also concluded that the following interrelated issues must be addressed:

1) Regional Planning - Impacts of major developments - both residential and nonresidential - occur well beyond the boundaries of the municipality in which they are located. Unfortunately, the current land use planning process in New Jersey does little to promote regional coordination and decision-making.

In addition, there needs to be greater acceptance that all areas of Hunterdon County are *not* appropriate for all types and intensities of development.

2) Infrastructure - The provision of infrastructure is one of the strongest forces guiding new development. Both state and local actions will impact the future provision and expansion of infrastructure.

As a planning strategy available to municipalities, determining which areas are appropriate for new sewer and water and which roads are in need of upgrading will be a major factor in determining the County's future. In addition, an emerging component of Hunterdon County's economic base is related to green infrastructure and ecotourism.

3) Business Retention and Expansion - Business retention and expansion will depend upon a more diverse, trained labor force, affordable and

diverse housing opportunities, and flexible local regulations and code enforcement.

4) Revitalization of Existing Towns, Villages and Hamlets - Although Hunterdon County's towns, villages and hamlets had historically been the center of jobs, many have become underutilized during the latter half of the 20th century. A viable downtown will need a tax base that will generate sufficient revenues to support it. If these areas are not encouraged and supported, they can become a significant drain on local revenues.

During 1997, the expanded Commercial, Office and Industrial Development Task Force met to formulate strategies that could help the County and its municipalities achieve the goal of a healthy economic base in the future. The recommendations of the Task Force are outlined below. It is important to note that the following is not an exhaustive list of strategies, but rather, an attempt to cover the most important issues discussed.

Regional Planning

Discussion

Municipal officials need to talk to each other on a regular basis to better understand the regional impacts of land use decisions made at the local level. By establishing direct contacts between adjoining municipalities, local officials will be able to constructively coordinate zoning, land use ordinances and development projects which may impact each other.

Periodically, the Hunterdon County Planning Board could convene informal meetings of groups of municipalities to discuss issues of regional concern, e.g., traffic congestion, infrastructure expansion, etc. This regional dialogue can help adjoining municipalities plan for complementary land uses along their common borders.

Recommendations

Each municipality should appoint an intermunicipal coordinator responsible for

keeping the municipality informed of, and commenting on, master plan proposals, zoning changes, and pending major development projects in adjoining municipalities.

Periodic meetings facilitated by the Hunterdon County Planning Board would be an appropriate forum for local officials to talk with each other and decide jointly where in the County significant development should occur.

Infrastructure

Discussion

Infrastructure needs apply to major roads, highways, water, sewer, railroads, electric power, gas service and telecommunications. Local officials should examine the infrastructure within their municipality and determine whether there is existing capacity. If not, an assessment should be made as to whether new infrastructure capacity is feasible or desirable. For example, what is the potential increase in rates versus the increase in costs to develop the new infrastructure? Will development pay for the new infrastructure? What are the environmental impacts associated with new infrastructure?

Municipalities should also review their master plans, zoning, land use and other ordinances to direct major new development toward areas which would utilize existing and new infrastructure capacity most efficiently.

Green infrastructure, such as preserved farms, open space, and outdoor recreation is also important. By promoting green infrastructure, the County and its municipalities are able to preserve natural resources while also promoting jobs and a healthier economy.

Public funds are becoming increasingly scarce for infrastructure expansion. Under the *New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan*, those areas which have been identified from a regional perspective as appropriate for growth will be the most competitive in securing

these limited funds.

Recommendation

Planning for new infrastructure as well as the upgrading of existing infrastructure capacity should be allocated to both residential and nonresidential development rates that provide the greatest return on the municipal tax dollar.

Business Retention and Expansion

Discussion

Local ordinances should be reviewed to determine whether they currently hinder or promote business retention and expansion. For example, do local regulations currently preclude the renovation of older buildings making them “functionally obsolete”? To the extent that local ordinances may affect businesses leaving the County, municipalities should provide greater flexibility in their regulations and encourage the State to become more flexible in its codes, mandates and regulations.

Municipalities need to educate the public on the consequences of not retaining existing commercial, office and industrial development. Municipal government also needs to increase public awareness of the lost potential in vacant buildings that could contribute to the tax base if filled.



Former Oyster Cracker Factory was recently redeveloped in Lambertville, NJ, with federal funding assistance.

Recommendation

Municipal government should proactively support the retention and expansion of existing commercial, office, and industrial facilities. Revitalization of Existing Towns, Villages and Hamlets

Discussion

Municipal government should identify potential threats to the viability of downtown areas. For example, what obstacles currently exist that work against the revitalization of the downtown areas of the County's traditional towns?

Municipalities should encourage downtown land uses that complement rather than compete with larger commercial development occurring on their fringes.

Hunterdon County's smaller villages and hamlets have unique opportunities to take advantage of their community's character. Historic inns, specialty shops, craft centers, outdoor recreation, and specialty agriculture are among the types of ecotourism activities that have the potential for creating a "focus" for the revitalization of the County's small crossroad communities.

resource base and offset it with economic benefits that meet the needs of the local community. Local officials should also investigate whether a percentage of tourism dollars can be used to preserve the rural character of Hunterdon County.



Main Street in High Bridge, NJ.

Recommendations

Municipal government should encourage the preservation and revitalization of existing towns, villages and hamlets.

An ecotourism program should be developed to promote the protection of the County's natural

Appendix A:

Meeting of Growth Management Task Forces to Review *Strategies for Managing Growth - Draft* March 16, 1998

Summary of Comments:

- County Planning Board should develop model design standards for municipalities.
- County Planning Board should sponsor planning education programs for local officials and the public.
- New Jersey property tax structure works against regional planning.
- To effectively implement centers concept of State Plan, funding is needed to protect the environs surrounding the centers.
- To date, centers receiving designation by the State Planning Commission have coincided with municipal boundaries of boroughs without addressing the protection of the environs.
- Innovative approaches needed to support farming as an industry and preserve farmland.
- The County should provide greater financial support for farmland preservation.
- The concept of Agriculture Enterprise Districts needs to be explored.
- Greenhouses will be critical to the future of agriculture in the County yet they are

presently unacceptable to the public.

- The future of agriculture is dependent on state level research and practical assistance.
- Schools are buying up valuable buildings and sites.
- We need to identify those industries that are environmentally sound and suitable for relocation to Hunterdon County to balance our tax base.
- An affordable work force is needed to maintain a healthy economy.
- The nature of manufacturing is changing nationally leaving an empty inventory of obsolete buildings in Hunterdon County.
- Significant ratables (such as Merck) benefit more than just the host municipality by contributing to County taxes and regional school taxes.
- Development impact fees are needed to fund education and infrastructure.
- Transfer of development rights must be made a practical land use tool; it needs to be made attractive to developers without granting density bonuses.
- There needs to be a stronger role for the County in regulating developments with regional impacts.
- Emergency services are needed; volunteers are harder to get, so the County should start planning to assume this responsibility on a county-wide basis; the County should also facilitate joint purchasing for those municipalities who want to benefit from the cost savings that could be realized.
- Carrying capacity needs to be considered in municipal master plans.
- Housing needs of senior citizens must be

addressed including the provision of age-restricted communities.

- Senior citizens are a valuable volunteer resource that have not adequately been tapped.

Appendix B:

Additional Publications

Hunterdon County Planning Board,
*Hunterdon County Planning Board Public
Opinion Survey - Summary of Results*, February
1994.

_____, *Quality of Life Concerns and
Planning Issues in Hunterdon County*,
September 1994.

Hunterdon County Growth Management
Advisory Committee, *A State of the County
Assessment - Planning Issues, Trends and
Visions*, January 1997.