

Once a community of forests, farms, small villages and towns, Hunterdon has undergone a dramatic transformation. In recent decades, development occurred with great rapidity, as it spread throughout the County. Improved highway systems, sewers, increased access to employment centers in nearby counties, and a desirable quality of life have all contributed to the volume and pattern of growth that has occurred. And yet, even so, we are still considered one of the most rural parts of New Jersey. In fact, the 2000 Census reports that Hunterdon County has more population in rural areas than any other county in the State.

County Profile—Land Development

Development Trends in Recent Decades

While the County’s earlier settlements began as small boroughs and towns, available sewer capacity and highway improvements contributed to the spread of growth beyond these communities, particularly in Raritan Township and along the I-78 and Route 22 corridors. Between 1955 and the early 1970s, several municipal and regional sewerage treatment plants were constructed, facilitating more intensive development. Interstate 78 opened in 1968, providing convenient access for commuters working along the I-287 corridor. Completion of its missing link in Union County in 1986 likely contributed to additional growth. Since the opening of Route 78, the County’s population grew by more than 75%.

Infrastructure improvements not only accommodated greater residential growth, but also provided opportunities for more intensive non-residential development. Increased accessibility and land availability made office space on highway corridors attractive. Supportive businesses, like hotels and restaurants and smaller businesses serving an expanding residential population also contributed to Hunterdon’s nonresidential growth in recent years. In turn, office development both in Hunterdon County and in neighboring counties likely drew employees to relocate their homes into Hunterdon.

In 1972, only 4.48% of the County was developed. By 1995, this grew to nearly 22% (Map 1). With development came the loss of farmland and woodlands (Figure 1). Land preservation efforts

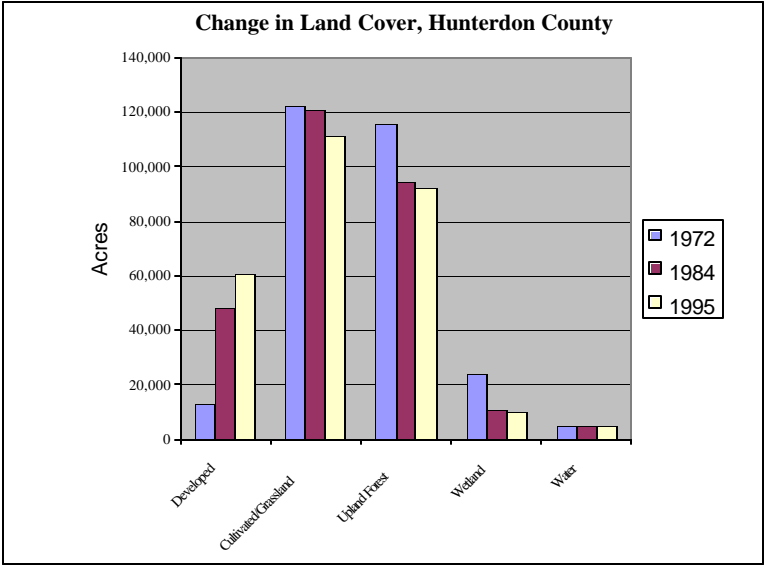
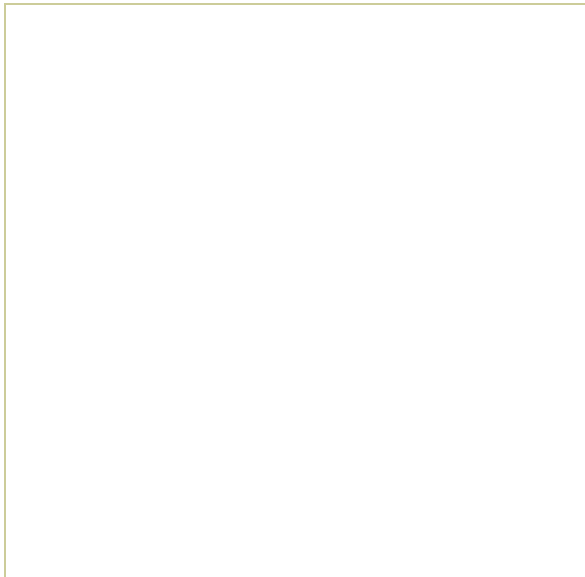


Figure 1—Change in Land Cover, Hunterdon County, NJ. Land Cover data is derived from Rutgers University Center for Remote Sensing and Spatial Analysis (CRSSA). Two additional categories, Bare Land and Unconsolidated Shore are not shown because the acreage is too small to appear on the chart.

Photo.

County Profile—Land Development

became aggressive, particularly in the past several years, when significant state funding opportunities arose. Despite these efforts, only 16.5% of the County's land base today (45,717 acres) represents preserved farms and open space.

Sewage systems came on line during the early and mid-20th century, but their capacity and service areas were limited. By and large, the vast majority of the County relies on individual septic systems. Thus, public sewerage treatment systems helped to facilitate development, however their limited service areas did not hinder the continued advancement of growth.

Today, corporate offices and commercial establishments continue to locate primarily on highways or adjacent commercially-zoned corridors. Residential developments are spreading out into the rural countryside in proximity to farmsteads and scenic views, well beyond any sewer lines. This characterizes much of the growth we have seen in recent years and expect will continue into the foreseeable future.

Mapping Land Development Patterns in Hunterdon County

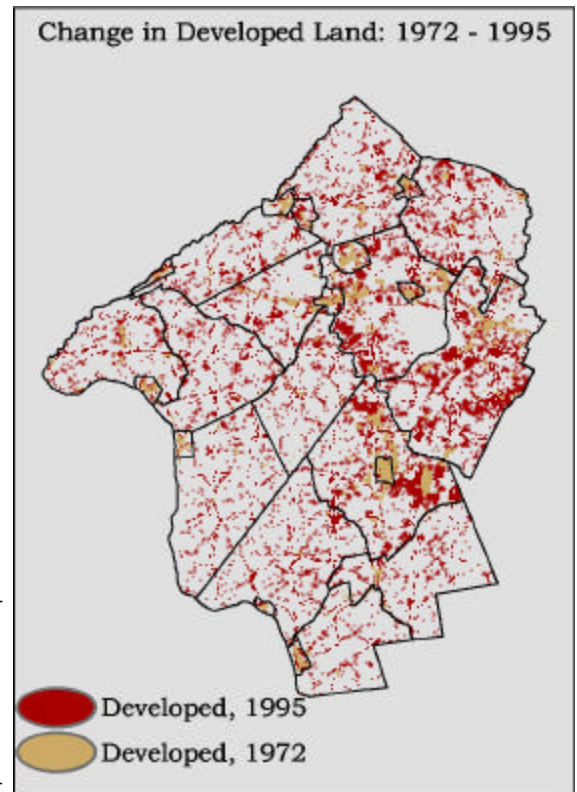
One way of characterizing development patterns is to distinguish broad geographic areas by the distinct "character" each conveys, as viewed from both an aerial and street perspective. For purposes of describing Hunterdon County's visual character, several terms are used to distinguish these areas. These terms, however, should not be confused with definitions used in the NJ State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

Rural – A predominance of open space, including farmland, wildlife habitats, open vistas and/or environmentally sensitive areas such as water, wetlands, woodlands, grasslands, and steep slopes.

Country Suburban – While open space is a dominant feature on the landscape, development is a more common occurrence than it is in rural areas. Houses may line streets, though frequently are broken up by relatively large expanses of open space. They may also occur in small subdivisions off of local roads. Often, residential lots are heavily wooded, creating a visual screen that helps to retain somewhat of a rural ambience. Country suburban areas may also include nonresidential uses.

Suburban – Suburban areas are characterized by a predominance of buildings and structures. Open spaces are limited to occasional recreational lands, detention basins or other small, unbuildable parcels. The open spaces are defined by the buildings and structures that surround them. Large residential subdivisions are common in suburban areas. Nonresidential uses include retail, office, recreation, civic, and services, often stripped along highway or commercial corridors. Although suburban areas are characterized by more intensive development, uses tend to be separated from each other so that reliance on automobiles to travel from home to shops, work or services is necessary. Cul-de-sacs, another common feature of new suburban development, provide the privacy and safety that many residents appreciate, however, they can also perpetuate reliance on cars and/or longer vehicular trips by eliminating interconnections between neighborhoods.

Historic Towns – These are tightly knit communities, dating back to the 18th and 19th centuries, containing a predominance of homes in one or more definable neighborhoods. They vary in size from quiet little communities like Little York to more expansive communities like the City of Lambertville. Towns occur in rural, country suburban and suburban areas. The majority of homes occupy very small lots – generally less than ½ acre in size – and exhibit visual diversity in terms of lot sizes, architectural styles, building sizes, dwelling unit types and building setbacks. This is due to the historic evolution and growth of these communities and the changing styles that emerged over time. Buildings sometimes contain



Map 1. Change in Developed Land: 1972–1995. Primary data source: Rutgers University CRSSA.

County Profile—Land Development

multiple uses (mix of office, retail and or residences) and varied dwelling unit types (single, duplex, apartments, etc). Historic towns are usually laid out either at a crossroads, in a linear configuration or in a more intricate grid street system.

Larger towns like Clinton, Frenchtown, Lebanon, Lambertville or Flemington contain offices, civic uses, recreational facilities and/or shopping, often contained in a definable "town center." Here a mix of uses and activities are tightly clustered, permitting ready access from place to place by foot or bicycle. Some town centers also provide ready access to other locations within or beyond Hunterdon County by bus and/or rail transit.

Photo. Rural character is defined by the predominance of undeveloped land..

Viewed in this way, Hunterdon County can still be characterized as largely rural and country suburban (Map 2). The more rural areas tend to be in the southern sections of the County and in the Delaware and Musconetcong River watersheds. However, they extend north through Delaware, Raritan and Franklin Townships as well. Smaller pockets are also found in portions of Lebanon and Tewksbury Township. Country suburban areas predominate in the central reaches of the County. Suburban areas occupy the greater Flemington area and much of the Route 78/22 corridors, where higher density residential development and higher intensity commercial developments prevail.

As one drives down a road, the character of the immediate surroundings can be much different from the overall character that these broader geographic areas convey. A large residential subdivision in the middle of a farm valley can certainly create a suburban feel, even though the larger area in which it is situated is mostly undeveloped. Yet, if this same development is screened by woods or topography, the overall impression can still be rural or country suburban because open space and/or woods are the predominant view. Similarly, views from the highway corridors can change at different stretches, conveying a much different impression. Although the Route 78 corridor east of Perryville falls within a broader suburban area, heavily landscaped medians, coupled with wooded berms along some sections, create a very rural feel, even though more intensive development may be situated just beyond one's limited view. Site design through landscaping and other techniques can have a significant impact on the visual character of an area, regardless of the relative intensity of development that may exist.

Site Design and New Development

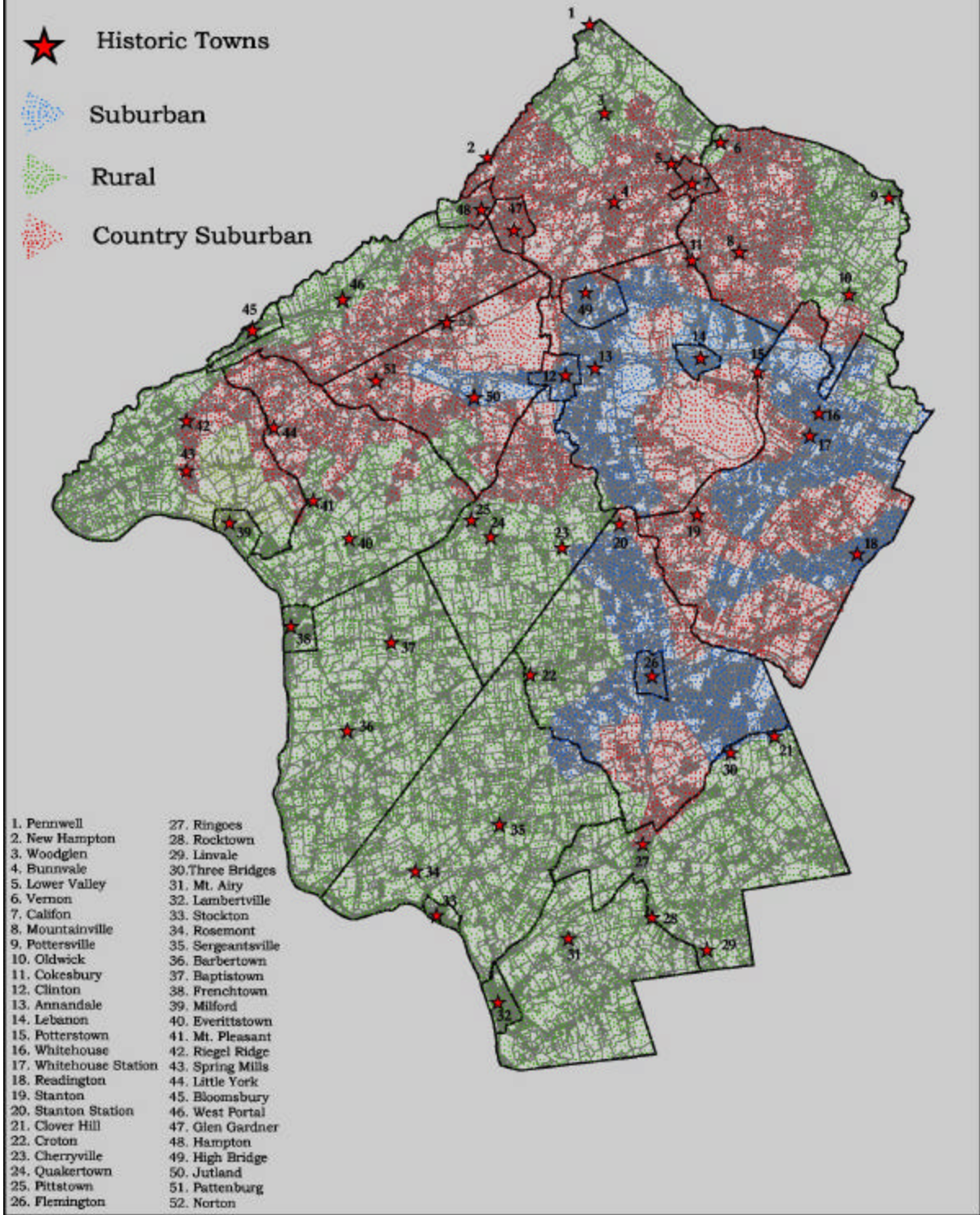
What does new development typically look like? How does it affect vehicular circulation and pedestrian mobility? What are some distinguishing characteristics of new development?

Residential Development

Large lot development has characterized much of our new residential construction in Hunterdon County over the past couple of

Photo. Suburban areas are characterized by a predominance of developed land.

Community Character Map



Map 2. Community Character. Primary data source: Hunterdon County Division of GIS.

County Profile—Land Development

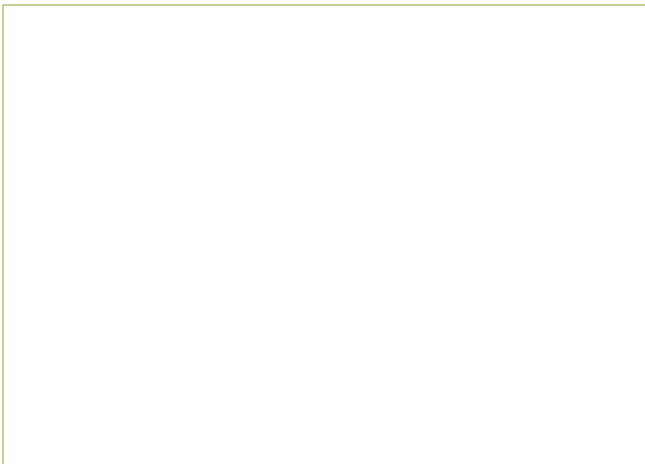
decades. During the 1970s and 1980s, the first of only a handful of higher density residential developments were built in communities like Raritan Township, Union Township, Glen Gardner, Lambertville, Clinton Township, Clinton Town, and Readington Township. Some of these developments contained several hundred units, including single family homes on small lots as well as townhouses, apartments, and/or condominiums. Some contain limited commercial uses as well. Several high density developments built in the 1980s and 1990s were “inclusionary developments.” Inclusionary developments are affordable housing projects in which a small percentage of the units are built as low or moderate income units, while the majority are built as market rate units (for more on this topic, see People and Housing Profile). Currently, the largest proposed inclusionary development is Windy Acres, a 911-unit project in Clinton Township.

Today, large single-family homes on large lots (generally two acres or more) dominate new residential construction. While this type of development generates fewer homes than the residential developments described above, it can remove land from agricultural use or from passive environmental use, when large contiguous areas become lawns.

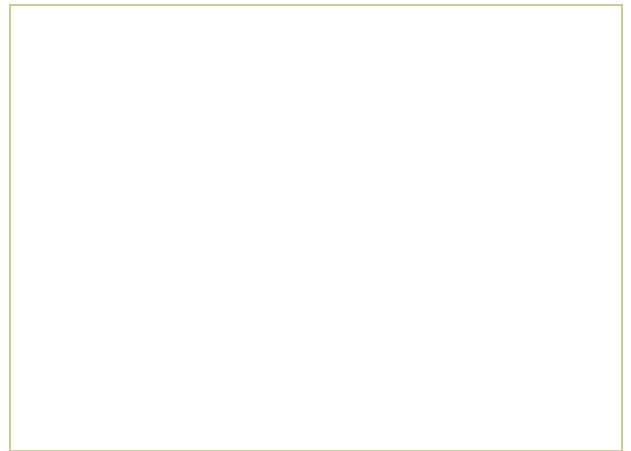
Open space developments – those accommodating reduced lot sizes in exchange for large contiguous areas of preserved land – are means by which some communities have attempted to retain as much open space or farmland as possible. Some communities permit open space developments but still require relatively large lot sizes (1 to 1.5 acres) to accommodate individual septic systems. Far fewer allow community wastewater treatment systems to serve open space developments, thereby permitting a reduction in lot sizes in exchange for larger tracts of preserved land. In one such development of 39 homes built in Union Township, homes are sited on 7,000 square foot lots. As a result, over 80% of the property was preserved in open space.

Aside from housing built within or near historic towns, residential developments tend to be isolated from each other and from shopping, government services, schools and businesses. Additionally, internal roadway circulation often precludes connections to existing or future neighboring developments. Many residents prefer cul-de-sacs because they add a perceived degree of privacy, security and recreational space. For all of these reasons, the automobile is the transportation mode of choice and more often, of necessity. Three-car garages are not unusual in new homes to accommodate parents and teenage children.

Until recently, sidewalks or pedestrian paths were uncommon in new developments. The NJ Residential Site Improvement Standards, adopted into law in 1997, impose sidewalk requirements in many instances. However, these requirements apply regardless of whether the property is in a developed, developing or rural area.



Lambertville is among Hunterdon County’s larger historic towns.



Trees and topography along Route xxx help screen views of suburban development, creating a rural ambiance.

County Profile—Land Development

Some developments result in major site clearance and grading – particularly on properties with difficult terrain, including steep slopes and woods. Other developments are designed to “fit into” the existing landscape and minimize disturbance to existing features. One means of accomplishing this is through landscaping requirements and natural resource protection standards. Another technique is the use of open space zoning. This allows developers to reduce lot sizes in order to preserve contiguous open space and retain natural resources or scenic vistas. Some communities also permit lot size averaging, a tool similar to open space zoning, as a way to encourage more flexible siting of homes and preservation of natural features.

The typical new subdivision home constructed in Hunterdon County is over 3,100 square feet in size, two stories tall, and colonial in style. Homes are set back from the road on large front lawns. Variations in decorative treatments, use of shutters, dormers, porches and other design elements introduce some architectural diversity and interest. However, the fundamental appearance, building materials and size are similar in most new developments. A few examples of new homes that draw carefully from nearby historic homes are also evident in Hunterdon County and elsewhere. In these situations, buildings incorporate some of the following features:

- use of traditional building materials (wood, stone, stucco or brick) extending to all building elevations
- shutters sized to fit windows
- ratios of windows and doors to façade similar to nearby historic homes
- human scale – architectural elements designed more or less to the size of a person
- masonry or stucco chimneys
- properly proportioned gables and dormers
- raised front entrances
- front porches
- side and rear facades with windows, recesses and projections carried over from the front façade
- visibly diverse massing, architectural styles, facades and building footprints
- diverse façade colors
- roof pitches and roof lines drawn from nearby historic buildings
- detached garages
- shallow front yards

Nonresidential Development

Exxon-Mobil opened its 800,000 square foot research and engineering headquarters on Route 22 in Clinton Township in 1983. Foster-Wheeler began construction on a 300,000 square foot office building in 1986, with the ultimate future buildout of over one million square feet. Merck & Co., Inc. broke ground on a 900,000 square



Photo. New residential subdivision in Hunterdon County.



Photo. Commercial development in Hunterdon County.

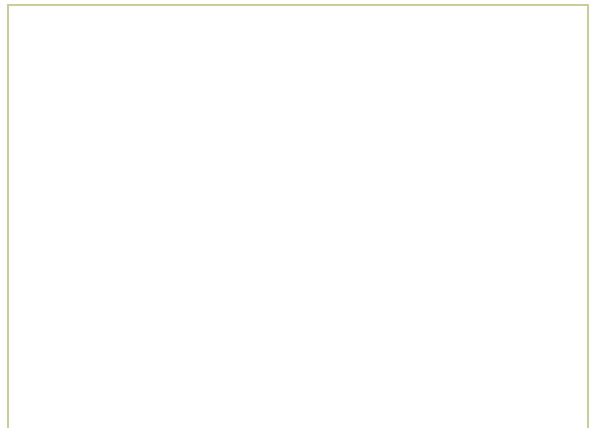


Photo. New residential construction in historic Sergeantsville.

County Profile—Land Development

- Merck & Co. – 1.12 million square feet
- 78 Corporate Center, Lebanon Boro— 180,828 square feet of existing office space; 429,200 square feet additional space proposed
- Hampton Inn, Franklin Tp – 86,098 square feet
- Walmart, Franklin Tp—116,754 square feet of pre-existing retail space
- Hampton Inn, Flemington – 70,179 square feet
- Walmart, Readington Tp—redevelopment of 119,095 square feet of existing retail space + 12,000 additional s.f. (proposed)
- Ingersoll Rand, Clinton Tp – 106,500 square feet
- Super Stop and Shop Shopping Center, Raritan Tp – 62,354 square feet
- Belle Mead properties at the I-78/C.R. 523 interchange, Readington/Tewksbury Tps – 1.9 million square feet of office space proposed (426,540 square feet recently occupied by Chubb)
- BJ’s Wholesale Club, Raritan Tp – 69,200 square feet
- Health Quest (health club), Raritan Tp - 104,108 square feet
- Home Depot, Raritan Tp – 121,344 square feet (under construction)
- A.M. Best Expansion, Tewksbury Tp – 135,000 square foot addition
- Town Center (retail), Raritan Tp– 97,392 square feet (under construction)
- Route 202 Shopping Center, Raritan Tp - 88,000 square feet (proposed)

Table 1—A snapshot of major nonresidential construction in Hunterdon County, NJ.

foot building in 1989 in Whitehouse Station. Several other major players are existing, under construction, or proposed (Table 1). Corporate office buildings, hotels, “big box” retail, as well as smaller retail and office buildings characterize much of the recent nonresidential development. Corporate office buildings tend to locate along highways, often on large, open campuses. This offers convenient highway access and a strong visible presence in the area. Not all, however, make their presence quite so visible. Other factors influencing location include quality of life considerations such as rural character and strong public school systems; telecommunication availability; convenient reverse commutes for employees located east of Hunterdon County; convenient, affordable housing in Pennsylvania; and land availability for future expansions. Corporate office buildings typically range in size from 50,000 to nearly one million square feet in size. Usually they are designed as contemporary structures of glass and brick or concrete, creating a distinct corporate identity.

Transit opportunities are extremely limited in Hunterdon County. Bus and train stops along the highways do not facilitate the volume of users to warrant corporate-sponsored vans for commuters to and from station stops. Employees do not live near transit stops, finding it easier to drive to work. Since employees rely predominantly on cars to commute, zoning requirements and commuter needs generate expansive parking requirements at these office facilities.

The Flemington/Raritan area hosts a high concentration of retail shopping centers. These retail centers are single story structures, whether stand-alone “big box” buildings like BJ’s and Home Depot, the Flemington Mall, or strip commercial centers. Shopping centers offer highway access with plenty of parking in front of the buildings. Like other commercial uses, the need for land-intensive development coupled with site constraints often direct detention basins to the front of the property, immediately alongside the highway. One of Flemington’s older shopping facilities - Liberty Village - is somewhat unique in design. Located within walking distance of downtown Flemington, it consists of multiple smaller buildings, with architectural details, pedestrian paths, and landscaping that create a walkable “small town” environment.

Our smaller communities have also seen some nonresidential development, albeit limited by comparison to that taking place on the highway corridors. For example, three older buildings in Lambertville, were renovated for office use, hotel, health club and micro-brewery. High Bridge saw the revitalization of the Taylor Wharton property, a long-vacant industrial complex to its current office and industrial uses. Commercial infill and adaptive reuse in our downtowns not only supports economic revitalization but also facilitates easy commute by foot or bike among local residents.

Photo. Office building in ___ Township, Hunterdon County.

County Profile—Land Development

Public Buildings

Civic space has undergone expansion and/or relocation in recent years, both at the local and county levels. West Amwell Township relocated its municipal offices from the Village of Mt. Airy to a rural area adjacent to South Hunterdon Regional High School, to facilitate expansion of space and property. Lambertville and Clinton Town were able to address their facility needs by remaining in a downtown location. Municipal offices in Clinton Town occupy an historic building which was expanded in an historically compatible manner to accommodate additional space requirements. Lambertville is renovating its existing building, also of historic value. In addition, it acquired a former commercial facility at the edge of town for police services and is acquiring a former grocery store located downtown for additional space. Raritan Township is relocating its municipal offices adjacent to the municipal court and police station. Hunterdon County is renovating its space in downtown Flemington to maintain a presence in town, though several offices have also moved out of town to Route 12, where other county facilities, including the library, are located.

What Accounts for Current Development Patterns?

Several factors may help explain the pattern of development evident today.

The Wealth Belt phenomenon – The Central Jersey region has been dubbed the Wealth Belt of New Jersey – the state’s critical mass of wealth, purchasing power and its economic engine. Hunterdon is one of six counties within the Wealth Belt. Those living in Hunterdon County command among the highest per capita incomes not only in the State but also in the country. They comprise a skilled labor force willing to commute on its highways to work so that they can enjoy the large home and acreage typical of new subdivisions in the County.

Large lot zoning – Large lot zoning, typically two to 10 acres, represents the majority of residential zoning districts in our townships. The zoning is based on the desire to preserve rural character, agriculture and/or natural resources. Water supply limitations and water quality issues also form the basis for low density zoning. Furthermore, studies repeatedly show that exclusive of very high cost homes and senior housing, most residential development generates more in community costs than it provides in tax revenues. Therefore, municipalities attempt to reduce the total volume of housing through what is perceived as the appropriate zoning.

Ratables chase – New Jersey’s property tax structure encourages municipalities to seek revenue-generating uses in order to offset the ever-growing cost of public services and infrastructure. Clean ratables such as high technology firms and corporate offices are often sought along our highway corridors to minimize traffic, noise and visual impacts in residential neighborhoods. Nonresidential uses can have positive fiscal impacts, offsetting residential tax burdens, and can provide a healthy mix of uses in a community. At the same time, they may generate more housing demands for relocating employees, fostering a continued trend toward large lot housing developments. In addition, they can increase a community’s affordable housing obligation.

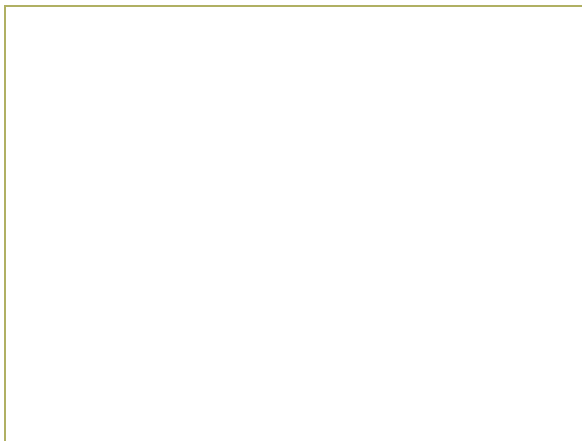
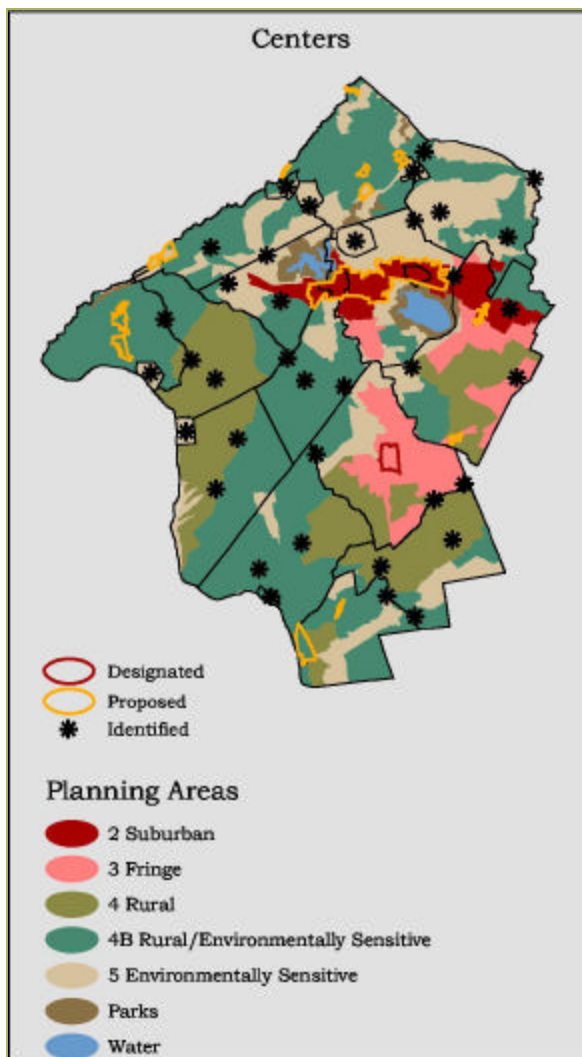


Photo.



Photo.

County Profile—Land Development



Map 3. Planning Areas and Centers: NJ State Plan.
Primary data source: NJ Office of Smart Growth (NJOSG).

Telecommunications - Advances in telecommunications – from computer technology to cell phones – provide increased opportunities for people to work from home. Additionally, cell phones make commuting to work more productive and long trips more tolerable. High tech Intelligent Transportation Systems” may create even more incentive to live further away from work, by providing technology to drivers that direct them to appropriate and time-efficient routes.

Council on Affordable Housing (COAH)— Many local officials voice concern about the impact of affordable housing needs on their respective communities. The Council on Affordable Housing, the State agency that oversees affordable housing in New Jersey, permits a variety of mechanisms for communities to address their need. One such tool is inclusionary zoning. Inclusionary developments, however, can have a significant impact on community character and generate broad reaching fiscal impacts such as school costs.

Inclusionary developments tend to be very large and very dense developments, designed to accommodate affordable housing construction while still providing a reasonable return to the developer. Builders remedy is a tool developers can use to force development upon a municipality that has not addressed its affordable housing obligation. A builders remedy results not only in the construction of affordable housing units, but a much larger number of market rate units as well.

Resistance to open space zoning – Open space zoning requires very small lot sizes – well under one acre – to amass large areas of preserved land. The Municipal Land Use Law not only recognizes open space zoning (called “clustering”) as a planning tool but also acknowledges noncontiguous open space zoning. Noncontiguous open space zoning allows development to be transferred between non-adjacent parcels as a creative means of preserving lands.

Few municipalities take full advantage of open space zoning as a vehicle to create compact development patterns, preserve land and offer more diverse housing options. There are several reasons for this. First, community wastewater treatment systems are perceived as a means to foster additional unwanted growth. By introducing community wastewater systems, open space zoning may permit a larger number of homes, given the same zoning density as those built using septic systems. Large lot zoning does not necessarily yield the gross permitted number of lots because of perc limitations. Community systems may not be as constrained by soils and therefore accommodate a greater number of homes. More importantly, many local officials perceive a loss of local control once community systems are authorized.

Photo. Flemington Borough—The only Designated Center in Hunterdon County, NJ.

County Profile—Land Development

There are few examples of well-designed open space developments. Too often, they appear as large, dense developments in the middle of farm fields or on hilltops, dominating views. When open space zoning is used in the absence of a proactive land preservation plan, it creates the potential for scattered pockets of development with open space that appears similarly sprawling and unusable. Many suggest that the open space preserved through this zoning technique is usually unbuildable, environmentally constrained lands anyhow, so little is gained in the end. In addition, there is a common perception that land preserved by deed restriction through open space zoning can succumb to future development through successful legal challenges to deed restrictions. Other concerns include water supply impacts of densely situated homes drawing down aquifers, as well as water quality issues when wells and septic systems are concentrated on a small portion of a site.

NJ State Plan and its application in Hunterdon County

The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan), first adopted in 1992 by the NJ State Planning Commission, creates a framework for directing the location and intensity of future growth. According to the State Plan, growth should occur primarily in the State's urban and suburban areas, where infrastructure exists or is planned to accommodate more intensive growth. More rural and environmentally sensitive areas will invariably grow as well. However, in these areas, development should occur principally in the form of "centers."

*Planning Area 2—Route 22 in Clinton (above);
Planning Area 3 in Raritan Tp (below).*

Table 2. Planning Areas in Hunterdon County: Definitions and Associated Planning Policies

Suburban Planning Area (PA 2) — located adjacent to densely developed urban areas of the state, however characterized by a more dispersed and fragmented pattern of predominantly low-density, automobile-oriented development. Infrastructure, including water, sewer, transportation systems, etc. are in place or planned for in PA 2. Municipalities should guide the bulk of future growth into PA 2 and minimize development in Planning Areas 3, 4, 4B and 5. Development should occur in more compact forms as centers and/or as infill, rather than continuing to spread out as low-density, land-consuming sprawl.

Fringe Planning Area (PA 3) —adjacent to PA 2, but a predominantly rural landscape, though scattered development is also evident. Generally, lacks the major infrastructure systems characterizing PA 2. Water and sewer may be available, however, it is primarily in centers. Municipalities should accommodate future growth in centers and protect rural and environmentally sensitive areas around them. Fringe Planning Area serves as a buffer between PA 2 and the Rural or Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas.

Rural Planning Area (PA 4) —large areas of undeveloped land including farmland, woodlands and other vacant property, along with scattered development served by rural roads, wells and septic systems. Future growth patterns should protect the rural features of the Rural Planning Area and locate predominantly in centers.

Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA 5) —contains large contiguous areas of valuable ecosystems, geological features and wildlife habitats. Future growth that is accommodated in PA 5 should be confined primarily to centers and natural resources should be protected.

Rural/Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA 4B) —shares traits and planning policies appropriate to the Rural Planning Area and the Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area. New growth that is accommodated in PA 4B should ensure that natural resources are protected.

County Profile—Land Development

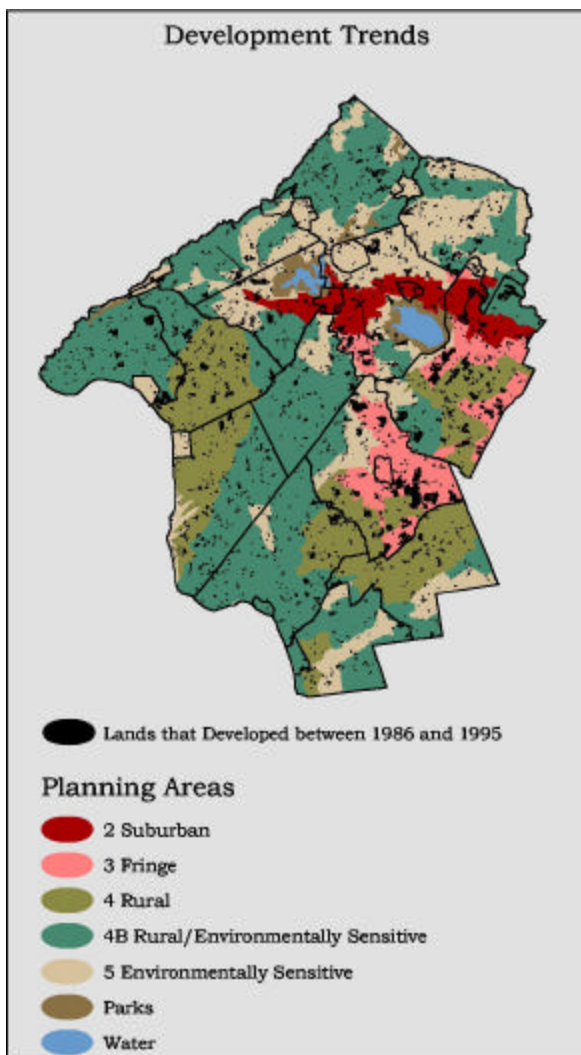
Centers are existing or planned communities with distinct characteristics that differentiate them from conventional subdivisions. Centers are compact communities with a mix of housing types and styles and mix of residential and nonresidential uses. Although new developments can qualify as centers, they must contain the infrastructure, densities, diversity of uses, pedestrian orientation and physical features that reflect the characteristics of our traditional historic towns.

Centers range in size and composition from the larger urban centers to regional centers, town centers, villages and hamlets. Hunterdon County contains numerous places that qualify as centers. The County and its municipalities recognized these centers when the State Plan was first adopted in 1992 and again in 2000, when it was updated. The State Plan includes a list of places that qualify as centers (Map 3). These are indicated as either “proposed”, “identified”, or “designated.” However, only those centers that have received official state recognition through a formal application process receive special state aid in the form of certain grant monies and expedited permits for select infrastructure needs. These are called designated centers. The Borough of Flemington is the only center in Hunterdon County that has received official center designation.

Centers can be located in any of six “planning areas.” Planning areas are large geographic areas (at least one square mile) distinguished by different development patterns and physical features. The State Plan recommends that municipalities recognize planning areas and centers in their own local planning efforts. Hunterdon County falls into five of six planning areas in New Jersey (Table 2, Map 3). The State Plan policies call for the bulk of growth in the State to occur in the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas. In Hunterdon County, while much growth has occurred in the Suburban and Fringe Planning Areas, we have witnessed significant development in the Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas as well in recent years (Map 4). However, the absence of infrastructure precludes the intensity and densities that are more typical in the Suburban Planning Area and in the sewered portions of the Fringe Planning Area.

The State Plan advocates the protection of “environs” outside of centers, while focusing growth within existing or newly planned centers. “Environs” may include parkland, farmland, environmentally sensitive areas and limited low density development. Many municipalities use available planning tools to help protect areas designated rural or environmentally sensitive. Some base zoning densities on natural resource limitations while others focus on agricultural viability. Many participate in acquisition of farmland and open space either through fee simple purchases or easement purchases as well. Several utilize techniques such as open space zoning and lot size averaging to help preserve contiguous areas of open space and

Planning Area 4—E. Amwell Township.



Map 4. Development Trends between 1986 and 1995 by Planning Area: Hunterdon County, NJ. Primary data sources: NJOSG, NJDEP.

County Profile—Land Development

farmland. While these tools may not be utilized to their full potential, communities do take advantage of them to one degree or another.

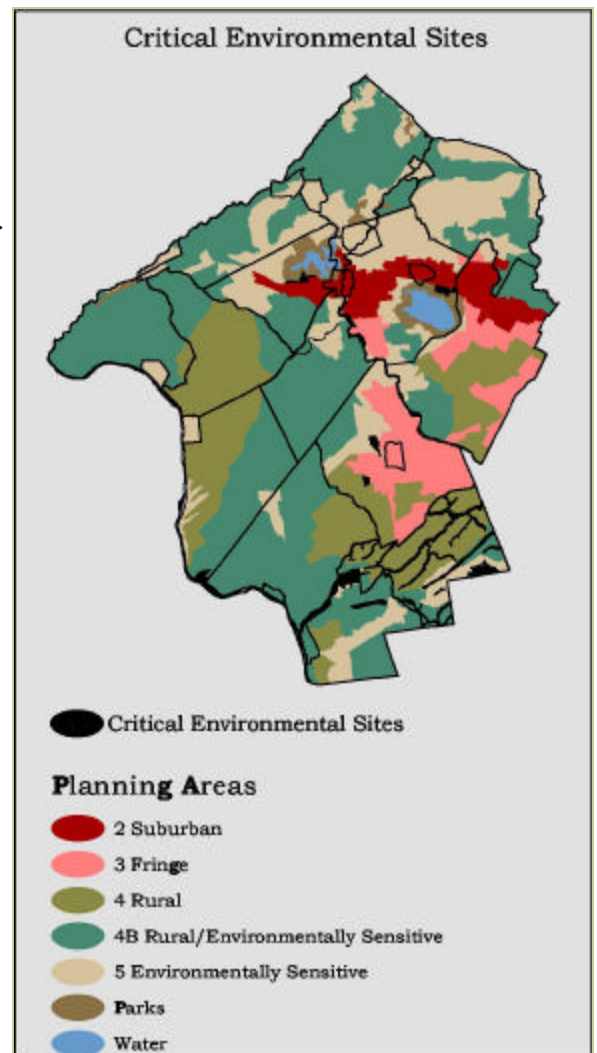
Few municipalities focus growth into centers. Center-based development redirects growth that would otherwise occur in the “environs” to existing or planned centers. The tools necessary to accomplish this are very limited and highly complex. Although opportunities do exist to help accomplish this goal, they require extensive planning studies and public support to succeed. Tradeoffs to accomplish this, including “density bonuses” as incentives for redirecting growth, meet with great public resistance. Likewise, the introduction or extension of public water and sewer receive strong opposition, for fear this will lead to uncontrolled growth. Additionally, many of the concerns local officials express over open space developments also hinder center-based planning.

In addition to planning areas and centers, the State Plan encourages municipalities to identify and protect “critical environmental sites” (CES) and “historic and cultural sites” (HCS). CES’s share similar characteristics with PA 4B and 5, however, they are less than one square mile in size and can be located in any planning area. In Hunterdon County, those features identified through local initiative include a handful of sites in East Amwell and Raritan Townships (Map 5). Additionally, the County identified four major streams and rivers forming its borders - the Delaware, Musconetcong, Lamington and South Branch of the Raritan - as CES’s. Historic and cultural sites in Hunterdon County have not as yet been acknowledged on the State Plan Policy Map.

Finally, the State Plan acknowledges regions considered “Special Resource Areas.” These are large contiguous areas that contain unique characteristics or resources of statewide importance. The New Jersey Highlands, including approximately one-third of Hunterdon County is assigned this designation. The 1,000 square mile region known as the New Jersey Highlands provides drinking water for more than 3.5 million people, hosts many threatened and endangered species, contains cultural and historic amenities and habitats of national importance. Its importance as host to an extensive system of natural, recreational and agricultural resource has gained it national attention, including federal studies and funding, in recent years. Consequently, State Plan policies call for planning among local, county, state and federal entities to critical resources while accommodating growth.



Photo. Planning Area 5 in Bethlehem Tp.



Map 5. Planning Areas and Critical Environmental Sites in Hunterdon County, NJ: NJ State Plan. Primary data source: NJOSG.