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# PINELANDS EXCELLENCE PROJECT

LIVABLE COMMUNITY PLANNING  
EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP

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## PROJECT DESCRIPTION



EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY VISIONING PROJECT

FUNDED THROUGH A GRANT FROM  
THE GERALDINE R. DODGE FOUNDATION

JUNE, 2005

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## BACKGROUND

Twenty-four years ago, the Pinelands Commission adopted the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP), N.J.A.C. 7:50, in response to federal and state legislation. The ability to protect unique natural systems and critical habitats in the 1.1 million acre Pinelands National Reserve is predicated on a regional approach to land preservation, land use and development. For example, the CMP's land use plan encourages residential and business development in areas that typically lay along its borders, proximate to major economic centers, while discouraging development in more centrally located, environmentally sensitive areas (a map of the Pinelands Area is attached). Since the CMP went into effect in 1981, more than 40,000 homes and businesses have been approved for development in the Pinelands, the vast majority of which are located in designated development areas. The remainder of the Pinelands Area, comprising 92% of its land mass, has been relatively free from development. Public land acquisition efforts have also been targeted in these environmentally sensitive areas, resulting in more than 430,000 acres of land now under public stewardship.

The Pinelands' Regional Growth Areas, comprising less than 10% of the overall Pinelands Area, are zoned to accommodate more than 100,000 new homes over the coming decades. The CMP anticipates that regional housing and development needs can largely be met in these growth areas without incursions into the most pristine parts of the region. However, the long-term success of this effort depends upon the creation of "livable" growth area communities - communities that are vibrant and attractive, and where important natural values and recreation areas are preserved for the residents' benefit. Yet, the pace of development (several communities have grown by as much as 300% over the past twenty years and are among the fastest growing in the state), and the lack of financial resources to comprehensively plan at the local level have made it extremely difficult for towns to stay ahead of the curve in effectively accommodating these housing demands.

This void has, in some cases, resulted in sprawl rather than "walk-able" town centers, poor neighborhood design, overburdened transportation systems, little or no open space and other amenities, and conflicts with natural resource protection. These issues are leading some municipalities to question the amount of development the Pinelands Commission has asked them to accommodate. Generally, the CMP prescribes a range of densities from 1 to 3.5 units per upland acre, which can be increased by 50% through the use of transferable development rights known as Pinelands Development Credits. These overall obligations are then translated into a variety of municipal zoning districts by the municipalities themselves. But simply reducing the amount of development in these areas may not be a panacea, and reductions in overall densities may not be appropriate. In addition, less development doesn't inherently lead to good community design. Moreover, the accommodation of less development in these growth areas may exert pressure to open up other areas of the Pinelands to satisfy unmet housing demands.

The Commission recognizes that control of the quantity of development is only part of a critical equation; another major component is development *quality*. In order to assure that the Pinelands preservation program is successful into the future, it is critical to ensure that the areas designated to accommodate growth are also livable places that meet the diverse needs of residents and business owners. The development and implementation of standards and any necessary facilities that promote quality community design are the keys to fulfilling this objective.

In response to the recognition of the need for attention to community design, the Pinelands Commission applied for and received a grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation in 2002 to undertake a two-year planning effort working with two fast-growing Pinelands communities, Hamilton Township in Atlantic County and Winslow Township in Camden County. This project marked the start of the *Pinelands Excellence Program* which was specifically developed to assist municipalities to conduct comprehensive community visioning and develop a set of innovative zoning and design policies to create livable communities embodying "smart growth" principles. Areas of emphasis included the creation of community centers; design standards to foster appropriate patterns and types of development;

architectural guidelines to ensure that the built environment is in keeping with the character of the community; the incorporation of open space into community design as a means to protect stream corridors and other natural values, provide recreation opportunities, protect scenic qualities, and facilitate non-motorized transportation through trail systems.

#### **EGG HARBOR TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY PLAN**

In January, 2005, the Commission received a second grant from Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation to continue the *Pinelands Excellence Program*. This current program is aimed at building on the initial experience with Hamilton's and Winslow's Livable Community Action Plans. With assistance from a planning and community design consultant, the Commission hopes that Egg Harbor Township will refine, expand and apply a range of community design tools. The selected planning firm will work with the Township to develop and detail high-priority strategies that may include, but not be limited to: linked open space plan implementation; commercial and residential design standards and architectural guidelines; identifying appropriate sites for future schools; traffic and circulation planning to efficiently accommodate development needs; and infrastructure design, for example, by developing a regional storm water program.

Once the community design strategies are developed, the consultant, will work with Egg Harbor Township to identify, formulate and "fit" the strategies to the particular needs of the community. To assure community "ownership" the strategy identification and development process must be driven by the elected officials and residents of the participating municipality. Regardless of the tools the Township seeks to implement, it is essential that the municipality be a full partner throughout all the phases of this project. It will be the consultant's responsibility to outline an effective process to accomplish this objective. To ensure broad community support, the process undertaken in conjunction with this proposal will provide frequent opportunity for community input as the plan evolves. Following identification of the specific community design and development strategies set, the consultant may be asked to assist the Township to take those actions deemed necessary for implementation.

#### **AN EXAMPLE FOR OTHER COMMUNITIES**

The issues to be addressed through the Egg Harbor Township community planning process and the strategies employed in Hamilton and Winslow Townships will be instructive to growing communities throughout the Pinelands. Consequently, at the conclusion of the project, the consultant will assist the Commission to conduct two seminars to help educate officials and community leaders throughout New Jersey about practical and specific solutions to their growth management issues and the public process that can be used to help identify and plan for them.

#### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

If you have any questions, or require additional information, please feel free to contact David M. Kutner, Director of Special Programs, the Pinelands Commission, P.O. Box 7, New Lisbon, NJ 08064, 609.894.7300 x 111, [David.Kutner@njpines.state.nj.us](mailto:David.Kutner@njpines.state.nj.us)

**PRELIMINARY  
PROJECT SCHEDULE**

Following is a ***preliminary*** project schedule outline. It is important to note that the following schedule will be refined and finalized following completion of the planning consultant selection process.

KEY DATES	ACTIVITY
<b><i>Consultant Proposal Solicitation Process</i></b>	
July, 05	Advertise Request for Proposals for consulting services
August, 05	Consultant Proposal due date
October, 05	Contract Award
<b><i>Community Planning Process</i></b>	
October-November, 05	Background Research
October-November, 05	Conduct Community Interviews
End of November, 05	Community Meeting
November-December, 05	Community Visioning Workshop Organization
Early January, 06	Conduct Community Visioning Workshop
January-February, 06	Draft Community Vision Plan
February-March, 06	Community Meetings to review Plan/obtain community input
March-April, 06	Refine Community Vision Plan to reflect community input
April-May, 06	Develop Implementation Strategies
Late May, 06	Community Meeting to review Implementation Strategies
Early to Mid-June, 06	Refine Implementation Strategies
Late June, 06	Public presentation of Community Action Strategies to Egg Harbor Township Committee