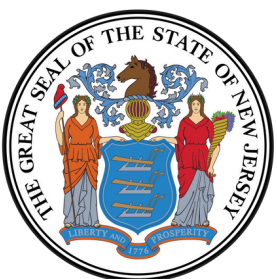




2024 STATE PLANNING COMMISSION

# ANNUAL REPORT

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NJ Office of Planning Advocacy



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New Jersey  
Business  
Action Center



## **STATE PLANNING COMMISSION/OFFICE OF PLANNING ADVOCACY 2024 ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

In 2024, the Commission and the Office reached a milestone achievement when it released the approved draft of the Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan (“State Plan”). The publication of that draft is the first step in adopting a final State Development and Redevelopment Plan. It is anticipated that the final Plan will be adopted by the end of 2025, which would make it the first update to the Plan since 2001. Details are provided below.

In addition to the significant undertaking of updating the State Plan, the Commission and the Office continued to work on the 2024 goals, as stated in the 2023 Year-End Report, as follows:

- Continue the Effort to Endorse Communities
- Continue Interagency Coordination
- Develop and Update State Planning Commission Policies
- Update State Planning Guidelines
- Coordinate with Other Planning Partners
- Continue to Advance Technical Assistance and Capacity to Counties and Municipalities

State Planning Commission members decreased to 13 during 2024 with the resignation of an Executive Branch employee. His resignation resulted in him being disqualified from this seat.

During 2024, the Office of Planning Advocacy was fully staffed. Currently, the staff consists of an Executive Director, a Deputy Director, two Senior Planners, two Assistant Planners, one Project Manager, one GIS Specialist, and an Administrative Assistant. Three interns are providing technical assistance to counties with the Cross-Acceptance process. Their tenure ends in May.

### **State Plan Update**

With the approval of Resolution 2024-11, the State Planning Commission approved the release of the Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan on December 4, 2024. The December 6, 2024 publication of the Plan began the Cross-Acceptance process. Implementation of the process and the eventual approval of the final Plan will be the primary 2025 goal of the Office and the Commission, and will be discussed in detail during the 2025 Goals section. While the publication of the Plan was delayed from a previously anticipated date, discussions with our State agency partners resulted in support at the state level for the goals and priorities.

Activities that led up to the approval of the Preliminary Plan during 2024 (and 2023) include continued public engagement, continued work with the counties, and providing technical assistance to the counties. Additionally, in 2024, work continued on the Infrastructure Needs Assessment and began on the Impact Assessment. The State Planning Commission, pursuant to Resolution #2024-06, approved population and employment projections.

The Office provided technical assistance to municipalities by internal staff, intern assistance, and consultant assistance. Through these vehicles, 16 of the 21 counties have received assistance to date.

The Infrastructure Needs Assessment work continues with the services of Rutgers University, and the Impact Assessment has begun utilizing Rutgers and Rowan universities.

Two mapping tools were created to assist in the mapping portion of the State Plan update. The first, Survey 1, 2, 3, is an electronic tool that will allow municipalities and counties to request mapping changes throughout the Cross-Acceptance process. Survey 1, 2, 3 was distributed to the municipalities through their counties for their use. The use of Survey 1, 2, 3 will make the mapping process more efficient and less cumbersome. Additionally, some counties are utilizing this product to produce the Statement of Agreements and Disagreements that is required from the counties.

The second mapping tool, the Smart Growth Explorer, identifies land use and environmental factors that a municipality can use to determine the best places to conserve and the best places to develop or redevelop. This tool enhances the concept of planning areas by incorporating factors that have not been historically considered when mapping areas for potential development or conservation. While this tool is not directly part of the State Plan update, it can be used in conjunction with the other tools provided to ensure the implementation of fair, equitable, and sustainable land use practices.

Outreach activities continued with presentations to stakeholders, public bodies, and other constituencies upon request. A separate outreach effort to reach previously underrepresented communities resulted in three events, one each in the northern, central, and southern parts of the state.

### **Continue the Effort to Endorse Communities**

OPA staff is currently working with fourteen municipalities toward Plan Endorsement. Those communities are Dover, Newton, Seaside Heights, Little Egg Harbor, Ocean Township (Ocean), Woodstown, Ocean City, Salem City, Barnegat, Sparta, Dennis, Berkeley, Manchester, and Red Bank.

The State Planning Commission endorsed Burlington Township on March 6, with the approval of resolution 2024-04.

### **Develop and Update State Planning Commission Policies**

The State Planning Commission updated its policies through the issuance of the Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan. Subject to public comment through the Cross-Acceptance process, those policies are as follows:

- **Economic Development:** Promote Economic Growth that Benefits all Residents of New Jersey
- **Housing:** Provide an Adequate Supply of Housing for Residents of All Ages and Incomes in Communities of Their Choosing That Meet Their Needs and Offer Ready Access to the Full Range of Supportive Goods and Services
- **Infrastructure:** Economic Opportunity Through Nation Leading Infrastructure
- **Revitalization and Recentering:** Revitalize and Recenter the State's Underutilized Developed Areas
- **Climate Change:** Effectively Address the Adverse Impacts of Global Climate Change
- **Natural and Water Resources:** Protect, Maintain, and Restore the State's Natural and Water Resources and Ecosystems
- **Pollution and Environmental Clean-Up:** Protect the Environment, Prevent and Clean Up Pollution

- **Historic and Scenic Resources:** Protect, Enhance, and Improve Access to Areas with Exceptional Archeological, Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space, and Recreational Value
- **Equity:** Implement Equitable Planning Practices to Promote Thriving Communities for all New Jerseyans
- **2024 Comprehensive Planning Goal:** Foster Sound and Integrated Planning and Implementation at All Levels Statewide

For a detailed discussion on each of these goals, refer to the Preliminary Plan document: [https://nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/update-to-state-plan/Draft%20Preliminary%20SDRP%20\(SPC%20Approved%2012.4.2024\).pdf](https://nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/update-to-state-plan/Draft%20Preliminary%20SDRP%20(SPC%20Approved%2012.4.2024).pdf)

### **Interagency Coordination**

During 2024, the Office represented the Commission and/or the Secretary of State on many interagency efforts. Some of these efforts include the NJ Interagency Council on Climate Change and the Extreme Heat Communication Subcommittee of the Interagency Council. Additionally, staff met with representatives of the Board of Public Utilities (BPU) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) to assist in determining the best protocols for expediting permits for broadband installations in DOT rights of way. This is critical as the BPU begins the work of installing cables for its Internet for All initiative. As part of DOT’s effort to update its Long Range Transportation Plan, its consultants conferred with OPA staff to identify issues, and in particular, how to coordinate with the Plan update.

The Office continued to provide support to DEP and OIT to upgrade the LIDAR system. The upgrade will assist the Commission when updating the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The LIDAR system assists in determining building heights on developed parcels and is used in determining development density and other factors in land use.

The Office participated in DOT’s Transit Village Task Force and the Quarterly Brownfields Roundtable. We actively engaged with the Business Action Center’s Business Advocates to collaborate at the nexus of good land use and sustainable economic growth. Staff met with the Housing and Mortgage Finance Agency (HMFA) regarding warehouse development considerations for the update to their Qualified Allocation Plan for the Low Income Tax Credit Program.

### **Coordination with Other Planning Partners**

The staff continues to work closely with the three Metropolitan Planning Organizations. The Office is a non-voting member of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. The Office is a voting member of the Regional Technical Advisory Committee, and is on their Financial Planning Subcommittee. As of 2023, the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) includes OPA as a non-voting, advisory member of their Technical Advisory Committee. Staff participated in the first South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization scenario-planning workshop. The workshop is part of the scenario-planning project, which will be incorporated into the long-range Regional Transportation Plan for South Jersey.

Staff participated in economic development meetings hosted by the Atlantic County Economic Development Alliance (along with a representative of the BAC’s business advocates) and presented to the Salem County Economic Development and Leadership Summit.

Staff also participated in NJ Future’s Housing Advisory Committee, the Route 9 TOD Transit Friendly Planning effort, FEMA Mitigation Consultation meetings, and GIS Coordinators meetings.

The Office attended meetings with the County Planners Association, NJ’s Conservation Blueprint, the NJ Coastal Coalition, NJ Climate Change Alliance, the NJ Climate Resilience Collaborative, and the Bayshore Council. Other participation included Rutgers Megalopolitan Coast Transformation Hub (MACH), the Collaborative Stakeholder Advisory Panel (CSAP), the Central Jersey Transportation Forum, Somerset County Regional Center Partnership, Village Task Force, the Watershed Institute, and the Southern Barnegat Bay Watershed Advisory Committee.

Staff continues to work with OIT on OPA’s website update (see below).

### **Update the State Planning Rules**

The final version of the Rules update was published in the January 2, 2024, NJ Public Register. The Rules became effective on the date of publication.

No other Rules updates are planned at this time.

### **Update guidelines, where applicable**

Work on the updated guidelines, based on the new Rules, has begun.

### **Determine Value-Added Efforts That OPA Can Offer Municipalities and Identify Incentive Opportunities for Municipalities**

The Office provides technical assistance to municipalities on an as-needed basis, where our resources can accommodate the requests. OPA’s value can be maximized by providing tools to municipalities to assist in good land use planning.

One such tool was introduced in 2024. The Smart Growth Explorer expands on the concept of planning areas, allowing users to further refine and identify areas that may be vulnerable to flooding and environmental concerns, while also accounting for important redevelopment factors. The Explorer is now on OPA’s website. It was presented to the Commission at its September meeting, and at the League of Municipalities Conference in November. A press release was issued, and was picked up by several media outlets. The tool was widely praised by many stakeholders. It is meant to be dynamic, with plans to periodically update the factors and the weights associated with those factors.

The Office’s website has been updated to make it more user friendly, provide more up-to-date resources, and enable Office staff to upload relevant information for stakeholders and the public.

OPA staff continues to respond to requests to speak at training sessions, conferences, and planning events, as well as acting as guest lecturers and advisors for programs at colleges and universities. Some of those events included sessions at the League of Municipalities, League webinars, the NJ Planning and Redevelopment Forum, ANJEC, Smart Growth America at the University of Maryland, the Watershed Institute, and numerous local and regional events. The Office participated in discussions with Rutgers and Princeton universities to determine if New Jersey should participate in the national Zoning Atlas project.

The Governor signed Executive Order 369 creating the New Jersey Economic Council. The Executive Director of the Business Action Center has been named to the Council and there is a provision for representation by land use professionals to be included on the Council. Once the Council becomes active, we will encourage participation by OPA, as representative of the Commission.

**STATE PLANNING COMMISSION/OFFICE OF PLANNING ADVOCACY  
2025 GOALS**

The primary goal of the Commission and the Office is the completion of the update of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. While this is now the highest priority, the other goals of the previous year will continue. Many of these efforts are interrelated, and accomplishing one will address others. All of these goals are consistent with the State Planning Act.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan Update

The publication of the Preliminary Draft of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan signaled the beginning of the Cross-Acceptance Process. Notification was made to a large mailing list of county and municipal officials, as well as other stakeholders as required by the Rules.

The first half of 2025 anticipates the following actions:

- Holding 22 public meetings, one in each county and one with the Highlands Council
- Publication of a citizen's guide to the Plan
- The beginning of the Cross-Acceptance process
- Continuation of outreach and stakeholder efforts
- Commencement of the Infrastructure Needs Assessment Phase II; completion of Phase I

Within the first 45 days (by February 12), counties are required to pass a resolution either accepting the role as Negotiating Entity for their county or waiving that role. The Office is required to name an appropriate entity to serve in the capacity of Negotiating Entity for any county that has waived the role. The Office secured the services of a planning consultant to serve in this role for Bergen County.

Additionally, the Office has been working with the Highlands Council to serve as the Negotiating Entity for the majority of communities within the Highlands region. Seventy-seven Highlands municipalities will be represented by the Highlands Council; the remaining 11 have chosen to be represented by their respective county.

The next step is the holding of a public information meeting in each county no earlier than 45 days after publication and no later than 90 days after publication of the Preliminary Plan. Substantial work has begun regarding scheduling the required public information meetings in each county. Given the December 6, 2024 publication date, the first public information meeting can begin no earlier than February 12, 2025 and the last must occur by April 16, 2025.

Once the Commission holds the public information meeting, the Negotiating Entity can formally begin the process of working with their municipalities on the development of the Statement of Agreements and Disagreements and State Plan Policy Map change requests. Many counties have already been working with their municipalities informally prior to the public information meeting so that municipal officials can become familiar with the tools and process and begin the initial work of Cross-Acceptance.

Additionally, in order to make the Plan more understandable to the general public, work has begun on a Citizen's Guide to the Plan. The purpose of the Guide is to provide information on the Plan's goals in easy-to-understand language so that the public can appreciate the Plan's impact on their communities and their daily lives. It is anticipated that the Guide will be ready by mid-February 2025. During this time,

stakeholder engagement and efforts to complete the Infrastructure Needs Assessment and the Impact Assessment will continue.

Once each county submits their Cross-Acceptance Response Template (CART), the Office, on behalf of the Commission, will begin the negotiations phase, whereby it will determine a negotiations agenda. As a result of these discussions, OPA will make a recommendation to the Commission regarding changes to the Plan and the Map. Together with the final Infrastructure Needs Assessment and the final Impact Assessment, a recommended Final Draft State Development and Redevelopment Plan will be presented at six additional public hearings. During this time, requests for presentations and stakeholder engagement will continue as requested. After these steps, OPA will present to the State Planning Commission for consideration and adoption of the final State Development and Redevelopment Plan and State Plan Policy Map.

The remaining goals of the Office and the Commission are consistent with the State Planning Act and activities in the previous years:

- Continue the Effort to Endorse Communities
- Develop and Update the State Planning Commission Policies
- Continue Interagency Coordination
- Update the State Planning Guidelines
- Coordinate with Other State Planning Partners
- Continue to Advance Technical Assistance and Capacity to Counties and Municipalities

#### **Continue the Effort to Endorse Communities**

The Office will continue its effort to work with communities toward Plan Endorsement. We are currently working with 13 communities toward this goal. There will be an emphasis placed on advancing the goals and policies of the updated Plan. The Commission and Office will continue to support regional planning approaches in our work with state entities, watershed management organizations, metropolitan planning organizations, counties, and other regional entities.

The Office continues to support efforts to provide additional resources necessary for communities to engage in the Plan Endorsement process. Given the focus of the State Plan update and the resources necessary to complete that effort, the Commission and the Office will continue to advocate for planning grants through state, regional, and non-profit sources. We will continue to provide technical assistance as our resources allow.

To the issue of local land use policies that lack consistency with State policies because local community character and vision are inconsistent with State goals, the Commission and the Office will develop educational programs and information to better provide more current information for local land use officials. This effort will be done in conjunction with the update of the State Plan.

#### **Develop and Update State Planning Commission Policies**

Concurrent with the update to the State Plan, Commission policies will be reviewed and updated to reflect the goals, policies, principles, and strategies contained in the updated Plan. Specifically, staff will continue to support the warehouse siting guidance effort and will update said guidance documents as necessary.

Staff will continue to enhance model ordinance language, and will research other ways to ensure that the State adequately supports the logistics industry—by advocating for development that is in the right location and properly sized.

In addition to warehouse siting guidance, some immediate policy topics will include:

- Equitable provision of affordable housing
- Regional planning, where appropriate
- Promoting economic and environmental sustainability through land use practices

### **Continue Interagency Coordination**

A statutory requirement of the State Planning Commission is the coordination of State agency partners. This is particularly important when it comes to incentivizing good land use practices. The Office will continue to work with our State agency partners to ensure that the State is not incentivizing land use practices that are contrary to a safe and sustainable future, while maintaining the balance of the State goals that the State Planning Act requires.

It is hoped that with the adoption of the new State Development and Redevelopment Plan in late 2025, there will be more opportunities to provide incentives and technical assistance to local government officials when implementing the updated Plan. First, the State Development and Redevelopment Plan must be implemented across State government. Additional resources can be made available to assist in comprehensive planning either at the municipal or the county level. Second, access to technical assistance and educational opportunities can be expanded. Third, a critical component of this goal is to continue to coordinate State agency participation to resolve local concerns that require State action by facilitating access to State agency decision-makers. In this way, the lines of communication to discuss obstacles to approvals and to find ways of achieving local and state goals can be optimized.

The value-added efforts should also include financial incentives from our State agency partners. Toward that end, the Office and the SPC will continue to advocate for more robust financial incentives for municipalities that implement land use policies consistent with the updated Plan. The need to change the overall narrative from center-based incentives to plan-endorsement-based incentives persists. While progress has been made, this effort needs to continue. Additional funds for planning efforts could be made available. Given budget constraints, a relatively small amount of funding can go a long way toward this end. Augmented technical assistance, additional points for competitive state grants, designated set-asides of existing funding programs, and permitting assistance are all likely to encourage good land use planning throughout New Jersey.

### **Update State Planning Guidelines**

The last update to the State Planning Rules was on January 2, 2024. The guidelines require review on an ongoing basis. As part of a new initiative, staff will identify potential changes based upon lessons learned and issues identified during the current Cross Acceptance process, as well as ways to enhance the Plan Endorsement process. Throughout the year, staff may bring potential updates to the Rules and Guidelines to the Commission for their consideration and approval.

### **Coordinate with Other Planning Partners**

The Office will continue to represent the Commission and the Lt. Governor on all task forces, committees, councils, and workgroups where it is appropriate to have representation. We will continue to work with our government and non-government planning partners at all levels to ensure public input on policies and subject matter expert consultations. We will continue to respond positively to presentation and panel requests. Additionally, we will continue to provide a range of opportunities for the public, and particularly underrepresented communities, to have a voice in all that we do.

### **Continue to Advance Technical Assistance and Capacity to Counties and Municipalities**

Whether it be through the State Plan update process, the Plan Endorsement process, ad-hoc assistance, or policy guidance, the Commission and the Office stand ready to assist municipalities and counties as requested. Staff will continue to work with our local planning partners to identify ways in which the Office can provide technical planning assistance. Staff will also strive to facilitate connections between our planning partners and additional resources.

The Office will continue to update its web presence to improve functionality and to serve as a resource for our planning partners. This includes, but is not limited to, updating the website on a regular basis, as well as adding model ordinances, reference materials, templates, and guidance documents. We envision the website as a “one-stop shop” for those municipalities and counties seeking planning resources. OIT has been a great resource to the Office in this endeavor. Additionally, we will be launching an E-News Email Blast, so as to keep our partners and residents better informed of relevant updates.