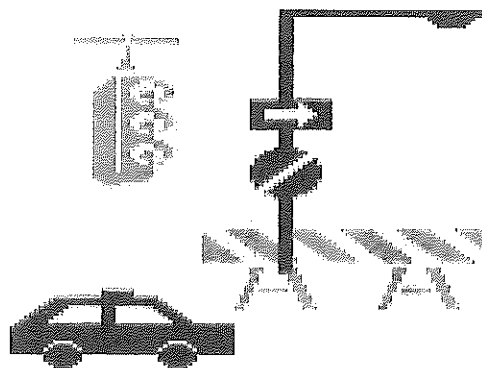


# COMMERCIAL TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN

2006



# **COMMERCIAL TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN**

**Prepared by**

**Commercial Township Land Use Board**

**under the direction and assistance of**

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**Williamstown, New Jersey**

**The original of this Master Plan was signed and sealed in accordance with  
N.J.A.C. 13:41, State Board of Professional Planners**

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# **Commercial Township Master Plan**

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# **Commercial Township Master Plan**

## **Vision Statement**

Situated along the banks and marshlands of the Maurice River, Commercial Township in southeastern Cumberland County, is first and foremost a community evolved from its natural setting. The existing land use patterns of its three villages and the several corridors of residential and commercial activity connecting them are subject to the natural sensitive environment with which they coexist. Significant tidal marshes, woodlands, and freshwater wetlands have and continue to dictate the community's pattern of development. The land use activity has been developed based on these natural conditions, the commercial opportunities they offer and the historical settlement patterns so intertwined with them.

This master plan recognizes the Township's ecological diversity and sensitivity, its historical heritage and the unique character of each of its three villages and in so doing, will permit opportunities for housing, employment, growth, and above all, a balance between nature and future development.

The community's traditional industries are dependent upon the natural environment. Earth extraction, shell fishing (historically oysters), and farming have and continue to be sources of employment. However, they are being directly impacted by a variety of governmental regulations, public land acquisition and continued public and private advocacy for conservation. State protection of coastal areas and freshwater wetlands, public and private purchase of lands for open space, conservation and land use regulatory measures proscribe where new development can occur and add to the complexity of determining and planning for the community's future.

This master plan sets forth goals and objectives to be achieved, identifies the Township's significant environmental resources with specific step to preserve, protect and utilize these areas. The Plan also evaluates the Township's housing stock and need while recognizing the requirement and a fair share plan to meet that need, and offers recommendations for economic development consistent with the community's natural setting. Finally within the context of the various plan elements noted, the Plan offers a land use pattern for future development. This plan was developed by the Land Use Board over a three year period which included monthly work sessions, a public participation program involving a questionnaire mailed to all Township properties, and six public meetings (two each in the Township's three villages).

In essence, the community vision is as it always has been - a rural community subject to its natural settings and benefiting from their natural beauty and bounty. This plan recognizes the historical development pattern and the community's rural character as it lays out future land use policies. The natural wealth of the lands and coastal waters of Commercial Township have and still offer opportunities without threatening the natural assets if they are carefully managed. The heightened concern for the environment and the impact on the environment by human activity create new challenges for the community's planning. It is the increased appreciation for and

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

### **GOALS and OBJECTIVES**

#### **Agriculture Preservation**

Although the Commercial Township does not have substantial farming activity or areas of high quality agricultural soils, farming was and remains an integral part of this rural coastal community. From its settlement to the present, woodlands and farms have been important land use activities with notable salt hay farming of continuing importance. Preserving these woodlands and farms and assuring their economic well being is important for maintaining the community's rural character.

#### **Objectives:**

Encourage farming by recognizing areas of good quality agricultural soils and reduce intrusion of substantial non-agricultural land uses into said areas.

Require new development in agricultural areas to be clustered to protect farmland.

Permit active farming operations to conduct farm-related business activities to supplement farm income and thereby help to sustain farming.

#### **Economic Development**

Given its significant environmentally sensitive areas and patterns of village development Commercial Township's economic development should be geared to those business activities and uses which can be accommodated with the least intrusion on these natural and man-made characteristics.

#### **Objectives:**

Existing natural resource industries such as land mining, commercial fishing and farming should be encouraged where appropriate under regulatory supervision that reduces conflicts between uses or detriments to the natural setting.

Commercial activities within villages should be sized and located to blend in with the scale and design of their settings to reduce adverse impacts of appearance, nuisance or character.

Development regulations should encourage ecotourism and those business activities which it spawns and needs to flourish.

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

Reclamation of former extractive use sites should be balanced to create a variety of land use activities including more commercial and public recreational opportunities. Such disturbed sites should become viable areas for limited development suitable to their environment and adjacent natural setting. A balance should be found for reclaimed lands between conservation and areas reclaimed for recreational, residential or limited commercial use which can then serve the needs of community residents and visitors and thereby protect more environmentally sensitive conservation areas.

Commercial activities should be limited to villages while permitting the Township's environs to continue related natural industrial and commercial activities like farming, fishing and earth extraction. Limited home-based commercial activities are encouraged within the villages along major County roadways.

Development design standards should be established that recognize a site's natural features in determining the intensity of development to be permitted. Such standards should also establish controls on site disturbance and preservation and/or protection of significant defined natural, historical or cultural features.

### **Housing**

Update and implement the Township's Housing Plan Element to meet Commercial Township's affordable housing obligation.

#### **Objectives:**

Provide sufficient affordable housing to meet the Township's fair share requirement.

Petition the N.J. Council on Affordable Housing for certification of the Township Housing Element and Fair Share Plan.

Monitor housing maintenance and undertake programs to assure renovation, rehabilitation and where necessary, removal of dilapidated units.

### **Recycling**

Adopt the recycling goals of Cumberland County and the State of New Jersey

Undertake the necessary municipal actions to attaining said goals

### **State Development and Redevelopment Plan**

Follow the precepts of the planning policies for Rural Planning Area and the Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas and concentrate development in an around Commercial's existing villages and existing developed nodes.

# **Commercial Township Master Plan**

## **Environmental Protection**

### **Introduction**

This element of the Township's master plan is concerned with environmental protection of the community by identifying its natural resources for preservation, conservation and utilization. Knowing what natural resources are present within the community and their significance obviously will also help to make land development decisions. More importantly perhaps, such information will indicate real or possible conflicts and impacts that existing or future land use activity may have on these resources.

Commercial Township is rich in natural beauty bordered as it is by the Maurice River to the east and the Delaware Bay to the south. These two water bodies have extensive coastal marshes providing natural habitats for a wide variety of wildlife which is of importance both locally and globally. Inland, the Township also has a significant amount of environmentally sensitive lands including: stream corridors, ponds and man-made bodies of water, tidal and freshwater wetlands, flood plains, and soils with high water tables.

Natural resources within and adjacent to the Township's have historically and continue to be major industries including earth extraction or land mining, and fishing, both commercial and recreational. The land mining results from the extensive amount and quality of its soils for producing marketable sands and gravel. Historically, the shellfish industry was from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> into the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a huge employer and producer of considerable wealth evident in the opulent architectural heritage of the residences of Mauricetown and Port Norris. Although greatly diminished, this industry remains active, productive and potentially more viable today.

Identifying and understanding the importance of the Township's natural resources is integral to assuring their protection and continued viability. Such information also provides a basis for the policies necessary to protect the continued presence and utility of these resources. When coupled with State and Federal regulatory efforts dealing with environmental resources, there is an understanding and guide to local land use planning that is compatible with the preservation, conservation and utilization of the Township's natural resources.

### **The Township's Natural Resources**

This plan element providing data and mapping of critical natural features of the Township to the extent known is similar to a Natural Resource Inventory (NRI). It offers a reference and a base for land use decisions. It is a tool available to the public, landowners, developers, and municipal officials in determining the natural conditions which will have an impact on or be impacted by development. For instance, soils with high water tables create problems for the installation and use of on-site septic disposal systems. Knowing where such soils exist within a municipality and then allowing development which takes into account any such limitations permits land use planning that is in concert with the natural environment.

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

the Township. Next is the Bridgeton Formation, the smallest in area, shown at surface level in three areas in the northwestern portion of the Township. Finally there is the Cohansey Sand which encircles the other two formations. Note that the Cohansey Sand is located along the Maurice River, Delaware Bay and the stream corridors.

It is the composition of these formations that affect use of the land and specifically their surficial features that is those which are closest to the surface. From a land use standpoint they are significant as they impact water retention and storage and the ability of the land (soils) to support various land use activities. Bedrock is at such great depth in Commercial that it does not impact development.

In essence, development, a home, store or factory site is affected by the land on which it is built which is composed of types of soils each with their own characteristics. How these soils interact with water, disturbance, supporting structures or their value for other activities like agriculture need to be considered in the land use planning process. Depending on the type of deposits: rock, sand, gravel, or clay, water will be pass through or be confined between layers creating aquifers which provide a source of water. In those cases where water does not percolate easily, it remains on the surface as open water or within the soils creating "wetlands." This interaction resulting from the geologic makeup of an area gives knowledge of the suitability of the land to support development.

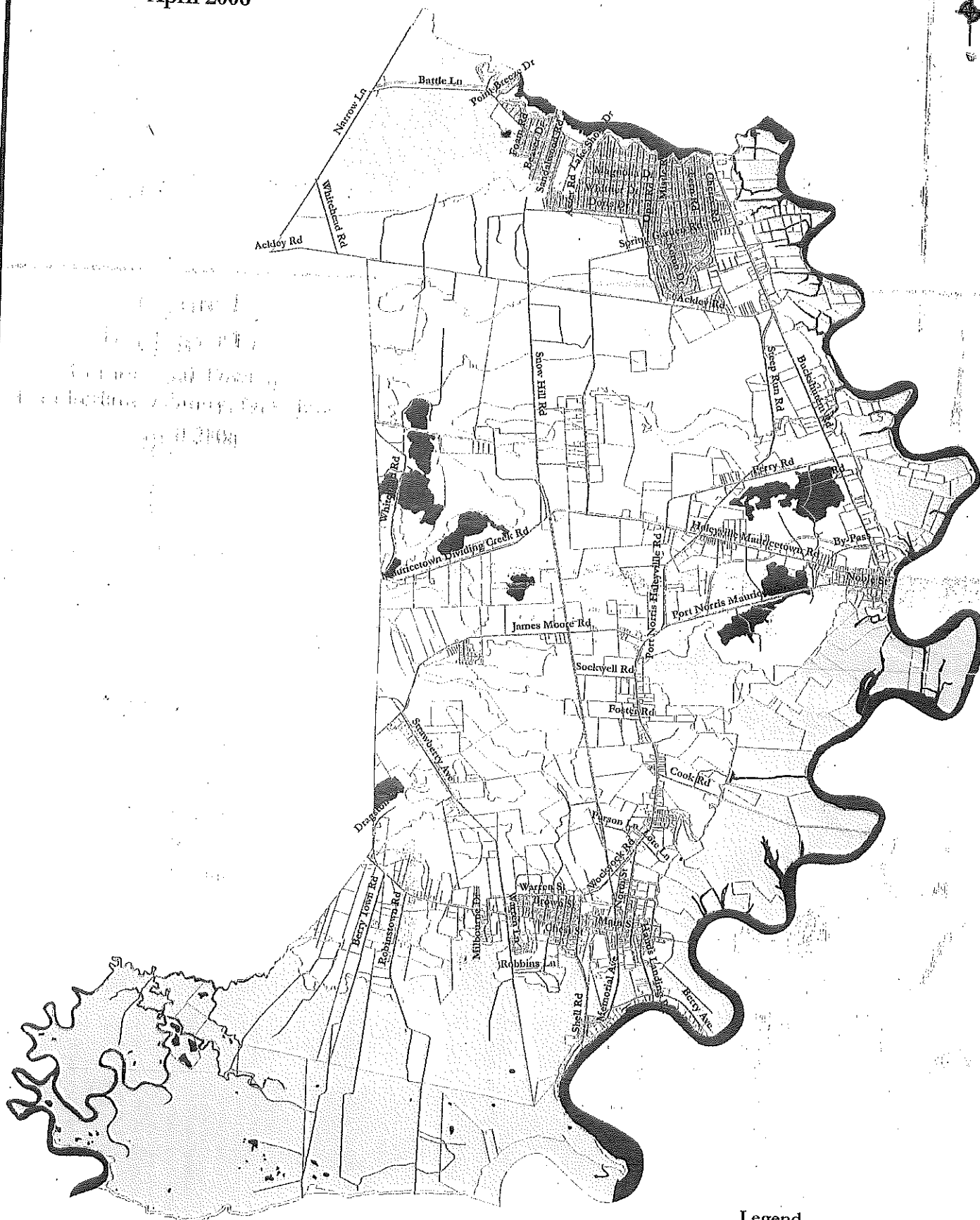
### ***COHANSEY SAND***

The Cohansey Sand Formation in Cumberland County generally consists of medium to coarse-grained sand with some clay and silt. Gravel is found throughout the formation but is locally concentrated near the base of well-defined channel deposits. There is often dark, massive, carbonaceous and micaceous, silty clay beds occurring locally in the upper part of the Cohansey, particularly on the slopes and divides of the larger present-day drainage basins. The color of the Cohansey varies from yellowish gray, light gray, brown, moderate red, to dark red.

The Cohansey Sand and the upper water-bearing sand of the Kirkwood Formation act as a single hydrologic unit and are sometimes referred to as the Cohansey-Kirkwood aquifer. Its thickness varies considerably but in Commercial it is about 35 feet thick although it thins towards the valleys and stream channels where the Cohansey-Kirkwood aquifer generally is overlain by sands of the Cape May Formation. It was laid down during the Tertiary Period during the Pliocene or Miocene Epochs. It is the most productive fresh water aquifer in Cumberland County.

In Commercial Township, much of the land shown within the Cohansey Sand Formation is tidal marsh and swamp deposits. These are composed of inter-bedded fine-grained sand, silt, and clay and much organic material. These deposits are usually soft (muddy or mucky). They are important for providing significant groundwater discharge areas with high rates of evapotranspiration. Evapotranspiration is the process by which water is transferred from the land to the atmosphere by evaporation from the soil and other surfaces and by transpiration from plants.

**Figure 1**  
**Geology Map**  
 Commercial Township  
 Cumberland County, New Jersey  
 April 2006



## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

All of the salt marsh and swamp areas are covered, at least intermittently, by tides or are water logged because the water table is close to or above the land surface. These two deposits may serve as portals for salt-water encroachment in areas where the freshwater head has been reversed in the shallow aquifer and has been lowered below tide levels by pumping from wells or by drainage conditions. Large areas of Commercial Township have been extensively drained by ditches along the Delaware Bay where salt marsh hay was and is still grown limitedly today.

### ***CAPE MAY FORMATION***

This formation manifest itself predominantly as low-level terrace deposits consisting of loose, uniform sand and silty sand generally not distinguishable from older sediments. It is relatively unimportant as a source of freshwater supplies. It may contain salty water near tidal areas such as found to occur about Mauricetown.

It is found along the Delaware Bay and adjacent to tidal marshes. It was laid down in the Pleistocene Epoch (1,640,000 to 10,000 years ago). Its thickness ranges from 0 to 120 feet. It is relatively unimportant as a source of large, freshwater supplies in Cumberland County although it is important in Cape May County.

It is assumed that the formation was deposited in three separate environments — estuarine, marine and deltaic, but only the estuarine and deltaic have been identified in Cumberland County. The estuarine environment resulted in two distinct facieses: basal sand and overlaying black clay. The deltaic sediments consist mainly of coarse-grained sand and fine gravel.

### ***BRIDGETON FORMATION***

The Bridgeton Formation also laid down during the Pleistocene epoch, is found in much of Cumberland County. It occurs as an older, higher level, terrace deposit than the Cape May Formation. It generally consists of reddish-brown to dull red, intermixed clayey silt, sand and gravel and contains thin layers of silty clay. The formation thickness varies from about 0 to 30 feet.

The Bridgeton Formation is largely above the water-table in much of the upland areas and it serves as a collecting unit for infiltrating recharge from precipitation to the underlying Cohansey-Kirkwood aquifer. This infiltration can be impeded by silt and clay layers within the Formation. Few wells use the Bridgeton Formation for water supplies.

### **The Water Supply**

Assuring an adequate supply of water is arguably the most urgent problem facing the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As we have seen over the past 10 to 15 years the supply of water to any given area is uncertain, subject to the effects of need, use (consumption or waste), pollutants, weather and land use. Relatively recently we have seen the severe manifestations of the unpredictability in the water supply ranging from horrendous flooding along the Mississippi and its tributaries in the 1990's to the recent severe drought and wildfires in the West. The ongoing cycle of water being exchanged between the earth and the atmosphere is part of the fluctuations in supply. But

## Commercial Township Master Plan

Still another concern is nitrate pollution from septic systems, agricultural use and from lawn maintenance activities involving the application of fertilizers. When high concentrations of nitrates occur in surface waters like lakes, ponds and estuaries, they are suffocated of oxygen from the nitrates promotion of water borne vegetative growth. This process is called eutrophication and it is responsible for algae blooms which deplete the oxygen in the water. Nitrates in drinking water at high enough concentrations can also cause health problems for newborns and those with illnesses.

There is also the possibility of "non-point" pollution from urban runoff. The term "non-point" refers to the fact that the source is not one specific site or location from where the pollutants originate. Large parking lots, roads or other areas where large amounts of runoff are discharged directly onto the land and into the streams to infiltrate into the aquifer are the source of such non-point pollution.

Providing sufficient drinking water for the residents of the State has resulted in various State agencies promulgating regulations and policies aimed at protecting the water supply through various techniques aimed at controlling pollution of water supplies, mitigating or eliminating activities recognized or proved to create pollution or over use of the supplies, and land use regulations aimed at limiting growth and/or types of land use activities which have a negative impact on water supply and/or quality.

Complicating the issue of water supply is the perceived water deficit that exists within Planning Area 21 which includes the Cohansey and Maurice Rivers' watersheds. According to the *New Jersey Statewide Water Supply Plan, August, 1996, prepared by the Office of Environmental Planning of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection*, Planning Area 21, within which Commercial Township lies, has a net available water projection of 54 mgd (millions of gallons per day). This figure may be subject to revision based on a careful analysis of the basin. In 1990, the basins' water demand was 63 mgd which means there was a watershed deficit of 9 mgd.

According to the Plan, that deficit was projected to increase to 18 mgd by 2010 when water demand is projected to be 72 mgd and to 23 mgd by 2040 when 77 mgd will be needed to meet projected water demand. The Statewide Water Supply Plan theorizes that Planning Area 21 to be in deficit because there is no surface water storage (and therefore no safe yield) and because groundwater use exceeds the estimated total available groundwater supply of 54 mgd.

There are a number of questions about the Statewide Water Supply Plan's hypotheses and assumptions regarding overall supply. For instance, the Plan notes the industrial use of water which includes the use of water in the sand mining industry. What is not clear is that the equation used to determine total water loss since a great deal of the water used in that industry is returned to the land or actually recycled in the mining process.

The Plan called for further study of this issue due to the difficulties seen in finding other sources for water supply such as the Pinelands and coastal wetlands, salt water intrusion and the fact that the confined aquifer is subject to the upcoming of ancient saltwater that is contained within the

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

**Figure 2      Water Recharge Areas**

Figure 4  
Wetlands Map  
Commercial Township  
Cumberland County, New Jersey  
April 2006



Legend  
Wetlands

## Commercial Township Master Plan

County in cooperation with the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection, the project was later stopped. Until a clearer picture of the actual deficit and its causes can be ascertained, land use planning must be more concerned with the supply of groundwater. Public water suppliers already operate under a State-imposed allocation system. The protection of groundwater quality and avoiding development patterns or activities which waste what may well be a limited supply of water, must be planned for to prevent a potentially serious lack of water.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection has also issued regulations dealing with groundwater quality and management (N.J.A.C. 7:9C-1). Stormwater Management Rules have also been promulgated (N.J.S.A. 7:8) and all municipalities and counties in the State are currently in the process of complying with the provisions of these regulations. These Rules in Section 5.2(a) require that the design of any development that disturbs at least one (1) acre of land or increases impervious surface by at least  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre must incorporate nonstructural stormwater strategies "to the maximum extent practicable." Commercial Township has recently adopted its Stormwater Management plan as all municipalities are required to do by NJDEP regulation.

To somewhat better understand stormwater management one needs to review the drainage of the municipality. Based on the topography of an area stormwater flows in various directions thus creating specific areas which are drained vis-à-vis this pattern of flow. These areas which are drained by specific routes, often a water courses, are known as drainage basins.

The topography of Commercial Township south of Noble Street and James Moore Road is approximately elevation 10 or less. North of Noble Street elevations begin to rise to 20 or 30 feet in around Haleyville and Mauricetown. Higher elevations begin further north with areas above Steep Run increasing to 40, 50 and 60 feet. The highest elevations appear at 70 feet in areas above Ashley Road west of Snow Hill Road, south of Laurel Lake along Spring Garden Road and the area north of Gravelly Run. The entire Laurel Lake area shows some of the steepest rises in elevation from 20 feet along the lake shore raises to a ridge at elevation 50 south of Battle Lane. The areas along the Maurice River from Laurel Lake begin at an elevation of 20 feet and then drop to 10 feet for non-tidal lands south to Mauricetown.

**Figure 3, Drainage Basins**, shows the ten basins which drain Commercial Township. Each of these basin flows to a specific stream, creek, the river or Bay. In several cases, the specific basin has been defined by a portion of the same watercourse into which the basin drains. This is done to note various areas' impacts on that watercourse for environmental and hydraulic reasons.

Most of the basins are fairly large, but three are exceedingly small. They include the Buckshutem Creak (above Route 555) visible at the northeast corner of the intersection of Dividing Creek Road and Shaw's Mill Road, the Maurice River (Mennantico Creek to Union Lake) along the Millville – Commercial border in the far northeast portion of the Township, and the Delaware Bay (Dennis Creek to Egg Island Point) located along the Maurice River in the extreme south of the Township.

All of these drainage basins play a major role in managing stormwater runoff during the development review process. Development regulations require that impacts to a basin(s) flow

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

**Figure 3      Drainage Basins**

**Figure 3**  
**Drainage Basins Map**  
 Commercial Township  
 Cumberland County, New Jersey  
 April 2006

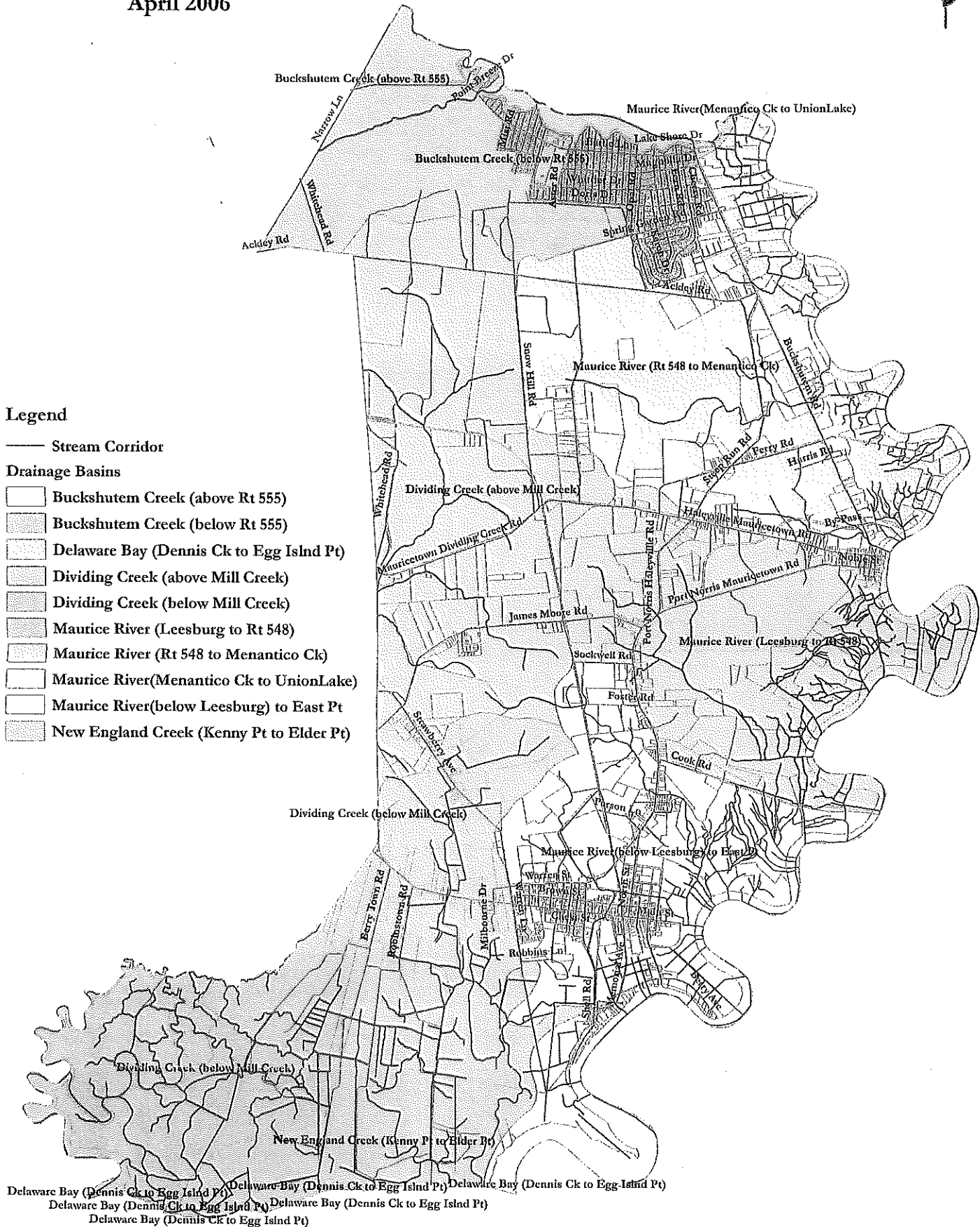


**Legend**

— Stream Corridor

**Drainage Basins**

- Buckshutem Creek (above Rt 555)
- Buckshutem Creek (below Rt 555)
- Delaware Bay (Dennis Ck to Egg Islnd Pt)
- Dividing Creek (above Mill Creek)
- Dividing Creek (below Mill Creek)
- Maurice River (Leesburg to Rt 548)
- Maurice River (Rt 548 to Menanico Ck)
- Maurice River (Menanico Ck to UnionLake)
- Maurice River (below Leesburg) to East Pt
- New England Creek (Kenny Pt to Elder Pt)



## Commercial Township Master Plan

and volumes be controlled to not overburden or otherwise deteriorate existing drainage conditions to the various watercourses affected.

### Wetlands

**Figure 4** also shows major natural features of the Township's area which are composed of hydric soils and wetlands. The water table in Commercial Township is very high either continually or seasonally in much of the municipality's land area. As such, these lands are severely limited in their ability to permit many land use activities from farming to development.

Recognizing the importance of these natural recharge, habitat, and storm protection areas and that ever increasing encroachment upon them was destroying an important natural asset, the Federal government began regulations of wetlands. In 1988, Federal jurisdiction over wetlands and their protection was ceded to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The Department regulates the use of wetlands requiring identification of any wetlands proposed for development and where found requires since 1989, the establishment of transitional buffer standards. In 1994, the Federal government gave its last regulatory control, the Clean Water Act, Section 404 permits were given over to the DEP to administer. Today the NJDEP has total regulatory control over wetlands.

Mapping of wetlands is now required by the Department to definitively identify and locate wetlands. This mapping relies on finding three natural features indicative of lands that are wet. These three identifying features which were taken from the definition of wetlands by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service are:

- (1) The land at least periodically and pre-dominantly supports hydrophytes (forms of vegetation characteristically found in saturated soils);
- (2) The soil substrate is primarily non-drained hydric soil characterized by at least long periods of oxygen starvation; and
- (3) The substrate is a non-soil and is saturated or covered by shallow water at some time during the growing season.

Soils capable of meeting one or more of these criteria and which are found within Commercial Township include Atison, Berryland, Fallsington, Hammonton, Klej, Muck, and Tidal Marsh. In the case of two of the soils, Hammonton and Klej, the hydric soils occur when the specific type of soil is found in association with other soil types, Fallsington and Atison in the case of Commercial Township.

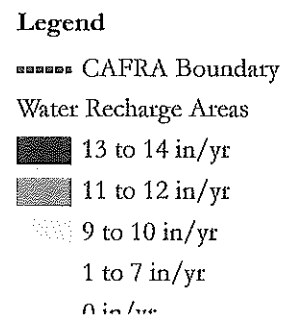
The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service also use a classification system<sup>1</sup> that recognizes a variety of wetlands' ecologies. The five systems defined are: Marine, Estuarine, Riverine, Lacustrine, and Palustrine. The Marine system, not found in Commercial Township, consists of the open ocean

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<sup>1</sup> **Classification of Wetlands and Deep-water Habitats of the United States**, L.M. Cowardin, v. Carter, F.C. Golet and E.T. LaRoe, 1979, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

## Commercial Township Master Plan

**Figure 4      Wetlands**



## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

and its associated coastline. The Estuarine system includes salt and brackish marshes and the brackish waters of coastal rivers and bays. Freshwater wetlands and deep water habitats (water over two meters in depth) are either classified as river or stream based (Riverine); lake, reservoir or large pond wetlands (Lacustrine); or Palustrine encompassing forested wetlands, bogs, and small ponds.

In regulating wetlands it is site specific information that must be obtained and analyzed in order to determine the presence of wetlands, and in establishing required buffer limits and the suitable placement of structures. As part of the development review process, the identification of wetlands is commonly a required part of the application submission. Development ordinances usually require a determination of the presence of wetlands and if present, the applicant is to obtain a Letter of Interpretation, (an "L.O.I.") from the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection and which serves as formal acceptance of the mapping by the DEP.

Municipalities may not regulate freshwater wetlands including determining or regulating transition areas or buffers. State law establishes three categories of wetlands: "exceptional resource value," "intermediate resource value," and "ordinary resource value." Exceptional resource wetlands harbor endangered species or are related to trout production and have a 150 foot wide transition buffer. Intermediate resource value wetlands are any wetlands which are neither exceptional nor ordinary. Intermediate wetlands require a 50 foot transition buffer. Ordinary wetlands are generally man-made and have no buffer transition requirement. Bodies of water and water courses with no fringe of associated wetlands are call "state open waters" and also require no buffer.

Commercial Township has approximately 12,105 acres of wetland including 670 acres of agricultural wetlands. The Township also has 1,930± acres of land covered by water. This means that more than half of the Township is wet. It is important to remember that actual delineation of the location of wetland must be established at the time of proposed use. For planning purposes, lands that exhibit the characteristics of wetland need to be identified and protected, but land use regulations must be based on specific data and in so doing, land may be developable.

### **Flood Prone Areas**

Floods have been a curse of mankind for millennia costing incalculable loss of life and property damage. But for a number of reasons waterfront properties are still highly desirable and in some cases, necessary due to the livelihood of an area's inhabitants such as waterside resorts, ports and fishing villages. The term "Flood Prone" is a measurement of the danger or probability of flooding. Flooding results from the overflowing of a body of water onto adjacent land, but can also occur as the result of a rise in the water table, so that land becomes saturated just below the surface. The level or nearly level areas on either side of a water course or body created by successive and cyclical inundation and erosion is typically classified as a flood prone area.

As used by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, "flood prone" describes both the flood plain areas that have been the subject of detailed engineering studies as well as

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

Of course there is also the Maurice River, Laurel Lake and a number of man-made ponds resulting from land mining operations. All of these watercourses, the river, streams (and ditches), lake and ponds have their place in the overall ecological character of the area and offer numerous natural scenic, aesthetic and perhaps recreational opportunities. As such protecting them from undo encroachment or impediments to their meeting these natural functions should be a high planning priority.

The lands located along the Maurice River offer broad vistas of the river, its attendant wetlands and marshes. In some locations from south of Laurel Lake to Mauricetown the land elevation enhances the view. Protecting and preserving these scenic vistas will maintain the Township's identity and interconnection with the River that has shaped its development. Much of the land along the River has been preserved by State and non-profit organizations. Scenic vistas are still visible from along Buckshutem Road where non-protected lands can still be developed and possibly precluding scenic vista from the land and the river.

The Maurice River was included in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory and found to be eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic River System. In 1987, that designation was made along 42.5 miles of the Maurice River, Manumuskin River, Menantico Creek and Muskee Creek. This included all of the Maurice River abutting Commercial Township.

The Local Management Plan for the Maurice River and Its Tributaries, prepared by the Cumberland County Department of Planning and Development, recommended that a local river conservation zone be established along the entire length of the Maurice River. Adoption of such zoning was identified in the Plan as the "... first step in protecting the nationally significant river-related resources. A river conservation overlay district was enacted across the River in Maurice River Township and it is recommended the same be adopted along the Commercial Township's side.

Many of the streams, especially in the northern portion of the Township are also now in State ownership. There are also several streams in the Township with portions of their paths having anti-degradation and Water Category designation by the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection. These designations indicate a concern with the particular stream ecological importance or for water supply reasons requiring an enhanced level of protection. As such, development is setback by State regulation from these streams 300 feet.

Within the Township the following waterways have such designations:

Gravelly Run (ON): Outstanding National Resource, Water Category is FW-1 Non-Trout.

Steep Run west of Snow Hill Road designated (ON), Water Category is FW-1 Non-Trout

Steep Run east of Snow Hill Road designated (C1), Water Category is FW-2 Non-Trout

Buckshutem Creek (C1), Water Category is FW-2 Non-Trout

## Commercial Township Master Plan

referred to as the Tidal Marsh association. This is described as nearly level, poorly drained and very poorly drained, silky and mucky tidal flats that are subject to daily flooding, on lowlands.

Source: General Soil Map, Soil Survey of Cumberland County, New Jersey.

### Soil Description and Characteristics

By reviewing detailed soil survey maps of a community or area the location of various soil series are identified and the characteristics of the soil can then be deduced. Based on the soil series' texture, depth of layers, natural fertility, permeability to rainfall, flood hazard, and other characteristics, a great deal of information is provided for making land use decisions. The USDA classifies soil series in a variety of ways including the degree of their suitability to various natural and man-made activities upon them. One of the most useful is by the soil series' limitations.

For a number of major uses such as engineering, suburban development and agriculture, the limitations presented by soil types are rated in terms of degree: slight, moderate and severe. The interpretation of these ratings as defined by the USDA, are:

**Slight** Slight ratings indicate that soil properties are generally favorable and limitations are so minor that they can easily be overcome.

**Moderate** Moderate ratings indicate that soil limitations can be overcome or modified by either planning, design or by special maintenance.

**Severe** Severe ratings indicate that costly soil reclamation, special design, intense maintenance, or a combination of these is required.

Another way soils are classified is a system called "capability groupings" the purpose of which is to show the suitability of each soil for various kinds of field crops. The capability system is broken into three parts: the Capability Class, the Subclass and the Unit. Capability classes are signified by the Roman numerals I through VIII, ranging from little to no limitations of use to severe limitations. Thus Class II soils have slightly more limitations which reduce the amount and types of crops grown on a certain soil. Class III & IV have more severe limitations which reduce the choice of plants and require careful management. Class V and VI have limitations that are generally impractical to eliminate and vary in severity. At the worst end of this scale are Class VII and VIII soils, which have limitations which preclude most kinds of development, especially agriculture.

Capability subclasses define what limitations, if any, each capability class soil has. Subclasses are designated by a smaller case letter added to the Roman numeral, either e, s, or w. The letter "e" signifies that the main soil limitation is related to erosion problems. A designation of "w" indicates a problem with periodic or continual wetness which interferes with plant growth and agricultural development. An "s" limitation of soils is due to shallowness, prone to drought or stoniness.

## Commercial Township Master Plan

natural fertility and high in organic-matter content. Permeability is moderately rapid and the hazard of erosion is slight and runoff is slow.

**Downer** - These soils also formed mainly under a hardwood forest in marine or fluvial deposits and are in high areas. The Downer loamy sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes is found in Commercial Township in cultivated areas where the soil is dark grayish-brown loamy sand. Its natural vegetation is mainly a forest of various oaks and pines, and hickory with a shrub understory of mountain laurel, lowbush blueberries and brackens.

These soils are best suited to vegetables and fruits and are not well suited to pasture and hay. Fertilizer leaches has rapid permeability. This soil is generally mapped with small areas of Aura and Sassafras soils. Surface runoff is slow, and the hazard of erosion is slight. The moderate available water capacity is the main limitation to use of this soil for cultivated crops.

**Evesboro** - Most areas of Evesboro soils are in woodland with a natural vegetation of oaks, chestnut, hickory, and pines. They are found on side slopes and in high areas. The Evesboro series consists of nearly level to moderately steep, excessively drained soils. Within the Township, the Evesboro sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes, and the Evesboro sand, 10 to 20 percent slopes are present.

Droughtiness and erosion are found in both these soil types and they are not generally suited to cultivation. Permeability is rapid and added fertilizer is leached readily. Soil erosion is high and in areas of slope increases. It is best suited for woodland.

**Fallsington** - These soils were formed similarly to Downer soils and are found in low flats where they receive much runoff. Areas of these soils that adjoin Tidal Marsh are subject to flooding during severe coastal storms. The Fallsington sandy loam is found in Commercial Township and is nearly level. The soil is moderately permeable and has a surface layer of sandy loam, it is easy to work and not difficult to drain. If drained these soils are suitable to a number of crops, but non-drained are wooded. In places, the substratum is as much as 20 percent gravel, and in other places it is fine textured between depths of 40 and 60 inches. This can create reduced recharge rates for ground water in ponds.

**Fort Mott** - This series is a well drained soil that is nearly level or gently sloping. They are dark grayish-brown loamy sand about 10 inches thick. In Commercial Township, this series is found as Fort Mott loamy sand, 0 to 5 percent slope. This soil is droughty because it is sandy to a moderate depth. Its natural vegetation is mainly oaks, Virginia pine and hickory with an understory of lowbush blueberry and brackens. This soil is not suited to farming as there is insufficient water available for satisfactory growth of nearly all annual crops. Erosion can also be a problem.

**Hammonton** - There are three types of this soil series found in Commercial Township: Hammonton loamy sand, 0- 5 percent slopes, Hammonton sandy loam, 0 - 2 percent slopes, and Hammonton sandy loam, 2 - 5 percent slopes. This series tends to be well-drained, nearly level loams and sands. Hammonton soils are medium in natural fertility and low in organic-matter content. Permeability is moderately rapid.

## Commercial Township Master Plan

produces methane gas. Freshly excavated material ranges from alkaline to slightly acid, but most dry material becomes more acid.

The Soil Survey notes that for 50 years the Mosquito Commission has constructed ditches to speed drainage of flooded land and the pools where mosquitoes breed. Extensive areas of Tidal Marsh were drained by building dikes so they could be farmed, especially along the Maurice River. Storm tides repeatedly breached the dikes and now none are farmed. At one time thousands of acres were partly drained using dikes so that native salt-tolerant grasses could be mowed and baled. Natural fertility is high in these areas and the organic-material content is high as is the available water capacity.

In most places tidal water is salty, but in the areas furthest inland along the major streams, such as the Maurice River, it is only brackish or even fresh in places. Tidal Marsh is extremely valuable as wildlife habitat for waterfowl, mammals, and crustaceans.

Special foundation designs are needed for roads, buildings, and other structures because the mucky and silty material in Tidal Marsh has low bearing capacity.

**Woodstown** – Woodstown soil is moderately well-drained, often with mottled colored, clayey substratum which indicates prolonged wetness. These soils are at an intermediate elevation and also on terraces just above Tidal Marsh. These soils are medium in natural fertility and moderate in organic-matter content. Permeability is moderate with available water capacity moderate. The water depth fluctuates between the winter through spring and the summer.

The natural vegetation is hardwood forest including various oaks, hickory, beech, yellow-poplar, and a few pines. The understory is lowbush blueberry, mountain laurel and holly. If cleared and drained, these soils are suited to vegetables, fruits, sod, nursery plants, and general crops.

Woodstown soils must be deeply drained if they are to be used as septic filter fields or as site for houses with basements. Two types of this soil series are found in the Commercial Township. Woodstown sandy loam and Woodstown sandy loam 2 to 5 percent slopes. The first is typical of the series, while the second has considerable wetness with surface runoff and erosion hazards.

In reviewing **Figure 5**, there is a listing under the Soil Classification key "Pits, sand, gravel, borrow material, and clay." This is not a soil classification, but rather a term to describe areas where earth extraction or land mining activities have occurred to remove topsoil and then various geologic materials as noted by the listing, is excavated for various reasons. In Commercial Township these sites are considerable especially in what is referred to locally as the "mining belt" running from just west of Mauricetown west to the Township border with Downe Township (into which it continues).

By analyzing the soil characteristics and properties as were described above, one can deduce the natural suitability of the soils for various land use activities. Based on the limitation measurements used in the USDA Soil Survey, the location of soils shows where the soils will or will not support such activities. In rural communities like Commercial Township this mapping exercise provides valuable information. This is because there is no infrastructure, sewers,

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

**Figure 5      Soil**

**Classifications**

**Figure 5**  
**Soil Classifications**  
**Commercial Township**  
**Cumberland County, New Jersey**  
**April 2006**

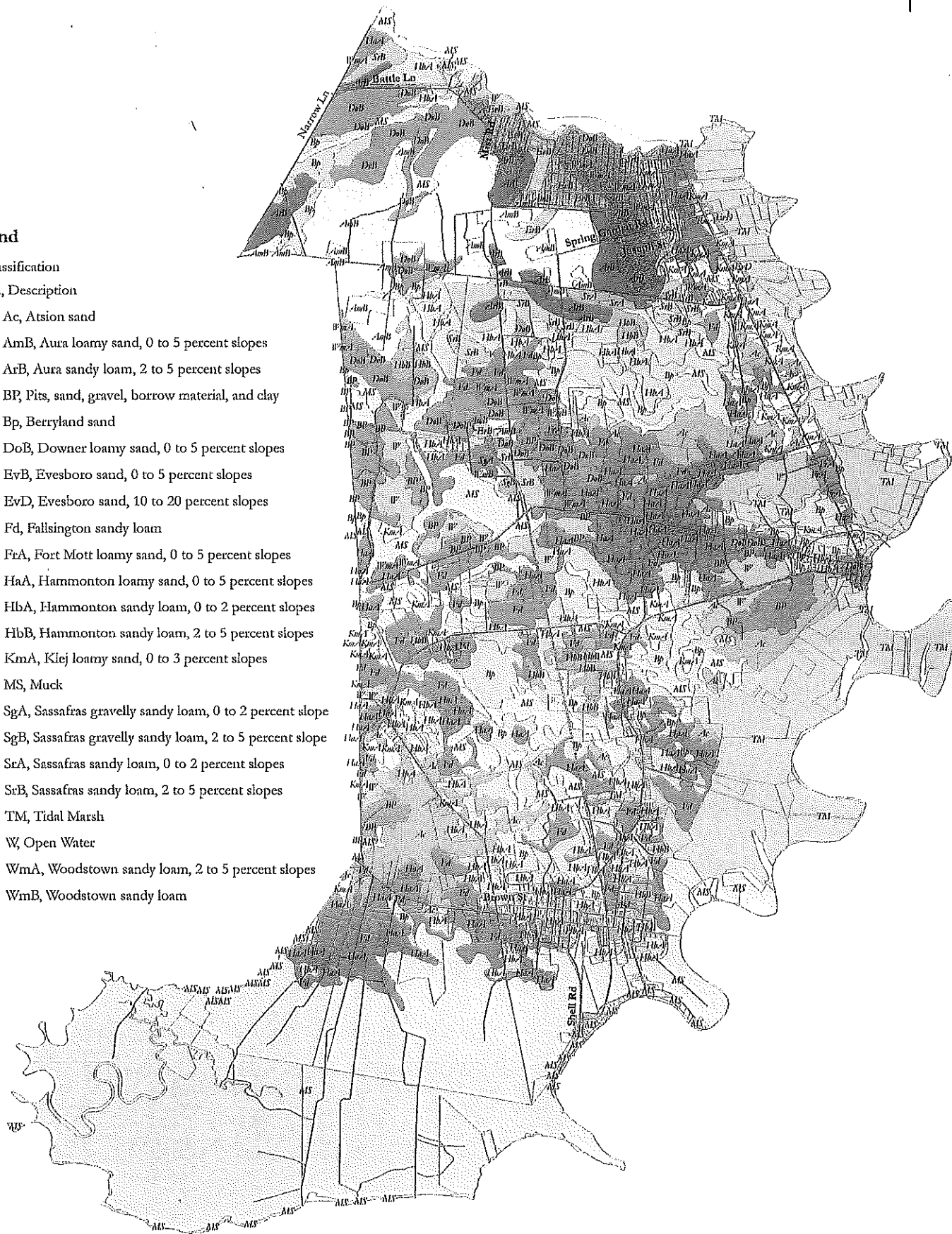


**Legend**

Soil Classification

Symbol, Description

- Ac, Atsion sand
- AmB, Aura loamy sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- ArB, Aura sandy loam, 2 to 5 percent slopes
- BP, Pits, sand, gravel, borrow material, and clay
- Bp, Berryland sand
- DoB, Downer loamy sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- EvB, Evesboro sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- EvD, Evesboro sand, 10 to 20 percent slopes
- Fd, Fallsington sandy loam
- FrA, Fort Mott loamy sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- HaA, Hammonton loamy sand, 0 to 5 percent slopes
- HbA, Hammonton sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes
- HbB, Hammonton sandy loam, 2 to 5 percent slopes
- KmA, Klej loamy sand, 0 to 3 percent slopes
- MS, Muck
- SgA, Sassafra gravelly sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slope
- SgB, Sassafra gravelly sandy loam, 2 to 5 percent slope
- SrA, Sassafra sandy loam, 0 to 2 percent slopes
- SrB, Sassafra sandy loam, 2 to 5 percent slopes
- TM, Tidal Marsh
- W, Open Water
- WmA, Woodstown sandy loam, 2 to 5 percent slopes
- WmB, Woodstown sandy loam



## Commercial Township Master Plan

drainage systems or water supply systems, in place to mitigate or negate the inability of the soils on a particular piece of land to accommodate various types of development.

Such analysis can show where problems will arise and indicate the need for special action to be taken to accommodate a particular land use. This in turn, if heeded, prevents development on unsuitable lands. Of course, soils are not the only measure of a site's suitability for a given land use. But they definitely alert the planner or land owner to problems which naturally exists and must be overcome or properly addressed.

**Figure 6 Agricultural Uses** shows the quality of soils throughout the Township in terms of the farm production for various crops. As can be seen, Commercial Township's soils are not classified as well-suited for agriculture as was evident from the soil series' descriptions. The best soils appear in the northern portion of the Township and are largely on public lands. Their rating by the Soil Conservation Service is rated: Good and Fair for seed crops and grasses and legumes. The rest of the Township the soils are shown as only rated: Fair.

There are a number of reasons why a soil or soil series are not suited to agriculture. From a planning standpoint, preserving farmland is a major goal of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. Preserving and promoting the continuation of farming are important policies for a number of reasons including food and other agricultural crop or livestock production, the continued use of farmland free from development threatening the potential for agricultural activities and while less important to agriculture than to the community at large, the provision of "open" areas as opposed to wall to wall development.

Determining the location of prime agricultural soils is necessary for communities attempting to preserve agriculture. It allows planners to base their land use decisions on site specific geographic information about the distribution of excellent to poor soils. Again, the Soil Conservation Service has a system for correlating soils and agricultural usefulness. For agriculture, the capability classes are again designated by Roman numerals: I through VIII. The numerals indicate progressively greater limitations and narrower choices for practical use as defined below:

Class I soils have few limitations that restrict their use

Class II soils have moderate limitations that reduce the choice of plants or that require moderate conservation practices.

Class III soils have severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require special conservation practices, or both.

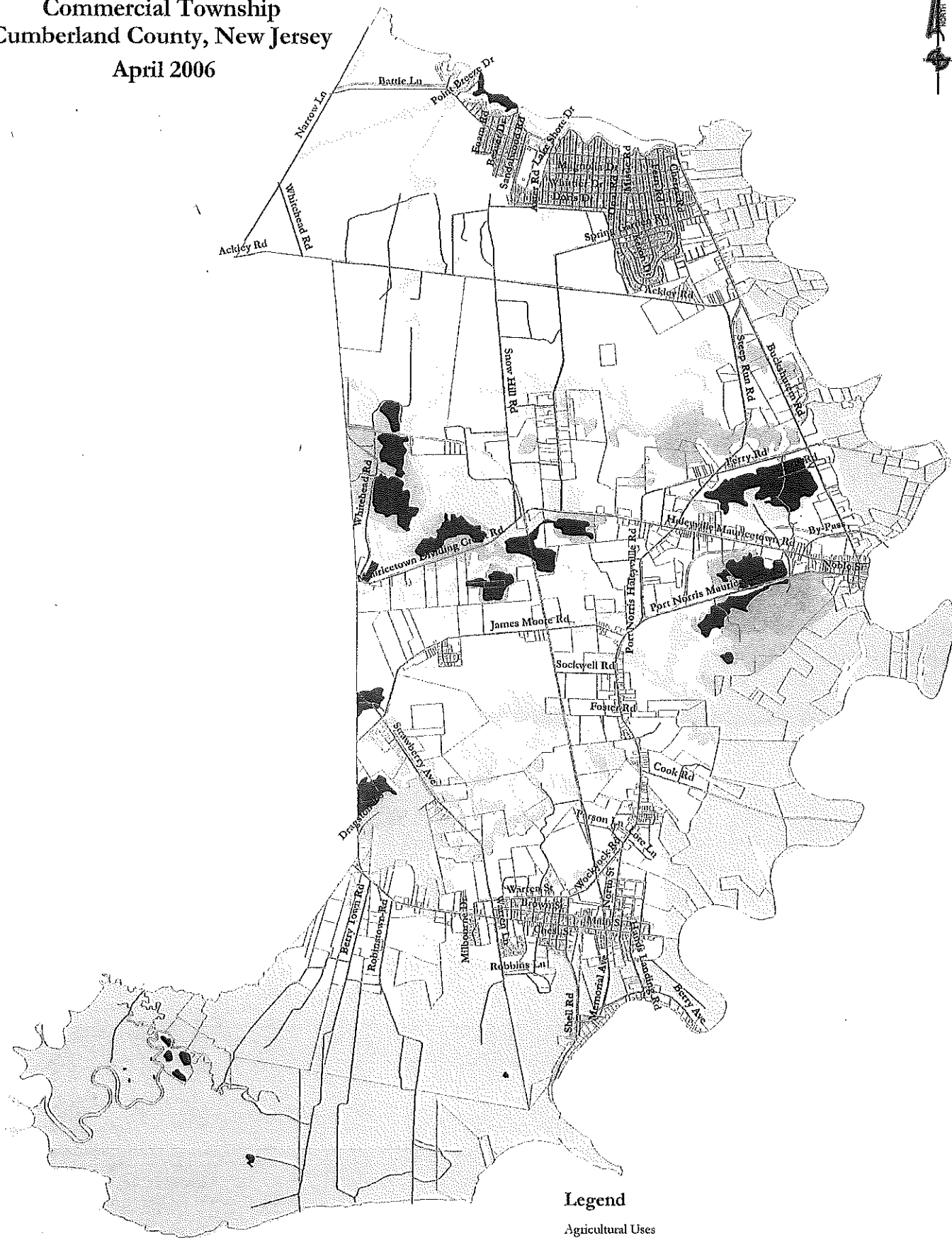
Class IV soils have very severe limitations that reduce the choice of plants, require special conservation practices, or both.

Class V soils are subject to little or no erosion but have other limitations, impractical to remove, that limit their use largely to pasture, woodland, or wildlife habitat.

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

**Figure 6      Agricultural Uses**

**Figure 6**  
**Agricultural Uses Map**  
 Commercial Township  
 Cumberland County, New Jersey  
 April 2006





**Legend**

Agricultural Uses

Fair For Grains and Seed Crops/ Good Grasses and legumes

Good For Grains and Seed Crops/ Good Grasses and legumes

 Poor For Grain and Seed Crops/ Poor Grasses and Legumes

 Poor For Grains and Seed Crops/ Fair Grasses and legumes

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

Class VI soils have severe limitation that make them generally unsuited to cultivation and limit their use largely to pasture, woodland, or wildlife habitat.

Class VII soils have very severe limitations that make them unsuited to cultivation, and that restrict their use largely to pasture, woodland, or wildlife habitat.

Class VIII soils and land forms have limitations that preclude their use for commercial plants and restrict their use to recreation, wildlife habitat or water supply, or to aesthetic purposes.

Where soils types are suited to agriculture and have not yet been encroached upon by development, a primary State and County planning goal would be their preservation for farming.

A list of prime soils for agricultural use has been established by the New Jersey State Agricultural Development Committee (SADC) and Cumberland County. The SADC has also classified soils that are important throughout New Jersey. These soils are in the land capability Class II and III but do not meet the criteria for Prime Farmland. These soils are nearly Prime Farmland and economically produce high yield crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Some may produce high yields as high as Prime Farmland if conditions are right. Within Commercial Township soils found which are on this listing include:

- Aura loamy sand (AvB)
- Downer loamy sand (DoA, DnA, DoB)
- Fallsington sandy loam (Fd, Fa)
- Fort Mott loamy sand (FrB, FrA)
- Hammonton loamy sand (HaA)
- Klej loamy sand (KmA)
- Sassafras (SrA, SrB)
- Woodstown (WmA, WmB)

Prime Farmlands include all those soils in Land Capability Class I and selected soils from Land Capability Class II. Prime Farmland is land that has the best combination of physical and chemical characteristics for producing food, feed, forage, fiber, oilseed crops and is also available for these uses. It has the soil quality, growing season, and moisture supply needed to economically produce sustained high yield crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods. Prime Farmlands are not excessively erodible or saturated with water for a long period of time and they either do not flood frequently or are protected from flooding. Prime Farmlands soils within the Township include:

- Aura loamy sand (AmA, AmB, AmA)
- Downer -Sassafras sandy loams (DwB)
- Hammonton sandy loams (HmA, HbA, HbA)
- Sassafras gravelly sandy loam (SgA, SgB, SsB)
- Sassafras sandy loams (SaA, SrA, SaB, SrB)
- Woodstown sandy loams (WmA, WmB)

It should be noted that although these soils may be found in the Township they may not necessarily meet the criteria listed. The Cumberland County Agricultural Development Board had identified only one area within the Township which appeared to meet the criteria for

## Commercial Township Master Plan

farmland preservation. It was located in the vicinity of Sockwell Avenue. However, this area has been recently subdivided and development is occurring such that the area is no longer considered a priority for preservation. There are however, approximately 182± acres of farmland that is preserved in the Township according to County records.

Although the farmland preservation program may not give priority to any particular site or area, the Township's soils have, can and will continue to be farmed. Assuring this continuity is a concern of planning and of the area's residents as noted in their survey questionnaire responses. The County Soil Survey notes, with management and advanced farming techniques or best practices, agriculture is viable and even profitable. Farmland gives a rural character to a community and it provides foodstuffs and other products, jobs and open space. Protecting and perpetuating farming within the Township is desirable and beneficial.

Farming should be preserved and protected within the Township and land use regulations should include right to farm language. In addition, other measures aimed at buffering or protecting farming from encroachment by development should be enacted to help ensure that agriculture will remain a viable industry in the Township.

It is clear that soil types impact what happens on the land. What the soils can bear and what they cannot. In Commercial Township this is particularly evident in terms of agriculture. From a land use planning standpoint, soils' characteristics for supporting various types of development have also been rated. One of the most significant in terms of community development is soil suitability for on-site septic disposal. Especially so in rural areas where there are not public sanitary sewers or potable water supply systems, on-site conditions dictate whether or not the land can accommodate development.

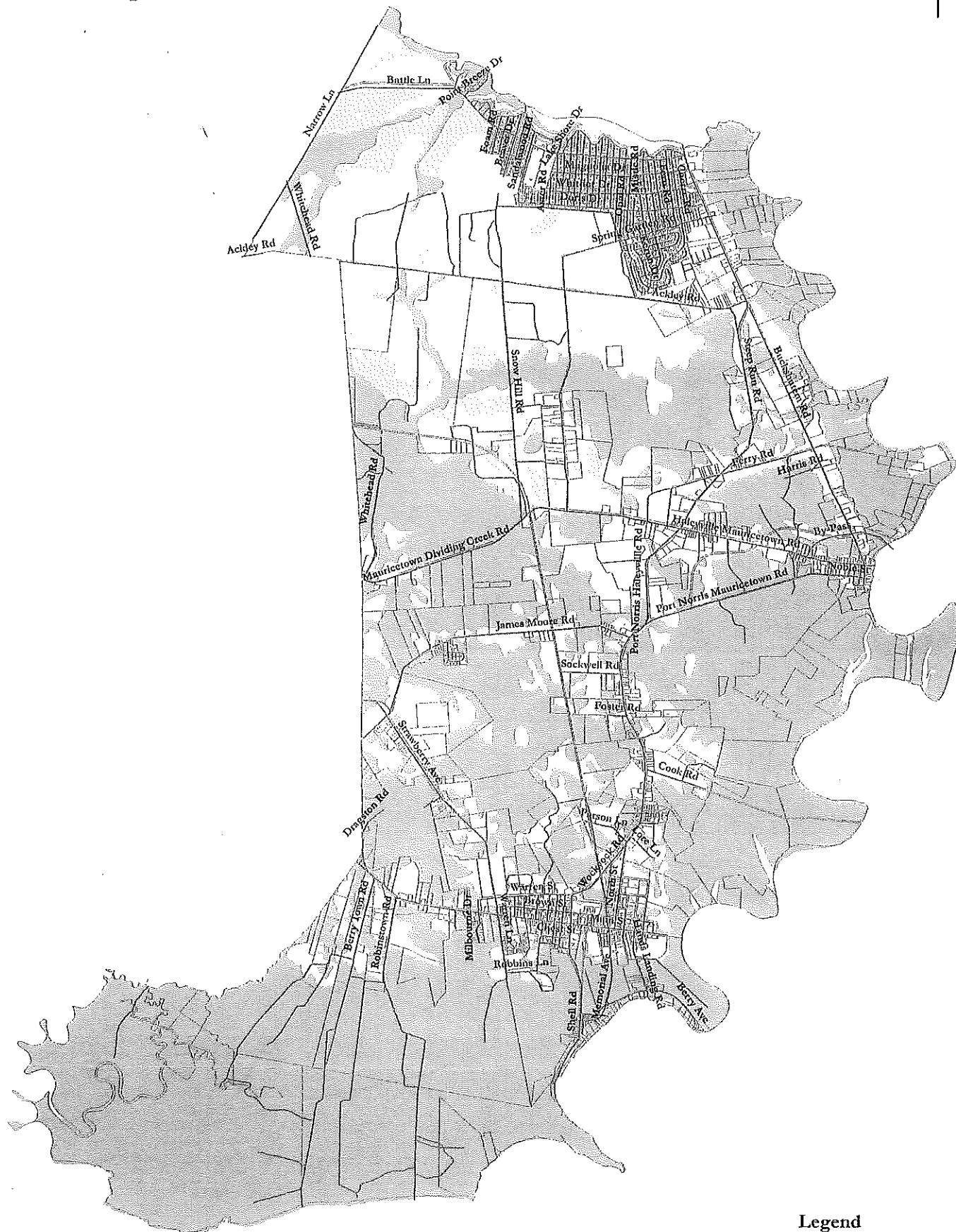
**Figure 7 Septic Limitation** graphically shows where the soils have limitations for handling on-site septic disposal. Obviously, this is an important indicator of where development should or can be located and at what density. Again the soils are rated as having slight, moderate or severe limitations for on-site septic disposal fields. Commercial Township's soils are rated as follows for septic tank absorption fields:

<b>Slight</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Severe</b>
Downer	Aura	Berryland
Evesboro (EvB)	Evesboro (EvD)	Atison
Fort Mott	Hammonton	Fallsington
Sassafras	Klej	Muck
	Woodstown	Tidal Marsh

Of course, each site must be evaluated separately at the time of proposed development in order to determine whether it is suitable to accommodate the development and its attendant activities. In reviewing **Figure 7** it is obvious that much of the Township has moderate to severe ratings. A considerable portion of those so rated areas are in public ownership in the northwestern portion of the Township. The combination of the data shown on **Figures 3 and 6** identifies a need for careful planning of development that is not currently served by a public sanitary sewer system.

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

**Figure 7     Septic Limitations**



## Commercial Township Master Plan

### Vegetation and Wildlife

As described throughout the soils series portion of this element, much of the land within the Township was and a large portion remains woodland. This naturally included predominantly various species of oak, pine, hickory, American white-cedar with some red maple, magnolia, black gum and holly trees. The naturally occurring shrubs include lowbush and highbush blueberry, mountain laurel, brackens, gall berry, scattered sheep laurel. Along the coastal areas of the Maurice River are a number of salt-tolerant grasses.

These tidal marshes are also significant breeding grounds for a variety of water fowl, mammals and crustaceans. Wild rice can be found north of Mauricetown Bridge and this draws large flocks of migratory birds to feed. Obvious and expected wildlife like fox, deer, rabbit, beaver, muskrats, squirrel, and a variety of native birds, amphibians and reptiles are denizens of the various ecological landscapes that make up the Commercial's environmental setting.

Information on wildlife and vegetation is available from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. A quick review of the data in the NJDEP files indicates the diversity and importance of its natural setting for a wide variety of plant and animal species, many of which are threatened or endangered. The Commercial Township Environmental Commission has prepared an environmental resource index providing additional information. An additional source of information available is an environmental inventory of the Bay Shore area prepared by the Nature Conservancy.

Because of the rapid development and urban sprawl which New Jersey has experienced, there has grown an awareness of the importance of saving the vegetative and animal habitats so that the various plant and animal species they harbor and protect will survive. The New Jersey Natural Heritage program of the Office of Natural Lands Management and the Department of Environmental Protection maintain data (available on the Internet) of rare species and their natural communities. The Partnership of the Delaware Estuary, a national estuary program, as well as a number of environmental non-profit organizations like the Nature Conservancy also has data bases and information on natural species.

Both the Federal and State governments have a status for each species which indicates the degree to which the species are surviving in a given area. Of most concern are those species designated as threatened or endangered. These terms are defined as:

**Endangered Species** are those whose prospects for survival in New Jersey are in immediate danger because of loss or change in habitat, over-exploitation, predation, competition, disease or contamination.

**Threatened Species** are those who may become endangered if conditions surrounding them begin to or continue to deteriorate.

The preservation of endangered and threatened species habitats and various special areas like tidal marshes need to be protected and preserved. They and the wildlife they draw are endemic

## Commercial Township Master Plan

to Commercial Township and well-known to the areas' residents. They also represent a natural resource that can attract eco-tourism business to the area.

### Conservation Planning and Regulation

In considering the need for conservation and protection of valuable resources it quite obvious that where and how development is permitted will depend on the ability of the land to support that development. Furthermore, given our collective understanding of the role nature plays in maintaining the quality of life in an area, making land use decisions cannot overlook or neglect significant environmental aspects of an area when making those decisions. In New Jersey, a state that has come to realize the impact of unbridled sprawl, a number of public actions has been taken to assure that a balance between natural and man-made environments are maintained. The legislation which authorizes planning in New Jersey, the **Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:44D-1 *et seq.*)**, stipulates in its enumerated listing of purposes (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-2) those which encourages planning to address the protection of the natural environment for public health and to assure ecological balance necessary for environmental protection. Six of the law's stated purposes address conservation of the natural environment:

- a. To encourage municipal action to guide the appropriate use or development of all lands in this State, in a manner which will promote the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare;
- b. To secure safety from fire, flood, panic and other natural and manmade disasters;
- c. To provide adequate air, light and open space;
- e. To promote the establishment of appropriate population densities and concentrations that will contribute to the well-being of persons, neighborhoods, communities and regions and preservation of the environment;
- g. To provide sufficient space in appropriate locations for a variety of agricultural, residential, recreational, commercial and industrial uses and open space, both public and private, according to their respective environmental requirements in order to meet the needs of all New Jersey citizens; and
- j. To promote the conservation of historic sites and districts, open space, energy resources and valuable natural resources in the State and to prevent urban sprawl and degradation of the environment through improper use of lands.

Providing for a continuing supply of safe drinking water is just one area where it is obviously that a municipality must control its development. Land use regulations must take into account the need to assure that adequate safe drinking water is and will be available and that the replenishment of that water will not be impeded or compromised by land use decisions or activities. Conversely, permitting growth to occur to the extent that its water demand will exceed or rapidly deplete existing supplies must also be considered. Both the State Planning Commission and the Department of Environmental Protection have promulgated planning

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

policies and regulations aimed at protecting groundwater supplies and assuring their continued sufficiency.

The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, adopted March 1, 2001, by the New Jersey State Planning Commission has Statewide Policies aimed at the protection of groundwater and surface water quality including:

- Include policies and standards for managing development in county and municipal master plans and development regulations to protect aquifer recharge areas and wellheads of public and private potable water supply systems.
- Manage the character, location and magnitude of development based on direct and indirect, individual and cumulative impacts on surface water quality as measured quantitatively.
- Provide for well-designed and maintained individual and community on-site wastewater treatment systems that produce treated effluent suitable for recharge to groundwater supplies to enhance the recharge of groundwater systems.
- Manage the location and design of land uses and structures that involve the use, storage, treatment or disposal of toxic and hazardous materials to prevent contamination of groundwater.
- Manage the character, location and magnitude of development in aquifer recharge potential, contamination or saltwater intrusion and to otherwise avoid adversely affecting the quantity and quality of water in the aquifer.
- Manage the character, location and magnitude of development to prevent the discharge of pollutants that may adversely affect public and private well fields and areas designated as existing or future water supply sources.

Additionally, as noted at the beginning of this plan element, the statute calls for and defines a conservation plan element which can be included in a municipal master plan.

There are also a number of State and County regulatory programs and activities aimed at protecting and preserving natural assets including groundwater quality, stormwater management, flood plain management, soil erosion, water and air quality, protection of natural habitats and areas of environmental sensitivity, and wetlands protection to name a few.

### **CAFRA**

The Coastal Areas Development Review Act (CAFRA) to controls development within a prescribed area adjacent to coastal areas. Approximately 15,429± acres of the Township are within the CAFRA area and subject to its regulation. This equals approximately 70% of the Township. Land use decisions must be cognizant of the impact of development on coastal areas and coastal areas' threat to development.

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

From the standpoint of planning, all levels of government have become involved in conservation and/or environmental planning. Various Federal and State agencies, departments and special area planning organizations have been established to protect and preserve areas of environmental importance.

The State Development and Redevelopment Plan calls for capacity-based land use planning. In essence this involves examining the future build-out of proposed land uses at specific intensities and measure same against the potential of natural and man-made systems to accommodate such growth. The goal is to develop a land use plan wherein proposed land uses will be permitted at levels of intensity that will not overwhelm natural or man-made systems and thereby incurring huge capital costs to prevent environmental, health and safety issues from arising.

In a municipality like Commercial Township which depends on natural systems, there is a real challenge since those natural systems are in some instances already overwhelmed. A number of responses to the Township survey questionnaire noted problems with on-site septic disposal and contamination of water supplies. The fact that man-made solutions are very difficult from ecological, fiscal or community development standpoints makes the planning task that much more of a challenge.

Over the last few decades a number of environmental regulations have been promulgated along with preservation programs. These have significantly reduced or stopped development on or from encroaching upon certain types of environmentally sensitive lands. Many have been State imposed like stream encroachment (development within the flood plain), freshwater wetlands, coastal areas development, water withdrawals and effluent disposal. Some municipalities have also taken the initiative and imposed regulations requiring stream setbacks, scenic corridors, prohibitions on development or site disturbance next to streams and bodies of water, prohibiting fill in flood plains, imposing agricultural buffers and other types of regulations aimed at protecting identifiable environmental assets from degradation or loss.

Today, most of those involved in planning and development regulation recognize the need for and agree with the purpose of protecting environmentally sensitive lands. Once such assets are lost, it is difficult, expensive and perhaps even impossible to ever get them restored. As has been noted, preventing the use of lands that are not suited to development or which serve important ecological purposes like flood protection, provision of open space, water supply recharge, and other natural functions of various natural landscapes is cost effective in innumerable ways.

### **The Plan for Environmental Protection**

The master plan section is intended to identify those aspects of a community's natural environment worthy of protection and preservation while still permitting their utilization under conditions that will not cause detrimental or adverse impacts on the natural resource or the land use activity. Preservation and protection can be by various approaches ranging from outright public purchase of particularly significant lands to regulations restriction of the use of specific lands or on adjacent lands that might be detrimental to the continued viability of the natural asset identified.

## Commercial Township Master Plan

It should be understood that this is an ongoing process in that as each development is proposed it must be evaluated for its impact on the natural as well as man-made environment to protect each from negative or adverse impacts. Development review must also be able to offer a variety of approaches appropriate to the situation and the given resource impacted so as to best preserve and protect the resource. This plan element begins that process by identifying the community's natural resources, their capabilities and their limitations.

The actual plan for environmental protection of the Commercial Township's natural assets and special areas of ecological concern are shown in **Figure 8 Environmental Protection Plan**. The plan shows currently known or identified environmentally sensitive and significant land within Commercial Township recommended for conservation and protection to some degree. In some cases, the Plan map offers an understanding of the natural resources that should be protected. It also serves as a guide for planning by showing areas where limitation to development exist or where development can be allowed if limitations to such development so identified can be overcome. Protection of these lands identified in whatever form that takes does not always mean that they are to become recreational open space or permanently protected lands cut off from the community. In many instances, their use is possible if such use is commensurate with their sensitivity and ability to accommodate the specific proposed uses or activities.

Some land may well require full protection and limited use to preserve significant environmental characteristics associated with them such as habitats of threatened or endangered species. In other cases, the lands may provide open space but need to be restricted to some or all activities in order to assure the success of their conservation. However, neither of these land use regulatory approaches to conservation should preclude access to the lands in public or non-profit organization ownership. Too often such lands are removed from the residents who have lived with them for centuries. There needs to be a recognition that controlled and fair regulation of such lands can permit the public's access within reasonable limitations. Conservation is possible through a variety of methods based on the reasons for preservation.

The **Environmental Protection Plan, Figure 8**, shows areas of Commercial Township that are or have been deemed to be worthy of protection due to their special environmental characteristics. In many instances, the **Plan** serves as a guide of where to avoid the degree of development and/or permitting development only after a finding that: (1) the land can accommodate it and (2) the type and degree of development can be permitted without undue detriment to the continued preservation and viability of areas of environmental sensitivity on or within close proximity to said proposed land use activity.

The **Plan Map** identifies areas of the community either already delineated for special land use regulations or which must be evaluated prior to them or adjoining lands being allowed to develop. It is broken into four categories of data shown. They are identified through various methods including aerial photography and are described as follows:

**Wetland Category** – This listing identifies lands which are to some degree saturated with water. This seasonal or lasting wetness does or may preclude these lands' use for most development and places them under the protection of wetlands regulations or other regulations aimed at protecting the species for which the wetlands provide habitat. They are:

# Figure 8 Environmental Protection Plan Map

Commercial Township  
Cumberland County, New Jersey

April 2006



## Legend

Coastal Centers Boundary

CAFRA Boundary

Streams

C1 or ON Antidegradation Stream Designation

### Conservation Concern Areas

Agricultural

Barren Land

Forest

NJDEP

### Wetland Category

Agricultural Wetlands

Atlantic White Cedar

Disturbed Wetlands

Saline Marshes

Wetlands

Water

### Natural Heritage Priority Sites

September 2001 Version

Critical Habitat for Rare Species and Natural Communities

Standard Site (usually < 3200 acres in size)

B2 Standard Site (Very High Significance)

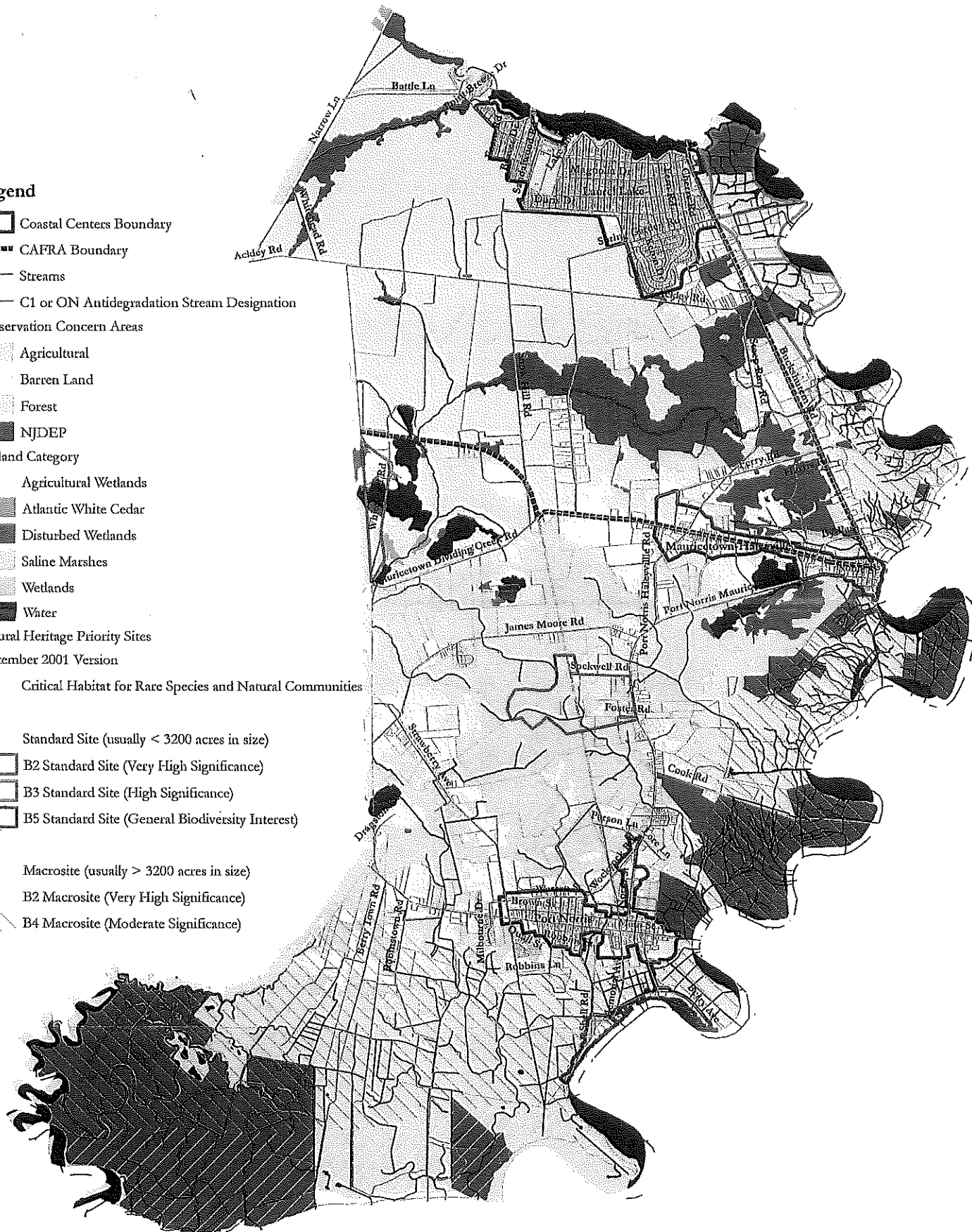
B3 Standard Site (High Significance)

B5 Standard Site (General Biodiversity Interest)

Macrosite (usually > 3200 acres in size)

B2 Macrosite (Very High Significance)

B4 Macrosite (Moderate Significance)



## Commercial Township Master Plan

**Atlantic White Cedar Swamp** - These wetlands are typically the predominantly closed canopy, seasonally flooded wetlands of southern New Jersey dominated by Atlantic White Cedar, *Chamaecyparis thyoides*. Some other trees such as the Red Maple, Sour Gum, and Black Gum and blueberry shrubs may also be present. The dense cedar cover, however, generally precludes a heavy herbaceous layer.

**Agricultural Wetlands** - These lands under cultivation are modified former wetlands areas and which still exhibit evidence of soil saturation. These lands will exhibit the textural signature characteristics described for other agricultural categories, but will have darker color and tonal signatures. Besides visual clues to their identity, these agricultural wetlands also exist in areas shown on soil surveys of the Natural Resource Conservation Service to have hydric soils. Note that as shown, they are often located adjacent to other farmland. The Township has approximately 670 acres of agricultural wetlands.

**Disturbed Wetlands** - These areas are former natural wetlands that have been altered by some form of clearing, leveling, grading, filling and/or excavating, but which still exhibit obvious signs of soil saturation when viewed. Because of the alterations, these areas do not generally support typical wetland vegetation, and may in fact be unvegetated. They do, however, exist in areas shown on the U.S. Soil Conservation Service soil surveys to have hydric soils. These areas may be in transition to a use or associated with a transitional development. In Commercial Township they appear adjacent to land mining operations near water (ponds) created.

**Saline Marsh** - In the coastal areas along the Maurice River coastal wetlands are the saline marshes. This cover type is predominantly vegetated by herbaceous plants adapted to the varied environmental conditions imposed by the tidal environment: water level fluctuations, salinity and sediment deposition. In the case of Commercial Township, the saline marshes are open graminoid (grassy) regions associated with waters with salinities greater than one part per thousand. Saline marshes are generally dominated by two growth forms of rope grasses depending on the salinity. Marshes exhibiting these characteristics are restricted to the Delaware Bay and associated tributaries downstream of Salem and all estuarine tributaries that empty into the Atlantic Ocean. Much of the saline marshes within the Township are owned by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and other conservation agencies such as the Audobon Society.

**Wetland** - The Township's wetlands are those areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or ground waters at a frequency and duration sufficient to support vegetation adapted to life in saturated soil conditions. Included in this category are naturally vegetated swamps, marshes, bogs and savannas which are normally associated with topographically at low elevations but may be located at any elevation where water perches over an aquiclude. As shown on the Conservation Plan, the term "wetlands" denotes Freshwater Wetlands associated with the numerous stream systems as opposed to those along the coastal rivers and bay, the "saline marsh" noted above. The Freshwater Wetlands may have a variety of vegetative covers and are regulated by law as discussed earlier in this chapter.

**Water** - Besides showing the Maurice River, Laurel Lake and the streams or tidal ponds, the areas shown as open water include ponds resulting from land mining activities. Such sites are

## Commercial Township Master Plan

bordered by the barren land (See next Category listing). These man-made water bodies must also be reclaimed and made useable through reclamation. They offer opportunities for open space, recreational, and aesthetic amenities for either natural areas or active use facilities related to waterside development.

### **Conservation Area Concerns including:**

**Agricultural Lands** – The mapping so noted identifies all lands used primarily for the production of food and fiber and some of the structures associated with this production. The “snapshot of agriculture” provided by this category is somewhat incomplete due to the nature of farming involved. Particular crop prices may have resulted in not farming particular sites in any given year or due the use of area photography in identifying other environmentally significant characteristics shown, agricultural lands in the Township may not be shown. Remember agricultural wetlands can be farmed, but cannot be developed. An example of this fact is evident on the **Plan** map in the area north of Warren Street in Port Norris. Township tax records indicate farmland assessment for a number of tracts which are shown on the **Existing Land Use** map, **Figure 9**, but which are not shown on the **Environmental Protection Plan** map.

Another area which shows a discrepancy in agricultural areas on these two mappings, conservation and existing land use, occurs west and north of Port Norris along Port Norris – Mauricetown Road extending up into Haleyville along the Port Norris – Haleyville Road south of Highland Avenue, and north along Strawberry Avenue. There are also agricultural lands located in Buckshutem along East Buckshutem Road from Henry Street south to Ferry Road. In many cases, agriculturally used land is actually agricultural wetlands or is in most cases lesser or minor land use activity on the property. As such, it is precluded from showing on the **Existing Land Use** map.

From a land use standpoint, these small, specialized farmed parcels represent a link to the community's identity and historic tradition. The survey of Township residents noted the loss of farms and the importance of retaining farming as a defining attribute of the community character. Many residentially used lots are of a size and natural character to permit farming activity. Existing State regulation of wetlands permits their farming. If, however, farming ceases than these lands must be allowed to revert to the natural wetlands state and cannot be developed. The important issue from a planning standpoint is the place of agriculture in the community's historic and traditional character.

**Barren Land** – Within Commercial Township “Barren Land” largely denotes those lands associated with extraction mining operations identifiable by a lack of vegetative cover in a non-urban setting with thin soil or sand. These lands are of concern from the standpoint of conservation as they represent man's impact on the land and the need to reclaim these areas for an appropriate use once said land mining activities have ceased.

**NJDEP** – Land owned by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection is shown under this heading. Much of these lands fall into two categories: coastal areas along the Maurice River and forested areas and wetlands along stream corridors around Laurel Lake and north of Ferry Road and the Winchester Western Railroad line. Interestingly, the latter represents the

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

majority of the lands located outside the Coastal Area Facilities Review Act (CAFRA) lands. As a landowner and land regulator, the NJDEP is therefore, a major force in land use planning within the Township. For the most part, these lands are truly conserved and local comments received through the Township questionnaire response raised concerns about public access or use of these significant amounts of land.

**Forest** – These lands are environmentally significant because they are forests. There are two levels of forest land. The first, referred to as Level 1, is lands covered by woody vegetation other than wetlands. These lands are capable of producing timber and other wood products, and of supporting many kinds of outdoor recreation. Forest land is an important category environmentally because it affects air quality, water quality, wildlife habitat, climate, and many other aspects of the ecology of the area. The second level is identified with Deciduous, Coniferous, Mixed Deciduous-Coniferous and Brushland forest lands. Isolated patches of various forest lands are located within the CAFRA area as both wetlands and non-wetlands forests.

### **Streams and Regulatory Boundaries**

The third category entitled: "Commercial Township" identifies the boundaries of regulatory entities and certain streams of environmental significance. They help to identify the Plan's areas of concern and include the following designations defined as:

**Parcel** – The light colored box area identifies how the plan identifies each tax map parcel.

**Municipal Line** – The municipal boundaries of the Township are identified by this heavier, darker line.

**Center Boundary** – The Township's three designated villages are delineated by a red line shown which marks the boundaries of Port Norris, Mauricetown – Haleyville, and Laurel Lake. Note that the designated village of Laurel Lake includes that portion located in the City of Millville.

**CAFRA Boundary** – The Conservation Plan identifies the boundaries of those areas regulated by the Coastal Areas Facilities Review Act (CAFRA) as those being within this blue and red line. The CAFRA line follows the Winchester and Western Rail line from the Downe Township border east to Highland Avenue and then along same to its intersection with Buckshutem Road and then following said road north to the City of Millville boundary line. All lands located south and east of this CAFRA boundary line are within the jurisdiction of Act.

**Stream** – The broken dark blue line indicates the Township's streams and/or ditches within the tidal marsh areas of the Township.

**C1 or ON Antidegradation Stream Designation** – Two streams within the Township are shown to have both a dark blue and a read interspersed line denoting their designation as Antidegradation streams accorded by the NJDEP. As noted earlier, portions of Buckshutem Creek, Steep Run and Gravely Run are so designated. Under the DEP's regulations, any

## Commercial Township Master Plan

development near these streams is required to maintain a 300 foot setback from those areas of the streams so designated so as to preserve the water quality of the streams.

**Natural Heritage Priority Sites** – The Plan shows four areas designated to be National Heritage Priority Sites. These areas identify the best habitats for various rare plant and animal species and natural communities of same as determined through analysis of the information in the New Jersey Natural Heritage Database. Natural Heritage Priority Sites contain some of the best and most viable occurrences of endangered and threatened species in the area. The map's showing these sites are intended to help municipalities prepare natural resource inventories, public and private conservation organization preparing open space acquisition goals; land developers and consultants identifying environmentally sensitive lands; and public and private landowners developing land management plans.

Each site is ranked according to its significance for biological diversity using a scale developed by the Nature Conservancy and the network for Natural Heritage Programs. The rankings can be used to distinguish between sites that are of global significance for conservation of biological diversity versus those that are of state significance. The scale ranges from B1 to B5 with sites ranked B1-B3 generally being of global significance and sites ranked B4 or B5 being of state significance.

In addition to the biological diversity rank, each site is categorized as a macrosite or a standard site. Standard sites are smaller in area (usually less than 3,200 acres in size), while macrosites tend to be larger (usually greater than 3,200 acres).

The ranking of sites is further clarified as follows:

- B-1** Outstanding significance, generally the "last of the least" in the world, such as the only known occurrence of any element (species or natural community), the best or an excellent occurrence of an element ranked critically imperiled globally, or a concentration (4+) of good or excellent occurrences of elements that are imperiled or critically imperiled globally. The site should be viable and defensible for the element or ecological processes contained.
- B-2** Very high significance, such as the most outstanding occurrence of any natural community also includes areas containing other occurrences of elements that are critically imperiled globally, an excellent occurrence of an element that is imperiled globally, or a concentration (4+) of good occurrences of globally rare element or viable occurrences of globally imperiled elements.
- B-3** High significance, such as a viable occurrence of an element that is globally imperiled, a good occurrence of a globally rare element, an excellent occurrence of any natural community, or a concentration (4+) of good occurrences of elements that are imperiled in the State or excellent occurrences of elements that are rare in the State.

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**B-4** Moderate significance, such as a viable occurrence of a globally rare element, a good occurrence of any natural community, a good or excellent occurrence or only viable state occurrence of an element that is critically imperiled in the State, an excellent occurrence of an element that is imperiled in the State, or concentration (4+) of good occurrences of elements that are imperiled in the State or excellent occurrences of elements that are rare in the State.

**B-5** Of general biodiversity interest

As shown on **Figure 8**, Commercial Township has:

Two **B2 Macrosites**: one located along the lower Maurice River in the extreme southern portion of the Township, and the other located on the Downe – Commercial municipal border running just south of the Winchester Western Railroad line south along the municipal border to Highland Street, (County Route No. 670);

One **B3 Standard Site** along the Maurice River in the northeastern portion of the Township running from the Millville boundary south to north of Steep Run;

Two **B4 Macrosites**: one running south along the Maurice River from just north of Steep Run's confluence with the Maurice River to High Street south of Port Norris including most of the localities of Shellpile and Bivalve; and the other encompassing an area south of Port Norris between the Township boundary with Downe Township east to High Street and above the earlier noted B2 Macrosite; and

One **B5 Standard Site** located in the south central portion of the Township on either side of railroad right-of-way south of James Moore Road (County Road No. 614).

Much of the coastal areas encompassed by these sites are in public or conservation organization ownership. Their natural conditions largely preclude development although portion of them do include non-Tidal Marsh areas. The two non-coastal sites are in areas that have some development activity occurring within them. Obviously, these sites represent significant environmental sensitivity.

### Conservation Recommendations

#### The Cost of Land Purchase

Commercial Township has already had a significant amount of acreage purchased by the State or private nonprofit conservation organizations. Where this has occurred along coastal areas, much of the land was unsuitable for development. A considerable amount of additional land was purchased by the State south and west of Laurel Lake. Continued purchasing of large tracts in fee simple is not recommended except in special circumstances where significant environmental sensitivity of lands is threatened or endangered. Outright purchase should be reserved for such circumstances as it is expensive, both in terms of land costs and loss of tax revenue, and too

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

often it removes the area's residents from the land they have historically and culturally known and enjoyed.

### **A Varied Approach to Conservation**

A varied approach to conservation is recommended. The Plan proposes use of various design techniques: preservation of sensitive lands through purchase or donation of development rights, transfer of development rights or credits might also be explored, and conservation easements which restrict the use of land in the interest of conserving the land's special natural features.

The implementation of such an approach would utilize development plan review, specific and local use of governmental agency programs and zoning which recognizes conservation goals and concerns. Such an approach requires cooperation among local, State and Federal agencies and that begins at the municipal level. Ideally, the Township's Master Plan should be updated, amended and supplemented as new information becomes available so its proposals are relevant to the latest thinking and knowledge about the conditions within the community.

Recommended conservation techniques include:

**Cluster Developments** – This is a form of development that concentrates buildings on a portion of the tract while preserving the remainder for open space or a conservation purpose.

**Farmland Protection and Right to Farm** – Assure that farming remains an active and vibrant land use activity is an important policy to follow. Regulations should protect farming activity and permit it throughout the Township.

**Site Design Review** – Development regulations can provide standards for the layout of buildings, circulation and utilities that is sensitive to the environmental, agricultural or open space value of the property involved. The key to this methodology working is the strict implementation of the regulations to force recognition of the development site's environmental constraints so as to plan the development with the little, if any, loss or degradation of such sensitive environmental features including aesthetic views and the noted protection of the Maurice River corridor.

All areas of environmental sensitivity as shown on the **Environmental Protection Plan** must be considered in any development review so as to determine possible negative impacts to such areas. In some cases like wetlands, site specific information required to be undertaken and submitted as part of the review process may show that the concern is not justified by reason of the absence of wetlands on all or portions of a development site.

**Zoning for Protection** – The Township's land use plan should restrict development to places where it is appropriate and so doing protect farmland, environmentally sensitive lands, woodlands (mature forests and secondary growth) and the preservation of farmland. This "natural" approach requires mitigation of adverse impacts by limiting or prohibiting development in areas that are deemed important for conservation and protection. But it also recognizes property rights, the public's right to enjoying the community's natural resources and

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

the need for sustaining both an economically and socially viable municipality. Any zoning map should mirror the land use plan and reflect the concerns for environmentally sensitive areas of the Township.

The protection of the Maurice River through land use regulation aimed at controlling the amount and type of development along this nationally recognized natural resource is strongly recommended.

# **Commercial Township Master Plan**

## **Land Use Plan**

### **Introduction**

The land use element of a master plan is a two part visual display with descriptive narrative on how land in the Township is and should be used. The first part is a detailed analysis of current or existing land use activities. In its simplest form, the existing land use map shows where land is used for general land use categories: residential, commercial, industrial, public, vacant, farming, and transportation (roads, rail lines and airports). Categories may be expanded or made more detailed based on the community's degree of existing development or to identify specialized or significant land use characteristics. This analysis offers a description of the various land use activities, patterns of development, existing conflicts, and other relevant concerns, problems or potential for meeting known community needs in terms of land use.

The second part of the land use element provide a plan for future land use which is based on the first part and other master plan elements especially those dealing with environmental issues or a community's special features, needs or assets to describe proposed land uses which addresses these issues. This map is provided with a narrative of the proposed land use categories describing their relative densities, land uses, and purpose in the overall master plan. In so doing, this Plan element is broken into two parts, the first of which involves existing land use. The land use element then becomes the justification for the municipalities zoning regulations and map.

### **Existing Land Use**

#### **Determining Land Use**

Using an initial mapping of land use developed through aerial photography undertaken by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, a land use survey was undertaken in the summer of 2004. This initial mapping was field checked by "windshield survey" (properties visible from public roads) to verify that the mapped land use information. The field survey was also compared with the Township tax duplicates which also identify general land use activity.

This survey provides a one-time snapshot of land use activity in the Township. Since land use is ongoing and ever changing, the mapping provided will not be "up to date." In some cases it was also not possible due to property densities to determine exact property boundaries or land use activities where they were not visible from public roads. The importance of the survey is to create a "picture" of how the land is currently being used. In so doing, the survey provides clues to where land use is changing, where use is not in accordance with current zoning or where such use is impacting other land use activities or conditions such as encroachment onto environmentally sensitive areas.

Wherever possible, there was an attempt to delineate between land use activities when more than one was present on a property, but that was not always possible. In many cases however, it was

## Commercial Township Master Plan

necessary to include an entire parcel in the predominant land use category since considerable portions of the involved property were not useable due to environmental constraints most notably wetlands. Determining the extent of such environmental sensitivity was also sometimes not possible.

**Figure 9, the Existing Land Use map**, shows the existing use of land throughout the Township as delineated by ten categories. **Figure 9** clearly displays that the majority of development in the Township has occurred within the three designated villages of the Township: Laurel Lake, Mauricetown- Haleyville and Port Norris which includes Shellpile and Bivalve; and along the major routes interconnecting these villages. As was noted in the **Conservation** element, land conditions including land ownership or environmental sensitivity have precluded many areas of the Township from being developed. Comparison of the **Figures 8, the Environmental Protection Plan Map**, and **Figure 9, the Existing Land Use map** vividly demonstrate the impact environmental sensitivity has on land use in Commercial.

The predominant primary use of the land determined what is shown on **Figure 9**. Where it was possible to identify and realistically identify split use such as a lot with a residential and commercial activity located upon it, such is shown. Within Commercial Township due to the large number of the lots which were deemed not suitable for further subdivision due to environmental sensitivity including agricultural wetlands minor land use activity such as farming as noted in the **Environment Protection Plan** element, only the main or predominant land use activity is shown. The primary concern from the planning standpoint was to determine land predominant use activities and whether or not lands were available for further development.

### Survey Land Use Groupings Defined

The land use activities in the Township were broken into ten categories or groupings. The categories were chosen to identify not only land use, but in some cases ownership of land. In so doing, when such information is coupled with the mapping of the various conservation-related areas a picture of how the land is and should be used emerges. The land use categories included:

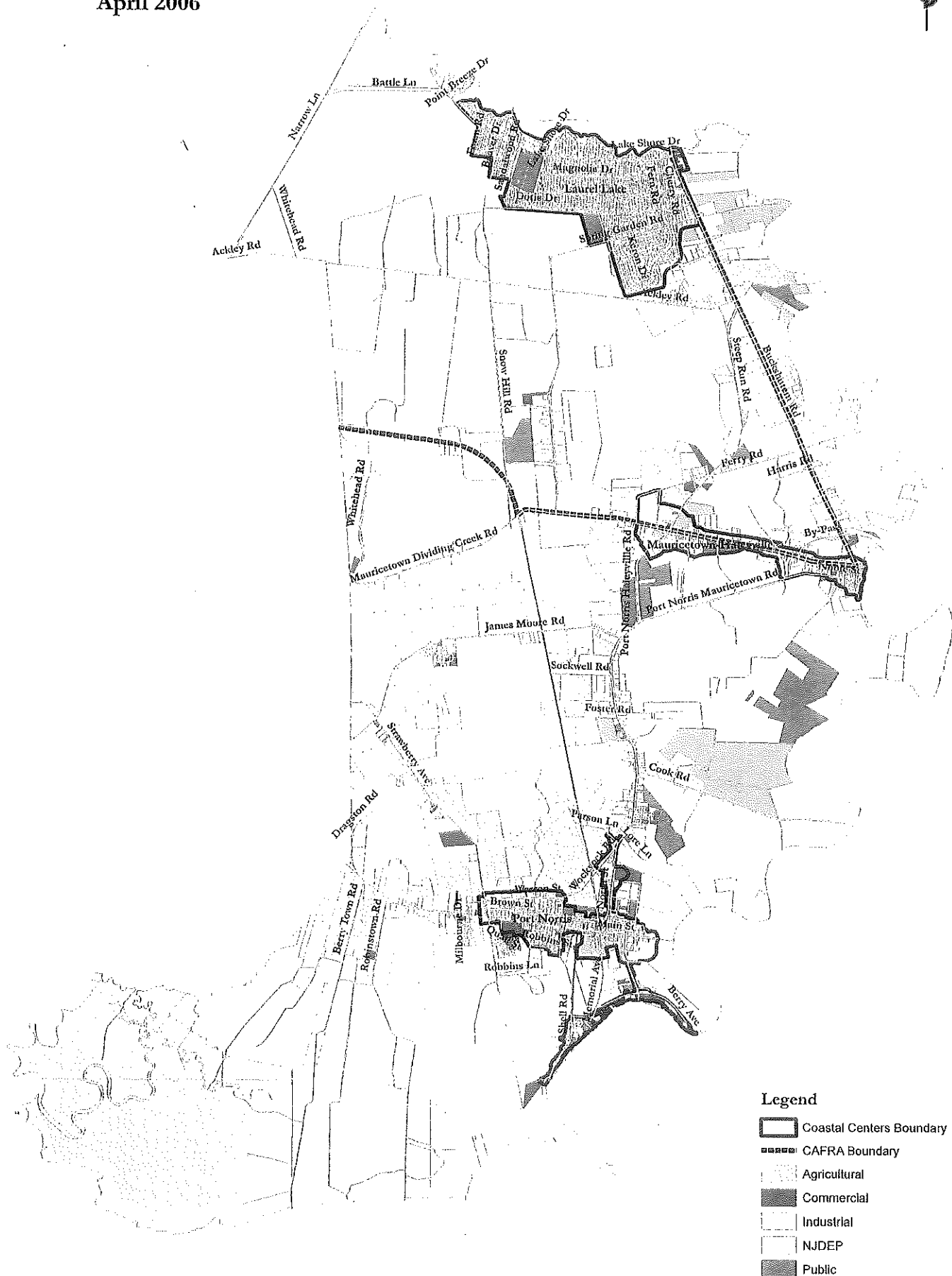
**Agriculture** – Lands farmed including crop and animal production, horticulture and other agricultural production. The largest concentration of farming (agriculture) from a land use standpoint occurs north and west of Port Norris. But there is also notable farming around Haleyville, along Buckshutem Road and along either side of the Port Norris to Mauricetown Road. **Figure 8, the Conservation Plan map**, often showed there was even more agricultural activity occurring along these two roads, but in a majority of these cases agricultural use was not detected from the survey or tax records. This does not necessarily indicate that farming may not yet occur again however.

A comparison of farmland assessments in the Tax records over a three year period indicates fewer properties than the survey showed in terms of actual farmed lands. The land use survey identified 78 properties being farmed. Examination of the Township's Tax Duplicates showed in 2003 that there were a total of 73 properties with an agriculture classification (25 Farm Regular) and (48 Farm Qualified), in 2004, that figure increased by one to 24 and 50 respectively, and in 2005 it increased to 76, 23 and 53 respectively. The flow of lands in and out of farming is often

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

### **Figure 9 Existing Land Use**

**Figure 9**  
**Existing Land Use Map**  
 Commercial Township  
 Cumberland County, New Jersey  
 April 2006



## Commercial Township Master Plan

the result of market forces such as hay production which has recently been a profitable crop. This market fluctuation may explain the higher number of farmed properties found by the survey.

**Commercial** – Retail sales and service businesses including office uses are shown in the commercial land use category. Because of its size and location one trucking company was also included. Most of the commercial activity within the Township is located with the village of Port Norris with much of that along the Maurice River in Shellpile and Bivavle. There is a concentrated business area in Laurel Lake along Buckshutem Road just south of the Millville boundary and a smaller one on Battle Avenue. Most of the other business properties shown are scattered throughout the Township consistent with the rural character of the community.

**Industrial** – All manufacturing (processing of shell fish), land mining or earth extraction operations and utility installations or facilities were included in this category. The majority of these industrial activities were related to the natural resources notably land mining and shell fishing.

**NJDEP** – This category shows all lands owned by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. These lands are identified as they have been acquired for conservation purposes and are therefore, removed from further development. They are also seen as permanent anchor for conservation and recreational areas with the community.

**Public** – This land use category identifies all lands owned by a public agency or entity and used for a public purpose such as schools, fire halls, the Township municipal building, senior center and the New Jersey State Police facilities. It also includes some lands owned by the public for historical preservation. There are also a number of parcels shown as "Public" that are not actually being used but are owned by the public and are considered to be worthy of being kept in public ownership due to their importance to the municipality for future public use or conservation and/or recreational areas.

**Quasi-Public** – Churches, cemeteries, and facilities or properties owned by religious or non-profit organizations are shown as quasi-public.

**Residential** – All properties with a residential dwelling unit located on them were included in this category except farm homesteads which were included in the agricultural figure. Residential dwellings include mobile homes. The **Housing Plan** element of the Master Plan gives specific numbers for total units.

**Riparian Grants** – This land use classification identifies areas along the Maurice River where riparian grants have been given by the State. On **Figure 9** they are shown in Shellpile and Bivalve and one site in Mauricetown. This category shows areas where adjoining property owners have permits to use lands along the River for piers, moorings or docks.

**Roads** – This group is self-explanatory and did include all known public rights-of-way within the community without any regard to roadway classification or jurisdiction, i.e., County or Township.

## Commercial Township Master Plan

**Township-Owned** – This category includes all lands that have come into the ownership of Commercial Township as opposed to being purchased or being used for a specific public purpose by the Township. In many cases they are shown within residential areas and represent lands and sometimes residences. They are shown on the plan to identify lands which having come into public ownership for whatever reason might be useful for meeting public needs. In some cases, lots might be combined to decrease density in areas considered to have problems supporting development, or in other instances, for needed services like parks or affordable housing locations.

**Vacant** – This category shows all the lands within the Township which did not have discernable use or activities associated with them. In many instances these areas are woodland, wetland or savannah.

**Table LU-1 Existing Land Use**

<b>Land Use Category</b>	<b>Percent of Total</b>	
	<b><u>Acres</u></b>	<b><u>Area</u></b>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<b>1,391</b>	<b>6.7</b>
<b>Commercial</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>0.5</b>
<b>Industrial</b>	<b>2,175</b>	<b>10.5</b>
<b>NJDEP</b>	<b>6,823</b>	<b>33.0</b>
<b>Public</b>	<b>451</b>	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Quasi-Public</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>2.2</b>
<b>Residential</b>	<b>1,489</b>	<b>7.2</b>
<b>Riparian Grants</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>0.1</b>
<b>Roads</b>	<b>565</b>	<b>2.7</b>
<b>Township-owned</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>0.3</b>
<b>Vacant</b>	<b>7,165</b>	<b>34.6</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>20,697</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### Land Use Trends and Issues

#### The Designated Centers

As noted, the Township's three centers are where the majority of development is located. All three of these centers, designated June 19, 2002 by the then State Planning Commission, owe their origins to adjacent waters. Each of these villages is either in whole or in part, similar in the density of their development and the problems they experience relying on on-site sanitary sewers and water supply systems.

#### Laurel Lake

This village began has a retirement and resort-type community along the shores of the Laurel Lake in the late 1920's. The original subdivision created hundreds of 90 x 30 foot lots. Today

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

there is an eclectic mix of residences including mobile homes, manufactured homes and stick-built houses. As throughout the Township, there are problems with septic systems failures due to small lot sizes and the high water table. Over the years, zoning regulations have increased the minimum lot size. The older development area closest to the Lake is zoned R-4 which currently requires 8,000 square feet for a residence. The remainder is zoned R-3 which requires 9,000 square feet. This Plan's recommendation is that all residential lots be 20,000 square feet in area within any of the village residential areas.

There are serious problems in this village with septic system failures and potable water supply contamination. Although these problems occur throughout the Township and especially within its centers, it is perhaps most severe in Laurel Lake due to its high density and the depth to water. The Township has vigorously sought the installation of public sanitary sewers without success thus far. The problematic issues in providing sewer service are basically two-fold: how to provide the service: (1) build a new system with a local treatment facility or tying into either the City of Millville's treatment facility or the Cumberland County Utilities Authority's system in Bridgeton; and (2) the cost of the system and ongoing service by property owners.

Besides its significant residential development, Laurel Lake is also the site of a two small business districts one of which is located along Buckshutem Road which provides more contemporary retail and service businesses as opposed to the smaller-sized (village) businesses in the other two centers. The other business district in Laurel Lake is located along Battle Avenue and is more a "neighborhood retail" area.

There is a relatively new Township park in Laurel Lake. Its location on the fringe of the village makes it somewhat isolated and thereby limits its use by smaller children or older adults. There have also been problems with vandalism. All three of the designated villages could use some smaller, more compact "pocket" or neighborhood parks offering more passive amenities such as benches and perhaps recreation for pre-school children. Such parks could serve as focal points for walkers, joggers, visitors to the villages, and as local meeting places. The large number of Township-owned lots within Laurel Lake provides an excellent opportunity to create such focal points through the villages and re-establish the amenities needed by many of the residents for such open spaces.

The Township also owns several larger tracts of land within the Laurel Lake village as shown on the existing land use map marked as "public." Although these sites are not currently used for public purposes at present, their size and location has been seen by the Township as possible sites for public services and facilities. One of these parcels has been considered as a possible future school site, but its central location makes it suitable to a number of public uses. A second site is located at the eastern fringe of the village and again would offer a location for some needed future public purpose use.

Southeast of Laurel Lake center is the non-designated locality of Buckshutem. It is the site of a number of residential properties and a church located along Buckshutem Road between its intersection with Ackley and Steep Run Roads. Its future growth is limited by environmental constraints and NJDEP land ownership.

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

### **Mauricetown – Haleyville**

This designated village consists of historical Mauricetown and Haleyville and runs in a linear developed pattern along Highland Avenue from the Maurice River west beyond the Highland's intersection with the Port Norris – Mauricetown Road. Mauricetown, the older of these two localities, sits on a high bank along the river. Its settlement was encouraged by the tidal wetlands offering abundant opportunities for the production of salt hay. It eventually became an important port and a ferry crossing. Ships' captains built many of the community's historic residences many of which have been restored to their original beauty.

This village is also along what is referred to as the "mining belt" due to the land mining sites and plants and that appears to bisect the center of the Township as shown on the **Existing Land Use** map.

Mauricetown has the only bridge across the Maurice River south of Millville and is therefore, an important route for evacuation of coastal areas to the east which includes the southern Jersey shore. The Mauricetown Bridge and its causeway connect to Routes 47 and 347 to the hamlet of Mauricetown Station in Maurice River Township.

The Mauricetown portion of this village center is a historically significant area with a considerable number of historic structures from residences and churches to small shops and barns/former stables. Mauricetown also due to small lot sizes has problems with on-site septic disposal and potable water supply. It is largely a built out community. Provision of sanitary sewer would enable this village to address existing problems and allow some increased density to the center's development.

Historic structures are also found along Highland Avenue into the other half of this designated center, Haleyville. This part of the village has considerable residential development along Highland Avenue. There remains a significant amount of vacant land within the Haleyville portion of the village. The existing land use map also shows a number of large industrial areas within and adjacent to this center. All are land mining operations including the processing plant of U.S. Silica near Mauricetown, one of the major land mining companies operating in the area.

The village is home to two Township parks: a small riverfront park along the Maurice River in Mauricetown and a larger "park" on the southside of Highland Avenue in Haleyville. The small riverfront park is perfect example of small neighborhood park which in this case offers a view of the river which can be enjoyed by residents and visitors to the village alike. The other park is not owned by the Township, but was established as a park-like area with picnic benches and entrance area with parking.

The village is also home to the Township senior center and the New Jersey State Police barracks. Just north of the center boundary on the Port Norris – Haleyville Road are recreational facilities also owned by the Township. One of the Township schools and offices of the Board of Education are located just to the south of the Haleyville portion of the village on the Port Norris – Haleyville Road

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

### **Port Norris**

The Township's third center is the village of Port Norris which includes both Shellpile and Bivalve, the two small historic, riverfront fishing communities located along the Maurice River. As is name indicates, Port Norris was historically an important shipping terminus for the Delaware Bay and eastern seaboard coastal trade. It was the fishing ports and shucking and packing sheds of Shellpile and Bivalve which eventually made Port Norris rich and noted for its oysters. As early as 1865, historical reports indicate that as many as ten rail cars a week of oysters were shipped from Port Norris. The oyster industry turned Port Norris into a thriving community and many of its historic structures remain attesting to the wealth oysters provided.

The oyster industry continues today but at a considerably smaller scale as it continues to recover from the devastating effects of the MSX disease which severely affecting oyster production in the Bay and Maurice River Cove. Port Norris village itself sits on a narrow band of land between tidal and freshwater wetlands. It is the seat of Township government and the location of the community's second school. There are a number of retail establishments along Main Street which are small in scale and size. A variety of commercial and industrial uses exists along the River in Shellpile and Bivalve. These include oyster and clam packing plants, a marina, and a restaurant.

This waterfront area is home to the Haskin Shellfish Research Laboratory of Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey and to the Bayshore Discovery Project which includes the Bivalve Shipping sheds and Wharfs and the AJ Meerwald, the State of New Jersey's official tall ship. There are only a few residences left in Shellpile and Bivalve although in its day ship chandlers, sail makers, shops and stores along with workers houses made these thriving communities.

Like Mauricetown, many of Port Norris' older residences are also being restored. There remains room for new development within this center, but again depth to seasonal high water tables creates problems for on-site septic disposal and portable water supply. Public sewer service would allow for higher density within the village and reduce development pressure on the remaining farmland outside the center. Increased commercial and industrial activity related to the historic fishing industry would also benefit from a sewage treatment facility. It would also permit businesses which might cater to the eco-tourists which the Bayshore communities along with Cumberland County have been promoting.

It is apparent that Commercial's three villages share character, similar problems and natural constraints on their future development. They all do have room for limited expansion. However, there are also existing problems in all three villages with on-site septic disposal and portable water supply. These problems pose a serious threat to permitting future growth within these long established centers. As time goes on the problems will become more difficult and the costly to resolve.

These problems also pose a threat to providing for non-residential development as well. This is particularly threatening to expansion and sustaining of the shell fish industry in Shellpile and Port Norris. While current production levels appear manageable, there are indications that problems will arise when the coordinated efforts of State and Federal governments to restore the

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

oyster production of the area's waters begin to increase the oyster harvest. Accommodating new packing activities would be challenging without appropriate treatment facilities.

Additionally, if the community's economic activity is to remain vibrant and focused on businesses related to the area's natural environment, then provision of public sanitary sewer and water supply will become evermore necessary. This would involve a combination of the traditional industries such as land mining, farming and commercial shell fishing, and a wide-variety of commercial activities related to ecotourism such as guest houses, recreational facilities, shops, restaurants and services like bicycle rentals, fishing supplies and charter boat service, as well as the businesses that serve these activities.

Recognizing this fact also raises another concern which is the maintenance of the villages' character and community's natural environment by permitting centered growth and a sustainable economic environment. Future development must be of a size and scale suitable to the existing village structures and protect natural and man-made assets (scenic vistas and historic structures and sites), provision of appropriate transportation and protection of residential neighborhoods from undue intrusion or the nuisances of tourists-oriented businesses or activities, and generally protecting the villages' ability to serve dual patrons - local residents and visitors.

Finding a balance within Commercial's centers will largely require recognition of existing land use activities against the potential for conflict with proposed ones. For instance, particularly within Mauricetown and Port Norris new development must be sized to a scale and designed to be respectful of these areas' historical heritage. New commercial activities need to carefully sited and integrated through good design standards with their surroundings. In the Shellpile and Bivalve areas of Port Norris, commercial and industrial land use activities exist along with recreational and historic sites. Reducing conflicts between uses and integrating them and their associated activities should be possible and in so doing, re-creating a vibrant and thriving riverfront community.

### **Lineal Development**

Given the Township considerable environmental constraints most development has occurred in the three villages. But there is considerable residential and some commercial development along the major routes connecting the villages. In particular, Buckshutem Road from the Millville border south to Mauricetown - Haleyville, Ferry Road, the Port Norris to Mauricetown Road, and to a lesser degree along Steep Run and Spring Garden Road north of Haleyville. The land along Sockwell Road is also experiencing some new residential development.

Historically, much of this development was small homesteads and farms located on the lands adjacent to roads located on narrow strips of high ground. Over the years and given the limitations of wetlands, new lots have been developed. While there appears to be potential for limited new growth along these routes, environmental conditions will most likely prevent substantial development from occurring.

This lineal development while probably a technical form of sprawl is not seen as a serious threat although there is concern for maintaining agricultural tracts in some areas and their continued

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

suitability for farming. In some other cases, forest area is also possibly vulnerable to development.

### **Environmental Sensitivity**

The **Environmental Protection Plan map, Figure 8**, clearly shows the majority of the Township to be of significance for environmental reasons and as such, unsuitable for development. Large tracts of land are in public and non-profit ownership thereby further reducing lands capable of being developed. These two facts raise two land use issues which need to be addressed.

The first involves the land use decision-making process and how it addresses proposed development activity. Given the sensitive nature of Commercial's landscape, land use decisions will require a full understanding of each proposed development site's suitability. Commercial Township is a historic community with many residents well versed in the natural beauty and the land's environmental sensitivity and therefore, aware of potential adverse impacts. The community survey clearly identified the public's recognition of the Township's natural beauty. To be a vital municipality Commercial needs to be able to sustain reasonable growth and evolve. Protecting and preserving significant natural assets must be balanced with appropriate development activity.

This leads to the second issue which concerns lands in public or non-profit ownership. Already approximately 40% of the Township is removed from active use and the tax rolls. Much of that land is owned by the State or non-profit environmentally-oriented organizations and is also in large part, removed from local residents in terms of its use by them. Some lands set aside for preservation are provided with access such as the river and marsh boardwalk site at the southern end of Strawberry Avenue, south of Port Norris Village. But all too often, such is not the case with tracts posted no trespassing and sometimes even fenced. This results in a loss of community character which as noted above has demonstrated an impact of the inextricable relationship of settlements with the environment.

The community survey noted considerable local concern over the limitations imposed by such "public" ownership. Local residents and the Township government should be more involved in the stewardship of these preserved and protected lands. There also needs to be some mechanism to offset the loss of these lands from the tax rolls. While preservation and protection of these areas is a primary goal except in site specific cases, it should not preclude passive enjoyment of them by residents or visitors interested in the beauty and ecology of these areas. Perhaps such lands should be deemed parks or some special conservation areas which permit their use under guidelines and regulations.

### **Land Mining**

Commercial Township due to its geological make-up has considerable commercially important sands and gravels. Historically, earth extraction has been and continues to be the major industry employing local residents. Existing and exhausted mining sites are visible throughout the

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

Township. Active mining operations are currently largely located south of the former Winchester Western Rail Line and Highland Avenue.

At present the Township has seven active mining permits issued for operations involving three companies. Commercial has regulations governing land mining which include plans for restoration of mined lands. Unfortunately, in the past restoration was not a requirement which resulted in "moon-like landscapes" next to large, deep ponds. Today, however, land mining companies are able to restore mining sites to a variety of landscapes for any number of land use or environmental purposes. Mining regulations strictly enforce restoration of mined areas and are now more interested in returning the land to more than just a natural state.

Concern was expressed by local residents in the survey over nuisances associated with land mining including movement of the materials over local roads and about the inevitable alteration of the natural landscape resulting from earth extraction. One survey question asked whether the Township should seek to have such sites restored for use as lake-front communities. There was expressed some concern that such activity would limit access to the restored lands and created restrictive communities within the Township.

As noted above, the loss of a considerable percentage of its land area for conservation purposes raises the questions of whether current or proposed mining areas should be restored for strictly conservation purposes. Perhaps more active use of former mining sites could be developed which would provide their continued use and access to local residents. Ultimately these altered areas must be restored so why not in a way that would continue their active use by the public while also remaining on the tax rolls? More areas for natural habitat and restricted use will only further remove more land from the public's use and benefit.

A related concern involves mining rights on lands that have been purchased with tax dollars for conservation purposes. Land mining companies own mining rights on such public conservation land and are no doubt interested in exercising these rights. Allowing mining of such sites must be a joint decision by the landowner (NJDEP or other public or non-profit organization), the Township and the mining company. Land mining is an important industry which provides needed products for today's world and provides jobs, but it is also quite obviously destructive of the natural setting. For these reasons, mining on conserved land should only be permitted where there is broad support and agreement among the landowners, the public and land mining companies.

Commercial Township's neighbor Township to the west, Downe, has incorporated into its zoning ordinance regulations related to extraction industries which require that as part of any application for mining in certain zones of the Township, the applicant shall provide one of two alternatives to offset the mining impacts on publicly-owned recreational land.

1. The applicant shall set aside a designated tract of land for the development of recreational and/or ecotourism facilities for the Township, as outlined in the regulations, or
2. The applicant shall make a cash payment to the Township in lieu of the recreational set aside outlined in the Township's regulations.

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

The recreational set aside is stipulated not to be greater than three (3) acres for recreation and ecotourism facilities for every ten (10) acres to be mined and included as part the mining application. As an alternative to the recreational set-aside option, the applicant shall make a payment to the Township of \$10,000 for every acre of land that would otherwise have been included in the recreational set-aside under the formula noted above. These regulations offer a possible way of maintaining local recreational lands or lands for ecotourism that might help maintain municipal economic vitality. Since the NJDEP is the owner of the public lands, it is doubtful that such a regulation would be of value to the Township in achieving its goal of providing future access to formerly mined lands for recreation and/or ecotourism activities. But the theory and intent behind these regulations might serve as a basis for developing regulations to address the concerns noted herein above.

### **Historic Preservation**

There are a number of historically significant structures within the Township's three villages. The restored homes, old commercial structures and the picturesque churches that give character to the villages and bear witness to Commercial's maritime heritage. The relationship of the land and water is evidenced by these communities from both a historical and present day perspective. Protecting and preserving these structures is important and reinforces the local flavor of the area. By maintaining and protecting these architectural treasures Commercial can benefit from their appeal to tourists as well as local residents living in historic structures.

The Bay Discovery Project in Bivalve is a perfect example of preservation as both an educational and economic asset. The restoration of the old oyster shucking wharves and the schooner, A. J. Meerwald, docked there offer education about a very significant part of the Township's past and serve as focal points for visitors to the area interested in local history, the Maurice River, Delaware Bay, and the oyster industry.

The numerous old historic residences offer economic opportunities for their owners and the community in general. Already there are a number of antique stores within the villages. Land use planning needs to recognize the contribution these historic structures can and do make and seek to protect them while assuring they can continue to have an active role in community life. There are a number of historic site and/or structure documents including maps of the historic properties in Mauricetown available of the website of the Cumberland County Department of Planning and Development.

The Township Land Use Board should consult these identified mappings or documented historic sites or structures when reviewing development applications. Care should be taken to assure that new development is not detrimental to such sites or structures and does not create nuisances or problems for them. New development needs to blend with the old and this can be accomplished through aesthetic touches to new structures which blend, mimic or harmonize with the older structure or through careful buffering and landscaping to soften any negative impact or glaring juxtapositions of old and new architecture.

## Commercial Township Master Plan

### Population - Past and Future

The population of Commercial Township since 1930 has been increasing. Determining a area's population natural increases or decreases is revealed through records of births and deaths coupled with the impact of migration, both in and out, from the community. The patterns of Commercial Township's population appear to mirror both local and national trends.

In analyzing the population changes shown in Table LU-2 below while the overall net result has been an increasing population, the growth was marked by a notable loss in population in one decade and irregular increases for the rest. The noted loss of population between 1930 and 1940 may be assumed to be a reaction of the Great Depression. Between 1940 and 1950 Commercial saw a notable 14.7% increase population corresponding to the end of the Depression and World War II. This increase was rather large increase for such a small community. Then in 1960 the population showed an increase of only 6% and Commercial's history gives us a clue as to why these fluctuations occurred. In the 1950's the Township's main business oysters were devastated by the MSX disease. Looking back the fate of the oyster industry seems indicative of the community's population trends.

**Table LU-2 Population Changes in Commercial Township  
1930 - 2000**

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>	<u>Increase</u>	<u>Percent (%) Change</u>
1930	2,873	-	-
1940	2,822	-51	-1.8%
1950	3,238	+416	+14.7%
1960	3,244	+6	+0.2%
1970	3,667	+423	+13.0%
1980	4,674	+1,007	+27.5%
1990	5,026	+352	+7.5%
2000	5,259	+233	+4.6%

From 1970 onward growth has been continual with a noticeable spike between 1970 and 1980. It is surmised that this growth spurt occurred in connection with out-migration from Millville and other local urban areas as this period coincides with discovery of the Township's supply of old historic structures especially in Mauricetown and Port Norris. Since 1980, growth has been continual, but on a decreasing scale.

The metropolitan planning agency for Cumberland County, the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) has undertaken population projects out to the year 2525 in five-year intervals. Commercial's population is projected as follows:

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
2005	5,472
2010	5,678

## Commercial Township Master Plan

<u>Year</u>	<u>Population</u>
2015	6,024
2020	6,280
2025	6,535

Given the U.S. Census Bureau's 2003 Commercial Township population estimate of 5,325 persons, the Township could expect an increase of more than 1,201 persons over the next twenty years. They would require 432 additional housing units using average household sizes from the last census figures. There were 2,171 units including occupied and vacant in the Township according to the 2000 Census. The 2000 Census showed a total of 298 vacant units. It is therefore, quite possible that the Township can accommodate some of that projected increase without substantial use of vacant land.

Of concern would be the ability of the Township to accommodate future increases in terms of the significant areas of environmentally sensitive lands and the difficulty of increasing the centers' density without provision of public sanitary sewers and/or water supply systems. There would also be increases in the school population along with a need for parks and recreation facilities, increased road construction and maintenance, and other services and facilities.

### **A Build Out Analysis**

Recognizing existing land use, an analysis of the number of acres available in each of the Township's existing zoning districts for future development was undertaken. Overall it was determined that approximately 1,067.58± acres of land were vacant and suitable for development. To determine the amount of land still available for development, the analysis considered all environmentally sensitive lands such as wetlands and lands already preserved for conservation, open space or preserved farmland and all land that were already developed. The vacant, useable (not environmentally sensitive) land was considered for what it would yield under current zoning.

Where residential development is currently permitted in Commercial Township, it was determined that there were a total of 984.32± acres available. To analyze the build out potential, the total undeveloped acres in each zone were decreased by at least 15% for roads, stormwater management and other required utilities.

This exercise is intended to give some idea of what the extent of full development would be if all lands capable or able to support development would be under the existing zone plan. The analysis is a planning tool only and does not accurately reflect what will or will not actually occur. Obviously, too many variables exist when considering land use decisions to give any true figures.

After taking into account anticipated provision of roads or other required infrastructure or open spaces, it appears theoretically under the current zoning total potential residential units possible might be in the range of 3,971 or 3,960. When considering nonresidential development a calculation of land available and the permitted building coverage anticipated by existing zoning

## Commercial Township Master Plan

regulations would indicate a potential build out with an additional 421,704 square feet of nonresidential development.

The estimate for residential units is no doubt too high since without public sewer and water supply high density apartment or townhouse projects of this size could not be built and the small lot sizes within the villages would create septic problems as well. One small townhouse project was erected in the Township, but did not have the density permitted by the existing zoning. The number of duplex units would also likely encounter wastewater disposal problems and would not yield the permitted density. It is also noted that within Laurel Lake there may be land available but not of sufficient size to permit a house. Since this is merely an exercise to "suppose" build out of the community, it might be more realistic to anticipate 3,000 plus new units under current zoning.

Multiplying this figure of 3,000 by the average household size of 2.8 would represent a population increase of 8,400 persons. When added to the estimated 2003 population of 5,325 would generate a total population at build out of 13,725. There are also extensive areas of the Township which as shown on the **Environmental Protection Plan** cannot bear development. Much of these lands are wet, but it is possible that specific on-site mapping could allow for a slight increase in overall areas able to support housing dependent upon on-site septic disposal and potable water supply.

This exercise is intended to show the effect of the existing zoning in terms of the future development of the Township. It is not a very accurate method, but does offer a concern as to how the Township might be impacted if developed to its currently zoned capacity. Of course there are a number of variables involved that such development would occur. They include any of the following:

- A change in market demand or lot size

- A change in the size of household which could decrease or increase the number of persons per unit

- The preservation of farmland

- Open space acquisition

- Changes in regulations including water withdrawal allowances, wetlands parameters, septic system designs or other similar environmentally-related restrictions

- And perhaps most important of all, a change in zoning which would change the entire equation

Thus what appears possible with present conditions might not happen based on possible changes to the land available for development, the desire or need for housing and at what size depending on the household, or on the regulations governing the use of the land. Commercial Township and its residents are able to impact some of the conditions which determine what the Township

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

might become over time. Many of the conditions that will affect housing development are not within the Township's control. Without a doubt as the record shows, the Township's population will continue to grow and the community must set policies now for how it wants the Township to look 20 years down the road.

Given Commercial Township's natural conditions, it is unlikely that such an increase in the population could occur. It does show that the Township theoretically could be developed to a population size that would require considerable new services and public facilities. It also shows that the more centered growth of today could be more dispersed and therefore, threatening to Commercial Township's significant natural environment and open spaces. It further demonstrates the need to center future growth into centers and in the rural areas through clustering.

### **Future Land Use**

In determining how the Township should develop over the next twenty years based on its community vision and goals and objectives coupled with its existing land use patterns as noted above, there are several specific issues which are paramount. First and foremost is Commercial Township's diverse and significant natural environment. These include its extensive coastal areas, its extensive wetlands, special habitats and areas of biodiversity and the industries that have developed there based on the area's natural resources: land mining, shell fishing, and farming.

The existing development patterns have been shaped by this natural environment and over the last twenty years by State policies and programs aimed at preserving and protecting that environment. Already coastal area and wetlands regulations have significantly limited where and the extent of development that is possible. Public and non-profit purchases of forests, wetlands and coastal areas have occurred further reducing the amount of land available although much of that land was not suitable to development due to environmental constraints.

The extractive industries seeking the high quality sands and gravels found in the Township have also had a major impact on the community's development as seen on **Figure 9, Existing Land Use** map. Large swaths of the community have been altered by land mining and although they are being restored it is usually as passive open space.

It might be said that Nature has in large part already planned Commercial Township. The Township's development pattern has been shaped by and around the natural conditions historically recognized by those who settled there. This fact will continue to influence, if not dictate, development decisions in recognition of the importance of the natural environment we as a society have come to understand and value.

### **Centered Development**

Over half of the Township's population lives in the three villages. The rest live along the roads connecting these villages. It is anticipated that the villages can accommodate much of the anticipated new growth that will occur in the next twenty years. This fact could be even more

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

certain if public sanitary sewer and/or potable water supply was provided to these villages. Therefore, the Township's development pattern can be seen as "centered."

Within the environs there is land available for future growth and as was noted, existing development has been along roadways that connect the villages. There have also been isolated clusters of development occurring where the natural environment permitted. In making land use decisions for the areas outside the villages the emphasis again should be to center new development rather than allow it to occur indiscriminately. Clustering should be mandatory in much of the Township on tracts of 30 acres or more. This would assure open space and protect existing agriculture and environmentally sensitive lands.

### **Protection of the Natural Heritage**

Conservation remains an important concern with regard to land use planning as set forth in the **Environmental Protection Plan**. The scenic beauty of this coastal community is evident from many vantage points. The diversity of the native and migratory wildlife and their habitats, the variety of landscapes: wetlands, forests, farms, lakes and ponds need protection. It is this natural landscape that has shaped Commercial's development and character.

This conservation must be balanced with the interests and concerns of landowners. Land use decisions must be made in light of existing regulations and developments. It is also important that conservation must not be allowed to "quarantine" or lock up the land from the public use.

### **Village Growth**

The high density permitted within the Township's three villages should allow for the absorption of much of the anticipated future growth. But in doing so, the development must be of a character and size so that the individual character of each village will be maintained. The historic heritage of the older villages, the lakeside residential atmosphere of Laurel Lake, and the scale or size of structures and land use activities within the Township's settled centers need to be preserved as new growth occurs.

Additional parks, playgrounds, walking and biking trails, community focal points and other public amenities such as the recent Main Street project in Port Norris, can help to sustain the community's identity and sense of place. This will become even more important as these communities grow. To accommodate that growth even higher densities will be necessary and can be accomplished if they are properly located, designed to blend in with existing development and will not diminish or impair the residents' vision of their locality.

Provision of public sanitary sewer and/or potable water supply would offer economic development potential, greater flexibility in accommodating new growth in the village centers and most importantly address serious problems with on-site disposal of septic effluent. Every effort should be made to provide the installation of such system(s) designed to support the limited population concentrations these villages can reasonably support without loss of their character. The U.S. Census Bureau identifies 55.7% of Commercial's population as living inside

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

“urban clusters,” meaning the three villages. The goal of this plan is that these villages retain their character while allowing for future growth.

It is recommended that both Mauricetown – Haleyville and Port Norris may need expanded designated village boundaries in order to accommodate additional growth in the future. The Haleyville portion of Mauricetown-Haleyville appears able to expand north, south and west. The western end of Port Norris could be expanded along both Strawberry Avenue and the Port Norris – Dividing Creek Road. This recommendation is made to support the idea of keeping the Township’s future growth centered. Future land use decisions in these possible expansion areas should be carefully made to assure that any permitted development does not alter future inclusion into the village.

### **Non-Residential Development**

The majority of commercial activities within the Township are located within the villages and industrial activities are has as already been noted natural resource industries: earth extraction, farming and shell fishing. The population of the Township and the natural environment are not conducive to the development of either extensive commercial or industrial development. The lack of sewer and water infrastructure also limits the size and type of businesses that could be accommodated.

It is anticipated that the natural industries will continue into the foreseeable future and be the mainstays of the community’s economy. It is also recommended that land use policies encourage ecotourism and the recreational, sporting, nature-related and services businesses for visitors.

Zoning regulations should provide for retail and service facilities that are sized and designed into the village settings. “Big box” stores or highway business-type development is not recommended. Small shops, home businesses, and small scale development would best be able to be accommodated into the villages’ settings. The riverfront in Shellpile and Bivalve are best suited to take more intense commercial and industrial development but only as it relates to the shell fishing industry and ecotourism. Even within these sections of the village of Port Norris, protection of the historic character of these settlements needs to be retain along with a balancing the mix of uses and people utilizing them.

### **The Plan’s Land Use Classifications**

Developing a land use plan means encompassing a variety of policies, issues, assumptions, and pertinent facts to arrive at a recommended use of the land. The findings of the municipal survey and the vision of the community’s future, the goals and objectives laid out in this plan, good planning principals including an emphasis on Smart Growth and the findings of the other plan studies included as part of this master plan were used to determine the best use of Commercial Township’s land. **Figure 10 Land Use Plan** graphically identifies the proposed uses of land proposed by this Master Plan.

Specifically, the Land Use Plan as shown was based on the following assumptions and goals:

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

Protect and preserve the Township's significant environmentally sensitive areas

Recognize the importance of villages and their character especially in terms of scale of development and their historic heritage

Assure that development intensity was consistent with the natural capacity of the land

Provide for a variety of land uses including residential development and in particular affordable housing

Promote the continued viability of agriculture and protect it from undue intrusion by non-agrarian development

Insure the continued viability of the traditional natural resource industries with the intent encouraging their integration into the community with the future sustainable use

Encourage public land use that will meet the needs and goals for services and facilities to support the population

Recognize previous planning goals and objectives and a continuity of land use regulation consistent with current realities

The following land use categories are proposed:

### **Conservation**

There are two categories proposed under the heading of "conservation." The first involves the extensive land holdings of the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection and to a less degree the Township. These holdings are shown under the category "Public Conservation/Recreation" and are intended to show the permanency of their preservation while encouraging their continued appropriate use by the public. Land uses permitted on such designated lands would include those consistent with land conservation such as parks, interpretive centers, trails, wildlife sanctuaries, nature observatories and similar land use.

This category is also intended to serve as an "anchor," so to speak, for the second category Conservation category.

The second land use category is simply given the title "Conservation" and includes lands which are identified on the **Environmental Protection Plan** and other relevant areas that are worthy of preservation and protection due to their environmental sensitivity. In many cases, the development of these lands is precluded by existing regulations.

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

The lands designated "Conservation" is not owned by the public although some are owned by quasi-public organizations dedicated to nature conservation. Land use activities within this designation area would include those permitted in the "Public Conservation/Recreation" areas. Since some lands in this category are privately owned and include isolated parcels of land not necessarily environmentally significant other uses would be allowed. Residential use would be permitted on three acre lots. Other principal uses might include parks, conservation and recreational areas.

Conditionally, the "Conservation" designated areas might permit the conversion of existing dwellings and site specific uses like studios and workshops, telecommunications facilities, and roadside stands or artisan's displays. These conditional land use activities would be most suited to lands located on existing roadways and which can identify sufficient uplands that is also not otherwise environmentally sensitive.

Overall the designation of conservation indicates that the land is worthy of protection and preservation. Development would be subject to proper permitting in the case of wetlands or design criteria relevant to coastal areas as regulated by the N.J. Department of Environmental Protection. Municipal development regulations should require appropriate field verification of sensitive environmental characteristics as well as appropriate environmental impact statements where conditions so warrant. The Land Use Plan's depiction of environmentally sensitive lands is to be viewed as a general location which must be verified during the development review process. This aspect of the Land Use Plan pertains to all land use categories depicted not just those denoted by the term "conservation."

### **Agriculture**

A land use category related to conservation and intended to recognize existing agriculture areas and maintain their open character while permitting some development is designated "Agricultural." Although farming would be permitted in all zoning districts on lots that meet farmland assessment regulations, areas so designated as "Agricultural" would also permit limited residential and related uses. Minimum lot size for residences is recommended to be 3 acres and any tracts of land of 30 acres or more in size would require clustering to develop. Similar permitted and conditional uses as called for in the Conservation designations would also be recommended. Lands designated for use as "Agricultural" are intended to of course, permit a farm homestead (the farm house).

This land use category could conditionally permit animal-related land use activities like kennels, riding academies, or animal hospitals or shelters. Recreational clubs, lodges or assembly halls would also be suitable conditional uses along with those uses associated with existing residences like conversions, studio or workshop, roadside stands or artisan displays and similar uses.

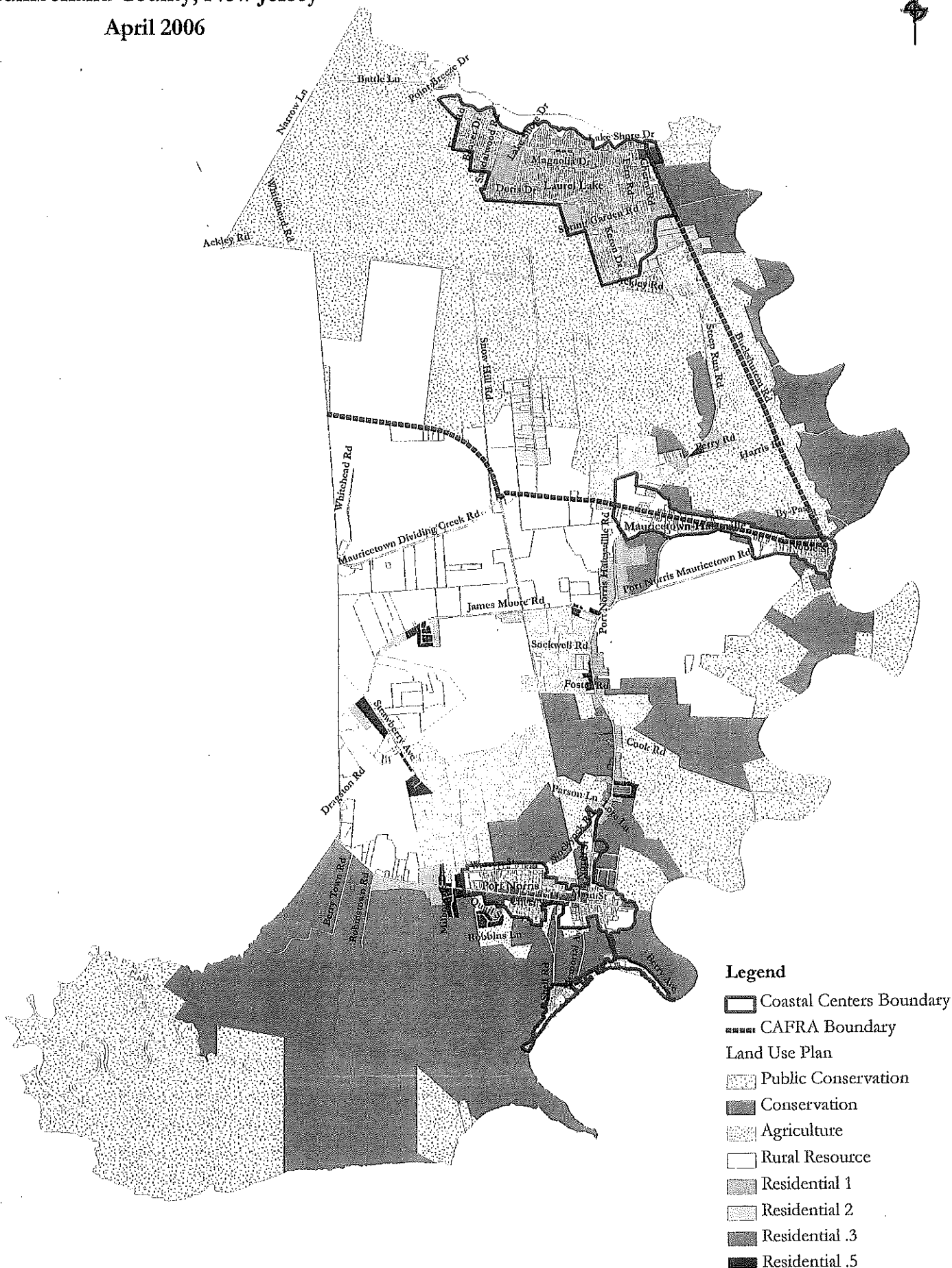
### **Residential Categories**

Residentially classified areas shown on the **Land Use Plan** are in large measure a response to existing residential development at similar densities as opposed to encouraging new development. In some cases, some vacant land within or immediately adjacent to such existing

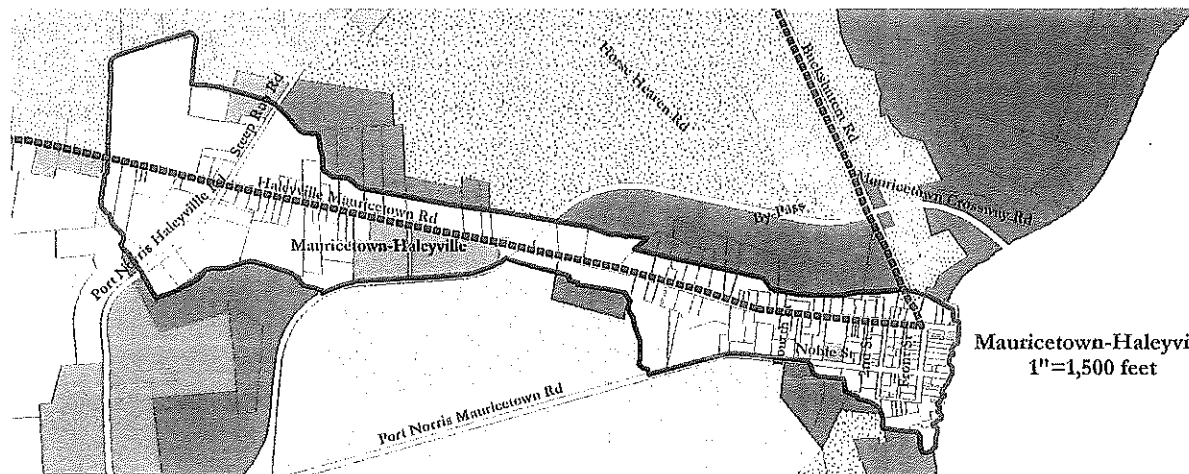
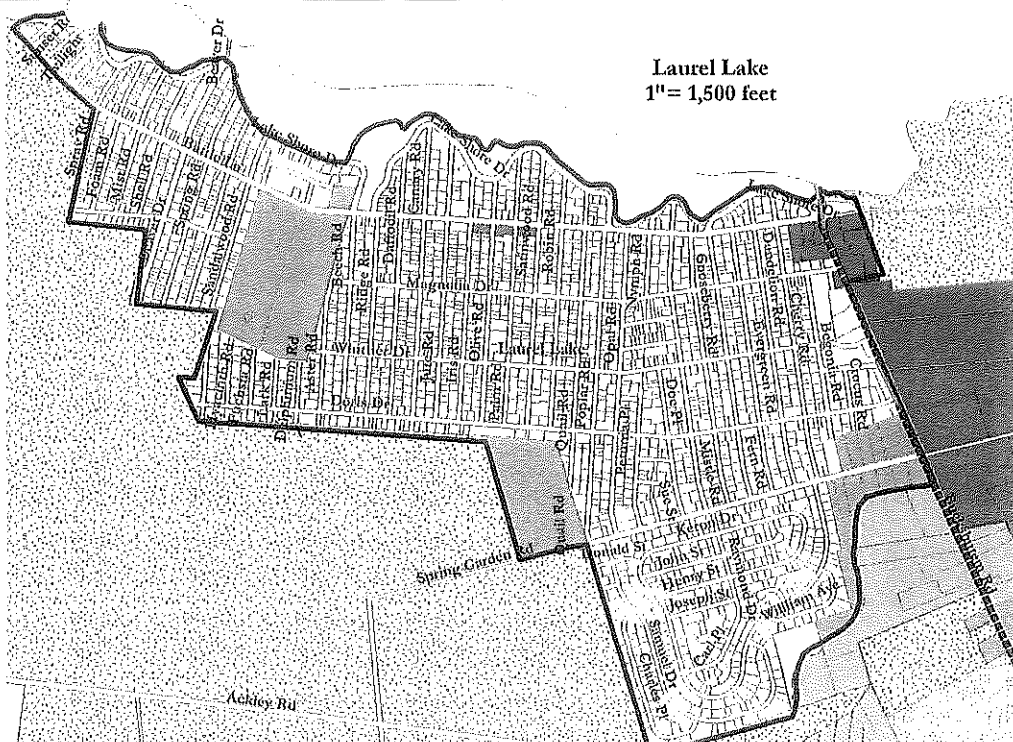
## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

### **Figure 10 Land Use Plan**

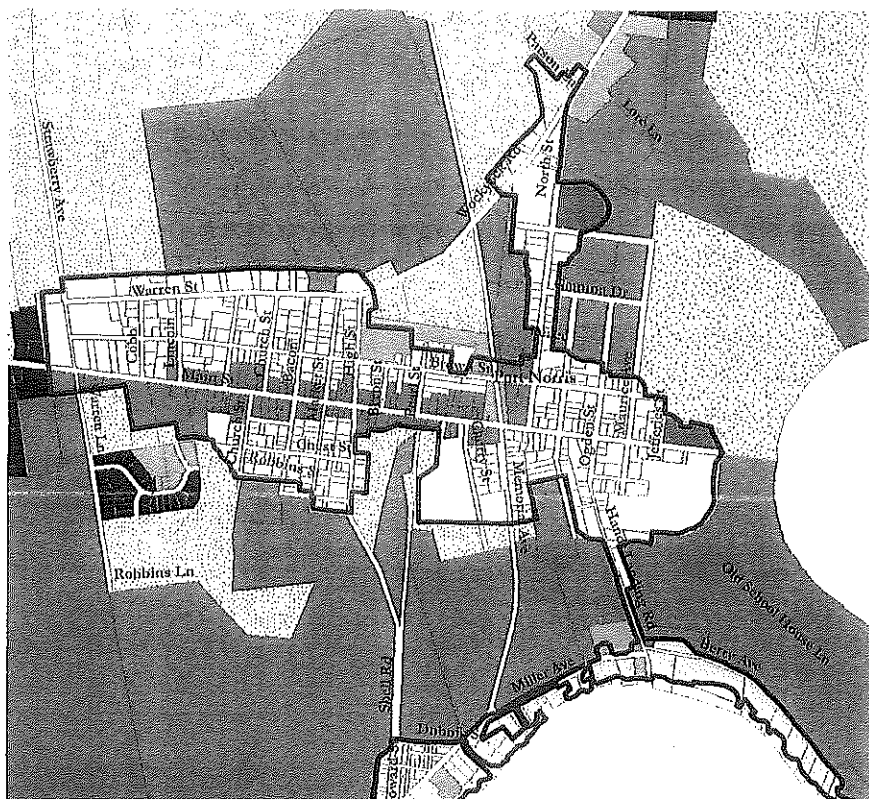
**Figure 10**  
**Land Use Plan Map**  
 Commercial Township  
 Cumberland County, New Jersey  
 April 2006



Laurel Lake  
1"= 1,500 feet



Mauricetown-Haleyville  
1"=1,500 feet



**Figure 10**  
**Land Use Plan**  
**Centers Detail Map**  
**Commercial Township**  
**Cumberland County, New Jersey**  
**April 2006**

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

development is included. Overall intent of the plan is that growth be centered thus the intent of allowing similar development where it current exist. The **Land Use Plan** identifies five residential classifications. Four of them are shown outside the villages.

### **Residential.3**

The Township has a number of developments which have occurred outside the villages on very small lots. This classification would recognize these existing settlements and allowing development on lots of 15,000 square feet in area. An analysis of such existing small lots indicates that there are lots which do not meet this area requirement. But on-site analysis of conditions will have to determine whether such existing lots can be utilized. Farming would of course be permitted and a variety of home or residential-related land use activities might be allowed again subject to the small lot size considerations. Uses related to residential uses as noted in the Agricultural land use category description might also be permitted site conditions so allowing.

### **Residential.5**

This land use classification also addresses a similar number of existing lots with a total area of slightly less or more than one-half an acre. Areas with such existing lots are recommended to permit a single-family house on a lot with 22,000 square feet in area. This classification is aimed at addressing existing development generally of this size and to permit some limited development of such lots, but on a very limited basis. Again, it is important to emphasize the need to determine site suitability for on-site septic disposal and water supply when reviewing proposals for such development.

### **Residential.1**

The Port Norris – Mauricetown Road, Strawberry Avenue and James Moore Road all have a number of existing lots of plus or minus one acre sized lots along them. This classification permitting a single-family house on one acre parcels addresses these existing developments and would permit some very limited new ones to be created adjacent to the existing ones. The design intent is to permit additional similar sized new lots to be created was determined by adjacent developable land of limited size usually less than ten acres.

These four (4) classifications of proposed residential development are primarily intended to address existing conditions and are not seen as creating substantial new development or noticeable increase in the sprawl or the existing development pattern. It is further recommend that development regulations permit use of existing lots of record at the time adoption of said regulations to be used for a permitted use even though they have insufficient required lot area if they have road frontage and can meet the setback requirements.

### **Village Residential**

An analysis of lot sizes was conducted within the three villages to determine the average for existing lots. It appeared that 20,000 square foot lots were an appropriate size and consistent

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with existing developed lots. Laurel Lake had smaller lot sizes, but septic system problems would seem to support increasing lot sizes to the 20,000 square foot area requirement and it would make all of the villages consistent in their residential lot sizes.

Recognizing the villages as "centers" this Plan envisions permitting a variety of uses normally associated or deemed compatible with residential development including churches, education, civic and cultural uses, cemeteries and parks, recreational areas. Based on conditions, this land use designation would allow home-based business activities of suitable size and character along with nursery and pre-school day care facilities.

### **Non-Residential Land Uses**

#### **Village Business**

This land use classification would permit businesses within the three villages at a scale and intensity intended to serve the village's residents' and visitors' needs. Lot sizes would be the same as for residential lots, 20,000 square feet. Business activities suitable to the village character would be small retail shops and stores and various services establishments including professional offices. Educational, civic, historical and cultural uses might be suitable along with public offices, parks and recreational or open space areas or facilities, and. This land use category would also permit single-family, detached dwellings and churches or places of worship as conditional uses.

Development regulations should specify the size and scope of business activities to be permitted to again maintain the village character and density of development which include both residential and business uses. It is recommended that village oriented retail uses be of low intensity in terms of septic system requirements and primarily be sized to serve the needs of the village's residents and expected visitors. It is recognized that special eco-tourism events might swell such visitors to the village, but such periodic surges should not be used to justify businesses normally found along major highways or of a size in terms of structure that is commensurate with existing residential and business structures in the village.

#### **C/R Commercial/Recreation**

This land use classification would include the entire waterfront along the Maurice River and other upland in Shellpile and Bivalve. The classification is intended to accommodate both commercial and industrial uses which currently exist there and which would be encouraged to remain, expand or allow new similar uses. Thus shell fish processing, marinas, restaurants, museums, research centers, stores and service businesses would all be suitable for this land use category. The emphasis would be to encourage and facilitate the two main industries associated with waterfront and River, commercial fishing and recreation.

#### **Rural Resource**

The area encompassing the existing land mining activity within the Township as well as those areas where mining rights exist would compose this land use classification. It would replace the

## **Commercial Township Master Plan**

Township's existing M-E Mining Extraction classification. As this area is diverse in environmental sensitivity so too are the land use that might be permitted including farming and some residential uses. Minimum lot sizes for residential uses would be four acres. This land use category would also encourage the use of restored mined land for other uses including residential, active and passive recreation or other suitable uses subject to characteristics of the land, i.e., environmental sensitivity.

The intent and objective would be to utilize these formerly mined lands which are drastically altered from the land's natural state. It is recommended that these lands be evaluated during the development review process so that a suitable use for the restored lands can be accomplished when mining ceases on them. The type of use and its intensity would be determined by the land and its surroundings. The types of permitted land uses should be broad enough within a given range of activities to offer more active use of such former mined sites.

This land use category might also permit conservation land uses, open space and recreational uses such as parks and playgrounds, public educational, cultural or civic uses, lumber and wood chipping or shredding operations on minimum tracts of 20 acres, and garden centers, nurseries or similar horticultural uses.

Conditionally, this land use category might permit animal-related land use activities such as kennels or animal hospitals or shelters, recreational clubs, lodges or assembly halls, and uses related to residential use like roadside stands or artisan displays. Of course earth extraction would be a conditional use and tracts of 30 acres or more would be required to be planned residential cluster developments.

### **Public**

This land use category would identify land use activities devoted to public purposes and owned and operated by a public agency such as schools, municipal buildings and parks and recreational areas or other public uses.

### **River Conservation and Flood Plain**

The Land Use Plan proposes the retaining of the River Conservation and Flood Plain District as an overlay zone as was originally established in 1992. This overlay district is as noted in its establishment is "...to provide for the protection of the natural resources of the Maurice River and its tributaries while providing regulations for the future development of the adjacent area. It is based on the **Local Management Plan for the Maurice River and Its Tributaries**, prepared and adopted by the Cumberland County Planning Board and the Commercial Township Land Use Board.

### **Future Development**

This Plan has already analyzed the possible impact of current on zoning on development activity that might be reasonably expected. It is therefore, important that this Plan's proposals for future land use be similarly reviewed in order to determine anticipated impacts.

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### **Land Use Plan Build Out Analysis**

The **Land Use Plan** element as noted above, has attempted to identify those areas unsuited to development and to permit development within those areas of the municipality which appears from the general analysis of conditions to permit development to occur. Of course, as part of the land development regulatory process, any application for development would have to be site specific in terms of identifying any areas unsuited to development and assuring that the site in question could bear the land use activities proposed. A build out analysis was performed on the land use plan to determine how much development (residential units and nonresidential square footage) could be accommodated by the Plan's proposed land use designation. Overall there were approximately 861.76± acres available for development based on the **Land Use Plan's** designations.

The analysis showed that the **Land Use Plan** would result in a build out for residential units of approximately 1,549. This is substantially less than the current zoning and reflects this Plan's recognition of the natural conditions. It is again just an exercise subject to a number of variables now and over time, but it does show the Plan's impact on what development might be permitted or anticipated. It is assumed as in the analysis performed for the existing zoning that in a number of instances the same existing conditions of land configuration or natural conditions might allow substantially more or less units for particular zoning districts. The majority of the residential growth would occur under this Plan would be within the centers, the Township's three villages.

As for nonresidential development would also be largely confined to the villages or centers of the community and would equal approximately 108,160 square feet. Again as in the residential analysis there could be additional commercial development within the village residential areas given the Plan's emphasis on home based businesses and the possibility that some of the other zoning district might experience the same type of activity including already developed areas. But it is not anticipated that such nonresidential development would come close to the anticipated nonresidential perhaps possible under current regulations. In both the residential and non-residential categories the buildout is substantially less than anticipated under current zoning.

This type of analysis is not exact by any measure, but an exercise to judge what the land use plan's outcome might be. This Plan appears from the exercise to have recognized the community's natural assets and proposed a future development scheme commensurate with it.

It should also be noted that development will also be impacted by the River Conservation Overlay District north of the Mauricetown Bridge since the size of lots for residential development within the overlay district increase in size.

### **Plan Consistency**

The New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law stipulates in N.J.S.A. 40:55D-29 that:

“[t]he Master Plan shall include a specific policy statement indicating the relationship of the proposed development of the municipality, as developed

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in the master plan to (1) the master plans of contiguous municipalities, (2) the master plan of the county in which the municipality is located, (3) the State Development and Redevelopment Plan adopted pursuant to the "State Planning Act" section 1 through 12 of P.L. 1985, c. 398 (C. 52:18A-196 et seq.), and (4) the district solid waste management plan required pursuant to the provisions of the "Solid Waste Management Act," P.L. 1970, c. 39 (C.131E.1 et seq.) of the county in which the municipality is located."

### **Surrounding Municipalities:**

#### **Downe Township**

Along the entire western border of Commercial Township is the Township of Downe. Within Downe Township, the zoning of land adjacent to Commercial is primarily related to extractive industries. From the right-of-way of the former rail line north the land is zoned M-2 Extractive Industries/Public Use/Public Use which permits minimum lot sizes of 25 acres. This zone allows as the same permitted principal uses as the C-1 Zone which are single-family, detached residences and agricultural uses. As conditional uses, the M-2 Zone allows resource extraction subject to complying with a number of conditions related to environmental consideration and the establishment of recreational and ecotourism benefits. Additionally, as a conditional use the M-2 Zoning District permits essential utilities.

The land within Commercial Township adjacent to this M-2 Extractive Industries/Public Use Zone in Downe Township is proposed as PC Public Conservation from Ackley Road north to the Township border with Millville, and RR Rural Resource south of Ackley Road to the railroad right-of-way. The PC land use category proposes primarily conservation and recreational land use activities along with agriculture. The RR Zone permits general purpose agriculture, conservation, recreational and open space land uses, public education, civic and cultural uses, single-family, detached dwellings, garden centers, nurseries or similar uses and lumber, wood chipping or shredding operations as permitted use. As conditional use the zone permits kennels and animal-related land use activities, planned residential clusters, clubs, lodges or assembly halls, resource extraction and a number of uses intended to be in conjunction with existing residential uses like roadside stands and studios and workshops.

It is not anticipated that there will be any conflicts between the proposed land use activities in Commercial and the existing zoning in Downe Township due to a number of reasons including the extensive wooded areas, requirements for vegetative buffers for extractive industries and the limited extent of the RR District along the border with the M-2 Zone in Downe Township. As will be seen, the RR Rural Resource land use designation in Commercial is very similar to the RR Rural Residential zoning in Downe thereby establishing similar compatible land use activity on both sides of the border. The one exception is the permitting of earth extraction within the RR Rural Resource land use category in Commercial.

From the railroad right-of-way south to just below Dividing Creek Road, the land in Downe Township adjacent to Commercial Township is zoned R-1 Rural Residential which permits as principal uses: single-family, detached dwellings, customary and conventional farming

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operations and farm dwellings, municipal buildings, parks and playgrounds and golf courses, private outdoor parks and recreational areas and golf courses and essential utilities. Conditional uses permitted are cluster developments. Minimum lot sizes for single-family detached dwellings is one (1) acre and six (6) acres for agricultural uses, parks and recreational facilities and excluding campgrounds, and are required to have a minimum of ten (10) acres.

Within Commercial Township the RR Rural Resource is opposite the R-1 Rural Residential Zoning District in Downe and as has been noted these two districts are very similar in the land use activities which they would encourage and permit with the exception of the Rural Resource land use category permits resource extraction. But again it is noted that extensive natural vegetative buffers are required so conflict should be greatly reduced.

Below the R-1 Rural Residence Zoning District is the M-1 Extractive Industries Zoning District within Downe Township. Like the M-2 Zoning District discussed above, the M-1 also permits all uses allowed in the C-1 Zoning District as principal uses and as conditional uses sand and gravel extraction and processing and related activities and essential utilities. Minimum lot size is 25 acres.

Across the border in Commercial from Port Norris to Dividing Creek Road north the zoning is RR Rural Residence and south of Port Norris to Dividing Creek Road the zoning is adjacent to Downe's M-1 Zone is Commercial's Conservation land use category. Commercial's RR land use category was discussed above. The Conservation category would permit those land use activities related to general purpose agriculture, water, forest, wildlife conversation areas and environmental research activities, parks, playgrounds and open space and recreational uses, public education, civic and cultural uses, single-family, detached dwellings, and churches or places of worship. Conditionally, the Conservation land use category permits animal related land use activities like kennels or animal hospitals, recreational clubs, lodges or assembly halls, other land use activities normally related to single-family, detached dwellings. Minimum lot size recommended for the land use category is three (3) acres.

While there might appear to be some conflict between the land use activities of the Conservation land use designation and the M-1 Zone across the municipal border from each other, it is not anticipated since the lands in this area within Commercial Township along the border are mostly vacant and are either wetlands or saline marsh.

The remainder of the lands along these two municipalities borders is zoned R-1 Rural Resource in Downe and in Commercial Conservation. Within Commercial the lands along the border in this area are either owned by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection or are saline marshlands. Conflicts between land use activities as proposed or permitted in the two Townships are not anticipated.

### **City of Millville**

To the north of Commercial Township is the City of Millville. Both Laurel Lake and the Village of Laurel Lake are bisected by the municipal boundary. Along the lake shore in the Laurel Lake Village section of Millville the zoning is R-10 Residential which according to the City's Land

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Use Plan Element permits 4-5 units/acre. This area is considered outside the City's center and is not served by city sewer. There does not appear to be any conflict as the Village of Laurel Lake is recognized as a designated center and includes both the portions in the two municipalities. The Lake separates the residential areas across the border offering additional buffering between the two settlements.

As part of the 1990 City Master Plan a study of soils characteristics within its portion of Laurel Lake Village was undertaken to identify soils unsuitable or problematic for on-site septic disposal due shallow depth to the water table. A Critical Soils overlay zoning district was enacted to require that minimum lot sizes be tied to the depth to the shallow water table. Minimum lot sizes vary from 20,000 square feet for lots with 4 or more feet to the shallow water table to 50,000 square feet for lots having only one foot to the shallow water table.

Further to the northwest along the Buckshutem Swamp beginning at the head of Laurel Lake, the zoning changes to LC Land Conservation. This zoning is intended to recognize the extensive public and nonprofit land holdings in this area including the Edward G. Bevans Wildlife Management Area which straddles the border between Millville and Commercial Township. As the Commercial Township side of the border is proposed for Public Conservation there should be no conflict between the two communities land use areas. Just to the northeast of this zoning district is the POS Public Open Space Zoning District which includes more publicly owned open space lands.

There have been concerns over the City's recent establishment a planned commercial development within I-3 Airport Industry Zones which are located further northwest on the north side of Buckshutem Road. This new zone would be identified as the Airport Motorsports/Entertainment District. In particular, fears were expressed by residents of Laurel Lake over the noise from the raceway(s). The City has reached agreement with parties opposed to the new district including a cessation of all racing at sunset. For the most part, the zoning along the border with the City of Millville is consistent.

### **Township of Maurice River**

Maurice River Township is located opposite Commercial Township across the Maurice River for its entire distance. The two municipalities are separated by the river and its many areas of tidal and saline marshes which are quite extensive in various areas such as along the Mauricetown Causeway connecting the two municipalities and in the lower reaches of the river as turns towards Shellpile and Bivalve and below. There is therefore considerable natural buffering between the two communities.

Additionally, the zoning along the Maurice River Township side of the River is remarkably similar to that in Commercial with conservation or village type zoning districts. The most visible land use activities seen along the eastern shore of the river from Commercial are those uses related to water like marinas, ship and boat repair, and some residential uses. This is similar to the view of Commercial Township from various vantage points along the Maurice River Township side. Both municipalities have adopted the Local Management Plan for the Maurice River and Its Tributaries and the Plan's river conservation overlay zone which further protects

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the impacts of development on the river and for that matter the effects of development on the two municipalities sharing the river's banks. The zoning of the two municipalities is consistent.

### **Cumberland County**

The Township land use plan is consistent with policies and plans prepared by the Cumberland County Planning Board with respect to recognizing environmental constraints to development, promoting ecotourism, centering development within the three villages and encouraging commercial activity within the villages commensurate in scale and type of activity needed within the densely populated areas.

### **Western/Southern Cumberland Region Plan**

Both the Commercial Township Master Plan Conservation and Land Use Plan elements appear consistent with the strategies set forth in the Western/Southern Cumberland Regional Plan. Development is centered and land use activity is designed to be consistent with the ability of land to accommodate it dependent upon the land being able to accommodate it environmentally and that once developed, the impact would not be harmful to the existing natural conditions. The Master Plan encourages ecotourism, preservation of the environment and agriculture, clustering of residential development outside centers, and the continuation of traditional ongoing natural industries like earth extraction, shell fishing and agriculture.

### **State Development and Redevelopment Plan**

As delineated on the last adopted State Plan, Commercial Township had parks and open space or conservation areas, rural planning areas and environmentally sensitive planning areas along with three centers: Laurel Lake, Mauricetown/Haleyville and Port Norris (including Shellpile and Bivalve). As noted above the Land Use Plan recognizes these areas and calls for centered development within centers, protection of environmentally sensitive lands, permits development activity commensurate with and protective of natural features of the land. The only inconsistency in the Land Use Plan might be the recognition of existing lineal development along major roadways which have historically occurred where permitted by natural conditions. The Plan continues to recognize such areas, but requires strict compliance with land use regulations intended to protect the environment and to assure development can be supported on the land for which it is proposed.

### **County Solid Waste Management Plan**

The Township is in compliance with the Cumberland County Solid Waste Management Plan including provisions regarding recycling.

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### **Economic Development Plan**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of an economic development plan is to consider all aspects of economic development and sustained economic vitality, including assuring that the type of economic development will be relevant to the area in terms of the area's labor pool and in determining the stability and diversity of the economic development to be promoted. In short, this requires finding the right businesses suited to the area in terms of offering job for and finding a labor pool to sustain the businesses and that the area can accommodate such businesses which will prove sufficient to assure jobs, businesses and revenues. For Commercial Township the task will be find those business activities suited to its natural and man-made environment. Most growth needs to be accommodated within the community's three villages: Port Norris and including Bivalve and Shellpile, Mauricetown/ Haleyville and Laurel Lake.

To accomplish this task of providing for the community's economic development we must obviously take a look at the community's historic economies, natural conditions and the labor force. The survey of the community which initiated this master planning project offers key insights into some of these issues as do the findings and recommendations of the Environmental Protection and Land Use Plan elements. The responses to the questionnaire sent to every homeowner in the Township provided a community snapshot of current thinking on a number of issues. The returned response represented 8% of the total mailings. Specific economic issues were addressed in the questionnaire, such as growth, sand mining operations, increased commercial development, loss of tax revenue on non-profit and state purchased lands, sprawl, increasing [tax] ratables and the development of ecotourism.

#### **The Community Natural Setting**

The overwhelming response by the residents and/or property owners reflected their understanding that the Township provides a unique rural environment in which to live and raise a family. The majority of residents felt that the natural environment, the community's heritage and the area's (Bayshore) cultural traditions should be protected and preserved, while still desiring controlled and limited development. There was a consensus that growth should take place in the designated centers of the Township (the three villages).

The Environmental Protection element of this Master Plan clearly identifies the significant areas of environmentally sensitivity of the community's landscape and shorelines. The highest single response (63%) to the survey's questions indicated the public's strong agreement to the statement *"I would like to see more open space and limited development but only within the designated centers."*

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The extensive land holdings within the Township's that are owned, controlled or restricted by public policy severely limits land which can be utilized or developed for economic activity. Vast tracts are owned outright by the Department of Environmental Protection, State Game Land Preserves, private land trusts and conservation agencies, and/or regulated by coastal areas protection (CAFRA), wetlands or other State mandated areas restricted in terms of land use activity due to their natural sensitivity and resource.

Such regulatory measures and the vast amount of nontaxable lands create major economic hardship for the community in terms of lost tax revenues and the increased cost to maintain existing as well as developing needed and required new infrastructure.

### **Existing Economy**

Commercial Township contains a variety of businesses which provide employment to both local residents and individuals from the surrounding communities which are based upon the natural resources of the community. These include earth (sand) extraction, oyster and shellfish harvesting, seafood processing and both commercial and recreational fishing activities related to the Delaware Bay. Rutgers University operates a marine research facility and the State Police operate a marine facility along the Bay in Shellpile. In addition, there are a number water related recreational businesses and historical attractions catering to tourists, such boat rentals, historic nautical museums, Bay sightseeing tours, restaurants, antique and small gift stores. There are also limited agricultural activities which remain viable including grain, salt hay, and nursery stock. These activities represent the historic and traditional industries of the Township.

Many of these industries are facing difficulties. Land mining activities require large acreages to obtain the particular products required by the market. They also create major alteration of the landscape which even though they are required to be restored result in permanent changes to the landscape due to the nature of the operation and creation of large, deep ponds. Their encroachment closer to existing villages tends to naturally create conflicts. The continued economic viability of this industry will depend upon the continued market for the product, the availability of the product and the cost of production from both environmental and aesthetic standpoints.

The shellfish industries that once sent trainloads of oysters from Shellpile and Bivalve have never recovered from the MSX parasite problem which arose in the mid-1950's. In the past several years additional problems have arisen with regard to the seeding the oyster beds due to very high mortality among the larvae which science has not yet been able to understand. Although the State is committed to solving these problems, the harvests continue to drop with the 2004 harvest coming in at 68,000 bushels while the 2005 harvest closer to 26,000 bushels.

The village of Port Norris was known for its oyster industry and the beauty of its older Victorian and early Twentieth Century architecture reflect the money generated by the shellfish industry. Additionally, many local residents moved to the area and were actively recruited from the eastern shore of Maryland to work in this industry. The loss of bountiful crops has had a direct impact on the employment rate and thereby the income of the entire community. It has also considerably reduced the thriving businesses within Port Norris which had served this industry.

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As for farming, much of the lands within the Township were farmed even though the soils of the Township were not considered of high quality for agriculture. Salt hay was a major farm product and continues to be grown commercially. As noted earlier in the Plan, no lands within the Township are considered worthy of designation for farmland preservation and with a few exceptions, most tracts used for agriculture are small family plots. Recently however, the growing of grain for horses has spurred lands formerly fallow to be tilled. There are other ongoing farming operations including nursery farming which has more and more taken over the fields of Cumberland County largely driven by the thriving housing market.

Outside of these cited traditional industries, the public school system and regional State Police Center are the major employers within the Townships. The Township has no major retail shopping facilities or concentration; however, it does support a number of small stores catering to local needs like convenience stores, pizzerias, package stores, several restaurants, and a gas station. Additionally, there are a number of businesses located around the community somewhat isolated and outside of the villages such as a burial monument firm, various types of automotive repair and sales operations, a marina, and trucking and construction firms.

### **Labor Pool**

Of the 200 responses given to a question on location of work, only 18% of the residents were employed within Commercial Township (10% Port Norris, 1% Laurel Lake, 3% Haleyville/Mauricetown and 4% elsewhere in the Township). Forty percent of the respondents were employed in the nearby larger regional commercial centers of Millville and Vineland, and the balance of 41% working in other communities outside the Township. According to the 2000 Census the mean travel time to work for a local resident is slightly over 25 minutes. Therefore, the major economic centers which supports both employment and commercial needs of the residents are regional commercial centers outside the immediate Township.

In this sense, the Township is seen today as more a "bedroom community," a suburb to the Vineland/Millville area, or even to areas further away like Atlantic City, the southern New Jersey seashore, or points north along Routes 47 and 55. But the statistics tell us additional facts indicating there are opportunities for additional local economic development which exist. While we know a number of residents work at a distance from the Township, there are no statistics or measurements of those that would prefer to work within their community, but cannot find work.

There are also those who commute to the Township for work in both the land mining, commercial fishing industries and other local businesses. The Township is not however, a prime regional generator of jobs and given its special environment and lack of infrastructure, it is not anticipated or suited to becoming one. However, there appears to be the potential for new employment within the Township and a labor pool which seems available.

There are a number of residents who are not employed. As of 2000 of those persons 16 years and older 2,362 were in the labor force. This represented 60.3% of the Township. The national average was 63.9%. The Township also had 2,074 persons or 63.2% of the population, with a high school diploma or higher. There were 206 persons with a bachelor's degree or higher. The

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national averages for these two categories were: 80.4% and 24.4% respectively. There were 179 families and 827 persons below the poverty level in 2000 according to the Census. This represented 13.0% of all families and 15.8% of total population for the Township. The national averages respectively were: 9.2% and 12.4%.

These figures demonstrate that the Township's residents may be unemployed or underemployed and that there needs to be increased education or training for some to attain employment and better paying jobs. In an isolated rural community, the ability and opportunities of residents to obtain either additional job training or better paying employment is obviously more difficult. Economic development goals and objectives must recognize these facts when offering ways of improving the community's overall economy. Encouraging a variety of businesses offering jobs will require a multiplicity of job skills and/or additional education for those wishing to fill these jobs. Therefore, programs to increase one's job skills through training appear to be necessary to improve the economic picture for area residents and the community's overall well being. Training for entrepreneurial skills is also important to those wishing to start their own business.

### **Infrastructure Deficiencies**

In a community as environmentally sensitive and rural as Commercial Township, the lack of infrastructure makes economic development much more difficult. Businesses and industries greatly benefit from improved roads, public sanitary sewers and public water supply systems. Road improve the movement of goods and services and offer access to jobs for those traveling to other areas. In Commercial Township as discussed earlier, the importance of the road infrastructure which is the only option available for employees to commute to and from places of employment and to shop for goods or services becomes critical. The ability of the community to attract new businesses or the customers for them is directly related the road system. The Township does have a good county road system and is connected via the Mauricetown Bridge to Routes 47, 347 and to the north 55 thereby offering access to and from the Township to the New Jersey Shore and points north. This is a critical and valuable asset for encouraging economic development.

Having dependable public sewers and potable water supply also increases the number and type of businesses that can operate in the community. The commercial seafood processing business in Shellpile and Bivalve, restaurants, cafes, coffee shops, visitor convenience centers, and any number of other businesses would benefit and prosper if dependence upon on-site septic disposal and water supply were not required. Providing jobs locally and new businesses to help with tax revenues also requires handling septic disposal and provision of potable water to customers and workers as well for the business use, processing and other activity. Providing such infrastructure is expensive and difficult given the area's environmental sensitivity.

Small package septic treatment facilities and/or water supply systems would help all three of the Township's villages develop new opportunities for jobs and ratables. Even if new economic activity were to be limited to those industries or businesses which were not major users of water or generators of septic effluent, any increase in economic activity within the community will increase the need for such facilities due to the nature of the current level of use and concentration of density within these designated centers.

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While some new businesses can be accommodated, meaningful improvement in the local economy will have to address the increase in the need for infrastructure. A balance will have to be struck between the environment and permitting and facilitating a viable municipal economy. This will require various State agencies to assist in promoting appropriate job growth and sufficient economic activity to assure residents can obtain employment at living wage parity or better. To the extent that the community can reasonably accommodate new business development within its centers deserves State support and cooperation in making this needed economic improvement in infrastructure a reality.

### **Major Issues for Expansion of Economic Development**

Having identified existing conditions that make up or affect the local economy it is important to identify concerns or problems with achieving significant improvement of the local economy. Some of these have already been noted above. Like planning for the future reclamation of the vast tracks currently under active sand extraction as well as land set aside for additional mining for the time when the value of the mineral extraction diminishes to the point that it is no longer a viable economic business operations.

There is also the already noted amount of significant tracts of land under the control of the public or nonprofit organizations or agencies and which reduce or eliminate tax revenues from such owned lands. This drastically limits the Township's opportunity to develop new business opportunities even when related to the environmental issues which justified their purchase in the first place. Fencing and posting these lands from public access has become commonplace and perhaps unreasonably exceeds the need for such restraint.

Both of these issues become intertwined when land mining companies seeking to mine publicly owned land since under existing regulations if such approval is granted then there must be an exchange of lands at a ratio that can equal up to 10 acres for every one acre allowed to be mined that is owned by the State. This in turn results in more land lost to possible economic development activities that might otherwise be utilized depending on whether or not the owner permits access and less than strict conservation.

Although most restoration and reclamation efforts involving land mining operations have been largely related to cosmetic replacement of cover soils and re-vegetation, the Township has encouraged the creation of home sites adjacent to former mining ponds. The survey questionnaire responses to a question about this type of restoration raised issues of affordability of such lots and the creation of exclusive developments cutting off the public from these restored land mine areas.

It is recommended that the Township considered the possibility of reclaiming former mined lands for active recreational areas. Archery and shooting ranges, motor bike tracts, paddle or row boat rental and diving training or programs on reclaimed ponds, golf driving ranges, batting practice areas or facilities, temporary ice skating rinks, and horse back riding trails could offer all season recreational business opportunities. Such facilities could also provide alternatives to families or groups who individually have different interests for visiting the community. Birders, naturalists, and history buffs might enjoy the area's flora and fauna, historic villages'

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architecture or historic oyster sheds, while other family or group members partake of more active recreational pursuits or shopping if new stores, studios, shops or craft and artist displays were developed. Economic opportunities could really multiply by diversifying the Township's commercial activities to appeal to a wider cross section of consumers.

Recreational businesses would also be able to draw local and non-local patrons to the Township throughout the year. Businesses like restaurants, sporting equipment and supply stores, and overnight accommodations would also be likely to be established to serve such a growing market. The existing and expanding nature related festivals and events already show success in attracting people to the community.

Along with these concerns, it is possible to identify areas where potential new economic development activity might be feasible. While the earlier discussed traditional industries will no doubt continue for some time to come, expansion of these industries would seem limited at best. With this in mind and given the community's environmental sensitivity economic development needs to focus on the villages and the natural environment. This Plan recommends two in particular: eco-tourism and village-based commercial activity.

Lastly, but certainly not least, there must be concern for the large amount of those untrained for employment or under employed who will require both entry level and new higher paying jobs be developed. There needs to be a concerted effort to motivate those seeking work or better paying work to take advantage of existing programs and opportunities to finish one's education, obtain new job skills or obtain assistance to establish their own business. Such efforts are important components to assuring that all working age persons so inclined can find meaningful, gainful employment. Identifying those needing or desiring such training or educational opportunities need to be identified, advised and connected with those programs, facilities and employment resources available locally and regional which might assist them to employment and higher incomes.

### **Activities for Economic Development:**

#### **Ecotourism**

Commercial Township's natural assets are ideally suited to ecotourism which is already beginning to take shape and offers the potential for considerable economic development opportunities. Ecotourism refers to ecological tourism that:

"...affords visitors an opportunity to enjoy natural resources and the environment of an area without destroying them. Ecological tourism seeks to manage the visitor experience to minimize the adverse impacts on the natural resource base that might otherwise occur."<sup>a</sup>

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<sup>a</sup> Cumberland County Ecotourism Plan: A Vision & Implementation Strategy for Economic Development and Conservation, Cumberland County Department of Planning and Development, Bridgeton, New Jersey, adopted March 6, 1996, p.1.

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The Township should encourage and promote opportunities for the development of ecotourism. It is a proven economic development generator which is well suited to the area's special environment. The types of businesses that might support and promote such tourism are of a scale which fits well within the confines of the villages. The community has a number of natural and man-made assets which would draw tourists for short visits, either as part of their sightseeing activities related New Jersey shore visits or a specific destination based upon a selected activity or site. Best of all, it has already begun within the community.

Delaware Bayshore days has become an anticipated annual weekend event bringing hundreds of visitors to Port Norris to visit and participate in the Bayshore Discovery Project festivities including the historic shipping sheds, wharves, and New Jersey's official tall ship, the schooner, **A.J. Meerwald**. The outreach educational activities provided by this organization offer an opportunity to provide a focal point for year round visits. The Township should continue to work with the Bayshore Project for a wider regional promotion and expansion of activities. Media stories in regional newspapers, magazines, historical publications and national would attract additional visitors.

Additionally, local conservation groups have been holding special birding events which also draw a number of people to the community. In cooperation with these various organizations, a listing of facilities that might be needed to facilitate, support and enhance such viewing of nature could be developed and plans made for their provision. The Township should continue its partnership and cooperation in the development, promotion and provision of these "special events" related to the environment. Efforts need to be made to draw other public and private conservation organizations into the planning and implementation of such programs so as to utilize the full range and scope of the Township natural setting.

The Township also has a head start with the bicycle lane from Port Norris to Shell Pile and Bivalve, the Maurice River and the wetlands boardwalk at the base of Strawberry Avenue. But more sites are needed including paths, viewing areas, descriptive signs for habitat areas, parking areas and other facilities which could make a visit to the area a more fun, safe and educational experience.

There also needs to be efforts made to help local businesses benefit from these activities. This includes keeping the local economy apprised of upcoming events and encouraging businesses to become involved in the activities.

Closely related to ecotourism is the interest in history and historic architecture of which the Township's villages of Port Norris and Mauricetown/Haleyville abound. In particular, Mauricetown provides an excellent opportunity to attract visitors which have an interest in exploring the architecture and river life of an early 18<sup>th</sup> Century community. The village has a scattering of antique shops which are open weekends. There is already an annual antique show and a seafood festival that bring visitors to the area. Increasing such special events and/or offering specific programs throughout the year would help to further encourage the development of ecotourism and historic site visits. The development of guided nature or historic tours of the villages' could be another means of promoting the area's assets and drawing tourist dollars to the community.

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Developing a ecotourism economy does take time (sometimes up to 20 years), but Commercial has already begun the process. The modest expansion of existing activities would expand opportunities for small scale economic activities, such as tea/sandwich shops, small gift stores selling historic and river-related wares, and perhaps bed and breakfast facilities. In addition, to special weekend events, scheduled or by appointment tours could be developed which reach out to groups always looking for new sights to visit.

Another promotional activity for the entire community would be a uniform signage program, perhaps with directional signs similar to and integrated with the attractive wood carved signs currently in place identifying each village. These would provide directions to all the potential sites or events within the Township and encourage visitors to explore other areas of the Township or Bayshore region. It is important that the Township is one of a number of Bayshore area communities along the Delaware Bay. Coordination and sharing of information between these municipalities should be undertaken to maximize the tourists' dollars that can be attracted to enter the area.

There are a number of established programs, references and studies which interested Township residents or organizations can utilized in developing an effective ecotourism program. These include the *Cumberland County Ecotourism Plan*, *New Jersey Birding and Wildlife Trails*, *Providing Positive Wildlife Viewing Experiences*, and a host of others.

Local government in cooperation and coordination with existing groups and property owners might identify specific projects that would enhance or promote such tourism and make the community more friendly and helpful to ecotourism opportunities. A number of sites within Port Norris, Shellpile and Bivalve would make excellent tourist information, interpretative or welcome centers. Tourists require sanitary facilities, places to get directions, sign up for tours, obtain brochures or maps and to serve generally as a starting point from which to head out and discover the area. The former church at High Street and Miller Avenue and the former gas station across from the Municipal Building on High Street would make excellent facilities. The former lumberyard sheds on North Avenue would make a wonder open air markets for various local products from local produce, crafts, antiques, or art.

### **River-related Business**

The Maurice River was an important reason for settling the area of Commercial Township and the river continues to offer opportunities for new businesses. The commercial fishing industry while experiencing serious difficulties is still active and should be supported in its efforts to expand and adapt to changing technologies. Recreational use of the river is also important and it too needs to expand along with the national trend for more recreational opportunities for fishing, boating, and waterside entertainment like dining, walking, biking, or other activities weather and nature permitting.

Land use regulations need to encourage and permit riverfront activities that can coexist with the commercial fishing industry and which are designed and built to prevent or lessen flood damage. Although residential development should be limited in Shellpile and Bivalve, temporary guest accommodations might be possible. The key is to balance the interaction of tourist/visitors with

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industrial/commercial activity so that there is a demarcation of the two areas including transportation routes of whatever variety transportation in order to limit conflicts.

### **Business Opportunities In and Out of Villages**

Closely related to ecotourism and including historic sightseeing as generating new opportunities for economic development is the need to increase business opportunities for the community's villages, especially Port Norris and Mauricetown/Haleyville. As noted throughout this Master Plan, the emphasis is that development be within centers. Since the community's centers are all villages and have no infrastructure it becomes necessary to try and create a scale of business development that is commensurate with the largely, older residential villages.

Historically, villages developed as places that were combination of residential and business with many businesses within, adjacent to or very nearby the business owner's residence. Encouraging new business activities which not only include home occupations of the traditional variety which are usually intended to be largely unnoticeable to neighbors or passing motorist, but also a more commercial home activity. Such businesses might include small shops, studios for crafters or artists, offices or tea or sandwich shops.

In allowing such increased commercial activity in connection with a residential use and setting care must be taken to assure that nuisances are limited and the size and scale of activity being pursued is in keeping with the residential character of the villages. Such development as proposed here is seen as expanding the commercial activity allowed within residences and residential areas. It is recommended that such uses be restricted to those residences located on major roadways (County roads) and strictly limited in floor area or property area. The ability to have appropriately sized signs and/or product display must also be limited and specified.

Where commercial zoning in the villages is established, maintaining the village character is important and new business structures should so conform. Big box stores, large or garish signs with excessive lighting, and large non-landscaped or buffered parking areas should be prohibited. As a general rule, new commercial facilities need to be commensurate in size to adjoining residential and commercial structures within Port Norris, Haleyville/Mauricetown and Laurel Lake.

Outside of the villages, there needs to be understanding that more and more people are working from their homes. Controlling and permitting such work is vital to offering economic opportunities to local residents which may in turn offer limited jobs for others. Where property size supports the accommodation thereof, studios or workshops might be permitted for those pursuing a craft, art or other small business capable of blending in with its surrounding residential setting.

Active farming operations should also be allowed to carry on business activities directly related to the farm so as to make the operation profitable year round. Activities which permit the use of farm buildings for storage, sale of farm-related products, equipment use, repair or rental (trucks, tractors or other vehicles), or other business activities that can be demonstrated to being able to

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be accommodated within the farm or its structures or appurtenances and which are specifically intended to be supplemental and incidental to the ongoing farming operation should be allowed.

Since the major numbers of Township residents work outside the Township and in order to maintain access to regional jobs, keeping the current transportation corridors in good condition is important to the economic vitality of the area. Related to rising gasoline prices, some consideration might be given to encouraging car pooling to regional employment centers or developing company-sponsored mini-van transport systems.

With residents using regional centers outside the Township for the bulk of their shopping, medical needs and professional services, the importance of transportation access is again demonstrated. The Township also has a relatively high proportion of disabled citizens, 24%, compared with a national average of 19%. This fact poses special needs related to accessible transportation for getting to work, shopping, medical and support services. These economic activities become a special challenge to residents who are elderly, disabled or are unable to afford automobiles.

The provision of a public sanitary sewer system within the villages and particularly Laurel Lake and Port Norris would greatly improve the opportunities for the existing businesses and residences to address major health issues and would allow new businesses to develop and thereby increasing types of economic development desired and suited to the area to be accommodated without fear of contamination or continual problems with failing or faltering on-site systems.

### **Increase Workers Skills**

A well educated and skilled workforce is important to raising the employment rate of Township residents. Post public school, community-based educational and employment training programs should be encouraged which link individuals with increased skills and access to skilled jobs. These programs might be incorporated and integrated with the local school system, Cumberland Community Collage, local churches and other outreach social programs and agencies. These programs in order to be successful need to undertake proactive outreach and have an active community recruitment component.

Local industries, businesses and government should be involved in determining job market needs and the skills necessary to provide a larger, more diverse pool of employees. Training should be provided for attaining high school equivalency, specific trade or industrial skills training, and entrepreneurial skills to encourage home-grown businesses that can partake of the villages' home occupational and ecotourism opportunities which exist. Tour guides, naturalist, shopkeepers, crafts persons, artists, chefs and a variety of future business people could learn the skills necessary to run a successful business.

The types of businesses proposed within the confines of the community's environment and centered development should be sufficient to provide jobs and employment opportunities. It will be important however, to establish outreach programs and local job listings to assure that all within the community in need of work are made aware of it.

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### **Recommendations for Community Action**

The Township can undertake steps that will encourage and assist economic development activity to occur. Below is a listing of recommendations which might assist the community towards promoting new business opportunities that are commensurate with the area's environmentally sensitivity and suited to its existing villages' character:

- Address parking issues related to the expansion of ecotourism, on street parking in villages and the establishment of off street parking lots for major events. (This might include allowing for shared parking or public parking facilities rather than forcing on-site parking in villages where it cannot be accommodated given the small lot sizes.)
- Permit within residential districts of the villages the establishment of small gift stores, antiques shops, bed and breakfast operations, tea shops, and other small businesses designed to serve the village's residents and visitors

Permit expanded home commercial activities as well as farm supplemental businesses to increase economic and employment opportunities

- Assure maintenance of roads for the majority of citizens who work in regional centers outside the immediate Township and address lack of public transportation for those seeking jobs or job training
- Provide standards and regulations for maintaining a balance for new commercial expansion within the community's natural condition and village-type centers
- Encourage through regulation land mining reclamation efforts which provide continued economic gain to the community through limited commercial recreational facilities
- Maintain the streetscape of the villages' "main streets" through the promotion of retail establishments which fit into the village's architectural style and scale
- Preserve the historical and architectural heritage of the Township, especially Mauricetown, through restoration, property maintenance and compatible residential design
- Encourage and help promote development of historic and specialized tours related to nature, e.g. the River, wildlife areas, historic districts
- Coordinate efforts with local groups, conservation organizations, State and County agencies to promote ecotourism, special programs and events and new appropriately sized businesses aimed at this fast growing market
- Address issues of "open access" for the general public along the Maurice River in terms of permitting viewing sites or even trails which might permit the public to enjoy the river's beauty

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- Seek agencies, churches or other organizations willing and qualified to provide job training skills, education and entrepreneurial skills
- Provide for local job listings or dissemination of potential jobs advertisements to local organizations involved in assisting those in need of employment
- Assist in coordination of financing for start up businesses through local banks or seek funding to establish a "seed capital" programs
- Seek grants to establish new biking and hiking trails within the Township, publish brochures or place ads promoting the community as destination for a variety of reasons – nature, history, shopping, etc.
- Participate and cooperate with local groups wishing to undertake preservation efforts or establish new facilities designed to encourage tourism within the community and area
- Seek contacts and coordination with nearby communities, the Jersey shore, and regional and State agencies and organizations to promote the Township's assets and to share in advertising and promoting larger area sights and attraction (Consider that a tourist will travel within a 60 mile radius or perhaps more)
- Develop walking and biking trails that would link villages
- Seek funding to develop a tourist center or at a minimum, sanitary rest facilities
- Work with the County, nonprofit organization and businesses to establish new carpooling, van services and other transportation options for a variety of residents in need of assistance in getting around whether for jobs, shopping, medical services or other activities

As can be seen, the municipal government can do much to assist and/or facilitate the private sector to encourage and promote new businesses establishments and to capitalize on the community's assets. In a time of budget cutting and limited public resources, perhaps the best economic development program is that which seeks to work with those wishing to open new businesses and which meet the community's needs as "good fits" with area's natural and man-made setting. Keeping a clean, well maintained, safe community is paramount when attempting to attract tourists. The natural environment of Commercial Township offers a variety of experiences and multiple opportunities to establish businesses related to it.

Unfortunately quick fixes are not feasible for a variety of reasons, but then they often don't work when tried even within major urban areas either. Patient pursuit of the goals and objectives set forth in a community's master plan is best way to assure that the economic growth that occurs is wanted, successful and productive for all parties concerned. Commercial Township is fortunate to already be headed down the road to developing a new economy that does not seek to replace the historic or traditional ones, but to augment and build on its continued presence and special environment in which it thrives.

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As a coastal community, the Township is vulnerable to catastrophic storms, flooding or tidal surges. The low level of the village of Port Norris is particularly vulnerable to such events with the potential to severely damage or destroy a major portion of the Township's economy. In terms of the commercial fishing industry there is little that can be done to protect it against such natural disasters since by necessity they must be located on the water. The preparation of plans for reducing horrific destruction of structures and equipment and developing plans for dealing with the aftermath including provision of potable water and energy of all forms will be essential to salvaging and reconstructing business and homes. Hurricane Katrina showed us the power of nature and the lessons to be learned from the devastation they can cause. We can't stop such disasters, but we might prepare for their possibility by developing our communities to the realities of their environment. Disaster evacuation and recovery plans are essential components to any economic development program.