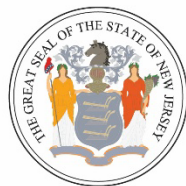


STATE PLANNING COMMISSION
OFFICE OF PLANNING ADVOCACY

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STATE OF NEW JERSEY

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

New Jersey Business Action Center - Office of Planning Advocacy

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REVIEW OF 2025 ACCOMPLISHMENTS

On December 17, 2025, the State Planning Commission (SPC) and the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) **successfully completed the process to update and adopt the State Development and Redevelopment Plan** (“State Plan”)—the first since 2001. This landmark achievement was the culmination of a year-long effort by the SPC, OPA staff, and a wide range of planning partners and stakeholders. The new State Plan represents the highest degree of consensus among these participants on a diverse array of planning goals and strategies, as well as a commitment to align planning policies at all levels of government.

Over the course of 2025, the SPC and OPA held or participated in **more than 145 meetings** (including public meetings, public hearings, negotiation sessions, workshops, and conferences) and **engaged with more than 4,200 people** to gather feedback and input on the new State Plan. Both the SPC and OPA appreciate all the individuals who participated in the Plan update process, particularly our planning partners at the counties, municipalities, state agencies, and regional entities who collaborated with the SPC and OPA extensively throughout 2025.

Ongoing Goals and Priorities from 2025

In addition to successfully completing the update of the State Plan, the SPC and OPA continued to work on their 2025 goals to:

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



Commission and Staffing Updates

State Planning Commission membership increased to fourteen (14) members during 2025 with the appointment of Jeffrey Oakman, Senior Strategic AI Hub Project Manager, Princeton University, and a public member of the Commission. Three positions remained vacant in 2025.

On February 1, 2025, Donna Rendeiro retired from her position as executive director of the Office Of Planning Advocacy, retiring after more than 25 years of public service to the residents of New Jersey. Throughout her leadership at OPA, she successfully advanced the implementation of the State Plan and updated New Jersey's State Planning Act. She also launched the State Plan update process by coordinating the completion and release of its Preliminary Draft. The members of the SPC and OPA staff thank Donna for her significant contributions and tireless support for collaborative, forward-thinking planning in our State.

For much of 2025, the Office of Planning Advocacy faced ongoing staffing shortages. A staff member's resignation led to a vacancy in an Assistant Planner position in mid-May, and the GIS Specialist position became vacant in August due to a staff member's retirement. In addition to those key vacancies, the three interns who provided technical assistance to counties during the Cross-Acceptance process concluded their tenure in May. A temporary Assistant Planner was employed from August to mid-November, while a permanent Assistant Planner was brought on in early December. Now, the Office of Planning Advocacy staff consists of an Executive Director, two Senior Planners, two Assistant Planners, one Project Manager, one GIS Specialist, and one Administrative Assistant.

State Plan Update

The publication of the Preliminary Draft of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (Preliminary Draft) in December of 2024 signaled the beginning of the Cross-Acceptance Process, which was completed in 2025. Notifications were sent to county and municipal officials, as well as other stakeholders, as required by the State Planning Rules.

Over the course of 2025, OPA took the following actions to update the State Plan:

- Held 22 public information meetings regarding the State Plan update
 - One in each county and one with the Highlands Council
- Published a “Citizen’s Guide” to the State Plan
- Continued outreach and stakeholder coordination efforts
- Completed Phase I (draft) of the Infrastructure Needs Assessment
- Completed Phase II (final) of the Infrastructure Needs Assessment
- Completed the Impact Assessment
- Completed the Cross-Acceptance Process
 - Hosted 42 meetings with Negotiating Entities to discuss potential changes to the Preliminary State Plan
- Held six additional public hearings
- Facilitated the preparation and adoption of the new State Plan

Within the first 45 days of the Preliminary Draft’s release (by February 12, 2025), counties were required to pass a resolution either accepting the role as Negotiating Entity for all participating municipalities within their county or waiving that role. OPA was required to name an appropriate entity to serve in the capacity of Negotiating Entity for any county that chose to waive that role. OPA **secured the services of a planning consultant** to serve in this role for the only county that chose to waive, Bergen County.

Additionally, OPA **coordinated with the Highlands** Council to serve as the Negotiating Entity for the majority of the communities within the Highlands region. Seventy-seven Highlands municipalities were ultimately represented by the Highlands Council; the remaining 11 chose to be represented by their respective county.

No sooner than 45 days after and no later than 90 days after the release of the Preliminary Draft (February 12, 2025 to April 16, 2025), OPA was statutorily required to **hold a public information meeting in each county** (and in the Highlands Region). OPA staff performed the logistical undertaking to schedule, conduct, document, and report on the public information meetings in each location.

Simultaneously, OPA staff **created a “Citizen’s Guide to the State Plan”** to make the State Plan more understandable to the general public. The purpose of the Guide was to provide information on the State Plan’s goals in easy-to-understand language so that

the public can appreciate its impact on their communities and their daily lives. Links to the Guide, the Preliminary Draft, and an online survey for feedback were shared with attendees of the public information meetings.

After holding the public information meetings, the Negotiating Entities were able to begin the process of working with their municipalities on the development of their Cross-Acceptance Responses. These reports **summarized each participating jurisdiction’s agreements, disagreements, comments, and other feedback** on the Preliminary Draft. OPA then reviewed each Cross-Acceptance Response, organized the actionable items in each report into lists of topics for discussion, and used these lists to create agendas for formal negotiation with the Negotiating Entities. This began the “negotiation phase” of the Cross-Acceptance process. OPA first scheduled “prep meetings” with each Negotiating Entity to review initial drafts of the negotiating agendas. Then, OPA convened public “negotiation sessions” with the Negotiating Entities to attempt to achieve consensus on each agenda item. “Periodic reports” of these discussions were then publicly disseminated by our Office. In accordance with the State Planning Rules, OPA publicly disseminated “periodic reports” of these sessions.

At the conclusion of the negotiation phase, OPA produced draft and final versions of the “Statement of Agreements and Disagreements (SAD),” which also included State Plan Policy Map change requests. The release of the final version of the SAD marked the end of Cross-Acceptance, after which OPA immediately began **preparing the Draft Final State Development and Redevelopment Plan**. Around this time, upon the recommendation of OPA, the SPC determined that it would pause consideration of all requested amendments to the State Plan Policy Map until after the adoption of the updated State Plan. Doing so proved to be prudent, as the final State Plan contained substantial changes to the criteria and descriptions of the various elements of the future State Plan Policy Map.

Before, during, and after Cross-Acceptance, OPA participated in **stakeholder engagement and contract management** efforts to facilitate the completion of the Infrastructure Needs Assessment and the Impact Assessment. Preparation of these two studies, also required by the State Planning Rules, was contracted out to the Voorhees Transportation Center, and to a collaborative team of academic professionals from Rutgers and Rowan universities, respectively.

In the final stretch of the State Plan update process, OPA convened **six additional public hearings**, at which the Draft Final State Development and Redevelopment Plan, the Draft Infrastructure Needs Assessment, and the Impact Assessment were presented for additional public and stakeholder feedback.

On December 17, 2025, the State Planning Commission formally adopted the final State Development and Redevelopment Plan after a presentation by OPA.



From the 2025 State Plan:

“As we look ahead to 2050, the overarching goal of the updated State Development and Redevelopment Plan is that New Jerseyans will enjoy and benefit from pristine natural resources surrounding and within pedestrian-connected, affordable, healthy, resilient, and sustainable communities, including housing which, for the most part, will be close and walkable to well-paying jobs, shops, schools, venues for arts and culture, accessible open space and trails, and high-quality transportation services. New Jersey’s sustainable prosperity is key to these important aspects of life.”

The updated State Plan has ten goals, which are of equal importance and are not presented in any particular order:

- **Economic Development:** Promote Economic Growth that Benefits all Residents of New Jersey
- **Housing:** Provide an Adequate Supply of Housing for Residents of All Ages and Incomes in Communities of Their Choosing That Meet Their Needs and Offer Ready Access to the Full Range of Supportive Goods and Services
- **Infrastructure:** Economic Opportunity Through Nation Leading Infrastructure
- **Revitalization and Recentering:** Revitalize and Recenter the State's Underutilized Developed Areas
- **Climate Change:** Effectively Address the Adverse Impacts of Global Climate Change
- **Natural and Water Resources:** Protect, Maintain, and Restore the State's Natural and Water Resources and Ecosystems
- **Pollution and Environmental Clean-Up:** Protect the Environment, Prevent and Clean Up Pollution
- **Historic and Scenic Resources:** Protect, Enhance, and Improve Access to Areas with Exceptional Archeological, Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space, and Recreational Value
- **Equity:** Implement Equitable Planning Practices to Promote Thriving Communities for all New Jerseyans
- **Comprehensive Planning Goal:** Foster Sound and Integrated Planning and Implementation at All Levels Statewide



Continue the Effort to Endorse Communities

While undertaking the Cross-Acceptance Process and successfully adopting a new State Plan, the State Planning Commission and the Office of Planning Advocacy staff were able to **approve five Plan Endorsement Petitions** in 2025. The five municipalities were: Newton, Dover, Seaside Heights, Red Bank, and Ocean (Ocean County).

The State Planning Commission endorsed the Town of Newton on March 5, 2025 with the approval of resolution 2025-02. This approval also designated a new Regional Center within the Town. The State Plan Policy Map was further amended to change a significant portion of the municipality's land mass from Planning Area 5 (Environmentally Sensitive) to Planning Area 4B (Rural/Environmentally Sensitive).

The State Planning Commission endorsed the Borough of Seaside Heights on August 6, 2026 with the approval of resolution 2025-06. This approval also designated a new Regional Center within the Borough. The State Plan Policy Map was further amended to add over 32 acres of the municipality to "Parks and Open Space."

The State Planning Commission endorsed the Town of Dover on August 6, 2025 with the approval of resolution 2025-07. This approval also designated a new Regional Center within the Town. The State Plan Policy Map was further amended to add over 600 acres of Critical Environmental Sites (CESs).

The State Planning Commission endorsed the Borough of Red Bank on December 17, 2025, with the approval of resolution 2025-13. This approval also designated a new Regional Center within the Borough. The State Plan Policy Map was further amended to account for minor variations in Planning Area 1 (Metropolitan), Planning Area 5 (Environmentally Sensitive), and "Parks and Open Space."

The State Planning Commission endorsed the Township of Ocean (Ocean County) on December 17, 2025, with the approval of resolution 2025-14. This approval also designated a new Town Center within the Township that is approximately 305 acres smaller than the previously designated Town Center. The State Plan Policy Map was further amended to remove a total of about 1,995 acres from Planning Area 2 (Suburban), and to add a total of about 1,573 acres to Planning Area 5 (Environmentally Sensitive) and a total of about 494 acres to "Parks and Open Space." Another 109 acres of Critical Environmental Sites (CESs) were also mapped.

Throughout 2025, the Office of Planning Advocacy continued to work with the Borough of Woodstown toward its Plan Endorsement, which was approved by the SPC in April of 2026. OPA remains engaged with Barnegat, Berkeley, Dennis, Little Egg Harbor, Manchester, North Wildwood, Ocean City, Salem City, Sparta, and Wildwood City on mapping and other requirements needed to achieve Plan Endorsement.

Continue Interagency Coordination

For most of 2025, the Commission's and OPA's **interagency coordination efforts were focused on the refinement of the Preliminary Draft** to address state agency comments, as well as all the comments received from our municipal and county partners and the general public. The Interagency State Plan Workgroup, facilitated by OPA, met several times to review and address state agency and public comments on the Preliminary and Draft Final versions of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. This extensive and frequent collaboration ensured the Plan reflected and advanced the Commission's goals and ensured the successful adoption of the new State Plan.

Over the course of 2025, OPA also represented the Commission and/or the Secretary of State on **many other interagency efforts**. Some of these efforts include the NJ Interagency Council on Climate Resilience and the Extreme Heat Communication Subcommittee of the Interagency Council.

The Office also participated in NJ Department of Transportation's Transit Village Task Force and the Quarterly Brownfields Roundtables held by the NJ Department of Environmental Protection. Throughout the year, OPA regularly engaged with the Business Action Center's Business Advocates to **collaboratively support economic development efforts** and to advance the Commission's economic development goals.

Update State Planning Guidelines

The State Planning Commission updated its policies through the refinement of the **Preliminary Draft of the State Plan** during the Cross Acceptance Process. Numerous changes were incorporated into the Draft Final and Final versions of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. While there were no changes made to the proposed goals of the State Plan (listed below), numerous revisions and refinements were made to their supporting strategies and polices, to enhance guidance to the State's planning partners and align planning and investment policies at all levels of government.

As part of the effort to update the State Plan, the SPC and OPA, as well as numerous planning partners, **identified potential changes to the State Planning Rules and SPC Guidelines** that could improve efficiency and support greater implementation of the vision and goals of the new State Plan. Changes under consideration include improvements to the Cross Acceptance, Plan Endorsement, and SPPM Map Amendment processes, as well as addressing issues with textual clarity and consistency. These potential changes will be considered in 2026.

Continue to Advance Technical Assistance to Counties and Municipalities

The Office of Planning Advocacy provided technical assistance to municipalities on an as-needed basis, when staff capacity allowed the Office to accommodate the requests. Most of the technical assistance provided in 2025 was to **support county and municipal participation in the Cross Acceptance Process** as part the effort to update the State Plan. In addition to the technical assistance provided by staff members, OPA **contracted with Heyer, Gruel & Associates to provide additional technical support** and assistance to counties to assist with the development of their Cross Acceptance Responses. The Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) also contracted with Heyer, Gruel & Associates to provide technical support and assistance to develop the Cross Acceptance Responses for the four counties in the DVRPC region.

OPA also **worked with Rowan University to refine and enhance the Smart Growth Explorer tool**. This tool was widely used by numerous county and municipal planning partners during the Cross Acceptance Process to identify potential planning area changes. It allowed users to identify areas that may be vulnerable to flooding, have other environmental concerns, or may support redevelopment opportunities.

Coordination with Other Planning Partners

As part of the SPC's and OPA's efforts to update the State Plan and to ensure the new Plan will be consistent with, supportive of, and implemented by a wide range of partners and stakeholders, **staff engaged with numerous non-state agency planning partners.**

These efforts included **meeting with all three of the State's Metropolitan Planning Organizations.** The Office is a non-voting member of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC). The Office is a voting member of the Regional Technical Advisory Committee, and is on their Financial Planning Subcommittee. Staff also participated in the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) as a non-voting, advisory member of their Technical Advisory Committee. Additionally, staff held several discussions with the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) regarding opportunities to advance the Commission's planning goals.

OPA attended meetings with the County Planners Association, the NJ Coastal Coalition, the NJ Coastal Resilience Collaborative, the PlanforHealthNJ Advisory Committee, and the Delaware Bayshore Council. Staff actively participated in the Rutgers Megalopolitan Coast Transformation Hub (MACH) and the Central Jersey Transportation Forum.

OPA staff continued to accommodate requests to speak at training sessions, conferences, and planning events, as well as acting as guest lecturers and advisors for programs at colleges and universities. Some of those events included sessions at the League of Municipalities, the NJ Planning and Redevelopment Conference, and numerous local and regional events. OPA's website was updated several times to make it more user friendly, provide more up-to-date resources, and enable OPA staff to upload relevant information for stakeholders and the public.



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2026

The primary goal of the Commission and OPA in 2026 will be to advance the implementation of the newly-adopted 2025 State Development and Redevelopment Plan. This will be in addition to continuing work to achieve the previously stated 2025 goals, as well as the new goals listed below.

Ongoing Goals and Priorities from 2025

In addition to successfully completing the update of the State Plan, the SPC and OPA continued to work on their 2025 goals to:

- Continue the Effort to Endorse Communities
- Provide Technical Assistance to Counties and Municipalities
- Enhance Interagency Coordination
- Coordinate with Other State Planning Partners

Goals and Priorities for 2026

- **Address all of the State Plan Policy Map Amendment Requests**
Roughly 1,500 requests were deferred by the SPC until after the adoption of the new State Plan. Numerous coordination meetings with our planning partners (municipalities, counties, advocacy groups, and interested parties) and public hearings will be held to resolve these mapping amendment requests.
- **Enhance and Revise the Plan Endorsement Process**
OPA plans to streamline the requirements and increase municipal participation to achieve broader implementation of the State Plan.
- **Review the State Planning Rules**
Staff will review the State Planning Rules and recommend changes to improve both the Cross Acceptance Process and the State Plan Policy Map Amendment Process. This will resolve issues identified during the State Plan update to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the SPC and OPA.
- **Collaborate with State Planning Partners to Develop the Criteria and Process to Recognize Special Resource Areas**
- **Increase OPA's Participation in Local and Regional Planning Efforts**
to support the implementation of the State Plan.

Many of these efforts are interrelated; accomplishing one will address others. All these goals (both old and new) are consistent with the State Planning Act.

Continue the Effort to Endorse Communities

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

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

Provide Technical Assistance Counties and Municipalities

The Commission and OPA will continue to be trusted resources for municipalities and counties seeking planning assistance. We will continue to work with our local planning partners to identify ways in which the Office can provide technical planning assistance, as well as strive to facilitate connections between our planning partners and external resources. The SPC and OPA will begin work on updating our existing guidance documents, and will seek to identify potential topics for new guidance documents, case studies, and model ordinances to advance the implementation of the State Plan.

OPA will continue to enhance our website, and will continue to issue regular email blasts to share information about resources and grants, as well as provide regular updates on the work of the Commission and the Office.



Enhance Interagency Coordination

Per the State Planning Act, a statutory responsibility of the SPC is the coordination with and amongst our state agency partners. The successful implementation of the State Plan is dependent on collaboration and coordination amongst and between state agencies and the Commission.

With the adoption of the State Plan, the SPC and OPA will also work with our state agency partners to enhance and increase opportunities for collaboration and coordination between state agencies, local governments, and other planning partners. Work will begin to:

1. Identify opportunities and provide additional resources and incentives to assist in comprehensive planning, either at the municipal level or at the county level.
2. Implement expansion of programs and initiatives to provide additional technical assistance and educational opportunities.
3. Identify existing state programs and grant opportunities to which changes can be made to better advance the implementation of the Plan.

Opportunities to provide augmented technical assistance, additional points for competitive state grants, designated set-asides of existing funding programs, and permitting assistance will be explored.

Coordinate with Other Planning Partners

The Commission and the Office will continue to represent the Department of State and the Lt. Governor on all task forces, committees, councils, and working groups where it is appropriate to have representation. The SPC and OPA will continue to work with our planning partners at all levels of government, as well as non-governmental entities, to ensure that we receive public input on policies and programs to advance the successful implementation of the State Plan and our shared goals and priorities.

We will continue to present at conferences, workshops, seminars, public meetings, and other speaking engagements, to explain how the State Plan can support our planning partners' efforts, as well as increase knowledge about the State Plan. Additionally, we will continue to provide a range of opportunities for the public, and particularly underrepresented communities, to have a voice in all that we do.

Image Credits

The State Plan cover design on page 6 was provided courtesy of the Office of the Governor.

All other images in this report were provided courtesy of the New Jersey Division of Travel and Tourism.

Cover Image - Branch Brook Park, Newark, NJ

Page 2 - Aerial view of Lambertville, NJ

Page 7 - Aerial view of boardwalk in Atlantic City, NJ

Page 11 - Aerial view of Cape May Winery & Vineyard in Lower Township, NJ

Page 13 - City of Cape May, NJ