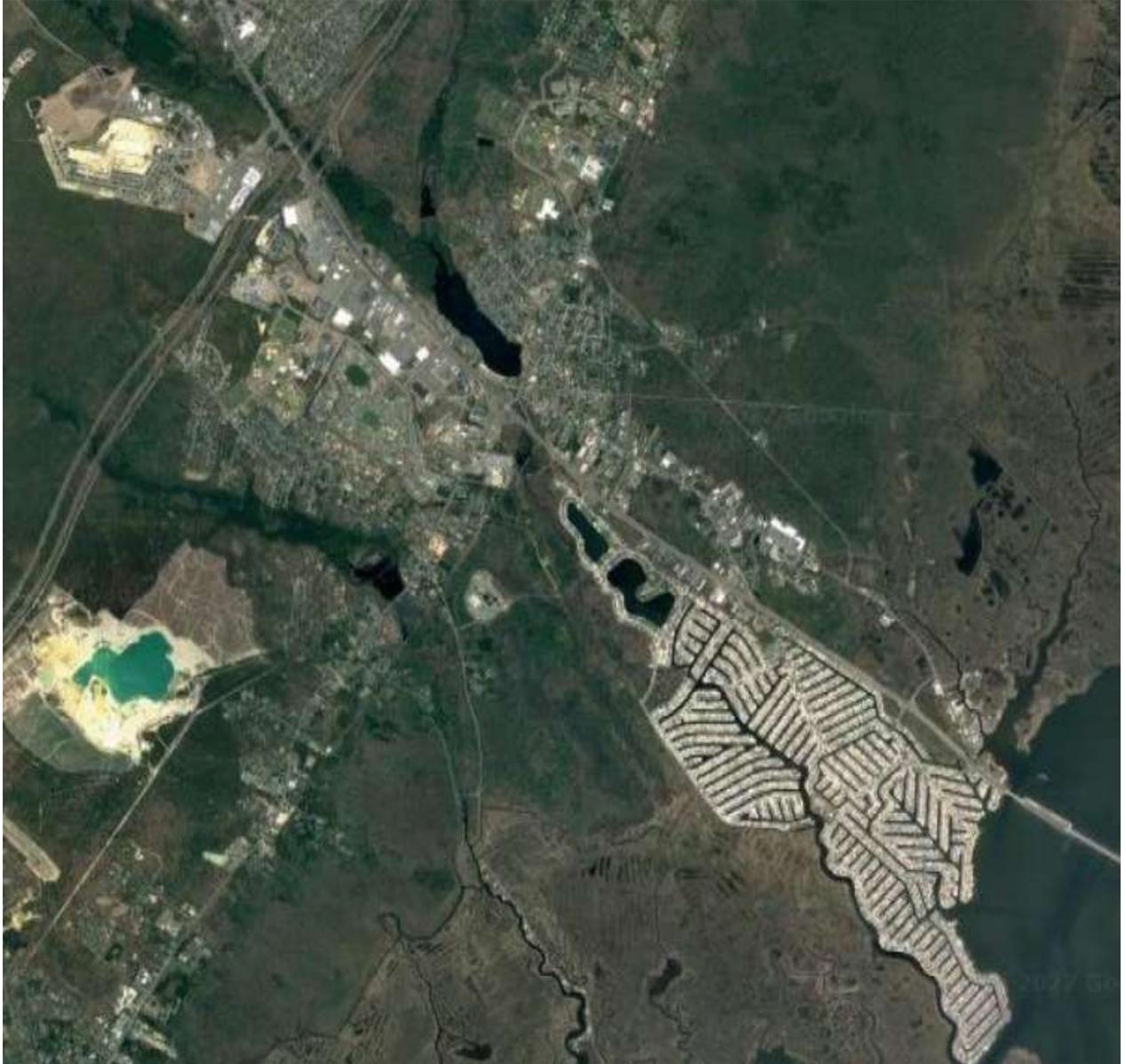


**Plan Endorsement Recommendation Report for  
Township of Stafford**



**New Jersey Department of State  
Business Action Center  
Office of Planning Advocacy**

This document is a recommendation report prepared by the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) as staff to the State Planning Commission (SPC) based on input of or partner agencies, Township of Stafford, Ocean County, and members of the public. OPA will post this report and other materials related to Township of Stafford Plan Endorsement petition on our website. You can contact our office by email regarding petition s for Plan Endorsement by providing contact information, including name, organization, address, and e-mail address to [osgmail@sos.state.nj.us](mailto:osgmail@sos.state.nj.us).

Documents submitted by Township of Stafford can be found here:

<https://nj.gov/state/planning/plan-endorsement.shtml>

Master Plan, Rexamination Report, Zoning and Land Use Maps, etc.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The Township of Stafford (hereafter Stafford or Township) in Ocean County received Regional Center designation by the State Planning Commission (SPC) on May 16, 2007. This designation was set to expire on June 30, 2020; however, the expiration has been extended through various extension approvals by the legislation, executive orders and/or State Planning Commission resolutions. According to Stafford's Municipal Self-Assessment, Stafford's primary reason for Regional Center designation renewal is that the Center designation will help the municipality by bringing together necessary entities to work together and make the Township a better community while supporting economic development, based off the already established commercial area in the Township. The Township has an area that they are considering for economic revitalization. This area includes the downtown area along the bay Avenue and Route. This area was once the main town center.

This report contains findings and conclusions concerning consistency of the Township's plans with the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan). The review of the petition is based on information submitted by the petitioner and information otherwise available to the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA).

Adopting a resolution in support of Plan Endorsement of their plans will demonstrate that they are taking appropriate steps to plan for the sustainable future by addressing their infrastructure, economic development, housing, open space, environmental and resiliency concerns.

## BACKGROUND

The Township of Stafford initiated the Plan Endorsement (PE) process with a pre-petition meeting with OPA and relevant State Agencies on August 28, 2019, so they could renew their Regional Center designation. They Township then appointed its Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee by resolution #2020-129 on March 10, 2020. The Municipal Self-Assessment (MSA) followed and was authorized by the Townships via resolution #2020-195 on May 26, 2020. The Township submitted their MSA to the Office of Planning Advocacy on June 25, 2020. OPA and our State agency partners responded with an Opportunity and Constraints Report on March 15, 2022. Currently, OPA, Stafford, and our state agency partners are in negotiations regarding the draft Plan Implementation Agreement (PIA). It is expected that Stafford’s Governing Body will formally approve the PIA at their August 9, 2022, meeting. This endorsement will be conditional on the approval and adoption of the PIA. The adoption of the PIA is not expected to be delayed. The draft PIA includes items that OPA and our State agencies believe will achieve consistency with the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (State Plan), as well as the recently updated Plan Endorsement Guidelines, which address State priorities for environmental justice and climate resiliency, including recent amendments to the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL).

## CHRONOLOGY

Event(s)	Date	Notes
Natural Resource Inventory	2006	Currently updating
Master Plan	2007	
Regional Center Designation	05/16/2007	
Historic Preservation Inventory	2017	
Master Plan	2017	Update under PIA
Land Use Inventory Map	2017	
Zoning Ordinance	2017	Update under PIA
Hazard Emergency and Mitigation Plan/Ordinance	2018	
<b>Pre-petition Meeting</b>	<b>08/28/2019</b>	
<b>Municipal Self-Assessment</b>	<b>05/25/2020</b>	
Climate Vulnerability Assessment & Resilience Plan	Ongoing	Update under PIA
Zoning map and schedule	2021	Update under PIA
Housing and Fair Share Plan	2021	
Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI)	2021	
Vacant Land Inventory	2021	
Traffic Circulation Element	2021	
Sustainable Jersey Report	2022	Update under PIA
<b>Opportunity and Constraints Report</b>	<b>03/15/2022</b>	
<b>Plan Implementation Report</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>	

<b>PIC Approval</b>	<b>TBD</b>	<b>With Mapping &amp; PIA</b>
<b>SPC Adoption</b>	<b>TBD</b>	

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

The Township followed the Plan Endorsement guidelines and requested a waiver for Step 5 of the Plan Endorsement process, Conducting Visioning Sessions. The Township had sufficiently demonstrated an intent for public participation through the number of public meetings that have been held and since 2019, the Township had six (6) Community Vision and Public Participation events to receive public input. The Township has noted that at all 6 events, the Plan Endorsement process was mentioned. On December 15, 2021, Executive Director Donna Rendeiro approved the waiver request.

## **LOCATION & REGIONAL CONTEXT**



Stafford Township is 54.882 square miles with 45.846 square miles of land and 9.033 square miles of waterways. It is located within the southern section of Ocean County and is the 6<sup>th</sup> largest municipality in the County out of 33 municipalities. The Township has sections that are in the Pinelands, commercial and Bayfront communities. The Township is strategically located along the coast within an hour and a half driving time of both New York City and Philadelphia. According to

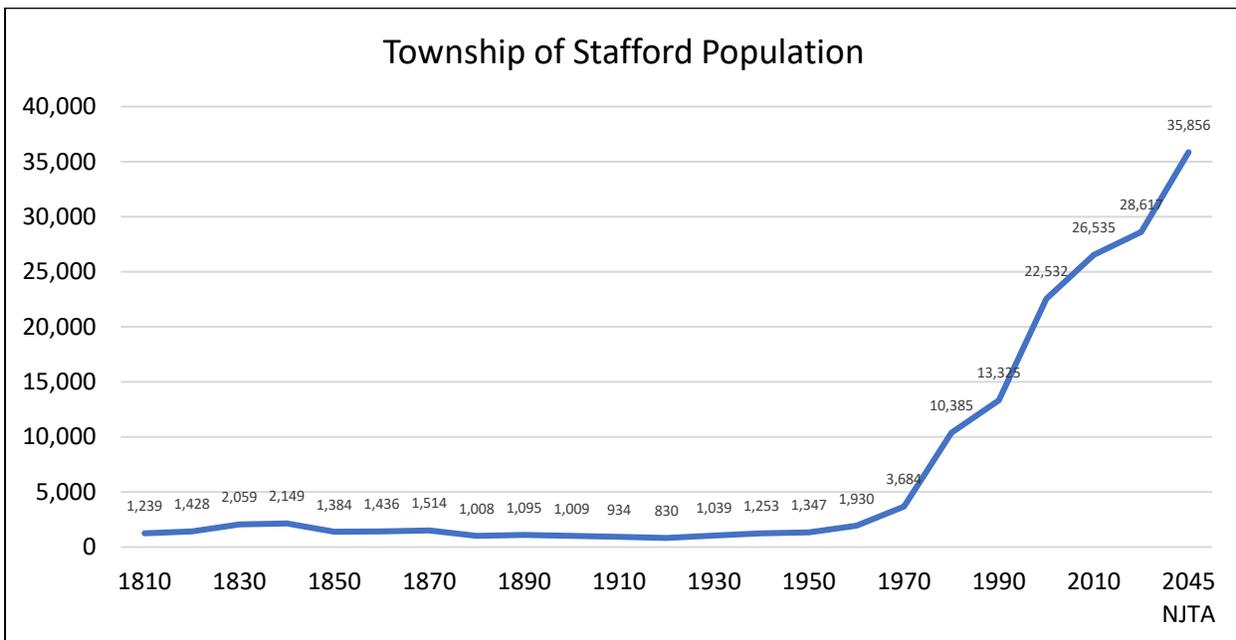
the Municipal Self-Assessment, the Township serves as a gateway to Long Beach Island. Due to the Township’s desirable location as a suburb of the metropolitan area and proximity to a season tourism destination, development has steadily increased.

	Township of Stafford	Ocean County
Land Area (sq. mile)	54.8	628.29
Population	29,498	648,998
Households	11,107	229,454
Average Household Size	2.61	2.60
Population Density (Persons/Sq. Mile)	620.6	1,014
Housing Units	14,540	295,584
Home Ownership Rate	88.3%	80.3%
Median Household Income	\$88,193	\$72,679

Per Capita Income	\$42,101	\$37,041
Persons Below Poverty Rate	5.2%	10.5%
Sources: US Census Bureau Ocean County Data Book 21 <sup>st</sup> Edition		

## DEMOGRAPHICS AND TOWNSHIP OF STAFFORD'S FUTURE

Stafford Township is one of twelve Ocean County municipalities that continues to see growth. The 2020 Census population estimate for the Township was 28,617, which is a 7.8% increase from 2010, which had a population estimate of 26,535. This is the same rate of growth for the entire county and is higher than New Jersey's rate of growth at 1%. The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority projects Stafford Township will have a population of 35,856 by 2045. This forecast assumes the rate of growth will slow to 1% and the increase will be more gradual over time.



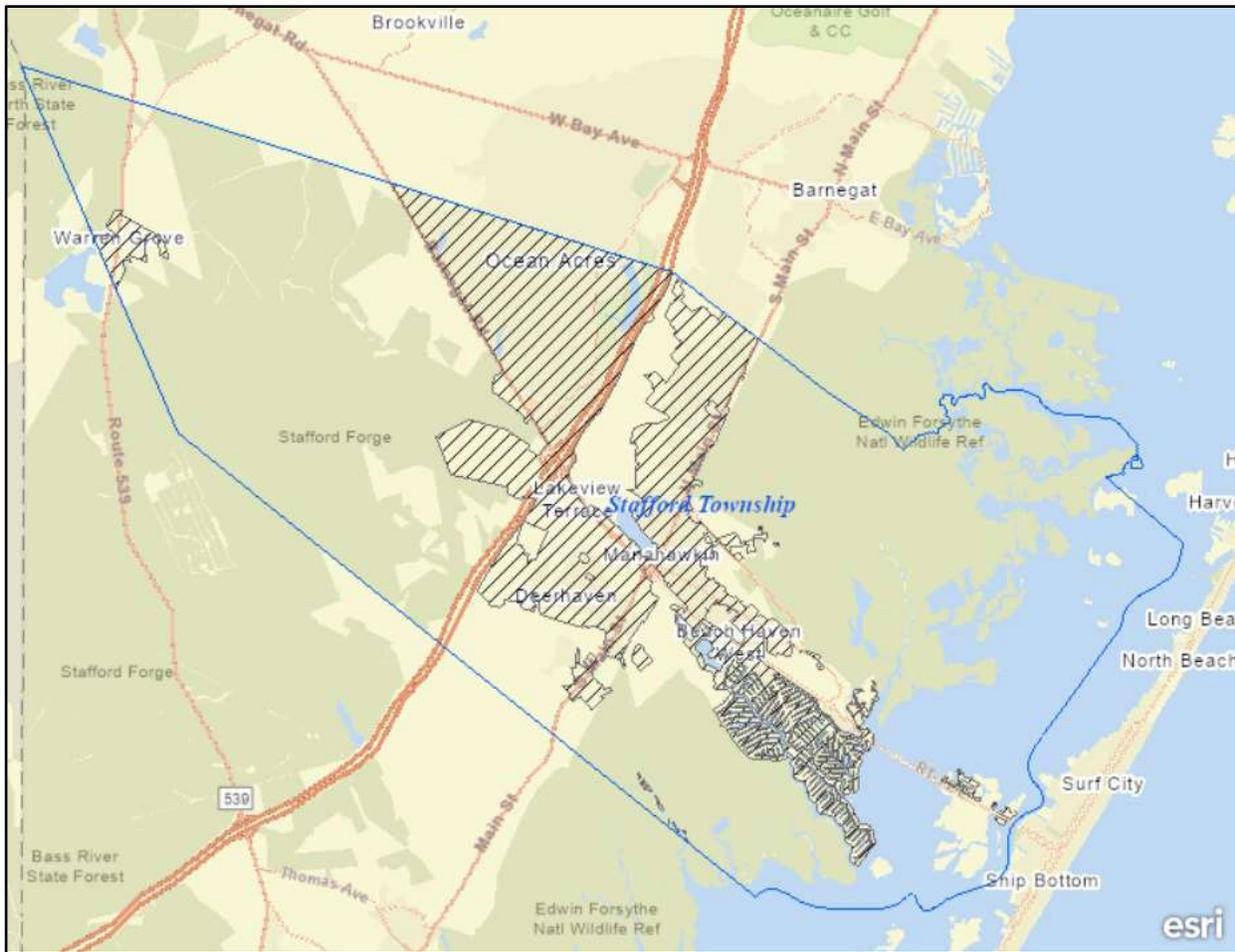
## INFRASTRUCTURE

### Water

According to Township's 2007 Master Plan "It shall be the duty of the Stafford Water and Sewer Utility Department to promote the distribution and treatment of potable water. It is in the public interest that the Stafford Water and Sewer Utility Department foster and promote the proper installation of comprehensive water systems, appurtenances and/or treatment plants. It is in the public interest that the Stafford Water and Sewer Utility Department foster and promote all reasonable means for the treatment of water in circumstances that are considered environmentally safe." Under the Sanitary Sewer Systems section of the Master Plan, it states, "It shall be the duty of the Stafford Water and Sewer Utility Department to promote the

collection, treatment and purification or disposal of sewerage or other waste. It is in the public interest that the Stafford Water and Sewer Utility Department foster and promote the proper installation of comprehensive sewer systems, appurtenances and/or treatment plants. It is in the public interest that the Stafford Water and Sewer Utility Department foster and promote all reasonable means providing for the collection and disposal of liquid waste, including sewerage sludge, such as is normally associated with a sanitary sewage collection system, in an environmentally sound manner.” According to the MSA, in 2020, the water system has been almost completely replaced and the sewer system is in the first stages of being replaced. The Township chose to focus 2019 on rehabbing the first section of the Beach Haven West sewer system. That work started on March 16, 2020 and was scheduled to be completed by the end of 2020. Currently, there are no capacity issues with either the water or sewer system.

### Sewer Service Area



### Water Quality Management Planning

The Township is included as part of the overall Ocean County Wastewater Management Plan (WMP). The WMP was submitted by the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders on January

8, 2015. The Plan was approved by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection on December 30, 2015. The Ocean County Wastewater Management Plan is an integral component of the Ocean County Water Quality Management Plan. The WMP assesses the adequacy of existing wastewater treatment alternatives to meet population growth projections, and proposes solutions where deficits are discovered. The WMP ensures that sewer service is not extended into environmentally sensitive areas. This is done through the adoption of a Sewer Service Area map. The WMP identifies public water supply areas and identifies the water supply needs associated with proposed development.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

### **Circulation**

The Township, as of 2010, had a total of 184 miles of roadways. The roadways within the Township are separated into three different jurisdictions: State (NJDOT & NJ Turnpike Authority/Garden State Parkway), Ocean County and Local. There are approximately 20 miles of roadways under State jurisdiction within the Township. The NJDOT has jurisdiction over NJ Route 72 (10 miles) and US Route 9 (5 miles). The NJ Turnpike Authority/Garden State Parkway has jurisdiction over the Garden State Parkway (5 miles). There are approximately 20 miles of roadways under Ocean County jurisdiction within the Township. All other roadways within the Township are under Township jurisdiction. The Township owned roadways comprise approximately 100 miles. There are two principal arterial roadways running through the Township: The Garden State Parkway and NJ Route 72.

### **Public Transportation**

According to the 2007 Circulation Element, NJ Transit operates one bus route through the Township (559 – Lakewood-Atlantic City). This bus route provides service between Lakewood Terminal and Atlantic City Terminal with local service along Route 9 through the entire length of the Township. The Ocean Ride transportation system provides 17 bus routes which operate throughout Ocean County. Five of the routes serve destinations within Stafford Township (OC 5A & 5B, OC 6, OC 9, LBI-North and LBI-South). The routes are designed to connect key residential developments areas with popular destinations such as local government facilities, healthcare, shopping, employment, social services, and other transit connections. Within Stafford Township direct service is provided to several of the larger shopping centers and public destinations (Town Hall, Library, SOCH, etc.). The bus routes operate on fixed schedules which vary by route and by day. Rail service is currently not provided within the Township.

### **Dial-A-Ride**

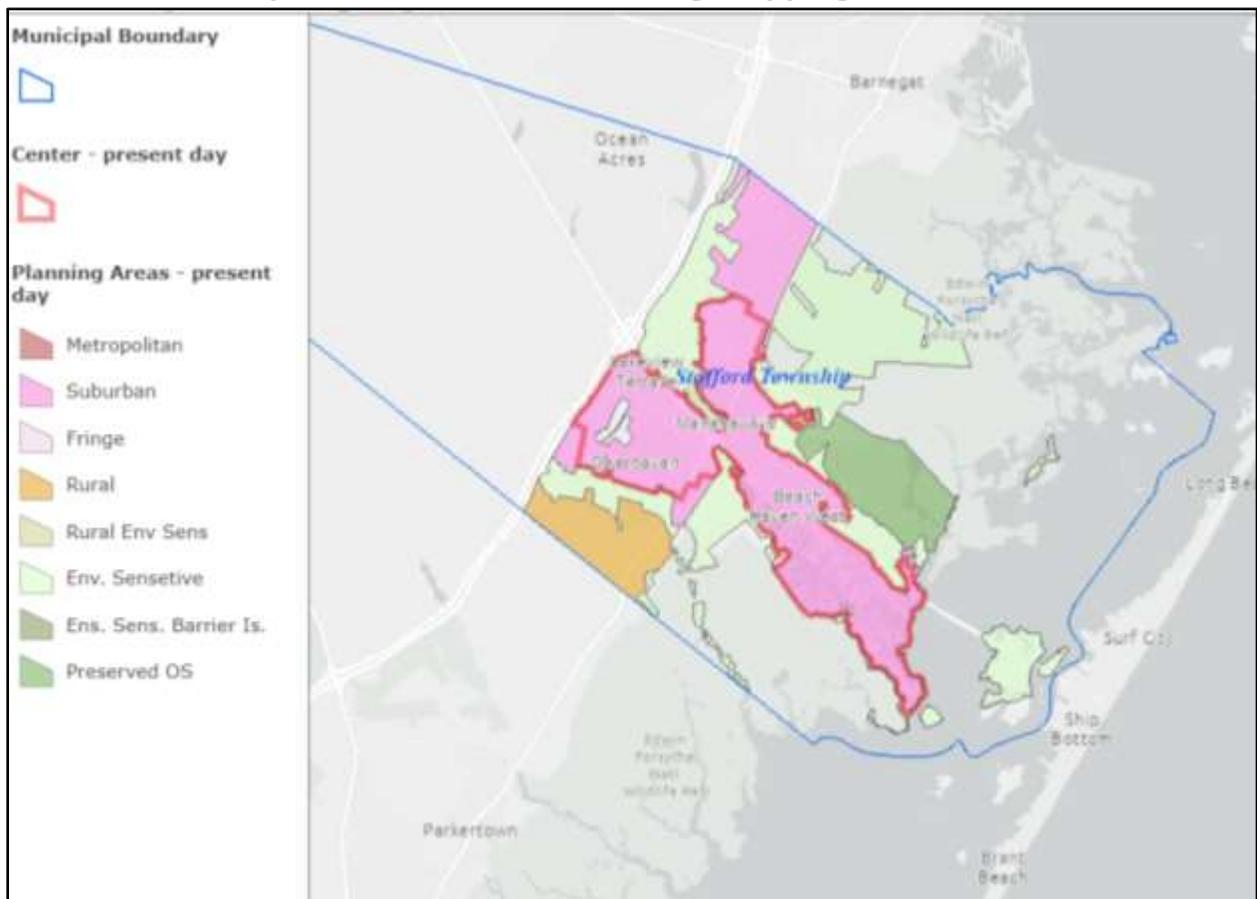
The Stafford Township Dial-A-Ride is a handicap accessible bus transportation service operating within Stafford Township and available to Stafford Township residents only. Residents between the ages of 12 and 17 are permitted to ride the bus once a pass is obtained. A parent or legal

guardian can apply for a Dial-A-Ride pass by providing proof of residency at the Public Works office located at 320 Haywood Road in Manahawkin.

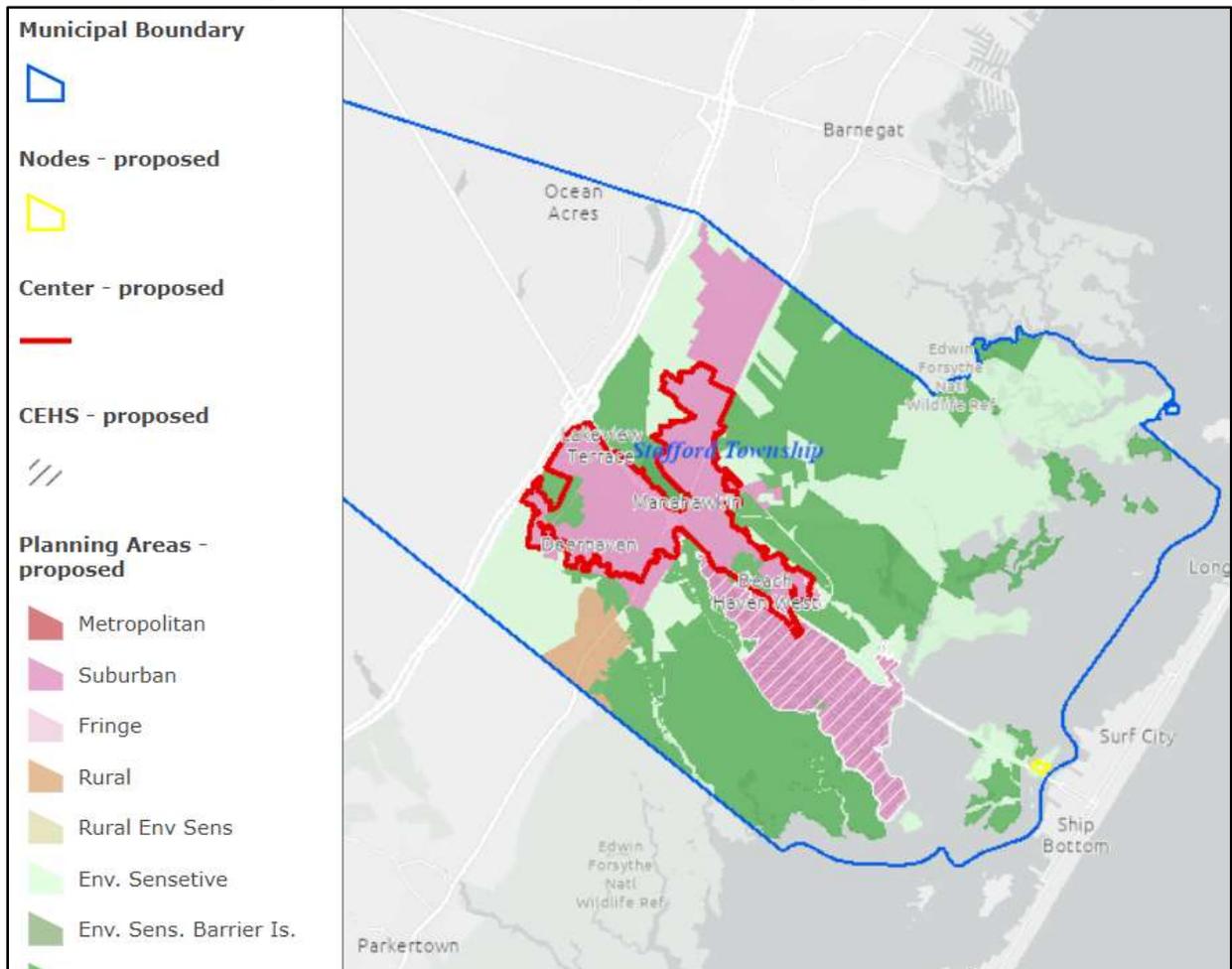
## PROPOSED MAP AMENDMENTS

In 2007 the State Planning Commission designated 3,589.70 acres of Stafford Township a Regional Center. Due to Executive Order 89 and the history of flooding in portions of the Township near Beach Haven West, the State proposed designated Regional Center will decrease to 1,986.60 acres.

### Stafford Township Plan Endorsement Existing Mapping



## Stafford Township Plan Endorsement Proposed Mapping



### Summary of Proposed Map Amendments

Planning Area	Label	Existing Acreage	Proposed Acreage
PA 2	Suburban	4,473.84	3,977.94
PA 4	Rural	757.34	348.03
PA 5	Environmentally Sensitive	4,104.18	5,315.12
Park/Preserved Open Space	Park/Preserved Open Space	7,081.77	6,776.23
Pinelands Area	Pinelands Area	1,3845.2	1,3845.2
CES	Critical Environmental Site	65.54	1,309.11

Center Designation	Existing Acreage	Proposed Acreage	Change in Acreage
Regional Center	3,589.70	1,986.60	-1,603.10

## STATE PLAN GOALS AND REVIEW

### Goal #1: Revitalize the State's Cities and Towns

- Regional Center Designation in the PA-2 Suburban Planning Area has the intention to organize growth that otherwise would sprawl throughout a corridor and create unserviceable demands. Regional Centers contain a mix of residential, commercial, and office uses at an intensity that make a variety of public transportation options feasible as the Centers are built out. These centers have a core of commercial activity, and the boundaries of the Centers are well defined by open space/significant natural features.

### Goal #2: Conserve the State's Natural Resources and Systems

- The Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) was completed on 4/6/22 and approved and accepted by the Township Council on 4/26/22. The NRI compiles and describes important, naturally occurring resources.
- The Township has a Water Conservation Ordinance, which was adopted by the Township Council of the Township of Stafford in 2001. The Ordinance states that "All Township residents and nonresidential property owners are encouraged to voluntarily assist in the advancement of the interest of water conservation by using private wells for irrigation and nonpotable water needs, which action shall further promote the purposes of this chapter. Further, Township residents and nonresidential owners are hereby encouraged to continue use of private wells for irrigation and nonpotable water needs subsequent to connecting to the public water system to promote water conservation. An update to the Ordinance has been added to the PIA.
- The PIA lists "adopt a Conservation Plan Element" to explore improvements to enhance natural resources, such as forest and park management for invasive plant species and measures to prevent saltwater intrusion into freshwater wetlands, especially vernal pools.

### Goal #3: Promote Beneficial Economic Growth, Development and Renewal for All Residents of New Jersey

- The Township has a Community Development Department, which is responsible for various land use related activities throughout the Township. All zoning issues including the issuance of zoning permits and investigating possible code violations based on the Township Code are dealt with through the Department. The Department also provides administrative and technical support for the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment as well as the Environmental Commission and the Township's Affordable Housing Program. In addition, the Department oversees the Township's participation with the Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) National Flood Insurance

Program's (NFIP) Community Rating System (CRS) in connection with Floodplain Management.

- The Township plans to create an Economic Development Committee into the future before the 2027 Master Plan update.
- Stafford Township has two thriving commercial districts.
  - Route 72 Corridor for the length of Route 72
  - Route 72/Route 9 to Hillard Boulevard – Economic Downtown area.
- As part of the Plan Endorsement process, Stafford Township was granted a commercial node on Cedar Bonnet Island.

#### **Goal #4: Protect the Environment, Prevent and Clean Up Pollution**

- The Township has an Environmental Commission, which is an advisory board which reviews all development applications that come before the Planning Board or Zoning Board of Adjustments. This Commission also makes ordinance recommendations to protect and preserve the environmental quality of the Township.
- The Stafford Township Green Team was established in 2019 and received its Certified Bronze Level in 2020. The Stafford Township Green Team's 2022 actions include educating the public on backyard composting and proper recycling, creating safe routes to school, implementing a Natural Resources Inventory, and preparing the community for the statewide law banning single use plastic and paper bags.
- From major sewer and infrastructure work the Township has accomplished in Beach Haven West; over 186 acres of bay have been cleaned up.
- The PIA lists "adopt a Conservation Plan Element" to explore improvements to enhance natural resources, such as forest and park management for invasive plant species and measures to prevent saltwater intrusion into freshwater wetlands, especially vernal pools.

#### **Goal #5: Provide Adequate Public Facilities and Services at a Reasonable Cost**

- The Township has four schools in the Township, including the Stafford Township School District, Southern Regional High School, Lighthouse Academy, and Saint Mary Academy.
- Stafford Township Municipal Complex – Located at 260 E Bay Avenue
- Pine Street Community Center – Located at 25 Pine Street
- Stafford Township's Water and Sewer Utility has 4 water treatment plants, 14 sewer pump stations, and 7 water towers.

#### **Goal #6: Provide Adequate Housing at a Reasonable Cost**

- The Stafford Township Planning Board adopted a Housing Element in 2017 and Fair Share Plan in 2021. The Fair Share Plan has been endorsed by the governing body. The Fair Share Plan describes the ways Stafford Township shall address its fair share for low- and moderate-income housing as determined by the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) and documented in the Housing Element.

- According to the Township’s Municipal Self-Assessment, the Township is in the process of meeting all its affordable housing needs.
  - Round One (1) of the Affordable Housing obligation was 555 units and that was met with the following:
    - Credits without Controls (243 of the 555)
    - Inclusionary Projects of Pine Crest Village and Perry’s Lake (86 of the 555 units)
    - 100% affordable developments of Presbyterian Homes and Stafford Park Family Units (143 of the 555)
    - Rental Bonus Credits (83 of the 555 credits)
  - Round Two (2) and Three (3) obligation was 94 Rehab and 360 units
    - Present Need (Rehabilitation Share 1999 to 2025): 24 and the rest in process
    - 360 Units – Met with the following:
      - Scattered site affordable for sale units: 11 of the 360 units
      - Inclusionary rental projects (Stafford Park Family and Age Restricted Units; Stafford Mews; Walters 100% affordable senior’s rental project; SOCH rentals accounting for 243 of the 360 required units; and
      - Supported/special needs housing (16 of the 360 required units)
      - Rental Bonus Credits (90 of the 360 units)

**Goal #7: Preserve and Enhance Areas with Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Value**

- The Township has a Historic Preservation Commission whose responsibilities include:
  - Prepare a survey of historic sites of the Township.
  - Make recommendations to the Planning Board of the Historic Preservation Plan element of the Master Plan and on the implications for preservation of historic sites of any other Master Plan elements.
  - Advise the Planning Board, and Board of Adjustment on applications for development pursuant to § 10-35 herein.
  - Advise the Planning Board on the inclusion of historic sites in the recommended capital improvement program.
  - Provide written reports pursuant to § 10-36 on the application of the Zoning Ordinance provisions concerning historic preservation.
  - Carry out such other advisory, educational, and informational functions as will promote historic preservation in the Township.
- Historic Preservation Element: The Historic Preservation Plan Element of the Stafford Township Master Plan of 2017 is prepared for the purposed of “(a) indicating the location and significance of historic sites and historic districts; (b) identifying the standards used to assess worthiness for historic site or district identification; and (c) analyzing the impact

of each component and element of the Master Plan on the preservation of historic sites and districts.”

- Township recently adopted an Historic Preservation Ordinance on May 5, 2022, to help try and preserve homes identified in the Township’s Historic Element and by the Historic Preservation Commission.
- The Township’s Open Space and Recreation Element is part of the 2017 Master Plan.
  - An Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) is defined by the Green Acres Program Section (New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection) as *“a local government’s vision of open space and recreation. It should establish a philosophical and practical justification for the protection and preservation of open space and recreation opportunities. An OSRP provides a framework for implementation.”*
  - Stafford Township has long preserved large areas for wildlife and open space conservation in concert with State and Federal lands. As indicated by the open space inventory most of these areas preserved in perpetuity are owned by the Federal Government, the State of New Jersey, and Ocean County. This would include the Edwin B. Forsythe Wildlife Refuge and the large amount of Township land within the Pinelands Preservation Area west of the Garden State Parkway. These management areas and Pinelands Areas are mostly not appropriate for active recreation and the Township owns other parks and recreational areas that the public can use.
- The PIA lists “adopt a Conservation Plan Element” to explore improvements to enhance natural resources, such as forest and park management for invasive plant species and measures to prevent saltwater intrusion into freshwater wetlands, especially vernal pools.

### **Goal #8: Ensure Sound and Integrated Planning and Implementation Statewide**

- Stafford Township plans to complete a Master Plan update in 2027.
- Keeping up to date on affordable housing elements.
- Completing the items agreed upon in the Plan Implementation Agreement
- Working with the State and County to be consistent with their planning.

## **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the work the Township of Stafford has supplied, actions taken and are committed to complete, it is my recommendation that the State Planning Commission adopt the Resolution for Plan Endorsement.

## **PLANNING & IMPLEMENTATION AGREEMENT**

See the attached PIA.