

***Plan Endorsement Recommendation Report***  
***Township of Maurice River***



**New Jersey Department of State**  
**Office of Planning Advocacy**  
**Meghan Wren, AICP, CFM, Area Planner**  
**February 24, 2023**

This document is a recommendation report prepared by the Office for Planning Advocacy (OPA) as staff to the State Planning Commission (SPC or Commission), based on input of our partner agencies, Township of Maurice River, Cumberland County and members of the public. OPA will post this report and other material related to the Township of Maurice River Plan Endorsement petition on our website. You can contact our office by email regarding petitions 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 the Township of Maurice River for Plan Endorsement can be found here: <https://nj.gov/state/planning/plan-endorsement.shtml> and include the Township's Master Plan, Amendments, Redevelopment Plans, etc.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Township of Maurice River (hereafter Maurice River, MRT or Township) first had its centers designated February 2000, prior to when the formal Plan Endorsement process was in place. It received various extensions over the ensuing years that are scheduled to expire on March 31, 2023.

The Township’s interest in pursuing formal Plan Endorsement was discussed on March 17, 2020 at a prepetition meeting with representatives from the state agencies and the Cumberland County Planning Department. According to the Municipal Self-Assessment Report, MRT is seeking Plan Endorsement to continue to align its local planning goals and objectives with the State Plan and help the municipality remain rural, historic and a coastal focused town. Specifically, to make mapping changes consistent with resiliency and sustainable development practices and New Jersey State Planning Commission policies such as adding several working waterfront nodes and streamlining mitigation, drainage maintenance and emergency repair permits. They would appreciate state partnership on preserving their natural resources, sustaining their economy, maintaining the character of their historic village centers and protecting themselves from inundation due to SLR, storms and erosion – including their working waterfront and the historic East Point Lighthouse.

The local goals, objectives and vision for the Township remain consistent with the State Plan, though some of the Center, Node and Planning Area boundaries are being amended to reflect current habitat data and resiliency considerations. The Township is working to update its Master Plan in 2023, has made strides in its redevelopment efforts and is diligent at implementing its vision for future quality of life, economic viability, and land use stewardship.

## BACKGROUND/ CHRONOLOGY

The Mayor forwarded the Township of Maurice River’s petition for endorsement in January, 2020.

In March, 2020, a Prepetition meeting was held, the Township authorized a Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee in March 2021; and submitted their Municipal Self-Assessment Report in January 2022. OPA participated in two local visions sessions that they held in November and December 2022.

Maurice River Township has been steadily building on its planning foundation, with efforts toward sustainability and smart growth as follows:

| <b>Event(s)</b>                               | <b>Date</b>               | <b>Notes</b>               |
|---|---------------------------|----------------------------|
| MRT Planning Study                            | 1976                      |                            |
| Pinelands Comprehensive Mgt Plan              | 1980 (1982 MRT Amendment) |                            |
| Centers Designated                            | 2000                      | Through Cross Acceptance   |
| Master Plan (Housing & Conservation elements) | 2000 (1989)               |                            |
| Zoning Map                                    | 2005                      |                            |
| Cumberland County Bike/Ped Plan               | 2007                      |                            |
| Comprehensive Recycling ordinance             | 2009                      |                            |
| NJ APA Community Assistance Workshop          | 2012                      |                            |
| Cumberland Co Transportation Plan             | 2013                      |                            |
| Tree Protection Ordinance                     | 2013                      |                            |
| Master Plan Reexamination                     | 2012/2013<br>(1996, 2006) |                            |
| NJ Delaware Bayshore Recovery Plan            | 2014                      | W/FEMA, Cumb Co & Partners |
| Open Space and Recreation Plan                | 2014                      |                            |
| Redev Plans: Ackley Garage & Sapello Foundry  | 2014                      |                            |

|  |                              |                         |
|--|------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Environmental Resource Inventory                   | 2015 (1993)                  |                         |
| SJ Bronze Certification                            | 2015                         |                         |
| Getting to Resilience                              | 2015                         |                         |
| Flood Hazard Protection Ordinance                  | 2016                         |                         |
| 'Dunkin Donut' Block 257, Lot1 Area in Need, Rehab | 2017                         |                         |
| Redevelopment Plan – Township-wide                 | 2018                         |                         |
| Cumb Co Wastewater Mgt Plan                        | 2019                         | With Build out analysis |
| Impervious Cover Report - Rutgers                  | 2019                         |                         |
| Submitted PE Petition                              | January 2020                 |                         |
| Prepetition Meeting                                | March, 2020                  |                         |
| Cumb Co Hazard Mitigation Plan                     | 2021                         |                         |
| Stormwater Ordinance                               | 2021                         | Recently updated        |
| Submitted MSA                                      | January 2022                 |                         |
| Visioning Sessions                                 | November 30 &<br>Dec 7, 2022 | With OPA support        |
| NJ Resilience Accelerator                          | Winter 2022/23               |                         |
| EV Ready Ordinance                                 | December 2022                | #718                    |
| PIC Recommendation (Scheduled)                     | Feb 15, 2023                 |                         |
| SPC ADOPTION (scheduled)                           | March 1, 2023                |                         |

## **PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

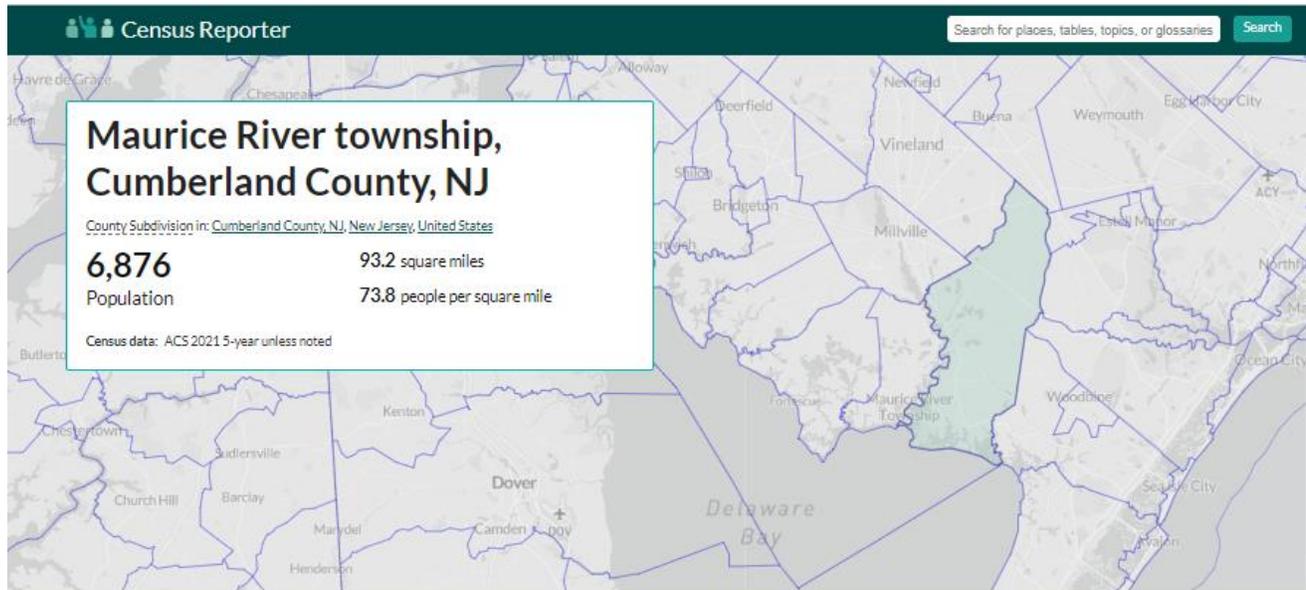
As part of the Plan Endorsement process the Township appointed a PE Advisory Committee on March 18, 2021 and hosted two local visioning sessions in person and virtual on November 30 and December 7, 2023.

## **LOCATION & REGIONAL CONTEXT**

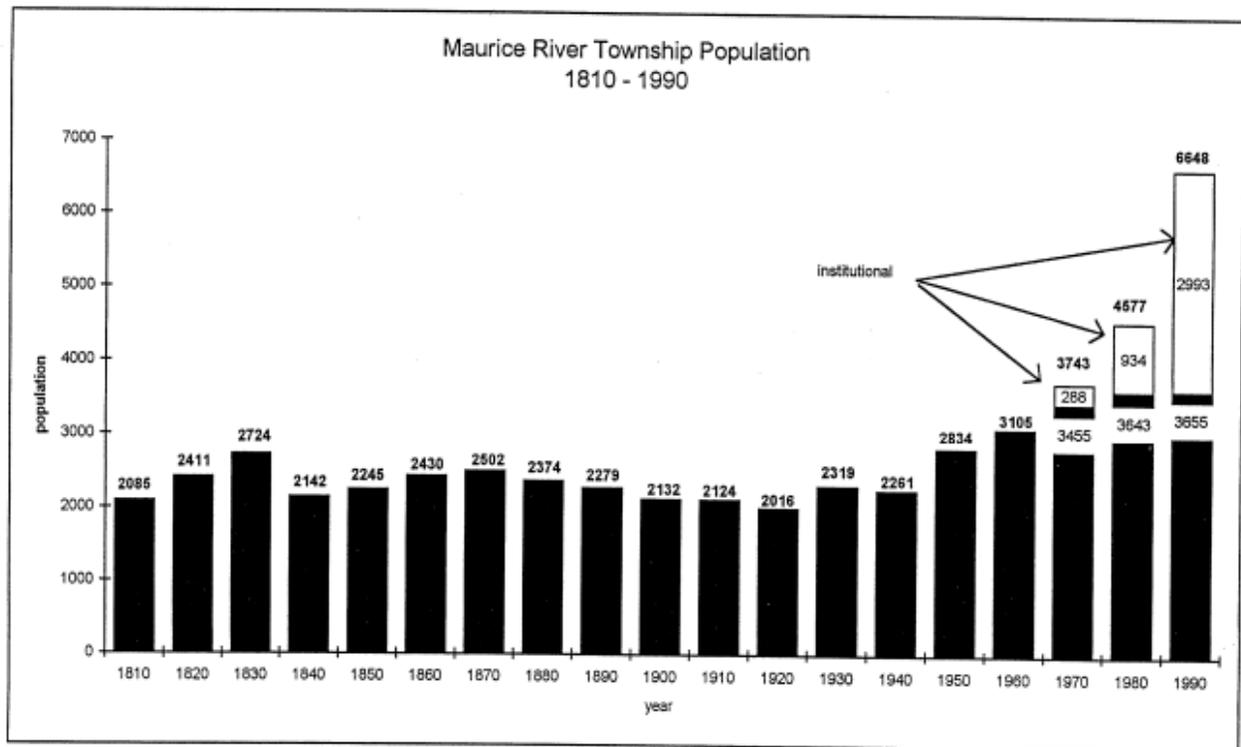
As per the MSA, Maurice River is the largest municipality located in Cumberland County. Incorporated in 1798, it consists of 94.7 square miles, 69% is in the Pinelands while the remaining lands are in CAFRA. Over 50% of the total land area in the Township is either State owned, in a Conservation program or publicly owned. Less than 2% of the land area is utilized for non-residential purposes and only 9% is residential. The Township contains portions of four designated Wild and Scenic rivers; the Maurice River, the Menantico River, the Manumuskin River, and the Muskee Creek. Residential development is primarily clustered in the Villages of Milmay, Cumberland, Delmont, Heislerville, Leesburg, Dorchester, Bricksboro and Port Elizabeth. Many of these villages predated the incorporation of Maurice River, dating back to the 1600's. Each of these Villages formed for different reasons related to local commerce on and proximity to the waterways. Maurice River is a quiet community extending from the mouth of the Maurice River (Delaware Bay) north into the heart of the Pinelands National Reserve. There are many unique and environmentally sensitive areas in the Township rich with history, scenic vistas and natural and environmental resources. The southern end of the Township contains various Delaware Bayshore beaches including the areas in East Point, Thompson's Beach and Moore's Beach. The only residential area remaining along the shore is on Bay Avenue in East Point. The buildings on Moore's Beach and Thompson's Beach have been lost in storms and reclamation efforts. Today, State agencies and non-profit land conservation groups maintain and protect the shoreline, providing a habitat for a wide variety of birds and horseshoe crabs and other natural resources. The Township is working with these agencies to maintain the dike system that separates the Delaware Bay from the Maurice River and keeps the salt water from intruding into freshwater. The Township is also struggling to maintain the water related industries including shipbuilding and fishing that used to thrive in the area...Shipbuilding was a predominate industry in the Dorchester and Leesburg areas where the A.J. Meerwald (the State Ship of New Jersey) was constructed.

## **LAND USE, DEMOGRAPHICS AND FUTURE**

Maurice River Township is home to two state prisons in one large complex outside of Leesburg that essentially doubles the population figures for the municipality and skews the demographic information considerably. Since roughly half of the people in the numbers below are housed in a state facility and whose wastewater treatment, land use and other considerations are not controlled by the municipality, it is difficult to get a clear picture of the Maurice River Township's true make up. Please read the following numbers accordingly:



A challenge facing Maurice River Township is balancing its natural resources while serving the population within and traveling through the area. Population growth in the Township has declined by 12% over the past forty years (1980 population 3,643; 2010 population 3,184). The largest residential population growth occurred in the 1960's and 1970's.



| Residential and Institutional Population<br>1960-2020 |             |            |            |               |            |            |
|---|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|------------|------------|
|   | Residential |            |            | Institutional |            |            |
|   | Population  | Change     |            | Population    | Change     |            |
|   |             | Population | Percentage |               | Population | Percentage |
| <b>1960</b>   | 3105        |            |            | 0             |            |            |
| <b>1970</b>   | 3455        | 350        | 11.3%      | 288           | 288        | -          |
| <b>1980</b>   | 3643        | 188        | 5.4%       | 934           | 646        | 224.3%     |
| <b>1990</b>   | 3655        | 12         | 0.3%       | 2993          | 2059       | 220.4%     |
| <b>2000</b>   | 3567        | -88        | -2.4%      | 3361          | 368        | 12.3%      |
| <b>2010</b>   | 3571        | 4          | 0.1%       | 4405          | 1044       | 31.1%      |
| <b>2020</b>   | 3184        | -387       | -10.8%     | 3034          | -1371      | 31.1%      |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau

The Township is located on one of the main travel routes for shore bound traffic, connecting Cape May County to Route 55 and the Philadelphia area. In the 1990's County Route 347 was enhanced as a bypass to State Highway Route 47 in an effort to divert the shore traffic off the local roadway. Route 347 bypassed Route 47 through Maurice River and relieved traffic congestion on the two-lane State highway. This had secondary unintended impacts. Route 47 runs through the Township's villages and commercial areas. While the shore traffic created an almost gridlock situation through the summer months, it also offered patrons to the local businesses and farm stands. With the construction of the Route 347 bypass not only has the gridlock situation on the state highway been reduced, the local businesses on Route 47 have not experienced the same level of customer volume.

There are limited opportunities for employment in the Township of Maurice River given the constrained lands and limited growth opportunities that exists. There is also a carryover from the population projections which reflects the counting of the prison population in the Census data, specifically the percent of the population that is not in the labor force is shown at 82.77%, clearly this includes the prisoners counted in the total population and is not reflective of the actual persons residing in Township housing.

| Employment by Industry, Civilian Employed population 16 years and over                     |              |             |
|--|--------------|-------------|
| Occupation   | No. Persons  | Percentage  |
| Agriculture, Forestry, Fishing and Hunting, and Mining                                     | 7            | 0.60%       |
| Construction   | 100          | 8.52%       |
| Manufacturing  | 86           | 7.33%       |
| Wholesale Trade  | 36           | 3.07%       |
| Retail Trade   | 204          | 17.38%      |
| Transportation and Warehousing, Utilities  | 72           | 6.13%       |
| Information  | 7            | 0.60%       |
| Finance and Insurance, and Real Estate and Rental and Leasing                              | 22           | 1.87%       |
| Professional, Scientific, and Management, and Administrative and Waste Management Services | 22           | 1.87%       |
| Educational Services, and Health Care and Social Assistance                                | 257          | 21.89%      |
| Arts, Entertainment, and Recreation, and Accommodation and Food Services                   | 50           | 4.26%       |
| Other Services, except Public Administration   | 66           | 5.62%       |
| Public Administration  | 245          | 20.87%      |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>1,174</b> | <b>100%</b> |

Source: American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2018)

Income

**\$26,746**

Per capita income

about 90 percent of the amount in Cumberland County: \$30,034  
about three-fifths of the amount in New Jersey: \$46,691

**\$61,042**

Median household income

a little higher than the amount in Cumberland County: \$58,397  
about two-thirds of the amount in New Jersey: \$89,703

Household income



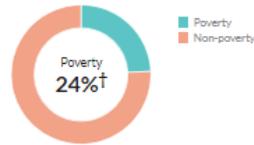
Poverty

**13.8%**

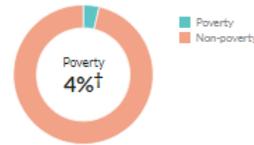
Persons below poverty line

about 90 percent of the rate in Cumberland County: 15.7%  
about 1.4 times the rate in New Jersey: 9.8%

Children (Under 18)



Seniors (65 and over)



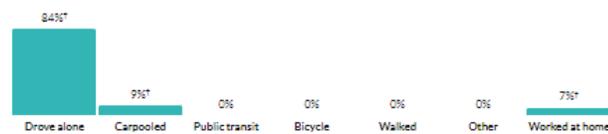
Transportation to work

**26.5 minutes**

Mean travel time to work

about 10 percent higher than the figure in Cumberland County: 23.8  
about 80 percent of the figure in New Jersey: 31.5

Means of transportation to work



Units & Occupancy

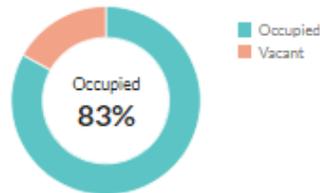
**1,169**

Number of housing units

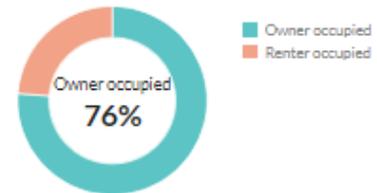
Cumberland County: 57,051

New Jersey: 3,738,342

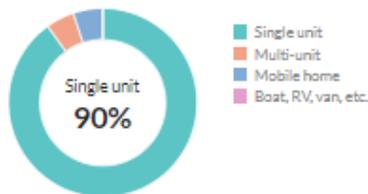
Occupied vs. Vacant



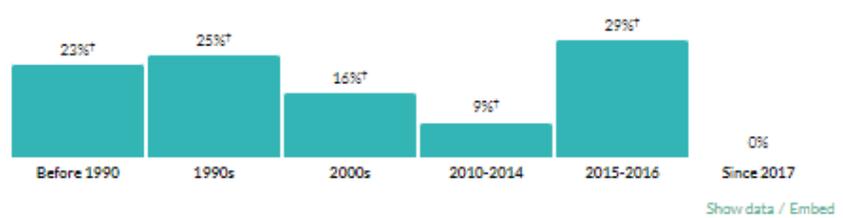
Ownership of occupied units



Types of structure



Year moved in, by percentage of population



Value

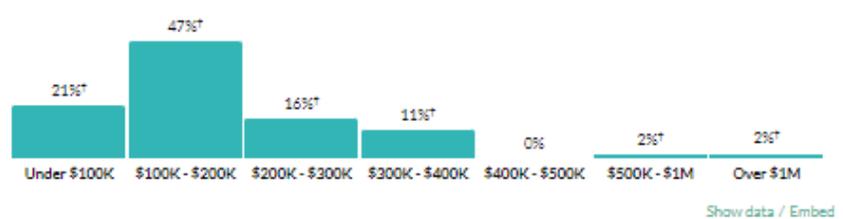
**\$168,200**

Median value of owner-occupied housing units

about the same as the amount in Cumberland County: \$168,900

about half the amount in New Jersey: \$355,700

Value of owner-occupied housing units



The Township has also seen a decline in their housing stock; from 2000 through 2020 the housing units have declined 1.2%. Some of this is due to environmental factors, and some due to age and condition. The housing stock is primarily homeownership, family units in single family detached units. The Township housing stock is older, with 24% built prior to 1939, and only 7% built after the year 2000.

| Summary of Household Characteristics - Maurice River Township            |                |            |
|--|----------------|------------|
|  | No. of Persons | % of Total |
| Family Households  | 683            | 68.71%     |
| Non-Family Households  | 311            | 31.29%     |
| Non-Family Households  |                |            |
| Living Alone   | 216            | 69.45%     |
| Not Living Alone   | 95             | 30.55%     |
| Family Households  |                |            |
| Married Couple   | 519            | 75.99%     |
| Single Male  | 83             | 12.15%     |
| Single Female  | 81             | 11.86%     |
| Total Households   | 994            | 100%       |
| Persons Per Household  | 2.5            | N/A        |
| Source: US Census Data/American Community Survey 5-year estimates (2018) |                |            |

## INFRASTRUCTURE

**Waste Water Treatment** - Maurice River Township is fully served by private septic systems and private wells except for several sand mines and the state prison which have their own individual systems. Residential wastewater management in Maurice River Township in the Rural District consists of individual subsurface septic systems under the jurisdiction of the Cumberland County Health Department. The lack of wastewater infrastructure in the township is a limiting factor to development.

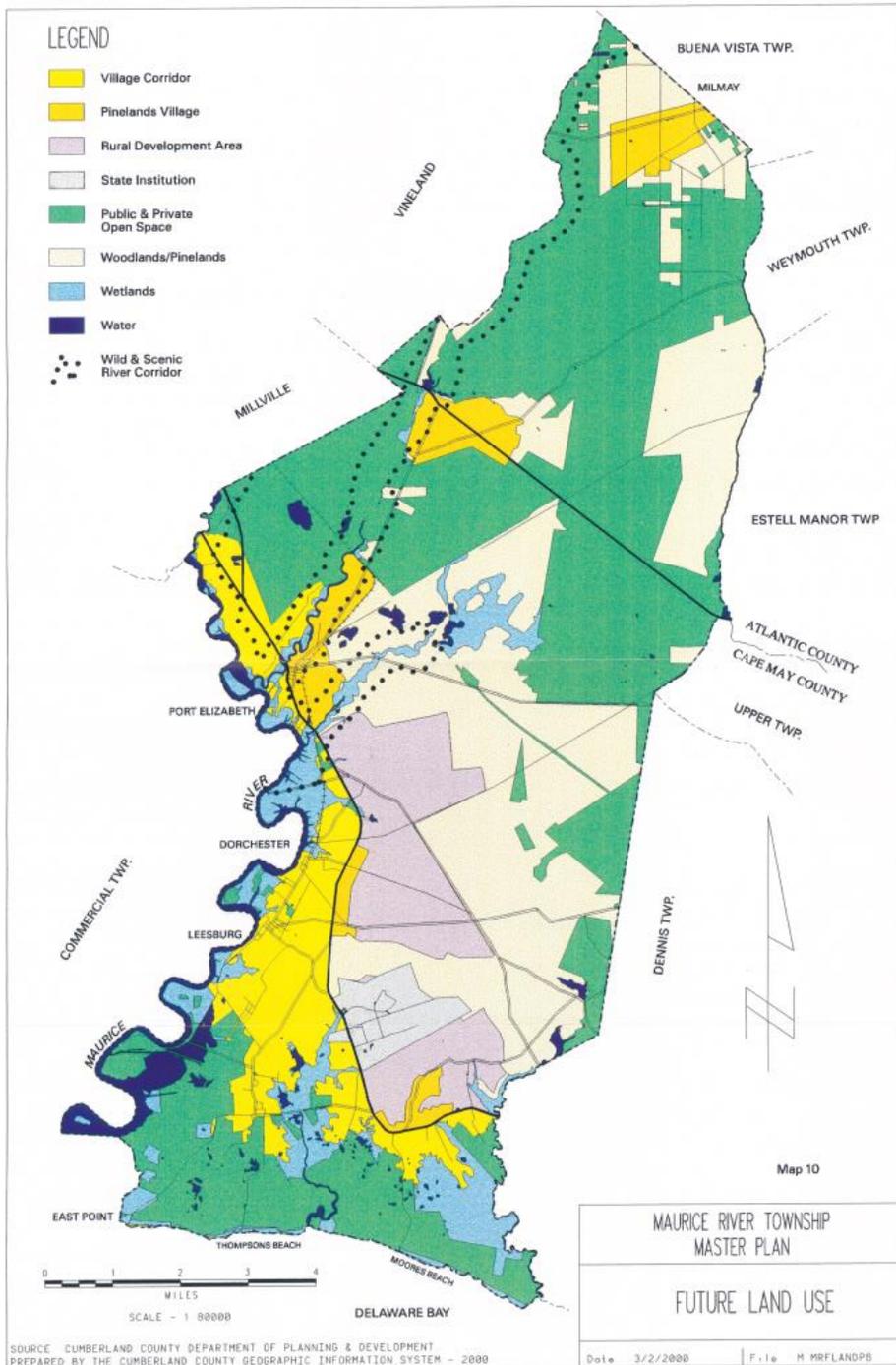
From the Cumberland County Wastewater Management Plan showing excess capacity upon full build out:

**Table 10** shows the total number of units projected based on zoning compared to the total number of systems allowable in each HUC11 watershed.

| Table 10. Septic Area Nitrate Dilution Analysis by HUC 11 Watershed |               |   |                          |                            |                              |                              |
|---|---------------|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| Municipality  | HUC 11 - Code | Septic Density <sup>1</sup><br>(acres/du) | Developable Land (acres) | Allowed Units <sup>2</sup> | Total New Units <sup>3</sup> | Carrying Capacity Exceeded X |
| Maurice River   | 02040302070   | 6.1                                       | 674                      | 110                        | 40                           | -70                          |
|   | 02040206170   | 6.6                                       | 0                        | 0                          | 0                            | 0                            |
|   | 02040206180   | 6.4                                       | 21                       | 3                          | 0                            | -3                           |
|   | 02040206190   | 5.9                                       | 1,097                    | 185                        | 97                           | -88                          |
|   | 02040206200   | 5.9                                       | 2,973                    | 503                        | 284                          | -219                         |
|   | 02040206210   | 6   | 1,770                    | 295                        | 78                           | -217                         |
| <b>Total</b>  |               |   | <b>6,535</b>             | <b>1,096</b>               | <b>499</b>                   | <b>-594</b>                  |

**Water** – Maurice River Township has no public service area for potable water supply. The Township is served by private wells. According to the Well Permitting section of the Bureau of Water Allocation and Well Permitting (Bureau), approximately 376 permits to drill domestic wells have been issued in Maurice River Township. There would need to be analysis of the health of the Kirkwood Cohansey Aquifer in this area should a public water source be pursued, and the vulnerability assessment should speak to the safety of the private wells in light of sea level rise.

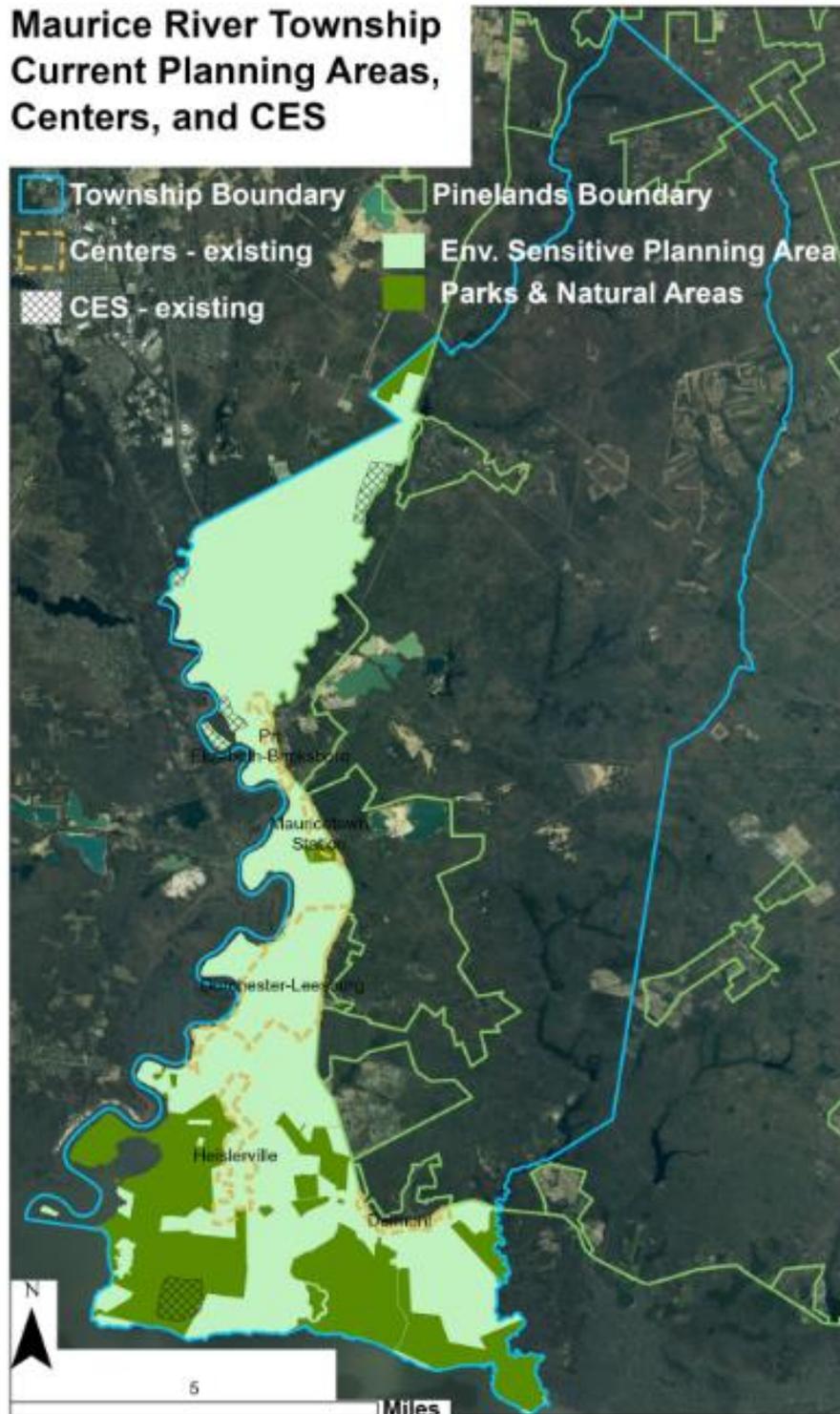
**FUTURE LAND USE /ZONING MAP (Below)**



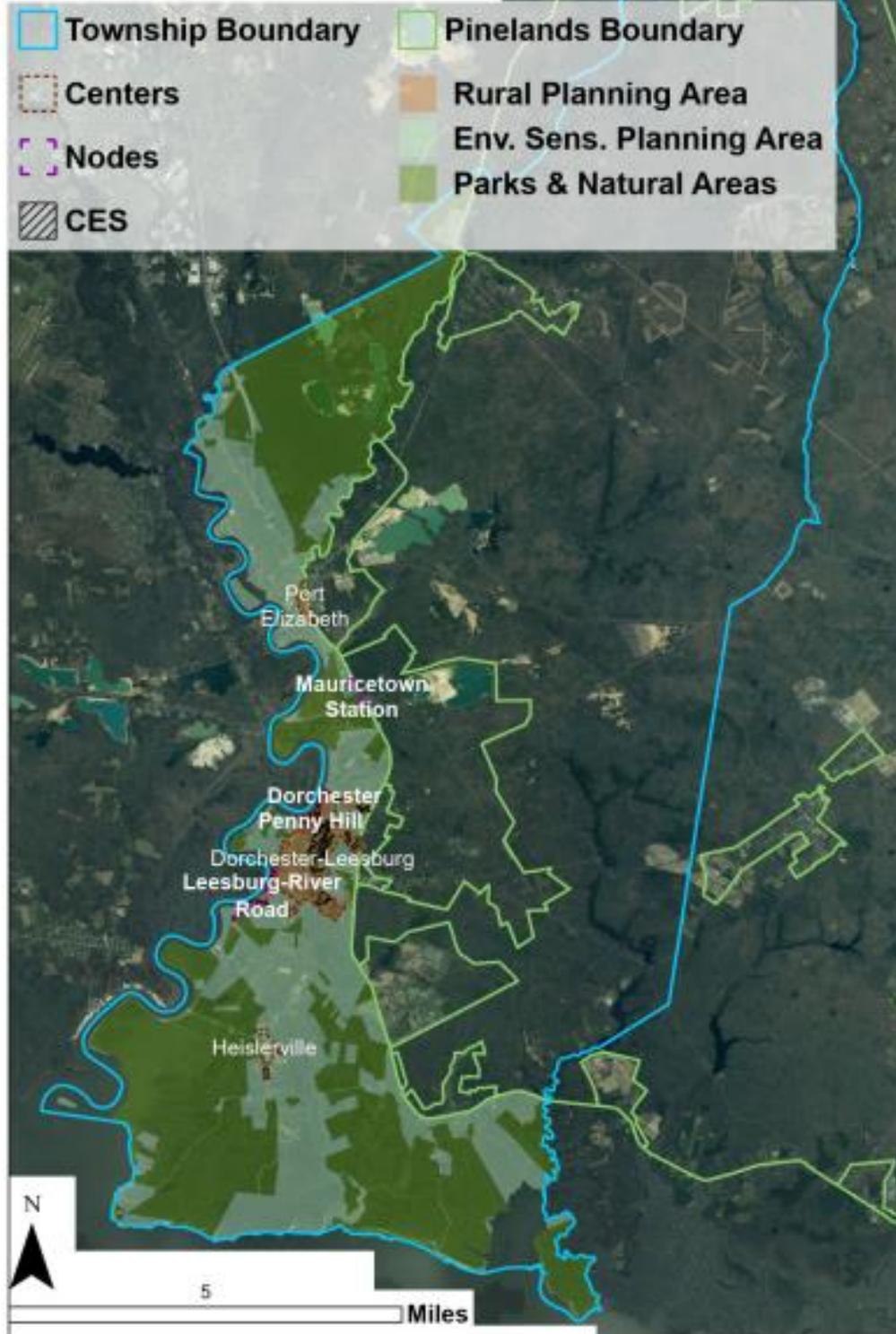
## PROPOSED MAP AMENDMENTS

Maurice River Township has reached consensus on their map's Planning Areas and Center/Node boundaries. Below are the existing and proposed planning areas, Centers, Nodes and Critical Environmental Sites (CESs).

Existing State Plan Policy Map for MRT:

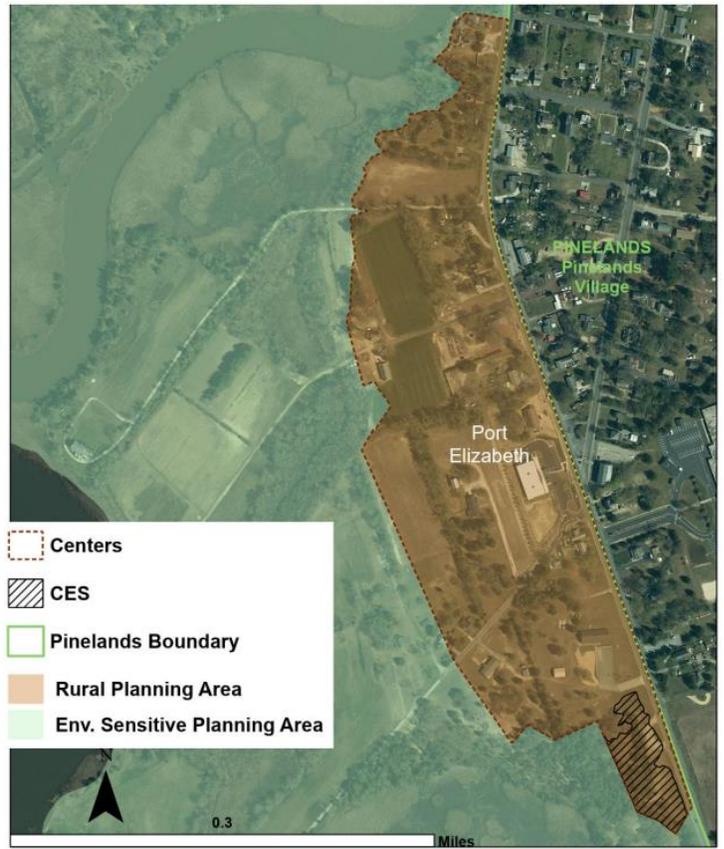


# Maurice River Township New Planning Areas, Centers, Nodes and CES



MRT Centers detail:

### Port Elizabeth Center, Planning Areas, and CES



### Heislerville Center, Planning Areas, and CES



# Dorchester-Leesburg Center, Planning Areas, and CES

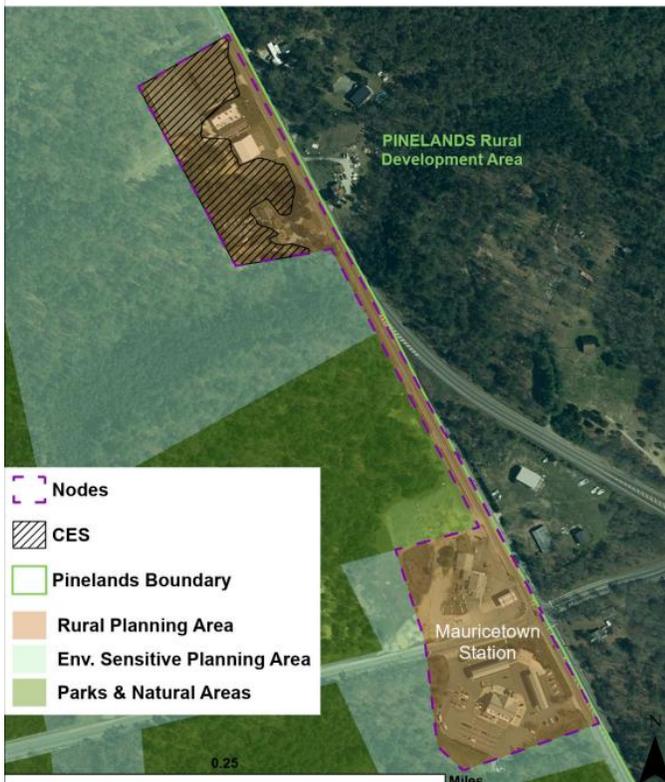
-  Centers
-  Nodes
-  CES
-  Pinelands Boundary
-  Rural Planning Area
-  Env. Sensitive Planning Area
-  Parks & Natural Areas



MRT Nodes:



### Mauricetown Station Node, Planning Areas, and CES



# Leesburg-River Road Node, Planning Areas, and CES



## **STATE PLAN GOALS REVIEW** *(From the MSA)*

**Goal #1 Revitalize the State's Cities and Towns** - The Township has historically maintained all development within their Village Centers. The Township enters this process with the intention of maintaining the historic development patterns and protecting the existing areas of development. Residential development in the Township is primarily clustered in the Villages of Milmay, Cumberland, Delmont, Heislerville, Leesburg, Dorchester, Bricksboro and Port Elizabeth. Many of these villages predated the incorporation of Maurice River, dating back to the 1600's. Each of these Villages formed for different reasons related to local commerce on and proximity to the waterways.

**Goal #2 Conserve the State's Natural Resources and Systems** - The Township has more than 50% of their land area as preserved open space. The Township takes the preservation of the environment as an integral part of its Planning Policies. Less than 2% of the land area is utilized for non-residential purposes and only 9% is residential. The Township contains portions of four designated Wild and Scenic rivers; the Maurice River, the Menantico River, the Manumuskin River, and the Muskee Creek.

**Goal #3 Promote Beneficial Economic Growth, Development and Renewal for all Residents of New Jersey** - Focusing on the Township's developed areas the Township has continued to promote economic development in areas consistent with their designated centers. The Township is currently working to create several working waterfront nodes along the Maurice River to recognize and promote the historic shipbuilding and maritime industries. Shipbuilding was a predominate industry in the Dorchester and Leesburg areas where the A.J. Meerwald (the State Ship of New Jersey) was constructed. Today the shipbuilding yards are predominately repair and maintenance, though two new vessels are under construction and a fledgling operation to support NJ's offshore wind is under development. Additionally, the Bayshore Recovery Plan identifies eco/heritage tourism as a key element of MRT's sustainability and the Township is working to support this ongoing economic sector. It's Green Team that had a buy local campaign is reauthorized and could play a significant role here.

**Goal #4 Protect the Environment, Prevent, and Clean Up Pollution** - The majority of the Township is forested land followed by significant areas of wetlands and environmental constraints. The primary land use in the Township is open space preservation efforts of State and Non-profit agencies. Over 30,000 acres are permanently preserved through various agencies as Wildlife Management Areas, State Parks and Preserves. This accounts for approximately 50% of the Township land area. There are several brownfield sites that are the subject of redevelopment plans/efforts and the Township is committed to addressing its known contaminated sites.

**Goal #5 Provide Adequate Public Facilities and Services at a Reasonable Cost** The Township has various recreation facilities located throughout the Community. The municipal building includes meeting halls and gathering areas. The Township also maintains the Senior Center. The Township is a small community with limited tax ratables and growth opportunities. The Township utilizes State funding to help offset the costs to the community where possible.

**Goal #6 Provide Adequate Housing at a Reasonable Cost** - The Township is limited in its ability to provide new housing opportunities given the environmental and regulatory restrictions. The Township contains just over 1,200 housing units with a median housing value of \$158,400. The housing element will be updated in the 2023 Master Plan.

**Goal #7 Preserve and Enhance Areas with Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space, and Recreational Value** - The Township has looked to encourage eco-tourism and preservation of its natural resources. The areas in the Township provide opportunities for birding, fishing, hiking, bicycling, canoe and kayak areas, scenic vistas and much more. With all of these natural resources the Township has worked to provide connections throughout the area with bike paths, walkways and trail systems. The Township contains part of the Bayshore Heritage Byway traveling down Main Street onto River Road and spurs to the East Point Lighthouse. The Township is also working to implement the recommended Rails to Trails segments from the Cumberland County Plan.

**Goal #8 Ensure Sound and Integrated Planning and Implementation Statewide** - The Township works with various State and County agencies and groups to protect its natural resources and promote appropriate economic development opportunities. This is clear throughout this document and all of the activities and actions that have occurred over the years in this small community.

The Township also works closely to ensure consistency with these surrounding municipalities as well as the County and State on planning and zoning regulations and plans such as:

- Western/Southern Cumberland Region plan
- State Development and Redevelopment plan
- County Solid Waste Management plan
- NJ Delaware Bayshore Council which coordinates planning, projects and advocacy with adjoining Bayshore communities, the county and regional NGOS
- Participation in the county wide Hazard Mitigation Plan and Waste Water Management Plan as well as other county lead initiatives like the Bike plan, etc.
- Maurice River Management Plan (Wild & Scenic)
- Cumberland County Delaware Bayshore Recovery Plan

### ***RESILIENCY***

Maurice River Township participated in the NJ Bayshore Recovery Plan after Sandy and has undertaken several efforts to support a more sustainable and resilient municipality and is preparing to undertake more:

- MRT completed Getting to Resilience in 2016
- The Township is working to update and amend its Flood Hazard Ordinance and is considering becoming a CRS community.
- MRT is rejuvenating its Environmental Commission/Green Team that will be poised to engage in resiliency issues.
- The 2021 Cumberland County All Hazard Mitigation Plan, including the MRT Annex, identifies vulnerable assets and actions to mitigate defined vulnerabilities.
- MRT has been paired with a Rutgers Climate Corp Fellow to undertake its Climate Change Related Vulnerability Assessment required by the PE (and MLUL).
- MRT is participating in the multi-agency effort NJ Resilience Accelerator to work on its Resilience Strategy
- MRT has applied to BRIC DTA to build its capacity and planning for resilience.

### ***STAFF RECOMMENDATION***

Maurice River Township has diligently planned and implemented measures to ensure that their centers, and environs remain sustainable and grow using smart-growth principles. Based on this work, they have demonstrated that their actions and plans, including with the items identified in the PIA, are aligned with the State Plan. It is staff's recommendation that the State Planning Commission approve Maurice River Township's petition for Plan Endorsement. Please see the attached PIA for details of their implementation agreement.