State of New Jersey
Department of State
New Jersey State Planning Commission
P.O. Box 820
Trenton, New Jersey 08625-0820

MIKIE SHERRILL
Governor

SHIRLEY U. EMEHELU
Acting Secretary of State

THOMAS K. WRIGHT
CHAIRMAN

WALTER C. LANE
Executive Director/Secretary

New Jersey State Planning Commission
Minutes of the Meeting Held on October 7, 2026
Zoom Video Conference

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Wright called the September 2, 2026, video conference of the New Jersey State Planning Commission to order at 9:31 a.m.

OPEN PUBLIC MEETINGS ACT

It was announced that notice of the date, time, and place of the meeting had been given in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act.

ROLL CALL

Members Present
Joe Grillo, Designee for Ben Hertz-Shargel, President, Board of Public Utilities
Ed Potosnak, Commissioner, Department of Environmental Protection
Keith Henderson, Designee for Jacquelyn Suarez, Commissioner, Department of Community Affairs
Michael Manzella, Designee for Priya Jain, Commissioner, Department of Transportation
Niurca Evangelista Louis, Designee for Shirley U. Emehelu, Acting Secretary of State, Department of State (joined at 9:59 a.m.)
Shanel Robinson, County Commissioner Director, County Member
Danielle Esser, Director of Governance, NJ Economic Development Authority
Jeffrey Oakman, Public Member
Stephen Santola, Public Member
Julia Somers, Public Member
Edward J. McKenna, Vice Chair, Public Member
Thomas Wright, Chairman, Public Member

Others Present through Video conference

See Attachment A

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Wright asked everyone to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Chairman Wright asked for a motion to approve the minutes of September 2, 2026 with no changes. The motion was made by Julia Somers and seconded by Jeffrey Oakman. Ayes: (11) Joe Grillo, Ed Potosnak, Keith Henderson, Michael Manzella, Shanel Robinson, Danielle Esser, Jeffrey Oakman, Stephen Santola, Julia Somers, Ed McKenna, and Thomas Wright. Nays: (0) Abstains: (0) The September 2, 2026, minutes were approved.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman Wright stated that he was looking forward to the presentation by Executive Director David W. Behrend and Senior Director of Planning Jeff Perlman of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), which would take place later in the meeting. He also shared his anticipation regarding Resolution 2026-07 mentioning that one of the major takeaways from last year's Cross Acceptance process was the importance of establishing a clear approach to recognizing Special Resource Areas (SRAs). Moving forward with this recognition process is essential to ensure that the designation carries meaningful weight and strengthens protections for fragile ecosystems across the state. Lastly, he stated that he had the opportunity to speak with Executive Director Walter Lane who was in good spirits, and is expected to be in attendance at the November 4, 2026, State Planning Commission (SPC) meeting.

Chairman Wright ended his comments and ceded the floor to Senior Planner Lisa Avichal, who would provide the Office of Planning Advocacy Staff's Report.

OFFICE OF PLANNING ADVOCACY STAFF'S REPORT

Before presenting the report, Senior Planner Lisa Avichal noted that all comments made using the chat feature would be read into the meeting record for the sake of transparency. She proceeded to provide a brief overview of the Office of Planning Advocacy's (OPA) work since the September 2, 2026, State Planning Commission (SPC) meeting.

She reported that staff continued work on a wide range of activities to advance the implementation of the new State Development and Redevelopment Plan, while working diligently with multiple municipalities on requirements needed to achieve Plan Endorsement. Senior Planner Avichal stated that OPA continues to host biweekly update meetings with both Manchester and Dennis Townships. Additionally, Little Egg Harbor recently approved, via resolution, agreement to the draft State Plan Policy Map (SPPM) amendments and their draft Plan Implementation Agreement (PIA), with their petition expected to be presented at the November 16, 2026, Plan Implementation Committee (PIC) meeting. She reported that later in October, OPA staff will be sending letters to certain endorsed towns to notify them that their year nine reports are due. Staff has been in receipt of some reports, and has met with several towns to discuss next steps.

Senior Planner Avichal stated that staff continued to attend various meetings, including but not limited to the following: the New Jersey Department of Agriculture State Agricultural Development Committee meeting, South Jersey Transportation Planning Organizations meeting, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission Board meeting, the New Jersey County Planners Association meeting, the Hunterdon County Informational Breakfast Talk, and the Conservation Blueprint Green Acres Partners Listening Session. Additionally, Senior Planner Steve Simone and Assistant Planner Felix Zamora attended the New Jersey Environmental Commission's 2026 Environmental Congress. Senior Planner Avichal attended the Plan for Health Municipal Grants Award Luncheon in which the Town of Newton, a Plan Endorsed municipality, was awarded a grant to incorporate health considerations into its Municipal Master Plan. She also participated in the Commercial Real Estate Development Association's Policy Pipeline event as well as taking part in a panel session discussion at the New Jersey Brownfields Coalition of the Northeast Brownfield Symposium.

Lastly, Senior Planner Avichal noted that the November PIC meeting is scheduled for Monday, November 16, 2026, a departure from the typical Wednesday schedule to account for the League of Municipalities Conference taking place that week.

With the Office of Planning Advocacy Staff's Report being complete, Chairman Wright asked Senior Planner Steve Simone to introduce North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority's Executive Director, David W. Behrend, and Senior Director of Planning, Jeff Perlman.

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation: Overview of the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority by David W. Behrend, Executive Director and Jeff Perlman, Senior Director, Planning

Senior Planner Steve Simone proceeded to introduce Executive Director David W. Behrend and Senior Director of Planning, Jeff Perlman. Executive Director Behrend serves as the Executive Director of NJTPA, leading several key initiatives, including federal certification reviews and a number of award-winning public engagement and outreach campaigns. Senior Director of Planning Perlman oversees a broad portfolio of planning activities, including long-range corridor planning, local planning, freight, safety, environmental planning, and mobility initiatives. Both have been with NJTPA for more than two decades, are members of the American Institute of Certified Planners, and will be discussing the mission of NJTPA and some shared objectives.

Executive Director Behrend's presentation began with an overview of NJTPA's role and the region it serves, including 13 counties and the two largest cities in the region, Newark and Jersey City. NJTPA's board structure, partner agencies, and supporting committees were briefly described. He outlined NJTPA's key planning products: the Long Range Transportation Plan (updated every four years), the annual work program, and the Transportation Improvement Program, which serves as the short-range element of the Long Range Plan. Executive Director Behrend emphasized the responsibility of Metropolitan Planning Organizations like NJTPA, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC), and the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO) in giving local governments a voice in transportation planning and in overseeing federal transportation investments.

Executive Director Behrend discussed the most recent Long Range Plan, Connecting Communities, including its vision for a resilient, modern, multimodal system serving all users and supporting economic, environmental, and public health goals. He emphasized that safety remains a top priority, with NJTPA participating in the statewide Target Zero initiative to eliminate roadway fatalities by 2040. The presentation then transitioned to Senior Director Perlman, who would discuss alignment between the State Plan and Connecting Communities, as well as details on NJTPA's technical assistance programs.

Senior Director Perlman highlighted the alignment between NJTPA's Long Range Plan, Connecting Communities, and the State Plan, noting shared goals related to economic opportunity, creating thriving communities, environmental protection, climate resilience, and equitable access. NJTPA's focus on integrating land use and transportation planning was explained, including new housing-related requirements under the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act.

Senior Director Perlman provided an overview of key planning department initiatives, including development of a regional Zoning Atlas, population and employment forecasts, and a Local Safety Plan (largely regionally adopted). NJTPA is also advancing active transportation planning, and maintains a long-standing database of planning recommendations (PRIME) which could be a resource for State Planning Commission work.

Senior Director Perlman summarized NJTPA's municipal technical assistance programs including Complete Streets Technical Assistance, Planning for Emerging Centers, Vibrant Places, and the Complete Streets Demonstration Library, which maintains materials for temporary demonstration projects that municipalities can borrow at no cost.

The presentation can be found here: https://www.nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/meeting-materials/2026-10-07-SPC-North-Jersey-Transportation-Planning-Authority%20Presentation.pdf

Following the presentation, Chairman Wright asked how NJTPA incorporates State Plan elements such as Planning Areas and endorsed towns into transportation investment decisions. Executive Director Behrend and Senior Director Perlman explained that while Planning Areas are not always referenced directly, they are considered alongside other factors, and project prioritization criteria often align with State Plan goals.

Commissioner Santola inquired about NJTPA's management of approximately $3 billion in annual investment. Executive Director Behrend explained that this reflects all federal surface transportation funds flowing into the region, including DOT, NJ Transit, municipal or county competitive grants, national competitive grants, and sub-allocated federal transportation formula funds. He noted that NJTPA helps direct these funds to both state and locally led projects such as bridge replacements and safety improvements.

With no additional comment from the Commission, Chairman Wright asked Assistant Planner Laura Gould to present on the Draft Special Resource Areas Recognition Application and Draft Process Overview Document.

Resolution 2026-07 Approving the Release of the Draft Special Resource Areas Recognition Application and Draft Process Overview Document for Public Comment

Assistant Planner Gould provided an overview of the draft Special Resource Area (SRA) recognition process and application. She explained that the process begins with a letter and pre-meeting with OPA before an application is submitted. Once an application is complete, SPC and OPA conduct simultaneous reviews and collect comments from federal, military, state, and local entities, and from the public, with the full process expected to take approximately 12–13 months. No substantive changes have been made to the application since the last SPC review at the September 2, 2026, SPC meeting.

Assistant Planner Gould indicated that staff is presenting the documents for the SPC to consider for release for public comment. After the public comment period, staff will share the comments and related edits with the PIC and then proceed to the SPC for final approval of the SRA timeline and application. The resolution to release the documents was written with a 60-business-day public comment period, but can be updated to a 45-day option. OPA is also developing detailed guidelines to accompany the process.

The Draft Special Resource Areas Recognition Application can be found here:
https://www.nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/meeting-materials/2026-10-07-SPC-Draft-SRA-Recognition-Application.pdf

The Draft Special Resource Areas Process Overview Document can be found here:
https://www.nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/meeting-materials/2027-10-07-SPC-Draft-SRA-Process-Overview-Document.pdf

Commissioner Wright noted that the SRA Application and Process will effectively distinguish between serious petitions aimed at meaningful planning work and those more appropriately handled through existing tools such as Plan Endorsement. The Commission then discussed the timing of the public comment period, with Senior Planner Avichal clarifying that both the 45-day and 60-day period would push final SPC action into early 2027, and the Commission agreeing on the 60-day window.

Chairman Wright opened the floor for public comment with Laurie Cleveland of the Sourland Conservancy thanking the team for their work and expressing excitement to read the draft.

Commissioner Santola asked whether the process sets a required number of municipalities that must support a petition. Senior Planner Avichal explained that at this time, no numerical threshold is required, and instead, municipal and county support will be evaluated through public meetings and the broader review process.

Chairman Wright asked for a motion to approve Resolution 2026-07. The motion was made by Danielle Esser and seconded by Julia Somers. Chairman Wright asked for a roll call vote. Ayes: (12) Joe Grillo, Ed Potosnak, Keith Henderson, Michael Manzella, Niurca Evangelista Louis, Shanel Robinson, Danielle Esser, Jeffrey Oakman, Stephen Santola, Julia Somers, Ed McKenna, and Thomas Wright. Nays: (0). Abstains: (0) Resolution 2026-07 was approved.

The Resolution can be found here:
https://www.nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/resolutions/2026-07-Resolution-Draft-SRA-Public-Comment-Certified.pdf

With no additional comment from the Commission or the public, Chairman Wright asked Senior Planner Avichal to present on the Draft State Plan Policy Map/Highlands Region Land Use Capability Zone Matrix.

Resolution 2026-08 Approving the Release of the Draft State Plan Policy Map/Highlands Region Land Use Capability Zone Matrix for Public Comment

Senior Planner Avichal reported that no Commissioner comments on were received in advance of the meeting, with one agency comment on the document submitted the previous week. OPA staff determined that the comment does not warrant delaying release of the draft matrix document and recommends proceeding with a 45-business-day public comment period. During the comment period the document will be posted to the OPA website and public feedback may be emailed to ospmail@sos.nj.gov.

She reiterated that the purpose of the matrix is to improve coordination with the Highlands Council and to implement the existing Memorandum of Understanding. She explained that municipalities and counties in the Highlands Planning Area that conform with the Highlands Regional Master Plan are treated as equivalent to Plan Endorsed communities and receive the same benefits, though conformance remains voluntary.

Senior Planner Avichal stated that there is currently no formal method for correlating Highlands Land Use Capability Zones with State Plan Policy Map Planning Areas. The draft matrix provides approximate equivalents, as developed by the Highlands Council in partnership with OPA. Ultimately, the Commission will be asked to approve a final version as a standalone guidance document for use in statewide planning. Today, OPA staff recommends releasing the draft for public comment.

The Draft State Plan Policy Map/Highlands Region Land Use Capability Zone Matrix can be found here:
https://www.nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/meeting-materials/2026-10-07-Draft-SPPM-LUCZ-Matrix.pdf

With no comments or questions from the Commission or the public, Chairman Wright asked for a motion to approve Resolution 2026-08. The motion was made by Ed McKenna and seconded by Shanel Robinson. Chairman Wright asked for a roll call vote. Ayes: (12) Joe Grillo, Ed Potosnak, Keith Henderson, Michael Manzella, Niurca Evangelista Louis, Shanel Robinson, Danielle Esser, Jeffrey Oakman, Stephen Santola, Julia Somers, Ed McKenna, and Thomas Wright. Nays: (0). Abstains: (0) Resolution 2026-08 was approved.

The Resolution can be found here:
https://www.nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/resolutions/2026-08-Resolution-Draft-SPPM-LUCZ-Matrix-Public-Comment-Certified.pdf

With Resolution 2026-08 being approved, Chairman Wright asked Senior Planner Avichal to provide the State Plan Implementation Update.

STATE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Senior Planner Avichal reported that Map amendments remain on hold pending review of the State Planning Rules regarding requirements for SPC initiated amendments. Department of State leadership have requested a timeline for general revision of the Rules and a stakeholder list for future Rule revisions, both of which have been submitted by staff.
Staff are also conducting a comprehensive review of the State Planning Act, existing Memoranda of Understanding or Agreement, and Commission Bylaws to ensure upcoming Rule revisions align with legislative obligations and established commitments. Draft materials will be presented to the Commission in the coming months.

She also outlined ongoing implementation efforts tied to the new State Plan. Staff have incorporated new provisions into the Plan Endorsement process, including Plan Implementation Agreements and updates to the State Plan Policy Map. Coordination continues with NJDEP, the Pinelands Commission, and NJDOT in pursuit of common objectives, such as endorsement petitions and environmental analysis. Senior Planner Avichal noted recent engagement with the Department of Health, whose representative expressed interested in participating more actively in the Plan Endorsement process to advance health-related strategies.

With no comment from the Commission, Chairman Wright opened the floor for public comment.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

No member of the public wished to comment.

ADJOURNMENT

With no further comments from the Commission or the public, Chairman Wright asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Ed McKenna and seconded by Shanel Robinson. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 10:37 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

Walter C. Lane
Secretary and Executive Director
Date: November 4, 2026

ATTACHMENT A

NEW JERSEY STATE PLANNING COMMISSION ATTENDEES

DATE: SEPTEMBER 2, 2026 TIME: 9:31 AM

Alan Hunt, Hunterdon County
Anthony Soriano, Morris County
Bill Millette, Hunterdon County
Brendan Lamb, Hunterdon County
Brian Ragunan, DAG
Chris Helms
Dave DuMont
David Behrend, NJTPA
David Schley
Donna Rendiero
Elizabeth Ward, Highlands Council
Glen Van Olden, NJ Farm Bureau
Jeff Perlman, NJTPA
Jelena Lasko, NJDOT
Katherine Fullerton, Hunterdon County
Laurie Cleveland, Sourland Conservancy
Leah Emmerich, MCPB
Matt Baumgardner
Mirah Becker, Middlesex County
Nicole Abbot
Ruth Foster, NJDEP
Ryan Rapp, NJDEP
Sabrina Rodriguez, NJ Future
Steph Brody, MCPB
Vincent Palmieri, Monmouth County