



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 September 2, 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 9:32 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

Nick Angarone, Designee for Ed Potosnak, Commissioner, Department of Environmental Protection
Keith Henderson, Designee for Jacquelyn Suarez, Commissioner, Department of Community Affairs
Jelena Lasko, Designee for Priya Jain, Commissioner, Department of Transportation
Niurca Evangelista Louis, Designee for Lt. Governor Dr. Dale Caldwell, Secretary of State, Department of State
Shanel Robinson, County Commissioner Director, County Member
Bruce Harris, Municipal Member
Jeffrey Oakman, Public Member
Stephen Santola, Public Member
Julia Somers, Public Member
Elizabeth Terenik, 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 August 5, 2026 with a few non substantive changes. The motion was made by Ed McKenna and seconded by Julia Somers. Ayes: (12) Nick Angarone, Keith Henderson, Jelena Lasko, Niurca Evangelista Louis, Shanel Robinson, Bruce Harris, Jeffrey Oakman, Stephen Santola, Julia Somers, Elizabeth Terenik, Ed McKenna, and Thomas Wright. Nays: (0) Abstains: (0) The August 5, 2026, minutes were approved.

CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS

Chairman Wright stated that Executive Director Walter Lane was not in attendance due to being on medical leave and wished him a speedy recovery. He mentioned looking forward to the presentation by Jennifer Marandino, Executive Director of the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPPO), which would take place later in the meeting. Lastly, Chairman Wright shared his anticipation for the update on the Special Resource Area Resource Process, to be presented by Assistant Planner Laura Gould.

Chairman Wright ended his comments and ceded the floor to Senior Planner Lisa Avichal, who would provide the Executive Director's Report.

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'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 August 5, 2026, State Planning Commission (SPC) meeting.

She reported that staff continued working 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. She reported that OPA has sent letters to all endorsed towns to remind them to submit their annual or bi-annual reports, 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 Target Zero Commission, the Transit Village Task Force, the Sustainable Jersey Certification Standards Committee Meeting, the New Jersey Coastal Coalition Incorporation Meeting, Staff and Manager Level Mapping Meetings with DEP, the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) Board Meeting, the Governor's Housing Council's Mapping Working Group Meeting, the State Agricultural Development Committee Meeting, the Interagency Council on Extreme Heat Coordinated Communications Workgroup Meeting, and the DVRPC's Regional Technical Committee Meeting.

With the Executive Director's report being complete, Chairman Wright asked Senior Planner Steve Simone to introduce South Jersey Transportation Organization's Executive Director, Jennifer Marandino.

NEW BUSINESS

Presentation: Overview of the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization by Jennifer Marandino, P.E., Executive Director

Senior Planner Steve Simone proceeded to introduce Executive Director Jennifer Marandino, who joined SJTPO in 2011. Before coming to SJTPO, she spent more than 10 years working in traffic and transportation engineering, and now has over 20 years of experience in the transportation industry.

Executive Director Marandino provided an overview of SJTPO's structure, role, and current planning efforts. She explained that SJTPO is the federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) for southern New Jersey, covering Atlantic, Cape May, Cumberland, and Salem counties and working collaboratively with its sister agencies, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority and the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. She also outlined the composition of SJTPO's Policy Board and Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), noting the addition of the New Jersey Office of Planning Advocacy as a non-voting TAC member in May 2023.

Executive Director Marandino reviewed SJTPO's core planning products, including the Regional Transportation Plan, the Transportation Improvement Program, and the Unified Planning Work Program, which guide the allocation of federal transportation dollars in the region. She highlighted several active technical studies including Countywide Local Road Safety Plans, Local Safety Program Design Assistance, Regional Pavement Condition Data Collection, Staff Augmentation, Complete Streets Technical Assistance Program Pilot, Regional Active Transportation Master Plan, Atlantic County Bikeway West Advanced Feasibility/Concept Development, and Data Collection for SJTDM Recalibration and Validation. Executive Director Marandino concluded by emphasizing SJTPO's overarching vision of a safe, efficient, and inclusive regional transportation system developed through collaboration.

The presentation can be found here: <https://www.nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/meeting-materials/2026-09-02-SPC-SJTPO-Presentation.pdf>

With the presentation complete, Chairman Wright welcomed Commissioner comments. Commissioner Harris inquired as to planning with respect to rail and bus transit in South Jersey, with Executive Director Marandino explaining that SJTPO does not participate in that process. Commissioner Oakman and Executive Director Marandino discussed the similar overarching organizational structure of New Jersey's MPOs. In response to Commissioner Somers' questions, Executive Director Marandino clarified that SJTPO is 100% federally funded and uses census-based travel patterns to determine regional boundaries.

Chairman Wright invited comments from the public, at which time Glen Van Olden of New Jersey Farm Bureau raised concerns about farm equipment safety on local roads, suggesting potential additions to safety plans. Kamal Saleh of Union County requested clarification about SJTPO's role regarding the Philadelphia urbanized area, with Executive Director Marandino explaining that DVRPC handles planning in those regions.

With no additional comment from the Commission or the public Chairman Wright asked Senior Planner Avichal to provide the State Plan Implementation Update.

STATE PLAN IMPLEMENTATION UPDATE

Senior Planner Avichal reported that Map amendments proposed during the State Plan update process remain on hold pending Rule clarification. In the interim, Department of State leadership requested that staff draft a timeline and outreach process to update the Rules, which is currently underway. Additionally, staff is developing guiding principles to update the Rules and streamline processes and continues to review the State Planning Act and the SPC Bylaws to ensure consistency; draft documents are expected to be presented to the PIC and SPC in the coming months.

Senior Planner Avichal discussed progress on implementing the new State Plan, including working on mapping Planning Area 1B and 2B in conjunction with municipal and state agency partners. Upcoming Plan Endorsement Petitions to be presented to the PIC and SPC will reflect these updates. She noted a productive meeting between Executive Director Walter Lane and the New Jersey Department of Health regarding Plan Endorsement process involvement, with a follow-up meeting anticipated later in September. Staff continues to work closely with state agency partners through the Interagency Workgroup Meeting; members are submitting information outlining their programs and initiatives that advance the goals of the Plan.

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

STATE PLAN POLICY MAP/HIGHLANDS REGION LAND USE CAPABILITY ZONE MATRIX

Before presenting her report, Senior Planner Avichal welcomed Highlands Council staff Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, James Humphries, and Elizabeth Ward.

She reported that OPA received a draft matrix from the New Jersey Highlands Council that compares State Plan Policy Map (SPPM) Planning Areas to Highlands Regional Master Plan's Land Use Capability Zones. As no official means of comparison exists, the draft matrix identifies the closest corresponding Capability Zone for each Planning Area. She noted that voluntary conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RPM) deems municipalities and counties as being Plan Endorsed by the SPC, giving them access to various benefits and incentives.

Senior Planner Avichal explained that ultimately, OPA will be asking the SPC to approve a final version of the matrix to serve as a formal guidance document outside the State Plan and replace the State Plan Policy Map Planning Area designations for Highlands communities when referenced in various statewide rules. The draft matrix was presented to the PIC at the August 19, 2026, meeting. Committee members' comments addressed the SPPM overlays, including Critical Environmental Sites (CES), and the need for clarification where multiple Planning Areas correspond to a single Capability Zone.

In response to the PIC members' comments, Senior Planner Avichal indicated that Capability Zones and Planning Areas have different size thresholds, with no one-to-one equivalency. Additionally, the CES overlay was determined have no direct Capability Zone equivalency. However, the State Plan shows areas needing protection and preservation while separately, the Highlands Council's Open Space and Recreation Plan is a supportive planning document and resource that can help achieve those same goals.

Lastly, Senior Planner Avichal stated that OPA staff recommend releasing the draft matrix for public comment at a future SPC meeting, and are asking the Commission to decide on either a 45 or 60 business day window for that comment period. Chairman Wright and Commissioner Somers voiced support for 45 days, which received no opposition from the Commission.

With no further comment from the Commission, Chairman Wright asked Assistant Planner Laura Gould to provide the Special Resource Areas Recognition Process Update.

SPECIAL RESOURCE AREAS RECOGNITION PROCESS UPDATE

Assistant Planner Gould reported that staff has continued to work diligently on the Special Resource Area (SRA) process and application. She presented a detailed 13-month timeline including submission of a letter of intent, steps for pre-meetings, internal and public review periods, and final recommendations by first the PIC and then the SPC, with the SPC to provide support to the newly recognized SRA as they work toward legislative authority. Assistant Planner Gould also detailed the application requirements, including information about the applicant or the petitioner,

mapping the potential SRA boundary, the uniqueness and significance of the area, current planning efforts, constraints and resources, and benefits of recognition. OPA staff are drafting detailed guidelines to better describe each requirement in the SRA process, and do not anticipate taking any applications until the guide is complete.

Assistant Planner Gould indicated that OPA staff were requesting final comments from the regarding the draft timeline and application to be incorporated before being presented to the upcoming PIC and SPC. If approved by the SPC, the draft timeline and application would then be released for public comment. Assistant Planner Gould solicited feedback from the Commission on whether a 45 or 60 business day public comment period would be appropriate.

The Commission evaluated the benefits of both durations, with consensus emerging around a 60 day public comment period to allow for more comprehensive feedback. After considering the protraction of the process as the Rules require the usage of business days, OPA staff agreed to attempt to further streamline the process. The group also discussed how to identify interested parties who need to be notified of applications and how to handle situations where support for SRA designation is not universally expressed.

With no additional questions or comments, Chairman Wright opened the floor to the public. Mirah Becker of Middlesex County asked whether information regarding newly recognized SRA would be added to the State Plan text and Map. Senior Planner Avichal indicated that SRAs would likely be mapped with an overlay on the locator map, with Chairman Wright noting the precedent set by the Highlands region's recognition as a part of Cross Acceptance and resulting in inclusion in the narrative description of the 2001 Plan.

David Heller, Program Manager with SJTPO, inquired as to incentives for an entity to pursue SRA recognition. Senior Planner Avichal responded that while the primary goal is an enabling legislative authority with oversight, each area of New Jersey is unique and would determine those incentives for themselves. Commissioner Somers emphasized that OPA can assist those entities in the event that SRA designation is not appropriate.

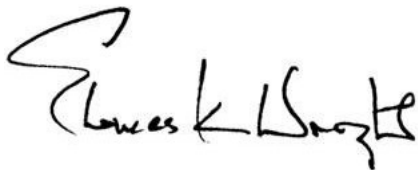
PUBLIC COMMENTS

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 Bruce Harris and seconded by Jeffrey Oakman. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 10:59 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas K. Wright". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "T" and "W".

Thomas K. Wright
Chairman
Date: October 7, 2026

ATTACHMENT A
NEW JERSEY STATE PLANNING COMMISSION ATTENDEES
DATE: SEPTEMBER 2, 2026 TIME: 9:31 AM

Anthony Soriano, Morris County
Barbara Allen Woolley-Dillon, PP, AICP, NJDEP
Becky Hall, Hunterdon County
Bill Millette, Hunterdon County
Cary Booker
Chris Helms
Craig Keiser, DAG
Dave DuMont
David Heller, SJTPO
David Schley
Elizabeth Ward, Highlands Council
Fern Ouellette, Delanco
Glen Van Olden, NJ Farm Bureau
James Humphries, NJ Highlands
Jason Kasler, AICP, PP (NJPO)
Jennifer Marandino, SJTPO
John
Jonathan Eagle, Warren County
Kamal Saleh, Union County
Katherine Fullerton, Hunterdon County
Laurie Cleveland, Sourland Conservancy
Lora BC
Maryjude Haddock-Weiler, NJ Highlands
Matt Baumgardner
Max Carlson, Warren County Planning
Mirah Becker, Middlesex County
Olivia Hirsch
Penni Wild, NJBAC
Peter Kortright
Ruth Foster, NJDEP
Sabrina Rodriguez, NJ Future
Samantha De Andrea, Somerset County
Tim Evans (New Jersey Future)
Tom Stanuikynas, Burlington County