



State of New Jersey  
DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
NEW JERSEY STATE PLANNING COMMISSION  
P.O. BOX 820  
TRENTON, NEW JERSEY 08625-0820

PHILIP D. MURPHY  
*Governor*

LT. GOVERNOR TAHESHA L. WAY  
*SECRETARY OF STATE*

THOMAS K. WRIGHT  
*CHAIRMAN*

WALTER C. LANE  
*Acting Executive Director/Acting Secretary*

**New Jersey State Planning Commission  
Minutes of the Meeting Held on April 2, 2025  
Zoom Video Conference**

**CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Wright called the April 2, 2025 video conference of the New Jersey State Planning Commission (SPC) to order at 10:32 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**

Danielle Esser, Director of Governance, NJ Economic Development Authority  
Megan Fackler, Designee for Francis K. O'Connor, Commissioner, Department of Transportation  
Joe Grillo, Designee for President Christine Guhl-Sadovy, Board of Public Utilities (joined at 10:35 a.m.)  
Bruce Harris, Municipal Member  
Keith Henderson, Designee for Jacquelyn Suarez, Commissioner, Department of Community Affairs  
Edward J. McKenna, Vice Chair, Public Member  
Jeffrey Oakman, Public Member  
Shanel Robinson, County Commissioner Director, County Member (joined at 10:46 a.m.)  
Stephen Santola, Public Member  
Julia Somers, Public Member  
Elizabeth Terenik, Public Member (joined at 10:39 a.m.)  
Thomas Wright, Chairman

**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 March 5, 2025, with no changes. Bruce Harris made the motion, and Edward McKenna seconded it. With no further discussion or questions, Chairman Wright asked for a roll call vote: Ayes: (10) Danielle Esser, Joe Grillo, Megan Fackler, Bruce Harris, Edward McKenna, Keith Henderson, Stephen Santola, Julia Somers, Jeffrey Oakman, and Thomas Wright. Nays: (0) Abstains: (0) The March 5, 2025 minutes were approved.

## **CHAIRMAN'S COMMENTS**

Chairman Wright stated that he looked forward to hearing a report on the public comments and seeing the Cross Acceptance (CA) process move forward. He thanked the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) staff, Commissioners, and members of the public in attendance, as well as the representatives of agencies, counties, and municipalities who have participated in the public meetings. Chairman Wright acknowledged Senator Cory Booker's recent speech in the US Senate and praised his efforts.

Commissioner Somers agreed with Chairman Wright and suggested that attendees call Senator Booker's office to thank him.

With that, Chairman Wright ended his comments and ceded the floor to Acting Executive Director (AED) Walter Lane for his report.

## **ACTING EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

### **Since the March 5 SPC meeting:**

AED Lane provided an overview of the Office's work since the March State Planning Commission. He noted that most of staff's efforts have been focused on CA, but work continues on a wide range of planning efforts.

### **Plan Endorsement**

- Staff is working with Dover, Seaside Heights, Little Egg Harbor, Ocean Township in Ocean County, Woodstown, Ocean City, Salem City, Barnegat, Sparta, Dennis, Berkeley, Manchester, Red Bank, and Wildwood City on mapping and other requirements toward Plan Endorsement (PE).
- The current PE petitions were reassigned to better balance workloads amongst staff members.
- Staff prepared and submitted the Register Notice for Newton's PE designation.
- The Office awaits documentation from Dover on their community visioning efforts as required by PE. Dover requested assistance in setting up a meeting with Morris County and NJ Transit to discuss the acquisition of property owned by NJ Transit for redevelopment.
- The draft Salem City Planning & Implementation Agreement (PIA) was sent to the municipality for their review and comment. Staff also discussed various mapping concerns related to this petition and await feedback from the municipality.
- The Office is reviewing NJDEP's latest map proposal for Barnegat and revising the map to reflect NJDEP's suggestions.
- Staff completed the draft PIA for Red Bank, which is currently under internal review.
- Ocean City's draft PIA was distributed to NJDEP, NJDOT, and NJDCA for comment. Staff provided clarification on the differences between CA and PE.

- Staff met with Ocean Township on March 31<sup>st</sup> to discuss their current petition.
- Work continues on refining the PE Tracking process and procedures and updating the PE Guidelines.
- Lakewood Township submitted their Biennial Review Report and staff awaits a response from NJDEP regarding the Habitat Suitability Determination (HSD) related to the requested map amendment.

Work continues on the Affordable Housing guidance document, brownfields webpage, mail processing procedures, and the Standard Operating Procedures Manual. Staff continues to work on recreating our Locator Map in ESRI Experience Builder.

This week, OPA will launch our E-News blast. The E-News Blast will provide updates on various efforts underway at the Office and will be distributed quarterly to OPA's interested parties email list, as well as subscribers to the previous newsletter effort.

OPA staff continues to assist the Office of Business Advocacy regarding potential development sites for businesses looking to locate or expand in NJ.

Staff also attended a large number of meetings, including but not limited to:

DVRPC Regional Technical Committee, SJTPO Regional Vulnerability Framework Discussion, SJTPO TAC Meeting, NJDEP Brownfield Quarterly Roundtable Meeting, OPA/DEP Managers Mapping Meeting, NJ IAC on Climate Resilience: Monthly Senior Staff Meeting, NJ Coastal Coalition Inc. Meeting, NJ Bayshore Council, NJ County Planners Association, and the IAC Extreme Heat Coordinated Communications workgroup.

AED Lane stated that SPC members should be receiving their Financial Disclosure Forms later this week. In addition, the Outside Employment Form was sent to all SPC members for completion. Originally, the Office was informed that all members should complete the form, but were later advised that public members of the Commission will be required to complete a different form, which will be distributed shortly.

With no comments from the Commission, Chairman Wright asked AED Lane to introduce the resolution, which had been distributed previously to the Commission for review.

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### **Resolution 2025-03 Approval and Adoption of the 2024 Annual Report**

AED Lane read the conclusion of the resolution.

The Resolution can be found at: <https://www.nj.gov/state/bac/planning/documents/resolutions/resolution-2025-03-annual-report-certified.pdf>

With no further discussion or questions, Chairman Wright asked for a motion to approve Resolution 2025-03. The motion was made by Julia Somers and seconded by Edward McKenna. Chairman Wright asked for a roll call vote. Ayes: (11) Danielle Esser, Joe Grillo, Megan Fackler, Bruce Harris, Edward McKenna, Keith Henderson, Elizabeth Terenik, Stephen Santola, Julia Somers, Jeffrey Oakman, and Thomas Wright Nays: (0) Abstains: (0) Resolution 2025-03 was approved.

With no further comment from the Commission, Chairman Wright asked AED Lane to present the State Plan update.

## **STATE PLAN UPDATE**

### **Status of Activities and Public Responses to Date**

AED Lane reported that staff has been diligently working on a range of activities to advance the CA process.

- The Office continues to provide technical assistance to numerous counties and municipalities through either interns, our consultant, or internal staff. Staff is providing some level of technical assistance to every county. OPA released a Request for Proposals for additional technical planning assistance services, mapping policy assistance, and editorial services for the final draft SDRP. Responses are due April 16<sup>th</sup>.
- Every county has submitted their CA work program and staff has approved every county's work program. Staff continues to work with Rowan and Rutgers on the draft Impact Assessment and the Infrastructure Needs Assessment. Staff should begin receiving some of the initial draft work products in the coming weeks.
- Public Meetings have been held in every county except Hudson, which is scheduled for next week. The meetings have been well attended, with over 450 people to date, averaging 20-25 individuals per meeting.
- Staff continues to attend municipal kickoff meetings held by the counties to inform their municipalities of how the county is conducting their CA efforts.
- Staff continues to attend informational meetings with various stakeholders on the State Plan and provide presentations as requested. AED Lane made a State Plan presentation to a planning class at Rutgers in early March, as well as at the Central Jersey Transportation Forum Meeting. He gave a State Plan update presentation to the DVRPC at their March 27<sup>th</sup> Board meeting and thanked the DVRPC Board for contracting with Heyer, Gruel, and Associates to provide technical planning assistance to the four DVRPC Counties during CA. AED Lane will present on the draft State Plan to the NJ Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in late April.
- OPA continues to work with the Highlands Council staff to provide guidance and information to the Highlands Counties regarding CA responsibilities. The Highlands Council is representing seventy-four (74) Highlands municipalities; the remaining fourteen (14) will be represented by their respective counties.
- The Office created a comment tracking document, which was shared with the Commission. AED Lane thanked Myles Elgart and Felix Zamora for putting the comment tracking document together, which reflects email comments and online form responses received to date and will be updated monthly.
- Staff prepared meeting summaries for the majority of the meetings held to date, which will be sent to counties for review. After review, all public meeting comments will be added to the comment tracking sheet.
- Overall, there seems to be support for the draft State Plan. The following are some of the types of comments received at the meetings:
  - Improving state agency implementation and coordination
  - Local land use issues and decisions
    - Concerns regarding the Plan overruling local zoning
  - Importance of agriculture
  - Need for increased incentives for counties/municipalities to implement the SDRP
  - Support for watershed based planning efforts
  - Update of mapping criteria and Planning Area designations
    - Definitions of centers, nodes and cores
    - How to map areas that are under current or future flooding risks
    - Planning Area definitions
    - Staff is meeting weekly to identify potential changes and develop recommendations for the PDC's feedback

- There have been several inquiries about designating the Sourland Mountain Region in the draft SDRP as an area of special resource area. Due to AED Lane's recusal from all Somerset County matters, he will not be participating in any Sourlands regional special resource area discussions and Lisa Avichal will provide a brief update.

At this time, AED Lane was placed in the Zoom waiting room and Ms. Avichal provided an update on the Sourlands region topic.

Ms. Avichal reported that at this time, the Office has received 106 comments specifically requesting that the Sourland Mountain Region be designated as an Area of Critical State Concern in the updated Plan.

She continued that the New Jersey Sourland Mountain Region encompasses 90 square miles in the west-central part of the state, stretching from the Delaware River in Lambertville to southern Somerset County. It includes parts of three counties: Mercer, Somerset, and Hunterdon, and seven municipalities: Hopewell Township, Hopewell Borough, Hillsborough Township, Montgomery Township, East Amwell Township, West Amwell Township, and the City of Lambertville.

Ms. Avichal stated that the Sourland Region faces threats, including the Emerald Ash Borer infestation, Beech Leaf Disease, overbrowsing by deer that prevents forest regeneration, invasive plant species, and increasing development pressures. The critical roles that the Sourlands play include:

- As a vital ecosystem, the Sourlands are home to dozens of rare and endangered species of plants and animals, and are an irreplaceable stopover for migrating birds
- They have headwaters that feed the supply of drinking water for more than one million New Jersey residents
- They have the most intensive carbon sink in New Jersey
- They contain countless historical sites, from the crossroads of the Revolution to the Underground Railroad

Ms. Avichal informed the SPC that OPA received a joint letter submitted by the Sourland Conservancy, Stoutsburg Sourland African American Museum, Lambertville Goes Wild, Lambertville Parks and Recreation Commission, The Watershed Institute, New Jersey Highlands Coalition, New Jersey Conservation Foundation, and the Montgomery Friends of Open Space. The letter was addressed to the Commission and stated that "By designating the Sourlands as an Area of Critical State Concern, the State Planning Commission can provide much-needed recognition and support for conservation efforts. This designation would create opportunities for increased funding for forest restoration, facilitate regional coordination on effective deer management strategies, and help ensure that future development is compatible with the ecological integrity of the region." The letter also stated that these groups are not seeking new regulatory authority, but simply recognition by the State of New Jersey.

Ms. Avichal stated that in addition to the comments the Office has received, the Town Topics (Princeton's weekly community newspaper) published an article earlier this month stating that the Commission released the preliminary draft Plan and omitted the identification of the Sourlands as an area of critical state concern.

She continued that on page 62 of the released preliminary Plan, it is stated that several additional areas of critical concern should be considered in the future. The Sourlands is listed among them and is followed by a statement that reads, "The State Planning Commission urges those participating in Cross-Acceptance to recommend policies as appropriate to address development, redevelopment, and conservation issues in these and other regions of New Jersey."

Ms. Avichal finished by noting that this topic was discussed at the PDC, and the Committee requested that OPA staff draft a recommendation to the Commission regarding the implications of such designation. Also, special resource areas and areas of critical state concern are used interchangeably in the preliminary Plan, which will be reconciled.

Before having AED Lane return to the meeting, Chairman Wright asked the Commissioners if they had any further questions or comments regarding Sourlands. As no member commented, AED Lane was returned to the meeting.

Commissioner Robinson asked Chairman Wright if she should abstain regarding the Sourlands as they are the approving entity.

Chairman Wright responded that this discussion has been ongoing and believes that the Commission can't move forward if everyone who has an interest abstains each time a topic is discussed. He indicated that AED Lane's situation is unique as a former employee of Somerset County and current employee of OPA, and requested further guidance from the DAG or other appropriate individuals on the matter.

AED Lane confirmed that in his role at Somerset, he facilitated a discussion regarding the special area designation with the former Executive Director of OPA, Donna Rendeiro, and the Sourland Conservancy. For this reason, he must be recused from any such discussion.

Chairman Wright clarified that the preceding conversation concerned the concept of needing recusal as opposed to any specifics about the previously mentioned letter and the potential designation of the Sourlands in the upcoming State Plan. He then opened the floor to the Commission for comment.

Commissioner Somers asked AED Lane if the Plan was on track time-wise.

AED Lane responded in the affirmative and thanked the Governor's office for ensuring that OPA had the funding to hire a consultant to provide technical assistance to the counties. The Office should receive the county CA reports by the end of May or beginning of June, which meets the timeline to hold negotiating sessions with the counties between June and the beginning of August. He indicated that the August SPC meeting may need to be delayed by one or two weeks to provide the Commission time to review the revised draft Plan before its approval for release at the end of August.

Chairman Wright inquired as to when the final round of public hearings will occur.

AED Lane responded that the six public hearings will occur mid-September, the week of the 15<sup>th</sup>. OPA intends to hold four of the meetings virtually and two in person, one in southern and one in northern New Jersey. The timeline is still on track to adopt the Plan in mid-December.

Chairman Wright added that he appreciates the information regarding the timeline and is encouraged by the amount of participation in and response to the meetings that have taken place thus far.

Commissioner Harris asked if there is a printable version of the Citizens' Guide to the State Plan.

AED Lane responded that the OPA interns are working on a physical document, and the Office is requesting editorial services in the consultant contract to assist with the readability of the Plan.

With no further comments from the Commission, Chairman Wright opened the floor to the public.

## **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Glen Van Olden of the NJ Farm Bureau mentioned that the Farm Bureau's official comments will be out shortly. He continued that farming is a business, and keeping farmers on the farm is paramount to good planning and

good agriculture. While the Plan mentions New Jersey's treasured sensitive farm landscapes, viable and profitable farming is of utmost importance. The products bring the consumers to where they are grown and harvested, which helps them learn about farming businesses. Additionally, agritourism should be a part of the SDRP.

Fern Ouellette of Delanco expressed concerns about the impact of school closures and funding issues on community planning, particularly in relation to redevelopment and affordable housing.

AED Lane responded that the Plan discusses, at a high level, ensuring that community facilities and service are provided in areas that are looking to grow. He encouraged Mr. Ouellette to submit his comments on the OPA website, via email, or the online form.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

With no further comments from the Commission or the public, Chairman Wright asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Edward McKenna and seconded by Joe Grillo. All were in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m.

**ATTACHMENT A**  
**NEW JERSEY STATE PLANNING COMMISSION ATTENDEES**  
**DATE: APRIL 2, 2025 TIME: 10:32 AM**

Angela Knowles  
Anthony Soriano, Morris County  
Barbara Woolley-Dillon, PP, AICP, NJDEP  
Bill Millette, Hunterdon County  
Charles Shadle, DAG  
David DuMont  
David Schley  
Dillon McNamara  
Donna Rendeiro  
Erika Phillips  
Fern Ouellette, Delanco  
Glen Van Olden, NJ Farm Bureau  
H. Knight  
John  
Katherine Fullerton, Hunterdon County  
Larry DiVietro  
Marlene Smith  
Matt von der Hayden  
Mirah Becker, Middlesex County  
Peter Kortwright  
Rae Baldwin  
Ruth Foster  
Samantha De Andrea, Somerset County  
Susan Bristol, The Watershed Institute  
Susan Weber, NJDOT  
V. Merritt