

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Sussex County – Friday, March 28, 2025 – 2:00 PM

START: 2:04 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Chris Carney, County Commissioner

- Welcome & Introductions

Walter C. Lane, Acting Executive Director, OPA

- The Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) is tasked by the NJ State Planning Act to implement the goals of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP).
- In addition to providing administrative support to the State Planning Commission, OPA is organized within the NJ Department of State's NJ Business Action Center (BAC). The broader purpose of the BAC is to facilitate economic growth in New Jersey through technical assistance and guidance provided to businesses and local governments.
- OPA is currently in the process of updating the SDRP.
- As per the NJ State Planning Act, the SDRP intends to establish an optimal balance of economic development and environmental conservation through sound planning practices.
- The SDRP is not a regulatory document, but a guidance document. It does not overrule, negate, or interfere with local plans or regulations. Instead, its aim is to foster greater coordination and consistency between planning objectives at all levels of government.
- In December of 2024, OPA disseminated the Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan, which is a draft version of the new SDRP. This began a process called Cross Acceptance, in which all New Jersey residents and local and regional entities are free to offer comments, thereby contributing to the final version of the SDRP.
- Because stakeholder engagement is critical to the Cross Acceptance process, OPA commenced its outreach to municipalities, counties, and regional entities well in advance of the release of the Preliminary SDRP.
- At present, OPA is conducting public meetings such as this in all 21 counties and at the Highlands Council. Later this year, OPA will conduct six public hearings on the outcome of the Cross Acceptance process.
- Concurrently, OPA is working with a team from Rutgers and Rowan Universities to prepare an Infrastructure Needs Assessment, which will project the public investments necessary to implement the new SDRP. An Impact Assessment, investigating societal and economic impacts of the new SDRP, is also underway. Furthermore, OPA is soliciting comments on the State Plan Policy Map and its underlying mapping protocols.
- The current SDRP, adopted in 2001, contains eight goals. The Preliminary SDRP contains ten goals. These goals pertain to economic development, housing, infrastructure, urban revitalization, climate change, water and natural resources, environmental protection, historic and scenic resources, equity, and comprehensive planning.
- The State Plan Policy Map, required by the State Planning Rules, serves as the geographic application of the SDRP's goals, strategies, and policies. Although planning area amendments will occur during Cross Acceptance, the addition of new centers and nodes will be addressed outside of Cross Acceptance, through the Plan Endorsement process.

- The Smart Growth Explorer is an online mapping tool developed by OPA's partners at Rowan University. It can be used to identify areas suitable for development and areas suitable for conservation. It can serve as a resource to stakeholders when considering requests to amend the State Plan Policy Map.
- OPA will complete its public meetings by mid-April. The Cross Acceptance process will then proceed to the Comparison Phase, in which County Cross Acceptance Reports are developed and submitted to OPA. Next is the Negotiation Phase, in which OPA and the counties will discuss points of agreement and disagreement in the Preliminary SDRP. Ultimately, we hope to adopt the Final SDRP, along with the Infrastructure Needs Assessment and the Impact Assessment, before the end of the year.
- QR codes are available to access the Preliminary SDRP, the Citizen's Guide to the Preliminary SDRP, and an online portal to submit comments on the Preliminary SDRP.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD:

Summary of **Questions** and *OPA Responses*

The Preliminary Plan seems to say that municipal plans must conform. Can this language be changed?

The State Plan cannot overrule local plans; it is a voluntary guidance document. However, conformance with the Highlands Council's RMP is not voluntary in the Preservation Area.

The current Secretary of the Interior supports resource extraction. If a conflict arises between the State and Federal governments over this issue, how is it resolved?

New Jersey has its own laws in place to protect natural areas. This is State's plan that outlines the state's goals.

Many people seem concerned about the development of more market rate housing and affordable housing. Is Trenton also addressing associated transportation issues? More housing requires more public transportation.

The State Plan provides a framework to address public transit needs. NJTPA is updating their own plans. Land use and transportation decisions need to happen together to support appropriate growth.

The last time the State Plan was adopted was in 2001. Is the standard for the Plan to be updated every 25 years?

No, in fact, we are mandated to update it every three years. There were efforts made to update the State Plan in 2007, and again in 2012, but these were ultimately unsuccessful.

Will the next administration be hindered by the new State Plan if it does not agree with the Murphy Administration's priorities?

No. After it is adopted, the next governor will be able to use the State Plan as a way to implement their vision for New Jersey.

The term, "next generation farmers," could resemble third or fourth generation farmers. Can this terminology be clarified?

By "next generation farmers," the Plan is referring to young farmers, not lineage. But this can be clarified, in the next draft of the plan.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

After reading the Preliminary Plan, I have some concerns about the document and the Cross Acceptance process in general:

- There is a perceived haste with the process of adopting the new State Plan.
- The current State Plan was adopted in 2001, and preceded the creation of the Highlands Council.
- This new State Plan is mostly focused on urbanization, at the expense of rural communities.
- Sussex County has preserved 45 percent of its land. Only 16 percent of the county has been developed, yet incentives for preservation have not been realized.
- The State Plan focuses on economic development and urban revitalization. COAH's affordable housing obligations have been challenging to meet due to the lack of sufficient land and essential services. Although more housing means more economic development and jobs, there will also be more people on roads, which creates major issues on county and local roadways as well as on I-80 and I-287.
- Center designations need to be made in more areas of Sussex County.
- Current resources in support of the agricultural sector are inadequate.
- Sussex County benefits from several historical assets and has become a tourism destination. Rails to Trails projects have been successful. More funding is needed from the State for these initiatives.
- I feel that the State Plan inadequately addresses the need for economic development in rural areas.

The State Plan discusses the alignment of agencies, specifically the big three: DCA, DEP, and DOT. Currently, there is a "big stick" for municipalities—the June deadline for affordable housing and fair share housing plans. The same planning boards are concentrating on meeting affordable housing obligations and adopting fair share housing plans. The SDRP will not get as much as attention.

The State Farmland Preservation Plan discriminates against Sussex County because we have rocky soil. We lose points every time, which affects the amount of money we get. The point system needs to be addressed. We have farms of all sizes and are in close proximity to larger outlets such as Hoboken and Jersey City. Additionally, farm preservation efforts should be less focused on acreage totals; many agribusinesses such as nurseries utilize less space but would still benefit from preservation.

Agriculture needs more support in order to be more viable throughout New Jersey.

END: 2:46 PM