

Public Information Meeting  
Preliminary SDRP  
Burlington County – Tuesday, March 11, 2025 – 6:00 PM

START: 6:02 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Tom Pullion, County Commissioner

- Welcome to all, especially County Commissioner Deputy Director Allison Eckel.
- The towns represented here tonight have made a good decision—to participate in this process.
- There are many planning resources available to our towns at the state and county levels, and tonight we will hear about some of them.
- If your town is considering a new planning initiative, or is updating its master plan, or is in the process of designating an area in need of redevelopment, now is the time for engagement. Now is the time to weigh in on the new State Plan and have your voice heard.
- Whether your town is facing issues with housing, or roads, or economic development, now is the time to put your heads together and communicate your concerns to the county, and to the state.
- Burlington County has an excellent professional staff, and they will be a great resource to you.
- This is our chance to ensure that the county stays strong and resilient, while also protecting our environment.

Tom J. Stanuikynas, Supervising Planner

- Thank you to all for attending.
- As Burlington County's Planner, I serve to assist our towns.
- I am pleased to welcome Walter C. Lane of the Office of Planning Advocacy.

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*

#### **How is a particular region, like the Highlands, identified for special attention?**

*The criteria for identifying Special Resource Areas is contained in the Preliminary SDRP, and they are primarily based on natural features. Areas such as the Sourlands or the Great Swamp may be identified as SRAs in the final Plan.*

#### **How would a corridor be designated for environmental concern?**

*That is something that can be included in the county's Cross Acceptance Response. Ultimately, though, the decision rests with the DEP.*

#### **What is the current status of the Cross Acceptance process in our county?**

*At this point, the towns are developing their Cross Acceptance Responses. These will be compiled into a countywide Cross Acceptance Response, which will then be transmitted to OPA by the end of May. A consultant is offering assistance to all counties in the DVRPC region.*

**While there are many “carrots” in the State Plan, what are the tangible benefits to participating in Cross Acceptance and Plan Endorsement?**

*There are many state government programs which consider State Plan consistency when determining funding awards. The NJEDA, for example, offers the Aspire tax credit program; it is only available to projects in Planning Area 1, Planning Area 2, or a designated center within a half a mile of a transportation station. Other programs award bonus points for Plan Endorsement or designated centers. There could be more opportunities in the future. OPA will be updating the list of such programs in the future. For now, it is pragmatic for municipalities to pursue consistency with the State Plan, because doing so will put you at the front of the line for funding.*

**How are the equity and climate change goals of the new State Plan expected to be affected by the changes in priorities at the federal government level?**

*It is simply too soon to tell what the impacts of new federal government policies will be. However, the New Jersey SDRP is a plan that is required by New Jersey law*

**What is the Impact Assessment likely to show?**

*Since the adoption of the current State Plan in 2001, several general trends have been observed. These include more investment in urban areas, and more land preservation. The IA will likely show the cost savings associated with these revitalization and preservation efforts, compare to trends that predate the Plan.*

**Will the Infrastructure Needs Assessment consider what changes need to be made on a municipal level?**

*The INA will not be that granular. Instead, it will indicate cumulative deltas in statewide land use. The INA is being prepared by Rutgers and Rowan.*

**Is consistency with the State Plan associated with some kind of point system?**

*No, this is a voluntary process. There are no mandates associated with the State Plan.*

**The rural areas of Burlington County, like Southampton Township, face many challenges while trying to balance environmental protection, housing obligations, and economic development. We have extensive cranberry bogs, which are essentially protected wetlands. We are also located in the Pinelands Area. This minimizes the amount of buildable land, which is increasingly taken up by warehouse development. What can be done to achieve an optimal land use balance?**

*The new SDRP is broad in its application, but is intended to reward good local planning. Consistency with the State Plan, along with a strong zoning ordinance, will give municipalities an advantage when charting the course of their future land use practices. For example, Bedminster Township was successful in its attempt to disapprove of a proposed development project. Bedminster’s local zoning ordinance was upheld in court due to its consistency with Planning Area 4 characteristics.*

**Does the State Plan account for rural areas in need of water and sewer infrastructure?**

*Yes. The State Plan enables municipalities to set their own planning priorities.*

**How can water and sewer infrastructure be implemented in a manner that does not over-incentivize warehouse development?**

*That can be determined by municipal zoning ordinances. Zoning strategies are derived from the municipal master plan.*

**Is there a centralized repository of all current municipal master plans in the county?**

*No, there is nothing of that kind at this time.*

[Allison Eckel, County Commissioner Deputy Director]: The county representatives in attendance have heard your request and may be able to help with this.

**Can the State Plan stress the link between agricultural land and agricultural business?**

*Yes, the State Plan seeks to create the conditions to keep this industry viable.*

**What can be done to discourage warehouse development in places like Pemberton Township? We identify as both an overburdened community and an historical town.**

*OPA can provide technical assistance to towns that are considering zoning changes. We cannot overrule local zoning.*

**What can be done about warehouses that are used to grow cannabis?**

*I would refer you to the MLUL.*

**If the State Plan is a guidance document, why are affordable housing provisions mandatory?**

*State law established the municipal responsibilities for the provision of affordable housing.*

**I think it is imperative to map areas that are most at risk of hazards posed by climate change. For example, more frequent droughts will lead to more frequent forest fires. This makes it harder to protect life and property during disasters, and in the meantime, it is harder to obtain homeowners insurance. And, unfortunately, we can no longer rely on federal regulations. That being said, why isn't the State Plan Policy Map being updated to account for these issues?**

*The points you've raised are all interrelated. The new State Plan, which is a high level guidance document, addresses all of these concerns. Your town can also submit a map amendment request.*

**How can we comment on specific projects such as the Glassboro-Camden Line?**

*You can submit comments through our online survey.*

GENERAL COMMENTS:

**It is important to link our trail systems.**

**Housing is often built in inappropriate locations. Neighborhoods should be walkable.**

**Warehouses used for growing cannabis are not appropriate on preserved agricultural land.**

**Property tax breaks for veterans, while deserved, incentivize towns to chase ratables like warehouses.**

CLOSING REMARKS:

Walter C. Lane, Acting Executive Director, OPA

- Thank you all for your time.
- Please reach out to Tom J. Stanuikynas if you have questions about your municipal CART.
- We look forward to helping you implement your goals.

END: 7:06 PM