

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Mercer County – Tuesday, February 18, 2025 – 6:00 PM

START: 6:05 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Michael Shine, Chair, Mercer County Planning Board

- Introduction and Welcome.

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*

There are a number of places in the economic development section that encourage regional planning, but the Plan does not have policy recommendations. Can policy recommendation regarding regional planning be more specific?

If the Preliminary Plan is not clear enough, we can make revisions. Suggestion on how to improve the plan can be submitted during Cross Acceptance.

Will the State Plan lead to an update of the MLUL or legislation?

The Plan is guidance and establishes a voluntary process. We do not dictate. We can provide the guidance in the Plan. Much of the implementation occurs during Plan Endorsement.

Regarding the Smart Growth Explorer Tool *beta. What is the final implementation of the tool?

It is both a screening tool and an informational tool that can be used during Cross Acceptance, but it can be used outside of the Cross Acceptance process as well.

Could the Smart Growth Explorer Tool be used to improperly justify a mapping change?

We would need backup material, documentation, and justification regarding any proposed mapping change.

Does the new SDRP address workforce development and workforce retention?

Yes, both are addressed in the Plan.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Quinton Zondervan, Member, Sourland Conservancy Board of Trustees

- Read a comment thanking us for acknowledging the Sourlands, but is requesting that the Commission act now to acknowledge the Sourlands as an area of critical need.
- Comments were previously submitted to OPA.

Susan Bristol, Municipal Policy Specialist, The Watershed Institute

- Commented support on the previous Sourlands comment.
- Read a brief statement that detailed she was pleased with the wording included on regional and watershed planning in the Plan Update.
- Urged that primary policy needs to focus on redevelopment and restoration.
- Plan should include a policy for the reversal of previous shortcomings.
- Plan does not fully recognize watershed protection at a regional scale.
- Encourage the Plan to add/reemphasize what a new growth model looks like.
- Climate resilience is shrinking developable land due to new flood data. Look to introduce green infrastructure in all development projects.
- Municipal master plans should include buildouts and adopt a watershed element.
- The Plan relies heavily on design and promotes the idea of municipalities redesigning. Most municipalities do not have an architect on staff.
- Policies should be written to prevent new commercial development that mimics stranded assets.
- Would be really helpful if the Plan went further in adaptive reuse.
- Would it be appropriate/valuable for the Plan to include timelines for short and long-term goals?
- Promotion of Centers: It is unclear if Centers will be sprinkled across the landscape like sprawl.
- OPA and State Plan should create an implementation document for the State agencies.

Beverly Asselstine, Chair, Hightstown Borough Planning Board

- Previously saw a recommendation for review of warehouse development on the county level, but it needs to be on a larger level.

END: 7:05 PM