

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Salem County – Wednesday, February 19, 2025 – 5:00 PM

START: 5:05 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Cordy Taylor, Commissioner

- Welcome
- Introductions: Walter C. Lane, Michael Davis (HGA), Hanah Davenport (HGA)
- Salem County has adopted a resolution designating itself the Negotiating Entity.
- Cross Acceptance is a voluntary process whereby the county and its municipalities can comment on and shape the new State Plan.

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*

Warehousing is an issue in municipalities such as Carney's Point. What can be done about this?

Warehousing can be noted in your municipality's Cross Acceptance Response. The new State Plan will not dictate changes that each municipality must make. Instead, it will be a broader policy guidance document.

If a municipality takes an action that runs counter to the guidance of the State Plan, will that affect their ability to acquire funding or to be granted approvals?

The Plan Endorsement process is a voluntary means by which municipalities can obtain additional technical assistance and better position themselves for receiving discretionary grants. The State will not punish municipalities for not participating, and it cannot force cooperation either. If a municipality pursues a land use policy that runs counter to the State Plan, we won't try to stop you, but we won't be involved in the process, either. The State does not intend to give out "A's" or "F's" for municipal planning efforts.

In light of the recent actions taken by the federal government, will the State Plan still be required to focus on equity in planning?

Yes. State law requires that disadvantaged communities be included in the planning process. The State's definition of disadvantaged communities is based on past insufficiencies in investment and representation, not demographic characteristics.

In light of the recent actions taken by the federal government, will the State Plan still be required to focus on climate change?

Yes. Of course, at this point it is unknown what the ultimate scope and impact of federal government changes will be. What is known, however, is that flooding risks, for example, are increasing. The State Plan intends to account for the best available data when balancing economic development opportunities with environmental protection.

Salem County is facing several issues regarding water quality and stormwater. What will the State Plan do about these issues?

The State Plan is intended to be a “high level” guidance document. For example, when it comes to affordable housing, the State Plan makes several policy recommendations but does not prescribe exact numbers of units to be built in each municipality. Similarly, when it comes to water quality enhancement and stormwater control, the State Plan makes policy recommendations, such as promoting green infrastructure and encouraging stormwater basin retrofitting. Concurrently, the State has adopted new stormwater management rules, and the DEP issues municipal stormwater permits that serve to correct some of these issues.

Salem County has a long history of farming. Does the State Plan provide for the preservation of farmland?

Yes, the new State Plan contains several strategies to promote agricultural preservation. There are two planning areas in the State Plan Policy Map, 4A and 4B, in which agriculture is the designated land use. The last State Plan, adopted in 2001, was largely successful in taming sprawl and led to an increase in land preservation. The state has still lost some of its farmland, of course, but at a slower rate than it would have otherwise.

Is there any way that the new State Plan can disincentivize farmers from selling their land to warehouse developers?

As has been shown over time, the State Plan, together with other State plans and initiatives, has been successful in promoting agricultural preservation.

What changes to the State Plan Policy Map are being proposed by the new State Plan?

No mapping changes are being proposed. Towns and counties can suggest changes during the Cross Acceptance process.

How exactly does the State Planning Commission approve of a mapping change? Can mapping changes be made to account for new redevelopment areas or preserved agriculture?

Mapping change requests can be made by the County in its Cross Acceptance Response. The SPC will then approve or deny the change. If a municipality is designating a redevelopment area that is not shown on the Map, this would be an appropriate request for a change. Municipalities are encouraged to also look into the Emerge and Aspire programs offered by NJEDA.

How rigid is the late May deadline for submitting final Cross Acceptance Responses?

We have to be pretty firm on this deadline in order to ensure we have adequate time for noticing and comment periods in subsequent steps in order to meet our goal of having the final State Plan adopted on December 17, 2025. We can work with Salem County to meet this deadline, and we will need the months of June and July to address Agreements and Disagreements. Our advice is to focus on areas of disagreement, and keep your responses succinct.

How are towns negatively affected by not participating in the Cross Acceptance process?

It is true that certain incentives may not be available to municipalities, depending on the Planning Area. Overall, the intent of the State Plan is not to punish towns that don't participate, but to reward good planning efforts. Good planning means not extending sewer service areas into environmentally sensitive areas, for example. We do not intend to make extra work for the municipalities. But by participating, you can influence the nature of the final State Plan. This means ensuring that language you view as too harsh or too broad is rewritten.

What is Salem County's role in the Cross Acceptance process?

Our office has been in contact with Salem County since early 2024. They recently hired a consultant, HGA, to assist.

[Michael Davis]: HGA was appointed one week ago to provide technical assistance to Salem County during Cross Acceptance. The firm has been working with the Office of Planning Advocacy for much longer, and is familiar with the process. Municipal meetings are being scheduled now, and notices will be sent shortly.

Is the main point of the State Plan to ensure more affordable housing is provided across the state?

Housing availability is not the sole purpose of the State Plan, but one of several. At the moment, there are a number of concurrent initiatives at the state level which promote more affordable housing. And these initiatives' underlying objectives go hand-in-hand: Reusing previously developed land, ensuring a return on investment, protecting the environment, etc.

One municipality in Salem County, Pennsville, appears to be mischaracterized on the current State Plan Policy Map. It is a rural community, but is described as metropolitan. Can this be changed?

Yes, this would be an appropriate request for a mapping change. Additionally, some of the historic definitions of Planning Areas may need to be updated in the future.

I disagree with the assertion that housing is an economic catalyst. How can a region accommodate more housing, whether affordable or market rate, if there are insufficient jobs?

The comment is appreciated. We encourage you to further elaborate on your position in the Cross Acceptance process, whether as a direct comment on the Preliminary Plan, or in your municipality's Cross Acceptance Response.

When will the new State Plan be fully implemented?

Our intention is to have it adopted on December 17, 2025. Outside of the Cross Acceptance process is Plan Endorsement, which any municipality can pursue at any time.

I disagree with the State Plan's suggested strategy of establishing preservation trusts. This could be problematic in Salem County. Why was this policy proposal included in the Plan?

Preservation trusts are one strategy among many that the State Plan proposes. If a locality feels that a particular strategy is not appropriate, they are not compelled to pursue it.

How does the State Plan ensure that water drawn from local aquifers does not exceed capacity?

The State Plan seeks to provide for an environment in which local goals can be achieved. This includes ensuring that local infrastructure is not overwhelmed.

The 2001 State Plan had specific 10-year attainment goals in terms of cost savings. Were these goals achieved?

As you may know, the original timeline for readopting the State Plan was every three years. Had that timeline been maintained, we would have already published updates on cost saving objectives several times over. Our new Infrastructure Needs Assessment and Impact Assessment will be considering these 2001 goals and the extent to which they were achieved. What we do know at this moment are the broader trends indicating the success of the 2001 Plan. Because of the 2001 Plan, more investment has occurred in previously developed areas, and less land has been lost to new development.

END: 6:08 PM