

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Morris County – Friday, February 28, 2025 – 10:00 AM

START: 10:00 AM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Joseph Barilla, Planning Director

- Reminded municipalities to get Cross Acceptance reports in
- Follow up with questions to either the County, OPA, or submit comments online

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 can we direct the state to help us in our communities? Our town is surrounded by the Passaic River and the Highlands. The state agencies are at a crossroads and there is no coordination. If there is flooding it will be to the detriment of our town. How can the state and other agencies protect this and other areas of concern?

One of the goals in the State Plan to increase coordination efforts; we welcome the comments on state agency coordination be included in the CART. The benefits of aligning plans at all levels of government may not be immediate, but there is a lot of value to doing so and takes a long-term vision.

We are the densest population in the country, and in regards to transportation, we have historically prioritized development in highways. There are no initiatives for biking in Morris County. The State pushes these policies and expects it all to happen. These are lofty goals, but the State will not do anything; they have not put their portion forward. Can you comment?

There are some success stories, including the State's complete streets policies. In Somerset County, there is a multi-purpose trail along Route 206 and there are bike lanes in many downtown areas. Municipalities are required to adopt complete streets policies.

What bike lanes has the State done? There are some done by counties and municipalities, but not the State.

The State Plan encourages the coordination efforts between all levels of government in advance opportunities to bike and walk.

Does the State Plan push for development where it is appropriate? Some places are not suitable due to flooding. Development in inappropriate areas creates the risk of a crisis during a rain event. We need to conserve the streams and rivers, and not just build and then buyout.

The State Plan addresses the preservation of and limits to development in these areas.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

David Hands, Long Hill Township Planning Board

- The implementation of handicapped curbs with no sidewalks along state roads is impractical and not well thought-out. *One State Plan goal is to advocate for comprehensive planning. Curbed ramps are required by federal ADA regulations. The State Plan advocates for adding sidewalks to make connections, through increased implementation activities.*
- The Township of Long Hill just finished its master plan; we addressed many of the issues that are also addressed in the State Plan.
- NJ Transit's programs, especially the rails-to-trails program, connects the centers in our town. We need additional support to carry out these initiatives.

Joseph J. Maraziti, Jr., Maraziti Falcon, Former SPC Chair

- The State Plan is important and it has achieved a great deal.
- The evidence is in the Plan itself. The impact assessment analyzed a planned future in which more development is directed into new and existing centers. That has happened dramatically; the certification of occupancy rates in ninety-percent developed communities has skyrocketed, as seen through the map, due to the utilization of the plan. Developed areas are given extra points, aimed to encourage additional development, while preserving other areas for conservation.
- Case law has imbedded municipal conformance with the state plan. For ordinances to be salient, they must promote development in growth areas or restrict growth in conservation areas.
- Unfortunately, some State agencies do not follow the State Plan. Due to this failure, there has been some progress but there is a big hole in the process.
- Communities are at the mercy of these state agencies. We need to address the issue of state agencies dropping the ball.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Joseph Barilla, Planning Director

- Use the State Plan as a tool. While there are many valid concerns, it is important to coordinate efforts, especially with OPA.
- In the future, you can point to the State Plan to justify your municipality's course of action when there is a disagreement with another state agency.

END: 11:45 AM