

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Highlands Council – Thursday, February 20, 2025 – 4:00 PM

START: 4:00 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Ben Spinelli, Executive Director, Highlands Council

- Highlighted the option use the Highlands or opt for County as the negotiating entity.
- Shared importance for regional planning and best actions towards good investments in infrastructure and tax dollars.
- Explained the importance of the 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*

As a planning consultant, what should we be telling our towns? I have received a couple of the Cross Acceptance Response Templates.

Summarize the body of municipal planning work and identify the areas of which you are consistent and inconsistent. The Highlands will send out links to their CART, which is a Microsoft form.

How do we implement Highlands centers and plan endorsed centers? To what extent will these be implemented into the Plan?

We cannot designate new centers during Cross Acceptance. This can be done outside of Cross Acceptance through plan endorsement. We are looking for comments in regards to the mapping criteria, specifically developed areas that flood.

Will Highlands capability zones be included in the new Plan?

Per our MOU, we do not have jurisdiction in the Highlands, but we work closely with the Highlands to achieve consistency between our plans.

Will there be a document available that shows specific changes between the 2001 State Plan and the Preliminary Plan?

We are keeping most of the goals the same, therefore there is no document that highlights the changes.

Is the State Plan regulatory or a policy guidance document?

This is a policy guidance document, which is not meant to force its suggestions onto the towns. The State Plan broadly addresses the policies within the state agencies, rules, and state legislation. Recommendations in the plan consider the Municipal Land Use Law and the County Planning Enabling Act.

What is recentering?

In areas with existing development, recentering is promoting more center like uses, such as mixed-use concepts. This includes a wide range of strategies.

Does re-centering include overlay zones?

Yes.

Can we receive a copy of this presentation upon request?

Yes.

Will the State Plan Policy Map be attached to the State Plan?

No. There are no underlying planning areas in the preservation area. We make sure that they are consistent with the Highlands land cover zones. We will only be doing mapping changes if suggested from the towns, county, or Highlands. Changes to the State Plan Policy Map come from the bottom up rather than from the top down.

Will commenters receive a response if their comments are implemented?

No. As we receive many comments, this would not be feasible.

During the State Plan update process, are cores, nodes, and center designations happening?

Center designation is part of the plan endorsement process, but we encourage identifying potential center designations, which will be formalized through the plan endorsement process.

What are the benefits of the plan endorsement process?

We are working on developing a chart of the benefits of the planning areas or designation centers.

Who is allowed to attend the negotiation meetings? Can we have affected non-municipal representatives attend?

We have to review the rules, but it may be possible to change the members on the municipal negotiating committee.

What are the next steps for elevating the fluvial areas based on new rules? What do those changes mean for development potential, zoning, and the value of land? The three-foot difference is very expensive and many municipalities cannot afford these changes.

The plan does not talk about generating new agencies or funding, the plan is more broad and outlines suggestions for these areas.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Ryan Conklin, PP, AICP, GISP – Assistant County Planner, Warren County

- During Cross Acceptance, OPA asked municipalities to put together a negotiating committee to identify discrepancies. The County then compiles the municipal responses into the CART, and then submits the responses to OPA. The negotiating meetings are slated to occur in May through August.
- He described Warren County's alignment with the state plan, which was sent in an email correspondence to all of their municipalities.
- They developed a website that allows municipalities to show the mapping changes that the municipalities can make.

New Jersey Highland Coalition

- Supports the State Plan where the planning areas are in conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.
- These efforts highlight the coordination between the Highlands Council and the State Plan.

END: 5:00 PM