

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Hunterdon County – Thursday, March 6, 2025 – 6:00 PM

START: 6:00 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

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*

What is the proposed mechanism to implement regional and watershed planning?

We plan to encourage collaboration through watershed planning across municipal and county boundaries and bring in state agency partners to address these issues as well.

What are the carrots?

Potential funding and award points on grant applications, if you are consistent with the State Plan or if you are in a center or within certain planning areas. NJTPA and NJEDA prioritize grant funding eligibility in PA1 and PA2 or in designated centers. Centers are designated through the plan endorsement process.

How do you think the MLUL will need to be updated to strengthen its reference to other towns' master plans?

The legislature may consider taking action to review the MLUL. county enabling legislation to advance potential policy changes to support the State Plan

How are municipal stakeholders identified?

Counties have identified municipal points of contact.

On the website, will you track a municipality's progress?

No, we will not be tracking or grading municipal planning efforts. The State Plan is a voluntary compliance document. Case law has defended the State Plan as a valid reference for their zoning. Municipalities' zoning and density requirements were upheld due to their consistency with the state plan.

Where does the State Planning Commission come into play with reconciling differences between state agencies? For example, the DEP and DCA in regards to sewer expansion.

The State Plan aims to facilitate conversations between state agencies. We cannot regulate other agencies. The State Plan helps facilitate conversations and address issues.

In regards to rural areas, there are concerns with productive farmland being designated as redevelopment areas. What can be done about this?

There are various strategies in the Plan. We encourage areas with existing infrastructure to consider redevelopment opportunities. Agricultural areas are generally considered for

preservation especially in the PA4, PA4B, and PA5 areas. Case law has upheld municipal zoning because of its consistency with the State Plan.

If the State Plan is done by end of the year, how do you roll it out? Will you have more public meetings or courses for municipal officials?

We will have conversations with anyone; we can have additional conversations with the municipalities. We encourage municipalities to go through Plan Endorsement and pursue mapping changes.

In regards to gathering input during this process, are you working with the network of professional planners who work with towns? Are they involved in this?

Yes, the NJAPA was a key consultant in drafting the Preliminary State Plan. The NJPO, county, municipal officials are very involved with our planning staff. OPA and the County Planners Association have monthly meetings to collaborate.

How is watershed planning going to be included in State Plan?

Areas of critical concern are being mapped, and we are encouraging participation, assisting, and guiding discussions. By advancing the State Plan—and showcasing this—we are promoting regional planning.

Is there any emphasis on using watersheds as a planning unit/boundary?

Yes, the State Plan addresses this. Tom Dallessio presented at the State Planning Commission meeting on Wednesday; the Musconetcong Watershed Association is highlighting how to build relations and help with a municipality's master plan update and aligning local and state plans. Through this we can set local partners up with success.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

Resident

- If state agencies not in compliance with the State Plan, they should be fined.

Resident

- In regards to New Jersey's 250th anniversary. We should promote Revolutionary War tourism. Hunterdon County had the most skirmishes in the state.

Susan Bristol, Municipal Policy Specialist, The Watershed Institute

- The Township of South Brunswick has abused the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law to develop rural areas with warehouses. The Local Redevelopment and Housing Law should be amended to preserve agricultural lands.
- Through regional watershed working groups, we bring together municipal and county planners and engineers. The East Amwell and West Amwell watersheds are the headwaters of two rivers. In accordance with MS4 stormwater permits, we facilitate improvement plans and working groups with county planners. We are practicing what the state plan is preaching.
- Existing jurisdictions such as counties and municipalities should focus on the Cross Acceptance process. Watershed planning does not respect political boundaries.

Resident

- It is very admirable to balance new growth and conservation. It is not enough to restore and repair; we need to reverse past actions. The Preliminary Plan references addressing previous shortcomings, but we should include a reversal of previous shortcomings.
- In addition to a restorative approach, permitted development should be paired with a restoration counterpart.

END: 7:00 PM