

# **County/Regional Plan Endorsement Guidelines**

## *March 2020*

### **Background**

There has been discussion about building OPA's capacity to endorse plans by entities other than municipalities, such as county, regional or multi-party political subdivisions. The concept of county and regional planning is anticipated and allowed in the rules but not detailed in the administrative guidance.

Although Counties have limited local land use authority, County Master Plans provide an important framework for local planning and infrastructure decisions and for aligning and coordinating land use policies for all levels of government. There are many other ways Counties can provide guidance and technical assistance. Counties are also interested in retaining their center designation and see County Plan Endorsement as a potential way to achieve this goal and/or help municipalities do so. The County PE process could help spur interest and greater municipal participation in the State Planning process.

Through county/regional plan endorsement, municipalities that choose to comply with a county/ regional plan could benefit from elements that are relevant to them, such as resiliency, hazard mitigation or farmland preservation, that have been developed for the county with municipal detail. This utilization would reduce submission requirements and streamline Municipal PE. Alternately, if a county and certain municipalities opt to go through PE concurrently, a county could lead municipalities through the PE process and, by municipal resolution, help the municipalities achieve PE through a joint process.

There is precedence in the endorsement of the Route 130 Corridor Plan and the Sussex County Plan, although these endorsements occurred prior to the current rules. Additionally, there were other attempts at regional planning that were not endorsed, such as the Western Cumberland Strategic Plan and the Monmouth County/Barneget Bay efforts.

### **Five Categories of County/Regional Plan Endorsement:**

Five categories of county/regional plans have been identified as potentially eligible for voluntary Plan Endorsement:

1. A single county looking for endorsement of a county plan – a county plan could have a separate track with a limited mapping component, leaving that aspect to the municipalities.
2. A county working with municipalities as partners\*:
  - a. 'Limited Partners' - Municipal partners still pursuing their PE independently. So long as the municipality's plan is consistent with the county plan on regional elements, those elements would be counted towards the municipality's PE process and other local elements would be submitted and reviewed independently.
  - b. 'Full Partners' - County & municipalities pursuing PE on a county and municipal level concurrently. The municipalities could achieve PE at the same time as the region/county by following this process.
3. Several municipalities working together without their county's involvement.
4. Multiple counties working together on a cooperative plan.
5. An entity other than a county working with multiple municipalities.

\* *With the exception of Highlands, Pinelands and Sports & Exposition Authority regions, a municipality must be 'all in' or 'all out' of PE.*

**Definitions** (from NJ AC 5:85-1.4):

“Regional” means an area encompassing land in more than one municipality, a county, or more than one county that is bound together by shared characteristics and regional systems.

“Regional agency” and “regional entity” means an agency which performs planning for land development, infrastructure or capital investment planning for a region.

## **County/Regional Plan Endorsement Guidelines**

***OPA's voluntary County/Regional Plan Endorsement (PE) procedure:***

**First:** County, lead municipality or regional planning entity must be identified as the lead entity through an authorization letter from the County or municipal official, conditioned on final approval by the municipality(s.)

**Second:** Authorized lead submits resolution on behalf of municipalities and/or counties requesting endorsement and scheduling of a Prepetition Meeting. Attach Prepetition Meeting Materials:

- Regional /County Plan
- Supporting documents as developed (TBD, including existing municipal plans for 'Full Partners')
- Any maps depicting plan policies

**Third:** Hold Prepetition Meeting - Must have an elected County official participate if a county is applying and, if applicable, authorizing resolutions from each participating municipality's elected leader if a regional planning entity is taking the lead

**Fourth:** Plan Endorsement Regional Advisory Committee - (Representatives from each engaged municipality and members of the public of all participating localities.)

**Fifth:** County/Regional Self-Assessment Outline:

- Introduction
- Existing Conditions – Include:
  1. Purpose of regional plan (theme/boundaries/organizing principle) and,
  2. Goals/objectives (must be able to articulate why and desired outcomes)
  3. Key Characteristics (County/Region overview with municipal detail if municipalities pursuing for PE)
- Demonstrate public/regional support for the concept
- Status of County/Regional Strategic Plan and Other Relevant Planning Activities
- County-wide/regional scale recent & upcoming development projects
- Authorizing Resolution or MOU committing entities to work together and implement outcomes.
- State Programs, Grants and Capital Projects within the region
- Sustainability/Resiliency Statement (Vulnerability and resiliency status/summary for the county/region – this may be addressed in hazard mitigation, master, climate action, resiliency or other plans and summarized here.)
- Consistency with State, County & Local Plans
  - Goals, Policies and Indicators
  - Center Criteria and Policies (if applicable)
  - Planning Area Policy Objectives
- Mapping
- State Agency Actions
- State Agency Assistance/Expected benefits
- Conclusion

**Sixth:** State Opportunities & Constraints Report

**Seventh:** Regional Visioning

**Eighth:** Consistency Review

**Ninth:** Action Plan Implementation

**Tenth:** Draft PIA including a MOU - reviewed by the PIC

**Eleventh:** State Planning Commission Endorsement

**Twelfth:** Monitoring and Benefits (Streamlined monitoring process.)