

# **Millstone Borough Visioning Process**

## **Introduction**

Millstone Borough is a small municipality in Somerset County with approximately 170 dwelling units and 410 inhabitants, and three hundred and sixty acres in size. It is located in a unique setting along the Millstone River, which provides recreational opportunities within the region. It is also blessed with an exciting history linked to the Revolutionary War; thereby providing opportunities for cultural tourism. Because of its history, portions of the Borough is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, but there are a number of historic residences and commercial properties within the Historic District that need to be elevated or relocated outside of the flood plain because of repeated flood damage.

The small size of the Borough means that it has limited resources to adequately implement needed infrastructure improvements such as public water and sewer.

The Borough has completed its Municipal Self-Assessment as part of the Plan Endorsement process and has received the Opportunities and Constraints Analysis from the Office of Smart Growth/Office of Planning Advocacy. The next step in the Plan Endorsement is the Visioning process.

Since submitting our MSA, the Borough has undertaken a comprehensive Redevelopment Plan for its commercial core and historic district; we feel that the amount and nature of the planning that the Borough has worked on, as well as the amount of public input from what is a very small population, justifies our request for a waiver from the Visioning Process of Plan Endorsement. Material documenting the process will be included in the document and on an accompanying CD.

We believe that Plan Endorsement will help provide the networking and funding streams that are necessary to make the Borough sustainable. Through the Cross Acceptance process as part of the State Plan, the Borough was recommended to be Planning Area 3, which would permit sewers through Village Center designation in the Plan Endorsement. This request for Plan Endorsement is tied to the Somerset County new Wastewater Management Plan, which proposes public sewers for the Borough.

Millstone is requesting Village Center status for most of the Borough as part of the Plan Endorsement process (map included on CD). We believe that the characteristics of the Borough are consistent with those of the Village Center designation in the State Plan.

## **Borough Goals**

**The Borough maintains the following goals, which conform to the State Plan:**

- Historic Preservation: the use of land planning strategies to encourage the preservation of the historic village character of the Borough of Millstone.
- The protection and preservation of the Millstone Watershed and the Millstone River Corridor.
- The promotion of appropriate sewerage and water systems to adequately meet the needs of the population of Millstone Borough and meet all applicable environmental constraints.
- The promotion of conservation of open space and valuable natural and historic resources.
- The protection of environmental assets and neighborhoods.
- Safety from fire, flood, panic and other natural and man-made disasters.

Millstone Borough has several needs that must be addressed:

- Public sewers and public water to serve the needs of the current residents and permit new development that is both contextual to the historic character of the community and at a development density that will encourage the private sector to meet the community's need for affordable housing. The provision of public sewers is also a component of a mediation agreement with the Van Cleef family regarding the last large buildable parcel in the Borough.
- Millstone needs to strengthen its economic base and ensure the financial health of the Borough by maintaining or increasing property values for its residents.
- Resources for archeological exploration and the development of a future interpretive park and linkage to the Millstone River for boating would be needed for these plans to be completed.
- Planning, technical and financial assistance is needed to relocate a number of uses, both residential and commercial, from within the flood plain. Technical resources are needed to provide mediation and clean up of a gas station that is located within the flood plain, and to relocate it to another area within the Borough.
- Technical and financial assistance in developing traffic calming that will enhance the scenic corridor that traverses through Millstone Borough.

The Borough has undertaken a number of planning efforts to help solve the problems listed above. Since our initial petition for Plan Endorsement, Somerset County has purchased the Rezem property for its permanent open space system, which was a major issue focused on in the Millstone Master Plan; a section of the original Rezem property was purchased and subdivided by the Somerset County Improvement Authority so that it could be used as a receiving site for houses that would be relocated due to flooding. Additionally, the Borough has completed a Redevelopment Plan for an Area in Need of Rehabilitation, located at the crossroads of Routes 514 and 533 (River Road/Main Street). Finally, the Borough has been pursuing a FEMA grant for the purposes of providing funds to relocate two houses of South River Street that have been repeatedly damaged by flooding from the Millstone River, subject to approval by appropriate State agencies.

The Borough has worked extensively with its landowners and the public and is committed to bringing these projects to fruition and to providing a sustainable future for this historic town.

## **Millstone Planning and Visioning Efforts**

The Borough has held public hearings specifically related to the Plan Endorsement process and it held a visioning workshop for the Redevelopment Plan on July 28, 2009. We believe that the intensity and variety of other planning projects have provided adequate public notice and participation. As in many other small communities, the cost of holding additional specific workshops would be prohibitive. With just over 400 residents of all ages, the number of persons (beyond those interested people already documented in the meeting minutes) who might attend is minuscule; in addition, there is also a very real problem of meeting fatigue for Borough board members and for the public as well. Whenever possible, the Borough has scheduled joint hearings of the Planning Board and Borough Council, and has presented multiple topics that require public discussion at these hearings (e.g. COAH, Master Plan Amendments, and Redevelopment Plan in May 2009).

The value of a small community, however, is that almost everyone knows what is going on and makes his or her opinions known to board members and the mayor through e-mails or phone or face-to-face conversation. We believe that this personal contact, as well as resident attendance and public comments at Planning Board meetings (minutes attached), has served as effectively as any additional Visioning sessions might, to provide opportunity for participation.

A basic summary of the Borough's planning initiatives is presented below.

## **Sewer Planning**

**Sewer negotiations:** The Borough, through its Borough Counsel Stephen Offen, has participated in negotiations with Hillsborough Township, the Van Cleef Family Partnership, and the Somerset Raritan Valley Sewerage Authority in Bridgewater, NJ 08807, a regional wastewater treatment plant located in Somerset County, New Jersey, currently serving seven communities: Branchburg, Bridgewater, Hillsborough, Manville, Raritan, Somerville and Warren. The Intermunicipal Cooperation Agreement between Township of Hillsborough, Borough of Millstone, Van Cleef Family Limited Partnership and Riverside LLC (Feb. 27, 2009) is attached.

## **Master Planning**

Although a new Master Plan was completed and adopted in 2005, the master planning process has been ongoing because of the Borough's efforts to settle litigation over two properties and its COAH obligation. In addition, the public (homeowners and Historic District Commission members) has continued to be involved in the process of applying for a FEMA grant and in creating a Redevelopment Plan.

**Housing Element and Fair Share Plan:** Millstone filed an adopted Housing Element and Fair Share Plan on November 22, 2002. Subsequent to the filing of the plan, Millstone Borough was sued for exclusionary zoning. The matter was transferred to COAH and Millstone entered into mediation with both the litigants, Van Cleef Family Limited Partnership (Van Cleef) and the owner of a second site in Millstone's adopted plan, the Rezem Family.

Negotiations began in July, 2004, resulting in executed Mediation Agreements with the Rezem and Van Cleef families. The Van Cleef site was incorporated into the newly adopted Fair Share and Housing Plan adopted by both the Planning Board and Borough Council at a joint meeting on December 18, 2008. Amendments to the Housing Element and Fair Share Plan sections of the Borough Master Plan were adopted after a public hearing in May 2009.

**Redevelopment Plan for Area in Need of Rehabilitation:** On the suggestion of Somerset County, the Borough began to study the process of defining a Redevelopment Plan for the intersection of Routes 514 and 533 (River Road). Since 2008 there had been discussion with the County about the possibility of selling the "County Lot" at the intersection to the Borough for relocating flood-prone houses. When the Board of Freeholders announced the purchase of the Rezem property in January 2009 by Somerset County, a new possibility arose: the parcel owned by the Somerset County Improvement Authority SCIA on Main Street across from the Borough Hall could serve as an excellent receiving site for relocated houses, opening up the use of the County Lot and other properties around the intersection for new commercial development that could benefit from recreational opportunities along the Millstone River and the enhanced open space and park system. The Borough's small grocery/convenience store and gas station at the intersection could be relocated out of 100-year flood zone and Historic District. In May 2009 the fundamentals of the process and rationale for declaring an Area in Need of Rehabilitation were presented at a public hearing (minutes attached).

In July 2009 a Visioning and Work Session for the Redevelopment Plan were held (minutes attached). The session was led by Thomas Banker, the County's consultant on redevelopment issues, and Carter van Dyke, Borough planner. Large maps were laid out and the public was invited to comment on them. An initial concept plan illustration was criticized because it did not provide enough space and visibility for the existing service station and convenience store after relocation, both of which businesses were seen as essential by attendees. A major concern was how the Borough's FEMA grant application would fit into this process.

At the August 2009 meeting of the Planning Board, adjustments to the concept plan were made to respond to the concerns raised by several members of the board at the July 2009 hearing, including increasing street visibility of the gas station and a reduction in size for a proposed restaurant/inn (minutes attached). The final plan envisions a gas station and convenience mart relocated from the flood-prone southeast corner of the intersection, as well as locations for several shops with 2<sup>nd</sup> floor housing and an inn/restaurant to serve recreational and cultural tourists attracted by the Millstone River and local historic sites. The Plan was completed and submitted to the Planning Board and Borough Council. The Borough Council adopted an ordinance to implement the *Main Street Redevelopment Plan* in February 2011 (minutes attached).

### **Flood mitigation**

**FEMA grant application:** The Borough submitted a grant application to FEMA in October 2009. Unfortunately, because there were no designated receiving sites for the relocated houses at that time, the grant request was not accepted since the benefit/cost analysis was not sufficiently high. Since then the Borough has been working with Somerset County to define the Improvement Authority's role in the grant application, both in terms of administration of the grant, and in providing receiving sites. The County is currently (May 2011) reviewing the costs of subdivision and lot preparation; the vacated lots near the river would be permanently deeded as open space and become part of the County park system.

Until the lots are subdivided and appraised and estimates for actual development costs are determined, however, the grant application cannot proceed, as the Borough and homeowners are unable to provide the required non-federal grant match.

The two homeowners whose houses are being considered for relocation have been active in the process (minutes attached, highlighted).

### **Millstone Borough's Vision**

Many ideas for the open space that remained in Millstone Borough had been proposed, some of which called for a total of 360 new dwelling units and over 400,000 square feet of commercial and office space, when the Planning Board adopted a new Master Plan in 2005 to protect and enhance Millstone's historic village character. The Plan addressed a number of conflicting goals:

- Meeting the Borough's affordable housing obligation
- Designing a build-out strategy that would create a ratable base to make the Borough sustainable
- Limiting development to a scale that would be compatible with the existing community
- Preserving the historic lands that tell the story of the Revolutionary War
- Setting up partnerships that would provide public sewers for all of the residents within the Borough
- Establishing new environmental controls for flood plain and storm water management.

The 2005 Master Plan attempted to address all of these goals, enabling Millstone Borough to meet all of its COAH obligations past, present and future, and to provide a stable tax base for the future. It was the intent of this plan that the most of the developed and all of the developable areas of the Borough eventually be sewerred, with a slightly expanded commercial village that would fit within the existing historic district.

The Borough has continued to update its Master Plan and Development Code to reflect changes in the status of its open space, specifically the purchase of the Rezem property by Somerset County. After the Borough is able to receive sewers, development of the Van Cleef property in the southwest corner of the Borough will mean that Millstone is, for all intents and purposes, built out. The Van Cleef development will be linked to “downtown” by walking paths, to further the creation of a walkable community .

The Main Street Redevelopment Plan of 2011 is consistent with the following goals of the Master Plan as it envisions limited historically appropriate development to strengthen the Borough’s economic base by providing services for primarily a local and limited regional market.

### **Master Plan Goals, 2005**

1. The use of land planning strategies to encourage the preservation of the historic village character of the Borough of Millstone by:
  - a. Protecting and enhancing the village’s historic character by preservation of the aesthetic and structural fabric of historic buildings, and of the social, physical and economic characteristics of the community;
  - b. Designing and developing a vehicular circulation system which promotes the free flow of through and local traffic while controlling volume and speed without sacrificing safety and historic village values;
  - c. Promoting the development of a pedestrian circulation network throughout the Borough, including all new developments. This pedestrian circulation plan must be safe and functional for adults and children, yet not compromise the integrity of the Borough neighborhoods;
  - d. Providing adequate space and appropriate location within the Borough for all land uses to adequately meet resident needs, and to maintain or increase the scale of the historic area;
  - e. Integrating new development so it is compatible with the existing development within the Borough;
  - f. Preserving the cultural landscapes which provide the context and setting for the historic buildings within the Borough. New development should be located where it has minimal impact on the existing development within the Borough.
  - g. Encouraging development where there will be no or minimal impact upon the existing historic roads within the Borough. New development should be directed toward new by-pass roads that route new traffic away from the existing street system within the Borough.
  - h. Providing for new land uses in both use type and intensity that will maximize financial benefits to the Borough by increasing the ratable base of the Borough.
  - i. Providing for new land uses in both use type and intensity that will insure the economic sustainability of the Borough by increasing the ratable base of the Borough while selecting those uses that will require minimum services in order to provide the increased revenue necessary to best meet the future needs of the Borough residents.

2. The development of standards to ensure the compatibility of future development with the present community in all aspects of scale, density, architectural detail and land uses by:
  - a. Developing design guidelines for both new residential and non-residential development that will be complimentary to and in contextual harmony with the character of the existing and expanded historic district.
  - b. The neotraditional village design approach is strongly encouraged in all new developments, or TND (traditional neighborhood development) which is described in the Development Guidelines.
3. The protection and preservation of the Millstone Watershed and Millstone River Corridor by:
  - a. Seeking to prevent the unnecessary cutting of trees along the Millstone River and all stream corridors and by preserving all natural vegetation;
  - b. Controlling the rate and quality of stormwater runoff, discharge of pollutants to ground and surface waters, by reducing impervious cover;
  - c. Retaining open space, trees and natural vegetation, and, as much as is possible, reducing disturbance within floodplain areas;
  - d. Prohibiting intrusion into the river by any construction which would inhibit water flow causing damage to the waterbody and its banks; and
  - e. Ensuring appropriate setbacks from the Millstone River and stream corridors.
4. The promotion of appropriate sewerage and water systems in partnership with Hillsborough Township and proposed developers to adequately meet the needs of the new Master Plan of 2005 and Borough environmental conditions.
5. The promotion of conservation of open space and valuable natural resources and the prevention of incompatible land uses.
6. The protection of environmental assets and neighborhoods by the establishment of appropriate densities and concentrations so as to adequately meet the needs of residents, and provide sufficient light, air and open space.
7. The assurance of safety from fire, flood, terrorism, and other natural and man-made disasters.
8. The National Park Service has used the 225<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the American Revolution to enhance the public understanding of the various meanings and enduring legacy of the Revolution. There were numerous encampments within the Borough of Millstone, which were crucial to the nation's struggle for independence. These sites must be preserved for future generations by:
  - a. Including the historic encampment areas in the Historic District.
  - b. Developing partnerships with county, state and federal agencies to create The Heritage Park, a park of regional importance that will tell the story of the role that Millstone Borough played during the American Revolution.
9. Development of a strategy that will foster public/private partnerships to implement the Master Plan by:

- a. Creating both zoning incentives and partnerships with other governmental agencies that that will encourage the preservation of historic lands with the minimal impact upon the Borough residents.
  - b. Creating positive zoning incentives for the private sector to implement the Borough's COAH obligation.
10. A focus on the Borough's rich historic resources to encourage economic redevelopment of the Borough's downtown by:
- a. Developing the historic resources and preserved open space into an historic park that will become a regional destination.
  - b. Providing for new non-residential development in both use type and intensity that will be complimentary to Millstone Borough and the proposed park as an historic regional destination.
  - c. Developing design standards for the new residential and non-residential development that will be complimentary and contextually compatible to the proposed regional historic park within the Borough.
11. Development of transportation design standards that will foster a walkable community and increase traffic safety within the Borough.

### **Main Street Redevelopment Plan Goals**

The creation of a Redevelopment Plan for the Borough involved a number of public meetings, including delineation of an Area in Need of Rehabilitation. The following statements are taken from the final Main Street Redevelopment Plan:

Millstone's proximity to the river has also caused it to suffer greatly because of repeated and frequent floods. To preserve some of its historic residences and commercial properties, the Borough has begun to consider a variety of flood mitigation procedures, including elevation or relocation of existing structures. Residential property values have been negatively affected by the repeated flooding.

Millstone also lacks a retail core where residents can purchase daily needs without having to drive outside the Borough. This fact, coupled with the desire to increase commercial ratables to help ensure financial sustainability, has led the Borough to undertake a redevelopment plan (the "Plan") for the redevelopment of the principal intersection in Millstone. The Plan has two major components: (1) the protection of those historic residences most in danger of permanent damage because of the nature and frequency of flooding in Millstone; and (2) the creation of a retail "core" developed in a manner that is consistent with the historic character of the Borough.

We believe that these goals are also consistent with the basic vision for the future of Millstone Borough: a community that has preserved and protected its historic character and resources while ensuring that development that does occur will also provide a strong financial base for the Borough and its residents.