

Municipal Self- Assessment Report

VERNON TOWNSHIP | SUSSEX COUNTY | NEW JERSEY



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Municipal Self-Assessment Report

Vernon Township, Sussex County

August 5, 2020

Acknowledgements:

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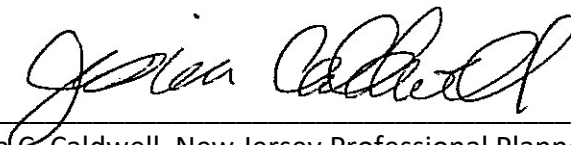
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The original of this report was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-12



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Cover Photo: Appalachian Trail Boardwalk

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INTRODUCTION

Vernon Township recognizes the many benefits of working with the State Planning Commission and creating planning documents which are consistent with the State Plan. The Township is seeking Plan Endorsement from the State Planning Commission to have access to the benefits that are included with Plan Endorsement. The Office of Planning Advocacy has guidelines for Plan Endorsement which require municipalities to follow a ten-step process. Vernon Township fulfilled Step 1 by completing a pre-petition meeting with the Office of Planning Advocacy and other state agencies on May 7, 2020. The Township will be requesting a waiver from Step 2, Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee and Step 5, Visioning, which is described later in this report. This document represents Step 3, the completion of a Municipal Self-Assessment Report. This Self-Assessment Report will review the Township's plans for consistency with the State Development and Redevelopment Plan and will act as the Township's petition for Plan Endorsement.

Local Goals and Objectives

As identified in the 2010 Master Plan, the Land Use Goals within the Township are as follows:

1. To achieve a balance between continued development and the preservation of the extensive natural resources of the community;
2. To preserve the existing residential neighborhoods and Lake Communities;
3. To provide for economic development through the Commercial, Light Industrial, Commercial-Recreation, and Agri-Eco Tourism Zones;
4. To ensure adequate infrastructure to accommodate the projected level of intensity of development;
5. To encourage commercial and mixed-use development in a form, location and design that preserves and enhances the unique character and identity of Vernon Township;
6. To direct the majority of future growth in the Township to the Vernon Center, Redevelopment Areas, and appropriate existing resort areas of the Township;
7. To ensure that land use and development activities within the Highlands Preservation Area of the Township occur only in a manner and location that is consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan; and
8. To create land use and development plans, policies, and ordinances that are predominantly consistent with the goals and policies of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

Relevant Planning Issues

Vernon's Town Center was designated by the State Planning Commission on July 16, 2003. Plans for Vernon's Town Center go back to the 1995 Master Plan. Vernon Township would like to address the following relevant planning issues through Plan Endorsement:

Promote Economic Development

- Encourage new businesses
- Support existing businesses
- Promote development opportunities
- Encourage tourist and resort-oriented development
- Increase access to tourist and recreational destinations
- Encourage tourist and resort support businesses
- Support and regulate short-term rentals

Stabilize Infrastructure

- Stabilize and increase the user base for the sewer system to stabilize bonds and payments
- Create additional public water capacity in the sewer service area
- Ensure a balance between cost of infrastructure to users, developers and tax payers

Create a Town Center

- Promote mixed-use, residential and commercial development in the Town Center
- Support expanded infrastructure including sewer and water throughout the center area
- Identify and encourage businesses that support local resiliency
- Identify and support sustainability in the center, i.e. electric car charging stations, green infrastructure and solar power, etc.

Support Local Resorts

- Help market and support local ski resorts, golf courses and resort-oriented businesses to ensure their survival

Assistance Needed

Vernon Township is seeking State assistance to help it achieve the following goals:

Promote Economic Development

- Encourage new businesses
- Support existing businesses
- Promote development opportunities
- Encourage tourist and resort-oriented development
- Increase access to tourist and recreational destinations
- Encourage tourist and resort support businesses
- Support and regulate short-term rentals

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Support Local Resorts

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Plan Endorsement Efforts

Below is a summary of efforts related to the Plan Endorsement process.

Planning Document	Agency	Date
Master Plan	Harold E. Pellow & Associates, Inc.	1995, Updated July 2010 & December 2011
Application Report for the Vernon Regional Center	Looney Ricks Kiss Architects	March 2003
BoA Annual Updates of N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70.1 Recommendations	Vernon Township Land Use Board	2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018
Future Wastewater Service Area Map	Sussex County Division of Planning and Sussex County Office of GIS	6/3/13
Plan Amendment Approval - Future Wastewater Service Area Map	DEP, Division of Coastal & Land Use Planning	6/4/13
DRAFT Resolution to create a Plan Endorsement Citizens' Advisory Committee	Township of Vernon	To be completed
Petition for Plan Endorsement Request	J. Caldwell & Associates, LLC	2/26/20
Center Designation Extension Request	Vernon Township Mayor Howard Burrell	2/28/20
Vernon Center Sewer Service Area Map	Vernon Township Engineering Department	7/20/09
Approval of Petition for Designation of the Vernon Town Center	Department of Community Affairs	7/31/03
Resolution #2003-09 Designating the Vernon Town Center	DCA, SPC	7/16/03
Vernon Town Center: A Historical Overview & Status Update	Louis M. Kneip, Director of Planning & Development	June 2008
Minutes - Prepetition Meeting	NJ OPA	5/5/20

Planning Area Summary

The current June 30, 2020 Center Designation deadline has been extended until 180 days after the revocation of Governor Murphy's State of Emergency declared in Executive Order #103, which was adopted March 9, 2020 and has been extended as recently as June 4, 2020 and remains in full force and effect. The resolution noting this extension was adopted by the State Planning Commission on April 15, 2020.

The Township is including a map of its proposed Center Boundary, which includes the current Vernon Sewer Service Area/Center Boundary area and an expanded area to connect the "Center Cores" which were designated in the first Center designation, being the Vernon Town Center and the Mountain Creek Center area.

Waivers

Vernon Township is seeking a waiver from Step 2, Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee, for a few key reasons. The first reason is that given the COVID-19 health emergency, it is very difficult to bring groups together from the public and to hold meetings. Vernon is conducting a combination of online and in-person meetings but both are challenging. Internet service in Vernon is not uniformly high speed and it presents people with difficulties in accessing video meetings. Additionally, the Township is trying to move through this process relatively quickly given the short timeframe that this process needs to be completed within. The Township has also been working with a broad group of interested parties as it moves through this process including the Land Use Board, the Vernon MUA, the Township Council and several subcommittees of the Township. For these reasons, the Township is requesting a waiver of this step.

Vernon Township is seeking a waiver from Step 5, Community Visioning, for a few key reasons. The first reason is that given the COVID-19 health emergency, it is very difficult to bring groups together from the public and to hold meetings. Vernon is conducting a combination of online and in-person meetings but both are challenging. Internet service in Vernon is not uniformly high speed and it presents people with difficulties in accessing video meetings. The second reason is that the Township has engaged the public recently in visioning for its Sustainable Economic Development Plan. These meetings addressed a broader range of issues than just the economy given Vernon's focus on tourism and bringing people into the community to enjoy its farms, open spaces and parks. The following meetings were held for the Sustainable Economic Development Plan:

1. 8/1/2018: Vernon Township Planners met with the Vernon Police Athletic League and conducted a SWOT analysis and discussed the programs and priorities of the PAL.
2. 8/1/2018: Vernon Township Planners met with the Vernon Chamber of Commerce and conducted a SWOT analysis and visioning with the Chamber and its members.
3. 8/6/2018: Vernon Township Planners attended a Vernon Township Greenway Action Advisory Committee meeting and conducted a SWOT analysis and visioning with its members. The meeting was a regularly scheduled meeting open to the public.
4. 8/7/2018: Vernon Township Planners attended a meeting with Vernon Economic

Development Advisory Committee and conducted a SWOT analysis and visioning. The meeting was a regularly scheduled meeting open to the public.

5. 8/9/2019: Vernon Township Planners attended a Vernon Township Board of Education meeting and conducted a SWOT analysis and discussed visioning. This was a regularly scheduled meeting open to the public.
6. 8/2019-10/2019: Vernon Township Planners conducted individual meetings with business owners in the Township and discussed the SWOT analysis and visioning. The businesses included the Daily Bean, Heaven Hill Farm, BOZ Electric and Smokey's Brick Oven Pizza.
7. 1/23/2019: Vernon Township planners attended a public meeting of the Vernon Land Use Board and discussed the SWOT analysis and visioning. This was a regularly scheduled meeting open to the public.
8. 3/13/2019: Vernon Township Planners attended a public hearing on the Sustainable Economic Development Plan and gave a presentation of the plan to the Board and the public. Public notice was given.
9. 4/10/2019: Vernon Township Land Use Board adopted a resolution approving the Sustainable Economic Development Plan.

The results of the public meetings and stakeholder meetings are in the Vernon Township Sustainable Economic Development Plan that was submitted to the Office of Planning Advocacy as part of the Plan Endorsement Pre-Petition. Because Step 5 also envisions a public hearing before the Governing Body, which was not conducted, we would like to ask that the public hearing before the Township Council discussing this Municipal Self-Assessment with the visioning component take the place of the second required public hearing for Step 5.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Location & Regional Context

Vernon Township is located in northeastern Sussex County and occupies 70 square miles. The Township is bordered by Orange County, New York to the north, and Wantage Township, Hardyston Township, and West Milford Township to the west, south, and east, respectively. Just over 40% of the Township is preserved open space. Both federal and state parks, as well as the Appalachian Trail, cross through the Township. In addition to those parks, there are multiple attractions in Vernon Township, including Mountain Creek Ski Resort and Waterpark, Crystal Springs Resort, and the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge. Other unique geographic features in the Township include a prehistoric quarry,

Historic properties are located throughout the Township and include sites such as the Black Creek American Indian Site, Price's Switch Schoolhouse, the St. Thomas Episcopal Church, several cemeteries, and High Breeze Farm.

Vernon Township falls within the New Jersey Highland's Region, with about a third (33%) of the Township in the Planning Region where compliance with the Regional Master Plan (RMP) is optional, and about two-thirds (66%) in the Preservation Region where compliance with the RMP is mandatory.

Background

Overview

According to U.S. Census 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) 5-Year Estimates, Vernon Township's population is approximately 22,369, which is about 15% of Sussex County's total population. The average household size in Vernon is 2.76 people, slightly higher than both the County average of 2.66 people and the State average of 2.73 people. The Township has a lower median household income (\$79,363) than both the County (\$90,520) and the State (\$93,902) but a similar income per capita. The Township also has the lowest poverty rate (2.6%) among the three geographies. About 60% of the population of the Township is in the labor force.

	Vernon Township	Sussex County	New Jersey
Land area (sq mi)	69.96	535.44	8,723.09
Population	22,369	142,298	8,881,845
Households	8,354	53,361	3,213,362
Average Household Size	2.76	2.66	2.73
Housing Units	10,922	62,371	3,605,401
Median Household Income	\$79,363	\$90,520	\$93,902
Per Capita Income	\$42,010	\$42,639	\$40,895
Poverty Rate (% of Families)	2.6	3.1	7.6
Civilian Population in Labor Force 16 Years and Over	13,437	80,037	4,675,686

Data Source: Social Explorer Tables: ACS 2018 (5-Year Estimates) (SE), ACS 2018 (5-Year Estimates), Social Explorer; U.S. Census Bureau

Population Change

The population of the Township began to decline around 2007. The Township also experienced some population decline after 2010; however recently (2017), the population dropped by 7.4%. With more development opportunities on the horizon, especially in Town Center, it is likely that Vernon will again shift toward population growth and exceed 2010 number population numbers. This is a direct result of the 2016 Master Plan policies that support development in the Town Center and surrounding areas and supported redevelopment of existing underdeveloped areas.

Population Change: 1950-2017						
	Township of Vernon (Vernon)	% Change	Sussex County (SC)	% Change	New Jersey (NJ)	% Change
1950	1,548		34,423		4,835,329	
1960	2,155	39.2	49,255	43.1	6,066,782	25.5
1970	6,059	18.1	77,528	57.4	7,168,164	18.2
1980	16,302	16.9	116,119	49.8	7,364,823	2.7
1990	21,211	30.1	130,943	12.8	7,730,188	5.0
2000	24,686	16.4	144,166	10.1	8,414,350	8.9
2010*	24,376	-1.3	149,265	3.5	8,791,894	4.5
2017*	22,572	-7.4	143,570	-3.8	8,960,161	1.9

Data Source: U.S. Census; 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Income

While Vernon's household incomes continue to be higher than the State and County median incomes, the gap is closing. Vernon's land use policies have promoted a variety of high wage jobs in industry sectors such as retail, manufacturing, and professional/scientific job types. The presence of the Mountain Creek Resort also provides good paying jobs and supports the economy of the Town.

Land use policies that continue to promote redevelopment and infill development, especially in the Town Center, will continue to improve the household income in the Township by improving the economic outlook of the Township's residents. Additional development also helps stabilize the tax base of the Township, which helps homeowners within the Township by reducing their tax burdens. The Township's Land Use Code and redevelopment plans have promoted redevelopment and infill development that maximizes the available buildable land in Vernon while maintaining its small-town character.

Household Income: 2017						
	Vernon	%	SC	%	NJ	%
Total households	22,572	100.0	53,618	100.0	3,199,111	100.0
Less than \$10,000	205	2.5	1,420	2.6	170,840	5.3
\$10,000 to \$14,999	195	2.3	1,133	2.1	113,188	3.5
\$15,000 to \$24,999	278	3.3	2,890	5.4	247,138	7.7
\$25,000 to \$34,999	343	4.1	3,313	6.2	232,026	7.3
\$35,000 to \$49,999	807	9.7	4,839	9.0	322,263	10.1
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1,438	17.3	8,719	16.3	490,325	15.3
\$75,000 to \$99,999	1,439	17.3	7,852	14.6	390,092	12.2
\$100,000 to \$149,999	1,987	23.9	11,591	21.6	556,938	17.4
\$150,000 or more	1,609	19.4	11,861	22.1	676,301	21.2
Median household income	90,805		89,238		76,475	
Median family income	97,179		102,430		94,337	
Median nonfamily income	54,770		51,629		41,692	

Data Source: U.S. Census; 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Redevelopment and Rehabilitation Areas

There are no brownfields or greyfields located within the Town Center. There are three (3) known contaminated sites within the Town Center, located on the following lots: Block 391, Lot 1; Block 391, Lot 4; and Block 407, Lot 5. A summary of these parcels is in the table below.

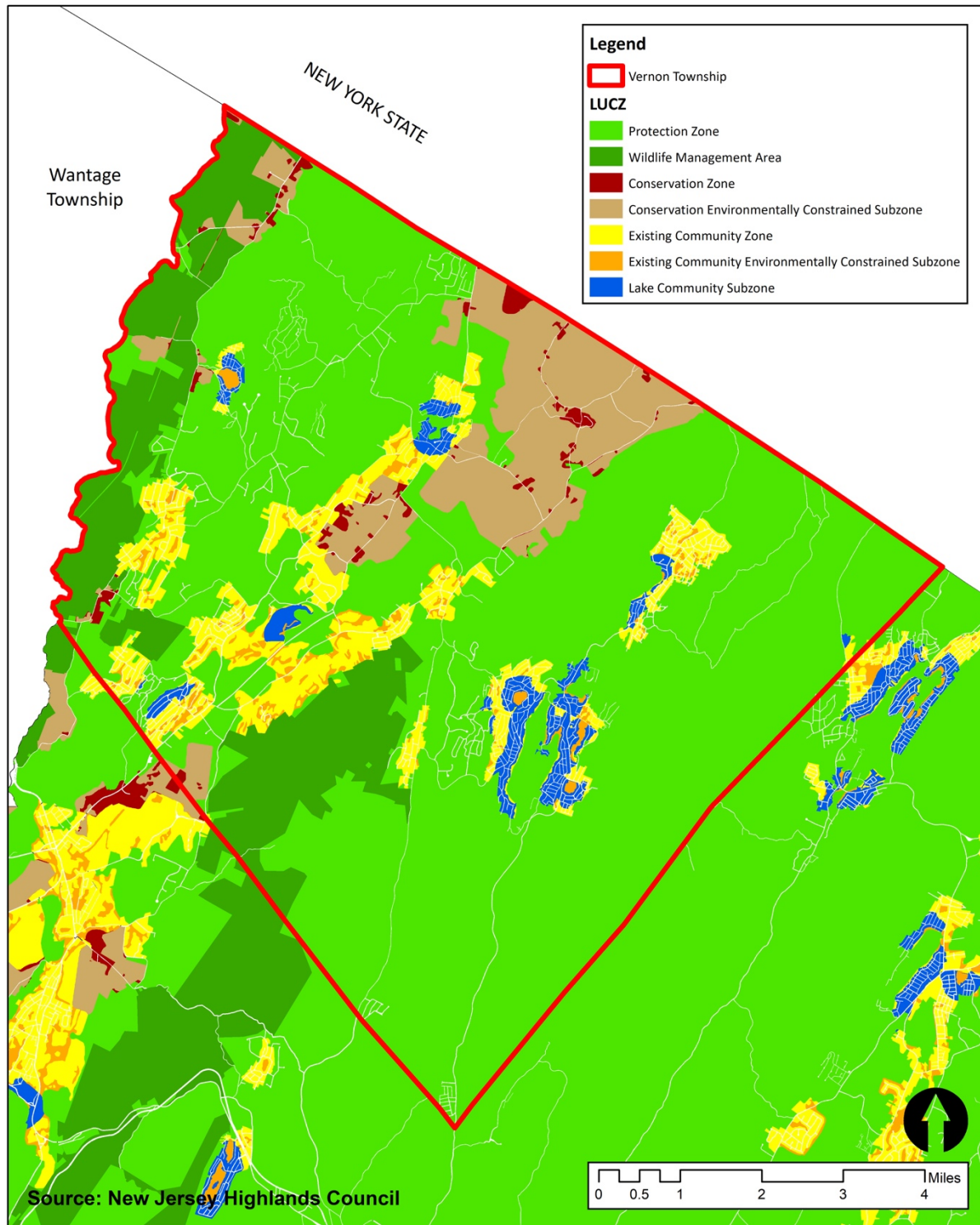
Block	Lot	Use	Status	Remediation Level
391	1	Bob Baldwin's Transportation, Inc.	Active	C2
391	4	Don's Automotive & Tire Center	Active – RAP	N/a
407	5	Lukoil	Active	C2

Data Source: NJDEP Geographic Information System (GIS) Digital Data

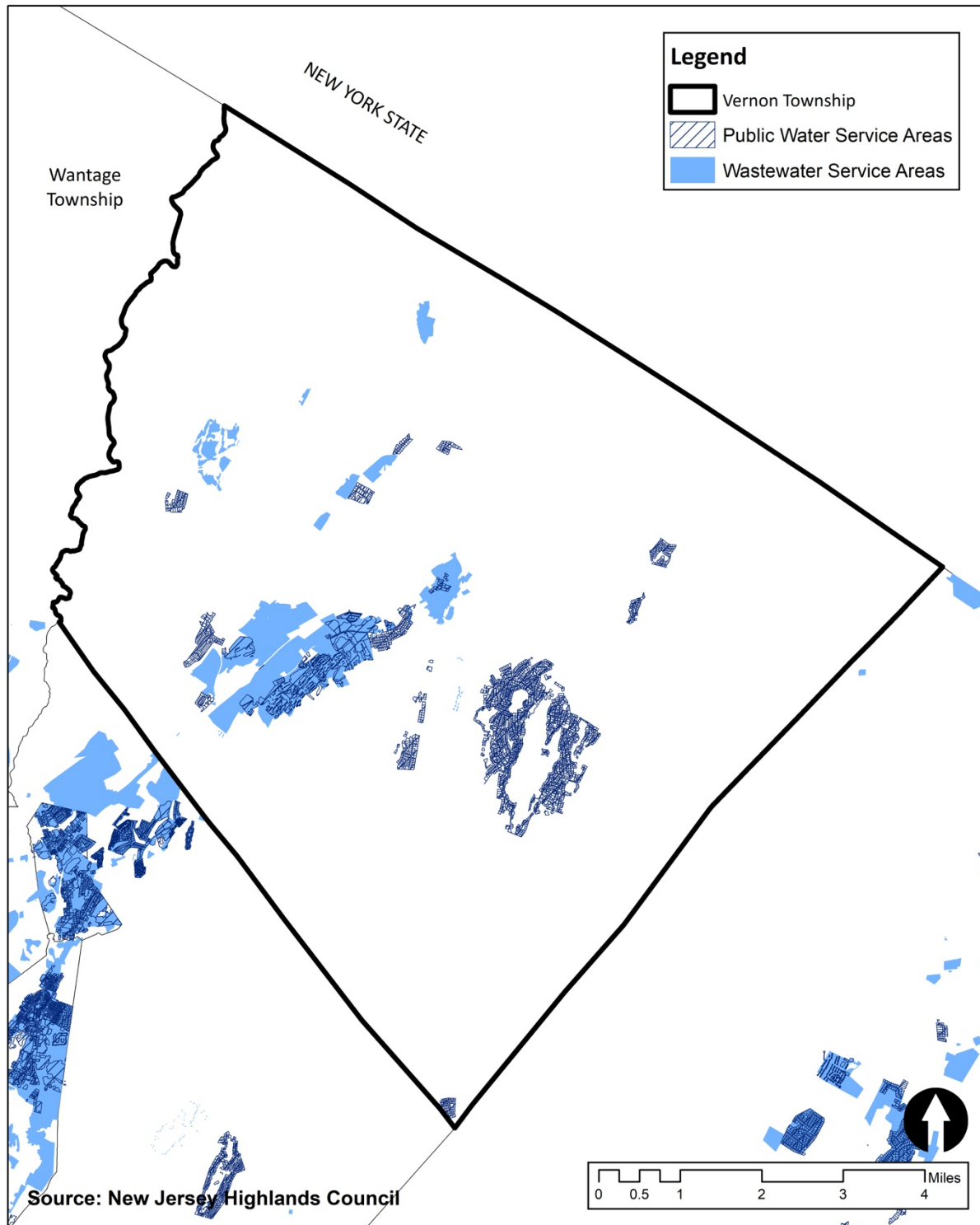
Inventory of Key Characteristics

The maps on the following pages include: Highlands Land Use Capability Zones, public water and wastewater Service Areas, steep slopes, U.S.G.S. topographic map, water bodies and wetlands, and critical wildlife habitats.

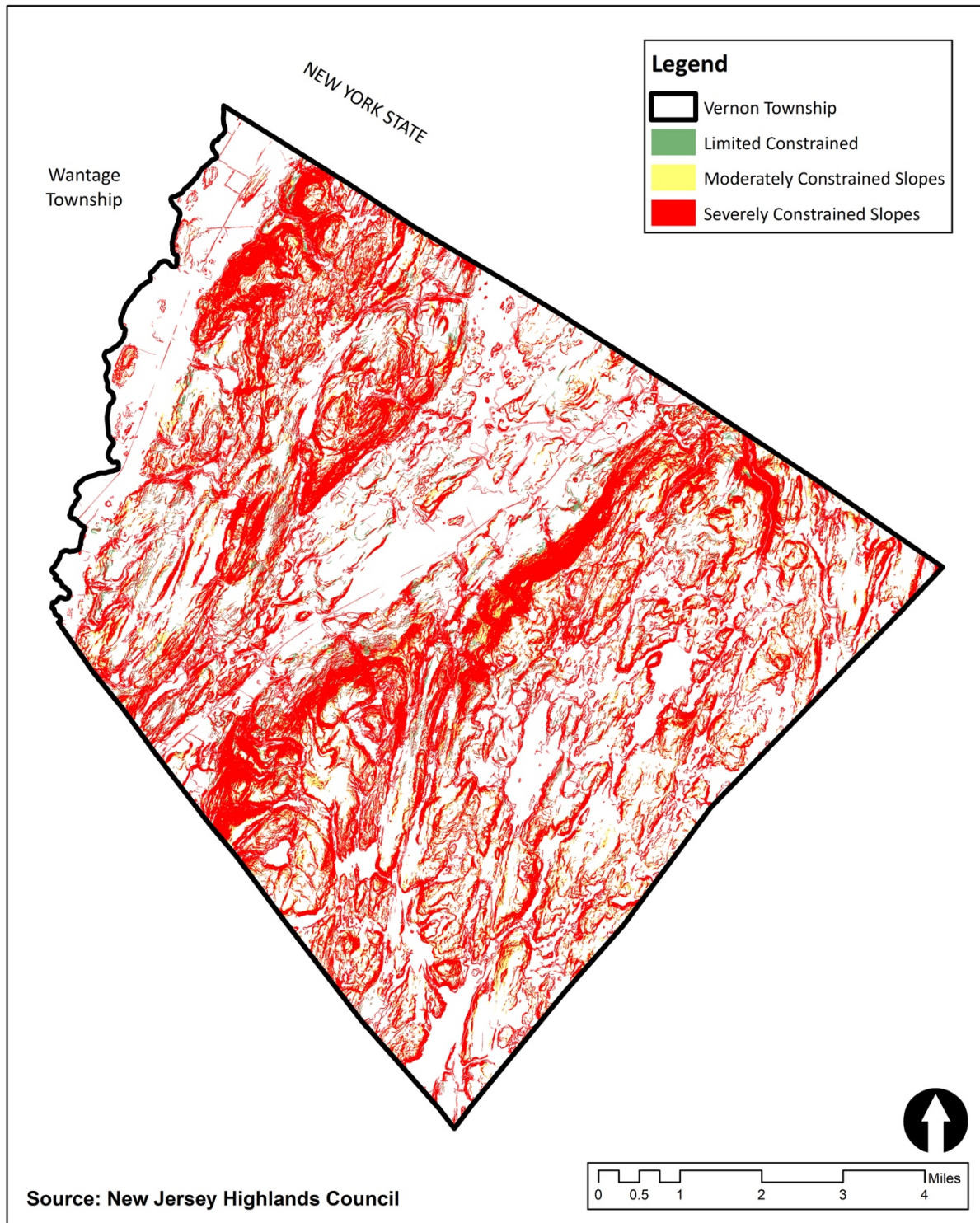
Land Use Capability Zones



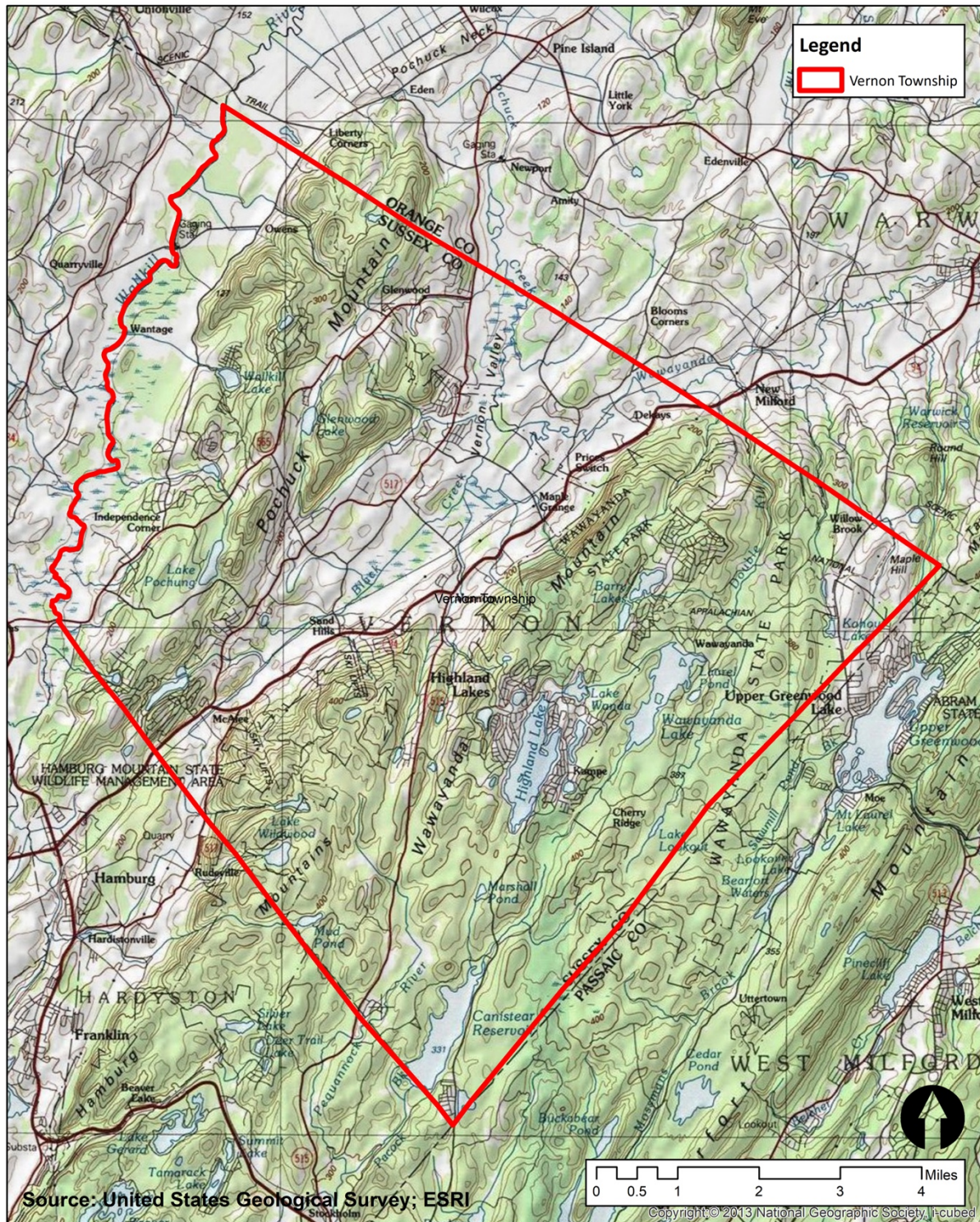
Public Water and Wastewater Service Areas



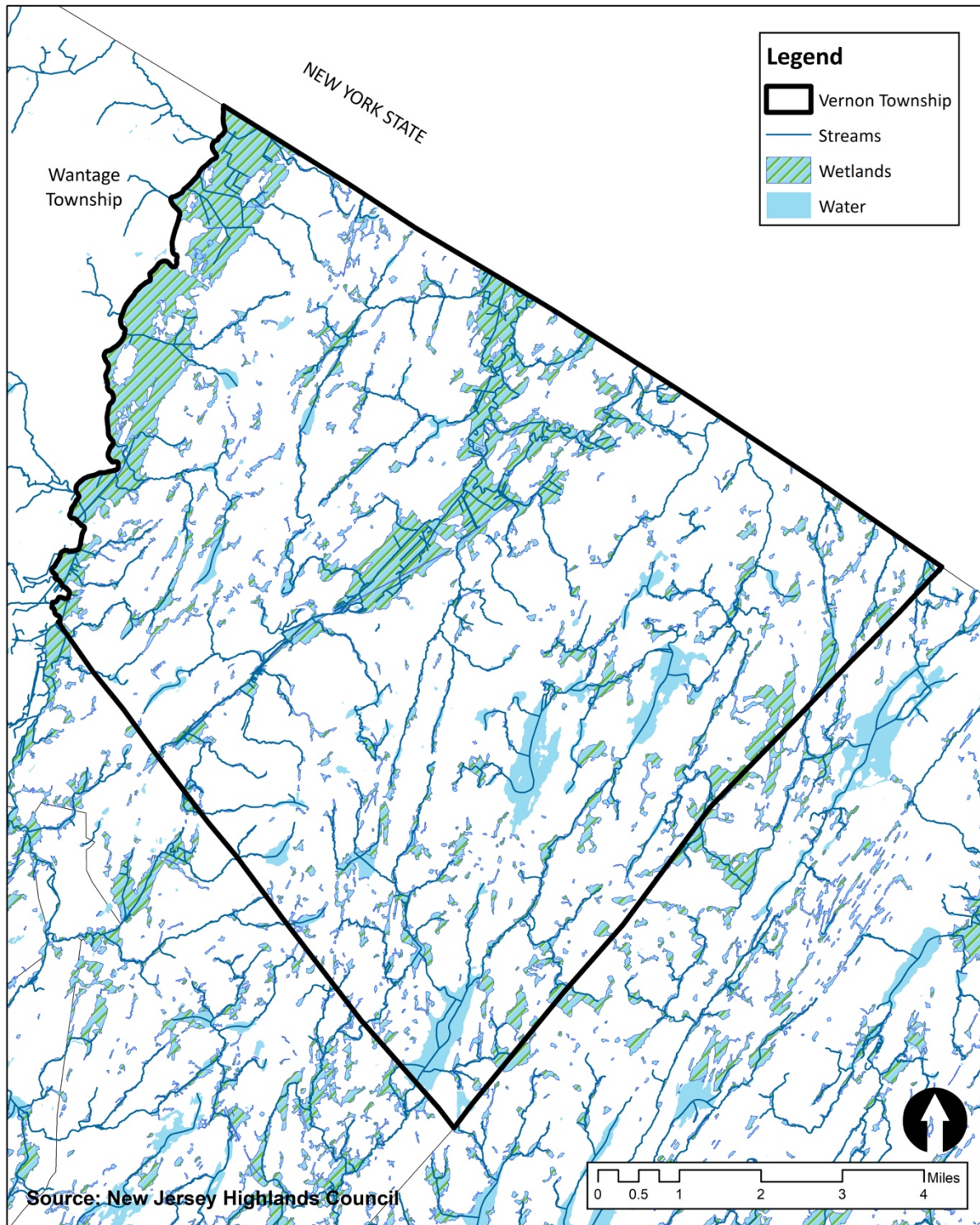
Steep Slopes



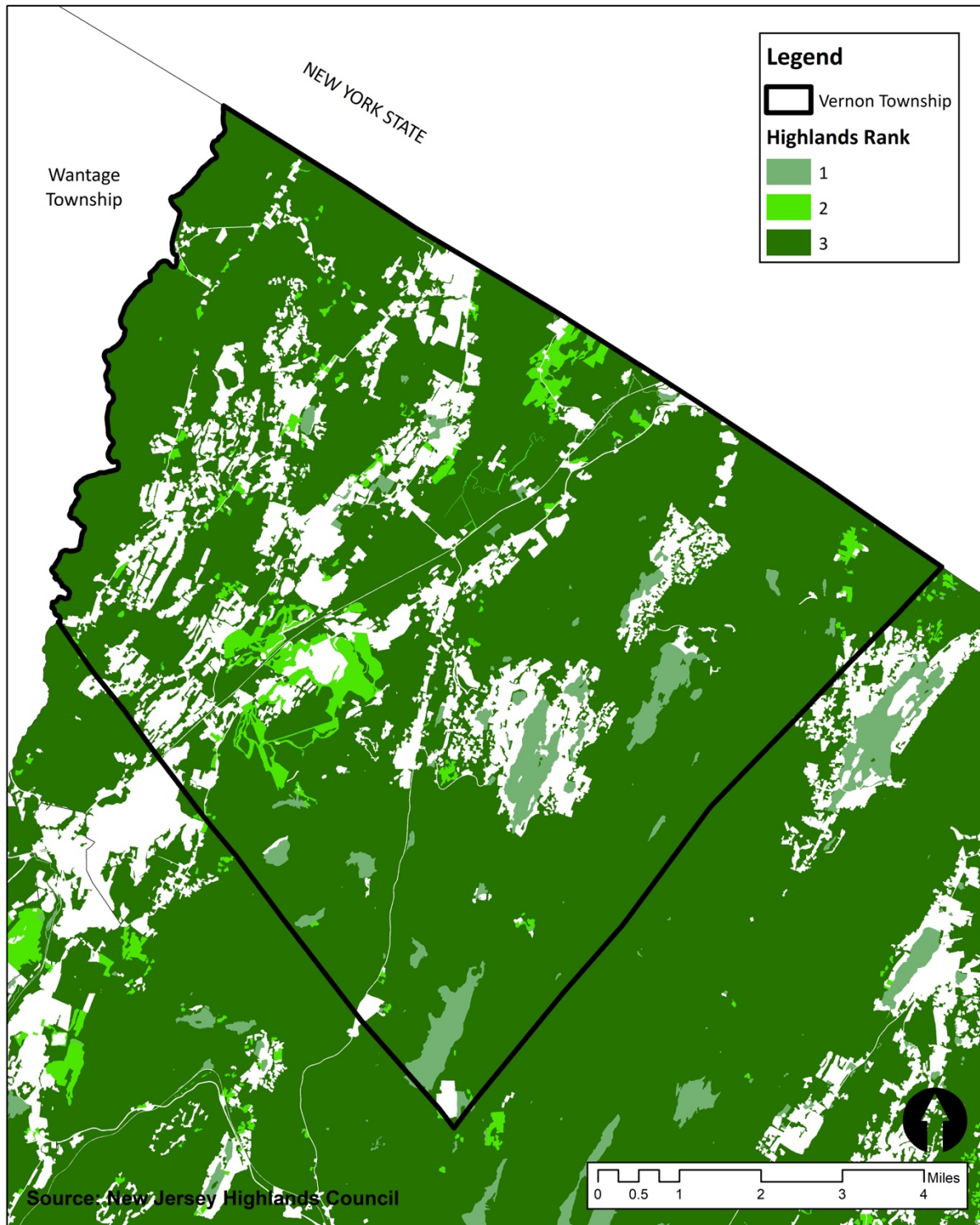
U.S.G.S. Topographic Map



Water and Wetlands



Critical Wildlife Habitat



Status of Planning

Vernon Township's first Master Plan was adopted in December 1970 and remained valid for 15 years. The update of that plan, which was adopted in September 1985, remained in place for 10 years. The Township's last complete Master Plan update was adopted in December 1995. A Master Plan Amendment was adopted in November 2003. The most recent update to the Master Plan is the 2016 update that revisited the original plan's goals and objectives, relationships to other plans, the Land Use Element, and the Recycling Element. A Sustainable Economic Development Plan was adopted in March 2019. An updated Open Space and Recreation Plan was also adopted in 2010.

Vernon has engaged in smart growth planning by working with the State Planning Commission to establish a Town Center designation with a plan for mixed-use and higher density development within the center of Vernon. This designation was approved by the State Planning Commission on July 16, 2003 and was set to expire June 30, 2020; however, the expiration has been extended until 180 days after the conclusion of the Public Health Emergency declared in Executive Order 103. Currently, the Public Health Emergency was most recently extended on June 4, 2020 and remains in full force and effect.

Vernon has engaged in Plan Conformance for the Preservation Area within the Township and has adopted a Highlands Master Plan Element and Highlands Land Development Ordinance.

COMMUNITY VISION & PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Township of Vernon is seeking a waiver for this requirement of the Plan Endorsement process, as an extensive public participation process was completed for the 2019 Sustainable Economic Development Plan. Below is a summary of public input and findings from that Plan.

Public Outreach

Public outreach sessions were conducted in August 2018 and included interviews with Township organizations, committees, and business owners. These groups provided feedback on how their organization, committee, or business relates to Vernon's economic outlook and gave an assessment of the Township's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats regarding sustainable economic development.

The following topics and issues were raised during the public outreach process:

Infrastructure

The lack of completely connected infrastructure in the Town Center was noted as a weakness in the Township

Red Tape

Respondents feel that the permitting process is too difficult for new businesses to navigate and suggest that a representative from the Township should be designated to help businesses through zoning requirements and the permit process.

Eco-tourism

Agricultural and recreation opportunities were often cited as ways to funnel more visitors and businesses into the Township. Building on these existing strengths, in conjunction with strengthening trail connects to the Town Center, could help Vernon capitalize on its vast natural resources and create a symbiotic relationship between the Highlands Preservation and Planning Areas within the Township.

Disparate Communities

Several respondents, as well as the Economic Development Advisory Committee survey, noted the low-density nature of Vernon Township. Historically, the Township's small villages (McAfee, Glenwood, Highland Lakes, etc.) grew separately, without a unified center or gathering place. Communities indicated that they now feel cut off from Township events happening in other neighborhoods and would like better communication and transportation connections between these population centers.

Warwick

Just across the border in New York State, the Town of Warwick stands as an example of Vernon residents' aspirations for their own town. Its lively, historic business district is bustling with a variety of retail and restaurants, closely surrounded by residential neighborhoods. While the respondents noted that they will often go to Warwick for errands or to entertain a guest, they

harbor no illusions that Vernon could transform into a Warwick-like village and would instead like to see Vernon offer things that Warwick does not or cannot.

Government

Respondents cited a lack of consensus at Township meetings, as well as the disparate visions of the Township by various groups, as obstacles to progress in Vernon. The municipal financial burden related to Mountain Creek and the resort's financial issues add to the need for additional development in the Town Center and add strain to the political climate.

Economic Development Advisory Committee Survey

In 2018, Vernon's Economic Development Advisory Committee (EDAC) conducted a survey of Vernon residents, workers, and residents of nearby municipalities. The survey received 349 responses. According to the EDAC survey, respondents would like the Township to attract businesses such as sit-down restaurants (over 85% of respondents), breweries, and bakeries/coffee shops. Many respondents hope that a movie theater comes to Vernon. When asked for locations where they would like community events to take place, respondents named the Town Center (60.2%) as one of the top locations. Respondents perceive the Township to lack a business-friendly permitting process, and would like more sidewalk and pedestrian facilities, mom-and-pop stores, and stronger connections and communication between neighborhoods.

Vision, Goals, and Objectives

The public outreach process resulted in a vision that emphasizes the Township's tourism industry, especially its outdoor recreation, natural resources, and agritourism. Goals and objectives were identified to carry out this vision and are discussed in detail under the Sustainability section of this report.

Vision Statement 2010 Master Plan

The Township's 2010 Master Plan contains a vision statement that was developed with the Land Use Board and a public hearing process for adoption of the Master Plan. The Vision Statement is as follows:

Vernon Township is unique in northern New Jersey. Set apart by the Hamburg and Wawayanda Mountains to the east and the Wallkill River to the west, the Township is home to New Jersey's largest ski resort. The unique and rugged, scenic ridgelines and stream-lined valleys provide for year-round recreation opportunities amidst the rich natural environment. Vernon residents enjoy a high quality of life with scenic beauty, clean air and water, a diverse community, an excellent school system and a high standard of living.

Tourism has been the primary industry in Vernon and the Township strives to be a four-season recreational community. The appeal of the Appalachian Trail, Wawayanda State Park, the Hamburg Mountain Wildlife Refuge and the Wallkill River Wildlife Refuge, draws visitors year-round. While outdoor activities are the centerpiece to Vernon's tourism industry, the Township

seeks to develop a balance with indoor fun and excitement, to promote a sustainable four-season recreational community. Resorts, hotels and bed and breakfasts also need to be augmented by dining and shopping opportunities in order to provide more reasons for visitors to stay and enjoy the Township.

Residents of Vernon share a strong interest in civic participation to promote the ideals of the community: natural resource, open space and farmland protection; beautification; access to recreation; economic development; tax stabilization; government efficiency; and a high-quality public school system.

In order to preserve their rich traditions and quality of life, Vernon residents strive to effectively manage change. The community works to enhance the Township's identity and foster a strong local economy, making Vernon an attractive place to work or run a business. Township leaders work to preserve open space for recreation, farmland and environmental preservation and make development decisions based upon sound planning principles, making Vernon an enjoyable place to live and visit.

All that Vernon is—its scenic landscapes, unique sense of place, economic self-sufficiency, strong community participation and leadership – reflects not only the positive investments of the past, but paves the way for a thriving future.

RECENT AND UPCOMING DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

The following table summarizes major site plan proposals in the Township over the last five (5) years.

Applicant	Block	Lot(s)	Description	Date
NWAC	192.02	19, 25	Renovation of Hidden Valley Ski Resort into a private, non-profit instructional skiing facility for youth.	7/3/15
Taco Bell	141	10.02, 10.05	Construction of Taco Bell at 297 Rt 94 with seating for 40 patrons and an accessory drive-through window; demolition of 2 single-family dwellings	8/10/15
Vernon Valley Reserve, LLC	180	25, 25.01, 25.02, 27, and 28	Phase II of project to locate six (6) new antennas & and equipment shed.	6/2/16
Kaching	141	12.04	Expand use from approved 5,000 sq ft to 7,200 sq ft along with site plan approval	12/23/16
NWAC	192.01	13	Demolish existing structure & parking on site to construct ski facility (ski trails, one-story lodge building, maintenance garage, and associated parking & landscaping.	1/6/17
Cellco Partnership d/b/a Verizon Wireless	173	6	Locate a wireless telecommunications facility	1/6/17
Aerial Adventure Ropes Course	231	1, 12.01	Move ticketing & parking for Great Gorge Golf Course Clubhouse	7/10/17
	Portions of 231.01	1		
NWAC	192.02	5	Construction of a 27,132 sq ft addition to existing main lodge, a 400 sq ft ski patrol building, and additional landscaping	1/9/17
Wilson Facility Management Services	232	17.01	Proposed use of property is an asphalt maintenance company with business offices & vehicle maintenance	5/4/18
Diamond Communications, LLC/T-Mobile Northeast, LLC	141	12.02	Construction of a 199-foot telecommunications lattice tower within a fenced compound	10/12/18

STATEMENT OF PLANNING COORDINATION

Vernon Township recognizes that in any planning effort it is important to take into account and incorporate efforts that are already underway from surrounding municipal, County, and State Entities. There are several planning processes within which Vernon is engaging in order to achieve planning coordination with Sussex County, the Highlands Council, and the State Planning Commission.

The Town Center is not located near the border of any surrounding municipalities and subsequently no land use or planning conflicts are expected.

Sussex County coordinates directly with local municipalities on two primary planning processes: solid waste management planning and wastewater management planning. The Township has been working with the County Planning Department and the NJDEP on the Wastewater Management Plan update for the County, which includes significant new planning restrictions that will reduce the size of the existing sewer service areas and limit septic system densities based on new nitrate dilution standards adopted by the NJDEP. Septic system densities will severely limit subdivision in Sussex County, as any subdivision with more than five lots will require an amendment to the Wastewater Management Plan and specific approval the NJDEP. The Township is working closely with the County and NJDEP to try to ensure that the sewer service area for Vernon's Center continues to allow center-based development.

Highlands Plan Conformance is the process by which planning coordination takes place between Highland's municipalities and the Highlands Council in order to ensure implementation of the goals, policies, and objectives of the Highlands Regional Master Plan. Conformance is required in the Preservation Areas of the Highlands and is voluntary in the Planning Areas. Approximately two-thirds of the Township is in the Preservation Area and therefore, the Township is actively engaged in the Plan Conformance process for the Preservation Area. The Township has chosen not to opt in to Plan Conformance for the Planning Area.

STATE PROGRAMS, GRANTS, AND CAPITAL PROJECTS

The following table lists the capital projects that Vernon Township has undertaken in the last five years:

Year	Description	Capital Improvements	BAN authorized
2015	Acquisition of two (3) utility vehicles	\$ 154,000.00	
2015	Mower	\$ 10,000.00	
2015	Vehicular Equipment	\$ 25,000.00	
2015	Computer/Server Replacements	\$ 45,000.00	
2015	Digital voice record and cameras for Police Department	\$ 142,500.00	\$ 135,500.00
2015	Street improvements	\$ 690,557.00	\$ 463,500.00
2015	One (1) wheel loader, one (1) mason dump truck for DPW, one (1) utility vehicle for Police Dept	\$ 191,000.00	\$ 181,625.00
2015	Renovation of Municipal Building, DPW Garage	\$ 510,500.00	\$ 486,000.00
2015	Street improvements	\$ 169,000.00	
2016	Mechanics Diagnostic Equipment	\$ 20,000.00	
2016	Automated External Defibrillators (AED)	\$ 10,000.00	
2016	Radio console equipment for Police Dept	\$ 155,000.00	\$ 147,600.00
2016	Improvement to Sammis Road	\$ 310,000.00	\$ 65,000.00
2016	Street improvements	\$ 462,000.00	\$ 440,000.00
2016	Two (2) dump trucks, four (4) utility vehicles, one (1) animal control van	\$ 366,000.00	\$ 348,300.00
2016	Improvements to Municipal Building	\$ 306,500.00	\$ 291,900.00
2016	Computer equipment for Police Dept	\$ 15,000.00	\$ 14,200.00
2016	Supplemental appropriation for acquisition of vehicular equipment	\$ 90,000.00	\$ 85,700.00

Year	Description	Capital Improvements	BAN authorized
2017	Trailer, drum roller, craack patcher, ramps, and wheel lifts	\$ 127,000.00	\$ 122,000.00
2017	Self-contained breathing apparatus for Fire Dept	\$ 746,000.00	\$ 363,000.00
2017	Street improvements	\$ 528,000.00	\$ 329,000.00
2017	Street improvements	\$ 248,000.00	\$ 237,000.00
2017	Two (2) dump trucks, backhoe, five (5) utility vehicles	\$ 732,000.00	\$ 700,000.00
2017	Improvements to Municipal Building	\$ 97,500.00	\$ 92,000.00
2017	Digital mobile radio system for Police Dept	\$ 145,000.00	\$ 138,000.00
2017	Fire truck	\$ 1,013,000.00	\$ 967,000.00
2018	Fire truck (supplemental appropriation for new estimate)	\$ 210,000.00	\$ 200,000.00
2018	Reach-in freezer for Senior Center Kitchen	\$ 3,500.00	
2018	Emergency lighting, slide out tray for Fire Dept	\$ 3,000.00	
2018	Flail Mower Head for DPW	\$ 9,250.00	
2018	Improvement to Sanitary Sewage System	\$ 140,000.00	\$ 140,000.00
2018	Ball field groomer, mini excavator, fleet equipment	\$ 85,970.00	\$ 81,720.00
2018	Self-contained breathing apparatus for Fire Dept	\$ 207,000.00	\$ 94,875.00
2018	Improvement to Wawayanda Road	\$ 350,000.00	\$ 115,000.00
2018	Street improvements	\$ 625,000.00	\$ 593,360.00
2018	Dump truck, roll off truck, four (4) utility vehicles	\$ 506,500.00	\$ 445,075.00
2018	Improvements to Municipal Building	\$ 61,400.00	\$ 58,470.00
2018	Alcotest machine	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 19,000.00
2018	Pumper fire truck	\$ 525,000.00	\$ 45,500.00

Year	Description	Capital Improvements	BAN authorized
2019	Traffic messaging trailer	\$ 18,500.00	
2019	Sweeper, leaf vacuum, two (2) dump truck bodies, sanders	\$ 317,918.00	\$ 261,540.00
2019	Street improvements	\$ 623,000.00	\$ 380,952.00
2019	Dump truck	\$ 185,000.00	\$ 176,190.00
2019	Improvements to Maple Grange Park	\$ 912,750.00	\$ 730,845.00
2019	DPW Leaf Collection Box	\$ 6,000.00	
2019	DPW Vehicle Purchase Program	\$ 35,000.00	
2019	Police Dept Vehicle Purchase Program	\$ 55,000.00	
2019	Fencing at Maple Grange Park	\$ 3,000.00	
2019	Council Recording System	\$ 20,000.00	
2019	Established Reserve for Sewer Lift Station Repairs	\$ 150,000.00	
2019	Police Dept Vehicle Outfitting Equipment	\$ 17,500.00	
2019	Animal Control Additional Feline Containment Cages	\$ 6,300.00	
2019	Veteran's Memorial Park Improvements	\$ 15,000.00	
2019	Improvements to Maple Grange Park	\$ 872,750.00	\$ 692,750.00
2019	Alarm system	\$ 40,000.00	\$ 38,095.00
2019	Street improvements	\$ 50,000.00	

SUSTAINABILITY/RESILIENCY STATEMENT

“Sustainability” or “Sustainable Development” has been defined as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” - The United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (The Brundtland Commission, 1987).

Sustainability has been a part of Vernon Township’s planning process since the 1995 Master Plan. In particular, the Township strives to have a year-round, sustainable tourism industry. One of the goals listed in the Master Plan includes the following:

- To promote energy efficient construction, green building, sustainable design, and alternative energy sources for housing in the Township to decrease long-term energy consumption and the cost of housing in the Township.
 - Develop green building and sustainable design guidelines for new development.
 - Review the Township’s ordinances to ensure that alternative energy sources are permitted where appropriate.
 - Encourage energy efficient construction within the Township.
 - Pursue a Sustainable New Jersey certification to raise awareness of sustainability issues in the Township.

The following ordinances have been adopted by the Township in order to further promote sustainable development and practices (detailed discussion on each of the ordinances is located within the “State Plan: Goals, Policies, & Indicators” section):

- Chapter 275 Flood Damage Prevention (Adopted Feb. 1984, amended Sep. 2011)
 - It is the purpose of this ordinance to promote the public health, safety, and general welfare, and to minimize public and private losses due to flood conditions in specific areas.
- Chapter 330 Land Development (Adopted Dec. 1997)
 - § 330-206 - § 330-211.5 Stormwater Management (Adopted Mar. 2006)
 - § 330-229 - § 330-239.4 Highlands Preservation Area Land Use Ordinance (Adopted July 2014)
 - § 330-240 - § 330-251 Tree Preservation (Adopted Oct. 2007)
 - § 330-260 - § 330-261 Solar Zoning and Standards
- Chapter 452 Recycling (Adopted Mar. 1988)
- Chapter 462 Sewage Disposal Systems, Individual Subsurface (Adopted May 1992)
- Chapter 478 Soil Erosion and Sediment Control (Adopted Aug. 1975)
- Chapter 483 Soil Removal (Adopted Aug. 1975)
- Chapter 484 Soil Fill Placement (Adopted Apr. 2018)
- Chapter 524 Used Oil (Adopted May 1988)
- Chapter 555 Water Supply, Potable (Adopted Aug. 1986)
- Chapter 560 Water Systems, Public Noncommunity and Nonpublic (Adopted Feb. 1988)
- Chapter 566 Water Use Restrictions (Adopted Sept. 1995)

In December 2011, the Township Master Plan was updated. In the Land Use Element of this update, the Public Lands, Preserved Open Space, and Conservation Districts are discussed. These lands are primarily preserved parks, refuges, and preserves. This district limits development in the Conservation District to development on pre-existing lots or within the septic system constraints of the Highlands Preservation Area. Additionally, the Eco-Tourism District permits limited commercial development related to tourism generated by agricultural uses and outdoor recreation.

The Recycling Element within the 2011 update acknowledged that the generation of solid waste is one of the negative effects of growth and development.

The Township also adopted a Sustainable Economic Development Plan in March 2019. The following goals and objectives were identified in that Plan:

Township Identity

1. To foster a community sense of place and identity by further defining the unique and positive aspects of Vernon.

Land Use

1. To encourage commercial and mixed-use development in a form, location, and design that preserves and enhances the unique character and identity of Vernon Township; and
2. To direct the majority of future growth in the Township to the Vernon Center, Redevelopment Areas, and appropriate existing resort areas of the Township.

Economic Development Goals

1. To create a comprehensive economic development plan for the Township that promotes Vernon as a four-season recreation community while also identifying opportunities to diversify Vernon's economy; and
2. To provide for economic development through the Commercial, Light Industrial, Commercial Recreation and Agri-Eco Tourism Zones.

Transportation/Circulation

1. To encourage use of alternative transportation modes (e.g. walking, biking, local transit, commuter buses, rail) to lessen congestion and air pollution; and
2. To support the use of rail service for passenger and freight purposes.

Conservation

To preserve and protect Vernon's natural resources.

CONSISTENCY SECTION

Local & Regional Planning

Vernon Township must fit into a local, regional, and state framework of land use plans. As a part of Sussex County, the Highlands Region, and the State of New Jersey, the comprehensive plans for each entity have an impact on the Township's planning initiatives and each plan has been reviewed for this Municipal Assessment.

The Sussex County Strategic Growth Plan was adopted in February 2006 and endorsed by the State Planning Commission in May 2007. The Strategic Growth Plan (SGP) was based on the landscapes of Sussex County including: rural agricultural; highlands; traditional centers; job creation centers; parks and wildlife management areas and lake communities. Vernon Township has elements of all of these landscapes. The SGP promoted the reorganization of development patterns to emphasize walkable, mixed-use centers that would promote existing agricultural and commercial development, while protecting, preserving and limiting development outside of centers. The SGP recognized the Vernon Town Center as a viable and appropriate planning tool for promoting the goals of the SGP, along with the preservation and acquisition of open space. Through Plan Endorsement, the Township plans to continue these principals of focusing development within the center while preserving large tracts of open space and farmland.

The Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) was adopted by the Highlands Council on July 17, 2008 and became effective on September 8, 2008. Vernon is approximately two-thirds Preservation Area and approximately one-third Planning Area. In the Preservation Area, the Township submitted a petition to conform to the RMP on December 8, 2009. In the Planning Area, Plan Conformance is optional and can be completed at any time. The Township plans to maintain mandatory land use designations that apply in the preservation area by promoting center-based development in the Planning Area.

State Plan – Goals, Policies, & Indicators

Goal #1: Revitalize the State's Cities and Towns

STRATEGY	POLICIES	INDICATORS
Protect, preserve and develop the valuable human and economic assets in cities, towns and other urban areas. Plan to improve their livability and sustainability by investing public resources in accordance with current plans which are consistent with the provisions of the State Plan. Leverage private investments in jobs and housing; provide comprehensive public services at lower costs and higher quality; and improve the natural and built environment. Incorporate ecological design through mechanisms such as solar access for heating and power generation. Level the playing field in such areas as financing services, infrastructure and regulation. Reduce the barriers which limit mobility and access of city residents, particularly the poor and minorities, to jobs, housing, services and open space within the region. Build on the assets of cities and towns such as their labor force, available land and buildings, strategic location and diverse populations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Policy on Urban Revitalization• Public Investment Priorities• Comprehensive Planning	<p><u>Key Indicator 5:</u> Progress in socioeconomic revitalization for the 68 municipalities eligible for Urban Coordinating Council assistance.</p> <p><u>Indicator 6:</u> Percent of jobs located in Urban Coordinating Council municipalities.</p> <p><u>Indicator 22:</u> Percent of building permits issued in Urban Coordinating Council municipalities.</p> <p><u>Indicator 27:</u> Number of Neighborhood Empowerment Plans approved by the Urban Coordinating Council.</p>

Goal #1 does not apply to Vernon Township as it is not in an urban planning area.

Goal #2: Conserve the State's Natural Resources and Systems

STRATEGY	POLICIES	INDICATORS
Conserve the state's natural resources and systems as capital assets of the public by promoting ecologically sound development and redevelopment in the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas, accommodating environmentally designed development and redevelopment in Centers in the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas, and by restoring the integrity of natural systems in areas where they have been degraded or damaged. Plan, design, invest in and manage the development and redevelopment of Centers and the use of land, water, soil, plant and animal resources to maintain biodiversity and the viability of ecological systems. Maximize the ability of natural systems to control runoff and flooding, and to improve air and water quality and supply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy Resources • Agriculture • Coastal Resources • Water Resources • Open Lands and Natural Systems • Planning Regions Established by Statute • Special Resource Areas 	<p><u>Key Indicator 2:</u> The amount of land permanently dedicated to open space and farmland preservation.</p> <p><u>Key Indicator 3:</u> Percent of New Jersey's streams that support aquatic life.</p> <p><u>Indicator 11:</u> Conversion of wetlands for development.</p> <p><u>Indicator 26:</u> Percent of land in New Jersey covered by adopted watershed management plans.</p>

Conservation has always been an area of focus for Vernon Township. The Township follows Highlands Preservation Area guidelines when required and encourages compact center development in the Planning Area. Additionally, the Township has large areas of land (more than 50% of the Township) that are preserved as parks and open space. Mountains, state lands, and protected watershed lands throughout the Township are primarily forested. The following goals of the 2016 Master Plan update apply to Goal 2:

- To preserve and protect Vernon's Natural Resources;
 - Review existing environmental ordinances to ensure they are adequate to preserve environmentally sensitive areas.
 - Adopt necessary protections in the Highlands Preservation Area to be consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.
 - Encourage clustering techniques for developments in order to preserve open space and farmland.
 - Identify, preserve and protect open space areas with significant scenic views and/or important historical, cultural, environmental or agricultural significance.
 - Ensure that ridgeline protection ordinances provide a clear definition and mapping of what is protected along with methods for ensuring protection of the resource.
 - Minimize the impacts of development on environmentally sensitive areas such as wetlands, stream corridors, and aquifer recharge areas.
 - Minimize the economic impact on the Private Lake Communities to ensure their continued viability
- To achieve a balance between continued development and the preservation of the extensive natural resources of the community;
- To direct the majority of future growth in the Township to the Vernon Center, Redevelopment Areas, and appropriate existing resort areas of the Township; and

- To ensure that land use and development activities within the Highlands Preservation Area of the Township occur only in a manner and location that is consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

The Township has implemented ordinances that assist in preserving the State's natural resources and systems. In Article XIX – Highlands Preservation Area Land Use Ordinance, it is the Township's intent to provide for cluster and conservation design development ("cluster development"). This ordinance provides background and definitions for cluster development and Article XI – Zoning applies these principles to districts within the Township. The stated purpose of Article XI - Zoning, and specifically § 330-201, is to promote the preservation of open space and to encourage, in connection with large tracts of land proposed for residential subdivision, the clustering of residences in order to accomplish the preservation of open space and natural resources. Non-contiguous clustering is permitted and encouraged where it affords a higher level of protection to Highlands Resource Areas than would otherwise be the case. Where residential cluster development is required, the minimum tract area shall be 20 acres and the minimum amount of open space to be set aside shall be 33% of the total tract area. All open space shall comprise a contiguous area of at least two acres.

To redirect development into the Town Center and away from natural resources and Highlands Resource Areas, § 330-233.3 ensures that development in the Preservation Area occurs at densities and intensities that are appropriate to the water supply and wastewater treatment options available to support it. This ensures two things: 1) that development that occurs does not exceed the capacity of the land, resources, and infrastructure available to support it; and 2) that any land disturbance is minimized.

In addition to zoning for clustered development, the Township has an ordinance that defines protection standards for scenic views. Specifically, these standards address shoreline development for all lakes that have public access. The proposed development must demonstrate that the protection of visual and scenic resources in the Scenic Resource Tier is achieved through the requirements set forth in § 330-234.4.B.

Goal #3: Promote Beneficial Economic Growth, Development, and Renewal for All Residents of New Jersey

STRATEGY	POLICIES	INDICATORS
Promote socially and ecologically beneficial economic growth, development and renewal and improve both the quality of life and the standard of living of New Jersey residents, particularly the poor and minorities, through partnerships and collaborative planning with the private sector. Capitalize on the state's strengths—its entrepreneurship, skilled labor, cultural diversity, diversified economy and environment, strategic location and logistical excellence—and make the state more competitive through infrastructure and public services cost savings and regulatory streamlining resulting from comprehensive and coordinated planning. Retain and expand businesses, and encourage new, environmentally sustainable businesses in Centers and areas with infrastructure. Encourage economic growth in locations and ways that are both fiscally and environmentally sound. Promote the food and agricultural industry throughout New Jersey through coordinated planning, regulations, investments and incentive programs—both in Centers to retain and encourage new businesses and in the Environs to preserve large contiguous areas of farmland.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic Development Urban Revitalization Agriculture 	<p><u>Key Indicator 1:</u> New development, population, and employment located in the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas or within Centers in the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas.</p> <p><u>Indicator 1:</u> Average annual disposable income among New Jerseyans</p> <p><u>Indicator 2:</u> Unemployment</p> <p><u>Indicator 3:</u> Conversion of farmland for development</p> <p><u>Indicator 5:</u> Agricultural output</p> <p><u>Indicator 7:</u> Economic output per unit of energy consumed</p> <p><u>Indicator 21:</u> Municipalities with median household incomes of less than \$30,000 per year (in 1990 dollars)</p> <p><u>Indicator 22:</u> Number of census tracts with more than 40% of the population living under the poverty level</p>

Tourism is the primary industry in Vernon and the Township strives to be a four-season recreational community. The appeal of the Appalachian Trail, Wawayanda State Park, the Hamburg Mountain Wildlife Refuge and the Walkill River Wildlife Refuge, draws visitors year-round. While outdoor activities are the centerpiece to Vernon's tourism industry, the Township seeks to develop a balance with indoor fun and excitement, to promote a sustainable four-season recreational community. The following goals of the 2016 Master Plan update apply to Goal 3:

- To create a comprehensive economic development plan for the Township that promotes Vernon as a four-season recreation community while also identifying opportunities to diversify Vernon's economy including the Private Lake Communities.
- To provide for economic development through the Commercial, Light Industrial, Commercial-Recreation, and Agri-Eco Tourism Zones;
- To encourage commercial and mixed-use development in a form, location and design that preserves and enhances the unique character and identity of Vernon Township;
- To direct the majority of future growth in the Township to the Vernon Center, Redevelopment Areas, and appropriate existing resort areas of the Township; and

- To create land use and development plans, policies, and ordinances that are predominantly consistent with the goals and policies of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

To accomplish the goals listed above, the Township has implemented ordinances such as Chapter 476 – Short-Term Rentals, adopted in April 2020, which allows for a flexible housing supply that contributes to the local economy by promoting travel and tourism.

Redevelopment planning efforts have also been used to promote beneficial economic growth, development, and renewal. In order to encourage economically viable commercial and industrial structures in otherwise underutilized areas, § 330-275.2 authorizes the utilization of up to 20 years of tax exemptions and abatements in areas in need of redevelopment.

Goal #4: Protect the Environment, Prevent and Clean up Pollution

STRATEGY	POLICIES	INDICATORS
Develop standards of performance and create incentives to prevent and reduce pollution and toxic emissions at the source, in order to conserve resources and protect public health. Promote the development of businesses that provide goods and services that eliminate pollution and toxic emissions or reduce resource depletion. Actively pursue public/private partnerships, the latest technology and strict enforcement to prevent toxic emissions and clean up polluted air, land and water without shifting pollutants from one medium to another; from one geographic location to another; or from one generation to another. Promote ecologically designed development and redevelopment in the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas and accommodate ecologically designed development in Centers in the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas, to reduce automobile usage; land, water and energy consumption; and to minimize impacts on public health and biological systems, water and air quality. Plant and maintain trees and native vegetation. Reduce waste and reuse and recycle materials through demanufacturing and remanufacturing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Water Resources • Waste Management, Recycling and Brownfields • Air Resources • Energy 	<p><u>Indicator 4:</u> Percent of brownfield sites redeveloped</p> <p><u>Indicator 7:</u> Economic output per unit of energy consumed</p> <p><u>Indicator 8:</u> The generation of solid waste on a per capita and per job basis</p> <p><u>Indicator 9:</u> Number of unhealthful days annually caused by ground-level ozone, particulate matter and carbon monoxide</p> <p><u>Indicator 10:</u> Greenhouse gas emissions</p> <p><u>Indicator 13:</u> Changes in toxic chemical use and waste generation (non-product output or NPO) by New Jersey's manufacturing sector</p> <p><u>Indicator 15:</u> Vehicle miles traveled per capita</p>

The following goals listed in the 2010 Master Plan update apply to recycling items in Goal 4:

- To plan consistently with the New Jersey Statewide Mandatory Source Separation and Recycling Act of 1987 as implemented by the NJDEP through the Sussex County Solid Waste Management Plan.

- To encourage use of alternate transportation modes (e.g. pedestrian, bicycles, local transit, commuter buses, rail) to lessen congestion and air pollution.

Additionally, the Township has worked extensively on illegal dumping issues within the Township and working to clean up “dirty dirt” while raising awareness of residents of this issue. § 524 sets forth requirements for handling and disposing of used oil and reporting any oil spills that contaminate soil, surface water, or groundwater. § 275-5.1-3 requires that all new and replacement water supply systems shall be designed and approved by the Health Department or Utility Company to minimize or eliminate infiltration of flood waters into the system and discharge from the systems into flood waters.

Goal #5: Provide Adequate Public Facilities and Services at a Reasonable Cost

STRATEGY	POLICIES	INDICATORS
Provide infrastructure and related services more efficiently by supporting investments based on comprehensive planning and by providing financial incentives for jurisdictions that cooperate in supplying public infrastructure and shared services. Encourage the use of infrastructure needs assessments and life-cycle costing. Reduce demands for infrastructure investment by using public and private markets to manage peak demands, applying alternative management and financing approaches, using resource conserving technologies and information systems to provide and manage public facilities and services, and purchasing land and easements to prevent development, protect flood plains and sustain agriculture where appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Investment Priorities • Infrastructure Investments • Transportation 	<p><u>Key Indicator 4:</u> Meet present and prospective needs for public infrastructure systems</p> <p><u>Indicator 14:</u> The percent of all trips to work made by carpool, public transportation, bicycle, walking or working at home</p> <p><u>Indicator 16:</u> Number of pedestrian fatalities in vehicular accidents on State roads</p> <p><u>Indicator 17:</u> Increase in transit ridership</p> <p><u>Indicator 18:</u> Percent of potable water supplies that meet all standards</p> <p><u>Indicator 19:</u> Percent of development on individual septic systems</p>

Center Designation offers many benefits such as the ability to work closely with State agencies and the ability to receive funding for special planning activities and infrastructure projects. As such, Vernon Township’s request for extension applies to Goal #5. Additionally, the following goals from the 2010 Master Plan update apply to this goal:

- To develop and improve a coordinated road system which enables the safe and efficient movement of people and goods;
- To separate local and through traffic to the maximum extent possible;
- To encourage use of alternate transportation modes (e.g. pedestrian, bicycles, local transit, commuter buses, rail) to lessen congestion and air pollution.
- Preserve the ability of the Private Lake Communities to maintain their road systems.
- To achieve a balance between continued development and the preservation of the extensive natural resources of the community;

- To ensure adequate infrastructure to accommodate the projected level of intensity of development;
- To direct the majority of future growth in the Township to the Vernon Center, Redevelopment Areas, and appropriate existing resort areas of the Township; and
- To ensure that land use and development activities within the Highlands Preservation Area of the Township occur only in a manner and location that is consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

The Community Facilities Element of the Master Plan includes a community facilities inventory, and a description of all available public services. To meet the goal of providing adequate public facilities and services at a reasonable cost, the Township has adopted the following ordinances and resolutions:

- § 99-36, 37 provides for designated taxi stands and bus stops throughout the Township;
- Resolution #20-87, adopted February 2020, authorized an agreement with the Sussex County Department of Human Resources, Division of Social Services for transportation services for senior citizens and people with disabilities who reside in the Township; and
- § 330-233.3.7 prohibits new, expanded, or extended public water systems, wastewater collection and treatment systems, and community on-site treatment facilities unless approved through the issuance of either a Highlands Applicability Determination or a Highlands Preservation Area Approval with waiver.

Goal #6: Provide Adequate Housing at a Reasonable Cost

STRATEGY	POLICIES	INDICATORS
Provide adequate housing at a reasonable cost through public/private partnerships that create and maintain a broad choice of attractive, affordable, ecologically designed housing, particularly for those most in need. Create and maintain housing in the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas and in Centers in the Fringe, Rural and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Areas, at densities which support transit and reduce commuting time and costs, and at locations easily accessible, preferably on foot, to employment, retail, services, cultural, civic and recreational opportunities. Support regional and community-based housing initiatives and remove unnecessary regulatory and financial barriers to the delivery of housing at appropriate locations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urban Revitalization • Housing • Design 	<p><u>Indicator 20:</u> Percent of New Jersey households paying more than 30% of their pre-tax household income towards housing</p> <p><u>Indicator 24:</u> Annual production of affordable housing units</p>

The following goals from the 2010 Master Plan update apply to Goal #6:

- To encourage the development of a variety of housing types including workforce housing and affordable housing to meet the needs of the population within the Township of Vernon;
- To provide opportunities for rehabilitation and redevelopment of existing housing stock within the Township;
- To promote energy efficient construction, green building, sustainable design and alternative energy sources for housing in the Township to decrease long-term energy consumption and the cost of housing in the Township;
- To preserve the existing residential neighborhoods and Lake Communities;
- To ensure adequate infrastructure to accommodate the projected level of intensity of development; and
- To encourage commercial and mixed-use development in a form, location and design that preserves and enhances the unique character and identity of Vernon Township.

The Township will develop an updated Housing Element and Fair Share Plan as part of Plan Endorsement. The latest Housing Element and Fair Share Plan, dated January 2011, included a Third Round obligation of 389 new construction units and 31 rehabilitation units. The Township proposed an inclusionary zone in the Town Center to provide for 265 new construction units, a 100 percent affordable project in the Town Center to provide for 97 units, and approvals for 27 units.

Goal #7: Preserve and Enhance Areas with Historic, Cultural, Scenic, Open Space and Recreational Value

STRATEGY	POLICIES	INDICATORS
Enhance, preserve and use historic, cultural, scenic, open space and recreational assets by collaborative planning, design, investment and management techniques. Locate and design development and redevelopment and supporting infrastructure to improve access to and protect these sites. Support the important role of the arts in contributing to community life and civic beauty.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historic, Cultural, and Scene Resources • Open Lands and Natural Systems 	<p><u>Key Indicator 2:</u> The amount of land permanently dedicated to open space and farmland preservation</p> <p><u>Indicator 12:</u> Conversion of land per person</p>

A variety of efforts have been and continue to be made to preserve the rich and varied historical heritage of Vernon Township. The Vernon Township Historical Society, founded in 1970, continues to be the driving force in preserving and protecting historical and cultural sites. There are two sites that are on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.

The following goal from the 2016 Master Plan update is applicable to historic items in Goal 7:

- To encourage commercial and mixed-use development in a form, location and design that preserves and enhances the unique character and identity of Vernon Township;

Vernon also aims to preserve and enhance the open space within the Township. The following goals from the 2016 Master Plan update apply to open space and recreational items in Goal 7:

- To achieve a balance between continued development and the preservation of the extensive natural resources of the community;
- To provide for economic development through the Commercial, Light Industrial, Commercial-Recreation, and Agri-Eco Tourism Zones;
- To encourage commercial and mixed-use development in a form, location and design that preserves and enhances the unique character and identity of Vernon Township;
- To direct the majority of future growth in the Township to the Vernon Center, Redevelopment Areas, and appropriate existing resort areas of the Township;

Vernon Township updated its Historic Preservation Element of the Master Plan in 2011. This update included a list of Historic Properties in the Township that have either been designated as historic on the National, State, and/or Township Register of Historic Places. The Historic Preservation Commission also has an inventory of several properties it is researching for possible preservation.

Open space preservation is discussed above in Goal #2.

Goal #8: Ensure Sound and Integrated Planning and Implementation Statewide

STRATEGY	POLICIES	INDICATORS
Use the State Plan and the Plan Endorsement process as a guide to achieve comprehensive, coordinated, long-term planning based on capacity analysis and citizen participation; and to integrate planning with investment, program and regulatory land-use decisions at all levels of government and the private sector, in an efficient, effective and equitable manner. Ensure that all development, redevelopment, revitalization or conservation efforts support State Planning Goals and are consistent with the Statewide Policies and State Plan Policy Map of the State Plan.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Equity• Comprehensive Planning• Planning Regions Established by Statute• Special Resource Areas• Design	<p><u>Key Indicator 6:</u> The degree to which local plans and State agency plans are consistent with the State Plan</p> <p><u>Indicator 25:</u> Municipalities participating in comprehensive, multijurisdictional regional planning processes consistent with the State Plan</p>

Vernon Township's 2016 Master Plan update includes identifying consistencies between regional comprehensive plans, including the Master Plan's relationship to plans of surrounding municipalities, Sussex County, and New Jersey. The following goals listed in the Master Plan apply to Goal 8:

- To ensure that land use and development activities within the Highlands Preservation Area of the Township occur only in a manner and location that is consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.
 - Pursue Plan Conformance for the Preservation Areas in the Township; and

- To create land use and development plans, policies and ordinances that are predominantly consistent with the goals and policies of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan.
 - Pursue Plan Endorsement from the State Planning Commission.

To ensure sound and integrated planning and implementation State-wide, the Township is compliant with the following entities:

- The Sussex County Strategic Growth Plan (“SGP”), adopted in February 2006 and endorsed by the State Planning Commission in May 2007, is based on the landscapes of Sussex County (rural agricultural; highlands; traditional centers; job creation centers; parks and wildlife management areas; lake communities). Vernon Township has elements of all of these landscapes. The Township seeks to continue implementing the principles of the SGP by focusing development within the center and preserving large tracts of open space and farmland;
- The Township submitted a Petition for Plan Conformance for its Preservation Area and was approved by the Highlands Council on May 17, 2012; and
- The Township received Center Designation from the State Planning Commission for a two-core center on July 16, 2003 and is in the process of reinstating the now-expired designation.

State Plan – Center Criteria & Policies

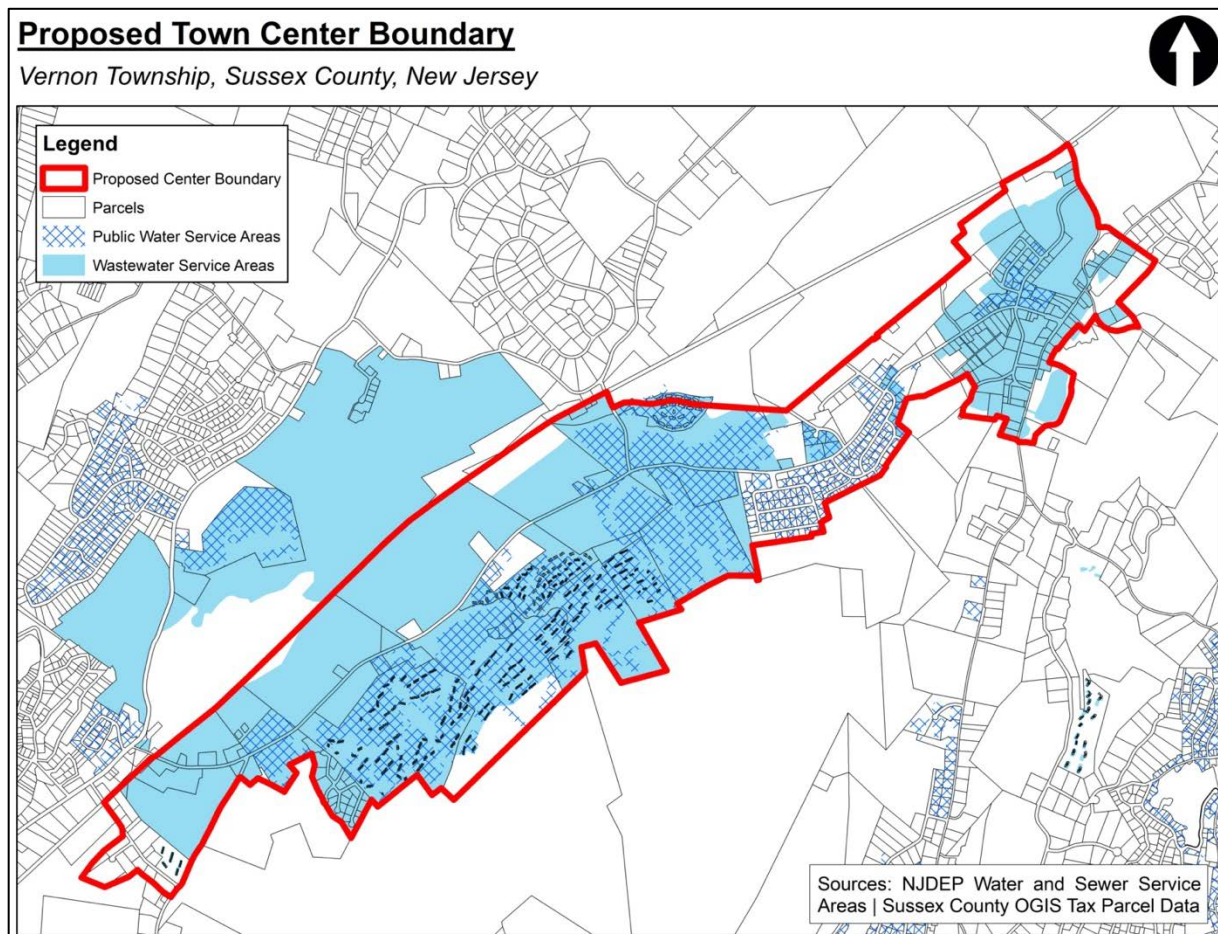
Vernon Township's Town Center designation was approved by the State Planning Commission on July 16, 2003 and is set to expire in 2020.

CRITERIA FOR CENTER DESIGNATION/PLANNING FOR THE YEAR 2020						
	URBAN	REGIONAL CENTER PA1, 2	REGIONAL CENTER PA3, 4, 5	TOWN	VILLAGE	HAMLET
Area (in square miles)		1 to 10	1 to 10	<2	<1	10 to 50 acres without community wastewater; <100 acres with community wastewater
Population	>40,000	>10,000	>5,000	1,000 to 10,000	<4,500	25 to 250
Gross Population Density (people/square mile)	>7,500	>5,000	>5,000	>5,000	>5,000	3,000
Housing		4,000 to 15,000	2,000 to 15,000	500 to 4,000	100 to 2,000	10 to 100
Gross Housing Density (dwelling units/acre)	>4	>3	>3	>3	>3	>2
Employment	>40,000	>10,000	>5,000	>500 to 10,000	50 to 1,000	
Jobs: Housing Ratio	>1:1	2:1 to 5:1	2:1 to 5:1	1:1 to 4:1	.5:1 to 2:1	

Note: Criteria are intended to be applied flexibly. Density criteria are relevant primarily to new Centers and to the growth areas of existing Centers, and are less relevant to the built-up portions of existing Centers. Designation criteria refer to the Center's planning horizon year (for example, 2020 population rather than current population).

The current Vernon Township Town Center is just under 2 square miles (1.98) and has a population of 2,745 people. This meets the Town Center criteria. The gross population density is 1,386 people per square mile and gross housing density is 1.5 dwelling units per acre, which are both lower than the Town Center criteria, however the potential for population growth in the Center could over time increase the population density so that the Center would eventually function like a true center.

Proposed Town Center Boundary Expansion



The proposed Town Center Boundary, pictured above, would expand the current Center by approximately 1.58 square miles, making the total area 1.98 square miles. Within this proposed boundary, there is a population of 2,745 people, a gross population density of about 1,386 people per square mile, about 1,878 housing units, and a gross housing density of 1.5 dwelling units per acre. The proposed boundary would promote walkable, center-based, mixed-use development and promote growth and development in places that are not preserved lands or open space. Further discussion is in the upcoming “State Plan – Planning Area Policy Objectives” section.

Centers

The following are definitions from the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (p. 238-247) regarding Center Designations:

Urban Centers are generally the largest of the Plan's five types of Centers. These Urban Centers offer the most diverse mix of industry, commerce, residences and cultural facilities of any central place.

Regional Centers may be either existing or new. Existing Regional Centers vary in character and size, depending on the unique economics of the regions they serve. In Metropolitan Planning Areas, they may include some smaller cities not designated as Urban Centers. In Suburban Planning Areas, they often serve as major employment centers.

Towns are the traditional centers of commerce or government throughout the state. They are relatively freestanding in terms of their economic, social and cultural functions. Towns reflect a higher level of investment in public facilities and services than their surrounding Environs. They provide a core of commercial services to adjacent residents and provide employment in their regions.

Villages are compact, primarily residential communities that offer basic consumer services for their residents and nearby residents. Villages are not meant to be Centers providing major regional shopping or employment for their regions. This larger economic function belongs to Towns and Regional Centers.

Hamlets are the smallest places eligible for Center designation in the State Plan. Hamlets are found primarily in rural areas, often at crossroads. Although Hamlets are primarily residential in character, they may have a small, compact Core offering limited convenience goods and community activities.

State Plan – Planning Area Policy Objectives

The proposed Town Center is located within the Rural (PA4) and Environmentally Sensitive (PA5) Planning Areas. *A description of Vernon Township's consistency follows each policy objective in italics.*

Land Use

PA4: Enhance economic and agricultural viability and rural character by guiding development and redevelopment into Centers. In the Environs, maintain and enhance agricultural uses, and preserve agricultural and other lands to form large contiguous areas and greenbelts around Centers. Development and redevelopment should use creative land use and design techniques to ensure that it does not conflict with agricultural operations, does not exceed the capacity of natural and built systems and protects areas where public investments in farmland preservation have been made. Development and redevelopment in the Environs should maintain or enhance the character of the area.

PA5: Protect natural systems and environmentally sensitive features by guiding development and redevelopment into Centers and establishing Center Boundaries and buffers and greenbelts around these boundaries. Maintain open space networks, critical habitat and large contiguous tracts of land in the Environs by a variety of land use techniques. Development and redevelopment should use creative land use and design techniques to ensure that it does not exceed the capacity of natural and infrastructure systems and protects areas where public investments in open space preservation have been made. Development and redevelopment in the Environs should maintain and enhance the natural resources and character of the area.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. The proposed center boundary encourages development and redevelopment into existing communities while maintaining surrounding open space. The Township adheres to Highlands regulations in its Preservation Area and encourages development and redevelopment around existing infrastructure to avoid disturbance of natural resources.

Housing

PA4: Provide for a full range of housing choices primarily in Centers at appropriate densities to accommodate projected growth, recognizing the special locational needs of agricultural employees and minimizing conflicts with agricultural operations. Ensure that housing in general—and in particular affordable, senior citizen, special needs and family housing—is developed with maximum access to a full range of commercial, educational, recreational, health and transportation services and facilities in Centers. Focus multi-family and higher-density, single-family housing in Centers. Any housing in the Environs should be planned and located to maintain or enhance the cultural and scenic qualities and with minimum impacts on agricultural resources.

PA5: Provide for a full range of housing choices primarily in Centers at appropriate densities to accommodate projected growth. Ensure that housing in general—and in particular affordable, senior citizen, special needs and family housing—is developed with access to a range of commercial, cultural, educational, recreational, health and transportation services and facilities. Focus multi-family and higher-density, single-family housing in Centers. Any housing in the Environs should be planned and located to maintain or enhance the cultural and scenic qualities and with minimum impacts on environmental resources.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. Though the Town Center zone does not permit residential uses, nearby zones (R-2 Low Density Residential, R-3 Medium Density Residential, and R-4 High Density Residential) have access to the commercial businesses located in the Town Center. Expansion of the Town Center would provide the opportunity for mixed residential and commercial uses.

Economic Development

PA4: Promote economic activities within Centers that complement and support the rural and agricultural communities and that provide diversity in the rural economy and opportunities for off-farm income and employment. Encourage tourism related to agriculture and the environment, as well as the historic and rural character of the area. Support appropriate recreational and natural resource-based activities in the Environs. Any economic development in the Environs should be planned and located to maintain or enhance the cultural and scenic qualities and with minimum impacts on agricultural resources.

PA5: Support appropriate recreational and natural resource-based activities in the Environs and locate economic development opportunities that are responsive to the needs of the surrounding region and the travel and tourism industry in Centers. Any economic development in the Environs should be planned and located to maintain or enhance the cultural and scenic qualities and with minimum impacts on environmental resources.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. Tourism is the primary industry in the Township and as such, the Township relies on maintaining the unique and varied natural scenery that exists in the municipality. With the expansion of the center boundary, more opportunities for promoting sustainable, economic development will arise.

Transportation

PA4: Maintain and enhance a rural transportation system that links Centers to each other and to the Metropolitan and Suburban Planning Areas. Provide appropriate access of agricultural products to markets, accommodating the size and weight of modern agricultural equipment. In Centers, emphasize the use of public transportation systems and alternatives to private cars where appropriate and feasible, and maximize circulation and mobility options throughout. Support the preservation of general aviation airports as integral parts of the state's transportation system.

PA5: Maintain and enhance a transportation system that protects the Environs from scattered and piecemeal development and links Centers to each other within and between Planning Areas. Encourage alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicle whenever feasible. Accommodate the seasonal demands of travel and tourism that support recreational and natural resource-based activities. In Centers, emphasize the use of public transportation systems and alternatives to private cars where appropriate and feasible and maximize circulation and mobility options throughout.

As a part of the Plan Endorsement process, the Township plans to adopt a Complete Streets Policy & Implementation Strategy and is considering an update of the 1995 Circulation Element of the Master Plan as well as working with NJDOT's Local Bicycle/Pedestrian Planning Assistance Program.

Natural Resource Conservation

PA4: Minimize potential conflicts between development, agricultural practices and sensitive environmental resources. Promote agricultural management practices and other agricultural conservation techniques to protect soil and water resources. Protect and preserve large, contiguous tracts and corridors of recreation, forest or other open space land that protect natural systems and natural resources.

PA5: Protect and preserve large, contiguous tracts and corridors of recreation, forest or other open space land that protects natural systems and sensitive natural resources, including endangered species, ground and surface water resources, wetland systems, natural landscapes of exceptional value, critical slope areas, scenic vistas and other significant environmentally sensitive features.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. Many streams in the Township are designated Category One and as such no development is permitted within 300 feet. About 18% of the municipality is wetlands and, consequently, have 50- to 150-foot buffers for development. Approximately 85% of the municipality is covered by forest, and much of that is preserved as parks and open space. Center designation, and especially the expansion of the existing center boundary, ensures development occurs in existing communities rather than preserved or endangered lands.

Agriculture

PA4: Guide development to ensure the viability of agriculture and the retention of farmland in agricultural areas. Encourage farmland retention and minimize conflicts between agricultural practices and the location of Centers. Ensure the availability of adequate water resources and large, contiguous tracts of land with minimal land-use conflicts. Actively promote more intensive, new-crop agricultural enterprises and meet the needs of the agricultural industry for intensive packaging, processing, value-added operations, marketing, exporting and other shipping through development and redevelopment.

PA5: Promote agricultural practices that prevent or minimize conflicts with sensitive environmental resources. Guide development to ensure the viability of agriculture and the retention of farmland in agricultural areas. Encourage farmland retention and minimize conflicts between agricultural practices and the location of Centers. Ensure the availability of adequate water resources and large, contiguous tracts of land with minimal land use conflicts. Actively promote more intensive, new-crop agricultural enterprises and meet the needs of the agricultural industry for intensive packaging, processing, value-added operations, marketing, exporting and other shipping through development and redevelopment.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. Agricultural uses are permitted in three different zones, none of which fall within the Town Center boundary or the proposed center boundary. Development and redevelopment within the proposed center boundary would not create any conflicts with agricultural uses within the Township.

Recreation

PA4: Provide maximum active and passive recreational and tourism opportunities at the neighborhood and local levels by targeting the acquisition and development of neighborhood and municipal parkland within Centers. Provide regional recreation and tourism opportunities by targeting parkland acquisitions and improvements that enhance large contiguous open space systems and by facilitating alternative recreational and tourism uses of farmland.

PA5: Provide maximum active and passive recreational and tourism opportunities at the neighborhood and local levels by targeting the acquisitions and development of neighborhood and municipal parkland within Centers. Provide regional recreation and tourism opportunities by targeting parkland acquisitions and improvements that enhance large contiguous open space systems. Ensure meaningful access to public lands.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. The Township strives to be a year-round tourism and recreational destination and as such places emphasis on creating and enhancing various types of recreational activities.

Redevelopment

PA4: Encourage appropriate redevelopment in existing Centers and existing developed areas that have the potential to become Centers, or in ways that support Center-based development to accommodate growth that would otherwise occur in the Environs. Redevelop with intensities sufficient to support transit, a broad range of uses, efficient use of infrastructure, and design that enhance public safety, encourage pedestrian activity, reduce dependency on the automobile and maintain the rural character of Centers.

PA5: Encourage environmentally appropriate redevelopment in existing Centers and existing developed areas that have the potential to become Centers or in ways that support Center-based development to accommodate growth that would otherwise occur in the Environs. Redevelop with intensities sufficient to support transit, a range of uses broad enough to encourage activity

beyond the traditional workday, efficient use of infrastructure, and physical design features that enhance public safety, encourage pedestrian activity and reduce dependency on the automobile to attract growth otherwise planned for the Environs.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. The Town Center boundary contains existing infrastructure and a mix of uses, and the expansion of the boundary ensures that the Township is taking full advantage of existing communities instead of allowing growth and development to occur in lands that would be detrimental to the Environs.

Historic Preservation

PA4: Encourage the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic or significant buildings, Historic and Cultural Sites, neighborhoods and districts in ways that will not compromise either the historic resource or the ability for a Center to develop or redevelop. Outside Centers, coordinate historic preservation needs with farmland preservation efforts. Coordinate historic preservation with tourism efforts.

PA5: Encourage the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic or significant buildings, Historic and Cultural Sites, neighborhoods and districts in ways that will not compromise either the historic resource or the ability for a Center to develop or redevelop. Outside Centers, coordinate historic preservation needs with open space preservation efforts. Coordinate historic preservation with tourism efforts.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. The 2016 Master Plan has an inventory of historic properties within the Township that are recognized as culturally and historically important to the Township.

Public Facilities and Services

PA4: Phase and program for construction as part of a dedicated capital improvement budget or as part of a public/private development agreement the extension or establishment of public facilities and services, particularly wastewater systems, to establish adequate levels of capital facilities and services to support Centers; to protect large contiguous areas of productive farmlands and other open spaces; to protect public investments in farmland preservation programs; and to minimize conflicts between Centers and surrounding farms. Encourage private investments and facilitate public/private partnerships to provide adequate facilities and services, particularly wastewater systems, in Centers. Make community wastewater treatment a feasible and cost-effective alternative.

PA5: Phase and program for construction as part of a dedicated capital improvement budget or as part of a public/private development agreement the extension or establishment of public facilities and services, particularly wastewater systems, to establish adequate levels of capital facilities and services to support Centers; to protect large contiguous areas of environmentally sensitive features and other open spaces; to protect public investments in open space preservation programs; and to minimize conflicts between Centers and the Environs. Encourage

private investments and facilitate public/private partnerships to provide adequate facilities and services, particularly wastewater systems, in Centers. Make community wastewater treatment a feasible and cost-effective alternative.

A primary goal of Vernon Township is to stabilize the cost of infrastructure and support both the public sewer and water systems within the Town Center. This includes both promoting sustainable development and expanding the area to connect existing developments. The expansion of the center boundary would be consistent with these goals and objectives.

Intergovernmental Coordination

PA4: Coordinate efforts of various state agencies, county and municipal governments to ensure that state and local policies and programs support rural economic development, agriculture, and the rural character of the area by examining the effects of financial institution lending, government regulation, taxation and other governmental policies and programs.

PA5: Coordinate efforts of state agencies, county and municipal governments to ensure that state and local policies and programs support environmental protection by examining the effects of financial institution lending practices, government regulation, taxation and other governmental policies and programs.

Vernon Township center designation is consistent with these policy objectives. The Township adheres to Highlands Preservation Area guidelines when mandatory and the Town Center itself does not immediately border any surrounding municipalities.

MAPPING

Vernon Township has provided mapping and data as part of its petition for Plan Endorsement. This report includes a proposed Town Center Boundary map in the State Plan - Center Criteria and Policies section for review by State Agencies.

STATE AGENCY ACTIONS

To be completed.

STATE AGENCY ASSISTANCE/EXPECTED BENEFITS

Following State Planning Commission endorsement of Vernon Township's plan as consistent with the State Plan, state agencies will provide benefits to the Township that will assist in implementing the endorsed plan. This assistance includes technical assistance, direct state capital investment, priority for state grants and low-interest loans, preferential interest rates, and a coordinated regulatory review for projects consistent with the endorsed plan.

Additionally, Center Designation would be extended through Plan Endorsement. Center Designations offer additional benefits such as lower utility connection fees for new development, the ability to establish and maintain sewer service areas, and the ability to receive funding for special planning activities and infrastructure projects. Vernon Township is seeking Plan Endorsement in order to have access to the benefits provided by state agencies for endorsed municipalities and to continue to pursue the development of its Town Center.

CONCLUSION

Vernon Township is a rural community whose unique geographic characteristics make it a tourist destination. Though there have been minimal population changes throughout recent years, it is likely that Vernon will again shift toward population growth in response to policies that support development in the Town Center and surrounding areas and supported redevelopment of existing underdeveloped areas. The Township is working to promote smart growth principles by planning for a compact town center area and restricting development in the Environs. Through this report, the Township finds that its Master Plan and planning documents are consistent with the State Plan and is therefore requesting Plan Endorsement from the State Planning Commission.

Proposed Town Center Boundary

Vernon Township, Sussex County, New Jersey

