



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
BUSINESS ACTION CENTER
OFFICE OF PLANNING ADVOCACY
PO BOX 820
TRENTON, NJ 08625-0820

PHILIP D. MURPHY
Governor

TAHESHA WAY
Secretary of State

SHEILA Y. OLIVER
LT. GOVERNOR

DONNA A. RENDEIRO
Executive Director

MEMORANDUM TO: Donna Rendeiro
FROM: Lisa Avichal, MCRP
Matthew Blake, PP, AICP
RE: Holmdel Map Amendment
DATE: 12/9/2020

The Office of Planning Advocacy received a petition from a private Petitioner, The Walters Group, for a State Plan Policy Map amendment on September 8, 2020. The Petition seeks to amend the State Plan Policy Map for Block 57, Lot 2 in Holmdel Township from Suburban Planning Area (PA-2) to Metropolitan Planning Area (PA-1). The proposed map amendment is supported by the Township of Holmdel.

On November 24, 2020, the map amendment petition was put in front of the Planning Implementation Committee. OPA staff recommended that the State Plan Policy Map be amended to redesignate the area from the NJ Transit Railroad Right of Way north to Holmdel's municipal boundary with Hazlet and Middletown Townships, from Suburban Planning Area (PA-2) to Metropolitan Planning Area (PA-1). OPA staff also recommended to amend the State Plan Policy Map to realign the boundaries of the existing Critical Environmental Site (CES) and condition SPC approval on the Township agreeing to enact an overlay ordinance that recognizes and protects that portion of the CES proposed to remain in place that encompasses the less developed stream segment, associated wetlands, and habitat. This recommendation expanded the proposed map amendment due to the reasons identified in the materials presented at that time.

During the PIC meeting, Mr. James Gorman, representative for Hazlet Township, expressed that Holmdel Township has pushed all of its affordable housing into a small section of Holmdel, up against Hazlet. He suggests that an expansion of the PA-1 to the Parkway instead of the railroad tracks will better serve Holmdel for potential affordable housing and more accurately reflect current underlying land use patterns within the subject area. DEP shared a concern that Hazlet Township's proposed expansion would change planning designations for almost one third of the township, and that the Department was not comfortable with effectuating such expansive revisions to the State Plan Policy Map outside of the Plan Endorsement process, where more rigorous analysis is conducted. A motion was entertained to move forward with the OPA staff recommendations with a commitment to review, from a land use perspective and with DEP's input, the area between the Garden State Parkway and the Railroad ROW. The motion was passed.

OPA has reviewed the expansion area proposed by Hazlet Township, which encompasses approximately 3 square miles of land within Suburban Planning Area (PA-2), and approximately 1.5 square miles of lands within Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA-5). Both areas comprise dispersed wetlands and stream-corridors throughout.

Suburban Planning Area (PA-2)

As indicated in the November 17th OPA Staff Memo addressed to Director Rendeiro regarding the Petition, the area south of the Railroad ROW comprising PA-2, was previously analyzed and found to be less suitable for inclusion into PA-1 in comparison to the area north. The majority of the PA-2 area resides within the Township's Residential & Agricultural Zone (R-40 A&B), as well as smaller and similarly zoned areas (R-30 and R-15), where the permitted and dominant land pattern is single family subdivisions - largely on .98-acre lots (43,000 s. f.). This area also includes a few pocket parks and a large tract of preserved farmland. A smaller portion of these residential zones extend into PA-5 (Environmentally Sensitive) as discussed below. There is also a largely built-out Medical District (M), which fronts the GSP, where medical offices appear to be the dominant principle permitted use.

While the PA-2 appears to meet the threshold PA-1 criteria with respect to minimum population density and the availability of public utilities, the presence of such considerations are not the only factors, which OPA considers. Based on local land use and zoning, much of the described residential area does not appear to be a suitable location to accommodate "much of the State's future redevelopment or to revitalize urban cities and towns, and more compact patterns of development" as the State Plan indicates for a PA-1. The opposite can be said for the area north of the Railroad ROW where there are numerous multi-family townhome developments and mix of uses, including big box retail strips fronting a major commercial corridor - all characteristics indicative of PA-1.

The only area within the PA-2 that is somewhat similar to the above characteristics of the adjacent PA-1, is in the western corner abutting the GSP and Hazlet that encompasses the Medical District (M) and two small residential zones comprising R-15 and R-30, where single family lots are predominantly between .35 and .5 (half acres) in size – a higher density than that found elsewhere between the Railroad ROW and the GSP. However, the Medical District comprises only a very small area (.3 Sq Mi) that is separated from the adjacent PA-1 immediately the west by established residential development. Given the relatively small size of the area and fact that it is physically separated from the proposed PA-1 to the north by the GSP, less dense development and parkland, it does not seem advisable to include this area.

In recognition of the comments raised by Mr. James Gorman that precipitated this secondary analysis, it should be noted that there is nothing in the State Plan, which would preclude Holmdel Township from developing affordable housing in PA-2. Indeed, the State Plan views PA-1 and PA-2 equally in terms of encouraging the production of inclusionary development and providing for a full range of housing choices within both Planning Areas. Whether Holmdel Township's planning efforts and zoning provide a realistic opportunity for affordable housing within PA-2 and its underlying zoning districts, is a separate question that is outside the scope of this map amendment petition. Under the State Plan, the intent of PA-2 is to provide for much of the state's future development; promote growth in Centers; accommodate public water and sewer; protect existing stable communities; protect natural resources; redesign and avert sprawl; and revitalize cities and towns. These goals, including the underlying land use patterns and zoning, remain consistent with the existing PA-2.

Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA-5)

The area comprising PA-5 immediately south of PA-2 and extending to the GSP is approximately 1.3 square miles in size and encompasses single family subdivisions, small parks, stream-corridors, wetlands, and a large tract contiguous forest surrounding the PNC Arts Center.

The eastern half of the PA-5 area is located within the Township's Residential-Agricultural (R40A&B) district and dominated by single family residential development on lots of an acre or just under in size. According to the Township's zoning code, the R40A district seeks to "zone existing low-density areas in a manner consistent with the

existing development in the R40A.” It further states that “the design standards are intended to provide flexibility in design so that vistas and views in the remaining undeveloped areas will be preserved as much as possible by locating homes over crests of hills, behind existing trees, or in other locations that will minimize the appearance of development.” The existing and low-density development local zoning calls for in this area is consistent with the intent of a PA-5 designation to protect environmental resources, as well as to protect the character of existing stable communities.

The western half of the PA-5 area largely resides within the Township’s Public Land District (P), which straddles the GSP and encompasses the PNC Arts Center and forested habitat designated under NJDEP’s Landscape Project. Permitted uses in this district are “reserved for civic uses and to identify lands owned by the Federal, State, County and Township agencies as well as land used for school purposes.” Both the PNC Center and Sewer Service Area that exist in this area, predate State Planning Area designations, which were later mapped as environmentally sensitive to reflect the C1 drainage basins. If the water draining into the streams is contaminated by development and associated land use activities, it will negatively impact the existing wildlife that depend on the streams

While the build-out of the above permitted uses will likely result in further habitat fragmentation and impacts to wildlife and other resources of concern within the PA-5, the existing land use patterns continue to encompass significant valuable habitat and other environmental features worthy of the underlying Planning Area designation. Changing the designation to a PA-1 would not advance the goal of protecting these resources or reflect the local zoning, existing community character therein or consistency with the State Plan.

The State Plan, and OPA's approach, is not reacting to prior uses that may be inconsistent with an underlying State Planning Area or cultural and environmental resources it was designed to protect. Instead, it is to encourage a vision of sustainable land use, attempting to build consensus around that preferred future. It is for these reasons that the Office of Planning Advocacy’s recommendation is to not extend the PA-1 south of the NJ Transit Right of Way to the Garden State Parkway. Hazlet’s proposed extension would encompass almost one-third of the municipality and is far too large a geographic area to fully review outside of Plan Endorsement; a concern shared by DEP. It is, however, recommended at this time that the State Plan Policy Map Amendment move forward with the original recommendations provided by OPA.