

VI. Implementation Comments and Recommendations

Middlesex County has determined that adequate planning at the local level provides a clean, safe living and working environment, provides choices in housing types, jobs, transportation, recreation, health facilities, schools and other services, and provides for the infrastructure needed to support those choices. Strategic planning should provide a basis for allowing choices while at the same time protecting important environmental resources and focusing limited public resources on appropriate infrastructure investment.

In New Jersey, there has never been a formal procedure for coordinating planning issues among adjacent counties. Limited resources available for planning make it difficult even to coordinate each County with its municipalities. There are no institutional mechanisms for coordinating adjacent counties. The State of New Jersey should provide adequate, continuing funding assistance to support coordinated planning at all levels of government.

Middlesex County feels that there are major opportunities for strong economic growth and the preservation of environmental resources that would continue to make New Jersey a good place to live and work. As the most urbanized State in the Nation, we have a unique opportunity to show how cooperative, proactive planning can preserve a high quality of life in the midst of dense development. The provision of resources for planning at the local and County level will help to achieve that objective. It is also important that resources for implementation of infrastructure be provided in a manner consistent with adopted plans and programs. In addition, SPA plans consistent with the endorsed plan concept should reflect that the higher densities resulting from redevelopment of existing cities and older suburbs may place a substantial strain on infrastructure systems. We cannot simply assume that urban and suburban areas have infrastructure sufficient to accommodate substantial additional growth. In many instances, older suburban communities have critically deficient infrastructure that requires major repairs and expansion. Developers often seek undeveloped land for new projects to avoid the added cost of removing and replacing old, inadequate infrastructure systems, causing both new development on vacant land and declining conditions in older areas.

Middlesex County recommends that municipalities identify environmentally sensitive areas and historic sites as part of the municipal master planning process. This is a critical part of the local planning process.

Middlesex County advocates the creation and coordination of strategic plans at regional, county, municipal and neighborhood levels. New Jersey planning enabling legislation should be amended to strengthen the role of all levels of government in participating in and coordinating the development of strategic plans.

In the absence of stronger State enabling legislation, interlocal agreements are the most effective means for coordinating planning and implementation. Counties or other regional entities should join with municipalities in inter-local agreements to provide coordination of planning issues of regional concern such as water quality, water supply, air quality and transportation.

The implementation of this objective requires strengthening of land use control and planning enabling legislation to provide tools for implementation. Specifically, state legislation is needed to permit the design and implementation of 1) school impact fees, 2) the phasing of development to conform to infrastructure capacity, 3) inter-municipal impact fees for infrastructure improvement, 4) creation of special-purpose trust funds for environmental protection and for cleanup planning and implementation at the local level, and 5) regional or inter-municipal implementation of transfer of development rights or credits.

Capital planning and budgeting should be conducted at all levels of government to support the elements of comprehensive and/or strategic plans covering the areas of transportation, land use, public health and safety, public facilities, environmental resource protection, recreation, open space, water quality, and water supply.

Middlesex County should institute comprehensive water resource planning and management for watersheds. This program should include consideration of surface and ground water quality and quantity concerns. It should incorporate water supply management, nonpoint source pollution control, point source pollution control, stormwater management, and flood control.

Integrated Geographic Information Systems should be installed and used at the municipal, county, and state levels to maximize the capacity to analyze and inventory land uses, land cover, infrastructure, and natural resources.

All planning should encourage the redesign of existing development affected by traffic congestion, inadequate bicycle/pedestrian circulation, inadequate open space, insufficient/inadequate public services, water or air pollution, or identified conflicts between land uses. This redesign should be accomplished as part of strategic redevelopment plans, special area design plans, and/or infrastructure planning at the municipal and/or intermunicipal level where appropriate. The State should provide financial and technical assistance to carry out such planning.

Special area design plans should provide for 1) mixed use development, 2) new development at an appropriate and comprehensible scale for the community, 3) recreation and cultural facilities for entire communities, 4) historic preservation, 5) alternatives to the single occupancy vehicle, including pedestrian, bicycle, and transit facilities, 6) traffic calming, and 7) the protection of environmental resources.

Neighborhoods should also be identified as elements of strategic planning efforts. Distinct neighborhoods exist in established urban and suburban areas and should be encouraged and supported by sound municipal planning.

Effective planning for the SPAs requires recognition of their surrounding areas or “environs”. The environs constitute a significant area that requires careful planning and management. The objective of strengthening strategic planning areas as locations for the concentration of future growth cannot be achieved unless there exists a commitment to, and cost effective means to assure, management of the environs. To accomplish this requires the use of such regional planning techniques as the regional implementation of development rights or credits transfers or of regional density transfers. Investment needs to be maintained in farmland preservation and open space acquisition or easement programs. Specific plans are needed to guide these programs.

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