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**Memorandum**

**To:** Middlesex County Smart Growth Task Force

**From:** William J. Kruse, Assistant Planning Director

**Date:** January 12, 2004

**Re: MIDDLESEX COUNTY STRATEGIC PLANNING AREA PLAN**  
**REPORT—Centers Strategy**

The Group I Report for the Metropark-Arthur Kill Raritan SPA revision to address the potential centers, cores and nodes within the SPAs was submitted to each municipality for comment. The only comment received was from the City of Perth Amboy. The City has requested that the text that was distributed be revised to include the recommendation that Perth Amboy be included as an Urban Center, rather than be identified as part of the Carteret-Sewaren-Perth Amboy Regional Center.

A revised draft to reflect Perth Amboy's request follows.

## VIII. Center Identification for the Metropark—Arthur Kill—Raritan Strategic Planning Areas

The New Jersey State Planning Act requires that the development of and future revisions to the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP) be accomplished through a “Cross Acceptance Process” to assure that there is consistency between County and municipal plans and the SDRP. Cross Acceptance is the primary means by which municipal and county representatives, other interest groups and the public provide input to the SDRP. In Cross Acceptance the County acts as lead agency to bring together municipal representatives, other interest groups and the public to review and comment on the proposed revisions and additions to the SDRP. After the review process is completed the County prepares a report identifying the comments and recommendations and the basis for them and transmits the report to the State Planning Commission. The Cross Acceptance process has been carried out twice. In 1989 to 1992 the first round of cross acceptance was conducted statewide for the first adopted SDRP. The second round of Cross Acceptance was conducted in 1998 to 2001. The third round of Cross Acceptance is expected to begin in early 2004.

The Cross Acceptance Process has resulted in recommendations for the designation of centers and Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs) proposed by Middlesex County and its municipalities for consideration by the State Planning Commission for approval as endorsed plans.

The SDRP recommends the designation of planned centers as mixed use, high density concentrations of future development. The channeling of future growth to centers is expected to prevent the disruption of environmentally sensitive areas, preserve agriculture, and reduce or eliminate the costs of extending new infrastructure into presently undeveloped areas.

The SDRP\* defines five types of centers: a **hamlet** (very small (10 to 100 acres), compactly developed area, mostly residential (maximum of 100 dwelling units and 25 to 250 residents) with limited retail and service land use); a **village** (larger (100 to 640 acres), compact development area, predominantly residential (maximum population of 4,500) with a broader range of land use types oriented to serving the community and its immediate environs); a **town** (larger still (640 to 1,280 acres), mixed use development concentration with a definable “core” or downtown area, the maximum population is 10,000 residents and it should have a major transportation facility that links it to a regional or urban center.); a **regional center** (very large (640 to 6,400 acres), with a core and surrounding areas with residential, commercial and other land uses serving regional needs, more jobs than housing units, a population of over 10,000 residents and having a hub for two or more modes of transportation); and an **urban center** (fully developed with at least 40,000 residents, a density of 7,500 persons per square mile, a high job to dwelling ratio, with varied land uses including government, education and cultural facilities, major transportation facilities, and the center boundary coincides with the municipal boundary).

\* New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, March 1, 2001, pgs. 237-248.

Within towns, regional centers and urban centers two distinct types of areas can be identified: cores and nodes. **Cores** are the traditional downtown areas providing a broad mix of land uses and activities, where transit, pedestrian and bicycle movement is encouraged, the single occupancy vehicle is discouraged, and the highest density of people and jobs is found. According to the SDRP a Village can also have a Core, however with fewer activities than in other center types.

**Nodes** are large single purpose areas including shopping centers, industrial and office parks, airports, seaports, regional cultural, educational and entertainment facilities; and housing developments. In some cases, with adequately planned redevelopment or infill development, nodes have the potential to become cores.

Center designation as a growth incentive in already developed areas (like much of Middlesex County) creates issues and concerns that include the following:

1. The need to expedite the cleanup of industrial and commercial sites that have been contaminated by former uses. Such sites (commonly known as “brownfield sites” ) unless remediated, are not suitable for residential and other activities/land uses that would bring people in contact with polluted soil, water or air. In most cases extensive and costly studies of such sites are needed just to determine the extent of contamination and the clean up required. If the site is abandoned and no responsible party is identified, the problem is further magnified. To what extent should the public provide resources to evaluate and ultimately clean up such sites? Should such public expenditures be reimbursed from future income generated by redevelopment of brownfield sites? Is the site marketable if cleaned up?

2. The need to devise means to fairly distribute the costs of services for new development in communities with already high property tax rates and utility fees. Many cities and their suburban areas have older infrastructure that is expensive and difficult to maintain. Careful planning is needed to assure that new development is phased so that the costs of upgrading infrastructure to accommodate that development is not placed on the existing residents. Infrastructure includes all aspects of the services and facilities needed to provide for the public’s health, safety and welfare; such as transportation, communications, police, fire protection, public health, water, sewer, power, and schools. One means to accomplish this is to establish the legal authority for government to assess local and regional impact fees on new development.

3. The need to plan for the transportation needs of older communities so that there are opportunities for alternative modes of transportation. Established roadway, rail and development patterns often leave little room for new roads, parking or rail/light rail service. Long range planning for transportation that includes innovative techniques for moving people and goods in densely developed areas is critical. All modes of transportation must be considered. Growth in vehicular traffic within centers reduces the opportunities for safe walking and bicycling. Planning and design for pedestrian and bicycling safety should be a primary concern in developing and redeveloping centers.

4. The need to provide for environmental restoration, open space, and recreation in the redevelopment process. The provision of new parks and open space entirely in the environs of centers is not sufficient to address the needs of new development in centers. Centers should be planned to include protection, acquisition and restoration of former environmentally significant sites that were disturbed by past land development activities. The residents of centers need parks and recreation facilities that are immediately accessible.

5. The need to provide for mixed uses in a manner that does not impose hardships on or ignore conflicts between such uses. In the past many residents chose to leave the cities because of noise and other pollution that resulted from high density development. Planning is needed to address the conflicts between residential and nonresidential land uses including noise, light pollution, solid waste disposal, dust, and congestion. Conversely the provision of high density housing in proximity to commercial or other land use may place a restriction on the hours of operation or the method of operation of a non residential land use. Such restrictions may reduce the competitive viability of the activity.

The above issues impact large areas of New Jersey and especially Middlesex County. However the SDRP recommends that centers, and cores and nodes within them, be identified as part of the endorsed plan process. Because Middlesex County is seeking to obtain Endorsed Plan status for the Metropark-Arthur Kill-Raritan Strategic Planning Areas Plan this document includes a delineation of potential centers within the Strategic Planning Area. Map 3 is included to illustrate the centers and cores and nodes within them.

A brief description of each proposed center and the cores and nodes within them follow.

### **The Metropark Area:**

**The Metuchen Town Center**—This center has been officially approved and designated by the New Jersey State Planning Commission. The center boundary is the municipal boundary for the Borough. The Borough downtown is proposed to be the core area for the center. The core encompasses the major retail downtown area including the rail station on the Northeast Corridor main line. The core also includes recent residential redevelopment that has been completed. Additional efforts to strengthen the mixed use aspects of the core area are planned. The Borough also has a designated Transit Village area focused on the rail station.

**The Northern Route 1 Corridor-Metropark Regional Center**—This is a proposed center that includes a core area on Amboy Avenue in the Clara Barton section of Edison. This area is proposed to become a downtown area with mixed use redevelopment and infill. The Wood Ave-Oak Tree Road area is a retail node with some residential. The J F Kennedy Medical Center is a major regional health facility that will probably expand in the future. The Metropark Transit hub with bus and rail facilities will continue to expand and

serve regional transportation needs as a node. Office commercial land use will grow adjacent to the transit hub. The Menlo Park Mall-Parsonage Road area node will continue to have regional shopping and residential use. The Woodbridge Center Mall node will have retail, office and residential uses. The Route One Corridor node will be a major redevelopment area that may have potential for future core status.

### **The Arthur Kill-Raritan Area:**

**The City of Perth Amboy Urban Center**—The City of Perth Amboy is proposed to be designated as an Urban Center for its entire municipal area. The city's transit access with regional bus and NJ Transit North Jersey Coast Line service, its vibrant downtown, regional health facilities, diverse housing stock and its waterfront on the Arthur Kill and Raritan Bay give Perth Amboy significant resources for urban growth and development into the future. Future investment in cultural facilities and additional commercial and residential land use that capitalizes on the access to the Bay will advance the City as an Urban Center. The City contains a core area that encompasses the existing downtown, surrounding housing and the transit facilities. Most of the remainder of the City would fall within two node areas that are shared with the adjacent Carteret-Port Reading-Sewaren Regional Center. One is the south western area of the City along the Raritan and the second is the north eastern section along the Arthur Kill and the Woodbridge River. Both of these areas are existing industrial areas with potential for future mixed use development.

**The Carteret, Port Reading, Sewaren, Regional Center**—This area extends along the Arthur Kill from Carteret on the north to Sewaren on the south. The area includes one core area: The downtown section of Carteret. Nodes within the regional center include the northern part of Carteret, along the Rahway River including the former municipal land fill site and industrial sites that may be redeveloped. Another node is the industrial area west of the NJ Turnpike. A third node is the area along the Arthur Kill including the Tufts Point area of Carteret, the Port Reading Rail Yard and the industrial area in Sewaren. A fourth node is the industrial area on the Arthur Kill and the Woodbridge Creek in Sewaren and Perth Amboy. A fifth node is the industrial area along the Raritan River in Keasbey (east of Route 9) and in Perth Amboy.

**The Raritan Center-Keasbey Regional Center**—The center extends along the Raritan River from the NJ Turnpike Bridge eastward to the Garden State Parkway. The core area is the Middlesex County College, the US governments EPA and GSA facility, the County's Edison Park and the southern less developed portion of Raritan Center. Nodes are the Heller Industrial Park and the Raritan Center-Keasbey industrial area.

**The Sayreville Town Center**—The center includes much of the western part of the Borough of Sayreville. The core area includes the existing downtown/municipal complex area of the Borough. Nodes include the industrial area along Jernees Mill Road and the waterfront area along the Raritan River.

**The Raritan Bayshore Regional Center**—This area extends from the eastern portion of Sayreville near the Middlesex County Utilities Authority wastewater treatment plant, along the River and Bayshore to the county boundary at Laurence Harbor/Whale Creek. Two core areas are delineated: one is the downtown section of South Amboy and the second is the Laurence Harbor section of Old Bridge. Two nodes are also delineated: the industrial area to the east and west of the Garden State Parkway/Route 9 in Sayreville and South Amboy and the industrial and mixed use area between Route 35 and the Garden State Parkway (near exit 120) in Old Bridge. This Regional Center is supported by the major transit hub in South Amboy including the NJ Transit North Jersey Coast Line rail station and the South Amboy to New York ferry service. South Amboy has been designated by the State as a Transit Village.

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