

I. Preface and Acknowledgements

The preparation of this plan report is an outgrowth of the Middlesex County Cross Acceptance Process for the review of and development of recommendations regarding the proposed revisions to the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP). The Cross Acceptance Process 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 allows for the designation of planned centers as mixed use, high density concentrations of future development. Center designation and the implementation of Smart Growth policies that support concentrated development will reduce the further spread of lower density development into open space or agriculture lands that are inadequately served by the infrastructure and public services needed to support growth. The unplanned spread of growth in population and jobs beyond the boundaries of adequate transportation and utilities service areas degrades important environmental resources, congests our roads and highways, promotes inefficient use of existing infrastructure investments, pollutes our air, water and land; and increases the cost of government services. Increasing the costs of services places an even greater burden on existing tax payers.

Large areas of New Jersey, especially including Middlesex County, do not have land uses adaptable to designated centers as the latter are envisioned by the SDRP. Established residential and commercial areas are not easily transformed into higher density, mixed use development. Middlesex County has few of the large expanses of open space that are seen as separating designated centers as promoted by the SDRP. The challenge for Middlesex County is how to accommodate the additional growth that is occurring in the County and at the same time achieve the SDRP's objectives.

Middlesex County is seeking to achieve the objectives of the SDRP through a Smart Growth Planning Process. This effort is funded by a Smart Growth Planning Grant provided by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. Smart Growth Planning is a coordinated planning effort involving all levels of government, the public and various interest groups to address the following principles:

- * creating sustainable, better designed communities
- * achieving more efficient use of existing infrastructure
- * reducing our reliance on the single occupancy automobile as the primary means of transportation

- * providing a greater range of choices in housing types and densities
- * providing greater opportunities for education, cultural activities, recreation and other amenities
- * maintaining a vibrant economy
- * protecting and managing the important resources (environmental and economic) that are needed by the residents and workers in, and visitors to, Middlesex County.

The SDRP places important emphasis on “endorsed plans” as an alternative to centers designation. This component of the SDRP provides Middlesex County with the opportunity to achieve priority for State infrastructure and program implementation through the endorsement of Strategic Planning Areas (SPAs) and plans for their future growth and infrastructure needs. Middlesex County has urged the State Planning Commission to give maximum support to SPA plans as “endorsed plans”. This concept is being implemented in Middlesex County through the development of plans for seven SPAs in the County. In these seven areas, a combination of new development and redevelopment of older and in some cases abandoned or underused areas can accommodate future growth and meet the objectives of the SDRP and those of the residents and officials of the County.

The seven SPAs in Middlesex County were subject to an extensive planning effort during the SDRP cross acceptance process. Since then, they have been assembled into three groups for greater efficiency in the planning process, and a Smart Growth Task Force has been created to oversee and participate in the process of developing an endorsed plan for each group of SPAs. The Task Force structure for the Strategic Planning Areas is:

Smart Growth Task Force for Group I:

- * The Arthur Kill, Raritan River Estuary, and Raritan Bay Area
- * The Metropark Area

Smart Growth Task Force for Group II:

- * The Route 18 Corridor, and
- * The Route I-287 Corridor

Smart Growth Task Force for Group III:

- * The Plainsboro-Forrestal-South Brunswick, Route One and Route 27 Area
- * The Turnpike Interchange 8A Area
- * The Route 130 Corridor

The County has supported the Smart Growth Task Force as part of the County's cross acceptance process. The continuing support of the State Planning Commission, the Office of Smart Growth Planning, and the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs of this effort is greatly appreciated.

Middlesex County's strategic planning process was initiated with input from the Middlesex County Planning Board, the Middlesex County Cross Acceptance Local Negotiating Committee appointed by the County Planning Board to provide oversight of the SDRP cross acceptance process, and municipal representatives designated by municipalities to participate in the process. Municipal representatives provided many hours of assistance in meetings and work sessions to define the relationship of the SDRP to municipal and county plans, programs and ordinances. In addition, the public and the representatives of many groups and organizations attended and contributed to the meetings held throughout the plan comparison and negotiation phases of cross acceptance.

In addition to the participation afforded by the Cross Acceptance process, the Smart Growth Task Force sponsored two "Visioning Sessions" for the combined strategic planning areas. The first was held on May 21, 2002 to provide the public the opportunity to comment on the priority concerns regarding growth in the SPAs. The second visioning session was held on June 11, 2002 to provide an opportunity to comment on infrastructure needed to support growth in the SPAs. In addition to the two sessions a brief public survey to obtain additional public input was distributed at SPA displays set up in municipal public libraries throughout the SPAs. Summaries of the visioning sessions and a tabulation of the survey results are contained in Appendix I.

Chief responsibility for overseeing the planning process for each of the three groups of SPAs was assumed by the Smart Growth Task Force. The Task Force will meet in succession to create Smart Growth Plans for each group of SPAs. Membership on the Smart Growth Task Force will vary with municipal representation from the SPAs. County and regional agencies will maintain representation for each group.

Upon completion of the three plans for the Smart Growth Planning Groups a final cumulative plan will effectively address the entire County, including the SPAs and their environs. The present plan document covers the Arthur Kill-Raritan Bay-Raritan River Strategic Planning Areas and is an outgrowth of the efforts of the Smart Growth Task Force for Group I., which first convened in January 2001 and commenced operations that spring.

The Middlesex County Planning Department staff wishes to take this opportunity to thank all those who participated in the Middlesex County SDRP Cross Acceptance Process, the Task Force and the visioning sessions, and made the preparation of this report possible.