

June 19, 2003

MEMORANDUM TO: Members, Plan Implementation Committee

FROM: Adam Zellner, Executive Director
Joseph I. Donald, PP, Area Planner

RE: Borough of Seaside Heights, Ocean County Center Petition

Pursuant to Subchapter 8 of the State Planning Rules (N.J.A.C. 17:32 et. seq.) in effect prior to January 7, 2002, the Borough of Seaside Heights, Ocean County, has submitted a petition to amend the State Plan Policy Map. Specifically, the Borough is requesting a Regional Center designation.

General Information: This petition was originally submitted during Cross-Acceptance II within the Ocean County Cross-acceptance report. The Borough of Seaside Heights is located within the Environmentally Sensitive/Barrier Islands Planning Area (PA5B) and is also a Coastal Barrier Center.

COAH Status - The Borough does not have a Housing Element and Fair Share Plan that is certified by COAH.

Need for Center Designation - The Borough is seeking Center designation in order to remain competitive with State grant programs and permitting prioritization. Additionally, the Borough anticipates that the designation will enhance its redevelopment programs, strengthen local regulatory planning controls and help in promoting economic development and tourism.

Growth potential - The Borough is almost fully built out. Approximately 96% of the Borough is developed. The Borough of Seaside Heights is anticipated to support only a small percentage of Ocean County's projected growth throughout the next twenty years.

Staff Recommendation: We recommend approval of the Borough of Seaside Heights as a Town Center, subject to the reduction of the proposed center boundary in order to match the existing Coastal Center Boundary, and to the revisions of the PIA as incorporated.

Public Participation: The initial Regional Center petition was presented, discussed and approved by the Borough Council of the Borough of Seaside Heights on August 5, 1998. The petition was also presented, discussed and approved by the Planning Board of the Borough of Seaside Heights on April 26, 2000. Similar public participation and approval was held at the Ocean County Planning Board during the Cross Acceptance process in 1998.

Major Issues:

- The Borough's petition lacks the weight of evidence to support a designation as a Regional Center. However, a Town Center designation is supportable.
- Modification of the center boundary – We recommend that the center boundary be reduced from that proposed by the Borough to be consistent with the existing Coastal Center Boundary.
- The Borough lacks a COAH certified Housing Element and Fair Share Plan.
- The Borough does not have an up to date Master Plan

Regional Profile: As shown on Map 1, the Borough of Seaside Heights is one of 40 municipalities in Ocean County. The County covers an area of approximately 636 square miles. Ocean County is conveniently located within traveling distance to Philadelphia, which is 50 miles to the west, and New York City, which is 60 miles to the north. Served by a network of major highways (the Garden State Parkway, State Routes 9, 35, 37, 70, 72, and US 195), the County became one of the primary developing areas in New Jersey. These convenient transportation opportunities for residents who commute to Philadelphia, New York or Newark changed the character of the community from primarily a resort to a full-time residential community.

The Borough is located on a Barrier Island, with the Atlantic Ocean situated to the east and the Barnegat Bay situated to the west. The “Ortley Beach” section of the Township of Dover is located to the immediate north and the Borough of Seaside Park is located to the immediate south. Key State Highways Route 35 (north-south) and 37 (east-west) both intersect in the Borough. The County's most intense land use and population densities occur within the Barrier islands and the easterly portion of the mainland

The Borough is located adjacent to the Proposed Regional Center for Dover Township. There are no other SPC Centers located along the Barrier Island. However, the closest Designated Centers exist in Stafford Township (Regional Center) approximately 18 miles to the south, and the Borough of Manasquan (Town Center) in Monmouth County, approximately 14 miles to the north.

The entire geographic area of the Borough of Seaside Heights is located within the jurisdiction of the Coastal Act Facility Review Act (CAFRA). Additional regulatory controls exist throughout the County wherein select areas are governed by either the New Jersey Pinelands Commission, or are part of the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, Wildlife Management Areas, or Wetlands systems.

The County has significant natural resources by virtue of its oceanfront and Bayfront exposure. Consequently, tourism is a key economic development attribute, especially throughout the summer months. It is quite normal for the population levels in many of the beachfront communities to more than triple throughout the summer months due to an increase in seasonal rentals and “day trippers”. The Barrier Islands are home to two of the County's popular tourist destinations; namely the Borough of Seaside Heights and the Island Beach State Park, located in Long Beach Township.

The primary north-south routeways are the Garden State Parkway and State Highway Route 9. Concerns relative to capacity are experienced during high peak travel times and during the summer months. The proposed Monmouth–Ocean–Middlesex Rail line, that will be potentially operating between the Borough of Lakehurst and other station stops throughout the region, if qualified for Federal funding, is anticipated to play a major role in traffic congestion on and proximate to the aforementioned routeways.

This summer, twelve municipalities¹ within the north of the County will commence the preparation of a sub-regional strategic growth management plan which is being funded by a Smart Future grant from the NJDCA.

¹Beachwood Borough, Berkeley Township, Brick Township, Dover Township, Jackson Township, Island Heights Borough, Lakewood Township, Ocean Gate Borough, Pine Beach Borough, Point Pleasant Beach Borough, Point Pleasant Borough, and South Toms River Borough.

Table 1: Comparison of Borough of Seaside Heights and Ocean County

	<i>Borough of Seaside Heights</i>					<i>Ocean County</i>				
	1990	2000	2020	2000-2020		1990	2000	2020	2000-2020	
Area- sq. mi.	0.61	0.61	0.61	#	%	636	636	636	#	%
Population	2,366	3,155	3,233	78	2.47	433,203	510,916	604,996	94,080	18.4
Jobs	1,431	1,321	1,321	0	0	112,223	136,578	198,086	61,508	45.0
Pop/Sq. Mi.	3,830	5,172	5,300			681	803	951		

Source: Seaside Heights 1996 Master Plan Reexamination, U.S. Bureau of Census and CUPR IA – Plan.

Municipal/Center Profile: The Borough of Seaside Heights comprises an area of .61 square miles² and is located along the Barrier Island portion of Ocean County. It is bounded to the north by the “Ortley Beach” section of Dover Township, to the south by the Borough of Seaside Park, to the west by Barneget Bay, and to the east by the Atlantic Ocean. The 2000 U.S. Census estimated that there were 3,155 persons residing in the Borough, which represents a 33.4 percent (or 789 person) decennial increase with an estimated density of 5,172 persons/square mile. However, for the next 20 years, the projected rate of growth slows greatly to a 2.47 percent (or 78 person) increase as the Borough moves closer to a fully built out status.

Seaside Heights is primarily a residential resort community. Historically, according to the Borough’s Police Department, the Borough’s summer season population increases to in excess of 25,000 residents. When the weather is exceptionally good, it is not unusual for the Borough to experience approximately 40,000 visitors during a single weekend.³ Some of the population increase is from second homeowners while a larger portion are seasonal rental unit occupants. The Borough serves as a destination point for the regions beachgoers. Many of the visitors to the Borough during the summer season live within an approximately 50-mile radius of the Borough. Organized⁴ and spontaneous recreative activities and events occur within the Borough year round. However, these activities and events are more numerous during the summer season from May through October.

It is not anticipated that the number of jobs within the Borough will significantly increase over the next twenty years. There are no large employers, neither are there any commercial labor-intensive year round land uses anticipated in the future. The primary employment activities are centered on part-time resort related opportunities. The Borough contains a limited supply of vacant or unused land. The land within the proposed center boundary that is available for development is, for the most part, not contiguous with other vacant land. This creates small lots that in most cases are only suitable for single family, duplex or other similar sized development. The predominant characteristic is mixed land uses with single family, and multifamily, and commercial development. The existing development pattern is reflective of a historic trend within the Borough.

The Borough of Seaside Heights is located entirely within a Planning Area 5B (Environmentally Sensitive/Barrier Islands Planning Area) and its lands are additionally regulated under the CAFRA. Approximately 51% of the lands in the Borough are designated as coastal wetlands. The Borough of Seaside Heights, as part of the barrier islands, is comprised of a massive sand bank along with flood and ebb tide deltas from which sediments are deposited, lost or exchanged in this dynamic system. The harsh and dynamic aspects of this barrier island system have provided for a unique assemblage of plants and animals adapted to survive under the island conditions.

² .61 square miles represents land area only. If water bodies are included the total would actually be 0.76 square miles.

³ A review of the record of daily beach badges sold throughout the summer season over the past ten years (1992 – 2002) indicated an average of 247,177 guests per year (guests under the age of 12 years are not charged to use the beach, consequently there is no official record of the number of guests in that age group). Combined with the number of patrons using the Borough’s Boardwalk and Nightclubs, the annual visitor count, according to municipal officials, swells to in excess of two million people (including “day trippers”, renters, seasonal resident homeowners).

⁴ Such as the Ocean County St. Patrick’s Day Parade, the July 4th Fireworks, Clownfest, and the Ocean County Columbus Day Italian Street Festival and Parade.

The following charts compare the Borough's demographic profile to both the SDRP's Regional Center criteria and Town Center Criteria. The numbers that are bolded represent departures from the SDRP guidelines.

Table 2a: Regional Center Criteria

Sources: Center Petition, U.S. Census Bureau, CUPR Projections

	Guidelines	Center Existing	Center 2020
Area (sq. mile)	1 – 10	.61	.61
Population	>5,000	3,155	3,278
Gross Population Density (Pop/sq. mile)	>5,000	5,172	5,374
Housing	2,000-15,000	2,840	4,753
Gross Housing Density (DU/Acre)	>3	7.3	12.2
Employment	>5,000	1,321	1,321
Jobs: Housing Ratio	2:1 – 5:1	2.15:1	3.6:1

Table 2b: Town Center Criteria

Sources: Center Petition, U.S. Census Bureau, CUPR Projections

	Guidelines	Center Existing	Center 2020
Area (sq. mile)	<2	.61	.61
Population	1,000 to 10,000	3,155	3,278
Gross Population Density (Pop/sq. mile)	>5,000	5,172	5,374
Housing	500 to 4,000	2,840	4,753
Gross Housing Density (DU/Acre)	>3	7.3	12.2
Employment	>500 to 10,000	1,321	1,321
Jobs: Housing Ratio	1:1 to 4:1	2.15:1	3.6:1

Environs Profile: The environs comprise the developed municipality of Seaside Park Borough to the south and the “Ortley Beach” section of Dover Township to the north. Both of the aforementioned are almost fully built out and are comprised of primarily residential land uses. Unlike the Borough of Seaside Heights, the same level of priority is not given to the support of developing an oceanfront amusement/entertainment center. These environs will retain the PA5B designation and remain outside of the Town Center Boundary.

Capacity Analyses Profiles:

1. **Growth Accommodation:** The Borough of Seaside Heights is approximately 96% developed. About fifty-four percent of the land use within the proposed center is residential. The balance of the land area comprises commercial uses, public uses and open space. Vacant land comprises a very small percentage of non-contiguous parcels. The Borough projects a modest increase in both population (+78 or 2.47%) between 2000 and 2020. However, there are no increases or decreases anticipated in the area of employment. Seaside Heights is a seasonal resort community. The population typically expands to in excess of 25,000 residents in the summer months. Some of this seasonal population increase is from second homeowners while the larger portion are seasonal rental unit occupants. The Boulevard, the Borough’s principal commercial street is undergoing revitalization with the primary design motif being the incorporation of a “New Orleans Theme”. One of the Borough’s goals is to encourage business expansion and development along with the attraction of increased patrons. Notably, Fire safety code enforcement is

monitored by the State of New Jersey Division of Fire Safety. Concerns have existed for years relative to the occupancy levels of many of the bars within the Borough, close proximity of buildings, and quality of construction of the summer rental property.

- 2. Existing and Potential Development and Redevelopment:** The predominant characteristic is mixed uses, with single and multifamily, and commercial development. The mix of residential homes, hotels and rentals are necessary to support the year round population and the seasonal visitors. The preponderance of building permits and Planning Board approvals have been issued for building upgrades and expansions.

A formal redevelopment plan (dated September 4, 2002) has been adopted by the Borough's governing body for the "Southeast Area". The Agency is currently soliciting developers to implement the plan. The Southeast Area is a four-block area located in the southeast corner of the Borough adjacent to the Borough of Seaside Park. It comprises 10.7 acres of land with scattered commercial properties, small residential dwellings on mainly 20' x 100' lots, and unimproved land used for parking. The goals of the redevelopment plan are to consolidate building lots to achieve an increased ratable potential through the development of new retail enterprises and parking facilities. Additional redevelopment potential within the Borough includes areas along the Boulevard and the northern Borough boundary. A CVS pharmacy has recently been approved by the Planning Board and the Planning Board continues to receive restaurant, condominium, etc. applications. Any existing vacant land within the Borough is primarily scattered. The Redevelopment Agency is currently considering options for assembling lots within the Redevelopment Area.

The Boulevard revitalization district is governed by the "New Orleans Theme" architectural design standards detailed in the Borough's Boulevard Revitalization Zoning Ordinance. A substantial revitalization of the Boulevard includes decorative street lights, benches, trees, brick pavers, etc. Up to \$6,000 in matching grants⁵ are available to owners of buildings on the Boulevard to alter the appearance of those buildings to be consistent with an overall architectural theme for the project. Borough Wide architectural design standards (prepared by SOSH Archetictics) are currently under consideration by the Redevelopment Agency, Planning Board and Governing body.

- 3. Transportation and Circulation:** Access to Seaside Heights is primarily accomplished by private motor vehicles. Public transportation throughout the Borough is provided via NJ Transit bus lines (Route 137 & Route 67) on a seasonal basis only. This service provides public bus access from New York and North Jersey. The Borough's perimeter circulation is accomplished via the major route access of Route 35 and Route 37. Internal circulation is accomplished via a combination of one-way and two-way streets and Boulevards. Traffic circulation changed dramatically in the 1950's when State Route 35 North was re-routed around the Borough. Now that traffic can flow North – South on either the Route 35 Belt or through the Borough on Central Avenue or the Boulevard, it is anticipated that the Borough will be able to support all future anticipated vehicular access need. Mathis Bridge (Route 37) provides a primary access causeway from the mainland to the Borough. The Causeway is not included within the Center.

⁵ Community Development Block Grant program

Vehicular parking during the summer season is managed via vacant lots with a fee charged for daily parking, on street metered parking (east of Central), on street and free lot parking (west of Central), and on-site parking at restaurants, hotels and condominiums. The development of off-street metered parking areas are promoted by the Borough. The Borough is completely sidewalked and safely supports the large pedestrian / family use experienced each year. Over the past 10 years, it has been the policy of the Borough to construct depressed curbing at all intersections and to rebuild many of the beach and boardwalk access ramps to ADA standards.

4. **Water and Wastewater Supply:** The Borough is served by public water and public sanitary sewers. The Borough operates and maintains the potable water system. The water is supplied by municipal wells. The Borough operates and maintains the sanitary sewerage system and contracts with the Ocean County Utilities Authority (OCUA) for pumping and treatment. The treatment plant is located in Bayville. There exists sufficient capacity to accommodate future projected growth. There are no sewer bans in effect. The Borough operates and maintains its own electric utility. Utilities are maintained and upgraded on a continuing basis through an active program of capital improvements, grants and loans. The Borough is currently involved in a study with the County and State regarding their stormwater system.
5. **Affordable Housing:** The Borough is a “court town” (under a builder’s remedy lawsuit) and does not have a Housing Element and Fair Share plan certified by COAH. It currently has a 10-unit rehabilitation obligation and no obligation for newly constructed affordable housing units. We recommend that the Borough prepare a housing element and fair share plan to satisfy COAH’s round 3 numbers and meet with COAH to discuss petitioning for substantive certification

There are two seasons for rental property within the Borough; winter and summer. During the summer season, which typically extends from Mid-May through until Mid-October, rentals within the Borough are expensive and reflect the seasonal tourist demands. During the off-season, rentals are affordable. Consequently, off-season renters who generally comprise the working poor, welfare recipients and transient residents, generally seek summer accommodation in other parts of the region (i.e. Burlington County, Lakewood Township, Lakehurst Borough, Keansburg, etc.). This has a major impact on the local Elementary school, wherein many of the youngsters may miss up to four months of schooling on an annual basis, due to the instability of annual living arrangements.

6. **Community Facilities:** The 1996 Master Plan Reexamination report did not indicate any significant deficiencies in public facilities. Given the prospect of limited future growth in the Borough, maintenance of existing facilities should be sufficient to accommodate future demand.

For educational services, students in grades kindergarten through six (6) attend the Hugh J. Boyd Elementary School in the Bay-front section of the community. Students in grades seven (7) through twelve (12) attend the Central Regional Intermediate and High Schools in Bayville⁶. The 2000 Census reported that 736 people or about 23 percent of the Borough’s total population is below eighteen (18) years of age. Seaside Heights has a

⁶ Central Regional serves the following municipalities: Borough of Seaside Park; Borough of Seaside Heights; Township of Berkeley; the Borough of Bay Head; and the Borough of Island Heights.

very high rate of transience within the local School District. Due to the high rate of turnover within rental properties associated with the vagaries of seasonal rentals, the Elementary School population is continually in a state of flux. By way of example, in October 2001, the School enrollment was 210 students. By May 2002, the enrollment fell to 270 students. This continues annually, with many students missing three to four months of schooling annually. Additionally, local school enrollment does not stabilize until the end of October. Consequently, the school does not receive its full per pupil funding from the State because the local per pupil formulae are determined by an October 15th cut off date. The school does not receive any special treatment from the Department of Education. Therefore, The school does not offer any after-school programs or summer programs. However, Ocean County is planning to provide funding for an addition to the Elementary School for three more classrooms to house Early Childhood, Pre K, and Kindergarten classes.

7. **Historic and Cultural Resources:** The existing Master Plan or Master Plan Reexamination reports do not address Historic Preservation.
8. **Environmental Resources:** The Borough is fully developed and has no forest or open tracts of land to protect, with the exception of the Bayfront and the Oceanfront beaches. Both the oceanfront and the bayfront have a block by block unrestricted access by the public. The Borough continuously monitors existing/probable open space within the Borough to meet resident needs. The Borough has recently utilized Green Acre funding for the 7 acre "Heiring Tract" in the Northeast portion of the Borough.

Growth Management Mechanisms: The Borough's primary growth management tools are the 1996 Master Plan reexamination report and 2002 Southeast Area Redevelopment Plan. The location, type, scale and character of future uses, buildings, landscapes, streetscapes and conservation areas will be guided by the Borough's 1996 zoning map.

Intergovernmental Coordination: The Borough of Seaside Heights and the neighboring municipalities have had a cordial working relationship. The Borough coordinates the Police, Fire, and Emergency Services with adjoining municipalities.

Planning and Implementation Agenda (PIA): Staff recommends a number of additions to the Borough's PIA, as follows:

Land Use:

- Update Master Plan to incorporate Town Center (2 Years)
 - Amend maps, land use plan and zone plan where applicable.
- Create design guidelines to preserve the character of the Borough/Center and promote it's economic growth (2 Years)
 - Complete visual assessment of Borough
 - Adopt design guidelines for commercial area.

Housing:

- Develop Housing Rehabilitation Program; Upstairs/Downstairs Program (2 Years)
 - Identify units, secure tenants, secure funding
- Apply property maintenance Code Enforcement Program (2 Years)
 - Continue to adopt or amend codes as necessary

Economic Development:

- Encourage the development and enhancement of defined commercial districts and programs supportive of the needs of both the business community and their patrons (2 Years)
 - Support sidewalk, streetscape, lighting and façade improvements designed to unify and identify commercial areas; develop a coordinated parking and circulation plan supportive of the needs of both the business community and their patrons.
 - Development of a “downtown improvement plan”.
- Promote year round arts, entertainment, and cultural activities (Ongoing)
 - Coordinate events with local business groups, Chamber of Commerce and regional organizations.
- Improve gateways into the Borough, and enhance its edges to promote travel into the Center (2 Years)
 - Identify sites, visual corridors. Develop critical intersections as economic opportunities.

Transportation:

- Maintenance and improvement of the traffic movement to and from the island (1 Year)
 - Participate in County Emergency planning process to insure the ability of its residents to evacuate in a safe and efficient manner in case of emergency.
- Consider the preparation of a bikeway plan that will link the Borough’s open spaces with a non-vehicular path (3 Years)
- Provide for improved pedestrian & bicycle safety. Prepare a Circulation Element for inclusion to the Master Plan to (3 Years):
 - investigate the possibility of freestanding pedestrian “yield” signs at intersections and crosswalks as appropriate.
 - provide painted crosswalks in conjunction with bus stops located along the four-lane section of Seaside Heights
 - identify key bicycle routes and placement of bicycle accommodations (parking and racks).
- Prepare a Route 35 Streetscape Plan (3 Years)
 - Include traffic calming features

Environmental:

- Reduce flood hazards on the Bay (On-going)
 - Replenish the bayfront beaches with sand using fill from local dredging projects.

Recreation and Open Space:

- Prepare an Open Space Plan (4 Years)
 - Develop plan and adopt ordinances

Human Services:

- Support school improvements. Evaluate needs & promote supplemental programs (1 Year)
 - Establish a Board of Education Committee to develop and oversee program