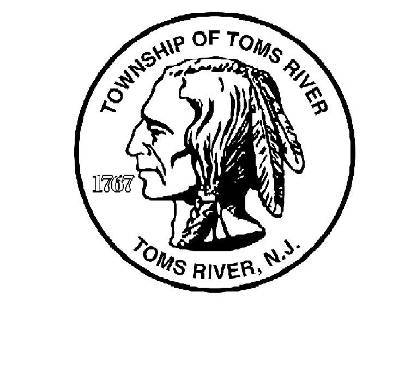
**TOWNSHIP OF TOMS RIVER**



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Township of Toms River Plan Endorsement

Descriptions of Proposed Centers

Submitted to the Office of Smart Growth

October 2009

**Requested Endorsement of Centers within the Township**

The Township proposes the following regarding the designation of centers in the Township:

* The Township proposes the designation of several centers within the Township.
* These centers will be properly incorporated into an update of the Toms River Master Plan.
* The Land Use Plan and other elements of the Master Plan will be consistent with the designation of the centers in terms of land use, intensity of development, design issues, circulation, and other relevant planning factors.
* Based on an understanding reached with the Office of Smart Growth, Plan Endorsement will be based on four designated centers as described herein, and the Township is able to submit proposals for additional center, node and other higher intensity locations during the Plan Implementation Agreement phase.
* Necessary modifications to the Master Plan and development regulations will be made to satisfactorily address OSG’s suggestion that mixed-use pedestrian and transit-friendly development be permitted with the centers.

The latest proposed boundaries for the centers within Toms River (“Toms River Township Proposed Centers” map provided herein) have been developed based upon the continuing input the Township has received from OSG and other involved State agencies. The proposed centers correlate with the Township’s existing and planned higher density residential areas in Downtown Toms River and in the proposed Northwest Center. In addition, centers are proposed in the Barrier Island Communities of Ortley Beach and North Beach. The Township’s existing and planned lower intensity zoning districts and existing commercial corridors are specifically excluded from centers. Areas within PA5 planning areas on the State’s draft State Planning Map are specifically excluded from proposed centers, as are the majority of Critical Environmental Sites (CES).

As Toms River’s primary land use policy document, the 2006 Master Plan plays an important role in outlining the Township’s stated land use and development goals. The Master Plan supports the following goals, objectives and recommendations, all of which are consistent with proposals for center designation:

* The development of nodes and centers throughout the Township that encourage walkability and reduce vehicular trips.
* Capitalize on mixed-use redevelopment and revitalization of areas that are becoming obsolete.
* The Township should identify new areas for mixed-use centers that include a variety of commercial uses that incorporate or are in close proximity to residential uses.
* Create new employment centers to reduce the number of residents who have to leave the County to find employment, and by doing so reduce the reliance on the congested regional highway network.
* Promote development that will allow the Township to capitalize on existing economic/ employment clusters.
* Create Special/ Business Improvement Districts in areas such as Route 37 to rehab existing businesses and upgrade areas through coordinated improvements.
* Utilize the Township’s historic assets to promote Smart Growth that incorporates conservation, sound land use and economic development throughout the entire municipality.
* Develop biking and walking trails and greenways throughout the Township.
* Require sidewalks and crosswalks in all new development or rehabilitation to promote the safety of residents.
* Locate parks and other recreation areas in proximity to schools and residential neighborhoods.
* Pursue cluster development to promote energy conservation.

The Township will continue to direct the vast majority of the more intensive development to the areas within centers. The Township seeks to encourage the redevelopment of existing underutilized or inappropriately developed properties along its commercial corridors as well as downtown and within these centers.

**Regional Centers**

Regional Centers are intended to serve as focal points for the economic, social and cultural activities of the region with a compact mix of uses. These centers should also include some of the following: access to infrastructure to support growth, a population in excess of 10,000, a population density of 5,000 per square mile, local employment in excess of 10,000, and proximity to mass transit. The Toms River Regional Center meets many of these criteria.

## Toms River Regional Center

*Population 2000: 7,500*

*Employment: between 6,000 and 7,000*

*Acres: 1,143*

*Square Miles: 1.8*

*Population Density: 4,200 persons per square mile*

*SDRP Designation: Suburban, with small areas of Environmentally Sensitive areas and Parkland.*

The Toms River Regional Center lends itself to this designation because of its important role as a true regional center for government, transportation, employment, and culture. Toms River is the county seat for Ocean County and therefore supports most of the government offices for the county and the Ocean County Justice Center, most of which lie within the boundaries proposed for the Regional Center designation. The Toms River Township offices also lie in this area, providing a sound geographical link between the county offices and the county’s most heavily populated municipality.

Other public uses within the center include the Toms River South High School and the Monsignor Donovan Catholic High School. Parks, open spaces and recreation within and adjacent to the Toms River Regional Center include the Winding River Park to the west, Huddy Park to the south, and the Toms River Country Club and Golf Course in the southeast. Winding River Park has emergent wetland, forested wetland and upland forest habitats suitable for colonial water birds, and species such as Carpenter Frogs, and Corn Snakes.

With its central location and close proximity to the Garden State Parkway, the area is also home to the New Jersey Transit operated Toms River Park and Ride facility, which offers connections to four NJ Transit bus lines and six Ocean County bus lines. NJ Route 37 and Water Street are major east-west connectors to the Garden State Parkway. In addition to the Parkway, Main Street/Lakewood Road (Route 166), and Hooper Avenue provide north-south connections. Local connectors such as Walnut Street, James Street, Dayton Avenue, and Washington Street and Highland Parkway link residential areas and government centers to major arterials and public transportation, and they serve as interior circulation routes as well.

Due to the high density of public, commercial and office uses in the center, most major intersections require improvements to accommodate pedestrian and bicycle traffic. These intersections lie mainly along Main Street, Water Street and Hooper Avenue and include Main & Water, Main & NJ Route 37, Hooper & Water, Water and Highland Parkway, Hooper & NJ Route 37, and Hooper & Walnut. The New Jersey Department of Transportation has proposed safety upgrades at the intersection of Route 37 and Main Street (Route 166), and a key highway business shopping center is about to be redeveloped in the northwest quadrant of this intersection. These improvements aim to provide better linkages between residential areas, and increased access to commercial and office uses. Improvements to directional signage should also be planned for the Garden State Parkway interchanges at NJ Route 37 and at Water Street/Lakehurst Road.

Housing within the center is concentrated in the north between James and Walnut streets and between the Garden State Parkway and Lakewood Road; and in the south between Main Street and Hooper Avenue south of NJ Route 37. The housing stock in the northern part is mainly multi-family, such as the Winteringham Village community, and that in the southern part is largely single-family residential. The area is characterized by small-lot single family and duplex development, affordable housing developments, and older multifamily developments that cater primarily to smaller households.

The 2006 Master Plan identifies a number of recommendations for this center that are consistent with the designation of the Toms River Regional Center. These recommendations include the creation of a façade program to improve retail facades in the downtown area, adding opportunities for mixed use development in the pedestrian-oriented downtown area, the importance of building on the established cultural and government nodes in the downtown area, and explicitly stating that the Township should strive to make downtown Toms River a “regional center.” The 2006 Master Plan adopts the overall plan for the downtown area, and it specifically provides design and conceptual guidelines that support the regional center designation. An important part of the plan calls for the redevelopment of a designated Redevelopment Area that lies primarily south of Water Street between Main Street and the Garden State Parkway. Pedestrian and bicycle flows will be coordinated with local and regional systems. Waterfront parks and a significant residential component will be incorporated into the plan, including coordination with the NJ Transit Park and Ride in an overall transit-oriented development.

## Northwest Center

*Population 2000: 1,800*

*Acres: 853*

*Square Miles: 1.4*

*Population Density: 1,300 persons per square mile*

*SDRP Designation: Suburban Planning Area*

The Northwest Center is the most under-developed of the proposed center areas, Located primarily in the triangle formed by US 9, Route 70, and Cox Cro Road, it exhibits significant potential to function as a new center in Toms River. While the 2000 Census showed little in the way of population density, a great deal of new housing has been developed and approved for development by the Planning Board.

There appears to be an undercount in the Census from the large mobile home parks that have existed in this area for about forty years, and while not recognized as creditable affordable housing under COAH Rules, they nevertheless are a valuable and affordable housing resource for the foreseeable future. Within the proposed Center are 1003 units in the following mobile home parks:

Riverwood 178 units

Homestead Run 460 units

Galaxy Manor 145 units

Raymor Park 58 units

Roberts 222 units

The existing multifamily developments include a portion of North Pointe Hollow lying north and west of Route 70 and Whitesville Road, which was an inclusionary development built in 1994 and which provides a total of 89 affordable units. Adjoining that development to the south is the 121 unit Toms River Crescent rental development, which is 100 percent affordable to low income and very low income households. A large condominium development known as Saratoga at Toms River provides 376 units of market-rate housing located in the northeast quadrant of the intersection of Whitesville Road and Route 70 adjoining the age-restricted community known as Lake Ridge.

In the Massachusetts Avenue corridor between Route 70 and Cox Cro Road are found the inclusionary developments known as Dover Chase (110 family rentals with 22 affordables), Woods at Massachusetts (70 condominium units with 14 affordables), and Hopes Crossing (125 family rentals 100 percent affordable).

The Master Plan and zoning regulations permit additional affordable housing in this corridor consisting of special needs housing for up to 72 persons at West Hickory Street across from Woods at Massachusetts. Another development proposal is Cornerstone Commons, an anticipated 131 unit 100 percent affordable age-restricted development at the corner of Cox Cro Road and Massachusetts Avenue. Both of these affordable housing developments are proposed on sites that are owned by the Township. They lie along a tributary of the Toms River and carry a C-1 designation, so the 300 foot buffer is part of the ultimate determination of site suitability.

In the Route 9 corridor there are two major inclusionary developments that have been approved and not yet built. One is the 350 unit Gabrielle Run that will produce 70 affordables, and the other is the Nobility Crest mixed use development that will produce 200 market units and 50 affordables. A significant Residential Health Care Facility, providing long-term low income rental opportunities for about 170 persons, is found at the Lakewood boundary in the southeast quadrant of the intersection of Route 9 and Route 70. This facility is known as Dover Woods and it generally caters to single room occupants on SSI.

All totaled, this proposed Center has about 1,000 mobile home units, and an existing and approved multifamily component of almost 2,000 units, almost 800 of which are affordable under COAH standards. Additional zoning is in place to provide for more multifamily and mixed use development in this area, providing a significant population base on which to build a center. The population of the Center on full build-out will exceed 7,000 persons.

The major transportation routes in the Center include US Route 9/Lakewood Road, County Route 527/Whitesville Road, NJ Route 70, and Cox Cro Road. Ocean County Route 637/Massachusetts Avenue is the major north-south connection through the spine of the Northwest Center. North Maple Avenue and Hickory Street provide east-west linkages to Lakewood Road. Improvements have recently been made along Route 70 by NJDOT. These improvements include upgrades to the intersections of Route 70 and US 9, Cox Cro Road and US Route 9, and NJ Route 70 and Massachusetts Avenue.

Most of the commercial development, such as food and drug stores, gas stations and restaurants, in the center is located at the intersection of NJ Route 70 and US Route 9. A new hotel is also being planned along Route 70. A Wawa has been built at the intersection of Route 70 and Massachusetts Avenue. One of the design challenges in the Center is to continue to provide for pedestrian-scale linkages between the various residential developments and the commercial retail areas that can serve their day-to-day needs. Based on the established pattern of development and the lack of clarity regarding the timing of improvements to Route 9, the Township has taken the prudent position of relying on pedestrian circulation along the existing roadways. Commercial development along Route 9 will continue to face the challenge of fitting in with the existing development pattern and addressing the needs of the traveling public, while at the same time providing the linkages needed to fit the pattern of a functional center.

# Barrier Island Communities/Coastal Towns

The Barrier Island Communities are identified as special areas in the SDRP and designated as Planning Area 5B or Environmentally Sensitive Barrier Islands. The barrier island communities of North Beach and Ortley Beach are among the most densely developed areas of Toms River and are appropriately designated as Coastal Towns. The barrier island areas are almost entirely built-out with the exception of some smaller islands to the west of the main barrier island in Barnegat Bay. These areas will remain as highly developed Barrier Island communities and rely on their status in the SDRP as designated Coastal Towns.

## North Beach

*Population 2000: 2,110*

*Acres: 560*

*Square Miles: 0.9*

*Population Density: 2,400 persons per square mile*

*SDRP Designation: Environmentally Sensitive Barrier Islands*

The North Beach barrier island community is located between Lavallette Borough to the south and Brick Township to the north, with the Barnegat Bay to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. The center is ideally located as a beach-side residential community with small-lot single-family residential housing, and some commercial and retail. The center holds strong potential as an attractive and accessible area for water-related activities, seasonal boarding and lodging, and local shopping and boutiques to attract visitors and locals alike.

The main thoroughfare in the center is Route 35, which handles most of the vehicular traffic and is also the commercial corridor with restaurants, food stores and other services. Local streets serve to link the community internally, as well as provide connection to the Chadwick Beach Island residential community.

To the west of the center lie several small islands such as the Middle Sedge, the Northwest Point Island, the Marsh Elder Island, and the Little Sedge Island. Smaller water bodies such as the Gap Cove and the Great Swan Bay are attractive boating and cruising areas to visit and see the islands. The islands are state-threatened Emergent Wetland habitats, home to the Northern Diamondback Terrapin and a Black-Crowned Night-Heron foraging habitat. Chadwick Beach along the ocean is a suitable beach habitat and should be promoted to the advantage of the center.

## Ortley Beach

*Population 2000: 1,580*

*Acres: 380*

*Square Miles: 0.6*

*Population Density: 2,600 persons per square mile*

*SDRP Designation: Environmentally Sensitive Barrier Islands, with small areas of Parkland.*

The Ortley Beach center is a part of the Barrier Islands with Lavallette to the north, Seaside Heights to the south, the Barnegat Bay to the west and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. The center is a dense residential community with smaller-scale retail concentrated along Route 35, which runs north to south down the middle of the island. Other major routes in the center include Eisenhower Avenue, Baltimore Avenue, and Bay Boulevard.

Housing within the center consists of small-lot single-family development on smaller, more densely developed residential lots. The commercial development within the area is limited to local restaurants, food stores, banks, and gas stations. The center holds strong potential as an attractive and accessible area for water-related activities, seasonal boarding and lodging, and local shopping and boutiques to attract visitors and locals alike.

Harbor Island and Mike’s Island lie to the west of Ortley Beach and north of Pelican Island. These are state-endangered Emergent Wetlands that are home to the Northern Diamondback Terrapin and an important Black-Crowned Night-Heron foraging habitat. The beach along the ocean is a suitable Beach habitat.

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