

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Warren County – Monday, February 24, 2025 – 6:00 PM

START: 6:01 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Ryan Conklin, PP, AICP, GISP – Assistant County Planner, Warren County

- Highlighted the coordination between OPA and Warren County.
- Expressed OPA and the County's great efforts and significant progress that end with a successful adoption of a State Plan.
- Gave background on County's and Highlands role in the Cross Acceptance process.

Jason Sarnoski, County Commissioner, Warren County

- Outlined the State Plan's importance in shaping Warren County's future and enables municipalities to assess the current environment for growth and preservation.
- Described the local needs and priorities are met funding for preservation, economic development, and infrastructure.

Walter C. Lane, Acting Executive Director, OPA

- The Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) is tasked by the NJ State Planning Act to implement the goals of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP).
- In addition to providing administrative support to the State Planning Commission, OPA is organized within the NJ Department of State's NJ Business Action Center (BAC). The broader purpose of the BAC is to facilitate economic growth in New Jersey through technical assistance and guidance provided to businesses and local governments.
- OPA is currently in the process of updating the SDRP.
- As per the NJ State Planning Act, the SDRP intends to establish an optimal balance of economic development and environmental conservation through sound planning practices.
- The SDRP is not a regulatory document, but a guidance document. It does not overrule, negate, or interfere with local plans or regulations. Instead, its aim is to foster greater coordination and consistency between planning objectives at all levels of government.
- In December of 2024, OPA disseminated the Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan, which is a draft version of the new SDRP. This began a process called Cross Acceptance, in which all New Jersey residents and local and regional entities are free to offer comments, thereby contributing to the final version of the SDRP.
- Because stakeholder engagement is critical to the Cross Acceptance process, OPA commenced its outreach to municipalities, counties, and regional entities well in advance of the release of the Preliminary SDRP.
- At present, OPA is conducting public meetings such as this in all 21 counties and at the Highlands Council. Later this year, OPA will conduct six public hearings on the outcome of the Cross Acceptance process.
- Concurrently, OPA is working with a team from Rutgers and Rowan Universities to prepare an Infrastructure Needs Assessment, which will project the public investments necessary to implement the new SDRP. An Impact Assessment, investigating societal and economic impacts of

the new SDRP, is also underway. Furthermore, OPA is soliciting comments on the State Plan Policy Map and its underlying mapping protocols.

- The current SDRP, adopted in 2001, contains eight goals. The Preliminary SDRP contains ten goals. These goals pertain to economic development, housing, infrastructure, urban revitalization, climate change, water and natural resources, environmental protection, historic and scenic resources, equity, and comprehensive planning.
- The State Plan Policy Map, required by the State Planning Rules, serves as the geographic application of the SDRP's goals, strategies, and policies. Although planning area amendments will occur during Cross Acceptance, the addition of new centers and nodes will be addressed outside of Cross Acceptance, through the Plan Endorsement process.
- The Smart Growth Explorer is an online mapping tool developed by OPA's partners at Rowan University. It can be used to identify areas suitable for development and areas suitable for conservation. It can serve as a resource to stakeholders when considering requests to amend the State Plan Policy Map.
- OPA will complete its public meetings by mid-April. The Cross Acceptance process will then proceed to the Comparison Phase, in which County Cross Acceptance Reports are developed and submitted to OPA. Next is the Negotiation Phase, in which OPA and the counties will discuss points of agreement and disagreement in the Preliminary SDRP. Ultimately, we hope to adopt the Final SDRP, along with the Infrastructure Needs Assessment and the Impact Assessment, before the end of the year.
- QR codes are available to access the Preliminary SDRP, the Citizen's Guide to the Preliminary SDRP, and an online portal to submit comments on the Preliminary SDRP.

QUESTION AND ANSWER PERIOD:

Summary of **Questions** and *OPA Responses*

How do we have more representation to hear voices from the agricultural community, particularly more representatives on the State Planning Commission? Why are there only two out of four local and county government officials on the Commission, with no agricultural representation?

We will talk with the Governor's Office to explore the potential to fill the vacancies in the local and county government that represent agricultural interests on the State Planning Commission.

What is the timeline and the next milestone in the Cross Acceptance process?

The next milestone is the Cross Acceptance Response Templates (CARTs), which are due at the end of May.

How can you protect water quality while promoting growth?

[Ryan Conklin, PP, AICP, GISP – Assistant County Planner, Warren County]: Look at Sewer Service Areas and have those issues reflected in the CART. The State Plan only affects Highlands planning areas to ensure consistency.

Was COAH interviewed during this process? How does the State Plan affect the COAH obligation numbers?

The State Plan is broad policy. The numbers are partially derived from planning area designations, but the State Plan does not generate the numbers.

Is the State Plan similar to a municipal master plan, but for the entire state?

No, the State Plan is a guidance document that includes planning policies and is voluntary.

When we are talking about redevelopment, does that include agricultural lands in redevelopment studies?

No, the State Plan includes redevelopment at a high level of already developed areas with adequate infrastructure capacity.

In the focus groups conducted in 2024, was Warren County involved?

Yes, Warren County is a member of the County Planners Association, and attends the regularly scheduled meetings.

Is Warren County the negotiating entity for all of the municipalities in the county?

No, Warren County is currently the negotiating entity for all of the municipalities outside of the Highlands region. Additionally, about five municipalities in the Highlands region opted for the County to be their negotiating entity.

How does the County manage dealing with two negotiating entities?

The County has been in coordination with the Highlands Council throughout this process.

What is the likelihood of a passenger train service from High Bridge to Allentown and Scranton?

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority is considering this as a possibility, and this would be consistent with the State Plan to build on existing infrastructure.

Is there grant funding for an update, re-examination, or completion of a master plan?

Yes, the Highlands Council offers grant funding for master plans for municipalities that achieve plan conformance.

How can you address the contradictory farmland preservation goals and the affordable housing goals?

The State Plan aims to balance the needs and goals of residents in New Jersey. We can meet the affordable housing goals and preserve farmland at the same time. The State Plan aims for the state agencies, counties, and municipalities to come to a consensus.

How can we align wastewater planning with employment and population projections?

We can map demographics and resources, as well as other statistics pertaining to infrastructure in municipalities to better inform development decisions. Warren County noted that they accept the NJTPA population projections and the employment assessment.

How will the State Plan preserve water quality? There are many wells in Warren County. There is waste dumped onto farmland, which increases costs. The NJDEP is understaffed and thereby cannot enforce illegal dumping.

The State Plan calls for the coordination of planning efforts of agencies managing land, water, and environmental resources to protect water quality and supply from the cumulative impacts of development. The State Plan focuses on cleaning up polluted land and water in both public and private areas, especially in communities facing more environmental challenges.

How can the police pull over trucks throughout the county which are suspected of illegal dumping? The NJDEP needs more assistance. The courts are backed up and need more resources to process cases. How can we address illegal dumping on private properties?

This is an issue throughout the State. We will discuss with the Governor's Office to see what we can do to address illegal dumping.

How can townships make planning boards more educated on warehouse development?

OPA has developed warehouse-siting guidance; planning board members can use this guidance to guide their local efforts and project reviews.

Master plans dictate municipal plans, what is the trickle-down effect of the State Plan?

When updating masters plans, the consistency between the municipal master plans and the State Plan needs to be considered.

How do we align different agencies with competing priorities?

We work with different agencies to enhance coordination efforts to ensure long-term benefits.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

James R. Kern, III, County Commissioner

- The State Plan calls for transit-oriented development; Warren County has one train station in Hackettstown that is two hours away with a connection to New York. We need to improve access to public transportation in Warren County.
- The State Plan calls for improved infrastructure; in Warren County there is a need to improve broadband and internet, so that people are able to access the internet and telecommute where applicable. However, this requires money, which the Bureau of Public Utilities (BPU) should provide.
- Through smart development, we can balance the needs of preservation, COAH, and warehouses.

Tom Dallassio, FAICP, PP, CPM, FRSA, Executive Director, Musconetcong Watershed Association

- The State of New Jersey is like a non-profit, and we give the donations to it via taxes.
- You would not want to donate your money into a non-profit that has a 23-year-old strategic plan.
- The previous impact assessment estimated the state would save billions of dollars with a successful state plan implementation.

END: 7:00 PM