

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Hudson County – Wednesday, April 9, 2025 – 5:00 PM

START: 5:15 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Byron Nichols, Chief, Division of Planning Hudson County

- Introductions
- Thank you and welcome to the members of the public in attendance.
- Cross Acceptance is very important in regards to highlighting the needs and desires of communities in Hudson County, and for coordination between the municipalities, county, and state.
- Thank you to Walter Lane and the OPA staff, for their efforts in this planning process and for scheduling this meeting.

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*

Where does public education fit into this? I have some concerns, as resources are dwindling for municipalities and counties. Education should be a concern of the state, as it pertains to topics such as equity and smart growth. Retaining highly educated graduates is a priority in Hudson County. Now, the federal government is eliminating laws and resources for education. What is the county's commitment and priorities for education?

We cannot speak for the County, as the State Plan is more of a policy framework to guide state, county, and local public policies. The Plan does address the value of education and workforce training. We can review the Plan to analyze how we can strengthen the links between various policy goals and education.

What are the state's resources for education and priorities? Community colleges train the local workforce. These colleges are often discounted, as they provide more than just job training. We are not finding the same support for higher education institutions.

One of New Jersey's strengths is education, and we support and train a lot of talent. The Plan is more of a high level policy guidance document. It contains land use policies that are all related in some manner to education, but there may be ways to improve them, or to be clearer about the value of education. We welcome your suggestions.

Does the State Plan call for changes to the MLUL or the County Planning Act to provide more support for local planning?

Yes, it contains some high level recommendation to support the update the MLUL. several State-funded programs utilize the State Plan for eligibility determinations, such as the NJEDA's Aspire and Emerge Tax Credits, which are only available in PA1, PA2, and designated centers. Planning Areas 1, 2, and designated centers receive higher priority funding from the NJTPA. Ultimately, the Plan has lot of carrots, but no sticks.

What incentives are promised by the new affordable housing legislation? How does this relate to the State Plan?

The new affordable housing legislation gives municipalities with a designated centers bonus credits towards affordable housing production to help them meet their obligations.

What incentives are there for municipalities to participate in Plan Endorsement?

There have been a few recent court cases in which municipalities have successfully defended their local zoning ordinances by demonstrating their consistency with the State Plan.

In light of recent changes at the federal government, the County has been advised to refrain from highlighting environmental justice issues in its federal grant applications. Will the State Plan be affected by these changes in priorities at the federal level?

We are aware of these developments. Be assured that the environmental justice objectives will remain in the State Plan, as it is an effectuation of State laws and priorities.

Does the governor support the continued inclusion of the equity and climate change goals in the new State Plan?

Yes. The message we have received from the Governor's office is to retain equity and climate change policies and strategies in the Plan.

I live in an area with a large amount of luxury housing. Even with rent control, rents and housing prices are still going up. New construction does not seem to be addressing unmet needs for other housing types. What does the State Plan have to say about this issue?

One goal of the State Plan is to provide a range of housing types, so as to serve a broad swath of economically diverse residents.

What explicit affordable housing provision goals are articulated in the new State Plan?

The explicit numbers are stipulated in the new affordable legislation, not the State Plan. The State Plan outlines high-level housing goals and objectives.

Does the State Plan mostly pertain to land use?

There are a lot of land use strategies presented in the Plan. Broadly speaking, there are areas that are identified as appropriate for higher density development, such as where there is infrastructure, services, and plan encourages the preservation of land where there is no infrastructure or environmentally sensitive features.

Does the State Plan call for the development of more hospitals, community facilities, and schools?

The plan discusses the importance to fulfill these needs, but at a high level. The State Plan is not like a typical municipal master plan; it takes a 40,000-foot level view, and provides a range of planning recommendations that counties and towns can implement. You pick the strategies that are most appropriate to implement in your community.

Is conformance with the State Plan compulsory?

We cannot make towns comply with the State Plan. We can only reward the towns that are doing good planning and advancing the goals of the State Plan.

As federal programs for hazard mitigation are eliminated, how will the State Plan help in this area?

The state legislature will have discussions on the budget if federal funds are withdrawn. The job of the State Plan is to connect state agencies to best marshal resources. In the past, we recommended that municipalities apply for BRIC funding. Our office is in the process of creating a guide to connect municipalities to other funding opportunities.

Historically, how successful have these State Plans been?

Several counties and municipalities have been able to complete various planning initiatives due in large part to their consistency with previous State Plans. That is because consistency with the State Plan facilitates access to funding and administrative resources. The 2001 State Plan has been successful with respect to guiding reinvestments toward urban areas, and minimizing the loss of farmland and open space to new development.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

The State Plan has been a help to Hudson County and I hope this new version will be adopted.

Hudson County has benefited from planning area designations that made it easier to remediate brownfields, in some cases, through grant funding of up to five million dollars.

I appreciate the environmental recommendations in the new State Plan. It is important to encourage municipalities to participate in this process and to know that this information is available. Diverting organic waste from trash streams and increasing the tree canopy should be priorities. The push to protect natural habits, discourage pesticide application, and facilitate indigenous species planting all make this Plan stronger.

END: 6:12 PM