

Public Information Meeting
Preliminary SDRP
Gloucester County – Tuesday, March 25, 2025 – 6:00 PM

START: 6:02 PM

PREPARED REMARKS:

Matthew Weng, County Commissioner

- Welcome
- It has been over two decades since the last State Plan was adopted.
- The County of Gloucester supports the mission of the new State Plan—fostering sustainable development.
- There are many good policies that are advanced by the new State Plan.
- Its adoption will better ensure that Gloucester County is a region with thriving business development opportunities.
- To make the new State Plan the best it can be, public input is needed.

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*

When do the towns need to get their Cross Acceptance Responses to the County?

[Nick Cressman, Senior Planner, Gloucester County]: The municipal Cross Acceptance Responses should be submitted to us before the end of May. We have set up an online survey tool for the benefit of the municipalities through Survey 123. The County Cross Acceptance Response is due to OPA by May 30th.

Typically, mayors and other municipal leaders rely on their planning consultants to advise them of what must be done to fulfill their obligations. How can we ensure that everyone involved understands what is required during the Cross Acceptance process?

[Nick Cressman, Senior Planner, Gloucester County]: The County is considering hosting a series of workshops for the municipalities and their planning consultants. These will be announced shortly.

In the case of Gloucester County, the DVRPC has already contracted with Heyer, Gruel, and Associates (HGA) to assist their counties throughout the Cross Acceptance process. You are in good hands with HGA's Mike Davis. Additionally, the State has taken measures to ensure that the Cross Acceptance process is as simplified and as streamlined as possible; we no longer expect voluminous reports from our counties and towns. We are simply looking for feedback on how the new Plan can be improved.

What changes will be made to the State Plan Policy Map?

No changes to the Map are being proposed at this time. However, we anticipate that requests for changes will be submitted to us during Cross Acceptance. These requests will be addressed, and if approved, will be incorporated into the Map.

Is the current State Plan Policy Map unchanged from 2001?

Largely, yes, except for minor alterations that came about through Plan Endorsement. For example, the Town of Newton in Sussex County recently completed Plan Endorsement; as a result, the Map was altered to add a center in Newton.

Portions of Riverside Township have been flooding in recent storms. Does the State Plan propose a strategy for DEP buyouts of floodprone properties in our municipality?

The State Plan will provide a higher level policy framework for this issue. The key is to strike the right balance between buying out properties where necessary and hardening other properties where necessary.

Does the State Plan have the support of the other State agencies?

Yes. It is understood across State government that the adoption of the new State Plan is a priority of the Murphy Administration. We are all working to have the Plan adopted by the end of the year.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:

- The current draft of the State Plan characterizes Gloucester County as a county that is experiencing slow growth. To the contrary, it is actually growing too quickly. Farms and historic areas are feeling increased development pressure. This should be corrected in the text.
- The current draft of the State Plan inadequately address the existential threat of climate change. Some of the biggest challenges we will be facing are sea level rise, ocean composition, and land subsidence. These stand to impact our marshes, wetlands, and other aquatic ecosystems, as well as industries such as recreation and commercial fishing. Current land use practices, which incorporate “armored” infrastructure, do not allow marshland to migrate inland. Resiliency in the face of these threats needs to be more prominently addressed in the new State Plan.

CLOSING REMARKS:

Nick Cressman, Senior Planner, Gloucester County

- Please feel free to call or email me directly with any questions about Cross Acceptance.

Michael Davis, HGA

- You can also reach out to me to set up an appointment to review your municipality’s mapping and/or survey responses.

Walter C. Lane, Acting Executive Director, OPA

- This is only the beginning of the process. Your participation is appreciated.

END: 6:44 PM