

NJ Office of Planning Advocacy

Plan Endorsement Process

Document Format Requirements

Submit petition documents in electronic format. This makes it easier to distribute documents among agencies and make them available to the public. Electronic documents should be in open, readily accessible formats, such as a Portable Document File (PDF) or in their original formats (e.g. Word). *OPA strongly encourages municipalities to make it standard practice when using a consultant to obtain both original and PDF formats of planning documents in addition to hard copies. It is also requested to the extent possible that municipalities submit mapping in a digital, GIS-capable format.*

Step 1: Pre-Petition Checklist

The primary purpose of the pre-petition step is to introduce the municipality to State agency partners and to introduce Plan Endorsement to the municipality. During this step, the municipality submits its **existing planning documents** for preliminary review and meets with State agency representatives at a pre-petition meeting.

____ 1. Letter from Mayor to the Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) requesting a pre-petition meeting with OPA and the relevant State agencies (include a statement of goals and intent in pursuing Plan Endorsement)

____ 2. List of Documents being submitted

____ 3. Municipality's existing planning documents, **to the extent they already exist**, unless providing copies is waived pursuant to N.J.A.C. 5:85-7.6, including:

- ____ **Most recently adopted Master Plan and any draft elements currently being considered**
- ____ **Master Plan Reexamination Report(s)**
- ____ **Official Map pursuant to N.J.S.A. 55D-32**
- ____ Land use map
- ____ **Zoning Ordinance and other land development standards**
- ____ **Zoning map and schedule**
- ____ Conservation Plan and Natural Resource Inventory (NRI)
- ____ Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI)
- ____ Redevelopment Plan(s) and/or Rehabilitation Plan(s) adopted pursuant to the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (LRHL)
- ____ Farmland Preservation/Agricultural Retention Plan
- ____ Resource protection ordinances
- ____ Inventory of pending major subdivision and site plan applications
- ____ Inventory of approved major subdivision and site plan projects for the past 5 years
- ____ Board of Adjustment reports prepared for each of the past 5 years pursuant to NJSA 40:55D-70.1
- ____ Past 5 years of Annual reports of the Board of Health & Environmental Commission
- ____ Any enforcement actions taken by the NJDEP
- ____ Any other adopted planning documents (e.g. Stormwater, Wastewater, Capital Plan, etc.)

Particularly of interest will be a Circulation Plan, Freight/Goods Movement, Complete Streets, Hazard Mitigation and Resiliency Plan.

Step 2: Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee Checklist

The petitioning municipality shall appoint a Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee to guide the Plan Endorsement process and serve as liaison between the municipality and throughout the Plan Endorsement process. The Advisory Committee also acts to increase public awareness of and involvement in of the community in planning its future. At a public meeting, the Mayor shall appoint the Advisory Committee with the advice and consent of the governing body, by resolution. This meeting is noticed in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, which requires at least 48 hours advance notice.

- ____ 1. Proof of public notice in the form of affidavit of publication for public meeting at which Plan Endorsement Advisory Committee was appointed. [Click here for sample notice.](#)
- ____ 2. Copies of the meeting minutes and public comments of each public meeting at which the Advisory Committee was appointed. Minutes should include summary of public comments and copies of written comments filed before, or presented at, the public meeting.
- ____ 3. Certified copy of resolution from governing body appointing the Advisory Committee. [Click here for sample resolution.](#)
- ____ 4. The Advisory Committee shall consist of between 5 and 10 people, including:
 - ____ At least one representative of the governing body, of which the mayor is considered a member for this purpose
 - ____ At least one Class IV member of the planning board;
 - ____ At least one member of another local board, commission or committee (such as a representative from the zoning board of adjustment, the Board of Education, Chamber of Commerce, the Environmental and Historic Preservation Commissions, or Agricultural Advisory Committee); and
 - ____ At least two members of the public who reside within the jurisdiction of the petitioner and represent diverse interests, such as social, economic, housing, environmental, or agricultural interests. The public members may not hold an elected position or hold an appointment in or be employed by the municipality.

Step 3: Municipal Self-Assessment Report Checklist

The Municipal Self-Assessment Report is the means by which the municipality reviews existing conditions. It includes identifying demographic trends, inventorying its resources and assessing the consistency of current planning and zoning documents with the State Plan. Another function of the MSA is to provide information on the key characteristics of the population, housing and economic conditions, public facilities and services, transportation, water and sewer infrastructure, and natural, cultural and recreational resources. By identifying the conditions, the community can better understand its assets and challenges to inform its community visioning process. This meeting shall be noticed in accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, which requires at least 48 hours advance notice. A Municipal Self-Assessment (MSA) Guidelines/Template in on the NJ Office of Planning Advocacy website [here](#).

- ____ 1. Proof of public notice in the form of affidavit of publication for public meeting(s) at which the Municipal Self-Assessment Report was presented.
- ____ 2. Copies of the meeting minutes and public comments of each public meeting at which the Self-Assessment Report was presented and of the meeting where it was approved. Minutes shall include summary of public comments and copies of written comments filed before or presented at the public meeting.
- ____ 3. Certified copy of resolution from governing body authorizing the submittal of the Self-Assessment Report and pursuit of Plan Endorsement. [Click here for sample resolution.](#)
- ____ 4. Municipal Self-Assessment Report. Template report can be found by clicking [here](#). The report shall be accompanied by the following:
 - ____ Any requests for mapping amendments to the State Plan in digital GIS format. If GIS format is unavailable, a high resolution scanned copy must be provided.
 - ____ Future planning activities
 - ____ Findings and conclusions regarding consistency with the State Plan, including an assessment of actions needed to achieve consistency
 - ____ Desired Plan Endorsement Benefits
 - ____ Zoning map in digital form including a zoning schedule for use in the Opportunities & Constraints Assessment (GIS format or a high resolution scanned copy if GIS is unavailable).
 - ____ GIS parcel and any other pertinent mapping to the extent that these files exist to ensure accurate mapping of centers and other feature
 - ____ Any requests for waivers, including a justification for same

Step 4: State Agency Opportunities and Constraints Report

Within 45 days of receipt of a complete Self-Assessment Report, the Office of Planning Advocacy shall provide to the municipality a report comparing the findings and conclusions of the petitioner's Self-Assessment Report with the most up-to-date regional and statewide data. This will include an evaluation of the Self-Assessment Report with regard to development, infrastructure and natural resources, as well as an assessment as to whether trend growth apparent in the petitioner's report is sustainable based on the resources available in the municipality, region and State.

Step 5: Community Visioning Checklist

To achieve Plan Endorsement, a petitioning municipality must have undergone a community visioning process resulting in the development of a Vision Statement. The petitioner, with the Advisory Committee taking the lead, undertakes visioning prior to the State agency consistency review. Upon approval of the Vision Statement, the petitioner shall submit the resolution and Vision Statement to OPA. Visioning is a process by which a community envisions the future it wants, and plans how to achieve it. The process should engage the public in many ways through a variety of tools. Tools include surveys, mapping exercises, focus groups, public forums, workshops, tours, press releases, newsletters, public displays, webpage, email distribution, and special events. Each tool is designed to gain public consensus regarding the community's future. A well-planned and organized visioning process will ensure that your master plan and development decisions are understood and supported by the community as a whole. Visioning Standards can be found by clicking [here](#). At a minimum, the Committee shall hold at least three facilitated public workshops and two public hearings, in which a preliminary Vision Statement is vetted and discussed. Because the purpose of the visioning process is to maximize community involvement, each of the visioning workshops shall be widely promoted, at least 10 days in advance, using each of the following promotional efforts, if available: issuing a press release to local newspapers promoting the workshops, posting notice on the official municipal website; posting notice in a conspicuous place (such as municipal buildings, schools and local businesses). The municipality shall provide notice at least 10 days prior to each workshop and public hearing.

- ____ 1. Proof of public notice in the form of affidavit of publication for each public workshop and hearing conducted as part of the visioning process. Click [here](#) for sample notice.
- ____ 2. Copies of the minutes and public comments of each public workshop and hearing at which the Vision Statement was discussed, presented and adopted. Minutes shall include a summary of public comments and copies of written comments filed before, or present at, the public workshops and hearings.
- ____ 3. Certified copy of resolution from governing body approving the Vision Statement. Click [here](#) for sample resolution.
- ____ 4. Copies of materials used in the visioning process.
- ____ 5. Summary report identifying actions taken to meet minimum and agreed upon additional requirements for performing the visioning process.
- ____ 6. Copy of Vision Statement. Submission of the above mentioned submission requirements initiates the consistency review. This includes all the submission requirements for the pre-petition meeting, self-assessment report, and visioning process, unless waived.

Step 6: State Agency Consistency Review

No action is required on the part of the municipality during this step. Within 90 days of receipt of all items submitted pursuant to N.J.A.C. 5:85-7.12, the Office of Planning Advocacy, in consultation with the relevant Federal, State and regional agencies, shall conduct a review of the petition for consistency with the goals, policies and strategies of the State Plan. Those found consistent are recommended for endorsement by the State Planning Commission. Municipalities whose plans are found inconsistent are provided with an Action Plan of tasks to be completed.

Step 7: Action Plan Implementation Checklist

Drafted by OPA during Step 6, the Action Plan outlines the steps the petitioner needs to take to bring local plans into consistency with the State Plan. The State Planning Commission considers the draft Action Plan and MOU at a State Planning Commission meeting at the earliest feasible time, preferably the meeting following OPA's distribution of the document. Within 60 days of approval by the SPC (or within a reasonable period of time as agreed to by the Executive Director and the petitioner), the Action Plan and MOU must be authorized at a public hearing or hearings before both the local planning board and the governing body. The Planning Board considers the draft Action Plan and makes a recommendation to the governing body before the governing body may execute the MOU. The petitioner may hold a joint public hearing for simultaneous consideration by the planning board and governing body. The governing body agrees to the Action Plan by passing a resolution authorizing execution of the MOU and adopting the Action Plan. The municipality shall provide notice at least 10 days prior to each public hearing at which the MOU and Action Plan are presented.

- ____ 1. Proof of notice in the form of affidavit of publication for each public hearing at which the Action Plan and MOU are presented. [Click here for sample notice.](#)
- ____ 2. Copies of the meeting minutes and public comments of each public hearing at which the MOU and Action Plan were discussed, presented and adopted. Minutes shall include summary of public comments and copies of written comments filed before or presented at the public meeting(s) or hearing(s).
- ____ 3. Certified copy of resolution from governing body authorizing the MOU and adopting the Action Plan. [Click here for sample resolution.](#)
- ____ 4. Signed MOU