Creating Communities of Place

Office of State Planning

Department of the Treasury
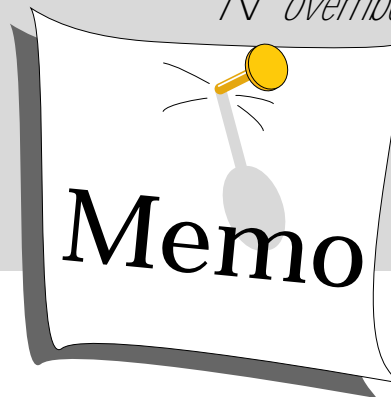
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Memo

Governor
Christine Todd Whitman

Treasurer
Brian W. Clymer

THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW CHECKLIST

The Development Review Checklist prepared by the New Jersey Office of State Planning is designed to assist communities, and anyone involved with the development process, to improve the quality of development, and to do so in ways which are compatible with the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. Like the State Plan, this checklist is not a regulatory tool, and should obviously not be used as the basis for approving or denying specific projects.

The checklist spells out a number of attributes and relationships which the Office of State Planning views as building blocks for livable communities, be they urban, suburban, exurban or rural. Each development occurs under a unique set of circumstances; and many projects are unlikely to fulfill on their own all or even most of the attributes listed in the checklist. There may be good reasons for this. Project size is an important consideration, with larger mixed-use projects better able to incorporate diversity than single use projects; other important considerations are neighborhood context, natural features, and so forth. The checklist is intended to stimulate discussion and focus attention on those reasons which prevent a particular development from satisfying certain checklist objectives.

The checklist is also intended to focus attention on the relationships between new development and exist-

ing communities, in particular on ways in which it can enhance neighborhoods, and contribute to the existing fabric. At present, new development is frequently viewed as an almost certain detriment to existing communities, given the fear of real or imaginary negative impacts on existing residents, in the form of additional traffic, school children, declining property values, or other. As a result, municipal codes are filled with provisions designed to insulate the existing from the new, using the conventional zoning toolbox of physical and visual barriers (setbacks; buffers; fences, walls and hedges; interrupted means of circulation, etc); and, to the extent possible, to ensure that new development will be as similar to the existing as possible. Each site is treated like an enclave, further fragmenting our communities. When proposals for new development are discussed, emphasis during public review is too often placed on their perceived negative impacts, with little attention paid to their potential benefits. Applications can live or die depending upon how well they perform along a single measure of impact, such as number of school children, or number of car trips generated. The requirement that projects be self-sufficient in many ways (meet all parking needs on-site, meet all stormwater detention/retention needs on-site, etc) further reinforces their isolation. Lost is the sense

that community building is a slow, incremental process, with many small and diverse contributions adding up to a greater whole. This is all the more important since infill projects can play a critical role in diversifying a community, by providing different housing products, including various types of affordable housing; by providing missing links, through extensions to the sidewalk systems, bicycle connections, or completion of the street network; by providing needed services, such as retail in understored areas, day-care, or civic sites; by providing open space; and so forth.

This checklist is presented to assist those involved in the development process to flush out the critical items in a development proposal, to distinguish between the essential and the accessory, and to better integrate a project with the surrounding fabric.

This checklist can also be used to evaluate existing zoning and/or master plan provisions and assess whether they are appropriate to the building of livable communities.

As always, the Office of State Planning welcomes your thoughts and comments on the usefulness of this checklist as a planning tool, as well as on its specific provisions. Please direct your comments to Carlos Macedo Rodrigues, Manager of Special Projects, by fax at 609.292.3292 and/or by phone at 609.292.3097.

1. General Context

	Yes	Somewhat	No	N/A
1.1 Is the location of the proposed development appropriate from a regional growth management perspective?	❑	❑	❑	❑
1.2 Does it promote a compact, walkable, Center-based land use pattern?	❑	❑	❑	❑
1.3 Is it appropriately linked to adjacent neighborhoods, maximizing accessibility for pedestrians, bicycles, emergency vehicles and other vehicles?	❑	❑	❑	❑
1.4 Is it consistent with the intent established for the area in the relevant planning documents?	❑	❑	❑	❑
1.5 Is it consistent with local and regional wastewater, stormwater, drinking water, energy, land use and transportation policies?	❑	❑	❑	❑
1.6 Will it contribute towards satisfying local and/or regional needs?	❑	❑	❑	❑
1.7 Will it contribute towards a more balanced and sustainable region?	❑	❑	❑	❑

2. Community Form and Structure

	Yes	Somewhat	No	N/A
2.1 Is it organized into neighborhoods with distinct character, or does it reinforce and complement the identity and character of existing or planned neighborhoods?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.2 Will it contain a balanced mix of activities (residential, commercial, civic, recreational, etc), or contribute towards such balance?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.3 Do neighborhoods have a center, or focus?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.4 Do neighborhoods have recognizable edges or limits?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.5 Are neighborhoods generally defined by a 10-minute walking distance?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.6 Are neighborhood centers characterized by higher density, with employment, mixed-use, multi-family housing, convenience shopping, civic uses, a transit stop, a neighborhood green and/or other central features?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.7 Are neighborhood edges defined by physical features such as major streets, rail lines, water features, greenways, preserved open space, large school sites, cemeteries, major parks, etc?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.8 Are neighborhood fringes characterized by lower density, with larger lot single-family housing, land-intensive community facilities, etc?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.9 Are neighborhoods organized according to a pedestrian-friendly block structure (200 to 400-foot blocks)? Do longer blocks have mid-block pedestrian and bicycle connections?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.10 Does layout follow traditional community design principles, with an emphasis on gateways, focal points, visual terminations, edge definition, etc?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.11 Does layout of streets and buildings promote energy efficiency?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.12 Do buildings face streets, and form near-continuous building walls, with relatively consistent setbacks and on-site surface parking (for multi-family or commercial uses) predominantly to the rear?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.13 Do civic and community buildings occupy prominent locations?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.14 Does layout respect historic structures and landscapes?	❑	❑	❑	❑
2.15 Are indigenous forms, building types and materials encouraged?	❑	❑	❑	❑

3. Transportation and Circulation

	Yes	Somewhat	No	N/A
3.1 Do circulation systems generally interconnect, minimizing cul-de-sacs?	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.2 Are circulation systems legible to the occasional visitor (use of modified grid, radial street networks, or other type of integrated network)?	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.3 Are there easy, clearly defined linkages between different uses?	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.4 Does site layout facilitate alternative modes of transportation, and create links between them?	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.5 Do the residential and commercial densities support transit?	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.6 Does it contain an integrated network of pedestrian (sidewalks, walkways), and bicycle facilities (lanes, paths), providing access to all types of uses, not just residential and recreational?	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.7 Are the street design standards pedestrian-friendly (narrow streets, traffic calming devices, curb side parking, small curb radii, etc)?	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.8 Do streets provide a safe environment for all users, not just cars and trucks?	❑	❑	❑	❑
3.9 Are alleys used to provide rear access to lots?	❑	❑	❑	❑

4. Parking

	Yes	Somewhat	No	N/A
4.1 Is curb-side parking permitted on most streets (day and night), and counted towards the minimum parking requirements?	❏	❏	❏	❏
4.2 Is on-site parking located behind, beside or underneath most buildings?	❏	❏	❏	❏
4.3 Have the overall parking requirements considered potential reductions from mixed-use, shared parking and other modes of transportation?	❏	❏	❏	❏
4.4 Is each use allowed to satisfy its parking requirement within a reasonable proximity (5-minute walk), rather than directly on-site?	❏	❏	❏	❏
4.5 Does the layout and distribution of land uses maximize shared parking?	❏	❏	❏	❏
4.6 Are large surface parking areas divided into smaller units and intensively landscaped and screened?	❏	❏	❏	❏

5. Housing

	Yes	Somewhat	No	N/A
5.1 Does the proposed development provide a variety of housing types to address a community's full range of housing needs? (different age groups, income levels, mobility options and life styles)	❏	❏	❏	❏
5.2 Does it broaden the range of unit types, by including multi-family, accessory housing (apartments over garages), apartments over retail, small lot single-family, cohousing, or others?	❏	❏	❏	❏
5.3 Does it address affordability by providing small starter units, encouraging rental income-producing accessory units, requiring affordable housing set-asides, or through other strategies?	❏	❏	❏	❏
5.4 Are different housing types mixed within the same development, neighborhood, street and block?	❏	❏	❏	❏
5.5 Are community-oriented housing features (front porches, small set-backs, balconies, etc) emphasized?	❏	❏	❏	❏
5.6 Are housing units oriented towards streets, not towards parking lots or driveways?	❏	❏	❏	❏

6. Commercial

	Yes	Somewhat	No	N/A
6.1 Are commercial uses physically/functionally integrated with housing and other uses, not isolated in single-use districts (office parks, retail malls)?	❏	❏	❏	❏
6.2 Do different commercial uses (retail, office, services) coexist with each other and with civic, cultural, and residential uses in "Main Streets", neighborhood/town centers or other pedestrian-friendly configurations?	❏	❏	❏	❏
6.3 Can many neighborhood retail/service needs be satisfied by stores located at neighborhood centers, easily accessible to pedestrians and cyclists, and within a short walking distance from the residential areas?	❏	❏	❏	❏
6.4 Are shopping areas pedestrian-friendly and transit-supportive?	❏	❏	❏	❏
6.5 Are employment nodes pedestrian-friendly and transit-supportive?	❏	❏	❏	❏
6.6 Will retail/service facilities, such as a grocery store, convenience store, restaurant/cafe, and so forth be provided as part of this project, or will they be available to most residents within a 15-minute walking distance?	❏	❏	❏	❏

7. Civic, Cultural, Recreational and Other Community Facilities

	Yes	Somewhat	No	N/A
7.1 Are the sites selected for civic, cultural and other community facilities well integrated into the community, or are they distant and physically separated?	❏	❏	❏	❏
7.2 Are the sites both prominently located and central to a majority of residents/users?	❏	❏	❏	❏
7.3 Are the facilities compact (multi-story, when possible) rather than land intensive (single-story, large parking lots)?	❏	❏	❏	❏
7.4 Are they easily recognizable architecturally?	❏	❏	❏	❏
7.5 Are they easily accessible to pedestrians and cyclists, not just by car?	❏	❏	❏	❏

7.6 Which of the following facilities will be available to most residents within a 15-minute walking distance:

	Yes		No	N/A
a. child care	❏		❏	❏
b. kindergarten	❏		❏	❏
c. elementary school	❏		❏	❏
d. middle school	❏		❏	❏
e. high school	❏		❏	❏
f. library	❏		❏	❏
g. church/synagogue/mosque	❏		❏	❏
h. community center	❏		❏	❏
i. playground/park	❏		❏	❏
j. pool/tennis/other active recreation	❏		❏	❏
k. police station	❏		❏	❏
l. fire station	❏		❏	❏
m. emergency/rescue	❏		❏	❏

8. Parks, Open Space and the Natural Environment

	Yes	Somewhat	No	N/A
8.1 Are natural systems preserved and integrated within the neighborhood structure, as part of the public realm, and are they accessible to the public?	❏	❏	❏	❏
8.2 Does layout minimize disruption to natural systems?	❏	❏	❏	❏
8.3 Does layout maximize natural resource and energy conservation?	❏	❏	❏	❏
8.4 Is there an appropriate amount of public open space, of various sizes and characteristics, and is it easily accessible to the public?	❏	❏	❏	❏
8.5 Are neighborhoods organized around or serviced by neighborhood greens?	❏	❏	❏	❏
8.6 Are larger community-wide or regional facilities located between neighborhoods or as part of green belts?	❏	❏	❏	❏
8.7 Do linear parks (greenways, blueways) define neighborhood edges, while providing pedestrian and bicycle linkages between neighborhoods?	❏	❏	❏	❏
8.8 Do stormwater management systems enhance the natural systems to be preserved?	❏	❏	❏	❏
8.9 Is impervious surface run-off treated, prior to discharge?	❏	❏	❏	❏