

# **Master Plan Reexamination, 2016**



## **Borough of Metuchen Middlesex County, New Jersey**

**Prepared by:  
James Constantine, PP  
Borough Planner**

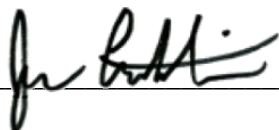
**July 8, 2016**

**With Planning Board Revisions, Adopted July 21, 2016**

# Master Plan Reexamination Borough of Metuchen

July 8, 2016

Prepared by:  
James P. Constantine, PP  
LRK Inc.  
182 Nassau Street, Suite 302  
Princeton, NJ 08542



---

It is certified that all copies of this document are  
in conformance with the one signed and sealed by  
James P. Constantine, P.P. License #3982

## Table of Contents

1. Introduction
2. Background Information, Existing Conditions and Present Master Plan Goals and Objectives
  - 2.1. Planning Environment
  - 2.2. The Region
  - 2.3. Land Use
  - 2.4. Economic Development
  - 2.5. Transportation
  - 2.6. Population
  - 2.7. Housing
  - 2.8. Open Space and Recreation
  - 2.9. Utilities, Public Facilities and Services
  - 2.10. Schools
  - 2.11. Community Character
  - 2.12. Land Use Patterns in Adjacent Municipalities
3. Changes in Assumptions, Policies, Objectives and Recommendations

## 1. Introduction

The *New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law*, NJSA 40:55D-1 et seq. requires that municipalities reexamine their master plans and development regulations at least every ten years.

Specifically, NJSA 40:55D-89 states:

“The governing body shall, at least every 10 years, provide for a general reexamination of its master plan and development regulations by the planning board, which shall prepare and adopt by resolution a report on the findings of such reexamination, a copy of which report and resolution shall be sent to the county planning board. A notice that the report and resolution have been prepared shall be sent to the municipal clerk of each adjoining municipality, who may, on behalf of the governing body of the municipality, request a copy of the report and resolution. A reexamination shall be completed at least once every 10 years from the previous reexamination.

The reexamination report shall state:

- a. The major problems and objectives relating to land development in the municipality at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.
- b. The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.
- c. The extent to which there have been significant changes in the assumptions, policies, and objectives forming the basis for the master plan or development regulations as last revised, with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses, housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition, and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in State, county and municipal policies and objectives.
- d. The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.
- e. The recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law," P.L.1992, c.79 (C.40A:12A-1 et al.) into the land use plan element of the municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.”

The MLUL also provides that “the absence of the adoption by the planning board of a reexamination report shall constitute a rebuttal presumption that the municipal development

regulations are no longer reasonable". NJSA 40:55D-89.1

## **2. Background Information, Existing Conditions and Present Master Plan Goals and Objectives**

### **2.1 Planning Environment**

This Master Plan Reexamination has considered the relevant planning documents at the state, county and local levels, and their implications for local planning efforts. The Borough's last complete Master Plan, which dates to 1983, has undergone reexaminations in 1988, 1994, 2000 and 2006.

Metuchen's comprehensive Land Development Ordinance was adopted in 1989 with subsequent amendments occurring periodically. The entire Land Development Ordinance was re-codified in 1997. A Housing Element/Fair Share Plan was adopted in 1989 and received substantive certification from COAH in 1992. In 1993, Metuchen received amended substantive certification to recognize environmental constraints on the former industrial Gulton, Oakite and Hampton tracts. The Borough adopted a new Housing Element/Fair Share Plan in 1998 and amended it in 2000. This plan received conditional certification from COAH in June of 2000. The Borough adopted a new Housing Element/Fair Share Plan on 6/29/2006, responding to COAH's Third Round requirements. Most recently, the Borough entered into a Settlement Agreement with the Fair Share Housing Center, a Supreme Court-designated interested party, to declare its compliance with the Mount Laurel Doctrine and Fair Share Housing Act of 1985 for the Prior Round (1987-1999) and Third Round (1999-2025) affordable housing obligations.

Metuchen was designated a "Town Center" under the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan by the New Jersey State Planning Commission in 1997, and a "Transit Village" by the New Jersey Department of Transportation in 2003. The Middlesex County Planning Board recognizes the Borough as a "Town Center" in the Middlesex County Strategic Plan, which was submitted to the State planning Commission for Plan Endorsement. From 2004 to 2007 the Borough participated through Middlesex County, in SDRP Cross-Acceptance review regarding proposed revisions to the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan.

The Borough has been the successful recipient of several grants in the past and since the last Master Plan Reexamination designed to advance smart growth planning in tangible ways:

- In 2007, the Borough received a "Smart Future Planning" Grant to conduct a public outreach process and prepare a plan and guidelines for a zoning overlay to downtown Metuchen.

- In 2009, using a “Reconnecting Your Community” Smart Growth Grant, the Borough took a comprehensive look at all circulation and related issues in the Borough and adopted a Circulation Plan element for the Master Plan.
- In 2010, using an ANJEC grant, the Borough prepared and adopted a plan for the Middlesex Greenway Extension that provides a vision and strategic plan for linking Metuchen’s Town Center to the Dismal Swamp and promoting redevelopment of former industrial and commercial sites along its route.
- In 2014, Together North Jersey , a consortium of North Jersey Sustainable Communities, prepared a Middlesex Greenway Access Plan as part of a Local Demonstration Project funded by a U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant with additional funding from project partners.
- In 2015, using a “Get Active NJ” grant, the Borough amended the Open Space and Recreation Plan to include a Complete Streets Policy as it relates to open space and recreation with the goal of promoting health and wellness.
- In 2016, the Borough was selected to participate in the New Jersey Department of Transportation’s Office of Bicycle and Pedestrian Programs Local Technical Assistance Program to develop a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan scheduled for completion by the end of the year.

## 2.2 The Region

The Borough of Metuchen covers 2.8 square miles in north-central Middlesex County, and is entirely situated within the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP) Metropolitan Planning Area (PA1). A highly urbanized, dense, metropolitan region, this planning area is typified by larger urban centers, a network of smaller, pre-WW II communities and post WW II suburban patterns. A key factor for Metuchen is the recognition that it is located entirely within a PA1 region and must manage all of the issues inherent to such a location, including aging housing and building stock, aging infrastructure and community facilities, and changes in regional employment and retail markets. As such, it is critical for the long-term stability of Metuchen to retain and reinforce those qualities which make it a desirable and unique place: an active and dynamic mixed-use downtown, stable residential neighborhoods, diverse housing markets and high overall quality of life.

## 2.3 Land Use

As noted in the 2000 and 2006 *Reexamination Reports*, Metuchen is a mature community with little vacant land available. As such, future growth will continue to occur primarily through adaptive reuse, occasional infill and redevelopment of previously developed parcels.

Metuchen has recognized the need to maintain its compact town center in order to better manage and maintain its regional image, quality of life for its residents, traffic, parking and economic development. The erosion of downtown retail activities that began in the early

1990s has continued due to lack of anchor(s). During its peak economic period, downtown was anchored by a 16,000 square foot multi-department clothing retailer located at the corner of Main and New Streets, two pharmacies, a smaller grocery in the A & P Liquor store space and a mid-size (26,000 square foot) supermarket located west of Lake Avenue. Two proposals in the 1990s by the former supermarket to expand by relocating outside of the downtown, along with satellite retail space, met with mixed reactions and were ultimately rejected by the community. Ultimately, the former supermarket moved to a Route One location just outside of town. Prior Master Plans and subsequent ordinances attempted to attract an “in-town” grocery as an anchor by limiting the size of a downtown supermarket to below 40,000 square feet and only permitting this use within a Mixed-Use Neighborhood containing a mix of other uses including residential.

In 2014, the Borough adopted an ordinance amending the Land Development Ordinance to establish a Downtown Gateway Overlay Zone in the B-3 Office Business District, B-4 Restricted Business District and D-1 Downtown Development District. The Downtown Gateway Overlay Zone was established to promote development of a supermarket as an anchor use for the downtown, to leverage significant public and private investment in the proposed public plaza, parking structure, redevelopment of the Pearl Street parking lot, and to act as a catalyst for reinvestment and improved connectivity along the New Street corridor between Main Street and Lake Avenue.

In June 5, 2014, Metuchen adopted a Master Plan Amendment to address the changing circumstances in the downtown including several new policies to promote downtown reinvestment. The Master Plan Amendment recommended applying the recommendations from the Parking Authority’s Downtown Parking Study prepared by Nelson\Nygaard Consulting Associates Inc. to properties located within the B-1 Central Business District, B-3 Office Business District and D-1 Downtown Development District which form the core of the downtown business and mixed-use zones. The properties in these zones are most proximate to and well served by the Train Station, bus stops, numerous Metuchen Parking Authority lots and the recently completed parking structure on the Pearl Street lot, thus allowing such properties to most effectively take advantage of the recommendations from the Downtown Parking Study.

These recently adopted Master Plan policies were targeted to help stimulate interest and “unlock” the latent value of properties that are too small or otherwise constrained to make it unfeasible to construct both a building and the required on-site parking. In such situations, the required on-site parking on the property itself acts as an effective constraint to redevelopment. The Borough wanted to maximize the benefits of public investment in the Pearl Street parking structure by promoting infill development on properties located within 1,250 feet (approximately equivalent to a five-minute walk) by utilizing Payment in Lieu of Parking (PILOP) for up to 100 percent of required parking.

The 2014 Master Plan parking policies were implemented by enacting ordinances in 2015. The ordinances reduced the minimum parking requirements by 50 percent and instituted a Payment in Lieu of Parking (PILOP) provision allowing uses that are short of required parking

to pay the Metuchen Parking Authority an established fee for each space needed. Metuchen's implemented "location efficient" parking policies have been recognized by statewide organizations as some of the most progressive Smart Growth policies in New Jersey.

The Borough has a longstanding policy of promoting downtown housing. As a result, the number of housing units in the downtown core and immediately surrounding area have steadily increased over the last 30 years through adaptive reuse, upper story additions, and redevelopment. Several larger scale mixed-use commercial and residential redevelopment and infill projects are now under construction within Metuchen's Downtown Business Districts.

Recent Downtown projects include the Parking Authority's Pearl Street parking lot redevelopment, a Whole Foods Market which will serve as a retail anchor, and a 750 space parking deck adjacent to a new public plaza. A new plaza will be strategically located as a high quality gathering place and activity anchor to further revitalize Main Street. Designed as a town square, the plaza will have textured paved streets and sidewalks designed as a "shared space," which will have the flexibility to be closed off to vehicular traffic and allow the space to expand for larger public events.

The presence of these larger scale national retail tenants with highly recognizable brands will act as an anchor and help improve the overall business climate for attracting and recruiting other regional and independent retailers, including those who will only locate in or near a retail center with a strong and reputable anchor.

## **2.4 Economic Development**

Over the past 30 years, the Borough has focused on improving its economic base by coordinating and facilitating revitalization efforts in and around the downtown. Metuchen has seen reinvestment in terms of façade improvements, conversions of upper floor warehouse space to apartments, and infill construction. A strong demand for downtown housing has fueled new construction for multi-story apartment buildings, thereby strengthening the local base for downtown retail and increasing tax ratables.

In 1989, the Borough eliminated retail uses in numerous outlying zoning districts in an effort to concentrate retail in the downtown core along Main Street. This single policy most likely prevented the "strip malling" of Metuchen during the past 25 years. However, the community has time-tested experience demonstrating that the revitalization of Main Street will not necessarily result from a primarily defensive economic development strategy that attempts to protect Main Street. While Metuchen has implemented several components found in downtown revitalization programs, the institution of a formal Main Street management program involving a Special Improvement District (SID) has only recently been adopted.

In 2016, the Borough adopted an ordinance enabling the creation and designation of a Special Improvement District (SID) within a downtown Central Business District (CBD). The goals of the SID include:

- Beautification, cleanliness, maintenance and design standards



- Marketing, advertising, public relations and events
- Business recruitment and retention
- Coordination of downtown activities and clearinghouse for information
- Integration of new developments with existing business district

The rate of unemployment in Metuchen has been on average lower than State or County unemployment levels according to the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development. In 2015, Metuchen had a labor force estimate of 7,600 with an annual unemployment rate of 3.7%, whereas the State and County had an unemployment rates of 5.6% and 5.0%, respectfully. During the Great Recession, peak annual unemployment for Metuchen reached 8.8% in 2009. Pre-recession unemployment levels for Metuchen held steady around 5% in 2006-2007.

Of the 6,296 Metuchen residents employed in the civilian labor force in 2014, 36% were in Professional, Scientific, and Technical Services (11.3%), Educational Services (12.6%), or Health Care and Social Assistance (12.5%) industries. These three main industries have consistently been the main employment industries over the past decade.

## 2.5 Transportation

Perhaps the greatest challenge confronting Metuchen’s development capacity are the constraints imposed on its transportation infrastructure by current patterns of circulation. The Borough recognizes that a certain level of traffic is inherent to being a central place that also serves the surrounding Edison Township, which has grown considerably in the last 30 years. Metuchen acts as an important hub along the Northeast Corridor rail line, but bears an inordinate amount of regional traffic impact.

In 2009, the Borough adopted a Circulation Plan Element for the Master Plan by using a “Reconnecting Your Community” Smart Growth Grant to take a comprehensive look at all circulation related issues. The Circulation Plan focused on several traffic and mobility issues and included an existing conditions assessment, a public education and visioning component, and a complete circulation plan that considers all modes of travel, including an analysis of transit opportunities. Specific implementation items in the Circulation Plan include recommendations in several different areas:

- I-287 Interchange Upgrade
- Proposed Trail Connections and Middlesex Greenway Expansion
- Expanding Metuchen Commuter Shuttle Route
- Traffic Intersection and Signal Improvements
- Traffic Calming and Pedestrian Safety Improvements
- Station Area Improvements
- Downtown Streetscape Improvements
- Proposed “Missing Link” Roadway Connections
- Parking and Commuter Parking Structures

In 2013, the Borough adopted a Complete Streets Policy to enable safe access so pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across public streets. The benefits of the Policy were many and aligned with the goals of the Circulation Plan Element and the Recreation and Open Space Master Plan Element. Some of these key benefits included: providing connections to bicycling and walking trip generators such as employment, education, residential, recreation, retail services and public facilities, thus promoting healthy lifestyles; and, improving safety for pedestrians, bicyclists, children, older citizens, non-drivers, the mobility challenged, those that cannot afford a car or individuals that choose to live car free. Moreover, the Borough's Complete Streets Policy further aligned with the goals of the 2013 Middlesex County Transportation Master Plan and the New Jersey Department of Transportation's Complete Streets Policy. This multi-jurisdictional alignment of complete street policies is critical to a municipality bisected by a New Jersey State highway. These goals included the promotion of an adequate and safe bicycle and pedestrian system that supports both mobility and recreation, the protection of the environment, and addressing energy conservation and climate change impacts on transportation.

In 2014, the Parking Authority of the Borough completed a Downtown Parking Study and Parking Management Plan that examined "Transformative" and "Supportive Strategies" to create a new approach to parking management and the downtown parking experience. The purpose of these strategies were to support the train station/provide commuter parking; generate a fair return to the citizens of Metuchen for the use of public property and to support the downtown economy/community. Recommendations included downtown zoning be amended to reduce minimum parking requirements, set maximum parking requirements and incentivize sharing of parking.

The Borough is currently developing a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan to comprehensively identify opportunities to create, enhance, and expand walking and bicycling facilities throughout the Borough. The plan will advance Metuchen's vision of an active friendly community and define a bicycle and pedestrian network, linking together key destinations that will encourage more people – of all ages and abilities – to choose healthy transportation. The plan is expected to be completed by 2016.

The Metuchen Parking Authority is also currently undertaking a way-finding project, which entails the development of a new signage and wayfinding system for the downtown area. The signage would highlight gateways within the community and add to the overall pedestrian and bicycle friendliness in Metuchen.

## **2.6 Population**

The Borough's population declined steadily between 1970 and 1990 and had marginal growth from 1990 to 2000. According to the 2010 US Census, the population of Metuchen increased 5.7% from 2000 levels, from 12,840 to 13,574. This is still well below historic population levels where population reached 16,031 in 1970.

In 2010, approximately 43% of Metuchen residents were between the ages of 25 and 54, with the median age being 41. Approximately 26% of Metuchen residents were below the age of 19. A total of 1,879 residents or nearly 14% of the population were 65 or older.

Exhibit 1  
Population and Age Cohorts (2010 US Census)

	Number	Percentage
<b>Population</b>	13,574	100%
Male	6,544	48.2%
Female	7,030	51.8%
<b>Age</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>
Under 5 years	458	411
5 to 9 years	495	454
10 to 14 years	475	449
15 to 19 years	417	356
20 to 24 years	271	232
25 to 29 years	318	325
30 to 34 years	387	431
35 to 39 years	498	534
40 to 44 years	546	603
45 to 49 years	543	594
50 to 54 years	512	586
55 to 59 years	457	511
60 to 64 years	388	444
65 to 69 years	250	277
70 to 74 years	182	231
75 to 79 years	146	188
80 to 84 years	113	206
85 years and over	88	198

Source: 2010 Census of Population and Housing

In the year 2010, there were 5,243 households in Metuchen, with a total household population of 13,573. This represents an increase of about 5% in households from the year 2000, which had 4,985 households. The average household size in 2010 was 2.59, which is almost consistent with 2000, which had an average of 2.57.

Exhibit 2  
Household Type and Relationship (2010 US Census)

Total	13,574
In households:	13,573
householder:	3,744
Male	2,635
Female	1,109
Spouse	3,055

Household Relationship	
Child Under 18 years	3,129
Brother or Sister	86
Grandchild	142
Parent	136
Other Relatives of Householder	190
non-relatives	449
In non-family households:	1,499
householders living alone	1,254
Male householder	588
Female householder	911
In group quarters:	1
Institutionalized population	0
Non-institutionalized population	1

Source: 2010 Census of Population and Housing

Total householders in 2010 increased 4% from 2000 from 3,593 to 3,744. A greater portion of females are householders in 2010 than in 2000. In 2010, about 30% of householders are female, which is a 6% increase from 2000.

Exhibit 3  
Median Household Income (2014 ACS 5-Year Estimates)

Income & Benefits (2014 inflation-adjusted dollars)	Households	Margin of Error	Percent	Percent Margin of Error
Less than \$10,000	162	+/-79	3.1%	+/-1.5
\$10,000 to \$14,999	86	+/-58	1.7%	+/-1.1
\$15,000 to \$24,999	181	+/-54	3.5%	+/-1.0
\$25,000 to \$34,999	233	+/-67	4.5%	+/-1.3
\$35,000 to \$49,999	295	+/-86	5.7%	+/-1.6
\$50,000 to \$74,999	764	+/-160	14.8%	+/-2.9
\$75,000 to \$99,999	595	+/-120	11.6%	+/-2.3
\$100,000 to \$149,999	1,171	+/-160	22.7%	+/-3.2
\$150,000 to \$199,999	731	+/-130	14.2%	+/-2.5
\$200,000 or more	931	+/-148	18.1%	+/-2.8
<b>Median household income (dollars)</b>	<b>\$109,351</b>	<b>+/-5,193</b>	<b>(X)</b>	<b>(X)</b>

Source: 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Approximately 49 percent of households earned between \$50,000 and \$149,999; and, median household income was \$109,351 in 2010.

## 2.7 Housing

In 2016, the Borough entered into a Settlement Agreement with the Fair Share Housing Center (FSHC), a Supreme Court-designated interested party, to declare its compliance with the Mount Laurel Doctrine and Fair Share Housing Act of 1985 for the Prior Round (1987-1999) and Third Round (1999-2025) affordable housing obligations. A Fair Share Plan prepared as part of the settlement found that the Borough's Third Round present and prospective need is satisfied with three existing ordinances ("Parking in the Downtown Area," "Downtown Gateway Overlay District," and a 1992 overlay zone requiring affordable housing set-aside) and two overlay sites, known as the Safety Place site and the South Main Street site.

Metuchen has continued to provide a variety of new housing to meet the changing needs of its current residents and to respond to market demand. While 70% of the 2010 housing stock was in the form of single-family detached houses, the other 30% of housing units are in either attached homes or multi-family buildings (Exhibit 4).

According to the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, a total of 110 certificates of occupancy were issued from 2007 to 2015 for new housing units. This represents a decline of about two-thirds from the period of 2000 to 2006, which had 306 certificates of occupancy issued. This can be attributed to the Great Recession and the ensuing housing market crash of 2007-2009.

The annual number of certificates of occupancy issued has been on the rise since 2011, but not at the same pace as pre-recession levels. Between 2012 and 2015, the number of certificates issued has increased to an annual average of 17 through 2012 to 2015, while in 2009 to 2011 the annual average was only 7. Pre-recession levels for total annual certificates of occupancy peaked at 96 in 2002.

Exhibit 4  
Type of Housing Units by Structure (2014 ACS 5-Year Estimate)

Unit in Structure	Estimate	Margin of Error
1, detached	3,640	+/-186
1, attached	611	+/-126
2	319	+/-106
3 or 4	138	+/-58
5 to 9	182	+/-75
10 to 19	158	+/-64
20 to 49	8	+/-11
50 or more	233	+/-80
Mobile home	11	+/-16
Boat, RV, van, etc.	0	+/-19
<b>Total</b>	<b>5,300</b>	<b>+/-193</b>

According to 2014 American Community Survey 5-year estimates, about 40% of households in Metuchen have one or fewer vehicles. The majority of these households with one vehicle or fewer occur in 1- to 2-person households.

Exhibit 5  
Household Size By Vehicles Available (2014 ACS 5-Year Estimate)

	Estimate	Margin of Error
Total:	5,149	+/-178
No vehicle available	252	+/-86
1 vehicle available	1,856	+/-244
2 vehicles available	2,234	+/-198
3 vehicles available	632	+/-107
4 or more vehicles available	175	+/-58
1-person household:	1,240	+/-178
No vehicle available	175	+/-67
1 vehicle available	960	+/-158
2 vehicles available	101	+/-63
3 vehicles available	4	+/-7
4 or more vehicles available	0	+/-19
2-person household:	1,645	+/-214
No vehicle available	37	+/-28
1 vehicle available	502	+/-135
2 vehicles available	936	+/-151
3 vehicles available	143	+/-74
4 or more vehicles available	27	+/-29
3-person household:	926	+/-147
No vehicle available	13	+/-18
1 vehicle available	182	+/-80
2 vehicles available	467	+/-106
3 vehicles available	211	+/-72
4 or more vehicles available	53	+/-34
4-or-more-person household:	1,338	+/-108
No vehicle available	27	+/-26
1 vehicle available	212	+/-89
2 vehicles available	730	+/-106
3 vehicles available	274	+/-77
4 or more vehicles available	95	+/-46

Source: 2014 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

## 2.8 Open Space and Recreation

The 2006 Master Plan Re-examination identified Metuchen as having approximately 5.5 acres of parks and open space per 1,000 residents. As of today, that figure is closer to 7.2 acres of parks and open space per 1,000 residents and includes the first leg of the Middlesex Greenway and public school recreational areas. The Lehigh Valley Railroad right-of-way (Middlesex Greenway) continues to present the most significant opportunity for Metuchen to increase its open space inventory. It will increase the amount of open space within the Borough by 40%, provide a link to the Dismal Swamp in the Borough's northwest quadrant

and the Metuchen SportsPlex, as well as furthering the Borough's stated goal of fostering bicycle and pedestrian mobility. The Greenway would connect to a national greenway system linking local greenways into a unified, 3,000-mile route from Canada to Key West, known as the East Coast Greenway.

The 2010 Middlesex Greenway Extension Plan prepared through a public participatory process, examined a vision, concept plan, and implementation strategy to bring the Middlesex Greenway Extension to fruition. The Plan provides a vision and strategic plan for linking Metuchen's Town Center to the Dismal Swamp and promoting redevelopment of former industrial and commercial sites along its route.

The 2014 Middlesex Greenway Access Plan and Health Impact Assessment prepared as a project for the Together North Jersey Local Demonstration Project Program created an access plan for the Middlesex Greenway through Metuchen, Edison and Woodbridge in Middlesex County. The Plan proposed enhanced use of the greenway by "promoting partnerships and enhancing links to nearby public transit stops, existing and proposed activity centers, parks and recreation, employers, and other community destinations." The Plan also identified public health benefits of the greenway, economic development opportunities through tourism and promotion of the greenway itself.

In 2015, funded through a "Get Active NJ" grant, the Borough amended its Open Space Plan and Recreation Plan, which was last revised in 1992, to include a Complete Streets Policy as it relates to open space and recreation to promote health and wellness. Part of the plan update included an analysis of the Borough's open space and recreation inventory. The updated inventory found that the Borough of Metuchen contains approximately 124 acres of public open space and recreation areas, 64 acres privately owned open space and recreation areas, and 4 acres of privately owned open space & recreation areas that allow for public access. These calculations were based on GIS parcel information as obtained from the New Jersey Office of Information Technology – Office of GIS. This parcel data is a generalized representation of land ownership and, as such, is less precise than legal descriptions of land ownership. Area calculations from this data are for general planning purposes only.

The Recreation/Open Space Master Plan Element contains the following goals and objectives:

1. To provide adequate and accessible active and passive recreation areas for use by Borough residents and others throughout the region.
2. To provide for safe accessible neighborhood playgrounds for the youth of the Borough.
3. To increase the number, size, type and variety of open space and recreational opportunities for the residents of the Borough.
4. To provide additional open space parcels with appropriate vegetation necessary to reduce noise, traffic and air pollution.
5. To provide for the establishment of alternate transportation modes (bicycle /pedestrian) to reduce traffic, noise and air pollution.

6. To provide for pedestrian and bicycle connections between the various recreation and open space parcels in the Borough, thereby providing additional recreational opportunities to all residents.
7. To utilize the unique characteristics of all specific open space parcels to further the goals and objectives of the Borough Master Plan for environmental, land use and circulation issues.
8. To enable safe access so all pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across public streets which provide public access to open space and recreation.
9. Open space and improvement of conditions for walking encourages exercise and an active community which promotes public health benefits.
10. To complete the extension of the Middlesex Greenway to the Dismal Swamp which will significantly expand the quality and quantity of open space and water (Dismal Brook) accessible to the public.

## **2.9 Utilities, Public Facilities and Services**

The Borough's infrastructure is fully developed and has been maintained and upgraded, within the resources available, to support projected development and growth primarily in the downtown area. The Borough maintains approximately 67 miles of storm and sanitary sewers and three-sewage-pumping stations. Water, storm water and sewage systems are well maintained and capable of handling increased demand.

Recent downtown development and infill has spurred renewed reinvestment in on-site and off-site improvements to infrastructure. Cleaning of the storm sewers that flow into the Dismal Swamp occurred as the result of an off-site improvement that was part of an approval for a Whole Foods Market in the downtown, which itself had a state-of-the-art drainage system with an underground retention basin. Improving the storm drainage capacity along the Main and Lake greenway drainage system has been recognized by the Borough since the 2006 Master Plan Reexamination as an important consideration. In 2006, the Borough adopted a new storm water management plan in compliance with NJDEP regulations.

## **2.10 Schools**

The Metuchen Public School System manages three elementary schools and a high school and consists of 2,109 students with a student-teacher ratio of 12.66:1. It is expected that the existing school facilities can accommodate any future growth that could occur in the Borough.

## **2.11 Community Character**

Metuchen has always been a community concerned with preserving its unique character. Over the years, the goals and objectives of the Master Plan have been elaborated and characterized to be principally focused on preservation: preservation of the Borough's essentially residential character, maintaining the integrity of its neighborhoods, and ultimately, its desirability as a community in which to live.



The Borough's Master Plan and Land Development Ordinance contain guidelines and standards specifically devised to protect and enhance community character. Metuchen's housing policies have been amended and adopted to respond to, increased concern over preserving the character and quality of each established neighborhood. Metuchen's special community character is based on a diverse mix of housing types, lot sizes, house and lot characteristics, and neighborhood patterns. Within some neighborhoods, a key element contributing to this character is a neighborhood pattern composed of a variety of lot sizes, house and lot characteristics, and housing types. In other neighborhoods, this character is derived from a pattern of consistent lot sizes, house and lot characteristics, and housing types.

These guidelines and standards have been carefully implemented by the Planning and Zoning Boards with each development application. Attention to detail is given to each application, and in particular, applicants of infill development are typically asked to provide evidence and testimony to address how their application relates to specific provisions of the Master Plan, including an analysis of how their proposed development will relate to the existing homes in the vicinity in regards to lot size, lot configuration, house size, setbacks, building heights and massing.

In 2008, the Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee was formed to advise the Mayor and Council on steps to strengthen Metuchen's commitment to historic preservation. One of the key goals of the Committee is to explore the development of a Metuchen Historic Preservation Ordinance to formally recognize and protect the town's distinctive historic and architectural character.

In July of 2016, the Borough Council authorized the submission of the nomination of the Woodwild Park/Middlesex Ave Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places. Homes in the proposed historic district were constructed during the period between 1890 and 1940 and represent major American architectural influences of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These homes have architectural styles that range from Queen Anne, Colonial Revival, Craftsman, Tudor Revival, Foursquare and Eclectic houses with stylistic mixtures of Colonial Revival, Dutch Colonial Revival, Tudor Revival and American Foursquare. Additionally, Woodwild Park, the Borough Improvement League, the Metuchen Club, the Metuchen Library, the Metuchen Inn, and St. Luke's Episcopal Church are all located in the center of the proposed historic district along Middlesex Avenue and were prominent in Metuchen's social, educational, and religious life.

All of the Borough's community design efforts have promoted a desirable development pattern with a special focus on creating higher-quality design, a specific sense of place, and greater real estate value within the community and specifically the compact, mixed-use downtown core.

## **2.12 Land Use Patterns in Adjacent Municipalities**

Edison Township completely surrounds Metuchen. Generally, land use policies in both municipalities are consistent with respect to adjoining areas. In addition, the two

municipalities are separated along Metuchen's eastern border by the Northeast Corridor, which both buffers adjacent land uses and creates a physical discontinuity between the two towns.

An aging suburbanizing municipality, Edison is now facing the same type of growth opportunities, through infill and redevelopment that Metuchen has been managing for 30 years. As such, Edison has emerging opportunities to re-center its development pattern and create new mixed-use nodes that can lessen the traffic pressure on Metuchen's downtown, improve the potential for mass transit and improve vehicular traffic conditions in the region generally.

### 3. Changes in Assumptions, Policies, Objectives and Recommendations

Since the Borough's latest Reexamination Report was adopted in 2006, there have been a few changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives of the Master Plan, many of which are reflected in the preceding sections of this report:

- The Borough took a comprehensive look at all circulation and related issues in the Borough and adopted a Circulation Plan element for the Master Plan.
- The Borough adopted a Complete Streets policy to enable safe access so all pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transportation riders of all ages and abilities are able to safely move along and across public streets.
- The Borough amended its Open Space and Recreation element of the Master Plan to include a Complete Streets Policy as it relates to open space and recreation with the goal of promoting health and wellness.
- The Borough adopted a Master Plan Amendment to address the changing circumstances in the downtown including several new policies to promote downtown reinvestment, including a Downtown Gateway Overlay Zone.
- The Borough conducted a downtown parking study and instituted a Payment in Lieu of Parking (PILOP) provision allowing uses that are short of required parking to pay the Metuchen Parking Authority an established fee for each space needed.
- The Borough continued its participation, through Middlesex County in the 3rd round of State Development and Redevelopment Plan cross-acceptance.
- Borough adopted an ordinance in 2016 enabling the creation and designation of a Special Improvement District (SID) within a downtown Central Business District (CBD).
- Amendments to the *Land Development Ordinance* continued to address the design of additions to single-family housing to preserve the community character of homes in Metuchen's neighborhoods.
- The Borough prepared a Fair Share Plan and entered into a Settlement Agreement with the Fair Share Housing Center to satisfy its obligations of the Mount Laurel doctrine and Fair Housing Act of 1985.
- In July of 2016, the Borough Council authorized the submission of the nomination of the Woodwild Park/Middlesex Ave Historic District to the National Register of Historic Places.

The majority of the assumptions, policies, goals and objectives that formed the basis for the 2006 *Reexamination Report* are still valid to varying degrees in 2016, with the exception of the issues that have been addressed earlier in this report. There are certain issues that continue to be of concern or have arisen since 2006 that should be reviewed and studied further and which constitute the recommendations of this Reexamination:

- The Borough should prepare a Vision Plan with community involvement that establishes where Metuchen is today, where it wants to go in the future; laying out a roadmap for getting there. The Vision Plan would address the downtown area, neighborhood business districts, areas in need of redevelopment, and parks and public space, among other key topics.
- The Borough should evaluate the impacts to the Southwest Gateway plan of the potential new interchange at Route 27 and I-287. The Borough should continue to pursue a full interchange at this location and improve the visual quality/image of the route 27 corridor within the remaining redevelopment and infill sites in the Southwest Gateway District.
- The Borough should consider whether additional measures to control “over-sized” homes relative to the neighborhood context are needed, and consider whether current provisions in the Land Development Ordinance should be reexamined. This is not unique to Metuchen and is a condition many older residential neighborhoods are facing throughout the state.
- The Borough should continue to explore appropriate types of redevelopment for the former industrial Oakite Site and Gulton Tract as determined by recent Area in Need of Investigations.
- The Borough should pursue the adoption and implementation of the Fair Share Plan to satisfy its obligations of the Mount Laurel doctrine and Fair Housing Act of 1985.

Redevelopment Plans pursuant to the *Local Redevelopment and Housing Law*:

In 2015, the Borough conducted three Area in Need of Redevelopment Investigations to establish “Non-Condensation Redevelopment Areas” for the Oakite Site, Gulton Tract and Metuchen Firehouse. Redevelopment Plans have not been prepared and adopted for these three sites as of this time.