

BOROUGH OF METUCHEN

COUNTY OF MIDDLESEX

STATE OF NEW JERSEY

MASTER PLAN REEXAMINATION REPORT

Introduction

The Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) requires a periodic reexamination of each municipality's master plan and development regulations. The first such reexamination was to be completed by August 1, 1982; the next reexamination, by August 1, 1988. The Borough of Metuchen adopted the latest Land Use Plan and Housing Elements March 17, 1983. The document which follows shall constitute the second such reexamination report.

The MLUL requires the master plan reexamination report to comment on the following issues, N.J.S.A. 40:550-89(1-d):

- a. The major problems and objectives relating to the 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 material resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclables 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.

Metuchen is a stable; developed community. As such the overall goals of the Borough remain essentially the same in 1988 as 1983. The 1967 Master Plan for the Borough of Metuchen espoused a number of policies which were endorsed by the 1976 Amendment to the Master Plan and the 1983 Land Use Plan Element.

Metuchen is a Borough of a generally declining and aging population. The 1980 census population of 13,762 is estimated to be 13,063 in 1986. In the analyses of research done by the Donnelly Marketing Information Service, the declining population trend is likely to continue, but may be softened by the baby boom, as the aging housing stock is turned over to younger families. The housing turnover rate ranged from 7.5 percent to 9.9 percent in 1988 and with the aging population the rate could increase even further in the future. In addition fewer families moving into the Borough could tend to have more school aged children to balance the declining school population.

Goals and Objectives

The 1983 Land Use Plan Element by Frost Associates, found that Metuchen, as a developed municipality has a principal goal of preservation. The goals and objectives of the 1983 Land Use Plan Element are as follows:

1) Preservation of the Borough's essentially residential character, of the integrity of its neighborhoods, of the viability of its central business district, of levels of municipal services, of fiscal stability of ultimately, of its desirability as a community in which to live. Preservation must be balanced with the necessity of an expanding tax base that alleviates an unreasonable tax burden to provide consistent levels of service.

2) Traffic and parking problems already exist in Metuchen, and in recognition of this, any development or redevelopment of the central business district should not intensify traffic problems beyond acceptable levels and should be undertaken in conjunction with adequate parking provisions.

3) Land uses to be encouraged in any development or redevelopment strategy should be appropriate to the area in which they are proposed, should represent an economic benefit to community, and should serve a valid market to insure the likelihood of their realization.

4) Preservation of areas of environmental sensitivity, but surrounding land uses should be planned to ensure maximum public benefit from the resultant open space.

5) Providing opportunities to meet the housing needs of Metuchen residents and work force should be encouraged. In addition housing should be considered as a means of creating an expanding market for existing businesses in Metuchen.

The 1967 Master Plan for the Borough of Metuchen, prepared by Candeub Fleissy and Associates espoused a number of policies which were endorsed by the 1976 Amendment to the Master Plan and the 1983 Land Use Plan Element, and with minor modifications remain valid in 1988.

1) To provide a variety of housing types to serve the residents of the Borough.

2) To preserve and enhance the residential character of the Borough.

3) To maintain the Borough's physical and visual identity in the region.

4) To improve the competitive position of Metuchen's downtown area.

5) To encourage new commercial development, but not at the cost of blighting residential areas.

6) To improve the efficiency of the major street network in Metuchen.

7) To provide quick and convenient access to the downtown area for the people who desire to use the facilities of the business district.

8) To develop and sustain a compact, efficient, and viable shopping area within the central business district.

9) To improve the overall appearance of the business district.

10) To provide a circulation system which brings into balance the needs of the pedestrian and the needs of cars, trucks and buses.

Generally, these goals and objectives for the Borough of Metuchen are still valid today, though specific strategies for implementation have been refined in the past twenty one years. The Borough of Metuchen continues to direct it's development and redevelopment with a commitment to the broad, multifaceted goal of preservation.

A common land use problem noted in the 1983 Land Use Plan Element is the extent to which non-residential land uses encroach upon residential areas. In recognition of this problem, a new land use plan and accompanying land development ordinance that specifically address changes in industrial uses and these non-residential impacts on residential areas, is currently being reviewed with an expected approval in 1988. The Draft Land Development Ordinance has reviewed and substantially incorporated the comprehensive land development of Metuchen.

There remains a continued commitment to downtown redevelopment, as noted in the goals and objectives on two downtown projects....directly address the needs with necessary mix of residential. In both cases the Borough is an active participant in the development plan, bringing Metuchen closer to its goals of improvements relating to Metuchen's downtown central business district, and providing a variety of housing for Metuchen's residents and work force, as well as affordable housing units and funding.

The 1983 Housing Plan Element by Frost Associates area as follows:

1) To improve and preserve the existing housing stock.

2) To promote, within the next two decades, the development of 300-500 units of new housing of varying types and sizes.

3) To stimulate the development of such housing in locations convenient to shopping, the railroad station, and employment centers.

4) To permit such housing to be constructed at densities high enough to encourage private investment but within the density range already permitted under the Borough's zoning (6-23 dwelling units per acre).

5) To foster the development of one hundred (100) or more units of subsidized family and elderly housing by non-profit sponsors, should funding be made available in the future.

Specific recommendations to implement each of the above Housing Plan Element goals are presented in the succeeding paragraphs.

1) To improve and preserve the existing housing stock.

Continue to target municipal funds toward appropriate capital improvements in neighborhoods needing street repairs or reconstruction, sidewalks, sanitary sewers and drainage improvements in an effort to encourage private investment in home improvement.

2) To promote the development of 300-500 units of new housing of varying types and sizes.

Select those vacant or redevelopable parcels which could be rezoned for residential purposes and institute appropriate zoning controls which would provide the necessary incentives to attract developers. Evaluate each of the various development schemes for the CBD proposed in the Metuchen 2001 Study in terms of their viability with the objective of selecting for implementation one which will provide needed housing without undermining other goals of the Land Use Plan Element.

Review the zoning on undeveloped portions of the northwest quadrant of the Borough and specifically evaluate whether various residential development alternatives would have equivalent or fewer environmental impacts on the Dismal Brook area than the industrial development for which the northwest quadrant is currently zoned.

Analyze the existing sewerage system, especially the main artery along Middlesex Avenue, to diagnose its capacity to receive additional flows and to prescribe necessary improvements.

Evaluate the existing traffic circulation network within the Borough to determine the effects additional residential traffic would have and what improvements would be required to accommodate it.

Seek public funding for the necessary traffic, parking and infrastructural improvements in anticipation of new residential development.

3) To stimulate the development of such housing in locations convenient to shopping, the railroad station and employment centers.

Focus promoting residential development/redevelopment feasible in the northwest quadrant and in the central business district considering the potential for developing a comprehensive pedestrian circulation network which will minimize dependency on the automobile and encourage the conservation of energy.

4) To permit new housing to be constructed at densities high enough to encourage private investment but within the density range already permitted under the Borough's zoning (6-23 dwelling units per acre for multi-family housing).

Permit the highest densities of residential development in closest proximity to the central business district where redevelopment costs would be high. Relate permissible densities in the northwest quadrant to environmental limitations and site development costs.

5) To promote residential development that is consistent with the character, quality and value of the existing housing stock.

Encourage the construction of attached or semi-detached single family homes rather than apartments in areas which abut single family residences.

6) To foster the development of one hundred (100) or more units of family and elderly housing by non-profit sponsors, should funding for subsidies be made available in the future.

Ensure that appropriate vacant parcels are zoned in a manner which would permit such construction.

Changes in State and County Policies

Several important changes, at the State level, potentially with significant consequences for local planning, have occurred in New Jersey's regulatory environment since 1983. Arguably, the most important is the Fair Housing Act N.J.S.A. 52:27D-301 et seq., enacted in 1985, which created the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH). COAH is responsible for determining each Municipality's "fair share" of affordable housing, and for evaluating proposed compliance strategies. COAH is also responsible for establishing all guidelines and criteria necessary for implementing the Fair Housing Act.

The methodology for estimating a municipality's fair share is set forth in COAH's substantive rules and regulations N.J.S.A. 5:92 et seq., which also define, the substantive contents of municipal housing elements. Municipalities are required to adopt a housing element, as a component of the master plan, by August 1, 1988.

A second important development in the State's regulatory environment can be found in the Freshwater Wetlands Protection act, which places stringent controls over development of non-costal wetlands. The Act which became effective on July 1, 1988 also defines transition areas of up to 150 feet to act as buffers between wetlands and proposed development. The impact of wetlands in Metuchen is minimal. There are only three areas of Metuchen that are considered wetlands and two of them are located in Borough owned parks.

Changes at the Local Level

The population of Metuchen has been declining and yet stable. Metuchen's population declined by just over 5 percent between 1980 and 1986 (Table 1).

Growth in the housing stock has been modest. Using residential building permit statistics, the housing stock had a net increase of 115 units between 1980 and 1986. Nearly all of the units built between 1980 and 1986 were single family detached residences. The demolition rate was high at 22 units (Table 2) as a result of continued growth in a developed community.

Table 1

POPULATION GROWTH 1980-86

US CENSUS 1980	NJ DOL 1984	NJ DOL 1985	NJ DOL 1986	ABSOLUTE CHANGE 1980-86	PERCENT CHANGE 1980-86
13,762	13,295	13,123	13,063	-699	5.01

Source: 1980 U.S. Census
New Jersey Department of Labor
Population Estimates of New Jersey

Table 2

	<u>RESIDENTIAL BUILDING PERMITS 1980-86</u>							-
	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986	1980-86
Single Family	7	3	3	7	8	84	26	135
2 to 4 Family							2	2
5 + Family								
Subtotal	7	3	0	7	8	84	28	137
Demolitions	3	0	1	1	3	1	13	22
Net Increase	4	0	-1	6	5	83	15	

Source: New Jersey Department of Labor
Residential Building Permits
1980 - 1986 Summaries

Findings

Metuchen is a stable developed community and as such the goals and objectives of the 1983 Land Use and Housing Plan remain valid.

In response to the Fair Housing Act Metuchen has:

1. Confirmed the basic assumption of the 1983 Housing Plan are still valid.
2. Taken additional steps to provide opportunity for affordable housing since 1983, i.e. the Lawler Tract Project, Section 411 of the Draft Land Development Ordinance, and the Balanced Housing Rehabilitation Grant application, etc.
3. The Borough is currently accessing whether or not to file a Housing Plan Element/Fair Share Plan with the Council on Affordable Housing.