

Reexamination Report
TOWNSHIP OF SPRINGFIELD

PLANNING BOARD
TOWNSHIP OF SPRINGFIELD
BURLINGTON COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

NOVEMBER 2005

Reexamination Report
TOWNSHIP OF SPRINGFIELD

Prepared pursuant to Article 3 (*N.J.S.A.* 40:55D-28)
of the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law

November 1, 2005

Adopted by the Springfield Township Planning Board

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A signed and sealed original is on file with the Township Clerk's office

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INTRODUCTION

The municipal Master Plan is a document, adopted by the Planning Board, which sets forth the policies for land use as envisioned by the municipality. The Master Plan is the principal document that addresses the manner and locations in which development, redevelopment, conservation or preservation occurs within a municipality. It is intended to guide the decisions made by public officials and those of private interests involving the use of land. Through its various elements, the Master Plan sets out a vision for the community in the coming years.

The Master Plan forms the legal foundation for the zoning ordinance and zoning map. New Jersey, among a handful of other states, specifically ties the planning of a community as embodied in the Master Plan with the zoning ordinance and zoning map. The zoning ordinance and map constitute the primary law governing the use of land at the local level. A zoning ordinance must be substantially consistent with the land use plan.

A Reexamination Report is a review of previously adopted master plans, amendments and local development regulations to determine whether the ideas and policy guidelines set forth therein are still applicable. The state land use law¹ requires that the Planning Board conduct a Reexamination at least every six years. Five specific topics are to be considered in the Reexamination Report. These are:

- 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.*

¹ New Jersey. 1975. Chapter 55D. The Municipal Land Use Law, *N.J.S.A. 40:55D-1 et. seq.*

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.²

This reexamination report addresses the first four of the required items. The last item is not relevant, since no redevelopment areas exist or are presently contemplated within the Township.

PLANNING HISTORY

In the past, the Planning Board has prepared various documents to guide the development and redevelopment of the Borough. A brief summary of the past Master Plan documents is provided below:

Master Plan History, 1967 - 1995

The Township's first Master Plan Studies were prepared by Herbert H. Smith in 1967. These studies documented the rural nature of the community and formed the basis for 1987 Master Plan, adopted on January 5, 1988. The 1987 Master Plan established eight broad goals and objectives for planning within the Township. These can be summarized as maintaining the rural character of the Township; providing a desirable place to live, work and play; preserving farmlands and natural areas; guiding development to appropriate locations; providing for a variety of land uses; ensuring that development is compatible with its surroundings, providing for efficient movement of people and traffic, and providing the opportunity for housing low and moderate income families.

² *N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89*

REEXAMINATION OF THE MASTER PLAN SPRINGFIELD TOWNSHIP

In 1993, the Township adopted a Master Plan Reexamination Report in accordance with N.J.A.C. 40:55D-89. The report reiterated the goals and objectives of the 1987 Master Plan, and added five new objectives focused on managing growth while preserving resources and providing a balance of land uses. Additionally, a goal statement was added in the 1993 Reexamination Report to clarify the Township's primary focus with regard to land use planning:

“The central goal of the Springfield Township Master Plan is to preserve and promote the viability of the local agricultural economy and the rural character which farms and farming lend to the township as a whole...”³

Master Plan History, 1996 - 1999

In 1996, the Township adopted a Reexamination Report and update to the Master Plan which included extensive analysis of existing land use, environmental factors, community facilities and services, farmland preservation and the relationship of the Master Plan with the planning documents of other jurisdictions. The stated mission of the 1996 Master Plan document was to

“further substantiate and build upon the accomplishments and intentions of Springfield Township to reasonably safeguard its rural agricultural character in a manner which is consistent with the findings and recommendations of the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan...”⁴

Under the 1996 Land Use Plan, the majority of the Township's lands were to be placed within the AR-3 district in recognition of the rural agricultural character prevailing throughout most of Springfield Township. The plan also recommended channeling the higher residential densities and non-residential development to specifically designated areas. In 1997, the Planning Board expanded on this approach by proposing a mandatory residential density transfer program (TDR program) for Springfield in accordance with the Burlington County TDR demonstration program authorized under the MLUL. However, the proposed TDR program was never implemented and was subsequently deleted from the Land Use Element in September 1999 due to a lack of funding for necessary infrastructure studies, and a change in political leadership.

2001 Land Use Element

³ Springfield Township, 1993 Master Plan Reexamination, adopted December 21, 1993

⁴ Township of Springfield, 1996 Land Use Plan Periodic Reexamination and Update Report, adopted January 21, 1997, Foreward-2

Following the adoption of a Reexamination Report in May, 2001, the Planning Board adopted a new Land Use Element in August 2001 that emphasized the importance of retaining and preserving farmland and recommended eliminating the large industrial and commercial zone districts found along highway corridors within the Township. The 2001 Land Use Element also recommended that a TDR program be considered again for the Township, and that viewshed corridors be established to protect scenic roads and highways, including the Route 206 and Route 68 corridors.

2003 Farmland Preservation Plan Element

In September, 2003, the Planning Board adopted a Farmland Preservation Plan (FPP) Element, that reiterated the primary planning mission of the Township as safeguarding its rural agricultural character, and noted that most of its lands are “not merely ‘undeveloped’ but are actively used for bona fide agricultural purposes.”⁵ The FPP also recommended that all policy decisions affecting the traffic and congestion along agricultural transportation routes be reviewed for negative impacts on agriculture.

MAJOR PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES AT THE TIME OF THE ADOPTION OF THE 2001 REEXAMINATION REPORT AND THE EXTENT TO WHICH THEY HAVE CHANGED

Farmland Preservation

In the 2001 Reexamination Report, it was noted that the lack of implementation of the transfer of development rights program (TDR) has slowed progress towards achieving greater farmland preservation. However, the report also indicated that farmland preservation efforts had continued in spite of the non-implementation of TDR and the fact that there had been development pressures in both the residential and non-residential sectors.

Currently there are over 5,600 acres of preserved farmland in Springfield. This includes preserved farms by Burlington County and by Springfield Township. This equates to approximately 30% of the 19,000 acres of land area within the Township. As of 2004 (when preserved farmland in the Township totaled 4,260 acres), Springfield had the second highest total of preserved farmland in Burlington County, and the fourth highest total of preserved farmland in New Jersey. Strong financial commitment, innovative

⁵ Springfield Township Farmland Preservation Plan Element, adopted September 2003, 2.

easement purchase options and solid strategic plans have placed Springfield Township and Burlington County among the statewide leaders in preserving agriculture.

To this day Springfield continues to actively acquire undeveloped tracts for open space and to identify farms for preservation. Mechanisms employed by the Township include fee simple purchase, purchase of development rights, donations and preservation of open space through the cluster subdivision provisions. Springfield supports these activities through tax revenue and through partnerships with the State of New Jersey Green Acres, and Burlington County.

The August, 2001 Land Use Element adopted by the Township underscores Springfield's focus on preserving farmland and rural character within the Township, stating that "preserving agriculture as a viable industry is the Township's top priority."⁶ The 2001 Land Use Element recommends limiting commercial and industrial zoning as side effects of this development negatively impact the agricultural community.

The 2003 Farmland Preservation Plan element also reiterates the primary planning mission of the Township as safeguarding its rural agricultural character and urges the Township to "accelerate the preservation of the remaining agricultural land base in the township."

Strip Highway Development

A primary concern raised in the 2001 Reexamination Report related to the potential implementation of the existing strip highway development zoning for the Route 68, Route 206, and Routes 680/545 corridors, the report emphasized "is contrary to State and County planning, and is inconsistent with sound planning principles." In addition to being incompatible with the existing agricultural and rural residential development along these corridors, the report noted that there was also no market demand for the extensive non-residential zoning recommended in the 1999 Land Use Plan amendment.

Land use changes proposed under the Township's 2001 Land Use Element in the Township limit strip development along highway corridors in favor of limited commercial development within existing neighborhood and community centers. The outdated zoning was withdrawn because it was illogical and inconsistent with the Township's desire to preserve the rural character of the Township. More specifically, the existing industrial and commercial zoning along highway corridors would have

⁶ 2001 Land Use Element, 1.

produced excessive commercial development (as much as 11 million sf.), required more housing, and services to support that development, and require sewer and water utilities that were not available nor planned for. The 2001 Land Use Element recommendation for limited commercial development within existing centers is intended to enhance open space and farmland preservation efforts in the Township's as well as to advance State and County planning efforts in this regard.

Preservation of Viewsheds

Related to the need for farmland preservation and for limiting strip highway and sprawl development, the 2001 Reexamination identified the need to establish viewsheds and preserve scenic roads within the Township, including the Route 206 and Route 68 corridors as a way to retain the rural character that identifies the farming community.

The 2001 Land Use Element includes several recommendations for preserving viewsheds along the Route 206 and Route 68 corridors, including transfer of development from one non-residentially zoned parcel to another, to move development out of the viewsheds. Additionally, buffering is recommended in the 2001 Plan to reduce the impact of new development and provide protection for farming operations.

CHANGES IN ASSUMPTIONS, POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES AT THE LOCAL, COUNTY AND STATE LEVELS

Cross-Acceptance and the 2004 Preliminary State Plan

The State Planning Act requires that the State Plan undergo revision and reoption at least once every three years. The Act also created a statewide planning process called "Cross-Acceptance" which requires government entities at all levels and the public to participate in the development of the State Plan and its periodic revision. A third round of Cross Acceptance process was triggered in April 2004, when the State Planning Commission released a Preliminary Plan proposing amendments to the 2001 State Plan.

Under the 2004 Preliminary State Plan, the statewide goals, strategies and policies as outlined in the 2001 State Plan remain fundamentally the same. However, the 2004 Plan proposes to reorganize the Plan to consolidate the goal statements and background sections for the existing eight goals under one statement and background section and to relocate policies and strategies under a specific goal. The State Plan Policy Map also remains fundamentally the same under the 2004 Preliminary Plan.

Burlington County Cross Acceptance Report

Under Cross Acceptance, Counties take the lead with their respective municipalities and residents in coordinating review and comments on the Preliminary Plan. In March, 2005, Burlington County completed a draft Cross-Acceptance Report, which provides a comparison of municipal and county planning documents with the State Plan and summarizes proposed changes to the State Plan.

No changes in the existing State Planning Area designation of PA-4 Rural Planning Area are recommended for Springfield Township under the County Cross-Acceptance report. Instead, the report indicates in its vision statement for Springfield that “agriculture is to remain as the predominant industry and land use through farmland preservation, municipal support for agriculture and right to farm.”⁷

Burlington County Strategic Planning – Route 206/Farmbelt Corridor

In 2001, the County’s Department of Economic Development and Regional Planning initiated a regional planning study focusing on the Route 206/Farmbelt corridor. The Route 206 corridor is considered the heart of the County’s farmbelt, where substantial public monies have been invested in farmland preservation efforts. The goal of this planning effort is to identify appropriate areas for development and appropriate areas for preservation, without comprising the public investment already made in farm preservation.⁸ The Township’s 2001 land use plan is consistent with and is intended to help support this strategic planning effort.

⁷ Burlington County, *Draft 2004/2005 Cross-Acceptance Report, Springfield Township*, March 28, 2005, vision statement

⁸ Burlington County, *Draft 2004/2005 Cross-Acceptance Report, Route 206 Corridor*, March 28, 2005, 2.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Zoning Density

The current three acre zoning in the agricultural zone is still an open invitation to developers. While the existing lot size requirements help protect groundwater through lower usage and increased infiltration, it results in the consumption of a great deal of prime farmland if and when developed. Additionally the need for a critical mass of farmland has always been important to agriculture and the intrusion of residential development will undermine that goal. For these reasons, lower density zoning is recommended accompanied by the creation of a transfer of development credit program (non-contiguous transfer) that will steer future growth away from the Township's farmlands and direct it to the Township's existing hamlet. This centers-based approach to growth is consistent with the principles espoused by the NJ State Planning Commission, the NJ State Plan and Smart Growth advocates.

Transfer of Development

A transfer of development credits program is ideal for Springfield Township because of the community's desire to preserve and protect its productive agricultural lands. The preponderance of environmental constraints provides additional reasons and support for transferring development out of its agricultural area into a more appropriate center.

It is recommended that new development in the Township be transferred and/or directed to the existing hamlets in the Township. These "receiving" hamlets are able to accommodate densities at approximately 1 unit per acre, although reduced lots sizes should be permitted wherever environmental conditions can support it. The "sending" area should include the entire Agricultural Zone, which has been divided into planning sectors to coincide with a specific receiving area. The division of the sectors is based upon a build-out analysis of the sending area, the capacity of the receiving areas and the likelihood that certain parcels will be developed and/or preserved.

Hamlet Development

Although the hamlets are suitable areas to accommodate growth, wastewater management can be an issue if density is too high. For development that is visually compatible with the existing homes in the receiving areas, and to minimize future problems associated with wastewater, the lot sizes should be as small as environmentally

possible, 1 acre, and the size of the homes should be limited to minimize the amount of wastewater and effluent in the small lots

Design Guidelines

The Township's desire to protect its rural character is best achieved by a combination of appropriate land use patterns, preservation and design guidelines. The built environment of a rural community has a unique vocabulary of materials, scale, window proportions and amenities. In Springfield, the rural hamlets are pedestrian oriented with moderately high densities of small and modest size homes. Commercial buildings resemble residential structures and are of similar scale, materials and proportions. The rural countryside is auto-oriented, has very low densities and everything from small to very large size homes. Of the few commercial and industrial buildings that exist in Springfield, they are typically box-like structures that are antithetical to the Township's residential and rural character. Design guidelines are an important way to ensure that the character of the Township is preserved and that future development occurs in a manner that reinforces and/or reinterprets the vernacular landscape.

The Township should consider crafting and adopting design guidelines as a high priority. The guidelines will direct the design of future development in receiving areas, protect the Township from undesirable franchise architecture and non-descript structures and provide valuable advice and recommendations for landowners and developers.