

Bethlehem Township
Hunterdon County, New Jersey

Master Plan Reexamination Report

Draft: March 2024

Adopted by the Bethlehem Township Planning Board on XXXXXXXX

Prepared by



Heyer, Gruel & Associates
Community Planning Consultants

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(732) 741-2900

BETHLEHEM TOWNSHIP

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The original of this report was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-12

Megan Stanley, AICP, PP #6278

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Bob Kenny, Committee Member
Paul Lenzi, Jr., Committee Member

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INTRODUCTION

This Report constitutes a Master Plan Reexamination Report for the Township of Bethlehem as defined by the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89). The purpose of the Reexamination Report is to review and evaluate the local Master Plan and Development Regulations on a periodic basis in order to determine the need for updates and revisions. The Municipal Land Use Law requires municipalities to perform a reexamination of their Master Plan and development regulations at least every 10 years. A reexamination, however, can occur as often as a municipality determines one is warranted. A municipality may choose to go through a reexamination process when there is a need to document recent noteworthy changes, or to plan for anticipated significant future changes in the community.

Bethlehem Township adopted its first Master Plan in 1984. The Township adopted subsequent Master Plan Elements and Reexamination Reports, with the most recent Reexamination Reports occurring in 2012 (one in February and another in July). The July 2012 Reexamination maintains the same “Major Land Development & Objectives” and “Extent of Reduction/Increase in Problems & Objectives” conditions as the February Report; however, it offers additional considerations to the “Significant Changes in Assumptions, Policies, and Objectives” for Bethlehem Township. Since the 2012 Master Plan Reexamination Reports, Bethlehem Township has adopted three Master Plan Elements, including the following:

- Highlands Element for Bethlehem Township Master Plan (2014)
- Highlands Land Use Ordinance for Bethlehem Township (2014)
- Housing Plan Element and Fair Share Plan (2020)

PERIODIC REEXAMINATION

New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89) requires the Master Plan Reexamination Report to contain the following:

- 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 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 Land Use 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 seq.) 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; and,
- F. The recommendations of the Land Use Board concerning locations appropriate for the development of public electric vehicle infrastructure, including but not limited to, commercial districts, areas proximate to public transportation and transit facilities and transportation corridors, and public rest stops; and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary or appropriate for the development of public electric vehicle infrastructure.

SECTION A. PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES IDENTIFIED IN PREVIOUS REPORTS

“The major problems and objectives relating to land development in the municipality at the time of the adoption of the last Reexamination Report.”

The goals and objectives of a Master Plan are intended to provide a policy framework for the Plan and to guide other activities in the Township that have an influence on land development. This framework is not presented in an order of hierarchy; rather, all items are important to the future growth and development within the Township of Bethlehem.

The February 2012 Master Plan Reexamination Report identified the following concerns as remaining relevant to the Township, many relating to Conformance with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP):

- The objectives and recommendation outlined in the 1999 and 2000 Reexamination Reports and the subsequent 2002 and 2004 Master Plan amendments had largely been held without implementation since the August 2004 adoption of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act.
- The RMP’s severe restrictions on non-residential development will minimize future commercial and industrial development and therefore hinder the Township’s efforts to provide for a variety of land uses. The restrictions on lot coverage for non-residential development prevent the Township from pursuing creative, clustered highway development, thereby encouraging a sprawling pattern of development. This is contrary to the Township’s goals to protect its rural character and conserve resources.
- There are very few lots, totaling 125 acres of land, which are eligible for development by the Highlands Act requirements; many of the unreserved lots already have a residence on site, reducing future development potential.
- The Township’s Research, Office & Manufacturing (ROM), Manufacturing (MFG), and General Commercial (GC) zoning districts continue to be restricted to a 3% impervious coverage, as established by the NJDEP rules with the passage of the Highlands Act.
- The Township’s affordable housing site is located within the Preservation Area, possibly delaying or compromising the construction of projections for organizations such as the ARC of Hunterdon County (supports and empowers individuals experiencing intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families).
- The details of the Highlands future Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program (i.e., offered as a compensatory tool in exchange for the RMP’s restrictive land use policies) had not yet been determined in Bethlehem Township.

- It was undecided within the Township if the lands of the Planning Area which had not been deed restricted for agriculture should conform to the RMP.

The February 2012 Master Plan Reexamination Report included the following recommendations:

- The Planning Board recommends that specific changes to the Bethlehem Township Master Plan be adopted, including modifications to the underlying objectives, policies and standards, all as outlined in detail, in the “Highlands Preservation and Planning Area Master Plan Element” approved by the Highlands Council as part of the Township’s Petition for Plan Conformance.
- The Planning Board recommends that the specific changes, as detailed in the document titled “Bethlehem Township Highlands Preservation and Planning Area Land Use Ordinance,” approved by the Highlands Council as part of the Township’s Petition for Plan Conformance be adopted by the Governing Body to implement the objectives, policies and standards as outlined in the Highlands Preservation and Planning Area Element of the Master Plan.
- The Planning Board recommends that the Township Committee adopt a Highlands Checklist Ordinance and revised zoning map to clearly indicate the revised zoning and submission requirements for consistent protection of Highlands Resources as required by the Highlands RMP.
- The Planning Board recommends the Environmental Commission review and approve the Highlands Environmental Resource Inventory, ERI, and submit the approved ERI to the Planning Board as a reference document.
- The municipality should continue to develop and adopt a wastewater management plan which will meet standards set forth by the NJDEP and the NJ Highlands Council.
- The municipality should continue to carefully monitor the developments in affordable housing regulation, Supreme Court decision and new legislation and be prepared to comply with the resulting new rules.
- The Farmland Preservation Plan may need to be updated to reflect new data and trends over the past five years or as required by SADC for grant funding.
- The Township’s land development regulations should be thoroughly reviewed to ensure the Planning Board of Adjustment have adequate documentation at the time of any application for development.
- The Planning Board recommends a solar ordinance and corresponding Master Plan policy language be adopted which would provide regulations and design standards for solar facility siting and development.

- Planning Board recommends Bethlehem Township Governing Body to adopt a new quarry ordinance and amended master plan language which will clearly identify the Township's vision for the operation, reclamation, and licensing of resource extraction activities and quarrying.
- Planning Board recommends the Bethlehem Township Preserved Lands Map, which was created as part of the Highlands conformance process, be adopted as an amendment to the Bethlehem Township Master Plan, specifically the Greenway and Open Space Plan and Recreation Plan Element.

The July 2012 Master Plan Reexamination Report added additional recommendations from the report written five months prior:

- Planning Board recommends that Solar and Wind master plan policy language be adopted simultaneously with the Highlands revisions and amendments to the master plan.
- Planning Board recommends that the Resource Extraction Ordinance and Quarry Licensing Ordinance be adopted.
- Planning Board recommends that the current Affordable Housing Residential Development Optional Development Alternative be rezoned as R-1, Single Family Residential Zoning District.
- Planning Board recommends that Block 26, Lots 2, 2.01, 2.02, 2.04, and 2.05 be reclassified from the Research Office Manufacturing (ROM) Zoning District to the Agricultural Residential Zoning District (AR).
- Planning Board recommends that Block 23, Lots 1, 2 and Block 24 Lots 1, 1.01 be reclassified from the Mountain Residential Zoning District to the General Commercial Zoning District (GC).
- Planning Board recommends reclassifying Block 17, Lot 1 to the Mountain Residential Zoning District (MR) from the General Commercial Zoning District (GC).
- Planning Board recommends that The Land Development Regulations Section 102-16 D be amended to add a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) of 0.2.
- Planning Board recommends that a revised Land Use Plan Map should be created and adopted as a part of the Land Use Plan Element of the Master Plan. Planning Board recommends that a Preserved and Publicly Owned Lands Map be created and made available in the municipal building.

SECTION B: REVIEW OF THE MAJOR PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES

“The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.”

Issues from the February 2012 Master Plan Reexamination Report

The objectives and recommendation outlined in the 1999 and 2000 Reexamination Reports and the subsequent 2002 and 2004 Master Plan amendments had largely been held without implementation since the August 2004 adoption of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act.

A Highlands Element for the Bethlehem Township Master Plan was implemented on April 18, 2014, after it was approved by the New Jersey Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council for consistency with the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP). This updated document discusses with greater specificity how Bethlehem Township plans toward “achieving full conformance with the Highlands RMP.” As 91% (approximately 12,146 acres) of Bethlehem Township fall within the Preservation Area of the Highlands Region, and the other 9% (1,141 acres) fall within the Planning Area, Highlands conformance remains both pertinent and relevant. This Element includes the following sections: Policies, Goals, and Objectives, Land Use Plan, Housing Plan, Conservation Plan, Utility Services Plan, Circulation Plan, Land Preservation and Stewardship Program, Agriculture Retention/Farmland Preservation Plan, Community Facilities Plan, Sustainable Economic Development Plan, Historic Preservation Plan, and Relationship of the Master Plan to State/Regional/Local Plans.

Bethlehem Township created a complementary, yet more detailed document in addition to the Highlands Element, the Highlands Land Use Ordinance. Officially adopted on September 18, 2014, this document notes the applicability of Highlands Development to the Township, lists Nonconforming Buildings, Uses, and Structures, discusses the establishment of Highlands Area Districts and enforcement of Conformance requirements, and offers additional appendices: Forest Determination, Highlands Act Provisions on Agriculture/Horticulture, NJDA Highlands Agricultural Regulations, and Sanitary Sewage Volumes by Facility.

Updated on January 5, 2023, as approved by the Highlands Council in the Highlands Implementation Plan and Schedule pursuant to Highlands Council Resolution 2010-12 from December 16, 2010, Resolution 2015-16 from July 16, 2015, and Resolution 2022-22 from December 1, 2022, the following projects have been implemented or ongoing as noted: Planning Area Petition Ordinance (Approved August 4, 2011), Environmental Resource Inventory (Approved by the Environmental Commission on May 20, 2014), Highlands Element (April 18, 2014), Farmland Preservation Master Plan (not completed, but recommended for SADC grant potential), Green Building Master Plan (date?), Highlands Land Use Ordinance (Adopted September 18, 2014), Zoning Map Update (Created December 2020 by Van Cleef Engineering, LLC.), Highlands Council Training (Training for Highlands Act Exemption Designees are noted in the Bethlehem

Highlands Area Exception Ordinance, adopted on February 16, 2017), Fair Share Housing Plan Update (completed August 10, 2020), Scenic Resource Management Plan (), Alternative Energy Generating Plan (), Alternative Energy Ordinance (not completed), and Wastewater Management Plan (October 2019).

The RMP vision for Bethlehem Township is a mandated, very low residential density throughout most of the Township and optional low-density land uses with the Planning Area.

This objective remains relevant for future sustainable and Highlands-compliant development in Bethlehem Township. The adopted 2014 Highlands Master Plan Element expands upon the need to develop in a conforming, yet characteristic of the Township in its Land Use Plan section, particularly throughout subsection C (“Density and Intensity of Development”), subsection D (“Cluster Development”), and subsection F (“Redevelopment Planning”). Bethlehem Township’s adopted 2020 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan also discusses this relevance in the “Capacity for Fair Share” section of the Fair Share Obligation chapter, the “Plan to Address Third Round Prospective Need” section of the Fair Share Plan chapter, and in Appendix E – “Overlay Zoning for the AH-8 and AH-16 Affordable Housing Overlay Districts.”

The RMP’s severe restrictions on non-residential development will minimize future commercial and industrial development and therefore hinder the Township’s efforts to provide for a variety of land uses. The restrictions on lot coverage for non-residential development prevent the Township from pursuing creative, clustered highway development, thereby encouraging a sprawling pattern of development. This is contrary to the Township’s goals to protect its rural character and conserve resources.

This issue of sustainable development that is both Highlands-compliant and true to the character of Bethlehem Township remains an ongoing issue. The 2014 Highlands Area Land Use Ordinance established the eleven distinctive articles which make up the Township’s current building code. Article V discusses both “Use Regulations” (i.e., permitted, conditional, and prohibited) and “Density and Intensity of Development” (i.e., development subject to water availability, septic systems, new, and extended utility infrastructure) for Bethlehem Township. Article VIII, “Planned Development Regulations,” breaks down the logistics and specific requirements for clustered development:

1. Cluster project area standards (§102A-8.1.3).
2. Preservation set aside of cluster project area standards (§102A-8.1.4).
3. Development set aside of cluster project area standards (§102A-8.1.5).
4. Single-family dwelling area, yard, and bulk standards (§102A-8.1.6).

Initiated by Bethlehem Township, in June 2023, newly created maps and reports are set to examine several parcels with frontage along NJ Route 173, in terms of Zoning, Land Use Coverage, Slopes, Topography, C1 Waterways, and Wetlands Proximity. A few dozen lots along Brunswick Pike and State Highway 173 within the GC–General Commercial and HC–Highway Corridor zones offer frontage along major roadways and

considerable buffers (i.e. > 300 feet) from Wetlands and C1 Waterways. These studies are intended to show where future commercial, industrial, and agricultural development can be both sustainable and Highlands-conforming.

There are very few lots, (most on the Northwest side of town), totaling 125 acres of land, which are eligible for development by the Highlands Act requirements; many of the unreserved lots already have a residence on site, reducing future development potential.

The Northwest section of town is home to Bethlehem Township's Planning Area, where most of the land falls within the Conservation-Environmentally Constrained Sub-zone (CECSZ) and remaining either the Conservation or Protection Zones. Nonetheless, residential development has been planned within this portion of town since the 2012 Master Plan Reexaminations. Two new Affordable Housing Overlay zones (AH-8 and AH-16) were established as feasible sites in 2020 to address the third-round prospective need within the Housing Element and Fair Share Plan. The developed area designated as AH-8 (Block 26, Lot 6) represents 8 units/acre gross density, and the designated AH-16 (Block 26, Lots 6.05 and 6.06) consists of 16 units/acre gross density. As noted in the "Analysis of Sites Addressing the Third Round Prospective Need" subsection, "Under single ownership, the[se] lots [are] "available site[s]" for the production of low- and moderate-income housing under an inclusionary zoning scheme. Located in an area primarily devoted to agriculture, there are existing single-family homes in the area, therefore the site is "suitable" in that affordable housing development would be compatible with surrounding residential land uses... While the site[s] currently [do] not have access to public sewer or public water systems, [they are] "suitable" in all other respects" (42).

The Township's Research, Office & Manufacturing (ROM), Manufacturing (MFG), and General Commercial (GC) zoning districts continue to be restricted to a 3% impervious coverage, as established by the NJDEP rules with the passage of the Highlands Act.

N.J. Admin. Code §7:38-3.5, "Impervious surfaces," denotes that this 3% maximum impervious coverage remains current. The following relative conditions are noted:

- Where impervious surface on a lot in existence as of August 10, 2004 exceeds three percent of the area of the lot, all lawfully existing impervious surface may remain but no additional impervious surface shall be permitted.
- Non-contiguous lots in existence as of August 10, 2004, that contain less than three percent impervious surface may be aggregated such that the percentage of impervious surface that would have otherwise been permitted under this subsection on one or more of the aggregated lots is transferred to one or more of the aggregated lots, provided:

- i. The proposed development on the lot or lots to which the percentage impervious surface is transferred complies with all Federal, State and local law;
- ii. The proposed development on the lot or lots to which the percentage impervious surface is transferred does not require a waiver of any requirement of this chapter;
- iii. The septic density standards of this chapter as set forth at 7:38-3.4(b) are met;
- iv. The non-contiguous lots to be aggregated under this paragraph are all located in the Highlands Preservation Area and within the same HUC 14; and
- v. The lot or lots from which the percentage impervious surface is transferred are permanently subject to a conservation restriction against future disturbance in accordance with 7:38-6.3.

The Township's affordable housing site is located within the Preservation Area, possibly delaying or compromising the construction of projections for organizations such as the ARC of Hunterdon County (supports and empowers individuals experiencing intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families).

The Affordable Housing Overlays of AH-8 and AH-16 have been relocated to a section of the Township that is within the Planning Area (zoned AR-Agricultural Residential), to the west of Valley Station Road and east of D Hull Lane, according to the December 2020 Zoning Map from Van Cleef Engineering Associates, LLC.

As of June 2023, locations for the ARC of Hunterdon County have been constructed in the following locations in New Jersey: Hampton, Milford, Sergeantsville, Flemington, and Three Bridges. The construction of an ARC branch in Bethlehem Township was never built.

The details of the Highlands future Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program (i.e. offered as a compensatory tool in exchange for the RMP's restrictive land use policies) had not yet been determined in Bethlehem Township.

The February 2012 Master Plan notes how "The Highlands Development Credit Bank has acquired Highlands Development Credits on one parcel in Bethlehem Township. The TDR program is far from complete, and concern still exists for landowner equity."

The current website for the Highlands Council indicates how Bethlehem Township is still active within the Highlands Development Credits (TDR Program). Since the most recent Master Plan Reexaminations, thirteen HDC allocations were submitted and six were approved for HDC Bank purchase between April 2012 and April 2021. Three transactions of HDC easements are recorded as "Sold" to the HDC Bank between 2013 and 2018, considering totals of \$328,000, \$288,000, and \$320,000. These properties include Block 8, Lots 11 & 12.01, Block 33, Lot 12, and Block 18, Lot 2, respectively.

It was undecided within the Township if the lands of the Planning Area which had not been deed restricted for agriculture should conform to the RMP.

The Township of Bethlehem adopted Ordinance #435.2017, "Township of Bethlehem Highlands Area Exemption Ordinance," on February 16, 2017. This document presents the contexts in which conformance exemptions are applicable, based on various project types. The following clauses relate to the conformance of land which is not deed-restricted for agriculture:

- Section §4.2, "Highlands Act Exemptions Eligible for Municipal Determination," outlines the conditions in which an applicant may be approved to not conform to the Highlands RMP Standards, ensuring that they provide "provide sufficient evidence that the proposed activity, improvement, or development project in fact qualifies as a Highlands Act Exemption." This section §4.1 reiterates that the final determination will come from either a State Agency or a Municipal Exemption, based on the following conditions:
 - Exemption 1: The construction of a single-family dwelling, for an individual's own use or the use of an immediate family member, on a lot owned by the individual on the date of the enactment of the Highlands Act (August 10, 2004) or on a lot for which the individual entered into a binding contract of sale to purchase on or before May 17, 2004.
 - Exemption 2: The construction of a single-family dwelling on a lot in existence on the date of the enactment of the Highlands Act (August 10, 2004), provided that the construction does not result in the ultimate disturbance of one acre or more of land or a cumulative increase in impervious surface by one-quarter acre or more.
 - Exemption 3: The reconstruction of any building or structure for any reason within 125% of the footprint of the lawfully existing impervious surfaces on the site, provided that the reconstruction does not increase the lawfully existing impervious surface by one-quarter acre or more. This exemption shall not apply to the reconstruction of any agricultural or horticultural building or structure for a non-agricultural or non-horticultural use.
 - Exemption 4: Any improvement to a single-family dwelling in existence on the date of the enactment of the Highlands Act (August 10, 2004), including but not limited to an addition, garage, shed, driveway, porch, deck, patio, swimming pool or septic system.
 - Exemption 5: Any improvement, for non-residential purposes, to a place of worship owned by a nonprofit entity, society or association, or association organized primarily for religious purposes, or a public or private school, or a hospital, in existence on the date of the enactment of the Highlands Act (August 10, 2004), including but not limited to new

structures, an addition to an existing building or structure, a site improvement, or a sanitary facility.

- Exemption 6: An activity conducted in accordance with an approved woodland management plan pursuant to section 3 of the “Farmland Assessment Act,” P.L.1964, c. 48 (C54:4-23.3) or a forest stewardship plan approved pursuant to section 3 of P.L.2009, c. 256 (C13:1L-31), or the normal harvesting of forest products in accordance with a forest management plan or forest stewardship plan approved by the State Forester.
- Exemption 7: The construction or extension of trails with non-impervious surfaces on publicly owned lands or on privately owned lands where a conservation or recreational use easement has been established.
- If one of the exemptions listed above are relevant to an applicant’s condition, they may rely upon the findings of a Municipal Exemption Determination as sufficient (see §4.1.2). However, if the necessary exemption does not fall under the §4.2 list of exemptions, the conditions of §4.1.1 (“State Agency Exemption Determination”) will apply; “State Agency Exemption Determinations shall consist of either, a Highlands Applicability Determination issued by the NJDEP for a Preservation Area proposal, or a Highlands Exemption Determination issued by the Highlands Council for a Planning Area proposal.”

SECTION C: SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE ASSUMPTIONS IMPACTING THE MASTER PLAN

“The extent to which there have been significant changes in 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.”

Since the reexamination for the Township’s Master Plan in February and July of 2012, there have been changes in the assumptions, policies, and objectives that must be addressed in the Township’s Master Plan. These include, but are not limited to demographic characteristics, housing conditions, employment, affordable housing, municipal efforts, and regional plans.

Changes at the Local Level

Demographics

The population trends for Bethlehem, Hunterdon County, and New Jersey from 1930 to 2020 are shown in the chart below. The Township’s population experienced steady growth from 1930 to 2010, reaching its peak of 3,978 residents in 2010. Between 2010 and 2020, the Township’s population experienced its first overall decrease, declining by a total of 5.9 percent. The Township’s total population was greater in 2000 than it was in 2020, with a decrease of 75 residents, or around 2 percent.

The Township’s overall population somewhat mirrors the trends at the County and the State. The Township experienced significant growth in population between 1950 through 1990, similar to both the State and County. The County’s population grew by 5.7% between 2000 and 2020, and the State’s population increased by 10.2% between 2000 and 2020.

Population Trends									
Year	Bethlehem Township			Hunterdon County			New Jersey		
	Population	Change		Population	Change		Population	Change	
		Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage		Number	Percentage
1930	735	-	-	34,728	-	-	4,041,334	-	-
1940	791	56	7.6%	36,766	2,038	5.9%	4,160,165	118,831	2.9%
1950	857	66	8.3%	42,736	5,970	16.2%	4,835,329	675,164	16.2%
1960	1,090	233	27.2%	54,107	11,371	26.6%	6,066,782	1,231,453	25.5%
1970	1,385	295	27.1%	69,718	15,611	28.9%	7,171,112	1,104,330	18.2%
1980	3,045	1,660	119.9%	87,361	17,643	25.3%	7,365,011	193,899	2.7%
1990	3,104	59	1.9%	107,776	20,415	23.4%	7,730,188	365,177	5.0%
2000	3,820	716	23.1%	121,989	14,213	13.2%	8,414,350	684,162	8.9%
2010	3,978	158	4.1%	128,349	6,360	5.2%	8,791,894	377,544	4.5%
2020	3,745	-233	-5.9%	128,947	598	0.5%	9,288,994	497,100	5.7%

Source: U.S. Census Bureau, Table DP05

The Township’s population by age cohort for the years 2010 and 2021 (the most recent data from the Census Bureau) are shown in the following table. During this eleven-year period, the total population experienced a decline of 5.4 percent. The age cohort that experienced the most growth within that timeframe was the 65 and over cohort, increasing by 70.7 percent. The Under 5 years and 55 to 64 cohorts also experienced a significant increase in population, totaling 52.4 percent and 55.3 percent, respectively. However, several age cohorts experienced significant decline, including 5 to 14 cohort (decrease of 43.7%), 15 to 24 cohort (decrease of 32.3%), 35 to 44 cohort (decrease of 29.7%), and 45 to 54 age cohort (decrease of 25.7%).

Population by Age 2010 and 2021						
Population	2010		2021		Change, 2010 to 2021	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Total population	3,978	100.0%	3,765	100.0%	-213	-5.4%
Under 5 years	143	3.6%	218	5.8%	+75	+52.4%
5 to 14	712	17.9%	401	10.7%	-311	-43.7%
15 to 24	632	15.9%	428	11.4%	-204	-32.3%
25 to 34	210	5.3%	274	7.3%	+64	+30.5%
35 to 44	600	15.1%	422	11.2%	-178	-29.7%
45 to 54	787	19.8%	585	15.5%	-202	-25.7%
55 to 64	580	14.6%	901	23.9%	+321	+55.3%
65 and over	314	7.9%	536	14.2%	+222	+70.7%

Source: US Census Bureau; 2021 ACS 5-year estimates, Table DP05

Housing Characteristics

Bethlehem Township had a total of 1,406 housing units in 2020, of which 95.8% were occupied and 4.2% were vacant.

Housing Characteristics				
	2010		2020	
	Total	Percentage	Total	Percentage
Total Housing Units	1,386	100.0%	1,406	100.0%
Occupied	1,344	97%	1,347	95.8%
Vacant	42	3%	59	4.2%

Source: 2010/2020 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table DP04

The American Community Survey 2010-2021 5-year estimates provides additional details pertaining to other housing characteristics, such as ownership and the year structure built. According to the ACS, the majority of all housing units (95.9%) are occupied by the owner with the remainder (4.1%) occupied by renters.

2021 Occupied Housing Units		
	Total	Percent
Total Occupied Housing Units	1,406	101.4%
Owner-Occupied	1,348	95.9%
Renter-Occupied	58	4.1%

Source: 2021 ACS 5-Year Estimates, Table B25040, B25014, DP04

Employment Characteristics

The 2021 American Community Survey 5-year estimates show that 69.2% of the population aged 16 and over in Bethlehem Township is in the labor force. The Township’s population is classified as being in the civilian labor force, with the majority being employed.

Employment Bethlehem Township, 2021 Estimates		
	Number	Percentage
Population 16 years and over	3,137	100.0%
In labor force	2,172	69.2%
Civilian Labor Force	2,172	69.2%
Employed	2,126	67.8%
Unemployed	46	1.5%
Armed Forces	0	0%
Not in labor force	965	30.8%

Source: 2021 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Table DP03

The American Community Survey 5-year estimates also offer information regarding trends in resident transportation and commute times to their place of work. The tables below provide a snapshot of Bethlehem Township resident commuter trends, across three major Census tracts. Hunterdon County and New Jersey are also analyzed to establish a better understanding of how the Township compares to Local and State trends.

Commute Time to Work									
Average Commute Time to Work	Bethlehem Township			Hunterdon County			New Jersey		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020
Less than 10 mins.	6.4%	5.9%	4.5%	11.0%	11.3%	9.4%	11.9%	11.5%	9.6%
10-19 mins.	19.5%	20.2%	15.8%	19.1%	20.6%	18.1%	26.4%	25.8%	23.8%
20-29 mins.	9.6%	19.6%	17.3%	16.5%	16.8%	17.9%	18.8%	18.9%	19.1%
30-44 mins.	19.4%	17.1%	28.9%	23.2%	25.5%	23.1%	20.1%	20.8%	21.4%
45-59 mins.	19.6%	12.8%	17.1%	14.9%	12.1%	13.4%	9.3%	9.4%	10.2%
Greater than 60 mins.	25.5%	24.3%	16.3%	15.3%	13.7%	18.1%	13.5%	13.7%	15.8%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, Tables S0801; 2000 DEC Summary File 3, Table P030

According to the community characteristic data above, Bethlehem Township experienced a trend between 2000, 2010, and 2020 where the most populous category of commute time shifted from traveling greater than 60 minutes to work (25.5% in 2000 and 24.3% in 2010) to 30-44 minutes by 2020 (28.9%). By 2020, this most populous commute category for Bethlehem Township was the same as Hunterdon County's. Hunterdon County did not see a similar shift as Bethlehem; however, the 30-44-minute time frame remained the most populous between 2000, 2010, and 2020 (23.2%, 25.5%, and 23.1%, respectively). On average, for the State of New Jersey, more residents consistently reported a shorter commute time than Bethlehem Township or Hunterdon County; the 10-19-minute commute time window was most common in 2000, 2010, and 2020 (26.4%, 25.8%, and 23.8%, respectively) for New Jerseyans.

Means of Transportation to Work									
Transportation Method (Excludes Working from Home)	Bethlehem Township			Hunterdon County			New Jersey		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020
Car, Truck, Van, Motorcycle	80.6%	83.7%	87.5%	89.9%	88.1%	78.5%	73.0%	73.3%	71.2%
Carpool	9.3%	8.4%	5.1%	7.4%	6.3%	5.8%	10.6%	9.0%	7.8%
Public Transportation (Including Taxi)	2.1%	2.8%	0.0%	1.7%	3.5%	3.6%	9.6%	10.6%	10.8%
Bicycle	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.3%	0.1%	0.2%	0.3%	0.3%
Walking	0.9%	0.5%	0.4%	1.8%	1.8%	1.7%	3.1%	3.3%	2.6%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

According to the data above, in the Township, County, and State, most residents drive themselves to work. This trend has remained consistent throughout the 2000, 2010, and 2020 Census tracts. Bethlehem

Township possessed a very similar transportation demographic as Hunterdon County, where personal transportation by means of Car, Truck, Van, or Motorcycle approached 90% and the Bicycle and Walking methods were essentially negligible. Beyond Hunterdon County, slightly more New Jersey residents at large will utilize public transportation or walk to work. The State displayed similar values amongst those residents who use a bicycle to travel to work, not reaching 0.4% in the context of either Township, County, or State.

Place of Work for Bethlehem Township Residents			
Location	2000	2010	2020
Within Hunterdon County	33.8%	49.2%	47.2%
Outside of Hunterdon County	58.8%	44.7%	48.4%
Outside of New Jersey	7.9%	6.1%	4.4%

Source: United States Census Bureau, American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

Progressing into the 21st century, less residents of Bethlehem Township are traveling outside of New Jersey for work (decrease of 3.5% between 2000 and 2020), and more are finding work within Hunterdon County (increase of 15.4% between 2000 and 2010). The 2020 totals establish a very similar percentage of residents working within Hunterdon County vs outside of the County, but still within the State (47.2% vs 48.4%, respectively).

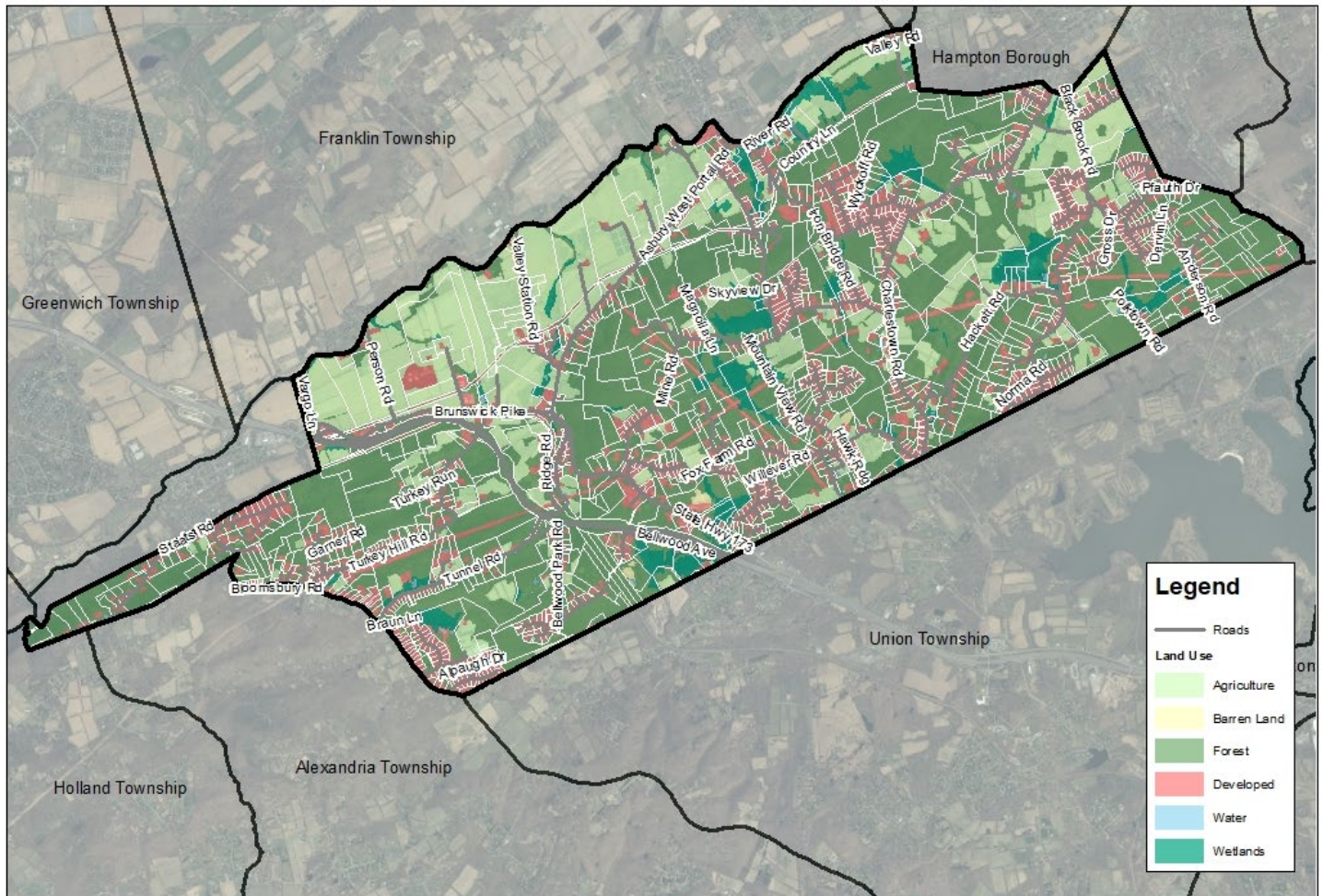
Existing Land Use

Based upon the Township’s 2020 Tax Assessment Records and available GIS parcel data, the Township is comprised of approximately 13,287 acres of “parcel area.” The following chart details the breakdown of existing land uses within the Township based upon tax assessment records.

Existing Land Use (2020)		
Property Classification	Acres	Percentage
MR – Mountain Residential	10,013.689	75.4%
R-1 - Single Family Residential	61.702	.46%
R-1.5 - Single Family Residential	650.446	4.95%
AR - Agricultural Residential	1,762.082	13.4%
GC - General Commercial	85.863	.65%
NC - Neighborhood Commercial	26.226	.2%
HC - Highway Commercial	222.034	1.6%
ROM – Research & Office	364.46	2.6%
MFG - Manufacturing	25.84	.18%
AH-8 – Affordable Housing Overlay	50.93	.37%
AH-16 – Affordable Housing Overlay	23.728	.19%
Total	13,287	100.0%

As shown in the chart above, most of the land (75.4% or over 10,000 acres) is assessed as Mountain Residential land. The second largest category of land uses in the Township includes Agricultural Residential designated land, which occupies approximately 13.4% of the Township’s parcel area, or nearly 1,800 acres. Single-family Residential (R-1.5) is the third largest category, although it represents only 4.95% of the Township’s parcel area.

The following map shows the location of the existing land uses within the Township.



Sustainable Jersey

Bethlehem Township has been participating in the Sustainable Jersey program since June of 2009. Bethlehem has filed two certification reports (in January 2013 and October 2014) that are worth the number of points required for a “Bronze” certification. However, the Township’s profile on the Sustainable Jersey site deems that its current certification is “none”; Bethlehem Township is not included on the map of Bronze-certified municipalities.

The following Sustainable Jersey actions have been completed or are ongoing initiatives:

- Create A Green Team (March-June 2014)
- Community Education & Outreach (“Country Wisdom: Guidelines for Better Living In Bethlehem Township” educational booklet, March 2013)
- Wind Ordinance (Fall Newsletter 2011)
- Farmland Preservation Plans (Updates from Fall 2013 and 2014 meetings between the Township Open Space Committee and SADC (State Agricultural Development Committee))
- Anti-Idling Education & Enforcement Program (2014 Township Resolution)
- Sustainable Land Use Pledge (Establish in 2009 and Ongoing)
- Energy Audit
- Open Space Plans (Greenway and Open Space Plan adopted by the Township in 2006 and 2014)
- Environmental Commission (Established more than 35 years ago and Ongoing)
- Natural Resource Inventory (Completed in 2005 and Ongoing)
- Recycling Depot (Spring 2014 Newsletter, located at the Twp. Municipal Building on Mine Road; closed until further notice in July of 2023)

Over the years, Bethlehem Township has demonstrated a commitment to good environmental stewardship. The Environmental Commission was formed in December 1972, which led to the establishment of the Green Team by the Township Committee. Their most notable education efforts include the publication and widespread distribution of “Country Wisdom: Guidelines for Better Living In Bethlehem Township,” as well as the Anti-Idling Education & Enforcement Program. The Township’s Fall and Spring Newsletters (entitled “From the Mayor’s Desk” at the time of the Sustainable Jersey certification reports) are a primary resource to promote ongoing sustainability efforts in Bethlehem Township, making known relevant former and new ordinances. Efforts mentioned in the Newsletters include the following:

- “On August 19, 2010, the Bethlehem Township Committee adopted ordinance #255.55.2010 the purpose of which is to promote the safe, effective and efficient use of small wind energy systems to reduce the on-site consumption of utility-supplied electricity.”
- “The Mayor and Township Committee of the Township of Bethlehem, Hunterdon County, New Jersey, hereby supports the adoption of “Idle Free Zones” by government agencies, schools, and businesses.”
- “Bethlehem Township’s Tree Ordinance is designed to preserve the rural character of the township and recognize the critical role trees play in floodwater management while not imposing hardships on residents with a true need to remove living trees from their property.”

The current Bethlehem Township official website maintains an array of sustainability-focused resources, from news, events, and public notices, to essential guides for homeowners.

Changes at the County Level

Hunterdon County Farmland Preservation Plan (April 2023)

The 2023 Hunterdon County Farmland Preservation Plan is an update to the 2008 Hunterdon County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan, and outlines the additional farmland preserved, eligibility requirements to receive County funding, and approaches to future economic development and strategic preservation. Ongoing participation in New Jersey's Planning Incentive Grant (PIG) program is essential for Hunterdon County's preservation efforts. Highlights of the Plan's sections below frame the scope of ongoing agricultural development in Bethlehem Township.

Agricultural Land Base

- Bethlehem Township contains 2,705 acres of active agriculture, which includes the following Land Uses-Land Cover (LU/LC) types from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP):
 - Cropland and Pastureland
 - 2,002 acres of the active agriculture is categorized as "Cropland Harvested," 166 acres as "Cropland Pastured," and 537 acres as "Permanent Pasture."
 - Bethlehem Township has experienced an increase in irrigated acres of vegetables from 10 acres in 2005 to 50 acres in 2018.
 - Agricultural Wetlands
 - Orchards/ Vineyards/ Nurseries
 - Other Agriculture
- Ultimately, Hunterdon County's land use distribution is experiencing a gradual increase in urban land cover and a decline in forest land, agricultural land, and wetlands.

Land Use Planning Context

- Soil types within Bethlehem Township are broken down into the following categories:
 - **All Farming Soils:** 800.63 acres within the Planning Area, 4,519.92 acres within the Preservation Area
 - **Prime Farmland Soils:** 694.54 acres within the Planning Area, 2,722.21 acres within the Preservation Area
 - **Soils of Statewide Importance:** 106.09 acres within the Planning Area, 1,797.52 acres within the Preservation Area

Farmland Preservation Program

- Bethlehem Township is included in the list of Hunterdon County's fastest growing municipalities (+23.1% population increase between 1990 and 2000) with close connections to major transportation corridors. Other Townships which developed at a similar rate during the same time frame include Clinton, Raritan, Union, and Readington.
- 1,442.33 acres of farmland in Bethlehem Township have been preserved since the previous *Hunterdon County Farmland Preservation Plan*. Of the \$10,003,617.69 total cost, \$7,906,593.98 were covered by State Funds, \$7,906,593.98 were covered by the County, \$1,340,371.34 was covered by the Municipality, and Other Funding provided \$23,281.00.
- As of February 27, 2023, a total of 19 farms within the Township had been preserved. They include the following properties and their preservation year in parentheses:
 - Block 8, Lot 20 (1997)
 - Block 8, Lot 21 (2002)
 - Block 25, Lot 5 (2001)
 - Block 26, Lot 1 (2001)
 - Block 26, Lots 5, 7 (2005)
 - Block 27, Lot 4 (2007)
 - Block 32, Lot 5 (2007)
 - Block 27, Lot 8 (2005)
 - Block 29, Lot 11 (1999)
 - Block 30, Lot 2 (1999)
 - Block 30, Lot 1 (1998)
 - Block 30, Lot 3 (1998)
 - Block 30, Lot 4 (1998)
 - Block 30, Lot 4.01 (2006)
 - Block 30, Lot 5 (1997)
 - Block 32, Lot 23 (2014)
 - Block 44, Lot 2 (2011)
 - Block 45, Lot 3 (2011)
 - Block 44, Lot 6 (2003)
 - Block 44, Lot 12 (2003)
 - Block 44, Lots 22, 22.03 (2003)
 - Block 46, Lot 2 (2021)

Future Farmland Program

- The *2008 Hunterdon County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan* established 7 project areas based on public input for which areas the farming community felt held a valuable context:
 - North, South, East, West, Lebanon, Bethlehem East, and Bethlehem West
- The project areas were designed to reflect differences within the agricultural landscape and coordinate preservation efforts with municipalities. As ADAs (Agricultural Development Areas) have become more parcel based, the prioritization of farms based on project areas has been reduced. Hunterdon County's new 2023 project areas consist of any lands that are within 1 mile of:
 - Targeted farms located within an ADA.
 - Lands for which an individual farm application has been granted final approval by the municipality, CADB (County Agricultural Development Board), and/or the SADC (State Agriculture Development Committee) pursuant to the Agriculture Retention and Development Act, as amended, and the Garden State Preservation Trust Act.
 - Lands from which development easements have already been purchased.
 - Other land permanently deed-restricted for agricultural use.
 - Lands enrolled in a term farmland preservation program or municipally approved farmland preservation programs.
 - Other permanently preserved lands dedicated for open space purposes that are compatible with agriculture, as approved by the SADC.
- The *2023 Hunterdon County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan* redefines 5 project areas based on these trends:
 - East, Northeast, Northwest (includes Bethlehem Township), South, West
- Strategic preservation for future farmland is categorized under three designations: Tier I: The Most Productive Farms (>40 Acres), Tier II: Farms Adjacent to Preserved Farms (10-40 Acres), and Other Farms: Farms Not Adjacent to Preserved Farms (10-40 Acres).
 - **Tier I** Target Farms in Bethlehem Township: Block 26, Lot 6 (Valley Station Road)
 - **Tier II** Target Farms in Bethlehem Township: Block 26, Lots 2.04 (State Route 173), 6.03 (Valley Station Road), 6.06 (Valley Station Road); Block 44, Lots 12.02 (Hackett Road, 333) and 31 (Hackett Road)
 - **Other** Target Farms in Bethlehem Township: Block 31, Lot 10 (Asbury-West Portal); Block 40, Lot 3 (Iron Bridge Road)

Economic Development

- Since the former *2008 Hunterdon County Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan*, the County released the *Hunterdon County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Report* in 2014. The report identifies the economic strengths of the County's rural quality, its viable, multi-generational

agriculture economy, the draw of agritourism, and its established equine industry. Its main objectives were as follows:

- Update the NJ Right to Farm legislation to re-address allowable activities that respond to the current economic environment.
 - Promote expansion of niche agricultural endeavors, including wineries and complementary farms and businesses (example: cheese, meat, honey, other food, rare animal farms).
 - Promote agricultural assets as year-round attractions.
 - Promote slow food, farm-to-table and farm-to-school movements which can increase markets and local farm visibility.
 - Evaluate the development of a large regional culinary school with a restaurant for niche (farm-to-table) cooking and natural foods.
 - Promote and organize farmers markets, CSA's, niche organic farms, unique farms and expand roadside market programs to increase growth potential and local agricultural sales over time.
- The overall *Economic Development Strategy* report recommended partnering individual farm businesses with the CADB, local municipalities, the Hunterdon Land Trust, NOFA, and Jersey Fresh. Even today, the farm-to-table movement is marketed to attract agritourism and encourage farmers to pursue niche and high-quality products on smaller farms. Behind the scenes tours, “pick-your own” activities, overnight farm trips, and winery tastings are activities that continue to draw community members and tourists to spend money within Hunterdon County’s agricultural system.

Natural Resource Conservation

- According to the *2018 Farmland Assessment of Hunterdon County*, Bethlehem Township includes 1,833 acres of Non-Appurtenant woodland and 518 acres of Appurtenant woodland.
- Updates for the *2023 Farmland Preservation Plan* includes a Hunterdon County Groundwater Aquifer Ranking Chart, provided by the Aquifers of New Jersey, NJDEP Division of Science and Research, and NJ Geological Society. Bethlehem Township’s natural resources include the following formations and aquifer rankings:

Formation	Bedrock Base Type	Aquifer Ranking
IMR: Igneous and Metamorphic	Gneiss, granite, schist and marble	D: 25-100 gpm
JKL: Jacksonburg Limestone, Kittatiny Supergroup, Hardyston Quartzite	Dolomite and limestone with minor shale, sandstone, and quartzite	C-D: >100-250 gpm – 25-100 gpm

Agricultural Industry Sustainability, Retention, and Promotion

- Highlighted strategies to sustain, retain, and promote agriculture in Hunterdon County include permitting streamlining, thoughtful community planning (i.e. agricultural vehicle movement / routes, right to farm, and agriculture-friendly zoning), agricultural labor housing/training, and wildlife management.
 - Bethlehem Township has adopted a RTFO (renewable transport fuel obligation), which specifically includes farmer's rights to utilize municipal roads. Since many farm vehicles travel over local municipal roads, municipalities should continue to support local agricultural businesses' right to do so. The SADC model "Right to Farm" ordinance recognizes the operation and transportation of large, slowmoving farm equipment over roads as a specific right.
 - Bethlehem Township showed moderate (25-50%) defoliation from gypsy moths per the 2022 NJDA Division of Plant Industry Aerial Defoliation Survey. The NJDA promotes an integrated pest management approach; however, aerial spray treatments on residential and recreational areas using the selective, non-chemical insecticide, *Bacillus thuringiensis* is recommended where natural controls struggle to keep the pest population in check.

Hunterdon County Growth Management Plan (Winter 2024)

A Growth Management Plan (GMP) is currently being prepared for Hunterdon County and is set to be adopted during the Fall of 2023. Its contents will include the following sections:

- Section 1: Introduction (Executive Summary, Purpose of GMP, Planning Process, and Vision, Goals, and Objectives)
- Section 2: Public Engagement (Summary of Meetings, Results, Findings, and Implications, and Public Engagement Conclusions)
- Section 3: Existing Conditions (Demographics, Housing Characteristics, Employment, Employers and Industry, Recent Development Approvals, Environmental Characteristics, as well as State, Regional, and County Planning Conditions)
- Section 4: Climate Change Assessment and Strategy (Driver of Climate Change, Climate Impacts, Hazards, Greenhouse Gas Emissions)
- Section 5: Build-Out Analysis (Analysis Process Narrative, Land Use/Land Cover Mapping, Composite Zoning Mapping, Table of Buildout by Municipality)
- Section 6: Future Land Use Framework and Recommendations (Future Land Map, Recommendations, Funding Opportunities, Recommendation Implementation Index)

Hunterdon County Hazard Mitigation Plan (2021)

The Hunterdon County Hazard Mitigation Plan outlines the current natural hazards in the County and identifies specific actions Bethlehem Township is taking to address them. The following is a summary of the issues, hazard rankings, and proposed mitigation actions for Bethlehem Township.

Identified Issues and Problem Areas

- Schools require backup generators.
- Poor foliage management and preventive maintenance by power companies has resulted in extended power outages in a community reliant upon well and septic.
- The Township has one repetitive loss property.
- The Township lacks a Continuity of Operations Plan.
- The Master Plan could use additional hazard mitigation integration.
- The status of the Township’s bridges and causeways is unknown in regard to the ability to withstand hazard events.
- The Township’s Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance lacks freeboard requirements.

Hazard Rankings

The chart below is a summary of the Township’s primary hazards of concern. These hazards were based on the problems identified in the risk assessment presented in section 4 of the Mitigation Plan. Each hazard was assigned a ranking of priority of low, medium, or high.

Low	Medium	High
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dam Failure • Earthquake • Geologic • Wildfire 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drought • Flood • Hazardous Materials • Invasive Species 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disease Outbreak • Hurricane and Tropical Storm • Nor’Easter • Severe Weather • Severe Winter Weather

Previous Mitigation Actions

The following are the Township’s 18 previous actions from the 2016 Hazard Mitigation Plan:

1. **Establish a Technical Assistance Outreach Program:** Establish an outreach program for technical assistance with natural hazard mitigation with local colleges and universities. There has been no progress made for this action.
2. **Utilize HMP for Updating Comprehensive Plan:** Utilize the Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) when updating the Comprehensive Master Plan. consider including hazard identification, hazard zones risk assessment information, and hazard mitigation goals as identified in the HMP. Further, the findings and recommendation of the HMP will be considered during any future site plan review

processes. There has been no progress made for this action. This action is included in the 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan.

3. **Prioritize Hazard Areas when Rezoning:** During the Township's rezoning procedures or update of the zoning ordinance, the Township will recognize hazard areas as limits on changes to zoning within the municipality. This is an ongoing capability.
4. **Incorporate Hazard Mitigation Initiatives into the Capital Improvement Plan:** Ensure hazard mitigation initiatives are incorporated into the capital improvement plan and municipal budget. Establish a line item for mitigation project funding in both the municipal budget and Capital Improvement Plan. This is an ongoing capability.
5. **Include Hazard Mitigation in Job Descriptions:** Where applicable, employee job descriptions will include hazard mitigation. This is an ongoing capability.
6. **Develop a Township Fire Plan:** Develop a fire plan for the Township and include a risk assessment and vulnerable areas for wildfire within the community. There has been no progress made for this action.
7. **Engage with Hazard and Mitigation-Based Community Service:** The Township will work with local school districts and assist with community service projects regarding hazards and mitigation. This action is in progress and is included in the 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan.
8. **Designate Local Officials as NFIP Floodplain Administrators (FPAs) and Certified Floodplain Managers (CFMs):** Have designated NFIP Floodplain Administrator (FPA), and other local officials who would benefit, become a Certified Floodplain Manager (CFM) through the Association of State Floodplain Managers (ASFPM) and New Jersey Association for Floodplain Management (NJAFM), and pursue relevant continuing education training such as FEMA Benefit-Cost Analysis (BCA) and Substantial Damage Estimation (SDE). This is an ongoing capability.
9. **Develop and Implement a Educational Mitigation Information Program for the Public:** Develop and implement an enhanced all-hazards, public outreach / education / mitigation information program on natural hazard risks and what they can do in the way of mitigation and preparedness, including flood insurance. This program will include:
 - Provide information and training regarding environmental problems or hazard areas to residents.
 - Use local meetings as a forum to share best practices and increase mitigation knowledge throughout the Township.
 - Use social media to provide information on natural hazard risk with the general public and private sector.
 - Educate residents of flood prone areas/flooded basements may be pumped by emergency services during power loss or excessive flooding.

- Provide information about well/septic use, available shelter resources through newsletter, website, Facebook, township/school meetings.

This action was completed and is now an ongoing capability.

10. **Develop a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP):** Develop a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) and include mitigation and recovery measures within the Plan. There has been no progress made for this action. This action is included in the 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan.
11. **Purchase School Generators:** Purchase generators for the schools in the Township. There has been no progress made for this action. This action is included in the 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan.
12. **Provide for Proper Tree Maintenance:** Provide for proper tree maintenance through education and/or ordinance. Work with power company to expand trimming right of ways. Prepare DPW for post storm cleanup activities. This action is in progress and is included in the 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan.
13. **Educate Residents on Emergency Services Capabilities:** Educate residents, especially those in flood-prone areas, about the capabilities of emergency services and DPW during a flood event. For instance, emergency services can pump flooded basements during power loss from excessive flooding. Note: This action is a subset of Action Bethlehem-9; however, it is being highlighted due to its higher importance to the community. This is an ongoing capability.
14. **Provide Residents with Well/Septic Use and Available Shelter Information:** Provide information about well/septic use and available shelter resources through the Township newsletter, Facebook, website, and Township/school meetings. Note: This action is a subset of Action Bethlehem-9; however, it is being highlighted due to its higher importance to the community. This is an ongoing capability.
15. **Identify Inadequate or Vulnerable Bridges and Causeways:** Identify inadequate or vulnerable bridges and causeways within the Township and replace the identified bridges and causeways. There has been no progress made for this action. This action is included in the 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan.
16. **Retrofit Critical Infrastructure:** Retrofit critical infrastructure, such as roadways and drainage systems, by elevating, improving, etc. This action was completed and is now an ongoing capability.
17. **Inform Property Owners of Mitigation Damage Strategies:** Inform property owners of different ways they can mitigation damage to their properties. This is an ongoing capability.
18. **Support the Mitigation of Flood-Vulnerable Structures:** Support the mitigation of flood-vulnerable structures via retrofit (e.g. elevation, floodproofing) or acquisition/relocation to protect structures from future damage, with repetitive loss and severe repetitive loss properties as a priority when applicable.

- Phase 1: Identify appropriate candidates and determine most cost-effective mitigation option.
- Phase 2: Work with the property owners to implement selected action based on available funding and local match availability.

There has been no progress made for this action. This action is included in the 2021 Hazard Mitigation Plan.

In addition to the above progress, the Township of Bethlehem identified the following mitigation projects/activities that were completed but not identified in the 2016 HMP mitigation strategy:

- Updated storm drainage in following areas: Route 173 (completed by state), Ludlow Station Road, Hackett Road and Norton Church Road.
- Public information and resources for current COVID Pandemic along with guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), Department of Health, and Governors Executive Orders and Directives.
- Discussions with JCPL to review and make adjustments to Tunnel Road power lines to help reduce the constant power outages. JCPL completed work to grade in this area and help reduce the amount of outages.

Proposed Mitigation Actions

Below is a summary of Bethlehem Township's proposed mitigation actions to reduce future hazard impacts. Initiatives are dependent on available funding and can be modified or removed at any time based on the occurrence of new hazard events and changes in municipal priorities.

- **Backup Power for Schools:** *Backup power sources are necessary to maintain critical services for critical facilities. Schools require backup generators as they serve as immediate sheltering in place locations for children. **Solution:** The Engineer will research what size generators are needed to power the school buildings. The Township will then work with the school boards to purchase and install the selected generator and necessary electrical components to supply backup power to the schools.*
- **Vegetation Management:** *Poor foliage management and preventive maintenance by power companies resulting in extended power outages in a community reliant upon well and septic. **Solution:** The Township will work with JCPL and the Board of Public Utilities to target high risk areas that have falling tree branches and vulnerable power lines for vegetation management efforts.*
- **Repetitive Loss Mitigation:** *The Township has one remaining unmitigated repetitive loss property. **Solution:** The Township will conduct outreach to the repetitive loss property owner and surrounding properties and provide information on mitigation alternatives. After preferred mitigation measures are identified, collect required property-owner information and develop a FEMA grant application and BCA*

to obtain funding to implement acquisition/purchase/moving/elevating residential homes in the flood prone areas that experience frequent flooding (high risk areas).

- **Continuity of Operations Plan:** The Township lacks a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) to guide emergency management following a disaster event. **Solution:** The Township will develop a Continuity of Operations Plan and include mitigation and recovery measures within the Plan.
- **Master Plan Update:** The Master Plan does not include all of the information contained within the updated hazard mitigation plan. **Solution:** The Township will utilize the Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) when updating the Master Plan; consider including hazard identification, hazard zones risk assessment information, and hazard mitigation goals as identified in the HMP. Further, the findings and recommendation of the HMP will be considered during any future site plan review processes.
- **Bridge and Causeway Survey and Retrofit:** The status of the Township’s bridges and causeway in relation to ability to withstand hazard events is unknown. Failure of bridges or causeways could result in loss to life and limitations to emergency access. **Solution:** Identify inadequate or vulnerable bridges and causeways within the Township and replace or retrofit the identified bridges and causeways.
- **Disaster Debris Management Plan:** The Township lacks a Disaster Debris Management Plan. **Solution:** The Township will prepare and adopt a Disaster Debris Management Plan.
- **Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance:** The Township’s Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance lacks the state mandated 1 foot of freeboard. **Solution:** The Township will update the ordinance to include 1 foot of freeboard for new construction in the SFHA.

High Priority	<p>Backup Power for Schools* Highest Importance</p> <p>Backup power sources are necessary to maintain critical services for critical facilities. Schools require backup generators as they serve as immediate sheltering in place locations for children. Solution: The Engineer will research what size generators are needed to power the school buildings. The Township will then work with the school boards to purchase and install the selected generator and necessary electrical components to supply backup power to the schools.</p>
	<p>Vegetation Management</p> <p>Poor foliage management and preventive maintenance by power companies resulting in extended power outages in a community reliant upon well and septic. Solution: The Township will work with JCPL and the Board of Public Utilities to target high risk areas that have falling tree branches and vulnerable power lines for vegetation management efforts.</p>
	<p>Repetitive Loss Mitigation</p> <p>The Township has one remaining unmitigated repetitive loss property. Solution: The Township will conduct outreach to the repetitive loss property owner and surrounding properties and provide information on mitigation alternatives. After preferred mitigation measures are identified, collect required property-owner information and develop a FEMA grant application and BCA to obtain funding to implement acquisition/purchase/moving/elevating residential homes in the flood prone areas that experience frequent flooding (high risk areas).</p>
	<p>Continuity of Operations Plan</p> <p>The Township lacks a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) to guide emergency management following a disaster event. Solution: The Township will develop a Continuity of Operations Plan and include mitigation and recovery measures within the Plan.</p>
	<p>Master Plan Update</p> <p>The Master Plan does not include all of the information contained within the updated hazard mitigation plan. Solution: The Township will utilize the Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) when updating the Master Plan; consider including hazard identification, hazard zones risk assessment information, and hazard mitigation</p>

goals as identified in the HMP. Further, the findings and recommendation of the HMP will be considered during any future site plan review processes.
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Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance
The Township's Flood Damage Prevention Ordinance lacks the state mandated 1 foot of freeboard. Solution: The Township will update the ordinance to include 1 foot of freeboard for new construction in the SFHA.

Hunterdon County Economic Development/Tourism Initiatives

Economic Impact of Tourism in Hunterdon County by Stockton University

“The Economic Impact of Tourism in Hunterdon County” was a report created by Stockton University in partnership with the Highlands Council, Hunterdon County Chamber of Commerce, and the Delaware River Towns Chamber of Commerce & Visitors Bureau. The study focused on the goal to expand tourism and recreation within the Highlands Region. The study reviews the impact promotional efforts for tourism opportunities in Hunterdon County. The report concludes that there is “strong evidence that the investment into the tourism promotion for the County is paying tremendous dividends.” In 2016, Hunterdon County generated \$317 million in tourism expenditures and achieved a new high in tourism receipts for the region. Overall, the County’s tourism industry created over 2,800 jobs for the county residents in area hotels, restaurants, and other attractions as well as businesses that support the tourism industry.

Establishing a Comprehensive Tourism Marketing Strategy for Hunterdon County as a Country Escape Destination

Studies on the viability of tourism in Hunterdon County and its continued ability to grow were conducted in 2022 by Dr. Jennifer Barr of Stockton University and Dr. James T. Strong of California State University, Stanislaus. Decline in tourism dollars and lack of a coordinated, centralized effort to formally position Hunterdon County as a viable tourism destination were the impetus for this investigation. Drs. Barr and Strong’s three-part study, commissioned by the Hunterdon County Board of Commissioners and supported through a grant from the New Jersey Highlands Council, analyzes and makes recommendations on how to increase the tourism spend in the County; the approaches are rooted in an improved marketing strategy that expands to multiple generations and considers branding and social media. According to this study, an effective destination marketing organization (DMO) is rooted in adequate, sustainable revenue sources and uses a hybrid approach relative to centralized marketing efforts. Infusing technology into a well-orchestrated marketing strategy is pivotal to elevating awareness and appealing to previously untapped

markets. Ultimately, drawing more visitors to the region is identified as essential to both the immediate need for growth in tourism spending and the long-term economic health of the region.

Explore Hunterdon

“Explore Hunterdon” is a promotional campaign created by Hunterdon County Economic Development and Tourism initiative to promote business and highlight the tourism opportunities in the County. The “Explore Hunterdon” website promotes local businesses, art, farmers markets, restaurants, historic & cultural sites, events, outdoor recreational activities and much more within Hunterdon County.

“Explore Hunterdon” has four county wide initiatives:

- Hunterdon Main Streets: Highlights specific towns with a “Downtown Main Street” in the county which are a destination for food, shopping, and recreation. The towns listed are Clinton, Flemington, Frenchtown, High Bridge, Lambertville, Milford, and Stockton. A new website for the County’s Main Streets is now live, launched in 2021. Features of the website include featured businesses (“Featured Biz”), Events (Upcoming and Popular Annual), News (Press and Newsletters), and Available Storefronts.
- Hunterdon County Beer Trail: The Hunterdon County Beer Trail promotes craft breweries and associated events within the County. The new website is active, offering users links to maps, brewery events, and initiatives such as the 2023 Spring/Summer Brewery Passport. The slogan of the Hunterdon Beer Trail reads, “Support Local. Drink Local. Drink Craft Beer from Hunterdon County Breweries.”
- Hunterdon County 579 Trail: The initiative promotes all agricultural related businesses including wineries, farmers markets, restaurants, and farms in the County that are along Route 579. A new website for the County 579 Trail is now live, launched in 2021. Offering an extensive network of resources, maps, calendars, and social media links, the website is generated upon the following subtabs: “Taste the Trail” (Wineries, Farmers Markets, Farm Stores, and Restaurants), “Play on the Trail” (On-Farm Fun, U-Pick, Events, Full Farm Listing), Events Calendar, “Plan Your Visit” (Trail Map, Create an Itinerary, Bike the Trail, Stay on the Trail, link to Hunterdon Main Streets, link to Hunterdon Beer Trail), “Locals Corner” (Farm Stands, CSA, Full Farm Listing), “Unique Stops,” and “About Us” (Newsletters, Press, Sign Up, Getting Here).
- BikeHunterdon.org: This website features bike trails within Hunterdon County. The top-rated trails within Bethlehem Township are the Heritage Park Blue Trail, as well as the Tower Hill and Jugtown Mountain Reserves.

Changes at the Highlands Regional Level

2018 Highlands RMP Monitoring Program Recommendations Report (MPRR)

The *2018 Highlands Regional Master Plan Monitoring Program Recommendations Report* evaluates the progress of achieving the goals established in the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) and creates a framework for potential amendments to the RMP, along with a six-year work plan for the Highlands Council.

- The report reviews the following topics included in the RMP:
 - Natural Resources
 - Water Resources
 - Water and Wastewater Utilities
 - Agricultural Resources
 - Historic, Cultural, Archaeological, and Scenic Resources
 - Transportation and Air Quality
 - Future Land Use
 - Landowner Equity
 - Sustainable Economic Development
 - Implementation

Within each topic area/chapter, the following structure is applied to offer a summary of development processes: Background and Introduction (i.e. discussion of the topic's significance within the Highlands Region), Indicators (i.e. program-relevant indicators that were identified through public participation processes), and Recommendations (i.e. drawn from a combination of implementation experience and analysis of identified indicators).

2021 New Jersey Highlands Economic Sustainability Plan

The *2021 New Jersey Highlands Economic Sustainability Plan's* goal is to "to provide the framework by which to secure the economic future of the Highlands Region," in coordination with the "Highlands Council and its partners in protecting and enhancing the natural resources of the Region."

The plan is organized by five goals:

- Goal 1: Reinforce the Highlands Region as a center of natural resource protection, innovation, and technology.
- Goal 2: Communicate the value of quality of life in the Highlands Region and evaluate how current assets meet, miss, or exceed market demand.
- Goal 3: Expand awareness and understanding of the New Jersey Highlands Council's purpose and impact on the business community.
- Goal 4: Strengthen the role of the New Jersey Highlands Council as leader in regional planning assistance.

- Goal 5: Support the Highlands Region's existing target industries and small businesses in their efforts to thrive and adapt in response to the new economy.

The document provides an overall review of the current economic trends and basic analysis of the region. It examines the growth potential of for industrial manufacturing and office development within the County, a county-wide industry analysis, and highlights market opportunities in the target industries of tourism and recreation, financial services, food production, and offices.

The recommended options for implementation were a New Regional Organization for economic development, a larger leadership role for the Highlands Council, a county coalition, hiring a consultant coordinator, and creating public-private partnerships to support execution of the plan.

2021 Hunterdon County Highlands Master Plan Element

The *2021 Hunterdon County Highlands Master Plan Element* outlines the framework for the County's compliance with the Highlands RMP and defines a set of activities for future implementation.

The plan is organized in three sections that provide an overview of the County's physical characteristics: demographics, land use and planning activity, and future goals related to Highlands Plan Conformance. The overall recommendations were to update the existing plans, establish goals to work alongside the Highlands Council, and implement a list of potential actions that the County can undertake in partnership with the Highlands.

2021 Hunterdon County Highlands Plan Conformance Petition Approval

On May 20, 2021, the Highlands Council approved Hunterdon County's petition for Plan Conformance, which was generated largely upon the above-mentioned Highlands Master Plan Element (finalized on January 6, 2021). As a result, towns could request the authority to make determinations on agricultural development exemptions; nine Highlands municipalities in Hunterdon have been certified to make such exemptions, including Alexandria Township, Bethlehem Township, Bloomsbury Township, Califon Borough, Clinton Township, Clinton Town, Glen Gardner, High Bridge, and Lebanon Township. This action was designed to help support key priorities in Hunterdon, including tourism, historic preservation, and managed growth. Hunterdon joined Passaic and Somerset Counties as the third county in the Highlands Region to earn this distinction.

78/22 Coalition – Home Based Initiative Final Report (2022)

The *78/22 Coalition: Home Based Business Initiative* represents an example in which the County implemented the Highlands Regional Master Plan at the local level. The *78/22 Coalition* consists of Hunterdon County municipalities along the I-78 and US-22 corridors including Bethlehem

Township, Union Township, Clinton Township, Clinton Town, Borough of High Bridge, Borough of Lebanon, Franklin Township and Readington Township. Coordinated along with the Hunterdon County Economic Development Office, the 78/22 Coalition engaged engineering consultant firm T&M Associates to develop a Home-Based Business economic development strategy that would be mindful of improved technology and increased interests in entrepreneurship.

The vision of the HBB initiative is that the 78/22 Corridor becomes a hub for HBB growth and innovation. The goals of the initiative include the following:

- Achieve successful and thriving communities;
- Respond to economic, social, and environmental challenges; and
- Ensure balance between economic growth and preservation of community character.

The objectives, or the specific ways in which to achieve the goals above, include:

- Create a model HBB ordinance that:
 - Provides a flexible user friendly permit platform for HBB approval
 - Removes outdated or unnecessary barriers; and
 - Provides reasonable regulations to protect the surrounding neighbors from nuisance impacts.
- Create a database and regional marketing plan for HBB uses.

The T&M Planning Team undertook a three-part analysis in the creation of a model HBB ordinance. While each municipality has different land use characteristics, there were some common opportunities and constraints that were shared among the 78/22 Coalition municipalities including:

- Opportunities
 - Creating a distinction between minor and major home occupations allows for a flexible permit process.
 - Permitting home occupations in all residential zones allows additional opportunities for the startup of a home occupation.
- Constraints
 - Home occupations are limited to certain residential zones which creates challenges for residents living in a zoning district that does not permit home occupations.
 - Limitations on the type of home occupation is a concern as the type of businesses residents are interested in starting changes and evolves as technology changes.
 - Limitations on the number of non-resident employees potentially limits future business growth.

- The prohibition of the sale of goods from the HBB limits potential future revenue and the variety of HBBs within a community.
- Limitation or prohibition of signs creates a marketing constraint and potential public safety concern.
- Creating a permit system that is long and costly creates barriers to new HBB start-ups.

2023 Highlands Council MS4 Permit Changes

Effective on January 1, 2023, the Highlands Council initiated the new municipal separate storm sewer system (MS4) permit, which has introduced significant changes for Highlands municipalities. Most notably, municipalities formerly classified as Tier B must now meet the same requirements as Tier A municipalities. Because meeting these requirements advances the goals and purposes of the Highlands Act and RMP, grant funding can be made available to any Highlands municipality for MS4 Permit compliance work.

According to N.J. Admin. Code §7:14A-25.3, Bethlehem Township is included in the list of Tier B municipalities. Therefore, the Township will need to reprioritize its stormwater strategies and agendas. In addition to offering templates for MS4 Permits (https://dep.nj.gov/njpdcs-stormwater/municipal-stormwater-regulation-program/tier_a/) and Stormwater Information (<http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/stormwater>), The Highlands Council breaks down three main steps for municipalities to account for these recent changes and plan a timeline to achieve the NJDEP deliverables for the MS4 Permit renewal:

- **Step 1: Secure NJDEP Funding**
 - One-page fillable PDF application is due by December 31, 2023; this submission automatically offers the former Tier B municipality \$25,000 in funding.
 - Once the specified deliverables are submitted, funding can be used for other permit-related costs; upon the completion of the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan (SP3), which is due January 1, 2024, \$50,000 in funding will be awarded to the former Tier B municipality.
- **Step 2: Develop a Timeline**
 - Develop a timeline for the remaining requirements, noting estimated cost and funding sources. The Highlands Council can help with this step and can fund many of the tasks.

- **Step 3: Access Highlands Council Funding and Expertise**

- The Highlands Council can be a valuable partner in helping meet MS4 permit requirements. Staff liaisons will work with your municipal team to help identify tasks that the Highlands Council can fund and assist with the development of an implementation timeline. Eligible activities include planning, design, and engineering costs.
- Highlands Council grants are non-competitive, require no match, reimbursement-based, possess no application deadlines, and are not limited to a maximum or minimum amount.
- Further Highlands Council contact information:
 - Website: <http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands>
 - Phone: 908-879-6737
 - Email: highlands@highlands.nj.gov

MS4 Permit Renewal Requirement Upcoming Timeline: Tier B to Tier A Municipalities		
Year	Items Due	Items to be Prioritized
2023	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. New and updated ordinances 2. Storage and maintenance plans 3. Initiation of annual inspections 4. Training activities 5. Some infrastructure installation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apply for NJDEP funding 2. Develop timeline to complete permit requirements 3. Apply for Highlands Council funding 4. Develop Stormwater Prevention and Pollution Plan 5. Create municipal stormwater webpage 6. Infrastructure mapping
2024	<p>(Due January 1)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Stormwater Prevention and Pollution Plan 2. Municipal stormwater webpage 3. New and updated ordinances 4. Storage and maintenance plans 5. Training activities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Infrastructure Mapping 2. Watershed Improvement Plan
2025		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Infrastructure Mapping 2. Watershed Improvement Plan Phase 1
2026	<p>(Due January 1)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Infrastructure Mapping 2. Watershed Improvement Plan Phase 1 3. New and updated maintenance plans 4. Training activities 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watershed Improvement Plan Phase 2
2027	<p>(Due January 1)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watershed Improvement Plan Phase 2 	<p>(Due by End of Year)</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Watershed Improvement Plan Phase 3

Above **Bolded** items can be funded by the Highlands Council

Changes at the State Level

Municipal Land Use Law Amendments

Since the adoption of the 2012 Reexamination Reports, changes made to the MLUL have presented implications for the Township and its land use policies and ordinances.

2013 Cluster Development

The first 2013 amendment added a definition, purpose, and standards related to cluster development. Cluster development involves concentrating development within a portion of a site in order to protect and preserve environmentally sensitive features.

2013 Performance Guarantees

The second 2013 amendment was related to transferring performance guarantees between a developer and its successor.

2015 Noticing

The 2015 amendment allowed for the transmittal of certain notice documents via email.

2016 Military Bases

The 2016 amendment added a new purpose of the Act and includes definitions and standards related to land use planning near military bases.

2017 Performance and Maintenance Guarantees

The first 2017 amendment modified the scope of improvements that could be covered by performance and maintenance guarantees. A performance and maintenance guarantee can only be required for improvements within a public right-of-way and those affecting adjacent properties such as buffer areas and the like.

2017 Smart Growth

The second 2017 amendment requires the Land Use element of a municipality's Master Plan to address "smart growth which in part, shall consider potential locations for the installation of electric vehicle charging stations, storm resiliency with respect to energy supply, flood-prone areas, and environmental infrastructure, and environmental sustainability issues."

2019 Municipal Public Access Plan as Optional Master Plan Element

The first 2019 amendment added the Municipal Public Access Plan as an optional Master Plan Element: "A public access plan element that provides for, encourages, and promotes permanently protected public access to all tidal waters and adjacent shorelines consistent with the public trust doctrine, and which shall include a map and inventory of public access points, public facilities that support access, parking, boat

ramps, and marinas; an assessment of the need for additional public access; a statement of goals and administrative mechanisms to ensure that access will be permanently protected; and a strategy that describes the forms of access to satisfy the need for such access with an implementation schedule and tools for implementation.”

2019 Zoning Board Backlogs

The second 2019 amendment to the MLUL allows for the creation of supplemental zoning boards in order to address backlogs of applications under certain circumstances.

2019 Electric Vehicle Charging Infrastructure

The third 2019 amendment deals with electric vehicle charging and became effective November 6, 2019. The MLUL was amended include provisions for electric vehicle charging stations:

- The first component of this amendment involves the preparation, modification, and required contents of a Master Plan (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-28). The components of the Land Use Element (a required Master Plan Element) have been updated to include a provision requiring the Element to show the “existing and proposed location of public electric vehicle charging infrastructure.”
- The second component of this amendment involves the requirements of the Master Plan Reexamination Report (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89). A new required section, Section F, has been added. This new section states the reexamination report shall state “the recommendations of the planning board concerning locations appropriate for the development of public electric vehicle infrastructure... and recommended changes, if any in the local development regulations necessary or appropriate for the development of public electric vehicle infrastructure.”

2021 Climate Change and Vulnerability Assessment

On February 4, 2021, Governor Murphy signed into law an amendment to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-28, which states the preparation, contents, and modification requirements to Master Plans. The amendment requires that any Land Use Plan Element adopted after February 4, 2021 must include a “Climate Change-Related Hazard Vulnerability Assessment.” The Assessment is mandatory and includes:

- Analyze current and future threats to, and vulnerabilities of, the municipality associated with climate change-related natural hazards, including, but not limited to increased temperatures, drought, flooding, hurricanes, and sea-level rise;
- Include a build-out analysis of future development in the municipality, and an assessment of the threats and vulnerabilities related to that development;
- Identify critical facilities, utilities, roadways, and other infrastructure that is necessary for evacuation purposes and for sustaining quality of life during a natural disaster, to be maintained at all times in an operational state;

- Analyze the potential impact of natural hazards on relevant components and elements of the Master Plan;
- Provide strategies and design standards that may be implemented to reduce or avoid risks associated with natural hazards;
- Include a specific policy statement on the consistency, coordination, and integration of the climate-change related hazard vulnerability assessment with any existing or proposed natural hazard mitigation plan, floodplain management plan, comprehensive emergency management plan, emergency response plan, post-disaster recovery plan, or capital improvement plan; and
- Rely on the most recent natural hazard projections and best available science provided by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

Local Redevelopment and Housing Law

2013 Amendments

In 2013, two changes were made to amend criterion 'e' based on the *Gallenthin v. Paulsboro* decision, and to modify the notice requirements based on the *Harrison v. DeRose* decision. These changes were made in response to concerns regarding the use of eminent domain. The language of Criterion 'E' was amended to require that a property be "unproductive" rather than "not fully productive." Additional notice requirements were instituted to require a statement at the outset of the redevelopment process whether properties in a potential redevelopment area could be subject to condemnation.

The 2013 legislation also amended and clarified the conditions necessary to classify an area in need of rehabilitation when there is evidence of environmental contamination.

2019 Amendment

Effective November 6, 2019, the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law was amended to update the requirements of a Redevelopment Plan (N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-7). Paragraph a.8. was added to require a redevelopment plan to include "proposed locations for public electric vehicle charging infrastructure within the project area in a manner that appropriately connects with an essential public charging network."

Additionally, Criterion "b" of the LRHL was expanded to include the discontinuance or abandonment of buildings used for retail, shopping malls and office parks, as well as those buildings which have had significant vacancies for at least two (2) consecutive years.

Flood Hazard Area Control Act Update (2016)

The Flood Hazard Area (FHA) Control Act Rules, N.J.A.C. 7:13 were adopted on November 5, 2007 and amended on June 20, 2016. The FHA rules implement the New Jersey Flood Hazard Area Control Act (N.J.S.A. 58:16A-50 et seq.). Because development within flood hazard areas can compound the frequency and intensity of flooding, the FHA rules incorporate strict standards for development within flood hazard

areas to mitigate the adverse effects of development. The 2016 comprehensive amendment reduced unnecessary burdens, added appropriate flexibility, and provided better consistency with Federal, Local, and other State requirements. The amendment additionally addressed several implementation issues that had been identified since the implementation of the 2007 rules.

Affordable Housing Third Round (2017)

The “Third Round” of affordable housing obligations within New Jersey has been a decades-long conflict over methodologies. The Coalition on Affordable Housing (COAH) made no progress for years in adopting a constitutional framework for affordable housing and so, in March 2015, the New Jersey Supreme Court disbanded COAH. In re Adoption of N.J.A.C. 5:96 & 5:97 by the N.J. Council on Affordable Housing, 221 N.J. 1 (2015) (“Mount Laurel IV”), the Court held that because COAH was moribund, trial courts were to resume their role as the forum of first instance for evaluating municipal compliance with Mount Laurel obligations. The Mount Laurel IV decision also established a transitional process for municipalities to seek temporary immunity and ultimate a Judgment of Compliance and Repose (JOR) or the “judicial equivalent” of Substantive Certification from COAH.

On January 18, 2017 in In Re Declaratory Judgment Actions Filed by Various Municipalities, County of Ocean, Pursuant To The Supreme Court’s Decision In In re Adoption of N.J.A.C. 5:96, 221 N.J. 1 (2015) (“Mount Laurel V”), the Court decided that for the sixteen year period between 1999 and 2015 (known as the “gap period”) when COAH failed to implement rules creating fair share obligations for municipalities, the Mount Laurel constitutional obligation did not go away. Therefore, municipalities continue to be responsible for the need created during the gap period.

Bethlehem Township’s Planning Board adopted an amended Housing Element/Fair Share Plan prepared by Kyle McManus Associates on August 10, 2020, which outlines the strategies that will be implemented to meet the Township’s affordable housing obligation.

Regarding COAH resources, the Township of Bethlehem has dedicated Affordable Housing Trust Funds to implement an Accessory Apartment program to create rental units that will be affordable to low-income households. Accessory apartments are self-contained residential dwelling units, which may be in an existing home, through the conversion of an existing accessory structure on the same site, or an addition to an existing home or accessory building.

Applications are currently being accepted from property owners who wish to participate in the program. The Township will conditionally permit the creation of a maximum of 3 low income units on a first come-first served approach. The Township, will provide \$25,000 per unit to subsidize the creation of a low-income accessory apartment that will be paid in three installments. Property owners will be required to deed restrict the units for ten (10) years so that the household renting the unit will pay an affordable rent as determined by the program.

The Bethlehem Township website also offers within its “Resources” panel a page on COAH Resources. Here, residents and the public at large have access to Bethlehem COAH Trust Fund Reports from 2021, 2022, and 2023, as well as two resources for landlords who are interested in the Bethlehem Accessory Apartment Program.

Short Term Rental Regulations (2018)

In June 2017, the New Jersey Legislature passed a bill to tax short-term rentals (AB 4587). The bill proposed to extend the state sales and use tax and hotel and motel occupancy fee to “transient accommodations.” The bill defines “transient accommodations” as a “room, group of rooms, or other living or sleeping space for the lodging of occupants, including but not limited to residences or buildings used as residences.” Renters would be responsible for paying the taxes and fees. The bill, however, was vetoed by Governor Christie.

In July of 2018, P.L. 2018, Chapter 49 was approved, which allows municipalities to impose the following taxes and fees on transient accommodations where applicable: the municipal occupancy tax, the sports and entertainment facility tax - Millville, the Atlantic City luxury tax, the Atlantic City promotion fee, the Cape May County tourism tax and assessment, and the hotel occupancy tax. This new law mandates that transient space marketplaces, like Airbnb, collect and pay the tax on behalf of the property owner.

In response to rising concerns about P.L. 2018, C. 49, Governor Murphy signed Assembly Bill 4814/4520, which applies to “rentals of professionally managed units and rentals obtained through a transient space marketplace or travel agency, as long as the transient space marketplace or travel agency does not exclusively offer transient accommodations owned by the marketplace or travel agency”, effectively excluding transactions made directly between property owners and renters.

2019 The State of Innovation: Building a Stronger and Fairer Economy in New Jersey

The 2019 State of Innovation Building a Stronger and Fairer Economy in New Jersey plan vision “is to reestablish New Jersey as an economic and innovation leader, as a place where diverse talent, companies, and ideas flourish, where real pathways exist to the middle class, where all residents can prosper, and where environmental stewardship, fiscal prudence, and high labor standards are promoted and encouraged.” The plan highlights the existing economic challenges in the state and establishes the overall goal to provide guidance for New Jersey to cultivate a stronger economy for the future.

The plan establishes four strategic priorities: Investing in People, Investing in Communities, Making New Jersey the State of Innovation and Making Government Work Better. The strategic priorities form the overall goals of the plan to be accomplished by 2025. The goals are to increase faster job growth by adding 300,000 jobs, increasing the median wage by 4%, creating the most diverse innovation ecosystem in the

nation and doubling venture capital investment, closing the racial and gender wage and employment gaps, and reducing poverty by focusing on encouraging “thriving and inclusive urban centers and downtowns.”

COVID Permit Extension Act (2020)

The year 2020 saw the emergence of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which caused a temporary shutdown of many government services. On July 1, 2020, Governor Murphy signed the Permit Extension Act of 2020, P.L. 2020, c.53 (“Chapter 53”) into law as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of this law is to provide a relaxation of the requirements for municipal action related to deadlines under the MLUL. Chapter 53 effectively extends the terms of all governmental permits, approvals and deadlines, which were due to expire on March 9, 2020 until at least six (6) months after the end of the public health emergency (the “COVID-19 Extension Period”). The suspension applies to state and local permits and approvals including New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJ DEP) issued land use approvals, municipal land use approvals, flood hazard permits, water supply permits and certifications, water quality management plan approvals and other environmental approvals.

On June 4, 2021, Governor Murphy signed law A.5820 and Executive Order EO244 which terminated the Covid-10 Public Health Emergency, marking the end of the Covid-19 Permit Extension Act.

New Jersey’s Global Warming Response Act 80x50 Report (2020)

In 2020, the NJDEP in partnership with numerous agencies including the Board of Public Utilities, Economic Development Authority, Division of Community Affairs, NJ Transit, Department of Labor, Department of Transportation, and the Department of Agriculture, issued New Jersey’s Global Warming Response Act 80x50 Report for Evaluating Our Progress and Identifying Pathways to Reduce Emissions by 80 percent by 2050.

The Report analyzes existing policies and programs and provides options to assist policymakers in crafting new initiatives to bridge the emissions reductions gap. Key strategies to achieve the 80% reduction by 2050 include 100% clean energy, 100% light-duty electric vehicles, and 90% of buildings being electrified. The Report analyzes transportation, residential and commercial buildings, electric generation, industrial sector, and waste and agriculture.

2020 New Jersey Scientific Report on Climate Change

In addition, in June 2020, NJDEP released the 2020 New Jersey Scientific Report on Climate Change. This report evaluated climate change and its effects, as well as its effects on resources and ecosystems.

The Report details the effects of climate change on temperature, precipitation, sea-level rise, ocean acidification, air quality, water resources, agriculture, forests, wetlands, terrestrial carbon sequestration, terrestrial systems, freshwater systems, marine systems and cyanobacteria.

Cannabis Regulations (2021)

Assembly Bill 21 / Senate Bill 21 was introduced on November 5, 2020 and adopted by both houses on December 17, 2020 and was signed by the Governor on February 22, 2021. The bill legalizes personal use cannabis for certain adults, subject to state regulation, decriminalizes small amounts of marijuana and hashish possession, and removes marijuana as a Schedule I drug. The bill defines 6 classes of license based on different operational aspects. For municipalities, Section 31 provides an option to adopt Municipal Regulations or Ordinances that permit or prohibit one or more classes of license within the municipality along with regulating time, manner, place, and quantity. Section 40 permits municipalities to levy an optional Cannabis “Transfer Tax and User Tax” that is capped at 1% of wholesale activities and 2% of cultivation, processing, and retail activities.

Ordinances that prohibit or otherwise regulate cannabis that predate the Act are not valid, a new Ordinance would need to be adopted within 180 days of passage of the Act. If an Ordinance regulating / prohibiting one or more classes of license is not adopted within 180 days, then any class not prohibited will be deemed permitted in the following locations:

1. Classes 1, 2, 3, 4, and 6 will be permitted in all Industrial Zones;
2. Class 5 will be permitted in all Retail / Commercial Zones.

After 180 days, if a municipality does not prohibit one or more classes, it must wait five (5) years to adopt an ordinance that prohibits cannabis uses. At that time, the ordinance would be prospective and would not apply to any lawfully existing businesses that open during the five-year period.

Currently, the Cannabis Resources page with the Bethlehem Township official website are under development. However, the page includes a link with more information to a presentation from the New Jersey State League of Municipalities, dated March 18, 2021 and entitled “Legislative Briefing: Marijuana Legalization.” The presentation gives residents of Bethlehem Township an overview of three new laws at the time, P.L. 2021, c.16, P.L. 2021, c.19, and P.L. 2021, c.25. They discuss the “New Jersey Cannabis Regulatory, Enforcement Assistance and Marketplace Modernization Act,” the decriminalization of certain future marijuana and hashish offenses, and “clean-up bill” underage possession or consumption of marijuana, hashish, and alcohol, respectively.

New Jersey Environmental Justice Law

The New Jersey Environmental Justice Law requires the NJ Department of Environmental Protection to evaluate the environmental and public health impacts of certain facilities on overburdened communities when reviewing permit applications. The law allows for permit denial for any proposed facility that has a disproportionately negative impact on an overburdened community.

The law requires the following facility permit applications in overburdened communities qualify for a review of their impact:

- Major sources of air pollution (i.e., gas fired power plants and cogeneration facilities);
- Resource recovery facilities or incinerators; sludge processing facilities;
- Sewage treatment plants with a capacity of more than 50 million gallons per day;
- Transfer stations or solid waste facilities;
- Recycling facilities that receive at least 100 tons of recyclable material per day;
- Scrap metal facilities;
- Landfills; or
- Medical waste incinerators, except those attendants to hospitals and universities.

According to the Statewide Overburdened Communities Map, Bethlehem does not currently have any portions of the Township that qualify as an overburdened community.

NJTPA Long Range Transportation Plan (2021)

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority adopted its Long-Range Transportation Plan (“Plan 2050”) on September 13, 2021. The Plan outlines the existing conditions of the State’s transportation network, including context, trends and performance. The Plan contemplates a number of environmental factors that present challenges to future transportation planning as North Jersey continues to face development pressures, such as climate change, air quality, environmental mitigation, water quality, open space and wildlife habitats, and cultural and historic resources.

The Plan states two improvements to transportation infrastructure in Hunterdon County. The first is funding for improvements and possible expansion of the Raritan Valley Line. The Raritan Valley Line has four stops in Hunterdon County. The second is \$18 million for roadway improvements on Route 31, Route 78/22 to Graysrock Road in Hunterdon County. Construction is projected to start in 2024.

The Plan notes that residents of rural communities are greatly impacted by the inequities from the lack of transportation options, as evidenced by two comments from Hunterdon County residents that participated in their public online survey that reflect this problem:

- “Not all train stations are accessible near us, and also there aren’t any wheelchair accessible taxis/Ubbers to even take us to a train/bus station. It’s very discouraging, especially for young people, who are striving to have some independence.” – Hunterdon County Respondent
- “Cheap, frequent, and widely available public transport, whether in the form of buses or trains, is very important to those who are disabled, elderly, or poor. Especially those in more rural communities, the availability of this type of transport is often the only means for some people to get out of the house.” – Hunterdon County Respondent

Climate Change Resilience Strategy (2021)

The State of New Jersey issued a Climate Change Resiliency Strategy in April of 2021, building upon the findings of the 2020 Scientific Report on Climate Change. This Report outlines six priorities with strategies which include:

1. Build Resilient and Healthy Communities
 - 1.1 Integrate Resilience into Local and Regional Planning
 - 1.2 Increase Technical Assistance Programs to Address Community Resilience
 - 1.3 Modify Regulatory Programs to Address Climate Change Impacts and Encourage Adaptation Over Time
 - 1.4 Decrease Vulnerability of Existing Infrastructure and Development
 - 1.5 Incentivize Sustainable Growth and Redevelopment that Incorporates Resilience and Investment in Safer Areas
 - 1.6 Integrate Public Health into Community Resilience Planning and Activities
2. Strengthen the Resilience of New Jersey's Ecosystems
 - 2.1 Promote Resource Conservation and Natural Lands Management to Strengthen Ecological Resilience
 - 2.2 Manage Agricultural Lands, Forests, and Other Ecosystems for Climate Impacts and Environmental Stressors
 - 2.3 Deploy Natural and Nature-based Solutions for Resilience
3. Promote Coordinated Governance
 - 3.1 Ensure Continuing Efforts by the Interagency Council on Climate Resilience to Lead a Coordinated, Whole-of-government Approach to Resilience
 - 3.2 Actively Engage Local Governments and Other Partners to Develop Resilience Solutions
 - 3.3 Incorporate Equity and Inclusion in Resilience Decision-making
4. Promote Climate-Informed Investments and Innovative Financing
 - 4.1 Expand Public Communication Efforts on Climate Change and Impacts on New Jersey
 - 4.2 Expand Climate Change Education and Training Opportunities
 - 4.3 Integrate Climate Change Vulnerability and Impacts into State Assessments
 - 4.4 Build a Collaborative Research Agenda to Guide Future Climate Resilience Research
5. Coastal Resilience Plan
 - 5.1 Integrate Climate Change into Existing State Investments and Funding Decisions
 - 5.2 Expand the Availability of Financing for Resilience Investments from Public and Private Sources
 - 5.3 Ensure Equity and Transparency in Resilience Investments

Solar on Farms- Grid Supply Bill (S2605 and A4554), Dual Use Bill (S3484 and A5434), 2021, and Dual-Use Solar Pilot Program (2023)

In July of 2021, two (2) separate solar bills were passed by the State Legislature. The Grid Supply Bill (S2605 and A4554) aims to permit utility-scale solar projects, that are eligible for renewable energy incentive certificates (SREC-IIs) on farmland. The Bill includes standards aimed to protect prime farmland soils and soils of statewide importance, while also establishing limitations on the area of utility-scale projects that can be within a County and its corresponding Agriculture Development Area. However, these projects are prohibited on preserved farmland and are not eligible for farmland assessment purposes.

The intent of the Dual Use Bill (S3484 and A5434) is to experiment to determine which techniques are best suited for using solar on working farms in order to ensure that farming remains productive and viable. The Bill establishes a 3- to 5-year pilot program which will test the viability of the dual use concept. Projects will be capped at 10 MW (estimated to be 50-100 acres) in size and the overall pilot program is capped at 200 MW (1,000-2,000 acres). The land is required to be actively devoted to agricultural and horticultural use. The loss of prime soils and statewide importance soils in Agriculture Development Areas are prohibited, and dual use projects approved through the pilot program will be a “permitted use” within a municipality. The BPU is currently in the process of establishing the Dual Use Solar Program. The Dual Use Law may have a significant impact on Bethlehem Township’s farmland, farming industry, and its scenic vistas.

On May 1, 2023, The New Jersey Board of Public Utilities (NJBPU) has approved an agreement with the Rutgers University Agrivoltaics Program (RAP) to facilitate the development and implementation of a Dual-Use Solar Energy Pilot Program over the next three years. The Pilot Program is designed to demonstrate and study the compatibility of agricultural or horticultural production with solar photovoltaic infrastructure on the same property. The Pilot Program will allow for the installation and operation of up to 200 Megawatts of direct current (MWdc) of solar installation capacity over three years, extendable by the Board to up to 300 MWdc over five years. Individual solar projects would be limited to 10 MWdc. The Pilot Program and the results from its associated research requirements will inform a permanent program that includes standards for construction and operation of dual-use solar energy projects.

The Pilot Program will provide incentives to solar electric generation facilities, located on unreserved farmland, which plan to maintain the land’s active agricultural or horticultural use. Dual-use solar can provide farmers with an additional stream of revenue, assisting with farm financial viability enabling continued agricultural or horticultural production of land while also increasing the statewide production of clean energy. The staff anticipates that projects seeking to participate in the Pilot Program will be determined after a competitive process that considers price and non-price terms, as directed by the Dual-Use Solar Act of 2021. The Board anticipates a straw proposal for the pilot program will be issued during Summer 2023 followed by a robust public engagement process.

“This action by the Board represents the next exciting step in the expansion of our already successful solar program,” said NJBPU President Joseph L. Fiordaliso. “Adding dual-use solar to our Community Solar, utility-scale solar, and customer-sited solar programs will provide us with the renewable energy we need to reach the Governor’s goal of 100 percent clean energy by 2035. The dual-use program provides a balanced approach to growing our solar industry while providing additional financial support to New Jersey’s working family farmers. We look forward to working with the Rutgers Agrivoltaics Program on this project.”

Distribution Warehousing and Goods Movement Guidelines (2022)

In September 2022, the New Jersey State Planning Commission Office of Planning Advocacy issued warehousing siting guidance for municipalities. The guidance document aims to

- Facilitate a proactive, rather than a reactive approach
- Provide municipal factors to consider and balance when developing or updating a Master Plan and reviewing applications, land use, and development requirements
- Encourage a regional approach to planning, siting, and facilitating the logistics facilities.

The report acknowledges that many rural municipalities are vulnerable to poorly sited and scaled warehousing projects, as their zoning ordinance permits broad light industrial uses, which often includes warehousing.

Special Occasion Events on Preserved Farmland (2023)

In February 2023, the State Senate and General Assembly passed a law that allows special occasion events on preserved farmland. The law allows special occasion events on preserved commercial farms that produce agricultural or horticultural products worth \$10,000 or more annually. A special occasion event is defined by the statute as “a wedding, lifetime milestone event, or other cultural or social event conducted, in whole or in part, on preserved farmland on a commercial farm. Special occasion event shall not include:

- (1) An activity which is eligible to receive right to farm benefits pursuant to the Right to Farm Act.
- (2) A recreational use permitted pursuant to a farmland preservation deed of easement.
- (3) A wedding held for a spouse, parent, child, grandparent, sibling, niece, nephew, or cousin of the owner of the commercial farm or the owner, operator, or employee of the commercial farm.

Special occasion events are required to abide by the following:

- The event shall last a maximum duration of two consecutive calendar days.
- The event does not interfere with the use of preserved farmland and shall be designed to protect the agricultural resources of the land.

- If the event involves alcoholic beverages, it shall comply with all applicable State and local laws, regulations, resolutions, and ordinances.
- All applicable State and local laws, regulations, resolutions, and ordinances including food safety, litter, noise, solid waste, traffic, and the protection of public health and safety shall apply to the event. To comply with local laws, etc., the municipality may require that an owner or operator of the commercial farm located on preserved farmland to submit an application to the municipality for approval if the special occasion event:
 - Generates parking or traffic flow that could unreasonably interfere with the movement of normal traffic or emergency vehicles.
 - Require the expenditure of municipal resources or inspections from agencies or authorities of the municipality.
- The municipal application shall not charge more than \$50 and shall not require more information than an identification of the locations of where tents or other temporary structures, sanitary facilities, parking, and access and egress for each event, the location of music, number of expected guests, and other information that may be of public concern and would be required of a similar event at a public park or other public venue.
- No new permanent structures shall be constructed or erected on preserved farmland for the purpose of holding a special occasion event.
- The installation and use of tents, canopies, umbrellas, tables, chairs, and other temporary structures on preserved farmland for special occasion events shall be permitted and limited to the timeframe encompassing April 1st through November 30th each year.
- Parking at a special occasion event shall be provided through the use of existing parking areas on the farm and curtilage surrounding existing buildings to the extent possible. Additional on-site areas to provide temporary parking shall comply with the standards for on-farm direct marketing facilities.
- The occupied area associated with a special occasion event shall be no more than the lesser of 10 acres or 10 percent of farmland.
- The Grantee (ie. the entity to which the development rights of a preserved farm were conveyed) shall develop an application process which shall include:
 - The number of special occasion events held on the commercial farm in a calendar year
 - Maximum attendance of the special occasion events
- A commercial farm shall not hold more than one special occasion event with over 100 guests per day.

- A commercial farm may hold 26 special occasion events each calendar year, of which only six special occasion events may have 250 guests or more in attendant at any time during the event.

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SECTION D. RECOMMENDED CHANGES FOR THE TOWNSHIP'S MASTER PLAN AND LAND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE

"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."

As indicated in Section B of this Master Plan Reexamination Report, many of the issues and recommendations of the 2012 Master Plan continue to remain relevant. Those issues identified continue to remain relevant and are recommended.

The following additional changes are recommended to the Township's Master Plan:

- The Township should participate in the State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC) Municipal Planning Incentive Grant Program (MPIG) and prepare an updated Farmland Preservation Plan in accordance with SADC criteria. A requirement of the MPIG is to prepare a Comprehensive Farmland Preservation Plan once every 10 years.
- Prepare a Land Use Plan Element for the Route 173 Corridor to evaluate appropriate uses that will foster economic development while remaining sensitive to natural resources and the Township's rural character.
- The Township should prepare the Climate Hazard Vulnerability Assessment, which will form the basis of zoning ordinance revisions that will allow Bethlehem Township to become a more resilient community and be better prepared for hazards, such as those identified in the Hunterdon County Hazard Mitigation Plan which includes hurricanes, nor'easters, and severe storms.
- The Township should prepare an updated Environmental Resource Inventory that establishes the baseline/existing conditions of the Township's natural resources. The ERI should incorporate older data that can be compared to the most up-to-date information to determine whether the resources are being improved or worsened. Once the baseline data is established, the Township should review the data and develop recommendations to mitigate those impacts.
- The municipality should continue to carefully monitor the developments in affordable housing regulation, Supreme Court decision and new legislation and be prepared to comply with the resulting new rules.
- Planning Board recommends the Bethlehem Township Preserved Lands Map, which was created as part of the Highlands conformance process, be adopted as an amendment to the Bethlehem Township Master Plan, specifically the Greenway and Open Space Plan and Recreation Plan Element. This mapping should be reviewed periodically to reflect any updates.

- Seek funding from the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities to prepare a Community Energy Plan (CEP.) A CEP helps a community work toward a better environment for all residents by using the state's Energy Master Plan (EMP) as a guide to align local efforts. The EMP identifies seven strategies for rapid reductions in greenhouse gas emissions by targeting efforts to reduce energy use, reduce emissions, increase renewable energy, and more. Many areas of the Township see frequent power outages. Increasing the Township's renewable energy may reduce reliance on the traditional power grid.

The following are recommended changes to the Township's Land Use Ordinance:

- Currently the Neighborhood Commercial (NC), General Commercial (GC) and Highway Commercial (HC) are combined into Section 102-15. The ordinances should be revised to include three (3) separate sections and appropriate uses reviewed for each zone district.
 - Each commercial zone should specify the intent and intensity of the uses. An example of each includes:
 - Neighborhood Commercial: Uses such as health care facilities, professional offices, small grocery stores, general or specialty stores which furnish convenience goods and services to meet the daily needs of the residents of the municipality. Uses should promote walkability and connection to assets such as parks and trails.
 - General Commercial: Uses that do not have outside activities such as night use drive-up windows, gasoline sales, significant late night parking lot activity or similar impacts adjacent to the lower intensity land use. (i.e. Hardware Store, Non-Drive Thru Restaurants, Drug Stores).
 - Highway Commercial: Uses and facilities which primarily serve the travelling public, such as automobile oriented facilities, tourist facilities, eating establishments, indoor recreation establishments, etc.
 - The intensity of the uses in each commercial zone must be sensitive to the overall rural and natural character of the Township.
 - Uses in these zones should be evaluated and updated to include uses that will spur economic development in the Township and to support and protect the Township's ecological and agricultural assets. Examples of these uses include agritourism, ecotourism, boutique hotels, museums, specialty retail shops, etc.

- Amend Section 102-8, entitled Definitions, to include definitions of “agritourism” and “tourism-oriented business” and “manufacturing, light” Suggested definitions are as follows:
 - Agritourism: Any activity incidental to the operation of a farm that brings members of the public to the farm for educational, recreational, or retail purposes.
 - Tourism-oriented Business: Businesses and commercial establishments catering primarily to persons traveling for pleasure, recreation, etc. Does not include hotels.
 - Manufacturing, Light: An establishment engaged in the transformation of finished products or parts into new products and where all processing, fabricating, assembly, or disassembly of items takes place wholly within an enclosed building. This use does not include manufacturing that generates fumes, gases, smoke, vapors, vibrations, noise or glare, or similar nuisances that may cause adverse effects on users of adjacent land.
- Several lots throughout the Township are currently split zoned, creating a burden on property owners. The lines for which the zones are split are not typically part of a land survey, and therefore create ambiguity. To alleviate the burden of split-zoned properties on the landowners, the Township should identify split-zoned properties and rezone as single zone districts, as appropriate, based on location, existing use, and surrounding uses.
- Buffer requirements between non-residential uses and residential uses should be evaluated.
- On September 28, 2023 the Highlands Council released the document titled “Policy Standards for Warehousing in the New Jersey Highlands Region.” This document set forth several areas where warehousing should be prohibited including: the Preservation Area, Protection Zone, and Highlands Conservation Zone. The entirety of the Township falls within one of these areas and should therefore review the Land Use Ordinance to ensure it is consistent with this policy. Furthermore, the township already bears the burden of traffic using Route 173 as an alternative to Route 78 and does not wish to further increase heavy truck traffic. The township also wishes to keep the rural and natural characteristics of the town, which warehousing does not promote. Therefore, while the Land Use Ordinance does not currently permit warehousing as a permitted use in any of the zoning districts, the Ordinance includes references to warehousing in the definitions and Attachment 11 (Design Element, Risks, Testing Requirements, Performance Standards, Preferred Design Elements and Remedial Plan Elements for Development on Karst Terrain).
- Review the ROM zone and evaluate the existing uses and bulk standards that are appropriate for the preservation area of the Highlands.

- The Township's land development regulations should be thoroughly reviewed to ensure the Planning Board has adequate documentation at the time of any application for development.
- The Township may want to consider incorporating Dark-Sky compliant standards, which may be appropriate for a rural community like Bethlehem Township. The International Dark-Sky Association is a grassroots advocate network that shares best practices and tools to protect the night skies for present and future generations. The Township should consider implementing dark sky compliant standards that reduce glare, light trespass, and sky glow as a means to retain the rural character of the Township.

The following are additional recommendations:

- In accordance with recent legislative changes concerning events on preserved farms, the Township should consider implementing a municipal permitting program, as permitted by law.
- Review and evaluate interconnectedness of publicly accessible open space properties. The Township should create an inventory of all public use easements, conservation easements and deeds that will help identify areas that may be underutilized and recommend additional easements or connections along roadways that would better link the Township's open spaces.
- When vehicle crashes occur on Route 78, Route 173 becomes a bypass, causing traffic concerns to the township and residents. The township should continue to work with the State and County to ensure the safety of motorists and residents when these incidents occur.
- The Emerald Ash Borer is a significant threat to the forested areas of the Township. The Township should review its ordinances and determine whether new ordinances or ordinance revisions are necessary. Examples include:
 - Determine whether the Township's Tree Replacement Ordinance should require stricter standards.
 - Review the ordinance to determine whether there are standards in place pertaining to tree clearing, especially as it pertains to new development.
 - Provide education and outreach to property owners regarding woodland management techniques and strategies.

SECTION E: RECOMMENDED REDEVELOPMENT PLANS

“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 seq.) 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 Township does not have any designated Areas in Need of Redevelopment or Rehabilitation. The Township may want to consider designated areas in Need of Rehabilitation as a means to foster appropriate economic development, particularly along New Jersey Route 173 within the GC (General Commercial,) HC (Highway Commercial,) NC (Neighborhood Commercial,) MFG (Manufacturing,) and ROM (Research & Office). All new development should be sensitive to the rural and historic character of the Township.

SECTION F: RECOMMENDATIONS REGARDING ELECTRIC VEHICLE INFRASTRUCTURE

“The recommendations of the Planning Board concerning locations appropriate for the development of public electric vehicle infrastructure, including but not limited to, commercial districts, areas proximate to public transportation and transit facilities and transportation corridors, and public rest stops; and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary or appropriate for the development of public electric vehicle infrastructure.”

It is recommended that the Township encourage the installation of public electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure on non-residential properties throughout the Township, especially those that have parking lots on site. Specifically, EV charging stations should be located on Township-owned properties, public spaces such as parks, and/or within the GC (General Commercial,) HC (Highway Commercial,) NC (Neighborhood Commercial,) MFG (Manufacturing,) and ROM (Research & Office).

Further, in accordance with State Law (P.L. 2021, c. 171), electric vehicle charging stations and Make-Ready parking spaces should be permitted accessory uses within all zoning districts in the Township. The Township should adopt the DCA Model Statewide Municipal EV Ordinance, which will codify the state law within the Township’s Land Management Ordinance.