

Summary of January 20, 2005 Public Hearing on the Warren County Planning Board Cross-Acceptance Draft Report

Date: January 21, 2005

On January 20, 2005 the Warren County Planning Board held a Public Hearing on the Draft Warren County Cross-Acceptance Plan Third Round of Cross Acceptance. The meeting was held at 7:30 p.m. in the Freeholder Meeting Room of the Warren County Administration Building. David Dech County Planning Director gave a summary of the Draft Cross-Acceptance Report. He described the process the Planning Department took to disseminate the Round Three Cross Acceptance Information and the 13 item questionnaire to all municipalities, how the department compiled the information that was returned and the subsequent report that was produced.

Mr. Dech explained that in the report are sections relating to notable events since Cross Acceptance II such as the institution of state regulations like NJDEP's Phase II Stormwater Regulations, the Highlands Planning and Protection Act and new rules governing COAH obligations. Mr. Dech also gave an overview of existing Planning Areas and Centers throughout the County. Some of the major issues with the State Plan in this section are the boundaries of existing and proposed centers, property taxes, center designation process/plan endorsement process, planning area designation, historic and cultural sites, critical environmental sites and local control of land use planning. Also included in the report are the municipal responses to the 13 item questionnaire.

In the Cross Acceptance Draft Plan Mr. Dech outlined the County response to the questionnaire. A key item in the county response is that the Office of Smart Growth should consider abandoning the Planning Areas and institute system consisting of four planning areas. Urban, Suburban, Rural and Rural Towns. Planning Areas as defined in the SDRP are "large masses of land that share a common set of conditions, such as population density, infrastructure systems, level of development or natural systems." Planning Areas do not necessarily correspond with municipal county boundaries.

Mr. Dech then described proposed changes in the Planning Area map as submitted by municipalities. In Hardwick there is an area of PA-4 located in Worthington State Forest that is recommended to be changed to PA-8. Two areas in Independence Township have been proposed for change, the first one is associated with the Great Meadows farmland and should be changed from a PA-5 to a PA-4b, and the other site is along the Mansfield Township boundary and should be changed from a PA-4b to a PA-5.

In Mansfield Township the area between the Musconetcong River and County Route 629 (Rockport Road) is all requested to be changed by municipal officials. Along the Hackettstown boundary, the Township would like to see this developed area changed from PA-4b to a PA-2, and toward Washington Township this area should be changed to a PA-4. Both areas are currently listed as PA-4b. Washington Borough is requesting the area within its boundary that is listed as a PA-4b be changed to a PA-4.

Washington Township is requesting that the area listed as part of the Washington Town Center be "De-designated" in the Township. In Greenwich a large area north of Rt. 78 should be changed from PA-4 to PA-5 and some park lands should be depicted as PA-8 in the municipality.

Mr. Dech ended his presentation on the Draft report noting that the office has received several written comments on the report and these comments are included in the report. The meeting was then open to the public for comments and questions.

T. Bolger asked:

"Can there be written response to the (Planning) Department and (Planning) Board?" The response to this is yes. Comments to the planning board should be made by January 25, 2005; comments to the Freeholders should be made by February 23, 2005.

K. Tarsi asked:

"Did the population figures for Alpha include the 50 lot subdivision on 7th Ave.?" The response to this was no. The population projections were based on approved subdivisions going back 5 years. The project in question was 6 years ago.

C Stracco stated:

"His client AJR/ Investment is opposed to Washington Townships request to be dedesignated from the Washington Borough Town Center." This statement was noted for the record.

M. Metzger stated:

"Pohatcong Township would like to reserve judgment on the population figures for the Township until their professionals can review it." This statement was noted for the record.

T Bolger made the following statements:

"The Township of Greenwich would like to have our Planner review the population projection numbers." This statement was noted for the record.

"I would like an explanation concerning the statement in the plan eliminating critical sites, historic sites and natural sites." Response was that these would not be removed. They would carry the same weight as they do now but be incorporated into the three planning area system.

"The Warren County Planning Department has been great to work with, but the report needs some refinement". This statement was noted for the record.

K Duffy asked:

“Would you please go over the timeline for this report?” Response: Comment period to go to Planning Board is 1-25-05, Planning Board review is 1/31/05, send to Freeholders for their review and approval 2/23/05. Transmit to State in March 2005.

M. Metzger asked:

“What is the process for changing center area designations after the report is submitted?” This could be accomplished through plan endorsement with the Office of Smart Growth.

R. Mathez asked:

“What cut off date did you use for identifying newly acquired Green Acres Lands and other parkland acquisitions?” The last revision for these maps was November 2004.

K. Duffy asked:

“What are you going to present the Freeholders on 2/23/05?” The freeholders will receive a revised version of the draft you got tonight.

T. Bolger asked:

“How will you communicate the outcome of the Freeholders meeting on 2/23/05? We will post the adopted plan on the county web page.

At this point no further comments were made or questions asked.

There are no additional meetings planned for the third round of cross-acceptance. Participants were urged to attend the County Planning Board meeting on 1/31/05 and the County Freeholder meeting on 2/23/05, if they had any additional testimony to give. Written comments would be accepted for the Planning Board up to 1/25/05, the Freeholder up to 2/23/05 or the State 60 days after the County submitted their report.