

**ADOPTED**  
**Hightstown Borough Master Plan Amendment**  
**Route 33 Corridor Planning Area**

The purpose of this Master Plan Amendment is to refine the Borough's planning policy as it relates to the Route 33 Corridor, particularly the area between Summit Street and the municipal boundary. The Borough has long recognized this area as one in need of revitalization.

In the late 90's, State Highway 133, otherwise known as the Hightstown Bypass, was under construction. At the time, the Borough anticipated that much of the traffic that utilized the downtown would be diverted to the By-Pass. With less trucks and pass-through commuter traffic using local roads, the Borough felt it could "*(p)romote the redesign of the Route 33 corridor to maximize pedestrian usability and minimize vehicular intrusion in the central downtown business district.*" (p.6 of 72, 1998 Master Plan) That became a driving force behind the planning policies of the 1998 Master Plan. The Town went so far as to propose that Hightstown should "*...petition the State to re-classify Route 33 through town and designate it as Business Route 33 in Hightstown.*" (p. 29 of 72) In short, the expectations were high that State Highway 133 would take much of the Town's undesirable traffic, including large trucks, out of downtown so the Borough could begin planning for a more pedestrian-friendly, revitalized commercial core.

By 2005, when the Borough's Re-examination Report was adopted, State Highway 133 was open and Coca-Cola (also known as Minute Maid) had been closed for two years. The traffic through town had been reduced, as expected. Downtown streetscape improvement projects had begun and the character of Hightstown's commercial district was improving, but only in the center of town. Route 33 in the area of Summit Street remained outside the improvement zone and under-utilized. Though there was less traffic and certainly fewer large trucks in the area, the businesses in the southwest corner of town were not benefitting from the Borough's streetscape improvement projects.

However, the 2005 Re-Examination Report saw the closure of the Minute Maid operation as an "*...opportunity to improve Hightstown livability*" (p. 14, 2005 Re-Examination Report) and reshape the direction of the Route 33 corridor. The Planning Board recommended the Industrial Zone be changed to a Highway Commercial (HC) zone, explaining that "*...additional highway commercial along Route 33 complements the neighboring businesses, and is appropriate for the level of automobile access there.*" (ibid) It was generally thought that the downtown business district was an appropriate place for small scale specialty shops that could capitalize on pedestrian users. In contrast, the Route 33 corridor near the edge of town was an appropriate area for slightly larger retail uses that might be accessed by both pedestrians and customers arriving by car. Large, big box stores were thought to be more logically located in East Windsor and on Route 130, closer to and along the regional highway.

With this in mind, the Planning Board outlined a few broad planning principles:

- Provide for a variety of commercial tenants along the corridor, with residential uses where the area abuts existing neighborhoods,
- Integrate the Borough and Township greenway plans,
- Provide for pedestrian and bicycling priorities, and
- Provide physical connections between the area and the rest of the Borough, both the residential neighborhoods around this commercial area and the downtown business district to the east.

In the context of this overall planning, the Minute Maid site warrants special consideration because of its imposing size and appearance; it has a significant impact on the character of the neighborhood. The fact that the site is currently unsightly and under-utilized adversely impacts the neighborhood's economic and revitalization potential. The future use, appearance and traffic generated by the site will affect the success of any revitalization effort in the area.

From 2005 to 2008 Borough officials sought to collaborate with the owners of the Minute Maid site to devise a viable, mixed use redevelopment plan, but a final plan never materialized. Ultimately, in October of 2008 the Borough implemented the recommendations of the 2005 Re-Examination Report and adopted an ordinance that changed the zoning from Industrial to Highway Commercial.

The following year the Borough partnered with East Windsor to apply for and secure a \$100,000 planning grant to develop an inter-municipal planning strategy for the Route 33 corridor between Summit Street in Hightstown and Route 130 in East Windsor. The grant produced a report entitled the Route 33 Corridor Revitalization Plan, dated May 2012. This Plan describes a cohesive vision for the Route 33 corridor area on both sides of the municipal line. The vision was developed after a careful analysis of the area's opportunities and constraints. A detailed market study was also undertaken. And there was months of coordination between the two municipalities as well as stakeholders in the area. In the end, the plan called for four (4) distinct zoning districts, of which two (2) are included in Hightstown – Main Street Retail and Planned Campus Development.

The proposed Main Street Retail zone encompasses the lots immediately adjacent to both sides of Route 33, beginning at Summit Street and proceeding west to the Borough line and even beyond, into East Windsor. In this zone, the intent is to “...create a small scale walkable area, with a ‘Main Street’ appearance.” (p. 55, Route 33 Corridor Revitalization Plan) It will have a “...wide variety of retail uses...” with shops close to the street and shared parking behind the buildings. These retail uses will be smaller in scale than those in the adjoining ‘Big Box Retail’ district proposed in East Windsor, but slightly larger than the small scale specialty shops that are more typical in downtown.

The plan proposes a network of pedestrian and bicycle paths, linked to greenway systems in both towns. It includes a regionalize stormwater management plan. One option envisions a YMCA or other indoor recreation facility as a “recreation destination

*anchor*” in the district. An important component of this zoning district will be the ‘Main Street’ appearance of the Route 33 corridor, including store fronts and appropriate streetscape improvements. The roadways will be designed to manage a volume of cars that will supply a large part of the area’s customer base. But the streetscape design also strives to insure that cars will share the Route 33 corridor with an active population of local pedestrians and bicyclists, who should also be targeted as primary users of the businesses in the area.

The other proposed zoning district in Hightstown is the Planned Campus Development, intended to be a “*low scale campus form (of) development.*” (p. 55) The permitted uses in this zone would include professional offices, both medical and general offices, and possibly an assisted living facility and/or a new YMCA. The success of these uses is less dependent on exposure to high trafficked roads like Route 33 or Route 130. They could benefit from close proximity to the area’s greenways and environmental resources to enhance a campus-like setting. Market studies have shown that the new, nearby Princeton-Plainsboro Hospital and a planned outpatient facility for Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia on the same campus make the area well positioned to support medical uses and satellite outpatient care facilities. These uses, in turn, would support retail uses in the Main Street Retail district, creating an integrated, complementary land use zoning plan.

Overall, the Route 33 Corridor Revitalization Plan is a well-researched, well constructed visioning document that outlines a positive direction and good planning policies for a section of Hightstown which the Borough has long worked to improve. With this Master Plan Amendment, the Hightstown Borough Planning Board formally adopts the Route 33 Corridor Revitalization Plan as an appendix to this Amendment, thereby making the Route 33 Corridor Revitalization Plan an integral part of the Borough’s Master Plan, more specifically, its Land Use Element. Lastly, with this Amendment, the Planning Board further recommends that zoning be developed to create a Main Street Retail zone and a Planned Campus Development zone that will implement as closely as practical the planning policies described in this Plan.

*Amendment Adopted: August 12, 2013*