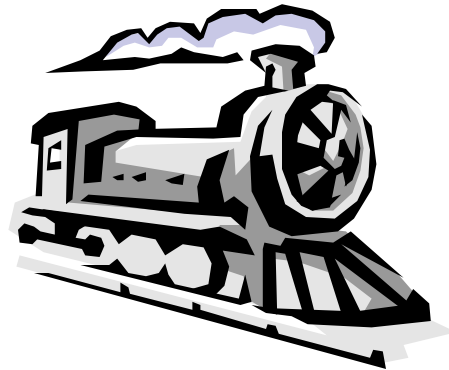


MASTER PLAN

for the

BOROUGH OF HIGHTSTOWN



Prepared for
The Hightstown Planning Board

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PREFACE

A master plan is the cornerstone of land use planning in any municipality. It establishes the policies and direction for future development, or redevelopment. A Planning Board uses a master plan to articulate a vision of the municipality and convey that vision to future Planning Boards. In towns that do not have a single Planning Board, Zoning Boards rely on direction in the master plan when they decide on application requests for variances.

A master plan is also the basis on which zoning, subdivision and site plan ordinances are written. Effective ordinances require a clear and detailed description of the hopes that a Planning Board has for its municipality. Without it, ordinances have no foundation on which to sustain a challenge from either a potential applicant or the courts.

Finally, people interested in living in, or doing business in a municipality, should be able to formulate a clear understanding of that community from its master plan. The plan must include sufficient detail to insure that the municipality's planning objectives are accurately articulated. Once people familiarized themselves with a town's master plan, then, should they decide to proceed and engage in business or development in the municipality, they are doing so with a clear understanding of the planning expectation of the community. Furthermore, if anyone chooses to challenge Planning Board decisions or local ordinances that are based on the master plan, then they are doing so against a process that included public review and sanction. Under these circumstances, the master plan becomes a critical document that supports a municipality's position in a possible legal challenge.

In addition to being detailed, a master plan must be long ranged. Historically, master plans have been written anticipating development for a twenty-year period. However, the current trend is to plan for a municipality's ultimate condition. The ultimate condition is the description of the community which the municipal planners, in most cases the Planning Board members, hope will hold true when the community becomes everything it can be; when it is completely built, and/or redeveloped as the municipal planners hope it will be. There is no predetermined time frame within which the ultimate condition must be achieved. Such false schedules only encourage planners to fix the most pressing problems. This kind of reactive planning tends to obscure the ultimate vision for the community.

By taking a longer view of land use planning, there is greater consistency in making planning decisions and actions. Immediate problems are addressed in the context of the "big picture" and so solutions are less likely to create new problems. Planning applications, ordinances and municipal projects are reviewed based on their ability to support the ultimate condition. This provides commonality to the decision making process and less conflicts develop. It is with this long range, intergenerational view of the ultimate condition of Hightstown that this Master Plan is written.

Hightstown's planners have created a vision of the Borough's ultimate condition. Admittedly, it is not a complete vision. It concentrates on the character and sustainability of the downtown area and the economic core of the Borough. At this point in time, the state of the Borough is such that little can be improved in the municipality without substantial

reforms to the commercial sector first to enhance ratables and strengthen revenues. Therefore, this Master Plan concentrates heaviest on these objectives. The municipal planners clearly expect to develop equally detailed visions for residential areas of town when the local economy begins to turn around. But recognizing the currently limited financial resources of the Borough, planning efforts must be directed toward improving the local economy first.

The Master Plan defines the ultimate condition for the Borough, and more specifically in this case a vision of the commercial sector of the Borough, through a series of chapters, referred to as elements. After the goals and objectives, the Master Plan has elements on historic sites, circulation, and recreation. Each of these describes valuable facets of the community that contribute to the unique character of the Borough. The elements outline policies for protecting and enhancing the Borough's various planning assets. The existing recycling element will be re-adopted. A new housing element that meets the requirement for fair share housing under the regulations of the Council on Affordable Housing has been adopted separately. However, the next updated master plan should build on improvements in the business districts anticipated in this Master Plan and define a more detailed ultimate vision for residential neighborhoods and municipal services.

Following the supporting elements that describe the essence of Hightstown and assert critical policies, the Land Use Element coalesces all of the information into a planning proposal. The proposal includes a proposed zone plan and some general land use considerations.

The proposed zone plan divides the Borough into land use zones and defines the types of uses that should be in those zones. The general land use considerations are specific issues of special concerns that the planners felt needed to be addressed, or, in some cases re-addressed. But the Land Use Element should not be used alone. The entire Master Plan, with all its elements defines Hightstown's ultimate condition and contains the planning policies necessary to reach that condition. The Plan, in its entirety, is designed to be used as a tool for making land use planning decisions.

This Master Plan supersedes the last one written in 1992. It will be followed by ordinances that will formally adopt the proposed zone plan and establish regulations to implement the planning policies.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

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GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

The Planning Board for the Borough of Hightstown establishes the following long term, intergenerational goals and objectives to guide development and redevelopment in the Borough toward a sustainable balance of land uses that promote high quality family life for a diverse resident population within a quaint, historic town center.

Goal #1: Protect and perfect an historic town center image for the Borough.

- Objective #1: Refine the Borough's historic land use pattern of a central economic core surrounded by residential neighborhoods.
- Objective #2: Encourage the development and redevelopment of the town center for the municipality.
- Objective #3: Encourage land uses which provide the residents with their daily needs for family life, enrichment, recreation, vocation and prosperity.
- Objective #4: Promote development and services that are family oriented and enhance and support family life.
- Objective #5: Provide opportunities and services for people of all ages, income levels and cultural backgrounds.
- Objective #6: Promote and restore the historic image of Hightstown in the Borough.
- Objective #7: Develop a unifying visual theme in the Borough, centered and most evident in the central downtown business district.
- Objective #8: Promote the priority of pedestrian movement throughout the Borough and create pedestrian links between the residential neighborhoods and the central downtown business district.
- Objective #9: Encourage a strong sense of community and promote local pride among both residents and business owners.
- Objective #10: Recognize the value of the schools and churches in Hightstown and integrate the goals of the Borough with those of the schools and churches to create a closer, more symbiotic relationship that advances the objectives of all three; the Borough, the schools and the churches.

Goal #2: Revitalize the central downtown business district and improve the economic viability of the Borough.

- Objective #1: Improve the appearance and economic viability of the Borough and restore the historic character to the central downtown business district.
- Objective #2: Improve the streetscape to make the central downtown business district inviting, appealing and pedestrian friendly.
- Objective #3: Maximize high valued ratables to help balance the cost of municipal services throughout the Borough.
- Objective #4: Encourage the protection and maintenance of an enhanced aesthetic quality of the buildings and the streetscape in the business district.
- Objective #5: Encourage creative and innovative reuse of underutilized or abandoned properties.
- Objective #6: Encourage businesses that contribute to the historic, small town character

- of the Borough and are likely to stay and thrive for a long time.
- Objective #7: Improve and expand employment opportunities for local residents.
- Objective #8: With sensitivity and careful study, incorporate mass transit service into the municipality's intimate, town center character, helping to reduce onerous vehicular traffic.
- Objective #9: Promote the redesign of the Route 33 corridor to maximize the pedestrian usability and minimize vehicular intrusion in the central downtown business district.
- Objective #10: Promote the redesign of vehicular circulation patterns where ever necessary to enhance the environment of the central downtown business district and maximize the pedestrian experience.
- Objective #11: Develop a functional plan for parking that complements the municipality's small scale town center image.
- Objective #12: Maximize the ease with which community residents can walk to the central downtown business district from Hightstown's residential neighborhoods.
- Objective #13: Promote an environment within the central downtown business district which is inviting to visitors and encourages them to stay and enjoy the many valuable assets of Hightstown.
- Objective #14: Establish a public/private partnership to market the Borough as an attractive town center and a destination of activity.
- Objective #15: Promote and expand Hightstown's annual and cultural events and employ a public/private partnership between the municipality, the local businesses, schools and churches to market and produce the events.
- Objective #16: Identify and utilize outside funding sources to facilitate improvements and business incentives.
- Objective #17: Provide incentives for business owners to rehabilitate store facades and restore Hightstown's original historic appearance.
- Objective #18: Develop a unifying theme for signage and insure that signs are not overly invasive within the general appearance of the streetscape.
- Objective #19: Assure that the street furniture, including lighting and photometric design enhances the original quaint, historic, intimate scale of the central downtown business district.
- Objective #20: Preserve, protect and enhance Peddie Lake, its environs and open space corridors as valuable natural resources within the central downtown business district.

Goal #3: Preserve and enhance the existing residential character of the Borough.

- Objective #1: Maintain and enhance quaint, family oriented residential neighborhoods.
- Objective #2: Promote less intense land use development in the more expansive residential neighborhoods and intensify development in the smaller business core so as to establish a balance throughout the municipality both fundamentally and economically.
- Objective #3: Maintain and enhance the housing diversity in terms of housing types and styles.

- Objective #4: Maintain the existing residential character along the primary corridors into and out of the Borough.
- Objective #5: Provide a reasonable mix of housing for all ages and income levels.
- Objective #6: Provide a variety of housing for senior citizens of varying income levels and physical abilities.
- Objective #7: Minimize conflicts between incompatible uses and segregate non-residential uses from residential housing.
- Objective #8: Promote historic restoration of old homes and historically appropriate architectural design of new or rehabilitated homes to help restore the Borough's historic visual image.
- Objective #9: Encourage housing designs and site plans that promote social, family friendly community behavior.
- Objective #10: Improve and rehabilitate the existing housing stock.
- Objective #11: Develop housing within the existing housing stock for low and moderate income families to meet current State requirements.
- Objective #12: In the central downtown business district, integrate residential development that is complementary to the intensity of the use and appearance of the Borough's commercial core district.
- Objective #13: Strive to create an appropriate balance between housing, which typically consumes more municipal services than the revenue it generates, and other, more highly valued ratables that increase municipal revenues.
- Objective #14: Promote well landscaped lots that create an appealing residential streetscape appearance.
- Objective #15: Give pedestrian movement priority over any other form of transportation.

Goal #4: Improve the municipal services including the infrastructure as well as operational systems.

- Objective #1: Provide a complete range of municipal services to support a diverse resident population with people of many different ages, economic levels, cultural and educational backgrounds.
- Objective #2: Expand the cultural opportunities within the Borough and integrate them seamlessly with quasi-public and private cultural opportunities available within the Borough.
- Objective #3: Improve both the function and the appearance of public utility services throughout the Borough.
- Objective #4: Recognize and promote the benefits of regional cooperation and pursue balanced, equitable and positive relationships with neighboring communities.

Goal #5: Protect the natural resources and improve recreational opportunities within the Borough.

- Objective #1: Improve and maintain the natural resources of Peddie Lake and the Rocky Brook corridor.

- Objective #2: Redevelop and maintain the abandoned railroad right-of-way; redesigning it and integrating it into the natural open space system of the Borough.
- Objective #3: Provide controlled public access to the Borough's natural resources, balancing the public's opportunities to enjoy the resources with necessary safe guards to protect and preserve the resources for future generations.
- Objective #4: Develop Memorial Park along Peddie Lake as a central community focal point.
- Objective #5: Provide sufficient recreational opportunities for people of all ages.
- Objective #6: Integrate public recreation with available facilities at local schools and other recreational sites.
- Objective #7: Develop a continuous open space system throughout the Borough.
- Objective #8: Establish high priorities for the protection of existing historic sites and the restoration of the historic quality of the Borough.

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HISTORIC ELEMENT

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HISTORIC ELEMENT

A. Introduction

The Historic Element outlines a brief narrative of the history of Hightstown and sets the stage for some of the planning policies that build on the Borough's rich past. The Borough has an interesting history that exists today more in its stories than its architecture. Nonetheless, it is a past which most local residents value and respect, and so an historic ambiance in the Borough is important to the community.

After a brief narrative, the Historic Element describes how local history will be woven into the character of the Borough. In some parts of town, where a few architectural remnants remain, it is appropriate to encourage historic preservation. In other areas where historic buildings have been unfortunately lost or changed, it might be more appropriate to encourage historic restoration. And yet there are still other parts of town where the existing, more contemporary development suits the area. After all, Hightstown has developed over several centuries. The Historic Element establishes planning policies that address all these areas.

B. Goals and Objectives

It is clear within the Goals and Objectives that an historic image for the town should be most clearly evident in the downtown area of Hightstown. The business district should be redeveloped along a unifying visual theme which is small scale and quaint. The small scale will make the business district more inviting to pedestrians and the quaintness will be comfortable and appear friendly. An historic visual theme will provide an opportunity to reintroduce elements of Hightstown's past which have been lost over time.

In some residential areas, historic restoration of older homes is important. They represent the last waning vestiges of Hightstown's past. Similarly, there are a few historic sites of particular value, which have earned their place as part of the Borough's inventory of places of public appreciation. They should be preserved. There is a consensus within the community that these few remaining historic buildings and sites should be preserved. A majority of the local community also feels that an historic character should be developed within the central business core. However, it is also commonly thought that historic preservation should be encouraged, but not mandatory, for when it becomes compulsory, historic preservation too often encumbers community growth and vitality.

C. Discussion

1. The History of Hightstown

In 1721 an Indian trail ran between Perth Amboy and Burlington. John and Mary Hight found a place along the trail where it crossed the Rocky Brook. They noticed there was enough change in elevation along the stream to construct and operate a mill, so they settled in what we now know as Hightstown. Almost thirty years later they had a village with a gristmill, a blacksmith shop, an inn and a small cluster of assorted buildings. By 1761 the original Indian trail had been replaced by a "King's Highway" along what is now Mercer Street. Revolutionary troops traveled the highway on their way to the Battle of Monmouth.

In 1816 the highway became a turnpike, chartered by the State legislature as a toll road between South Amboy and Bordentown. It had two tollgates, or pikes, one in Old Bridge, where State Highway 18 now crosses and a second where the highway intersected with the Old Bridge-Brunswick Turnpike. The town bustled, as it quickly became a hub for farmers' produce on their way to South Amboy and New York to the north and Camden and Philadelphia to the south. Migrant workers made a valuable contribution to the success of farming in the area. Hightstown became the commercial and transportation center of this lucrative agricultural area.

The turnpike through Hightstown was very well used. About the same time, in 1826, Colonel John Stevens built the nation's first steam locomotive and displayed and demonstrated it on his Hoboken estate. When the turnpike could no longer handle the volume of traffic, horses and stagecoaches that used the highway, the State legislature agreed to permit a rail line and expand freight and passenger service.

On February 4th, 1830 the legislature granted a charter for the state's first commercial railroad to the Camden and Amboy Railroad and Transportation Company (C&A). Interestingly, the charter was approved despite heavy opposition from small, but powerful special interest groups, like stagecoach owners and canal promoters. There was so much public support for the rail that it took only *ten minutes* to sell the entire railroad stock of one million dollars. In contrast, a similar stock sale for the Delaware and Raritan Canal charter at the same point in time yielded only \$100,000 in a few days, and took an entire year to become fully funded.

With the State's charter in hand, the C&A elected Colonel Stevens' son, Robert to be its president, and his other son Edwin, treasurer. In the fall of 1830 Robert Stevens ventured off to England, where the railroad industry had progressed a little farther than it had in the States. During this trip, Stevens crafted a wooden model of the first "T" shaped rail. It was innovative and people were wary of it. He had to call on the good graces of a friend of his father's who owned a mill in

Wales in order to get the new rail manufactured. No one else in England was willing to produce his new rail design. Nonetheless, the Stevens' rail became, and remains the standard of modern railroads, as does the hook-headed spikes, which he developed at the same time.

With the rails and spikes under production, Stevens ordered a new steam locomotive from Robert Stephenson and Co. Then he headed home. In May of 1831 the first rails arrived in the U.S. and in August the locomotive, the "John Bull" arrived. It was literally in pieces. Assembly was required. A brave, 22 year old man named Isaac Dripps was charged with the responsibility of putting it together. He had never even seen a locomotive before. And yet, on November 12th, 1831, the "John Bull" made its maiden run, amidst a flurry of public promotion and celebration.

The rail line was complete to Hightstown by the Fall of 1832. The entire line was finally finished by January of 1834. It was initially laid on large stone blocks, called sleepers, which were built by inmates at the Sing Sing Prison in New York. In the Winter of 1832 Robert Stevens was anxious to complete the construction through to South Amboy and the stones from Sing Sing were not arriving fast enough, so he ordered the rails to be installed on logs set in a stone bed. This invention of necessity became yet another industry standard that would last. He had created the modern railroad tie.

Well, the railroad line continued to be successful and the "John Bull" ran continuously until 1866. In 1892 it made one last run to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago before it was retired to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, D.C., where it remains today.

Railroading certainly helped Hightstown prosper. She developed as an agrarian hub with farmers' co-ops and produce packing companies. In the late 1890's a lot of new inventions started to change Hightstown. The Borough started to develop public utilities, like water, telephone and electricity. Around the turn of the century, automobiles ushered in new opportunities and manufacturing began. Native Lace Works joined the Hightstown Smyrna Rug Company which came to the Borough in 1898. By 1910 the Reed Brothers Brick Plant had shipped 2,000,000 bricks. And the town was now large enough to support a hotel, a theater, banks, a public library, and a school system. Hightstown was no longer simply a big farmers' market.

With the introduction of cars and the paving of State Highway Route 33 in 1919, rail service started to decline. Passenger service was ultimately discontinued in 1940, and freight service continued only until the mid-1960's. By then the present day New Jersey Turnpike was well used and the first Hightstown by-pass, otherwise known as Route 130, was also quite popular. Vehicular traffic moved in and around Hightstown extensively and continues to do so today.

It's obvious that the railroad played a big part in the history of Hightstown. It is equally noteworthy that Hightstown played a significant role in the history of railroading in this state and the country. The town has been a vibrant commercial center, first for agriculture and later for industry. Its location at the crossroads of a number of different transportation routes has been central to the development of the Borough since the beginning. Therefore, it is only logical that these aspects of Hightstown's past, railroading, the town center, and transportation should continue to be central to planning within the municipality.

2. Hightstown's Historic Sites

Hightstown may not be overwhelmed with historic buildings, however, there are still a number of existing historic buildings and sites that deserve public appreciation and respect. Most notably they include:

- **Cook House** - 234 Morrison Avenue (*corner of Summit and Morrison*)
- **Smith House** - 137 Stockton Street (*corner of Stockton and Railroad Avenue*)
- **Clara Barton House** - 356 S. Main Street
- **Civil War Monument** - triangular corner of Rogers Avenue and Stockton Street
- **Reed House** - 200 N. Main Street (*corner of N. Main Street and Bank Street*)
- **Railroad Sleeper Site** - northeast corner of Rogers Avenue and Railroad Avenue
- **Ely House and Railroad Freight Station** - 164 N. Main Street (*corner of N. Main Street and Bank Street, adjacent to the Borough Hall*)
- **Old Lace Mill** - 278 Monmouth Street
- **Ward Farmhouse** - 319 S. Main Street (*part of The Peddie School Campus*)
- **Ashton House** - 172 Stockton Street (*to the right of the Walker House*)
- **Walker House** - 176 Stockton Street (*to the left of the Ashton House*)
- **Redford Job House** - 384 Stockton Street (*the existing school district administration building*)
- **Josephine Dawes' House** - 238 S. Main Street (*corner of S. Main and South Streets*)
- **Dr. George Titus House** - 210 S. Main Street
- **Octogon House** - 231 S. Main Street (*part of The Peddie School Campus*)
- **The Rug Mill** - Bank Street (*adjacent to the west side of the Borough Hall*)
- **Beekman House** - 218 S. Main Street (*to the right of Josephine Dawes' house*)
- **Norton House** - 161 E. Ward Street (*northwest corner of the Peddie Lake Bridge*)
- **E.C. Taylor House** - 125 S. Main Street (*east corner of South Street and Taylor Avenue*)
- **Mayor Cunningham House** - 503 S. Main Street
- **Thomas Applegate House** - 505 S. Main Street

- **George Pierson House** - 409 S. Main Street (*south corner of Etra Road and S. Main Street*)
- **Stults House** - 133 S. Main Street (*west corner of South Street and Taylor Avenue*)
- **William Morrison House** - 523 S. Main Street
- **Dr. John Barlow House** - 232 Stockton Street (*east corner of Stockton Street and Park Way*)
- **Cunningham House** - 236 Stockton Street (*west corner of Stockton Street and Park Way*)
- **Historic House** - 605 S. Main Street (*opposite Leshin Lane*)
- **Joseph Mohr House** - 556 S. Main Street (*opposite Schuyler Avenue*)
- **Cox-Taylor-Cox House** - 630 S. Main Street
- **Carlton Villa Estate** - Meadow Lakes Retirement property
- **Kenneth Applegate House** - 503 N. Main Street (*north corner of N. Main Street and Wyckoff's Mill Road*)
- **The Mercer Street School** - 230 Mercer Street
- **The Wyckoff Homestead** - 421 N. Main Street (*south corner of N. Main Street and Wyckoff's Mill Road*)
- **The Log Cabin** - 181 E. Ward Street (*northeast corner of the Peddie Lake Bridge*)
- **Davison Wham House** - 201 East Ward Street (*northwest corner of E. Ward Street and Davison Road*)

Other buildings, including homes, churches and some commercial buildings have a rich historic past, that should be important to present and future generations. From these buildings we can trace the development of the Borough over the years. But as the town grew, new buildings were constructed with sometimes distinctly different architectural styles and detailing. This is evident in the porches and windows, roof lines and balustrades, as well as some site elements like fences, lighting and stone retaining walls. The character of the architecture and the diversity in the style and appearance of the structures gives Hightstown a uniqueness that is valuable to most Hightstonians.

D. Planning Recommendations

Hightstown seems to have had its "heyday" in the late 1800's, corresponding with the growth of the Camden & Amboy Railroad. This was an exciting time in Hightstown. The farmers' market was bustling and the town was starting to attract new business and industries. It is the intent of this Master Plan to restore the same vibrancy and enthusiasm of the 1800's to modern day Hightstown.

Presently, Hightstown lacks a positive central image. For many people outside the Borough, Hightstown is simply a "bottle-neck" along Route 33. The town needs a new image. Drawing on its rich past, Hightstown should establish an historic image, particularly for the central business district. This image should be fashioned in a Victorian context of the late 1800's, when activity within the

Borough was at its fullest.

A first step can be to develop a streetscape plan. It should be prepared from representative examples of period site furniture like streetlights, benches, signs and banner poles. The plan should include recommendations for renovating building facades for property owners interested in making improvements to their buildings. While historically representational improvements should not be mandatory, the

Planning Board should consider proposals which include historically appropriate renovations as benefits to the community when they weigh positive and negative criteria of redevelopment and variance applications.

Collaterally, an Architectural Review Board (ARB) should be established to *advise* the Planning Board, as well as the Mayor and Council. There are not enough historic buildings remaining in town to warrant an Historic Commission, however, an Architectural Review Board made up of local historians, architects and builders could help the Planning Board review applications. The ARB could provide insight and constructive recommendations on how to reintroduce historic features into modern development and redevelopment plans. The ARB could also provide assistance to applicants who wish to develop historically appropriate plans. The ARB should prepare a citizen's guide on historic home restoration for residential property owners. The guide should draw upon and utilize the few remaining historic structures in town and build on their examples. The Borough should consider ways to keep construction permit fees low and eliminate disincentives for historic structures which are restored with respect for their past.

A review of an application by the ARB should not be mandatory as a matter of course for any and all development applications. Instead, the ARB should be available to applicants who wish to take a favorable review from the ARB to the full Planning Board. In addition, the ARB should be employed at the option of the Planning Board for applications that involve historic sites or historic buildings. The Board should be able to request an opinion from the ARB whenever Planning Board members feel they could improve their assessment of an application with input from the ARB.

The ARB should also be responsible for developing a formal historic inventory of the buildings and sites within the Borough and delineating an historic district for review and approval by the Planning Board. The purpose of the historic district will be educational only to guide the development of walking tours, plans for historic markers and schedules for historic festivities. The ARB should pursue State grants to produce the inventory and define the district, as well as draft an ordinance which codifies the educational nature of the historic district. Again, the ordinance would be reviewed by the Planning Board, and per New Jersey Land Use Law, passed by the Borough Council. Specific ordinances regulating historic preservation or restoration are not warranted based on the limited number of historic buildings in town. Furthermore, strict regulations would be onerous upon

the property owners and could jeopardize potential redevelopment in the area.

Nonetheless, absent an enforceable historic preservation ordinances, some historic buildings that hold truly significant historic value to the community should be pursued under the National and State Historic Registry programs. These programs provide protection for historic sites and buildings and pave the way for supplemental funding for restoration work. The historic inventory developed by the ARB should identify sites and building which would appropriately fall under the Historic Registry programs. In this way, the few truly historic buildings that remain in town can be preserved without establishing an overly regulated historic district.

Historic markers should be placed throughout the Borough, taking note of significant places and buildings. To be most beneficial, the markers should include a very brief history of the identified site, so visitors are not required to seek out a separate printed guide pamphlet. A pamphlet might be available to provide additional information, but a minimal amount of information should be available on the marker itself. Only this way can the markers be truly educational and help to enhance the intent of the historic district.

A walking tour passed the markers should be designed by the ARB, in conjunction with the local Parks Commission (see the Open Space and Recreation Element). The ARB should utilize the plans for a Heritage Corridor Trail as outlined in the Greenways Plan prepared by the Hightstown Environmental Commission, dated June 27, 1997. The final tour, however, might be a composition of the Heritage Corridor Trail and information obtained from the historic inventory. Ideally, the walking tour would finish where it started, preferably downtown, stimulating people to have a bite to eat with their friends, talk about what they've seen and go buy a souvenir before they head home.

Similarly, planned historic events can be very important to local residents as well as visiting friends. Presently groups have organized a Fall house tour, a Christmas event, annual events at the Ely House and the Meadow Lake Room. However, there should be more. The ARB and the Parks Commission, in conjunction with community groups like the Hightstown Historic Society, the Garden Club, and the Greater East Windsor Hightstown Improvement Project, should consider such celebrations as

- **Railroad Rally**, with walks along the right-of-way, tours into a resident steam engine, a model railroad convention, and miniature train rides for children.
- **Victorian Weekend**, in early summer with boat rides on Peddie Lake, ice cream served from push carts, horse and carriage rides, flower displays and arrangements sold, outdoor dining, music and colored lanterns along the sidewalks and through the parks and volunteers that stroll among the crowd in distinctive Victorian garb.

- **Farmers' Day**, late in the summer when farmers are encouraged to set up fresh produce stands, children can visit a small petting zoo, local restaurants set up outdoor booths and barbecues, serving food while musical groups keep the atmosphere lively and exciting.
- **Visitors' Day**, when all the businesses in Hightstown show off their best wares, hold their greatest sales, serve their finest food and there are hot air balloon rides in the park, outdoor toy train exhibits and face painting.
- Any and all of these events could be scheduled to coincide with a Peddie School Open House, which also draws visitors into town.

Public events and tours, coupled with incentives to redevelop an historic image to the downtown and certain residential areas will help to keep Hightstown rich past alive. At the same time, it will give Hightstown a unique identity that will attract new businesses and redeveloping businesses and invigorate the local economy.

HOUSING ELEMENT

(The Housing Element and Fair Share Plan was prepared and adopted separately from the rest of the Master Plan document. Its primary focus at this time centers on the Borough's need for compliance with the requirements of substantive certification by the Council on Affordable Housing.)

CIRCULATION ELEMENT

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CIRCULATION ELEMENT

A. Introduction

Many circulation issues have been pivotal to land use planning in Hightstown. John and Mary Hight settled this area where an Indian trail crossed the Rocky Brook. The development of the railroad industry made Hightstown flourish. The introduction of automobile travel helped the Borough to grow. And the construction and subsequent traffic of major area highways initiated the Town's economic decline. Now, another circulation project, the Hightstown By-Pass promises to turn things around.

The State's traffic analysis of the impact of the new Hightstown By-Pass promises a dramatic reduction in traffic through town, including a substantial decline in truck traffic. After regional through traffic is diverted away from downtown Hightstown, the Borough will have an opportunity to reclaim its old town charm and revitalize its business district. The future holds the promise of better retail development, higher valued ratables, a more balanced municipal budget, improved community services and, hopefully, lower taxes. The By-Pass alone won't do it all, but without it, certainly none of this would be possible.

The Circulation Element describes the state of transportation and circulation patterns in the Borough today, and outlines the expected impact of the By-Pass on those patterns. It discusses the needs of other transportation users, like pedestrians, bicyclists, mass transit riders, and commercial haulers. It establishes policies for various forms of transportation. It sets forth a circulation plan to meet and balance the needs of all forms of local transportation.

B. Goals and Objectives

Improving the quality of life in Hightstown is central to the Master Plan. Part of improving life in the Borough is improving pedestrian accessibility. The Goals and Objectives clearly state that pedestrian movement must be a priority. It's been far too long since pedestrians felt comfortable on Main Street. Trucks and impatient regional traffic have dominated the streetscape. Local planners recognize that pedestrian users must reclaim their interests in the downtown area so that economic vitality in the business district can rebound.

Similarly, regional through traffic has bisected the Borough, separating neighborhoods from neighborhoods and residential communities from business districts. Linkages must be re-established between the various areas of town. The Borough is small enough to be easily accessible from anywhere in town. Distance does not make it essential for local residents to use their cars. In fact, demographic data shows that Hightstown residents own fewer cars per household

than their contemporaries in neighboring towns. However, existing traffic on local streets makes using a car a preferred and often safer option. If links can be established for alternative modes of transportation, and existing traffic volumes can be reduced, then the services throughout the Borough will be more available once again to local residents.

C. Discussion

1. Hightstown's Location

Hightstown is literally the product of a crossroads. Though only 1.2 square miles, it is divided like a pie by County Routes 571 and 539 and State Route 33. It is bound to the west by State Highway 130 and to the east by the New Jersey Turnpike. Exit 8 on the Turnpike delivers interstate traffic to Hightstown's doorstep. The traffic on these roads is heavy and exceedingly fast. Regional users of these corridors presently perceive little reason to stop, or even slow down in Hightstown, since their primary objective seems to be traveling from one part of the state to another, in all directions. Local neighborhoods, particularly the downtown, is overrun with through traffic.

Trucks represent a special problem on Routes 33 and 571. They are noisy, overbearing in size and produce more soot and pollution than other vehicles. Only a small percentage of the trucks originate in Hightstown. Many of them will be able to utilize the By-Pass, once it is complete.

The Hightstown By-Pass was conceived by the State and is currently under construction. It will connect State Route 33 with County Route 571, creating an efficient east/west access around the Borough. There will be an interchange at Route 130 and an overpass over the New Jersey Turnpike. Hopefully, it will be fully operational by the end of 1999. The State's traffic analysis predicts dramatic improvements for Hightstown's downtown area once the By-Pass opens.

2. Traffic Volumes

Traffic analyses prepared by Louis Berger and Associates for the Hightstown By-Pass project indicate that traffic levels will drop substantially at the intersections of North Main Street and Franklin Street, and Main and Stockton Streets. The intersection of Stockton and Main, at the heart of downtown Hightstown, will change from a level of service F to a level of service B, on a scale of A to F. A level of service F indicates that the traffic creates an average delay of more than sixty seconds for most motorists during the busiest times of the day, that is the morning and evening rush hours. In fact, the average delay is currently more than two minutes. But after the By-Pass is open, the average delay at Stockton and Main, during rush hour, should be less than ten seconds.

Improvement at Franklin and Main is less obvious and may not be immediately realized, however, that is more a reflection of the signaling at this intersection, than the anticipated traffic volumes. The volume of traffic at this intersection will, in fact decrease, yet, because of the nature of the three-way intersection and the traffic patterns that a three-way configuration generates, the initial delay for motorists at this intersection may still exceed sixty seconds. Technically, this classifies this intersection as a level of service F. However, the traffic study goes on to report that with the reduced traffic volumes, signalization of the intersection can be modified to reduce the delays and improve the ultimate level of service for the intersection. Therefore, the report concludes that ultimately the By-Pass will improve the traffic situation in Hightstown at both of these critical intersections in the downtown area.

Yet the By-Pass alone will not solve all of Hightstown's circulation problems. Circulation patterns on local roads have their own problems, and alternative modes of transportation have not been given enough attention to date.

3. Street Patterns

The Borough's street pattern is essentially a grid, which makes it easy to follow and navigate through town. However, Mercer Street cuts diagonally cross the grid pattern and this creates some awkward, and sometime dangerous acute angled intersections. In particular, the intersections of South Street/Mercer and West Ward/Mercer are both dangerously askew. Similarly, South Main Street and Mercer Street intersect at "the Point," a difficult confluence that's sometimes safer to avoid than utilize.

Hightstown Borough police report that the intersection with the highest incidents of traffic accidents is South Main Street and Ward Avenue during morning and evening rush hours. This is an unsignalized intersection with two stop signs. Commuters and people driving their children to the Peddie School are those most likely to be involved. Interestingly, similar intersections near the public schools, where crossing guards are employed do not have the same number of accidents. Mercer and Ward Avenue has the second highest number of accidents, again due in part to rush hour traffic as well as a dangerous angled alignment.

There are quite a few rear end collisions along Stockton, Main and Franklin, due in large part to the volume of impatient through traffic that travels this route. Unexpected was the report that the parking lot with the most number of fender benders was the Krauser shopping center at Franklin and South Main. One might have thought that the haphazard arrangement of parking in some of the town's older lots would be more disorienting and lead to accidents. But Hightstown's newest parking lot might be falling victim to the impatience of typical convenience shoppers, an access drive that is too short off the heavily traveled Franklin Street, and access restrictions that are difficult to enforce.

4. Pedestrian Use

The pedestrian circulation systems need a great deal of attention in both the downtown area and residential neighborhoods. In the downtown area it is very difficult to cross from one side of the street to another. It is almost impossible to cross Main Street, Stockton Street and particularly Franklin Street. This discourages shopping activity and contributes to the declining vitality of the business district. Again police report that the source of most pedestrian complaints stems from people who have trouble crossing Franklin at Broad Street. This, unfortunately, makes the newly expanded County Library difficult to reach.

The Borough developed a conceptual streetscape plan designed to improve pedestrian use of the street corridors of the downtown and improve the viability of the business district. The plan includes traffic calming techniques, like raised crosswalks and pedestrian right-of-way signage. It also incorporated design elements to make the street corridor more comfortable for pedestrians, like landscaping, benches, intimate-scale light poles and decorative banners. All of these features would make the streetscape more usable and inviting for pedestrians. The downtown streetscape project also serves as an important link through the downtown, connecting two disconnected ends of a new pedestrian pathway along the abandon railroad right-of-way.

In residential areas, the sidewalks are essential. The Borough is small enough that it should be possible to walk anywhere within the Borough from anywhere else. Yet the sidewalk system is incomplete. Residents, particularly school children, have a difficult time walking through the neighborhoods. In some situations the conditions are simply unsafe. Children cannot get to school safely, requiring some parents to drive their children to school, thereby unnecessarily adding cars to the congested roadways. Safe sidewalks would improve the livability of the Borough and could foster positive habits of leaving personal vehicles at home.

5. Bicycles

Bicycling is a popular sport. In fact, the town maintains a cycling shop, yet there are few resources for cyclists. Whether they be children who must ride safely to school, recreational cyclists on a weekend outing, or avid cyclists on their way to work, the Borough's roadways do not accommodate bicyclists' needs. The volume of vehicular traffic that crowds the roads is one problem. A lack of designated bike lanes is another. There are also too few bike racks both downtown and around town. Instead, bikes are chained to signs and posts, which block pedestrian walkways, already too narrow for people to stroll comfortably. The main roads to the downtown do not have advanced bike stops at the intersections, so for people who might want to bike downtown, the task is not an easy one. There are also no recreational bike paths for leisure time. In short, the Borough could encourage more people to leave their cars at home if it offered more resources to cyclists.

6. Mass Transit

Similarly, if mass transit were more easily accessible, it might help to lessen people's dependence on personal automobiles and improve public transit ridership. Mass transit includes bus service along Route 571 from Route 130, diverting along Rogers Avenue and continuing through town on Main Street to Route 33/Franklin Street, and east passed the Turnpike. Local transit minibuses also service the area along a similar route, continuing north and following North Main Street, instead of Franklin. Presently, there are three bus stops in town; one on Rogers, near Main Street, one on Franklin, near North Main Street, and one at Stockton and Rogers. Carpooling and ride-sharing are other forms of mass transit, yet there are no park and ride lots within the Borough limits. This makes these forms of mass transit particularly difficult to use from within the Borough. Anything the Borough can do to promote and support alternative forms of transportation will help to reduce vehicular traffic on local area roads.

D. Planning Recommendations

1. Balance Transportation Needs

If we assume that the By-Pass will, indeed reduce traffic through the Borough, then the municipality must build on this initiative and advance other improvements to the circulation system in town. Improvements should be designed to restore pedestrian priorities to the downtown, manage and control vehicular through traffic, and provide a balance of opportunities for all modes of transportation. All three of these objectives are interconnected. Improving resources for alternative modes of transportation will lead to less vehicular traffic and more opportunities for safe pedestrian access. There are a number of steps the Borough can take toward this end.

The Borough's small size relates directly to traffic levels. It is easier to develop congestion in a small town than a large one. Therefore, the Borough must recognize the importance of all forms of transportation, cars, trucks, bicyclists, carpools, buses. Obviously, trains are not an option in Hightstown anymore. If the Borough can improve conditions for alternative modes of transportation, it will help to encourage more people to leave their cars at home and thereby reduce traffic levels.

This is not to say that cars should be banned from downtown. Far from it. Most people will still arrive in Hightstown by car but their experience can be made a more positive one if unnecessary cars are not sharing the roadway. People who do arrive by car must find easy access to parking and well designed signs to help orient themselves. Parking should be close to stores, whether in front or in back, and should be attractive, inviting and safe.

Most of the truck traffic in town in recent years has been through traffic, utilizing the east/west corridor of Routes 571 and 33. A few large industries in town, like Coca Cola contribute trucks to the traffic mix, but they can be easily diverted to the new By-Pass without too much interruption. Moreover, the trucks which remain should be encouraged to travel slowly. In this regard, raised crosswalks installed at key intersections, like Stockton and Main, or Rogers and Main, or North Main and Franklin, would help to slow trucks down.

The same key intersections should be redesigned to accommodate bicyclists better. Advanced bike stops would give cyclists the advantage they need to overcome the vehicular traffic in the downtown. In fact, all of the major intersections along the Borough's primary arterioles should be made safer for cyclists by incorporating advanced bike stops.

Bicyclists also need proper bike racks to which they can secure their bikes. Racks should be located in public spaces in the downtown area and at as many commercial establishments along Route 33 and North Main Street as possible. Schools and parks should be well supplied too.

Carpooling and ride sharing are other means of minimizing vehicular traffic on the roads. The Borough should investigate providing opportunities for carpoolers.

A few small lots, around town to serve the various neighborhoods would suffice.

The Borough should try to develop public/private partnerships with large residential users, like the Housing Authority and the Wyckoff Condominiums. Parking lots on these sites empty out dramatically during the day, and a shared parking arrangement might be feasible. Such an arrangement would give Hightstown residents a place to meet and leave their cars, while they carpool to work. Meanwhile, the property owners might secure nominal token of the Borough's appreciation for their contribution to the service of the community. The "designated carpooling lots" can be fairly small at the start, but might grow, depending on their popularity with local residents.

Finally, the current bus stops, are centrally located, however, they can impede efficient traffic flow when loading and unloading passengers. The stops should be redesigned to incorporate bus pull-off lanes where possible. At the same time, the Borough should seek to provide some parking for mass transit users near bus pull off stops, for this would help to make bus travel easier and a more attractive alternative to commuting by car. Stops should be equipped with large pedestrian shelters, able to accommodate a gathering of people comfortably.

2. Redesigning Downtown Traffic Patterns

Managing the traffic better is another method minimizing traffic. Clearly, the intersection of Stockton and Main Streets is the highest traffic point in town. The situation might be eased if southbound Rt. 33 traffic were directed to use Rogers Avenue. A no right turn sign should be installed on Stockton at Main Street.

The "Point" intersection, at the corner of Mercer Street and South Main should be redesigned to eliminate the dangerous point configuration and provide two way access onto South Main, where only egress from South Main is currently available. In addition, a four-way stop should be installed at the Borough's most dangerous intersection, Ward Avenue and South Main Street

Additionally, Railroad Avenue, between Rogers and Stockton should be abandoned. This would replace a four way intersection on Rogers with a three way stop intersection. Traveling on Rogers would be more efficient but also slower, with the extra stop sign, increasing pedestrian safety at the bend in the road which is presently hazardous. Closing a block of Railroad Avenue would also eliminate an intersection on Stockton that contributes traffic to the mix on Stockton at a point close to the intersection with Main Street. However, any change to existing traffic patterns should be predicated on a traffic study to analyze the potential impacts of the change, particularly after the effects of the new By Pass can be measured.

If a block of Railroad Avenue is abandoned, the nearby parking lots between Railroad Avenue and the stores on Main Street can be reconfigured to improve the circulation of the lots, increase the number of parking spots and provide a circuitous, albeit through-traffic relief accessway. The Borough should strive to coordinate improvements to the parking lot with efforts by merchants to improve the rear facades of their buildings. (See a detailed plan following the Circulation Plan.) The abandoned Railroad Avenue should be redeveloped with some parking for the area and some expanded greenspace around the sleeper stone exhibit. This will provide a nice transition between the open space of a redeveloped railroad right-of-way and the built environment of the downtown business district.

There are other areas of town where improvements can be made to parking areas and linkages can be improved. For instance, there should be a pedestrian link between the parking behind the buildings on North Main Street, north of Stockton, and the sidewalk on North Main. A walk should be installed at the north end of that cluster of buildings.

The parking lot at the Mill at Bank Street is another good example of parking that can be redesigned to be more efficient, more attractive and better able to handle more cars. Similarly, the parking lots of the First Baptist Church on Main Street and the First Union Bank could be redesigned, combined and shared to reduce wasted impervious cover and improve downtown parking efficiency. However, since these lots are privately owned, the Planning Board must use incentives and powers of persuasion to convince local landowners that parking improvement are worthwhile. The Borough should consider providing helpful directional signage for establishments and their parking facilities so landlords will be encouraged to improve parking lots and the rear facades of their establishments.

3. Directing Transportation through Land Use Planning

Promoting greater use of alternative forms of transportation will help to reduce the volume of cars on the road. Redesigning traffic patterns can help too. However, proper land use planning will also control traffic. Permitted uses within the core of the business district, where traffic problems are their greatest should be limited to uses that do not attract a regional draw. Small scale specialty shops, restaurants, daily convenience stores and services are appropriate uses for the central business district.

Having said that, Borough planners should further distinguish between regionally recognizable convenience establishments and uniquely Hightstown shops. For instance, a nationally franchised convenience store is also regionally recognizable. Therefore, it is quite possible that people will be drawn to come to downtown Hightstown to shop the franchised store simply because they remember that it's there. Example, "There's a WaWa in Hightstown. Let's pick up the milk." And yet, these sorts of visitors contribute little to the local economy. They are in and out as quickly as it takes to get a quart of milk. Their biggest contribution to the Borough is their car in the downtown traffic mix.

It is preferable to permit uses within the downtown that complement a palette of small, intimate specialty shops. A "mom and pop" deli or general store might provide essentially all the things a franchised convenience store might have, but it would not necessarily have the regional draw that a larger franchise establishment might. A small deli would serve the local residents, many of whom might walk to the store, but it would not entice out of towners to make that quick run into Hightstown.

Another example of selective land use planning would be a drive through automatic teller machine. Again, people might very possibly drive to Hightstown for nothing more than to use the teller machine. They would contribute nothing to the business district except their car in the traffic. On the other hand, a bank could provide walk up teller service in a plaza area, away from the main thoroughfare. While this would serve patrons who come to town, park, stay awhile, walk around and shop, it would be less convenient for the person in a hurry who wants nothing more from Hightstown except to use the ATM.

These are examples of uses which are designed or can be designed to cater to pedestrians and less to people whizzing through town in their cars. The Planning Board should look for similar ways of guiding business development. They should consider the impact of proposed uses on traffic volumes and depend on municipal professionals, as well as the applicants' professionals, for ideas on how to structure a proposed use to minimize traffic. Moreover, this concept should be codified in the zoning for the downtown.

4. Improved Pedestrian Circulation

With traffic diverted to the By-Pass, alternative modes of transportation accommodated, and appropriate land use zoning to minimize traffic, the Borough should see a real improvement in the circulation of the town. Nonetheless, it is paramount that the Borough work to enhance the circulation patterns for pedestrians. A good pedestrian system will improve the livability of the Borough as well as stimulate economic vitality.

A basic requirement for good pedestrian circulation is continuous, uninterrupted sidewalks in good repair. Children must be safe walking to school. Senior citizen must not be encumbered by tripping hazards. Sidewalks must be complete and crosswalks must be highly visible. Crosswalks on major streets, like Stockton Street, Morrison Avenue, Oak Lane, Herron Avenue, Summit Street, Monmouth, East Ward and Etra, as well as Mercer, South Main Streets and Franklin should be constructed with specialty paving and signed for pedestrian rights-of-way. The Borough should diligently enforce the State's laws which give pedestrians the right-of-way over cars and trucks. Where traffic volumes dictate it, crosswalks should also be raised to slow vehicular traffic.

If the Borough hopes to succeed in encouraging people to walk, and use their cars less, then sidewalks must be enjoyable to walk as well as safe. They should be tree lined, for street trees moderate the radiant heat of the roads, shade the walks and provide a perceptual barrier between the sidewalk area and the cartway. The Environmental Commission maintains a schedule of street tree plantings for the main roads in town, and it should be expanded upon over time to include more roads. Street lighting can help to make sidewalks attractive too, as well as safe. Small, historic styled pedestrian lighting should be installed. Such lights would contribute to the pedestrian scale of the streetscape and enhance the historic appearance of the town.

Of course, improved pedestrian access in the downtown business area will contribute to economic stability. Making the business district a more attractive place to be will help to encourage people to visit the downtown, stay there a while and shop. The Borough's latest conceptual streetscape plan, developed in February of 1998 for the downtown should be adopted by the Borough and implemented as funds become available. It includes new raised crosswalks to make crossing safer for pedestrians on Main Street and Franklin Street. It will be easier to shop on one side of the street and visit Memorial Park and the County Library on the other. The plan also calls for new sidewalks constructed of specialty paving to improve the appearance of the downtown and eliminate tripping hazards. New street furniture will be installed and the streamlined location of benches, receptacles and banner poles will make it easier to walk along the narrow sidewalks without dodging street trees and trash bins. Hanging plants and/or appropriately sized street trees will soften the hard lines of building facades. Objectionable utility poles should be relocated out of the streetscape corridor viewshed. The Borough

should also petition the State to re-classify Route 33 through town and designate it as Business Route 33 in Hightstown.

These streetscape concepts should be implemented in the downtown first, where traffic has had its greatest impact, and expanded, block by block to other reaches of the Borough. As improvements to the business district grow, local businesses should fair better. Then the local economy will improve and revenues will rise. Eventually the municipality can expect to have sufficient revenue to undertake other improvement projects in its residential neighborhoods and among its natural resources. In short, the downtown streetscape project is only a beginning; only phase one of a larger, more comprehensive plan to improve the quality of life in the Borough of Hightstown.

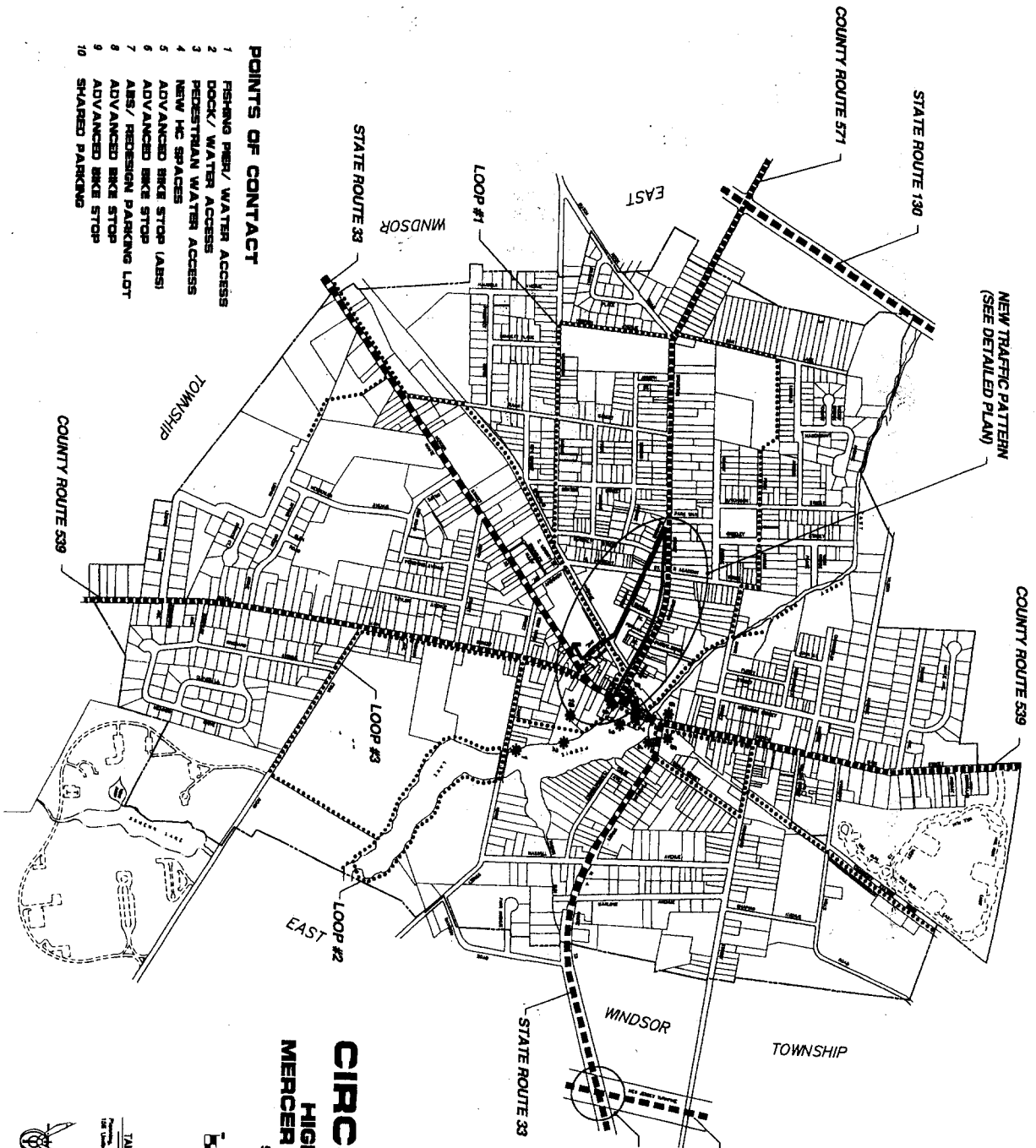
5. Create Leisure Circulation Routes

The quality of life in Hightstown also depends on the Borough's ability to link the residential neighborhoods with the downtown business district. Again, the sheer size of the Borough makes it possible to walk from one end to the other, but the existing circulation system does not. The existing abandoned railroad right-of-way should be redeveloped with a walking path and bike lanes. The Rocky Brook corridor should also include a trail system. These two corridors divide the town in quarters and almost every residential neighborhood is accessible to a point on these routes. Therefore, the right-of-way and the Brook provide logical linkages between the residential neighborhoods and the center of town. However, any development of these routes should be developed with safety in mind. The paths should be accessible to emergency and law enforcement vehicles. The Environmental Commission should continue to pursue grants from the State and the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) to redevelop these areas.

A number of other leisure routes are described in the Open Space and Recreation Element and shown on the Open Space and Recreation Plan. They include loops that link recreational facilities and residential neighborhoods, a loop around Peddie Lake, a key natural resource for the Borough, and a route that passes the historic sites of Hightstown. These are all important to the residents of Hightstown. While they may not contribute directly to the economic viability of the downtown, they do contribute most significantly to the quality of life in the Borough and a sense of community that will help the town to flourish.

CIRCULATION PLAN

COPY



NEW TRAFFIC PATTERN
(SEE DETAILED PLAN)

COUNTY ROUTE 539

STATE ROUTE 130

COUNTY ROUTE 571

EAST

LOOP #1

STATE ROUTE 33

WINDSOR

TOWNSHIP

COUNTY ROUTE 539

LOOP #3

LOOP #2

EAST

WINDSOR

STATE ROUTE 33

EXIT 8

NEW JERSEY TURNPIKE

TOWNSHIP

LEGEND

- STATE HIGHWAYS
- COUNTY HIGHWAYS
- RECREATIONAL ROUTES
- * POINTS OF CONTACT
- NEW TRAFFIC FLOW

NOTE

THE RECREATION ROUTES DEPICTED ON THIS MAP ARE CONCEPTUAL ONLY. THEY ARE NOT INTENDED TO BE FINAL PROJECT DIRECTIONS OR LOCATIONS AND WILL BE SUBJECT TO FINAL PROJECT APPROVAL AND FUNDING AND OBTAINING OF ALL NECESSARY PROPERTY INTERESTS.

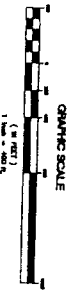


CIRCULATION PLAN

HIGHTSTOWN BOROUGH

MERCER COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

SCOTT CASTER, MAYOR



GRAPHIC SCALE

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October 1998

NEW PROPOSED DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC PATTERN

COPY



NEW PROPOSED DOWNTOWN TRAFFIC PATTERN

October 1998



Plan City
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OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

COPY

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT

A. Introduction

As a self-reliant, family oriented town center, the Borough of Hightstown must meet the needs of all its residents. Leisure and recreation are important aspects of community life that help to strengthen families, friendships and personal well being.

The Open Space and Recreation Element takes note of the recreational opportunities available in Hightstown, identifies the unmet needs of the resident population and proposes future development of new or expanded recreational facilities. Many of the proposals outlined in this element reflect similar conclusions drawn the Hightstown Environmental Commssion in their report entitled "Greenways Plan," dated June 27, 1997.

B. Goals and Objectives

The overriding goal of this Master Plan is to redevelop Hightstown as a vibrant town center. The town center, per the Borough's State Center Designation, includes the entire municipality. And while the commercial downtown area is very important, the "livability" of the entire town is equally important. If the needs of the resident population are satisfied, then the residential neighborhoods will continue to support and enhance the commercial downtown.

In today's hardworking society, where many families must depend on two income wage earners, and/or careers that are long on hours and short on vacations, studies show that personal time spent with the family is dwindling. It is in Hightstown's best interest to provide recreational outlets for its residents to help families maximize their time together. Similarly, when residents come together in parks and at recreational events, it helps to foster a sense of community and belonging to a larger "family," the Hightstown family. Older citizens often use parks as a means of feeling less isolated, after their nests have emptied. Adolescents find each other and something constructive to occupy their energies in neighborhood parks. Recreational facilities bring together people of all ages and cultural backgrounds, so obviously parks and open spaces provide important links and services in the community. Therefore, it is important for Hightstown to have a recreational system that meets the many different needs of all the many different people that live here.

C. Discussion

On the bright side, while it is almost fully developed and only 1.2 square miles, Hightstown still has some exciting natural resources that are invaluable to its open space system. Unfortunately, it also has a very sparse supply of active municipal

recreational facilities. The task at hand is to balance the conservation of the precious natural resources while expanding active recreation throughout the town.

One good way to measure a municipality's supply of active recreation is to compare it to the National Park, Recreation and Open Space Standards, established by the National Park and Recreation Association in 1990. Based on a population of 5,126 people, the following chart summarizes a list of facilities which would be supported by a town the size of Hightstown.

Facility	Standard: Facility per No. People	Hightstown's Existing Facilities (Units Each)	Units Required (population: 5,126 in 1990)	Deficiency or Surplus Units
Baseball- 90 ft.	1/5,000	0*	1	-1
Softball/Little League	1/5,000	0*	1	-1
1/4 Mile Running Track	1/20,000	0	Minimal Need	<i>Some Unmet Need</i>
Tennis Courts	1/2,000	0	2.5	-2.5
Basketball Courts	1/5,000	2	1	+1
Handball Courts	1/20,000	0	Minimal Need	<i>Some Unmet Need</i>
Football	1/20,000	0*	Minimal Need	Negligible
Soccer	1/10,000	0*	0.5	Negligible
9-Hole Golf Course	1/25,000	0	Minimal Need	Negligible
18-Hole Golf Course	1/50,000	0*	Minimal Need	Negligible
Public Open Space	5 Ac/1,000	20.7 acres	25 acres	-4.3 acres
Volleyball	1/5,000	0	1	-1
Community Center	1/25,000	0	Minimal Need	<i>Some Unmet Need</i>
Swimming Pool - 50 meter	1/20,000	0*	Minimal Need	Negligible

An * indicates no specific municipal facilities available, however, there are some other facilities in town, such as the athletic fields at the schools. Yet, even with these supplemental facilities, the above chart clearly demonstrates that the Borough lacks more recreation than it offers.

Tot lots are most well used within a 1,000 foot radius of the site and the Open Space and Recreation Plan shows that existing tot lots, while recently refurbished, only serve the central, western and northern quadrants of the Borough well. The eastern and south portions of town remain remote and lacking.

Hightstown has four beautiful parks. Dawes Park was recently redesigned with the diligent efforts of the Friends of Dawes Park. It is home to the only two basketball courts in town. Grant Avenue Park is a traditional neighborhood square, encompassing an entire block in the middle of a residential neighborhood. Its majestic old canopy trees are a rarity in the Borough and worth preserving for the character of the landscape they create. The Bank Street Park is contiguous with

Rocky Brook and includes some of the Borough's most sensitive environmental systems. It is a natural resource area with exceptional value wetlands, something quite unique in any intensely developed municipality. The Borough has a new site plan design for the fourth municipal park, Memorial Park. The new design will enlarge the park area, minimize the adjoining parking lot and take full advantage of the site's location along the shore of Peddie Lake. All four of these parks are valuable to the community in different ways. They are also all located in the north central part of the Borough. (See the Open Space and Recreation Plan).

Typically, when all of a community's parks are located in one area, other parts of town are left wanting for recreation. However, in Hightstown, several local schools have some facilities, both at the elementary schools in the west and at the high school to the south. The Peddie School in the southeast corner of town includes large expanses of open space and athletic fields that are sometimes opened to use by Hightstown residents. Additionally, the Rocky Brook corridor and the abandon railroad right-of-way cross the Borough, reaching all four corners of Hightstown, and intersecting in the center of town. These two corridors offer potential pedestrian links between neighborhoods. In summary, the fact that the major parks are clustered together is not necessarily a bad thing. The Borough has potential for providing recreation through other outlets. Nonetheless, two areas of town could be served better, in particular the south central and east central part of the Borough, both of which seem to lack any type of facilities or connections to recreation.

D. Planning Recommendations

The most important existing recreational assets are the four existing parks, Peddie Lake and the Rocky Brook corridors. Beyond that, the greatest potential for improving recreation in Hightstown lies in 1) developing a good system for linking the neighborhood and the commercial downtown area with the existing facilities and 2) establishing a cooperative relationship with the local School Board and private entities that maintain recreation facilities that can be shared with the resident public.

1. The Parks Commission

Some time in the near future, the Borough should consider reconstituting the Parks Commission and expanding its role to include coordinating the development, maintenance and administration of all of the Borough's recreational facilities. The Commission should serve the Planning Board, providing advice and assistance on recreational matters as needed. One of the Commission's top priorities should be to initiate a working relationship with the local School Board as well as the Peddie School. Among other things, it should identify the current policies regarding public use of school facilities, develop a pamphlet summarizing those policies and advertise the information to Hightstown residents on a regular if not seasonal basis. The Commission should go one step further and serve as

the party responsible for scheduling the use of school facilities for local residents. With such a system, it will be easier for residents to have access to the facilities, and the schools would have the benefit of working with one entity, rather than the public at large. This system should extend to the cultural facilities of the schools as well. In this way the valuable recreational assets of the local schools can be better integrated into the community as they are already permitted to be by the schools' administrations. Similarly, the Commission should coordinate with local private recreations groups, like EWPAL and HEWBYL.

The Commission should also undertake a project to develop a recreational program that capitalizes on the historic sites around town. They are a valuable asset of the community and should be actively enjoyed by the public. The program should include annual events, house tours, as well as the design of the heritage trail or trails. Since historic sites are to be included within the recreational palette of the municipality, the Parks Commission should include at least one member from the Architectural Review Board, and preferably an historian from that Board. The Architectural Review Board will have the responsibility of developing an inventory of the town's historic sites and disseminating information about them. This information can and should be coordinated with the Parks Commission's agenda and a member that serves on both committees would provide an effective liaison.

The Parks Commission should also be responsible for generating plans for park redesigns, the redevelopment of the railroad right-of-way and the recreational trails through the Borough. Once the plans are developed, the Commission should seek grants and other funding to supplement municipal contributions to Hightstown's recreational system. The Commission should coordinate and support the efforts of citizen groups, like the Friends of Dawes Park and the Grant Avenue Park Committee.

2. Trails

The Environmental Commission's "Greenways Plan" starts to link some of the Borough's recreational sites through a proposed greenway link trail and heritage corridor trail. The proposed trails generally follow the Rocky Brook corridor and the edge of Peddie Lake in a southeast/northwest direction, and the abandon railroad right-of-way in the southwest/northeast direction. In both cases, the trails follow public streets in areas where private land intercepts the course.

These proposed trails would, quite appropriately, connect with companion trails in neighboring East Windsor. However they do not create self contained loops within the Borough. Therefore, it is necessary to expand them as shown on the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

One expansion, loop #1, would designate a bike lane and jogging path pass Grant Avenue Park, to the elementary schools down Morrison Avenue to Dawes Park.

There it would connect with a new trail to be developed within the railroad right-of-way. The bike lane should be developed within existing cartways and over school property. The jogging path should be integrated with the sidewalk along public streets. It would be part of the bike lane where the trail traverses school property. The length of the trail would be peppered with benches and lighting, as well as trail markers, distinguishing it from typical neighborhood sidewalks.

Another loop, #2, would be designed to take full advantage of one of Hightstown's best natural resources, Peddie Lake. This trail will require a bridge over Peddie Lake and an access easement from Peddie School. The Town must encourage cooperation from the Peddie School in order to insure adequate access to the lake for the community. A closed trail system around Peddie Lake will be an important recreational resource and it should be available to all Hightstown residents. By developing a closed loop, people will be more likely to use the trail, when they know they can return to the place where they started without backtracking where they've already been.

Although a competitive running track is not essential to a Borough of 5,000 plus people, trails for running, in-line skating and bicycling are important. Hightstown has long supported a cyclist shop, which indicates a healthy interest in bicycling. These two trails would provide a new resource for trail based activities. Loop #1 would be confined in large part to local roadways and serve higher speed cyclists and loop #2 could be designed for less strenuous, more leisurely biking. It would also be appropriate to develop a narrower, more curvilinear path along the natural edge of the Rocky Brook corridor, where people might wish to ride more slowly and enjoy the natural outdoors. There are areas along this corridor which are as natural in character as the downtown is urban, and it should be accessible to be enjoyed by all.

All trails should be coordinated with East Windsor's systems, so both municipalities can take advantage of the other's resources. The Parks Commission should communicate and share information on recreation with East Windsor.

Finally, a third expansion loop, #3, would take advantage of the historic buildings along South Main Street. It would expand the Heritage Corridor Trail up South Main and back through the Peddie campus to East Ward Street. Again the School's cooperation is required, but a trail which strives to present an appreciation of local architecture can appropriately include parts of the Peddie campus. The trails over Peddie property can be to the School's advantage as well, for visitors to the school could use trails which connect to the downtown area, stroll pass some of Hightstown's greatest historic sites and natural resources, and end up downtown for shopping and dining. Undoubtedly, visitors would walk away with a very positive image of the Borough.

The new trails will also help to link the town's recreational facilities with each other and make it easier for local residents to get to the municipal parks. The

trails will provide connections between residential neighborhoods and the downtown center area. In this way, the Borough can promote shopping downtown as a recreational event. While worthwhile for many reasons, the trails do not provide traditional, or structured active recreation and this is an area in which Hightstown is sorely lacking.

3. Active Recreation

Active recreation for all ages is also important, and the municipality owns little. Hightstown has three tot lots and two basketball courts. The National Park and Recreation Standards indicate that the Borough needs much more, although it is important to keep in mind that the Standards are only a guide, not a prescription. A thorough evaluation must consider other factors in the community and weigh the potential for, and the probability of success for each recreational facility as it might be received by the community.

For example, Hightstown is essentially fully developed and there is little room for adding new and large ballfields. Additional ballfields are not necessary, considering the extensive facilities of the area's schools. A variety of court facilities that accommodate the interest of many age groups would be more useful. Some courts might be designed to permit flooding in the winter for skating. The municipality should maintain a small building in the Bank Street Park from which a summer recreation program can be operated for children. Short on space, Hightstown should be developing shared uses wherever possible. While the Bank Street Park offers the greatest opportunity for new recreational facilities, it is not a large site. The environmental resource areas of the park must be preserved as the valuable recreational and education resource that they are. The areas should be enhanced with revegetation that expands the floral diversity and improves the prospects for viable wildlife habitat.

At the same time, the Borough has four schools, all with athletic fields. Again, developing too many municipal fields would be repetitious. In a town as small, and built up as Hightstown, excessive repetition is wasteful of precious space. That's why a cooperative relationship with the local schools is so important and the Parks Commission's role in this matter is so critical. If cooperation can be secured, almost the entire Borough will be serviced by some form of active recreation.

The Wyckoff Mills Condominium Association provides a significant amount of recreation for its residents in the north end of town. The only area that remains under served is the eastern section of town. By improving the streetscapes along Franklin Street and Monmouth Street, and developing the greenways trail down Broad Street, this area becomes accessible to recreational facilities in town.

4. Private Recreation and Entertainment

Without the space or the funds to develop extensive recreational facilities, the Borough can provide incentives for private industry to develop recreational opportunities in town. Certainly the downtown area should be promoted as a recreational opportunity, providing a day of shopping, strolling, dining and entertainment. A small movie theater, that reflects the quaint, historic ambience of the town center the Borough aspires to be, could add a source of recreation to the community. Similarly, restaurants and comedy clubs would offer the community a spot of local recreation. However, the Planning Board must be mindful of the character of the community and critical of proposed entertainment uses. Above all, Hightstown is small scale, quaint, historic and family oriented and recreational uses that tend to be franchised, or large scale, or might generate excessive amounts of regional traffic would compromise the character of the community more than they would enhance it.

The Mill at Bank Street offers a unique opportunity to mix retail and recreational uses. The interior scale of the building can be developed into a year round recreational facility, making it profitable for the developer, and supplementing some of the Borough's recreation. Mixed with retail and restaurants and possibly some office, a balanced mix of uses would support each other as well as complement businesses in the downtown area. Moreover, the site of the Mill at Bank Street has the ability to manage much of its own parking on site. In terms of a long term rationale, it would be in the best interest of the Borough to encourage appropriate redevelopment of this site and provide the necessary incentives to make redevelopment possible.

5. Passive Recreation

Passive recreation is another important component of leisure time for people of all ages, and particularly for senior residents. Memorial Park, located along the shores of Peddie Lake is centrally located and a prime location for passive recreation. However, three things need to happen to capitalize on the potential of Memorial Park. (1) Pedestrian access to the park must be improved. The Borough must continue to pursue and expand upon a streetscape plan that was recently developed for downtown, near the Park. The streetscape plans are designed, in large part, to improve pedestrian access to the park and the adjoining library site.

(2) The Park must be redesigned. Currently it is overwhelmed by the traffic on the streets and in the adjoining parking lot. The parking lot can be redesigned to reduce the impact of traffic on park users, and the park needs to be landscaped and buffered from the road congestion nearby. (See Memorial Park Conceptual Plan)

(3) Finally, the lake must be maintained. The Environmental Commission with

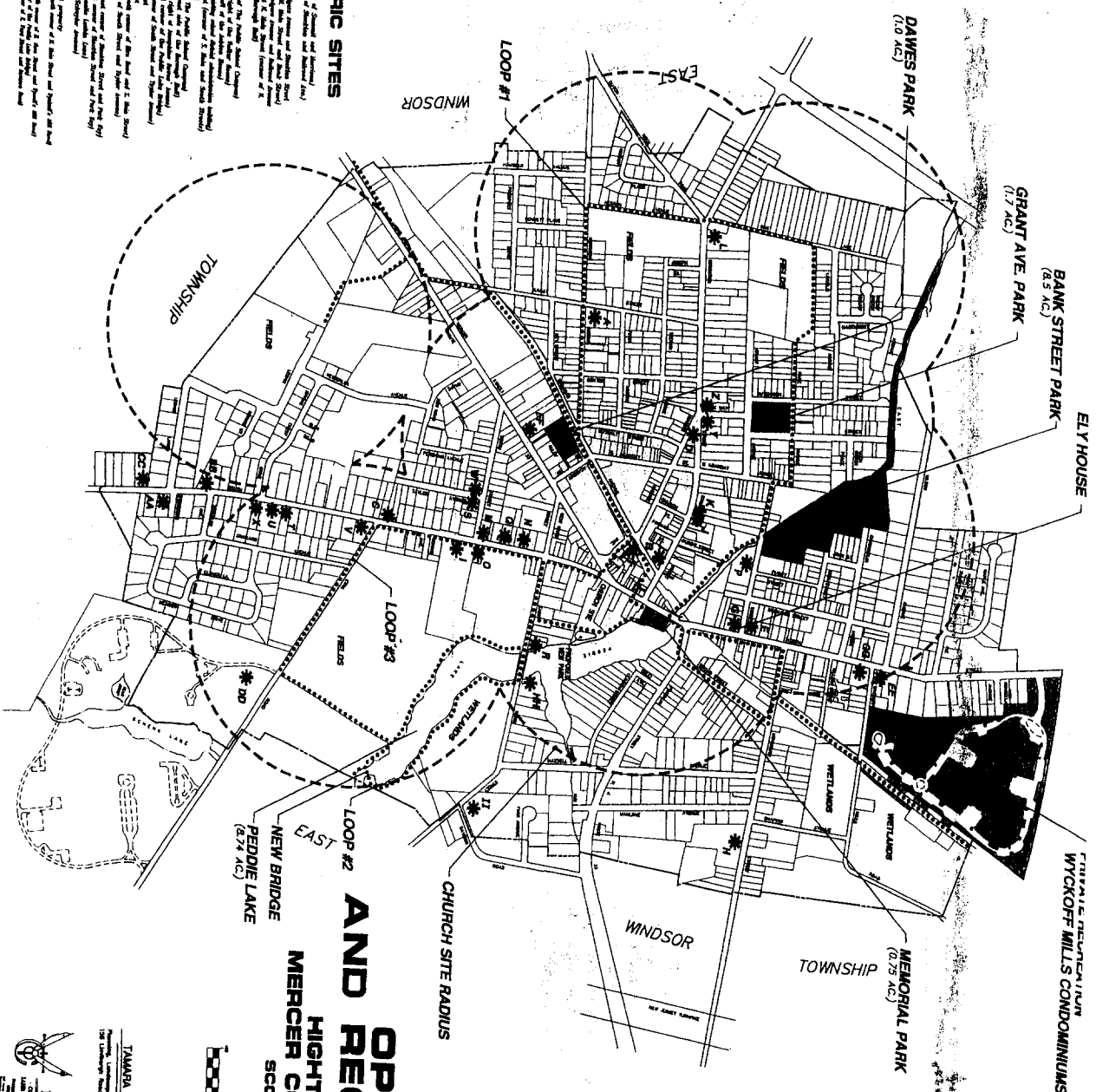
the Lake Management Committee should pursue a natural resources grant to develop a lake management plan. The lake is too important to the downtown area, the image of Hightstown, and the community to relinquish control to a natural lands trust that might preserve the lake, but forbid any recreational use of it. Instead, the Borough should devise a viable management plan for maintaining and utilizing the lake. Fishing, non-motorized boating and possibly swimming are all valuable forms of recreation that would punctuate the heart of Hightstown.

With the redevelopment of Memorial Park along the lake, the Borough should strive to expand the park and take full advantage of more of the western lake edge. The Borough should encourage the First Union Bank and the First Baptist Church of Hightstown to develop a shared parking lot. This would significantly consolidate the impervious cover in the area and make room for more park space and a new tot lot along the lake near the boat launching ramp and fishing pier. An expanded park design would hold the promise of endless possibilities for a wide range of community based events for people of all ages.

Ultimately, a well balanced recreational system, with both active and passive recreation, for everyone from toddlers to senior citizens, and accessible from all parts of the Borough will serve Hightstown residents well. The lack of existing recreation, and more importantly, the lack of available public space in which to build new facilities, means the Borough must cultivate positive and functional relationships with local schools as well as private owners of recreational places. The Parks Commission can help, but zoning and local ordinances must also be used to encourage private participation in the community's recreational system.

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

COPY



KEY TO HISTORIC SITES

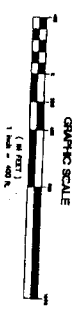
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OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN HIGHTSTOWN BOROUGH MERCER COUNTY, NEW JERSEY SCOTT CASTER, MAYOR

LEGEND

- RECREATION ROUTES TO ACTIVE RECREATION FACILITY
- HISTORIC SITE (SEE ATTACHED KEY)
- RECREATIONAL ROUTES

NOTE
THE RECREATION ROUTES DEPICTED ON THIS MAP ARE CONCEPTUAL ONLY. THEY ARE NOT INTENDED TO BE FINAL PROJECT DEPICTIONS OR LOCAL IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ROUTES SHOWN ON THIS MAP IS SUBJECT TO FINAL PROJECT APPROVAL AND FUNDING AND OBTAINING OF ALL NECESSARY PROPERTY INTERESTS.



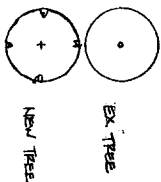
PREPARED BY
THOMAS L. LEE, P.E., ACP, CEA, ASLA
100 Washington Blvd., Suite 200, NJ 08520
(609) 333-0070

Alan Clay
Engineering Associates
100 Washington Blvd., Suite 200, NJ 08520
(609) 333-0070

October 1998

MEMORIAL PARK CONCEPTUAL PLAN

COPY



EXISTING AND NEW PLANTING ARE TO BE SET BACK FROM PUBLIC RIGHT-OF-WAY

N. MAIN STREET

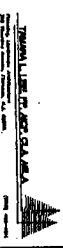
RECONFIGURE PARKING LOT
(To help show vehicular commercial through traffic)

PEDDIE LAKE

NOTE:
ALL SIDEWALK AND CURBING REVISIONS
MUST BE APPROVED BY THE BOROUGH
ENGINEER PRIOR TO THE INSTALLATION
OF SIDEWALKS AND CURBS.

CLAS 8551
PP44287

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LAND USE ELEMENT

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LAND USE ELEMENT

A. Introduction

The purpose of the Land Use Element in the Master Plan is three fold:

1. to illustrate where various types of existing and proposed land uses occur throughout the Borough,
2. to consider the relevance and relationship of issues raised in previous, supportive elements of the Master Plan as they relate to land use development and redevelopment in the Borough, and
3. to propose zoning that will effectuate the desired future land use plans for the Borough.

Hightstown is almost completely developed. Patterns of land use development become apparent when we examine the Existing Land Use Map. We then evaluate where development has been positive and where it could be better. We can't ignore areas of potential redevelopment. We must take into account present day circumstances that have changed since the last Master Plan, and factor in the implications of those changes on Hightstown's future. With a perspective of the entire municipality, and the context in which it has developed, the Land Use Element then describes the picture of Hightstown when it is everything the local planners think it should be, a vision often referred to as the ultimate condition.

Finally, the Land Use Element outlines the Proposed Zone Plan that will help to meet the goals and objectives of the Borough and create the ultimate condition. Eventually, when the Master Plan is adopted, ordinances will be written to enact the new Zone Plan and establish standards to guide development and redevelopment.

B. Goals and Objectives

Hightstown must renew its efforts to capitalize on the hidden strengths that are indigenous to the Borough; assets which, unfortunately, have remained underutilized and untapped for some time. A majority of local residents feel that the town's renewed image should be one of a quaint and historic town center. To be developed most clearly in the business district, an historic image will help to improve the shopping experience downtown and create a lasting impression that will remind people to return over and over again. Hightstown must revitalize the business district to improve the economic viability of the Borough. After all, the quality of life in Hightstown can only be enhanced if municipal revenues improve. And it is unreasonable to think that the local condition can be improved on the backs of residential homeowners. More likely, it will be the value and profitability of the business sector that will boost municipal revenues significantly. Once the local economy revitalizes, other important plans for the town can follow.

All this emphasis on the business sector does not diminish the importance of residential neighborhoods. Municipal services must be improved and expanded and aging infrastructure must be upgraded. Parks and recreation should develop to meet the needs of the resident population. Currently, recreational facilities are deficient. With all of this redevelopment, the Borough's valuable natural resources must be protected, and even enhanced. Residential neighborhoods must be improved and they should be connected more effectively with the center of town.

While this Master Plan concentrates heavily on the business district, it does not mean to suggest that residential neighborhoods are any less important or less valuable. The Governing Body and the Planning Board simply recognize that the potential revenue from the business district is an essential priority at this point in the Borough's history. The Borough fully intends to address housing and municipal services in more detail in the near future. However, improving the value of the ratables in the business district now, will lead to greater improvements throughout the Borough later.

C. Circumstances that have changed since 1992

The last Master Plan was prepared in 1992 and it included a Housing Element, a Fair Share Plan, a Recycling Element and a Land Use Element. A number of circumstances have changed since then, some of which have important consequences for the Borough.

1. Demographics

While a quick look at the local demographics shows that Hightstown is unusually stable, a more detailed analysis of the age groups suggests that there is a minor shift from mature families to younger ones. The number of people between the ages of 55 and 74 years was down slightly between 1980 and 1990, but the number of people between 25 and 44 was up proportionately for the same time period. (see Land Use Element Appendix). Therefore, from this trend it is reasonable to assume that Hightstown will continue its tradition of being a family oriented community and the Borough should plan accordingly.

2. State Policies, State Master Plan

After the last Master Plan was adopted, the State adopted a master plan of its own, the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP). The focus of the State's plan is to concentrate development in centers and avoid suburban sprawl. Toward that end, the State intends to provide more support to existing centers and new centers, rather than communities which evolve without such clear land use patterns.

In March of 1997 Hightstown was awarded Center Designation by the State Planning Commission and became a recognized "Town Center" within the SDRP.

As such, the Borough will receive priority for State funding and permitting procedures. For its part, the Borough must undertake the tasks outlined in its Plan and Implementation Agenda, a schedule of objectives delineated in the Borough's petition for Center Designation. (see Land Use Element Appendix).

As a Town Center, the Borough has committed itself to the State to redevelop the business district, define and establish an historic image, improve open space corridors and utilize them to connect residential neighborhoods with the downtown area. Hightstown must also work to rehabilitate housing, provide a balanced mix of land uses and strengthen pedestrian circulation in the face of currently overwhelming vehicular traffic. All of this is intended to reinforce the Borough's viability as a cohesive and highly functional Town Center.

3. Regional Transportation

Clearly the greatest driving force on planning issues in Hightstown at the time of the writing of this Master Plan is the construction of the Hightstown By Pass. The State expects, and the municipality certainly hopes, that the By Pass will significantly reduce regional traffic through town. This offers vast opportunities for improvement in the business district and throughout the Borough.

Heretofore, the community has been physically divided into quadrants by regional traffic routes. While the Borough is certainly small enough to function as a single unit, with any area of town close to any other area, proximity alone has not always related to easy access in Hightstown. When the amount of regional traffic through town is reduced, the Borough will be able to re-establish links between residential neighborhoods, and also between residential neighborhoods and shopping areas. Hightstown will be able to improve local pedestrian and bicycle traffic and make it easier for its own residents to take advantage of the many unique assets the Borough holds.

At the same time, Hightstown will always be subject to the impact of the regional circulation patterns that surround the Borough. Therefore, the municipality must initiate and engage in continual dialogue with East Windsor, Cranbury, the Turnpike Authority, the County and the State. Contributing as an equal participant in regional discussions will help to protect the interests of Hightstown residents when plans are developed to change regional transportation in the area.

D. Existing Land Uses

Hightstown's objectives, those of 1) re-establishing an historic town center image, 2) revitalizing the business districts and 3) improving revenue flow, establish the direction for the Borough's future land use planning and redevelopment. Current circumstances seem to support these objectives. The next step is to evaluate the

pattern of existing land uses and identify its strengths and weaknesses. The Existing Land Use Plan employs a typical professional planning color scheme to illustrate the Borough's existing land uses as described below.

1. Residential Uses

There are four distinct residential neighborhoods in each of the four corners of town. In many respects they are similar, laid out with small lots, on rectilinear streets. And yet, there is a great deal of variety inherent in each neighborhood. The local housing stock includes single family homes, duplexes, large homes divided into apartments and garden apartments. There are public housing units and private condominiums. Most of the housing was developed over a period of 150 years. This long growth period created a wide array of architectural styles as well as some truly outstanding one-of-a-kind treasures. While some of the houses are historically significant, others are valuable to the community for their sense of simple, small town Americana.

2. Commercial Uses

Commercial uses in Hightstown can be divided into two categories, those which comprise the central core of the town and those which flank the principal roads leading into town. Both types of commercial uses are important to the future of Hightstown. These commercial properties hold the key to increasing local ratables and improving municipal revenues.

The commercial properties on the principal roads leading into town, that is along Mercer Street, North Main and Franklin Street, tend to be large and more able to accommodate customers arriving in cars. These might be people from outside Hightstown, or they might be customers who need their cars in order to shop in the stores that they're visiting. For instance, supermarkets tend to attract people in cars, since it is easier to carry packages home in a car, as opposed to walking.

On the other hand, the downtown area along Main Street between Franklin and Rogers is densely developed with small-scale businesses. The shops are small, the streetscape compact and the businesses tend to serve the local community. Parking is available, but not necessarily accessible. The concentration of stores here suggests that pedestrian use should be most important. Unfortunately, the imposition of regional traffic prohibits this.

If the traffic and the congestion are the worst aspects of Hightstown's downtown image, then Peddie Lake and the dam might be considered among its best. Having beautiful natural resources smack in the middle of a built up business center is not only highly desirable, but also fairly unique. The Borough needs to build on positive elements in the community like this when it begins to revitalize the town center.

3. Municipal and Community Sites

The majority of the Borough's municipal services operate from the center of town on North Main Street, near Bank Street. The Borough Hall, police and fire protection are located within the same complex. The municipal water plant is close by on Bank Street and a new municipal maintenance facility is planned nearby. In short the Borough's services are equally accessible from almost anywhere in town and similarly, they are well situated to easily serve the entire Borough.

There are a number of community sites, including the two elementary schools near Route 130 and the high school in the southwestern corner of town. The Mercer County Library is centrally located on the corner of Franklin and South Main and has been recently expanded and renovated. The local YMCA is right downtown on Mercer Street. There are a number of churches throughout the Borough, in both residential and non-residential areas. The collection of public and semi-public community sites meet many of the needs of Hightstown residents.

4. Industrial Uses

There are two major industrial sites in town, the Coca Cola bottling plant and the abandon Mill at Bank Street. Both are valuable community assets for different reasons; Coca Cola for its ratability, and the Mill at Bank Street for its potential. The Coca Cola plant lies on the western edge of town. Presently, it lacks the support of municipal sanitary sewer services. Historically, this has been a problem for the company, but one which it hopes to resolve someday. The Mill at Bank Street is located in the center of town. This site is deteriorated and vacant, but its relatively large size and unique architecture hold many redevelopment possibilities.

5. Recreational Uses

Active recreation in town is minimal, comprised of two basketball courts at Dawes Park and three tot lots, one each at the Bank Street, Grant Avenue and Dawes Parks. The public and private schools have extensive recreation facilities, which are available to the public on a limited basis, but the Bank Street Park is the only viable location for any new, substantial, wholly municipal, active recreation. There is significant potential for linear recreation, walking, bicycling, etc, along the abandoned railroad right-of-way and the Rocky Brook Corridor. These corridors can also be developed as important links between residential and non-residential parts of town.

6. General Implications

After analyzing the Borough's land use patterns, the next question is, "What, then, are the general implications of these land use patterns?" Understanding the general

implications will lead to effective and productive municipal planning for the future.

a. Residential - Most residential lots are small and quaint. The closeness of the houses and the compact nature of the community can lead to positive socializing and heightened community awareness. Statistically, this positive social behavior leads to safer communities. The housing stock is very diverse, having developed over many decades. The architectural diversity provides richness and interest in the community and should be encouraged.

On the negative side, the number of single family homes is growing and not as slowly as one might expect. Despite the reality that there is very little undeveloped land on which to build, existing large lots are obtaining minor subdivisions, adding new single family homes to the tax rolls every year. But, single family homes do not pay for themselves. Property taxes on most single family homes rarely cover the cost of providing services to family households. In fact, single family, residential buildings tend to cost a community more in services, ie. fire, police, and schools, than they contribute in taxes. Therefore, the fact that more and more minor subdivisions are occurring in Hightstown is exacerbating the Town's lagging revenue situation. Absent a huge improvement in the non-residential tax base, the growing housing stock must be contained.

b. Commercial - Commercial development in town is situated well for accessibility. Unfortunately it currently suffers the adverse impact of regional through traffic. With the new By Pass completed, traffic should ease and this should open the door for substantial improvements to the Town's commercial areas. Their success will be one key factor in revitalizing Hightstown.

The Borough has several distinct areas of commercial development, each with their own special qualities. Most obviously, the central downtown area, where Mercer Street, South Main, North Main, Stockton and Franklin Streets all come together is the economic core of the Borough. It is small in scale, intimate, and should cater to pedestrians most of all. With some imagination, a lot of hard work and coordinated efforts, this area can become a vibrant showcase of commercial activity. It should be redeveloped to serve the daily needs of the community as well as provide a recreational shopping experience for out of town visitors, looking for a day trip outing.

A second commercial area exists along Mercer Street, at the southern entrance to town. Here, larger retail uses are easy to get to for regional shoppers coming in from Route 130. With ample room for on site parking, customers can shop and return to Route 130, without passing through downtown streets. The character of this area is not at all quaint or small scale, like the downtown. Instead, important planning issues on

Mercer Street are easy vehicular access and good visibility from cars moving at a fairly fast pace.

A third area of commercial businesses exist within a mix of non-residential and residential development in the northeastern corner of town, between the railroad right-of-way along Broad Street and Franklin Street. This area is less well defined, in part because of the interplay between existing commercial, office and residential uses. Nonetheless, commercial development here tends to center along the main roads with the most traffic. The residential uses are more concentrated on smaller, interior roads, like Maxwell Avenue.

Since the area is clearly mixed, permitted land uses must respect the integrity of all the uses in the area. This means that commercial development cannot adversely impact existing residential uses. At the same time, residential uses must acknowledge that the traffic along the main roads in this area is more conducive to commercial development than residential. Whether it be commercial or residential, planning for the future in this area must also consider the fact that Franklin Street is as important an entrance to the Borough as Mercer Street or Stockton, so the image along Franklin must be positive, for the good of the Borough.

c. Municipal and Community Sites - The municipal and community sites in town, including recreational facilities, are essential if the Borough is to satisfy the needs of its residents as it should and function as a viable town center. Hightstown can pride itself on the fact that it has the potential to be fairly self subsistent. It has a good mix of housing and a wide spectrum of land uses, from "urban" areas to ecological wildlife areas. It has parks, schools, shopping, offices, churches, employment centers and a library. When the Borough balances its revenue stream with its costs and services, it will have, within its own borders almost all the resources most residents look for to satisfy their daily needs.

The administrative end of the municipal services is aptly located in the center of town, equally accessible from almost everywhere. Recreational facilities, including school facilities, are well distributed throughout the Borough. The abandoned railroad right-of-way and the Rocky Brook corridor criss cross the town and, if developed with pedestrian paths, will provide terrific access across town, through the town center and beyond to other local neighborhoods.

The greatest obstacle seems to be coordinating the Borough's resources. Some of the resources are owned by the Borough, other's by the local school system, and some are privately held, the Peddie School being the largest of the private holders. Local churches and even some private landowners also maintain rights to some of the Borough's best resources.

Since the Borough has neither the space, nor the capital to develop all of its own municipal resources, a cooperative and organized system must be developed to integrate public and private uses. Moreover, in a town as small and financially strapped as Hightstown, it would be illogical to utilize precious space and sparse funds to develop duplicative facilities.

d. **Industrial** - The two largest industrial sites in town are quite different. The Coca Cola site on Mercer Street is a valuable ratable. Company officials have indicated that relocating the truck traffic from downtown to the new By Pass will not substantially impair their operation nor create a hardship on the company or its haulers. However, the issue of sewer service is important to them. Presently, the company must ship all of its sewage out of town, yet the Borough's sewage treatment plant has adequate capacity to handle it, with some minor modifications. The cost of connecting the company to the plant is at the heart of the issue. Earlier discussion between the company and the Borough suggested that a viable solution was possible. It is in the best interest of everyone to continue working toward a negotiated agreement.

E. Proposed Zone Plan

With an understanding of the general implications of the existing land use patterns, we can examine the existing Zone Plan and determine if it effectively responds to the general implications. If not, the Zone Plan should be changed.

Upon closer examination, it's evident that the existing Zone Plan closely follows the Existing Land Use Plan, establishing residential and non-residential zones in appropriate locations. However, the zoning ordinance, which enacts the Zone Plan is less accurate. In many instances some permitted uses within the zones are highly inappropriate. The main problem stems from the over-use of cross referencing, where the permitted uses in one zone are cross referenced with the permitted uses in another. This can lead to development or redevelopment that is less pointedly directed toward the specific objectives of each land use zone. Therefore, it is important to the effectiveness of Hightstown's Zone Plan that the Borough re-evaluate the classifications of many of its zones and define them more appropriately.

1. Residential

The economic situation in Hightstown can be improved if the Borough reigns in the number of minor subdivisions that have occurred over recent years. The Borough should review the bulk requirements of residential zones, compare them to an inventory of existing lot sizes and dimensions, and determine if it is possible to change the standards and reduce the number of minor subdivisions.

Later, when the Borough can study residential neighborhoods in more detail, and concentrate on the residential areas with the same intensity as this Master Plan

concentrates on the commercial areas, the Borough should prepare an illustrated Housing Element that accurately and clearly describes the desired character of the residential community. Drawing from the best of the residential neighborhoods and building on the housing stock composition and diversity, the illustrated Housing Element should paint a picture of what residential neighborhoods in Hightstown should look like and propose planning recommendations to see that they redevelop that way.

In the meantime, the new Zone Plan should correct one minor mistake in the zoning boundaries of the R-4 zone on Summit Street. The line was drawn to include the Cedar Hill Cemetery in the R-4 zone. However, the line mistakenly bifurcates the Cemetery site, which includes a collection of tax lots. The line should include all of the cemetery lots and extend west to Summit Street as depicted on the Proposed Zoning Map.

2. Central Commercial, 1 & 2

This Master Plan proposes to redefine and re-delineate the Central Commercial Zones 1 and 2 (CC-1, CC-2). Presently the CC-1 and CC-2 areas are small and comprise the southern half of the Borough's downtown business district. Using the Existing Land Use Map to delineate the downtown area, the new Central Commercial Zones will encompass all of the non-residential uses in the center of town. Existing commercial uses which are zoned differently, either PED, or R-3 and R-4 will be rezoned.

a. Redefining Central Commercial Zones - Presently, the most densely developed commercial area in town, around the intersections of North and South Main, Stockton, Rogers and Franklin, is divided into six different zones, ranging from residential (R-3) to planned economic development (PED). Per the ordinances, among the six zones, there is a collection of very diverse permitted uses, including detached single family homes, agriculture, research labs and public and private schools. Many of these uses are seemingly inconsistent with the character of the area.

The downtown commercial area should be rezoned as shown on the Proposed Zone Plan. CC-1 and CC-2 zones will define most of the downtown. The new zones correspond with the limits of existing commercial uses; they do not expand it. Moreover, while they appear as two zones, they could be more accurately described as one zone and a variation of the same.

b. The Land Use Planning Intent - The new Central Commercial Zones will create special zoning for commercial development. Both the CC-1 and the CC-2 will permit commercial uses that are small scale, intimate, specialty shop type businesses. Any use that might attract regional traffic will not be allowed, for the downtown area does not have the room to handle regional

traffic and accommodate important pedestrian priorities at the same time. As history has already shown us, in a competition between regional traffic and pedestrians, the vehicular traffic wins. So, by instituting proper land use controls over permitted uses, the Borough can help to control oppressive traffic generation rates.

In addition to encouraging small-scale commercial uses, the Central Commercial Zones will also be flexible. Performance standards will take precedent over technical ones. A list of proposed uses should be *representative* of permitted uses, not a limit of allowable uses. Given enough detail and guidance, performance standards will allow developers and business owners to propose uses that are not specifically listed in the ordinance, but which still satisfy the planning intent of the zone. The burden of proof will remain on the applicant to demonstrate that their proposed uses satisfy the performance standards, however, given adequate testimony and well thought out proposals, this should not be difficult.

At the same time, the Planning Board will have a greater responsibility, under performance zoning to interpret planning testimony and insure that adequate proofs are established on the record and the standards of the ordinances are met. While there may be some increased subjectivity in a performance ordinance, subjectivity is minimized substantially with clear, well-defined planning objectives for the commercial zones outlined in both the Master Plan and the ordinances to follow. The Planning Board should be aware, however, that performance ordinances are much more inextricably links to the Master Plan than traditional, technical ordinances.

c. Planning Objectives - The planning objectives for the Central Commercial Zones are several. Obviously, businesses must be small scale and not regionally oriented. Uses which inherently generate a lot of vehicular traffic should not be permitted. Proposals should be adaptable to an historic theme, since the new image for the downtown area will be an historic, some say even Victorian in appearance. Proposals which include historic qualities should be reviewed as if the historic design is one beneficial factor when considering the benefits of a project to the community.

Proposed uses must also serve the daily and/or casual needs of the local community, keeping in mind that Hightstown is a family oriented town. Some *examples* of such uses are:

- Retail and service shops
- Delicatessens and other specialty eateries
- Bakeries, coffee shops, and ice cream parlors
- Bars and taverns
- Full service restaurants

- Barber shops and salons
- Bookstores
- Pharmacies
- Flower shops

All of these sorts of uses serve the needs of the resident community. They complement pedestrian use of the downtown. Hightstonians might easily walk along the new pedestrian paths in the railroad right-of-way and visit the business district to shop at any of these types of stores. Taken together, the collection also creates a complete experience for out-of-town visitors who might want to enjoy a day of shopping in a quaint, historic town center.

d. Franchise Developments - None of the representative uses noted above represent large scale franchise development. In fact, if a regional or national franchise business proposes to develop in Hightstown's Central Commercial Zones, the proposal should be required to prove that the franchise nature of the business will not detract from the Town's desire to establish a quaint, small scale, historic image for itself. Taking the matter one step further, such applications should also prove convincingly that the franchise nature of the business, which tends to make all franchised establishments look the same as others within the same franchise, will be designed to create an individual establishment that is distinctly Hightstown.

A proposal must be complementary of Hightstown's goals and objectives. It is not enough for a franchise proposal to have "no negative impacts." The character of the downtown is so important to the cohesion of the town center image and the economic viability of the Borough, that any "chain style establishment" must be based on *clear* evidence that the proposal advances the quaint, intimate, historic image that the Borough is striving to create. The Borough should not entertain an approval for any application that offers any less.

e. Office Uses - The Central Commercial Zones should also permit some office and professional office uses, but again, they should be confined to those which encourage pedestrian traffic. For instance, travel agencies and optometrists might be acceptable, since people often browse in travel offices or shop for a new personal look in an eyeglass shop. But real estate and medical offices are less appropriate. People who visit real estate offices are generally out for the purpose of locating a new house, not casual shopping in downtown Hightstown. A real estate patron is not likely to also take advantage of the downtown's other shopping opportunities. Similarly, someone visiting a medical office is usually not feeling well. They drive to their appointment and they leave abruptly. A medical office, therefore, will not complement the other commercial uses in the area. Again, the distinction between appropriate office uses and

inappropriate ones can be best managed with performance zoning ordinances.

Office use provides the distinction between the new Central Commercial 1 and Central Commercial 2. In CC-1, offices will not be permitted on the first floor. Regardless of the amount of activity they generate, offices in general do not generate as much pedestrian traffic as retail establishments do. Therefore, offices on the first floor in the CC-1 zone would compromise the pedestrian energy inherent in center of Hightstown's business district. This issue is less critical on the edges of the business district in the CC-2 areas, where office uses will be permitted on the first floor.

f. Uses on Upper Floors - In both CC-1 and CC-2, mixed uses will be permitted on the upper floors. This will include retail, service, office and residential uses. Apartment dwellers, in particular, will make valuable use of downtown parking during off peak hours, in the evenings, when the stores are closed. During the day, when most people work, they will not be using the parking and it will be free for visiting shoppers. Downtown apartment dwellers will also create a resident market in the immediate area for the stores and shops, and especially nighttime entertainment spots, like restaurants.

In addition, when Hightstown's downtown begins to bustle, and the commercial sector starts to thrive, businesses will be clamoring for any space they can get in Hightstown, even if its on the second, third or fourth floors. By then, zoning will be in place to allow that to happen, permitting a mix of office, retail and service uses on upper floors.

g. The Mill at Bank Street - The Mill at Bank Street is a unique site in the downtown. On the one hand it is arguably one of the least attractive sites in the area. As an abandoned industrial building, it stands idyl and rusted, its large size ever present. And yet, its size and relatively sound structural condition, as well as its proximity to downtown activity, give this site some of the greatest redevelopment potential in the area. It is located on the banks of the Rocky Brook, where some incredibly interesting and creative site designs could integrate landscape architecture, building architecture and site planning. Some elements of the industrial architecture of the buildings are valuable from a design perspective and can be incorporated into a contemporary reuse of the entire site.

It is essential that this site be developed with the highest valued ratables possible. Not warehousing or light industrial use, but high class retail businesses that will generate a lot of municipal revenue. With some imagination, the site can be redeveloped into a showcase project for the Borough.

The highest and best use of the site is a high valued mix of retail establishments. These would include specialty retail shops, restaurants, entertainment establishments and possibly galleries. Once again, the mix should complement a Hightstown experience so that people might enjoy an entire day of shopping, dining, entertainment, strolling along the Brook, finishing the night off with a cup of latte before heading home. The buildings could be developed into indoor shopping mini-malls and connected among landscaped plazas with outdoor eating areas and a few entrepreneurial vending carts.

The Borough should also establish a conditional use for the CC-2 zone that would open the door for a small-scale hotel to develop in the Mill at Bank Street. The Peddie School presently directs its visiting parents to Princeton for lodging, however, that's not really necessary. The Mill at Bank Street could become a high quality hotel. It would capture the local market and feed other businesses in town.

As a conditional use, a hotel would be subject to some important criteria to insure that it complements, and does not compete with businesses in the downtown or compromise the ability of the Borough to maximize other ratables. For instance, a prospective hotel should be moderate in size, not so large as to attract conferences. A large hotel would overwhelm the Borough with its traffic. It should be able to manage its own parking on site. Rental rooms should not be permitted on the first floor, for the ground floor should be reserved for high valued ratable retail shops and restaurants. Office uses on the first floor should not be permitted unless they are accessory to the hotel itself. There should be a drop off lane at the hotel's entrance to help keep standing cars off local streets when visitors transfer luggage to and from their cars. Structured appropriately, a conditional hotel use in the CC-2 zone could certainly create a very positive commercial magnet in the Borough's business district.

h. The Downtown Character. It is not enough to propose uses for the downtown. The Master Plan must also give some guidance for the creation of an ordinance that will promote small scale, intimate and historic development. Regarding an historic theme, the Borough should work with the Architectural Review Board to develop a streetscape plan. Studying the Borough's inventory of historic sites, the ARB will be knowledgeable of historic design elements that are appropriate for the town center.

Other design elements can be incorporated into building facades to promote an intimate scale and comfortable pedestrian feel. For instance, where space is too confined to permit the healthy growth of street trees, hanging plants can be installed on poles or attached to building facades. In

some cases planted window boxes might work. Windows that are divided into smaller panes, rather than constructed with huge plate glass will create a more quaint appearance to the building facade. Windows with arches, or bay windows on upper floors, where they cannot impede pedestrians on the sidewalks would help to break up the appearances of large, expansive building facades. Similarly, entrances that are recessed not only provide cover from the weather, but also interrupt the typical flat elevation of most buildings. Roof lines that vary and include gables or mansards are also important in creating a complete image of the streetscape. Amenities like awnings, shutters and wall mounted lanterns add interest and character to landscape. None of these design elements should be mandatory; some business owners might be deterred from doing business in Hightstown if they are mandatory. However, ordinances should be written with positive incentives to encourage these sorts of design considerations and eventually the business district will transform itself.

i. Signage. A sign ordinance must be carefully written to insure that the signs do not over power the downtown image being developed. Signs should not be permitted to have a dominant presence in the landscape, or even a predominance over a building façade. When the new commercial zoning is successful, the palette of uses in the downtown area will complement each other, not compete with each other. Moreover, combined with other efforts, the zoning will encourage redevelopment in such a fashion as to transform Hightstown into a place where people want to stay and stroll. In that kind of environment, businesses do not need to "catch the eye" of passing customers as obviously as they might need to if they were dependent on customers passing by in fast moving cars. Businesses will be able to utilize more subtle signage and still attract business.

j. Rear Entrance Improvements. Finally, the ordinance for the Central Commercial Zones should address the back side of commercial buildings as well as the streetscape and front building facades. In Hightstown, the rear of commercial buildings is also important. Much of the available parking exists in back of the stores. Again, the municipality should encourage business owners to improve the rear entrances of their stores for both the vehicular users that use the parking lots and the local residents that might walk to town and prefer not to walk all around the building to the front door. Improving and expanding the accessibility of the stores will also improve business. Redesigning the parking lot between Stockton and Rogers as described in the Circulation Element and vacating a block of Railroad Avenue will be more successful if the businesses on Main Street simultaneously improve their rear facades. This is a typical example of the kind of public/private partnership project that can improve the appearance and function of the town center.

k. Summary - In short, the new Central Commercial Zones will be more flexible in nature to make it easier for developers and business owners to establish and operate businesses in the downtown. At the same time, the ordinances will encourage developers and business owners to operate in Hightstown in a way that helps the Borough kindle an image as a quaint, historic town center.

3. Residential and Professional Office

The new Zone Plan leaves two small remaining areas of Residential and Professional Office (RPO) zoning; one on North Main and the other along Franklin Street. It also enlarges the RPO Zone on Stockton and creates a new area for Residential Professional Office uses on South Main Street, at East Ward Avenue. All four of these areas represent critical thresholds to the commercial center of Hightstown. In these areas, professional office uses are easily accessible to patrons that come to shop downtown. At the same time, the residential character of these areas, and in some cases the historic value of the residences, is important to the quaint, small town, historic image that this Master Plan is designed to promote for the Borough in general and the central downtown business district specifically.

The RPO zone includes residential and professional office uses intermingled with, and adjacent to residential uses. While careful consideration must be paid to the residential uses, it is important to note that traffic in these areas is substantial enough to suggest that long term, continued residential use in *any* either of these areas is not a probable expectation. Because of the traffic, these properties are more valuable as non-residential uses. Even after the By Pass reduces the amount of through traffic, the general traffic in the area will be commercial in nature and not residential.

Moreover, the proximity of these areas to the business district, the Central Commercial Zones, suggests that these areas are more aptly zoned as a less intense, non-residential use. The Master Plan is not suggesting that the existing residential uses be eliminated or even discouraged. In fact, residential use should continue as a permitted use. But the Master Plan does recognize the long term probability that the character of this area is changing.

Once again, the existing ordinance for the RPO zone cross references this zone with others and by doing so allows these areas to be developed with some inappropriate uses like hospitals and cemeteries, agriculture and schools. Clearly these areas are not intended to be developed with these types of uses. So the ordinance for the RPO zone should be rewritten. As a transition zone between the downtown business district and the residential zones, the RPO zones should include non-residential uses in residential-looking structures. It should permit professional offices in existing or converted residences. However, office uses should be limited to those which do not generate much vehicular traffic or require sizeable parking lots. Again, as an example, a single account or a graphic artist would not necessarily generate a lot of

traffic, while a surveying company would require a larger parking lot for its field vehicles, not to mention its field crew employees and visiting clients. The number of cars visiting the site must be controlled to minimize the traffic, but more importantly, to minimize the size of the parking lot that might adversely impact adjoining residential uses.

As already mentioned, residential uses should also be permitted. This is a transition zone and a mix of residential uses and non-residential uses in residential style houses is appropriate. Furthermore, home occupations, which are generally fairly restrictive in more homogeneous residential neighborhoods, can be more relaxed in the RPO zone. Considering the nature of the zone, small signs and even very small parking lots would not detract from the character of the area, like they might otherwise in a universally residential neighborhood. In this way, home occupations provide a good way of integrating business and residential use in this transitional planning district.

The RPO should permit community residences and shelters, because these residents typically lack private transportation. The nearby location of the RPO to the Central Commercial Zones makes it easy for the group home residents to shop in the downtown and meet their daily needs without depending on public or private transportation.

Commercial family day care facilities are another example of a non-residential use that can be easily operated in a residentially style building. Like the others, it does not generate a lot of traffic throughout the day, it can operate within a house, does not require a large loading zone nor dumpsters nor extensive signage. Again, a performance ordinance for the RPO zone would provide flexibility and encourage redevelopment, while including sufficient standards, guidelines and incentives to insure that the area develops in a manner that is in keeping with the objectives of the neighborhood.

4. Highway Commercial

The Highway Commercial (HC) Zone includes four enclaves, all along the Mercer Street, Franklin Street and Broad Street. The zones are designed appropriately to capitalize on the traffic into and out of the downtown. The northernmost HC area, on Broad Street is somewhat unique in that it faces residential uses and the character of Broad Street is not as "impersonal" as the more highly trafficked Mercer Street. The Broad Street HC zone must be extended to compensate for the redistribution of the Central Commercial Zones. It should also be improved through an active effort to redesign the streetscape of Broad Street.

Presently, Broad Street is a wide road which was probably designed to be majestic, but which, in fact, does little more than inspire high speed traffic. This is a concern, particularly in light of the residential uses on the east side of the street. The "broad" sense of the street can be preserved while narrowing the cartway, if very wide street

tree lawn panels are installed. Broad Street has a 60-foot wide right-of-way. If the road were reduced to a 26 foot cartway, the Borough could develop twelve foot wide lawn panels on either side, add a four foot wide sidewalk on each side between the lawn panels and the edge of the right-of-way and plant large, formidable street trees, like sycamores to line the street. This design would retain the "broad street" image but reduce the width of the street and encourage slower traffic. It would also add a substantial amount of landscaped space between the highway commercial uses on one side of the street and the residential ones on the other.

The other Highway Commercial areas operate appropriately for the existing uses within them, however, the Borough should review the site plan ordinances and see if changes can be made that would improve the appearance of the HC zones and hence the view of Hightstown at its thresholds.

5. Research and Office

The Research/Office (RO) Zone is clustered in the northeast corner of town. It is located close to the Turnpike Interchange, and the new eastern entrance to the Hightstown By Pass. It is positioned well to receive a lot of commuter traffic from regional highways, without burdening too many of the local roads with that traffic. This zone also has more undeveloped land than any other zone in town. The area is undeveloped in part because of the economy, and in part because of the wetlands in the area. However, when the economy of Hightstown improves, it will be easier to attract developers to the site, especially with the improved access to and around Hightstown. The wetlands might still present a problem. Clearly the wetlands should be preserved, enhanced and incorporated into a redesign of the abandoned railroad right-of-way, expanding the valuable natural resources of the Borough.

6. Industrial

There is only one area of industrial zoning in town, on Mercer Street at the southern entrance to the Borough. While zoned appropriately, the definition of the industrial is unnecessarily broad, permitting anything that is also permitted in the Highway Commercial Zone and the Research Office Zone, in addition to manufacturing uses. This broad classification of industrial zoning may seem flexible, accommodating almost any possible proposal. But it also indirectly encourages developers to establish uses which are typically highway commercial or research office in an area of town where they were not intended or best suited.

The objective of land use zoning is to insure that certain kinds of development occur in certain desired areas. Therefore, in areas where municipalities wish to encourage development, they create flexible, comprehensive zoning classifications, such as the new Central Commercial Zones proposed for the downtown. Since Hightstown needs to reinvigorate its commercial and ratable areas more than any other at this

time, it is critical that other non-residential zones are not designed to effectively draw potential development away from the zones which hold the greatest potential for stimulating municipal revenue.

Therefore, the Industrial Zone should be redefined and the scope of permitted uses narrowed to reflect more specifically the type of typically industrial uses that the Borough expects to operate in this zone. This will provide better protection for the Highway Commercial and Research Office Zones, as well as the Central Commercial Zones.

In addition, it is commonly accepted that industrial uses are not as highly valued as commercial uses. Because of this, their juxtaposition to nearby commercial uses that might develop in the Industrial Zone as it is currently defined stands to jeopardize the value of commercial property that should otherwise be more marketable. If the value of the property is reduced, the potential revenue to the Borough is also less. Obviously, limiting the Industrial Zone to characteristically industrial uses is logical for a number of reasons.

7. Private School Zone

The public schools are part of the community. They are built and operated with taxpayers dollars. When the local School Board comes before the Planning Board with proposed construction, it does so more out of courtesy rather than land use regulation. The Borough has little control over public school initiatives.

On the other hand, the Peddie School, a private school, is also located within the Borough. Hightstown is certainly proud to be the home of this prestigious, highly acclaimed, and world-renowned educational institution. Yet, as a private school, it is bound by the rules that govern all other private developers. Furthermore, as a private school, it has been a permitted use within the R-1 zone, subject to minimal conditions. Nonetheless, if the school's application cannot satisfy the prescribed conditions, the school is bound by the land use law to obtain variances just like any other developer. However, the standards to which the school's applications might be compared are those of a single family development in the R-1 zone and obviously, these standards are quite inappropriate for the Peddie School, since a school is very different from single family development.

In addition, the Borough risks its own future when it permits the school to operate in a zone that permits such things as hospitals and sanitariums. In the off chance that the Peddie School ever decided to leave Hightstown and sell the property, it could sell it to a hospital. The town would have a much less desirable non-profit, inherently beneficial use contributing much less to the community. Similarly, as part of a widely defined residential zone, an argument could conceivably be made that a youth oriented use, say a youthful detention facility, is close enough in kind to a school campus to warrant a use variance to operate on the property. Again, this would be a much less desirable non-profit use that could make a bid for the property

and conceivably make reasonable arguments before the Planning Board.

Therefore, to protect the Borough and establish more site design control over the Peddie School sites, Hightstown should develop a separate school zone between East Ward, South Main and Etra Road. An adjoining lot on the south side of Etra Road, east of Orchard Avenue, should also be part of this zone. The zone should clearly define the desired use and character of the area. It should tie the use and character of the area to the immediate residential zones surrounding it, and leave no question or ambiguity about the intentions of the Borough to limit, and yet respect, this area for academic operations.

F. Adjoining Municipality

East Windsor is the only municipality bordering Hightstown. The Borough is the "hole" in the "doughnut." In a general way, the Township's zoning is consistent with that of the Borough. Clearly, the most intensely developed zones in the Township border Hightstown, which tends to be more densely developed than the more distant, suburban reaches of the East Windsor Township.

Nonetheless, in some isolated areas, there are potential conflicts between East Windsor's land use zoning and the Borough's. Most critical is the area of Wyckoff Mills Road, where the Borough has maintained Research Office zoning and Residential-Planned Multi-family Zoning. The Township anticipates industrial zoning here. That will significantly and adversely impact the marketability and developability of Hightstown's land for research and office development. The Borough should approach the Township and engage it in a dialogue to ascertain if a positive resolution is possible. Both the State and County planning offices, through which a settlement might be mediated, should be involved if mediation is required. But this is an issue that has a very direct and immediate impact on Hightstown's central goal of stimulating municipal revenue and it should be addressed quickly and effectively.

The other zoning issue that involves both municipalities is the potential for the development of a regional center. As promulgated in the Borough Center Designation Report, Hightstown envisions a day when the Borough is a thriving Town Center, attractive as a destination for welcomed visitors. At that time, development in East Windsor could complement that of Hightstown. It is the hope of the Borough that East Windsor will engage in a productive dialogue about a joint regional center.

As part of a regional center agreement, both municipalities would agree to engage zoning that complements and not conflicts with the zoning of the other. In this case, East Windsor might confine its Highway Commercial zones to regional uses that draw on the regional traffic along Route 130. It would discourage the establishment of smaller, specialty stores that fit more appropriately into the intimate character of Hightstown's downtown. Similarly, Hightstown would confine its zoning to

specialty commercial uses and discourage regional business more appropriately situated outside the Borough, in the Township. Working together, the two towns could define their separate "niches" from which both would benefit. Again, assistance from the State and County planning offices would be appropriate to facilitate the dialogue.

G. General Land Use Considerations

Every element of this Master Plan includes planning recommendations particular to the subject of the specific element in which they appear. These recommendations are just as important and should carry just as much weight as the planning recommendations in the Land Use Element when municipal planners evaluate planning decisions. There are a couple of planning issues which do not fall neatly into any particular element per se. They are nonetheless similarly critical to the decision-making processes for which the Borough will depend upon the Master Plan. Therefore, these miscellaneous issues are presented here and should be considered with due diligence during the review of any development or redevelopment proposal.

1. Residential Neighborhood Planning

This Master Plan concentrates on the economic redevelopment of the Borough in hopes of jump starting the local economy and stimulating positive and prolonged change in Hightstown. As such, it concentrates on creating a clear and distinctive image for the commercial areas of town. However, the same detail which is given here to the downtown, and the description and guidance offered to local planners to help them evaluate commercial development, should be created for the residential neighborhoods. The Master Plan should be amended to incorporate such detail. Moreover, once a detailed image of the residential areas is established, residential ordinances should be modified appropriately to ensure that that image is developed. Again, incentive based, performance ordinances would be most effective.

Yet even before the Borough addresses the character of the residential neighborhoods, it must curtail minor subdivisions and eliminate the expanding cost of more single family development.

2. Signage

There are generally two reasons why non-residential establishments use signs. They are either attempting to attract the attention of passersby, or they are simply identifying themselves within a large commercial community. In Hightstown, particularly in the downtown area, the latter should be the only consideration.

When the municipality succeeds in transforming the downtown into a more pedestrian oriented, functional town center, people will come to Hightstown and

stay for a while. The town, with its historic image and quaint atmosphere, its mix of interesting shops and the serenity of the lake and Rocky Brook will captivate people's interest. The stores in town will have the people's attention. Shoppers will return to Hightstown time and time again until they know Hightstown almost as well as the locals do. In such a town center it will not be necessary for overbearing signs to stimulate people's awareness.

In a small town center, signage should be subtle. Effective, but subtle. Store windows should not be plastered with posters and storefronts should not be decorated with banners. Stores should be encouraged to advertise their sales in publications, not in their windows. Temporary signs should be banned, except for incidental chalkboards that might advertise a deli's daily specials or luncheonette menus. Business owners should be encouraged to remember that their signs are as much a part of the town's streetscape design as sidewalk paving and streetlighting. A new sign ordinance should be drafted that insures that signage in Hightstown promotes an historic town center image and encourages business owners to rethink existing signs that do not contribute positively to the local streetscape.

3. Open Space and Recreation

The fact that Hightstown's open spaces are so intertwined with its developed areas is a rare and valuable asset. Peddie Lake, the abandoned railroad right-of-way and the Rocky Brook corridor enhance the experience of the downtown and soften the build up hardscape. Memorial Park is equally important to the business district, and Dawes and Grant Avenue Parks are similarly critical to their respective residential neighborhoods. Hightstown has a lot of roads and, as a kind of open space, the design of the streetscape adds another important piece of open space to the development mix in Hightstown. It's all interconnected.

Applicants before the Planning Board may tend to emphasize the use of their buildings or the design of their parking. Board members must insist that equal attention be given to the way proposed developments fit in with the character of the community. Not necessarily the existing character of the community, for in some areas the existing character is truly needy. But applicants must demonstrate that their proposals help to advance the Borough's desire to create a town center with a quaint, historic image and in this regard the open space around a building will be as important as the use that occurs within it.

4. Land Use Zoning Ordinances

With the desired ultimate condition of the municipality described in this Master Plan, the Borough must now establish an ordinance that will develop that condition. A first step in doing that is to review the Borough's zoning classifications and eliminate the cross referencing of zones which leads to inappropriate uses permitted where they should not be. Cross referencing is not only cumbersome, especially when a cross reference refers to another cross

reference, but it also dilutes the integrity and individuality that is the reason for having separate land use zones in the first place.

5. Property Maintenance

The small size of the municipality and the close proximity of uses to each other, dictates that the condition of one property will impact on neighboring properties. Coupled with the Borough's goal to enhance its image, the Borough recognizes that property maintenance is important to the success of Hightstown. Therefore, existing property maintenance ordinances should be enforced and applied to both residential and commercial properties. When necessary, the Borough should take steps to remedy maintenance problems that become a threat to the health, safety and welfare of the public, assessing the subject property owners accordingly.

6. Use Variances

Hightstown's small size also relates directly to the potential impact of use variances on the community. In a community where everything is so close together, a single use located in the wrong place can change an entire neighborhood. Improving the zoning classifications and eliminating cross referencing will help to better define the land use zones as they are intended to be classified. However, in the event that a use variance is sought, the Planning Board should be diligent in requiring applicants to provide all of the necessary proofs required under Municipal Land Use Law.

No applicant is ever "entitled" to a variance of any kind, use or otherwise. New Jersey Law requires that certain proofs be provided, including negative criteria, special reasons and enhanced proofs. Negative criteria demonstrate how the benefits of a proposed use *outweigh*, not compare, to the detriments. In this case, the detail given in this Master Plan regarding the intentions to develop a town center with a distinctive image for Hightstown, is a prescription for beneficial development. Aspects of an application, which promotes the image of Hightstown outlined in this Master Plan, should be considered beneficial. They still must be weighed against, and outweigh any potential negative impacts of a development, but this Master Plan is establishing a basis for positive development.

Special reasons include proofs which explain why a site is particularly suited for the proposed use. There must be something special about the site, not the use, that makes the proposal appropriate. For instance, a waterfront site is particularly well suited for a boat rental business. On the other hand, the mere fact that a proposed development will clean up an otherwise vacant property does not speak to particular characteristics of the site which are well suited for the proposed use.

And finally, negative reasons are proofs which demonstrate that the proposed use will not adversely impact the zone plan. In this regard, the applicant must draw

on the Master Plan and prove that his/her project is compatible with the goals, objectives and planning recommendations outlined herein.

The MLUL permits Zoning Boards, or Planning Boards in municipalities which have a single reviewing board, to grant variances to permit "a use...in a district restricted against such use" upon a showing of special reasons and satisfaction of the two elements of the negative criteria - (1) that the variance may be granted without substantial detriment to the public good, including among other things, the impact of the variance on the neighborhood; and (2) that the variance will not substantially impair the intent and purpose of the zone plan and ordinance.

The Supreme Court of New Jersey has held that in dealing with inherently beneficial uses (e.g., schools, hospitals, houses of worship and nursery schools) Zoning Boards, or their equivalent single or joint reviewing board, must apply a balancing test when considering the following:

1. The public interest at stake.
2. The detrimental impact of the variance.
3. Whether the detrimental impact can be mitigated by reasonable conditions.
4. Weighing the positive and negative criteria to determine whether the grant of the variance would cause substantial or significant detriment to the public good.

In all other cases where a Board is considering a use variance application, the Courts, in addition to proof of special reasons, have called for an enhanced standard of proof and clear and specific findings that the variance is not inconsistent with the intent and purpose of the master plan and zoning ordinance. The applicant's proofs and the Board's findings must also reconcile the proposed use variance with the zoning ordinance's omission of the use from those permitted in the zoning district and the board should consider such factors as substantial changes in the municipality since the adoption of the ordinance and new development in adjoining municipalities in arriving at its decision.

Any proposal which does not offer the reviewing board all proofs, should not be permitted. It is always the responsibility of the applicant to provide the proofs. The Board is not required to seek its own justification for granting an approval. Without valid and adequate proofs on the record, the Board has *no discretion* under Municipal Land Use Law. It must deny variance requests. Variances are only permitted when valid and justifiable proofs have been provided.

(Author's note: 6. Use Variance was written in collaboration with G. Rosensweig, Esq.)

7. Telephone Towers

Telephone towers are an example of relatively new land uses, for which modern ordinances must be modified. Held by some courts as inherently beneficial uses,

communications companies have pressed forward and sought to develop towers seemingly everywhere. However, in the intimate and quaint surroundings of Hightstown, an improperly located tower structure will impact on the entire community. Therefore, the municipality must plan ahead and control the placement of any potential future towers that might seek to come into the Borough.

Existing towers and other municipal sites should be used for co-location. Towers should be limited to unlighted antennae. The more obtrusive "dish" structures should be confined to locations wherein they can be completely concealed. Similarly, lights, blinking or not, are disconcerting in a nighttime landscape and should be banned. Indirectly, this will insure that proposed towers will be relatively small, since only the tallest towers require lighting for aviaional warning.

8. Houses of Worship

Churches and other houses of worship play an important part of any community, particularly one like Hightstown that tends to be family oriented. The churches in town are well dispersed, serving the needs of their respective neighborhoods. However churches have evolved over the years and defined a new niche for themselves. Once a place of weekly worship and fellowship, many houses of worship now promote extracurricular activities for their congregation. Toward this end, they are building additions to their facilities which include gymnasiums, lighted ballfields, theaters, dining halls, and even greenhouses. Some facilities can become substantial complexes.

In addition to expanding the size of non-taxable property, thereby limiting the municipality's ability to collect revenue and provide essential services, this practice of expanding the traditional role of churches impacts directly on the immediate neighborhood. Often these types of site plan expansions require large parking lots, detention basins and intense site lighting to provide nighttime safety.

Once a hub of humming activity on a Sunday morning, some churches have become social spots five or six days a week, bringing unwanted traffic and visitors to an otherwise quiet residential area. Therefore, if applications come before the Planning Board for expansions to existing churches, the Board should review the proposals in detail and insure that they will not adversely impact the community. Moreover, the Board should be mindful that while churches are inherently beneficial uses, it is up to the applicant to prove that the proposed expansion is similarly inherently beneficial. That is to say, is a gymnasium inherently beneficial? Like all other applications, churches, too, must prove all of the necessary proofs required under New Jersey's Municipal Land Use Law. Without them, any variance application must be denied.

H. Summary

This Master Plan has within it planning recommendations and policies designed to help rebuild Hightstown as a vibrant town center. The recommendations and policies are presented in every element of the Master Plan, and therefore, no element is more important than another. While most of the land use policies are outlined in the Land Use Element and stand to be implemented through the Proposed Zone Plan, this does not suggest that the planning recommendations in any of the supportive elements are less important. In short, any new proposal, capital improvement project, ordinance or grant application should be considered in the context of the entire Master Plan. Any development, which is not in keeping with the policies and recommendations of this Master Plan, should not be permitted. By permitting development that is consistent with the Master Plan, Hightstown will eventually realize its desired ultimate condition.

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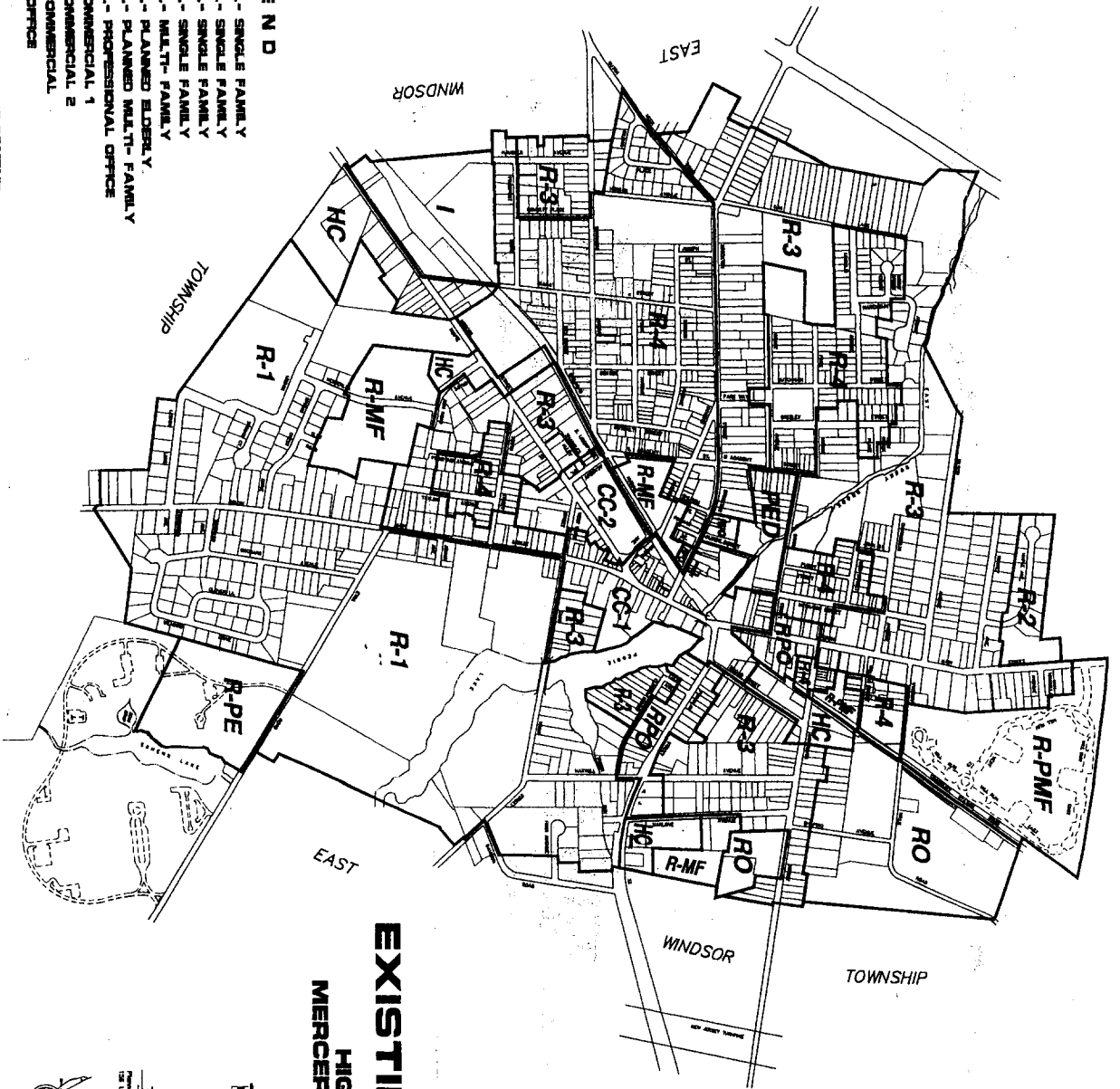
EXISTING LAND USE MAP

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EXISTING ZONING MAP

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 - CC-2 CENTRAL COMMERCIAL 2
 - HC HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL
 - RO RESEARCH OFFICE
 - IND INDUSTRIAL
 - PE PLANNED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT



EXISTING ZONING MAP **HIGHTSTOWN BOROUGH** **MERCER COUNTY, NEW JERSEY** **SCOTT CASTER, MAYOR**



PREPARED BY

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October 1998

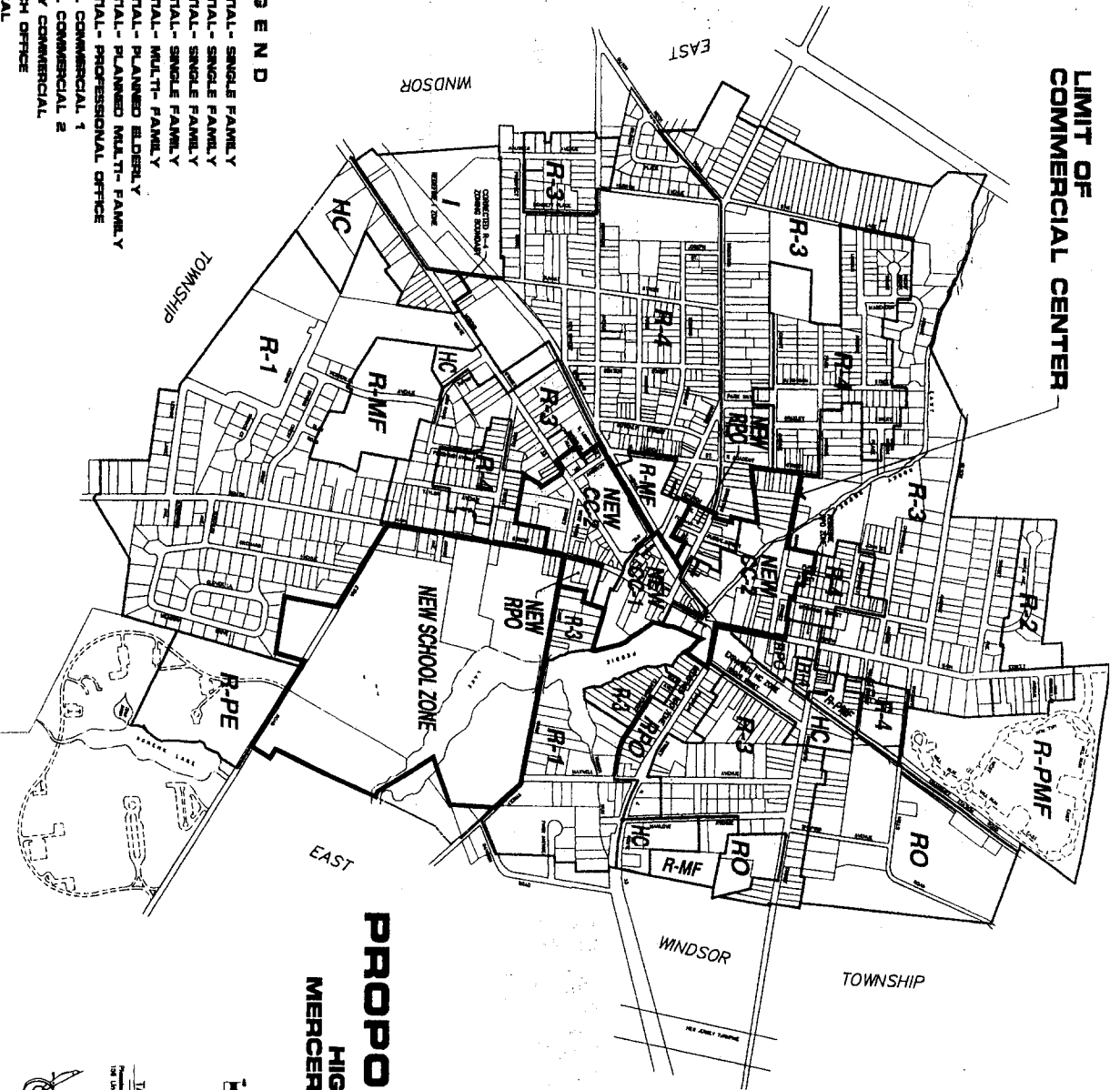
HIGHTSTOWN TOWN CENTER MAP

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PROPOSED ZONING MAP

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COMMERCIAL CENTER**

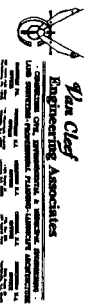


PROPOSED ZONING MAP **HIGHTSTOWN BOROUGH** **MERCER COUNTY, NEW JERSEY** **SCOTT CASTER, MAYOR**



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October 1998

LEGEND

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- R-7 RESIDENTIAL- PLANNED MULT-FAMILY
- R-8 RESIDENTIAL- PROFESSIONAL OFFICE
- CC-1 CENTRAL COMMERCIAL 1
- CC-2 CENTRAL COMMERCIAL 2
- HC HIGHWAY COMMERCIAL
- RO RESEARCH OFFICE
- IND INDUSTRIAL
- PED PLANNED ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

RECYCLING ELEMENT

COPY

The Recycling Element was prepared and adopted separately from the rest of the Master Plan document. It is re-adopted herein with the current Master Plan.

MASTER PLAN APPENDIX

for the

BOROUGH OF HIGHTSTOWN

LAND USE ELEMENT APPENDIX

An Analysis of Demographic Characteristics

1. Age Groups

The population in Hightstown is notably stable. Whereas the population in general across the country and in most municipalities is experiencing a dramatic demographic shift, Hightstown maintains essentially the same demographic characteristics in 1990 as it had in 1980. Unlike many other localities, the number of young children remained constant, despite the fact that the 1990's has seen a prolific baby boom, comparable to, and some say surpassing the boom of the 1950's.

TABLE 1 - HIGHTSTOWN - AGE GROUPS - 1980 vs. 1990

<u>AGE GROUP</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>% of 1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% of 1990</u>	<u>% CHANGE 1980-1990</u>
Pre-School (0-4 Years)	313	6.8	350	6.8	no change
School (5-20 Years)	1,006	22.0	967	18.9	down 3.1
Employment (21-44 Years)	1,712	37.4	2,136	41.7	up 4.3
Employment (45-64 Years)	929	20.2	929	18.1	down 2.1
Retirement (65 Years or More)	621	13.6	744	14.5	up 0.9
Total	4,581	100.0	5,126	100.0	11.9

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. "1980 and 1990 Census of Population, Profile #2."

While the total population of the Borough grew between 1980 and 1990, it is important to note that the Wyckoff Mills Condominium Development was constructed and opened during that decade. It is a unique contribution to the community. But if we consider that it has 248 units, and each unit probably averages 2.65 people/household (1980 factor), this one development alone added 657 people to Hightstown by 1990. Subtracting that

land use planning anomaly from the demographic equation, 5,126 – 657 people translates to 4469 people, less than in 1980. Therefore, if the Wyckoff Mills Development had not developed in Hightstown, the local population might have drop from 4581 to 4469, or 2.5%. Even if we consider some less intense residential development might have occurred on site, if the Wyckoff Mills had not been approved, one would not have expected the total population for the Borough to have risen as significantly. Therefore, it is consistent to suggest that the baseline demographics of the Hightstown community has remained constant since 1980.

Having said that, a closer look at the age distribution reflects a very slight change in the population, from families to younger adults. The shift might be statistically insignificant, but it is interesting to note that it reflects a similar shift in the broader, national patterns. There is a small decline in the number of school age children and a similar change in the number of mature adults between the ages of 55 and 74, possible the parents of the school age children. This would seem to suggest that some older families are moving out of Hightstown. However, there is also a slight increase in the number of people between the ages of 25 and 44, typically those of children bearing years, and since the number of families and households are also increasing, this may indicate that a new generation of families are moving into town. Certainly the Borough has a history of being a family oriented community, and it would be logical that that tradition would be continuing.

TABLE 2 - HIGHTSTOWN - POPULATION - 1980 AND 1990

<u>AGE (YEARS)</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>% of 1980</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>% of 1990</u>	<u>% CHANGE 1980-1990</u>
Total	4,581	100.0	5,126	100.0	--
0-4	313	6.8	350	6.8	no change
5-9	326	7.1	244	4.8	down 2.3
10-14	353	7.7	300	5.9	down 1.8
15-19	327	7.1	288	5.6	down 1.5
20-24	361	7.9	369	7.2	down 0.7
25-34	805	17.6	1,071	20.9	up 3.3
35-44	546	11.9	831	16.2	up 4.3
45-54	450	9.8	569	11.1	up 1.3
55-64	479	10.5	360	7.0	down 3.5

65-74	345	7.6	337	6.6	down 1.0
75 and greater	276	6.0	407	7.9	up 1.9

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. "1980 and 1990 Census of Population, Profile #2."

TABLE 3 - HIGHTSTOWN - FAMILIES AND HOUSEHOLDS
1970 through 1990

	<u>1970</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1980</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>1990</u>	<u>%</u>
Families	1,399	--	1,222	-12.6	1,359	11.2
Households	1,984	--	1,696	-14.5	2,005*	18.2*
Persons per Household	2.70	--	2.65	-1.9	2.48	-6.5

* 248 units in the Wyckoff Mills Development. 2005-248=1,757 or 3.6% increase.

Sources: U.S. Department of Commerce. "1970-90 Census of Population: Household Type and Relationship by Age, Race, Hispanic Origin and Sex, Profile #6."

In summary, this all suggests that Hightstown should establish a planning course that will meet the needs of families, albeit not devoid of the acknowledgment of other members of the community. Yet it seems fair to say that Hightstown is a family oriented town, not a commercial center, a senior citizen community or some other characterization. And though somewhat intangible, there seems to be a prevailing sense of the importance of families and family life in the community, which supports the conclusions drawn from the Borough's demographic characteristics