

2023 MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT



Borough of South River Middlesex County, New Jersey

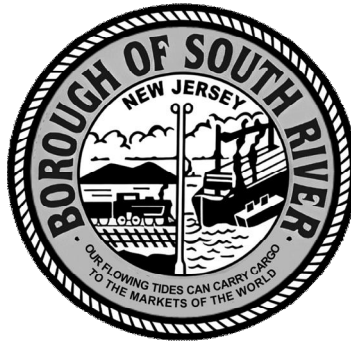


Bignell Planning Consultants, Inc.

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**ADOPTED:
June 20, 2023**

This plan was adopted by the South River Planning Board on June 20, 2023.



Borough of South River Planning Board Members and Staff

Mayor John Krenzel, Esq.

Richard Byrne

Michael Clancy

Shirley Dockery

Anthony Ciulla, Council Representative

Hartman Walker, Jr.

Donna Zammit

Eric Acs

Danielle Ciulla

Cynthia Urbanik, Vice-Chairperson

Cynthia Wilk, Chairperson

Thomas Barlow, Esq., Planning Board Attorney

Bruce Koch, PE, CME, Planning Board Engineer

Julie Moy, Planning Board Secretary

Todd Bletcher, AICP, PP, Planning Board Planner

Arthur Londensky, Borough Administrator

Henry Bignell, PP

NJ Lic: 33LI00237400

For the Firm

and

Todd Bletcher, AICP, PP

NJ Lic: 33LI00592200

For the Firm

The original of this report was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-1, et. Seq. and N.J.A.C. 13:41-1.1, et. Seq.

**RESOLUTION
ADOPTION OF MASTER PLAN REEXAMINATION
AMENDMENT REPORT**

WHEREAS, the Planning Board of the Borough of South River is authorized pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89 may consider an Amendment to its Master Plan.

WHEREAS, the Planning Board of the Borough of South River retained the services of Bignell Planning Consultants, Inc., a professional planning firm to prepare a study to see if an amendment to the Master Plan was warranted; and

WHEREAS, Bignell Planning Consultants, Inc., prepared a report entitled "2023 Master Plan Amendment", dated May 10, 2023; and

WHEREAS, notice of a public hearing was sent to the New Jersey Office of Planning Advocacy, the Middlesex County Planning Board, the Sayreville Borough Clerk and the East Brunswick Township Clerk; and

WHEREAS, the Planning Board of the Borough of South River conducted a public hearing on June 20, 2023, at which time the public was invited to comment and ask questions; and

WHEREAS, at said meeting all those who desired to be heard were heard, and the testimony was recorded by the Planning Board of the Borough of South River; and

WHEREAS, the testimony was carefully considered, and the following findings of fact were made:

FINDINGS OF FACT

1. Bignell Planning Consulting, Inc., prepared a report dated May 10, 2023, entitled "2023 Master Plan Amendment" in conformance with N.J.S.A 40:55D-89;

2. The Planning Board reviewed the Bignell Planning Consulting, Inc., report and heard the findings and recommendations of Mr. Bletcher. The Master Plan Amendment Report includes a review of previously adopted Master Plans and Development Regulations to determine whether the assumptions, policies, goals, and objectives and implementing documents remain applicable and/or desirable considering changes which may have occurred over time as to three (3) particular areas: WR-Waterfront Revitalization Zoning District; OP-Office Professional Zoning District and Main Street Redevelopment Area.

3. Mr. Bletcher made certain recommendations more fully set forth in the report.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Planning Board of the Borough of South River hereby adopts the Amendment to the Master Plan Report as prepared by Bignell Planning Consulting, Inc., entitled "2023 Master Plan Amendment", dated May 10, 2023.

RESOLUTION PB-2023-10

MASTER PLAN REEXAMINATION AMENDMENT REPORT

Adopted: June 20, 2023

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of this Resolution shall be forwarded to the New Jersey Office of Planning Advocacy, the Middlesex County Planning Board, the Sayreville Borough Clerk and the East Brunswick Township Clerk.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that copies of the Master Plan Amendment Report be forwarded to the Middlesex County Planning Board and the Office of Planning Advocacy, and to any Municipal Clerk of any adjoining municipality which requests a copy thereof.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Planning Board hereby recommends that the Borough Council consider amendments to the Zoning Ordinance in order to implement the recommendations contained in the Master Plan Amendment Report.

The undersigned, acting Secretary to the Borough of South River Planning Board, hereby certifies that the above is a true copy of a Resolution memorialized by said Board on the 20th day of June 2023, on the following vote:

Moved by: Mayor Krenzel

Seconded by: Mr. Acs

ROLL CALL	YES	NO	ABSTAIN	ABSENT
Richard Byrne				X
Michael Clancy				X
Shirley Dockery	X			
Anthony Ciulla	X			
John M. Krenzel	X			
Cynthia Urbanik	X			
Hartman Walker, Jr.	X			
Donna Zammit				X
Cynthia Wilk	X			
Alternates				
Eric Acs	X			
Danielle Ciulla	X			

APPROVAL: 8

ABSTAINING: 0

The Township will publish a Legal Notice in the Home News within twenty (20) days of the memorialization of this written Resolution.



JULIE M. MOY, SECRETARY
SOUTH RIVER PLANNING BOARD

Bignell Planning Consultants, Inc.

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(Original Dated: May 10, 2023)

South River Planning Board
48 Washington Street
South River, NJ 08882

2023 Master Plan Amendment – Adopted Edition

I. Background

1. Statutory Requirements: 2021 Reexamination Report

The South River Master Plan was adopted in 2011. The 2021 Re-examination report is attached to this document. This report examined the current Master Plan and identified several issues and objectives in need of modification relating to land development in the Borough. This Master Plan Amendment is provided to address these issues. This Master Plan Amendment shall be considered an addendum to the 2011 Master Plan, which shall remain in effect with the items modified herein.

2. 2022 Workshops

A 'Main Street' Workshop was held on July 19, 2022 to provide an opportunity for residents to express thoughts and concerns over the development of the Main Street Redevelopment Plan area. Discussion themes for the event were "Historic Preservation", "Parking" and "Atmosphere." Residents were asked to classify issues into categories of "Preserve", "Create", and "Change." Responses are summarized below:

HISTORIC	PARKING	ATMOSPHERE
Preserve: War Memorial building Bank façades Police station Doughboy statue	Preserve: Existing spaces	Preserve: Historical and architectural details
Create: Heritage Day Encourage new businesses Adopt a historic look	Create: Parking deck Parking on George Street Purchase unused lots	Create: Underground wiring Storefront and signage Grant writer Tax credits for facade upgrades
Change: 65 Ferry Street Develop Ferry Street	Change: Additional parking Mobile parking meters Payment in lieu of parking	Change: Change foliage and planters Better code enforcement Expedite permits/inspections

II Master Plan Modifications

A. Modifications to the Waterfront Revitalization Zoning District

1. Long-term area of concern

South River's waterfront was identified at the 2011 community visioning workshops as one of the most critical areas in the Borough. This area includes all parcels east of Water Street, all parcels on the north and south sides of Causeway Street, the industrial parcels in and around the Conrail right-of-way, and most waterfront parcels east of Whitehead Avenue. The 2011 Master Plan divided the 'Waterfront' concept into two areas; a zoning district for the parcels between Veterans Memorial Bridge and the boat club property, and a passive recreation area from the boat club parcel continuing south along the waterfront. The southern parcels were addressed via the creation of the PR-Park, Open Space, Recreation and Conservation Zone which coincides with the natural and recreational character of that area. No changes are made for the PR Zone or those parcels.

2. 2011 Master Plan Assumptions are No Longer Valid

The northern waterfront area now exists as the WR-Waterfront Revitalization Zone and exhibits the greatest need for re-thinking and re-development. In 2011, the WR Zone district was envisioned as location for a mixed-use housing, retail, office, commercial, restaurant, waterfront recreation, and marina use. That plan was built on the underlying assumption that the U.S Army Corps of Engineers flood control project, authorized by Congress in 2007, would be constructed. The project was to provide hurricane and storm damage protection from a 500-year event and ecosystem restoration of 379.3 acres of degraded wetlands. Physical improvements were to consist of a storm surge barrier spanning the South River for a length of 320 feet, two combined levees (10,712 feet long)/floodwalls (1,655 feet long) constructed along the east and west banks of the South River in the Boroughs of Sayreville and South River, and interior drainage facilities. (US Army Corps of Engineers, January 4, 2010.) That project was never constructed.

Superstorm Sandy struck South River in 2012, causing major property damage to and beyond the limits of the WR Zone including approximately \$4 million of assessed loss. In the years following the storm, the NJDEP Blue Acres buyout program became available to homeowners with flood-damaged properties. Using funds from the popular program, NJDEP acquired over 100 high-risk properties, in the Borough mostly along the waterfront, demolished the homes, and deed restricted these properties against any future development. Following the proliferation of the Blue Acres program, the USACOE federal flood control plan was terminated by the US Army Corps of Engineers in 2016. This represented a significant policy change from the 2011 Master Plan and was re-evaluated with the 2014 Post-Sandy Strategic Recovery Planning Report. The Blue Acres buyout program has replaced the USACOE flood control plan as a key assumption underlying the Borough's Master Plan. With this policy change, a refocused reliance has been shifted to state and federal dollars to facilitate future rounds of buyouts. Although there have been some emerging maintenance concerns, the Borough has so far encouraged property owners to accept buyout proposals from the NJDEP and vacate flood-prone properties.

3. Current Conditions in the WR-Waterfront Revitalization Zone

The remaining WR Waterfront Revitalization zoning district today contains mostly commercial and light-industrial uses consisting of auto repair, parts salvage, truck repair, material storage yards, heavy equipment storage yards, steel fabrication, concrete and manufacturing uses. Some of the uses are lawfully existing commercial uses, however a number of properties have been turned into illegal, unregulated, outdoor storage and vehicle yards. A 2022 visual inspection of the area appears to show some of the larger lots have created internal "lease areas" where owners may be renting space to a sub-lessee. Several parcels are simply unimproved, unfenced dirt/gravel lots and have the visual appearance of a junkyard. Some parcels contain observable construction debris, inoperable vehicles, trailers,

shipping containers, and general open piles of trash. Shipping containers and trailers are prolific. In several instances property lines are not clearly delineated and these uses thereon appear to be encroaching onto abutting woodland properties or into the river.

After 8 years of the Blue Acres program, over 100 homes have been demolished and only approximately fifteen (± 15) single-family homes remain among with several dozen open-space lots and unimproved streets. One (1) known retail business (an ice cream shop) remains open in the area on a seasonal basis. The South River Boat Club, a private for-profit business, remains operational on the southernmost tip of this zone.

4. Revised Planning Assumptions for the WR-Waterfront Revitalization Zone

The following assumptions and planning principals are herein adopted for the WR Waterfront Revitalization Zone (WR Zone):

- A. The general appearance of existing uses and properties in this area is unsightly, reflects poorly on the Borough, and is detrimental to the overall health, safety, welfare and morals of the South River community.
- B. The entirety of the WR Zone is located in the FEMA Repetitive Loss Area. Thus, economic development of the area is no longer a realistic or appropriate policy goal for the zone.
- C. The Borough has the power under the Municipal Land Use Law to adopt Master Plans and Zoning Ordinances to guide development in order to advance orderly growth, provide economic stability, adopt zoning plans, control land use, encourage re-development of particular sites, and to secure and protect persons and property from flood, disaster or other harm.
- D. The Borough has health, safety, fiscal, and economic concerns over the potential for contamination of industrial properties in the WR Zone currently occupied by unknown users.
- E. The Borough has safety concerns over the continuance of residential homes and commercial employment in WR Zone areas subject to repetitive flooding, particularly when local roads, in their current condition, can become inaccessible to emergency services.
- F. The Borough has traffic concerns over the impacts of movement of materials, trucks and large construction equipment from the WR Zone through the central, residential, and downtown portions of the Borough.
- G. The Borough has economic concerns over the inefficient costs of maintaining municipal utilities in areas which are becoming depopulated and abandoned.
- H. The Borough has a fiscal concern over the sustainability of ratable properties in areas which are subject to repetitive flooding damage, thus vulnerable to loss of assessed value from a disaster.
- I. The Borough recognizes the jurisdiction of state and federal agencies regulate wetlands, waterways and flood areas of the State, and expects many properties in the WR Zone will be encumbered by environmental regulations.
- J. The Borough recognizes that Blue Acres deed restrictions in place on several lots in this area will complicate the effectual re-development of the greater area.
- K. The Borough expects Blue Acres program funds continue to be available from the NJDEP in the near-term and therefore encourages remaining residential property owners in the WR Zone to negotiate with NJDEP to facilitate buy-outs of the remaining properties before funding becomes unavailable.
- L. The Borough may one-day desire to coordinate the purchase of remaining non-residential property in the WR Zone with green acres monies, stormwater infrastructure grants, disaster resiliency funds, county open space taxes, or other local, state or federal funding sources.
- M. The Borough will not tolerate illegal construction, occupancy, use, trespassing, dumping, or encroachment by any actor in the WR Zone and will utilize its enforcement authority to aggressively address non-compliant sites, operators and owners.
- N. This Master Plan and the Borough development ordinance respects the property rights of all lawfully-existing, approved, and/or permitted uses in this area to continue to the full use and

enjoyment of their property, so long as they operate lawfully and comply with local zoning, property maintenance codes, and state regulations. This Master Plan desires to protect the rights of these property owners, and, in the case of any forthcoming zone change that renders their property a (preexisting) non-conforming use, desires these properties be allowed to continue their existing lawful uses, without intensification or modification, in perpetuity.

- O. Any future zoning change in the WR Zone should permit pre-existing non-conforming status to lawful uses to continue in their current state, in perpetuity, but should not permit expansion or intensification of these sites in any way.
- P. This Master Plan discourages the expansion or intensification of industrial uses in this zone and encourages the eventual relocation of these operations to other properties in the Borough which have been zoned for LI Light-Industrial use, and which are better located for highway access.

5. Development Goals for the Waterfront Revitalization District

Based on the new assumptions above, the long-term planning goals of the WR Zone shall be to create special planning district which may include any the following components:

- A. Creation of a new public park/nature preserve;
- B. Expanded waterfront access and pedestrian walkways;
- C. Construction of stormwater management infrastructure to advance state goals of storm resiliency and disaster preparedness;
- D. A recreation component with a possible combination of sports fields, tot-lots, pet facilities, amphitheaters, a public assembly space, skating rinks, community gardens, and/or similar public facilities;
- E. Nature walks, dog walks, bike paths, trails connecting to other Borough recreation areas, to Ferry Street, and to Main Street;
- F. Public and private marinas, boat clubs or similar facilities related to recreational use of the river;
- G. Public parking areas for park users along with comfort/toilet/concession facilities;
- H. Commercial uses such as snack bars, restaurants, or recreation equipment rentals;
- I. Prohibition of new single or two-family residential uses;
- J. Eventual elimination and relocation of light industrial uses;
- K. Eventual elimination of unnecessary impervious surfaces and street rights-of-way in the area;
- L. Reforestation and environmental restoration;
- M. Possible elevated multi-family development in select locations, with specific development conditions and limitations based on bulk, height, density, and infrastructure requirements;
- N. Use of open-space tax monies, green acres, and similar grants/funds to purchase private properties;
- O. Environmental cleanup and site cleanup as general development priority;



6. Regulatory Framework for a Modified WR-Waterfront Revitalization District

- A. A new, flexible development code should be provided for the area, allowing changes from time to time based on various development opportunities that may arise. This may be via a traditional zoning code or a Redevelopment/Rehabilitation Plan;
- B. A phasing plan element should be created for development/concept expansion as properties become available through private sale;
- C. Phase I goals should include code and property enforcement and preparation of concept drawings, zoning framework, phasing plans, redevelopment plans and/or a new zoning ordinance to guide development in the zone;
- D. Phase II goals should generally include acquisition of properties west of Freeman Street and properties between Martin Street and Causeway Streets;
- E. Phase III goals should include NJDEP purchase and clearance of remaining residential dwellings;
- F. Phase IV goals should include assembly of funding sources for purchase of non-residential properties and acquisition of commercial properties and properties suspected to be in need of remediation;
- G. Phase V would include development of the area in accordance with the revised zoning ordinance/redevelopment plan for the area.

B. Modifications to the OP-Office Professional Zoning District

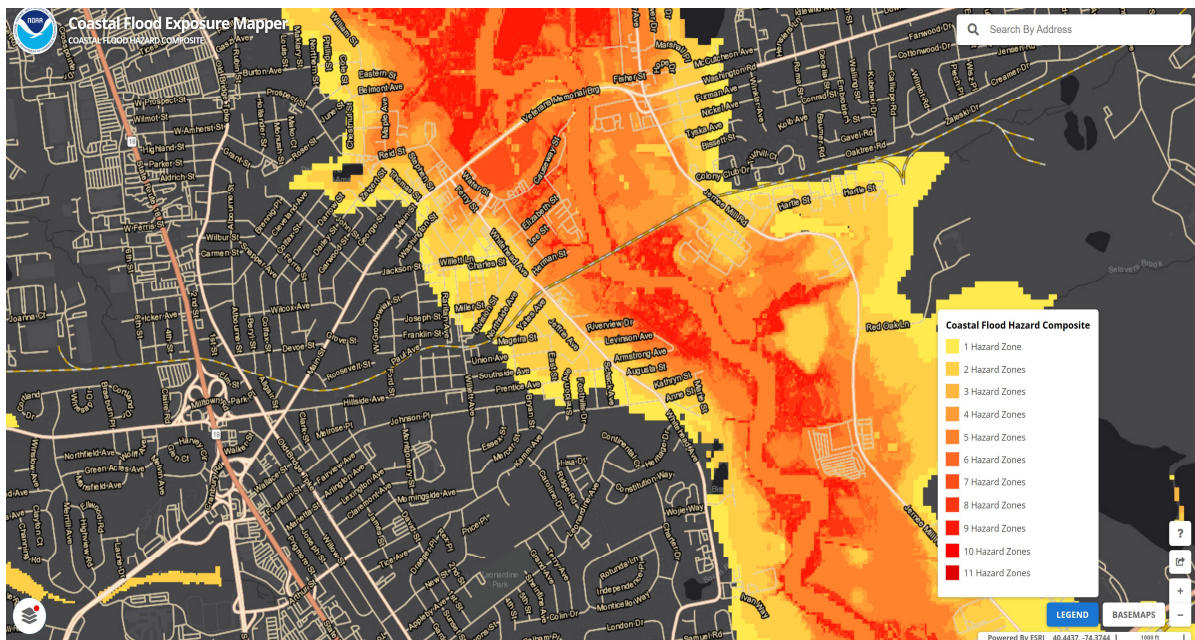
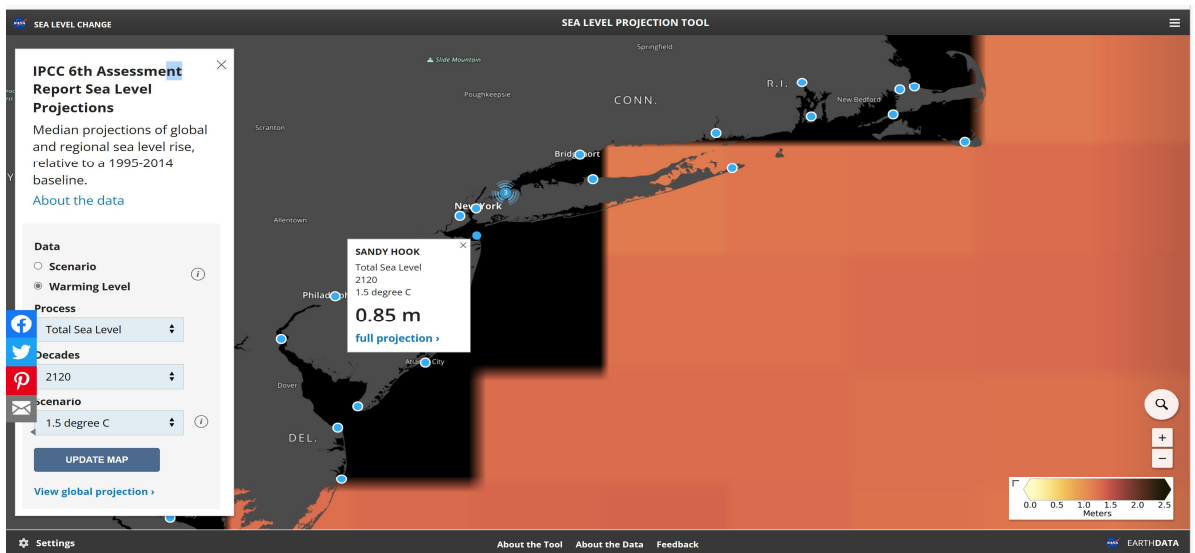
The 2022 Main Street workshop session yielded a request to eliminate offices (as a permitted use) from OP-Office Professional Zone adjacent to Main Street. Many of the buildings in this area have, in the last several decades, transitioned from office to residential use. This area was not the primary focus of the workshop, but was within the scope of the 'Main Street' discussion. The overall change was positively received. Upon review of the text and map of the OP-Office Professional zoning ordinance, this Master Plan considers the most appropriate way to effect this change would be to modify the south boundary line between the OP Zone and R-75 Residential Zone, condensing the OP Zone northward to the area generally between the MSR Zone and Wilcox Avenue, and thereby expanding the R-75 Zone into that location. The resulting change would be a rezoning of approximately 22 parcels, 100% of which are currently residential in occupancy, into the R-75 or R-100 Residential Zone. No commercial uses are present in this area in question. This plan provides the affirmative basis for this modification; however, any forthcoming zoning changes remain at the discretion of the Borough Council.

C. Flood Resilience, Climate & Sea Level Rise

1. This Master Plan amendment does not encourage new residential development within the area designated by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) via the Community Rating System (CRS) 'Repetitive Loss Area', as shown in the Borough's "Floodplain Neighborhood Acquisition Plan." Based upon the requirements of this program, the Borough has outlined a ± 700 parcel area where severe and imminent flooding is expected in the future. However, complete prohibition of development in this entire area would be unrealistic. Underlying zoning remains in place. This plan recommends the Borough consider creating a development boundary line, flood buffer area, or other regulatory measure within a specified distance (500' should be considered) of the banks of the waterway. The intent should be to prohibit development and infrastructure investment into the most hazardous areas of the floodplain. If the Borough leaders believe this is an emerging issue, this plan provides the affirmative basis for this concept, however any forthcoming zoning changes remain at the discretion of the Borough Council.
2. This Master Plan contemplates the Borough may adopt future ordinances related to flood resilience, including ordinances to harden community assets most vulnerable to flooding, extreme weather, natural disasters, and sea-level rise. This may include ordinances requiring back-up power generation at specific uses and sites including utility stations, gasoline stations, banks and ATM machines, communications facilities, and grocery stores. Potential ordinances should also consider requiring new facilities in this

category to be “generator ready” should mobile generator support be made available during a natural disaster. This may also include protecting automotive re-fueling facilities when these are designed as electric vehicle charging stations (EVCS.)

3. In terms of climate change, the issue of long-term sea level rise is the singular concern facing the Borough. The National Aeronautics and Space Administration has created a [Sea Level Change Projection Tool](https://sealevel.nasa.gov/ipcc) (Available: <https://sealevel.nasa.gov/ipcc>). An alternate [Coastal Flood Exposure Manager](https://coastalfloodmapper.noaa.gov/) tool is available from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. These online visualization tools support communities assessing their coastal hazard risk. The tools create a collection of user-defined maps that show the people, places, and natural resources exposed to coastal flooding. The maps can be saved, downloaded, or shared to communicate flood exposure and potential impacts. (Available: Coastal Flood Exposure Mapper ([noaa.gov](https://coastalfloodmapper.noaa.gov/))) The NASA data is shown above with the NOAA mapping data shown below. Models predict a 0.85 meter (2.7 feet) rise in sea level over the next 100 years (Data for 2120; Sandy Hook monitoring location.) Images are shown below.



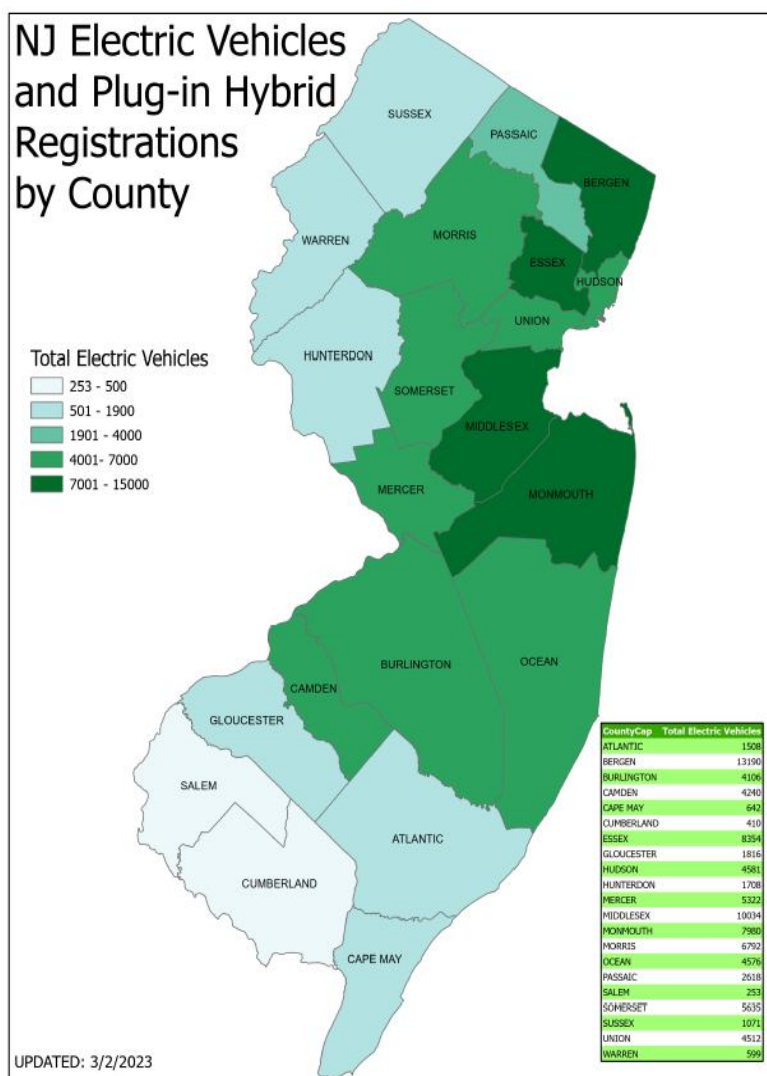
D. Electric Vehicles (EV) and Electric Vehicle Charging Stations (EVCS)

Increasing usage of clean vehicles and other transportation alternatives is a key strategy in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and improving air quality in the State. Accordingly, several major vehicle manufactures have announced fleet-wide production goals of electric vehicles as high as 30%-40% by 2030. This Master Plan aims to support the use of electric vehicles by promoting the installation of electric vehicle charging stations in an orderly way.

In 2012, there were 338 electric vehicles (EV) registered in New Jersey. As of December 2022, there were 91,515 electric vehicles registered with 10,034 registered in Middlesex County alone. (Available:

<https://dep.nj.gov/drivegreen/nj-ev-data>) See the map to the left for a county-by-county analysis. The 2022 rate of EV sales in NJ is currently double the national rate and, according to New Jersey's Electric Vehicle Act 2020, the number of EVs in the state will increase three fold over the next three years to over 300,000. This will bring the amount of EVs in New Jersey to 25% of all registered vehicles with a full transition goal to a 100% clean energy transportation system by 2050. Recommended EVCS sites in the Borough should include all gasoline stations, popular public destinations such as parks, employment centers, restaurants, retail sites, and public parking facilities.

EVCS equipment provides different charging levels that vary by manufacturer. These variables affect the time required to charge a vehicle. The most common charging location is in a residential home.



- Level 1 is the slowest of EV charging station types and connects to standard 120V outlets. On average, a Level 1 charger will provide enough charge to travel 123 miles in 20 hours.
- Level 2 charging uses 240 V, and on average can provide enough charge to travel 124 miles in 5 hours. Most public chargers are Level 2.
- Other public chargers fall under DC fast charging, which provide the quickest charging for electric vehicles; these station can provide, on average, enough charge to travel 124 miles in 30 minutes. (See www.chargehub.com)

The table below is recommended to be adopted in ordinance form to reconcile with the NJ Model Ordinance for Electric Vehicles:

EVCS Calculation based on NJ Model Ordinance		
Use Type:	Total Required with Site Plan:	Make-Ready Required:
Residential:		
1-4 units	None	None
5 or more units (or mixed use per NJ Model Ordinance)	[15% of required off-street parking spaces] Initial Occupancy: 5% of total required spaces	By Year 3: 10% of total By year 6: 15% of total
Non Residential:		
Non-Residential Parking Facilities ("All others" per Model Ordinance)	No initial spaces required. See column to right for Make-Ready requirement: (See Note 1.)	26-50 or fewer parking spaces: 1 EVCS
		51-75 parking spaces: 2 EVCS
		76-100 parking spaces: 3 EVCS
		100-150 parking spaces: 4 EVCS & (1 must be ADA accessible)
		> 150 parking spaces: 4% of total parking spaces (5 % ADA accessible)
Retailer that provides 25 or fewer off-street parking spaces, developer or owner of a single-family home	Exempt	Exempt
1. In lieu of installing Make-Ready parking spaces, a parking lot or garage may install EVCS to satisfy the requirements. 2. One EVCS spaces counts as 2 spaces for up to 10% of the total parking requirement.		

E. Addendum Plans as Master Plan Elements

The following Plans and Reports shall be adopted as addendums to the Master Plan and should be considered Master Plan Addendum Elements. This Plan contemplates the future adoption of Redevelopment or Rehabilitation Plans and the general utilization of the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law in the future.

1. The Main Street Parking Strategy
2. The Lower Main Street Redevelopment Area and Plan
3. The Post-Sandy Strategic Recovery Planning Report
4. The Flood Neighborhood Acquisition and Fiscal Impact (Buyout) Plans
5. The Lincoln School Neighborhood Overlay Zone

F. Housing & Demographics

1. This Master Plan recognizes previous housing plans, elements and reports which have been prepared for the Borough and endorses the use of a Development Fee Ordinance which may be adopted to capture a percentage of the equalized assessed value of development. These ordinances are usually applicable to properties which are zoned for non-residential development and are rezoned for residential purposes, or, properties which receive a use variance to allow residential uses or a zoning change or density variance to permit an increased density. Such an ordinance would be designed to comply with the 2008 Statewide Non-Residential Development Fee Act (40:55D-8.1 through 8.7.) This plan provides the affirmative basis for this ordinance, however any forthcoming ordinance changes remain at the discretion of the Borough Council.
2. Demographic Changes Since 2010; Updated Community Data is provided in the tables below. Table III-1 shows 50-year population growth in the borough with stable growth in recent decades. Table III-2 shows population density compared to neighboring towns. Table III-3 shows 2020 Census economic and housing data compared to Middlesex County and the State for that year. The Master Plan Amendment ends after Table III-3.

Table III-1 : Population Growth Trends: 1970-2020

YEAR	SOUTH RIVER		MIDDLESEX COUNTY		NEW JERSEY	
	POPULATION	% CHANGE OVER PREVIOUS DECADE	POPULATION	% CHANGE OVER PREVIOUS DECADE	POPULATION	% CHANGE OVER PREVIOUS DECADE
1970	15,428	-	583,813	-	7,168,143	-
1980	14,361	-6.9%	595,893	+2.1%	7,364,823	+2.7%
1990	13,692	-4.6%	671,780	+12.7%	7,730,188	+5.0%
2000	15,322	+11.9%	750,162	+11.6%	8,414,350	+8.1%
2010	16,008	-2.3%	790,738	+5.4%	8,707,739	+3.4%
2020	16,118	+0.6%	863,162	+9.1%	9,288,994	+6.6%
* population projections from the Middlesex County Planning Department ** data from 2010 population estimates from the US Census Bureau						

Table III-2 : Population Density Compared to other Middlesex County Municipalities

Municipality	Population	Area in Square Miles	Population Density (Persons per Square Mile)
Old Bridge	65,998	40.7	1623
East Brunswick	48,010	22.4	2143
Sayreville	44,556	18.7	2382
South Amboy	9,411	2.7	2913
Edison	107,558	30.7	3503
Metuchen	15,049	2.7	4895
South River	16,118	2.9	5557
Highland Park	15,072	1.8	7875
New Brunswick	55,266	5.8	8650

Source: Middlesex County Planning Department, & US Census Bureau

TABLE III-3 : 2020 Census Data	South River	Middlesex County	New Jersey
Housing			
Housing units, July 1, 2021, (V2021)	5,658	317,113	3,780,004
Owner-occupied housing unit rate, 2017-2021	66.3%	63.9%	63.8%
Median value of owner-occupied housing units, 2017-2021	\$322,200	\$362,900	\$355,700
Families & Living Arrangements			
Households, 2017-2021	5,658	299,455	3,397,156
Persons per household, 2017-2021	2.84	2.78	2.66
Education			
High school graduate or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2017-2021	86.8%	89.9%	90.5%
Bachelor's degree or higher, percent of persons age 25 years+, 2017-2021	27.6%	44.8%	41.5%
Economy			
In civilian labor force, total, percent of population age 16 years+, 2017-2021	68.3%	65.7%	65.8%
In civilian labor force, female, percent of population age 16 years+, 2017-2021	61.0%	59.4%	60.8%
Total retail sales per capita, 2017(c)	\$4,000	\$17,964	\$16,783
Income & Poverty			
Median household income (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021	\$82,031	\$96,883	\$89,703
Per capita income in past 12 months (in 2021 dollars), 2017-2021	\$36,282	\$43,300	\$46,691
Persons in poverty, percent	12.4%	8.0%	10.2%

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January 12, 2021

Donna Farren, Chairperson
South River Planning Board
48 Washington Street
South River, NJ 08882

Re: Re-examination Report of
2011 Master Plan:
(Draft) Preliminary Report

Dear Chairperson,

The South River Master Plan was adopted on February 24, 2011. Its 10-year period runs through February 24, 2021. Please accept this "Re-examination Report" as required by §40:55D-89, which reads,

"The Governing Body shall, at least every 10 years, provide for a general reexamination of its master plan and development regulations by the Planning Board, which shall prepare and adopt by resolution a report on the findings of such reexamination..."

This outline shall serve as a preliminary reexamination report reviewing the changes in the Borough over the last 10 years and outlining the items the Planning Board may wish to address in a subsequent plan or ordinance amendment. The elements of this general re-examination report include:

A. A summary of the major problems and objectives relating to land development in the Borough at the time of the adoption of the 2011 Master Plan.

1. Proportions of ownership vs rental housing
2. Concern with the economic viability of the Borough, given the proliferation of (low) household income in certain census tracts in the Borough.
3. Physical decay and abandonment of former sites used for manufacturing, commercial, institutional or residential purposes.
4. Concern with the stagnation of the Main Street commercial corridor, particularly over competition with highway commercial development on Route 18 in East Brunswick.
5. Proliferation of truck traffic and pass-through traffic from East Brunswick to Sayreville.
6. Desire for economic development of the South River waterfront.
7. Reliance on federal government action to protect flood-prone areas.
8. Concern over development pressure on vacant land and open space, including private undeveloped spaces
9. Concern over erection of multiple and uncoordinated wireless communication towers throughout the Borough.

B. An analysis of the increase or reduction to the above problems and objectives identified in the 2011 Master Plan.

1. Proportions of ownership vs rental housing; The Community Profile Element of the Master Plan should be updated based on the results of the 2020 Census. This will not only provide useful information on housing occupancy, but household income, population change, and overall demographic trends, including the change in school-aged-children, population loss from Blue-Acres floodplain buyouts, population gain from new multi-family developments constructed after 2011, and population changes caused by millennials returning to live with their parents following the “great recession.” Further action is needed on this item.
2. Concern with the economic viability of the Borough; Given economic conditions, the proliferation of (low) household income in certain census tracts in the Borough has not likely changed since 2011. The most significant change to this policy has been the (federal) Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 establishing ‘Opportunity Zones’ allowing investors to avoid capital gains taxes when investing in properties in specific neighborhoods. The State of New Jersey designated 25% of its lowest-income census tracts as Opportunity Zones. In South River, this area includes the entire Borough north of Main Street. To qualify for the “tax avoidance” permitted by the law, an Opportunity Fund must invest more than 90% of its assets in a Qualified Opportunity Zone Property located in an Opportunity Zone. When this occurs, capital gains taxes are deferred for investments reinvested into properties in these zones and, if the investment is held for ten years, all capital gains on the new investment are waived. The Borough is unaware of any investors, individual or institutional, who have utilized this section of the tax code to foster economic development in the Borough. As of yet, there has been no programs, plans, policies or educational attempts to utilize this program. This topic may be worthy of further exploration as to how the Borough can market its Opportunity Zones to investors including marking and creation of an “investment prospectus.”
3. Physical decay and abandonment of former sites used for manufacturing, commercial, institutional or residential purposes.
The Borough’s prominent vacant sites remain as follows:
 - a. After 6 years of pending applications and property acquisition, the former Lincoln School building has been demolished and is undergoing redevelopment by a private developer. The demolition also includes a number of vacant properties abutting the former school building.
 - b. The former coat factory site located at the “triangle” property of Division, Charles, Anderson and Whitehead has been demolished and redeveloped with a multi-family apartment complex containing approximately 32 apartment dwelling units.
 - c. The former Herrmann, Aukam & Co. Handkerchief factory on Herman Street has been abandoned for over 50 years. Herrmann left this property over 100 years ago. There have been no notable redevelopment efforts for this property.
 - d. The former “Ecko Unltd” office and facility on the corner of Water Street and Martin Street remains vacant. There have been no notable redevelopment efforts for this property.
 - e. Although occupied at the time of the Master Plan, the former “Mapei” warehouse and Manufacturing facility at 97 Whitehead Avenue is now vacant and for sale. The lot contains approximately 5 acres including waterfront access.
 - f. The former South River Elks property at 205 Main Street was considered for purchase by the Borough for a new firehouse development, however deed restrictions were discovered which would prohibit this use. The site is now owned by a private developer who has proposed several concept developments for the site.
 - g. The former Willett School was already in operation as the Moshe Aaron Yeshiva High School in 2011. The yeshiva later terminated operations and sold the building to another privately owned school operator, operating as the Pillars Prep Academy. This owner secured development approval in 2018

to convert the upper floor of the school building into dormitory space to house foreign and out-of-state students who attend the school.

- h. The former Laffin Chevrolet and abutting former hotel/boarding house property at 7 Main Street is currently being considered for a mixed-use supermarket, retail and apartment development known as Port Plaza. This application has been submitted to the Borough but has been stalled over tidelands title issues with the NJDEP.
- i. The Bank of America building located at 25 Main Street remains vacant since it was flooded during Superstorm Sandy. The building was constructed in 1915 and has contained several state and national bank corporation tenants over the past century. This is a highly visible vacant building and is owned by a developer seeking potential tenants or uses, however no development applications have materialized for this property.

4. Concern with the stagnation of the Main Street commercial corridor, particularly over retail competition with highway commercial developments on Route 18 in East Brunswick.

Since the 2011 Master Plan was adopted, the Borough delineated a “Lower Main Street Redevelopment Area” and plan for the general area overlaying Main Street and Ferry Streets. This created a Redevelopment Area in this location with each city block designated as a sub-area within the plan. Sub-area plans can be amended to allow different uses, heights, bulks, and densities without the need to amend the overall plan. Although most development applications are brought under the MSR Zone, interest in the Main Street area has increased since 2011 with the following development projects proposed and/or approved:

- a. 37 Main Street (Former theatre/Da-Green property converted into 36 residential apartments)
- b. 46 Main Street (Application to remodel the entire front façade of this building)
- c. 48 Main Street (Former Lee’s Auto property to be renovated with a 3rd floor addition)
- d. 48 Main Street (Application to occupy the first floor this building with a 3,000 sf grocery store and create a rear connection to the Borough parking lot)
- e. 32 Main Street (Application was approved for a tavern in this building)
- f. 17-19 Jackson (A dog grooming use was granted approval to occupy this building)
- g. 32 Main Street (An application for a cigar/smoking lounge was submitted and later withdrawn)
- h. 7 Main Street (Pending application to convert former Laffin/hotel property into a mixed use project known as Port Plaza)
- i. 65 Ferry Street (Over the Borough’s objection, granted a certificate of pre-existing non-conformity to continue a boarding house use.)
- j. 1 Klausers Lane and Water Street (Application approved to operate a freestanding parking lot at this site to serve other uses in the MSR Zone)
- k. 6 Jackson Street (Bank received site plan approval to revamp its property and drive-through lane)
- l. 101 Main Street (Site plan approval to permit tire sales and storage in the building)
- m. 100 Main Street (Wasef Application to convert this building into a 2-family dwelling was denied)
- n. 235 Main Street (Investor application to convert this building into a 2-family dwelling was denied)
- o. 190 Main Street (Rincon application to convert this building into a 2-family dwelling was denied)
- p. 56 Main Street (Approved for division of the retail space into smaller spaces)
- q. 18 Jackson Street (Application was approved to permit multi-family units in this building.)
- r. 17 Main Street (Granted site plan approval to repurpose former law office into commercial use)
- s. 28 Main Street (A taxi business was granted use variance approval to occupy an existing building)
- t. 52 Main Street (Application was approved to permit gold sales and repair.)
- u. Also of note is a 2107 Ordinance relaxing the requirements for outdoor dining in the MSR Zone.
- v. Also of note is the creation of the 2018 Payment in Exchange for Parking – PEP Ordinance, which established a parking policy and allowed developers to pay into a parking fund for long-term parking infrastructure, in lieu of building on-site parking.

The Borough will need to review the generality of the above applications and determine if any changes should be policy, practice and implementation of development tools in the Main Street area. Additional consideration is needed.

5. Proliferation of truck traffic and pass-through traffic from East Brunswick to Sayreville.

To date, there have been no efforts made to address this item. This remains a low-priority for the Borough.

6. Desire for economic development of the South River waterfront.

Re-development has been elusive in the Borough's waterfront areas. The accessible portions of the WR Zone are partially occupied. This area has been utilized to industrial and outdoor storage uses who are use these properties for outdoor equipment, construction material storage, car parts storage, automobile repair and storage, storage of heavy equipment and machinery, small warehousing, light manufacturing and other commercial uses. The South River Boat Club is also located in this area. Many parcels in this area are not desirable for retail or commercial uses needing pass-by traffic. Many parcels in this area are located amidst abandoned or flood-buyout properties and have become increasingly remote. Some commercial businesses are located in proximity to vacant lots, utilitarian storage lots, or other unkempt properties.

The WR Zone portion of this area may need to be re-thought as non-developable area of open space and limited outdoor storage. Proliferation of this as an "industrial" area still creates a number of problems for the Borough; Outdoor storage of materials/vehicles represents a low level of economic benefit for the municipality. It generates low levels of job creation and modest tax revenues for the Borough. It will continue to track industrial vehicles through residential and commercial areas of the Borough and most importantly, it has the appearance of abandonment and decay. This should be an item of further attention and plan amendment.

7. Reliance on federal government action to protect flood-prone areas.

With the implementation of the NJDEP Blue Acres buyout program, the federal flood control plan/program was terminated in 2016 by the US Army Corps of Engineers. This represents a significant policy change from the 2011 Master Plan and was re-evaluated with the 2014 post-Sandy Strategic Recovery Planning Report. The Blue Acres buyout program has replaced the USACOE flood control plan as a key assumption underlying the Boroughs Master Plan. With this policy change, a new reliance has been created on state and federal dollars to facilitate future rounds of buyouts. The Borough has so far encouraged, but not forced property owners to accept buyout payments. Questions arise as to how holdout properties will be handled. Does the Borough desire a patchwork of occupied and buyout properties? Will federal funding cease? Will the Borough maintain utilities and streets after most, or all properties have been abandoned? Does the Borough want to more strongly encourage or discourage buyouts in specific locations? Does the Borough need to change the zoning in specific floodplain areas to protect life and property? Should the Borough prohibit residential construction in these areas, or should flood-elevated homes be permitted? All of these questions should be addressed and a revised set of policies, plans and ordinances should be created to control development in this area under a clear set of policies. This should be an item of further attention and plan amendment.

8. Concern over development pressure on vacant land and open space, including private undeveloped spaces.

After this issue was raised the 2011 Master Plan, the Borough, in its subsequent zoning ordinance update, created the OSCR-Open Space, Conservation and Recreation Zone and the CEM Cemetery Conservation Zone. These zones were adopted to take development pressure off land maintained as public and private open space, (developed or undeveloped) recreational space, and land used as cemeteries. To date, there have been no development applications for properties in the OSCR or CEM Zones. No action is recommended.

9. Concern over erection of multiple and uncoordinated wireless communication towers throughout the Borough.

Following the 2011 Master Plan, the Borough enacted a comprehensive wireless communications ordinance and plan which remains in effect. Approximately four (4) applications have been filed since 2011 under this ordinance, all of which have been co-location applications. The scope of this ordinance was usurped by the NJ Legislature which changed the laws for wireless communication towers. The new law allows existing towers to add carriers, under specific conditions, as a matter of building permit application. As technology improves, the Borough should be mindful of the growing importance of the availability of 'next generation' wireless internet connectivity to commerce. Several municipalities are exploring options to provide municipal wireless services as an economic development incentive. Emerging issues also include capacity problems within the wireless networks as more users stream richer data to sophisticated devices. Also emerging is the need to provide low height antenna arrays to provide additional network capacity where wireless coverage is already sufficient. This may be an item of further attention and zoning ordinance amendment, to ensure a process of "co-location or use variance."

C. **A re-examination of the extent to which there have been significant changes to the assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis of the 2011 Master Plan or development regulations. This would include particular focus on density, distribution of population and land uses, housing, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, flood resilience and sustainability, and changes in Municipal, County, State or Federal policies.**

1. Flood Control and the Waterfront Zone

The 2011 Master Plan assumed the federal flood control project would one-day be constructed, and thus the area was suited for some kind of future re-development. That presumption is no longer valid. With the official termination of this program in 2016, the area large area, spanning several zoning districts, remains in "imminent and severe" flood danger, where no flood protections should ever be expected. With expected sea-level rises over the next century, this area will become less, not more, attractive to redevelopment. This represents a significant change to the underlying assumptions of the WR Zone expressed in the 2011 Master Plan. Therefore, the policy for the waterfront may need to be conceptually reconsidered. The WR Zone portion may need to be re-thought as non-developable area of open space and limited outdoor storage. Proliferation of this as an "industrial" area still creates a number of problems for the Borough; Outdoor storage of materials/vehicles represents a low level of economic benefit for the municipality. It generates low levels of job creation and modest tax revenues for the Borough. It will continue to track industrial vehicles through residential and commercial areas of the Borough and most importantly, it has the appearance of abandonment and decay. This should be an item of further attention and plan amendment.

2. Flood Control and Blue Acres

The implementation of the NJDEP / Blue Acres buyout program also represents a significant policy change from the 2011 Master Plan. With this change a new reliance has been created on state and federal dollars to facilitate future rounds of buyouts. The Borough has so far encouraged, but not forced property owners to accept buyout payments. Questions arise as to how “holdout” properties will be handled. Will funding run out? Will the Borough maintain utilities and streets after most, or all properties have been abandoned? Does the Borough want to more strongly encourage or discourage buyouts in specific locations? (See item 7 above for additional discussion on this topic) This should be an item of further attention and plan amendment.

3. Housing

The Borough need to update its housing element in the Master Plan with current data. Focus should be on the change in rental/ownership units, economic conditions of households, and population changes. This should result in an updated “Community Profile and Housing” or similar Element.

4. Flood Resilience and Sustainability

A Flood Resilience Element should be added to the Master Plan.

A statement/policy should be included relative to electric vehicles and electric vehicle charging facilities.

Housing policy (discussed in other sections of this report) should be reviewed for flood-hazard areas.

5. Public Access/Recreation on the Waterfront

A public access plan/concept should be considered for the waterfront area. This has been an elusive issue for several years in the Borough. A rails-to-trails concept was initially discussed and never finalized, along with another project known as the “Vaca Trail.” This item is worth a review given the changes to the waterfront areas anticipated in the plan revision.

D. A resulting list of specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any.

1. The Master Plan needs to be amended to create a revised set of development goals for the WR Waterfront Revitalization Zone.
2. The Master Plan needs to modify its development recommendations for general waterfront neighborhoods and areas on the eastern portion of the Borough to change the policy assumptions from “develop with flood control” of the non-development paradigm of buyouts and depopulation. This may include a designation of this area into non-residential use or may include designation of a return to a natural state and/or installation of stormwater management improvements, but no occupancy.
3. Although the Borough has not had an unmet affordable housing obligation from the Council on Affordable Housing, consideration of a development set-aside ordinance, as a preemptive or precautionary measure, to safeguard the Borough from future policy changes, court decisions, or action of the NJ Legislature or inaction of the NJ Legislature which might change the affordable housing obligations, methodologies, procedures, or protections in effect in the State. This would be to attempt to account for “future proof” the Borough’s growth as more housing is constructed in the next 20 years.
4. Consideration of a purpose-built affordable, senior, veterans, or disabled persons, or similar housing facility in cooperation with a housing, social service, veterans or similar group.
5. Minor revisions to the Borough’s Wireless Communications Ordinance to bring it into compliance with changes in State statute.
6. Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance reconsideration of residential zones where they are located in areas identified by the Borough’s FEMA/National Flood Insurance Program’s Repetitive Loss Area Map. The Floodplain Neighborhood Acquisition Plan should be formally absorbed into the Master Plan, providing the basis for any zone changes in this area. This will be a significant change to the Borough and comes after approximately seven (7) years after the buyout program first started. The Borough leadership will

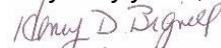
need to consider if the time has come to prohibit new residential development, and/or more aggressively discourage residential housing in flood-hazard areas.

E. Recommendations of the Planning Board concerning in incorporation of Redevelopment Plans into the land use element municipal Master Plan and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the Redevelopment Plans of the Borough.

6. Incorporation of the Main Street Parking Strategy and adopted the PEP Ordinance into the Master Plan.
7. Incorporation of the Lower Main Street Redevelopment Area into the Master Plan.
8. Incorporation of the Post-Sandy Strategic Recovery Planning Report findings into the Master Plan.
9. Incorporation of the Flood Neighborhood Acquisition and Fiscal Impact (Buyout) Plans into the Master Plan.
10. Incorporations of Redevelopment or Rehabilitation areas into the land use plan element
11. Main Street Redevelopment Zone
12. Lincoln School Neighborhood Overlay Zone
13. Adding a general Master Plan basis for future redevelopment or rehabilitation zones that may be created throughout the Borough.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or comments relative to items in this report.

Very truly yours,



Henry Bignell, P.P.

For the Firm

HB/TB

All Board & Staff Members

R. Eppinger, Borough Council President

A. Londensky, Borough Administrator