



## CREATING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

### A GUIDE FOR DEVELOPERS AND COMMUNITIES

## BASIC LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

Local environmental planning starts with the generation of tools such as an up-to-date Master Plan, natural resource inventory (NRI), and zoning ordinance and map. These tools help determine the community's vision including appropriate development and open space protection. When these tools are out-of-date, local communities frequently lose control of their vision for the municipality, resulting in the unnecessary loss of natural resources, development densities inconsistent with the community's character, and a reduction in quality of life for its residents.

The master plan is a statement of objectives, policies and standards upon which the physical, economic and social development of the municipality are based. The master plan shows the existing and proposed locations and intensity of land development for specific uses, such as residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural, and educational uses. The master plan also should include information and strategies for achieving community objectives. The master plan offers the framework for the planning board and governing body to develop the elements of good land use, including meeting local housing and economic development needs and protecting important natural resources.

An NRI is a factual report of integrated data providing baseline documentation for measuring and evaluating resource protection issues. The NRI index and description of features and their functions, rather than an interpretation or recommendation. Identifying significant environmental resources is the first step toward ensuring their protection and preservation. The planning board should adopt the NRI as part of the municipal master plan, either as an appendix or as part of a master plan conservation element. As part of the master plan, the NRI can provide the foundation and documentation for the development of resource protection ordinances and resource-based land use planning.

The zoning ordinance and map are adopted policies that serve as a jurisdiction's land-use regulations. Parts (zones) of an area are designated and mapped for a particular type of development, residential, commercial, etc., and the ordinance provides the details as to what is allowed within each zone. A zoning ordinance can set density limits, height requirements, structural and design standards, setback requirements, and many other land-use standards and regulations. Additionally, the zoning ordinance can serve as an environmental tool that promotes the preservation of environmentally sensitive areas and allows for "Smart Growth".

The master plan and NRI form the basis of planning in your municipality. Environmental Planning, promoting compact development patterns, completing capacity and Buildout analyses are the next steps toward comprehensive sustainable planning.

## APPLICABLE NEW JERSEY GOALS

- Updated local planning documents and ordinances.
- State Plan Endorsement.

## SUGGESTED ACTIONS AND STRATEGIES

- Update/review Master Plan.
- Update/complete a Natural Resource Inventory.
- Update zoning ordinance and building regulations.
- Participate in the State Plan Endorsement process (Office of Smart Growth).



## STATE TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Plan Endorsement Benefits - <http://highpoint.state.nj.us/dca/osg/docs/pebenefitschart.pdf>

## FURTHER INFORMATION

- NJ Office of Smart Growth (OSG) - <http://highpoint.state.nj.us/dca/osg/>
- Association of NJ Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) – ANJEC promotes the public interest in natural resource protection, sustainable development and reclamation and supports environmental commissions and open space committees working with citizens and other non-profit organizations. [www.anjec.org/](http://www.anjec.org/)
- Municipal Land Use Center – The Municipal Land Use Center supports municipal governments in meeting the region’s land use challenges by identifying opportunities for improved development and redevelopment, open space acquisition, and farmland preservation through the provision of education and training, essential tools, technical assistance and referrals to lead to more livable communities for the 21st century. [www.tcnj.edu/~mluc/about.html](http://www.tcnj.edu/~mluc/about.html)

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