



State of New Jersey
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
NEW JERSEY STATE PLANNING COMMISSION
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Governor

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SHEILA Y. OLIVER
Lt. Governor

September 08, 2020

Mayor Howard Burrell
Township of Vernon
21 Church Street
Vernon, NJ 07462

Dear Mayor Burrell:

The Office of Planning Advocacy is in receipt of your request to waive Steps 2 & 5 of the Plan Endorsement Process, the appointment of the Plan Endorsement Citizens' Advisory Committee (N.J.A.C. 5:85-7.8) and Community Visioning (N.J.A.C. 5:85-7.11).

Based on facts identified below and in accordance with N.J.A.C. 5:85-7.6, I approve Vernon's request for waiver for Steps 2 & 5, the appointment of the Plan Endorsement Citizens' Advisory Committee and Community Visioning.

Approval to waive Step 2 is based on the following information:

On March 13, 2019, following a publicly noticed hearing, the Vernon Township Planning Board adopted a resolution approving a comprehensive Sustainable Economic Development Plan ("Plan") as an Element of the Master Plan. Over the course of developing the Plan, the Planning Board subcommittee and its planning professionals conducted a well-documented and extensive public outreach and engagement process. In addition to meeting with individual businesses and other interested members of the public, the subcommittee held several separate, regularly scheduled Visioning Workshops with seven diverse community stakeholder groups, comprising broad interests within the community. These meetings were regularly scheduled and open to the public. Recognizing the Township's focus on tourism, outdoor recreation and natural resource protection, the planning process addressed a wider range of topics than that typically contained in a Sustainable Economic Development Plan. As such, the resulting plan was not only comprehensive in nature, but addresses many subjects germane to a Master Plan update that are equally relevant to Plan Endorsement. The results and input received from the public hearing, stakeholder Visioning Workshops and individual business meetings, are in the Vernon Township Sustainable Economic Development Plan that was submitted to the Office of Planning Advocacy as part of its Plan Endorsement Pre-Petition. It was also further described in the Municipal Self-Assessment Report that was submitted with copies of public notices and minutes published for both the public hearing and the Township Committee meeting on the Plan. There have been no substantial changes in the Land Use Plan since the adoption of the Master Plan in 2010.

Approval to waive Step 5 is based on the following information:

As discussed in the above summary recommendation, the Vernon Township Planning Board adopted a comprehensive Sustainable Economic Development Plan (Plan) in 2019, following an extensive and well-documented public outreach and engagement process. Over the course of developing the Plan, the Planning Board subcommittee and its professionals conducted several Visioning Workshops with diverse community stakeholder groups that were regularly scheduled and open to the public. These meetings addressed a broad range of topics that are highly relevant to Plan Endorsement and the requirements entailed under Step 5: Community Visioning. During the Visioning Workshops, the Township's planning professionals conducted a standard community assessment technique known as a SWOT analysis that was used to identify community strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats with respect the various planning topics and issues to be addressed in the resulting Sustainable Economic Development Plan. In addition to the Visioning Workshops, the Township's professionals and subcommittee representatives also met with businessowners and other interested members of the public. A public hearing was held at the conclusion of the process, where the final Plan was adopted. The Plan contains an in-depth discussion that outlines the extent of public engagement and feedback received from the community as part of the visioning process. In addition, the Community Vision remains unchanged since the adoption of the Sustainable Economic Development Plan and that vision is substantially consistent with the 2010 Master Plan Update.

In closing, it is my understanding that your Administration supports the findings and recommendations of the Sustainable Economic Development Plan and the vision it contemplates for the future of Vernon Township. The Township has committed the time of the Township Planner and others, as necessary to provide administrative support to gather information required to complete its application for Plan Endorsement. It has agreed to ensure public access to information and provide opportunities for public input and comment. I also understand that the Township intends to commence a Master Plan Re-examination in the near future, which will afford opportunities for close coordination with the Office of Planning Advocacy in an effort to address other planning updates and needs as identified as part of the Plan Endorsement process.

Given the recent adoption of the Sustainable Economic Development Plan, with its strong visioning component were undertaken within the last two years, and given there have been no major changes to the Township's land use policies since that plan was adopted, approval of your waiver request for Steps 2 & 5 are granted.

I look forward to working with the Township to complete the Plan Endorsement process. Should you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact myself (donna.rendeiro@sos.nj.gov) or Matt Blake, Senior Planner for Sussex County (matthew.blake@sos.nj.gov).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Donna A. Rendeiro".

Donna A. Rendeiro
Executive Director