

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Executive Summary

The Township of Berkeley Heights has prepared a Master Plan with a Land Use Plan Element. The Master Plan will provide the frame work for updating the Township Zone Map, Zone Ordinances and Land Development Ordinances. The Township has addressed their Housing Plan Element and Utilities Plan Element through separate reports which are referenced herein. There is a need to also prepare other optional elements of a Master Plan, including but not limited to a Circulation Plan Element, Open Space Plan Element and a Community Facilities (schools) Plan Element. However, in order to move forward with the updating of the Land Use Development Ordinances and the revitalization of the Downtown Business District without further delays, the Land Use Plan Element has been completed in advance of these other optional elements.

A review of the last Master Plan prepared for the Township of Berkeley Heights in July, 1999 "recommended the review and, if necessary, the amendment of design criteria for the Downtown Development District. The details of such criteria should be developed through a study of the district and the buildings which comprise the district in order to establish the development theme and forward specific criteria which fosters that unified theme. The underlying intent is to create a business district which is aesthetically pleasing, functions in a manner which promotes safe and efficient pedestrian and vehicular circulation, and encourages business. Some of the general criteria which should be considered are as follows:

- The height and scale of new development should relate to that of existing development. Avoid new construction which greatly varies in height and mass from older buildings in the surrounding area.

- Highlight the main entrances of buildings with covered porches, porticos and other architectural features. The main entry should be a prominent visual feature.
- Avoid long horizontal facades with no architectural features. Break up such facades with vertical elements which mask the length.
- Relate roof forms to those in the surrounding area. Use traditional roof shapes, pitches and materials to make new structures more visually compatible. Screen roof top mechanical features and screen at grade mechanical features with landscaping.”¹

The focus of this Master Plan has been to study the existing land uses, properties, buildings and structures within the Downtown Business Districts and to provide specific recommendations for the future redevelopment, rehabilitation and revitalization of the Downtown Business Districts.

The Downtown Business District as discussed within this report consists of the Downtown Development Zone (DD), the Housing Business 2 (HB-2) Zone and the Housing Business 3 (HB-3) Zone Districts.

The Master Plan contains a Strategic Revitalization Plan that is intended to serve as a blueprint for the ongoing efforts to revitalize the Downtown Business District by encouraging an open discussion between the business owners, property owners and Township Officials. The purpose of the Strategic Revitalization Plan is to target specific properties and areas within the downtown corridor where opportunities exist for new development to take place.

¹ Township of Berkeley Heights Master Plan, July, 1999.

The Master Plan recommends that demonstrating compliance with the Design Standards (Part 19) of the Land Use Procedures Ordinance be made to be a checklist item for any application within the Downtown Business Districts.

The Master Plan recommends the Township of Berkeley Heights establish a Downtown Business District Review Committee (DBDRC) that would meet with applicants for development projects within the Downtown Business District as a first step in the Township approval of any new development proposal. The purpose of the DBDRC would be to work with each applicant to ensure the design standards and site improvements which are desired by the Township are understood in the earliest possible planning stages of a development.

The Master Plan recommends the Township explore the advantages of establishing a Special Improvement District (SID) for the Downtown Business Districts.

The Master Plan recommends the need to adopt an Ordinance to establish a "Change in Tenancy" requirement to bring the older properties located within the Downtown Business District into compliance with the Township's Design Standards.

The Master Plan recommends amending the Land Use Procedures Ordinance to lower the maximum building height in the Downtown District from 42 feet to 36 feet and 3 stories.

The Master Plan recommends amending the Land Use Procedures Ordinance to lower the maximum building height in the HB-3 Housing Business District from 46 feet to 36 feet and 3 stories.

The Master Plan recommends amending the Land Use Procedures Ordinance to provide that the maximum building height in the HB-2 Housing Business District is amended to be 36 feet and 3 stories.

The Master Plan recommends the Township consider the need to amend the definition of "Building Height" and "Story" as contained within the Land Use Procedures Ordinance to provide for the ability to construct a three story building that gives one the appearance of a two and half story structure, reflect the different roof styles that are desired by the Township, and addresses the requirements of the Design Standards for the Downtown Business Districts.

The Master Plan recommends establishing a maximum density and floor area ratio (FAR) standard for the DD Downtown Development District.

The Master Plan recommends amending the Land Use Procedures Ordinance to increase the front yard building setback in the Downtown Development District from twelve (12) feet from the curb line or four (4) feet from the right of way line to be amended to be twelve (12) feet from the right of way line.

The Master Plan recommends amending the Land Use Procedures Ordinance to increase the front yard building setback in the HB-3 Housing Business District from the Springfield Avenue Right of Way from twelve (12) feet to twenty (20) feet.

The Master Plan recommends eliminating the DH-12 District and rezoning Lot 1 and Lot 3, Block 501 to be in the HB-3 District and rezone Lot 2, Block 101 to be in the OL Open Lands District.

The Master Plan discourages the creation of flag lots for residential uses in the Township.

The Master Plan encourages the Township to explore the feasibility of relocating some municipal services within the Downtown Business Districts by means of a land swap with a private landowner(s) who in turn would redevelop the Township owned parcels with a mix of civic, residential and non-residential uses.

The Master Plan encourages the revitalization of the Downtown Business Districts through the planting of street trees at regular intervals along both sides of all roadways and the addition of street furniture such as trash receptacles, benches, bike racks, and like items outlined within the Design Standards (Part 19) of the Land Use Procedures Ordinance.

The Master Plan encourages the Township to implement the short-term and long-term recommendations for increasing commuter parking and access to the train station as outlined in the Park and Go Study Berkeley Heights Station Area.

The Township of Berkeley Heights has been proactive in the preparation of planning studies and reports which are valuable tools and references to guide future growth and development. The Township has prepared a Natural Resources Inventory (NRI), prepared by the Township of Berkeley Heights Environmental Commission & Passaic River Coalition, 2005. In April, 2005 the Township of Berkeley Heights adopted a Municipal Storm Water Management Plan (MSWMP). The MSWMP was adopted as part of the Utility Element of the Township Master Plan. Also, the Township has prepared a Fair Share Housing Plan addressing the requirements of the Third Round Rules of the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH). The Township has also recently released a report entitled Park and Go Study Berkeley

Heights Station Area. This report provides recommendations that are intended to assist increasing commuter parking and access to the train station. It is recommended that all of these reports are read and considered in conjunction with the Master Plan.

1.2 History of Berkeley Heights

The Township of Berkeley Heights encompasses 6.26 square miles and is located in the western section of Union County, New Jersey. The earliest signs of settlement began in the 1600s with the purchase of land from the Leni Lenape Native Americans. The Dutch were unsuccessful in developing their land, however the English settled Elizabethtown (area surrounding Berkeley Heights) in 1664 which flourished rapidly, due to the influx of immigrants.² Peter Willcoxie, one the first European settlers, built a lumber mill located in the Watchung Reserve that helped to develop Berkeley Heights. "Feltville" was a proprietary mill town founded in the Blue Brook Valley by David Felt, a manufacturer of stationary. In 1860, Feltville ceased operation and the town was sold. It later became known as "The Deserted Village".³ Also located in Berkeley Heights is another unique community called "Free Acres", which is a single tax community and one of three still operating in the United States.

Springfield Township, Summit, New Providence and Berkeley Heights were all run under the single, regional government of New Providence in 1793. Summit seceded from the New Providence Township in 1869 and shortly after, the other municipalities followed suit due to the acts of the New Jersey Legislature that made it economically beneficial to separate into smaller, locally governed communities.

² Natural Resources Inventory. Township of Berkeley Heights and Passaic River Coalition, 2005. Page 4.

³ Natural Resources Inventory. Township of Berkeley Heights and Passaic River Coalition, 2005. Page 4.

Berkeley Height's population grew from 2,194 in 1940 to 9,500 in 1962, primarily due to the development and introduction of the American Telephone and Telegraph Company - Bell Laboratories. Prior to the introduction of Bell Laboratories, Berkeley Heights was a sparingly populated farming area. The Connell Company was also influential in the growth of business and population when it was established in 1926. The Connell Corporate Park, along with Runnels Hospital is home to more than 4,000 employees.

CNN/Money Magazine has named Berkeley Heights as one of the top 100 Best Places to live in the United States, ranking #45 in its July 2007 edition, due to the excellent school systems and spacious parks.⁴ Berkeley Heights is a highly desirable place to live in New Jersey. Berkeley Height's ideal location provides for an easy commute to New York City and with its convenient access to Interstate 78, Route 22 and the Berkeley Heights Train Station, it allows residents to easily reach many other points of interest.

⁴ Berkeley Heights Township website <www.berkeleyheightstwp.com>

modified in order to address the ever changing land use issues that impact a municipality.

2.2 History of Master Plan Documents

The following is a list of prior studies the Township of Berkeley Heights has completed.

- Township of Berkeley Heights Master Plan Studies – 1959.
- Township of Berkeley Heights Master Plan – 1974.
- Berkeley Heights, Central Business District, Report on Phase II – Detailed Program, 1979.
- Township of Berkeley Heights Master Plan – 1983.
- Township of Berkeley Heights Master Plan Reexamination Report – July, 1988.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Master Plan Amendments, Housing Plan Element, Land Use Plan Element, Circulation Plan Element – February 6, 1989.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Mount Laurel Compliance Plan – April 1989.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Master Plan Amendments, Housing Plan Element, Land Use Plan Element, Circulation Plan Element – June 27, 1990.
- Planner Report, Analysis of the Removal of “New Main Street” and Town Square from the Mount Laurel Compliance Plan and Master Plan, Township of Berkeley Heights – October 1, 1992.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Master Plan Amendments, Housing Plan Element, Land Use Plan Element, Circulation Plan Element – November 23, 1992, March 17, 1993.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Master Plan Re-Examination – July 27, 1994.

- Township of Berkeley Heights, Master Plan Amendments, Housing Plan Element – December 7, 1994.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Master Plan – July, 1999.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Municipal Stormwater Management Plan, April 1, 2004.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Master Plan Re-Examination Report & Amendments to the Land Use Plan Element, March 2007.
- Township of Berkeley Heights, Master Plan Re-Examination Report & Amendments to the Land Use Plan Element, August, 2007.

The Municipal Land Use Law (Chapter 291, Laws of New Jersey, 1975, as amended, known as the MLUL) established the legal framework for municipal planning and requires that municipalities conduct a reexamination of their Master Plans at least once every six years and that this review be conducted by the Planning Board. This Master Plan is required to maintain the presumption of validity for municipal land use policies and ordinances. This Master Plan also recognizes municipal planning as an ongoing and participatory function of local governing.

- Beautify businesses on major streets by focusing on the rehabilitation and revitalization of those properties identified on the Strategic Revitalization Plan.
- Require landscape buffer areas to screen parking lots and adjoining residential uses.
- Incorporate local cultural and historic themes into the design of streetscape and signage elements particular to the neighborhood.
- Seek community input on large-scale plans early in the development proposal process.
- Identify and enhance “gateways” or landmarks to the neighborhood.
- Provide “wayfinding” signage for pedestrians and drivers that show important links, such as from the Berkeley Heights Train Station or along bus routes.

Transportation

Goal: Increase pedestrian safety, especially for the elderly, disabled, and children.

Objectives:

- Improve conditions at pedestrian crossings, including improvements to signal phasing and compliance with the American Disabilities Act regulations.
- Construct or improve sidewalks where feasible to improve pedestrian access to recreational areas and other public spaces.

Goal: Develop neighborhood parking solutions

Objectives:

- Follow through on the short-term and long-term recommendations for increasing the number of commuter parking spaces in and around the train station as outlined in the Park & Go Study, Berkeley Heights Train Station Area.
- Enforce parking laws and restrictions.
- Explore shared privately owned parking lots, particularly on weekends.
- Improve the use of all available parking, both public and private.
- Improve signage to direct shoppers to all of the available parking in and around the Downtown Business District.

Goal: Improve traffic circulation

Objectives:

- Identify potential changes in circulation patterns and signalization to improve traffic flow and promote implementation of those changes.
- Identify and prioritize congested intersections for further study as funding becomes available.
- Resolve conflicts between buses, automobiles, pedestrians and bicycles.

Goal: Encourage use of alternative modes of transportation

Objectives:

- Implement bike lanes where feasible on major corridors.
- Provide protected bike racks at the transit stations, institutions and other destinations.
- Require bike racks at new housing developments.
- Promote car pooling

Sustainability

Goal: Encourage the incorporation of sustainability principles into both private development and public infrastructure projects

Objectives:

- Encourage “green” development standards and projects that are designed in conformance with the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Green Building Rating System. LEED’s is the nationally accepted benchmark for the design, construction, and operation of high performance green buildings.
- Encourage universal design to be integrated early on into any public or private development.
- Reduce impervious surface areas and encourage the use of “green” roofs.

- Encourage transit, pedestrian and bicycle-friendly development and roadways.
- Use zoning to encourage mixed-use developments in appropriate areas, such as around the Berkeley Heights Train Station.

2. Housing: Provide a full range of housing choices through redevelopment, new construction, rehabilitation, adaptive reuse of nonresidential buildings, and the introduction of new housing into appropriate nonresidential settings. Preserve the existing housing stock through maintenance, rehabilitation and flexible regulation.

3. Economic Development: Promote economic development by encouraging strategic land assembly, site preparation and infill development, public/private partnerships and infrastructure improvements that support an identified role for the community within the regional marketplace. Encourage job training and other incentives to retain and attract businesses. Encourage private sector investment through supportive government regulations, policies and programs, including tax policies and expedited review of proposals that support appropriate redevelopment.

4. Transportation: Maintain and enhance a transportation system that capitalizes on high-density settlement patterns by encouraging the use of public transit systems, walking and alternative modes of transportation to reduce automobile dependency, link Centers and Nodes, and create opportunities for transit oriented redevelopment. Facilitate efficient goods movement through strategic investments and intermodal linkages. Preserve and stabilize general aviation airports and, where appropriate, encourage community economic development and promote complementary uses for airport property, such as business centers.

5. Natural Resource Conservation: Reclaim environmentally damaged sites and mitigate future negative impacts, particularly to waterfronts, scenic vistas, wildlife habitats, Critical Environmental Sites and Historic and Cultural Sites. Give special emphasis to improving air quality. Use open space to reinforce neighborhood and community identity, and protect natural linear systems, including regional systems that link to other Planning Areas.