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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The role of the Strategic Plan is to provide policy guidance for local plans, guide future investment in the transportation network, ensure that adequate public facilities exist and to accommodate growth where it can be best coordinated. The Plan also helps to coordinate local planning activities with the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan as described in the Background below.

This chapter describes the role the Strategic Plan will play in the coordination of local land use plans and the State Plan. It also provides an overview of the process that was followed to develop the Strategic Plan. The subsequent chapters of the Plan explain the outcome of the steps in planning process in greater detail. An overview map of Warren County and its 22 municipalities is provided in **Figure 1** (see next page).

### I. BACKGROUND

The Strategic Plan will be used to revise the Warren County General Development Plan of 1979 as well as the Transportation Plan of 1984. The funding purpose and role of the plan are described below.

#### A. Funding

In 2002, Warren County received a grant from the New Jersey Office of Smart Growth to complete a Regional Strategic Plan. A Regional Strategic Plan is defined in the State Plan as:

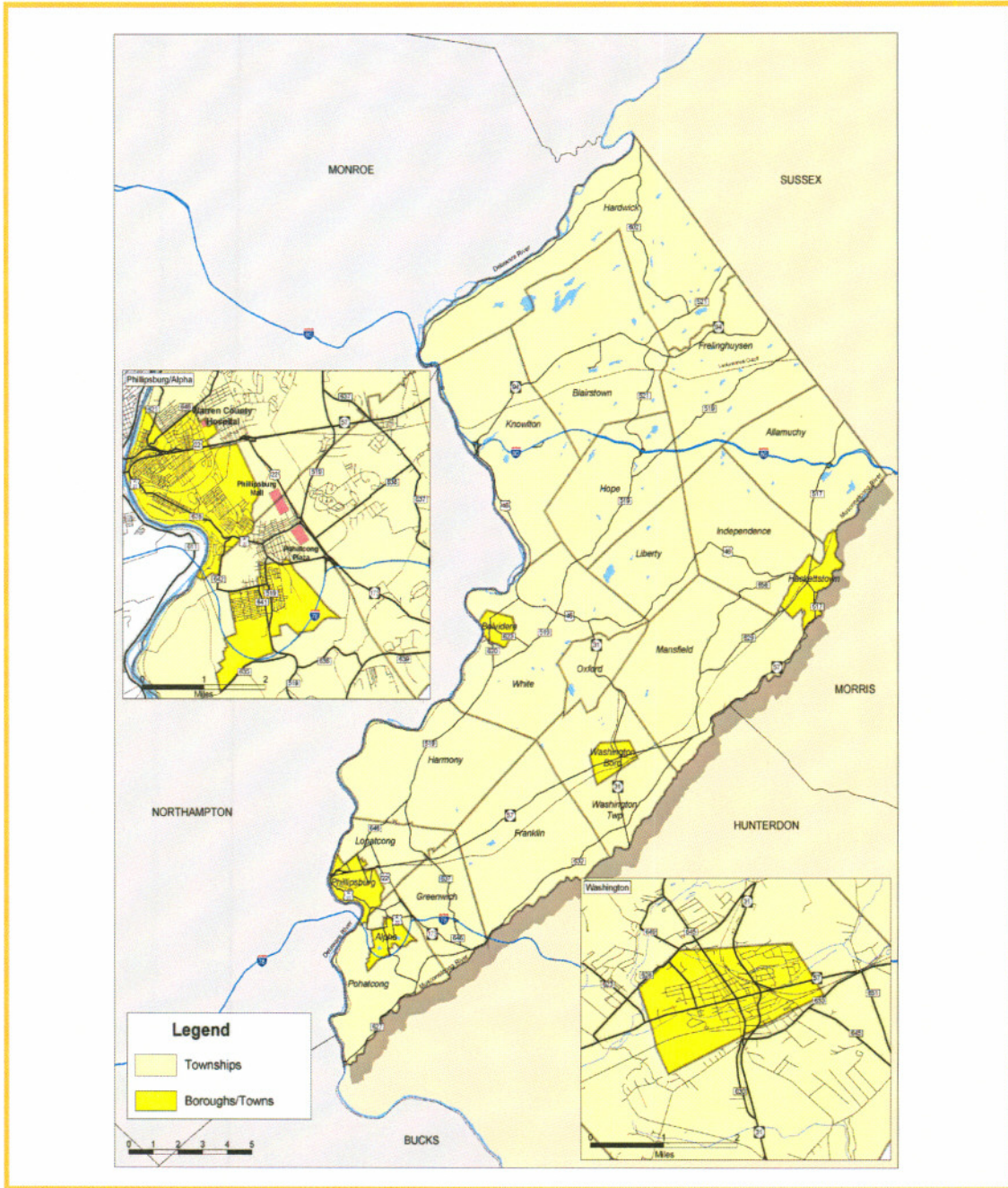
“a plan that is developed through a partnership of state, county, regional and municipal agencies for labor markets or other areas that define the needs, opportunities, vision and regional objectives and strategies for:

- land use;
- redevelopment;
- economic development;
- housing;
- public facilities and services;
- environmental protection and conservation;
- intergovernmental coordination; and
- quality of community life.”

The Warren County Strategic Plan is a result of this partnership.

The Smart Growth grant was accompanied by a grant from the North Jersey Transportation Planning Agency (NJTPA) to conduct a Transportation Technical Study. The Technical Study examined the future cumulative transportation impacts of the current zoning in all 22 municipalities as well as for the alternative land use scenario. It is further discussed in Chapters 3 (Existing Conditions) and 4 (Alternatives Analysis).

**Figure 1**  
Overview Map



**WARREN COUNTY** SMART GROWTH PLAN



**Edwards  
AND  
Kelcey**

**B. Role of Plan**

As established in the New Jersey County Planning Enabling Act (NJRS 40:27-2) the County Planning Board is responsible for preparing and adopting a plan for the physical development of the county. This Strategic Plan fulfills that responsibility.

Under the State Planning Act, counties play a vital role in the preparation and update of the State Plan. They also negotiate Cross-acceptance between the State Planning Commission and municipalities. Cross-acceptance is the process of comparing the provisions and maps of municipal, county and regional plans and regulations with the State Plan. It includes the dialogue that occurs among participants during and after this process to achieve consistency among the plans. The three phases of Cross-acceptance are comparison, negotiation and final review.

The Countywide Strategic Plan presents an opportunity to incorporate State Plan policies in the Warren County General Development Plan. Thus, the Strategic Plan serves as an intermediary between the state and municipalities.

The Strategic Plan also serves as a guide to the 22 municipalities in Warren County on local planning decisions. The State enabling legislation also encourages the County Planning Board to seek the cooperation of municipalities within the county in the implementation of the Strategic Plan. Although local governments are empowered by the state to undertake land use planning and management, local land use decisions are often fragmented. This results in uncoordinated development patterns as well as spillover effects across municipal and county boundaries. This is shown in the buildout analysis under existing zoning for the municipalities as described in Chapter 4.

The State Plan and the Strategic Plan seek to increase the effectiveness of local planning by enhancing intergovernmental coordination. The County Plan recommendations serve as a menu of strategies that could be used by the county and municipalities to facilitate the coordination of local plans with the plans of other municipalities in the county as well as with other levels of government.

**II. PLANNING PROCESS**

The Strategic Plan was developed by the Warren County Planning Department with the assistance of a Steering Committee. The Steering Committee was comprised of up to four representatives from each of the County's 22 municipalities. The committee members were typically representatives of the local governments and environmental, agricultural and business communities. In addition, a series of public workshops and focus groups were conducted to solicit additional input at key points in the planning process. These are described below.

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**A. Key Steps**

The Plan was developed through the following multi-step process:

**Identify key issues** – Key issues were identified by the Steering Committee and members of the public in the initial round of workshops. The key issues are summarized in Chapter 2 (Issues and Goals).

**Develop goals and indicators** – The key issues were formed into draft goal statements to guide the development of the plan. The goals were reviewed with the Steering Committee, the public and in focus groups and further refined. The focus groups included invited representatives of the business, real estate, environmental, and agricultural communities. The goals are presented in Chapter 2 (Issues and Goals). In addition, a series of performance indicators were developed to help track how well the county and municipalities perform in attaining these goals. The indicators are also presented in Chapter 2.

**Document existing conditions** – The existing land use, socio-economic, environmental and transportation conditions were compiled to establish an understanding of how the goals might be met. In addition, a key component of the existing conditions analysis was an assessment of existing zoning densities to protect groundwater quality impacts due to nitrate pollution. A summary of the existing conditions is presented in Chapter 3 (Existing Conditions).

**Forecast future conditions under existing zoning** – The potential buildout for each of the 22 municipalities under their existing zoning ordinance was forecast to determine the magnitude of potential future development. The buildout forecast was used in the land use and transportation model to assess the future traffic conditions. The existing zoning buildout is provided in Chapter 4 (Alternatives Analysis).

**Create draft alternative land use vision** – Steering Committee members participated in a visioning workshop to develop and refine an alternative land use plan for the county. The plan included a “center in every municipality” as a way to meet the goals. The alternative vision is described in Chapter 4 (Alternatives Analysis).

**Forecast future conditions under alternative vision** - The potential buildout for each of the 22 municipalities under the alternative land use scenario was forecast to determine the magnitude of potential future development. The buildout forecast was used in the land use and transportation model to assess the future traffic conditions under this alternative scenario and was compared to the existing zoning forecast. It is presented in Chapter 4 (Alternatives Analysis).

**Refine alternative vision** – The alternative land use vision was refined to reflect comments of the Steering Committee members. The refined vision views a focus on growth in existing centers and larger, regional cores (i.e.,

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Hackettstown and Phillipsburg) as desirable. The refined vision is presented as the recommended land use vision in Chapter 5 (Recommendations).

**Identify implementation recommendations** – The necessary actions for achieving the recommended land use vision were developed and are presented in Chapter 5 (Recommendations).

## **B. Public Participation**

The planning process was based on an extensive public participation process. The process included a series of Steering Committee workshops, public information meetings, focus group meetings, a public opinion survey, a bus tour (September 12, 2002) and meetings with municipal officials. The Steering Committee workshops are summarized below.

- No. 1 (August 22, 2002, Pequest Fish Hatchery) - Issues Definition
- No. 2 (October 29, 2002, Warren County Technical School) - Initial Review of Preliminary Goals
- No. 3 (February 13, 2003, Pequest Fish Hatchery) - Review of Existing Conditions Analysis
- No. 4 (March 5, 2003, Warren County Technical School) - Review of Transportation Technical Study Analysis
- No. 5 (May 29, 2003, Pequest Fish Hatchery) – Review of Alternatives Analysis, Focus Groups and Water Quality Modeling
- No. 6 (June 24, 2003, Centenary College) – Discussion of Centers Based Alternative
- No. 7 (October 15, 2003, Pequest Fish Hatchery) – Review of Survey Results and Performance Indicators
- No. 8 (March 2, 2004, Pequest Fish Hatchery) – Presentation of Draft Plan

Focus group discussions were held on April 30, 2003 and May 22, 2003 with four distinct groups, including representatives of the real estate industry, agriculture, business community and environmental groups. The focus groups examined the issues, needs and potential strategies for Warren County to pursue as part of the Strategic Plan.

A public workshop was conducted on November 14, 2002 to review the planning process for the Strategic Plan. The session was also held to allow residents to identify issues and to review the preliminary goals.

In addition, a public survey was conducted in the summer of 2003 to assess issues and the plan alternatives. A summary of the survey results is presented in Chapter 4 (Alternative Analysis).

Lastly, the Warren County Planning Department requested the opportunity to present the alternative scenario and emerging recommendations to each of the 22 municipalities during the summer and fall of 2003. Presentations and discussions were held with 16 of the municipalities that responded to the request.

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## 2. ISSUES AND GOALS

### I. ISSUES

At the initiation of the project, a Steering Committee workshop was held to help define the issues facing Warren County. The workshop participants responded to three questions:

1. What do you envision when you think of Warren County?
2. What do you like least about Warren County?
3. How do you see Warren County in 20 years?

The responses to the questions are provided in Appendix 1. The issues that emerged from the discussion were far ranging. For example, land use issues included:

- encouraging growth in existing centers,
- protecting rural character,
- promoting economic vitality,
- maintaining infrastructure and services while minimizing costs,
- improving the character of new development, and
- protecting the quality of life and protecting water quality and character.

Traffic issues included reducing congestion, managing access on major roads, improving connections (particularly north south) within the county, maintaining rural road character, sharing streets with bikes, pedestrians and buses and truck traffic. Transit issues included restoration of passenger rail service on the abandoned Lackawanna Cut-off in the northern portion of the county as well as extension of the existing NJ TRANSIT service from Hackettstown along the Washington Secondary Line to Phillipsburg and from High Bridge to Phillipsburg along the Raritan Valley Extension in the south. The need for additional intra-county bus service, and park and ride facilities, were also raised as transit issues.

Participants also noted several outstanding natural resources that warranted special management, including the existing Delaware River and proposed Musconetcong Wild, Scenic and Recreational River corridors, the New Jersey Skylands and Highlands, prime farmland soils and threatened and endangered species habitat. It was noted that many of these resources are the basis for the county's significant tourism economy. In addition, participants noted that implementation of the County's 1999 Open Space Plan was important.

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## II. GOALS AND INDICATORS

The following are the goals of the Strategic Plan. The statements were developed, in part, based on the issues raised by Steering Committee members, focus group participants and public workshop attendees. The goals were refined through the planning process based on further input from the Steering Committee and the Warren County public opinion survey.

The Strategic Plan recommends the use of indicators or performance measures to determine the County's success in achieving the Plan's goals. The indicators will be assessed, where feasible, on an annual basis by the Warren County Planning Department to measure the success of plan implementation. The results will also assist the public in understanding the role municipalities play on achieving the stated goals.

The indicators were selected based on the following characteristics:

- Relevance to goals and specific recommendations;
- Ease of understanding;
- Reflection of long-term view; and
- Availability on reliable and timely data.

One or more indicators have been created for each goal and are listed below. Indicators utilized in the New Jersey State Plan (NJSP) are noted.

**Goal No. 1** - Preserve and enhance rural character as well as agricultural, natural, environmental, historic and open space resources and provide incentives to achieve this goal.

- Amount of land permanently protected as open space and farmland.
- Number of sites and districts entered into the National Register of Historic Places.
- Amount of agricultural output (volume and dollars).
- Amount of land in agricultural production.

**Goal No. 2** - Focus growth in existing centers and provide financial incentives to local government, school districts and developers to achieve this goal.

- Number of housing units proposed in centers versus rural areas.
- Square feet of non-residential space proposed in centers versus rural areas.
- Percent of population in centers versus rural areas.
- Number of incentives.

**Goal No. 3** - Protect and enhance water quality and quantity.

- Number/percent of individual wells that do not meet water quality standards prior to treatment.

- Number of monitored stream locations with exceedences in water quality standards.
- Number of acres preserved in aquifer recharge areas.

**Goal No. 4** - Maintain and improve the existing transportation system to provide safe and efficient mobility and access.

- Number, type and severity of motor vehicle accidents per year.
- Number of road segments that operate at level of service D or lower during peak periods.

**Goal No. 5** - Provide safe and efficient alternative modes of transportation to reduce auto dependence.

- Percent change in transit ridership.
- Number and usage of park and ride lots.
- Percent of labor force that travel by carpool, public transportation, bicycle or walking.
- Percent of labor force that work at home.

**Goal No. 6** - Improve public infrastructure to support existing centers.

- Percent of sewage system capacity available.
- Percent of centers with fiber optic or digital cable.

**Goal No. 7** - Encourage desirable development that provides local employment opportunities in existing centers.

- Number of brownfield sites redeveloped in centers.
- Number of acres zoned industrial, commercial or mixed use within centers versus rural areas.

**Goal No. 8** - Increase educational and cultural opportunities.

- Number of museums and other cultural facilities.
- Number of higher/adult educational and cultural activities and programs offered.

**Goal No. 9** - Promote inter-municipal, county and state cooperation.

- Municipalities participating in comprehensive, multi-jurisdictional regional planning processes, meetings or events.
- Number of multi-jurisdictional planning meetings and events held annually within the county.

**Goal No. 10** - Encourage state legislation to provide localities more control over growth.

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- Number of growth management bills signed into law placing growth management responsibility and authority with local municipalities.

**Goal No. 11** - Ensure that benefits and costs of plan implementation are shared equitably among all residents, landowners and businesses in Warren County.

- Amount of acreage of conservation easements purchased.
- Percent of infrastructure investment in existing centers versus rural areas.

**Goals No. 12** – Provide a mix of housing types.

- Number of municipalities with COAH-certified plans.
- Number of municipalities with zoning that allows multiple housing types.
- Mix of housing types to be constructed per monthly building permits.
- Mix of housing types per development applications.

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