

***Master Plan
Periodic Reexamination Report***

***BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP
SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY***

*Prepared by the
Bridgewater Township Planning Board
with support by Scarlett Doyle, P.P.*

ADOPTED
APRIL 27, 2015

THE ORIGINAL OF THIS REPORT WAS SIGNED AND
SEALED IN ACCORDANCE WITH N.J.S.A. 45:14A-12.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Scarlett Doyle", is written over a horizontal line.

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**PERIODIC REEXAMINATION REPORT
BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP
SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY**

I. INTRODUCTION

The periodic Reexamination Report portion of this document addresses the required areas outlined in the provisions of the Municipal Land Use Law: N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89. These are:

- A. Identify the major problems and objectives relating to land development at the time of adoption of the last Reexamination Report.
- B. Discuss the extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.
- C. Discuss the extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the Master Plan or development regulations as last revised, with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses, housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources and energy, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in State, County and Municipal policies and objectives.
- D. Outline the specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.
- E. Provide recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law" into the land use plan element of the master plan and recommended changes, if any, to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

II. AREAS OF DISCUSSION FOR PERIODIC REEXAMINATION REPORTS

**** 1 ****

- A. Identify the major problems and objectives relating to land development at the time of adoption of the last Reexamination Report.**

OBJECTIVE: TO PRESERVE THE DEVELOPMENT CHARACTER AND QUALITY OF BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP. THIS OBJECTIVE APPLIES TO RESIDENTIAL AND NON-RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES.

B. Extent that the objective has increased or decreased as a municipal concern:

The objective to reexamine its planning strategies has increased as a municipal concern in order to improve and fortify the appeal of the township. Preserving the character of the individual neighborhoods, remain a clear objective. New Bridgewater Township should continue to maintain and improve its residential neighborhoods and its commercial sectors without creating undue intrusion from traffic, noise, light and degraded air quality.

C. Extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions/policies:

As often the case, changes in land use and lifestyle needs can occur swiftly or gradually over time. Changes in Master Plans and Reexamination Report assumptions and policies must acknowledge these changing circumstances. Increased emphasis on Master Plan / Reexamination evaluations by the Planning Board was initiated in 1990. The progressive reexamination reports have gradually developed into an overriding evaluation that the highway corridors were not proving to have land uses that were responsive to the ever-increasing traffic volumes and need to fortify the township's economic base. The Bridgewater policy is that a stable fiscal foundation is needed to strengthen the desirability of the Bridgewater lifestyle and thereby keep Bridgewater as one of the most sought-after communities in the state. A summary of the Planning Board studies are summarized below and demonstrate the policy to focus on improvement of the highway corridors.

- Master Plan, dated 1990 provides a vision for the Township, citing valued policies and objectives for the township.
- Master Plan Amendment and Reexamination Report, dated February 28, 2005 addresses newly-developed policies and development strategies intended to serve as a basis for focused study in an effort to preserve the goals outlined in the 1990 Master Plan and to further enhance the quality of life in the township through additional sound planning policies.
- Master Plan Amendment and Reexamination Report, dated November 11, 2008 deals with impervious coverage and floor area ratio standards to maintain the established scale within several residential and non-residential districts.
- Master Plan Amendment of the Recreation Element of the Master Plan adopted on May 24, 2010 sets forth a plan for facilities and uses on public lands.
- Master Plan Amendment and Reexamination Report-Economic Element, was adopted on April 13, 2010. This study was developed in response to the Master Plan Amendment and Reexamination Report, dated February 28, 2005, where the study was recommended to, "Encourage appropriate development of land use focus areas in the Township that will, within the limits of zoning, return underutilized land to productive use, generate economic development activity, diversify the municipal economic base, create new employment opportunities, and strengthen the tax base." This study and resulting reports focused on non-residential improvements along much of the Route 22 corridor in an effort to bring land use along the highway to a higher potential.

- Master Plan Amendment and Reexamination Report-Circulation Element, dated September 2010 studied traffic circulation and modes of transportation throughout the Township which resulted in recommendations to be addressed moving forward. The focus of this study and resulting reports was to establish modernized criteria for development, parking and sound strategies for evaluation of development.
- Reexamination Report dated February 8, 2011 addressed recommendations for places of assembly, focusing these on roadways that can accommodate higher volumes of traffic, including county and state highways.
- In 2014, Bridgewater tackled the redevelopment criteria which included the study of ‘areas in need of redevelopment’ in an accelerated goal to identify “areas in need of redevelopment” and design Redevelopment Plans to bring underdeveloped lands into productive use.

D. Specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared:

The Route 202 corridor, from the Branchburg line to the Raritan Borough line is considered to have potential for increases in value due to the underutilized nature caused by patchwork land uses and influences of unbuffered heavy industry against small residential lots. The proximity of these lots to relatively high commuter traffic volumes and the robust activity of a regional shopping center affect the R-20 residential ‘pod’ located on the eastbound lane immediately across from the Regional Shopping Center.

The population densities, highway access and the strong demographics make Bridgewater an ideal location for retailers. Appropriately located, commercial properties can contribute to the overall benefit of the township.

Recommendation for a Master Plan: An entirely new Master Plan is not recommended at this time; however, this reexamination report highlights areas where specific study and Master Plan amendments are recommended.

Recommendations for Development Regulations:

It is recommended that amendments to the Master Plan are required to achieve prior goals as cited in prior Master Plans:

- *Encourage appropriate development of land use focus areas in the Township that will, within the limits of zoning, return underutilized land to productive use, generate economic development activity, diversify the municipal economic base, create new employment opportunities, and strengthen the tax base.*

- *Require aesthetically pleasing land use design that prefers subtle character in site appearance, particularly along major corridor routes.*

The Master Plans recommend ongoing study and changes in development regulations that may be warranted based on these studies.

- *Consideration to provide clarity for improvements, identifying when improvements are required for all forms of development applications.*
- *Consideration revising the list of permitted uses along the major corridors of Route 22, 202 and 206 to improve the visual and economic benefit.*

E. Provide recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the “Local Redevelopment and Housing Law” into the Land Use Plan Element of the Master Plan and recommended changes, if any, to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

The Bridgewater Township Council designated a portion of Block 483 lots 17, 18 and 19 as a ‘redevelopment area’. The entire site is approximately 109.557 acres and is located on Route 202/206 North. Approximately 61.95 acres of this site has been designated as a ‘Redevelopment Area’ and the balance of the three lots comprise approximately 47.61 acres. The entire site of Block 483 lots 17, 18 and 19 is recommended for study and for development of a Master Plan amendment of the Land Use Element and a Redevelopment Plan prepared in accordance with the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law.

**** 2 ****

A. Identify the major problems and objectives relating to land development at the time of adoption of the last Reexamination Report.

OBJECTIVE: TO PROMOTE A WELL-BALANCED VARIETY OF RESIDENTIAL, RECREATIONAL PUBLIC, COMMERCIAL, INDUSTRIAL AND CONSERVATION LAND USES.

B. Extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.

The extent of the concern is increased due to the need to adjust to increasing interest to encourage productive land use, particularly along the major highway corridors.

C. Extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the Master Plan or development regulations as last revised.

Since adoption of the Amendment to the Master Plan Economic Element, there is an enhanced interest and objective toward evaluation of the busy highway corridors and adopt regulations which will continue to have a mix of uses which are compatible with and complimentary to their

surroundings. There is also need to clarify the restaurant use as not permitting drive-through restaurants as a permitted right within the township.

D. Specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.

A Master Plan amendment should consider new and appropriate uses on highways, particularly Route 202, from Branchburg Township on the west to Raritan Borough on the east.

Developing zone change strategies to produce an economically-viable commercial district along Route 202 across from the existing 1.2 million square feet Regional Shopping Center was considered by the Bridgewater Economic Development Advisory Committee. This committee is comprised of Bridgewater residents with expertise in real estate development and business issues. The policies in a Master Plan Amendment should consider several recommendations from the Economic Development Advisory Committee, which includes a wide range of uses that serve the public and are particularly appropriate for the highway environment.

Changes recommended in the Master Plan should result in the creation of new employment which would help diversify the economy, as well as offer local residents more service options. Zoning and development regulations for underutilized residential properties will benefit the township by increasing Bridgewater's tax base and establishing an architectural theme along the Route 202 corridor.

Consideration of new and appropriate uses should also be considered on Route 202/206 North, from Garretson Road on the south to Bedminster Township on the north. These studies should include all zones, but initially the uses and regulations for the R-20 zone along this highway, but initially, the M-1 Limited Manufacturing Zone (126-315). The Regional Retail Shopping Complex in the M-1 zone (126-341.4) should be evaluated as related to the drive through restaurant use, which should be clarified to remove drive-through facilities.

Study should be conducted and specific zone standards should be recommended for the Redevelopment Area, as designated by the Bridgewater Township Council. Zoning for the remaining portion of area of Block 483 Lots 17, 18 and 19 which is not in the Redevelopment Area should be streamlined in order to better deal with the complicated provisions of the Special Economic Development zone (SED). In response to the Township Council directive, preparation of a Redevelopment Plan for Block 483 and a portion of lots 17, 18 and 19 should be provided.

**** 3 ****

A. Identify the major problems and objectives relating to land development at the time of adoption of the last Reexamination Report

OBJECTIVE: TO GUIDE LAND DEVELOPMENT AND LOCATION OF COMMUNITY FACILITIES TO MEET THE NEEDS OF BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP RESIDENTS AND TO PROMOTE THE PRESERVATION OF THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT.

B. Extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.

The extent of the concern is reduced. An Open Space tax was used to acquire open space lands for recreational use, with a portion dedicated to maintain the quality of the public spaces. A Recreation Plan Element to the Master Plan was adopted in 2010. Bridgewater Township Open Space Advisory Board and Park Board continue to actively analyze municipal lands for possible Green Acres, Recreation and Open Space (ROSI) designation. There is a strong commitment to retain municipal lands, particularly if there is a public benefit.

C. Extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the Master Plan or development regulations as last revised.

There are no significant changes in assumptions, policies or objectives since the time of adoption of the last Reexamination Report.

D. Specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.

Consideration should be given to ways in which Bridgewater can preserve its open space stock by the purchase of all or segments of privately owned lands for preservation, particularly if the privately owned segments abut existing open spaces or for small vest-pocket parks that service a smaller section of the community. This policy does not require a Master Plan Amendment.

**** 4 ****

A. Identify the major problems and objectives relating to land development at the time of adoption of the last Reexamination Report.

OBJECTIVE: COORDINATE FUTURE GROWTH WITH NEEDED EXPANSION OF PUBLIC FACILITIES AND SERVICES.

B. Extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.

The extent of the objective has been reduced. The municipal complex is constructed; the new animal shelter is completed and the turf field adjacent to the municipal building is completed and the venue for many Bridgewater sports teams.

C. Extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the Master Plan or development regulations as last revised.

There are no changes in assumptions, policies or objectives as it relates to this topic.

D. Specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.

Although specific development regulations are not recommended for ordinance or Master Plan amendment, Bridgewater Township should furtherance of quality of life amenities for Bridgewater, including the mayor's initiative to consider the public and private land use option of creating Community Gardens in areas throughout the township which will benefit those who may not be able to have a personal garden or who may wish to have a social network with other gardeners. As noted previously, creation of community gardens should be encouraged in locations appropriate for growing edible plants.

**** 5 ****

A. Identify the major problems and objectives relating to land development at the time of adoption of the last Reexamination Report.

OBJECTIVE: TO PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL SYSTEMS, ENVIRONMENTAL RESOURCES, RURAL APPEARANCE, AND THE NATURAL AMENITIES WHICH PRESENTLY CHARACTERIZE BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP.

B. Extent that the objective has increased or decreased as a municipal concern:

The objective remains an ongoing objective; however, no Master Plan amendment or Zoning Ordinance amendment is recommended. Prior adoption of a storm water management ordinance and adoption of new controls on impervious coverage and floor area ratio has improved Bridgewater's natural systems. Adopted buffer regulations have also contributed to improving natural amenities.

C. Extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions/policies:

There have been no significant changes in assumptions/policies.

D. Specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.

There are no specific recommendations for changed advanced at this time

**** 6 ****

A. Identify the major problems and objectives relating to land development at the time of adoption of the last Reexamination Report.

OBJECTIVE: REVIEW THE ZONING MAP TO IDENTIFY PROPERTY, BOTH PRIVATE AND PUBLICLY HELD WHICH ARE LOCATED IN THE PUBLIC (P) ZONE. CONFIRM THAT SUCH LAND IS STILL REQUIRED FOR SOME PUBLIC PURPOSE. IF NOT, THOSE LANDS SHOULD BE RE-ZONED FOR DEVELOPMENT PURPOSES AND DISPOSED OF AS ALLOWED FOR BY LAW.

B. Extent that the objective has increased or decreased as a municipal concern:

This objective remains a municipal concern and should be revisited in a Master Plan amendment.

C. Extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions/policies:

For land held in privately-held ownership, there should be some consideration for an expansion of permitted uses within the P and the P-2 zones.

D. Specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.

There are no specific recommendations needed. However, expanded opportunities for Permitted Uses within the P and P-2 zone are favored. Study should be done to recommend specific uses.

**** 7 ****

A. Identify the major problems and objectives relating to land development at the time of the adoption of the last Reexamination Report.

OBJECTIVE: THE 2005 MASTER PLAN AND REEXAMINATION REPORT DEFINED THE OBJECTIVE, AND THE MUNICIPALITY NEEDS TO EMPLOY PLANNING STRATEGIES WHICH WOULD ENHANCE BRIDGEWATER'S QUALITY OF LIFE.

B. Extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.

The objective for improved aesthetics and compatible development design has increased in concert with the increased desire to balance the need for economic vitality in the ongoing challenge of assuring the economic stability and its high quality of life. This includes efforts to encourage zoning adjustments that will bring underutilized properties into a productive land use compatible with its surroundings, focus on uses appropriate for segments of the highway corridors in the township, and development of a Redevelopment Plan for properties that have been designated as, “an area in need of redevelopment.”

C. Extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions, policies and objectives

Bridgewater is at the forefront of continually reexamining its Master Plan to better achieve its policies and objectives. Bridgewater desires to accommodate changes in lifestyle and corporate needs by evaluation and planning a course of action regarding whether or not alternative zoning would lay shape a better Bridgewater future. It is believed that there is somewhat greater urgency for the study and evaluation of appropriate commercial and residential land uses along the highways, particularly because the out-migration of the millennial work force and the negative levels of office rentals in Somerset County.

Well known economist, Jeffrey Otteau, recently provided the Planning Board with testimony regarding various commercial and residential trends. His report cited several statistics which are necessary to consider in the ongoing preparation for the future of the township. Below are bullet points of his report which summarizes the climate for New Jersey, Somerset County, and Bridgewater Township.

- 74 million R&D square feet is currently-available in New Jersey and with the current rate of absorption, it would take 62 years to fill the office space that already exists.
- Based on the pace at which office and R&D space is being filled, it will take 170 years to fill what is currently available in the employment market within a 15 mile radius of the ‘redevelopoment area’. This timeframe is triple what exists at the state level.
- Somerset County has a negative net absorption trend, with a 23% office vacancy rate.
- New Jersey has nearly the highest rate of residents moving out of state.
- The population in Somerset County increased by 9% between 2000-2010.
- The millennial population in Somerset County declined by 14% between 2000-2010.
- The population in Bridgewater increased by 3.5% between 2000-2010.
- The millennial population in Bridgewater *declined* by 33% between 2000-2010.
- New Jersey vacancy rates were cited for the following sectors:

Industrial warehouse:	6%,
Retail:	7%
Multifamily:	2%
Office	17%
Pharmaceutical	39%

Bridgewater is noted as an employment node for the pharmaceutical industry. The statistics above highlight the significant impact that these vacancy rates could have on the quality of life of Bridgewater. The Master Plan amendment should address highway zoning with the aim to adjust zoning strategies to fortify the fiscal stability of the township.

D. Specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.

1. In large part, highway corridors establish a perception of the quality of life that Bridgewater offers. It is suggested that study be initiated for zoning changes and development regulations for vacant, underutilized and designated Redevelopment land along the highways. Uses on Route 202 highway frontages should be designed to vitalize commercial enterprise. The R-20 residential node where it is surrounded by the industrial zone of M-1 of Thermo-Fisher Scientific and across from the Regional Shopping Center area has been highlighted by the Bridgewater Township Economic Development Advisory Committee as an area where land use changes were recommended. In connection with a zone change, it is recommended that ordinance amendments be considered so that, if there is a proposed zone change, the residents who currently reside in the R-20 zone have every opportunity to remain in their homes, unencumbered by the regulations of a non-residential zone if they choose not to sell their property.
2. A Master Plan Amendment of the Land Use Element and a Redevelopment Plan, including development regulations, should be prepared for the entire 109.557 acre site on Route 202/206 North where 61.95 acres of it was designated as an 'area in need of redevelopment'. The Board recommends an ordinance amendment to implement changes to the existing SED zone. The rationale for this is to establish compatibility for overall design and function throughout this district.
3. *Master Plan studies to offer development regulations for the Route 22, Route 202/206 and the Route 202 corridors should be considered as a continuation of the corridor studies conducted in 2010. Of particular note in this recommendation is that a study focus on land locally known as the SJP office complex and the abutting Ethicon facility to the west. Located along Route 22 and also Route 202/206 across from the Bridgewater Commons Mall, these premises are within the M-1 Limited Manufacturing zone. The Planning Board recommends that the M-1 Limited Manufacturing zone at this location be evaluated to determine if there is a more appropriate zoning designation and uses for any portion of this zoned area, if any.*

4. *Studies should also be conducted for zoning districts along highway corridors. Studies should consider the residential character, wetlands, steep slopes, structures and numerous small lots which are found on the highways. This is particularly true along Highway Route 202/206 North where lots frequently exhibit steep slope constraints. The following areas are recommended for focused corridor studies and the Master Plan revisions which result from these studies. Once these corridors are evaluated, another phase of study should be the uses and zoning on Route 28 and the Somerset County roadways.*

FIGURE 1

RECOMMENDED MASTER PLAN STUDIES ALONG HIGHWAY CORRIDORS
OF ROUTE 202, ROUTE 202/206 AND ROUTE 22

Zone	Zone Description	Location	Master Plan Study
SED	Special Economic Development	Route 202-206	Route 202-206 To Be Studied
HEC	Highway Enterprise Center	Route 22 & Route 202-206	Studied
GCM	General Commercial and Manufacturing	Route 22 & Route 202-206	Route 22 Studied Route 202-206 To Be Studied
GC	General Commercial	Route 22	Studied
HIC	Highway Interchange Commercial	Route 22	Studied
M-1	Limited Manufacturing	Routes 22, 202 and Route 202/206	<i>Route 22, Route 202 and Route 202-206 To Be Studied</i>
M-1B	Limited Manufacturing (Small lot)	Route 22	Studied
M1-C	Manufacturing	Route 22	Studied
LC	Limited Commercial	Route 22	Studied
C-1	Neighborhood Business	Route 22 and Route 202	Route 22 Studied Route 202-206 To Be Studied
C-2 (BRC)	Bridgewater Regional Center (aka Commons Mall)	Route 22 and Route 202-206	Based on Developer's Agreement
C-3	Office and Service	Route 22	Studied
C-3A	Limited Office	Route 202-206	Route 202-206 To Be Studied
C-5	Commercial Nursing Home	Route 22	Studied
Residential Zones on Highway Corridors	All Residential Zones	Route 22, Route 202 and Route 202-206	Route 22 To Be Studied Route 202 To be Studied Route 202-206 To Be Studied