

Periodic Reexamination Report

BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

*Prepared by the
Bridgewater Township Planning Board*

April 23, 2018

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, appearing to read "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 addresses the required areas outlined in the provisions of the Municipal Land Use Law: N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89:

- 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 approaches remains as a strong municipal concern in order to improve and fortify the appeal of the township. Preserving the character of the individual neighborhoods remains a clear objective. 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. This ongoing issue includes the desire to preserve the residential character as well as the corporate character of the township, particularly as viewed from the highway corridors.

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

As often the case, changes in land use and adjustments to lifestyle needs can occur swiftly or gradually over time. Changes in Master Plans and Reexamination Report assumptions and policies must acknowledge and respond to these changing circumstances. 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. Increased emphasis on Master Plan/Reexamination evaluations by the Planning Board was initiated in 1990. A summary of the Planning Board studies are summarized below and demonstrate the policy to focus on improvement of the highway corridors which buttress the fiscal stability and maintenance of residential neighborhoods.

- Master Plan, dated 1990 provides a vision for the Township, citing valued policies and objectives for the township. The Master Plan recommends that:
 - a) *'The Township continue to investigate and adopt development controls for conservation such as clustering...'*
 - b) *'Municipal ordinances be adopted to permit clustering.'*
- 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 particular 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 commercial-based development, parking and sound strategies for evaluation of such 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’. The Plan accelerated the goal to identify “areas in need of redevelopment” and design Redevelopment Plans to bring underdeveloped or underutilized lands into productive use.
- The Reexamination Report of April 27, 2015 addressed several issues that were documented in prior Master Plans and Reexamination Reports, most particularly continuing dealing with areas in continuing need of redevelopment and also the need to revisit zoning districts along the highway corridors.

Below is a condensed excerpt of the matters that address study and recommendations in this 2015 Reexamination Report which highlights significant changes:

Master Plan studies should be conducted 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.

The Reexamination Report also suggests review of residential development along the highway.

Studies should also be conducted for zoning districts along the highway corridors. Studies should consider the residential character....

The Reexamination Report also specifically addresses the need to study residential zones along Route 202-206 and also identifies the increase in interest to reconcile existing uses with their zoning:

...there is an enhanced interest and objective toward evaluation of the highway corridors and regulations which will continue to have a mix of uses which are compatible with and complimentary to their surroundings.

- The Reexamination Report of December 13, 2016 responds to a recent municipal settlement agreement with a religious organization, another matter presents itself as a significant change in a policy and assumption – to study a non-permitted premises that was not located on the highway corridor. Evaluation of this non-permitted land use was viewed as an opportunity to bring the land use (non-conforming commercial use) into conformity with the surrounding single-family residential neighborhood.

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:

- Reconsideration of the cluster to bring the development regulations into harmony with the 1990 Master Plan which recommends that: *'The Township continue to investigate and adopt development controls for conservation such as clustering...'*
 - a) Amend the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126A.1) to limit eligible cluster projects to the R-40 and R-50 single-family zones.
 - b) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349B) to read: *'Minimum lot number of lots. The maximum number of lots to be permitted shall be arrived at by the applicant's submitting a sketch plat showing a conventional subdivision which shall meet the design criteria as established in Part 9 and elsewhere in the Township Code. The sketch plat shall be liberally interpreted to establish the number of allowable lots in a cluster development.'*
 - c) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349C.1) to amend the minimum tract size from 10 acres to 7 acres.
- Consider revising the list of permitted uses along the major corridors of Route 22, 202 and 206 to improve the visual and economic benefit to best serve the township.
- Reinforce the residential zoning of an existing non-permitted use so that the land use will strengthen the existing and stable character of the single-family zone that surrounds it.
- No development of a Master Plan is needed at this time, however, new regulations, as cited above, are recommended.

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 most recent redevelopment areas have been recommended for the Eden Woods neighborhood (Finderne) and Center of Excellence (Route 202/206) site. These redevelopment plans have been adopted by the Township Council. There are no plans or consideration of more 'areas in need of redevelopment' or for redevelopment plans.

**** 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 for such balance is increased due to the need to adjust to increasing interest to encourage consistency of use with the zoning ordinance, 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 Amendments to the Master Plan of 2014 and 2015, there is an enhanced interest and objective toward evaluation of the highway corridors and regulations which will continue to encourage a mix of compatible uses which are complimentary to their surroundings.

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 continuation study of development regulations should consider new and appropriate uses on highways, including zone change strategies to produce economically-viable commercial districts along Routes 22 and 202/206.
- Changes in development regulations should result in the education needed for new employment skill sets which will help diversify the economy, as well as offer local residents more service options along the highway corridor. Zoning and development regulations for underutilized residential properties will benefit the township by increasing Bridgewater's tax base and establishing an architectural theme.
- Bridgewater should increase its visual appeal with widespread permanently preserved land exhibited in the township. An increased effort to amend regulations to foster the advantage of open space through cluster development should be implemented:
 - a) Amend the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126A.1) to limit eligible cluster projects to the R-40 and R-50 single-family zones.

b) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349B) to read: 'Minimum lot number of lots. The maximum number of lots to be permitted shall be arrived at by the applicant's submitting a sketch plat showing a conventional subdivision which shall meet the design criteria as established in Part 9 and elsewhere in the Township Code. The sketch plat shall be liberally interpreted to establish the number of allowable lots in a cluster development.'

c) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349C.1) to amend the minimum tract size from 10 acres to 7 acres.

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.

There are no plans or consideration of more 'areas in need of redevelopment' or for redevelopment plans.

**** 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 over open space remains a municipal interest. 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 and expand the inventory of municipal open space 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.

The assumptions, policies and objectives remain without significant changes.

- 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 should be reconsideration of seeking authority from the voters for re-instituting an Open Space tax.

- 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.**

There are no plans or consideration of more 'areas in need of redevelopment' or for redevelopment plans.

**** 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. There are no major problems relating to expansion of public facilities and services.

- 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 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.**

- Bridgewater Township should continue to monitor and implement, where possible, 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.
- Amendment to the cluster provisions of the Conditional Use section of the ordinance should be encouraged order to increase the lands dedicated to permanent conservation:

a) Amend the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126A.1) to limit eligible cluster projects to the R-40 and R-50 single-family zones.

b) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349B) to read:

‘Minimum lot number of lots. The maximum number of lots to be permitted shall be arrived at by the applicant’s submitting a sketch plat showing a conventional subdivision which shall meet the design criteria as established in Part 9 and elsewhere in the Township Code. The sketch plat shall be liberally interpreted to establish the number of allowable lots in a cluster development.’

c) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349C.1) to amend the minimum tract size from 10 acres to 7 acres.

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.

There are no plans or consideration of more ‘areas in need of redevelopment’ or for redevelopment plans.

**** 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. Promotion of a rural appearance will be facilitated through amendment to the cluster development ordinance.

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

There have been no significant changes in assumptions or 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.

- Amendments to the Ordinance should address conservation through minor adjustments to the Conditional Use section:
 - a) Amend the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126A.1) to limit eligible cluster projects to the R-40 and R-50 single-family zones.
 - b) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349B) to read: ‘Minimum lot number of lots. The maximum number of lots to be permitted shall be arrived at by the applicant’s submitting a sketch plat showing a conventional subdivision which shall meet the design criteria as established in Part 9 and elsewhere in the Township Code. The sketch plat shall be liberally interpreted to establish the number of allowable lots in a cluster development.’
 - c) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349C.1) to amend the minimum tract size from 10 acres to 7 acres.

A new Master Plan is not recommended at this time.

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.

There are no plans or consideration of more ‘areas in need of redevelopment’ or for redevelopment plans.

**** 6 ****

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

OBJECTIVE: RECONCILE USES ALONG THE HIGHWAY CORRIDORS TO CORRELATE TO ZONING.

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

The following objectives are increased in municipal concern:

Increased municipal concern for objective of identifying permitted uses along the major corridors of Route 22 and 202/206 to improve the visual and economic benefit.

Increased municipal concern to reconcile residential land uses along Route 202/206 with the increasing traffic. The study should consider existing multifamily uses with the objective to reconcile the existing, stable multifamily neighborhoods with the single-family zone and office and commercial uses along this corridor.

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

The first cited change in policies is of strong municipal concern. The ordinance has been amended to reconcile the existing, stable multifamily complexes on the highway.

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 recommendations for a new Master Plan.

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.

There are no plans or consideration of more 'areas in need of redevelopment' or for redevelopment plans.

**** 7 ****

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

OBJECTIVE: DEVELOP PLANNING STRATEGIES WHICH WOULD ENHANCE BRIDGEWATER'S QUALITY OF LIFE, THIS INCLUDES VESTING STABLE COMPLEXES WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF A ZONING ORDINANCE THAT RESPECTS THE SURROUNDING AREAS AND AFFORDS CONSISTENCY WITH ZONING.

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

The objective for improved aesthetics increased the desire for preserved land, through private ownership and Homeowner's Association, has increased in importance.

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 to a better Bridgewater future. It is believed that there is need for the study and evaluation of appropriate residential land development patterns which will address Bridgewater's desire to maintain its rural character.

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.

In large part, highway corridors establish a perception of the quality of life that Bridgewater offers. It is desirable for the sustained quality of the township that existing uses be evaluated for consistency with zoning. It is suggested that the following be conducted and reported in an Amended Master Plan since an entirely new Master Plan is not needed at this time.

- Continue in the study and provide revisions, where applicable, of permitted uses along the major corridors of Route 22, 202 and 202/206 to improve the visual and economic benefits afforded to the township from these corridors.
- Reconcile the difference between the existing patterns of development with existing zoning and circumstances of the environment. Particular attention should be focused on residential land uses along Route 202/206.
- Bridgewater should study measures to reinforce the identity of single-family neighborhoods, protecting them against the impacts of non-permitted uses.
- Reinforce the cluster land use to strengthen the stability of the single-family zone, particularly if the resulting open space tends to increase the permanently-preserved land areas. Revise the Conditional Use cluster subdivision requirements of 126-349C:
 - a) Amend the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126A.1) to limit eligible cluster projects to the R-40 and R-50 single-family zones.
 - b) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349B) to read: ‘Minimum lot number of lots. The maximum number of lots to be permitted shall be arrived at by the applicant’s submitting a sketch plat showing a conventional subdivision which shall meet the design criteria as established in Part 9 and elsewhere in the Township Code. The sketch plat shall be liberally interpreted to establish the number of allowable lots in a cluster development.’
 - c) Revise the Conditional Use section for Cluster Development (126-349C.1) to amend the minimum tract size from 10 acres to 7 acres.

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.

Bridgewater Township has the redevelopment areas of what are known as The Commons at Route 202/206 and Route 22, The Sixth Avenue Redevelopment Tract located on North Bridge

Street and Prince Rodgers Road, and most recently the Eden Woods site on East Main Street and the Center of Excellence on Route 202/206.

There are no plans or consideration of more 'areas in need of redevelopment' or for redevelopment plans.