



# Bedminster Master Plan Review Committee

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APRIL 2018 REPORT

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## **Executive Summary**

Bedminster has long been prized for its scenic countryside and unspoiled natural places. These features have been a major factor in the selection of Bedminster's land use policies, which focus growth around the State highways and the villages of Pluckemin and Bedminster. Resource conservation zoning has helped conserve Bedminster's countryside, while the villages have enjoyed an expanding role as centers with desirable, walkable neighborhoods, expansive parklands and convenient local services. A relative abundance of affordable housing, strategically situated along the interstate highway network, provides a resource that is increasingly scarce in Somerset County.

Protecting high environmental quality, conserving community character, retaining farms and farmland and protecting Bedminster's history are key objectives of the Master Plan, which is also dedicated to promoting a sustainable future for the township and the region.

Regional planning initiatives at the state level and affordable housing mandates have helped to shape a landscape where varied, and at times conflicting, objectives for conservation and development have been balanced through an open, transparent policy development process with extensive public participation.

As the township evaluates these recommendations, it will be important to protect opportunities for sustainable development as well as conservation in this crossroads community, where Early American history, regional transportation and scenic natural beauty converge.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Excerpted from the June 5, 2008 Bedminster Township Master Plan Reexamination Report. It is not lost on this Committee that these same goals and objectives remain as valid today as they did a decade ago.

## **Forward**

This report has been compiled by a volunteer four member group appointed by Mayor Steven Parker. The group is diverse, including a former Mayor and Planning Board chair, the former chair of the Environmental Commission, a former member of the Planning Board and Open Space & Farmland Preservation Committee, and a current member of the Environmental Commission.

The Planning Board is the sole determinant of any action that may arise from this report, and may elect at its discretion to act on some, all or none of these recommendations. This is not a Master Plan Re-Examination. It is a look at issues that we feel need to be addressed as the Master Plan is updated, or that the Township Committee may consider directly.

We solicited feedback from the following groups, and requested they provide a bullet list of comments related not just to their area of expertise, but any concerns they may have regarding any section of the existing Master Plan. Some responded with comments, and others did not.

Board of Educational  
Environmental Commission  
Historic Commission  
Board of Health  
Sewer Authority  
Open Space-Farmland Preservation Committee  
Recreation Commission  
Township staff, including Police  
Volunteer Emergency Services (29 Fire, 63 Fire and 29 Rescue)

Any written responses we received from these functions are included in Appendix C.

## **General Observations**

The changes we see about us are happening quickly and are significant. Shifts in demographics, the workplace, commerce, transportation, education, housing and the delivery of health care services, just to name a few, challenge our traditional concepts of zoning. Conventional urban and suburban demarcations are changing, mixed use demand is increasing, religious sites are transforming, an increasing number of farm assessed properties show signs of distress, and certain commercial buildings risk obsolescence without future investment. We need to protect our residents from substantive tax increases while maintaining their quality of life expectations, but do so in a way that insures the ongoing viability of our commercial corridor. Balancing this equation requires solutions that preserve Bedminster's unique character and continue to distinguish it from neighboring towns.

This document attempts to place a spotlight on the items that we have observed as well as issues that have been conveyed by those we have met with.

## Introduction & Overview

Our review shows that there have been very rapid changes in many aspects of how we live, work and play. The traditional model of working in the city but living in the suburbs has changed to a certain degree, as more individuals have opted to live proximate to their work location. This trend has given rise to the revitalization of cities like Hoboken and more recently Jersey City. Not surprisingly, data from the [Highlands Fiscal Impact Assessment](#) indicates that younger individuals are typically migrating towards more urban centers upon graduating from school. Bedminster is located in the Highlands Region and is included in the report data.

In response to, or perhaps a cause of, this migration is an ever increasing number of mixed used developments where individuals can not only reside, but also work and enjoy amenities such as dining and shopping. These developments appeal particularly to younger individuals and couples who seek a walkable, commute limited existence with the amenities of life quickly accessible, preferably without an automobile. These developments have experienced success not only in areas targeted for urban revitalization, but also in suburban greenfield applications, which are not available in Bedminster.

Concurrent with this shift, multi-family building permits are increasing, while single family building permits peaked in 1998, long before the 2008 real estate crash. Since most Highlands towns prohibit or limit multi-family uses, they are being constructed in more urban areas. While multi-family demand is likely driven by both economics and demographics, the data suggests that since the trend began in the late 90's and preceded both the real estate downturn and the recession that followed, demographics may be the larger factor. Whether this trend continues or reverses as the millennials approach middle age and Generation Z (post-millennials) come of age and enter the workforce remains to be seen.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time, many suburban communities throughout NJ have experienced population declines, a decrease in average household size, an increase in the average age of its residents, stagnant real estate prices and a drop in school enrollment. Clearly there are many factors at work that determine this outcome – while some suburban towns have suffered, others, particularly those with an educated workforce and accessible via highway or public transportation, have thrived. Bedminster's population is steady and has not seen any major shifts that would be a cause for concern. Over 65% of our residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, about 25% higher than the rate in Somerset County, and more than 1.5 times the rate in New Jersey (37.5%). In addition, we are fortunate to be located not only at two major crossroads (287 and 78), but also at the intersection of two major industries, technology and pharmaceutical.

The evolution of the work environment is driving many of the changes being seen both statewide and nationally. Large office complexes constructed prior to the advent of broadband Internet and wireless connectivity were built assuming the majority of employees worked on site, similar to a factory model. Telecommuting enabled more flexible work arrangements, but also impacted both productivity and real estate utilization – suddenly many offices were largely empty, as more employees worked remotely. As management trends have evolved over the past decade, so too has the workplace, which now optimizes for flexibility, collaboration and square footage utilization. Gone are the gray cubicle farms of the 80's, replaced by an automatically assigned workspace upon building check-in. Open spaces support collaboration and communication across individuals, organization and even companies occupying the

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<sup>2</sup> Generation Z comprises individuals born from the mid 1990s to the early 2000s and make up 25% of the U.S. population, making them a larger cohort than the Baby Boomers or Millennials.



same real estate. As the corner office has all but disappeared, so too has the allocation of square footage per person - down from the average 250 square/feet per employee to 150 or less. Concurrently, parking has become both a premium and a problem, as more workers vie for a limited numbers of spaces computed in a bygone era.

As the labor market tightens, employers recognize that an updated workplace is an asset for attracting talent, as the latest generation of workers demand on-site amenities – the traditional cafeteria supplemented by a coffee bar, third party dining options and takeout meals, on-premises childcare, and health and wellness centers, to name just a few. Suburban office parks constructed post WWII to accommodate the onslaught of workers migrating out of the city must now update and reinvigorate themselves to compete with more modern spaces now being erected in or near major urban centers, often replacing the very factories that were abandoned in the first place.

Commercial landlords and tenants, many of whom constructed or acquired suburban office space in the heyday of the 80's and 90's, are now faced with an investment decision as the last cycle ends and the utility of traditional space continues to wane. Several in our immediate area, including Verizon and Mallinckrodt, have made significant investments to revitalize their properties and make them a competitive asset. Obviously, the economic decision is predicated by an ability to reduce expenses (employees/sq. ft.), increase productivity and attract and retain talent.

In fact, suburban office construction dominated new office space in 2017 - a whopping 38.1 million square feet of the 48.9 million square feet erected nationwide last year. And the trend is likely to continue – CBRE projects just over 39 million square feet of suburban office space will be delivered this year. Suburban office space featuring 'urban-type' amenities – so called urban-suburban developments with live/work/play environments – are more likely to capture tenant interest. Locations proximate to leading industries, notably tech, media and pharma, are also in high demand.

Part of the reason for the recovering suburban office market is due to demographics, as older millennials are starting to leave cities for walkable suburbs. The oldest millennials, now in their late 30's, have gotten married and are having families, so what may have appealed to them ten years ago is not necessarily the same thing now. As priorities such as increased space, safety, good schools and affordability come into the forefront, these individuals are looking for the best of both worlds – the amenities of the city combined with the attractions of the suburbs. Reacting to this trend, more companies are making their own moves to suburbia to attract this talent, choosing locations near public transit and walkable suburban main streets.

So what does this mean for Bedminster? We are geographically near the edge of this phenomenon, and have to decide if we wish to pursue mixed use development as part of our planning and zoning strategy. These changes are occurring across the country, so we cannot consider ourselves immune, but we must also proactively define how we respond and adapt before those choices are inadvertently made for us. Traditional planning and zoning concepts that even a few years ago may have stood as best practices are now subject to reexamination. The public's input into this decision is critical, as there are significant positive and negative implications. We must assess how best to accommodate these changes while maintaining the quality of life we have all come to expect as Bedminster residents.

These are but a few of the changes and trends that are emerging. A more comprehensive overview is provided in Figure 1.

# Converging Trends and Influences

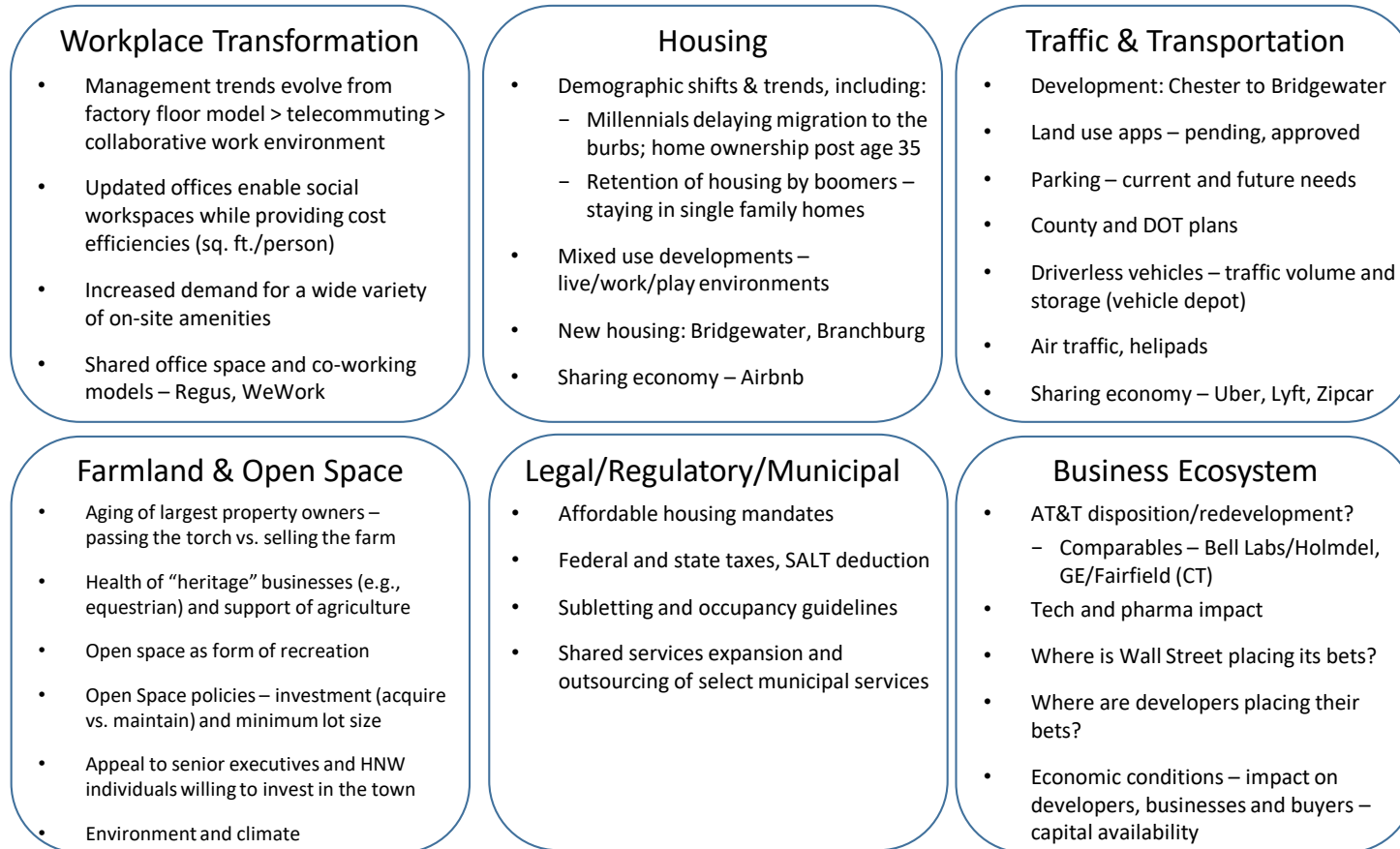


Figure 1

## **General Approach**

In order to evaluate the implications of this changing environment, we have highlighted key items for consideration using the structure of the existing Master Plan, last fully updated in 2003 with certain sections later revised between 2005 and 2009.

### **PART 1 – Goals and Objectives**

No changes.

### **PART 2 – Land Use Plan**

#### **Areas of Special Concern**

##### *Preserving Western Bedminster*

- Large swaths of land in the existing western R-10 zone have historically been used for farmland and agricultural purposes, and continue to do so.
- Making preserved farmland productive by insuring support functions for agriculture is permitted and encouraged. One particular issue involves the inability of farmers to provide on-site housing for laborers, as only a single accessory dwelling is permitted by ordinance. The Planning Board may want to evaluate whether this limitation should be scaled to lot size. If expanded, we recommend limiting the ability to subdivide affected properties, in order to preclude applications for same at a future point in time.
- Increasing minimum lot sizes to insure the continued pursuit of agriculture is recommended. Ten acre lots cannot support agriculture, and subdivision into 10 acre plots will disrupt the pattern of the farmland. According to studies available through Frank Banish, a minimum lot size in the range of 25-40 acres is needed to provide the continuation of fields suitable for production. Not only does contiguous farmland improve economic viability, it also provides environmental benefits and contributes to the preservation of the viewshed.
- Should a new agricultural zone be adopted, the developed areas in the villages of Union Grove, Lamington and Burnt Mills should remain as R-10 zones.

##### *Houses of Worship*

- Houses of worship have evolved from hosting religious services to full-time community centers featuring adult education, daycare and dining, to name just a few. Given the increased traffic and 24/7 applications, they are no longer appropriate to be located in residential neighborhoods. We need to consider moving the function from neighborhoods into the non-residential districts.
- Existing houses of worship would continue as pre-existing non-conforming uses. The villages all have houses of worship currently, including Bedminster, Pluckemin, Lamington, Pottersville, and Union Grove (Church of the Hills).

## *Revolving Rentals*

- Applications such as Airbnb have allowed homeowners to rent out their homes for short periods of time, typically measured in days or weeks as opposed to months or years.
- The use of a residence on a short term, pay-per-use basis to accommodate transient guests is similar to a boarding house, bed and breakfast, hotel or motel uses, all of which are currently prohibited by ordinance in residential zones.
- Given traffic and safety concerns, further analysis of how neighboring municipalities are addressing this issue is highly recommended.

## **Properties of Special Concern**

### *AT&T*

- This is the largest property in the existing OR zone. It was built by AT&T in 1975 and later sold to MetLife; the building is currently leased back to AT&T and is fully occupied.
- While AT&T has significantly updated and modernized the complex over the past decade as part of its WorkPlace 2020 initiative, its lease expires in 2023. AT&T, once headquartered in New York and New Jersey, is now a Texas operating company with significant assets in California (DirecTV) and potentially New York, pending the completion of the Time Warner acquisition. There is no guarantee AT&T will remain in Bedminster post 2023, nor is there yet any indication they are planning to leave.
- The ability to attract a single corporate tenant large enough to occupy the approximately 1.1M square feet of office space encompassed in the four interconnected buildings that make up the complex would likely be very challenging. Multi-tenant occupancy would be possible.
- The building being vacant would collapse the appraised value of Bedminster's largest taxpayer, and create a significant increase in the tax burden on residential properties. AT&T currently represents 26.7% of the total commercial ratables, and 5.3% of the entire tax base.
- This property is in the OR zone and is conforming.

### *Advance Realty*

- Designed in the late 90's as a multi-tenant facility, the owners of this property have indicated the rents for the property have dropped to the point where maintaining the property as quality office space may be in jeopardy. However, as of May 2017, the three buildings comprising the site are 92% occupied.
- If the property is reduced to lower quality space, it will lower the appraised value and create an increase in the tax burden on residential properties.
- This property is in the OR zone and is conforming.

### *Lamington Road (north side east of 206)*

- This is a 5.2 acre tract of residential buildings and outbuildings that have been abandoned since the death of the original landowner approximately ten years ago.
- It was most recently the subject of a Land Use Board application in 2017 seeking the construction of 35 luxury condominiums on the site. This application has since been withdrawn, and another developer is currently assessing the property.
- Balanced reuse of this property could help our rate base, pending the nature of the residential component.
- The property is located in the Bedminster Village historic district and is in the VN Zone.

### *Purnell School*

- The school is an adaptive reuse of a former residential estate, with the addition of some education specific buildings.
- Due to changes in demographics, this type of facility is having trouble attracting students and is suffering financially.
- The property is a collection of various sized and aged buildings that would make adaptive use problematic at best, given the constraints, former reuse, and layout.
- Reuse of this property is additionally complicated by being in the Highlands Preservation area.
- If the school were to close, it would place a very large tract of land (approximately 80 acres) on the market.
- If adapted to a new use, it would probably require considerable reconstruction, which could benefit the municipality if the new use returned the property to the tax rolls.
- This property is in the R10 zone.

### *Willow School*

- The conditions here are similar to the Purnell School, with the exception that this was a purpose built education facility with minimum reuse of existing structures.
- Like Purnell, it is also in the Highlands Preservation area.
- The development on the site is very high quality, environmentally friendly and recent.
- This property covers approximately 35 acres and is located in the R10 zone.

## Options for Properties of Special Concern

There is an argument to be made that market forces will dictate the best use of these properties, and rather than encouraging development through anticipatory rezoning (i.e., if you rezone they will come), applications should be evaluated on an individual case basis as they appear before the zoning board.

The disadvantage of this approach is that an applicant can appeal a zoning board denial, in which case the state's judicial system is empowered to make municipal zoning decisions. These appeals can be granted in cases where the court feels the application represents an inherently beneficial use or that extreme or undue economic hardship exists and cannot be otherwise remediated. A prime example of this is The Hills development, where the developer's plan was implemented without municipal input. As a result, there are no sidewalks or parks, and the public school is not located in the neighborhood.

The AT&T property is of greatest concern, and whether the company opts to renew its lease will likely not be known until 2022. This does however provide sufficient time to evaluate options and seek public input. The required analysis could be supported through a planning grant, e.g., through the Somerset County Priority Growth Investment Areas initiative or the Highlands Council.

Other than maintaining the status quo, a number of other options exist, including:

- Create a New Zone for Non-Residential Areas: Given the demographic and workplace trends cited earlier, the OR Zone may not be sustainable as it currently exists. Another option is to create a new commercial zone providing more flexibility – AR-1, for Adaptive Reuse. This AR-1 zone could incorporate one or more of the following concepts:
  - A form-based formula for re-development that would allow the marketplace to determine the actual uses, subject to limitations in scale and scope. This would allow a site to continually evolve to meet market demands, rather than officials trying to predict optimal utilization. Site uses could encompass office, residential and retail components, each of which could be weighted individually and/or collectively scored against a maximum total. This formula would need to be crafted carefully and take into consideration the impact to surrounding properties and the area as a whole.
  - A “tract” approach to land management, with the option (at the sole discretion of the Land Use Board) that adjoining lots under the same ownership be merged within the tract. The intention of a tract is to enable contiguous parcels of land to be under the control of a larger, more sophisticated organization, so as to insure a coordinated site design with cohesive uses. Maintaining or dividing into smaller lots creates diverse ownership and oftentimes results in incompatible development. Tract owners could use land leases to bring in independent developers for specialty uses, e.g., assisted living.
  - An intra-municipal Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program that would both assist preservation efforts in the agricultural areas and provide limited relief from our stringent coverage and floor area ratios (FAR) in select commercial zones. While coverage and FAR values could be moderated in the ordinance, a TDR program would balance increased density by requiring purchase of easements on farmland or outright purchase of open land in exchange. Since the open space tax can now be used for land maintenance in addition to land acquisition, there may be reduced resources for the

purchase of open space and farmland easements in the future. Any TDR would need to be tempered with a ratio of coverage to preserved farmland, and a maximum allowable transfer amount determined by study. As an example, the existing FAR in certain commercial zones could be increased from 12% to 16%, comparable to neighboring municipalities. This represents a trade-off of intensity vs. rural protection, and would have to be carefully considered by the Planning Board and public alike.

- Create a New Zone for Residential Areas: In light of the economic issues facing both of the aforementioned private schools, a second Adaptive Reuse zone, AR-2, could be implemented for residential areas, especially in the Highlands Preservation Area (HPA). Similar to AR-1, AR-2 could implement a form-based formula for re-development. The impact of development in the HPA would be constrained by the Highlands Act rules, which limit development far more than our ordinances. Tract based land management could also be utilized to optimize site redevelopment, as warranted.

## **Other Land Management Issues**

While not Master Plan issues, a number of land management issues have been identified that may necessitate changes to our existing ordinances. These include:

- Adopting the Highlands Master Plan: There is an argument to be made for adopting the Highlands Master Plan, and the Planning Board should seriously consider the advantages and disadvantages of same.

Bedminster is entirely within the Highlands Region, with most of the township in the planning area. Conforming Highlands municipalities are eligible for grant funding to support the reasonable expenses associated with planning activities related to plan conformance. Each conforming municipality is assigned a Highlands Council staff liaison, and also benefits from the planning, science, and GIS expertise of the entire Highlands Council staff. Planning grants and technical assistance are available in the areas of water use and conservation management, wastewater management, sustainable economic development, agritourism, ecotourism, and more.

Municipalities and counties that align local plans and regulations with the Highlands Regional Master Plan are eligible for certain benefits under the Highland Act, including:

- State Aid and Assistance for Smart Growth: Any municipality or county approved for Highlands Plan Conformance qualifies for all state aid, planning assistance, technical assistance, and other benefits and incentives provided by the state to municipalities and counties that have received plan endorsement from the State Planning Commission or that otherwise practice or implement smart growth strategies and principles.
- State Plan Endorsement: Any municipal master plan and development regulations approved by the Highlands Council are deemed the equivalent of having those plans endorsed by the State Planning Commission and receive all the same benefits, including legal protections.



Bedminster's Plan Conformance Petition for preservation area lands was approved by the Highlands Council in 2011. However, the bulk of the township (94%) is in the planning area, which is not currently covered by the Highlands Master Plan, as shown in Appendix B.

The Township has completed all required basic Plan Conformance components, including the Highlands Environmental Resource Inventory (ERI), Highlands Preservation Area Master Plan Element, Highlands Referral Ordinance and Highlands Area Exemption Ordinance. Bedminster is currently working on Plan Conformance Modules 2, 3, and 7, which include Build-Out Analysis & Report Update, Housing Element & Fair Share Plan (recently resolved) and Implementation Planning Schedule Update. Funding remains available for follow-up Plan Conformance implementation items, including Agricultural Retention/Farmland Preservation Planning, Sustainable Economic Development Planning, Habitat Conservation and Management Planning, Stream Corridor Protection/Restoration Planning and Stormwater Management Planning.

- Office Parking: Parking for office uses should be reconsidered in light of the changes in building utilization. Office space is far denser now than when our parking standard was adopted. Whereas 250 square feet per person was the norm 20-30 years ago, 125-150 square feet is more common today, necessitating increased parking space requirements. While long term changes in transportation (as highlighted in our Circulation Plan comments) will temper these needs, the problem is likely to get worse before it get better.
- Medical Parking: Parking requirements for medical facilities should be increased due to changes in health care delivery. Actual face time with providers is shrinking, increasing patient turnover and waiting room loads. Many freestanding medical facilities, while conforming, have parking areas that are dangerously undersized.
- Religious Parking: Parking requirements for houses of worship should be increased. The growth in religious diversity has led to a decrease in the average number of attendees per vehicle (in some cases, just one individual per vehicle), creating increased demand for parking.
- Unconstructed Parking: There should be a formal process to cause the construction of parking spaces that were left as "reserved/future." Placing bonds or other security could be required for unconstructed parking that remains available, so that subsequent owners may be able to provide expanded parking.
- Driveway Access for Emergency Vehicles: Many of the private residences on the west side of town have narrow driveways with limited access for emergency vehicles. In addition, common driveway standards, including regulations for turnouts and pull offs, are sorely needed. Bernardsville and Tewksbury both have ordinances that could be used as a model for our own.
- Emergency Water Supply Access: In areas of the town unserved by fire hydrants, water tanks are located on private properties to provide an emergency source of water for firefighters. Oftentimes, these are neither maintained to allow access nor properly marked. Design, maintenance and inspection requirements could be incorporated into a municipal ordinance similar to what has been done in Bernardsville.

- **Hills Maintenance:** In The Hills, it is the responsibility of the neighborhood associations to maintain their thoroughfares, remove overgrowth and insure unfettered access to hydrants. As the developments age, we are seeing more instances of landscaping interfering with road and building access (e.g., trees preventing ladder deployment) and hydrants becoming inaccessible (e.g., not marked and/or covered in snow). In addition, recent improvements by some of the associations (e.g., deck replacement) have left large numbers of condos without posted street numbers, potentially hampering police and fire response.

### **PART 3 – Conservation Plan**

Deer damage to our forests has been identified as an ongoing and cumulative threat to the ecosystem. An average of 10-15 deer can be supported per square mile, whereas between 50 and 60 deer per square mile are estimated to exist in certain areas of town. Without a comprehensive deer management plan, this situation will only worsen, threatening the very existence of the forests and the species that inhabit them. The New Jersey Conservation Foundation has been at the forefront of this issue, most recently highlighting the work of Dr. Jay Kelly of Raritan Valley Community College (summary [here](#) and attached as Appendix D). While outside the purview of the Master Plan review, we recommend that a subcommittee of the Land Use Board and/or Environmental Commission update the existing plan and recommend actions for remediation.

### **PART 4 – Recreation and Open Space**

Bedminster's inventory of recreational facilities is currently well suited to our needs. We have witnessed a shift in the use of recreational fields, most notably away from baseball and toward soccer and lacrosse, and have adjusted accordingly. With respect to the construction of new facilities, tennis courts and a skate park were suggested, but in the case of the latter, the prior facility at Pluckemin School Park proved to a maintenance and insurance liability, and was removed. No request for further space acquisition for active recreation was identified; maintenance of existing facilities remains a top priority.

An update to the Open Space section of the Master Plan is currently underway to insure compliance with Somerset County. The need for contiguous preserved farmland is core to this plan and should help set funding priorities.

### **PART 5 – Circulation Plan**

We are rapidly approaching what may be the biggest change in personal transportation since the invention of the automobile, the impacts of which will be felt over the next decade. These include:

#### *Vehicles*

- Electric cars are moving from early market adoption to mass market availability, driven in large part by Tesla (the Apple of the automobile industry). While they are unlikely to fully supplant gasoline powered engines until 2045 at the earliest, electric cars will likely see exponential growth as efficiency (battery life) improves, charging station become more widely available,

and prices drop.

- Coupled with the emergence of electric vehicles will be the widespread availability of self-driving vehicles. Leveraging cloud based-intelligence, these vehicles have already amassed multiple millions of miles of driving experience, far surpassing what any of us will realize in a lifetime. They will likely come fully online in only a few years' time, prompted by the maturation of the technology and insurance incentives.
- As self-driving vehicles become more common, Mobility as a Service (MAAS) will further displace the need for vehicle ownership. Already, services like Uber have impacted vehicle sales and car rentals, as city dwellers and business travelers alike see less of a need for a dedicated vehicle. By removing the single largest cost and the biggest detraction, the driver<sup>3</sup>, from the vehicle, these services will proliferate. This will expand transportation options for large segments of society, including those unable to afford a car and others who no longer wish to drive or cannot safely operate a vehicle. In addition, commuting will likely change, as the option to summon a vehicle from one's smartphone is an app and a click away. Owning a car may someday become like owning a plane – an exception pursued for recreation and limited transportation by a select few.
- As MAAS proliferates, landlords and companies will likely seize upon the opportunity to reduce expenses by allocating less dedicated parking space per occupant. By offering options that encourage MAAS utilization and discourage parking (e.g., through payroll incentives or parking fees), both commuting behavior and car ownership will be further impacted. In commercial buildings, we may see a short term peak in parking needs as less office space is allocated per employee, followed by a long term downturn as MAAS becomes prevalent. Likewise, apartment complexes may be able to ultimately dedicate less parking per unit as vehicle ownership declines.
- Electric and self-driving vehicles will need dedicated space to be recharged. This may be done on-premises (home or office), or in the case of MAAS, in a centralized depot, with locations determined by demand and optimal distribution algorithms (much as Amazon does fulfillment today). These vehicles would remain in the depot until called into service, necessitating careful management of inventory and storage. The Planning Board may want to consider passing an ordinance in the near future in anticipation of this developing industry and the need for vehicle depots.
- As time moves on, improvements in air quality and a reduction in noise pollution will likely be realized. Notwithstanding that, there will remain an environmental impact, as electric generating stations and distribution infrastructure will see increased demand.
- As the adoption of self-driving vehicles and MAAS increases, safety should improve as human fallibility is reduced or removed. Roadway capacity may also improve – increased demand for point-to-point transportation may be offset by fewer vehicles occupying the road, but this remains to be seen.

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<sup>3</sup> As the joke now goes: 1998 – Don't talk to strangers over the Internet. Don't get into a stranger's car. 2018 – Literally summon a stranger over the Internet and get into their car.

### *Internal Roadways*

- Based on our current population and limited/no growth, our local and county roads are not subject to volume delays except where they intersect the state roadways.

### *State Roads*

- The state roads, namely I-287, I-78, Rt. 202 and Rt. 206, are problematic during all peak periods. I-78 has the most accidents per year in total, while Rt. 206 between mile markers 78.9 and 79 (Lamington Rd) has the most accidents per year on a normalized basis.
- Most of the traffic congestion is driven by thru traffic that is south and east bound in the morning and north and west bound in the evening. Traffic is predicted to increase along this corridor approximately 1.5% per annum. Any traffic analysis needs to account for volumes and delays proximate to Bedminster, including bypass traffic as a result of accidents on either interstate highway (averaging approximately one per week) and traffic counts from Peapack/Gladstone through Bridgewater.
- The elimination of the project to construct new entrances to 78/287 south of Pluckemin has condemned 206 in the area of the Hills and Pluckemin to all the thru traffic destined for Bridgewater. The current construction at the 78/287 interchange probably removes the opportunity for improvement for at least a generation.
- While a Pluckemin bypass had been discussed for years, and most recently when the DOT was considering options for its maintenance property on 206, the DOT's decision not to pursue relocation has effectively eliminated any plans for a bypass. However, a traffic study prepared by Bedminster's traffic consultant at the time included suggestions to improve the throughput of the 206/Washington Valley Rd/Burnt Mills intersection. These could be revisited and updated to alleviate some of the traffic burden on Pluckemin.
- The only relief for Rt. 206 would be the completion of the planned Route 24 to Route 206 highway connection, but this is unlikely to be pursued in the near term.

## **PART 6 – Community Facilities Plan**

The demand for facilities is primarily driven by population. Driven by the development of The Hills, Bedminster went through an explosive growth period in the 80's and 90's, rising from a population of 2,469 in 1980 to 8,165 in 2010. This rapid growth placed a significant strain on public facilities, which were improved commensurate with the growth. Bedminster's population has since entered a relatively steady state, with an estimated population of 8,234 as of 2016. The following are worth noting:

- The municipal building was constructed since the last master plan was issued, and was sized to be able to service the fully “built-out” population that was then projected at approximately 12,000.
- The fire house for the Far Hills-Bedminster Fire Department was also constructed after the last master plan was issued, and also sized for the “built-out” population.

- Bedminster School was opened in 1993, and was expanded around the turn of the century. It was sized for the anticipated school age population through build-out. The consolidation of school districts in Somerset Hills was attempted around the turn of the century, but failed at the ballot. As the cost of education continues to steadily increase, and the formula used by the Somerset Hills School District for high school students becomes more burdensome, the regionalization question will most likely be asked again. In our discussions with the Board of Education, the question of additional facilities was not on their list of needs.
- The Bedminster Far-Hills Rescue Squad is located in a dedicated building on Route 202 near the Far Hills border. The building is close to the north branch of the Lamington River, and the rear of the property is subject to periodic flooding. This property was last reviewed in the 2013 Emergency Response Study, and no changes were recommended at that time, nor do we recommend any changes at present.
- The Department of Public Works was constructed after The Hills development and was enlarged by taking over the adjoining former firehouse. This function is driven by the population and road miles, neither of which are changing.
- The Police/Court facility was completed after the Hills development and is adequate for the present time. The building was inexpensively built and does require extra maintenance. The space limitation that currently exists is as a result of the combined courts, which is being addressed through the conversion of the main meeting room in the municipal building to a dual court/meeting room.

In conclusion, it appears that no additional municipal facilities are required within the scope of the next master plan cycle.

## **PART 7 – Water and Sewer Utilities Services Plan**

As a matter of policy, the Sewer Advisory Committee is not in favor of any general expansion of the existing service area, except in certain circumstances and on a case-by-case basis. Additional feasibility studies, in addition to the one previously performed by the township engineer, should be contemplated to examine less costly alternatives to providing service in areas where septic failures are common. This should be limited to established neighborhoods which are adjacent to, or in close proximity of, the existing service area, or that are nearby to existing sewer infrastructure.

It can be articulated that any decision to expand the service area as described above is completely at the discretion of the planning and governing bodies, and will not constitute any change in policy as to the limitations previously set forth in the Master Plan on the desired boundaries of the service area.

## **PART 8 – Historic Preservation Plan**

Any updates to the Master Plan regarding historic preservation would need to conform to federal, state and municipal requirements. Protection of valuable historic resources, including (but not limited to), Bedminster's role in the American Revolution, properties, homes, cemeteries and makers, is an integral component that should be considered when evaluating land use proposals and municipal ordinances. In addition, historic architecture in Bedminster's four historic districts should be protected, and any redevelopment in these districts should preserve this legacy by insuring compliance to relevant architectural standards.

## **PART 9- Housing Plan**

As of March of 2018, Bedminster's settlement agreement with the Fair Share Housing Center has been approved, which should satisfy the township's affordable housing obligations through at least 2025, and possibly beyond. No additional action on the housing plan appears to be required at this time.

## **PART 10 – Recycling Plan**

As this function is primarily handled by the county, no updates are required at this time.

## **PART 11 – Farmland Preservation**

The state, county and town have all made substantial investments in farmland preservation. As part of these agreements, property owners have surrendered their development potential. If the underlying agricultural economy does not succeed, there will be considerable pushback, and the likelihood of additional farmland preservation will be in jeopardy. There are a number of things that must be addressed in order to encourage the growth of Bedminster's agricultural economy, as follows:

- Increase minimum lot sizes in the agricultural areas. Having contiguous farmland and larger plots not only improves land productivity, but also increases efficiency, as much of farming is now done by contractors,. The minimum lot size should be 25 acres, and in certain instances 40 acres may be warranted.
- The amount of preserved farmland must be increased in order to provide and maintain a level of farming that can sustain ancillary farm support services, including farriers, large animal veterinarians, contract farmers, farm materials and equipment suppliers. In addition, measures need to be taken to insure the safety of farm equipment on local and county roads.
- A "farm store" ordinance was passed a number of years ago, but to date no one has taken advantage of the opportunity. It deserves study by the Agricultural Committee to see if it meets today's needs.
- Today, the largest agricultural use in Bedminster is equine. This includes horse farms, pasturing and hay production. One of the best ways to stimulate growth in this sector is to encourage equestrian events. Fortunately, there has been an increase in the number of events of late, and

this trend should be reinforced. Event control ordinances, police involvement, permit requirements, etc., should be kept as simple as possible to insure the safety of the public. Most of these events are operated by non-profits, and can be economically fragile.

- A growing trend is “farm to table” dining. Three Meadows Farms in Bedminster, operated by the Somerset Hills Learning Institute, has partnered with local restaurants to deliver this capability. Successful implementation requires a combination of farm production, distribution channels (e.g., farmer’s markets), restaurants and education.
- A setback to preservation was suffered with the elimination of the limit on the use of Open Space tax revenues for maintenance and development purposes. Creation of a Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) program as discussed in other portions of this document could help address this issue.
- The Chair of the NJ State Agriculture Development Committee (SADC), at a recent Somerset County Planning Board public meeting, indicated that farmers suffer deer damage to crops on the order of 25%. This is another reason to pursue an aggressive deer management program.

## **Final Thoughts**

Public input into this process is key as the Land Use Board evaluates the recommendations in this document and weighs the alternatives. Optimizing to any one variable (e.g., ratables) can unbalance an equation which also includes quality of life, open space and environmental considerations. Conversely, ignoring the health of our business sector could place an undue tax burden on our residents over the long term. Without the public’s involvement upfront, there is no way to gauge the right balance and any identify potential tipping points.

Over the course of the last year, we have witnessed neighboring municipalities make the mistake of springing plans and proposals on their constituents at the last moment, only to have them hastily withdrawn after swift public outcry. Let us not make the same mistake here. In addition to public meetings and open forums, there are a plethora of tools and capabilities available to insure continuous public input and feedback. Online surveys, social media and website polling are just a few of the tools available to insure the public is a key stakeholder throughout the process.



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## Appendix B Highlands Summary

Highlands Municipalities

Release Date: January, 2017

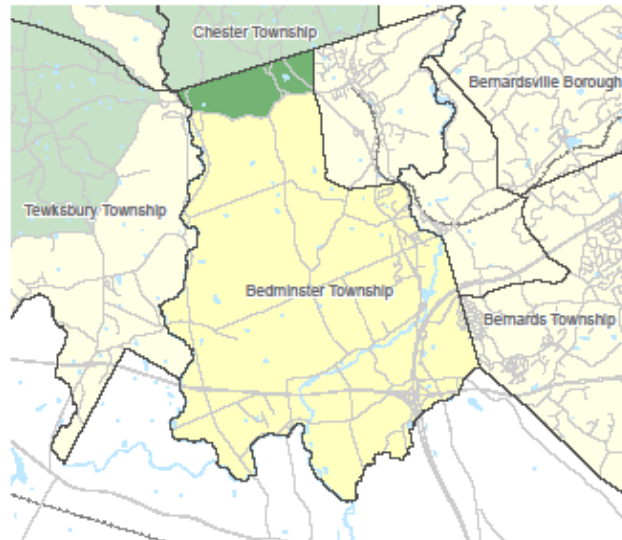
### Bedminster Township, Somerset County

Plan Conformance Status	<input type="checkbox"/> Planning Area
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Preservation Area

	Acres	%
Planning Area	15,866	94%
Preservation Area	1,009	6%
Municipal Boundaries		

<b>PRESERVED ACREAGE</b> (NJ Highlands Council, 2016)	Acres	%
Total	4,226	25%
Muni. preserved acreage per capita	0.51	-
County preserved acreage per capita*	0.19	-

<b>LAND USE CAPABILITY ZONES</b> (NJ Highlands Council, 2016)	Acres	%
Protection Zone	3,040	19%
Wildlife Management Area	0	0%
Conservation Zone	2,781	17%
Conservation Zone Environmentally Constrained Subzone	8,986	56%
Existing Community Zone	1,103	7%
Existing Community Zone Environmentally Constrained Subzone	159	1%
Lake Community Subzone	0	0%



View Interactive map online at [www.nj.gov/njhighlands/gis/](http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/gis/)

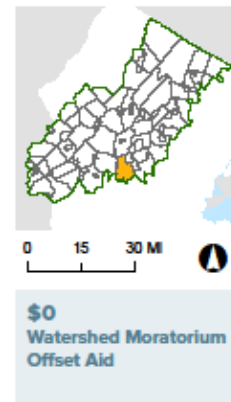
<b>LAND USE LAND COVER</b> (NJ DEP, 2012)	Municipality	County*	Highlands Region
Agricultural	34.5%	17.1%	11.9%
Forest	36.6%	34.8%	45.6%
Developed	21.3%	37.3%	27.5%
Water	1.3%	1.2%	4.0%
Other	6.4%	9.7%	10.9%

LAND DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITY		Municipality		County*		Highlands Region	
Land sales (NJ MCO-N, 2013)		Plan.	Pres.	Plan.	Pres.	Plan.	Pres.
Single Family	Number	160	0	458	0	4,526	1,209
Home Sales	Average value	\$307 K	-	\$523 K	-	\$315 K	\$252 K
Improved Commercial	Number	1	0	4	0	114	13
Property Sales	Average value	\$1	-	\$181 K	-	\$991 K	\$684 K
Vacant Land Sales	Number	3	0	23	0	224	139
>0.15 acres	Average value per acre	\$68 K	-	\$168 K	-	\$78 K	\$20 K
Vacant Land Sales	Number	0	0	2	0	21	28
>5 acres	Average value per acre	-	-	\$61 K	-	\$24 K	\$7 K
Certificates of Occupancy Issued (NJ DCA, 2013-2014)		4	0	168	0	1,693	763

<b>DEMOGRAPHICS</b>	Municipality	County	Highlands Region	Municipality Change
Population (U.S. Census ACS, 2010-2014)	8,221	328,704	822,166	+56
Total Employment (U.S. Census LEHD, 2010-2014)	9,877	186,149	357,337	+556
Average Household Size (U.S. Census ACS, 2010-2014)	2.03	2.79	2.67	Increase
Median Household Income (U.S. Census ACS, 2009-2013)	\$92,500	\$99,020	\$96,340 (Muni. Avg.)	Decrease
Median Age (U.S. Census ACS, 2010-2014)	47.3	40.4	42.3	Increase
K-8 School Enrollment (District Average) (NJ DOE, 2010-2016)	495 (District)	1,972 (District Avg.)	1,020 (District Avg.)	-72

<b>PROPERTY TAXES</b> (NJ DCA, 2010-2014)	Municipality	County	Highlands Region	Municipality Annual Change
Taxes Collected Per Capita	\$925	\$717	\$856	+3%
Total Municipal Equalized Value	\$2.47 B	\$57.82 B	\$129.82 B	-2%
Average Tax Rate	0.32	0.56	0.65	+3%

\*Denotes that this value only includes the area or population of the county within the Highlands Region boundary. All other values are for the full county.  
More about Plan Conformance Status at [www.nj.gov/njhighlands/plancconformance/bedminster.html](http://www.nj.gov/njhighlands/plancconformance/bedminster.html)



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## Appendix C Individual Committee & Department Comments

### *Board of Education*



BOE Master Plan  
Comments.pdf

### *Environmental Commission*



EC Input - Rapid  
Forest Health Assessn

### *First Aid Squad*



First Aid Squad  
Input.pdf

### *Historic Preservation Commission*



HPC Master Plan  
Section 8 Comments f

### *Police Department*



PD Points for Master  
Plan Review 2017.pdf



PD Master Plan  
Pages.pdf



PD Resolution  
2015-039.pdf

### *Sewer Advisory Committee*



Sewer Advisory  
Committee Input.pdf

### *Tax Assessor*



Tax Assessor  
Report.pdf

## Appendix D NJCF – Forest Ecology



### THE STATE WE'RE IN

*by Michele S. Byers*  
Executive Director

## Without its 'understory' layer, the forest will collapse

Forrest Gump claimed life is like a box of chocolates; we think a healthy forest is like a layer cake.

At the bottom of the cake is the "understory" layer, with seedlings, saplings, woody shrubs and other plants. Next up is the "mid-story," with taller young trees and larger shrubs. The "canopy," with the oldest, largest trees is the top layer of the cake!

What happens to a cake if the lower layer is pulled out? It collapses. And, ecologically, that's what could happen to forests in central New Jersey.

According to Dr. Jay Kelly, a biology professor at Raritan Valley Community College who is studying forest health, **many forests are in trouble because their lower understory layers are disappearing.** "They're being decimated by deer and invasive plants," he explains. Kelly assesses forest health by comparing current conditions to those of 50 to 70 years ago.





*Photos from Dr. Jay Kelly's study: Left, healthy forest with dense understory and native plant species. Middle, overbrowsed forest. Right, overbrowsed forest with invasive barberry shrubs.*

The study uses a **"treasure trove of data"** collected by former Rutgers professor **Murray Buell from 1948 to 1972**. Buell studied forests at 13 sites in four central New Jersey counties, including the Watchung Reservation, Jockey Hollow, Hacklebarney State Park, Voorhees State Park, Duke Island Park, Johnson Park, Mettlars Woods, Cushetunk Mountain, Musconetcong Mountain and Herrontown Woods.

"Those studies were conducted prior to the deer population explosion," Kelly said, noting that white-tailed deer essentially vanished from New Jersey prior to 1948 and didn't rebound until decades later.

Kelly and his students surveyed these same forests ... and the differences today are astounding!

While Buell counted **an average of 10 deer per square mile in central New Jersey forests, the number today is closer to 70 deer per square mile!** "We found deer numbers over 300 per square mile in some places," Kelly said. "It's been catastrophic for the understory plants."

The number of medium and large trees has decreased only slightly since Buell's time, but saplings have plummeted by 85 percent and small trees by 90 percent. "If this trend continues, **we're actually going to be losing forest as the older trees die, because there are no new trees to replace them,**" Kelly said.

When native saplings and plants are eaten by deer, they often don't grow back. Instead, invasive plants spring up in their place. These invasives aren't appealing to deer, or to native insects and birds. "Our forests are actually more invasive than native at this point," laments Kelly.



Why is it important to keep native plants in our forests? Without them, the forest loses its rich diversity and resiliency to droughts and floods. A healthy, biodiverse forest also helps break down dead plants and recycles them into soil that further promotes a healthy understory for more native plants.

### **What can be done?**

Kelly evaluated ways to control deer and keep New Jersey's forest understory healthy. Deer fences are expensive, he said, but effective. When deer are kept out, native plants regenerate and out-compete invasive plants. This is good news not just for the understory, but for the entire forest.

Controlling deer populations through contraceptives is still experimental and is expensive and not very effective. Allowing recreational hunting in public forests is not highly effective. Culling deer with trained sharpshooters is effective, but costly and controversial.

It's clear to Kelly that some combination of these deer control measures is needed. **If the number of deer per square mile isn't reduced, he said, thousands of forest plants and animals will not survive.**

Kelly said that humans also benefit from fewer deer. Towns with reduced deer populations have fewer deer-automobile collisions and lower rates of tick-borne illnesses like Lyme disease.

On March 2, Dr. Kelly will speak about forest ecology at the **NJ Land Conservation Rally in New Brunswick**, along with Dr. Emile DeVito of NJ Conservation Foundation and Eric Karlin, a professor of plant ecology at Ramapo College. He will also address municipal leaders on March 29, along with Michael Van Clef of the NJ Invasive Species Strike Team, at a program sponsored by Raritan Headwaters.

To see a copy of Kelly's presentation, go to [http://raritan.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Kelly\\_Assessing-Forest-Health-in-Central-New-Jersey\\_June-2017.pdf](http://raritan.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Kelly_Assessing-Forest-Health-in-Central-New-Jersey_June-2017.pdf).

And to learn more about preserving New Jersey's land and natural resources, visit the New Jersey Conservation Foundation website at [www.njconservation.org](http://www.njconservation.org) or contact me at [info@njconservation.org](mailto:info@njconservation.org).