

Township of West Orange – 2010 Master Plan Update

Master Plan Reexamination Fact Sheet

Master Plans and Zoning in General

A master plan is a document that guides the growth, redevelopment and enhancement of a community. A master plan is comprised of text, maps, and figures. It represents a community's vision for what type of place it will be ten or twenty years from now.

Although the exact form of a master plan may vary, it usually includes three general components: (1) what a community is; (2) what it wants to be; and (3) how it will become what it wants to be. The first component provides a factual basis for the rest of the plan by documenting existing conditions through population, employment, and housing data; maps; and other relevant information. The second component includes a series of goals and objectives, with specific plan elements covering topics such as land use, transportation and economic development that elaborate upon the goals and objectives. The third component is an implementation strategy.

This final component is particularly important, as a master plan is a policy document, not a legal tool. Instead, it is the basis for zoning and other legal documents, and it guides public officials in making decisions regarding development and capital improvements. A master plan is most effective when it does not just sit on a shelf, but is referred to on a regular basis by citizens and government.

New Jersey Statutory Requirements

Planning and zoning in New Jersey is regulated by the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) at N.J.S.A. 40:55D. According to the MLUL, a municipality may not enact zoning regulations unless it has prepared a master plan. The zoning ordinance also must be generally consistent with the master plan. The mandatory and optional elements of a municipal master plan are listed at N.J.S.A. 40:55D-28, and include 1) Statement of objectives, principles, assumptions, policies and standards, 2) a land use plan element and 3) discussion of the plan's relationship to the master plans of contiguous municipalities, the county master plan, the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, and the county solid waste management plan. A housing plan element also is required if a municipal zoning ordinance is to be adopted. Other optional plan elements include topics such as circulation, community facilities, and historic preservation.

Master Plans are required to be periodically updated. The MLUL at N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89 mandates that the municipal planning board adopt a general reexamination of the master plan and development regulations at least every six years. There are five elements which the reexamination report must include:

- 1) A section outlining the major problems and objectives relating to land development in the municipality at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.

- 2) A section describing the extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to that date.
- 3) A section discussing the extent to which there have been significant changes in the 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, energy conservation, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in state, county and municipal policies and objectives.
- 4) A section setting forth the recommended changes to the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.
- 5) A section setting forth the 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 municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

A master plan is adopted by the municipal planning board. Municipal staff or consultants generally assist the board, as a master plan must be prepared by a New Jersey licensed professional planner.

West Orange Background

The Township of West Orange benefits from many assets, including its location, diverse population, employment base and accessibility. It has also benefitted for some time from forward-looking planning efforts, which have shaped the Township and improved quality of life for residents. From early undertakings such as Llewellyn Park, one of the nation's first planned residential communities, to more recent redevelopment projects, West Orange has been proactive in guiding its future. The Township has grown from a population of fewer than 7,000 in 1900 to nearly 45,000 in 2000, yet has maintained a balance of land uses and open spaces. While West Orange has grown in population, its neighborhoods and business centers have retained their own unique characters within the context of a larger municipality.

However, there are also issues facing West Orange. The Planning Board recognizes the challenges that have emerged as a result of development pressures, and seeks to protect the established character of residential and commercial areas. At the same time, a need for creative reuse, infill and redevelopment is recognized by local leadership, and the Township would like to leverage opportunities to incorporate smart growth, energy efficiency, environmentally friendly practices, low-impact development policies and other sustainability measures in its planning. In addition, inconsistencies between land use classifications, zoning designations and actual land uses should be examined to determine whether changes to the Township's zoning map are needed. There are also many changes that have occurred since 2004, when the most recent reexamination of the West Orange Master Plan was adopted.

West Orange Master Plan Reexamination

The West Orange Planning Board will be adding to the Township's legacy of planning through the preparation of a Master Plan Reexamination. This document will be drafted through a process that involves extensive review of existing conditions and incorporates the community's vision for West Orange. The Reexamination will include broad goals and policy recommendations. It will include all of the required components of a master plan reexamination, as well as updates to existing plan elements for the following topics:

- Land Use
- Economic Development
- Historic Preservation
- Community Facilities, Utilities and Recycling
- Circulation
- Housing

A new sustainability plan element will be prepared that integrates recommendations from various aspects of the reexamination and plan updates. This process also is being coordinated with the preparation of an updated Open Space and Recreation Plan for the Township by the West Orange Open Space Committee, which will be incorporated into the Master Plan.

A Master Plan Reexamination Committee is guiding the preparation of the Master Plan Reexamination and other updates. This committee includes representatives of the Township Council, the West Orange Planning Board and the Township's directors of Planning and Engineering. The planning process will incorporate the input of the Township's residents and business community, through public meetings as well as other outreach efforts. The West Orange Planning Board has retained Phillips Preiss Shapiro Associates, Inc. (PPSA) to assist with the preparation of the master plan. PPSA is a planning and real estate consulting firm with extensive experience preparing master plans and master plan reexaminations for municipalities throughout New Jersey and other states. The firm also has expertise in areas such as zoning, economic development, and downtown revitalization. PPSA will be assisted by Langan Engineering & Environmental Services, which provides specialized expertise in sustainability planning.

What Do You Think?

As part of the process of preparing the Master Plan Reexamination and plan element updates, Township staff and consultants conducted interviews with dozens of representatives of Township of West Orange and Essex County departments and other stakeholders. The purpose of these meetings was to obtain background information on topics that will be included in the Master Plan Update. A number of suggestions were also made during the course of these interviews. A sampling of these is listed below, organized by topic area. It should be emphasized that the items listed below represent suggestions and input from stakeholders, and will not necessarily be included as recommendations in the actual plan.

Land Use/Zoning

- A comprehensive review of the **Zoning Ordinance** should be undertaken
- Need to find a way to rein in “**McMansions**” – incorporate best practices from elsewhere
- Residential **deck applications** should continue to go before the Board of Adjustment to be reviewed
- Need standards for **environmental impact statements**: in what instances should they be required? What does applicant need to provide to the board? Whose burden is it to raise environmental issues?

Economic Development

- Continue to fight the perception of West Orange as a “bedroom community”
- Provide additional shopping and services for residents in West Orange, help **balance land use mix**
- Need more **commercial uses** that contributes to tax base – possible ones to encourage: medical office, retail, restaurants, car washes (none today west of Main Street), indoor recreation
- Promote appropriate development on **Northfield Avenue** in the vicinity of Turtleback Zoo that complements the zoo as well as events and sports practices at Codey Arena

Sustainability/Environmental

- **Solar**: encourage on residential properties
- Can solar grids be put on public property/parks?
- **Wind turbines** should be encouraged where feasible
- All **municipal buildings** should be green – however, can be difficult due to age of some existing buildings
- **Municipal vehicles** (and school district) are an area that could be improved
- Some vehicles already use biodiesel fuel – encourage additional use

Open Space/Recreation

- Create a Township indoor **recreation center** – possible sites could include JT’s on Pleasant Valley Way, the Armory, Essex Green or Crystal Lake
- **Crystal Lake** is a great resource, yet is underutilized
- Cherry Lane currently closed through **South Mountain Reservation** up to South Orange Avenue on Sunday mornings – how about closing it off further north up to Northfield Avenue?
- More **pocket parks** should be considered in built up areas
- How about creating a **skate park**?

Circulation

- **Parking** is a major issue throughout the entire downtown area, including both Main Street and the Valley
- One-way streets in could help:
 - In Watchung Heights, has been suggested that Kling Street become one way eastbound, Columbia one way southbound and Liberty one way northbound
 - What about in the Valley or on Main Street?
- **Sidewalks** should be required in conjunction with new developments, even if there are no existing sidewalks

- What about adding an additional **commuter shuttle** route? Maybe for the south end of town that goes to Millburn station via Pleasant Valley Way/Cherry Lane?

Community Facilities

- Improve the **Municipal Complex Parking Lot** – perhaps include parking deck, with open space and/or solar panels on roof?
- Could make sense for Fire Department to be more centralized
- What about locating Fire Department at First Aid Squad building (formerly was a fire station)?
- Keeping library in current location or elsewhere **downtown** important – serves as an anchor that helps bring people to the area
- Want to continue to serve all aspects of very diverse community

Historic Preservation

- There are currently **no local historic districts** in West Orange, although some areas could qualify

Main Street/Valley

- **Aesthetics** a concern – while there are formal design guidelines for the downtown area in the Zoning Ordinance, there may be a need for stronger regulations
- At site level, improve facades and signage – balance aesthetics and safety concerns with being business friendly and First Amendment rights regarding signage
- **Parking** is big issue in the area
- For new development, should be centrally located to serve all attractions
- Promote additional **services** in the Valley – coffee shop, tea shop, bagel store, bakery?
- Support for **arts concept** in the Valley – redevelopment in area can be more “gritty” in the area due to arts theme

Do you agree with these ideas? Do you have any others? Is there anything in particular you would like the Planning Board to address in this document? The following page includes information on how to provide your thoughts.

Tentative Next Public Meeting Dates

Wednesday March 3, 2010

Wednesday June 2, 2010

Confirmed meeting dates and other project information will be available on the Master Plan update website, <http://westorange.webnode.com>. If you have any questions, contact the West Orange Department of Planning and Development at (973) 325-4110.

Township of West Orange – 2010 Master Plan Update Volunteer Tasks

We would like to get your ideas for what should be addressed in the Master Plan Update. Please feel free to attend and participate in public meetings. Other ways to get involved:

Identify and photograph:

- Important views and vistas
- Important buildings, spaces, or streets
- Building designs that should be protected or emulated
- Good new construction and rehabilitation
- Bad new construction and rehabilitation
- Other notable features

We want to know what you think makes West Orange a special place architecturally and physically, and what we can do to make it a more attractive place. Photograph only those features that interest you. Be sure to write on the back or include in the email message: (1) what the photograph represents from the above list, and (2) your name for proper credit if we use the photograph in the plan or other reports.

Identify and map:

- Problem areas in terms of pedestrian or vehicular safety
- Problem areas in terms of traffic
- Problem areas in terms of lighting
- Crime or drug activity “hot spots”
- Your favorite views and vistas
- Unattractive gateways
- Other places that influence your quality of life, and how

We want to understand better your quality of life issues. Feel free to map only your block or neighborhood. Be sure to provide a key as to what you are mapping. Please provide your name and a phone number and/or email address in case we want to contact you for an explanation.

Other suggestions or ideas: Send in any other suggestions or comments that may be useful for this process.

Return these items in one of the following ways:

By email: westorange@ppsaplanning.com

By mail: Paul Grygiel

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