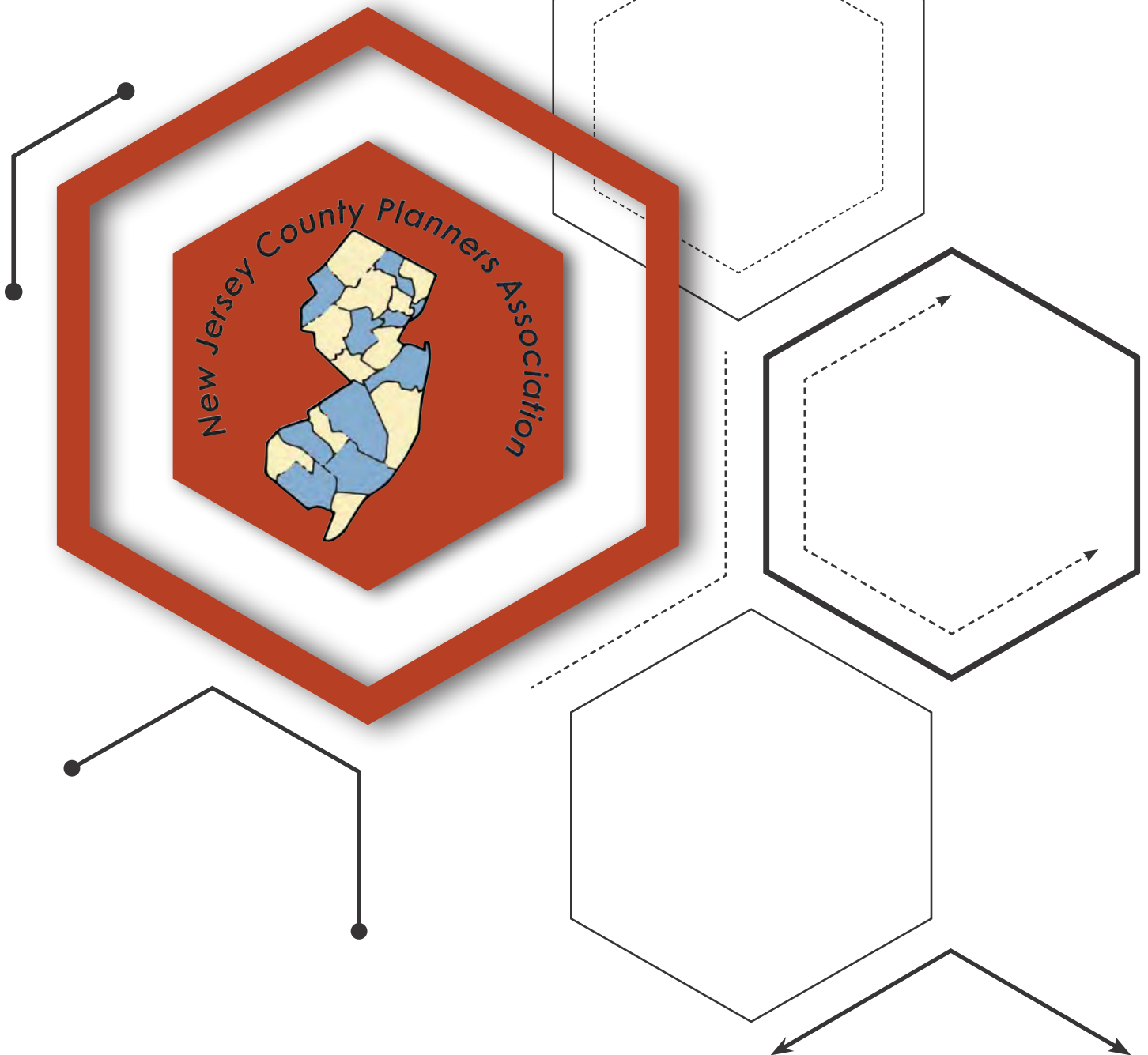


CREATING A HEALTHIER, PROSPEROUS AND MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE FOR ALL NEW JERSEY'S RESIDENTS

**NEW JERSEY COUNTY PLANNERS ASSOCIATION
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INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 has presented a set of unprecedented challenges to public health, safety and welfare, thanks to COVID-19 and climate hazards across the country. This has shed a bright light on long-simmering societal inequities, as communities of color have borne disproportionate impacts to their health, jobs, education and environments.

As New Jersey plans for how to emerge from this crisis, the state stands at a crossroads. Will we seek short term fixes that focus primarily on economic relief? Or, will we work to rebuild the economy and healthier communities while breaking down barriers to an equitable society?

The purpose of this document is to present a set of recommendations for state, county and local governments to consider on how to bring comprehensive land use planning and community engagement to bear on the statewide effort to create a healthier, prosperous and more equitable future for all New Jersey's residents.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND ACTIONS

Create well-informed and inclusive decision-making processes

Public engagement through inclusive governmental processes may be difficult to coordinate and administer but can lead toward more equitable decisions being made. Understanding the views from those rarely engaged is good governance.

- Make public engagement a regular and meaningful part of planning at the state, county and local level.
- Provide opportunities for residents to become agents of change in their own communities.
 - Engage residents in their communities and in their languages.
- Ensure equitable access to public services and resources.
 - Ensure equal representation by all groups and diversity within decision-making bodies.
 - Reform government operations, procedures, and requirements to ensure they are equitable and accessible to all community members.
 - Streamline procedures and processes and remove other barriers to participation and decision-making opportunities.
- Identify and engage marginalized groups, particularly those whose voices were typically not previously heard, in a meaningful and purposeful way.
- Invest the necessary resources in public engagement and utilize multiple, diverse outreach venues to ensure success.
 - Provide adequate timeframes for providing input.
 - Enlist the help of trusted voices.
- Dismantle the silos that exist among agencies, organizations and groups to achieve greater coordination, collaboration and information-sharing on cross-cutting issues and to align investment decisions at all levels of government.
- Nurture and create strong future leaders with diverse backgrounds who can champion best practices at all levels within the public, private and non-profit sectors.
- Utilize arts and cultural interventions to foster communication, multi-sectoral inclusion, self and multi-faceted expression, and sustained engagement in order to build a sense of place and enhance economic well-being.
- Take into account the different methods for messaging and engagement in urban, suburban, and rural communities and non-traditional outlets that may be more impactful to public engagement.

Prepare for future natural disaster-related disruptions

Recognizing all types of hazards is crucial toward saving lives and preventing financial hardship. Ensuring quality of life can be sustained and/or reasonably recovered is a critical component of economic resilience. State and county coordination with community and economic decision making with their partners at the local level is important.

- Coordinate emergency response planning across disciplines to better understand needs and scope of response.
- Identify gaps in emergency planning capabilities, enhance recovery planning capacity at all levels and provide the resources that are needed to undertake comprehensive planning efforts.
- Add critical system redundancies.
- Use technology to its fullest and take maximum advantage of NJ's highly educated STEM workforce by collaborating with New Jersey's universities and K-12 educators.
- Strengthen and protect critical facilities, services and infrastructure - medical, energy, communications, transportation and water supply.
- Update emergency response and preparedness plans.
- Add public health emergencies (pandemics, epidemics, etc.) to all Hazard Mitigation Plans.
- Develop plans to ensure the resiliency of the state's healthcare system (capabilities, resources/ supplies and workforce).
- Address shelter needs and avoid housing disruptions.
- Ensure continuity of mass transit and other transportation resources to avoid disruptions to access for the workforce and emergency response.
- Develop efficient systems of communication between levels of government to deploy information and response activities in preparation for and response to emergencies.

Coordinate land use planning and economic development initiatives with public health and social equity objectives

A core tenet of planning is about protecting the health, safety and welfare of our communities. Utilizing this lens for how land use and major infrastructure decisions impact the public will naturally generate positive results. Considering people of all types will also help create more stable and sustainable economic conditions.

- Complete and implement the Statewide Climate Resiliency Strategy.
- Provide safe, healthy and affordable education, childcare, youth services and other service network enhancements by investing in our schools.
- Encourage coordination between all levels of government to ensure that investment in educational services and facilities supports broader land use and planning goals.
- Support health care system transformations to improve health care access and recovery outcomes for all residents.
- Increase the supply of affordable housing to reduce eviction, foreclosure & homelessness risks.
 - Provide a comprehensive and equitable state affordable housing framework to meet our current and future demographic needs and labor force composition.

- Support and fast-track municipal preparation and implementation of updated Housing Elements and Fair Share Plans to create a variety of affordable housing types by all communities.
- Identify and mitigate Environmental Justice (“EJ”) issues.
 - Prioritize brownfield clean-up and restoration of degraded environmental assets in EJ communities.
 - Support planning efforts to ensure environmental justice concerns around new and existing industrial developments are addressed (pollution assessments and reduction plans).
 - Expand environmental and pollution monitoring in EJ communities and enhance protections where necessary.
 - Provide ample opportunity for community input to address EJ issues.

Provide Easy & Expedited Access to Information, Tools and Resources

Facilitating evidence-based planning and investment opportunities through actual data will facilitate strategic investment strategies while also streamlining the development process.

- Support robust statewide planning through the Office of Planning Advocacy.
- Invest in technology and information system development that will elevate decision making capacity at all levels and become a draw for information-based industries.
- Create a clearinghouse for best practices and case studies that promote short- and long-term recovery efforts.
 - Host webinars and educational events.
 - Provide an online database of best practices, modal ordinances and case studies.
- Identify and provide access to reliable, authoritative expertise, accurate science and factual data/ and information.
- Prioritize solutions that yield multiple benefits across the environmental, societal and economic sectors.
- Engage diverse partners from public, private and non-profit sectors.
- Factor-in benefits & costs when making investment and planning decisions.
- Identify potential unintended consequences with the goal of avoiding negative outcomes.

Create a More Equitable, Sustainable and Resilient Economy

Supporting and accelerating business model transformations so industry can become more nimble and creative are of great benefit as adaptation to an ever-changing environment becomes more common.

- Provide workplace flexibility and maximize associated job productivity, environmental and quality of life improvements.
- Strengthen and support small businesses throughout the economic recovery process.

- Provide ready-made solutions for municipalities to support small businesses.
- Provide small business rent assistance.
- Provide tools to minimize/mitigate vacancies.
- Expand the capabilities and capacity of local chambers of commerce, business associations, and workforce training programs to provide programs including but not limited to business coaching, planning, investment strategies, networking opportunities, job fairs, incubators, hubs, shared services, job readiness and reentry into the workforce, etc.
- Update and/or develop Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDs).
- Develop downtown recovery plans, prospectus and lease programs.
- Utilize the State Development and Redevelopment Plan and support related state programs to advance investment in the right locations (Opportunity Zones, Garden State Growth Zones, Designated Redevelopment/Revitalization Areas, Urban Enterprise Zones, Transit Villages, Designated Centers, etc.).
 - Inventory and reposition stranded assets including but not limited to underutilized and vacant properties, infrastructure and public facilities.
 - Modernize zoning to facilitate the repurposing/adaptive reuse or redevelopment of stranded commercial assets.
 - Evaluate and improve tax credit programs, prevailing wage requirements, apprenticeship programs and other incentives.
- Use job readiness programs to incentivize and attract new workforce participants to critical response and recovery occupations and other high-growth industry sectors.
- Train people locally to do local while reducing carbon footprints with less commuting and reducing job loss due to vehicle constraints.
- Enable the reconfiguration of workspaces and provide workspace flexibility in existing and new construction (to accommodate social distancing, improved ventilation, changes in workflows, operations, technology, etc.).
- Create an agile, skilled and adaptable workforce by providing affordable, accessible life-long workforce development and training opportunities.
 - Create a program and/or join forces with community groups to provide local job training opportunities in new and emerging fields (utility sector, clean energy, green infrastructure).
- Implement wage/benefit reforms to reduce income gaps, provide living wages and fairly compensate those performing high-risk jobs.
- Evaluate, and where appropriate, update workforce protection/occupational Safety and Health Regulations.
- Enable home-based businesses and auxiliary activities such as street vending, outdoor dining, yard sales and other venues/channels.
 - Allow the use of sidewalks, parking spaces and parking lots for small business activities while balancing the needs of vehicular and pedestrian circulation and minimizing nuisances/disturbances in residential areas.
 - Modernize zoning provisions to facilitate working from home or remote locations.
 - Adopt and/or update home-based business ordinances.

Advance a Green and Sustainable Economy

Retooling our economy and transitioning it to a more resilient and sustainable green-based model will create jobs and spur ingenuity while improving health

- Develop a plan for a “green economy” that supports sustainability goals while developing a robust sector of the economy that provides jobs and incentives for private investment.
- Include climate change mitigation and adaptation risk assessments in recovery initiatives, reduce hazards and prioritize actions that restore the economy, keep people and property out of harm's way as well as improve environmental quality.
 - Increase workforce development programs that bolster growth of the green job sector.
- Promote energy efficiency and renewable energy and the transition to clean energy in both transportation and the built environment.
- Develop agricultural and food system sustainability and resiliency solutions through local agriculture.
- Apply “Lifecycle” & “Circular Economy” waste reduction and recycling principles.
 - Prioritize waste reduction strategies.
 - Design products for re-use and recyclability.
 - Source goods and services locally.
 - Encourage “green purchasing” and the use of products with recycled material content.

Overcome the Digital Divide

Addressing easy access to technology will not only help bridge opportunity gaps win education and work productivity but will prepare communities for future hazards and disruptions.

- Improve access to technology (especially smart phones) for all residents.
- Strengthen community resilience by providing redundancy for critical communications technology infrastructure.
- Ensure access to safe, reliable virtual/remote working, learning, and information sharing platforms for all.
- Expand cyber-security, especially for critical services and infrastructure systems.
- Use technological and other creative solutions to provide more efficient and less costly state and local government services (remote meeting capabilities, document sharing, etc.).

Invest in Communities

New Jersey is a home-rule state whereby most decisions are driven by the local approval process while simultaneously being driven by an over-reliance on property taxes. More support needs be provided through both a horizontal and vertical approach toward governance

- Support investment and redevelopment opportunities in designated growth areas (Garden State Growth Zones, Designated Redevelopment/Revitalization Areas, Opportunity Zones, Urban Enterprise Zones, Transit Villages, Designated Centers).

- Reduce development pressure in rural/agricultural and environmentally sensitive areas through economic incentives and investments.
- Advance complete streets/green streets planning and implementation.
 - Add flexibility regarding the use of road rights-of-way, plazas and other public spaces to allow for diverse activities including but not limited to outdoor dining, pop-up retail, entertainment and services.
- Expand multi-purpose greenways that provide flood resilience, ecological, recreational and mobility services and are accessible to all neighborhoods and residents
- Enhance parks, plazas and building grounds to include green infrastructure and accommodate diverse uses such as community gardens, exercise space and market fairs.
- Achieve environmental and ecological restoration through redevelopment and revitalization initiatives.
- Promote urban and suburban agriculture, including but not limited to various forms of roof-top, indoor horticulture and agricultural reclamation of vacant lots and under-utilized buildings.
 - Ensure community gardens have clean soils and policies in place to allow the gardens to become permanent community resources.

Environmental Protection and Restoration

Maximizing ecological services in ways that recognizes our densely populated urban ecosystems will inevitably support protection and restoration in areas where environmental and agricultural resources are the priority. A balanced and collaborative approach is key.

- Meet human needs without compromising ecosystem health.
- Prevent current human and economic activity from disproportionately burdening current and future generations.
- Utilize community risk assessments and adaptation plans to identify and reduce climate change risks/vulnerabilities and associated environmental and human health consequences.
- Monitor, evaluate and inform the public about changing environmental conditions at the regional and local levels, particularly with regard to public health threats.
 - Promote the development of municipal and county natural resource inventories (NRI); and include natural resource restoration and protection strategies.
 - Prioritize the protection and restoration of resources in urban, suburban and rural areas to maximize the flood, soil erosion, soil fertility, biodiversity and water quality benefits they provide.
 - Make local climate, water quality and air quality monitoring data and trends readily accessible and understandable.
 - Utilize community-wide, business and household Green House Gas Inventories, Environmental Audits and other benchmarking and tracking tools.

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