

2007 RE-EXAMINATION REPORT

for the

BOROUGH OF RIVERTON



**Prepared by the Riverton Planning Board and
the Master Plan Subcommittee**

in collaboration with

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Introduction

The Municipal Land Use Law requires that municipalities re-examine local planning policies every six years. Towns have the option to re-write their master plans or draft a re-examination report, analyzing the merits of the existing Master Plan.

Riverton adopted a new and comprehensive Master Plan in 1998. Since that Master Plan was so comprehensive, the Planning Board decided that it was not necessary to re-write it, but rather a re-examination of the Plan would suffice.

The Municipal Land Use Law outlines the requisite elements that must be included in a re-examination report. They are the following:

- The report must identify the goals and objectives that were included in the previous Master Plan.
- It must note which goals have been met and which remain unmet.
- It should identify any circumstances that might have changed since the previous Master Plan was adopted.
- It should identify any goals and objectives which are no longer valid because of intervening events that may have changed the Municipality's circumstances.
- The report should identify new planning recommendations that would be appropriate based on current conditions.

The Law requires the Planning Board to present the Re-Examination Report to the community at a public hearing and consider public comment on it. The Planning Board then revises the Report as necessary to reflect public input and eventually adopts the final Re-Examination Report. At that point the Report becomes part of the Municipality's official Master Plan.

Goals and Objectives

A. 1998 Goals and Objectives

In 1998, the Borough identified many precise and distinct goals for the Borough. With few exceptions, these goals remain valid today. This report identifies *with italics* some appropriate refinements to those previously adopted goals which continue to represent current planning policies. The Planning Board removed six objectives which it felt were redundant.

Goal 1. Preserve and enhance Riverton's small town character and strong sense of community and place as evidenced in our pride, concern, and support for community institutions, programs and services.

- Objective 1. Preserve and enhance the physical condition and character of valued community facilities and places.
- Objective 2. Preserve and enhance the historical integrity of the "town center".
- Objective 3. Maximize the potential for pedestrian movement over vehicular traffic, throughout the community, particularly in providing access to community facilities, recreation opportunities and retail areas.
- Objective 4. Encourage the development and redevelopment of the business area in order to maximize community resident patronage of local business establishments.
- Objective 5. Maximize public awareness of community initiatives and activities to promote public participation and community awareness.
- Objective 6. Promote an appropriate stewardship by private property owners to preserve and enhance the exceptional historic and aesthetic qualities of the community and its buildings.

Goal 2. Provide the opportunity for a multigenerational, age and income diverse population to live, work and prosper in the Borough of Riverton.

- Objective 1. Preserve the existing variety of housing types and styles through appropriate zoning regulations.
- Objective 2. Continue the existing ban on further conversion of single family residences into multiple family units. *This objective should be expanded to limit the construction of new apartments also.*
- Objective 3. *Improve* and upgrade of the existing single and multiple family housing stock.
- Objective 4. Seek innovative methods to accommodate the Borough's fair share of low and moderate income housing *in accordance with current COAH regulations.*
- Objective 5. *Promote* pedestrian access to the Town Center.
- Objective 6. *Promote* opportunities for increased employment within the Borough.

- Objective 7. Develop ordinances to regulate and inspect existing apartments in the Borough.
- Objective 8. Encourage and support services and activities for the full range of residents of all ages.

Goal 3. Preserve and enhance the key distinguishing man made and natural features that define Riverton’s character as a historic, Victorian, riverfront community.

- Objective 1. Retain the existing open vistas, public open space and residential land use pattern adjacent to the Delaware River.
- Objective 2. Encourage the stability and maintenance of pedestrian use of lands adjacent to the Riverfront.
- Objective 3. Preserve and enhance the Borough’s vast inventory of mature trees through *funding* adequate maintenance and replanting *while maintaining high standards of our Tree City, USA designation.*
- Objective 4. Accentuate the history and historic resources of the town through all municipal activities and communications in order to bolster the Borough’s reputation as a historic area.
- Objective 5. Retain the architectural integrity of existing structures.
- Objective 6. Create and implement a streetscape plan for prominent, public areas to preserve the Borough’s special places.
- Objective 7. Continue the existing ban on further conversion of single family residences into multiple family units.

Goal 4. Strengthen the Borough’s economic vitality.

- Objective 1. Encourage the development and redevelopment of the Borough’s business district.
- Objective 2. Establish a Riverton Business Economic Development Association jointly with Council and Business Owner membership.*
- Objective 3. Preserve and maintain the historic “Borough center” character of the Borough’s business district.
- Objective 4. Promote creativity, invention and innovation in preserving, maintaining and recreating the original period architectural character and aesthetics of the Borough’s business district.
- Objective 5. Take advantage of outside funding sources for infrastructure improvement, business incentives and tax relief to enhance economic opportunity in the Borough.
- Objective 6. Maintain and improve the existing infrastructure of the Borough.

B. 1998 Goals and Objectives that have been Met

One of the most important goals of the 1998 Master Plan was to rezone the town in a manner that more closely reflected the existing conditions. That was achieved. The entire town was rezoned. The residential areas were zoned to reflect existing and predominate lot sizes. Three residential zoning districts were established, R-15 (or 15,000 sf lots), R-8 (or 8,000 sf minimum lots), and R-4 (with 4,000 sf minimum lots). Commercial areas were zoned into two districts, the Neighborhood Business district (NB) and the General Business District (GB). Industrial uses as a permitted use were eliminated.

When the Borough received COAH certification in 2001, it added an Affordable Housing Zone on Martha's Lane (AH) to the new zone plan, which continues to serve the community well and reflects the Borough's hope to promote a varied, though balanced pattern of land uses.

Many of the Borough's other planning goals are not finite, but rather on-going. The Borough has made great progress in its efforts to enhance the historic character of the town. It has engaged in streetscape enhancement projects as well as productive discussions with developers of private projects, who have designed and redesigned their projects to make them more reflective of Riverton quaint, small scale charm.

Pedestrian accessibility is another on-going goal, which the Borough tries to promote when reviewing development applications. Riverton is also pursuing safe street initiatives and coordinating with school officials to promote safe pedestrian access to schools for students. The Drive 25 Campaign is part of this initiative. Work on the Riverton Borough Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan Study will generate valuable information and ideas for improving circulation through the Borough. The results of the study will complement and supplement the Circulation Element of the Master Plan.

Open space and recreation for residents of all ages continue to be important to the quality of life in Riverton. Presently, the Town is developing an Environmental Resource Inventory which will be followed by a new Open Space and Recreation Master Plan Element. The prime objective of this project will be to develop a more comprehensive and detailed plan for providing easier access to recreation and open space resources for everyone in the community.

Conditions that have changed since 1998

Several things have changed since 1998. Some of these changes have been very positive. Others have had a significant impact on the town, though the community at large might debate whether or not it's been positive. All of the changes will impact how Riverton plans for the future.

The light rail line project is complete and operating. The popularity of the line and its future success remains a hopeful prospect, but for now, the projected benefits of the line do not seem to have been fully realized. Nonetheless, the line, and the activity that it brings to the Borough, must be incorporated into future planning in Riverton, since the station now exists in the center of town.

While many other towns with rail lines center their redevelopment around their local train stops, the stop in Riverton was always intended to be ancillary to the local downtown business center. The Riverton stop was designed to be a 'kissme stop,' where people are generally dropped off or otherwise arrive more commonly by foot or bike, rather than a larger 'destination stop' with its associated high volume of vehicular commuters and large parking lots. The Riverton station will hopefully stay small and not become a larger transit center.

Another big change for the Borough came with the State's new rules regarding affordable housing. New COAH (Council on Affordable Housing) rules and regulations for Round Three certification require the Borough to become active participants in the process of generating affordable housing in town. It will also affect how the Borough reviews development projects. The Borough will soon be responsible for affordable housing in ways it has not been in the past. The Borough has considered methods for managing this new responsibility and created an Affordable Housing Advisory Committee and appointed a Municipal Housing Liaison.

Many positive things have improved the town or have the potential to improve the town in the near future. The Broad Street Enhancement Project has been completed, adding decorative paving, site furniture and a community plaza to the central business district. A grant from the Center of Place enhancement program added more improved sidewalks to the Broad Street project that preceded it. New street lights and many façade renovations have also beautified the downtown.

Approval was recently given to applications that are reconstructing two large, neglected sites; Riverton Shoppes, formerly known as the Sitzer property and the CVS and Shoppes of Riverton, previously known as the Nu-Way property. Site specific redevelopment plans were generated for both these properties, though ultimately, they were redeveloped by a private developer, without assistance from the Redevelopment Agency.

The Borough was recently awarded another grant; this one from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, for downtown redevelopment and revitalization. While the specific scope of work is yet to be determined, the project could examine the use and implementation of more site specific redevelopment plans and/or the redevelopment and reuse potential of the local post office building. All of these enhancement projects will bring long-awaited economic stimulation to the business district and help stabilize the Borough's local tax base.

The Borough has also established several entities involved in supporting and promoting the downtown business area, including the Riverton Business and Civic Association, the Riverton Economic Development Committee and the Riverton Improvement Association. All three groups work on improvement projects to enhance the downtown and coordinate community events that promote local businesses.

A new ordinance to allow bed and breakfasts introduced a welcomed new use to the community. Public access to the Heritage Trail is still improving. The official path of the trail has been relocated from Bank Avenue to Broad Street through Riverton. The local post office building will soon be available and the Borough will have an opportunity to capitalize on this well-known local landmark if it starts to plan for its future.

Unfortunately, taxes continue to be higher than anyone would like and increasing development in surrounding Palmyra and Cinnaminson is creating unwanted traffic for Riverton. However, with appropriate planning, Riverton will be able to protect itself from these outside forces and continue its progress toward an ever-improving sustainable vision. A County initiative, called the River Route Advisory Committee, was established by the Freeholders and includes one member from each of the twelve towns of the Route 130 Corridor Plan among its participants. The hope is that this advisory committee will stimulate and expand economic growth and vitality into all the communities of the district, beyond the limits of Route 130 frontage properties. Riverton Borough will benefit by engaging actively in this committee's work.

Recommendations

A. Recommendations for continued implementation of, and amendments to, the 1998 Master Plan

Riverton's Master Plan includes planning recommendations in each of its plan elements; Historic Element, Housing Element, Economic Element, Circulation Element, Municipal Services Element, Recreation Element and Land Use Element. In 2006, a draft Stormwater Management Element was adopted and added to the Master Plan, in accordance with N.J.A.C. 7:8-1 et seq. The following analysis of the recommendations is presented in an order consistent with the outline of the original Master Plan.

Historic Element

The historic appearance of Riverton remains an important factor in local planning. While specific ordinances have not been developed to mandate architectural controls, the Architectural Review Committee has been effective in guiding developers to design their projects to be consistent with the character of the community. The Planning and Zoning Boards have been similarly effective in securing architectural sensitivity from developers. This effort has been made a little easier by the recent approval of the Borough's National Historic Registry Nomination. Therefore, the need to mandate strict, architectural controls through local ordinances seems less important now than it was in 1998, but the underlying importance of quaint, small scale historic design remains critical in Riverton.

Housing Element

In residential neighborhoods, there is an intricate fabric of building designs, each with unique facades, elevations, rooflines and amenities. Over the years, Riverton's housing stock has become a delicate balance of historic consistencies and interesting variety. This design concept remains essential to the character of Riverton. New construction should continue this historic pattern.

In the original Master Plan, the Housing Element proposed apartments over retail space in the downtown, hoping this would bring activity into the downtown at night while creating affordable housing. This planning concept has been only marginally successful. As a primary means for creating affordable rehab units, the concept no longer seems reasonable. Instead, affordable housing units that can be rehabilitated should be pursued wherever they exist throughout the Borough. This does not mean that apartments over commercial uses should be abandoned completely, for it is a useful option that brings character and interest to the downtown when it can be done successfully. It also makes it easier for store owners or managers to live where they work, which is desirable.

The Housing Element outlines the Borough's plan for creating affordable housing, and it was re-written in December of 2005 as part of the Borough's Round Three COAH petition. The Borough is currently proposing to rezone the General Business zoning

district for a slightly different mix of uses. It will include office and retail spaces, primarily, with a minor amount of both market rate and affordable housing in the area of the GB zone that abuts the existing AH1 zone along Martha's Lane. The residential units from the GB zone, to be re-named the Affordable Housing 2 zoning district (AH2), will complement the housing proposed for the AH1 zone, creating a more complete neighborhood.

The new Housing Element is currently being reviewed by COAH and approval of the Borough's Third Round petition is pending, although the exact status of the Borough's Plan is uncertain, due to the recent Court decision that challenged many of COAH's Third Round rules. The Borough's Housing Plan may require modifications, once the State resolves its issues with the Courts.

Economic Element

There are two primary economic areas in town, the Neighborhood Business (NB) district and the General Business (GB) district. The NB district is located in the center of town around the light rail station. The GB district borders Cinnaminson and includes the National Casein property and the CVS and Shoppes at Riverton site, among others.

In general, the economic condition in Riverton seems improved over what it was in 1998, however, there is a perception that it lags behind the renaissance being enjoyed on Route 130. The County's new River Route Advisory Committee may help to equalize this disparity, but nothing will help as much as local, site specific revitalization.

The NB district has seen important improvements to the streetscapes and some of the buildings. It continues to be increasingly quaint, charming and inviting to pedestrians. The Zoning Board of Adjustment's approval of a mixed use development on the former 'Sitzler' property, now called Riverton Shoppes, promises to revitalize a large, important site at the center of town.

Similarly, the Planning Board's approval of a plan for the former Nu-Way site, now the CVS and Shoppes of Riverton, will rejuvenate a site that had long been in decline. The Borough is hopeful that both these projects will enhance the Borough's potential for continued economic revitalization.

As mentioned previously, the idea of promoting residential uses downtown has met with inconsistent success. Some apartments should be permitted, but a newer idea, to permit second floor commercial uses like offices and retail, could increase the number of businesses in town and potentially help equalize the tax base with new ratables.

Circulation Element

Pedestrian circulation in Riverton remains important and cars continue to interfere with the pedestrian experience. The County has resurfaced Broad Street in conjunction with the Broad Street Enhancement Project. Local efforts are underway to quantify and begin

to design traffic calming techniques that might eliminate some of the overbearing cut-through traffic that uses the Borough's local streets. Increased development in both Palmyra and Cinnaminson seem to be making this problem worse, so a local solution to the problem is increasingly important. A grant-supported study will generate the Riverton Borough Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan and the results of this plan should be incorporated into an amendment of the Borough's Master Plan Circulation Element.

Continued attention to a safe sidewalk system as well as an uninterrupted network of bicycle lanes is still important too. Recent developers have created pedestrian friendly site plans for commercial sites, however, more existing businesses need to develop dual access to their stores, from both the front and rear of the buildings.

The issue of public access to the river is a perpetual matter of discussion within the community. Much of the river front is privately owned, but there are spots of Borough land interspersed along the river's edge. As part of a planning project underway with a grant from the State's Office of Smart Growth, the Borough will conduct public workshops to discuss Riverton's open space planning policy in general. These workshops will provide a healthy opportunity for the public to discuss public access and the riverfront, among other topics. The culmination of the project will be an updated Open Space and Recreation Element for the Master Plan.

Municipal Services Element

The capacity of the Borough's sewer plant has not changed and a study is still required, however, without any major redevelopment pending, the need for a complete study is not critical at this time.

The Borough presently has comprehensive plans for the repair and upgrade of its sewer lines, the repaving of its roads and the maintenance of its street trees.

Local school facilities have been upgraded and limited partnerships with other school systems and municipalities have been established for some education related services and operations. More such partnerships are anticipated. Local planning efforts should continue to be mindful the schools' parking needs and students who should be able to walk to school safely.

Finally, the historic Post Office on Main Street will be available soon, as the Federal Government intends to abandon it. It would be advisable for the Borough to conduct a feasibility study to assess the potential re-use of this important local landmark.

Recreation Element

The Borough's Smart Growth grant will fund the creation of an Environment Resource Inventory and a revised Recreation Element. It will be referred to as an Open Space and Recreation Element and will include an analysis of the Borough's open space system and

future needs. Local planning policies will be integrated with those of the Pompeston Creek Watershed Association and the Heritage Trail system.

As part of the project, public workshops will be conducted to discuss issues of open space and recreation. The intent is to achieve a consensus on appropriate planning policies to guide the management and enhancement of open space and recreational spaces within Riverton. Ultimately, the project will generate a stream corridor buffer ordinance for the Pompeston Creek and land use planning guidelines for the Delaware riverbank. The Borough should monitor current proposals by the State to increase the width of buffer areas along waterways that supply drinking water, including the Pompeston Creek. Obviously, any revisions to State regulations should be incorporated into the Borough's open space plans.

Land Use Element

With the Borough's ever-increasing popularity and calls for redevelopment, Borough planners and officials will need to be vigilant in their strides to preserve the quaint character that defines Riverton so uniquely. However, the Borough has demonstrated its ability to protect the character of the town without overbearing ordinance regulation. For the present, this continues to be the Borough's preferred means of land use management.

Some recent development applications have highlighted the fact that the new ordinances that were adopted after the 1998 Master Plan have some inconsistencies in them. In general, the zoning districts reflect the Master Plan goals and objectives. However, some of the definitions and zoning requirements contradict each other. The land use ordinances should be reviewed for inconsistencies and corrected. Until that work can be completed, the Planning Board should establish policy statements when they can be used to clarify known contradictions in the ordinances, and share these statements with the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Small shops in the Neighborhood Business district remain an important control on traffic, since larger establishments would tend to draw more regional vehicular traffic. The Borough can be more flexible in the General Business district, which is located on the edge of town and fronts directly onto Broad Street. If COAH approves the Borough's Round Three petition as currently drafted, the GB zone will be changed to the Affordable Housing 2 (AH2) zone, permitting a mixed use of high density commercial uses and some market rate and affordable housing uses. This will positively expand the Borough's tax base and provide necessary affordable housing to the community.

Parks and open space are important to the residents of Riverton. Access to the parks for all the residents is still a vital objective. Broad Street remains an obstacle that many residents must cross to get to Memorial Park. The County has not agreed to reduce the width of Broad Street, or eliminate a lane, as suggested in the 1998 Master Plan. However, the Broad Street Enhancement Project made the Broad Street corridor more pedestrian friendly and incorporated some traffic calming techniques, like choker intersections so it is a little easier to cross.

Other recreational resources and a system for linking them will be the focus of the Borough's new Open Space and Recreation Plan Element. Local community workshops will invite the public to participate in the process; making the community the principal architects of the Town's new recreation plans.

Traffic continues to be a problem, particularly the commuter cut-through traffic on local roads. The previously mentioned circulation study and the Drive 25 Campaign are working to study the problem and offer solutions. The Borough is hopeful these efforts will yield some constructive ideas.

Parking is always a concern. Recent site plans for the Riverton Shoppes and the CVS/Shoppes of Riverton will create new parking lots for downtown businesses. New on-street parking on Broad Street should help too. However, as the rail stop continues to attract new riders, the Borough may need to consider some form of parking regulation to control the impact of railroad commuters. The Riverton stop was always intended to be a 'kissme stop' and if out-of-town commuters begin to over use the Borough's limited parking facilities, the Borough may need to investigate other models for managing the situation.

The Town's parking ordinance should also be reviewed. These days, almost every applicant for a commercial use is required to apply for a parking variance, because the existing local standards are the same as traditional suburban parking standards, which exceed that which is necessary in a downtown setting. A few things could be investigated to modify the parking requirements and lessen this burden on prospective applicants.

The planning industry now recognizes different parking standards for in-town situations. Studies show that small downtowns can be supported by lower parking requirements. Since patrons can visit multiple shops from a single parking space in a small Borough, many parking studies are showing that in-town situations can benefit from this patron behavior and less parking is required.

The Borough may consider a wholesale revamping of the parking standards, utilizing the alternative in-town parking ratios. It might also consider requiring parking plans only when new businesses are more intense than the existing ones. The Borough would need to devise an easy administrative process for evaluating the existing and proposed intensity of the uses; otherwise the new process might not be less arduous for the applicants.

Also, recognizing that there are a limited number of parking spaces available in town, and little or no opportunity to create more spaces, asking applicants to prepare arguments that state the obvious is sometimes frustrating. It might be more useful to encourage applicants to study and commit to plans for encouraging employees to bike to work or use the rail line, if they can't walk to work.

The Planning Board might consider establishing a subcommittee to study the issue and develop alternatives for managing parking within the context of new development applications.

The design and character of residential and commercial projects continues to be paramount in Riverton. There has been some discussion about the need for a property maintenance ordinance that would not be onerous on senior citizens. This continues to be something the Borough should pursue.

Finally, the Borough has a new cell tower ordinance and a local cell tower was constructed on Riverton's sewer treatment plant site. The tower can accommodate other cell companies that may wish to co-locate there. It is unlikely that another cell tower would be required somewhere else in the Borough and a second tower elsewhere in the Borough would be undesirable.

Municipal Stormwater Management Plan Element

The Municipal Stormwater Management Plan Element is currently being reviewed by the County and will be adopted when the review is complete and the revisions have been finalized. The Element adopts the State's stormwater design regulations and strives to protect the integrity of the Pompeston Creek, and the rest of the Borough's surface and groundwater systems.

B. Recommendations for the Redevelopment Plan

The General Business zone, along with other isolated sites in the Neighborhood Business zone, were the subject of a redevelopment study and the Borough determined that these sites were eligible for redevelopment. A Redevelopment Plan, with site development standards was generated. However, before the Plan was adopted, Riverton drafted a new Housing Plan and submitted it to COAH in an effort to secure Third Round certification. The new Housing Plan proposes to create inclusionary zoning on the National Casein site. This proposed affordable housing zone would be different from the zoning proposed in the Redevelopment Plan.

Therefore, the original Redevelopment Plan was placed on hold, pending final approval of the Affordable Housing Plan. Once that COAH process is complete, the Redevelopment Plan could be modified to reflect the Affordable Housing Plan and the Redevelopment Agency might proceed with those plans. However, as noted previously, the Borough generated two site specific redevelopment plans and hopes to utilize a new planning grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission to generate more site specific plans. It may be easier for the community to respond to individual site specific plans, rather than the comprehensive plan originally proposed, though care must be taken to insure that the site specific plans coordinate well with each other and the Master Plan.

The National Casein operation has been a local business in town for many years. It's been a good neighbor and a steady tax ratable. However, the site was rezoned from industrial to commercial after the 1998 Master Plan was adopted and the local objective continues to promote a future use that will be primarily retail and office in character, with a minor residential component. This is how the area is characterized in the current Housing Plan too. The Borough should reach out to National Casein and investigate their long-term plans for their property.

Conclusions

The Borough is in the process of undergoing some very positive changes, including redevelopment of the two important commercial sites in downtown and the continued enhancement of the Broad Street corridor. The Environmental Resource Inventory and the Open Space and Recreation Plan to follow it will help to improve the state of leisure activities in Town. Pedestrian circulation should continue to be made better and safer, and vehicular traffic should be controlled and diverted off local roads and focused onto the County roads that can handle it.

The Borough has made encouraging steps toward satisfying many of the goals of the 1998 Master Plan. The underlying principles of preserving the historic character and quaint charm of the town still hold true. The Town has demonstrated its ability to work constructive with developers who respect local objectives and an improving future looks promising.