

Taking the Next Step:

East Windsor
Municipal Assessment

Executive Summary

May 2003

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Introduction

The elected and appointed officials in East Windsor Township have a challenging task. They must balance natural resource protection with economic prosperity, encourage business, provide residential services, and determine where to best site residential, commercial and agricultural interests within the town. They must provide all of this while maintaining a unique quality of life for their residents. The Township's leaders also strive to ensure that the needs of current residents are met, as well as those of the future. To carry out this daunting task, officials look to their Master Plan for the vision and use zoning, policies and ordinances as the tools to move towards this vision.

The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association (the Association) realizes the magnitude of this task and also understands that the protection and health of a watershed relies a great deal on the land use laws and policies that govern development. Thus, we developed the Municipal Assessment Project to partner with municipal leaders to provide an outside evaluation of current practices and support for implementing proactive measures to ensure that the vision in the Master Plan is achieved and that natural resources are protected.

The Association was pleased when East Windsor became the second municipality to partner with us in this project. East Windsor Township, a fairly developed community, has already implemented many programs, ordinances, and policies that balance development and conservation and look toward the future of the community. They have adopted a Stream Corridor Ordinance that protects the area around streams to ensure the protection of water quality and critical habitats and they have also been granted significant funding to preserve open space. By linking greenways for bicycle and pedestrian access and using a ride-share program, transportation in East Windsor is less focused on automobiles. The Township has made great strides in utilizing their greenways for passive recreation and alternative transportation, as well as for preserving open space.

Another step in this journey was taken by choosing to participate in the Municipal Assessment Project that takes a comprehensive look at the municipality's vision and the current zoning, ordinances and policies meant to achieve it. The results of this analysis are documented in this report, entitled "Taking the Next Step," that highlights areas where the municipality has set positive examples in current practices and areas where planning strategies, already in place, could be enhanced or where new strategies could be developed.

Outlined below are the 14 strategies for achieving East Windsor Township's goal. (Please refer to the report for more detail).

8 **Groundwater Protection**

Township Goal: To recognize water supply and wastewater disposal as limited resources that must not be overburdened. To ensure that future low intensity development in areas not served by public utilities is adequately controlled through sound septic management techniques to assure maintenance of a high level of surface and ground water quality.

Current Practices: Working on Geographic Information Systems (GIS) mapping showing the location of public wells and their wellhead protection areas. Currently, all wellheads are surrounded by greenspace that is dependent upon the level of surrounding development.

Recommendations: Adopt ordinances to protect groundwater and increase map database.

§ **Pesticide and Fertilizer Use**

Township Goal: Policies and guidelines for chemical application is an important goal for the Township to protect water quality.

Current Practices: The Township does implements an Integrated Pest Management program that needs to be supported with an educational program for residents to learn about its benefits.

Recommendations: Adopt ordinances that regulate the spraying of pesticides/fertilizers.

§ **Stormwater Management**

Township Goal: To ensure that future low intensity development in areas not served by public utilities is adequately controlled through sound septic management techniques to assure maintenance of a high level of surface and ground water quality.

Current Practices: Stormwater management shall conform to §22-10 of the Technical Standards Ordinance. It is the obligation of the applicant to seek the appropriate approvals from State and County agencies and the Delaware and Raritan Canal Commission, whichever has jurisdiction. Township has also developed a checklist for Planning Board use during application review.

Recommendations: Adopt additional ordinances and policies to implement stormwater management.

§ **Stream Corridors**

Township Goal: Lands lying along streams should be preserved for recreation or open space, including such activities as hiking or cycling.

Current Practices: An encroachment permit is required from the Division of Water Resources for full or diversion of a water channel, alteration of a stream, repair or construction of a bridge, culvert, reservoir, dam, wall, pipeline, or cable crossing.

Recommendations: Adopt ordinances to coincide with the association's stream corridor ordinance.

§ **Soil Erosion and Sediment Control**

Township Goals: The Township's 2002 Master Plan and Reexamination Report describes goals for protection of environmentally sensitive areas and to ensure a compatible balance between environmental and economic concerns.

Current Practices: The State Soil Conservation Committee requires and monitors plans submitted by municipalities. East Windsor Township is working toward this in addition to their own efforts. Township staff is also knowledgeable about the sections of ordinances that apply to this area.

Recommendations: Adopt a monitoring program to ensure soil erosion management and sediment control.

§ **Natural Resource and Habitat Protection**

Township Goals: Preserve, to the extent practical and feasible, environmentally sensitive areas, major vistas and other aesthetic attributes of the township and ensure adherence to strict performance standards for those developments, which incorporate such areas. More specifically, lands that have mature wooded areas, particularly upland woodlands, should be protected to the extent possible, perhaps through the use of cluster forms of development

Current Practices: Protections include language for conservation easements, through the Township's Stream Corridor Ordinance, Environmental Commission reviews, which includes guidance from the Shade Tree Commission, and through the updated Natural Resources Inventory.

Recommendations: Adopt ordinances to protect wetland, woodland, and wildlife habitats.

§ **Cultural and Historical Resources**

Township Goals: To preserve major vistas and other aesthetic attributes of the Township and ensure adherence to strict performance standards for those developments which incorporate such areas.

Current Practices: The Township has a Historic Preservation/Cultural Heritage Commission that sponsors and participates in many educational programs.

Recommendations: Adopt additional ordinances and policies to ensure further preservation and protection of historic structures, lands, and views.

§ **Open Space**

Township Goals: To recognize the land as a prime community resource that is both finite and irreplaceable, to provide steps to protect the land from poor development practices, conserve appropriate quantities as permanent open space and actively seek practical methods for preserving farmland.

Current Practices: The Township allows for conservation easements in §22-27.6a Preservation of Open Space. This type of open space shall be either deed restricted from future development by conservation easements, or dedicated to the township or another public or quasi-public agency or organization.

Recommendations: Adopt additional ordinances and policies to ensure further permanent protection of the township's remaining open space.

§ **Cluster Development**

Township Goals: Utilizing, where appropriate, clustering techniques, which consider social and environmental factors in meeting future housing needs.

Current Practices: Cluster development is allowed when the tract size is at least ten acres, all dwelling units are connected to approved and functioning central water and sanitary sewer systems, except for developments which lie in the RA and RE zoning districts.

Recommendations: Adopt a Conservation Design element in the Master Plan to accommodate preservation of contiguous open space.

§ **Green Infrastructure**

Township Goals: To subject all development to rigorous quality standards regardless of types of location

Current Practices: The Township allows for development practices that are considered "green" designs. The Mayor also mentioned that they have considered shared parking on some properties.

Recommendations: Encourage more innovative techniques in Public works projects.

§ **Construction Practices**

Township Goals: The Township's Land Subdivision Ordinance gives support for construction practices regarding landscaping and design although no goals are mentioned in the Master Plan.

Current Practices: New construction practices are supported by ordinance language including, Landscape and Site Design and Soil Disturbance. These sections lay out guidance for ensuring minimal disturbance on construction sites.

Recommendations: Adopt ordinances that allow for new construction practices such as, Low Impact Development and Critical Areas.

§ **Master Plan Revision and Rezoning of Township**

Township Goals: To work across political boundaries to achieve more regional goals.

Current Practices: Includes an Impact Statement saying, every municipal agency (is) empowered to require of any application a statement containing as much of the following information as that agency deems: Inventory of Existing Environmental Conditions, Assessment of Environmental Impact of Project, Listing of all Unavoidable Adverse Environmental Impacts, Steps to Minimize Environmental Damage, and any Alternatives.

Recommendations: Continue to ensure the master plan is fully updated and replaced every six years.

§ **Resident Participation**

Township Goals: East Windsor Township continuously recruits volunteers who regularly participate in Township events.

Current Practices: Through the quarterly newsletter the Mayor encourages residents to serve on the Township's volunteer boards and committees. It also puts out information on when and where volunteers are needed, educational materials on various issues, new development projects, and other areas where residents can get involved.

Recommendations: Continue to encourage public participation by expanding information available on your Township website, setting up an email user group, or having Committee members, etc., write a regular column in the newspaper to keep residents informed on key programs and issues.

§ **Education of Officials, Planning Board, and Environmental Commission Members**

Township Goals: Increased cooperation with adjoining municipalities on environmental issues should be a goal for the Township. This would help increase regional awareness and knowledge.

Current Practices: East Windsor Township works with NJDEP, SBMWA, and ANJEC to help protect the watershed. A town newsletter, website, public meetings and town programs help to educate residents about the Township's goals.

Recommendations: Encourage training and site walks for commission members.

The document is meant to be an interim step in the implementation of practices that work to balance land use planning with environmental protection. After the Township prioritizes the areas they would like to develop, the Association will provide support for implementation.

Acknowledgements

We commend East Windsor's leaders for participating in this program and for allowing the Association to evaluate current practices. It is often difficult for anyone—whether an individual, municipality, or even a business—to see the various options where work could still be done to improve a current system. East Windsor is in a fortunate position because of all that it has already accomplished. We now offer a myriad of choices for future endeavors.

Our hope is that East Windsor will share experiences, challenges, and successes with surrounding municipalities, keeping in mind that zoning and policies should correspond with surrounding areas to provide comprehensive, sensible regional growth. We also look forward to partnering with the Township in embracing new opportunities that support efforts in proactive planning.

We wish to thank the William Penn Foundation and the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation for their generosity in funding this project, and the Township Council, Planning Board and Environmental Commission for their enthusiastic responses to our Framework Questions. We would also like to acknowledge the individual input of Mayor Janice Mironov, Tom Ogren, and township staff for generously giving our staff the time and answers to complete the assessment.

Highlights of Your Town

East Windsor Township was the second municipality to accept our offer of assistance and partner with us on this project. When beginning the assessment, members of the East Windsor Township Committee, Planning Board, and Environmental Commission articulated their goals and vision for the Township by responding to our survey. We feel it is important to note the proactive measures that Mayor Janice Mironov, Town Council, Planning Board, other committees and the staff have been implementing within the Township.

Good Things...

Every Wednesday at 7 pm, Mayor Janice Mironov hosts a live call-in program called “Spotlight East Windsor: Ask the Mayor”. The program keeps residents well-informed about programs, events, news, and other issues. The Mayor also connects with residents by contributing the “Mayor’s Message” to the Township newsletter’s front page.

East Windsor Township has a very active committee, “Clean Communities”, that is dedicated to producing educational materials, projects, and volunteer programs that help enhance the environmental quality of the Township. Activities such as poster contests, Adopt-A-Spot, and a month dedicated to clean-up activities are some examples of what this committee has accomplished. The Township employs numerous activities that contribute to the health of the watershed and to sound planning strategies. Some of these current practices include:

- ⌘ Providing greenspace around wellhead areas to protect groundwater from nearby development
- ⌘ Implementing an Integrated Pest Management program
- ⌘ Encouraging new development designs to incorporate natural stormwater management strategies and retrofitting conventional stormwater designs to create vegetated areas
- ⌘ Encouraging the Environmental Committee to refer to a checklist when reviewing site plans and subdivision proposals to ensure that all environmental areas are covered
- ⌘ Enforcing the Association’s Stream Corridor Ordinance protecting critical habitat and water quality
- ⌘ Preparing a soil erosion and sediment control plan in accordance with the State Soil Conservation Committee to enhance protection of steep slopes and their critical environment
- ⌘ Updating the Natural Resources Inventory and becoming knowledgeable about plant and animal species within the Township to support protection strategies
- ⌘ Utilizing the Greenway Plan to map out stream corridors and woodlands to help in preparing documents to protect these critical areas
- ⌘ Considering shared parking on some properties to reduce impervious cover in residential and commercial areas

In 2001, East Windsor was named a Tree City, USA by the National Arbor Day Foundation and in a partnership with Washington Township in Mercer County, East Windsor Township has created the Bear Brook Greenway, one project that implements some of the Township’s goals for open space planning. The Township is also active in open space and farmland preservation efforts with approximately 200 acres in open space acquired in 2002 alone. They have also been awarded a \$2.5 million Green Acres Grant to implement the Open Space Plan.

Finally, due to the increased development in the Township, Historic Preservation and Cultural Heritage Commissions have definitely had difficult tasks in front of them. They have made great strides in preserving

the Historic and Cultural aspects of the community. For instance, the threatened Rescarrick-Moore House was dismantled and is being held in storage until a proper site is established for permanent residence and a published book on local historic landmarks is available on the Township's website—www.east-windsor.nj.us. The Commission has also taken the initiative to set up Goals for the year 2003. Some of these goals include recording and displaying archaeological finds from One Mile Road dig sites and distributing a children's education package entitled "A Kid's History of Early East Windsor".