

Taking the Next Step:

Hopewell Borough
Municipal Assessment

January 2005



The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association

Since 1949, our member-supported organization has worked on behalf of local residents to protect, preserve and enhance our local environment. We are dedicated to caring for the integrity of the natural ecosystems of the 265-square miles of central New Jersey drained by the Stony Brook and the Millstone River. We focus on environmental education, watershed stewardship and water resource advocacy – helping future generations understand the wonders and workings of the natural world we are preserving on their behalf.

We are headquartered on a 825-acre nature reserve in Pennington that includes a community supported organic farm, nature center, pond, and a 14-mile trail system that leads visitors through our woodlands, wetlands, and fields.

Many activities within our watershed affect the quality of streams, wetlands, ground water and forests. By changing how we carry out these activities, we can improve our environment and our quality of life. So whether at home, work or play, we can all make a difference.

If you have questions about this report or want to learn more about membership support, volunteer opportunities, and new programs please contact us at:

(609) 737-3735.



www.thewatershed.org

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Executive Summary

Picture it: Autumn, 2024, Hopewell Borough, New Jersey. The tree-lined Broad Street is slowly shedding its leaves on the visitors that spend the day window shopping at the array of antique stores. Across town a train has just arrived and has brought more visitors for the day's event in the Borough Park. Artists, musicians, and craftsmen display their talents as local organizations provide a wealth of information to all who attended. It is a day for celebrating 20 years of preserved farmland, forests, waterways and the village charm that makes Hopewell Borough unique.

Sound like a Utopia? Maybe. But the issues are real and municipal officials have the opportunity to make decisions that will lead to this heightened standard of living. They can enact ordinances and educate the public, but they can't do it alone.

Over the years, municipalities have been contacting the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association (the Association) requesting guidance with various planning or environmental issues. The Association decided that responding to these issues comprehensively would be most effective. Thus, the Association created the Municipal Assessment Program. This program is designed to identify the issues in a municipality that contradict the preservation of natural resources or quality of life in and around the community. It takes strong community leadership to step back and evaluate goals, policies and strategies and determine how to better achieve their ultimate vision. Hopewell Borough was ready for this challenge and the Association was, in turn, excited to work with such a dedicated and open community.

The Association would first like to commend Hopewell Borough for their ongoing projects and past accomplishments, which include:

- ⊘ Providing a website to inform and update residents about events and news in the Borough.
- ⊘ Encouraging residents to be a part of the Borough's Master Plan Reexamination process.
- ⊘ Conducting restorations on streambanks in the Borough Park to rehabilitate the waterways for enjoyment and healthful habitats.
- ⊘ Providing a sense of community through musical performances at the Borough Park Gazebo in the summertime.



Gazebo in the Borough Park

After Hopewell Borough formally partnered with the Association through a resolution, Association Staff began the municipal assessment process with a collection of survey responses from municipal officials, staff, and consultants to determine the community's vision. The Association then reviewed the Borough's Master Plan, land use ordinances, policies, and best management practices. These two steps guided the evaluation, which is divided into four major themes: Land Use Planning Techniques, Land Conservation Techniques, Direct Municipal Responsibility for the Environment, and Watershed Stewardship Projects. Using the Master Plan and survey responses as the Borough's overall vision, the evaluation of the Borough's ordinances and best management practices led to determining areas that need to be strengthened so that Hopewell can realize its vision. These areas became the focus of the assessment report and a "step" toward making the connection.

Each chapter - or "step" - in the assessment report lists the Borough's *Goal* according to the Master Plan and survey responses and the *Current Protection* the Borough has on the books. The heart of each step focuses on the *Options* for new opportunities, as suggested by the Association. Here the municipality is given a menu of choices for planning and conservation projects to implement now and in the future. The *Did You Know* section contains information such as population change within the Borough and efforts on which surrounding communities are working. Finally, *Additional Resources* provide additional information or guidance about that particular subject.

As a catalyst to achieve responsible planning and environmental quality, it is the Association's intention that this report serve as a guide and inspiration for work, such as the aforementioned accomplishments. Future boards and committees should refer to this document for ideas and guidance and to make connections with other communities and local organizations. As an interim step in the implementation of these practices, the report offers a variety of recommendations, which the Association is partially funded to help implement.

This report is a general guide to current and future projects for this community that will connect goals with implementation and implementation with vision. The results of this analysis for Hopewell Borough are documented in this report, entitled "**Taking the Next Step**". Outlined below are the 12 strategies for achieving Hopewell Borough's goals. (Please refer to the full report for more detail).

∅ **Creating a Stormwater Management Plan**

Borough Goal: Encourage the continued analysis of surface water, perhaps by the stream watch group of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed.

Current Protection: Planning Board "may" consider the relationship between the area to be developed and the total drainage basin of that area, total impervious cover of the site, and the use and condition of the remaining land in the drainage basin.

Recommendations: Adopt ordinance language and policies to implement stormwater management and best management practices.

∅ **Protecting Critical Recharge Areas**

Borough Goal: To conserve and protect natural resources, including: maintain water quality and supply and complete a watershed study to inventory wells and where they draw from.

Current Protection: The Borough currently does not have ordinances that protect recharge areas.

Recommendations: Completing a wellhead inventory throughout the Borough and creating a wellhead protection plan (WHP).

∅ **Preserving Open Space**

Borough Goal: “To complete a greenbelt around the Borough...” is the Borough’s major goal for preservation.

Current Protection: Implemented a \$0.01 Open Space Tax and received \$3 million in 1993/94 that was allocated to Mercer County and the Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space.

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

∅ **Protecting Stream Corridors**

Borough Goal: Development proposals for remaining vacant lands should be sensitive to available potable water supply, and sanitary sewer capacity.

Current Protection: No structure shall be built within 25 feet of the centerline of an open stream carrying water on an average of six months of the year (and that) no building shall be constructed on land subject to periodic overflow.

Recommendations: Adopt Best Management Practices to prevent stream degradation.

∅ **Resolving Existing External Traffic Issues**

Borough Goal: Short term goals include participating in a regional partnership to address transportation needs and concerns. Longer term goals are narrowed down to five issues: Regional Roadways, Passenger Rail Service, Public Bus Service, County Speed Limits, and Land Use/ Transportation Tools.

Current Protection: The only “protection” for external traffic issues can be found in the Subdivision Ordinance in the form of street specifications.

Recommendations: Utilize the completed traffic study to formulate an action plan for the Borough.

∅ **Providing Facilities Concurrent with Growth**

Borough Goal: Expand housing opportunities to permit small, affordable living units (accessory apartments in outbuildings)

Current Protection: Under the NJ Fair Housing Act of 1985 “all municipalities in the State [must] include an adopted housing element in all master plans.”

Recommendations: Create and implement policies to allow for accommodation of the growing population.

∅ **Protecting Wetlands, Woodlands, and Wildlife Habitat**

Borough Goal: To conserve and protect natural resources.

Current Protection: Lands which are designated wetlands, wetland transition areas and which are permanently protected from development by other regulations shall be restricted by deed reservation to conservation uses only.

Recommendations: Adopt additional ordinances and land use policies to ensure preservation and protection of wetland, woodlands, and wildlife habitats.

∅ **Preserving Village Character**

Borough Goal: Promote opportunities that will maintain and enhance Hopewell Borough as a village center.

Current Protection: In this district “any proposed exterior new construction, alterations, or renovations that can be seen from a public street requires Planning Board review and approval.

Recommendations: Develop land use policies and design standards that will maintain and enhance Hopewell Borough as a village center.

§ **Creating Redevelopment Strategies for Downtown**

Borough Goal: The 1997 Master Plan recognizes that the community is a very special place by virtue of its existing village form, its historic identity, and its visual attractiveness. All plan proposals are intended to preserve and/or strengthen these features while reflecting Master Plan goals.

Current Protection: Majority of the Borough's main street is zoned for residential with lot sizes up to 14,000 square feet and for business with lot sizes up to 4,000 square feet. In addition, these areas are also under the Historic District Zone.

Recommendations: Adopt redevelopment strategies in the Master Plan to provide viable rehabilitation to the Borough's core area.

§ **Preserving/Protecting Historic, Archaeological and Cultural Features**

Borough Goal: All development and redevelopment should be harmonious with the historic character of the community.

Current Protection: The Historic District zone (HD) is regulated through the Borough's Zoning Ordinance and a map identifying all of the properties in the Borough that are included in the HD zone.

Recommendations: Continuing to educate and involve the community in protecting historic features, including structures, lands and views.

§ **Municipal Official Education**

Borough Goal: To ensure that decisions are based on sound facts and to ensure that the Borough does not become polarized.

Current Protection: Elected and appointed officials work with Hopewell Township's Health Department, among other entities to ensure communication between the municipalities.

Recommendations: Encourage municipal officials to attend technical trainings and workshops.

§ **Public Participation**

Borough Goal: To continue to include community members in the municipal process.

Current Protection: The Borough has recently revamped the town's website to include local news and updates, as well as upcoming events!

Recommendations: Continue to encourage residents to attend public meetings and to get involved with community events.

Ultimately, Hopewell Borough must develop strategies that work toward achieving the current vision of the community and for future generations of residents. This report is the next step in creating that vision. By committing to follow through on this report, the Association and Hopewell Borough are achieving the mission of preserving and enhancing the watershed and the communities within it.

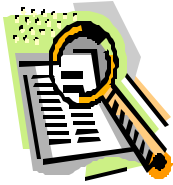
Acknowledgements

We commend Hopewell Borough's leaders and professionals for participating in this program and for allowing the Association to evaluate current practices. It is difficult for anyone, whether an individual or a municipal body, to have the courage to evaluate current work, determine where and how to improve a current system, and if necessary develop, a new strategy. We want the readers of this report to look at not only what can be done, but what has already been accomplished in Hopewell Borough.

Our hope is that Hopewell will learn from and expand on their own experiences, challenges, and successes, as well as those of surrounding municipalities, keeping in mind that zoning and policies should look regionally to provide comprehensive and sensible growth. We also look forward to partnering with the Borough in embracing new opportunities that protect and enhance the character and natural environment that makes Hopewell a special place to live.

We wish to thank the William Penn Foundation and the Geraldine R Dodge Foundation for their generosity in funding this project. We would also like to acknowledge the individual input of Hopewell Borough's former Mayor George Padgett, Borough Administrator Michelle Hovan, and the members of the Master Plan Subcommittee for generously giving our staff the time and assistance to complete the assessment.

How To Use This Report

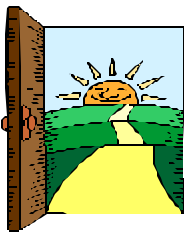


After evaluating the survey responses, we reviewed Hopewell Borough's Master Plan and its land use ordinances, policies, best management practices using a background study developed by the Association. To guide our evaluation, we developed a checklist that covers areas important to land planning techniques, land conservation, how the municipality addresses environmental issues and what watershed stewardship projects are underway. We also interviewed key personnel to complete the assessment.

Each "step" in the assessment report lists the Borough's *Goal* for that step according to the Master Plan and survey responses and the *Current Protection* the Borough has on the books. The heart of each step focuses on the *Options* for new opportunities, as suggested by the Association. Here the municipality is given a menu of choices for planning and conservation projects to develop now and in the future. In the *Did You Know* section you can read about information pertaining to Hopewell Borough and what communities state and nationwide are doing. Finally, *Additional Resources* provide additional information or guidance about that particular subject.

This report serves as a guide for future boards and committees to inspire work on new projects and to support those tasks before them. It also provides an opportunity for those municipal groups to support other community and local non-profit groups.

Next Steps



As Hopewell Borough continues its work enhancing quality of life, this document serves as guidance for future projects and provides ideas on where to begin. Once the Assessment report is adopted and a short list of priorities is determined, the Association will work with Borough officials to develop more detailed information, models and guidance to help implement that list. This partnership will allow for the Association to support Hopewell Borough and to also learn from your experiences.

The Association will work by your side in your efforts to provide Borough citizens with a sense of community, a healthy environment and a strong economy, all within a rural setting. We realize that the Borough has already begun implementing some of the options listed in this report (for example, involving the public in a master plan process). The Association offers assistance to the Borough in their efforts to achieve comprehensive planning and ensure that the plans relate to the strategies of the surrounding communities. By committing ourselves to follow through on this report and its results, the Association is achieving its mission of protecting and preserving the watershed.

Highlights of Your Town



When beginning this assessment, members of the Hopewell Borough Council, Planning Board, and various staff and consultants articulated their goals and vision for the Borough by responding to our survey. The Association feels it is important to note the proactive measures that have been implemented within the Borough and that have created the unique place that is Hopewell Borough.

Good Things...

Hopewell Borough Website

Since the start of the Municipal Assessment process, the Borough has released a new website with information for residents and visitors to use and enjoy. Residents are able to get information on Borough meetings, local news and updates, and events happening in Hopewell. The Borough's website is now up and running at www.hopewellboro-nj.us.

Restoration Projects

Through a grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Hopewell Borough's Engineer, with assistance from the Association, will conduct a streambank restoration project and replace a footbridge on the Beden Brook in the Hopewell Borough Park. The footbridge will be raised out of the flow of the water to restore the natural stream flow and increase habitat for organisms in the stream and animals in the stream's corridor. This project will also allow for more residents and visitors of the Borough to enjoy the Park, the Brook, and the Trails to the fullest.

Master Plan / Public Process

Hopewell Borough is currently undergoing the Master Plan update process for which they have opened meetings to the public for review and comment on drafts. Taking part in this municipal assessment process will be useful for the Borough in preparing a comprehensive Master Plan, as the assessment provides a watershed perspective of land use and environmental planning.

Introduction

The elected and appointed officials in Hopewell Borough have a challenging task: balance natural resource protection with economic prosperity, encourage business, provide residential services, and determine where best to site a variety of land uses in the Borough. Hopewell Borough leaders strive to ensure that the needs of current residents are met and that there will be high quality of life for residents in the future. To carry out this important task, officials rely on their Master Plan to provide a vision for the future and use zoning, policies and ordinances as the tools to ensure the prosperity and health of their Borough.

The Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association (the Association) recognizes the magnitude of this task, especially in knowing that the protection and health of a watershed relies a great deal on the land use laws and policies that govern development. Thus, the Association developed the Municipal Assessment Program. In partnering with municipalities the Association provides an outside evaluation of current practices and supports planning that protects the natural environment and ensures the vision in the Master Plan is achieved.

By developing a Master Plan that guides both growth and conservation, clearly states goals and objectives, and highlights a vision for the future, Hopewell is planning for quality of life for both current and future residents. The leaders recognize their current position and are actively working to ensure that their community retains its historic character, environmental health, and viable economy.

The Association was excited to partner with Hopewell Borough on this project, as it is a community reevaluating an overall vision through the Master Plan reexamination process, while protecting the unique cultural and historic features of the community. Hopewell has many historic landmarks, including homes and churches; a Main Street that serves as a major thruway for over 30,000 vehicles a day, as well as a destination spot; open spaces within and surrounding the Borough; and well-educated, dedicated representatives who have worked hard to provide and maintain all of this for Hopewell Borough citizens.

This unique combination of elements presents an opportunity for the Borough to share experiences with surrounding municipalities and with the Association. Making the bold move to assess their own practices, Hopewell Borough is advancing efforts to take on the challenge of protecting and enhancing the Borough's qualities.