
BOROUGH OF HIGHLAND PARK 2003 MASTER PLAN

Middlesex County, NJ



May 2003

HIGHLAND PARK MASTER PLAN

Borough of Highland Park
Middlesex County, NJ

Adopted May 5, 2003

Prepared by

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The original of this report was signed and sealed in
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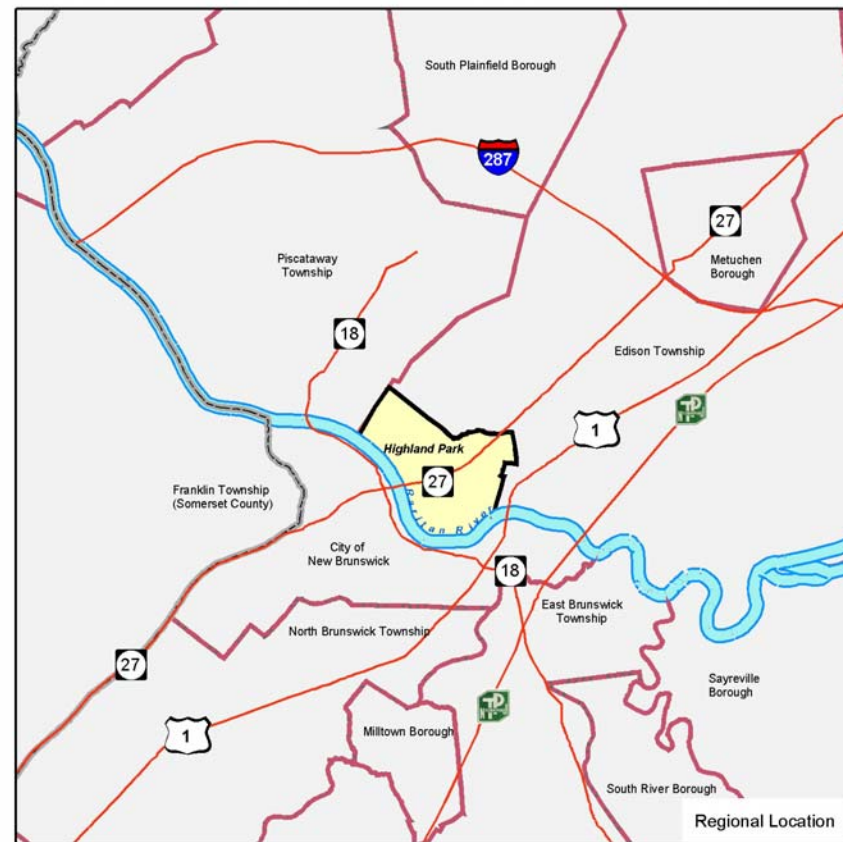
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SECTION I: GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



The Borough of Highland Park, 1.9 square miles in area, is situated in the western part of Middlesex County, located within central New Jersey. As shown on the Regional Location Map, the Borough is well-served by major roadways with convenient access from the New Jersey Turnpike, Routes 18, 1, and I-287. The Borough is adjacent to the City of New Brunswick, Edison and Piscataway Townships and within commuting distance of Manhattan. Highland Park is distinguished by a strong traditional town character, attractive neighborhoods, a mixed-use downtown and extensive parks, recreation and open space. These factors contribute to a high quality of life that makes Highland Park a desirable place to live, work and visit.



SOURCE: NJDEP

MASTER PLAN REQUIREMENTS

A master plan provides a comprehensive guide for the future development and preservation of key areas within a community. It serves as a comprehensive approach to planning issues and considers many factors impacting a

community's development, including physical, aesthetic and economic needs.

The Municipal Land Use Law, NJSA 40:55D-1, requires that a municipality prepare a master plan and provide an update every six years. The Borough of Highland Park prepared its last Master Plan in 1995 and a Reexamination Report was completed in June 2001. In an effort to examine the Borough's existing conditions and provide a new vision for the future of Highland Park, a Master Plan Advisory Review Committee was established.

State law requires master plans to include a statement of goals and objectives upon which the plan is based. The plan must also include:

- A land use plan indicating natural conditions, the extent and intensity of land to be used for future development, the location of existing or proposed airports and airport hazard areas and a statement of recommended population density and development intensity.
- A specific policy statement indicating the relationship of the Plan to its neighboring communities, the County and other appropriate jurisdictions.

In order for the zoning of a community to be held valid, the master plan must contain a Housing Plan Element. The Borough's Housing Element was prepared in 1998 and remains in effect until 2004. It is summarized in this plan.

This master plan includes the required components, in addition to the following optional elements:

- Economic Development;
- Circulation;
- Municipal Services;
- Conservation, Open Space and Recreation;
- Historic Preservation; and an
- Action Plan.

Upon adoption by the Planning Board, the master plan gives the community the legal basis for adopting land use regulations. Most recommendations are implemented in the form of amendments to zoning and land development ordinances, a process which begins after the master plan is adopted.

MASTER PLAN PROCESS

The Borough initiated the comprehensive planning process in early 2002. Public participation has been an integral part of the process. Over the past year and a half, eight meetings open to the public were held with the Master Plan Advisory Review Committee (MPARC), a community survey was conducted and two community meetings were held to identify key issues and provide opportunities for feedback and comment. During the final stages of the document, the master plan was also presented to the Planning Board and discussed at two public meetings. Comments on the document have been incorporated into the final draft. The goal of this process has been to ensure that the plan is developed in concert with the public's concerns and perceptions of the community. This is especially important given the vitality and diversity of the Borough's residents.

MPARC AND COMMUNITY INPUT

In addition to the MPARC meetings, the Borough held two community meetings as a part of the public participation to address the master plan. The first meeting was held on March 10, 2002. Its purpose was to provide a brief overview of the master plan and its process, to identify the community's strengths and areas of concern and to provide a forum for public participation and input. Some of the key strengths identified by participants were:

- The town's manageable size and walkability (sidewalks, safety, small size and scale).
- Diversity in residents.
- Small town atmosphere and character of the Borough.
- Presence of natural resources such as the riverfront, parks, and conservation areas.
- Good school system.

Some of the identified areas of concern were:

- Lack of business coordination.
- Insufficient diversity in downtown retail stores.
- Congestion and the need for traffic calming and pedestrian safety improvements along Raritan Avenue and parallel streets.
- Vacant storefronts and the need for downtown revitalization.
- The importance of conserving natural resources and open space.

A second community meeting was held on December 18, 2002. A presentation of the master plan was provided and public input was solicited through stations addressing the various elements of the plan. Comment forms were also used to record the public's concerns.

In addition to the community meetings, additional outreach activities were conducted to facilitate the community's views and vision for Highland Park. The first of these efforts included the Highland Park Community Survey. This survey was conducted during the Highland Park Street Fair and included questions, such as:

- What attracted you to live in Highland Park?
- What are the top three community development challenges facing Highland Park and what would you like to see change?

In general, the majority of respondents liked being able to walk or bike to places and activities, identified neighborhood character as an asset, enjoyed being close to New Brunswick, noted the good school system and found accessibility to mass transit a benefit. Residents also noted the top three community development issues facing the Borough as:

- Promoting a vital central business district;
- Protecting the small town feel of the Borough; and,
- Preserving the Borough's remaining environmentally sensitive lands.

The second effort was the Highland Park Shopper Survey. This survey asked questions relating to the downtown and the overall shopping experience in the Borough. The majority of the respondents frequented downtown Highland Park two to four times per week. The survey also asked where residents shop outside of the Borough. The majority of respondents went to New Brunswick and Princeton for dining, Menlo Park Mall for clothing, Edison for food shopping, and along Route 18 for specialty stores. The survey also addressed the types of stores and services people would like to see in the downtown. Some of these included restaurants, bookstores, food shopping, bakeries, gourmet shops, health food and gift shops.

MASTER PLAN GOALS & OBJECTIVES

The Municipal Land Use Law (40:55D-28) requires that every municipal master plan contain a statement of Goals and

Objectives that serve as the basis for the community's comprehensive master plan.

The Goals and Objectives have been established through comments received at the public forums, responses to surveys distributed throughout the Borough, discussions at open meetings of the Planning Board and public hearings on the draft of this plan.

The Goals are developed as an overall framework for the development and preservation of the Borough. The Objectives provide a more specific approach to obtaining the Goals.

Goals:

The goals of this Master Plan are:

- To preserve and enhance the character and small town feel of the community;
- To ensure a vibrant downtown and commercial corridors;
- To protect the Borough's environmentally sensitive areas; and,
- To promote a high quality of life for all residents.

Land Use Objectives:

- Minimize conflicts between residential and nonresidential uses;
- Identify opportunities for redevelopment and revitalization to enhance the economic diversification of the Borough and the Borough's tax base;
- Incorporate the existing natural and historic features in the Borough's future development and revitalization;
- Continue to provide a variety of housing types for a diverse population;
- Expand opportunities for mixed-use development in the downtown, including ground floor retail with housing and professional offices on upper floors;
- Ensure new development, expansions and renovations of commercial, residential and public uses meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the New Jersey Barrier Free Access Code;
- Continue to administer the Neighborhood Preservation Program and to assist residents in evaluating their eligibility for the County's rehabilitation program;

- Define the Borough's downtown gateways by enhancing the Raritan Avenue and Woodbridge Avenue entries with attractive signage, landscaping, and streetscape amenities;
- Promote a vital Central Business District through revitalization, redevelopment and development of a comprehensive vision and marketing strategy;
- Improve connections between the Woodbridge Avenue and Raritan Avenue commercial areas by implementing compatible, yet unique streetscape elements;
- Coordinate local, county and state planning efforts to revitalize underutilized commercial and industrial sites, especially along Raritan and Cleveland Avenues;
- Improve code compliance, especially of commercial areas;
- Improve coordination with surrounding communities and Rutgers University to achieve regional recreation, transportation, economic development, and land use goals;
- Encourage in-fill development that is compatible with the scale, density and design of the Borough's existing residential neighborhoods and historic development patterns; and,
- Recognize the Raritan River as an important natural, recreational and educational resource within the Borough.

Economic Plan Objectives:

- Identify opportunities for revitalization, redevelopment and infill development in the Borough's non-residential districts;
- Integrate the downtown revitalization planning process commencing for the downtown (Main Street Program) with other master plan recommendations to support future planning efforts;
- Identify a management structure for revitalization efforts, such as a Business Improvement District and creation of a redevelopment agency;
- Continue and expand successful incentive programs such as the Façade Improvement Program, the commercial component of the Neighborhood Preservation Program and the recently established Awning Assistance Program;

- Encourage expansion of traditional retail uses in the Central Business District;
- Encourage residential units in the downtown above stores;
- Cultivate partnerships with Rutgers University, Johnson & Johnson, the City of New Brunswick, the recently established Main Street Program and the Fund for Highland Park, to aid in redevelopment efforts; and,
- Seek plan endorsement from the reconstituted Office of Smart Growth to assist with plan implementation and to position the Borough for priority funding by state agencies.

Circulation Objectives:

- Provide road and intersection improvements to address identified safety hot-spots and to improve circulation for vehicles, pedestrians and bicyclists;
- Coordinate with NJDOT and the County to ensure that any roadway improvements will be context-sensitive and consider all modes of transportation, especially pedestrian mobility;
- Improve pedestrian safety and mobility throughout the Borough;
- Designate bikeways and bike routes;
- Identify funding sources for pedestrian and bicycle safety improvements on the Borough's main arteries;
- Identify key locations for traffic calming improvements, especially in residential areas and in close proximity to schools and other community facilities;
- Pursue funding options for a community shuttle bus demonstration project connecting the Borough to New Brunswick and the Rutgers campuses; and,
- Examine CBD parking supply and parking requirements.

Municipal Services Objectives:

- Ensure all areas of the Borough receive adequate municipal services;
- Continue to maintain and upgrade Borough infrastructure in a systematic fashion; and,
- Identify funding sources to help address service and equipment needs.

Conservation, Open Space, and Recreation Objectives:

- Preserve and protect important natural features such as the Raritan River, Mill Brook and Buell Brook;

- Provide mini-parks within ¼ mile of residential neighborhoods;
- Promote expanded recreational opportunities for all segments of the community in both local and regional parks;
- Develop linkages and expand passive recreational areas along the Raritan River Greenway;
- Develop the Environmental Education Center/ Waterfront Park as the focal point of the Raritan River Greenway;
- Incorporate public spaces into future downtown redevelopment projects;
- Identify and plan to acquire open space through a variety of techniques, including acquisition with NJ Department of Environmental Protection Green Acres funds and Middlesex County open space funds, conservation easements, and cluster development;
- Execute and expand street tree planting program in the Borough's commercial districts, especially along Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues; and,
- Adopt steep slopes and stream protection ordinances.

Historic Preservation Objectives:

- Identify historic districts and structures to protect and enhance the architectural fabric of the community;
- Retain and protect historic features in new projects, as well as in rehabilitation and redevelopment projects;
- Encourage land use and revitalization strategies that are consistent with and preserve the architectural and historical integrity of the community;
- Encourage in-fill development and rehabilitation projects to respect historic features of existing neighborhoods and incorporate those features as the basis for design;
- Expand public education on the benefits of historic preservation;
- Include historic information in the environmental education center's interpretive markers;
- Study feasibility of a historic commission and ordinance, as contemplated by the Municipal Land Use Law; and,
- Pursue funding sources to assist in preservation efforts, including surveys and educational outreach.

SECTION II: LAND USE ELEMENT



DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Following the construction of Livingston Manor in the early part of the 20th Century, Highland Park's population grew to almost 5,000. A second growth spurt occurred following WWII. During the post war period, between 1950 and 1960, the Borough experienced the most explosive growth of any period in its history as its population reached over 11,000 residents.

As residential development continued east of Fifth Avenue and south of Raritan Avenue in the 1960s, the Borough's population grew to 14,385 residents in 1970. Throughout the seventies and eighties, the Borough's population decreased as household size declined and residential development in larger, suburban communities accelerated. By 1990, the population of Highland Park reached a thirty year low at 13,279. However, during the 1990s, household size again began to increase (from 2.30 to 2.37) and by 2000, the Borough's population increased by 5% to 13,999. Population projections prepared by the Middlesex County Planning Department for Highland Park indicate an increase of 852 people over the next 20 years or a 2020 population of 14,851.

Year	Total Population
1970	14,385
1980	13,396
1990	13,279
2000	13,999
2020	14,851

Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1970 - 2000; Middlesex County Planning Department, 2020 population projections.

Table II-2 presents population by age group for 1990 and 2000. As shown, there were major increases in the 5-19 and 45-54 age groups during the 1990s, with 25% and 32% gains, respectively. Concurrently with the increases in school-age children and residents in the 45 to 54 year cohort, there was a 24% decrease in residents between the ages of 65 and 74 and a 20% increase in those 75 years and older.

Table II-3 shows population by race and ethnicity for 1990 and 2000. During this decade, the Borough experienced a nearly threefold increase in its Asian population and a 42% increase in its Latino population.

Age	1990		2000		% Change (1990-2000)
	Total	Percent	Total	Percent	
Under 5	915	6.9%	836	6.0%	-8.6%
5-19	1,955	14.7%	2,447	17.5%	25.2%
20-24	1,032	7.8%	997	7.1%	-3.4%
25-34	3,064	23.1%	2,805	20.0%	-8.5%
35-44	2,162	16.3%	2,382	17.0%	10.2%
45-54	1,349	10.2%	1,782	12.7%	32.1%
55-64	1,031	7.8%	1,078	7.7%	4.6%
65-74	1,028	7.7%	783	5.6%	-23.8%
75 and Over	743	5.6%	889	6.4%	19.7%
Total Population	13,279		13,999		5.4%

Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990 and 2000.

Total Population	1990		2000		% Change (1990-2000)
	Total	%	Total	%	
White	11,251	84.7%	10,109	72.2%	-10.2%
Black/African American	1,132	8.5%	1,096	7.8%	-3.2%
American Indian/Alaska Native	22	0.2%	6	0.0%	-72.7%
Asian	643	4.8%	1,926	13.8%	199.5%
Native Hawaiian	*	N/A	0	0.0%	N/A
Some Other Race	231	1.7%	496	3.5%	114.7%
Two or More Races	*	N/A	366	3%	N/A
Hispanic or Latino**	799	6.0%	1,132	8.1%	41.7%
Total Population	13,279		13,999		5.4%

*This response was not included in 1990 Census.

** Excluded from total.

Source: U.S. Census of Population and Housing, 1990 and 2000.

EXISTING DEVELOPMENT PATTERN

A land use analysis of Highland Park was conducted using existing mapping and tax records, as well as extensive field verification. Table II-4 shows the breakdown of the land use categories and the acreage devoted to each use. Map II-1 shows existing land use. Land uses in the Borough can be classified into the following categories:

- Single Family Residential
- Two Family Residential
- Townhouses

- 3 to 8 Dwelling Unit Multi-family
- Garden Apartments
- Midrise Apartments
- Retail Business/Service
- Automotive Commercial
- Office
- Light Industrial
- Quasi-Public/Institutional
- Community Facility
- Recreation/Conservation
- Utility
- Vacant (Privately Owned)
- Vacant (Publicly Owned)

Land Use Type	Acres	Percent
Single Family Residential	350	36%
Two Family Residential	36	4%
Townhouses	8	1%
3-8 DU Multifamily	11	1%
Garden Apartments	117	12%
Midrise Apartments	12	1%
Retail Business/Services	25	3%
Automotive Commercial	8	1%
Office	30	3%
Light Industrial	14	1%
Quasi Public/Institutional	38	4%
Community Facility	30	3%
Recreation/Conservation	217	23%
Utility	23	2%
Vacant (Private)	31	3%
Vacant (Public)	12	1%
Total	962	100%

Source: Orth-Rodgers and Associates, 2002.

The Borough's land use pattern reflects the historic development patterns typical of many smaller, older suburbs. Raritan Avenue serves as the Borough's main street. Its central location anchors compact neighborhoods on either side. Most Borough residents are within walking distance of shopping, transit and recreation. Today, most of the Borough's industry is located along the Cleveland Avenue corridor.

Piscataway

Edison



















Edison

New Brunswick

Raritan River

Raritan River

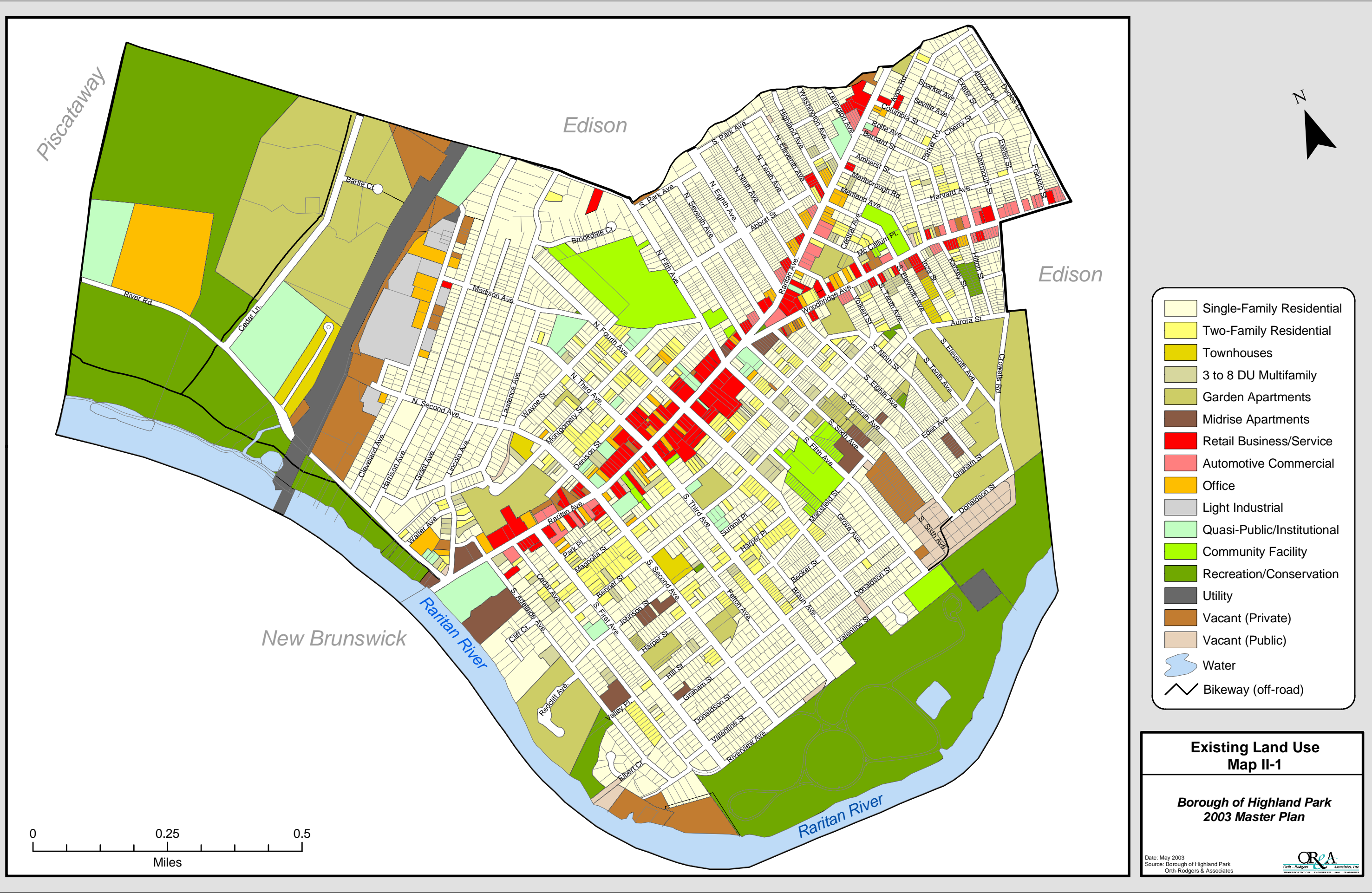
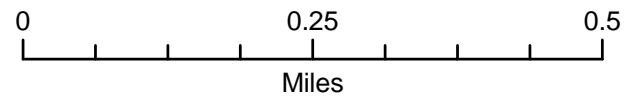


-  Single-Family Residential
-  Two-Family Residential
-  Townhouses
-  3 to 8 DU Multifamily
-  Garden Apartments
-  Midrise Apartments
-  Retail Business/Service
-  Automotive Commercial
-  Office
-  Light Industrial
-  Quasi-Public/Institutional
-  Community Facility
-  Recreation/Conservation
-  Utility
-  Vacant (Private)
-  Vacant (Public)
-  Water
-  Bikeway (off-road)

**Existing Land Use
Map II-1**

**Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan**

Date: May 2003
Source: Borough of Highland Park
Orth-Rodgers & Associates



Piscataway

Edison

Edison

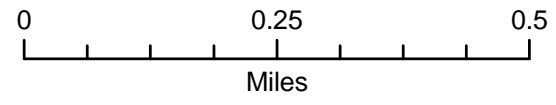
New Brunswick

Raritan River

Raritan River



-  Commercial
-  Conservation & Recreation
-  Central Business District
-  Community Services
-  Light Industrial
-  Professional Office
-  Quasi-Public
-  Single-Family Residential
-  Single-Family Ecologic
-  Two-Family Residential
-  Garden Apartments
-  Midrise Residential
-  Townhouses
-  Riverfront Residential
-  Senior Citizen Public Housing
-  Research & Development
-  Bikeway (off-road)



**Land Use Plan
Map II-2**

**Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan**

Date: May 2003
Source: Borough of Highland Park
Orth-Rodgers & Associates



Compact development helps to define the character of the Borough's commercial corridors and residential neighborhoods.

In addition to the built environment, the Raritan River has been identified as a valuable natural resource. It played a significant role in the Borough's development historically and provides recreational and open space opportunities to the community and region.

This element identifies the Borough's existing development by land use type, and provides recommendations for each major land use category within the Borough. These recommendations, as well as major conservation, open space and recreation recommendations, are reflected on the Land Use Plan, Map II-2.

RESIDENTIAL LAND USE
Existing Residential Land Use

The predominant land use in Highland Park is single family residential, covering 36% of the Borough's land area. While lot sizes vary throughout the Borough, the typical single-family lot is 5,000 square feet. Generally, existing homes are older, well-maintained structures that exhibit details of their period of construction.

The Livingston Manor residential neighborhood, generally bounded by Cleveland Avenue, Lawrence Avenue, Madison Avenue and River Road, is architecturally distinct from other places within the Borough. This neighborhood was developed between 1907 and 1922 by Watson Whittlesey and contains many examples of late 19th- and early 20th-century architectural styles with significant Craftsman-style influence. Another unique characteristic of this neighborhood is the mid-block sidewalks that bisect the long blocks between cross streets. Other single-family residential areas of the Borough were also developed as distinct tracts by specific architects/developers. For example, a group of South Adelaide Avenue and Cliff Court houses were designed by Alexander Merchant, a significant local architect during the first half of the 20th century.



Single Family Neighborhood

Garden apartments, second only to single family residences, account for approximately 21% of the Borough's residential land area and 12% of the total land area. This reflects the high percentage of renter-occupied units (60% of the Borough's housing stock).



Garden Apartments

Residential development, which has occurred over the past several decades, has been a mixture of garden apartments, townhouses and single-family dwellings. Some of the Borough's sizeable garden apartment developments include the Highland Montgomery Apartments on Montgomery Street, the Orchard Gardens Apartments on Crowells Road, as well as complexes on Cedar Lane, Magnolia Street and Woodbridge Avenue.



Townhouse Dwelling

The remaining residential uses include two-family, three to eight unit multifamily structures, townhouses and mid-rise developments. Two-family homes are scattered throughout the Borough; however, the highest concentration can be found within three blocks of Raritan or Woodbridge Avenues. Townhouses are located on North Second Avenue and more recently the L'Ambiance Townhouses off River Road.



Four-Family Dwelling

Public housing takes the form of garden apartments, located in the Borough's southeast corner. Mid-rise housing can be found on Raritan, Woodbridge and Adelaide Avenues and Graham Street; mid-rise, senior housing complexes are located on South Fifth and Sixth Avenues. In total, approximately 7 percent of the Borough's land is occupied by two to eight unit structures, townhouses and mid-rise residential uses.



Parktown Apartment

Recent ordinance amendments, aimed at reducing the impact of development on environmentally constrained lands, include the rezoning of several tracts to a new RA-E Single-Family Ecologic District. These tracts include part of the former Borough landfill (approximately 6.5 acres of the Meadows), the vacant tract between South Fifth and South Seventh Avenues (formerly known as the Buck Property), the Midland Ross property (approximately 9 acres between Janeway Avenue, the rail corridor and Cleveland Avenue) and the previous RMT-E Townhouse Ecologic district that encompassed part of the Rutgers Ecological Preserve.



Midland Ross



Vacant tract between South Fifth and South Seventh Avenues

This designation provides for greater flexibility in development and preservation of natural resources and critical areas. In addition, the areas zoned RA-E are adjacent to major open space holdings or county parks. With creative site design, these parcels provide an opportunity to connect open spaces within the Borough.

The Rutgers Ecological Preserve & Natural Teaching Area, which is the Borough's largest undeveloped tract, is under state ownership and used for conservation and educational purposes. It hosts a diversity of wildlife habitats, including successional fields and woodland areas, mature forested uplands and lowland areas along stream corridors. In addition, over 200 species of animals have been recorded in the Preserve, a number of which are endangered. Waterbodies, including the Buell Brook, flow through the Rutgers Ecological Preserve. The site also contains floodplains and areas of wetlands. It is recommended that the Rutgers Ecological Preserve be rezoned to conservation and recreation to reflect the site's public ownership, the property's designation as an ecological preserve, the State Plan's designation of the property as a Critical Environmental Site, the site's environmental character and natural assets. Under state law, Rutgers is required to notify the Borough prior to any sale of the property. Based on discussions with the Director of Physical and Capital Planning, Rutgers does not presently have plans for development within the Ecological Preserve. Should Rutgers opt to sell the property to a private entity in the future, the Borough should commence a planning process to determine the most appropriate designation for the property.

Proposed Residential Bulk Requirements and Design Standards

The fabric of the Borough's existing and established historic neighborhoods should be protected and the character of residential areas should be maintained and supported when new or rehabilitative construction occurs.

In this regard, the Borough should adopt infill residential design standards that apply to the Single Family Residential (RA) and Two Family Residential (RB) Districts. Building lines and façade treatment should respect the existing development patterns and a greater use of pervious materials for driveways should be encouraged to minimize impervious coverage. Prevailing yard setbacks should be used as a guide for infill development in residential neighborhoods and existing bulk requirements should be reviewed in the context of prevailing conditions.

The goal is to create a set of architectural design standards that will guide rehabilitation and new construction within the Borough's residential districts. Some of the guidelines may be included as amendments to the bulk requirements in the RA district, while others may be specified in a separate section of

the Borough code. At a minimum, these standards should address the following:

- Yard Setbacks – In cases where historic block patterns have been maintained, yard setbacks should be determined by the prevailing setbacks found on the block, or by a predetermined distance measured in linear feet, whichever is greater. If the prevailing setback is not uniform within a certain range, the specified District standard would govern.
- Detached Garages – Detached garages should be encouraged if they are prevailing on the subject property's block.
- Architectural Features – Architectural features such as cornices, windowsills, transoms, lintels and other traditional façade components should reflect existing styles of development within neighborhoods.
- Landscaping - The area between the roadway edge and the sidewalk, commonly known as parkways, should be planted with grass, trees or some other vegetative cover. The use of pavement, pavers or stones should be discouraged.

While these guidelines are generally informational and intended to be collaborative in nature to guide residential additions and new construction, they should ultimately be used to provide the basis for amendments to the Land Development Ordinance.

Riverfront Residential District

The YM-YWHA Property, a 4-acre parcel located at the intersection of Raritan Avenue and Adelaide Avenue, should be rezoned to a new Riverfront Residential District, as reflected on Map II-2.

The site is currently zoned QP, Quasi-Public, which permits townhouses, two-family residential and single-family homes as conditional uses. Given its proximity to downtown and the New Brunswick Train Station, a new residential designation would complement the Borough's efforts to add residential units in the downtown. The new zoning designation should respect the site's scenic and environmental character and allow for compatibility with the planned riverfront greenway extending along the Raritan River.



YM-YWHA

The Riverfront Residential District should permit residential and institutional uses and encourage flexible building and design standards. Open space should be provided along the riverbank and interior to the site. Residential development should target niche markets, specifically those who want to be close to cultural and educational amenities. Efforts to preserve as much of the Meyer Rice House as feasible should be pursued as part of any future development of the Y site. Traffic impacts and internal circulation should be addressed as part of the site planning process. At a minimum, bulk and design standards should address the following:

- Height: 3-6 stories with three stories along the South Adelaide Avenue frontage.
- Design standards: Building massing, scale and architectural treatments should result in a design that is compatible with site features and minimizes visual impacts from Adelaide Avenue. In addition, standards should address circulation, landscaping and preservation of the steep river embankment.
- Density: 25 –35 units per acre maximum.
- Parking: Encourage structured/below grade parking.

Downtown Residential

Where possible, future residential uses should be incorporated into redevelopment and revitalization efforts. Housing above retail, in close proximity to restaurants, stores and transit, is one of the most appropriate uses for the Central Business District (CBD) and a cornerstone of smart growth planning principles.



Central Business District

Housing should be encouraged in the downtown to support downtown retail uses and services and revitalization efforts. A mix of owner occupied and renter occupied housing units are desired in the CBD. Recent amendments to the CBD zone allow for residential uses on all upper floors of buildings in the downtown and increase the maximum height to four (4) stories in an effort to encourage mixed-use buildings with first floor retail and upper floor professional offices and apartments.

Other Residential District Recommendations

The Borough's current Land Development Ordinance does not adequately address home-based offices. It is recommended that home-based offices be permitted in residential districts subject to specific conditions relating to traffic, parking and visual impacts. In accordance with MLUL requirements, the Borough should also amend its Land Development Ordinance to permit community residences for the developmentally disabled and family day care homes in all residential districts. In addition, amendments should permit licensed childcare centers in all non-residential districts, as required by state law. The Borough's Senior Housing District permits low and moderate income affordable housing for senior citizens. The Borough should explore opportunities for market rate age-restricted housing (55+ older) in the future as the Borough's 45 to 54 year old cohort ages in the coming decade.

COMMERCIAL LAND USE

Existing Commercial Land Use

The vast majority of the Borough's commercial properties are located along Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues. The Raritan Avenue (Route 27) corridor, the Borough's "main street," is the

primary focus of revitalization efforts due to its large concentration of retail and service businesses.

The section between Adelaide Avenue and Sixth Avenue functions as the Central Business District (CBD) and contains a mix of commercial/ retail and service establishments, including restaurants, banks, specialty stores and personal service occupations such as beauty salons. A number of churches and a synagogue are also located in the corridor, as well as the Post Office. Office and residential uses can be found above ground floor commercial uses in the CBD. Woodbridge Avenue (C.R. 514) is also a focus of commercial revitalization efforts. The section of Woodbridge Avenue that extends from Raritan Avenue to Irving Primary School has a mixed-use character, with retail stores, services, offices and apartments.



Central Business District



















Woodbridge Avenue




Most professional offices are located along Raritan Avenue in the CBD; however, they are not permitted as principal uses on the ground floor.

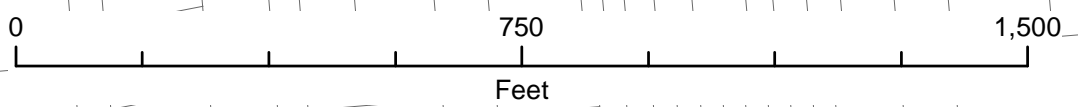
Map II-3 and Table II-5 identify the commercial uses in the CBD, including: 41 retail businesses, 27 professional offices, 17 restaurants/food services outlets, 14 hair/nail salons and seven auto sales/services establishments. The Detailed Existing Land Use Inventory indicates that Highland Park has a disproportionate number of auto sales and service stations in its downtown. On Raritan Avenue, the greatest concentration is between Adelaide and Second Avenues, in the heart of the downtown. There are six non-conforming auto-related sales and service uses in this three-block stretch, with the majority clustered between First and Second Avenues. The inventory also indicates that there are three banks within a four block section of the CBD, each of which has a drive-through facility. Banks and financial institutions generally do not



-  Artist Studio/Gallery
-  Auto Sales/Service
-  Bank
-  Fraternal Organization
-  Funeral Home
-  Hair/Nail Salon
-  Off-Street Parking
-  Other Commercial
-  Professional Office
-  Public/Institutional
-  Residential
-  Restaurant/Food Service
-  Retail
-  Taxi/Livery
-  Vacant Land
-  Vacant Storefront

Existing Zoning

-  Commercial District
-  Central Business District
-  Professional Office District



**Central Business District
Map II-3**

*Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan*

contribute to the vitality and street life of central business districts, especially when they contain drive-through facilities. In addition, the free-standing structures preferred by most banks are incompatible with the urban scale and character that is being promoted in the CBD. While the inventory indicates the predominance of existing retail businesses within the CBD, there should be a greater emphasis on more traditional downtown retail uses, such as restaurants and specialty stores, and greater diversity within the retail mix, including arts and cultural establishments.

Table II-5 Commercial Uses in the CBD	
Land Use	Count
Artist Studio/Gallery	2
Auto Sales/Service	7
Hair/Nail Salon	14
Bank	3
Public/Institutional	7
Off-Street Parking	12
Professional Office	27
Restaurant/Food Service	17
Retail	41
Taxi/Livery	1
Vacant Land	7
Vacant Storefront	3
Other Commercial	14
Total	155

Source: Orth Rodgers and Associates, 2002.

A shopper survey was conducted in the summer of 2002. The survey analyzed shopping patterns, including frequency of downtown shopping for a variety of goods and services. The survey indicated that 41% of respondents would like to see more restaurants and cafés in the downtown, and 18% indicated that lack of store variety is a problem that should be addressed. Table II-6 lists the types of land uses within the Upper Raritan Corridor (as shown on Map II-4). This area extends north along Raritan Avenue from Sixth Avenue to the Edison Border. The main uses are professional offices, auto sales and service, restaurants and retail stores.

Table II-7 lists the commercial uses along the Woodbridge Avenue Corridor (as shown on Map II-4). Woodbridge Avenue has a mix of offices, retail stores and auto sales/service uses.

The auto uses are generally clustered at the north end of Woodbridge Avenue, east of Amherst Street.

Table II-6 Commercial Uses in the Upper Raritan Corridor	
Land Use	Count
Artist Studio/Gallery	1
Auto Sales/Service	7
Hair/Nail Salon	2
Fraternal Organization	1
Bank	1
Public/Institutional	2
Off-Street Parking	3
Professional Office	12
Restaurant/Food Service	4
Retail	4
Taxi/Livery	0
Vacant Land	1
Vacant Storefront	0
Other Commercial	7
Total	45

Source: Orth Rodgers and Associates, 2002.

Table II-7 Commercial Uses in the Woodbridge Avenue Corridor	
Land Use	Count
Artist Studio/Gallery	1
Auto Sales/Service	12
Hair/Nail Salon	3
Fraternal Organization	0
Funeral Home	1
Bank	0
Public/Institutional	2
Off-Street Parking	0
Professional Office	7
Restaurant/Food Service	5
Retail	8
Taxi/Livery	0
Vacant Land	10
Vacant Storefront	0
Other Commercial	3
Total	52

Source: Orth Rodgers and Associates, 2002.

Unlike many other towns, the Borough has retained many of the attributes that attract shoppers to its downtown. These attributes include an interesting architectural fabric, compact form, a mix of retail and office uses and a pedestrian-friendly scale. An analysis of 2000 Census data reveals that a significant population base resides within 1,500 feet of the downtown, over 8,000 residents and 3,600 households. Unfortunately, the addition of certain uses over the years has detracted from the positive aspects of the Borough's downtown. Based on the number of housing units within 1,500 feet of the downtown, the downtown could support 205,000 square feet of retail space.¹ Current estimates indicate that downtown retail uses occupy no more than half of this square footage.

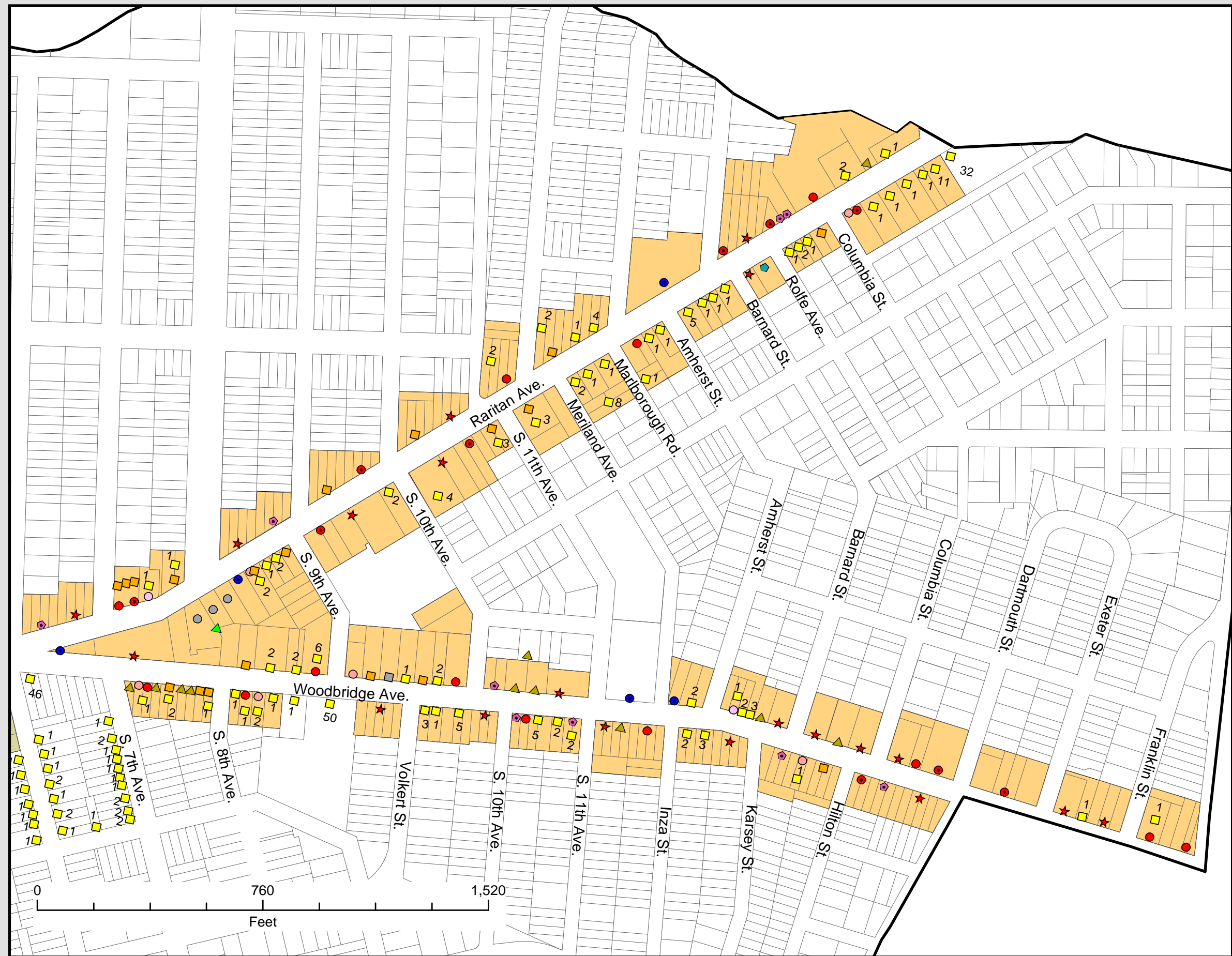


Mixed-Use within Central Business District

Proposed Changes to CBD District

The revitalization of Raritan Avenue and Woodbridge Avenue is strongly encouraged. According to population and market demands, revitalization should take the form of mixed-use buildings, containing first floor retail, and upper floor professional office and residential uses, with a minimum of two stories in height. The addition of downtown housing will both help to support existing retail and service uses and create demand for new businesses. Efforts to attract new businesses, such as restaurants, clothing stores, shoe stores, jewelry stores, cafés, diners, book shops, theatres, delis and upper-story professional offices and apartments, should be addressed and

¹ Nelessen, Anton. "Visions for a New American Dream;" based on 22.5 to 56 square feet per household within 1,500 feet of the downtown core.

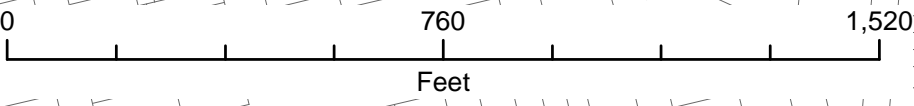


- Artist Studio/Gallery
 - Auto Sales/Service
 - Bank
 - Fraternal Organization
 - Funeral Home
 - Hair/Nail Salon
 - Off-Street Parking
 - Other Commercial
 - Professional Office
 - Public/Institutional
 - Residential
 - Restaurant/Food Service
 - Retail
 - Taxi/Livery
 - Vacant Land
 - Vacant Storefront
- Existing Zoning**
- Commercial District

Commercial District
Upper Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues
Map II-4

**Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan**

Date: May 2003
Source: Borough of Highland Park
Orin-Rodgers & Associates



incorporated into a comprehensive revitalization strategy. Smaller scale arts and cultural uses, as well as specialty shops, should be especially encouraged in the CBD since they both cater to Borough residents and have a greater regional appeal. Currently, artist's studios and artistic instruction space are permitted on ground floors accessory to arts-related retail uses and on all other floors as principal uses. The Borough should consider further ordinance revisions to permit artist live/work spaces in the downtown.

The development of a comprehensive revitalization strategy should be coordinated with the Borough's Main Street program, other Borough economic development initiatives and Highland Park Chamber of Commerce activities. In addition, the Borough should fully explore the use of New Jersey's local redevelopment statutes, including the creation and designation of a redevelopment body to coordinate and oversee revitalization efforts.

As part of the revitalization efforts, public spaces should be incorporated into any future redevelopment areas. Additional seating and landscaping is also recommended within the rights-of-way of Raritan Avenue, Woodbridge Avenue and side streets.



Woodbridge Avenue

The zoning along part of Woodbridge Avenue should be changed from the Commercial-C District to CBD to better reflect its pedestrian scale, existing mixed-use character and revitalization potential. Retail uses along this portion of Woodbridge Avenue are locally oriented, similar to those found in the CBD, and transportation characteristics, such as

the presence of on-street parking, bus stops and a two-lane roadway section, add further justification to the area's rezoning.

In particular, the following areas on Woodbridge Avenue should be rezoned from C District to CBD:

- Part of the block bounded by Raritan, Woodbridge and Ninth Avenues, including the service station, the bank and the bank parking lot.
- The north side of Woodbridge Avenue from Sixth Avenue to Eleventh Avenue.
- The south side of Woodbridge Avenue from Seventh Avenue to South Eleventh Street. The garden apartments located between Eighth and Ninth Avenues should remain in the RMG district.
- The north side of Raritan Avenue between North Sixth and Eighth Avenues.

Downtown Urban Design

Consideration must be given to urban design issues when addressing downtown revitalization. Certain blocks along Raritan Avenue in the downtown exhibit signs of strip development which result in a discontinuous and cluttered streetscape that lacks character. Multiple driveways contribute to poor traffic circulation and pedestrian conflicts. Furthermore, they interrupt pedestrian linkages, resulting in an unsafe and undesirable pedestrian environment. As a result, drive-through establishments should continue to be prohibited within the CBD. Pedestrian activity and appropriate downtown design to promote pedestrian flow and safety should be strongly encouraged in downtown revitalization efforts.



Parking Lots within the Central Business District

To promote an architecturally interesting and vital CBD, a variety of building heights and massing are encouraged. Buildings in the CBD should be closely spaced and have a minimum of two stories in height. They should maintain a continuous frontage along Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues. Street level activity should be reserved for retail and personal service uses and parking lots should be confined to the rear of buildings. Additional revitalization goals include developing a marketing strategy to fill vacant storefronts and continuing to expand the Borough's Façade Improvement and Awning Assistance Programs to aid revitalization efforts. A wide range of streetscape and pedestrian safety improvements are also necessary to achieve revitalization objectives (see Circulation Element).

In addition to implementing these improvements, the design standards in place for the CBD, C and PO Districts should be overhauled to ensure creation of a solid identity and consistent appearance for the downtown, and Upper Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues. Guidelines should be tailored to encourage new styles and practices of both architecture and landscape architecture while being responsive to the scale, orientation and feel of the historic nature of the CBD. The Borough's lighting and signage standards should be updated to reflect the scale and character of the downtown. This work should be closely coordinated with the Main Street Program and its Design Committee.



Concept sketch of Raritan and Fourth Avenue with streetscape enhancements

Downtown Gateways

Access to the Borough should be both attractive and inviting. There are two primary gateways, or points of entry into Highland Park's downtown when entering along Route 27. The first greets motorists heading southbound at Veteran's Park, at the junction of Raritan Avenue and Woodbridge Avenue, and the second welcomes visitors when crossing the Albany Street Bridge or traveling west from River Road. Raritan Avenue serves as the backbone of the Borough. It not only acts as the center of commercial activity, but also functions as the primary transportation route for all forms of traffic entering Highland Park.

The retaining wall along the south side of Raritan Avenue, near the Albany Street Bridge, offers a unique opportunity for a community mural or other similar artwork that can be incorporated into the overall gateway concept. The future Raritan Gateway Park at the junction of River Road and Lincoln/Raritan Avenues will also function as a critical part of the gateway. The concept sketch, as shown to the right, illustrates the potential to enhance the Raritan Avenue entry into the Borough.



Retaining wall at Raritan Gateway

Given their importance and visibility, gateways should present open, attractively landscaped entrances to the community with entry signage and passive recreation opportunities. The Borough also has an opportunity to enhance Veteran's Park with additional landscaping and streetscape amenities. Secondary gateways may also be established within the downtown to provide opportunities for seating, landscaping and civic art.



Concept sketch of Raritan Gateway looking north from the Route 27 bridge

PROFESSIONAL OFFICE DISTRICT

Existing Professional Office District

There are several small PO Districts on the fringe of the CBD along Magnolia and Denison Streets. There is also a PO District along the east side of Cleveland Avenue, between Janeway and Madison Avenues. The PO District permits offices as principal uses. However, the majority of the properties in these districts are residential.

Proposed Changes to Professional Office District

The intent of the PO-Professional Office District, to encourage conversions of residences to office use, has not fully materialized. The following changes are thus recommended for the PO district:

- Continue to permit professional offices as principal uses, but also allow two-family homes and single-family homes as permitted uses and apartments as accessory uses above offices.
- Strengthen design standards for professional offices to minimize potential disruptions to the residential character of the neighborhood. Standards should include: locating parking and all building support systems in the rear, and requiring front facades and front yards to reflect the residential character of adjacent buildings and surrounding properties.



Professional office

In addition to the districts near the downtown, a PO District is also located along the east side of Cleveland Avenue, between North Second and Madison Avenues. With few exceptions, the majority of uses in this PO District have non-conforming components. Nonetheless, the District contains some vacant land with future development potential. Any future development should minimize impacts to the adjacent residential neighborhood, and design standards within the District should be strengthened to address potential conflicts and impacts. Specific recommendations include:

- Maintain the existing PO District along Cleveland Avenue. This would continue to make the existing light industrial uses non-conforming, but would allow the PO District to continue to function as a buffer between residential and light industrial areas.
- Extend the PO District along Cleveland Avenue north of Madison Avenue to the end of Cleveland Avenue. This area is currently occupied by single-family homes and professional office uses. A PO designation would better reflect the existing uses and would appropriately buffer the adjoining residential uses from the east end of the LI District.

PROPOSED RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT DISTRICT

A new Research and Development District is proposed for the following parcels:

- Cenacle Retreat House: This 13 acre site is located on River Road and currently occupied by a religious order. It is currently zoned QP, which permits private and philanthropic institutions, and parks and playgrounds as

principal permitted uses. Townhouses at a density of six units per acre are permitted as a conditional use.



Cenacle Retreat House

- **Castle Property:** Located off of River Road, this 17 acre property currently serves as the corporate headquarters for Kaplan and Sons Construction and is currently zoned RMT-H which permits townhouses at six units per acre with a 25% open space setback.



Castle Site

- **Parker House:** This 7.5-acre site, currently used as the Parker Memorial Home (in Piscataway) and zoned QP, is adjacent to the Castle property on River Road.



Barn on Parker House property

The goal of the Research and Development District is to help balance the mix of uses within the Borough by providing an opportunity for larger-scale research and office development. The intent of the District is to promote sustainable design practices to preserve the sites' historic and environmental resources to the greatest extent possible. The proximity of the proposed district to Rutgers University, Johnson and Johnson, Robert Wood Johnson, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey (UMDNJ) and St. Peter's hospitals is an asset which is unrecognized by the current zoning. Given the area's location relative to the Rutgers Ecological Preserve and Johnson Park, green building techniques and open space connections should be strongly encouraged and incorporated into any future development.

Principal permitted uses should include office and research facilities with a marketing strategy to identify potential uses that will benefit from the proximity to Rutgers University, Johnson and Johnson and nearby medical facilities. Three to five story buildings should be permitted and structured or underground parking encouraged to minimize impervious coverage. A significant open space requirement should also be incorporated into the new district. Setbacks along River Road should be generous to maintain woodlands and preserve slopes. The district should encourage site design which incorporates public access to natural habitat areas for low impact activities like birding and nature studies. If residential uses remain as a conditional use within the Research and Development District, new bulk and design standards should be devised to better reflect the historic and natural features of the sites.

INDUSTRIAL LAND USE

Existing Industrial Land Use

Industrial uses located within the Borough include manufacturing, storage and warehousing activities located primarily along Cleveland Avenue. Light industrial land uses cover almost 14 acres of land on Cleveland Avenue. A vacant industrial site, known as the former New Brunswick Sheet Metal facility, lies at the terminus of Cleveland Avenue.



Illuminating Experiences

Some of the larger uses include Illuminating Experiences, Vanly Trading Company, and A. Garlatti Construction. The larger facilities tend to be located at the rear of the properties, adjacent to the rail line, while smaller warehousing and office establishments are located closer to the Cleveland Avenue frontage. There are also a number of professional offices, including a three-story medical office building, an optician's office, an engineering office, a dance company and a retail outlet for a chocolate manufacturer.

Proposed Changes to LI District

Given the wide range of uses found in the LI District, the uses permitted within the zone should be expanded to include the full range of office, manufacturing and commercial uses that presently co-exist in the District. Business incubators (which provide programs for new businesses to develop, grow and succeed), should also be permitted and encouraged in the District, with vacant properties, such as the former New Brunswick Sheet Metal and Lampe Berger buildings holding the greatest promise. In addition to amending the district's use

provisions, a triangular land-locked parcel between the rail corridor and Cleveland Avenue should be rezoned to LI.

A small number of industrial buildings located along Cleveland Avenue appear to be underutilized. These include the former New Brunswick Sheet Metal facility, vacant parking lots at the end of Cleveland Avenue, as well as some outdoor storage areas. The Cleveland Avenue corridor is currently the subject of a Determination of Needs Study, which will attempt to determine redevelopment eligibility.

Should part of the area be determined eligible for redevelopment, redevelopment efforts should include the development of a marketing strategy aimed at attracting potential tenants. Transportation should be given appropriate consideration when weighing redevelopment options. Various funding mechanisms should be sought for the repair, cleanup and rehabilitation of existing buildings and infrastructure in the District.

PUBLIC/QUASI-PUBLIC LAND USES

Public uses in the Borough include municipal/community services, schools, and parks and recreation lands. Major recreation and conservation areas lie along the Raritan River within Highland Park. The Raritan River serves as a defining feature along the Borough's southern border and provides opportunity for recreation and educational activities. The Borough and the County are currently working to implement a continuous greenway along the riverfront. The river and the greenway should be integrated into community planning efforts, including downtown revitalization and historic preservation activities.

Quasi-public uses include places of worship, private schools and institutional uses such as the YM-YWHA, the Center School on North Third Avenue, and lands adjacent to Rabbi Pesach Raymon Yeshiva on the Edison border. The Municipal Services Element provides an overview of Borough facilities. The Conservation, Open Space and Recreation Element provides an overview of existing conditions, as well as recommendations for acquisition of parks, and recreational facilities and further discussion of the Raritan River Greenway.

GENERAL LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS

The Action Plan provides implementation time frames and identifies responsible party/funding sources for each recommendation of this element. The following list briefly summarizes the land use recommendations:

Land Development Ordinance/Zoning Changes:

- Undertake a comprehensive revision of the Borough Land Development Ordinance, including procedures, use standards, regulations and design standards.
- Amend use standards in residential districts to allow home-based offices.
- Amend PO use standards to permit single and two-family homes, as well as accessory apartments on upper floors.
- Amend CBD district to require a minimum of 2 story buildings.
- Expand the range of uses permitted in LI District to better reflect the existing range of uses and the potential for new uses such as business incubators.
- Amend residential districts use standards to allow home-based offices under certain conditions.
- Evaluate prohibited uses in all zoning districts in light of recent judicial decisions and amend as necessary.
- Develop more specific use categories for non-residential zoning districts.
- Adopt infill residential design standards that apply to the RA and RB districts.
- Rezone Woodbridge Avenue (between South Sixth and South Eleventh Avenues) to CBD to better reflect its pedestrian scale, existing mixed-use character and revitalization potential.
- Create a new Research and Development District along River Road.
- Create a new Riverfront Residential District at the corner of Raritan and South Adelaide Avenues.
- Rezone Cleveland Avenue between Madison Avenue and the end of Cleveland Avenue to PO.
- Overhaul design standards for the CBD, C and PO Districts to ensure a distinctive and consistent appearance for the downtown, Upper Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues, consistent with the Main Street Program.

- Rezone land-locked parcel adjacent to the rail corridor and Cleveland Avenue to LI.
- Rezone RA-E property within the Rutgers Ecological Preserve to Conservation and Recreation.

Redevelopment/Revitalization:

- Proceed with downtown revitalization and redevelopment where statutory criteria are met.
- Create a vision and marketing strategy to attract more traditional retail uses and arts/cultural establishments to the downtown.
- Encourage residential uses above stores in the downtown to support retail uses and services and revitalization efforts.
- Evaluate Cleveland Avenue corridor for redevelopment eligibility.
- Coordinate revitalization efforts with the Main Street Program, the Neighborhood Preservation Program and other Borough economic development initiatives.
- Develop appropriate marketing strategies to fill vacant storefronts and buildings in the Borough's industrial and commercial districts.
- Continue to expand the Borough's Façade Improvement and Awning Assistance Programs to aid revitalization efforts.
- Maintain and enhance the character of the Borough's commercial areas when new or rehabilitative construction occurs.
- Address design issues, such as encouraging shared access drives and linked parking lots, as a part of commercial revitalization.
- Enhance the River Road/Raritan Avenue and Raritan Avenue/Woodbridge Avenue gateways with streetscape and pedestrian safety improvements, including creation of the future Raritan Gateway Park at Raritan Avenue/Lincoln Avenue and upgrades to Veteran's Park.

Other:

- Recognize the Raritan River and greenway as an important natural, recreational and educational resource within the Borough and integrate this asset into revitalization and historic preservation efforts.
- Pursue Plan Endorsement by the State Planning Commission.

SECTION III: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT ELEMENT



INTRODUCTION

This Economic Development Plan discusses the existing economic conditions of the Borough, and the steps that should take place to bring about sustained economic vitality. Given the limited tax base in Highland Park, economic development – particularly revitalization of the downtown – is a critical goal.

Downtown revitalization has been emphasized by Borough residents at recent community meetings as an important opportunity. Highland Park has taken significant steps to begin the revitalization process on Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues, by establishing the Main Street program and the Neighborhood Preservation Program.

More broadly, the Economic Development Plan seeks to:

- Promote economic development efforts to ensure continued revitalization of the Borough's commercial corridors;
- Create an identity for the downtown with marketing and promotional efforts that build on the community's diversity to attract new stores and services, as well as additional housing and offices on upper floors;
- Encourage cooperation among business owners and the various entities working on revitalization;
- Identify commercial areas that meet the statutory criteria for redevelopment under New Jersey's Local Redevelopment and Housing Law;
- Attract businesses to the Borough's Industrial District and proposed Research and Development District through specific marketing strategies; and
- Partner with major regional entities, such as Rutgers University, Johnson and Johnson, UMDNJ, and Robert Wood Johnson and St. Peter's Hospitals, to target businesses for the proposed Research and Development District.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Income, Education and Employment

An examination of the Census was conducted for Highland Park residents' income levels, educational attainment and employment by industry. This analysis provides an overview of existing economic characteristics and context for economic development potential for Highland Park.

Table III-1 shows the income levels in the Borough compared to Middlesex County and New Jersey averages. Eleven percent of Highland Park's households have an income of \$15,000 or less, comparable to the state average, but slightly higher than the County. Approximately one-third of the Borough households have incomes between \$15,000 and \$50,000, comparable to the County. The 1999 median household income for Highland Park was \$53,250, 13% less than the County average of \$61,446, but only slightly less than the statewide average of \$55,146.

Income in 1999	Highland Park	% of Total	Middlesex County	% of Total	New Jersey	% of Total
Less than \$15,000	687	11.6%	23,067	8.7%	357,722	11.7%
\$15,000 to \$24,999	537	9.1%	20,603	7.7%	288,606	9.4%
\$25,000 to \$34,999	750	12.7%	24,398	9.2%	305,449	10.0%
\$35,000 to \$49,999	820	13.9%	37,097	14.0%	437,373	14.3%
\$50,000 to \$74,999	1,146	19.4%	57,308	21.6%	608,244	19.8%
\$75,000 to \$99,999	784	13.3%	42,599	16.0%	413,928	13.5%
\$100,000 to \$149,999	704	11.9%	40,544	15.2%	391,123	12.8%
\$150,000 or more	477	8.1%	20,282	7.6%	263,329	8.6%
Total	5,905	100.0%	265,898	100.0%	3,065,774	100.0%

Source: U.S. Census of Income and Poverty, 2000.

Highland Park's median household income is approximately 25% less than Edison and Piscataway, and 20% less than Metuchen. It is 48% higher than New Brunswick.

Table III-2 shows the education attainment level for Borough residents compared to the County and the State. Over 80% of Highland Park's residents have attained some level of college, and 69% have earned either an associate, bachelor's or graduate/professional degree. Almost 40% have a graduate or professional degree, which is more than twice the County average. This high level of educational attainment reflects the sizable presence of Rutgers faculty members and graduate students among Borough residents.

Attainment Level	Highland Park	% of Total	Middlesex County	% of Total	New Jersey	% of Total
Less than 9th grade	229	3%	31,015	7%	373,429	8%
9th to 12th grade	643	7%	47,449	11%	641,048	13%
High school graduate	929	10%	81,068	19%	930,730	19%
Some college, no degree	1,089	12%	84,865	19%	998,872	20%
Associate degree	415	5%	27,033	6%	298,096	6%
Bachelor's degree	2,376	26%	102,750	24%	1,063,665	22%
Graduate or professional degree	3,451	38%	62,783	14%	621,196	13%
Total	9,132	100%	436,963	100%	4,927,036	100%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

As shown in Table III-3, almost 40%, or 2,678 of Borough residents work in the education, health and social sciences field, compared to 19% for Middlesex County. The second highest work field includes professional, scientific, management, administrative and waste management services, comprising almost 15% of the Borough's population. Retail employment accounts for over 10% of Borough residents.

Classification	Highland Park	% of Total	Middlesex County	% of Total
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting/mining	0	0%	441	0%
Construction	157	2%	16,784	5%
Manufacturing	653	9%	50,728	14%
Wholesale trade	246	3%	17,900	5%
Retail trade	669	9%	41,175	11%
Transportation, warehouse and utilities	179	2%	24,672	7%
Information	440	6%	19,426	5%
Finance, insurance, real estate, and rental/leasing	559	7%	35,229	10%
Prof., sci., mgmt, administrative, and waste mgmt	1,124	15%	48,150	13%
Educational, health and social services	2,678	35%	68,930	19%
Arts, entertainment, recreation, accommodation and food services	379	5%	20,289	5%
Other services (except public administration)	239	3%	14,044	4%
Public administration	225	3%	13,049	4%
Total	7,548	100%	370,376	100%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

In 1999, Highland Park had a total of 367 employers with about 2,000 workers. As Table III-4 shows, Highland Park's major

employment groups include 193 service establishments with over 1,000 employees, 71 retail trade establishments with 463 employees, and 32 finance/insurance and real estate establishments with 209 employees.

**Table III-4
1999 Annual Private Sector Employment for Highland Park**

Industry	Annual Average Units	Average Employment
Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing/Mining	8	28
Construction	15	62
Manufacturing	7	27
Transportation/Communication/Utilities	14	89
Wholesale Trade	27	80
Retail Trade	71	463
Finance/Insurance and Real Estate	32	209
Service	193	1,025
Total	367	1,984

Source: New Jersey State Data Center, Labor Market Information, 1999.

The five largest employers in Highland Park are the Highland Park Board of Education with 250 employees, Borough of Highland Park with 130 employees, Stop & Shop market with 100 employees, Harley Davidson with 40 employees and Illuminating Experiences with 39 employees. Many residents leave the Borough to work elsewhere, especially in the professional, scientific, healthcare and education sectors, (more specifically at Rutgers University, Robert Wood Johnson and St. Peter's Hospitals, as well as the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey).

Commercial Corridors

As shown on the Existing Land Use Map (Map II-1) in the Land Use Plan Element, nearly all of the Borough's commercial and professional offices are located along Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues, with a handful of commercial sites along Cleveland Avenue.

Raritan Avenue

Raritan Avenue, NJ Route 27, is the Borough's "Main Street" and the primary focus of the community's revitalization efforts. The core of the downtown is located along Raritan Avenue from the Raritan River to Sixth Avenue and is zoned Central Business District (CBD).

A field analysis was conducted to identify the existing land uses along Raritan, Upper Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues. Map II-3 of the Land Use Plan Element shows the existing zoning and land use inventory for Raritan Avenue. The purpose of this inventory was to identify the types and distribution of uses within the Borough's commercial corridors and to compare the relationship between these uses and existing zoning. Along Raritan Avenue's CBD, there is a mix of commercial and retail/service establishments, including restaurants, banks, specialty stores, art galleries, and personal services such as hair/nail salons. A number of churches and a synagogue are also located within the downtown, as well as the Post Office. Six auto-service and auto-related retail uses are clustered between Cedar Avenue and Second Avenue, with much of the block on Raritan Avenue between First and Second Avenues occupied by these uses. Auto uses are not permitted in the CBD and most pre-date the Land Development Ordinance. A number of professional office buildings are located along Raritan Avenue; however, they are permitted on the ground floor only in the PO, Professional Office district. Also located within the Central Business District are three vacant storefronts, as well as small, scattered vacant lots.

In addition to Highland Park residents, the downtown is also utilized by residents of surrounding communities, specifically nearby neighborhoods in New Brunswick, Edison and Piscataway. Due to the accessibility and variety of services within Highland Park, the downtown also attracts some shoppers from the larger region that are among the approximately 25,000 vehicles passing through the downtown each day. Any downtown marketing strategy should seek to capture a greater share of this largely untapped market.

A shopper survey was conducted in the summer of 2002. The survey analyzed shopping patterns, including frequency of downtown shopping for a variety of goods and services. The survey indicated that 41% of respondents would like to see more restaurants and cafes in the downtown, while 18% indicated that lack of variety among stores in the downtown is a problem that should be addressed.

It is important to note the large number of auto-related services within downtown, scattered vacant parcels and a limited number of vacant storefronts. While the land use

inventory indicates the predominance of retail businesses within the CBD, there should be a greater emphasis on more traditional retail uses (stores, restaurants, etc.) and greater diversity within the retail mix while prohibiting the expansion of non-conforming uses. In addition, the Borough should evaluate underutilized, non-conforming and vacant areas, especially between Adelaide and Sixth Avenue, for redevelopment eligibility under state law.

The Main Street program and the Borough's economic development committee should work with the Chamber of Commerce to craft a vision and revitalization strategy for the downtown.

Upper Raritan Avenue

Map II-4 of the Land Use Plan Element identifies existing land uses within the Upper Raritan Avenue commercial area. It extends north along Raritan Avenue from Sixth Avenue to the Edison Border and serves as a transition area between the downtown and the adjacent larger, commercial center within Edison. The primary uses along Upper Raritan are professional offices, auto sales and services, restaurants and retail stores. There are also over 25 residential buildings, generally clustered between South Eleventh Avenue and the Edison Border.

East of Sixth Avenue, Raritan Avenue begins to transition from a two-lane cross-section with on-street parking to a four-lane section without parking. This transition is completed by Eighth Avenue. Since there is some consistency in retail character in these two areas, the section of Raritan Avenue between North Sixth and North Eighth Avenues should be integrated into the CBD. East of Eighth Avenue, the character of the Raritan Avenue corridor changes. The Circulation Element recommends that the Borough consider changing the configuration of Raritan Avenue east of Eighth Avenue from a four-lane to a three-lane cross section, and reducing travel speeds. The commercial frontage on this section of Raritan Avenue should reflect this more pedestrian-friendly roadway character. Ultimately, this section of Raritan Avenue should provide a more attractive and pedestrian-safe gateway between the CBD and the more intensive commercial corridor to the east in Edison Township.

Woodbridge Avenue

Woodbridge Avenue can be divided into two sections: Sixth Avenue to Irving Primary School (Eleventh Avenue) and Eleventh Avenue east to the Borough border. The section of Woodbridge Avenue that extends from Raritan Avenue to Irving Primary School has a mixed-use character, with retail stores, services, offices and apartments. There are a handful of auto-related uses within this section of Woodbridge Avenue. From Eleventh Avenue east to the Borough border, the diversity of commercial uses decreases and the majority of businesses are auto-related.

The primary revitalization efforts underway along Woodbridge Avenue include the commercial component of the Neighborhood Preservation Program and Borough efforts to implement streetscape improvements through applications to Middlesex County's Downtown and Business Improvement District Fund. Highland Park has developed a ten-year plan to improve the Woodbridge Avenue commercial corridor and to unify it with the CBD. To further these goals, the Borough should also consider rezoning parts of Woodbridge Avenue between Sixth and Eleventh Avenues from Commercial to Central Business District. This designation would better reflect its pedestrian scale, existing mixed-use character and revitalization potential.

Cleveland Avenue

Cleveland Avenue, north of Janeway Avenue has historically been a center of commercial/industrial activity and is presently characterized by a mix of industrial, office, and warehouse uses. Some of the major properties include Illuminating Experiences, A. Garlatti Construction and Birnn Chocolates. Consistent with the June 2001 Master Plan Reexamination, the Borough should pursue redevelopment along Cleveland Avenue to revitalize this area to its full potential.

Analysis of Retail Demand

Table III-5 shows the population and housing characteristics within the primary service area of the downtown, or within 1,500 feet of the CBD. An analysis of 2000 US Census data reveals that a significant number of the residents and housing units are located within the Borough's core area. Indeed, more than half of the Borough's population and housing units

are located within 1,500 feet of the downtown, including over 8,000 residents and 3,600 households.

	Highland Park	Primary Service Area
Population	13,999	8,094
Number of Housing Units	6,839	3,661
Largest Age Cohort	33-49 (33%)	33-49 (32%)

Source: Census TIGER/Line® Shapefiles, 2000.

An inventory of commercial space conducted along Raritan Avenue between Adelaide and South Sixth Avenues reveals a number of properties that contain vacant lots or storefronts. There are many non-conforming professional office uses which, while desirable on upper floors, do not generate pedestrian activity or interest when situated as the primary use on the ground floor. Similarly, conditions along Woodbridge Avenue exhibit some vacant lots, but existing buildings are largely occupied with retail, service and office uses.

Based on a range of 22.5 – 56 square feet¹ of retail space per household in the downtown area, the amount of convenient, locally oriented retail that Highland Park can support is between 82,375 and 205,000 square feet. Commercial uses in the core actually occupy over 200,000 square feet but much of this space is occupied by professional and medical office uses and services. Less than one-third of the commercial space in the downtown is occupied by retail services. The Borough's downtown revitalization strategy should seek to attract new businesses, such as restaurants, clothing stores, cafés, movie theaters/cultural uses and more diversified retail uses to the CBD.

REVITALIZATION/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

Key components

A major component of the Economic Development Plan is to identify opportunities to strengthen commercial revitalization. Economic development requires a sustained effort over many years to succeed.

¹ Nelessen, Anton. "Visions for a New American Dream;" based on 22.5 to 56 square feet per household within 1,500 feet of the downtown core.

Streetscape and Aesthetics

For a commercial area to be successful, streetscape elements must be addressed to create a visually identifiable and attractive place that reflects the scale and character of the community. More broadly, a downtown revitalization strategy should include:

- Streetscape and pedestrian safety improvements (sidewalks, lighting, landscaping, etc.) including a wide range of enhancements to achieve revitalization objectives (a preliminary funding plan has been developed to upgrade sidewalks, crosswalks, street lighting and landscaping throughout the Borough's commercial corridors);
- Overhauling the design guidelines and standards for commercial districts to assist property owners with improvements and to ensure a consistent "look" for the Borough's commercial areas, including reviewing the lighting standards to minimize glare;
- Zoning enforcement and coordination with property owners to ensure property maintenance and up-keep;
- Continuation and expansion of the Borough's Façade Improvement and Awning Assistance Programs to aid restoration efforts; and,
- Incorporation of public spaces and additional seating and landscaping within public rights-of-way and future redevelopment areas.

Vision and Marketing Strategy

The Borough should develop a comprehensive economic development strategy that includes a distinct vision and business retention and attraction strategy for each targeted area: the downtown, Upper Raritan Avenue, Woodbridge Avenue, Cleveland Avenue and the proposed Research and Development District. The Borough's diversity, compact form and eclectic mix of businesses should be the starting point for defining a vision for each area. Building on these assets, the strategy for the downtown should target a diversified mix of retail uses, stores and arts/cultural venues with residential units or offices and studio spaces on upper floors. The Borough should also promote its very low crime rate, its pedestrian-friendly environment and its diversity as major assets.

The vision for the Woodbridge Avenue corridor should reflect the goals of the NPP program including efforts to implement streetscape improvements to better unify the corridor with the

CBD. For both the downtown and Woodbridge Avenue, strategies should include encouraging development to go up rather than out, with mixed-use buildings to attract young professionals and graduate students to the area. Marketing and promotional strategies should capitalize on the Borough's locational advantage near world-class educational and health service facilities.

The vision for the Cleveland Avenue corridor should target an eclectic mix of uses, such as professional offices, light industrial uses, research laboratories and business incubators.

The vision for the proposed Research and Development District should identify potential developers and tenants who would benefit from proximity to major research facilities at Rutgers University, the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey, Robert Wood Johnson, St. Peter's Hospital, and Johnson and Johnson. Green building practices and sustainable design should also be part of this strategy.

The Development Review and Approval Process

An important part of successful economic development is providing assistance to local businesses. As such, the development application completeness review process should be streamlined by making the Borough's Technical Advisory Committee a required part of the approval process. This will allow preliminary design issues to be discussed much earlier in the approval process.

User-friendly guidance materials on the development review and approval process and applicable design standards should be developed. The *Business Handbook*, prepared in 2000, outlines the building permit process, Borough procedures for fire code compliance, inspection and certificates of occupancy. The Handbook also explains the process for sign and awning permits for businesses. In an effort to continue providing local assistance for businesses, the *Business Handbook* should be updated to reflect current practices and to incorporate current program and contact information.

Borough Tax Base

In order to evaluate the proportion of the tax base within Highland Park that is residential relative to the total assessed value of the Borough, an analysis of the 2002 Middlesex County Abstract of Ratables was undertaken. The Borough

was compared to the County as a whole, as well to other boroughs within Middlesex County. Table III-6 indicates the breakdown among residential, commercial and industrial ratables for 2002. Highland Park's total assessed value is \$525,969,300.

Taxing District	Residential	%	Commercial	%	Industrial	%	Total Assessed Value
Carteret	\$609,867,800	66	\$114,983,300	12	\$200,192,500	22	\$925,043,600
Dunellen	\$122,530,700	87	\$14,657,100	10	\$3,581,600	3	\$140,769,400
Highland Park	\$472,461,800	90	\$48,462,300	9	\$5,045,200	1	\$525,969,300
Metuchen	\$764,288,400	84	\$98,198,100	11	\$41,137,100	5	\$903,623,600
South Amboy	\$142,419,500	83	\$20,353,000	11	\$10,092,200	6	\$172,864,700
South River	\$370,779,600	88	\$24,976,900	6	\$22,751,300	6	\$418,507,800
Middlesex County	\$26,970,339,500	70	\$5,941,101,500	15	\$5,440,087,700	15	\$38,351,528,700

Source: Middlesex County Board of Taxation, 2002.

Approximately 10% of the Borough's total assessed value is comprised of non-residential land uses, compared to 30% Countywide and between 12 and 34% for other Middlesex County boroughs.

As noted earlier in this chapter, there are about 2,000 jobs in the Borough. Based on a job to housing ratio of 1.0, a general planning standard which seeks to balance residential and non-residential uses, Highland Park should strive to expand its non-residential base. While it is not recommended that the Borough seek to accommodate 6,000 jobs, the current imbalance points out the degree to which the Borough is dependent upon residential uses for its tax base. The need to enhance the commercial and industrial base should therefore be considered in the overall revitalization of the downtown and incorporated into the marketing strategy for the Borough's Industrial and proposed Research and Development District.

Use of Redevelopment

New Jersey's Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (LRHL) (NJSA 40:12A-1 et seq.) provides municipalities with an important tool to facilitate economic development. Under the statute, the Borough can examine an area to see if it meets the criteria for an area in need of redevelopment. Sections 5

and 6 of the LRHL specify the conditions which must be met and the process to be undertaken by the planning board.

As specified by Section 6 of the LRHL, the governing body must pass a resolution to authorize the planning board to undertake a preliminary investigation of an area to determine if it meets any of the following criteria:

- The generality of buildings are substandard, unsafe, unsanitary, dilapidated, or obsolescent, or possess any of such characteristics, or are so lacking in light, air or space, as to be conducive to unwholesome living or working conditions;
- The discontinuance of the use of buildings previously used for commercial, manufacturing, or industrial purposes; the abandonment of such buildings; or the same being allowed to fall into so great a state of disrepair as to be untenable;
- Land that is owned by the municipality, the county, a local housing authority, redevelopment entity, or unimproved vacant land that has remained so for a period of ten years prior to adoption of the resolution, and that by reason of its location, remoteness, lack of means of access to developed sections or portions of the municipality, or topography, or nature of the soil, is not likely to be developed through the instrumentality of private capital;
- Areas with buildings or improvements which, by reason of dilapidation, obsolescence, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light and sanitary facilities, excessive land coverage, deleterious land use or obsolete layout, or any combination of these or other factors, are detrimental to the safety, health, morals or welfare of the community;
- A growing lack or total lack of proper utilization of areas caused by the condition of the title, diverse ownership of real property therein or other conditions, resulting in stagnant or not fully productive condition of the land potentially useful and valuable for contributing to and serving the public health, safety and welfare;
- Areas, in excess of five contiguous acres, whereon buildings or improvements have been destroyed, consumed by fire, demolished or altered by the action of storm, fire, cyclone, tornado, earthquake or other casualty in such a way that the aggregate assessed value of the area has been materially depreciated.

In addition to the above criteria, Section 3 of the LRHL allows the inclusion of parcels necessary for the effective redevelopment of the area, by stating "a redevelopment area may include land, buildings, or improvements, which of themselves are not detrimental to the health, safety or welfare, but the inclusion of which is found necessarily, with or without change in their condition, for the effective redevelopment of the area in which they are a part."

The local redevelopment statute requires that the planning board hold a hearing on the area recommended for designation. Once the planning board's recommendation is provided, the governing body may adopt a resolution determining that the delineated area, or any part thereof, is a redevelopment area. It is important to note that the study area investigation and parcel level analysis is only the first step of the redevelopment process and does not provide guidance with respect to the planning, development or redevelopment of the project area. Section 7 of the LRHL describes the tool, a redevelopment plan, which specifies permitted uses, bulk requirements and design standards guiding the redevelopment. A redevelopment plan, once prepared and adopted, supercedes the zoning of an area.

The Borough is in the process of evaluating areas in the downtown and along Cleveland Avenue to determine if they meet the criteria for an area in need of redevelopment. The results of this investigation will be incorporated in a Determination of Need report adopted by the Planning Board and submitted to the Borough Council for consideration. If the Borough Council accepts the findings and recommendations of the report, next steps may include establishing a redevelopment agency and creating a redevelopment plan to guide the future development of the identified areas.

OTHER BOROUGH INITIATIVES

Main Street Program and Designation

The Main Street Program, administered by the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, provides technical assistance and training to support local downtown revitalization efforts. Its designated area is shown on Figure 1. It is a public-private partnership designed to help improve all aspects of a downtown with an emphasis on downtown

marketing and promotion, business retention and attraction, downtown design and economic restructuring. During the mid 1980's, Highland Park pursued this designation and established a local Main Street board. However, the governing body was unable to commit staffing and resources due to budgetary constraints. In March 2002, the Borough submitted a new Main Street application and was newly designated in the summer of 2002. A Board of Directors and four committees are in place. The committees include:

- Organization- getting everyone working toward the same goal, and building consensus and cooperation among the groups.
- Promotion- selling the image and promise of Main Street to all prospects, and marketing the district's unique characteristics to shoppers, investors, new businesses, visitors.
- Design- getting Main Street into top physical shape, and capitalizing on its best assets.
- Economic Restructuring- finding a new purpose for Main Street enterprises by helping downtown businesses expand and by creating new ones.

The following Borough's strengths and opportunities were identified through the Main Street program's visioning process:

- Good location;
- Diverse population;
- Hometown feel;
- Community support;
- Wealth of artistic and academic talent;
- Downtown functioning economically;
- Heavy traffic;
- Successful events;
- People always on the street;
- Restaurants;
- Locations for infill;
- Rutgers/Colleges;
- Universal access; and,
- No competition by similar towns.

The Main Street program sponsored a downtown design workshop in April 2003 to develop a future vision for the downtown. This vision is a starting point for much of the revitalization work that Main Street will be supporting in the coming years and is consistent with the recommendations of this plan.

NPP Residential and Commercial Component

The Neighborhood Preservation Program was initiated in 2000 and focuses on rehabilitation and revitalization to the Orchard Heights community. The Highland Park NPP is funded by a five-year grant through the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. The primary goal of the NPP is to rehabilitate low-income areas and promote economic activities to revitalize the Orchard Heights neighborhood. Year one of the program actually spanned both 2000 and 2001 due to interruptions in staffing the NPP Coordinator position. Year two was recently completed at the end of 2002.

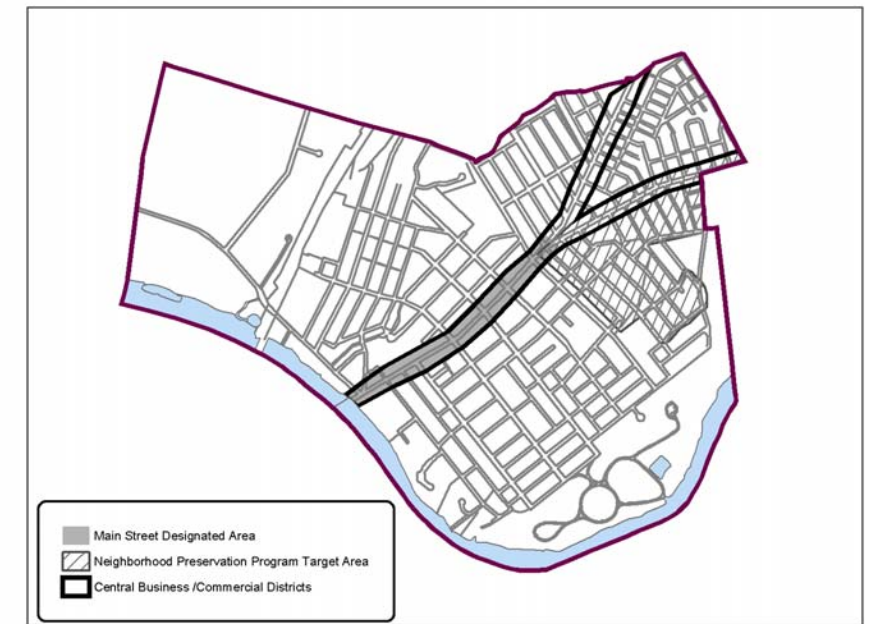


Figure 1 Main Street Designated Area, Neighborhood Preservation Program Target Area and CBD/Commercial District Map

A five-year program with a budget of \$100,000 per year, the Highland Park NPP has facilitated activities such as the creation of the Orchard Heights Community Association (OHCA), various events to encourage neighborhood participation (including a teen dance and clean-up day), and the rehabilitation of 11 homes, one rental property and four commercial properties. The NPP focus area is bounded by Sixth Avenue, Woodbridge Avenue, Donaldson Street and the Edison Border, as shown in Figure 1. The residential rehabilitation component of the program includes three grant programs, as follows:

- 100% funding for low-income qualifying households,

- 80% funding for low-to-moderate income households,
- 60% funding for moderate-income households.

The community has been very receptive to the NPP and the various benefits this program has brought to the area. This has been apparent in the number of rehabilitation grant applications, the establishment of the OHCA, participation in the NPP-sponsored adult education programs, and in private investment in the Orchard Heights area.

The following is a list of the various programs NPP facilitates and the status of improvements underway or completed:

- **Residential Rehabilitation Grants**
 - Sixteen residential, rental and commercial grants
- **Rental Grants and Commercial Façade**
 - Two rental property and five commercial façade grant applications were funded during the first year of the program.
 - Amenities were installed on Woodbridge Avenue, including eight new trash receptacles and three benches. Funding was provided by the Highland Park Clean Communities Program.
- **Infrastructure**
 - Some of the streets within Orchard Heights were repaved at a cost of \$40,000, funded by Middlesex County. A town-wide Water Leak Detention program was conducted and over 25 potholes were filled.
 - The Department of Public Works pruned existing trees and removed and replanted new trees within Orchard Heights.
 - Highland Park NPP sidewalk grant recipients are participating in the Borough sidewalk program. Four Orchard Heights residents were awarded \$500 in Year 1 to assist with their cost of repairing sidewalks, curbs and gutters.
- **Parks and Amenities**
 - The NPP worked with the Borough to develop a long-term vision for Karsey Street Park. A neighborhood survey, public meetings, and further residential input were all key factors in the plan's development.
 - With funding from the Middlesex County Open Space Program, the Borough purchased a vacant parcel on South Eighth Avenue to be used as a future pocket park. The NPP will work

with neighborhood residents and Borough officials to develop the park accordingly.

- **Community Association**
 - OCHA established a few annual projects: the Karsey Street Park Clean-up, the Block Party and the Graffiti Clean-up.
- **Adult Education**
 - The Highland Park NPP sponsored two home maintenance courses for residents through Lowe's Warehouse. The NPP allocated \$3,750 for each home maintenance seminar and each participant received a toolbox of necessary tools for home repair.
- **Youth Programs**
 - The NPP contributed a down payment on a youth leadership camp and DJ services at a teen dance.

For its second year, the NPP hopes to:

- Continue residential and commercial rehabilitation programs using HOME and Middlesex County funds.
- Continue working with the Borough's façade and awning grant programs, as well as coordinating the landscape and streetscape improvements along Woodbridge Avenue.
- Procure additional DCA funds for the abatement of rental property deficiencies.
- Allocate \$2,000 for the four sidewalk grants awarded in Year I.
- Allocate \$21,810 for upgrades to Karsey Street Park with assistance from DCA and CDBG monies.
- Allocate \$1,000 towards the support of the OHCA.
- Allocate \$1,000 for awards or educational activities in conjunction with the Board of Education.
- Pursue \$50,000 in Casino Reinvestment Development Authority funding for completion of the Phase I Woodbridge Avenue Improvements planned through Middlesex County Downtown and Business District Improvement Fund.

Woodbridge Avenue Improvements

The Borough has developed a ten-year plan to revitalize the Woodbridge Avenue commercial corridor and better unify it with the CBD. In September 2001, the Borough of Highland Park received a \$68,000 grant from the Middlesex County

Downtown and Business District Improvement Fund. The purpose of this grant is to help develop an integrated commercial corridor by unifying Woodbridge and Raritan Avenues. The areas to be improved as part of Phase I of this grant include: the intersection of North and South Sixth Avenues with Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues and the north side of Woodbridge Avenue to South Seventh Avenue. Proposed improvements include:

- Paved "neck downs" (sidewalk extensions) at the intersections of Woodbridge and South Sixth Avenues;
- Traffic calming measures at Woodbridge and South Seventh Avenues; and
- Textured crosswalks and improvements to increase pedestrian crossing safety.

In its 2002 application, the Borough requested an additional \$100,000 from Middlesex County for Phase II, which extends along Woodbridge from Seventh Avenue to Volkert Street on the south side and to Tenth Avenue on the north side. The project will:

- Improve pedestrian movement and safety through sidewalk and crosswalk improvements; and
- Provide for lighting upgrades.

The goal of the entire project is to provide assistance to an area within the Borough that is in need of both physical and visual improvements.

In addition, the Highland Park Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) is allocating \$12,000 in its Year II to support efforts to coordinate the commercial district along Woodbridge Avenue with the Main Street Program Target Area along Raritan Avenue.

Façade Grants

The Borough façade improvement program provides grants to businesses for up to 30% of the total renovation costs, up to a maximum of \$3,000 per business. The types of improvements that qualify under this program include correction of exterior code violations, painting, signs and awnings, exterior repairs, door and window replacement, rehabilitation and historic preservation, shutters and trim work, landscaping and site amenities and sidewalk repairs. There are currently three pending façade improvement grant applications: two on Raritan Avenue and one on Woodbridge Avenue.

Awning Promotion Program

Business owners can also take advantage of the Borough's Awning Promotion Program. Awnings are 100% financed up to \$1,500 per storefront with a maximum grant of \$5,000 per property. There have been five new awnings installed through the program over the past year with nine applications pending.

Open for Business Program

Under the Highland Park Awning Promotion Fund, the Borough has recently developed a new Open for Business program which provides incentives to commercial property owners to undertake barrier-free improvement. The funding structure includes 100% funding for barrier-free entrance improvements to commercial establishments up to \$1,500, plus additional funding at 50% up to \$3,000.

Tax Abatements for Major Improvements

Under state law, municipalities may adopt an ordinance providing residents and business owners with a 5-year sliding scale property tax abatement on the assessed value of major improvements. The Borough adopted this incentive several years ago as a tool to encourage property owners to improve their buildings.

Business Improvement District Feasibility Study

In order to complement the work of the Main Street Program in the downtown target area, the Borough is considering the feasibility of a Business Improvement District to provide funding needed for services identified by the business community. The Borough received a Challenge Grant from DCA to fund 50% of the cost of the feasibility study, which would identify service deficiencies and needs in the downtown area, as well as evaluate funding formulas, management structure and potential budget. The study will inventory commercial properties in the proposed BID area and survey business owners and Borough officials to help identify service needs. A draft BID ordinance will be prepared, and based on the results of the surveys and meetings with the business community, considered for adoption. The study has commenced and is expected to be completed by Summer of 2003.

Pedestrian and Bicycle Safety Enhancement Improvements

In August 2002, the Middlesex County Improvement Authority prepared an interim report for proposed pedestrian and

bicycle safety enhancement, alternative transportation, and downtown streetscape improvements for Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues. The report's goals include:

- Enhance pedestrian and bicycle safety,
- Improve the livability of the downtown, and
- Improve the efficiency with which elements of the transportation system work.

Infrastructure improvements recommended in the report include:

- New crosswalks,
- Traffic signal upgrades,
- Sidewalk improvements,
- New street lighting,
- Traffic calming in residential neighborhoods, and
- A community shuttle bus.

Next steps involve working with federal, state and local agencies to secure funding to implement the report recommendations.

Fund for Highland Park

The Fund for Highland Park, a private non-profit organization, was incorporated in December 2001 with a \$15,000 seed donation from a Borough resident. The Fund's overall mission is to help improve the quality of life for Highland Park residents and businesses. The organization focuses on four areas:

- Economic Development
- Arts/Cultural
- Community-building
- Historic Preservation

One of the Fund's principal objectives is to promote economic development and revitalization of the downtown area. The organization's focus includes all commercial areas within the Borough, yet the Main Street designated boundary is the initial emphasis. The Fund for Highland Park is currently in the process of finalizing its Board of Directors and is hoping to raise money through private and corporate entities to support the Fund's objectives.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Action Plan provides implementation time frames and identifies responsible party/funding sources for each recommendation of this element. The following list briefly summarizes the economic development recommendations:

Streetscapes and Aesthetics:

- Improve pedestrian connections from Raritan Avenue/CBD to parking areas behind stores.
- Continue to coordinate economic development activities and design standards within the downtown and the Main Street program, as well as with other commercial areas of the Borough.
- Overhaul the signage ordinance and commercial design standards to be consistent with the Main Street design standards and to reflect the vision for the downtown.

Vision and Marketing:

- Build on the diversity of the community in encouraging an eclectic mix of retail uses and stores within the downtown.
- Promote evening hours for retail stores in the downtown, including galleries, bookstores, and coffee shops.
- Ensure coordination between the entities engaged in revitalization to minimize areas of overlap and promote a strong, unified vision for the Borough's future.
- Target businesses that will benefit from proximity to Rutgers University and regional medical facilities for the proposed Research and Development district.
- Continue to encourage promotional activities such as the Highland Park Street Fair, the Farmer's Market, the Summer Film Series and the Borough-wide Yard Sale.

Other:

- Encourage cooperation among business owners, the Borough, the Neighborhood Preservation Program, the Main Street Program, and the Chamber of Commerce to successfully carry out revitalization.
- Provide incentives for commercial property maintenance and greater resources for zoning enforcement.
- Evaluate the vacant and underutilized areas throughout the Borough and consider redevelopment where statutory criteria are met.
- Evaluate parking needs as redevelopment/revitalization occurs.
- Ensure that funding mechanisms continue for the NPP target area once the NPP expires.
- Consider the establishment of a BID to fund specific services for downtown businesses.

- Rehabilitate the old Borough Senior Center to create a mixed-use cultural/retail center.
- Provide for a continued source of funding for the Façade Improvement and Open for Business programs as the revitalization of the downtown occurs.
- Streamline development application materials and review process to improve efficiency and aid revitalization efforts.
- Strengthen zoning enforcement activity of all commercial areas, especially in light of revitalization efforts.

SECTION IV: CIRCULATION ELEMENT



INTRODUCTION

The Circulation Element discusses the existing transportation conditions for vehicular traffic, pedestrian, bicycle and transit modes within Highland Park, followed by an analysis of issues and detailed recommendations for improvements. A special emphasis has been placed on safety. Since Highland Park is a developed municipality, the focus of this Element is on making the existing transportation system more functional.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

NJ Route 27, known locally as Raritan Avenue, serves as Highland Park's "Main Street." This roadway carries heavy traffic volumes, at 25,000 vehicles per day. Highland Park is also a multimodal community, served by NJ Transit and the Rutgers University bus systems, and within walking distance of the New Brunswick Train Station. The Borough has developed on a grid street system, and walking is thus convenient and valued. Bicycle ridership is also high, especially among the University community. The following sections describe existing transportation conditions within the Borough.

Vehicular

Like most communities, Highland Park's road network is comprised of a hierarchy of streets that serve a variety of functional purposes and carry varying levels of traffic. Below is a description of the functional classification of roadways.

Freeway/ Expressway	Limited or no access to abutting land uses. Access only from major streets at interchanges.
Principal Arterial	An inter-regional road that conveys traffic between centers. Should be excluded from residential areas.
Minor Arterial	Conduct and distributes traffic between lower-order residential streets and arterials and expressways. Designed to promote free traffic flow; therefore, parking should be prohibited and direct access to homes should be avoided. Should be designed so they cannot be used as shortcuts by non-neighborhood traffic.
Collector	Provides frontages for access to lots and carries traffic of adjoining residential access street. Is not intended to interconnect adjoining neighborhoods or subdivisions. Should not carry regional through traffic.
Local Access	Provides frontage for access to lots and carries traffic having destination or origin on the street itself. Carries least amount of traffic at lowest speed.

The functional classification of the streets in the Borough are summarized below.

Freeway/ Expressway	There are no freeways or expressways located within the Borough of Highland Park.
Principal Arterial	Raritan Avenue (NJ Route 27).
Minor Arterial	Woodbridge Avenue (Middlesex County Route 514) River Road (Middlesex County Route 622) Cedar Lane (Middlesex County Roadway)
Collector Road	Eleventh Avenue Duclos Lane (Middlesex County Roadway)
Local Access Road	All other streets in the Borough.

Source: New Jersey Department of Transportation/ Orth-Rodgers & Associates, Inc.

Following are the estimated Average Daily Traffic (ADT) volumes for select arterial and major collector roadways in Highland Park:

Roadway	Average Daily Traffic Volume	Year
Raritan Avenue, east of Woodbridge Avenue	14,500	2002
Raritan Avenue, between River Road and Woodbridge Avenue	23,000 to 25,000	2002
Woodbridge Avenue	10,000	2002
River Road	14,500 to 16,000	2000

Source: Estimates based on hourly counts performed by the Middlesex County Engineer's Office and Orth-Rodgers & Associates, Inc.

According to the Borough Police Department, there are 500 vehicular accidents in the Borough every year. Three-fifths of these accidents occur on Raritan Avenue, Woodbridge Avenue, and River Road. Map IV-1, High Accident Locations, indicates the location of every site in the Borough with an average of five or more accidents per year. The intersection of Raritan Avenue, River Road and Lincoln Avenue is the most dangerous intersection, averaging 27 accidents per year. The intersection of Raritan Avenue and Fourth Avenue is second at 17 accidents per year. The intersections of Raritan Avenue

and Second Avenue, and River Road and Cedar Lane, each average 16 accidents per year.



Intersection of Raritan Avenue, River Road, and Lincoln Avenue

Lower Raritan Avenue

The section of Raritan Avenue between River Road and Sixth Avenue averaged 9.46 accidents per million vehicle miles per year for the calendar years 1998 through 2000, over twice as high as the accident rate of 4.4 on comparable state highways (two lanes, no shoulder). However, it should be noted that the state average is a composite of both urban and rural roadways, and it is expected that Raritan Avenue would have a higher accident rate than most two-lane rural roads. The section of Raritan Avenue between Sixth Avenue and the Edison boundary had 7.45 accidents per million vehicle miles per year, also higher than the state average for comparable roadways (four lanes, no shoulder, no median) at 6.55 accidents per million vehicle miles.

Although the accident rate is high, an overview of accident frequency and accident type for Route 27 for the calendar years 1998 to 2000 does not reveal any unusual conditions that would contribute to accidents. The leading accident type on Raritan Avenue between Sixth Avenue and River Road is rear end collisions, accounting for 57 percent of accidents. The high rate of rear end accidents is not unexpected given the stop-and-go travel conditions found on Raritan Avenue.

Piscataway

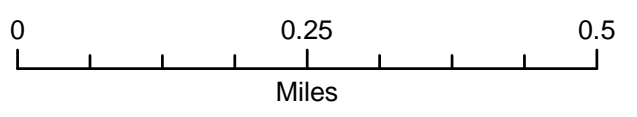
Edison

Edison

New Brunswick

Raritan River

Raritan River



**High Accident Locations
1997-2001**

**Motor Vehicles
Annual Average 1997-2001**

5 - 10

11 - 15

16+

Pedestrian Total 1997-2001

Bicycle Total 1997-2001

**High Accident Locations
1997-2001
Map IV-1**

**Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan**

Date: May 2003
Source: Borough of Highland Park
Orth-Rodgers & Associates



It is of interest that the highest number of rear end collisions occur at the westbound approach to Sixth Avenue, as vehicles transition from the relatively free flow of traffic east of the CBD to the queuing that is common downtown. The speed limit changes from 40 to 30 mph at the curve in the road west of Eighth Avenue; an intermediary speed limit of 35 mph should be considered further east, to better slow vehicles before entering the CBD.

Other high concentrations of rear-end accidents were documented as being westbound at Fourth Avenue, eastbound at Adelaide, and eastbound at River Road. A contributing factor at the latter intersection may be the absence of signal heads east of the stop bar for eastbound traffic. Motorists stopped past the stop bar, a not uncommon occurrence at this intersection, are not able to see the signal change.

The higher accident rate on Raritan Avenue between River Road and Sixth Avenue is partly a function of higher volumes on Raritan Avenue, and high volumes of turning movements from intersecting roads and driveways. Mid-block locations on Raritan Avenue between Fourth and Fifth Avenue, for example, average 12 accidents per year.

The second leading cause of accidents on this section of Raritan Avenue is left turn accidents, accounting for 10 percent of accidents. Accidents involving parked vehicles are also over-represented compared to other state highways, accounting for 8 percent of accidents. Like rear end collisions, a certain percentage of parking accidents in the CBD are unavoidable given the presence of on-street parking. On-street parking in the Borough has been designed to encourage safer parking operations than many other municipalities. The parking stalls, marked in a "Travers tandem" formation with 16 ft. gaps between each pair, permit vehicles to maneuver in and out of traffic more easily than if all stalls were marked back-to-back. On-street parking in a downtown environment is desirable, as it provides easy access to merchants on Raritan Avenue and provides a buffer between pedestrians on the sidewalk and moving vehicles. The presence of parked cars also can serve as a "traffic calming" measure by essentially narrowing the roadway for moving vehicles, and thus reducing speeds.

Upper Raritan Avenue

"Same direction" accidents account for the highest percentage of accidents on Raritan Avenue between Sixth Avenue and the Edison boundary, at 38 percent. Most of these are rear end collisions, but others are side-swipes, as may occur from vehicles changing lanes. Angle accidents account for 25 percent, and left turns for 20 percent. Many of these accidents result from vehicles turning into and out of the many streets and driveways intersecting Raritan Avenue on this section. There is a relatively high concentration of accidents stemming from turning movements at the intersections of Raritan Avenue with Meriland, Highland, and Tenth Avenue. The largest cluster of rear end accidents occur at Eleventh Avenue, which results from vehicles braking for the traffic signal at that intersection.

Woodbridge Avenue

The intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Duclos Lane does not stand out for the number of accidents based upon Borough accident reports, with an average of six per year. It should be noted that these are only the accidents within Highland Park. Part of this intersection lies in Edison Township, and accidents here would be the responsibility of that municipality's police force. This intersection poses a hazard because westbound vehicles on Woodbridge Avenue coming off the Route 1 overpass are typically moving at a relatively high speed as they enter the Borough. The Middlesex County Engineering Department has studied this intersection for signalization. It meets the warrant for signalization, but the signalization agreement has not yet been processed by Highland Park or Edison Township.

Local Streets

The safety conditions at the intersection of local streets were also reviewed. Since the Police Department database can not rank intersections by the number of accidents, it is impossible to determine which local intersection is the most dangerous. This review is thus not comprehensive. However, intersections of streets with higher volumes, or with unusual geometry, were reviewed for high accident histories. No intersection was the site of five or more accidents per year, the normal threshold for a serious traffic study. The intersection of Fourth Avenue and Benner, averaging 3.8 accidents per year from 1997 to 2001, had a higher accident history than other

local street intersections reviewed. The intersection of Fourth Avenue and Magnolia, called out for study in the 1995 Master Plan, averaged 2.4 accidents per year. A spot check of intersections indicated, in general, that streets on the South Side experience a higher rate of accidents than streets in other neighborhoods.

Pedestrian and Bicycle

With few exceptions, the Borough is well served by sidewalks. Existing designated bicycle facilities include the Southside bike path and paths along River Road and within Johnson Park. In addition, due to moderate traffic volumes and speeds on most local streets, bicyclists use a variety of streets to reach destinations.

For the calendar years 1997 to 2001, there were a total of 68 pedestrian and bicycle accidents in the Borough which resulted in an injury; 41 of these were pedestrian accidents, and 27 were bicycle accidents.

Of the total accidents, 44 occurred on Raritan Avenue, Woodbridge Avenue, or River Road. The remaining 24 accidents were classified into one of Highland Park's three neighborhoods. The South Side stands out as the most hazardous for pedestrians and bicyclists; 18 accidents occurred on the local streets of that neighborhood, versus 3 on the North Side and 3 in the Triangle. It should also be noted that one of the three North Side accidents occurred in Johnson Park.

Accident "Hot Spots"

For this Master Plan, the accident reports for all sites with at least two pedestrian or bicycle accidents were reviewed, in order to focus on accident "hot spots." No such clusters appeared anywhere on local streets. Benner Street was the only local street with multiple accidents, with five; all of these accidents took place at different intersections. Further, the accident reports for Benner Street revealed no consistent cause for these accidents, such as vehicular speeding. Vehicular speeding was not indicated as a factor in any of the pedestrian and bicycle accident reports reviewed for this safety analysis.

Table IV-4
High Accident Locations

Location	Annual Average Accidents
Raritan Avenue & River Road	27
Raritan Avenue & Fourth Avenue	17
Raritan Avenue & Second Avenue	16
River Road & Cedar Lane	16
Raritan Avenue & Adelaide Avenue	15
Raritan Avenue & Fifth Avenue	14
Raritan Avenue & Third Avenue	13
Raritan Avenue & First Avenue	9
Raritan Avenue & Sixth Avenue	7
Raritan Avenue & Eleventh Avenue	6
Woodbridge Avenue & Duclos Lane	6
Raritan Avenue & Tenth Avenue	5
Woodbridge Avenue & Eleventh Avenue	5

Source: Borough of Highland Park.

Clusters of pedestrian accidents can be found on Raritan Avenue, especially between Adelaide Street and Fifth Avenue. This section was the scene of 14 accidents from 1997 to 2001. Every one of these accidents occurred at an intersection; eight of the accidents involved a turning movement by a motor vehicle. The intersection of Fourth Avenue and Raritan Avenue has the highest accident incidence, with six pedestrian accidents. Every accident resulted from a turning vehicle failing to yield to a crossing pedestrian.

The other accidents resulted from a through vehicle striking a pedestrian. In half of these cases, the pedestrian was crossing against the green light, and was at fault.

The situation with bicycle accidents along Raritan Avenue through the CBD for 1997 to 2001 is the reverse of pedestrian accidents. Whereas every pedestrian accident within the CBD occurred at an intersection, 8 of the 10 bike accidents occurred at a mid-block location. As with pedestrian accidents, there were common aspects to bike accidents in the CBD. Four of the accidents occurred when the bicyclist was riding on the sidewalk. This can create a higher risk of accidents, as motorists turning in or out of a driveway or street do not anticipate encountering a bicyclist on the sidewalk. However, riding on Raritan Avenue, with limited space available for bicyclists, creates its own set of problems. One accident resulted when a motorist of a parked vehicle opened his door into a passing bicyclist. Two other accidents

resulted from conflicts between bicyclists and motorists maneuvering into parking spaces.

Other than Raritan Avenue in the CBD and River Road, the only intersection with multiple bicycle or pedestrian accidents appears to be at the intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Hilton Street. This was the site of two bicycle accidents, one in 1997 and one in 2001. In both cases, the bicyclist's behavior contributed to the accident. In one, the bicyclist was riding west in the eastbound lane of Woodbridge Avenue, and a motorist turning right from Hilton Street struck the bicyclist. In the other case, the bicyclist suddenly crossed Woodbridge Avenue 44 ft. west of Hilton Street, and was struck by a through motorist.

Transit

Two New Jersey Transit routes serve Highland Park: Route 810 and 814. Route 810 originates in New Brunswick, and passes through Highland Park via Raritan Avenue. It makes stops in Edison, Metuchen, and Woodbridge, before terminating at Woodbridge Center. Route 814 originates in North Brunswick, and passes through New Brunswick, Highland Park via Raritan Avenue, and Edison on its way to Middlesex County Community College.

Based on data provided by the New Jersey Transit Bus Service Planning Department, on a typical day 258 people board one of these two buses in Highland Park, with 269 deboarding. The bus stop with the highest amount of boarding activity is Raritan Avenue and Fourth Avenue, with 36 people boarding. The bus stop at Raritan Avenue and Woodbridge Avenue has the greatest amount of deboarding activity, at 40.

There are currently two sheltered bus stops in the Borough; westbound at the intersection of Raritan Avenue and Second Avenue, and westbound at the intersection of Raritan Avenue and First Avenue.

The Rutgers University campus bus passes through Highland Park, between its campuses in Piscataway and the College Avenue and Douglas/Cook campuses in New Brunswick. Depending on the route, the bus uses River Road and/or Cedar Lane. There are existing bus shelters on both roadways.

Parking

The most visible supply of parking in the Borough consists of 122 on-street parking spaces along Raritan Avenue. There are also three public parking lots: at the old Community Center between Second and Third Avenues, on Third Avenue between Raritan Avenue and Magnolia Street, and on Sixth Avenue just north of Raritan Avenue.

Merchants and residents have not expressed strong concern about the availability of parking in the Borough, and investigations indicate that vacant parking spaces can typically be located within 500 ft. of downtown destinations. In part, this is a function of generally adequate parking at some of the larger generators, such as Stop 'N' Shop and Charlie Brown's. There is an excess of spaces at Rite Aid. The Borough does not have a large number of major parking generators.

ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Vehicular Analysis

Raritan Avenue in the CBD

From the motorists' perspective, the greatest traffic issue in the Borough is congestion on Raritan Avenue. While there is noticeable congestion on Raritan Avenue, especially during peak travel periods, a certain amount of traffic congestion is actually desirable on a community's "main street." It reinforces the fact that Raritan Avenue is a shopping destination, not simply a thoroughfare. Moderate traffic speeds also make pedestrians feel more comfortable.

Excessive congestion in a CBD can also have negative side effects, such as increased air pollution, and encourage a greater number of motorists to cut through local streets. Where feasible – particularly if existing traffic signals are upgraded in the future – the Borough should examine if it is possible to improve traffic flow through critical intersections on Raritan Avenue in the peak hour, without increasing vehicular speeds during off-peak hours. Prior to any study of improving traffic flow along Raritan Avenue, the Borough should request that the State lower the speed limit on Raritan Avenue from the current 30 mph to 25 mph between River Road and Eighth Avenue. The overall goal of improvements in the CBD should be to maintain an environment amenable to pedestrians.

Access Management along Raritan Avenue

The numerous mid-block driveways along Raritan Avenue contribute to both vehicular and bicycle accidents. In particular, they account for a major share of recent bike accidents in the Borough; four bike accidents occurred when motorists were turning into or out of driveways. Two of the accidents, on the 300 block of Raritan Avenue, resulted when motorists exited driveways with severely limited sight distance, and struck bicyclists. In both of these cases, 320 and 325 Raritan Avenue, the parking lots behind the businesses could have been linked to other parking areas with direct access to side streets, thereby removing the dangerous access onto Raritan Avenue. As these establishments change uses in the future and owners apply for site plan approvals, the Borough should request that owners explore means to improve the safety of these driveways onto Raritan Avenue, linking them with other parking areas where feasible. A more comprehensive means of controlling these driveways would be the development of an access management plan for Raritan Avenue. This would require the involvement of NJ DOT, and a more detailed traffic study. The plan would recommend the location of all driveway openings along Raritan Avenue and would be justified given the problems that mid-block driveways pose for both bicyclists and motorists in this area.



Typical Parking Lot within Central Business District

These photos and Figure 1 depict parking areas behind commercial uses on the 300 block of Raritan Avenue. Bollards and chain-link fences separate parking areas that could easily be integrated.



Typical Parking Lot within Central Business District

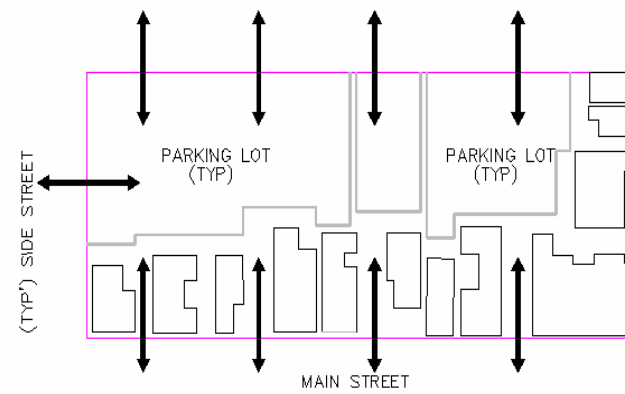


Figure 1 Typical Main Street Existing Access

The linkage of parking areas behind land uses, as shown in Figure 2, could reduce the number and/or intensity of use of mid-block driveways in the CBD, and thereby reduce the frequency of vehicular and bike accidents on Raritan Avenue.

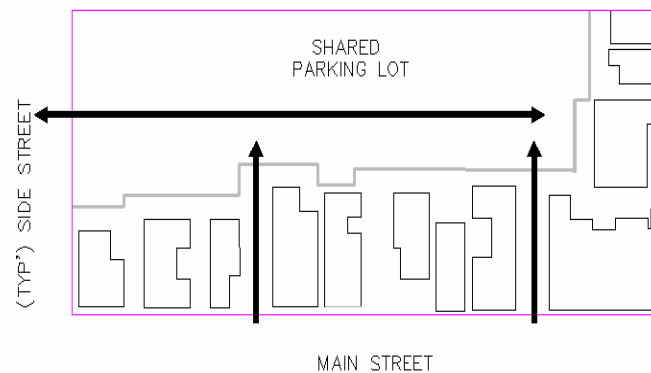


Figure 2 Proposed Shared Access and Parking

Raritan Avenue east of Sixth Avenue (Upper Raritan)

The cross section of Raritan Avenue east of Sixth Avenue (Upper Raritan) is shown in Figure 3. With four lanes, posted speeds of 40 mph, and traffic volumes of 14,000 per day, Upper Raritan can be difficult for pedestrians to cross. Sidewalks are narrow, at 4 feet in some locations, and in other places non-existent, as parking areas are paved up to the roadway. In addition, the grass buffer between the street and sidewalk in most locations is minimal. The buffer typically ranges in width from 2 to 4 ft., and on some blocks, it is completely absent. As a result, pedestrians are uncomfortably close to moving traffic. The design of this street poses difficulties for motorists, too, as indicated by the higher-than-average accident rate. Four-lane undivided roadways have a higher accident rate than other types of roadways. Bicyclists also avoid this roadway; the lane widths range from 10 to 11 ft., making the street incompatible for bicycle travel.

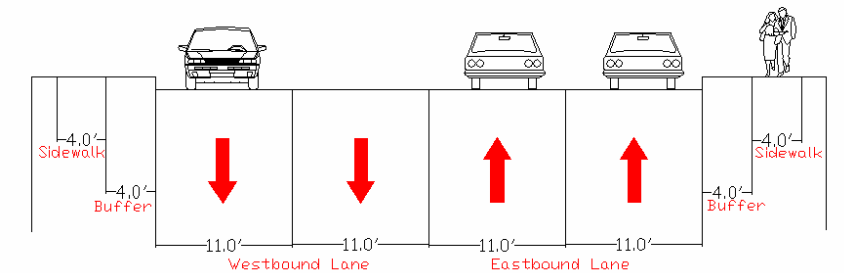


Figure 3 Existing Cross-Section Upper Raritan Avenue

The desired lane configuration of Upper Raritan Avenue should be the subject of further study. Various alternatives to the current cross-section of four lanes, on a cartway of 44 ft., should be considered. For example, as shown in Figure 4, a three-lane cross section would consist of one 11 ft. travel lane in each direction, one 11 ft. two-way left turn lane, and two 5.5 ft. shoulders.

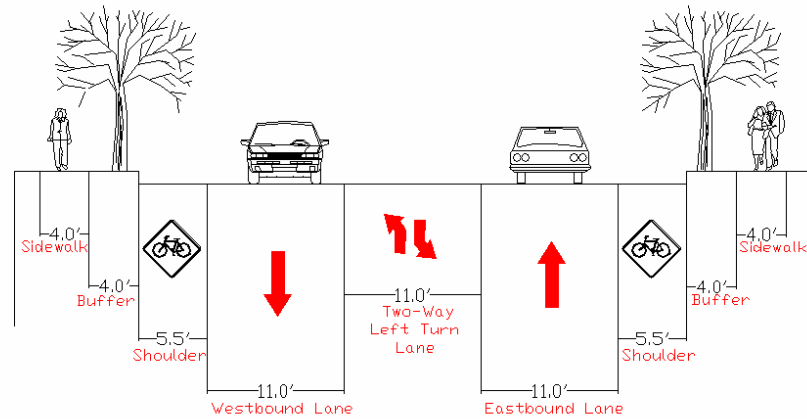


Figure 4 Proposed Cross-Section Upper Raritan Avenue

As another example, the roadway could consist of one 14 ft. travel lane in each direction and two 8 ft. parking lanes. Other configurations would be possible by narrowing the roadway width; through roadway narrowing, the sidewalk and buffer widths could be increased. This alternative would be pedestrian-friendly, but would also be quite expensive, due to the need for added sidewalk, and the moving of utilities and drainage. Whichever alternative is chosen, the Borough should request NJ DOT to lower the speed limit from the current 40 mph to 35 mph.

A three-lane cross section would seem to have a number of advantages, over both the existing and a two-lane cross-section. Nationally, studies suggest that the conversion to a three-lane cross-section would lower the accident rate along the corridor. The two-way left-turn lane would permit left-turning vehicles to move out of the traffic flow, reducing the number of rear-end collisions. The cross-section would also likely reduce the number of side-swipe accidents, by preventing lane-changing. The addition of a shoulder may also have value in reducing the number of accidents. Further, the shoulder could accommodate bicycle traffic, making bicycle travel along the roadway safer. The shoulder would also serve to shift moving vehicles away from pedestrians. Median islands could be added to provide safer crossing points for pedestrians, and to channelize left turns at intersections.

A two-lane cross section with parking may have greater potential for slowing speeds and could provide a substantial buffer for pedestrian traffic, make pedestrian crossings more safe and increase parking capacity. It should be noted,

however, that the numerous driveways through this section, and the short blocks and street alignment would all serve to limit parking capacity. This is because many of the streets on opposite sides of Raritan Avenue are not offset. At a T-intersection, parking is prohibited not only along the nearside block face within 25 ft. of the street corners, but also within 25 ft. of the street corners on the farside. The sight distance at a number of intersections along Upper Raritan Avenue is not optimal, given the acute angle at which many of the side streets intersect Raritan Avenue; this creates a problem with sight distance, which could be exacerbated by parked vehicles. Finally, the two-lane cross-section would greatly diminish capacity.

The Borough should coordinate with NJ DOT on changing the configuration of Upper Raritan. Based on both safety and capacity, it would likely be more feasible for NJ DOT to approve a three-lane cross-section than a two-lane cross-section. A proposed cross-section which required physical reconstruction, such as narrowing of the cartway or installation of median islands, would necessarily be more involved than a cross-section which involved only re-paving and re-striping.

The Borough should request NJ DOT to study Upper Raritan Avenue through the Local Planning Assistance program, or the Transportation Needs Assessment. These studies would enable a more thorough analysis of the safety and capacity issues on this corridor for all modes of transportation. In this regard, the Borough should coordinate with Edison Township on a regional corridor study. A multi-jurisdictional initiative may be more competitive in requesting funding from NJ DOT planning programs.

Cedar Lane

A reconfiguration of Cedar Lane should be considered for slowing vehicular speeds. At 52 ft., with four lanes, Cedar Lane is the widest roadway in the Borough. Based on these visual cues, motorists frequently travel above the posted speed limit of 25 mph. Physical narrowing would create a traffic calming effect. One alternative would be to install a 24 ft. median with one 14 ft. travel lane in each direction. Another alternative would be to install a 20 ft. median with one 11 ft. lane in each direction and 5 ft. shoulders. These travel lanes would be bicycle-compatible, which would be desirable as many

bicyclists will likely prefer to continue riding on Cedar Lane rather than using the adjacent bike path. The median would have to be cut back to permit a left-turn lane at the westbound approach to River Road, as left turns are particularly heavy at this intersection. The median would also have to include a number of openings, to permit motorists to turn to access the housing developments on either side of Cedar Lane. There are nine curb cuts for the apartment complex on the south side of Cedar Lane. Many other alternatives for Cedar Lane are also possible, including simply restriping the roadway as a three-lane cross-section, with a two-way left turn lane, two through lanes, and bike-compatible shoulders.

River Road

The County has considered re-aligning River Road as it passes through the Amtrak railroad overpass. This was the site of 12 accidents in the Borough from 1997 to 2001. There are two important concerns that the County should address as it studies this site. The railroad overpass is historic, and its integrity should be maintained. Further, if River Road is re-aligned such that southbound vehicles approach the Cleveland Avenue intersection at a faster speed, this would compromise the goal of making it easier for pedestrians and bicyclists to cross River Road to Johnson Park.

Traffic Calming

The Institute of Transportation Engineers defines traffic calming as "the combination of mainly physical measures that reduce the negative effects of motor vehicle use, alter driver behavior, and improve conditions for non-motorized street users." Traffic calming could be used in Highland Park to reduce speeds on streets where speeding is a persistent problem. Speed studies have not been conducted on Borough streets; these should take place as part of a traffic calming program.

Speeding is more likely to be a problem on streets where motorists do not encounter Stop signs, where there are not sharp curves, and on wider streets or streets with minimal on-street parking. An example of a street segment that should be checked for speeding is North Fourth Avenue/Madison Avenue to Cleveland Avenue to River Road, a popular cut-through route for motorists. One of the five fatal traffic accidents in the last nine years took place at the intersection

of North Fourth Avenue and Wayne Street, along this route. Other potential speeding locations identified by residents include Harrison Avenue between Second Avenue and Madison Avenue, and Woodbridge Avenue in the vicinity of Irving Primary School.

Most traffic calming programs across the country approve roadways as eligible for traffic calming if the 85th percentile speed on that roadway exceeds 5 to 10 mph over the speed limit. Highland Park could employ the 5 mph criteria in an effort to more rigorously hold down vehicular speeds.

Traffic calming should be investigated particularly for those areas with a higher rate of accidents. As discussed earlier, the South Side experiences a higher rate of vehicular, bicycle and pedestrian accidents than other neighborhoods in the Borough. A study would have to be conducted to determine if speeding, or other conditions amenable to traffic calming, are factors in the different accidents.



Speed hump

A variety of traffic calming measures could be considered for Borough streets. The two most popular measures in the country are speed humps and traffic circles, in that order. Speed humps are relatively inexpensive, and very effective at reducing speeds. The Borough has a high number of four-way intersections on its local streets, which lends itself well to the application of traffic circles. Unlike speed humps, traffic circles can be landscaped, and therefore better fit in to the visual fabric of a neighborhood. Curb extensions and chicanes could also be considered. The latter measure essentially

comprises curb extensions on alternate sides of the street. As such, these measures require the removal of on-street parking spaces.



Traffic circle

Grant programs exist for funding local traffic calming studies. One such program is the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation New Jersey Walks Initiative.

Other Safety Recommendations

The Police Department should annually rank the most dangerous intersections, and the Borough should take action if a review of accident reports reveals a continuing pattern, or if individual accidents point to conditions that can be easily remediated.

It is recommended that the Police Department file its accident reports using a computer database program, rather than hand-write them on paper. Municipalities across the state are increasingly moving in this direction. Having accident reports on a computer database make these reports much more accessible for safety analysis. In addition, the Borough should coordinate with adjacent municipalities to compile accident data for streets on the Borough's borders.

Vehicular (and bicycle and pedestrian) safety at local intersections should be enhanced with more consistent marking and signing of the no parking zone and crosswalks. Many motorists are unaware that they cannot park within a distance of 25 feet from a crosswalk or street corner, or within a distance of 50 feet from Stop signs. Parking close to the

intersection impedes sight distance for motorists, increasing the possibility of accidents.

A small number of four-way intersections in the Borough, such as Parker Street and Alcazar Street, and Parker Street and Exeter Street, have no traffic controls. The Borough should investigate the need for traffic controls, including Stop or Yield signs, at these intersections.

Traffic Impact Studies

The requirements for the conduct of traffic impact studies for developments in the Borough are minimal. The "Environmental Impact Study" section in the Land Development Ordinance makes only minor reference to the need to study traffic impact. This section should be revised to include more detailed procedures for conducting a traffic impact study. The ordinance should also specify the "threshold" that triggers the traffic impact study provision. Typical thresholds are presented in square feet for non-residential developments and number of units for residential developments, or the number of trips anticipated in the peak hour and on a daily basis.

Planned Improvements

Middlesex County is currently considering a number of roadway improvements. The County has received a warrant to install a signal at the intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Duclos Lane, but Highland Park and Edison need to process the agreement. Also noted earlier, the County has just entered the design phase for improvements at the intersection of Cedar Lane and River Road, but has not indicated the nature of the proposed improvements.

Pedestrian Safety

As documented in the Existing Conditions section, it is a common occurrence for vehicles at intersections along Raritan Avenue to turn into the path of pedestrians. While it is fortunate that relatively few of these encounters have resulted in accidents and subsequent injuries, pedestrians at these intersections would benefit from signage informing motorists of their obligation to yield to pedestrians. Many New Jersey municipalities have installed signage instructing motorists to yield to pedestrians at crosswalks. With very few exceptions, these signs have been installed at non-signalized intersections, where motorists must yield to pedestrians crossing all legs.

State law for signalized intersections requires only turning vehicles to yield to pedestrians. It is thus recommended that signs with the message "Turning Vehicles Yield to Pedestrians" be installed at key signalized intersections along Raritan Avenue. The top priorities are the intersections of Fourth, Fifth, Third, River Road and Adelaide Avenue. The signs could be installed with flexible orange pylons on the roadway centerline, or on the mast-arms of the traffic signals.

Another means of improving pedestrian crossings at intersections would be the installation of curb extensions. These involve the extension of a curb for six to eight feet from the existing curb line, for a length of not more than 20 feet from the corner. The pedestrian crossing is thus shortened, and sight distance of and by the pedestrian is typically improved. The additional sidewalk space gained could be used to host bike racks or street furniture.



Several streets in Highland Park have curb extensions. This curb extension on North Third Avenue at Raritan Avenue is only four feet wide; more effective extensions would be six to eight feet in width.

The installation of curb extensions, if installed on the approaches to intersections along Raritan Avenue, would have a major effect on traffic flow. While all approaches at intersections west of Sixth Avenue have only one lane, in practice through or right-turning vehicles are currently able to move past left-turning vehicles waiting to turn onto side streets. With the addition of curb extensions, a left-turning vehicle could prevent the movement of all vehicles behind it during a signal cycle, leading to significant congestion. Therefore, if curb extensions are placed on Raritan Avenue, the "No Left

Turn" restrictions currently enforced on certain intersections from 4 to 6 PM may need to be extended to a greater time period, or all day. Curb extensions on Raritan Avenue should only be considered after a more detailed traffic study is conducted to make appropriate recommendations.

A variety of pedestrian improvements are needed throughout the Borough, but particularly in the CBD. These include:

- Handicapped-accessible curb ramps at street corners;
- Pedestrian indications at traffic signals. Currently these indications are found only at the intersections of Raritan Avenue with Sixth Avenue and Woodbridge, and Raritan Avenue at Lincoln Avenue and River Road. Pedestal mounted traffic signals should also be considered through the CBD. Along Raritan Avenue, there are many street corners where pedestrians waiting to cross cannot easily see lights mounted on mast-arms. For example, a pedestrian waiting to cross from the southwest corner of Raritan Avenue and Second Avenue cannot see traffic lights across either of these streets, and would have to be cued by vehicular traffic when it was safe to cross.
- Crosswalks with longitudinal markings. These markings are more visible than the parallel stripe markings currently found along Raritan Avenue. These markings can be installed such that the tire marks of most vehicles can pass between the markings, thereby increasing their lifespan. Given the higher pedestrian flows, these markings are of particularly high priority for Raritan Avenue.

Some Borough residents have expressed interest in mid-block crosswalks along Raritan Avenue. These can be effective in a downtown setting for aiding pedestrian movement, especially at locations where pedestrian crossings regularly exceed 25 per hour. It should be noted that any mid-block crosswalk installation has the potential to remove up to four parking spaces on Raritan Avenue. Mid-block crosswalks must be approved by the New Jersey Department of Transportation, whether the street is local, County, or State-controlled. The Borough should work with NJDOT to investigate the installation of a mid-block crosswalk on a demonstration basis.

Sometimes, physical features and signage can be effective in reducing speeds in the absence of police enforcement. This is the principle behind traffic calming. However, it is equally true that for many traffic offenses, police enforcement is essential. Pedestrian safety throughout the Borough would be enhanced if police regularly ticketed motorists who fail to yield when pedestrians have begun their crossings at non-signalized locations, or when turning vehicles fail to yield to pedestrians at signalized locations.

With traffic volumes of 14,500 to 16,000 per day and a posted speed limit of 35 mph on River Road, bike and pedestrian crossings of this street can be difficult to accomplish. Middlesex County installed pedestrian crossing signs at the intersections of River Road with Harrison Avenue and Cleveland Avenue two years ago in an effort to facilitate crossings to Johnson Park, but a high percentage of motorists on River Road still fail to yield to waiting pedestrians and bicyclists. Recently, Highland Park was awarded \$149,000 from NJDOT for Pedestrian crossing improvements along River Road. These improvements also include ADA upgrades and solar powered pedestrian crossing warning signals at the intersections of River Road with Harrison and Walter Avenues.

In an effort to bring about greater motorist compliance with the law on yielding to pedestrians at the crossings of Raritan Avenue with Cleveland Avenue and Harrison Avenue, more prominent crossings are recommended. Pedestrian- or bicyclist-actuated warning lights could be installed at these two intersections; actuated flashing lights at pedestrian/bike crossings have been demonstrated at many installations across the country to be effective in increasing the percentage of motorists that yield. The Borough has submitted a grant request to NJ DOT to fund warning lights at the intersections of River Road and Harrison Avenue, and River Road and Walter Avenue. As a less costly interim measure, the Borough should consider installing "Yield to Pedestrians in Crosswalk" signage and longitudinal-striped thermoplastic crosswalks.



Example of Yield to Pedestrian sign placed on roadway centerline. Text on sign can be modified.

The effort to address pedestrian safety on Woodbridge Avenue is currently being spearheaded by the Neighborhood Preservation Program Committee, with input coming from neighborhood residents through the Orchard Heights Community Association. Concerns along Woodbridge Avenue include open curb cuts, the lack of a buffer between the roadway and sidewalk, and lack of ADA-compliant curb ramps.

Bicycle Safety

As documented in the Existing Conditions section, the most significant bicycle accident locations are along Raritan Avenue in the CBD and on the River Road bike path. Bicycle accidents along Raritan Avenue could be reduced through access management along this roadway; this issue has been addressed earlier in this element under Vehicular Analysis.

As noted earlier, the most dangerous spot for bicyclists is found on the River Road bike path, at 2 River Road, with three accidents in five years. In all three accidents, a vehicle exiting the driveway hit a northbound bicyclist. Poor sight distance is the major contributing factor at this location. Given the accident history here, short-term action is warranted. The Borough should require the property owner to trim the shrubbery next to the driveway, and thus improve sight distance. There is a Stop sign for exiting motorists, but it does not prepare them to look for bicyclists. A bike path sign should be installed at the driveway exit, with a supplementary plaque advising motorists to look both ways. This message could also be stenciled on the driveway. A sign should also be installed

advising bicyclists to be cautious when approaching the driveway.

The situation illustrates a basic principle of bicycle facility design. Off-road bicycle facilities have significant potential for encouraging bicycling activity. However, two-way bike paths are generally not recommended where driveways intersect with roadways; they are more appropriate along linear features such as rivers or canals, or interior to large parks. If not properly designed, the intersection of two-way bicycle paths with driveways and roadways can actually lead to more hazardous conditions, partly because bicyclists or motorists are more apt to be caught off-guard by each other's movements.

Rutgers University has recently installed a bike path along Cedar Lane. This bike path is wider than the River Road bike path (9 ft. versus typical 6 ft. on River Road). It has two intersections on Cedar Lane. A bike path sign is posted at the exit of Forest Glen at Cedar Lane, and a similar bike path sign is needed at the intersection of Treetops Road and Cedar Lane. The bike path on Cedar Lane is not completed, and stops 250 feet east of River Road. Given the high traffic volumes on River Road, and the relatively high level of vehicular accidents at the intersection of River Road and Cedar Lane, proper signage and markings will be particularly important at the intersection of the bike path at this location. Middlesex County is currently preparing a design for improvements at the intersection of Cedar Lane and River Road, and extension of the bike path to River Road will be included in this project.

Consideration should also be given to improving lighting along the Johnson Park bike path, and on River Road at the Amtrak railroad overpass. This would provide safer conditions for residents of the garden apartment complexes on Cedar Lane, who must currently use River Road or the park path to access downtown Highland Park. A more direct connection between these complexes and the rest of Highland Park is desirable, but would be difficult and quite expensive.

Curb inlet grates on the Cedar Lane bike path were installed on the western curb cut at the intersections of the Cedar Lane bike path with Forest Glen and Treetops Road. It is undesirable to locate grates directly on bike paths, as a bicyclist would not

anticipate a change in road material from asphalt to steel at these points. The grates also prevent a smooth transition in grade between the bike path and the two roadways. Further, because the grates are set slightly higher than the surrounding asphalt, sand and other debris tends to collect around the grates. These inlet grates should be relocated off the bicycle path.

Proposed Bike Route System

For bicycling purposes, local streets are superior to Raritan Avenue. A bike route system should thus be established on local streets. Based on input from the Borough, a recommended bike route system has been incorporated into the March 2002 Middlesex County Transportation Plan. Bicyclists entering Highland Park from New Brunswick could turn from Raritan Avenue onto South Second Avenue. From there, two alternative routes split off to the east: one using Magnolia Street to Fifth Avenue; or along Valentine Street, connecting to Donaldson Street via the Southside bike path, and thence to Crowells Road and Woodbridge Avenue. On the north side, the primary east-west route would be along Denison Street from Second and Fifth Avenue, or Harrison Avenue from River Road to Fifth Avenue. The primary north-south routes through Highland Park would be River Road; Second Avenue from Donaldson Park to Harrison Avenue; and Fifth Avenue from Valentine Street to Harrison Avenue. The Borough would need to install bike route signage along all of these roadways. Map IV-2 indicates proposed bicycle facilities.

The primary focus of the proposed bike route system is to foster connections between Highland Park and New Brunswick, due to the presence of the many Rutgers faculty and students who live in Highland Park. Many Highland Park residents work elsewhere in New Brunswick or commute to New York via the New Brunswick Train Station. However, the intersection of River Road and Raritan Avenue is imposing for bicyclists and pedestrians to navigate. Bicyclists typically choose to ride on the sidewalk on Raritan Avenue and on the Albany Street Bridge, due to inadequate lane widths on both sections of Route 27 and high traffic volumes. Enhancing access to the Albany Street Bridge, whether through signs, markings or physical improvements, should thus be a major focus of study.

Piscataway

Edison

Edison

New Brunswick

Raritan River

Raritan River



Legend

Greenways

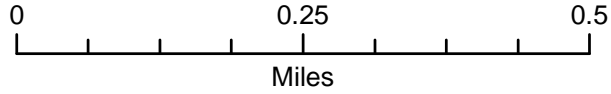
- Interim Greenway (dashed green line)
- Proposed Greenway (solid green line with arrows)

Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities

- Existing Bike Path (orange line)
- Proposed Bike Route (blue line)
- Future Bike Route (purple line)
- Water (light blue area)

**Bicycle/ Pedestrian Paths
Map IV-2**

*Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan*



Date: May 2003
Source: Borough of Highland Park
Orth-Rodgers & Associates



The Borough would benefit from a greater number of bike racks. New bike racks do exist in a number of locations, including the old Community Center on Raritan Avenue between Second and Third Avenues, the Community Center on Sixth Avenue and the Library. The Bartle School and High School have the traditional bike rack, in which bikes are locked by the wheel. Bike racks should also be placed at the more popular commercial destinations in the Borough, such as Stop 'N' Shop, Rite Aid, or Fleet Bank, or proximate to the intersections of Raritan Avenue with Fourth Avenue, Third Avenue and Cedar Avenue. They should also be placed at community facilities such as the proposed Environmental Education Center. In several locations – such as the Community Center on Sixth Avenue – poor installation limits the use of new bike racks. These racks are referred to as “wave” racks and are not recommended by the Association of Pedestrian and Bicycle Professionals. In many places through the CBD, simple “inverted U” racks would work well. It is recommended that the Borough adopt design guidelines for bike parking.

Greenways

Greenways are generally linear open space areas which include passive or active recreational facilities, and bicycle and pedestrian paths.

A bike path could be incorporated into the proposed Raritan River greenway from Donaldson Park to Johnson Park. Adelaide Avenue could be used as an interim greenway route until the river-side greenway is realized. This greenway could also include a connection at Valley Place Ravine, Elbert Court, and a short segment linking Fifth Avenue to Donaldson Park through the DPW yard. (The Raritan River greenway is discussed in greater detail in the Conservation, Open Space and Recreation Element.) The conceptual illustration of the greenway is shown on Map IV-2.

Highland Park's inclusion in the East Coast Greenway (ECG) is a major asset. This Greenway (distinct from the Raritan River Greenway shown on Map IV-2 and discussed above) is an effort to link together trails from Florida to Maine into one coordinated system for bicyclists, hikers, and other non-motorized users. Within Highland Park, it will include the Johnson Park bikepath, and the Rutgers bikepath on Cedar

Lane. The Highland Park Environmental Commission is a sponsor of the ECG.

Transit

Based on passenger activity alone, consideration should be given to installing shelters at the intersections of Raritan Avenue with Woodbridge Avenue and with Fourth Avenue. The intersection of Raritan Avenue and Third Avenue could also be considered for a shelter. A bus stop has recently been moved from Woodbridge Avenue at Eleventh Avenue, to reduce vehicular activity in the proximity of Irving Primary School students.

A large number of Rutgers faculty, staff and students live in Highland Park, and the Borough should coordinate with the University on exploring the feasibility of an extension of the campus bus system or a shuttle bus into the Borough CBD.

Parking

Greater use could be made of the public parking lots in the Borough. Appropriate “way-finding” signs should be installed to better direct motorists to these lots.

The Borough has recently reduced parking requirements for commercial properties in the CBD. This is consistent with the compact nature of the Borough, in which many people can walk or bike to commercial uses in the CBD, as well as the regular presence of vacant parking spaces. As uses are redeveloped in the CBD, and commercial uses intensified, the parking supply should be monitored.

The Borough should seek a “special area standard” with regard to parking requirements under the state Residential Site Improvements Standards (RSIS). The RSIS mandates the same level of parking spaces for residential uses across the state. It does not reflect the greater availability of transportation modes to Highland Park residents: NJ Transit lines on Raritan Avenue, Rutgers campus buses on River Road, and the New Brunswick train station within walking distance. As noted above, many residents walk or bicycle as part of their regular activities, and the municipality is less auto-dependent than others. A “special area standard” would also make it more feasible to develop residential uses above commercial uses downtown, consistent with Master Plan goals.

Streetscaping

Much of the focus of this circulation plan has been to recommend steps to improve safety and efficiency. The improvement of pedestrian facilities is a particular emphasis; when Borough residents are asked why they like Highland Park, many respond that it is a walkable community. This aspect of the Borough derives from the fact that it is compact and planned on a grid system. On a less tangible basis, people enjoy walking around Highland Park because it has many attractive, well-kept neighborhoods. However, many sections along Raritan Avenue and Woodbridge Avenue, two of the major streets in the Borough lack amenities such as street trees, streetscaping, and street furniture. Improving the appearance of these major streets would do much to further encourage pedestrian activity, and augment the Borough's reputation as a community where walking is a valued activity.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Action Plan provides implementation time frames and identifies responsible party/funding sources for each recommendation of this element. The following list briefly summarizes the circulation recommendations:

Vehicular:

- Reduce the speed limit on Raritan Avenue between Eighth and Tenth Avenues to 35 mph.
- Install signal heads east of the eastbound stop bar on Raritan Avenue at River Road.
- Mark “No Parking” areas on consistent basis across Borough.
- Install signal at intersection of Woodbridge and Duclos Avenues.
- Encourage linked driveways/parking areas for land uses along Raritan Avenue.
- Reduce speed limit on Raritan Avenue in CBD from 30 to 25 mph.
- Reduce speed limit on Upper Raritan Avenue from 40 to 35 mph and consider changing cross-section from 4 lanes to 3 lanes.
- Consider changing Cedar Lane cross-section from 4 to 2 lanes.
- Initiate Borough-wide traffic calming needs assessment.
- Investigate need for traffic controls at four-way intersections with no existing controls.

- Install signs to encourage use of Borough-owned public parking.
- Monitor parking needs as downtown revitalization efforts continue.
- Apply for "special area standard" for residential parking requirements.

- Improve procedures for monitoring traffic and pedestrian safety by transitioning to computer-based accident reporting.
- Update Land Development requirements for Traffic Impact Studies.

Pedestrian:

- Install "Turning Vehicles Yield to Pedestrians" signs at Raritan Avenue intersections.
- Consider curb extensions at Raritan Avenue intersections.
- Install handicapped-accessible curb ramps throughout Borough.
- Install pedestrian indications at traffic signals.
- Install pedestal mounted traffic signals where missing on Raritan Avenue.
- Install longitudinal crosswalk markings.
- Review need for mid-block crosswalks on Raritan Avenue.
- Enforce law against vehicles not yielding to pedestrians/bicyclists at intersections.
- Install pedestrian-actuated crossing signage on River Road.

Bike:

- Install signage, trim shrubbery on River Road bike path.
- Install signage, relocate inlet grates on Cedar Lane bike path.
- Install bike route signage.
- Study pedestrian and bike connections to Albany Street Bridge.
- Install bike racks.
- Prepare design guidelines for bike installation.

Transit:

- Install bus shelters at intersections of Raritan Avenue with Woodbridge Avenue and with Fourth Avenue.
- Partner with Rutgers University to initiative community shuttle.

Other:

- Improve appearance of CBD streetscape.

SECTION V: MUNICIPAL SERVICES ELEMENT



INTRODUCTION

This element describes the existing municipal services within Highland Park, including police, fire and rescue facilities, library, schools, senior/youth center, and water, sanitary and recycling services. The purpose of this element is to ensure that all areas of the Borough receive adequate municipal services and that the Borough continues to maintain and upgrade its infrastructure in a systematic fashion.

MUNICIPAL SERVICES

The Highland Park Borough Hall is located on South Fifth Avenue. It houses many of the Borough's municipal services, including the Borough Administration, Board of Health, Borough Clerk, Construction Office, Finance Department, Housing Inspector, Human Services, Planning and Zoning Board, Public Assistance, Rent Leveling Board, Tax Assessor and Tax Collector. Future planned improvements to the building include making barrier-free upgrades to the main entrance on South Fifth Avenue and applying for state funding to make the Council Chambers fully accessible.

Police

The Highland Park Police Department currently has a 31-member police force consisting of 28 full-time officers, 2 full-time civilian dispatchers and 1 part-time dispatcher. Centrally located on South Fifth Avenue, the police department shares its headquarters with the Fire Department. The Department maintains 13 patrol vehicles and four unmarked vehicles. Staffing levels and the number of vehicles are generally considered adequate; however, police department personnel indicate that the department needs more space. The Highland Park Police have recently implemented three new programs: Community Oriented Policing, a Domestic Violence Response Team and a Hostage Response Team. For purposes of quantifying municipal services such as police and fire, a generalized planning standard has been applied to Highland Park (see Table V-1). The standards indicated that the Borough has adequate personnel and vehicles. However, it should be noted that these standards are entirely population-based and do not take into account the unique characteristics of a community. The Borough is currently seeking a grant to install video cameras in patrol cars. The cameras would be useful against unfounded general-liability claims brought against officers for misconduct, wrongful arrests or other offenses.

The presence and determination of the police force and community efforts have resulted in a low crime rate for the Borough of Highland Park. The total crime rate for the Borough, 17.4/1,000 residents is far below the County average of 26.5 per 1,000 people, as shown in Table V-2. Even when compared to other municipalities with similar attributes, such as Metuchen, Bound Brook and Somerville, Highland Park has a lower total crime rate and lower violent crime rate. At 0.6 per 1,000 residents, the Borough's violent crime rate is one-quarter the County average.

Factor	Standard (per 1,000 population)	Existing Level	Planning Requirement	Deficiency/Surplus
Personnel	2	28	28	0
Vehicles	0.6	13*	8	(+) 5

Source: R. Burchell, D. Listokin, Development Impact, Urban Land Institute, 1994.
* Represents Patrol Vehicles

	Crime Rate per 1,000	Violent Crime Rate per 1,000	Nonviolent Crime Rate per 1,000	Police Officers per 1,000
Carteret	26.5	2.9	23.5	50
Dunellen	29.2	3.2	25.9	18
Highland Park	17.4	0.6	16.7	28
Metuchen	19.9	1	18.8	27
South Amboy	19.3	1.1	18.2	23
South River	10.5	2.6	7.9	31
Middlesex Co. Avg.	26.5	2.4	24	1556
Bound Brook	27.4	1.2	26.2	21
Manville	16.6	0.7	16	25
North Plainfield	31.8	2.5	29.3	45
Raritan	25.4	0.5	24.9	17
Somerville	29.2	3.5	25.7	32
S. Bound Brook	10.5	0.7	9.8	10
Somerset Co. Avg.	17.5	1	16.5	571
Clark	13.7	0.1	13.6	44
Fanwood	18.5	0.3	18.3	20
Garwood	18.3	0.2	18.1	16
Roselle	33.2	4.4	28.8	51
Roselle Park	17.3	1.4	15.9	34
Union Co. Avg.	38.4	4.4	34	1447

Source: Uniform Crime Reports, State of New Jersey, 2000.

In order to help make Highland Park police and fire departments more efficient and responsive, the Borough has applied for funding through the Department of Law and Public Safety Livable Communities Pilot Program to purchase domestic preparedness equipment.

Fire

Fire protection and response in the Borough is largely provided by volunteer firefighters. The Highland Park Fire Department maintains one fire house on South Fifth Avenue and shares its building with the Police Department. It responds to over 400 calls a year which are divided into two shifts. The day shift covers 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. and the night shift covers 6 p.m. to 8 a.m. Over 57 percent of the calls occur during the night shift. The current staffing level is 48, including one full-time firefighter,

Factor	Standard (per 1,000 population)	Existing Level	Planning Requirement	Deficiency/Surplus
Personnel	1.65	11/37*	23	0
Vehicles	0.2	3	3	0

Source: R. Burchell, D. Listokin, Development Impact, Urban Land Institute, 1994.

* Staffing levels include 1 full-time and 10 part-time firefighters as well as 37 volunteers, for a total of 48.



Highland Park Fire Station/Police Department

10 part-time firefighters and 37 volunteers. Staffing is generally considered satisfactory; however, the department would like to increase the number of active volunteers. Like many other volunteer departments throughout the state, it has implemented a Length of Services Award Program (LOSAP) for

its members. At present, the department has three fire engines in service; however, it is seeking funding assistance from Federal Emergency Management Agency to replace its 27 year old, 1,200-gallon pumper truck with a 1,500-gallon pumper truck. The Department is also seeking to replace a rescue vehicle that is over 20 years old.

As shown in Table V-3, the Borough's fire department meets both staffing and vehicle planning guidelines. However, it should be emphasized that these standards are population based and do not necessarily take into account unique characteristics of a fire department, such as the large percentage of volunteer members.

Fire Prevention & Housing Inspection Office

Highland Park's fire prevention and housing inspection functions are combined in one office with two-full time staff members, one-part time staff member and one grant-funded part-time staff member. The office ensures compliance with the New Jersey Uniform Fire Code in all structures of the Borough and works closely with the fire department to investigate the causes of fires and to initiate prevention programs. More specifically, the office's fire prevention responsibilities include:

- Conducting five-year cyclical fire safety inspections in all rental housing structures with three or more housing units;
- Conducting fire prevention reviews of development applications;
- Conducting annual life hazard inspections for structures with particular risks due to occupants or materials handled, such as nursery schools, gas stations and dry cleaners;
- Conducting smoke detector certifications when any one or two-family house is sold;
- Conducting fire prevention inspection for certain types of permits, such as for welding or fireworks displays;
- Conducting educational outreach with seniors, school children, and other interested groups; and,
- Responding to complaints and conducting investigations at the request of the fire department.

In addition to these efforts, the Borough initiated business inspections in the past year. The goal of this new program is to conduct annual fire safety inspections of buildings within the

CBD; annual inspections are recommended due to the age of buildings and their relative proximity. The program also seeks to conduct business inspections every two years in other commercial areas of the Borough.

Through November of 2002, the following types and numbers of fire prevention inspections were conducted during the year:

Rental housing inspections (5-year cyclical):	581
Smoke detector certifications:	122
Permits:	18
Business inspections:	77
Life hazards:	72

The office's housing inspection activities address renter-occupied housing units. Specifically, certificate of occupancy inspections are conducted when there is a change in rental unit occupancy. Two-family owner-occupied units are exempt from this requirement. Approximately 800 units are inspected annually under this program.

In addition to housing inspections, the office responds to tenant housing complaints, appears in court to enforce the rental property maintenance code, and conducts visual sidewalk inspections. The State currently conducts five-year cyclical housing maintenance inspection for all structures with three or more units in the Borough. In an effort to centralize inspection activities, the Borough is evaluating resuming the responsibility for these housing maintenance inspections.

Construction Office

The Borough's Construction Office, with four part-time inspectors (one of which is the Zoning Officer) and a full-time technical assistant, is located at Borough Hall on South Fifth Avenue. The Construction Office enforces the New Jersey Uniform Construction Code and handles applications for all types of building permits, including new construction, additions, and electrical and plumbing work. The office is also responsible for enforcing the New Jersey Barrier Free Subcode. To inform the public of barrier-free design requirements, a sign should be posted in public view indicating enforcement of applicable laws. As part of the zoning permit review process, the Zoning Officer determines if applications require approvals and/or variances and refers applicants to the appropriate

board. In order to streamline the building permit review process, applicants are encouraged to contact the Zoning Officer to discuss their projects prior to submitting an application. The Borough should amend building permit and development review applications to include barrier-free requirements. In addition, the Borough should develop updated informational materials on the development review process for both businesses and residents. As part of the effort to further streamline the process, the Borough should also consider making the Technical Review Committee a required step of the development application review process (see Economic Plan). Finally, the Borough should monitor code enforcement activities and consider enhancing code enforcement capabilities to better serve the public.

First Aid Squad

The First Aid Squad is located on South Eleventh Avenue across from Irving Primary School. The Squad provides emergency medical services, including basic life support and ambulatory services and responds to approximately 1,000 calls per year. There are approximately 25 members in the completely voluntary squad. Of the total members, 14 are active, riding members, having committed more than ten years of service.



Highland Park First Aid Squad

The First Aid Squad owns three ambulances, a light truck and a boat that serves the entire Borough. While the squad has attempted to provide 24-hour service, staffing is a problem during the daytime hours. To address fluctuations in coverage, the Borough has mutual aid agreements with neighboring Edison Township and Rutgers University EMS to provide for back-up coverage. As noted by the Squad Captain, the

squad is actively recruiting new members. In addition to staffing needs, the Squad Captain indicated that the facility is somewhat outdated and would benefit from upgrades.

OEM Command Center

Due to the changing times, the Borough of Highland Park's Police and Fire Departments, First Aid Squad and the Office of Emergency Management applied for a grant to purchase additional computer and communication equipment to establish an Official Emergency Management command center. Its primary use would be to efficiently coordinate the necessary resources in case of an emergency. The Borough was recently awarded \$165,864 from the Department of Public Safety to purchase the emergency response equipment, including specialized emergency protective gear, chemical, radioactivity and gas detection systems and emergency communication and rescue equipment.

Library

The Highland Park Public Library, located on North Fifth Avenue, is open to all Borough residents and operates seven days a week. The library recently underwent a planned expansion, enhancing the total area of the building to 13,000 square feet and greatly increasing seating capacity and shelf space. Applying a general planning standard of 0.6-0.65 square feet of library space per capita, the existing library facility more than meets the recommended minimum square footage. The library is viewed as a tremendous asset and is widely used by Borough residents of all ages. In addition to a variety of programs, the library has implemented an online catalog and installed six computers with public internet access.

Factor	Standard (square feet per capita)	Existing Level	Planning Requirement
Area (sf)	.6-.65	13,000	8,399-9,099

Source: R. Burchell, D. Listokin, Development Impact, Urban Land Institute, 1994.



Highland Park Public Library

School System

Highland Park's public school facilities include Irving Primary School on Woodbridge Avenue, Bartle Elementary School on South Fifth Avenue and Highland Park Middle/High School on North Fifth Avenue. As anticipated in the 1995 Master Plan and shown in Table V-5, school enrollment has increased slightly, particularly at the primary and high school levels.

School	1993-93	1997-98	2001-02
Irving Primary (K-2)	393	434	429
Bartle (3-6)	502	473	493
Middle/High School	621	615	695
Total	1,516	1,522	1,617

Source: Long Range Facilities Plan, Highland Park Public Schools, June 2001.

As shown in Table V-6, the 2002 public school enrollments were approximately 75 pre-k students at the middle school/high school, 350 kindergarten through second grade students at Irving Primary School, 485 grade 3 through grade 6 students at Bartle School, 251 grade 7 through grade 8 students at the middle school, and 438 grade 9 through grade 12 students at the high school. Based on five-year projections contained in the 2001 Long Range Facilities Plan (LRFP), current enrollments remain at or near the five-year target projections.

School	Enrollment	Target Capacity (5 yr projections)
Pre-Kindergarten	75	115
Irving (Grades SE/K-2)	350	360
Bartle (Grades 3-6)	485	485
Middle School (Grades 7-8)	251	250
High School (Grades 9-12)	438	450
Total	1,599	1,660

Source: Long Range Facilities Plan, Highland Park Public Schools, June 2001.

To estimate private school enrollment, public school enrollment was subtracted from total enrollment as reported in the 2000 Census. As shown in Table V-7, over one-third of the Borough's school population attend private school.

School	2000 Census	Public	Estimated Private	% Private
Pre-Kindergarten	320	75	245	77%
Kindergarten to Eighth Grade	1,566	1,086	480	31%
High School (Grades 9-12)	683	438	245	36%
Total Grades PK-8	1,886	1,161	725	38%
Total Grades K-12	2,249	1,524	725	32%
Total Grades PK-12	2,569	1,599	970	38%

Source: U.S. Census, 2000 and Board of Education, 2002.

The oldest school buildings within Highland Park date to 1914. Irving Primary School and the Middle/High School have been expanded several times. For the most part, all three schools have retained their original mechanical, plumbing and electrical system; however, the 2001 LRFP indicates that these systems do not function in accordance with their original design intention. However, regular maintenance and replacement have kept these systems functional.

According to the LRFP, Irving Primary School does not have adequate capacity to accommodate projected Pre-K to second grade enrollments for the future. Pre-K classes are presently located at the Middle/High School complex. Although Irving Primary School has been expanded over the years, the LRFP notes that most spaces are outdated,

undersized, inadequately equipped and/or inadequately configured. The LRFP recommends that Irving Primary School be replaced with a new school on a different site that can accommodate the Pre-Kindergarten program and community functions. In the interim, the LRFP indicates that some minor work will be required at Irving Primary School in order to address mandates from local building inspectors.



Irving Primary School

Both Bartle School and the Middle/High School have adequate space for projected enrollments. The LRFP calls for minor renovations at Bartle School and the Middle/High School. These renovations generally pertain to current code, life cycle and functional deficiencies. Although the Middle/High School received an addition and renovations in 1998, the LRFP calls for a small addition to address middle school program needs. The plan states that any future space modifications should retain the separate middle and high school wings of the building.



Highland Park High School



Bartle School

A Strategic Planning Study was completed for the Board of Education in March of 2002. The study examined and analyzed the educational capabilities and conditions of existing school facilities within the Borough and explored various alternative options for relieving the identified inadequacies. The study focused on several options for Irving Primary School, expansion of the Pre-Kindergarten program, and upgrades to the Middle/High School. Four different options for Irving Primary school were explored. For each option, the cost of relocating and/or expanding the Pre-Kindergarten program was examined. The following summaries each of these options:

- Option A: to renovate and expand Irving Primary school at its present location (cost estimated from \$4.79 to \$10.45 million);
- Option B: to demolish the 1915 wing of Irving Primary School and construct additional classrooms (cost estimated from \$9.21 to \$13.77 million);
- Option C: to maintain the single-story 1964 wing and construct additional classrooms (cost estimated from \$14.41 to \$18.07 million); and,
- Option D: to replace Irving Primary School with a new school at a new site or on the existing site (cost estimated from \$17.17 to \$21.20 million).

The Strategic Planning Study also analyzed necessary improvements to the Middle School as a result of relocating the Pre-Kindergarten program to Irving Primary School. Two options are presented, as follows:

- Option A: Upgrades to program space (i.e. art room, technology/multi media room, middle school health classroom, small group rooms and a faculty room)

without building a school addition, and upgrades to the parking and circulation on the site.

- Option B: An addition to the middle school with a new main entrance, administrative and student service offices, and a large group/student commons area, along with upgrades to program space, and improvements to parking and circulation.

The alternatives presented in the study are being used by the Highland Park School district to begin the process of planning for the future and to address the inadequacies identified by the Strategic Planning Study. The Board of Education is carefully weighing all of the options evaluated in the Strategic Planning Study and will be seeking public input in the near future.

In addition to its public schools, students who reside in the Borough attend a number of private schools within and outside of Highland Park. These schools include Rabbi Pesach Raymon Yeshiva on Harrison Avenue, and the Center School on North Third Avenue. There are also eight nurseries and day care facilities located within the Borough.

Department of Community Services

The Borough of Highland Park is planning to merge the Recreation Department and Department of Aging to create a new Department of Community Services located at the Senior/Youth Center on South Sixth Avenue. The Recreation Department organizes group and individual activities for men and women of all ages. Some of the activities include: open-gym basketball, women's softball, fishing derby, Halloween dance party, summer camp, teen center, various youth programs (baseball/softball, soccer, basketball), summer tennis, wrestling, track and field, weightlifting and adult indoor soccer.

In addition, the Borough offers many opportunities for both active and passive recreation at various parks throughout the Borough. The Conservation, Open Space and Recreation Plan Element provides a more detailed discussion of these facilities.

The Department of Aging provides a variety of activities to senior citizens including focus groups, lunch & learn programs, art exhibits, dances and bingo. Other senior services include medical transportation.



Highland Park Senior/Youth Center

Department of Public Works

The Borough's Department of Public Works (DPW), with 16 full-time employees, is located at 444 Valentine Street. DPW provides garbage collection services to the Borough twice a week. Garbage collection is being provided to the CBD three times a week as part of a recently implemented pilot program. Under the DPW's supervision, litter control is conducted by a group of community service volunteers on a weekly basis. Street cleaning is also managed by public works, and is conducted weekly. To improve street cleaning services, the Borough recently acquired a new street sweeper. The DPW also oversees the following activities:

- Tree maintenance;
- Maintenance of Borough-owned properties;
- Line painting;
- Storm sewer repair;
- Snow removal;
- Pothole repair;
- Street sign maintenance; and,
- Maintenance of Borough vehicles.

Part of the Borough property adjacent to the Southside Bikeway is used as a construction staging area. The Borough should consider designating this area for material storage and implementing a maintenance program or identify an appropriate alternative location.

WATER AND SANITARY SEWERAGE DISPOSAL

The entire Borough is served by public water and sanitary sewer systems. The Borough's water is purchased from the Middlesex Water Company. In the event of a service

disruption or emergency, the Borough is still connected to the Elizabethtown Water Company. The 2001 Highland Park Master Plan Reexamination Report states that relatively few changes have occurred regarding water and sewer service.

A Water Distribution System Master Plan was prepared for the Borough by CME Associates in 1993. The document has provided a course of action for Borough infrastructure improvements, including potable water distribution upgrades, and has guided the Borough's expenditures in this area over the past decade. One of the plan's recommendations was for the Borough to undertake water main cleaning and lining. As a result, Highland Park has completed Phases A, B and C of the water main cleaning and re-lining program, covering the areas south of Raritan Avenue. Phases D and E, north of Raritan Avenue, will be completed in 2003. Sanitary sewerage disposal for Highland Park is handled by the Middlesex County Utilities Authority in Sayreville. Over the past decade, the Borough has undertaken planned sewer rehabilitation improvements at various locations, including cleaning the lines and installing devices to monitor the lines structurally.

RECYCLING

In 1999, Middlesex County took over recycling functions for the Borough. According to a report recently released by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, the County's facilities rank first in the state in recycling. The recycling program covers the following materials:

- Mixed paper and cardboard;
- Co-mingled goods (bottles, cans and plastics); and,
- Newspapers.

Table V-8 summarizes the Borough's curbside recycling from 1999-2001.

In addition, Highland Park also participates in the County's pickup of yard waste, which includes brush, leaves and grass, which are turned into compost. Table V-9 summarizes the Borough's yard waste tonnage for 1999, 2000 and 2001.

Item	1999	2000	2001
Co-mingled Goods (bottles, cans, plastics)	300	475	472
Mixed paper and cardboard	372	719	595
Newspaper	272	402	512
Total	944	1,596	1,579

Source: Middlesex County Improvement Authority, October 2002.

Item	1999	2000	2001
Brush	419	82	33
Leaves	222	159	274
Grass	0	0	74
Total	641	241	381

Source: Middlesex County Improvement Authority, October 2002.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Action Plan provides implementation time frames and identifies responsible party/funding sources for each recommendation of this element. The following list briefly summarizes the municipal service recommendations:

- Develop a maintenance plan for existing facilities to ensure their continued serviceability.
- Coordinate with the Board of Education to evaluate facilities and options for future expansions and rehabilitation.
- Examine First Aid Squad response time, staffing levels and facility upgrade needs.
- Replace the fire department's 27-year-old, 1,200-gallon pumper truck.
- Continue to identify funding sources for barrier-free upgrades to the Council Chambers.
- Evaluate police department space needs and identify potential solutions.
- Inform the public of barrier-free design requirements by creating user-friendly educational materials and by posting a sign in public view indicating enforcement of applicable laws.
- Develop updated informational materials on the development review process.

- Make the Technical Review Committee a required step of the development application review process.
- Amend building permit and development review application materials to include barrier-free requirements.

SECTION VI:

CONSERVATION, OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION ELEMENT



INTRODUCTION

The Conservation, Open Space and Recreation Element of the Master Plan is designed to provide a useful planning tool for the preservation, conservation and utilization of the Borough's natural resources. This element identifies Highland Park's existing environmental conditions, including soils, wetlands, woodlands, waterbodies, flood hazard areas, wildlife, and topography. It also identifies the various State, County and municipal parks and recreation facilities located within the Borough. Finally, this plan serves to outline the Borough's conservation, open space and recreation strategies and recommended actions.

This element references and includes recommendations for a number of areas within the Borough. Some of these areas are referred to with colloquial names. The following descriptions are provided to assist in identifying these areas:

The Meadows: "The Meadows" is the historic term for the orchards, farmland and wetlands along the Raritan River. The portion remaining is downstream from (east of) Donaldson Park. It is a contiguous Borough-owned area spanning multiple tax blocks and lots. It includes the former municipal landfill, the Southside Bikeway, and several paper streets (Valentine, Donaldson, Graham, and South Sixth). It is shown clearly on Map II-1, Existing Land Use, at the southeast edge of the Borough along the river. The largest single parcel, south of Valentine Street (paper street) to the Borough's edge, is over 16 acres and is referred to as the "Lower Meadows." The "Upper Meadows" includes the Southside Bikeway, the paper streets named above, and all the rest of the municipally owned vacant land north of paper Valentine Street.

Ayres Beach/Barwood Marsh: This area can be seen on Map II-1, Existing Land Use, adjoining and upstream (west) of Donaldson Park. Part of the property, the former Red's Marina and surrounding marsh, is being acquired by Middlesex County. It is often referred to as Ayres Beach, the former name for Highland Park's historical swimming area on the Raritan River, once owned by the Ayres family. The eastern portion connecting the former marina to Donaldson Park is privately owned, and referred to as the Barwood/Gutman property.

Native Plant Reserve/Environmental Education Center: This Borough-owned three acre parcel along River Road was

established in 1994 under the Urban Forestry Program and protected as Green Acres open space.

Rutgers Ecological Preserve (Kilmer Woods): This site consists of a wooded tract in the northeast corner of the Borough with 68 acres in Highland Park, extending into Piscataway. Military restrictions at former Camp Kilmer preserved the natural character of this area. The property is owned by Rutgers, the State University of NJ.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Soils

The Soil Conservation Service prepared a Soil Survey in Middlesex County that identifies the soil series throughout the County. The types of soils found in a given location is the result of many factors, including the climate, time, presence of plant and animal species in the area, topography, and the composition of unconsolidated mass covering the earth's surface in that location. Within Highland Park, there are several different types of soils, which include the Klinessville, Lansdowne, Nixon, Psammets, Rowlan, Urban Land and small amounts of Reaville. The location of the soils is shown on Map VI-1, Soils Map. The 1992 Natural Resource Inventory, prepared for the Highland Park Environmental Commission, describes each of these soil types in detail and identifies issues associated with development.

Wetlands

Wetlands are one of the many types of environmental features located throughout the Borough and serve specific purposes. They are defined by the NJDEP as "areas that are inundated or saturated by surface or groundwater at a frequency and duration sufficient to support a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions." They experience flooding or soil saturation during some portion of the growing season and are identified by a wetland delineation that is reviewed and approved by the NJDEP. Wetlands are categorized into three groups, and depending on their resource classification, transition and buffer requirements apply.

The New Jersey Freshwater Wetland Maps provide the most comprehensive inventory of wetlands for all municipalities in the state. The data, derived from NJDEP wetland maps, were

prepared using remote sensing techniques and field verification.

Wetlands are generally located between well-drained, rarely flooded uplands and the inundated waters of lakes, streams and coastal embankments. They usually include swamps, marshes and bogs that can be found throughout the state. The Highland Park Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) also identified areas within the Borough that contain wetlands. As shown on the Environmental Resources Map, Map VI-2, these areas are located primarily along the Raritan River corridor, within the Middlesex County park properties; throughout the Rutgers Ecological Preserve and Castle sites, along the rail embankment; and within the southern part of the Borough including the Meadows and Donaldson Park. The NRI describes wetland classification and identification in further detail. The preservation of the Borough's wetlands is critical to the health of its plant and wildlife populations. State law precludes development within a wetland without a permit from the NJDEP. Future development should be avoided on wetlands and their respective transition area buffers. These areas should be preserved and incorporated into the open space requirements of developments.

Woodlands

Deciduous forests are found in several areas of the Borough. These include south of Mansfield Street to the Raritan River, along the Raritan River corridor, in the northern part of Highland Park in the Rutgers Ecological Preserve, adjacent to Castle, Parker and Cenacle Retreat sites, and buffering the rail line. In addition, the vacant tract between South Fifth and Seventh Avenues and a substantial part of the Meadows are forested. Any future development in these areas should preserve mature trees to the greatest extent possible.

Waterbodies

Highland Park's hydrologic features include a number of waterbodies, including the Raritan River, Buell Brook and Mill Brook. The Raritan River forms the Borough's southern and western border, separating the City of New Brunswick from Highland Park. The River serves as an important natural feature and provides fish and wildlife habitat, as well as opportunities for recreation. Smaller streams include Buell Brook in the northwestern part of the Borough, which flows through the

Piscataway

Edison

Edison

New Brunswick

Raritan River

Raritan River



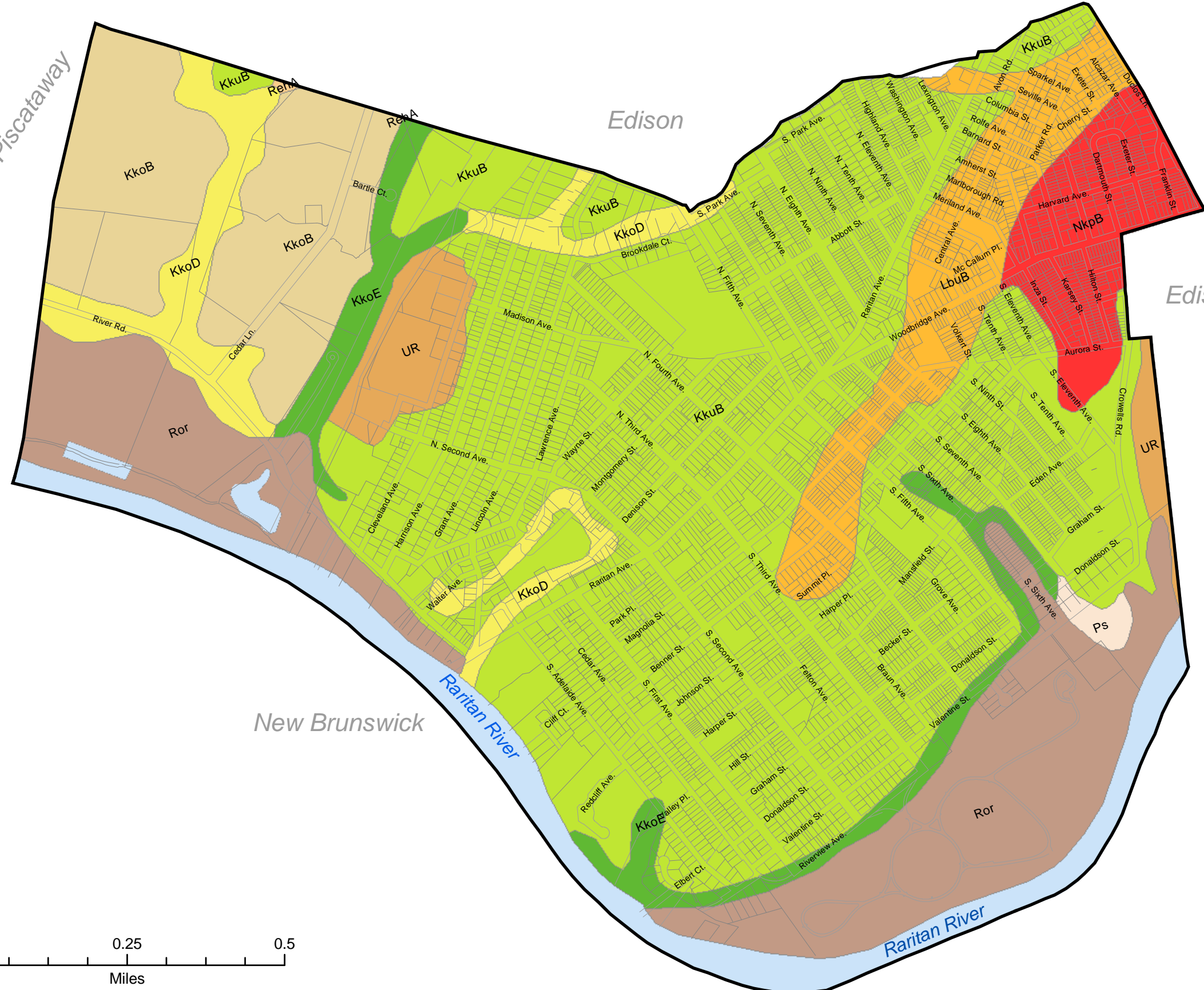
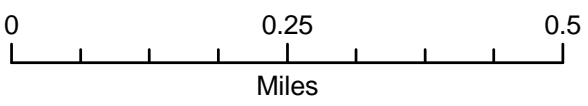
Soil Type

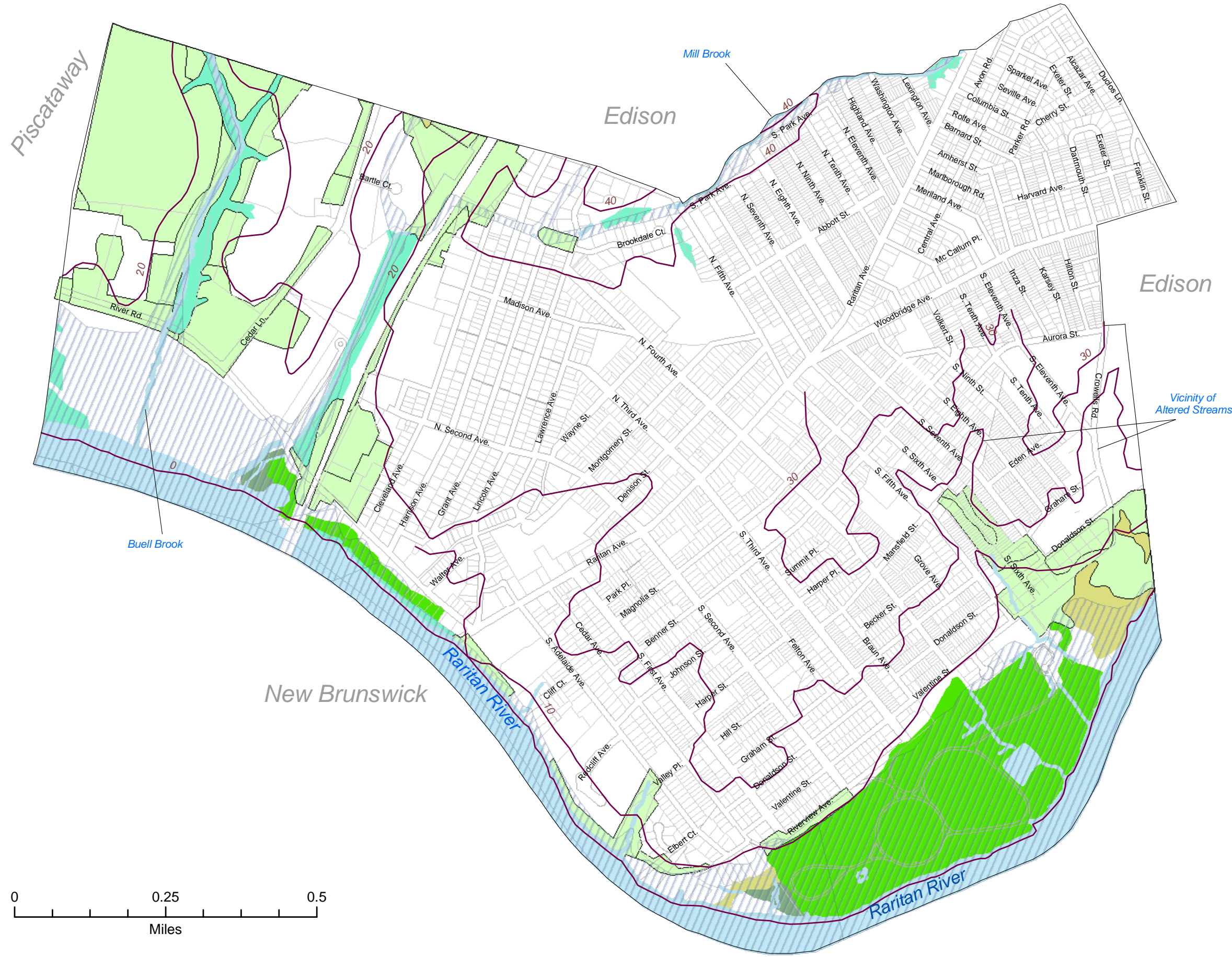
- KkoB - Klinesville Shaly Loam, 0-5% Slopes
- KkoD - Klinesville Shaly Loam, 5-15% Slopes
- KkoE - Klinesville Shaly Loam, 15-25% Slopes
- KkuB - Klinesville-Urban Land Complex, 0-5% Slopes
- LbuB - Lansdowne Urban Land Complex, 0-5% Slopes
- NkpB - Nixon-Urban Land Complex, 0-5% Slopes
- Ps - Psamments, Nearly Level
- RehA - Reaville Silt Loam, 0 to 3% Slopes
- Ror - Rowland Silt Loam
- UR - Urban Land
- Water
- Municipal Boundary

**Soils
Map VI-1**

**Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan**

Date: May 2003
Source: Borough of Highland Park
Orth-Rodgers & Associates





- Contours (10 Meter Intervals)
- Herbaceous Wetlands
- Deciduous Scrub/Shrub Wetlands
- Deciduous Wooded Wetlands
- Managed Wetland In Built-Up Maintained Rec Area
- Forest
- 100 Year Floodplain
- Water Body/ Stream

**Environmental Resources
Map VI-2**

**Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan**

Date: May 2003
Source: Borough of Highland Park
Orth-Rodgers & Associates



Rutgers Ecological Preserve (Kilmer Woods), and Mill Brook, which straddles the Borough border with Edison Township, flowing southwest along the rail line. Both streams flow into the Raritan River through Johnson Park. Highland Park also contains shorter or intermittent streams which empty into the Raritan River adjacent to Johnson Park, the Native Plant Reserve, Ayres Beach/Barwood Marsh, Donaldson Park and the Meadows.



Buell Brook

Since the Borough's streams and waterbodies provide a habitat for many species and serve as wildlife corridors, development within these areas should take into consideration the preservation of this critical natural resource.



Raritan River

Flood Hazard

Flood hazard is a measurement of the danger or probability of flooding. The term generally applies to nearly level areas of

land adjoining the channel of a stream or river. The 100-year flood hazard areas are shown on Map VI-2 and are defined by the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection defines a flood hazard area as the total areas inundated in a 100-year flood plus 25% of the base flood discharge.

The Borough's flood hazard areas are found along the stream corridors of the Raritan River, Buell Brook and Mill Brook. Large flood hazard areas are also found within Johnson Park and stretch east along the Raritan River through Donaldson Park to the border of Edison. They usually coincide with wetland areas, as shown on the Environmental Resources Map; however, wetlands are usually more extensive than the flood plain areas.

Wildlife Habitat

Due to the amount of open space, the Borough of Highland Park is home to a variety of wildlife. According to the 1992 NRI, the Borough houses over 200 species of animals within the Rutgers Ecological Preserve and its environs. Some of the species observed near Buell Brook are the Red-tailed Hawk and White-tail Deer. Due to development which has occurred over the past several decades, the remaining large tracts of contiguous open spaces, wetlands and stream corridors throughout the Borough have become particularly important for many plant and animal species. Not only do they provide a steady food supply, but the areas also offer protection for nesting and migration. As a result, any development in these areas should preserve large contiguous areas of open space as well as wildlife corridors.

The Biological Survey of The Meadows (2001) prepared for the Environmental Commission, performed over one year and during several seasons, documents both found plant and animal species and habitat suitable for native species not found. In addition, the Raritan River and adjacent wetlands and floodplain areas have been identified as habitats for wildlife, including birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians.

Topography

The 1992 Natural Resource Inventory's Topography and Steep Slopes Map delineates the slope and topography within the Borough. The Map shows categories of areas with a slope of up to 15%, 15% to 20% and greater than 20% slope. According

to the NRI, areas of 15% or greater slopes are located along Buell Brook and the rail embankment, within Valley Place Ravine, in the southern part of the Borough between South Fifth and South Seventh Avenues (formerly known as the Buck property) and the Meadows, which slopes south into the Raritan River.

Slope regulation and preservation is exceptionally important. Regulation of steep slopes is important during construction due to the potential of erosion or slippage that may alter a slope and cause serious harm. Preservation of steep slopes is also essential to help preserve the Borough's natural topography, retain its scenic views and protect its wildlife habitat. It is recommended that the Borough of Highland Park enact regulations which govern building in or development on steep slope areas. In addition, chronically unvegetated soils should be discouraged, particularly in areas of steep slopes. Alteration of steep slopes can affect local hydrology, with potential impacts to adjacent properties and to water quality as runoff patterns change.



Mill Brook

Environmental Commission and Shade Tree Committee

The Borough of Highland Park has an Environmental Commission and a Shade Tree Advisory Committee that assists local government through various educational and planning activities. In 2002, the Environmental Commission prepared an Open Space Plan and Annotated Open Space Inventory.

The Commission also conducts advisory reviews on applications before the Planning and the Zoning Boards and provides environmental information to residents, much of it in its collection of publications at the public library. The commission consists of seven members, and meetings are held the third Wednesday of the month in Borough Hall. Recent Environmental Commission activities include administering a \$15,000 NJDEP trails grant to improve the pedestrian path from Valentine Street to Donaldson Park on the Department of Public Works facility and the design of the Environmental Education Center/Waterfront Park on River Road.

The Raritan River is one of Highland Park's greatest natural assets. Discussions on a potential environmental education have centered on the river and floodplain as an environmental education resource. The plan originated from a working group drawn from a larger committee of school and environmental representatives. The impetus for action is the Borough's recent Middlesex County environmental education center grant.

The first environmental education center concept, which included a classroom/laboratory building at the River Road Green Acres site (Native Plant Reserve) emphasized one site, and according to the working group of the Environmental Commission, was overly expensive. Instead, the working group proposed site restoration and a modest center at the Native Plant Reserve. Enhancements at the Native Plant Reserve include a pavilion, a parking area, sculpture gardens, sign boards and restoration plantings and watering system. Wayfinding signage should direct individuals from the downtown and other sites throughout the Borough to the Environmental Education Center facilities.

As a subcommittee of the Environmental Commission, the Shade Tree Advisory Committee (STAC), advises the Borough on street trees and on plantings for parks and public open spaces. Members designed the Native Plant Reserve on River Road. The committee encourages arboriculture and horticulture, maintains the tree inventory and develops and maintains a comprehensive master plan for planting and maintenance. The current Street Tree Master Plan was prepared in 1998 by the Environmental Commission through a New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection grant. It provides an inventory of the types of trees within the Borough

and their conditions, recommendations for spacing and funding, and includes an appendix for suggested street trees and a reference manual.

The STAC prepared a Community Forestry Management Plan, which was approved by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection earlier this year. Approval of this plan puts Highland Park among the small number of communities that have successfully completed this process. The plan provides a scientific basis for managing the trees of the "community forest" along its streets and it also makes the Borough eligible for state grants in the Community Stewardship Incentive Program (CSIP).

Recent Shade Tree Advisory Committee grants for planting and maintenance include:

- A New Jersey Forest Service Tree Planting Grant of \$18,750 will provide a Spring 2002 planting of street trees. This is the largest grant ever awarded to STAC.
- A Middlesex County Urban Forestry Grant provided nine additional native trees at the Native Plant Reserve.
- Community Development Block Grants continue to support street tree plantings at sites agreed to by STAC and homeowners in the community development census tracts.
- A Community Stewardship Incentive Program (CSIP) grant for pruning mature trees will provide an extra round of tree pruning, beginning in Spring 2002. Since 2000, 200 new trees have been planted. For smaller trees, the pruning and removal has been done in-house through the Department of Public Works. However, through the CSIP grant, maintenance and tree removal for larger trees is now handled by a state vendor.

Existing Parks, Recreation and Open Space

The Borough of Highland Park has over 220 acres, or 21%, of its total land area in State, County and municipal parks, recreation and open space. Map VI-3 identifies the various types of recreation and open space facilities located in the Borough, which include part of the Rutgers Ecological Preserve, Middlesex County parks, Borough open space, existing and potential Borough parks, and vacant land.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) classifies parks into several categories: mini-parks, neighborhood parks,

community parks, regional parks and nature preserves. Acreage based guidelines are provided for the three facility types that serve local populations: mini-parks, neighborhood parks and community parks. Mini-parks, also known as "vest-pocket" or "pocket" parks, are less than one acre in size and function to serve a limited population, such as young children, or specific geographic locations, such as the CBD. Neighborhood parks are larger facilities, generally over one acre, which are developed for both active and passive recreation and act as a social focus of the neighborhood. Generally larger than neighborhood parks, community parks are designed to accommodate a variety of ages and user groups, including children, adults, the elderly and special populations.

Table VI-1
Active Recreation Inventory

	Kilmer Woods (Rutgers)	Donaldson Park	Johnson Park	Karsey Park	Felton Park	Irving School	Bartle School	High School
Baseball/Softball Field		5	3					1
Basketball Court		2				1	1	
Football Field		1						1
Soccer Field			1					
Tennis Court		4	8					
Volleyball Court		1						
Playground		3	1	1	1	1		
Picnic Grove		7	2					
Running Track								1
Boat Ramp		1						
Trail/Path	1	1	1	1	1			

Source: Highland Park Recreation Department, 2002.

State-Owned Parcels

Several areas of preserved open space within Highland Park provide recreational and open space needs for the community and have been identified as valuable natural resources. Highland Park's largest public, open space parcel is the approximately 68-acre Rutgers Ecological Preserve, located along Cedar Lane in the Borough's northwestern corner. The Board of Governors of Rutgers University preserved this large wooded tract of land in 1976. The Preserve hosts a diversity of wildlife habitats, including successional fields and

Piscataway

Edison

Edison

New Brunswick

Raritan River

Raritan River

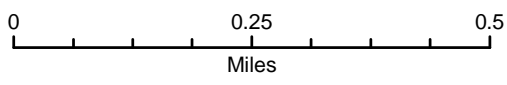


- Rutgers Preserve (State)
 - Existing County Tot Lot
 - Middlesex County Park
 - Designated Borough Open Space
 - Existing Borough Parks/ Tot Lots
 - Proposed Borough Park/ Tot Lot/Open Space
 - Vacant (Private)
 - Vacant (Public)
 - County Acquisition Underway
 - Recommended for County Acquisition
- | | |
|-------|-----------------------------|
| BES | Bartle Elementary School |
| BH/SC | Borough Hall/ Senior Center |
| BP | Borough Parking |
| FA | First Aid |
| FCC | Former Community Center |
| IS | Irving School |
| LIB | Library |
| MS/HS | Middle School/ High School |
| PD/FD | Police/ Fire Department |
| PW | Department of Public Works |

**Parks, Recreation and Open Space
Map VI-3**

**Borough of Highland Park
2003 Master Plan**

Date: May 2003
Source: Borough of Highland Park
Orth-Rodgers & Associates



woodland areas, mature forested uplands and lowland areas along stream corridors. In addition, over 200 species of animals have been recorded in the Preserve, a number of which are endangered.

Middlesex County Parcels

Additional large recreation facilities include the two County parks. Both Donaldson and Johnson County Parks provide active and passive recreation opportunities for Highland Park residents and neighboring communities with fields, tennis courts, picnic areas, walking trails and public access to the Raritan River. Donaldson Park, in particular, functions as both a neighborhood and community park for Borough residents. Middlesex County is presently finalizing plans to renovate these parks. Plans for Donaldson Park include: circulation improvements, trail upgrades, a new boat ramp, a pavilion and new restrooms. Borough residents and the Environmental Commission have recommended that a small bridge or floating boardwalk be constructed as part of the County improvements to Donaldson Park to provide access to the Meadows Complex and its nature trails. Johnson Park will also be undergoing site improvements, including pond and bikeway enhancements.



Donaldson Park

While the two County parks primarily serve a recreation purpose, they also contain wetlands and lie within the floodplain of the Raritan River. Recent efforts by the Borough and Middlesex County have sought to preserve land along the Raritan River to create a greenway system which would ultimately connect the two County parks. County acquisition of the former Red's Marina property will preserve this important riverfront site and provide an additional connection along the Greenway.



Johnson Park

Borough-Owned Parks and Open Space

The Borough owns parks and playgrounds that are significantly smaller than County facilities. The Borough's open space and recreation holdings include: Karsey Park, Felton Park, Valley Place Ravine, the Native Plant Reserve on River Road, and the 16-acre parcel known as the Lower Meadows.



Valley Place Ravine

In addition, the Borough recently designated a 1.35 acre site along River Road adjacent to the Native Plan Reserve as a focal point of the Environmental Education Center. A small 0.14-acre site on South Eighth Avenue has also been recently purchased for a mini-park.

The locations of these facilities are depicted on the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Map, VI-3. In addition to these parks, the Borough owns or maintains other small, "pocket" parks, such as Veteran's Park at the junction of Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues.



Karsey Park



Volkert/South Ninth Avenue



Felton Park

Two additional Borough-owned properties function as open space: a parcel at the corner of Volkert/South Ninth Avenue, which provides a greenway/pedestrian connection from Volkert Street to South Tenth Avenue, and a 0.11 acre site on

South Sixth Avenue which presently serves as passive open space. In addition to Borough facilities, residents north of Raritan Avenue and east of North Fifth Avenue are served by Thomas A. Edison Park in Edison Township. Facilities in the park include ballfields, tennis courts and a track.

Raritan River Greenway

Middlesex County identified the following Raritan River Greenway projects for Highland Park in its 1995 Open Space and Recreation Plan:

- Raritan River Greenway (Central)
- Raritan River Greenway (West)

The Borough continues to work with State, County and local agencies to achieve a Raritan River Greenway which includes the following existing environmental, education and recreation facilities:

- River Road/Native Plant Reserve and Environmental Education Center/Waterfront Park;
- Donaldson and Johnson Parks;
- The 16-acre Lower Meadows;
- Red's Marina;
- Barwood/Gutman Property; and,
- Valley Place Ravine.

In addition, a Greenway Feasibility Study was prepared for the Environmental Commission in 1995 to explore the feasibility of developing a greenway along the Raritan River.

Board of Education Properties

There are also several Borough tot lots and recreation amenities located on Board of Education properties. These are located at the High School (football field, track and small baseball field), at the Irving Primary School (tot lot/play area), and at Bartle School (tot lot).

NATIONAL RECREATION AND PARK ASSOCIATION STANDARDS

As mentioned previously, the NRPA provides planning standards for three facility types: mini-parks, neighborhood parks and community parks.¹ According to the NRPA standards, Highland Park has a sufficient amount of land devoted to overall recreation use, due primarily to the size and amenities afforded by Johnson and Donaldson Parks.

¹ For purposes of this analysis, Donaldson and Johnson Parks have been categorized as community parks.

However, as shown in Table VI-2, the Borough has deficient acreage devoted to smaller, neighborhood-oriented facilities.

Park Type	Standard (acres per 1,000 population)	Acres	NRPA Requirement	Deficiency/Surplus
Mini-Parks	0.5	< 1 acre	7 acres	(-) 6 acres
Neighborhood Parks	1.5	1 acre	21 acres	(-) 20 acres
Community Parks	6.75	149 acres	91 acres	(+) 58 acres

Source: National Recreation and Park Association Standards, 2002.

As a result, the acquisition and designation of pocket parks accessible to residential neighborhoods is a major goal of this plan.

CONSERVATION, OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION STRATEGIES

Acquisition

To address the need for locally oriented facilities, particularly mini-parks (also referred to as pocket parks), the Borough should consider the acquisition of potential open space and recreation parcels with State (NJDEP Green Acres) and County assistance. Acquisition should thus target parcels with potential to serve local and neighborhood needs.

Acquisition with State Assistance

NJDEP administers the Green Acres Program that provides open space funding to local governments, as follows:

- State Acquisition and Matching Grants: The Green Acres Program carries out the State's purchase of conservation and recreation lands, and provides open space matching grants and loans to municipal and county governments, and grants to tax-exempt non-profit organizations that qualify as "charitable conservancies" (N.J.S.A. 13:88-1 et. seq.). Counties and municipalities can obtain grants for 25 percent of the purchase price, but local governments that have a dedicated open space funding mechanism can qualify for 50 percent grants if they undertake certain planning efforts.
- Low-interest Loans: The Green Acres Program offers loans to local governments (currently at a 2 percent interest rate, payable over 20 years) for purchase of

open space and also for the development of recreational facilities.

- Matching Grants to Non-Profit Organizations: Green Acres also provides matching grants to nonprofit organizations to acquire land for public recreation and conservation purposes.
- Tax Exemption Program: Green Acres also administers the Tax Exemption Program, which provides exemption from local property taxes to eligible nonprofit organizations that own recreation or conservation lands and permit public use of their private lands.

Acquisition with Middlesex County Assistance

Maintaining a balance between open space and development has long been a priority in Middlesex County. The MCIA conducts legal and technical due diligence for the Middlesex County Open Space Trust Fund and negotiates the purchase of key parcels of land. The Trust Fund is supported by a special tax levy of three cents per one hundred dollars of assessed valuation, approved by Middlesex County voters in 1995 and 2001. The levy pays the debt service on revenue bonds issued by the MCIA, which finance the acquisition of open space. The County is in the process of acquiring 7,000 acres of open space through the Open Space Trust Fund. Recent and in-progress acquisitions with County assistance include:

- Red's Marina Property (acquisition in progress);
- Raritan Gateway Park (acquisition in progress); and,
- South Eighth Avenue mini-park.

Conservation Easements

Conservation easements are restrictions that landowners voluntarily place on their property that legally bind the actions of present and future owners of the property. Under this approach, the landowner retains legal title and all rights associated with the property except the right to develop the site. Conservation easements may be used to establish greenways, to preserve stream corridors, and to protect open spaces dedicated to the Borough or County by developers and/or private property owners.

One of Highland Park's outstanding natural assets is the Raritan River. As shown on Map IV-2 of the Circulation Plan Element, the Borough has identified existing, future and proposed paths, greenway connections and bikeways throughout the Borough,

including along the Raritan River. The long-term development of a continuous greenway system along the Raritan River, accomplished via County acquisition of land, and Borough and County acquisition of easements, is a long-term goal. Map IV-2 also shows an interim greenway that follows existing streets on the south side of Raritan Avenue.

Ordinances

Ordinances to protect natural features and open space are an important conservation tool. Ordinances to protect natural features and open space are an important conservation tool. The Borough should consider an ordinance to better protect steep slope areas. Currently, the Land Development Ordinance defines slopes over 10% as an environmentally sensitive area. The Ordinance under Section 17-15.2.a.10.(d)(2).iii.(xi) requires developers to “demonstrate that there will be no adverse impact to environmentally sensitive areas from the proposed development.” Steep slopes could actually be better protected if the Borough adopted a “steep slope ordinance.” Under such an ordinance, the Borough would limit the percentage of areas over 10% slope that could be disturbed by development. Many New Jersey municipalities have adopted this provision. Typically, this provision is established with a sliding scale; for more steeply sloped lands, a smaller percentage could be disturbed.

The Borough should also consider adopting a stream corridor protection ordinance. Under such ordinances, a buffer of 50 or 75 feet in width is designated adjacent to a stream bank. New structures would be prohibited within this buffer, which could be established through a conservation easement or other means. A stream corridor protection provision could be added to Chapter 16, “flood damage prevention,” in Highland Park’s Ordinance. This chapter was adopted in 1989 and should be revised to better reflect current flood protection standards. For example, the Ordinance permits construction of non-residential structures within the floodplain, a practice which should no longer be followed, except in the cases of public, educational or recreational facilities.

Specifically, the following tools may be incorporated into a municipality’s land development ordinance to achieve preservation goals:

- Steep slope ordinance;
- Stream corridor protection ordinance;

- Environmental Impact Statement requirements for major new development;
- Cluster development techniques; and,
- Open space requirements, including provisions for paths and trails to connect open spaces where feasible.

OPEN SPACE, CONSERVATION AND RECREATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Proposed Borough Parks/Tot Lots

In response to the need for neighborhood-oriented parks, the Borough is currently seeking to identify and acquire additional pocket parks. The Parks, Recreation and Open Space Map identifies proposed Borough mini-parks or pocket-parks, including:

- Raritan Gateway Park: Highland Park is currently purchasing this 0.32-acre site at the corner of River Road and Lincoln/Raritan Avenues with County assistance. The site is currently occupied by a used car sales and limousine storage business. The Borough is also seeking a NJDEP Livable Communities grant to construct park improvements. The mini-park would function as a focal point of the gateway to the downtown.

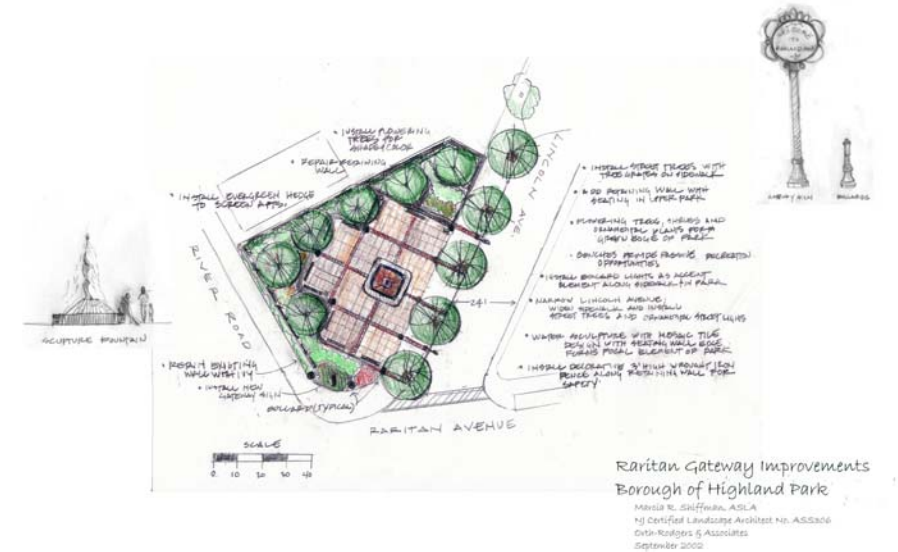


Proposed Raritan Gateway Park site at the corner of Lincoln Avenue and Raritan Avenue

- North Eleventh Avenue: Two small, non-contiguous Borough-owned properties of 0.06 and 0.02 acres are located on North Eleventh Avenue. Since the adjacent neighborhood is not well served by existing park and recreation facilities, a designation of at least one of

these parcels as Borough open space would help meet neighborhood needs.

- Woodbridge Avenue Playground: A Borough-owned 0.57-acre site fronts Woodbridge Avenue adjacent to Irving Primary School. The Borough’s 2002 open space/recreation submission to Middlesex County included a community park and school playground/basketball court on this site.



Concept Plan for Gateway Park

- South Sixth Avenue: This Borough-owned 0.11 acre site, at the intersection of South Sixth Avenue and Mansfield Street, serves as passive open space and is in close proximity to the adjacent senior housing and Bartle School.
- Downtown Pocket Park: A pocket park in the heart of the downtown should be planned as part of the on-going revitalization efforts.
- Former Borough landfill, east of South Fifth Avenue: This 6.5 acre site, also referred to as the Upper Meadows, is currently zoned RA-E, Single-Family Ecologic. The Borough may consider rezoning this property at any time. Certainly, if the former Buck property is acquired for preservation, then the Upper Meadows should be revisited and rezoned as Conservation and Recreation to provide a continuous link to the Lower Meadows and Donaldson Park. The NJDEP has identified the former landfill as a known contaminated site. Based on the September 2000 Environmental Study Report by PMK

Group, Inc. and testing that was conducted in 1982, the landfill has been used for the disposal of construction debris and domestic refuse. The 2000 Study notes that further delineation of the landfill and testing are necessary prior to any development of the site. It is recommended that the existing RA-E zoning be maintained on the property and that additional testing and necessary remediation be conducted as part of any effort to develop the property. Any future development of the site should be designed to maintain a bikeway connection from South Seventh Avenue to South Fifth Avenue.

Proposed Acquisition with State and County Assistance

In addition to the small, Borough-owned parcels, there are some larger tracts along the Raritan River or adjacent to major County and Borough open space holdings that should be preserved if State and County funds can be leveraged. These sites include:

- Vacant tract between South Fifth and South Seventh Avenues: Formerly known as the Buck property, this 4 acre site is currently zoned RA-E, Single Family Ecologic. Highland Park should pursue County and/or State funding to acquire this property; in the interim, the current RA-E designation should remain. The acquisition of the property would provide another sizable passive recreational tract with excellent accessibility from nearby residences, schools and senior citizen housing.
- Ayres Beach Natural Area: Middlesex County is in the process of acquiring this 2.5-acre site, known as Red's



Ayer's Beach/Barwood

Marina. The property is located adjacent to the Raritan River, contains prime wetlands, and will function as part of the Raritan River Greenway.

- Barwood/Gutman Property: This 5.2 acre site is the subject of an unexecuted open space dedication that was a condition of Planning Board approval for the Skyview Terrace subdivision. This site contains prime wetlands. The preservation of the property is critical to linking Red's Marina with the County's Donaldson Park holdings. The Borough should pursue options for enforcing the dedication of open space; and, if necessary, County funding to acquire the property.

Proposed Greenways and Bikeways

Certain properties have been recommended for potential bicycle/pedestrian paths and greenways and/or improvements to existing amenities. These include:

- Raritan River Greenway – The goal is to preserve a corridor along the river with trail opportunities and connections as land and easements are assembled. Various open space recommendations are designed to implement the greenway concept, including acquisition and easements for Red's Marina, the Barwood/Gutman Property and Devonshire Arms sites. The Borough has requested Middlesex County assistance to purchase a narrow easement behind the parking area of the Devonshire Arms Apartments to provide for a continuous greenway along the Raritan River from the Borough's northwestern corner to the Route 27 Bridge.
- Meadows Complex – This property has potential for future trail development. If the Upper Meadows is developed, trails connecting to the Southside Bikeway should be incorporated into any future plans. The lower 16 acres is Borough-owned and zoned Conservation. A trail system in the Lower Meadows connecting to Donaldson Park and the Raritan River would add to the Borough's passive recreation system and connect to the riverfront trail in Donaldson Park. The Borough received NJDEP funding to improve access from Valentine Street via a path adjacent to the stream that traverses the Borough's DPW Facility.
- Cedar Lane Bike Path – Rutgers University has constructed a side path along the west side of Cedar Lane. The path's users would benefit from safety

improvements, specifically relocating storm drains, and installing signs warning bicyclists of the path's terminus short of the River Road intersection.

- Bike Routes - A bike route system should be established on local streets consistent with the recommendations incorporated in the March 2002 Middlesex County Transportation Plan and the Circulation Element.
- Paper Streets – Paper streets presently used as pedestrian connections should be examined to determine appropriateness for formal designation as paths. One example is South Fourth Avenue between Valentine and Donaldson Streets.
- Department of Public Works Path – The Borough has a \$15,000 grant from NJDEP to improve the path adjacent to the stream on the Department of Public Works property that connects to Donaldson Park.
- Valley Place Ravine – This Green Acres site encompasses a stream and trail to the Raritan River. Recommendations include improving the footpaths that abut the stream as a rare public access point to the river.
- North Eighth Avenue Median Strip – North Eighth is attractively designed as a boulevard with mature Magnolia and Sycamore trees lining the median strip. It is recommended that the median strip be considered a greenway and further enhanced with additional landscaping and occasional seating opportunities.

Proposed Active Recreation Improvements

The Borough has also identified several proposed active recreation improvements and is seeking County assistance for implementation. These include:

- Senior Center/Recreation Center - The Borough's 2002 submission to the County Open Space Plan called for replacing the run-down bocce court with a landscaped seating and activity area, possibly incorporating a pergola and small garden.
- Former Borough Recreation Center – It is recommended that this site be rehabilitated and coordinated within a larger revitalization project. The Borough should consider incorporating arts and cultural uses, some Borough offices, and accessory retail uses, such as a café.

- Bartle School Basketball Court – The Borough should consider installation of a basketball court to serve both school and neighborhood needs.
- Karsey Street Park - The Borough is seeking County funding assistance to install play equipment, a gazebo and benches in this well-used mini-park.
- Red's Marina - This site has the potential for nautical activities, such as a community boathouse, or boat locker facility for the Borough, and non-motorized (or quiet-electric motor only) boat access.

In addition to these improvements, the Borough Recreation Committee has noted a significant need for additional ballfields, particularly given that the Borough does not have direct control over fields it presently uses within county facilities. The Borough should explore options for future fields, in addition to continuing to work with Middlesex County to coordinate field use and maintenance activities. The Borough should also approach Rutgers University to explore sharing additional ballfields on nearby Livingston Campus.

Other Open Space and Conservation Recommendations

- Rezone RA-E property within the Rutgers Ecological Preserve to Conservation and Recreation.
- Cluster development: The RA-E, Single-Family Ecologic District encourages the use of cluster development. Cluster techniques can provide open space and preserve critical land areas, while balancing development rights. Due to Highland Park's limited vacant land inventory, the Borough should encourage the use of this technique to ensure preservation of contiguous open space within any new development in the RA-E District.
- Ordinances:
 - Stream Corridors ordinance: The stream corridors of Highland Park serve as wildlife corridors and natural buffers which protect water quality in the streams and underlying aquifer. By adopting a stream corridor protection ordinance tailored to local conditions, the Borough will be better able to guide the management of stream buffers.
 - Steep Slopes ordinance: Throughout the Borough, there are areas of steep slopes which should be protected. For the purpose of preserving the Borough's natural topography,

retaining its scenic views and protecting its wildlife habitat, a steep slopes ordinance should be adopted which would restrict new construction on critical environmental areas and provide safe building sites by preventing surface erosion. In addition, chronically unvegetated soils should be discouraged in areas of steep slopes.

- Environmental Impact Statement (EIS): The purpose of EIS requirements is to provide guidelines for an applicant to assess and mitigate the effects of proposed development on the environment. It is recommended that the Borough strengthen the EIS requirements in its Land Development Ordinance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Action Plan provides implementation time frames and identifies responsible party/funding sources for each recommendation of this element. The following list briefly summarizes the conservation, open space and recreation recommendations:

Proposed Borough Parks/Tot Lots/Open Space:

- Develop pocket parks, such as the South Eighth Avenue and Raritan Avenue Gateway Parks, to serve neighborhood needs and function as a gateway to the downtown.
- Designate at least one parcel along North Eleventh Avenue as open space to address the present lack of recreation/open space facilities.
- Develop the Woodbridge Avenue Playground adjacent to Irving Primary School as a community park and school playground/basketball court.
- Use the South Sixth Avenue site as passive open space due to its proximity to the senior housing and Bartle School.

Acquisition:

- Continue to identify areas for potential open space/park acquisition or park development for submission to NJDEP and Middlesex County open space funds.

- Apply to NJDEP Green Acres Fund to acquire and preserve the vacant 4-acre tract between South Fifth and South Seventh Avenues.
- Continue to use a variety of various funding and preservation techniques, including acquisition, conservation easements, and cluster development.
- Develop a pocket park in the heart of the downtown as part of Main Street revitalization efforts.

Greenways and Bikeways:

- Work with Middlesex County and private land owners along the Raritan River to preserve a continuous greenway along the Raritan River.
- Coordinate with adjacent communities, including Edison and Piscataway, to extend the Raritan River greenway into these communities.
- Purchase easements along the Raritan River, such as along the rear of Devonshire Arms Apartments, to provide a continuous greenway from the Route 27 bridge to the Piscataway border.
- Use existing paper streets as greenway and trail connections, in particular South Fourth Avenue between Donaldson and Valentine Streets and Donaldson Street between Elbert Court and the Raritan River.
- Connect the Southside Bikeway to Donaldson Park through future trail development within the Meadows Complex.
- Seek County assistance to preserve the Barwood/Gutman property as a critical link in the Raritan River Greenway.
- Coordinate Cedar Lane Bike Path improvements with Rutgers University and Middlesex County.
- Establish a bike route along local streets, consistent with the Middlesex County Transportation Plan.
- Improve the path adjacent to the stream on the Department of Public Works property to provide connection to Donaldson Park.
- Improve footpaths on the Valley Place Ravine site which abut the stream.
- Coordinate with Middlesex County to install floating bridge connecting Donaldson Park to the Lower Meadows.

Active Recreation:

- Seek funds to develop non-motorized (or quiet electric motor only) boat access at Red's Marina, as well as a community boathouse or boat locker facility.
- Consider the installation of a basketball court at Bartle School.
- Seek County funding to install play equipment, a gazebo and benches at Karsey Street Park.
- Enhance the Senior Center/Recreation Center with outdoor amenities such as a landscaped seating area and small garden.
- Seek alternatives to provide additional ballfields.
- Work with County to better maintain ballfields and share facilities within County parks.
- Coordinate with Board of Education to share recreational facilities at schools.
- Explore opportunities with Rutgers University and neighboring communities for sharing ballfields.

Other:

- Adopt ordinance to govern building or development on steep slopes.
- Develop a long-term maintenance and monitoring program for Borough open space and recreation parcels.
- Adopt stream corridor protection ordinance to help guide the management of stream buffers.
- Enhance North Eighth Avenue median strip with additional landscaping and seating opportunities.
- Encourage the use of cluster development within the RA-E District.
- Strengthen the EIS requirements in the Borough's Land Development Ordinance.
- Rehabilitate the former Borough Recreation Center to include arts and cultural uses, some Borough offices and accessory retail uses, such as a café.

SECTION VII: HISTORIC PRESERVATION ELEMENT



OVERVIEW

The Historic Preservation Plan Element is organized according to the requirements of the Municipal Land Use Law for a historic preservation plan. This element:

- Describes the location and significance of historic sites and historic districts;
- Identifies the standards used to assess the merit of historic sites or district identification;
- Creates goals and policies governing future development and preservation of historic resources and districts within the Borough.

The Historic Preservation element is centered upon three goals that are crucial to insure the preservation of Highland Park's historic resources, as follows:

- Conduct a comprehensive survey and site data management program in order to have accurate and extensive information on the location, significance and condition of the Borough's historic resources, including properties constructed after 1890;
- Develop a municipal preservation program that balances the impact of development/land use activities and projects upon historic resources with private property rights of individual property owners;
- Develop strategies to foster public awareness of the Borough's history and its abundant historic resources, as well as an understanding of the potential impact of any applicable regulatory processes.

HISTORY OF HIGHLAND PARK¹

At the time of the European settlers, the native Lenape people inhabited the hilly land aside the gently flowing Raritan River upon which Highland Park sits. Their trails criss-crossed the land. One of the earliest recorded settlers in the Highland Park area was Henry Greenland who owned 384 acres and operated an inn along the Mill Brook section of the Assunpink Trail. It is thought that a portion of the Cenacle Retreat House on River Road is part of this late 17th century inn.

George Drake, Reverend John Drake and Captain Francis Drake, kinsman to the famous explorer, also settled in the area with a group of dissident Baptists. In the early 1700s, a few

¹ Excerpted from materials prepared by Jean Kolva, Borough Historian.

wealthy Europeans settled on large tracts of land establishing an isolated farmstead pattern of development that would continue for the next 150 years.

In 1685, John Inian bought land on both shores of the Raritan River and built two new landings further downstream from the Assunpink Trail's fording place. He established a ferry service and the main road then was redirected to lead straight to the ferry landing. This river crossing was run by generations of different owners until a toll bridge replaced the ferry in 1795. The wood plank Albany Street Bridge was dismantled in 1848, reconstructed in 1853, and replaced by a stone arch bridge in 1893. That bridge is still there today, although the bridge was widened in 1925 with poured concrete.

In 1809, the Reverend John H. Livingston, newly chosen head of Queen's College (now Rutgers University), purchased a 150-acre plot of land, which would subsequently become known as Livingston Homestead. A gracious Greek Revival house was built for Robert and Louisa Livingston around 1843. This house, at 81 Harrison Avenue, now stands amidst the Livingston Manor neighborhood. It was altered in the Classical Revival style by Watson Whittlesey about 1908, and was owned by the Waldron family throughout most of the 20th century. It remains Highland Park's most prominent historical home. Also in the 1840's, several major suburban estates were built on the bluff overlooking the Raritan River by prosperous businesspersons.

In the 1830s, both the Delaware & Raritan Canal and the railroad were constructed. In 1836, the New Jersey Railroad and Transportation Company built a rail line that terminated on the Highland Park side at a station named "East New Brunswick," a nickname that stuck for many subsequent decades. In 1838, the Camden and Amboy Railroad built the first railroad bridge which eliminated the station stop. Carrying pedestrian and wagon traffic on its lower level, the two-tier, wooden railroad bridge was destroyed by fire in 1878. An iron truss bridge was quickly built upon enlarged stone piers, which in turn was replaced in 1902 by the twelve span stone arch railway bridge we see today.

Despite the construction of the canal and railroad in the 1830s, Highland Park's land did not undergo significant residential development until 30 years later. Several stately homes were

built on South Adelaide Avenue; this road was gated for many years. More modest houses were constructed on Cedar, First, and Second Avenues, as well as on the newly formed cross streets of Magnolia, Benner, and Johnson. By 1870, the small hamlet changed nicknames from "East New Brunswick" to "Highland Park," a name derived from the housing development on the south side streets. This was also the year that Highland Park was annexed into the newly formed Raritan Township (present-day Edison Township).

By 1885, the seeds were sewn for Highland Park's independence from Raritan Township over the issue of schooling for the 85 school-age children. Township officials granted the formation of Highland Park's own school district and on March 23, 1886, a one-story Queen Anne schoolhouse opened to 33 students at the corner of Benner Street and South Second Avenue. Miss Chrissie Bartle was the first teacher. By the late 1880s, there were approximately 75 dwellings in Highland Park constructed primarily on Raritan Avenue and on the south side streets.

The 1890's saw the advent of both industrial and commercial development. In 1891, Johnson and Johnson opened up a laboratory on the east side of North Adelaide. Five years later, the John Waldon Company built a wallpaper machine factory adjacent to the railroad line, on what is presently known as the Midland Ross site. This plant was the earliest large scale manufacturing facility in Highland Park. The decade also saw the addition of two trolley lines, one to Perth Amboy in the east and the other to Bound Brook in the north. Also at this time, community facilities and smaller commercial establishments began to appear, usually along Raritan Avenue.

1905 marked the year when the community of Highland Park broke away from Raritan Township and was incorporated as a borough. Important factors contributing to the movement to incorporate were the desire for an independent school system and a related dispute over school taxes. The fire department, which had formed in 1899, also wanted more local control over its affairs.

In 1906, the Livingston Manor Corporation was established by Watson Whittlesey. Over the next twenty years, Whittlesey would subdivide the grounds of the old Livingston Farmstead,

which lies roughly between River Road, Cleveland Avenue, Madison Avenue and Lawrence Avenue. This residential development coincided with the Borough's most critical period of growth. There have been many other tract developments such as the Viehmann Tract between North Fifth and North Eighth Avenue, Riverview Terrace on the south side, and East New Brunswick Heights in the Orchard Heights neighborhood. By 1930, most of Highland Park's land had been subdivided and its streets mapped out. Many of the Borough's churches, temples, schools and community facilities were built during this period.

The period following World War II saw the last major growth spurt, with ranch houses and apartment complexes accounting for much of the residential development.

HISTORIC PROPERTIES AND DISTRICTS

Individually Eligible Properties

The Stage 1A Cultural Resource Reconnaissance Survey for the Borough of Highland Park (1993) identified structures and locations of architectural and archaeological significance.

The architectural component of the 1993 study identified a total of 20 pre-1890 properties that are eligible for listing on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. Of these 20 properties, the following 10 have been identified as eligible:

- 1207-B5 23 South Adelaide Avenue
- 1207-B12 452 Cedar Avenue
- 1207-B13 64 Johnson Street
- 1207-B23 203/205 South First Avenue
- 1207-B25 212 South First Avenue
- 1207-B31 133 Benner Street
- 1207-B34 202 Raritan Avenue
- 1207-B39 233 Magnolia Street
- 1207-B42 81 Harrison Avenue, Livingston Homestead
- 1207-B47 411 River Road, Belleview/Cenacle

The Livingston Homestead at 81 Harrison Avenue was listed on the New Jersey Register of Historic Places in 2001 and the National Register of Historic Places in 2002.

The following six resources have been identified as potentially eligible, indicating that additional research is necessary prior to the rendering of a definitive evaluation:

- 1207-B2 17 Cliff Court
- 1207-B20 103 South First Avenue
- 1207-B24 208 South First Avenue
- 1207-B41 105 Montgomery Street
- 1207-B46 51 River Road
- 1207-B48 443 River Road, barn

Finally, the following five resources have been identified as being eligible as part of a larger district (23 South Adelaide is also individually eligible):

- 1207-B3 3/5 South Adelaide Avenue
- 1207-B4 17 South Adelaide Avenue
- 1207-B5 23 South Adelaide Avenue
- 1207-B6 29 South Adelaide Avenue
- 1207-B7 76/78 South Adelaide Avenue

The survey focused primarily on architectural features built before 1890. A total of 21 structures of historical merit (principally religious and educational facilities) that were built after 1890 were also inventoried as part of the study.

Potential Historic Districts

Based on an initial assessment, the Livingston Manor neighborhood may be eligible for listing on the New Jersey and National Register of Historic Places (*Evaluation of Historical Significance of the Livingston Manor District, 1997*, prepared by Cultural Resources Consulting Group at the request of the Borough Environmental Commission). This report states that the proposed Livingston Manor Historic District comprises a group of properties developed between 1907 and 1922 by Watson Whittlesey or the building corporation he founded, in addition to one early 19th-century residence that predates Whittlesey's development (81 Harrison Avenue).

When evaluated using the criteria of eligibility for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, the 1997 study on the Livingston Manor District suggests that these buildings form a coherent entity, or historic district, based on their stylistic similarities and shared history. Together, they may be considered eligible for National Register listing under Criterion A, for their association with events that have made a contribution to the broad patterns of our history, and under Criterion C, for their distinctive architectural characteristics. Taken singly rather than as a part of the district, it is likely that

only the 1830s Livingston/Waldron Homestead, located at 81 Harrison Avenue, could be listed on the National Register as a significant architectural resource. However, with the exception of a few houses built within the district boundaries after 1922 and several that have been compromised by alterations, the 1997 study of the Livingston Manor District notes that each of the structures within the district contributes to the district's significance.

In addition to the 1830s Greek Revival manor house that serves as its centerpiece, the district is an amalgam of late 19th- and early 20th-century architectural styles ranging from the Bungalow with Shingle, Craftsman, and Japanese-style influence, to the Colonial with Prairie or Craftsman-style influence, to the American Foursquare with Craftsman-style influence. While various styles are represented, the buildings in the district are tied together by specific shared characteristics, by the developer's overall design, and by the attention to detail that is typical of the Craftsman school, which emphasized the value of handwork by skilled artisans proud of their abilities.

Based on the following factors, the 1997 study finds that the district may also be significant for its association with historical changes in land use and with the history of early 20th-century residential development as pioneered in this area by Whittlesey. The manorial former home of the prominent Livingston family forms a link in the chain of New Jersey's land ownership that extends from the earliest European settlement to the present. The manor house remains as an example of the transition from the ownership of vast land grants by wealthy patrons to the holding of large estates by affluent families such as the Livingstons. The district shaped around the manor house by Whittlesey represents the final change to individual ownership of smaller plots, brought about by the partitioning of the former estates. Whittlesey, as one of the earliest developers to buy large tracts and resell them as subdivisions with houses of his own construction, helped to usher in the phenomenon of modern suburban development. At a local level, he also provided the impetus for Highland Park's 20th-century transformation from a small, semi-rural settlement to a thriving residential community.

The 1997 Evaluation of Historical Significance of the Livingston Manor District lists the following structures and streetscapes that best represent the character of the district:

Pre-Livingston Manor Corporation

- 1207-15(LM) Block 180, Lot 3 & 4, 81 Harrison Avenue

Livingston Manor Corporation (constructed 1907-1914)

- 1207-47(LM) Block 176, Lot 3, 96 Lawrence Avenue
- 1207-48(LM) Block 165, Lot 9, 240 Lawrence Avenue
- 1207-38(LM) Block 167, Lot 28, 211 Lincoln Avenue
- 1207-49(LM) Block 166, Lot 34, 220 Lincoln Avenue
- 1207-35(LM) Block 167, Lot 24, 235 Lincoln Avenue
- 1207-50(LM) Block 178, Lot 11, 62 Grant Avenue
- 1207-51(LM) Block 179, Lot 23, 63 Grant Avenue
- 1207-52(LM) Block 185, Lot 1, 8 Harrison Avenue
- 1207-16(LM) Block 180, Lot 8, 35 Harrison Avenue
- 1207-53(LM) Block 179, Lot 6, 66 Harrison Avenue
- 1207-60(LM) Streetscape Grant Avenue
- 1207-61(LM) Streetscape Lawrence Avenue
- 1207-62(LM) Streetscape Lawrence Avenue

Livingston Manor Corporation. After Whittlesey's Death (constructed 1912 to 1922)

- 1207-54(LM) Block 177, Lot 7, 400 Second Avenue
- 1207-55(LM) Block 177, Lot 5, 108 Lincoln Avenue
- 1207-56(LM) Block 167, Lot 19, 307 Lincoln Avenue
- 1207-42(LM) Block 167, Lot 44, 310 Grant Avenue
- 1207-17(LM) Block 179 Lot 4, 50 Harrison Avenue

Independent Contractors

- 1207-57(LM) Block 176, Lot 7 & 8, 120 Lawrence Avenue (post 1922)
- 1207-58(LM) Block 180, Lot 7, 55 Harrison Avenue (pre-1922)
- 1207-59(LM) Block 168, Lot 42, 308 Harrison Avenue (1924)

The Highland Park Historical Society submitted an application to the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office in 2000 for the designation of Livingston Manor as a National Register Historic District, but it was not accepted due to insufficient information. The Borough Historian has received funding from the New

Jersey Historical Commission for additional research on Livingston Manor, and will be preparing an application for this district. The Borough should support this effort to identify whether or not the Livingston Manor district qualifies for such a designation.

A number of historically significant buildings are also found along South Adelaide Avenue. The Borough should sponsor the needed inventory and studies to determine if South Adelaide should be considered as a district, or if individual buildings should be designated. New research has discovered that a group of South Adelaide Avenue and Cliff Court houses were designed by Alexander Merchant, a significant local architect during the first half of the 20th century.

The Borough should also evaluate designating River Road and Raritan Avenue as scenic/historic corridors. Four properties eligible for the National Register lie along River Road, as follows:

- J. Seward Johnson's 1928 estate "Merriwold," now called "The Castle" at 433 River Road;
- "Bellevue," Robert Wood Johnson, Jr.'s former summer house, now the Cenacle Retreat house at 411 River Road;
- The Livingston Manor Historic District; and
- The Amtrak overpass, which was constructed by the Pennsylvania Railroad company in 1902 and is individually eligible according to the New Jersey Historic Bridge Survey.

River Road itself follows the original pathway created by the Lenape Indians. The National Park Service (NPS) is currently studying the historic potential of the old Lincoln Highway, presently known as Route 27 or Raritan Avenue within the borough. Highland Park should consider designating the section of Lincoln Highway as a historic roadway pending the outcome of the NPS study. Designation of River Road and Raritan Avenue as "Critical Environmental / Historic Sites" would be incorporated into the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, thus recognizing the historic character of these roadways.

Together, the 1993 Stage 1A Cultural Resource Reconnaissance Survey and the 1997 evaluation of Livingston Manor provide valuable information about Highland Park's past. However, significant work remains in documenting historic properties and neighborhoods in the Borough. As one example, the Stage 1A Survey is now almost ten years old, and future historic preservation efforts will require updated information because many structures have undergone alterations within the past decade. Just as significant, most of the Borough's structures have been constructed after 1890, and the vast majority of these structures/neighborhoods have never been systematically evaluated for architectural/historic significance.

Therefore, it is recommended that the Borough undertake a comprehensive survey of historic properties throughout the entire Borough, with a particular concentration on post-1890 properties. The identification of historic resources is essential in making informed decisions about managing and protecting these resources.

Accompanying a comprehensive survey program is the need to establish and maintain a system to record site information, including not only buildings and archaeological sites but also other historic features such as brick streets, statues, parks and decorative walks. An extensive site database accumulated from surveys can be used to evaluate more clearly the impact of both public and private projects on historic resources. A locally maintained site database can also be used to facilitate the federal review process, as well as to provide the information necessary for designating landmarks and historic districts.

A needed step in organizing information on historic resources is the cataloguing of historic documents and photographs held by both the Borough and private owners. Historic Site Management grants are available from the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust Fund, managed by the New Jersey Historic Trust. The Borough should seek funding from this program as part of an effort to archive its historic materials.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION AND ORDINANCE

The Borough does not presently have a Historic Preservation Commission. There is an "ad hoc" Historic Preservation

Committee (herein referred to as the Committee), in which two to three Borough residents have participated on an on-going basis. There is also a Borough Historian, which is a volunteer position; and the Highland Park Historical Society, whose mission is to "promote the maintenance and rehabilitation of Highland Park's historical resources and to heighten awareness of the Borough's historical and cultural heritage." These individuals and groups have played an important role in promoting historic awareness in Highland Park. However, none can statutorily fill the role of a Historic Preservation Commission, as provided for by the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL).

The Borough should re-establish the activity of the Historic Preservation Committee, which has not met recently. If the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office approves the designation of the Livingston Manor or any other area within Highland Park as a historic district, the Committee should provide support to the Borough on evaluating creation of a permanent Historic Preservation Commission and/or the adoption of a historic preservation ordinance. However, given the potentially broad regulatory powers (see detail below) granted to a Historic Preservation Commission in conjunction with a historic preservation ordinance, and their potential impact on the property rights of individual property owners, it is strongly recommended that the Committee conduct sufficient public outreach and education to guarantee that there is a clear consensus among the residents of such district in support of a Historic Commission and/or local ordinance. Input from the residents of Livingston Manor or any other potential district should be carefully considered by the Committee in the formulation of its recommendations. Membership on the Committee should be expanded to include residents of any affected district.

For informational purposes, the following is a summary of the duties and powers of a Historic Commission under the MLUL. According to state law, Historic Commissions shall consist of a minimum of five members, all of whom have a demonstrated interest, competence, or knowledge in historic preservation. To the extent available in the community, the local government shall appoint professional members from the disciplines of architecture, history, architectural history, prehistoric archaeology and historic archaeology who meet the

requirements of professional qualifications standards of the Historic Preservation Office.

Under state law, the MLUL provides for the following duties of a Historic Preservation Commission:

- Maintaining a system for the survey and inventory of historic resources that is compatible and coordinated with the state Historic Preservation Office's inventory.
- Making recommendations for the designation of local landmarks and historic districts to the appropriate local governing body. The recommendations shall be based on established written criteria.
- Reviewing applications for alterations, demolitions, and new construction affecting designated landmarks and historic districts. The recommendations should be based on established written standards and criteria.
- Acting in an advisory role to other officials and departments of local government regarding the designation and protection of cultural resources.
- Acting as a liaison on behalf of the local government to individuals and organizations concerned with historic preservation.
- Working toward the continuing education of citizens within the Borough regarding historic preservation issues and concerns.

Historic preservation ordinances have become the primary method used by local governments in New Jersey and nationally to provide protection for historic resources. Historic preservation has been legally established as a valid public purpose of government in numerous court decisions, the most consequential of which was the Supreme Court decision in the case of Penn Central Transportation v. the City of New York (1978). Historic preservation ordinances can foster community pride and appreciation, as well as act as a catalyst for neighborhood stabilization and downtown revitalization.

Based on information from the National Historic Trust, historic preservation ordinances typically include the following:

- A statement of purpose.
- Definitions.

- Establishment of a historic preservation review commission (Commission) and a grant of powers to it.
- Criteria and procedures for the designation of a landmark and a historic district.
- Criteria and procedures for the review of applications affecting designated landmarks or districts.

Design Standards

In the absence of a historic preservation ordinance, historic commercial properties in the Borough could be better protected through revision of the Borough Design Standards. The Design Standards should specify that important historic features be preserved or recovered, when feasible, on existing buildings. Raritan Avenue in the CBD offers few architecturally distinguished facades; in some cases, interesting features on the facades of historic structures have likely been obscured by newer, more plain facades. A revision of the Design Standards should be coordinated with the Main Street Design Committee, which has been established under the new Main Street program. Similar standards to address commercial areas outside of the Main Street target area should also be provided in the Borough Land Development ordinance.

Notification

It would be desirable for the Borough to notify the Borough Historian and Highland Park Historical Society whenever a property owner requests a demolition permit for a structure older than 50 years. This would allow the Borough Historian/Highland Park Historical Society to photograph and document the structure with permission of the property owner prior to demolition. Through this means, basic data-gathering could take place before the structure is actually demolished. The Borough could perform this notification without passage of an ordinance. As discussed earlier in this element, formal procedures for review of demolitions could be incorporated in a historic preservation ordinance.

Certified Local Governments

The Borough may wish to consider meeting the basic eligibility criteria to become a Certified Local Government. The Certified Local Government Program (CLG) was authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act Amendments of 1980. It was created to give municipalities a role in federal and state preservation programs. Certification makes communities

eligible to apply for a portion of the State's grant funding for historic sites survey and historic preservation planning projects. Further, it provides an opportunity to comment on all New Jersey and National Register nominations in their jurisdiction.

The actions required to meet the basic program criteria include:

- Creation of a local historic preservation review commission.
- Initiation or continuation of a comprehensive survey of historic properties.
- Designation and protection of local landmarks and historic districts.
- Development of a process that ensures public participation in the local historic preservation program.

PUBLIC EDUCATION

Many Borough residents are unaware of the important events in the Borough's past, and of its landmarks. Unfortunately, as is true of all municipalities, some of the most important buildings in Highland Park have been lost. For example, in 1997, a Georgian Revival house built in 1910 at the intersection of North Adelaide and Raritan Avenues was demolished to make way for an office building. At one time this was one of the finer residences in Highland Park, designed by Alexander Merchant, an architect responsible for a number of other distinguished structures in the region.

Heritage education at all levels is critical in developing an awareness and appreciation for the Borough's history and historic resources, and thus creating an effective program that can preserve such historic structures. As noted in the Historic Preservation Committee section, much of the effort to sustain awareness of the Borough's resources has been conducted on an ad hoc basis. However, the Borough would benefit from a more sustained public awareness effort.

Developing public support requires the creation of programs and activities highlighting local historic resources, as well as focusing public attention on preservation issues and topics. Significant historic buildings, structures and archaeological sites should be marked with plaques to inform the public of their historic or architectural significance. This effort could be coordinated with the planned environmental education site on River Road, starting with a brief overview of the uses of the

Raritan River. As sites and districts are locally designated, additional markers and signs can be used to link information included at the River Road site with historic markers in Livingston Manor, on South Adelaide Avenue and within the downtown.

Brochures, pamphlets and books should be issued or sponsored by the Historic Preservation Committee to inform residents, property owners and visitors about historic sites, the historic preservation process, the organizations in the Borough that are engaged in historic preservation activity and the Borough's own preservation programs.

In conjunction with educational and cultural institutions and historic organizations, the Historic Preservation Committee should sponsor at least one seminar per year for the public on historic preservation topics, particularly on the economic advantages inherent in the rehabilitation of historic buildings. Current federal tax incentives for preservation include a 20% tax credit for the rehabilitation of certified historic structures, and a 10% tax credit for the rehabilitation of non-historic, non-residential buildings built before 1936. Further, an effective historic preservation program may augment property values.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Action Plan provides implementation time frames and identifies responsible party/funding sources for each recommendation of this element. The following list briefly summarizes the historic preservation recommendations:

- Support the continued research and study of the Livingston Manor district to identify whether the district qualifies as a National Register Historic District.
- Re-convene the Ad-Hoc Historic Preservation Committee and expand membership to include residents of potential historic districts.
- Conduct outreach to residents of any potential historic district to gauge support for a local ordinance.
- Evaluate creation of a permanent Historic Preservation Commission, as outlined by state law.
- Notify Borough Historian and the Highland Park Historical Society when owner applies for demolition permit of structure older than 50 years.
- Update Borough Design Standards.

- Develop public awareness program and conduct public outreach on the benefits of historic preservation.
- Conduct study of historic structures along South Adelaide, for potential National Register designation.
- Evaluate designating River Road as a "Critical Environmental/ Historic site."
- Consider designating Raritan Avenue as a "Critical Environmental/ Historic site," based on outcome of National Park Service study.
- Conduct comprehensive survey of historic structures, particularly those built post-1890.
- Establish site information management program.
- Consider pursuing Certified Local Government Status, if a Historic Preservation Commission and historic preservation ordinance are implemented.

SECTION VIII: SUMMARY OF 1998 HOUSING ELEMENT



This section presents recent census data on the Borough's housing stock and summarizes Highland Park's 1998 Housing Element and Fair Share Plan, which is in effect until November 2004.

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Housing Stock Characteristics

The Borough has a variety of housing types, including one, two and multi-family dwelling units, garden apartments, townhouses and mid-rise buildings, as well as senior housing. While lot sizes vary to some extent throughout the Borough, typical single-family dwellings rest on 5,000 square feet lots. Generally, the existing homes are older, well-maintained structures that exhibit details of their period of construction.

Due to the small amount of vacant, buildable land remaining in the Borough, the pace and quantity of residential development slowed in recent years. According to the 2000 Census, since 1991, there have been a total of 32 single-family and 8 multi-family dwelling units constructed. As shown in Table VIII-1, there are a total of 6,071 homes within Highland Park.

The majority of homes within the Borough are not new; as Table VIII-1 depicts approximately one-third of the Borough's housing inventory pre-dates 1940, and two-thirds pre-dates 1960. The Borough contains a broad range of housing types, with 37% single-family detached dwellings, 12% apartments, 18% three- to four- family dwellings, and 12% two-family dwellings. Over half of the Borough's housing units contain at least two bedrooms, one-fourth contain three bedrooms, and almost 10% contain four bedrooms. Only 3% of the total housing stock contains five or more bedrooms. As of 2000, the median rent in Highland Park was \$848, which was comparable to Piscataway, Metuchen, New Brunswick and slightly lower than Edison. The median housing value was \$183,300, which was comparable to Edison, Piscataway and Metuchen, yet 30% higher than New Brunswick. While Highland Parks has experienced a 26% increase over the 1990 median rent and a 5% increase over the 1990 median house value, the Borough's vacancy rate between 1990 and 2000 decreased from 7.5% to under 3%.

Table VIII-1 2000 Housing Characteristics by Year Built, Housing Tenure, Vacancy Status and Median Rent and Housing Value		
YEAR STRUCTURE BUILT	Number	Percentage
Built 1980 to March 2000	622	10.3%
Built 1970 to 1979	631	10.4%
Built 1960 to 1969	853	14.1%
Built 1950 to 1959	1,345	22.2%
Built 1940 to 1949	673	11.1%
Built 1939 or earlier	1,947	32.1%
Median	1953	(X)
HOUSING TENURE		
Owner-Occupied Units	2,475	40.8%
Renter-Occupied Units	3,424	56.4%
Vacant Housing Units	172	2.8%
Total Housing Units	6,071	100%
VACANCY STATUS		
For Rent	76	44.2%
For sale only	19	11%
Rented or sold, not occupied	22	12.8%
For seasonal, recreation and occupational use	26	15.1%
Other vacancy	29	16.9%
RENT		
Median Rent		\$848
HOUSEHOLD VALUE		
Median Household Value		\$183,300

Source: U.S. Census, 2000.

Public Housing

The Highland Park Housing Authority is an autonomous body whose powers are prescribed by state law. Its responsibilities enable it to build, rehabilitate, maintain and operate housing for low and moderate-income residents of the Borough. It currently maintains 124 housing units, including the Park Terrace apartments. Under now state regulations, the Authority is permitted to maintain a maximum of 160 units.

The Highland Park Public Housing Authority owns and maintains one senior housing complex, the 24-unit Samuel J. Khronman Senior Apartment Complex on South Sixth Avenue. Each apartment contains a living room/dining area, kitchen, bath

and one or two bedrooms. In addition to the housing units the Authority maintains, it also supervises a total of 145 Section 8 vouchers, with an additional 21 units under contract.

Existing Rehabilitation Programs

The Middlesex County Department of Housing and Community Development and the Borough have entered into a cooperative agreement to administer CDBG funds. About half of the annual CDBG grant for Middlesex County goes directly to participating municipalities for eligible projects of their choosing. These funds can be used to provide housing rehabilitation grants to low and moderate-income homeowners. The grant also funds a housing rehabilitation program serving low-income homeowners and a limited number of sub-grants to nonprofit agencies serving low income, elderly or disabled persons. The County also offers low interest loans to low-income homeowners through the HOME Investment Partnership.

In addition to the County program, the Borough has a Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) for the Orchard Heights neighborhood that provides grants for structural rehabilitation and fosters partnerships between homeowners, businesses and lending institutions. Programs relevant to the Borough's housing rehabilitation needs include:

- A low income 100% housing rehabilitation grant providing up to \$10,000 to households earning less than 50% of the county median household income, and
- A low to moderate income 80/20 housing rehabilitation (partial) grant, which provides up to \$8,000 to households earning between 50% and 80% of the county median income.

Both of these programs give priority to the abatement of major code violations and 16 grants have been distributed, representing only one-quarter of the grant applications received by the NPP.

SUMMARY OF 1998 HOUSING ELEMENT

In 1993, Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) determined the present and prospective affordable housing needs for all municipalities in New Jersey. In an order to address State Affordable Housing Law, the Planning Board adopted a Housing Element as an amendment to the Master Plan in February 1998 and filed a petition for substantive certification

of its housing element and fair share plan with COAH. The Borough received substantive certification from the COAH in 1999, which is in effect until November 2004.

The following table summarizes the Borough's affordable housing obligation.

Table VIII-2 Highland Park's Certified Affordable Housing Plan	
Precredited need	46
Less: Rehabilitation Credits	-5
<u>Fair Share (Rehabilitation Component)</u>	<u>41</u>
Plan:	
Less: Age Restricted Units	-10
<u>Housing Rehabilitation</u>	<u>-31</u>
<u>Surplus/Shortfall</u>	<u>0</u>

Source: New Jersey Council on Affordable Housing, 1999.

As indicated above, COAH determined that the pre-credited need in the Borough was 46 units. The Borough received credit for five units that had been rehabilitated after April 1, 1990, thereby reducing its Fair Share obligation to 41 units. Ten of these units have been satisfied through construction of a 55-unit age-restricted complex on South Sixth Avenue, AHEPA Senior Housing. (Although this complex contains 55 units, COAH only permits 25% of a municipality's affordable housing obligation in any one round to be met by age-restricted units). Highland Park's certified Housing Element addresses the remaining obligation through rehabilitation with continued participation in the Middlesex County Housing and Community Development housing program.

The Borough should continue to use Federal, State, County and local programs to rehabilitate its housing stock and meet its affordable housing obligation. Upon release of the third round numbers by NJ COAH, the Borough should prepare a new Housing Element.

SECTION IX: RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANNING EFFORTS



INTRODUCTION

The New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) requires that all municipal master plans consider and examine the master plans of contiguous municipalities, county plans and the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP). The Borough of Highland Park is surrounded by three municipalities: the City of New Brunswick to the south, southeast and southwest; the Township of Edison to the north and northeast; and the Township of Piscataway to the northwest.

EDISON TOWNSHIP

Highland Park shares its northern and eastern borders with Edison Township. Along Highland Park's eastern border adjacent to Donaldson Park and the Orchard Gardens apartments on Crowells Road, Edison Township's 1989 Master Plan calls for multi-family residential development at a density of 10-15 apartments per acre, reflecting the existing development of the area. This is consistent with Highland Park's existing land use and zoning designation for garden apartments and compatible with the conservation and open space zoning of Donaldson Park.

In the area between Woodbridge Avenue and Aurora Street, Edison Township's land use plan recommends single-family residential at four dwelling units per acre. The existing land use within Highland Park abutting this area consists of single-family dwellings on 5,000 square foot lots. The required lot sizes in the two municipalities differ only slightly; the land uses and zoning in this border area are therefore consistent.

Along Woodbridge Avenue, both Edison and Highland Park encourage commercial development. The comprehensive plans of both municipalities provide for single-family dwellings north of Woodbridge Avenue and south of Route 27. The existing land uses and zoning in each community are compatible in this area. Along Route 27, Edison permits retail businesses, wholesale outlets, motels and business/professional offices. Highland Park's commercial district north of Eighth Avenue on Route 27 permits a diverse mix of commercial uses, including retail stores and professional offices. The plans for this area are therefore compatible.

Between Raritan Avenue and the Northeast Corridor rail line, Edison Township recommends single-family dwellings at four

dwelling units per acre, with a small institutional designation at the Yeshiva property. This is compatible with the residential and quasi-public land uses and zoning in place within Highland Park

The 2003 Draft Master Plan for Edison Township designates the Middlesex Water Company parcel north of the rail line as utility, the Rutgers property as civic and the Kilmer Woods site as conservation. In the same area, Highland Park provides for garden apartment development and recreation and conservation; both are compatible with Edison's land use designations.

CITY OF NEW BRUNSWICK

New Brunswick is located south and west of Highland Park, with the Raritan River serving as the boundary between the two municipalities. The area along the river within New Brunswick contains a mix of parkland, residential and commercial development. It is zoned for open space/parkland, single-family development, highway commercial uses and includes a special redevelopment area. Land uses along the river in Highland Park include Johnson and Donaldson Parks, a combination of single-family, garden apartment and mid-rise apartment uses and the new riverfront residential designation proposed on the south side of Raritan Avenue. Highland Park's land use designations are largely compatible with New Brunswick's 1995 Master Plan and present zoning. Both municipalities designate commercial uses along the Route 27 corridor and open space/parkland and residential along the Raritan River.

PISCATAWAY TOWNSHIP

The Borough shares its northern boundary with Piscataway Township. Johnson Park, which is located between the Raritan River and River Road, extends into both municipalities and both master plans provide for compatible recreation, conservation and open space designations for the park. The Parker property, which straddles the Highland Park-Piscataway border, is located opposite River Road from Johnson Park. Piscataway Township's 1999 Master Plan provides for single-family development at one dwelling unit per acre on the site. Due to the existing care facility (Parker Memorial Home) in Piscataway and provisions recommended in this master plan for Highland Park's proposed Research and Development

District which address open space conservation and protection of natural resources, this designation is largely compatible with the Borough's plan. North of the Parker site within Rutgers property, Piscataway provides for state and county educational institutions and universities as permitted uses, and dorms and classrooms as accessory uses, which is compatible with Highland Park's conservation and recreation designation.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY

Transportation

The 2000 Transportation Plan calls for realigning a portion of CR 622, located under the rail overpass along River Road. Cedar Lane is also designated for corridor improvements. The 2002 Middlesex County Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan calls for a number of improvements to the borough, including the following:

- Waterfront bicycle path from Donaldson Park to Johnson Park through Highland Park.
- Shared bicycle routes along the following roads:
 - NJ 27 to South First Avenue to Magnolia Street to South Fifth Avenue to NJ 27 and CR 514;
 - South Fifth Avenue from Raritan Avenue to the Valentine Street bike path;
 - Valentine Street from South Second to South Fifth connecting to South Seventh via the Southside Bike path, to Donaldson Street to Crowell's Road to Woodbridge Avenue;
 - North Fifth Avenue from Raritan Avenue to the paved bike path connecting to Harrison Avenue; Harrison Avenue from the Edison border to River Road.
 - Shared road bike route from Magnolia Street to Donaldson Park; South Second Avenue from Raritan Avenue to Magnolia Street; North Second Avenue from Raritan to Harrison Avenue.
 - Cedar Lane Bicycle Path from River Road to Livingston Campus.

These bike routes have been incorporated in the Borough Master Plan Circulation Plan Element.

Open Space and Recreation

The County's 1995 Open Space and Recreation Plan identifies the following projects in Highland Park:

- Raritan River Greenway (Central)
- Raritan River Greenway (West)

The Raritan River Greenway is being implemented in phases by the County and Borough. This Master Plan is consistent with the County's goal of a Raritan River Greenway and incorporates the greenway concept into the Conservation, Open Space and Recreation and Circulation Elements.

RARITAN BASIN WATERSHED MANAGEMENT PLAN

The Raritan River Basin, located in central New Jersey, covers approximately 1,100 square miles in Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Somerset and Union Counties and consists of a collection of watersheds that all drain to the Raritan Bay. Major waterways in the Basin include the North Branch and South Branch of the Raritan River, the Millstone River, the Green Brook, the Lawrence Brook and the South River, along with their many feeder streams. It is divided into three watershed management areas (WMA): North/South Branch Raritan, Lower Raritan and Millstone. The Lower Raritan Watershed Management Area, which includes Highland Park, is 352 square miles and is surrounded by the Upper Passaic Watershed to the north, the Arthur Kill and Monmouth Watersheds to the east, the Millstone Watershed to the southwest and the North & South Branch to the west.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, in partnership with the New Jersey Water Supply Authority has initiated a watershed planning initiative designed to address watershed pollutant loads, water withdrawals and the effects of intense land use development within the watershed.

The project has two phases. The Characterization & Assessment Phase began in February 1999 and was completed in August 2001. That phase characterized water resource conditions in the Basin, assessed the gaps between current and desired conditions and identified issues to be addressed through a management planning process.

Phase 2 began in October 2000 and has resulted in a Basin Management Plan which was completed in December 2002. Phase 2 planning included developing a management plan that incorporates watershed protection goals, objectives, implementation strategies and commitments. Within the

Conservation, Open Space and Recreation Plan Element, the Borough recommends adoption of a steep slopes ordinance, a stream corridor ordinance and strengthening of the EIS requirements that apply to major proposed development.

The Borough should incorporate best management practices into its policies and ordinances, consistent with the Lower Basin Management Plan.

STATE PLAN

New Jersey's State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP) was adopted by the State Planning Commission in 2001. The SDRP is intended to guide public policy decisions to achieve the goals of the State Planning Act. The goals include:

- Revitalize the State's cities and towns;
- Conserve the State's natural resources and systems;
- Promote beneficial economic growth, development and renewal for all residents of New Jersey;
- Protect the environment, prevent and clean up pollution;
- Provide adequate public facilities and services at a reasonable cost;
- Provide adequate housing at a reasonable cost;
- Preserve and enhance historic, cultural, scenic, open space and recreational value; and
- Ensure sound and integrated planning and implementation statewide.

According to the plan, these planning goals are to be achieved through the flexible application of the plan's Statewide Policies, which are designed to improve the planning and coordination of public policy decisions among all levels of government. They are intended to be applied to public and private decision-making through the State Plan Policy Map and its Planning Areas.

Planning areas serve a critical role in the SDRP by setting forth policy objectives that guide the application of the Plan's statewide policies within each area, guide local planning on the location and size of Centers within the Planning Area, and protect or enhance the environs of these Centers. There are five planning areas: Metropolitan Planning Area (PA1), Suburban Planning Area (PA2), Fringe Planning Area (PA3),

Rural Planning Area (PA4) and Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA5). These planning areas account for the unique conditions that exist in different areas of the state.

The Borough of Highland Park is contained entirely within the Metropolitan Planning Area, PA1. PA1 includes developed communities that range from large urban centers to post-war suburbs. Many of these communities are fully developed, with little vacant land available for new development. Much of the new growth, therefore, will take the form of redevelopment. In addition to the planning areas, the State Development and Redevelopment Plan also identifies critical environmental sites (CES). A CES is an environmentally sensitive area, such as a riparian corridor, forest or a small wetland, which is less than one square mile. Western and southern portions of the Borough, including the Rutgers Ecological Preserve, Johnson and Donaldson Parks, and Buell and Mill Brooks, are designated as critical environmental sites.

The centers concept is a key organizing principle for new growth and development in the SDRP. The State Plan Policy Map identifies Centers, in which compact development and redevelopment is proposed in order to protect the natural resources throughout the state. The Plan designates five types of Centers: Urban Centers, Regional Centers, Towns, Villages and Hamlets. Centers are compact forms of development that consume less land, deplete fewer natural resources and are more efficient in the delivery of public services.

Although the Borough meets all of the criteria for a Town Center outlined by the SDRP, Highland Park never sought center designation from the State Planning Commission. According to current procedures, designation will have to be accomplished through the Plan Endorsement process, created by the State Planning Commission in December 2001. Once a county or municipal master plan is updated and is consistent with the goals and provisions of the State Plan, it can be "endorsed" at the state level. After Plan Endorsement by the State Planning Commission, a municipality becomes eligible for priority funding and incentives such as expedited permitting.

Upon adoption of the Highland Park Master Plan, the Borough should commence the Plan Endorsement Process.

SECTION X: ACTION PLAN



LAND USE

Recommendation	Time Frame¹	Responsible Party/Funding Source
Land Development Ordinance/Zoning Changes		
Comprehensively revise Borough Land Development Ordinance, including procedures, use standards, regulations and design standards.	Short	Borough Council in cooperation with Planning Board and Zoning Board
Adopt infill residential design standards that apply to the RA and RB districts.	Short	Borough Council
Create new Riverfront Residential District.	Short	Borough Council
Amend use standards in residential districts to allow home-based offices.	Short	Borough Council
Rezone Woodbridge Avenue (between South Sixth and South Eleventh Avenues) to CBD.	Short	Borough Council
Overhaul design, lighting and signage standards for the CBD, C and PO Districts to ensure consistent appearance for the downtown, Upper Raritan and Woodbridge Avenues.	Short to Medium	Borough Council
As required by state law, amend Land Development Ordinance to permit community residences for developmentally disabled, family day care homes and licensed childcare centers.	Short	Borough Council
Amend PO use standards to permit single and two-family homes, as well as apartments on upper floors.	Short	Borough Council
Amend CBD district to require a minimum of 2 story buildings.	Short	Borough Council
Rezone Cleveland Avenue between Madison Avenue and the end of Cleveland Avenue to PO.	Short	Borough Council
Create new Research and Development District along River Road.	Short	Borough Council
Widen range of uses permitted in LI District to better reflect range of uses that coexist and potential for new uses such as business incubators.	Short	Borough Council
Rezone land-locked parcel adjacent to the rail corridor and Cleveland Avenue LI District to LI.	Short	Borough Council
Rezone RA-E property within the Rutgers Ecological Preserve to Conservation and Recreation.	Short	Borough Council
Ensure development of former Borough landfill does not proceed without additional testing, studies and any necessary remediation.	Short	Borough Council
Redevelopment/Revitalization		
Promote an architecturally interesting and vital CBD, a variety of building heights and massing are encouraged.	Short to Long	Borough, Main Street
Proceed with Determination of Need Studies to identify areas in the downtown and along Cleveland Avenue which meet redevelopment criteria.	Short	Borough Planning Board, Borough Council
Proceed with preparation of Redevelopment Plans for any identified areas as in need of redevelopment.	Short	Borough Planning Board, Borough Council
Attract traditional retail businesses (specialty shops, restaurants, etc.), especially specialty shops and arts/cultural establishments to the downtown.	Short to Medium	Borough, Main Street Program
Encourage residential and professional office uses above stores in the downtown.	Short to Long	Borough, Main Street Program
Develop appropriate marketing strategies to fill vacant storefronts and buildings in the Borough's industrial and commercial districts.	Short to Medium	Borough, Main Street Program
Continue to expand the Borough's Façade Improvement and Awning Assistance Programs.	Short	Borough, Main Street Program
Address urban design issues during downtown revitalization, such as encouraging shared parking lots and improving pedestrian safety.	Short to Long	Borough Council, Main Street Program
Enhance Raritan Avenue/River Road and Raritan Avenue/Woodbridge Avenue gateways with streetscape and pedestrian safety improvements including the creation of a future Raritan Gateway Park at Raritan Avenue/Lincoln Avenue and upgrades to Veteran's Park.	Short to Medium	Borough
Coordinate revitalization efforts with Main Street Highland Park, Neighborhood Preservation Program and Chamber of Commerce.	Short	Borough, Main Street, Neighborhood Preservation Program
Other		
Recognize the Raritan River and greenway as important natural, recreational and educational resources within the Borough and integrate them with revitalization and historic preservation efforts.	Short to Long	Borough, Main Street
Pursue Plan Endorsement by the State Planning Commission.	Medium	Borough Council, Borough Planning Board

¹In effort to plan for implementation the following time frames have been developed: short (0-2 years); medium (2-4 years); and long (4+ years).

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Recommendation	Time Frame	Responsible Party/Funding Source
Streetscapes and Aesthetics		
Improve pedestrian connections from Raritan Avenue/CBD to parking areas behind stores.	Short to Medium	Borough, Main Street Program
Continue to coordinate economic development activities and design standards within the downtown and the Main Street program, as well as with other commercial areas of the Borough.	Short to Long	Borough Council, Borough Economic Development, Main Street program, NPP
Overhaul the signage ordinance and commercial design standards to be consistent with the Main Street design standards and to reflect the vision for the downtown.	Short to Medium	Borough Council, Borough Planning Board, Main Street Program
Implement streetscape and gateway improvements to unify Woodbridge Avenue with the CBD.	Short to Long	Borough, NPP, Main Street Program
Vision and Marketing		
Encourage diverse mix of retail uses and stores within the downtown.	Short	Borough, Main Street Program
Promote evening hours for retail stores in the downtown, including galleries, bookstores, and coffee shops.	Short	Borough
Ensure coordination between the entities engaged in revitalization to minimize areas of overlap and promote a strong, unified vision for the Borough's future.	Short to Medium	Borough, Main Street Program
Target businesses that will benefit from proximity to Rutgers University and regional medical facilities for the Research and Development district.	Short to Long	Borough
Continue to encourage promotional activities such as the Highland Park Street Fair, the Farmer's Market, the Summer Film Series and the Borough-wide Yard Sale.	Short to Long	Borough, Main Street Program, Chamber of Commerce
Target eclectic mix of uses for Cleveland Avenue corridor.	Short to Long	Borough
Other		
Encourage cooperation among business owners, the Borough, the Main Street Program and the Neighborhood Preservation Program to successfully carry out revitalization.	Short to Long	Borough, Main Street Program, Chamber of Commerce, NPP
Provide incentives for commercial property maintenance and greater resources for zoning enforcement.	Short	Borough
Evaluate the vacant and underutilized areas throughout the Borough and consider redevelopment where statutory criteria are met.	Short to Medium	Borough
Evaluate parking needs as redevelopment/revitalization occurs.	Medium	Borough, NJDOT Local Planning Assistance
Ensure that funding mechanisms continue for the NPP target area once the NPP funding expires.	Medium	Borough
Consider the establishment of a BID to fund specific services for downtown businesses.	Short to Medium	Borough
Rehabilitate the old Borough Senior Center to create a mixed-use cultural/retail center.	Short to Medium	Borough
Provide for a continued source of funding for the Façade Improvement and Open for Business programs as the revitalization of the downtown continues.	Medium	Borough, Main Street Program
Streamline development application materials and review process to aid revitalization efforts.	Medium	Borough Planning Board, Borough Council
Strengthen zoning enforcement activity.	Short	Borough

CIRCULATION

Recommendation	Time Frame	Responsible Party/ Funding Source
Vehicular		
Lower speed limit on Raritan Avenue to 35 mph between Eighth and Tenth Avenues.	Short	Borough, in coordination with NJ DOT
Install signal heads east of the eastbound stop bar on Raritan Avenue at River Road.	Long	NJ DOT
Rank intersections by level of accidents on periodic basis; determine contributing factors.	Medium	Borough Police
Mark "No Parking" areas on consistent basis across Borough.	Short to Medium	Borough
Install signal at intersection of Woodbridge and Duclos Avenues.	Medium	County, Borough
Encourage linked driveways/parking areas for land uses along Raritan Avenue.	Short to Long	Borough
Study changing Upper Raritan cross-section from 4 lanes to 3 lanes; lower speed limit from 40 to 35 mph.	Medium to Long	Borough, NJ DOT Transportation Needs or Local Planning Assistance
Study possible change of Cedar Lane cross-section.	Long	County, NJ DOT Local Aid
Identify needed signalization improvements on Raritan Avenue.	Medium	NJ DOT Transportation Needs or Local Planning Assistance
Lower speed limit on Raritan Ave in CBD from 30 to 25 mph.	Medium	Borough; NJ DOT Local Aid
Study need for traffic calming program.	Short to Medium	Borough, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, NJ DOT Bicycle and Pedestrian Program
Update traffic impact study requirements in Land Development Ordinance.	Short	Borough Council.
Pedestrian		
Install "Turning Vehicles Yield to Pedestrians" signs at Raritan Avenue intersections.	Short	NJ DOT Local Aid; Borough
Consider curb extensions at Raritan Avenue intersections; accompany with turning movement restrictions.	Long	Borough, in coordination with NJ DOT
Install handicapped ramps throughout Borough.	Short to Long	Borough
Install pedestrian indications at traffic signals.	Medium	NJ DOT, Borough
Install pedestal mounted traffic signals where missing on Raritan Avenue.	Long	NJ DOT, Borough
Install longitudinal crosswalk markings.	Short	Borough
Review need for mid-block crosswalks on Raritan Avenue.	Medium	Borough
Enforce law against vehicles not yielding to pedestrians/bicyclists at intersections.	Short	Borough
Install pedestrian crossing signage on River Road.	Short	NJ DOT Local Aid
Bike		
Install signage, trim shrubbery on River Road bike path.	Short	Borough, private property owners
Install signage, relocate inlet grates on Cedar Lane bike path.	Medium	County
Install bike route signage.	Short to Medium	Borough, NJ DOT Local Aid
Study pedestrian and bike connections to Albany Street Bridge.	Medium to Long	NJ DOT
Install bike racks.	Short to Medium	Property owners; Borough
Prepare design guidelines for bike installation.	Short	Borough
Transit		
Install bus shelters.	Medium	NJ Transit
Study shuttle bus system from Rutgers/New Brunswick into the Borough.	Medium to Long	NJ Transit, Keep Middlesex Moving
Parking		
Review parking supply in the CBD as revitalization progresses.	Medium	Borough
Install signs for parking.	Short	Borough
Apply to RSIS Board for "special area standard" for residential parking requirements.	Short	Borough

Other		
Improve appearance and pedestrian safety with CBD streetscape enhancements.	Medium to Long	TEA-21 Enhancements
File accident reports on computer system.	Long	Borough Police
Update Land Development requirements for Traffic Impact Studies.	Medium	Borough

MUNICIPAL SERVICES

Recommendation	Time Frame	Responsible Party/ Funding Source
Develop a maintenance plan for existing facilities.	Short to Medium	Borough
Coordinate with the Board of Education to evaluate facilities and options for future expansions and rehabilitation, if necessary.	Short to Medium	Borough, Board of Education
Examine First Aid Squad response time, staffing levels and facility upgrade needs.	Short	Borough
Replace the fire department's 27-year-old, 1,200-gallon pumper truck.	Short to Medium	Borough
Continue to identify funding sources for barrier-free upgrades to the Council Chambers.	Short to Medium	Borough
Evaluate police department space needs and identify potential solutions.	Medium	Borough
Inform and educate the public about barrier-free design requirements by creating user-friendly educational materials and by posting a sign in public view indicating enforcement of applicable laws.	Short	Borough
Develop updated informational materials on the development review process.	Short	Borough
Make Technical Review Committee a required step of the review process.	Short	Borough
Amend building permit and land development review application materials to include barrier-free requirements.	Short	Borough

CONSERVATION, OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

Recommendation	Time Frame	Responsible Party/Funding Source
Proposed Borough Parks/Tot Lots/Open Space		
Develop pocket parks, such as the Raritan Gateway Park and South Eighth Avenue.	Short to Long	State (NJDEP), County, Borough
Designate Borough-owned parcel along North Eleventh Avenue as open space.	Short	State (NJDEP), County, Borough
Develop the Woodbridge Avenue Playground as a community park and school playground/basketball court.	Medium	State (NJDEP), County, Borough
Designate Borough-owned parcel on South Sixth Avenue site as passive open space.	Short	Borough
Develop a pocket park in the heart of the downtown as part of Main Street revitalization efforts.	Short to Medium	State (NJDEP), County, Borough, Main Street Program
Acquisition		
Pursue acquisition of open space/park parcels with NJDEP and Middlesex County funds.	Short to Long	State (NJDEP), County, Borough
Apply to NJDEP Green Acres Fund to acquire and preserve the vacant four-acre tract between South Fifth and South Seventh Avenues.	Short to Medium	State (NJDEP), Borough
Greenways and Bikeways		
Work with Middlesex County and private land owners to create a continuous greenway along the Raritan River.	Short to Long	County, Borough
Purchase easements along Raritan River to provide a continuous greenway.	Short to Long	County, Borough
Use existing paper streets as greenway and trail connections, in particular South Fourth Avenue between Donaldson and Valentine Streets and Donaldson Street between Elbert Court and the Raritan River.	Short to Medium	Borough
Connect the Southside Bikeway to future trails within the Meadows Complex.	Medium	State (NJDEP), County, Borough
Seek County assistance to preserve the Barwood/Gutman property as a critical link in the Raritan River Greenway.	Medium	County, Borough
Coordinate Cedar Lane Bike Path improvements with Rutgers University and Middlesex County.	Medium	County
Establish a bike route network along local streets.	Short to Medium	Borough, NJDOT Local Aid
Improve the path on the Department of Public Works property to provide connection to Donaldson Park.	Medium	Borough, State (NJDEP) grant
Improve footpaths on the Valley Place Ravine site.	Medium	Borough, State (NJDEP)
Coordinate with adjacent communities, including Piscataway and Edison, to extend the Raritan River Greenway into these communities.	Short to Long	County, Borough, Edison, Piscataway
Coordinate with Middlesex County to install floating bridge connecting Donaldson Park to the Lower Meadows.	Medium	County, Borough
Active Recreation		
Seek alternatives to provide additional ballfields.	Medium	Borough Council
Work with County to better maintain ballfields and share facilities within County parks.	Short	Recreation Department
Coordinate with Board of Education to share recreational facilities at schools.	Short	Recreation Department
Explore opportunities with Rutgers University and neighboring communities for sharing ballfields.	Short	Recreation Department
Seek funds to develop non-motorized (or quiet electric motors only) boat access at Red's Marina, as well as a community boathouse or boat locker facility.	Medium to Long	County, Borough
Consider the installation of a basketball court at Bartle School.	Short	Borough
Seek County funding to install play equipment, a gazebo and benches at Karsey Street Park.	Medium	County, Borough
Enhance the Senior Center/Recreation Center with outdoor amenities such as a landscaped seating area and small garden.	Medium	County, Borough
Other		
Adopt ordinance to govern building or development in steep slopes.	Short	Borough Council
Develop a long-term maintenance and monitoring program for Borough open space and recreation parcels.	Medium to Long	Borough
Adopt stream corridor protection ordinance.	Short	Borough Council
Enhance North Eighth Avenue median strip with additional landscaping and seating opportunities.	Medium	Borough
Encourage the use of cluster development within the RA-E District.	Short to Long	Borough
Strengthen the EIS requirements in the Borough's Land Development Ordinance.	Short	Borough Council
Rezone Rutgers Ecological Preserve from RA-E to Conservation and Recreation.	Short	Borough Council
Rehabilitate former Borough Recreation Center.	Short	Borough

HISTORIC

Recommendation	Time Frame	Responsible Party/ Funding Source
Support the continued research and study of the Livingston Manor district.	Medium to Long	Borough Historian
Re-convene the Ad-Hoc Historic Preservation Committee and expand membership to include residents of potential historic districts.	Medium to Long	Historic Preservation Committee, Borough Council
Conduct outreach to residents of any potential historic district to gauge support for a local ordinance.	Medium to Long	Historic Preservation Committee, Borough Council
Evaluate creation of a permanent Historic Preservation Commission, as outlined by state law.	Medium	Historic Preservation Committee, Borough Council
Notify Borough Historian/Highland Park Historical Society when owner applies for demolition permit of structure older than 50 years.	Short	Borough Council, Construction Official
Update Borough Design Standards.	Short	Planning Board, Main Street Design Committee, Borough Council
Develop public awareness program and conduct public outreach on the benefits of historic preservation.	Short to Long	Historic Preservation Committee/Borough Historian
Conduct study of historic structures along South Adelaide for potential National Register designation.	Medium	Borough
Evaluate designating River Road as a "Critical Environmental/ Historic site."	Medium	Borough
Consider designating Raritan Avenue as a "Critical Environmental/ Historic site" based on outcome of National Park Service study.	Medium	NPS, Borough
Conduct comprehensive survey of historic structures, particularly those built post-1890.	Long	Borough
Establish site information management program.	Short	Borough Historian/New Jersey Historic Trust
Consider pursuing Certified Local Government Status, if a Historic Preservation Commission and historic preservation ordinance are implemented.	Medium to Long	Historic Preservation Committee, Borough Council