

**HIGHLAND PARK PLANNING BOARD  
HIGHLAND PARK BOROUGH HALL  
221 South Fifth Ave.  
Highland Park, NJ**

**DECEMBER 12, 2019  
7:30 PM**

**Call to Order**

The December 12, 2019 regular meeting of the Highland Park Planning Board was called to order in accordance with the rules for the Open Public Meetings Act by Chairwoman Kim Hammond at 7:40 pm; Ms. Hammond indicated the location of the fire exits.

**Roll Call:**

Present	Kim Hammond, Scott Brescher, Rebecca Hand, Padraic Millet, Jeffrey Perlman, Coretta Pinelli, Susan Welkovits, Allan Williams
Absent	Alan Kluger, Paul Lanaris, Stephen Nolan, Coretta Pinelli
Agency Professionals	Jim Constantine, Planner, Bruce Koch, Engineer and Roger Thomas, Esq.

**Public Hearing**

Master Plan Reexamination and Land Use Element Public Hearing

Ms. Hammond said that there will be presentation from the Borough Planner Jim Constantine. Mr. Thomas said that this is a noticed hearing with regard to the adoption of the Master Plan, noticed in accordance with section 13 of the land use law; the documents have been placed in the municipal building at least 10 days in advance for public inspection.

Mr. Constantine presented the Master Plan reexamination and land use element to the Board and public. He indicated that this it is to be reexamined every 10 years. One of the components of the Master Plan is the reexamination report which meets the statutory requirements and there are things that the law requires be addressed such as: objectives related to land development, a refreshed look at everything in the course of that look at population, land use, housing characteristics, circulation all at a very high level, conservation, natural resources, energy conservation, recycling, municipal policies and objectives. It was decided early on that we would try to take a different approach to the 2003 Master Plan which was a great document, the high level goals from the 2003 Master Plan are to preserve and enhance the character and small town feel of the community, ensure a vibrant downtown and commercial corridors, protecting the Borough's environmentally sensitive areas and promoting a high quality of life for residents. At the very beginning of the process a whole series of documents that were reviewed including taking every single goal, objective, policy, recommendation from 2003 and 2010 reexamines and putting those into a spreadsheet that the Master Plan subcommittee evaluated, items that were completed were removed and others added as a result of community input. They also prepared a companion document to the reexamine called the land use plan element this effort was not meant to be fully broad, we were strategically focused on some key issues including some things that were identified as short term action items in 2003 but perhaps that 2003 plan was almost to comprehensive and to deep and we wanted to ensure things were not going to be left behind for years.

One of the big changes was to focus on the Borough's long-term efforts at redevelopment which have not yielded the type of results that were envisioned when that was put in place 13 years ago. This plan looks at downtown and some of the corridors such as Upper Raritan and Woodbridge

and tries to put a vision forward that would take and put in place the overarching goals that identified in 2003. Identifying some of the ways that we can actually bring vision to the environmentally sensitive corridors along the river and basic issues such as making that walk/bike across the river that so many people do every day and transform that into something that is key to the Borough. A big driver of the plan was the community participation, 575 people took the online survey, 1,500 responses, several 1,000 comments. From people who took the survey the comments on why they live in Highland Park: character of community, quality of life, and availability of trains, indicating that this is a very transit orientated population. , quality of life downtown also saying something about the value of the. He explained that these were the sort of insights that gave focus to the Master Plan. He said that they also asked people to identify three words that they think best describe Highland Park and walkability again scores high. 17% of survey respondents both live and work in Highland Park, 77% live here and work elsewhere and there may be jobs to housing balance issue to look at in the future. Among the survey respondents 88% were the first person in their family to live here, 13% who were either raised here, second generation or their families have lived here for generations; tended to live in single family homes so a little higher level of homeowners taking the survey. Another question was which upgrades they would like to see to improve mobility throughout town: 53% improve pedestrian conditions; 40% improve access to the New Brunswick train station and this is something that the Master Plan embraced. Improve biking conditions was 32%; add for streetscape amenities and these things are related to whole multi-mobility: walk, bike, safer and more attractive, slow down traffic, adding jitney service, improving accessibility and mobility for people with limited mobility. Adding more parking in the downtown just 16% and tells you about the values of the community. More than half of the Highland Park community has one or no cars, a high value on walkability and those things are important. The biggest sector for jobs for people who live in town, it educational, healthcare, meds and social services, this a smart community, graduate or professional degrees 39% of the community, bachelor's degree 29.4%, where 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of the community if highly educated, significantly greater than the County and State as a whole. There was a lot of community participation by way of the two open house, September and October, close to 200 people came out to participate.

He said that the land use plan was a strategic plan and focused on certain areas with a little more detail such as downtown, Raritan Avenue, Upper Raritan, Woodbridge, River Road corridor and Cleveland Avenue. Sub-Area and Corridor Strategies. In the survey they asked about each of those areas to try and identify how people would like to see the corridor the same as it is today, downtown at 9% so the community is absolutely open to wanting to see change. The vision is the leverage reinvestment, revitalization, in-fill, and redevelopment, expand opportunities for mix use, and support a walkable community by filling in the gaps along those streetscapes and making a more thriving downtown. Brining in re-fill development helps to frame the street, make it more walkable, and make it a more pleasant experience then what is there today. The community wants to see change and that is the vision. For each of the corridors, existing conditions were identified and a series of issues that were identified: high number of vacant properties, empty store fronts, high turnover, businesses making the streetscape unpleasant and not having this sense of neglect along portions of the avenue and wanting to see uses that don't exist today to add more vibrancy. Raritan Avenue opportunity sites were identified for in-fill and redevelopment, and lots of places where there could be change. During the survey a question was what features or activities would you like to see more of that would make you come to downtown more often and 58% town square public space, arts and cultural events. The vision that Borough Square would be an art culture activated public space is clearly supported by the community and tells you we are going in the right direction. Attempt to create a mixed use

transition zone, the uses is very varied and the zoning tends to be more ridged almost as if the same thing is happening block after block. They are suggesting revisiting what happens in the zoning and particularly those transition zones because the pattern is so different. This will come up again on Upper Raritan, as well as the Cleveland Avenue Corridors. It was asked how many people would like to see it remain the same on Upper Raritan – only 6%. The challenge with Upper Raritan is that there are life and death issues here because of the speed, the inability to cross, so the vision along Upper Raritan is to try to address those conditions by transforming these street into a complete street, protected bike lanes, reducing the width of the road, sets the frame work to slow traffic down and not have this high speed highway in the middle of the town separating neighborhoods, and use this as an opportunity to promote mixed uses and in-fill redevelopment so we can begin to frame the street and make it feel like a livable edge of the neighborhood, to create an outdoor room it becomes livable. Some of the things had to deal with the fact that there is also a need to try to provide some small pocket parks, or gathering places. There is already property assemblage occurring in the Upper Raritan corridor in anticipation of the Planning Board adopting this and the fact that there is a renewed interest in revisiting the zoning and wanting to see this corridor transformed. The rezoning that occurs for more flexibility for some of the missing middle housing, 2-4 family apartments that exist in Highland Park but are not actually recognized under existing zoning, and may be an ideal transition from changes in the corridor to the neighborhoods at the scale of the neighborhood.

Woodbridge Avenue – only 4% of respondents said they wanted the corridor to remain the same. The vision there is similar to Upper Raritan, treat it as a gateway, increase mobility for bicycle and pedestrians, add streetscape improvements, the road by the Doughboy goes on a diet and becomes slightly more narrow, providing space for people to bicycle and walk and drivers develop an awareness for that because they feel like they are in a different place then are currently. The community is telling us to try to do something, housing density could be part of making this corridor more livable and many have said that there are real concerns with the walkability and safety in places where you are up against raw cars at the edge of the street. One of the things that the Master Plan subcommittee discussed as well as the Planning Board, the automobile business, we do not to make those go away but there needs to be a place for them and not as overwhelming particularly on the Edison end and part of the strategy is to extend the downtown further along road coming from downtown and at the other end allow for things some of the automobile use to be transformed. There is also a package of zoning revisions in the land use plan element that would allow us to create a minor site plan to actually allow something occur where we fill in the trees, bring pedestrian sidewalk that's currently missing because cars park on it, give the business a mice sign at the corner that character of their mid-century modern business (white rose) but also make it a walkable strip and fill it back in. It is a pro reinvestment, make it high quality but try to find a way for both the public/private partnership, we have to make it work for the business if we expect them to reinvest significantly.

River Road - 8% of respondents what to see it remain the same. The vision in the Master Plan is to try and make the community along River Road and its connection between parks and open spaces and the river much stronger. People identified that there is a lot of opportunity along River Road but its apart of the community, with a different set of issues but parallels Upper Raritan in that it is sort of separated from the rest of the community, it's hard to get across to the River and its dangerous and something needs to be done because there is a lot of activity along the corridor. There were a whole series of recommendations including findings and places where we can bump out the street making the crossing shorter and safer because people do want to get to the river and also to identify places where we may have some activation along the river

front which is important because this is a river front community but people want to see and feel the water. The bridge is a bridge to the rail station, to jobs, to education but its experience is something that needs to be transformed in some way so that it becomes a pleasant experience. There could be a combination of lighting that can be done with advertisers, and there are companies that will do this, the bridge can be a celebration to Rutgers and some of the other things there.

Cleveland Avenue – 4% of respondents said to leave it as is. The vision here is to see this corridor transform in a way that does keep some town quality because it does back up to a residential neighborhood trying to rethink the streets, as well as the light industrial zoning which now permits things that there is no demand for, would generate trucks at a level that you would not want. Rethinking the future of what Cleveland Avenue is, there has been a lot of residential redeveloper in the lower portion; people were talking about neighborhood commercial districts since now the lower portion of Cleveland is a neighborhood. Looking into opportunities where there might be in-fill, traffic calming, streetscape improvements and in January the Planning Board will be seeing a redevelopment plan for that back large assemblage which is proposed for a private school. Other things that might happen in terms of reusing some of the existing buildings, could add character for unique tucked away neighborhood places, corner store or café, as well as some open space enhancements. There are a whole series of recommendations for this corridor as well and in the land use plan generally there is series of recommendations to take those overarching seven goals and try to put those into play in a number of different ways.

There is a new base map which has context environmental resource mapping, community facilities, parks, open space, there is a whole series of maps in the Master Plan that never existed before: existing land use, colored zoning map. An analysis of the residential zoning was done, which was a recommendation in the 2003 Master Plan, the need for residential design guidelines. He said that there is really one residential zoning district, RA with 50x100 lots, surprising because the pattern of types of residences and size of lots, and how much yard area are so varied in town and there is just one zoning district, so an analysis was done and found that there are a number of non-conforming lots, the two family with very few two family homes within it, adding together the non-conforming lot area and lot width, so there is a lot of variation and a lot of things that do not meet the minimum standards. In particular it affects the smallest lots in the community so when we talk about housing affordability it things like these 35' wide lots which meet almost none of the zoning requirements that are some of the most affordable homes in the community to own and live but you can't do anything to expand them because they are non-conforming and suggested visit the zoning in the residential zones and try to have different types of lots to accommodate this varied pattern so you preserve some of the variation that is the rich character of Highland Park while providing relief to those undersized lots so a lot of these little projections, porches things that are all outside of the permitted zoning envelope, there are recommendations in the Master Plan that would basically make them legal versus non-conforming and will instill re-investment in some of the smallest more affordable homes in town. Right now these homeowners are looking at months and thousands of dollars to get a variance, and most of time once they are told that is what they need that is the end of their improvement project. Allowing the provision of garages on these smaller lots and how they can be back from the street and not intrude and then some basic design requirements.

There were a couple areas of special focus , environmental sustainability, climate change in the fact that this is a river community, multi-mode mobility, and some ways to further activate place

making, and then focus on open space and recreation and the need for a parking management plan.

Ms. Hammond said that as you can see the Borough was in good hands with LRK, there was also a committee made up of Planning Board members, people from SWACC and also while reaching out to the public for the open forums, the various boards and commissions were specifically targeted for feedback on the areas pertaining to them.

Ms. Hammond opened the floor to the public.

Alvin Chin, 111 South 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Apt., sworn and affirmed. He thanked Mr. Constantine for a good presentation, and appreciated the effort, there are a few things he was concerned about, the cost of a parking garage, it can range anywhere upwards of \$30,000 per space for construction of a multi-story parking deck; the existing land use map seemed to have some variations, there were areas where there were vacant lots that were shown as having single family houses, there were parcels that were shown single family that were actually multi-family. He said that he communicated these concerns at a previous planning board meeting and he knows it takes times to update the GIS and do field observations but would like to see an effort made to improve field observations for these existing conditions. He appreciates very much and he loves seeing the renderings of more stories along Route 27 along the corridors but in the meantime he would like to a change to the zoning map or zoning code so that the multi-family uses are protected. He indicated that if something were to happen such as a fire, his apartment building could not be built as it is right now because it would more than a partial and built as a single family house. He would prefer if people could have a bit more density rather than reduced density after a crisis or lose of a house.

Kathryn Korten, 235 Benner Street, sworn and affirmed. She noticed that there was something that was called a third round housing and fair share plan court approved settlement agreement on page 14 and asked what that was. She asked if the survey helpful and would like know what the biggest thing you got from the survey or most helpful. She is a retired teacher and she does not think of herself as a low income person, she feels very fortunate because she has a pension and gets social security, but there is no place she can go to get an apartment or a condo that she can afford it is cheaper for her to stay in her house and pay Highland Park taxes, and don't any developers make reasonable apartments for people, there is a strong need for more reasonable housing for people not subsidized just reasonable. She belongs to a book club in the library, a bunch of retired people, three or four people in their 90s that are very wonderful to know, and very inspiring in this book club and just feels that the library in Highland Park is one of the few places where we can really experience the diversity of this town, she sees all kinds of people, all ages, all races in that library and is a wonderful assets in town. She feels that the library gets shorted, the computers are covered because the roof leaks, and could use some help, she knows that we give them over a million and now they only get a million, and we lost a person who worked for 21 years in the library who helped the book club and it was a real lose Lisa she was a wonderful asset and very friendly warm person to have in the public library. She would like to see something happen to make the library a little bit more important in Highland Park. She asked what in-fill housing was. She asked if all of the apartments going up were expensive apartments.

Mr. Thomas explained that the third round housing was a constitutional obligation as found by the NJ Supreme Court for each community to have a responsibility to provide low and moderate

income housing in their communities and that was established in 1973, and formalized in a statute known as the Fair Housing Act of 1985, and there have been rounds of activity. There have been requirements placed upon individual towns to provide for low and moderate income housing. What you are looking at on page 14 is the third round, that has been the subject of a lot of controversy, a lot of litigation throughout the state, it has resulted in the courts taking over the responsibility for monitoring low and moderate income housing implementation in the State of New Jersey and therefore in the Borough of Highland Park. The court instructed towns to do, if they choose to, is to file litigation, something called declaratory judgment actions to try to establish what their fair obligation was. Your municipality did that which was the appropriate thing to have done, it ended up going to court and ultimately as of 2019 there was ultimately what was called a judgement of compliance, that means that the entity that is generally involved in this is called the fair share housing center, they monitor all of this on behalf of low and moderate income individuals and there has been an agreement and approved by a Judge that says your plan as produced by Mr. Constantine and his people is now in compliance with the requirements for low and moderate income housing. That was approved as of the year 2019, it means that you have some obligations over next 5 years, 2025 the period of review extends generally for a period of 10 years that period will end in 2025 and then we will be dealing with round four. The Borough is in the process of meeting its obligation as approved by the court.

Ms. Hammond addressed the affordability of staying in your own versus moving to an apartment and indicated that it was one of the goals is to promote housing diversity, variety of housing type, single family, multi-family, apartments, town homes, rentals to serve the diverse population. The goal to the diverse housing types it's a better strata for different types and pricing of housing. Mr. Constantine said that there is a land use strategy and it is recommended that we investigate the feasibility of establishing an accessory dwelling unit ordinance and other types of missing middle housing such as the two family homes, 3-4 family multi apartments that exist in Highland Park but are not actually zoned and permitted. The leading public advocacy group in the United States for accessory dwelling unit ordinance provisions is the association of Retired Persons. The Borough does not have that now but there is a good chance it will be explored and interest in Highland Park. The AARP sees the ability for someone to have choices such as creating an accessory apartment, they are preparing an accessory dwelling unit code now that meshes a couple of existing ones together for the municipality in Princeton. There is advocacy group include seniors that want to see that so that they can actually build there flat that is universally designed so they can age in place. He said in-fill is when something fills in a vacant or there is a tear down and a rebuild that is typically referred to as in-fill, commercial or residential.

Ms. Korten said that around the corner from her is the Sunoco station that is dead, and then behind that is what used to be the BB Big, and she asked about that at one of the Borough Council meetings and the Mayor said that there is an ordinance for homes that are left empty but we don't have an ordinance for businesses that are left empty and that has been empty for a really long time. It doesn't get shoveled and forces people into the street and suggested that we need an ordinance so people can't just leave things forever to rot away.

Kathryn Bull, 221 Felton Avenue, sworn and affirmed said that she was unclear about the relationship of the bicycle and pedestrian plan and the Master Plan. She is here to speak about the importance of the bicycle/pedestrian plan. She has a master's in city and regional planning and works with people all day long about bicycle and pedestrian safety. She knows that the Master Plan references the Bike/Ped plan and seems that the direction that the Borough is taking

just makes it imperative that the plan be put in place and be part of the Master Plan. With the additional people coming into town, we are hoping they do not have two vehicles but we need a safer walking and biking environment and obviously the people of Highland Park have said this in the Master Plan process. The Bike/Ped plan was put together by a committee and with a lot of community input; a lot of the ideas are very strong and very important. It is very important for people to be able to walk and certainly for the children to be able to have some level of independence but with the distracted driving and the way people drive in town she would have her doubts about how successful on how people are going to be getting around. This puts the town on the right path, if we are going to have e-bikes and e-scooters in town you have to provide the infrastructure for that and that's agreement the Borough is in the process of making with Rutgers and neighboring communities. It will not be successful if we not have the infrastructure in place. As Mr. Constantine noted bicycling/pedestrian infrastructure is an equity issue, a lot of the community members do not own cars and we have to provide a safe environment for them to be able to move around. Women and girls tend to not be as comfortable bicycling without really strong infrastructure, so have everyone participating in bicycling and walking in town and to be able to get around we need to provide this infrastructure. The Planning Board and the Borough Council created these issues over the last few decades and yet this plan is part of the solution to some of the difficulties that we will have.

Ms. Hammond said there was a resolution on the agenda tonight to adopt the Bike/Ped plan which references the Master Plan and the Master Plan references the Bike/Ped plan but because it is going too referenced that way in the Master Plan, we have to do the notice requirements that were not done. The intention is for that matter to be before the Board and appreciates that she supports it.

There being no one further, Ms. Hammond closed the public portion of the meeting.

Mr. Thomas said that they are all of a of ministerial type matter they do not change the substance of the Master Plan and they can, if the Board so chooses to, to incorporate them into the Resolution that you have adopting both the Reexamination report and the Land Use Element.

It was MOVED by MILLET and seconded by HAND that the adoption of the Master Plan Reexamination report and the Land Use Element with the changes outlined by Mr. Cosenza be approved.

ROLL CALL: Ayes- Brescher, Hand, Millet, Perlman, Pinelli, Welkovits, Williams, Hammond  
Nays – None

There being eight (8) ayes and no nays the motion passed.

### **Memorialization of Resolutions**

Resolution P2019-07

Borough of Highland Park Planning Board Resolution to  
Adopt a Bicycle and Pedestrian Plan as part of the Borough  
of Highland Park Master Plan

Ms. Hammond that Resolution P2019-07 will be carried to the next meeting for noticing requirements.

**Approval of minutes of previous meetings**

June 13, 2019 Regular Meeting

It was MOVED by HAND and seconded by PERLMAN that the June 13, 2019 and July 11, 2019 minutes as distributed be approved and with a voice vote by all present the minutes were approved. and one (1) abstention.

July 11, 2019 Regular Meeting

It was MOVED by HAND and seconded by PERLMAN that the July 11, 2019 minutes as distributed be approved and with a voice vote by all present and two abstentions from Pinelli and Welkovits the minutes were approved.

**Correspondence and reports.**

Zoning/Building Officer report – Scott - None

Rehabilitation Screening Committee report – Kim - None

Mt. Laurel status update - Roger/Jim - None

Fair Share Housing Obligation report - Jim/chair of FSHO committee - None

Master Plan Prep report - None

**Action on any other business and work session.**

Reorganization Meeting - -1.9.2020

The Board agreed to have the reorganization meeting on January 9, 2020.

**Adjournment**

There was a motion to adjourn from MILLET with a second by PERLMAN the meeting adjourned at 8:57 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Santiago, Board Clerk