

II. PLANNING HISTORY

A. Introduction

Bridgeton City has a long history of municipal planning. The first Master Plan was completed in 1976 and numerous plans, reports, studies and redevelopment plans have been completed since then that contribute to the vision for Bridgeton. A chronological record and summary of the Master Plan, Master Plan Re-examinations, Master Plan Elements, and related planning documents are listed below.

B. 1976 Master Plan

The Bridgeton City 1976 Master Plan was prepared by Williamson Design Group. The plan included both the Master Plan and Six Year Capital Improvement Plan. The 1976 Master Plan included a number of Long Range Community Goals that remain current. These include:

- The City should continue to strengthen its position as a financial and commercial center by revitalizing its Central Business District and adjacent fringe area through active private and public renewal programs.
- Major retail commercial, professional, and other service uses should be concentrated in and around the Central Business District and small neighborhood service centers should be strategically located in or near residential areas of Bridgeton in order to meet all of the commercial needs of the City's residents.
- Industrial development should be encouraged in selected locations well served by roads and utilities, in order to provide additional employment in the area and to strengthen the tax base of the City.
- A maximum amount of open space and appropriate community facilities should be provided to satisfy existing needs and reserve land for future requirements.
- The City should strengthen its role as a residential community by encouraging an expanded range of housing types and values.
- The various land uses should be coordinated to achieve an efficient functioning of the City for the convenience and well-being of its residents, workers and visitors.
- The development of the City should be coordinated with the growth of surrounding communities and the County.
- Traffic circulation should be coordinated with the various land uses to maximize safety and for the efficient movement of goods and people within the City, as well as to and from it.
- An improvement of the public transit system should be encouraged.

C. 1982 Master Plan Reexamination

The Master Plan Reexamination was prepared by the City of Bridgeton Department of Planning. The 1982 Master Plan was the first of three reexamination reports to the 1976 Master Plan. The plan reviewed: problems and objectives; the extent to which Bridgeton's problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased; changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives; and changes recommended. The plan addressed Future Land Use, Community Facilities and Services, Transportation, Recreation and Conservation, Planning Implementation and Capital Programming.

D. Riverfront Urban Design Plan (1982)

The Riverfront Urban Design Plan was created by the City of Bridgeton to complement Master Plan goals for the riverfront in the Central Business District in order to capitalize on the river as a central component of the city. The main recommendations of this plan included:

- Relocate the City Zoo to Waterworks Park
- Locate the New Jersey Farm Museum near the new zoo location
- Develop the Riverfront as a link between the zoo, museum, and downtown
- Improve retail and office uses fronting the River to provide better pedestrian access
- Create paved, lit, and landscaped pedestrian courtyards along the Riverfront area and public alleys
- Clean, repair, and maintain rear facades of buildings in the River area
- Create murals on large, blank walls depicting the river's history on store facades
- Riverfront industrial and office spaces should create attractive riverfront access and amenities for employees to enjoy
- Soft architecture—awnings, flags, banners—should be used as decorative elements to add color and movement to the streetscape
- Rehabilitate historic and architecturally interesting buildings
- Underutilized buildings should be used for new retail and tourist activities
- Middle income apartments should be created in 2nd and 3rd story spaces in the CBD
- Year-round annual events and festivals should be developed for the Riverfront
- Vehicular and pedestrian signage should be developed for the Riverfront

E. Port District Redevelopment Plan (1987)

The Port District Redevelopment Plan was prepared by Louis C. Joyce, PP for the city and addressed four broad land use categories: waterfront recreation, commercial, industrial/port, and mixed use residential.

In order for the Port District plan to function as proposed, two primary factors must be provided. First, the river must be dredged on a regular basis to allow barge traffic to proceed and second, there has to be sufficient barge-reliant industry to make the

shipping economically viable. Recommendations for traffic studies and the provision of open space are valid goals for the Port District Redevelopment.

The recommendations set forth in the plan include:

- Continued commercial revitalization of the downtown riverfront area
- Upgrades to the South Avenue Historic District
- Provision of continuous recreation opportunities along the riverfront
- Provision for orderly growth of a new residential neighborhood on the Cohansey River

The Port District Redevelopment Plan defined specific use group classifications within the District that must be followed unless amended.

An undated amendment was adopted to the Port District Redevelopment Plan as Ordinance #8705. The amendment related to the remainder of the Val Mode site, Block 265 Lots 12, 13 and 14. The amendment recommended the parcels be redeveloped to recognize the important component of the downtown to encourage pedestrians and shoppers. Essential to the City's retail economy and vibrancy of the downtown is to capture traffic on Route 49 through attractive storefronts at street level. The amendment further states that the Zoning Ordinance standards for the area and bulk for the C-2 District are superseded by the Port Redevelopment Plan. Guidelines for future development included situating buildings directly on the street as part of an urban storefront streetscape with entrances for upper level offices fronting on Atlantic Street; providing Route 49 facades that complement the historic industrial character of the Val Mode site, providing appropriate signage, and complimenting lighting on the west side of the river with that which exists on the east side.

F. 1989 Master Plan Reexamination

The Master Plan Reexamination was prepared by T & M Associates. The Reexamination reports that the Master Plan was revised in July 1980 to designate the Bridgeton Historic District and a Downtown Design District. The City's Development Regulations were subsequently amended in October 1980 to create the Historic Preservation Zone and make further changes to the Zoning Map. In June, 1982, a reexamination of the Master Plan was completed.

The 1989 Reexamination stated that the community goals and planning policies promoted in the 1976 Master Plan remain valid but that the City has moved ahead to implement programs that would revitalize the community. As a result, there are several changes in the Assumptions, Policies and Objectives of the Master Plan and Development Regulations that were reported in the 1989 plan. These changes and recommendations include the following:

- Port District Redevelopment Plan, adopted in 1987. The Plan includes zoning, land use, circulation, and recreation recommendations for an expansive area adjacent to both banks of the Cohansey River from Broad Street south to the City

boundary. Revisions to the land use, circulation and recreation elements will be required to reflect the changes.

- Riverfront Urban Design Plan for the Central Business District, created in 1982 and included land use, zoning and design criteria. Revisions to development regulations to implement plan recommendations will be required.
- Historic Preservation building inventory completed in 1979 resulting in Bridgeton having the largest historic district in New Jersey. A Historic Preservation Element of the Master Plan should be completed.
- Economic Development efforts undertaken including creation of an Urban Enterprise Zone and participation in federal and state programs.
- Density and Distribution of Population and Land Uses to increase the minimum lot size in the R-1 Residential Zone to protect single family neighborhoods. As a result, provisions allowing planned development options through the City were repealed.
- Housing Conditions and recognition of need for improvement and maintenance of housing stock. Rehabilitation and code enforcement efforts should continue.
- State and County Policies: Preliminary State Development and Redevelopment Plan designation of Bridgeton as a Tier 3 Suburban and Rural town and designation of the southern portion of the City as an area of critical concern which is subject to CAFRA regulations.
- Update the Utilities Plan to address future water infrastructure needs and sewer line replacement and drainage improvement needs.
- Update Circulation Plan to address parking needs in the central business district.
- Update the Land Use Plan Element including an inventory of the vacant and underutilized properties.
- Update on population characteristics and projections.
- Create an Economic Development plan element.

G. 1989 Master Plan Recycling Plan Element

The Recycling Plan Element draft was created to comply with the New Jersey Statewide Mandatory Source Separation and Recycling Act of 1987. Bridgeton City's recycling program for residential properties was set to be effective as of July 1, 1989. A Mandatory Recycling Ordinance was adopted and an agreement entered with the Cumberland County Improvement Authority. Requirements were established for site plan and subdivisions to comply with the ordinance requirements.

H. 1989 Master Plan Housing Plan Element and Fair Share Plan

Introduction

The 1989 Housing Plan Element and Fair Share Plan was prepared as a Draft document that does not appear to have been formally approved by the Planning Board nor submitted to the New Jersey Council on Affordable Housing for approval. Following is a summary of the Plan.

Summary and City Obligation

The Housing Plan Element and Fair Share Plan were created to comply with the New Jersey Fair Housing Act and Municipal Land Use Law to meet low and moderate income housing needs. Bridgeton's Urban Aid status provided an exemption from the obligation to provide for reallocated present or prospective housing need but the City was obligated to provide for its indigenous need. Bridgeton's obligation was limited to the needs of existing lower income households presently within the City who occupy deteriorated buildings. The Council on Affordable Housing calculated this indigenous need to be 150 dwelling units.

Credits for New Construction

The report indicated that the City may be able to claim credits for six low and moderate income rental projects operated by the City's Housing Authority. There were 200 family units and 250 senior citizen units for a total of 450 low and moderate units. Credit could be taken for 50 senior citizen rental units that were available for occupancy after April 1, 1980. These included 26 units on Dare Avenue, 8 units on Pine Street and 16 units on Hampton Street.

Credits for Rehabilitation

The City's Community Development office administered Federal and State funds for housing rehabilitation including 312 loans, principle reduction grants, and direct loans, Balanced Neighborhood Rehabilitation Programs and a Rental Rehabilitation Program. Between April 1, 1989 and December 31, 1987, 162 units were completely rehabilitated and 107 units were partially rehabilitated. Between January 1, 1987 and December 31, 1988 an additional 91 units were completely rehabilitated. Total eligible rehabilitation was 360 units.

Determination of Fair Share

The City claimed credits for 50 senior units and 360 rehabilitated units. The fair share housing need determined by COAH was 150 resulting in the City having a reserve of 260 units.

Future Housing Need

The plan indicates that the City satisfied its fair housing obligation by COAH's calculation but that housing rehabilitation exceeds COAH estimates. The City should continue to emphasize maintenance and improvement of existing housing.

I. Bridgeton Design Guidelines for the Historic District (1989)

The design guidelines were prepared by the Bridgeton Historic District Commission and the City of Bridgeton's Office of Community Development with the

assistance of the City of Plainfield. The document recognizes the historic assets that Bridgeton has to offer and creates guidelines for the proper maintenance and rehabilitation of these properties and districts. The guidelines include rehabilitation and maintenance (exterior walls, windows, entrances and porches, roofs, trim, storefronts, signs, fences, walkways, exterior painting, half-doubles and architectural good manners, natural objects), new construction (siting, size and scale, rhythm and directional emphasis, materials, building elements, garages and parking), and removals (select demolition, complete demolition, moving buildings).

J. 1997 Master Plan Reexamination and Revisions

The 1997 Master Plan Reexamination was prepared by Marc Shuster, AICP, PP. This reexamination included the Municipal Land Use Law mandates. A summary of relevant conclusions to future planning are provided below.

Major changes and events affecting the City since the last Reexamination:

- County Courthouse expansion generating new employment and potential for customers for downtown sales and services.
- New State office building at the foot of Pearl Street generating new employment opportunities and potential for customer base in downtown.
- Construction of South Woods State Prison designed to house 3,000 prisoners and provide over 1,000 permanent jobs.
- Approval of Depot Plaza, a multi-use development behind tourist center that will provide better parking and access to the Tourist Center.
- CAFRA revisions designating Bridgeton as an urban area that provides greater intensity of development which in turn provides greater incentives for developers and investors.
- State Development and Redevelopment Plan recognition of Bridgeton as a Regional Center, acknowledging its importance as an economic, cultural and governmental center of the County.
- Green Acres funding for improvements to the Cohanzick Zoo and the boat ramp and dock.

The Reexamination revised a number of the goals in past years. Those appropriate for future planning efforts include the following.

- Eliminate inconsistencies in the land use map and zoning map and ordinances and incorporate any Redevelopment Plans into the Master Plan.
- Revitalization of the Central Business District and fringes as a financial, institutional, cultural and commercial center.
- Continue redevelopment efforts in selected areas of the City to increase home ownership, improve infrastructure and amenities and economic development.
- Concentrate major retail, professional and other services around the Central Business District and strategically locate small neighborhood service centers in neighborhoods to meet the needs of residents.

- Encourage industrial development in appropriate areas well served by roads and utilities to provide additional employment and strengthen the tax base.
- Strengthen the City's role as a residential community by expanding the range of single family housing and well designed, low-rise garden type condominiums and apartments.
- Encourage the improvement of the public transit system.
- Encourage development of a cultural activities center in the central business district.
- Encourage a variety of mixed uses in the central business district including professional offices, restaurants, retail sales and services, and motel-hotel accommodations with appropriate shops.
- Encourage enlargement of the Riverfront promenade with landscaped walkways.
- Encourage pedestrian traffic in the central business district by limiting through vehicular traffic and providing additional off-street parking on the periphery of the area.
- Provide sidewalks along all streets and initiate a street lighting program.

The Master Plan recommended a new land use configuration for non-residential zones to better accommodate current and future uses. The proposal was for the following Districts:

- Downtown Business District to include retail sales and service, financial institutions, professional offices, and general offices on upper floors.
- Downtown Residential District to aid in providing housing for workers in the professional offices near the County Complex.
- Residential-Professional District to lessen intensity of uses away from the center while allowing for some professional offices.
- Institutional District to allow for health care offices surrounding the hospital.
- Public/Parks/Recreation District to identify open space, parks, and schools.
- Highway Commercial District to replace portions of the C-4 and C-5 districts.
- Business-Industrial District to replace the Industrial zone and expand the types of uses permitted to make the area more attractive. Uses include light manufacturing, distribution, storage, warehousing, office, and a combination of uses.
- Residential District changes proposed include the expansion of the R-1 to include vacant areas for residential development and elimination of R-4 to reduce potential densities.

K. City of Bridgeton Parking and Circulation Study (1997)

The Parking Study was completed by Lehr and Associates through funding by the South Jersey Transportation Planning Organization (SJTPO). Only the Introduction and Findings and Alternatives of the study were available for review. There were several key findings in the study about the overall parking and circulation within the city, however,

some of the findings are dated in that redevelopment proposed at the time has not occurred or has not occurred as planned.

- The overall parking supply in the CBD is adequate to meet current demand; however, on-street parking turnover and off-street parking utilization could be improved.
- Future parking demand created by increased occupancy of currently vacant retail space and proposed redevelopment may need to be addressed by increasing parking supply in the CBD.
- On-street truck loading/unloading activity in the CBD negatively affects circulation.
- Designated off-street parking for courthouse employees is deficient.
- Short-term and visitor parking around the courthouse is extremely limited.
- Redevelopment of the Val Mode site will generate a need for additional parking in the courthouse area and CBD.
- Other Cohansey River redevelopment projects will provide adequate on-site parking or will be accommodated by existing parking.
- A shuttle service would provide a transportation alternative in the CBD, but it would not be self-supporting financially.

L. Regional Center Petition, City of Bridgeton, Hopewell Township, Fairfield Township and Upper Deerfield Township, March 2000

This petition for Regional Center designation for Bridgeton and urbanized areas of surrounding communities contained a number of positive factors for Bridgeton. The City is the County seat and center for social and cultural events in western Cumberland County. Sunset Lake and the City Park offer sites for numerous regional and local cultural, social and athletic events. The population of the center is over 20,000 people with a density of 1,666 persons per square mile, twice that of Vineland at 797 persons per square mile. The employment base is over 10,000 with the State Prison, County complex and Courthouse base in Bridgeton. Economic development opportunities present themselves with Route 49 and Route 77 intersecting in the central business district. Route 49 connects to the Delaware Memorial Bridge to the west and to the shore counties to the east. Route 77 connects the City to Philadelphia to the north. In addition, the potential for a reviving freight rail system in the County adds another layer of opportunity to the City. The petition also discusses Bridgeton's natural resources and the City Park that is comparable to a regional or state park. The park contains an outdoor amphitheatre, guarded swimming beach, guided nature trails, playgrounds, tennis courts, zoo, picnic areas, historic reconstruction area and boat rentals. Bridgeton offers a free boat launching facility in the downtown as well as an urban riverfront park in the central business district. The petition also discussed Bridgeton's cultural resources, infrastructure, social services, transportation, housing, and design guidelines.

Designation of the City as a Regional Center has positive implications for additional sources of funding and assistance from the State and greater development

potential under the Coastal Area Facilities Review Act (CAFRA) permitting requirements.

M. Bridgeton Hope VI Redevelopment Plan (2001 Draft)

The Bridgeton Hope VI Redevelopment Plan was prepared by Lindemon, Winckelmann, Deupree, Martin and Associates. The Hope VI program was created in 1992 by the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) from the National Commission on Severely Stressed Public Housing. The program aims to replace severely distressed public housing projects, occupied exclusively by poor families, with redesigned mixed-income housing and to provide housing vouchers to enable some of the original residents to rent apartments in the private market. Bridgeton's Hope VI plan includes redevelopment and rehabilitation of a neighborhood east of the Cohanse River in the northern part of the city. The plan includes physical improvements to the neighborhood, including infill housing and rehabilitations, as well as social and economic improvements due to the creation of a mixed-income neighborhood. It provides design guidelines for the architecture of the new homes and streetscape improvements, as well as goals to improve the neighborhood for residents. The plan also includes the creation of a recreational greenway along the Cohanse River that will link the neighborhood to the Central Business District. The Redevelopment Plan states the following:

This Redevelopment Plan shall supersede all provisions of the Bridgeton Zoning Ordinance that are specifically addressed herein. Any zoning related question that is not addressed herein shall refer to the Bridgeton Zoning Ordinance for clarification. No variance from the requirements herein shall be cognizable by the Zoning Board of Adjustment. The Planning Board alone shall have the authority to grant deviations from the requirements of this Plan, as provided herein. Upon final adoption of this Plan by the Municipal Council of Bridgeton, the Bridgeton Zoning Map shall be amended to rezone the area covered by this Plan as Bridgeton Hope VI Redevelopment Area and all underlying zoning will be voided.

N. Comprehensive Riverfront Planning, Riverfront Redevelopment and Open Space Strategy (RROSS) (2003)

This plan summarizes riverfront and open space plans for Bridgeton and creates one plan for the riverfront. After examining the prior planning documents, including the 1976 Master Plan, Hope VI Redevelopment Plan, Riverfront Urban Design Plan, Port District Redevelopment Plan, Bridgeton Land Use Ordinance, Lower Cohanse River Management Plan, and the Cumberland County Ecotourism Plan, the following recommendations were listed:

- Create a river logo for the city
- Promote eco-tourism, especially south of Broad Street

- Increase maintenance and policing at Riverfront Plaza
- Promote boat rides on the river as part of city events
- Develop new ordinances to encourage river uses on riverfront
- Require bike paths in all new riverfront parks and developments
- Connect Riverfront Plaza, Boat Ramp, and Riverwalk Development
- Upgrade alleys from Laurel to Riverfront Plaza
- Improve rear facades in CBD on riverfront
- Provide sculpture and wall signs at riverfront entrances
- Develop a riverfront Community Center
- Provide welcome Kiosks
- Develop mini parks along Cohansey bluffs south of Broad Street

A more detailed review of the study with current recommendations is provided in the Riverfront Access Element.

O. Upstairs Living in the Central Business District (2004)

Up until the 1970s, Bridgeton had a history of downtown residential units, mainly business owners living over their storefronts. In 1976, the new Master Plan and Ordinances for the city created zoning that prohibited new residential dwellings in the Central Business District. The number of residences in the CBD has decreased since then. Despite attempts to revitalize the CBD, it continues to decline. The City has expended substantial amounts of money and efforts for physical improvements such as brick sidewalks, benches, lampposts and a riverfront promenade. A Main Street Program offered façade rehabilitation loans and the entire downtown was included in the Urban Enterprise Zone which allows participating merchants to charge fifty percent less sales tax on most retail items. Recreation programs, downtown festivals, concerts and lunch time entertainment programs attempted to draw pedestrians and shoppers to the Central Business District.

The question of whether downtown living will positively contribute to Bridgeton's downtown revitalization was addressed in this report. The potential for reintroducing apartments in the downtown above stores was examined using case studies from other cities. The study outlined ten proactive steps every city expecting to promote downtown housing should take. These include:

- Emphasize the City's architectural heritage.
- The downtown must be defined physically by streetscape amenities such as a particular lighting scheme or flags.
- Downtown housing must be a priority to key partners. Business owners, residents, and municipal officials must all agree to pursue rehabilitation vigorously as part of an overall downtown plan.
- Maintain the infrastructure scrupulously. This should encompass both private and public domains. Building facades should reflect the City's pride in itself. Citizens and visitors should feel they can depend on cleanliness of the streets, reliability of utilities and availability of parking.

- Offer enough amenities and services that the downtown remains populated and vibrant after dark.
- Inspire resident confidence in their and their guests' safety while downtown with sufficient public safety presence, good lighting and vigorous enforcement of acceptable public behavior.
- Utilize land use regulations to encourage downtown living. Appoint a downtown coordinator to help owners with residential conversions as well as an ongoing facilitator for downtown living.
- Make the downtown accessible. Offer free or reduced public transportation from the outlying townships, particularly from senior housing concentrations.
- Maintain the downtown "edge." The neighborhoods surrounding the Central Business District should not be allowed to deteriorate as the downtown succeeds.
- Downtown living, and a successful overall downtown, is never a "fait accompli." Improvements of twenty years ago must be updated and new ideas must be instigated or a gradual slide to decay is inevitable.

One of the cities investigated was Millville which is located just ten miles east of Bridgeton. Their aggressive campaign and proactive planning to establish a marketing theme for the downtown resulted in a recovery bringing vibrancy to the area.

The case studies reviewed present a number of viable downtown living initiatives. Options for Bridgeton include:

- Rent guarantees of up to five years as an incentive to owners to rehabilitate their buildings
- Work and live space restricted to artists
- Elimination of parking requirement for upper floor housing
- Mix of kinds of rehabilitation to appeal to different renters/buyers
- Design guidelines for historic rehabilitations
- Market rate and subsidized apartment mix
- Tax incentives and help obtaining tax credits
- Procurement of support from local businesses and landlords

The study also notes the large increase in the Hispanic population in the blocks just north of the CBD, and the increase in new stores and pedestrian traffic in the downtown associated with it. The redevelopment of the Val Mode building across the Cohansey River from the CBD to senior housing could create a spillover effect of housing demand in the downtown. Of the 95 two and three-story buildings, about 50% would be suitable for upper story residences; however, vacant lots would add greater opportunities for new construction mixed use buildings or parking opportunities.

The study cites two factors for a successful upstairs downtown movement. The first is a demand for housing which Bridgeton appears to have and the second is a downtown that provides a regional draw for nightlife and other amenities. The study raises questions about utilization of upper floors of existing buildings that are now vacant. If the City wants to utilize its vacant downtown space to reinvigorate the CBD,

the study recommends a long term strategy with multiple actions that must be considered and implemented.

The actions that should be stressed if the City pursues upstairs living in the CBD are the following:

Action Items

1. The City should create a database of potential upstairs living space. The Upstairs Living report contained an initial survey of the CBD but a database should contain information on access, plumbing, number of rooms per story, construction materials, occupancy and use of all levels. The data will be the basis of, and evidence for, discussion among citizens as to the value of downtown living. The database must be kept current and made available to investors and business people.
2. Hold a series of downtown community “summits” to educate citizens about downtown living and to create a partnership of building owners/potential residents/business owners.
3. Hire a downtown housing coordinator who will:
 - Pursue housing grants/loans for building owners interested in rehabilitation
 - Research code issues with regard to conversions and work with building owners who wish to pursue conversions
 - Enforce the zoning ordinance/building code/landlord regulations stringently in order to create a positive atmosphere in the CBD
 - Market downtown housing to a broader region.
4. Change zoning ordinance to:
 - Allow some form of housing above the ground floor in the CBD
 - Create parking ordinance to allow resident permitted on street 24 hour parking and/or create resident-only parking lots at strategic locations downtown
 - Reduce the maximum building height for the CBD from 125’ to 40’. This will prevent the temptation to develop high rise buildings in the historic downtown

P. Cumberland County Cross Acceptance Report for the NJ State Development And Redevelopment Plan (2005)

The Cross Acceptance Report summarizes the changes to and concerns with the NJ State Development and Redevelopment Plan. Bridgeton is cited as having several land use issues that are relevant to the state plan policy. These are:

- Changes in CAFRA boundary within the city, particularly to exclude the urbanized portions of the Cohansy River. Under the UEZ, Bridgeton is entitled to special consideration for projects within CAFRA areas

- Funding for new requirements as a result of the state plan policies. Burdens and benefits of the State Plan are not distributed equitably and, as a result, rural areas are bearing more burden with less benefit than parts of the State with urban complexes and urban centers. Bridgeton does not feel promise of “adequate” funding has been fulfilled for planning.
- Regulatory relief as part of Center Designation. This should be streamlined and expedited permit processing.
- Priorities for infrastructure improvements. Bridgeton should have the highest priority for infrastructure improvements and capacity expansion based on its status as the growth center for western Cumberland County. By setting Urban Centers and Urban complexes before all other Centers, the State Plan limits resources for rural areas, even when they have a Center status.
- Migrant Housing burden. Bridgeton is bearing the lion’s share of the community services for low income workers from outlying municipalities. State and federal funding for migrant worker housing is inadequate.
- Improved access to Route 55. Bridgeton’s growth potential and economic health of much of western Cumberland County is limited without better access to Routes 55 and 295 in terms of road improvements and bypasses. Bridgeton’s issue with transportation planning is as a redevelopment and development tool and capital facilities tool. The policies which advocate planned economic growth and redevelopment based on Centers have not been adequately funded in western Cumberland County.

Q. Southeast Gateway Neighborhood Strategic Plan (2005)

The Southeast Gateway plan was prepared by the residents of the Southeast Gateway Neighborhood and Tri-County Community Action Partnership. The plan aimed to create an identity for this neighborhood as another gateway to the city. The Southeast Gateway neighborhood is located at the southern terminus of NJ Route 77. It is also located south of Route 49. Three neighborhood needs were determined with goals associated with each:

Need 1. Enhance the Wealth of the South Bridgeton Neighborhood

- Reverse the out-migration of families from the neighborhood
 - Target areas of the neighborhood for new housing opportunities and infill housing
 - Create opportunities for before/after school programs
 - Develop a social activities center in neighborhood
 - Provide additional opportunities for home ownership
 - Offer a wider array of retail options
- Expand business opportunities in the neighborhood
 - Develop a neighborhood convenience center with retail and service businesses
 - Provide entrepreneurial and small business development training
 - Develop small business incubator
 - Provide a link to multi-cultural artists outlet

- Revitalize the industrial centers of the neighborhood
 - Work to revitalize the Bridgeton waterfront
 - Prepare access to job training in the neighborhood
 - Develop linkages between the neighborhood and the Florida Avenue Industrial Park
- Provide affordable housing
 - Purchase and rehabilitate old houses and abandoned properties
 - Identify areas where affordable housing can provide critical infill development with a focus on home ownership
 - Work with neighboring municipalities to explore a regional affordable housing strategy that would make South Bridgeton a target neighborhood

Need 2. Make Improvements to the Physical Condition of the Neighborhood

- Revitalize existing housing stock
 - Provide a low interest loan program for homeowners to fix up houses
 - Enforce existing codes and ordinances
 - Offer grant program for free paint, materials and supplies for home repair
 - Coordinate plan findings with results of Capital Access Housing Study
 - Oversee design and function of housing options
 - Involve the Workcamp Foundation in neighborhood redevelopment
- Clean-up sidewalks and common community areas
 - Create a neighborhood “Adopt a Block” program
 - Designate Clean up Saturdays
 - Appoint Block Captains to monitor progress, offer suggestions, and implement neighborhood clean up programs
 - Provide land for “Neighborhood Gardens” program
- Upgrade community parks, facilities, and playgrounds
 - Apply for community Development funds for playground enhancement and development
 - Create new community parks and common areas at key entrances to the Southeast Bridgeton Neighborhood
 - Develop a rollerblade park and outdoor sports facilities at the old “Tin Can” site
 - Coordinate park and playground development with the new Cherry Street School construction
 - Explore opportunities for biking and walking trails
 - Utilize the Southeast Recreation Center as a focal point for community functions and activities
- Construct and Rehabilitate Sidewalks and Street Lighting
 - Extend the historic character of downtown Bridgeton into the South Bridgeton Historic District and neighborhood

- Link schools, churches, playgrounds, and other community facilities with sidewalks and pedestrian ways
- Provide new and improved street lighting both to enhance the appearance of the neighborhood and to act as a deterrent to crime
- Provide sidewalks where there are none in place today
- Provide better community parking and street circulation
 - Explore with the County ways to reduce speeds on South Avenue and Grove Streets
 - Explore other traffic control devices that can help to reduce speeds on key neighborhood roadways
 - Designate and/or construct neighborhood parking lots to reduce on-street parking and congestion in key areas
 - Assign designated truck routes to minimize the presence of heavy commercial traffic in the neighborhood
- Provide new gateway projects that enhance entrances to the neighborhood
 - Construct key gateway project at the head of South Avenue and Grove Streets and at other key gateways to the neighborhood
 - Develop streetscape improvements throughout the neighborhood that enhance community pride and provide greater residential, traffic, and pedestrian safety
 - Develop outlet for community artists through mural painting and other community art projects
 - Utilize public utility (PSE&G) programs to enhance community street lighting

Need 3. Expand the Availability of Services and Facilities

- Provide a more visible and consistent police presence in the neighborhood
 - Provide special police patrols/neighborhood task force
 - Provide for multiple police substations in the neighborhood
 - Develop Crime Watch Program
 - Explore weed and seed program for South Bridgeton
 - Provide drug hotline for reporting drug dealing and other illicit activity
- Provide a greater range of resident programs and services
 - Provide neighborhood training/computer center
 - Provide outlet for tutoring and self help classes
 - Offer Spanish/English classes to neighborhood residents
 - Develop neighborhood ambassadors program to bridge language and cultural divides
- Provide new retail and service opportunities
 - Develop neighborhood convenience center that offers Laundromat, banking, eating, postal and other convenience services
 - Develop specialty retailing opportunities for entrepreneurs
 - Explore DCA and other financing opportunities to promote new commercial development.
- Expand the availability of transportation
 - Develop South Avenue transit link

- Subsidize existing taxi and other par transit services
- Work with churches and non-profit agencies on specialized transit needs
- Develop partnerships with the faith based institutions in the neighborhood
 - Work with faith based organizations to offer professional and educational training programs
 - Partner on home ownership and home development initiatives
 - Discuss with the Union Baptist Temple ways that the church's new community center can be a focal point for neighborhood programs and projects.

The plan follows up with specific projects to accomplish each goal and meet neighborhood needs as well as the actions needed to implement these projects.

R. Western/Southern Cumberland Region Strategic Plan (2005)

The Western/Southern Cumberland Region Strategic Plan (WSCRSP) was prepared for twelve municipalities, including Bridgeton, to achieve the following goals:

- Address the existing need for jobs, infrastructure and economic development
- Provide a balance between economic development and environmental protection
- Achieve intermunicipal agreement on development goals and strategies
- Develop a planning and implementation agenda
- Obtain plan endorsement

The plan includes the strategies for the region in the future, identifies designated centers (state plan), and provides regional and municipal planning and implementation agendas. Bridgeton City is the only urban center in Cumberland County, the only fully sewered town and the only municipality in the study area that is entirely within Planning Area 1.

A Planning and Implementation Agenda (PIA) was created for Bridgeton, listing issues, strategies to deal with the issues, and the targeted outcome. These include natural areas, historic and cultural, agriculture, transportation, economy, community facilities and services, housing, land use, and inter-municipal coordination.

Specific targets were:

- Greenways plan for the Cohansey River: Develop the Cohansey River as an expanded waterfront park in the downtown, and part of the Cohansey Greenway.
- Preserve historic character: Update the inventory of historic structures; maintain historic structures of significance; identify funding mechanisms to support property rehabilitation; investigate reducing the scope of the historic district.
- Support agricultural production and farmland preservation in environs by providing services, jobs and facilities in Bridgeton center. Develop agricultural industrial park and Food Innovation Center.

- Increase access to public transportation: coordinate with efforts to expand public transportation, especially for elderly, poor and handicapped.
- Improve roadways: obtain funding to implement roadway improvements at “hot spots” of Route 77 and Route 49, two Cohansey River bridges and at the Industrial Park/prison area of Burlington Road.
- Enhance economic development in Bridgeton through re-use of old industrial and commercial sites. Redevelop Brownfield sites; renew central business district by supporting Main Street program; encourage County government to serve as anchor of redevelopment in downtown Bridgeton, through renovating existing structures or building new structures for facilities; support completion and marketing of Florida Avenue Industrial Park and other industrial park sites in the City.
- Improve schools and use new school facilities as neighborhood centers.
- Enhance Bridgeton’s appeal as redeveloping center through upgrading recreational facilities: Maintain and improve City Zoo and City Park and explore cost sharing possibilities.
- Enhance Bridgeton’s appeal as a redeveloping urban center through creating attractive, vital neighborhoods: Rehabilitate deteriorated housing and create vital mixed income neighborhoods through projects such as Hope VI; investigate acceptance of Regional Contribution Agreements from regional municipalities for rehabilitation and infill housing; support completion and implementation of Southeast Gateway project in order to create attractive neighborhoods.
- Land Use: Update land use plan and regulations. Incorporate mixed use center type zoning into Highway Business District; update and revise Master Plan and Zoning Ordinance.
- Continue regional planning efforts and projects: Continue WSCR planning process; participate in regional shared services study to identify potential opportunities to reduce costs; establish Bridgeton Regional Center Partnership to review intermunicipal issues and to coordinate solutions.

S. Systems and Programs: Inventory and Analysis (2006)

This inventory and analysis was completed by Thomas Comitta Associates, Inc. In 2005, Bridgeton was designated a Distressed City by the State of New Jersey Department of Community Affairs which put the city under DCA control. After completing a process of workshops, one-on-one interviews, and document review to analyze the current condition of the city, these critical needs were determined:

- Creation of a cohesive vision and work program
- Improve staffing, budget, and resources to improve efficiency
- Improve morale of employees
- Improve appearance of city
- Improve perception of city
- Realization of city’s potential

Recommendations for inclusion in the Master Plan are:

- Create a unified vision for city leaders and staff to work towards
- Establish a city-based economic development plan
- Rank historic properties into 3-tiers of significance
- Establish a utility services plan
- Establish city-wide goals for neighborhood preservation programs
- Establish capital improvements plan
- Update property maintenance codes
- Reevaluate and provide implementation agenda for Cohansey River redevelopment
- Promote mixed-use, upstairs living and increase density in the CBD
- Assess connections between downtown, City Park and Zoo, Cohansey River, and City neighborhoods
- Map and evaluate 5-10 minute walks between important hubs within the city and identify needed linkages

Key Elements in the study that are applicable to the Master Plan include the following:

Code Enforcement

The appearance of the City is important because it forms the basis for a first impression. Code Enforcement is a method to implement the goals and strategies of the Master Plan and create a great first impression. Code Enforcement will play a large part in the City's ability to create a positive perception of its image and appearance. Code Enforcement can be improved for better results and to protect the appearance of the City.

Housing and Rehabilitation Programs/Neighborhood Preservation

The study indicated that the City currently exceeds the requirements for its fair share of affordable housing and is in need of additional market rate housing. Additional market rate housing will attract a wider range of income levels and promote homeownership. Because the City is largely built-out, this new residential development will be created with infill units and redevelopment.

The study recognized that the City's housing and neighborhood preservation goals focus on rehabilitation and redevelopment within the largely built out neighborhoods and promote home ownership, but with one major obstacle: the size and condition of most units within the Historic District. The plan states a major emphasis of the Master Plan should be to classify the Historic District into three tiers ranging from the most historic core to the lesser historic places. This evaluation can then be compared to preservation goals and strategies to help clarify the strategies that rehabilitation and revitalization plans can realistically address.

Many neighborhood plans have already been completed and can form the basis of a citywide housing strategy as part of the Master Plan. This is especially important, as the City's demand for rehabilitation funding far outweighs the funds available. Each plan should be reevaluated and prioritized by the City enabling funds to be focused or dispersed across the City in a way that corresponds to the overall plans for strengthening the downtown and neighborhoods.

Regional Center

The study states that the City has many advantages and the Regional Center concept promotes the City in many ways. It is the County seat and hub for government services and programs. The City also has many plans for redevelopment and revitalization in neighborhoods and the downtown. The Cohansey River and Cohanzick Zoo are unique features that can provide a regional draw and distinguish the City from other areas. Economic development and industry, tourism and ecotourism, government centers, education, and arts and entertainment can all be a part of the City's regional identity.

Challenges to the reality of Bridgeton as a Regional Center include the scarcity of available land, aging infrastructure, lack of major highways and Brownfield sites. The City must examine the challenges and opportunities that will make it a Regional Center and must focus on how to promote development and redevelopment to the greatest extent possible.

Downtown

Bridgeton's downtown has the potential to be a charming, vibrant, compact main street environment but the challenges are deterioration of buildings, the cost of rehabilitation, competition of outlying malls and shopping centers, parking and challenges of working with existing business owners to focus on improving the downtown. The City should increase diversity of businesses and attract higher end businesses, businesses that provide services to residents, dining and entertainment opportunities and expanded hours of business. At almost every meeting held during the study, the lack of a hotel with conference or banquet facilities was mentioned as a deterrent to encouraging tourism.

The "Upstairs Living in the CBD" provides an overview of successful efforts to encourage downtown living. Residential development in the downtown will increase support for local businesses, contribute to positive activity and promote the perception of safety and security. The Main Street Association completed parking surveys and assessments at the request of past City Mayors that recommended changes to the availability of parking in the downtown area.

The study stated that the Master Plan should highlight and take under strong consideration methods for improving the downtown:

- Recommended zoning changes included in the Upstairs Living in the CBD report by the Bridgeton Main Street Association should be taken under consideration to encourage downtown living;
- Parking in the downtown should be considered and studied as part of the Master Plan to ensure that adequate parking exists, that regulations are not too stringent for the types of establishments that the City would like to see in the downtown, and that the design of parking lots is conducive to safe, convenient and attractive usage.
- Develop specific goals and strategies for the downtown district that incorporate the urban design goals of the Riverfront Urban Design Plan and studies which concentrate on the downtown in relation to the Cohansey River.

Historic District

The Historic District presents challenges of preservation and progress for redevelopment. The study states that the Bridgeton Historic District was designated in 1979 and is the largest historic district in the State with more than 2,200 properties listed. The Master Plan should examine the Historic District, clarify the Commission's standards, streamline the process and minimize obstacles to rehabilitation and renovation.

Walkability

The characteristics that make a place "walkable" include a combination of compact, mixed land uses, community design, and positive activity that contributes to the perception and reality of safety. Pedestrian friendly design includes a system of well-maintained and well-lit sidewalks or pathways, short, interconnected blocks, interesting destinations, signage; and streetscape amenities. Studies show that people will walk between an eighth to a quarter mile or approximately five to ten minutes to reach a destination, though longer if the route is more attractive. Respondents to the Systems & Programs study agreed that Bridgeton has a compact, walkable character, especially in the downtown but there are challenges to the pedestrian friendly character.

That study indicated a number of former studies recommended increasing pedestrian connectivity between the City's neighborhoods, the downtown, the Cohansey River, and Cohanzick Zoo and City Park. Improved walkability is believed to be an important part of the overall revitalization plans to increase the attractiveness of the City to residents and visitors and contribute to the popularity of existing walking tours on the west and east sides of the City.

Obstacles to walkability include the existence and condition of sidewalks and the degree of safety and security. While sidewalks exist throughout most of the City, the conditions are inconsistent with many poorly maintained. Security or the perception of security is also an impediment to walkability.

Strategies to improve the walkability should begin by identifying a series of five to ten minute (quarter mile radius) walks to connect the various neighborhoods and

destinations such as the City Park, Zoo, and Riverfront. After the walks are mapped, gaps and obstacles to access can be identified and prioritized.

Cohansey River

The study stated that of all the points of interest in Bridgeton, no asset has been more studied, planned or conjectured about than the Cohansey River and its place in the City's past, present, and future. Whether for redevelopment in now abandoned industrial areas, reclaimed open space development that permits better access to the waterfront, or as the hub of ecotourism in Cumberland County, the Cohansey River is seen as a possible "key" to the City's future. It also presents a shining example of one of the City's planning success stories. The Riverfront Promenade Plaza demonstrates foresight and follow-through on the part of the City.

The focus of the prior planning studies has been with the River as part of the downtown with recommendations for urban design guidelines, increased access, especially between the park and downtown, and signage as essential elements of the effort to bring this underutilized asset to life.

The study recommends that the Master Plan consider the existing plans for the Riverfront and downtown and prioritize goals and objectives as well as comprehensively plan the entirety of the riverfront in Bridgeton as it relates to regional efforts for increased tourism, based on development and redevelopment.

City Park and Cohanzyck Zoo

The City Park and Cohanzyck Zoo are unique assets to the City. The Zoo, containing 10 acres, is the oldest zoo in the State. Plans to expand the green space into the downtown are part of at least two existing riverfront redevelopment plans. The Master Plan should explore the goals, policies and codes that will ensure these connections are safe, convenient and attractive to users. The Zoo and Park are listed as part of the Bridgeton Area and Cumberland County Bicycle Route maps, Historic Bridgeton brochure, and Coastal Ecotourism Guide. Further marketing opportunities should be explored.

Summary of Assessment and Action Items

The study presents in table format, topics, assessments and action items. Those related to the Master Plan and planning in the City include the following:

- *Existing Land Use Plans and Codes*
 - Comprehensively Update Master Plan
 - Update City Codes to reflect best practices and goals of the Master Plan
 - Establish Capital Plan to implement long term and costly capital investments needed

- *Economic Development*
 - The City is in need of higher paying jobs. Create opportunities for higher paying employment
 - Create a City based Economic Development plan in conjunction with existing plans
 - Review development review processes

- *Code Enforcement*
 - City has a tired appearance and needs stronger code enforcement
 - Streamline violation process
 - Update property maintenance codes

- *Housing Rehabilitation/Neighborhood Preservation*
 - Existing support for neighborhood preservation cannot keep up with the demand for housing rehabilitation and renovation
 - Establish goals for neighborhood preservation programs, prioritize existing plans, and evaluate gaps
 - Evaluate historic review process for redevelopment areas

- *Regional Center*
 - The City has the potential to live up to its Regional Center designation
 - Negotiate more favorable terms with the State during Cross Acceptance
 - Take a long term view of economic development on all fronts, including ecotourism, government facilities, the food industry and others

- *Downtown*
 - Building renovation, parking management and a diversity of businesses are needed to bring the downtown to life
 - Encourage mixed use, upstairs living downtown, and increased density in the downtown district
 - Enhance interface with Bridgeton Main Street Association to involve business owners

- *Bridgeton Historic District*
 - The Historic District is too large and is an impediment to revitalization and redevelopment
 - Prioritize most important historic resources and consider creating three tiers of regulatory activity
 - Review Regulations

- *Walkability*
 - Bridgeton has a compact, walkable center and neighborhoods
 - Map 5 to 10 minute walks from known destinations and origins throughout the City and identify needed linkages

- *Cohansey River*
 - The river needs to be fully utilized through better access and redevelopment
 - Reevaluate, prioritize and set schedule for implementation of existing planning studies.
- *City Park and Cohanzyck Zoo*
 - The Park and Zoo are underutilized assets that create a strong regional draw
 - Assess expansion opportunities and provide connection to the downtown
 - Seek outside funding
 - Consider user fees

Finally, the study identified strengths and opportunities and weaknesses for the City. These are summarized below.

Strengths/Opportunities

- + Bridgeton is a compact, walkable, historic town.
- + The Downtown has great potential as a viable and attractive business and shopping district.
- + City staff does the best they can with limited resources.
- + The Bridgeton park system and zoo is "a gem" that distinguishes Bridgeton from surrounding towns.
- + The update of the Master Plan will provide a new vision for Bridgeton.
- + The City is perceived as a "Diamond-in-the Rough."
- + There is a great opportunity for redevelopment and infill development with improved access to the riverfront.
- + The Bridgeton Historic District is a significant asset that could attract people to the City.
- + The Bridgeton Historic District, the largest in the State, protects resources with great historic and architectural significance.
- + The City has a track record of following through on planning studies (such as the CBD Riverfront improvements).
- + Cultural diversity.
- + Ability to draw seashore traffic (since there is no bypass or super highway).

Weaknesses

- Lack of personnel causes difficulties with productivity.
- Support staff needs to be more productive and skilled.
- New automated mapping systems are needed.
- New centralized software system and database is needed, especially between the EMS/police/fire and tax assessment departments.

- Capital Improvements Programs and Budgets for 1, 3, 5 and 10 years need to be established.
- Weak tax base, but opportunities are there to raise more revenues.
- City infrastructure and equipment is aging and needs to be upgraded or replaced.
- Many public buildings, facilities, and spaces are not adequately maintained.
- The City "needs one big scrub."
- The extensiveness of the Bridgeton Historic District creates an impediment to affordable rehabilitation and concentrated revitalization.
- Communications need to be enhanced in all areas, departments, programs, and activities.
- City staff meetings need to be mandatory and have more structure.
- Lack of funds could be offset with User Fees.
- Storage space is needed in several departments.
- The Fire Department and Police Department are operating in deficient facilities, and need a new, more effective facility.
- The City needs to strengthen its Economic Development initiatives in coordination with county and state programs and entities.
- Crime is perceived to be a major problem.
- The lack of a long-range vision and plan makes it difficult for everyone to work together.
- Lack of good paying jobs.
- Lack of a decent hotel/motel or other accommodations for visitors to stay in Bridgeton.
- Traffic patterns/parking.
- Appearance of gateways.

T. Plan for the Phoenix Redevelopment Area (2007)

The Phoenix Redevelopment Area is located between Burlington Road and the Winchester & Western Railroad line in the southeastern portion of the City. The Redevelopment Area is 64.85 acres in size. The goals for the Phoenix Redevelopment Plan include:

- To revitalize an underutilized and mostly vacant area of the City into a vital, productive and coordinated mixed use area with standards which promote a variety of development options including a coordinated mix of commercial and suitable industrial uses and/or commercial-residential development.
- To add jobs within the City.
- To increase tax revenues.
- To revitalize the area and create larger development parcels than those that currently exist that will accommodate new businesses and on-site parking.
- To utilize design standards in construction of buildings, streetscapes, open space and other improvements which will result in a high quality district which will set a standard for all new development in the city.

Permitted uses include:

- Hotel and Conference Centers
- General business, professional and corporate offices
- Retail sales and services
- Planned Mixed Use Commercial Residential (PMUCR per 370-56.1)
- Planned Residential Retirement Community (PRRC per 370.56.1)
- Warehousing and distribution facilities
- Churches and community centers
- Schools
- Assisted Living Centers/Nursing Homes when associated with PRRC
- Municipal buildings and uses