

## **Somerset County Smart Growth Strategic Plan Update, June 2008**

The County Smart Growth Strategic Plan is intended to comprise an update of the 1987 Somerset County Master Plan. This plan will provide an overall regional planning framework for smart growth, preservation and infrastructure investment decisions. It will play an important coordination role by defining how the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, the Highlands Regional Master Plan and the Updated County Wastewater Management Plan should be translated at the local, regional and state levels so that land use, policy and investment decisions at these different jurisdictional levels are mutually supportive.

Preparation of the County Smart Growth Strategic Plan commenced in 2004, and is funded by a \$250,000 Smart Growth Grant from the NJ Department of Community Affairs, as well as additional funding provided by the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders. The lead consultant responsible for implementing the project is CMX, Inc. (formerly Schoor Depalma, Inc.) The National Center for Neighborhood and Brownfields Redevelopment served as a sub-consultant in charge of build-out modeling work and the preparation of indicators for measuring plan implementation progress. Technical guidance, implementation of the community outreach process and project management support is provided by County Planning Staff.

The County Smart Growth Strategic Plan embraces, and builds upon the new mapping and spatial analysis tools provided by Geographic Information System (GIS) technology, which now forms the foundation for contemporary state, regional and local plans across the country and internationally. The new plan will include “indicators” for measuring progress in attaining the plan’s goals, making it a “strategic” as well as comprehensive regional planning guide for Somerset County.

Phase I involved the completion of a “County Profile Report” that compiles data describing land development, demographic, economic and environmental trends and issues affecting Somerset County; “Guiding Principles” that comprise the goals and objectives of the County Smart Growth Strategic Plan, and the development of GIS datasets necessary for performing “Trend” build-out and impact analyses based on current zoning, using innovative spatial data analysis tools including the “CommunityViz” Model by Orton, Inc.

Phase II involved the preparation of the additional GIS datasets needed to define and complete a “Smart Conservation” build-out scenario. The results of the Smart Conservation Scenario were compared with “Trend” results, and demonstrated the relative advantages targeted growth and enhanced conservation efforts will have in helping to achieve the County’s regional smart growth vision for the future.

Phase III, which is currently underway, involves the shaping of plan maps that represent the vision for the future of the County. The plan is organized around the concept of “3 Systems”: 1) Natural and Cultural System, which is represented by the “Smart Conservation” components of the plan; 2) the Community and Economic System, which is represented by the “smart investment” components of the Plan’ and 3) the Transportation and Infrastructure System”, which is represented by the “Smart Investment” components of the Plan. Each of the 3-System Plan components will be mutually supportive, directly reflect the guiding principles, and link to the Plan’s “Implementation Strategies”. The mapping protocol and datasets for creating these GIS-based plans were developed by County Planning Staff. Draft maps were recently prepared by the Consultant and submitted to County Planning Staff for review, along with draft Chapters 1 through 4.

A revised schedule for completing the public involvement process and the plan document has been prepared by staff. Two public meetings on the draft plan will be held this summer, with finalization of the draft plan anticipated during the Fall of 2008. The County Planning Board hopes to pursue County Plan Endorsement at that time. Information about upcoming meetings will be posted on the County Website, along with draft plan documents. For more information contact: [Kratina@co.somerset.nj.us](mailto:Kratina@co.somerset.nj.us).