

***2006 MASTER PLAN
REEXAMINATION REPORT***

**BRANCBURG TOWNSHIP
Somerset County**

Adopted:
May 23, 2006

Prepared by: Branchburg Township Planning Board

In Consultation with Banisch Associates, Inc.
Sergeantsville, New Jersey

*The original of this report has been signed and sealed
in accordance with N.J.A.C. 13:41-1.1*

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The Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL), at N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89, includes the following statement relative to the periodic examination of a municipal Master Plan:

The governing body shall, at least every six years, provide for a general reexamination of its master plan and development regulations by the planning board which shall prepare and adopt by resolution a report on the findings of such reexamination, a copy of which report and resolution shall be sent to the county planning board and the municipal clerk of each adjoining municipality. The first such reexamination shall have been completed by August 1, 1982. The next reexamination shall be completed by August 1, 1988. Thereafter, a reexamination shall be completed at least once every 6 years from the previous reexamination.

The most recent *Master Plan Reexamination Report* was adopted by the Planning Board in August 1999 and, prior to that date, the Board adopted both a *Reexamination Report* and *Land Use Element* in July 1993. In addition, the Planning Board adopted the *Housing Element / Fair Share Plan Element* in 2005, a *Farmland Preservation Plan* in December 2003, and an *Open Space and Recreation Plan* in October 2002. Appendix A includes summaries of Branchburg's adopted planning documents and State Plan Cross Acceptance activities.

The MLUL sets forth the following five questions to be addressed in preparing the Reexamination Report:

C. 40:55D-89a *The major problems and objectives relating to land development in the municipality at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.*

C. 40:55D-89b *The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.*

C. 40:55D-89c *The extent to which there have been significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the master plan or development regulations as last revised, with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses, housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in State, county and municipal policies and objectives.*

C. 40:55D-89d *The specific changes for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and*

standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be proposed.

C. 40:55D-89e

The recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the “Local Redevelopment and Housing Law”, P.L. 1992, c. 79 (C. 40A:12A-1 et seq.) into the land use plan element of the municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

The following sections respond to the statutory requirements noted above.

A. MAJOR PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES RELATING TO LAND DEVELOPMENT AT THE TIME OF THE LAST MASTER PLAN

Branchburg’s 1999 Master Plan Reexamination assessed the status of the major problems and objectives related to land development as follows:

- Goal # 1: Preserve the rural character of Branchburg’s undeveloped areas.

The Township was viewed as fairly successful in achieving this goal with its low-density residential zoning in the northern and southern rural areas and limited sewer extensions. Branchburg was also seen as the leader in Somerset County in the amount of agricultural land preserved in 1999.

- Goal # 2: To provide a diversity of non-residential uses in appropriate locations to provide for a balance of land uses within the Township.

Finding that ten recommendations from the 1993 Master Plan had been implemented, including the establishment of the OL/Office Laboratory zone, design standards and landscaping requirements were seen as improving the appearance of non-residential zones. Large-scale commercial development and commercial zoning were not found to intrude into residential or office/laboratory areas. The reexamination cited limited redevelopment in the Route 202 and Route 22 retail service zones.

- Goal # 3: To provide for the orderly, compatible in-fill development of remaining vacant parcels within the Township.

Citing the need to protect established neighborhoods from intrusive and incompatible development, along with a need for more substantial buffers, the reexam highlighted the inadequacy of buffer requirements to “effectively protect residents from adverse impacts of non-residential development”.

- Goal #4: To address Branchburg’s affordable housing obligation.

The Township had addressed its cumulative affordable housing obligation through 1999 with a Housing Plan Element and Fair Share Plan adopted in July 1997.

- Goal #5: To preserve and protect the Township’s existing centers of North Branch and Neshanic Station.

The reexamination cited the Draft Historic Plan Element and revised historic regulations then under consideration in furtherance of this goal.

- Goal #6: The large scale utility uses in the Township should be acknowledged and be designated to reflect the existing electric and gas utilities in the Land Use Plan.

This objective was addressed in the revised Land Use Plan.

- Goal #7: To address the statutory requirements for air hazard zones pursuant to the air safety and hazardous zoning act of 1973, as amended.

The Township adopted the required air safety zoning.

- Goal #8: To provide for the open space and community facilities of existing and future residents of the Township.

The Reexamination recommended a detailed recreation needs assessment to project the Townships requirements for recreation facilities and parklands. Citing a draft Recreation Plan Element, the Reexamination recommended a separate open space element be prepared.

- Goal #9: To identify and protect the Township’s historic and natural resources.

The Reexamination recommended “stronger regulation” to implement this goal.

- Goal#10: To provide for the regulation of historic sites consistent with the State statutes.

The 1999 Reexamination cited the revised Historic Plan Element and historic regulations as advancing this goal.

B. THE EXTENT TO WHICH PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES HAVE BEEN REDUCED OR INCREASED

- Goal #1: Preserving rural character has become increasingly difficult.

The State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP) Policy Map divides Branchburg among five “Planning Areas”, which reflect the intent of the State Plan. These include:

Planning Area 2 (PA2) – Suburban Planning Area (generally south of Deerfield Trail and north of Forest Lane throughout central Branchburg)

Planning Area 3 (PA3) – Fringe Planning Area (small area along Windy Willow Way)

Planning Area 4 (PA4) – Rural Planning Area (generally south of Forest Lane throughout the southern portion of Branchburg)

Planning Area 4B (PA4B) – Rural/Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (extreme northern portion of Branchburg)

Planning Area 5 (PA5) – Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (along the river and stream corridors)

Throughout the various Planning Areas, the intent of the SDRP seeks to revitalize cities and towns and confine public sewers and water systems to “centers” (cities, towns, villages and hamlets), where growth is to be directed. Within each Planning Area, however, the State Plan targets distinct objectives for the use and conservation of land and water resources. In PA2, protecting natural resources and community character and redesigning areas of sprawl are primary goals. Throughout the remainder of Branchburg, however, in PA4, PA4B and PA5 are areas that are not intended to become suburban. Rather, the SDRP promotes the retention of large contiguous areas of farmland and other open lands in PA4, to help maintain a viable agricultural economy. PA5 seeks to retain large contiguous areas to protect environmental resources, while PA4B has the combined intent of PA4 and PA5.

Branchburg has significant areas of preserved open space along the riverfront greenway and preserved farms in both the northern and southern sectors of the Township that serve as anchoring elements in the Township’s linear open space network. However, the development standards of the “A” Agricultural Zone, which result in conventional sprawling suburban lots, have transformed much of this 3-acre agricultural zone into suburban development.

- Goal #2: Land use diversity has increased as new development has replaced some tired uses, but conflicts with neighbors remain a concern.

Hotels and upscale age-restricted housing are among the uses approved by variance that will expand the range of land uses in Branchburg. However, the fairly generous bulk and use requirements of the Industrial and OL zones are attractive to truck-reliant uses, and substantial lands within these categories remain undeveloped. In some cases, these zones adjoin densely developed residential neighborhoods and can produce significant conflict, as industrial or commercially zoned lands are converted to parking lots and loading areas in close proximity to residential neighbors.

A 2002 analysis of the remaining undeveloped land in Branchburg's commercial and industrial zones revealed that over 8.6 million square feet of non-residential floor area could be developed, based on current zoning. Over $\frac{3}{4}$ of this total would result from build-out of the I-1 and I-2 Zones (over 6 million square feet), while the OL Zone would account for almost 1.9 million square feet. Nearly half of all potential non-residential development in Branchburg would occur on vacant land south of Route 22 in the I-1 Industrial zoning district.

By contrast, non-residential development of vacant land within the Office Zone (slightly over 200,000 square feet) and the Retail Service Zones (slightly over 80,000 square feet) represent a minor portion of the future non-residential build out.

Providing for compatible, orderly in-fill development remains a challenge, particularly where non-residential development will occur in close proximity to existing residences.

- Goal #3: The goal of orderly, compatible infill requires rethinking some permitted uses.

To assure compatible, orderly in-fill development, attention should be paid to areas where non-residential development will occur in close proximity to existing residences, especially densely settled neighborhoods.

- Goal # 4: Affordable housing resources have kept pace with the obligation.

Addressing Branchburg's affordable housing obligation has been further advanced through mediation of the Branchburg Builders, Inc. litigation, resulting in a 2004 finding by COAH that the Township had 8 affordable units in excess of its Second Round obligation.

- Goal # 5: Preserving and protecting North Branch and Neshanic Station as existing centers will require attention.

Repeated flooding in North Branch has been disruptive of lifestyles and businesses, and required removal or raising of historic structures, altering the fabric of the hamlet. Managing the character of traffic and land use in the Route 28 corridor is key to the quality of life in North Branch. And while the fabric of Neshanic Station has remained beyond substantial suburban encroachment, it not remain so for much longer.

- Goals #6 & #7 have been addressed - utility and air safety zoning has been put in place.
- Goal # 8: Providing open space and community facilities were advanced by the Planning Board's adoption of the Open Space and Recreation Plan Element in 2002, including a detailed recreation needs assessment.

The 2002 Open Space and Recreation Plan documented the inventory of active recreation lands (590 acres) and passive open space (over 1,100 acres). While the needs analysis concluded that Branchburg conformed to recommended minimum open space and recreation standards, the Open Space Plan acknowledged the importance of a continuing program to acquire additional land and further develop recreation facilities – key elements in the perceived, and actual, quality of life in the community. The Open Space and Recreation Plan included an action plan calling for priority acquisition criteria and outlining a series of implementation approaches and funding sources. The acquisition targeting process will be aided by a priority ranking system currently being developed with the assistance of the Open Space Advisory Committee.

- Goal #9: The Township’s historic and natural resources will require continuing care and attention.

Cultural and historic resource protection has been advanced through the preparation of a historic preservation plan. Mapping and description of Branchburg’s natural resources has not been updated since the 1983 Master Plan, which included black-and-white natural resource mapping. The Township’s natural resource protection and landscape stewardship goals suggest the need for a comprehensive Conservation Plan Element.

- Goal#10: Protection of historic sites has been advanced, but not regulated, and additional attention is needed to reflect this concern.

The Historic Preservation Plan has identified and characterized local historic resources, although no historic districts have been designated within the zoning ordinance.

C. THE EXTENT TO WHICH THERE HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE ASSUMPTIONS, POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES FORMING THE BASIS FOR THE MASTER PLAN AND DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS SINCE LAST REVISED

RURAL CHARACTER.

The assumption that 3-acre agricultural zoning will maintain the rural ambiance of Branchburg is no longer valid. The limited growth designations in the SDRP have prompted many nearby municipalities to reduce permitted development densities to better reflect the resources conservation objectives of the Rural Planning Area (PA 4), and the Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA 5).

And as other semi-rural municipalities continue to substantially reduce densities and/or increase lot sizes, Branchburg’s agricultural zone will prove increasingly attractive for suburban development. Additionally, the Highlands legislation, which has dramatically reduced the development potential of over 800,000 acres in northern New Jersey, increases the threat of rapid conversion of Branchburg’s rural reaches for residential use.

Three-acre zoning is a template for suburban sprawl that uses up all of the land, virtually assuring that housing will consume all the farmlands or woodlands proposed for development.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER AND BALANCED LAND USES.

Providing a balance and diversity of non-residential uses remains a goal of this reexamination report. However, the potential build-out of non-residential zones, which will attract truck-intensive uses and limited employment, does not appear to reflect a balance, but rather is heavily loaded with industrial uses. Additionally, in locations where non-residential uses will intrude into established residential settings, or where future residential development will be negatively impacted by non-residential uses, it is appropriate to reconsider the most appropriate uses for some of these zones.

Age restricted housing, a “clean” ratable popular with developers and municipalities alike, is increasingly seen as a viable substitute for industrial uses, since it produces substantial tax ratable benefits without the truck traffic, loading docks, lighting, traffic and other impacts attendant to industrial and commercial uses. Appendix “C” examines relevant considerations related to age-restricted housing and its appropriateness for Branchburg. It should be noted that very low pupil generation rates are also seen in certain non-age-restricted housing types, which generally include higher cost, multi-story elevator buildings with structured parking under buildings. When age restrictions are not employed, diverse housing opportunities can help meet the housing needs of young couples and professionals without children, as well as empty nesters.

COMPATIBLE INFILL

Providing for the orderly and compatible in-fill development of remaining vacant parcels continues to be an objective of this reexamination report. Nonetheless, reexamination of the relationship between residential and non-residential zones should yield a series of recommendations to minimize incompatibilities between these uses.

While the Township has generally supported the State Plan designations for suburban and limited growth areas in Branchburg, the 1999 Reexamination Report found that “a new high intensity mixed use center would be out of character and frustrate the established pattern of development”. It is unclear what was intended by “high intensity mixed use center”, but the smart growth policies advanced by the State Plan suggest that mixed use developments can also provide desirable a neighborhood character, with high quality architecture and design, increased local employment and solid ratable generation.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Branchburg has addressed the Township’s affordable housing obligation with a variety of strategies that have met and exceeded prior COAH obligations. Planning proactively for the new “growth share” obligation, required under the Third Round COAH rules, is a key objective and must assume a high priority, since the obligation falls upon the

Township, unless Branchburg provides for developer participation. The Township will be undertaking an update of the housing plan element and fair share plan in the latter part of 2006.

HISTORIC RESOURCES

Historic preservation has long been objective of Branchburg's Master Plan. Evidence of Branchburg's historic past is spread throughout the Township, where farmsteads and historic homes and other structures impart a distinctive scenic and historic character to the countryside and Branchburg's traditional neighborhoods. A rich cultural landscape spans from one end of town to the other, with the Raritan River as a focus and backdrop.

The most significant concentrations of cultural resources in Branchburg are the historic buildings and landscapes at the North Branch Hamlet, and in the village of Neshanic Station. The Historic Preservation Commission has noted the need for an updated inventory of historic sites and districts, calling attention to Branchburg's historic resources at South Branch, Burnt Mills and Centerville, as well as the settlements at Neshanic Station and North Branch. Centerville's historic fabric, while largely contained in Readington Township, extends into Branchburg, as does the Burnt Mills historic district, which spans the North Branch of the Raritan River into Bedminster.

Repeated flooding of the North Branch has forced the removal or elevation of many historic homes and other buildings in the South Branch area, where most of the hamlet is set within the wide floodplain that spans from the river to near Station Road. Protection of the remaining historic fabric of North Branch Hamlet should assume a high priority, and North Branch is a historic center that may serve as the nucleus of an expanding "smart growth" center.

Neshanic Station in southern Branchburg contains numerous reminders of its historic heritage, set astride the scenic North Branch and the historic bridges spanning the river here. The many intact buildings and the walkable neighborhood character offer a distinctive lifestyle, where open space is centrally located and historic dwellings are arranged in a traditional neighborhood style.

Traditional neighborhood design has evolved as a major smart growth initiative, with new development attempting to mimic the character of older historic areas. While neo-traditional developments strive to create an identity and build credibility as a desirable place, many of the authentic places in New Jersey's rural reaches are under attack from infill redevelopment.

Infill redevelopment involves expansion or replacement of existing buildings or further subdivision of existing developed lots. Touted as a smart growth technique, insensitive infill can undermine the established fabric of quaint villages like Neshanic Station by introducing out-of-scale new buildings, sometimes unflatteringly called McMansions, and frequently bearing no relationship to the architectural vernacular reflected in the villages.

As North Branch and Neshanic Station have grown and changed over time, parcels of various sizes have been created, some smaller and some larger. Branchburg's village and hamlet zoning standards permit subdivision to a least common denominator lot size, generally reflecting the smallest typical lot size within the village. This zoning invites the deconstruction or radical alteration of these scenic hamlets and villages, as stately older homes on "oversized" parcels are frequently relegated to undignified remnant parcels as large new modern homes and blacktop cul-de-sac "lollipops" erase the context of an earlier era, and with it, an important element of village character. Left unchecked, the proliferation of residential subdivision to achieve the least common denominator lot sizes will undermine the scenic historic character of the villages.

As Branchburg continues to promote and preserve its agricultural and historic heritage through increased land preservation activities and public education and information, it will be important to identify threats to community character and to propose land use policies and regulations that are effective at protecting this character while also permitting beneficial economic use of private property.

Of particular concern is the fact that there is no protection at this time from demolition of historic structures or insensitive infill in historic districts. As the "tear down" phenomenon spreads across New Jersey, suburban neighborhoods are increasingly affected and historic districts are particularly threatened.

Preserving and protecting the Township's historic centers remains an important objective, although it is unlikely that historic preservation planning alone will inspire private actions that will preserve these resources and maintain vitality in these areas.

OPEN SPACE AND FARMLAND

The importance of preserving open space and farmland has increased as the Township has witnessed the continuing march of suburban expansion throughout formerly rural portions of the Township. The Township is currently developing an acquisition targeting system for open space and farmland that combines the priorities for important natural resource conservation and recreational utility with a recognition of the threat of permitted development.

The 1999 Reexamination noted that cluster residential development was included in the prior master plan and subsequently removed, because the regulations failed to account for critical land features that serve to limit development potential. This in effect provided a density bonus for less developable parcels, and in 1999 the Planning Board recommended limited use of clustering "where it would benefit the Township". At this time it appears that clustering techniques can provide a significant impetus for the conservation of remaining rural character and large contiguous open areas, assets valued and recognized in the plans of Branchburg, Somerset County and the State.

NORTH BRANCH/ROUTE 28 CORRIDOR REVITALIZATION

The Route 28 corridor poses a unique opportunity for smart growth efforts, anchored by Raritan Valley Community College and North Branch hamlet, both significant activity centers. As Branchburg examines its opportunities for creative design and beneficial development, this area holds the potential for a rebirth of North Branch as an evolving mixed use center. The ability to create a dynamic streetscape in this area is enhanced by the availability of significant-sized vacant parcels woven among prime opportunities for redevelopment.

The Township should explore the market forces that will shape the future of the Route 28 corridor. They have the potential to make this area one of the most dynamic, people-oriented, multi-use centers in the county, if a coherent vision can be articulated, embraced and paired with land use strategies that provide the right “fit” for North Branch and Branchburg Township. Where Route 202 and Route 22 are relatively inhospitable to pedestrian and bicycle traffic, and have been designed for higher speed traffic, North Branch and Route 28 offer a refreshing contrast, and an opportunity to maximize bicycle and pedestrian connectivity among homes, shops, workplaces and open spaces.

Residents of the North Branch area have expressed concerns that traffic speed and volume compromise the quality of life in their neighborhood. As Branchburg explores changes to zoning and design standards in this area to optimize neighborhood character, traffic calming measures should be employed to the greatest extent practicable. Branchburg should develop partnering relationships with the County, the State and RVCC to promote a walkable and livable Main Street along the Route 28 Corridor.

Assuring that development does not increase flooding problems in North Branch is another key concern of the Township and area residents. Branchburg’s newly adopted stormwater management plan suggests that mitigation may be useful where full compliance with stormwater mitigation cannot be reasonably accommodated on site. To the extent possible, mitigation strategies should be directed toward the North Branch flooding problem.

D. RECOMMENDED CHANGES TO THE MASTER PLAN AND LAND USE ORDINANCE

MASTER PLAN RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Updated Vision Statement.

Building upon the longstanding objectives of conserving natural resources and protecting historic character and scenic vistas while promoting beneficial development, the Planning Board proposes an updated vision statement that reflects the Townships current goals and objectives. This new vision statement emphasizes the importance of enhancing historic buildings and districts; protecting and preserving open space and farmland; establishing density and intensity standards to relate development and redevelopment activities with

the natural and built infrastructure; preventing sprawl development with appropriate regulatory techniques; providing housing opportunities for all ages and income levels; and implementing landscaping and design criteria to encourage the highest quality of development.

A recommended “Vision” statement, representing a summary of Branchburg’s planning goals and objectives, is included as Appendix B.

2. Natural Resources Inventory/Conservation Plan

The Township should develop a comprehensive natural resources inventory which updates the 1983 Master Plan using GIS technology and current NJDEP and other data. This resource inventory should serve as the basis for a comprehensive conservation plan which outlines Branchburg’s ambitions for the preservation, conservation and utilization of natural resources.

3. Resource Conservation Zone.

The North Branch and South Branch form a meandering green spine along the Township’s eastern boundary before they join to form the main stem of the Raritan River. Valuable as a life sustaining potable water resource, the river and its riparian corridor also serve as a flood storage zone and critical habitat area that contributes to the attractive and scenic countryside character of Branchburg.

The SDRP includes the Raritan River and its flood plain within Planning Area 5, and throughout this area extensive state and county ownership provide permanent preservation of an expansive greenway connecting the Township’s agricultural and less developed northern and southern sectors. Fertile farmland, easily converted to housing, has been displaced by new neighborhoods in many areas, and remaining lands are increasingly affected by critical land and water features (wetlands, steep slopes, floodplains, etc.).

As seen on the map titled “Proposed Changes to the Land Use Plan and Zoning Map”, this 2006 Reexamination Report recommends establishing a new Resource Conservation (RC) District that combines agricultural and other open lands along the riverfront corridor into a continuous low intensity/conservation zone throughout the Township from north to south (excluding only Route 28 frontage lots). This configuration is shown on the map titled “Recommended Changes to the Land Use Plan”. Recognizing that substantial portions of the Agriculture District have been developed in the southern portion of Branchburg, a new R-3/3 acre residential zone is proposed throughout the residentially-developed portion of the Agriculture district.

To achieve the objectives of the SDRP and Branchburg’s Master Plan to conserve large contiguous masses of farmland and other undeveloped lands, these lands need to be retained as a byproduct of development, rather than entirely committed to development. The new RC zone will address this need by reducing the permitted density of residential

development, with a 6-acre per unit density standard replacing the current 3-acre standard. Conventional subdivisions of 6 acre lots should be discouraged or prohibited, while conservation-based cluster designs, which retain most of a parcel as open space or farmland, should be encouraged or mandated.

The East Amwell Open Lands zoning approach, upheld by the Appellate Division, provides a model for retaining significant agricultural and other open lands after development, by limiting development to roughly 25% of the tract area. This is accomplished by permitting the reduction of single-family residential lots to the extent they can reasonably accommodate septic systems. In East Amwell's Agricultural District, where soil and geologic conditions are similar to those found in Branchburg, a 1-½ acre minimum was selected.

Lot size averaging, which permits the varying of lot sizes based on an overall tract density, can also be a useful tool, provided lot averaging standards are designed to assure large contiguous areas and large parcels remain after development, and that most lots in the subdivision are reduced to or near the minimum (i.e. 1 ½ acres). This helps to retain valuable farmland for continuing agriculture, flood plains and other open lands to perform their natural functions and retaining wildlife habitat to the greatest extent practicable.

4. Age-restricted housing.

A number of developers have expressed interest in construction of housing designed for active adults (at least one resident over 55 and no children under 18), and proposals have been advanced for this use at a number of locations around the Township. Typically, these are single-use communities, and not mixed-use developments. Age-restricted housing is an attractive land use for a number of reasons. It provides housing for a growing demographic segment, as the baby boom approaches retirement years. Since these units place no burden on the local school system, which is the most expensive part of the local tax bill, age restricted housing is a clean ratable that is relatively low in water use, has relatively low traffic impacts and provides a significant ratable benefit for relatively little local service cost to the municipality.

In light of the Township's longstanding concerns that residential uses be protected from conflicts with non-residential uses, age-restricted housing offers some unique advantages. Since it is residential in nature, it does not involve commercial traffic and loading operations or extensive paved areas and nighttime lighting glare. Rather, as a residential use, it is highly compatible with non-restricted housing neighborhoods, particularly when compared to non-residential uses. Many communities express concern that an influx of older residents will require more expanded emergency services including ambulance and rescue personnel, concerns that should be evaluated along with any proposals for age restricted development.

In recent months, applications before the Planning Board have highlighted conflicts that have resulted where truck movements, blacktop, lighting and noise have affected the

lifestyles of nearby residents. The Planning Board has looked at potential locations for Planned Adult Community (PAC) districts to minimize future conflicts, and recommends their establishment in one or more locations to be determined.

The Planning Board has heard neighbors in the residential zones objecting to industrial development within the industrial zones in close proximity to their homes and residential neighborhoods. Inclusion of the PAC zone at such locations may offer several advantages, reducing boundary conflicts and serving as transitions between residential neighborhoods and higher intensity uses.

5. North Branch Hamlet Extension

Old Route 28 provides a unique opportunity for smart growth planning and design. Extending from North Branch hamlet at the Raritan River to Route 22, this corridor includes the historic hamlet, significant vacant parcels, likely redevelopment parcels and the College. This provides a unique opportunity for pedestrian-friendly mixed-use neighborhoods, where a walkable and attractive streetscape is the central element in the development and revitalization of this area. As currently zoned, existing residential zones adjoin Route 28 on the north and industrial and retail service zones are to the south.

The Route 28 corridor is a logical extension of the North Branch hamlet. West of Station Road, this area outside the flood plain has tremendous potential for smart growth, including new development and redevelopment. Reinforcing this historic center can create a vital, walkable “Main Street” that will be the core conduit of a comprehensively-planned assemblage of diverse housing types, as well as commercial and other non-residential uses.

Economic development initiatives frequently migrate toward college settings and New Jersey’s pharmaceutical industry is developing continuing initiatives in this area. The North Branch hamlet extension area has the potential to develop considerable synergy among a variety of residential, retail and office uses in highly styled, attractive architectural designs. A visioning process, including design charrettes, should be conducted to engage public participation in shaping the character and composition of the evolving Route 28 corridor and the expanding North Branch neighborhood.

6. RIVERWALK: Bike and Hike Trail

Branchburg is planning, with the aid of a Somerset County planning grant, for a bike and hike trail spanning the length of the greenway corridor and connecting preserved open spaces with the Township’s residential neighborhoods. Conceived as a scenic and recreational asset for Branchburg residents with eco-tourism appeal, Riverwalk can serve as a potential linkage among other regional greenways. This plan should be developed with an eye toward safety, connectivity and ecotourism.

7. Scenic Resource Management Guidelines

Several scenic corridors throughout Branchburg Township reveal attractive natural landscapes including broad floodplains, wooded stream valleys and expansive agricultural grasslands. The Township should develop a technique to identify and categorize these scenic resources and develop management strategies to prevent new development from substantially degrading the scenic character of Branchburg.

8. Route 22 Vision Plan

While existing development and preservation objectives have largely shaped the land use plan for the southern and central portions of the Township and its northern tier, the most significant area slated for development in Branchburg is the Route 22 Industrial Zone.

The major concentration of usable vacant land found in this area occupies a prominent regional location where industrial uses may not be the highest and best use or a good fit for Branchburg residents.

Combined with the significant redevelopment opportunities found along this corridor, particularly near Old Route 28, new development in this area will dramatically shape the perception of Branchburg for those who traverse the corridor. It will also play an important role in shaping the balance of land uses and the ratable benefits. The quality of life in many neighborhoods will also be shaped in part by the types of uses and the way this area develops.

It is remarkable that such a significant massing of vacant or underutilized land is found at such a desirable regional location. However, the opportunity this area presents for smarter growth suggests that this is an area in need of a new vision. The millions of square feet of single use industrial development currently zoned along Route 22 may undermine the potential for this area to inspire more desirable development patterns, better and cleaner ratables and a true diversity of land uses in Branchburg.

The process of “revising” for Route 22 may prove to be an appropriate adjunct to the visioning process recommended for the North Branch Extension, and both should be undertaken expeditiously, as development interests are keen and requests for use variances and zoning changes are increasing.

9. Historic and Cultural Resource Management

As recommended by the Historic Preservation Committee, a thorough inventory of the Township’s historic resources should be updated and refined, and the portions of the Centerville and Burnt Mills Historic Districts which are located in Branchburg should be specifically highlighted within the Historic Preservation Plan, along with North Branch and Neshanic Station. The updated inventory of historic sites and districts should be prepared using GIS mapping and a searchable database.

Branchburg’s historic resources at South Branch, Burnt Mills and Centerville, as well as the settlements at Neshanic Station and North Branch, are an important reflection of its cultural heritage. The Historic Preservation Plan should identify strategies to prevent demolition of historic structures or insensitive infill in historic districts.

Branchburg should also explore developing a “Pride in Place” initiative, to aid public awareness and promote the preservation and restoration of the Township’s historic sites and districts. Community pride and increased awareness of Branchburg’s heritage can be supported with a variety of activities, including photo contests, heritage events and similar interest-raising activities, along with a coordinated public information and education program, which can help to protect community character and manage change in these neighborhoods.

ORDINANCE RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the significant changes and enhancements to the Master Plan outlined above, the following changes are recommended to the Township’s land use ordinances.

1. **Design Standards** – High quality design is a reflection of a community’s values and the response of the development community. When a place lacks desirability, it is difficult to demand much. However, in a desirable location like Branchburg, where the return on investment will be high, it is important to provide design guidance that will produce a coherent design theme.

The Township should develop a vocabulary of design standards to unify the character of new development and redevelopment around central design themes, responsive to local objectives for various areas of Branchburg. Protection of historic sites and districts will demand a certain type of approach, targeted to retaining the desirable existing character.

Design guidelines for the highway corridor areas should offer a cohesive vision of the future character to be encouraged. These are high-visibility areas that have a high potential for redevelopment and infill new development. Developing a cohesive design theme and standards that assure quality design will be important to “placemaking” in these districts. Traditional architectural designs are favored.

Since the retail service zones are also gateways into Branchburg (from Bridgewater along Route 202 and into the Route 28 corridor/RVCC/North Branch hamlet), they play a unique role in shaping the evolving identity that Branchburg is achieving over time. At present, the RS zones lack any unifying themes, and fail to convey a desirable sense of place. The scenic, natural North Branch greenway that marks the point of entry into Branchburg along Route 202 is eclipsed as a gateway by the auto fueling and fast food uses with large signs.

2. **Buffers** – The Township should review current standards regarding buffer width and planting requirements to assure that landscaping of new or expanded non-residential uses protects nearby residential neighborhoods from negative impacts

and reinforces the high quality of development sought by Branchburg Township. Where new residential development is proposed adjacent to existing industrial or commercial uses, a “last man in” buffer requirement should be imposed on the residential development parcel, to prevent the juxtaposition of incompatible uses and unnecessary nuisance factors.

3. **Parking** – Current parking standards related to shopping centers and other commercial uses should be reexamined to assure that adequate parking is being provided while at the same time not requiring unnecessary blacktop for parking in excess of what is actually required.
4. **Tree Ordinance** – The Township should develop an enforceable standard for prevention of inappropriate tree removal and the requirement for replacement landscaping.
5. **Impact assessment** – Regulatory tools to assess impacts of development (environmental, traffic, fiscal, etc.) should be reviewed to assure that they provide a clear picture of the effects of all development, and the threshold for this requirement should address smaller scale developments (i.e.-5 or more dwellings) as well as those of a larger scale. Additionally, Branchburg has expressed an interest in imposing “impact fees”, which are not currently authorized by statute for general use by municipalities. However, impact fees may be charged when Transfer of Development Rights (TDR) are used to protect the Highlands Preservation Area. Since Highlands TDR receiving areas can be designated in any municipality within a “Highlands County”, Branchburg should explore whether this could be a useful tool.
6. **Midland School** – Midland Adult Services (MAS) has proposed to build an adult residential project. The current Community Facilities (CF) zoning of the Midland School does not permit such use, and MAS has tentatively proposed to make such housing available to the general public with disabilities, and not only those affiliated with Midland School. Rezoning to permit this use should be explored, along with whether these units would qualify for COAH credits.
7. **Minimum Lot Area for Unsewered Lots in the LD Zone** –In remaining undeveloped portions of the LD zone, the current lot area requirement is not appropriate unless sewer service is available. In areas of the LD Zone without sewers, an increased lot area requirement should be imposed.
8. **Floor Area Ratio and Lot Coverage for Non-residential Zones** – The intensity of non-residential uses can be controlled using a variety of techniques, including building coverage, lot coverage and floor area ratio (FAR). Branchburg does not currently utilize a FAR requirement in these zones, but could benefit from such a regulatory tool. Additionally, coverage standards should be reconsidered to assure that new development and redevelopment are properly scaled to available and usable land.

9. **Zoning Map** – The map titled “Proposed Changes to the Land Use Plan and Zoning Map” will form the basis for changes to the Zoning Map after adoption of the revised land use plan.

10. **Historic and Cultural Resource Management** - Permitted residential development densities within the Hamlet and Village Districts should be reconsidered. The 8,000 square foot minimum lot size permitted in North Branch and the 15,000 square foot minimum in Neshanic Station will promote potentially damaging infill redevelopment and may encourage the removal and replacement of existing buildings on lots exceeding these minimums. While the 8,000 and 15,000 square foot minimums are reasonable to accommodate the uses found in these areas at this point, further subdivision to achieve these minimum criteria will serve to deconstruct the historic fabric. Additionally, the substantially larger homes and outdoor amenities frequently constructed today would be woefully out of place on such small lots.

In the North Branch Hamlet District and the Neshanic Station Village Residential District, the following revisions should be made to VR and NBH “Purpose”

“§3-6 VR VILLAGE RESIDENTIAL DISTRICT (NESHANIC STATION)

§3-6.1 Purpose

The purpose of the VR zone is to recognize the unique character of the Neshanic Station and ensure that any new development is consistent with the character and scale of the existing Village development. The traditional neighborhood fabric that has grown around the historic village core does not intrude upon the older historic area of the village. And while substantial suburban development has occurred in the environs around the village, the remaining farmland and preserved open spaces along the South Branch greenway are reminders of the historic setting of the village that reinforce its special character. Access to the scenic corridors that traverse the village should be carefully managed, and changes to the scenic roadside should be minimized, to prevent the intrusion of incongruous elements along a gracefully aging streetscape.

§3-7 NBH NORTH BRANCH HAMLET ZONE

§3-7.1 Purpose

The purpose of the NBH zone is to ensure the continued existence of the historic North Branch hamlet, and to recognize its special character. Managing change in the environs of the hamlet will also be very important, since large undeveloped areas have the potential to overwhelm the tiny hamlet with sprawling conventional development patterns, rather than provide for the orderly growth and expansion of North Branch as a center. The NBH district permits small-scale development on remaining vacant lots, and seeks to promote the preservation of the village character, to serve as the nucleus of an expanding mixed use place that is walkable and physically appealing.

sections:

Managing the character of change in the historic districts is central to retaining their authentic sense of place. Among the features that would assist in protecting the special character of these traditional neighborhoods are:

- a. Inclusion of a density standard that reduces the incentive to maximize subdivision potential in these zones.
- b. Designation of historic districts in the Land Development Ordinance, as authorized by the MLUL.

11. Retail Service Zones - At present, the use and bulk characteristics of the retail service zones have resulted in the development of highway-oriented uses with extensive coverage and, even for newer developments, extensive front yard parking. Despite the landscape requirements of the Land Development Ordinance, these zoning standards do not invoke any desirable sense of place, but rather assure a “highway strip” appearance, where blacktop and automobiles dominate the streetscape.

Among the regulatory changes that should be considered for these zones, site design should be manipulated to reduce the appearance of blacktop and vehicles, eliminating or sharply curtailing front yard parking and developing façade setbacks that establish a more engaging streetscape of stylistically compatible buildings.

Additionally, some uses like automobile fueling stations, which are dominated by automobiles and covered with open canopies, cannot readily be given a “streetscape” feeling or traditional styling. As such, they are not well suited to establishing a gateway “signature”, but they are nonetheless valuable uses to travelers along the highway. Since both Route 22 and Route 202 have a multiplicity of existing service stations, it may be appropriate to establish a variant on the retail service zone focused on these highway uses, and to preserve other portions of the retail service zone for more engaging architecture to reinforce the traditional styling that typifies the Township’s historic buildings.

E. RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING REDEVELOPMENT PLANS

During 2005, the Planning Board evaluated the State highway corridor areas and identified several locations that could qualify for redevelopment area designation.

- Along Route 22 westbound, extending eastward from the intersection of old Route 28, the westbound Route 22 frontage includes a series of automobile related uses and trailer parks with extensive coverage and outdated uses. This area would likely qualify for a redevelopment designation.

- Along Route 202, within the Retail Service zone, the Planning Board identified a series of adjacent facilities on both northbound and southbound frontages that appeared to qualify for redevelopment designation.

Market-based redevelopment has replaced a number of former motels and other uses with new development, suggesting that the desirability of Branchburg will continue to inspire redevelopment without the need for redevelopment designations. However, the opportunity for ad hoc rezoning through variances has been witnessed already and may continue absent a plan for desired redevelopment.

This reexamination has examined the likely locations for redevelopment, and a detailed characterization of how the statutory criteria for Redevelopment Area designation apply to lands and buildings in Branchburg can be provided to the Township Committee for their review and action, if such an initiative is deemed desirable. It may be desirable for the Township to adopt one or more redevelopment plans to manage Retail Service Zone lands close to residential neighborhoods. Such plans could specify a mix of land uses, using residential uses as transitions to current neighborhoods. The redevelopment plans could also establish internal circulation streets and pedestrian/bikeways to promote neighborhood connectivity.

APPENDIX A

SUMMARY OF BRANCBURG'S ADOPTED PLANS (1993-2006) AND CROSS ACCEPTANCE

Branchburg Master Plan Reexamination / Land Use Plan (July 1993)

A. Reexamination Report

The *1993 Master Plan Reexamination Report* identified seven major goals from the *1988 Master Plan* and addressed the progress, or lack thereof, in their implementation. Substantial progress was noted with respect to the follow objectives:

- Preserving farmland through acquisition of development rights for several farms.
- Preserving rural areas and natural features by virtue of protections afforded by freshwater wetlands regulations and through the adoption of a density adjustment ordinance.
- Improved landscaping standards for commercial and residential uses.
- Development of a new municipal complex on Route 202.
- Approval of a senior citizen facility within an affordable housing site on Whiton Road.

Other goals from the *1988 Master Plan* that remained unfulfilled were:

- Create a viewshed inventory.
- Implement zoning regulations to create rural hamlets and 'village centers'.
- Implement a Transfer of Development Rights program.
- Establish "*less stringent*" standards for roads in the Township's rural areas.
- Limit strip commercial development.
- Prepare "*redevelopment standards*" for facades, parking areas, landscaping and signs.
- Construction of a new municipal library.

Agricultural and low density zoning in proximity to the existing villages of North Branch and Neshanic Station were credited with helping to implement design and develop standards to reflect the community's "*positive aesthetic values*". Construction of corporate offices on large parcels along Route 202 was cited as a positive step in the implementation of the Master Plan goals, whereas the expansion of a mobile home park and the failure to upgrade the quality of industrial buildings received negative ratings.

Planting street trees and landscaping for properties along Route 22 and Route 202 was suggested to enhance the Township's "*rural/suburban*" character. In the more rural areas of the Township, the *1988 Master Plan* called for streetscape improvements (lighting, fencing, sidewalks, landscaping) in conjunction with "*less stringent road standards*",

although it was noted that the goal to create “*new and enhanced villages*” was not carried out.

Significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives influencing the Master Plan analysis since 1988 included the *State Development and Redevelopment Plan* (SDRP) delineation of Branchburg into three distinct Planning Areas (PA2, PA4, and PA5; Suburban, Rural, and Environmentally Sensitive, respectively), and the *Council On Affordable Housing* (COAH), which assigned Branchburg an affordable housing obligation of 112 units for the period of 1993 – 1999.

B. Land Use Plan Element

The *Land Use Plan Element* identified 10 Goals and Objectives as follows:

1. Preserve rural character of Branchburg’s undeveloped areas.
2. To provide for a diversity of nonresidential uses in appropriate locations to provide for a balance of land uses with the Township.
3. To provide for the orderly, compatible infill development of remaining vacant parcels within the Township.
4. To address Branchburg’s affordable housing obligation.
5. To preserve and protect the Township’s existing centers of North Branch and Neshanic Station.
6. The large scale utility uses in the Township should be acknowledged and be designated to reflect the existing electric and gas utilities in the Land Use Plan.
7. To address the statutory requirements for Air Hazard Zones pursuant to the Air Safety and Hazardous Zoning Act of 1983 as amended.
8. To provide for the open space and community facilities of existing and future residents of the Township. The Township should prepare a detailed Recreation Needs Assessment to project the Township’s requirements for recreation facilities and parkland.
9. To identify and protect the Township’s historic and natural resources.
10. To provide for the regulation of historic sites consistent with the State statutes.

The *Land Use Plan* also identified several “*special study areas*” with specific issues of concern. They were as follows:

Route 202/Route 22 Commercial Corridors

The major concerns focused on circulation, parking, signage, landscaping, permitted uses, and bulk standards. Recommendations to address the problems included a limit on the number of curb cuts, revised driveway standards, improved buffering of parking areas, and revised standards to discourage front yard parking.

North Branch Hamlet

Nonresidential uses in the VR Village Residential district were found contribute to traffic noise and safety concerns, particularly resulting from unregulated on-street parking conditions.

Neshanic Station Village

The need for development regulations for both residential and business uses to promote development and redevelopment in character with the historic village was underscored.

The analysis of the Township's zone plan offered a number of recommendations, summarized below.

Residential Areas

- A-Agricultural: The minimum lot area was recommended to increase to 3 acres with consideration for reduced improvement standards (road width, curbing, drainage facilities) for lots of 5-to-10 acres. Lot averaging and flag lots in conjunction with design standards to protect natural features and view was likewise suggested.
- LD-Low Density Residential: Ensuring infill development compatible with established neighborhoods and protecting stream corridors through land dedication or conservation easements were recommended.
- VR-Village Residential (Neshanic Station): As with the LD District, the recommendation called for standards to ensure that the scale, rhythm and setbacks of infill development would be compatible with established development patterns.

Commercial Areas

Revisions to the bulk standards and improved landscaping and signage criteria for the R/S-Retail Service District on Route 202 and along Route 22 / County Route 614 corridor was recommended to improve the aesthetic character of the area. Separate bulk and dimensional standards were also suggested for the Route 22 / County Route 614 corridor, to account for the distinct lot configurations with frontage on both roadways.

Minimum lot sizes of 10 acres with a FAR not to exceed 0.2, together with improved design standards and increased buffers of 100 feet or more to adjacent residential uses was proposed for the O/L-Office/Laboratory District along the Route 202 corridor. For

the O-Office District along the Route 22 corridor, the Plan recommended a minimum lot size of 5 acres for business, professional and administrative offices.

Industrial Areas

The revision or elimination of a Floor Area Ratio (FAR) standard and reduced permitted lot coverage constituted the changes proposed for the I-1 District along Route 22 corridor. The other industrial area, the I-2 District at the Route 202/Old York Road intersection, was targeted for a change to increase the minimum lot area to 5 acres and the elimination of manufacturing activity among the permitted uses.

Public and Semi-Public Areas

The single recommendation here concerned the need recognize existing gas transmission and electric substation areas as “Utility” districts.

Branchburg Master Plan Reexamination Report (August 1999)

The most recent Master Plan Reexamination Report was adopted by the Planning Board in August 1999. The ten Goals and Objectives set forth in the 1993 Land Use Plan Element were analyzed with regard to the extent the problems and objectives had been met. A summary of the findings is presented below.

- The goal to preserve the Township’s rural character was found to have been “*fairly successful*” through low density residential zoning in the northern and southern sections of the municipality and through the preservation of agricultural land through acquisition of development rights.
- Comprehensive ordinance changes helped accomplish the goal of creating a diversity of nonresidential uses. Specific examples include the creation of a large lot, low FAR Office-Laboratory zone and zoning modifications along the Route 22 corridor to provide for a variety of office uses. Improved design standards and landscaping requirements were credited with the enhanced quality of site improvements.
- Progress was acknowledged in creating adequate safeguards to protect existing neighborhoods and to establish effective buffers between different land uses or intensities of uses resulting from the development of remaining vacant parcels, however; the need to upgrade such buffers to protect residential areas from non-residential development remained a key concern.
- The Township’s cumulative affordable housing obligation was met through 1999.

- In order to protect and preserve the character of the existing centers of North Branch and Neshanic Station, the 1999 Reexamination Report urged the adoption of the draft Historic Plan Element and revised regulations.
- The Land Use Plan was revised to include a category for the existing large scale utility uses in the Township, thus satisfying that particular goal.
- Air hazard zoning was adopted consistent with the Air Safety and Hazardous Zoning Act of 1983, as called for in the 1993 Land Use Plan.
- The need to prepare a detailed recreation needs assessment for the Township was achieved with the completion of a draft Recreation Plan Element. The 1999 Reexamination recommended a separate Open Space Plan Element to fully address the earlier goal to “...provide for the open space and community facilities of existing and future residents of the Township.”
- Protecting the Township’s historic and natural resources was the theme of both Goals 9 and 10 in the 1993 Land Use Plan. The 1999 Reexamination Report indicated that, with regard to Goal 9, the need to identify and protect the Township’s historic and natural resources would be achieved with “*expanded Housing Plan Element*” coupled with stronger regulation, although it appears that the reference should have been the *Historic Plan Element*.
- In response to the call for the regulation of historic sites, consistent with State statutes in Goal 10, the 1999 Reexamination Report recommended adoption of a Historic Plan Element and historic regulations.

The 1999 Reexamination Report also addressed the question as to any “...*significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the master plan and development regulations since last revised*”. Its findings were as follows:

Branchburg, through the Cross Acceptance process, was in general agreement with the policies of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, with the exception of the concept of creating a new Center within the Suburban Planning Area (PA2) where it was considered out of character with the established land use patterns.

Notwithstanding the conclusion in the 1993 Master Plan Reexamination Report that there would be no large scale community shopping centers located within the Township, particularly with the adoption of regulations to preclude the construction of such a center with a large anchor tenant, the construction of “...*a substantial grocery store [Shop Rite] in the Route 22 corridor*”, was noted. This project was expected to reduce the potential for any additional community shopping centers with a food store anchor.

Revisiting the issue of cluster development, the 1999 Reexamination Report recommended it be reintroduced for “...*limited use where it would benefit the Township.*”

The 1999 Reexamination Report addressed the issue of “*Specific changes recommended for the Master Plan or development regulation,...*”. And the following recommendations were offered:

Rezoning

The Planning Board did not favor a request to change the OL-Office Laboratory zoning for a portion of a 73 acre tract located at the southwest corner of the intersection of Route 202 and Old York Road to permit a retail shopping center along Route 202 as it would conflict with the Township’s policy to limit retail development in this highway corridor. A favorable recommendation was offered to rezone 30 acres of the same tract to I-2 Industrial. Another tract known as the Neshanic Dartco site was recommended to be rezoned from the Village District to the ‘A’, three-acre zone district.

The Planning Board did not favor changing the Office Zone on Route 22 to one permitting industrial use but did support the concept of ‘pilot plants’ and research facilities in the Office zone district with the stipulation that appropriate standards would be developed to control scale, intensity and impacts of such uses.

New Master Plan Elements

The 1999 Reexamination Report recommended adoption of several new Master Plan Elements. These included a Historic Plan Element prepared by the Branchburg Historic Commission and separate Recreation and Open Space Elements.

Resolving Conflicts Between Different Land Uses

Adverse impacts to residential areas from industrial development i.e. noise, dust, glare and lack of aesthetic appeal, were cited as a significant problem. One suggested solution was to reevaluate the buffer requirements and design standards and to modulate setbacks based on the building’s height.

Clustering/Lot Averaging

The Planning Board supported the recommendation to reinstitute residential cluster and lot averaging mechanisms to preserve open space in the area north of Harlan School Road and east of Readington Road. A new LD Cluster zone was proposed for some 70 acres of undeveloped land at this location with the goal of preserving at least 40 percent of any development parcel as permanent open space.

Signage

Modifications to the Township’s sign regulations were recommended to improve legibility from adjacent highways.

The 1999 Reexamination Report addressed the final question concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plan(s) with the suggestion that the Township consider utilizing the *Local Redevelopment and Housing Law* to determine if certain industrial areas e.g. Chubb Way / West County Drive industrial zone qualify as areas in need of redevelopment.

Open Space and Recreation Plan (October 2002)

The Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), adopted by the Planning Board in October 2002, proposed 12 Goals and Objectives, and an *Action Plan* to implement them. The OSRP also provided a series of maps depicting the Township's Recreation and Open Space Inventory (ROSI), areas of environmental sensitivity (wetlands, forest, steep slopes), critical habitat areas, and the Township's existing and proposed open space and recreational facilities system. Periodic updates are recommended concurrent with the six-year statutory requirement for the Master Plan review to keep the OSRP current.

The goals established in the OSRP are consistent with those found in the *State Development and Redevelopment Plan*, particularly for the Branchburg Planning Areas 2, 4, and 4B, and those included in the *Somerset County Parks, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan* of 2000. A brief synopsis of the *Inventory, Needs Analysis* and *Action Plan* is presented below.

Inventory

- Municipally-owned land: 463.47 acres (303.28 acres undeveloped; 160.19 developed as parkland.)
- Somerset County land holdings: 737.72 acres (includes both active and passive recreational lands.)
- State of New Jersey – Dept. of Environmental Protection: 502 acres (Confluence Reservoir)

Needs Analysis

With a population of 14,566 in the year 2000 and a land area of approximately 13,024 acres, the *Needs Analysis* determined that Branchburg met the minimum open space and recreational needs as factored by the National Recreation and Parks Association "Level of Service" approach (population based) and the New Jersey Balanced Land Use Concept method (land area based). The findings caution, however; that meeting minimum standards should not preclude a continuing program to acquire additional land and to further develop the Township's recreational facilities.

Action Plan

The *Action Plan* offers (1) criteria for land acquisition and preservation, and (2) potential funding mechanisms to accomplish this objective. These are briefly described as follows:

1. Proposed Additions, Improvements and Acquisitions

The following criteria established to evaluate potential land acquisition decisions:

- Suitable for active recreation
- Provides linear or contiguous system of open space for greenways and habitat protection

- Contiguous with existing or proposed open space or recreation areas
- Provides linkages between open space or recreational facilities
- Preserves and protects environmentally sensitive areas
- Preserves historically or culturally significant sites
- High development potential

2. Implementation Approaches and Resources

The following sources and options were identified as funding sources to be used to assist in the acquisition of open space and recreation lands:

- Branchburg Township’s Open Space Tax
- Garden State Preservation Trust
- NJ Green Acres Program
- NJ State Agriculture Development commission Farmland Preservation Program, specifically the Planning Incentive Grants (PIG) for the purchase of development rights to promote farmland preservation
- Environmental Infrastructure Trust Financing Program
- Somerset County’s County/Municipal Open Space Partnership of Somerset County.
- National Recreational Trails Program
- Private Development Initiatives Land Donations and Dedications
- Conservation and Recreation Easements

Open Space and Recreation System Map

The *Open Space and Recreation System Map* identifies existing and proposed locations for recreation, open space, and farmland preservation.

Farmland Preservation Plan (December 2003)

Adopted by the Planning Board in December 2003, Branchburg’s *Farmland Preservation Plan* summarized the Township’s position regarding agriculture as follows:

“Branchburg’s planning policy has generally been supportive of agriculture, and the township is aiming to create a better environment for agriculture as a business through a variety of means. First and foremost, the Township will seek to preserve as many agricultural operations as possible, utilizing a variety of land preservation techniques. Recognizing that land preservation is only the first step, the Township will analyze and undertake a variety of additional measures to ensure that farming can remain a viable economic activity for future generations on family farms.”

Some of the key findings in the *Farmland Preservation Plan* are as follows:

- Approximately 3,699 (28%) of the Township’s land area qualify for reduced tax assessment under the Farmland Assessment Act of 1964.
- Preserved farmland: 955 acres
- 73% of Branchburg’s land area consists of highly productive agricultural soils (prime and statewide important soils: 7,500 acres/58%); (locally important soils: 1,896 acres /15%).
- As of 1997, 4,453 acres in agricultural use

The Plan offered a series of recommendations to improve the economic viability of agriculture in Branchburg. These were:

- Establish an Agricultural Advisory Committee.
- Incorporate Right-to-Farm section into the Land Development Ordinance.
- Promote participation in the 8-year municipally approved farmland preservation program.
- Encourage agricultural pursuits that support equestrian activities to preserve countryside character.
- Allow Bed-and-Breakfast inns on farm parcels to support rural economy.
- Reduce costs for building permits for structures associated with agricultural use.
- Review and update land use regulations to minimize deterrents to agricultural activity such as permitting direct marketing of locally grown produce.
- Consolidate all regulations concerning farming under a separate “Agriculture” section in the Township Code for ease of reference.
- Establish an outreach initiative between Planning Board and/or Governing body and local farmers to better understand agricultural trends and needs.

Amendment to the Housing Element of the Master Plan

- Adopted by the Planning Board: March 13, 2001
- Endorsed by Township Committee: March 19, 2001

This 2001 Element amended the previously approved Housing Element / Fair Share Plan filed with COAH in May 1998. Before the 1998 Plan secured Substantive Certification from COAH, litigation was initiated by a development entity known as Branchburg Builders, Inc. (BBI). Eventually the matter was transferred by the Court to COAH in order to accelerate the substantive review process. At that time COAH also required the Township and BBI to engage in mediation, which eventually resulted in a Mediation Agreement, dated January 22, 2004.

During the course of events, Branchburg determined that an amended Housing Element / Fair Share Plan would be necessary to recognize changes in the alternative living component of the Plan, prompted by the developer of the facilities, Midland Residential Communities, Inc. Instead of one complex of 48 units, the revised plan proposed several smaller group homes scattered throughout the municipality. The 2001 Amendment to the Housing Element also factored into the analysis credits and reductions the Township was entitled to receive for prior housing activities.

The Amended Housing Plan demonstrated that the Township satisfied its 1987-1999 cumulative affordable housing obligation of 309 units, including 7 rehabilitation units, and generated a surplus of 8 new construction units. COAH granted Substantive Certification on August 11, 2004, subject to the terms of the January 2004 Mediation Agreement. In its Revised Compliance Report, dated July 21, 2004, COAH summarized Branchburg's position as follows:

*“Branchburg’s 12-year cumulative second round (1987 to 1999) obligation is 309 units consisting of seven rehabilitation units and 302 new construction units. The township is eligible for 267 credits and an eight-unit substantial compliance reduction leaving a remaining new construction obligation of 34 units. The Township proposes to address its remaining 34-unit new construction obligation with 17 low-income alternative living units and four low-income family rental units. **This plan would yield 21 additional rental bonus credits, resulting in an eight-unit surplus.** When combined with units from the Township’s first round plan, the cumulative plan produces 68 low-income units and 65 moderate-income units township-wide and satisfies the 50/50 low/moderate split on a township-wide level.”* (Emphasis added.)

The terms of the January 2004 Mediation Agreement required the subdivision of a 200 acre tract, known as the Reeves Estate (Block 4, Lot 1; Block 2, Lot 8) into four lots, as follows:

- *Housing Lot* (50 ac.)
- *Lanigan Lot* (20.8 ac.)
- *Open Space Lot* (105 ac.)
- *Farm Lot* (unspecified acreage)

BBI would construct 50 market-rate homes on the *Housing Lot* and provide Branchburg with a payment in lieu of construction of affordable housing units in an amount equal in value to a 15 percent set aside of affordable housing units at a cost per unit of \$25,000. The total contribution would therefore equal \$187,500.

Within two years from the August 11, 2004 date of Substantive Certification, Branchburg was required to:

- Secure an amended Regional Planning Policy Map change for the re-designation of the *Housing Lot* in the BBI tract from PA5 to PA2; and
- Amend its Wastewater Management Plan to include *Housing Lot* (BBI tract).

Historic Preservation Element

The Township's 1998 Master Plan examined the Township's historic characteristics in detail in the *Historic Resources* chapter. The Plan summarized Branchburg as follows:

“From a geographic and thematic perspective, Branchburg’s architecture can be categorized into three general groupings: 1) Structures located within the village of North Branch, 2) Structures located within the village of Neshanic Station, and 3) Structures located within the outlying rural regions of the township.”

A series of goals were articulated to advance the cause of historic preservation in Branchburg. These were:

- Preserve and enhance the architectural and historical integrity of North Branch Village
- Protect and enhance the architectural and historical integrity of Neshanic Station Village
- Substantially revise the zoning provisions for VR zones, in order to protect and enhance the integrity of the Township’s historic villages, (including a call for the creation of a Historic Preservation Commission)
- Protect and enhance all historic resources within the Township
- Protect all significant archeological sites within the Township

This subject was revisited in the *Draft Historic Preservation Plan Element* of July 1999 wherein six areas of the Township were targeted for particular attention. They were described in the document as follows:

North Branch Village

Proposed historic district

Location: Branchburg/Bridgewater across North Branch of Raritan River

Primarily residential “modest frame construction in the vernacular style” dating to mid-quarter 19th century

North Branch Depot

Location: Intersection of Station Road / River Road

Simple vernacular style with Victorian embellishments

Environs of Village: Dumont Farm, Somerset County Park lands, Chambers Brook

South Branch

Location: Intersection of Studdiford Drive / South Branch Road (extends across South Branch of Raritan River into Hillsborough)

Neshanic Station

Proposed Historic District

Significant example of late 19th / early 20th century town developed in proximity to railroad

Hamlet of Burnt Mills

Formerly known as Bromley

Farmland with linear settlement pattern

Two remaining structures date to late 18th to mid 19th century

Hamlet of Milltown

Location: adjacent to Mill Lane along North Branch of Raritan River

Two remaining structures dated from early 19th century

Thompson Mill and Store recommended for National and State Register of Historic Places.

The *Draft Historic Preservation Plan Element* recommended the adoption of a Historic Preservation Ordinance, the creation of a Historic Preservation Commission, and the designation of Historic Sites and Districts and provided design criteria to guide the Commission's work.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan - Cross Acceptance

Branchburg participated with Somerset County in the third round of the Cross Acceptance process to ensure consistency between the Township Master Plan and the State Development and Redevelopment Plan and the State Plan Policy Map. A series of proposed Policy Map Amendments to the State Plan Policy Map were submitted by the Township.

In the northern portion of the municipality, changes from the environmentally sensitive categories of PA4B and PA5 to PA2, the Suburban Planning Area were recommended to conform to the sanitary sewer service boundary of the Somerset Raritan Valley Sewage Authority and to accommodate development resulting from a settlement agreement between the Township and Branchburg Builders, LLC, related to the Township's affordable housing obligation.

Additional map changes were requested to reclassify open space parcels owned by the Township and the County to PA6 and lands held by NJDEP to PA8.

APPENDIX B

BRANCHBURG'S VISION

Branchburg is planning for a sustainable future by protecting and enhancing community character and important natural and cultural resources and with a proactive vision for positive change. Toward this end, Branchburg's Master Plan is designed with the goals of:

Expanding and linking the North Branch Greenway system of private and public open spaces with neighborhoods along a network of pathways, stream corridors and significant natural features and providing for safe pedestrian and bicycle travel.

Protecting and improving the quality of the air and water through increased land and water stewardship.

Preserving and protecting the cultural landscape by recognizing historic structures and districts, and managing change within the historic villages.

Conserving community character by carefully managing the scale and intensity of new development and retaining farmland and open spaces.

Maintaining the quality of municipal services and community facilities that contribute to the quality of life for present and future Township residents.

Planning for development and redevelopment at densities and intensities that will respect capacities of the natural and built infrastructure, retain the remaining natural areas of the Township, protect sensitive environmental areas, and encourage high quality designs.

Protecting the township's scenic vistas and conserving the character of the remaining rural countryside and the historic hamlets that give Branchburg its unique identity.

Providing for a variety of housing types serving a broad range of needs of Branchburg residents of all age and income levels.

Promoting a diversity of non-residential uses that provide high quality employment, goods and services and contribute to Branchburg's fiscal health.

Promoting design and other techniques that result in energy and water conservation and minimize the impact of development on the environment.

Preventing sprawling developments that consume all the land and promoting smart growth and conservation-based design approaches, including lot averaging and Open Lands subdivision designs.

Fulfillment of this vision will require a combination of public actions, such as farmland preservation, open space and development rights acquisition and private conservation efforts, as well as sustainable land use strategies and zoning techniques.

APPENDIX C

Executive Summary

The aging of the postwar “Baby Boom” has implications for the housing market that are apparent throughout central New Jersey, including Branchburg, where the 55 and over population saw a 55% increase during the 1990’s. This demographic and a growing municipal reluctance to permit family housing (out of fear that the school impact will further inflate soaring local property taxes) have led towns throughout New Jersey to choosing age-restricted housing as a desirable element in local land use plans. When this occurs, it frequently supplants potential non-age restricted single family housing.

Viewed from another perspective, however, new age-restricted housing may have an unintended impact, as empty nesters vacate family-sized homes with room for schoolchildren. Additionally, State-mandated affordable housing requirements create a new “growth share” obligation that can only be partially met with age-restricted units. Thus, the fiscal desirability of these uses may dampened by both the secondary pupil impact they induce and the growth share obligation they create.

Prospective developers of “active adult” communities have responded to this market potential with projects undeterred by highway frontage locations, as seen by the approvals granted in Branchburg for two such developments on Routes 202 and 22. Proponents of such zoning changes in Branchburg have asked for consideration of this use at many more locations, including other highway settings and non-residential zones.

Age-restricted residential communities are generally highly compatible neighbors to existing residential neighborhoods, unlike some of the industrial uses and zones that are interwoven among some of Branchburg’s dense neighborhoods. Thus, while no panacea, they merit consideration as a potential replacement for industrial zones that are likely to exacerbate land use incompatibilities as they continue to develop. But other considerations will also shape the decisions about where these communities will be most useful to and the best fit for Branchburg.

This report examines the nature and desirability of housing for older persons in general, and other relevant considerations, as Branchburg examines its appropriateness as part of the local zone plan.

Age Discrimination

The Fair Housing Act of 1988 (FHA) allowed three categories of housing for older persons to be exempt from the controls against discrimination. The subsequent Housing for Older Persons Act of 1995 which eliminated the requirement that such housing had to provide “*significant facilities and services*”, a standard that proved difficult to define and apply. The three categories of housing permitted by the FHA are as follows:

- *Housing provided under any State or Federal program that the Secretary determines is specifically designed and operated to assist elderly persons (as defined in the State or Federal program)*
- *Intended for, and solely occupied by, persons 62 years of age or older*
- *Intended and operated for occupancy by persons 55 years of age or older*

It is the third category that is the focus of this memorandum. The criteria for housing limited with an age threshold of 55 years of age and older, is cited below.

1. At least 80 percent of the occupied units in the “housing facility or community” must be occupied by at least one person 55 years of age or older with no permanent resident younger than 19 years of age.
2. The facility or community must publish and must adhere to policies and procedures that demonstrate an intent to comply with the requirements of the Fair Housing Act.
3. The community or facility must meet the rules for verification of occupancy

In New Jersey, this issue was addressed by the Supreme Court in Taxpayers Assoc. of Weymouth Tp. v. Weymouth Tp. 71 N.J. 249 (1976) which sanctioned housing targeted for a specific age group. Concerning the question of exclusionary zoning practices, the Court found that a balance in housing opportunities within a municipality would be a determining fact, noting:

... it seems obvious that the seriousness of any exclusionary threat will depend upon the circumstances of each case, including in particular the relationship which the population, area, and available vacant land within the municipality bears to that within the areas occupied by the senior citizens communities. If the latter areas are small enough, it would not seem necessary that similar density housing be mandated in the same district. And if said areas were excessively large, the exclusionary impact would not necessarily be obviated by requiring that some similar housing, with no stated minimum of area or units, be permitted within the same zoning district. [292-3]

Age-restricted housing is expressly encouraged by the Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S. 40:55D-1 et seq.). Among the *Purpose of the act* as set forth in N.J.S. 40:55D-2, subsection (l) states:

“To encourage senior citizen community housing construction.”

Further, the legislative intent to plan and zone “sufficient space in appropriate locations” for a wide variety of uses, including age segregated housing, is clear from subsection ‘g’.

Desirability of Age-Restricted Housing

Age-restricted housing has witnessed increasing popularity in recent years, as municipalities seek to accommodate the housing needs of older individuals while at the same time providing for a “clean” ratable. Since such communities do not involve the generation of school pupils, they produce tax revenues which far exceed the costs of such development to the community.

A concern has arisen in some quarters, however, regarding the secondary effects of such housing on a municipality’s school age population as a result of turnover in the existing housing stock when older residents relocate to age-restricted developments. A study conducted in June 2005 by a Massachusetts organization known as the Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association suggests that the creation of housing exclusive to older residents may lead to an influx of younger families with school-age children as empty nesters vacate family-sized homes to avail themselves of this new housing option. The report stated in part:

Even though it is clear that factors other than favorable demographics are contributing to the proliferation of age restricted housing, many continue to wonder what the downside of this trend is. As older people vacate the homes they raised their families in to move into age restricted communities, those homes become available for younger families.¹

Location Considerations

Quality of life considerations play a prominent role in the selection of an age restricted housing community. The ability to minimize maintenance responsibilities and enjoy on-site recreation facilities such as swimming pools, tennis courts, club houses and like facilities, have made the “active adult” lifestyle increasingly popular.

Many of these communities have been successfully situated along arterial and collector roadways, and landscape features are typically designed to provide significant buffers from traffic corridors and other land uses. Age restricted housing can be a good transition between areas of higher and areas of lower intensity, when properly located and sited.

The literature on this subject emphasizes quality of life considerations in the selection of this type of community. Some of the ideal conditions include:

- Compatible surrounding land uses particularly if building heights are permitted to be 40-50 feet to allow for internal ground floor parking
- Proximity to public transportation

¹ Heudorfer, Bonnie, Age Restricted Active Adult Housing in Massachusetts, A Review of the Factors Fueling Its Explosive Growth and the Public Policy Issues It Raises, Citizens’ Housing and Planning Association, June 2005, page 52.

- Proximity to facilities or zone districts that allow for the provision of daily service needs (i.e.-beauty salons, restaurants, senior centers, banks, pharmacies, etc.)
- Proximity to hospitals and medical facilities (more important for 62 /plus age category)

According to a report issued by the Urban Land Institute, the immediate surroundings of an age-restricted housing development are very important considerations to the industry. Locating such a project adjacent to schools, large commercial districts, and employment centers may adversely affect the project’s viability due to concerns with “...*traffic congestion, noise, excessive light at night, and privacy and security.*”²

Site access must be easily identifiable. If situated along an arterial road, the entry/exit point should be located at a traffic signal where possible to control ingress and egress. The decision to permit controlled access via a gate and/or guard is a matter of local preference although careful consideration must be given to the need for unimpeded access by police, fire and first aid responders.

We previously provided the Planning Board with a map of vacant developable lands which identifies parcels less than 10 acres, 10 to 20 acres and over 20 acres. For an age restricted community to succeed, it requires a critical mass of dwelling units to support the Homeowners Association and various facilities that will be developed. Thus, the minimum size parcel relates directly to the permitted residential density for such uses. Age restricted communities typically minimize maintenance responsibilities for home owners and provide a supportive opportunity within which residents can “age in place” in independent living situations.

Some of the factors to consider when planning for age-restricted housing, identified by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA)³, are as follows:

- areas where basic services such as health care facilities, supermarkets, restaurants, post offices, libraries, senior centers are located.
- areas served by continuous network of sidewalks, public transportation.
- areas that are compact, walkable, and mixed-use in character.
- sidewalks (wide enough to accommodate canes, walkers, wheelchairs).
- safe street crossings (traffic calming measures; reprogramming crossing signals for average walking speed of older pedestrian).
- streetscape amenities (frequent benches [with backs] and resting places, legible signage, lighting).
- security (sufficient lighting).

² Suchman, Diane R. et al, Developing Active Adult Retirement Communities, Urban Land Institute, 2001, page 62.

³ ICMA “Active Living for Older Adults – Management Strategies for Healthy and Livable Communities”, September 2003

Density Considerations

Age restricted housing occurs in various formats including detached single family dwellings, town house style units (attached two story units) or condo “flats”, typically provided in three story or higher buildings. Typical residential densities for suburban age-restricted housing, based on housing type, are:

- Single family: 4 -6 units per acre
- Townhouses: 6 -8 units per acre
- Condo/Flats: 8+ units per acre

As a point of reference, in 2005, Branchburg’s Zoning Board of Adjustment approved a 48 unit age-restricted project on the former Pine Motel site on Route 202 and North Branch River Road comprised of two buildings, each containing 24 units, some structure parking and a separate 1,125 square foot clubhouse. Situated on 4.8 acres, this development has a gross density of 10 units per acre. A similar density was approved by the Zoning Board for a project along Route 22.

Since certain on-site recreation and other facilities will likely be provided, it appears appropriate to plan for a minimum project size of at least 100 units to support these facilities through a homeowners association. Thus, if 100 single family units were constructed at 4 units per acre, at least 25 acres would be required for a minimum product of 100 units. At 6 units per acre, at least 18 acres would be required and at 8 units per acre approximately 13 acres would be the minimum size project.

Desirable Site Amenities

The size of an age-restricted housing community has a bearing on the type of amenities that can be reasonably provided. Generally a central ‘club house’ is included in larger projects. One recently approved project consisting of 360 units in Morris County includes a 14,000 square foot clubhouse. For smaller developments having less than 100 units, a meeting or ‘social’ hall of 1,200 to 1,500 square feet is becoming more common.⁴ Some of the other types of on-site improvements and amenities that should be considered, or even required, are as follows:

- Swimming pool
- Sidewalks
- Walking / nature trail (non-concrete base, minimum width 12 ft.)
- Ample site lighting
- Benches, seating areas, covered picnic pavilion
- Bocce courts, horseshoe pits
- Open space
- Community gardens

⁴ Suchman, Diane R. et al, Developing Active Adult Retirement Communities, Urban Land Institute, 2001, page 66.

Affordable Housing

Branchburg has been assigned a ‘growth share’ obligation of 53 affordable units for the period of January 2004 through December 2013 based upon population and employment projections developed by its metropolitan planning organization (MPO), which, in northern New Jersey, is the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority. However, in light of approved or anticipated development in Branchburg over the third round period, actual growth share may actually be measured in hundreds of units.

A significant point to consider is that COAH’s third round substantive rules do not allow more than 50 percent of the growth share obligation “...*addressed within a municipality...*” to be satisfied by age restricted housing (N.J.A.C. 5:94-4.19). Consequently, if Branchburg utilizes a Regional Contribution Agreement (RCA) to transfer units to another jurisdiction, the age-restricted cap applies to the remaining balance to be constructed within the municipality.

To illustrate, consider two scenarios, assuming a growth share obligation of 200 units. One assumes the maximum allowable number of units are transferred via RCA’s, while the other has no RCA, with the entire growth share obligation to be met within Branchburg. As shown in Tables 1 and 2 below, these situations represent the two extremes with regard to the number of age-restricted units that would be eligible for credit in the third round. In Table 1, where the maximum number of units (100), are transferred out, 50 age-restricted units would qualify for credit. In contrast, Table 2 shows that if the entire growth share obligation is constructed within Branchburg, the number of eligible age-restricted units is increased to 100.

Table 1
Maximum RCA Transfer

Branchburg 3 rd Round Growth Share	200 units
Maximum number of units transferred out of Township via RCA*	100
Balance of affordable units to be built in Township	100
Maximum age-restricted units qualified for 3 rd Round credit	50
Affordable family units	50

Table 2
With No RCA Transfer

3 rd Round Growth Share	200 units
Maximum age-restricted units qualified for 3 rd Round credit	100
Affordable family units	100

If new age-restricted developments generate a growth share obligation beyond what they can be credited for, the fiscal attractiveness of the proposal is reduced.

Population Characteristics

There is very limited available information to date concerning the market radius for such housing. Various surveys, including a study by the National Association of Home Builders, find that a desire to relocate close to family and established social networks is a primary concern, along with the ability to enjoy a maintenance-free life style.

The demographics for Somerset County in general and Branchburg in particular, suggest an appreciable population base for this type of housing. The Township and the County as a whole have experienced growth in older age groups, as indicated in Tables 3 and 4, below. The data include the following:

- In Branchburg, persons 55 years of age or older increased by 928 persons (55%) while those in the 45-to-54 age cohort increased by 745 persons (48 %) between 1990 and 2000.
- Branchburg’s 55 and older population numbered 2,600 or 18 percent of the Township’s total population, as compared to 20 percent of the County’s total population in this age category.
- The 45-to-54 age bracket in Branchburg as of 2000 numbered 2,289 or 16% of the total population, whereas 15% of the County population was in this group.

Table 3
Township of Branchburg
Selected Age Cohorts - 1990-2000

Age Distribution	1990	2000	Net Change	Percent Change
Total Population	10,888	14,566	3,678	33.7
55/over	1,672	2,600	928	55.5
65/over	764	1,206	442	57.8
45-54	1,544	2,289	745	48.2
55-59	493	853	360	73.0
60-64	415	541	126	30.3
65-74	486	739	253	52.0
75-84	212	369	157	74.0
85/over	66	98	32	48.4

Table 4
Year 2000: Branchburg and Somerset County Population by Age Cohort

Age Distribution	Branchburg	Percent of Total	Somerset County	Percent of Total
Total Population	14,566	-----	297,490	-----
Median age	37.3	-----	37.2	-----
62/over	1,512	10.4	39,546	13.3
65/over	1,206	8.3	33,381	11.2
55/over	2,600	17.8	59,459	19.9
45-54	2,289	15.7	43,861	14.7
55-59	853	5.9	15,170	5.1
60-64	541	3.7	10,908	3.7
65-74	739	5.1	17,770	6.0
75-84	369	2.5	11,482	3.9
85/over	98	0.7	4,129	1.4

Changing Nature of Market

In considering age-restricted housing as one of the options for Branchburg, it is instructive to note the changes anticipated by some in the building industry. The aforementioned ULI report describes the shift to larger residential units to accommodate the new generation of buyers in the following excerpt:

During the past four decades, as the target market for AARC's [Active Adult Retirement Communities] has shifted from fully retired households to a younger, semiretired market, the housing products have grown from small, cottage-type homes of 800 to 1,600 square feet to full-blown ;homes ranging in size from 1,200 to 3,500 square feet. Downsizing from the family home, which was common among active adults in the previous decade, is no longer occurring. Moreover, whereas a home of 1,600 square feet was once considered large, the average home is now 2,000 square feet or more, and many dwellings have lofts and basements.⁵

Others in the home building industry are not convinced age-restricted housing will continue in its present configuration. Feinberg & Associates, an architectural firm specializing in designing age-restricted housing, has coined the term “Nexers” for the next generation of active adult buyers, currently aged 45 - 57. Feinberg cites Tom Troy of Sharbell Development Corp., a NJ-based residential development company, who believes the market will shift from exclusive age-restricted developments to what he calls “blended communities”:

⁵ Suchman, Diane R. et al, Developing Active Adult Retirement Communities, Urban Land Institute, 2001, pages 295-6.

*“I believe you’ll see increased market resistance over the next five years to age-restricted communities. I think the Nexers will become really turned off to the fact that these are communities that people go to and age. The next real trend will be to offer age-targeted units in blended communities. I think the market will push this idea more than anything else. Builders will need to give a lot of thought to how to make the housing mix work in a mixed-use community. Mixed-use communities are starting to catch on because many people prefer to walk to nearby professional and commercial services instead of driving their car. The types of services offered in such communities will take some serious consideration, as well.”*⁶

The idea of “*blended communities*”, a mix of unrestricted and age-limited units is seen by some as gaining strength in the market. Again to cite from Feinberg & Associates:

*The nexers insist that the residents should be mixed in age and stage of life, and that they should include a range of backgrounds. The more realistic possibility is that they will like the image of being in a blended community, but that they might not be as open as they claim to next door neighbors with young children and out of control teenagers who are literally next door. The best solution seems to be a community where the overall population is blended, but where there is the opportunity to provide “pods” or other dedicated sections which have special appeals for the nexers.*⁷

Others see the need to design units and developments for households without children without actually imposing a legal restriction, as indicated below. Interestingly, among the attractions identified as important, at least two (i.e. the college and County parklands) are found in Branchburg.

It is much less difficult for builders to get zoning approval for communities that are age-restricted because townships frequently want to limit the number of schoolchildren in new communities to bypass the expense of building new schools. On the other hand, builders will find it increasingly difficult to sell age-restricted housing to the baby boomers.

As an industry, we must figure out how to make this a win-win situation far in advance of breaking any ground. One possible solution is to build homes with age-targeted designs that appeal to couples and single people, but may exclude the needs of families with children living at home.

If builders design homes that appeal to the Nexers in places that they can enjoy themselves (for example, near universities, recreation areas, and

⁶ “A Perfect Blend: Mixing Age-Qualified with All-Age Communities, An Interview with Tom Troy” Feinberg & Associates, www.feinbergd.com

⁷ What’s Next for the Nexers? Pre-Retirement Boomers Talk about Their Future”, Feinberg & Associates, www.feinbergd.com

urban life) and couple the product with a strong marketing strategy developed expressly for the Nexers, then the over-55 market will buy homes without communities mandating age restrictions.⁸

⁸ William E. Becker , “Marketing to the Nexers - Your Next Generation of Buyers”, Published in March/April 2003 issue of Sales and Marketing Ideas magazine as cited by Feinberg & Associates, www.feinbergdsgn.com

GLOSSARY OF TERMS REGARDING AGE-RESTRICTED HOUSING

Age-Targeted Communities - Single-family homes, town homes, cluster homes, manufactured housing and multifamily housing — targeted to adults 55 years of age or older, but not explicitly age-restricted — where residents lead an independent, active lifestyle. These communities are not equipped to provide increased care or health-related services, but include amenities such as a clubhouse, a golf course, walking trails, and other recreational spaces. Outdoor maintenance is normally included in a monthly homeowner’s association or condominium fee.

Active Adult Communities - Single-family homes, town homes, cluster homes, manufactured housing and multifamily housing — restricted to adults 55 years of age or older and excluding younger residents as allowed under exemptions granted in the Fair Housing Act — where residents lead an independent, active lifestyle. These communities are not equipped to provide increased care or health-related services, but often include amenities such as a clubhouse, a golf course, walking trails, and other recreational spaces. Outdoor maintenance normally is included in a monthly homeowner’s association or condominium fee.

Seniors Apartments - Multifamily rental housing restricted to adults 55 years of age or older. These properties do not have a central kitchen and generally do not provide meals to residents, but may offer community rooms, social activities, and other recreational amenities.

Independent Living Communities - Age-restricted multifamily rental housing with central dining facilities that provide residents, as part of a monthly fee, meals and other services such as housekeeping, linen service, transportation, and social and recreational activities. There are more than 6,500 units in Independent Living residences in Massachusetts, most in large Continuing Care Retirement Communities. At least 1,500 additional units are expected to be completed over the next 3-4 years.

Congregate Housing Facilities - Shared living environments where elders can maintain their independence and receive supportive services.

Rest Homes/Residential Care Facilities - Residences that provide housing, meals, 24-hour supervision, social and recreational programs, administration of medications, and personal care to individuals who do not routinely require nursing or medical care.

Assisted Living Residences (ALRs) - State-licensed and regulated rental housing that provides assistance with activities of daily living (ADLs) — such as bathing, dressing, toileting, moving from place to place, and managing medication — and a variety of support services including meals, assistance with personal care, housekeeping, laundry, social and recreational programs, oversight of residents’ self administration of medication, 24-hour security, and on-site staff to respond to emergencies.

Continuing Care Retirement Communities (CCRCs) - Multilevel services bring various levels of care together, often on one campus, so that residents can stay in the same community as their needs change. CCRCs offer their residents a contract that generally secures living accommodations and services. Payment plans vary, but usually include a long-term contract between the resident and the community. There are three common types of contracts: 1) unlimited nursing care for little or no substantial increase in the usual monthly payments; 2) specified amount of nursing care beyond which the resident is responsible for payment; 3) residents pay full daily rates for all long term nursing care required.

Nursing Homes - Skilled nursing facilities that offer 24 hour nursing care. In addition, they provide personal care, recreational activities, physical and occupational therapy, and all meals. Some nursing homes have special units for residents with dementia or Alzheimer's disease.

Aging in Place - A concept that allows a senior to remain in his or her living environment, despite the physical and/or mental decline that may occur during the aging process.

Accessory Apartment - A separate living unit inside, or attached to, a single (or multi) family dwelling. Accessory apartments offer the convenience of physical proximity between an older person and a friend, neighbor or relative, while maintaining a measure of privacy. They can also provide an income stream and/or a source of caregiving for a senior who wishes to remain in her own home. (Also called accessory dwelling unit)

ECHO (Elder Cottage Housing Opportunities) - A small, temporary home installed on the same site as a single-family residence, usually that of an adult child or other relative. ECHO units allow seniors to remain close to family members and receive the support they need while retaining a great deal of independence.

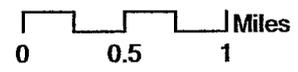
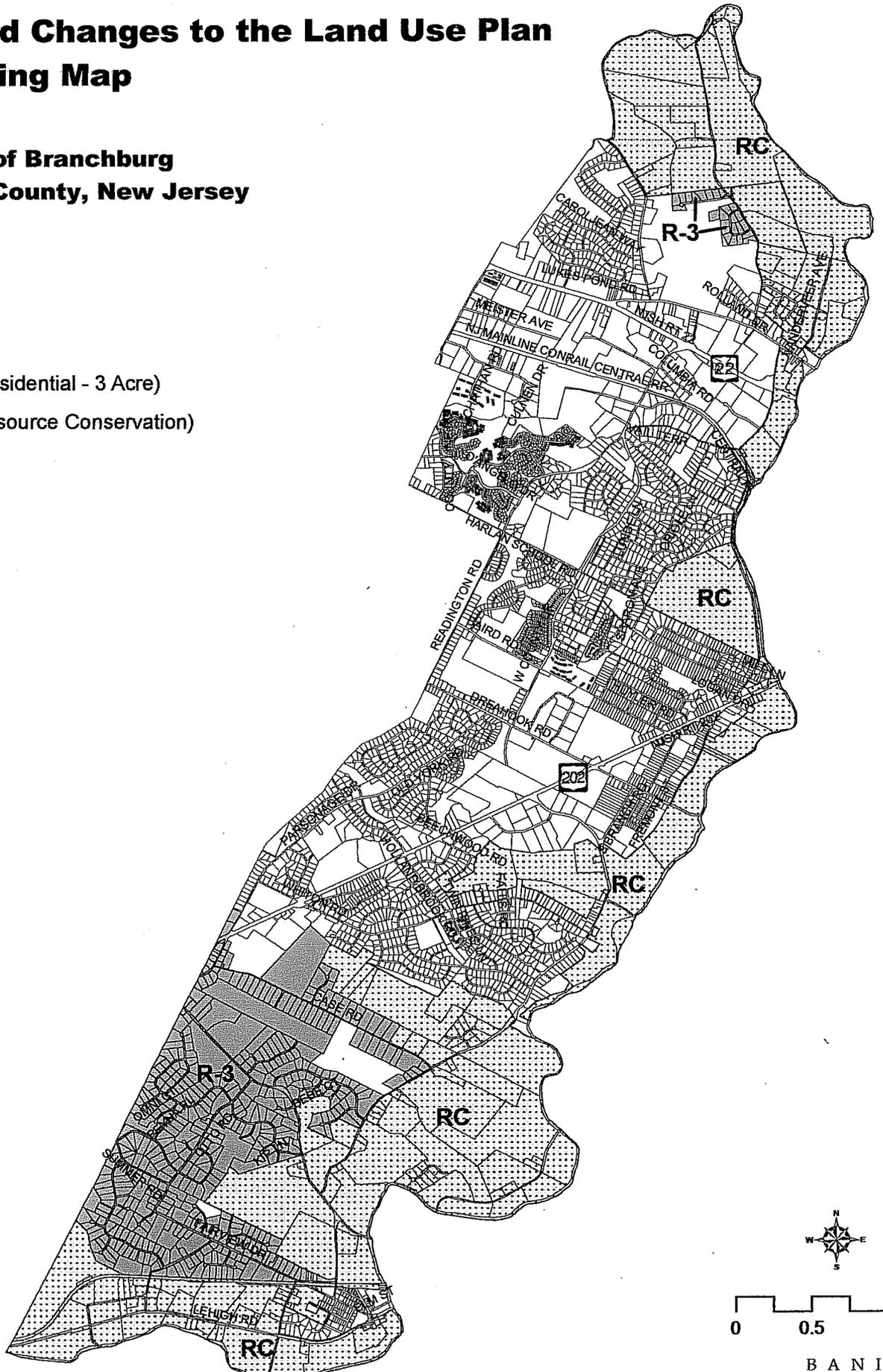
Proposed Changes to the Land Use Plan and Zoning Map

Township of Branchburg
Somerset County, New Jersey

May 2006

Legend

-  R-3 (Residential - 3 Acre)
-  RC (Resource Conservation)



Data Sources:
Somerset County GIS
Banisch Associates, Inc.

BANISCH
ASSOCIATES, INC.
Planning and Design