

## **Section I**

# **INTRODUCTION**

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The Master Plan provides a comprehensive guide for the future development and preservation of areas of West Windsor Township in order to enhance the overall quality of life for its residents. The key element in defining the difference between a Master Plan and other planning studies is the Master Plan's comprehensive approach to planning issues. It considers many factors having an impact on community life, with the focus on its physical, social, economic and aesthetic needs. These aspects are considered with respect to the entire community and in the formation of policy proposals. By addressing the various issues that make up the entire Master Plan at one time, the different elements of the Plan can be better interrelated and made more consistent throughout the Plan.

The last comprehensive West Windsor Master Plan was developed in 1979, with a subsequent Master Plan Update developed in 1986. Since 1986, there have been various amendments to portions of the Master Plan and several newly created sub-elements to the Master Plan. In addition, two reexamination reports were completed, the first in 1992 and the second at the beginning of the year 2000.

Both the 1992 and the 2000 Reexamination Reports recognized the need to both update and compile the various Master Plan Elements, Sub-Elements and amendments into a single comprehensive document, outlining the Township's overall land use planning policy. To that end, this current document brings together the various Master Plan Elements into the Township's comprehensive Master Plan. Plans and recommendations in this Master Plan will be the basis for future development and preservation within the Township. In some cases, these recommendations call for additional study not possible within the scope of the present document. As these studies are completed, this document may be amended as needed.

This Master Plan, a compilation of long standing goals and policies and a reasoned response to new challenges, builds on the efforts of previous planning boards. A continuum of community planning work has made West Windsor one of the premiere suburban communities in New Jersey. Due to the guidance of Master Plan policies that formed the framework for sustained decision making coordinating public and private development over three decades, West Windsor has emerged from being a largely rural agricultural community to a suburban community with the beneficial attributes of a planned community. West Windsor can demonstrate the benefits of decisions flowing from previous Master Plan goals and policies that are embedded in its land use controls. The positive cumulative results of planning-based decisions can be observed as one travels through West Windsor and sees park-like landscaped berms which shield homes from major roads, a greenbelt network centered on the community's water regimen, a permanent farmland preserve, retail, commercial and office development along the Route 1 corridor with award-winning site design features and affordable housing which, despite judicial skepticism, has emerged and is creating very pleasant residential environments.

West Windsor's planners have not shied away from trying innovative planning approaches to solve the problems vexing suburban New Jersey. West Windsor has used transfer of development credits to permanently preserve the Cranbury Golf Course. The deliberate directed use of cluster development design created open space linkages through the heart of its residential neighborhoods. In recent years, an ambitious Timed Growth program was instituted in a Master Plan amendment with the aim of matching the pace of road improvements with the pace of development. Though the ordinance implementing the Timed Growth program was struck down by a Superior Court decision, it stimulated a lively conversation across New Jersey about the tools needed to deal with the problems of suburban development.

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With the broad land use character of this municipality largely in place, the updated Master Plan focuses on the completion of this community and the impacts of past and future growth as West Windsor approaches a mature stage of development.

As West Windsor moves into the future, this Master Plan envisions the community's economic base will be focused on high tech business and research development businesses and their related spin-off companies located along the Route 1 corridor. Research and knowledge are part of the municipality's logo and industrial leaders in high-tech such as the Sarnoff Corporation have found West Windsor a fruitful place to grow a business. Nurturing the growth of other technology-based businesses will take proactive marketing, state assistance, the support of Central Jersey's colleges and universities and local cooperation. Above all, it will take vigilant planning efforts to assure that West Windsor remains a quality place to live and work. Community planning is an on-going process and part of future planning will involve monitoring future development to assure it is in balance with the necessary infrastructure. A community that cannot maintain this balance will lose high tech businesses to other communities which can deliver a high quality of life. To assure West Windsor's balanced approach to growth is sustained, this Master Plan will be fine-tuned in the near future with a detailed review of floor area ratios in all nonresidential zones.

### THE LEGAL CRITERIA FOR A MASTER PLAN

The New Jersey Land Use Law (c.291, N.J. 1975) establishes the legal criteria for a Master Plan, and each community must be certain that its plans comply with the legal requirements of the law. The following is summary of these requirements:

#### *Preparation and Adoption*

Master Plan policies and recommendations are based on a community's characteristics and goals at a certain point in time. As time goes by, conditions change, laws are amended, and the characteristics of the community changes. Master Plans must be revised to reflect these changes.

The responsibility for the preparation of a Master Plan rests with the local Planning Board. A plan may be adopted (or amended) only by the Planning Board and only after a public hearing and must be reviewed at least once every six years.

#### *Content*

The Master Plan must include a statement of objectives upon which the plan is based. It must include a land use plan indicating: natural conditions, extent and intensity of land to be used for varying types of future development, the location of existing or proposed airports and airport hazard areas and a statement of recommended population density and development intensity. A specific policy statement indicating the relationship of plan proposals to the plans of neighboring communities, the County, and other appropriate jurisdictions must also be included.

#### *Enforcement and Implementation*

The Master Plan, after adoption by the Planning Board, gives the community the legal basis for control over future development. The major means of implementation are as follows:

- All of the provisions of a zoning ordinance, or any amendment or revision thereto, shall

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- The location and design of new streets created through the process of land subdivision or site plan approval may be required to conform to the provisions of the Circulation Plan Element of the Master Plan (N.J.S.A. 40: 55D-38b (2)).
- Where the Master Plan provides for the reservation of designated streets, public drainageways, flood control basins, or public areas, the Planning Board may require that such facilities be shown and reserved in subdivisions and site plans in locations and sizes suitable for their intended use. The reservation powers are effective for a period of one year after approval of a final plan. The municipality must compensate the owner for such action (N.J.S.A 40:55D-44).
- Whenever the governing body or other public agency proposes to spend public funds, incidental to the location, character or extent of a capital project, such proposal must be referred to the Planning Board for review and recommendation. No action shall be taken without such recommendation or until 45 days have elapsed (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-31).

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE MASTER PLAN

As part of the development of this Master Plan, the Planning Board created a Master Plan Subcommittee, made up of members of the Planning Board, Township Staff, and Township Consultants. The purpose of the subcommittee was to collect data, review current planning conditions, identify issues, review proposed policy and make recommendations regarding the creation of a comprehensive Master Plan Element. Also, at the beginning of this initial review process, a series of public hearings were held to provide the general public with opportunity to voice their concerns and make recommendations regarding issues to be considered in the creation of the Master Plan. These issues were considered by the Master Plan Subcommittee during the creation of the Plan.

This current Plan has been prepared as a collaborative and cooperative effort. It combines separate elements prepared by and/or in assistance with Township Staff, Township Consultants, and members of the Township Environmental Commission, the Mayor's Open Space Task Force, and the Shade Tree Commission in accordance with direction received from the Master Plan Subcommittee over the course of multiple meetings to discuss Master Plan issues. As this receives further review from the entire Planning Board, further amendment can be anticipated.