



AMERICAN LITTORAL SOCIETY

16 N. High Street, Millville, NJ 08332

Middle township Committee
Master Plan Hearing Testimony
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According to the proposed Master Plan, over the past ten years Middle Township lost 33% of its vacant, largely forested land to development as well as over half, or 77 of its remaining farms. The new Master must do a better job at protecting what remains of these critical resources – especially since you’ve only got about 3,500 acres of it left. Unfortunately, the proposed zoning will only result in the balance of your towns’ remaining farmland and forest being developed, and calls for over 5,000 new houses, plus over 2 million square feet of office and commercial space.

Taken together, the new zoning increases the town’s population by 11,624 more residents – that’s 70 percent increase in population.

These numbers are totally unsustainable and we question whether officials have seriously considered the implications and impacts that such development and habitat fragmentation will have on the community character, traffic, water quality, and natural resources of international importance.

The benefits of high density center designation are supposed to be balanced with measures that adequately avoid sprawling and unsustainable development patterns in environs, and conserve that part of the landscape. We don’t see how this has been achieved when the town’s build-out calls for developing nearly as much land in the environs (over 950 acres) as it does in the growth centers (over 1,000 acres).

In addition, permitting single family development on 1 and 3.5 acre lots in the environs is still far too high a density and will only accelerate the loss of farmland and critical open space where the protection of such resources is fundamental to your resident’s quality of life and provides the basis for a county eco-tourism industry worth \$522 million annually.

Particularly concerning is the proposed grandfather clause, which sidesteps the proposed zoning in the environs by permitting existing undersized vacant lots to be developed so long as they’re fourth-fifths of an acre (35,000 sq. ft) in size and contain a minimum of three-tenths of an acre (15,000 sq. ft.) of unconstrained uplands.

The grandfather clause essentially permits the very type of growth the Rural Conservation Zone was created to prohibit.

In addition, we don't see how suburban zoning in the environs accomplishes your plan's resource protection goals when it would result in 958 acres of remaining farmland and forest being developed. Far too much of these critical areas have already been lost because the township failed to follow its former 2003 Master Plan's recommended zoning changes that would have reduced density from 1 to 10 acres per unit in the environs – this is the very same recommendation both we and the DEP urge you to make now.

Refuge Lands: Despite the Zoning Board's denial of the Conifer Project on Railroad Ave in Cape May Court House, as well as the site's inclusion in the federal refuge acquisition boundaries, it remains within the proposed CMCH (Center) boundaries. The site is surrounded by the federal refuge on three sides in an area with documented vernal pools and federally threatened species.

The former Master Plan recommended that the "Township should continue to protect and enhance the Refuge by supporting the protection of natural resources and water quality of lands adjacent to this area." We don't see how the town's selection of this site to meet its Affordable Housing obligations implements these objectives and we strongly believe that all lands within the Refuge boundaries should not be included in centers. There are two other instances (CMCH - Goshen RD 615 & Rio Grande – Secluded Acres) where the town proposes to extend centers into the federal acquisition boundaries. We urge you to show your support for the Refuge by placing these sites in the RC Zone.

Coastal Development/Coastal Residential Districts: We do not support the proposed density of 1 acre on private septic in either CD or CR Zones. Middle's Natural Resource Inventory clearly states that groundwater within the township has already been degraded by contamination from underground septic disposal. The proposed density in these zones threatens to exacerbate this serious issue by placing septic in locations and soils that are entirely unsuitable for it. The existing built densities in these areas is already excessive given their location within the Flood Hazard Area and proximity to coastal wetlands, which are all subject to flooding and rising coastal waters. Therefore, all residential development in the CD & CR Zone should be placed in the RC Zone.

Water resources: According to the township's NRI, ground water resources are under increasing stress from a variety of factors effecting both available supplies and quality. Indeed, the findings of the recently issued USGS Report clearly indicate that over-pumping of the shallow groundwater aquifer has already resulted in adverse impacts to several vernal pools in Middle Township.

The report predicts that unless other sustainable water-supply alternatives are implemented, that serious negative impacts could result, including a decrease of base-flow to streams by as much as 3-26%. The report also warns that salt-water intrusion could migrate another 7,100 feet inland to contaminate several major municipal water production wells.

With these serious issues in mind we can't understand why the Master Plan is silent on how it will address the report's findings. For example, the proposed zoning densities only reflect conformance with the state's nitrate dilution standards, while failing to consider how the town's build-out will affect the overall water supply crisis and impacts to streams and wetlands.

In addition, the proposed MP lacks any discussion about how Middle will protect future well locations within the township. The USGS report discusses the drilling of 6 new wells along the spine of Middle Township, while the proposed MP offers no plan to protect these areas and their underlying aquifers from inappropriate development and contamination – aquifers, which the report concludes are already experiencing water-level declines, saltwater intrusion and external contamination.

The protection and sustainable use of water supply represents the most critical planning imperative in Cape May County. As such, the township's master plan must set a high priority on advancing planning activities that enhance, and not jeopardize the protection and sustainable use water resources. Unfortunately, the proposed MP fails to do this, and should additionally take steps to implement water conservation measures for existing and new development.

Conclusion: The proposed MP could be significantly improved by simply increasing lot size acreage in the environs outside of the proposed growth centers. What you've proposed only perpetuates suburban sprawl on remaining farmland and open space. By increasing buildable lot sizes beyond that currently proposed, and eliminating the grandfathered lot provision, the town will go a long way towards protecting its character, quality of life, prized open spaces, and sensitive freshwater resources so important to all life.

Thank you