



TOWNSHIP OF LONG HILL
MASTER PLAN



TOWNSHIP OF LONGHILL



MUNICIPAL MASTER PLAN

Prepared for:
Long Hill Township Planning Board

DRAFT

The original of this report was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-12

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EXECUTION SUMMARY

Plan Mission

Long Hill Township is a special blend of five communities, each with a distinct history and heritage, collectively forming a semi-rural landscape.

The mission of the Master Plan is to responsibly grow the Township, while maintaining the semi-rural landscape of Meyersville and Homestead Park, regenerating Stirling's Workers Village, respecting Millington's Historical features and recognizing Gillette as a visitor's gateway to the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

The Master Plan promotes responsible change for a sustainable future while honoring the past, creating a Township where people will want to build their own future for generations to come.

What is a Master Plan?

A Master Plan is a governing document that articulates a community's vision for its future and establishes a framework of policies to enact that vision. More specifically, a Master Plan specifies how a community's built and natural environment will evolve and how it will utilize the land going forward. The laws enacted must conform to the goals and strategies adopted in the Master Plan.

Like Long Hill Township, a Master Plan is made up of many different parts, or elements that discuss issues like transportation, land use, housing, open space and conservation that coalesce into a larger entity. The vision outlined in the Plan will outline important policy decisions affecting land development, ranging from individual residential renovations to the proper location of business districts and areas that should be preserved for open space. Additionally, it serves as a high-level guide for the Township's Planning and Zoning Boards in their review of applications that

come before them. This Plan was written with implementation in mind to help Long Hill realize its goals, and remove barriers to investment into the Township.

Master Plan Requirements

A Master Plan is among the most important components of the State of New Jersey's Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL), which gives and outlines authority to local governments to make their own policies that they believe will advance their unique local interests. The Master Plan guides local policies, such as zoning ordinances, which implement the plan and give it regulatory teeth through resident-led Planning and Zoning Boards. A Master Plan is by its nature, an aspirational document. It's a guide for a community to set the land use policies to provide direction in effectuating priorities to set the course for the future it desires. Simply stated, a Master Plan outlines a vision for a community and the steps that are needed to attain that vision. It is also an important tool for prioritizing investments, solving existing problems and for attracting more resources into the community.

The MLUL requires every municipality to update its Master Plan once every 10 years. Long Hill last passed a comprehensive update of its Master Plan in 1996. Officials have approved updates and passed a reexamination in the decades since, but even those changes are framed and shaped by recommendations made over two decades ago. Since 1996, the challenges and opportunities at hand for Long Hill have evolved, as have the aspirations of its residents. Those aspirations are embodied in the goals and objectives contained in this Master Plan, which articulates an intricate set of tools and strategies meant to realize them.

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A Master Plan is composed of a series of individual plans, or “elements,” each pertaining to a specific subject. The MLUL requires municipalities to prepare a Land Use and a Housing Element. Land use and housing, though, constitute only a part of the built environment. Communities prepare other plan elements to address such areas as parks and open space, transportation, sustainability, economic development, and historic preservation. The MLUL provides guidance for elements that address many of these areas so that they may be used by decision makers to manage the growth and preservation of their community. This Plan includes elements that address each of these disciplines and presents thoughtful proposals for how to enhance the aspects of life in the Township that residents value the most, while addressing those that residents see as the most in need of improvement.

This document also meets the MLUL Master Plan requirement to include “a statement of objectives, principles, assumptions, policies and standards upon which the constituent proposals for the physical, economic and social development of the municipality are based.” As such, it shall serve as the basis for any subsequent Master Plan elements or revisions to existing elements. Going forward, all planning efforts and policies must describe how they are consistent with or serve to further the vision, goals, and objectives contained within this document.

METHODOLOGY

The Master Plan was prepared through an open and public process designed to reach and obtain

significant input from a wide spectrum of voices from every sector of Long Hill’s community. Each part of the outreach process was facilitated by the members of the Master Plan Committee, who worked with Town Planning professionals to ensure that it remained accessible and relatable to the Township’s residents. The recommendations within are based on the ideas, challenges, aspirations, and insights shared with professionals by members of the community.

This process extended throughout several years, and included a mix of in-person engagement (including public sessions held in the Fall of 2017 that focused upon Stirling and Millington), online-based surveys, meetings with key stakeholder groups and regular Master Plan Committee meetings. Hundreds of residents would participate in this outreach process. Throughout the course of these years, the Township would experience changing conditions, and adopt specific elements such as the Housing Element and Fair Share Plan to satisfy the Township’s legal obligations. All these changes, along with the results from community engagement were carefully reviewed and organized by the members of the Master Plan Committee.

Beyond the adoption of this Master Plan, updates to the Elements should be sought on a regular basis as determined by Township Committees, Boards and Commissions or any legal obligations that may be imposed. Therefore, it is the intent of the Planning Board to address such changes periodically to keep this Master Plan current and relevant between Re-examination and Revision

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COMMUNITY PROFILE

Long Hill Township is located in the southernmost corner of Morris County bordering Union County to the southeast and Somerset County to the south and west. The semi-rural, small-town characteristics of Long Hill Township exemplifies the transitional area between the higher density municipalities to the east and more rural communities to the west.

Long Hill largely consists of areas of natural beauty, including the Millington Gorge along the Passaic River. Several of the town's parks touch the Passaic River, a waterway that defines its western and southern borders. The 7,800-acre Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge comprises much of the township's northern land area and is among the most defining features of Long Hill. In fact, Federal and State lands, Township Open Space, and steep slope properties, account for about 55% of the Township land which is unavailable for future development.

Long Hill Township is greater than the sum of its parts and is a uniquely pleasant community. With its own distinctive charms and character, many consider it a great place to raise a family. Township residents take pride in their community, many volunteering on the various boards and committees to keep it vibrant and active.

Three of Long Hill's distinct centers (Millington, Stirling & Gillette) offer commuter rail service to New York City via the NJ Transit Gladstone Branch of the Morris and Essex Rail Line. Nearby highways such as Interstates 78 and 287 offer easy access to major regional centers and beyond.

Since the early 1990s, the Township has not undergone significant business or residential

growth with much of the developable land utilized by existing businesses and residences. Growth was also limited as a result of the sewer hookup ban caused by flow limitations at the Township Wastewater Treatment Plant (WWTP). The sewer ban also contributed to the Township maintaining the small town charm that most residents deeply appreciate. In addition, during this timeframe some existing businesses have fallen into disrepair which creates further challenges for the Township.

Over the last five years, the Township has been faced with meeting future housing obligations as the result New Jersey statutory changes. On July 6, 2015, Long Hill Township sought a declaratory judgment for compliance with the Mount Laurel doctrine and Fair Housing Act of 1985. The purpose of judgment was to allow the Township to negotiate a settlement agreement with the Fair Share Housing Center that met the terms of the Mount Laurel doctrine and Fair Housing Act of 1985. On December 15, 2017, a settlement agreement was reached requiring the adoption of an updated Housing Element and Fair Share Plan. The Township prepared a Fair Share Plan in conjunction with a revised Housing Element in April 2018 meeting these requirements.

Recognizing that large capital improvements would be necessary to lift the sewer ban, a requirement of the Fair Share settlement, the Township looked at the available alternatives to fund these necessary changes. The Township Committee twice recommended, and in November 2019 residents approved, through a referendum, to sell the WWTP to New Jersey American Water Company. The terms of the

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sale will lead to improvements at the WWTP which will allow for sewer hook-ups to existing residences, where possible, and future growth opportunities in the Township.

The Master Plan needs to reflect upon changes that have already taken place, and to identify where improvements can be made while considering future needs and address the changing priorities taking place in our society. To this extent, the Master Plan includes a new element on Sustainability, and expands the Conservation Element.

Finally, the Master Plan should provide a vision for the future that considers the desires of the township residents based on the feedback received from the recent Township Master Plan Assessment.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Total Population

The Township's population has neither grown nor fallen dramatically in the last fifty years. The 2010 Census found that 8,702 people lived in Long Hill. The 2010 estimate represents a decline from 2000, when the Township had an estimated population of 8,777 residents. The most recent Census data, the 2018 American Community Survey, put the population at 8,659 residents. If accurate, the Township would have a population density of 713 residents per square mile.

Total Households & Household Size

Long Hill has 3,194 households, as per the most recent Census data. The average household size in the Township is 2.74 persons, which is slightly higher than the Morris County average, 2.68 residents.

Population Projections

Looking forward, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority projects Long Hill's population to grow over the next three decades, rising to 9,343 residents and 3,487 households by 2045. The population increase projected would necessitate an annual growth rate of 0.2%. While the Township's population has been in a slight decline for the past two decades, new housing projects in compliance with the Township's affordable housing requirements would suggest a modest increase to overall population is likely over the next decade.

Age

The median age of Long Hill residents is 43.4 years old, approximately the same as that of Morris County and surrounding communities.

Race & Ethnicity

Non-Hispanic whites are the largest demographic group by race and ethnicity, accounting for 93.5% of the population. Residents of Asian descent comprise an estimated 3.6% of the Township's population and are the second largest demographic group.

Educational Attainment

Long Hill is a highly educated community. According to the 2018 ACS, 62.2% of residents have a bachelor's degree or higher. Approximately 28.9% of residents have a graduate degree or higher.

Employment – Overall

According to the 2018 American Community Survey, Long Hill Township had an unemployment rate of 4.8% and a labor force participation rate of 67.9%. By comparison, the Census estimated the unemployment and labor force participation rates for New Jersey to be 6.1% and 65.6%, respectively.

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Occupational Statistics

Residents work in a wide range of industries. Of the total workforce, 15.9% of Township residents work in the financial services and the insurance sector, making it the most prominent industry for Long Hill residents. The healthcare and social services industry, which employs 12.5% of Long Hill workers, is the next largest employer. The professional scientific and technical services sector also employs a substantive share of the Township workforce representing 11.4% of the total workforce.

RELATIONSHIP TO OTHER PLANS

Morris County Master Plan

Morris County's Future Land Use Element has not been updated since 1975. That document recognized Villages such as Millington, Stirling and Gillette as providing the "small town" or rural atmosphere that many Morris County residents value. The preservation of this lifestyle remains an important planning objective today.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan

The 2012 State Strategic Plan (New Jersey's revised State Development and Redevelopment Plan) provides a strategic framework for growth, development, and preservation activities throughout the State. The goals contained in this document are consistent with those of the 2012 State Plan, which are: (1) Targeted Economic Growth, (2) Effective Regional Planning, (3) Preservation, Protection, and Enhancement of Critical State Resources, and (4) Tactical Alignment of Government. Provisions within this Plan will advance these goals, particularly those relating to the conservation of open space and critical environmental resources owing to the large percentage of protected natural areas within the Township.

Morris County Solid Waste Management Plan

The Solid Waste Management Act designates every county in the state as a solid waste management district, and each district is required to prepare a Solid Waste Management Plan. The Morris County Municipal Utilities Authority is responsible for the Morris County Solid Waste Management Plan, which serves as a blueprint for how the County reduces, recycles, and disposes of all waste generated within the district. This Plan encourages the reduction and recycling of solid waste and recognizes both as important Township-wide objectives.

Passaic River Consideration

The Passaic River is one of the defining natural features of Long Hill Township. The river and its tributaries flow through Harding and Chatham Townships to the north and east, then forms the boundary along our western and southern edges with the Townships of Bernards, Warren and Berkeley Heights. The opportunities it offers and potential challenges it raises are discussed elsewhere in this document and are shared by all these communities as well as others further downstream. The Township is cognizant that how it manages those challenges may impact those other communities too.

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