

# Reexamination Report

## Jersey City Master Plan and Regulations

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Prepared by Robert D. Cotter, PP, AICP  
Planning Director

The City of Jersey City adopted a new Master Plan in May of 2000, after more than a year of preparation, staff work and presentation and discussion within all six of the city's wards. The new Master Plan led to a total revision of the city's Zoning Ordinance into the Jersey City Land Development Ordinance, which was adopted in April of 2001.

As we approach the sixth anniversary of the 2000 Master Plan, it is timely to present a reexamination report. The Municipal Land Use Law requires a municipal review of the city's plans and regulations at least once every six years.

The reexamination report shall state:

- a. The major problems and objectives relating to land development in Jersey City at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.
- b. The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.
- c. 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.
- d. The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.
- e. 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 al.) 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.

These requirements are addressed as follows.

## **The major problems and objectives relating to land development in Jersey City at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.**

The last Master Plan Reexamination Report was produced in 1992. It recommended a new master plan be prepared, since the last comprehensive Master Plan done for Jersey City dated back to 1966. In fact, the Master Plan adopted by the Planning Board in 2000 was prepared in response to the 1992 Reexamination Report's recommendation. The 2000 Master Plan is comprehensive and contains all the plan elements mandated and recommended by the MLUL. In addition, it contains an Urban Design Element. This report will consider the major problems and objectives relating to land development in Jersey City since the adoption of the 2000 Plan.

Since the last reexamination report led to the 2000 Plan, we will discuss the major problems and objective relating to land development since the adoption of the 2000 Plan.

Since May of 2000, the most important change to Jersey City may be the Hudson Bergen Light Rail. Although it opened April 15, 2000 – a month before the Plan was adopted – its full impact could not be felt until it expanded north into North Hudson communities including the connection to Hoboken's Rail Station and further north to the Weehawken Ferry Terminal.

The light rail has spurred new interest in the west side of Jersey City and redevelopment plans have been adopted for this area to take advantage of the new transit connection. Higher density housing has been approved in Transit Oriented Developments (TOD's). There continues to be market pressure to expand the residential development as the old industrial infrastructure continues its decline.

An absolute boom occurred in the Hudson River waterfront after the arrival of the Light Rail, and more than 7 million square feet of office space was developed in the few years between 2000 and 2005. However, the events of September 11, 2001 have led to profound changes in the office market, as Lower Manhattan continues its recovery. The exact impact on Jersey City's office market as a result of September 11<sup>th</sup> is difficult to gauge, but there are currently no office projects in construction, and none are planned.

However, the residential market remains strong. There are over 3,200 dwelling units being constructed in the Downtown marketplace as we write this and thousands more in the planning stages. Journal Square has just seen the completion of the first new residential high-rise in 40 years and the first non-subsidized high-rise apartment building in history was just approved by the Zoning Board for a Journal Square site. On the West Side, new residential development is occurring on former industrial sites, with over a hundred units built in the last year, and several hundred planned and approved near the West Side Light Rail Station.

The Marion section is home to new residents along Sip Avenue and the former American Can Company building has been approved for residential conversion of the first 200 units with more than a 1,000 potentially to be built in the next few years.

Greenville has seen numerous two-family units go up on scattered sites, and the former Republic Container site has produced over a 100 units with more to come in the second phase, soon to start. These are to be townhouse units.

The Morris Canal redevelopment area and the Lafayette section in general have seen unprecedented growth and renewal in the last few years, as many new developments are in the planning stages. Whitlock Mills is in construction and the first 80 units will be occupied early next year.

Industrial development has not been significant and more industrial sites are converting to other uses. This decline in blue collar employment is of concern and needs to be addressed.

**The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.**

The decline in commercial development, both office and industrial, are due to market and global forces and cannot be effectively addressed at the local level. Indeed, it may not be desirable to retain industrial uses in certain areas of the city as places like the Warehouse District become functionally obsolete for the intended industrial uses. Forces such as increased use of trucking over rail, and narrow streets in the district make it difficult to move today's large tractor trailers through this area. Conversion to non-industrial uses can save the buildings and bring new life to the area.

The office market is really a regional market, and as Manhattan goes, so do we. When Lower Manhattan starts to grow, we will likely see that market improve in the waterfront commercial district, as well.

The residential boom brings with it concerns about the carrying capacity of certain sites, neighborhoods and sectors of the city. There is adequate sewer and water capacity for more development, but how much more is a question that needs to be addressed. The city has formed an Infrastructure Planning Group to deal with these issues and an RFP for such planning has been produced and will yield some answers within the coming year.

**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.**

There have not been any significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives which formed the basis of the master plan and development regulations in the past six years. We are seeing the fruits of our years of planning and redeveloping our city. The residential market has generated its own critical mass and this sector of real state development will likely continue despite the ups and downs of the greater New York-New Jersey marketplace.

**The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.**

It is recommended that the master plan be amended to include the following.

The Harsimus Stem of the Pennsylvania Railroad should be added to the list of Historic Landmarks to preserve the historic character of the stone embankments and the right-of-way, including the sections without embankment structures. This will provide areas for open space, historic preservation, and transportation options. Losing this rail road right-of-way and historic engineering marvel would adversely impact the booming residential component of the city's growth as it would remove possible improvements to accessibility as well desperately needed open space. A public walkway, similar to Manhattan's High Line and Paris' Promenade Plantee, can be developed on top of the structures. The East Coast Greenway has selected the Embankment as part of the Jersey City link. Light Rail transit could also be installed in a narrow strip of the Embankment at some point in the future and still leave room for these pedestrian and bicycle uses.

The city should explore the use of transfer of development rights to address issues related to saving the some of Jersey City's historic character. This may mean reducing development intensities in some districts and allowing transfers of development rights from sending sites to replace the development rights so reduced. This technique has been successfully used in New York for decades and has just been added to the New Jersey land use law.

The changing industrial landscape needs intensive study to determine where to allow new industrial uses to occur and where to encourage conversion to residential and other uses. It is recommended that the Waterfront Planned Development district along Routes 1 & 9 be amended to allow warehouse uses. This brown field site cannot support multi-storied structures due to sub-surface conditions, but may be amenable to a single-story warehouse and distribution facility. Meanwhile the industrial area south of the light rail right-of-way in the Morris Canal area should be considered for residential and mixed use development as a means of cleaning the area of its historic soil contamination. Only higher scaled development can generate the economic incentives to make this happen.

The Warehouse District should be added to the city's list of historic districts. Although this was done in 2004, it was undone by error in the city's procedures and these needs to be corrected to deal with the functional obsolescence of the area for warehousing and trucking and conversion to residential uses with an emphasis on arts district economic development.

The Jersey Avenue Redevelopment Area has not seen any significant development except along 10<sup>th</sup> Street. Current litigation seeks to return the densities with the optional buy back were at under earlier plan versions. The reduction of densities with the optional buy back of development rights for the purposes of open space creation was an appropriate means of regulating development and addressing the need for some green space. Parks make great neighborhoods, as witnessed by great neighborhoods such as Hamilton Park, Van Vorst Park, and Audubon Park. Our planning needs to impose public open space requirements in redevelopment areas in the interest of recreating these great places in our city. It is not inappropriate to allow mixed uses and even incompatible industrial uses to exist in the Jersey Avenue redevelopment area as we await the eventual conversation and removal of these uses by future redevelopment.

The Neighborhood Commercial district at the southern end of Kennedy Boulevard needs to be revisited. It should be changed from mixed use to residential development more compatible with the character of the neighborhood. At the same time, the area of the Boulevard extending from Winfield to Terhune Avenue also needs to be studied to determine an appropriate mixed use category for this stretch of the Boulevard.

**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 al.) 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.**

Jersey City will continue to use the powers of the redevelopment statute. With 63 redevelopment plans in place, and more planned, we are foremost in New Jersey in the use of this tool to renew our city. It has obviously worked well.

New areas to be explored include the area along Center Street north of Grand Street; the area near the foot of First and Third and Third Street at Merseles; the area along Hoboken Avenue and New York Avenue, and the Route 440 corridor.

The 440 corridor was the subject of an intense study was the subject of an intense study by the city, NJ City University and the Jersey City Schools, which resulted in the Bayside concept plan. That plan should form the approximate basis of revised zoning in this area. Specific land uses need to be clarified and certain concepts, such as open space and transit provisions need be further studied, but the long term conversion to true new-urbanist parameters will most likely occur. With the consent of the current property owners, a redevelopment plan can effectuate this change more efficiently. A boulevard to replace 440 and relocation of the city public works compound can be seen as part of this effort.

Saint Francis hospital has been discontinued as a hospital use. It should be redeveloped into a mixed-use facility compatible with the Hamilton Park Historic District.

The Medical Zone district needs to be reviewed to ensure appropriate height standards are in place, particularly considering a reduction in height.

The area at Grove Street and Montgomery needs to be redeveloped to complement City Hall and the Majestic Theater project.

The area between Jersey Avenue and Grove Street and Columbus Drive and Newark Avenue should be looked at for possible redevelopment.

The Cultural and Community Facilities element of the Master Plan should be reviewed for the inclusion and/or expansion of convention facilities, arts, and cultural resources throughout the City.

Access to the west side of the City needs to be addressed, with the potential for increased mass transit, a PATH station, and transit corridors. The Circulation Element of the plan should be revised to address these concerns.

Lot and bulk standards in the O/R zone should be analyzed. With an abundance of undersized lots, it should be ensured that the standards will achieve the desired density and intended development.