

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Bergen County Department of Planning and Economic Development has not only played an active role in participating in the Cross-Acceptance process under the auspices of the State Plan, but provided the nexus of coordination for information dissemination, changes to the State Plan map, and negotiation for inconsistencies between municipal planning and the overarching State Plan.

In our outreach to constituent municipalities, we addressed the following key questions:

- ❖ **What is the State Plan?**
- ❖ **What is Cross-Acceptance?**
- ❖ **What will this round of Cross-Acceptance accomplish?**
- ❖ **How will the County and Municipalities participate in the Process?**

The answers to these Cross-Acceptance “Basics” are provided in the following section.

## **Cross-Acceptance Basics**

The State Planning Act of 1985 empowered the State Planning Commission with the responsibility to prepare, revise, and readopt the State Development and Redevelopment Plan and its accompanying Policy Map every three years. The previous State Plan was adopted in March 2001. On April 28, 2004, the State Planning Commission released the preliminary State Plan for reexamination through a process known as Cross-Acceptance.

An ambitious process, Cross-Acceptance calls upon all levels of government to review, examine, and “Cross -Accept” the goals, policies, and objectives of the State Plan. The State Planning Act also provides for the counties to serve as the negotiating entity between the State and its constituent municipalities throughout Cross-Acceptance. As spelled out in a resolution of the Bergen County Board of Chosen Freeholders, the Bergen County Department of Planning and Economic Development has served (and continues to serve) as the official negotiating entity for the County and, as such, is charged with coordinating all Cross-Acceptance activities.

This round of Cross-Acceptance features a number of significant changes. As a result of these changes, the County’s role has taken on added importance. These changes entail the following:

- ***Participation of State Agencies.*** Each agency's goals and policies (The Department of Community Affairs, Department of Environmental Protection, Department of Transportation, Department of Agriculture, Department of the Treasury, and the Council on Affordable Housing) has been incorporated into the Plan, with special attention to ensure that one agency's goals, objectives, and programs do not contradict another's.
- ***Role of the Map.*** Another important change is the role of the State Plan map. The intent here is to use the map to promote smart growth, and corollary preservation of environmental resources. To achieve this end, Development Permitting will be attached to the map – with more stringent permit procedures in environmentally sensitive areas, and conversely, streamlined permitting in areas designated for Smart Growth. The State has also discussed the potential for the Map to aid in prioritizing funds and directing future infrastructure investments into those areas that make the most sense – the Smart Growth areas. These areas will be prioritized for much-needed infrastructure investment.
- ***Public Outreach Efforts.*** This ambitious effort was kicked off with a countywide meeting, held in conjunction with the Office of Smart Growth, as an initial forum for municipalities and local officials to have input into the process. Regional Outreach Meetings have also been held to discuss broader-reaching issues related to the State Plan – and any other planning and development related concerns our constituent municipalities may have. These meetings have been conducted for each of our 6 planning areas throughout the County, and provided an important forum to discuss issues both common to the overall area (thereby promoting the concept of region-wide issues and solutions to key planning concerns), and particular to individual communities. In addition, in order to capture more localized and specific issues of concern to the municipalities, the Department utilized its Cross Acceptance Grant from the Office of Smart Growth to enable us to reach out individually to each of our 70 municipalities, to guide them on specific policy and mapping issues, and help them to voice items of concern and draft changes to the overall State Plan Map.

Bergen County was allotted approximately six (6) months in which to complete our Cross-Acceptance report for the County and our seventy (70) municipalities. The Bergen County Department of Planning and Economic Development has streamlined our Cross-Acceptance process, acting as the coordinating entity, in order to accomplish this ambitious task within the abbreviated timeframe.

As noted, municipalities were provided with a number of forums in which to provide input into the Cross-Acceptance process. Each municipality's responsibility in this process started with the following steps:

1. To appoint an official municipal representative as a regular liaison to the county throughout the process -- someone who is familiar with municipal master plans, ordinances and policies – for the sake of clarity and consistency. The Mayor and other municipal officials of course,

were always welcomed to participate throughout the process (as many did) in coordination with the Cross–Acceptance Representative.

2. To adopt a municipal resolution to denote the municipality’s official participation in Cross-Acceptance.
3. To update the county’s existing files and databases containing all municipal Master Plans, Land Development Regulations, and Capital Budgets. The Department of Planning and Economic Development prepared a questionnaire geared toward the designated Cross-Acceptance representative to provide this information. Master Plan documents and local ordinances were to be consulted as particularly important to provide input into the municipality’s current and future development and growth potential, and also such that their stated goals, policies and implementation mechanisms could be reviewed to see how they match the new State Plan. In addition, environmentally sensitive features in these communities were identified that the municipality felt should be preserved and protected. In order to do so, the municipalities were asked to provide documentation as to how your municipality is working to protect these areas, as well.
4. Should municipalities choose not to participate in Cross-Acceptance, they were notified that written confirmation would be required for our County Cross-Acceptance Report.

In all of our outreach efforts, the Department stressed that the big incentive for all of us, county and municipalities alike, is that investments and permits will be tied to how our communities are mapped, what our individual planning policies are, and on how local policies support the map. Naturally, we want to succeed, individually and as a region. As a mature, inner suburb – nearly fully developed – our investments should be geared toward sustaining our economic strength and protecting our environmental assets.