

Thomas B. Harvey

A Citizen Planner Par Excellence



Thomas B. Harvey, winner of PlanSmart NJ's Van Zandt Williams, Jr. Community Involvement Award.

The historic Village of Cranbury has been cited by county and state officials as one of the “best preserved villages” in NJ—and many people would agree this distinction is largely due to the leadership of Thomas Harvey, the longtime Planning Board Chairman.

“Cranbury has a substantial historic center because enough people cared about controlling the future of the town,” says Harvey, who is this year’s winner of PlanSmart NJ’s Van Zandt Williams, Jr. Community Involvement Award. “Thirty years ago, our town was surrounded by farmland. But in the 1980s, we saw everything disappearing fast, with one-acre housing going up everywhere. Nobody wanted that, so we worked together to preserve open space as well as our town.”

Tom Harvey joined the Township Planning Board in 1981 and has served as its Chairman for 21 years. Under his leadership and direction, the Planning Board began a long-term program to revise the Township Master Plan, recommend new zoning provisions, and to implement programs to permanently preserve the Township’s agricultural lands. It also moved aggressively to amend the Historic Preservation Ordinance and to establish a local nonprofit housing program to implement the Township’s lower-income housing obligation.

Of particular note is Cranbury’s permanent preservation of 3,500 acres, or 85 percent, of the land in the Farmland Preservation Zone—the highest percentage in Middlesex County and one of the highest in the state. The preservation program was funded with tax ratables that came to fruition after the Township recognized the enormous commercial potential in the area to the east of Route 130, where industrial, office, and warehouse development were growing.

The decision to permit warehousing in the Township initially raised concerns about the negative visual impact of one-million-square-foot buildings on the surrounding community. At Tom Harvey’s suggestion, architects and engineers, many representing developers, met with the Planning Board to discuss specific standards. The Planning Board then recommended, and the Township Committee adopted, architectural and site planning standards which addressed these concerns.

The success of the planning program in Cranbury, including various techniques such as lot averaging, open space preservation, agricultural preservation, and residential and non-residential design review standards, can serve as a useful guide to other towns in implementing sound

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Award Winner (continued)

planning principles. The Township's impressive achievement in farmland preservation has already been conveyed to surrounding municipalities through regional conferences, county meetings and direct communication.

"Based on my 50 years of experience in planning, I believe Tom Harvey is by far the best Planning Board Chairman I have ever worked with or been before," said local planner Harvey Moskowitz, who nominated Harvey last year for a New Jersey American Planning Association Distinguished Leadership Award for a Citizen Planner. (He won that award, too.) "Tom Harvey is a delight to work with, applicants find him fair and direct, and he goes out of his way at a Planning Board meeting to ensure that the public has an opportunity to express its opinion."

At the end of 2007, Harvey is planning to retire as head of the Planning Board, although he says he will continue to be available to consult with Township officials about matters concerning the future of Cranbury.

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The Van Zandt Williams, Jr. Award

This award was set up in 1996 to honor our long-time Board member and former chairman of the Board, Van Williams, and to complement our annual C. McKim Norton Award. This new award was not necessarily to be given every year, but only when a particularly worthy individual came to the attention of the Awards Committee. It was established to be given to an individual who, like Van, through active civic involvement or volunteer efforts, has made a personal commitment to the quality of life in the region. Previous awardees have included:

1996: Van Zandt Williams, Jr., Princeton University

1997: Joseph Taylor, Matrix Development Group

1998: Robert Prunetti, Mercer County Executive

2000: George Taber/Donald Wilson, *Business News New Jersey*

2001: Hon. James Weinstein, Commissioner, NJDOT

2002: Joseph Maraziti, Jr., former Chairman of the State Planning Commission

2005: Candace M. Ashmun, former Executive Director of the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions.

2006: The Institute for Advanced Study