

# **Reframing Smart Growth in NJ**

*A Radical New Vision for Land Use Decision-Making*

***The Regional Planning Partnership  
Smart Growth Economy Project  
White Paper***

*Building Better Lives Through Better Planning*

***Executive Summary***

***DRAFT***

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## ***Acknowledgements and Disclaimer***

This paper draws on the Regional Planning Partnership's (RPP) nearly four decades of work in regional land use issues. It has also benefited from the experience of project supporters and participants in the roundtables, interviews, conference, surveys and briefings that RPP conducted as part of its Smart Growth Economy Project.

RPP acknowledges the generous contributions of time, expertise and data from representatives of government as well as the private and nonprofit sectors. Without them, we would never have been able to make the progress that we have. We wish to point out, however, ***that the contents of this Paper are solely the responsibility of the Regional Planning Partnership.***

## ***About the Smart Growth Economy Project***

RPP's Smart Growth Economy Project used two previous successful projects as models: RPP's Regional Forum in the 1980's, and Forum 2020 in the 1990's which had five components:

1. **Partnerships:** Setting up a structure to work with leaders in the private, public and nonprofit sectors.
2. **Goals:** Agreeing on what is to be accomplished for the state.
3. **Facts:** Researching the facts.
4. **Breakthroughs:** Creating new policy frameworks.
5. **Recommendations:** From this new vantage point, finding common ground on which to base new solutions.

The Smart Growth Economy Project has partnerships (roundtables on topics ranging from housing to water to transportation); set a new goal of optimizing results in four vital areas: economy, environment, resource efficiency and regional equity; gathered facts through research, surveys and analysis, particularly on what is driving growth now and is needed to drive growth in the future; and achieved breakthroughs, producing new planning tools to guide policy makers in better directions. We are now ready to consolidate our progress and expand our results into detailed recommendations.

## ***About RPP: Building Better Lives Through Better Planning***

RPP is particularly known for working with leaders and professionals in land use development and conservation, developing cutting-edge concepts and products that will produce a better quality of life through the better use of land. We have:

- **Shaped laws**, such as Farmland Preservation; and the Fair Housing, State Planning, and Transfer of Development Rights Acts.
- **Developed new policy frameworks**, such as the center-based land use structure used in the State Plan and Goal-Oriented Zoning (GOZ) to implement it.
- **Designed new approaches to Smart Growth**, such as VISION 2050 for central Jersey and 4E Planning for any region.
- **Invented new planning tools**, such as the computer-based GOZ<sup>®</sup> model, the Regional Action Plan process, TrendShift, and PlanMetrics.
- **Partnered to create new coalitions**, such as the D&R Greenway, NJ Future, Coalition for Affordable Housing and the Environment, NJ Regional Coalition.
- **Facilitated consensus** on such issues as infrastructure investments and centers.
- **Published books**, such as the *Growth Management Handbook*, *Suburban Design Handbook*, *Green Infrastructure Guide*.
- **Conducted federally-funded research**, such as measuring the land use/transportation relationship, and land use and urban forestry.



## **Executive Summary**

### ***Our Economy Is As Fragile As Our Environment***

RPP's White Paper addresses the many different problems facing New Jersey: rising housing prices, exceedingly long commute times, an alarming loss of open space and one of the most economically segregated states in the nation. Our White Paper proposes ways to restructure how land use and infrastructure decisions are made and provides a new platform from which to evaluate government programs on job growth, housing affordability, traffic congestion, urban revitalization, natural resource protection, environmental quality, racial and economic integration, property taxes and other pressing issues.

Better land use planning can “connect the dots” to achieve efficiencies in data collection and public spending, and effectiveness in meeting economic, environmental and regional equity goals that have, to date, eluded most government programs.

Our White Paper describes three revolutionary new tools. The first is **4E Planning**, a smart growth approach to the economy, environment, resource efficiency and regional equity. It is the first attempt in years to revive comprehensive planning, an approach that has languished since the federal government abandoned the practice in the 1960s.

The second tool is **PlanMetrics**, the first serious effort to apply target-based planning to land use. The new tools include a set of **Target Calculators** to set growth targets by County, and a **Land Use Index**, to describe base conditions in each County. Taken together, these metrics provide a new way to connect policy to local land use planning, based on optimizing a range of goals. Local officials can choose from a menu of strategies which, if acted on regionally, will achieve the targets.

The third tool is the **RAP (Regional Action Plan)**, the first public involvement process that is not based on asking open-ended questions, such as “what do you want?” but, instead, on finding the answer to the question “what will we do together to reach our joint goals?”

The process is designed to bring municipal officials together by county to negotiate the targets set by the **PlanMetrics** and the agreement on how the targets will be met. The RAP was designed by RPP with the help of some county and local officials in the Route 1 Corridor to bring usable technical data to the lay public, to help them to make better informed and better quality land use planning decisions.

All of these tools were developed following nearly four decades of work in the field, which has grounded RPP in real-world experience based on the many public and private partnerships that we have successfully cultivated over the years. The feedback, so far, is that we have something important—indeed, something revolutionary—that could reframe Smart Growth in New Jersey and become a model for land use planning across the nation.

## Next Steps

RPP's White Paper was written to launch discussions about the new planning concepts and tools that RPP has developed as part of the Smart Growth Economy Project. Our White Paper contains the preliminary findings and recommendations from the Project. RPP is currently circulating a draft of our White Paper for private discussion. After incorporating the feedback, RPP will develop a set of recommendations to deliver to Governor Corzine, key members of his administration, the Legislature and stakeholder groups.

We are planning four sets of meetings to be held throughout the remainder of 2007:

First, we will reconvene our roundtables on housing, transportation and water, and establish two new roundtables: on regulatory reform and regional equity.

Second, we will set up Regional Forums around the state to take the concepts and regional data to various locations. These meetings will give us a feel for how our concepts might work in diverse parts of the State. The feedback we get from these sessions will help us to refine and augment our recommendations. Our Forums will also allow us to establish a new **Planning Innovation Network** with interested parties throughout the State.

Third, we will hold meetings with representatives from the Governor's Office, Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), Department of Transportation (DOT), Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and Office of Smart Growth (OSG). Our goal for these meetings will be to encourage officials to embrace the concepts, consider their feedback, and to work with them on implementation.

Fourth, we will introduce our concepts to key lawmakers to consider what legislation they might introduce to implement and support our concepts.

In addition, RPP is seeking Project funding to: 1) collect the data that is missing but needed for our PlanMetrics and the RAP (Regional Action Planning), such as the location of infrastructure capacity and economic opportunities; 2) continue developing our target calculators and land use index; and 3) build a constituency around the state in multiple stakeholder groups.

We are planning a statewide conference on the recommendations of our Final Report in the spring of 2008. Happily, the date of this conference will coincide with RPP's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary!

***RPP invites public commentary on the findings and recommendations drafted in this White Paper.***

## The Smart Growth Economy Project

**Problem:** New Jersey has long been one of the most prosperous states in the nation, but today that future is at risk thanks to years of misguided land use decisions. Bad planning has driven up the cost of housing, increased traffic so that NJ's commutes are the third worst in the nation, and made life in the Garden State so challenging that many people are simply choosing to move out of the state.

Experts have long decried this problem. In 2006, the Brookings Institution released a report describing how the state's land use and housing policies are costing the state high-wage jobs. In 2003, Ameregis highlighted the threat to community stability from concentrated poverty, another planning issue. The nonprofit world has sought to address these concerns by tackling the issues separately: Homes New Jersey, Open Society's First Suburbs Mayors, the Keep It Green campaign. No coordinated approach has been developed to address the root of the problem—NJ's land use decisions—until now.

**Solution:** In 2005, the Regional Planning Partnership began work on our **Smart Growth Economy Project**, which led to a radical rethinking of how land use planning is practiced in New Jersey. In this White Paper, RPP outlines a number of "breakthrough" concepts that suggest a revolutionary new structure that would:

- **Reduce controversy** by addressing multiple goals within the same framework.
- **Transform broad, statewide goals** into quantifiable targets, making them more manageable, and more easily monitored for results.
- **Coordinate government actions** from state to local levels and across agencies.
- **Integrate land use plans, regulations and infrastructure decisions across jurisdictions and issues:** job growth, income, housing, transportation, etc.
- **Integrate the pieces of the State Plan:** goals, policies, planning objectives and the State Plan Policy Map.
- **Streamline Cross-acceptance and Plan Endorsement**, while setting aggressive targets and Best Planning and Management Practice standards.
- **Increase accountability** for results by connecting decisions to policy targets.
- **Reduce data collection** to that which is needed to inform specific decisions.
- **Form the basis for streamlining the development process**, while also building confidence that targets will actually be met.

## Preliminary Findings

### *Our Economy Is as Fragile as the Environment*

In 2005, RPP set up the Smart Growth Economy Project using some of DEP's work as a model. DEP had set the bar for other State agencies, by mapping environmental data to inform the State Plan.

Since the other agencies had not yet done so, RPP sought to provide the State Plan with other important data needed to address all of the goals in the State Planning Act: on the economy, resource efficiency and regional equity. It was expected that, combined with the environmental data, our information could produce a more effective, less controversial and yet more powerful State Plan.

This draft White Paper summarizes the progress to date on RPP's Smart Growth Economy Project. It includes the following findings and recommendations:

1. The Project was based on the premise that the **economy** is as fragile and as important to New Jersey's future quality of life as the **environment**. For this reason, growth decisions, as well as conservation plans, must be goal-oriented, fact-based, transparent and based on the public interest.
2. The Project was also based on the premise that **resource efficiency** (e.g., public investments in gray and green infrastructure, taxation policy) and **regional equity** (reducing New Jersey's racial segregation, concentrations of poverty, and other community disparities) need to be added to the conditions that must be improved when growth and conservation decisions are being made.

While both efficiency and equity are goals in the State Planning Act, regional equity is not, but should be, in the current State Plan. The White Paper includes a proposed new council: the **Governor's Regional Equity Advisors**.

3. The Project was designed to reframe debates on growth from "whether to grow," to "how much growth, where, to improve existing conditions by how much."
4. The White Paper will be supplemented by a companion document that will be released by RPP in late spring 2007: **The Geography of New Jersey's Economy**. This document will summarize the quantitative and qualitative material RPP gathered to provide insight into where the economy wants to grow and why, by economic sectors important to the State, by region. Through interviews and surveys, it will also show what representatives of each sector believe to be important about New Jersey's job growth, housing, income, infrastructure and the regulatory environment.

Later in the year, RPP will produce Appendices to the White Paper, as resources allow, including results from a test of the new tools in a region, and reports on recommended reforms in planning for transportation, watershed protection, housing

and the property tax system. In addition, RPP will prepare papers to supplement the Geography of New Jersey's Economy: Geography of Regional Equity, Opportunities for Efficiencies, and the Geography of the Environment.

5. The White Paper shows how to replace broad generalizations that currently guide smart growth programs, such as the vague goals in New Jersey's State Plan, with specific targets. For added power, the targets are drawn from existing laws, regulations or policies, such as the Governor's Economic Growth Strategy, the Stormwater Act and the Mt. Laurel Doctrine. These targets are intended to answer the questions: "**How much growth?**" "**Where?**" "**To do what?**" They also provide the means to monitor results and to hold public officials accountable for meeting publicly agreed objectives.
6. The White Paper lists what **data** should be collected by whom and shared with all agencies and levels of government. This material must include, for example: zoning build-out with an estimate of its impacts; the location of capacities and constraints in gray and green infrastructure systems; priority areas for redevelopment, investment, conservation and preservation; and an understanding of environmental and fiscal constraints.
7. It points out that this **data does not determine state and local plans, but rather informs their development**. The plans are expected to optimize a full range of goals, across a number of policy areas, coordinated from state to local government, supported by effective regulations and efficient infrastructure investments, and lead to accountability and results.
8. The White Paper recommends returning **the Office of State Planning to the Department of Treasury**. It was originally placed in Treasury to focus on the efficiencies of coordinated and strategic investments, and to reduce inter-agency disagreements.
9. It also outlines a **Preliminary Plan for Growth and Conservation** that will provide the basis for Cross-Acceptance and Endorsement and link statewide goals with local land use decision-making. This **Preliminary Plan** will provide the targets that will, in turn, provide the parameters for monitoring the implementation and results of these plans. For the development of this **Preliminary Plan**, the White Paper outlines a process and describes a number of new tools, described above: **4E Planning, PlanMetrics** and the **RAP**.
10. It describes how the new tools will shift emphasis in planning efforts **from visioning to implementation**. It also describes how the tools will emphasize **optimizing** results on a number of goals, rather than **maximizing** results on any one.