
PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

for

Determination of an Area in Need of Redevelopment

BOUROGH OF WOODSTOWN SALEM COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

Supply Industrial District & Vicinity



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I. INTRODUCTION

In an effort to create an environment to enable existing businesses to thrive, promote the introduction of additional, complementary uses, and enhance the vitality of commercial and industrial development in the Supply Industrial District, the Borough of Woodstown's Borough Council authorized the Borough's Planning Board to conduct a Preliminary Redevelopment Investigation to determine whether the area of the Borough known as the "study area," consisting of the following parcels, qualifies under the statutory criteria to be declared an area in need of redevelopment:

- Block 18, Lots 29, 30, 31, 32, 34;
- Block 20, Lots 14, 15, 27, 28, 37;
- Block 23, Lots 1, 9;
- Block 24, Lots 1, 2, 19, 20, 21;
- Block 500, Lots 2, 3

The Planning Board commissioned Remington and Vernick Engineers, licensed professional planners in the State of New Jersey, to undertake the Preliminary Redevelopment Investigation on its behalf. The study was conducted in accordance with the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law.

Enacted in 1992, the *Local Redevelopment and Housing Law* P.L. 1992, c.79 (C40A:12A-1 et seq.) provides municipalities with a means to address conditions of deterioration and lack of proper land use for lands and/or buildings which are abandoned, decayed, undeveloped/underdeveloped, or non-productive/under-productive enabling redevelopment of such areas into productive assets for the community.

Additionally, the redevelopment statute gives municipalities the power to acquire private property for the purposes of redevelopment (through negotiation or condemnation); to clear and reprogram said lands; to install infrastructure and/or other site improvements; and to negotiate and enter into partnerships with public and private entities in order to accomplish a municipality's redevelopment goals and objectives.

An area may be deemed in need of redevelopment given the applicability of certain criteria and undertaking of appropriate procedures outlined in the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law. If the study area is deemed an area in need of redevelopment this then permits the preparation and execution of a Redevelopment Plan, the acquisition of buildings and land through condemnation, the leasing or selling of property without public bidding, and allows the area to qualify for financial incentives.

II. REDEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The redevelopment statute requires a multi-step process that must be adhered to in order for the municipal governing body and planning board to exercise those powers lawfully. This process is outlined below. Only after completion of this public process is a municipality able to exercise the powers granted under the Redevelopment Statute.

- (1) The governing body must authorize the planning board, by resolution, to undertake an investigation of the delineated to determine whether it meets the criteria set forth in section 5 of P.L.1992, c.79 (C.40A:12A-5).
- (2) The planning board must then prepare and post a map showing the boundaries of the area and the location of the various parcels therein. The map must also include a statement setting forth the basis for the investigation.
- (3) The planning board must conduct a preliminary investigation and hold a duly noticed public hearing in order to discuss the findings of the investigation and to hear persons who are interested in or would be affected by the contemplated action. The results and recommendations of the hearing are then referred to the governing body in the form of a planning board resolution for formal action.
- (4) Upon receipt of the recommendation from the planning board, the governing body may act to adopt a resolution designating the area in question, or any part thereof, as an area in need of redevelopment.
- (5) Upon the designation, the planning board or redevelopment entity is then required to prepare a redevelopment plan, which establishes the goals and objectives of the municipality and outlines the actions to be taken to accomplish these goals and objectives within the redevelopment area
- (6) The redevelopment plan, after review by the planning board, is referred to the governing body for adoption.
- (7) Upon receipt of the redevelopment plan from the planning board, the governing body may act to adopt the plan by ordinance. The adopted redevelopment plan may become an amendment to the municipality's zoning district map and zoning ordinance or may be treated as an overlay to existing zoning.

III. STUDY AREA & BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION

Study Area Delineation

The study area includes nineteen (19) parcels that are generally located in the center of the Borough along East Grant Street, Route 40, and Broad Street. The study area is located within the (SI) Supply Industrial district, the (C1) Commercial district, the (R3) and (R5) Residential districts and is in close proximity to the downtown retail district of the Borough.

The area is comprised of a mix of industrial, commercial, public, and residential uses, as well as religious institutions, and unimproved vacant land, all of which are located in close proximity to one another. A functioning rail line also traverses the study area.

Background

In general, the existing development pattern and layout of the buildings does not allow for the development of new business uses within the district. Many of the buildings were constructed prior to 1950 and a number of structures are not able to fully accommodate the current needs of the existing businesses or provide for expansion opportunities in their present state. The majority of the buildings are suitable mostly for storage, which limits the potential development of the structures as well.

In addition, private residences are located within the study area without adequate buffering from adjacent commercial uses. The rail line is also in need of maintenance and repair in order to provide improved service to the surrounding businesses.

Access

The study area is in a prime location for expansion of existing uses and development of additional businesses. The study area is in close proximity to the Route 295 corridor and is also located near Route 40, which connects to the New Jersey Turnpike to the west and connects to the Atlantic City Expressway to the east. Residential areas surround the study area, enabling pedestrian access to the sites. Both on-street and off-street parking currently exist.

Existing Infrastructure & Environmental Conditions

The sites on which the commercial structures are located are serviced by public water, sewer, electric and gas. Existing paved streets and a functioning rail line are also present. A stream runs along the western edge of the study area. It is exposed along the Woodstown Ice & Coal (Block 18, Lots 29 and 34) property and channeled beneath Grant Street through Block 20, Lots 14 and 28. Due to the developed nature of the study area and absence of wetlands, additional development would be feasible.

Description

Although the redevelopment statute stipulates that the preliminary investigation determines whether the study area qualifies as an area in need of redevelopment on an area-wide basis, a description of parcels within the study area is useful to demonstrate the conditions apparent within the study area. Below is a description of the study area relative to the conditions present on the parcels suggestive of a need for redevelopment.

**South Jersey Farmers Exchange –
Block 23, Lot 9**

The South Jersey Farmers Exchange is located within a large building with heavy wood frame construction. The building is almost a century old and exhibits dilapidated pavement and a cracked foundation. Inefficiencies currently exist due to the configuration of the building to suit outmoded operations. Fertilizer mixing is the primary business on the premises and has been for the past few decades. The nature of the business has evolved from a batch blending operation to a “blend to specification” operation whereby fertilizers are mixed, delivered and applied on the same day.

The current proprietor intends to continue and expand these operations into the future, however, the current site and building configuration is impeding the ability of the business to respond to changing market conditions. Fifty percent (50%) of the building is either underutilized or not used for current operations given the segmented floor arrangement precluding efficient internal cartage operations; lack of loading bays and location; limitations of outdoor tube conveyor; and lack of indoor unloading facilities.

The building also has antiquated mixing equipment that is no longer appropriate for the current business operation and the rail side is obsolete given that the operation requires heavier cars for delivery. Overall, the building exhibits dilapidation and is obsolete given the nature of the current operation.



**Woodstown Farm Supply –
Block 18, Lot 31**

The Woodstown Farm Supply utilizes a wooden frame building for retail and storage. The building exhibits dilapidation at both the rear portions of the site and in the foundation of the storage area. In addition, a significant outdoor storage of supplies and equipment is present without adequate buffering.

Adjacent to the market’s storage/distribution area is a parcel on which tractor trailers are located (see photo below). These are strewn about the property and exhibit neglect and deteriorated conditions, Fencing has not been provided or adequate security lighting, contributing to hazardous conditions. The site has the potential of becoming an attractive nuisance, especially considering the close proximity of the site to residential uses.



**Owen Supply Property –
Block 24, Lots 2, 19, 20**

Ace Hardware and New Holland Sales share the same wooden frame building, which exhibits depilation as evidenced by a cracked foundation is cracked and significant pavement deterioration. It appears that there is excessive building coverage that exceeds the requirements of the present retail use.

Although the use is in conformance with the prevailing zoning of the (SI) district, there is also lack of buffering of adjoining residential properties located in the R5 zone and there is a zero setback line along Route 40.

Faulty arrangement of buildings and parking areas is also evident on the site. Tractors for sale are currently located within the parking area with no clear delineation between tractor inventory and patron parking.



Fire House – Block 24, Lots 21

The fire house is a relatively new building in comparison to other structures within the study area. However, personnel responding to an emergency currently access the site via Route 40 from the rear of the site given the narrowness of the existing pavement adjacent to the southerly elevation of the fire hall. This requires vehicles to use the drive aisles and parking lots of adjoining properties, creating the potential for hazardous conditions.



**Railroad Parcels –
Block 500, Lots 2 and 3**

Two (2) parcels within the study area are railroad parcels. Although the railroad is currently in operation, the railroad tracks and ties are in need of repair and maintenance. Ties adjacent to the Farmer’s Exchange are of insufficient gauge to accommodate the weight of the rail cars required to service current operation of the business.

There is also trash and rusty machinery strewn around the railroad tracks. Although the trains travel at a relatively low rate of speed, there is a lack of fencing or signage preventing the public from accessing the site, creating a potentially hazardous condition.



**Residential Uses –
Block 24, Lot 1; Block 20, Lot 27**

There are three residential uses within the study area, the presence of which impedes the improvement of circulation within the study area, parcel assemblage and redivision of land, and the potential expansion of existing uses.

A single family residential use is located in the R5 district between Owen Supply and the fire house (see photo 1). An additional single family residential use is located in the R3 district adjacent to TJ’s Lawn and Landscape located in the Commercial district (see photo 2).

In addition, appropriate buffering has not been provided to buffer the residential uses from the commercial and industrial uses within the study area (see photo 3).



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

**Saint Lukes Church –
Block 20, Lot 15**

The church is located on the edge of the study area in the R5 zone and is a permitted conditional use within the R5 zone. The off-street parking is limited to a paved pad that does not have stalls delineated and is currently insufficient to accommodate the needs of a congregation. The sidewalk is also in poor condition.



**Vacant Unimproved Land –
Block 20, Lot 14, p/o Lot 28;
Block 23, Lot 1; Block 18, p/o 29**

There are three parcels within the study area that are unimproved vacant land. Adjacent to Saint Lukes Church is an expanse of unimproved vacant land on which a residence was once located (see photo 1). Unimproved land is also located on the church property with frontage on Grant Street (see photo 2). The unimproved land extends behind existing housing to Bowen Avenue. Additional vacant land is located on the property of Woodstown Ice & Coal adjacent to the railroad at the corner of Broad and Elm Streets (see photo 3).



Photo 1



Photo 2



Photo 3

Luigi's Restaurant – Block 20, Lot 37

The site in question currently houses two retail establishments. The physical design of site exhibits faulty arrangement in both the situation of the building and the parking arrangement. Parking is currently located in the front of the building along Route 45 for Luigi's Italian restaurant, requiring that vehicles back out into on-coming traffic and across the sidewalk, endangering pedestrians. The design is out of character with the retail establishments along the same street frontage towards Route 45, which have zero setbacks.



**TJ’s Lawn and Landscapes – Block 20,
Lot 28**

The building containing TJ’s Lawn and Landscapes, which abuts the retail establishments on Route 45, exhibits cracked walls. Many of the windows have been boarded for warehousing purposes, preventing light and ventilation within the structure.

The site also has a significant expanse of unimproved on-site parking, which appears to be in excess to accommodate the typical demand of the present use of the building, suggesting that there exists an underutilization of land which would otherwise be beneficial to economic well being of the community.



**Woodstown Ice & Coal –
Block 18, Lots 29, 34; Block 23, Lot 1**

Woodstown Ice & Coal is comprised of three brick buildings that exhibit outward signs of deterioration and a small retail establishment that is located on a separate parcel. The site can be accessed from both Grant Street and Elm Street due to an access drive traversing the length of the parcel. Circulation on the site is ill-defined, and subsequently hazardous due to the mix of large trucks, private vehicles and pedestrians. The land is largely underutilized.



Currently, the manufacturing aspect of the business is limited to one building. The additional two buildings are used for storage. The rear of the site is largely vacant and contains tanks. The site is also unfenced, contributing to potentially hazardous conditions.



IV. STUDY AREA & BASIS FOR INVESTIGATION

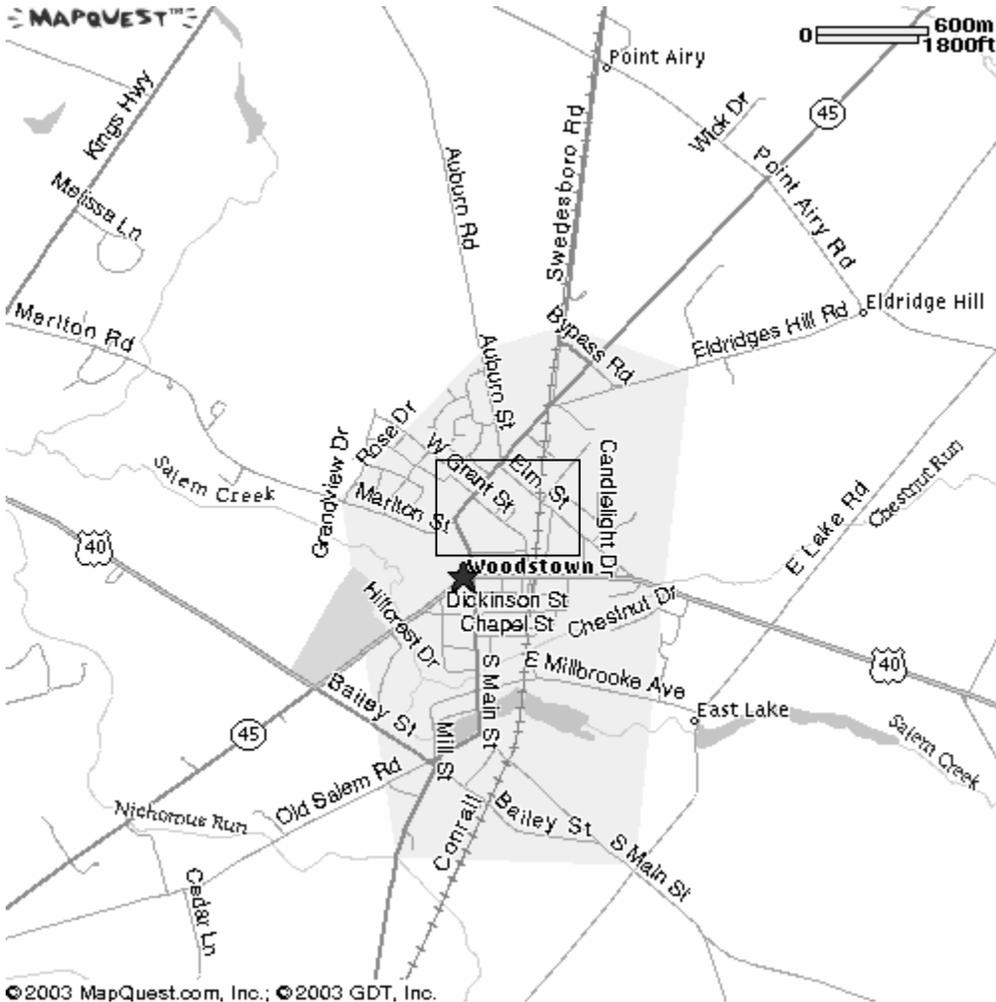
Parcels of the Study Area



Aerial Map of Study Area



Access Routes



V. STATUTORY CRITERIA

Under 40A:12A-5, a delineated area may be declared in need of redevelopment if, after investigation, notice and hearing, the governing body of the municipality, by resolution, concludes that within the delineated area any of the following conditions is found:

- a. The generality of buildings are substandard, unsafe, unsanitary, dilapidated, or obsolescent, or possess any of such characteristics, or are so lacking in light, air, or space, as to be conducive to unwholesome living or working conditions
- b. The discontinuance of the use of buildings previously used for commercial, manufacturing, or industrial purposes; the abandonment of such buildings; or the same being allowed to fall into so great a state of disrepair as to be untenable
- c. Land that is owned by the municipality, the county, a local housing authority, redevelopment agency or redevelopment entity, or unimproved vacant land that has remained so for a period of ten years prior to adoption of the resolution, and that by reason of its location, remoteness, lack of means of access to developed sections or portions of the municipality, or topography, or nature of the soil, is not likely to be developed through the instrumentality of private capital
- d. Areas with buildings or improvements which, by reason of dilapidation, obsolescence, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light and sanitary facilities, excessive land coverage, deleterious land use or obsolete layout, or any combination of these or other factors, are detrimental to the safety, health, morals, or welfare of the community
- e. A growing lack or total lack of proper utilization of areas caused by the condition of the title, diverse ownership of the real property, therein or other conditions, resulting in a stagnant or not fully productive condition of land potentially useful and valuable for contributing to and serving the public health, safety, and welfare
- f. Areas, in excess of five contiguous acres, whereon buildings or improvements have been destroyed, consumed by fire, demolished or altered by action of storm, fire, cyclone, tornado, earthquake, or other casualty in such a way that the aggregate assessed value of the area has been materially depreciated
- g. In any municipality in which an enterprise zone has been designated pursuant to the New Jersey Urban Enterprise Zones Act, P.L. c. 303 9C52:27H-60 et. seq.), said designation and prescribed related action are, in and of themselves, sufficient basis for the determination that an area is in need of redevelopment for the purpose of granting tax exemption within the enterprise zone or the adoption of a tax abatement and exemption ordinance.

In addition to the criteria, the Redevelopment Statute states:

“A redevelopment area may include lands, buildings, or improvements, which of themselves are not detrimental to the public health, safety, or welfare, but the inclusion of which is found necessary, with or without change in their condition, for the effective redevelopment of the area of which they are a part.¹”

¹ N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-3

VI. APPLICABILITY OF STATUTORY CRITERIA

Overall, the existing conditions within the study area represent a trend toward a not fully productive utilization of land given the growing obsolescence of the buildings, faulty arrangement of buildings and parking areas contributing to inadequate circulation patterns, and instances of vacant conditions of land, all being detrimental to the economic well-being of the community. The study area is also in close proximity to residential uses, which are not sufficiently buffered from commercial uses.

For the reasons above, it is submitted that the parcels comprising the study area meet the statutory definition for an “Area in Need of Redevelopment” based on criteria “d” and “e.” Therefore, it is recommended that the Mayor and Council of the Borough of Woodstown and Planning Board take action necessary, after public notice and hearing, to make that determination according to law.