

**AMENDMENT TO THE NORTH  
BRUNSWICK MASTER PLAN**

**DESIGNATION OF BLOCK 148, LOTS 5.04,  
7.01, 7.03 & 23 FOR A TRANSIT VILLAGE**

**TOWNSHIP OF NORTH BRUNSWICK PLANNING BOARD**

**ADOPTED NOVEMBER 12, 2009**

## **MASTER PLAN AMENDMENT ADDRESSING BLOCK 148, LOTS 5.04, 7.01, 7.03 & 23**

Pages 55-57 of the North Brunswick Master Plan, adopted in May of 2006, discuss the possibility of the former J&J campus on northbound Route 1 being developed for a transit village.

However, the Master Plan concluded that “. . . the key factor in determining the ultimate land use mix and density of development for the J & J site is whether NJ Transit decides that the site is feasible for consideration of a new rail station.”

The Mater Plan also states that the Planning Board should reinstitute meetings to determine the appropriate mix of land uses for a transit village if the site appears appropriate for a rail station.

Over the past three years, the Township has had numerous discussions with NJ Transit relative to the feasibility of constructing a rail station and a transit village on this site. After much discussion, it has become clear that the primary stumbling block to NJ Transit constructing a rail station is a financial constraint.

Transit has performed feasibility and operational analyses of the site relative to construction of a new train station. Transit’s preliminary studies reveal that the site is viable for a train station. Transit’s analysis also revealed the need for a grade-separated rail line Turnback Loop in order to meet the demand for service along the Northeast Corridor between North Brunswick and New York City. This grade-separated Turnback Loop appears critical to increase capacity on the Northeast Corridor. Several thousand feet to the south of the site, Transit identified sufficient undeveloped or underdeveloped land to accommodate the Turnback Loop.

Transit engaged a consultant to prepare preliminary estimates of the construction cost of a new train station and the desired Turnback Loop. Transit indicated to the Township that the preliminary estimate for the rail station and Turnback Loop is approximately \$300 million.

While Transit has not produced an official report recommending this Turnback Loop as the preferred alternative for addressing Transit’s capacity problems, Transit officials have expressed to the Township that their analysis shows that this improvement would eliminate the capacity impediments caused by having to cross over the tracks to reverse the direction of trains at Jersey Avenue.

The Master Plan also discusses on pages 54-55 the importance of creating centers of activity that have a “sense of place”. Page 55 identifies the former J & J campus as an area to be considered for center-based development.

After much discussion, the Planning Board has determined that the development of the former J & J site as a transit village is consistent with Smart Growth principles and will have a positive impact upon the township in terms of creating a sense of place, as well as in addressing the commuting needs of both township and area wide residents. As such, the Planning Board recommends that this property be designated so that a transit village can be constructed if appropriate roadway and intersection improvements can be put in place to address traffic impacts from a proposed transit village.

The redevelopment of the subject property as a sustainable, mixed-use transit-oriented development requires a mixture of residential and nonresidential development at densities that are sufficient to make the project sustainable and feasible. However, the mix of uses and density of development will have a substantial impact upon generation of automobile trips, and as a result, traffic congestion at intersections and roadways located in close proximity.

It is not reasonable to expect the Township to rezone the NBTOD property to accommodate a rail station and transit village unless all of the infrastructure improvements necessary to improve mobility can be accommodated in a timely fashion to ensure that travel times post-development are an improvement over travel times pre-development.

The timing of off-tract roadway improvements must be coordinated and constructed simultaneously with construction of the project to assure that the project will at no time during its build-out result in a deterioration of existing traffic conditions.

In order to determine if the redevelopment of the site for a transit village can be accomplished while addressing traffic concerns, the Planning Board solicited bids for traffic consultants to conduct a detailed traffic study to identify roadway and intersection improvements that are necessary to accommodate the traffic projected to be generated by the proposed development.

The Planning Board retained the services of Maser Consulting to conduct this study. The key objective of this study is to determine what roadway and intersection improvements are required to support the rezoning of the former Johnson & Johnson tract for a new train station and transit village.

In light of the state of the economy and current market conditions, the Township is considering modifying the traditional Transit Village retail mix in order to allow large retail establishments as a major component. While it is anticipated that the large retail establishments will be constructed prior to construction of a rail station, the large retail establishments are not intended to stand alone on the site for any significant length of time. It is the Planning Board's belief that large retail establishments will be the catalyst to trigger the necessary investment of funds by North Brunswick TOD Associates, the State Department of Transportation (DOT), New Jersey Transit (Transit) and Middlesex County to bring a new rail station and transit village to fruition.

While NJ Transit has made it clear that the timing of a rail station being constructed on the site could be 10-12 years into the future, it is clear that development of the site would have to be accomplished in phases. As such, the traffic study is required to break down the traffic impact into development phases.

The first phase, known as the Large Retail Establishment Phase, must address the impact of the following development:

- as much as 500,000 square feet of large retail establishments;
- an additional 50,000 square feet of main street commercial use;
- an additional 40,000 square feet of restaurant use; and
- a hotel of up to 200 rooms; and
- up to 255 housing units to be located on the second to fourth stories of large retail establishments and main street commercial uses

The second phase, known as the Full Build-Out Phase, must address the impact of the following additional development:

- 88,000 square feet of additional retail;
- 200,000 square feet of office development;
- an additional 1620 dwelling units;
- a rail station with parking for up to 4,500 cars;
- a bus depot with parking for up to 500 cars; and
- 50,000 square feet of civic space.

The preliminary findings of the Maser study have shown that adequate roadway improvements can be made to roadways and intersections in close proximity to the development to not only mitigate the negative impacts of new projected traffic, but to also bring about an improvement to existing traffic by reducing travel delays.

Based upon the preliminary findings of the Maser study, the Planning Board recommends that zoning regulations be established to create an overlay zone

that would allow for the development of a transit village subject to the implementation of roadway improvements that will address all anticipated traffic impacts. While a final determination should be made upon completion of the Maser study, it is recommended that the zoning regulations require a reduction in travel delays of approximately 20-25%.

In addition, the Planning Board believes that maximum development densities should be established in a way that they can be achieved through the application of density bonuses that encourage the developer to follow good planning practices and sustainability practices.

Bonuses should be instituted for application of green technologies that will ensure that this project a model for green development in the future. Consideration should be given to incorporating density bonuses that are triggered by generating a significant portion of all energy to be consumed on site by renewable sources such as solar, geothermal and wind.

The Planning Board is also concerned about the aesthetics and functionality of the proposed transit village given the allowance for large retail establishments. Retail centers that include large retail establishments with individual users occupying in excess of 50,000 square feet typically have several uninspiring design features in common:

- no frill site plans that eschew connection to the surrounding community and environs
- plain vanilla, standardized, rectangular single story buildings
- monolithic, smooth surface block facades
- recognizable corporate color schemes
- minimal architectural details
- massive asphalt parking lots covering several acres
- limited landscaping
- few pedestrian amenities

While the Planning Board supports Smart Growth, the Planning Board's vision for this transit-village differs significantly from the standardized mediocrity reflected in many centers with large retail establishments. As a result, it is recommended that the Council adopt form-based development guidelines that will require the large retail establishments to relate better to the community and have less negative impact upon the environment. This will be achieved through integrating the large retail establishments into the fabric of the development and the surrounding community by regulating the following areas:

- the relationship of buildings to the streets and the surrounding community, including civic amenities;

- the form and architectural characteristics of buildings;
- the color and materials utilized on exterior surfaces;
- pedestrian flows; and
- the placement, appearance and visual impact of off-street parking

The Planning Board's intent is that the regulations to be adopted for this site will bring pedestrians and bicyclists into the site and to allow them to maneuver safely throughout the site from store to store, to the future rail station and bus depot, and to public spaces on a series of interconnected pedestrian pathways. As a result of these regulations, large retail establishments will incorporate pedestrian scale features into the design of their buildings and the parking lots that surround them. In effect, large retail establishments shall become a part of the main street environment, as opposed to clashing with the main street environment.

To summarize, the Planning Board is recommending the designation of the former J & J campus for redevelopment as a transit village that incorporates a significant amount of large retail establishments as the economic engine to bring the transit village to fruition. This designation should, however, be subject to the Council establishing in the zoning standards for this site, the types of roadway improvements that are necessary to meet the traffic delay performance standards to be incorporated into the zoning of this site.