

Sustainable Development in Union County: A Livability Guide

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I. Executive Summary

Project Overview

Union County is a diverse, urbanized and densely populated county composed of urban centers and suburban communities. The urban centers of Union County, like the cities of Elizabeth, Rahway, Plainfield and Linden, were once thriving industrial areas that were and remain a major component of the county's land-use, transportation and economic systems. These cities are surrounded by suburban, bedroom communities, each with their own unique character and qualities. The county's diversity in population, land-use patterns and extensive transportation network presents numerous planning opportunities and challenges that require coordinated policies among county, municipal, regional and state agencies.

Recognizing that many of its planning documents are outdated and in need of revision, the county sought to create a single document with a unifying theme to help better guide and coordinate county policy decisions and to assist with its updates and revisions to several key plans, the goal of which was to ensure that separate plans work to complement one another and to promote a more sustainable and dynamic county. In considering different approaches, the county determined that the Principles of Livability developed by the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities, was an appropriate model upon which to center its efforts. It was also determined that the guide should include complementary policies and recommendations for municipalities to assist them in their decision making thereby achieving greater policy integration among multiple levels of government.

The Principles of Livability are to: provide more transportation choices; promote equitable, affordable housing; enhance economic competitiveness; support existing communities; coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment; and value communities and neighborhoods.

Process

Recognizing the importance of connecting with stakeholders, the county conducted extensive outreach to its constituent municipalities and community groups to gain insight and feedback on the concepts of what would make Union County more livable. Outreach was conducted through mailings and personal contacts by email and telephone. Public forums were held in various locations throughout the county, organized by the livability concepts. A facilitator with expertise in the specific discussion topic moderated each forum and surveys were taken to represent the interests and concerns of the participants. The information was then collated and analyzed by county staff.

In addition to the public forums, county documents were reviewed and analyzed in the context of the principles of livability and were found to be in need of revision, not only due to the age and obsolescence of the documents themselves, but also to make them more relevant and responsive to the needs of county residents and the economic and demographic changes within the county.

Key Challenges

Based upon the feedback from stakeholders and a review of current County planning documents, a number of key challenges were identified, a sampling of which include the following:

- There is a growing demand for affordable housing that exceeds supply;
- The county's infrastructure is aging and in need of maintenance;
- There is a need to promote economic development initiatives to stabilize the county's tax base and to create employment opportunities lost as a result of the 2008 Recession;
- Changing demographic and economic shifts are occurring that require policy responses that reflect current market trends;
- There is a need to repurpose and reclaim abandoned industrial sites many of which are contaminated and considered Brownfields;
- County residents desire more transportation choices;
- Many of the county's current planning documents are either outdated or not sufficiently integrated to deal with current trends and county needs.

Key Recommendations

Based upon public input, meetings held with county staff, a review of county documents and research into best practices in New Jersey and nationally, a series of key strategies and actions for the county and municipalities was developed and included as part of this guide. It is presented in a matrix format for ease of reference and use, with the expectation that the county will use it for strategic planning and update it with specific targets and benchmarks in the future.

In addition, recommendations for implementation were developed for Union County, including:

- **Formally adopt the livability principles.** The Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders should adopt a supporting resolution formalizing the principles as county policy.
- **Build cohesiveness.** The County should engage in team building to secure staff buy-in to the concepts of livability and to outline achievable priorities and actions to promote livability principles. This would include developing metrics by which to measure progress.
- **Engage the community.** Outside partners and resources should be identified and engaged on a regular basis in formulating and financing livability initiatives. Outreach would include but not necessarily be limited to: municipal representatives, non-profit community groups, businesses and financial institutions and educational institutions.
- **Update plans to integrate the livability principles.** As the County reviews and revises its planning documents, livability principles need to be integrated into the documents. The matrices presented in the Guide offer a useful tool and should be used to achieve this goal.
- **The Guide should be viewed as a framework.** It should be expanded upon and continually reviewed with additional actions incorporated into the document as new issues and needs are identified.

II. Introduction

Union County is in the process of evaluating several of its planning documents to determine their relevance to the county's present and future needs. Most of these planning documents date back to the late 1990s and early 2000s and are in need of revision, either due to their diminished relevance as a result of age or because of statutory requirements. As the county evaluates its planning documents and policies, there is a desire to formulate new documents and plans based upon the Principles of Livability¹ developed by the Partnership for Sustainable Communities.² The principles are to: provide more transportation choices; promote equitable affordable housing; enhance economic competitiveness; support existing communities; coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment; and value communities and neighborhoods. The county seeks to make its programs consistent with these principles and to incorporate sustainability into its policymaking.

This guide was developed by researching best practices throughout the United States and New Jersey as well as analyzing several existing county planning documents. Information from public outreach sessions conducted by the county (see page 9 – Union County Local Government Capacity Grant Efforts to Date) was also incorporated into the guide along with input from staff from the Union County Department of Economic Development.

How Union County Should Use the Guide

This guide identifies specific opportunities to formulate and coordinate county policies and programs to promote the six livability principles and to leverage and utilize county resources more efficiently and effectively. Key strategies, actions and implementation recommendations are presented for county staff to consider and can form the basis for future policies that reshape Union County and its constituent municipalities to meet current needs while preserving and enhancing the quality of life for Union County residents for future generations.

How Municipalities Should Use the Guide

Union County is comprised of 21 municipalities, all with local land-use decision-making authority. By state statute, county land-use jurisdiction is limited to county infrastructure investment and expansion, including, but not limited to road networks and bridges on county roads; county parks; and drainage systems. Land-use decisions made at the local level can have significant regional impacts upon county planning policies and goals. In order to promote livability and sustainable land-use decisions at the local level and to coordinate more effectively countywide, this guide offers specific actions that can be undertaken by municipal governments to assist them in formulating their own livability policies.

¹ <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/mission/livability-principles>

² <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov/mission/about-us>

Defining Livability and Sustainability

In 2009, The U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT), U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (USHUD) and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) collaborated to form the Partnership for Sustainable Communities for the purpose of helping communities nationwide improve access to affordable housing, increase transportation options, lower transportation costs and at the same time protect the environment. This partnership resulted in the development of six Livability Principles designed to provide a framework to help guide federal, state, regional and local agencies and communities. These principles are:

- **Provide more transportation choices.** Develop safe, reliable, and economical transportation choices to decrease household transportation costs, reduce our nation's dependence on foreign oil, improve air quality, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and promote public health.
- **Promote equitable, affordable housing.** Expand location- and energy-efficient housing choices for people of all ages, incomes, races, and ethnicities to increase mobility and lower the combined cost of housing and transportation.
- **Enhance economic competitiveness.** Improve economic competitiveness through reliable and timely access by workers to employment centers, educational opportunities, services and other basic needs, and expand business access to markets.
- **Support existing communities.** Target federal funding toward existing communities—through strategies like transit-oriented, mixed-use development and land recycling—to increase community revitalization and the efficiency of public-works investments and to safeguard rural landscapes.
- **Coordinate and leverage federal policies and investment.** Align federal policies and funding to leverage funding, remove barriers to collaboration, and increase the accountability and effectiveness of all levels of government to plan for future growth, including making smart energy choices such as locally generated renewable energy.
- **Value communities and neighborhoods.** Enhance the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods—rural, urban, or suburban.

While the term livability is subjective and lacks a universally accepted definition,³ the following statement by the Partners for Livable Communities provides a useful frame around the concept:

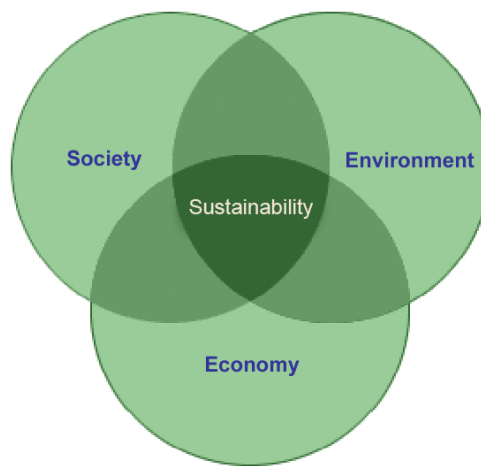
“Livability is the sum of the factors that add up to a community's quality of life—including the built and natural environments, economic prosperity, social stability and equity, educational opportunity, and cultural, entertainment and recreation possibilities.”⁴

³ National Association of Regional Councils. *Creating Livable Communities: An Implementation Guidebook*. 2012. <http://narc.org/wp-content/uploads/FHWA-Livability-Guidebook-FINAL.pdf>, p. 13.

⁴ <http://livable.org/about-us/what-is-livability>

Contrary to livability, sustainability has developed a universal definition commonly accepted worldwide. The universally accepted definition of sustainable development arose as a result of the 1987 United Nations Brundtland World Commission on the Environment, which defines sustainability as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.”⁵ The concept of sustainable development is predicated on the “three pillars of sustainability:” the environment, economics, and social justice. In order to achieve true sustainability, development must balance the three in a way that each pillar can be supported without compromising the others. This is best illustrated by the universally recognized graphic presented in Figure 1 below:

FIGURE 1 – The Three Pillars of Sustainability



Connection between Livability and Sustainability

Livability and sustainability are related concepts that are often used interchangeably and suffer from conceptual overlap.⁶ To quote the National Association of Regional Councils:

“Based upon the literature reviewed, livability emerged as a way to describe tactics that local governments and regional planning organizations used to achieve the kind of sustainability goals described by the Brundtland Commission. However, after the creation of the Partnership’s six livability principles, more organizations and local governments defined livability either similar to or exactly like the Partnership.”⁷

⁵ Brundtland World Commission on Environment and Development. 1987.

⁶ National Association of Regional Councils. *Creating Livable Communities: An Implementation Guidebook*. 2012. <http://narc.org/wp-content/uploads/FHWA-Livability-Guidebook-FINAL.pdf>, p. 14.

⁷ Ibid.

Consequently, livability and sustainability are best described as interrelated but overlapping concepts. An analysis of best practices nationwide supports the idea that regional and local planning entities use livability principles to achieve longer-term sustainable results. Sustainability emphasizes balance among economic, social and environmental goals. It emphasizes the integrated nature of human activities and, therefore, the need for coordinated planning among different sectors, jurisdictions and groups.⁸ Livability refers to the subset of sustainability impacts that affect people in a community directly, including local economic development, local environmental quality, equity, affordability, public safety and health, and community cohesion (positive interactions among neighbors).⁹ In other words, implementing programs to promote livability becomes the action plan by which sustainability is achieved. Both are elements that work together to create a strong positive reaction for community change.

⁸ http://www.vtpi.org/sus_liv.pdf

⁹ Ibid.

III. Context

Together North Jersey and the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Union County is a member of the Together North Jersey (TNJ) partnership that was formed to undertake a three-year planning initiative for the 13-county North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) region. The product of this effort will be a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD). It is funded by a \$5 million Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant from USHUD, and an additional \$5 million in matching and leveraged funds from NJ TRANSIT, the US Department of Transportation through the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority and the state of New Jersey. As part of the effort, TNJ funded 40 projects to provide technical assistance, and offer educational opportunities that build the capacity of county and local jurisdictions, organizations and the public to advance livability projects and initiatives.

Union County's Local Government Capacity Grant Efforts to Date

Union County was awarded a Local Government Capacity Grant (LGCG) from TNJ on January 2, 2013 in order to create a sustainability guide. After forming a standing committee comprised of the NJTPA Trustee from Union County and various Union County department heads and division staff, the county embarked on an outreach program to elicit public input to shape the project's focus. Outreach consisted of a series of five public meetings throughout the county, organized around specific meeting topics based upon the six livability principles articulated by the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities discussed in the previous chapter. Stakeholders were identified by interest area -- for example, transportation advocates were targeted for the transportation choices session and housing advocates for the equitable, affordable housing session and so on. Invitations were sent by mail and by personal email and telephone to a wide range of county stakeholders including all of the county's municipalities, nonprofit organizations and community groups, and other governmental agencies such as the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, NJTPA and the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development. Sessions were generally well attended, however, attendance varied according to the topic area.

At each of the five outreach sessions, participants were given background information on Together North Jersey and the Regional Plan for Sustainable Development. Each session was assigned a facilitator knowledgeable in the theme of the meeting. The facilitator encouraged discussion comparing the county's demographic and statistical position within the topic areas as compared to the state and region as a whole and then asked for feedback as to where the county should be headed and the necessary steps to get there. This discussion was framed by asking participants for the inputs, outputs and definitions of success as well as challenges based on the particular session theme (ex. economic competitiveness, transportation options, etc.).

Participants at the meetings included the mayors from Linden, Garwood, and Summit as well as officials from Scotch Plains, Plainfield, Cranford, Westfield, Fanwood, Garwood, Roselle, Hillside, Union, and Elizabeth. Also in attendance were representatives from various social service and

advocacy groups and business administrators, as well as members of the general public from diverse backgrounds. An overview of these sessions are detailed in Appendix B along with an Opportunity Matrix that the county developed to summarize the most common stakeholder ideas and responses to the questions posed in each of the five outreach sessions. In addition, Figure 2 on page 11, a chart titled Connecting the Responses, visually draws the connections between the most common stakeholder responses and key themes. All of the feedback from the outreach sessions has served as a foundation for this guide; there is a recommended key strategy, action or implementation step to address most of these concerns.

Livability in Practice

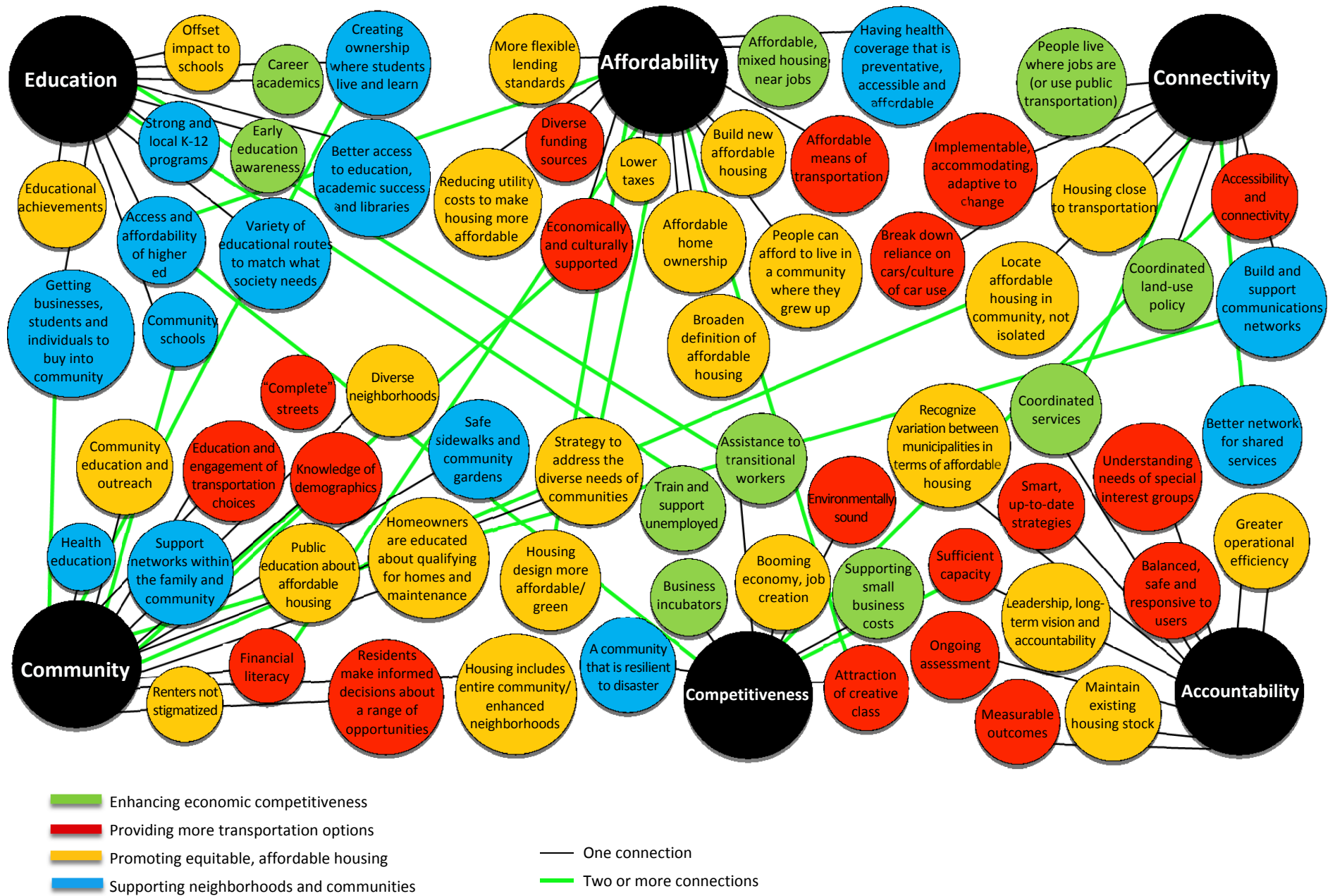
The stakeholder responses in Union County are very consistent with discussions held in other regions. The National Association of Regional Councils conducted a nationwide review of initiatives to advance the livability principles that revealed eight common strategies as universally associated with livability principles:¹⁰

- **Smart Growth:** Planning principles that integrate land use and transportation decisions intended to encourage compact, mixed-use development within areas served by existing infrastructure, thereby discouraging development sprawl.
- **Safe Routes to School:** Providing for safe walking and bicycling to and from schools, and in daily life, to improve the health and well-being of children and to foster livable, sustainable communities.
- **Context Sensitive Solutions/Design:** The development of transportation facilities that fit within a particular physical setting while preserving natural, aesthetic, historical and community attributes.
- **New Urbanism:** Planning principles that promote compact, walkable, pedestrian-oriented mixed-use development with a heavy emphasis on urban design.
- **Complete Streets:** Designing streets to accommodate all users and abilities, including pedestrians, bicyclists and mass transit riders in addition to drivers, safely and where feasible in order to provide enhanced transportation choices and a reduction on the reliance of cars for travel.
- **Transit-Oriented Development:** Encouraging high-density, mixed-use, walkable development around transit facilities to encourage transit usage and reduce reliance on automobiles.

¹⁰ National Association of Regional Councils. Creating Livable Communities: An Implementation Guidebook. 2012. <http://narc.org/wp-content/uploads/FHWA-Livability-Guidebook-FINAL.pdf>. p. 14.

Figure 2 – Connecting the Responses

An illustration of the interconnectivity between Union County stakeholder responses and how they relate to broader themes.



- **Lifelong Communities:** Integrating a variety of housing types within a neighborhood to accommodate the needs of all life cycles of individuals as they age from youth to senior citizen, allowing people to remain in the neighborhoods in which they grew up.
- **Placemaking:** Using arts and culture to create public spaces that attract people and promote public activity such as recreation, outdoor events, shopping or spending leisurely time.

These planning concepts offer useful guidance for developing policies to implement livability goals. They address many of the sentiments expressed by the public during the outreach sessions and are incorporated into this guide in the key strategies chapter.

County Profile

Union County is an older, fully built-out county. Its municipalities all experienced their growth waves in the 1950s or earlier, largely before the rise of widespread suburban cul-de-sac development. It is the third most densely populated county in the state (behind similarly urbanized Hudson and Essex) and has a population density more than four times that of the state as a whole -- 5,285 people per square mile as of 2013, compared to 1,185 for New Jersey. Every municipality in Union County has a population density greater than that of the state, and in fact only two upscale suburban towns in the west end of the county – Berkeley Heights and Mountainside – have densities that are less than *double* the statewide density. At the other end of the scale, several of the county's more urbanized municipalities have densities that are more than five times that of the state – Roselle Park (highest in the county, at 11,055 people per square mile as of 2013), Elizabeth, Plainfield, Winfield, Roselle, Hillside, Rahway, Garfield, and Union. The eastern half of the county developed earlier and tends to be more densely populated, though the pattern is not as uniform as in neighboring Essex County.

The east-west contrast is also visible in incomes. Of Union County's 21 municipalities, eight rank in the top quintile in the state in terms of median household income, all of them in the western half of the county: Berkeley Heights, Westfield, Fanwood, Mountainside, New Providence, Summit, Cranford, and Scotch Plains. But there are also six municipalities that rank in the bottom quintile among the state's 565 municipalities, almost all of them in the eastern half of the county: Elizabeth, Plainfield (the only geographic exception), Winfield, Hillside, Linden, and Roselle.

The same pattern is visible when looking at poverty rates. Union County's poverty rate of 11.0 percent (as of the 2008-2012 American Community Survey) is slightly higher than the statewide rate of 10.1 percent. But there are dramatic internal disparities, with five municipalities having poverty rates that exceed the statewide rate – Plainfield (highest in the county at 19.4 percent), Elizabeth, Hillside, Roselle, and Rahway, again all in the eastern half of the county except for Plainfield. Meanwhile, six municipalities have poverty rates below 3.0 percent, all of them west of the Garden State Parkway: Fanwood, Berkeley Heights, Garwood, Scotch Plains, Westfield and Cranford.

Unemployment rates follow the same pattern. The municipalities with the highest unemployment rates in 2013 – 9.0 percent or more (compared to the statewide rate of 8.2 percent) – are all east of the Garden State Parkway, once again with the exception of Plainfield: Hillside, Elizabeth, Plainfield, Roselle Park, Roselle, Linden, and Rahway. Meanwhile, the eight municipalities with the lowest rates – all below 6.0 percent – are all in the western end of the county: Mountainside, Cranford, Westfield, New Providence, Springfield, Scotch Plains, Summit, and Berkeley Heights. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, unemployment rates have improved greatly in recent months. The unemployment rate for Union County has decreased from a recent high following the Great Recession of 10.4 percent in February 2010 to 6.0 percent in November 2014. This is only slightly higher than the national average of 5.8 percent and lower than the state average of 6.4 percent.

Union County's racial demographics tend to follow a similar pattern, with higher percentages of minorities (anything other than non-Hispanic white) tending to appear in the same places with the lowest incomes and highest rates of poverty and unemployment. New Jersey as a whole was 40.7 percent minority as of the 2010 Census. Eight of Union County's municipalities have a minority percentage higher than the state's: Plainfield (highest in the county, at 91.7 percent), Roselle, Elizabeth, Hillside, Rahway, Union, Linden, and Roselle Park. Again with the exception of Plainfield, all of these are east of the Garden State Parkway, with the GSP running roughly through the middle of Union. The county's 13 other municipalities all have minority percentages well below the statewide number, with the highest among the 13 being Scotch Plains at 27.2 percent.

The New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development, Division of Workforce Research and Analytics prepared a detailed County Community Fact Book for Union County dated August 2014. This data book contains a detailed analysis of important trends affecting the county. The data presented analyzes population and economic development indices and provides a snapshot of current trends. Among the key statistics:

- Between 2010 and 2020, Union County's population is expected to grow by 24,000. This 4.5 percent growth rate over the 10-year period is anticipated to be slower than that of the state (5.1 percent); however, Union County is expected to remain the seventh most populous county in the state.
- While population projections in each age category are expected to show growth, the greatest increase is expected among the 45-64 and 65+ age groups, indicating an aging population. The 0-14 and 25-44 age groups are projected to grow the most slowly.
- Union County is expected to become increasingly diverse by 2020. The county's fastest-growing racial groups are projected to be multi-racial and "other." By 2020 the number of Asian and black residents is expected to grow by 16.5 percent and 6.2 percent respectively.
- The average annual private-sector wage in 2012 was \$61,796, which was 6.4 percent higher than the state average.
- The highest average annual wage in 2012 was in the manufacturing sector (\$106,207).
- Median household income in 2013 for Union County is \$68, 507.
- Major employment sectors for Union County as a region include education and health services (21.4 percent of employed workers); professional, scientific, managerial and

administrative (12.1 percent); manufacturing (10.3 percent); followed by retail trade (10.2 percent). These four categories make up 54 percent of the job categories of the labor force.

Demographic Opportunities. There are demographic factors and trends that should be considered in future planning efforts in order to take advantage of market opportunities and to avoid a “disconnect” between market needs and planning policies, since these trends affect economic, land use, housing and transportation decisions.

One group in particular, the so-called Millennials, the cohort of Americans born between 1980 and the mid-2000s, are the largest generation in the U.S., representing one-third of the total U.S. population in 2013. With the first cohort of Millennials only in their early 30s, most members of this generation are at the beginning of their careers and have the potential to be an important engine of the economy in the decades to come. In Union County, this population group is expected to grow more slowly (see bullet two above), which might indicate a need to change policy to better accommodate or possibly attract this population. Some of the lifestyle preferences of this cohort differ from preceding generations and include:

- Marrying later or not at all;
- Delaying or forgoing having children;
- Having fewer children, resulting in smaller family sizes with less need for space;
- A preference for a more mixed-use lifestyle allowing for less dependency on cars and greater walkability to jobs, shopping and recreation;
- A preference for living near transit options;
- Demanding higher-quality but smaller housing arrangements, with the expectation that amenities would be provided essentially redefining the housing market and the types of development that would be required to satisfy this demand.
- Preferring rental options over home ownership.

At the same time that this Millennial generation is coming of age and entering the workforce, the overall population is growing older. As of 2012, more than 2.3 million New Jersey residents (26.6 percent of the population) were at least 55 years old, with more than half of that total over the age of 65. The trend will only get more pronounced as the huge Baby Boomer cohort (individuals born between 1946-1964) ages. In Union County, the greatest population increase is expected among the 45-64 and 65+ age groups, indicating a need to pay attention to this dynamic. There is a growing preference among this age group to remain in towns where they presently live and are thinking about their options for places to age. Similar to the Millennials, many also seek locations that are walkable, provide access to transit and other cultural opportunities. In New Jersey, significant gaps exist between the type of smaller scale, high-end residential development demanded by this market sector and what is widely available, making it difficult for those who wish to age in place.¹¹ It is essential to address the different needs of these demographic cohorts when considering the types of housing choices that should be encouraged in Union County.

¹¹ New Jersey Future. Creating Places to Age in New Jersey. January 2014.

Economic Opportunities. Significant changes are occurring within the economy, affecting where businesses are locating and how they are conducting their business. The overdevelopment of the highway-oriented suburban office market in New Jersey is well documented. The supply of suburban corporate office space – once the prized jewel for many New Jersey communities – now far exceeds demand, reflected by high vacancy rates and declining rents.

Demand has also been affected by changes in the workplace that have significantly reduced the need for office space. Specifically, technological advances have created a boom in the “mobile” office industry. The mobile office is one where most office functions and job responsibilities can be performed on computer devices such as smart phones, tablets and laptops that is not dependent upon a fixed office location. This has freed many office staff workers from having to work within the traditional, office location and to work primarily from alternate locations such as from home or on the road. The consolidation of major corporations and the bankruptcies of others worldwide have similarly reduced the need for office space. This, combined with the use of “corporate hoteling” – the practice of providing office space on an as-needed basis to employees who work primarily from home and in the field, as opposed to a permanent desk location – may reduce the space needs of even flourishing industries. As a result, throughout suburban New Jersey, major office facilities and real estate holdings are repurposing these corporate buildings for other uses, such as residential or mixed-use buildings, in order to recapture utilization and value.

Existing Plans, Reports and Initiatives

As part of the development of this guide, the following existing planning documents were reviewed to gain familiarity with regional issues facing Union County and to identify opportunities to capitalize on common policies and areas of interest among various planning agencies:

- Union County Master Plan (1998)
- Union County Land Development Standards (1999 with amendments adopted 2009)
- Union County Transportation Plan (2002)
- Union County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy Update Report (2005)
- Union County Bicycle Master Plan (2007)
- Union County Community Development Block Grant Five-Year Consolidated Plan (2010-2014)
- Union County Workforce Investment Board Report (2012-2013)
- Union County Community Development Block Grant Consolidated Action Plan (2013-2014)
- Planning for Emerging Centers: Union County Sustainability Corridor Economic Development Opportunities Study (Summer 2013)
- Biking In Union County: A Proposed Initiative for 2015 (2014)
- Union County Community Fact Book (2014)

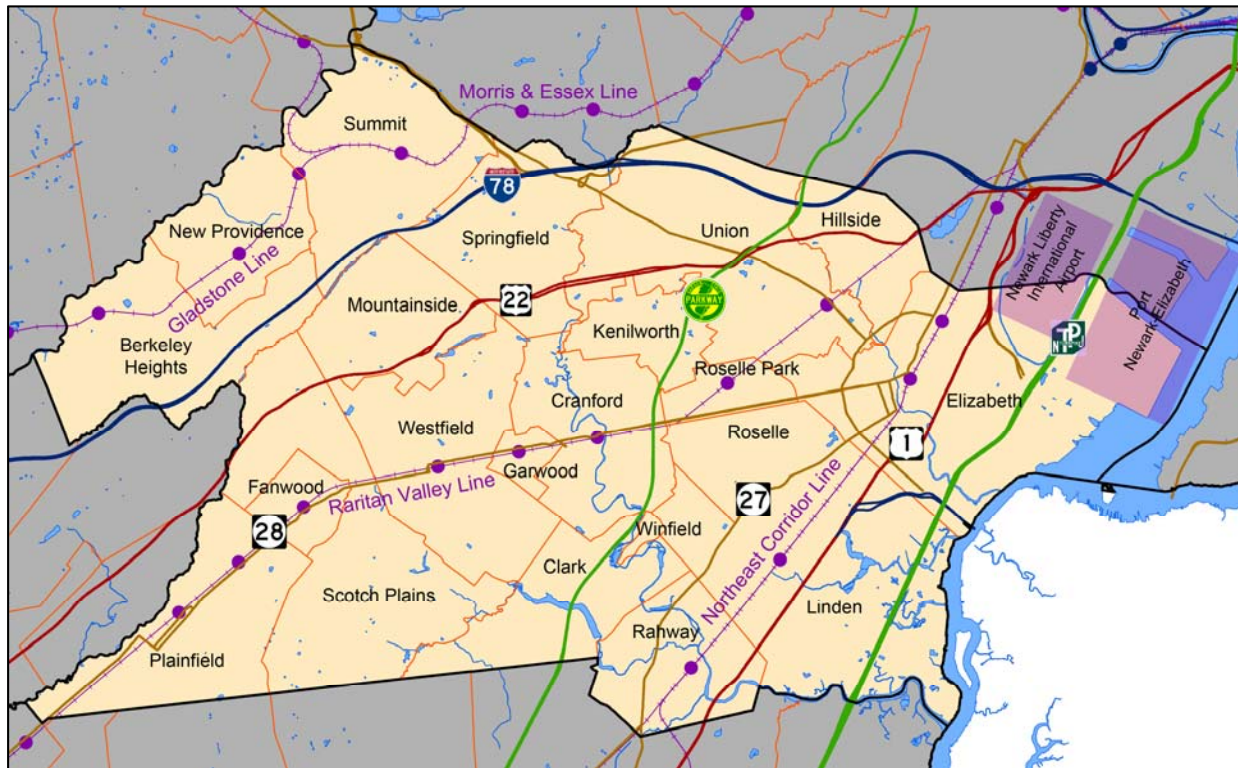
IV. County Drivers

Union County possesses traits and characteristics that offer numerous opportunities to promote livability programs. Based on an examination of all the information presented and on discussions held with county staff, a number of key findings and recommendations emerge that have informed the development of this guide.

Extensive Union County Transportation Network

Union County is served by a well-connected transportation network that includes highways (NJ Turnpike I-95, Garden State Parkway, I-78, I-278, U.S. Route 1/9, U.S. Route 22, Route 28, Route 35, Route 82, Route 124, Route 439); rail (Raritan Valley, Northeast Corridor, Morris & Essex and North Jersey Coast lines); and significant bus service (bus routes serve all the major arterial roadways connecting the county and include bus service to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in Midtown Manhattan). Communities with rail stations are well positioned to create transit villages and to encourage transit-oriented development. In fact, a number of municipalities, including in Cranford, Rahway, Linden, Elizabeth, Summit and Plainfield are state-designated Transit Villages. It is noteworthy that 21 percent of the state's 28 designated transit villages are in Union County.

Figure 3 – Map of Union County



Key economic and transportation hubs also include facilities operated by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey. Newark Liberty International Airport and the Port of Elizabeth, both with footprints within the county, are critical components of the transportation and economic network affecting Union County and are significant assets to the region.

The county has recently established regional development plans that take advantage of its extensive transportation network by articulating meaningful planning policies and actions that achieve many of the livability principles outlined earlier. Most notable of these efforts are the 2013 [Planning for Emerging Centers: Union County Sustainability Corridor Economic Development Opportunities Study](#) by Regional Plan Association, Union County Bicycle Master Plan (2007), and the county's effort to support NJ TRANSIT's establishment of a Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route along the Route 28/South Avenue corridor connecting Cranford, Plainfield, Newark Airport and Elizabeth. The county is also considering an ambitious cycling initiative that will provide street improvements and amenities that will promote countywide access to cyclists to the East Coast Greenway. The significance of these efforts lies in the fact that the county was able to bring municipal stakeholders to the table to create plans that address regional needs in a sustainable way.

The Planning for Emerging Centers Report, prepared by the Regional Plan Association in collaboration with NJ TRANSIT, NJTPA, Union County and municipal stakeholders, offers a prime example of how development opportunities – consistent with livability principles – can and should be pursued throughout the county. The study promotes mixed-use development near key transit locations and provides a corridor vision that seeks to create:

“...a thriving network of communities, each with their own, unique assets – collaborating to foster economic development within and beyond their borders. The proposed enhanced transit service would effectively connect the corridor to regional destinations including Newark Liberty International Airport and Jersey Gardens Mall, as well as the Northeast Corridor rail line.”¹²

The county also supports the efforts of the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition, a consortium of communities, including many within Union County, situated along the NJ TRANSIT Raritan Valley Line. This coalition advocates for a “one-seat” ride (a direct line without transfer at Penn Station, Newark) going into New York City. This is an important transportation and economic development initiative that has successfully resulted in securing initial funding that introduced one-seat off-peak day service in March 2014 and after-8 p.m. one-seat service as of January 2015.¹³ Significantly, this coalition also includes other counties as partners in this effort. This effort remains an important initiative for the county, given the need to promote and support mass-transit service into Manhattan for county residents who work in Manhattan. There are numerous benefits to the county and region as a whole associated with this enhanced service. These would include

¹² Regional Plan Association. [Planning for Emerging Centers: Union County Sustainability Corridor Economic Development Opportunities Study](#). 2013. p 4.

¹³ See <http://www.raritanvalleyrail.com>

increased property values in communities situated along the rail line, employer access to a larger workforce, and worker access to more jobs and shorter commuting times. This enhanced service will result in increased ridership thereby reducing traffic congestion and auto emissions. With the county's support, the Raritan Valley Rail Coalition is working to expand the program to include weekly peak hours and weekend service. A significant challenge facing the Coalition, however, is the lack of peak-hour capacity into New York Penn Station, which must be addressed in order to achieve full implementation of the one seat service.

Union County Redevelopment Opportunities

Since Union County is primarily a built county, the policies emphasized in this guide must address redevelopment of the county's already-developed areas. A redevelopment strategy offers a significant opportunity to re-invent and invigorate the county in a manner that would benefit residents, businesses and the environment. Coordinated development policies that emphasize smart redevelopment of existing, underutilized or otherwise obsolete building sites will result in environmental and cost savings that directly promote livability principles.

The transit-oriented development (TOD) patterns embraced by many communities along existing rail lines are a key example of how mass-transit assets can generate opportunities via redevelopment to revitalize areas that otherwise would not realize their full development potential. Transit-oriented development encourages compact forms of mixed use, walkable, bicycle-friendly development within close proximity to (typically within a half-mile) of a transit facility.

Union County is an urbanized county characterized by older urban centers like Elizabeth, Plainfield, Linden and Rahway. These cities once had thriving industrial areas that were a major component of the county's land-use, transportation and economic systems. The decline in manufacturing within the region has left many manufacturing facilities vacant. Additionally, many of these sites are "brownfield sites," contaminated as a result of prior industrial uses, which present redevelopment challenges.

Significantly, the county is promoting heavily the redevelopment of its brownfield sites. Over the years, the county has received EPA grants to maintain an updated inventory of brownfield sites. As recently as October 1, 2014, the county received a \$600,000 EPA Coalition Assessment Grant for the purpose of advancing the planning efforts of municipalities with brownfield sites in order to facilitate their redevelopment. These communities include Plainfield, Elizabeth, Rahway, Roselle, Linden and Garwood. By maintaining an updated inventory of brownfield sites and offering assistance to affected municipalities in planning for redevelopment of these properties, the county is promoting the adaptive and productive re-use of otherwise underutilized and toxic sites.

Seeing Union County as a Connector

Important to this discussion is the fact that Union County has demonstrated the capacity to connect and engage with municipal stakeholders to analyze, coordinate and formulate regional plans that benefit the county as a whole. In fact, connectivity is a dominant theme in how the county develops its planning and economic development policies. Union County's banner on its website embodies this theme in its tagline: "Union County, New Jersey. *We're Connected to You!*" This becomes a powerful message that can help the county focus its planning policies going forward.

Engaging stakeholders is a key component in advancing livability principles, and there are a number of ways in which the county has connected with many of its various constituencies, including:

- **Regional planning.** The county has recently developed a number of regional development plans. It coordinated these planning initiatives with municipalities, regional agencies such as NJ TRANSIT, and neighboring counties to achieve local and regional planning goals. For example, the development of a comprehensive brownfields redevelopment program required outreach and coordination among federal, state and local agencies.
- **Business development.** There is countywide support for businesses through networking and informational events as part of the "Union County Means Business" initiative. The county provides a direct link on its website to informational events, and sponsors networking programs to promote business opportunities and the exchange of information. The events are open to all businesses in the area and are extremely well attended. The county's sponsorship of these programs helps businesses to form important connections within and even outside the county.

Through its Workforce Investment Board (WIB), the county leverages funds to "direct training investment for sustainable jobs, develop marketing strategies to promote business services and design competitive economic and workforce policies." The WIB is a working group comprising private sector, non-profit, governmental and educational professionals, reflecting the diversity of Union County.

The county recently announced its initiative to build a "community of the arts" to grow and stimulate the county's economy. This initiative involves promoting the performing arts centered around the restored Union County Performing Arts Center in Rahway and creating opportunities to redevelop the area by creating an artist colony that will attract business and tourism. Within walking distance of the arts center is the Hamilton Stage and nearby art galleries, arts studios and planned artists' housing.

- **Municipal engagement.** The county has also promoted meetings among Union County mayors to discuss regional issues. This initiative provides an important forum for input into solutions and areas of potential collaboration on planning projects of mutual concern between the county and its municipalities. These meetings form important connections among communities.

Through each of these initiatives, the county has acted as a catalyst to promote livability principles while positioning itself as a connector between government and the private sector.

V. Key Strategies

Critical to realizing the livability principles is incorporating them into the county's regular program decision-making. To implement livability principles, this policy guide addresses the six specific topic areas of livability and incorporates the themes outlined above.

For ease of reference, a chart has been developed that describes each livability principle, then details specific strategies for both Union County and its municipalities to explore. A resource listing is provided in Appendix A as a reference tool, with reference numbers provided throughout.

This guidance is general in nature and intended to provide strategy recommendations for county and local decision-makers involved in policy-making and planning. These recommendations are not intended to be prescriptive or to offer rigid metrics or benchmarks, but rather to provide a comprehensive overview of how to approach livability in principle. The guide should be viewed as a development tool to be adapted, discussed and expanded upon by county and municipal staff. It should be used as a foundation to develop a strategic plan with specific actions, timeframe and responsible entity.

PROVIDING MORE TRANSPORTATION CHOICE By encouraging and supporting mass transit and alternatives to single-occupancy cars, the county can reduce traffic congestion; provide access for those who do not have vehicles, and reduce vehicle miles traveled, helping to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Providing more choices also helps reduce household transportation costs.	
1. Improve access and connections to public transportation.	
Union County:	Identify opportunities for, and obstacles to, linking rail and bus service to strategic locations within the county, including job centers, residential areas and shopping and recreational areas. Identify and support shuttle service to connect workers with their job sites especially for the “last mile.” Create and continue to support specialized and subsidized transportation to serve the travel needs of seniors and the disabled. Implement 2013 Planning for Emerging Centers: Union County Sustainability Corridor Economic Development Opportunities Study and identify other corridors for enhanced TOD opportunities. Continue to support the development of the NJ TRANSIT Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) route along the Route 28/South Avenue corridor.
Municipal:	Identify opportunities for, and obstacles to, linking rail and bus service to strategic locations within the county, including job centers, residential areas and shopping and recreational areas. Install way-finding signs to better identify transit facilities in strategic locations and provide safe, clean and strategically located shelters and other amenities, including benches, bike racks and appropriate lighting, to create safe access to transit stops and other key destinations throughout the municipality. Utilize the 2013 Planning for Emerging Centers: Union County Sustainability Corridor Economic Development Opportunities Study as a planning resource.
2. Consider a Complete Streets approach, whereby streets are designed to meet the needs of all users, including drivers, pedestrians of all abilities, cyclists and transit riders. Complete Streets apply to both new and retrofit projects as well as maintenance, where appropriate and feasible.¹	
Union County:	Consider adopting a countywide Complete Streets policy to promote multi-modal transportation opportunities along county roadways, where appropriate and feasible. Explore preparation of a Complete Streets implementation plan to establish an administrative structure, design procedures and guidelines, training and checklists for incorporating the Complete Street Policy into the County’s roadway project development, construction and maintenance processes.²

Municipal:	If not already in place, consider adopting a municipal Complete Streets policy to promote multi-modal transportation opportunities along municipal roadways, where appropriate and feasible. Explore preparation of a Complete Streets implementation plan to establish an administrative structure, design procedures and guidelines, training and checklists for incorporating the Complete Street Policy into municipal roadway project development, construction and maintenance processes. Develop a comprehensive bicycle and pedestrian facility implementation plans to identify gaps in sidewalk connectivity and map out bike lanes and shared lanes on streets to interconnect neighborhoods and destinations. Seek out grant funding offered by the State of New Jersey and other grant sources to plan and implement Complete Streets programs.
3. Maintain a safe, pedestrian- and bicycle-friendly environment.	
Union County:	Support transportation alternatives to the single-occupancy vehicles such as improved pedestrian and bicycle facilities as a means to offer more travel choice and improve air quality in the region. Incorporate traffic-calming within county improvement plans, where needed. Invest in intersection improvements that provide safe pedestrian crossings, particularly near transit stops. Review, revise and incorporate the countywide 2007 Bicycle Master Plan and the 2015 Biking in Union County Report as part of the upcoming Union County Transportation Master Plan update. Incorporate East Coast Greenway³ plans into county corridor improvement plans.
Municipal:	Identify opportunities for traffic calming in areas with high crash rates or speeding. Identify and redesign key intersections to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety that indicate a clear need for improvements that would include, where appropriate, traffic calming measures, enhanced signalization and signage, wider pedestrian sidewalk areas, bicycle lanes and dedicated right turn lanes, particularly near transit. Utilizing Union County Bicycle Master Plan, provide sidewalks and bicycle lanes where feasible, particularly in areas where there are safety concerns. Sponsor Pedestrian Safety Enforcement Training⁴ workshops as part of ongoing police training. The City of Elizabeth developed a <i>Complete Streets Concept Plan for Morris Avenue</i> to increase the safety of pedestrians, bicyclists, and drivers along a 1.2-mile section Morris Avenue, a gateway corridor that connects the Midtown Elizabeth Train Station to Kean University, and functions as the heart of “Little Colombia.” The concept plan proposes low-, medium-, and high-cost options to improve safety and security, to support walking, biking and transit use and increase neighborhood vitality.

4. Provide Safe Routes to School to promote children walking and biking to school.⁵	
Union County:	Support Safe Routes to School programs near county roads and seek state and federal funding for identified improvements. Partner with municipalities to identify areas of mutual concern to promote safe routes along county and municipal roads. Consider targeting Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funding for eligible Safe Routes to School projects, as well as FHWA Transportation Alternatives Program funding for Safe Routes to School. STREETSMART is a new public education, awareness and behavioral change campaign. Counties and municipalities can download materials to implement their own campaigns at http://bestreetsmartnj.org/.
Municipal:	Partner with school districts to create Safe Routes to School programs for local schools. Seek state and federal funding for identified improvements. Partner with county and local Transportation Management Associations⁶ (Meadowlink/EZ Ride and/or TransOptions) to identify areas of mutual concern and to promote safe routes along county and municipal roads. Leverage funding opportunities via joint, multi-municipality funding applications.
5. Promote compact and mixed-use development patterns that promote walkability and support transit.	
Union County:	Promote smart growth principles in the proposed Union County Transportation Plan.<i>(Ex. Identify through the county planning process locations within county corridors appropriate for higher-density, mixed-use development and redevelopment.)</i> Implement the Planning for Emerging Centers: Union County Sustainability Corridor Economic Development Opportunities Study (2013)⁷ recommendations and identify other corridors for similar treatment.
Municipal:	Review present Master Plan policies and zoning ordinance requirements for developable land within walking distance of a mass transit hub to identify potential redevelopment areas that would promote mixed-use, transit-oriented development to support transit use.

6. Promote transit-oriented development (TOD) to bring people and jobs closer to transportation options.⁸	
Union County:	Promote mixed use, walkable and bike friendly TOD wherever opportunities exist.
Municipal:	Adopt mixed-use transit-supportive zoning where appropriate within walking distance of mass transit stations. The NJTPA will be conducting Transit Support Development (TSD) workshops in 2015 for a selection of interested municipalities to introduce key municipal stakeholders to TSD concepts. Look at the wide-ranging successes of communities who have capitalized on linking transit and development such as Rahway, Cranford and Plainfield.
7. Minimize the negative impacts associated with automobile parking.	
Union County:	Promote public jitney and shuttle services to mass transit hubs. Support and promote countywide mass-transit opportunities that connect county corridors. Support municipal efforts to designate and promote park-and-ride options in strategic locations that promote mass transit. Support mixed residential, retail and office land uses where appropriate, encouraging design features that promote attractive and walkable streetscapes.
Municipal:	Review local zoning ordinances and revise requirements that overstate the need for parking. Consider reducing parking requirements in mixed-use centers and downtowns and for transit-oriented development.⁹ Allow and encourage shared parking arrangements between uses to reduce the total amount of parking. Promote mixed residential, retail and office land uses where appropriate, encouraging design features that promote attractive and walkable streetscapes.

PROVIDING EQUITABLE, AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Affordability is a critical component to strengthening neighborhoods by promoting diversity and providing for healthy housing conditions for families and individuals. Housing affordability also affects the ability of workers to live near their jobs, and affects the local and regional economies through families' ability to afford other amenities. Providing access to equitable and affordable housing is also a constitutional requirement in the State of New Jersey; the Fair Housing Act requires towns to provide for their "fair share" of affordable units.

1. Increase the supply of affordable housing units available to county residents.

Union County:	Utilize federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships (HOME) and Housing Opportunities for Persons with AIDs (HOPWA) funds to support affordable housing construction examples of which would include rental subsidies, construction assistance, mortgage finance assistance and other federally eligible programs.
Municipal:	Adopt inclusionary zoning ordinances that require a fixed percentage of affordable units be provided as a part of any new development, particularly in areas with strong housing markets and property values,

2. Locate affordable housing units in strategic locations within walking distance of education, employment, recreation and shopping.

Union County:	Promote inclusionary-development opportunities near transit facilities and within areas that would benefit from mixed-use redevelopment strategies.
Municipal:	Support residential densities in appropriate locations proximate to existing development and infrastructure that support inclusionary housing development.

3. Create programs to retain existing affordable housing units.

Union County:	Utilize CDBG funding to assist rehabilitation of affordable housing units, where eligible.
Municipal:	Utilize affordable housing trust funds and municipal bonding to support housing rehabilitation programs as well as to maintain affordable housing units whose affordable-housing controls are expiring.

4. Promote affordable homeownership opportunities.

Union County:	Provide countywide housing counseling services to assist potential homeowners in purchasing a home. Actively promote the HOME Investment Partnership Program as a funding source to which developers can apply to construct or rehabilitate affordable housing units to also include units that are designed to meet the physical needs of eligible disabled, handicapped and elderly residents.
Municipal:	Utilize affordable-housing trust funds to create buy-down programs that assist income-eligible families in purchasing a home.

5. Provide for a diversity of affordable housing types to suit a variety of housing needs including housing designed to address the aging and handicapped populations.	
Union County:	Promote the integration of a variety of housing types that address needs for handicapped, elderly and young families. Actively promote the HOME Investment Partnership Program as a funding source to which developers can apply to construct or rehabilitate affordable housing units for eligible disabled, handicapped and elderly residents.
Municipal:	Encourage a variety of housing types to meet multiple demographic needs, including units that are accessible to handicapped and elderly residents, within redevelopment and TOD projects by including policies in municipal master plans.
6. Maintain an appropriate balance of affordable housing between homeownership and rental units.	
Union County:	Through the RFP process, seek a balance between home ownership and rental units within redevelopment projects.
Municipal:	Require housing development within redevelopment and TOD projects to include a balance between owner-occupied and rental units.

ENHANCING ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS

Simply defined, economic competitiveness is the ability of a nation or region to offer products and services that meet the quality standards of the local and world markets at prices that are competitive and provide adequate returns on the resources employed or consumed in producing them. Enhancing economic competitiveness is critical to maintaining the economic health of the region in order to provide the jobs necessary to sustain the local economy in a manner that maintains a healthy standard of living for the region's residents. Without a healthy economy, social structures break down and systems fail.

1. Identify the market strengths and weaknesses of the county and regional economy and form policies that capitalize on emerging markets.

Union County:	Utilize the forthcoming regional and urban Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) to identify specific actions to maximize opportunities in the present and emerging marketplace that promote economic development opportunities. The regional CEDS¹⁰ is an outgrowth of Together North Jersey process and will be completed in 2015. The urban CEDS¹¹ is an effort of the Urban Mayors Association supported by the John S Watson Institute at Thomas Edison College, to advance economic and community development in New Jersey with a particular focus on the most urban areas in need of revitalization. Map and market locations in the county that are identified as Qualified Incentive Areas for the Grow NJ program (housed within the NJ Economic Development Authority - NJEDA).¹² The Grow NJ program provides tax credits to qualified businesses based upon the generation and retention of jobs created by the business activity. Utilize resources available through the Choose NJ program, a public/private partnership that offers a variety of services including location assistance, branding and marketing information to encourage businesses to locate in New Jersey.¹³ Update inventory of brownfield development sites and prioritize these for investment.
Municipal:	Through the master planning process, identify areas appropriate for growth, with emphasis on potential redevelopment locations within walking distance of existing transit stations and developed areas with existing infrastructure. Identify areas for mixed-use, transit-friendly redevelopment. Utilize resources made available to municipalities through Grow NJ and other similar programs and organizations. Partner with the county to educate local businesses about available economic-development programs. Review forthcoming regional and urban Comprehensive Economic Development Strategies (CEDS) and incorporate concepts where appropriate. Employ creative place making techniques to use the arts to spur economic activity, particularly in underutilized public spaces.

2. Provide job-training programs to address gaps between local employment skills and job requirements in the present employment market.	
Union County:	Update the Work Investment Board (WIB) Strategic Plan regularly and promote the plan with municipalities. Expand training programs to include emerging needs of employers. (E.g., development of a soft-skills (also referred to as people skills) training program designed to train workers to interact with each other and management in productive and meaningful ways.) Expand programs to include the segment of the workforce that does not currently qualify for employment training benefits. Continue to support the Union County Means Business program, an initiative that brings local business owners, prospective owners and managers in contact with government representatives who can help them obtain information about grants, loans, social media, employee recruitment, and other resources. Continue participation in the North Jersey Partners coalition and eight-county effort working to create a regional workforce development strategy integrated with a regional economic development plan.
Municipal:	Partner with WIB to identify and address local workforce needs particularly where gaps exist between job training programs and income requirements that preclude participation of a segment of the Union County workforce that are unemployed, or under employed due to changes in the economy but who do not qualify for WIB job training programs.
3. Emphasize green workforce and economic development strategies as part of overall planning approach. Green industries are those that protect the environment, recycle, limit use of fossil fuel, are very energy efficient, and use sustainably harvested wood and non-toxic alternatives. The term also refers to those businesses that specifically are involved in the delivery of environmental services or products.	
Union County:	Work to attract green industries, into existing industrial areas that are presently underutilized or undergoing redevelopment.
Municipal:	Work to attract green industries into existing industrial areas that are presently underutilized or undergoing redevelopment as defined above.
4. Locate job-training centers near transit- accessible locations.	
Union County:	Identify key training locations near mass transit.
Municipal:	Promote job-training opportunities to residents.

5. Encourage reuse and redevelopment of unproductive brownfield sites.¹⁴	
Union County:	Inventory and market brownfield sites for redevelopment. Prioritize properties for remediation, based on factors such as negative health effects on surrounding community, proximity to transit, etc. Seek funding to remediate properties, leveraging relationships with the Union County Improvement Authority, Union County Alliance, state partners such as the NJ Economic Development Authority (NJEDA), NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP), and also the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA). Form public/private partnerships with developers, banks and public funding agencies to promote brownfield redevelopment.
Municipal:	Working with the county, develop redevelopment plans for identified brownfield sites.
6. Provide access to state and county incentive programs to attract economic activity.	
Union County:	Partner with the Union County Economic Development Corporation, NJ Economic Development Authority, NJ Business Action Center and Choose NJ to identify opportunities to attract businesses to the county and convey these opportunities back to the municipalities.
Municipal:	Partner with the Union County Economic Development Corporation, NJEDA, NJ Business Action Center and Choose NJ to identify opportunities to attract businesses to the municipality.
7. Create a business retention program to retain existing businesses and jobs.	
Union County:	Create a comprehensive market survey of existing businesses to identify countywide business issues and needs.
Municipal:	Create a comprehensive market survey of existing businesses to identify countywide business issues and needs.
8. Advance "Buy Local" efforts that support small, independently-owned local businesses.	
Union County:	Review procurement procedures to notify local or countywide businesses of procurement opportunities when feasible. Continue to fund Union County Economic Development Corporation (UCEDC) training sessions for prospective local vendors on how to navigate the public procurement process.
Municipal:	Review procurement procedures to notify local businesses of procurement opportunities when feasible and to provide training sessions to prospective local vendors on how to navigate the public procurement process. ¹⁵

9. Promote arts and culture as an economic-development tool.	
Union County:	Continue efforts to develop an arts master plan to catalog the arts resources in the county and to find the best way to use and market them to advance the arts in Union County. This would include identifying potential partners in the arts such as municipalities, universities, the county college and the arts community.
Municipal:	Inventory creative assets within the community.¹⁶ Develop a creative placemaking plan by using the arts and culture to create public spaces that attract people and promote public activity such as recreation, outdoor events, shopping or spending leisurely time.¹⁷ Look at the Rahway Arts District, which has incorporated theatres, supportive housing for performing and visual artists and new retail opportunities.

SUPPORTING EXISTING COMMUNITIES	
Supporting existing communities is important as it emphasizes reinvestment in the neighborhoods that are already in place while protecting the remaining undeveloped and environmentally sensitive areas.	
1. Revitalize existing neighborhoods through redevelopment of vacant and underutilized properties.	
Union County:	Encourage infill and redevelopment strategies to revitalize existing neighborhoods.
Municipal:	Develop infill and redevelopment strategies to revitalize existing neighborhoods.
2. Promote transit-oriented development.	
Union County:	See Union County Actions under Providing More Transportation Choice, number 6: Promote transit-oriented development (TOD) to bring people and jobs closer to transportation options. Identify and promote redevelopment opportunities centered around mass-transit facilities. Implement 2013 Enhancing Corridors Study and identify other corridors for enhanced TOD opportunities.
Municipal:	Identify and promote redevelopment opportunities centered around mass-transit stops. Look at the wide-ranging successes of communities who have capitalized on linking transit and development such as Rahway, Cranford and Plainfield.
3. Target underserved areas for infrastructure and housing rehabilitation to help revitalize declining neighborhoods.	
Union County:	Utilize CDBG and other county funding sources to promote neighborhood revitalization through housing rehabilitation, infrastructure improvements, job programs and other programs designed to serve underserved areas.
Municipal:	Identify high-need areas and apply for state and county funding to revitalize declining neighborhoods through housing rehabilitation, infrastructure improvements, job programs and other programs designed to serve underserved areas. Enforce property maintenance codes.
4. Create community facilities and parks within walking distance of neighborhoods, particularly where such facilities are lacking.	
Union County:	Identify and expand open-space opportunities including expanding, revitalizing and maintaining existing park facilities.
Municipal:	Prepare and adopt open-space and recreation plans that identify underserved areas of the community.

5. Protect existing communities from flooding and other natural hazards.	
Union County:	The Union County Hazard Mitigation Plan (HMP) should include long-term land-use strategies as part of its mitigation approach, including green-infrastructure solutions to mitigate flooding in prone areas.
Municipal:	Participate in FEMA’s Community Rating System to increase community resilience and reduce flood insurance costs for property owners. Adopt a flood hazard ordinance if one does not exist, and review and update as necessary to reflect current hazards. In concert with the county, prepare a municipal Hazard Mitigation Plan. Consider a coordinated buy-out program for areas that have suffered repetitive flooding and loss.
6. Design infrastructure for resiliency to extreme weather and climate change.	
Union County:	Revise the Union County Land Development Standards (1999) and Design Standards (2009) to require low-impact design techniques and green infrastructure to manage stormwater more effectively on county roads. ¹⁸
Municipal:	Create a green-development checklist to be used as part of the development application review process that includes consideration of low-impact design techniques and green infrastructure to manage stormwater more effectively.¹⁹ Adopt low-impact design standards directly into the official site plan checklist²⁰ and into future municipal capital investments, including roads, public spaces, etc.
7. Protect undeveloped and environmentally sensitive areas.	
Union County:	Identify critical lands for preservation. Review county land-development standards and incorporate regulations designed to protect environmentally critical areas.
Municipal:	Review zoning regulations and other policies and programs to update and create development regulations, if necessary, intended to guide the physical development of land in a manner that protects environmentally sensitive areas not already preserved or part of existing open-space programs.

VALUING COMMUNITIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Valuing communities entails promoting healthy lifestyles and cohesive neighborhoods to provide for a sense of community. The best way to value communities is to create a desirable place to live through sound planning and design. This is accomplished by enhancing the unique characteristics of all communities by investing in healthy, safe, and walkable neighborhoods—urban or suburban. Strong neighborhoods provide for social cohesion that creates a positive environment; promotes public safety – i.e., “eyes on the street”; and creates a sense of identity that protects property values and ultimately enhances family values, resulting in a healthy environment in which to live, work, play and raise a family.

1. Promote walkable, center-based mixed-use development and redevelopment, particularly near transit.

Union County:	See Union County Actions under Providing More Transportation Choice, number 5: Promote compact and mixed-use development patterns that promote walkability and support transit.
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Municipal:	See Municipal Actions under Providing More Transportation Choice, number 5: Promote compact and mixed-use development patterns that promote walkability and support transit.
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2. Ensure availability of and access to open and recreational spaces, particularly in underserved areas.

Union County:	Continue to review existing open-space plan to identify and prioritize underserved areas. Evaluate linkages to park areas to ensure accessibility by all county residents.
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Municipal:	Review and update open-space plans to identify and prioritize underserved areas. Evaluate linkages to park areas to ensure accessibility by all municipal residents.
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3. Adopt land-use policies that reinforce and protect positive existing neighborhood characteristics.

Union County:	Identify areas for neighborhood preservation that protect existing stable neighborhood characteristics. Direct development pressures to designated redevelopment areas.
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Municipal:	Evaluate master plan and land-use regulations to identify and protect existing stable neighborhoods and direct development pressures to designated redevelopment areas.
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4. Provide access to fresh healthy foods, particularly in underserved areas.²¹

Union County:	Promote local community gardens and farm-to-table programs. Promote urban agricultural uses in appropriate areas.
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Municipal:	Promote local community gardens and farm-to-table programs. Promote urban agricultural uses in appropriate areas.
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COORDINATING POLICIES AND LEVERAGING INVESTMENT In today's economic climate with limited public funds, it is imperative that public services be delivered efficiently. Coordination is key in order to target the needs of the community and not duplicate expenditures and programs.	
1. Create a unifying document that will guide policy and decision-making across multiple departments.	
Union County:	Develop a coordinated countywide investment framework that clearly articulates priority growth investment areas. ²²
Municipal:	Work with the county to identify areas of investment that address mutual concerns, and target resources accordingly.
2. Form an interdepartmental planning group to coordinate grant expenditures and identify program areas where funding can be leveraged.	
Union County:	Identify all grant sources by department and division and formulate a common matrix to identify where leveraging opportunities exist.
Municipal:	Identify and communicate funding needs to the county, to aid in identification of funding opportunities.
3. Create an annual review system to evaluate the effectiveness of programs.	
Union County:	Based upon mutually identified strategies and priorities, develop metrics to enable evaluation of the effectiveness of county programs.
Municipal:	Create a communitywide strategic plan that identifies key needs and develop metrics for measuring the effectiveness of municipal programs and strategies.
4. Conduct quarterly interdepartmental planning meetings to coordinate policies, evaluate program effectiveness and share best practices.	
Union County:	Develop quarterly reports to administration evaluating the status of countywide programs.
Municipal:	Create internal metrics and reports to monitor and evaluate the status of municipal programs.
5. Promote shared services between county and municipal governments.	
Union County:	Continue to provide opportunities to promote shared services, such as centralized 911 dispatch and EMS mutual aid.
Municipal:	Evaluate, and where financially beneficial, participate in shared-services arrangements.

See Appendix A (page 42) for a listing of resources to support these key strategies.

VI. Implementing the Livability Principles in Union County

In addition to the key strategies and actions articulated in the previous chapter, the following are a few next steps recommendations for Union County that will help advance and operationalize a countywide livability program. Fundamental to this work is the creation of a culture within county government to promote and support the livability principles consistently.

1. Formally adopt the livability principles. There are a number of actions that can be taken to adopt Livability Principles as an active concept in the county's policy making:

- A supporting resolution endorsing the principles of livability should be considered for adoption by the Union County Board of Chosen Freeholders. While not a statutory requirement, such action would send a powerful policy message and institutionalize livability as a countywide priority in establishing county policies.
- County staff should adopt a mission statement that reflects a commitment to livability principles. This mission statement would serve to reinforce the county's intention to implement the livability principles in policy and continually remind staff of their importance.

2. Build cohesiveness. The county should engage in team-building to secure staff buy-in to the concepts of livability and to outline achievable priorities and actions to promote livability principles. Metrics for measuring effectiveness of programs should also be developed.

- The county should conduct routine inter-agency reviews of its programs to ensure that metrics are being met and if not, what adjustments are needed. Reviews should also include a determination of whether new programs under consideration achieve livability goals. This should be done on a regular basis. Staff should develop a program evaluation form that would rate programs and projects on their relative impact on promoting livability principles.
- The county should conduct regular departmental and inter-agency reviews to identify opportunities to leverage funds and other resources needed to accomplish livability goals.
- A program evaluation form that incorporates livability principles should be developed. This form would be used universally throughout the county to provide consistency in program development and to ensure that programs are consistent with county livability policies and goals.

3. Engage the community.

- Outside partners and resources should be identified and engaged on a regular basis in formulating and financing livability initiatives. Opportunities to partner with non-profit and community groups to advance livability goals should be identified. Private-sector partners who have mutual interests with the county should also be identified and engaged. Using digital media can be a relatively inexpensive way to develop and expand a countywide

outreach program. Examples: Create a livability web page on the county's website; conduct online surveys; promote countywide meetings on specific livability topics, etc.

- The county should continue to engage in and support municipal planning initiatives that advance livability goals. The development of a new county Transportation Plan and Land Use Plan would offer an excellent forum and opportunity to identify local and countywide planning initiatives that promote livability principles, which can then be incorporated into formal planning documents.
- The county should continue its outreach program to businesses and elected officials to solicit continuous feedback on the effectiveness of county programs and to gain insights that could produce new initiatives.
- Planning policies and programs should incorporate the goals and objectives of the Together North Jersey initiative.

4. Update plans to integrate the livability principles. Using the key themes from best practices identified earlier and building on the strategies presented in the matrices, the county should proceed to update its plans to incorporate livability principles.

- This is particularly relevant to the county's upcoming Transportation Plan update. Livability concepts will be reflected in the update of the 2002 Union County Transportation Master Plan that is underway. The new County Transportation Master Plan will identify policy initiatives such as Complete Streets and Safe Routes to School and will include the need for pedestrian access to improve safety and connectivity of facilities as well as the role played by transit-oriented development. The new Transportation Master Plan will also address emerging concepts such as green infrastructure.
- The county should update its Land Use Plan and Land Development Standards and coordinate that effort as much as possible with the Transportation Plan update that is underway. The Land Use Plan would address issues not necessarily covered within a transportation plan, such as the development of affordable housing; place making strategies to revitalize downtown areas or to re-purpose abandoned or underutilized community areas; incorporation of the county's Brownfield initiative to promote the redevelopment of abandoned industrial sites; development of recommendations for streetscape standards that could be used as a template by municipalities in adopting their own standards; and incorporation of other important elements of livability such as recreation, environmental protection and hazard mitigation.
- The guide should inform other county programs where resources are expended. For example, the expenditure of CDBG monies should be prioritized according to livability goals.

VII. Regional Connections, Implementation and Next Steps

As described previously, Together North Jersey established the Local Government Capacity Grant Program to provide financial and technical assistance to county and municipal members for planning efforts related to the creation of a Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) in northern New Jersey. This document was developed with support from that program, which, in addition to providing funding, requires inclusion of a summary chapter that explains how the final document addresses the requirements of the project funders (HUD, FHWA and FTA). This chapter is intended to serve as the summary section for the overall guide.

Types of Recommendations:

Policy or legislative changes:

- The Key Strategies chapter of the guide offers both the county and its municipalities recommendations or “actions” that can be taken to advance the six livability principles. They range from exploring the adoption of a Complete Streets policy and the livability principles to supporting inclusionary development and zoning, to pursuing shared services. Many of these recommendations require little or no funding to implement and would go a long way toward leveraging resources to advance multiple sustainability goals in the county.

Additional planning studies needed:

- The county has already identified the need to update its Transportation Plan and has received funding from NJTPA to do so. The guide strongly recommends an update to Union County’s Land Use Plan and Land Development Standards in concert with its Transportation Plan in order to better coordinate policies across these two critical documents. Some of this work can be handled in-house with existing Union County staff, but would benefit from additional financial support to make consultant time available. The county may use its own resources or seek grant funding.
- The county’s stakeholder outreach process, along with its well-attended quarterly mayors meetings, reveals an appetite among local government officials for discussing planning priorities on a countywide level. This guide has identified that need and suggests an opportunity for Union County to play a strong role in facilitating those discussions. The guide specifically recommends that Union County convene its municipalities to identify and build consensus around priority growth and preservation areas in the county, similar to Somerset County’s Investment Framework.¹⁴ This effort would require resources to conduct the meetings with local governments and other stakeholders, collect data and prepare maps of investment areas and supporting infrastructure investments. Similarly, in the key strategies section in the first item under Enhancing Economic Competitiveness

¹⁴ www.co.somerset.nj.us/planweb/sustainable/sciframework.htm

(page 28), the guide recommends that the county use Somerset County's approach to mapping the state's location-based tax incentives to help market priority sites in the county.

Implementation strategies or actions:

- The Implementing the Livability Principles in Union County chapter identifies a suite of nearer-term implementation strategies for the county to consider. Key among them are: 1) a freeholder resolution adopting the livability principles formally; 2) building cohesiveness within the county departments behind the livability principles through regular departmental and inter-agency reviews; 3) engaging the community (both municipalities, partner organizations and businesses); and 4) updating critical planning documents (such as the county Land Use and Transportation plans).
- The guide strongly recommends implementing the Planning for Emerging Centers: Union County Sustainability Corridor Economic Development Opportunities Study from 2013. The study offers an approach to working with municipalities on transit-oriented development and redevelopment, advancing most if not all of the livability principles supported by the county and the RPSD.
- The Key Strategies chapter was designed in a user-friendly matrix format to facilitate conversation about the recommended actions that can be expanded upon by county and municipal agencies as projects and policies evolve.

Inclusion and Engagement:

- The guide reflects the input received as part of the extensive public outreach effort conducted by the county at the start of the project. There were five outreach sessions between March and October 2013, each of which focused on one of the federal livability principles. Participants at the meetings included the mayors from Linden, Garwood, and Summit as well as officials from Scotch Plains, Plainfield, Cranford, Westfield, Fanwood, Garwood, Roselle, Hillside, Union, and Elizabeth. Also in attendance were representatives from various social service and advocacy groups and business administrators, as well as members of the general public from diverse backgrounds. The outcomes of these sessions are detailed in the summary reports attached in Appendix B. It served as a foundation for the key strategies as well as county and municipal actions identified in this guide.
- The guide provides an overview of the demographics in Union County using racial, ethnic and economic data (see Key Demographic Trends section in the Context chapter). For example, the numbers show modest population growth in the county through 2020, with the greatest increase being in the 45-64 and 65+ populations. The guide identifies this trend as an issue and recommends development of county and local housing and transportation strategies that address lifecycle needs.
- The provision of affordable housing has been identified as critical to advancing the livability principles in Union County. The guide provides specific recommendations for implementation for both the county and municipalities to advance affordable

housing, particularly near transit-accessible locations. In particular, it is suggested that the county use existing CDBG, HOME and HOPWA funds to support these initiatives and that towns in strong-market locations adopt inclusionary zoning ordinances to mandate the creation of affordable units as part of any new development.

Regional Plan for Sustainable Development/Regional Context:

How does the guide support regional planning?

- The recommendations presented within the guide are intended to be implemented by Union County and its constituent municipalities to integrate sustainable planning principles more effectively within a local and regional planning context. Recommendations are provided to facilitate interaction between the county and its municipalities and to offer a platform for joint actions and enhanced coordination of effort to promote the livability principles and sustainability more broadly.
- The interrelated nature of the topics addressed by the guide address a broad spectrum of livability and environmental areas of concern, such as land use and urban design, transportation, housing, and the environment. The key strategies and actions presented within the guide are specifically tailored to meet regional and local sustainability needs in an integrated fashion.

In which place types are the recommendations applicable?

- The key strategies presented in the guide, are both locally and regionally focused and are compatible with both levels of government. Many of the recommended actions apply to both urban and suburban municipalities alike; however, Union County is a fairly developed and transit-rich county and many of the land-use recommendations in the guide focus on redevelopment and transit-oriented approaches.

Lessons Learned

- Institutional and funding challenges will need to be addressed in order to implement the recommendations in the guide. Funding from state and federal sources is available but is highly competitive. In following the guide, Union County will need to focus on leveraging the funding sources to which it currently has access; will need to coordinate staff efforts to focus on specific actions arising from the guide; and will need to continue its extensive outreach to its constituent municipalities to maintain the connections with local government needed to advance the federal Livability Principles.

Transferability

- The format of the guide and the principles it contains are highly adaptable and transferable to other jurisdictions within the region. The livability principles and related key strategies create a broad foundation that others, even entities outside of New Jersey, can build from and customize.

RPSD Topic Areas Covered

- The guide is related to or is associated with many of the RPSD topic areas:

Livability and the Environment		Economic Competitiveness and Workforce Development		Society and Community	
Land Use & Urban Design	◆	Asset-Based Infrastructure Development	□	Health & Safety	□
Transportation	◆	Workforce Preparedness & Training	❖	Arts & Culture	❖
Housing	❖	Industry Sector Development	❖	Education	□
Energy & Climate	□	Business Environment & Entrepreneurial Support	❖		
Natural Lands	□				
Air Quality	□				
Water Resources	□				

◆ Significantly associated with topic

❖ Associated with topic

□ Minor association with topic

Appendix A: Additional Resources for Key Strategies

General Resources

There are extensive resources available online that can provide guidance for developing policies based on livability principles. The listing below offers a good basis and overview of what is available.

Together North Jersey. <http://togethernorthjersey.com>. Provides guidance, resources and examples of best practices relevant to New Jersey.

Partnership for Sustainable Communities. <http://www.sustainablecommunities.gov>. The federal coalition formed by the EPA, HUD and USDOT to promote livability principles. Provides resource guides and toolkits for implementing principles.

Federal Environmental Protection Agency/Smart Growth. <http://www.epa.gov/smartgrowth>. Provides guidance and toolkits for implementing smart growth policies.

Smart Growth America. <http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org>. National coalition promoting smart growth principles, offering resource guides and implementation fact sheets for smart growth, placemaking, context sensitive design and Complete Streets.

New Jersey Department of State, Office of Planning Advocacy. <http://www.state.nj.us/state/planning/spc-research-planning-links.html>. Provides extensive listing of available resources in implementing smart growth and livability principles.

Institute of Transportation Engineers (ITE) Context-Sensitive Solutions. <http://www.ite.org/css>. Provides extensive guidance, resources and tools for developing context-sensitive design solutions for transportation improvement projects.

Project for Public Spaces. <http://www.pps.org>. Recognized world leader in promoting placemaking and context-sensitive design and revitalizing underutilized public spaces through creative design solutions.

Congress for the New Urbanism. <http://www.cnu.org>. Leading organization on promoting walkable, livable communities. Provides resources and guidance in promoting livability principles.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Green Infrastructure. <http://water.epa.gov/infrastructure/greeninfrastructure/index.cfm>. Provides resources, tools and potential funding for green-infrastructure projects.

Resources by Key Strategy

The following is a list of online resources organized by the Key Strategies outlined in Section V of this document.

¹ Complete Streets:

- National Complete Streets Coalition: www.smartgrowthamerica.org/complete-streets
Resource guides and detailed information for implementing Complete Streets programs.
- New Jersey Department of Transportation, Complete Streets Policy and Resource Guide: www.state.nj.us/transportation/eng/completestreets/policy.shtm.
Policy guidance, resources and potential funding for Complete Streets projects.
- New Jersey Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center: njbikeped.org
In addition to best practices materials, the NJBPRC keeps a listing of adopted county and municipal Complete Streets policies in New Jersey: njbikeped.org/?page_id=2279

² Essex County Complete Streets Implementation Action Plan (2014):

http://togethernorthjersey.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Essex-County-CS-Plan_100214.pdf

³ The East Coast Greenway is a trail system that links many of the major cities of the Eastern Seaboard. Information on the East Coast Greenway in New Jersey: www.greenway.org/explore-by-state/nj

⁴ Pedestrian Safety Enforcement Training opportunities through the NJ Bicycle and Pedestrian Resource Center: njbikeped.org/training-workshops/

⁵ Safe Routes to School (SRTS):

- National SRTS: www.saferoutesinfo.org/
- SRTS New Jersey: www.saferoutesnj.org/

⁶ Union County Transportation Management Associations:

- **Meadowlink/EZ Ride** (urban areas): www.ezride.org/
- **TransOptions** (suburban areas): www.transoptions.org/

⁷ *Planning for Emerging Centers: Union County Sustainability Corridor Economic Development Opportunities Study* (Summer 2013): www.njtpa.org/Planning/Regional-Studies/Studies/Planning-for-Emerging-Centers-Transportation,/Emerging-Centers/TCSP-Union-County-FINAL.aspx

⁸ Transit-Oriented Development:

- Center for Transit-Oriented Development: www.ctod.org/
Current research and best practices on TOD implementation nationally.
- TOD Supportive Zoning guidance from Sustainable Jersey: www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/522
- *Manual of Best Practices for Transit-Oriented Development*, NJDOT (2013)
www.state.nj.us/transportation/community/village/pdf/todbestpracticesmanual2013.pdf

⁹ *Municipal Implementation Tool #6: Parking Management Strategies*, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (May 2004): www.dvrpc.org/reports/MIT006.pdf Offers strategies for balancing parking supply and demand, with a focus on efficiency and design.

¹⁰ Regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for Northern New Jersey: http://togethernorthjersey.com/?page_id=20091

¹¹ Urban-Focused Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for North-Central New Jersey: <http://www.tesc.edu/watson/institute/Urban-Focused-Comprehensive-Economic-Development-Strategy.cfm>

¹² Somerset County mapped the areas within the county that qualify for location-based tax incentives under the Grow NJ program: www.co.somerset.nj.us/planweb/pdf/EOA_Map_11x17.pdf

¹³ **Grow NJ incentives:** choosenj.com/Incentives.aspx

¹⁴ **Brownfields Reuse guidance from Sustainable Jersey:**

- Brownfields Inventory and Prioritization: www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/515
- Brownfields Marketing: www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/524
- Brownfields Reuse Planning: www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/514

¹⁵ **Support Local Businesses guidance from Sustainable Jersey:**

www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/45

¹⁶ **Creative Assets Inventory guidance from Sustainable Jersey:**

www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/500

¹⁷ **Creative Placemaking Plan guidance from Sustainable Jersey:**

<http://www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/512>

¹⁸ **Green Streets in Passaic County:** www.passaiccountynj.org/index.aspx?NID=565

Overview of Green Streets initiative in Passaic County that incorporates low-impact design elements that can mimic natural systems, incrementally reducing flood events and their impacts.

¹⁹ **Create a Green Design checklist guidance from Sustainable Jersey:**

www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/483

²⁰ **Site Plan Green Design Standards guidance from Sustainable Jersey:**

www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/31

²¹ **Healthy Food Access guidance from Sustainable Jersey:**

- Community Gardens: www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/52
- Buy Fresh Buy Local: www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/48
- Farmers Markets: www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/#/open/action/49

²² **Sustainable Somerset: Somerset County Investment Framework:**

www.co.somerset.nj.us/planweb/sustainable/sciframework.htm

The Somerset County Planning Board worked closely with state, county and municipal officials, local and regional planners, the business community and other individuals and stakeholder groups to prepare a series of GIS-based infrastructure, community and environmental asset maps. These maps formed the basis of a “criteria-based approach” for identifying areas in the county most suitable for either growth or preservation.

Appendix B: Outreach Session Summaries

1) Opportunity Matrix

A summary table of the stakeholder responses from four of the outreach sessions by topic area.

2) Outreach Session Summaries

Meeting summaries for four of the outreach sessions as follows:

- Providing More Transportation Choices Summary (May 7, 2013)
- Promoting Equitable, Affordable Housing Summary (May 29, 2013)
- Enhancing Economic Competitiveness (March 28, 2013)
- Supporting Communities and Neighborhoods (July 16, 2013)
- Coordinating Policies and Leveraging Investment (October 9, 2013)

Opportunity Matrix

Summary of Union County stakeholder outreach responses organized by session topic.

Session Topic	Inputs of Success	Outputs of Success	Definition of Success	Challenges to Success
1 <i>Enhancing Economic Competitiveness</i>	Early education awareness Business incubators Coordinating services Supporting small business costs Assistance to transitional workers Train and support unemployed	Affordable, mixed housing near jobs Public transportation options connecting to jobs Career academics	People live where jobs are (or use public transportation) Coordinated land-use policy	High taxes Finding educated workforce Traffic and transportation Politics
2 <i>Providing More Transportation Options</i>	Sufficient capacity Knowledge of demographics Accessibility and connectivity Education / engagement of transportation choices Break down reliance on cars – culture of car use Understand needs of special interest groups Diverse funding sources	Attraction of creative class Residents make informed decisions about a range of opportunities Smart, up-to-date strategy Responsive systems Equitable “Complete streets” Ongoing assessment	Balanced, safe and responsive to users Implementable, accommodating, adaptive to change Economically and culturally supportable Measurable Environmentally sound Affordable Dynamic – ability to serve bikes, drivers, transit riders, pedestrians	Creating balance Getting people to understand / be comfortable with mass transit Traffic Politics Balance of cities and suburbs Institutional ownerships Funding

Session Topic	Inputs of Success	Outputs of Success	Definition of Success	Challenges to Success
3 <i>Promoting Equitable, Affordable Housing</i>	Financial literacy Community education and outreach Leadership / long-term vision / accountability Housing close to transportation Offset impact to schools Reducing utility costs to make housing more affordable Housing design more affordable / green design Broaden definition of affordable housing Greater operational efficiency, increase Recognize variation between municipalities in terms of affordable housing	Diverse neighborhoods Affordable homeownership Booming economy, job creation Lower taxes Benefits to upper- and middle-/lower-income households Educational achievements More stable families, lower crime, more time for volunteering Strong public education about affordable housing More flexible lending standards Homeowners are educated about qualifying for homes and maintaining them	Variety of access to transportation Everyone can afford to live somewhere All communities should have certain basic amenities – sustainable neighborhoods, community-based strategies Housing includes entire community / enhanced neighborhoods Maintain existing housing stock Build new affordable housing Renters not stigmatized Locate affordable housing in community, can't be isolated People can afford to live in a community where they grew up	Land availability Expiration of affordability controls Zoning issues Housing “turnover” “Not in my backyard” Lack of community education Fiscal impact, other services Foreclosures / predatory lending Politics Ownership patterns Opposition to new development

Session Topic**Inputs of Success****Outputs of Success****Definition of Success****Challenges to Success****4** *Supporting Communities and Neighborhoods*

Health education
Available activities for the senior population outside of the house
Safe sidewalks, community gardens
Communication is key, as well as communication strategies
Strategy to address the diverse needs of communities
Support networks within the family and community
Increasing partnerships between community centers and businesses
Dynamic ESL
Holistic education programs – using libraries
Shared resources between municipalities

Support networks, build communications networks
Better access to education – academic success and libraries
Community schools
Better network for shared services
Variety of education routes for children – matching what society needs
Living educational communities – create ownership where students live/learn – may increase brain drains
Getting community members to feel safe and comfortable

Having health coverage
Policies that cover prevention, access and affordability
A community that is resilient to disaster
Strong and local K-12 programs
Access and affordability of higher-education programs
Community schools
Everyone has a share in sustainable communities
Matching education outputs to what communities need
A strong network within the community

Diverse county – finding the balance between urban and suburban
Lack of opportunity for family education
Lack of community centers and opportunity for community
Cultural and language barriers
Relationship between municipalities and communities
Getting businesses, students and individuals to buy into the community
Technology gap – education through technology
Keeping arts in education
Cross-jurisdictional barriers
Public health

Union County Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Providing More Transportation Choices Outreach Report Summary

The Union County Transportation Choices community stakeholder outreach program aimed to coordinate the ideas, plans and goals of engineers, green transportation advocates, Port Authority of NY & NJ representatives, township economic development departments and Mayors in order to create streamlined, viable plans that will help Union County become more dynamic and sustainable. The Transportation Choices outreach, held on May 7, 2013 at the Cranford Community Center, worked to find ways to develop safe, reliable and economical transportation choices while also decreasing costs, improving air quality, and promoting public health. This program successfully facilitated important discussion about the types of transportation modes available and used by County residents, as well as ways to maintain, update and revitalize these choices.

Facilitator Tom Schulze's presentation provided useful statistics about transportation usage within Union County, leading to interesting discoveries about how and where Union County residents travel. We learned that 48% of Union County residents work within the County, 10% of residents work in New York City, and that even though only 10% of residents use mass transit transportation options, it was a high percentage of residents when compared to other New Jersey counties.

The stakeholders were asked **to identify the aspects of transit that are important to a strong local and regional economy**. They touched upon issues such as reducing traffic, maintaining roadways, expanding mass transit options, and increasing the capacity of highways for both people and goods. However, not all participants believed that increasing capacity would solve the problem of congestion in much of our region, and equated adding highway lanes to "loosening a belt to deal with obesity." Eventually, the participants agreed that the most important aspect of transportation planning is the creation of a balanced plan, where an increase in highway capacity does not occur simultaneously with an increase in mass transportation options, because highways will always suck people off of mass transit.

Throughout the discussion, participants identified the **challenges and obstacles to creating a successful transportation plan**, such as:

- Educating people on the benefits of mass transit
- Balancing access to cities and suburbs
- Breaking down political barriers within the region
- Establishing a source of funding for transit projects
- Finding ways to effectively deal with traffic and congestion issues

Keeping these challenges in mind, the participants were then asked to identify the **outputs of a successful transportation plan**, citing that the County should attempt to:

- Attract the "creative class" through providing mass transit options and walkable neighborhoods
- Provide means for residents to make informed decisions about a range of transportation opportunities
- Facilitate the creation of smart and up-to-date transportation strategies
- Maintain a balanced transportation plan through a responsive and equitable system

Throughout this discussion, County stakeholders were able to define a wide-range of concrete transportation solutions that will guide future planning initiatives towards a more diverse, balanced and sustainable Union County.

Union County Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Promoting Equitable, Affordable Housing Outreach Report

The Union County community stakeholder Equitable Housing outreach program aimed to coordinate the ideas, plans and goals of homeowners, real estate agents, homeless advocacy groups, developers and municipal leaders in order to create streamlined, viable plans that will help Union County become a more dynamic and sustainable County. The Equitable Housing outreach, held on May 29, 2013 at the Union County Offices in Westfield, focused on equitable and affordable housing issues within Union County. This program successfully guided discussions surrounding housing in the Union County region, as well as identified the steps needed to create a more equitable and affordable housing environment.

Facilitator Lucy Vandenberg challenged participants to think about the current state of housing, both in urban and suburban municipalities within the County. The discussion focused around what defines affordable housing, what it should look like and what its goals should be. She began by introducing interesting statistics that challenged the participant's existing knowledge on housing within the County. We learned that while the average renter would need to make \$24.00 per hour to afford a two bedroom apartment within the County, in reality, the average renter only makes \$17.79 per hour, highlighting the disconnect between availability and affordability.

The participants were then asked to **describe the housing conditions in Union County**, pulling from their diverse backgrounds as tenants, homeowners, contractors and advocates. These participants noted that in Union County:

- Overcrowding is a serious housing issue
- There are 18,000 individuals/families on the Section 8 waiting list
- It is necessary to update the definition of homelessness to combat issues
- Many families live in apartments too small for their family size
- Housing costs such as taxes and utilities can change affordability for many

These facts presented by the participants illustrate the challenges and sometimes overlooked aspects of creating equitable, affordable housing within Union County. Throughout the conversation, participants identified **potential solutions** to these issues, concluding that:

- Building new affordable housing units next to or near dilapidated areas will not provide the benefits expected - communities will not benefit unless the entire community is served- We cannot ignore existing housing stock
- The County must update and explain the definition of affordable housing to educate people so that they become more receptive and responsive to these changes.
- The property tax issue is making homeownership impossible - on top of housing costs and extra associated costs; property taxes are cutting out many from being able to afford homeownership
- The location of affordable housing needs to be integrated and functioning in the community, close to transportation and jobs

Union County Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Economic Competitiveness Outreach Report Summary

The Union County community stakeholder Economic Competitiveness outreach program aimed to coordinate the ideas, plans and goals of residents, education institutes, local economic development corporations and municipal leaders in order to better allow our region to grow effectively and sustainably. The Union County Regional Plan for Sustainable Development will work to create streamlined, viable plans that will help Union County become a more dynamic and sustainable County. The Economic Competitiveness outreach, held on March 28, 2013 at Kean University in Union Township, focused on Union County's economy, and guided important discussions surrounding the needs and goals that will lead this region to become more economically competitive.

Facilitator Jennifer Cleary's presentation asked participants to think about the "magic ingredients" for creating a competitive economy and how these ingredients can be applied to Union County. The discussion that followed focused on key issues and sparked innovative, unique ideas.

The participant stakeholders were asked to define the **challenges and obstacles** our County faces in creating and managing a competitive and transitional economy. Throughout this discussion, we have concluded that:

- Manufacturing jobs are not competitive globally
- There are fewer research type job opportunities in the area
- There is a need for realistic expectations of who will come if we put manufacturing back into the region
- People do not have the needed skill sets
- The County should focus more resources on the unemployed
- The County should focus on immediate need for current workforce

We have also concluded the need to recognize the types of economic issues and questions that happen on an individual level, such as: *"How do I, the job-seeker, know about new opportunities moving into the region?"*

With these large and small-scale challenges in mind, we shifted the discussion on **proposals for solutions** and **beneficial initiatives** that would provide the County with a path to a more competitive economy.

- Industry-specific training programs
- Promotion of seeding new business and entrepreneurship; creating a business incubator atmosphere
- Better linkage of early education to jobs being produced at lowest possible level
 - High school's "best practices" program –divided interests/jobs/applications
 - Exposure of specific economic needs to kids- attract business to area after that

The stakeholder's discussions on both the challenges and solutions of creating a more economically competitive Union County can be linked to the types of transitions within the economy that have been seen throughout the region. Where we have discovered a gap between the skill sets of the County's residents and the types of industry that have stayed within Union County we can see the opportunity for skill-specific training programs catered to the need of the County's industries. This diverse group of stakeholders has shown us the importance of connecting employees or potential employees to specific opportunities within Union County, and these solutions aim to do this in a variety of ways. Implementing these types of County-wide solutions will allow Union County to revitalize its economy, its workers and the North Jersey region.

Union County Regional Plan for Sustainable Development

Supporting Communities and Neighborhoods Outreach Report

The Union County community stakeholder Supporting Communities outreach program aimed to coordinate the ideas, plans and goals of health officers, environmental advocates, historical society representatives, public safety officers and municipal leaders in order to create streamlined, viable plans that will help Union County become a more dynamic and sustainable County. The Supporting Communities and Neighborhoods outreach, held on July 16, 2013 at the Cranford Community Center, tasked participants with identifying what sustainable, supportable communities and neighborhoods look and feel like in order to define ways to improve Union County.

Facilitator Cherron Rountree of Union County asked participants several questions designed to test their knowledge of County-wide health, public safety and environmental facts. These statistics illustrated the many different aspects that define the viability of our communities and neighborhoods. Participants learned that in 2012, 22,622 children in Union County received food stamps, signifying an increase over the 2010-2012 time period. Cherron Rountree explained that assistance statistics are often markers in measuring the overall 'health' and livability of a community, asking participants to think about how these types of issues affect the next generation's health and education. The participants also learned that Union County ranked 4th amongst the Together North Jersey counties in highest crime rate. The perception of violence in communities has a negative impact on the physical and mental well-being of the residents in the community, and throughout the discussion, participants were challenged to identify ways to address this issue.

With these enlightening statistics in mind, the stakeholders were asked to discuss the **challenges and obstacles** of creating sustainable and enjoyable communities and neighborhood, noting that:

- The diversity of Union County requires us to find a balance between urban and suburban areas
- There are a lack of community centers and opportunities for community programs
- There are cultural and language barriers that hinder community engagement
- The County is challenged with getting business and individuals to "buy into" the community
- A technology gap exists within members of the community
- Sometimes a sense of community is forgotten due to cross-jurisdictional barriers
- There is a disconnect between County students in different communities and municipalities

Keeping these challenges in mind, the stakeholders looked for **inputs and solutions** that would lead to more cohesive and livable communities and neighborhoods, suggesting that:

- Schools should encourage community ownership through the integration of "community education" into the curriculum (arts, culture, history)
- A stronger community network be put in place to address localized concerns
- The County assist with increasing the availability and visibility of community based public health programs
- Projects such as community gardens and safe sidewalks be created to foster a sense of community
- Dynamic English as Second Language and cultural integration programs be supported County-wide
- Schools engage in partnerships with community centers, local businesses, libraries, etc. to create holistic learning environments