



FOCUS AREA 4: Focus development and redevelopment in places with existing infrastructure

WHAT AND WHY Embracing policies and actions that direct new development in places with existing capacity can maximize economic and social benefits and reduce new infrastructure's public and private sector costs. For example, Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) policies can foster mixed-use walkable development patterns near transit services. Strategic reuse of underutilized, vacant or abandoned lands can support community growth and redevelopment goals. Limiting encroachment on unprotected, undeveloped open space and agricultural land can minimize negative impacts on the environment. When designed effectively, these strategies can create engaging, vibrant areas that help to reduce congestion on our roads, protect critical natural resources and habitats and foster more significant community interaction.

HOW From North Jersey's bustling downtown business districts to community main streets, from densely populated neighborhoods to quiet residential streets and from major transportation hubs to local train stations and bus stops, opportunities for efficient development and redevelopment abound. Embracing flexible land use policies, including infill development (new housing or commercial space on vacant land between existing uses), rehabilitation and repurposing of brownfields (vacant commercial lands with potential pollution challenges), transit-oriented developments (compact, mixed-use development and redevelopment designs that concentrate population and employment in locations easily accessible to transit stations and stops) and "Smart" land use practices that maximize spaces for people and walkable connections over parking requirements, can improve the character of existing neighborhoods and help achieve more resilient, equitable and sustainable community design and economic growth vs. separated use zoning practices.

STRATEGY 4.1: Promote transit-oriented development

Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) is a land use that supports compact, mixed-use development and redevelopment that concentrate population and employment in locations easily accessible to transit stations and stops. TOD requires less infrastructure, makes homes and jobs more accessible and can reduce the need to own personal vehicles. Developers, planning boards, elected officials and other stakeholders should seek to codify its use wherever possible to improve the community's livability, economic opportunities, and resilience. Our region can promote TOD by promoting best practices and incentives for development. We should also secure dedicated funding sources for TOD planning initiatives, increase funding for existing initiatives, and adopt TOD-friendly land use regulations.

STRATEGY 4.2: Repurpose vacant and underutilized properties

Vacant or underutilized residential properties, surface parking lots, office buildings, shopping centers, old factories and empty lots throughout the region can be reused or redeveloped. Many are located on parcels suitable for zoning densification and building designs with large floor area ratios (FARs), have access or renewable connections to existing sewer, water and electrical infrastructure capacity, and proximate transit and roadway connections. Reorienting state and local funding to target infrastructure supportive of infill and redevelopment projects, fostering greater adaptive reuse of historic properties through a state historic tax credit, and linking redevelopment incentives to workforce development programs are strategies that could encourage the repurposing of underutilized properties.

STRATEGY 4.3: Prioritize brownfields for redevelopment

Brownfields are properties that can be difficult to redevelop because of the presence or potential presence of hazardous substances, pollutants, or contaminants. Due to our region's industrial heritage, brownfield sites are widespread in many North Jersey cities, older towns, suburbs, and rural areas. They may remain vacant or underutilized for years or decades and have the potential to impede revitalization efforts in the surrounding area. Real estate developers, investors, and others often bypass these properties because they assume that the cleanup of contaminants would be too complex and too costly; however, some brownfields remain undeveloped due only to the perception they are contaminated. Brownfields present a wide range of economic, housing, recreational and open-space opportunities to communities. Because brownfields are often located in areas with developed infrastructure and are often near other active commercial, residential, and employment uses, they pose a unique reuse opportunity. Our region should continue to support funding and incentives for brownfield inventory, cleanup, and redevelopment while promoting research and best practices for brownfield redevelopment.

STRATEGY 4.4: Incorporate smart development planning

Communities that embrace “Smart” land use policies tend to create more sustainable designs that balance a vibrant mix of residential, employment, and retail uses to provide a better quality of life for residents, employees and visitors. Smart development planning can involve performance-based zoning, design standards and guidelines, context-sensitive land use density and minimum parking requirements, climate resilient and environmental sustainability approaches and multi-modal mobility and access for all travel needs and modes. Examples of Smart planning strategies can include “Form-Based Codes” that regulate the form and function of development rather than that particular use of property, allowing the market to decide the best use, noncontiguous cluster development that allows one parcel to be preserved while its density is transferred and developed on a different, noncontiguous parcel, and Transfer of Development Rights, which moves an owner’s right to build from one site where development is prohibited or discouraged to a location more optimal for development. Our region should promote these planning strategies through training workshops, technical assistance, education, and incentives to municipalities and local nonprofit and community-based organizations.

