

Figure 2

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT CENTERS

How does the NJ State Plan define a Center?

A Center is defined as a compact form of development with one or more “cores” (pedestrian-oriented areas of commercial and civic uses) and residential neighborhoods. It ranges in size from urban centers down to regional centers, towns, villages and hamlets. In Planning Areas 3, 4 and 5 especially, Centers should be delineated with boundaries around them. Land preservation and environmental protection are priorities outside of these boundaries.

Does the State Planning Commission require every community to direct growth either into existing or planned Centers?

No. The key is for the municipal master plan goals to match its zoning requirements and for all of this to be consistent with the Planning Area policies in the State Plan.

Does Hunterdon County have any Centers?

There are many existing places that would qualify as Centers in Hunterdon. Examples of hamlets might be Little York, Norton, or Rosemont. Villages include Ringoes, Pittstown, Whitehouse Station, and Oldwick. Towns include Lambertville, High Bridge and Milford.

Flemington is the only designated Center. That means the municipality went through a formal process of submitting the necessary documentation to receive official recognition by the State Planning Commission and committing to implementing an action agenda supportive of Center designation.

Does the Center designation process still exist?

In the past, there was a Center designation process. This preceded the recent creation of the Plan Endorsement process. The problem, however, was that the focus of Center designation was on ways to develop/redevelop Centers, disregarding the way development occurred outside of those Centers. Now, Centers can only be designated as part of Plan Endorsement.

Does Center designation trigger the permit-streamlining provisions for new development?

Yes. The permit-streamlining law applies to certain DEP, DCA and DOT permits in Planning Areas 1 and 2, designated Centers, and redevelopment sites.

PROS AND CONS OF CREATING CENTERS OR DIRECTING GROWTH INTO EXISTING CENTERS

Here's a start...anything else?

PROS:

- Diverse housing options (greater mix of sizes and styles)
- Walkable communities
- Less reliance on cars
- Emphasis on design
- Sense of neighborhood
- Development pattern consistent with hamlets, villages and towns of Hunterdon County
- Reduces sprawl since lots are less spread out and land outside Center is concurrently preserved
- Helps preserve land outside Center (if done using Transfer of Development Rights or noncontiguous clustering)
- If using Transfer of Development Rights (TDR), additional planning monies available; land preservation occurs through private market transactions rather than expenditure of public dollars
- If State Planning Commission recognizes as designated Center, receives higher priority for various state funding programs and eligible for certain state agency regulatory programs
- If State Planning Commission recognizes as designated Center, becomes location where state agency permit-streamlining provisions apply for municipal and other locally desired projects

CONS:

- In many cases, need wastewater treatment alternative to septic systems
- Expensive to master plan and implement
- If using TDR, might necessitate density bonus to make economically feasible
- If State Planning Commission recognizes as designated Center, becomes location where permit-streamlining provisions for development in Smart Growth areas apply, including projects that may not be desirable locally
- In Highlands Planning Area, Highlands Council will consider designated Centers as potential voluntary receiving zones in a TDR program - this could involve development rights sent from another municipality