

# 2024 Master Plan Reexamination & Land Use Amendment

June 20, 2024


**Union Township**  
Union County, New Jersey



Prepared for:

Union Township  
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Project No. UTT0144

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## Introduction

The New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law, N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89 et seq., requires that Municipal Planning Boards review municipal master plans and zoning and land development regulations at least once every ten years. At least once every ten years is the minimum requirement. However, Planning Boards may undertake a Reexamination Report at any time in order to address changes in municipal assumptions or policies regarding land use or emergent land use issues. The statute requires that the Reexamination Report be adopted by the Planning Board by resolution and distributed to the municipal governing body, the County Planning Board and adjacent municipalities.

The purpose of a Reexamination Report, prepared in accordance with the Municipal Land Use Law, is to periodically reexamine the master plan, zoning and land use and development regulations of a municipality to determine whether they continue to address the development goals and objectives of the municipality and to provide recommendations that will address proposed changes in development goals, the impact of development within the municipality and the impact of planning and development regulations by the county, the State of New Jersey, and the federal government. The Municipal Land Use Law requires that municipalities review the master plan and zoning and land development regulations in terms of the following:

- A. The major problems and objectives relating to land development in the municipality at the time of adoption of the last reexamination report.
- B. The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.
- C. The extent to which there have been significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the master plan or development regulations as last revised, with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses, housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in State, county and municipal policies and objectives.
- D. The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.
- E. The recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law", N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 et al., into the land use plan element of the municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

The last Master Plan the Union Township Planning Board was adopted on March 25, 2021. At that time, the desire for mixed use neighborhoods was widespread, and such use categories were incorporated into all non-highway commercial areas. Subsequently, a repositioning to limit certain downtown commercial areas to strictly commercial uses has taken place, with a mixed-use focus on the Downtown Core and Downtown Transition Districts, and a more low-scale commercial-only focus on the Neighborhood Core (NC) areas.

An opportunity to create revenue from additional signage has also emerged. A number of township-owned properties on Route 22 with limiting lot conditions (area, geometry) would provide opportunities for such installations.

And, an existing TO Transit-Oriented zoned area adjacent to the C/I Commercial/Industrial zone should be reconsidered for C/I zoning to align with its current use and future plans to allow for cannabis-related uses.

This reexamination report will focus solely on the 2021 Land Use Element and problems, changes thereto, assumptions, and recommendations as they pertain to the above matters.

A. The Major Problems and Objectives Relating to Land Development in the 2021 Master Plan

The 2021 Master Plan contained no mention of potential signage modifications. Two goals and their corresponding objectives relating to non-residential uses are as follows:

**Goal 2:** Support desirable non-residential development.

- Encourage reuse of vacant properties that enhances the character of development and reduces traffic impacts.
- Establish zoning policies that reduce adverse impacts of strip commercial development.
- Require buffering around incompatible non-residential properties to soften the visual and functional impact of their design and use.
- Ensure public and quasi-public land uses remain compatible with the needs and character of adjacent neighborhoods.
- Identify zoning ordinance improvements that can respond to changing economies and market demands.
- Limit incompatible residential uses from locating in non-residential areas outside of downtown or neighborhood centers which would generate adverse impacts to traffic, noise, or safety.

**Goal 3:** Strengthen downtown centers by encouraging a mix of nonresidential and residential uses that provide employment, retail opportunities, services and entertainment.

- Strengthen the Springfield Avenue business district by encouraging façade improvement programs and a possible Business Improvement District (BID).
- Promote mixed-use development in the downtown and near the train station.

- Update and enhance the design standards for the Springfield and Stuyvesant corridors that promote walkability and a desirable visual environment, while not inhibiting creativity.
- Consider establishing design standards for the neighborhood core districts.
- Consider adoption of a form-based code for the downtown and neighborhood districts.

B. The Extent to which such Problems and Objectives from the Last Master Plan and Last Reexamination Report have been Reduced or Increased

**Goal 2:** Support desirable non-residential development. *This goal remains and the desire to eliminate residential uses from NC zones should be emphasized as in the objectives below.*

- Encourage reuse of vacant properties that enhances the character of development and reduces traffic impacts. **Objective remains**
- Establish zoning policies that reduce adverse impacts of strip commercial development. **Objective remains**
- Require buffering around incompatible non-residential properties to soften the visual and functional impact of their design and use. **Objective remains**
- Ensure public and quasi-public land uses remain compatible with the needs and character of adjacent neighborhoods. **Objective remains**
- Identify zoning ordinance improvements that can respond to changing economies and market demands. **Objective remains, and modified as discussed herein**
- Limit incompatible residential uses from locating in non-residential areas outside of downtown or neighborhood centers which would generate adverse impacts to traffic, noise, or safety. **Objective remains, and modified to limit all residential uses from the NC district**

**Goal 3:** Strengthen downtown centers by encouraging a mix of nonresidential and residential uses that provide employment, retail opportunities, services and entertainment. *This goal should be modified to “encouraging a mix of nonresidential and residential uses that provide employment, retail opportunities, services and entertainment in the Downtown Core and Downtown Transition Districts.”*

- Strengthen the Springfield Avenue business district by encouraging façade improvement programs and a possible Business Improvement District (BID). **Objective remains**
- Promote mixed-use development in the downtown and near the train station. **Objective remains, and to be clarified to refer to the Downtown Core, Downtown Transition, and near the train station.**
- Update and enhance the design standards for the Springfield and Stuyvesant corridors that promote walkability and a desirable visual environment, while not inhibiting creativity. **Objective remains**
- Consider establishing design standards for the neighborhood core districts. **Objective remains**

- Consider adoption of a form-based code for the downtown and neighborhood districts. **Objective remains**

C. Significant Changes in the Assumptions, Policies and Objectives Forming the Basis for the Master Plan or Development Regulations

The assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for Union's Master Plan and development regulations as they relate to land use in the NC District have not changed appreciably since 2021, and thus a re-analysis of census and land use data is not necessary to understand the existing conditions. Focusing residential mixed-use development to the Downtown Core and Downtown Transition Districts, rather than scattering it through the NC District as well, should help ongoing efforts to revitalize those downtown areas.

D. The Specific Changes Recommended for the Master Plan or Development Regulations

#### Neighborhood Core District

The Neighborhood Core (NC) District currently allows a mix of residential housing types, as well as numerous commercial uses. It is recommended that the zoning district regulations be revised to eliminate the residential uses along with any necessary bulk adjustments resulting therefrom.

#### Signage

Union Township has an opportunity to install signage on township-owned properties along Route 22 that, based on size and geometry, have little to no development potential. In order to install off-site signage, the zoning code needs to be amended to allow such signs through rezoning and revised use and bulk requirements. Such signage will provide the opportunity for the township to collect advertising revenue on township-owned land. It is recommended that any zoning code amendments include limitations on size, height, and location of such signage.

#### TOD to C/I rezoning

There currently exists on Green Lane two parcels (Block 301, Lots 44 and 47) zoned TOD which currently operate as light industrial uses (beverage distribution, doors distribution, etc.). The sites are expected to remain in operation for the foreseeable future, and there is added interest in incorporating cannabis-related uses into the use at Lot 47. C/I zoned lots sit adjacent immediately to the northeast. As such, rezoning both parcels C/I to align with their existing function is most practical.

#### Conclusion

In an effort to concentrate mixed-use development in the Downtown Core and Downtown Transition Districts, the zoning code should be revised to remove residential uses from the Neighborhood Core District, along with any corresponding bulk requirements. Commercial rezoning of select publicly owned lots along Route 22 would provide an opportunity for municipal revenue through signage.

And, modifying the zoning of two lots on Green Lane (Block 301, Lots 44 and 47) from TOD to C/I will allow continued operations of a conforming use into the future.

E. Recommendations Concerning Incorporation of Redevelopment Plans

At this time there are no recommendations for the incorporation of redevelopment plans pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law." Several Redevelopment Plans are underway and should continue through the normal adoption process.

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**TOWNSHIP OF UNION PLANNING BOARD  
RESOLUTION RECOMMENDING ADOPTION OF  
2024 MASTER PLAN REEXAMINATION AND LAND USE AMENDMENTS**

**WHEREAS**, Kristin Russell, PP, AICP, of Colliers Engineering & Design (“Colliers”), prepared and presented a 2024 Master Plan Reexamination and Land Use Amendment to the Township of Union Planning Board on Thursday June 27, 2024; and

**WHEREAS**, Union Township adopted a Master Plan on March 25, 2021; and

**WHEREAS**, municipalities may undertake a Reexamination of their Master Plan at any time to address and insure that the Master Plan is addressing the goals and objectives of the municipality; and

**WHEREAS**, one of the goals of the Master Plan is to support desirable non-residential development; and

**WHEREAS**, the Master Plan allows for a mix of residential housing and commercial uses in the Neighborhood Core District; and

**WHEREAS**, Colliers recommends that the zoning code be revised so that the residential uses and corresponding bulk requirements are removed from the Neighborhood Core District; and

**WHEREAS**, Colliers recommends that the language of the Master Plan be clarified to promote mixed-use development in the Downtown Core, Downtown Transition, and near the train station; and

**WHEREAS**, Ms. Russell advised that select town-owned properties along Route 22 have little development potential; and

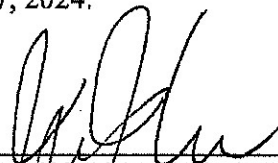
**WHEREAS**, Colliers recommends that the zoning code be revised so to allow signage to be installed on select municipal owned lots along Route 22; and **WHEREAS**, Colliers

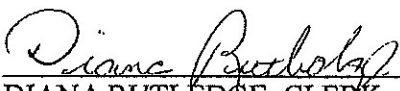
recommends that two of the lots on Green Lane (block 301, lots 44 and 47) be modified to be a Commercial/Industrial zone so as to fit with the current usages of the lots and allow for future non retail cannabis-related uses;

**WHEREAS**, the Township of Union Planning Board finds the zoning changes recommended by Colliers to be in furtherance of the goals of the Master Plan and voted to recommend to the Township Council that it adopt the zoning changes recommended by Colliers in the 2024 Master Plan Reexamination and Land Use Amendment.

**NOW, THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Township of Union Planning Board recommends that the Township of Union adopt the 2024 Master Plan Reexamination and Land Use Amendments as recommended by Colliers Engineering & Design and presented to the Board by Kristin Russell, PP, AICP, on June 27, 2024.

I hereby certify that the foregoing Resolution was adopted by the Planning Board of the Township of Union at its regular public meeting on July 25, 2024, reflecting its oral decision from a vote at its public meeting held on June 27, 2024.

  
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JAMES JOHNSTON, CHAIRMAN  
PLANNING BOARD OF THE  
TOWNSHIP OF UNION

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
DIANA RUTLEDGE, CLERK  
PLANNING BOARD OF THE  
TOWNSHIP OF UNION