

Circulation

Draft

## Circulation

The Village presently has a Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan for the improvement of bicycle and pedestrian safety. This Smart Growth Plan does not intend to break new ground. Rather this plan will highlight the achievements in this area to date and suggest links between already established and publicly supported plans. This includes the Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, the Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan, the East Branch of the Rahway River Master Plan and the results of the public input sessions. These documents are summarized in the "Planning Context and History" portion of this document.

However, additional concerns were brought to light in the public visioning sessions regarding parking and vehicular traffic. This plan will highlight the concerns of the citizens and recommends a complete study of both issues in any future Master Plan revision in the Village. Of course, all of the strategies in this Smart Growth Plan will seek to increase bicycle and pedestrian safety, access and connectivity as well as relieve parking problems and traffic congestion.

### *Walking/Biking/Transit*

At the visioning sessions, it was generally agreed that biking is generally unsafe in South Orange due to a number of factors, including the width and design of roadways (such as small shoulders and lack of bike paths); missing connections so that you have to traverse major roads; and driver behavior (including speeding and inattention to bicyclists). It should be noted that improvements to pedestrian and bicycle circulation is addressed in detail in the recently-adopted Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan, which is summarized in the "Planning Context and History" portion of this document. Village wide recommendations in the plan included sidewalk design, crosswalk striping and signage, illumination, shared use trail along the Rahway River, expanded bicycle parking, traffic calming measures and signage improvements. All of these concerns are currently under review and the Village Engineer's office has preliminary plans in place for some of these initiatives.

A desire for traffic calming devices and enforcement of speed laws was expressed, as was the need for bike racks at key destinations, including at the train stations and in shopping areas. Many of these objectives can be met with cooperation between the Police Department, the Village, Main Street South Orange and NJ Transit.

A need for "yield to pedestrian" signs at crosswalk locations throughout the Village was mentioned at the visioning sessions. However, it was further clarified that mid-block crossings would not work from a public safety standpoint because drivers simply do not expect to stop for pedestrians in mid-block areas. Of special concern to the public was the path from South Orange Avenue to Mead Street. This connection needs to be lit, paved, with stormwater runoff problems such as pooling water and winter ice fixed. It was also requested of the Village to keep, repair and maintain the footpaths on Floods Hill and not remove them.

When those who drive to the train station were asked in the survey what options might convince them to use other modes of transportation, jitney service seems to hold the most potential with 64% indicating that they might use a Jitney service at least some of the time if it were expanded or improved. Improved pedestrian access and improved access via bicycle were not seen as particularly needed.

It should be noted that improvements to pedestrian and bicycle circulation is addressed in detail in the recently-adopted Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan, which is summarized in the "Planning Context and History" portion of this document.

## Parking

An additional focus of the public visioning sessions for this Smart Growth Plan included the availability of parking. It is important to note that the perception of parking availability and the reality of parking availability are not always the same. Quantitative analysis of parking availability within the business districts and other areas of the Village provides additional guidance to decision makers regarding necessary measures. Shoor Depalma conducted one such study in 2004 for the Village and the South Orange Parking Authority.

The study was conducted on the eleven (11) parking lots within the Village, including the New Jersey Transit parking lot and Village Lots 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 7A, 9 and 10. The New Jersey Transit parking lot was fully utilized and pick-ups and drop offs occurred in lot 9, creating issues of availability in that lot as well. Weekday peak hours of 9 am to 5 pm had occupancy of eighty percent (80%) or greater. Street parking was also inventoried and nearly ninety-five percent (95%) of on-street parking was occupied during peak hours with a significant amount of turnover, especially on South Orange Avenue. The study concluded that comparing parking availability and utilization to reasonable parking standards, the CBD demands exceeded availability by almost 600 spaces on an average weekday. This would lend credence to the public perception of parking availability and the support for structured parking.

Sixty-four percent (64%) of the survey respondents identified the availability of parking as a "weakness" (36%) or "strongly negative weakness" (28%) in the Village. Conversely, only 15% identified the availability of parking in the Village as an asset. When asked in the survey whether they would support Village regulations or publicly funded programs that would improve the availability of parking in the Village's commercial areas, survey respondents indicated strong support. Ninety-two percent (92%) indicated that they would be either "strongly supportive" (53%) or "supportive" (39%) of such efforts.

Parking was identified as an important issue in each of the business districts as well as at Baird Community Center. Eighty percent (80%) of the survey respondents felt that the availability of parking in the Central Business District was "average" or worse, with only sixteen percent (16%) identifying parking there as "good" or "very good." The availability of parking in the Valley Street area received similar ratings, while parking seemed to be less of a concern in the Irvington Avenue area. Generally, survey respondents indicated that they would be more

likely to visit the Central Business District and Valley Street area if parking was improved, with greater emphasis on the Central Business District.

Attendees of the visioning sessions discussed the need and desirability of more parking and, in particular, structured parking near the downtown area. It was expressed that “there is no place to park downtown” and that “parking is going to be even worse when the PAC opens.” The need for well sited but attractive structured parking in the downtown area was discussed. It was expressed that “parking decks can be done in nice way” and if done right can look more attractive than surface lots. Wrapping decks with other development (first floor retail with residential above) was one approach discussed. A planned redevelopment project in Harrison next to the PATH station was cited as an example, as was Livingston Town Center and State College, PA.

It was suggested that a deck with retail on the NJ Transit lot “would kill two birds with one stone, by adding needed retail downtown as well as necessary parking.” However, it was expressed that the design of any such facility would need to be coordinated with the river improvement plans. It was also expressed that another “logical place to tuck a lot of cars is the Third Street Rescue Squad lot where it could serve downtown and Valley Street.”

### **Vehicular Traffic**

Another focus of the public visioning sessions was traffic and circulation. Again, a quantitative traffic analysis of the Village would provide additional guidance to decision makers regarding necessary measures. Sixty-seven percent (67%) of the survey respondents identified traffic flow during rush hours as a “weakness” (27%) or a “strongly negative weakness” (40%) in the Village. However, traffic flow during other times of the day received much more mixed results with more than half indicating that traffic flow during other times of the day was “neither an asset nor a weakness.”

Traffic in the Central Business District is generally perceived to be worse than the Valley Street and Irvington Avenue areas. Fifty-five percent (55%) of survey respondents identified traffic flow in the Central Business District as “poor” or “very poor,” while a much lower percentage characterized traffic flow in the Valley Street and Irvington Avenue areas in this way (most identified traffic in those area as “average/fair”).

When asked in the survey whether they would support Village regulations or publicly funded programs that would improve traffic flow in the Village’s commercial areas, survey respondents indicated strong support. Eighty-six (86%) indicated that they would be either “strongly supportive” (48%) or “supportive” (38%) of such efforts. However, input from the visioning session expressed concern that traffic flow improvements must be done in a manner that is consistent with the Village objectives of improving pedestrian and bicycle friendliness and must also not negatively affect the Village’s supply of on-street parking.

Participants of the visioning sessions identified cut-through traffic on residential streets, Montrose Avenue and W. Montrose in particular, as a significant concern. Input from the survey was consistent with this (i.e., this was one

of the key factors identified as affecting neighborhood character). It was expressed that the Village should investigate traffic calming measures. However, it was expressed that the “problem with traffic calming is that it pushes thru-traffic into another neighborhood.” A similar concern was the pass through or regional traffic on South Orange Avenue. Both Montrose Avenue and South Orange Avenue function as regional and local collector roads.

Any future Master Plan revision in the Village should include a traffic study to identify the following:

- Identification and description (qualitative and quantitative) of traffic problems
- Identification of potential solutions
- Actions to be taken to address problems
- Responsible entities
- Transportation recommendations will seek to use a “Context Sensitive Solution” approach and include a strategy for traffic calming and coordination with land use plans

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# Parks, Open Space, and Recreation

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## Parks, Open Space and Recreation

The Village presently has an excellent plan in place for the preservation of natural resource and the provision of recreation facilities. This plan does not intend to break new ground in this area. Rather this plan will highlight the achievements in this area to date and suggest links between already established and publicly supported plans. This will rely heavily on the 2004 Recreation & Open Space Plan and Recreation Element of the Land Use Master Plan, Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan Element of the Master Plan, the East Branch of the Rahway River Master Plan Element of the Master Plan and the results of the public input session. These documents are summarized in the "Planning Context and History" portion of this document. Of course, all of the strategies in this Smart Growth Plan will seek to preserve open space and enhance recreational opportunities

In all of the previous planning documents, the availability of recreational facilities and recreational programs was identified as a strong Village asset. Input at the visioning sessions expressed the same general opinion, where it was expressed that the "Village's parks, pool and other recreation facilities are good, they just need sprucing up."

Suggestions offered at the visioning session included:

- Improving the "Baird Loop"
- Improving the Floods Hill area
- Improving the pool buildings at Cameron Field, specifically the changing rooms and bathrooms
- Designating the Middle School parking lot as a parking lot for Baird activities when school is not in session or school activities are not occurring
- Starting a campaign to encourage walking, especially to parks, and the need for a healthy lifestyle.

The "Baird Loop" was identified as being potentially dangerous in light of automobile and pedestrian interactions, such that:

- Automobiles speed to the field area from the entrance driveway
- Automobiles encroach on pedestrians crossing from parked spaces to go to Baird
- Automobiles "cruise" to see who is at the park, not stopping at the park as a destination
- Children playing basketball often chase balls onto Mead Street conflicting with cars
- A basketball drop off area is needed in that location (parents drop-off and pick-up kids in the fire lane) and that the pool buildings, specifically the changing rooms and bathrooms, at Cameron Field are in fair condition at best
- Parking at Baird Community Center will be improved by the addition of a bridge proposed in the Rahway River Plan. Such a bridge will allow shared parking between Meadowbrook Place and the Baird Community Center.

### Recreation & Open Space Plan and Recreation Element of the Land Use Master Plan

Highlights Include:

- Development of a greenway zone and bikeway/walkway along the river, creating a stream buffer and greenway zone along the river for about 25 feet on both sides, “daylighting” covered portions and enhancing the river as an attractive place
- Development of an additional soccer field and a skate park
- Making better use of and adding value to existing parks and open space
- Making greenway connections between and among parks and major destinations.
- Acquiring strategic parcels of land
- Requiring conservation easements for new development and redevelopment
- Requiring developers to include open space as part and parcel of their site plans through cluster zoning or lot averaging

The Plan places an emphasis on the river restoration project. The Plan “considers the river as the connective, coordinating ‘spine’ of passive and active recreational activities and open space/park fields in town.” It indicates that with the restoration project, the river will “serve as the access link via a bikeway and pedestrian path connecting parks, Baird Community Center, the pool, tennis courts, the Middle School, downtown business areas, the main train station and other important destinations.” The Recreation Plan also recommends that recreation and open space lands and facilities needs should be a specific recognizable category with line items in the Village’s capital improvement plan, whether the expenditures are to be funded by the Village or private parties, and should be developed by Village department heads and professional staff, and approved, as all capital plans are, by the Village Trustees.

### Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan

Highlights include:

- Village-Wide Recommendations
  - Sidewalk Design and Condition
  - Crosswalk Striping and Signage
  - Illumination
  - Shared Use Trail Along Rahway River
  - Expand Bicycle Parking

- Traffic Calming Measures
  - Signage Improvements
- Primary Corridors and Routes
  - South Orange Avenue
  - Irvington Avenue
  - Montrose Avenue
  - Ridgewood Road/Walton Avenue
  - Valley Street
  - Academy Street
  - Vose Avenue and Scotland Road
- Secondary Corridors and Routes
  - Wyoming Avenue
  - Prospect Street/Third Street
  - Highland Avenue/Mead Street
  - Newstead Corridor
  - Grove Park Loop
  - Southeast Loop
  - Centre Street Loop
  - Meadowland/Mountain Station Corridor
  - Waterlands Corridor
- Improved Connections Between Parks
  - Meadowland Park to Waterlands Park
  - Waterlands Park to Chyzowych Field (in Maplewood)
  - Improvement of the Rahway River Bridge to Meadowland Park
  - Improved access to South Mountain Reservation.
- Connections Among Major Bicycle Destinations, Improved Access to Schools, Improved Access to Train Stations
  - South Orange Station
  - Mountain Station
  - South Mountain Elementary School
  - South Mountain Annex
  - Marshall Elementary School
  - South Orange Middle School
  - Columbia High School
  - Our Lady of Sorrows School
  - Marylawn of the Oranges School
  - Seton Hall University

The purpose of the Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan is to improve bicycle and pedestrian mobility for all township residents, employees, and visitors. The Plan recommends actions to improve non-motorized access, connectivity and the overall quality of the Village's walking and bicycling environment and to help South Orange achieve its vision for a Village-wide bicycle and pedestrian network that builds on the community's existing strengths. Additionally, it describes educational and promotional measures that can be adopted to increase walking and bicycling, and to improve safety for these modes throughout the Village.

#### East Branch of the Rahway River Corridor – Master Plan Report

Highlights Include:

- **Southern Segment**
  - Consolidation of the DPW compound
  - Construction of new trails that will provide connections to Chyzowych Field and Farrell Field
  - Existing pump house building retrofitted into a new nature center
  - Existing, underutilized open space redesigned and engineered as a wetland environment
  - The riparian improvements as "outdoor classroom" to study the ecology of the river corridor
  - Boardwalks will provide access to the wetland, and informational panels will provide environmental interpretation and guidance for leisure activities.
  - A proposed pedestrian bridge will connect the active recreation areas at Waterlands Park with the passive recreation and educational areas on the opposite side of the river.
  - Third Street will become an important gateway by providing access to the existing playground area and the new ecological learning areas
  
- **Central Segment**
  - Widening the river edges to foster leisurely enjoyment and recreational activities.
  - Widening the edges will encourage Village residents and others to access the river more comfortably and effectively.
  - Urban promenades provide a connection between the urban center and ecological areas.
  - Promenade plaza area will provide a pedestrian connection across South Orange Avenue to the river corridor's northern portion.
  - Pathway on the eastern side of the river will transition to a more park-like character.

- On the opposite side of the river, the corresponding pathway also transitions to a park-like character.
- **Northern Segment**
  - Reconfiguring the pathways and pedestrian bridge, providing improved connections and creating a gathering space for leisure activities.
  - Reconfiguring the existing Middle School parking area would provide more space for the improved pathways.
  - Connection of this area to the opposite side of Mead Street by an improved pedestrian crossing.
  - Proposed pathways will improve connections between Baird Center and the existing ball fields, tennis courts, and playground adjacent to the community pool.
  - New pathways will be added along both sides of the river corridor, adjacent to both the Baird Recreation Center parking lot and Meadowbrook Lane.
  - A small pedestrian bridge will be added here to connect Floods Hill to the activities in the vicinity of Baird Recreation Center.
  - The path will continue between the existing residential area, Montrose School, and the baseball fields alongside the commuter rail line. The extension of this pathway will require the removal of two of the tennis courts at the Baird Recreation Center in order to allow for safe passage near the Recreation Center.
  - The proposed Meadowbrook Lane promenade is intended to respond to the historic nature of the adjacent Flood Hill Park and Duck Pond, while satisfying the need for river slope re-vegetation and riparian edge creation.
  - In order to accommodate these changes, Meadowbrook Lane will be reconfigured so that parallel parking can occur on both sides, adding parking for special events in the park and recreation areas.

South Orange is currently investigating the feasibility of restoring the East Branch of the Rahway River Corridor, which runs through the Village and neighboring communities. In its current configuration, a significant portion of the Rahway River within South Orange functions as an uninviting, concrete-lined drainage channel. The Village is planning to transform this underutilized waterway into an attractive greenway and community focal point. The

envisioned greenway would serve as a north-south spine for a Village-wide non-motorized network. This network would provide improved accessibility and connectivity between major bicycle and pedestrian destinations throughout the Village, including the Central Business District, train stations, schools, and parks.

Working with Main Street South Orange Inc, the Village of South Orange commissioned the preparation of a plan for the restoration of the river corridor, the latest version of which is dated February 2007.

### The Green Map

The one element of the Smart Growth Plan that is new as it relates to recreation and open space planning is the combination of all of these plans into a single map to fully understand their interactions and to identify any areas that are incongruent, superfluous or neglected. More simply put, do these plans work well together and what did we miss?

- The Green Map links the Recreation and Open Space Master Plan, Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan, the East Branch of the Rahway River Master Plan and the results of the public input sessions.
- Promotes the establishment of connections between schools and the University to business zones and train stations via bicycle and pedestrian greenways.
- Coordinate with the Rahway River Plan including potential connections to trails planned along River, extension into neighborhoods, any missing links (e.g., missing sidewalks, etc.) in order to link educational, economic and commercial destinations public facilities and downtown amenities.

The Smart Growth Committee has identified the following additional linkages/elements that will reinforce the existing plans.

- Additional Bike/Pedestrian connections on Lenox Avenue, Harding Drive and Overhill Road
- Additional Bike/Pedestrian connections on Clark Street and Meeker Street
- Additional Pedestrian crossings at Seton Hall University
- Additional Vacant Properties that might be useful as open space acquisitions
- Definite Linkages between the Bike/Pedestrian Trails and the River Trail

# Capital Improvements

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## Capital Improvements

Community facilities play a key role in maintaining the Village's quality of life and contribute to a community's reputation as a desirable place to live and work. In 2006, the Village created a new six-year capital budget. Under this budget, the Village proposed \$9.366 million in capital improvements. Approximately half of the estimated budget is for engineering services. Large allocations are also made to Recreation and Public Works. While this allocation will address most of the Village's capital improvement needs, some may remain unmet. Although many of South Orange's community facilities are of the highest standard, both the Village Hall and the Police Headquarters are known to be in poor condition either due to age, design, maintenance, or space. Therefore, in 2006 the Village hired the firm Wank Adams Slavin Associates (WASA) to prepare condition reports that would detail the current deficiencies of these buildings and the cost for improvement and repairs.

### **Village Hall**

Wank Adams Slavin Associates (WASA) prepared a condition assessment report for the Village concerning all possible improvements to the Village Hall in October 2006. The report was divided into four basic parts: Historic Condition Assessment, Mechanical Engineering and Plumbing assessment, Interior Spatial Needs and Requirements, Proposed Programmatic Improvements. Each of these four basic areas broke down the current condition of the building and the improvements possible under each area. All improvements were subdivided into three categories: Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3. Level 1 improvements are imperative, and if the Village is to undertake any improvement to the Village, then Level 1 improvements are the highest priority. Level 2 improvements are required and recommended. Level 3 improvements are desirable upgrades that would improve the overall condition of the building.

The Condition Assessment Report for Village Hall totals more than \$2 million dollars of potential improvements spread across all three levels. \$1 million of the improvements fall under Level 1 due the amount of deferred maintenance on the more than 100 year old structure. The report describes the situation as one of cascading deterioration, where each additional form of deterioration causes further deterioration of more areas of the building. The WASA report found that the largest problem is the poor condition of the roof. With a more than century old slate roof, the Village Hall now needs a new roof. The current roof is a source of many leaks and water damage that are causing interior and exterior deterioration, particularly of the decorative brick, stone and wood features. Therefore, of the Level 1 improvements, more than \$850,000 are roofing improvements, including a new slate roof, new flashing, and waterproofing. While many more improvements focus on both the internal layout of the building and refurbishing the historical charm of the structure, the most important non-roof improvements are safety and code related. These include removal of asbestos on the HVAC system in the

building and the reconstruction of stairwells throughout the building to meet modern fire code standards for public buildings.

### **Police Station**

The Village also retained WASA to create a Condition Assessment Report for the Village Police Headquarters. The report was completed in August 2006. The building currently provides joint space for both the police department and the municipal courts. The WASA report found that most of the internal improvements for the structure are code and ADA improvements, including additional access for the first floor and basement. The site inspection also found roof deficiencies, the need for additional storage space, and suitable prisoner bathing areas. The largest single deficiency found was the lack of space, with the combined court and police building being approximately 4,000 square feet too small for the operations that are carried out at the facility. A simple lack of space makes accommodating many of the required code and ADA improvements even more difficult.

To address the necessary improvements, including the approximately 4,000 square foot space deficiency, the report recommends three building expansion options. Option 1 would be an addition on the rear of the existing building, conversion of the entire site to police use, and the construction of a new one story Court building on a separate site. For the \$3.9 million cost, this expansion would provide the combined court and police offices with an additional 6,000 square foot for operations. Under Option 2, the existing one story courtroom and public entry would be demolished for a two story addition. The addition would place court facilities on the second story of the structure with some basement storage space and police storage and operations on the entire first story and a portion of the basement. Option 2 would provide the combined court and police operations with approximately 7,000 square feet of additional space at a cost of \$4.8 million. Option 3 calls for one and two story additions with additional basement space, including expanded shared court and police spaces on the first story and basement. Option 3 provided approximately 4,000 square feet of additional space at a cost of \$3.9 million. For all three options approximately 17% of the cost would go to making the required code, ADA, floor, and internal repairs identified for the existing structure.

### **Recommendations**

Over time, the Village has acquired community facilities of varying ages. In an attempt to meet the needs of these varied facilities, the Village has allowed deferred maintenance to accrue at some of its oldest and most venerable facilities, such as Village Hall. The Village's recent efforts to inventory its most pressing maintenance needs is an important step in addressing this deferred maintenance. The Village should no longer be deferring maintenance on community facilities. Instead, all maintenance obligations for community facilities should be accounted for and addressed through the Village's long-range capital facilities budget.

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