

# Township of South Orange Village SMART GROWTH PLAN

Township of South Orange Village  
Essex County, New Jersey



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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
INTRODUCTION	
<i>What is Smart Growth?</i>	1
<i>South Orange – Example of Smart Growth</i>	1
<i>Purpose of Smart Growth Plan</i>	2
<i>The Process</i>	2
<i>The Plan</i>	3
PLANNING ASSESSMENT	
EVALUATION OF EXISTING AND FUTURE CONDITIONS	
<i>Current, Historic and Projected Population Growth</i>	4
<i>Anticipated Growth in Employment and Non-Residential Development</i>	6
<i>Existing Land Use</i>	6
<i>Population and Household Composition</i>	7
<i>Housing Characteristics</i>	10
<i>Public Transportation</i>	11
<i>Vehicular Circulation</i>	14
<i>Open Space, Parks and Recreation</i>	14
<i>School District Projections</i>	16
<i>Infrastructure</i>	16
<i>Historic Resources</i>	16
<i>Environmental Conditions</i>	20

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
PLANNING CONTEXT AND HISTORY	
<i>Master Plan - Overview</i>	21
<i>Draft Master Plan Reexamination Report (2006)</i>	21
<i>Recreation &amp; Open Space Plan and Recreation Element of the Land Use Master Plan (2004)</i>	22
Short-Term Goals	23
Mid-Term Goals (by 2010)	23
Action Plan	23
Non-Acquisition Related Action Items	25
<i>Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan (2005)</i>	26
Village-Wide Recommendations	26
Recommendations - Primary Corridors and Routes	29
Recommendations - Bicycle Connections Among Parks	31
Recommendations - Additional Bicycle Routes	31
Recommendations - Key Destinations	32
<i>East Branch of the Rahway River Corridor – Master Plan Report</i>	34
Southern Segment	35
Central Segment	37
Northern Segment	38
<i>Housing Element and Fair Share Plan (2005)</i>	38
<i>Central Business District and Surrounding Area - Revitalization/Redevelopment</i>	39
Streetscape Improvements	40

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
South Orange Train Station Redevelopment Plan	40
Central Business District Redevelopment Plan	41
Church Street Redevelopment Plan	43
Redevelopment Projects	44
<i>Transit Village Designation</i>	45
<i>Main Street New Jersey</i>	46
<i>Land Development Chapter</i>	46
Residential - Single-Family (RA) Districts	46
Residential – Two-Family (RB) District	47
Residential – Townhouse (RTH) District	47
Residential – Senior Citizen (RSC) Housing District	47
Residential – Planned Residential Cluster (PRC) Districts	47
Residential – Multi-Family/Office (RC-1) District	48
Primary Business (B-1) District	48
Secondary Business (B-2) District	48
General Business (B-3) District	49
University (U) District	49
Open Space Public Use (OS/PU) District	49
PLANNING COORDINATION – STATE, REGION AND ADJOINING MUNICIPALITIES	
<i>State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP)</i>	50
<i>Essex County 2004 Cross-Acceptance Report</i>	50

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
<i>Essex County Park, Recreation and Open Space Master Plan (April 2003)</i>	51
Ivy Hill Park	51
South Mountain Reservation	51
<i>Adjacent Municipalities</i>	51
Newark	51
Maplewood	52
Orange	53
West Orange	53
East Orange	53
PLANNING ISSUES	
Meetings of the Smart Growth Plan Committee	54
Initial Public Outreach Program	54
Strengths	55
Key Issues	56
Central Business District	56
Valley Street	58
Irvington Avenue	61
Parking	63
Vehicular Traffic	64
Walking/Biking/Transit	65
Parks, Open Space and Recreation	65

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
Community Character	66
<b>THE PLAN</b>	
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES	68
COMMUNITY CHARACTER	
<i>Historic Preservation</i>	73
<i>Urban Design</i>	81
<i>Business Districts</i>	85
<i>Other Land Use and Zoning Issues</i>	97
CIRCULATION	
<i>Walking/Biking/Transit</i>	111
<i>Parking</i>	112
<i>Vehicular Traffic</i>	113
PARKS, OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION	
CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS	115
STRATEGIC PLAN	
<i>Implementation Strategies</i>	121
<i>Funding Plan</i>	123

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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	<u>page</u>
APPENDIX A	131

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Introduction

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# INTRODUCTION

## *What is Smart Growth?*

Smart Growth is a planning movement that seeks to slow the sprawling pattern of suburban development that has been occurring in New Jersey for the better part of this century. This sprawling pattern has spread development into previously undeveloped areas of the State, eating up farmland and environmentally sensitive areas, changing the character of previously rural areas and doing so at significant public cost through the expansion of infrastructure and public services. In contrast, Smart Growth emphasizes the improvement of existing, developed communities with particular emphasis on communities that exhibit the principles of Smart Growth, like South Orange Village.

Smart Growth can be defined as:

“A proposed development pattern that makes efficient use of limited land, utilizes existing services and infrastructure, promotes a wide variety of transportation and housing options, absorbs and effectively serves a significant portion of the future population growth in centers, protects and enhances the architectural and environmental character of the community through compatible, high quality, and environmentally-sensitive development practices. Inherent to this definition is the need to implement Smart Growth through comprehensive, consistent and effective policies, regulations, capital projects and incentives.”

A Smart Growth community is one that exhibits the key principles of Smart Growth, which are:

- Compact, mixed use development
- Walkable town center and neighborhoods
- Predictable, fair and cost-effective development decisions
- Distinctive, attractive community offering a “sense of place”
- Range of housing choice and opportunities
- Community and stakeholder collaboration in development decision-making
- Emphasis on open space, scenic resource preservation, parks and recreation
- Variety of transportation options, including access to transit
- Open space and scenic resource preservation
- Future development strengthened and directed to existing communities using existing infrastructure

## *South Orange – Example of Smart Growth*

With its compact mixed-use development, its walkable and attractive neighborhoods and town center, the variety of transportation options including excellent mass transit accessibility, and its wide range of housing choice and opportunities, South Orange has been widely identified as an example of Smart Growth. South Orange exhibits all of the above Smart Growth characteristics to one degree or another. In fact, many of these characteristics help define South Orange in many people’s minds. The fact that South Orange exhibits these characteristics led the Village to be one of the first communities in New Jersey to be designated a “Transit Village,” as well as a “Main Street New Jersey” community. The Village was one of the original five Transit Villages (designated in

1999), a designation the NJ Department of Transportation grants municipalities that demonstrate a commitment to revitalizing and redeveloping the area around its transit facility into a compact, mixed-use neighborhood with a strong residential component.

### ***Purpose of Smart Growth Plan***

South Orange has undertaken an aggressive revitalization of its downtown. Such efforts have included significant redevelopment projects, including redevelopment of the train station area, as well as a number of transit-oriented residential projects near the train station. The South Orange Performing Arts Center (which involves a live theater and five movie theaters next to the train station) opened in November 2006. Several mixed-use projects in the downtown area have obtained approvals and are expected to be developed within the next few years. Accompanying these redevelopment efforts, South Orange has rebuilt and revitalized its town center to make it more pedestrian friendly by providing wider, brick-paved sidewalks, additional crosswalks, better lighting, additional public safety officers and several façade initiatives that make the downtown more aesthetically pleasing. Additional efforts include the preparation of a new Village-wide Bicycle and Pedestrian Circulation Plan, preparation of a new Village-wide Recreation & Open Space Plan, and the planned restoration of the East Branch of the Rahway River. All of these efforts seek to capitalize and/or reinforce the Village's revitalization efforts.

However, there is always opportunity for refinement and improvement. Recognizing this opportunity, the Village applied for, and was awarded, grants from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) to prepare this Smart Growth Plan.

The purpose of this Smart Growth Plan is to build upon the aspects of South Orange that make it a "smart growth community" in order to make it a true model of Smart Growth in the State of New Jersey. A key component of this effort is the creation of a unified, long-term and Village-wide strategic vision and plan that reinforces the continued implementation of Smart Growth principles in the Village. The Smart Growth Plan will be adopted as a key component of the Master Plan.

### ***The Process***

The process officially began when the Village received grants from the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs (DCA) and the Association of New Jersey Environmental Commissions (ANJEC) in June of 2005. The Village created an ad-hoc Smart Growth Plan Committee comprised of residents and individuals representing the Village Board of Trustees, Village residents, the Planning Board, the Environmental Commission, and Village staff. The Smart Growth Plan Committee was in charge of directing the Smart Growth Plan process.

The Smart Growth Plan Committee working with the Planning Consultant was charged with creating a future vision for the Village and building consensus to implement the Plan. This Smart Growth Plan provides a long-term guide for the Village's future. The Plan stresses positive and pro-active cooperation among property owners,

developers, and the Village to achieve the objectives of the Plan. The Plan serves as a policy statement and provides a framework for Village implementation ordinances.

This Smart Growth Plan was the result of a consensus-based process. The following strategies were employed to pursue a broad-based representation throughout the planning process:

- Meetings of the Smart Growth Plan Committee.

The Committee has met on various occasions to identify and discuss issues to be addressed in the Plan and to develop the public outreach program. Following the public outreach program, the Committee met to review and analyze the results and determine the future direction of the Plan. The Committee has had further meetings to review individual plan elements in draft and revised forms and make comments and suggestions. The Committee reviewed the final document prior to a public hearing.

- The Public Outreach Program

1. *Community Survey*

Working with its consultant, the Committee prepared and conducted a community survey. The survey was posted on the Village's website. Paper copies were also made available at Village Hall, the Library and Baird Community Center. The survey was advertised in advance in The Gaslight (the community newsletter which is mailed to each resident and business address in the Village) and the News Record was made available to the public for a period of one full month.

2. *Public Visioning Sessions*

Two public visioning sessions were conducted in 2006. The first visioning session was held on Tuesday, May 23rd, 7 pm at the Marshall School. The second visioning session was held Wednesday, June 7th, 7 pm at the South Orange Middle School. Both sessions were advertised in advance in The Gaslight, on the Village's website and in the News Record. The visioning sessions expanded upon the input received from the surveys by eliciting more "forward thinking" input from the public. The visioning sessions were organized around the following five general topics:

- neighborhood character/preservation
- circulation
- open space, parks, recreation and historic character
- community development/ design - Valley Street
- community development/ design - Irvington Avenue

3. *Public Information Session*

The final draft of the Smart Growth Plan was presented in a public workshop for comments and suggestions regarding the plan elements and policy initiatives identified prior to the public hearing

#### 4. *Public Hearing*

The plan will be presented at a public hearing to obtain additional input from residents. In addition, a public hearing will occur when the Plan is considered by the Planning Board for consideration of adoption as an element of the Master Plan.

#### ***The Plan***

This Smart Growth Plan consists of the following components:

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES- Summary of the goals and objectives of the Plan from the community outreach conducted throughout the planning process.

COMMUNITY CHARACTER- Analysis and recommendations regarding historic preservation, urban design, the Village's business districts, and other zoning changes.

CIRCULATION- Analysis and recommendations regarding pedestrian, bike, and vehicular circulation and parking.

PARKS, OPEN SPACE, RECREATION- - Analysis and recommendations stemming from the synthesis of the Village's many park and recreation plans, including the Rahway River Corridor Master Plan.

STRATEGIC PLAN- Summary of the recommendations to be implemented, a timeline of implementation, and funding sources to aid in implementation of the recommendations.

The Smart Growth Plan will serve as a long-range guide for the downtown and the Village as a whole. It is a policy document detailing the official vision for the Village's future. However, it is not a mere statement of general goals or policies. This Plan also contains a detailed "strategic plan" element consisting of time schedules and responsibilities for implementation, as well as funding strategies (including identification of potential public and private funding sources to assist in implementing the plan).