



# 2019 Annual Report

Mercer County Planning Department  
Brian M. Hughes, County Executive  
Leslie R. Floyd, Planning Director





# Message from the Director

I am pleased to present the second Annual Report of the Mercer County Planning Department. Under the leadership of County Executive Brian M. Hughes, the Planning Department has the ability to consider the immediate and future needs of our residents in areas including sustainability, land and historic preservation, land development review, geographic information systems, and water and transportation planning. The County's outstanding professional planning and support staff is dedicated to advancing planning practices to improve the quality of life for those who live, work and play in Mercer County.

Working from a regional perspective allows the Planning Department to convene and advise our municipal partners, agencies and others on issues of regional importance. The Planning Department values and nurtures these partnerships and recognizes the value of collaborative effort.

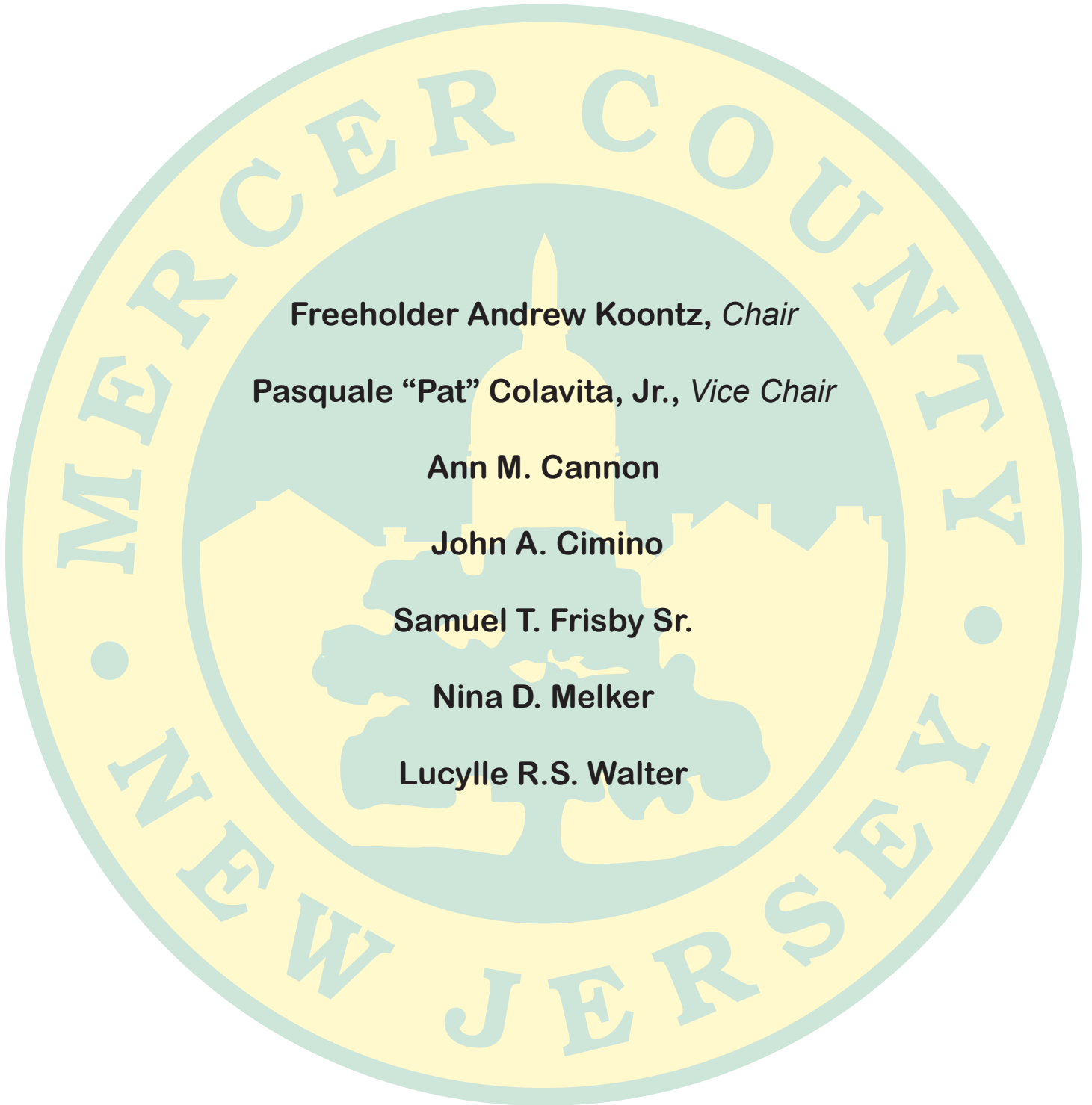
The Planning Department continually seeks out opportunities to work with other County departments to help us all plan more effectively for the long-term benefit of the County. In particular, the Planning Department extends thanks to the Mercer County Park Commission and County Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, both under the leadership of Deputy County Administrator Aaron T. Watson. Many of the successes of the Planning Department are found in our collaboration with these two departments.

On behalf of the Planning Department staff, I am honored to offer this summary of our activities in 2019.

~Leslie Floyd



# Board of Chosen Freeholders



**Freeholder Andrew Koontz, *Chair***

**Pasquale "Pat" Colavita, Jr., *Vice Chair***

**Ann M. Cannon**

**John A. Cimino**

**Samuel T. Frisby Sr.**

**Nina D. Melker**

**Lucylle R.S. Walter**

# Boards

## ***Open Space Preservation Board***

Haig Kasabach, *Chairman, Assunpink Region Representative*  
Alan Hershey, *Vice-Chairman, Piedmont Region Representative*  
Brian M. Hughes, *County Executive*  
Tricia Fagan, *Cultural and Heritage Representative*  
Wendy Mager, *Millstone Citizen Representative*  
Jennifer Rogers, *Park Commission Representative*  
Michael Shine, *Planning Board Representative*  
Kristine Walsh, *Agricultural Board Representative*  
Vacant, *Urban Citizen Representative*

## ***Agricultural Development Board***

Steve Jany, *Chairperson*  
Frank D'Amico, Jr., *Vice-Chairperson*  
Scott Ellis  
Laurie Emde  
Gary Mount  
Kristine Walsh  
Theodora Wang

## ***Planning Board***

Michael Shine, *Chair*  
William S. Agress, *Vice Chairman*  
Brian M. Hughes, *County Executive*  
Samuel Frisby, *Freeholder*  
George Fallat, *Mercer County Engineer*  
Paul A. Penna  
Samuel M. Rubino  
Taiwanda Terry-Wilson

# Planning Department Staff

**Leslie R. Floyd, AICP/PP, Planning Director**

**Lisa K. Fritzing, AICP/PP, Assistant Planning Director**

**Matthew Lawson, AICP/PP, GISP, Principal Planner-Transportation**

**Richard Smith, AICP/PP, Principal Planner**

**Emily B. Blackman, AICP/PP, Senior Planner**

**Regine Delcy, AICP/PP, Senior Planner**

**Andrew Lloyd, Assistant Planner**

**Matthew Zochowski, AICP, Assistant Planner**

**Kathleen Sar, Supervising Drafting Technician**

**Jill Benner, Principal Clerk**

# Open Space Preservation

Since 1989, Mercer County residents have overwhelmingly approved referenda to fund a dedicated Open Space Farmland Preservation and Historic Preservation Trust Fund. These funds are used to acquire land for open space, conservation, and farmland preservation, provide improvements to enhance active and passive recreational activities, for historic preservation and for stewardship activities to protect and enhance lands that have been acquired.

The Mercer County Open Space Preservation Assistance Program provides grants to municipalities and nonprofit land conservation organizations to assist in the preservation of locally significant open space, consistent with local master plans and goals. In 2019, the County's open Space Preservation Board approved six grants in Hopewell, Robbinsville, Princeton and East Windsor totaling \$1,370,660. Upon Freeholder approval of these grants, this will result in the preservation of 223 acres. Four properties totaling 66 acres that were approved in 2018, closed in 2019 in Hamilton and Hopewell Township.



# Historic Preservation



In conjunction with the Park Commission and funded by the County's Open Space Preservation Trust Fund, the Rogers House Constructed Ruin at Mercer County Park was completed.

The John Rogers House (Rogers House), built in 1761, is a historic home believed to be the oldest existing structure in West Windsor Township, New Jersey. The Rogers House was listed on the State and National Register of Historic Places in 1976; it is significant as a good example of the 18th century pattern brick architecture. The structure was deeded to Mercer County in 1970 when

the lands around the house became Mercer County Park. The County wants to ensure that this valuable historic resource is available to the public for generations to come. Based on park planning, the County preserved the historic brick walls as an "open-air" constructed ruin adapted for interpretation; three walls were stabilized to preserve the historic brick of the house and integrate the structure into the Park's programming. The renovated Rogers House site includes adjacent landscape with porous paved walking paths, vehicle access roads, parking and outdoor interpretive signage. Archaeological monitoring and documentation occurred prior to and during demolition. The interpretive signage tells the story of the Rogers' farmstead and house within the local and regional history of the area. The renovated site will serve as a public gathering space and a point of interest along the walking paths and trails.

The Planning Department updated the Trenton Bath House website, [kahntrentonbathhouse.org](http://kahntrentonbathhouse.org), to ensure that the site is responsive, using the newest technologies, able to work on all browsers and viewable on all sized platforms. Originally designed by Louis I. Kahn for the Jewish Community Center (JCC), the Bath House opened in 1955 in Ewing, NJ. The Bath House provided an entrance and changing areas to patrons of the outdoor pool. In 1984, the Bath House was placed on National Register of Historic Places. The Bath House was restored in 2010 and the former JCC is now operated by Ewing Township as the Ewing Senior and Community Center.





# Land Stewardship

The Planning Department and the Park Commission have stewardship programs and staff dedicated to protecting and enhancing the environmental integrity of all county-owned open space and parkland. In 2019 stewardship projects all over the county increased and enhanced habitat by stabilizing streams, converting lawns to meadows, planting thousands of native trees and shrubs, and seeding hundreds of acres of native grasses and flowers.



- **Lawn to Meadow Conversions:** Converting lawn to meadow is an impactful restoration activity. It provides critical habitat to declining pollinators while reducing maintenance and labor costs associated with lawn. The stewardship team partnered with Ewing Township to complete two conversions in 2019, one at the Ewing Senior and Community Center and the other at Village on the Green, a neighborhood in Ewing. These projects brought 1.5 acres in total of pollinator habitat to Ewing. This was a pilot Partners of Pollinators (POP) project; there are plans to work with other municipalities in future years.
- **Open Space Stewardship:** Two projects were completed on open space properties in the Crosswicks Creek area, as well as a lawn to meadow conversion at Roebling Park, all in Hamilton Township. These projects restored 13 acres of county land into habitat for native wildlife.
- **Hopewell Borough Park:** A pollinator pocket, with approximately 400 native flowers, was planted in partnership with Sourland Conservancy and Hopewell Borough Elementary School. All of the approximately 400 students at the School participated in the planting. This pollinator pocket will bring vibrant color and pollinator activity to the park.
- **Roots for Rivers Riparian Restoration Projects:**
  - The Park Commission received \$19,950.50 from the Nature Conservancy from their Roots for Rivers Riparian Reforestation Planting Program to implement a 6-acre planting along the Stony Brook in Hopewell Township. (250 volunteers)
  - Sourland Conservancy partnered with the County to receive \$17,544.80 to implement a 5-acre planting on County property along Moores Creek, benefiting the Delaware River watershed. Howell Living History Farm collaborated on this project to form a robust planting team. (100 volunteers)
  - Between these two efforts, 4,200 native trees and shrubs were planted by volunteers and the stewardship team.
  - Once established, these plantings will reduce erosion, mitigate flooding, filter contaminants from water, and provide food for native wildlife and pollinators. Hundreds of citizens volunteered their time to make this planting possible.
- **Other habitat improvements:** Willow Pond in Mercer Meadows (80 native trees/shrubs to expand riparian buffer), pollinator pocket planting in South Riverwalk Park, Trenton (300 grasses, flowers, ferns)
- A total of 2,756 volunteer hours were dedicated to Stewardship efforts in 2019.

# Dam Site 21 Master Plan

The County Planning Department and the Mercer County Park Commission hired landscape architectural firm Simone Collins from Norristown, PA, and began the process of preparing a Master Plan for property commonly known as Dam Site 21. This property was developed as part of a flood control project and is located southeast of Mercer County Park and lies along the Miry Run. This 279-acre site was purchased in the late 1970s to be held and used for permanent recreation and conservation of land and water resources. The corner of the Robbinsville, West Windsor, and Hamilton Township municipal boundaries are in the center of this park. The lake is approximately 50 acres and the lands are undeveloped wetlands, woodlands and open fields. Currently there is limited access and amenities, but the public uses the land for activities such as fishing and hiking. A mowed portion of the Capital to the Coast trail runs along the northern side of the lake from Line Road in Robbinsville to Old Trenton Road in West Windsor.

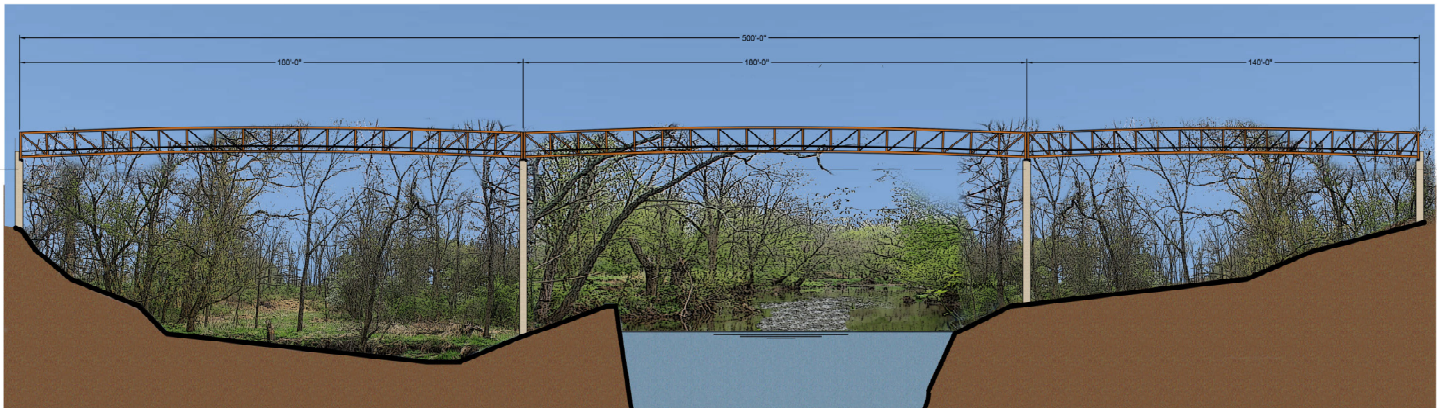
The planning process began in early 2019 and the first of three public meetings was held on March 7, 2019. The planning process, conducted over the course of the year, included a very comprehensive public outreach component, including meetings for the general public, area institutions, interest groups and nearby residents. These meetings were held as the planning process developed from a conceptual design to the final draft. In addition to the public meetings, input was solicited via an online survey, personal interviews and input from the local governments and community leaders through a community advisory board. The "Miry Run Ponds Master Site Plan" was adopted by the Mercer County Park Commission on January 26, 2020.

The Master Plan provides for passive recreational activities including multi-use trails, fishing, canoe and kayak launch, boardwalk paths along the lake, nature-based and inclusive play, scenic overlooks and views. Although the site provides many natural features and unique habitat, the lake is man-made and much of the land is disturbed and is not a natural landscape. The master plan includes significant environmental enhancements, such as converting agricultural land to grassland, providing vegetative buffers along the lake and improving run off and drainage through best management practices. Miry Run Pond will be developed in several phases, and construction of the first phase is anticipated in 2022.



# Old Mill Road Pedestrian Bridge

A pedestrian bridge over the Stony Brook is under construction and it is anticipated for an early spring 2020 ribbon cutting. This pedestrian bridge is part of the Lawrence Hopewell Trail (LHT), providing an alternative to the current share-the-road segment on Old Mill Road in Hopewell Township. The new trail and bridge will connect discontinuous parcels of Mercer Meadows and create a safer and more aesthetically pleasing route along the LHT in this area, improving access for all, but more particularly families accessing the trail from Pennington Borough.



## Mercer at Play

The Mercer at Play (MAP) program was introduced in 2006 and a second pool of funds was allocated in 2016. This program makes grants available to all municipalities in the County for the capital funding of construction or rehabilitation of local recreational facilities. The objective of the program is to increase active recreational opportunities that are easily accessible to local populations. The expansion of active recreational opportunities promotes active lifestyles and helps in the battle against obesity.

Awarded Mercer at Play Funds to the following municipalities in 2019:

- East Windsor and Hightstown: East Windsor Senior Center Expansion - \$800,000, Anker Park including Pond Improvements - \$150,000, Dawes Park Improvements - \$50,000
- Ewing: Ewing Senior and Community Center pool Splash Pad - \$346,113.99
- Princeton: Hilltop Park - \$500,000
- Robbinsville: Indoor Gymnasium/Multi-Use Recreational Facility - \$500,000
- Trenton: Martin Luther King Jr. Park - \$162,5000, Monsignor Lipinski Park - \$37,500, Breunig Park-\$25,000, West Ward Recreation Center - \$275,000
- West Windsor: Conover Park - \$500,000

# Sustainability

In 2019 the Planning Department made a commitment and provided staff to address the issues of sustainability. An important initiative to address energy efficiency for county facilities was approval for a NJ Clean Energy Local Government Energy Audit. The Local Government Energy Audit (LGEA) Program allows government agencies and nonprofits to examine their facilities and see how they can improve their energy use. The audit of approximately 30 County-owned buildings commenced in December 2019. The audit includes an inventory of all energy-consuming equipment, comprehensive utility bill analysis, facility benchmarking, and feasibility for solar and combined heat and power. At the end of the audit process, Mercer County will receive a list of recommended, cost-justified measures and facility upgrades that will help reduce operating expenses and, in many cases, improve the health and productivity of the buildings' occupants. Many of the recommended measures will be eligible for additional incentives available through New Jersey's Clean Energy Programs. The County also published Beyond the Bucket, a resource guide to recycling uncommon objects.



The County recognizes the need to implement sustainable practices to ensure and promote a healthy community and environment. Sustainability practices and initiatives will be developed over time to be integrated with County Planning activities and County facilities. Additional efforts include educational programs for residents, and coordination with local sustainability programs.

# Land Development

In 2019 Mercer County Planning Board / Land Development Committee reviewed and approved the following projects:

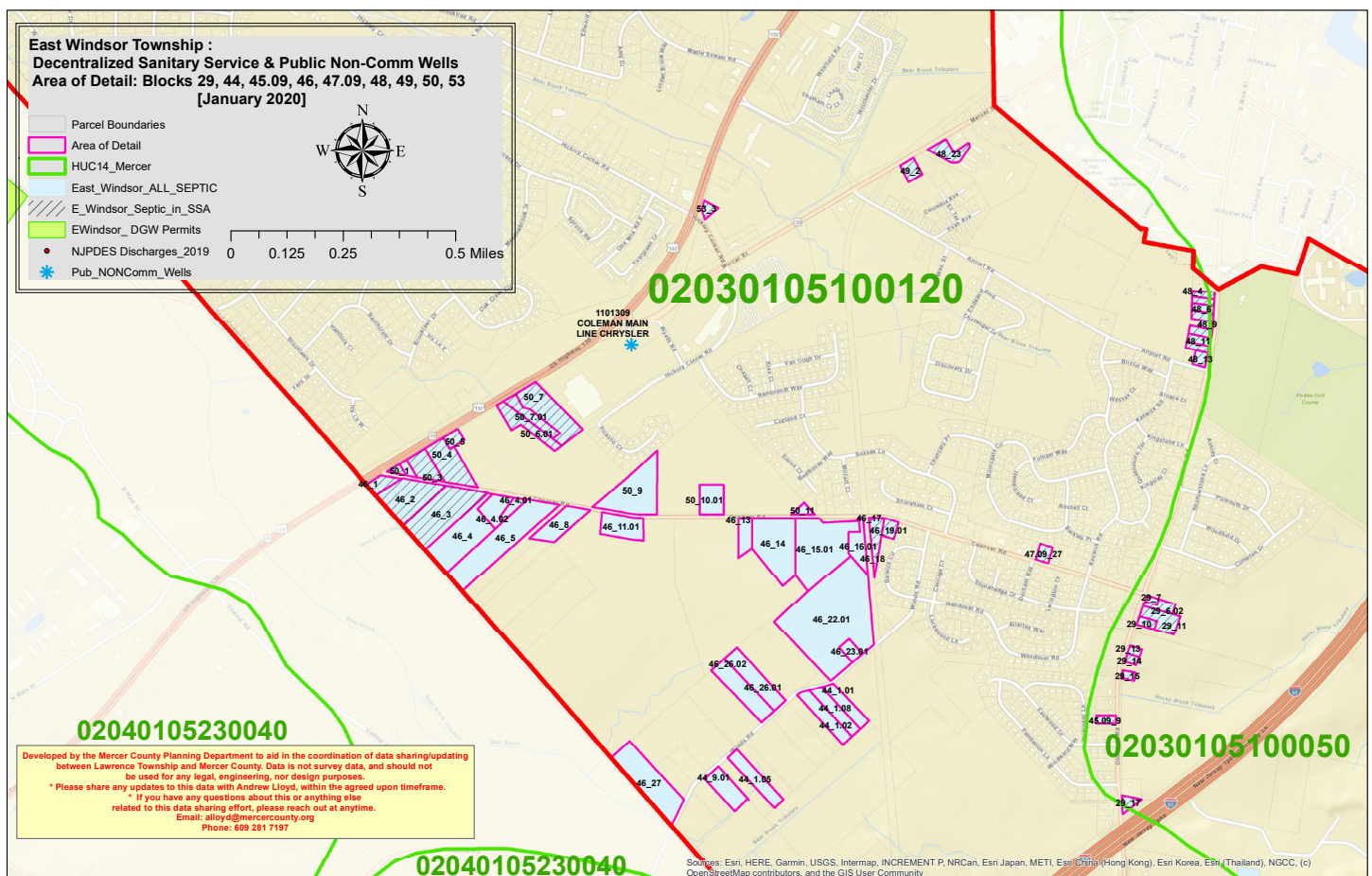
- 360,137 (+/-) square feet of new warehouse / manufacturing space
- 8,876 (+/-) square feet of additional warehouse / manufacturing space
- 237,901 (+/-) square feet of new office and retail space
- 70 new lots were created through subdivision approvals
- 9.2 (+/-) acres of open space created through the subdivision approvals
- 46 new single family lots created through the subdivision approvals
- 500 (+/-) new apartment units
- 347 new townhouse units, of which 38 are assisted living units
- Approvals for renovations, site improvements and/or additions for the Thomas Grover Middle School, Hun School, Lawrenceville School, Peddie School and the proposed development of 115,000 square feet of student housing to house 1,038 new student beds at Princeton University.
- Site Plan approvals for upgrades to the existing PSE&G Penns Neck Substation in West Windsor Township and the expansion of the PSE&G White Horse – Switching Station in Hamilton Township.
- Approvals for construction of a ground-mounted solar panel array (solar farm) in Robbinsville Township and construction of a series of canopies of solar panels over existing parking lots at the Carnegie Center, West Windsor Township.

# Water Quality

As the designated Water Quality Management Agency for the County, Mercer County submitted the County's updated Wastewater Management Plan to the State of NJ Department of Environmental Protection, on schedule and under budget.

Also, as part of the wastewater management planning process the County provided GIS/mapping assistance throughout the County to help municipalities with water quality planning on the local level.

- Created GIS of Zoning from PDFs, created maps showing sewer service areas, environmental constraints
- Mapping assistance provided to wastewater treatment facilities
- Mapping assistance provided to municipal health offices (septic areas, NJPDES discharges, wellheads, and just beginning to add wells).
- Starting a Data Sharing protocol with municipal health officers using aforementioned mapping and Excel files, with goal of updating and improving septic data dynamically
- Gathering stormwater infrastructure data from municipalities (Trenton, Ewing, Hopewell Borough to date) to help coordinate projects that cross municipal/county drainage areas/rights of way.



# Transportation

## **Regional Planning:**

Planning staff participated in the development of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission’s FY 2020 Transportation Improvement Program (TIP). The TIP authorizes federal and state funding for significant highway and transit capital projects in the 5-county DVRPC region. Semi-annual updates require a comprehensive review and update of project progress across multiple agencies, and a thorough public outreach process.

At DVRPC, staff also participated in DVRPC’s Future’s Group, which in 2019 began developing scenarios for the regional 25-year plan (2045 horizon). With uncertainty about the impacts of climate change, disruptive transportation technologies, and workplace and global economic transformations, forecasting the future today is particularly fraught. The Futures Group brings together planners, scientists, and industry leaders to imagine these impacts. One of the Futures Group exercises was the focus of DVRPC’s annual meeting, hosted at the Grounds for Sculpture in Hamilton Township.

In partnership with the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority, DVRPC supports the Central Jersey Transportation Forum. Planning staff serve on the Forum’s steering committee, along with planning directors from Middlesex and Somerset counties and representatives from NJDOT, NJ Transit, and the regional TMAs. Mercer staff in 2018 focused on interagency coordination to improve east-west transit in northern Mercer County, including coordination with Princeton (Municipality and University) and NJ Transit regarding future service on the Dinky Line, and on a grant-funded project of the Greater Mercer TMA to develop job-access transit on the CR 571 corridor. The County’s 2019 request to analyze potential transit ridership along the 571 corridor and from Trenton to the Trenton-Mercer Airport were programmed in DVRPC’s FY 2021 Unified Planning Work Program.



***Bicycle Planning:***

Planning staff coordinated an accelerated bicycle facility implementation schedule in 2019. Summer 2019 paving projects were analyzed to determine if bicycle improvements could be incorporated. Staff then designed concepts and worked through accelerated reviews with County Engineering to have shovel-ready concepts. Staff also worked with municipalities on coordination and Council Resolutions related to bicycle improvements. This resulted in the design and implementation of 6.78 miles of new bicycle lanes in Hightstown, Ewing, Princeton, and Hamilton and implementation of bicycle sharrows in Pennington. This is approximately 22% of the draft Bicycle Facility Master Plan element goal of implementing 30 miles of new bicycle facilities by end of 2025!

Staff prepared an RFP and selected a consultant for the Great Western Bikeway. This was the first action on a \$2.365 million grant from the State for a 17-mile bikeway project spanning four towns. Following most of CR 546 and Scotch Road, the bikeway will take bicyclists from the Delaware River, through Pennington, to the D&R Canal adjacent to CR 546 & US 1. A spur on Scotch Road (CR 611) down to Ewing will take bicyclists from CR 546, past the Trenton-Mercer Airport, to the Ewing Town Center and ultimately to the West Trenton Train Station.

***Complete Streets:***

Staff coordinated with Engineering on prioritizing installation of ADA ramps and pedestrian crossings where requested by municipal officials or local agencies. Staff assisted in design of a “tactical urbanist” mini-roundabout in Pennington to replace a skewed intersection. During public outreach regarding bicycles sharing the road (sharrows) on Ingleside Avenue (CR 631) in Pennington, residents complained of dangerous speeding and turns at Burd Street. The concept of a mini-roundabout was floated and met approval in that meeting, and Planning, Engineering, and Highway staff, in less than two weeks, designed and installed it.

***County Highway Projects:***

With Engineering, Planning staff negotiated and approved the preferred alternative for improvements on Parkway Avenue (CR 634), including a road diet, pedestrian and ADA improvements, and roundabouts at Lower Ferry Road (CR 643) and Olden Avenue (CR 622). The project will advance to preliminary engineering in 2020 with continued funding under the federal Highway Safety Improvement Program.

Staff issued an RFP and selected a consultant for the Olden Avenue Multi-Modal Corridor concept development study. The goal is to improve mobility choice and safety along this dense commercial corridor from New York Avenue (US 1 access) to Pennington Road (NJ 31). The project kicked off early this year and has developed several alternatives for vetting by NJDOT engineers, who must approve changes to State intersections, which the project encompasses. Public outreach to select a preliminary preferred alternative will occur in early 2020.

# Geographical Information Systems



The Planning Department takes responsibility to manage the enterprise Geographic Information System, working in conjunction with the County's Department of Transportation and Infrastructure, Emergency Communications and the County Clerk.

Two significant events in 2019 affected the development of the County's enterprise GIS. First, in late June, the simultaneous failure of several hard drives destroyed all data on the production server. This resulted in a request by the Office of Information Technology to explore hosting enterprise GIS in the cloud. The cost of cloud hosting led to a decision to reorganize GIS infrastructure on new local hardware. This process took several months. Fortunately, the plan and resources to fail over to a backup server at the Dempster Fire Academy preserved all but the most recently developed data and allowed relatively uninterrupted user experience. A similar backup scheme will be developed in the new environment.

The other significant event followed staff turnover in the Highway Division and shortcomings in the enterprise asset management software being implemented there. This led to Planning staff again contributing technical resources to enterprise asset management, including research on alternative software and procurement, processing asset inventories for guiderail, curve safety improvements, pavement condition, and street trees, and the discovery that the existing enterprise asset management software and all its major competitors require integration with the proprietary GIS software the County had been moving away from. As a result of these events, staff decided to abandon its roadmap to transition to free and open source GIS software of the previous two years and retain licensing to ESRI GIS software. With new hardware and significant changes in ESRI data management practices and user access, the last quarter of 2019 was spent reconstructing enterprise data repositories and updating the software stack with the latest ESRI releases. In addition, the County will make more intensive use of cloud resources offered by ESRI for hosting organization and public data and interactive web maps.



# Looking Forward

- Complete the update and revision of the County's Land Development Standards ordinance, the bulk of which dates to 1970.
- Update several elements of the County Master Plan including our Mobility Element, Open Space and Recreation Element, and Farmland Preservation Element.
- Begin a master plan process for development of the Moores Station Quarry into a public open space (ownership of the quarry will revert to the County in 2023).
- Update of Baldpate Management Plan.
- Continue existing efforts to preserve farmland parcels targeted for preservation and continue to pursue open space preservation such as available lands adjacent to Baldpate Mountain in Hopewell Township and lands along the Assunpink Creek, rails lines and greenways.
- Continue Stewardship efforts such as hazard tree management in response to emerald ash borer: ash tree removal at Baldpate, Mercer Meadows (removal of dangerous trees at parking lots, LHT) and invasive pest management, with focus on removal of Tree of Heaven in response to spotted lanternfly.
- Tidal Freshwater Wetlands Restoration at Roebling Park:  
In partnership with the Park Commission, the first year of work on Phase I of the project was completed, which included monitoring and large-scale treatment of invasive Phragmites reed. The goal of this 200-acre restoration is to promote regeneration of native marsh habitat to enhance wildlife value and park-user experience.
- Return on Environment Study. Such a study would quantify the ways in which protected open spaces are more than just pretty places; they generate hundreds of millions of dollars in economic value every year and are a wise public investment that pays us back.
- Continue to expand sustainability initiatives and programs.