



Amendment to the Land Use Element of the Master Plan for Cranbury Township

Route 130 Corridor

Adopted by the Cranbury Township Planning Board on February 21, 2013

**AMENDMENT TO THE LAND USE ELEMENT OF
THE MASTER PLAN FOR CRANBURY TOWNSHIP:**

ROUTE 130 CORRIDOR

Prepared for

Cranbury Township Planning Board

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I. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Amendment to the Township of Cranbury Master Plan is to reexamine the permitted uses and development standards of the non-residential zones along the Route 130 Corridor in Cranbury Township, and to recommend changes that will spur new development and redevelopment that will promote the purposes of the Cranbury Master Plan and the Municipal Land Use Law. The recommended change to zoning in this amendment is focused primarily on the Highway Commercial (HC) and General Commercial (GC) districts within the Township, but also contains a recommended amendment to the planned industrial parks in one of Cranbury's industrial zones as well. The proposed revisions have the potential to further advance a number of the Township's planning goals and objectives. The refinements recommended herein do not include any changes to the classification or boundaries of any zones along the Route 130 Corridor. However, the proposed changes are recommended given the dearth of applications for new development or redevelopment following the 2010 Master Plan and the zoning amendments intended to implement the recommendations of the Master Plan, which were enacted in 2011.

II. 2010 MASTER PLAN

On December 16, 2010, the Township of Cranbury Planning Board adopted a Master Plan which included recommended changes to permitted uses and bulk standards in the HC and GC zones, as well as the addition of design guidelines in these two zones.

A. HC–Highway Commercial District

With regard to the HC district, the Master Plan states:

There is a need to substantially revise the uses permitted in the current HC zone, as well as the bulk and design standards in order to encourage the redevelopment of current marginally-used properties, to provide for the retail needs of the community, to substantially upgrade its image, and to generate tax ratables. Larger-scale retail uses and designated shopping centers are to be permitted, but within the context of a series of design requirements that would avoid the prototypical suburban highway strip center or big-box development.

The 2010 Master Plan sets forth specific recommendations regarding permitted uses in the HC zone, including:

- Larger retail stores providing goods and services that are unlikely to locate in the Village Commercial (VC) zone in downtown Cranbury, including, but not limited to, agricultural supplies and accessories, home garden centers, sporting and hobby stores, pharmacies and drug stores and banks, including drive-thru banks
- Automobile parts and supplies, car rental or service-only stores
- Clarification so that offices, which are already permitted, are also permitted over retail uses

- Retail shopping centers combining a number of retail establishments permitted in the zone, with or without second floor offices

The 2010 Master Plan also indicated the types of uses which should be omitted or not permitted in the HC zone, as follows:

- Those smaller convenience and specialized retail and personal service establishments that would be more likely to be located and successful in Cranbury’s downtown (e.g., beauty salons, gift shops, clothing and shoe stores, florists, bike sales and service, and restaurants and other eating and drinking establishments).

The 2010 Master Plan also recommended that the following uses be prohibited in the HC zone:

- Automobile, camper and truck sales
- Gas stations
- Convenience stores

B. GC–General Commercial District

With regard to the GC district, the Master Plan states:

With its larger average lot sizes, the C-R (current GC General Commercial) District at Route 130 and Brick Yard Road would be appropriate for larger, modern suburban-style shopping centers that will allow Cranbury to provide important types of retail that are not appropriate for the downtown area, and to make Cranbury’s retail sector more competitive with retail offerings in adjacent communities.

Within this district, the aim is to “encourage the redevelopment of marginally-used parcels for more intensive commercial uses to generate economic activity and a better visual environment than this currently dismal gateway into Cranbury from East Windsor Township.”

The Master Plan sets forth specific recommendations regarding permitted uses in the GC zone, including:

- The same uses permitted in the HC district
- Regionally, automotive-oriented establishments such as automobile sales, gas stations, convenience stores, supermarkets and designed shopping centers
- All of the permitted uses should be permitted on any floor

C. Planned Industrial Parks on Route 130

The primary focus of the 2010 Master Plan’s recommendations related to the HC Highway Commercial and GC General Commercial zones in Cranbury. However, the Route 130 Corridor also has in addition to these two retail-oriented districts a number of residential districts and industrial districts. No substantive changes were recommended for either of these two types of districts, although the 2010 Master Plan did recommend (1) allowing smaller lot sizes and widths for certain industrial zones; (2) adopting net out resources provisions to ameliorate

overdevelopment on environmentally constrained land; and (3) increasing the overall floor area ratio and impervious coverage requirements in certain industrial districts to allow for slightly higher yields on non-environmentally constrained land. Generally, the uses permitted and other bulk and design provisions related to the industrial districts were to remain as reflected in the Cranbury Land Development Ordinance.

III. PROPOSED ZONING AMENDMENTS

A. Need to Reexamine Route 130 Corridor Zoning

In 2011, the Township of Cranbury Zoning Ordinance was amended to reflect many of the above recommendations for the HC and GC districts, and for the industrial zones as set forth in the 2010 Master Plan; the Township declined to change the name of the HC and GC districts, instead favoring the familiarity of the existing names. It was thought that the implementation of these recommendations would spur commercial development along the Route 130 Corridor. Like many municipalities throughout New Jersey, at the time the 2010 Master Plan was prepared, Cranbury had seen a decline in commercial development and related economic opportunities during the recession. In recent years, as the recession has lifted and surrounding communities have seen an uptick in commercial development, and application for new retail uses or the renovation or redevelopment of shopping centers. There have been a few applications for development or renovation in downtown Cranbury in the VC zone. However, despite the existence of a number of tracts of undeveloped, underdeveloped or marginally developed land, Cranbury has not seen a similar interest in commercial development along the Route 130 Corridor.

It has become apparent that the implementation of the Master Plan recommendations for the HC and GC zones or the changes to the industrial zones has not affected change as desired. As such, there is a need to reexamine the zoning changes adopted in 2011 and consider if the uses currently permitted in the HC and GC zones were still too restrictive and/or no longer up-to-date with changing economic conditions. Additionally, at the time the 2010 Master Plan was being prepared, it was not anticipated that public sewer service would be extended to parts of the GC district that heretofore were not served by public sewer. Based upon proposed changes to the Sewer Service Area by Middlesex County, it is now anticipated that sewer service will be extended into parts of the GC zone, thereby allowing the zone to support more intensive retail development.

B. Recommended Zoning Amendments

This Amendment recommends an increase in the variety of permitted uses in the HC and GC districts. These recommendations are made to further the Township's economic development goals by allowing a wider variety of commercial uses along the Route 130 Corridor, thereby generating ratables, employment opportunities and providing a greater variety of goods and services to the residents of Cranbury. These amendments will help Cranbury to realize the goals articulated in the 2010 Master Plan.

This Master Plan Amendment still limits opportunities for smaller stores providing convenience goods to the VC Village Commercial zone. However, the opportunities for the retail sector to expand within the VC zone in downtown Cranbury are limited. Lot sizes are small. There are no vacant properties in the VC zone that could accommodate new development. Since 2010 some additional development has occurred in the downtown (e.g., the redevelopment of the PNC Bank lot for a bicycle store, office and single-family home) and some changes in tenancy have occurred which have strengthened the downtown. It does not appear that allowing a wider range of commercial uses along route 130 would negatively impact the retail sector in downtown Cranbury.

Opportunities for more expansive, regionally-oriented commercial development do exist along Route 130. The recommendations set forth in this Amendment support the planning goals and objectives of the Township. An overriding goal in the 2010 Cranbury Master Plan was to establish a sufficient ratable base to sustain the Township's fiscal and community needs in the long term, and to focus such efforts on the Route 130 Corridor and areas east of Route 130. Relevant objectives included:

- Encourage larger properties in the HC zone, GC zone and PO/R District¹ with frontage along Route 130 to redevelop with a stronger retail focus, but not to the detriment of the Village's downtown.
- Capitalize on economic opportunities from pass-by traffic on Route 130 to increase tax ratable base and improve the appearance of existing businesses along Route 130.

This amendment acknowledges that this goal is unlikely to be achieved if the current restrictive list of permitted uses is not expanded to allow for a wider range of opportunities.

1. Recommendations for the Highway Commercial (HC) District

Amongst the list of uses that are recommended to be added to the list of permitted uses are the following types of uses, and uses which are substantially similar to them:

- Stores selling books, music, DVDs and other media
- Office supplies and stationery stores
- Bakeries
- Restaurants, eating and drinking establishments and catering establishments, except fast food restaurants or drive-through restaurants
- Liquor stores, bars and taverns
- Car washes, subject to conditional use standards.
- Establishments selling and servicing computers, electronic goods and appliances
- Grocery stores and food stores, but not supermarkets, warehouse discount stores or clubs or big-box general retail stores

¹ The PO/R District on Route 130 was amended to the H-M Highway Mixed-Use zone.

2. Recommendations for the General Commercial (GC) District

This Master Plan amendment recommends that all of the uses which are proposed to be added to the list of permitted uses and conditionally permitted uses in the HC zone should also be added to the GC zone—to the extent that they are not already permitted. Furthermore, the 2010 Master Plan did recommend that gasoline service stations and convenience stores, either standalone or combined, should be conditionally permitted in the GC zone. However, the 2011 Zoning Amendments did not include such provisions in the Cranbury LDO. In light of the overall objective of the 2010 Master Plan, this Master Plan amendment recommends that such changes now be incorporated into the Cranbury LDO.

3. Recommendations for Planned Industrial Parks

This Master Plan Amendment further recommends that the prescribed minimum requirement for uses other than warehouses and light industrial use for planned industrial parks in the RO/LI Research Office and Light Industrial District—set at 30% of total floor area—be deleted. Due to changes in the market for office uses in particular, nationally, regionally and within Cranbury itself, where office vacancies have increased, and where virtually no new office developments have occurred, the lifting of such a restriction is keyed to spur development in such industrial parks. In both research and/or flex space, the percentage of non-industrial or non-warehouse—that is office space—is much closer to 3% or 5%, not 30%. There are still a number of vacant or underutilized parcels in the RO/LI zone along the Route 130 Corridor that could benefit from such a change. In planned industrial parks the mix of uses should be left to the discretion of the developer. Under this scenario, the market, rather than the Cranbury LDO, will dictate which of the permitted uses is best suited to a particular tract of land, especially along the Route 130 Corridor in the Township.

V. GOALS OF MASTER PLAN AND PURPOSES OF MLUL ADVANCED BY PROPOSED ZONING AMENDMENTS

A. Goals of 2010 Master Plan

The following goals of the 2010 Master Plan, which are endorsed and retained in the amendment, would be furthered by the zoning amendments recommended herein.

1. Land Uses in the Route 130 Corridor

- (a) Encourage larger properties in the HC zone, GC zone and PO/R district with frontage along Route 130 to redevelop with a stronger retail focus, but not to the detriment of the Village's downtown.
- (b) Capitalize on economic opportunities from pass-by traffic on Route 130 to increase Cranbury's tax ratable base and improve the appearance of existing businesses along Route 130.

2. Economic Development

- (a) Direct retail and service commercial development to appropriate locations within the Village and encourage redevelopment at appropriate locations along Route 130 so as to strengthen its viability, to provide for the shopping needs of Cranbury residents and employees, and to generate additional tax ratables.
- (b) Increase the Township's non-residential ratable base by permitting a greater variety of retail uses along the Route 130 corridor and within the Township's professional office/residential district.

B. Purposes of the Municipal Land Use Law

The following purposes of the Municipal Land Use Law (NJSA 40:55D-2) would be advanced by the zoning amendments recommended herein:

- g. To provide sufficient space in appropriate locations for a variety of agricultural, residential, recreational, commercial and industrial uses and open space, both public and private, according to their respective environmental requirements in order to meet the needs of all New Jersey citizens;
- e. To promote the establishment of appropriate population densities and concentrations that will contribute to the well-being of persons, neighborhoods, communities and regions and preservation of the environment;
- a. To encourage municipal action to guide the appropriate use or development of all lands in this State, in a manner which will promote the public health, safety, morals and general welfare;