

Report on Activities of Regional Plan Association's New Jersey Office



2008-2009

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Table of Contents

Overview	1
RPA/NJ Activities during the Reporting Period and in the Next 12 Months	1
Open Space – the New Jersey Highlands	1
Ramapo Mountain Greenway	2
Transportation	2
Climate and Energy	3
Community Design and Public Participation	3
Partnerships with Institutions	5
Regulatory Reform	5

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Overview

Regional Plan Association is a not-for-profit regional planning organization that improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning, and advocacy. For over 80 years, RPA has been shaping transportation systems, protecting open spaces, and promoting better community design for the region's continued growth. RPA anticipates the challenges the region will face in the years to come, and mobilizes the region's civic, business, and government sectors to take action.

RPA focuses its efforts on the 31 counties that compose and surround New York City and share critical economic, environmental, and transportation systems. RPA is governed by a 65-member Board of Directors and three state Committees comprised of business leaders, experts and opinion makers. They provide strategic advice to RPA's staff of 32 planners, designers, and policy experts.

RPA's state offices provide an on-the-ground presence for the organization in New Jersey, Connecticut and on Long Island. Guided by the State committees, these offices play a critical role in the research, planning and advocacy for projects in their respective sectors of the region.

Over the past year RPA's New Jersey office continued to focus on advancing the sustainability of our communities, in its many facets – fiscal, social, economic, and ecological – and the role community design and land use play in this effort. With the support of our New Jersey Committee and a number of generous donors we were able to engage local and State officials, interest groups and the public in programs to redesign New Jersey communities in a more livable way. Newark, the state's largest city, continued to be a special focus. We monitored progress in the preservation of the Highlands region and conducted a number of local community design interventions.

RPA/NJ Activities during the Reporting Period and in the Next 12 Months

Open Space – the New Jersey Highlands

In the summer of 2008 RPA was instrumental in mobilizing the other major New Jersey planning and smart growth organizations in support of the Highlands Council's Regional Master Plan and in urging Governor Corzine not to veto the adopted Plan, which had been severely criticized by a variety of environmental groups. While RPA did not consider the plan a perfect document, we were very concerned that a veto by the Governor would severely undermine the authority of the Highlands Council and its staff and fatally derail the planning process. We also did not agree



Map of the Highlands Region

with the factual basis presented by the groups looking to undermine the Plan. Ultimately, Governor Corzine did not veto the Plan, thus allowing the Highlands Council to proceed towards implementation.

Looking towards plan implementation, RPA met with senior Highlands Council staff to discuss how we could best assist the implementation process. The Council expressed interest and enthusiasm for a number of ideas presented by RPA. As a first step, it was decided that RPA would organize a one-day educational workshop for local elected and appointed officials and other relevant stakeholders, co-sponsored with the Highlands Council, focusing on regenerative design and its potential applications in the region.

RPA has had a long tradition of bringing innovative solutions to planning and development. In 2006 we published the groundbreaking "The Economics of Transferring Development in the New Jersey Highlands," a report which defined the concept, discussed the viability of a market for the development rights and analyzed a series of value-generation scenarios that demonstrated the value of bonus density credits.

Now, RPA has successfully secured funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation to plan a workshop for the winter of 2009 on the application of the concept of "regenerative design" to the Highlands. The Highlands Act's main goal is to protect the quantity and quality of the water supply for nearly half of New Jersey. RPA's "Design the Highlands: Innovative Approaches to Water Conservation and Aquifer Recharge" one-day conference on regenerative design will focus on achieving the goals of the adopted Highlands Regional Master Plan and the ambitious standards set forth therein for water conservation and aquifer replenishment. It is anticipated that the conference — while beginning with a general introduction to the topic—will, through breakout sessions and specific case studies, take a focused look at critical aspects of green development. Storm water management and ground water infiltration, low impact design, water conservation, grey water reuse and other techniques will be discussed in a clearly understandable fashion. RPA will work with the Highlands Council, Department of Agriculture and other relevant public agencies and draw on

the experience of experts in the field such as “green” developers and advocates for innovative design and land use.

We are also discussing with some of the Highlands counties funding for possible Mayors Institutes on Community Design specifically for Highlands mayors, similar to the very successful Institute we organized in June of 2007.

Ramapo Mountain Greenway

Bergen County has significant open space holdings in the Ramapo Mountain portion of the County. In total there are approximately 19 square miles of open space along the New Jersey/New York border. Bergen County’s holdings total approximately 4,500 acres and the area is generally referred to as Bergen County’s Ramapo Valley Reservation. The most popular and frequent use in the Reservation is hiking. There are a number of trails which are administered and managed by the New York - New Jersey Trails Conference. The Conference has its headquarters on Ramapo Valley Road in Mahwah.

The County has been successful in its efforts in preserving large portions of the Ramapo Mountains as open space. Now, as one of the most populous counties in the State, Bergen County wants to insure that its residents can fully enjoy these public lands by implementing a management plan. The management plan should include opportunities for active recreation, passive recreation, and education. At the same time, the management plan should insure that these uses are implemented in a responsible manner that does not compromise the ecological uniqueness of the Ramapo Mountain Preserve area.

RPA has teamed with Maser Consulting to ensure that Bergen County’s Ramapo Mountain Greenway Master Plan addresses the concerns and interests of critical stakeholders and the general public.

Towards this end, RPA is interviewing public and private stakeholders; organizing and holding a public visioning session and writing a report on our overall findings and recommendations. RPA will provide comments on the scope and direction of the Ramapo Greenway Plan, the contents and map products of the landscape assessment, and the final format and recommendations of the Greenway Plan.

The purpose of the RPA-led stakeholder interviews is to engage the public agencies, private organizations, and major civic leaders who have a direct and indirect interest in the future of the County property. They include representatives of public agencies (e.g. NJ DEP, Highlands Council); adjoining landowners (e.g. Palisades Interstate Park Commission, State Parks, Ramapo College, North Jersey Water Supply District



Ramapo Valley Reservation
Credit: W. Ferren, Maser Consulting

Commission); user groups (e.g. Boy Scouts of America, NYNJ Trails Council), and major civic organizations (e.g. Ramapough Mountain Indians, Highland Coalition).

The public workshop will inform a broad group of public officials, citizens, and interest groups about the scope and timeline of the Ramapo Mountain Greenway Plan, and solicit the opinions of those attending as to the programming, organization, and management of the Greenway. The meetings include a plenary presentation on the overall plan, and a series of small group exercises that solicit ideas for broad programmatic goals for the Greenway and identify desired uses and activities, and a preliminary sense of the best location for these uses. The results of the workshop will be presented to the study team through a draft internal written report and a series of working maps and graphics to be incorporated in the final plan.

Transportation

RPA continues to provide research, planning and advocacy for the new trans-Hudson commuter rail tunnel (aka Access to the Region’s Core or ARC) for which NJ Transit and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey are the lead agencies. This month, the \$8.7 billion project is scheduled to be launched in North Bergen, where earth-moving machines will carve out an underpass beneath Routes 1&9. To ensure continued funding for the project, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey and NJ Transit are embarking on a public outreach effort to explain to commuters and residents the value of ARC.

RPA has testified and submitted written testimony on behalf of ARC on numerous occasions in both New York and New Jersey, including at public hearings for the preliminary and final Draft Environmental Impact Statement and at North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) Board meetings. RPA will again testify on behalf of ARC at upcoming Uniform Land Use Review Process (ULURP) hearings in New York City.

Also as part of this effort, in November 2008, Regional Plan Association was asked by the Port Authority to estimate the effect that ARC will have on the property values of the homes that are located within the commutershed of the rail lines due to benefit from the new service. The project is led by Juliette Michaelson, Senior Planner, who documented with multiple-regression analysis, the impact that MidTOWN DIRECT (new direct service to Penn Station) had on properties along the Morris & Essex Line. She found that MidTOWN DIRECT increased the value of homes within one-half mile of train stations by \$90,000 compared with homes farther away, all other things being equal. Juliette, with the support of RPA/NJ staff, is using a similar methodology to extrapolate property appreciation for ARC.

While continuing to monitor the project’s progress, RPA has turned its sight to the next generation of transit projects that will capitalize on ARC’s capacity. This past year, RPA conducted an urban core analysis identifying over forty projects and policy recommendations to improve transit in the tri-state region’s urban core. A special section on New Jersey points to opportunities to enhance mass transit by developing Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) networks in Newark and strategically extending the Hudson-Bergen Light Rail line. These recommendations range from short to long-term and relatively inexpensive to capital intensive. This “blueprint” will be used by RPA and others to advocate for transit improvements over the next decade or longer.

RPA recently submitted a proposal to New Jersey Transit to develop a strategic plan and manage the agency’s transit-friendly planning assistance program.

RPA/NJ is also engaged in transportation planning studies on the ground. An example is the soon to be completed transportation strategy for the Route 22 corridor in Warren County. Over the past decade explosive housing, commercial and retail development in southern Warren County has increased travel demand along this corridor to the point where significant

peak period weekday congestion already occurs along portions of the roadway. In addition, new residential, retail and commercial developments, including major new big box shopping centers (Target, Lowes, Home Depot and Super Wal-Mart), are planned and/or have been constructed along the Route 22 corridor. Developers have also obtained approvals to redevelop portions of the vast Ingersoll Rand site in Phillipsburg. Route 22 serves as a major transportation corridor for commuters that live in Pennsylvania and commute into Central New Jersey to work.

The RPA-led study identified a series of roadway improvements as well as a package of transit enhancements, land-use and community design strategies, travel-demand and travel management strategies, and bicycle and pedestrian improvements. The goal of the study is to outline an approach to incrementally enhance safety and increase mobility in the Route 22 corridor sub-region in Warren County through short term spot improvements and long term solutions such as new road connections, transit improvements and bicycle and pedestrian improvements. These improvements and planning strategies will be advanced into the NJTPA Project Development Work Program.

Another example is RPA's engagement in developing a new Master Plan for Bergen County. RPA's assignment includes developing strategies for enhancing transit services in the county, promoting transit-oriented and transit-supportive development and mitigating against the impacts of climate change.

RPA continues to monitor closely proposals to refinance the state's transportation system and, in particular, the Transportation Trust Fund (TTF).

And finally, in response to the New Jersey Turnpike Authority's proposal to increase tolls following the demise of the Governor's plan to "monetize" New Jersey's toll roads, RPA/NJ provided testimony to the Turnpike Authority during the public hearings in support of toll increases to be dedicated to the building of the ARC Tunnel. RPA/NJ also testified against using money from the toll increases for the widening of the Garden State Parkway between exits 63 and 30, which is seen by many as sprawl-inducing. Ultimately the Turnpike Authority approved the toll increases at a lower level than initially proposed while the financial commitment to the ARC Tunnel remained unchanged. RPA also cautioned the Authority that the proposed plan would likely remove—or at a minimum constrain—future toll increases as a politically viable option in the near future for recapitalizing the Transportation Trust Fund.

Climate and Energy

RPA/NJ and the New Jersey Sustainable State Institute at Rutgers University (NJSSI) were asked in 2007 by the City of Trenton and the State of New Jersey to develop a "Trenton Green" plan—a broadly defined blueprint for the city's long term sustainability. Other project partners include ICLEI – The International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives; PSE&G, the energy provider for Trenton; ISLES, a local community development corporation; The JPMorgan Chase Foundation; and the State of New Jersey.

In order to create local ownership and foster stakeholder involvement in sustainability planning and climate change action, RPA and NJSSI—with the other project partners—assembled the Trenton Green Task Force, a project steering committee. This Task Force, composed of a broad range of stakeholders, is designed to guide and make substantive decisions about the project. The Steering Committee includes City of Trenton staff – the chief of staff, chief information officer, planning director and others who receive direction from the mayor – state government representatives, drawn from the Board of Public Utilities, NJ Department of Environmental Protection and others – business interests, PSEG, ISLES and others. The Task Force has been meeting every other week and is responsible for guiding the project and making substantive decisions about process and content.

With the assistance of the Task Force, RPA and NJSSI also convened seven working groups each focused on a specific area including greening the master plan, municipal facilities and operations/purchasing; sustainable economic development and green jobs/workforce; climate and energy; green building; outreach and education; and health.

The Trenton Green project was officially launched on March 11, 2008, at a widely attended event at Thomas Edison State College in Trenton. Mayor Palmer addressed the participants and provided a brief introduction to the initiative. After a few presentations, the plenary session was re-organized into a meeting of the seven working groups. These working groups have subsequently met a few more times, as needed.

RPA and NJSSI have staffed the working group meetings, provided background research on the relevant issues, and produced interim and final working group reports that contained lists of possible new actions that could be undertaken by Trenton. These reports and recommendations were in turn funneled to the Steering Committee and are in the process of being integrated into a draft Trenton Green plan.

RPA has also been active in assisting the City in identifying potential immediate, near-term, and longer-term policies and projects to reduce emissions. Typical policies and measures implemented by CCP participants include energy efficiency improvements to municipal buildings and water treatment facilities, streetlight retrofits, public transit improvements, installation of renewable power applications, and methane recovery from waste management.

RPA has been working to make sure that the State of New Jersey's commitment to reducing the level of greenhouse gas (GhG) emissions has an appropriate land use and transportation component. New Jersey's Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) is implemented through the Carbon Dioxide (CO2) Budget Trading program (NJAC 7:27C), which will require certain GhG producing facilities to purchase CO2 allowances, through auction. The auction proceeds will be disbursed to NJDEP and other agencies and will be available to fund a variety of activities designed to reduce GhG emissions, in accordance with the Global Warming Solutions Fund law (NJSA 26:2C-50 et seq). RPA and other civic groups have been working to ensure that the rules NJDEP eventually adopts for disbursement of these funds (currently proposed as NJAC 7:27D) encompass the transit-oriented and transit-supportive activities. RGGI funding may be the only source of planning money available through State Government in the foreseeable future.

On March 2, RPA/NJ and its partners, NJ Future, Tri-state Transportation Campaign, APA/NJ and others, sent a letter to Governor Corzine commenting on the state's draft Greenhouse Gas Reduction Plan. The letter recommended a number of specific actions the Governor's Office should take to ensure that the plan is realistic and implementable, including maintaining NJ Transit services despite budget constraints and continuing investment in ARC, jumpstarting construction of employment centers and homes in locations near transit, and implementing land-use changes that will increase efficiency in the way we plan and build our communities.

We also met with high level officials from the state Department of Environmental Protection, Transportation and Community Affairs, along with the Governor's office and were able to present these suggestions, which were generally well received. We are now in the process of following up with the various agencies to make sure the appropriate policy decisions are taken.

Community Design and Public Participation

RPA continues to provide public participation and design assistance to communities throughout the state.

Place-Based Interventions

One of the recently completed highly successful projects was the community visioning initiative in Kearny, NJ. The future Kear-



Plan for Kearny, NJ

ny train station is located in a declining industrial area adjacent to the Meadowlands, roughly half a mile from the town's lively business district. With direct rail service to Midtown Manhattan made possible by the rehabilitation of the Harrison-Kingsland branch and the completion of ARC in 2017, the future Kearny station area is poised for transit-oriented development. The RPA-led visioning process has aided the community in articulating a pedestrian and bicycle-friendly, transit-oriented vision for the area's future that complements and enhances the town's unique character.

RPA's strategy included several interactive stakeholder meetings, at which research by RPA was presented and discussed, ultimately leading to a planning framework for the site. That framework emphasized robust connections between the site and Kearny Avenue, the town's main street, opportunities for better utilization of the town's existing parks and open spaces, and the preservation and enhancement of the tight-knit residential neighborhoods between Kearny and Schuyler Avenues.

The centerpiece of the visioning process was an all-day public design workshop at the Kearny Public Library on June 28th, 2008. Attended by over 50 town residents, the workshop featured physical models which enabled residents to visualize various development scenarios. Also included were valuable tools created during RPA's previous work in Somerville, NJ: fiscal and traffic worksheets that clearly laid out, in tax dollar and trip number amounts, the impacts that different development types would have on the larger community. Finally, a sheet detailing how much various amenities (new parks, sewer systems, recreation centers, etc) would cost was handed out. With these tools in hand, residents were empowered to make informed decisions about the type and intensity of development that they wanted to see, and, with the help of architecture and urban design expert facilitators, to design the new neighborhood in a way that is consistent with TOD principles as well as with the existing context of the town.

The various designs and development scenarios that came out of the workshop were then synthesized into two consensus schemes and presented back to the public in the form of an illustrated report.

The Kearny TOD report envisions a walkable, mixed-use neighborhood oriented around the new train station, that complements the town's existing character while also taking advan-

tage of the coming commuter rail access to midtown Manhattan.

Another community design project where RPA has taken the lead is in Park Ridge (Bergen County). RPA was asked by the town's Vision Committee to help it develop a strategy to further revitalize Park Avenue -- its Main Street area. The committee had done some background research, developed a mission statement and a list of objectives and compiled relevant background information. The committee felt that hosting a public visioning workshop was the best way to move the process forward and RPA was asked for assistance with this visioning exercise. Some of the areas that the project is studying include the "L" shaped Main Street (Park Ave and Kinderkamack E); the NE corner of intersection of Park and Kinderkamack, a rather awkward intersection; the gas station site; a solid waste transfer facility; and the commuter parking lot. The project was also investigating ideas for minimizing curb cuts, and enhancing sidewalks, street furniture, landscaping, signage, traffic calming and other amenities, to make the downtown more pedestrian friendly and draw increased foot traffic.

The community workshop took place in March and a final report with recommendations has been released.

Mayors Institute on Community Design

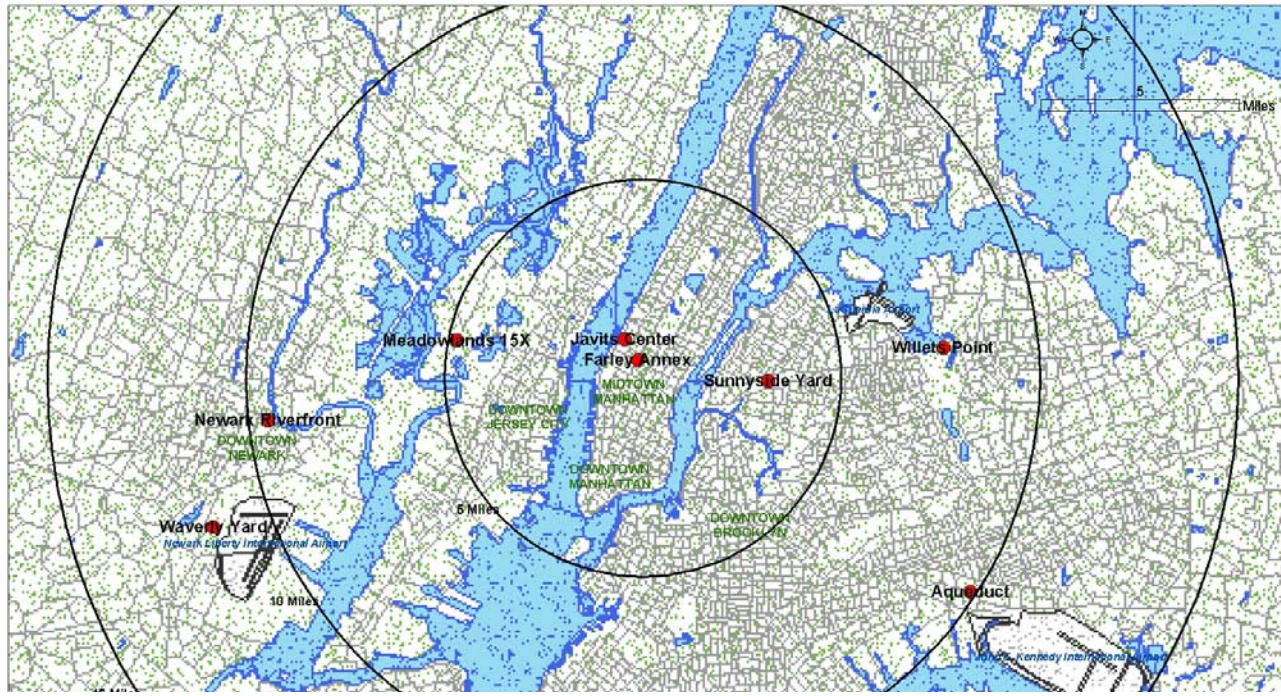
This past January, RPA held another of its award-winning New Jersey Mayors Institutes on Community Design. "Designing for Success" brought together the Mayors, of Perth Amboy, City of Orange, South Orange Village, Pemberton Township, Princeton Borough and Pleasantville, to discuss a range of interesting design case studies in these locations. The studies ranged from the redevelopment of an industrial site facing the mouth of Raritan River in Perth Amboy; to turning the site of a recently demolished "project" into a safe and vibrant mixed-income neighborhood in Orange; to new design schemes for the South Orange Performing Arts Council's parking lot right next to the train station; to area revitalizations in Pemberton, Princeton and Pleasantville, each with its own unique challenges.

The resource team RPA assembled to review the case studies and provide design and planning ideas included such distinguished professionals as Timothy Delorm, Vice President/Principal, EDAW; Martin Johnson, President, Isles, Inc.; Joseph Maraziti, Esq., Partner, Maraziti, Falcon & Healey, LLP; Darius Sollohub, Associate Director of Infrastructure Planning and Associate Professor of Architecture, New Jersey Institute of Technology; Ron Witte, Partner and Architect, WW Architects; and Bettina Zimny, Planning Director, RBA Group.



Plan from Mayors' Institute on Community Design

New York-New Jersey- Connecticut Region Convention Center Potential Sites



Newark

RPA continues its work in Newark, which started in 2006 and laid the groundwork for our involvement with the Administration of Cory A. Booker. This initiative has built upon our continued relationship with city's residents, businesses and community based organizations in the City, as well as governmental entities in the New York-New Jersey-Connecticut Tri-State Region.

Following up on drafting Mayor Booker's Newark Vision Plan, RPA provided technical assistance to Newark's Division of Planning and Community Development – we examined the urban housing typology in Newark and created design guidelines to transform the Bayonne Box into a new house for the City.

RPA was invited to join the consultant team that has been tasked with producing the Master Plan for Newark, with RPA taking the lead on the Economic and Community Development components of the plan. We are also investigating the feasibility of several sites for a possible new convention center in Newark.

Park Financing

Similar to RPA's 2007 report "On the Verge" which addressed emerging public space financing needs in New York City, RPA is now surveying New Jersey parks and evaluating the relative effectiveness of various funding and management strategies used to build and maintain urban public spaces throughout the State. RPA has reviewed parks owned and managed by different entities—including the State, counties, municipalities and not for profit organizations—in terms of their design features, programming and security. The report, which is immediately targeted to assist Newark with a new waterfront park on the Passaic River, will also serve as a guide to other municipalities throughout the State as they review strategies for funding and maintenance, as well as new park design.

Partnerships with Institutions

RPA continues to explore opportunities for strategic partnerships with key New Jersey institutions of higher education, business partners as well as other non-profits. Carlos Rodrigues has made presentations at a number of high-profile events organized by Princeton University, Rutgers, NJIT, and others.

Tri-State Region Potential Convention Center Sites

As an example, on March 3, 2009, Mr. Rodrigues spoke at the annual 2009 Economic Outlook Breakfast co-sponsored by Sovereign Bank and the Gateway Regional Chamber of Commerce. Hosted by Gateway President James Coyle and Sovereign's John Harrison, NJ Commercial Banking Market Executive, the program included also presentations by James Hughes, Dean of Rutgers University Bloustein School, economist Maria Fiorini Ramirez, David Gialanella, New Jersey director for CB Richard Ellis and Jason Bram, senior economist with the New York Federal Reserve Bank.

Carlos Rodrigues also spoke at the 2008 Land Use Institute "The Current State of Land Use Regulation" organized by the Institute for Continuing Legal Education; the annual conference of the American Planning Association – New Jersey chapter, and at many other events throughout the year.

Regulatory Reform

RPA is closely involved with a number of important initiatives that seek to modernize New Jersey's planning statutes and remove unnecessary and costly regulatory barriers to a more rational and sustainable growth.

At the request of the Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Joseph Doria, RPA-NJ Director Carlos Rodrigues was an active participant in the Housing Task Force established to assist the Administration find ways to deliver on Governor Corzine's commitment of 100,000 new units of affordable housing.

The RPA-NJ office has also been educating legislators and informing the drafting of a legislative package that would address various aspects of economic development and land use regulatory reform. RPA has been active in drafting proposed amendments to the State Planning Act. Later this year, RPA plans to host a retreat for former Chairs and key members of the New Jersey State Planning Commission, to discuss legislative reform proposals.

And with funding from the New Jersey Office of Smart Growth, RPA continues to investigate options for modernizing the State's zoning process.

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Regional Plan Association (RPA) is an independent regional planning organization that improves the quality of life and the economic competitiveness of the 31-county, New York-New Jersey-Connecticut region through research, planning, and advocacy. Since 1922, RPA has been shaping transportation systems, protecting open spaces, and promoting better community design for the region's continued growth. We anticipate the challenges the region will face in the years to come, and we mobilize the region's civic, business, and government sectors to take action.

RPA's current work is aimed largely at implementing the ideas put forth in the Third Regional Plan, with efforts focused in five project areas: community design, open space, transportation, workforce and the economy, and housing. For more information about Regional Plan Association, please visit our website, www.rpa.org.

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