



Executive Summary

Master Plan for the Township of Bloomfield

Essex County, New Jersey



1 Introduction

The Township of Bloomfield is in the Midst of a Resurgence.

Bloomfield has always been home to great neighborhoods, parks, architecture, institutions, and people. Recent years have seen the population grow to an all-time high as redevelopment projects have brought new life to former industrial and other underutilized properties.

This Master Plan seeks to support and build on this existing momentum to create a Twenty-first Century community that will be a model of economic, environmental, and social sustainability.

This Master Plan provides a blueprint to achieve a vision for Bloomfield which includes the following:

- New investment in strategies to mitigate impacts from and build resiliency to flooding and other climate related concerns.
- Improvements to Bloomfield Center to make it a true center and destination.
- Enrichment and protection of residential neighborhoods.
- Distinct, vibrant mixed-use commercial areas.
- Enhanced community facilities, open space and recreation amenities, and municipal services.
- Protection of historic resources.
- Abundant green spaces and preserved tree cover.
- Diverse housing opportunities including for young families and seniors.
- Expanded use of renewable energy sources.
- Complete Streets to accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and capabilities.
- Redevelopment of dormant, obsolete, or underutilized sites to benefit Bloomfield residents.

In short, this Master Plan aims to promote the responsible growth of Bloomfield in a way that honors the past, protects existing neighborhoods, preserves the Township’s environmental assets, and bolsters and reimagines commercial areas. The vision is to continue to evolve towards a **sustainable future** so that Bloomfield remains a place where people want to build their own futures for generations to come.

2 Master Plan Process



This Master Plan was prepared through an **open and public process**, taking place over 2 years, that was designed to reach and obtain significant input from a wide spectrum of voices from every sector of Bloomfield’s community. This process included a mix of **in-person engagement** (including public sessions, one in person at the municipal building and one via Zoom); an **online-based survey** provided in both English and Spanish for which over 360 responses were submitted; **meetings with key stakeholders** including each Council member and key members of the Township staff; and regular meetings with the Township’s other land use professionals. Hundreds of residents participated in this outreach process. The recommendations within this document are based on the ideas, challenges, aspirations, and insights shared with professionals by members of the community.

From this outreach we learned **Bloomfield residents celebrate and take pride in the Township’s history, diversity and the many amenities available.** The Township enjoys a strong sense of community—among its residents, businesses, and institutions—many of which have deep roots in Bloomfield.

3 Community Vision



Vibrant, attractive commercial areas both inside and outside Bloomfield Center that

incorporate a distinct Township brand and identity; are walkable and bicycle friendly; offer a variety of activities and amenities including spaces for visual and performing arts; appealing open space and gathering areas; a diversity of modern retail, restaurants, and other commercial establishments including more locally owned businesses; and convenient and adequately supplied parking.



Key Recommendations:

- **Create attractive and welcoming gateways into Bloomfield from the railroad and Garden State Parkway** through landscaping, signage; and attractive architecture.
- **Consider hiring a Commercial Area Manager** to oversee the management, and revitalization of Bloomfield’s commercial business districts including **creating a branding strategy** that advertises the Township as a desirable destination with a unique sense of place; recruiting new businesses; acting a liaison between the Township and business and property owners; conducting outreach with the Bloomfield business community; coordinating downtown events and programming, etc.
- **Implement Streetscape Improvements and Enact Design Guidelines** to help make Bloomfield’s commercial areas inviting and welcoming places where people want to spend time.
- **Invest in wayfinding signage** to direct both pedestrians and vehicles to parking locations and amenities.
- **Examine permitted uses in the downtown commercial districts and make zoning amendments as necessary** to ensure that a variety of uses and activities are permitted in the zoning that will draw visitors for experiences and events not available online.
- **Work with the County to install pedestrian and cyclist safety improvements** throughout Bloomfield’s commercial corridors that are located on County roadways. This can include identifying appropriate locations for curb extensions; high visibility crosswalks; green infrastructure including rain gardens, bioswales, permeable pavement, and stormwater trees; and bike lanes and/or green-back sharrows, among other improvements.

- **Examine parking requirements in commercial areas** to determine if they reflect modern best management practices and consider any modifications as appropriate in order to provide ample and conveniently located parking for visitors to Bloomfield’s commercial areas to encourage visitors to frequent these areas on a regular basis.
- Consider creation of a **performance art or exhibition space** in Bloomfield Center which can attract both Bloomfield residents and visitors from other municipalities.
- **Account for new or emerging business models in zoning and development regulations** to continuously monitor trends in the market and ensure that its zoning standards remain up-to-date.



Development/redevelopment projects that balance a variety of community priorities. These priorities include improved architectural and streetscape aesthetics; more diverse and affordable housing options, particularly for young adults and seniors; additional public open spaces and gathering areas; consideration of environmental impacts; and economic development that helps offset residents' tax burdens.

Key Recommendations:

- Residential development and redevelopment projects should include a **variety of housing choices** specifically for long term residents wishing to remain in Bloomfield; renters looking to purchase a home; and seniors who would like to age in place.
- **Develop design guidelines** to encourage new development and renovations be consistent with the architectural character of the neighborhood where the property is located.
- **Include considerations for the creation of publicly accessible open space and recreation resources as part of large-scale redevelopment projects** that would be available to the general public to enjoy.
- Continue to **communicate and work with Montclair State University** regarding future plans for Bloomfield College in order to work towards a future for the school that benefits the university community and the residents and businesses of Bloomfield.

- **Proactively establish a vision to guide potential future redevelopment**, if they occur, of major non-residential properties in the office zones based on sound planning principles and community needs that benefit the public welfare while minimizing adverse impacts. For example: incorporating attractive site and architectural designs; utilizing sustainable design and construction practices; providing a mix of commercial uses in non-residential components; a variety of housing types for residential components; and deliver community benefits such as public gathering spaces, recreation fields and amenities; provision for stormwater mitigation, etc.



Bloomfield as a model of environmental sustainability and resiliency

that includes investing in strategies to mitigate impacts from flooding and other climate related concerns; providing safe alternatives to single-driver car travel; encouraging reduction in solid waste removal through recycling, composting, and upcycling; promoting the use of renewable energy sources; incorporating green building and low impact landscaped design in Redevelopment Plans and other development projects; maintenance and enhancement of the Township's open space and recreational resources, as well as the tree canopy; along with other sustainability measures intended to reduce both the individual and collective carbon footprint.

Key Recommendations:

- **Develop a Regional Stormwater Task Force** with neighboring municipalities to promote improvements to floodplain management and stormwater mitigation.
- **Continue improvements to Township stormwater infrastructure** to prioritize the repair, maintenance, and upgrade of heavily damaged/blocked or deteriorated stormwater facilities.
- **Implement recommendations of the Stormwater Management Plan update** related to stormwater assets and continue compliance with the New Jersey Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit, Tier A MS4 permit, and the Stormwater Pollutant Prevention Plan.
- **Update the Township Stormwater Ordinance** to reflect the most current language and requirements.
- **Continue drinking water infrastructure improvements and maintenance** by continuing to be vigilant in identifying and replacing lead service water pipes to meet the obligations of the NJ DEP administrative consent order.
- **Adopt a Renewable Energy Ordinance** permitting and placing bulk restrictions on renewable energy facilities in the Township. Specifically, the ordinance should address solar panels including ground-mounted, roof-mounted, building integrated, and parking lot canopies. The Township's ordinances should also be updated to reflect Municipal Land Use Rules regulations regarding renewable energy systems.



- **Adopt an EV Ordinance and Encourage EV Spaces at Public Venues** by amending the zoning ordinance to reflect State mandates requiring EV charging stations in new multi-family residential and non-residential projects; partnering with private companies to provide EV charging stations on municipally-owned property; and encouraging installation of EV stations on privately-owned properties with expansive parking lots.
- **Hold informational sessions and create brochures or other materials regarding sustainable best management practices.** This information could be available on the Township’s website.
- **Expand the Community Gardens program** to identify additional locations to create a network of community gardens that makes fresh and healthy food sources available to all Township residents.
- **Encourage the ongoing strategic acquisition of open space properties,** to include land for conservation, flood protection and critical habitats.
- **Undertake a Community Forestry Management Plan** for the preservation of the Township’s tree canopy and heritage trees.



- **Increase public awareness of stormwater management issues** to better inform Township residents of actions they can take to reduce stormwater pollution, whether it be regarding lawn care and the use of chemicals (i.e., fertilizers, pesticides), cleaning up pet waste, preventing littering, environmentally safe vehicle maintenance, and more.

A Township-wide Circulation Network that safely accommodates pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and transit riders of all ages and capabilities that includes ADA accessibility and safe routes to school, as well as strategies to improve roadway conditions and minimize traffic congestion.



Key Recommendations:

- **Adopt a Vision Zero Policy for the Township** which champions active decision making and policy changes that take human error into account, with a goal of eliminating all traffic fatalities and severe injuries.
- **Develop a High Injury Network (HIN) for Bloomfield.** A HIN involves reviewing crash data over at least a 5-year period to identify and map the concentrated locations and types of traffic incidents. The results of the data analysis allows the municipality to focus limited resources and develop solutions for those specific problem areas.
- **Identify locations that experience traffic bottlenecks and/or alternatively motorists exceeding the speed limit** and pursue funding and resources to address these locations.
- **Audit traffic signage** and allocate funds annually to replace any missing, damaged and weathered signage on local roadways and contact the County regarding signage on its roadways.
- **Build on the adopted Township policy of Complete Streets** to integrate Complete Streets design and policies into all future transportation-related planning, developments, right-of-way changes/paving, and project approvals through a Complete Streets design checklist.
- **Create a Township traffic and pedestrian safety committee** that can steer the traffic improvement implementation process, engage in outreach efforts, and develop community visioning and goals.
- **Participate in and apply for grant funding from the NJDOT Safe Routes to School Program** which provides funding to encourage children in grades K-12 to walk and bicycle to school.
- **Undertake a sidewalk audit to identify missing links and assess the condition of existing sidewalks** and ensure the provision of ADA compliant handicap accessible infrastructure along all roads, sidewalks, and intersections within Bloomfield.

- **Supplement sidewalks with adequate pedestrian amenities** including benches, bike racks, public trash cans, transit stops and shelters, public art, etc.
- **Utilize a variety of traffic calming strategies** along roadways that exhibit high vehicular speeds and generally unsafe pedestrian and bicyclist conditions.
- **Consider developing a dedicated and protected bicycle and pedestrian network.**
- **Work with NJ Transit to enhance, beautify, clean-up, and provide additional amenities at the Township's rail stations** including adequate bike racks and bike lockers to encourage transit riders to bicycle to and from the transit stops.



Traffic calming initiative in Jersey City, NJ
Source: Phillips Preiss Grygiel Leheny Hughes LLC May 2024



Residential neighborhoods which are maintained and protected from inappropriate development.

Key Recommendations:

- **Develop design guidelines** to encourage new development and renovations be consistent with the architectural character of the neighborhood where the property is located.
- Add a requirement to the application checklists that **applicants must include a rendering of the proposed development** and photos of adjacent buildings, so that the reviewing Board can evaluate the compatibility of the project with neighboring structures.
- Explore strategies to **improve enforcement of zoning violations** to combat quality of life concerns such as illegal living situations; littering; street cleaning; and pest control.
- Examine existing non-conforming lots in one- and two-family zones and **consider zoning changes to bring them into compliance.**
- **Improve the efficiency and transparency of the Land Use Code and application process** by providing both in online and hard copy formats informational materials, clear checklists, templates, and timelines to be used by both Township staff, Board Professionals, and applicants.
- **Prepare a Housing Element and Fair Share Plan** which details Bloomfield's compliance plan to rehabilitate low- and moderate-income housing in accordance with the State Fair Housing Act.



Enhanced Preservation of Historic Buildings and Districts

that safeguard architectural and historic resources; highlight Bloomfield's rich past; and allow for adaptive reuse that enable historic buildings a modern use and relevance.

Key Recommendations:

- **Work with the Historic Preservation Commission** to evaluate historic resources and locally designate such resources as warranted.
- **Investigate the feasibility of applying for Certified Local Government status** from the State Historic Preservation Office to expand local historic preservation efforts.
- **Create design guidelines for historic districts and resources** that can help guide residents interested in upgrading or making improvements to their historic structure on appropriate design, materials, and colors.
- **Further educational outreach** to property owners, real estate agents, business owners, students, and other members of the community including the numerous benefits of historic preservation, what local landmark means for property owners, best practices for restoring and rehabilitating historic resources, and grant funding and tax incentive programs available to property owners.
- **Implement a historic plaque program.**
- **Create a user-friendly map highlighting historic resources** available for use on the Township's website.



Abundant and well maintained open spaces offering both passive and active recreation opportunities for residents of all ages and abilities, as well as stormwater mitigation and preservation of habitat; and preserved tree cover.

Key Recommendations:

- **Continue to make planned and/or needed improvements to existing park and recreation resources** including upgrading tot lots; developing more multi-purpose fields which can be used for a variety of purposes.
- **Continue to look for locations and funding for a Township-wide indoor recreation center** to provide indoor recreation and organized athletic programs at a centrally located site with adequate access, sufficient land area and proximity to existing recreation facilities.
- **Maximize opportunities for enhancement and/ or expansion of trails and greenways, as well as open space and recreation resources near existing and planned trails and greenways** including enhancing and completing the planned sections of the Morris Canal Greenway and Essex-Hudson Greenway in Bloomfield.
- **Identify locations and evaluate the feasibility of a new community park in the underserved southeast section of the Township** to create parks within walking distance of those neighborhoods.
- **Continue to identify and evaluate large vacant parcels of land for potential open space preservation.** Particular attention should be given to those parcels of vacant land that are located adjacent to, or along the route of any potential Township Greenway or contiguous to existing park and recreation facilities.
- **Advocate for increased maintenance and improvements to Brookdale and Watsessing County Parks** by Essex County. Coordinate with Essex County on obtaining County Open Space Trust Fund and State Green Acres program assistance for necessary improvements.
- **Continue to take advantage of opportunities** for all available funding for park development and open space preservation.



- **Undertake a long-range plan of the entire Township park system** with a specific focus on future facilities to be developed and existing facilities that could be considered for a different park use in order to ensure that the Township addresses changing preferences in recreation types and addresses recreation needs of all age ranges and abilities.
- **Continue to balance habitat protection and restoration with active recreation activities** and continue to work to eliminate invasive species in the Township's parks and open spaces.
- **Continue to incorporate green infrastructure in active recreation planning.** Lion Gate Park is an exemplary model for how to incorporate stormwater management in active recreation.



