

## VIII. Historic Preservation Plan

### Introduction

The Township of Bloomfield has a long and storied history that includes its original settlement by Native Americans and later settlement by European colonists and their successors. Historical records indicate that the Township has been continuously occupied and developed since the 17<sup>th</sup> century when the Dutch first arrived, followed by the English and successive waves of immigrants from other parts of Europe and throughout the world. During the intervening centuries, Bloomfield grew rapidly from a small outpost in the New World to a bustling industrial center before maturing into the stable and fully developed suburban community of today. The Township has consequently developed a rich history that reflects its unique character, diverse population, economic evolution and the relatively dense pattern of development that has produced an appealing suburban environment.

Bloomfield has a number of historic resources that are worth preserving because they provide a physical link to the past, contribute to the sense of community in the present and offer a degree of continuity as the Township advances into the future. More tangibly, historic preservation contributes to attractive streetscapes, stable neighborhoods, economic development and increased property values. The Historic Preservation Plan Element highlights the benefits of preserving the local heritage, identifies sites listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places and discusses the Township’s preservation efforts to date. Historic preservation is encouraged as a way of protecting sites that have played a significant role in Bloomfield’s development and as an element of the Township’s on-going revitalization, economic development and neighborhood preservation efforts.

### Historical Overview<sup>1</sup>

The Township of Bloomfield has a history that dates to the earliest period of colonial settlement in New Jersey and New York. The area now known as Bloomfield was part of Newark in 1666 when the Township was settled. The land was purchased from the Yantecaw, a sub-tribe of the Lenni-Lenape Indians and was first known as Wardessen ward. Early settlers such as the English came from Connecticut and the Dutch came from the Hudson River Valley. The Township separated from Newark in 1812 and was incorporated as the Township of Bloomfield, taking its name from the Presbyterian parish named for General Joseph Bloomfield in 1796. At the time Bloomfield, covered 20.52 square miles and included several villages that seceded during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The

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<sup>1</sup> History provided by Ina Campbell of the Historical Society of Bloomfield in a summary from the “Preface to the Code of the Township of Bloomfield.”

Town Green, which was used as early as 1775 for a military parade ground, has remained the physical and historic center of the Township.

The earliest roads followed Indian trails leading to Newark, Newtown and Cranetown (now Montclair). The main occupation was farming and the area was predominantly rural in character. Three (3) local waterways provided a reliable source of power for the first industries; sawmills and gristmills. They were followed by paper mills and tanneries. Sandstone was quarried locally and exported to New York City as early as 1765 for the construction of brown-stone houses.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the Township of Bloomfield experienced rapid growth and many significant changes. The Newark and Pompton Turnpike (now Bloomfield Avenue) started in 1806, fulfilling the need for better transportation and transforming the Township into a commercial center. By 1830 there were many factories, mills and other commercial enterprises. The Oakes Woolen Mill was founded in 1830 and remained in operation until the 1940's. At one time it was the largest industry in the Township. The Morris Canal connecting the Delaware River to the Hudson River was constructed through the Township and began operation in 1831. The Canal was the catalyst for further commercial, industrial and residential development. Other significant transportation improvements during this period were the first railroad to Newark in 1856, the construction of the first streetcar line in 1867 and the arrival of the New York/Montclair/Greenwood Lake Railroad in 1872. The opening of the Morris Canal and the construction of the railroads precipitated the rapid residential growth and industrial development of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that transformed Bloomfield from a small farming community into a bustling suburb of Newark.

The population of Bloomfield increased significantly in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century due to the arrival of new immigrants from Europe, especially Italy, Poland and Germany. The new immigrants found work in the growing industries that were located in the Township. Their arrival spurred further development that transformed Bloomfield into a prosperous community with many new houses, apartment buildings and hotels. A number of schools, churches and cultural organizations were founded during this period to serve the new residents of the Township.

Bloomfield's population expanded to 38,000 in 1930 with an estimated 68 industries employing 6,000 workers. These industries included Charms Candy Company, General Electric, Lehn and Fin, Schering, Scientific Glass and Westinghouse. During World War Two, Township industries rated among the upper 10 percent of those in the eastern region of the U.S. in production of war materials. Bloomfield's population increased to 41,623 in 1940, 49,313

in 1950 and peaked at 52,029 in 1970. The Township’s last remaining farms gave way to development during this period of post-war suburban development.

Today, Bloomfield is an established and stable suburban community that has lost much of its industry but not its vitality or character. The Township had a 1990 population of 45,061 and a 2000 population of 47,683. This represents a population gain of 2,622 or 5.8 percent and signals that Bloomfield remains an attractive community to live in. Although there are numerous commercial districts, the Township functions largely as a bedroom community where residents live while working elsewhere during the day. The public school system has grown from one small building in 1758 to the current well-regarded and comprehensive K-12 system of 11 schools. Historic and significant local institutions that link today’s Bloomfield to the past include Bloomfield College, Bloomfield High School, Oakeside-Bloomfield Cultural Center, Bloomfield Presbyterian Church and the Town Green.

**Benefits of Historic Preservation**

The Township of Bloomfield is one of the oldest communities in New Jersey with a rich history that dates to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Bloomfield is a microcosm of New Jersey and its development reflects many of the historical trends and events that have influenced the State over the past several centuries. These include the development of railroads, the industrial revolution, urbanization and immigration. As a result of these trends and events, the character of the Township and State has changed from rural and agrarian in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries to urban/suburban and industrial in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Additional changes are underway as the Township enters the post-industrial information era of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Bloomfield has numerous resources that document its rich history as well as the trends and events that have shaped its unique character and development. These include a diverse collection of historic structures, sites and districts, some of which are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. The Township’s historic resources are an important but underutilized community asset. In addition to providing a link with the past, they have the potential to contribute significantly to local culture, education, economic development and quality of life.

The aesthetic, cultural and social benefits of historic preservation are well documented. They include an enhanced visual environment, reinforcement of local character and creation of a sense of place. The economic benefits of preservation, on the other hand, are not well-understood and are often overlooked. These benefits are identified in a 1997 study, *The Economic Impacts of Historic Preservation*, that the Rutgers University Center for Urban Policy Research prepared for the New Jersey Historic Trust. This study is the most detailed analysis of

historic preservation in New Jersey ever prepared and it concludes that preservation activity has a broad range of economic benefits. These benefits include employment growth, income gains, property value increases and additional tax revenue. The major findings of the study, on a Statewide basis, are summarized as follows:

- In 1994, a total of \$123 million was spent on the rehabilitation of historic structures, properties and sites with more than two-thirds of all rehabilitation activity occurring in cities and older suburbs. Rehabilitation activity produced 4,607 new jobs, \$156 million in income, \$207 million in gross domestic product and \$65 million in tax revenue on an annual basis. New Jersey captured approximately half of these benefits.
- During the 1993-1995 period, an estimated 9.1 million visits to historic sites were made annually by tourists with day-trippers and overnight visitors spending \$432 million. Historic tourism generated approximately 15,530 jobs, \$383 million in income, \$559 million in gross domestic product and \$216 million in tax revenue on an annual basis. New Jersey captured approximately half of these benefits.
- In 1996, historic organizations and sites spent \$25 million for operations, staff, marketing and other expenditures. Historic organizations produced 1,438 jobs, \$33 million in income, \$43 million in gross domestic product and \$14 million in tax revenue. New Jersey captured approximately half of these benefits.
- Historic properties have a market value of \$6 billion and pay an annual \$120 million in property taxes. Designation as an historic site has been found to increase the market value of properties and associated tax revenue because of their unique design, often extensive rehabilitation and the premium that purchasers are willing to pay for such “one of a kind” properties.

Bloomfield has a realistic opportunity to capture some of the economic benefits of historic preservation because of its historic resources, accessibility and proximity to major population centers in the region. As a result, historic preservation is encouraged as a complement to the Bloomfield’s overall economic development program and as a means of differentiating it from competing municipalities that lack the historic resources found in the Township. Consideration should be given to promoting uses that capitalize on the Township’s rich history, such as bed-and-breakfast inns and adaptive reuse of obsolete industrial buildings for apartments, galleries and restaurants.

### Existing Historic Resources

The Township of Bloomfield has a number of historic resources that reflect its development from a small rural village to a mid-size suburban center since the 17<sup>th</sup> century. During this period, the Township evolved from a farming community into a residential, industrial and transportation center. Many of Bloomfield’s historic resources originated in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries during a period of rapid population growth and intensive residential, commercial and industrial development. They include a broad range of public facilities, churches, residences, districts and remnants of the industrial past.

Table VIII-1 Historic Resources, 2001 Township of Bloomfield, NJ		
Resource	Location	Date of Designation
<i>State Register/National Register</i>		
Bloomfield Green Historic District	Montgomery, Spruce, State, Liberty and Franklin Streets; Belleville Avenue	SR: 10/12/77 NR: 04/20/78
Bloomfield Railroad Station	Lackawanna Plaza between Washington Street and Glenwood Avenue	SR: 03/17/84 NR: 06/22/84
Morris Canal	N/A	SR: 11/26/73 NR: 10/01/74
Oakes Estate	240 Belleville Avenue	SR: 06/17/81 NR: 08/06/81
<i>SHPO Opinion</i>		
Bakelite Corporation Factory Buildings	230 Grove Street	SHPO Opinion: 12/04/95
Bloomfield High School	Broad Street and Belleville Avenue	SHPO Opinion: 12/14/77
The Collins House and Well	Marcal Paper Mill Site	SHPO Opinion: 03/04/82
Halcyon Park Historic District	Watsessing, Franklin, Berkeley and Florence Avenues	SHPO Opinion: 12/04/95
White Circle System Diner	176 Bloomfield Avenue	SHPO Opinion: 09/28/95
<i>Source: New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places; New Jersey State Historic Preservation Program; New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection; Division of Parks and Forestry</i>		

Bloomfield has 4 sites and districts that are listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, as shown in Table VIII-1. They are the Bloomfield Green Historic District in an area bounded by Montgomery, Spruce, State, Liberty and Franklin Streets and Belleville Avenue; the Bloomfield Train Station on Lackawanna Place; the Morris Canal corridor; and the Oakes Estate at 240 Belleville Avenue. The listing of these sites and districts on the State and National Registers of Historic Places provides them with protection from adverse impacts caused by public projects as well as eligibility for rehabilitation tax credits, grants and loans.

Bloomfield has 5 properties, sites and districts that are eligible for listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places, as shown in Table VIII-1. They are the Bakelite Corporation Factory Buildings at 230 Grove Street; Bloomfield High School at the intersection of Broad Street and Belleville Avenue; the Collins House and Well at the Marcal Paper Mill Site; the Halcyon Park Historic District in the area bounded by Watsessing, Franklin, Berkeley and Florence Avenues; and the White Circle System Diner at 176 Bloomfield Avenue. These sites have received a SHPO Opinion of Eligibility from the State Historic Preservation Office. This status provides essentially the same protections as official listing on the National Register of Historic Places, although it does not apply to the State Register of Historic Places. It also facilitates official listing on the State and National Registers of Historic Places once a nomination is made.

### **Certified Local Government Status**

The Township of Bloomfield, like every other municipality in New Jersey, may participate in the State's Certified Local Government Program. The Certified Local Government Program is intended to promote historic preservation on the municipal level with an emphasis on local control and oversight. In order to achieve this, the Program provides qualified municipalities with financial and technical assistance for historic preservation efforts.

Municipalities such as Bloomfield must meet certain requirements to be eligible for the State Certified Local Government Program. At a minimum, municipalities must adopt an historic preservation ordinance to identify and protect historic resources within the community. The ordinance must provide for the designation of historic sites and districts as well as the review of exterior renovations to ensure that the historic integrity of designated sites and districts is preserved. All reviews are performed by the local Historic Preservation Commission in consultation with municipal officials and the Planning Board as well as Zoning Board of Adjustment.

Municipalities that have been designated a Certified Local Government are eligible to apply for 60/40 matching grants for a broad range of historic preservation initiatives. These include the preparation of Historic Preservation Plans, Historic Structures Reports, Historic Resource Surveys, Design Guidelines and Historic Preservation educational outreach. At present, more than \$60,000 in grant funding is available from the State Historic Preservation Office each year. Technical assistance, such as ordinance review and staff training, is also available from the State Historic Preservation Office. Consideration should be given to applying for Certified Local Government status in order to further historic preservation efforts in Bloomfield. Necessary initial steps would involve the preparation of an historic resources survey and adoption of an historic preservation ordinance.

**Potential Recommendations**

1. Prepare an updated historic resources survey to identify historically significant properties, buildings, sites and districts in the Township. Evaluate eligible candidates for nomination to the State and National Registers of Historic Places.
2. Investigate the feasibility of applying for Certified Local Government status from the State Historic Preservation Office to expand local historic preservation efforts.
3. Consider permitting appropriate, limited uses to preserve existing historic structures in danger of deterioration or demolition. Such uses include bed-and-breakfast inns, galleries/studios, artist’s live/work space, professional offices and restaurants.