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2021 HISTORIC PRESERVATION PLAN ELEMENT

BOROUGH OF METUCHEN MASTER PLAN

Borough of Metuchen, Middlesex County, State of New Jersey

Prepared by LRK, Inc. and Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee

October 4, 2021 with Amendments Adopted by the Planning Board on October 21, 2021

**2021 Historic Preservation Plan Element
Borough of Metuchen Master Plan**

Borough of Metuchen
Middlesex County, State of New Jersey



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Cover Image: St. Luke's Episcopal Church, looking past the Horse Trough.

Photo by Nancy Zerbe

Adopted October 21, 2021



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1.0 Executive Summary

This *Historic Preservation Plan Element* was developed by LRK, Inc., the Borough of Metuchen’s professional planners, in close coordination with the Borough’s Historic Preservation Committee. The primary goals of this plan element are to reinforce the Borough’s appreciation for its rich history and strengthen its commitment to the preservation of the significant irreplaceable properties that represent that history. This plan element builds upon Metuchen’s past planning documents, many of which incorporate references to Metuchen’s rich heritage as well as the need to preserve the Borough’s residential neighborhoods with its many fine homes and tree-lined streets. However, the Borough has to date lacked a comprehensive plan element addressing how to preserve Metuchen’s historic resources.

This plan element was developed in accordance with the requirements of New Jersey’s Municipal Land Use Law and with guidance from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office and Sustainable Jersey. As mandated by the Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-2b.(10)), the plan element components:

- A. indicate the location and significance of historic sites and historic districts;
- B. identify the standards used to assess worthiness for historic site or district identification; and,
- C. analyze the impact of each component and element of the master plan on the preservation of historic sites and districts.

In addition to this Section 1 Executive Summary, the plan element includes an Introduction (Section 2) with background information as well as a statement of this plan element’s goals, followed by two overviews to provide historic context: Section 3 overview of Metuchen’s history and its architecture, and Section 4 summary of Metuchen’s past planning efforts. Section 5 provides information on relevant public policy material, including the relationship between historic preservation and other aspects of Metuchen’s planning as well as an overview of relevant laws, programs and policies at all levels of government. Section 6 addresses historic properties in Metuchen, including their significance, efforts to date to evaluate historic properties, past losses, and issues affecting historic properties’ integrity and existing conditions. Section 7 (Goals and Objectives) and Section 8 (Action Plan & Agenda) provide a plan for moving forward. Finally, Section 9 consists of important supportive documentation or guidance in the form of appendices.

The development of this plan element has resulted in a comprehensive historic and architectural context for Metuchen; a compilation of all past historic sites survey material; an understanding of relevant legislation, programs, and policies; and an action plan to guide Borough officials and the Historic Preservation Committee. The action plan is based on specific goals and objectives, including:

- Fostering public appreciation for Metuchen’s historic resources through additional investigation into Metuchen’s historic resources and dissemination of information on why their preservation is important;
- Developing and promoting measures to preserve Metuchen’s historic resources, e.g., grant programs, tax incentives, and technical assistance guidance; and,
- Encouraging new development that is compatible with – and minimizes damage to – Metuchen’s historic resources through a comprehensive historic preservation program that addresses the growing number of building demolitions and the integration of historic preservation into other Borough programs and planning processes.

This document serves as a critical planning tool for future preservation efforts in the Borough of Metuchen and its commitment to advancing the preservation of the Borough’s historic resources.

2.0 Introduction

Historic preservation is the practice of protecting and conserving significant buildings, structures, objects, historic districts, and planned open space. Comprehensive historic preservation programs at the federal, state, and local levels consist of the following three basic components: the identification and evaluation of potential historic properties using established eligibility criteria; the designation of properties that both meet the criteria and retain sufficient integrity; and the protection of designated historic properties through both regulation and incentive programs.

The federal historic preservation program is governed by the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended; the state program by the New Jersey Register of Historic Places Act of 1970; and municipal programs by the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (“MLUL”) and each municipality’s respective historic preservation ordinance. The MLUL encourages municipalities to both develop a historic preservation element as a component of their municipal master plans and to base any historic designations on sites identified in the municipality’s respective historic preservation element.

In Metuchen, the initiative to develop a historic preservation element originated with the Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee (“HPC”), an advisory group that the Borough formed in 2008 in response to public concern about the loss of Metuchen’s historic properties and character. The Borough charged the HPC with exploring steps to strengthen Metuchen’s commitment to historic preservation. After an initial study, the HPC submitted to the Mayor and Council in 2009 the following committee goals:

- Develop public education on the benefits of historic preservation;
- Honor Metuchen’s historic resources by increasing the number of structures in town listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places; and,
- Explore the development of a Metuchen Historic Preservation Ordinance to formally recognize and protect the town’s distinctive historic and architectural character.

To accomplish these goals, the HPC has undertaken numerous projects, almost all of which received funding from Middlesex County, including:

- Organized the “Celebrate Metuchen: Caring for Our Architectural Heritage” workshop;
- Organized for the public annual Historic Preservation Scavenger Hunts during the month of May, National Historic Preservation Month;
- Retained a consultant to assess the potential within the Borough for historic districts worthy of nomination to the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places;
- Based on the consultant’s recommendations, successfully nominated the Middlesex Avenue - Woodwild Park Historic District to the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places, increasing the total number of registered properties from two to 169;
- Successfully nominated the Mary Wilkins Freeman House to the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places, thus increasing the total number of registered properties to 170;
- Utilized material gained in the National Register process to develop and distribute 2,500 copies of a booklet on Metuchen’s history as the “Brainy Borough”;
- Following the National Register nomination, identified the highest priority as the need for a historic preservation plan element to be incorporated into Metuchen’s Master Plan. To effectuate this effort, the

HPC:

- Retained Hunter Research, Inc., Trenton-based historical resource consultants, to develop historic context material for this historic preservation plan element; and,
- Worked closely with Borough Planner, LRK, Inc., to develop this draft plan element.

Sustainable Jersey describes the benefits of a municipal historic preservation program and the importance of developing a historic preservation element:

The preservation of historic buildings has environmental, social, and economic benefits and has been proven to sustain and revitalize communities across the country. By creating a Historic Preservation Element (“HPE”), a municipality can guide land-use decisions and provide the basis for ordinances addressing historic preservation and land-use issues. This in turn will help municipalities control sustainable development and foster a higher quality of life for their residents. Communities that are committed to historic preservation will have more tools available to them by adopting a HPE, since the Municipal Master Plan creates the foundation for the local zoning and land use ordinances that govern development and redevelopment within a community.

3.0 Historical and Architectural Summary Context

3.1 What Is a Historic Context Statement?

Contextual evaluations are at the root of identifying historic properties under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which established the National Register of Historic Places; the New Jersey Register of Historic Places Act (N.J.A.C. 7:4); and the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law, the enabling legislation for historic preservation zoning (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-1 through 136). According to the National Register Bulletin: *How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation*:

The significance of a historic property can be judged and explained only when it is evaluated within its historic context. Historic contexts are those patterns or trends in history by which a specific occurrence, property, or site is understood and its meaning (and ultimately its significance) within history or prehistory is made clear. Historians, architectural historians, folklorists, archeologists, and anthropologists use different words to describe this phenomena [sic] such as trend, pattern, theme, or cultural affiliation, but ultimately the concept is the same (Staff of the National Register of Historic Places, 2002).

The purpose of this historic context therefore is to provide a tool that will be used by elected and appointed officials and citizens who may wish to understand Metuchen’s history, furthering a general appreciation of their community’s past and how that past affects its present and future. Specifically, the context provides a general framework for assessing the potential significance of buildings, structures, objects, and districts that could be officially recognized through federal, state, or local designation. The context statement will be relevant in making the sometimes-difficult decisions that separate historically significant properties from those that are not. Foremost, the information in this context should be used to inform and educate the general public about Metuchen’s significant heritage.

3.2 Narrative History

3.2.1. Colonial Metuchen, Circa 1688 to 1783

Metuchen, named for the Native-American chief “Matouchin,” was inhabited prior to European colonization by the Raritan tribe, a band of the Lenape people living around the Raritan bay area. Very little is specifically known about the Raritan tribe in Metuchen, but archaeological resources have been discovered in the Borough. While the past four centuries of development have likely disturbed or destroyed prehistoric sites that might have once been located within the bounds of Metuchen, it is not an unreasonable assumption that some archaeological evidence remains in situ, likely tucked away under minimally developed pockets of land (Pagoulatos and Eshelman 1993).

Located in an upland topography along the divide between the Raritan and Rahway river watersheds and in close proximity to the important colonial port of Perth Amboy, Metuchen was at the periphery of settlement until about 1700. The first official uses of the name “Metuchen” are references in 1689 and in 1701 to an over-seer of roads for a “Metuchen district.”

Metuchen was generally described as being located between Bonhamtown and Oak Tree, with the Bonhamtown-Oak Tree Road (approximate route of Central Avenue/Main Street/Plainfield Road), Woodbridge-Metuchen roads (Woodbridge Avenue), and the Piscataway Road (Durham Avenue) serving as the district’s principal colonial roads. Where these three roads intersected formed the nucleus for a crossroads community.

Between 1717 and 1730, a Presbyterian meeting house was constructed near the intersection of Main Street and Woodbridge Avenue. This original colonial meeting house no longer exists, but the colonial Presbyterian cemetery is extant on the west side of Main Street opposite the Woodbridge Avenue intersection. During the latter part of the eighteenth century, several businesses, including a tavern, a general store, a cooper’s shop, and a blacksmith’s shop,

could be found at the Metuchen crossroads, serving the local farm families. In addition, a 1799 map shows a small cluster of 10 buildings centered around the present-day intersection of Main Street and Durham Avenue.



Photograph 1. Old Colonial Cemetery

New Jersey has been called the “Crossroads of the American Revolution,” and Metuchen, as a literal crossroads, was in the midst of troop movements and raids. In early 1777, British troops occupied key New Jersey towns, including nearby Bonhamtown in Edison (then Woodbridge) Township, and systematically dispatched troops to remove provisions and livestock from the region’s farms and villages. The New Jersey militia, sometimes with Continental Army support, harassed the raiding British. Fighting occurred in or near Metuchen during the skirmish at Drake’s Farm (February 1, 1777) and the Battle of Punk Hill (March 8, 1777). Later that year, the Battle of Short Hills (June 26, 1777), involving some 2,500 American troops and 11,500 British troops, began in the center of Metuchen and continued as a running skirmish as the Americans retreated, leading the British north through Edison Township and the Short Hills area.

3.2.2. The Turnpike and Railroad Come to Metuchen: The Origins of the Northeast Corridor, Circa 1790 to 1860

Metuchen was in the path of one of the most important economic and technological trends of the first half of the nineteenth century. This trend, sometimes referred to as “the transportation revolution,” involved a massive investment in turnpikes, canals, and railroads. The first of these to affect Metuchen was the Middlesex and Essex Turnpike (now Middlesex Avenue), established in 1806 as a link in a direct overland turnpike between Trenton and Newark. This turnpike was soon followed by the Perth Amboy Turnpike (now Amboy Avenue), established in 1808 between Perth Amboy and Piscataway. In 1834, geographer Thomas F. Gordon described “Matouchin” as a place in Woodbridge Township “at the intersection of the turnpike roads leading, one from New Brunswick to Elizabethtown, and the other from Perth Amboy towards Bound Brook...contain[ing] a Presbyterian church, store, 2 taverns, and 10 or 12 dwellings, surrounded by a fertile country of red shale” (Gordon 1834, 174).

The Middlesex and Essex Turnpike, although not having charged tolls for over 120 years, lives on as Middlesex

Avenue / New Jersey State Route 27. This highway was improved in the early twentieth century for automobile travel by the New Jersey State Highway Department. From 1913 to 1929, it was famously part of the Lincoln Highway, forming a link in the nation's first transcontinental automobile route. The Lincoln Highway was also the principal automobile route between New York City and Philadelphia until the completion of U.S. Route 1 in 1929, which bypassed Metuchen just to the southeast.

The second transportation revolution in Metuchen was the railroad. New Jersey's first commercial railroad was the Camden and Amboy Railroad ("C&ARR"), established in 1830, with its route between Bordentown and South Amboy. That same year, the state legislature chartered the New Jersey Railroad to run from Jersey City to New Brunswick by way of Newark, Elizabeth, and Rahway, while at the same time the C&ARR opened a new branch from Trenton to New Brunswick, completing a direct railroad connection across the state along the straightest and most direct route. The New Jersey Railroad was completed in 1838-1839, running nearly parallel to the Middlesex and Essex Turnpike as it passed through Metuchen in a southwest-to-northeast orientation.



Photograph 2. Main Street Station. Circa 1940. (Source: Metuchen-Edison Historical Society)

The New Jersey Railroad constructed a station at Lake Avenue in 1841, which served as the primary station until its replacement in 1888 by the current station on Main Street. Another stop, the Robinvale Station, named for another prominent landowner, the Robins family, was located at the end of Dark Lane, now Grove Avenue. These stations served as Metuchen's portals to the region's growing cities, and slowly but surely Metuchen's identity was drawn into the corridor of communities and economies linked together by the railroad. In 1867, the New Jersey Railroad was leased to the Pennsylvania Railroad ("PRR"), which began operating the Philadelphia to New York City route, now known as the Northeast Corridor.

Two later nineteenth-century railroads passed through Metuchen, but their impacts were less dramatic than that of the New Jersey Railroad/PRR corridor. The Lehigh Valley Railroad ("LVRR") established a line in 1872-1875, in a northwest-to-southeast direction across the Borough. This line's purpose was principally to deliver coal from northeast Pennsylvania to a tidewater coal terminal in Perth Amboy. The LVRR operated a small passenger station and freight depot at the corner of Lake Avenue and Amboy Avenue, and passenger service was offered until the 1930s. The Reading Railroad similarly built a coal-hauling line in an east-to-west direction across the northern part of the Borough in 1892, part of its route to deliver coal from Pennsylvania to a tidewater coal terminal at Port Reading on the Arthur Kill. The line had no stops in Metuchen (Tomkins 2012).

These rail lines had a major impact on Metuchen's development. At the end of the nineteenth century, there were 26 passenger trains to New York daily: 18 on the Pennsylvania Railroad and 8 on the Lehigh Valley Railroad, with almost one-quarter of Metuchen's residents commuting (Spies, 2000, 8). Passenger service on the LVRR ended in the 1930s; service on the Northeast Corridor continues to be important to Metuchen and its residents.

3.2.3. From Crossroads to Town, Circa 1870 to 1920

By the mid-nineteenth century, Metuchen was comprised of a town center of closely spaced homes interspersed with businesses along Main Street; clustered development around the train stations located on Main, Lake, and Grove avenues; and some outlying picturesque “country homes” with circular drives and names such as “Prospect Hill” or “Wood Wild.” Between 1870 and 1920, enterprising citizens, businessmen, and developers took full advantage of the opportunities afforded them. The village experienced unprecedented population growth and economic development as well as expansion into a full-fledged independent Borough. In 1870, Raritan Township, encompassing present-day Metuchen Borough and Edison Township, separated from Piscataway and Woodbridge townships, breaking the municipal ties that had existed since the early colonial period. In 1900, Metuchen, with a population of approximately 1,500 people, became its own Borough, separating from Raritan and Woodbridge townships.



Photograph 3. Woodbridge Avenue

“Why Metuchen is a Desirable Home,” published circa 1896, advertised Metuchen as a commuter town. Promoting the convenience of the railroads, the pamphlet also described the “five excellent macadamized routes” available for carriages traveling to and from the village center. Metuchen was further described as “a village of homes for business men [sic] in New York, Jersey City and Newark, and for retired and professional men.” Personal testimonies cited the morality and affluence of Metuchen’s residents as primary reasons for their choosing to live there (Rothacker & Schweizer 1898). In 1890, a newspaper article noted that Metuchen did not have any large manufacturers or industry, making it desirable for new homeowners wishing to escape the noises, smells, and crowds of cities (NY World 1890). The picture drawn by the village’s boosters and developers reflected the fact that Metuchen was evolving from a rural village surrounded by farms to a small town surrounded by larger homes and estates. In addition to the new commuters, Metuchen’s growing population consisted of people who worked at trades, small businesses, and domestic service. Consequently, Metuchen also began to look like a more populous and diverse place.

Typical of most American communities, Metuchen's churches were a bedrock of social organization. Many African Americans moved into homes near Metuchen's two primarily African-American churches (both of which have been demolished): the 1891 Bethel African Methodist Church located near the corner of Central Avenue and Durham Avenue (Reuter 2000), and the Second Baptist Church at the corner of New and Pearl streets. The Presbyterians built a new church on Woodbridge Avenue in 1836 (Grimstead 1941); the Dutch Reformed a new church at the corner of Le Grand Avenue (now Amboy Avenue) and Graham Place in 1857; the Centenary Methodist Episcopalians a new church at the corner of Main Street and Middlesex Avenue in 1866; and the Episcopalians a new church (St. Luke's) at Middlesex Avenue and Oak Avenue in 1869. The First Baptist Church was established in 1908 at Carlton Road and Clinton Place. St. Francis Roman Catholic Church, first constructed as a wood-frame church dedicated to St. Joseph in 1871, was destroyed by fire in 1903.

Metuchen's Main Street became ever more commercial during this period, taking on the character that most people associate with small-town main streets. In 1876, a jail, a bank, and the Metuchen Inn were located along the east side of Main Street north of the Pennsylvania Railroad. On the west side of Main Street there was a structure on almost every available lot between Pennsylvania Avenue and the Middlesex Turnpike. Main Street's commercial buildings, with their first-floor storefronts and upper level living spaces, housed grocers, cobblers, pharmacists, plumbers, butchers, bakers, barbers, and laundrists. There were also hardware and paint stores, saloons, a notions store, cigar shop, and a pool hall, along with civic buildings including a fire house and water company office.

The residential area near Woodwild Park, in the northeast section of Metuchen, emerged during this period as an up-and-coming neighborhood, although its development stretched out over many decades from the 1850s to the 1920s. Charles Corbin, who subdivided the land, also donated two-and-a-half acres as park land, known as "Wood Wild Park" (Zerbe, Reuter and Newman 2017).

In the late nineteenth century, Metuchen garnered a reputation as a welcoming place for poets, authors, artists, and other intellectuals; by the early twentieth century it began to be referred to as "The Brainy Borough." Notable residents included author Mary Wilkins Freeman; Harper's Editor Henry Mills Alden; ceramic artist Charles Volkmar; engineer Gustav Lindenthal; and naval architect and shipbuilder Lewis Nixon (Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee 2015).



Photograph 4. Mary Wilkins Freeman House

As Metuchen grew, so did the need for educational, governmental, and social institutions. In 1901, the Borough Improvement League organized to address community issues and acquired and preserved the ca. 1807 one-room Old Franklin Schoolhouse (Zerbe, Reuter and Newman 2017). Franklin High School, which has been subsequently demolished, was constructed in 1909 (League of Women Voters circa 1950), and the Edgar Memorial School, located along Brunswick Avenue, was constructed and dedicated in 1918 to serve students living in the southern portion of the Borough. In 1911, Metuchen acquired a “regulated police department” (Grimstead 1941, 46).



Photograph 5. Old Franklin Schoolhouse

3.2.4. Filling the Borough, Circa 1920 to 1980

During the 1920s, Metuchen’s population increased dramatically from roughly 3,330 to 5,700 people, mostly as a result of an influx of new residents. Metuchen’s social composition by the end of World War I in 1919 primarily consisted of residents born in New Jersey, along with some people relocating from New York and other surrounding states. During the 1920s, this began to change rapidly, particularly with the arrival of immigrants from European countries, including Austria, England, Hungary, Ireland, and Italy. The New Hope Baptist Church and the Christadelphian Church were organized in 1923, adding to the already religiously diverse Borough.

Metuchen continued to develop as a primarily residential community, with the railroads attracting commuters. In addition, Metuchen had a small but vibrant industrial economy located along the railroad corridors. With the increased popularity of automobiles in the 1920s, car dealerships and service stations appeared throughout the business center of Metuchen. During this time, the Borough began improving streets, sidewalks, and sewer lines; however, many of the roads reaching out to the edges of the Borough remained unpaved into the middle of the twentieth century.

Residential expansion during the 1920s included extensive residential development throughout the Borough, the development of the Radio District located in the northern area of the Borough (Cheslow 1996; McTeague 2010), and the construction of two apartment complexes, Redfield Village and Jefferson Park.

During the 1920s, Metuchen’s educational, governmental, and social institutions continued to expand. In 1922, an addition was built on the 1909 Franklin High School, League of Women Voters circa 1950), and the YMCA on High Street was dedicated. Borough Hall was constructed in 1924 at the intersection of Main YMCA Street and Middlesex Avenue and served as the town hall of Metuchen until its demolition in 2002. In 1926, two new facilities were constructed: Washington School (now known as Moss School) at the end of Simpson Place, and the Forum Theater on Main Street. Two years later, the St. Francis parochial school opened to offer education to the children of Catholic

families, many of recent immigrant descent.



Photograph 6. YMCA on High Street



Following the Great Depression that started in late 1929, Metuchen's population growth slowed, although its growth rate was higher than state and national averages. Nonetheless, the 1930s were a time of economic austerity with little new residential construction. Public construction during the 1930s, some of which was funded by New Deal-era programs, included an expansion and upgrade of the sewer system; two additions to the Franklin School; and construction of the public library (League of Women Voters 1950) and a new Metuchen post office.

Following the war, as the American economy recovered and then went into an unprecedented period of expansion, Metuchen experienced a dramatic increase in population that continued into the 1950s. Middlesex County during this time quickly industrialized, and Metuchen reaped the benefits and continued to be “a comfortable, upper middle-class community” (Grimstead 1941, 4). The postwar years saw residential development push toward the Borough's borders, resulting in a growing recognition that Metuchen real estate was nearing the limits of traditional single-family housing. By the end of the 1950s, most neighborhoods had their own schools to accommodate a growing population of school-age children, the leading edge of America's “baby boom.”

Metuchen's municipal officials addressed growth through a variety of policy tools, but the most powerful tool at their disposal was zoning. A planning board was established in Metuchen in 1949 to regulate and bring some order to growth by anticipating and guiding development. A Master Plan Report prepared in 1956 by I. Candeub and Associates of Metuchen identified nine neighborhoods (see Figure 1), which are useful to view from a historic preservation perspective. Neighborhood 1 has some older homes dating from the 18th to the early 20th centuries; the older homes in Neighborhoods 2 and 8 form the core of the Middlesex Avenue - Woodwild Park Historic District; Neighborhood 3 contains the Radio District; Neighborhood 4 has older homes associated with the early development along Durham Avenue; Neighborhood 5 contains “some of the older estates” along Lake Avenue, Graham Avenue; High Street, Graham Avenue, and Rose Street, twentieth century bungalows and Jefferson Park; the early

intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Main Street, and two important civic buildings, the YMCA and Edgar School; Neighborhood 6 consists of the southeast portion of Metuchen with older homes along South Main Street and its cross streets; Neighborhood 7, which was described as a “natural neighborhood,” includes many early to mid-twentieth century houses, Moss School (originally Washington Elementary School), and Redfield Village Apartments; and Neighborhood 9 consists of the mid-twentieth century Beacon Hill area.

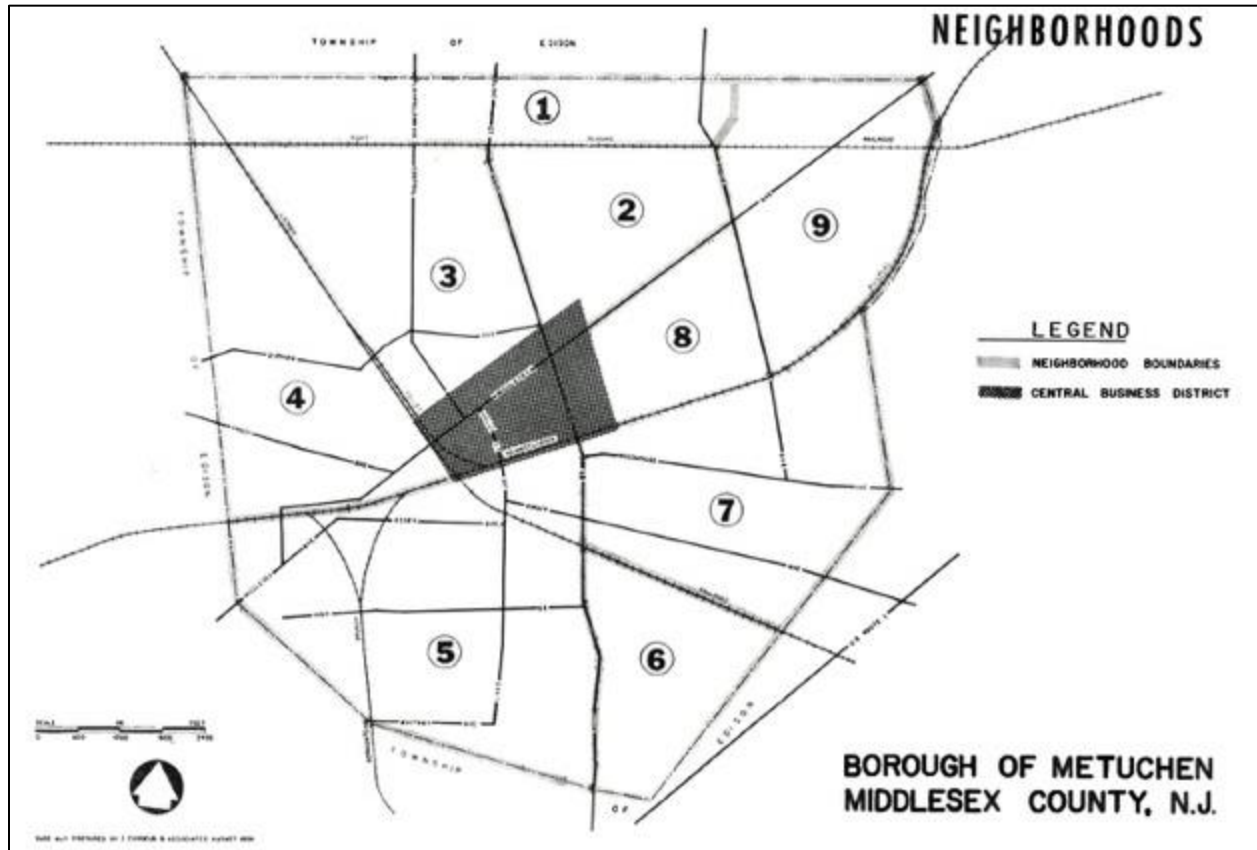


Figure 1. I. Candeub and Associates. Neighborhoods. 1956

town’s commercial zones. Labeled as the “Central Business District” in the Master Plan of 1956, Main Street in the 1950s housed appliance stores, several service stations, department stores, bakeries, cleaners, barbers and beauty shops, banks, confectionaries, markets, jewelers, and pharmacies. Maintaining its role as the commercial center of Metuchen, Main Street continued to flourish into the 1960s. The shops along the street consisted of small, family-owned businesses mixed with other name-brand businesses and franchises. Car dealerships, pharmacies, hardware stores, grocers, banks, and other storefronts supplied Metuchen residents with such necessities. It was not until the 1970s that nearby malls in other communities began to draw business away from the downtown.

After the original Dutch Reformed Church burned down, a new church, designed by Metuchen architect Clement Fairweather, was constructed in 1949 at the intersection of High Street and Lake Avenue. In 1963, the current church of St. Francis was built at the corner of Main Street and Elm Avenue and was dedicated as the Cathedral of St. Francis in 1981.



Photograph 8. Metuchen Reformed Church

New residential development during the 1960s and 1970s concentrated on ever-smaller parcels of property, with properties of a couple of acres or more being subdivided, and less desirable locations, particularly along the railroad corridors, being developed, often with multi-family affordable housing. The Metuchen Municipal Pool was completed in 1967, and an addition to the library was constructed in 1972. Metuchen had once been separated from neighboring towns by farms and open space, but by 1970 neighborhoods in Metuchen adjoined those beyond its boundaries with Edison in all directions.

By the beginning of the 1970s, when Metuchen reached its historically high population of 16,031, Metuchen had very little land remaining for development within its boundaries. In a 1972 Metuchen Planning Board annual report, the number of requests for subdivisions of land and site plans was minimal; roughly 15 requests were approved for minor subdivisions, four for major subdivisions, and 13 for site plans. During the 1970s, 137 new housing units were constructed throughout Metuchen, 122 of them built for senior citizens (Frost Associates 1983). By the end of the 1970s, Metuchen had filled entirely to its boundaries.

3.3 Metuchen’s Architecture: From Farmhouse to Apartment House

3.3.1. Introduction

Metuchen’s architecture covers more than 270 years of development, with a mix of many architectural styles, both “high-style” and more vernacular in form. The following summary overview of Metuchen’s predominant architectural styles is organized by five approximate time periods (1740-1850; 1850-1890s; 1900-1940s; late 1940s -1960s; 1970s to present). To the extent possible, neighborhoods with clusters of a particular style are listed in the overview, although many of the styles are found throughout the Borough.

An overriding characteristic of Metuchen’s architecture is that it temporally and spatially relates to a visible pattern

of outward growth from a center point at Main Street between Woodbridge and Middlesex avenues. While there are few extant structures from Metuchen's earliest periods of development, Metuchen retains many of its older nineteenth- and early twentieth-century structures despite demolition and infill. A map created in 1956 illustrates the infilling and construction of the 1950s. Construction since the 1970s tends to have been related to demolition and replacement, and it is this development of the past 50 years that sometimes seems architecturally out of scale or texture with the older properties and neighborhoods.

Metuchen's street plan, which is its dominant town planning characteristic, consists of three major elements, which are evident in the siting of Metuchen's historic resources. First are the arterial roads, often representing the routes of old colonial roads or turnpikes; second are the street grids of residential development of the 1870s to the 1920s, which related to Metuchen's train stations; and third are curvilinear suburban-style streets, mostly of the 1950s and later. Today, most streets, no matter their age, are lined with mature trees; have sidewalks that are a mix of bluestone, slate, and concrete; and have traditional wood or concrete post street signs. Residential construction, primarily from the 1930s and onward, tends to be located on smaller lots, while earlier residential development usually features dwellings set further from the street on larger lots.

3.3.2. Oldest Extant Architecture, Circa 1740 to 1850

Around a dozen eighteenth-century dwellings throughout the Borough remain to reflect Metuchen's early beginnings. Notable among them is the Ayers-Allen House at 16 Durham Avenue, Metuchen's oldest documented building, constructed circa 1740 with twentieth-century additions. The building is vernacular in style and reflects the early settlement architecture that would have been found in Metuchen in the eighteenth century. The Ross House (35 Hofer Court), another mid- to late-eighteenth-century dwelling, is located at the end of a cul-de-sac, although the more-recent construction tends to make it difficult to imagine its original rural context.

The remaining early historic resources are the Old Colonial Cemetery of Metuchen and the Voorhees House at 343 Main Street (Greek Revival constructed circa 1830) at the intersection of Woodbridge Avenue and Main Street. Adjacent to the Presbyterian Church and cemetery on Woodbridge Avenue is the congregation's parsonage, which was constructed in 1780. The Ellis Daniels House at 28 Homer Place is believed to have been constructed during the eighteenth century and received Greek Revival additions during the first half of the nineteenth century. The First Presbyterian Church (Greek Revival constructed in 1836) and its cemetery are located not far from the intersection of Main Street along Woodbridge Avenue. The Old Franklin School (Greek Revival), located on Middlesex Avenue, and constructed circa 1807 with mid-nineteenth-century modifications, is included in the Middlesex Avenue – Woodwild Park Historic District. The popularity of Greek Revival-style architecture grew out of the eighteenth-century interest in classical buildings and spread across the United States during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Houses of this style commonly date between 1825 and 1860. An 1860s example of this style is the Governor Silzer's House at 79 Graham Avenue, which was constructed in 1867.



Photograph 9. Ayers-Allen House at 16 Durham Avenue



Photograph 10: Ross House at 35 Hofer Court



Photograph 11. Ellis Daniels House at 28 Homer Place



Photograph 12. Governor Silzer's House at 79 Graham Avenue

3.3.3. The Victorians, Circa 1850 to 1890s

By the mid-nineteenth century, the more formal classical styles of the late 18th and early 19th centuries gave way to asymmetric “Victorian” styles. The most common styles from this period are listed below with the dates of their greatest popularity, their common features, and a representative Metuchen example:

- Gothic Revival (1840–1880); grew out of English influence; represented by steeply pitched roofs with cross gables and decorated bargeboard trim along the eaves. Metuchen examples include 52 Elm Avenue (see Photograph 13) and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church at 17 Oak Avenue.
- Italianate style (1850–1880); typically exhibited a low-pitched roof; wide overhanging eaves with decorative brackets; arched openings; decorative crowns above windows; sometimes arranged in an L-plan. Metuchen examples include 36 Clive Street (see Photograph 14), 48 Graham Avenue (see Photograph 15), and 207 Lake Avenue.
- Second Empire (1860-1880); imitated the latest French styles of architecture; defined by a mansard roof form. Metuchen examples include 44 Home Street (see Photograph 16), 8 and 14 Homer Street, and 40 Williams Street.
- Queen Anne (1880-1900); identified by its asymmetrical plan, varied rooflines, and use of patterned wood ornamentation that is sometimes referred to as “gingerbread.” Metuchen examples include 259 Main Street (see Photograph 17), and 61 Hillside Avenue.
- Shingle (1880-1900); asymmetrical façade with steeply pitched roof line; shingles on exterior elevations; intersecting cross gables; and porches. Metuchen examples include 56 Oak Avenue (see Photograph 18).
- Colonial Revival (1880-1940); draws on its Georgian and Federal predecessors and has developed through several phases. Metuchen examples include 443 Middlesex Avenue (see next section for additional examples).

Areas with concentrations of these styles include:

- Areas surrounding the crossroads near the intersections of Main Street with Amboy, Woodbridge, Middlesex, and Durham Avenues;
- Graham Avenue area including along Lake Avenue, Spring Street, Franklyn Place, and Rose Street; and,
- Middlesex Avenue – Woodwild Park Historic District.



Photograph 13. Example of Gothic Revival style



Photograph 14. Example of Italianate style



Photograph 15. Example of Italianate L-Plan style



Photograph 16. Example of Second Empire style



Photograph 17. Example of Queen Anne style



Photograph 18. Example of Shingle style

3.3.4. Suburban Architecture of the 1900s to 1940s

In the early twentieth century, the more exuberant styles from the Victorian period gave way to more simplified styles, including the following styles listed below with the dates of their greatest popularity, their common features, and a representative Metuchen example(s):

- Colonial Revival (1900-1940); continuation of a more formal symmetrical style that began in the late nineteenth century; Classical door surround; gable, hipped, or Dutch Gambrel roof. Metuchen examples include 64 and 72 Hillside Avenue (see Photograph 19) and 368 Middlesex Avenue (see Photograph 20).
- American Foursquare (1900-1930); influenced by the Prairie Style; hipped roof; dormers; front porch. Metuchen examples include 59, 63, and 67 Carson Avenue (see Photograph 21) and 35 Franklyn Place (see Photograph 22).
- Bungalows (1900-1930); originated in the Midwest and grew with the popularity of the Craftsman style during the early twentieth century, small, single- to one-and-a-half-story house; focus on horizontal lines; overhanging eaves; porches. Metuchen examples include 5 and 7 Lawrence Street (see Photograph 23) and 115, 117, and 119 Spring Street (see Photograph 24).
- Tudor Revival (1890-1940); featured steeply pitched roofs; multiple cross gables; decorative half-timbering; round arched doors; groups of narrow windows with multi-pane glazing. Metuchen examples include 83 Linden Avenue (see Photograph 25) and 143 Lake Avenue (see Photograph 26).
- Neoclassical Revival (1895-1950); symmetrical façade; Classical features; full-height columns. Metuchen example includes the National Bank Building at 406 Main Street (see Photograph 27).

The dwellings of these styles and forms are found throughout the Borough, but with high concentrations along Amboy Avenue, Woodbridge Avenue, Lake Avenue, Rose Street, Grove Avenue, and their peripheral streets, as well as within the Middlesex Avenue – Woodwild Park Historic District. In addition, as the Borough expanded outward, many early twentieth century homes were built along side streets off of Main Street in the southern part of Metuchen.

In the early twentieth century, there was an increased use of masonry on the exterior of homes, including brick on some Colonial Revival and Tudor Revival homes as well as on bungalows clustered along Cliffwood Place and Spring and High streets. Stucco was also increasingly used, especially on bungalows and foursquares.

The twentieth century also saw the introduction of mail order houses, with the Sears, Roebuck and Company offering over 400 different models of ready-to-assemble houses. There are numerous houses in Metuchen, such as the bungalow at 230 Woodbridge Avenue, that appear to have been mail order houses, although more research would be needed to determine exactly how many examples there are in the Borough.



Photograph 19. Examples of Colonial Revival style



Photograph 20. Example of Dutch Colonial Revival style





Photograph 22. Example of American Foursquare style



Photograph 23. Examples of Bungalow style



Photograph 24. Examples of Bungalow style



Photograph 25. Example of Tudor Revival style



Photograph 26. Example of Tudor Revival style



Photograph 27. Example of Neoclassical Revival style

By the 1920s, particularly due to the high price of real estate in New York City, apartment-style living in the United States was seen as an attractive alternative. During the 1920s, Metuchen witnessed its first apartment-style developments; Jefferson Park apartments and condominiums, which are Tudor Revival in style; and Redfield Village apartments, which are Colonial Revival in style. Both were completed by 1929.

Metuchen's commercial area is filled with buildings that demonstrate a variety of architectural phases in Metuchen's history. Older commercial buildings, such as the National Bank Building, are surrounded by one- to four-story commercial buildings that illustrate the change in storefront architectural styles from the late Renaissance Revival of the 1900s to 1910s to the Art Moderne of the 1920s to 1940s.

3.3.5. Suburban Residential Architecture of the Late 1940s to 1960s

The post-World War II period of circa 1945 to 1970 marked a transition in architectural development for Metuchen. During this time, Metuchen drew upon developer-built, suburban street plans and architecture with neighborhoods of curvilinear residential streets. Construction both filled in where development was less dense and created new larger neighborhoods on the edges of the Borough. Prevalent house styles and forms included: Cape Cod (1935-1950), ranch houses (1935-1975), and split-levels (1955-1975) (see Photographs 28-30). In addition, Metuchen has several noteworthy examples of Mid-century Modern architecture (1940-1980), including 247 Christol Street (see Photograph 31), 61 Spring Street designed by prominent New York architect Edward Larabee Barnes (see Photograph 32), and 18 Crest Drive designed by world-renowned architect Edgar Tafel.

3.3.6. Suburban Architecture of the 1970s to Present

The highest concentrations of development of the past half century are located along the Borough's borders and intrude into the center of town along the railroad corridor and the southwestern end of Middlesex Avenue. Commercial architectural styles of this period can be difficult to characterize, perhaps because historical perspective has yet to be achieved, but they are often described as Contemporary or Post-Modern. They rely on steel- or concrete-frame construction with brick, concrete panel, or glass curtain walls, and thus often have a grid-like façade, very often with Post-Modern interpretations of the Colonial Revival style.

This period includes residential infill of single-family homes, townhouses and garden apartments. House styles continued to be ranch houses and split levels, but Victorian Revival and Colonial Revival styles grew in popularity from the late 1980s to the present.

This post-1970s period of development also incorporates the industrial areas in the western parts of Metuchen, especially those closest to the Peter J. Barnes III Wildlife Preserve and extending along the railroad corridor to Central Avenue. Another industrial area developed along Middlesex Avenue closer to I-287. Architecturally, these industrial buildings often reflect the single-story "big box" plan behind modern industrial and commercial plant layout, where the idea is to maximize flexible indoor space. Outwardly, the buildings usually have relatively blank, nearly windowless brick or concrete-block walls.



Photograph 28. Example of Cape Cod style



Photograph 29. Example of Ranch style

3.3.7. Concluding Remarks

The preservation of the built environment is vital to demonstrating visual change over time with-in a community and is often associated with the preservation of heritage and culture (Teutonico and Matero 2001, vii). On the whole, Metuchen's highly varied architecture fits its long history of growth and development, from its founders' New England roots to the diverse people attracted over time to Metuchen for a variety of geographic, economic, social and cultural reasons and opportunities. The remaining structures of the colonial and early federal periods are the visual foundation for Metuchen's roots as a small rural crossroads. The Borough's large presence of nineteenth-century Victorian resources points to the town's exponential growth as a result of the industrial and transportation revolutions. Metuchen's twentieth- and twenty-first-century structures demonstrate the continued development and filling of the Borough as it entered the automobile age, as well as an increasingly economically and culturally diverse population. By designating areas of heritage or cultural importance, certain aspects of a history are selected for preservation and remembrance. In Metuchen, the designation of the Middlesex Avenue - Woodwild Park Historic District demonstrates an effort to retain the character of a neighborhood associated with Metuchen's Victorian era. Overall, Metuchen's surviving architectural and historical resources work together to tell a complete history of its adaptation and development through time.

4.0 History of Planning and Historic Preservation in Metuchen

Early efforts to improve Metuchen’s quality of life relied heavily on the private sector. In 1901, only a year after the Borough was incorporated, a group of concerned citizens met in Robins Hall on Main Street to discuss the formation of a Village Improvement Society, an organization that is still in existence today as the Metuchen Borough Improvement League (“BIL”). In its early years, this group focused not just on the problems brought on by progress, but other ills that beset a town as well, such as the poor, infirm, mosquitoes, poison ivy, etc. During Metuchen’s early years, the BIL was instrumental in the following: establishing street signs, setting up garbage collection, forming a Mothers Club (forerunner of the P.T.A.), enlarging the library, numbering Borough houses in conjunction with the Middlesex Water Company, and forming a shade tree commission.

By the mid-twentieth century, concerns over Metuchen’s growth and development had led to increased municipal planning efforts. A planning board was established in 1949 and Master Plans were developed in 1959 and 1967. Neither of these early plans specifically mentioned historic sites. Instead, they discussed more general aspects such as maintaining Metuchen’s residential character, particularly “its many fine homes, tree lined streets and diversified civic interests.” Many of the goals in these plans involved “preservation,” which was defined in general terms, e.g., preservation and improvement of the community’s appearance, and preservation of residential use within the existing neighborhoods.

The Borough’s first master plan element that specifically mentioned historic sites was its 1983 Land Use Plan Element. This document incorporated the 37 historic resources that had been identified in the Metuchen Environmental Commission’s 1976 National Resources Inventory.

Despite the inclusion of historic sites in the 1983 plan element, the focus of the plan was similar to that of the earlier plans, emphasizing the preservation of neighborhoods and the business district rather than the preservation of individual structures. The plan element stated, for example, that “in a developed municipality such as Metuchen, the principal goal is one of preservation: preservation of the Borough’s essentially residential character, of the integrity of its neighborhoods, of the viability of its central business district, of levels of municipal services, of fiscal stability and, ultimately, of its desirability of a community in which to live.”

In 1989, the Borough, with assistance from a grant from the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, evaluated the possibility of adopting a historic preservation ordinance. At that time, a draft “Historic Preservation Plan” was drafted, but no official action was taken to adopt the plan or an ordinance.

By the time of master plan reexaminations in 1988 and 1994, historic sites were no longer specifically mentioned, although there continued to be general references to preserving Metuchen’s character and integrity of its neighborhoods. The 1999 Housing Plan Element & Fair Share Plan also did not specifically mention historic sites, despite the fact that many of the 37 historic sites mentioned in the 1976 inventory were houses and that—as the element acknowledges—a great deal of Metuchen’s housing stock was by that time more than 50 years old. Instead, the element discusses “preserving the character and quality of each established neighborhood.” This plan element did, however, add goals of ensuring that new infill housing is compatible with the character of a neighborhood and that demolition of structurally sound dwellings is discouraged, but without any specific reference to historic structures, either individually or as part of historic districts.

In conjunction with the 2006 Master Plan Reexamination, amendments to the Land Development Ordinance were adopted to address the design of new housing as well as additions to existing single-family homes, but without specifically relating these guidelines to historic structures.

In 2008, in recognition that Metuchen was suffering from loss of its historic structures, primarily due to development pressures, the Borough formed the Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee (“HPC”), which was charged with

advising the Mayor and Council on steps to strengthen Metuchen’s commitment to historic preservation. The Committee established the following goals:

1. Develop public education on the benefits of historic preservation;
2. Honor Metuchen’s historic resources by increasing the number of structures in town listed on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places; and,
3. Explore the development of a Metuchen Historic Preservation Ordinance to formally recognize and protect the town’s distinctive historic and architectural character.

Using grants from the Middlesex County Office of Arts and History, the HPC has worked on these goals, with a major accomplishment being the 2017 listing of the Middlesex Avenue - Woodwild Park Historic District onto the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.

Metuchen’s most recent Master Plan Reexamination, adopted in 2016, continues to emphasize preservation in very general terms: preservation of Metuchen’s “unique” and “essentially residential character, maintaining the integrity of its neighborhoods, and ultimately, its desirability as a community in which to live.” This plan acknowledges the two above-mentioned steps in developing a municipal historic preservation program: the 2008 formation of the HPC and the 2017 historic designation of the Middlesex Avenue - Woodwild Park Historic District.

In 2020, the Borough of Metuchen applied to the New Jersey Historic Trust (“NJHT”) for a grant to hire a consultant who would work with Borough officials, the Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee, and the public to develop a historic preservation ordinance. In October 2020, the NJHT Board voted to recommend to the New Jersey Legislature that Metuchen’s grant application be approved.

5.0 Public Policy Review

The following review provides information on relevant public policy material at the municipal, county, state, and federal levels. For the municipal level, the review in Section 5.1 analyzes, in accordance with New Jersey’s Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-2b.(10)), the impact of each component and element of Metuchen’s master plan on the preservation of historic sites and districts. In addition, the review covers relevant municipal ordinances that impact historic sites. For the county, state, and national levels, Section 5.2 provides a brief description of all relevant preservation programs and legislation.

5.1 Borough of Metuchen

5.1.1. Master Plan

Metuchen’s first Master Plan was adopted in 1959, representing a culmination of over three years of planning that began in 1956. It was later updated in 1967 in response to several changes and pressures to increase residential densities throughout the Borough.

In 1983, following a year-long planning exercise, the Borough reexamined its Master Plan and formally adopted the 1983 Land Use Plan Element and 1983 Housing Plan Element. To date, the Borough adopted two other elements of the Master Plan, including a Recreation Plan Element (originally adopted in 1992) and a Circulation Plan Element (originally adopted in 2009). Each of the four elements has been periodically reviewed and reaffirmed or updated, where necessary, in various Master Plan amendments and Master Plan Reexamination Reports adopted in 1988, 1994, 2000, 2006 and most recently in 2016.

Throughout its planning history, Metuchen has recognized the “uniqueness” of its community character and the importance of preserving that character. Two key planning documents, the 1999 Housing Plan Element and the Land Use Plan Element portion of the 2016 Metuchen Master Plan Reexamination, for example, emphasize the importance of preserving the integrity of Metuchen’s neighborhoods, and ultimately, its desirability as a community in which to live.

The one factor—perhaps more than any other—that gives Metuchen a unique sense of place are its older, historic buildings, especially within its residential areas. However, with over 125 houses demolished from 2013 - 2020, this character is at risk of being lost. The following public policies, discussed in the 1999 Housing Plan Element and the Land Use Plan Element portion of the 2016 Master Plan Reexamination, warrant review for their impact on historic preservation:

- Encouraging downtown revitalization and economic development;
- Encouraging new housing to meet the changing needs of Metuchen’s current residents and to respond to market demand;
- Discouraging the demolition of structurally sound dwellings;
- Evaluating zoning provisions, including measures to control “over-sized” houses; and,
- Recommending development of a municipal Vision Plan.

The encouragement of new development should take into consideration the effect on older buildings, which are an important aspect of Metuchen’s character. In addition, the older and often smaller houses can provide more affordable housing than many of the new larger homes. To encourage preservation, demolition of historically significant houses, as well as those that are structurally sound, should be discouraged. Zoning measures should encourage the preservation of older houses as well as the compatibility of the new houses with the older houses.

Finally, due to the important role that historic resources, including buildings, neighborhoods, streets, and parks, play in defining Metuchen, historic preservation needs to be an integral part of the future Vision Plan.

A third planning document that relates to historic preservation is Metuchen’s 2016 Recreation / Open Space Plan Element, which serves as an update to the 1992 Recreation / Open Space Plan Element. This document discusses the importance of two resources that have been historically important to Metuchen. First, the Middlesex Greenway, situated on the historic Lehigh Valley Railroad, provides valuable open space and recreational area as well as an opportunity to honor Metuchen’s rail history. Second, Woodwild Park and its historic horse trough, which are key contributing features of the New Jersey and National Register-listed Middlesex Avenue – Woodwild Park Historic District, provide valuable open space as well as preserve important features of Metuchen’s history.

Another planning document that warrants review is Metuchen’s 2009 Circulation Plan Element, which utilized a “Reconnecting Your Community” Smart Growth Grant to address circulation and related issues in the Borough. Among its goals and objectives is to extend the Middlesex Greenway to access with the Peter J. Barnes III Wildlife Preserve – the largest natural open space in northern Middlesex County. Additionally, the plan seeks to create a consistent streetscape standard and improve mobility and quality of life benefits for all users of all abilities utilizing all modes of travel.

Both the Recreation / Open Space Plan and Circulation Plan Elements emphasize the importance of the Middlesex Greenway and its potential extension to the Peter J. Barnes III Wildlife Preserve, as well as pedestrian experience throughout the community. Access to former rail lines and open spaces as well as the design of roadways are critical elements of the character of the community and can profoundly affect historic sites and districts. These elements should continue to incorporate in their planning consideration for historic resources, including the potential for their creative re-use such as the conversion of the historic Lehigh Valley Railroad to the Middlesex Greenway.

5.1.2. Borough Ordinances

In 1966, the Borough adopted a tree ordinance (now Chapter 181). This ordinance states “No person shall, without a written permit from the Shade Tree Commission, cut, break, climb with spikes, injure or remove any living tree in a public highway or injure, misuse or remove any device placed to protect such tree.” Similar provisions related to attaching items to trees, preventing water and air to the roots, and protection during construction are included. While not explicitly stated, these provisions adopted over 50 years ago help promote the policy of preserving and protecting valuable natural resources that create scenic value, preserve character defining features of older homes and neighborhoods, and enhance the identity of the Borough.

In 1988, the Borough adopted a property maintenance ordinance (now Chapter 140) that pertained to commercial and industrial properties. The purpose of the property maintenance ordinance was to protect and promote the public health, safety and welfare by establishing minimum standards for the maintenance, appearance and conditions of such properties in the Borough and to assign responsibilities and duties upon its owners, operators and occupants. The ordinance authorized the enforcing officer(s) to be able to determine the fitness of such properties and established procedures in which the enforcing officers could demand that necessary repairs be made and fix penalties for those who violate the provisions of the ordinance.

This ordinance was subsequently amended in 1990 to include similar provisions applicable to residential properties and it was ultimately replaced in its entirety in 2014 in an effort to streamline procedures and provide additional measures in which the Borough may abate violations and place a lien upon a property in which its owner, operator or occupant fails to abate such violations.

In 2003, as part of the Borough’s response to concerns related to infill housing, the Land Development Ordinance

was amended to include performance standards specifically for tree removal requirements for major and minor subdivisions and site plans. These standards included the submission of a landscape plan with certain base information and design requirements, measures for site protection and a requirement for a number of replacement trees based on the caliper of the existing trees being removed. A contribution to the Shade Tree Commission Fund can be made for the purposes of planting trees on public lands in lieu of planting trees on the site. In 2013, the ordinance was further amended to extend the application of the front yard shade and ornamental, street tree and replacement tree requirements normally associated with subdivisions and site plans, to new single- and two-family homes.

The 2003 amendment to the Land Development Ordinance also included standards pertaining to single- or two-family dwellings. The amendment added a series of design standards that address orientation, façade width/massing, garage location and design, preservation of existing vegetation, minimum foundation and front yard plantings. These standards play a large role in shaping the design of dwellings in an effort to ensure that new infill housing fits in within established residential neighborhoods. In 2013, the ordinance was further amended to extend the applicability of all of these standards normally associated with subdivisions to all single- and two-family homes.

In 2015, the Borough continued to address concerns related to property maintenance by adopting a vacant property ordinance (now Chapter 139). This ordinance addresses structures and storefronts that have been neglected and otherwise vacant and/or abandoned for six months, and that thereby cause severe harm to the health, safety and general welfare of the community. In the interest of offsetting disproportionate costs incurred by the Borough in order to deal with the problems of such properties, the ordinance imposes a fee in conjunction with its registration, establishes procedures to permit a waiver of such fees upon the satisfaction of certain reasonable conditions, and fixes penalties for those who fail to register, renew or remit fee payment.

5.1.3. Borough-wide Rehabilitation Designation

Metuchen has recently sought to address conditions within the Borough and stimulate private investment, and determined that the appropriate course of action to prevent further deterioration is to redevelop and rehabilitate properties in accordance with New Jersey's Local Redevelopment and Housing Law ("LRHL") at N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 et seq.

Under the LRHL, there are two basic methods for redevelopment: 1) designation of an area in need of rehabilitation and 2) designation of an area in need of redevelopment. These designations allow the local government to be proactive in encouraging rehabilitation and redevelopment by enabling the municipality to prepare site-specific redevelopment plans as well as a myriad of other benefits. While the criteria for designation of an area in need of rehabilitation and redevelopment differ, they both generally provide the same benefits, with the exception that eminent domain and long-term tax abatements (in excess of five and up to 30 years) can only be accomplished through the redevelopment method.

Metuchen has previously utilized the redevelopment method for various sites, including the Oakite tract, Gulton tract, Metuchen Firehouse and the Metuchen Arts District, declaring each of those sites as an area in need of redevelopment and, to date, prepared redevelopment plans for the Oakite tract and the Metuchen Arts District.

The Borough has recently utilized the rehabilitation method and applied it to the entire municipality, as permitted by the LRHL. Late in 2019, the Borough Council adopted Resolution 2020-287, referring a proposed "Rehabilitation Area Designation" for the entire municipality to the Planning Board for its statutory review, with the finding that the entire area of the municipality satisfies one of the criteria set forth in N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-14(a), specifically that a majority of the water and sewer infrastructure in the entire area of the municipality is at least 50 years old and is in need of repair or substantial maintenance, and a program of rehabilitation, as defined in N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-3, may be

expected to prevent further deterioration and promote the overall development of the community.

Following the Planning Board’s review and recommendation, the Borough Council adopted Resolution 2020-50, formally designating the entirety of the municipality as an area in need of rehabilitation. The Borough Council subsequently prepared and adopted Ordinance 2020-10, which created the “Redevelopment Plan for Rehabilitation in the Borough of Metuchen” dated March 2020, which aims to provide a realistic opportunity for the redevelopment and rehabilitation of the Borough and incorporated the underlying zoning currently in effect.

With the rehabilitation designation in place, redevelopment plans may be prepared which empower the Borough additional planning tools not available under conventional zoning, including the following:

- Greater control than conventional zoning which is not limited to redevelopment involving built form and can include structures to be preserved, areas to be down-zoned, areas to be preserved as open space and improved as parks or other landscape features, as well as the provision of off-site improvements.
- Preparation of a site-specific conceptual plan that can prescribe structures and open space to be preserved, land use, density, setbacks, form, scale, site layout including the location of new structures, streetscape and public space improvements, off-site improvements, etc.
- The exercise of greater control over design of any project including detailed provisions regulating the preservation of structures and open space, as well as the layout, design and appearance of any future building or improvement.

Additionally, the designation makes eligible certain benefits that can be utilized at the option of the Borough, including the following:

- All powers and rights of a redevelopment designation except for the power of eminent domain and the ability to confer long-term PILOTs.
- Tax exemptions or abatements for up to 5 years.
- Eligibility for tax exemptions or abatements can be customized by a municipality based on structure and/or types of improvements.
- Eligibility for tax exemptions or abatements can differentiate among the various neighborhoods, zones, areas or portions of the area in need of rehabilitation with respect to eligibility.
- Designation of the first \$5,000 or \$15,000 or \$25,000 in assessor's full and true value of improvements for each dwelling unit primarily and directly affected by the improvement in any dwelling more than 20 years old, as not increasing the value of the property for a period of five years.

As such, the rehabilitation designation provides the Borough with additional planning tools and financial benefits to enable the creation of rehabilitation programs which may be expected to prevent further deterioration and promote the overall development of the community. More specifically, redevelopment plans may include a component of preservation of structures and open spaces and rehabilitation programs can be utilized to promote and encourage the preservation and rehabilitation of historic structures.

5.2. National, State and County

5.2.1. Preservation Laws & Programs

National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA)

In 1966, the National Historic Preservation Act (“NHPA”) was enacted, becoming the first historic preservation

legislation at the national level. It established several institutions, including the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, State Historic Preservation Officers, the National Register of Historical Places (“NR”), the National Historic Landmark (“NHL”) program, and the Section 106 review process. The National Register is an inventory of significant historic resources of local, state, or national significance; the NHL program identifies historic resources of national significance. Both the NR and the NHL programs are administered by the National Park Service (“NPS”), an agency of the United States Department of the Interior. Properties listed on or eligible for inclusion in the National Register receive a certain degree of protection from federal undertakings in accordance with Section 106 of the NHPA.

As part of the federal historic preservation program, each state’s governor is responsible for appointing a State Historic Preservation Officer (“SHPO”). In New Jersey, the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (“NJDEP”) serves as the SHPO and the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office (“NJHPO”) serves as his/her staff. The SHPO’s serve as “boots on the ground” to coordinate federal program, including conducting a comprehensive survey of historic properties, maintaining an inventory of historic properties, identifying and nominating properties to the National Register, maintaining a statewide historic preservation plan, reviewing federal undertakings conducted in accordance with Section 106, reviewing investment tax credit applications, and providing general assistance, education and advice.

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)

In 1969, the National Environmental Policy Act (“NEPA”) was passed, becoming effective January 1, 1970, and was born out of the public’s growing interest and concern for the country’s environment and resources during the 1960s. This act promotes environmental stewardship at the national level and established the President’s Council on Environmental Quality (“CEQ”).

Among the six goals of the NEPA is to “preserve important historic, cultural, and natural aspects of our national heritage, and maintain, wherever possible, an environment which supports diversity, and variety of individual choice.” One of the outcomes of the NEPA is the requirement that consideration must be given to any federal action that could potentially affect the environment, by the preparation of an Environmental Assessment (“EA”) and Environmental Impact Statement (“EIS”).

New Jersey Register of Historic Places Act (NJRHPA)

The New Jersey Register of Historic Places Act (“NJRHPA”) was enacted in 1970 and readopted in 1997. This act allows for historic properties to be nominated and placed onto the New Jersey Register, which is maintained by the New Jersey Historic Preservation Office.

Modeled after the National Register program, the New Jersey Register program adopted the federal criteria for inclusion and integrated the nomination process. Historic properties listed on the New Jersey Register have a degree of protection from encroachment by state, county, or municipal agencies, who must obtain the prior authorization of the NJDEP Commissioner prior to encroaching upon, damaging, or destroying a New Jersey Register property.

Incentives for Buildings Listed in or Eligible for the National or State Registers

The rehabilitation of certified historic structures for income-producing use may qualify the project for a 20% income tax credit. The rehabilitation work must be in accordance with the *Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Rehabilitation* and the project must meet IRS requirements for “substantial” rehabilitation.

The State of New Jersey recently enacted the New Jersey Economic Recovery Act of 2020, which was signed into law

on January 7, 2021. Part of the seven-year, \$14 billion package includes the New Jersey Historic Property Reinvestment Program, which seeks to leverage the federal historic tax credit program to further support rehabilitation of qualified historic properties.

Additionally, the New Jersey Historic Trust (“NJHT”) offers historic preservation grants and loans to state, county, and municipal agencies and private non-profit organizations. In addition, the NJHT accepts the donation of historic easements, thereby providing the donor with a tax incentive.

Certified Local Government (CLG)

Jointly administered by the National Park Service (“NPS”) and the State Historic Preservation Offices (“SHPOs”), a community can be certified and recognized as a Certified Local Government (“CLG”), which allows the community to gain access to funding, technical assistance, and other benefits of historic preservation. In New Jersey, \$60,000 - \$80,000 grants from the Historic Preservation Fund is awarded annually to its CLGs.

New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL)

The Municipal Land Use Law (“MLUL”) was originally passed in 1975, becoming effective August 1, 1976, and provides protocols pertaining to the use and development of land in the State of New Jersey “in a manner which will promote the public health, safety, morals, and general welfare.” One of the objectives of the MLUL pertains to historic preservation, specifically purpose “j”, which aims “to promote the conservation of historic sites and districts, open space, energy resources and valuable natural resources in the State and to prevent urban sprawl and degradation of the environment through improper use of land.”

The MLUL establishes the powers and duties for the Borough Planning Board, which is essentially the steward of the Master Plan, within which, among others, a statement of objectives, principles, assumptions, policies and standards as well as a Land Use Plan Element are the required components, while a Historic Preservation Plan Element is one of the 15 optional plan elements.

New Jersey Rehabilitation Subcode

Adopted in 1998, the Rehabilitation Subcode of New Jersey Administrative Code is a comprehensive set of technical requirements that attempts to accommodate and enable the restoration and rehabilitation of buildings that were constructed using an outdated code. This stand-alone sub-chapter contains the technical requirements to a rehabilitation project, and it allows for flexibility in applying a variety of code sections. Additionally, rehabilitation projects on buildings that are designated as historic are subject to relaxed code requirements, which accommodates and encourages the preservation and reuse of such historic buildings.

The Rehabilitation Subcode identifies three different types of projects: 1) rehabilitation; 2) change of use; and 3) additions; four categories of rehabilitation: 1) repair; 2) renovation; 3) alteration; and 4) reconstruction; as well as five sets of requirements: 1) products and practices; 2) materials and methods; 3) new building elements; 4) basic requirements; and 5) supplemental requirements.

Executive Order No. 215

In 1989, the Governor signed Executive Order No. 215, which requires departments, agencies and authorities of the State to prepare and submit to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (“NJDEP”) an EA or EIS in support of major construction projects to reduce or eliminate any potential adverse environmental impacts that are

initiated or funded (including those that are granting at least 20% financial assistance) by the State. This action does not apply to projects for ordinary maintenance or repair projects, renovations or rehabilitation of existing buildings, expansions or additions of existing buildings provided that the expansion or addition does not increase the building's capacity by more than 25%, or projects involving loans or tax exempt financing to the private sector.

Main Street New Jersey

Main Street New Jersey, the Certified State Coordinating Program of the National Trust's National Main Street Center was established in 1989 to promote the revitalization of New Jersey's downtown areas. The program provides selected communities with on- and off-site technical assistance and training of proven value to revitalizing historic downtowns, utilizing comprehensive and incremental approaches to improve the economy, appearance and image of their downtowns. Established in 2016, the Metuchen Downtown Alliance is one of 21 Main Street America Accredited programs in New Jersey that have a proven track record of planning, implementing, and measuring results that align with the Main Street Approach.

New Jersey Historic Trust

Created in 1967, the New Jersey Historic Trust provides support and protection for New Jersey's historic resources. The Trust, an affiliate of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs ("NJCA"), provides a series of grants, loans, and property donation programs, including the Garden State Historic Preservation Trust Fund, Capital Preservation Grants, Historic Site Management Grants, Emergency Grant and Loan Fund, Revolving Loan Fund, Preservation Easement Program and the New Jersey Legacies Program.

5.2.2. Planning Policies

New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan

The New Jersey State Planning Act was originally adopted in 1985 to private a vision for future growth in the State and required that a State Development and Redevelopment Plan ("State Plan") be crafted as a blueprint for Statewide land use planning. The State Plan was adopted on March 1, 2001, to enable cooperative planning at the State level while respecting the municipal planning authority under the MLUL.

Specifically, the purpose of the State Plan is to "coordinate planning activities and establish Statewide planning objectives in the following areas: land use, housing, economic development, transportation, natural resource conservation, agriculture and farmland retention, recreation, urban and suburban redevelopment, historic preservation, public facilities and services, and intergovernmental coordination." (N.J.S.A. 52:18A-200(f))

The historic preservation section indicates that it is "vital to catalog and inventory what resources exist, why it is important and how to best utilize its historic value" in order to better protect and preserve a community's historic resources. The State Plan recognizes that there had been substantial growth in the number of municipalities that have historic preservation plan elements in their master plan or historic preservation ordinances; however, most do not, and "more still needs to be done to integrate historic preservation with infrastructure and economic development activities."

The State Plan Policy Map identifies different types of compact forms of development and redevelopment (called Centers) and the areas surrounding them (called Environs) and the regions in which they are found (called Planning Areas). The Borough of Metuchen is located in the Metropolitan Planning Area (PA-1), which is intended to "protect the character of existing stable communities" and has the stated goal of historic preservation as follows: "encourage

the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic or significant buildings, Historic and Cultural Sites, neighborhoods and districts in ways that will not compromise either the historic resource or the area's ability to redevelop. Coordinate historic preservation with tourism efforts."

While the State Plan relies primarily upon the Environmentally Sensitive Planning Area (PA-5) as the means of protecting and managing the State's natural and environmental resources, "the State Plan recognizes that there are natural and environmental resources found throughout the State", which are referred to as Critical Environmental Sites ("CES") and Historic & Cultural Sites ("HCS"). It is the intention of the State Plan to preserve and enhance "areas with historic, cultural, scenic, open space, and recreational values" by providing a means for the designation of CES and HCS for their protection and enhancement. They may be mapped within any Planning Area, and could be utilized to delineate isolated sites as well as in tandem to create linkages of open space with both environmental and cultural significance, including a rails-to-trails system that is linked to a stream or wooded area.

New Jersey Historic Preservation Plan

In 2013, the State Historic Preservation Office ("SHPO") and Preservation New Jersey ("PNJ") developed the 2013-2019 New Jersey Comprehensive Statewide Historic Preservation Plan. Through a multi-year planning effort to build on the prior plan, *New Jersey Partners for Preservation: A Blueprint for Building Historic Preservation into New Jersey's Future*, establishes goals and objectives to inform the actions of agencies and individuals involved in historic preservation efforts and strategies for implementation of effective municipal historic preservation plans in the State of New Jersey.

Among the plan's six goals is to "use historic preservation as a tool to strengthen and revitalize New Jersey's state and local economies in a sustainable manner" as well as to "increase stewardship and support to protect the authentic places that tell the stories of New Jerseyans." The plan provides a series of ideas in which any person, group or agency could play a role in preserving New Jersey's character and important historic resources.

Middlesex County

The Middlesex County Open Space and Recreation Plan was adopted in 2003 which was a major update of the County's 1995 Plan. The Plan provides an introductory overview, mission statement, goals and objectives, history of land acquisition and direction for future acquisition, a review of facilities and an overview of the Middlesex County Cultural and Heritage Commission.

Given the rapid expansion of land development in the County beginning in the mid-1990s, "Middlesex County established the Middlesex County Open Space, Farmland and Historic Preservation Trust Fund" in 1996 which was subsequently expanded in 2001 to further support, among other goals and objectives, historic preservation. One of the elements of its Mission Statement is to promote "environmental, agricultural, scenic, historic, cultural and social opportunities" including preservation of historic sites or structures.

The Middlesex County Office of Arts and History, formerly the Cultural and Heritage Commission, has developed and promoted numerous programs related to the history of Middlesex County and the State since 1971. Through its granting program, the Office of Arts and History "underwrites historic projects sponsored by local communities, as well as a wide range of technical assistance workshops, long range planning projects, and community-based programming."

The Plan also recognizes that historic sites and structures in the County have been lost to new development and notes that "it is important that the remaining sites are at least documented and an effort should be made to secure the preservation of the most significant sites."

6.0 Significance

The first step in any historic preservation program, whether at the federal, state, or local level, is to assess resources' potential significance as defined by established eligibility criteria. Age alone does not make a resource significant. The resource must also have a reason for significance, e.g., representative example of an architectural style, home of a prominent individual, or association with an important historic development or event, and must retain integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

Section 6.1 discusses the eligibility criteria that are utilized at the state and federal levels and that have to date been used by the Borough of Metuchen to assess which older resources are considered significant. Sections 6.2 and 6.3 provide an overview of past and ongoing efforts to identify significant resources. Finally, Section 6.4 discusses the extent to which historic resources in Metuchen have been lost due to demolition or a significant degree of alterations.

6.1 Designation Criteria

One of the most effective methods of preservation of historic sites and structures is by way of designation and protection at the local level. The Municipal Land Use Law ("MLUL") allows a municipality to adopt a historic preservation ordinance that establishes a process to evaluate, designate, and protect historic properties and districts. However, a municipality's evaluation of significance must be done in accordance with established criteria. Past efforts in Metuchen to identify and evaluate potential historic resources have utilized the *Criteria for Inclusion in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places*. As cited in the Code of Federal Regulations, Title 36, Part 60, National Register of Historic Places (36 CFR 60.4), these criteria state:

The quality of significance in American History, architecture, archeology, engineering, and culture [that] is present in districts, sites, buildings, structures, and objects that possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association and:

- a. that are associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history, or
- b. that are associated with the lives of persons significant in our past, or
- c. that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction, or
- d. that have yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history (36 CFR 60.4).

There are several criteria considerations. Ordinarily, cemeteries, birthplaces, or graves of historical figures, properties owned by religious institutions or used for religious purposes, structures that have been moved from their original locations, reconstructed historic buildings, properties primarily commemorative in nature, and properties that have achieved significance within the past 50 years shall not be considered eligible for the National Register. However, such properties will qualify if they are integral parts of districts that do meet the criteria or if they fall within the following categories:

- a. a religious property deriving primary significance from architectural or artistic distinction or historical importance, or
- b. a building or structure removed from its original location but which is significant primarily for architectural value, or which is the surviving structure most importantly associated with a historic person or event, or

- c. a birthplace or grave of a historical figure of outstanding importance if there is no other appropriate site or building directly associated with his/her productive life, or
- d. a cemetery which derives its primary significance from graves of persons of transcendent importance, from age, from distinctive design features, or from association with historic events, or
- e. a reconstructed building when accurately executed in a suitable environment and presented in a dignified manner as part of a restoration master plan, and when no other building or structure with the same association has survived, or
- f. a property primarily commemorative in intent if design, age, tradition, or symbolic value has invested it with its own historic significance, or
- g. a property achieving significance within the past 50 years if it is of exceptional importance (36 CFR 60.4).

Of the four basic Criteria for Inclusion (A-D), the two most relevant for Metuchen are Criterion A for association with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history and Criterion C for properties that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction. The one notable exception is the Mary Wilkins Freeman House at 207 Lake Avenue; this house is historically significant under Criterion B for its association with noted author Mary Wilkins Freeman.

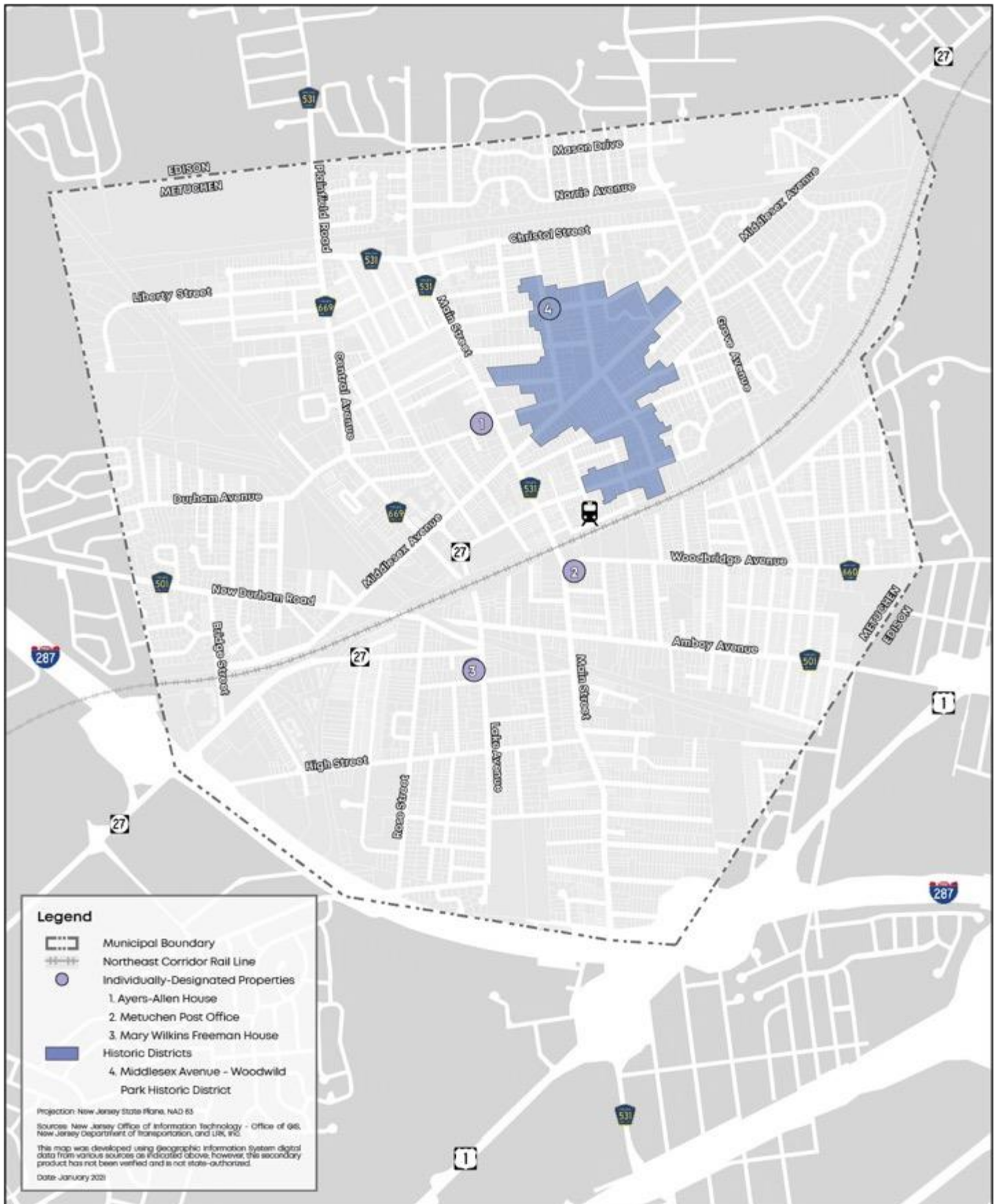
6.2 Previously Identified Historic Resources

Although the Borough of Metuchen has not had a comprehensive historic preservation program, there have been numerous efforts to identify Metuchen’s potentially significant historic properties, including buildings, structures, historic districts, objects, or sites. As part of that effort, a number of properties have been formally identified as historically significant, either through listing on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places, or through a New Jersey State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO)-issued Certification of Eligibility (“COE”), Determination of Eligibility (“DOE”), or Opinion of Eligibility (“SHPO Opinion”).

6.2.1 Properties Listed on the New Jersey (NJ) and National Registers (NR) of Historic Places

- Ayers-Allen House, 16 Durham Avenue (NJ 7/10/1985 / NR 9/5/1985). Built ca. 1740, this house is historically significant as one of Metuchen’s oldest houses and for its representation of mid-eighteenth century Central Jersey farmhouses.
- Metuchen Post Office, 360 Main Street (NJ 6/25/2007 / NR 4/2/2008). Constructed in 1939, the Metuchen Post Office derives its primary significance from its place in political and social history and its architectural and artistic distinction.
- Middlesex Avenue – Woodwild Park Historic District (COE 7/14/2014; NJ 6/5/2017 / NR 7/31/2017). Primarily a residential district consisting of 167 properties, Metuchen’s first National Register-listed historic district is significant for its association with Metuchen’s development as an attractive suburban railroad town and for its representation of major architectural styles in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The district is centered on Middlesex Avenue and includes Woodwild Park, the Borough Improvement League, the Metuchen Club, the Metuchen Library, the Metuchen Inn, and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church, all of which were prominent in Metuchen’s social, educational, and religious life.

- Mary Wilkins Freeman House, 207 Lake Avenue (COE 9/14/2017; NJ 10/7/2019 / NR 1/17/2020). The Mary Wilkins Freeman House is significant in the history of American literature as the only extant house associated with the writing career of noted author Mary Wilkins Freeman, who was married in this home and lived there with her husband, Dr. Charles Freeman, from 1902 to 1907, during a time when she was actively pursuing her writing career. Freeman, well known throughout the United States and abroad for her short stories, was described in James F. Broderick's 2003 *Paging New Jersey: A Literary Guide to the Garden State* as "one of the most significant and widely acclaimed women writers in American literature during the late 1880's, the 1890's, and the early 1900's."



**Historic Preservation Plan Element
 Master Plan of the Borough of Metuchen**

Borough of Metuchen, Middlesex County, New Jersey

**Figure 2 - Properties Listed on the New Jersey
 and National Registers of Historic Places**



Metuchen’s original Borough Hall, listed on the National Register on May 14, 2001, was subsequently demolished in 2002.

6.2.2 Properties Formally Identified as Eligible for Inclusion in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places

Each of the following resources has been assessed by the New Jersey SHPO as having sufficient significance and integrity to warrant eligibility for inclusion in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places:

- Metuchen Railroad Station, 350 Woodbridge Avenue (DOE 8/26/1977)
- Washington Hose Company, 505 Middlesex Avenue (COE 9/17/2009)
- Metuchen Railroad Passenger Station Pre-Contact Site Main Street at Woodbridge Avenue (SHPO Opinion 2/6/2012)
- New Jersey Route 27 / Middlesex Avenue (Lincoln Highway) (SHPO Opinion 11/19/1999)
- Pennsylvania Railroad New York to Philadelphia Historic District (SHPO Opinion 10/2/2002)
- Port Reading Railroad Historic District (SHPO Opinion 3/15/2002)
- Public Service Electric and Gas (“PSE&G”) Company Northern Inner Ring Transmission Line (SHPO Opinion 12/31/2013)

6.3 Potential Historic Resources

Over the course of more than 40 years, from 1976 to 2018, the Borough of Metuchen and Middlesex County, with assistance from the Metuchen-Edison Historical Society, have conducted a series of historic sites surveys to identify properties that have the potential to be considered historically significant. These surveys, conducted in 1976, 1979 (updated in 1985), 1990, 2010, and 2017-2018, provide a valuable starting point for assessing Metuchen’s historic resources. Although each of these surveys assessed significance to some extent, it is also important to understand their limitations. First, these surveys were primarily conducted based on what is colloquially called a “windshield survey,” i.e., based on an assessment of buildings’ exterior appearance with only a limited amount of supportive historic research. However, a building’s significance often relates to its residents or occupants or to key historical developments or events, which can only be fully understood through historic research. In addition, in the 30-45 years since the earliest surveys, many buildings in Metuchen have reached the 50-year age criterion needed for potential historic significance, thereby opening up the possibility of many more buildings being potentially significant. Finally, consistent with national trends in the discipline of historic preservation, the focus of historic sites survey efforts has increasingly shifted over time from individual buildings, structures, and sites to considering potential historic districts.

The 1976 survey identified 37 individual resources, primarily Metuchen’s oldest structures that were considered potentially significant at a time when the country was celebrating its bicentennial. The 1979/1985 survey identified 123 individual resources, one multiple property resource, and one historic district. Of the 123 individual properties, five were evaluated as definitely meeting the criteria for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places: 406 Main Street, 36 Clive Street, 86 Clive Street, the Old Franklin Schoolhouse, and St. Luke’s Episcopal Church. The multiple property resource consisted of 11 houses along Main Street and Amboy Avenue. These houses were also incorporated into the one identified historic district described as consisting of “85 buildings of note.” That historic district encompassed Main Street from Middlesex Avenue to High Street. South of the Northeast Corridor rail line,

the district extended west to Halsey Street and east to Barnstable Street. North of the tracks, the district extended east to Rector Street; however, it did not extend further west than Main Street.

The district proposed in the 1990 survey incorporated the 1979/1985 historic district, but greatly expanded it to include properties north of Middlesex Avenue and properties as far south as Brunswick Avenue. In addition, the survey assessed over 500 individual resources in relation to that district. All properties in the 1990 survey, whether within or outside of the historic district, were evaluated as either “Significant” or, if of lesser potential significance, “Contributing.”

The appendix to this element includes a summary of the results of Metuchen’s past historic sites surveys, with listings of each survey’s identified individual historic resources included in chart form. To the extent possible, each chart includes all extant resources that were identified as having potential significance.

Under the guidance of the Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee, the Borough in 2010 initiated steps to build upon the earlier surveys and make updated recommendations. At that time, the Borough retained Linda B. McTeague, a professional historic preservation specialist, to evaluate the potential for historic districts. After a review of past historic sites survey material, some limited additional historic research, and a reconnaissance-level survey of the Borough, Ms. McTeague recommended that – in contrast to the large historic districts identified in 1979/1985 and 1990 – the Borough should consider several smaller historic districts that represent distinct areas of Metuchen. Her recommendations culminated in the Borough’s nomination of the Middlesex Avenue – Woodwild Park Historic District to the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places. In addition, the Borough utilized her recommendations to direct further identification and evaluation of historic resources, including surveys conducted in 2017 by a Borough intern.

As defined by the National Register Office, a historic district “derives its importance from being a unified entity, even though it is often composed of a wide variety of resources. The identity of a district results from the interrelationship of its resources, which can convey a visual sense of the overall historic environment or be an arrangement of historically or functionally related properties.” Building upon the various historic sites surveys, the Borough has taken the following steps to further assess potential historic resources, both individual buildings and structures as well as historic districts:

- Reviewed the clustering of individual properties identified in the earlier historic sites surveys.
- Evaluated the potential historic districts identified in the 1979/1985 and 1990 surveys. Both of these districts included properties on the north and south sides of the Northeast Corridor rail line, some of which were incorporated into the Middlesex Avenue – Woodwild Park Historic District.
- Reviewed Ms. McTeague’s recommendations for historic districts.
- Reviewed development patterns as indicated by Sanborn fire insurance maps.
- With assistance from a Middlesex County grant, retained Hunter Research, Inc. to research and write an updated historic overview for the Borough. The previous historic context document, which had been prepared in 1979, focused on Metuchen’s development up until approximately 1930. The new study extended this time period to discuss Metuchen’s history subsequent to 1930 so that more recent properties could be evaluated for both their historic and architectural significance.
- Utilized the Borough’s 1956 classification of neighborhoods to identify areas that were historically considered distinct neighborhoods and therefore could potentially meet the National Register definition of a historic district as an area that is “a unified entity.”
- Conducted reconnaissance-level surveys.

Based on the historic sites survey work to-date, the Borough has identified numerous individual buildings and structures that have potential historic and architectural significance. All resources identified in past surveys as either significant or potentially significant (see Appendix) warrant consideration for historic designation, either individually or as part of historic districts that – as defined by the National Park Service – derive their importance from being a unified entity. Although the potential historic resources are located throughout Metuchen, the Borough has identified three areas that, in addition to the Middlesex Avenue – Wooldwild Park Historic District, have concentrations of older buildings. These three areas, shown below, contain many resources that could be individually significant or could form historic districts with unified identities.

Clive Street – Plainfield Avenue houses

Considered part of Neighborhood 1 on the 1956 planning map (see Figure 1), this small cluster of older homes in close proximity to the Port Reading Railroad line contains the eighteenth-century house at 35 Hofer Court and several Victorian-era houses, including 6 Plainfield Avenue and 36 and 76 Clive Street. These houses were all identified as individually significant in either the 1975 survey or the 1979/1985 survey, and warrant consideration either as individual resources or as a small historic district as recommended in Metuchen’s 2010 historic district study.



Photograph 33. Representative imagery of Clive Street – Plainfield Avenue area

Tommy's Pond / Lake Avenue / Rose Street neighborhood

The Borough's southwest quadrant, identified as Neighborhood 5 in 1956, contains "some of the older estates" along Lake Avenue, Graham Avenue, High Street, Graham Avenue, Rose Street; and twentieth-century bungalows, Jefferson Park; and YMCA. This neighborhood encompasses many individual buildings identified in the 1975 and 1979/1985 surveys, portions of the historic districts identified in the 1979/1985 and 1990 surveys, and historic district recommendations in the 2010 and 2017 studies.



Photographs 34-35. Representative imagery of Tommy's Pond / Lake Avenue / Rose Street neighborhood

Woodbridge Avenue / Amboy Avenue / Main Street area

These three streets and their cross streets were identified in 1956 as Neighborhood 7, which was described as a “natural neighborhood.” This area consists of primarily residential properties west of Main Street that are located between the Lehigh Valley Railroad (currently the Middlesex County Greenway) and the Northeast Corridor rail line. It includes many early homes along Amboy and Woodbridge Avenues and their cross streets; Moss School (originally Washington Elementary School); and Redfield Village Apartments. This area encompasses numerous individual structures identified in all of Metuchen’s past surveys, the Main Street / Amboy Avenue Houses Multiple Property Nomination recommended in the 1979/1985 survey, portions of the historic districts identified in the 1979/1985 and 1990 surveys, and historic district recommendations in the 2010 and 2017 studies.



Photograph 36. Representative imagery of Woodbridge Avenue / Amboy Avenue / Main Street area

6.4 Past Losses

The Borough's records of demolition permits reveal that in the time period of 2015 – 2020, approximately 100 buildings were demolished throughout Metuchen. Although not all of these buildings were historic, demolitions over time have resulted in the loss of two categories of potential historic resources. First, Metuchen has lost approximately one out of every seven buildings identified in the 1970s as potentially significant. This loss is more than just a matter of numbers. Metuchen has lost important examples of numerous architectural styles including French Second Empire, Italianate, and Colonial Revival. In addition, Metuchen has lost the homes of many important past Metuchenites, including people who helped establish Metuchen and others who excelled in a wide range of fields from the arts to social movements. Metuchen has also lost public, civic, and religious buildings that were an important part of its past.

In addition to the individual resources, Metuchen has lost numerous buildings located within neighborhoods identified for their concentrations of older buildings. There have been numerous demolitions along Columbia, Harvard, Midland, and University Avenues, potentially resulting in a detrimental effect on the Radio District's ability to be considered a unified entity. Likewise, in the Tommy's Pond / Lake Avenue / Rose Street neighborhood, buildings have been demolished along Graham Avenue, High Street, Lake Avenue, Spring Street, and Rose Street. In the Woodbridge Avenue / Amboy Avenue / Main Street neighborhood, buildings have been lost along Amboy and Woodbridge Avenues as well as on cross streets off these two major roads, and along Barnstable Street, Henry Street, and Grove Avenue near the historic Robinvale Railroad Station, located at the end of Dark Lane, now Grove Avenue.

6.5 Integrity and Existing Conditions Issues for Historic Properties

The greatest current threat to Metuchen's residential neighborhoods is the growing number of demolitions and the resulting construction of infill houses. One factor that sometimes leads to demolition is the lack of maintenance of older homes, often due to an aging population. Metuchen's recent Borough-wide Rehabilitation Designation (described above in Section 5.1.3) provides additional planning tools and financial benefits to incentivize the upkeep of older properties. This is especially important because properties with older homes are often situated on larger lots, thereby making them attractive to developers who want to create a subdivision. These large properties, which often change hands with little public awareness, could benefit from the protection afforded by a guaranteed marketing period to potentially identify a buyer who would agree to rehabilitate the older building.

Design factors, both for new infill housing and for renovations to older houses, also affects potential historic properties. To address infill housing, the Borough has developed design guidelines through its zoning ordinances. Guidance to property owners on recommended approaches to the rehabilitation of older buildings can best be addressed through increased public education, both from the Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee and the Zoning Officer.

7.0 Local Historic Preservation Goals & Objectives

Metuchen values its rich history and appreciates that the preservation of its historic resources has many environmental, social, and economic benefits that provide for sustainable development and improve the quality of life.

7.1. Goals

Metuchen has three historic preservation goals, as follows:

- A. To foster a public appreciation that Metuchen's historic resources significantly contribute to and define Metuchen's character;
- B. To develop measures to preserve Metuchen's historic resources; and,

- C. To encourage new development that is compatible with—and minimizes damage to—Metuchen’s historic resources.

7.2. Objectives

Metuchen has a series of historic preservation objectives, as follows:

- A. Prioritize additional historic sites surveys and research in order to identify Metuchen’s historic resources, including buildings, structures, objects, historic districts, and planned open space;
- B. Educate the public about Metuchen’s history and its historic resources, ensuring that the history covers a full range of time periods, historic themes, and individuals and groups;
- C. Explore the historic preservation options available to municipalities under New Jersey’s Municipal Land Use Law;
- D. Address the growing number of building demolitions throughout Metuchen’s neighborhoods;
- E. Integrate the importance of historic preservation into other elements of Metuchen’s Master Plan to acknowledge the importance of Metuchen’s historic neighborhoods, buildings, rail corridors, open space areas, and streets in defining Metuchen’s character;
- F. Review Metuchen’s zoning ordinances to ensure that they encourage the preservation of Metuchen’s historic properties;
- G. Encourage municipal officials, including the Zoning Officer and the Planning and Zoning Boards, to promote historic preservation;
- H. Encourage property owners to consider the advantages of rehabilitating and reusing historic homes and buildings;
- I. Encourage real estate agencies to prioritize the preservation of houses that are on the market;
- J. Ensure the preservation of neighborhood and community character by protecting against the demolition or inappropriate alteration of historic buildings and their surroundings;
- K. Promote the stabilization of neighborhoods and commercial areas by careful review of redevelopment plans and their impact on Metuchen’s historic resources; and,
- L. Support programs at the State, county, and municipal levels that incentivize the preservation of historic resources.

8.0 Action Plan & Agenda

Metuchen has identified a series of action items as it relates to historic preservation, as follows:

- A. Update Metuchen’s historic resources inventory and maintain a process for regular review and updates to the inventory;
- B. Utilize the Borough’s 2010 study of potential historic districts to prepare a nomination for 1-2 additional historic districts;
- C. Initiate regularly issued Borough historic resources highlights, which would be available to the public via Metuchen Media, the Borough’s website, and the Borough’s social media pages;
- D. Work with a consultant to explore the development and adoption of a historic preservation ordinance that will designate and protect historic resources from either demolition or treatments that alter historic buildings’ character;
- E. Support the Borough’s initiative under the municipal-wide “area in need of rehabilitation” designation to explore rehabilitation programs including tax abatements to property owners who renovate their properties and thereby potentially save a historic structure;
- F. Provide Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee (“HPC”)-led training for municipal officials and public members of the Planning Board and the Zoning Board of Adjustment on the importance of historic preservation and the tools to support preservation;
- G. Provide the Zoning Officer with historic preservation guidance material that will assist homeowners in making rehabilitation decisions that will be sensitive to their historic buildings;
- H. Provide information to local realtors about the importance of historic resources;
- I. Integrate historic preservation into future planning documents, including updates to Metuchen’s Master Plan and the municipal Vision Plan if one is developed;
- J. Ensure that the Borough Clerk promptly notifies the Metuchen HPC of a property pending foreclosure. If the HPC evaluates the property as historically significant, the Borough will reach out to the respective bank and realtor handling the foreclosure in order to recommend that in the upcoming sale, priority should be given to individuals agreeing to rehabilitate and live in the property;
- K. Establish an awards program recognizing local historic preservation achievements that foster pride in the community and help maintain Metuchen’s unique character;
- L. Promote the community’s awareness and utilization of historic preservation grant funding and tax incentive programs for resources listed on or eligible for listing on the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places, including the National Park Service’s historic preservation tax incentive program, New Jersey Historic Property Reinvestment Program, New Jersey Historic Trust’s cyclical grant funding, Corporate Business Tax Historic Preservation Fund, Capital Preservation Grants through the 1772 Foundation, Historic Preservation Revolving Loan Fund, Emergency Grant and Loan Fund, and historic preservation easement program;
- M. Coordinate with Middlesex County for funding and technical assistance that will promote the preservation of Metuchen’s historic resources;
- N. Protect the visual integrity of historic districts and individual sites against changes or new construction that are not in character with existing historic buildings (by establishing Historic Preservation Ordinance);
- O. Develop stewardship guidelines for the management and rehabilitation of historic streetscapes, which

would cover streets, roads, and alleys as well as adjacent buildings and spaces. Features to be considered include paving, utilities, signs, public art, curbs, sidewalk paving, street furniture, plantings, and structures such as bus shelters and kiosks; and,

- P. Create a comprehensive management plan for municipally owned historic properties with established standards and guidelines for altering, restoring, and rehabilitating these historic resources.

9.0 Appendix

- Comprehensive List of All Individually Identified Resources, Metuchen Historic Preservation Committee
- United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Mary Wilkins Freeman House at 207 Lake Avenue (2019)
- United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Middlesex Avenue - Woodwild Park Historic District (2017)
- United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the United States Post Office at 360 Main Street (2008)
- United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Metuchen Borough Hall at 500 Main Street (2000)
- United States Department of the Interior, Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service, National Register of Historic Places Inventory - Nomination Form for the Ayers-Allen House at 16 Durham Avenue (1985)
- Historic Preservation: A Historic Preservation Perspective, by the United States Department of Environmental Protection, Natural & Historic Resources, Historic Preservation Office
- Historic Preservation (Memo Vol. II, No. 3, April 96) by the New Jersey Department of the Treasury, Office of State Planning
- The New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Historic Preservation Office
- Technical Preservation Services by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service
- *The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring & Reconstructing Historic Buildings* by the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service, Technical Preservation Services
- New Jersey Register Review of Historic Places Act Rules, [N.J.A.C. 7:4](#), Readopted with Technical Changes by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Historic Preservation Office
- Municipal Land Use Law, New Jersey Statutes Annotated Historic Preservation Related Sections by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Natural & Historic Resources, Historic Preservation Office
- New Jersey's Certified Local Government Guidelines by the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, Natural & Historic Resources, Historic Preservation Office