

Woodbridge Center Mall – Area 1 Redevelopment Plan

Township of Woodbridge
Middlesex County, New Jersey



Prepared by:
Township of Woodbridge
Department of Planning & Development

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INTRODUCTION

Woodbridge Center Mall has been a regional shopping destination for the past 50 years. Due to the popularity of e-commerce, changes in consumer behavior, and the 2020 Covid-19 global pandemic, malls around the county are experiencing a decline in in-store shoppers and unforeseen new challenges. In 2019, Lord & Taylor announced the closing of five (5) of its stores, including its Woodbridge Center Mall location. The Lord & Taylor department store at Woodbridge Center Mall closed permanently on December 24, 2019 and has remained closed since. Malls are ever-adapting to changing conditions to remain open, competitive and financially viable. This Redevelopment Plan represents an opportunity to reuse the Lord & Taylor department store with uses that complement the existing mall and/or are in demand. This plan will foster the transformation of the property to a productive use. The Redevelopment Area should become a highly desirable location for businesses to thrive.

The redevelopment of these properties presents unique challenges. In response to the physical and economic conditions in this area, the Township Council requested that the Planning Board evaluate the properties in this Woodbridge Proper location as a “non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment” on July 5, 2022. The Council concluded that the area did meet the criteria to be designated as a “non-condemnation area in need of redevelopment” on August 23, 2022.

STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS

According to the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (N.J.S.A. 40:A 12A-1, et. seq.) the Redevelopment Plan shall include an outline for the planning, development, redevelopment or rehabilitation of the project area sufficient to indicate:

- Its relationship to definitive local objectives as to appropriate land uses, density of population and improved traffic and public transportation, public utilities, recreational and community facilities and other public improvements;
- Proposed land uses and building requirements in the project area;
- Adequate provision for the temporary and permanent relocation as necessary of residents in the project area, including an estimate of the extent to which decent, safe, and sanitary dwelling units, affordable to displaced residents will be available in the existing local housing market;

- An identification of any property within the Redevelopment Area proposed to be acquired in accordance with Redevelopment Plan;
- Any significant relationship of the Redevelopment Plans to:
 - A) The Master Plans of contiguous municipalities;
 - B) The Master Plan of the County in which the municipality is located; and;
 - C) The State Development and Redevelopment Plans adopted pursuant to the “State Planning Act.”

PLANNING CONTEXT

The Township of Woodbridge is 24.2 square miles in size and has a population of approximately 100,000 people. Located in northeastern Middlesex County, Woodbridge is known for its central location in the state and accessibility from numerous state highways, including the Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike. The Township contains 10 sections: Avenel, Colonia, Fords, Hopelawn, Iselin, Keasbey, Menlo Park Terrace, Port Reading, Sewaren and the Woodbridge Proper section of the Township. The Township of Woodbridge is bordered by Clark Township, the City of Rahway, the City of Linden, and Union County to the north; the Borough of Carteret, the Arthur Kill and the City of Perth Amboy to the east; the Raritan River to the south; and Edison Township to the west.

The Woodbridge Center Mall - Area 1 Redevelopment Area is located on the Woodbridge Proper section of the Township. The Woodbridge section of the Township is generally bound by the city of Perth Amboy to the south, Fords to the west, Iselin and Avenel to the north, and Sewaren to the east. The Woodbridge section of the Township consists of the central business district, residential neighborhoods, and commercial uses along Route 1, Route 9, and Route 35. There are some industrial uses in the section as well.

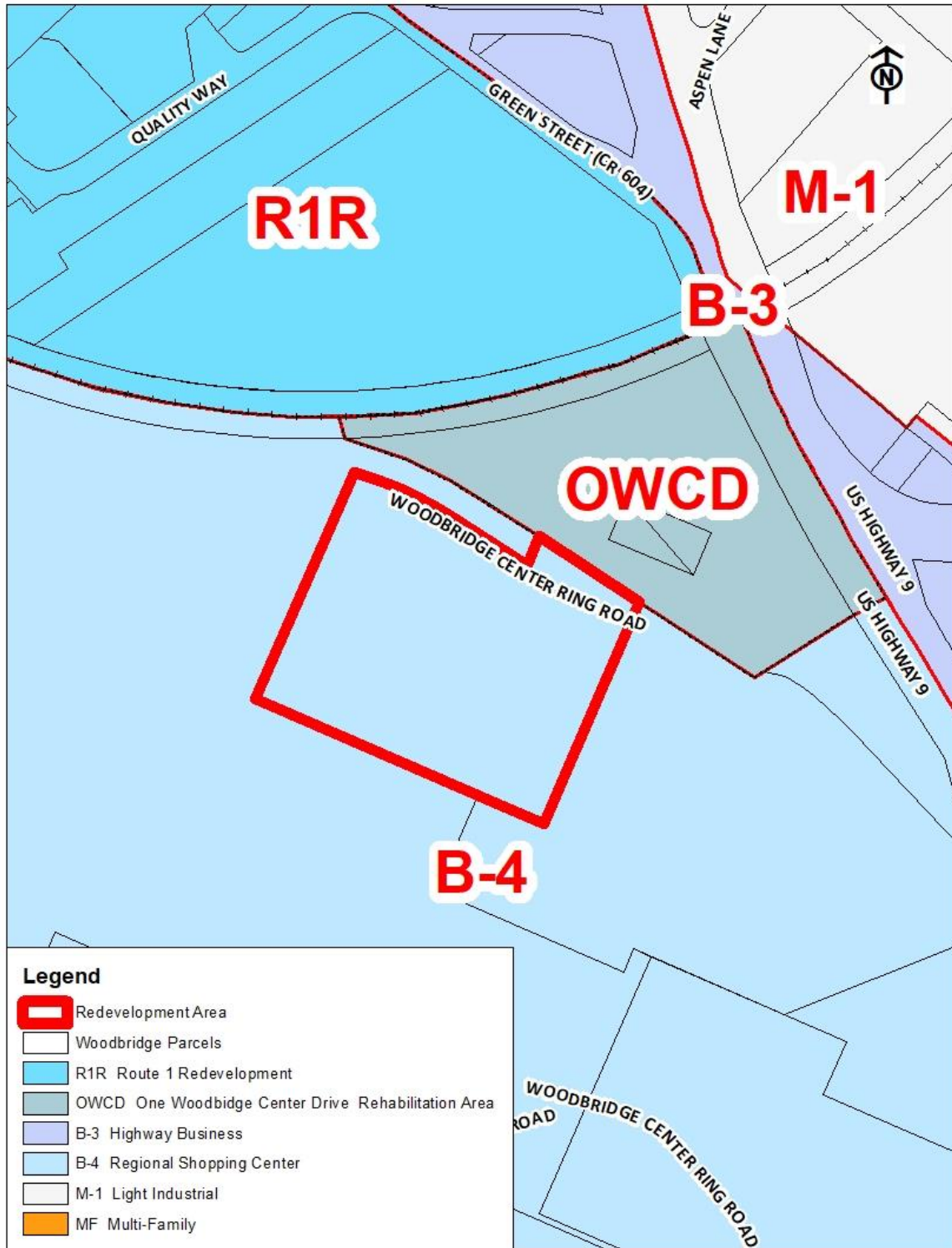
The redevelopment area is located at the Woodbridge Center Mall. The mall is accessible from Route 9, Route 1, and Woodbridge Center Drive. The subject property is located on the north side of the mall and is most easily accessible from Route 9.

The Lux/Jewelry Exchange is located across from the redevelopment area. The Lux is a nine-story mixed-use building with the jewelry exchange located on the ground floor and 132 apartments above.

Figure 1: Redevelopment Area Map



Figure 3: Current Zoning



HISTORY OF WOODBRIDGE PROPER

The Township of Woodbridge is the first incorporated township in the state of New Jersey. The Woodbridge Proper section of Woodbridge Township is one of the earliest settled sections of the Township. Woodbridge Proper contains a downtown central business district and is where some of the first community facilities were built, such as townhall, schools, fire houses, libraries, churches, and a train station. Woodbridge was known for clay mining in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Woodbridge Center Mall opened in 1971 on the site of a former clay pit.

MASTER PLANNING AND ZONING DESIGNATION HISTORY

The Township Master Plan was prepared in 2009 and re-examined in 2016. The Township Master Plan recognizes that the current land use for the redevelopment area as commercial. The current zoning for this area is B-4, Regional Shopping Center Zone. The Master Plan recommends this area continue to be utilized as B-4, Regional Shopping Center Zone. The Master Plan made the following comment about Woodbridge Center Mall: *In New Jersey and throughout the United States, regional malls are undergoing conversion and redevelopment into modern mixed use centers. The redevelopment of Woodbridge Center is an opportunity to maintain the long-term success of the operation.*

The B-4 Regional Shopping Center Zone first appeared on the Township Zoning Map in 1975. Prior to 1975, the redevelopment area and the current mall area was zone as M-1 Light Industrial.

PLAN GOALS

The overall goal of this Redevelopment Plan is to address the existing conditions that have negatively impacted the Area and comprehensively upgrade the area for redevelopment. The Township aims to reach the following goals:

- To stimulate economic investment in the Area;
- To promote the effective use of all the Redevelopment Area properties and to increase property tax base;
- To improve the physical appearance of the Area;
- To adapt to changing market conditions and utilize a vacant building;

- To promote environmental sustainability and the use of energy-efficient buildings.

COMMUNITY HEALTH

Redevelopment of any site within the Township which is either outdated and/or not fully productive promotes community health. New construction promotes a reduction in the nuisance (and overall anxiety of residents and flood inundation dealing with a nuisance) of properties.

COMMUNITY RESILIENCY

This Plan promotes resiliency to climate change by permitting redevelopment in an area of minimal flood hazard, outside the 500-year flood. Furthermore, this development shall comply with all municipal and state stormwater regulations, including any requirements for green infrastructure. Additionally, this redevelopment area has NJ Transit bus service, and if utilized, will reduce automobile emissions.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Any construction of new housing units presents an opportunity to contribute to the Township's affordable housing stock and must be provided in accordance with the relevant case law, statutes and regulations in effect at the time of an approval for development of the property.

WOODBIDGE CENTER MALL - AREA 1 REDEVELOPMENT AREA ZONING STANDARDS

The purpose of this Redevelopment Area is to enhance current opportunities for this commercial area; to promote compatible land use development of attractive building groups; and to improve and provide for the efficient and safe traffic flow within.

Permitted Uses:

Permitted principal uses shall include, at a minimum:

- Architectural and drafting supply sales and instruction
- Art galleries or museums
- Art schools
- Art supply stores
- Audiovisual equipment and supplies
- Auto supplies, parts and accessories
- Bakeries
- Banks and other financial institutions
- Barbershops
- Beauty shops
- Blueprinting and photocopying
- Bookstores
- Business schools
- Butcher shops or meat markets (no slaughtering permitted)
- Cafeterias
- Candy and confectionery stores
- Carpet, rug and floor covering stores
- Ceramic equipment and supply sales
- Cleaner or laundry pickup
- Clothes-pressing establishments
- Clothing or clothing accessory stores
- Clothing or costume rentals
- Cocktail lounges
- Cosmetic shops
- Curtain and drapery shops
- Dance schools
- Delicatessens

- Department stores
- Drive-in, drive-through, fast-food and take-out restaurants
- Drugstores or pharmacies
- Dry-goods or fabric sales
- Eating and drinking establishments (non-drive-in)
- Florist shops
- Food stores
- Furniture or home furnishings
- Gift, souvenir or card shops
- Greeting card shops
- Groceries
- Haberdashers
- Hairdressers
- Hardware stores
- Hobby shops or sporting goods stores
- Household appliance sales and repairs
- Ice cream stores
- Interior decorating establishments
- Jewelry shops
- Junior department stores
- Laundries, self-service
- Leather goods or luggage stores
- Libraries
- Locksmiths
- Luncheonettes
- Mail-order houses
- Medical and dental laboratory equipment and supplies
- Medical offices and outpatient clinic
- Medical testing and reference laboratories
- Men's clothing and accessories
- Music schools
- Music stores
- Newsstands
- Nightclubs or dance clubs
- Office equipment and supplies
- Office fixtures and furnishings sales
- Office services
- Offices, business and professional
- Offices, general
- Offices, municipal

- Optometrists
- Package liquor stores
- Paint stores
- Parking structures
- Pet shops
- Photographic equipment sales
- Photographic studios
- Physical culture or health establishments
- Post offices
- Printing, custom
- Public offices and facilities
- Record shops
- Restaurants
- Retail stores, large format
- Safe depositories
- Sewing machine stores
- Shoe or hat repair shops
- Shoe-shine parlors
- Shoe stores, children or adult
- Snack bars
- Sporting goods
- Stamp or coin stores
- Stamp redemption centers
- Stationery stores
- Supermarkets
- Tailor dressmaking shops
- Taxicab dispatch offices
- Telephone, radio and phonograph sales and services
- Tobacco shops
- Toy stores
- Travel agencies
- Umbrella shops
- Variety shops
- Wallpaper stores
- Women's clothing and accessories

The Township will consider amendment to this plan for other compatible activities.

Permitted accessory uses shall include, at a minimum:

- Parking structures for storage of vehicles operated as part of a permitted use; and
- Other customary accessory uses and structures which are incidental to the principal structure or use.

Bulk Standards:

Principal Building:

- Minimum lot size: 5 acres;
- Minimum front yard setback: 200 feet, measured from Woodbridge Center Ring Road;
- Minimum side-yard setback: 200 feet, measured from Woodbridge Center Ring Road
- Minimum rear-yard setback: 0 feet, when attached to the mall;
- No setback shall be less than 50 feet from a residential zone boundary or public street or right-of-way;
- Maximum building height: 65 feet;
- Maximum Lot Coverage (including principal and accessory buildings): 30%. Any building or portions thereof which shall be devoted substantially to providing covered or enclosed pedestrian malls, courts, walkways, rest areas or other similar amenities and any structures or buildings or unenclosed areas devoted to parking shall be excluded from the aforesaid thirty-percent limitation upon land coverage;
- Maximum Impervious Surface Coverage: 100 %

Accessory Buildings:

Accessory Buildings shall conform to the same height and setback requirements as the principal building, except as set forth below:

- Minimum front-yard, side yard, and rear-yard setback: 10 feet.

Sustainability:

- All development is encouraged to incorporate green building practices.
- Solar Panels are permitted on buildings and on the top level of parking structures.
- “Make-Ready” electric vehicle parking spaces and installed electric vehicle supply equipment shall be installed according to state legislation.
- Bike share programs, and car share programs are all encouraged.

Additional Standards:

Shared Parking:

Shared parking spaces shall be permitted to promote efficiency. Where a shared parking analysis is submitted to the Planning Board, as part of a land use approval application, that demonstrates multiple uses may share parking spaces, which will effectively serve such uses, the total number of required space may accordingly be reduced from the total that would otherwise be required for each individual use. Surrounding parking spaces outside of the redevelopment area may also be counted as part of parking supply.

Parking & Loading Spaces:

The required size of parking spaces in the Redevelopment Area shall be as follows:

- At grade, perpendicular parking spaces: 9 feet wide x 18 feet long;
- Parallel parking spaces: 7 feet wide x 22 feet long;
- Compact parking spaces in structured/garage parking: 8 feet x 16 feet, provided that compact spaces shall not exceed 10% of the total number of spaces provided.

The required number of non-residential parking spaces:

- Minimum number of spaces shall be as set forth in the Land Use and Development Ordinance of the Township of Woodbridge.

The required number of loading spaces in the Redevelopment Area shall be as follows:

- Minimum number of loading spaces shall be as set forth in the Land Use and Development Ordinance of the Township of Woodbridge

Lighting and Signage:

- Lighting and Signage shall be in accordance with the requirements set forth in the Land Use and Development Ordinance.

Circulation:

- Bike lanes and walkways should be considered at appropriate locations.

Replacement of Trees:

- Any trees removed shall be in accordance with the tree replacement ordinance of the Land Use and Development Ordinance.

RELATIONSHIP OF PLAN TO THE TOWNSHIP LAND USE AND DEVELOPMENT ORDINANCE (APPLICATION & PROCESS)

The Redevelopment Areas shall be redeveloped in accordance with the standards detailed in this Redevelopment Plan. This Plan supersedes the use and bulk provisions of the Township Land Use and Development Ordinance (Chapter 150) for the Redevelopment Area unless specifically referenced. Other Township regulations affecting developments that are in conflict are superseded by this Plan; however, existing engineering standards, performance standards and definitions shall apply.

In connection with site plan or subdivision applications, the Planning Board may grant deviations from the regulations contained within this Redevelopment Plan where by reason of exceptional narrowness, shallowness or shape of a specific piece of property or by reason of exceptional topographic conditions, pre-existing structures or physical features uniquely affecting a specific piece of property, or by reason of an extraordinary and exceptional situation uniquely affecting a specific piece of property or the structures lawfully existing thereon, the strict application of any provision of, or regulation adopted pursuant to this Redevelopment Plan would result in peculiar and exceptional practical difficulties to, or exceptional or undue hardship upon, the developer or redeveloper of such property. The Planning Board may also grant a deviation from the regulations contained within this Redevelopment Plan related to a specific piece of property where the purposes of this Redevelopment Plan would be advanced by such deviation from the strict application of the requirements of this Plan and the benefits of granting the deviation would outweigh any detriments. In connection with site plan or subdivision applications, the Planning Board may grant deviations from the regulations contained within this Redevelopment Plan, pursuant to the criteria of N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70c(1) and (2) for bulk variances, and such deviations shall not be considered an amendment to this Redevelopment Plan. No deviations may be granted under the terms of this section unless such deviations can be granted without resulting in substantial detriment to the public good and will not substantially impair the intent and purpose of the Redevelopment Plan.

The Planning Board may grant exceptions or waivers of design standards from the requirements for site plan or subdivision approval as may be reasonable and within the general purpose and intent of the provisions for site plan review and/or subdivision approval within the Plan, if the literal enforcement of one or more provisions of the Plan is impracticable or would exact undue hardship because of peculiar conditions pertaining to this site. No deviations may be granted which will result in permitting a use that is not a permitted use within this Redevelopment Plan. Any deviations from standards of this

Plan that results in a “d” variance pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-70d shall be addressed as an amendment to the Plan rather than via variance relief through the Township’s Zoning Board of Adjustment. An application requesting a deviation from the requirements of this Redevelopment Plan shall provide public notice of such application in accordance with the public notice requirement set forth in N.J.S.A. 40:55D-12. All development must be approved by the Planning Board and shall be submitted through the normal site plan and subdivision procedures as identified as N.J.S.A. 40:55D, et seq.

Final adoption of this Redevelopment Plan by the Township Council shall be considered an amendment to the Township of Woodbridge Land Use and Development Ordinance and Zoning Map. Unless otherwise defined in the Plan, terms used in this Plan shall have the same meaning as defined in the Township’s Land Use and Development Ordinance.

Woodbridge Center Mall - Area 1 REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

RELATIONSHIP WITH OTHER PLANS

RELATIONSHIP TO THE TOWNSHIP MASTER PLAN

The Township of Woodbridge's last comprehensive Master Plan was prepared in February 2009. The Master Plan recommended this area be devoted to Office Research and Highway Business uses.

The Master Plan adopted the following goals that are relevant to this Plan:

- To preserve the existing character consistent with current development patterns through zoning standards that correspond to existing development patterns;
- To encourage and control commercial development by limiting regional commercial and office development to major highway corridors;
- To expand retail and service activities in appropriate locations to meet the future shopping needs of Township residents;
- To continue attracting premier Retail, Industrial and Office end users to the Township;
- To expand and protect the Township's ratable base through the attraction and retention of nationally known and respected companies;

For all these aforementioned reasons, this redevelopment plan is consistent with the Township Master Plan.

MASTER PLANS OF ADJACENT MUNICIPALITIES

The Woodbridge Center Mall - Area 1 Redevelopment Area is located along Route 1, Route 9, and Woodbridge Center Drive. It is not near any neighboring municipality. This plan is not expected to have any adverse impact on adjacent municipalities.

MIDDLESEX COUNTY PLANS

Consistency with Middlesex County Master Plan

The Woodbridge Center Mall - Area 1 Redevelopment Area is generally consistent with the elements of the Middlesex County Master Plan, a document that addresses sprawl and sustainability in the region. The Woodbridge Center Mall - Area 1 Redevelopment Plan relates directly to the goals, values and objectives of the Middlesex County Master Plan which aims to:

- Make fuller use of existing transportation lines and facilities. The County Plan anticipated that public transportation would achieve greater significance as a necessary alternative to the private automobile, with its attendant problems of pollution, energy availability, and congestion;
- Find a more feasible alternative to the present situation of “strip” commercial development found on major roads, and single-family homes on unnecessarily large lots;
- “Cluster” future growth around definable town centers and transportation facilities to include commercial and office employment as well as residential, with land use intensity decreasing as distance from the town center increases.

New Jersey State Development & Redevelopment Plan

The Woodbridge Center Mall - Area 1 Redevelopment Plan is consistent and would effectuate the plans and policies of the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP), adopted in 2001. The SDRP is a unique document that guides State-level development and redevelopment policy as well as local and regional planning efforts. This Plan is consistent with the following statewide goals in the SDRP.

- Revitalize the State’s cities and towns;
- Promote beneficial economic growth, development and renewal for all residents of New Jersey;
- Protect the environment, prevent and clean up pollution;
- Provide adequate public facilities and services at a reasonable cost;

- Preserve and enhance areas with historic, cultural, scenic, open space, and recreational value;
- Ensure sound and integrated planning and implementation statewide.

The SDRP also includes a State Plan Policy Map, which divides the state into regions, known as Planning Areas, and includes specific goals for each area.

The Policy Map also identifies “Centers”, locations into which development is to be directed, “Environs,” areas to be protected from future growth. The Township of Woodbridge falls in the ‘Metropolitan Planning Area’ (PA1). The State Plan recognizes that all communities in this planning area are essentially fully developed; hence much of the change in land uses will occur as redevelopment.

The State Plan’s planning objectives for the ‘Metropolitan Planning Area’ includes:

- Providing for much of the state’s future redevelopment;
- Revitalizing cities and towns;
- Redesigning areas of sprawl;
- Protecting the character of existing stable communities.

The New Jersey Department of State has been preparing a new State Strategic Plan since 2012. The proposed plan has not been adopted by the State Planning Commission.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

REDEVELOPMENT ENTITY

The Woodbridge Township Redevelopment Agency will serve as the Redevelopment Entity.

PHASING:

- Projects may be developed in phases;
- The phasing may include phased start and completion dates among the various land use components, as well as internal phasing schedules within sections, subject to specific provisions in the redevelopment agreement.

APPOINTMENT OF A DESIGNATED REDEVELOPER

The Redevelopment Entity may select one or more redevelopers to participate in the implementation of the Redevelopment Plan.

As part of the process to be designated a redeveloper, the Redevelopment Entity will negotiate a formal Redevelopment Agreement.

Designation of a Redeveloper(s) by the Redevelopment Entity shall be subject to the execution of an appropriate Redevelopment Agreement.

CONDITIONS IN REDEVELOPMENT AGREEMENT(S)

Each Redevelopment Agreement will be contingent upon the following conditions, restrictions, and/or requirements.

1. Each Redevelopment Agreement will incorporate the pertinent aspects of the selected redeveloper's proposal and will address financial considerations, planning, phasing, development and such other issues as deemed appropriate and/or as required according to state law in order to implement the Redevelopment Plan.

2. A designated redeveloper will be obligated to complete on-site improvements as approved, together with any specified off-site improvements, as may be required in accordance with the Redevelopment Plan and the Redevelopment Agreement.
3. No designated redeveloper will be permitted to dispose of property until the issuance of the Certificate of Completion, unless the prior written consent of the Redevelopment Agency has been obtained, subject to the terms and conditions of the Redevelopment Agreement.
4. The Redeveloper(s) shall pay to the Redevelopment Entity an application fee for consideration of redeveloper as a designated redeveloper and will fund an escrow for the Agency's costs in implementing redevelopment.

DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

No application for development or redevelopment in the area may be filed with the Planning Board until such time as the applicant has applied for and received a designation as redeveloper from the Redevelopment Entity and has executed a Redevelopment Agreement with the Redevelopment Entity providing for the proposed application. In addition to any requirements of the Agency, major preliminary and/or Final Site Plans and/or subdivisions, with details sufficient to comply with the Municipal Land Use Law and Local Ordinance, shall be submitted for Planning Board review and approval for each development parcel, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 40:55D-1 et seq.

The Planning Board shall require the developer to provide a bond or bonds in accordance with the requirements of the Municipal Land Use Law.

DURATION OF REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

During the time that the Redevelopment Plan is in effect, any party acting as a redeveloper, (as defined in the LRHL) must obtain the approval of the Redevelopment Entity. The Redevelopment Plan will remain in effect for 30 years.

AMENDING THE REDEVELOPMENT PLAN

This Redevelopment Plan may be amended from time to time in compliance with the requirements of law, provided that with respect to any land in the project area previously disposed of by the Redevelopment Entity for use in accordance with the Redevelopment Plan, the Entity will notice the owner of such land whose interests may be materially affected by such amendment.