

**SUMMARY REPORT
OF THE DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT
FOR THE 2021 CALENDAR YEAR**

During the 2021 calendar year, the Director of Community Development and the Economic Development Committee continued their efforts to identify, develop, and promote goals and objectives for Waterford Township's Municipal planning and programs and continued ongoing dialogue regarding Township economic development policies and procedures. This report summarizes primary efforts undertaken in that regard.

Historically, the prior directors of Community Development engaged largely in zoning, land use and construction office enforcement. However, since 2020, the Township Committee has begun to focus its economic development efforts on business and commercial growth, refurbishment and redevelopment of existing land parcels and continued dialogue with residents regarding desired community facilities. Although Township operations and certain projects have been slowed by the Coronavirus Pandemic, the Township's Community Planning and Development analyses was not slowed down.

1. **Haines Boulevard Redevelopment Area.** At the request of Township Committee Members, Waterford Township Community Development and the EDC began conducting a review of policies related to the Haines Boulevard Redevelopment Area. Due to the limited infrastructure within the tract, the Township reached out to the United States Department of Agriculture Rural Development Program to inquire regarding the availability of grants and low interest loans and to discuss the USDARD's requirements for rural development lending. Although the USDARD's response has been somewhat slowed by Covid-19, the agency has made it clear that it stands ready, willing and able to assist Waterford Township with respect to its desire to create utility facilities that will attract the growth of commercial development along the Haines Boulevard corridor. USDARD stated that the Township must first identify one or more potential users/beneficiaries of the infrastructure, as well as to provide data on prospective commercial usage. To that end, Waterford Township Community Development began a dialogue with the Township's Affordable Housing Developer, Conifer Realty, LLC, regarding the projects of a joint application for sewer and water facility development from the White Horse Pike to the Conifer project. The Township would also like to see service lines extended northerly along Haines Boulevard to at least the approved Capital Flooring. During the 2022 calendar year, the Waterford Township Community Development intends to strengthen its outreach to USDARD Agency with the hope that the Township may avail itself of the low cost federal infrastructure grant and loaning programs.

2. **Affordable Housing Effort.** In 2020, the Township enacted an Affordable Housing Ordinance pursuant to the terms of an April 2017 New Jersey Superior Court settlement with Fair Share Housing Center. In furtherance of its Affordable Housing efforts, the Township selected Conifer Realty, LLC (“Conifer Realty”) as its Affordable Housing site redeveloper for a six and a half acre tract of land located at the rear of the former Lombardo’s property. Conifer Realty is a for profit corporation that is regarded as one of the very best developers, owners, and managers of affordable housing projects in the northeastern United States, having approximately 16,000 residential units in its portfolio. In 2021, Conifer proposed constructing ninety-five (95) affordable housing rental apartments within five (5) buildings; inasmuch as the project will consist entirely of rental units, the project will receive a fifty-two (52) unit bonus credit towards the Township’s overall net affordable housing obligation of 189 units. The Waterford Township Community Development has been the primary contact for Conifer Realty’s efforts to enable the Township to meet its affordable housing obligation for the 2015 to the 2025 cycle, with Conifer’s proposed 95 dwelling units plus the bonus credit of 52 units, means that the Township’s remaining affordable housing obligation would be 42 units through the 2025 calendar year. An additional benefit to Waterford Township is that Conifer Realty has agreed that it will serve as the Township’s Administrative Agent for all affordable housing marketing, regulatory, compliance, and reporting issues pertaining to its project. As of December 2021, Conifer Realty had not qualified for 2022 federal funding; however, Conifer Realty remains committed to Waterford Township and will continue to pursue all available funding for its project.

3. **Zoning Issues.** As a result of numerous concerns expressed by Township Officials and residents, the Waterford Township Community Development and the Waterford Township Economic Development Committee began undertaking a review of the Township’s zoning and land use ordinances. It is apparent that the Zoning Code contains multiple zones which appear to be the product of outdated Township policies that originated in the 1980’s and 1990’s. The Waterford Township Economic Development Committee believes that zoning regulations must be reviewed and revised to reflect and confirm Waterford’s status as a largely rural community with limited areas for commercial development. The Waterford Township Economic Development Committee believes that zoning boundaries should be revised and zoning uses should be updated accordingly.

4. **Pressing Township Needs.** Since 2020, the Waterford Township Community Development and the Waterford Township Economic Development Committee have engaged in an effort to identify and facilitate commercial development along the White Horse Pike, Jackson Road and Atco Avenue corridors. A foremost goal is to obtain a grocery store/supermarket within the Township. To that end, the Waterford Township Community Development has contacted Lidl, Aldi, and has reached out to the Independent Grocers Association (“IGA”) to solicit guidance in its efforts to attract a retailer to the Township. The Waterford Township Community Development has also contacted several commercial development firms to solicit their participation in the Township’s efforts to attract suitable retail uses.

With respect to the Township's "wish list", there is an acute need for both senior and market rate apartment housing by which long-standing residents can downsize and still remain in the community. Modern apartment housing in Waterford is extremely limited; many of the existing apartments are fifty, sixty, or seventy years old. Although a typical apartment "density" may require the acquisition of Pinelands Development Credits, the Township remains committed to undertaking efforts to enable its long-standing residents to remain in Waterford Township as they age.

Although the Township has been actively creating outdoor recreation activities, many residents continue to request the creation of a Community Center which would offer both indoor assembly and recreational opportunities for the Township residents.

5. **Commercial Tax Base.** In addition to its efforts to attract participation by commercial real estate brokers and developers, the Waterford Township Economic Development Committee has begun investigating marketplace impediments to development. For example, various parcels of developable real estate in Waterford Township are being offered for sale at "asking prices" that far exceed their tax assessment. The asking price begs the question: Are the tax assessments on these parcels too low? Should commercial property along high traffic, high visibility corridors be reflective of the owners' values? The Waterford Township Economic Development Committee intends to investigate further. In a similar light, Waterford Township Community Development and the Waterford Township Economic Development Committee have engaged in discussions concerning efforts to investigate the status of "Brownsfields" and other "blighted" commercial sites within the Township. The Economic Development Committee's efforts have been hampered by the New Jersey government shutdown, which has impeded its efforts to review both NJDEP's and New Jersey Department Of Community Affairs' files. Nevertheless, the return of environmental constrained properties to the tax base remains a primary objective of the office.

6. **General Community Development.** During 2021, Waterford Township Community Development engaged in ongoing dialogue regarding the enhancement of community amenities. With respect to the "downtown" area along Atco Avenue, there should be consideration as to whether or not one or more properties along Atco Avenue can be designated as an area or areas "in need of redevelopment". The Township has a need for enhanced bike trails and walking paths throughout the Atco area. Residents have also inquired about the advisability of creating a dog park on Township property, and the establishment of more restaurants within the Township. Waterford Township Community Development also participated in several meetings with community groups who are actively pursuing the erection of a train station replica near the intersection of Atco and Raritan Avenue. It has also participated in discussions concerning two potential cannabis facility developers.

7. **Other Goals and Objectives.** The Waterford Township Community Development and the Waterford Township Economic Development Committee have been active in efforts to re-examine the Township Master Plan and to review the goals and objectives identified in the Township's recent Strategic Plan. During the 2022 calendar year, the Waterford Township Community Development desires to become more actively involved in soliciting grants and other

economic assistance for the Township. The Waterford Township Community Development also intends to contact both the NJDEP and the Green Acres Program to review records regarding Township properties. The objective is to enhance and maximize the financial benefits available to Waterford Township.

In summary, the Waterford Township Community Development and the Waterford Township Economic Development Committee have undertaken a great deal of effort to identify economic goals and objectives in 2021, but there is much work left to do.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Michael J. Ward".

By: Michael J. Ward, Esquire

December 31, 2021