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2023 Master Plan Amendment

Town of Belvidere Warren County, New Jersey

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I. Introduction

The purpose of this 2023 Master Plan Amendment (hereinafter “2023 Amendment”) is to set forth a proposed framework to guide the implementation of a new zoning overlay district in the Historic Waterfront Business District.

In 2021, a Neighborhood Preservation Program (“NPP”) Implementation Plan was adopted, identifying several goals and related projects that the NPP wished to undertake in the coming years. In 2022, that Implementation Study was updated, and the goal of “*Redistrict/Rezone Specific Town-Wide Areas for Economic Growth*” identified.

As part of a boundary expansion request, which was recently approved, the NPP explains that:

the expansion will include the rezoning of several areas of town to create a cottage district. This will provide incoming businesses with more options for potential locations, as Belvidere does not have any other properties to build upon. By expanding the boundary lines and creating a cottage district, the district will be able to showcase a wider range of architectural styles, cultural landmarks, and other important sites that have helped to shape the district's character over time. This expansion will also bring more attention to the district, as well as provide a larger canvas for the community to showcase its history and cultural heritage.

This Amendment to the Town’s Master Plan and 2018 Master Plan Reexamination Report contemplates a new overlay zone district within the downtown area of Belvidere. The following chapters of this 2023 Amendment detail the history of the area, the planning justifications for the overlay, and the zoning recommendations.

II. Business District Context

The NPP Implementation Plan recognizes the Historic Waterfront Business District (“the HWB District”) which is overseen by the Town of Belvidere NPP team and stakeholders. The HWB District “*once housed Victorian two-story balconied businesses, riverside barns and mills for local commerce, with picturesque views of converging rivers with easy access from dozens of walkable access zones. The district is ripe for a revitalization because it offers multiple options to improve the quality of life for its citizens, and visitors that come to the town. Eateries, local shopping, nightlife, outdoor recreational activities, small business, and more are all located within this district*” (District Implementation Plan Update 2023, pg. 20).

The HWB District, as recently expanded, is irregularly shaped but runs roughly along Market Street/Greenwich Street, Prospect Street/Hardwick Street, Mansfield Street, Water Street, Front Street, Second Street, and Third Street. The specific HWB District boundaries are shown on the attached map.

There are four zones within the HWB District: B (Business – Retail), R-75 (Single-Family Residential), LM (Light Manufacturing), and CH (Courthouse).



III. Need to Modify the Master Plan

The Town seeks to create an overlay district that would be coterminous with the HWB District as per NPP Implementation Plan. The Master Plan is hereby amended to include this recommendation, recommending that the governing body consider amendments to the zoning code and zoning map accordingly.

The new overlay district should include provisions to “provide incoming businesses with more options for potential locations,” (District Implementation Plan Update 2023) allowing for ground floor commercial uses and conversion of existing structures into business uses.

IV. Planning Justifications

As Belvidere seeks to encourage downtown business development, zoning to make that straightforward, realistic, and consistent though the HWB District is important. There are numerous zones throughout the HWB District, making it difficult to understand what regulations apply.

The primary commercial areas in the HWB District are Water Street, Market Street, Front Street, South Water Street, and Greenwich Street. However, the entire HWB District and the associated recommended overlay district can and should serve as a mixed-use district, generating activity, economic growth, and small business development.

V. Zoning Recommendations

While a zoning code amendment is a separate municipal action, the recommended overlay district considerations may include:

- A future overlay zone should permit conditional uses to allow ground floor commercial occupancy of existing structures. Such uses would mirror most of the B – Business – Retail zone, and would include retail stores; offices; personal service stores or studios; restaurants.
- The underlying zone and permitted uses and bulk requirements would remain in effect.
- It is recommended that the overlay encompass the entire HWB District for continuity of zoning.
- Conditions for the overlay should include permitting commercial uses on the ground floor in residential districts while keeping the upper floors residential, hours of operation, limiting façade modifications and building expansions in order to preserve the character of the buildings, and other necessary site plan and performance considerations, which may include parking, lighting, noise, etc.

VI. Conclusion

This Amendment to the Master Plan and 2018 Reexamination Report is necessary to establish the foundation for a new zoning overlay in the Historic Waterfront Business District. The Neighborhood Preservation Program is working toward the goal of increasing business and commercial activity in the downtown, an effort detailed in their 2023 District Implementation Plan Update. It is appropriate that the vision of that document be herein incorporated into the Master Plan, and ultimately carried out through a zoning code and map amendment.



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