

CA - Piscataway

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Expert Report: Planning Report - Housing Density Analysis

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PLANNING REPORT

HOUSING DENSITY ANALYSIS

For: Leonard Lange

Property Located at Old New Brunswick Road near Stelton Road
Piscataway Township, New Jersey

July, 1984


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Introduction

This report is prepared for Leonard Lange for the purpose of assisting in establishing housing densities for multifamily development. The property included in this analysis consists of about 16 acres located in the south-westerly portion of a triangular-shaped block which is bounded by a railroad freight line to the south, Old New Brunswick Road and Stelton Road. While the property involved is known as Block 319, Lot 1A, and Block 317, Lot 11B, many of the findings and conclusions contained herein apply equally to the balance of Block 317, which includes 4 additional parcels over 5 acres in size. These 4 parcels total about 35 acres and are either undeveloped or have no more than a single family dwelling located on them.

Part of the premise of this density analysis is that 20 percent of the units would be made available to households of low and moderate income, as defined by the New Jersey Supreme Court in the Mount Laurel II decision. Further, it is my understanding that a preliminary determination has been made by the court-appointed Master, Carla Lerman, PP, that this location has been determined to be suitable for the construction of housing which would include low and moderate income families. With this basic determination in place, and under the assumption that not all locations determined to be appropriate for low and moderate income housing should be assigned the same density, this report establishes a density rationale for this area.

Site Characteristics

The block in which the property is located is essentially flat, with no critical environmental limitations. There is one small area which is poorly drained. It is located near the tracks. A determination will have to be made as to the proper method of handling on-site drainage in the vicinity of this small low area, but it is likely that this area will become part of a detention basin, which would be required for development in any event.

There are some wooded areas in the block, particularly along Old New Brunswick Road. While the woods need to be thinned out, there are some desirable trees which could be saved and worked into the landscaping for new development.

The railroad located along the southerly boundary is a lightly used freight line which should have little or no effect on the use of the property for residential purposes. It provides an effective separation of the site from industrial uses to the south.

Old New Brunswick Road and Stelton Road are important traffic carriers. While additional comments are offered later in this report on Old New Brunswick Road, an important item to point out as a part of the site analysis is that there is a traffic light located at the North Randolphville Road intersection, which is just north of the railroad on Old New Brunswick Road. This traffic light would provide a controlled access point for site-related traffic.

The only area of established single family homes in this block is along Stelton Road. The Old New Brunswick Road frontage is essentially undeveloped, with only one or two single family dwellings found between the railroad and the Stelton Road traffic light.

Neighborhood Characteristics

The properties involved are generally oriented to Old New Brunswick Road, which is developed in garden apartments along the opposite side of the street. The R-M zoning found in that area allows apartment development at up to 15 units per acre, with no requirement for low and moderate income housing.

Along Stelton Road, there are single family dwellings, but the pattern of small lot single family homes is most strongly established between Stelton Road and Washington Avenue.

On Stelton Road north of the intersection with Old New Brunswick Road is a neighborhood commercial area which offers a variety of commercial, financial and professional services within walking distance of the proposed multifamily housing.

Two schools are also within walking distance, one of which is located in the same block but facing Stelton Road, while the other is along North Randolphville Road only a few hundred feet from the traffic light at Old New Brunswick Road.

The properties involved are located near Interstate 287, but more importantly they offer housing opportunities in a residential area which is very conveniently located near the many employment centers along Route 287 in Piscataway Township.

Planning Considerations

The Piscataway Township Master Plan, adopted in October, 1983, recommends certain improvements to Old New Brunswick Road in the vicinity of Route 287. It calls for widening the bridge over 287 to 4 lanes, and calls for establishing a full interchange at that location rather than the partial access available at present. It also calls for a different alignment of Route 18 through the township, falling along Hoes Lane and Old New Brunswick Road south of Route 287, as one alternative. Full interchanges are also called for in the Master Plan at South Randolphville Road and South Washington Avenue, all of which are located near the properties in question.

As noted earlier in this report, the R-M District located across from this site is developed in multifamily in a district which permits a gross density of 15 units per acre, as indicated in the township zoning ordinance.

An amendment to the ordinance in November, 1983, established an R-20A District, which has a base density of 8 units per acre, with a bonus density of 2 per acre if 20 percent of the units are low and moderate income. Assuming some form of that designation would apply to this site because of its highly desirable development characteristics, it is suggested that the bonus provisions of the R-20A are inadequate to provide an incentive for the construction of lower cost housing. If a developer is faced with the prospect of building market rate housing at 8/acre, and sees the possibility of developing two additional units per acre, but only for lower income households, the property would generate a lower profit margin because of the internal subsidy involved, and there may be a marketing problem presented by the presence of lower income units. All things considered, it is unlikely that the addition of only 2 units per acre would offer any incentive for a private developer, and therefore does not make the development of lower cost housing realistically achievable. In fact, bonuses would have to be significant in order to serve as an incentive to builders. While there is no hard evidence of the amount of bonus needed to become attractive, it is clear that it would have to offer the development of additional market rate units in order to overcome the negative financial and marketing aspects of developing lower cost housing.

Density Recommendations

With a density of 15 units per acre across Old New Brunswick Road, the presence of high intensity employment centers to the south, direct access to both Old New Brunswick Road and Stelton Road, adequate sewer and water services, and the presence of nearby shopping, this area offers all the ingredients necessary to warrant high density development.

In attempting to define high density, it could be related to the 15 units per acre which served as the basis for the apartment development across from the site. However, much of that development occurred with a high percentage of one bedroom units, which allows for more housing units and lower impact than those with a higher proportion of larger units. At the same time, the gross density of 8 units per acre set forth in the R-20A District, even with the density bonus of 2/acre, offers a gross density which is only two-thirds that of the apartments.

Within the context of other sites under consideration for Mount Laurel II housing in the township, this site appears to offer locational advantages not found in many other areas. As a result, it should receive the highest density designation permitted. Assuming a base density of 8 units per acre, as set forth in the R-20A District, it is not unreasonable to look toward either a 50% density bonus for providing 20% percent of the units as low and moderate income, or a gross density of 12/acre with a mandatory setaside of 20 percent. By assigning this higher density to the desirable sites in the township, and establishing lower densities, say a gross of 6 units per acre on the less desirable sites, it will allow the township to accommodate more units than would be possible if the maximum gross density were set as low as 10/acre, as provided in the R-20A.