

# FRANKLIN TOWNSHIP: Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

AUGUST 7, 2017

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Franklin Township, NJ

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## Background

4ward Planning was retained by Franklin Township to conduct a community market analysis and develop strategic zoning and economic development recommendations in support of its Hamilton Street Business District (HBD) and Corporate Business (CB) district. The Hamilton Street Business District (HBD) stretches approximately 1.2 miles east from Franklin Boulevard to Hawthorne Drive (Figure 1), while the 500-acre CB district is bound by County Route 527 and Pierce Street to the north and south, respectively, and World’s Fair Drive and Davidson Avenue to the east and west, respectively (Figure 2). Grounded in community market analysis findings, the strategic recommendations included in this document focus on strengthening Franklin Township’s economy by matching market-supportable development opportunities with targeted private investment.



Figure 1 Hamilton Street Business District

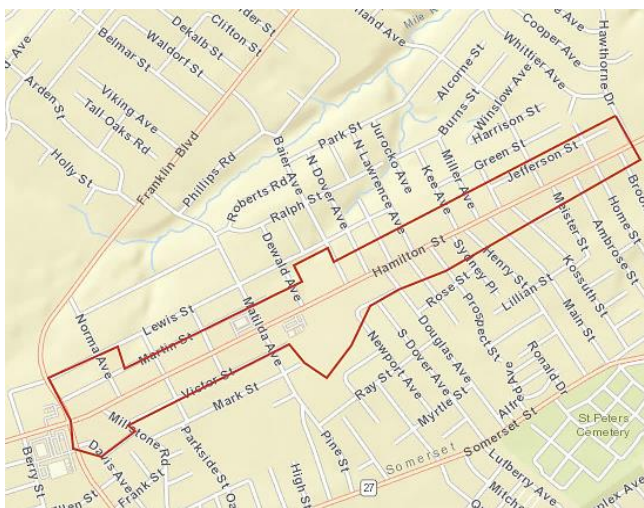
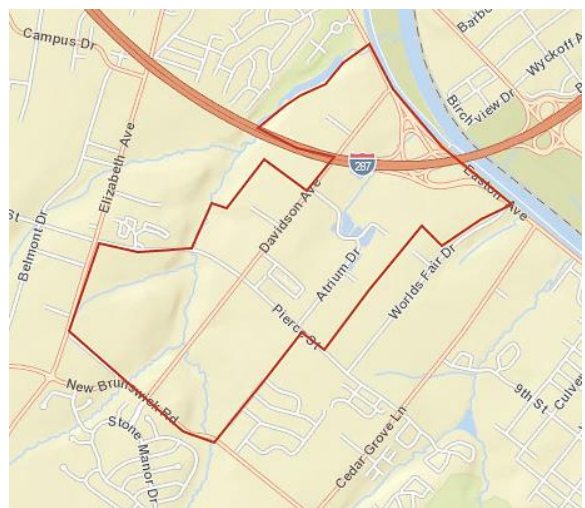


Figure 2 Corporate Business District



## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

Specifically, the recommendations are designed to help address the following questions:

- What currently makes the Township attractive and how can the Township capitalize upon this?
- How can the CB zone office vacancies and Hamilton Street redevelopment be successfully managed through targeted development?
- How can growth areas best leverage themselves to create stronger and consistent bases?
- Could the market absorb more dining establishments, and would this help retail stores?
- What low-cost efforts can be implemented quickly and easily to make the Township more marketable?
- How can the Township capitalize on market deficiencies or regional opportunities, given location and demographic considerations?
- What strategic changes and/or investments can the Township implement that would catalyze the greatest return to business and community?
- What is most constraining to business attraction, retention, and/or expansion?
- What types of market opportunities are the best and most realistic for key parcels?
- What incentives can be offered to attract businesses?

## Hamilton Business District

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### 1. Existing Economic Character

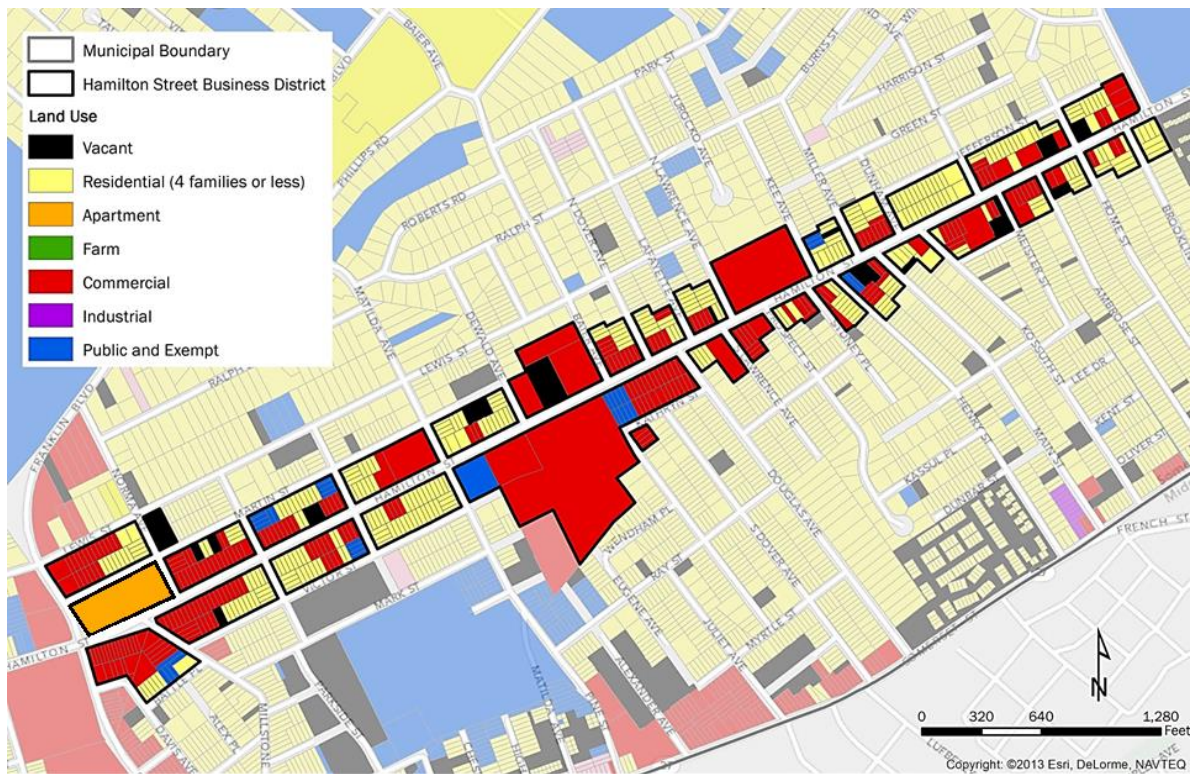
As earlier identified, there are 270 commercial parcels along the HBD, totaling 36 land acres (Figure 3). The HBD features a mix of land uses and building heights (mostly one- and two-story), including single-family detached and multi-family housing, service retail, automotive repair and service, quick-serve eating establishments, churches, banks, and grocery store-anchored shopping plazas. The eastern end of the HBD (between Meister Street to Hawthorne Drive) currently exhibits new private investment in mixed-use multi-family residential, with ground-floor retail (note that this new investment is in direct response to the Township's recently amended zoning for this area, permitting higher density development and greater lot coverage). That new investment is more robust within the eastern end of the HBD is of no surprise, given the segment's proximity to the campus of Rutgers University and the willingness of students to live on the outer edges of the campus.

The earlier identified improvement-to-land value (ILV) analysis (Figure 4) demonstrated that there are several underutilized land parcels within this segment of the HBD – a few of which are currently being redeveloped as mixed-use residential. The central section of the HBD corridor (between Matilda Avenue and Kee Avenue) features the greatest degree of underutilized property, per the earlier identified ILV analysis. That is, while all parcels in this segment of the HBD are developed to one degree or another, several of these parcels (e.g., large shopping plaza parcels) feature relatively low improved value to land value ratios (e.g., low ILV) and, thus, present opportunities for more intensive mixed-use development. The western segment of the HBD (from Matilda Avenue to Franklin Boulevard) features the greatest concentration of residential properties relative to the rest of the corridor and is, generally, the most visually appealing, in terms of property condition and street character. This segment of the HBD corridor also features a few parcels identified as having low ILV.



# Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

## Figure 3 Hamilton Street Business District Land Use



## Figure 4 Hamilton Street Business District Improvement-to-Land Value Analysis



## 2. Prior Plans

Municipal leaders and Hamilton Street businesses have been working collaboratively for years to promote the economic vitality of Hamilton Street and to guide investment along the corridor. Today, the effort is led by the work of the Hamilton Street Advisory Board (HSAB). The 11 voting members are mostly business operators and property owners in the district.

Key initiatives include:

- Vision Document
- Design Guide: Preparation of design guidelines illustrating specific dimensional characteristics of the desired pedestrian-oriented retail environment
- Zoning Update: Drafting of revisions to zoning ordinances adopted by the Township
- District Boundary Update: Expanding the HBD boundary

## 3. Recommended Zoning Updates

***Recommendation: Update regulatory requirements; illustrate (and test) desired outcomes, to guide the anticipated increase in private investment. Investigate redevelopment incentives and planning techniques likely to encourage the kind of infill development and new anchor businesses envisioned for Hamilton Street.***

### a. Overview of Zoning Topics

Recent development projects demonstrate that an uptrend is underway. Several Hamilton Street development projects are being designed in accordance with the mixed-use/main street model anticipated by the aforementioned zoning update and design guide. Additional planning steps that address issues identified by the advisory board's overview document and included in the 2015 Master Plan Reexamination Report are described in the following section.

### b. Rename and Refine "Business Center" as "Hamilton Village Center"

4ward Planning observes, as did the HSAB, that, "...the length of the corridor with development land use pattern results in there being no sense of an identifiable, memorable 'place' along Hamilton Street...no significant concentration of retail, residential, government" that coalesces into a distinguishable town center. Current zoning language refers to the district as the Hamilton Street Business district zone. 4ward Planning believes it is preferable to refer to the district as the "Village Center." Further, we recommend that the zoning provisions for Hamilton Street be renamed and mapped as the Village Center (VC) zoning district (Figure 5).

## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

We identify three distinct sections of the proposed Village Center and a general description of the permitted development types and land-use character within each:

- Vc1 - (Dewald Avenue to Kee Avenue, Figure 6): The heart of the district is to be compact, lively, and walkable.
- Vc2 - (Kee Avenue to Hawthorne Drive, Figure 7): East of Kee, up to Hawthorne are to be planned to support more activity - becoming a lively, walkable mixed-use district. The proximity to Rutgers University is likely to attract university-related residential development: students, faculty, and workers, as well as empty nesters and others that will appreciate the emerging vibe and supportive services. This section is distinguished from Vc-1 by the following:
  - More permissive requirements related to setbacks, frontage, and ground floor uses.
  - A Height Bonus conditioned on provision of meeting certain requirements for unit mix, parking and civic amenities.
- Vc3 - (Franklin Boulevard to Dewald Avenue, Figure 8): To the east, between Franklin Boulevard and Dewald Avenue, is a transitional section of “main street,” with an array of building types, including houses and some suburban-type commerce on larger parcels along Franklin. This section is likely to evolve as an active commercial “gateway”/transition district. It is anticipated that commercial activity, building types, and therefore requirements related to setbacks, frontage, and ground-floor uses will be somewhat different than Village Center Vc-1 blocks (between Matilda and Kee Avenues).
- It is anticipated that these distinctions - the Township’s HBD recently adopted zoning provisions establishing the regulatory framework for the incremental transformation of the 1.25-mile stretch of Hamilton Street from a suburban commercial corridor to a village-scale “main-street” - will be supported by:
  - Design guidelines for the gateway blocks that anticipate:
    - Lighting improvements, banner poles, crosswalks, seasonal lighting, and public art to heighten the sense of liveliness and welcome.



This image from NJDOT's *Smart Transportation Guidebook* shows dimensional qualities and planning principles characteristic of New Jersey streets and roads. Hamilton Street is evolving from a place that most closely resembles a Suburban Corridor into a future Town Center.



# Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

Figure 5 Hamilton Street - Between Franklin Boulevard and Hawthorne

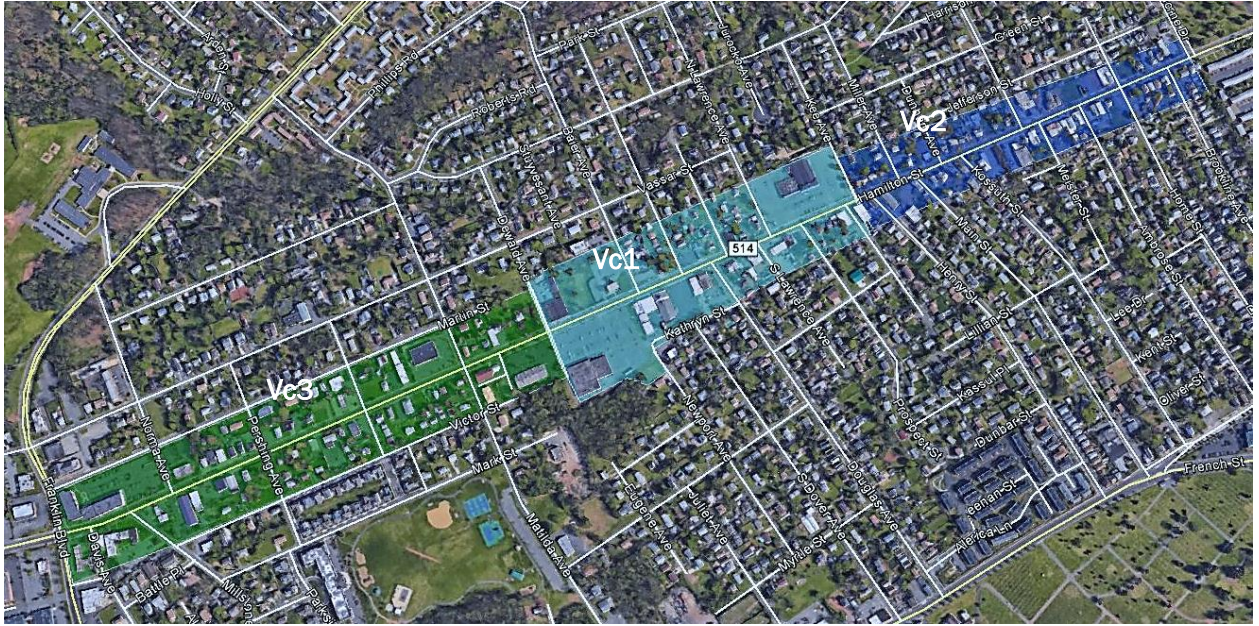


Figure 6 Vc1 – Dewald Avenue to Kee Avenue





# Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

Figure 7 Vc2 – Kee Avenue to Hawthorne Drive

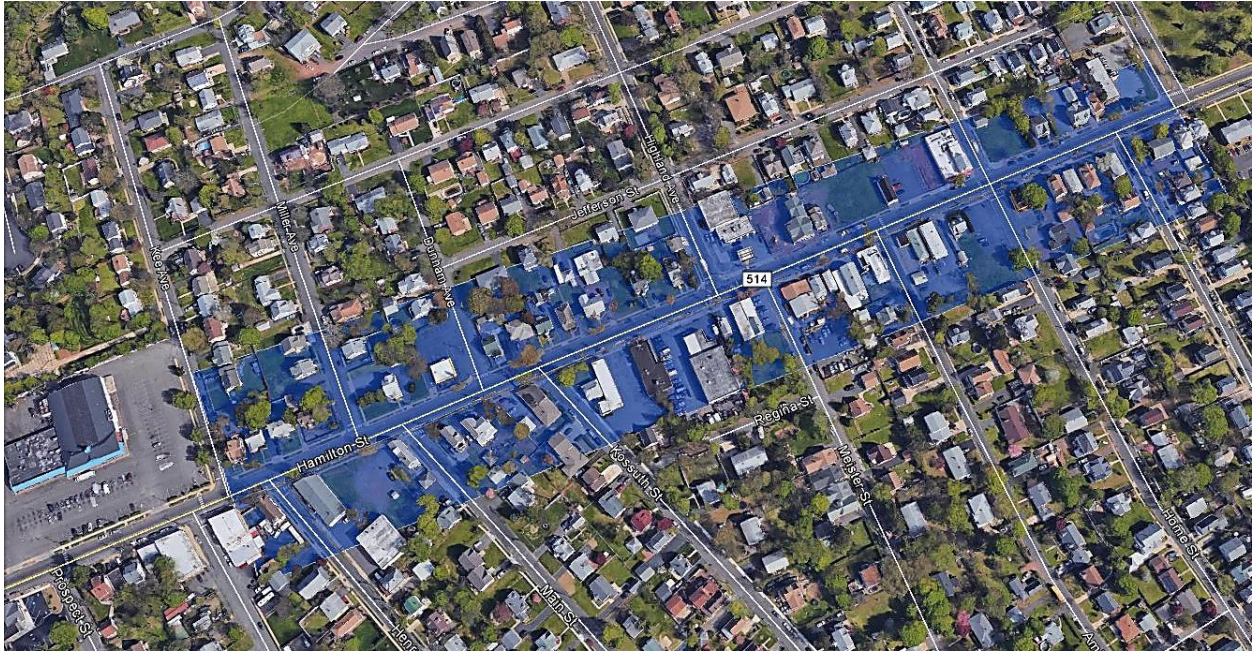


Figure 8 Vc3 – Franklin Boulevard to Dewald Avenue





**c. *Incentivize Investment – Height, Coverage, Concentration***

A key element of the Township’s economic development planning policy is to spur revitalization through private investment. Accordingly, the Township evaluated its land development ordinances and procedures in 2014, to avoid unintended obstacles inherent in the zoning code and its application. Subsequently, several improvements to the zoning code have been proposed and adopted, as outlined below:

- Expanded the Business District zoning to include several larger parcels along Franklin Boulevard;
- Encourages/permits additional development by providing a “development bonus”; an additional floor of vertical height, conditioned on inclusion of over-the-shop residential units, and provision of an appropriate amount of parking;
- Encourages mixed-use development. Though existing apartments, townhouses, and single-family houses are “grandfathered” non-conforming uses, future residential-only projects are to be directed to locations outside of the district;
- Review lot coverage dimensions are to be focused on the necessity for on-site parking - acknowledging that future development may necessitate more complex parking solutions, such as shared parking, parking management, paid public parking, payment-in-lieu for the creation of off-site parking, and/or structured parking; as well as reduction/relief of Residential Site Improvement Standards (RSIS)-based requirements on a case-by-case basis; and
- Encourages public realm design standards intended to create a lively pedestrian-oriented, shopper-friendly, and retail-focused district.

Consequently, the corridor has, over the past three years, attracted new mixed-use investment, likely the result of an improved economic climate, as well as market-responsive zoning policies.

Next-step recommendations to further guide and encourage desired private investment in the emerging Hamilton Street “Village Center” include following:

- Apply market-demand economic analysis to Township planning policy and, more specifically, to municipal land development regulations guiding future public and private investment in the Township’s Village Center district – between Franklin Boulevard and Hawthorne Drive.

Subsequent recommendations include:

- Direct (through incentives and regulatory provisions) more intense mixed-use, pedestrian-oriented development to the blocks between Matilda and Kee Avenues (Vc1). It is important that uses and building types that are detrimental to the evolution of the HBD have opportunity to participate in the district’s revitalization through redevelopment. At present, there are a number of gas stations, auto repair and sales operations along the corridor which serve as a disincentive to increased private mixed-use residential development.
- Ultimately, improving these sites include the following actions:

## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

- Consider the benefit of increasing residential density – especially between Kee Avenue and Hawthorne Drive (Vc2), which can capitalize on growing and unmet demand for Rutgers student and faculty housing in proximity to the campus.
- Zoning provisions for the Vc3 district should exclude (or, at minimum, relax) requirements for ground-floor retail, and/or permitting an additional floor of residential units.
- **Incentivize investment.** Private development projects that advance the desired goals of the Village Center district should be supported, where warranted, with expedited planning and zoning approvals and design assistance. The provision for a public benefit such as off-site public infrastructure improvements is an example of how the Township can leverage private sector investment for public benefit.

### 4. Economic Development Investment Strategy

#### a. *Business Recruitment Strategy: Invest in Hamilton Business District Events*

**Goal:** *To promote current and prospective investment opportunities within the HBD corridor to local and regional entrepreneurs (inclusive of business owners and operators, and real estate developers). Commercial real estate brokers and agents should also be a target audience.*

**Objective:** Increase private investment within the HBD corridor by \$2 million annually, over a five-year period.

**Actions:** Identify a fall and a spring date for hosting a half-day event (three hours). Using a combination of print media and direct mail, small business owners and operators, and commercial real estate developers will be given a walking tour of the proposed Village Center (see zoning recommendations) area within the HBD and informed of ongoing and prospective public and private investments. Printed brochures identifying permitted uses and general zoning criteria will also be provided to attendees. Those expressing interest in the market analysis will be directed to the Township’s website, where a PDF of the market study can be viewed online or downloaded.

**Responsible Parties:** This action should be led by the Economic Development Director/Business Advocate, with ample support from the planning director, Township Manager, and the Town’s economic development committee.

**Financial Resources:** Direct mail and print media expenditures should run between \$2,500 and \$5,000 annually (covering two separate dates).



## Corporate Business District

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### 1. Existing Economic Character

Most of the developed real estate within the CB district dates from the 1970s and 1980s, and ranges from one-story flex office and warehouse buildings, to multi-story glass and steel corporate office buildings. From the 1970's into the 1990's, the office campus was in high demand by corporate employers drawn to glassy buildings arranged on green, manicured campus landscapes across the country. Developers and corporate leadership worked to accommodate that demand, focusing on farmland near present or planned highway access. The roughly one-square-mile area framed by the Raritan River to Pierce Street and Davidson Avenue to Cedar Grove, evolved quickly to become a premier location for corporations, hotels, and service providers eager to be near Exit 10 of the "NYC Bypass" Route 287, with well-engineered, high-volume, vehicle connection to the city and regional highway network.

Several lodging facilities (both overnight and extended stay offerings) can be found within the CB district, with some offering banquet and meeting space facilities. Zoned land uses within the district include commercial, light industrial, vacant, residential, and farm. However, the majority of land uses are either commercial office or light industrial (Figure 9).

The CB district appears to be, generally, well-maintained, in terms of the visual appearance buildings and street infrastructure (there are no sidewalks within the CB district) and landscaping. Notwithstanding the relatively high vacancy rate among corporate office buildings (there is relatively little vacancy noted for light industrial buildings), there is no obvious evidence of blight within the CB district. A retail plaza, located at the corner of Pierce Street and World's Fair Drive, offering quick service and sit-down dining options, along with other retail conveniences, was developed within the last three years (2014), and provides CB district workers with a nearby option for dining and personal service retail.

Figure 9 Corporate Business District Land Use

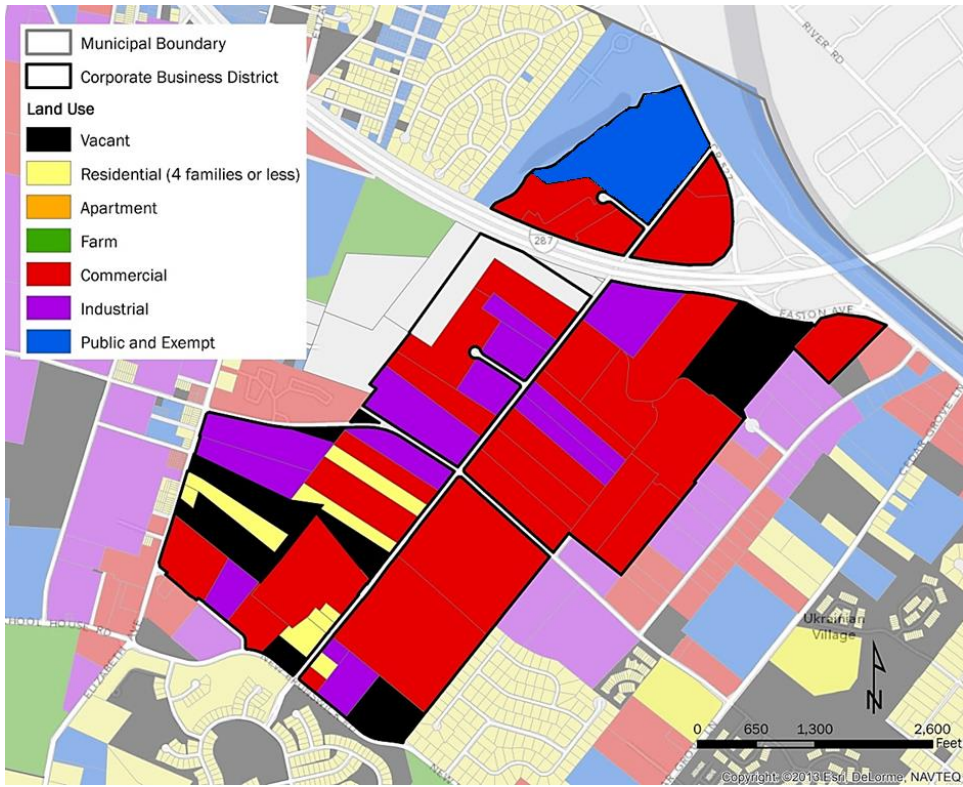


Figure 10 Corporate Business District Study Area



## 2. Prior Plans

The 2006 Master Plan stated as goals, the following:

- Encourage commercial and industrial development in areas with access to major regional highways (I-287) and in established areas;
- Locate major employment and traffic-drawing uses in areas where they will least impact residential neighborhoods;
- Maintain the size of industrial districts to ensure adequate space for light industry and warehousing, noting a decreased the amount of land available for industrial development;
- **A mix of uses.** However, as the plan also observes, a mix of uses could result in increased demands for uses to service the residents: personal service and restaurants – offerings that were lacking in this area - to serve the long-existing corporate and industrial uses until the RDO development on Elizabeth Avenue;
- **Coverage limitations and parking requirements.** The 2006 Master Plan concluded that the maximum impervious coverage requirement for all zoning districts appear reasonable; however, and from time to time, variances for exceeding existing lot coverage requirement are granted, where deemed appropriate;
- However, the plan did observe that parking requirements for warehouse and industrial could be reduced and that a reduction in the amount of required parking spaces could increase building size, and could also increase groundwater infiltration of stormwater.



## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

Specific modifications were recommended and adopted, designed to reduce the overall area dedicated to parking spaces; and

- Warehouse parking calculated on a sliding scale: 0.75 to one space per 1,000 square feet every 2,500 square feet thereafter (it is recognized that this has since been completed). In this manner, the smaller buildings will be served while the larger buildings will not be over-served. At the same time, the parking for Industrial and Manufacturing Establishments was set on the amount of building square-footage proposed, and also based on a sliding scale: two spaces per 1,000 square feet GFA for the first 5,000 square feet and one space for every 2,500 square feet thereafter.

**2013 Somerset County CEDS report** – The county-wide effort focused on employment and economic trends and future competitiveness and placed high priority on renovation of outdated industrial and commercial building stock. Particular recommendations include:

- Inventory, repurpose, and re-occupy the overlooked asset of the region’s considerable light industrial and distribution space that lends itself to advanced manufacturing uses. Vacant and under-occupied corporate campus developments are apparent in the region. A prioritized inventory of significant properties for re-use will aid the development and delivery of new and existing incentives and resources to facilitate productive occupancy. Recently, the County, with participation by the Township, evaluated potential redevelopment opportunities in the office/industrial area in the northwest quadrant of the Township as part of the County’s “Access and Mobility” planning study.
- In particular, this study evaluated potential redevelopment opportunities in the Atrium Drive area between Davidson Avenue and Worlds Fair Drive. The study also evaluates certain circulations improvements (e.g., connection of Atrium Drive to Napoleon Court) to improve access to the area to increase its potential for job creating development. Napoleon Court/ Atrium Drive Connection. World's Fair is an important collector road the provides access to one of the Township's light industrial zones. It also provides access to Easton Avenue and provides access from Route I-287.

**The 2015 Reexamination report** notes that because of “...*permanent changes in the national economy (e.g., reduced need for office space due to technology advances and other changes in business practice), office vacancy rates have increased significantly. This issue affects not only employment opportunities within the Township but has long term potential to negatively affect the Township’s non-residential tax base.*”

### 3. Recommended Zoning Updates

***Recommendation: Adopt measures to update regulatory requirements, illustrate (and test) hoped-for outcomes, shape private investment, and investigate desirable traffic and mobility improvements.***

#### **b. *Overview of Zoning Topics***

As described and quantified in the recent Somerset County CEDS report, trends have shifted. Today, there is a profound oversupply of corporate office space on bucolic suburban campuses. 4ward Planning agrees with the assessment of the 2015 Reexamination report, that because of

## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

“...permanent changes in the national economy (e.g., reduced need for office space due to technology advances and other changes in business practice), office vacancy rates have increased significantly. This issue affects not only employment opportunities within the Township but has long term potential to negatively affect the Township’s non-residential tax base.”

One indicator of that trend is that, in recent years, Franklin Township has been approached by property owners and business operators looking for space to support advanced manufacturing and distribution operations, activities that are currently outside the uses permitted in the Corporate Business (CB) zoning district. Further, the Township is investigating whether municipal zoning regulations are negatively affecting business opportunity.

As such, responses being considered are:

- Expanding the M-2 Light Industrial zoning district;
- Merging the Corporate Business CB District with the M-1 and M-2 districts’ requirements, in ways to create hybrid overlay - perhaps making light industrial operations a permitted principal use in the CB District and doing away with having both M-1 and M-2 districts, in favor of having, simply, an M zone;
- Enhancing pedestrian and cycling accommodations and expanding public transportation, as well as facilitating car-share services - such as two or more Zipcar facilities; and
- Exploring transportation funding opportunities, jointly with Somerset County and New Jersey Transit.

### a. *Evaluate Requirements*

Clearly, one initiative that can be undertaken by the Township to attract new investment is to exercise its municipal zoning powers. We offer the following recommendation for consideration:

- Anticipate future subdivision of some CB-zoned properties to allow/encourage a broader range of activities in the CB zoning district (typically fronting on Davidson Avenue). Consider the potential of parcels to accommodate uses currently permitted in the M-2 zoning district, while still maintaining a high-quality business campus environment. We observe elsewhere in this document that vacancies in industrial parks and corporate campuses have spiked dramatically. That is true nationally, as well as regionally.

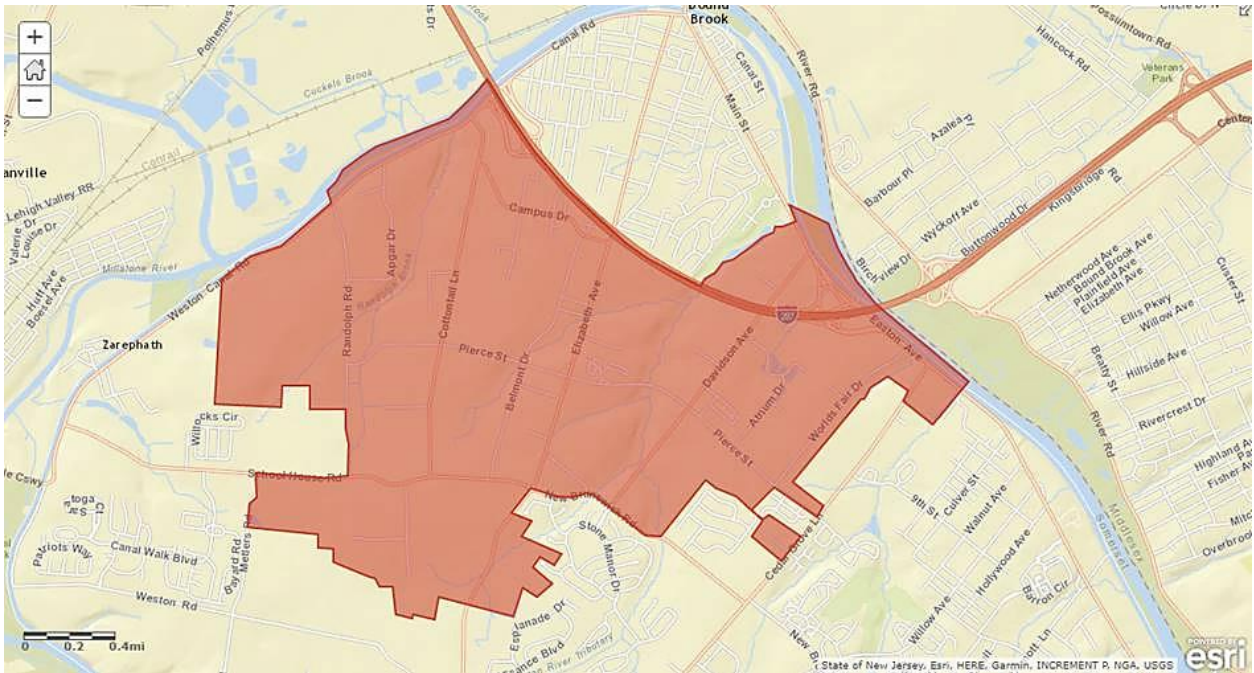
Reasons for the trend and remedies related to development opportunities and land-use policies are offered. However, even if these measures are fully deployed, the deficit of amenity and place-identity will continue to factor into decisions of potential new tenants or those that are potential expanders or relocators.

As a result, the district may continue to struggle, as the shrinking pool of potential tenants elect to locate elsewhere. Assuming there is general agreement that this is a challenge, we would encourage the Township and Somerset County, or other entity (or combination thereof) to sponsor/host a planning initiative designed to lay out a prioritized strategy (and consistent with/supportive of the policies and recommendations identified within Somerset County’s Supporting Priority Investment in Somerset County strategic plan) to ensure that the district evolves into a competitive high-amenity, mixed-use commercial (e.g., supportive retail oriented services) campus community.

- Potential priority topics should include:

## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

- Landscape, lighting, and stormwater management standards
- Creating the “Franklin Business and Technology Park” District, the boundaries of which



are depicted in Figure 11.

- Directional signage throughout the newly named Franklin Business and Technology Park, helping to direct existing tenants and visitors, alike, to lodging facilities, dining and retail services within the park.
- Resource sharing and other eco-friendly practices (e.g., district energy management system, whereby business park users could access inexpensive renewable energy systems such as geothermal and photovoltaic field arrays)
- Collaborative approach to internal circulation, parking, delivery/loading operations, autonomous vehicles, electric cars' power station, etc.
- Accommodation of all forms of transportation (public transit, bike and car share); and connections to surrounding corridors and trail systems
- Building design standards
- Programming: food vending, outdoor performance/concert series, farmers market, festival/special event spaces, other recreational programs

**Figure 11** Franklin Business and Technology Park

- A typical consideration will be the bulk/setback requirements. Total side setback between principal buildings is 50 feet in the M-2 district, 100 feet in the M-1 district, and 120 feet in the CB district. 4ward Planning recommends the consolidation of the M1 and M2 districts into a solitary M zone and extend said zone to cover the current CB Zone. Further, it is recommended that the CB zone be recognized as an overlay zone within the newly created M zone, allowing for additional regulatory requirements, where appropriate.



## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

- Broaden the list of permitted uses: Update zoning to accommodate emerging demand for other compatible business activities that will find the campus environment and excellent access to I-287 and nearby regional transportation network an attractive location. An indoor sports and recreation facility, showroom retail (e.g., where a light assembly business or manufacturer offers a limited selling space (no more than 10 percent of the gross building area) for purposes of displaying and selling products which are made on site), assisted living facilities, and educational institutions are examples of uses that could bring new synergies and investment to the district.
- Update setback and parking requirements that may be outmoded and calibrated for needs of an earlier period. For example, the Schedule 4 parking requirement for “general office or professional office building” is one space for every 250 square feet. This parking requirement was conceived during a period in which office demand was much higher than it is currently and, as a result, there are several office property parking lots within the CB district which exhibit a high degree of underutilization – and, by extension, lost economic opportunity.

**b. *Illustrate Outcomes***

The recommendation to update municipal zoning ordinances and, at the same time, to shape future expectations, includes the necessity to demonstrate desired outcomes. Illustrative “test-for-fit” demonstrations might include:

- Illustrative site plan showing the potential result of text amendments to the municipal Land Development Regulations regarding parking and site design requirements. Adjustments to be reviewed include:
  - Frontage and area requirements to demonstrate the outcome of more intensive land use; and
  - Landscape standards to test/troubleshoot the introduction of desirable adjacency and connectivity into municipal guidelines presently focused on creating an auto-friendly, park-like atmosphere.
- Comparable case-study models of successful signs, furnishing, lighting, and landscape.

**c. *Incentivize Investment – Encourage Appropriate Mixed-Use Development***

Define specific opportunities and opportunity sites, to include:

- Calibrate regulation to accommodate specific, market-viable uses identified by the 4ward Planning Franklin Township Community Market Analysis, including the undeveloped 18-acre site adjacent to I-287 (now zoned CB, Figure 11), together with the adjacent former Econolodge site and proposed expansion to incorporate the underutilized Atrium parking lot facilities. For example, the Township’s Planning Office should investigate land area requirements necessary for the accommodation of up to a 175,000-square-foot indoor sports facility – a use deemed to have potential, per 4ward Planning’s case study analyses and strategic investment recommendations.
- Work with local property owners of underutilized/undeveloped property to encourage private investment.
- Designate chronically underutilized locations as “Area(s) in Need of Redevelopment.”

Figure 12 18-Acre “Levin” Site



d. *Identify Appropriate Redevelopment Tools*

Utilization of rehabilitation powers must be calibrated to specific circumstances. Property owners, business operators, and the Township could pursue exercise of municipal rehabilitation powers in order to:

- **Create a comprehensive plan for the district.** Engage professional planning and urban design assistance to plan for, build, and maintain coordinated campus-wide improvements for landscape, lighting, public walks and bikeways, directional banners, gateway features, and best practices stormwater management.
- **Increase confidence in the process.** Elevate lender/investor confidence in outcomes. An open, public process with clearly defined, agreed-to objectives is more likely to result in initiatives that endure - to be refined and updated rather than eliminated as administrations and circumstances change.

e. *Operational Considerations - Zoning Requirements*

**Parking, Traffic movement, and Roadway design.** If the current trends of declining demand for suburban office space and increasing demand for transportation-centric uses like advanced manufacturing, logistics, and light industrial operations continue, there should be a plan in place to accommodate these trends without diminishing the campus-like character of the district. As mentioned in section a, the township may elect to amend the zoning ordinance to permit light industry uses in portions of the CB district, while still maintaining a high-quality campus environment. Opportunities to be pursued by both property owners and the Township include:



## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

- Offering more flexibility in how businesses operate and cooperate. For example, increased efficiency can be achieved if parking fields are combined/shared between adjacent users.
- Revising Schedule 4 parking requirements. As noted in section 2.b.3, parking requirement for “general office or professional office building” is one space for every 250 square feet. Though it is logical for such demand to be met onsite where there is little excess capacity, that is not the case in the CB and M-2 districts, where most parking lots are only half full, indicating an opportunity to consolidate parking facilities and repurpose property for other, more commercially viable uses. It is of interest to the municipality to ensure that the industrial park can successfully compete for new, expanding and relocating businesses. Both the regulations and the business mix should be adjusted to reflect actual demand. [Keep in mind that some desired uses, such as advanced manufacturing may typically engage more workers per SF than light manufacturing or distribution/warehousing; anticipated at 2 spaces per 1,000 sf for first 5,000 sf and 1 per 2,500 thereafter].
- Reducing current municipal requirements for lot area, planted side-yards and tree-lined “belt” or buffer around parking lots in the M-2 district will give businesses greater flexibility in deciding how to expand their facilities or to enhance the park-like environment with a landscape reflective of company values.
- Maintaining and expanding the beautiful street network, impressive property frontages, while cooperatively pursuing capital improvements like walking/biking trails, gateway features, branding and wayfinding signage.
- Initiating a design standards process to anticipate location, orientation, spacing and setback of future buildings and building expansions, location of access points, size and location of signage, common open spaces, vehicular parking and movement areas, grading, preservation of existing vegetation, overall landscaping, and stormwater management - recognizing that particular care should be taken to organize the landscape plan in such a way as to maximize the visual effects of green spaces as seen from the public rights-of-way.

## 4. Economic Development Investment Strategy

### a. *Business Retention Strategy: Conduct Semi-Annual Business Surveys*

**Goal:** Head off business relocations or closures by being proactive with addressing business concerns or challenges.

**Objective:** Keep the annual percentage of business closures and relocations at no higher than two-percent of total municipal businesses.

**Actions:** Implement a semi-annual online survey (using a low-cost service such as Survey Monkey) and promote its use among businesses in the Township through direct mail and advertisements in local news publications.

- Develop a survey instrument with the assistance of the Somerset County Partnership and local area Chamber of Commerce to ensure relevant questions are being asked (e.g., “Over

## Franklin Township Strategic Zoning and Economic Development Recommendations

the next six months, how likely is it that your business will relocate to another town? 1. Highly Likely 2. Likely but not Certain 3. Uncertain 4. Not Likely but not Certain 5. Highly Unlikely”)

- Allow survey respondents to receive follow-up via a manner of their choosing (e.g., by phone, email, or in-person visit).
- Log outcomes based on interventions employed. Improve upon interventions as greater experience is gained through this process.

**Responsible Parties:** Economic Development Director/Business Advocate with assistance from part-time admin and/or college intern.

**Financial Resources:** Current department resources (outside of the hiring of a part-time assistant) should be sufficient to carry out this activity.

### b. *Explore the Creation of an Indoor Sports Complex Opportunity*

***Recommendation: Issue a request for proposals to explore the opportunity of an indoor sports complex development for an appropriate location within the Franklin Business and Research Park area. The RFP should focus on conducting an industry-specific market and feasibility analysis that would inform facility planning and design, including siting, construction, development, and financing.***

The indoor sports facilities management industry has experienced growth in recent years, and youth and adult participation in indoor sports continues to grow. This increase is attributed to improved public education of the health benefits of physical activity and exercise, and a growing awareness of public health issues such as child obesity and diabetes.

Franklin Township possess advantages that may enable the Township to benefit from this trend, including its relatively dense urban population, accessibility from I-287 (which is close to the NJ Turnpike and other major arterial roadways); and proximity to nearby hotels that could benefit from the potential boost in local and regional activity such a facility would bring.

The following provides a brief overview of indoor sports complexes, nationally and in the state of New Jersey, including common characteristics of successful facilities across the U.S. and benefits to their local and regional communities.

### i. Overview of Indoor Sports Complexes

Indoor sports complexes are found in communities across the country. Nationally, there are about 900 to 1,000 multi-sport indoor sports facilities – excluding college facilities, YMCAs/YWCAs, and a few other types of operations<sup>1</sup>. These complexes range in size, commonly anywhere between 10,000 to 200,000 square feet, but can be much larger – and offer a plethora of indoor infrastructure and equipment, including courts, fields, rinks, and other facilities to accommodate a variety of sports, recreation, and fitness activities including but not limited to:

- Basketball
- Cheer
- Dance
- Fencing
- Field hockey
- Flag football
- Futsal
- Gymnastics
- Indoor golf
- Lacrosse
- Marathons
- Martial arts and ultimate fighting
- Soccer
- Softball
- Swimming
- Track
- Ultimate frisbee
- Volleyball
- Wrestling
- Hockey
- Tennis

Indoor sports complexes may provide or host several other activities, including the following:

- Tournaments (in addition to more standard and popular sports like soccer and basketball, this might also include martial arts, wrestling, table tennis, etc.)
- Youth, high-school, and adult sports leagues and league meetings
- Day-long clinics, weekly or seasonal camps, training academies, and full-season leagues
- After-school/child care programs
- Adult education and training and certification programs related to sports, and health and safety (for example, coach training or community courses in CPR and First Aid)
- Other corporate and industry events, community events, and public and private functions, such as: birthday parties and bar/bat mitzvahs, vendor conferences, promotional events and expos, and sales meetings
- Corporate team building events or organizational leadership seminars

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<sup>1</sup> Burkey, Brent. 2012. *Business of Sports: Indoor athletic facilities keep customers during recession*. Central Penn Business Journal.



## ii. Benefits of Indoor Sports Complexes

In offering year-round access to sports and recreational facilities protected from the weather, research has shown that these facilities offer numerous benefits to individuals, families, and other community groups<sup>2</sup>, including:

- Contributing to better health outcomes
- Boosting students' performance and scholarship eligibility
- Reducing crime rates among youth
- Increasing property values of adjacent homes
- Growing the local tourism economy – a particular benefit to the local hotel market

## iii. Common Characteristics of Top U.S. Facilities:

Although they vary drastically in size (e.g., 50,000 to 700,000 square feet, with average square footage for indoor facility estimated at about 100,000 s.f.), the highest rated indoor sports facilities share some common characteristics of accessibility, amenities, and flexibility, while incorporating innovative, state-of-the-art training space and equipment and related technology. This diversity of programming ensures active use of the facilities year-round and positions the facilities as a regional draw – particularly given their capacity to host tournaments and other corporate, community, and private events – that can help boost the local tourism economy.

A review of top-rated indoor sports facilities in the U.S.<sup>3</sup> reveals the following common characteristics:

- Offer on-site meeting, training, and multipurpose rooms, including office space and locker rooms
- Enable easy transportation access (e.g., proximity to interstate highways or major thoroughways)
- Proximity to hotels and restaurants (some of the larger, more modern facilities have these amenities onsite, with food service focusing on contemporary, healthy cuisine, or include features like an indoor/outdoor grill area, café, or food court)
- Supply multiple courts for a variety of sports (basketball, field hockey, soccer, volleyball, etc.)
- Incorporate video walls/boards, and digital and LED scoreboards
- Include fitness centers, weight rooms, gymnasiums, climbing walls, and arcades

## iv. Local Profiles

There are at least 30 indoor sports complexes operating in the State of New Jersey (see Table 1). While this is not an exhaustive list of such facilities and excludes single-use indoor sports facilities (i.e., indoor complexes focusing, for example, just on soccer, or community swimming

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<sup>2</sup> Jumpsix Marketing. 2016. *11 Benefits of a Community Recreation Center*. Sports Facilities Management.

<sup>3</sup> *9 Top Indoor Facilities for 2016*. Sports Planning Guide. (<http://sportsplanningguide.com/9-top-indoor-facilities-for-2016/>)

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pools or staking rinks), it helps illustrate the diversity of such facilities throughout the State. The following sections highlight some local examples:

**The Fields Sports Complex, East Brunswick, NJ<sup>4</sup>** – Located in East Brunswick NJ, The Fields is a state-of-the-art FieldTurf® sports complex facility supporting team sports such as soccer, baseball, flag football, and lacrosse, among other indoor sports and activities.

- In addition to its state-of-the-art 200x100-foot FieldTurf® indoor soccer field, this indoor facility houses numerous rooms which are available to rent for sports and other events, ranging in size from 20x40 feet to 17x50 feet. Additional facilities include meeting space, a multipurpose room for receptions, a café and observation lounge, dance studios, pitching lanes, and virtual golf. The Field makes its modern indoor turf available through partial or full field rentals on an hourly basis, and batting cage rentals available in single or multiple 30- to 60-minute sessions.
- The Fields offers various programs for youth soccer, for example, summer camps for children ages three to 13 and elite high school training for youth ages 15 to 18, and hosts adult Men’s Open Soccer and College Leagues. Training courses, such as New Jersey Youth Soccer (NJYS) Coach Education License Courses, are also available. In addition to its sports programming and training, The Fields offers educational courses on nutrition, sports psychology, and speed and agility.
- The Fields doubles as a party and event space for gatherings, offering comprehensive and interactive birthday party packages and an hourly bounce house rental. The Fields has hosted a diversity of corporate, community, and private events, including bar and bat mitzvahs, bachelor/bachelorette parties, sports trainings, seminars and lectures, certification programs and classes, product launches, proms, balls, and galas.



**The Center Circle, Rahway, NJ<sup>5</sup>** – Located just minutes off the NJ Turnpike in Rahway, New Jersey, The Center Circle is a 55,000-square-foot regional four-season indoor recreational sports complex that houses two full-sized indoor arenas (84’ x 190’) to accommodate year-round play of soccer, roller hockey, flag football, lacrosse, extreme softball, and field-hockey, as well as other sports and activities.

- Primarily an indoor soccer and hockey complex offering a variety of sports programming, the Center Circle offers adult and youth tournaments, youth and adult soccer leagues, high school leagues, and open pick-up soccer, and accepts reservations for use of scrimmage and practice space. The Center Circle also hosts flag football and lacrosse leagues for children, youth, and adults, as well as competitive league play for individuals and teams involved in field hockey, extreme softball, and ultimate frisbee.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thefieldssportscomplex.com/>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.thecentercircle.com/>

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**Table 1 - Indoor Sports Complexes in New Jersey**

Facility Name	Address	City/Town
Branchburg Sports Complex	47 Readington Road	Branchburg, NJ
Bridgewater Basketball	3E Chimney Rock Road	Bridgewater, NJ
Capelli Sport Center	472 Route 17A	Florida, NY
Centercourt Sports Academy	184 Flanders Netong Road	Flanders, NJ
City Sports Arena	9 Gertrude St.	Bayonne, NJ
City Sports On 4	62 Route 4	East Englewood, NJ
Cricmax Sports Facility	4440 Bordentown Ave.	Old Bridge, NJ
Elite Training Academy	1 Tice Road	Franklin Lakes, NJ
Euro Sports Center	1524 Grant Street	Egg Harbor City, NJ
Fastbreak Basketball Center	236 Richmond Valley Road	Staten Island, NY
International Sports Centre-Cherry Hill	600 Kresson Rd	Cherry Hill, NJ
International Sports Centre-Mt. Laurel	1 Hovtech Blvd.	Mt. Laurel, NJ
International Sports Skating & Fun Centre	1 Hovtech Blvd.	Mt. Laurel, NJ
Marlton Field House	785 E. Main Street	Marlton, NJ
Maximum Sports Center	1100 N Route 17	Ramsey, NJ
Nj Sports House	12 Write Way	Oakland, NJ
Pinelands Sports Center	3 Coleman Court	Southampton, NJ
Smg Sportsplex At Metuchen	215 Durham Avenue	Metuchen, NJ
Sofive Elkin Park	46 Church Road	Road Elink Park, NJ
Sportika Sports	323A Fairfield Rd.	Freehold, NJ
Sports City	P.O. Box 104	Manasquan, NJ
Sports Galaxy	101 Bilby Rd	Hackettstown, NJ
Sportszone	4 Farrington Boulevard	Monroe Township, NJ
Tab Ramos Sports Center	17 Blair Road	Aberdeen, NJ
The Center Circle	1255 Main Street	Rahway, NJ
The Fields Sports Complex	8 Cornwall Ct.	East Brunswick, NJ
The Field House	605 Glen Avenue	Moorestown, NJ
Total Turf Experience	614 Lambs Road	Pitman, NJ
Turf City	1235 Rt 23 South	Wayne, NJ
WT Sports Complex	120A Sewell Rd.	Sewell, NJ

Sources: "Sports Centers in New Jersey", FunNewJersey.com; "Indoor Facilities 2017", NJYouthSoccer.com



v. National Case Studies

**Spooky Nook Sports Complex, Manheim, PA<sup>6</sup>** - Located just outside of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the Spooky Nook Sports Complex opened in 2013, after renovation of the then-vacant former Armstrong World Industries distribution center.



Spooky Nook is the largest indoor sports complex in the nation, with over 700,000 square feet of indoor facility space and over 50 acres of outdoor space. Spooky Nook's indoor facilities include 10 hardwood basketball courts, four field hockey courts, 10 volleyball courts, six soccer fields, a full-sized baseball infield, and a 60-yard track - providing regulation courts and playing fields for more than a dozen sports under one roof. Spooky Nook's outdoor facilities include a field hockey pitch, a water-based turf field, and a climate-controlled dome used for field hockey, soccer, football,



among other events. Additional amenities include a 10,000-square-foot fitness center, a Clip n' Climb climbing center, a fencing and martial arts space, special events and meeting spaces, a food court, and an arcade. With just over a million visitors in 2016, the Spooky Nook Sports Complex hosts clubs, leagues, tournaments, and championship events throughout the year.

In addition to its extensive sports facilities, the Spooky Nook complex includes the Warehouse Hotel, an on-site hotel offering 135 guest rooms and an adjacent 175-seat restaurant and bar, introduced in 2015.

- ***Key Stakeholders and Funding:*** Sam Beiler, former owner of Auntie Anne's Pretzels, is the private owner and developer of the Spooky Nook Sports Complex, the plans for which he originally announced in 2012. Beiler bought the vacant facility for \$11.25 million in December 2011, and is thought to have spent an additional \$26 million on the property's redevelopment, with an additional \$9.5 million for the hotel and restaurant in 2015. Beiler recently announced another facility, also a renovated industrial building, which will be called Spooky Nook at Champion Mill in Hamilton, Ohio, slated to open in late 2018.
- ***Key Drivers and Catalytic Decisions:*** Spooky Nook's partnership with Orthopedic Associates of Lancaster has resulted in on-site physical therapy and rehabilitation services, extending the complex's customer base. Spooky Nook will be home to the U.S. Women's National Field Hockey Team through 2022. The addition of the Warehouse Hotel and its adjoining bar and restaurant in 2015, made Spooky Nook a one-stop destination for visitors to the sports complex. Prior to the Warehouse Hotel opening, in 2014, Spooky Nook contributed more than 10,000 room nights to Lancaster County hotels. Since then, other local hotels, restaurants, and area shops reported double-digit traffic and revenue growth during peak times of the year. Spooky Nook saw over one million visitors in 2016, up from 800,000 in 2015, and 600,000 in 2014. The local economic impacts of the sports complex and its growing partnerships have yet to be fully realized.

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<sup>6</sup> Sources include: McKeel, Tim "Spooky Nook Sports Eyes Expanding into Ohio with \$38M Facility," Lancaster Online (2016); Nephin, Dan "Spooky Nook Sports, Nation's Largest Indoor Sports Complex, Ready to Open," Lancaster Online (2013); "Rise of the Megacities," Sports Planning Guide (2016); Rutledge, Mike "Spooky Nook Built a Giant Sports Complex, and the People Have Come," Journal-News (2017); [www.spookynooksports.com](http://www.spookynooksports.com).

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**Virginia Beach Field House, Virginia Beach, VA<sup>7</sup>** - Built in 2010, the Virginia Beach Field House offers over 175,000 square feet of sports and recreation space including six turf fields with mezzanines, eight regulation volleyball courts, four basketball courts, walking areas, multiple party rooms, an arcade, and an indoor Fun Zone playground.



Other amenities include a full-sized food court, full locker rooms with day lockers and showers, over 40 flat-screen television sets throughout the building, and four giant-screen televisions in the expansive guest lounge. Field House programming includes leagues, camps, clinics, and tournaments for youth and adults in soccer, flag football, volleyball, basketball, arena (indoor) baseball and softball, field hockey, lacrosse, dodgeball, and other social sports, as well as birthday and team parties, corporate events, and other organized activities. The Field House's regular occupancy is 2,600 people.



As testament to the Field House's success, a study presented to City Council members in late 2016 recommended a new, additional sports complex, as Virginia Beach has reached capacity as a sports venue. According to the study, 77 sports events in 2016 accounted for more than 100,000 hotel room nights, and an additional facility holds the potential to draw 36 new sports events each year, increasing sports event-related hotel patronage by an estimated 50 percent.



- **Key Stakeholders and Funding:** Owned and operated by the partnership of John Wack and the Eastern Sports Management Group, the Virginia Beach Field House is one of the partnership's three such facilities – the others located in Fredericksburg, Virginia and Union City, Pennsylvania. The City of Virginia Beach owns and leases the 13 acres of land on which the Field House was built; for the first 10 years of its 20-year lease, John Wack and Eastern Sports Management Group are paying city real estate taxes, which are reimbursed with annual incentive grant payments. Prior to the Field House's construction in 2010, City officials authorized a publicly funded contribution of approximately \$400,000 toward the project for its use as a public hurricane shelter.
- **Key Driver and Catalytic Decision:** Building the Field House on city-owned land, also home to the now privately owned Sportsplex - a sports complex comprised of a stadium, training center, and outdoor field - allowed the privately-owned Field House the perks of a private-public arrangement and the draw of another complementary, non-competing venue.

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<sup>7</sup> Sources include: Jiggetts, Jennifer "\$15 Million Sports Complex Opens in Virginia Beach" The Virginia-Pilot (2010); Parker, Stacy "Virginia Beach Needs Another Field House to Keep up with Demand, Study Says," The Virginia-Pilot(2016); Teague, Corey "Virginia Beach Field House," Mississippi State University (2014); [www.beachfieldhouse.com](http://www.beachfieldhouse.com).