

Reexamination Report

Jersey City Master Plan and Regulations

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The City of Jersey City adopted a new Master Plan in May of 2000, after more than a year of preparation, staff work, presentations, and discussion within all six of the City's wards. The new Master Plan led to a total revision of the city's Zoning Ordinance into the Jersey City Land Development Ordinance, which was adopted in April of 2001.

The Master Plan was last reexamined in November of 2006. The Municipal Land Use Law requires a municipal review of the City's plans and regulations at least once every six years.

The reexamination report shall state:

- a. The major problems and objectives relating to land development in Jersey City at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.
- b. The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.
- c. The extent to which there have been significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the master plan or development regulations as last revised, with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses, housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in State, county and municipal policies and objectives.
- d. The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.
- e. The recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law," P.L. 1992, c. 79 (C.40A:12A-1 et al.) into the land use plan

element of the municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

These requirements are addressed as follows.

The major problems and objectives relating to land development in Jersey City at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.

The last Master Plan Reexamination Report was presented to the Planning Board in November of 2006. In it, several recommendations were made concerning a new “R-1A” zone to be added to the City’s zoning map. Specifically, the report recommended that the R-1A zone include “all residential areas of Jersey City where large lots are common and influence the character of their respective neighborhoods.” The report focused on the West Side and Greenville neighborhoods. The City’s Master Plan describes the typical lot size in Jersey City as 25 by 100 feet, and 2,500 square feet in area. The Master Plan notes that the “primary exception” to this typical lot size pattern is in the Greenville and West Side neighborhoods.

Since last year’s reexamination report, Jersey City has continued to sustain a significant residential construction boom. The November 2006 Master Plan Reexamination Report stated that “this housing boom began on Jersey City’s Hudson River waterfront, but has continued to move into new neighborhoods of Jersey City. While one of the most visible features of this housing boom has been the new high-rise towers now common in downtown, small scale infill housing throughout the city has brought change to many areas of Jersey City. Pressure to subdivide lots and new construction on undersized lots has been increasing. While the housing boom has brought new construction and new investment into many of Jersey City’s neighborhoods, it has also exposed some failings in Jersey City’s Land Development Ordinance.” This trend continues to transform the City.

All of Jersey City’s neighborhoods contain a variety of lot sizes. Lots of 25 by 100 feet are considered “standard” or “typical” in Jersey City, and the majority of lots conform to this dimension; however, non-standard sizes, both larger and smaller, are in fact common City wide. While the larger lot sizes in Greenville and West Side are the most obvious, large lot sizes can be found throughout the City and in every neighborhood. Often large lots are “hidden” by the lack of lot consolidations on the city’s tax maps, where one building was built on multiple lots, thus effectively combining them. Small clusters of large lots are scattered throughout the city, providing each neighborhood with variety in their housing types, building styles, unit sizes, and architectural designs. This pattern reflects Jersey City’s unique history as an agglomeration of several previously independent municipalities, each with its own shopping streets, industrial areas, and each producing its own clusters of larger homes on large lots. Today, these small groupings of large lots not only provide for greater architectural diversity, but also allow for greater economic and social diversity to coexist in close proximity within each residential neighborhood.

The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.

After the adoption of the Zoning ordinance in April of 2001, the pace of residential infill development has continued to strengthen. In previous years, most of this infill development has been accommodated by new construction on previously existing 25x100 vacant lots scattered throughout Jersey City. As this “low-hanging fruit” has been developed, pressure to build more residential units has moved to tearing down larger homes on large lots to be subdivided. The Planning division regularly receives requests to subdivide and tear down older one and two-family homes with excellent architectural character to make way for two two-family homes on a standard or even substandard lots. This has diminished the architectural quality and unique character of many of Jersey City’s residential streets. Applications to subdivide lots into substandard dimensions continues to be common. The creation of undersized lots leads to construction of housing which rarely is in keeping with the character of the street due to homes’ excessive narrowness in width, or in the creation of attached housing where the general pattern of development is detached.

The extent to which there have been significant changes in the assumptions, policies, and objectives forming the basis for the master plan or development regulations as last revised, with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses, housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in State, county and municipal policies and objectives.

There have not been any significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives which formed the basis of the master plan and development regulations in the past year.

The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.

It is recommended that the Master Plan be amended to include the following.

Section II, the Land Use Plan, describes Jersey City’s residential neighborhoods, and notes that Greenville and the West Side frequently has larger lot sizes of 3,000 to 5,000 square feet. This section should be amended to include reference to the variety of lot sizes found in every Jersey City neighborhood.

The Master Plan further lists present issues and states that “Preserving of the streetscape and character of the one- and two-family housing districts” as the first issue to be addressed by the zoning ordinance. The recommendations section should be amended to include a specific recommendation to create various one and two-family housing districts with different lot sizes requirements so as to preserve the diversity of lot sizes and housing types in each neighborhood of Jersey City. Furthermore, the Master Plan should specifically discourage subdivisions that create undersized lots where the development of such lots cannot maintain the predominant housing type and character.

The recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the “Local Redevelopment and Housing Law,” P.L. 1992, c. 79 (C.40A:12A-1 et al.) into the land use plan element of the municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

Jersey City’s Land Development Ordinance should be amended to include a variety of one and two-family housing districts similar to the R-1 and R-1A zones, to preserve the variety of lot sizes found throughout the City. Creating these new residential zoning districts will preserve the unique character and history of each district. The proposed new one and two-family zones should require appropriate lot size, setback, and coverage standards appropriate for the lot sizes found in each neighborhood.

It is technically not feasible to create all of these zones for each neighborhood simultaneously. Thus, as staff time and resources permit, the zoning ordinance should be amended in stages to add each of these new one and two-family zones as each area of the City is researched and evaluated.