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SECTION 4: STRATEGIES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

LAND USE AND ZONING

Maintain a strong quality-of-life and consistency of scale in Maplewood’s residential neighborhoods, with safe and convenient access to parks, transit, and other amenities.

Residential areas make up the largest single land use in Maplewood, and its neighborhoods play a major role in giving the Township its look and feel. For homeowners, a house represents their single largest asset, and for all residents – owners and renters alike – the neighborhood is the lens through which they experience Maplewood on a day-to-day basis. It is critical that all neighborhoods have a high degree of aesthetics, functionality, and connection to residential amenities.

At the same time, given Maplewood’s lack of vacant developable land, home upgrades and new development within neighborhoods can be expected to continue. Zoning provisions should accommodate such development in a way that complements existing scale while providing a range of housing opportunities and reinvestment in the community.

Recommendations

Implement context-sensitive zoning revisions, such as changes to density requirements (e.g. floor area ratio) and setbacks, and encouragement of architectural features to break up building bulk: Communities throughout the region are struggling with the scale of new homes in established neighborhoods, given changing tastes that often result in homes that are much taller and larger than their surrounding context. Maplewood already has some design and performance standards in place to control residential development, including provisions that avoid adjacent

homes that are overly similar in design. The Township should consider additional context-sensitive regulations to ensure that new development does not impair the existing development pattern and that it promotes strong aesthetic quality. Some examples for consideration include: linking residential building height to the front yard setback distance; establishing prevailing height standards (i.e. a house cannot exceed existing heights within the vicinity by more than a set amount); establishing floor area ratio (FAR) requirements to control the bulk of homes; increasing side yard setbacks; requiring front-facing garages to be set back from the building façade; and encouraging architectural features (such as dormers) that break up the bulk of large facades. At the same time, building elements that are incongruous with the existing scale or context should be discouraged. For example, Maplewood’s current zoning (Sec. 271-38(B)(3) requires that attached or two-family dwellings include a “simulated conventional chimney” for each dwelling unit, if a working chimney is not required. This requirement can result in unnecessary and inappropriate building features that do not contribute to actual function of the use. Detailed analysis and public input will be needed to determine which measures may be appropriate, recognizing that works for one zoning district may not in another, and to avoid creating the need for a significant number of variance applications.

Improve transitions between low-density residential uses and commercial, multifamily, or mixed uses:

Where low-density (typically single-family) neighborhoods abut downtowns; commercial corridors; or major commercial, institutional, or multifamily properties, careful consideration must be given to setbacks and other zoning provisions, to avoid jarring transitions and potential negative impacts on the residential use. Maplewood’s residential zoning currently addresses this issue by defining a “transitional lot” as:

“The first residentially zoned lot (or lots in common ownership) having a side yard adjoining the side line of a lot in a business zone fronting on the same street and extending into the residential zone no more than two times the minimum lot frontage of the residential zone in which the lot is located.”

Within transitional lots in single- and two-family zones, off-street parking, professional offices, and multiple dwellings are permitted as conditional uses. However, no details are given in terms of what conditions need to be met for such uses to be permitted. The transitional lot definition is highly confusing and has proven difficult to implement.

These provisions should be revisited to improve clarity and balance infill development with protection of neighborhood scale. Rather than defining a transitional lot, the Township should consider defining a transitional area, which could be identified as the first set of three lots within a residential zone with frontage along a side street that intersects with a non-residential zone. Within this transitional area, off-street parking, professional offices and multiple dwellings

would continue to be conditional uses, but the conditions could be specified to balance the protection of established neighborhoods with promotion of infill “missing middle” housing (e.g. townhouses, two-family homes, and small apartment buildings). Conditions should generally seek to focus building bulk away from existing homes and toward adjacent non-residential zoning. Potential elements include:

- Requiring a larger lot size (e.g. 25% larger) than the minimum size permitted in the residential zone, unless the professional office or multiple dwelling is provided within an existing building. This would ensure that non-single-family uses would have additional room for parking and other needed elements, while lessening the incentive to subdivide oversized lots for development of single-family homes.
- For a non-single-family lot abutting a single-family lot, requiring a larger side yard setback (e.g. 50% larger) than the minimum side yard setback required in the residential zone. This provides some additional buffer between the single-family use and the more intensive adjacent use.
- For new construction of professional offices or multiple dwellings, not allowing building height to exceed 3 stories.
- For off-street parking within transitional areas, requiring vegetative buffering to protect adjacent residential uses.



Example of Missing Middle Housing

Source: AARP Discovering and Developing Missing Middle Housing, AARP and Opticos Design

Encourage property maintenance and reinvestment in older buildings to prevent unnecessary demolition, by permitting minor upgrades through a streamlined process: Because much of Maplewood’s housing stock pre-dates current zoning, existing nonconformities may require homeowners to seek variances to undertake even minor changes, such as stair or deck replacements. This process can be quite onerous for the homeowner. The Township should review the zoning code for opportunities to streamline and expedite such upgrades and avoid disincentivizing basic upkeep. The review should also look at opportunities to adjust lot coverage, façade length, and similar requirements, to reduce the need for variances and allow homeowners to make modest expansions, while balancing the need to control bulk.

Review performance, noise and lighting standards: These provisions should be assessed for consistency with other regulations and best practices, while allowing for ease of enforcement by municipal staff. In addition, the Township should explore ways to ensure that newly constructed buildings reflect not only applicable building codes, but are constructed to standards that assure their longevity and aesthetic value. This could be accomplished through revisions to the design standards as discussed above.

Continue to explore the use of street ends, other public rights-of-way, and easements on private property to provide pathways to parks and the train station: Maplewood has been successful in creating connections to neighborhood amenities through the use of public rights-of-way. Some examples include streets that abut Maplecrest Park and the connection between Carleton Court and Mountain Avenue/Maplewood Avenue (as illustrated in Figure 23) that provides access to the Village. Similar opportunities should be pursued as they arise, including the use of easements with larger property owners to provide public access. For example, a large portion of Winchester Gardens is devoted to walking paths and abuts the Maplewood Community Pool, but provides no direct access to this amenity. Working with this property owner on a shared-access agreement would enhance access to the pool while also creating the opportunity for areas east of Boyden Avenue (such as Avalon and the Maplewood Village condominiums) with more direct access to Maplecrest Park. Another example would be extending Vermont Street from Burnett Avenue to Boyden Avenue along the DPW property/50 Burnett, a recommendation of the redevelopment plan for this site.



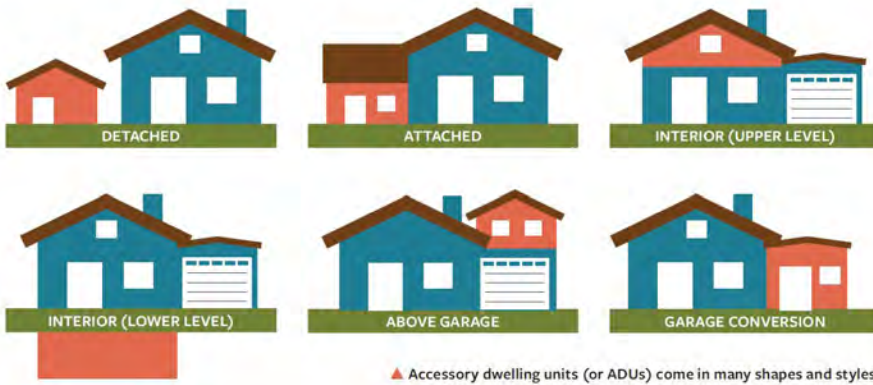
Figure 23: Connection between Carleton Court and Mountain Avenue/Maplewood Avenue

Source: Nearmap, BFJ PlanningJ

Work with large institutional and multifamily property owners to address potential impacts on adjacent homes and promote a “good neighbor” approach: These large properties, and their operations, have the potential to create negative impacts on adjacent single-family neighborhoods, such as noise, traffic, and lighting. The Township should ensure that all existing provisions governing these quality-of-life factors are being enforced, and as large-scale properties come to the land use boards for new approvals, opportunities should be taken to further protect adjacent residents through buffers and operational controls, as permissible.

Provide housing opportunities across income, household size, abilities, and age groups.

A range of housing options exist in Maplewood, including single- and two-family homes, condominium townhomes, small apartment buildings, and more recent transit-oriented multifamily development. This diversity of housing stock serves different segments of the population. Diverse housing options in terms of price ranges, number of bedrooms, and services and amenities for all age groups and those with special needs meet an essential need of the community. This range of options also helps enable existing residents to remain in Maplewood as they graduate through the various phases of life without being priced out. Maintaining a housing stock that can serve a broad spectrum of the community helps to ensure that living in the Township is attainable for those who are just starting out as well as seniors who have raised their families and want to stay in the community.



Examples of Accessory Dwelling Units (ADUs)

Source: *The ABCs of ADUs*, AARP and Orange Splot LLC

The Township must also continue to affirmatively address its affordable housing obligation as provided for in its current Housing Element and Fair Share Plan. There is an urgent need for affordable housing options throughout New Jersey, the region, and nationwide. For Maplewood, in particular, the community has expressed concerns about escalating housing prices within historically affordable neighborhoods that have become increasingly attractive to new residents and investors.

Addressing these complex issues requires more than a “one size fits all” solution, but rather a toolbox of strategies ranging from deed-restricting units as affordable under the State’s requirements, to simply providing for different housing types by expanding what is permitted and removing barriers to options that are already allowed but not being implemented. Such a multi-pronged approach should seek to identify appropriate strategies across neighborhoods and conditions, to ensure a balance of housing opportunity throughout Maplewood.

Recommendations

Reduce the minimum lot area requirement (currently 2 acres) for multifamily development in the R-2-4 district:

This requirement exists in the R-2-4 district, but attached dwellings are permitted as conditional uses in single-family zones without any apparent minimum lot size. There are no lots in the R-2-4 district that meet this standard, and the few that do throughout Maplewood are already developed. At a minimum, the Township should clarify whether any minimum lot standard is called for as part of the conditional use standards in single-family zones. Any such standard should be uniform across residential zoning districts, and should be small enough to provide for actual development of contextual multifamily development (i.e. small apartment buildings and townhomes).

Revisit the Accessory Dwelling Unit (ADU) regulations to remove potential barriers for implementation:

Communities across the country are finding that accessory dwelling units can be an excellent option to provide a more affordable housing type, particularly for downsizing seniors or small households that are just starting out. In 2020, the Township enacted a zoning change to allow ADUs within any single- or two-family zoning district, subject to satisfaction of certain conditions. This was a positive step that put Maplewood ahead of many of its peers in the state in terms of broadening housing opportunities. However, to-date, no ADUs have actually been constructed. While some of this situation may be related to ongoing pandemic impacts, the Township should reassess the ADU ordinance to determine if any changes are warranted to further promote their development.

Creating an ADU on a single-family lot is not necessarily a small undertaking. In particular, state building code requirements for foundations and weatherization to convert detached garages to dwelling units can be cost prohibitive. Therefore, any ADU regulation should avoid placing undue impediments to the introduction of ADUs, such as owner occupancy requirements (which have been held by courts as illegal in New Jersey), differential tax treatment from single-family homes, or onerous permitting or licensing requirements (including the owner’s annual affidavit of continued compliance). The Township may also consider ways to further incentivize ADUs, such as by relaxing selected zoning provisions to allow homeowners with a detached ADU to also have an accessory shed for storage, increasing the allowable height for accessory structures, or by providing financial incentives from housing trust fund monies in exchange for deed-restricting the ADU as an affordable unit. At the same time, the ADU regulations should be carefully tailored to ensure that the lot does not become a de facto two-family home.



Example of a Two-Family Home in Maplewood

Consider permitting two-family homes beyond the R-2-4 district: As discussed above, attached dwellings (i.e. townhomes) are already permitted as conditional uses in all single-family districts as are ADUs, and multifamily uses are permitted on transitional lots within those zones. Thus, the Township has determined that non-single-family residential uses are appropriate under certain circumstances in single-family zones throughout Maplewood. Expanding the areas where two-family homes are permitted would be in keeping with this approach, and would recognize that two-family housing is an attractive and valid option for many homeowners, whether they are seeking an entry point into the community or are looking to downsize or establish a multi-generational housing structure.

The Township should explore allowing two-family homes as conditional uses in all or certain single-family zones. As a start, the R-1-7 zone could be considered, given its larger lot sizes. Conditions could include minimum lot size, width, and depth to ensure sufficient room for off-street parking and other infrastructure needs. Paramount in the consideration for expanded two-family home development is the assurance of strong building and site design to blend in harmoniously with established neighborhoods. Older two-family homes often appear similar to single-family home and are “stacked,” with one unit on each floor and either no garage or a rear/side garage. More recently constructed two-family homes typically use a side-by-side configuration, which each unit elevated over a front-facing garage served by its own driveway. The result is visually quite different from the existing built context, and also generates more impervious coverage in the front yard and a less safe and appealing pedestrian environment.

Conditions to permit two-family homes in more zoning districts should address these design considerations, through provisions that, among other factors, limit the number and/or frontage of attached garage widths, pavement in front yards, and building heights. These design elements could also be incorporated into the Township’s existing design and performance standards, to achieve a higher level of design for two-family development in the R-2-4 district as well.

Update the rent control regulations for greater clarity and effectiveness: In 2005, Maplewood enacted new rent control regulations, which provided for limits on rent increases, under the jurisdiction of the Rent Leveling Board. However, there are several issues with this code provision. Among other controls, the regulations limit rent increases to no more than the increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) for the previous three years. This puts the burden on Township staff to track the CPI and could result in high rent increases during inflationary periods. Other communities have addressed rent control in more straightforward ways that also allow for consideration of seniors. For example, Montclair’s rent control ordinance, adopted in 2022, caps annual rent increases to 4%, or 2.5% if the unit has a tenant 65 or older. That ordinance also has a provision for fees, which can help cover the administrative cost of a rent control program. Maplewood should consider amendments to its rent control regulations to more effectively balance affordability controls with protection for landlords and ease of enforcement.

Explore offering incentives to upgrade existing aged apartment stock in exchange for deed-restricting a portion as affordable housing: Maplewood has a number of apartments that, because of their age and configuration, may be offering below market-rate rents. Thus, the gap between their current rent levels and allowable rents under the state’s affordable housing requirements may not be significant. Some of these units could be subsidized through housing trust fund monies and deed-restricted to count toward the Township’s affordable housing obligation. The use of the housing trust fund typically carries requirements to rehabilitate the subsidized unit to a minimum standard. Thus, this arrangement can be a true “win-win” – the Township increases its supply of credited affordable units without the need for new development, and the property owner is incentivized to upgrade its buildings to a higher standard.

Maintain existing affordable housing stock: As part of ongoing implementation of its Housing Element and Fair Share Plan, Maplewood should seek the extension of expiring controls for all affordable housing developments as affordability controls near expiration.

Work with nonprofit organizations and the private sector to market Maplewood to a diverse range of prospective residents, and support programs for existing residents to help them better understand and manage ongoing homeowner costs: First-time homebuyers, particularly prospective residents of color, may be hesitant to consider purchasing a home in the Township due to preconceptions about cost, social considerations, and other potential barriers to entry. In addition, potential and new residents may have limited awareness of ongoing costs of owning a home and living in Maplewood. The South Orange/Maplewood Community Coalition on Race has programs to market the Township to potential residents of color, as part of its overall efforts to maintain diversity and reduce racial segregation. The Township should work with this organization, other like-minded nonprofits, and private-sector partners such as local realtors to continue ensuring that Maplewood is attractive and attainable to a broad and diverse population.

Explore financial incentives, including tax incentives, to assist elderly residents in the cost of remaining in their Maplewood homes: For seniors who own homes in the Township and wish to remain in their residences, the most significant barrier is typically the property tax burden. While high taxes are a regional issue and the majority of local tax bills are not municipal taxes, Maplewood should consider strategies to mitigate the financial burden on elderly residents. This could take the form of fee reductions or a senior discount program for local businesses.

Consider eliminating or streamlining the annual certification requirement for rental properties: Currently, all rental units in Maplewood – whether in multifamily complexes or within a single-family home – are subject to an annual certification requirement, in addition to an inspection requirement at least once every 24 months. It is important for the Township to keep track of its rental units, and the regular inspection of all rentals is critical to ensure

basic fire safety and address any building code issues. However, the annual certification requirement could be onerous, especially for smaller landlords, and a barrier to the creation of rental units. The Township could consider eliminating or reducing the registration requirements for smaller rental properties.

Ensure that group homes and other residences for special needs individuals are welcomed within the community, both through zoning regulations and education/outreach initiatives including Township staff: Group homes and similar facilities that function as single-family homes are an important resource for special needs individuals who wish to live in Maplewood, and their families. In addition, group home beds can count toward the Township’s affordable housing obligation. Maplewood should ensure that group homes are allowed more broadly within single-family neighborhoods, and should implement educational initiatives to assure the public is aware that such facilities are legal and welcomed within the community. While group homes are currently permitted in all single-family zones, homes with more than six people are conditional uses, restricted to designated arterial or collector streets. This requirement is onerous and does not make sense when considering that there are no locational restrictions for single-family homes with more than six occupants.

Explore opportunities to provide and incentivize housing for low- to moderate-income health care workers, including partnering with nonprofits: As part of its ongoing affordable housing efforts and the need to provide high-quality local health and social services, Maplewood should look at the potential to incentivize – potentially through housing trust fund monies and financial assistance from nonprofits and hospital operators – housing units that are affordable and/or targeted to health care workers. Participants in the Master Plan process noted that it can be difficult to find local home health care workers because they often cannot afford to live in the community.

Encourage all types of housing applications to consider incorporating ADA accessibility and principles of universal design for upgrades to existing and new housing

developments: In support of the ability of residents to age in place, and to promote inclusivity and equity for people of all abilities, the Township should encourage – through the land use approvals process and redevelopment initiatives – the use of accessible design in new housing. Educational resources, including available financial incentives, should also be provided to existing residents who are interested in upgrading their homes for enhanced accessibility.

Explore opportunities for strategic revitalization of key areas and properties, including through use of the redevelopment tool.

As a built-out community with virtually no vacant land available for development, Maplewood must look strategically at its developed areas, to channel growth, enhance areas that need revitalization, support the tax base, and provide future housing opportunities. Some of this development is already occurring, such as along Springfield Avenue, while regulatory changes recommended in this plan should unlock further potential. However, some properties or areas will be best addressed through the redevelopment tools available under the New Jersey Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (LRHL). These tools are appropriate when properties are unlikely to develop on their own and according to the community’s vision, whether because of environmental cleanup issues, difficult physical conditions, or other factors. The redevelopment tool is also useful where revitalization of a large area is contemplated and a holistic approach is needed. Adoption of a carefully tailored redevelopment plan that incorporates community engagement can address issues of site and building design in more detail than is permissible under conventional zoning. At the same time, redevelopment planning should be targeted and well-considered, to avoid an ad hoc or piecemeal approach to revitalization and to provide predictability for nearby property owners and the community as a whole. As with any land use regulation, the redevelopment tool should be grounded in the municipality’s overall land use vision, as expressed in the Master Plan.



Millburn Avenue Corridor



Former Movie Theater Building



Maplewood Village



Irvington Avenue

Source: Google Maps

Recommendations

Consider targeted use of the redevelopment tool to

facilitate strategic revitalization: The Township should evaluate the potential for new or revised redevelopment or rehabilitation designations for the following areas:

- The Millburn Avenue corridor, currently zoned HB and OB, from the municipal border with Millburn to Springfield Avenue. This area serves as a gateway into the Township and should be strengthened with more community-serving businesses, more attractive design, and establishment of a sense of place that identifies the corridor and adjacent residential neighborhoods as being part of Maplewood. The Township should consider coordinating with Millburn and Union on a joint cross-municipal revitalization effort.
- The Irvington Avenue business district, currently zoned NB, generally between Parker Avenue and Putnam Street. This effort should be coordinated with Newark and Irvington as part of a joint revitalization effort.
- Other opportunity sites, particularly in business or industrial districts, such as the former movie theater building in Maplewood Village, which is currently being studied for a redevelopment designation, and the RD-2 Redevelopment Area off Springfield Avenue, which was designated as a redevelopment area but has not seen any implementation.
- The entire Maplewood Village area, because of the age of its buildings, would qualify as an area in need of rehabilitation. Such a designation does not necessarily result in significant new development; it can accomplish improvements to the public realm (e.g. sidewalks, open spaces, lighting) and infrastructure improvements such as street upgrades and public parking. Working with the Maplewood Village Alliance and the Historic Preservation Commission, the Township should explore whether a rehabilitation designation could accomplish some of these larger public goals.

Ensure maximum transparency for redevelopment planning and other major development:

To the greatest extent practicable and allowable under state statutes, Maplewood should provide for public notification and involvement in significant development plans. Any

Township-initiated redevelopment should incorporate a public visioning process. For privately initiated redevelopment or large residential or mixed-use site plans before the Planning Board or Board of Adjustment, the applicant should be strongly encouraged to hold a neighborhood meeting as part of the process.

In addition, beyond minimum statutory notification requirements, the Township should ensure that the wider public is informed of the status of redevelopment or major site plan processes through such methods as e-blasts, announcements at public meetings, bulk mailings, etc. For redevelopment projects, the same noticing requirements as site plans should be used, even though the State does not require this extent.

Review large-scale commercial and industrial zones to ensure the appropriateness of uses and area and bulk controls.

Maplewood has several zoning districts, primarily located on the eastern side of the Township, that are intended to promote large-scale commercial or industrial development. Some of these areas, such as the Highway Business (HB) zoned areas, are remnants of time when Springfield Avenue was intended to be an auto-oriented, regional business corridor. Other areas such as the industrial and office zones, are distinct from the two primary business districts and neighborhood business nodes, in that they tend to house larger business operations and thus have the potential for greater negative off-site impacts. Each of these large-scale areas needs to be strengthened in targeted ways, as they provide valuable services to the community and support jobs throughout the local region.

Recommendations

Consider reducing the Highway Business (HB) zone on Springfield Avenue:

The HB zone is only found in three locations on the corridor: a small portion at its western end including the south side of Marie Place, a Walgreens site in the east-central portion of the corridor, and the area on the south side of Springfield Avenue east of Boyden Avenue. Given the longtime overall vision for the corridor as a cohesive, pedestrian-oriented environment

and the community's expressed desire to reduce negative impacts on adjacent neighborhoods, the Township should look at eliminating the zone in selected portions. For the westernmost HB portion, land uses include an office building and associated parking lot, which could be brought into the OB zone, and residential uses which should be rezoned to the appropriate residential district. The Walgreens property could be rezoned to Pedestrian Retail Business (PRB), while most of the area east of Boyden Avenue could be rezoned to Neighborhood Business (NB). Properties that contain uses that are only permitted in the HB zone should retain the HB zoning to avoid creating nonconformities. Where the HB zone remains, the Township should explore potential adjustments to improve aesthetics and address impacts on adjacent residential areas.

Revisit the need for the Research and Office (RO) district:

This district is only located on one property (the NJ Transit Hilton bus garage), which seems to be a better fit for the CI district.

Promote a renewed focus on historic preservation, especially where it can achieve complementary goals

Maplewood's historic built environment is a key part of its attractiveness and sense of place. While the Township has been diligent in preserving many historic buildings, landmarks and culturally important places, development can place pressure on historic resources and lead to inappropriate renovations that detract from their historic value. It is important to inventory historic resources and implement appropriate zoning controls and design guidelines to help promote preservation of the historic resources. These regulatory measures should be balanced with economic considerations and private property rights, both to facilitate preservation of historic resources and to avoid placing a cost burden on property owners to the extent that they cannot afford to maintain historic resources.

It is particularly important to protect historic resources from new development that would be implemented through demolitions rather than historic preservation. In this regard, Maplewood has seen success in promoting adaptive reuse of structures such as The Mill site on Valley Street.

This strategy should continue to be pursued throughout the Township, particularly along the periphery of non-residential districts that abut established neighborhoods.

At the same time, historic designation should avoid the unintended consequence of disincentivizing owners from maintaining and upgrading their properties. The designation process should be transparent and collaborative, involving the property owner to the greatest extent practicable. Once properties are designated, the review of alterations to those properties should be objective, based on clear standards that are understandable to the layperson. In addition, the cost to the homeowner of historically appropriate improvements should be considered in the Historic Preservation Commission's (HPC) review. Historically significant homes have value to the community, but they are also residences, and as is the case for most homeowners, the property likely represents their single largest financial asset. The review of property alterations for historic properties should avoid unduly cost burdening homeowners, and the potential for incentives and financial resources for owners of designated historic properties should be explored.

Lastly, historic preservation should not be viewed in a vacuum. Recognition and designation of historical assets can achieve parallel goals including economic development, strengthening of community facilities and programs, greater arts and cultural awareness, and enhanced community identity. For example, the Township should explore opportunities to recognize sites and buildings that represent the full diversity of its history. Specifically, there may be resources that are historically important for communities of color, immigrants, and the LGBTQ+ community – all groups that may not have been fully recognized in traditional historic preservation efforts.

Recommendations

Update the Historic Preservation Element of the Master

Plan: The Historic Preservation Plan Element was last updated in 2008, and since then Maplewood has experienced significant changes in its development context and a broadening of understanding about sites and structures that could benefit from historic designation. A comprehensive update of the Historic Preservation Element would address key topic areas including:

- Streamlining the process for designation of additional historic sites and districts so that additional resources could be designated. The process should incorporate collaboration with affected private property owners of prospective historic designations. Properties that are considered at greatest threat to demolition or deterioration, and/or have the support of the owner for designation, should be prioritized.
- Strengthening the role of the HPC, including clarity on its role in the land use approvals process and greater funding through grants and other sources. The current criteria for review in Section 271-83(E) are vague and should be revised to reduce subjectivity and consider cost burdens on property owners, and the language in Section 271-80(D) on the determination of emergency repairs should be clarified. In addition, the Township Committee should seek input from owners of designated historic or eligible properties in the review process, including potential representation on the HPC. Lastly, agendas and minutes of the HPC should be regularly posted, and vacancies on the Commission publicized for interested residents to apply.
- Promotion of educational programs for property owners about maintenance and improvement requirements of historically designated properties, and exploration of available incentive programs for private property owners. In particular, historic homeowners are not eligible for the State's Historic Property Reinvestment Program tax credit program, which is limited to income-producing properties. The Township should explore local tax or other incentives to support maintenance of its historic properties.

- Documentation of historically valuable infrastructure in Maplewood, with development of guidelines for upgrades or replacement, to balance preservation with modern infrastructure needs (including infrastructure that addresses resiliency needs).

It is important to note that, unless and until the Township's Historic Preservation Element is updated, the 2008 Historic Preservation Element, together with the historic preservation findings and recommendations of this Master Plan, shall stand as the basis for Maplewood's historic preservation regulations, pursuant to the MLUL.

Enact targeted land use regulations to support historic

preservation efforts: With an updated Historic Preservation Element as a baseline, the Township should consider adoption of key ordinances to address preservation goals, including:

- Potential demolition ordinance to require that no demolition permit be granted to a building over a certain age without review by the HPC or approval by the Planning or Zoning Board.
- Encouragement of adaptive reuse of historic buildings for appropriate uses such as general office, personal-service, and retail uses rather than demolition. This may be accomplished by providing flexibility in area, bulk, and parking provisions where re-use of an existing building is proposed.
- Development of design guidelines for distinct areas of the Township to guide historically appropriate and attractive development.

Promote historic tourism: Maplewood has a wealth of historical resources designated at the national, state, and local levels that should be promoted to residents and visitors alike. The Township should highlight these resources to make them more prominent and foster visitation. Some recommendations include enhancing signage/wayfinding for historic assets, improving pedestrian connections between important destinations, and increasing marketing efforts.



Pedestrian Environment in Maplewood Village



Pedestrian Environment along Springfield Avenue



Example of Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure



Maplewood Station

CIRCULATION AND MOBILITY

Implement a policy shift to prioritize walking, bicycling, public transportation, and micromobility over automobile parking and throughput.

Maplewood has the opportunity to respond to the community's desire for safe, convenient, and equitable alternatives to automobile travel. At the same time, residents and visitors alike depend on cars and parking to take advantage of the Township's many attractions and amenities. Ultimately, policy decisions must reflect an earnest move toward non-auto travel to address safety, environmental, and social goals while addressing, but de-emphasizing, auto demand. This Master Plan can establish and/or advance numerous efforts to create a more holistic approach to mobility in the Township.

Recommendations

Develop a new Circulation Master Plan Element: The Circulation Element would include a detailed study of existing and projected travel conditions, identify priority areas for safety improvements, incorporate a sidewalk implementation plan, and provide an implementation matrix to better plan for new projects. The Element should focus on designing streets for all users, particularly the community's most vulnerable users, and identify a comprehensive toolbox for improvements. Priority areas should be at intersections with high crash rates, schools and community facilities, and access to public transportation.

Any proposed transportation infrastructure projects should include cost estimates and designs so that they can be readily advanced by the Township. The Circulation Element should consider the impacts and opportunities associated with temporary street uses such as parklets, outdoor dining, and community events. Restarting the Transportation and Safety Committee will help guide planning and implementation efforts within a community-facing structure.

Update and Implement the 2010 Maplewood Bikeway Network Plan: The 2010 Maplewood Bikeway Network Plan provided a thorough evaluation of existing conditions and potential improvements for a safer bicycling network and facilities. Its objectives included advancing bikeway

corridors identified in the 2004 Master Plan, enhancing connections between major destinations throughout Maplewood, providing connections to South Orange and Millburn, and focusing safe bicycling opportunities on key corridors including wayfinding.

Some progress has been made; however, the plan has largely not been implemented. This Master Plan validates continued community desire for a more bikeable Maplewood and can further codify the need to update and commit to the Bikeway Network Plan.

The 2012 Municipal Parking Plan also highlighted the 2010 bike plan, underscoring the importance of cross-referencing related planning efforts and not precluding recommended improvements when changing design of parking or roadway facilities.

Renew and strengthen commitment to “complete streets” policy: Maplewood adopted a resolution establishing a complete streets policy in 2012. The language and intent of this policy can be further strengthened and integrated into Township planning and design practices to continually enhance street safety and utility for all users. The NJDOT model complete and green streets policy should be consulted for guidance. The policy should also incorporate the use of checklists for compliance with complete streets requirements for planning, capital, and repaving projects; see the Essex County Master Plan Circulation Element for a model. To assist in this effort, the Township should consider establishing a Complete Streets Committee to identify areas for improvement, funding opportunities, and outreach/ educational opportunities.

Adopt a Vision Zero safe systems approach to street safety: An increasing number of communities are committing to the safe systems approach espoused by the Vision Zero movement, with a goal of eliminating deaths and serious injuries on local roadways. Complementary to Maplewood’s complete streets policy would be a Vision Zero systems approach to street safety, inclusive of the myriad departments and stakeholders in the Township that influence or participate in transportation service, design, engineering, and policy. The safe systems approach declares deaths and serious injuries unacceptable, and recognizes human error, human vulnerability, shared

responsibility, and a proactive approach to improved safety. For the Township, this means designing streets to anticipate human error and managing infrastructure to both minimize risk and reduce the impact of mistakes on the human body. The Vision Zero and safe systems approach highlights the vulnerability of specific road users (e.g., pedestrians, bicyclists, the very young and elderly) while focusing on design and policy interventions to all users, including motorists.

Explore Safe Routes to School opportunities and funding:

School access remains a focal point for pedestrian safety, notably for children and caregivers. In a relatively large school district, individual access to school varies significantly, from very walkable, to challenging or impossible walks, to busing. The Township should explore and pursue vital funding sources such as Safe Routes to School (SRTS) grant funding.

The SRTS program is a federally funded reimbursement program established in 2005 by the Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act - A Legacy for Users (SAFETEA-LU). Under the most recent legislation, funding does not provide for a standalone SRTS Program. The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) has elected to continue funding the SRTS program separately. The SRTS program is funded through the Federal Highway Administration’s (FHWA) Federal Aid Program and is being administered by NJDOT, in partnership with the North Jersey Transportation Planning authority (NJTPA).

County, municipal governments, school districts, and schools are eligible to apply to the program, and nonprofit organizations are eligible as direct grant recipients for this solicitation. The SRTS program provides funding for both infrastructure and non-infrastructure projects.



Bicycle Infrastructure at Maplewood Train Station

Design and maintain roadways for safe, equitable mobility options for all users.

Building on these policy initiatives, Maplewood should develop the procedural tools and physical interventions necessary to support project development and implementation of projects that meet community needs.

Recommendations

Develop complete streets design standards with comprehensive input from Township departments and stakeholders working in street rights-of-way: Fundamental to the enhancement of the Township’s complete streets policy is the creation of a complete streets design guide, demonstrating commitment to safe and accommodating street design while offering specific, Township-vetted guidelines for project design and construction. Such a design guide requires thoughtful input from a wide array of stakeholders and a thorough understanding of decision-making processes associated with work in the right-of-way. Most of Maplewood’s streets are within the Township’s jurisdiction and purview, affording significant opportunity for actionable improvements to meet community needs.

Expand the use of traffic calming tools Township-wide to address speeding, aggressive driving, and distracted driving: In keeping with a Vision Zero safe systems approach, the Township has the opportunity to significantly increase its deployment of traffic calming design interventions on municipal roadways. Corridors ripe for traffic calming include Parker Avenue and Prospect Street, which currently facilitate motorist speeding with wide rights-of-way, straight alignments, and relatively few stops. Traffic calming can take many forms, in accordance with NJDOT guidelines and accepted practices, including:

- Reduce speed limits on Township-owned roads.
- Reduce travel lane widths.
- Install signalized pedestrian crossings (e.g., Rectangular Rapid-Flashing Beacons (RRFBs)).
- Narrow pedestrian crossing distances and add pedestrian refuge islands where needed.
- Introduce speed humps, chicanes, and other design interventions.
- Install radar speed signs.



Intersection at Parker Avenue and Prospect Street

In older communities such as Maplewood, many roadway rights-of-way are narrow and present other constraints that may limit the ability to implement adequately protected bicycle lanes, wider sidewalks, or other enhancements. As such, one of the most effective ways to improve safety and reduce the risk of crashes is to lower speeds and calm traffic. Higher motorized vehicle speeds dramatically increase the likelihood of serious injury or death in the event of a crash.

Identify opportunities for safe, protected bicycle lanes:

Where rights-of-way do offer adequate space, the Township is strongly encouraged to design and install protected bicycle infrastructure. Physical protection for bicyclists from motorized vehicle traffic significantly increases bicyclist comfort and better encourages bicycling as a viable mode of travel, particularly for more vulnerable users. In conjunction with an update to the Bicycle Network Plan, Maplewood should pursue a series of coordinated infrastructure investments to facilitate safe and direct bicycling opportunities between neighborhoods and activity centers.



School Pick Up

Improve safety and operations at problem intersections and corridors: Conditions can be improved for all roadway users, including drivers, bicyclists, pedestrians, and transit users, at numerous intersections and roadway segments identified by community members (see conceptual intersection plans on Figures 24 - 27). Examples include:

- Areas around schools experience heavy traffic during school pick up/drop off and rush hour including Parker Avenue, Springfield Avenue, and Valley Street.
- Intersection examples:
 - Wellesley Street and Franklin Avenue - Potential for all-way stop
 - Valley Street and Parker Avenue – Potential for pedestrian-friendly signal timing (as noted in NJTPA’s Road Safety Audit for Valley Street)
 - Boyden Avenue and Jacoby Street – Potential for improved pedestrian crossing
- Roadway redesigns - Some narrow residential roads may be converted to one-way, such as in the Hilton neighborhood, in conjunction with traffic calming and robust bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure improvements.
- Sight Triangles - There are sight triangle concerns at some intersections, such as retaining walls and landscaping, that create safety issues. One example is the Baker Street and Ridgewood Road intersection. The Township has looked at potential bumpouts at this intersection to improve safety.
- Corridor plans – Major thoroughfares such as Springfield Avenue deserve a holistic assessment to unify facility designs, address intersection and safety deficiencies, and promote placemaking and economic development.
- Lighting – Identify streets where lighting is missing, not maintained, or does not meet code requirements. Streetscape designs should include pedestrian-scale lighting to improve sense of place, comfort, and safety while avoiding excessive light pollution.

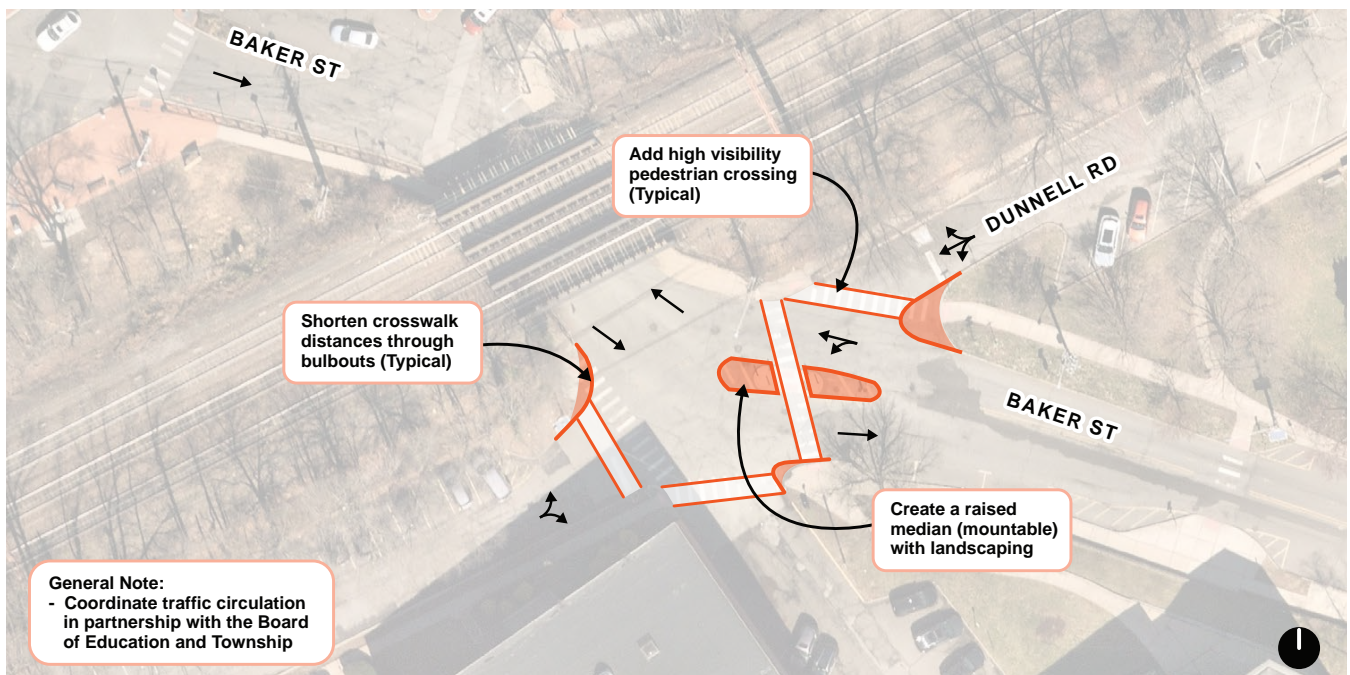


Figure 24: Conceptual Plan for the Intersection at Baker Street and Dunnell Road

Source: Nearmap, BFJ Planning

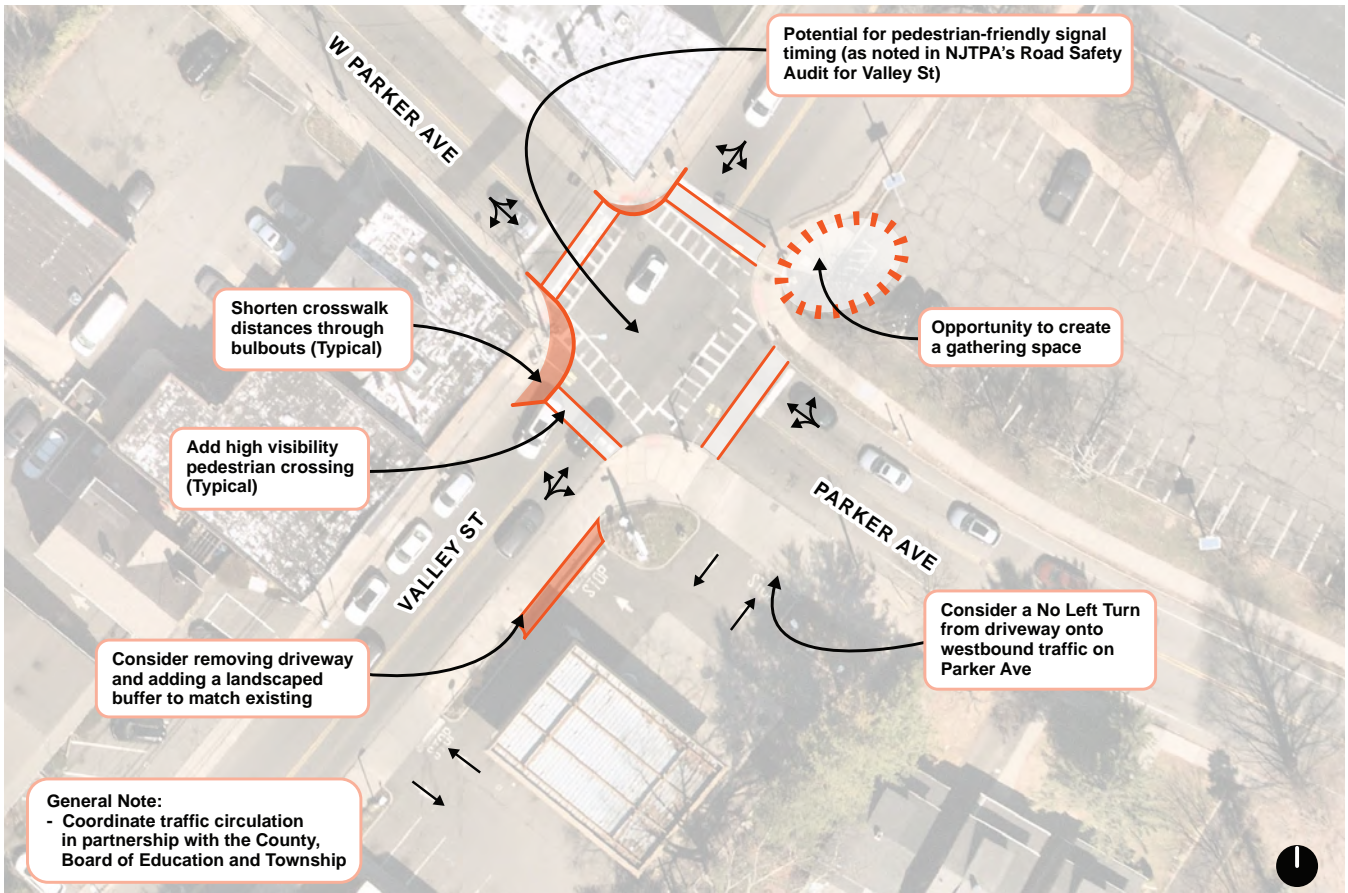


Figure 25: Conceptual Plan for the Intersection at Parker Avenue and Valley Street

Source: Nearmap, BFJ Planning

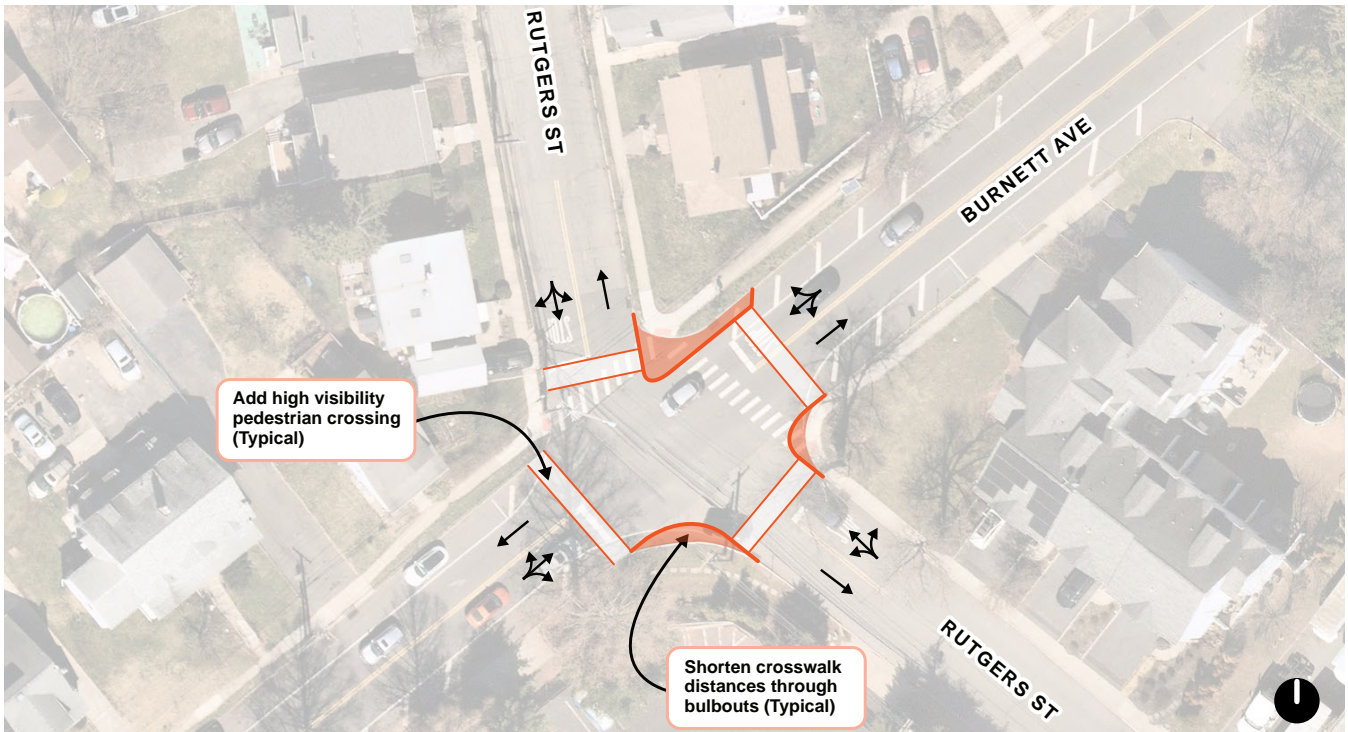


Figure 26: Conceptual Plan for the Intersection at Burnett Avenue and Rutgers Street

Source: Nearmap, BFJ Planning

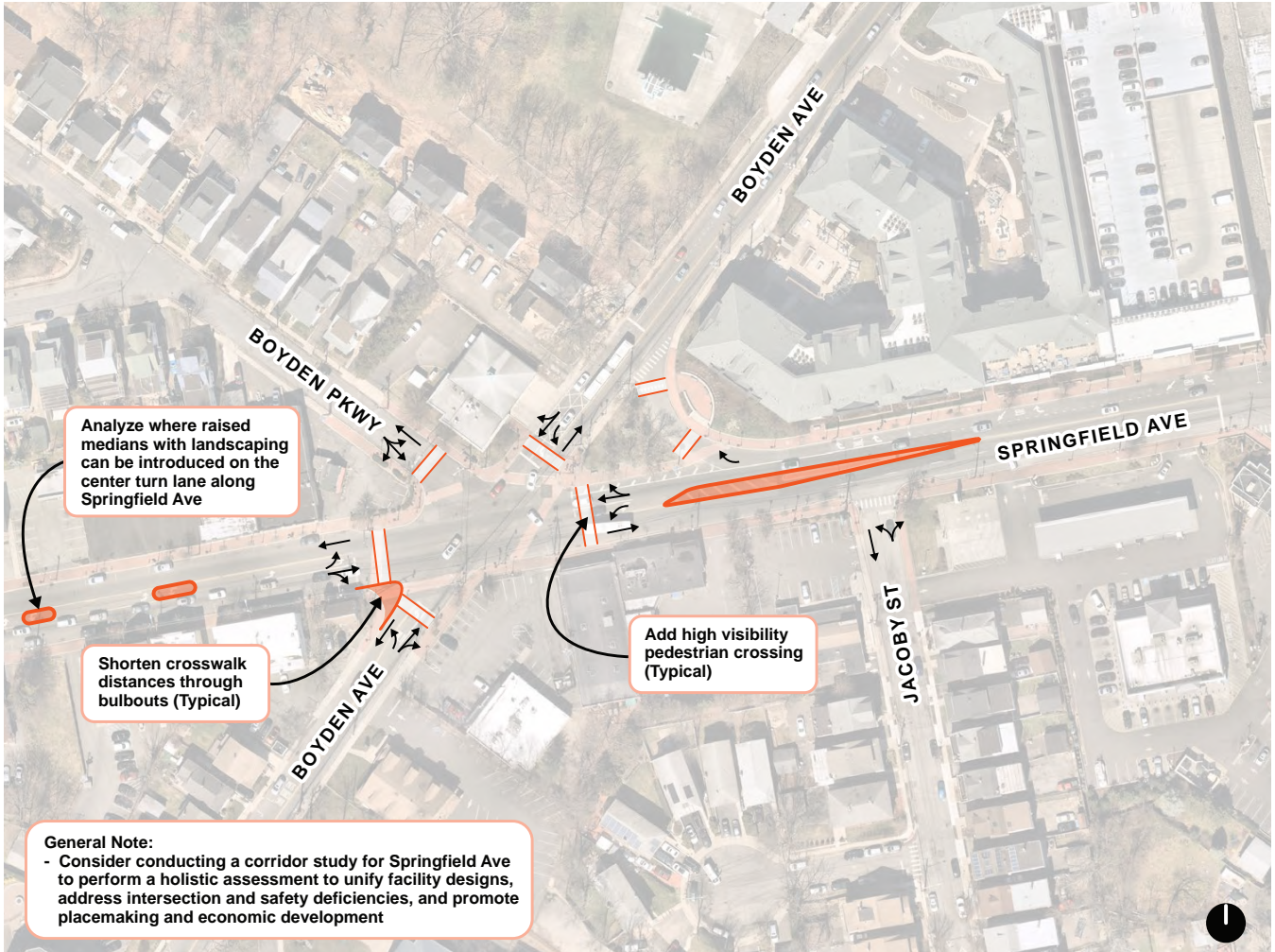


Figure 27: Conceptual Plan for Springfield Avenue between Boyden Avenue and Jacoby Street

Source: Nearmap, BfJ Planning

Expand access to public transportation and micromobility options.

Maplewood is host to significant public transportation assets, including NJ TRANSIT rail, bus, and the Township jitney; however, these services are not fully integrated and do not all satisfy ADA accessibility needs. The Township will benefit from a holistic, modernized analysis of its public transportation options to address current and future travel needs, including technology and accessibility upgrades to improve the user experience and expand access.

Recommendations

Continue to lobby NJ TRANSIT and elected officials for rail station accessibility upgrades: Significant investment is required to upgrade the Maplewood train station to full accessibility for wheelchair users and those with mobility challenges. However, these upgrades are vital to create

a truly equitable and functional transportation system for all community members and visitors. The Township should continue dialogue with NJ TRANSIT and elected officials to explore funding opportunities to meet these needs. New funding sources such as the Federal Transit Administration’s All Stations Accessibility Program (ASAP) may be tapped to pursue station upgrades in partnership with NJ TRANSIT. NJ TRANSIT also used to operate local bus service between Maplewood and South Orange to facilitate rail use at the fully accessible South Orange station. This service was discontinued, and community members have expressed desire to reinstate this connection to encourage and facilitate use of the rail network.

Implement jitney vehicle upgrades to address emissions and accessibility: Maplewood was recently awarded a \$1.15 million grant through NJ DEP to replace its three diesel jitney buses with electric vehicles. These upgrades may require additional vehicle charging infrastructure; the Township should explore available locations and funding opportunities for such equipment.

In addition, like the Maplewood train station, the Township's fleet of jitney buses is not ADA-accessible, further limiting mobility options for many potential users. Although it is not possible for the new electric jitney buses from the DEP grant to be accessible, the Township has secured \$90,000 in CDBG funding from Essex County toward the purchase of an electric ADA-compliant bus to serve seniors on-demand.

Improve communications and real-time information on the jitney system: The Township can improve the jitney customer experience and encourage more ridership on the jitney system by implementing real-time schedule and arrival information via mobile applications. Online and printed route and schedule information can be significantly enhanced to provide clear maps and user-friendly schedules, fare/pass information, and connecting service opportunities including NJ TRANSIT bus (i.e., not only rail). Unified applications and Mobility as a Service (MaaS) approaches can further integrate travel options by combining jitney information with parking availability and payment options. The Township should also lobby NJ TRANSIT to include jitney information in its own array of maps, schedules, trip planning, and mobile applications.

Explore evolution to microtransit to address diverse mobility needs: The continued success of the jitney program presents an opportunity to modernize and further meet community needs through an evolution to microtransit service. Microtransit offers on-demand service through mobile devices or telephone reservation, allowing tailored and user-friendly transit options to community members. A variety of service models may be explored, including full turnkey operations by contractors, to vendor provision of software and dispatching for the Township's own vehicles and operators.

Efficient and attractive microtransit service represents an important opportunity for contributions from developers in lieu of traditional traffic improvements as condition for local approval. Partnerships and mandatory contributions can enhance the Township's own investment while increasing service frequency and reach.

Expand jitney services for non-commuter activities: Whether through the existing jitney operating model or a modernized microtransit service, Maplewood can address a variety of unmet travel needs highlighted by community members, including midday service and connections between neighborhoods and activity centers. The current jitney network is structured around traditional peak period rail travel; however, seniors, parents, and other community members have expressed desire for local, non-auto mobility within the Township. Off-peak service would require additional operating budget but would not require capital expenditure.



Existing Bus Stop along Springfield Avenue

Enhance bus and jitney stops: Shelters, signage, and amenities at NJ TRANSIT and Township jitney bus stops will further encourage ridership and improve the customer experience for public transportation users. Beginning with high-volume corridors such as Springfield Avenue, a coordinated and consistent approach to improving transit customer comfort will further address equity considerations while fostering placemaking and streetscape improvements.

Improve the efficiency of existing and future parking resources.

As in many communities with active downtowns that generate significant traffic for shopping, dining, and employment, Maplewood often hears concerns about the adequacy of public parking. Balancing the need to meet parking demand while avoiding excessive and underused surface parking conditions is a complex process that requires careful study and analysis. The last comprehensive study of Maplewood’s parking assets and utilization was the 2012 Municipal Parking Plan.

Effective management of the parking supply also requires the use of best practices in off-street parking requirements. In addition, the Township must stay abreast of evolving technologies that affect parking, such as the growing demand need for electric vehicle charging stations and the increasing prevalence of scooters and e-bikes.

Maplewood should also create a unified approach to parking policies and facilities to promote a “park once” environment in support of local business, cultural, and institutional destinations. Parking is an important component of Maplewood’s transportation network; however, careful consideration must be given to minimizing unnecessary, short trips between multiple parking facilities and avoid incentivizing driving when walking, bicycling, or other modes of travel are feasible.

Recommendations

Update the 2012 Municipal Parking Plan: Independently, or as part of a Circulation Element update, the Township should conduct an updated assessment of parking facilities. This effort would consider on- and off-street parking,

particularly in the Village and commercial nodes/corridors, identifying typical utilization by day and time, regulations and permit use, and opportunities for greater efficiency to promote mobility and economic vitality in the community.

Streamline and modernize parking regulations and policies:

A variety of concerns were raised by community members about existing policies, facilities, and utilization of Township parking assets. For example, some business owners in Maplewood Village indicated that, as some tenant spaces in the Village have repopulated (e.g., on Baker Street), merchant parking has become scarcer, and there was concern that street reconfiguration due to recent development may have exacerbated this situation. However, the Township has performed some analysis of merchant parking utilization and found that it is underutilized. Better education for businesses and wayfinding for merchant parking are possible and encouraged. Some employees are not using merchant parking and are parking in public areas, moving their cars around as needed to meet time limits. Merchant parking is more needed on side streets than Maplewood Avenue.

With the onset of COVID-19, the Township implemented temporary 10-minute parking in front of businesses where clients could pick up their purchases. Businesses have shown support for this strategy. The Township should formalize this short-term parking strategy to encourage business patronage while keeping parking turnover high. The location and regulation of these spaces (particularly enforcement) should be carefully planned and monitored to ensure they are effectively utilized for quick trips and not for longer visits. If short-term spaces are not used and long-term spaces are not available, people will be inclined to use the 10-minute spots for long-term parking.

Opportunities should be explored for designated location(s) for daily train station parkers to shift them slightly away from occupying prime locations in the center of Maplewood Village. Information sources, both online and in print, can better illustrate the locations of publicly accessible parking along with hours and relevant pricing and policies.

Additional opportunities:

- Review off-street parking regulations and permitting to balance adequate supply with the efficient use of space, avoid excess surface parking and be consistent with current best practices. For example, the current requirement for houses of worship is based on number of seats, which may not be applicable for all such uses. In addition, the residential parking requirement is 2 spaces per unit, which in some cases may be higher than the RSIS standards.
- Transition from parking minimums to parking maximums which can reduce the number of parking spaces which may often go unused, and can make smaller sites more viable for development by lessening the amount of parking that must be provided. For buildings that include structured parking, using parking maximums could free up more ground-floor space for retail, community amenities, or other uses that better engage with the street. Setting parking maximums, as with parking minimums, should be based on analysis that considers the proposed use or mix of uses, the potential for shared parking, and the proximity to transit.
- Revise the zoning and design standards to clarify and improve the provision and location of off-street parking. Specifically:
 - Add the PRB zone to the parking location requirements for business districts.
 - Clarify the restrictions on parking in front yards.
 - Adjust residential side yard setback requirements to encourage detached garages, the traditional urban form in most of the Township.
- Encourage underground parking beneath structures, where feasible.
- Explore allowing overnight on-street parking in residential areas by permit, which would lessen the need for on-site parking and could promote the development of ADUs and two-family homes.

- Explore the potential to create a Parking Benefit District, where merchants/property owners could share in some of the revenue through streetscape improvements or other local enhancements.
- Create an improved comprehensive parking wayfinding and signage system (consistent with pedestrian, bicycle, and other wayfinding).
- Adopt bicycle parking requirements for multifamily and commercial uses.

Improve the efficiency of existing surface parking: Where off-street parking lots serve adjacent properties, every opportunity should be taken to connect these lots to reduce the number of separate curb cuts and allow for the shared use of surface parking by adjacent property owners through cross-access and shared parking agreements.

Update parking requirements for electric vehicle (EV) charging stations: Maplewood should ensure consistency with the New Jersey parking requirements, including requiring EV charging spaces for certain types of private development. Electric vehicle charging is primarily to be considered an off-street amenity so as not to prioritize vehicle parking/charging over potential pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure improvements in limited rights-of-way.

Address emerging needs for delivery and short-term loading areas: In the wake of the pandemic, there is an increased need for short-term drop-off and pick-up areas for delivery of food and other goods. Meanwhile, some residents may forgo the need to own a car and rely on car-sharing as a transportation option, which can reduce the need for off-street parking spaces. In site planning for new residential and mixed-use development, the Township should provide space for short-term loading to leverage efficiencies while avoiding negative impacts on adjacent properties.



Village Parking Wayfinding and Signage System

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Support Maplewood’s small and emerging businesses to help them remain competitive in a challenging retail environment, supporting the continued success of the two primary business districts while strengthening smaller, neighborhood-oriented commercial nodes.

Maplewood’s local businesses have faced significant headwinds from trends in e-commerce, interruptions from the COVID-19 pandemic, and a constantly changing social and economic environment. Today’s small and emerging businesses must be more agile than ever and be able to adapt efficiently to an ever-changing business landscape. Another key factor affecting small and emerging businesses is the change in the local market brought on by new development and revitalization, which can affect the market environment in terms of changing customer demographics, competition with new uses, and potentially higher rents.

In light of these factors, it is more important than ever to support the Township’s small and emerging businesses, both to help existing businesses thrive and enable complementary future businesses to take root and grow. This is particularly true for businesses outside of the two primary retail areas, which lack the support of the SIDs.



Springfield Avenue between Prospect and Yale Streets

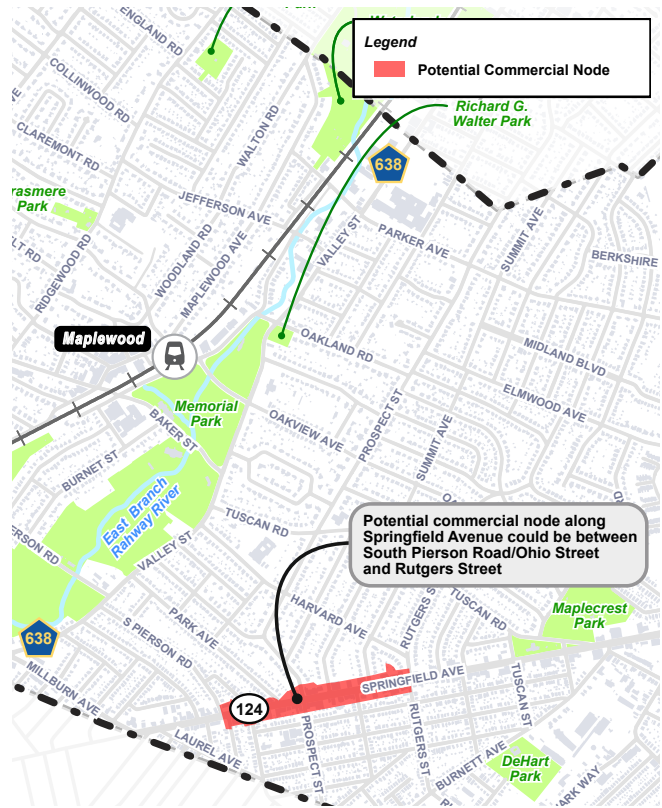


Figure 28: Potential Location for the PRB Sub-District
 Source: Essex County, USGS, NJ Transit, NJDEP, NJDOT, OpenStreetMap (OSM) Road Network, (Exported from Urban Footprint), BFJ Planning

Recommendations

Consider creating a sub-district for the Pedestrian Retail Business (PRB) district, to focus commercial and mixed-use development at key nodes where retail is particularly strong: The PRB district spans approximately 5,000 feet along Springfield Avenue. This lengthy corridor has pockets of commercial uses scattered throughout serving residents with basic everyday necessities. The Township should look at revisions to the PRB district to promote the clustering of commercial uses to create recognizable and vibrant nodes. Within these nodes, the ground floor should include active uses to create consistent lively storefronts, implement an attractive and welcoming streetscape, and encourage pedestrian activity. Because parking requirements are often a limitation to providing ground-floor commercial uses, the Township should consider relaxing or eliminating parking requirements for non-residential uses in these nodes. To further strengthen these commercial nodes, residential uses (or related amenities) would not be allowed on the ground floor. A potential commercial node along Springfield Avenue could be between South Pierson Road/Ohio Street and Rutgers Street as illustrated in Figure 28.

Review the zoning code for permitted uses in the business

districts: Review permitted uses, area and bulk requirements, parking requirements, and other provisions in Retail Business (RB), Neighborhood Business (NB), and PRB districts to streamline approvals processes overall and remove potential barriers to entrepreneurs, new business types, and experiential retail. Below are some zoning code revisions the Township should consider:

- **PRB District** – The building height setback requirement in the PRB district has required many variance requests over the years and promotes a design with the building bulk pushed toward abutting residential properties. It should be eliminated. Instead, the Township should consider imposing a maximum front building setback (approximately 5 to 15 feet). In addition, the Township should review the regulation stating that PRB lots abutting transitional lots should have a minimum front yard equal to 50% of that required in the residential district where the transitional lot is located. This requirement is confusing and difficult to implement.
- **Change In Use** – Switching from a non-restaurant to a restaurant use requires a minor site plan, review, and approval, which has proved to be onerous to small business owners. The Township should consider waiving the site plan requirement for changes of permitted use, allowing such applications to be handled administratively by staff. In addition, the Township should ensure that doctor’s offices are allowed in all business zones, and urgent care facilities are allowed in HB and OB zones.
- **General Items** – The Township should consider prohibiting storage of materials as a principal use within the business zones if not already prohibited.

Continue to partner with neighboring municipalities on the revitalization of the Irvington Avenue commercial area:

The City of Newark, the Townships of Irvington and Maplewood, and South Orange Village should continue their efforts to strengthen the economic vitality of Irvington Avenue to support existing local small businesses and attract new businesses. In 2014, Maplewood, South Orange, and Newark, together with Essex County, the Maplewood Chamber of Commerce, and NJ Transit, collaborated on a Local Demonstration Project referred to as Irvington Avenue: Creating a Complete Corridor, whose recommendations should be carried forward.



Irvington Avenue: Creating a Complete Corridor

In particular, the plan calls for the need to increase management capacity of “Maplewood Corners,” the stretch of Irvington Avenue from approximately Hillcrest Road to Franklin Terrace. The plan recommends the creation of a Merchants Association in the short-term, with the potential to establish a Maplewood Corners Special Improvement District (SID) in the long-term. The potential new SID would build on Irvington Avenue’s special features make it a unique neighborhood commercial node for local residents. In the exploration process, the Township should engage with commercial property and business owners along Irvington Avenue to discuss their concerns and gauge interest in a potential new SID.

Encourage the establishment of new green businesses by ensuring they are permitted in appropriate zoning

districts: Green businesses are dedicated to running holistic sustainable practices with awareness of local community and global environmental and public health. Examples include indoor agriculture, battery production and storage, recycling, and sustainable energy technology. Because of the large building footprints likely needed for such operations, the CI and SLI districts are the strongest candidates for these uses. Advances in manufacturing processes have made many of these traditionally intensive uses significantly less impactful in terms of noise and negative environmental impacts; however, performance standards should be incorporated into the provisions for such uses. The Township should leverage Maplewood’s climate leadership to attract businesses working on multiple aspects of the global warming response transformation.

Explore the use of Township-owned facilities for rental by small and emerging businesses, particularly those focused on the arts: The Township could explore the yearly usage of Township-owned facilities, such as The Woodland and the Burgdorff Center for the Performing Arts, to identify opportunities to further optimize the use of spaces in these facilities. If space is available, the Township could look into renting certain spaces out to local small and emerging businesses focused on the arts.

Broaden permitted uses in the Commercial and Industrial (CI) and Special Light Industrial (SLI) districts to encourage entrepreneurship and small business start-ups:

Maplewood's industrial areas are concentrated in the CI districts found along Rutgers Street/Newark Way and the SLI district found along Camptown Road. Potential uses that could be explored include art galleries, maker spaces, food production (e.g. coffee roastery), and limited retail space to accompany light manufacturing (i.e. space to sell products made on-site). These additional potential uses would help to expand the spectrum of industrial uses allowed to meet the needs of small and emerging businesses. New permitted uses should complement and not compete with existing industrial uses. The introduction of standard retail and restaurant uses should be carefully controlled in these areas, to avoid pushing out industrial uses and transitioning to a business district that could compete with established business areas. In addition, new residential uses (unless artists' live/work units) should not be permitted in the CI and SLI zones. Where residential uses exist (such as along Boyden and Burnett Avenues) those properties should be rezoned to R-2-4. The introduction of new uses should also be leveraged to promote greater public access and improved conditions along the Lightning Brook.

Explore opportunities for placemaking at key locations, to showcase Maplewood's creativity, generate economic activity, and build community.

Improvements to the public realm can be highly effective in bringing visitors to commercial areas, whether they are Maplewood residents or visitors. Beyond basic streetscaping enhancements such as sidewalk and landscaping (which are also important) placemaking looks at targeted, creative ways to activate a public space, better connect it with the surrounding area, and make it

a location where people want to visit and linger. When done well, placemaking taps into assets already present in the community, such as a local arts scene or historic and cultural institutions, to build on the community's identity in an authentic way.

Placemaking can also help to establish a stronger community identity where it may be lacking, such as along municipal peripheries where the borders are unclear and residents may not feel part of the community. Some Master Plan participants noted this issue in Maplewood, such as at the southwestern border along Millburn Avenue and along Irvington Avenue. Strengthening gateways into the municipality and establishing consistent streetscapes along key corridors can mitigate these problems and be a source of community pride.

Recommendations

Enhance existing and establish new gateways in strategic locations, through signage, landscaping, and public art:

Gateways are marked entry points into a municipality that serve to create a sense of place, provide orientation, and welcome residents and visitors. Generally, gateways have consistent signage showcasing the municipality's name along with landscaping elements. There is an opportunity to enhance the Township's existing gateways to ensure they serve as clear and identifiable markers welcoming one into Maplewood. In addition, the Township should consider establishing new gateways at key locations to ensure all residents and visitors are aware they are entering Maplewood. An example of an existing gateway is the Maplewood demarcated signage and landscaping at the southeast corner of Springfield Avenue and Laurel Avenue.



Gateway Signage at Springfield and Laurel Avenues

Expand and improve public spaces, such as Ricalton Square, to provide gathering areas and increase pedestrian activity in support of nearby businesses:

As a charming, quaint, community, Maplewood has a number of public open spaces primarily located within the commercial areas. These spaces provide residents with a dedicated space to meet up with family, friends, and neighbors to enjoy a locally purchased beverage or snack, relax, sit, and stroll through. Some existing public spaces could use improvements to landscaping areas and tree canopies, lighting fixtures, overall general maintenance, and programming to attract more residents to stop by and use these spaces at various times of the day. Located at the heart of Maplewood Village, Ricalton Square provides a

wonderful green open space with few seating areas and walking paths connecting the downtown area with the train station area. Ricalton Square has the potential to become a stronger community resource with enhancements to the landscaping, lighting, seating, and overall continued care and maintenance (see Figure 29 for a conceptual plan). In another example, the Maplewood Village Alliance is currently working to enhance the seating area on Baker Street next to the NJ Transit parking lot with public art and additional seating. Finally, the small plaza next to the Walgreen’s at the intersection of Springfield Avenue, Burnett Avenue, and Tuscan Road could benefit from additional seating, public art, and similar placemaking elements.

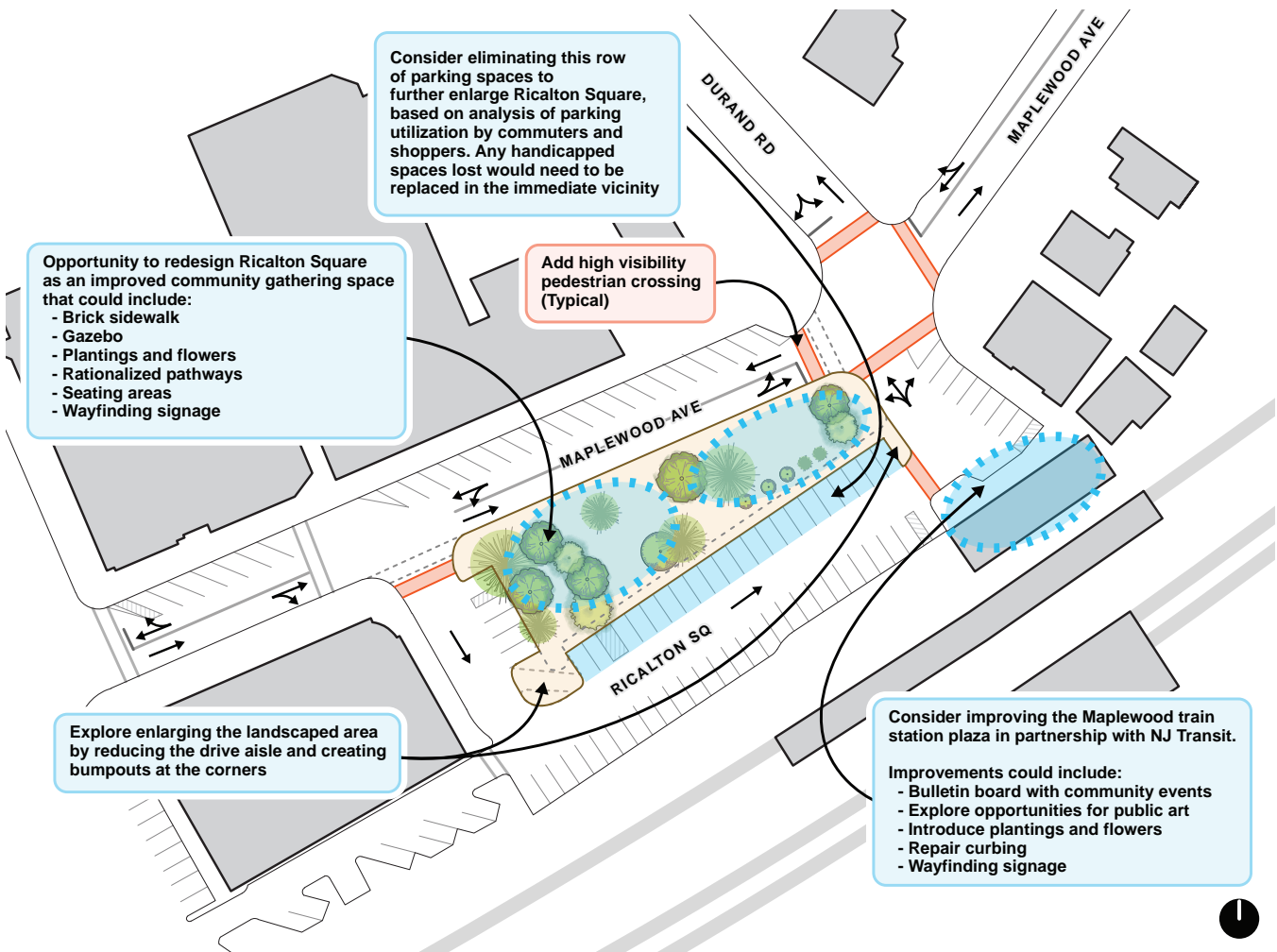


Figure 29: Conceptual Plan for Ricalton Square

Source: Nearmap, BfJ Planning

Take advantage of opportunities to introduce public art in municipal facilities, public spaces (e.g. the train trestle, public parking lots), and in new significant development:

The Township should partner with the local working artists who live in the community to explore opportunities to incorporate public art at key locations. Public art could be used as a multi-faceted tool to enhance public spaces, make the local arts community more visible, promote the various art forms, and support local economic development. Grant funding opportunities are available for public art initiatives. For significant new developments, the Township could encourage property owners to consider dedicating a percentage of space to art programming to continue expanding access to the arts.

Incorporate placemaking into transportation improvements (e.g. make streets safer and at the same time places where people want to be): Future mobility and transportation projects (e.g. public transit and roadway design) should consider incorporating creative placemaking techniques starting at the projects' onset. Creative placemaking is the art of creating meaningful public spaces associated with transportation projects that recognize and reflect the art, culture, and history of the local community. The Township should partner with local art, community, cultural, and religious institutions to engage community members, especially historically underrepresented populations, to capture their vision for the placemaking initiatives.

Focus pedestrian and bicycle improvements around small commercial nodes, such as the Ridgewood Row area, Irvington Avenue, Valley Street, and the Boyden Avenue/Elmwood Avenue/Orchard Road intersection:

Maplewood has distinct commercial nodes that serve the everyday needs of surrounding neighborhoods. Generally, these nodes are located along roadways that serve as direct routes connecting Maplewood to adjacent municipalities. As such, the roadways with one lane in each direction and narrow sidewalks tend to feel more auto-oriented. Creating a safe walkable and bikeable environment would allow local residents to frequent the commercial nodes on a regular basis by walking or biking rather than driving. This transition in travelling behavior has many benefits such as enhancing air quality, improving public health, reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and supporting local businesses.



Public Art at the Maplewood Train Station



Public Art at Yale Corners

Support and expand the vibrant arts and cultural resources to better serve the local Maplewood artists and the entire community.

Maplewood is known in the region as a haven for artists and arts-related organizations, and it is also home to several municipally owned facilities that are well-used and have enormous future potential. The Township recognizes the significant community and economic development value of these resources and will continue to support their growth and evolution through efforts that nurture the arts and cultural community as well as the physical facilities that are expressions of that community. This means promoting arts and culture as a key element of Maplewood's identity and ensuring that the individuals and groups who are active in the artist community can continue to live and work in the community. It also means thinking broadly about what cultural assets the Township offers, to include its historic assets as tourism drivers in addition to their preservation value.

Recommendations

Strengthen the programming and visibility of the Township's Division of Arts and Culture to make artists and arts-related activities more visible in the community:

Maplewood's Division of Arts and Culture is responsible for organizing arts and cultural activities within the Township in collaboration with other organizations, such as the Maplewood Arts Council. The Division also manages the reservations for the Township-owned facilities, including the Burgdorff Center for the Performing Arts and The Woodland. The arts and cultural programs are not as visible in the community as recreational activities. The Township could look into strategies to elevate the arts and cultural activities to ensure the activities are well publicized and accessible to all Maplewood residents.

Create and maintain a comprehensive list of all artists, arts and cultural organizations, houses of worship, nonprofit organizations, and others:

The Township could explore creating a comprehensive list of artists, art and cultural organizations, houses of worship, nonprofit organizations, and others to serve as a living reference document for the entire Maplewood community. This list would help organize all the various talented individuals and organizations into one place, assist with building connections, and make the individuals and organizations more visible to the community. It will be important for this database to remain up-to-date with current contact information.

Undertake an Arts and Cultural Assets Strategic Plan:

Township-owned facilities provide Maplewood and South Orange residents with the opportunity to rent facilities for special events. The facilities, including DeHart Community Center, the Burgdorff Center for the Performing Arts, The Woodland, and 1978 Maplewood Arts Center, are well-sought out venues that require approximately one month advanced reservations, especially for Friday evening and weekend events. On weekdays, local working artists who live in the community, arts and cultural organizations, and community groups rent the spaces for classes, clubs, performances, and practices. The Township should undertake a strategic plan to document all the arts and cultural assets to better understand if the facilities are being optimally used. In addition, the plan should investigate if there is a need for more venue options to host additional arts and cultural related programming such as galleries,

plays, shows, among others. Master Plan participants indicated the need for these community facilities to prioritize the local Maplewood artists, arts and cultural organizations, and community groups prior to other outside individuals or organizations. The plan should:

- Document the use of spaces in Township-owned facilities.
- Determine the condition and needs of facilities.
- Explore strategies to ensure equity of access (e.g. Implement a low cost to participate and support for organizations that serve a broad demographic).
- Look into partnership opportunities with the South Orange Maplewood School District and the region.



The 1978 Maplewood Arts Center

Investigate the potential to establish a community art studio space:

The Township should explore opportunities to create a formal community art studio space where working artists who live in the community could rent work spaces at affordable rates. Potential art studio spaces could be established in Township-owned facilities, in existing vacant commercial storefronts in partnership with local private property owners, in an adaptively reused building, among others. One idea that arose from the Master Plan process is the potential to create a community artist working studio space like Manufacturers Village in South Orange.

Permit a wide range of arts-related uses: Within Maplewood's commercial or industrial areas, the Township should allow a wider range of uses to cultivate the artist community. Uses could include galleries, live/work units,

maker spaces, performance spaces, and other arts-related uses to allow artists to continue living and working in Maplewood. To continue expanding access to the arts, the Township should encourage property owners to dedicate a percentage of a development or redevelopment plan for community art spaces and programming. There is an opportunity for these arts spaces to be sponsored or subsidized making them more affordable for working artists who live in the community to afford renting these spaces. In addition, the Township should explore reducing the barriers for coffee shops, restaurants, and venues to host performances by local artists of all ages and abilities who live in the community to showcase their talents. Potential subsidies could be considered for businesses who wish to host performances at their establishment.

Continue to enhance the Township’s planning for economic development initiatives.

Maplewood has several organizations working actively in the economic space, including the two SIDs, the SOMA Chamber of Commerce, and the Township’s Committee on Entrepreneurship and Economic Development (CEED). While each of these groups has its own mandate and area of responsibility, there is clearly overlap and potential for greater effectiveness through collaboration. The Township can lead this effort through preparation of planning documents that address economic development issues and opportunities, improving overall communication with the business community, and beefing up its own grant-seeking capabilities to pursue economic development initiatives.

Recommendations

Consider hiring a municipal liaison to the business community: The municipal liaison could work with the SIDs, Chamber of Commerce, and other key stakeholders to assist all Township businesses in navigating the initial land use approvals process and providing basic business assistance services. These needs are most pressing for commercial areas outside of the SIDs. As part of this position, the liaison could assist with improving information sharing between the Township and all business organizations, and would also be the point person for businesses to call with issues.

Explore hiring a municipal grant writer: The Township would benefit from hiring a municipal grant writer, who could seek out pertinent grant and funding opportunities, prepare and submit the applications with the required sections and supporting documents, and maintain a detailed record of the Township’s potential and secured funding opportunities.

Prepare a new Economic Development Element of the Master Plan: The Township should consider updating the 1999 Economic Development Plan to identify new priorities that reflect current local social and economic conditions. This effort could be led by members of the Planning Board and CEED, as well as Township staff.

Pursue a branding initiative to identify, reflect, and promote all aspects of Maplewood.

Maplewood has historically been divided, east-west, by roadways, topography, and demographic differences, and the concept of “One Maplewood” was a recurring theme during the Master Plan process. While residents identify with the Township overall, they may feel a particular affinity and comfort level for their own neighborhood. For example, some residents expressed that they do not feel that parks on the opposite side of town are “theirs,” or feel more of a connection to one shopping area than another. At the same time, some residents along the Township’s periphery indicated that they do not feel part of Maplewood because of fragmentation caused by intersections and roadways and a lack of easy access to community amenities.

A comprehensive branding initiative for Maplewood could go a long way toward resolving some of these issues, by establishing a unified visual identity for the Township that celebrates the character of individual neighborhoods and places while under the larger umbrella of Maplewood. Similar to placemaking, an effective branding campaign can strengthen community identity and pride. Branding could also celebrate Maplewood’s leadership in sustainability, resiliency, and equity efforts. At the same time, the municipal brand should support the existing brands of the two SIDs, which have been carefully cultivated and are highly successful within the region.

Recommendation

[Develop a consistent branding and signage program for Maplewood:](#) A comprehensive Township-wide branding scheme will help residents and visitors visually understand they are in Maplewood through a consistent color scheme, design, style for signage, wayfinding, website, and other media platforms. A unified signage program would focus on consistency for Township-wide assets: park signage, community facilities, gateways, wayfinding signage, municipal parking lots, historic markers and Township publicity materials such as the website. Major gateways into Maplewood should be marked with signage, signature entry markers, and landscaping to welcome residents and visitors. Wayfinding signage guides residents and visitors on where they can find key destinations, such as arts and cultural resources, community facilities, historic sites, and public parking.



DeHart Park Signage



Rotary Park Signage



Municipal Parking Signage along Springfield Avenue



Memorial Park Signage



Municipal Parking Signage for the Woodland Lot



Orchard Park Signage

COMMUNITY FACILITIES, RESOURCES, AND PROGRAMMING

Enhance the existing system of parks and open spaces and expand the system as feasible.

Maplewood's parks and recreation resources are a major quality-of-life amenity for its residents and contribute to its identity. The Township should not only enhance access to parks through safe sidewalks and crossings, but should continue to explore opportunities for new spaces as conditions permit. At the same time, Maplewood must continue to maintain and support existing parks to ensure that they remain attractive, safe, and usable for both the surrounding neighborhoods as well as Township residents overall.

Recommendations

Maintain and improve existing parks and open spaces:

Maplewood's parks and open spaces provide passive spaces to gather, relax, and stroll through as well as active spaces for community events, recreational activities, and sports programming. Master Plan participants indicated that all parks need better maintenance to ensure they remain valuable resources for current and future residents to enjoy. Maintenance, programming, and renovations of these resources should be addressed equitably across the system. In addition, as equipment is upgraded, the Township should incorporate elements that are accessible to all ages and abilities. Lastly, in the face of climate change impacts, the Township should strive to adapt its parks and open spaces to problems such as increased heat and more frequent heavy rainfall. These efforts could include installing more shade structures and implementing drainage improvements to mitigate flooding.

General improvements to all parks and open spaces include upgrading park restroom facilities and water stations, exploring ways to expand operating hours, and creating additional recreational fields. Below are specific examples of necessary improvements to parks and open spaces.

- **DeHart Park** – need for more lighting, trees, signage, and police presence to deter criminal activity near the Newark Way entrance to the park.
- **Maplecrest Park** – need for more lighting, programming, landscaping, replacement of the picnic tables that were removed (including installation of a canopy over the tables), general continued maintenance, and upgraded multigenerational playground equipment. In addition, the tennis court area has been closed since Hurricane Sandy and needs work to reopen it safely to the community.
- **Maplewood Community Pool** – need to review and improve the pool concession stand, equipment, space, and environment. There is a critical need for additional shading structures at the pool concession stand and the community waiting area to enter the pool. The pool could also benefit from additional tables and seating under shading structures. Lastly, the Township should explore making the pool memberships more affordable to ensure equitable access to this community amenity.
- **Memorial Park** – need for more benches, replanted trees, and replaced shrub. Currently, the Maplewood Memorial Park Conservancy is working to plant trees as part of the Memorial Tree Program and Tree Replacement Master Plan, and to plant shrubs as part of the Shrub Replacement Plan, and implement additional seating and internal pathways as part of the Valley Street Border project.
- **Milo S. Borden Park** – need for general continued maintenance, upgraded soccer field, and tree maintenance.
- **Ricalton Square** – need for more lighting, programming, landscaping, and general continued maintenance.

- **South Mountain Reservation (Essex County)** – need to restore the park’s understory and manage the forest health to keep up with the changing climate. Partner with Essex County to explore strategies to address wildlife management in South Mountain Reservation to mitigate the amount of wildlife wandering into the Township.
- **Chyzowych Field** – continue efforts, in partnership with the Township of South Orange Village, to redesign the field as a more accessible, multigenerational, resilient, and valuable community asset.
- **Athletic Fields** – Maplewood’s athletic fields are under enormous demand, and the grass and drainage conditions can be poor, requiring periodic cancellations of events and additional travel to other towns. There is a need for improvements to athletic field facilities, with a focus on durability and low maintenance requirements, new lighting, and new or expanded facilities to increase field capacity. These improvements should not wait on preparation of a new Open Space Element of the Master Plan (see the following recommendation).



Athletic Fields Located Along Baker and Valley Streets

Create a new Open Space and Recreation Plan Element of the Master Plan:

The element should document existing parks and open spaces and establish a continued maintenance plan, as well as explore opportunities for new potential parks and opens spaces. In addition to the specific park improvements identified above, broad components that should be addressed include:

- Ensure sufficient amenities, lighting, passive spaces, multigenerational playgrounds, seating, recreational fields and spaces, recycling and trash bins, and water stations to meet the needs of all age groups and abilities.
- Explore opportunities to optimize parks and open spaces to make them accessible and useable all year with consideration to environmental justice and equity.
- Ensure park entry points, facilities, internal pathways, and public restroom facilities are accessible to all Maplewood residents, particularly the senior population, residents with disabilities, and caregivers.
- Continue partnering with South Orange and the school district to best accommodate field usage schedules for business sports, recreational, and school teams.
- Identify new potential open spaces (e.g. community garden, dog park, parks, plazas, etc.).
- Investigate ways to make existing and new parks and open spaces more sustainable and resilient to more frequent heavy rainfall and intensified natural disasters.

Consider creation of an Open Space Zone: Currently, parks and open spaces are classified under various residential and commercial/industrial zoning districts. The Township should consider the creation of a parks and open spaces zoning district dedicated to the preservation and enhancement of these environmental and natural resources, including privately owned recreation.

Continue to expand the open space network as

opportunities arise: The Township should perform a yearly review with the Department of Public Works, Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee, Environmental Advisory Committee, and Green Team Advisory Committee to update

and prioritize the properties highlighted in the Open Space and Recreation Plan Element. This should include a visit to the properties to decide upon which one(s) to submit for grant funding. The Township should prioritize developing parks for both active and passive uses in areas that appear to be underserved, such as the eastern and southern portions of Maplewood.

Continue to seek funding opportunities for parks and open spaces: To support the continued maintenance of existing parks and open spaces and to acquire potential new parks, the Township should continue active efforts in identifying and securing grants and funding opportunities.

Improve connections between parks and open spaces throughout Maplewood.

Maplewood's parks vary in size and location. While they are not typically located close to each other, parks are near residential neighborhoods and should be well-connected to these areas so that residents can readily access them, whether or not they have a vehicle. Wherever possible, the Township should strengthen links to parks and open space assets to form interconnected greenways that provide connectivity to neighborhoods, public facilities (i.e. schools and libraries) and employment areas. The use of coordinated signage, lighting, and street furniture can better mark approaches to parks, while opportunities should be explored to create new pedestrian entry points to improve access.



Lightning Brook

Recommendations

Continue efforts to implement the proposed Rahway River Greenway: The Rahway River's East Branch runs through the central portion of Maplewood and continues north to South Orange and south to Millburn and Union. The 2010 Rahway River Corridor Study identified the need to revitalize the river in Maplewood to address water quality and flood protection issues. Conceptual plans illustrate opportunities to enhance the river's riparian habitat, manage stormwater runoff, and increase access for pedestrians and cyclists.

The plan proposed creation of a greenway, a combination of walking paths and bicycle routes, along the river seeking to connect Memorial Park in Maplewood to Waterlands Park in South Orange. As a next step, the plan recommended expanding the greenway to connect Maplewood to Millburn and the South Mountain Reservation. The Township of Maplewood is working to realize these plans in coordination with properties along the river between Chyzowych Field and Oakland Road. The Township should continue active efforts to establish the greenway and partner with South Orange to connect both municipalities' greenways at Chyzowych Field.

Preserve and strengthen Lightning Brook as a resilient natural resource accessible to the public: In partnership with the Hilton Neighborhood Association, the Maplewood Environmental Advisory Committee, and the Townships of Irvington and Union, Maplewood should pursue a comprehensive revitalization of the brook. These efforts should also consider how to make Lightning Brook and the immediate surrounding area resilient to future heavy rainfalls and natural disasters. Where the brook passes through private properties, the Township could work with property owners to acquire conservation easements to implement a multiuse path with native plantings along the brook's edge.

Prepare a comprehensive pedestrian and bikeway pathway plan: The Township should create a plan documenting pedestrian and bicycle paths connecting community facilities, houses of worship, parks, open spaces, and neighborhoods. This plan could provide residents and visitors with a visual map highlighting the best routes to walk or bike from one location to another. In addition, the plan



Bicyclist on Sidewalk next to Memorial Park

should look into the potential use of “paper” streets (roads illustrated on maps, but not formally built) and street ends to create new access points, as well as the use of public- or nonprofit-owned lands. A continued maintenance plan should be included for existing and future paths. Where the walking or biking paths are located within the public right-of-way, the Township should prioritize sidewalk and roadway improvements along these routes.

Assess existing community facilities to identify needs and opportunities.

Maplewood’s municipal functions occur in old buildings of varying condition, which can limit function based on modern needs. At the same time, there are opportunities to improve the accessibility to these facilities, to ensure that all residents can safely and comfortably access key functions and participate in community programming and events. The Township has been proactive in planning and implementing significant improvements to community facilities, such as the current replacement of the main library branch. Continued long-term planning is needed to identify critical needs for remaining facilities and set priorities for actionable next steps, particularly given Maplewood’s limited available land and the significant cost of needed improvements. A comprehensive assessment of facilities will also help to establish budgetary needs and assist the Township in seeking grants and other funding opportunities.

Recommendations

Prepare a new Community Facilities Plan Element of the Master Plan: This Element would evaluate all municipal facilities to ensure they meet the service needs of the community. An inventory of Township-owned buildings and spaces should be conducted to assess current conditions and space configuration and utilization. Higher-level assessments could be undertaken for facilities owned by Essex County, the Board of Education, South Orange, and others. In addition, Maplewood’s houses of worship should be considered as part of this assessment as they serve as an extension to community facilities by providing spaces for local programming, shelter during natural disasters, and food pantries. The assessment should identify potential opportunities where colocations, expansions, relocations, and upgrades are feasible. The Township should strive to retrofit community facilities with sustainable and resiliency design elements to ensure they could serve as resilient gathering centers during extreme weather-related events. In addition, the plan should explore opportunities to optimize seasonal facilities, such as the Maplewood Community Pool and adjacent surface parking lot, to make them accessible and useable during the off-season with consideration to environmental justice and equity.

Take steps to ensure that all municipal facilities are both compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and embrace principles of universal design: All municipal facilities should be accessible to all Maplewood residents, especially for the senior population and special needs community. The Township should evaluate municipal facilities to ensure they are compliant with the ADA standards for accessible design, and should seek to incorporate accessibility for individuals with both mobility challenges and developmental disabilities. For example, libraries and community centers could have “quiet rooms” for individuals with autism or sensory processing issues. The Township should also embrace universal design principles, meaning that facilities are easy to access, comprehend, and use by all age groups and abilities.

Consider allocating some parking spaces at municipal facilities to special needs individuals, including drivers with small children, the elderly, and anyone who is mobility-challenged: Some special needs individuals do not have

mobility issues that would qualify for a handicap parking permit, but these individuals have trouble walking distances. The Township should explore assigning some parking spaces or accessible drop-off areas at municipal facilities to accommodate the needs of special needs individuals with limited mobility. These parking space would be in addition to the required ADA accessible parking spaces.

As part of land use applications, take every opportunity to improve handicapped accessibility for private buildings and facilities: Beyond accessibility at municipal facilities, the Township should strive to make the entire municipality more ADA accessible, as feasible. As part of land use applications, the Township should consider encouraging private property owners to incorporate ADA accessibility for private buildings and facilities.

Strengthen and expand the Township's lines of communication with the community.

Communication was a significant area of concern for participants in the Master Plan process. Many residents expressed that they do not feel well-informed about what is happening in Maplewood, whether that means learning about an initiative being undertaken by the Township or a major development under consideration, or simply knowing about community events.

The Township has a robust e-blast system and regularly posts updates on its website, but these efforts may have limited success reaching segments of the population that lack strong access to technology or are less digitally savvy, such as seniors. These groups often prefer paper mailings. However, taking that approach can be difficult to reach renters, of which there are a large number in Maplewood.

Township departments exert significant effort toward communicating with residents, businesses, and visitors. However, communication is generally being undertaken in silos, with staff undertaking their own outreach efforts. In today's environment, a more unified, all-encompassing strategy is needed to "fire on all cylinders" – using mailings, paper flyers, website updates, social media, texting, and various other techniques in a coordinated system.

Recommendations

Consider hiring a municipal communications specialist to help streamline communications: The Township could consider creating a staff position for a municipal communications specialist, with responsibility for coordinating all Township communications and providing regular updates about upcoming events. Communications should be made available in the key languages spoken by Maplewood residents, including English, Spanish, Haitian Creole, and Russian. In addition, the municipal communications specialist could help the Township with staying connected with local community organizations, houses of worship, neighboring municipalities, among others. The specialist could take on many of the recommendations outlined in this overarching strategy.

Set and implement a Municipal Communications Strategy: Creation of a Municipal Communications Strategy would identify the best ways for the Township to effectively communicate, engage, and reach the community. The strategy would highlight recommendations to improve the Township website and communication with residents. It would provide guidance on how to make the website easier to navigate for all users. The website should host essential information, documents, and reports to serve as resources for the community. Also, the website could be improved with a more robust calendar showcasing community events, engagement opportunities, programs, and meetings. In terms of email blasts, the Township should explore consolidating updates from all Township boards, departments, commissions, and committees into one e-blast if possible.

In addition, the communications strategy would assess the existing communication channels most used by residents, and build from those channels to share activities, community engagement opportunities, events, meetings, programming, or specific updates. Through this assessment, the Township could consider the feasibility of creating a social media platform, such as a Township of Maplewood dedicated Instagram or Facebook page, to help streamline communications. Both the Township website and other communication channels should be updated and maintained regularly.

Continue to establish strategies to reach out to Maplewood’s underrepresented populations, including communities of color, low-income communities, and renters:

Maplewood is home to a diverse community, with residents of varying cultural, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds. The Township should explore the most effective ways to actively engage with underrepresented populations to ensure they are fully aware and can access events, programming, and resources. For example, the Township could partner with South Orange Maplewood Community Coalition on Race to learn from their inclusive community engagement strategies and to potentially co-host future engagement events as needed. For the renter population, the Township could reach out to the management teams at apartment developments to identify the best ways to engage with their tenants (e.g. building events, bulletin board, e-blasts, etc.).

Continue regular coordination with Maplewood’s neighborhood associations: The Township’s neighborhood associations are resources to ensure residents are aware of neighborhood-related events, improvements, and updates.

Provide new residents with a “Welcome Wagon” kit: To ensure new residents are welcomed, the Township should consider providing new residents with a “Welcome Wagon” kit, which would include all the important information a new resident would need to know to assist with settling into the community. This could include transit information (e.g. jitney bus service), a recycling and trash collection calendar, contacts for key Township departments, information on native trees and landscaping, and yearly events to look out for.

Investigate the potential to provide public Wi-Fi at community facilities and parks: The Township should explore the feasibility of providing residents with free public Wi-Fi at specific locations such as community facilities, parks, and open spaces. The Library’s Hilton Branch and the Springfield Avenue Partnership (SAP) were awarded grant funding to purchase Wi-Fi extenders to expand internet access to the area immediately surrounding the library. The Township could consider implementing Wi-Fi extenders at other community facilities, and publicize this amenity.

Build upon the Township’s existing programming, resources, and services to make them accessible to all residents.

Maplewood has a well-deserved reputation for inclusiveness and acceptance of residents from all walks of life. Maintaining a community that is accessible to all takes constant effort on the part of the municipality, as well as strong collaboration with partners such as adjacent communities, local businesses, and the nonprofit sector, to ensure that municipal programs, facilities, and events are open to all and are also functioning in the most efficient way possible.

Participants in the Master Plan process raised the need for efforts to better serve special needs residents and those with disabilities, as well as a desire for more programming and events for all ages. Maplewood is not alone in this need. Many communities in the region are actively engaging in these areas; for example, a number of local recreation departments offer adaptive sports programs for children with special needs, while others run cross-municipal services for seniors including shuttle buses. The Township should explore opportunities to improve services and programming, both on its own and in partnership with neighboring communities, to ensure possible participation by all residents.

Recommendations

Identify gaps in the Township’s recreational opportunities, such as activities and programming, to ensure all

age groups and abilities are accommodated: Some participants in the Master Plan process identified the need for expanded intergenerational recreational opportunities (sports and non-sports), especially for teens, young adults, seniors, and people with disabilities. Community stakeholders highlighted the importance of ensuring recreational offerings are accessible, equitable, and inclusive of all residents. Specific recommendations include focusing bike and pedestrian improvements around community facilities and recreational amenities, improving communications about recreational programming, and ensuring that programming is inclusive of the full diversity of the community, in terms of age, race, gender identity, and ability.

Establish a Disability Advisory Committee: A Disability Advisory Committee, comprised of Maplewood residents well versed in this important topic, could identify actions to serve and include special needs residents, such as:

- Sharing resources on available programs in the region.
- Compiling information on resources and services for special needs residents in Maplewood that could be provided to new residents as part of the “Welcome Wagon.”
- Explore ways that Maplewood can become an autism-friendly community.
- Advising the Township on upgrades or renovations to municipal facilities as well as transportation/ infrastructure projects to ensure the special needs community is accommodated.
- Implementing sensitivity training for municipal workers on interacting with special needs individuals.
- Planning and implementing community events that are inclusive to the special needs community.
- Incentivizing or encouraging local businesses to hire special needs employees with assistance from local partnerships, such as with the SIDs.

Develop a Township Strategic Department Plan: To better understand the needs of each department, the Township could evaluate each department to identify the current capacity and resources as well as to determine hiring and resource needs.

Continue collaborating with South Orange and other neighboring communities: These municipalities have numerous shared service arrangements enabling them to run more effectively and efficiently. Maplewood and South Orange share fire departments, municipal court services, school systems, and other services. The Townships should continue collaborating with each other and with other neighboring municipalities, as needed.

Partner with local arts and cultural organizations, businesses, community groups, houses of worship, and other organizations to host key events: The Township could look to collaborate with community stakeholders to host larger events rather than many smaller events for similar functions (e.g. holiday events) to enhance the overall event success, increase community building, and reduce costs.



Maplewood Community Fridge and Food Shed

Local community stakeholders could include local arts and cultural organizations, businesses, community groups, houses of worship, and other organizations.

Strengthen and promote community resources related to public health, such as access to affordable healthy food, social services, and wellness programs.

The COVID-19 pandemic elevated public health concerns and soundly established public health as a key aspect of land use planning and design for both public- and private-sector projects. In addition, the isolation and reduced social interaction seen during the pandemic underscored the importance of promoting mental health and social connectedness through the creative use of open spaces and the public realm. The Township should continue current efforts to support public health and wellness of the entire Maplewood community. Some Master Plan participants indicated the need to amplify, promote, and streamline the Township’s public health and wellness programs, resources, and services, especially those related to domestic violence, food distribution, mental health, and social services.

Recommendations

Support and implement recommendations from Maplewood’s Sustainable Jersey Health Gold Committee:

As part of the Township’s Sustainable Jersey certification and efforts to achieve Health Gold status, the Maplewood Health Department prepared a Community Health Assessment Report to capture resident feedback on current public health services and ways to improve these services in an equitable manner. This Master Plan fully supports the Health Department’s efforts, and the Township should consider implementing the report’s short-, medium-, and long-term interventions as recommended by the Sustainable

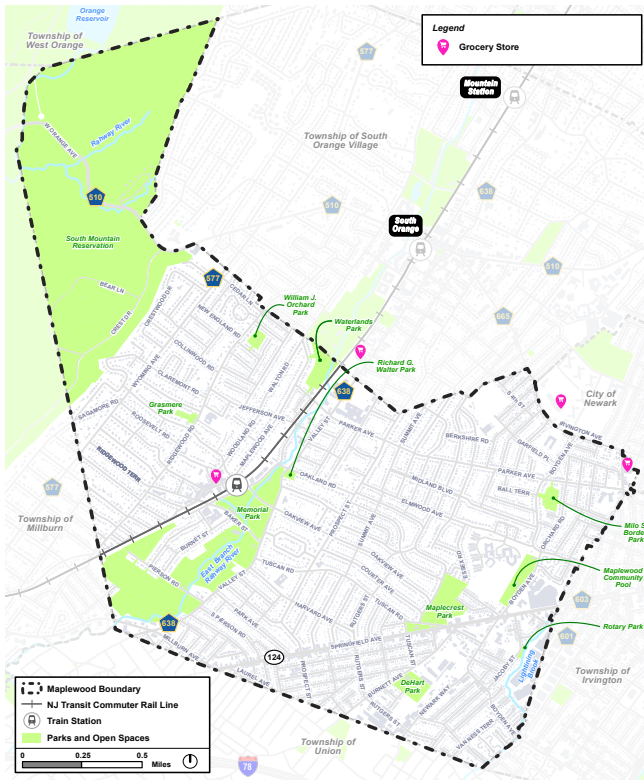


Figure 30: Existing Grocery Stores

Source: Essex County, USGS, NJ Transit, NJDEP, NJDOT, OpenStreetMap (OSM) Road Network, (Exported from Urban Footprint), BfJ Planning

Jersey Health Gold Committee. Some of the following recommendations are derived from this report.

Address food insecurity by promoting grocery stores, Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), and similar uses, particularly in the eastern and southern portions of the Township: Maplewood has a limited number of full-service grocery stores (see Figure 30), with some portions of the Township, such as neighborhoods along Springfield Avenue, relying on dollar stores and convenience stores for food. To mitigate this situation, grocery stores, community supported agriculture (CSAs), and food cooperatives should be permitted uses in all business, commercial, and industrial districts. In addition, these uses should be supported as optimal for the ground floors of mixed-use development, as they both respond to a community need and promote an active pedestrian environment. In such mixed-use development, consideration should be given to relaxing parking requirements for the commercial food-related use through shared parking arrangements. In particular, the development of grocery stores and similar uses should be promoted within the eastern and southern portion of the Township, where Maplewood's low- to moderate-income households primarily reside.

Explore ways to make the Farmers Market more accessible

to all residents: Maplewood's Farmers Market runs on Monday afternoons from June 5 through November 20, at 1866 Springfield Avenue on the surface parking lot. The market provides the community with another option for weekly fresh produce. The Township should consider strategies to make the market more accessible to the entire community, including:

- Evaluate the operating hours.
- Provide transportation access to the market.
- Create financial access by accepting various payment forms.
- Enhance ADA-accessibility within and surrounding the market area.
- Explore the potential to create a Mobile Farmers Market Stand in partnership with Meeting Essential Needs with Dignity (MEND).
- Implement a new jitney bus service route dedicated to taking community members to grocery stores and the Farmers Market with stops that are more accessible in neighborhoods where there are lower income households, people with limited mobility, seniors, special needs individuals, and others in need.



Farmers Market

In addition, the Township should consider expanding the market's operations year-round to provide even greater services to the local community, either by creating an outdoor covered market space or using an indoor flex space. One opportunity could be to approach houses of worship about hosting a reduced-scale indoor market. This could provide a revenue stream to the host facility and typically aligns with their mission to serve the community.

Investigate the potential to create additional community gardens: Maplewood has two active community gardens, at the municipal building and Maplewood Community Pool. The Township should consider the possibility to establish more community gardens where appropriate, expanding the reach and benefits these amenities provide.

Support public and mental health programs and ensure that residents are aware of and have access to mental health and social services: This includes facilitating non-vehicular and transit access to health and social services facilities and organizations so that local residents can safely reach them, and collaborating with relevant agencies on any upgrades to public infrastructure (e.g. sidewalks) that may be needed to improve access. For example, the Township should advocate with NJ Transit to restore bus service along Valley Street, which previously provided access to St. Barnabas Hospital in Livingston. In addition, Maplewood should ensure that local health-care options are available by permitting urgent care facilities in all business districts.



Community Garden at the Municipal Building

Partner with the South Orange-Maplewood School District on future planning efforts.

The school district is an important part of Maplewood's attractiveness and identity; for many families, the schools are the primary way they engage with the community. Schools are also key components of land use in the Township, and they are both generators of – and highly sensitive to – vehicular traffic. Any major long-term planning effort must consider impacts to local schools and the way that residents reach and engage with them.

Although Maplewood's current and projected school-aged population does not currently raise major concerns for the school district, it is important for the Township to maintain a strong, collaborative relationship and ongoing communication with the district on any significant planned development, the needs of individual schools, and transportation issues.

Recommendations

Coordinate with the District on its transportation planning to identify and mitigate hazardous routes, including coordination on Safe Routes to School: Some Master Plan participants stressed the need to improve the safety of school routes, especially for pedestrians and cyclists. The District aims to identify and mitigate hazardous routes to ensure safety and accessibility for Maplewood and South Orange residents, and has engaged a professional engineer in this effort. The Township should coordinate with the District on their transportation planning efforts to collaborate on improving routes to school, including coordination on the Safe Routes to School program.

Maintain close coordination with the District on enrollment trends and significant new housing development that could affect school capacities: The District has retained a new demographer to work on updating the 2017 Demographic Study to illustrate the current student enrollment and future projections. This study will incorporate the District's intentional integration efforts. The Township continue close collaboration and coordination with the District on student enrollment trends, in particular identifying significant new housing development that could affect the facility usage.

SUSTAINABILITY, INFRASTRUCTURE, AND RESILIENCY

Foster development that focuses on energy-efficient, sustainable, and resilient practices.

Building more sustainable developments assists with protecting the resources and systems that support us today so that they will be accessible to current and future generations. The potential impacts of climate change, which is a global issue, must be considered when planning for the future to ensure communities are resilient and can adapt to climate change related impacts. The Township should adopt and enforce land use policies that reduce sprawl, preserve open space, reduce energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, and reduce automobile use by improving walkability. The recommendations below should be taken by the Township take to encourage high environmental standards for development and infrastructure, conserve resources, promote renewable energy, and improve the environmental performance of municipal property.

Recommendations

Prepare a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element of the Master Plan: This element should focus on identifying strategies to build upon and enhance the Township's green building and sustainability initiatives. As stated in New Jersey's Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL), the element contents should promote the efficient use of natural resources and the installation and usage of renewable energy systems; improve the incidence effectiveness of recycling and reduce waste; consider the impact of buildings on the environment; allow ecosystems to function naturally; conserve and reuse water; treat stormwater on-site; and optimize climatic conditions through site orientation and design.

Continue to encourage new development and renovations to incorporate sustainable practices compatible with U.S. Green Building Council (USGBC) rating systems or comparable principles: The Township should encourage multifamily and mixed-use developments to incorporate all practicable sustainable design components as feasible. Green components could include greywater recycling, solar energy harvesting, vegetated green roof, among others. The USGBC established the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) rating systems to guide the creation of green buildings as well as green neighborhoods and cities. There are additional green building certification programs such as the Energy Star Building Certification, Living Building Challenge, and WELL Building Standard. The Township has taken strides to implement sustainable development practices within municipally-owned facilities. In 2008, the Township officially opened the new Maplewood Police and Court Building, which is recognized as the first LEED certified municipal building in New Jersey with the LEED Silver certification.

Support the shift toward reliance on renewable energy sources: Renewable energy can be replenished by natural sources, such as geothermal, hydro, solar, or wind powered energy. The transition to renewable energy sources provides many benefits, including creating local job opportunities in the green industry (e.g. manufacturing, installation, and continued maintenance of renewable energy sources), improving air quality, minimizing the use of nonrenewable energy sources, providing cleaner and cost-effective energy sources, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Shifting to renewable energy sources is imperative for the future health and well-being of all biodiversity and the natural environment.

As noted in the 2019 New Jersey Energy Master Plan, the State has a goal of reaching 100% clean energy by 2050. Maplewood should support the transition from non-renewable to renewable energy sources, in particular focusing on electrical power sources, also known as electrification or decarbonization. As a first step, the Township should investigate the potential to generate its own distributed generation of electricity (e.g. Maplewood Community Solar). Simultaneously, the Township should assess the feasibility of retrofitting municipal facilities to all-

electric power. Each municipal facility could undergo an energy audit to identify the facility's overall efficiency and potential to be retrofitted. The Township should strive for all municipal facilities to be net zero over time.

Furthermore, the Township could partner with Maplewood's Green Team and Environmental Advisory Committee to provide the community with comprehensive educational resources about the benefits of shifting to renewable energy sources and potential funding opportunities.

Support and implement the Maplewood Community

Energy Plan: Current efforts are taking place in the Township to assist in reaching the State-wide clean energy goal. The Maplewood Community Energy Plan Working Group and the Rutgers Center for Green Building are partnering to develop the Maplewood Community Energy Plan, which seeks to determine the capacity for electrification in the Township, investigate the feasibility of community solar, and study the capacity for adequate electric vehicle charging infrastructure. The Township should support the plan's completion and implementation.

Continue active efforts to improve air quality: The Township has taken strides to improve the air quality and overall public health for all Maplewood residents and biodiversity. As of January 1, 2023, gas-powered leaf blowers are not allowed to be used by residents and contracted landscape professionals. The Township should consider a further ban on gasoline-powered lawn mowers and other gas-powered equipment to further enhance air quality.

Continue seeking additional funding opportunities to implement sustainability and resiliency efforts: Participants in the Master Plan process stressed that a major challenge to fulfilling much needed sustainability and resiliency projects is the amount of funding needed to complete them. The Township should actively pursue grant opportunities to support projects seeking to strengthen its future sustainability and resiliency, and other funding strategies such as a revolving loan fund for projects related to sustainability and resiliency.



Sustainable Jersey

Support continued efforts to maintain and increase

Sustainable Jersey certification: In 2019, Maplewood became a certified community as part of the Sustainable Jersey municipal certification program. This nonprofit organization provides tools, training, and financial incentives to support communities as they pursue sustainability programs. Participating communities are required to establish a Green Team to assist with completing actions required for Sustainable Jersey certification. The Township is actively involved in the Sustainable Jersey program and earned the Silver certification status in 2022. Maplewood should continue to support efforts to maintain and increase its certification status.

Establish comprehensive waste management strategies to reduce negative environmental impacts.

As part of overall sustainability efforts and preparation of a Green Building and Environmental Sustainability Element of the Master Plan, Maplewood should promote strategies to comprehensively minimize and manage waste. These efforts should focus both on municipal facilities – as a way to lead by example and effectuate change quickly – and on individual property owners, who can collectively have an enormous impact on the waste stream. Many of these strategies also involve education and public outreach efforts, which should be led by Maplewood's Green Team and Environmental Advisory Committee.

Recommendations

Continue working to reduce the volume of waste and promote municipal recycling: In partnership with Maplewood’s Green Team and Environmental Advisory Committee, the Township has taken active strides to minimize the amount of waste at the municipal-wide level, including the composting pilot program and dual stream recycling program in collaboration with South Orange. The Township should continue investigating best management practices to lessen overall waste, while avoiding unintended negative consequences to other communities. In addition, the Township should consider providing incentives and/or creating requirements for recycling by commercial building owners. With the implementation of commercial recycling, business owners would have the structure and support needed to recycle, resulting in a larger impact on waste reduction.

- **Public outreach:** Raise public awareness with flyers, training, and workshops to educate the public about the Township’s revised recycling schedule and materials eligible to be recycled. To facilitate a higher rate of recycling, the Township could provide residents with free bins that protect against contamination from rainwater and other elements.
- **Continue to seek ways to reduce single-use plastics:** The Township adopted ordinances banning single-use plastic bags, polystyrene foam containers, and other single-use plastic food items. Maplewood should continue to explore ways to minimize the usage of other single-use plastics, building on efforts underway at the state level.
- **Continue to support and expand the food waste composting program:** There is community interest to see the composting pilot program expanded beyond the 70 participating households. In addition, the Township should facilitate a greater presence of private composting operators in Maplewood.



Recycling Center

Consider the potential to increase the types of items that can be recycled at the Recycling Center: The Township’s Recycling Center provides residents with a facility where they may drop off various items to be recycled. Some items include clothing, electronics, and scrap metals. There is an opportunity to further increase the types of items that may be recycled such as EpiPens, textiles, Styrofoam, and commercial and residential building materials. Furthermore, the Township could provide residents with a list of companies, such as TerraCycle, that collect a broader range of items that are not collected at the Recycling Center.

Create opportunities for local drop off or collection of hazardous waste: The Recycling Center does not currently accept household hazardous waste materials, such as oil based paint. As a result, Maplewood residents are required to bring hazardous waste to the Essex County Utilities Authority, during special collection days. The Township should explore providing residents with the opportunity to drop off or collect hazard waste at a local site.

Identify key locations to install trash and recycling bins, including “Big Belly” trash compacting bins: Participants in the Master Plan process stressed the lack of trash and recycling bins throughout Maplewood, such as in the commercial areas and around schools. The Township should identify additional locations where trash and recycling bins may be appropriate.

Support conservation of environmentally sensitive areas.

With two key waterbody resources, various parks and open spaces, and a range of topographical conditions, Maplewood has a wealth of unique and valuable environmental assets that need to be protected. Critical



East Branch of the Rahway River

environmental resources such as riparian areas, wetlands, steep slopes, and floodplains help buffer the effect of hazardous weather and climate change, particularly in mitigating the impacts of flooding. In addition to fulfilling their protective role, these resources often provide local habitat for plants and animals, as well as an attractive environment that is an important piece of Maplewood's identity. Priority areas for conservation should be those undeveloped areas that have a high ecological value; will guard against flooding, soil erosion, and stream sedimentation; and/or can connect to a comprehensive parks and open space network.

Recommendations

Review Township ordinances to ensure they are providing maximum protection to environmentally significant areas:

In coordination with the Environmental Advisory Committee, the Township should assess all ordinances that seek to protect the environmental resources, such as conservation easements, steep slopes, stream corridor protection, tree removal, wetlands, wildlife habitat areas, and others to ensure they are as strong as possible. There is an opportunity to revise or enforce the open space regulations for chemical/pesticide use restrictions.

Review the Open Space and Recreation Plan Element yearly:

The Township should review this plan element of the master plan yearly to update the open space and recreation properties and related information, and submit the update to Green Acres.

Create a new Environmental Resources Inventory (ERI):

Last completed in 2006, Maplewood's ERI provides a detailed inventory of all environmental resources along with information on their baseline conditions for measuring and evaluating resource protection issues. The

ERI is an important tool for the Environmental Advisory Committee, Planning Board, Zoning Board, and other environmental groups. This inventory is a useful document to guide modifications to zoning regulations and land use ordinances. Funding is available to create this inventory through the Sustainable Jersey program.

Consider acquiring properties in floodplain areas to reduce vulnerabilities and increase public space along watercourses, such as the East Branch of the Rahway River and the Lightning Brook:

The Township should develop a regular process to contact small and large landowners to request that the Township have an opportunity to purchase the property before the land is placed on the open market. Property owners could also be contacted to discuss the option of placing conservation easements on their land. In addition, Maplewood should prepare at least one application a year for Essex County Recreation and Open Space Trust Fund grants.

Minimize impervious surfaces and implement green infrastructure techniques.

Many properties in Maplewood, especially located in commercial areas, are distinguished by large building footprints, large surface parking lots, and wide roadways (see Figure 31). Many of these features were constructed prior to the adoption of current stormwater management regulations. In some commercial areas, most of the available land area has been consumed by impervious surfaces, leaving little room for landscaping and open space, which filters stormwater and allows for ground water recharge.

One problem with large impervious surface area is the potential for pollution of stormwater. Impervious surfaces collect biological and chemical pollutants (i.e. oil, soaps, chemicals, trash, organic material), which can subsequently pollute either surface waters, or the groundwater that recharges the aquifers that provide a source of drinking water. High volumes of surface water runoff from impervious surfaces can also exacerbate the erosion of areas that are not paved with concrete or asphalt, degrading important landscape elements within the community. These factors, combined with projections of increases in storm intensity,

can lead to additional environmental and physical damage in the future. Another major issue in particular is the impact of impervious surfaces on groundwater recharge. If stormwater discharges directly from impervious areas to piped infrastructure, it is not filtering back into the ground where it may replenish drinking water sources.

Lastly, significant paved areas create a heat island effect which can reduce the enjoyment and usability of many residential and commercial areas, particularly for pedestrians. Current climate change projections indicate a high probability of increasing prevalence of extreme heat, which is magnified by the urban heat island effect. The greening of urban areas by planting trees and other vegetation, installation of green roofs, and similar measures can help mitigate the urban heat island effect and the impacts of increasing ambient temperatures. The trees can also provide shade, which provides a refuge and some welcome relief from the sun during hot weather.



Figure 31: Impervious Surfaces in Maplewood

Source: Essex County, USGS, NJ Transit, NJDEP, NJDOT, OpenStreetMap (OSM) Road Network, (Exported from Urban Footprint), BfJ Planning

Recommendations

Maintain and strengthen the Township's existing tree canopy:

Maplewood's beautiful natural environment is one of the many reasons longtime and new residents chose to call it home. With time, the Township has seen the continued loss of the tree canopy due to age, disease, or proper tree care and continued maintenance. There is an opportunity to better maintain and strengthen the existing trees so they may continue serving as sustainable natural resources that also provide many other benefits, such as reducing stormwater runoff, improving air quality, increasing shade, and beautification. The following recommendations seek to strengthen the tree canopy.

- Consider hiring a Township arborist staff person or a forestry consultant, with responsibility for ensuring proper tree care and maintenance of publicly owned trees.
- Investigate the establishment of a Shade Tree Commission to support municipal efforts to maintain and expand the tree canopy.
- Create a Township-wide Tree Canopy Documentation and Maintenance Plan: Similar to the Memorial Park Tree Replacement Master Plan, the Township should explore creating a tree canopy master plan to serve as a guide for the continued maintenance of existing trees and for guidance on planting new trees. To significantly reduce the heat island effect, the Township should strive to increase the tree canopy coverage throughout Maplewood to at least 40%.



Examples of lack of tree canopy in Maplewood Village

- Revise the Tree Ordinance to incorporate language about tree replacement: The Township should aim for a one-for-one replacement requirement when trees need to be removed. Where an owner cannot replace all the trees on their property, an in-lieu program could be established to plant appropriate trees in the immediate vicinity. In addition, the Township should undertake a public education campaign to raise awareness of the existing regulations on tree removal.
- Provide the community with educational resources: In addition to the maintenance of publicly owned trees, the Township should also provide residents with resources to properly care and maintain their private-owned trees. Trainings, workshops, and educational resources on native and invasive species could be provided to the entire Maplewood community.
- Identify locations for new or replanted trees in commercial areas, with a focus on prioritizing areas with less existing tree canopy coverage. When commercial property owners seek approvals for new or significantly altered development, the opportunity to introduce trees, landscaping, and green infrastructure to reduce the existing impervious coverage should be a high priority.

Conduct a Heat Island Assessment and Mitigation Plan:

Generally, the eastern and southern portions of Maplewood have the least amount of tree canopy coverage, and thus experience higher temperatures compared with more shaded areas. This heat island effect poses public health

concerns for residents who live in these neighborhoods. The Township should conduct a comprehensive heat island assessment to identify areas experiencing extreme heat and ways to mitigate these conditions. Some measures could include the implementation of awnings, shading structures, green roofs, cool roofs, green infrastructure, landscaping, or trees. The Township could receive Sustainable Jersey credits for completing this plan.

Modify zoning code to reduce impervious surfaces

coverage: Some strategies for commercial properties include potentially reducing impervious coverage maximums, especially in non-residential areas. In addition, the Township should closely review its ordinances to ensure that they are not having unintended consequence of incentivizing impervious surfaces. Related to ADUs recommendation mentioned earlier in the land use section, the Township should explore the existing impervious coverage allowances to ensure the primary home, ADU, and accessory storage shed could all coexist under the zoning code.

Lead by example at municipal properties:

The Township should consider upgrades at municipal parking lots where landscaping is minimal, to explore the potential for green infrastructure and plantings to reduce runoff. As other municipal facilities are renovated or created, best management practices (BMPs) for green infrastructure should be employed to reduce or minimize impervious coverage, such as use of pervious pavement, bioswales, and rain gardens.



Examples of lack of tree canopy on Springfield Avenue



Maplewood Community Pool Parking Lot

Continue and expand public awareness of sustainability

practices: In partnership with the Maplewood Green Team and Environmental Advisory Committee, the Township should continue providing residents with educational resources, such as providing homeowners, property owners, and businesses with information on the benefits of using pervious surfaces and a list of contractors familiar with installing pervious driveways, patios, and walkways. There could be potential to introduce bulk contracting or purchasing.

Rehabilitate aging infrastructure to support existing and potential new development.

Many portions of the Township’s sewer and water infrastructure are past their intended useful life and are either currently in need of repair or will require repairs to maintain the reliability of the sanitary sewer and water systems. With heightened weather-related events expected with climate change, the Township should strive to prepare Maplewood’s infrastructure and public utilities to become more sustainable, resilient, and adapt to these potential future events. The Township should continue active efforts to conserve water, reduce stormwater runoff, and minimize impervious surfaces.

Recommendations

Implement a program to monitor and report on the state of the physical infrastructure and public utilities serving Maplewood: To ensure infrastructure and public utilities are running effectively and efficiently, the Township should regularly monitor and report the current conditions of infrastructure and public utilities. The Engineering Department and various public utility providers should collaborate on these efforts. Examples include Township-owned roadways and storm sewers as well as those utilities provided by other entities such as power, water, and telephone.



Raised Landscaped Median along Midland Boulevard

Explore the use of green infrastructure in roadway

projects: The Township should explore the potential to install green infrastructure and use best management practices where practical in coordination with future roadway, sidewalk, and parking lot improvements as well as other public projects. Green infrastructure, also referred to as green streets, assists with reducing the amount of stormwater runoff and mitigating flooding. The Township should encourage green infrastructure practices on both public and private properties.

Maintain and strengthen the Township’s stormwater management infrastructure to ensure the systems are running efficiently:

In addition to reducing impervious surfaces and implementing green infrastructure practices, the Township should continue to undertake regular maintenance of storm drains and replace undersized pipes as needed. The Township should also ensure that culverts or drainage canals are continuously maintained and cleared of overgrown bushes, trees, and any other barriers. Storm drain leaders and sump pumps that direct to the street should be addressed. Furthermore, stormwater should be addressed at the source in and around the sewer system.

Upgrade sanitary sewer and water infrastructure, starting with priority locations:

Throughout the Master Plan process, participants stressed the need to upgrade aging infrastructure that dates back to the 1930s. The Township should upgrade the sanitary sewer and water infrastructure beginning with priority locations. In addition, the Township should seek to identify grants and funding resources, including resources from funding entities for the purposes of environmental protection, resiliency, and climate change adaptation in order to access the lowest cost means of completing the needed upgrades.

Adopt a one-time sanitary sewer connection fee for new construction: The fee could be based on number of units or square footage, and should be reduced for affordable units.

Encourage interior and exterior water conservation to mitigate the need for additional sewer and water capacity increases: The Township should raise public awareness on water conservation for interior and exterior use, which may include public education campaigns, restrictions on water use, upgrades to public facilities to improve water efficiency, and incentives to property owners to upgrade their properties for greater water efficiency. The Township could partner with Maplewood’s Green Team and Environmental Advisory Committee, New Jersey American Water Company, and/or other entities to identify ways to reduce water consumption.

Continue partnership with PSE&G to implement sustainable infrastructure improvements: The Township should continue coordinating with PSE&G on public utility improvement projects. One project example is that the Township should advocate for PSE&G to replace mercury vapor streetlights with more solar energy-efficient LED lighting. Furthermore, the Township should explore the potential for PSE&G to bury electrical lines to beautify the streetscape, improve site lines, and reduce the risk of power outages due to downed trees.

Strengthen Maplewood’s flood-prone areas to mitigate the risk and impacts of weather-related events heightened by climate change

Maplewood’s floodplains are of significant importance to the health and well-being of its residents, as climate change is increasing the frequency of major storms. During peak rainfall events, substantial impacts can occur to a vast number of properties. For example, Hurricane Ida devastated the area with heavy rainfall and flooding resulting in substantial damages to properties and loss of lives of beloved community members. Some homes and businesses close to the East Branch Rahway River and Lightning Brook are within a 100-year floodplain.

One of the most effective techniques to improve a floodplain condition is the conversion of developed property within a floodplain to undeveloped property replanted with native vegetation. This solution is not easily accomplished due to the high cost of developed real estate and the price to reclaim these lands. Nonetheless, the Township should continue to analyze properties within floodplain areas that may be appropriate for acquisition as open space to accommodate floodwater storage.

General roadway flooding is also an issue in the Township. Flooding could be caused by clogged storm drains and older pipes that are not as large as modern drainage pipes. Drain clogs are caused by stormwater runoff, which is made worse when impervious surfaces aren’t buffered by vegetation that could soak up water and stop sediment before it clogs the drain. The Township should continue making active strides to strengthen Maplewood’s flood-prone areas to be resilient to more intense weather.

Recommendations

Explore the creation of a Stormwater Utility: Through State enabling legislation, the Township should investigate the potential to create a Stormwater Utility dedicated to regularly maintaining the stormwater infrastructure.

Continue to reference and update the Municipal Stormwater Management Plan: In 2018, the Township developed the Stormwater Pollution Prevention Plan to guide the approach to stormwater runoff for both existing and future developments at the municipality-wide level. The Township should regularly monitor the stormwater infrastructure and update the plan as needed to ensure its effectiveness.

Update regulations to require stormwater management for minor site plans: Maplewood has adopted the State’s stormwater management regulations, but there is an opportunity to expand on these regulations to require stormwater management for minor site plans. Such a change should be accompanied by a significant educational campaign to property owners.

Encourage homeowners to disconnect downspouts: Many downspouts are piped underground and discharged to the street. Disconnecting reduces the amount of water running into a storm drain. Redirecting it to the lawn, a garden, or a rain barrel can provide a number of environmental benefits.

Continue to implement initiatives from the County of Essex All Hazard Mitigation Plan 2020 Update: The Township should continue working to implement recommendations from the County’s All Hazard Mitigation Plan. Some recommendations to be implemented include stream bank improvements to stabilize the banks of Lightning Brook and drainage upgrades in the Orchard Road and Wyoming Avenue/Jefferson Avenue areas.

Prepare a flood-prone area study to identify priority locations and determine mitigation strategies: Throughout the Master Plan process, community members raised the critical need to address areas greatly impacted by flooding. The flood-prone area study could also explore how to manage stormwater runoff flows to avoid local and downstream surges as well as identify local stormwater containment opportunities. Stormwater containment includes recognizing and correcting areas of fill that have placed watercourses into channels and pipes. In addition, the plan should consider equity as an overarching theme to ensure strategies include low- and moderate-income neighborhoods. For example, there is a need to manage local rainfall to prevent excessive flows into low-income areas located downstream. It is important to coordinate this planning effort with Essex and Union Counties and various municipalities to address flooding comprehensively. Below are examples of waterbodies and their surrounding neighborhoods noted to have experienced severe impacts due to flooding:

- East Branch Rahway River – Partner with the Township of South Orange Village (for the northern end of the river) and the Township of Millburn and the Township of Union (for the southern end of the river)
- Lightning Brook – Partner with the Township of Irvington
- South Mountain Reservation – Partner with Essex County, the Township of Millburn, and the Township of South Orange Village

Encourage properties located in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Special Flood Hazard Areas (SFHA) to consider making their property and structures more resilient against future impactful weather events: The Township should encourage homeowners, business owners, property owners, houses of worship, and others with properties in FEMA’s SFHA to make flood-related modifications. Funding opportunities include FEMA’s flood mitigation grant programs, Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP), Pre-Disaster Mitigation (PDM) Program, and the Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program.

Partner with South Orange on strategies to mitigate flooding at Chyzowych Field: A portion of the South Orange-owned Waterlands Park, referred to as Chyzowych Field, extends into Maplewood. Master Plan participants indicated the need to enhance this underutilized field into a resilient community resource. Some ideas include the creation of a multigenerational recreational complex for active and passive recreation that incorporates green infrastructure elements. As the park is located in the AE flood zone, these green infrastructure elements seek to capture, divert, and store water to assist with mitigating flooding. Upgrades to Chyzowych Field should ensure that the Rahway River Greenway from South Orange connects with the greenway portion in Maplewood.

Continue the Township’s involvement in The Mayors Council Rahway River Watershed Flood Control: The Township should continue to remain involved in the Mayors Council to advocate for the completion and implementation of the Rahway River Flood Mitigation Plan.



Chyzowych Field

Improve Maplewood's capacity to prepare, respond, and recover from emergency events and natural disasters.

Supplementing the preparation of the physical built environment for future natural disasters, the Township should also provide the community with guidance on how to approach each emergency event type. The Township should raise public awareness about the importance of emergency management through a public campaign, workshops, trainings, and educational resources.

Recommendation:

Provide the Maplewood community with educational and supportive resources to ensure everyone is prepared for future natural disasters:

In preparation for future emergencies and natural disasters, the Township should explore and implement ways to improve communication before, during, and after emergency events and natural disasters is essential to ensure the entire community is aware, prepared, and ready. These efforts should include a focus on disadvantaged populations who may be less able to prepare and recover, such as low-income communities, renters, and residents without a vehicle. This effort should build on the Township's Emergency Operations Plan (EOP), which is required to be prepared every four years and submitted to the State Police Office of Emergency Management. The latest EOP will be submitted in June 2023 and run through May 2027. As per the NJ Attorney General, the EOP is not a public document due to the sensitive nature of the information on emergencies, vulnerabilities, and planned responses. However, the EOP can inform the resources prepared for and provided to residents to improve disaster-preparedness.

