

MASTER PLAN
OF THE

BOROUGH OF HAWTHORNE
PASSAIC COUNTY
NEW JERSEY

Part 1. Objectives

Part 2. Land Use

Prepared by the Hawthorne Planning Board
October, 1978

1. STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES, ASSUMPTIONS, POLICIES AND STANDARDS.

A Master Plan is the sum of the guidelines, proposals, and goals of the community, through which it seeks to regulate the use of land to ensure the achievement and maintenance of the highest standards of public health, safety, and general welfare possible under the varying factors and circumstances that exist in each community, and in accordance with the character and desires of the populace.

The factors which dictate, and limit, the reasonableness of such goals differ in each community and must be understood at the outset in order that the goals remain within the sphere of reasonable expectation.

The Borough of Hawthorne is a relatively small (under three square miles) suburban community located in Passaic County immediately north of the City of Paterson, and falling within the outer reaches of the traditional perimeters of the "New York metropolitan area". Although the advent of direct highway connections across the northern part of the State have recently increased these perimeters, the development of the Borough of Hawthorne occurred during the earlier part of this century, and gave rise to a far greater local, parochial, and self contained character, than the recently developed communities that have emerged as "bed-room" communities serving the housing needs of commuters to the nearby urban centers. Hawthorne has clearly felt the influence of increasing development of surrounding communities, and the region in general, but has nonetheless retained much of its original character. The median age of the population is substantially higher than the median throughout the County, and the transiency or "turnover"

rate of the population is substantially lower. It is estimated that more than two thirds of the working population of Hawthorne are employed out of town, but comparison with adjacent suburban communities indicate that to be a relatively high rate for this region. Of greater significance is the observation that the majority of out of town workers are employed in other New Jersey communities within the region of Northern New Jersey, and do not commute out of state, or such a substantial distance as to diminish identification with or loyalty to their "home" town. There also continues to exist a high proportion of "second-generation" residents.

The Borough of Hawthorne has been long established, predominantly as a residential community with mostly one and two family homes located on medium size lots. A good balance of industry and business is also located within the Borough, however the community has never constituted a regional center and many of the industries, and most of the businesses, are small and are locally owned and operated. Less than 10% of the privately owned land in the Borough remains vacant and available for development, so that the principal concern is not to guide the development of vacant land, but to promote and encourage the continued upkeep and maintenance of the existing uses in the best possible condition right up to the point where obsolescence or economic factors dictate the redevelopment of property. Thusly, an adjunct of such goal will be the elimination of gradual decline in either residential or industrial neighborhoods which causes loss of community pride, and by maintaining the highest possible standards, the replacement or "renewal"

of neighborhoods will occur privately and spontaneously, without any period of "blight". To this end, the land use plan, submitted herewith, as well as all other elements of the Master Plan, viz. circulation, utilities, community facilities, etc., now under consideration, have and will consider "maintenance" as the primary objective.

2. LAND USE PLAN

The Planning Board adopted a comprehensive Master Plan during 1968 which included thorough studies and analyses of existing uses, aging patterns, neighborhood characteristics, etc., and proposed a number of changes in existing zoning restrictions to promote the desired goals therein stated. In 1970 the Board of Commissioners adopted a major revision of the zoning ordinances of the Borough, in which the proposals of the previous Master Plan were substantially complied with. In several instances experience dictated modification of the zone designations in specific areas, in order to accommodate the needs of the area or the circumstances that developed in response to the zoning revision of 1970. A current review of the trends which have occurred and the conditions which now exist tends to support the validity of that zoning revision, and it is felt that such a review indicates continuation of substantially all of the restrictions and designations therein.

RESIDENTIAL

The population of the Borough has remained at slightly under 20,000 since the previous Master Plan, and no substantial increase has occurred. Undoubtedly, the recession in construction during the early 1970's was the greatest factor,

and during the same period the counterbalancing factor of diminishing household size continued, thereby stabilizing the population level notwithstanding more recent residential development. The existing density is approximately 8 dwelling units per acre, since even though R-3 zones permit 24 units per acre and R-4 zones 14 per acre, the residential zones in the Borough are predominantly one family (R-1) and one and two family (R-2). There remains less than 250 acres available for residential development, and this lies predominantly in the area designated for Planned Unit Development (R-5). The development density allowed therein is an average of 5 units per acre, which is largely dictated by the topographic factors, but which constitutes an acceptable development density, in view of the already existing somewhat high figure of 8 units per acre. The obvious result is that the population growth of the Borough will probably not exceed 25,000 by 1985, and without additional apartment zones, may not reach that figure for more than 10 years.

The dominant residential use is one and two family dwellings, which are permitted in zones providing for two sizes of one family lot (R-1 requires 18,750 sq. ft., while R-2 requires only 5,000 sq. ft.) and one size two family lot (R-2 requires 6,500 sq. ft.). A rather large percentage of the lots zoned for R-1 one family use are unfortunately nonconforming as being undersize, but redesignation of substantial portions thereof to the R-2 zone designation would undoubtedly result in a rash of conversions to two family use so that many of those neighborhoods would suffer the adverse effects of a precipitous change in character. Experience after the prior Master Plan and Zoning Revision indicates

that occasions of unfair circumstances or unjust restrictions have been adequately resolved by the Zoning Board of Adjustment on a case by case basis, and accordingly no change is proposed in either lot sizes or zone designations of the R-1 zones.

The Borough previously recognized that the remaining areas available for new construction included in substantial part the extremely steep terrain on the southerly portion of the "ridge" which lies along the westerly side of the Borough. The central portion of this ridge was considered to be adequately level to accommodate one family development, and that judgment has proved correct, as one family construction is presently progressing at that location. The topographic problems of the area south of the R-1 zone made the traditional "lot" concept difficult to promote economically sound development, and that area was designated for Planned Unit Development as an alternate permissible use. The previous Master Plan, and the Zoning Revision of 1970, permitted one family homes in detached, or semidetached, or attached (townhouse) groupings, with certain concessions in lot size and road length, to facilitate development. Although no applications for such a use have been submitted for this area, it is still felt that such a configuration is a viable economic alternative under the conditions that exist, and no change is presently proposed. This area, however, should be reviewed periodically, particularly as other vacant areas become developed, so that further analysis can be given to the feasibility of the standards in this zone.

The general patterns of maintenance and upkeep of existing housing has been good and the zoning requirements and designations

of the residential zones do not appear to require modification or amendment from the current ordinances.

BUSINESS

As previously noted, the Borough of Hawthorne developed primarily during the early part of this century, when transportation, utilities, as well as planning concepts, were entirely different, causing, among other things, the emergence of a central business district which expanded as "strips" along Lafayette Avenue and Diamond Bridge Avenue, extending through residential districts. The nature of buildings and the central location of this business district render it extremely impractical if not impossible for any conversion or alteration of this scheme to be within reasonable expectation, and accordingly this Plan accepts this configuration with no effort to alter the same. The businesses are primarily small owner operated retail convenience type stores, and generally do not create intolerable congestion or other undesirable results often associated with "strip" zones. The allowance of two dwelling units on the second floor of these business uses not only recognizes the traditional existence of such apartments on small town "main streets", but also serves to encourage the continued operation of the stores by local private owners.

Separate from the central business district at the intersection of Lafayette and Diamond Bride Avenues, there are also several areas that developed local retail business uses, with much lesser density or concentration but which enjoy a definite business character that could not be ignored. The prior Master Plan recommended neighborhood commercial standards for these areas, and further recommended such designation be utilized in the areas

where business development appeared likely. In that fashion existing neighborhood business areas would enjoy conformity, and be subject to limiting standards, while new business neighborhoods would not create the density and other undesirable characteristics of the central business district. The use of B-1 zones appears to have accomplished this purpose, as the northerly portion of Lafayette Avenue indicates. A substantial number of properties have been converted to business use, but through alteration and restoration of the existing structures, rather than new construction, and the resulting tone of the area is much less commercial than it might have been.

The area from McKinley Avenue to Warburton Avenue, between Grand Avenue and Lafayette Avenue, originally hoped to gradually develop office uses (0-1), has continued the business operations originally located there, and in fact such business uses have been revitalized by liberal court interpretations of the doctrine of "prior non-conforming uses". Accordingly, no purpose is served by continuing such nonconformity, and it is recommended that these two blocks be changed to B-1 zone designation.

OFFICES AND RESEARCH

The 0-1 and 0-2 zones in Hawthorne were first introduced by the prior Master Plan, and were at the outset understood to be "trial" type zones warranting further analysis. The only 0-2 zone was located on State Highway 208 and has since been developed for that purpose. The 0-1 zone designation was placed along much of Lafayette Avenue, with restrictions and requirements relating to the height, side-yards, buffers and parking, which served to limit the size and type of offices which

would result. Small local type office structures, or conversions of existing oversize residential structures have been the response to these restrictions, and have provided a viable alternative for obsolete residential structures, or small lots along Lafayette Avenue not suitable for one family use. In fact, this zone designation has probably resulted in a better response to the intended inducement than other attempts to guide a change in neighborhood character. The converted dwellings have been refurbished and renovated, yet the basic residential appearance remains, and the neighborhood has avoided the congestion and overcrowding of larger office buildings, or the blight of rooming houses or multifamily conversions. No additional areas are proposed for this zone designation, however, as Lafayette Avenue remains the principal street peculiarly suitable for it, and there appears to remain sufficient sites suitable for future conversion with the present zones.

INDUSTRY

Industrial uses have constituted a basic ingredient in the development of the Borough, in many instances inducing the influx of new residents to the then developing farm community. At present, many of the industries have grown to substantial size, and employ large numbers of workers who live in nearby cities and commute to Hawthorne.

The initial industrial development followed the right of way of the principal freight railroad in the Borough, the New York Susquehanna and Western R.R., which approximately bisects the town. The other primary industrial zone was along the Passaic

River, where unlimited water, as well as disposal, was available. Additional Industrial area was designated along Grand Avenue, but development did not materialize, and the area was rezoned at the request of one of the property owners to R-3, Medium Density Apartments. No substantially large areas suitable for modern industrial construction remain available, so that no increase in this zone designation is proposed. The desired trend is in any event toward smaller privately owned industrial activities, rather than large factory type facilities.

PUBLIC AND SEMI-PUBLIC USES

Although not specifically designated on this map, there remains in Hawthorne five elementary school sites and one high school site. One elementary school is in the process of being eliminated, and it is not anticipated that additional school sites will be requested.

The Borough also has adequate churches of various denominations, although new churches are permitted throughout the residential and business zones and are not intended to be restricted in any way by this Plan or any observations contained herein.

The Borough has also continued to maintain the park and playground facilities previously owned, and together with the Goffle Brook Park, owned by the Passaic County Park Commission, provides adequate facilities. The governing body has upgraded the junior baseball fields, added new tennis courts, and has shown an awareness of the changing needs of the population.

Sufficient park areas are available for such future development that may be required, and it is intended that a recreation survey, including designated sites for public and semi-public uses will be shown, all as part of the Community Facilities Plan Element presently being prepared as Part 6 of this Master Plan.