

Harrison Township, New Jersey
PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

BLOCK 38 LOT 6

2/24/2011

Redevelopment Preliminary
Investigation Report
pursuant to Harrison Township Committee
Resolution 056-2011.

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1.0 Introduction

The analysis presented within this document serves as the basis for our recommendation that certain lands located along Breakneck Road and Cedar Road in Harrison Township, Gloucester County, New Jersey are in need of a redevelopment designation and warrant accompanying guidelines that will ensure that the site is developed in a manner that adheres to local and state plans, incorporates sound principals of urban planning and design, promotes the public welfare, and contributes to the sustainable economic development of the Township. The property in question include six acres of vacant land along two county roads.

The area is zoned under the Institutional District ordinance, the intent of which is to provide regulations for public and quasi-public land uses and to ensure the compatibility of those uses with the surrounding land use.

2.0 The Redevelopment Act

New Jersey's Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (LRHL), empowers municipalities and local governments with the ability to initiate a process that transforms underutilized or poorly designed properties into healthier, more vibrant, or economically productive land areas. The process has been used successfully across the state to creatively improve properties meeting statutory redevelopment criteria. Projects approved for redevelopment are often eligible for certain types of technical and financial assistance from the state.

Harrison Township has identified a portion of the parcel at Block 38 Lot 6 as an opportunity for redevelopment in accordance with the provisions of the LRHL. This investigation encompasses six acres on the northern portion of Block 38, Lot 6 bound by Cedar Road (County Road 667) and Breakneck Road (County Road 603).



Figure 1: The site viewed from Breakneck Road and Cedar Road.

3.0 Redevelopment Procedure

The LRHL requires municipalities to perform a number of steps before it may exercise its Redevelopment powers. This process is meant, in part, to ensure that the Governing Body acts in concert with the goals and objectives of the Township's Master Plan. Recognizing the Planning Board's role as the steward of the Master Plan, these steps require the Planning Board to make recommendations to the Township Committee. The required steps are as follows:

- a. The Governing body must adopt a resolution directing the Planning Board to perform a preliminary investigation to determine whether a specified area is in need of redevelopment according to criteria set forth in the LRHL (N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-5).
- b. The Planning Board must prepare and make available a map delineating the boundaries of the proposed redevelopment area, specifying the parcels to be included in it. This map should be accompanied by a statement setting forth the basis of the investigation.
- c. The Planning Board must then conduct the investigation and produce a report presenting the findings. The Board must also hold a duly noticed hearing to present the results of the investigation and to allow interested parties to give testimony. The Planning Board then may adopt a resolution recommending a course of action to the Governing Body.
- d. The Governing Body may act on this recommendation by adopting a resolution designating the area an "Area in Need of Redevelopment". The Governing Body must make the final determination as to the Redevelopment Area boundaries, although these are typically accepted as recommended by the Planning Board.
- e. A Redevelopment Plan must be prepared establishing the goals, objectives, and specific actions to be taken with regard to the "Area in Need of Redevelopment."

f. The Governing Body may then act on the Plan by passing an ordinance adopting the Plan as an amendment to Township's Zoning Ordinance.

4.0 Current Progress

The Harrison Township Committee adopted a resolution on January 18, 2011 (Resolution 056-2011) instructing the Planning Board to initiate an investigation in accordance with Part "a" above. Together with its accompanying maps, this report is meant to satisfy parts "b", and "c" above.

This analysis concerns a six acre portion of a 68 acre publically owned parcel. This analysis will determine if this site warrants redevelopment based upon the statutory criteria of the LRHL. This report will conclude by recommending if this parcel should be included in any redevelopment designation in order to produce an effective, comprehensive redevelopment plan for the area.

The six acre site is located adjacent to the intersection of Cedar Road and Breakneck Road. It is bounded by Cedar Road to the east, a Green Acres park area to the south, single family residences to the west, and Breakneck Road to the north. The site is comprised of vacant land and a small cluster of trees. Directly north of the site is a CVS Pharmacy. To the east is Clearview Regional High School. The intersection is currently a four-way stop. Approximately 36.9 acres of Block 38 Lot 6 is a park area permanently preserved by Green Acres. The remaining portion of this parcel is 23.4 acres and contains a pump station for the Township.

The site is zoned Institutional. The parcel is owned by Harrison Township and falls into tax class 15C Public Property. Figure 5 contains a zoning map of the site.

Analysis is being presented on the following parcels in accordance with the Township Committee's resolution:

Part of Block 38, Lot 6.



Figure 2: The site viewed from Breakneck Road and Cedar Road.

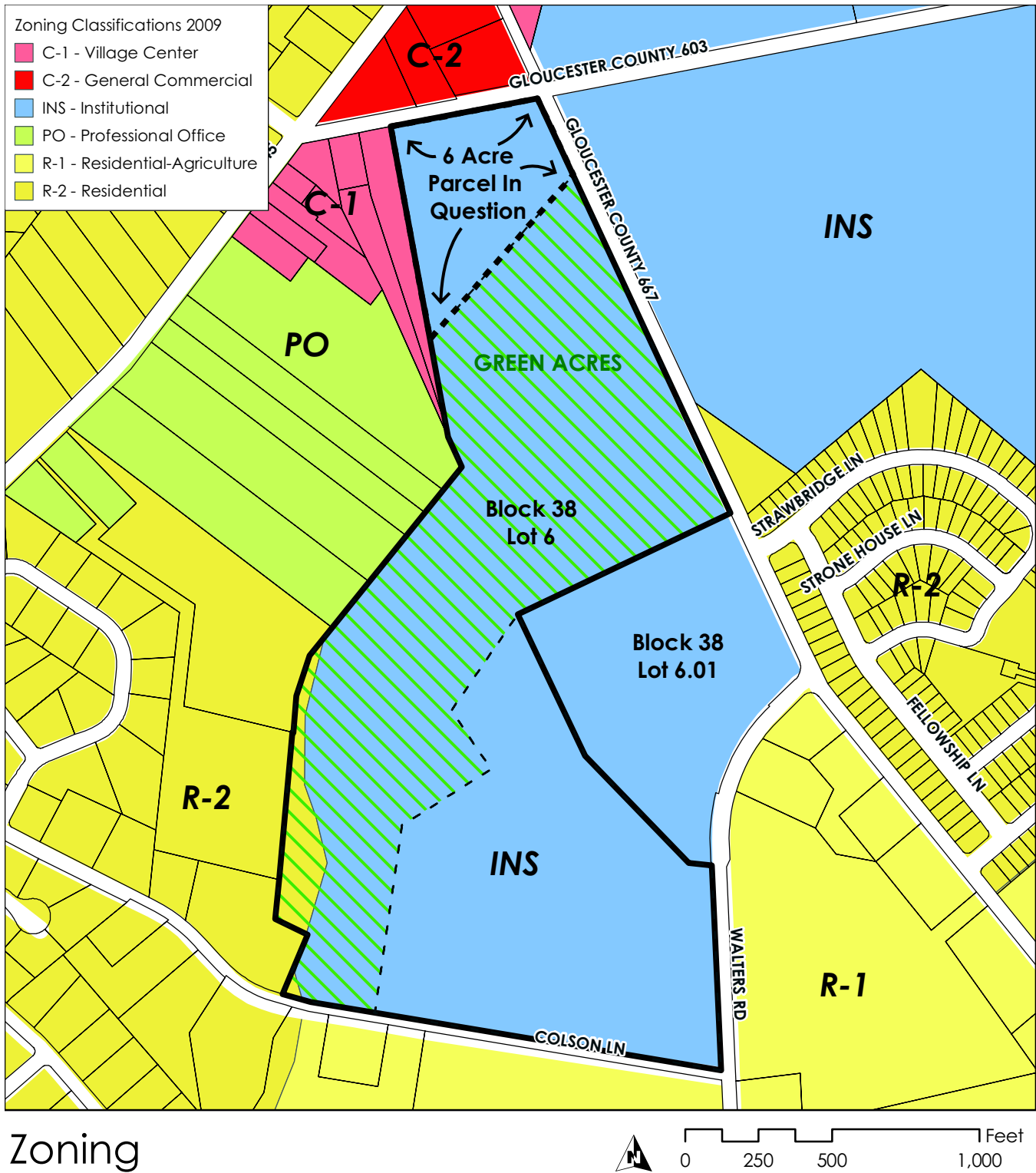


Figure 3: A portion of the Green Acres area on the parcel



Figure 4: The pump station and insititutional use on the southern portion of the parcel

Figure 5: Zoning Map



5.0 Statutory Criteria for Redevelopment

An area qualifies as being in need of redevelopment if it meets at least one of the eight statutory criteria listed in Section 5 of the Land Redevelopment and Housing Law. (N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-5) These criteria are as follows:

- A** The generality of buildings are substandard, unsafe, unsanitary, dilapidated, or obsolescent, or possess any of such characteristics, or are so lacking in light, air, or space, as to be conducive to unwholesome living or working conditions.
- B** The discontinuance of the use of buildings previously used for commercial, manufacturing, or industrial purposes; the abandonment of such buildings; or the same being allowed to fall into so great a state of disrepair as to be untenable.
- C** Land that is owned by the municipality, the county, a local housing authority, redevelopment agency or redevelopment entity, or unimproved vacant land that has remained so for a period of ten years prior to adoption of the resolution, and that by reason of its location, remoteness, lack of means of access to developed sections or portions of the municipality, or topography, or nature of the soil, is not likely to be developed through the instrumentality of private capital.
- D** Areas with buildings or improvements which, by reason of dilapidation, obsolescence, overcrowding, faulty arrangement or design, lack of ventilation, light and sanitary facilities, excessive land coverage, deleterious land use or obsolete layout, or any combination of these or other factors, are detrimental to the safety, health, morals, or welfare of the community.
- E** A growing lack or total lack of proper utilization of areas caused by the condition of the title, diverse ownership of the real property therein or other conditions, resulting in a stagnant or not fully productive condition of land potentially useful and valuable for contributing to and serving the public health, safety and welfare.



Figure 6: Clearview Regional High School across Cedar Road from the site.

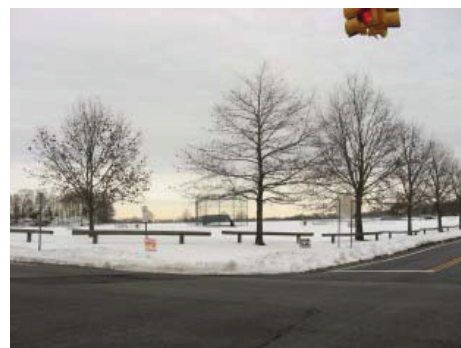


Figure 7: Athletic fields across Breakneck Road and Cedar Road.



Figure 8: The CVS across from the site on Breakneck Road.

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- F** Areas, in excess of five contiguous acres, whereon buildings or improvements have been destroyed, consumed by fire, demolished or altered by the action of storm, fire, cyclone, tornado, earthquake or other casualty in such a way that the aggregate assessed value of the area has been materially depreciated.
 - G** In any municipality in which an enterprise zone has been designated pursuant to the "New Jersey Urban Enterprise Zones Act," P.L.1983, c.303 (C.52:27H-60 et seq.) the execution of the actions prescribed in that act for the adoption by the municipality and approval by the New Jersey Urban Enterprise Zone Authority of the zone development plan for the area of the enterprise zone shall be considered sufficient for the determination that the area is in need of redevelopment pursuant to sections 5 and 6 of P.L.1992, c.79 (C.40A:12A-5 and 40A:12A-6) for the purpose of granting tax exemptions within the enterprise zone district pursuant to the provisions of P.L.1991, c.431 (C.40A:20-1 et seq.) or the adoption of a tax abatement and exemption ordinance pursuant to the provisions of P.L.1991, c.441 (C.40A:21-1 et seq.). The municipality shall not utilize any other redevelopment powers within the urban enterprise zone unless the municipal governing body and planning board have also taken the actions and fulfilled the requirements prescribed in P.L.1992, c.79 (C.40A:12A-1 et al.) for determining that the area is in need of redevelopment or an area in need of rehabilitation and the municipal governing body has adopted a redevelopment plan ordinance including the area of the enterprise zone.
 - H** The designation of the delineated area is consistent with smart growth planning principles adopted pursuant to law or regulation.

6.0 Applicability of Statutory Criteria to the Redevelopment Area

Under the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law, an area may be deemed in need of redevelopment if it meets any one of the statutory criteria. Block 38, Lot 6 meets criteria C and H.

The "C" criteria, "Public and Vacant Land", applies to the six acre site. Criteria C states that a property owned by a municipality may be designated in need of redevelopment due to its location, remoteness, lack of access, topography, or soil conditions.

The entire parcel is owned by Harrison Township and is zoned institutional. The parcel is 68 acres total, and contains a pump station, green acres easement, and the six acre site. The pump station is at the southern end of the parcel on a 23.4 acre portion of the site independent of the six acre site under review. The Green Acres designation applies to a 36.8 acre portion of the of the property that is also independent of the six acre site that is under review.

During the economic boom of the past 15-20 years, the Green Acres designation was thought to have applied to the entire parcel, and, as a result, this perception impeded the property from being sought for public or private development uses (see Figures 11, 12, and 13 for historic and current aerial maps). The Township worked with Green Acres and clarified the location of the easement in 2011 (see Figure 5 Zoning Map). With the Green Acres designated portion of the property now clearly defined, the six acres being examined could be utilized for public or private development. Unfortunately, the economic downturn and decrease in development have left this site vacant.

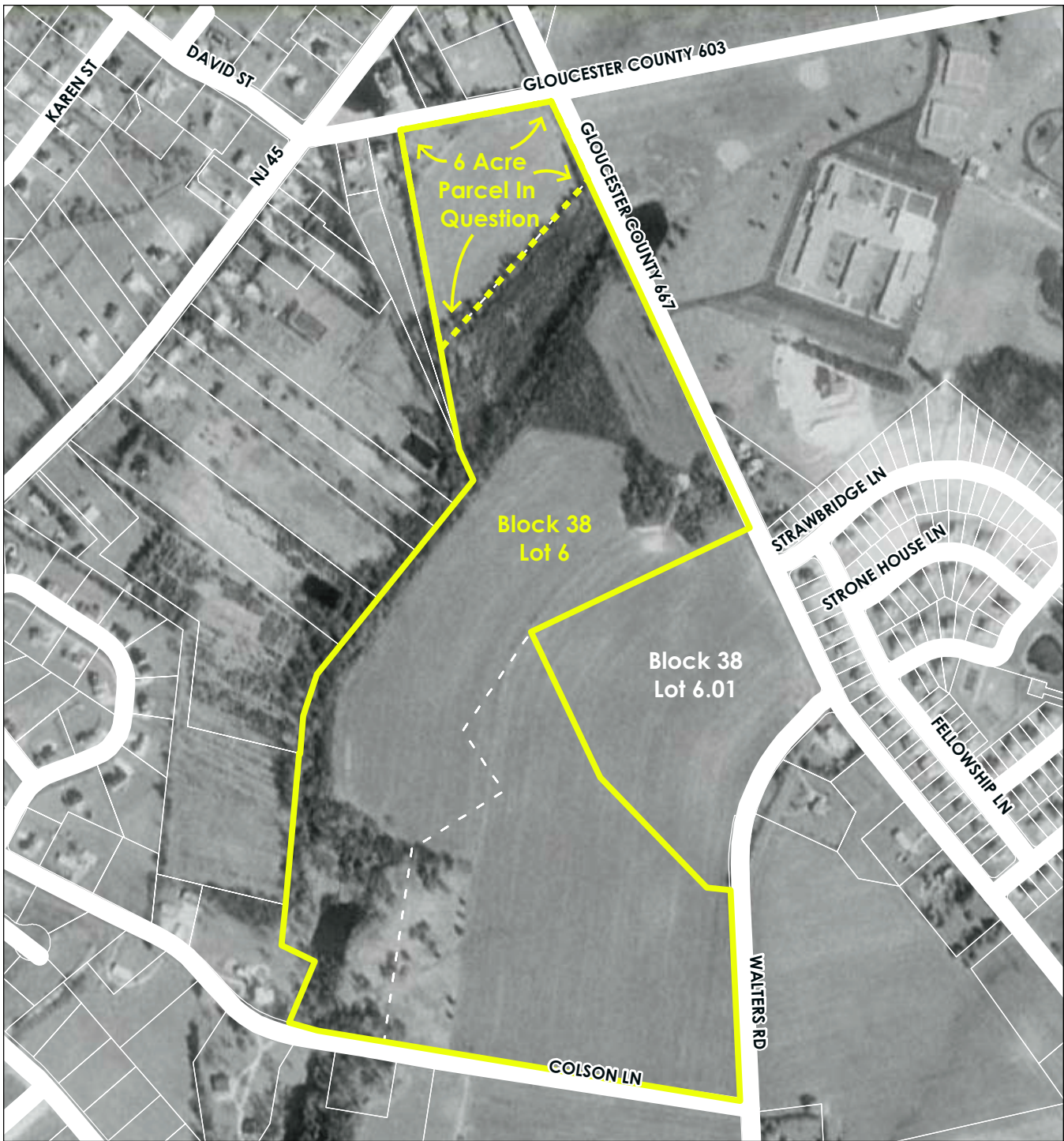


Figure 9: The site viewed from Breakneck Road.



Figure 10: Green Acres land on the parcel

Figure 11: 1991 Aerial (Google Earth)



Aerial (1991)

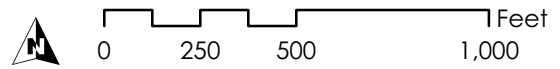
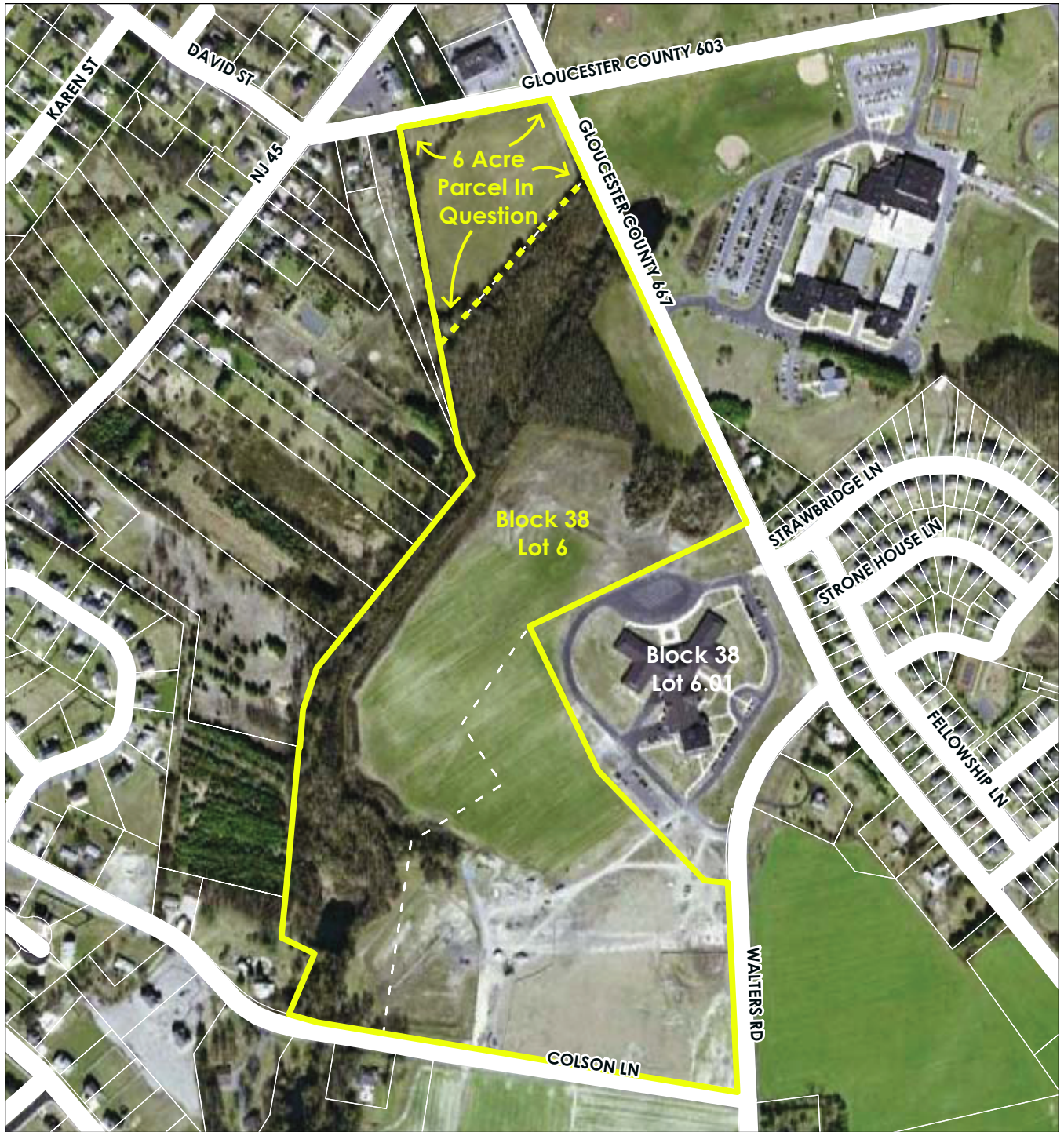


Figure 12: 2002 Aerial (Google Earth)



Aerial (2002)

Figure 13: 2007 Aerial (NJDEP)



Aerial (2007)

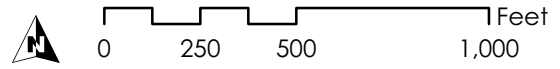
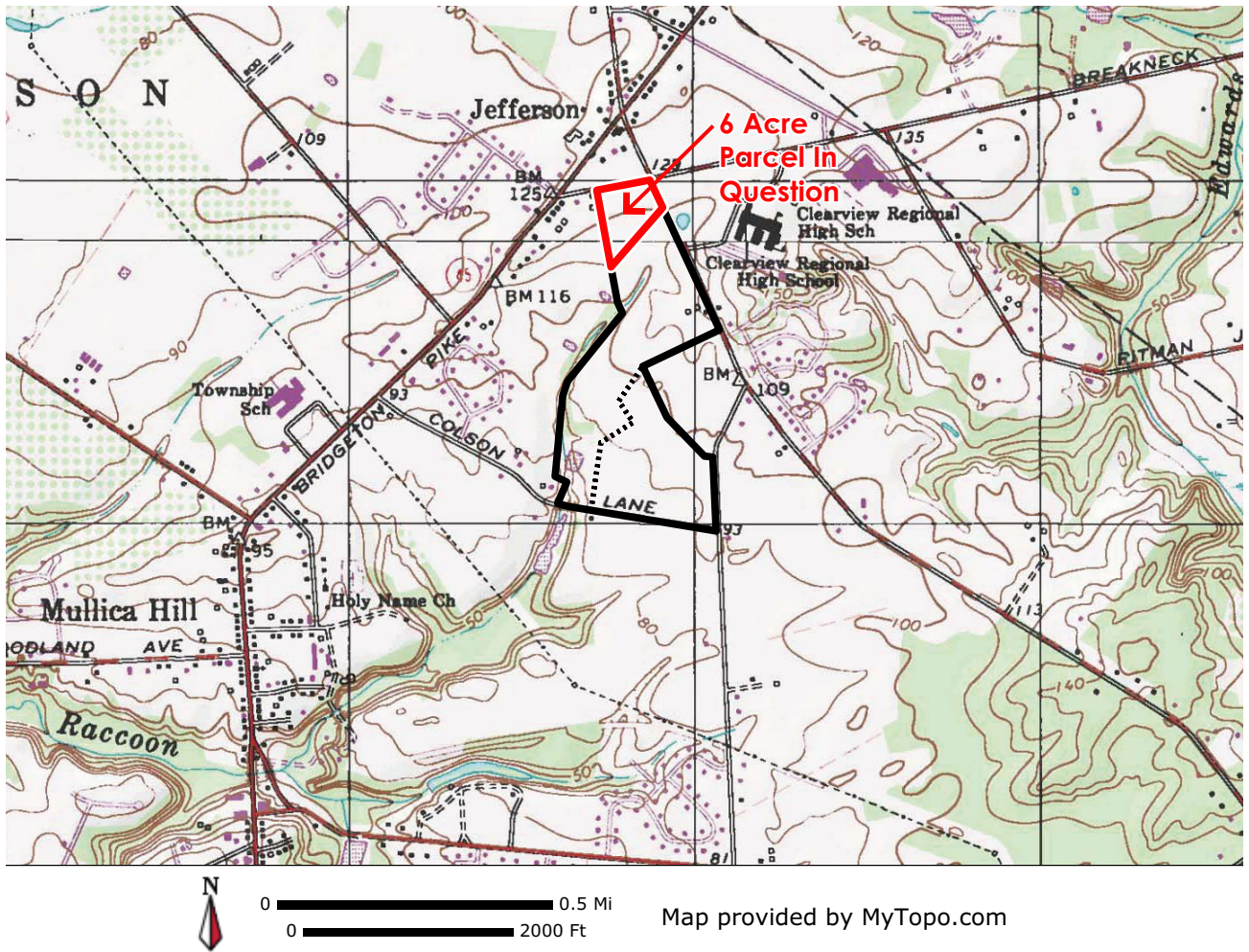


Figure 14: USGS Map



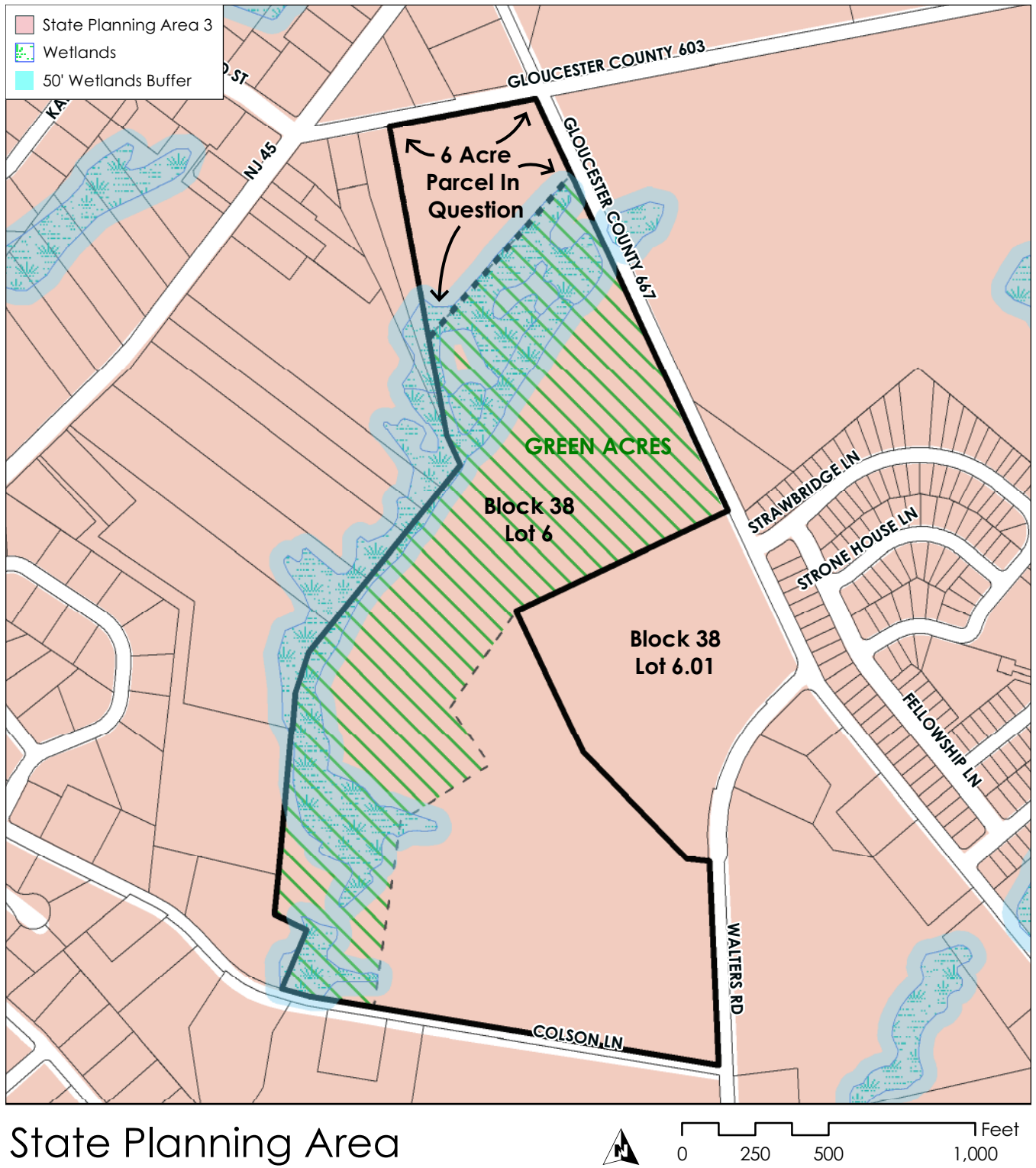
Additionally, based on review of USGS mapping and interviews with civil engineers employed by the Township, the site's topography causes a development constraint in terms of providing sewer to the site (see Figure 14, USGS map). The site is in the sewer district and therefore public sewer must be provided to any new development. However, there is an approximate ten foot to fifteen foot drop in topography from the street frontage on Breakneck Road to the back of the site. This means that to develop the site, the developer must provide a new pump station to connect to the existing gravity line on Breakneck Road opposite the site. This creates a development constraint and economic disadvantage as compared to other parcels. If the site were to be developed using a gravity approach to sewer, acquisition of easements on one or more of the properties abutting this site would be required in order to tie into the line on Route 45. However, this too has a development constraint because it would involve unusual costs, making development of this site less feasible for public or private development.

The “H” criterion, Smart Growth Consistency, applies to the site. The State Planning Act (N.J.S.A. 52:18A-196 et seq.), adopted in 1985, establishes the framework, for State policies and regulations related to smart growth principles. Among the stated objectives in the Act that serve as this framework are the following:

- A** Protect the natural resources and qualities of the state, including, but not limited to: agricultural development areas, fresh and saltwater wetlands, flood plains, stream corridors, aquifer recharge areas, steep slopes, areas of unique flora and fauna, and areas with scenic, historic, cultural and recreational values;
- B** Promote development and redevelopment in a manner consistent with sound planning and where infrastructure can be provided at private expense or with reasonable expenditures of public funds. This should not be construed to give preferential treatment to new construction;
- C** Identify areas for growth, limited growth, agriculture, open space conservation and other appropriate designations that the commission may deem necessary;
- D** Coordinate planning activities and establish statewide planning objectives in the following areas: land use, housing, economic development, transportation, natural resource conservation, agriculture and farmland retention, recreation, urban and suburban redevelopment, historic preservation, public facilities and services, and intergovernmental coordination.

The New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, adopted pursuant to the State Planning Act, contains a series of smart growth goals and policies and a map which reflects desired growth patterns. The parcel in question is located in Planning Area 3, Fringe Planning Area, where growth is directed at centers in these areas in order to preserve environmentally sensitive lands and open space (see Figure 15).

Figure 15: State Planning Area Map



State Planning Area

The policy objectives of State Planning Area 3 include the following:

- Focus development and redevelopment in appropriately located and designed Centers to accommodate growth that would otherwise occur in the Environs.
- Provide for a full range of housing choices primarily in Centers at appropriate densities to accommodate projected growth.
- Encourage appropriate redevelopment in existing Centers and existing developed areas that have the potential to become Centers, or in ways that support Center-based development, to accommodate growth that would otherwise occur in the Environs.

(2001 State Plan, p. 202, 203)

Redevelopment at this site supports these planning objectives by directing redevelopment into an a developed area of the township, preserving the Green Acres space on the site, and directing this housing development away from the Environs of the Township. With respect to good Smart Growth, Center-based practices, and locating development near community amenities and walkable environments, the site is proximate to Harrison's Historic Mullica Hill, approximately one-half mile from the Gloucester County Library, and one-tenth mile from Clearview Regional High School. The proposed use of the site would be low and moderate income housing for seniors, which would add to the diversity of housing choices in the Township and support Smart Growth practices.

7.0 Conclusion

Based on the above analysis and findings, it is concluded that the conditions in the study area qualify as an “Area in Need of Redevelopment” as defined in N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-5). As described above, the parcel in question meets several of the following statutory criteria listed in the Local Redevelopment Housing Law (N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1):

- C – Public and Vacant Land
- H - Smart Growth Consistency

The Planning Board, upon adoption of a resolution, hereby recommends to the Governing Body that the study area be found to be an “Area in Need of Redevelopment” in accordance with N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-5 pursuant to the findings of this report.