
Consistency Review Report

Proposed Amendment to the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan

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Phillipsburg Planning Board

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Introduction

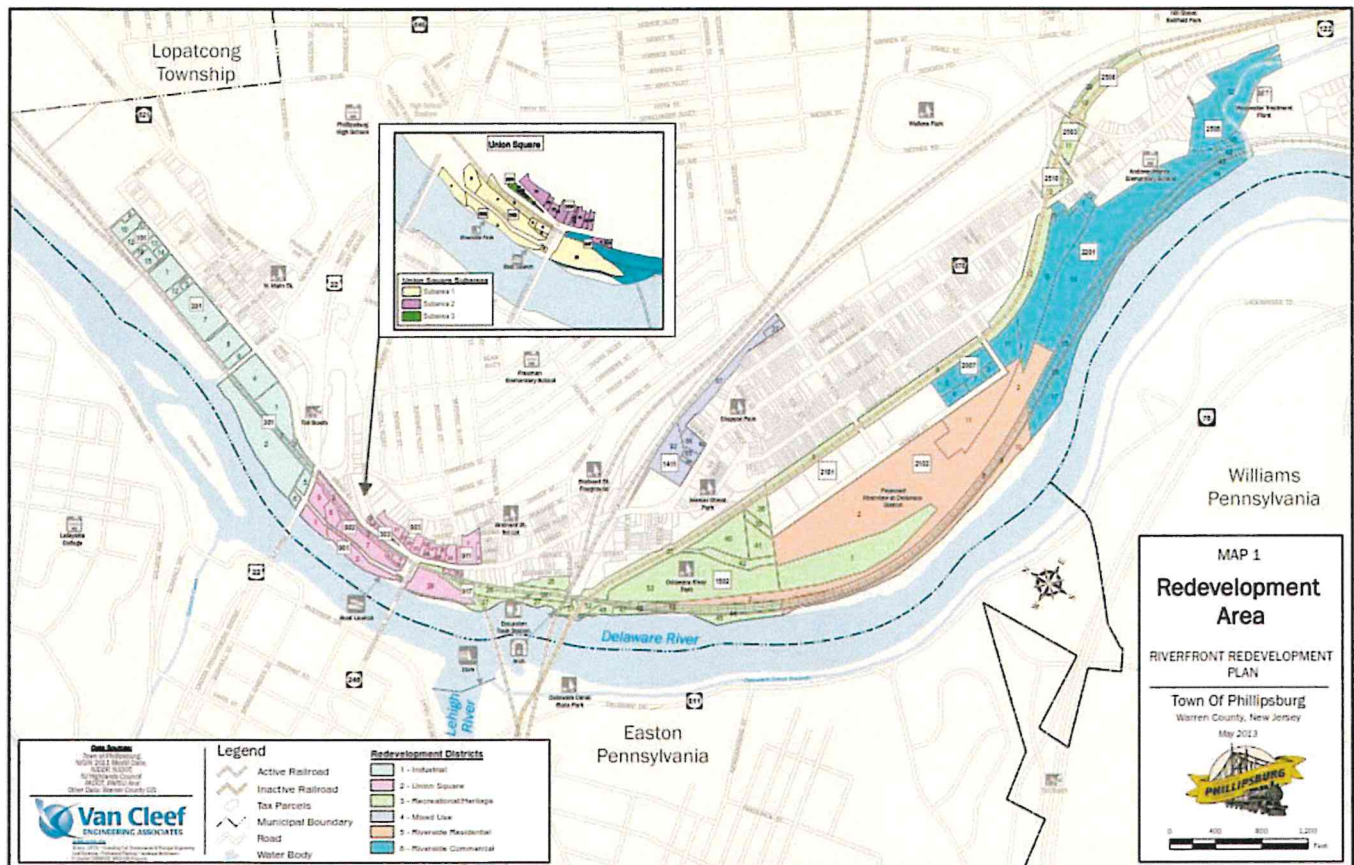
The purpose of this report is to assess the consistency of a proposed amendment to the 2017 Riverfront Redevelopment Plan with the permitted uses, bulk standards and general intent of the Redevelopment Plan for the Riverfront and with the Town's 2004 Master Plan. This report has been prepared in accordance with the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (LRHL) Section 40A:12A-7e. which states that:

Prior to the adoption of a redevelopment plan, or revision or amendment thereto, the planning board shall transmit to the governing body, within 45 days after referral, a report containing its recommendation concerning the redevelopment plan. This report shall include an identification of any provisions in the proposed redevelopment plan which are inconsistent with the master plan and recommendations concerning these inconsistencies and any other matters as the board deems appropriate.

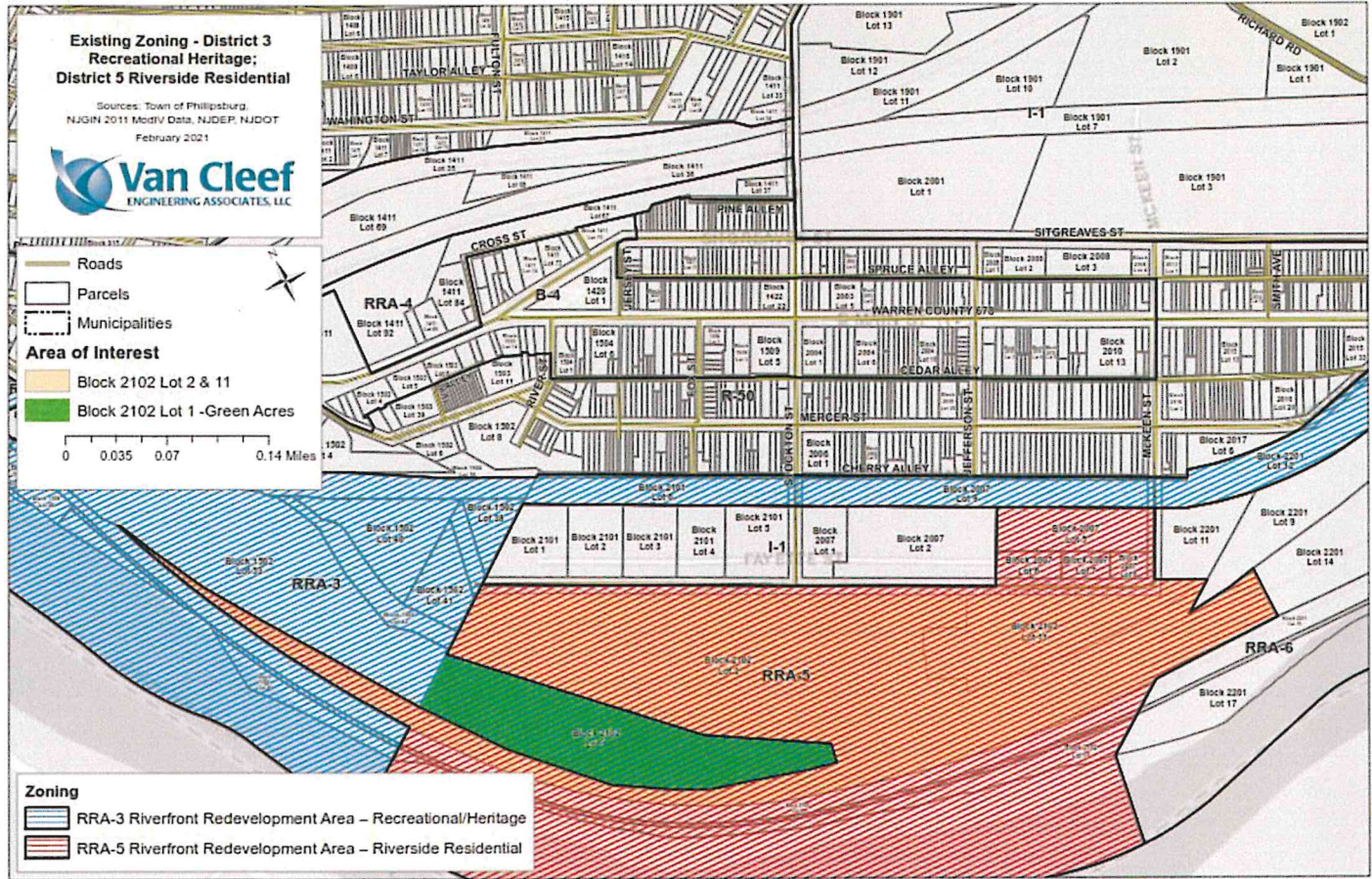
The Riverfront Redevelopment Area was designated an "area in need of redevelopment" pursuant to the LRHL by the Phillipsburg Town Council in August 2005. As illustrated in Map 1, the redevelopment area covers the length of the Delaware River waterfront from approximately Fifth Street at the northern end to Pursel Street at the southern end. It now incorporates six districts of varying uses and character.

As part of the Highlands Center planning process, Phillipsburg prepared an analysis of the 2005 redevelopment plan to determine its continued feasibility in light of evolving conditions and trends. The Riverfront Redevelopment Study – Final Report & Recommendations, which was prepared in November 2012, concluded that the 2005 redevelopment plan was still basically sound but that certain provisions of the plan should be revisited and revised. To that end, the study outlined recommendations for supporting the continued redevelopment of the riverfront, including recommendations for amending the 2005 redevelopment plan. One of the recommendations was to reconfigure and expand on the Riverfront Redevelopment Area districts to better reflect the existing and future land uses in those particular areas.

In this report, we are focusing on one lot in District 3 – Recreational Heritage and two lots in District 5 – Riverside Residential, more specifically Block 2102 Lots 1, 2, and 11 (Map 2). Initially this area was proposed for a several-hundred-unit apartment complex that never materialized and in the past 15 years the Town has struggled to find a suitable use for this site. We are now embarking on a similar process to what was completed in 2012, to evaluate whether a proposed amendment to the current Riverfront Redevelopment Plan (adopted in November 2017) is consistent with the goals of the Master Plan and the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, and more specifically, if these particular parcels are suited for siting an industrial use in this District.



Map 1 – Riverfront Redevelopment Area (2013)



Map 2 – Existing Zoning

Existing Conditions

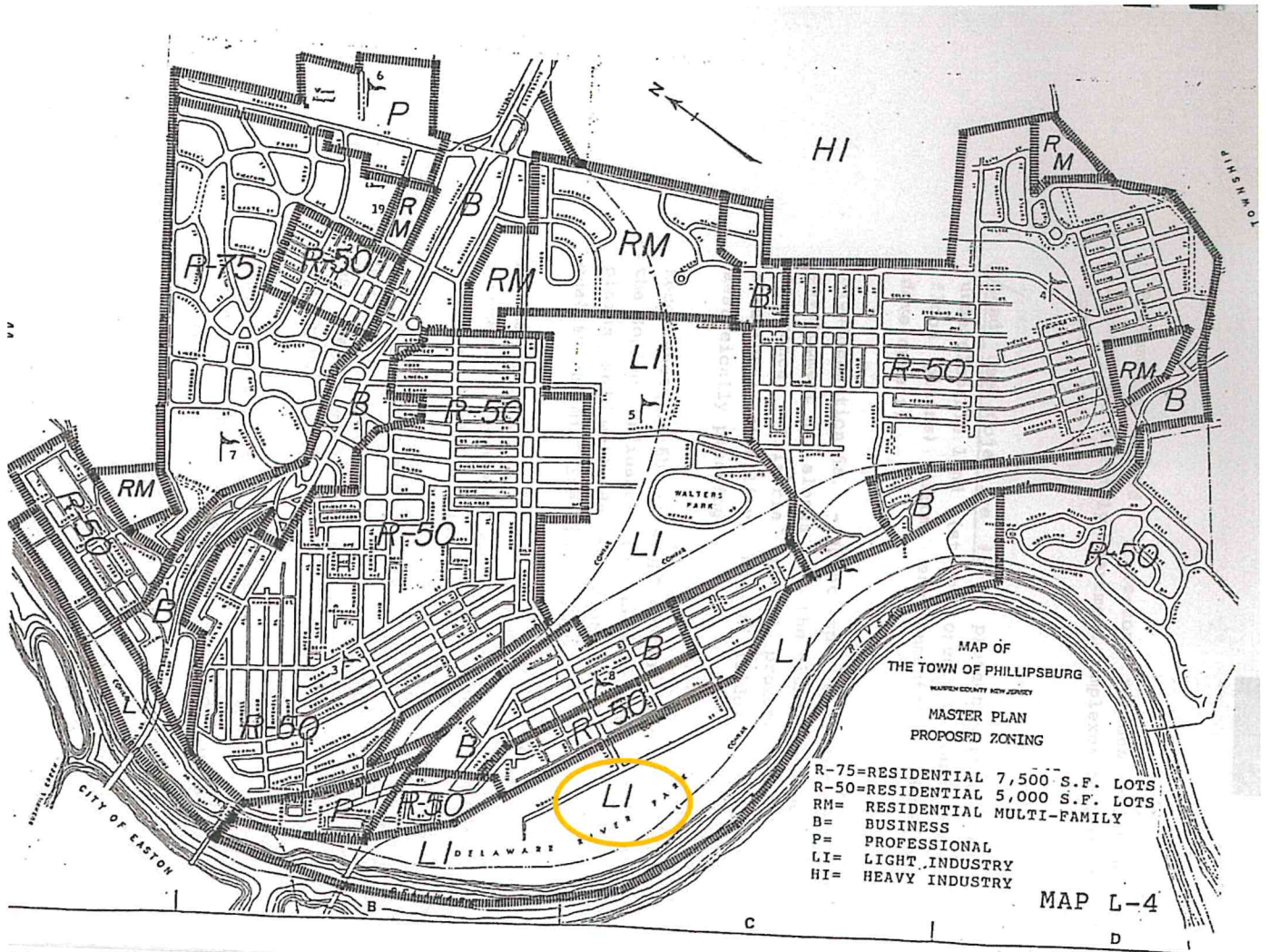
The subject parcels (Block 2102, Lots 1, 2, and 11) are located within Districts 3 & 5 and total approximately 43.6 acres in size. All three lots are currently vacant with overgrown vegetation.

- Lot 1 is 7.52 acres located within District 3 (Recreational Heritage) and is identified on the Town's Recreation and Open Space Inventory as municipal Open Space.
- Lot 2 is 31.3 acres located within District 5 (Riverfront Residential) with frontage on Howard Street and with rear access to the active railroad that parallels the river.
- Lot 11 is 4.89 acres located within District 5 (Riverfront Residential) and adjacent to Lot 2 with frontage on Howard Street. Lots 2 and 11 both have boundaries with the adjacent Redevelopment District 6 – Riverside Commercial.

Prior to this area being designated as part of the Riverfront Redevelopment Area, the zoning for these lots was identified as "Manufacturing" (1988 Town of Phillipsburg Master Plan). At that time, the Master Plan had recommended changing the existing zoning from a Manufacturing Zone to a Light Industrial Zone. That zone was identified on the zoning map as LI (Light Industry Zone) and has the same zoning regulations as the parcels that lie along Howard Street today. In subsequent reexamination reports, there

were two separate overlays applied to these lots: The 2005 Redevelopment Plan designated the area as an overlay zone known as the RA-3 (HR) zone and then the RRA-5 zone in the 2013 Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. Given the Open Space designation on Lot 1, an amended Redevelopment Plan should indicate that development on this lot is not an option at this time. These conditions are shown on Map 3, Map 4, and Map 5.

Map 3: Zoning Map from 1988 Master Plan



Map 4: Redevelopment Area Zoning Map from 2005 Redevelopment Plan

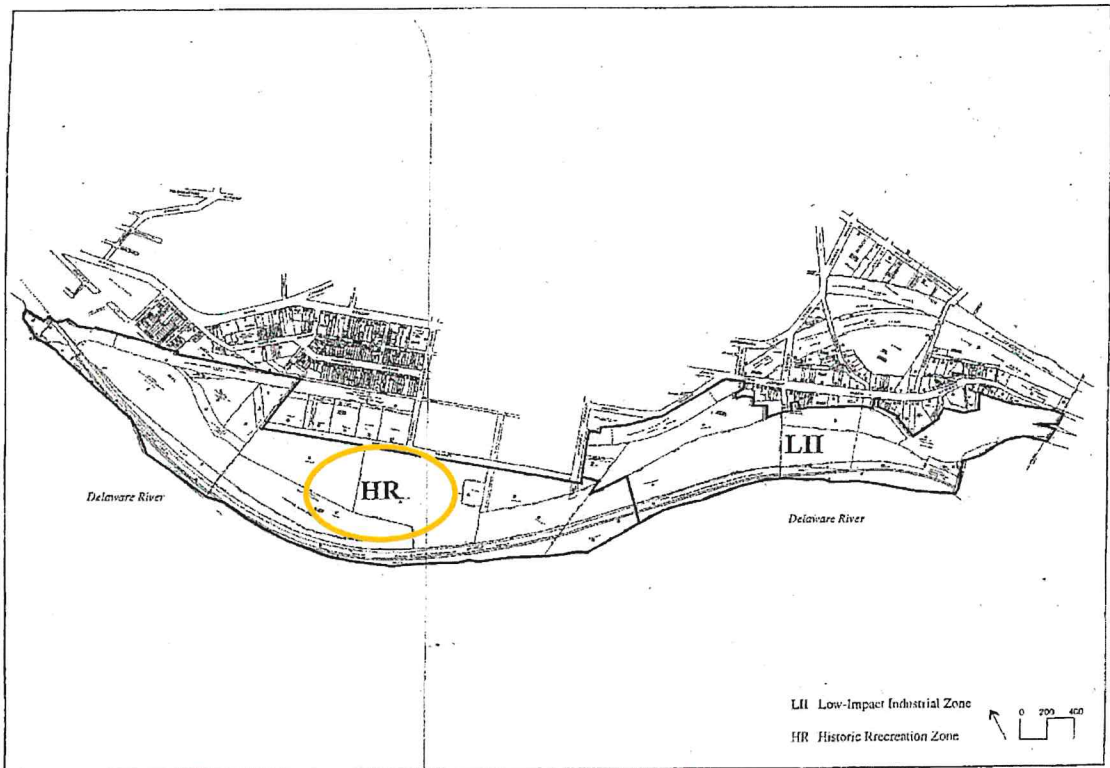
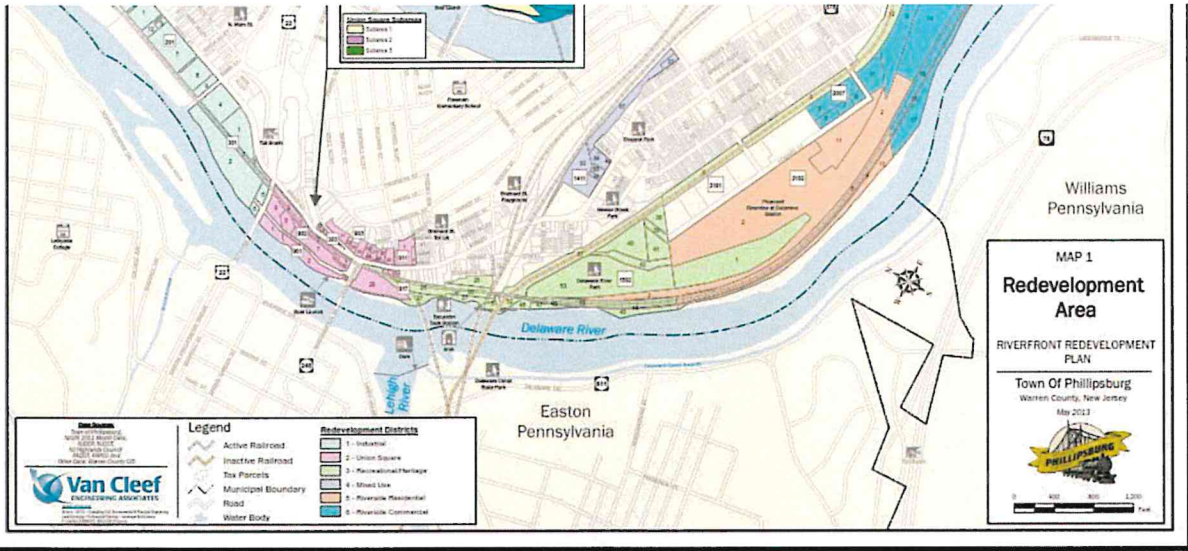


Figure 3: Redevelopment Area Zoning
Abelso Phillips Proins & Shapiro, Inc. 1999

Map 5: Redevelopment Districts from 2013 Redevelopment Plan



In light of these historical facts, it appears the underlying zoning would be in line with that of the Industrial zone on Howard Street and with flex space for more intense uses should they be desired. Therefore should the Council move forward with the amendment, we recommend the I-2 Zone standards be applied in the amended redevelopment plan for these parcels.

Permitted Uses in the Districts

In order to determine the consistency of the proposed redevelopment plan amendment with the existing zoning permitted uses, we have outlined below the existing conditions for each parcel and each zone. We have included the permitted uses for another riverfront industrial zone (I-2 Zone) for comparison (See Tables 1 and 2 below). Should the Town accept this report and move forward with an amendment to the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, it is recommended that the amended zoning regulations reflect those of the existing I-2 District with components of the Recreational Heritage District to ensure the history and the natural assets of the area continue to be celebrated within the development of these properties. This is discussed further in the Recommendations section of this report.

Table 1: Existing Redevelopment Area Districts

Subject Parcel	District
Block 2102, Lot 1	Recreational Heritage
Block 2102, Lot 2	Riverfront Residential
Block 2102, Lot 11	Riverfront Residential

Table 2: Current Permitted Uses

Primary Permitted Uses	I-2	Riverside Residential	Recreational Heritage
Manufacturing, fabrication, packaging and treatment of conversion of products	✓		
Scientific or research laboratories devoted to research, design, and/or experimentation and processing and fabricating incidental thereto.	✓		
Office buildings for business, professional, executive and administrative purposes.	✓		
Wholesale businesses	✓		
Retail sales associated with the principal use of the building	✓		
Trucking Terminal	✓		
Lumberyards and similar operations requiring bulk storage of materials,	✓		

such as plumbing and building construction supplies, including the retail sale of such materials.			
Mid-rise and low-rise residential buildings		✓	
Retail establishments and offices on the first floor of mid-rise building		✓	
Museums, cultural and educational facilities on the first floor of mid-rise or free-standing bldgs		✓	
Railroads and related activities			✓
Parks and outdoor recreation			✓
Tourism facilities and interpretive displays			✓

Proposed Uses

The current owner and redeveloper proposes to develop the parcels into an industrial use, yet to be determined. At the time of the preparation of this report, the owner/redeveloper has not submitted a formal application to the Town for review.

Consistency Review with the 2004 Master Plan and the 2017 Riverfront Redevelopment Plan

2004 Master Plan

The Township's 2004 Master Plan was prepared and adopted with an overarching goal to provide "guidance and aid in the process of redefining the direction of development in the Town. The Master Plan is divided into Plan Elements which each have their own set of goals, objectives and recommendations for advancing the Town's intent to provide a heightened quality of life for resident. One specific plan element is the Land Use Plan. The Land Use Plan was further broken down into goal areas: Housing, Commercial and Industrial. Relevant objectives from each of these goals areas include:

1. Reduce conflicts between residential and non-residential uses
2. Encourage the development and expansion of businesses and industries that will generate jobs and provide services for local residents.
3. Provide functional, accessible, and cost effective locations within the Town for industrial uses that enhance the economics for the individual uses and the Town as a whole.
4. Encourage and aid incompatible non-residential uses whose current location is or will negatively impact the future development/redevelopment of that area to find alternate, more appropriate and functional locations within the Town.

Additionally, the Land Use Plan made recommendations for each of the goal areas to consider in aiding with the implementation of the goals. Recommendations included:

- Review and revise standards for buffering, screening, lighting, and parking for non-residential uses adjacent to residences.
- Review the location and allowed uses in the Town's industrial zones to determine consistency with the Land Use objectives above and revise as needed.
- Provide for adaptive reuse of buildings to provide more compatible uses adjacent to residential zones/uses.
- Review design standards for industrial uses, giving proper consideration to off-site impacts, such as traffic, noise, lights, screening, landscaping, location of loading areas.
- Inventory the Town's vacant and/or underutilized industrial properties and reprioritize the list of potential redevelopment sites.
- Develop a program to encourage poorly located industries to relocate to more favorable locations within the Town.

2017 Riverfront Redevelopment Plan – Districts 3 & 5

The goals stated in the 2017 Riverfront Redevelopment Plan were created with the intent to promote new uses that would range in activities based on their locations. For instance, in District 3, the focus is on "recreation and railroad/canal heritage uses and is intended primarily for public recreational use such as parks and trails and associated tourism activities. It can also accommodate certain private tourism enterprises that complement the recreation/heritage experience such as the excursion train. This district

will also be the hub for the Riverfront Heritage Trail system”. In District 5, the area was proposed to provide for “mid-rise residential buildings to be constructed primarily along the Howard Street frontage and low-rise residential buildings to be constructed between the mid-rise buildings and the Bel-Del right-of-way.” Development in this district was also proposed to enhance and provide access to the adjoining park and recreation facilities including the proposed trail system and we would recommend these objectives to be carried forward into any amended redevelopment plan.

Conclusions & Recommendation

On the whole, it appears the proposed amendment, would be consistent with the goals and objectives of the 2004 Master Plan and with the intent of the 2017 Riverfront Redevelopment Plan. Since the adoption of the Redevelopment Plan, and the 2013 Plan which preceded this one, the Town has struggled to attract the desired residential development that would be appropriate for the district and the subject parcels. In that time, the Town has embarked on redevelopment activities elsewhere along the Riverfront where residential uses would be located, and are perhaps better suited. The proposed amendment speaks to the goals of the 2004 Master Plan in that it is proposing to locate industrial uses in a more favorable location in town: adjacent to an existing industrial zone and out of sight from residential and downtown uses.

However, there are concerns with the proposed change from residential to industrial. First, we recommend that any developer coming in to this area be required to work with the community on finding the right fit for the neighborhood. Residents, businesses, non-profits and faith-based organizations should be included in the discussion.

Second, any new industrial use would most certainly increase truck traffic and potentially automobile traffic in this downtown area that is working to become more pedestrian-friendly. We strongly discourage the Town from permitting additional truck traffic to enter the downtown (South Main Street). Re-routing traffic around the downtown will help to avoid conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists as well as help to preserve the downtown character of the neighborhood. We recommend the Town revisit an earlier idea to extend Howard Street south to bypass the downtown and connect to South Main Street somewhere around Center Street.

Third, we feel it is important to maintain components of the existing District 3 with access to recreation and a continuation of the Heritage Trail System in this area. An amended Riverfront Redevelopment Plan should include a connection to open space and recreation areas, following along the riverfront and providing an opportunity to link up with the Morris Canal Greenway further south.

Recommendation to Town Council

From these statements, and previous zoning designations over the past 30 years, it is clear that the Town envisioned this area - close to the river and railroad - as a non-residential, light industrial area. Goals and Objectives in the previous Land Use Plans provide the foundation for these uses and identify measures to

ensure there is consideration for any off-site impacts and for nearby residential uses. Given the subject parcels are located adjacent to an existing I-1 zone, a Riverside Commercial Zone, and an established municipal park, there would appear to be little-to-no impact on the immediate neighboring non-residential properties if an amended redevelopment plan were to implement Heavy Industrial zoning standards.

It is for these reasons that the proposed amendment appears to be consistent with the Master Plan and Riverfront Redevelopment Plan, as long as the above recommendations are included as conditions of an amended redevelopment plan. We trust that the comments found herein are sufficient for the Council's review and consideration of the proposed amendment of the Riverfront Redevelopment Plan District 5.