

PEMBERTON TOWNSHIP  
BURLINGTON COUNTY, NEW JERSEY



BROWNS MILLS STRATEGIC REVITALIZATION AND REDEVELOPMENT STUDY



Prepared by RAGAN DESIGN GROUP

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*The original of this document was signed and sealed in accordance with N.J.A.C. 13:14-1..3(b).*

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Councilwoman Diane P. Stinney ♦ Councilman Ken Cartier ♦ Councilman Thomas Inge ♦ Councilman Richard Prickett ♦ Councilwoman Sherry Scull

### **Planning Board Members**

David Cooper, Planning Board Chairman ♦ Steven Borders, Vice Chairman ♦ Donna Lefebvre, Secretary ♦ Councilman Ken Cartier ♦ Mr. Mark Loeser ♦ Mrs. Christine Kalill ♦ Mrs. Helen Kemp ♦ Mayor David Patriarca ♦ Mrs. Tonya Stilts ♦ Mr. William Doherty

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Project Overview

Browns Mills is located in the eastern part of Pemberton Township, Burlington County, New Jersey, deep in the Pinelands National Reserve. The downtown area is a small town center situated on Mirror Lake and the North Branch of the Rancocas Creek. The boundaries of the downtown area are Stackhouse Elementary School to the north, Pemberton Township Library to the east, Mirror Lake to the south, and Lake Shore Mobile Home Village to the west, which are represented in Map 1. From its infancy, Browns Mills was destined to become a regional destination for merchants, entrepreneurs, and outdoor enthusiasts seeking new and exciting opportunities due to its location deep within the Pine Barrens and being the halfway point between Philadelphia, Trenton, and the New Jersey Shore Points. The ample amount of lakes, streams, and trees made Downtown Browns Mills into a regional market for vacationers, milling companies, and merchants. By the 1880s, the downtown area was filled with boardinghouses, grand hotels, commercial stores and restaurants to support the needs of travelers, mill workers, and regional farmers.

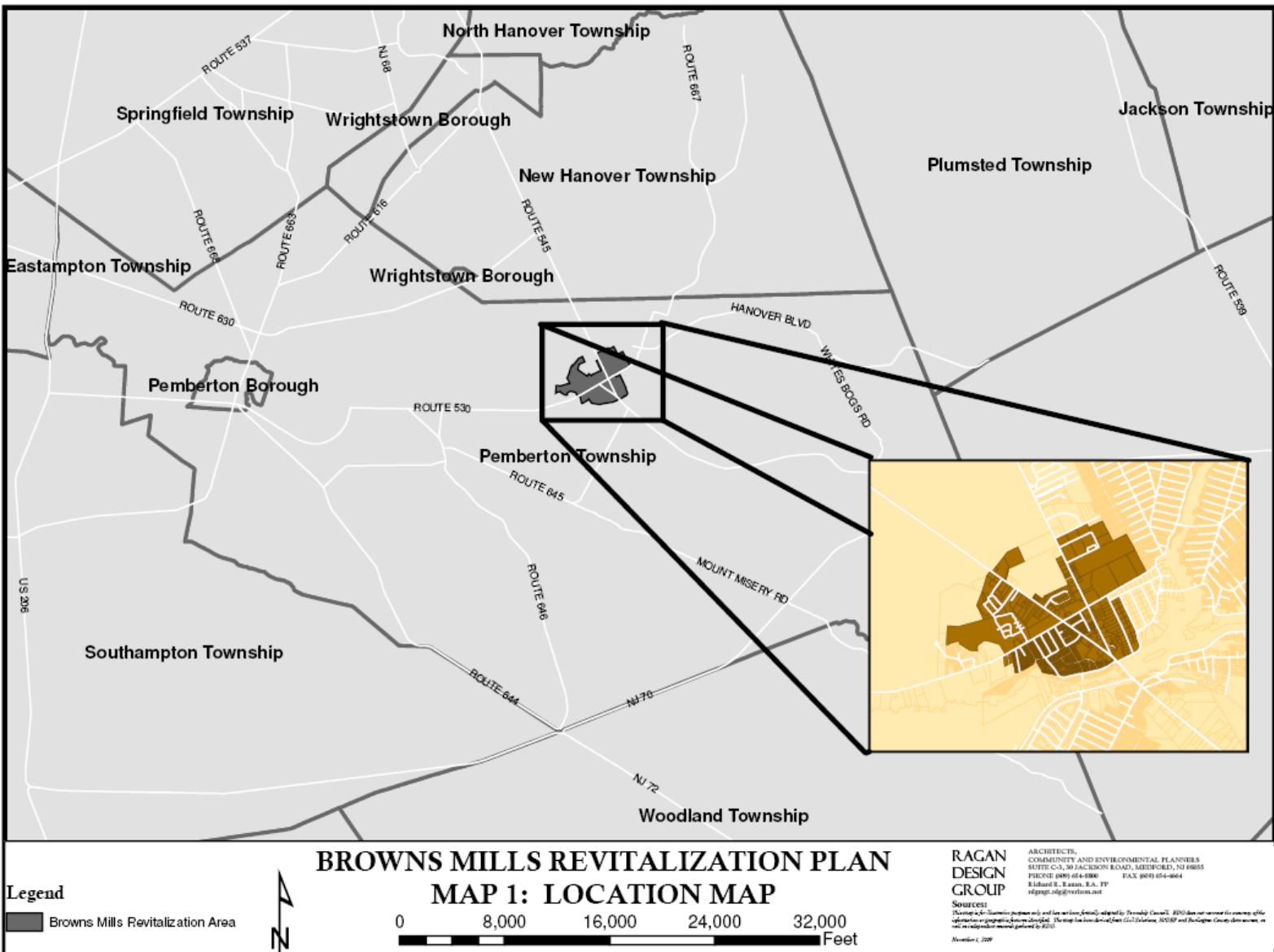
Browns Mills' popularity started to spread in the early 1900s due to the belief that Mirror Lake and the surrounding cedar lakes contained homeopathic minerals within the cedar water that could cure respiratory ailments such as tuberculosis, pulmonary diseases and asthma. The supernatural powers of the lakes brought scientists, doctors and curious travelers to the area, which eventually led to the development of Deborah Heart and Lung Center, a world renowned heart and lung medical research and treatment center. Also during this period, the military purchased property in Browns Mills to expand its

training operations at Camp Dix. The area was so popular with vacationers, hunters, anglers, and outdoorsmen, that the *Philadelphia Sunday Press* in 1916 started to sell 80' x 20' parcels in Browns Mills. The *Philadelphia Sunday Press* advertised that the subscribers could own a "Piece of Paradise" if they purchased a newspaper subscription for six months for \$39.20 which could be paid in monthly installments.

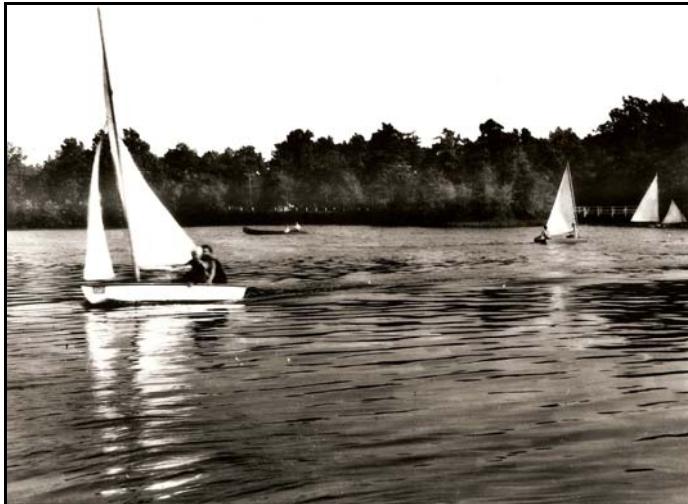
By the 1930s, the downtown area was bustling with retail stores, entertainment venues, and restaurants to accommodate tourists, outdoor enthusiasts, regional employers, soldiers, and residents. People traveled by train to Browns Mills to escape the congestion in the big cities such as Philadelphia, Trenton and New York. By the late 1930s and early 1940s, Browns Mills was filled with military personnel training for combat in Europe and the South Pacific. Families would visit the soldiers and stay at one of the boardinghouses. During this time period, Browns Mills started to grow into a year-round community as more military personnel and their families became attached to the lakes and rustic environment.



Mirror Lake Recreation Area



Following the end of War World II, the economy in Downtown Browns Mills transformed from a recreation-destination economy to an auto-oriented suburban commercial strip-center economy. Improved highway networks, cheaper land values, and suburban commuter trends made Pemberton Township an ideal place for residential growth. From 1950 to 1960, the population of Pemberton Township increased almost 200 percent.<sup>1</sup> During this period the *Philadelphia Sunday Press* lots, County Lakes Estates, and Presidential Lakes were developed into residential subdivisions. As more people were able to live in Browns Mills, the demand for hotels and boardinghouses in the downtown area diminished. Older boardinghouses, restaurants, and neighborhood businesses were leveled to create space for newer commercial centers and parking lots.



It was very common to see sailboat races on Mirror Lake during the 1950s and 1960s

<sup>1</sup> Pemberton Township Master Plan, 1972; page 5.

During the 1960s and 1970s, the residential population growth rate in Pemberton Township slowed down, but the side effects of increased development resulted in a significant expansion of municipal services. New schools and community facilities were built to meet the demands of the growing community. By 1970 there were approximately 19,754<sup>2</sup> residing in Pemberton Township. The downtown area was filled with retail shops to support the residents and men and women training at Fort Dix. The military was a major component in the Township's economic vitality and population growth. Military personnel who were stationed at Fort Dix would shop and buy houses in Pemberton Township.



Community parade supporting the military in Browns Mills

Following the end of the Vietnam War and the early 1980s, Downtown Browns Mills started to decline. Like so many other downtown areas throughout the region, “Main Street”

<sup>2</sup> US Census, Pemberton Township, Burlington County, NJ, 1970 Census.

commercial stores went out of business due to the expansion of regional malls such as Moorestown, Cherry Hill and Burlington Center. People started to favor the larger chain stores rather than the quaint mom-and-pop shops. It was during this period Pemberton saw its housing vacancy rate increased to eight (8) percent. Military personnel were no longer purchasing homes in Pemberton. Businesses were turning-over more frequently and there was limited commercial development in the downtown area.<sup>3</sup>

The last part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was financially challenging for Browns Mills. Troop levels at Fort. Dix and McGuire Air Force Base, now known as Joint Base McGuire Dix Lakehurst (hereafter referred to as the “Joint Base”), were reduced under the Department of Defense’s BRAC Commission in the 1980s. The military also began to privatize commercial businesses on base which depleted Browns Mills’ shopping core. Mirror Lake Recreation Area and the surrounding parks lost its regional mystique as families became more mobile and were able to take vacations to other national destinations. Mirror Lake was no longer the *de facto* midway point to New Jersey shore towns as people opted to take Route 70, the Garden State Parkway, Route 72, and the Atlantic City Expressway. The most damaging financial impact to the Browns Mills’ economy was the perception that the downtown area had deteriorated into a high crime area with drugs, gangs and loitering; a viewpoint still prevalent to this day. All of these regional events, plus several downturns in the national economy, have made it challenging for the Township to maintain a viable downtown with reliable tax ratables.

However, there are some promising activities starting in and around Browns Mills. The Department of Defense has consolidated all of the military bases in the Mid-Atlantic region into one megabase located at the Joint Base, which will create more jobs and employment opportunities in the area. Deborah Hospital completed construction on an emergency management care center and additional medical office space in March 2010. Deborah’s capital expansion will improve emergency medical treatment in the Township as well as provide additional opportunities for medical-related jobs. The Police Department has reported that criminal activities in the Township have decreased in the past two years.<sup>4</sup> Burlington County Community College continues to expand its facilities and services. The expansion of these entities, coupled with the Township’s strong desire to revitalize Brown Mills into an economically viable town center, will help reinvigorate Downtown Browns Mills in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



Burlington County Community College and Deborah Heart and Lung Center provide job opportunities to Township residents.

<sup>3</sup> Pemberton Township Master Reexamination, 1982; page 22.

Today, the residents and business owners seek to revitalize Downtown Browns Mills and restore it with quaint buildings, attractive streetscapes, and neighborhood oriented-businesses. Capitalizing on the existing recreation areas, nearby employment centers, and higher learning institutions, this Revitalization Plan has been prepared to restore Downtown Browns Mills as a regional destination for recreation, shopping, medical research, education and employment.

## 1.2 Revitalization Efforts

### 1.2.1 Blight Studies and Redevelopment Plans

In the early 1990s, the Township started to see the impacts from the BRAC Commission's military realignment strategies and population decreases in Pemberton Township. Businesses along Pemberton Browns Mills Road, Trenton Road and Juliustown Road were unable to generate sufficient revenues to support their operations due to the lack of shoppers, regional competition and the increased perception that Downtown Browns Mills was unsafe. Slowly, commercial buildings and professional office spaces were vacated, buildings were boarded-up, and business owners left Browns Mills for more viable economic markets. In an effort to improve the economical situation in Browns Mills and restore financial stability, Pemberton Township Planning Board and Township Council conducted a preliminary investigation study, also known as a blight study, in which they concluded that there was a need for redevelopment in Browns Mills. Map 2 indicates the boundaries of the redevelopment area as delineated in the 1993 preliminary investigate report.<sup>5</sup> In 1995, the Township adopted a redevelopment plan and zoning

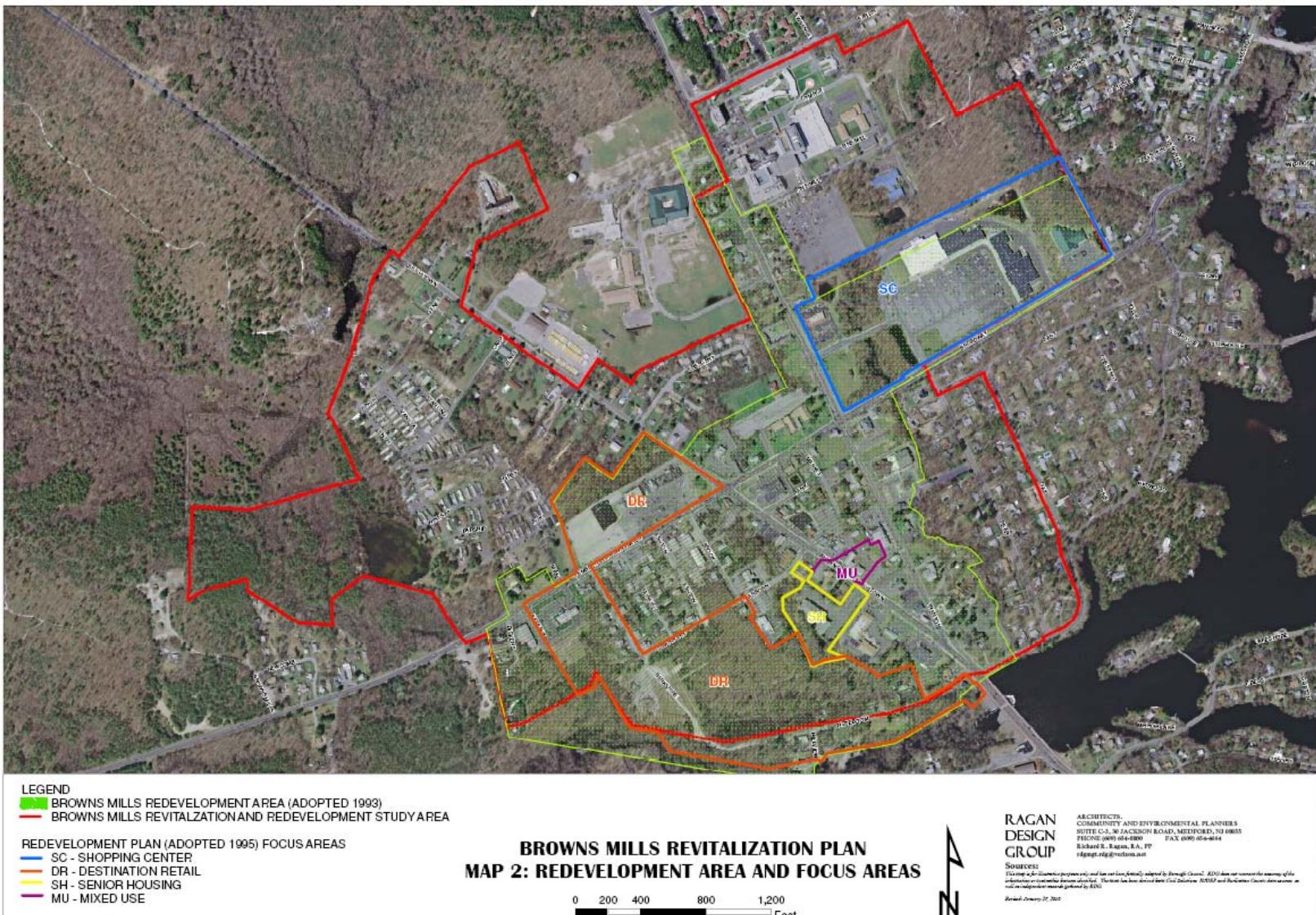
<sup>5</sup> On December 27, 1993, Pemberton Township Planning Board adopted the Preliminary Investigation of Proposed Redevelopment Area: Browns Mills Towns Center Findings and Recommendations.

regulations to facilitate redevelopment activities through the utilization of redevelopment mechanisms such as tax abatements, grant monies, and property acquisitions. The goals of the Redevelopment Plan are to "provide opportunities for new commercial and business developments in the downtown area, promote the recreation attributes of Mirror Lake and the North Branch of the Rancocas Creek, and provide better opportunities for development along Noteboom and Dearborn Avenues."<sup>6</sup> The Redevelopment Plan establishes four focus areas: Shopping Center (SC), Destination Retail (DR), Senior Housing (SH), and Mixed Use (MU) as indicated in Map 2. The land use, zoning, and design guidelines within the Redevelopment Plan were instrumental in the development of the Pine Grove Shopping Center at the intersection of Broadway and Trenton Road.



The redevelopment plan was instrumental in the development of the Pine Grove Shopping Plaza

<sup>6</sup> Browns Mills Town Center Redevelopment Plan adopted March 16, 1995.



Before the Redevelopment Plan was adopted, the Township was unable to stimulate development at this intersection. In 1999, the Township entered into a redevelopment agreement with Pine Grove Developers, LLC, to develop the site for the purposes of generating revenues and jobs for the Township. Pine Grove Shopping Center has successfully created more than 100 jobs, with Pemberton residents filling more than 80 percent of those jobs.

Although the Redevelopment Plan was able to achieve its goal of developing the Pine Grove Shopping Center, the remaining land use and zoning policies have become outdated and non-applicable to the current market demands for Township residents and business owners. The Township's Redevelopment Plan is 15 years old and several of the zoning and design regulations within the plan are inconsistent with current market trends. Furthermore, the Redevelopment Plan does not recognize changes in local land use policies such as smart growth principals, urban design techniques and sustainability. There are still blighted conditions that exist in Browns Mills that are affecting the Township's ability to attract new businesses and residents to the area. In fact, the blighted conditions in the downtown area have expanded to areas south of Mirror Lake and north of Pemberton Browns Mills Road that were not originally designated within the preliminary investigation report. Underutilized land, illegal activities, and loitering continue to exist in the downtown especially around the Browns Mills Shopping Village, Red Roof Inn, Browns Mills Shopping Center and Skip's Bar, which has adversely affected the appeal of the businesses along Juliustown Road and Pemberton Browns Mills Road. Building vacancies, vacant parking lots, and untenable buildings due to environmental contamination on Pemberton Browns Mills Road, Juliustown Road and Trenton Road continue to remain.

Boarded-up buildings, 100 percent tinted glass, and steel bars on windows and doors on commercial businesses perpetuate the blighted image that Browns Mills is unsafe and rundown.



The Acme Market in the Browns Mills Shopping Center continues to remain stagnate and untenable since 1995.

Due to the lack of implementation of the redevelopment plan and the spreading of blighted conditions near the downtown area, the governing body found it necessary to clarify the 1993 preliminary investigation report and determine whether additional areas adjacent to the existing redevelopment area qualify as areas in need of redevelopment. In February 2010, Township Council authorized the planning board to confirm that the Browns Mills Town Center Redevelopment Area continued to meet the statutory criteria as an area in need of redevelopment. In March 2010, the planning board reaffirmed that the existing Browns Mills Town Center Redevelopment Area and determined that areas adjacent to the existing redevelopment area are in need of the redevelopment. The boundaries of the Browns Mills Town Center Redevelopment

Area (adopted 1993) and expanded area (adopted 2010) are indicated in Map 3.



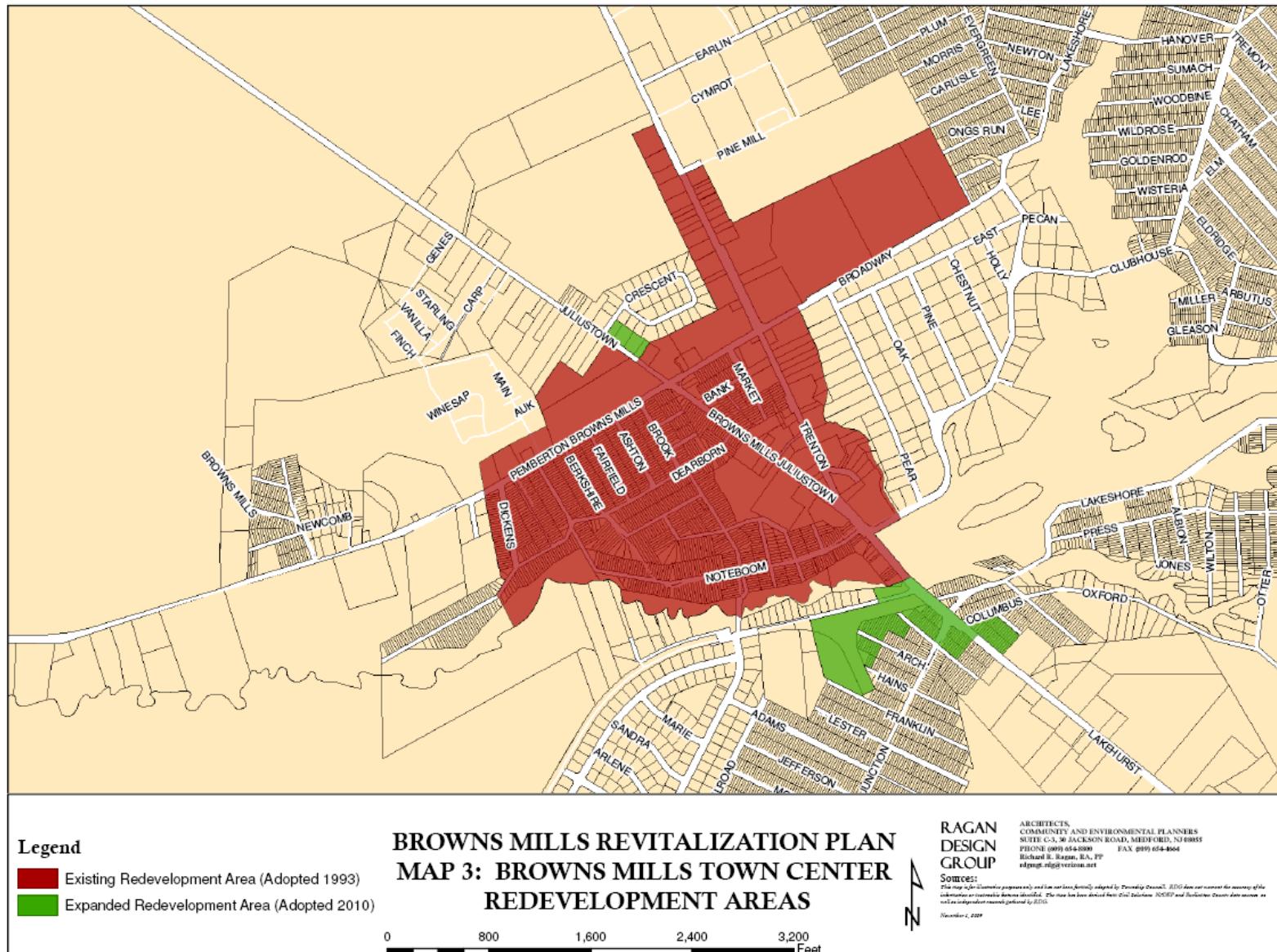
One of nine building vacancies at the Browns Mills Shopping Center

N.J.S.A 40A-12A-7(4) requires a redevelopment plan to identify all properties within the Redevelopment Area which proposed to be acquired in accordance with the redevelopment plan. Over the past 15 years additional buildings and vacant parcels have become blighted, which the Township should consider acquiring in order to effectuate the objectives of redevelopment plan and revitalization study. The Revitalization Study recommends Township Council and planning board consider amending the Township's Redevelopment Plan to include all properties within the existing redevelopment area and expanded redevelopment to its acquisition list except the residential properties located between Pemberton Browns Mills Road, Berkshire Street, Dearborn Avenue and Brook Street that are situated in the R-80

overlay zoning district. Specifically, the following parcels should be excluded:

- Block 531/Lots 12-29;
- Block 532/Lots 12-49;
- Block 533/Lots 12-49; and
- Block 534/Lots 12-49.

The commercial and residential buildings within the existing redevelopment area and expanded redevelopment area are dilapidated, neglected, polluted, underutilized, and in poor condition, which affects the Township's ability to attract new residential and commercial tenants to the area. Several of these buildings are vacant or lack landlord supervision, which has created community problems and police incident reports. Due to their blighted conditions, it is recommended the Township amend the Redevelopment Plan to include these properties within their acquisition list and consider purchasing them as part of the revitalization efforts in Browns Mills. Several of these properties, specifically Block 553 and Williams Paving, are for sale or the landlord has expressed interest in selling the property. In an effort to prevent more abandoned buildings in the downtown area, it is recommended that the Township consider purchasing these properties and find alternative locations for residential and commercial tenants. Another alternative is for the Township is to encourage private investors and redevelopers to purchase these properties and redevelop them in accordance with the design criteria recommended within this report. The New Jersey Economic Development Authority (NJEDA) and the New Jersey Redevelopment Authority (NJRA) provides grants and low interest loans to municipalities and private equity firms to acquire and remove dilapidated buildings for redevelopment efforts.





This apartment building on Juliustown road is partial vacant and has boarded-up windows and dilapidate fence. Revitalizing this building is essential in improving the commercial appeal on Juliustown Road.

Implementation of the redevelopment plan may require the acquisition of private property and the relocation of owners and tenants. Prior to any relocation activity, the Township will have to make adequate provisions for the temporary and permanent location of residents and commercial businesses. Relocation activities will comply with all applicable Federal and State statutes including the Relocation Assistance Law of 1967, N.J.S.A. 52:31B-1 et seq., the Relocation Assistance Act, N.J.S.A. 20:4-1 et seq., and the Relocation Assistance and Eviction Regulations of the Department of Community Affairs, N.J.A.C. 5:11-1.1 et seq. Additionally, no relocation activities, sponsored by the municipality, will be able to take place until a Workable Relocation Assistance Program (WRAP) plan is prepared and approved by the (NJDCA).

## **1.2.2 Urban Enterprise Zone (UEZ)**

Pemberton Township became an UEZ in 1996. The goal of the program is to promote redevelopment and new development

within the UEZ zone. The principal focus of the UEZ program is to create new jobs and generate tax ratables in the Township. The program grants participating municipalities a 100 percent sales tax exemption on most business-related purchases, charge a 3.5 percent Sales Tax instead of the standard 7 percent New Jersey sales tax, a one-time corporation tax credit of \$1,500 for each qualified new employee, funding for façade signage improvements, and priority financial assistance. Within Browns Mills, the specific objectives include the development of new retail sales and services to meet the needs of the Township's residents and the refurbishment and retention of existing businesses. The Pemberton Township UEZ program has had several significant accomplishments, specifically the development of the Pine Grove Shopping Center. Key to the construction of this commercial center was the utilization of more than \$300,000 in UEZ funds, spread over four-years, which induced the developer to construct the 75,000 square foot shopping center. The Pine Grove Shopping Center opened in November 2001. Fifteen UEZ-certified businesses occupy the plaza, significantly increasing the Township's sales tax revenues and real estate ratables. The UEZ program has been vital in the development of the CVS Pharmacy, ABCO Credit Union and Auto Zone. As of December 2009, there were 50 companies that participate in the UEZ program in Pemberton Township.

### **1.2.3 Transportation and Community Development Initiative Grants (TCDI)**

In 2007, Pemberton Township's governing body received a TCDI grant from the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to develop a strategic plan and design guidelines to revitalize and redevelop Downtown Browns Mills. The main purpose of this revitalization study is to provide the Township's governing body and private investors

with an action plan on how to revitalize Downtown Browns Mills into a viable commercial center that can support the daily needs of the military, Deborah Hospital, Burlington County Community College, and the residents of Pemberton Township. As part of the planning process, the Township evaluated existing land uses, zoning regulations, circulation patterns, environmental constraints, streetscape designs, regional markets, business climate and local economies. The planning process began in December 2007 when Mayor David Patriarca organized an Economic Steering Committee “Steering Committee” to facilitate and spearhead the revitalization study for Downtown Browns Mills. The Steering Committee held public meetings on the first Tuesday of the month to encourage public participation and to ascertain a community vision for Downtown Browns Mills.

#### **1.2.4 Pemberton Township Master Plan 2009**

The Township adopted a new Master Plan in July 2009. The Master Plan recommends redevelopment in all areas of Downtown Browns Mills to enhance its economic vitality, improve the quality of life, and strengthen its ties to the rest of Pemberton and the surrounding communities.<sup>7</sup> The Master Plan also recommends capitalizing on employment centers such as Deborah Heart and Lung Center, Burlington County Community College and the Joint Base by providing goods and services to meet their daily needs.<sup>8</sup> The land use, zoning, design guidelines, and transportation improvements suggested within this Revitalization Plan should be amended to the Township’s Master Plan and serve as the planning analysis and recommendations for Neighborhood Planning Area #1: Downtown Browns Mills.

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<sup>7</sup> Pemberton Township Master Plan, adopted July 9, 2009.

<sup>8</sup> See Note #7.

All of these revitalization efforts, along with community input, have culminated into the development of this Revitalization Plan.

### **1.3 State and Regional Planning Context**

#### **1.3.1 State Planning Commission**

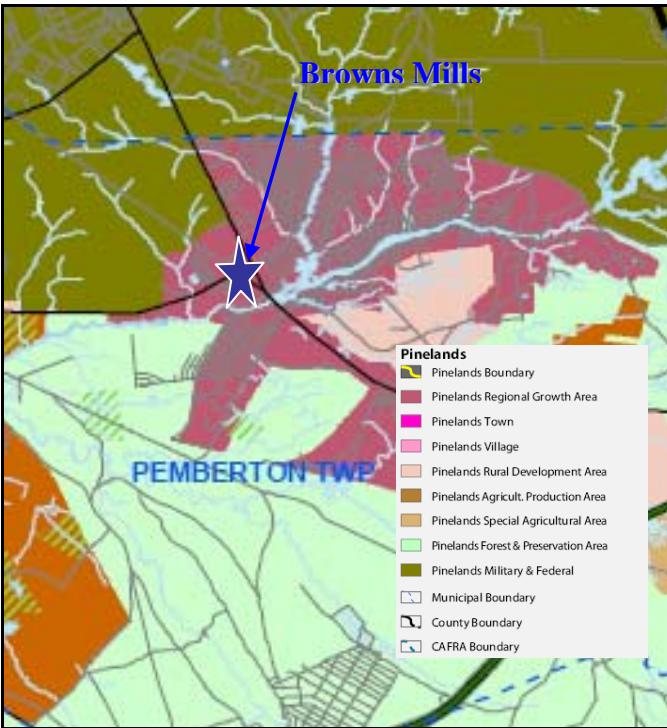
The State Planning Act of 1985 mandated the New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP), which establishes State-level planning policy. The State Plan is intended to serve as a policy guide for State departments and agencies, regional, county and municipal jurisdictions.<sup>9</sup> It advocates Smart Growth planning, by targeting the State’s resources and funding in ways that are consistent with well-planned, well-managed growth. Smart Growth is a comprehensive strategy for sustainable development, i.e., development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Smart Growth emphasizes principals such as mixed land uses, compact community design, and community and stakeholder collaboration in development decision-making

The SDRP is a reaction to the inefficient use of land and infrastructure and lack of a sense of community associated with suburban sprawl. It is intended to provide a balance between growth and conservation by designating planning areas that share common conditions with regard to development and environmental features. Basically, it seeks to maintain and revitalize existing cities and towns, focus growth into compact

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<sup>9</sup> New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan, Draft Final Plan, January 2010; page 243.

mixed-use communities that offer array of choices and options, and protect farmland and natural resources.



Source: New Jersey Department of Community Affairs, Office of Smart Growth. Draft Final New Jersey State Development and Redevelopment Plan Policy Map. Last revised January 19, 2010.

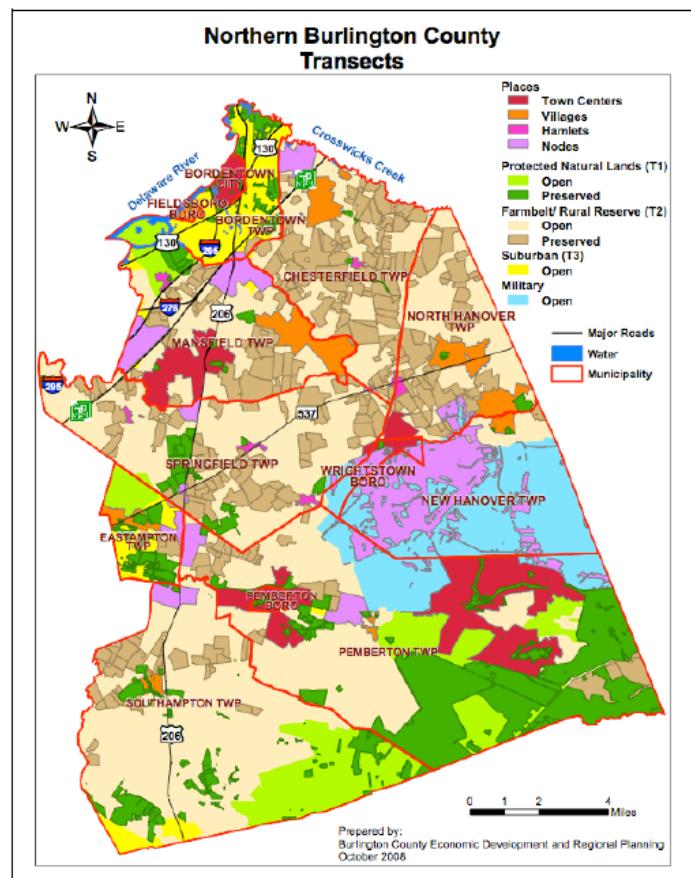
The last state plan was adopted in 2001 and the mandatory update is five years overdue. In January 2010, the State Planning Commission adopted a Draft Final State Plan which recognized Browns Mills as a Pinelands Regional Growth Area. The Township's vision to revitalize its downtown and create a mixed use neighborhood is consistent with the policies suggested in the SDRP 2010.

### 1.3.2 Burlington County

The Burlington County Department of Economic Development and Regional Planning recently completed the Northern Burlington County Regional Strategic Plan (hereafter "Regional Strategic Plan") and the Northern Burlington County Growth and Preservation Plan (hereafter "GAPP"). The policies in the Regional Strategic Plan support the strategies and recommendations in the GAPP.

The GAPP Plan evaluated existing planning and zoning practices in the Northern Burlington County and determined that local land use policies promote sprawl and loss of the County's rural character, agricultural industry, and quality of life. To change this outcome, the GAPP recommends a new development strategy, known as Transects, that utilizes a system of centers and corridors as the basis for future development, rather than sprawl type of development. It suggests that planning move beyond strict town boundaries so that it can occur on a regional basis.

The Regional Strategic Plan recommends establishing higher development densities, clustering in specific areas, and wastewater management systems in centers and nodes in the region in order for centers to become a realistic growth organizing principle for the rural communities of Northern Burlington County. It recognizes that redevelopment opportunities exist in Browns Mills. Additionally, the plan advocates that communities surrounding Fort Dix and McGuire Air Force Base, like Pemberton, diversify their local economies in order to avoid being overly depending on the military for their economic futures, despite the proposed "megabase" investment.



Burlington County's GAPP recognized Browns Mills as a Town Center

The GAPP recommends that the State Planning Commission recognize particular Pinelands Regional Growth Areas (RGAs) which could be considered as additional State Plan-style “Town Centers,” including the Browns Mills Town Center. Pemberton’s plan for additional commercial development and economic revitalization are consistent with the County’s GAPP plan.

### 1.3.3 Pinelands National Reserve

Browns Mills is located in the Pinelands National Reserve and is designated a Regional Growth Area in the Pinelands Comprehensive Management Plan (CMP) and is considered a Pinelands Town Center. For the most part, all site plans and subdivision applications must be reviewed and approved by the Pinelands Commission. Additionally, land use and zoning policies concerning land development such as density, impervious coverage, infrastructure improvements and stormwater management are reviewed for compliance with the (CMP). As part of the consensus building process, members of the Steering Committee have been meeting with representatives from the Pinelands Commission to determine an amicable revitalization plan that would not adversely impact the Pine Barrens ecological system. One area the Steering Committee has been diligently working with the Pinelands on is the area north of the Rancocas Creek along Noteboom Avenue. The area along Noteboom Avenue is impacted by a wetland buffer that the Township has addressed with the Pinelands Commission as part of the Revitalization Plan. The wetland negotiations and increase in residential density is an ongoing process that requires constant communication between the Township and the Pinelands Commission. It is recommended that the Township continue to maintain an open dialogue with the Pinelands throughout the redevelopment and revitalization process.

### 1.3.4 Joint Base McGuire Dix Lakehurst

McGuire Air Force Base and Fort Dix are located just to the north of downtown Browns Mills. In 2005, The BRAC determined that McGuire Dix and Lakehurst meet the military’s mission of providing efficient mobilization and training with little cost impact to the military. In 2008, Ocean and Burlington Counties hired a consultant team to determine

existing and potential areas of land use and zoning conflicts as well as economic opportunities within adjacent municipalities due to the military's expanded mission. Additionally, the consultants assessed noise and safety impacts associated with increased Joint Base's missions. The consultants prepared a Joint Land Use Study (JLUS) in which they supported the redevelopment efforts in Browns Mills. The JLUS also identified one area of concern in Browns Mills with regard to land use and zoning: Lakeshore Mobile Home Village and the residential homes on Pemberton Browns Mills Road. Lakeshore Mobile Home Village and several residential homes along Pemberton Browns Mills Road (zoned R-3 and R-80) are located in the military's designated Accidental Potential Zone (APZ) II area. APZs are areas immediately beyond the ends of runways and along primary flight paths and are subject to more aircraft accidents than other areas. The Department of Defense identifies these zones to protect the safety of the general public and provide some level of protection against the effects of aircraft accidents. These zones are designated to restrict incompatible land use to reduce potential aircraft incidents.<sup>10</sup> APZ II has a potential for aircraft related accidents (5% of the accidents studied occurred in this zone). APZ II areas extend from the outer end of each APZ I an additional 7,000 feet along the runway centerline with a width of 3,000 feet. The military has determined that mobile homes and residential homes on less than three acres are incompatible land uses in the APZ II. The military has recommended that the Township adopted an APZ overlay ordinance to restrict future mobile home and single family residential development in these areas. In 2009, the governing body drafted an APZ overlay ordinance, but no

<sup>10</sup> It is important to note that the military's APZ areas are recommended designations and there is statutory law that requires the Township to implement the APZ overlay zone and land use standards to comply with the military recommendations.

action was taken. It is recommended the governing body reinitiate discussions on implementing an APZ overlay ordinance to protect the community.



Source: Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, JLUS for Counties of Ocean and Burlington: Final Report April 2009. The above map indicates in the yellow box that Stackhouse Elementary School, Lakeshore Mobile Home Community, and several residential homes along Pemberton Browns Mills Road are located in the military's designated APZ II overlay area.

#### 1.4 Private and Public Participation

As noted above, the Township received a grant from the DVRPC to prepare a Revitalization Plan for Browns Mills in May 2007. Starting in December 2007, the Township began to

hold community-wide planning workshops on the first Tuesday of each month in the Township's municipal building. At the first meeting, a Steering Committee was organized to spearhead the development and implementation of the revitalization plan. The Steering Committee is comprised of elected officials, Township employees, professional consultants, business owners, and residents. The Steering Committee continues to meet the first Tuesday of each month and plans to continue to meet following the completion of this study to ensure the Action Plan items listed at the end of this document are implemented.

Public participation and community input was a major component of this Revitalization Study. The Township organized an evening community workshop in May 2008 at the Browns Mills Volunteer Fire Company building and a Sunday workshop in February 2008 at the Browns Mill Improvement Association (BMIA) building where participants provided their thoughts, concerns and recommendations on how to revitalize Browns Mills. A Community Vision Survey and Business Climate Survey were also distributed to participants requesting them to rank the most important things to them in order to redevelop Brown Mills into a successful town center. The Community Vision Survey was used to develop the Vision Statement for the Revitalization Plan as well as zoning requirements and design guidelines to improve the downtown area. Additionally, Ragan Design Group and Maurice Jones, Urban Enterprise Zone Director, went door-to-door and talked to business owners to better understand the business climate in Browns Mills. Business Climate surveys were distributed to business owners to determine how business owners characterize the business climate in Browns Mills and what can be done to improve it. The following are some observations made from the surveys and talking to business owners:

- A number of respondents felt that the Township was not supportive of local businesses and felt that the restrictions by the Pinelands Commission and Township were too stringent. They felt these cumbersome regulations made it too difficult for local business owners to expand and attract new customers.
- Several respondents stated that there was a lack of police presence in downtown Browns Mills from dusk to dawn. Several business owners stated their customers, especially senior citizen, felt unsafe at the Pine Grove Shopping Center and around the Browns Mills Shopping Plaza because of loitering, children skateboarding and riding their bikes in the parking lots.
- A majority of the respondents felt that transients and loiters were chasing away potential customers from downtown Browns Mills. The amount of transients and loiters have "branded" downtown Browns Mills as an unsafe place to shop and conduct business. The business owners want to create a new identity for Browns Mills – one that is safe, affordable, and welcoming to businesses.

Through the public input at the Steering Committee meetings, the evening workshop, and the surveys, the Township has been able to develop revitalization strategies.

## **2.0 VISION, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES**

### **2.1 Vision Statement**

Browns Mills is a naturally rich community built on strong community values and environmental stewardship. For over a hundred years, Browns Mills was a vacation destination for travelers from Philadelphia and New York City. People would travel great distances to Browns Mills to escape the smog and pollution of the “big” cities. These travelers would come and stay in Browns Mills to swim in therapeutic cedar lakes, sunbathe, fish, hike, and camp. By the early 1900s, Browns Mills and its cedar lakes were so popular that people throughout America were traveling to the area in hopes of curing their ailments including tuberculosis, asthma, and other respiratory diseases. In the 1920s, Deborah Heart and Lung Center constructed a hospital in Browns Mills to treat people with heart and lung ailments. Strategically located in the center of New Jersey, the US Army established a regional training base on the border of Browns Mills in the early 1900s and has trained troops for over a century to protect Americans’ rights. Men and women from Fort Dix and McGuire Air Force Base have fought in World War I, World War II, the Korean Conflict, Vietnam War, the first Persian Gulf War and the current conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. Browns Mills vitality is closely linked to the success of the lakes, Deborah Hospital, and the Joint Base.

In the past 40 years, many physical and economic changes have impacted Browns Mills: businesses have come and gone, families have moved, Deborah Hospital now faces competition from larger hospital systems, and Fort Dix and McGuire Air Force experienced downsizing due to the BRAC Commission and have been forced to close their doors to Browns Mills due

to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. However, two things have remained a constant in Browns Mills – the community maintains its strong values and Mirror Lake and the surrounding Pine Barrens still create an amazing landscape. The community wishes to recreate the downtown into its former eco-adventure destination for families, professionals and outdoor enthusiasts.

Almost 35 years have passed since the people of Browns Mills gathered to discuss, debate, and support a vision statement that describes a shared image for downtown Browns Mills. Through a community-wide visioning process, the residents of Browns Mills have created a clear image of how they want to redevelop downtown Browns Mills and the path to achieve that goal. The community recognizes that creating a healthy downtown economy requires building relationships with existing businesses and residents. The community envisions a downtown that incorporates businesses that support Deborah Hospital, Fort Dix, and Burlington County Community College. The community envisions a downtown where doctors, military families, and residents open businesses in the downtown area to support the needs of Pemberton residents and the surrounding municipalities. The downtown becomes a dynamic environment with community members, doctors, families, business owners, teachers and students all exchanging ideas in an open space which creates an exciting atmosphere on the street.

The community envisions downtown Browns Mills and Mirror Lake as a recreation destination for families and travelers to share in the community’s natural beauty and attractions. The community envisions paddle boats, sunfish sailboats, canoes and kayaks scattered on the lake throughout the year. There are regular fishing tournaments and sailboat races on the lake.

During the summer, there are movies and shows at the lake. Mirror Lake becomes a regional destination for the 4<sup>th</sup> of July to watch fireworks. There is a sporting goods store in the downtown area that provides equipment to outdoor enthusiasts. There is a comprehensive trail system around Mirror Lake that connects to Whitesbog and the Rancocas Creek.

The community envisions an extensive pedestrian network with streetscape elements in the downtown that provides a safe environment for everyone. Buildings in the downtown are compact, human scale, pedestrian-oriented and designed to be consistent with the small town rural characteristics of the Pine Barrens and lakes. People casually walk along the tree-lined sidewalks, window shop and read menus of outdoor bistros that front Juliustown and Trenton Roads. At night, the area is active with couples eating at the restaurants, listening to music at the local bistro, or taking a late night stroll around Mirror Lake.

This is the community's vision in the year 2025...or sooner.

## 2.2 Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of this Revitalization Plan are to provide guidance to Township Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board, investors, and redevelopers on the Township's vision, both physical and emotional, for Downtown Browns Mills. The goals and objectives establish the appearance and atmosphere the Township wants to achieve in Browns Mills in the next 15 years. The goals noted below are broad policy statements, which the Township should strive to attain. The bullet points following the goals statements are tangible objectives the Township needs to implement in order to bring this Revitalization Plan to fruition.

2.2.1 GOAL: Develop a *pedestrian-oriented downtown* that facilitates safe mobility and encourages sidewalk activity.

- Create an attractive streetscape for all roadways within the study area that includes 10' to 12' sidewalks, street trees, benches, ornamental lights, security cameras, and wayfinding signs.
- Work with the Burlington County Department of Land Development, Pemberton Township Public Works Department, and Fire Department on allowing on-street parallel parking on all streets within the Revitalization Area.
- Implement a wayfinding plan to direct motorists and pedestrians to Deborah Heart and Lung Center, the Joint Base, Mirror Lake Recreation Area, Senior Center, the municipal parking lot, street names, and commercial businesses.
- Require pedestrian crossing lights and crosswalks at all major intersections and mid-block crossings within the Revitalization Area.
- Install ADA compliant sidewalk ramps and bump outs at all curb cuts to provide a safe environment and reduce the risk of conflicts between motorists and pedestrians.

2.2.2 GOAL: Encourage a *mixture of land uses* in the downtown area to support a greater level of activity in Browns Mills, which can increase the number businesses and improve the economic viability of the Downtown Browns Mills.

- Accommodate the demand by young active adults such as students, professionals and military personnel, by improving the selection and quality of residential housing types in Browns Mills which will help support the local retailers and increase ratables.

- Modify the Town Center (TC) zoning district and bulk requirements to a form-based zoning code which places more emphasis on building architecture, street orientation, and pedestrian scale rather than parking requirements and land use groups.
- Work with the Pinelands Commission on determining a feasible residential density in Browns Mills to support commercial activities.
- Support two to three story mixed-use buildings on Juliustown Road, Pemberton Browns Mills Road, and Trenton Road with the first floor being utilized by commercial space and the second and third story used for residential space, office or retail space. Residential units on the first floor should be prohibited on Juliustown Road, Pemberton Browns Mill Road, and Trenton Road in order to create longer durations of activity in the downtown area.

**2.2.3 GOAL:** Support the expansion of existing businesses and the development new businesses through ***financial incentives, infill development, land assemblage, lot consolidations and building rehabilitation.***

- Create public and private partnerships to acquire land and buildings that are dilapidated, blighted, and underutilized for redevelopment.
- Provide financial incentives to business owners and investors such as tax abatements, Redevelopment Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOTs), and UEZ funding mechanisms for façade improvements, infrastructure enhancements, and streetscape elements.
- Consolidate smaller lots into larger lots to entice larger developments in the downtown area as well as to conform to Pinelands Stormwater Management Regulations.

**2.2.4 GOAL:** Encourage a ***multimodal transportation system*** that supports the needs of the Pemberton, students, military, and senior citizens.

- Continue to support the BurLink bus service in Browns Mills and Country Lakes and expansion into Presidential Lakes.
- Work with NJ Transit, Burlington County Department of Economic and Regional Planning, Cross County Connections, and the military on maintaining the 317 bus route in Downtown Browns Mills.
- Improve the bus shelters located at the Browns Mills Shopping Center and Pine Grove Shopping Center to include bike racks, benches, lights and canopies for protection from inclement weather.

**2.2.5 GOAL:** Improve the ***quality of life and perception*** of Downtown Browns Mills.

- Increase the number of police patrols, beat-patrols, bicycle patrols, and community watch groups in the Revitalization Area.
- Strategically place security cameras and other crime design protection techniques on buildings and streetscape elements to provide people with an extra sense of security.
- Continue to utilize the UEZ-funded Clean Team to clean and maintain all streets, parking lots, and parks on a regular-basis to improve the aesthetics and perception in the downtown area.
- Strictly enforce existing municipal and state building codes for the maintenance and appearance of commercial and residential buildings (vacant or occupied).

- Preclude the utilization of iron bars, roller steel doors, frosted-glass, and 100 percent tinted-glass on downtown building windows and doors.
- Develop a Neighborhood Watch program to mitigate the loitering and criminal activities at the Red Roof Inn, Pine Grove Shopping Center, Browns Mills Shopping Center, and other areas in the downtown.
- Develop a new brand identity and promotion campaign for Browns Mills that represents the downtown area as a safe place to live, work and play.

**2.2.6 GOAL:** Implement a ***comprehensive marketing plan and advertising plan*** that focuses on reinventing Browns Mills as a regional destination for recreation, shopping, world-class medical treatment, and higher education.

- Create a new brand identity and town center logo for Downtown Browns Mills that represents the essence of the residents, businesses and lakes.
- Develop a marketing campaign that targets businesses and professionals in the recreational, medical, military-support and education fields.
- Promote the advantages of locating to an UEZ area and Redevelopment Area such as grant money for façade improvements, state sales tax reductions, short term tax abatements, and Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) programs.

**2.2.7 GOAL:** Improve ***vehicular circulation and parking demands*** while providing a pedestrian safe environment.

- Continue to work with the military and Burlington County on reopening Texas Avenue or a suitable alternative to civilians.

- Encourage shared-parking agreements and cross easements between downtown businesses and property owners.
- Develop a parking in-lieu fee ordinance to encourage shared-parking and raise funds for parking enhancements as the area becomes more successful.
- Repave, reorient, and expand the municipal parking lot to allow for better internal circulation and access points.

**2.2.8 GOAL:** Promote the ***development of ecotourism and eco-adventure retail stores*** and activities in Browns Mills.

- Build a multiuse path around Mirror Lake with connections to the downtown area, residential neighborhoods and the Rancocas Creek.
- Construct a boat house for canoes, kayaks, sunfish sailboats and other non motorized boats on South Lakeshore Drive near Reflection Park.
- Encourage the development of outdoor sporting goods stores in the downtown area.
- Develop a partnership with outdoorsmen organizations to bring fishing tournaments, bicycling races, triathlons etc. to Browns Mills.

**2.2.9 GOAL:** Encourage the utilization of ***sustainable design techniques, energy efficient building materials and alternative energy resources*** to reduce Pemberton's carbon footprint.

- Construct a hydroelectric generator at the mouth of Mirror Lake Dam to produce electrical energy to power the ornamental lights and streetscape elements in Browns Mills, which will reduce the Township's energy costs.
- Encourage solar panels on roof tops and solar panels awnings on buildings.

- Fast track developers' site plan applications that utilize renewable energy infrastructure that help reduce its carbon footprint.
- Support the utilization of bioretention basins, rooftop gardens, community gardens, and other sustainable design techniques.



Proposed Browns Mills Town Center

## **3.0 EXISTING CONDITIONS**

### **3.1 Demographics**

The 2000 Census<sup>11</sup> indicates that there were 28,691 people, 10,050 households, and 7,487 families residing in the Township. The population density was 465.2 people per square mile (179.6/km<sup>2</sup>). There were 10,778 housing units at an average density of 174.8/square mile (67.5/km<sup>2</sup>). The US Census has projected that the population in Pemberton Township in 2008 was 27,975, which indicates Pemberton's population decreased 716 persons (2.49%) in nine years since the last Census was performed.<sup>12</sup> This is important to note since most municipalities in Burlington County and throughout New Jersey experienced some type of growth from 1995-2007 due to the "residential boom" and various financing options during this time period. Pemberton, however, experienced little residential and commercial development during this period. Throughout the visioning process, Steering Committee members as well as the public participants grappled with the fact that little economic growth occurred in the Township. It was concluded that development within Pemberton and Browns Mills was limited during this period due to the fact that 90 percent of the Township is located within the Pinelands, the vast number undersized parcels in Browns Mills, existing haphazard development in the downtown area, the reduction in the military's function in the area, and the perception that Browns Mills is unsafe.

The racial makeup of the Township in 2000 was 66.03 percent White, 23.12 percent African American, 0.46 percent Native American, 3.18 percent Asian, 0.08 percent Pacific Islander,

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<sup>11</sup> All 2000 Census data was obtained from U.S. Census Bureau, Summary File 1 (SF 1) and Summary File 3 (SF 3)

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008 American Community Survey (ACS).

2.89 percent from other races, and 4.24 percent from two or more races.<sup>13</sup> Hispanic or Latino<sup>14</sup> of any race were 8.63 percent of the population.

There were 10,050 households of which 37.5 percent had children under the age of 18 living with them, 53.3 percent were married couples living together, 15.7 percent had a female householder with no husband present, and 25.5 percent were non-families. 20.4 percent of all households were made up of individuals and 6.3 percent had someone living alone who was 65 years of age or older. The average household size was 2.80 and the average family size was 3.22.

The median income for a household in the Township was \$47,394, and the median income for a family was \$52,860. Males had a median income of \$36,572 versus \$26,689 for females. The per capita income for the Township was \$19,238. About 6.2 percent of families and 9.3 percent of the population were below the poverty line, including 12.5 percent of those under age 18 and 7.8 percent of those age 65 or over. The average price for a home in Pemberton was \$190,800.

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<sup>13</sup> Two or more races include not only persons who marked only one race (the 'race alone' category) but also those who marked that race and at least one other race.

<sup>14</sup> For Census 2000, American Community Survey: People who identify with the terms "Hispanic" or "Latino" are those who classify themselves in one of the specific Hispanic or Latino categories listed on the Census 2000 or ACS questionnaire - "Mexican," "Puerto Rican," or "Cuban" - as well as those who indicate that they are "other Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino." Origin can be viewed as the heritage, nationality group, lineage, or country of birth of the person or the person's parents or ancestors before their arrival in the United States. People who identify their origin as Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino may be of any race.



Typical two bedroom two bath home found in Browns Mills

Evaluating data collected from field investigations, windshield surveys, interviews, and tax records, the estimated residential population in the Browns Mills study area is 982. Due to a lack of census tract data for this particular planning area it is difficult to determine the racial breakup, household size, age cohorts and income characteristics for this area. However, based upon the field investigations conducted, it is estimated the demographics for the revitalization area are similar to the overall projections for the municipality.

### 3.2 Physical Features

Some key physical attributes of the land within the study area:

- Number of Parcels: 1,174
- Average Size of Parcels: 0.2435 acres
- Total number of housing units: 283 single family and 48 multifamily units
- Approximately number of square feet of commercial/retail space: 503,485 square feet

The average size of all the parcels in the Town Center is smaller when compared to similar downtown areas, which makes it very challenging for the Township to attract larger anchor tenants to the downtown area. It has also become difficult for the Township to keep accurate records on land ownership details and title information on the “*Philadelphia Press*” lots for tax purposes and land use decisions. Throughout the visioning process several developers and investors advised the Steering Committee that they require a minimal of two acres for their building, parking lot and stormwater management facilities. It is essential that smaller lots be consolidated into larger lots to attract commercial tenants. The revitalization study recommends the Township develop a policy to require all new land owners of common name/ownership to consolidate the lots to simplify tax records and title searches for the Township.

**How to Secure  
Brown's Mills In-the-Pines Lots**

**S**UBSCRIBE to the daily and Sunday PRESS for six months for which you pay your newsdealer the usual subscription price. In consideration for this six months' subscription, the PRESS will give you a lot at Brown's Mills in-the-Pines for \$39.20 AND THIS \$39.20 COVERS THE COST OF MAKING THE DEED, ALL NOTARIES' FEES AND ALL INCIDENTAL EXPENSES. Payments may be made in installments of \$2.80 a month.

When you have made your first payment of \$2.80 you will be given the right to use the property and you can build on it at any time. When you have taken and paid for the PRESS for the six months covered by your agreement and have made all your lot payments, you will be given the deed to the lot. It is a simple and definite proposition.

Advertisement in the Sunday Press selling lots in Browns Mills