

## THE NEED FOR BETTER PLANNING

New Jersey's population and employment continue to grow. As a State, New Jersey has experienced at least 50 years of constant development and decentralization between New York City and Philadelphia resulting in massive suburban sprawl. Our highways get more congested while our rail systems are at capacity with virtually no room for expansion for either. New Jersey has 4.8 million acres of land. 1.9 million of those acres are undeveloped and unprotected. As of September 2000, legislation was passed which dedicated 1 million acres of the 1.9 million left to be set aside for open space. In terms of population density, New Jersey is more densely populated than Japan. Japan has 800 people per square mile while New Jersey has 1,100 people per square mile. It is estimated that we are developing 50 acres per day. At that rate we will be completely "built-out" in 50 years. We are at the forefront of that race.

I learned all these interesting facts at a recently attended seminar. The seminar was presented by a team of attorneys, through a very well-known provider of continuing education credits. The first half of the day was dedicated to Zoning and Municipal Land Use law in New Jersey. The second half of the day was reserved for a discussion and introduction to Smart Growth. About five minutes into the presentation on Smart Growth; the attorney making the presentation turned sympathetically to the audience and said, "I know this is not a very interesting subject, but you'll need to bear with me to the end in order to get your credit." Yes, the look, style, and approach of his presentation was extremely boring; but what could be more interesting and important than planning our future relative to the unstoppable freight train of bad development for the sake of generating private income and public tax money? This attorney's attitude and statement was so short-sighted, it compelled me to devote an entire quarterly newsletter to the subject of Smart Growth.

Attempts by Attorneys and Planners to implement "good" community development manifest themselves in a complicated formula of rezoning and revised Master Plans. The process of revising Master Plans is not a luxury. It is required of municipalities at specified intervals as per State law. You can be sure the process allows little if no time for real innovative and creative input. Maybe if Architects were more involved, or required to be involved in the development of Master Plans, we would start to see a change. In suburban areas, we could incorporate more walking and bike paths, more parks, more green areas, thereby creating a natural thread through our communities, connecting our homes, recreation areas and even shopping malls. In urban areas we could implement creative solutions for multi-family housing, cleverly incorporating it into vibrant and revitalized streetscapes that respect local shops, pedestrian walkways, park areas and mass transit. If better planning were implemented and enforced for new developing areas as well as retrofitted into existing areas, we may finally begin to control, define and shape our communities while respecting and preserving the natural habitat left in our State. This is, ultimately the meaning and intent behind Smart Growth. Architects need to be consulted on, and share the responsibility for, community planning. We may not be able to prevent development in the State of New Jersey, but we can certainly contribute so much to the process.

Brian Altman, AIA  
Editor