

CITY OF UNION CITY
HUDSON COUNTY
MASTER PLAN REEXAMINATION REPORT

January 2019

Adopted by the Planning Board on January 22, 2019

Prepared by



Heyer, Gruel & Associates
Community Planning Consultants
236 Broad Street, Red Bank, NJ 07701
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Union City
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Hudson County, New Jersey

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sealed in accordance with N.J.S.A. 45:14A-12


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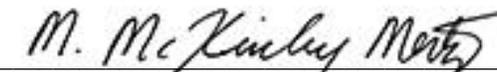

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INTRODUCTION

This report constitutes a Master Plan Reexamination Report for Union City as defined by the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89). The purpose of the Reexamination Report is to review and evaluate the local Master Plan and Development Regulations on a periodic basis in order to determine the need for updates and revisions.

The City adopted its last Master Plan in April 2009, and a Master Plan Reexamination Report was prepared and adopted by the City on March 6, 2018 ("March 2018 Reexamination Report"). Subsequent assessment and identification of land use and zoning-related issues have taken place since the March 2018 Reexamination Report was adopted. In a continuing effort to ensure the protection and enhancement of the existing residential neighborhoods that characterize the City, it is appropriate to prepare an updated Master Plan Reexamination Report.

Section A of this report identifies the goals and objectives that were established in the 2009 Master Plan. Section B and C describe changes that have occurred in the City, the County and the State related to City-specific development issues and general shifts in planning assumptions. Finally, Sections D and E discuss recommended actions to be addressed by the City.

It is the intent of this Report to consider and provide recommendations concerning land use and zoning issues in the City.



PERIODIC REEXAMINATION

New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law (N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89) requires the Reexamination Report to contain the following:

A. The major problems and objective relating to land development in the municipality at the time of the adoption of the last reexamination report.

B. The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.

C. The extent to which there have been significant changes in assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the master plan or development regulations as last revised with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses. Housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition, and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in State, county and municipal policies and objectives.

D. The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared, and

E. The recommendations of the Planning Board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law," P.L. 1992, c. 79 (C.40A: 12A-1 et seq.) into the land use plan element of the municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

The Mayor and Board of Commissioners support the notion that public involvement is critical to a successful and comprehensive planning process. As such, the community was provided two opportunities to meet with City representatives and consultants to be part of the Master Plan Reexamination process. On February 14th and 15th the City conducted public meetings, allowing the community to voice comments and opinions on a wide range of issues and topics. The following are key issues identified through the public outreach process:

- Parking availability should be addressed throughout the City, but specifically in the residential neighborhoods.
- Improving and creating new parks and open space should continue to be top priorities for the City.
- Where possible, residents would like to see the City take steps to reduce traffic and improve pedestrian mobility.
- Specific concern was expressed regarding the affordability of housing. Residents would like the City to continue to pay close attention to housing affordability and take measures to ensure existing residents do not get priced out.
- Preservation and adaptive reuse of old and historic buildings should be encouraged as opposed to demolition and rebuilding.
- Residents would like to see improved public transit options within the City.
- Members of the community were interested in maintaining the existing density and scale of the City as opposed to constructing new high rise developments.
- The residents want to ensure the family character of the City remains and are interested in smart growth techniques that promote a healthy quality of life.

SECTION A

Major Problems and Objectives

Goals and Objectives within a Master Plan are meant to provide a policy framework for the Plan as well as to guide other activities in the City that have an influence on land development. This framework is not presented in an order of hierarchy; rather all are important to the future growth and development within the City of Union City.

In order to derive these Goals & Objectives, the 2009 Master Plan Committee consisting of community stakeholders provided valuable feedback as to what the Master Plan should seek to address. Several meetings were held and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats analysis (SWOT) was performed to assess the community through the eyes of the public. While some of the issues citizens raised were perceptions and perhaps are not reality, a truly open review of them allows the City to address the public's comments and concerns through a concerted planning effort.

Goals and Objectives

The Goals & Objectives were then derived from the SWOT input.

Goal 1:

- Provide a balance of land uses, and balanced development patterns, in appropriate locations in order to:
 - Preserve the character of the community;
 - Encourage economic development;
 - Increase park and recreation facilities;
 - Accommodate community facilities;
 - Facilitate local and regional circulation;
 - Protect and preserve the established residential character;
 - Provide a broad range of housing choices;
 - Promote and reinforce the City as a desirable residential location and attractive shopping/entertainment/recreation destination; and
 - Improve the quality of life of the residents of Union City.

Goal 1 Objectives:

1. Re-classify the zoning districts and revise the zoning ordinance, to be consistent with the prevailing development patterns while allowing an appropriate mix of building types and uses.
2. Coordinate the City's Zoning districts to facilitate specific areas where its unique character can be enhanced or developed by creating more design standards for parks, streetscape programs, historic neighborhoods, building heights or other aspects of community characteristics.

3. Encourage mixed-use development in the City's commercial corridors and redevelopment plans where appropriate.
4. Continue to foster and facilitate affordable housing in the City through home ownership programs and housing rehabilitation grants as a method to promote stable neighborhoods and increase community pride.
5. Eliminate substandard properties in the City through code enforcement efforts, education, ordinance amendments and community outreach.
6. Preserve and enhance existing parks throughout the City, where appropriate, allow new development and redevelopment incentives to provide for additional public open spaces.
7. Ensure that given the scarcity of land available for development, that adequate parking provisions are established for residential and commercial areas but without detriment to the pedestrian environment. Incorporate strong parking design standards into new developments; and encourage uses with shared parking facilities.
8. Encourage transit-oriented development opportunities near the Light Rail Terminal, with strong pedestrian and bicycle linkages between the Terminal, the commercial corridors and residential areas.
9. Continue to work with developers to implement existing redevelopment plans.
10. Review redevelopment plans to ensure consistency among them. Revise and update obsolete redevelopment plans as necessary.
11. Discourage non-conforming uses in residential, commercial, and industrial areas to ensure compatibility with all land uses and neighborhoods.
12. Re-evaluate and redefine commercial corridors, including the possibility of including some commercial corridors and strengthening the existing ones. Encourage neighborhood service-oriented retail uses only on pre-existing and/or specifically delineated lots in residential neighborhoods.
13. Continue to strengthen and improve Citywide and neighborhood commercial districts as centers of employment, shopping, services, entertainment and education.
14. Maintain consistency between the intended land use patterns and: streetscape improvements; open space planning; historic preservation; traffic and circulation improvements; and physical improvements in commercial and industrial areas of the City

Goal 2:

- Capitalize on the City's proximity to Manhattan, and its ideal location within one of the largest financial, industrial, and cultural metropolis in the World.

Goal 2 Objectives:

1. Preserve existing and create new housing opportunities for middle income and working class families, while also balancing the opportunity to attract all market types.

2. Preserve the views of Manhattan skyline by establishing height regulations in the eastern sections of the City.
3. Capitalize on the unique cultural diversity that sets Union City apart from other towns and cities within the metropolis.
4. Establish design standards for new construction that supports the preservation of unique architectural and historic features while remaining practical.
5. Expand and encourage the Union City CDA façade improvement program to guide and improve the aesthetics of established commercial corridors through guidance on appropriate storefront renovations and building maintenance practices that enhance the long-term values of the structure. The FIP should include practical design standards that work to coordinate signage, awnings, window displays, and where applicable and permitted, sidewalk cafes.
6. Craft form-based zoning standards with special emphasis on scale of buildings, architecture, materials, and façade appearance, so as to complement architecture from several eras of history.
7. Identify and enhance the major gateways into the City. These gateways should resonate the importance of Union City as a diverse cultural center.
8. Revitalize the City's existing commercial corridors, and recognize newer corridors where commercial activity has become predominant by: encouraging uses such as supermarkets, coffee houses, bookstores, etc; encourage establishment of artist communities with galleries, and shops; streetscape improvements unique to the commercial corridors; encouragement of shared parking facilities adjacent to commercial corridors; taking advantage of an established UEZ District; identification and enhancement of specific core areas of activity; new bus routes or jitney service serving commercial corridors; attraction of smaller businesses such as home offices on upper floors of commercial buildings; provision of tax-based incentives to property owners for façade and other improvements; and revision of City's zoning ordinances to allow for a wide variety of uses, while enhancing the physical character of City's commercial corridors.
9. Promote historic preservation as a tool for successful economic development.
10. Recognition of structures listed on the National and State Register of Historic Places demolition and inappropriate alteration by designation and markings as an historic structure;
11. Induce the use of the Investment Tax Credit to encourage appropriate rehabilitation of the structure and adaptive re-use.
12. Capitalize on the ethnic diversity of the City as a tool for economic development. by encouraging ethnic businesses to recognize the diversity of the marketplace.

Goal 3:

- Improve internal circulation (pedestrian as well as vehicular), and enhance connectivity to the regional transportation network (major roadway systems that are in close proximity, bus, and light rail)

Goal 3 Objectives:

1. Reduce auto-dependency through innovative design practices that discourage surface parking lots and suburban strip mall design practices.
2. Adopt a streetscape plan that focuses on issues such as traffic, pedestrian flow, physical conditions of streets, street trees, utilities, signage, land uses affecting the quality of street environment, to complement the strong street network of Union City. The plan should also include a phasing plan, implementation strategies, and funding opportunities for streetscape improvements.
3. Minimize traffic impacts on residential streets.
4. Identify and eliminate congestion on major internal streets, and commercial streets such as Bergenline Avenue
5. Ensure that any redevelopment efforts in the City are inextricably linked to and consider pedestrian, bicycle and mass transit circulation access.
6. Anticipate and coordinate design and placement of directional and informational signs indicating parking areas, public facilities (town hall, library, schools, etc.) in graphics not dependent on language literacy.
7. Work with the NJ Transit, the State, and adjacent municipalities to: ensure adequate bus options are available; add additional bus routes connecting the City regionally and internally; extend light rail service to Manhattan past midnight; increase the frequency of mass transit serving the City;
8. Establish a comprehensive parking system in the City, especially in areas served by mass transit. Encourage shared parking opportunities with community residents, businesses and visitors.

Goal 4:

- Preserve and build open spaces, community facilities and recreational amenities as unique assets of the City.

Goal 4 Objectives:

1. Consider the creation of a central town square for public use over I-495 that will unite the City physically and socially.
2. Continue strengthening partnerships with institutional uses such as churches for increased cultural activities and social services.

3. Recognize the existing open-space assets of the City and make efforts to acquire land for new open spaces. Develop a network of open spaces so that every corner of the city is within a 5-minute walking distance from a park, playground or other public spaces.
4. Improve the provision of recreational facilities for residents of all ages within the City. Create a policy whereby developer agreements in redevelopment plans share their indoor and outdoor recreational facilities with the public
5. Consider exploration of additional opportunities to share City, County and School parks and recreational activity space given the built-out nature of the City and its needs to provide recreational space.
6. Strengthen protection of the Palisades.
7. Encourage reduction of waste and promote recycling and require developers of multi-family residential developments to obtain site plan approval of recycling areas pursuant to the Solid Waste Management Act.

Implementation Element

In addition to the goals and objectives, there are Implementation Strategies included in the Master Plan that are intended to address and act upon the City's goals and strategies:

Land Use – Community Character

Urban Design

- Review Design Standards from Redevelopment Plans for application as General Site Design Standards that should apply throughout the City
- Change Bulk Standards from Residential and Commercial zone areas to support General Site Design standards
- Change Municipal Site Design standards for residential and commercial development to support General Site Design standards
- Include Street, Sidewalk and Crosswalk standards in a Circulation Element of Master Plan as well as in revised engineering and construction standards
- Review and revise Design Standards for Central Business District in light of continuing redevelopment activity
- Create Design Standards for the Business District
- Create Design Standards for Center City District based on findings of the Master Plan
- Revise Design Standards for all districts based on continuing redevelopment, infill development and Board of Adjustments reports
- Create a plan for the Center City Area that includes decking I-495 to create a new Urban Park

Zoning, Planning and Redevelopment

- Review the Development Application and Approval procedures. Ensure proper professional engineering and planning review is completed on all applications so that applications are realistic and feasible while promoting public health, safety, and welfare
- Comprehensive review and revision of Land Development Ordinance per new Master Plan
- Create new zoning standards for the Central City based on the Master Plan recommendations

Business Districts

- Create and Promote Specific and Unique Identity for each Business District
 - Identify Strengths and weaknesses
 - Existing and future retail and mixed use development possibility
 - Relationship to Neighborhoods
 - Opportunities to create public spaces
- Review and Revise Design Standards for Central Business District in light of continuing redevelopment activity
- Promote discussion and evaluation of Business/Special Improvement District for the entire City or for each individual Business District, similar to UEZ.
- Create and Implement Marketing Studies for each Business District to identify potential for expanded retail and service businesses
- Promote continuing cooperation between Government, Planning and Zoning Boards and Chamber of Commerce, and UEZ
- Identify opportunity to link Business District improvements with promotion off Historic Preservation Tourism of areas such as the Monastery.
- Continue to evaluate use of Redevelopment and Rehabilitation for Business District Improvement

Circulation

Bicycle/Pedestrian

- Create Green Infrastructure Map – composite view/map of overall Recreation, Open Space, Bike and Pedestrian access to identify areas of potential improvement, including recommendations for strategic links throughout the remainder of the community/
- Establishment of pedestrian connections between schools and business zones

Parking

- Create a Comprehensive Parking Strategy for the City
- Promote alternatives (bike and pedestrian) for local access to merchants
- Establish better drop off and pickup locations at Train Station (kiss and ride)
- Continue to study options for structured parking in Central Business District for shared use by commuters and Central Business District merchants and residents

Traffic / Vehicular Congestion

- Incorporate traffic calming measures into Site Planning process for new applications before Planning Board in areas of concern
- Analyze and determine solutions for traffic circulation issues throughout the City in a Circulation Element of Master Plan, focusing on:
 - Cut through traffic on residential Streets
 - Delivery Truck traffic
 - County transportation Corridors
 - Bus Routes
- Continue to study circulation issues throughout the City

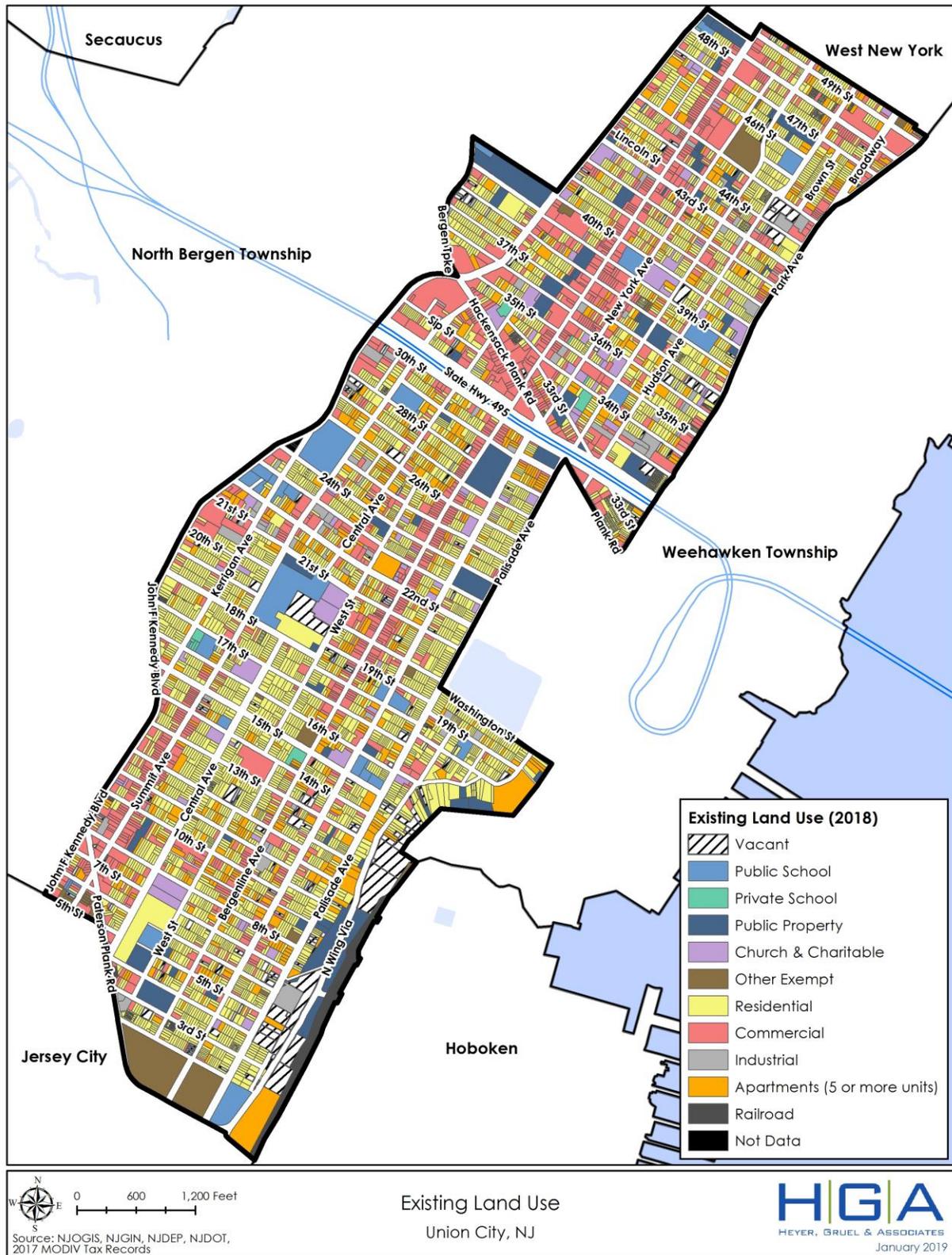
Parks and Open Space

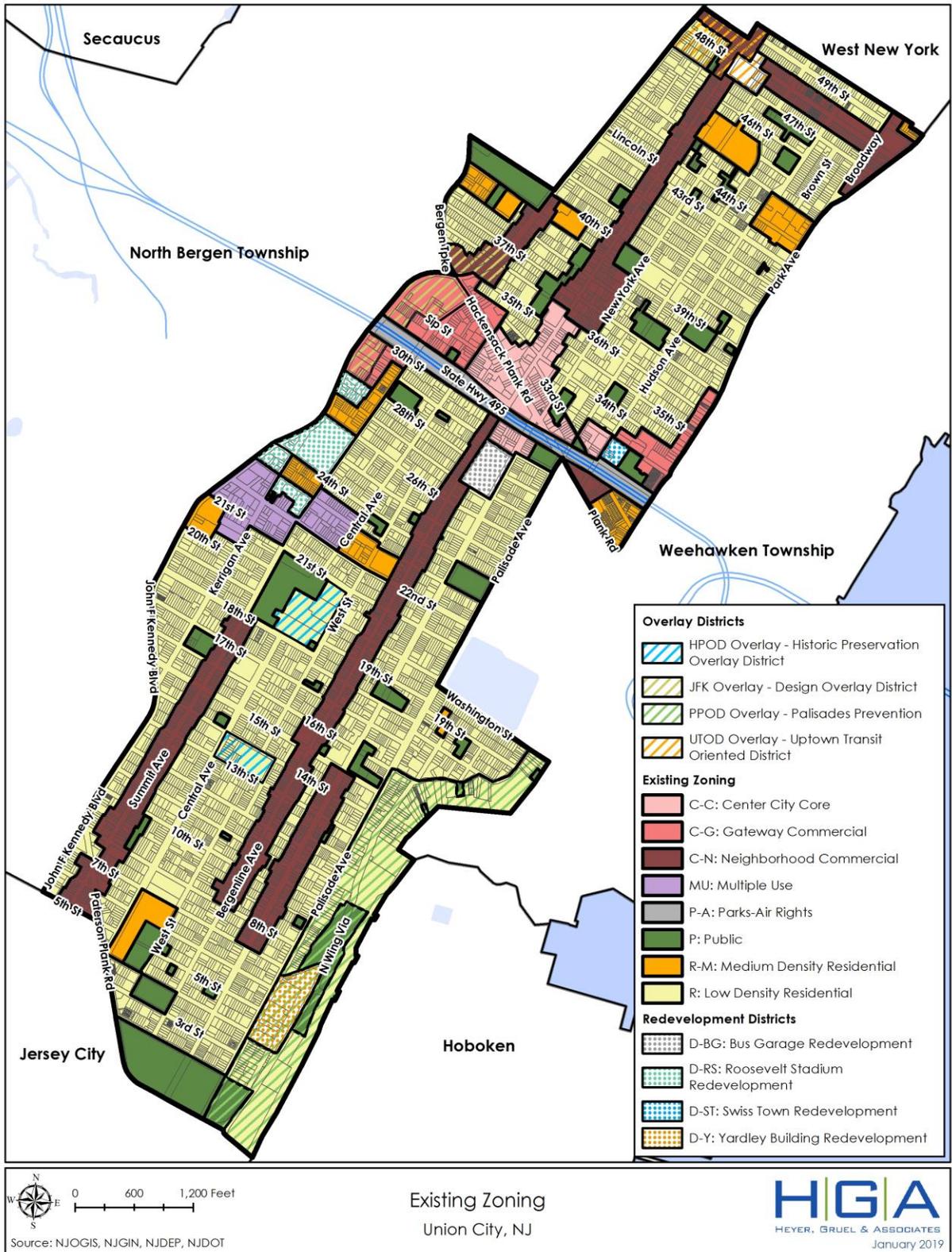
- Create Green Infrastructure Map – composite view/map of overall Recreation, Open Space, Bike, and Pedestrian access to identify areas of potential improvement, including recommendations for strategic links throughout the remainder of the community.
- Create a Recreation & Open Space Plan and Recreation Element of the Land Use Master Plan
- Review opportunities to expand the Parks and Recreation system through Planning and Redevelopment

SECTION B

The Extent to Which Goals and Objectives Have Been Reduced or Have Increased Since 2009

The March 2018 Reexamination Report examined the Goals and Objectives as well as the Zone Plan Recommendations of the 2009 Master Plan. The extent to which the goals and objectives have been reduced or increased remains the same as it was in the March 2018 Reexamination Report.





SECTION C

Significant Changes in Assumptions Impacting the Master Plan

Since the City adopted its 2009 Master Plan, there have been demographic changes and policy and regulatory changes in the City, in Hudson County, and in the State of New Jersey. These changes affect the assumptions, policies, and objectives that form the basis of the Master Plan.

The March 2018 Reexamination Report examined significant changes at the local level of Union City, changes at the County and regional level, and finally changes at the State level. The changes in assumptions have not altered since the March 2018 Reexamination Report was adopted. The evaluation in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remains valid.

SECTION D

Recommended changes for the City's Master Plan and Land Development Ordinance

Changes to Goals and Objectives

The additional goals and objectives that were included in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid. No additional goals and objectives are proposed.

Affordable Housing

- Implement the provisions of the adopted Housing Element and Fair Share Plan.

The recommendations regarding affordable housing made in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid.

Since the March 2018 Master Plan Reexamination Report, the City received a Judgment of Compliance and Repose (JOR) from the Court. In an Order dated October 23, 2018, the City was granted a Judgment of Compliance and Repose, to remain in effect until July 1, 2025. During this period, the City will have immunity from all Mt. Laurel builders remedy type law suits, as well as any other law suits challenging the terms set forth in the Order.

Parking

The recommendations regarding parking made in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid.

Streetscape

The recommendations regarding streetscapes made in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid.

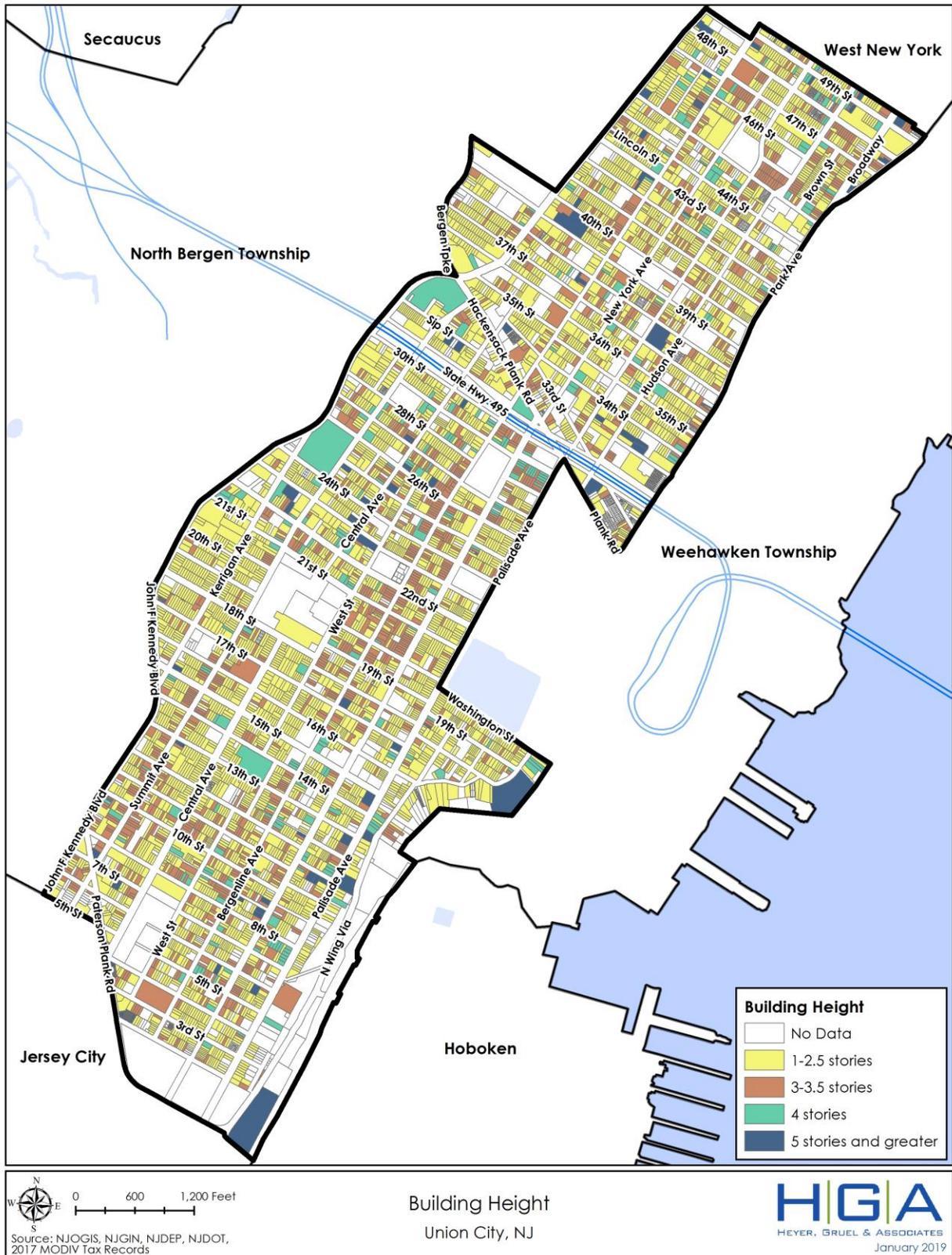
Transportation

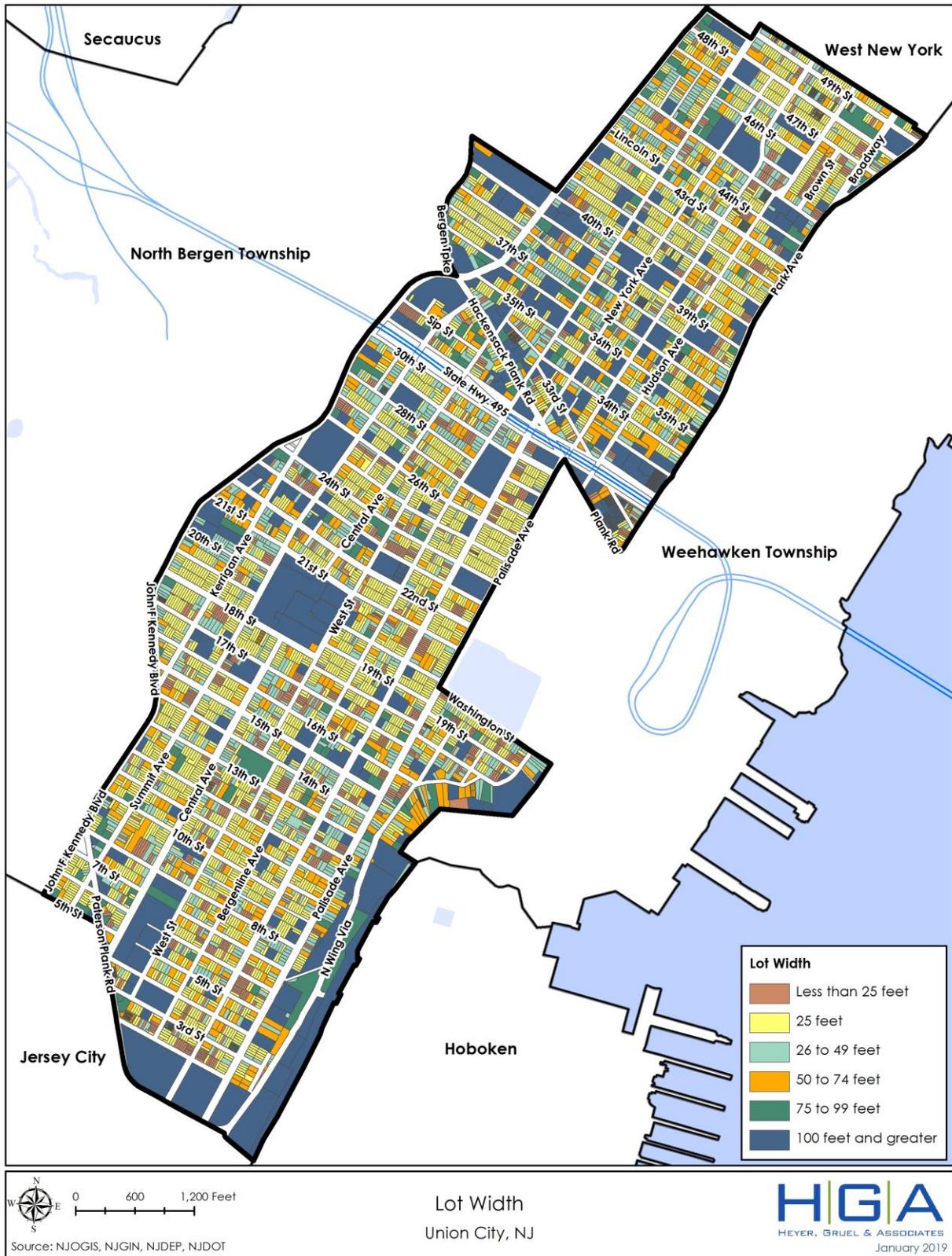
The recommendations regarding transportation made in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid.

Residential Zoning

The following recommendations replace those of the March 2018 Reexamination Report:

- Consolidate the lower density residential zones into a single residential zone that permits one-, two-, and three-family structures. The majority of Union City's existing housing stock is within a similar density, and the City has seen an increase in demand for three-family structures with three-bedroom units. Three-family structures permit the City to grow and develop in a way that complements the existing character of the residential neighborhoods and meets the demands of the growing three-family market.
- Allow the existing high-rise residential buildings to be grandfathered as a permitted use.





Commercial Zoning

The following recommendations replace those of the March 2018 Reexamination Report:

- It is recommended that the City merge their several commercial zones into a single zone. The standards and permitted uses in several of the commercial zones are similar to one another and create redundancy throughout the Ordinance. Consolidating the C-G and C-C zoning districts into the C-N zone would eliminate the replication of standards and would promote the small-scale commercial development that already defines Union City's commercial corridors.
- It is recommended that the boundaries between some of the residential and commercial zones be revised so as to better represent uses that are seen "on the ground."
- It is recommended that the boundaries of the MU Multiple-Use Zone be realigned so as to better represent the uses that are seen "on the ground."
- It is recommended that the parking requirements be revised for non-residential uses within the commercial zone as well as encourage shared parking strategies. This would eliminate barriers to small-scale commercial development and allow for further opportunities to create residential parking in the place of commercial parking.

Existing Redevelopment Plans

The following recommendations replace those of the March 2018 Reexamination Report:

- It is recommended the City evaluate all existing redevelopment plans to determine whether updates or revisions are needed.
- The D-BG Bus Garage Redevelopment Area was declared an "area in need of redevelopment" on June 29, 1999 and a subsequent Redevelopment Plan was prepared. The Redevelopment Plan allows for the maintenance of a bus garage on a portion of the site and residential and commercial uses on the remainder of the site. Due to changing conditions within the City and around the Redevelopment Area, it may be appropriate the permit other uses at the site. It is recommended the City prepare an update to the D-BG Bus Garage Redevelopment Plan and evaluate the site to determine if it is suitable to allow municipal uses geared toward the community, including but not limited to community centers, recreation complexes, gallery spaces, athletic complexes, etc.

Specific Recommended Changes to Development Regulations

The following revisions are recommended for the City's Land Development and Zoning Regulations based on updated goals and community input:

Zoning Regulations

Districts

- Eliminate all references to the R-M, C-C, and C-G districts (see Proposed Zoning Map).

Zoning Regulations for R Residential District:

The recommendations regarding the R Residential District made in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid.

Zoning Regulations for C-N Neighborhood Commercial District:

The recommendations regarding the C-N Neighborhood District made in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid.

Zoning Regulations for the MU Multiple Use District:

It is recommended the permitted uses and supplemental requirements remain the same.

Zoning Regulations for Overlay Districts:

It is recommended the JFK Overlay District and the UTOD Overlay District be removed in their entirety.

Zoning Regulations for Wireless Communication Facilities:

The recommendations regarding the Wireless Communication Facilities made in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid.

Bulk Schedule Recommendations:

- 223 Attachment 1, Schedule of Bulk Regulations, should be amended to read as follows:

R – Residential Zone District Bulk Standards	
Minimum Lot Area	2,500 square feet
Minimum Lot Width	25 feet
Minimum Lot Depth	100 feet
Minimum Front Yard	10 feet or prevailing setback
Minimum Side (one)	2 feet
Minimum Side (both)	5 feet
Minimum Rear	5 feet (clear and unobstructed)*
Maximum Height	4 stories / 45 feet
Maximum Building Coverage	80%
Maximum Lot Coverage	100%
Residential Requirement	Each building shall have a maximum of 3 residential units

*Mechanical / HVAC equipment is only permitted in rear yards a minimum 10-foot rear yard setback is provided.

C-N Neighborhood Community Zone District Bulk Standards	
Minimum Lot Area	2,500 square feet
Minimum Lot Width	25 feet
Minimum Lot Depth	100 feet
Minimum Front Yard	0 feet
Minimum Side (one)	0 feet or 5 feet if provided
Minimum Side (both)	N/A
Minimum Rear	20 feet
Maximum Height	4 stories / 45 feet
Maximum Building Coverage	80%
Maximum Lot Coverage	100%
Residential Requirement	Each building shall have a maximum of 3 residential units above ground floor commercial

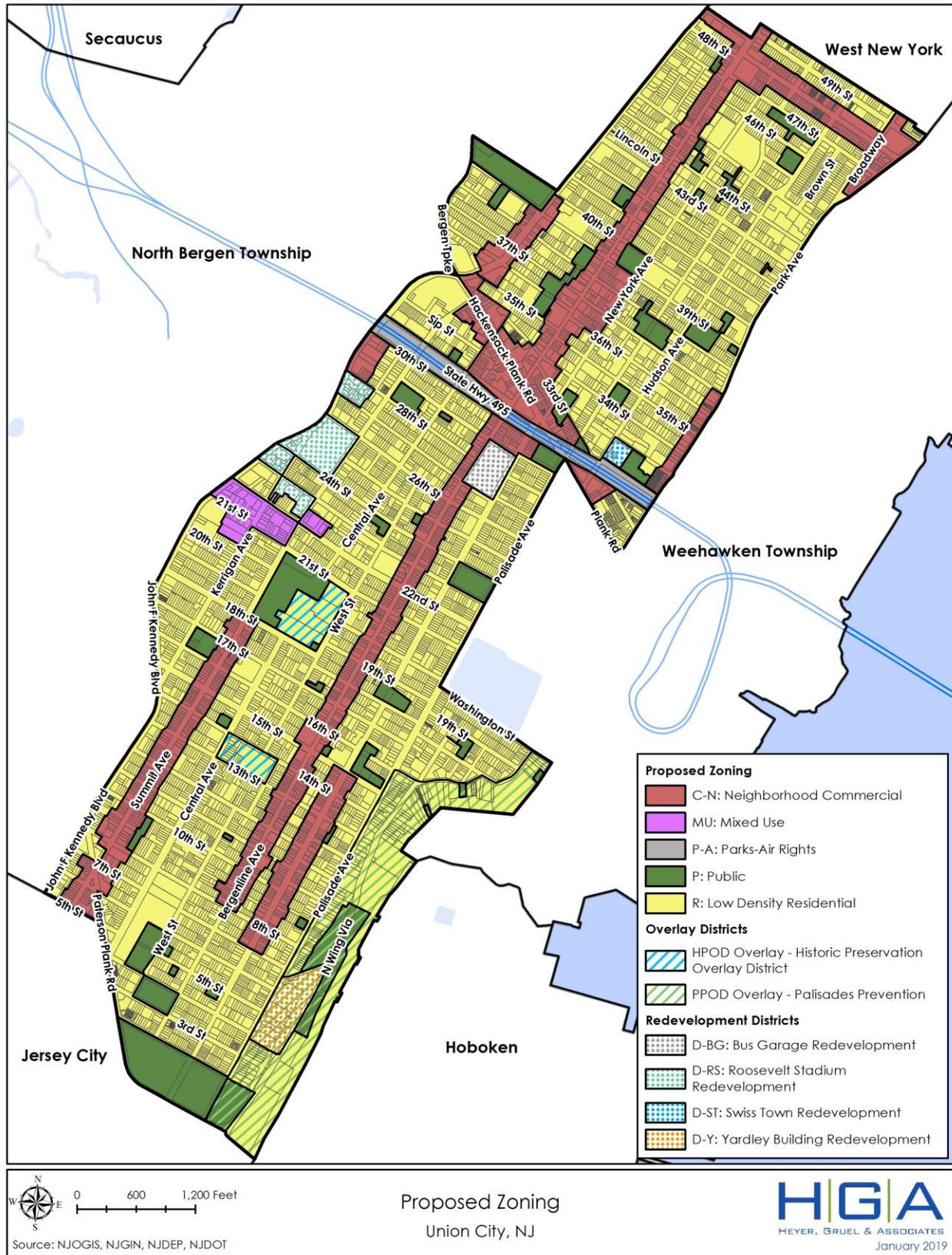
MU Multiple Use Zone District Bulk Standards			
	Low-Rise Apartments	Mid-Rise Apartments	All Other Uses
Minimum Lot Area	10,000 square feet	12,500 square feet	5,000 square feet
Minimum Lot Width	100 feet	100 feet	50 feet
Minimum Lot Depth	100 feet	100 feet	100 feet
Minimum Front Yard	10 feet or prevailing setback per §223-8B(4)	10 feet or prevailing setback per §223-8B(4)	10 feet
Minimum Side (one)	3 feet	5 feet	3 feet
Minimum Side (both)	12 feet	15 feet	12 feet
Minimum Rear	25 feet	25 feet	25 feet
Maximum Height	3 stories/40 feet	4 stories/50 feet (5 stories/60 feet for lot area of 15,000 square feet or greater)	4 stories/50 feet (5 stories/60 feet for lot area of 15,000 square feet or greater)
Maximum Building Coverage	60%	50% / 70% when parking provided in building	50%/70% when parking provided in building
Maximum Lot Coverage	75%	75% / 90% when parking provided in building	75%/90 when parking provided in building

Conditional Use Standards:

The recommendations regarding the Conditional Use Standards made in the March 2018 Reexamination Report remain valid.

Land Development Regulations

In concert with the proposed zoning ordinance amendments, the City should conduct a thorough review of its other land development standards to ensure compatibility with the changes to the zoning ordinance.



SECTION E

Recommendations of the Planning Board concerning the incorporation of Redevelopment Plans into the Land Use Element of the Master Plan

No new areas are recommended for investigation as redevelopment areas at this time.