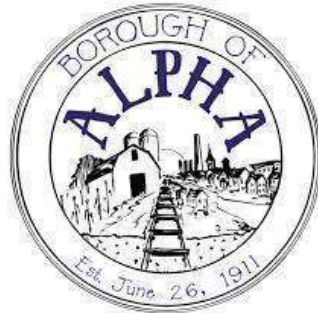


Borough of Alpha, Warren County
HIGHLANDS CENTER DESIGNATION PLAN



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NJ. Lic. # PP-3213



HIGHLANDS CENTER DESIGNATION PLAN

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INTRODUCTION

Alpha is a borough in Warren County, New Jersey, United States. As of the 2010 United States Census, the Borough's population was 2,328, reflecting a decline of 154 (-6.6%) from the 2,482 counted in the 2000 Census, which had in turn declined by 48 (-1.9%) from the 2,530 counted in the 1990 Census.

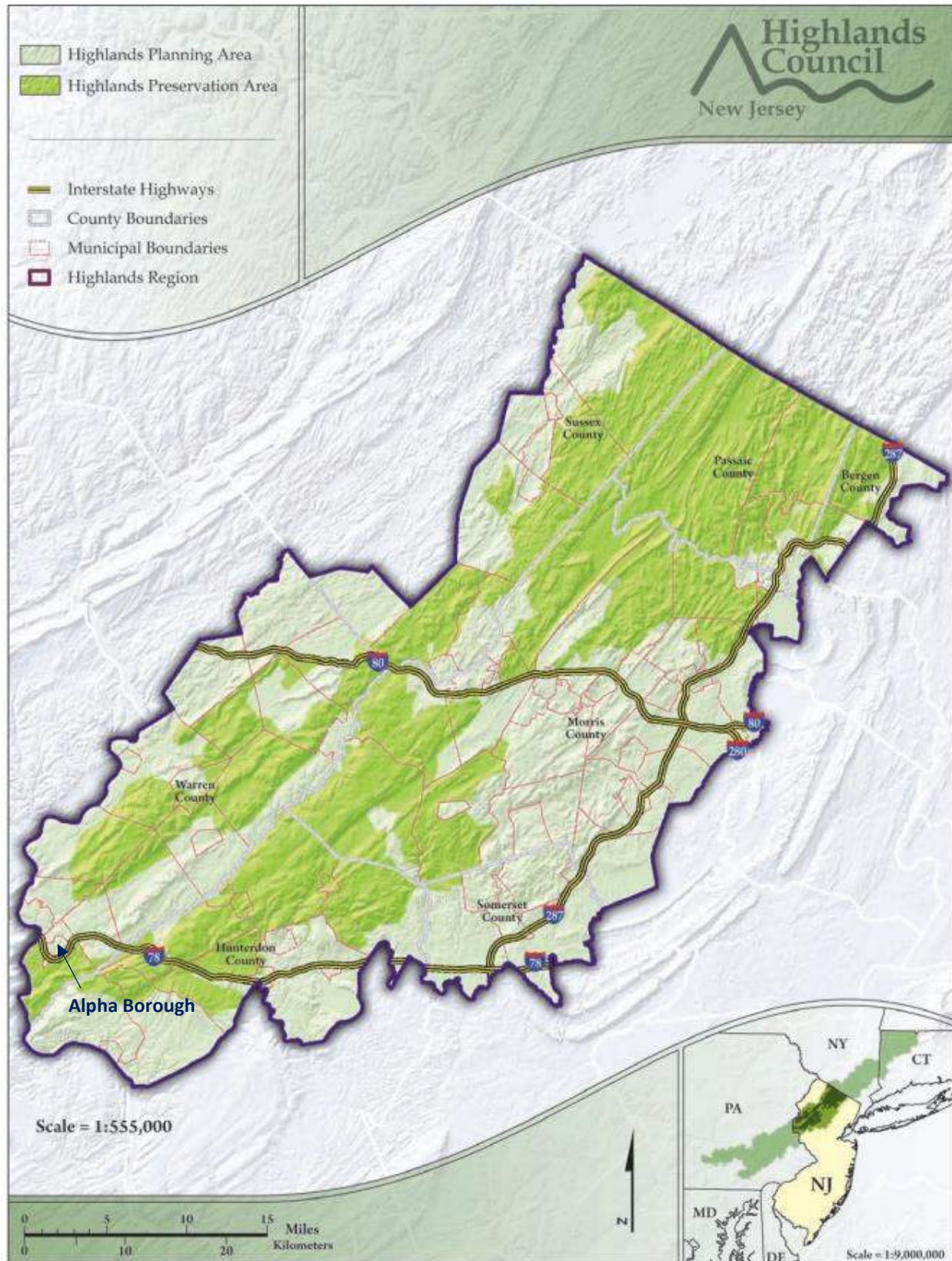
It is one of 88 municipalities protected by and subject to the provisions of the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act ("Highlands Act," N.J.S.A. 13:20-1 et seq.). The Highlands Act was enacted by the State Legislature on August 10, 2004 for the purpose of protecting, enhancing, and restoring Highlands natural resources, in particular water resources, which provide drinking water to over 5 million New Jersey residents. The Highlands Act created the Highlands Water Protection and Planning Council (the "Highlands Council") and charged it with crafting a comprehensive master plan for the Highlands Region. To complete that task, the Highlands Council engaged in a four-year planning process involving extensive scientific and technical analysis of the Region, along with an intensive program of public outreach and participation.

The Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) was adopted by the Highlands Council on July 17, 2008, and became effective on September 8, 2008. As the product of a long-term, participatory, and region-wide planning effort, the RMP is representative of the collective response of the wider community to the Legislature's call for a Highlands comprehensive master plan. The Borough places value in the regional planning process that was undertaken to fully develop the RMP and acknowledges its role in furthering the vision that it represents.

The New Jersey Highlands is 1,343 square mile area in the northeast and lies within seven counties (Hunterdon, Somerset, Sussex, Warren, Morris, Passaic and Bergen) and includes 88 municipalities. The Highlands Act establishes major subareas within the Highlands region – the Preservation Area and the Planning Area (see Highlands Region Map on the next page).

The Highlands Act designated specific boundaries for the Preservation Area, which consists of nearly 415,000 acres located in 52 municipalities within the seven counties. The Planning Area consists of nearly 445,000 acres located in 83 municipalities including Alpha. The Borough of Alpha is located fully within the Planning Area and affirmatively seeks to align its land use planning program with the provisions of the RMP. The Borough's Center Designation is intended to be a cohesive element of the Borough's Master Plan and consistent with the Highlands Regional Master Plan.

In 2010 the Borough's Petition for Plan Conformance was accompanied by a request for a Highlands Center Designation which, after review and discussion with the Borough, resulted in the Highlands Council Staff recommending the Highlands Council approve the designation of a Highlands Center for a portion of the Planning Area, conditioned upon the completion of a planning process to refine the proposal. This Plan addresses the expansion of the Center to include all parcels within the Borough except the R-1A Agricultural District Zone, located in the southwestern corner of the Borough and speaks to the Goals and Objectives of that expansion.



Highlands Region

Public Outreach Strategy

In accordance with the Municipal Land Use Law, each Master Plan Element will be publicly noticed and will provide the public an opportunity to provide comments and feedback on each Plan Element. This also applies to any ordinance revision that will be publicly noticed and adopted by the Borough Council. For this project and for other such Highlands' related projects, specific tasks in the Implementation Plan/Schedule may require additional public outreach and public outreach may include community visioning events, information sessions, and meetings with stakeholders, as needed.

To inform the community about this project, and to obtain feedback on it, planning consultants from Van Cleef Engineering participated in the Borough's first annual Fall Fest on November 4, 2021. It is estimated that about 500 to 600 people attended the event as this was first of its kind. Food, beverages and toys for kids were sponsored by many organizations that are located in the town or have an interest in the community. As part of the public outreach strategy, surveys were distributed to fest-goers and the planners engaged with the public on the topics of Open Space and Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety in the town. This activity brought about awareness among residents and visitors about the distinct planning needs of various areas throughout the town. Between the face-to-face conversations and the surveys, which were also linked on the Borough's website, public outreach resulted in about 50 responses.

People from varying age groups responded to both surveys. With regard to active transportation, survey participants were concerned about multiple safety aspects for both biking and walking, including the lack of safe routes to school. Among the open space responses, respondents' two favorite parks were identified as Alpha Park and Alpha Memorial Park because of the variety of activities, the open areas, and pavilion. The most valuable recreation programs among survey participants are Adventure and Outdoor activities. The survey asked "What would make Alpha's parks better?" Respondents agreed on improvements such as "walking trails all around parks and fields, new playground equipment, restrooms, Dog Park, repaired basketball courts, better parking, and more equipment".

These survey responses will help to guide the Planning Board and Council on prioritizing projects as funding becomes available for implementation. A complete summary of the survey responses can be found in Attachment A of this plan.

Planning Background

The planning of future land use decisions can inform goals for economic development and promote sustainable development within the Borough. This plans seeks to identify ways to improve the diversity of development, promote place making strategies and improve bicycle and pedestrian safety in the Borough. All of which should improve economic development in the business corridor and promote the conservation of important environmental resources.

A review of past planning efforts assists in directing future land use decisions. Alpha's last comprehensive master plan update was prepared in 1998 and consisted of a land use element and housing element. A stormwater management plan was added in 2006 and an open space and recreation plan was added in 2007. Reexamination Reports were prepared in 2005 and in 2018, where improvements in the business corridor and redevelopment options were prioritized. A Quarry Redevelopment Plan was also adopted in 2015 to outline potential future uses of the "eastern" quarry once it fully closes. The Borough considers it a high

priority at this time to continue support for these issues in the Borough while expanding future planning efforts to include growth directed to existing developed areas, protecting the environs, and promoting a walkable and bike-able town with updated and improved streetscapes and place-making elements.

PLANNING CONTEXT

Since the 2018 Reexamination Report, the nation engaged in the latest Census count (2020). In preparing this Center Designation Plan, we have summarized this data in order to help plan for future growth in the Borough.

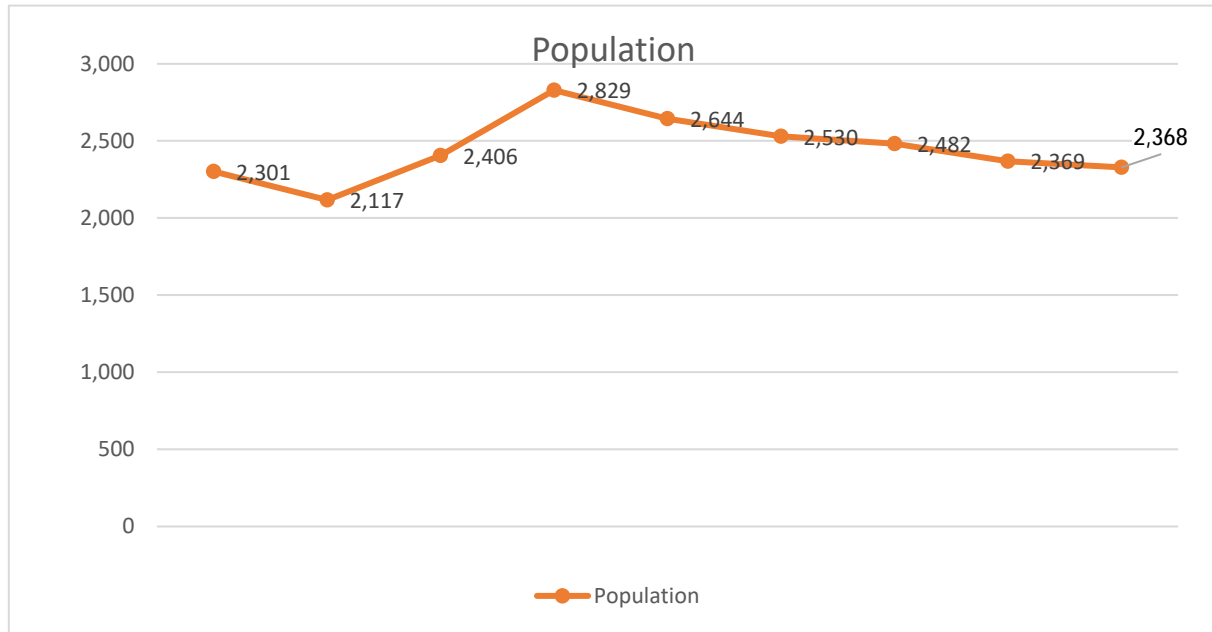


Figure 1: Total Population

Alpha's population in 2020 is 2,368 which is almost the same as the 2010 population of 2,369. This continued a steady decline from the 1970 population of 2,849 (see Figure above). That being said, however, Alpha's population has remained relatively stable over the last 70 years, fluctuating by only 712 people.

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) issued population and employment projections on August 24, 2009 (pre-2010 Census). As reported by NJTPA, the number of residents in Alpha was expected to increase to 2,850 by the year 2035 (see Table II-1), which would equal the Borough's 1970 population.

From these numbers we can see that Alpha has not been a growing community in the past 20 years. The Borough has enjoyed a small town character for decades and intends to keep that character. This plan – and others – aims to help the town maintain its identity as a small town while supporting the existing businesses and neighborhoods to continue to thrive at their current scale.

Density

Alpha Borough covers 1.7 square miles. It is the second smallest municipality in Warren County after Belvidere, which is 1.35 square miles. Alpha was the fifth most densely populated municipality in Warren County in 2010 at 1,316 persons per square mile (PPSM) (see **Table 1**) and one of only six municipalities in the county with a population density greater than 1,000. The Borough's density contributes to its quaint nature and also makes it a walkable town. This plan recommends strategies for safer pedestrian and bicycling options.

Phillipsburg was the most densely populated municipality at 4,672 PPSM and Hardwick was the least densely populated at only 45 PPSM. The overall density in Warren County was 298 PPSM, which is representative of the largely rural nature of the county. The statewide density was slightly lower than Alpha at 1,007.

Table 1: Population Density Rank (2010)	
Municipality	Persons Per Square Mile
1. Phillipsburg	4,672
2. Washington Borough	3,313
3. Hackettstown	2,778
4. Belvidere	1,986
5. ALPHA	1,316
6. Lopatcong	1,076
7. Greenwich	512
8. Oxford	405
9. Washington Township	372
10. Independence	277
11. Pohatcong	257
12. Mansfield	253
13. Liberty	245
14. Allamuchy	213
15. Blairstown	193
16. White	171
17. Franklin	131
18. Knowlton	120
19. Harmony	111
20. Hope	102
21. Frelinghuysen	94
22. Hardwick	45
Warren County	298
New Jersey	1,007

Age

Median age in Alpha, as illustrated in Tables 2 and 3, is on par with the county and state. The median age increased between 2000 and 2010 in keeping with the county and statewide trends. Table 4 shows the ratio of male to female residents.

Table 2: Age (Borough & County)			
Alpha Borough		Warren County	
Age group	#	Age group	#
0-19	406	0-19	62,513
20-44	566	20-44	69,891
45-64	675	45-64	64,693
65+	435	65+	45,950
5 to 19	273	5 to 19	49,298
Source : US Census 2006-2020 ACS, DP03			

Table 3: Median Age			
	2000	2010	2020
Alpha	37.7	40.6	46.5
Warren County	37.6	41.5	44.2
New Jersey	36.7	39	39.5

Table 4: Gender Ratio	
Total Population	2,328
Male	991
Female	1091
%	89.4
Source : US Census 2006-2020 ACS, DP03	

In Table 2 we can see that a larger set of the population are between the 45 to 64 age group and there are about 273 people in the school age group. In Table 3 we can see that in 2010, Alpha had a lower percentage of residents under age 20 than the county and the state. On the other end of the age spectrum, Alpha had a higher percentage of residents 65 and older than the county and state. Alpha ranked slightly lower than the county and state in terms of school aged children. All but the 45 to 64 age group dropped as a percentage of the population between 2000 and 2010. The 45 to 64 cohort experienced a fairly substantial increase.

These tables indicate a need for the Borough to continue planning for its aging population and provide services geared toward this group. In addition, amenities like benches along the business corridor or near parks and open spaces make those areas more accessible for people of all abilities.

Income

Income is based on two standard measurements of income – median household and per capita. Alpha’s median income ranked lower than the county and the state in 2010, as did the Per Capita income (see Table 5).

Table 5: Income		
	Per Capita	Median Household
Alpha	\$28,567	\$63,953
Warren County	\$32,985	\$71,364
New Jersey	\$34,858	\$69,811
<i>Source : US Census 2006-2010 ACS, DP03</i>		

Resident Occupation

Table 6 provides an overview of the industries where Alpha residents work. More than three-quarters of Alpha’s workforce are employed in the private sector, which is on par with the county and state. The three leading industry types employing Alpha residents are (1) manufacturing, (2) educational services, health care and social assistance, and (3) retail trade. The highest ranked industry group in both the county and state is educational services, health care and social assistance.

In 2010, the management, business, science, & arts occupations ranked first among Borough, County, and State residents although to a lesser degree in Alpha. Alpha residents reported a higher level of sales and office occupations and production, transportation, & material moving than county or state residents as a whole (see Table 6).

Table 6: Occupation					
	Management, business, science, & arts	Service	Sales and Office	Natural resources, construction, & maintenance	Production, transportation & material moving
Alpha	29.5	15.8	28.8	9.0	16.9
Warren County	37.2	15.7	25.8	10.0	11.4
New Jersey	39.4	15.8	26.5	7.8	10.4
<i>Source: US Census 2006-2010 ACS, DP03</i>					
<i>”Occupation” is the kind of work a person does to earn a living; “Industry” is the type of activity at a person’s place of work.</i>					

MASTER PLAN & 2018 REEXAMINATION REPORT

The 1998 Master Plan focused on a variety of issues that faced the Borough with respect to an influx of industrial development in the town, and in nearby towns, and the impact that the growth of industrial uses could have on the community. Traffic and circulation were addressed as important to ensure the character of the neighborhoods would not be compromised, especially with regard to large trucks and the frequency of their trips into and out of the town. Similarly, ground and surface water protection were also important factors in the conversation of developing industrial uses in appropriate locations. The Borough's soils are such that groundwater is more susceptible to contamination in most areas and needs to be considered in siting intense uses. Given these conditions, the Borough sought to concentrate development and create a business district that services the Borough's residents as well as nearby communities.

In 2005 the Master Plan was reexamined but with little to no recommendations for zoning changes, it left much of the Land Use Ordinance unchanged from earlier years. The 2018 Reexamination Report identified the Borough's petition for Plan Conformance with the Highlands Council, which was approved in 2012. The Master Plan Reexamination Report reviewed the Borough's 1998 Master Plan for consistency with the Highlands Regional Master Plan and identified the planning tasks which needed to be completed to conform to the Highlands RMP including development of the initial Center Plan and adoption of ordinances to implement resource protections. The report noted that while changes to zoning had been initiated in the business corridor, additional upgrades to aesthetics and streetscapes along much of the main business corridor needed to be completed. The report also identified the priority of maintaining the small-town, village character of the Borough, which this Center Designation Plan seeks to do.

The report also identified several properties as "areas of interest" for potential redevelopment sites.

- Block 97 Lot 2 – This parcel is located at 801 Vulcanite Street and is currently developed with a single-family structure and frame shed. The parcel had been subdivided as part of a Last Will and Testament of the owner and therefore available for development. It is located in the R-4 Zone. Development on this lot would have to either comply with those development regulations of the zone or be subject to a Redevelopment Plan, should one be authorized.
- Formerly Block 96 Lot 5 – This parcel is approximately 22 acres in size and was subdivided into a series of Blocks and Lots to accommodate an affordable housing, townhouse development. The subdivided lots make up the AH (Affordable Housing) district in the Borough which permits single-family detached and attached units, townhouse units (not to exceed 6 units per acre), multi-family dwellings (not to exceed 12 dwelling units per acre), senior housing, parks and playgrounds and public or private schools and day-care facilities. Construction on this housing development has yet to begin and is therefore available for development or redevelopment. The subdivision includes:
 - Block 96.01 Lots 5.01 through 5.40;
 - Block 96.02 Lots 5.53 through 5.82;
 - Block 96.03 Lots 5.55 through 5.61;
 - Block 96.04 Lots 5.83 through 5.92;
 - Block 96.05 Lots 5.41 through 5.94.
- Block 100.01 Lot 10 – This parcel is 37 acres in size and is bounded by I-78 to the north, Edge Road to the east, an inactive rail line to the west, and the border with Pohatcong Township to the south. It is

located in the I (Industrial) district of the Borough which permits a number of industrial, light manufacturing, agricultural, scientific / research, and warehousing uses, among other similar uses (§410-20 Zoning). It is currently in agricultural uses, is not preserved, and is therefore available for development. The property is also not in a sewer service area and therefore any proposed development would be limited in intensity, unless a sewer connection could be obtained. As of the drafting of this plan, the Borough has applied to the NJDEP for this parcel to be included in the Sewer Service Area.

- Not Mentioned in 2018 Reexamination Report: Block 98, Lot 2 – This parcel was not mentioned in the 2018 Reexamination report but is zoned Industrial, located in the Center Designation, but is not currently within the Sewer Service Area.

Land Use and Planning Strategies

This Center Designation Plan also supports and promotes the purposes of the Borough's Land Use Ordinance planning strategies, especially in relation to the possibility for redevelopment and the areas identified above. This plan affirms and restates the following Land Use and Planning Strategies:

- Identify opportunities to improve Center zoning for increased development in the Center and as recommended by Center sub-areas.
- Update Master Plan to incorporate recommendations from this Plan.
- Update ordinances to incorporate recommendations from this Plan.
- Update Open Space & Recreation Plan.
- Incorporate Placemaking Strategies:
- Identify opportunities for public art and events.
- Identify opportunities for place making through municipally-sponsored activities, grants and public-private partnerships.
- Develop gateway features into the Center.
- Sponsor and work with local businesses to encourage Pop-Up events/uses;
- Continue work on streetscapes.
- Identify opportunities to widen sidewalks, encourage outdoor dining.
- Develop wayfinding signage.

With the Center now incorporating all parcels within the Borough except the R-1A Agricultural District Zone, located in the southwestern corner of the Borough, these reaffirmed strategies will apply throughout the town.

Highlands Regional Master Plan

The Highlands Water Protection and Planning Act passed in 2004 with an overarching goal to protect drinking water resources, along with open space and natural resources. The act was followed by adoption of the Highlands Regional Master Plan (RMP) in 2008, which laid out the goals and policies for the Highlands Region.

The Highlands Region is divided into the Planning Area and the Preservation Area. The Borough of Alpha is located completely within the Planning Area. Further, the Highlands Regional master Plan identifies the Borough of Alpha as a "Center" in its Planning Area. "Centers" in the RMP are defined as "an area where development and redevelopment is planned and encouraged". Highlands Centers are intended to support

balance in the Highlands Region by providing for sustainable economic growth, while protecting critical natural resources. The Borough of Alpha identifies with the following RMP Goals, Policies, and Objectives:

- **Policy 5A4** To provide for safe and efficient pedestrian connections including features such as sidewalks, proper lighting, signage, shelters, and green street initiatives consistent with the NJDOT's Pedestrian Safety Initiative.
- **Policy 5A5** To promote safe routes for children to travel to and from school in support of the NJDOT's Safe Routes to School Program.
- **Policy 5C4** To support economic development by ensuring that transportation planning and improvements support regional development, redevelopment and tourism opportunities.
- **Policy 5E1** To promote land use patterns that support a balance of jobs to housing as a means of reducing average trip lengths.
- **Policy 5E3** To promote land use patterns which facilitate use of alternative modes of transportation including walking and the use of bicycles.
- **GOAL 6F and All 6F Policies** Support of compact development, mixed use development and redevelopment and maximization of water, wastewater and transit infrastructure investments for future use of land and development within the Existing Community Zone.
- **Policy 6H6** To integrate public parks and green spaces into development and redevelopment projects and ensure restoration of impaired natural resources to the extent required by law, at a minimum, and where feasible to a greater extent to maximize long-term value of the project.
- **Objective 6H8a** Development and redevelopment initiatives shall encourage the use of HDC as a means to enhance the existing or adjacent community while protecting local and regional natural resources.
- **Policy 6H9** To incorporate smart growth principles and green building design and technology in development and redevelopment initiatives.
- **GOAL 6N** Use of Smart Growth principles, including low impact development, to guide development and redevelopment in the Highlands region.
- **GOAL 6O** Market-rate and affordable housing sufficient to meet the needs of the Highlands region within the context of economic, social and environmental considerations and constraints.
- **GOAL 8A** Sustainable economic development in the highlands region.
- **GOAL 8C** Expansion of compatible and sustainable tourism and recreation within the Highlands Region.
- **GOAL 8D** Expansion of innovative technology and entrepreneurial businesses including home office, energy efficiency, and resource conservation enterprises in the Highlands Region.
- **GOAL 8E** Estimate and track over time the costs and benefits associated with plan implementation and the protection of critical resources of the highlands region.
- **GOAL 10A** Maximize municipal participation to ensure the regional master plan achieves its long term goals of protecting, enhancing and restoring Highlands resources and maintaining a sustainable economy in the Highlands region.

CENTER AREA DESCRIPTION

The purpose of the Highlands Designated Center (HDC) is to identify certain areas within the Planning Areas where growth in the form of infill and/or redevelopment, improvement of open spaces, and other smart growth strategies are focused. The Borough of Alpha's original Center generally encompassed the business district along the length of Route 519 and industrial areas to the east of the major business corridor.

Figure 1



Through a series of conversations between the Borough and the Highlands Council, the Borough has opted to expand the Center to include most of the Borough's parcels, bringing the boundary in line with the Borough's municipal borders with the exception of a few farmland parcels to the southwest (**Figure 2: Proposed HDC Boundary**). The main reason for this expansion is to ensure smart growth development is promoted throughout the town and that uses are situated appropriately to their locations. This updated Center Designation Plan recognizes the expanded boundary limits and offers analysis and recommendations on how to address any outstanding items from the previous Center Designation Plan.

These provisions will override most of the current Highlands Master Plan Element with respect to proposed development and redevelopment activities within the designated portion of the Borough, with retention of applicable and appropriate Conservation Plan language regarding protection of Highlands's resources, as applicable.

Figure 2

Overview

The Center Designated area covers 1,089 parcels and approximately 859 acres in land area, roughly 78.35% of the Borough's land area. The newly expanded Center will include a mix of uses to reflect current conditions: small neighborhood commercial, large scale commercial, industrial, offices, quarry, multifamily and single-family residential, parks, playgrounds, the school and municipal offices. The larger scale developments, quarries and industrial uses are located to the outer boundaries of the Center and in some cases closer to major roads, although not all accessible to I-78. The small neighborhood commercial and offices are located closer to the center of town while the residential, parks, playgrounds, and the school flank the business corridor, providing opportunities for walkability.

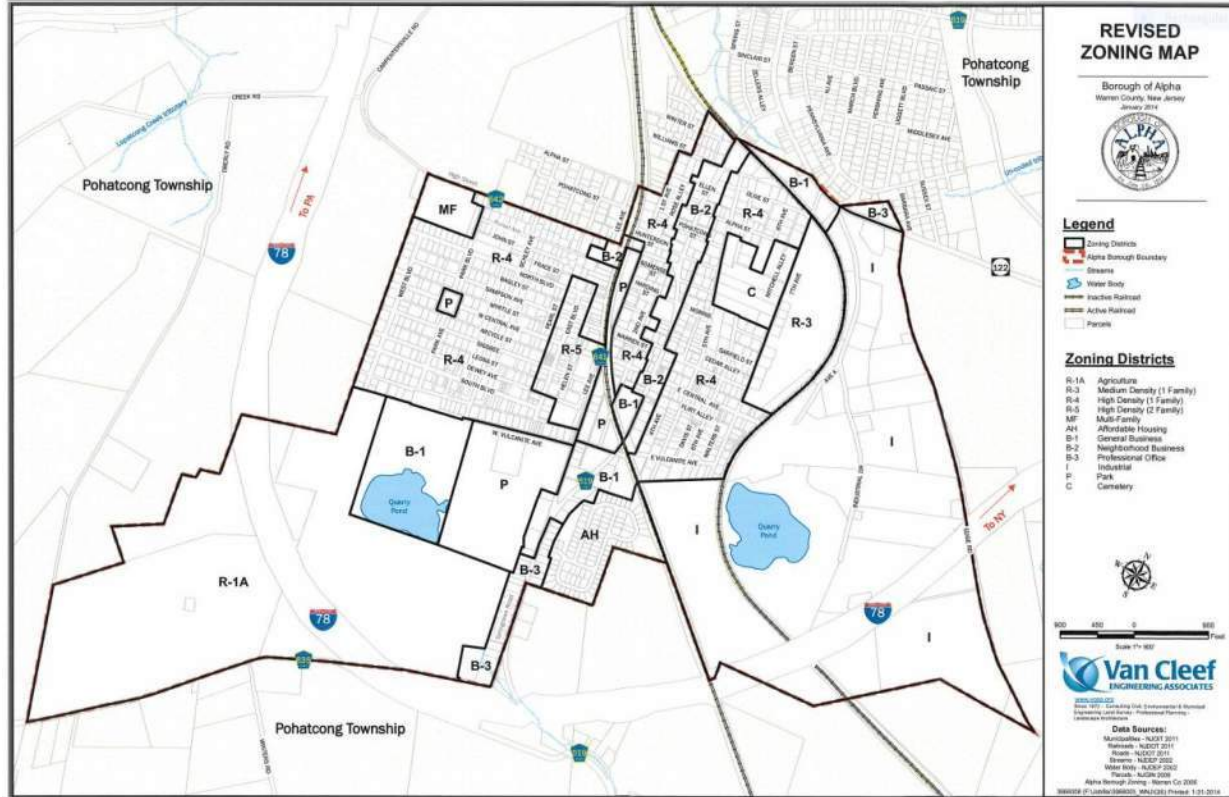
The redevelopment areas of interest are scattered throughout the Borough and additional areas may be considered to support redevelopment of dilapidated sites.

It is noted that, per N.J.A.C. 7:15, the amendment to the Highlands Master Plan Element and Highlands Center Designation Plan could also modify the sewer service area in the area-wide Water Quality Management Plan.

CENTER ZONING

The zoning for the Center is dominated by residential (29.84%) and industrial zones (24.51%), with the remaining areas in Commercial Zones. Agricultural uses dominate the south-western portion of the town, but the Borough does not have agricultural zoning and thus it falls within residential zoning.

Figure 3

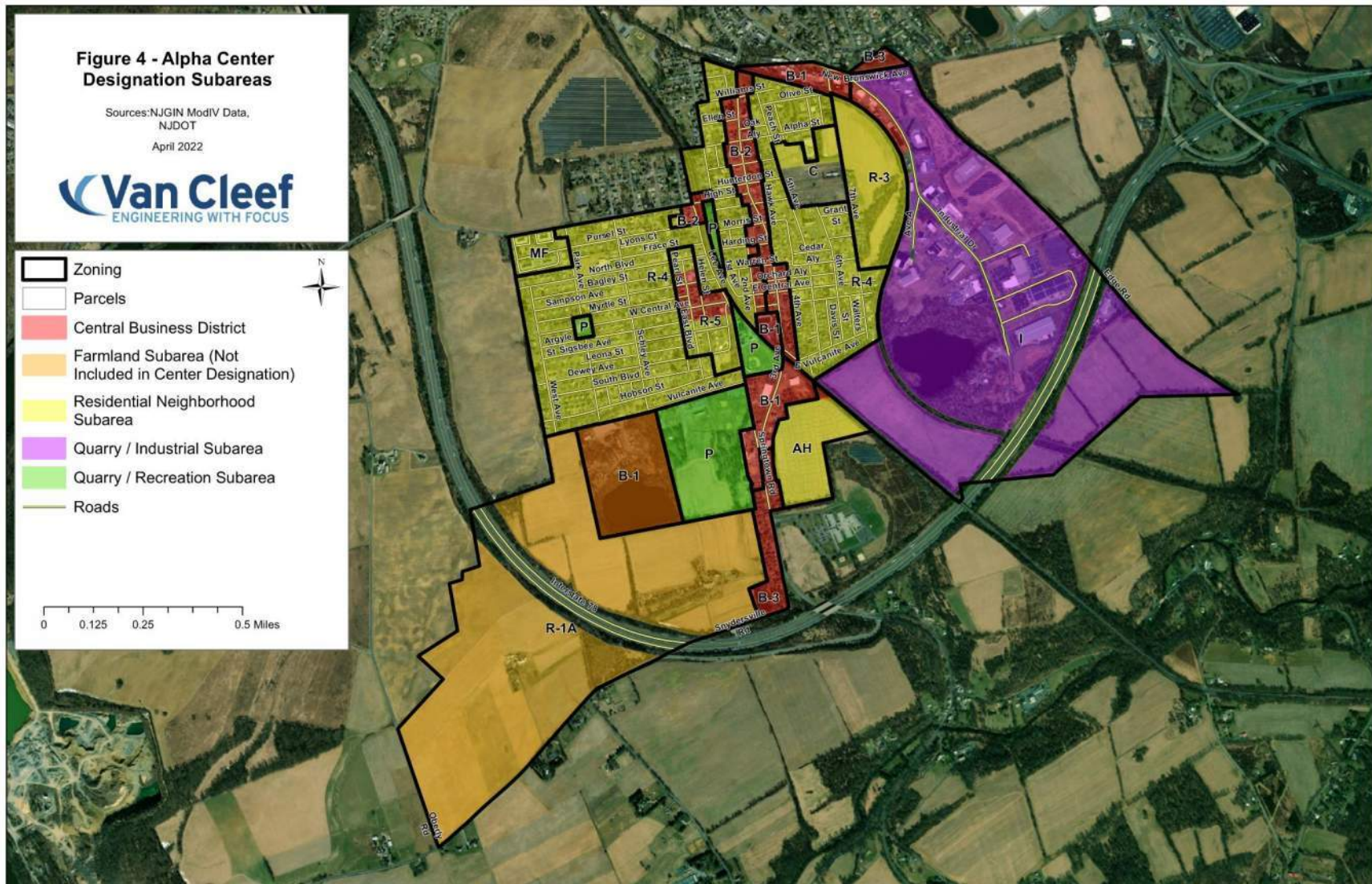


Analysis of Existing Land Uses

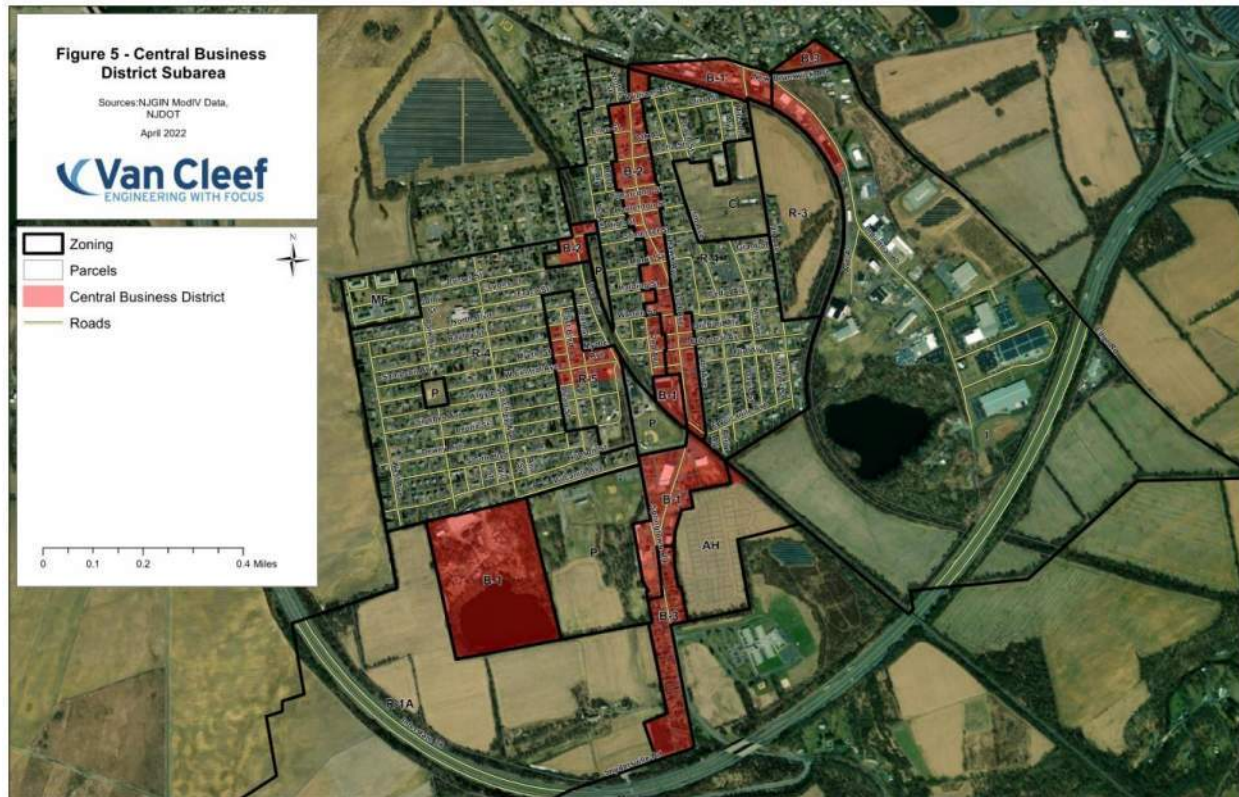
The Center can be organized into five (5) sub-areas for ease of further study: **Central Business District**, **Quarry/Industrial**, **Quarry/Recreation**, **Farmland (Not Included in Center Designation)** and **Neighborhood Residential Areas**. Although we have identified the Farmland Subarea as part of the study area, it is for context purposes only. The Borough does not have a desire to change any part of the agricultural areas. They are currently zoned for residential development, however the Borough considers them farmland.

Subarea	Acreage	% Acreage
Neighborhood Residential	327.62	29.84
Central Business District	96.47	8.79
Quarry / Parks	82.61	7.52
Quarry / Industrial	269.05	24.51
Farmland (Not Included in Center Designation)	269.05	24.51
Non-Categorized Areas	53.06	4.83
Alpha Borough	1,097.86	
Total		100

Figure 4



Central Business District

Figure 5**Figure 5**, showing properties in red as business district

The Central Business District Subarea consists of properties along the Route 519 “spine” of the central business district in the Borough. The area is flanked by residential properties, making for a very walkable “downtown” area. Properties in the Central Business District Subarea are a mix of small neighborhood commercial/retail, office, and light industrial. This area stretches almost the entire length of the borough from north to south and includes the B-1, B-2, and B-3 zoning districts. Improvements to the Central Business District Subarea could include the addition of crosswalks, streetscapes, outdoor dining, and wayfinding signage to local businesses, parks, and areas of interest.

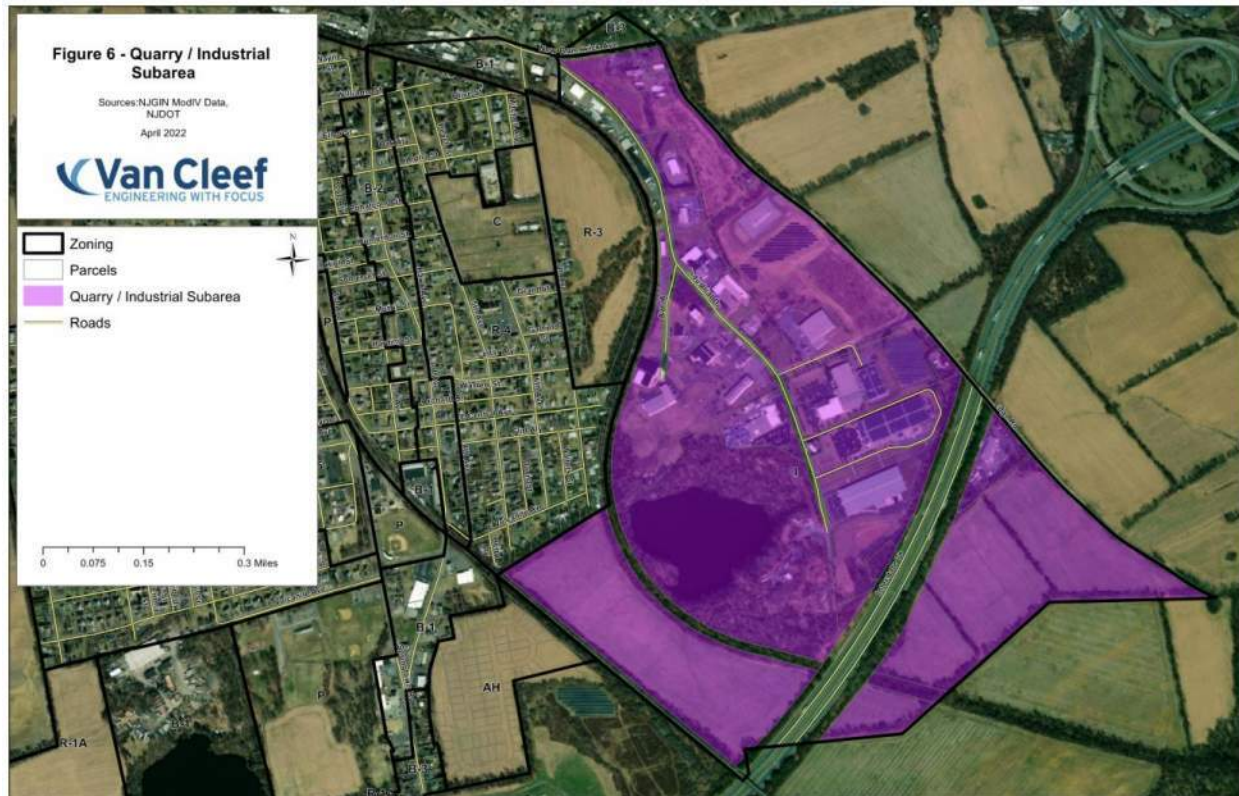
The Central Business District Subarea contains single-family residential properties that creates a disjointed aesthetic along the streetscape.



The photos above show typical land uses in the area, including the mix of residential and commercial uses.

Quarry / Industrial

Figure 6



The Industrial / Quarry District has many industries that are sustainable and energy efficient. These industries together form a strong sense of revenue generation for the Borough. The industrial district includes vehicle and storage areas that are part of the industrial uses. Alpha has always been welcoming warehouses and renewable energy facilities in its industrial district. The accessibility to I-78 and residential neighborhoods have helped flourish the industrial zones.

A wide variety of industries are coming forward to be a part of Alpha Borough. Industries like warehouses and renewable energy facilities are becoming a trend in Warren County and are both growing industries. Through this plan the Borough is identifying the areas where this type of use would be appropriate.

The photos below show the typical industrial land uses in the Borough.



Quarry / Recreation

Figure 7



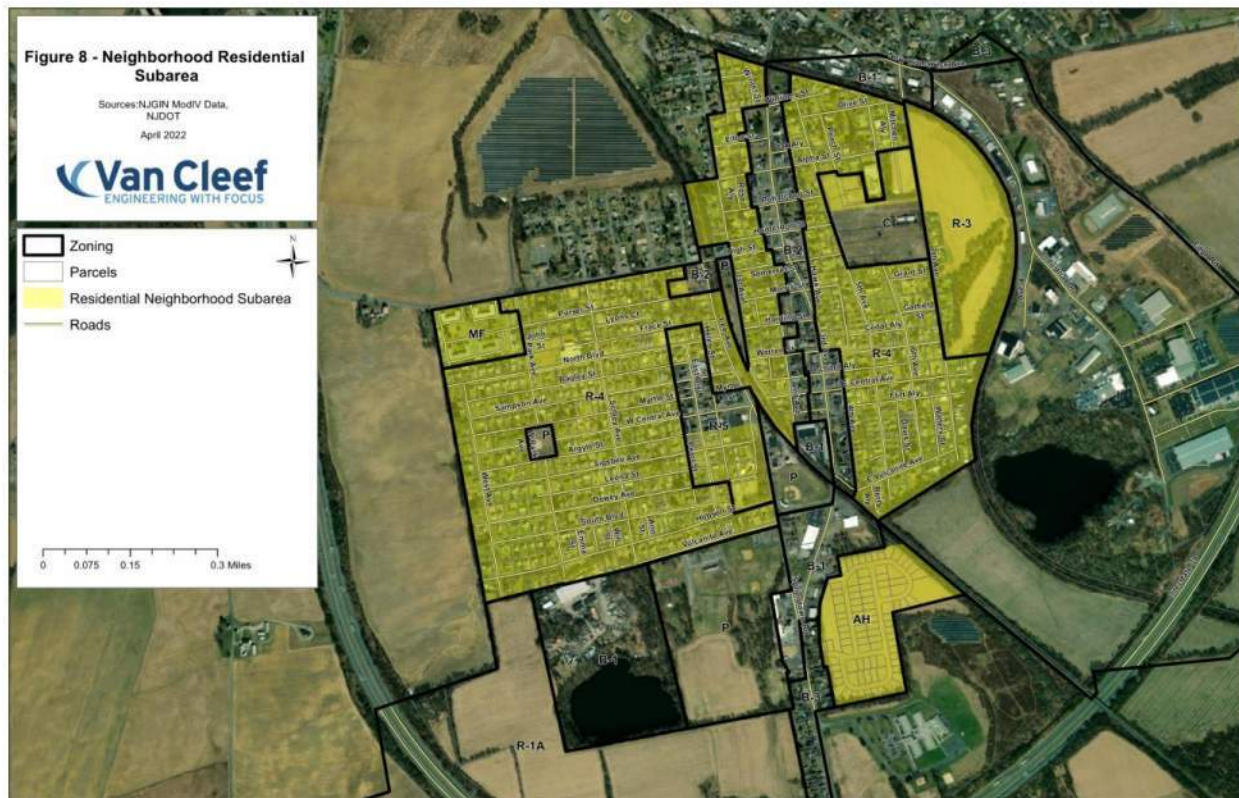
Alpha has many parks including, Alpha Memorial Park, Alpha Park, and several playgrounds and ballparks. Alpha Park is the most popular and is where the Borough recently held their first Fall Fest, a community event meant to bring the borough together and introduce residents to local businesses and organizations. Residents of Alpha use their parks for sports, events and community activities. Alpha Park has a playground and baseball field, while Alpha Memorial Park has benches for people to relax and enjoy nature.

The parks are generally used for recreation activities although, in our open space survey, it was seen that residents of Alpha Borough use the parks for biking (about 20%). Supporting this idea, festival-goers also commented that they would like to see more active transportation like biking throughout town. The Borough should plan appropriate routes and connections and potentially build infrastructure for this purpose. Similarly, amenities such as bike racks, wayfinding signs, and facilities for long-distance cyclists coming into town would help to improve on the influx of people biking.



Neighborhood Residential

Figure 8



Properties in the residential neighborhood subarea consist of both single family and multifamily housing. Evergreen Village has 98 apartment units which is the only multifamily residential development in the Borough. The Neighborhood Residential Subarea stretches across the Borough from east to west of Alpha, and occupies the largest land area of the Borough.

In order to maintain the quaint, small-town character of the residential neighborhoods, the Borough should consider creating design guidelines to improve the architectural details of existing housing, as well as any new development. As the business district grows and thrives, it will attract more people to the residential districts.

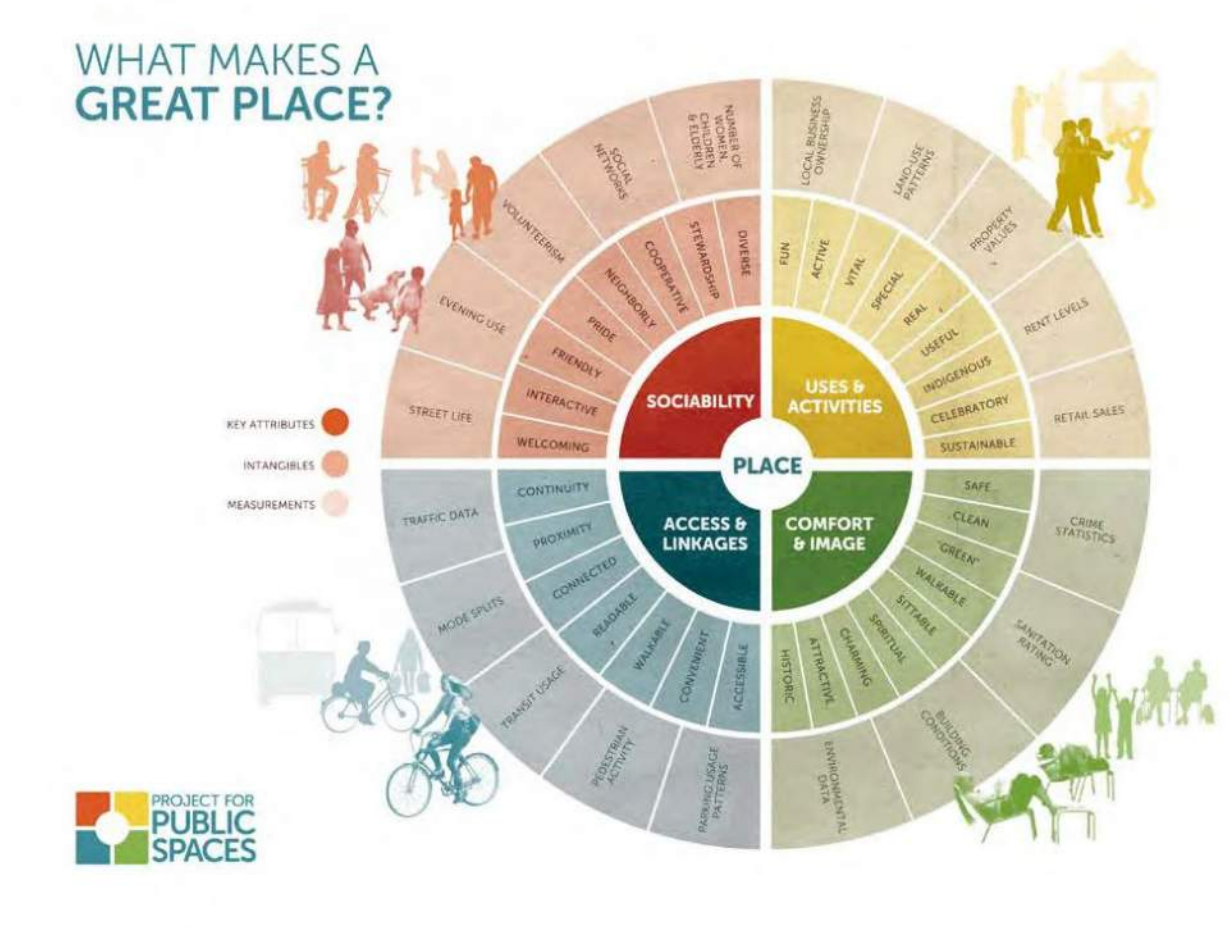
The photos below show typical housing units in the Borough. There is a variety of styles including: Cape Cod, Colonial, and Farmhouse style homes.



PLACEMAKING

Each sub-area of the Center Designation Plan hosts opportunities for placemaking in some form: Wayfinding, Streetscapes, Public Art, and Walkability / Bike-ability. These distinct locations can be seen as providing opportunities for Alpha to increase the unique sense of place associated with each of the Center Areas. Using tested and proven concepts from urban design outlets across the country as a guide, the following recommendations for improvements in each of the Center Areas area presented below. We also recommend revisiting previous recommendations from the Land Use & Circulation Plan which provided options for pedestrian safety in the Business Corridor as viable projects for improving safety and accessibility.

“WHAT IS PLACEMAKING? As both an overarching idea and a hands-on approach for improving a neighborhood, city, or region, placemaking inspires people to collectively reimagine and reinvent public spaces as the heart of every community. Strengthening the connection between people and the places they share, placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.” –Project for Public Spaces.



Placemaking in Alpha



Businesses along the main commercial corridor can add sidewalks, landscaping, and outdoor seating appropriate to the scale and context of the use.

- *The picture on the top lacks safe access for pedestrians due to the lack of sidewalks, vehicles parked directly against the side of the structure on the right and parking stalls that exit directly onto a roadway.*
- *The bottom picture shows a sidewalk for safe pedestrian access and landscaping to buffer pedestrians from vehicles in the parking lot.*



Streetscape Improvements



This is an example of a Business Corridor with enough “pause points” that can make a difference to pedestrians. It gives enough spaces to people shopping in the business district to sit down and have a rest, and increase engagement with people and the community.

The business district can be occupied with commercial, retail or other approved uses to encourage pedestrian-scale activity. Outdoor dining and seating is encouraged within the business district.

A minimum of six foot clear zone must be maintained within the building setback in order to allow adequate pedestrian flow. The streetscape should be designed with a similar palette of materials and standards in order to portray a cohesive district.

Most municipalities have ample amount of space available for the use of parklets, which are intended to serve as an extension of a sidewalk. The parklet programs in Princeton and Jersey City have gained a lot of attention. A parklet can occupy one to three parking spaces and serve pedestrians looking to eat, socialize and people-watch in the business district. Below are some examples.



Sidewalk, crosswalk, pedestrian plaza



Complete Streets are streets designated and operated to enable safe use and support mobility for all users. This is the most efficient roadway design guidelines that helps all ages and abilities. All corner should have an open landscape area should include an open landscape area. The Borough should consider design for all crosswalks.

Complete Streets are streets designed for all users, all modes of transportation, and all ability levels. They balance the needs of drivers, pedestrians, bicyclists, transit riders, emergency responders and goods movement based on the local context. A Complete Streets workshop is another way to get the community to take charge of road design and road safety. It's a fun activity that would engage the community and bring more awareness about road safety to Alpha Borough.

Public Art

Public art should be accessible and tied to the history of Alpha Borough and if possible should be created by local source and include water, seating, planting, decorative architectural elements or plaza space designs. Public art should be visible, but not interfere with pedestrian circulation or create a traffic hazard; made of durable, weatherproof materials; and should be designed to avoid physical hazards.



Signage



Signage is a great way to communicate with travelers, they make connectivity through business corridors efficient. Keeping the architectural intent, we can use more vintage look to the signage. Signage in the business district can make the pedestrian flow smoother.

Community Events



Community events like the Borough's Fall Festival brought people together and created fun activities for all ages. It was estimated that 500-600 people attended. Local businesses donated toys, books, games, and local organizations like the PTO and the fire department added fun activities like the Bake Sale and the Bonfire. These types of community events bring people together and encourage interaction. The Borough should look to hold at least one annual event so that the community can come together.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This Center Plan offers the following recommendations for the Borough to further consider in its future planning throughout the entire town:

Land Use and Planning Strategies:

- Review the business corridor for redevelopment opportunities.
- Identify opportunities to improve Center zoning for increased development in the Center and as recommended by Center sub-areas.
- Update Master Plan to incorporate recommendations from this Plan.
- Update ordinances to incorporate recommendations from this Plan.
- Update Circulation Plan element with Bicycle and Pedestrian Safety component.
- Update Open Space & Recreation Plan.

Placemaking Strategies:

- Identify opportunities for public art and events.
- Identify opportunities for placemaking through municipally-sponsored activities, grants and public-private partnerships.
- Develop gateway features at identified gateways into the Business Corridor.
- Hold additional community events and work with businesses to encourage pop-up events/uses.
- Continue work on streetscapes, Safe Routes to School, and Recreational trails.
- Identify opportunities to widen sidewalks, encourage outdoor dining in the business corridor.
- Develop wayfinding signage.

This Center Plan also identifies four primary sub-areas where growth, appropriate to that area, can be directed, streetscapes can be improved to enhance the aesthetics of the sub-area, and bicycle and pedestrian safety can be incorporated into any future designs or development.

Recommendations for Business District

In order to diversify the Borough's economy, this plan recommends focusing on enhancing existing businesses and attracting new businesses that are complementary to the existing. Incorporating Alpha's cultural heritage and enhancing outdoor recreation / tourism will help in this effort. Additionally, ongoing improvements to the transportation network in and around the business corridor will assist with attracting businesses that are in keeping with the character of the area.

Recommendation for Residential Neighborhood Districts

The Borough's residential neighborhoods have not changed for decades and the Borough has expressed a desire to maintain its small-town feel. This plan recommends enhancing each neighborhoods' streetscapes, sidewalks, and connectivity to parks, schools, and the business corridor. It is also recommended the town identify meaningful opportunities to provide affordable housing in the town.

Recommendation for Quarry/Industrial Districts

The "eastern" Quarry and Industrial Districts have a place in the Borough as a meaningful tax base, an opportunity to attract diverse talent/workforce, and an opportunity to create a niche for sustainable industries with sound revenue generation. Proper traffic circulation will be imperative as new and expanded industries locate within the town and should be made a priority with any new industrial development. This plan also recommends prioritizing the recommendations from the Borough's Quarry Redevelopment Plan to determine the next feasible steps in the process.

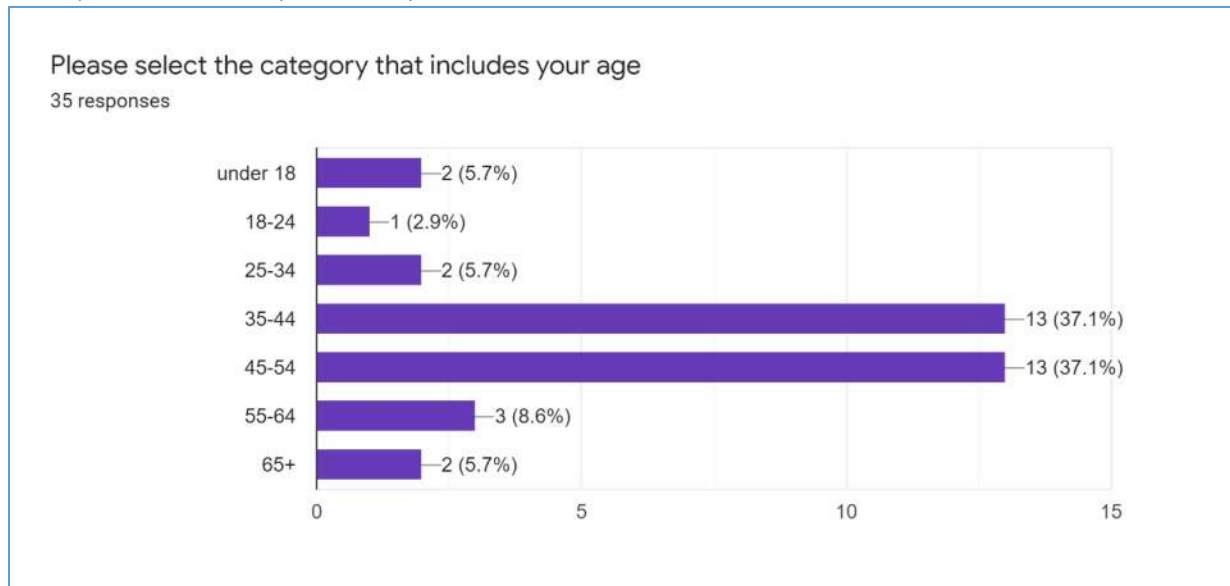
Recommendation for Quarry/Recreation Districts

The Borough's "western" Quarry and Recreation areas have potential to enhance the recreation experience in the town. This plan recommends improving and adding facilities at neighborhood parks where feasible (ie. Restrooms, water fountains, lighting, signage, etc) to enhance the user experience at these places. Public outreach indicated that residents would like to see more passive recreation opportunities which could be a good fit for this district. In particular, a biking trail circumventing the town was mentioned. Additionally, smaller gathering spaces within the larger parks would offer a variety of recreational activities in one space and would attract a greater diversity of users.

ATTACHMENT A: Borough of Alpha – Highlands Center Designation Plan Public Outreach Survey Summary

The surveys were posted on the Borough website for several weeks and distributed through the school PTO. They were also distributed at the Borough's Fall Fest (held November 4, 2021) and a presentation board explained the project. Overall, 36 responses came in for both the open space survey and active transportation survey. They are summarized below:

Transportation Survey Summary



The majority of respondents are in the age group 35-54 (74.2 percent of all respondents). 5% of the respondents were under the age of 18 and 5% were over the age of 65. The age of the remaining respondents varied. The age of the remaining respondents varied within the rest 25.8%. 97% of respondents live in the Borough.

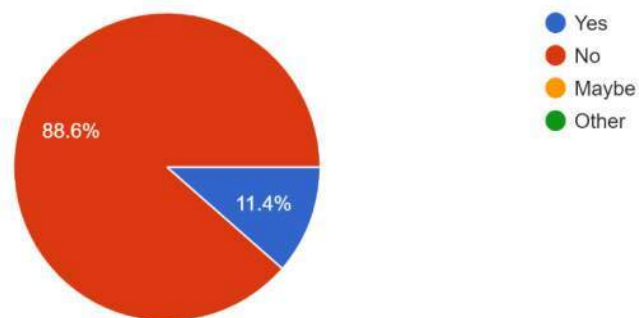
Do you live in Alpha Borough?

35 responses

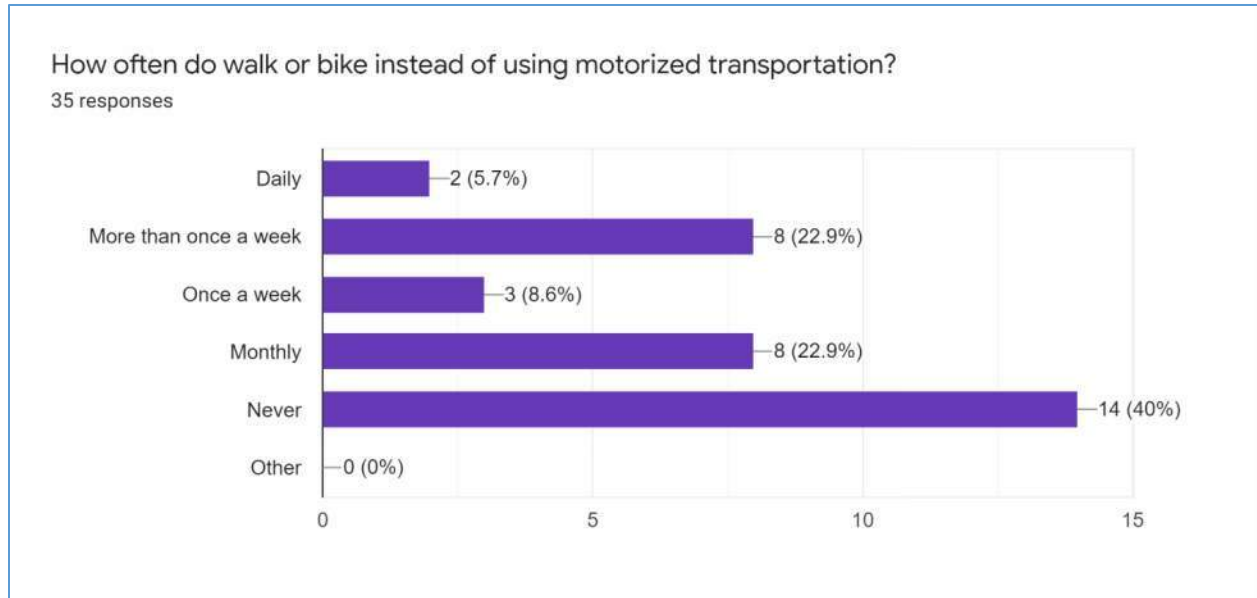


Do you have a mobility or physical disability?

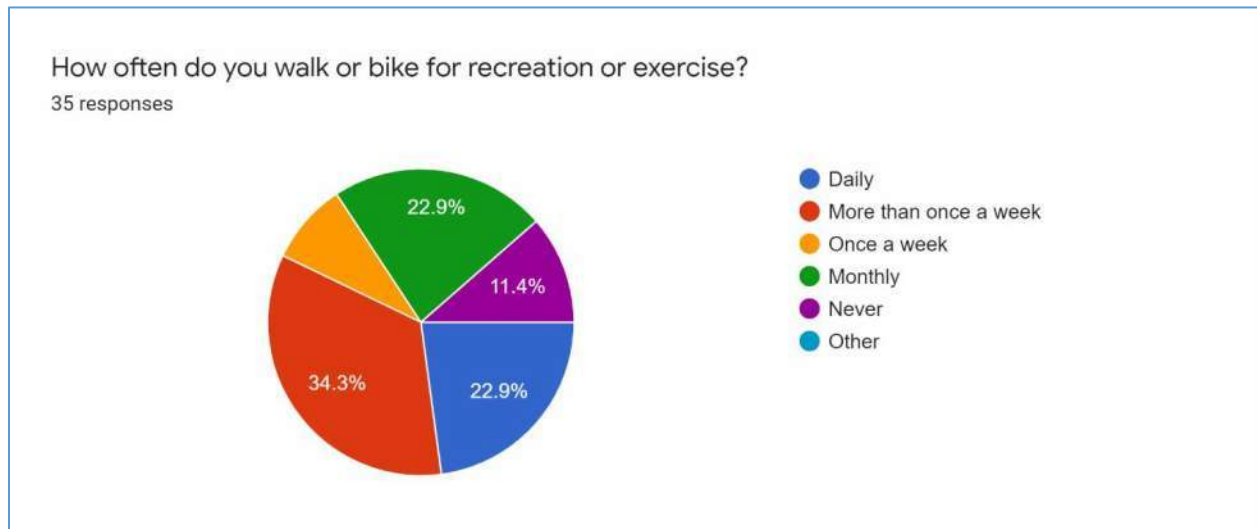
35 responses



11.4% of people who responded identified themselves as having a physical disability. This is important to know as we plan for all mobilities.



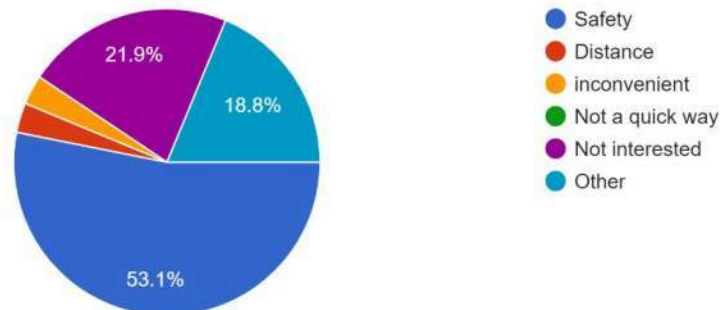
40% of people never walk or bike around town and only 5.7% of people bike or walk daily. The majority of respondents bike or walk less often, but more than once a week (23%) and at least monthly (23%).



A larger section of survey respondents (34.3%) bike more than once per week and 23% bike at least daily for exercise or recreation. Comparing this to the age of respondents, we can surmise that a higher number of younger to middle-aged people are biking more frequently around town. This information benefits the town in its planning for bike infrastructure and to promote active transportation. The Borough can encourage the business district to install bike racks, create separate sidewalks for running and also develop parks with better infrastructure facilities.

Where are the biggest barriers to bicycling in your town?

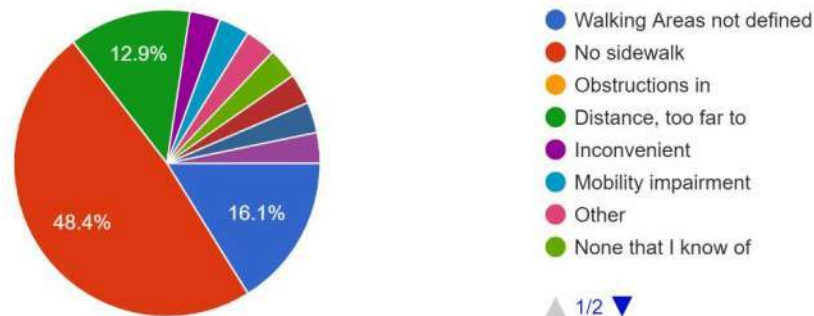
32 responses



Safety is the biggest barrier for bicycling in the town, yet just under a quarter of the respondents said they are just not interested in bicycling. The Borough can use this information to assess where more and safer crossings are needed and where sidewalks and intersections can be improved to increase safety for bicyclists and pedestrians. The State's Complete Streets program as highlighted in this document, is a great place-making tool that helps in road safety design, and which helps to remove any barriers to active transportation. For those who responded "not interested", the town can plan events around bicycling that will help to create more awareness and gradually increase interest in biking.

Where is the biggest barrier to walking in your town?

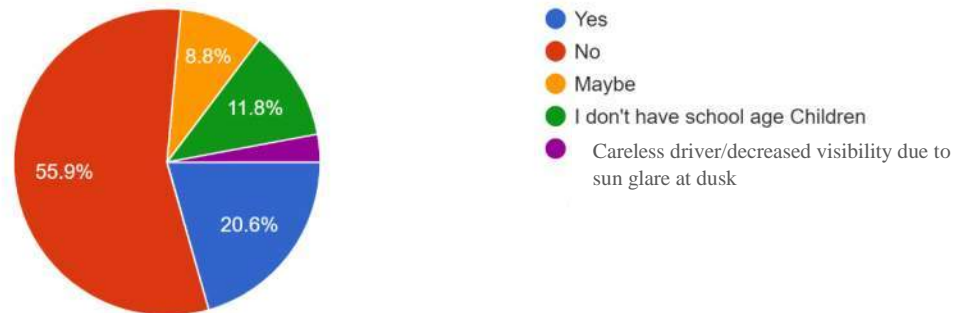
31 responses



In this survey 16.1 percent of respondents stated that areas for walking are not defined. Having a good defined pedestrian walkway is crucial to pedestrian safety and for ease of access to locations around the town. The community has realized the need for better walkways, crosswalks and sidewalks, which will encourage more walking and biking.

If you have school-age children, do you feel that there are enough safe routes to walk or bike to school?

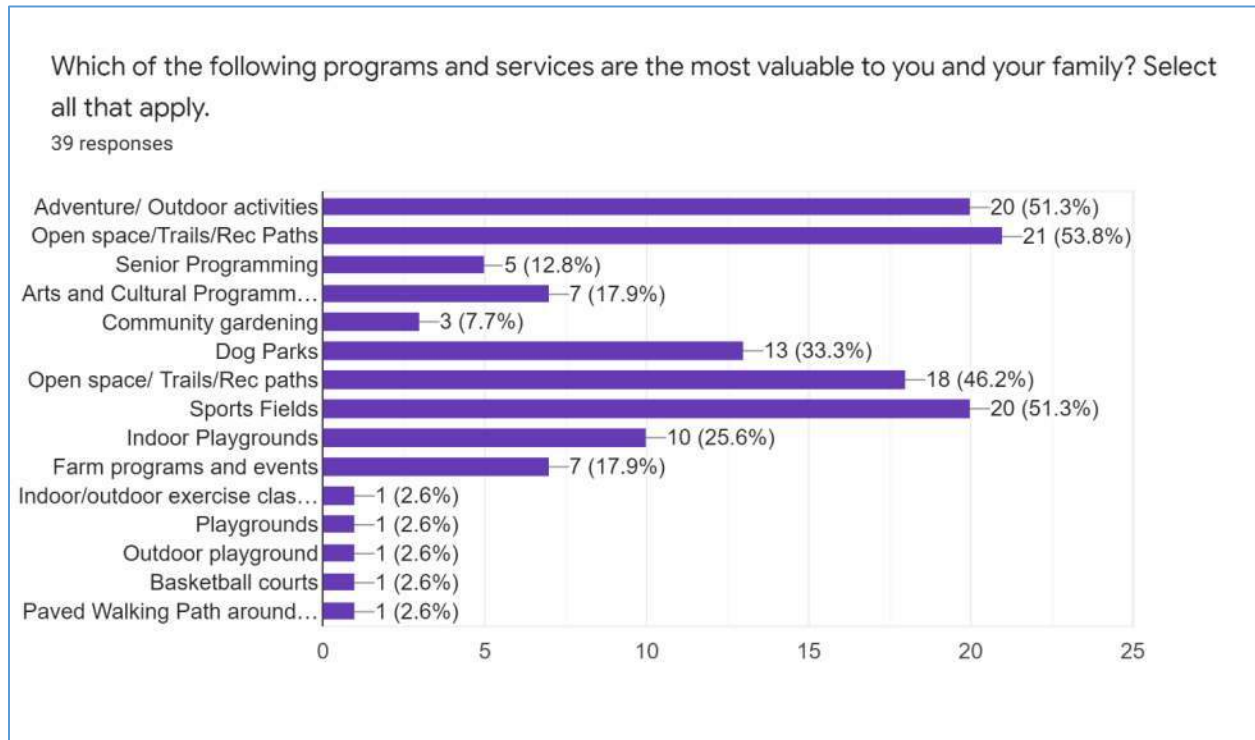
34 responses



55% percent of respondents said that there aren't enough safe routes to school for biking and walking. The NJDOT's Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program is an approach that promotes **walking and bicycling** to school through infrastructure improvements, enforcement, tools, safety education, and incentives to encourage walking and bicycling to school. Nationally, 10%–14% of car trips during morning rush hour are for school travel. SRTS initiatives improve safety and levels of physical activity for students.

Community Parks Survey

Alpha Park and Alpha Memorial Park are the two most popular parks (52.8% and 11.1%, respectively). It is likely the reason these two are the most popular parks is because of the amenities. Alpha Park has playground equipment and sun/shade areas, basketball court and soccer pitch. Alpha Memorial Park has a lot of space, walking trail, and benches for resting.



Respondents felt that the most important recreation programs and services for the community are open spaces, trails, recreational paths, adventure and outdoor activities, and sports fields. More specifically, people felt that better amenities are needed in the existing parks and playgrounds, for example inclusive playground equipment for all abilities, active uses for organized sports and paid programs through user fees, restrooms, walking trails all around parks and fields, trails to ride bikes, improved basketball courts, a fenced dog park and better parking.

All of these recommendations from the community will become important as the Borough plans for future improvements and uses of their parks and open spaces.