

Introduction and Purpose

Like many jurisdictions, Monmouth County faces the challenge of preserving its many natural and human resources and high quality of life, while confronting the many traits of modern life - traffic congestion, high taxes, and uncertain financial times.

In March 2007, the Monmouth County Board of Chosen Freeholders commissioned a non-partisan Budget Task Force to conduct an independent review of county policies and finances as they affect the long-term fiscal health of Monmouth County government. Their findings were released in July 2007 and included a strong recommendation, that a strategic plan be developed by the Freeholders to guide the direction of county government, and to maximize its financial and human resources for the coming years. In response, the County issued a Request for Proposals on February 6, 2008 to retain a consulting firm to facilitate a strategic planning process and complete a strategic plan that could serve as a blueprint for the future of Monmouth County government. JANUS Solutions was chosen to facilitate the planning process and development of the Strategic Plan.

Approach and Process

The JANUS Solutions approach to this initiative revolves around the belief that planning is a strategy for positive change, not simply a process and the production of a document to grace a shelf.

The planning process was designed to ensure that the Freeholders and senior leadership and management would be involved at every stage of the decision-making process and that the process utilizes the organizational structure to support its findings. The intent was to create a process that was inclusive, transparent, effectively managed the time and resources of the county, and garnered input from multiple avenues throughout the community at large, as well as county employees. The input and synthesis of information was paramount to the design of a specifically tailored strategic plan that would guide decision-making in the future. The planning process included:

- the establishment of a Strategic Planning Committee,
- the formulation of a draft vision, mission, values and principles,
- the identification of nine Focus Areas to structure information gathering, discussion, and analysis,
- the gathering of information through a five-pronged approach,
- analysis and the identification of emerging strategic themes and issues,
- the establishment of strategic areas, goals, and objectives,
- the designation of Goal Attainment Team leaders,
- the preparation of a detailed Strategic Action Plan.



A Strategic Planning Committee was established at the outset of the engagement to guide and inform the process, and served as the focal point for the design, synthesis, and communication of the plan. The Committee was comprised of Freeholder Director Barbara McMorow, Freeholder Rob Clifton, County Administrator Robert Czech, senior leadership of the administration, and select members of the public. The Strategic Planning Committee began its work by developing a draft vision and mission statement with values and principles. These drafts were intended to provide a conceptual framework for practical actions and were reviewed throughout the process for revisions and improvements.

The Strategic Planning Committee identified nine Focus Areas to organize the assessment and analysis process:

- Focus Area #1: Administration/Financial Impact
- Focus Area #2: Citizen Services
- Focus Area #3: Education
- Focus Area #4: Health and Human Services
- Focus Area #5: Municipalities
- Focus Area #6: Planning and Economic Development
- Focus Area #7: Public Safety
- Focus Area #8: Recreation, Parks and Libraries
- Focus Area #9: Transportation, Engineering and Public Works

The JANUS Team established a variety of methods to gather baseline data, information, and opinions about the many aspects of Monmouth County government.

Collection and review of relevant county plans, studies, and other documents related to County government operations

The JANUS Team was provided copies of numerous county planning documents and related data that were critical to understanding the current status of many issues facing county government and its constituency.

An objective Community Survey of Monmouth County residents

In order to obtain scientifically valid and representative information concerning the views of Monmouth County residents, JANUS Solutions commissioned the Monmouth University Polling Institute (MUPI) to conduct a public opinion survey of residents' attitudes and priorities. The survey was designed to identify key issues for the strategic plan, and also serve as a benchmark for tracking progress





Analysis and Identification of Emerging Themes and Issues

in ensuing years. The survey was conducted by telephone with a scientific random sample of 501 adult Monmouth County residents in November 2008.

Intensive discussion, analysis, and priority-setting through Strengths, Weaknesses Opportunities and Threats (S.W.O.T.) groups for each of the areas

A S.W.O.T. Analysis was conducted on each of the nine Focus Areas. Each S.W.O.T. was facilitated by the JANUS Team and lasted 2.5 to 3.5 hours in duration. An effort was made to select participants who had a unique knowledge of the Focus Area topic and representative of the numerous job titles within the targeted departments, a total of 130 individuals participated.

Community Forums

Two community forums were held in an effort to obtain additional resident input into the Strategic Plan, held on

November 6, 2008 at the Eastern Branch Library in Shrewsbury and on November 17, 2008 at the Western Branch Library in Manalapan. Both public forums were two hours in duration and also offered an educational presentation of the numerous services provided by the county.

Website Input

The Monmouth County website was made available to support communication and information gathering during the strategic planning process. A visible icon on the home page allowed residents to access current information regarding the planning process and more importantly, provide an opportunity to submit comments and/or suggestions for consideration.

The Freeholders kept county residents apprised of the progress of the strategic planning process and activities through a television show on the local cable TV network, highlighting of the process in the County newsletter, and periodic updates provided at Freeholder meetings.

As data, information, and opinions were collected through the five sources, the analysis of this information began. Various plans and documents shared by the county, along with demographical information, painted a picture of a county as a dynamic, growing area of the state, with a population that has increased by 7.2% since 2000. Monmouth is a relatively wealthy county (median household income of \$78,274), and also an expensive place to live (median housing value of \$445,000, median new housing value of \$752,500, and median rent of \$1,080/month).

The budget for Monmouth County in 2008 was \$481,000,000 (\$490,216,000 in 2009). There was no county tax levy increase in 2008. The County also has a financial rating of “AAA” (highest) by all three major rating agencies. The county is home to 844 miles of county roads, and has many amenities and natural and man-made resources that make it an attractive place to live.

The community survey of county residents showed that nearly all (91%) Monmouth County residents view their home county positively. Nearly half (44%) give the top rating of excellent and another 47% say it is a good place to live. A clear majority (57%) say that Monmouth County is a better place to live than other counties in New Jersey.





The survey asked residents to rate 14 different facets of Monmouth County life. The environment, recreation, education, and controlling crime are generally considered to be among the county's top qualities. Culture, open space, and transportation infrastructure are also generally considered to be good by most residents. However, the cost of living, access to good jobs, and traffic congestion are rated negatively by most residents.

Nearly all Monmouth County residents express positive views about the county in general and most see it as a better place to live than other counties in New Jersey. Residents who have had direct contact with county services or used county facilities in the past year – mainly for recreational services and the library system – are largely very satisfied with their experience.

Key features that make Monmouth a good place to live include its overall attractiveness and the state of the environment; access to good schools and educational opportunities; the variety of recreational and cultural activities, including the beaches and coastline; and low crime rates. The county receives mixed reviews on open space preservation and transportation infrastructure. While a majority gives positive marks to the current amount of open space in Monmouth County, the maintenance of roads and bridges, and access

to public transportation, a sizeable number of residents express negative views about these areas. Moreover, traffic conditions in the county are rated negatively by nearly 2-in-3 residents. Improving traffic and controlling development are among the top suggestions residents give for enhancing the county's quality of life.

The lowest ratings given by residents pertain to the cost of living in Monmouth, including the cost of housing, and the perceived lack of good job opportunities in the county. The most common suggestion offered by residents for improving the county is to lower taxes, particularly property taxes. It should be noted that this is a fairly common issue throughout New Jersey, regularly topping lists of concerns expressed by residents in statewide polls.

The survey revealed some differences within the county population, that should be kept in mind when formulating a strategic plan. Racial and ethnic minorities are less likely than white residents to avail themselves of most county services, with the exception of human services. Minority residents also express lower satisfaction with the crime rate, and recreational and cultural opportunities in Monmouth.

Overall, the survey results suggest that residents understand that the county plays a key role in maintaining the environmental quality of the county, along with providing needed health, human, and educational services. Large majorities of Monmouth residents say these are very important services for county tax dollars to support. However, the survey found that Monmouth residents tend to be largely unaware of the actions of their county government.

Nine (9) S.W.O.T. sessions were held during which a total of approximately 125 people gave input into the strategic plan. Each session included discussion about organizational mandates, trends, the mission statement and guiding principles/values, and the identification of priority items for each focus area.

The first Community Forum was attended by 15 people. Remarks were made about the strategic planning process, expressing pleasure that the process was taking place, requesting an update on the planning process as it progressed, and recommending that steps be taken to ensure that the Spanish-speaking population in the county has an opportunity to provide input into the planning process. Issues raised included traffic congestion, the importance of the human service "safety net", and transparency of County government. The second Forum was attended by 26 people. A broad range of issues and positions were raised, including green technology and the role and size of county government. Recommendations were also made related to traffic, rail line, and parks.

A total of 21 comments were received through the County website. A wide variety of issues were raised, including open space, libraries, parks, transportation/traffic, green technology, and a lack of services in the western part of County. Three (3) written comments were received regarding the preservation of established bike paths and a particular recreation project. In total, approximately 640 people provided input during the strategic planning process. Input from all sources was used to identify emerging strategic themes and issues in each of the Focus Areas.