

RINGOES VILLAGE STUDY

Township of East Amwell
Hunterdon County, New Jersey



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The original of this document has been signed and sealed pursuant to N.J.A.C. 13:41-1.3

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INTRODUCTION

The Township of East Amwell boasts a rich mixture of agricultural lands, fragile ecosystems, and historic village and hamlets. The Township has been at the forefront of preserving these unique and diverse qualities through effective long-term planning and preservation activities. The Ringoes Village Study is part of the ongoing effort to preserve and enhance the character of the Township. The quality of life of the Township's residents, and in particular those in Ringoes, must be balanced with a community's desire to attract businesses that provide services to citizens and give stability to the tax base. In order to accommodate these objectives, it is important to address the appearance, character and performance aspects of development, redevelopment and ongoing maintenance.

Ringoes Village, one of many historic settlements that dot the 100+ mile length of the Old York Road, still boasts buildings that date back to the Revolution. The Henry Landis House, an attractive red shale stone house that sits just north of the village on the Old York Road, saw the Marquis de Lafayette treated for illness by Dr. Gershom Craven. Just south of the village core is John Ringo's tavern, where rebellious patriots, indignant about the Stamp Act and other British oppressions, organized the Hunterdon Chapter of Sons of Liberty in 1766 and where the Hunterdon County Freeholders penned a Resolution that led to the July 2, 1776 formation of the independent State of New Jersey. And a gray stone building on Larison's Road housed The Academy of the Arts and Science, which was conducted from 1876-1909 by Dr. Connellius Larison and also served as the publishing house for his "Fonic Speling Wurks in Orthoepy".

The Ringoes Village Historic District has been listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places. According to the National Register nomination:

The Ringoes Historic District possesses significance in the areas of settlement pattern, architecture, education, communications, transportation, commerce, agriculture, and industry. The village exemplifies the small agglomerate settlements that proliferated throughout the region in the 18th and 19th centuries to serve its dispersed agricultural population, and whose moderate later growth later reflected their limited access to 19th-century transportation innovations. The Ringoes Historic District has architectural significance as an assemblage of modest, mostly 19th century buildings whose construction, form, detailing, and spatial organization are representative of the rural region's vernacular architecture in that era.

The charm of the village is reflected in this "regional vernacular architecture" of older homes and buildings that still dominate the village landscape. However, like so many historic hamlets and villages in the County, traffic and pedestrian safety, congestion, parking, and ongoing property maintenance problems have taken a toll on the quality of life. In an effort to enhance the appearance and functionality of Ringoes, this initial study outlines a course of action and promotes planning and community efforts to address some of the ongoing issues that diminish the quality of life and sense of place in the village.

This study has continued a long-term dialog about the village among residents, business owners and Township, County and State officials designed to engage stakeholder opinion and translate expressed concerns into actionable items. Thus the goal of the study is:

- To provide recommendations to the East Amwell Township Planning Board and Township Committee that enhance and improve the residential and business environments in the Village of Ringoes.

The concerns are reflected in the 2006 East Amwell Master Plan goals, specifically:

- Preserving the cultural landscape by recognizing historic structures and districts, and managing change within the historic villages.
- Protecting scenic vistas of the rural countryside and the village and hamlets that impart the special character of East Amwell.
- Maintaining an efficient circulation system that promotes important circulation linkages, retains the rural road system and provides for pedestrian, equestrian and bicycle movements.

STUDY AREA AND APPROACH

Ringoes Village occupies the core of the larger Ringoes neighborhood. For the purposes of land use analysis and zoning discussion, the study Area focuses on the Village and Local Business Zone Districts located in Ringoes ([Map 1](#)). However, the village is influenced by factors beyond these zoning boundaries, such as land uses along Routes 202 and 31 and agricultural and residential areas surrounding the village. Therefore, while the analysis is focused within the zone district boundaries, influencing factors are more broad based. In general, the approach has been designed to:

- Identify residents concerns and issues related to Ringoes Village;
- Determine specific improvements and recommendations that are appropriate to maintain the quality of life in the village;
- Explore solutions that may be creative or unique to address issues;
- Develop a plan for these improvements; and
- Coordinate the actions of residents, the Township and outside agencies to implement strategic responses.

In order to facilitate the goals and objectives of this Plan, the East Amwell Planning Board formed a subcommittee including Ringoes Village residents, along with Planning Board Township Committee members, to conduct outreach to the public, prepare and distribute surveys, and review survey findings. The subcommittee met several times and reached out to the public through canvassing, website announcements and the local newsletter, The Voice of Interested People (V.I.P.). In addition, two community visioning sessions were held in May 2014 where members of the public provided comments and input on the issues in Ringoes Village and possible solutions. The proposed improvements that are presented in this plan represent the consensus of opinions heard at these public meetings.

STAKEHOLDER/PUBLIC INPUT AND VISIONING

The community visioning process, which provided a forum for community and stakeholder input in a meaningful and directed way, included special meetings, online interactions, surveys or other forms of public contact.

Public outreach was effective in helping develop a consensus on issues of concern. The Ringoes Village Subcommittee's primary task involved continuous outreach to residents, business owners, and public officials. This effort began in the spring of 2014, with the preparation of two surveys -- one tailored to residents and one tailored to business owners ([Appendix A](#)). These surveys were distributed through canvassing, the V.I.P, placed on the Township website, available for pick up at the Municipal building and copies distributed through local businesses. The response to the survey was very positive, with 64 resident surveys and six business surveys returned, and several common themes were identified in almost every response. These included the maintenance of existing structures, traffic and pedestrian safety issues, parking issues, conflicts between residential and non-residential uses and the need for community space, especially since the loss of the library ([Appendix B](#)).

The second major task involving public input included two public visioning sessions. The first was held on the morning of Saturday, May 17, 2014 at the Kirkpatrick Church and the second held in the evening of May 21, 2014 at the Municipal building. Both sessions were well attended with active participation, and the common issues echoed survey responses (maintenance, traffic and safety issues, conflicts of uses and need for community space).

PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

Development Pattern and Existing Land Uses

Ringoes Village is predominantly residential in character, although a series of commercial uses occupy central locations in the village core and extend in a ribbon pattern along Old York Road north and south of the village. The village is set within the agricultural backdrop of the Amwell Valley. "[Map 2: 2007 Land Use/Land Cover](#)" illustrates land cover characteristics, distinguishing the developed areas from undeveloped and natural areas. "[Map 3: Land Use By Property Class](#)" illustrates the tax class for lots in Ringoes Village, which is primarily residential with commercial uses located at the village core, in the Local Business District.

Businesses in the village include Mom's Restaurant, Carousel Deli, Ringoes Deli, two auto repair facilities, and Hopewell Valley Community Bank. At the southern end of the village, at the point of Route 179 and Old Route 31, is the post office and office space, which previously housed the South County Branch of the Hunterdon County Library, recently relocated to West Amwell. A pattern of commercial uses also extends to the north and south of the village including Harvest Moon Restaurant, a repair garage, a garden center/florist to the north and a tire center and well driller to the south. Public and semi-public uses in the area include Kirkpatrick Church, East Amwell Municipal Building and East Amwell Township School, Clawson Park and the Public Works yard. The smallest

residential lots are found in the village core, with larger residential lots outside the village core.

Zoning

For purposes of this study, the focus has been on the traditional Ringoes Village core, which includes two zone districts, Village and Local Business (Map 4). Both districts permit small scale mixed use development in the form of residential, professional office and retail, with slight variations. The Village District (Section 92-94) permits:

- Detached single-family home.
- Parks and playgrounds.
- Firehouses and municipal facilities.
- Houses of worship.
- Antique shops.
- Bed-and-breakfast.
- Accessory uses include home occupations and accessory building shall comply with the bulk requirements listed in this section and comply with the definition of a home occupation.

Uses permitted in the Local Business District include (Section 92-96):

- Residences as permitted in and adhering to the requirements of the Village District.
- Retail sale of consumable products, wearing apparel, pharmaceutical, hardware, appliances, household goods, confections, stationery, printed material and similar goods in small-scale retail operations and not large-scale general merchandise department store- or supermarket-type operations.
- The sale of personal services, such as the repair of appliances, shoes and jewelry, tailors, music and dancing schools, photographer studios, but not photo processing.
- Offices and financial institutions.
- Restaurants.
- Libraries.
- Utility facilities needed to directly provide the service of the utility to the consumer, such as pumping stations and transformers, but excluding repair garages, open storage and work areas, and similar industrially oriented aspects of a utility service.

Conditional uses in the Local Business District include automobile service stations provided specific requirements such as maximum building coverage, minimum distance between property lined and similar restrictions. Another conditional use in the Local Business District permits residential dwellings within a permitted nonresidential use. Residential uses are permitted if the unit is above a store, shop, office or other similar permitted nonresidential use, provided that adequate water supply and sewage disposal, as determined by current Board of Health standards are available.

The main difference between the two districts arises primarily from the distinction between the level and type of non-residential uses. The Local Business permits offices and

restaurants and more traditional non-residential uses while the village allows low intensity non-residential uses, like antique shops, are more in keeping with a village residential setting.

As will be discussed later, the Township may wish to review these two zoning districts to allow for a mix of uses commonly observed in recent times and allow more flexibility to encourage live/work balances.

Infrastructure

Ringoes Village, like the rest of the Township, relies upon on-site wells for potable water and septic systems for wastewater treatment. At this time, there are no plans to introduce centralized systems to the village. Given the restrictions inherent with on-site infrastructure, these considerations will govern any zoning change considerations, as continued reliance upon wells and septic systems will only support uses and densities similar to what is permitted now, with no significant increase in demand for water or wastewater systems.

Traffic and Safety

One of the major considerations of this report relates to traffic and vehicular and pedestrian safety in the village. Like many historic settlements in central New Jersey, Ringoes occupies a crossroads where Main Street is a State Highway, all major roads in Ringoes are under the jurisdiction of either the County or State, including roads that were historically the primary routes from Trenton to Easton and other destinations. These include Old York Road (State Route 179), the Trenton-Easton Turnpike (locally known as Old Route 31) and John Ringo Road (County Route 579) north of Old York Road. Although the major regional traffic function was removed from Old York Road by the establishment of the Route 202 bypass, it still accommodates considerable regional through-traffic. Like many hamlets and villages where Main Street is also a State highway, traffic demands place unique burdens on the village. This plan seeks to address some of these burdens and the impact they have on traffic and pedestrian safety and the quality of life for Ringoes Village residents.

All three major functional road classifications, arterial, collector and local roads, adjoin and traverse Ringoes, providing excellent regional and local access. Roads under state jurisdiction include US 202, State Route 31 and State Route 179. Roads under the County's jurisdiction include John Ringo Road (Route 579) and Wertsville Road (Route 602). Municipal roads include Boss Road, Melbourn Road, Larison Lane, Frontage Road, Fox Hunt Road, Sandra Road and Iron Horse Drive.

State Highways are the primary arterial roadways that carry major regional traffic and provide direct access to abutting properties. The two County Roads in the study area are designated by the County as primary collector roads, which draw traffic from local streets and distribute traffic to the arterial system. Route 579 serves a particularly important function, providing a primary route of travel through rural Hunterdon County and linking many employment centers to residential areas. This is a well-traveled route for commuters during peak hour, resulting in traffic times of day, which in part, serves to explain high traffic speeds along this road in the village.

The reconstruction of Route 579 by Hunterdon County several years ago resulted in a dramatic increase in capacity and speed on portions of this roadway north of the village. Pavement widening and scores of super-elevations (banked curves) have eliminated all but a few of the flow restrictions. Traffic speeds exceeding 50 mph are commonplace north of Ringoes, where the speed limit north of the railroad overpass is 45 mph. At Route 202 entering the village from Route 31, the posted speed limit is 50 mph up to Melbourn Road.

Sidewalk Locations

Walkability, one of the many positive attributes of Ringoes, has been the focus of prior planning efforts that led to the expansion and upgrading of Ringoes sidewalks. Many resident and business survey respondents identified the ability to walk to various businesses as a key asset. The village is fortunate to have an existing network of sidewalks (Map 5). However, the condition of sidewalks is variable, from very good to poor, coupled with dangerous crosswalk locations, make traversing these roads dangerous for pedestrians. One of the main recommendations of this plan is to revisit sidewalk conditions and traffic issues to provide more “complete streets”, where the needs of all users of all ages and abilities can be met. This includes providing safe pedestrian and bicycle routes and calming traffic.



For the most part, the extent of sidewalks in the village has been well established, with little recent change except a new sidewalk segment along Wertsville Road from 579/179 to the parking area at the ball fields. A major sidewalk project by the County has improved pedestrian safety along Rt. 579 north of Mom's Restaurant with new sidewalks and a mid-block cross walk. Apart from these new sidewalks, the condition of these sidewalks, and associated finishes, vary significantly.



Sidewalks found along John Ringo Road and 579 at the northern end of Ringoes are generally in good condition. In the village core are two painted crosswalks, one extends from the west side of John Ringo Road, across Route 579 to the point at Mom's Restaurant and then continues across Route 179 to the vicinity of the Hopewell Valley Community Bank and Ringoes Deli. The other crosswalk is located just south of Wertsville Road where it crosses Old York Road. In front of Carousel Deli and an adjoining residence are sidewalks that extend to the north end of the

firehouse property and no further south.

Along State Highway Route 179, just south of its intersection with Old Route 31, are sidewalks that connect with the Post Office, office uses and former site of the library. Painted crosswalks have been installed from the corner of Boss Road, at the former PNC

Bank, across Route 179 to “the point” and between “the point” and the firehouse. This will promote safer pedestrian travel between Wertsville Road and vehicular pedestrian activity at the Post Office site.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Property Maintenance

A recurring concern expressed by the public related to property maintenance. Deteriorating structures and abandoned properties that have been neglected and fallen into irreparable disrepair for decades are an ongoing source of distress for those who live and work in the village. Unkempt structures and properties detract from a historic village such as Ringoes. Ringoes' primary identity as a historic village is premised primarily on the very historic structures and homes that make up its core. While newer homes that fall into disrepair can be replaced by comparable structures, historic structures will not be easily or authentically replicated. Even rehabilitation of historic structures requires careful consideration in order to balance modern needs and materials with the original historic components.

There are several means to address property maintenance issues; incentives, enforceable regulation and community self-help. Regarding regulation, Township maintenance code regulations are not broad enough to address the pressing issues found on deteriorating buildings within the village. Ringoes has numerous properties that are in a continued state of deterioration. There may be several causes for these situations; lack of owner funds to alleviate issues and make repairs, health issues or aging owners who cannot physically maintain their property to a standard previously attained, foreclosure and abandonment of property and general lack concern.

An "Unfit/Unsafe Building Ordinance" can be a useful tool to prevent further deterioration when owners are not responsive. This would provide a method of building code enforcement through tax liens imposed after building condition problems are corrected. The focus of such an ordinance would be on safety and habitability standards defined in the building code. Items like broken windows, lack of climate control and structural deficiencies, once cited by the Building Inspector can be repaired by the town and the cost recovered via tax lien.

The solution to maintenance issues requires balance. On the one hand finding support and incentives to help willing property owners perform work is crucial to the revitalization of properties. Many properties in a state of deterioration are a result of a snowball effect which the property owner is financially or physically unable to correct. Incentivizing and finding support for such a person, without guilt or repercussions is important. One way the Township Committee could incentivize residents would be to consider tax abatements on the improved property values for qualified residents. An example is the 5-year tax abatement currently in place in Flemington Borough's historic district. In addition, Township-assisted low interest loans for qualified households as well as grants to assist building restoration secured by a community private 501 c3 organizations, are other forms of support.

On the other hand, unsafe properties and those that have been abandoned or neglected due to foreclosure or other such occurrence require effective regulation and enforcement. To address these concerns, an unfit building ordinance, based on the International Building Code, could require residential and commercial buildings to conform to accepted structural standards and provide a remedy when owners fail to perform essential maintenance and repairs.

The following issues, which directly impact public health and safety, should be considered:

- garbage or refuse
- natural overgrowth that becomes a hazard
- ground hazards such as holes, excavations, breaks or projections in areas that are available to the public or in the vicinity of public access
- sources of infestation or conditions conducive to infestation by animals or insects

Vacant buildings pose an additional level of concern since the property owner is presumably not witness to hazards that develop. If a building is vacant or abandoned, internal systems left unattended become fire and safety hazards. Regulations that may be considered for these buildings include:

- Ensure that all plumbing, electrical, heating, and cooking equipment are in sound condition and properly maintained.
- Ensure safety from fire by prohibiting storage of flammable liquids, rubbish, furniture or building materials.
- Ensure the building is secure to reduce intrusion but also allowing for adequate entry by fire and rescue squads in an emergency situation.
- Ensure that the foundation and exterior walls are weather-tight and rodent proof.
- The exterior of every structure or accessory structure should be free of broken windows, loose shingles, crumbling stone or brick or excess peeling paint.
- Accessory structures be maintained in a similar fashion to principal structures.
- Any yard area shall be cleared and maintained free of trash, solid debris or any other materials.

A general maintenance ordinance that regulates “nuisance” issues is not envisioned since enforcement is difficult and therefore not typically effective. A better approach would be to enact regulations that give the Township the power to make needed repairs and assess a tax lien on the affected property.

Community Self-Help

The recent economic recession has resulted in the increase in foreclosed and vacant properties as well as leaving many homeowners without sufficient funds to maintain their homes and property. Residents in harder hit cities, like Detroit, Buffalo, and Chicago, frustrated with watching neighborhoods continue to deteriorate, have come together to address property maintenance issues. Neighborhood and community organizations have filled a need to help keep neighborhoods viable and safe. Community self-help

organizations have the power to effect immediate and meaningful change. Such organizations require no government intervention, can organize independently, and members can contribute at levels that meet their needs and abilities. Such groups build a collective knowledge base where individual experience, effort and expertise can unite a neighborhood.

While Ringoes does not suffer from urban blight, the theory and practice of these recovering cities can work here as well when-neighbors organize to help each other. The type of organization varies. Some volunteer groups help property owners address issues on their property, through monetary assistance, donation of materials, donating their time, painting siding, replacing windows or other repairs. Other groups act more like member-based organizations, where each member identifies projects they need help completing and each week all the members rotate among properties to address the project. Thus, each member gets help from all the members on a designated day to complete a task. The owner of the property supplies any needed materials to complete the project and the group brings more man power and expertise to a project than any one individual. Some communities even have designated "Fix-up" festivals where neighbors come out on a specific day to help provide minor repairs and clean up to those in need, providing materials and time as needed.

The opportunities for community involvement are wide ranging. While many groups supply their own time and materials, there are some who seek grants from government or private sources. For example, many corporations have small grant programs to help military veterans or low-income persons.

The public input and support witnessed during the public visioning sessions and responses to the survey in Ringoes indicates a deep sense of community among residents. The formation of a community group to address the issues raised through this process would be a valuable tool not only for property maintenance but also to help address other concerns of community cohesion that will be discussed later. Township officials should encourage and support, the formation of such community groups.

Traffic Calming Techniques

Traffic concerns remain a high priority to residents and officials alike. Ringoes Village, like so many historic villages, was settled largely because of its location along established routes between larger destinations. These traditional thoroughfares have since been converted to County and State roads intended to handle higher amounts of higher speed traffic.

Many historic villages face conflicts between pedestrian and vehicular traffic and frequently community character is at odds with roadway functions. In 2002, the Township prepared the Old York Road Pedestrian Safety and Traffic Plan in an effort to address these same issues.

Traffic calming techniques are a means to address some of these conflicts. Traffic calming are intended to implement physical improvements and management of the roadway systems to reduce traffic speeds and promote safe pedestrian movements. During the preparation of the 2002 Plan, residents were provided an opportunity to assess solutions in a public forum and the following were identified as methods that could reduce conflicts:

- Maintaining on-street parking
- Reduced speed limits
- Pavement rumble strips to alert motorists to reduced speed limits
- Reduced pavement width, real and/or perceived
- Stop sign at the CR579 intersection with Route 179, rather than yield
- Sidewalk and curb construction
- Bike route signage/bike lane designation along Old York Road
- Streetscape enhancements such as:
 - shade tree plantings
 - pedestrian benches
 - bike racks
 - hitching posts
 - in-road pedestrian crossing signs

As a result of the public visioning sessions, additional improvements were discussed that can also help to calm traffic. Delineated parking spaces, bump outs and speed signals would provide immediate feedback along Old York and John Ringo Roads. Of particular interest was the concept of returning the road width to its pre-1980 cross section at the "points", the intersection of Route 179 and 579 Road at Mom's Restaurant and south at the intersection north of the Ringoes Rentals, LLC at Old Route 31 and Route 179 (Map 6). Where these areas, or "points" were previously unpaved and green, pavement widening have invited higher speed traffic and less clarity about who has the right-of-way.. County road work several years ago paved these areas resulting in a loss of any visual cues to drivers to reduce speed as they enter and leaving the village. In addition, these paved areas reduce traffic safety as drivers fail to yield in the intersection.



Many residents have suggested reverting these areas back to some form of unpaved and green area. This type of pavement reduction is often referred to as a "road diet". A road diet, also called a lane reduction or road rechannelization, is a technique in transportation planning whereby the number of travel lanes and/or effective width



of the road is reduced in order to achieve systemic improvements. Proponents of road diets generally believe key benefits include lower vehicular speeds, reduced crash rates, an improved pedestrian safety. Other benefits of road diets include promoting better land use, reducing induced traffic, and promoting greater driving attentiveness.

Traffic calming techniques can also discourage large truck traffic that currently uses roads in Ringoes as a cut through to Route 202 and 31. Reducing the speed and convenience of these routes will reduce the number of trucks using the area as a cut through, and those that continue to do so will be forced to slow down as they move through the village, reducing noise as well.

Traffic calming techniques and road diet review in Ringoes requires open dialog with the County and State since the roads under discussion are under their jurisdiction. The Township should therefore revisit discussions with the County and State to Review previous plan, including the 2002 Old York Road Plan and subsequent circulation plans to implement appropriate traffic calming techniques to address ongoing vehicular and pedestrian safety issues. Included in those discussions should be a review of NJDOT's Complete Streets policies and how they could apply to the Village of Ringoes.

A variety of traffic calming suggestions relate to both the roadway and pedestrian system and include the following:

- Complete the sidewalk system within the village.
- Adopt a sidewalk maintenance ordinance which requires the homeowner to maintain the sidewalk.
- Maintain the bridge on Rt. 579 at BR&W with the same vertical underclearance to prevent taller trucks from using that portion of the roadway. Add "telltales" before the bridge to prevent hits on bridge by taller trucks.
- Look at increasing the size of the speed limit signs along 179 and trimming trees that block or partially block the signs.
- Eliminate the "your speed is" radar trailer in the 45 MPH zone on Rt. 179. Consider moving to 30 MPH zone.
- Paint roadway with "reduce speed ahead" or similar messages.
- Look at possible geometric changes at the Rt. 579/Rt. 179 intersection at Mom's – consider roundabout, concrete or painted island with stop sign and queuing lane.
- Look at possible long range methods of routing some traffic around Village that could involve new roads or connections to Rt. 202.
- Address line of sight for on-street parking along Rt. 179 at the Post Office.

Parking

Parking is another major topic identified by the public as an issue that impacts both residents and business owners. Many non-residential uses in the village have off-street parking, however, the amount of off-street parking is not adequate to meet the parking demands. In addition, there are a few businesses that do not have off-street parking and patrons park on the street. All of the roads in the village permit on-street parking but there are no designated parking spaces. The lack of designated parking spaces combined with the speed and traffic volume along Routes 179 and 579 and Old Route 31 has resulted in several safety concerns.

One of the primary resident concerns was the difficulty faced when entering or exiting their private driveways as a result of parked cars along public roads. Parking too close to the entrance of private drives results in reduced visibility for cars pulling onto the public roads. This is amplified considering the speed and volume of traffic on the roads in Ringoes. Designated parking goes hand in hand with the traffic calming techniques identified above. Parking facilities on roads increase visual cues to drivers that they are entering the village and can help reduce speeds. Discussions with the County and State over striped designated parking should be undertaken by the Township in conjunction with the traffic calming techniques identified above.

Other considerations of parking are the lack of spaces available for businesses that do not have on-site parking and parking management. The Township should consider a new Circulation Plan Element of the Master Plan to address traffic calming, parking and other traffic and pedestrian safety considerations.

Zoning Considerations

The current zoning in the village includes two zone districts, the Village and the Local Business Districts. As mentioned previously, both districts permit detached single family homes and small scale retail and office uses. Comments from the public session and surveys identified a strong desire to keep and promote local businesses, seeing the services provided by these businesses as key to the character of Ringoes. Many respondents stated that being able to walk to the post office, deli, bank and other services was important to their quality of life. At the same time, many respondents expressed concerns about residential and non-residential conflicts or introduction of any larger scale developments, such as strip malls or big box stores that would be a significant threat to the village character.

When reviewing the permitted uses, it is clear that the small scale of non-residential uses contemplated in the Village Zone are intended to provide services to local residents, however, the uses identified are narrow in definition. For example in the village, while promoting mixed-use, the only non-residential use defined is antique shops. Bed and breakfasts and accessory home occupations are called out as part of existing residential structures. In contrast, the Local Business district is more varied, identifying retail sales, personal services, office and restaurants.

The economic recession and a movement toward small scale walkable communities suggests that the village would benefit greatly from a re-evaluation of the permitted uses in Ringoes to determine if an expansion of uses, or permitting more flexibility in the uses, might enable market forces to introduce new businesses in the village that would benefit not only the village residents but the Township in general through increased services and tax rates. Such uses would have to be in keeping with the village character, small-scale and respectful of the historic setting, and the constraints of parking, existing lot size and on-site septic demands. Adding more home occupation flexibility, live/work spaces, mixed use and services to the Village and Local Business Districts could help to retain and attract businesses and revitalize the Village.

When changes to village zoning are contemplated, a focus on the arts, culture, entertainment and shopping (ACES) will assist in adding vitality and tourism interest.

Community Events and Facilities

Community events and facilities provide an essential opportunity to galvanize a community. It is no surprise that the public visioning sessions and surveys cited concerns about the loss of the branch library and the deterioration of the Clawson House.



The library was an essential service for the residents of Ringoes and the Township and the loss was deeply felt. Many residents loved to walk to the library and meet with others and the library provided a community space to enhance village life. Many expressed a deep wish to find a way to return the library to the village. The Township officials have discussed the possibility with the County and serious efforts are underway in attempt to return the branch to Ringoes. However, another consideration arose from the public comment period. As work on the Clawson House progresses, a wonderful new opportunity presents itself to have the Clawson House fill, at least in part, the hole left by the departed library.

Clawson House, once completed, could be used for a variety of community purposes from a library area and meeting space to a repository of historical items. As space for families to utilize when visiting the park, it is the ideal location in East Amwell for community festivals, events and meetings. In addition, the Township should look to other historic structures in the village for additional community space. Many cited the Oddfellows building as a property that could be renovated and utilized for public good. The Township should conduct a study on abandoned and underutilized buildings in Ringoes that could potentially be revitalized and reused for the good of the Township.

Community events such as festivals, community days, cruise night, green festivals, outdoor concerts, craft fairs and similar events provide residents and business owners an opportunity to meet each other, discuss issues, appreciate their community and form lasting bonds that promote the village and the Township. Many respondents to the surveys identified a need for more community events to draw neighbors out and promote the area. The Township should work with the community to identify events that may promote the area and interaction between residents and businesses.

Summary of Recommendations

This analysis of community concerns offers a toolbox of strategies to revitalize and promote Ringoes. Community renewal and revitalization helps residents and business within the village and provides a sense of community for all of East Amwell. These strategies are in keeping with the historic village character varied by residents.

Maintenance Recommendations

Poor property maintenance, identified as one of the greatest threats to the character of Ringoes, is an issue that requires careful consideration. It is important to find a balance between helping those who need assistance (i.e. elderly, handicapped, etc.) and enforcement of regulations when needed. Providing financial incentives to assist residents is a tangible action the Township should consider. Another strategy that can pay future dividends is establishment of a community group to support and help each other. Community groups can be started through volunteerism and require no government intervention or public funding. Community groups can also reach out to other groups such as local churches, Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts for support.

Township Committee Action Items for 2015

- consider incentivizing residents with tax abatements on improved property values for qualified residents
- consider providing low interest loans to improve residential homes for qualified residents
- adopt an “unfit building” ordinance that is based on the International Building Code in the first quarter of 2015

Local Residents Action Items for 2015

- Local residents form a not for profit 501c3 whose mission is to help and assist residents with maintenance issues and to acquire grants for building restoration in the village
- Local residents form community volunteer groups to assist residents on maintenance issues

Traffic Calming Recommendations

Traffic and pedestrian safety, a major concern of Ringoes stakeholders, is seen as one of the greatest threats to Ringoes. Traffic calming techniques, including road diets, streetscapes, and designated parking areas are all ways to reduce traffic speed and volume and increase safety. These techniques are part of a longer term strategy that require ongoing discussions and planning with County and State officials. The Township should begin the process by reviewing and updating previous circulation plan elements, the Old York Pedestrian Plan and other planning documents as needed. At the same time, the Township should begin to reach out to the appropriate officials at the County and State to discuss strategies for traffic calming. The process will have to be a coordinated effort on many levels, and the Township should seek out any grant funding available through the State for these endeavors.

Township Committee Action Items for 2015

During the first quarter of 2015:

- Engage the appropriate County and State officials to discuss strategies for traffic calming techniques for the village such as:
 - Road diets at the intersections of Rte. 579 and 179 as described in the report
 - Streetscapes including bump outs
 - Designated parking areas in the Village especially along Old York Road
 - Radar Speed Signs/Driver Feedback Signs
- Determine if NJDOT's Complete Streets can assist in traffic calming efforts
- Throughout 2015 seek grants from the State to fund traffic calming efforts

Zoning Recommendations

Zoning refinements are an intermediate term strategy that can be done over the next year. These include reviewing the current zone district regulations in the Village and Local Business District to determine if it is appropriate to expand the list of permitted uses to expand business opportunities at an appropriate level for the village. At the direction of the Township Committee, the Planning Board can begin review of planning documents and ordinances and provide recommendations to the Township Committee next year.

Planning Board Action Items

- Update the OLD YORK ROAD Pedestrian Plan
- Review the Circulation Plan Element of the Master Plan
- Review the permitted uses in the Village for possible expansion and or greater flexibility

Community Self-help Recommendations

Finally, the promotion of community facilities and events helps to improve the sense of community for the village and the Township. While the completion of Clawson House, and any reuse of other structures in the village for community purposes, is a longer term strategy, a review of the abandoned and underutilized structures in the village could determine whether any are appropriate for community use. Determined effort by the Township should continue in an attempt to return the South County Branch to Ringoes.

A short term strategy would introduce more community events in the village. These "Pride in Place" initiatives will require community and Township coordination to identify appropriate events and implementation. Since the Township and residents are well versed in conducting community events, this should be possible on an abbreviated time line.

Township Committee Action Items

- Continue engaging the County in discussions to return the South County Branch to Ringoes
- Study abandoned, underutilized and historical structures for possible community uses
- Identify and promote events that encourage community interaction
- Investigate formation of private, non-profit 501 c3 organization to promote community self-help efforts, including “lend a hand” efforts to assist in the repair and/or clean-up of abandoned or other problem properties.
- Investigate and if appropriate enact an unfit building ordinance that allows the Township to make needed repairs on private property and assess the cost in the form of a tax lien on the property.

CONCLUSION

The Ringoes Village Study provides short and long term recommendations to address many of the issues that have impacted the village character and quality of life for Ringoes residents. Maintenance, traffic, parking, zoning and loss of community events and facilities have all taken a toll on the village community and sense of place. This Study is intended as a catalyst for change to lay the groundwork for future revitalization of Ringoes. Many of the recommendations require the coordinated effort at several levels. However, some small changes, like community groups and events, can have a dramatic impact in a short time.

The revitalization of Ringoes benefits not only those who live and work in the village. Ringoes provides a sense of community for the entire Township and adds to the quality of life and attributes that make East Amwell one of the most sought-out residential communities in New Jersey. Residents, business owners and the Township can work together to actively promote and restore the authentic historic village charm that is key to Ringoes and the Township's identity.

APPENDIX A: SURVEYS

RINGOES VILLAGE VISION PLAN QUESTIONNAIRE

1. If you had to describe the Ringoes Village in one sentence, what would it be?
2. What are your favorite things about Ringoes, what of these would you like to see remain forever?
3. What are three greatest threats to the physical character and livability of the Ringoes Village and vicinity?
4. What opportunities do you see to improve the quality of life in Ringoes?
5. Do you live in Ringoes Village? _____
6. How long have you lived in East Amwell? _____
7. What would you like to see come out of this visioning process?

RINGOES VILLAGE STUDY - BUSINESS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. Are you a business owner in Ringoes Village? _____
2. Are you a resident of Ringoes Village? _____ Of East Amwell? _____
3. Do you rent or own your space? _____
4. If you rent, do you feel that your rent is:
 Above market rate
 Below market rate
 At market rate
 Not sure/rather not answer
5. How long has your business been located in Ringoes? _____
6. If your business were to grow, could your location accommodate growth and associated needs? If not, why? _____
7. Who are the majority of your customers? (choose all that apply)
 Local residents
 Seniors
 Young People
 Adults
 Families
 Local businesses
 Other (please specify) _____
8. How many people (including yourself) are employed by your business? _____

9. Over the past 5 years has the level of your business:
___ increased
___ decreased
___ stayed the same
Please explain: _____
10. Why did you open a business in Ringoes? _____
11. Have you ever considered relocating?_____ If yes, why?
12. What are the greatest opportunities for doing business in Ringoes?

13. What are the greatest challenges for going business in Ringoes?

14. What would help the overall business climate in Ringoes (for example, more parking, aesthetics, cleanliness, walkability, mix of businesses, outdoor green spaces, etc.)?

15. Please provide any additional comments or suggestions you feel would be useful to improve the business climate in Ringoes.

-

APPENDIX B: SURVEY RESULTS

RINGOES VILLAGE VISION PLAN QUESTIONNAIRE (Summarized)

1. If you had to describe the Ringoes Village in one sentence, what would it be?
 - Charming small and friendly village surrounded by open space, farmland and rolling hills
 - small community with ambiance
 - quaint
 - historic structures/historic character
 - nice place to live
 - nice local businesses
 - overwhelmed with traffic
 - pass through on way to Lambertville, Trenton, Flemington or Hillsborough
 - a missed opportunity - could be attractive welcoming with some cleanup and attention
 - tired
 - empty
 - deteriorated over past 20 yrs
 - several houses/stores in need of repair
 - third world country downtown
 - unattractive
 - eyesore and embarrassment
 - depressed
 - depressing
 - disconnected neighborhood divided by two major roads
 - once beautiful with lovely architecture, now falling apart
 - broken down with best days behind it and led by people with no vision that anyone cares about
 - part of Sweet Valley
2. What are your favorite things about Ringoes, what of these would you like to see remain forever?
 - Quaint small town with friendly feel
 - Everything
 - Walkable/sidewalks - can walk to basic services such as deli, bank, post office, etc
 - safe place to live
 - local businesses such as; Mom's, Carousel Deli, Harvest Moon, Franks Pizza, Walt's, Sweet Valley, Champion Tire
 - That there are no chain stores or big box stores
 - The Fairgrounds
 - Clawson Park
 - Historic structures/Character including Clawson House, Landis House, Railroad, Grange building, Odd Fellows Lodge, "Washington Hotel"
 - Mature trees lining roads,
 - Community uses - post office, school, rescue squad and fire company,
 - open space/farmland preservation
 - Special events such as Pumpkin Festival
3. What are three greatest threats to the physical character and livability of the Ringoes Village and vicinity?

- Maintenance/deterioration of historic homes and other structures
 - Abandoned properties loss of historic character
 - Loss of Library
 - Too much traffic
 - traffic safety issues
 - Speeding
 - Loss of local businesses
 - Lack of vision
 - non-residential uses in conflicts with historic/residential neighborhood
 - Clawson house
 - Parking
 - change in zoning
 - Truck noise
 - Potential redevelopment of Schaffernoth property
 - Hazardous waste sites
 - No community events
 - Sidewalks need improvements
 - Septic issues
 - Change of any kind
 - potential for new development not in scale with character (strip malls, big box, high density residential surrounding village)
 - Oddfellows Lodge
4. What opportunities do you see to improve the quality of life in Ringoes?
- Help homeowners to fix up home/properties
 - traffic Calming/Streetscape
 - Rehabilitate structures
 - Improve sidewalks
 - Help local businesses clean up and stay viable
 - bring back library
 - sidewalk to school
 - Look to other historic villages/boroughs for inspiration
 - Clean up Clawson Park and House
 - Free clean up day
 - More community events
 - Attract new businesses that are in scale with village, ice cream shop, bakery, coffee shop, pizza, etc.
 - See if public transportation is an option
 - Buy Oddfellows Lodge for community purpose
- 5 and 6. Do you live in Ringoes Village? How Long have you lived in East Amwell Township.
- 34 not in village
 - 26 in Village
 - 4 no responses
 - Average years of residency = 33
 - Median and mode years of residency = 30
 - 60% of respondents live in Township more than 30 years
 - 30% of respondents live in Township more than 40 years
7. What would you like to see come out of this visioning process?
- Help the village maintain it's historic and quaint character

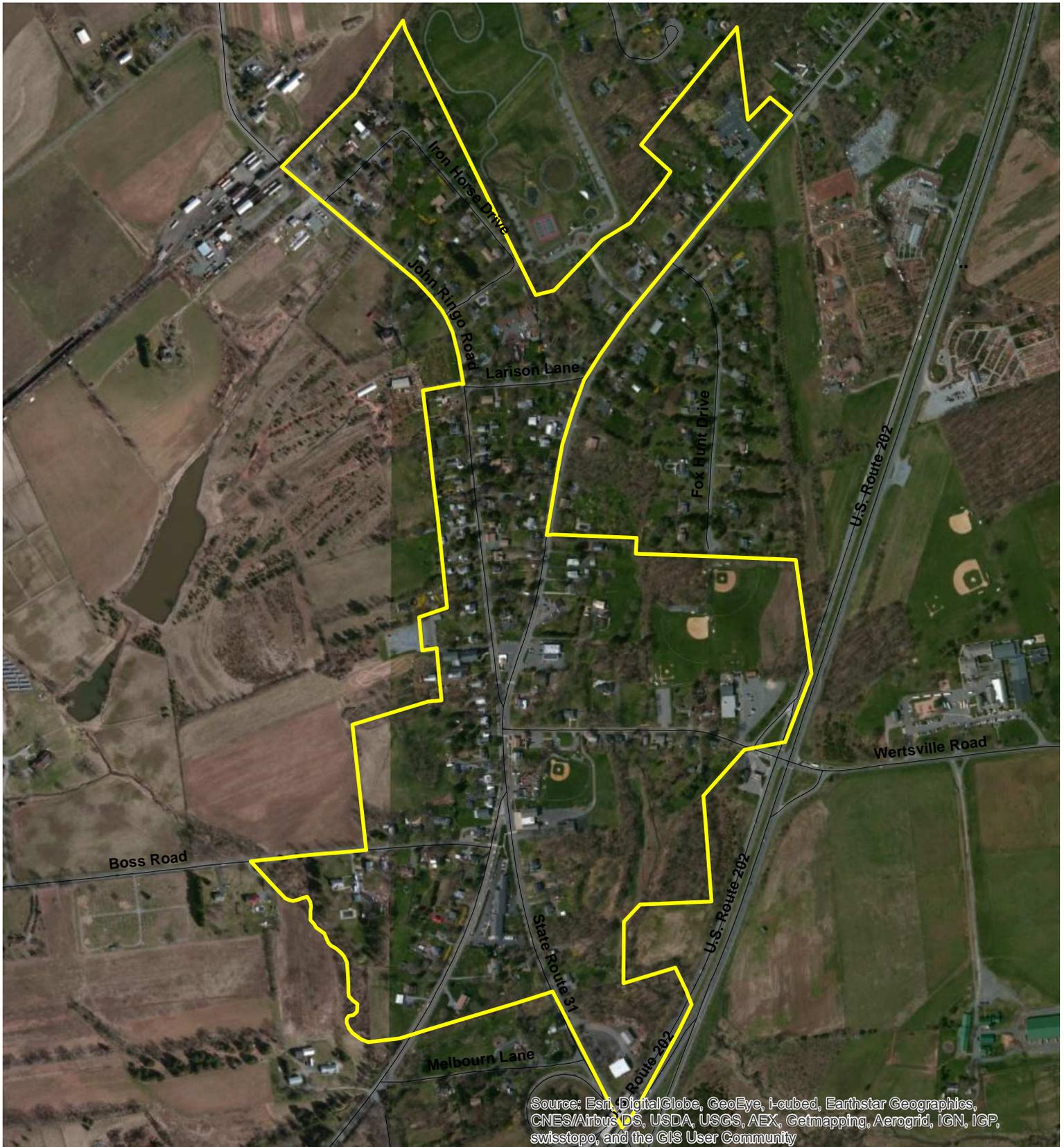
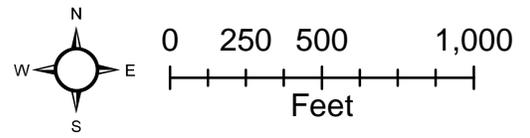
- Help to rehabilitate historic structures/houses
- Fix up local businesses
- Maintenance enforcement
- Traffic calming/reduce speeding, traffic noise, fix parking issues
- Take action
- Community events
- support and help draw local businesses
- No new development
- Develop a community plan/vision
- Design standards
- reduce residential/non-residential conflicts
- Finish Clawson House
- Sell Clawson house
- buy Oddfellows
- Implementation of recommendations
- Make Ringoes a destination rather than a drive through
- Tax incentives to restore and maintain homes

RINGOES VILLAGE STUDY - BUSINESS QUESTIONNAIRE
(Summarized)

1. Are you located in Ringoes Village: 6 "Yes" responses; 0 "No" responses
2. Are you resident of Ringoes: 4 Of East Amwell? 2
3. Do you rent or own your space? 3 Rent; 3 Own
4. If you rent, do you feel that your rent is:
0 Above market rate
1 Below market rate
1 At market rate
1 Not sure/rather not answer
5. How long has your business been located in Ringoes? 12, 14, 7, 47, 35, 46 (years)
6. If your business were to grow, could your location accommodate growth and associated needs? If not, why? 3 responded yes, 2 responded no, 1 n/a.
Lack of space and parking were reasons for no response.
7. Who are the majority of your customers? (choose all that apply)
 Local residents
 Seniors
 Young People
 Adults
 Families
 Local businesses
 Other (please specify)
2 Businesses responded they see clients only which may or may not be local. 4 responded they service all the above.
8. How many people (including yourself) are employed by your business? 1, 35, 4, 8, 12, 6,
9. Over the past 5 years has the level of your business:
3 increased

- 2 decreased
1 stayed the same
Please explain: Big box and economy were cited for any decrease
10. Why did you open a business in Ringoes?
- Close to home/live in area/community
 - good location
 - easy access to highways
 - rent
 - Size of building
11. Have you ever considered relocating? 2 Yes; 3 No; 1 N/A If yes, why? Rent costs and issues
12. What are the greatest opportunities for doing business in Ringoes?
- Easy access to major highways
 - good internet access
 - close to support businesses
 - Good location
 - close to home
 - Community
13. What are the greatest challenges for going business in Ringoes?
- Pedestrian safety
 - parking
 - traffic issues/speeding
 - maintenance issues reflect badly on business
 - clients/patrons have no where to go after visiting specific location - nothing to keep them in town
14. What would help the overall business climate in Ringoes (for example, more parking, aesthetics, cleanliness, walkability, mix of businesses, outdoor green spaces, etc.)?
- parking
 - aesthetics
 - walkability
 - mix of businesses
 - cleanliness
 - nothing
 - promote local businesses through signage or commerce group
15. Please provide any additional comments or suggestions you feel would be useful to improve the business climate in Ringoes.
- Realignment of roads
 - traffic calming
 - More business support from Township officials
 - Aesthetics of Town helps business climate
 - Support community groups and emergency services
 - pedestrian safety

Figure 1:
Ringoes Village Study Area
East Amwell Township
Hunterdon County, NJ
December 2014



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

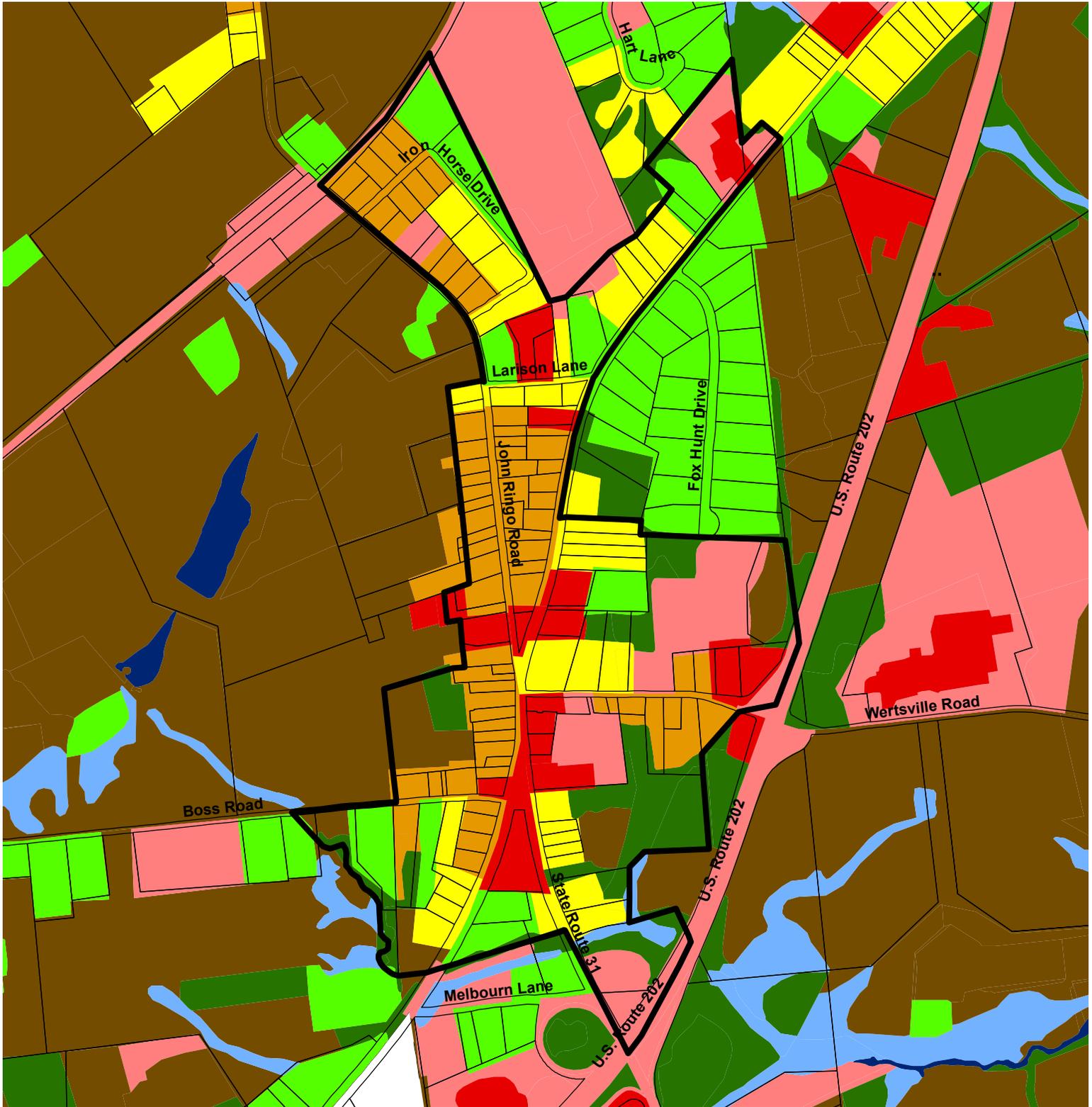
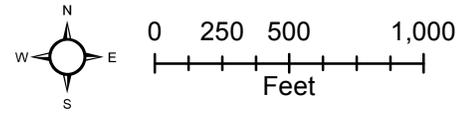
Legend

 Ringoes Village Study Area

Data Sources:
Hunterdon County Division of GIS
BANISCH
 ASSOCIATES, INC.
Planning and Design

Figure 2: 2007 Land Use/Land Cover

East Amwell Township
 Hunterdon County, NJ
 December 2014



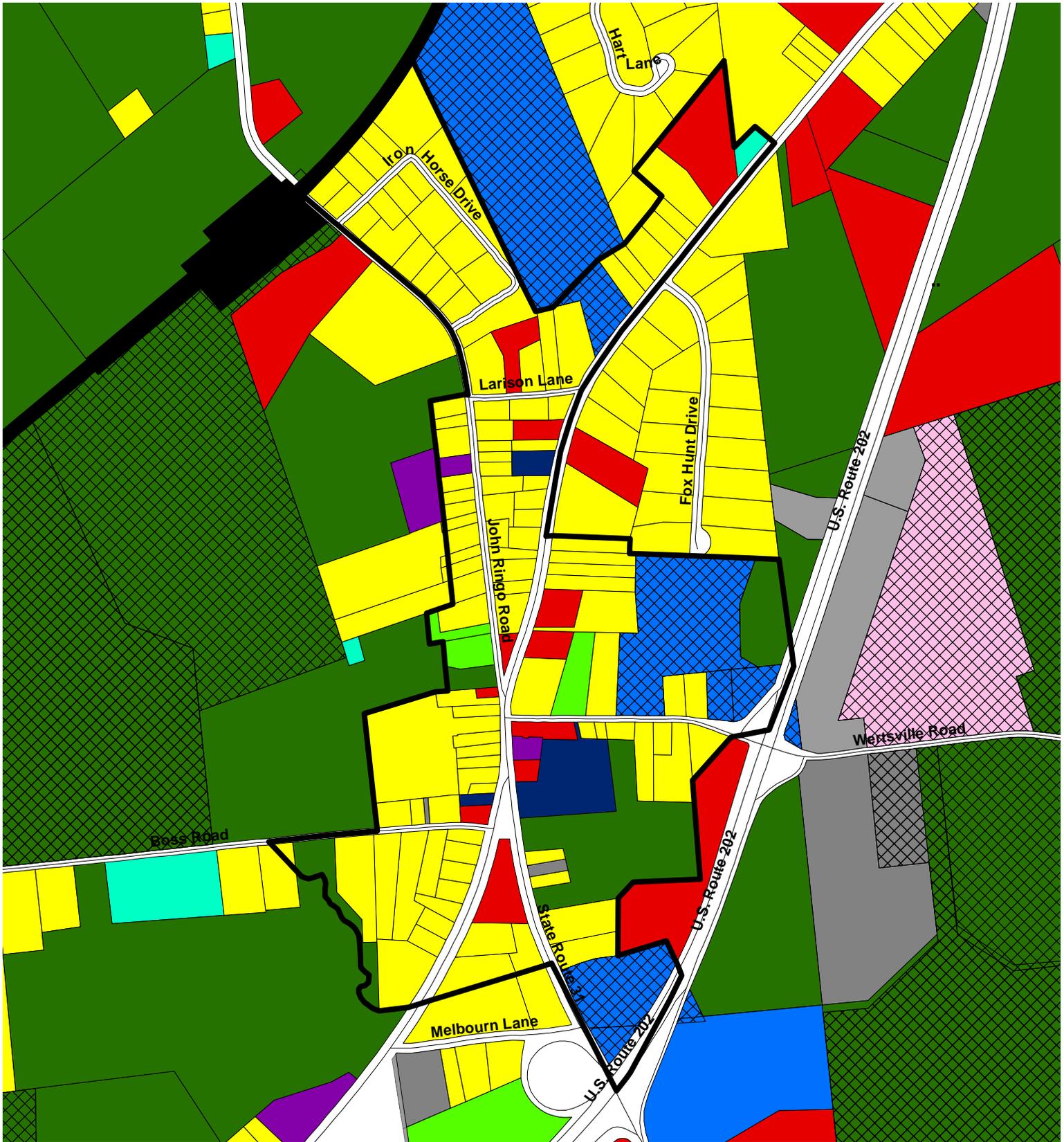
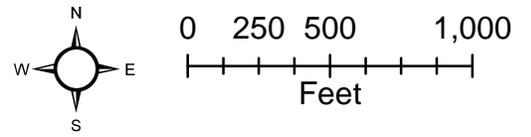
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- Ringoes Village Study Area
- Rural Residential
- Agriculture
- Other Developed
- Commercial
- Residential, Low Density
- Barren Land
- Water
- Industrial
- Residential, Medium Density
- Forest
- Wetlands

Data Sources:
 Hunterdon County Division of GIS

Figure 3: Property Tax Class
East Amwell Township
Hunterdon County, NJ

December 2014



Legend

- | | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------------|
| Ringoes Village Study Area | Farm Assessed | Railroad | Cemetery |
| Deed Restricted Property | Commercial | Public School | Other Exempt |
| Vacant | Industrial | Public Property | No Data |
| Residential | Railroad | Charitable | |

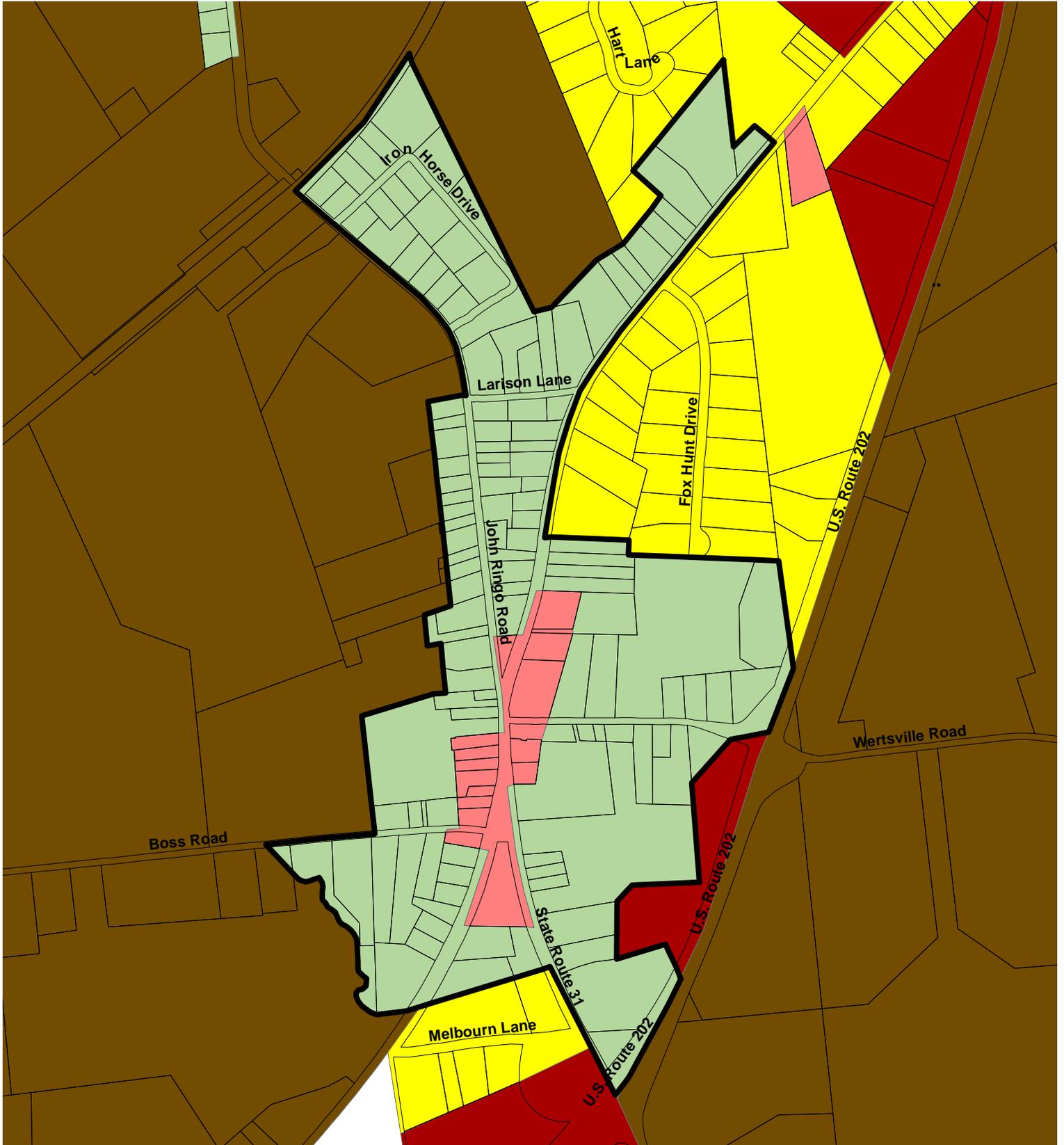
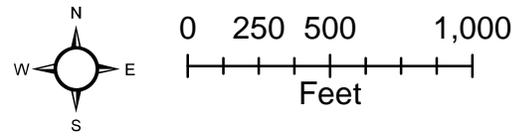
Data Sources:

Hunterdon County Division of GIS

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Figure 4: Zoning
East Amwell Township
Hunterdon County, NJ

December 2014



Legend

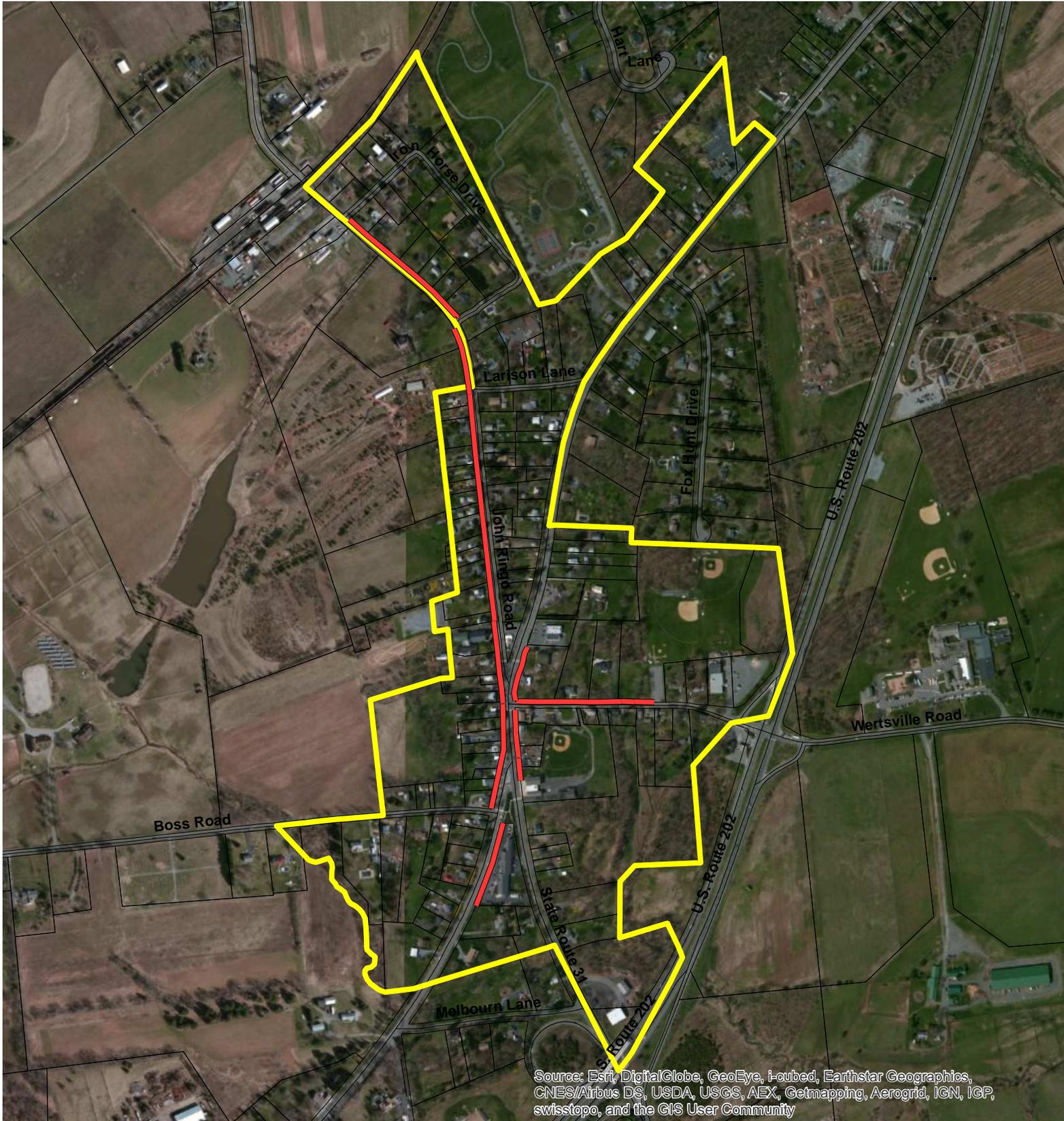
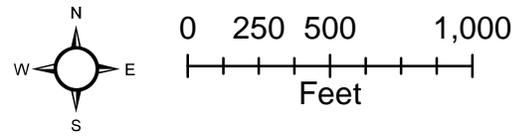
-  Ringoes Village Study Area
-  Residential
-  Highway Office
-  Village
-  Local Business
-  Amwell Valley Agricultural District

Data Sources:
Hunterdon County Division of GIS

BANISCH
 ASSOCIATES, INC.
Planning and Design

Figure 5: Sidewalks
East Amwell Township
Hunterdon County, NJ

December 2014



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, Earthstar Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Legend

-  Sidewalks
-  Ringoes Village Study Area

Data Sources:
Hunterdon County Division of GIS

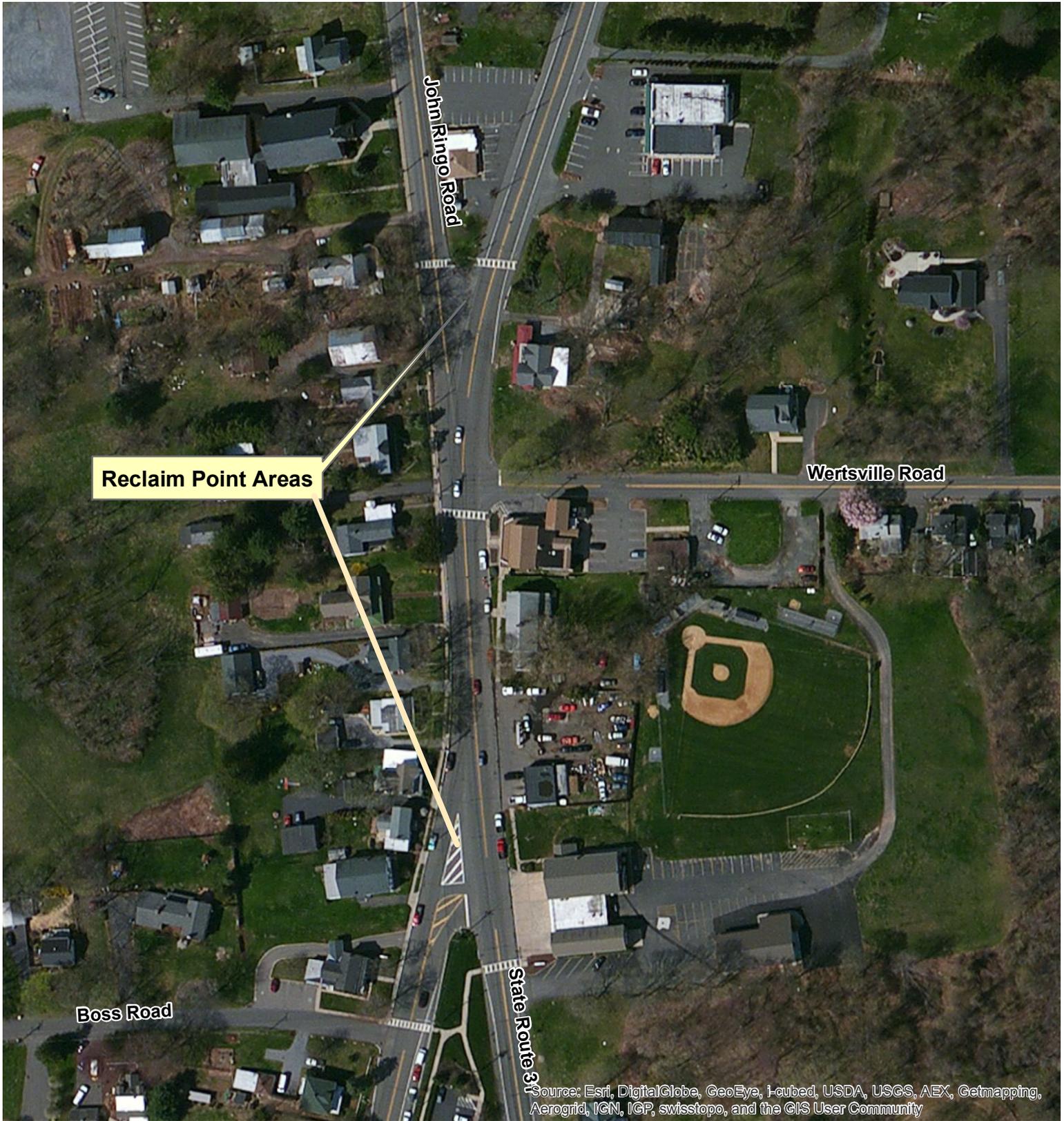
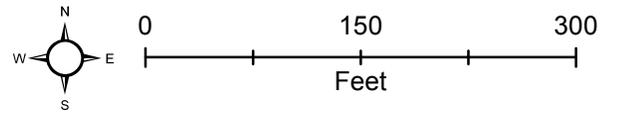
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Figure 6: Traffic Calming at "Points"

East Amwell Township

Hunterdon County, NJ

December 2014



Source: Esri, DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, i-cubed, USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping, Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo, and the GIS User Community

Data Sources:
Hunterdon County Division of GIS