

Important Events

March 8, 2023

The Highlands Rediscovered

@ 6:30 pm

@ The Phillipsburg Free Public Library

This will be a free 30 minute film, with a short presentation by staff from the New Jersey Highlands Coalition.

The New Jersey Highlands span just 17% of the state's land area, yet provide over 70% of its residents with clean, affordable drinking water. Learn the history and importance of one of New Jersey's "last great forests" during this 30 minute film.

The New Jersey Highlands Coalition is the parent organization of the grassroots Phillipsburg Environmental Watch group. All are welcome.

March 9, 2023

Land Use Board Special Meetings

Town Circulation Plan

@ 7:00 pm

@ Housing Authority Community Room

535 Fisher Avenue

If you care at all about the possibility of Center Street becoming a designated truck route, then you must come to this meeting. To those of you who may have appeared before, please come again. We need everyone to show up and let the town know that Center Street as a truck route is unacceptable.

This will be an opportunity for the public to provide comments. The Land Use Board may take a vote that could start the process of opening the door to making Center Street a truck bypass route. If you do not want Center Street to be a truck bypass route, come and make a public statement to the Land Use Board.

About Making Public Statements to the Land Use Board

There will be at least one portion of this Land Use Board meeting where members of the public can make public comments. Public comments will typically have a time limit. The time limit will vary per meeting. Land Use Board meetings typically have a time limit of five minutes. If the governing body of the meeting perceives there are a lot of people who wish to speak, they may cut the time limit down to two minutes.

There are many approaches to making public comments. Some people will write their comments down and read their statement. Some people will write some bullet points down and speak from the bullet points. It generally is a good idea to only ask your questions after you have made all the points you think are important.

When you ask a question and get a response from the governing body, the time the governing body takes for its response is often counted against your time, and the time you lose when they are answering your question limits what you can get into your speaking time. I have seen, what I believe, are attempts by members of a governing body make long winded answers in an attempt to eat up the speakers' times.

You can be firm in your comments, but always be respectful, even when you may not agree with what is being said. It is certainly OK to remind the governing body that you are going to vote, and your vote will go to those who you believe best represent your interests. You may also let the governing body know that you will also be encouraging others to vote in the upcoming elections.

Goals and Call to Action

What are the Goals?

- The primary goal at this stage of the process is to stop the Land Use Board from passing a Circulation Plan that in any way endorses or mentions using Center Street as a truck bypass route.
- Another goal is to organize and monitor the town government to ensure that Center Street does not become a truck bypass route

Call to Action

What actions can you take?

- Come and speak at the March 9, 2023 Special Land Use Board Meeting regarding the Circulation Plan and let them know you do not want them to move forward a Circulation Plan that in any way mentions using Center Street as a truck route.
- Provide Phillipsburg Environmental Watch your contact information for further organizing. If you visit the website <http://pewnj.org>, you can use the “Contact Us” feature to provide your name and email address to be added to the contact list.

The Circulation Plan’s Primary Objectives

One of the primary objectives of the town’s Circulation Plan is to relieve congestion and keep trucks from using South Main Street, between McKeen Street and Union Square. One of the primary options that is presented for keeping trucks off of South Main Street is to make Center Street a designated truck route. If Center Street becomes a designated truck route, all trucks traveling through Phillipsburg would connect between South Main Street (State Route 122) and Memorial Parkway (State Route 22) by using Center Street and Roseberry Street. You can visually see this by looking at the map that is part of this news letter, and the map is also page 30 of the town’s Circulation Plan Report that will be discussed at the March 9, 2023 meeting.

Several Phillipsburg residents have spoken against this idea of using Center Street as a truck bypass route at both Town Council Meetings and Land Use Board meetings. Some business owners have spoken in favor of the Circulation Plan to keep trucks off South Main Street.

The net result of preventing truck traffic from using South Main Street will potentially shift the burden and harm of the truck traffic directly through the currently truck restricted and neighborhood-friendly Center Street. Once Center Street is opened to truck traffic, then trucks from the proposed Peron Howard Street warehouse in downtown Phillipsburg, trucks from Bridgepoint 78 – one of the largest warehouse centers in the north east region of the United States -, and all other trucks traveling through Phillipsburg would also use Center Street.



The screenshot shows a Facebook post from the Town of Phillipsburg, dated 22 hours ago. The post text reads: "The Land Use Board is hearing this matter as way to start the public discussion and introduce the working circulation plan concept. The Town of Phillipsburg recommends that local businesses, community groups and residents to participate in developing the circulation plan. The subcommittee has developed a framework to start the discussion with the public as a whole, which hopefully will result in substantial input. It is our hope that this process spurs a larger discussion/debate, as development of this plan is critical to the Town." Below the text is a logo for the Town of Phillipsburg, New Jersey, featuring a bridge and the text "THE TOWN OF PHILLIPSBURG NEW JERSEY". To the right of the logo, the text reads: "PHILLIPSBURGNJ.ORG TOWN OF PHILLIPSBURG CIRCULATION PLAN – Phillipsburg Ne..."

Why does this plan to have trucks use Center Street exist?

We are of the opinion that the plan to divert traffic from South Main Street, and potentially use Center Street as a truck route, is directly related to the proposed Peron Howard Street warehouse in downtown Phillipsburg along the Delaware River. The Peron Howard Street Warehouse project was first publicly spoken about by Town Council in January 2021. There was initially a lot of resistance by the downtown business community, largely due to the increase in truck traffic. Evidence of this connection between the warehouse and the plan to make Center Street a truck bypass route can be seen in the Consistency Review Report for the Peron Howard Street Property. The Town Council has strongly denied our assertions of the connection between Peron Howard Street Warehouse and the plan to reroute traffic from South Main Street to Center Street, but we point to the following paragraph in the “Consistency Review Report” for the Peron Howard Street Warehouse project prepared December 20, 2001. This document specifically says that because of the Peron Howard Street Warehouse truck traffic the town should be “**Re-routing traffic around the downtown...**” Although this paragraph mentions the Howard Street Extension, the emphasis is stopping trucks from using South Main Street between McKeen and Union Square, potentially resulting in Center Street becoming a truck bypass route.

Second, any new industrial use would most certainly increase truck traffic and potentially automobile traffic in this downtown area that is working to become more pedestrian-friendly. We strongly discourage the Town from permitting additional truck traffic to enter the downtown (South Main Street). Re-routing traffic around the downtown will help to avoid conflicts with pedestrians and bicyclists as well as help to preserve the downtown character of the neighborhood. We recommend the Town revisit an earlier idea to extend Howard Street south to bypass the downtown and connect to South Main Street somewhere around Center Street.

We believe the plan to keep tractor trailers off South Main Street, and potentially make Center Street a truck bypass route, was at least partially proposed to placate the downtown business owners and reduce resistance to the Peron Howard Street Warehouse project. Of course, the potential consequence of this is Center Street could become a truck bypass route.

Some of the business owners we have spoken to are dismayed at the idea of diverting truck traffic up through residential streets, and are horrified at the idea of a warehouse on the Peron Howard Street Property. However, you can expect that there will be some business owners who will be at the meeting in support of diverting truck traffic away from downtown Phillipsburg and, if necessary, support the idea of diverting tractor trailers up through the residential area of Center Street.

Consequences to Residents of Center Street and the Surrounding Area

Some possible items you can speak to when you address Council:

- Center Street has three schools which parents and students travel to get to school. Approximately 1,400 students attend Phillipsburg Primary School, the Early Childhood Education Center and the Phillipsburg Elementary School. Many of those students either walk or travel with their parents to these respective schools using Center Street.
- If Center Street becomes a truck bypass route, then the street will become more dangerous for the residents of Center Street and their children
- Center Street and the nearby area will have the noise and vibration of trucks 24 hours a day
- Center Street and the nearby area will have the fumes and pollution from trucks
- Center Street is on hills, and at various spots it will be hard for trucks to stop.
- If Center Street becomes a truck bypass route, then residents living on Center Street and the surrounding area will see their property values severely hurt.
- If Center Street is opened to truck traffic, then trucks coming from the Peron Howard Street Warehouse, truck traveling through Phillipsburg and trucks traveling to and from the BridgePoint 78 Warehouse complex will all be able to travel using Center Street.

Some other things you could mention

- Ask the Land Use Board to remove any mention of Center Street as a potential truck bypass route from the town Circulation Plan.
- Ask the Land Use Board to pass a resolution for the Town Council to pass a resolution letting the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) know the town will not consider Center Street as an alternate truck bypass route

Arguments you can expect to hear from the town:

You will hear the town say that “we” do not understand the issue of making Roseberry Street and Center Street a designated truck route between South Main Street (State Route 122) and Memorial Parkway (State Route 22).

We do understand that there is the very real potential that Center Street may become a truck bypass route.

On New Year’s Eve, 2021, the Town Council held a special meeting where the public was first presented with a map showing no truck traffic between McKeen and Union Square, and Center Street as a truck bypass route. I (David Morrisette) questioned the Center Street issue at this meeting. This resolution, Resolution 2021-316, passed at the Special Town Council Meeting called for New Year’s Eve, December 31, 2021.

On January 3, 2022, Town Engineer Tim O'Brien sent a letter/report to Charles R. Reilly at the NJDOT. Tim O'Brien specifically recommends in his report, that because of proposed warehouses (Peron Howard Street Warehouse being one) the town needs to have designated truck routes throughout town. The designated truck routes shown in his report specifically show no truck traffic on South Main Street, between MeKeen Street and Union Square, and using Center Street as a truck bypass route to connect South Main Street (State Route 122) and Memorial Parkway (State Route 22).

Charles R. Reilly is the person in NJDOT who will review the information from the town, and will be the person who will determine if the State will designate Center Street as a truck bypass route. Many Phillipsburg residents sent letters to Charles R. Reilly to protest the idea of Center Street becoming a truck bypass route.

Shortly after this letter/report was sent, I called Charles R Reilly and spoke with him. Charles R. Reilly said that because the plan was submitted by a duly elected municipal body of government, the only thing that could stop his consideration of making Center Street a truck bypass route is if the governmental body passed legislation telling him not to consider the plan. He said that if Center Street is considered an acceptable truck route it would be up to the Town Council to determine if they would allow trucks to use Center Street as a truck bypass, or keep things as they are with South Main Street connecting State Route 122 and State Route 22. However, even if the current Council did not now allow trucks to use Center Street as a way to connect between South Main Street (State Route 122) and Memorial Parkway (State Route 22), if Center Street is designated as a truck bypass route by NJDOT, a future Council could allow it be a truck bypass route based on NJDOT's recommendation that it is an acceptable truck bypass route.

I (DM) continued questioning the Center Street truck route bypass issue at other town meetings.

In February of 2022, Town Council went through the motions of protesting the inclusion of Center Street becoming a designate truck route and prepared a resolution to notify NJDOT that Council did not want Center Street to become a designated NJDOT truck route. In a confusing resolution, Resolution 2022-51, Council said we do not want Center Street to a designate truck route, but if NJDOT wanted to make Center Street a designate truck route, then that would be fine with Council. Here is a snapshot of the essence of that Resolution 2022-51.

WHEREAS the Council understands NJDOT may not provide relief as sought and should such relief not be provided the Council supports and authorizes consideration of an alternate route per NJAC 16:27-4.3(b)7.i that includes the use of Center Street and portions of Roseberry Street to be included as part of the designated truck route to provide required local route connections between State Route 22 and State Route 122; and

Many residents have signed petitions telling NJDOT they do not want Center Street to be a truck bypass route, and passed these petitions onto the Town Council. A few residents have come to Council meetings and told Council they do not want Center Street to be a truck bypass route.

Councilmen Wyant, Clark and Kennedy have come out strongly and publicly against making Center Street a truck bypass route. Councilman Wyant, in line with my conversation with Charles Reilly, did say that if Center Street is designated by the state as a truck bypass route, there is nothing to stop a future Council from making it a truck bypass route.

Councilman Clark indicated he has brought representatives for Governor Murphy's office to look at Center Street and emphasized he does not want to see Center Street become a truck bypass route.

Councilman Piazza indicated that State Senator Douglass Steinhardt, a strong and vocal supporter of the Peron Howard Street Warehouse, spoke with the head of the NJDOT, Dian Gutierrez-Scaccetti, and said he did not want to see Center Street get the designation of being a truck bypass route. Offline, Councilman Piazza and I do have a difference of opinion on one issue. Councilman Piazza indicated to me he was told by Senator Steinhardt that if NJDOT indicates Center Street is an acceptable truck bypass route, and Council votes to not make Center Street a truck bypass route, that this kills the possibility of Center Street becoming a truck bypass route forever. My understanding, based on my conversation with Charles R Reilly, is that the approval from the NJDOT for allowing the town to divert traffic from South Main Street onto Center Street does not die if it is rejected by the current Council, and is open for a future Council to make Center Street a truck bypass route based on the NJDOT approval that would potentially currently happen. We do need further clarification on this. I would love to be wrong on this issue.

Now, with the current Circulation Plan, it is clear that making Center Street a truck bypass route is still a clear possibility as evidence from the snapshot of the text below (only to be implemented if required by the state):

- The designation of Roseberry Street and Center Street are considered an alternative to meet the regulations of the New Jersey Department of Transportation. This action has been met with public outcry but is misunderstood. It is not the preferred route and is only included as an alternative to meet the NJDOT requirements, only to be implemented if required by the State.

So please come to this meeting and ask let the Land Use Board know that you do not want see Center Street to be part of a truck bypass plan in the town Circulation Plan. Let the Land Use Board know you want this stopped in its tracks now.

Your voice is needed!

Phillipsburg Environmental Watch: <http://pewnj.org>

Save Center Street: <http://savecenterstreet.org>

New Jersey Highlands Coalition: <https://njhighlandscoalition.org/>

**Phillipsburg Environmental Watch
Executive Committee**

President: David Morrisette

Vice President: Stuart Ridley

Treasurer: Sandra Morrisette

Secretary: Janice Hosbach

Elizabeth Ridley: Founding Member

Stephen Ellis: Project Specialist

Attached to this newsletter are relevant documents from the town's draft Circulation Pan that will be discussed March 9, 2022 regarding truck routes.

D. Truck Traffic

1. Overview

Trucks and their respective impacts are an important consideration for this circulation plan for the Town of Phillipsburg. Truck traffic directly impacts the well-being of residents and the economic viability of businesses that use truck traffic to maintain their operations. The residential and non-residential tax bases are absolutely related to the impacts of truck traffic, and since the prior circulation plan in 2004, truck traffic has grown to be a more substantial concern than ever before. This is due in part to the increase of truck movements related to warehousing and e-commerce, which affects all municipalities.

The NJDOT is still reviewing the report prepared by the Governing Body. This designated truck route map is in alignment with the Master Plan goals and objectives, so long as the final route does not include Center Street and Roseberry Street, as noted in the report.

Regional Truck Routes

Phillipsburg is bound by US Route 22, State Route 122 and Interstate 78 which are critical routes through the region that generate truck traffic. The impact of these regional routes is that when traffic conditions do not promote efficient movements due to crashes or detours, toll crossing operations etc., trucks will attempt to reroute through local Town roads. These truck trips end up impacting the wellbeing of the community from environmental and public safety standpoints when they get stuck within the Town. As result of the concerns due to cut through traffic, goals were established that may result in reduce cut through traffic. Such goals include designated truck routes so detoured trucks don't get stuck, removal of State Truck Route 122's designation as a truck route on the state map and active participation with regional community partners to develop regional truck routes.

Safety Concerns

It is critical that trucks are able to move safely through the Town. From the designated truck route prepared separately from this study, a number of safety concerns were found that included low clearances, steep slopes, and limited turning radius and related. Please see Section 4, Community Input below for additional comments received during the public hearing process.

As mentioned, the Town of Phillipsburg via its engineering consultant, Van Cleef Engineering Associates, has previously conducted extensive research through its engineering department to address Truck Traffic in the Town. The results of these submissions are pending, with the latest report being a comprehensive Designated Truck Route dated August 23, 2022. While the Plan encourages all to review that report in its entirety for complete comprehension of the issues pertaining to truck traffic and the solutions proposed from exhaustive engineering study, the Plan summarizes these in the subsequent sections.

2. Summary of August 2022 Designated Truck Route Study

The truck route was developed in hopes of resolving issues with the public regarding increased truck traffic due to additional warehousing and logistics industries that have recently developed in Phillipsburg. The goal was to identify a safe and stable route designated for truck traffic over 4 tons to get them to either Route 122 our Route 22 as quickly and safely as possible. The route was developed with the extra intent to minimize conflict points between truck and non-truck traffic. To do this, VCEA studied items including but not limited to: crash report data, traffic counts, sight distance, speed limits, road geometry, existing truck routes, roadway conditions and roadway jurisdiction within Phillipsburg to determine the ideal locations for the truck routes.

A few notes regarding the following map:

- The designation of Roseberry Street and Center Street are considered an alternative to meet the regulations of the New Jersey Department of Transportation. This action has been met with public outcry but is misunderstood. It is not the preferred route and is only included as an alternative to meet the NJDOT requirements, only to be implemented if required by the State.

- If the Howard Street Extension project is completed, the proposed route designates this extension as the primary local truck route, and removes a portion of South Main Street and McKeen Street from local truck traffic.
- The route removes the ability for of the downtown area to be used by heavy truck traffic.

3. Interfacing with the Land Use Plan

The Town of Phillipsburg Land Use Plan is a separate document that covers the permitted uses of land within the Town of Phillipsburg. The assessments made within the Land Use Plan form the basis for the zoning map, which is more commonly understood. While land use is not something that is explicitly part of this Circulation Plan, the land uses contained within Phillipsburg has a profound impact on the patterns of circulation that can be found within the Town.

It is important to note that the Land Use Plan provides provisions for land uses that generate trucks, as such land uses are necessary to the economic well-being of community. Phillipsburg's Land Use Plan includes areas of industrial zones that permit use that would generate trucks. It is critical that, with such uses, consideration is given to impacts on how trucks would access these areas, as developer responsibilities are usually limited to their driveway entrance and not to the ability of the local roadway network to support such activity. In recent projects, such as the Bridge Point 78 redevelopment, the Town, in conjunction with the State and Lopatcong Township, considered the impact of truck circulation to the surrounding communities and established with the developer(s) additional access points to Route 22, to promote the use of Route 22. Additionally, Phillipsburg permitted the installation of a signalized intersection to ensure limited impact at an existing site access point that historically was impacted by traffic. The Town also worked with developers on a different site to modify an existing intersection to better accommodate truck movements.

Future updates to the Land Use Plan should consider impact of circulation include trucks while also reviewing Phillipsburg's vulnerability to climate-induced hazards and incorporating best management practices from "Distribution Warehousing and Goods Movement Guidelines" document prepared by the New Jersey State Planning Commission's Office of Planning Advocacy in September of 2022. One key consideration as it relates to this Circulation Plan regards the proximity of warehousing activities to Centers. While Phillipsburg is designated as a Center pursuant to the State Planning Commission, all of Phillipsburg is located no greater than approximately 4 miles away from interstate 78 interchange no. 3 and no greater than 1 mile from either US Route 22 or State Route 122, and most of the warehousing has some connection to regional railways. For additional information regarding this proximity, refer to maps contained in Appendix E.

4. Community Input

Community input was received throughout the process of developing this document. The full compendium of meeting minutes for the public hearings are located in Appendix A, however some notable excerpts pertaining to truck facilities are outlined below with our responses:

5. Truck Goals

Short Term

- Install signs that designate low clearance hazards for trucks.
- Install wayfinding signs that may reduce truck movement conflicts.
- Develop/participate in planning discussions on truck routes with regional planning agencies such as NJTPA and Warren County, as Phillipsburg becomes a cut through to access Route 22.
- Finish/Obtain approval for the Truck Route Designation Report and coordinate with the NJDOT as necessary.
- Identify obstructions with the truck route as they occur and coordinate with industry to relocate or remove them.

Long Term

- Improve intersections and routes utilized by trucks to reduce impact to Town:
 - Improve turning radius at intersections
 - Upgrade traffic signal to reduce pole knock downs
- Develop improved truck turn around at Union Square to reduce need to trucks to utilize South Main Street.
- Coordinate with rail providers to reduce clearance conflicts within the Town.
- Improve access to rail lines to reduce truck demand at local business.
- Develop a partnership with the county to facilitate future truck traffic studies and improvements.