

Master Plan 2025 – 6. Community Facilities and Services Plan Element Draft 7a

Released on March 25, 2025 by element writing team Chair Ryan Schwab for consideration for adoption by the Planning Board.

Thanks go to the following people who helped create the draft Community Facilities and Services Plan element: Chair Ryan Schwab, Suzanne Elliott, Allison Neary, Kate O’Neill, Rob Ingram, Roger Demareski, and Andy Jackson.

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1. Introduction

The Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) includes a Community Facilities Plan as a permitted Master Plan element. N.J.S.A. 40:55D-28(4) describes the element as follows:

“A community facilities plan element showing the existing and proposed location and type of educational or cultural facilities, historic sites, libraries, hospitals, firehouses, police stations and other related facilities, including their relation to the surrounding areas.”

We have chosen to name the element the Community Facilities and Services Plan element to act as a guide to facilities and services available to Borough Residents and to present goals on how to improve or enhance both. We benchmarked the Community Facilities Plans in the Master Plans of nearby communities. We also reviewed the Community Facilities Plan of the 1998 Pennington Borough Master Plan and in the 2005, 2013 and 2023 Master Plan Reexamination reports. These can be accessed on the Borough website.

The vision and goals for the Community Facilities and Services Plan element are a subset of the overall Master Plan 2025 vision and goals developed by the Master Plan Committee (MPC) and the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). The CAC is composed of 15 resident volunteers appointed by the Mayor on October 4, 2023. The role of the CAC is to assist the Planning Board in any area assigned to it, as detailed in NJ MLUL 40:55D-27a. In this case, the CAC is assigned to help the Planning Board develop Master Plan 2025. Their role is to work with the MPC and

with the Committees and Commissions developing draft elements for the Master Plan. CAC members serve as community contacts, obtaining feedback and buy-in as the Plan elements develop.

In the fall of 2023, the MPC and CAC worked together to develop the vision and goals for the updated Master Plan. Their report was reviewed, modified and endorsed by the Planning Board in a public meeting on January 10, 2024. The modified vision and goals were presented to the public at an Open House at Borough Hall on April 10, 2024. Revisions were made based on feedback from Borough residents. The resulting list of draft goals was distributed to the teams developing the Master Plan elements as a guide for their discussions. The community facilities and services goals in that report were the starting point for the Community Facilities and Services Plan element writing team.

2. Community Facilities and Services Plan Vision, Goals and Strategies

This Community Facilities and Services Plan Element includes data on existing and proposed municipal and other public facilities, semi-public facilities, parks and recreation, schools, utilities services, stormwater management and recycling.

Pennington Borough provides an excellent range and quality of community facilities to serve its population. The Borough undertakes a review of its community facilities needs on an annual basis by the Borough Administrator in collaboration with the Hopewell Valley Office of Emergency Management and Borough Council to ensure facilities are properly functioning and have the capacity for the forecasted annual usage. Many of the existing facilities have been upgraded over the course of the last decade to reflect Americans with Disabilities Act requirements and other needs.

According to the 2020 Census, Pennington Borough has a population of 2,802 people. With limited opportunity for new development in the Borough, major additions to or expansions of the existing community facilities are not anticipated.

Pennington Borough's vision is to ensure equitable access to community facilities, parks, services, and other amenities for people who are diverse in age, race and ethnicity, gender identity, religion, abilities, and socioeconomic status. The Borough will enhance the physical and mental wellness of its residents by creating meaningful opportunities for social connections, culture, learning, and leisure, and by supporting the availability of public and commercial facilities in the community.

Goals for community facilities and services:

1. To support community activities, the Borough should keep an updated list of public, semi-private and private indoor and outdoor facilities that are willing to host volunteer activities, such as community events, youth and adult sports, meetings of volunteers, book clubs, art shows, etc. Helping residents find facilities that meet their needs will bring the community together in shared activities.

2. With the refurbishing of Borough Hall and the modern Public Works facility, the community is well positioned to provide municipal services. However, space is limited and may not be adequate for the proper functioning of some departments. The Borough should consider its current inventory of space and how upcoming changes to the uses of buildings can best support all services. It may be necessary to consider renting some nearby space or repurposing other borough buildings.
3. The Borough should keep the community apprised of the services it provides, such as the library, police department, public works department, courts and more, and what is their role in an emergency along with clear and transparent communication via multiple modes of communication.
4. In addition to routine maintenance, the Borough will continue to improve energy efficiency and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from its buildings. Establish redundant energy systems, where it is feasible, to allow community facilities to maintain operations during public emergencies.
5. A long-term replacement for the Emergency Medical Services and expansion of our Emergency Services should be prioritized through a review of the Pennington Fire Company and Hopewell Valley Emergency Services to ensure capacity to service the regional needs.
6. Pennington Borough should become a National Weather Service StormReady municipality and work with our regional municipalities and the Hopewell Valley OEM to offer a comprehensive StormReady environment in Hopewell Valley. A strong consideration should be made to the implementation of Outdoor Warning Sirens to ensure multiple layers of alerts.
7. The Senior Center on Reading Avenue may become redundant when the regional Community Center on Reed Road is opened. Plans should be developed for the future of that site to support local needs and increase services within Pennington Borough.
8. Pennington should have a place that provides opportunities for learning, social connections, culture, and leisure for all. It should be rich in arts, community activities, and entertainment. The proposed new community center on Reed Road may provide this but its distance from the Borough center may be a discouragement and public transportation from the Borough may be needed for young people and others who do not drive.
9. Church attendance is in decline and some of the churches in the Borough may close or consolidate. These buildings are often historic, and the Borough should encourage repurpose for other uses instead of demolition.
10. The Borough should encourage the development or revitalization of daycare services to help families be able to live in Pennington.

3. Information on Community Facilities and Services

a. Borough-Operated Facilities and Services

1. Pennington Municipal Building (Borough Hall)

Borough Hall houses offices and conference rooms for the Mayor, Council, Borough officials, and the various municipal agencies and departments, including Public Works, Planning & Zoning Board, Parks & Recreation Commission, Environmental Commission, Economic Development Commission, Historic Preservation Commission, Open Space Committee, Shade Tree Committee, Board of Health, and Office of Emergency Management. In addition, there are offices for the Tax Collector, Tax Assessor, Zoning officer, Building and Construction officials, Borough Administrator and Borough Clerk. Borough Hall also houses the Police Station and the Municipal Court, a local court created by state law, whose procedures are governed by New Jersey Court rules.

2. Police Department

(<https://www.penningtonboro.org/police>)

The Pennington Police Department is responsible for enforcing local and state laws with respect to motor vehicle and New Jersey criminal code. Police headquarters is located within the Municipal Building on North Main Street. This space houses offices, a holding cell, an evidence room and break rooms for the station.

Police equipment in 2025 included the following:

- 4 Marked police vehicles
- 1 Unmarked police vehicles
- 1 Mobile Speed Monitor

Pennington Borough has shared service agreements with Hopewell Township and Mercer County for Emergency 911 and Dispatch. The Department's authorized complement of officers and dispatchers is supplemented by civilians and crossing guards.

3. Emergency Management

(<https://www.hopewellpolice.nj.gov/divisions/oem>)

Hopewell Valley has a regional Office of Emergency Management (OEM) including Hopewell Township, Hopewell Borough and Pennington Borough. Each municipality has an emergency Management Coordinator. The OEM is responsible for planning for, responding to and coordinating efforts during major emergency events in Hopewell Valley. The office has developed and constantly updates a comprehensive emergency operations plan. Periodically the office conducts drills involving the police departments, fire departments, emergency medical units, communications centers, health department and other government agencies such as the public works departments.

The OEM uses an emergency operations center located in the Hopewell Township Police headquarters. This center is activated several times a year for incidents such as floods, major snowstorms, and other large-scale events. The Hopewell Valley OEM works closely with the Mercer County and New Jersey State Emergency Management Offices.

4. Department of Public Works

(<https://www.penningtonboro.org/departments-public-works>)

The Department of Public Works is located on North Main Street on a lot in Hopewell Township owned by Pennington Borough. The lot also includes a PSE&G solar farm, which provides electric power to the grid and provides power to the Public Works building. The building and parking lots store all equipment for garbage and other refuse collection, and for the maintenance of roads, water and sewer systems, buildings & grounds, parks, streams and catch basins, and shade trees. The maintenance of vehicles and equipment is conducted in the Public Works building. Further information on Public Works services and facilities, including the sites of water wells and sewer pumps can be found in the Utilities Plan element of the Master Plan.

5. Pennington Public Library

(<https://www.penningtonlibrary.org>)

Pennington Public Library has been a community institution since its founding in 1876. The mission of the Library is to celebrate reading in all formats and provide a warm, welcoming place where community members of all ages can interact, engage in public discourse, and pursue lifelong learning for personal growth and entertainment. The library offers a variety of quality programming, knowledgeable staff, dedicated volunteers who staff the circulation desk, a comfortable physical environment and coffee and tea station courtesy of the Friends of the Library. The Library's current collection of books, e-books, DVDs, newspapers and magazines exceeds 34,000 titles. The circulation is over 44,000 titles checked out annually. The Library also provides access to the world through free Wi-Fi, offers frequent programs for education and entertainment, and builds a strong community by sharing information from local organizations.

To ensure fiscal parity among municipalities that support a local or joint library and those that support a county library, on March 21, 2011, Governor Chris Christie enacted P.L. 2011, c. 38 (S-2068). The law provides a dedicated line item on the property tax bill for the minimum funding to municipal and joint free public libraries. In 2025, the Pennington Municipal Library tax was 0.039 cents per \$100 of valuation. The library receives a budget from the Borough based on taxes collected and this is supplemented by donations from the community to the Friends of Pennington Library. Library cards can be obtained at no charge for people who live in the Hopewell Valley Regional School District. The library trustees have completed a strategic plan and a building program plan. An evaluation is currently being undertaken to determine future library needs.

6. Board of Health

(<https://www.penningtonboro.org/board-health>)

(<https://www.hopewelltpw.org/190/Board-of-Health>)

The Board of Health provides health services to Borough residents through a shared services agreement with the Hopewell Township Health Department. The mission of the Township Board of Health is to protect, improve, and promote the health, productivity, and well-being of all Hopewell Township residents. There are also shared service agreements with the Township for animal control and senior services.

7. Senior and Community Center

The Hopewell Valley Senior Center on Reading Street serves seniors from Pennington Borough, Hopewell Borough and Hopewell Township. Activities are organized by Hopewell Township and those at the Reading Street facility include Artists' Choice and Collage, Social Bridge, Games, Knitting Club, and Mahjong. Other activities open to Pennington seniors take place at the Hopewell Township Building, the Mercer County Library and the Hopewell Borough Library. Additionally, the Mercer County Nutrition Program for Older Adults provides ready-to-eat meals at the Reading Street facility.

Hopewell Township is in the design stage of a multipurpose building off Reed Road to serve primarily as a senior and community center, with integrated fitness & wellness facilities for residents of the Hopewell Valley municipalities of Hopewell Township, Hopewell Borough and Pennington Borough. It is envisioned as a single multi-story building with outdoor amenities that will serve as a senior services center, a community center, and a fitness and wellness facility, with additional support office space for area non-profits. Outdoor amenities envisioned include an outdoor pool, passive and active recreation areas, a walking nature trail, and a community garden. No date has been set for completion, but when it is opened, the current Senior Center on Reading Street in Pennington Borough will become obsolete and will need to be repurposed or replaced.

8. Parks and Recreation

As shown in Table 1, Pennington has four public park and playground facilities for active and passive recreational use, covering 11.8 acres of Borough land. Educational facilities in the Borough contribute an additional 34.3 acres of land that is available for public use. These include Toll Gate School rear field and playground, the Board of Education's Administration Building rear field, Pennington Schools sports fields and lake on Burd Street and its fields and woodlands on both sides of Green Street. In addition, the Pennington African Cemetery contributes 1.3 acres and there are 5.4 acres of open space north of the Senior Center on Reading Street. The total area of open space available to the public in Pennington is about 53 acres.

The National Recreation Association has determined that about 10 acres of parkland is needed for each 1000 persons of population. With a population of about 2,800, the Borough should have 28 acres of recreational open space so it is well served by the 53 acres of combined open space as indicated in Table 1. In addition, the Borough is surrounded by large tracts of open space including Baldwin Lake, The Watersheds Institute, Rosedale Park, Mercer Meadows and Curlis Woods and is connected to additional resources via the Lawrence Hopewell Trail.

The Pennington Parks & Recreation Commission, with its regional partner Hopewell Township Parks & Recreation Department, sponsors recreational programs from youth to senior levels. Included are summer concerts, Art in The Park, Hopewell Valley Night Out and the 4th of July Races. Theme events include the Memorial Day Parade, home run derby and the Easter Egg Hunt.

Table 1. Parks and Other Open Space in Pennington

Use/Facility	Location	Size (Acres+/-)
Parks and Recreation		
Kunkel Park	King George Rd.	7.5
Mini-park	Sked St.	1.1
Veterans Memorial Park	Broemel / Knowles	0.5
Arboretum	E Curlis	<u>2.7</u>
		11.8
Educational Facilities		
Tollgate rear field and playground	South Main	3.3
HVRSD Admin rear field, excl. bus park	South Main	2.9
Pennington School sports fields and lake	Burd Street	15.9
Pennington School woods walk and field	Green Street, east side	5.7
Pennington School field and tennis courts	Green Street, west side	<u>6.5</u>
		34.3
Other Open Space		
African Cemetery and the lot to the south	South Main	1.3
Senior Center, excl. building and parking	Reading Street	<u>5.4</u>
		6.7
Total area		52.8

The annual Pennington Day in May is organized by the non-profit company Pennington Day Inc. Pennington Day's stated mission is to further the borough's spirit and identity as a community, and enhance its quality of life, while providing community groups, civic organizations and businesses of Hopewell Valley an opportunity to inform the community of their mission, to allow community organizations to raise funds through their sponsorship of Pennington Day events and/or the booths, and to make grants to non-profits, civic organizations, schools and municipalities for specific projects that serve Pennington Borough and Hopewell Valley.

b. Other Facilities and Services

1. Emergency Services

Pennington Borough Fire District No. 1 is an autonomous entity responsible for providing fire protection and extinguishing fires within the geographic boundaries of Pennington Borough and, pursuant to an agreement with the Hopewell Township Board of Fire Commissioners, for

providing primary fire protection and extinguishing fires to the central and southern portions of Hopewell Township, New Jersey. The Fire District is funded through a fire tax, currently about 1.5% of real estate taxes, and is governed by a five-member Board of Fire Commissioners. Its mission is to protect life, property and the environment from damage due to fire and environmental emergencies in the district, and to assist neighboring communities in their mission to do the same. The Fire District's administrative office is located in the Pennington Fire Company (PFC) building on Broemel Place in Pennington.

Pennington Fire Company is a 100% volunteer organization that has provided volunteer fire services and emergency services to Pennington Borough, Hopewell Borough, and Township, as well as the surrounding areas, since 1891. It is one of only four 100% volunteer fire companies left in Mercer County. (<https://penningtonfire.org>)

The Pennington First Aid Squad (PFAS) stopped responding to emergency calls on February 28, 2022, after 68 years of continuous 911-response to the community. The squad has gone out of business due to steadily declining numbers of volunteer EMTs. Squad leadership pursued several avenues to help ease staffing difficulties, including ramping up recruitment and retention efforts, and trying to expand the use of paid EMTs to supplement the volunteers. These were not enough to overcome the challenges, and the squad was left with no other option than to disband. In its February 7, 2022, regular meeting, the Borough Council authorized the Mayor to enter into a Shared Services Agreement with Mercer County for the provision of EMS dispatch services (Resolution 2022-2.13).

2. Post Office

The United States Post Office occupies a building on a 0.5-acre site on Broemel Place across from the Pennington Fire Company. Post Office employees provide window and P.O. Box services and all carriers and vehicles for the delivery of mail in the 08534 Zip Code operate out of the building.

3. Churches

There are five churches, and one active cemetery located in Pennington. These are identified in Table 2 below. Partnership with these churches to have their buildings be safe houses as part of the emergency management plan is recommended. Some of their playground or green space could be added to community assets. If the churches were to offer public parking outside church hours it could alleviate the chronic parking problem in the Borough and help town center businesses. They could also add fee-based electric charging infrastructure to their community services.

The Pennington Historic Commission recognizes the importance of preserving historic structures while repurposing them to meet evolving community needs. Many buildings within the Historic District, including its five churches, offer unique opportunities to serve as community facilities. The adaptive use and reuse of these structures can provide venues for cultural, educational, and recreational activities while maintaining their historical integrity.

Given the potential for church closures or consolidations due to declining attendance, the Commission advocates for proactive measures to repurpose these historic buildings. These spaces could accommodate a range of services, such as daycare centers, meeting halls, or cultural hubs, ensuring their continued contribution to the community fabric. Integrating these historic facilities into the Borough's service offerings allows Pennington to honor its architectural heritage while meeting modern needs, fostering a sense of continuity and shared purpose.

Table 2. Churches and Active Cemeteries

Use/Facility	Location	Size (Acres+/-)
Pennington United Methodist Church	South Main Street	1.0
First Baptist Church of Pennington	Academy Street	0.3
St. Matthew's Episcopal Church	South Main Street	1.2
St. James Roman Catholic Church	Eglantine Avenue	5.0
Pennington Presbyterian Church and Cemetery	South Main Street	1.9
Pennington Cemetery Association	South Main Street	<u>4.8</u>
	Total Area	14.2

4. Howe Commons

Named for a very influential member of the community, who developed many of Pennington's neighborhoods and served twice as Mayor, the William P. Howe Commons at 65 South Main Street is made up of five buildings that fit with the Colonial feeling of the town. The oldest building, Abey House, started life as a farmhouse in the early 1800's and after a few ups and downs, was restored to its current state by Dr. William Abey as his residence in 1942. Building E, the last of the five, was completed in 2009. Building D is occupied Howe Commons' principal owner, the Electrochemical Society. The grounds of the Commons add to the aesthetic appeal of the Borough streetscape. Hosting various public events in the Borough has been a long-standing tradition of Howe Commons. These include concerts for the Parks & Recreation Committee, use by the Pennington Business & Professional Associations for The Holiday Walk and to host the Borough Christmas Tree and Menorah, as a gathering place for dignitaries for the Memorial Day Parade and for Pennington Day.

5. Trenton Cyrus #5 Freemasons Lodge

The Freemason Trenton Cyrus #5 Lodge has a Temple at 131 Burd Street in Pennington. It holds regular Communication Meetings at 7pm on the 3rd Wednesday of the month. The Temple was dedicated and open for business on September 23, 1961. It hosts several events open to the public, including Oktoberfest, a Santa Claus visit before Christmas, and various events to celebrate local citizens, who do not need to be freemasons.

6. Public Schools, Hopewell Valley Regional School District

(<https://www.hvrsd.org>)

The Hopewell Valley Regional School District (HVRSD) has been in operation since 1965 when voters of Hopewell Township, Hopewell Borough and Pennington Borough approved a plan to consolidate their schools. A history of schools in Hopewell Valley can be found on the HVRSD website. The District School Tax takes up 57% of the real estate taxes paid by Borough residents. (HVRSD) operates six schools, Central High School (grades 9-12), Timberlane Middle School (grades 6-8) and four elementary schools (pre-K to grade 5). Pennington resident children may attend Toll Gate Grammar School, Timberlane Middle School and Central High School.

Toll Gate Grammar school is located at 275 South Main Street in Pennington Borough and has a student population of around 300. It was built in the 1920's along with the original Central High School at 425 South Main Street, which now houses the HVRSD administration offices. These two buildings are well-preserved landmarks in the historic landscape of Pennington and if either were to be vacated by HVRSD, the Historic Preservation Commission would like to see adaptive reuse to preserve the historic architecture.

7. Private Schools

The Pennington School

The Pennington School was founded in 1838. It is a private, coeducational school with day and boarding programs for students in grades 6 through 12. Boarding is offered for grades 8-12. The Pennington School has an enrollment of about 535 students. Currently about half of whom live on campus. School grounds are located on both sides of West Delaware Avenue. Approximately 33 acres are located on the south side of West Delaware and 17 acres on the north side, including staff housing. As shown in Table 1, about 12 acres on either side of Green Street are open space.

Cambridge School

Cambridge School is an independent grade 1-12 day school that specializes in helping students with language-based learning differences such as dyslexia, ADHD, or just struggling to read. The school is located at 100 Straube Center Boulevard in Pennington Borough and serves around 130 students with a teacher-to-student ratio of about 4.

4. Relationship with Regional Community Facilities Plans

a. Hopewell Township Master Plan

<https://www.hopewelltp.org/DocumentCenter/View/8614/Community-Facilities-Plan-Element--Adopted-April-12-2007>

Hopewell Township adopted a Community Facilities Plan element in 2007. It covered

1. Hopewell Township Municipal Complex
2. Fire Protection and Emergency Services
3. Police Protection
4. Hopewell Valley Regional School District
 - a. Enrollment
 - b. Elementary Schools

- c. Secondary Schools
- 5. Library
- 6. Senior Citizens
- 7. Youth Activities

Facilities and services recommendations were made in five areas in the 2007 element:

1. Municipal Operations

The addition of more bays at the public works building is recommended, because the bays are undersized for some of the existing equipment and some equipment is stored outside. Given the size of the tract and its location, the public works site also presents further opportunities for expansion.

2. Township Fire District

The Fire District is developing a plan for the construction of a building in the Municipal Services Complex to house Fire District administrative offices, equipment storage, rescue vehicles and emergency response. As residential and non-residential development proceeds towards build-out, the Fire District may also need to re-evaluate its operations and the need for additional facilities.

3. School District

After a population growth analysis, it appeared that future school enrollments, combined with programmatic requirements established by the N. J. Department of Education (DOE), will create a need for a new school site or substantial reconfiguration of existing school sites. In the HVRSD planning process an early childhood center also is being considered.

4. Hopewell Valley Senior Advisory Board

A proposal by the Hopewell Valley Senior Center Planning Committee (later constituted as the Senior Advisory Board) recommended the construction of a Hopewell Valley Senior Center with a full-time director.

5. Youth Activities and Youth Advisory Committee

It was recommended that the Youth Advisory Committee meet with interested parents, community leaders, government officials, health professionals and youth to determine the feasibility of a teen/youth center in Hopewell Valley.

No significant changes were recommended for the 2007 Community Facility Plan element in the 2021 Master Plan Reexamination report.

b. Mercer County Master Plan

<https://www.mercercounty.org/home/showpublisheddocument/1242/636058423221200000>

The Mercer County Master Plan framework document of 2010 and amended in 2016 discusses County assets, strengths and challenges in Section III. Regional Vision: Goals, Policies, and Strategies (page. The assets are discussed at a very high level, rather than at the facilities or services level.

<https://www.mercercounty.org/departments/planning/mercerc-at-play-3-test>

A 2024-25 \$450k grant program called Mercer County at Play for All enables non-profits and municipalities to provide programming and facility improvements that benefit vulnerable populations. Funding is available in three eligibility categories:

1. Equipment purchases and programming for Municipal Senior Physical Recreation programs.
2. Inclusive Playground improvement grants to Municipalities
3. Programming support grants for Non-profits that provide after school mentoring and Sports programming to underserved youth

This and similar future programs could be tapped for resources to improve certain Borough recreational facilities and services.

5. Relationship with Other Plan Elements in Master Plan 2025

The Community Facilities Plan impacts and is impacted by other Master Plan elements as follows:

Land Use Plan Element. This plan relates to the Borough's zoning and potential redevelopment areas. Community facilities and services may be impacted by the Borough's development and redevelopment plans.

Housing Plan Element. The borough has identified areas of redevelopment which have the opportunity for high density housing, including affordable. The impact of these developments on the need for additional community facilities should be considered.

Economic Development Plan Element. This Plan considers all aspects of commerce and economic development in the Borough. Some of the commercial facilities in the Borough may be willing to offer space for community activities.

Open Space and Recreation Plan Element. Open space and recreation was combined with community facilities in the 1998 Master Plan. Although they are now separate plans, it is necessary to review both plans to ensure the goals are consistent.

Historic Preservation

Historic preservation aims to maintain the Borough's historic character. Some of the preserved buildings may be of interest for a variety of community activities, both historical and recreational.