

# Master Plan Reexamination Report

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## Borough of Montvale

Bergen County, New Jersey



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## INTRODUCTION

The New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law, N.J.S.A. 40:55D-89 et seq., requires that Municipal Planning Boards review municipal master plans and zoning and land development regulations at least once every ten years. At least once every ten years is the minimum requirement. However, Planning Boards may undertake a Reexamination Report at any time in order to address changes in municipal assumptions or policies regarding land use or emergent land use issues. The statute requires that the Reexamination Report be adopted by the Planning Board by resolution and distributed to the municipal governing body, the County Planning Board and adjacent municipalities.

The purpose of a Reexamination Report, prepared in accordance with the Municipal Land Use Law, is to periodically reexamine the master plan, zoning and land use and development regulations of a municipality to determine whether they continue to address the development goals and objectives of the municipality and to provide recommendations that will address proposed changes in development goals, the impact of development within the municipality and the impact of planning and development regulations by the County, the State of New Jersey and the Federal government. The Municipal Land Use Law requires that municipalities review the master plan and zoning and land development regulations in terms of the following:

- A. The major problems and objectives relating to land development in the municipality at the time of adoption of the last reexamination report.
- B. The extent to which such problems and objectives have been reduced or have increased subsequent to such date.
- C. The extent to which there have been significant changes in the assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for the master plan or development regulations as last revised, with particular regard to the density and distribution of population and land uses, housing conditions, circulation, conservation of natural resources, energy conservation, collection, disposition and recycling of designated recyclable materials, and changes in State, county and municipal policies and objectives.
- D. The specific changes recommended for the master plan or development regulations, if any, including underlying objectives, policies and standards, or whether a new plan or regulations should be prepared.
- E. The recommendations of the planning board concerning the incorporation of redevelopment plans adopted pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law", N.J.S.A. 40A:12A-1 et al., into the land use plan element of the municipal master plan, and recommended changes, if any, in the local development regulations necessary to effectuate the redevelopment plans of the municipality.

The last Reexamination Report was adopted by the Montvale Planning Board on September 2, 2014. This was a comprehensive reexamination, which reaffirmed the recommendations of prior master plans and made recommendations for a rezoning of School No. 2 to accommodate senior and special needs affordable housing.

One of the reaffirmed goals from the 2008 Master Plan was to protect the character of existing neighborhoods. In the past, churches, temples and houses of worship were considered benign uses that blended in with the character of residential neighborhoods. Typically congregations were, for the most part, small and activities were limited to weekly religious services. However, in recent years such uses have tended to offer expanded services attracting larger congregations with activities sometimes on a daily basis. These expanded activities and increased attendance have the potential to adversely impact the character of residential neighborhoods. The current Borough of Montvale Zoning Ordinance treats churches the same as any other permitted use in the R-40, R-15, R-10 and RI-10 Districts. Given that the past assumptions regarding churches, temples and houses of worship are no longer valid it is appropriate to prepare a reexamination of the Master Plan and Development Regulations specifically as they relate to these uses.

Similar to houses of worship, public and private schools also tend to draw large crowds during certain periods of time for various events, which can have an impact on the surrounding neighborhood if sufficient on-site parking is lacking. The current Zoning Ordinance treats public and private schools the same as any other permitted use in the R-40, R-15, R-10 and RI-10 Districts. In order to protect the character of the surrounding residential neighborhoods, it is also appropriate to evaluate public and private schools in this reexamination report.

#### **A. THE MAJOR PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES RELATING TO LAND DEVELOPMENT IN THE 2008 MASTER PLAN AND 2014 MASTER PLAN REEXAMINATION REPORT**

The 2008 Master Plan and 2014 Master Plan Reexamination Report contained at least one problem and two objectives relating to the protection of the character of existing neighborhoods.

The 2008 Master Plan listed outdated zoning as a problem noting that:

“The Borough’s outdated zoning regulations, especially the lack of design guidelines, made the Borough vulnerable to poorly designed projects and uses which might be inappropriate in certain locations. Knockdowns and the building of bulky houses threatened to undermine the character of established residential neighborhoods.”

The two objectives relating to the protection of the character of existing neighborhoods are:

##### *Goal 3 Protect character of existing neighborhoods*

To protect the character and scale of housing within established neighborhoods, through

discouraging McMansions, and by encouraging designs which are harmonious with those which exist in the immediate vicinity; and

*Goal 12 Update regulations relating to land use*

Related to the problem of outdated zoning regulations an objective expressed in 2008 was to comprehensively revise and update the Borough's zoning regulations, not only to make them consistent with the Master Plan, but also to rid them of loopholes, ambiguities and unnecessary regulations.

**B. THE EXTENT TO WHICH SUCH PROBLEMS AND OBJECTIVES FROM THE LAST MASTER PLAN AND LAST REEXAMINATION REPORT HAVE BEEN REDUCED OR INCREASED**

The 2014 Reexamination Report noted that the most egregious problems or loopholes in Montvale's Zoning Regulations had been tackled since 2008 but a comprehensive update was not accomplished.

Regarding neighborhood character, the 2014 Reexamination Report noted that "The downturn in the real estate market following adoption of the 2008 Master Plan slowed the impetus for knockdowns and the building of bulky houses in Montvale". The Reexamination Report went on to note that "The impact of large accessory structures on single-family lots, such as decks, patios, sports courts and the like on adjacent property owners has become a concern".

Since the 2014 Reexamination Report a comprehensive code update has not been completed. Nor has the Borough comprehensively tackled the impact of large accessory structures.

**C. SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE ASSUMPTIONS, POLICIES AND OBJECTIVES FORMING THE BASIS FOR THE MASTER PLAN OR DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS**

The assumptions, policies and objectives forming the basis for Montvale's Master Plan and development regulations as they relate to neighborhood character have not changed appreciably although the potential impact of large churches, temples and houses of worship on neighborhood character can be added to the concerns expressed in prior years regarding the impact of bulky houses and large accessory structures on single-family lots. Neighborhood character can also be impacted by public and private schools especially if sufficient space is not provided to facilitate drop-off and pick-up on-site. Furthermore, many schools have athletic fields, with tall light poles to provide nighttime illumination. A compliant minimum-sized parcel in the R-40, R-15, R-10 or RI-10 Districts could not accommodate a school building, the required circulation or any athletic fields. There have been no changes to the zoning and development regulations to ameliorate the potential impacts on neighborhood character as recommended in the 2008 Master Plan and the 2014 Reexamination Report.

Recognizing that churches, temples and houses of worship have been modified over time and now tend to be much larger than in the past and by their very nature can cause impacts on surrounding areas due to their tendency to draw large numbers of people and attendant traffic, the assumptions regarding these facilities have changed in recent years. A house of worship no longer serves only the immediate neighborhood or community in which it is located. The assumption now is that such facilities can and do have impacts on neighborhood character as evidenced in other municipalities. The scheduling of activities now extends throughout the week during day and evening hours and schools, child day-care, housing for clergy and social and cultural festivities may be offered on site. The increased activities require large buildings or multiple buildings and more parking, which can be out of scale with the established identity and character of residential neighborhoods.

A November 2012 article published in Planning (the American Planning Association's monthly magazine) confirms the previous statements. Key statements from the article include the following:

- *As the role of the church shifts within our communities, church planning, design, and worship style are rapidly changing to keep pace with the times.*
- *To offset declining attendance, more congregations are aiming to strike a responsive chord with parishioners by reaching out to engage their entire congregation...Accommodating programs outside the realm of the traditional church services requires more than the adjunct of space. Ensuring adequate parking, identifying the potential need for separate entryways – particularly for children's programs – and the overall impact of traffic on the surrounding area are aspects that require thorough planning.*
- *Churches with ample square footage and plenty of surrounding land often opt to construct separate, unattached buildings specifically designed for their youth. Teen centers, complete with snack bars, game rooms and plenty of space to socialize and hang out, are becoming a driving force for families seeking to attend a church dedicated to families. For smaller churches striving to keep up with changing times and the competitive offerings at other churches, preschool space, classrooms and social gathering spaces and being integrated either through total renovations or moderate retrofits depending on the current space and objectives.*
- *No longer exclusively a place of worship, today's churches, with their community-driven services, are a hub of activity that communities must take into careful consideration. Among the factors to consider are parking, round-the-clock activity, and land requirements... ”<sup>1</sup>*

As noted above, assumptions regarding public and private schools have also changed. Due to a multitude of reasons, including, but not limited to budget constraints, economies of scale, busing

and technology, today's schools tend to be much larger than in the past. Public and private schools no longer serve the immediate surrounding residential neighborhood they are located in. Two examples of this are St. Joseph Regional High School, which draws students from the metropolitan area and Pascack Hills High School, which serves grades nine through twelve for Montvale and Woodcliff Lake with a student body of approximately 800 students.<sup>2</sup>

#### **D. THE SPECIFIC CHANGES RECOMMENDED FOR THE MASTER PLAN OR DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS**

##### **Churches, Temples and Houses of Worship**

Presently, churches are a permitted use in the R-40, R-15, R-10, RI-10, B-1 and B-2 Districts. The Borough believes the term "churches" is too narrow and recommends changing the permitted use to "churches, temples and houses of worship". Furthermore, the Montvale Planning Board has recommended that churches, temples and houses of worship be permitted in all of the Borough's residential zones, but removed as a permitted use in the B-1 and B-2 Districts. This Master Plan Reexamination Report concurs with the Board's recommendation as it provides those facilities with many more location options than the six existing zoning districts. Therefore, churches, temples and houses of worship should be permitted in the R-40, R-15, R-10, RI-10A, RI-25B, RI-40B, A, AH-1B, AH-3B, AH6, AH7, AH8, AH-8A, AH9, AH-9A, AH-10A, R1-10, T-6 and LMSCH Districts.

Because the recent trend is for churches, temples and houses of worship to be large in size with large congregations and with frequent activities, it is necessary to ensure that these facilities are sited and designed to protect the character of existing residential neighborhoods. The current zoning and development regulations offer no guidance in this regard. This Reexamination Report recognizes this as a significant concern and recommends that the zoning and development regulations be amended to ensure that churches, temples and houses of worship are located on appropriately sized lots with sufficient parking, on roadways that are able to accommodate the anticipated traffic volumes generated by such uses. Also, appropriate setbacks for buildings, parking lots and buffer areas as warranted should be established to protect adjacent and nearby residential uses.

It is further recommended that churches, temples and houses of worship be permitted in all residential zones with a minimum lot size of five (5) acres for a religious use consisting solely of a place of assembly for religious services or worship, which minimum lot size would increase when additional uses or facilities (cleric's residence, schools, day-care, etc.) are included.

Currently, there are three houses of worship in Montvale. First is the Montvale Evangelical, which is located on 5.7 acres along West Grand Avenue. This property contains both the church as well as a rectory. The church's website provides a calendar of events, which for the month of May shows multiple events six days a week.<sup>3</sup> This facility has both a paved parking lot behind



the church as well as a gravel overflow parking lot to the side of the house of worship.

Second is St. Paul's Episcopal, which encompasses 8.5 acres located along Woodland Road. In addition to the worship facilities, St. Paul's also has an on-site nursery school<sup>4</sup> and a rectory. The property also contains a large playground and a spacious parking lot.



**Photo 1: View of St. Paul's parking lot and nursery school.**

The third house of worship is the International Christian Church, which is located on 0.48 acres at the corner of Woodland Road and West Grand Avenue. The International Christian Church is the oldest religious building in Montvale and according to 2008 Master Plan; the stone building was constructed in approximately 1896.<sup>5</sup> The church was constructed for St. Paul's Episcopal and the original building is roughly 25 feet by 42 feet with 14-inch-thick walls faced with fieldstones.<sup>6</sup> See the Photo 2 on page 7.

As shown by Photo 3, this facility has a very narrow parking lot that can only accommodate a few cars. There are no delineated parking spaces, nor is there an area to turn around once one reaches the end of the pavement. This type of facility is incompatible with the needs and trends of houses of worship in the modern era.

Montvale's experience with its three places of worship has been that the Evangelical and Episcopal churches have been in the same location for over 20 years. However, the International Christian Church has changed denominations a number of times over the past 20 years. This is further evidence that a small house of worship is not viable.





Photo 2: View of historic church from Woodland Road.



Photo 3: View of International Christian Church’s parking lot looking towards Woodland Road.



Both St. Paul's and Montvale Evangelical provide sufficient parking on-site for their events and activities. Therefore, a minimum of five (5) acres was established in keeping with the current houses of worship, which will ensure sufficient on-site parking can be provided for events and activities. The provision of adequate on-site parking is a safety concern, as the Borough wishes to prevent parking along residential streets, which can cause traffic issues that have the potential to impact the ability of emergency vehicles to respond in a timely fashion to emergencies that may occur in or around these facilities. Also, a five (5) acre minimum is being recommended to prevent a minimum lot size that would render all of the Borough's houses of worship non-conforming. This minimum acreage is consistent with two of the Borough's existing religious property lot sizes.

Finally, additional minimum acreage should be required when a religious facility wishes to add a rectory, educational facility, etc. to ensure there is sufficient space to accommodate on-site parking. St. Paul's Episcopal is a prime example where the facility has benefited from additional acreage where there is also an on-site rectory and nursery school. The site has had no known off-site parking issues as it is able to accommodate its parking need on the property's 8.5 acres.

### **Public and Private Schools**

Presently, public and private schools are a permitted use in the R-40, R-15, R-10, RI-10, B-1 and B-2 Districts. The Montvale Planning Board has recommended that a minimum lot size be established for public and private schools to ensure the school property can accommodate the peak traffic periods for drop-off and pick-up as well as the necessary parking for school events. Schools offer frequent after-school activities that can draw large crowds and it is necessary to ensure that schools are sited and designed to protect the character of existing residential neighborhoods. The current zoning and development regulations offer no guidance in this regard. This Reexamination Report recognizes this as a significant concern and recommends that the zoning and development regulations be amended to make certain that public and private schools are located on suitably sized lots with sufficient parking on streets that are able to accommodate the anticipated traffic volumes generated by such uses. Also, suitable setbacks for buildings, parking lots, athletic fields should be established to protect adjacent and nearby residential uses.

Similar to churches, temples and houses of worship, the Planning Board has recommended that public and private schools be removed as a permitted use in the B-1 and B-2 Districts, but permitted in all residential zones. This Master Plan Reexamination Report concurs with the Board's recommendation as it provides schools with many more location options than the six existing zoning districts. Therefore, public and private schools should be permitted in the R-40, R-15, R-10, RI-10A, RI-25B, RI-40B, A, AH-1B, AH-3B, AH6, AH7, AH8, AH-8A, AH9, AH-9A, AH-10A, R1-10, T-6 and LMSCH Districts. By moving schools to the residential zones, it will place the facilities in close proximity to those they serve – the students. This will also allow

school children to walk to school.

Currently, there are four schools in Montvale. St. Joseph Regional High School is a private high school located along Chestnut Ridge Road on 31.79 acres. Pascack Hills Regional High School is located at the intersection of West Grand Avenue and Spring Valley Road on 24.45 acres. Fieldstone Middle School is located at 47 Spring Valley Road and serves grades 5 through 8. The school sits on 13 acres. Memorial Elementary School is located at 53 Grand Avenue and serves grades Pre-K through 4. The school sits on 10.66 acres.

Montvale's experience with its one private and three public schools has been that the facilities provide sufficient on-site parking and have had no known off-site parking issues. Based on the existing school facilities within the Borough, it is recommended that a minimum lot size of ten (10) acres be established. This minimum lot size will provide adequate space for on-site parking for events and activities. Just as adequate on-site parking is a safety concern for churches, temples and houses of worship; it is also a safety concern for public and private schools. The Borough wishes to prevent parking along residential streets, which can cause traffic issues that have the potential to impact the ability of emergency vehicles to respond in a timely fashion to emergencies that may occur in or around these facilities.

## **Conclusion**

In an effort to protect the Borough's residential neighborhoods, a zoning ordinance should be prepared that incorporates the above recommendations. This will advance two of the 2008 Master Plan goals – protect character of existing residential neighborhoods and update regulations relating to land use.

## **E. RECOMMENDATIONS CONCERNING INCORPORATION OF REDEVELOPMENT PLANS**

At this time there are no recommendations for the incorporation of redevelopment plans pursuant to the "Local Redevelopment and Housing Law".

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<sup>1</sup> Planning, November 2012, <https://planning.org/planning/2012/nov/changingchurch.htm>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.pascack.k12.nj.us/Page/6418>

<sup>3</sup> <http://montvalechurch.org/event-calendar/>

<sup>4</sup> [http://saintpaulsmontvale.org/?page\\_id=35](http://saintpaulsmontvale.org/?page_id=35)

<sup>5</sup> 2008 Master Plan, page 133.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.