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November 6, 2007

Absecon City Council
500 Mill Road
Absecon NJ 08201

Re: Ordinances proposed by the Planning Board

Dear Members of City Council:

I would like to offer some insight to so that you have a better understanding of the process the Absecon Planning Board and City Council is working through. I hope the following will assist you.

The newspapers and some members of City Council have been referring to the current process we are working through as a change in the Master Plan. It should be known that we are **not** changing the master plan. The 2005 re-examination of the Master Plan was adopted on May 23, 2006. The Planning Board has made numerous recommendations for changes to the Absecon Developmental Ordinance to City Council as recommended by the master plan.

The value of the documents recommended to you is directly related to the effort put into them and the integrity of the source of their creation. It is important to remind each member of City Council who is presenting the proposed ordinances on behalf of our Planning Board.

I am not just a paid professional, I am a friend, a neighbor, a long-time Absecon resident, a concerned citizen, Absecon taxpayer, President of the Historical Society, founding trustee of the ABCD Corp. Inc. and community minded person. I first came to Absecon in 1976. I have practiced my profession for over thirty (30) years. For over thirty (30) I put municipal land development ordinances to actual use. Absecon has the benefit of my many years experience. I have successfully designed a countless number of commercial and residential projects using municipal land development ordinances to improve the quality of life while increasing land values. Of those years, I spent over 27 years in professional offices on New Jersey Avenue and on the White Horse Pike. My children attended Absecon Schools from pre-K to 8th Grade. You learn a great deal about your town in all those years. Because of the many years I have developed a great affection for my town. My family and I are involved in many aspects of the community. We see our friends and neighbors each day around town, shopping, at church, at school and school sponsored activities, at civic organizations, local sports events year round. I listen to their concerns, their ideas, their hopes and dreams. I hear their praises and complaints of city government as resident and as the Planning Board Planner.

My family and I expect to live in this town for the rest of our lives. We will have to live with the decisions we make today as city officials, and so will my friends, neighbors and fellow taxpayers. As Planning Board Planner and a resident I see the Master Plan process and the Planning Board's recommended fourteen (14) ordinances as an investment in our towns future.

I value truth, family, friendship and community. As a professional I believe that I have an obligation to give back to the community. I have demonstrated that by donating many hours of my time for many years to my town.

I take my professional responsibility very serious. I have clearly described my professional responsibility in my professional contracts with the City. Section 6 of my contract with the City entitled "Consultant's Responsibility" describes my professional responsibility in accordance with NJAC, Title 13, Chapter 41 and the American Institute of Certified Planners Code of Ethics, which state that my primary obligation to the public interest. Each and every recommendation I make to the City Council, Planning Board, any City official or citizen is based on what is in the best interest of all of us.

With each recommendation I have made, I have used my many years of experience of advancing economic growth and creating value for the land as a professional consultant for my town, Absecon.

In 1998-1999 I authored preparation of the 1999 re-examination of the Master Plan. The Planning Board adopted of the 1999 re-examination of the Master Plan in November of 1999. As the result of the 1999 re-examination, the Planning Board made numerous recommendations and drafted twelve (12) ordinances. Of the twelve ordinances, two were adopted by City Council in 1999 and nine were adopted in 2000.

The recommendations included the rezoning of Memorial Recreation Field on the White Horse Pike to commercial to allow the City to sell to a developer and increase the potential for commercial ratables; creating age-restricted overlay districts to increase ratables that do not generate school age children, provide a development alternative to garden apartment project previously approved; replace the antiquated New Jersey Avenue School site with a viable use and to increase the pedestrian activity on New Jersey Avenue.

The Master Plan also recommended a portion of R 2 be rezoned to allow for the increase the size of Pitney Park and the relocation of the recreation fields from the White Horse Pike site. The sale of the White Horse Pike recreation field paid for the new recreation fields at Pity Park. All of these Planning Board recommendations resulted in City Council Adopting numerous ordinances to allow for the positive changes to take place. We now have tennis courts, baseball fields, football field, soccer field, clubhouse, concession stand, jogging path and parking all at one central location. The expanded recreation area has increased the values of all the existing single family homes that adjoin it or are in walking distance.

The age-restricted ordinance resulted in the replacement of previously approved 285 garden apartments that could have generated hundreds of school-age children with a age-restricted 125 townhouse unit development with a commercial component. The age-restricted also resulted in the construction of 87 units at the former New Jersey school site and 269 units now under construction at the former City owned property on Pitney Road known as "Visions". According to our Tax Assessor the three age-restricted projects will be **valued at approximately 120 million dollars. That is approximately 25% of our current total assessed value in our town of approximately 475 million.**

In 2005-2006 I authored the 2005 re-examination of the Master Plan. The Planning Board adopted the 2005 re-examination of the Master Plan in May of 2006.

The recommendations in the master plan are outlined in the fourteen (14) proposed ordinances forwarded to City Council by the Planning Board.

Of the all of the recommendations, the adoption of the Open Space, Age-Restricted Overlay, Train Station Overlay and Affordable Housing Ordinances are of the most critical importance to our town.

The following is a brief description of the above listed ordinances. (For a more detailed description refer to the introduction in each proposed ordinance which can be found on my website).

The **Open Space Ordinances** (Planning Board proposed Ordinances - reference # **ABS 046.01 and ABS 046.05**) allows our town to preserve the remaining City owned wooded area for future public use. City owned vacant lands consist of approximately 104 acres (**or 2.2% of the total lands in Absecon**). City owned vacant lands includes numerous undersize infill lots through-out Absecon. This area also includes larger contiguous parcels adjacent to Pitney Park and in the northwestern portion of Absecon in the R 2 Residential District.

The **Age-Restricted Overlay Ordinance** (Planning Board proposed Ordinance - reference # **ABS 046.02**) will increase the property owner's land development opportunities, encourage economic growth by providing additional residents to attract commercial ratabables with the burden of increasing education expenses and provide the opportunity for voluntary contributions for affordable housing in the proposed Train Station Area Overlay zone.

The **Train Station Area Overlay Ordinance** (Planning Board proposed Ordinance - reference # **ABS 046.09**) will increase the property owners land development opportunities, encourage economic growth, help preserve our downtown, increase the rent structure to attract more quality merchants, increase much needed pedestrian activity in our downtown central business district, provide for mixed use with market rate residential units, affordable residential units and commercial. This ordinance will allow developers to voluntarily provide a mix of affordable housing, along with market rate housing and commercial near mass transit.

The **Affordable Housing Ordinance** (Planning Board proposed Ordinance - reference # **ABS 046.10**) The Fair Housing Act, NJSA 52:27D-307 et. seq., dictate that every municipality in the State is required to provide opportunities for the development of its "fair share" of affordable housing. **Municipalities are not required to participate in the COAH program or provide affordable housing, but each municipality has constitutional obligation to provide for a realistic opportunity for the development of affordable housing with its framework of its land use regulations.** This ordinance will allow our town to meet our moral and constitutional obligation to provide for the opportunity for affordable housing in our land development ordinance and protect us from a public advocate organization lawsuit to force us to allow a developer to build affordable housing. If such a lawsuit is successful, Absecon does not get to decide where the affordable housing will be constructed.

The first drafts of the Planning Board's proposed ordinances have been available since November 2006. The City Council sub-committee members reviewed the draft ordinances back in January 2007. On March 1, 2007 City Council directed Michael Blee and I to review the draft ordinances and take in consideration comments made by the City Planner at that time. Between March and July, Mr. Blee and I did just that. On July 24, 2007 the ordinances as modified by myself, Mr. Blee and the Planning were forwarded to City Council for adoption. On October 18th and November 1st we only discussed a portion of the recommended ordinances. I am prepared to discuss in detail, each of the proposed ordinances again with Mr. Blee. The City Planner's additional comments were not anticipated at this late date. His comments were considered when we reviewed the draft ordinances from March to July of this year.

I have a professional obligation to see this process through to the end. My only motivation is that it is the right thing to do. I plan on attending every City Council meeting until each ordinance is adopted. I will offer professional testimony and answer every question Council may have.

The Master Plan Committee has directed me to meet with Mr. Blee prior to the next Council meeting to help move this process along. As previously requested, please allow Mr. Blee and I to meet prior to the next City Council meeting to discuss any possible changes to the proposed ordinances.

I am available to answer any and all questions about the proposed land development ordinances as recommended by the Planning Board. Please feel free to call me at anytime. My cell number is 609-289-6424. For copies of the master plan and / or ordinances you can call me or visit my website at: www.abseconplanner.com.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Reid', followed by a vertical red line.

Robert L. Reid, AICP, PP
Absecon City Planning Board Planner

Cc: Mayor Peter C. Elco
Michael J. Blee, Esq., City Attorney
Henry Gorohoff, Chairman of the Master Plan Committee
Planning Board Members