Port of Belford

Economic Feasibility Study and Conceptual Development Plan

Township of Middletown, NJ
The Louis Berger Group, Inc.
January 2009

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Economic Feasibility Study and Conceptual Development Plan

Presented to:

Township of Middletown, N.J.

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Purpose

Purpose: Examine the economic and physical viability of commercial development complementary to and supportive of the existing commercial fishing industry.

The purpose of the study is to examine the economic and physical viability of commercial development within the Belford study area that is complementary to and supportive of the existing commercial fishing industry. The commercial uses that were examined include: a clam depuration plant, an aquaculture facility, mixed-use recreation/retail destination, and a live fish market. The study identified the siting requirements of each of these alternatives and assessed the relative suitability of the site and region to satisfy these requirements.

Once the physical and market evaluation of each of the development alternatives was complete, the Berger Team worked with the Township and the Technical Advisory Committee to develop consensus on a recommended development alternative for the subject sites. For this discussion, a feasibility and suitability matrix was used which described the pros and cons and tradeoffs for each development alternative. The feasibility and suitability matrix provided a means for comparing and contrasting alternative development uses.

For the recommended development alternative, conceptual development plans were created. These plans include design guidelines, development phasing, environmental screening and permitting analysis, and funding strategy and sources.

Strategies

Live Fish Facility

Educational

Marine Research

Open Space

Environmental Recreation

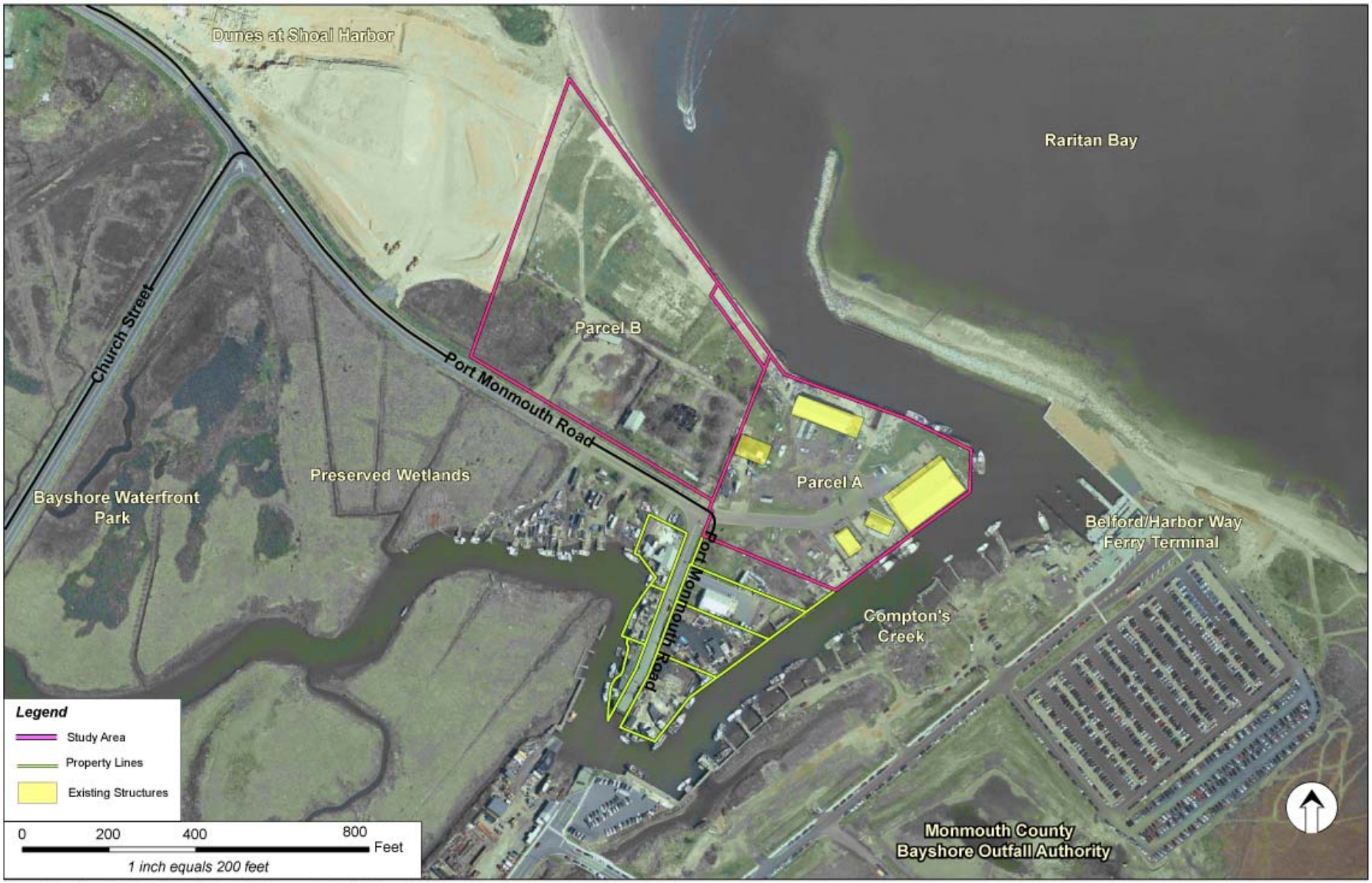
Bayshore Inn

Seafood Retail

Marketing & Processing Improvements

Several strategies are described in this plan to achieve these overall goals including the following:

- The expansion of the existing live fish operation at the Port is a business and development opportunity that can help sustain the livelihood of Belford fishermen.
- An interactive/discovery center will preserve the maritime heritage that exist at the site and within the region while building an attractive public destination.
- A marine science research center, sponsored by a State educational institution, will be a cradle of business incubation, fishery management research, and education/workforce training.
- Due to the site's significant environmental value and recreational opportunities, open space preservation and park development is incorporated into the overall development plan.
- The Bayshore Inn, with an elaborate courtyard, will capitalize on the scenic open space surrounding the property and expansive views and provide highly demanded space for weddings, ceremonies, meetings, and conferences.
- A retail booth providing easily accessible, fresh seafood to ferry riders will be constructed at the ferry terminal.
- Additional strategies for Belford businesses include improvements to fish processing, group marketing, and Jersey Seafood labeling.



Source: New Jersey 2003 High Resolution Orthophotography (MrSID format)

Introduction

The Port of Belford is a unique place with a rich maritime history, tremendous views of the Bay, and surrounded by ecologically valuable natural areas. As the oldest operating fishing port on the U.S. East Coast and historically known throughout the nation for menhaden production and shellfish, the Port continues to support the Garden State's excellent reputation as a producer of fine fish and seafood. The fishermen, with many being third and fourth generation Belford fishermen, maintain a small fleet of lobster boats, clamming boats, trawlers, and seining boats and utilize tools and techniques that date back hundreds of years, such as the clam rake used by Lenape Indians harvesting in the Bay. However, these fishermen now struggle to survive in the face of increasing production costs and international competition.

The study examines the economic and physical viability of commercial development within the Belford study area that will help revitalize and support the existing commercial fishing industry. The commercial uses that were examined include: a clam depuration plant, an aquaculture facility, mixed-use recreation/retail destination, and a live fish market. The study identified the siting requirements of each of these alternatives and assessed the relative suitability of the site and region to satisfy these requirements.

An extensive stakeholder interview program was conducted to gather pertinent information for this analysis. Interviews were conducted with the following: federal, state and local government officials; property and business owners; civic associations; experts in the commercial fishing industry and regional seafood wholesale and retail industry; and select private industries

Figure 2.1: Study Area showing Parcel A and B. Figure 2.2: View from ferry terminal.

and industry associations (for a complete list of interviewees see Appendix 3). The information gathered from these interviews assisted in clarifying the physical and market requirements for each development alternative and the feasibility of the select industry successfully operating at the subject sites at the Port of Belford.

Once the physical and market evaluation of each of the development alternatives was complete, the Berger Team worked with the Township and the Technical Advisory Committee to develop consensus on a recommended development alternative for the subject sites. For this discussion, a feasibility and suitability matrix was used which described the pros and cons and tradeoffs for each development alternative. The feasibility and suitability matrix provided a means for comparing and contrasting alternative development uses.

Figure 2.3: Interviews with fishermen were a critical part of understanding the opportunities and constraints at the Port.

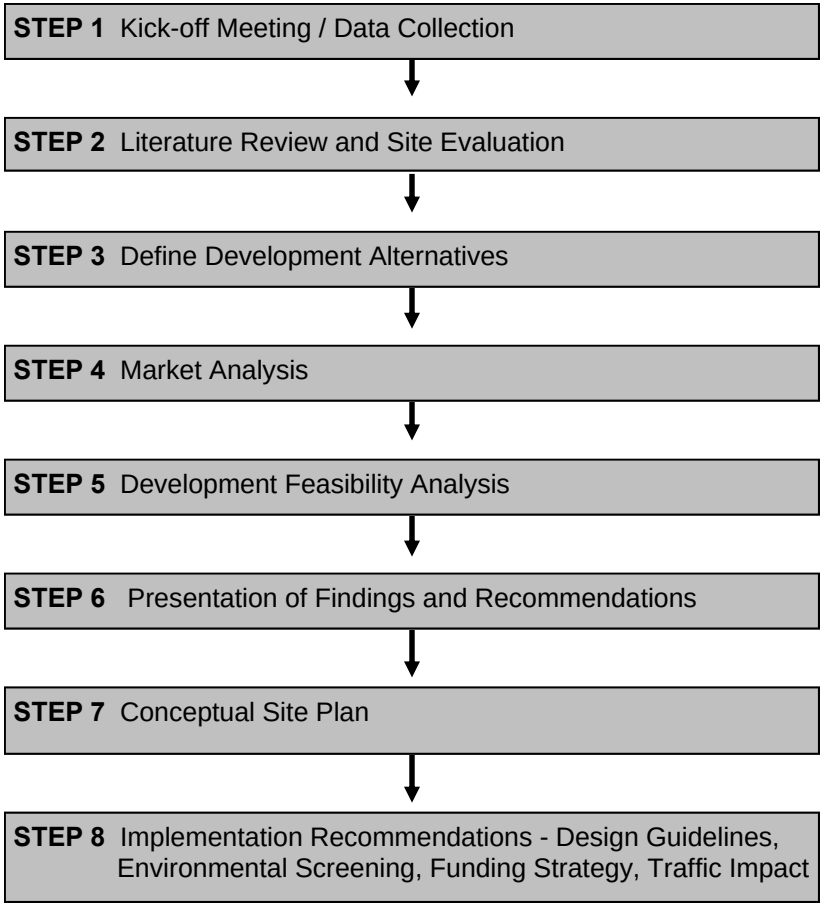


Figure 2.4: Major Steps of the planning process.

For the recommended development alternative, conceptual development plans were created. These plans include design guidelines, development phasing, environmental screening and permitting analysis, and funding strategy and sources.

Existing Conditions

Figure 3.1: Fishing boat coming into port.

Study Area and Surrounding Uses

The study area consists of two adjacent coastal properties located at the Port of Belford in the Township of Middletown, NJ. One property is a 6-acre lot on Compton's Creek, owned by the Belford Seafood Co-op, and the second property, 9-acres owned by Seaport Associates, fronts on Raritan/Sandy Hook Bay and the mouth of Compton's Creek (see Figure 2.1 and Figure 3.3).

The 6-acre site is home to a mixed-fishery commercial fishing fleet along with associated dock and storage facilities, a seafood distribution operation, a fresh fish market and a seasonal seafood restaurant. The 9-acre property (to the west) is privately owned, and was the location of the J. Howard Smith fish factory, later owned by Seacoast Products and Hanson Industries, which operated between 1911 and 1982. No aboveground structures remain, and the site is currently vacant. The shoreline of the site, approximately 700 feet, is bulkheaded, but is badly deteriorated. In addition to the 6-acre Co-op site, there are other adjacent properties to the south that are actively used for commercial fishing operations. Port Monmouth Road and Main Street are the two principal roads connecting the study area to Middletown.

In recent years the Belford area has seen development including the luxury townhouse complex "Dunes at Shoal Harbor" (west of the study area) and the Belford ferry terminal and parking facility (east of the study area). The "Dunes at Shoal Harbor" consist of 123 units of luxury townhomes and includes a clubhouse, gym, pool, and game rooms. The ferry terminal, completed in 2002, is owned by Monmouth County and leased by NY Waterway which operates a high-speed ferry service between Belford and Manhattan. The ferry service provides approximately 2,200 daily trips. In addition to the terminal, a 500-car parking lot was also constructed by the County, and was increased to 1,050 parking spaces in 2006 due to demand. Both of these developments have added a significant amount of new activity to the Belford area.

The Belford area is surrounded by ecologically valuable coastal habitats. Directly to the south of the study area, Compton's Creek winds its way through extensive salt marsh wetlands. A portion of this marsh is permanently preserved as part of Bayshore Waterfront Park, a 222-acre Monmouth County Park. This environmentally sensitive wetland complex provides habitat for a wide variety of native plants and animals, including numerous shorebird species. The creek is a destination for local kayak paddlers seeking quiet passive recreation. Bayshore Waterfront Park also consists of a beach and fishing pier, and the County offers coastal environmental education programs during the summer months. Within the study site, the bulkhead along the mouth of Compton's Creek attracts recreational fishermen, as the deep waters off of the bulkhead offer excellent fishing opportunities for striped bass and bluefish .

Figure 3.2: Adjacent residential development

Source: New Jersey 2003 High Resolution Orthophotography (MrSID format)

Figure 3.3: Study Area boundary and existing buildings