

*A Municipal Needs Assessment
of
Central Jersey Municipalities*

*The Municipal Land Use Center
at
The College of New Jersey*

Summer-Fall 2004

Table of Contents

	Page
<i>Executive Summary</i>	3
<i>I. Introduction</i>	4
<i>II. Methodology</i>	4
<i>III. Findings</i>	6
<i>A. Identifying Land Use –related Needs</i>	7
<i>B. Services MLUC Might Provide to Meet those Land use –related Needs</i>	9
<i>C. The Training Issue</i>	12
<i>IV. Conclusions</i>	14
<u><i>Appendices</i></u>	
A. List of Municipalities Responding to Survey	16
B. Letter to Municipalities & Survey	17
C. Tables	24

Executive Summary

The Municipal Land Use Center at The College of New Jersey (MLUC@TCNJ) was established in January 2004. It conducted a survey of municipalities through telephone and in-person interviews over the summer 2004. The purpose of these interviews was primarily two-fold: 1) to identify municipal needs in the five-county Central Jersey region in which MLUC operates along with a range of services that the Center might provide; and 2) to make the 138 municipalities and 5 counties in the Central Jersey region aware of MLUC's existence.

MLUC devised a survey questionnaire, which it first tested on several pilot municipalities and also sought comments from planning consultants working in the region. After minor changes to the survey instrument in response to the comments it received, MLUC conducted a mailing in which it sent explanatory correspondence to all of the 138 municipal clerks in the region along with an enclosed survey questionnaire. Initially, it was expected that all 138 municipalities would be contacted and interviewed. However, after difficulties were experienced in making the appropriate municipal contacts, an alternative strategy was devised. Eventually 55 municipalities were contacted and 57 interviews were conducted throughout the summer 2004 and into September. Efforts were made to attain representation that would be reflective of the five-county region. Representatives of municipalities were not just drawn from the five counties, but also drawn to reflect urban, suburban and rural areas.

With respect to the findings, they are divided into three categories: 1) Identifying Land-use Related Needs; 2) Services MLUC Might Provide to Meet those Land-use Related needs; and 3) The Training Issue. Concerning the first, interviewees were asked to choose among a list of 17 potential municipal needs. The most frequently expressed needs had to do with traffic. Other high-ranking needs had to do with the loss of State aid and "growth management" concerns more generally. The lowest relatively ranked need had to do with "green-buildings," but may have had something to do with the lack of familiarity with the concept.

As to services that MLUC might provide, municipalities urged most frequently that MLUC provide municipalities with assistance to obtain additional Federal and state funding, share information as to case studies and best practices and create additional opportunities for improved training.

With regard to training, noteworthy findings include how infrequently planning board and zoning board of adjustment members attend training, while simultaneously there is general and wide agreement on its importance. The interviewees pointed to the difficulties in motivating volunteer board members to attend trainings, but also the importance to provide training in ways that are relevant and convenient and get beyond just the elementary concepts as well as providing additional incentives for board members to attend.

In conclusion, the Municipal Needs Assessment appears to have achieved the purposes for which it was designed. It was both able to collect important information to guide the future direction of the Center and assisted in letting the municipalities that were contacted to learn more about the Municipal Land Use Center at The College of New Jersey.

I. Introduction

The Municipal Land Use Center (MLUC) was established at The College of New Jersey (TCNJ) in January 2004. Its opening reception was held on February 28, 2004. The Center was established with a Congressional appropriation secured by Congressman Rush Holt (12th C.D.) and directed through the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) to the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT).

The Center's mission is to "support municipal governments in meeting the region's land use challenges by identifying opportunities for new development and redevelopment, open space acquisition, and farmland preservation through the provision of education and training, essential tools, technical assistance, and referrals to lead to more livable communities for the 21st century." Its focus is on the five central New Jersey counties—Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth and Somerset-- and their respective 138 municipalities.

The purpose of this survey was two-fold. First, it was important to "take the pulse" of a substantial number of municipalities in the five-county region before the Center invests its limited resources on major initiatives. This pulse-taking may serve to guide the Center in terms of staff and consulting recruiting as well as shaping its early initiatives. Second, and perhaps just as important, a municipal survey was viewed as an effective and convenient means to introduce a significant number of central Jersey municipalities to MLUC's establishment and the work it expects to do. Both these purposes were met by this study.

MLUC acknowledges and thanks the 56 municipalities that participated in this study. Mathew Polsky contributed to the development of the questionnaire. He also did most of the interviewing and compiling of the data for this Report. MLUC also extends its appreciation to the three planning professionals who reviewed and commented on the initial survey questionnaire: Frank Banisch, Stanley Slahedtko, and Gail O'Reilly.

II. Methodology

A preliminary survey questionnaire was designed and tested. The survey questionnaire was first reviewed internally. It was also commented upon by several "pilot" municipalities. Three external consultants were asked to comment on the preliminary instrument. Comments were collected, analyzed, and modifications were made to the questionnaire at this preliminary stage.

It was initially intended that most, if not all, of the municipalities (138) in the five-county region would be surveyed. The survey questionnaire was mailed to each municipal clerk in the five-county region. Those clerks were asked to forward the questionnaire to the most appropriate person to respond for the municipality. The accompanying cover letter explained the purpose of the survey; and that a follow-up telephone call might be placed to discuss the questionnaire.

Despite the best of intentions, it quickly became obvious that surveying all the municipalities within the five-county region would be a difficult if not unattainable objective in the timeframe anticipated. Contacts with municipalities required multiple calls. The situation was in part exacerbated by conducting the survey during the summer months. At times, when a municipal clerk was reached by telephone he/she reported that he/she had not received the earlier correspondence. In some instances, the person contacted by telephone did not feel that he/she had the authority to respond or felt that some other municipal official was more appropriate to be interviewed. Finally, a small number of municipalities (6), apparently misreading the cover letter, did not wait to be contacted by telephone, but instead simply faxed back responses to the mailed questionnaire. In all, a total of 55 municipalities were either interviewed via telephone, in person, or faxed back responses.

In the instance of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township, two municipalities served by a single planning board, one interviewee, the professional planner responded for both municipalities. In the case of Avon-by-the-Sea and Bradley Beach, one interviewee responded for those two municipalities as he served as a Planning Board member in the first and as Secretary to the Planning Board in the second. In addition, in two municipalities—Holmdel and South Brunswick—multiple interviews were conducted in each of those municipalities.

The questionnaire survey response rate was ultimately 40.6% of the potentially total municipal, five-county universe. However, despite this respectable response rate, it is recognized that the responding sample was not entirely random, so that generalizations about the unsurveyed population should remain subject to qualification.

Once it was acknowledged that not all the municipalities in the five-county region would be interviewed, pains were taken to ensure a modicum of representativeness across the five-county region. In Mercer, 9 of 13 municipalities or 69.2% were contacted and interviewed. This county reflected the highest percentage of its municipalities participating. The others reflected a more narrow range of participation. For Middlesex, MLUC interviewed 13 of 26 municipalities or 50.0%. In Hunterdon County, 10 of 26 municipalities or 38.5 % were interviewed. In Somerset County, 8 of 21 municipalities were interviewed for a percentage of 38.1%. In Monmouth with the largest number of municipalities at 53, 18 of the 53 were interviewed or 34.0% were interviewed.

Efforts were also made to attain a cross-section of urban, suburban and rural municipalities. Across counties, the range extended from New Brunswick, Long Branch and Red Bank as examples of heavily urbanized municipalities to rural communities like Delaware Township, Upper Freehold Township or Alexandria with suburban locales such as West Windsor or Montgomery Township falling in between. (See Appendix A)

The contacted respondents reflect an eclectic group ranging from municipal clerk to business administrator to planning board secretary to planning board member to zoning officer to township engineer to a number of elected governing board members including at least one mayor. In one instance, the survey was conducted in a group manner in which

the municipality's mayor, planning consultant and business administrator participated together (Eatontown).

Most of the interviews were conducted over the telephone. However, seven interviews were conducted face-to-face. The face-to-face interviews were used as a "check" on the data being collected in the telephone interviews.

The notes for each interview were transcribed. The results were aggregated by county. In many interviews, the interviewees refused to be constrained to simple "yes" or "no" answers, but instead elaborated at considerable length. Little attempt was made to discourage interviewees from elaborating in this way as the additional fact-finding was thought to be valuable. Questions that might have been intended, at least initially, as closed-ended and more easily measurable became open-ended inquiries that had to be re-interpreted and translated into more quantifiable-like categories.

Interviewees often raised questions about MLUC's origins, sources of funding and its function. In addition, they sometimes posed questions about the meaning of terms in the questionnaire, e.g., "state regulatory responsiveness," "affordable housing," etc. For this reason, interviews often became less "quiz-like," but instead more resembled a conversation. While acknowledging the loss of easy quantification and some objective rigor, encouraging such conversation was felt consistent with at least one of the purposes of the survey, i.e., public outreach.

A substantial number of respondents objected to the use of the word "problem" when posed by the interviewer and as originally included in the questionnaire. These objectors were generally more comfortable with the words "issue" or "concerns." The term "affordable housing," in the context of whether a town has a problem with it, came to be understood as meaning either that the municipality was out of compliance with the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) or in the alternative whether people could afford to live in that municipality. Such clarification often led to further discussion. Interviewees also seemed to be generally unfamiliar with the notion of "green buildings." That topic required additional explanation as did the concept of "performance measures" when applying them to the evaluation of municipal services.

III. Findings

The Survey Questionnaire might be divided into just three broad categories. The first part of the questionnaire focused on identifying municipal needs or "problem identification." A second part of the survey questionnaire concentrated on ways that MLUC might begin to meet those municipal needs. A third aspect of the questionnaire was designed to probe about issues related to training, particularly training for planning and zoning board of adjustment members.

A. Identifying the Land Use–related Needs

A list of 17 potential land use-related problems or needs was read to the municipalities' representatives. With respect to each one, they were asked to rank them as a "problem." A significant number reacted to the characterization as a "problem," and often recast "problems" as "concerns," or urged the substitution of the term "needs."

The 17 potential land-use related concerns included in the survey questionnaire are the ones listed below. In the course of the study, two categories "Business District Development" and "Business District Redevelopment" were merged into a single category, thereby reducing the findings to just 16 categories.

1. Traffic Congestion
2. Regulatory Responsiveness of State agencies
3. Open Space Preservation
4. Farmland Preservation
5. Growth Management
6. Inter-municipal Cooperation
7. Recreational Opportunities
8. Green Building
9. Affordable Housing
10. Business District Development/Redevelopment
11. Water Shortages and/or Water Quality
12. Watershed Management and Flooding
13. Stormwater Rules Requirements
14. Reduction of State Aid and Increasing Cost of Schools
15. Sewers and Septics (wastewater issues)
16. Managing Municipal Services and Tax Rates due to Growth in the Community

The most consistent and frequent response was traffic congestion with 49 of the 57 municipalities surveyed overall or 86% identifying traffic congestion as an important concern. In addition, the issue appeared to be consistently regarded across all five counties including 100% of those questioned in Mercer, followed by 92% in Middlesex, 88% in Somerset, 83% in Monmouth and 70% in Hunterdon. (See Appendix C, Table 1).

The second most frequent response was related to the reduction of State aid and rising school costs, with 44 of 57 or 77% of those interviewed ranking this concern as significant. Furthermore, five additional municipalities viewed this problem as somewhat a problem. If those five municipalities are grouped with the others, the municipalities that considering this issue a concern rises to 86%. This concern was also evident across all five counties (See Appendix C, Table 14).

Other high ranking concerns, although to a somewhat lesser degree include "Managing Municipal Services and Tax Rate due to Growth in the Community," at 30 of 57 municipalities or 52.6% (See Appendix C, Table 16 ; and "growth management" at 29 of 57 or 50.9% (See Appendix C, Table 5) of municipalities questioned. Taken as a group, these concerns, all ranking above 50% by those municipalities polled, demonstrate the

level of concern related to “growth management” more generally, by municipalities in this five-county Central Jersey region.

In a lesser, perhaps middle range of concern were two sets of needs. The first was “Affordable Housing” about which 24 of 57 or 42.1% of the municipalities surveyed identified it as a concern (See Appendix C, Table 9); and “Watershed Management and Flooding,” which yielded a similar percentage (See Appendix C, Table 12). “Affordable Housing” appeared to be a weaker concern in the Mercer County municipalities sampled with only 3 of 8 identifying it as a need or 37.5% as contrasted with Monmouth County, where it appears as a much stronger concern with 55.6% or 10 of 18 municipalities pointing to it as a need. The three other counties fell in between.

With respect to “Watershed Management and Flooding,” Somerset County showed the strongest concern with 7 of 8 of its municipalities identifying it as a need, or 88% of Somerset municipalities interviewed. Hunterdon expressing the least concern of the five counties at 30.0% or 3 of 10 municipalities with the other three counties falling in between. (See Appendix C, Table 12)

Other substantive areas falling into somewhat of a middle range include “Inter-municipal Cooperation,” (See Appendix C, Table 6) especially when the affirmative and “somewhat” responses are combined to add to 19 of 57 or 33.3%. “Recreational Opportunities,” (See Appendix C, Table 7); also at 19 of 57, or 33.3%, is in this middle range. “Business District Development/Redevelopment,” at 12 of 57 or 21.1%, (See Appendix C, Table 10) is at the lower end of this middle range of concerns.

The topic area that seemed to garner the least interest was “green building.” Only 5 of 57 or 8.8% of municipalities questioned expressed this issue as a need. As previously stated, in some instances, lengthy explanation was required as to clarify the meaning of “green buildings.” This response probably indicates a lack of awareness of the concept. It may also be reflective of the facts that not all municipalities are currently engaged in buildings construction or that the person being interviewed was not knowledgeable about building design and construction. Additional exploration of this issue is required.

Other relatively low scores of interest were evident, but not as low as “green buildings.” These low-end categories ranged from 21% to 27% and included “Water Shortages and Water Quality” at 12 of 57 or 21.1% (See Appendix C, Table 11), “Sewers and Septics” or Wastewater at 14 of 57 or 24.6% (See Appendix C, Table 15), “Open Space Preservation” at 14 of 57 or 24.6% (See Appendix C, Table 3), “New Stormwater Rules Requirements” at 15 of 57 or 26.3% (See Appendix C, Table 13), and “Farmland Preservation” at 15 of 57 or 26.3% (See Appendix C, Table 4).

In conducting these interviews, the interviewers encouraged additional conversation by posing an open-ended question: “Are there other land use problems that the municipality is facing that I haven’t mentioned? Could you explain why they are a problem.”

The responses to this question varied significantly from place to place. For example, the question of “tear-downs” was an acute concern in Monmouth County’s coastal municipalities (Avon-by-the-Sea). This situation raised concerns with respect to the amount of impervious cover, visual impact and property tax implications. Other concerns that emerged in this region were the future of Fort Monmouth and the impact that its possible closing may have on the region’s economy (Eatontown); and concerns about the impact of college-related housing on one municipality’s neighborhoods (Long Branch).

In southern Middlesex County, concerns arose related to Exit 8A on the New Jersey Turnpike and the traffic congestion associated with that Exit. Of particular concern in that region is the apparent inability for road-building to catch up with warehouse and distribution center development that has occurred in the past decade. The reported result has been a loss of “civility” around land use issues, at least according to one interviewee, a municipal planner; and concerns raised about the alignment and timing for construction of Route 92, raised by several interviewees throughout this region.

In Hunterdon County and parts of Somerset County, interviewees voiced concerns related to the mindset of the home building industry and about the continued spread of highway commercial strip development. More specific concerns were raised about uses for underutilized and unused farm buildings and acceptable percentages of impervious cover on preserved farmland. One interviewee raised a concern about the density of horses per acre in parts of Hunterdon County. Water re-charge issues in the Sourlands was also raised as a concern by one interviewee in light of increasing development in that region.

Offering a region-wide perspective, several of those interviewed raised concerns related to the anticipated growth of Central Jersey now that the Pinelands was protected to the south and the Highlands had achieved special status to the north. Would Central Jersey now become the focus of accelerated and poorly managed growth as a consequence of its being the least regulated area wedged in between two more stringently regulated regions. This concern was heightened during the period that the surveying occurred because of the enactment of “fast-track” legislation at that time.

B. Services that MLUC Might Provide to Meet those Land Use-related Needs

The survey questionnaire provided a list of services that MLUC might provide to address municipally identified land use-related needs. There were nine different services that might be provided to municipalities in the five-county region. The potential services were listed with a ranking requested that ranged from “very useful” to “useful” to “no difference” to “detrimental” to “very detrimental.” These services included the following:

1. State Plan Cross-acceptance and Plan Endorsement Assistance;
2. Training Courses on Planning and Zoning Issues;
3. Generating a Data base of Land Use, Demographic and Economic Data;
4. Assistance in Identifying State and Federal Funding Sources;
5. Providing Meeting Facilitation and Conflict Resolution Services for Controversial Topics/Issues;

6. Sharing information from our archive of new and innovative planning practices, case studies and resources (best practices);
7. Selection and Use of Performance Measures;
8. Work Collaboratively with the Community to Implement New or Innovative Planning Approaches;
9. Assistance in the Employment of New Tools such as GIS, Checklists, Visual Preference Surveys, Charrettes, etc.

None of the respondents responded that any of these potential services would be either “detrimental” or “very detrimental.” The concerns most frequently cited for MLUC assistance included – “Assistance in Identifying State and Federal Funding Sources,” at 51 of 57 or 89.5%; “Share Information from Our Archive of New and Innovative Planning Practices, Case Studies and Resources (‘Best Practices’)” at 50 of 57 or 87.7%; and the third highest score for “Training Courses on Planning and Zoning Issues,” at 49 of 57 or 86.0%.

Assistance in the Employment of New Tools, e.g., GIS, Checklists, Visual Preference Surveys, Charrettes, weighed in with 41 of 57 in the “very useful” and “useful” categories or 71.9%. Falling closely behind in ranking is ““Generating a Data Base of Land Use, Demographic and Economic Data,” which scored just a bit lower with a score of 40 of 57 or 70.1%. These two potential services seemed to provide the “middle range.”

MLUC was curious as to whether it might fill a need with respect to creating forums for inter-municipal dialogue. There were three questions in this regard: Question 7A --“Do you ever talk to adjoining towns on issues that affect you and them;” Question 7B -- “Does your community have any regularly organized opportunities to network with surrounding communities on planning and growth issues;” and Question 7C -- “Would you find this type of exchange useful?”

The results of the survey indicate that most municipalities reported communicating regularly with neighboring municipalities, 34 of 57 or 59.6%. Only 20 of 57 or 35.1% reported that such communications were conducted through organized opportunities. Finally, about 49.1%, or 28 of 57, indicated that these organized types of exchanges would be helpful.

There were also a number of relatively low rankings in terms of activities that MLUC might pursue. These rankings, it should be noted, were relatively low when compared with those already discussed. For example, with respect to State Plan Cross-acceptance and Plan Endorsement, 34 of 57, or 59.6%, thought that assistance in this area would be either “very useful” or “useful.” This category proved to be among the weaker ones ranked along with “Work Collaboratively with the Community to Implement New or Innovative Planning Approaches.” That potential service scored at 33 of 57, or 57.9%, as either “very useful” or “useful.” Despite the fact that significantly more than half the municipalities responding thought these activities would be either “very useful” or “useful” they scored significantly below the percentages garnered by the four sets of

activities above – finding funding, promoting best practices, training, and creating greater-than-local forums.

The “Selection and Use of Performance Measures” was ranked low as well, with only 32 municipalities finding them either “very useful” or “useful,” for a percentage of 56.1%. However, with respect to this inquiry, it seemed as though few interviewees understood what “performance measures” were and what their value might be. The interviewers had at times to engage in extensive explanation, likely indicating a lack of familiarity with measures in general and the ways that they might be relevant to assessing municipal performance more specifically. Finally, among the weaker selected categories, facilitation and conflict resolution did not rank so well with just 30 of 57 municipalities ranking this topic as either “very useful” or “useful,” for 52.6%.

Question #10 of the Survey was intentionally open-ended —“Are there any other services the MLUC could provide, and exactly what would need to be provided?” In response to that open-ended question, a number of interesting suggestions were made including the following:

1. MLUC could perform a valuable service by simply responding to inquiries from municipal attorneys, engineers, planners, planning boards, zoning boards of adjustment and environmental commissions;
2. MLUC could provide guidance with respect to Master Plan writing along with documented case studies of municipalities’ master plan writing experiences;
3. MLUC could be the source and/or repository of municipal and county model ordinances on a range of planning issues, e.g., transfer of development rights (TDR’s);
4. MLUC could provide a valuable website with important connections to other valuable websites and produce a well-designed, periodic newsletter to educate citizen planners throughout the state;
5. MLUC might provide guidance as to regulatory interpretations in the absence of State department and agency interpretations that are frequently promised but not always forthcoming, e.g., NJDEP Stormwater regulations;
6. MLUC might provide third-party assessments to controversial local issues serving as a challenge to the work typically done by engineering and planning consultants;
7. MLUC could advocate on behalf of municipalities to make the frequently non-transparent processes of State departments and agencies more transparent;

8. MLUC could assist municipalities in producing more effective visuals including, but not necessarily limited to Geographic Information Systems (GIS) materials, for presentations to local governing bodies and boards. GIS training was also a part of this recommendation;
9. MLUC could devise planning and zoning training that might lead to either individual planning board member or planning board certification and/or licensing. Ethics training was cited as a special concern in these regards. (“People need to understand what their role is supposed to be; what they’re supposed to be basing their decisions on; and the issues involved in conflicts of interest, when they sit on municipal boards. They need to learn ways to deal with and cope with decisions that may affect their relatives and long-standing friends.”) Training planning boards in marketing techniques to more skillfully “roll-out” development proposals was cited as important. Conducting training in innovative ways, bringing training on-site to municipal buildings and training planners to be trainers were also included among these recommendations.
10. MLUC could advance the notion of regional planning to counteract the excesses of home rule and improve coordination among municipal jurisdictions.
11. MLUC might assist local jurisdictions with a number of miscellaneous site-specific issues including, but not necessarily limited to the following-- Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) on Route #1, alternative transportation modes along Route #9 in Monmouth and Ocean Counties, establishment of an impartial forum to address concerns related to Route #92.
12. MLUC might establish baselines and benchmarks with respect to various municipal services to better assess municipal performance;

C. The Training Issue

Training of municipal planning board and zoning board of adjustment members was of particular interest to MLUC so that special attention was paid to this subject in the survey questionnaire. The results proved noteworthy.

In Middlesex County, of the 13 municipalities surveyed, 10 reported that planning and zoning board of adjustment members “rarely if ever” attended training sessions. At first, these findings were thought to be atypical, but that proved not to be the case. Three-fourths of Mercer County’s municipalities

reported similarly that they “rarely, if ever” attended training. Half of Somerset County’s municipalities reported similarly, although 2 pointed favorably to assistance that they received from the county. Hunterdon County municipalities were a bit better. Tewksbury appeared to be outstanding in terms of the time and effort expended to keep its Board members up to date. It along with other municipalities in the County gave the County Planners high marks in assisting municipalities. In Monmouth County, of the 18 municipalities questioned, 9 reported that their board members “rarely if ever” attended training, 8 reported that they attended once a year, and one stated that he attended twice each year.

Municipal interviewees overwhelmingly and simultaneously pointed to the importance of training. Interviewees throughout the five-county region pointed to the difficulties inherent in attempting to motivate volunteer board members to attend and actively participate in training, particularly when the boards are at times over-worked. Serving on boards can often seem like a thankless task. Training combined with some type of certification was suggested as a possible motivator. Others suggested that training be made mandatory. Still others warned that traditional classroom instruction at the typical locations were often too inconvenient to expect board members to attend. Long-distance learning offered new possibilities. Some took advantage of the training sessions held at the annual League of Municipalities Convention. Many were aware of courses offered by Rutgers University and the New Jersey Planning Officials.

Recommendations were made to improve available training courses, both in terms of substance and delivery. These recommendations include the following:

1. Deliver training on-site during the working sessions usually held in the hour before planning boards and zoning boards of adjustment meet;
2. Deliver training in adjacent municipalities encouraging municipalities to network in the process;
3. Ensure that training is relevant and to the point, wherever possible presented in a problem-solving format;
4. Planning and Zoning Boards of Adjustment require more in-depth training. Adhering to just the Municipal Land Use Law and Roberts’ Rules of Order is insufficient. More advanced planning-related subjects ought to include economic redevelopment, transfer development rights, and master plan guidance among others;
5. Planning and Zoning Boards of Adjustment would benefit from training in such non-planning areas as leadership, mentoring and marketing;

6. Ethics should be an important aspect of training. Board members need to understand what are the legitimate bases on which their decisions ought to be made;
7. Showcase those boards who are doing things correctly and use veteran planning board and zoning board of adjustment members as mentors.

IV. Conclusions

The purpose of this needs assessment was primarily two-fold: 1) to “take the pulse” of Central Jersey municipalities in the five-county region; and 2) to inform those municipalities of the establishment and purpose of the Municipal Land Use Center (MLUC). Both these objectives were met by this study.

The questionnaire employed to survey municipalities in the region focused on three general areas: 1) to identify municipal needs or issue identification; 2) to explore ways that MLUC might begin to work with municipalities to address those needs; and 3) to document the need and to glean a number of meaningful recommendations related to the training of planning board and zoning board of adjustment members.

The identification of municipal needs began with the interviewer listing 17 potential needs categories. Those that most frequently resonated with the 57 municipalities surveyed included “traffic congestion” and “rising school costs.” Other “growth management” concerns were also ranked highly. A middle range of concerns included “affordable housing,” “Watershed Management and Flooding” and “Inter-municipal Cooperation.” The listed topic area that elicited least interest was “Green Buildings, likely demonstrating a lack of awareness about this topic. Others falling into the weaker category were “Water Shortages and Water Quality,” “New Stormwater Rules Requirements,” “Wastewater Issues,” “Open Space Preservation” and “Farmland Preservation.” In addition, an open-ended question, produced a wide range of issues affecting individual municipalities in different parts of the region.

In exploring services that MLUC might provide, municipal interviewees were provided with a list of 9 potential service areas. None of these were viewed negatively. However, the one ranked positively was to provide “assistance in identifying additional State and Federal funding.” Other relatively high ranking categories included “sharing best practices,” “training courses on planning and zoning issues,” and “establishing greater-than-local forums for inter-municipal coordination and problem-solving.”

Assistance in the Employment of New Tools” and “Generating a Data Base” fell into a middle range along with State Plan-related issues. Scoring relatively low was “performance measures” about which there seemed to be only limited understanding. An open-ended question provided a “laundry list” of a dozen interesting service areas that MLUC needs to consider as well.

In conducting the survey, MLUC was also interested in gaining valuable insights related to the training of planning board and zoning Board of adjustment members. Particularly

noteworthy proved to be the large number of interviewees who candidly admitted that board members rarely attend training. They pointed to the obstacles that resulted in that situation, but simultaneously to training's importance. Some suggested that training become mandatory, while others offered ideas to make training more palatable through incentives such as certification. Insights were also provided into the kinds of training and innovative methods of delivery that might be tried to improve current offerings.

In conclusion, this Municipal Needs Assessment provides MLUC with valuable guidance in devising a future course of action to better meet municipally-identified needs as elicited from a significant number of municipalities in the five-county Central Jersey region.

Appendix A
Municipalities Responding to the Survey

Hunterdon County (10)

1. Alexandria
2. Bethlehem
3. Delaware
4. East Amwell
5. Franklin
6. Frenchtown
7. Glen Gardner
8. Readington
9. Tewksbury
10. West Amwell

Mercer County (8)

1. Ewing
2. Hamilton
3. Hopewell Borough
4. Lawrence
5. Pennington
6. Princeton Borough/Township*
7. Washington Township
8. West Windsor

Middlesex (12)

1. Cranbury
2. Dunellen
3. Edison
4. Middlesex
5. Monroe
6. New Brunswick
7. Old Bridge
8. Plainsboro
9. South Amboy
10. South Brunswick**
11. Spotswood
12. Woodbridge

Monmouth County (18)

1. Allentown
2. Atlantic Highlands
3. Avon-by-the-Sea*
4. Belmar
5. Bradley Beach*
6. Deal
7. Eatontown
8. Freehold Township
9. Hazlet
10. Holmdel**
11. Howell
12. Interlaken
13. Long Branch
14. Millstone
15. Red Bank
16. Roosevelt
17. Rumson
18. Upper Freehold

Somerset County (7)

1. Bernards
2. Hillsborough
3. Manville
4. Montgomery
5. North Plainfield
6. Rocky Hill
7. Somerville*

* Princeton Borough and Princeton Township have a regional planning board, so the planner was interviewed to include both municipalities. One person was interviewed, employing two interviews, to cover both Avon-by-the-Sea and Bradley Beach as he served as a Planning Board member in the former and as paid Secretary to the Planning Board in the latter.

** These two municipalities experienced two interviews each. So that the interviews involved 55 municipalities but numbered 57 interviews.

Appendix B

The letter and survey that was mailed to each municipality's municipal clerk.

July 1, 2004

Dear Municipal Clerk,

Land use issues are on public officials' minds throughout New Jersey these days. Open space and the environment, traffic congestion, affordable housing, and property tax concerns have long been important considerations. The recent passage by the New Jersey State Legislature of the Transfer Development Rights (TDR) legislation, the Highlands bill, rapidly followed by the "Smart Growth" Permit Approval act serve to heighten these concerns. What will these changes mean to municipal governments?

The Municipal Land Use Center (MLUC) is dedicated to helping Central Jersey municipalities in meeting the region's land use challenges. MLUC is located at The College of New Jersey in Ewing, New Jersey. It is funded by a Federal grant secured by Congressman Rush Holt (12th C.D.) to support local government decision-making. MLUC is seeking to provide that support by making available up-to-date planning information, education and training, public agency referrals and technical assistance.

To ensure that MLUC becomes even more effective, an MLUC interviewer will be contacting you shortly to conduct a telephone survey. The survey will help the Center to better identify and understand your municipal planning and zoning needs. The survey is intended to cover all municipalities in the five-county Central Jersey region—Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth and Somerset counties.

It may be that you feel that someone else may be more appropriate to participate in this survey. In that case, we would appreciate your assistance in helping us identify that person when the MLUC interviewer calls. A sample survey has been enclosed to help you in making that determination. Also enclosed are a brochure and a reprinted news article that describe MLUC in more detail.

We thank you in advance for your cooperation. If you wish speak further with a Center representative about the survey, or any other matter related to MLUC and the ways it might relate to your municipality, either now or in the future, please feel free to call at (609) 771-2832.

Sincerely,

Martin A. Bierbaum, Ph.D., J.D.
Executive Director

Matt Polsky, M.A., M.B.A.
Project Director (609-771-2802)

Municipal Land Use Center Sample Questionnaire
July 2004

1) Are you the best person to talk to about (name of municipality's) land use planning and zoning issues? These are related to such issues as traffic, managing development and growth pressures, increasing costs for municipal services and education, addressing state regulations such as affordable housing and storm water management rules, relations with state government, regional cooperation, etc.

2) What is your name and title? _____

3) I'm going to read to you from a list of possible land use issues that (name of municipality) might be facing. For each item on this list, I'd like to know if it is a problem to your municipality. Any comments you'd like to offer on any of these issues are welcome. It's also very important that if I don't mention an important land use problem, that you bring it to my attention. Here's the list of possible land use problems:

<u>Issue</u>	<u>A Problem?</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
a) traffic congestion		
b) regulatory responsiveness by individual state agencies, adequacy of services provided by individual state agencies		
c) open space and greenway protection		
d) farmland preservation		

Issue

A Problem?

Explanation

- e) growth management issues
- f) inter-municipal/regional cooperation on land use topics
- g) providing active & passive recreational opportunities
- h) green, energy efficient, healthy building
- i) affordable housing
- j) business district development
- k) redevelopment of declining business districts
- l) water shortages & water quality
- m) watershed management & flooding concerns

<u>Issue</u>	<u>A Problem?</u>	<u>Explanation</u>
--------------	-------------------	--------------------

- n) new stormwater management rule requirements

- o) reduction of state aid & increasing cost of schools

- p) providing adequate sewer capacity & addressing septic system problems (wastewater issues)

- q) managing municipal services & tax rate due to community growth

4) Are there other land use problems (the municipality) is facing that I haven't mentioned? Could you explain why they are a problem?

5) Besides the basic provisions of the Municipal Land Use Law, how would you describe the ways planning and zoning decisions are currently made in your municipality? What are the strengths of the current process? What are the weaknesses with the current process, and how could they be improved?

6) Where do you currently go for assistance on planning & zoning issues? How well are these resources meeting your needs? How might such assistance be improved?

Planning organizations _____ Planning consultants _____ Other elected officials _____
 Township Attorney _____ Other Board members _____ NJ League
 of Municipalities _____ NJ Planning Officials _____ Non-Governmental
 Organizations/Nonprofit Regional Planning Groups _____ NJ Chapter APA
 _____ Other sources _____

7A) Do you ever talk to adjoining towns on issues that effect you and them?

7B) Does your community have any regularly organized opportunities to network with surrounding communities on planning & growth issues?

7C) Would you find this type of exchange useful?

8) Here is the list of possible services the MLUC might provide. Please rate the degree of usefulness of each to you, ranging from “Very Useful,” to “Useful,” to “No Difference,” to “Detrimental,” to “Very Detrimental.”

<u>Service</u>	<u>Degree of Usefulness</u>				
	<u>Very Useful</u>	<u>Useful</u>	<u>No Difference</u>	<u>Detrimental</u>	<u>Very Detrimental</u>
(a) State Plan Cross-Acceptance & Plan Endorsement	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
(b) Training courses on planning & zoning	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
(c) Generating a database of land use, demographic, & economic data	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
(d) Assistance in identifying state & federal funding sources	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
(e) Providing meeting facilitation & conflict resolution services	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
(f) Share information from archives of new & innovative planning practices, case studies, resources	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

<u>Service</u>	<u>Degree of Usefulness</u>				
	<u>Very Useful</u>	<u>Useful</u>	<u>No Difference</u>	<u>Detrimental</u>	<u>Very Detrimental</u>
(f) Selection and use of performance measures	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
(g) Work collaboratively with community to implement new or innovative planning approaches	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
(h) Assistance in the employment of new tools, e.g., G.I.S., checklists, visual preference surveys, charrettes	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

9) Which of these tools if provided by MLUC would be most useful?: G.I.S. _____
 checklists _____ visual preference surveys _____ charrettes _____

10) Are there any other services the MLUC could provide, and exactly what would need to be provided?

11) Returning to the subject of training, where do you currently go for training and education assistance? How well is this source meeting your needs? What are its strengths? Its weaknesses?

12) How often do your Planning & Zoning board members receive or attend training sessions? Rarely if ever _____ Once a year _____ Two or three times per year _____ Four or more times per year _____

13) What method or methods of training and education might best serve your needs?
 On-the-job/Just-in-time training _____ Computer based training _____
 Traditional classroom training _____ Team-building/problem-solving training with simultaneous access to experts _____ Other kinds of training _____

14) MLUC is considering offering seminars and forums at TCNJ. Would you be interested in attending seminars _____, could you make it to the campus _____,

could you think of specific topics you'd be most interested in learning about?

15) What is the best way to keep your town informed about our program and activities?

Mail _____ Newsletter _____ Website _____ Email _____ Fax _____

Other _____

16) Now that we're almost finished with this survey, do you have any further

suggestions on how MLUC could be most helpful? _____

17) Are there others in (name of municipality) that you recommend we speak with about the types of issues we've just discussed?

Name _____ Position _____

Phone Number _____

Name _____ Position _____

Phone Number _____

Name _____ Position _____

Phone Number _____

18) Would you like a copy of this report when it is fully completed? Yes _____ No _____

19) Would you like contact info for the MLUC? Yes _____ No _____

Appendix C
Tables

Table 1
Traffic Issues

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	7	2	1	0
Mercer	8	0	0	0
Middlesex	12	1	0	0
Monmouth	15	2	1	0
Somerset	7	1	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>49</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>0</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>86.0%</u>	<u>10.5%</u>	<u>3.5%</u>	<u>0.0%</u>

Table 2
Regulatory Responsiveness of State Departments and Agencies

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	2	8	0	0
Mercer	1	6	0	1
Middlesex	6	6	0	1
Monmouth	8	6	2	2
Somerset	2	4	2	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>33.3%</u>	<u>52.6%</u>	<u>7.0%</u>	<u>7.0%</u>

Table 3
Open Space Preservation

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	2	8	0	0
Mercer	1	6	0	1
Middlesex	2	10	0	1
Monmouth	6	11	0	1
Somerset	3	4	0	1
<u>Totals</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>39</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>24.5%</u>	<u>68.4%</u>	<u>0.0%</u>	<u>7.0%</u>

Table 4
Farmland Preservation

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	3	6	0	1
Mercer	1	7	0	0
Middlesex	2	10	0	1
Monmouth	5	13	0	0
Somerset	4	4	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>40</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>26.3%</u>	<u>70.1%</u>	<u>0.0%</u>	<u>3.5%</u>

Table 5
Growth Management Issues

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	4	5	0	1
Mercer	4	4	0	0
Middlesex	7	6	0	0
Monmouth	10	7	0	1
Somerset	4	4	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>26</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>50.9%</u>	<u>45.6%</u>	<u>0.0%</u>	<u>3.5%</u>

Table 6
Inter-municipal Cooperation

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	2	7	0	3
Mercer	4	2	2	0
Middlesex	4	9	0	0
Monmouth	4	11	0	3
Somerset	1	5	2	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>34</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>26.3%</u>	<u>59.6%</u>	<u>7.0%</u>	<u>10.5%</u>

Table 7
Recreational Opportunities

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	4	6	0	0
Mercer	3	3	1	1
Middlesex	2	11	0	0
Monmouth	8	8	1	1
Somerset	2	5	0	1
<u>Totals</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>33</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>21.1%</u>	<u>57.9%</u>	<u>3.5%</u>	<u>5.2%</u>

Table 8
Green Buildings

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	1	7	0	2
Mercer	0	8	0	0
Middlesex	1	10	0	2
Monmouth	2	15	0	1
Somerset	1	7	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>47</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>5</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>8.8%</u>	<u>82.5%</u>	<u>0.0%</u>	<u>8.8%</u>

Table 9
Affordable Housing

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	4	6	0	0
Mercer	3	5	0	0
Middlesex	3	9	1	0
Monmouth	10	4	2	2
Somerset	4	4	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	24	28	3	2
<u>Percentages</u>	42.1%	49.1%	5.3%	3.5%

Table 10
Redevelopment/Business District Redevelopment

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	1	8	0	1
Mercer	3	4	0	1
Middlesex	3	9	0	1
Monmouth	5	12	0	1
Somerset	0	6	0	2
<u>Totals</u>	12	39	0	6
<u>Percentages</u>	21.0%	68.4%	0.0%	10.5%

Table 11
Water Shortages &/or Water Quality

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	4	4	2	0
Mercer	0	6	2	0
Middlesex	2	9	1	1
Monmouth	4	11	2	1
Somerset	2	5	1	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>35</u>	<u>8</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>21.1%</u>	<u>61.4%</u>	<u>14.0%</u>	<u>3.5%</u>

Table 12
Watershed Management &/or Flooding

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	3	6	0	1
Mercer	3	5	0	0
Middlesex	5	7	0	1
Monmouth	6	9	0	3
Somerset	7	0	0	1
<u>Totals</u>	<u>24</u>	<u>27</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>42.1%</u>	<u>47.4%</u>	<u>0.0%</u>	<u>10.5%</u>

Table 13
New Stormwater Rule Requirements

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	4	5	0	1
Mercer	2	4	0	2
Middlesex	2	7	0	4
Monmouth	3	10	0	5
Somerset	4	3	0	1
<u>Totals</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>26.3%</u>	<u>50.9%</u>	<u>0.0%</u>	<u>22.8%</u>

Table 14
Reduction in State Aid & Increasing School Costs

	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	7	1	2	0
Mercer	8	0	0	0
Middlesex	9	2	2	0
Monmouth	12	3	1	2
Somerset	8	0	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>44</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>77.2%</u>	<u>10.5%</u>	<u>8.8%</u>	<u>3.5%</u>

Table 15
Sewers and Septics

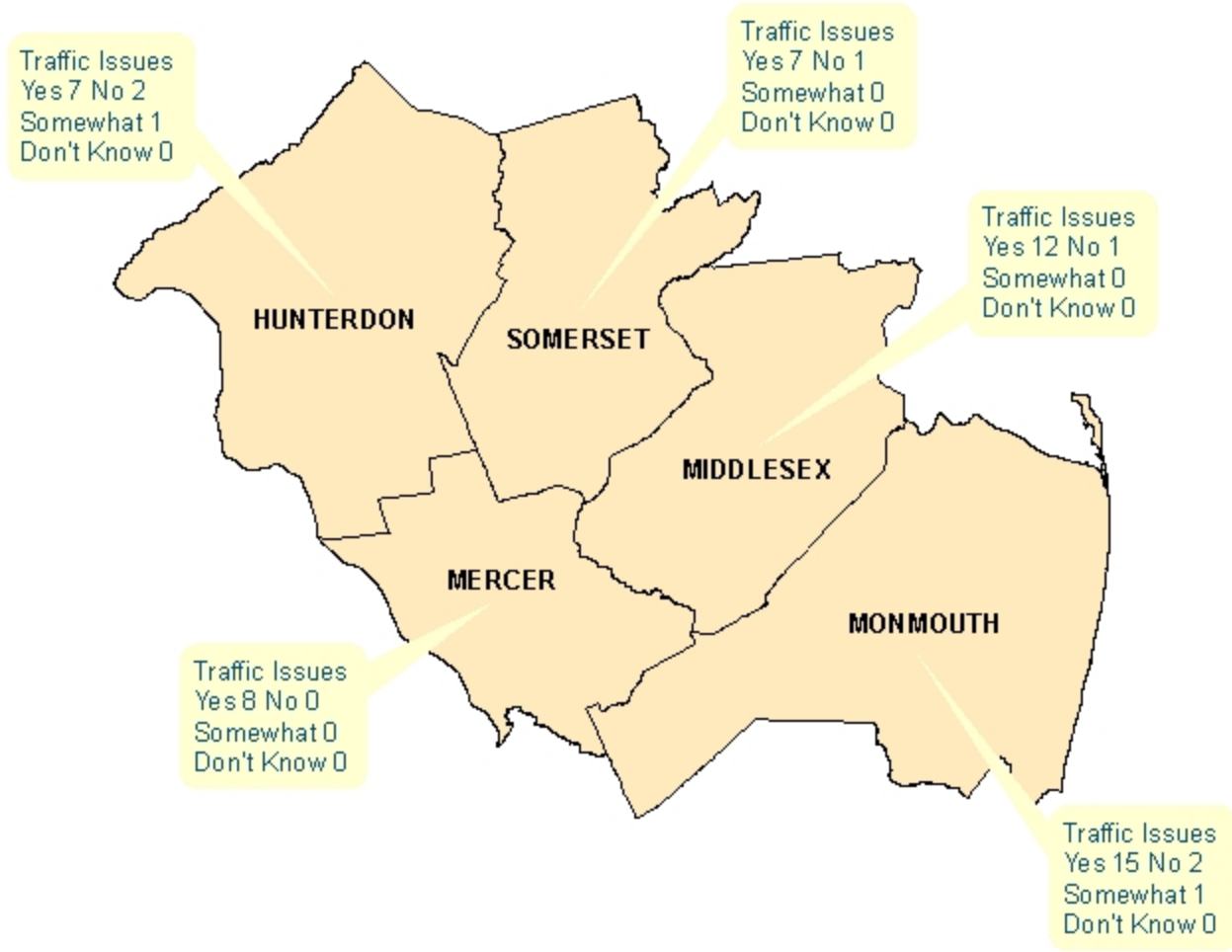
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	5	5	0	0
Mercer	1	7	0	0
Middlesex	2	10	0	1
Monmouth	5	12	0	1
Somerset	1	7	0	0
<u>Totals</u>	<u>14</u>	<u>41</u>	<u>0</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>24.6%</u>	<u>71.9%</u>	<u>0.0%</u>	<u>3.5%</u>

Table 16
Managing Municipal Services and the Tax Rate Due to Growth

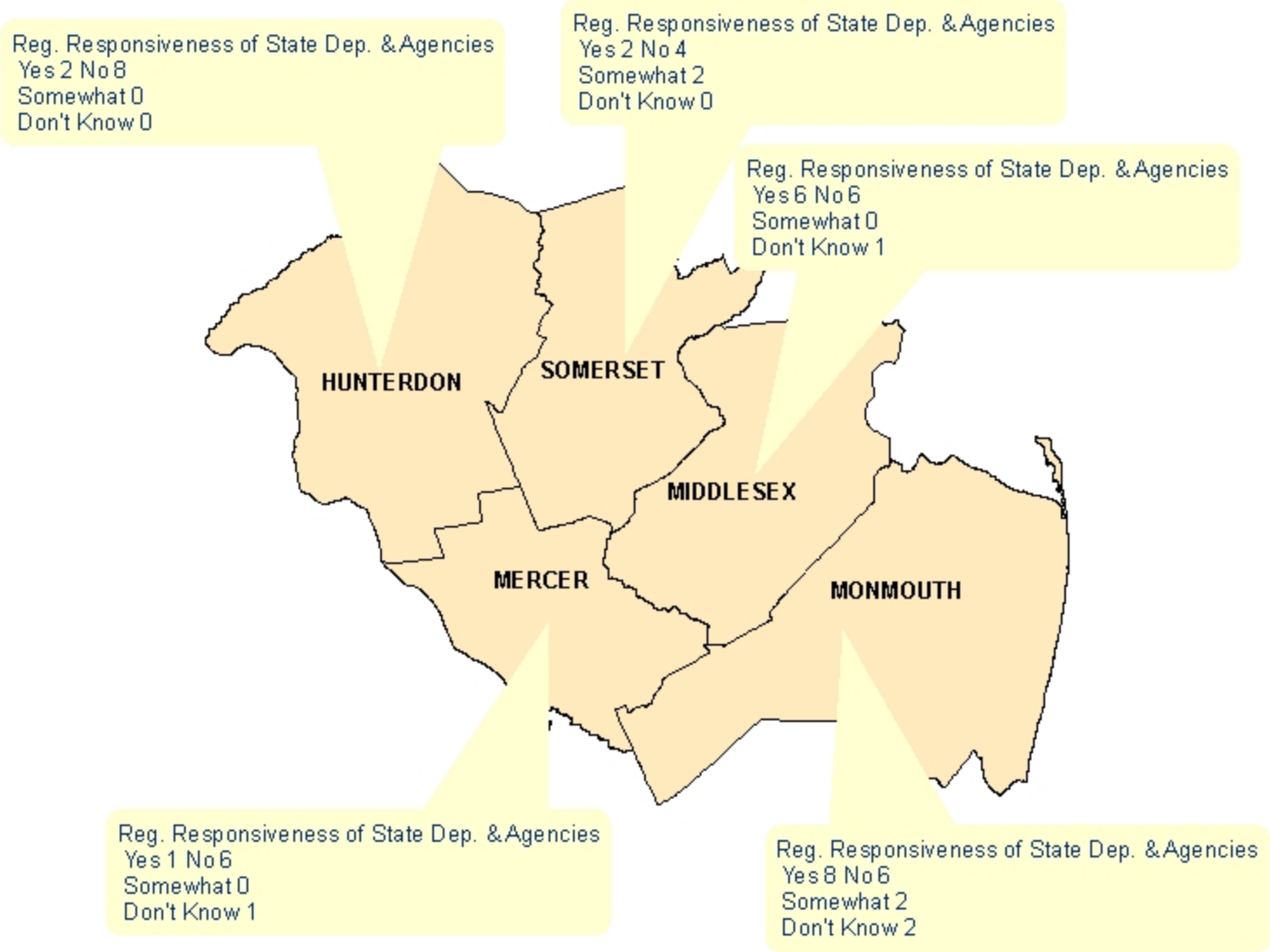
	<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Somewhat</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Hunterdon	5	5	0	0
Mercer	5	2	1	0
Middlesex	7	6	0	0
Monmouth	8	7	0	3
Somerset	5	2	0	1
<u>Totals</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>4</u>
<u>Percentages</u>	<u>52.6%</u>	<u>38.6%</u>	<u>1.8%</u>	<u>7.0%</u>

Graphic A - Municipalities Responding to the Survey

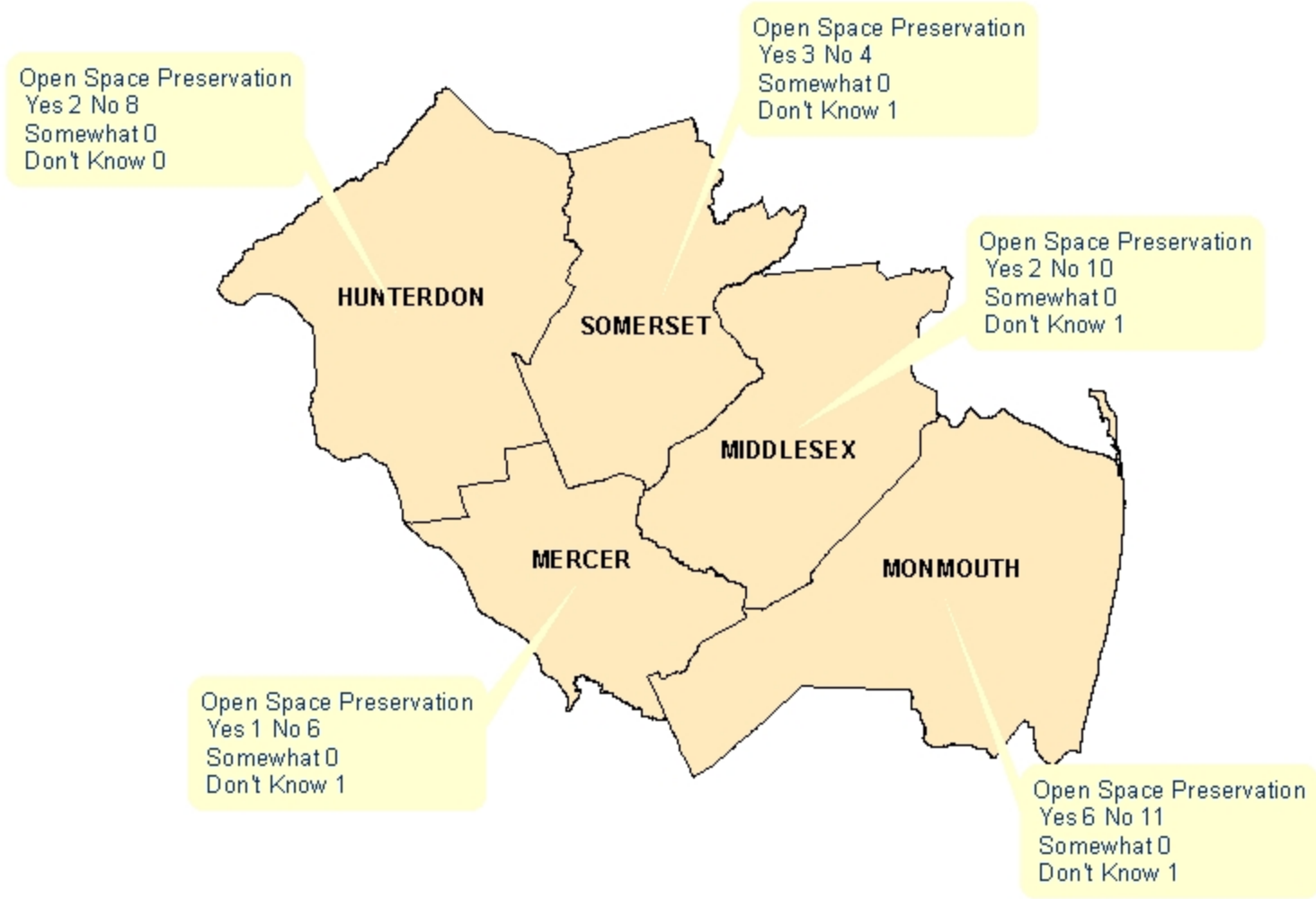
Graphic 1 - Traffic Issues



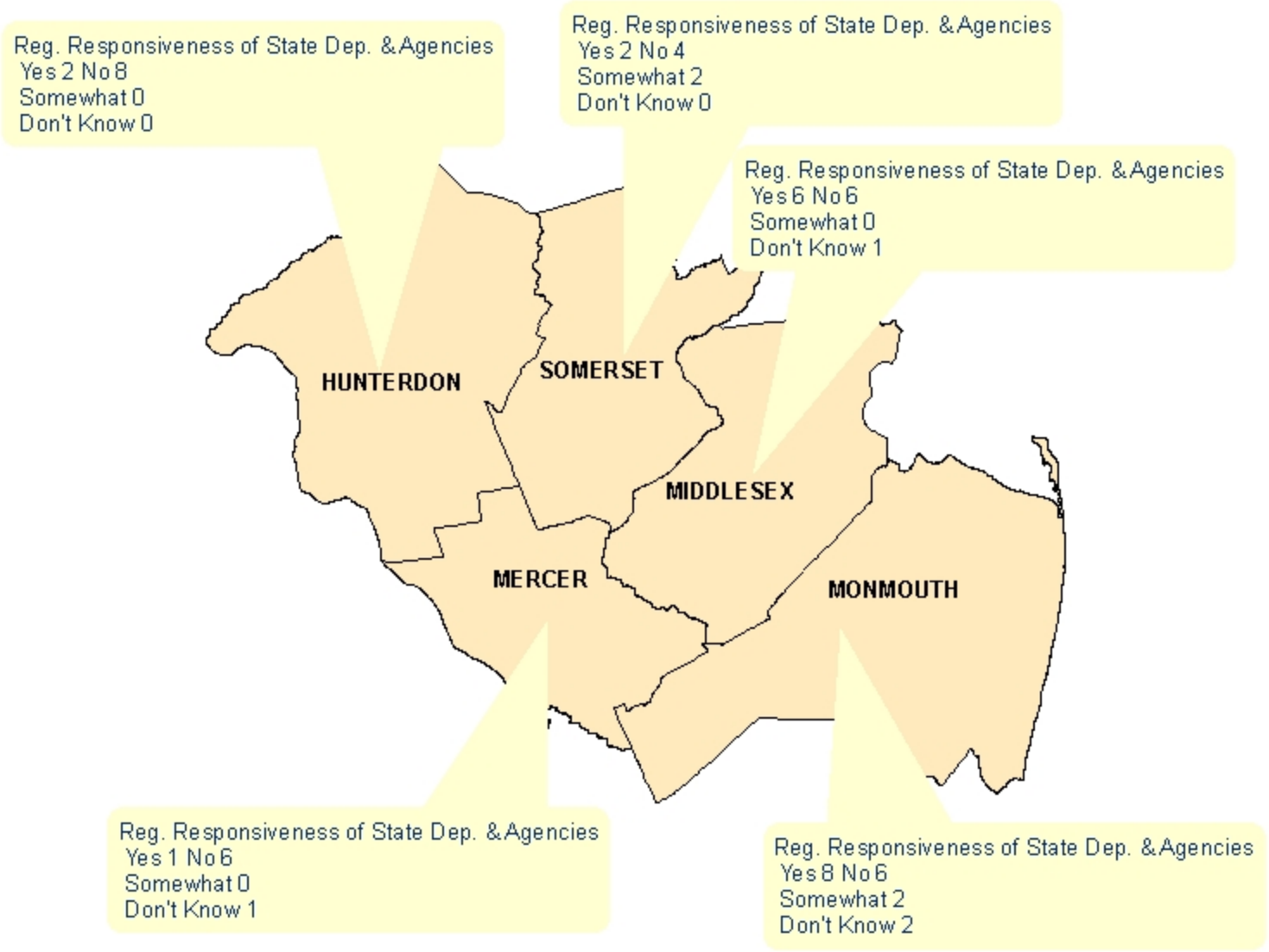
Graphic 2 - Regulatory Responsiveness of State Departments and Agencies



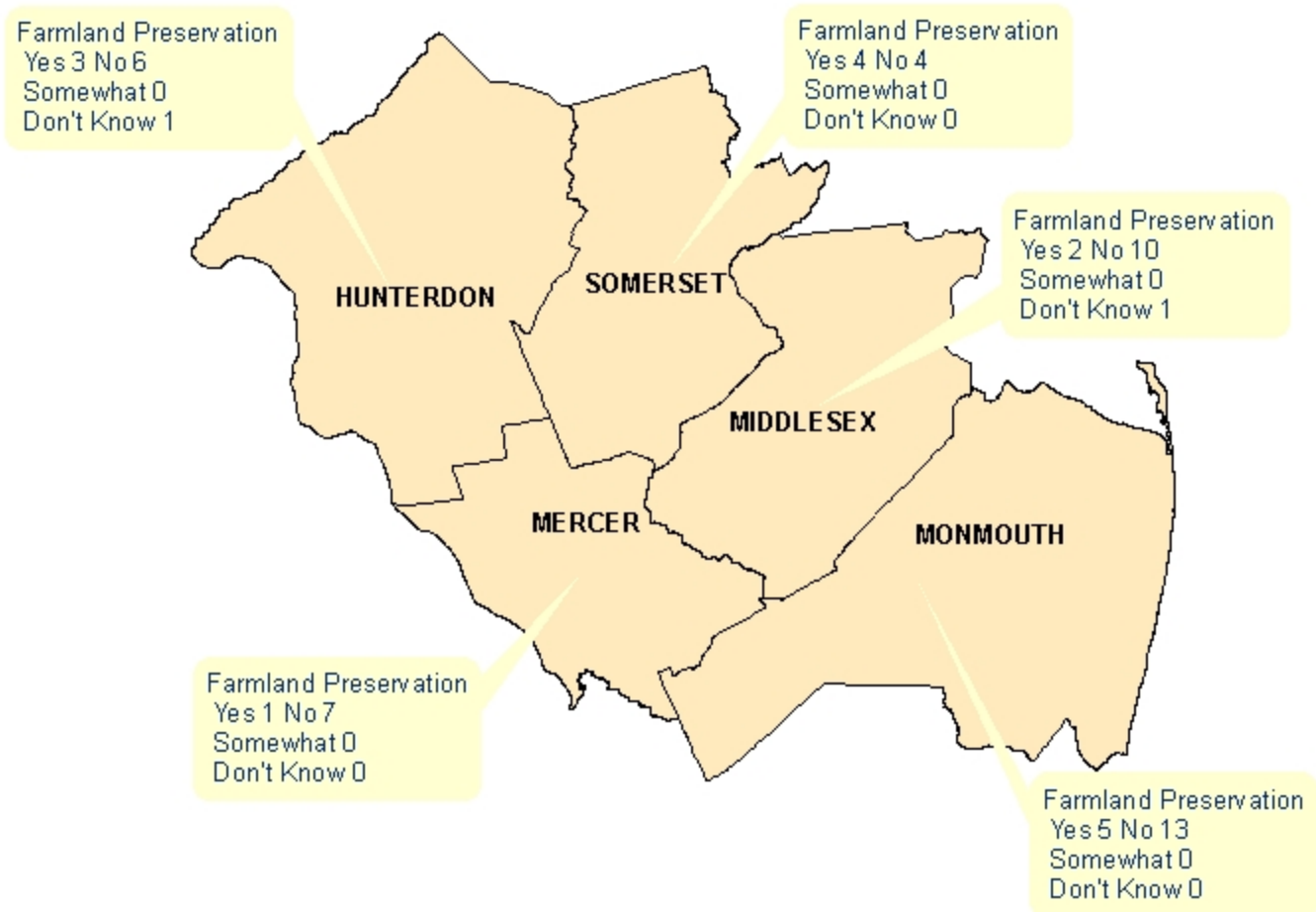
Graphic 3 - Open Space Preservation



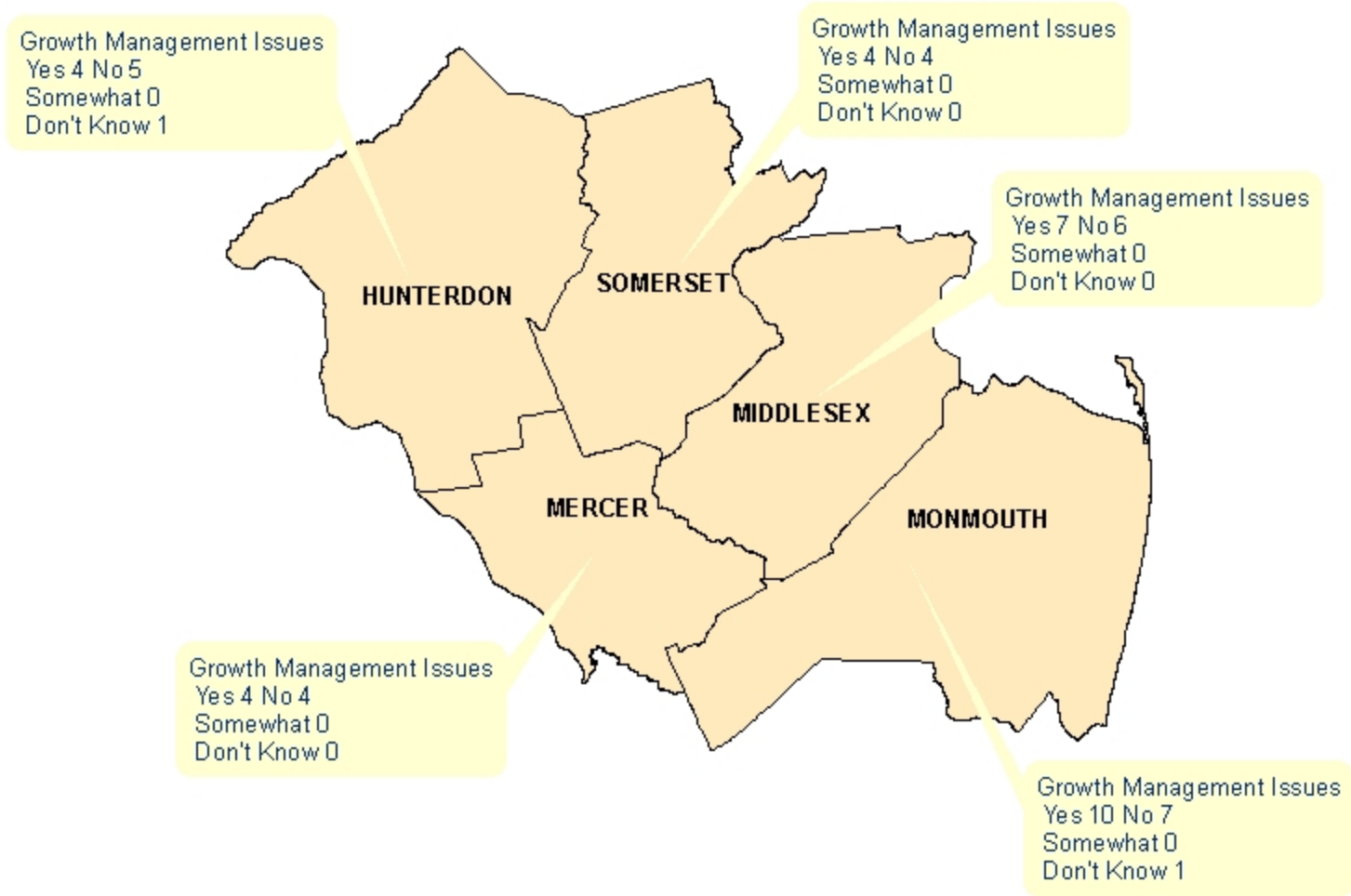
Graphic 4 - Regulatory Responsiveness of State Departments and Agencies



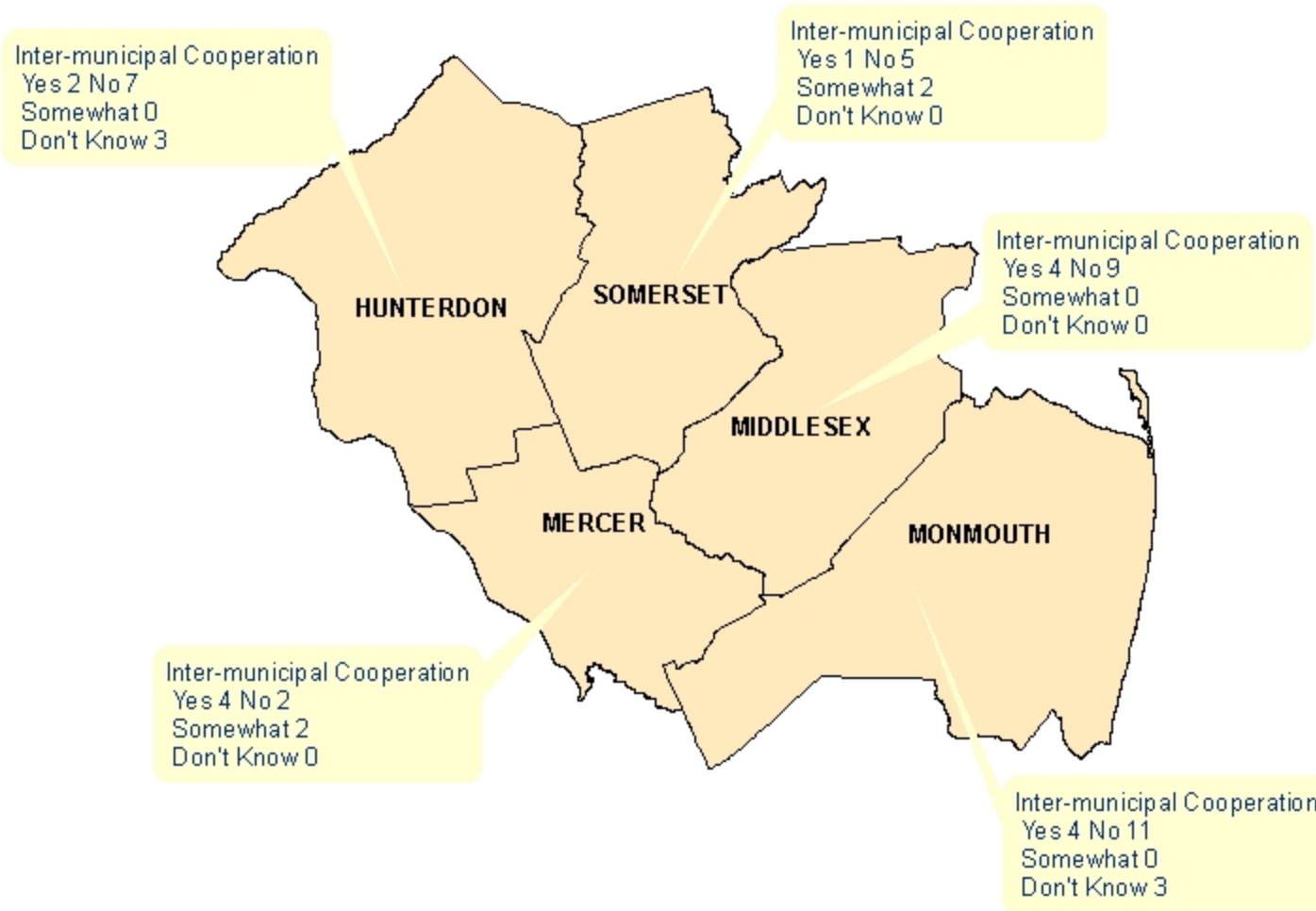
Graphic 4 - Farmland Preservation



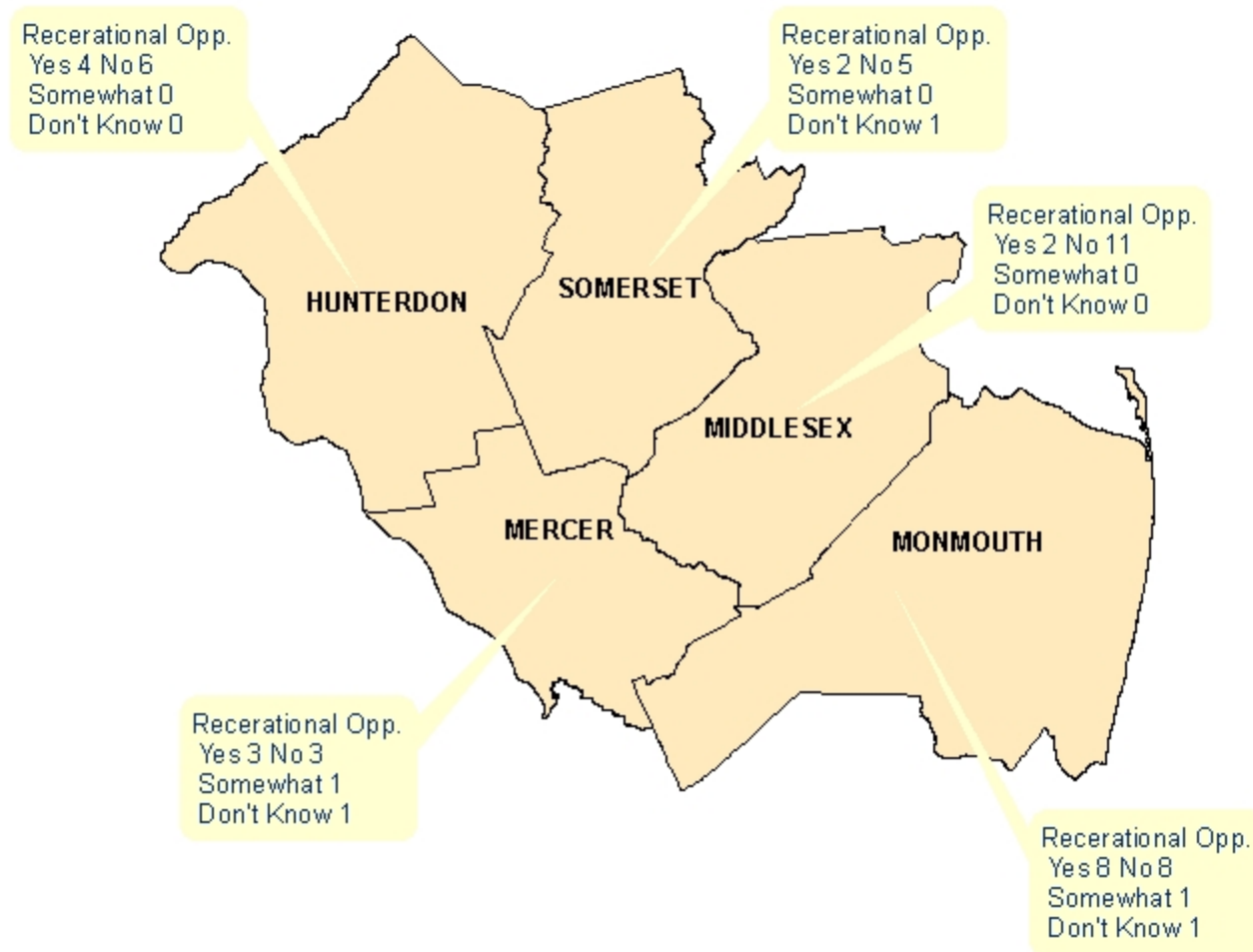
Graphic 5 - Growth Management Issues



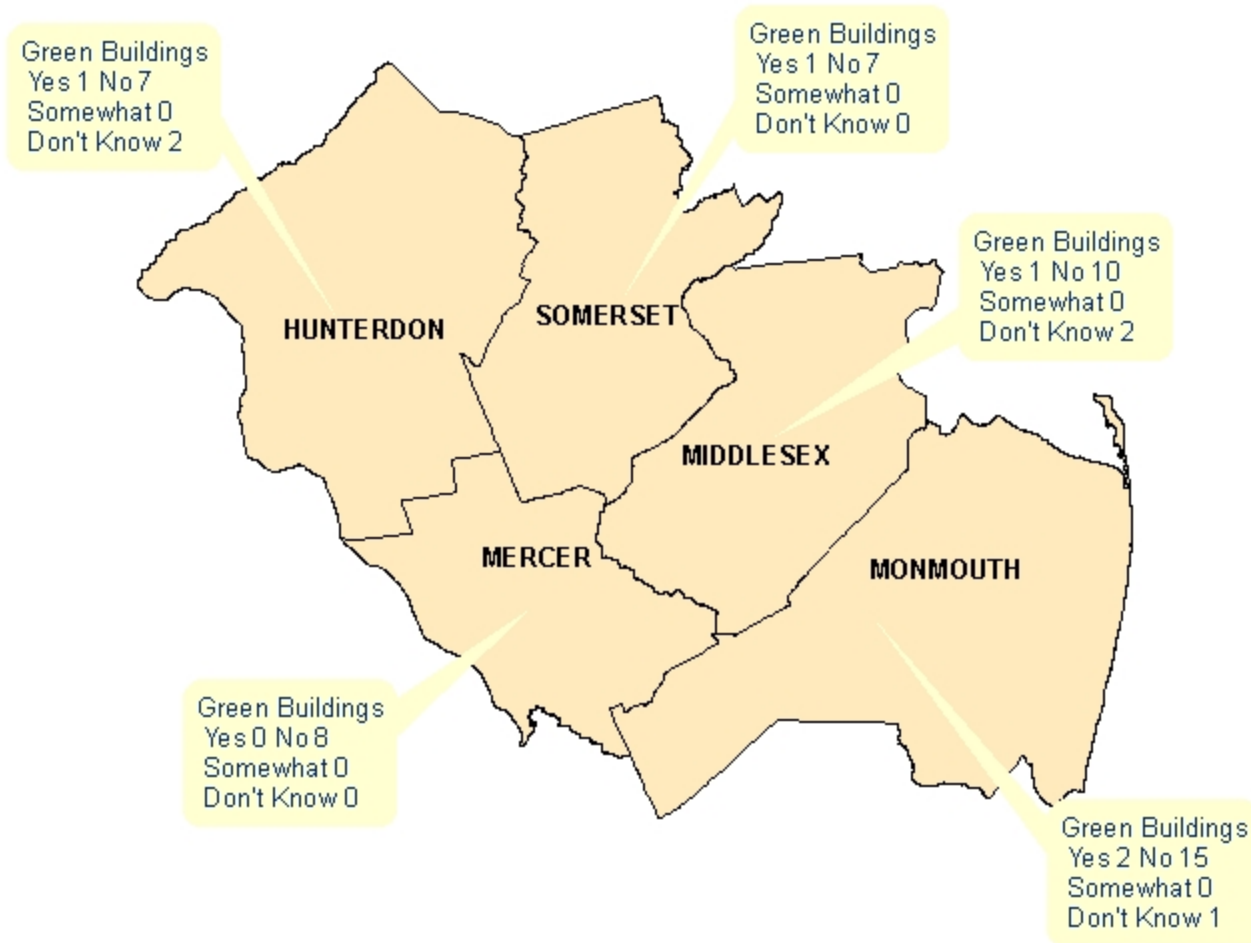
Graphic 6 - Inter-municipal Cooperation



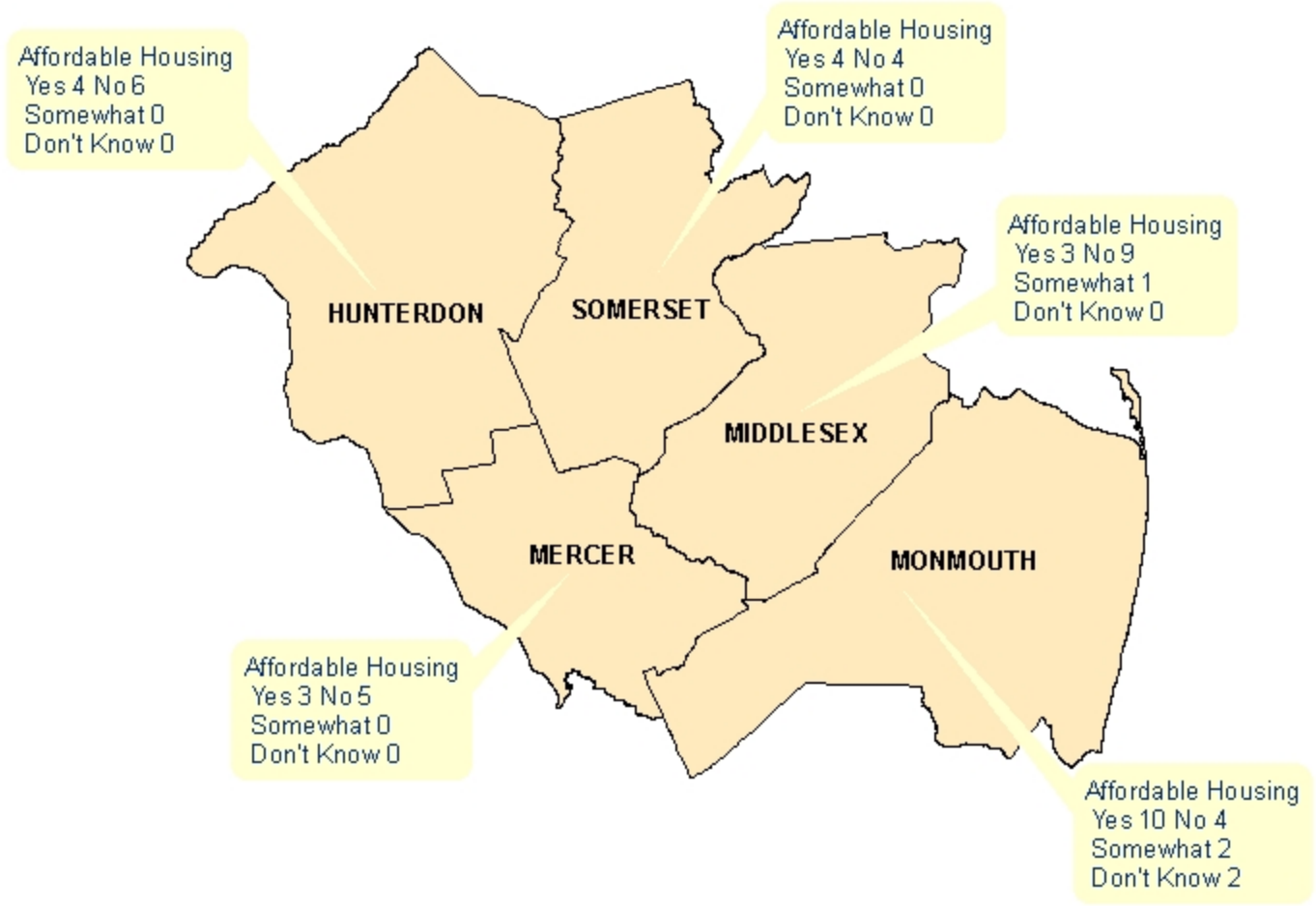
Graphic 7 - Recreational Opportunities



Graphic 8 - Green Buildings



Graphic 9 - Affordable Housing



Graphic 10 - Redevelopment/Business District Redevelopment

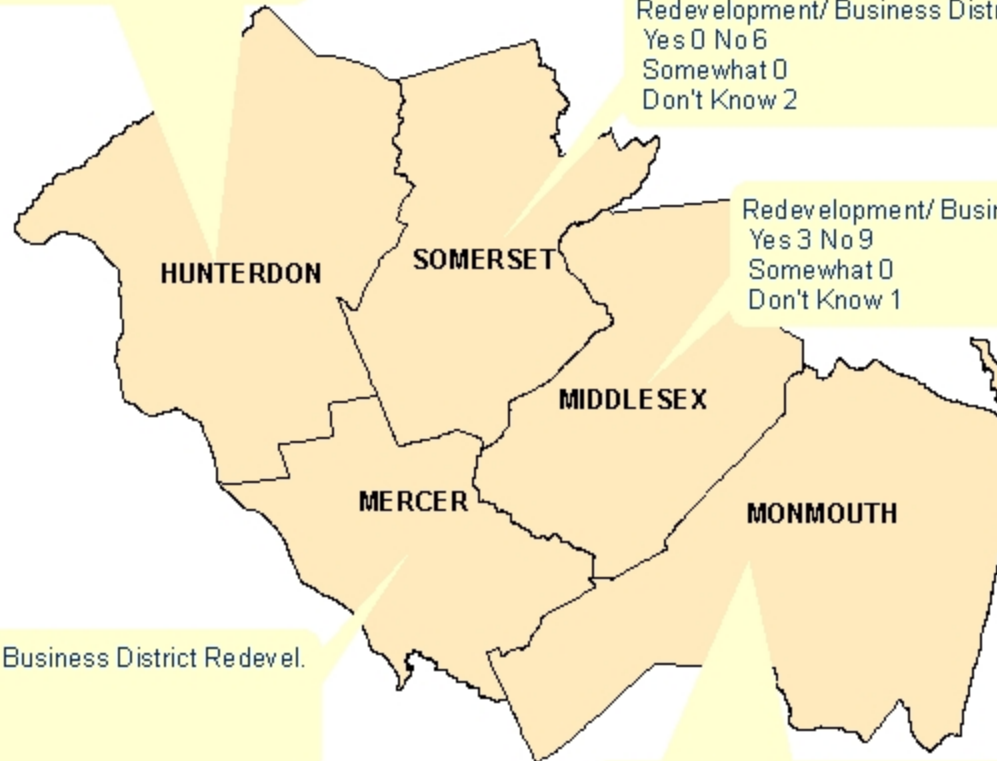
Redevelopment/ Business District Redevel.
Yes 1 No 8
Somewhat 0
Don't Know 1

Redevelopment/ Business District Redevel.
Yes 0 No 6
Somewhat 0
Don't Know 2

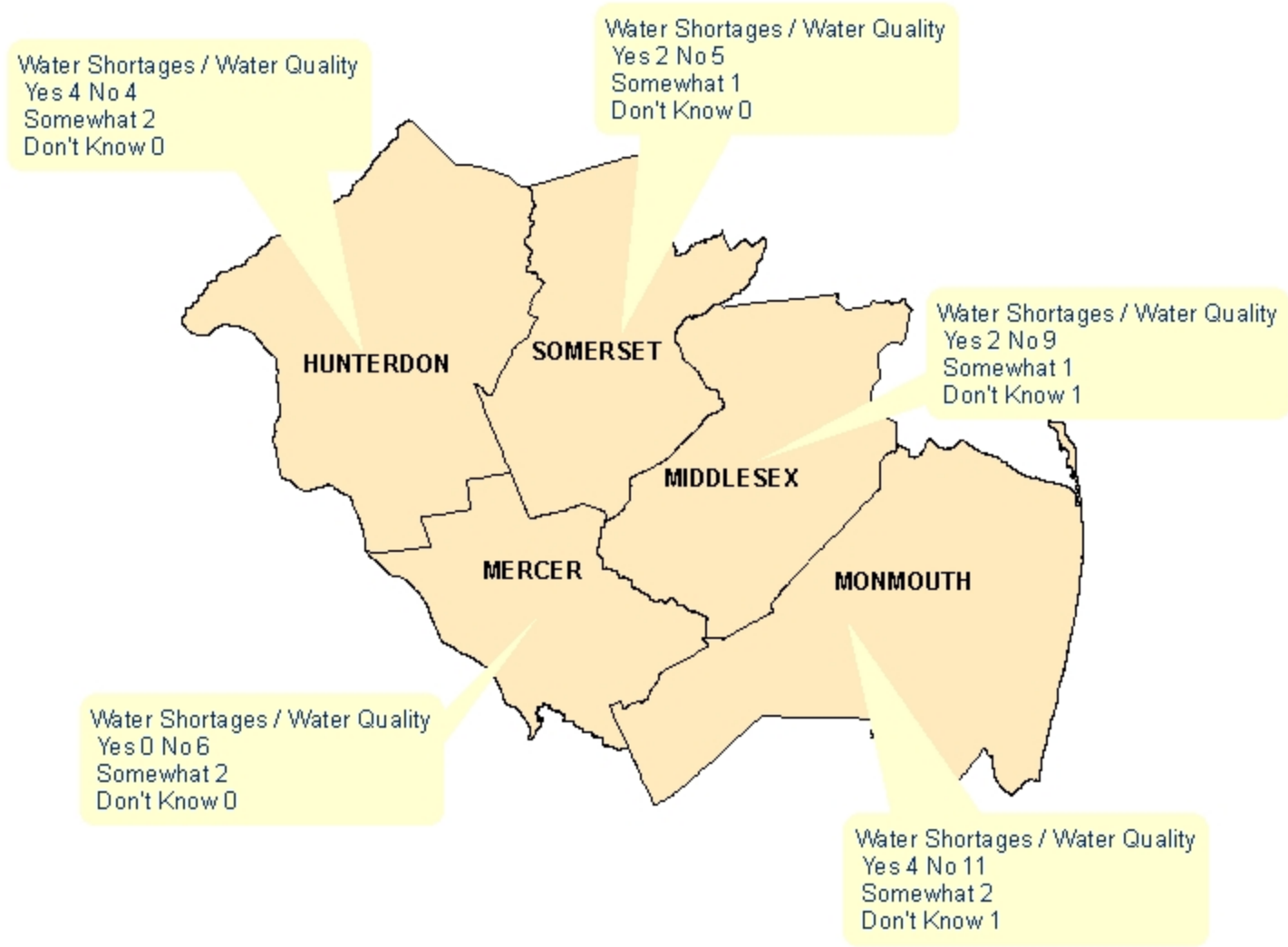
Redevelopment/ Business District Redevel.
Yes 3 No 9
Somewhat 0
Don't Know 1

Redevelopment/ Business District Redevel.
Yes 3 No 4
Somewhat 0
Don't Know 1

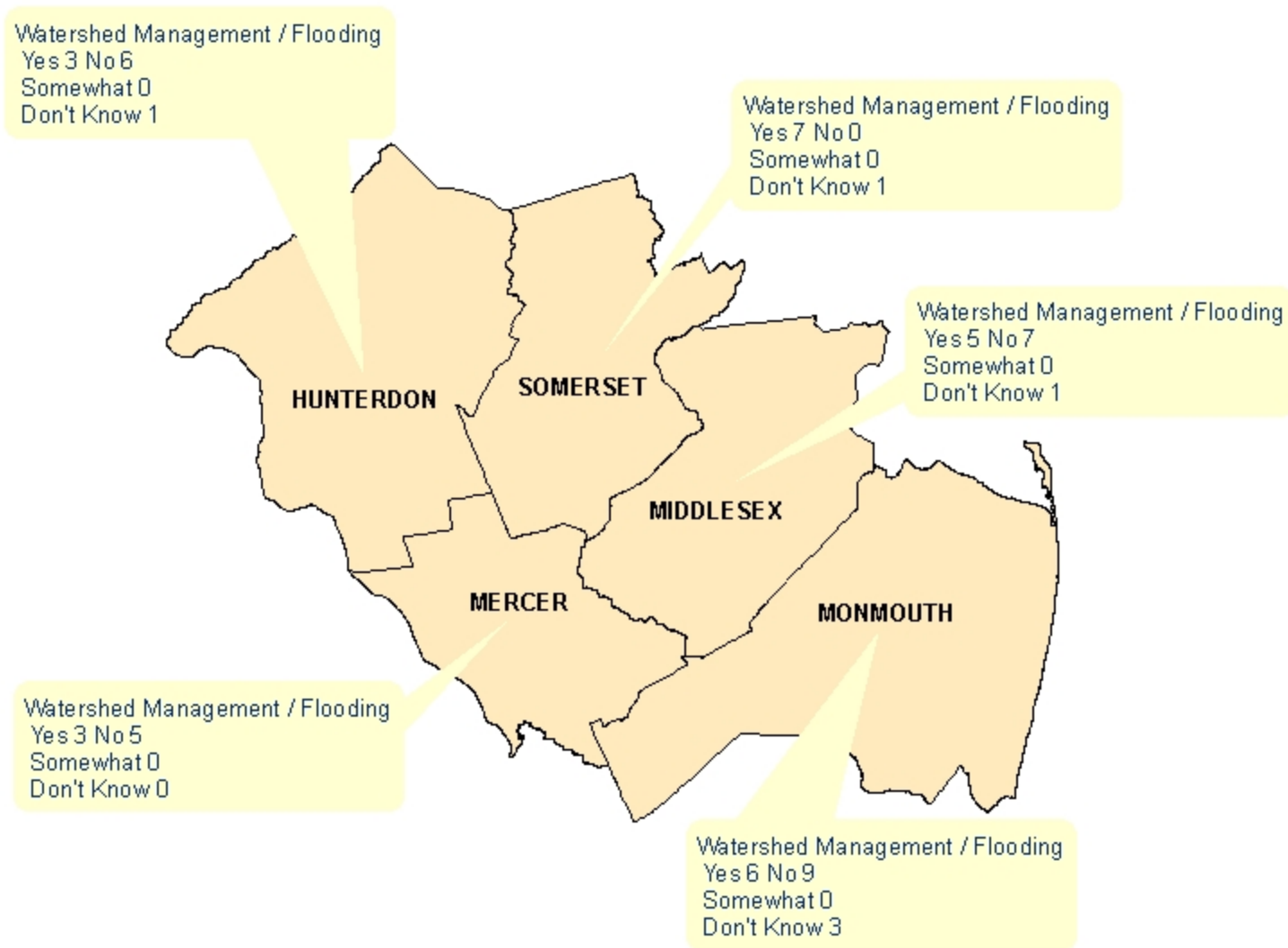
Redevelopment/ Business District Redevel.
Yes 5 No 12
Somewhat 0
Don't Know 1



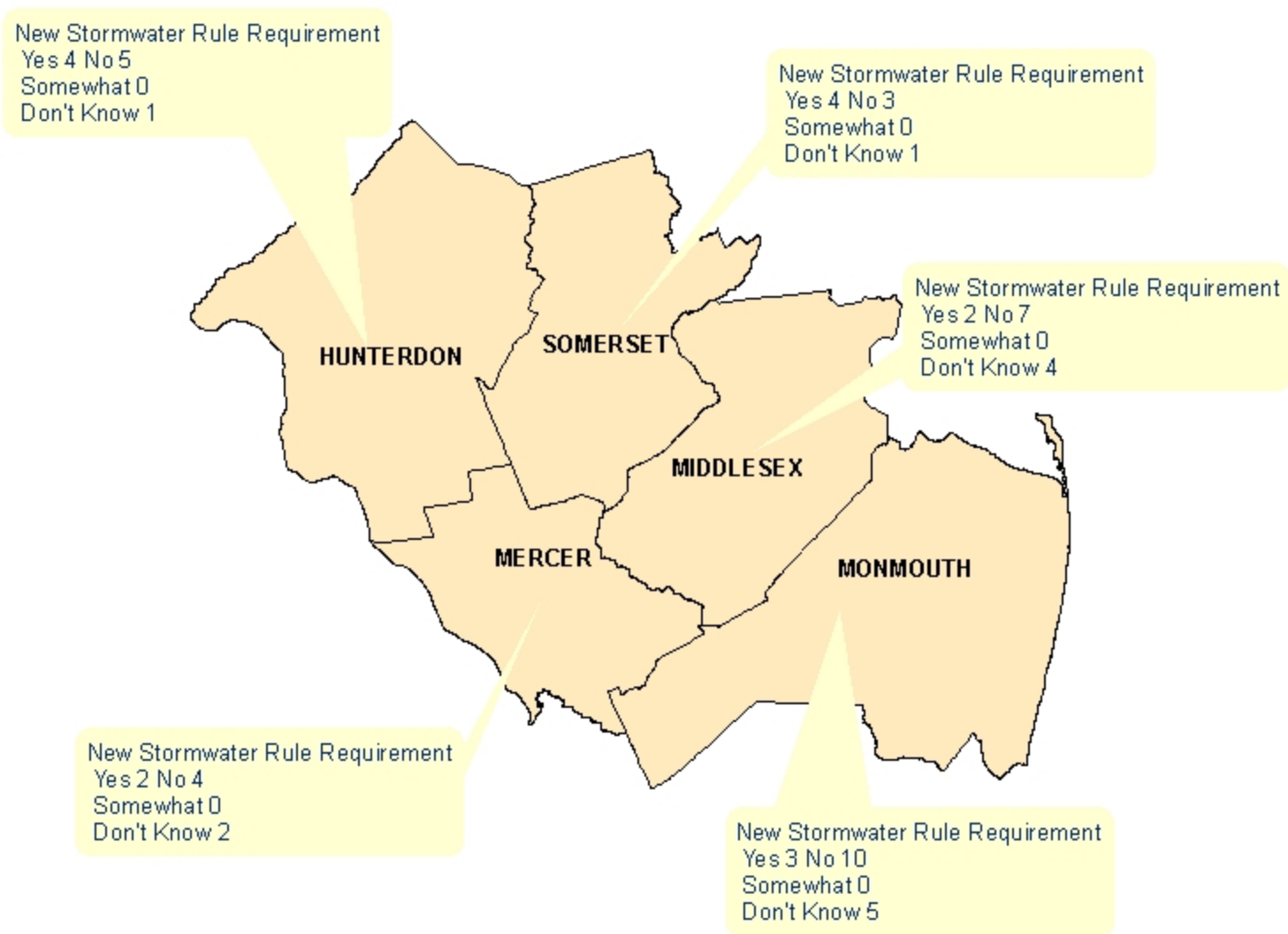
Graphic 11 - Water Shortages &/or Water Quality



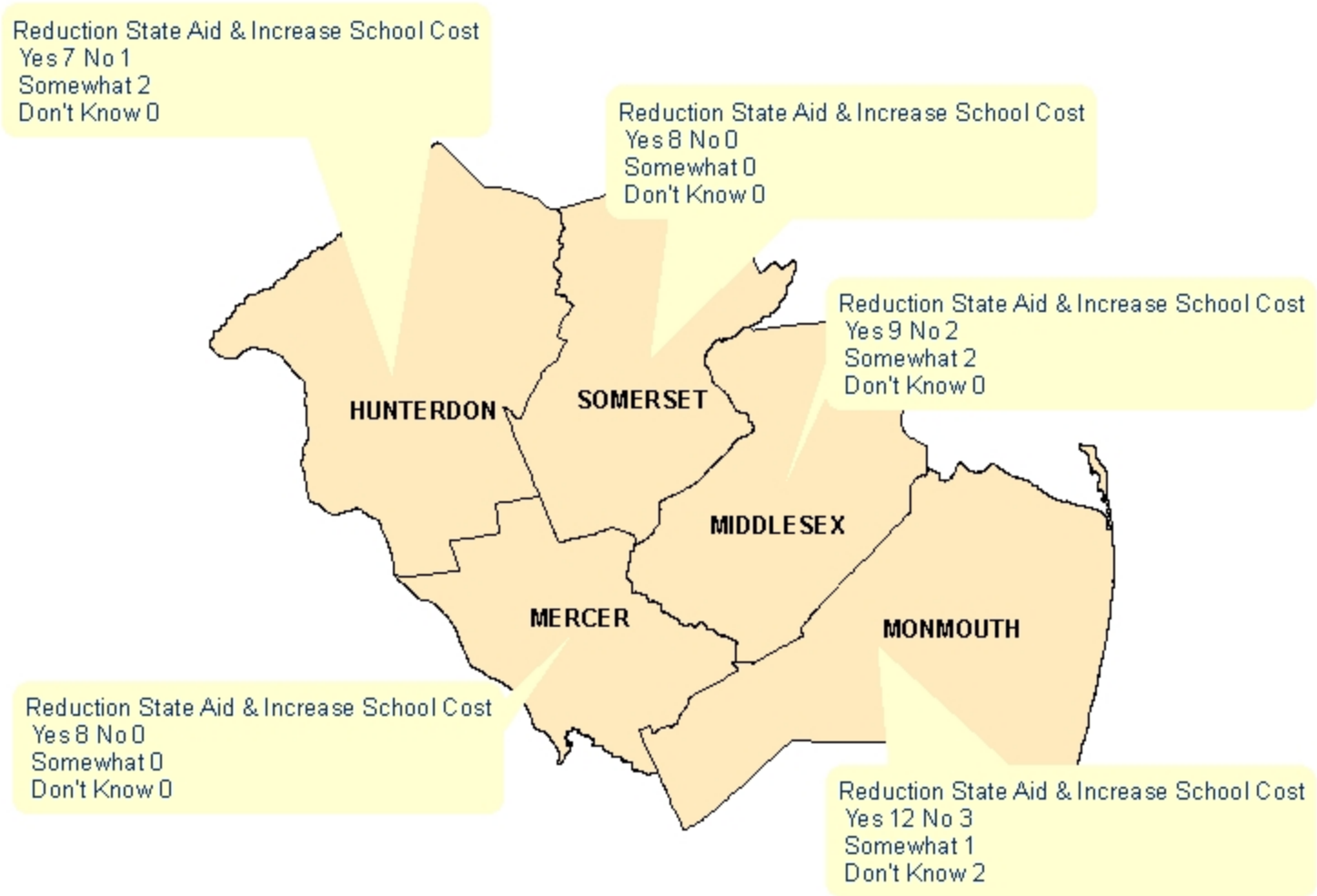
Graphic 12 - Watershed Management &/or Flooding



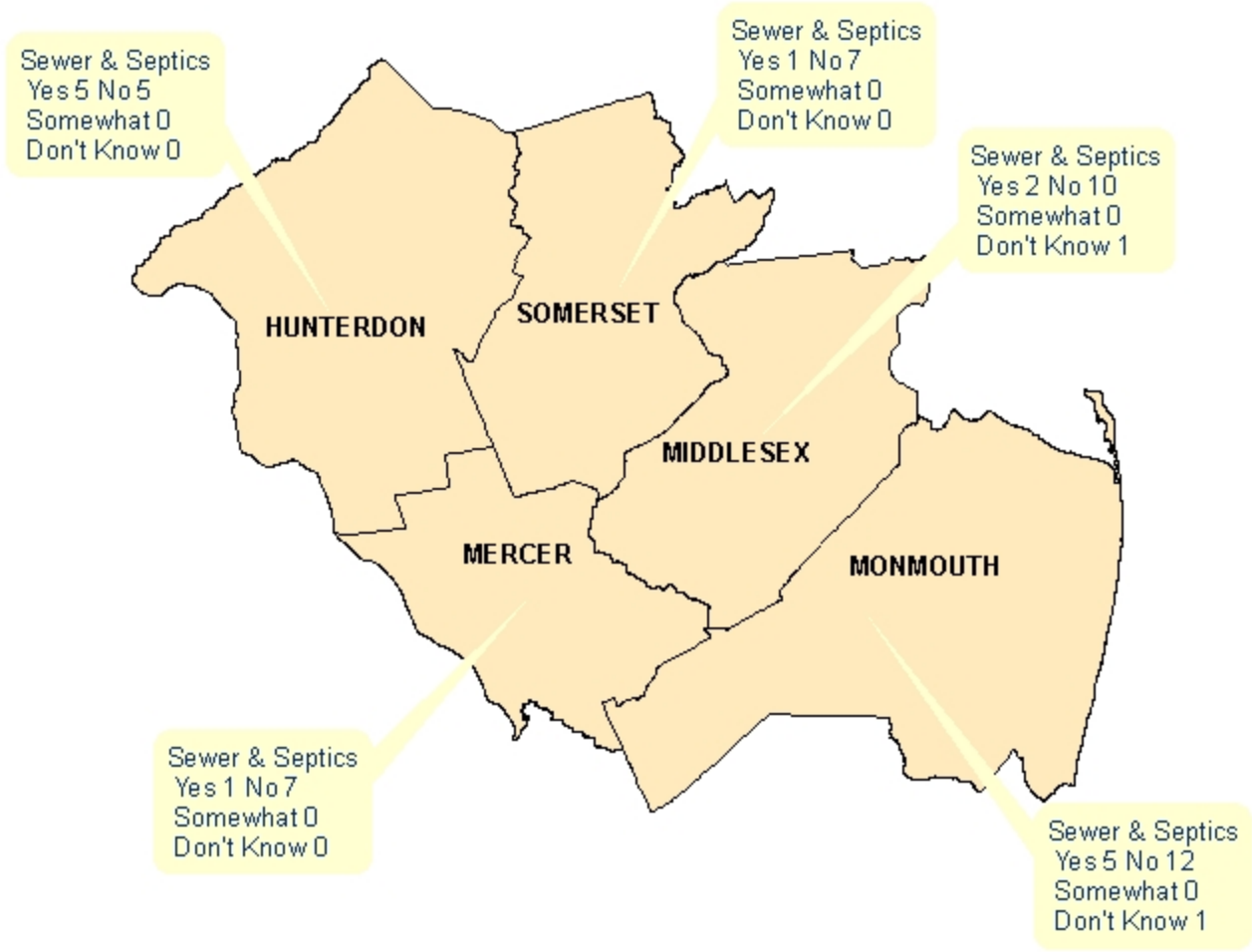
Graphic 13 - New Stormwater Rule Requirements



Graphic 14 - Reduction in State Aid & Increasing School Costs



Graphic 15 - Sewers and Septics



Graphic 16 - Managing Municipal Services and the Tax Rate Due to Growth

