The future is still taking shape! 2023 provided a number of reminders of the perils, challenges, and opportunities available for us—as New Jerseyans, and as New Jersey Future—to realize the best possible future for everyone who calls our great state home. We believe that collaboration, coordination, and sustained advocacy can deliver clean and safe water and enhance our transportation network to get people where they need to go without reliance on an automobile. By properly planning and encouraging redevelopment, we can support and construct great places to live and work, and in the process increase our resilience in the face of the challenges of climate change.
INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE

Our water and transportation infrastructure continue to demand major investment and improvement to meet the needs of this century and deliver clean, safe, healthy water and transportation options.

Throughout 2023, New Jersey Future (NJF) continued its advocacy for urgent and sensible investment in our infrastructure systems to meet the needs of present and future generations. New Jersey Future serves as the “backbone staff” for two statewide collaboratives, Lead-Free NJ and Jersey Water Works (JWW). Jersey WaterCheck, a data dashboard created by JWW, released its fourth data update, including a new lead resources page, a one-stop shop on all lead service line resources for New Jersey. NJF also has a number of programs aimed at facilitating sensible water infrastructure investment, and chairs the Clean Water, Healthy Families, Good Jobs campaign, which secured over $50 million for water infrastructure in the state budget for Fiscal Year 2024.

From the very start of 2023, it has been clear that New Jersey, and in particular the programs, collaboratives, and partnerships that NJF has supported for many years, are serving as a national precedent for remediating lead in our environment. Our staff traveled to the White House in January 2023 to attend and participate in the “Get the Lead Out Partnership,” where New Jersey was named one of the US Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) initial four lead service line replacement accelerators. As the year drew to a close, the EPA adopted New Jersey’s framework in its updated Lead and Copper Rule, citing the City of Newark and our water advocates as national examples for leadership. This is a tremendous endorsement of our approach and dedication as a nonprofit, a collaborative, and as a state to tackle lead head on.

Our water advocates, primarily Sewage-Free Streets and Rivers (SFSR), in collaboration with JWW and local partner organizations, meticulously reviewed and submitted comments to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection on draft Combined Sewer Overflow (CSO) Permits across multiple regions, underscoring the critical importance of transparency and community engagement and emphasizing the need for expeditious implementation. To involve the community in the decision-making process, SFSR partnered with JWW to conduct two webinars, leveraging social media and newsletters to ensure widespread participation in the public comment process for the draft CSO permits. This inclusive approach aimed to foster a sense of shared responsibility and awareness among community members most impacted.

Recognizing the vital role of municipalities in addressing stormwater challenges, our Mainstreaming Green Infrastructure program took proactive measures by hosting five town-hall style Stormwater Utility Information Forums organized by the JWW Stormwater Utility subcommittee. These events attracted over 70 participants and encouraged municipalities to establish stormwater utilities, to promote a deeper understanding of the importance of managing stormwater effectively.

As much as we need infrastructure upgrades, we also need a quality workforce ready to manage our utilities. In a groundbreaking initiative to address workforce development in the water industry, JWW collaborated with Hudson
By properly managing our land use and balancing it with our need for walkable communities and attainable housing, NJF believes we can construct great places to live and position our communities to thrive. We’ve endeavored to prepare decision-makers to properly account for current and future needs as we construct a blueprint for building a bright future.

Much of our work in 2023 was to prime us for a big year in 2024. NJF began to shape the State Plan update, by contributing in-depth research and policy advice and promoting opportunities for public input and engagement. NJF will continue to be engaged in the rollout of the State Plan updates in 2024.

In 2023, New Jersey Future was able to successfully facilitate the Emerging Water Leaders of Color Leadership Circle pilot program to support 11 leaders in the water sector industry.

In 2023, New Jersey Future launched new efforts to ensure residents have safe, healthy ways to get around without having to drive everywhere and without emitting greenhouse gases. We recruited over 80 partners to push for state funding so communities can plan for local trails and parks, a first step in applying for capital funding. We joined the Circuit Trail coalition and worked with partners to elevate federal funding opportunities. Our report made the case for an e-bike incentive program. We continue to advocate for reducing our Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMTs) at a state level and promoting walkable town centers, complete streets, and multi-modal trails in our advocacy, writing, and in a plenary session at the NJ Planning and Redevelopment Conference, which featured national, state, and local experts. With a growing cadre of partners, we called on our state leaders to establish a dedicated funding source for NJ Transit before it reaches a financial cliff as Covid relief funds expire.

**COORDINATING STATE PLANNING, HOUSING, AND REDEVELOPMENT EFFORTS**

This coming year brings with it the planned release and update of our State Plan. This long-awaited update has been years in the making, and our efforts to positively influence the State Plan were well underway in 2023, while we continued to promote affordable housing, smart growth, and redevelopment.

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While housing and planning are central to great placemaking, NJF also acknowledges the importance of coordinating and properly siting warehouse development. NJF has supported the propagation of the State warehouse siting guidelines and recommended legislation to bring a regional focus to the issue. Relatedly, NJF promoted and advanced amendments to the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law that will both address warehouse sprawl and close a loophole that allows open space development to be considered redevelopment.
New Jersey took a major step forward in preparing households for the impacts of climate change when the Flood Disclosure was enacted into law earlier this year. This law ensures renters and home buyers are aware of a property’s flood history before signing their lease or purchasing a property. NJF worked with a diverse group of partners to ensure this bill became law, and that New Jersey joined other states in our nation to provide this critical information to households making major financial and life decisions.

NJF also worked with state and agency partners to develop resources for municipalities and developers to properly account for climate change. NJF provided comments and guidance to the NJ Department of Environmental Protection on the updated Inland Flood Rule, and is promoting the new rule’s adoption. NJF released a new comprehensive guide for towns to conduct quality climate change-related hazard vulnerability assessments and prepare their locality. The Climate Change Hazard Vulnerability Assessment Guide is now available for planners to implement in their communities; NJF is currently coordinating with partners to support initial pilot phase adopters of this assessment guide, and aims to steer technical assistance to the municipalities that will need it to conduct their climate change assessments.

**EVENTS**

In June NJF co-hosted our three-day NJ Planning and Redevelopment Conference with the American Planning Association NJ Chapter, which once again drew hundreds of attendees to our virtual sessions and in-person finale in New Brunswick. Session blogs available on our website.

2023 also granted us the opportunity to resume our in-person celebration of our annual Smart Growth Awards. This year we honored three individuals and seven projects throughout the state. We celebrated redevelopment of projects in Newark, Paterson, and Dover, and forward-thinking planning from Westfield and Somerset County. Our Cary Edwards Leadership Award winners were Kean University’s Watson Institute for Urban Policy and Research Executive Director Barbara George Johnson and JWW Co-chair Nicole Miller for their leadership, while we introduced a new award, the Redevelopment Trailblazer, which honored George Vallone for his visionary career. All ten video profiles are available online for the public to view.

Jersey Water Works’ annual conference was held in person at The College of New Jersey, featuring community, industry, and government leaders. One major feature of this year’s JWW Conference was the addition of a utility track, to provide training and insights to industry professionals in need of training credits and best practices. By bringing together the diverse collaborative of water professionals in NJ, the JWW Conference continues to serve as a critical convening space to share tactics and innovations in addressing our water infrastructure needs.

**THANK YOU**

NJF could not have made this progress without the funders, champions, and partners that support this work. See our list of supporters.