



History of the Regional Center

In May of 1996, in accordance with the State Planning Rules N.J.A.C. 17:32-8.6(a), the New Jersey State Planning Commission designated the Boroughs of Somerville and Raritan and an adjacent portion of Bridgewater Township as an official Regional Center, the first multi-jurisdictional center in the state. The approval defined at that time a 14.2 square mile (now 12.6 square mile) area to serve as the focal point for enhanced planning to benefit a population of approximately 25,000 residents and 40,000 workers.

Factors for determining the designation of a Regional Center include:

- location along major corridors that attract economic growth;
- areas that are compact, containing a mix of residential, commercial, and office uses at an intensity that will make expansion of public transportation options feasible;
- a core of commercial activity bounded by well-defined open space or significant natural features;
- a region that serves as an employment center of regional significance in proximity to a critical mass of housing options and supported by institutional, civic, recreational and other public uses;
- an area that has a variety of goods and services that serve a regional market with large and small retail, sports, and entertainment facilities, along with specialized or niche retail;
- ability to attract large-scale commercial development such as corporate offices and industrial parks; and
- have mid-size educational facilities including community colleges and cultural facilities.

Regional Center Designation Report

A Regional Center Designation Report was prepared in to outline the public policy goals of the three communities and Somerset County to promote economic growth, development and redevelopment; ensure sound and integrated planning; provide adequate public services and housing; and preserve and enhance historic resources, open space and recreational opportunities.

Regional Center Partnership

As a condition of Regional Center designation, the State Planning Commission required that a formal organization be formed to ensure the successful implementation of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan's goals and objectives for the Regional Center. The Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County was created in 1998 to direct the coordinated planning framework that is needed to achieve the goal of advancing the identity and functionality of the Regional Center, the quality of life for residents, and a favorable environment for business.

Inter-municipal Cooperation

To attain success, in 1999 the Regional Center Partnership, the Somerset County Planning Board, and the governing bodies and planning boards of Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville approved and signed an Inter-municipal Policy Agreement stating that "all parties hereby agree to cooperate and improve the

coordination of inter-local planning and regulatory activities, monitoring the progress of the Regional Center planning and implementation process as a whole and the investment of limited resources to achieve common benefits.” The inter-local agreement grew out of a recognition that there is a common interest in maintaining the Regional Center’s quality of life.

Inter-municipal cooperation has fostered

- development of joint economic development and marketing strategies;
- coordination of public and private investment in transportation and other infrastructure improvements;
- establishment of formal inter-municipal planning procedures;
- development of outreach strategies to adjacent municipalities to increase cooperation;
- use of the Regional Center as a forum for the exchange of ideas and for reconciling opposing views.

In 2016, the implementation procedures were amended to help streamline the process for sharing information regarding land development projects of regional significance.

How We Reached Today

1999 The Regional Center Vision Initiative - April 21 to 25, 1999

The "Regional Center Vision Initiative," an intensive five-day workshop to develop a comprehensive vision of what the Regional Center could become over the next twenty years.

2002 Strategic Issues Report

The 2002 Strategic Master Plan Issues Report addressed issues affecting the Regional Center and updated the 1999 Vision, presenting opportunities and challenges that were expected to influence the character, quality of life, and business climate in the 21st century.

2005 Planning Retreat: Charting an Action Agenda

The morning-long workshop brought together members of the Partnership with the mayors of Bridgewater, Raritan, and Somerville, and local and county officials and staff to analyze needs and set a course for the future of the Regional Center by updating priorities and strategies to ensure that the region continues to remain ahead of the curve. The session focused on: Open Space & Recreation; Circulation; Neighborhood Preservation; Redevelopment/Economic Development; and Downtowns/Main Street.

2013 Plan Endorsement

On October 16, 2013, the Regional Center Partnership and the Regional Center municipalities of Raritan and Somerville Boroughs and Bridgewater Township achieved a major milestone by attaining Plan Endorsement from the State Planning Commission, re-establishing “regional center” designation for another ten years.

2015 Visioning Session

In 2015 the Regional Center Partnership and Regional Plan Association conducted a visioning workshop to direct the Regional Center agenda for the next five years. The objectives were to determine the current priorities and issues on which the Regional Center Partnership will focus its resources. Of key consideration was the Regional Center communities’ relationship to the [Somerset County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy \(CEDS\)](#), and the the Regional Center as a Priority Growth Investment Area within the Somerset County Investment Framework. The results of the workshop laid the foundation for updating the 2006 Regional Center Strategic Master Plan which ultimately led to the [Somerset County Regional Center Strategic Plan](#) adopted in 2018.