

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County
Draft
Thursday, September 9, 2021 Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was convened by means of video conference.

Name/Organization

Voting Members

Troy Fischer, Chair, RCP
Jason Dameo, Vice-Chair, RCP
Victoria Allen, RWJBarnabas Health
Anthony Tufaro, Ethicon Somerville
Michael Pappas, Bridgewater Administrator
Andrew Fresco, Bridgewater
Angela Knowles, Raritan Borough Planner
Nick Zamora, Raritan
Dennis Sullivan, Mayor, Somerville
Somerville Councilwoman Jane Kobuta
Rick St. Pierre, Somerville
Paul Drake, Somerset County (SC) Board of County Commissioners
Sara Sooy, SC Board of County Commissioners (Alternate)
Bernie Navatto, SC Planning Board
Walter Lane, SC Planning Division
Geoffrey Soriano, SC Park Commission
Chris Edwards, SC Business Partnership

Non-voting County Support Staff

James Ruggieri, SC Planning Division

Non-Voting Guests

Barry Ableman, NJ Office for Planning Advocacy
Donna Allison, RideWise
Phil Decker, Somerville Resident
Rich Reitman, The Reitman Group

The meeting commenced at 5:00 PM.

Business Items

Call to Order

RCP Chair Troy Fischer called the meeting to order.

Attendance Roll Call

Principal Planner James Ruggieri read through the roll call and noted for the record the voting members that were in attendance.

Chair's Remarks

Chair Troy Fischer welcomed everyone to the meeting. Chair Fischer also welcomed Somerset County Business Partnership Vice-Chairperson Chris Zarelli, noting that Mr. Zarelli has been appointed to serve on the Regional Center Partnership (RCP) as the Business Partnership's Alternate voting representative in place of former Business Partnership Vice-President for Economic Development John Maddocks who retired earlier this year. Chair Fischer added that, by way of background, Mr. Zarelli is the President at Promo-Coach, a veteran-owned business where for the past ten years he has worked with successful businesses on their corporate marketing needs; prior to that Mr. Zarelli worked for three years at the American Diabetes Association NJ Chapter where he was in charge of fundraising walks throughout the state. Mr. Zarelli currently co-Chairs the Italian Festa at St. Ann's Parish in Raritan. A life-long County resident, Mr. Zarelli earned his BA in Pharmaceutical Marketing at St. Joseph's University. On behalf of Mr. Zarelli, Somerset County Business Partnership President & CEO Chris Edwards thanked Chair Fischer for the warm welcome, noting that Mr. Zarelli had a conflict and was unable to attend the meeting.

Chair Fischer announced that, in accordance with the RCP Bylaws, the Nominating Committee consisting of the three mayors will be meeting prior to the next RCP meeting regarding candidates for the four RCP officers and the appointment of one At-Large private/institutional sector representative to the Executive Committee.

Adoption of Meeting Minutes

Chair Troy Fischer asked if there were any corrections to the meeting minutes; there being none, Chair Fischer asked for a motion to approve the July 21, 2021 meeting minutes. Somerville Councilwoman Jane Kobuta moved and Somerset County Planning Board Chair Bernie Navatto seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: 13
Nays: 0
Abstentions: 0

The motion to approve the minutes was approved.

Treasurer's Report for July-August 2021

Mr. Ruggieri noted the Treasurer Report was sent out with the meeting reminder and offered to answer any questions. Mr. Ruggieri noted that with the funding commitments from Somerset County and Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville having all been fulfilled the 2021 Budget and Workplan is now fully funded.

Chair Fischer asked if there were any questions or comments concerning the Treasurer Report; there being none, Somerset County Planning Director Walter Lane moved to approve the Treasurer's Report for July-August 2021 and Councilwoman Kobuta seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: Troy Fischer, Jason Dameo, Vicky Allen, Tony Tufaro, Michael Pappas, Angela Knowles, Nick Zamora, Jane Kobuta, Rick St. Pierre, Sara Sooy, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano and Chris Edwards.
Nays: none
Abstentions: none

The motion was approved.

Resolutions Honoring Mike Kerwin, John Maddocks, Brian Gallagher, and Cynthia Sullivan

Mr. Ruggieri noted that over the years it has been the practice of the RCP to honor retiring or departing leaders of the RCP with a resolution and Certificate of Appreciation for their commitment and leadership during the terms of service to the RCP. In keeping with this practice, four resolutions have been prepared honoring former Somerville Mayor & Somerset County Freeholder Brian Gallagher, former Somerset County Business Partnership President & CEO Mike Kerwin, former Somerset County Business Partnership Vice-President for Economic Development John Maddocks, and former Somerset County Park Commission Assistant Director Cynthia Sullivan. The resolutions recognize the great leadership and contribution they provided to help us achieve the Regional Center's goals and objectives. The Executive Committee considered the resolutions and recommends the resolutions be adopted. The draft resolutions were forwarded to everyone with the meeting reminder for review. Mr. Ruggieri added that, if approved, in the past the Certificate of Appreciation would be presented to the honoree in person; however, due to COVID situation, other arrangements will need to be made such as a separate presentation or have the resolution and certificate mailed to them.

Chair Fischer asked if there were any discussion, questions or objections to adopting the resolutions and awarding the certificates of appreciation. Mr. Navatto commented that he thought it was very appropriate to recognize their service and motioned to adopt the resolutions honoring Brian Gallagher, Mike Kerwin, John Maddocks and Cindie Sullivan; Vice-Chair Jason Dameo seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: 14

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 0

The motion was approved.

Public Comment Period

There were no public comments concerning the Action items on the agenda.

Action Items

Raritan River Rain Barrel Rebate Program

Mr. Ruggieri noted that a proposal was included with the meeting reminder proposing to continue offering the Raritan River Rain Barrel Rebate Program through October 31, 2022 while funding remains available. Residents continue to show interest in the rain barrel rebate program as evidenced by the number of rebate applications received so far this year including some very recent rebate applications. Presently just over \$3,000 remains available for future rebates and \$150 for administrative-related costs. The program criteria and eligible rebate amounts will remain the same. Staff requests formal action be taken to continue the rebate program through October 2022 while funding remains available. All the program information and rebate application forms are posted on the RCP's website.

Chair Fischer noted that the proposal to continue the rain barrel rebate program was discussed at the Executive Committee meeting and it was noted that, while it does require some staff time such as maintaining the funding balance, overall Regional Center towns have benefitted from the program and cost wise is not a burden to the three municipalities or the County because the program is entirely funded by a grant from the New Jersey Water Supply Authority.

There being no other discussion, Mr. Navatto moved to continue offering the Raritan River Rain Barrel Rebate Program as proposed through October 2022; Raritan Planner Angela Knowles seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: Troy Fischer, Jason Dameo, Vicky Allen, Tony Tufaro, Michael Pappas, Angela Knowles, Nick Zamora, Jane Kobuta, Rick St. Pierre, Sara Sooy, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano and Chris Edwards.

Nays: none

Abstentions: Dennis Sullivan

The motion was approved.

Authorization to Release Request For Proposals Through the Competitive Contracting Process for Auditing and Tax-related Services

Mr. Ruggieri reported that staff has prepared a Request For Proposals (RFP) for the annual audit and tax – related services. The scope of work (SOW) tasks are very similar to the SOW tasks for the last RFP released in 2019; i.e., prepare the annual audit and financial statement, prepare and file IRS Form 990, and prepare the information necessary for RCP to file the NJ Charitable Organization Registration/Verification Statement.

Following past practice, the RFP was prepared using the County’s template for RFPs that are administered through the Competitive Contracting process which allows the RCP to award a two-year contract to perform the same services each year; i.e., the contract would be for years 2021 and 2022. The proposed Not to Exceed amount for each year is \$4,000.00 to perform the tasks for the year ending December 31, 2021 and \$4,000 to perform the same tasks for the year ending December 31, 2022. The not to exceed amount of \$4,000.00 for each year represents an increase of \$600 from the last RFP not to exceed amount of \$3,400 per year for 2019/2020; the \$4,000.00 not to exceed amount is the first increase since 2017 and is intended to reflect the general increase of costs in the profession. Mr. Ruggieri added that, if the RFP release is approved, \$4,000.00 will be committed out of the current budget under “Legal & Accounting” which has a current balance is \$4,942.00. County Purchasing is reviewing the RFP for technical completeness. Depending on when we hear back from Purchasing will determine when we can release the RFP; the tentative timeframe is to release the RFP so that proposals can be submitted in time to be evaluated and a recommendation to award a contract at either the November or January meetings. The Executive Committee is in agreement with releasing the proposed RFP for a two-year contract for a Not to Exceed amount of \$4,000.00 per year. Mr. Ruggieri concluded by saying that if there were no objections staff requests authorization to release the RFP for a Not To Exceed amount of \$4,000.00 per year.

Mr. Lane noted that County Purchasing is assisting some of the communities with purchasing and finance issues related to the recent flooding caused by Hurricane Ida and that is why they are a bit delayed in reviewing the draft RFP.

Chair Fischer asked if there were any questions regarding releasing the RFP; there being no questions, Chair Fischer asked if there was for a motion. Vice-Chair Dameo moved to authorize staff to release the RFP for a 24-month competitive contract for auditing and tax-related services for a not to exceed amount of \$4,000 per year; Somerset County Park Commission Secretary/Director Geoffrey Soriano seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: Troy Fischer, Jason Dameo, Vicky Allen, Michael Pappas, Angela Knowles, Nick Zamora, Dennis Sullivan, Jane Kobuta, Rick St. Pierre, Sara Sooy, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano and Chris Edwards.

Nays: none

Abstentions: Andrew Fresco

The motion was approved.

Information Items

Marketing Update

Marketing Consultant Rich Reitman reported he has been posting every Wednesday on Facebook about a recent news article which is getting some attention. After working extensively with staff on editing the 2020 Annual Achievements Report as well as taking some pictures, the Annual Report has been completed and distributed. Mr. Reitman also performed website maintenance updates, issued press releases on the Raritan River Rain Barrel Rebate Program, issued a press release regarding the Suburban Disadvantage legislative victory, provided weekly analytics reports, and is very close to completing the September newsletter.

Plan Endorsement Renewal

Mr. Ruggieri shared that the Regional Center including each of the three Regional Center municipalities were formally endorsed by the State Planning Commission in 2013 through the Plan Endorsement (PE) process and that we want to preserve our “endorsed center” designation because endorsed centers receive more “points” when applying for competitive state discretionary funding assistance. Staff discussed this with the Executive Committee and everyone at the meeting was on board with moving ahead.

Mr. Lane added that the Somerset County Regional Center is being held up high by the state Office of Planning Advocacy (OPA) as a model for others wanting to pursue PE. The hope is that “renewing” our PE status will bring some additional resources to the Regional Center and that the State Planning Commission will grant another ten years of center designation based on the Regional Center’s track record of doing good planning. Mr. Lane explained that in 2012 RCP offered Planning Assistance grants to help Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville achieve PE and staff’s recommendation to the Executive Committee is that we offer this again. There is enough funding in the budget to make such grants available. In response the Executive Committee directed staff to confirm with OPA how much additional work may be involved so that we can estimate how much funding should be allocated for the planning assistance grants. Based on staff’s discussion with OPA, the OPA is drafting a new PE rule change intended to streamline the PE process for those “centers” that have done good planning so that they will not have to start from scratch. When the new PE rule is about to be adopted by the State Planning Commission in 2022 RCP and the three towns should plan on writing letters in support of the rule change. While it is reasonable to assume that some work may still be required to renew our PE standing, the hope is that it will be a relatively painless process under the new rule compared to the last time.

OPA Principal Planner Barry Ableman affirmed Mr. Lane’s report and noted that the Regional Center’s 2013 PE is good for ten years and that if nothing is done then the Regional Center’s “center” designation would expire in October 2023. OPA is pleased we are pursuing PE and starting early in the process. OPA is operating under the expectation that the new PE Renewal rule will be adopted and OPA would like to use the Somerset County Regional Center as a test case for the new rule. Mr. Ableman added the Regional Center has a Plan Implementation Agreement (PIA) which says we agreed to do certain tasks over the next ten years to ensure our plans are aligned with the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. OPA Executive Director Donna Rendeiro and Mr. Ableman are currently going through the PIA to see what may be required and based on their findings will prepare a letter to each town outlining what the next steps will be under the new PE rule.

No action was taken; everyone was in agreement to conceptually move ahead with pursuing Plan Endorsement in anticipation of taking action at the November 10 meeting.

NJ Transit Bicycle Storage Facility Pilot Project

Mr. Lane noted that staff wanted to make RCP aware of a potential grant program being considered by NJ Transit and the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) for a pilot project involving bicycle storage lockers at train stations. Staff understands the locker facilities will be owned and managed by a third party. The project is currently in the formative stage; when the project gets closer to the implementation stage staff will forward the grant announcement to the Regional Center towns with instructions on how to apply.

Municipal and Other Reports:

Raritan Planner Angela Knowles reported the Crossings at Raritan Station (Block 81) are starting to get certificates of occupancy. The developer for the Raritan River Apartments on Orlando Drive is working through

final engineering details with the Borough; the recent Hurricane Ida flooding may have stalled their time frame for groundbreaking.

The Borough just finished the downtown revitalization plan for the downtown and vicinity around Somerset Street. The Borough was provided with numerous planning documents including a visioning plan and implementation toolbox with model ordinances. A Plan Implementation Working Group has been formed to prioritize the recommendations from these planning documents and determine how to move the bike and pedestrian safety improvements forward. An estimated 4,500 people attended the Discovering Raritan event on July 31; the Borough hopes this event will become an increasingly popular annual event. Planning is underway for the Christmas Market in December including identifying the best location for the Market based on the downtown revitalization plan.

Ms. Knowles read a note on behalf of Raritan Mayor Zachary Bray expressing much appreciation to all the employees and volunteers from Somerset County and the towns for their response to the Hurricane Ida flooding, that he was very proud to partner with Bridgewater for the collection of cleaning supplies for the community, and that a vigil was held for those lost in the storm. Mayor Bray concluded in his note with a word of thanks to Bridgewater Mayor Matt Moench for organizing this on such short notice.

Raritan Local Private/Institutional Sector representative Nick Zamoro reiterated that the Discovering Raritan event was a huge success and that it was great to see businesses coming together and showcase what they do, and that hopefully this will become an annual event.

Somerville Mayor Dennis Sullivan reported the recent visit of US Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg who toured the Somerville train project and then rode the train to Westfield for a roundtable discussion and press conference which a focus on getting one seat ride service to New York. A ribbon cutting was held last week for the first phase of the Somerville transit-oriented development (TOD) project; to date over 30 townhouses have been sold. Mayor Sullivan noted the townhouses are the first “owner” type housing being built in Somerville since the early 1960s.

Local private/institutional sector representative Rick St. Pierre shared that on September 11 Arts on Division will be hosting Art All Day and on September 12 the Central Jersey Jazz Fest will be held as a fundraiser and all welcome to attend. Mayor Sullivan added the Borough had to cancel the Somerville Bike Race in light of the recent flooding but looks forward to having the race next Memorial Day. Mayor Sullivan expressed appreciation for being able to partner with Raritan and Bridgewater in the wake of Hurricane Ida. The Borough will need help with trucks and snowplows after losing all of this to Hurricane Ida. Mr. St. Pierre highlighted how everyone is working hard to clean up after the storm including the John Basilone Memorial statue in time for Raritan’s Basilone Parade and the upcoming 911 memorial service.

Bridgewater Township Administrator Michael Pappas reported Bridgewater Mayor Matt Moench could not attend the meeting. Mr. Pappas shared the Township will be having a 911 memorial ceremony to commemorate the 20th anniversary of 911; the ceremony will include placing several thousand American flags around the municipal complex. The Township’s annual Community Day will be held at the Bridgewater Commons Mall; Mr. Pappas expressed appreciation to Bridgewater Commons for providing the event location and to the Jewish Community Center to help make the event happen. The Township is having its first ever Restaurant Week featuring restaurants located within the Township. The Township suffered a very significant sewer main breach under Route 22 near the Lexus dealership. The state Department of Transportation and several utility companies have responded to address the portion of the bridge that failed; the new sewer pipe will be installed shortly. 18 Township roads were damaged from the storm including some structures that were breached forcing the closer of Vossellar Avenue. With total repair costs estimated to be around \$3 million the Township will be looking to FEMA for help and to help the other communities impacted by the flooding.

Somerset County Park Commission

Mr. Soriano reported the County parks suffered much damage from the recent flooding. Duke Island Park will remain closed the park bridge is deemed safe to use. At the Park Commission Headquarters the first-floor carpeting is being removed after being under water. Fortunately, County golf courses were not impacted since the Park Commission relies on the revenue they generate. Mr. Soriano shared that there was much deliberation about whether the Park Foundation should proceed with hosting the annual Raymond L. Hughes Pro – Celebrity

Golf Tournament out of consideration for the community in the wake of Hurricane Ida; the decision was made that the event should be held because it is the Park Commission's biggest revenue generator which is critical to the Park Commission's operating expenses. The Raritan River Greenway trail will need to be repaired after being damaged by the floods. The Park Foundation recently partnered with RWJ/Barnabas Health to co-sponsor a major promotional effort at County golf courses to encourage voluntary blood donations resulting in 108 blood donations. Mr. Soriano added that this kind of partnership can serve as a great example of how agencies can partner together for an important cause.

Somerset County Business Partnership

Mr. Edwards reported the Business Partnership through Somerset County Tourism is working with hotels, motels and Air BNBs in Somerset County to negotiate room rates to help families and persons displaced by the flooding; this effort is now being handled by Somerset County Board of Social Services. The Business Partnership is also working with the NJ Economic Development Authority regarding if the Business Partnership's facilities at 360 Grove Street in Bridgewater can accommodate businesses impacted by the recent flooding especially businesses who had previously moved into a home-based model during the pandemic only to be displaced by the flooding. The Business Partnership is moving ahead with its Citizen of the Year event to be held at the Bridgewater Marriott after being postponed in April 2020 due to COVID. On October 21 the Business Partnership's BizFest & Wellness Expo Networking Event will be held outdoors on the concourse of TD Bank Ballpark. Mr. Edwards added that about a dozen ribbon-cutting events will be held this fall and anyone interested in having a ribbon cutting event should contact the Business Partnership.

Public Comment Period

There were no public comments regarding any items not on the agenda.

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.