

Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County

Wednesday, January 18, 2023, Meeting Minutes

The meeting was convened by means of video conference.

Name/Organization

Voting Members in Attendance

Troy Fischer, Chair
Jason Dameo, Vice-Chair, RCP
Anthony Tufaro, Johnson & Johnson

Matthew Moench, Mayor, Bridgewater
Filipe Pedroso, Bridgewater Twp. Council
Michael Pappas, Bridgewater
Andrew Fresco, Bridgewater

Zachary Bray, Mayor, Raritan Borough
Nicolas Carra, Raritan Borough Council
Stanley Schrek, Raritan Borough Engineer
Nick Zamora, Raritan

Dennis Sullivan, Mayor, Somerville
Rick St. Pierre, Somerville
Bernie Navatto, Somerville
Walter Lane, SC Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development

Geoffrey Soriano, SC Park Commission
Janine Erickson, SC Park Commission Alternate

Chris Edwards, SC Business Partnership

Non-voting County Support Staff

Angela Knowles, Somerset County Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development
Erika Phillips, Somerset County Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development

Non-Voting Guests

Barry Abelman, NJ Office for Planning Advocacy
Courtenay Mercer, Mercer Planning Associates
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 Community Planner Erika Phillips 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 and wished them a Happy New Year.

Action Items

Adoption of Meeting Minutes

Chair Troy Fischer asked if there were any corrections to the meeting minutes; there being none he asked for a motion to approve the Nov.10, 2022, meeting minutes, Somerville representative Rick St. Pierre moved, and Vice Chair Jason Dameo seconded the motion.

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

Ayes:	16
Nays:	0
Abstentions:	0

The motion to approve the minutes was approved.

Adoption of Meeting Dates for 2023

Chair Fischer presented the meeting dates for 2023. He explained that it is typically the same day (third Wednesday of every other month) each meeting month. He asked if there were any concerns or recommendations on adjusting the meeting dates. There being no questions, comments or adjustments Chair Fischer asked for a motion to approve the meeting dates for 2023. Nicholas Carra moved the motion and Director W. Lane seconded the motion.

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

Ayes:	16
Nays:	0
Abstentions:	0

Treasurer’s Report for November /December 2022

Principal Community Planner Erika Phillips presented the November and December treasurer’s report. She gave an overview and explanation of expenditures and deposits. She asked if there were any questions or comments concerning the Treasurer Report. There being no questions, comments, or corrections Chair Fischer made a motion to approve the November and December 2022 Treasurer’s Reports. Vice Chair Jason Dameo moved the motion, and Somerville Mayor Dennis Sullivan seconded the motion.

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

Ayes:	16
Nays:	0
Abstentions:	0

The motion was approved.

Adoption of 2023 Budget and Work Program:

The Regional Center 2023 Budget and Work program draft was discussed and presented by Deputy Director Knowles back in November. Erika Phillips reiterated that after the last meeting and presentation of the budget and work program the draft version has remained the same and no changes were made. In addition, she also noted that no comments or feedback were offered from the group via email. Since there was no feedback, she stated that the assumption was that the group was okay with the version that was presented. Director Lane noted that the budget includes a focus on plan implementation and other priorities identified by the Partnership. Chair Troy Fischer noted that this group, along with the County has done a significant amount of planning over the years. He noted that he would like to see a shift from being primarily a planning organization to an implementation organization with an aim of putting their plans into action. Chair Fischer made a motion to approve and adopt the 2023 Budget and Work Program The motion was made by Nicholas Carra and seconded by Mayor Matthew Moench.

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

Ayes:	16
Nays:	0
Abstentions:	0

The motion was approved.

Principal Marketing & Communications Services Consultant (2022-2023)

Courtenay Mercer of Mercer Planning Associates introduced herself to the group. She has a background in planning, having worked with Somerset County Planning Board and the Regional Center partnership. Her boutique planning firm specializes in outreach and communication, and she serves as the consulting executive director of Downtown New Jersey, an organization focused on economic development. Courtenay is looking forward to working with the group and helping them with their priorities.

Information Items

Plan Endorsement Renewal Update:

Director Angela Knowles discussed the process of an expedited State Plan endorsement for the Regional Center. She explained that much of the process involves gathering documentation and information that is needed for the process. She also explained that each of the towns should have received a letter outlining the process and the plan is to reach out to the towns to support them in collecting the necessary data.

Later in the conversation, Barry Ableman from the Office of Advocacy joined the discussion and reiterated his involvement in the plan endorsement process. He noted that the Regional Center has been doing good planning work and that this expedited renewal process is something that the State is trying out with RCP. He stated that this should not be a hard lift for the RCP and the participating towns because of the good planning and implementation work that has been done already. He said that this is mostly a process of making the State aware of what the RCP and the towns have been doing. He assured the group that he is still working with them and offered his assistance in this process as needed.

Goals

Director Knowles noted that the goals for 2023 are based on the Strategic Plan adopted in 2018. Some of those overarching goals were reflected in the areas of health and wellness, resiliency, job growth, private sector investment and embracing the Raritan River. She stated that the goal is to form a working group which will go through these priorities and create a path forward for implementation. There was some discussion of the working group being the marketing group that is currently in place and or using that group or developing a subgroup. The goals will be circulated among the small group to gather thoughts, and by the next meeting these outcomes will be used to discuss how we move forward. It was mentioned that Courtenay (MPA) might be able to help guide the group in the right direction. Director Knowles said that we needed to get volunteers to participate. It was also suggested that the marketing group be the core group to talk with MPA about past present and future visioning so that this information can be brought to the larger group (board).

Municipal and Other Reports:

Somerville:

The Mayor of Somerville discussed various ongoing and upcoming projects in the city, including the completion of projects around the train station on Main Street, new tenants on Main Street, construction of a new emergency services facility on Gaston Avenue. He said they are beginning construction on a solar farm at the Somerville Landfill and putting the council chambers in the West End redevelopment zone up for sale. The goal is to coordinate the sale of the council chambers property with the move into the new facility in the Train Station Plaza project.

Raritan:

Mayor Bray discussed several redevelopment projects underway in Raritan, with the Raritan Mall site being the focus. He mentioned that a study has been completed and a plan has been authorized, and they are currently discussing financial terms with a developer. He said Raritan applied for a transit hub planning grant that could tie into the TAP grant. He said it has been a long process since they applied for the grant in 2016, but hopefully, they will receive authorization to proceed with the final design soon. Additionally, they have some redevelopment projects that are currently in the works, with public hearings scheduled for some of them. One project near the Nevius Street Bridge is waiting for the developer's issue to be resolved. There are two other projects on Grain Street and one on Tillman Street that needs some revisions. The Planning Board has a major project under review for next week, involving retrofitting the Raritan Crossings mall into a 74-unit apartment site.

Bridgewater:

Mike Pappas reported in place of the Mayor of Bridgewater

Mike Pappas noted that like Somerville they have a host of infrastructure improvement projects underway and several applications for use variances and planning board reviews for commercial facilities. They are coordinating projects with both NJ American Water and PSE &G replacing a host of water and gas mains. They are working to coordinate things so that they do not have to do replacements of the pavement. Overall, he said it seems like 2023 will be a busy and productive year for the community.

Somerset County Business Partnership: Chris Edwards noted that the Business Partnership has had great success in the Sip and See Program. He said they had over 5K completions and that it has brought a lot more business to the area of the locations. They have been talking to Hillsborough to encourage them to take on a similar campaign and he suggested that the RCP consider doing a “micro” version of an overall county campaign with the three municipalities. He also mentioned that the ELC for Somerset County will be hosting a “Meet the Mayor” to give an update to the business community later this year.

Somerset County Park Commission: Geoff Soriano updated the group that the Parks Commission was still rebuilding from Hurricane Ida. He noted that the greenway trail which has value to the RCP has been repaired at a cost of around \$750,000 and it was done relatively quickly. He also said that some bridges will be replaced due to age and that a roller hockey rink along Greenway Park in North Branch that was taken down in 2022 will be a repurposed space. Lastly, he introduced Janine Erickson as the new alternate representative for the Parks Commission.

Public Comment Period:

Director Walter Lane thanked his team and reminded the RCP of the efforts of the Planning Board to address regional flooding issues through the Regional Flooding Roundtable and the other initiatives to address climate resiliency. He encouraged the towns of the Regional Center to continue to engage in this process being led by Deputy Director Knowles.

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 5:45