

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County  
Draft  
Wednesday, March 16, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was convened by means of video conference.

**Name/Organization**

**Voting Members**

Troy Fischer, Chair, RCP  
Victoria Allen, RWJBarnabas Health  
Anthony Tufaro, Johnson & Johnson  
Matt Moench, Mayor, Bridgewater  
Michael Pappas, Bridgewater Administrator  
Andrew Fresco, Bridgewater  
Zachary Bray, Mayor, Raritan Borough  
Nicolas Carra, Raritan Borough Council  
Dennis Sullivan, Mayor, Somerville  
Thompson Mitchell, Somerville Borough Council  
Rick St. Pierre, Somerville  
Paul Drake, Somerset County (SC) Board of County Commissioners  
Bernie Navatto, SC Planning Board  
Walter Lane, SC Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development  
Geoffrey Soriano, SC Park Commission  
Chris Edwards, SC Business Partnership

**Non-voting County Support Staff**

James Ruggieri, Somerset County Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development

**Non-Voting Guests**

Barry Ableman, NJ Office for Planning Advocacy  
Phil Decker, Somerville Resident  
Patrick Pelliccia, SC Vocational & Technical Schools  
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.

## **Adoption of Meeting Minutes**

Chair Troy Fischer asked if there were any corrections to the meeting minutes; there being none, Chair Troy Fischer asked for a motion to approve the January 19, 2022 meeting minutes. Raritan Council President Nicolas Carra 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 January-February 2022**

Mr. Ruggieri reported that the treasurer report was sent out with the meeting packet and that he would be happy to answer any questions. Mr. Ruggieri noted that staff has submitted the financial backup records to Suplee Clooney & Company to prepare the audit report and provide the tax-related services for the year ending December 31, 2021.

There being no questions or comments, Chair Fischer asked for a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report for January-February 2022. Mr. Navatto moved and Somerville Councilman Thompson Mitchell seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: Troy Fischer, Tony Tufaro, Michael Pappas, Andrew Fresco, Zachary Bray, Nicolas Carra, Dennis Sullivan, Thompson Mitchell, Rick St. Pierre, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano, and Chris Edwards, Vicky Allen, and Paul Drake.  
Nays: none  
Abstentions: none

The motion was approved.

## **Public Comment Period**

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

## **Action Item**

### **Authorization to Release RFP thru the Competitive Contracting Process for Principal Marketing Services**

(Marketing consultant Rich Reitman was moved into a "waiting room" before any discussion commenced about the Authorization to Release RFP through the Competitive Contracting Process for Principal Marketing Services agenda item.)

Mr. Ruggieri reported that we are still in the discussion stage in terms of refining the Scope of Work for the Request for Proposals (RFP) through the competitive contracting process to provide principal marketing services; as such, staff recommends holding off on taking any action at this time and that as the SOW gets refined staff will report back at a future meeting.

Discussion followed. Some points made include the need to have a full discussion with the Marketing Committee to decide how the work products should be refined; i.e., should the work products lean towards print or digital; also whether it is feasible to focus resources on having seminars or other large in-person events given the uncertainty in this post-pandemic environment. The conclusion was to follow staff's recommendation to hold off on taking any action until the scope was refined. Another point made was that if a marketing contract is not awarded at the May meeting that it may be necessary to take action to authorize the expenditure of certain funds to ensure the essential marketing services are continued in the interim until a contract can be awarded.

## **Information Items**

### **Plan Endorsement Renewal Update**

Somerset County Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane shared that Mr. Ruggieri did a great job pulling together a summary of all the work done by the three towns in connection with Plan Endorsement. The Plan Endorsement fulfillment summaries are currently being reviewed by the three towns. A meeting with representatives from the three towns and the Office for Planning Advocacy (OPA) is scheduled for March 24 to talk about next steps in the Plan Endorsement process to preserve the Somerset County Regional Center's Plan Endorsement standing, how to move forward, and what's expected from the state and how much of a lift it will be to maintain PE. Some discussion followed. Somerville Mayor Dennis Sullivan and Mr. Lane noted in reading the summary reports it is evident just how hard work the three towns have undertaken over the years. Chair Fischer affirmed that when you look back 10 or 20 years you and then consider what we are doing now one can see that taken as a whole that the Regional Center is active and meaningful and a lot has been accomplished among the towns and the County. NJ Office for Planning Advocacy Principal Planner Barry Ableman wanted to thank the County Planning Board for preparing the summary reports through all three towns which has made things a lot easier for Mr. Ableman in this stage of the Plan Endorsement process and that Mr. Ruggieri will be sadly missed.

### **Marketing Update**

Marketing consultant Rich Reitman reported that he continues to review local media and municipal websites on a daily basis for searching for newsletter content, post articles from previous newsletters onto the Facebook page, and send Analytics to Mr. Ruggieri each Friday. Mr. Reitman went through past Analytics reports and has detected that we are consistently getting ten or more new website visits each week. The March newsletter was completed and distributed, and a Regional Center Partnership ad prepared for the St. Patrick's Parade program. Mr. Reitman also prepared a press release honoring past RCP members which is currently on hold. He also continues to work on the Annual Achievements Report for 2021, has begun working on the May newsletter, and has just received website update information to implement shortly. Chair Fischer commented that he likes how the changes we made to the newsletters a few years ago have made the newsletters livelier and provide a balance in the content between recent past events and upcoming events by the three towns or at the regional scale.

### **Municipal and Other Reports:**

**Raritan** Mayor Zachary Bray reported that this week is Restaurant Week and encouraged everyone to visit Raritan's Economic Development Committee's "Make Raritan Yours" website and take advantage of special deals. Mayor Bray shared that Raritan's former planner Angela Knowles has accepted a job with the County so Borough Engineer Stanley Schrek will be helping represent Raritan Borough at RCP meetings unless a new planner comes aboard. Also, the Planning Board will soon begin meeting twice a month.

**Bridgewater** Mayor Matt Moench reported that over the past couple few weeks the Township has been very focused on the incident with the Township police that occurred at the Bridgewater Commons mall and is currently responding to and managing this issue which continues to be an ongoing situation; Mayor Moench invited anyone with any questions regarding this to please reach out to him or Bridgewater Township Administrator Michael Pappas. Mayor Moench also reported on the Township's Universal Road Assessment project. The Township made a substantial investment in 2021 to objectively rate Township roads conditions which led to improving 62 roads in 2021. The Township is now preparing the 2022 Road Improvement Plan

which will be kicked off this year. The Township is also preparing a drainage improvement plan to help deal with the costly drainage issues that became very apparent with Hurricane Ida last year. The Township is also focusing on moving forward with various work projects pursuant to the Township Recreation and Open Space Master Plans including opening up Camp Cromwell to the public which the Township purchased from the County. Mayor Moench added that he is looking forward to supporting the local restaurants in Raritan as part of Restaurant Week.

**Somerville** Mayor Dennis Sullivan reported they had a very successful and well attended St. Patrick's Day Parade. The Planning Board just approved the Oak Somerville project on East Main and South Bridge Streets. The four existing storefronts located there will be demolished and replaced with the two multi-story restaurant buildings offering magnificent views. The applicant for the proposed Somerville Multi Family residential project on South Bridge Street is expected to appear before the Planning Board with a modified version of their original plan that was denied last year. A developer has expressed interest in building luxury apartments on a former industrial site on Fairview Avenue. Mayor Sullivan shared that he understands a new buyer who is expected to close on the old Baker Taylor property on Kirby Avenue has expressed interest in pursuing the same residential project that was previously approved for the site. Mayor Sullivan also reported that Congressman Tom Malinowski of the 7<sup>th</sup> Congressional District was able through his efforts to secure an approximately \$2.5 million federal grant to remediate and restore Chambres Park on Southside Avenue.

Mr. Navatto shared that after a two-year hiatus the Tour of Somerville bike race is going live again. This year Unity Bank will continue to be the title sponsor and Arts on Division has resumed control over the race. Over the next few months he may be reaching out for support.

Mr. St Pierre reported that confidence is up among the merchants on Main Street. All the people who came out last month really helped rejuvenate the businesses and the tables are coming out. Mr. St. Pierre also shared how they have been working with the Ukrainian Orthodox Church USA in South Bound Brook to help raise support for the refugees in Poland and Ukraine displaced by the war. Mr. St. Pierre asked if everyone could help spread the word that anyone interested in helping can visit the church's website which has an active donation button and that the church will be releasing these funds to help the refugees. Mr. St. Pierre shared the website which is [www.ucofusa.org](http://www.ucofusa.org). Mayor Sullivan noted the world is shrinking around us and we are all family.

Mayor Sullivan concluded his report by wishing Mr. Ruggieri all the best in his upcoming retirement and hopes Mr. Ruggieri will come back to visit and see the great things that have happened here and that it has been a pleasure working with Mr. Ruggieri professionally. Mr. Ruggieri thanked Mayor Sullivan for his kind words and shared that it has been a great pleasure working with everyone over the years. Chair Fischer thanked Mr. Ruggieri as well.

**Somerset County Park Commission** Mr. Soriano expressed appreciation to both Mayors Bray and Sullivan for their work in their respective towns, that that he is looking forward to dining in Raritan during Restaurant Week and that this year's St. Patrick's Day Parade in Somerville was a great event. Mr. Soriano reported that the Park Commission's confidence is high and they are looking forward to doing all the things the Park Commission has ever done in the past -the July 4<sup>th</sup> fireworks, the Rose Festival, and all the activities at the Environmental Education Center, and expressed appreciation to the Somerset County Business Partnership for helping promote the Park Commission's activities and events. Some brief discussion followed about whether the 4-H Fair will be held this summer; Somerset County Commissioner Paul Drake said he will reach out to Rutgers Cooperative Extension. Mr. Soriano concluded his report by expressing appreciation to Mr. Ruggieri for all the service he provided to Somerset County.

**Somerset County Business Partnership** Mr. Edwards shared that on March 1 the Business Partnership launched a new division at the Business Partnership called Why Somerset <https://whysomersetnj.org/> which is geared towards the attraction and retention of businesses in Somerset County; the County Chamber of Commerce realized that in this post COVID environment we have to go on the offensive to attract and retain businesses. All 21 municipalities as well as Downtown Somerville Association, Raritan Borough and the Bridgewater Commons are represented on the website. Lifestyle, Talent, and Amenities are the three focus areas. The Business Partnership recently helped to bring a major biotech company to Warren Township and Mr. Edwards is working with Mr. Lane on other opportunities for the County, so this is off to a great start.

In April the Business Partnership is launching a major planning and advertising campaign with the website as a homebase, focusing on job retention first, then they hope in the future to go after attracting businesses outside

the area and start bringing them into the County. Mr. Edwards said if anyone sees something on the website that needs changing to please contact him. Some brief discussion followed. Mr. Edwards said after the initial campaigns there might be an opportunity to work with special areas of the County or municipalities to do targeted advertising.

### **Somerset County Board of County Commissioners**

County Commissioner Drake wished Mr. Ruggieri good luck in his retirement and thanked him for his hard work with the Regional Center and Somerset County and that the Regional Center Partnership would not be the same were it not for his long hours of dedication. Mr. Ruggieri thanked Commissioner Drake for his well wished and shared how it has been great working with everyone and that looking over his entire career in planning the work with Somerset County and the Regional Center has really shown how planning can blossom as multiple jurisdictions facing common issues can work together to achieve great goals and to improve the quality of life.

Mr. Lane also thanked Mr. Ruggieri and shared how he has been a driving force and true public servant dedicated to helping this organization thrive.

### **Bridgewater Commons**

Chair Fischer shared some thoughts about the Bridgewater Township Police incident that happened at the mall that has been in the news. Chair Fischer shared how never in his career has he experienced anything like what has been transpiring over the past few weeks since the incident, and that if anyone has any questions or comments to please feel free to reach out to him, and that hopefully this is slowly being put behind us, that we are waiting for the internal investigation by the County Prosecutor's office and that hopefully in time to come we will be able to move forward from wherever the investigation lands. Chair Fischer also shared that they have some good things on the horizon and hopefully they will be able to announce them in the coming months.

### **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.