



THE REGIONAL CENTER

Winter
2005-2006

BRIDGEWATER • RARITAN • SOMERVILLE

A partnership for a better tomorrow

IN SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

SOMERVILLE LANDFILL VISIONING UPDATE

The Regional Center Partnership was presented with a detailed update on the status of the visioning project for the Somerville Landfill site on Route 206, south of the borough's Main Street.

The 112-acre property includes 8 parcels, seven of which are privately owned and one of which (82 acres) is now under control of borough government after years of litigation with a developer.

Colin Driver, Director of Economic Development for the Borough, explained that the visioning process involves a Steering Committee to set direction for a Stakeholders Group comprised of approximately 50 residents and business owners. The process, begun in September of 2005, is being accomplished in cooperation with New Jersey Transit and the Regional Plan Association, headed by Rob Lane.

Mr. Driver explained that the process is designed to develop a consensus-based master plan for the former landfill and the property in proximity to the Somerville Train Station that will support the Somerville community and economy.

The fact-finding portion of the effort is expected to be completed in September of 2006, with an RFP distributed to interested developers issued in November.

EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS SET DIRECTION FOR REGIONAL CENTER COMMUNITIES

When elected officials, municipal employees, members of the Regional Center Partnership, and community and business leaders gathered on June 11, 2005 for the 2005 Planning Retreat, "*Charting an Action Agenda*," they embarked on the first step in a process to assess future needs for the Regional Center communities. Further definition of the results of the retreat took place at a series of three "How To" Educational Forums in late September and October. The sessions focused on "*Neighborhood Plans: What Are They? How to Do Them?*" "*Open Space & Recreation in the Regional Center: Making it the Best*," and "*Business Recruitment & Retention in the Regional Center: Keeping the Local & Regional Economies Strong*." The goal of the forums was to elicit community input to effectively formulate potential next steps in each category.

The overriding theme of the "Neighborhood" forum was to ensure that residents have a stake in the development and implementation of any and all plans. To that end, town meetings will be scheduled to discuss neighborhood concerns and identify planning priorities. Among the issues on the future agenda are neighborhood housing studies to assess supply, condition, mix, and affordability. Additional issues include a "Resources Inventory" of schools, parks, environmental issues, and places of worship; a "Community Character Study" to recommend changes or improvements; an

"Historic Preservation Study" to identify resources; a "Streetscape Improvement Study" to recommend improvements including street trees, signage, sidewalk improvements, and street furniture needs; a "Traffic Study" to improve safety and develop a pedestrian/bicycle trail plan.

The Open Space & Recreation forum results recommended a "Connections Study" to identify methods of connecting open space and recreation to neighborhoods, schools, employment hubs, and commercial districts. An "Open Space & Recreation Plan" will

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ONGOING PROJECT UPDATES

REGIONAL CENTER BUS SHUTTLE UPDATE

The Regional Center Partnership's plans to establish a Shuttle Bus program is under budget discussion with the Board of Chosen Freeholders..

The Regional Center asked the Board of Chosen Freeholders for funding to establish a pilot program for the Shuttle. County funding will supplement the \$200,000 committed by the Partnership from the 2005 and 2006 budgets. In addition, RideWise has obtained \$130,000 in federal funds dedicated to the project.

Depending upon the outcome of this year's County budget process, the shuttle bus may be up and running before the end of 2006.

The Shuttle Bus is designed to provide public transportation within Bridgewater, Somerville, Raritan, and Manville, with stops in residential neighborhoods, shopping districts, and employment destinations.

The Committee reported that other Regional Center projects are receiving priority funding from County government. Specifically cited were issues relating to the elderly and pedestrian connector projects, including the proposed Peter's Brook Pedestrian Overpass over Route 202/206 and the associated walking/bike paths that will ultimately connect Bridgewater Raritan High School to the south side of Somerville.

ROUTE 202/206 PEDESTRIAN OVERPASS FUNDING REQUESTED

The Board of Chosen Freeholders has approved a Regional Center Partnership request to apply for a \$1.5 million Transportation Enhancement Grant to fund construction of a pedestrian over-

pass over Route 202/206 at Peter's Brook. If the grant is received, the overpass will ultimately be a connector of a walking/bicycling path between the south side of Somerville at Chambres Parks and Bridgewater Raritan High School. This project, within the Regional Center, is an element of the Somerset County Park Commission Greenway Plan that will construct a continuous trail that will effectively connect Hunterdon County to Middlesex County.

The 2006 Regional Center budget includes \$180,000 for design and engineering of the overpass.

PHASE 1 OF TORPEY COMPLEX COMPLETE

The first phase of the Frank "Nap" Torpey Athletic Complex in the Finderne section of Bridgewater has been completed. The complex currently includes two lighted ball fields with dugouts and ample parking.

The next stage of construction will include an all-purpose field and field house. No date has been set for Phase 2.

PARK COMMISSION CAPITAL FACILITIES PLAN TO BENEFIT REGIONAL CENTER

The Somerset County Park Commission has introduced a twenty-year, \$204 million Capital Facilities Plan for improvements and additions to the parks and recreation inventory in Somerset County.

The Park Commission retained the services of Brandstetter Carroll, Inc. of Lexington, Kentucky, an internationally respected planning firm with a strong focus on parks and recreation project development to survey and assess Somerset County's unmet recreation demand; determine gaps in the delivery of park and recreation services; examine

current maintenance needs; and project new facility requirements to meet the demand of a growing and increasingly sophisticated population.

The Brandstetter Carroll Capital Facilities Study presented a series of recommended development and maintenance options for implementation over the next 20 years. Included in the recommendations are:

- Athletic fields
- Indoor recreation
- Pavilions/picnic shelters
- Skate parks
- Interpretive/education facilities
- Water parks/aquatic centers
- River access
- Open space
- Hiking trails
- Nature parks & natural areas
- Large county-wide parks
- Paved walking & bike trails
- Botanical gardens & arboreta
- Environmental education areas
- Historic sites
- Outdoor amphitheater
- Picnic shelters
- Non-paved trails
- Ice rink
- Non-motorized boating
- Basketball courts
- Golf
- Outdoor tennis courts
- Spray parks

The study also revealed that the most important actions to be taken by the Park Commission include (in order of priority):

- Purchase land to preserve open space
- Preserve & conserve arboreta & garden
- Preserve & conserve existing parks
- Purchase land to develop active recreation
- Develop new walking & bike trails
- Develop new outdoor pools

The elements of the Plan have yet to be prioritized and no decision has been made regarding which of the elements will be constructed and which will be deemed unnecessary, redundant, or inappropriate.

ONGOING PROJECTS (CONT.)

ROUTE 22 RECEIVES ADDITIONAL FUNDING

A cooperative initiative between Somerset County, the Somerset County Business Partnership, and the Regional Center Partnership has resulted in the appropriation of an addition \$5.4 million dollars dedicated to advancement of the Route 22 Sustainable Boulevard Project.

Through the efforts of Congressmen Rodney Frelinghuysen and Mike Ferguson, the Route 22 project received both the appropriation and an authorization that makes the project a "High Priority Plan" that fosters a long term commitment from Washington.

The total of \$9.4 million that has been allocated will be directed to planning the Suburban Boulevard and implementing short-term safety improvements including closing of median u-turns and increasing safety at the junction of Route 22 and Routes 202/206.

It was reported that Somerset County has entered into negotiations with the NJ Department of Transportation (NJDOT) to assume responsibility for the planning and implementation of the long term improvements. It is anticipated that this agreement will be finalized in early 2006 and will allow the project to move forward more quickly.

NJDOT has assumed the responsibility for the short term safety improvements and is currently analyzing accident data to determine the improvements that will be necessary and the properties on the median that will be have to be purchased. Federal funds will be used to acquire properties as deemed necessary.

SOMERVILLE'S DOWNTOWN DEVELOPMENT MOVING FORWARD

Lawsuits have been settled and final negotiations are taking place to allow the long-awaited West Main Street Redevelopment Project to move forward. The Downtown Somerville Shopping Center is expected to be razed in the spring of 2006 to accommodate the construction of 264 residential rental units, commercial office, and retail space on the south side of West Main Street.

BIOTECHNOLOGY BUSINESS PLAN

The draft copy of the Biotechnology Business Development Center Report was introduced at the January Partnership meeting by John Maddocks, Vice-president of Economic & Community Development for the Somerset County Business Partnership. The purpose of the report is to develop an action plan isolating the impediments to future success of the life sciences industry in Somerset County and determine potential sites for the establishment of a facility that will overcome these impediments.

The project scope includes an analysis of the critical success factors for the life science industry that public and private initiatives can effectively influence. The ultimate goal is to guide the planning for a Life Sciences Business Development Center. The current report is based on research and interviews with key figures in the industry. A February, 2006 meeting with the Steering Committee will provide review of the report and dictate next steps in the process.

EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS (CONT.)

build on the County-wide plan that identifies all resources and gaps in availability. It was also recommended that sites for potential land acquisition be determined and a "Trailway Plan" be developed.

Specific needs isolated by the participants included a multi-purpose indoor recreation facility to increase available space for youth and senior activities and improved access to the Raritan River. It was also suggested that the various providers of recreation services employ the principals of the Regional Center and coordinate services between municipalities and with other community organizations.

The "Business Recruitment and Retention" session results suggested preparation of a "Regional Tourism Resources Inventory," a "Business Mix Study" to determine gaps in product and service availability, and a "Regional Economic Development Plan" to identify opportunities for growth.

To foster growth of the business sector, a "Coordinated Marketing Campaign" was recommended to promote business and tourism within the Regional Center. A "Regional Center Tourism" brochure would be part of the campaign development. Additionally, a "Sustainable Buildings & Development" seminar will serve to explain the environmental benefits of sustainable building and development.

The forums also defined the needs for a support system for all initiatives, including funding and financing issues and communication needs. The process is ongoing and will continue to seek input for the affected parties in each category. Though the process is time consuming, the result will create a better Regional Center for everyone.

2006 BUDGET ADOPTED

The Regional Center Partnership adopted a 2006 budget designed to continue to support cooperative planning and implementation efforts in Raritan, Somerville, and a section of Bridgewater. Major elements of the budget are as follows:

Regional Center Strategic Master Plan - \$25,000 - Costs associated with the further development and finalization of the Strategic Master Plan and funding for municipalities to address interlocal master plan issues.

Regional Center Strategic Plan Vision Initiatives - \$230,000 - Funding for planning projects defined by the Strategic Plan, Vision Initiatives, and the Regional Center Retreat. Projects include: Bus Shuttle Implementation and Marketing; Planning & Engineering for the Peter's Brook Pedestrian Overpass over Route 202/206; Regional Center Greenway Plan; Gateway Signage; Route 22 Suburban Boulevard (Funds to be matched by the Somerset County Business Partnership); Funding for workshops & seminars.

Program Support Services - \$25,000 - Funding for advancement of recommendations from the Retreat including Neighborhood Planning, Economic Development Initiatives, Recreation/Open Space Planning.

Public & Business Education Program - \$10,000 - A program to promote the Regional Center and selected initiatives.

Regional Center Challenge Grant Program - \$120,000 - A program that funds municipal initiatives with matching grants up to \$40,000 per municipality.

2005 CHALLENGE GRANTS AWARDED

The Regional Center Partnership Challenge Grant program provides matching funds, up to \$40,000 annually, to the three Regional Center municipalities for programs that are determined to enhance the Regional Center vision. The Regional Center Partnership awarded the following 2005 Challenge Grants:

BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP - FINDERNE NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN - \$40,000

Funding will be used to hire a consultant to prepare a neighborhood plan for the Finderne section of the Township. The study area will include Main Street from Finderne Avenue to Foothill Road and the adjacent residential streets. The plan will identify architectural and cultural sub-areas and recommend potential streetscape and facade improvements that will enhance neighborhood identity and promote economic vitality. This initiative is a direct result of recommendations at the Regional Center Partnership Planning Retreat in the spring of 2005.

RARITAN BOROUGH - RIVERFRONT STUDY - PHASE II - \$20,000

Funding will be used to study three municipally owned properties south of Orlando Drive. The study will identify environmental constraints and regulations that will dictate future use. The overall goal is to develop a site plan for the open space parcel that will allow for recreation, river access, and development of a riverfront trail along the Raritan River.

SOMERVILLE BOROUGH - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMPONENT OF MASTER PLAN - \$40,000

Funding will be used to provide additional support to the municipal master plan reexamination effort. The borough has previously been awarded \$25,000 from the Municipal Planning Partnership to fund the project. The additional Regional Center funding will allow for inclusion of an economic development component to the master plan that will focus on ensuring that the Somerville Landfill project is consistent with and accentuates the borough's larger economic development vision. This initiative is a direct result of recommendations at the Regional Center Partnership Planning Retreat in the spring.

STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN REACHING COMPLETION

At the January 2006 meeting of the Regional Center Partnership, members unanimously approved an agreement with Diane M. Saltel, A.I.C.P., M.C.I.P., P.P for completion of the Somerset County Regional Center Partnership Strategic Master Plan.

Ms. Saltel has presented three main initiatives to be accomplished for completion of the plan: Reconciliation of the November, 2002 Strategic Master Plan and all collateral documentation; Update of the existing draft Master Plan in accordance with input for research, questionnaire responses, and stakeholder and municipal meetings; Redesign report layout and update existing graphics in accordance with current physical characteristics. The Regional Center Strategic Master Plan is expected to be completed in July of 2006.

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