



# THE REGIONAL CENTER

Summer  
2005

BRIDGEWATER ¥ RARITAN ¥ SOMERVILLE

A partnership for a better tomorrow

IN SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

## REGIONAL CENTER IN REVIEW

In preparation for the 2005 Planning Retreat, the Regional Center Partnership detailed the major accomplishments and ongoing initiatives with which the Regional Center has been involved. Some of these projects are initiatives of the Regional Center Partnership and others are the result of alliances with municipalities and key agencies with the Partnership providing resources and support. All of these projects are designed to make the Regional Center communities better places to live and work. Among these accomplishments are:

- Bridgewater Bus Shelters Enhancement Program
- Proposed Peter's Brook/Route 202/206 Pedestrian Bridge
- Mountain Avenue Pedestrian Bridge, Somerville
- Route 22 Sustainable Corridor Safety Improvement Plan
- Route 22 Suburban Boulevard Plan
- Chimney Rock Road Interchange Improvement Plan
- Regional Center Traffic Calming Study
- Raritan Woolen Mills Development
- Grove Street Overpass Sidewalk Project, Bridgewater
- Somerset Street Streetscape Improvements, Somerville
- Route 28 Corridor Improvements
- Peter's Brook Greenway, Somerville
- Proposed Bus Shuttle Program
- Frank "Nap" Torpey Athletic Complex

## RETREAT SETS THE STAGE FOR THE FUTURE OF THE REGIONAL CENTER

Not willing to rest on the laurels of seven years of success, the Regional Center Partnership convened the 2005 Planning Retreat, "*Charting an Action Agenda*," on Saturday, June 11, 2005. 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.

The Bridgewater/Raritan/Somerville Regional Center received designation from the State of New Jersey in 1996, as the first tri-municipal organization to be recognized by Trenton. Since that time, representatives of the three municipalities and the Somerset County Planning Division have been working diligently to enhance the quality of life for the residents and employees that live and work in the area. Major planning initiatives since 1998, when the Regional Center Partnership was established, have been the 1999 Vision Planning Charette and the development of the

2002 Strategic Issues Report and Strategic Plan. To maintain the momentum of the Regional Center, it is now critical to initiate new strategies to ensure that the region continues to remain ahead of the curve. New short and long term priori-



ties must be identified and strategies developed to ensure success.

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# ONGOING PROJECT UPDATES

## **NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE REGIONAL CENTER**

Rose Evans, CPM, Vice President of Property Management for Levin Management Corporation, has been elected Chairperson of the Regional Center Partnership, and Janell Vaughan, General Manager of the Bridgewater Commons, has been elected Vice Chairperson.

## **SOMERSET VALLEY YMCA RECREATION NEEDS ANALYSIS**

Efrain Centeno, Executive Director of the Somerset Valley YMCA, presented the Regional Center Partnership with a survey with over 600 respondents who were asked to detail their needs for recreation services in Somerset County.

Topping the list is a need for a new recreation facility in Franklin Township, with expansion of the Bridgewater Pool not far behind. The survey also showed that the most requested programs include traditional fitness and wellness programs, warm-water aquatics, and programs for youth and teens.

In response to the survey, Mr. Centano presented an overview of the major improvements that are planned for the Bridgewater facility that are intended to increase the Somerset Valley YMCA level of service to the Regional Center community. A capital campaign is underway.

## **RPA "VISION TO REALITY PROJECT" UPDATE**

The Regional Plan Association (RPA) has been focusing on three main tasks within the Regional Center.

"The Green Plan" - RPA has created a new Geographic Information System (GIS) database addressing the open space inventory of the Somerset County

Park Commission. RPA is continuing its ongoing intervention to help resolve DEP permitting issues at strategic parcels within the Raritan River Greenway. The result of this effort will be the development of a comprehensive "green infrastructure" plan for the Regional Center.

"The Route 22 Sustainable Suburban Corridor Study" is moving forward, with RPA having completed an analysis of existing land use patterns and a physical study model of the corridor. RPA will complete a second round of design studies for the corridor and present these findings to obtain public input. In November of 2004, the House of Representatives approved a \$3 million grant to put the multi-year plan into action. There is currently \$6.75 million in Federal funds designated to the project. The Sustainable Corridor plan's main objective is to reduce traffic and improve the safety on an eight mile stretch of Route 22 through the Regional Center.

RPA is also focusing its resources on research that will address the ongoing tax reform debate in New Jersey. This report will recommend reforms that will facilitate implementation of the Regional Center Vision and Master Plans.

## **REGIONAL CENTER BUS SHUTTLE UPDATE**

The Regional Center has been working with the County Planning and Transportation Departments to expand shuttle bus service within the Center. When implemented, the service will provide transportation within Bridgewater, Somerville, Raritan and Manville, with stops in residential neighborhoods, shopping, and employment destinations. Proposed hours of operation are from 5:30 A.M. to 6:30 P.M., Monday through Friday. Expansion of service hours and days of operation will be re-

viewed after implementation of the program. The Shuttle Bus service is being designed to increase accessibility to the both the workplace and to commercial centers in the Regional Center while minimizing traffic impact. The shuttle bus will provide needed transportation options to people who would otherwise have to rely on friends and family. The service will begin as a one-year pilot program.

## **2005 BUDGET RATIFIED**

The Regional Center Partnership has approved a budget of \$330,000 for 2005. Planned expenditures include the costs for implementation of the Regional Center Master Plan, the RCP retreat and program support services, workshops and seminars, legal and accounting services, public and business education programs, the Challenge Grant program that funds municipal projects advancing Regional Center initiative (increased to a maximum of \$40,000 per municipality), and various administrative services. The budget will also cover the cost of the Partnership's strategic plan and vision initiatives including project elements of the Greenway and open space plan, the shuttle bus program development, and testing of the Traffic Calming Study recommendations.

## **RESOLUTION IN SUPPORT OF CHIMNEY ROCK RD/RT 22 INTERCHANGE PROJECTS**

The Regional Center Partnership unanimously passed a resolution in support of the preferred design change for a grade-separated interchange at the Chimney Rock Road and Route 22 intersection. The inefficient design of the area and the tremendous increase in traffic in the corridor has resulted in a dangerous situation on local streets, specifically Thompson Avenue in Bridgewater and

## RETREAT CONT.

Keynote speaker at the retreat was Robert Yaro, President of the Regional Plan Association, the nation's oldest and most respected metropolitan research and advocacy group. Mr. Yaro has been an integral part of the Regional Center Partnership since its inception, having been a key figure in the Planning Charette held in Somerville in 1998, that resulted in the designation of many of the projects that have and are now being addressed.

The message delivered by Mr. Yaro stressed the importance of cooperative planning and vision needed to assure that quality of life issues are addressed before they become quality of life problems.

The retreat focused on the following issues:

- Open Space & Recreation
- Circulation
- Neighborhood Preservation
- Redevelopment/Economic Development
- Downtowns/Main Street

The more than 60 participants at the retreat engaged in breakout sessions to discuss each of these issues, isolating problem areas, determining obstacles, and enumerating the short and long term solutions necessary to address the issues.

A summary of the conclusion reached at the retreat includes:

### OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

- Increased Coordination Among Groups  
Regional Center (RC) should bring together all recreation providers, build on the County Open Space survey, fill existing recreation service gaps, and coordinate programs.
- Need for Linkages & Connectivity  
RC should identify a plan for making connections between recreation facilities employment areas, green belts, and neighborhoods.
- Increase Priority for Land Acquisition  
RC should prioritize opportunities and pursue funding options.

### CIRCULATION

- Safety Issues on Route 22, Route 28, and Route 206  
RC should access all traffic studies

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## ONGOING PROJECT UPDATES CONT.

local residents' concerns, the Partnership has opted to support the upgrade that will separate the stretch of highway into a local and a through lane. This configuration is a continuation of the Sustainable Corridor Plan that is being studied for the area of Route 22 through Somerville and Bridgewater.

### **LIFESTYLE CENTER AT BRIDGEWATER COMMONS**

Janell Vaughan, General Manager of the Bridgewater Commons and Vice Chair of the Regional Center, provided the Partnership with an update of the 94,000 sq. ft. Lifestyle Center adjacent to the regional mall. The project is under construction as of the Spring of 2005, on land south of the Marriott Hotel and in proximity to Route 22 west. The project is expected to be completed in the Spring of 2006.

The Lifestyle Center will have a "town center" feel with buildings oriented along a "main street" with sidewalks, pedestrian amenities, and storefronts on both the "main street" side and the parking lot side. Announced tenants include Crate & Barrel and Maggiano's Restaurant.

### **NJ WATER SUPPLY AUTHORITY OPEN SPACE & DEVELOPMENT STUDY**

The New Jersey Water Supply Authority (NJWSA), represented by Dan Van Abs and Bob O'Neill, presented the Regional Center Partnership with a description of the NJWSA efforts to identify vacant and underutilized properties in the lower Raritan Basin. The study will determine which properties should be preserved as open space and which are appropriate for development. The model that will be developed for Bridgewater, Raritan, and Somerville will be used throughout New Jersey.

The scale of measurement is based on both environmental criteria and economic criteria. Preliminary results are as follows:

#### Undeveloped Site Selection;

New Development w/Site Design Controls	15 parcels/144 acres
New Development/Resource Protection	53 parcels/375 acres
Resource Protection	651 parcels/1403 acres
Little Economic/Environmental Value	46 parcels/119 acres

#### Underutilized Site Selection:

Redevelopment w/Site Design Controls	5 parcels/45 acres
Redevelopment/Resource Protection	17 parcels/137 acres
Resource Protection	65 parcels/420 acres
Little Economic/Environmental Value	20 parcels/114 acres

Meetings will be held with the individual municipalities to assure that the Authority has assessed all appropriate property. The final results will be used to identify redevelopment sites, sites that will require greater attention for environmental reasons, and those that are a conservation priority. Upon verification of the data, properties will be prioritized with conceptual site layouts prepared for those with the highest priority. Grant assistance will then be sought for development support.

## RETREAT CONT.

and combine with the Regional Traffic Study to obtain a complete picture of current and projected regional traffic issues.

- Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety

RC should address issues of sidewalk conditions, traffic light timing, and bike paths.

- Train Stations

RC should establish a program to clean up rail stations and provide circulation maps and schedules to enhance movement around the Regional Center.

### NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION

- Neighborhood Character

RC should facilitate dialogue on issues including establishment of a Neighborhood Watch, community signage, residential design guidelines, streetscape improvements, and Green Neighborhood programs.

- Planning

Neighborhood-based planning should be included in the municipal master plans and the Regional Center Strategic Master Plan.

- Program Affordability

Funding sources for the implementation of neighborhood programs should be researched by the RC.

### REDEVELOPMENT/ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- Coordinated Planning

RC should coordinate the economic development activities of the three municipalities with the efforts of the Somerset County Business Partnership, creating a Regional Center Economic Development Committee.

- Somerville Landfill

RC should assume an active role in the planning for future development on the former Somerville Landfill site.

- NJ Transit & Port Authority

RC should advocate for the establishment of direct access to mid-town Manhattan via train.

### DOWNTOWNS/MAIN STREET

- Parking

Raritan - There is a lack of municipal parking in proximity to the central business district. RC should support a program for shared parking between property owners and the municipality.

Somerville - There is a need to coordinate the business of parking under an authority or utility. In addition, there is a need for trailblazing signage for municipal lots.

RC should support these initiatives with funding and technical assistance.

- Marketing

RC should establish a program to market the Regional Center as a unified destination.

- Housing & Condition of Older Structures

RC should provide technical assistance and research funding sources to support efforts to

bring older residential and commercial buildings into current code compliance, particularly with ADA. Additionally, support is needed to address issues of code enforcement in the areas of overcrowding and illegal conversions. Municipal planning should make recommendations to ensure an appropriate mix of owner occupied, rentals, senior housing, and affordable housing.

- Access

RC should address issues of improved pedestrian access in and between business districts, public transportation between districts, and access to key tourism sites in proximity to the Regional Center.

A comprehensive report on the Strategis Planning session will be issued by the Regional Center Partnership



## THE REGIONAL CENTER

BRIDGEWATER, RARITAN, SOMERVILLE • SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

Contact: Somerset County Planning Board • Post Office Box 3000, Somerville, New Jersey 08876

Phone 908-231-7021 • www.rcpartnership.org