



# THE REGIONAL CENTER

BRIDGEWATER • RARITAN • SOMERVILLE

*A partnership for a better tomorrow*

IN SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

## APPROACHING A DECADE OF PROGRESS

Though planning for the establishment of the Bridgewater•Raritan•Somerville Regional Center began in 1995, official designation by the New Jersey Office of Planning was not received until 1998. As the first multi-municipal Center in the state, the Regional Center has become a model for cooperative planning.

The Regional Center Partnership remains at the forefront for Smart Growth and innovative planning, focusing efforts on community-based consensus building, municipal and county cooperation, public-private partnerships, and extensive public input.

Over the past 8 years the Partnership has implemented 5 major planning initiatives:

- 1999 Vision Plan
- 2002 Strategic Issues Report
- 2002 Strategic Plan
- 2005 Charting an Action Agenda
- 2006 Strategic Master Plan

These initiatives focused on strengthening downtowns, revitalizing neighborhoods, protecting natural resources, and resolving mobility issues in the Regional Center.

Regional Center initiatives include:

- Bridgewater Bus Shelter Enhancements
- Mountain Avenue Pedestrian Bridge
- Route 22 Sustainable Corridor
- Proposed Rt. 202/206 Pedestrian Bridge
- Chimney Rock Road Interchange
- Traffic Calming Study & Implementation
- Grove Street Overpass Sidewalks
- Somerset Street Streetscape
- Peters Brook Greenway

(cont. pg. 3)

## REGIONAL CENTER COMPLETES STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN

The Regional Center Partnership has completed the “The Somerset County Regional Center Strategic Master Plan,” a document that details the initiatives that will enhance the future of Bridgewater, Raritan, and Somerville. Based on the input of Regional Center stakeholders and agencies of the three municipal governments through a detailed public process, the Plan represents the next steps in Somerset County’s unique planning process. The recommendations and implementation strategies presented in the Plan were derived from input by residents, business leaders, and elected officials through a series of workshops, public meetings, a community questionnaire, and stakeholder interviews.

The intent of the Strategic Master Plan is to coordinate with the master plans of the three individual communities. Whereas the local master plans address more specific issues, goals, and policies, the Regional Center Strategic Plan addresses global and cooperative issues crossing municipal lines.

The Plan components include:

- Background information relating to the planning & implementation process
- A vision of the Regional Center 20 years out
- Identification of opportunities and constraints
- Key planning issues including land use, development activity, community design, infrastructure, housing, circulation, environmental resources, recreational opportunities, community facilities, historic and cultural resources
- Identification of goals and objectives focusing on downtowns and main streets, redevelopment areas, economic development and community design, train station areas, neighborhoods and housing, circulation, open space and natural systems, shared services, community facilities, and historic and cultural resources
- Action strategy for major recommendations
- Strategic implementation plan and agenda matrix
- Land use analysis
- Joint planning opportunities
- Indicators to evaluate progress

Specific recommendations in key areas address continued revitalization of downtowns through special financing and business assistance mechanisms; utilizing the redevelopment process to encourage reuse of brownfield sites,

(cont. pg 4)

### IN THIS ISSUE

Strategic Master Plan Completed  
Park Commission Master Plan  
Route 22 Endorsement  
NJWSA Concept Plan  
Endorsement Process Concludes  
Life Sciences Advance  
Municipal Reports

## **PARK COMMISSION DEFINES PARKS MASTER PLAN WITHIN REGIONAL CENTER**

Ray Brown, Secretary-Director of the Somerset County Park Commission presented details of the Park Commission Master Plan, emphasizing activities taking place within the Regional Center.

Mr. Brown pointed out that Phase I of the Raritan River Greenway project is complete through Dukes Park in Bridgewater with Phase II to extend eastwardly into Raritan Borough. The Greenway provides a walking/ biking path that will ultimately stretch across the entire county.

He further noted that the Frank “Nap” Torpey Athletic Complex Phase I project has been completed with the opening of lighted baseball and softball fields. Bid documents have been distributed for construction of a turf field to accommodate football, soccer, and lacrosse with plans for a multi-purpose building to serve the entire facility.

Adjacent to the complex, the Army Corps of Engineers, as part of the Green Brook Flood Control project, has constructed a trail system and two soccer fields. The trail will ultimately be a connector for the Greenway from Duke Island Park to Commerce Bank Ballpark.

Mr. Brown also noted that plans are being developed to build a new clubhouse at Green Knoll Golf Course in Bridgewater. Preliminary plans include “Green Design” to assure sustainability of the new building and support of the environment.

## **GREEN DESIGN COMES TO SOMERSET COUNTY**

Mike Kerwin, President of SSP Architectural Group, presented an overview of “Green Design” and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards to the Partnership, focusing on the opportunity for Somerset County to assume a leadership position in the movement.

The benefits to green design include a healthier work environment, employee efficiency, reduced operational costs, and environmental sustainability.

Mr. Kerwin strongly recommended that the Regional Center advocate for Green Design in all construction within the Regional Center.

## **REGIONAL CENTER ENDORSES ADVANCEMENT OF ROUTE 22 SUSTAINABLE CORRIDOR PLAN**

The Regional Center Partnership has passed a resolution in support of the advancement of the Route 22 Sustainable Corridor Plan. The formal resolution has been distributed to the governments of the three Regional Center municipalities, the Somerset County Freeholders, State Legislators, the North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA), and the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT).

The resolution states that the section of Route 22 through the Regional Center experiences accident rates three to four times the statewide average with more than 1,200 accidents in the past three years. Statistics show that Route 22 in Somerset County carries approximately 100,000 cars per day, more than twice the daily volume than the parallel section of Interstate 287.

The Suburban Boulevard design will reduce speeds and accidents by creating local and express lanes to separate local and regional traffic, while establishing new connections between the north and south sides of the Regional Center.

Thus far, over \$9 million in federal funding has been committed to the project and short term safety improvements have been designed and reviewed through an intensive public outreach program.

The Regional Center resolution endorses pursuit of design alternatives to improve traffic safety “in a manner that accommodates local traffic while maintaining capacity for regional traffic flow.” The resolution further supports the concept of Somerset County assuming long-term management for the project from NJDOT.

## **NEW JERSEY WATER SUPPLY AUTHORITY PRESENTS CONCEPT FOR WATERSHED REGIONS**

As a result of nearly a year of research focusing on protection of environmentally sensitive areas in the Regional Center, representatives of the New Jersey Water Supply Authority (NJWSA) presented the results of their study, “Opportunities for Watershed Protection & Economic Growth in New Jersey’s Urban & Suburban Watershed.” The pilot project is part of the NJ Department of Environmental Protection sponsored study of how economic development and redevelopment can be accommodated on sites with significant environmental resources.

Utilizing Geographic Information Systems (GIS) technology, NJWSA identified undeveloped and underutilized sites near critical water resources to determine if the sites were appropriate for economic development, open spaces preservation, or a combination of both.

The plans presented are case studies only and will serve as the basis for the development of a model to be implemented statewide. The two sites that were isolated are Peters Brook on the western end of Somerville at the intersection of Route 22 and 202/206; and the area adjacent to the Torpey Athletic Complex along the Raritan River.

(cont. pg 3)

## REGIONAL CENTER ENDORSEMENT PROCESS DRAWS TO CONCLUSION

The Bridgewater•Raritan•Somerville Regional Center Plan Endorsement has moved forward with submission of the Plan to the State of New Jersey. The Endorsement process is required by the state to allow the Regional Center Partnership to continue its initiatives.

The purpose of Plan Endorsement is to increase consistency among municipal, county, regional and state agency plans and the State Plan and to facilitate the implementation of these plans. The State Plan outlines six objectives that derive from this purpose:

1. To encourage municipal, county, regional and state agency plans to be coordinated and support each other to achieve the Goals of the State Plan;
2. To encourage counties and municipalities to plan on a regional basis while recognizing the fundamental role of the municipal master plan and development regulations;
3. To consider each municipality, including Centers, Cores, Nodes and Environs, within the context of regional systems;
4. To provide an opportunity for all government entities and the public to discuss and resolve common planning issues;
5. To provide a framework to guide and support state investment programs and permitting assistance in the implementation of municipal, county and regional plans that meet statewide objectives; and
6. To learn new planning approaches and techniques from municipal, county and regional governments for dissemination throughout the state and possible incorporation into the State Plan.

The Regional Center submission includes approximately 100 municipal planning reports, master plan elements, and zoning ordinances, in addition to Regional Center Plans and reports. When the State Planning Commission determines the plan consistent, it will be formally endorsed and the Regional Center Partnership will continue to be eligible for priority assistance and incentives that flow from the State.

### APPROACHING A DECADE OF PROGRESS (cont.)

- Raritan Woolen Mills Redevelopment
- Proposed Regional Center Shuttle Bus Service
- Route 28 Corridor Improvements
- Frank “Nap” Torpey Athletic Complex
- Route 22 Suburban Boulevard
- Raritan Streetscape Plan

Among the other achievements of the Partnership are:

- Priority Ranking for Competitive County, State, & Federal Grants
- Receipt of County & State Planning Grants Totaling \$484,000
- Regional Center Municipal Challenge Grant Awards of \$400,000
- Infrastructure Improvements & Construction Funding
- Receipt of Transportation Funding of \$42,400,000

The Regional Center Strategic Master Plan, detailed elsewhere in this publication, will serve to define future projects that will carry on the progress to benefit the citizens and businesses in the three municipalities.

### NEW JERSEY WATER SUPPLY (Cont.)

The study determined appropriate use and design to optimize economic, social, recreational, and environmental value of redevelopment and the value of preservation. Planning was based on an environmental constraints evaluation to determine the developable area of each site.

It was concluded that the Peters Brook site allowed .4 acres of developable land near the end of Oak Terrace off Mountain Avenue in Somerville and that the Torpey Athletic Complex site featured 5.74 acres for development fronting on Nimitz Street off Loeser Avenue in Bridgewater.

Three concept plans for the Peters Brook site were created: commercial cluster development with two intersecting buildings with ground floor retail and upper level office; small store commercial development with pedestrian and highway access; and a residential cluster of multi-family units.

The Torpey site recommendation also includes 3 scenerios: two full-size indoor soccer fields with lounge and an outdoor terrace overlooking three outdoor fields; a single-family residential cluster development surrounding common green space with pedestrian-oriented retail; maintenance of the farm-like quality of the area with an educational facility and working barn with a stable and equestrian ring.

The basic principles supporting the concept plans are to protect environmentally sensitive watershed areas while enhancing initiatives for appropriate use of lands with the potential for development. Though strictly a model at this juncture, it is hoped that the conclusions result in effective development and environmental protection in these areas and throughout the state.

### LIFE SCIENCES CENTER ADVANCES

The Life Sciences Business Plan Initiative of the Somerset County Business Partnership has made progress on two fronts, according to John Maddocks, VP of Economic & Community Development.

The Phase I marketing plan has resulted in the determination that Somerset County is in need of an “Accelerator Facility,” the next step following life science incubators. The study further determined the county’s need for additional Class A laboratory space.

Mr. Maddocks noted that discussions continue with the Borough of Somerville to explore the potential for location of a Life Sciences facility on the former landfill site. Progress is also being made on attraction, retention, and expansion activities.

## NEWS FROM THE REGIONAL CENTER MUNICIPALITIES

SOMERVILLE, NJ - The Regional Center Partnership has endorsed the grant request of the Borough of Somerville for funding to complete Phase 2 of the Peters Brook Greenway Trail. The next phase of the project will extend the recently completed multi-purpose trail along Peters Brook south from East High Street to its confluence with the Raritan River.

Peters Brook is centrally located within the Borough and the Regional Center. Implementation of the trail system will encourage active use of the greenway park and promote walking and bicycling for physical fitness.

FINDERNE, BRIDGEWATER, NJ - The Finderne Neighborhood Plan proposes to revitalize the Finderne neighborhood area along East Main Street between Finderne Avenue and Polhemus Lane. The plan suggests a variety of building facade improvements and streetscape improvements, including period-style lighting, creative signage, drop curbing, and pocket parks. The plan also proposes methods of improving pedestrian circulation.

The plan was introduced at a public forum and will be presented to the Township Council for endorsement.

BRIDGEWATER, NJ - Wyeth Corporation, current owners of the property located behind Commerce Bank Ballpark, has granted Bridgewater Township funding to retain an environmental consultant to evaluate the best uses of the site from an environmental standpoint. The final determination may or may not include a golf course.

Though a plan for the use of the property has yet to be developed, the determination must be made regarding the degree of clean-up required for indoor (residential or commercial) and outdoor (recreational) uses.

SOMERVILLE, NJ - The District Management Corporation has commissioned a study to determine the feasibility of offering cable-free Internet access throughout the central business district.

Wireless Fidelity (WiFi) access is expected to draw more people to Somerville businesses and restaurants. The report is expected to address both cost and value of proceeding with implementation and will be reviewed by the Board of Trustees.

SOMERVILLE, NJ - New Jersey Future has awarded Somerville a "Smart Growth Award" for their extensive public visioning process relative to the Landfill redevelopment project. This was the first award of its kind to be granted to a Somerset County municipality.

In addition, the Somerset County Planning Board received a similar award for its work involving the Regional Center. Both Somerville and the County Planning Board received their awards at a special ceremony held in June in Newark.

### STRATEGIC MASTER PLAN (cont.)

ensuring that these areas are developed to benefit downtowns; enhance pedestrian connections and greenways. The report further suggests the promotion of mass transit ridership and adopting neighborhood plans that address connections, community facilities, parks, and recreation.

### THE VISION

The Regional Center Strategic Master Plan provides a vision in which, over the next twenty years, the Regional Center will gradually witness the repair of natural and man-made connective systems, the improvement of the built environment, sustained residential neighborhoods, and enhanced community life. The Center's natural waterways will be utilized to connect communities. Multi-modal transportation options will facilitate movement of people and goods and strategic roadway improvements will reduce congestion. An effective system of paths and trails will diminish the need for the automobile.

New office and retail centers will be both walkable and served by efficient mass transit and traffic calming measures, enhancing safety for pedestrian and bicycle transit. Infill development and adaptive reuse of existing buildings will enhance the central business districts of Raritan and Somerville and the Finderne Main Street area will be revitalized. Major employment centers along the highways will continue to provide quality employment opportunities.

Residential neighborhoods will be strengthened through planning that will ensure that physical changes respect the traditional character.

The Regional Center will continue its innovation, municipal cooperation, sharing services and resources to continue to ensure the highest quality of life for residents and businesses.

### THE REGIONAL CENTER

BRIDGEWATER, RARITAN, SOMERVILLE • SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

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