



THE REGIONAL CENTER

Winter
2009/2010

BRIDGEWATER • RARITAN • SOMERVILLE

A partnership for a better tomorrow

IN SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

www.regionalcenterpartnership.org

2ND ANNUAL REGIONAL CENTER SUMMIT FOCUSES ON FUTURE

The 2nd Annual Regional Center Summit brought together elected and appointed officials, business people, and residents to hear the three mayors discuss the economic future of their municipalities.

Keynote speaker at the events was Caren Franzini, CEO of the New Jersey Economic Development Authority who provided an overview of grants and loans programs available to support economic growth in the Regional Center.

Bridgewater Economic Development Officer Howard Turbowitz detailed the redevelopment efforts at the 300,000 square-foot Singer-Diehl factory in Finderne. The previously abandoned site has been converted into a major warehouse and distribution center.

He also discussed the new 200,000 square-foot Somerset Tire Services new warehouse that is under construction at a former brownfields site on the east end of the township.

Raritan Borough Mayor Jo-Ann Liptak discussed the soon-to-be formed economic development committee and the projects planned for Orlando Drive, the Somerville Circle, and the former Federal Steel site.

Somerville Mayor Brian Gallagher said all redevelopment projects are about

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MUNICIPALITIES COMPLETE STATE-MANDATED SELF-ASSESSMENTS

The Regional Center Partnership has reviewed and accepted the Municipal Self-Assessment Reports from Bridgewater, Raritan, and Somerville following approval by the municipal Planning Boards and Councils. Municipal Plan Endorsement of the Self-Assessments by the State Planning Commission ensures the continuation of the Regional Center designation.

Municipal Plan Endorsement is a review process designed to ensure the coordination of state, county and municipal planning efforts in achieving the goals and policies of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The Plan serves as the blueprint for achieving these goals and provides the template for a coordinated effort among the three Regional Center municipalities.

It is through the Plan Endorsement process that local, county and state governments work together to develop coordinated capital investment and planning decision-making mechanisms that are consistent with the State Plan and with each other. The endorsement process expands upon the requirements of the Municipal Land Use Law (MLUL) and incorporates the planning initiatives of state planning agencies.

Plan Endorsement allows the communities to promote the vision and implementation of smart growth and sustainable development recommendations identified for the Somerset Regional Center in the November 2006 Strategic Master Plan. The plan states that “the Regional Center will be gradually redesigned to repair natural and man-made connective systems, improve the built environment, sustain residential neighborhoods, and enhance community life.”

Bridgewater Self-Assessment Report

The Bridgewater report states, “Bridgewater recognizes the many benefits of maintaining the Somerset Regional Center designation and continuing to create planning documents which are consistent with regional and state objectives. In addition, there are a number of important

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2009 CHALLENGE GRANTS

AWARDED

The Board of Trustees of the Somerset County Regional Center Partnership has approved the 2009 Challenge Grants for the participating municipalities of Bridgewater, Raritan, and Somerville.

The goal of the annual Regional Center Challenge Grant Program is to help achieve the broad Regional Center Partnership Vision that includes downtown redevelopment, neighborhood revitalization, connecting the three sub-centers, and using natural resources to shape development consistent grants of up to \$25,000 per project for each municipality.

“The Challenge Grants allow the municipalities the opportunity to pursue programs that enhance livability within the community,” stated Regional Center Chair Rose Evans. “The projects serve the public good, save the taxpayers money, and enhance the quality of life in the Regional Center.”

The approved Challenge Grants for 2009 are:

Bridgewater – Driver Feedback Signs

Funding will be used to target speeding motorists, primarily in the Finderne neighborhood and other areas of the Township as funding permits. The Driver Feedback Signs encourage motorists to slow down, increasing pedestrian and bicycle safety.

Raritan –Sanitary Sewer Assessment & Mapping

Funding will be used to accurately assess and map the Borough’s sanitary sewer collection system in areas that have not previously been addressed. The current mapping is 70 years old and is incomplete. The mapping will allow the information to be translated into AutoCAD and GIS for easy access and planning. This request is the Phase II of the Challenge Grant provided in 2008.

Somerville – Re-examination of Residential Zones

The funds will be used to engage a professional planner to facilitate the process of analyzing the Borough’s residential district including existing residential land use laws focusing on constraints and flaws in the existing zoning.

Recent Challenge Grants include:

2008 Grant Awards:

Bridgewater Township: Finderne Infiltration/Inflow Study

Raritan Borough: Raritan Borough Sanitary Sewer Assessment

Somerville Borough: Somerville/Raritan Public Works

Consolidation Study & Implementation Roadmap

2007 Grant Awards:

Bridgewater Township: Peters Brook Greenway Phase II

Raritan Borough: Redevelopment & Revitalization Plan for Somerville Circle Area

Somerville Borough: Comprehensive Zoning Review

SOMERVILLE & BUSINESS PARTNERSHIP

EXPLORE LIFE SCIENCES CENTER

The Somerset County Business Partnership has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the Borough of Somerville to pursue the feasibility of developing a Life Sciences Center on a portion of the Somerville landfill along Route 206.

According to the agreement, the Business Partnership will perform the planning work that will include engaging a consultant team to perform a Market Demand Analysis for the Life Sciences Center. If the initial study determines that a demand exists, phase 2 will address the Facilities Plan for the project. The entire study is expected to take 48 weeks from the time that the consultant team is named.

The Life Sciences Center will potentially be home to emerging industries cited in a recent study performed by the Partnership. The emerging industries that are likely to call Somerset County home include:

- bio-nanotechnology – the manipulation of bio-particles at the nano scale;
- bioinformatics – information technology to the biotech industry; and
- geospatial technology – geographic information systems for telecommunications, land use and homeland security.

The results of the market study and facilities study would determine if the project will move forward with the determination of the amount of land needed and the precise location of the building.

SOMERVILLE LANDFILL AWARDED

BROWNFIELDS DESIGNATION

The Borough of Somerville has secured a \$2.1-million grant from the NJ Department of Environmental Protection to begin the process of remediation of the 45-acre former Somerville Landfill. The Brownfield Development Area designation, makes up to \$5 million in grant money available annually. Grants may potentially cover 75 percent of the remediation costs.

The grant will fund research to determine the level of soil contamination and will address permitting; testing, and studies of the redevelopment area. The results will provide the information needed for the creating the remediation plan.

Upon completion of the work, the Borough will have the option of performing closure of the landfill or soliciting proposals for closure and development.

The Brownfield development sites are chosen through a competitive process that weighs factors including the quality and completeness of the application, the project's impact on the community, and smart growth principals.

ROUTE 22 SHORT-TERM IMPROVEMENTS BEGIN

Following years of discussion and funding efforts, the Route 22 Phase I Short-term Safety Improvements have begun. To date, more than \$14 million in Federal commitments have been received to fund both the short-term improvement and the long-term redesign plan..

The initial safety improvements will alleviate accident “hot spots” and improve vehicular safety. Improvements include acceleration lanes on westbound Route 22 at Finderne Avenue and Grove Street and razing of the weigh station on the center island.

Phase II, set for the Spring of 2010, includes eliminating existing u-turns through the center median and the addition of acceleration and deceleration lanes at the intersections of Gaston Avenue, North Bridge Street, Adamsville Road and in proximity to Lone Star Restaurant. Acceleration lanes will be extended from Route 202/206 eastbound and at Mountain Avenue near Immaculata High School. In addition, a new traffic signal will be installed at the intersection of Foothill Road and Ronson Road.

Somerset County has officially taken over the project management responsibilities for the study and design of the long-term Route 22 Sustainable Corridor project. The County is currently soliciting qualifications from transportation planning and engineering firms to undertake this study. It is expected that the study will begin in the early spring of 2010.

SOMERSET COUNTY RECEIVES PEDESTRIAN OVERPASS FUNDING

Freeholder Director Rick Fontana received a letter from New Jersey Commissioner of Transportation Steve Dilts informing him that Somerset County has been selected to receive \$2,057,000 in Transportation

Enhancement Program funding for the Peters Brook Greenway Extension and Pedestrian Bridge of Route 202/206. When constructed, the bridge will cross the highway south of the Hess gas station and connect the Peters Brook Greenway with Clark’s Woods and the Somerset Shopping Center. The project is a critical element in the long-term Greenway Plan that will ultimately provide a pedestrian/bicycle connection for the three Regional Center Communities.

PUBLIC OFFERS INPUT INTO PROPOSED VO-TECH ATHLETIC FACILITY

The Regional Center Partnership hosted a November 4 public meeting to review the results of the feasibility study focused on the conceptual expansion and re-orientation of the multi-purpose athletic fields at the Somerset County Vocational & Technical Schools (SCVTS) campus. Concept plans were presented for review prior to a presentation by the consultant team of Brandstetter Carroll, Inc. and The RBA Group.

The Regional Center Strategic Master Plan “identified a significant demand for high-quality multi- purpose athletic playing fields to help relieve the burden on existing facilities in the Region.”

Proposed elements of the complex include:

- Baseball Field - 90’ bases; Outfield 310’ down the lines and 375’ to 400’ to center field; Grass infield; Backstop, bleachers, bullpen, batting cages; Lights; Irrigation; Scoreboard
- Softball Field - 60’ bases; Outfield 200’ to 225’; Dirt infield; Backstop, bleachers, bullpen, batting cages; Lights; Irrigation; Scoreboard
- Multi-Purpose Fields - Sized for high school soccer, lacrosse, and field hockey; Lights; Natural grass with irrigation or artificial turf (preferred); Two fields preferred.

Additional proposals include having the Vo-Tech Culinary Arts program run the concessions; inclusion of an additional education building; a par 3 golf hole serving as a field laboratory; and a demonstration landscape area.

Next steps in the process include selection of the preferred design; approval by Vo-Tech, Regional Center and County; exploration of funding options; and identification of the lead entity to move the plan forward.

REGIONAL CENTER SELECTS OFFICERS & MEETING DATES FOR 2010

The Regional Center Partnership has selected the following officers for 2010:

Chairperson: Rose Evans
Vice Chair: Troy Fischer
Treasurer: Freeholder Peter Palmer
Secretary: James Ruggieri

Meeting will be held at 5:00 P.M. in the Engineering Conference Room at 20 Grove Street in Somerville on the following dates:

Wednesday, January 20, 2010

Wednesday, March 17, 2010

Wednesday, May 19, 2010

Wednesday, July 21, 2010

Wednesday, September 15, 2010

Wednesday, November 10, 2010

REGIONAL CENTER SUMMIT (Cont.)



Regional Center Summit participants listen to NJDEA CEO Caren Franzini

improving the quality of life for residents in the Somerville neighborhoods that are impacted. He addressed the redevelopment projects including the Landfill site, the West End, the East End, and the Kirby Avenue.

SELF-ASSESSMENTS (CONT.)

municipal needs and initiatives that the Plan Endorsement process can help to implement in the Township, including critical transportation improvements and revitalization initiatives.”

The Self Assessment Report addresses several potential commercial development sites under consideration:

- The former Central Jersey Industrial Park
- The Fischer Scientific sites on Route 202 and
- The area of Chimney Rock Road.
- There are also opportunities for limited development on a smaller scale within the existing stable neighborhood business districts of Finderne, Bradley Gardens, and Martinsville.
- Also identified are opportunities to return vacant and/or underutilized industrial properties to productive use through redevelopment including the Wyeth (American Cyanamid Site), perhaps the largest single redevelopment opportunity and challenge within the Regional Center.
- The Township has designated the Bridgewater Regional Center Core, Finderne, and the Route 22 corridor as a smart growth zone to promote mixed-use and walkable development linked to neighborhoods by an expanded open space system and balanced transportation network. Major projects that have been initiated including a neighborhood plan for Finderne, the Raritan River Greenway with connections to the Washington Valley/Second Watchung Open Space System, and initial improvements to Route 22 as part of the suburban boulevard project.

Raritan Self-Assessment Report

Raritan has identified a number of key projects that are recommended for state financial and technical assistance, primarily in order to assist in achieving the long term vision identified for Raritan in the June 2003 Raritan Borough Master Plan Update: Regional Center Strategic Plan Element. The vision for Raritan is of “a prosperous community with a high quality of life, stable residential neighborhoods, a vibrant Central Business District, a diversified economy, extensive parks and open space, modern infrastructure, and a multi-modal transportation system.”

- Orlando Drive: A key priority is to determine how the Orlando Drive corridor can be transformed. The south side of Orlando Drive is of concern due to underutilized/vacant buildings, incompatible and obsolete buildings, and uses, and uses located within the floodway/floodplain of the Raritan River.
- Federal Steel/Johnson Drive: The Federal Steel/Johnson Drive site is a major potential redevelopment site in the Borough. The Federal Steel site is a former industrial parcel that has been vacant for an extended period of time and is underutilized in its current condition. The Johnson Drive site is an active industrial area that is used for medical research/laboratories, warehousing/distribution, and other light industrial activity.

- Potential Transit Village at Anderson and Thompson Streets: As part of the downtown planning effort, the Borough is considered creating a transit village around its railroad station.

Somerville Self-Assessment Report

The Self-Assessment specifically identifies a number of key recommendations for the Borough including: that the riparian ecosystem in Somerville will be protected and restored; Downtown Somerville will be revitalized and enhanced; and Somerville’s residential neighborhoods will be strengthened as the heart of the community. The report addresses specific issues to be accomplished through the co-operation of the Regional Center, the County, and the State.

- The Borough is aggressively pursuing the redevelopment of four designated areas: the former municipal Landfill (Station Area and Landfill area), West Main Street, Eastern Central Business District and Kirby Avenue. All have adopted Redevelopment Plans and currently are in various stages of redevelopment.
- Downtown Somerville will become a major transportation hub with Somerville Train Station, Landfill and West End redevelopment areas providing a Transit-Oriented Development Village consisting of mixed-uses in densities consistent with objectives of State Plan.
- The Regional Center’s cultural and economic hubs will be linked through completion of the Raritan River and Peters Brook Greenways connecting communities along the Raritan River and Peters Brook through a system of interconnected trails and bikeways. The Raritan River Greenway has been described as the most significant natural resource and potential recreation amenity in the Borough and Regional Center.
- The Borough is working on a Safe Routes to School Plan in conjunction with a grant award from the NJ Department of Transportation.
- The Borough’s recently completed Historic Preservation Plan Element (2008) indicates the location and significance of historic sites and historic districts. The Plan Element also includes a number of recommendations to protect the character of existing stable communities including the adoption of design guidelines for historic property owners and property owners located in historic districts.

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