

THE REGIONAL CENTER

BRIDGEWATER • RARITAN • SOMERVILLE

A partnership for a better tomorrow

IN SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

www.regionalcenterpartnership.org

FEASIBILITY STUDY: VO-TECH MULTI-PURPOSE ATHLETIC FACILITY

The Regional Center Partnership is funding an investigative study to determine the feasibility of creating a multi-purpose athletic facility by upgrading the existing fields at the campus of the Somerset County Vocational and Technical Schools (SCVTS) in Bridgewater. Working closely with the Somerset County Planning and Engineering



County and local officials dedicate the multi-purpose field at the Torpey Athletic Complex

Divisions, the Partnership issued a Request for Proposals (RFP) in October of 2008. The consulting team of Brandstetter Carroll, Inc and The RBA Group were selected for this project to determine what alternatives may exist for the multi-purpose facility.

It is hoped that the facility will help to relieve the tremendous demand on existing athletic fields in the Regional Center and help to resolve over-

crowding and scheduling conflicts. The concept for the complex is addressed in the Regional Center Strategic Master Plan which may be viewed on the Regional Center Partnership web site at www.regionalcenterpartnership.org.

The need for high-quality outdoor athletic facilities in the region was demonstrated by the recently dedicated multi-purpose field at the Somerset County Park Commission Torpey Athletic Complex in the Finderne section of Bridgewater Township. The Torpey multi-purpose field will accommodate football, soccer and lacrosse. The facility also includes one regulation sized lighted baseball field and one regulation sized lighted softball field with

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REGIONAL CENTER SUMMIT (Cont.)

representing the NJ Office of Smart Growth; John Maddocks of the Business Partnership who spoke on the Route 22 Sustainable Corridor Project and the Energy Audit Programs of the County and the Business Partnership; Jef Buehler of Main Street NJ who spoke on retail issues; Bill Amann of M&E Engineers who addressed Green Design issues; Ray Brown of the Somerset County Park Commission who described the Raritan River Greenway and Open Space initiatives.



Freeholder Peter Palmer welcomes guests to the Summit

He stressed that only a cooperative planning effort among Somerville, Bridgewater, Somerset County, and NJ Department of Transportation could result in the Mountain Avenue pedestrian overpass that protects the safety of students, employees, and shoppers walking from Somerville to the Bridgewater Commons. Mr. Buehler of Main Street NJ discussed the importance of a strong retail base in the Regional Center. He addressed infrastructure issues including parking and beautification in addition to effective marketing of both the Raritan and Somerville town centers and the Bridgewater Commons as being key factors in the success of the Regional Center.

A second Regional Center Summit is being planned for the fall of 2009.

The content presented by each of the speakers was on point in support of the efforts of the Regional Center Partnership. Mr. Spinelli, representing the Office of Smart Growth, focused on the Regional Center as an example of good planning that should be followed by municipalities throughout the state.

2008 MUNICIPAL CHALLENGE GRANTS

Regional Center Partnership Challenge Grant applications for the 2008 funding round were approved by the Partnership Board. Matching grants in the amount of \$25,000 each will fund projects in each of the three communities. The projects funded are deemed consistent with the goals and objectives of the Regional Center Strategic Master Plan.

Bridgewater Township will conduct an analysis to identify sanitary sewer inflow/infiltration (I/I) problem areas and capacity issues within the Finderne neighborhood area.

Raritan will perform a similar assessment for their sanitary sewer collection system throughout the Borough.

Somerville will conduct a feasibility study to assess the costs and value of consolidation of the Raritan and Somerville public works departments.

2009 REGIONAL CENTER OFFICERS & BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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SOMERSET COUNTY PARK COMMISSION
Ray Brown, Secretary/Director

*RCP Executive Committee member

2008 REGIONAL CENTER SUMMIT AN EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

The Somerset County Regional Center Summit, "Economic, Environmental & Infrastructure Advantages for the Public & Private Sectors," was held on Wednesday morning, October 29, 2008, at the Somerville Elks Lodge in Bridgewater. The Summit was part of the Somerset County Business Partnership week-long series of "Spotlight on Somerset" events showcasing county initiatives.

The Summit provided an interactive educational forum that addressed the advantages of the Regional Center designation to governments, businesses, and residents in Bridgewater, Raritan & Somerville.

The morning-long schedule included a welcome by then-Freeholder Director Peter Palmer; Regional Center Partnership Chair Rose Evans who outlined the goals and accomplishments of the Regional Center; Ben Spinelli



Ben Spinelli addresses the Regional Center Summit guests

NJTPA ISSUES RARITAN RAIL YARD STANDARDS

The North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority has issued standards designed to regulate idling diesel engines in the New Jersey Transit (NJT) Rail Storage Yard in Raritan and other locations across the state.

The regulations address issues of both air and noise pollution and reduced fuel consumption during train storage at the facilities. The Regional Center Partnership has long supported Raritan's and Bridgewater's efforts to rectify this quality of life issue.



Diesel engines are used for approximately 40 percent of commuter rail transit including along the Raritan Valley Line.

NJT recently contracted for the purchase of 26 dual-powered (diesel & electric) locomotives with automatic start/stop devices. Plans are also in place to install automatic start/stop devices in 33 recently purchased locomotives that are expected to remain in service for years to come.

The new procedures dictate that locomotives in layover will remain connected to wayside power sources to facilitate start-up. It is estimated that resulting savings will include 1,100,000 gallons of fuel at a projected cost of \$4.4 million and significant reductions in levels of nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide, hydrocarbons, and carbon dioxide.

NJWSA PROPOSES PETER'S BROOK RAIN GARDEN INITIATIVE

At the January, 2009 meeting of the Regional Center Partnership, representatives from the New Jersey Water Supply Authority proposed the concept plan for the Peter's Brook Rain Garden Initiative. The purpose of the program is to prevent high rates of storm water runoff containing pollutants from neighborhood yards and streets from entering the brook unfiltered.

A Rain Garden is a landscaped, shallow depression that allows rain to be collected and seep naturally into the ground. Water loving native plants serve as filters for pollutants associated with storm water runoff. As the captured water slowly percolates into the ground, pollutants are filtered out and used as nutrients for the plants or broken down by microorganisms. By allowing approximately 30% more precipitation to penetrate the ground, the Rain Garden is an excellent tool for reducing the amount of storm water that reaches storm drains.



It is hoped that the success of this project will encourage property owners to use this process and similar tools to reduce storm water runoff in the Peter's Brook Watershed.

The NJWSA will take the next steps of researching the area, developing the groundwork plan, and developing a budget for the project.

STRATEGIC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION PROJECTS 2008-2009

The Regional Center Partnership recommended the following priority projects set forth in the Strategic Master Plan:

- Raritan and Somerville Joint Public Works facility feasibility study
- Raritan and the Somerset County Park Commission effort to acquire necessary land adjacent to the John Basilone statue to create a memorial park.
- Commit up to \$65,000 to conduct a feasibility study addressing the upgrading of athletic facilities at the Vocational and Technical Schools to create a regional multi-purpose recreation facility.

The resources of the Regional Center will be applied in partnership with county and municipal resources to advance these projects in a timely manner.

ROUTE 202 HIGHWAY CORRIDOR STUDY RESPONSES UNDER EVALUATION

Somerset County, in cooperation with RideWise, the Somerset County Transportation Management Association, conducted a 2008 commuter survey of drivers utilizing the Route 202 corridor between the Flemington and Somerville traffic circles.

Staff has received in excess of 1,000 comments from the public concerning issues and advancing recommendations for ways to improve traffic flow along this well traveled roadway. Among the more frequently mentioned recommendations for improvements to the corridor were establishment of a shuttle service, express travel lanes, and pedestrian/bicycle paths.

The full report including recommendations for improvement is expected in early summer of 2009.

BRIDGEWATER, RARITAN & SOMERVILLE NEWS

BRIDGEWATER TOWNSHIP PLANNING GRANT

The New Jersey Office of Smart Growth has awarded a \$60,000 Smart Future Planning Grant to Bridgewater to update the circulation plan element of the Bridgewater Master Plan.

The objective of the Plan is twofold: to identify potential pedestrian and bicycle routes that will connect Township open spaces, County park sites, school sites, and recreation sites, and to encourage the use of local roads to get to places of shopping, relaxation, and recreation without further burdening already congested routes, such as US 202/206.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Bridgewater is in the process of completing the economic development component of the Master Plan with two grants totaling \$37,100 from the Somerset County Municipal Planning Partnership Program.

This study will include a complete inventory of commercial office space in the Township, a review and recommendation for enhancements to the existing commercial zoning along Route 22, and a discussion on the impact of potential future development on the local economy, traffic patterns, and adjoining communities.

SOMERVILLE BOROUGH DESIGN STANDARDS

The Somerville Architectural Review Board and District Management Corporation are utilizing the resources available through the Main Street NJ program to help update the architectural design guidelines. The new guidelines will focus on standards for the Special Improvement District but will also incorporate a residential design to provide detailed guidance to developers seeking approval for infill construction.

JSM AT SOMERVILLE

In November, 2008, the Borough

negotiated a revised Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for development of the former Downtown Somerville Shopping Center.

The major elements of the MOU include:

- Both parties agree to work diligently to revise the Redeveloper's Agreement, Redevelopment Plan (if necessary), and Site Plan.
- Strict deadlines for the completion of all aspects of the project leading to construction
- Remedies if the parties do not reach agreement or miss deadlines

In February, 2009, JSM at Somerville, LLC advised the Borough Council of their inability to proceed with the project as approved by the Planning Board in 2005 and modified as late as September 2008. Jack Morris (President of JSM at Somerville) described how the collapse of the financial markets had made it nearly impossible for any developer to get loans for construction projects today.

He suggested that it was possible to finance a scaled down project constructed in stages. In March of 2009, Borough Council agreed that the project should move ahead with certain provisions and asked the West End Redevelopment Committee to work with JSM to define the revised project.

At this writing, negotiations are underway to define the details of the project and timing in order for demolition and construction to commence.

SOMERVILLE TRAIN STATION

New Jersey Transit (NJT) is about to embark on a project to reconstruct the Somerville Train Station to bring it into Americans with Disabilities Act compliance. The station serves 1,500 weekday passenger trips.

NJT will replace the existing low-level platforms with two high-level platforms with canopies, two new elevators, heated and air-conditioned inbound waiting room with a ticket agent office and restrooms, stairs, and heated platform shelters with windscreens.

The pedestrian tunnel will be renovated and new passenger communications system will be installed, complete with CCTVs and video message signage.

MULTI-PURPOSE FIELD (Cont.)

certain other amenities, including a concession stand, grandstands, locker rooms, public restrooms, and ample parking.

The SCVTS study will investigate the feasibility for a shared facility among SCVTS, County residents, Regional Center schools, and various athletic organizations from the Regional Center and throughout Somerset County.

The study will analyze to what extent one or more fields may be constructed given environmental or other physical constraints. The study will also address costs relative to construction, operation, and maintenance.

Planning for this project included a presentation to the Vo-Tech School Board last August that was followed up by a focus group meeting with Vo-Tech technical staff. The project will ensure the land needed for the School's long-term programmatic and capital expansion plans is preserved.

There will be at least two public meetings scheduled to see the results of the investigation and offer input into the development of various alternatives. This input will help shape a preferred alternative that will be presented at a final public meeting. The dates of the public meetings will be advertised as well as posted on the Partnership's website.