



# THE REGIONAL CENTER

Winter  
2013

BRIDGEWATER • RARITAN • SOMERVILLE

A partnership for a better tomorrow

IN SOMERSET COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

[www.regionalcenterpartnership.org](http://www.regionalcenterpartnership.org)

## REGIONAL CENTER TO TO SUPPORT TRAFFIC CALMING INITIATIVES

In early fall the Regional Center mayors met with Somerset County Planning staff to identify a project that would implement the Regional Center Strategic Master Plan goal for encouraging pedestrian and bicycle transportation.

The conclusion was reached that the project would have to address a quality of life issue that was common to the three communities while raising awareness that it was a Regional Center initiative.

On November 15, the Regional Center Partnership approved \$66,211 as seed money for potential matching funding from other grant sources for the purchase and installation of solar-powered Driver Feedback Signs (DFS). Included on the DFS signpost will be a visual representation of the Regional Center logo.

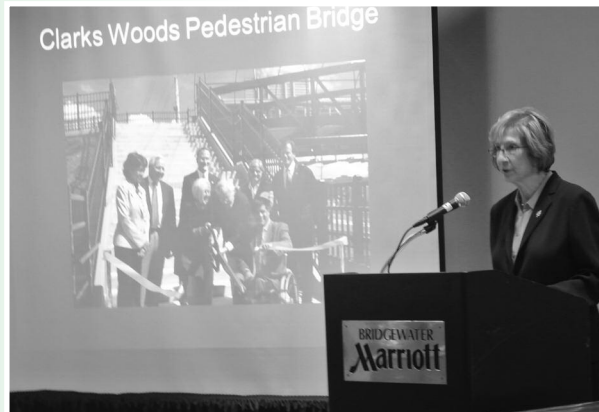
When agreed upon, funding for implementation of the project will be the responsibility of the Regional Center Partnership. The funds will be made available in equal amounts to Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville upon final agreement and execution of an inter-local agreement.

Additional meetings are planned to arrive at a mutually acceptable design for these DFS and determine the locations.

## 2012 SUMMIT CELEBRATES REGIONAL CENTER SUCCESSES

The Regional Center Partnership celebrated two decades of success at the 2012 Summit held at the Bridgewater Marriott. Opening the Summit, Freeholder Patrick Scaglione praised the Partnership for its commitment to long term economic development planning, citing participation in the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that focuses on job creation, economic investment, and developing an inventory of projects of regional significance.

Partnership Chair Rose Evans detailed recent accomplishments including preparation of



*Rose Evans Opens the 2012 Summit*

visioning and strategic planning initiatives; the development of the Frank Torpey Athletic Complex; the Route 22/Chimney Rock Road Interchange; bus stop shelter installation; two pedestrian overpasses; Raritan River Greenway initiatives; the Raritan River Sustainability initiative; and numerous projects in the three communities funded by annual Regional Center Challenge Grants.

Bridgewater Mayor Dan Hayes highlighted the demographic assets of the Township including a well-educated workforce with 54% of the adult population having earned a 4-year college degree; geography that features access to interstate and state highways; a median income of \$108,600; and an \$8.5 billion ratable base making Bridgewater the 9th largest in the state.

Challenges facing the Township include the loss of high-income knowledge based jobs with the relocation of Sanofi; the need for the Township to remain attractive to highly educated workforce; and adequately plan for future housing, retail, transportation, recreation, and employment trends.

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## RE-IMAGINING THE RARITAN RIVER WATERSHED

The Raritan Borough Economic Development Committee, the Rutgers E.J. Bloustein School of Planning and Public Policy, and the Sustainable Raritan River Collaborative, recently presented the film, “Re-Imagining Our Watershed: Renaissance on the Raritan.”

The film celebrates the numerous environmental achievements that have been accomplished in the Raritan Watershed. With Raritan Borough featured as a typical riverfront community, the film captures the enthusiasm that drives the quality of life in the borough which has increasingly turned its focus to the river.

The Raritan Basin is the largest river basin located entirely within the State of New Jersey, covering approximately 1,100 square miles and including parts of seven counties (Hunterdon, Mercer, Middlesex, Monmouth, Morris, Somerset and Union counties) and all or part of 100 municipalities. The Basin provides water to approximately 1.2 million people in central New Jersey, including drinking water, irrigation water for farms, nurseries and golf courses, and processing water for industries.

With Challenge Grant funding provided by the Regional Center Partnership, the Borough recently partnered with the Bloustein School to develop a regenerative urban design plan for a portion of the Borough’s waterfront.

## RARITAN RECEIVES 2012 BLUE RARITAN RIVER AWARD

The Borough of Raritan is the recipient of the 2012 Blue Raritan River award from the Sustainable Raritan River Collaborative for work in support of planning initiatives and projects that benefit the Raritan River. The nomination was made by the Somerset County Regional Center Partnership in the category of Government Innovation for the Waterfront Revitalization Plan.

The award was earned for the borough’s partnership with Rutgers University’s Bloustein School of Planning & Public Policy’s “Raritan River Brownfield Studio” at which graduate students developed a regenerative urban design plan for a portion of the Borough’s waterfront.

“It is a project of this type that is the cornerstone of the Regional Center Partnership effort,” commented Rose Evans, Chair of the Regional Center Partnership. “Creative thinking, effective partnerships among government and the educational community, and foresight on the part of municipal officials, all focused on maximizing the public use of a natural resource, is the fulfillment of our goals.”

The Bloustein School study results are available at <http://raritanwaterfront.com/>



*Freeholders Pat Walsh, Peter Palmer & Pat Scaglione (front row) cut the ribbon to open the pedestrian overpass above Route 202/206 while (l to r) Assemblywoman Donna Simon, Freeholder Bob Zaborowski, Somerville Councilman Tom Mitchell, Bridgewater Councilwoman Christine Henderson-Rose, and Matthew Holt, NJTPA look on.*

## **NEW ROUND OF CHALLENGE GRANTS AWARDED**

The goal of the Regional Center Challenge Grant Program is to help achieve the broadly accepted Regional Center Partnership Vision that includes downtown redevelopment, neighborhood revitalization, connecting the three subcenters, and using natural resources to shape development consistent with community planning initiatives.

### **Bridgewater - Woodlawn Avenue Sidewalk**

Funding will be used to construct a sidewalk along Woodlawn Avenue (off North Bridge Street) from Rambler Drive to the bridge over I-287. Once the entire length of the sidewalk is completed it will serve high school students living in the neighborhood and eliminate the need for Bridgewater to provide hazardous busing in this neighborhood.

### **Raritan - Improvements to the Sgt. John Basilone Memorial Park**

Funding will be used to prepare design documents for the Sgt. John Basilone Memorial Park on the property east of the current location of the Basilone Statue. The project is a result of the Orlando Drive visioning and the culmination of the Rutgers University design studio that targeted the western gateway to the Borough.

### **Somerville Borough – Gaston Avenue (Route 28) Study**

Funding will be used to conduct a full scale review of all commercial and housing conditions and permitted uses on North Gaston Avenue between Route 22 and East Main Street in Somerville, with concentration on the area from Union Avenue to East Main Street. The Borough will examine current zoning and identify amendments that may be warranted. The goal is to identify desired businesses to be located on North Gaston Avenue and make changes to the ordinances to ensure desired building uses are included in the permitted use schedules.

## **REGIONAL CENTER SUMMIT (CONT.)**

Mayor Jo-Ann Liptak of Raritan focused her comments on the ongoing effort to revitalize the waterfront area along Orlando Drive. The Borough is preparing a regenerative urban design plan that extends from the current location of the Basilone Statue on the west to Route 206 on the east. Key components of the plan are the existing structures including the Duke Farm Filter House and the Nevius Street Bridge. Preliminary plans include a boathouse, Veterans Memorial Park, a boutique hotel and tavern, a boathouse and boat launch, a mobile market, and entertainment center.



Somerville's Economic Development Director, Colin Driver, detailed the Borough's four current redevelopment areas, specifically the landfill, Kirby Avenue, West Main Street, and the east central commercial district. Driver noted that New Jersey Transit is prepared to announce a developer for 34 acres of the property and that negotiations are continuing to obtain funding for the South Davenport Street access tunnel under the rail tracks to enable a connection from Orlando Drive in Raritan to Veterans Memorial Drive in Somerville.

Mike Van Wagner, Executive Director of the New Jersey Business Action Center, provided the keynote address, stressing that New Jersey is committed to creating a climate where business is welcome. He noted that the perception of New Jersey as a positive place to do business is improving, as regulatory and business tax issues are being addressed and the knowledge is spreading that New Jersey has the educated workforce, location, and infrastructure to support business. He concluded by explaining that the State Strategic Plan would soon be adopted and is focused on enhancing local control of development where it best fits, noting that Somerset County is already a model for this approach to development.

Bob Bzik, Director of Planning for Somerset County, cited the numerous advantages of the Regional Center, most importantly the increased awareness of the benefits of municipal cooperation. He further explained that due to inter-municipal cooperation, both Somerville and Raritan have been designated as Transit Villages and have been viewed as models for the soon to be adopted State Strategic Plan.

Dan Loughlin, Managing Director of Jones Lang LaSalle, explained that the excess capacity in office space in Somerset County and the state is in part due to the changing nature of the pharmaceutical industry. He noted that there is currently an average 25.6% vacancy rate in northern/central New Jersey and a 28% vacancy rate along the I-78 corridor. Urban transit hubs are experiencing a 20% commercial vacancy rate. He stressed that the departure of Sanofi from Somerset County and Merck from Hunterdon County will have a significant impact on Somerset County and that attention must be given to the emerging bioscience industry to attract operations to the abandoned space. Detailing the strengths of the area, Somerset County enjoys excellent highway access, a strong and well-educated work force in bioscience and information technology, and high quality of life standards.

Wayne Kasbar, Vice President Brokerage for Silbert Realty and Management Company

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## REGIONAL CENTER SUMMIT (CONT.)

explained that there is a 20% retail vacancy rate statewide, noting that Somerville's linear central business district lacks visual connectivity amidst the differing building styles. The mid-density housing currently under construction, and proposed for the NJ Transit site, are big advantages for Somerville.

Tim Taylor, Executive Director of Duke Farms, concluded the session explaining that Duke Farms has become a model of environmental responsibility as it inspires visitors to become informed stewards of the land. The recent \$50 million investment has resulted in a diverse eco-system with representative wildlife, adaptive re-use of buildings, regeneration of the landscape, and energy efficient utilities.

In the first 5 months that Duke Farms has been open to the public it has attracted 200,000 visitors, developed 400 community garden plots, presented 100 programs for the public, 6 school programs for 12 schools, and has become a business incubator of organic farming. Taylor concluded the session by listing the economic development advantages of Duke Farms including applied research, education, demonstrations, recreation, and commercial development.

## REGIONAL CENTER SUBMITS CEDS REQUEST FOR COMMUNITY CENTER STUDY

The Somerset County Regional Center submitted a formal request as part of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) initiative for funding to study the feasibility of development of a regional community center.

If granted, the funds will be used to determine the best location for a community center within the Regional Center boundaries and develop a plan for its function and design.

The Regional Center Strategic Master Plan recommends the establishment of a facility that will house regional arts initiatives, cultural, and recreational events. This type of public facility is a necessary part of the facilities that contribute to the overall attractiveness of the Regional Center as a destination for business, tourism, and residential relocation.

## REGIONAL CENTER 2013 MEETING DATES

Wednesday, March 20th @ 5:00 P.M.

Wednesday, May 15th @ 5:00 P.M.

Wednesday, July 17th @ 5:00 P.M.

Wednesday, September 18th @ 5:00 PM

Thursday, November 13th @ 5:00 PM

All meetings take place in the County Administration Building Engineering Conference Room, Second Floor, 20 Grove Street, Somerville, New Jersey.

## 2013 REGIONAL CENTER OFFICERS & BOARD

Chair: Troy Fischer  
Vice-Chair: Glenn McCreesh  
Treasurer: Freeholder Director Peter Palmer  
Secretary: James Ruggieri (non-voting position)

At-large Private/Institutional Sector Representatives  
Troy Fischer, Chair, Senior General Manager, Bridgewater Commons\*  
Glenn McCreesh, Vice Chair, Vice-President of Operations, Somerset Medical Center\*  
James Driscoll, Site Manager, Workplace Solutions, Johnson & Johnson Company  
Jason Dameo, General Manager, Dameo Companies

Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders  
Patrick Scaglione, Freeholder\*  
(Freeholder Director Peter Palmer, Alt.\*)

Somerset County Planning Board  
Robert Bzik, Director of Planning, Somerset County  
Bernie Navatto, Chair, Somerset County Planning Board

Bridgewater Township  
Mayor Daniel J. Hayes, Jr.\*  
Councilwoman Christine Henderson-Rose  
Planner Scarlett Doyle  
Henry E. Reynolds, Jr., local private sector representative

Raritan Borough  
Mayor Jo-Ann Liptak\*  
Councilwoman Denise Carra  
Planner David Maski  
Don Christensen, local private sector representative

Somerville Borough  
Mayor Brian Gallagher\*  
Councilman Nick Stires  
Planning Board Vice-Chair Phil Decker  
Rick St. Pierre, local private sector representative

Somerset County Business Partnership  
Michael Kerwin, President/CEO  
(John Maddocks, Alternate)

Somerset County Park Commission  
Ray Brown, Secretary/Executive Director  
(Cynthia Sullivan, Alternate)

\*RCP Executive Committee member

## THE REGIONAL CENTER

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