

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County
Approved
Wednesday, January 19, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was convened by means of video conference.

Name/Organization

Voting Members

Troy Fischer, Chair, RCP
Jason Dameo, Vice-Chair, RCP
Victoria Allen, RWJBarnabas Health
Anthony Tufaro, Johnson & Johnson
Filipe Pedroso, Bridgewater Twp. Council
Michael Pappas, Bridgewater Administrator
Andrew Fresco, Bridgewater
Zachary Bray, Mayor, Raritan Borough
Nicolas Carra, Raritan Borough Council
Angela Knowles, Raritan Borough Planner
Nick Zamora, Raritan
Dennis Sullivan, Mayor, Somerville
Somerville Council Thompson Mitchell
Paul Drake, Somerset County (SC) Board of County Commissioners
Bernie Navatto, SC Planning Board
Walter Lane, SC Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development
Geoffrey Soriano, SC Park Commission
Dina Trunzo, SC Park Commission (Alternate)
Chris Edwards, SC Business Partnership

Non-voting County Support Staff

James Ruggieri, SC Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development

Non-Voting Guests

Barry Ableman, NJ Office of Planning Advocacy
Phil Decker, Somerville Resident
Patrick Pelliccia, Somerset County Vocational & Technical Schools
Rich Reitman, The Reitman Group

The meeting commenced at 5:00 PM.

Business Items

Call to Order

RCP Chair Troy Fischer called the meeting to order.

Attendance Roll Call

Principal Planner James Ruggieri read through the roll call and noted for the record the voting members that were in attendance.

Chair's Remarks

Chair Troy Fischer welcomed as the new members to the Regional Center Partnership (RCP) Raritan Council President Nicolas Carra, Somerville Councilman Thompson Mitchell, and Somerset County Park Commission Administrator of Leisure & Community Services Dina Trunzo who is serving as Somerset County Park Commission Alternate to the RCP. Chair Fischer also welcomed Patrick Pelliccia who is the new Acting Superintendent for Somerset County Vocational-Technical Schools following the recent retirement of Dr. Chrys Harttraft.

Adoption of Meeting Minutes

Chair Troy Fischer asked if there were any corrections to the meeting minutes. Mr. Ruggieri noted that, after staff had forwarded the draft November 10, 2021 meeting minutes to the members, staff discovered a typographical error on page 5 regarding Vice-Chair Jason Dameo's request for a motion to allocate funding from the 2021 budget for Planning Assistance Grants for Plan Endorsement Renewal; the draft minutes incorrectly said "2020 Budget" instead of "2021 Budget." There being no further changes or corrections, Chair Fischer asked for a motion to approve the November 10, 2021 meeting minutes with the noted correction. Somerset County Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane moved and Somerville Mayor Dennis Sullivan seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: 17
Nays: 0
Abstentions: 0

The motion was approved.

Adoption of Treasurer's Report for November-December 2021

Chair Fischer asked if there were any questions or comments concerning the Treasurer's Report. Noting that the Treasurer's Report was sent out with the meeting reminder, Mr. Ruggieri gave a brief overview of the Treasurer Report for the benefit of the new members. There being no questions or comments, Chair Fischer asked for a motion to approve the Treasurer's Report for November-December 2021. Mayor Sullivan moved and Somerset County Planning Board Chair Bernie Navatto seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: Troy Fischer, Jason Dameo, Vicky Allen, Tony Tufaro, Filipe Pedroso, Andrew Fresco, Zachary Bray, Angela Knowles, Nick Zamora, Dennis Sullivan, Paul Drake, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano, and Chris Edwards.
Nays: none
Abstentions: Nicolas Carra, Thompson Mitchell

The motion was approved.

Nominations and Elections

a) Election of Four (4) At-Large Private/Institutional Sector Representatives for 2-year Term

Chair Fischer and Mr. Ruggieri reported that the Nomination Report was presented by the Nominating Committee and accepted at the November 10, 2021 meeting and that the action to be taken now concerns the election for a two-year term the four At-Large Private/Institutional Sector representatives as recommended by the Nominating Committee:

- Vicky Allen of RWJ Barnabas Health
- Jason Dameo of Dameo Trucking, Inc.
- Troy Fischer of Bridgewater Commons; and
- Anthony Tufaro of Johnson & Johnson.

Somerset County Commissioner Paul Drake moved to elect the slate of the four At-Large Private/Institutional Sector representatives to the RCP Board of Trustees; Raritan Council President Nicolas Carra seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: Filipe Pedroso, Andrew Fresco, Zachary Bray, Nicolas Carra, Angela Knowles, Nick Zamora, Dennis Sullivan, Thompson Mitchell, Paul Drake, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano, and Chris Edwards.

Nays: none

Abstentions: Troy Fischer, Jason Dameo, Vicky Allen, and Anthony Tufaro.

The motion was approved.

b) Election of Officers and Appointment of At-Large Private/Institutional Sector Representative to Executive Committee for 2-year Term

Mr. Ruggieri reported that the following officer candidates were also nominated in November by the Nominating Committee: Troy Fischer for Chair, Jason Dameo for Vice-Chair, Vicky Allen for Treasurer, and James Ruggieri for Secretary. The Nominating Committee also nominated Vicky Allen to serve as the at-large private/institutional sector appointment to the Executive Committee.

Mr. Ruggieri noted that he has informed Mr. Lane and Chair Fischer that he will be retiring from Somerset County at the end of March and that he is willing to continue serving as Secretary through the end of March unless the RCP wants to elect someone else at this time to serve as Secretary for the 2022-2023 term; otherwise, a special election would need to be held at a future meeting after March to elect a new Secretary for the remainder of the 2022-2023 term.

Chair Fischer congratulated Mr. Ruggieri on his impending retirement. Chair Fischer asked if there were any questions or comments; there being none, Mr. Navatto moved to elect the slate of officer nominees and accept the appointment of Vicky Allen to the Executive Committee; Bridgewater Township Councilman Filipe Pedroso seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: Tony Tufaro, Filipe Pedroso, Andrew Fresco, Zachary Bray, Nicolas Carra, Angela Knowles, Nick Zamora, Dennis Sullivan, Thompson Mitchell, Paul Drake, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano, and Chris Edwards.

Nays: none

Abstentions: Troy Fischer, Jason Dameo, and Vicky Allen.

The motion was approved.

Public Comment Period

There were no public comments concerning the Action items on the agenda.

Action Items

Authorization to Award Year 1 of Competitive Contract for Auditing & Tax-related Services

Mr. Ruggieri reported that, pursuant to action taken at last September's RCP meeting, on October 20th staff released the Request for Proposals (RFP) to perform auditing and tax-related services for the years ending December 31, 2021 and December 31, 2022 for a not to exceed amount of \$4,000 per year. The funding for this was encumbered out of the current 2021 budget. The RFP was prepared using the County's template for soliciting proposals through the competitive contracting process. The RFP was advertised on the County and Regional Center Partnership websites and in the Courier News and Star-Ledger; also, about half a dozen accounting firms were notified by email about the RFP. One proposal was received by the December 8th deadline. The proposal was submitted by Suplee Clooney & Company for a fee of \$4,000 per year. County Purchasing reviewed the proposal and deemed it technically complete. The proposal was reviewed by the proposal evaluation committee using a weighted scoring criterion resulting in a total score of 379 out of a maximum possible score of 400. The recommendation from the Executive Committee is to award the contract to Suplee Clooney for a not to exceed amount of \$4,000 per year. Mr. Ruggieri concluded his report by noting that, if there are no questions, staff requests the contract be awarded to Suplee Clooney & Company for a not to exceed amount of \$4,000 per year.

There being no discussion, Chair Fischer asked for a motion to award Year 1 of the competitive contract to Suplee Clooney & Company to perform auditing and tax-related services for the year ending December 31, 2021 for a not to exceed amount of \$4,000 per year. The motion was made by Vice-Chair Jason Dameo and seconded by Commissioner Drake.

A roll call vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: Troy Fischer, Jason Dameo, Vicky Allen, Tony Tufaro, Filipe Pedroso, Andrew Fresco, Zachary Bray, Nicolas Carra, Angela Knowles, Nick Zamora, Dennis Sullivan, Thompson Mitchell, Paul Drake, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano, and Chris Edwards.

Nays: none

Abstentions: none

The motion was approved.

Adoption of 2022 Meeting Dates

The schedule of meeting dates for 2022 was shared on the screen. Chair Fischer noted that everyone should have received a copy of the proposed schedule of meeting dates for 2022, and that November's meeting will be on the second Thursday of November to due to the annual New Jersey League of Municipalities convention.

There being no questions, Mr. Navatto moved to adopt the 2022 Meeting Dates and Somerville Councilman Thompson Mitchell and seconded the motion.

A voice vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes: 17
Nays: none
Abstentions: none

The motion was approved.

Adoption of 2022 Budget and Work Plan

Page 2 of the proposed RCP Budget and Workplan was shared on the screen. Mr. Ruggieri presented the Final Draft Budget and Workplan for 2022 which was forwarded to everyone with the meeting reminder. A major objective of the RCP in 2022 is to build upon past successes and to continue making the Regional Center of Somerset County a premier location favorable for business investment and to live, work, shop, play and learn. The means to achieve this objective is shaped by the recommendations from the adopted Somerset County Regional Center Strategic Plan. The Budget reflects the action taken at November's meeting in which \$105,000 was committed from the 2021 Budget under Plan Implementation to offer up to \$35,000 per town in planning assistance grants to help Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville achieve Plan Endorsement Renewal. The Budget also reflects the adjustment made to the carry over amount to reflect a one-time expense plus the interest earned in November and December resulting in an adjusted carry over amount of \$18,634.24. As noted in November, the budget assumes the amount of County support will remain at \$65,792.25 and the amount of support from Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville will remain at \$10,890 per town for a total of \$98,462.25 in anticipated revenue. Adding the \$18,634.24 carry over to the total anticipated funding amount of \$98,462.25 results in a total budget of \$117,096.49.

The budget allocates funding for three line items –Plan Implementation, Non-Profit Legal/Accounting, and Public & Business Education (marketing). For Plan Implementation, the 2022 Budget allocates up to \$87,096.49 which is \$30,477.59 less than budgeted for this line item in 2021. Plan Implementation funding could be utilized to support an initiative or project identified as a priority of the Regional Center Strategic Plan, the Somerset County Walk Bike Hike Study, the Somerset County Preservation Plan, and/or the Somerset County Roadway Safety Study. Funding for Challenge Grants would be dependent on the other planned work program activities. For Public and Business Education, the budget allocates up to \$25,000 for principal marketing activities which is the same amount allocated in 2021 for this line item. This would include funding to perform the regular marketing outreach activities (Annual Achievements Report, press releases, website maintenance, newsletters, etc). The Public & Business Education portion of the budget also contemplates up to \$6,000 to support public outreach efforts. Mr. Ruggieri concluded his report by noting that, if there are no questions, staff requests the Board adopt the Budget and Workplan for 2022.

Discussion followed. Bridgewater Councilman Pedroso asked what is our marketing goal in terms of who we are trying to target, what are we trying to accomplish, and do we have a targeted email list? In response to these questions Mr. Ruggieri noted that the main objective of our principal marketing efforts is to educate the businesses and residents of the Regional Center about what the Regional Center Partnership is doing to help make the

Regional Center a great place to live, work, play, visit and learn; that is our targeted audience which we try to reach through our newsletters, press releases, website, etc; our secondary audience consists of the residents of Somerset County. Mr. Ruggieri also noted that, besides the principal marketing efforts, RCP also committed \$30,000 to fund the development and implementation of a Strategic Marketing Plan designed to reach bigger tourism and commercial markets well beyond Somerset County and even beyond New Jersey about why major employers should consider locating in the Regional Center area of Somerset County, New Jersey.

Somerville Councilman Mitchell asked if we expended the entire Business and Public Education (marketing) budget line item in 2021? Chair Fischer said no and explained that the reason is largely because in the past couple years we have not had large in-person events due to COVID which otherwise would have consumed a larger portion of the budget, e.g., the former economic summits that RCP held. Also, in the past couple years RCP was more focused on setting aside funding to ensure RCP was positioned to respond strategically when the opportunity became available to proactively respond to what had become at the time a very uncertain future regarding the state's incentives program for job attraction and retention which was critically important to the long-term economic interests of the Regional Center, e.g., Suburban Disadvantage Report, etc. Mr. Lane added that a major objective of RCP's principal marketing efforts is to highlight the value the investment the three Regional Center municipalities and the County have made to better the Regional Center, noting that we are always interested in looking at refining our marketing methods and that anyone interested in sharing ideas and recommendations is welcome to join and share them with the Marketing Committee.

Mr. Ruggieri shared that, after accounting for the current \$19,000 principal marketing contract and all other marketing-related expenditures incurred in 2021, the \$25,000 allocated in the 2021 budget for Business and Public Education (marketing) had a year-end balance of \$5,300. Chair Fischer added that the intent is not to necessarily spend all \$25,000 and that we will not spend this funding without first sharing with everyone any major marketing proposal and that everyone will have a say regarding any major funding decisions.

There being no further questions or discussion, Mr. Navatto moved to adopt the 2022 Budget and Work Plan; Somerset County Park Commission Secretary/Director Geoffrey Soriano seconded the motion.

A roll call vote was taken resulting in the following voting record:

Ayes:	Troy Fischer, Jason Dameo, Vicky Allen, Tony Tufaro, Filipe Pedroso, Andrew Fresco, Zachary Bray, Nicolas Carra, Angela Knowles, Nick Zamora, Dennis Sullivan, Thompson Mitchell, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano, Chris Edwards and Michael Pappas.
Nays:	none
Abstentions:	none

The motion was approved.

Information Items

Marketing Update

In response to the marketing-related questions raised during the discussion about the budget, marketing consultant Rich Reitman shared that over the years he has developed an email distribution list for the newsletters, that this list is besides the email distribution list used by staff, and that he has asked the Regional Center towns and anyone else to forward the newsletters to anyone who may be interested; if the newsletters are being forwarded it is difficult to gauge how far the newsletters are reaching beyond the initial distribution. Mr. Reitman added that he is continuously working to expand his list. Mr. Reitman then gave the marketing report. Mr. Reitman continues to scan daily media and municipal websites for newsletter content, he has initiated the 2021 Annual Achievements

Report, completed and distributed the January newsletter, provided regular email list management, initiated the March newsletter, continues to provide staff with weekly Analytics reports, and every Wednesday continues to feature on Facebook an article from one of the newsletters. Mr. Reitman added that based on the Analytics we are getting increasingly more website visitors almost on a weekly basis of which approximately 89% are new visitors.

Plan Endorsement Renewal

For the benefit of the new members, Mr. Ruggieri gave an overview about the Regional Center's involvement in Plan Endorsement (PE), what it means and why it's important to the Regional Center. In 2013 the State Planning Commission granted the Somerset County Regional Center PE which preserved our status as a designated "regional center" which is supposed to give us more "points" when applying for state technical and funding assistance. As per the State Planning Rules, PE is good for ten years, ie, the Regional Center's PE designation will expire in 2023 unless we pursue PE again. As shared at November's meeting, we want to get a head start on the PE Renewal process. Staff has begun preparing three draft reports -one each for Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville -detailing how much of the PIA has been achieved over the past eight years which was a condition of getting PE in 2013; e.g., master plan re-examinations as per the Municipal Land Use Law, Natural Resource Inventories, expansion of mobility options, etc.; staff will be forwarding the draft reports to each mayor for review in case we missed anything that should be added. Staff is putting some potential dates together for a meeting with the three mayors and the Office for Planning Advocacy (OPA) to clarify if the Regional Center towns are eligible for expedited PE Renewal under the proposed new rule.

Mr. Lane added that the revised PE process (PE Renewal) is moving through the rulemaking process and that we should wait until the new rule is adopted before formally commencing with PE Renewal. The state is anticipating the new rule to be adopted by the second quarter of 2022. The state is very impressed what we have accomplished so far so we should be in really good shape. NJ Office for Planning Advocacy Principal Planner Barry Ableman confirmed that based on OPA staff meetings and feedback from Governor Phil Murphy's office the rulemaking process is proceeding and that OPA is proceeding in anticipation that the new rule will be adopted. Once Somerset County gets the feedback from the three towns regarding the draft PIA progress reports we can proceed to set up the meeting where a more formal introduction to the process will be presented. Mr. Lane added that at the last State Planning Commission meeting OPA Director Rendeiro highlighted how the Somerset Regional Center will be the pilot for the new PE Renewal rule, so we have a lot of support to make this work.

Municipal and Other Reports:

Raritan Mayor Zachary Bray reported that Raritan Planning Board will be meeting next week and that the main goal for 2022 is bringing new economic life to the largely vacant Raritan Mall. DeLucia's Brick Oven Pizza is celebrating over 100 years in Raritan and has been heralded as one of the best pizzerias in the state often selling out each day due to tremendous popularity. Raritan Local private/institutional sector representative Nick Zamora reported on a recent phone interview he had on the air with New Jersey 101.5 radio host Steve Trevelise which has resulted in a lot of great feedback from people from all over the state coming to dine at Esposito's restaurant in Raritan. Raritan Planner Angela Knowles added that the Planning Board will try to prioritize the great recommendations outlined in the Sustainable Economic Development Plan.

Somerville Mayor Sullivan reported that Jane Kobuta has resigned from Borough Council and the RCP to move to be closer to family in Utah. The first big event for Somerville is the St. Patrick's Day Parade. Last night Downtown Somerville Alliance presented their budget and goals for the new year and their strategy for marketing the Special Improvement District and creating a new position called "Town Ambassador" who will be a uniformed non-law enforcement position to walk the streets, interact with people, help promote what is being done to help market the downtown, etc. The Borough added five new police officers and will assign one or two as foot patrols to be present during major public events. The redevelopment project at the southeast corner of East Main and South Bridge Streets is moving from the concept stage to formal Planning Board proposal. A new traffic signal is being installed on South Bridge Street at the entrance to the train station. Mayor Sullivan concluded his report by noting that the Borough is hopeful we will see the end of COVID and that life in town will resume the way it was in 2019.

Bridgewater Councilman Pedroso deferred to Bridgewater Administrator Michael Pappas. Mr. Pappas reported that Mayor Matt Moench could not attend the meeting. Mr. Pappas reported that Township Engineer William Burr reported to Township Council that the Township's road improvement program launched by Mayor Moench has been very successful with 64 township roads identified in need of improvement with the improvements to 62 roads completed, and that the Township was very pleased with the pricing for the improvements. Mr. Pappas recognized Councilman Pedroso for spearheading a project last year while he was Council President to identify improvements needed at all of the township's park facilities. This is important to the Township to keep its parks in ideal shape given that the larger township parks host numerous popular sporting events. Mr. Pappas noted that at the Township reorganization meeting Allen Kurdyla was named Council President and Michael Kirsh Council Vice-President. On February 12th, the Township will be hosting a Chinese New Year celebration.

Somerset County Business Partnership

Somerset County Business Partnership President & CEO Chris Edwards gave an update on Somerset County Tourism. Governor Murphy signed a bill moving \$25 million from the New Jersey Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) funding to the NJ Division of Travel and Tourism with \$5 million of this being distributed to the state's 19 Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) -including Somerset County's DMO-which will allow the Business Partnership to roughly triple its advertising ability, including advertising for special attractions in the Regional Center. Mr. Edwards noted that the remaining balance of the \$25 million funding will be used by the state to target areas impacted by the COVID pandemic. Because the state tends to direct funding more towards the state's major urban areas and the shore area, and in light of how Somerset County's tourism was especially hit hard in the travel and hospitality areas, the Business Partnership may be calling on the Regional Center municipalities to help advocate for the Regional Center to get some of this state funding assistance.

The Business Partnership recently unveiled its list of "Top 40/Under 40" recipients for 2021 and Mr. Edwards said he wanted to recognize Mayor Bray who was one of the Top 40 Under 40 to be honored.

Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital Somerset

Vicky Allen, VP, Strategic Marketing, Southern & Central Region, RWJBarnabas Health, announced that anyone who needs to get a COVID booster shot or other vaccine shot can get the shot at the mega site set up in the former Lord & Taylor store in the Bridgewater Commons Mall by making an appointment, and that there is plenty of parking. Chair Fischer added that a smoky situation occurred at the mega site the other day when all the electrical heater switches were turned on at once but fortunately the fire department was able to quickly bring the situation under control and everyone was able to keep their appointments.

Public Comment Period

There were no public comments regarding any items not on the agenda.

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.