

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County
Draft
Wednesday, July 20, 2022, Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was convened by means of video conference.

Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County

Voting Members in Attendance

Troy Fischer, Chair, RCP
Jason Dameo, Vice-Chair, RCP
Victoria Allen, RWJ Barnabas Health
Anthony Tufaro, Johnson & Johnson
Filipe Pedroso, Bridgewater Twp. Council
Michael Pappas, Bridgewater Administrator
Zachary Bray, Mayor, Raritan Borough
Nicolas Carra, Raritan Borough Council
Stanley Schrek, Raritan Borough Engineer
Nick Zamora, Raritan
Dennis Sullivan, Mayor, Somerville
Deirdre Rosinski, Somerville Planning Board
Rick St. Pierre, Somerville
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
Chris Edwards, SC Business Partnership

Non-voting County Support Staff

Erika Phillips, Somerset County Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development

Non-Voting Guests

Barry Ableman, NJ Office for Planning Advocacy
Rich Reitman, The Reitman Group
Donna Allison, Ridewise
Philip Decker, Somerville Resident

The meeting commenced at 5:00 PM.

Business Items

Call to Order

RCP Chair Troy Fischer called the meeting to order. Director Walter Lane introduced new planning board staff person Erika Phillips to the group. Ms. Phillips spoke briefly and gave the group a short description of her background in planning. The members in attendance welcomed her on board.

Attendance Roll Call

Principal Community Planner Erika Phillips read through the roll call and noted for the record the voting members that were in attendance.

Chair’s Remarks

Chair Troy Fischer welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Adoption of Meeting Minutes

Chair Troy Fischer asked if there were any corrections to the meeting minutes; there being none, Chair Troy Fischer asked for a motion to approve the May 18, 2022, meeting minutes. Somerset County Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development Director Walter Lane moved, and Somerset County Planning Board Member Bernie Navatto seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: 18
Nays: 0
Abstentions: 0

The motion to approve the minutes was approved.

Treasurer’s Report for March -April and May-June 2022

Chair Fischer asked if there were any questions or comments concerning the Treasurer Reports. There being no questions, comments, or corrections Chair Fischer asked for a motion to approve the March/April and May/June Treasurer’s Reports. Somerset County Planning Board Member Bernie Navatto moved, and Somerville Representative Rick St. Pierre 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, Michael Pappas, Zachary Bray, Nicolas Carra, Stan Schrek, Nick Zamora, Dennis Sullivan, Deidre Rosinski, Rick St. Pierre, Paul Drake, Bernie Navatto, Walter Lane, Geoff Soriano, Chris Edwards.
Nays: None
Abstentions: None

The motion was approved.

Action Items

No action items.

Information Items

Marketing RFP/SOW Update:

(Marketing consultant Rich Reitman was moved into a “waiting room” before any discussion commenced about the Marketing Request for Proposals (RFP)/Scope of Work agenda item)

Mr. Lane informed the group that the Marketing RFP was sent to the group earlier in the week to review. The final draft was the product of meetings with the marketing committee and the Regional Partnership. Mr. Lane shared his screen with the group. Information presented outlined the minimum requirements and tasks requested at a cost not to exceed \$20,000/year of contract. Information was garnered from the last draft of the RFP. Items that were updated included experience with nonprofit marketing campaigns, public relations, operating audio-visual equipment, social media campaigns and accounts. In addition, the group outlined the need for the creation of a digital annual report along with developing and rolling out a public awareness campaign, news releases and newsletter highlighting the Regional Center. Lastly, the chosen marketing group would also need to quantify and track visits to the Regional Center website, engage in website maintenance and highlight community and public events related to the Regional Center. Mr. Lane acknowledged that various members, specifically Vicky Allen and Rick St. Pierre who fine-tuned the scope of work. Mr. Lane also highlighted Angela Knowles work in putting all the feedback and input together to get this current version that was generated this evening. Mr. Fischer acknowledged that there is more clarity in this newer version and that this will enable better execution of the tasks at hand and a better understanding of the expectations. He also mentioned that the tasks were much more streamlined and that there were many alterations as a result of the pandemic. Ms. Allen spoke more to the enhancement of the scope of work being reflective of the digital world and moving away from the traditional things of the past. Mr. Lane noted the comments sent to him via email from Mr. Andy Fresco. Although, he could not be in attendance he was a part of the team that offered enhancement of the scope. He too was satisfied with newest version that is being circulated and reviewed.

Chair Fischer asked for a motion to approve the newest version of the Marketing RFP to solicit marketing services for the Regional Center. The motion was made by Mayor Sullivan and seconded by Ms. Rosinski. A roll call vote was not taken since there was no expenditure of funds. All participants voted AYE. There were no NAY votes.

Questions:

Ms. Rosinski inquired where the RFP would be posted and advertised. Mr. Lane responded that it would be posted on the County’s website, the Regional Center’s website, and an advertisement would be run in the Star Ledger Newspaper. Mayor Sullivan reiterated that he would like to see an aggressive outreach toward marketing agencies and to get as many eyes on it as possible. Mr. Edward noted that he would send the RFP out to his many counterparts to ensure that we get a variety of candidates.

Rich Reitman was brought back into the Zoom Meeting Room.

Municipal and Other Reports:

Bridgewater: Michael Pappas reported that the township has been continuing its campaign of aggressive road improvements. The township recently had an approval of an \$8M bond ordinance. The Township has been broken down to six (6) sections and the contractors are dealing with each area section by section. Councilman Pedroso awarded the contracts. The mayor and council settled with Advance Realty Company. There were detailed negotiations, and a settlement was approved. The governing body and planning board have settled on an outcome. The result will enhance the 202/206 corridor. Councilman Pedroso expressed happiness about the settlement. He noted that he was not a fan of the original development because it was expensive and would impact the character of Bridgewater. He noted that the agreement satisfied everyone.

Raritan: Mayor Bray extended an invitation to 3rd Annual Discovering Raritan on Saturday, July 30, 2022, from 3-9pm. Highlights include sidewalk sales at local businesses, an ice cream eating contest, food trucks, a bubble show, a DJ, a Band and adult refreshments. He thanked the County for cleaning the old gold driving range on Orlando Drive. It’s a first step in connecting over Route 206 to Somerville, Raritan to Duke Island Park/Duke Farms. An update was also given by Stan Schrek regarding the NJ DOT TAP Grant. He gave some background

and explained how the grant would help increase connectivity between transit and Duke Farms. They received a \$1M award in 2016 and signed paperwork in 2017. They received funding for the design pool in 2019 then the pandemic hit. Hopeful that Spring of 2023 they will have a project ready. They received an additional \$636K awarded to the project due to rising costs since the award in 2016. Currently, three redevelopment projects in Raritan and \$1M in capital improvement projects are on tap for the township.

Somerville: Sullivan stated that they have a host of outside events going on in Somerville which includes Thursday Night movies, the Friday night car show and Saturday concerts. There will be Courthouse green events at the County. The street fair is scheduled for Oct. 2nd.

The Borough is aggressively working on infrastructure improvements. Currently, they have \$5M bond approved by the Council to create a new road to improve access to Highway 206 North to coincide with the train station development. He stated that this will alleviate traffic on S. Bridge Street. This improvement will prohibit southbound traffic on Highway 206. Financing will be arranged through a bond that is in place. He reported that rentals in Somerville are strong. Townhome developments are strong as well and there is a scheduled ribbon cutting for a development this Fall. Council is also preparing for the sale of the sewer system via an ordinance. Developing a public referendum to go on the November ballot. The referendum should be adopted at the Aug. 1 meeting. This will allow for informational packets to be put together to educate the public. The transaction will enable for the sale of the public sewer system to a private entity. This referendum will relieve the borough of the expense of maintaining the sewer system and allow for funds to be brought into the borough. Groundbreaking is scheduled for the Fall for the new EMS building. Final paperwork was signed for the construction. It is scheduled to take 18-24 months for the construction with an opening in early 2024.

Somerset County Business Partnership: Chris Edwards gave an update on the project collaboration for the Sip and See Somerset Campaign. Mr. Edwards gave some background on how the county lost a lot of business travel due to Covid, especially overnight hotel stays. The goal now is to bundle short day trips that are four (4) hours or more into an overnight stay. The project is centered around five (5) locations in the county. The idea is to promote more than the five locations. Mr. Edwards mentioned that there is a QR code associated with the passport, and it allows people to see in real time the events going on in region. A host of articles about the area have been generated due to bloggers and newspaper reporters attending a tour and writing about the collaboration. This is phase one. Phase two will be a Harvest Edition in the Fall. He noted that he thinks all three towns will benefit from this program

Somerset County Park Commission: Geoff Soriano gave an update on Duke Island Park. Paving of the greenway trail is going to be completed by the end of the week. Two bridges are out near Roberts St. and the Liquor Barn. Currently working on a fix. He also mentioned a summer concert series that occurred that highlighted a new genre of music. Invited everyone to visit area eateries and reminded everyone of the 4H Fair in August.

Plan Endorsement Renewal Update:

Barry Ableman New Jersey Office for Planning Advocacy (NJOPA) informed meeting members that all the municipalities will be receiving within the next month a letter from Donna Rendiero, Executive Director of NJOPA with instructions on information gathering for the Regional Center ten-year renewal. Any questions he noted he is available.

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.

Meeting adjourned at 5:45