

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County
Draft
Wednesday, November 10, 2022, Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was convened by means of video conference.

Name/Organization

Voting Members in Attendance

Jason Dameo, Vice-Chair, RCP
Victoria Allen, RWJBarnabas Health
Anthony Tufaro, Johnson & Johnson

Filipe Pedroso, Bridgewater Twp. Council

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

Walter Lane, SC Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development

Geoffrey Soriano, SC Park Commission

Non-voting County Support Staff

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

Non-Voting Guests

Matt Blake, NJ Office for Planning Advocacy
Rich Reitman, The Reitman Group

The meeting commenced at 5:00 PM.

Business Items

Call to Order

RCP Vice Chair Jason Dameo called the meeting to order in the absence of Chair Troy Fischer.

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

Vice Chair Jason Dameo welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Action Items

Adoption of Meeting Minutes

Vice Chair Jason Dameo asked if there were any corrections to the meeting minutes; there being none he asked for a motion to approve the July 20, 2022, meeting minutes, Somerville representative Rick St. Pierre moved, and Somerset County Planning Board Member Walter Lane seconded the motion.

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

Ayes:	11
Nays:	0
Abstentions:	2

The motion to approve the minutes was approved.

Treasurer’s Report for July -August and September-October 2022

Vice Chair Dameo asked if there were any questions or comments concerning the Treasurer Reports. There being no questions, comments, or corrections Vice Chair Dameo asked for a motion to approve the July/August and September/October Treasurer’s Reports. Somerville Representative Rick St. Pierre moved, and Planning Director Walter Lane, seconded the motion.

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

Ayes:	13
Nays:	0
Abstentions:	0

The motion was approved.

2023 Budget and Work Program:

The Regional Center 2023 Budget and Work program draft was discussed and presented by Deputy Director Knowles. She stated that it builds on the work that has been done over the past few years. The budget includes anticipated revenue from towns and the county, with a carryover of \$54,000 from 2022, resulting in a total budget of \$152,481.17. The budget includes a focus on plan implementation and strategic plan update, with \$65,000 allocated for a consultant to engage in an RFP process. Additionally, funding is allocated for challenge grant initiatives and plan endorsement, nonprofit legal accounting services, and public and business education

programs. The budget is for discussion and no action will be taken until the next meeting in January, where any comments and concerns will be incorporated in the revised draft. Somerville representative, Rick St. Pierre had concerns about the amount of money allocated for a strategic plan update and questioned whether it were necessary. There was some additional discussion around this topic. Deputy Director Knowles responded and informed him that this was merely a placeholder for future work.

Auditor's Report

The annual auditor's report was reviewed by the group. Copies were sent electronically, and hard copies were available for pickup. Deputy Director Knowles asked if there were any questions related to the report. Director Lane noted that the important thing was that the books were in order and that no issues were found by the auditor. He noted that the Regional Center is on a continued streak in which there are no corrective actions necessary because everything has been in good standing. None of the members asked any questions. Raritan Mayor Bray made a motion to approve the auditors report and the motion was seconded by Director Lane.

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

Ayes:	13
Nays:	0
Abstentions:	0

The motion was approved to accept the auditor's report.

Review of Marketing and Communication Consultant Proposals:

(Marketing consultant Rich Reitman was moved into a "waiting room" before any discussion commenced about the Marketing Proposals)

Deputy Director Knowles explained to the group how decisions were made in picking the Marketing Consultant for the Regional Center. She gave a quick summary of the proposals that were finalists in the process. In addition, she elaborated on the considerations the interviewing committee contemplated in choosing the final two consultant groups. She explained that the larger committee did the scoring of the four proposals and that the two finalists were then interviewed by the smaller committee made up of herself, Victoria Allen and Erika Phillips. The final two candidates were Rich Reitman of the Reitman Group and Courtenay Mercer of Mercer Planning Associates. Interviews were conducted on October 18, 2022, via Zoom. She explained that although the smaller interviewing team believed both consultants had an extensive knowledge base in marketing for non-profits one consultant seemed to be a better fit. All members thought that the Reitman Group had a rich historic knowledge base of the RCP, the organizations, and the towns here in the County. The interview team cited Mercer Planning Associates' extensive knowledge in marketing for nonprofits and Courtenay Mercer's fresh approach to looking at downtown and smart growth organizations as reasons for the decision. Courtenay currently runs her own consultancy, Mercer Planning Associates, and has big clients such as Downtown New Jersey, for whom she does marketing. The marketing committee also noted Courtenay's skillset in event and conference planning and her tech savviness as factors that made her a good fit for the organization. During the discussion, it was also mentioned that the marketing committee wanted to move in a direction that was more community engagement-focused, which was why the communications part was added to the RFP when it was sent out. Courtenay discussed the possibility of piggybacking off other events or promotions to maximize the organization's budget. However, she also mentioned that the budget may not be able to cover all the planned marketing and communications efforts, which led the marketing committee to think more in-depth about the strategic plan and how they want to move forward with the larger RCP group.

Overall, the group praised Angela's job of encapsulating all the information. Courtenay's qualifications as a professional planner and her work with the office of smart growth and the state planning commission make her well suited for the work with the Regional Center. The group was open to answering any questions, and Vicky and Erika also chimed in with additional information. Director Lane disclosed that Courtenay worked for the Somerset County Planning Board some years back and that she currently does contract work with the Somerset County Cultural and Heritage Commission. He said that they had been pleased with her work and that she comes highly recommended.

After further discussion, Deidre Rosinski, made a motion to move forward with the group's choice of MPA and Courtenay Mercer to be the Marketing and Communications consultant for the Regional Center Partnership. The motion was seconded by Vice Chair Jason Dameo.

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

Ayes: 11

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 2

The motion was approved to take the recommendation of the interviewing committee and to contract with Mercer Planning Associates for Marketing and Communications Services for 2023.

Information Items

Plan Endorsement Renewal Update:

Matt Blake from the New Jersey Office of Planning Advocacy was present in the meeting. He explained that the partnership had gone through the plan endorsement process in 2013 and the clock is ticking to get the partnership and the member communities through the process again. He also mentioned that the state planning commission is in the process of updating the rules that haven't been updated in over a decade, and a new expedited renewal process is being considered, as the current process requires going through the whole process again after 10 years. He then explained that the partnership will soon receive a letter and a draft outlining the steps involved in initiating the process, and that the process will require a letter from the mayor and a resolution from each town and the county. He also mentioned that the partnership is in good shape and much of the work is already done, as they have a good strategic plan and are up to date on monitoring reports.

Municipal and Other Reports:

Raritan: Mayor Bray and Stan Schrek, reported that there are a couple of new businesses opening in the town, specifically, Somerville's first location of Ambee Coffee. The focus for the rest of this year and going into next year is the Raritan Mall, with a focus on getting something in front of the planning board that is beneficial to the town. The mayor also mentioned that the developer for the strip mall next to the Raritan Mall is planning to make improvements and that a four-story residential complex is planned with rooftop amenities. The developer will be before the planning board on the 30th. Additionally, Mayor Bray and Schrek mentioned that Raritan is also focused on infrastructure projects, such as the \$600,000 in sanitary sewer repairs that were funded by Covid funding and \$600,000 in DOT grant work that is currently under construction.

Bridgewater: Bridgewater did not have any updates to report, as the mayor was not present.

Somerville: Mayor Dennis Sullivan reported that there is a lot going on in Somerville and infrastructure is one of the main things. He mentioned that there was a successful public referendum on Tuesday night for the sewer system, and it was approved almost 3 to 1. He also mentioned that they will be going through the legal steps to formalize everything, and the sewer system will likely be operating for most of the next year and shifting over in

the last quarter. He also mentioned that there are other projects going on such as the solar farm initiative on the former landfill on 206, the emergency services facility at the old Gaston Avenue bakery site, the Baker Taylor site, and small business Saturday. He closed by saying that there is a lot of optimism from many sources and looks forward to continuing their association with the Regional Center.

Somerset County Business Partnership: no report

Somerset County Park Commission: no report

Public Comment Period

Congratulations were made to Walter Lane and the Borough of Somerville for their accolades from the NJ Chapter of the American Planning Association. Walter received the Budd Chavooshian Award for Outstanding Professional Planner. Somerville was awarded the Outstanding Implementation Award for the Borough of Somerville Station Area and Landfill Redevelopment Plan and

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 5:45