

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County  
Wednesday, December 6, 2023, Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was convened by means of video conference.

**Name/Organization**

**Voting Members in Attendance**

Troy Fischer, Chair  
Vicky Allen, RWJ Barnabas  
Nicolas Carra, Raritan Borough Council  
Nick Zamora, Raritan Borough  
Zachary Bray, Raritan Borough  
Andrew Fresco, Bridgewater Township  
Filipe Pedroso, Bridgewater Township  
Dennis Sullivan, Somerville Mayor  
Thompson Mitchell, Somerville Council  
Deidre Rosinski, Somerville  
Rick St. Pierre, Somerville  
Bernie Navatto, Planning Board Chair, Somerset County  
Janine Erickson, SC Park Commission  
Walter Lane, SC Office of Planning, Policy and Economic Development

**Non-voting County Support Staff**

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

**Non-Voting Guests**

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**

Supervising Planner Erika Phillips did the roll call and noted for the record that there were 14 voting members present.

**Chair's Remarks**

Chair Troy Fischer welcomed everyone to the meeting.

## **Action Items**

### **Adoption of Meeting Minutes**

Chair Troy Fischer asked if there were any corrections to the meeting minutes; there being none he asked for a motion to approve the September 20, 2023, meeting minutes, Somerville representative Rick St. Pierre moved, and Somerset County Planning Board Chair Bernie Navatto seconded the motion. There was some discussion of the people that were not in attendance at the last meeting and those members abstained from voting.

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

Ayes: 9

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 5

The motion to approve the minutes was approved.

### **Treasurer's Report for September and October 2023**

Supervising Planner Erika Phillips presented the September and October 2023 Treasurer's Reports. She gave an overview and explanation of expenditures and deposits. She asked if there were any questions or comments concerning the Treasurer's Report. There being no questions, comments, or corrections Chair Fischer made a motion to approve the September and October 2023 Treasurer's Reports. Somerset County Planning Board Chair, Bernie Navatto moved the motion, and Somerville business owner Rick St. Pierre seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: 14

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 0

The motion was approved.

### **Meeting Dates for 2024**

Members were given the RCP meeting schedule for 2024. Erika Phillips asked whether people felt comfortable gathering in person instead of via Zoom. Participants said that they were comfortable meeting in person and that they would like to go back to in-person meetings. Therefore, it was decided that we would hold the 2024 meetings in the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor Engineering conference room at the Somerset County Administration Building moving forward. There was some discussion surrounding those that travel for work and cannot make every meeting in person. It was requested that we have a hybrid set up in the conference room for anyone that needs to sign on through Zoom. Walter Lane noted that the Planning Department had a new OWL device that enables the use of Zoom for a hybrid set up and that he would try to have it available for future meetings. Bernie Navatto moved to go back to in-person meetings and Deidre Rosinski seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: 14

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 0

The motion to approve the meeting dates for 2024 and to meet in person was approved.

### **2024 Draft Budget and Workplan**

Erika Phillips and Planning Director Walter Lane presented the 2024 Draft Work Budget Plan. In their discussion they disclosed how they maintained most of the elements of the previous year's budget while increasing the funding for challenge grants and planning for a regional center retreat. Allocations included a strategic plan update, challenge grants for the towns, increased funding for non-profit legal services (auditor) and marketing outreach efforts. The town's contributions would remain the same and formal adoption would occur at the January meeting. Director Lane explained that the plan is for the executive committee to come together and discuss challenge grant themes and determine allocation amounts. He also encouraged the meeting members to submit grant ideas/ themes that they think should be considered. There was some discussion around this being the formal implementation of all the planning that has been done over the years with the utilization of the challenge grants.

### **Marketing Services and Auditor Services**

Erika Phillips and Director Lane explained to the group that they were seeking approval for moving forward with the development of RFP's (Request for Proposals) for both auditing and marketing services. Director Lane reiterated that we would do our best to have both RFP's ready for the board at the January 2024 meeting, release the RFP's and bring someone on board or extend the current contract. A motion was made by Zachary Bray to authorize the issuance of the RFPs for those 2 services and the motion was seconded by Thompson Mitchell.

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

Ayes: 13

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 1

The motion was approved.

### **Marketing Consultant /Website Update from MPA:**

Courtenay Mercer of MPA sent a statement of updates to be read to the board. She anticipated that the website would be ready to go live by the end of the year and that MPC would proceed with the content update outlined in the communication strategy previously presented to the board. This entails converting the information in PDF's into actual web pages to enhance accessibility and search engine optimization.

### **Information Items**

### **State Plan Endorsement:**

Director Lane introduced Donna Rendiero, Executive Director of the Office of Planning Advocacy to the group. Executive Director Rendiero provided updates on the progress related to updating the New Jersey State Plan. She highlighted the importance of regional coordination and commended Somerset County as a model for good planning. She also discussed the ongoing state development and redevelopment plan update, emphasizing the need for early community engagement. The timeline includes issuing a preliminary plan in March or April, followed by cross-acceptance procedures involving public hearings in each county. She also mentioned efforts to support counties with resources including planning grants and intern assistance. Technological advancement will be leveraged for mapping and public input, and rule changes have been made to facilitate electronic document submission and virtual meetings. The floor was opened for questions and comments with Director Lane expressing gratitude for Donna's work and stressing the significance of a bottom-up approach. Donna reiterated her willingness to engage with communities and emphasized the benefits of early input for an improved planning process.

### **Municipal Updates:**

**Somerville:** Former Mayor Sullivan expressed gratitude and shared updates on the town's progress during his 28 years of service. Some of the achievements he mentioned included the completion of the new council chambers, ongoing construction of the emergency services complex on Gaston Avenue, the redevelopment projects like the train station and the positive transformation of the town's southeast corner. He highlighted the completion of these plans and thanked colleagues, representatives, and the incoming Mayor Brian Gallagher who he believes is well qualified for the job. The former mayor noted the town's growth since 1978. He said that the collaborative efforts of the group were the main reasons for its success. Some of the highlighted events for December were Santa's visit on the 15<sup>th</sup> in the downtown area and ice skating.

**Bridgewater:** No new updates from Bridgewater.

**Raritan:** New Mayor Nick Carra noted that he had some discussions with potential buyers of the old Agway building by the train station. They are especially eager about this endeavor since the news of the one seat ride. He also made mention that he and Don Tozzi are prioritizing downtown development. They noted that they want to add variety to the types of businesses they have in Raritan because some residents have said that there are a lot of the same types of businesses. He also said that he wanted to create more options for parking. They want to mirror what Somerville has been doing with their business alliance.

**SC Parks Commission:** No updates.

### **Public Comment Period:**

No comments

### **Adjournment**

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 5:50