

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County
Wednesday, September 18, 2024, Meeting Minutes**

The meeting was convened in person.

Name/Organization

Voting Members in Attendance

Troy Fischer, Chair
Tony Tufaro, Johnson & Johnson
Filipe Pedroso, Bridgewater Township Council
Nicolas Carra, Raritan Borough Mayor
Donald Tozzi, Raritan Borough Council
Joseph Brosnan, Raritan Borough
Nick Zamora, Raritan Borough
Brian Gallagher, Somerville Borough Mayor
Rich Reitman, Somerville Borough Council
Rick St. Pierre, Somerville Borough
Walter Lane, Somerset County Planning Division
Daniel Hayes, Somerset County Park Commission

Non-voting County Support Staff

Victoria Schulz, Somerset County Planning Division

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 Community Planner Victoria Schulz performed the roll call and noted for the record that there were 11 voting members present. Somerset County Park Commission Representative Daniel Hayes joined the meeting after roll call.

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 May 15, 2024, meeting minutes, Somerville representative Rich Reitman moved, and Raritan representative Joseph Brosnan seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: 11
Nays: 0
Abstentions: 0

The motion to approve the minutes was approved.

Somerset County Park Commission representative Daniel Hayes joined the meeting.

Treasurer’s Report for May/June and July/August 2024

Planning Director Walter Lane presented the May/June and July/August 2024 Treasurer’s Reports. He gave an overview and explanation of expenditures and deposits. He 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 May/June and July/August 2024 Treasurer’s Reports. Somerville Mayor, Brian Gallagher moved the motion, and Raritan Mayor Nicolas Carra seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: 12
Nays: 0
Abstentions: 0

The motion was approved.

Somerville Challenge Grant Extension Request

Planning Director Walter Lane summarized the Challenge Grants that were given out during COVID to help recover from the Pandemic. The grant period was two years, Somerville Borough has asked for an additional year to complete the project. Somerville Mayor Brian Gallagher explained to the Board that the Grant predates his time as Mayor and that COVID slowed the project, but it is being revitalized. Somerville Business Owner Rick St. Pierre explained that it is an agreement with Provident Bank on Main Street that has been closed and that low rent has been secured art groups can use the space for the holidays and further. The project is the same as what was originally approved. Somerset County Park Commission’s Daniel Hayes moved to extend Somerville’s Challenge Grant and Somerville Councilman Rich Reitman seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: 12

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 0

The motion to extend Somerville's Challenge Grant was approved.

New Member Recommendation by Mayors for At-Large Vacant Position

Planning Director Walter Lane asked to table the decision at the request of the three Mayors. The recommendation is still being discussed amongst the Mayors.

Information Items

Findings and Next Steps from May Strategic Planning Retreat

Planning Director Walter Lane reviewed the summary of the May Strategic Planning Retreat developed by Courtenay Mercer of Mercer Planning Associates. Director Lane explained that creating a new Strategic Plan with the results of the retreat would help memorialize the new ideas from the retreat and serve as a guide for the Board to accomplish the new goals. Chair Troy Fischer commented that updated affordable housing guidelines may be troubling counties, municipalities, and regional areas and it is difficult to come up with a regional solution. Somerville Mayor Brian Gallagher mentioned the rushed timeline to adopt these guidelines also makes it more difficult to do so. Somerville representative Rich Reitman commented that altering the RCP meeting agenda to include 15-minute discussions surrounding topics from the May Retreat would be helpful going forward to brainstorm ideas. Chair Troy Fischer added that how RCP embraces different ideas such as embracing the Raritan River can impact how neighboring municipalities will address these topics as well. Essentially, the Regional Center can be a leader in many initiatives. Director Walter Lane mentioned inviting those knowledgeable about these topics to present to the Board so that a discussion can be sparked from these ideas. Director Lane also advocated for the creation of a new strategic plan.

State Development and Redevelopment Plan Update

Director Walter Lane updated the Board about the upcoming State Plan, the preliminary draft has not been released as of the September 18, 2024 meeting. Director Lane said that the State is developing and has released a beta version of a Smart Growth Explore tool help municipalities and counties analyze their jurisdictions for development or redevelopment. Somerville Mayor Brian Gallagher asked about the RCP formerly having a State Plan representative. Director Lane said he would inquire about a new representative being present.

Municipal Updates

Raritan: Raritan Mayor Nicolas Carra began the Municipal Reports by discussing the Borough being sued for \$100 million dollars by the developer of the Raritan Mall Project and that the Borough's insurance company selected a law firm to represent the Borough in this matter. In June, Mayor Carra, Donald Tozzi, and Jessica Paolini from Somerset County Economic Development took a walk in Raritan

downtown with Somerset County Business Partnerships' Jeff Buhler to discuss downtown enhancement. The information was given to Consultant Angela Knowles in doing a Raritan Downtown study for a Sustainable Economic Development Plan. Raritan Planner Joseph Brosnan mentioned the new Raritan municipal building still being worked on. Raritan Councilman Donald Tozzi discussed the Basilone parade that is scheduled for the weekend following the meeting.

Bridgewater: Bridgewater Councilman Filipe Pedroso yielded his time.

Somerville: Mayor Brian Gallagher discussed Somerville discussing reviewing and accepting planners for developing and redeveloping town, specifically for affordable housing planner, a day-to-day planner, and a "documents planner" to help update municipal plans. Recently, Somerville has had two concept plans for redevelopment submitted to the planning board recently: one is on the East end of Main Street to build more than 175 units in the middle of a flood plain and the other is the Granetz building. Mayor Gallagher also discussed South Adamsville Road as a project with Bridgewater Township to help deal with the truck traffic. Mayor Gallagher concluded by praising SC Parks for working with Somerville to move equipment into Torpey Park to avoid being damaged by floods. Somerville representative Rich Reitman highlighted that in 2025, the Tour of Somerville will be the 80th running and result in a weekend of events.

SC Parks Commission: Somerset County Park Commission Representative Daniel Hayes highlighted pickleball courts being installed at Milltown Road and a new pickleball Commissioners' Cup Countywide Tournament that is open to all County residents.

Johnson & Johnson: Johnson and Johnson Representative Tony Tufaro discussed J&J being settled into their new buildings and that everything is going well.

Bridgewater Commons: Chair Troy Fischer highlighted that Fogo De Chao is now open in Bridgewater Commons. Chair Fischer also highlighted the new medical facility in The Village having a soft opening at some point in early to mid-October and a grand opening on November 12, 2024. Finally, Chair Fischer discussed some possible new stores for the former Banana Republic space.

County: Director Walter Lane discussed the recent public hearing for the upcoming Circulation plan. Director Lane also highlighted the upcoming Electric Vehicle study in order to transition the County fleet of vehicles to EVs and public charging infrastructure, funded by the North Jersey Transportation Authority. The County is actively working on open space and historic preservation projects. The County is also working to update the County Investment Framework and will eventually be out for municipal comment. Director Lane additionally discussed the County Cultural and Heritage Commission updating their plan for eligibility for some funding. Somerville Business Owner Rick St. Pierre asked if grant funding availability exists for the municipalities through the County's Local Arts Program and Director Lane said it does.

Public Comment Period

No comments

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 5:50