

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County
Wednesday, January 17, 2024, Meeting Minutes**

In- person meeting at Somerset County Administration Building
Engineering Conference Room-2nd Floor

Name/Organization

Voting Members in Attendance

Troy Fischer, Chair
Vicky Allen, RWJ Barnabas
Tony Tufaro, Johnson & Johnson
Nicolas Carra, Mayor, Raritan
Nick Zamora, Raritan Borough
Donald Tozzi, Raritan Borough Council
Joseph Brosnan, Raritan Borough Engineer (via phone)
Brian Gallagher, Somerville Mayor
Rich Reitman, Somerville Council
Rick St. Pierre, Somerville, Private Sector
Bernie Navatto, Planning Board Chair, Somerset County
Chris Edwards, SC Business Partnership
Daniel Hayes, SC Park Commission
Walter Lane, SC Office of Engineering and Planning

Non-voting County Support Staff

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

Non-Voting Guests

Janine Erickson, SC Park Commission, Alternate

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 fourteen (14) voting members and one alternate voting member 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; with there being none he asked for a motion to approve the December 6, 2023, meeting minutes, Somerville representative Rick St. Pierre moved, and Raritan Mayor Nick Carra seconded the motion. There was some discussion about members of the meeting that were not in attendance during 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 November 2023 and December 2023

Supervising Planner Erika Phillips presented the November 2023 and December 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 November and December 2023 Treasurer's Reports. Somerville Mayor Brian Gallagher moved the motion, and Somerset County Planning Board Chair Bernie Navatto seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: 9

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 5

The motion was approved.

Adoption of the 2024 Budget and Workplan

Planning Director Walter Lane presented the 2024 Draft Work Budget Plan to be adopted by the group. In his discussion he emphasized that the plan is based on anticipated income and that the funding amounts serve as placeholders for potential expenditures. He noted that no specific expenditures were being authorized at this moment; instead, the plan was providing a framework for future decisions. Specifically, he noted revisiting the use of Challenge Grants for the towns. He mentioned that in years past the group

had grants that fell under various themes, ideas and projects like tourism, community enhancement etc. He requested that the group consider various themes and ideas for the Challenge Grants and that they submit their ideas to Erika Phillips. Ideally, the goal is to have some flexibility with a chosen theme to effectively address the various needs of the community. It was noted that the Executive Committee would meet and come back to the group with ideas. These suggestions would then be discussed and potentially voted on during the March meeting. He noted that an eighty-five-dollar (\$85) error on the last version of the workplan was corrected. Chair Troy Fischer made a motion to adopt the 2024 Budget Workplan, Rick St. Pierre moved the motion and Bernie Navatto seconded the motion. A voice vote was taken, and the ayes carried the motion. There were no opposition votes or abstentions.

Information Items

Update of Marketing Services and Auditor Services RFP

Director Lane explained to the group that the RFP's (Request for Proposals) for both auditing and marketing services are currently being worked on with plans to present something to the marketing committee in the coming weeks. The goal is to have the complete RFP's ready for approval to be released at the March meeting.

State Plan Endorsement

Director Lane and Erika Phillips asked the meeting members if they had any questions about the state plan endorsement process. For purposes of clarification Director Lane made note that the State Plan endorsement is different from the update of the state plan which Executive Director Donna Rendiero presented to the group at the last meeting. He explained that plan endorsement is what keeps the Regional Center designation in force. Ms. Phillips said that emails had been sent to town and borough administrators to determine if there was a need for assistance in the process. Director Lane also mentioned that the process should not be a heavy lift as there has been good planning occurring in all the municipalities within the Regional Center over the past 10 years. He also reiterated that funding was available for any town within the Regional Center Partnership that needed assistance in getting the tasks associated with the process completed.

Municipal Updates

Somerville: Mayor Gallagher expressed gratitude and that he was glad to be back as Mayor working with this group. He highlighted the long history of collaboration since 2004. He emphasized the shared responsibility among the boroughs and townships as well. He reflected on the significant development and growth that Somerville has experienced over the past 20 years and noted the need to revisit the master plan, zoning ordinances and redevelopment plans with a fresh perspective. He acknowledged the challenges ahead but expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity to create a new playbook that will shape the borough's trajectory for the next few decades.

Bridgewater: No new updates from Bridgewater.

Raritan: Mayor Nick Carra noted that he wants to focus on economic development with a particular focus on the downtown redevelopment and public participation in the redevelopment projects. He is working to create a redevelopment advisory committee and a new downtown development standing committee to ensure more public input and council focus on downtown revitalization. Councilman Don Tozzi emphasized the importance of improving the downtown appearance to attract businesses and customers while also developing relationships with current local business owners. He also emphasized the importance of a cleaner more inviting and attractive downtown and noted the importance of power washing and tree

trimming to make the area look better. Nick Zamora mentioned improving several recreation facilities in their town. They have developed a recreation survey to gather information from the residents to see what they are interested in doing for improvements. He also mentioned plans to revitalize the parks that are underutilized, including the old Washington School site.

SC Parks Commission: Dan Hayes expressed his enthusiasm for being back and taking on a different role within the group, specifically focusing on parks. He highlighted the SC Parks commitment to supporting the County as a great place to live through their mission of conservation, preservation, recreation, and leisure activities. He noted that he is open to meeting and encouraged anyone within the Regional Center Partnership to reach out for more discussion.

SC Business Partnership

Chris Edwards discussed the launch of the kiosk around the County that provides information about local businesses and attractions. He said that the initial visitor numbers were impressive. The kiosks aim to modernize services and increase public engagement with local offerings. He also mentioned upcoming opening of the headquarters in downtown Somerville called the Somerset Business Hub. This hub will serve as an entrepreneurial and educational center for businesses offering training and resources beyond the Partnership's membership. He said they are working to fill the void left by the departure of certain services during the pandemic. He noted that he was excited about the upcoming significant events like the World Cup and the 250th Anniversary. He said that Partnership wants to enhance visibility and support local businesses.

Public Comment Period

Chair Troy Fischer made note of the new stores coming to the mall. He said that the Brazilian eatery Fogo de Chao should be opening in March and that JD Sports will be opening soon as well. He also mentioned Summit Medical Group has finished the reconfiguration/construction of the old Crate and Barrel and the doctors will start rotating in very soon.

Adjournment

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 5:50