

**Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County  
Wednesday, March 20, 2024, Meeting Minutes**

In- person meeting at Somerset County Administration Building  
Engineering Conference Room-2<sup>nd</sup> Floor

**Name/Organization**

**Voting Members in Attendance**

Troy Fischer, Chair  
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  
Daniel Hayes, SC Park Commission  
Walter Lane, SC Office of Engineering and Planning

**Non-voting County Support Staff**

Erika Phillips, Somerset County Office of Engineering and Planning, Planning Division

**Non-Voting Guests**

Janine Erickson, SC Park Commission, Alternate

The meeting commenced at 5:20 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 eleven (11) 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 January 17, 2024, meeting minutes, Somerville Mayor Brian Gallagher made the motion to move, and Raritan Mayor Nick Carra 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.

### **Treasurer's Report January 2024 and February 2024**

Supervising Planner Erika Phillips presented the January 2024 and February 2024 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 asked for a motion to approve the January and February 2024 Treasurer's Reports. Somerville Mayor Brian Gallagher made the motion to move and Somerset County Planning Board Chair Bernie Navatto seconded the motion.

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

Ayes: 11

Nays: 0

Abstentions: 0

The motion was approved.

### **Strategic Planning Retreat**

Planning Director Walter Lane discussed the planning aspects for an upcoming strategic planning retreat for the Regional Center. He asked the meeting members if they would like to have another retreat and why he thought there was a need for this event. There was some discussion on how it had been done in the past. There was also some discussion regarding the loss of engagement due to meeting virtually during the pandemic and that a retreat could possibly help re-ignite the engagement aspect of the group. He noted some key points and considerations:

The purpose of the retreat is to bring together members of the Regional Center to set the stage for the organization's direction over the next few years. He reiterated that this includes developing an action plan to ensure that the partnership aligns with the goals of the towns and county.

After some discussion the group agreed the best timeframe for the retreat would be sometime in May or June. This enables for ample time to plan and organize the event. A discussion ensued about the duration and timing of the retreat: The group pondered whether to hold the retreat on a Saturday, like the 2005 retreat, or in the evening on a weekday, as was done at the most recent retreat. The duration of the retreat was also considered, with options ranging from a half-day to a couple of hours.

Director Lane asked for volunteers for the planning committee to assist in organizing and setting up the retreat. Volunteers included R.Pierre, D.Tozzi, N.Carra, R.Reitman,. This group will help in planning the program and the logistics for the event. There was some discussion surrounding the location. While the previous retreat was hosted by the park commission, meeting members indicated a potential need to find a new venue for the retreat. There was some discussion of the new spot that Chris Edwards and the SCBP recently opened called the Post Office Plaza. It was noted that this venue holds 60 people and meeting members noted that it would be a good opportunity to show case the new place. There was also some discussion about the use of RWJ for a location and that they would possibly supply food too.

The group thought it was important to consider the preferences and availability of the members to participate when finalizing the details of the retreat, ensuring that they have buy in and excitement for the event. In addition, the group wanted to identify issues that they can work on together and that it's conducive to productive discussions and engagement from all participants.

### **Update of Marketing Services and Auditor Services RFP**

Director Lane presented to the group that the RFP's (Request for Proposals) for auditing services that was developed and submitted. The RFP has been reviewed by the Somerset County purchasing department, and some date changes were noted by Bernie Navatto and revised. The RFP will be advertised on the RCP website and in the local newspaper. The RFP covers a two-year contract, with only the first year being awarded initially. The second year will be awarded after the 2025 budget is adopted. There was a discussion about the cost increase this year compared to previous years, due to the realization that costs have risen over time. The timeline for releasing the RFP was discussed and the scope of work. Erika Phillips noted that she would email the auditing committee with any proposals received and scoring sheets to analyze and review the submittals. The goals are to bring back a recommendation for the May meeting. Due to the timing, an extension for the tax filing deadline (May 15th) may be necessary, as it's typically handled by the auditor. A voice vote for the approval was taken during the meeting.

### **Information Items:**

#### **State Plan Endorsement**

Director Lane led a discussion about the development of a draft state development/redevelopment plan, which is an update of the 2001 plan. He noted that the State Planning Commission is set to release the draft plan in early April. Following the release of the draft plan, there's a requirement for hearings to be held in each of the 21 counties within 45 days of the release of the draft State Plan. The first of these hearings is tentatively scheduled for June 12, 2024.

He shared with the group that there would be an upcoming Planning Partners Forum in mid-April, in which he would go over in brief detail the cross-acceptance process with various stakeholders in the community. Despite the comprehensive nature of the plan update, he expressed confidence that much of the groundwork has been laid through previous efforts like the County Investment Framework, and that it should streamline the process. He said that Somerset County will be one of the first counties to have their public meeting.

There was some discussion of the mapping portion of the process and the map amendments. He made mention there is a point system and that a municipality gets more points when their mapping is consistent with the state plan and less when it is not. He said as of now the state is not generating any map amendments. The hope is that NJDEP will do the same.

### **Municipal Updates**

**Somerville:** Mayor Gallagher expressed concerns traffic and infrastructure problems on South Adamsville Road, affecting both Bridgewater and Somerville. He noted that this issue has been ongoing for several years and involves the impact of manufacturing facilities on residential areas and the flow of heavy truck traffic onto East Main Street. He said that there have been previous discussions about potential solutions, including road connections and traffic routing. The group acknowledged the need for further discussion and action to address these concerns, particularly given the growing impact of traffic from warehousing developments.

He also brought up a second issue involving enhancing connectivity between the areas of Raritan and Somerville. He recognized the challenges posed by Route 206 acting as a barrier between the two towns and the need to improve physical and visual connections. He also made mention of the importance of pedestrian-friendly infrastructure. He said that there need to be better linkages between the two towns shared areas to facilitate pedestrian movement.

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

**Raritan:** Mayor Carra offered several updates and initiatives being carried out in Raritan. He noted that they are particularly focused on municipal development and revitalization efforts. He mentioned that they opened bids for the municipal building, with the hope of awarding a contract by May. He also noted that he has been in discussion with Collen Mahr, County Administrator and Economic Development Manager Jessica Paolini about revitalizing economic development efforts in Raritan. He said they created a new redevelopment advisory committee and that they, are focusing on some affordable housing projects on Tillman Street. They've also been in discussions about the mall's redevelopment. He also discussed the progress on a TAP grant, with the expectation of completing design work by August. There are plans for streetscaping and signage projects, potentially tying into broader initiatives to enhance connectivity within the town. Discussions are ongoing about revitalizing the Raritan River and Greenway, with plans to schedule further meetings to move the project forward. Overall, they said that they are trying to make a concerted effort to stimulate economic growth, improve infrastructure, and enhance community engagement within Raritan.

**SC Parks Commission:** Dan Hayes outlined that March is a bustling time for parks, with preparations underway for the spring season. He mentioned it's a busy period because so many activities get started during this time. He said they begin the preparations for the gardens and getting the ball fields ready for spring. He noted that Pavilion reservations open on March 1st, and four out of five golf courses are already open. He said that there is ongoing work at Warren Brook and Green Knoll, but that the courses remain open. The Environmental Education Center (EEC) has a full calendar of programs, including the introduction to paddling and the stables offer pony rides and other activities. He has been meeting with the Business Partnership to discuss materials for kiosks. There's a focus on supporting the (250th anniversary) events and the World Cup. Efforts are underway to finalize an agreement with Somerville to assist with parking during flood emergencies, emphasizing the park's commitment to supporting the community.

**SC Business Partnership-** No update provided.

**Public Comment Period**

**Adjournment**

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.

Meeting adjourned at 6:05