

# Spotlight



NEWSLETTER

AUTUMN 2022

The Somerset County  
**4-H Fair** !  
Returned in 2022



# Your County Government is Here to Serve You



*Somerset County Commissioners (L-R) Paul Drake, Director Shanel Y. Robinson, Sara Sooy, Deputy Director Melonie Marano, and Doug Singleterry.*



**Darrin Russo** Sheriff



**Steve Peter** County Clerk



**Bernice Jalloh** Surrogate

Somerset County's government serves over 345,000 residents in 21 municipalities. The county is governed by a **Board of County Commissioners** of five members elected countywide. Each year, one or two seats is up for election. In January, the Commissioners elect one member to be Commissioner Director and another to be Deputy Director.

The Board of Commissioners holds regular public meetings on the second and fourth Tuesdays of each month in the County Administration Building at 20 Grove Street, Somerville. Regular meetings start immediately following the 5:00 pm agenda session and are streamed live on the County website and Facebook page. Items discussed at each agenda session will be voted on at the next regular meeting that occurs two or three weeks later.

Three other elected officials serve the people of Somerset County. The **County Clerk** is responsible for record keeping related to real estate, businesses, and elections; and for receiving election petitions, designing election ballots, and certifying election results, among other functions.

The **County Sheriff** provides security at the Somerset County Courthouse and the county complex; operates the Somerset County Jail; transports county prisoners; and is responsible for Sheriff's Sales, a K-9 Unit, the execution of civil and criminal court warrants, among other duties.

The **County Surrogate** probates wills; qualifies executors, administrators, and trustees; and issues necessary documents for administering estates. 🏛️

## On Our Cover: Somerset County 4-H Fair Returned!

After a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic, the Somerset County 4-H Fair drew an estimated 60,000 attendees August 10-12. On our cover, Bridgewater resident Emily Granja, 16, is shown with her sheep, Gracie. The pair won the Senior Showmanship Award. Don't miss next year's fair in the summer of 2023. "The return of the 4-H Fair is just one more sign of recovery from two challenging years," said Somerset County Commissioner Sara Sooy, liaison to the Somerset County 4-H Association and the Cooperative Extension, which oversee the fair. 🏛️



# Rental Relief Helps 2,000 Residents Avoid Homelessness

Somerset County responded to the COVID pandemic financial crisis with an Emergency Rental Assistance Program (ERAP) that allocated about \$9 million in federal money this year to prevent eviction of more than 2,000 residents while ensuring landlords received rent payments.

The average support package was about \$10,000. “No one should have to lose their home because of something that is completely outside of their control like the COVID pandemic,” said Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson.

“I personally want to thank Somerset County for assisting my tenant and her fiancé to stay in their home and get back on solid ground after losing so much to COVID,” said Steve DeMattheis, a landlord in Bound Brook.

Residents of 18 municipalities received rental assistance, including almost \$2.9 million to the residents of the county’s largest town, **Franklin Township**. Residents of **Bound Brook**, **Somerville**, and **North Plainfield** each received at least \$750,000, while at least \$100,000 in aid was received by residents of **Branchburg**, **Bridgewater**, **Hillsborough**, **Manville**, **Montgomery**, **Raritan**, and **South Bound Brook**.

The county provided bilingual caseworkers and kept administrative costs to just 1.7% of the total allocations, ensuring that more than 98% of funding went to residents in need. 🏠

## \$3M in ARP Funds to County Nonprofits



Somerset County has distributed about \$3 million in federal ARP pandemic relief funds to local nonprofits and municipalities, including the Montgomery Township Food Pantry which received a ceremonial check from Commissioner Singletery (second from left above).

Montgomery Officials were (L-R) Committeewoman Neena Singh, Recreation Director John Groeger, Deputy Mayor Shelly Bell, and Mayor Devra Keenan.

Key priorities for funds have included mental health, dependent care, people with disabilities, and food security.

# County Sponsors YMCA Summer Camp to Support Families

The Somerset County Board of Commissioners dedicated \$400,000 in American Rescue Plan aid to the Greater Somerset County YMCA to fund a Summer of Outdoor Adventure and Recreation (SOAR) program for children from under-resourced families in **Franklin**, **Bound Brook**, **South Bound Brook**, and **Manville** who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic.

The program ran in July and August at the Somerset County Park Commission’s Colonial Park in Franklin, where up to 200 children each week enjoyed outdoor recreation and sports, and nature education, while providing affordable childcare to families.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has had an especially harmful impact on families of limited financial means, leading to even greater economic insecurity and emotional stress,” said Somerset County Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson. “We were extremely pleased to partner with the YMCA to provide a summer camp to children and parents who needed it most.”

The Greater Somerset YMCA also operates summer camps in **Basking Ridge**, **Bernardsville**, **Bridgewater**, **Hillsborough**, and **Somerville**. 🏠



Camp SOAR campers with Somerset County Commissioner Director Robinson & Deputy Director Marano (center, back row).

# County Invests \$3.3 million in Outdoor Recreation

The Somerset County Board of Commissioners last October agreed to fund improvements to municipal parks with Open Space revenues. Since then, \$3.3 million has been allocated to projects in 11 municipalities, with several more projects in the pipeline.

Previously, open space funds were focused primarily on purchases of larger tracts of land which meant communities without available properties were often left out of granting opportunities.

“No matter what community you call home, it’s important for health and quality of life to have outdoor public spaces that are close by, safe, and attractive,” said Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson. “By expanding our open space grant program to include development of new and expansion of existing public spaces in our more densely populated communities, we ensure everyone in Somerset County benefits equally.”



Officials recently met at the site of a future recreation pavilion paid for with county open space funds. They were Hillsborough Administrator Anthony Ferrera, County Commissioner Paul Drake, and Hillsborough Mayor Shawn Lipani; Director of Parks Bob Wagner, and Assistant Recreation Director Griffin Dunne.

“The pandemic showed us how important outdoor recreation is to the health and happiness of residents,” said Deputy Director Melonie Marano, liaison to the county’s Open Space Committee. “These are investments that will pay off in both physical and mental wellness.”

The following grants have been awarded in 2021:

<b>Bedminster</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>	<i>for a Community Garden at River Road Park</i>
<b>Bernardsville</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>	<i>for Pickle Ball Courts at Polo Grounds</i>
<b>Bound Brook</b>	<b>\$455,000</b>	<i>for improvements to its Municipal Pool</i>
<b>Bridgewater</b>	<b>\$350,000</b>	<i>for trail improvements at Camp Cromwell</i>
<b>Franklin</b>	<b>\$360,000</b>	<i>for a playground at Catalpa Park</i>
<b>Hillsborough</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>	<i>for the Mike Merdinger Memorial Trail Pavilion</i>
<b>Manville</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>	<i>for its Lost Valley Nature Park development</i>
<b>Montgomery</b>	<b>\$350,000</b>	<i>for an inclusive playground for children of all abilities</i>
<b>Somerville</b>	<b>\$375,000</b>	<i>for upgrade of Michael Lepp Park Pool</i>
<b>S. Bound Brook</b>	<b>\$350,000</b>	<i>for a pavilion at Memorial Park</i>
<b>Warren</b>	<b>\$300,000</b>	<i>to replace the Pavilion at the Municipal Complex</i>

## Infrastructure Grants Benefit 60% of County Residents

Somerset County’s Board of Commissioners awarded \$7.6 million to five sewer and water projects affecting 13 municipalities and 200,000 County residents. The funds are part of the \$64 million the County received from the American Rescue Plan (ARP) to recover from the pandemic.

“These upgrades and repairs to our county’s aging sewer and water systems will make a real difference in the quality of life and health of our residents,” said Deputy Director Melonie Marano, liaison to the Public Works Department.

Each project was under discussion or planned by the towns or authorities and would have been funded by debt and/or rate increases for sewer customers and taxpayers. By utilizing federal funds, nearly 200,000 residents and businesses will enjoy the benefits without additional costs.

The Board of Commissioners awarded \$1.47 million to rehabilitate the Miller Lane Pump Station serving residents of **Bedminster, Far Hills, and Peapack-Gladstone**. This pump station not only serves residents, but also the Bedminster School, the Matheny School, two libraries, and many businesses.

The **Township of Greenbrook** will use its \$180,000 allocation to fund the final three years of video inspections of their sewer lines, and to perform cleaning to improve flow along the line.

**Montgomery** will receive \$500,000 to connect the Otto Kaufman Community Center to the municipal water system, removing it from well water to provide more reliable water for its users, and allowing for future expansion.

**South Bound Brook** is receiving \$1.67 million for a borough-wide rehabilitation program of more than 10 miles of aging sewer lines, including video inspection, sewer main cleaning, joint grouting, and manhole rehabilitation.

The largest allocation, \$3.8 million, is for the reconstruction of the Somerset Raritan Valley Sewer Authority’s storm control pump station that supports seven communities: **Branchburg, Bridgewater, Hillsborough, Manville, Raritan, Somerville, and Warren**. For more than 30 years, the emergency pump station has operated when storm events create very high flow. The station ensures all sewage is maintained in the system and does not enter waterways or residences. Located in a flood plain, the station’s generator and electrical components failed during Hurricanes Floyd, Irene, and Ida. The grant moves key equipment to higher ground. 🏠

# Washington's Tent Returns to Somerset County 240 years later!

During the Revolutionary War between 1776 and 1783, George Washington and the Continental Army spent more time in New Jersey than in any other state.

The actual battlefield tent Washington used throughout the war has been preserved by the Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia. On October 8 and 9, the museum will erect an exact replica of the tent on the Courthouse Green in Somerville, as part of **Somerset County's Journey Through the Past Weekend**. Visitors will be shown the interior of the tent and can ask questions of expert reenactors.

More than two dozen historic sites will be open for the weekend, including homes that Washington and his generals lived in during the Middlebrook Encampments in the Bridgewater/Bound Book area. You can get the free program's guidebook at [www.SCHistoryWeekend.com](http://www.SCHistoryWeekend.com).

To help history buffs learn more about our place in the nation's founding there is a new audio tour through Somerset County called "Washington Slept Here," available from the Crossroads of the American Revolution on an app called TravelStorys. 🏰



An exact replica of Washington's battlefield tent will be on the Courthouse Green in Somerville October 8-9.

## Join the Food and Fun at Our Diversity Festival October 16

Somerset County will hold its annual **Diversity Festival** on **Main and Grove Streets** in Somerville on **October 16th** from **noon to 4pm**. The theme for the free event will be **"More Food-More Fun!"**

Activities will include a Kids' Zone with games and activities, a Food Court with a wide variety of international cuisines, as well as music and dance performances from many cultural tradition.

For more information, visit the county website at: [www.co.somerset.nj.us](http://www.co.somerset.nj.us) 🏰



Dancers perform at last year's Diversity Festival.

# Join Us!

## We are Hiring



# TOP 4 REASONS TO PARTICIPATE IN



1 Learn About Somerset County

2 Network with Community Leaders

3 Enhance Team & Leadership Skills

4 Make a Positive Impact in the Community

Adults who *live* or *work* in Somerset County are invited to apply for the **Leadership Somerset Class of 2023**

Applications are due

**October 31, 2022**

To learn more, visit: [co.somerset.nj.us/LS\\_Apply](http://co.somerset.nj.us/LS_Apply)



(908) 231-7040

## New Hires Reflect Commitment to Public Health & Safety

Following Somerset County's state-leading testing and vaccination programs for COVID-19 — and strong response and recovery efforts from Hurricane Ida — the county has hired two highly experienced women to lead health, safety, and emergency response. Dr. Terry Clancy is the new Director of Public Health and Safety, and Lisa Werner is the new Emergency Management Coordinator & Director.

"Somerset County has some of the best people working in our public health and safety departments, and that has led to success in managing long-term crises like COVID and rapid response disasters like Hurricane Ida," said Commissioner Doug Singleterry, liaison to Public Health and Safety. "By adding the emergency response and incident command knowledge and experience of Dr. Clancy and Ms. Werner to the team, Somerset County residents can be confident in our future capabilities."

Dr. Clancy has two decades of experience with the New Jersey Department of Health where she was Director of the Office of Emergency Management and oversaw COVID vaccination megasites statewide. Previously she worked on the state's mobilizations for Hurricanes Irene, Sandy, and Ida. Ms. Werner most recently served as Planning Section Chief in the New Jersey State Emergency Operations Center, managing field operations for COVID vaccination megasites, and received The New Jersey Civilian Commendation Medal for her work coordinating local, state, and federal resources during emergencies. 🏛️



Lisa Werner (L) and Dr. Terry Clancy.

## Keep Up with COVID Vaccination to Protect Family & Community

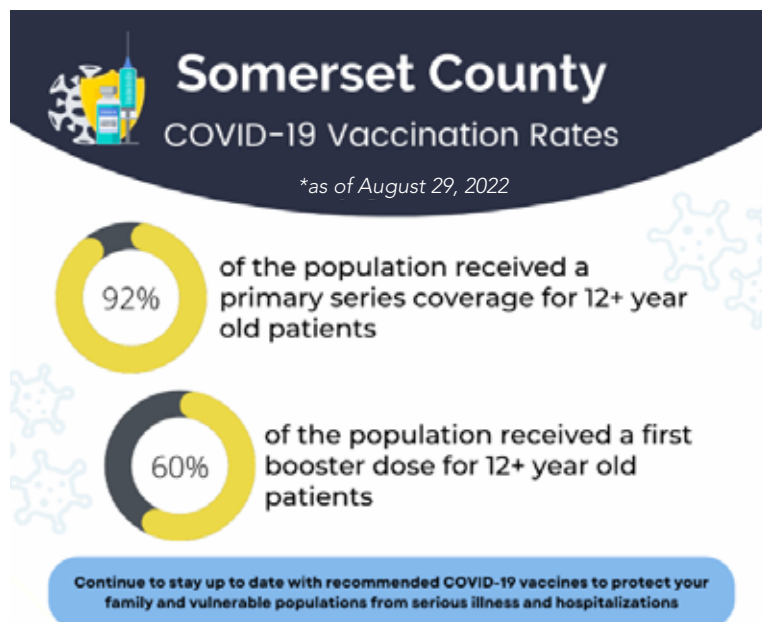
The virus that causes COVID-19 changes over time, which allows the virus to spread more easily or become resistant to treatment or vaccines. Keep your protection up to date this fall and winter by getting an updated COVID-19 bivalent booster, which includes components of the original virus strain and the Omicron subvariants.

"About 40% of Somerset County residents have delayed getting their booster vaccinations" according to Dr. Terry Clancy, Director of Public Health & Safety. Dr. Clancy further "urges all residents to stay up to date on their COVID vaccination boosters to protect themselves and their community".

Individuals ages 12 and older are recommended to receive an updated COVID-19 bivalent booster, if it has been at least two (2) months since their completed primary series or most recent booster.

- **Pfizer-BioNTech** bivalent vaccine is available for individuals ages **12 and older**
- **Moderna** bivalent booster is available for individuals ages **18 and older**

Everyone should continue stay up to date with COVID-19 vaccination, which includes all primary series doses and recommended boosters for their age group. All Somerset County COVID-19 vaccination clinics are listed at [soconj.gov/vaxclinics](https://soconj.gov/vaxclinics) 🏛️



# Sip & See Somerset Tour Promotes Rebound for Small Businesses

Central Jersey counties such as Somerset have suffered sharp declines in tourism because of the pandemic, posing an economic threat to the hotels and small restaurants and retail businesses that depend on visitors.

“Getting the word out about our beautiful county is one of the most important things we can do to promote economic recovery,” said Melanie Marano, Deputy Director of the Board of Commissioners. “New Jersey has so much to offer beyond our beaches. Even Somerset County residents may be surprised to learn about some of the wonderful staycation opportunities in their own backyard.”

One of Somerset County’s first efforts to attract visitors and support businesses is the Somerset County Tourism division’s new “Sip and See Somerset” craft beverage tour, funded with federal monies via the Board of Commissioners. Participants get a “passport” to visit craft beverage sites, and are encouraged to visit nearby restaurants, parks, and historic sites. With so much to do, “Sip and See” encourages visitors to spend time in Somerset County! Learn more at [visitsomersetnj.org](https://visitsomersetnj.org) 🏡



*Somerset County Deputy Director Marano with state tourism Executive Director Jeffrey Vasser at a cidery in Bedminster, part of the Sip & See Somerset Tour.*

# County Promotes Mental Health of Youth, Families, Seniors

The **US Surgeon General** last December announced that the nation is suffering from a youth mental health crisis triggered by the pandemic. Many adults and seniors are also dealing with the pain of losing friends and family members to the disease, isolation, and stress from changes to daily lifestyles.

Somerset County is one of just two New Jersey counties with a county-owned mental health facility, **Richard Hall Community Health and Wellness Center** in Bridgewater. Recognizing the importance of mental health following the pandemic, the Somerset County Board of Commissioners has supported recruitment and retention of facility staff with American Rescue Plan funding. In addition, the facility is being expanded by 2,940 square feet to provide residents with dental and medical care through a partnership with Zufall Health Center.

The County also continues to support a state sponsored program called **Hope & Healing**, which offers free counseling services to residents impacted by Hurricane Ida by phone at **(908) 231-6414** or email at [HopeandHealing@co.somerset.nj.us](mailto:HopeandHealing@co.somerset.nj.us). Additional resources, including virtual programs for youth and seniors, are available on the county website at [soconj.gov/RichardHall](https://soconj.gov/RichardHall) 🏡



*County Commissioner Paul Drake (R) at the Richard Hall Community Health & Wellness Center in Bridgewater with Executive Director Nicci Spinazzola. Dental and Medical capabilities are being added to the mental health facility this fall.*

There is a new national suicide prevention line for people in crisis: Dial **9-8-8**.

## What's Inside:

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Find out how **Somerset County** is investing its share of **American Relief Plan** funds from the U.S. Government.



13 towns received water & sewer grants, including Bedminster.