

**MINUTES OF THE SEPTEMBER 17, 2024  
MEETING OF THE SOMERSET COUNTY PLANNING BOARD  
HELD AT 4:45 P.M.  
IN PERSON MEETING**

**Call to Order**

The September 17, 2024 meeting of the Somerset County Planning Board convened at 4:45 p.m. This meeting was held in person.

**Pledge of Allegiance**

**Open Public Meetings Statement**

Vice Chairman Michael Giordano reported the meeting had been duly advertised in accordance with Open Public Meetings Act as follows:

In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et seq., and associated regulations, adequate notice of this meeting has been provided. The date and time for this meeting was published in The Star Ledger and the Courier News. The agenda for this meeting was also posted on the County Planning Board website.

**Roll Call**

The Roll was called, and the following were in Attendance:

Michael Giordano, Vice-Chair  
Albert Ellis, Member  
Christopher Kelly, Member  
Commissioner Paul Drake  
Matt Loper, Recording Secretary

**Absent**

Bernard V. Navatto, Jr, Chair  
Erika Inocencio, Member  
Sami Shaban, Member  
Ashok Rakhit, 1<sup>st</sup> Alternate  
Commissioner Director Shanel Y. Robinson

**Also Present from Staff:**

Walter Lane, Director of Planning  
Erika Phillips, Supervising Planner, Environment and Resiliency  
Ken Wedeen, Supervising Planner, Transportation  
Jonathan Eagle, Senior Transportation Planner  
Nora Fekete, Supervising Planner, Comprehensive Planning  
Victoria Schulz, Principal Community Planner  
Samantha Quan, Planner - Land Development

Tom Boccino, Supervising Planner, Preservation  
Josephine Taranto, Planner -Preservation  
Sheli Daniels, Office Manager  
Marina Stinely, Esq. for Joseph Demarco, County Counsel

### **Approval of the August 20, 2024 Meeting Minutes**

Vice Chairman Giordano called for a motion to approve the August 20, 2024 Planning Board Meeting Minutes. The motion was moved by Chris Kelly and seconded by Al Ellis. A voice vote was taken, and motion passed unanimously.

### **DISCUSSION / PRESENTATION ITEMS:**

#### **Somerset County Circulation Plan: Keep Somerset Moving 2045**

Supervising Transportation Planner Ken Wedeen provided an update on the Somerset County Keep Somerset Moving Transportation Plan 2045 Study. He stated that as of September 17, 2024, the County has received approximately fifty (50) comments from sixteen (16) different persons/organizations. The deadline for submitting public comments is Friday, September 20<sup>th</sup>.

Supervising Planner Wedeen provided an overview of the types of comments received to date:

- Improve frequency and coverage of public transit for county residents without a car.
- Updating data in plan to 2023 i.e. NJ TRANSIT and private carrier ridership data.
- Update bus mapping to include bus service on Route 27 from Princeton Borough.
- Need for more bus stops and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure along Route 27.
- Updating data in plan to 2023 i.e. vehicle crash safety data.
- Building more protected bike lanes near Route 206 and CR 518 to offer an alternative to automobile usage for persons traveling in the Rocky Hill, Montgomery, and Princeton areas.
- Request to reduce green time on county roads to reduce traffic congestion in downtown Raritan Borough.
- What is the County's role when the County receives a site plan for a proposed affordable housing development as related to being built to nearby public transit service, pedestrian, and bicycle facilities?
- Need higher frequency bus service between Bound Brook and New Brunswick to better serve residential and retail growth in downtown Bound Brook Borough, South Bound Brook Borough, and along the Easton Avenue corridor.
- Need pedestrian safety improvements for persons walking along Raritan River Bridge in South Bound Brook and access to D&R Canal State Park entrances in South Bound Brook Borough.
- Need to rethink how public transit can boost business and tourism by providing service that connects businesses and tourist hotels and destinations of interest.

Supervising Planner Wedeen stated that staff will prepare responses to every comment that is submitted. A chart with all of the comments and proposed responses/changes will be developed and presented to the Board at the October 15<sup>th</sup> regular County Planning Board meeting. The Board will be asked to consider and potentially approve the proposed changes to the draft plan at this meeting.

Director of Planning Walter Lane thanked Supervising Planner Kenneth Wedeen, Senior Transportation Planner, and Principal Community Planner Victoria Schulz who oversaw the development of this plan.

### **Planning Director's Report**

Director of Planning Walter Lane was pleased to announce Victoria Schulz was recently hired as the Principal Community Planner after working as an intern for the Planning Division. He stated Victoria is a great addition to the team. The Board welcomed her to the County.

The next Planning Partners Forum will be held via Zoom on September 24<sup>th</sup> at 8am. The main agenda items will be updates on the County Circulation Master Plan, the Local Safety Action Plan, and the State Development and Redevelopment Plan. The link to register for the meeting was sent to the members of the Planning Board earlier today. As of today, twenty-nine (29) people have registered, and more registrations are expected since a reminder was sent to the municipalities and our planning partners earlier in the day.

Director Lane provided a short update on the update of the County Investment Framework Map. Rutgers University Voorhees Transportation Center (VTC) is working with the County to update the map. Staff will be meeting with VTC staff later this week to resolve any outstanding issues with the updated version of the map. He then detailed some of the data issues, as well as the methodology used to create the map that was adopted as part of the County Master Plan. Once the updated version of the map is completed, staff will review the new map in detail with the Committee prior to meetings with the municipalities.

### **ACTION ITEMS / INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

#### **September 2024 Land Development Report and Approval of the August 2024 First Time Submissions**

Supervising Planner Nora Fekete reported the County Planning Board Land Development Committee met on September 11, 2024, in a meeting held via Zoom. The only item on the agenda was the first-time submissions for the month of August 2024. The Committee did not have a quorum therefore, the County Planning Board must approve the first-time submissions for August 2024.

She stated that during the month of August, the County Planning Board reviewed a total of 40 submissions. There were two new lots proposed. There was 37,199 new square feet of non-residential building space proposed and 109 multi-family residential units proposed. There was \$3,800.00 in development review fees paid to the County Planning Board and no improvement value posted with the County Planning Board.

Vice Chairman Giordano called for a motion to approve the September 2024 Land Development Committee Report and the August 2024 First Time Submissions. The motion was moved by Al Ellis and seconded by Chris Kelly. The roll was called, and the motion passed unanimously.

### **Regional Center Partnership Update**

Supervising Planner Erika Phillips reported findings from the Regional Center Partnership retreat which was held on May 30<sup>th</sup> at the Chimney Rock Inn in Bridgewater. She noted that 14 people attended and that Courtenay Mercer of Mercer Planning Associates facilitated the meeting. She told the board that the goal of the retreat was to regroup post pandemic. She noted some of the findings. There is a strong desire to reinvigorate the RCP and make it more proactive and strategic in pursuing initiatives and projects of regional significance. The RCP's value is its ability to work collaboratively in identifying solutions, advocating for change, and seeking funds.

Supervising Planner Phillips reported that the group did SWOT analysis which highlighted two notable strengths of the Regional Center which included:

- Location - Centrally located in NJ with access to transit and major highways giving them a competitive advantage
- Destination - Access to high quality jobs and a plethora of places to shop and dine, great recreational options, open space, and desirable housing options.

The group highlighted improvements within the Regional Center which included:

- Collaboration amongst the group and further encourage more dialogue between RCP members and the staff to discuss projects and issues of regional significance.
- Capitalize on their non-profit status and seek grant funding for regional initiatives which would bolster the partnership between the three municipalities

The group's most supported actions were:

- Health & Wellness - Actively support farmer's markets and locally sourced food options
- Resiliency - Support implementation to include resiliency and hazard mitigation in Municipal Master Plans

Additionally, the group identified two items that would support the betterment of the Regional Center which were to:

- *Think Regionally.* Natural features and economic drivers extend beyond the boundaries of the Regional Center and offer opportunities to invite others into the discussion, expand and economize planning efforts, and collaborate on marketing. For example, "the Raritan River" connects the broader region as an asset and potential liability that would benefit from more expansive discussion and collaboration.
- *Be Focused.* Avoid getting caught up in the minutia of local government initiatives that do not have a regional impact; instead, focus on regional themes where the RCP's collaborative efforts can have the greatest impact, including transportation, infrastructure, hazard mitigation, recreation, and tourism.
- *Reimagine Board Meetings.* Rather than report-outs on individual initiatives, use board meetings as an opportunity to learn about topics of regional significance, and/or discuss possible collaborative solutions to regional issues.

Supervising Planner Phillips reported stated these topics will be discussed in more detail at the next Regional Center Partnership meeting which will be held on September 18<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

### **Somerset County Local Safety Action Plan**

Supervising Transportation Planner Ken Wedeen reported the staff have been working with North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority (NJTPA) and the consultant team to launch the Local Safety Action Plan (LSAP) website. A press release promoting the LSAP study, website online survey, and online mapping tool was transmitted to all media outlets. Planning Division staff transmitted a request to all municipalities for any municipal streets with safety issues to be submitted for inclusion in the Somerset County LSAP Plan. A press release and several social media posts promoting public engagement on the LSAP website were distributed on the Somerset County social media platforms.

He reported the NJTPA's consultant team are scheduled to speak at the September 24<sup>th</sup> Planning Partners meeting about LSAP and importance for municipalities and residents to engage in taking the online survey and online mapping tool to provide safety concerns to be included in the study. Planning staff is working to email planning partners with requests to share the press release and social media posts with their members and social media followers.

### **State Development and Redevelopment Plan Update**

Planning Director Walter Lane provided a brief update on the status of the update of the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP). The new release date of preliminary SDRP has not been announced. The draft plan may be released sometime in late September or early October. He is also continuing to work with the County's GIS Office to create a Survey123 App to allow the municipalities to submit State Plan Policy Map changes as well as complete their Cross Acceptance Response documents electronically.

The State Planning Commission released the Beta version of the New Jersey Smart Growth Explorer. This tool is intended to provide guidance to counties and municipalities when analyzing potential changes to the State Plan Policy Map. The NJ Smart Growth Explorer will provide guidance as to whether a particular site is appropriate for either development or preservation. Depending on the when the draft SDRP is released for public comment, the State Planning Commission may start the process to address any potential changes to the State Plan Policy Map.

### **Wastewater Management Plan Update**

Director of Planning Walter Lane provided a brief update on the status of the County's wastewater management planning activities. The deadline for providing comments and/or consent resolutions on the Septic Management Plan (SMP) was September 12, 2024. To date, twelve (12) municipalities and Middlesex County have submitted resolutions supporting the adoption of the SMP. Both Montgomery Township and Branchburg Township have raised concerns about the age of the information contained in the draft SMP. To the age of the data, Montgomery said they cannot provide a consent resolution at this time and asked if the Township could update their chapter of the SMP. Branchburg Township provided updated information to be included in the SMP. Staff spoke with the NJ Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP) regarding the possibility the updating the SMP prior to NJDEP

adopting the plan. NJDEP stated that proposed changes to the current SMP would restart the adoption process and the County would have to readvertise the adoption notice, hold a new hearing in Middlesex County, and obtain new resolutions of consent. The County could start the amendment process after the current version of the SMP is adopted. Staff informed NJDEP that the County would continue with the adoption process. The Master Plan Committee agreed that continuing to move forward with the adoption process is best course of action. Director Lane asked the Board if they agreed with the Master Plan Committee's position. The Board agreed with the Master Plan Committee's position.

He stated the County has still not received any comments on the other draft components of the County Wastewater Management Plan, which was submitted in June of 2021, from. He reported that he is still trying to schedule a meeting with NJDEP to discuss the status of their review and request a timeline for when the County can expect to receive the NJDEP's initial review comments.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

No members of the public were present.

### **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

Committee Reports were included with the meeting packet.

### **NEXT MEETING DATE**

October 15, 2024 @ 4:45pm Regular In-Person Meeting

There being no further business before the Board, Vice Chairman Giordano asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was moved by Chris Kelly and seconded by Paul Drake. A voice vote was taken, and the motion passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:07PM.

Respectfully submitted,



Matthew D. Loper, Secretary