“In my capacity as a construction official, I sometimes have to make damage assessments in the event of a disaster. The curriculum fit, absolutely, right into what I do every day of my life and was a great choice for my career.”

Stephen Jones, MSHS ’16, BSAST ’12
Construction Code Official
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A Statewide Dialogue

Public discourse is a vital tool in fulfilling your responsibility as a municipal official. That discourse flows in many directions and for many purposes. That discourse requires of all participants time, patience, and empathy. And that responsibility requires you to be involved in the public discourse at many levels. That is where the League can help you.

In his training for newly elected officials, League General Counsel William Kearns includes a component on “choosing civility.” He reminds us that incivility begets further incivility which can lead to hostility and the breakdown of constructive public discourse. Local officials must engage in public discourse with this in mind both as governing officials and as their community’s representatives to other levels of government.

Jimmy Carter once said, “Government is a contrivance of human wisdom to provide for human wants. People have the right to expect that these wants will be provided for by this wisdom.”

Local officials have heard the critics. Effective local officials have even learned to listen to the criticisms. In the current political environment, it is probably wise to welcome the counsel, even of those who may wish you ill. Truth is elusive, often imperfectly perceived–never conclusively captured–and, in the final analysis, the master, more than the servant, of any good party or man.

For those reasons, we owe it to each other as citizens, as well as public servants, to parlay, to argue, to listen, and to learn; to engage in honest public discourse. I don’t possess the ultimate truth. But, from where I sit, I do perceive aspects of it invisible to you. And you, from where you sit, see things that I can hardly imagine.

As New Jersey municipal officials, the League brings you together to promote that dialogue. And the League’s Legislative Action program takes it a step beyond. It brings our common perspective to those other public servants, who strive valiantly to provide for the wants of the people in the halls of the statehouse in Trenton.

I encourage you to get involved in that dialogue. In the pages of this issue, we hope to show you how. A host of interests engage in public discourse to influence State decision-makers. Maybe not all of them have, as their primary focus, the greatest good for the people of our State. Your Legislators will hear from them. Shouldn’t they also hear from you?

Your fellow citizens have placed you “in the arena.” As you strive to serve, you come to realize that the reward for trying to do your best is to be asked to do more. Please get involved, to the maximum extent that your other responsibilities allow, in the League’s Legislative efforts. Working together, you can help our fellow public servants to make the best of this Garden State and our time in its service.

Working together, you can help our fellow public servants to make the best of this Garden State and our time in its service.”

Michael Darcy
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Path to Cooperating Communities

Vision and planning help Somerset County Regional Center mark 20 years of success

By Dan Hayes, Mayor, Bridgewater; Chuck McMullen, Mayor, Raritan; Brian Gallagher, Mayor, Somerville

In May of 1996, in accordance with the State Planning Rules, N.J.A.C. 17:32-8.6(a), the New Jersey State Planning Commission designated the Boroughs of Somerville and Raritan and an adjacent portion of Bridgewater Township as an official Regional Center, the first multi-jurisdictional center in the state. The approval defined a then 14.2 square mile district (now 12.6 square miles) to serve as the focal point for enhanced planning and expedited public review to benefit a population of 25,000 residents and 40,000 workers. The Center is bisected by U.S. Route 206, U.S. Route 202, U.S. Route 22, NJ State Route 28, and I-287.

The Regional Center designation encourages achievement of policy objectives in areas of growth; enables development and redevelopment by providing priority funding for assistance in existing downtown business districts, and with new residential and non-residential infill opportunities; fosters establishment of more effective mass transportation linkages and provides priority funding for key intersection and corridor improvements; and makes available funding for linear open space concepts, planning and design of recreation facilities, passive open space acquisitions, and new and existing historic preservation and revitalization programs.

To implement the plan for the future of the Regional Center a non-profit public/private partnership was formed. For the past 20 years this group has brought together the vision and planning of three communities, Somerset County, various non-profit agencies, and the private sector, working collaboratively to guide development and investment.

Catalyst for Cooperation

The Regional Center has become the catalyst for cooperation and progress while influencing effective and sustainable development throughout the County. What has been accomplished in 20 years is a testament to the conviction of the principals in the three communities and the guidance of the County.
The Partnership provides leadership to the municipalities to shape planning policies that ensure that the Somerset County Regional Center continues to be a premier location to live, work, learn, and play. Technical support and assistance is provided by Somerset County.

“What has been accomplished in 20 years is a testament to the conviction of the principals in the three communities and the guidance of the County.”

Through broad-based public participation and consensus building, the Regional Center has created an environment where sharing certain common threads is natural to the communities. Coordinated planning saves the municipalities money and facilitates the process of being a good neighbor by minimizing the impact of development on neighbors. The Partnership provides a forum through which interaction, sharing ideas and concerns, and working together to address common issues allows the towns to address common issues.

**Success Stories**

Over the past two decades the Regional Center Partnership has been successful in securing funding to move forward on important regional initiatives, with close to $500,000 in planning grant money and over $130,000,000 in construction funds allocated. The Regional Center Partnership has also administered the Challenge Grant program to help advance local projects and initiatives that resolve regional problems.

Among the programs that are the result of regional cooperation are:

- **The Somerset Street Streetscape Linkage Project** facilitating safe pedestrian passage between Somerville and Raritan while extending the Somerville Streetscape design to the western border.
- **The Regional Center Neighborhood Traffic Calming and Implementation Plan Project** resulting in improvement to the quality of life by eliminating cut-through traffic and reducing speeds in neighborhoods and along commercial corridors.
- **The Somerset County Investment Framework**, a series of GIS-based infrastructure, community, and environmental asset maps that identifies areas most suitable for growth and preservation in Somerset County. The Regional Center is one of 24 “Priority Growth Investment Areas.”
- **The Somerset County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)**, a Collaborative Blueprint for Economic Success, identifies and prioritizes economic development strategies to further job creation and private-sector investment.
- **The Pedestrian, Bicycle & Greenways Systems Connection Plan** A North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority grant establishes a pedestrian, bicycle, and greenway transportation plan within the Regional Center and beyond.
- **A Pedestrian Overpasses** provides a safe pedestrian and bicycle link between Somerville and the Bridgewater Commons Mall. The success of this project led to a similar overpass over Route 202/206 connecting the Peter’s Brook Greenway with Clark’s Woods and the Somerset Shopping Center.
- **The Green Design Toolkit** was prepared for municipal engineers and code officials to aid in the review of projects participating in the Somerset County High Performance Public Buildings Program.
- **NJ Water Supply Authority Open Space & Development Study** created a GIS-based approach for identifying undeveloped and underutilized nonresidential sites near water resources to determine appropriateness for economic development, open space preservation, or a combination of both.
- **Route 202 Corridor Assessment & Multi-Modal Mobility Plan** provides a comprehensive analysis of the Route 202 corridor between the Flemington and Somerville Circles.
- **The Route 22 Sustainable Corridor Plan** was developed as a direct result of the Regional Center 1999 “Vision Initiative” that called for a safe, landscaped highway connecting employment and mixed-use centers and providing multi-modal options and connections between neighborhoods, making Route 22 in Somerset County a connector rather than a divide.
- **The Somerville West End Redevelopment** involved the replacement of 81,526 square feet of retail space with a new specialty retail and residential development in the central business district that features the recently completed five-story building and a planned L-shaped five-story building.
- **The Frank “Nap” Torpey Athletic Complex** is located along the north side of the Raritan River in Bridgewater and consists of one lighted grass baseball field,
Cooperating Communities

One lighted grass softball field, two soccer fields and one lighted state-of-the-art synthetic turf multi-purpose athletic field.

- The Chimney Rock Interchange at Route 22 improves safety on the heavily traveled US Highway 22 by moving traffic more efficiently along the Route 22 corridor; the interchange also opens up economic development opportunities in the area.

- The Raritan River Greenway extends through the Regional Center and is being developed as a paved bikeway with segments completed in Duke Island Park and along the river in Bridgewater, Somerville and Raritan. The plan will include a series of nodes and linked trails with parking, convenient access, and information stations.

- Challenge Grants have been awarded annually to the three municipalities and have included funding for:
  - Wayfinding System Transit Village Study
  - Sewer Camera Project Natural Resource Inventor
  - Stream Corridor Protection Neighborhood Plan
  - Par Course Fitness System Greenway Plans

Benefits of Creating a Regional Center

Achieving Plan Endorsement as an official Regional Center ensures the coordination of state, county, and municipal planning efforts in achieving the goals and policies of the State Planning Act. With approval from the State, the Regional Center is in a better position to receive financial and technical incentives to assist in accomplishing the goals for the Regional Center Strategic Master Plan.

Information on the activities of the Regional Center may be found at regionalcenterpartnership.org, rcponline.org, or by calling 908-231-7021.

- Sanitary Sewer Mapping Various Development/Redevelopment Plans
- Pedestrian/Bicycle Safety Plans Park Improvement Plans

Additionally, the Regional Center has purchased and installed Driver Feedback Signage to enhance pedestrian safety at critical locations in each of the communities and has collaborated with the New Jersey Water Supply Authority to implement the Raritan River Rain Barrel Rebate Program for homeowners in all three communities.

In October of 2013, the Regional Center Partnership received notification that all qualifications had been satisfied for the Somerset County Regional Center to be granted Plan Endorsement. The State Planning Commission determined that the Regional Center, the Boroughs of Raritan and Somerville, and the Township of Bridgewater earned a 10-year Regional Center designation.

At a pedestrian bridge opening (l to r): Hunterdon County Freeholder Matt Holt, former Chair NJTPA; Somerset County Freeholders Patricia Walsh and Patrick Scaglione; former Assemblywoman Donna Simon; Ed Zelis, Somerset County; Brian Munyak, Somerset County Engineering; Bridgewater Councilwoman Christine Henderson Rose; Christine and Bob Flanagan, Flanagan Contracting.
How Can We Help You?

As we continue to reflect on each decade of New Jersey Municipalities’ history, we continue to look forward through the lens of looking back. For the League’s magazine, 1919 to 1931 was a time of shifted focus as the magazine changed size and frequency and style to meet perceived members’ needs.

Presented as a bi-monthly bulletin, the magazine was altered to free up people power for the creation of important publications and reports such as a Salaries and Composition of Police Force in New Jersey Cities and Salaries of the following officers in New Jersey Cities, Towns and Boroughs; Mayors, Commissioners, Clerks, Engineers, Counsels, Treasurers, Attorney, Aldermen, Comptrollers, Police Chiefs, Fire Chiefs, and Receivers of Taxes. Versions of these reports are still released bi-annually today by the League, providing critical information for Municipal operations.

We continue to offer a wide variety of publications on topics of interest, including the latest release: “A Primer for Local Elected Officials 2016-2017.” For more information on all of the League’s offerings, visit njslom.org/publications.

As a monthly magazine offering a full array of articles, we at NJ Municipalities have the opportunity to serve as a communications center for municipal officials. This month, we are focusing on the Parks and Streets that keep communities connected. Whether making streets and parks senior friendly to encourage aging in place, pooling efforts to create better roads for several municipalities at one time, or creating a bright burst of color inviting residents of all ages to utilize parks year-round, we share the stories that help make life better for residents and inspire officials in their future plans.

Do you have an idea or want to know more about an important topic? Send us an email (NJM@NJSLOM.org) and we’ll continue our century-long mission to provide useful information.

Time Capsule: 1920-1931

In December 1920, it was announced that a change would take place for New Jersey Municipalities:

“New Jersey Municipalities will appear in abbreviated form and will contain only essential material. Its effort will be to be true to its name, New Jersey Municipalities, and will contain gossipy New Jersey news, the business and proceedings of the League, and some of the reports that will be issued from time to time.”

A decade later, the magazine was ramped up again to reflect an increase of services, providing members with:

“...More prompt information service, the preparation of model ordinances, and the publication of the monthly magazine...”
The American Red Cross is joining together with municipalities, fire departments, and community groups to reduce home fire deaths and injuries by 25%. Since the launch of the multi-year Home Fire Campaign nationwide in October 2014, the Red Cross New Jersey Region and its local partners have installed more than 16,000 free smoke alarms in homes throughout New Jersey.

Through the campaign, the Red Cross and its partners recruit, train, and dispatch volunteers to install free smoke alarms and deliver fire safety information in neighborhoods with a higher risk of fires.

“Working smoke alarms can cut the risk of someone dying from a home fire in half,” said Ana Montero, regional chief executive officer, American Red Cross New Jersey Region. “This cross-sector collaborative demonstrates the collective impact of government, the private sector, and the non-profit sector to help save lives and protect against home fire disasters with preventative action.”

As part of the Home Fire Campaign, volunteers with the American Red Cross, Trenton Fire and Emergency Services, PSEG, Church & Dwight Co., Inc., and Signature Information Solutions prepare to canvass neighborhoods in Trenton, installing free smoke alarm in homes that need them and educating families about fire safety on Tuesday, October 25.

Fire Prevention & Protection Program Focus for Red Cross, Communities

During a recent Home Fire Campaign canvassing event in Trenton, the partnership had teams made up of Red Cross volunteers, corporate employee volunteer groups, and members of Trenton Fire and Emergency Services. Teams went door-to-door, educating families about fire safety and installing 230 free smoke alarms that day.

The Home Fire Campaign is active in municipalities across New Jersey including Trenton, Paterson, Atlantic City, Camden, Perth Amboy, Jersey City, Clifton, Linden, Irvington, New Brunswick, Asbury Park, Plainfield, Pleasantville, Passaic, and Newark, to name a few.

The Red Cross responded to more than 760 home fires in New Jersey last year, offering comfort and providing emergency assistance to more than 1,800 families to help meet needs such as shelter, food and clothing, as well as referrals and mental health services as needed.

Visit redcross.org/homefires to find out more about protection from fire, access free fire safety resources, and volunteering.
The Piano Town

Carteret’s Pianos in the Park highlights the borough’s commitment to art and showcases some of the borough’s local talent. Pianos began appearing in community spaces in August and remained outside throughout the fall. During the winter months pianos are stored indoors, but will once again appear in parks this spring.

Local artists were invited to submit designs, and 11 submissions were approved. Refurbished pianos were tuned, sanded, and primed in preparation for the artists, who were provided with supplies. After painting, each piano was lacquered to protect it from the elements.

Park attendees were able to stop and not only enjoy the art displays, but to play the pianos as well. The borough collaborated with the Central Jersey Arts Council on this program.

Paperless Parking Permits

In Summit downtown employees no longer need to place a physical permit on vehicles to park in municipal lots and garages. This past September, the City of Summit Parking Services Agency launched a digital option to obtain and renew annual parking permits.

To complete the new digital process, employees created personal accounts online, and registrations were confirmed via email confirmations containing additional instructions for participating in the program. Rather than a paper tag, the new digital system uses license plate recognition.

In additional parking news, the city attempted to make parking easier for downtown employees during the holiday shopping season by offering a valet parking service in one of its garages Monday through Friday from 10 a.m. to 7 p.m. at a fee of $4 per day.

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