Somerset County Regional Center Vision Initiative

Co-sponsored by
The Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County
Regional Plan Association
Lincoln Institute of Land Policy
November 1999
Co-sponsored by:
Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County
Regional Plan Association
Lincoln Institute of Land Policy

November 1999
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Regional Center Vision Initiative represents a joint effort of the Regional Plan Association (RPA), the Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County, Inc. (RCP) and the County of Somerset. RPA provided funding assistance through a grant it received from the Lincoln Institute of Land Policy. The RCP and County of Somerset also provided funding and in-kind support for this project. Robert Lane, Director, Regional Design Program, RPA was primarily responsible for preparation of this report, including compilation of text and images. Patrick Condon, Assoc. Professor and Director, Landscape Architecture Program, The University of British Columbia, also participated in preparing this report. Special thanks are given to Walter Lane, Senior Community Planner, Somerset County Planning Division, who provided editorial assistance and technical support. Much appreciation also goes to Elf Multimedia, for their assistance in formatting this report. The following individuals and organizations are acknowledged for their contribution to this project:

Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County, Inc.

Officers:
John Kitchen, Chairman
Rose Evans, Vice Chair
Denise Coyle, Treasurer
Walter Lane, Secretary

Executive Committee:
Denise Coyle, Director, Board of Chosen Freeholders
David Hollo, Mayor, Borough of Somerville
Charles Harrison, Councilman, Bridgewater Township
Maureen Wilson, Councilwoman, Raritan Borough
Rose Evans, Vice President, Edmar Corporation
John Kitchen, President, Title Central
Dennis Longstreet, Group Chairman, Johnson & Johnson

Michael Turner, President, Somerset Medical Center
Henry Freeman, President & Publisher, The Courier News

Non-voting Advisors:
Robert Bzik, Director, Somerset County Planning Division
Thomas D’Amico, Supervising Planner, Somerset County Planning Division
Walter Lane, Senior Community Planner, Somerset County Planning Division
Stephen Dragos, President, Somerset Alliance for the Future & RideWise of Raritan Valley
Barbara Roos, President, Somerset County Chamber of Commerce

Members:
Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders
Somerset County Planning Board
Township of Bridgewater
Borough of Somerville
Borough of Raritan
Somerset Alliance for the Future
Somerset County Smart Growth Steering Committee
Somerset County Coalition for Smart Growth, Inc.
Somerset County Chamber of Commerce
Somerset County Coalition on Affordable Housing
Somerset County Park Commission
RideWise of Raritan Valley
Private sector representatives

Regional Plan Association
Peter W. Herman, Chairman
Christopher J. Daggett, Co-Chair, NJ
Hon. James J. Florio, Co-Chair, NJ
Claude Shostal, President
Robert D. Yaro, Executive Director
Robert Lane, Director, Regional Design Program
Jeffery Zupan, Senior Fellow, Transportation
Regional Center Vision Initiative Workshop

Design Team Participants:
Robert Lane, RPA – Co-Director
Patrick Condon, University of British Columbia, Co-Director
Warren T. Byrd, Jr., Nelson-Byrd Landscape Architects
Harry Dodson, Dodson Associates
Cyril Paumier, LDR Inc.
Carter van Dyke, Carter van Dyke, Associates
Marybeth Carter, March Associates
Kathlene John-Alder, March Associates
William Lennertz, Lennertz Coyle & Associates
Douglas Kelbaugh, University of Michigan
Jonathan Barnett, University of Pennsylvania
Mark Keener, Brown & Keener Urban Design
Robert Brown, Brown & Keener Urban Design
Christopher Steinon, Skidmore Owings & Merrill
Joel Schwartz, Joel Schwartz Architects
Colin Cathcart, Kiss and Cathcart Architects
Richard Close, Somerset Alliance for the Future
David Pederson, NJ Brownfields Program Director
Thomas R. D’Amico, Somerset County Planning Division
Walter Lane, Somerset County Planning Division

Transportation Focus Group:
Jeffery Zupan, Regional Plan Association, Chairman
William Beetle, NJ Department of Transportation
Robert Bzik, Somerset County Planning Division
John Carnegie, MSM Regional Council
David Pederson, NJ Brownfields Program Director
Robert Brown, Brown & Keener Urban Design
Colin Cathcart, Kiss and Cathcart Architects
Richard Close, Somerset Alliance for the Future
Stephen Dragos, Somerset Alliance for the Future
Walter Lane, Somerset County Planning Division

Policy Focus Group:
Robert D. Yaro, Regional Plan Association, Chairman
Diane Brake, MSM Regional Council
Robert Bzik, Somerset County Planning Division
Lee Canttaneo, NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Patricia Clark, Somerset County Office of Policy and Organizational Development
Henry Colman, Rutgers University
Denise Coyle, Somerset County Freeholder Director
Thomas G. Dallessio, Governor’s Office on Policy and Planning
Stephen Dragos, Somerset Alliance for the Future
Stephen Kehayes, NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Michael Kerwin, Somerset County Smart Growth Coalition, Inc.
Laurette Kratina, Somerset County Planning Division
Anthony McCracken, Somerset County Planning Division
Bernard Navatto, Jr., Somerville Borough Planning Board
Peter Palmer, Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders
Carlos Rodrigues, NJ Office of State Planning
Robert Tudor, NJ Department of Environmental Protection
Tom Wells, NJDEP, Division of Green Acres
Tom Wright, NJ Office of State Planning

Richard Mariani, NJ Transit
Anita Perez, RideWise, Inc.
Peter Riscica, NJ Department of Transportation
Martin Robins, Rutgers University
Paul Sullivan, NJ Transit
Andrew Tessema, NJ Department of Transportation
Laura Watson, Somerset County Planning Division
Kenneth Wedeen, Somerset County Planning Division

Acknowledgements
# Somerset County Regional Center Vision Initiative

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I. Introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>II. Design Team Workshop Objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reinforce and Link the Three Core Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Exploit the Potential of the Road Network to Connect Communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Reinforce the Role of Natural Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>III. Transportation Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Transportation and Land Use Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>A Transportation Vision for the Regional Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Transportation Vision Implementation Strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>IV. Policy Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>Implementation Issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Findings of the Policy Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>A Plan for Action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>V. Next Steps</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. INTRODUCTION

The Somerset County Regional Center is an incredibly diverse and interesting landscape. It is also fractured in terms of its built form, open space resources, pedestrian connections and ultimately, community. Clearly, there are many wonderful pieces in the Regional Center landscape - beautiful residential neighborhoods, lively downtown shopping streets, stately corporate campuses. The problem though, is that "the total is less than the sum of its parts".

"Sustainable development" in a maturing metropolis, such as the greater New York/New Jersey metropolitan area, is not only a matter of how new "greenfield" development takes place, but even more a matter of retrofitting, connecting and completing places like the Somerset County Regional Center. The goal should be to do this in ways that create a sense of place and community, while maintaining the unique suburban character and quality of life that developers, retailers, local officials and home-buyers demand.

The results of the Regional Center Vision Initiative Workshop summarized in this report, as well as the Regional Plan Association's work elsewhere in the region, underscores two of the fundamental issues with retrofitting "edge cities": the scale of these places in an unplanned setting defeats any attempt at a synergistic and comprehensive development and redevelopment, and sprawl patterns do not support significant transit and pedestrian oriented improvements that compact centers are able to provide.
Introduction

The Regional Center of Somerset County consists of the Boroughs of Raritan and Somerville and portions of the Township of Bridgewater. These municipalities jointly received official center designation from the NJ State Planning Commission in 1996. The Regional Center was the first tri-municipal center in the State. The Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County Inc., a non-profit organization, was established to provide a coordinated planning framework for the center so as to enhance the quality of life for its residents, while providing a favorable environment for business. The Regional Center Partnership is made up of representatives from the three communities, the County of Somerset, Somerset County Chamber of Commerce, Somerset Alliance for the Future, Somerset Coalition for Smart Growth, Somerset County Coalition on Affordable Housing and the private sector.

The Regional Center Vision Initiative brought together a broad cross section of design professionals, planners, elected officials and civic associations for an intensive five-day workshop. The purpose was to envision the next twenty years of growth based on the principles of sustainable and center based growth. Interdisciplinary teams of architects, landscape architects and urban designers worked with local government and non-profit agencies to address these design issues from three different points of view:

• The "Points" Team - reinforcing existing concentrations of land uses and the connections among them;
• The "Lines" Team - reexamining the role of the major and minor highway corridors in shaping development patterns and enhancing mobility through carefully planned infrastructure improvements; and
• The "Planes" Team - establishing the role of natural systems in guiding future development.

While design of the center was the primary focus of this workshop, two other parallel working groups were convened: one focusing on transportation issues and another focusing on implementation and policy issues. Jeff Zupan, Senior Fellow for Transportation at RPA, chaired the Transportation Focus Group and explored potential transportation improvements and strategies with state, county and local officials. Robert Yaro, Executive Director of RPA, led the Policy Focus Group. This group, comprised of state and local leaders, explored the policy side of implementing the vision, including transfer of development rights and revenue/service-sharing. This report summarizes the results of all of these efforts.

This project is intended to serve as a model for other places in New Jersey and the nation, not only in terms of design principles, but in terms of the process - a process that has brought together, in a creative and cooperative environment, the broadest possible array of civic, government, business, design and technical resource people. The sustainable growth of the New York/New Jersey Metropolitan Region will depend on the success of places such as the Somerset County Regional Center.

This is only the first step for Somerset County and the Regional Center Partnership in a twenty-year process. The public presentation of the results at the end of the workshop initiated what must be an ongoing dialog and outreach effort. The ideas explored here will have meaning if they have the support of the communities, neighborhoods and public and private interests that comprise the Regional Center. By helping the community envision a bright future, a process can be shaped that will ultimately result in a Regional Center where “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts”.

The Regional Center Vision Initiative
II. DESIGN TEAM WORKSHOP OBJECTIVES

Reinforce and Link the Three Core Areas

There are three principal core areas within the larger Somerset County Regional Center: downtown Somerville, downtown Raritan and the Bridgewater Commons area (Regional Shopping Center). The downtowns of Raritan and Somerville are superb examples of turn-of-the-century traditional main street civic and business core areas surrounded by mature residential and mixed-use neighborhoods. These downtowns possess strong economic, civic and community vitality with demonstrated "staying power" that should be reinforced.

Although these three core areas are relatively close to each other, there are barriers between them, especially between the mall area and the two traditional downtowns. Presented here are a number of strategies for reinforcing the connections between them. Some of these strategies propose the strategic placement of future development to reinforce connecting corridors, the development of links among development parcels, and reinforcement of the existing downtowns through selected development projects.

Transit service improvements are suggested, in particular a rubber-wheeled trolley between the three core areas and expansion of rail and bus linkages to employment centers and neighborhoods.

Figure 2. Strategic Plan Diagram by the Points Team

The "Points Team" was charged with the task of creating connections between the three principal core areas within the Regional Center – downtown Somerville, downtown Raritan and the Bridgewater Commons Regional Shopping Center. As the "new math" on this sketch indicates, the basic philosophy is that if these connections are made, "the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts". In addition to the physical planning ideas presented, this team proposed a shuttle system between the three core areas that would use the roads outlined in red.
Figure 3. Over-all Regional Center Plan by the Points Team

This plan, prepared by the Points Team, shows the relationship among the three core areas. Development is concentrated around the mall to create a new core area for Bridgewater. Downtown Somerville is reinforced by extending the existing street pattern into the landfill site. Restoring the Woolen Mills as a mixed-use destination site can enhance downtown Raritan.

Figure 4. Detail Plan of the Connecting Corridors

The connecting streets are reinforced by promoting infill, and where appropriate, higher density development along them (rendered as the red buildings at the ends of the blocks). North Bridge Street and Grove Street are paired, and together form the principal connection between downtown Somerville and the Bridgewater Commons area. These two roads are looped together where they intersect with the proposed Route 22 Suburban Boulevard. Landscape architecture and site design techniques are utilized to emphasize the connection between these two core areas.
Create a central place at the Bridgewater Commons and surrounding areas.

Major office, hotel, and retail expansions have recently been proposed for the 900,000 sq. ft. enclosed Bridgewater Commons Regional Shopping Center and adjoining separately owned SJP, Inc. parcels. Adjacent to this is the Bridgewater Municipal Complex and Sixth Avenue Redevelopment Area, within which substantial infill and redevelopment opportunities also exist. Rather than continue the “status quo,” the designers propose retrofitting this area to become more “center-like.”

The area around the Bridgewater Commons, including the large parcels to the west, the municipal complex to the north and the uses to the east, can be consolidated and additional development introduced. This would create a town center environment in place of what is currently a dispersed, auto-dependent “edge city” type of environment. There are precedents throughout the country for re-making malls into pedestrian-friendly, “downtown” environments. Unfortunately, the scale and configuration of the mall property does not lend itself to that kind of makeover, and so it will remain an automobile oriented facility. Nevertheless, the designs demonstrate that internal connections within this area can be enhanced and linkages to the downtown core areas strengthened.

Future planning should exploit opportunities to connect Bridgewater Commons itself to the adjacent developments. The Somerset Corporate Center properties to the west of US Route 202/206 are at a similar elevation as the lowest level of the mall. This creates the possibility for an at-grade connection between these two major properties by passing underneath US 202/206. This connection could take the form of an open-air drive, pedestrian or bikeway, an enclosed arcade lined with stores and services or the next generation of office development.

A number of strategic road realignments will help connect these areas, which are currently separated by the highways and highway interchanges. These public infrastructure improvements could become the framework for the future build-out of the mall vicinity as a new core area. The key new alignments would be between Vogt Drive, Prince Rodgers Avenue and Commons Way.

Figure 5. Detail Plan of the Greater Bridgewater Commons Mall Area

In addition to the new core area for Bridgewater to the west of the regional mall, this plan reorganizes development around a new street and block system that incorporates the various municipal uses east of the highway. Vogt Drive and Prince Rodgers Avenue are realigned to facilitate the connection between the municipal area, the mall and the new core area. This plan also shows the proposed mall expansion terminating in a high-rise hotel at the junction of the highways. The dashed line represents the proposed shuttle bus route linking the three core areas of downtown Somerville, downtown Raritan and the Bridgewater Commons area.
A new core area for Bridgewater Township is proposed on the site of what is now the Somerset Corporate Center just to the west of Bridgewater Commons Mall. It is envisioned as a mixed-use, compact, walkable collection of buildings and outdoor spaces that engender a sense of place and urbanity. The new core area has a clear center and edges: a variety of public and private buildings; clearly defined streets lined with trees and mid-rise buildings. Parking structures in conjunction with on-street parking are provided to reduce surface parking lots.

This plan, prepared by the Points Team, incorporates the two office buildings and parking structures already built by SJP, Inc. and tries to incorporate the “hemicycle” street and building footprints planned for the southern half of the property.

The core area is organized around two boulevards: the “Boulevard of Commerce” extends from a cluster of three office buildings (lower right hand corner of the sketch) north and west through the new core area. At this point, there is an intersection with “Civic Boulevard”, which connects over the highway to Bridgewater Commons and beyond.
The new Bridgewater core area and its connection to the regional mall as proposed by the Points Team are pictured here. Since the ground floor elevation of the mall is similar to that of the existing corporate center, it may be possible to create a pedestrian and/or automobile connection between the two. This connection could be created both by extending the mall in this direction and by creating an enclosed shopping arcade as shown here.
Figures 9 and 10. Aerial View of the Bridgewater Commons Hotel Site, and Corresponding Aerial Photograph

This sketch shows an expansion of the mall to the southeast in the area between Interstate 287 and US Route 22. In recognition of the scale of this high-speed highway environment, the hotel could be a high-rise structure of a larger scale than the town center development shown elsewhere. In this way, the hotel becomes a landmark, announcing arrival at this point where the connections between the three core areas come together.
Develop the landfill site as an extension of downtown Somerville.

The 90-acre Somerville Landfill site presents an enormous redevelopment opportunity for reinforcing Somerville’s downtown. This site is the largest parcel available for redevelopment in this more fully developed Borough. Redevelopment of the landfill should take place by creating a design with a street and block system that will allow incremental, mixed-use development of this area. This scenario would promote higher density, mixed-commercial and multi-family residential development in the area adjacent to the train station. Connections to downtown Somerville would include a new underpass at the rail line between the landfill site and the parking lot behind Landmark Shopping Center. New infill development within the parking lot of the Landmark Shopping Center would be used to reinforce connections between downtown Somerville, the landfill site and the Bridgewater Commons area.

The configuration of this site suggests that this new block and street pattern should have a southwest, diagonal orientation towards the Raritan River. This would facilitate connections to the River and to downtown Raritan, and enable some commercial development along US Route 206.

**Figures 11 and 12. Aerial Perspective of Somerville Landfill (looking southwest), and Corresponding Aerial Photograph**

The Somerville Landfill site could be developed as an extension of the downtown, with a traditional street and block system. There could be higher density, mixed-commercial and multi-family residential development adjacent to the train station. There could also be commercial development along the edge of the site that is bounded by US Route 206.
Figure 13. Plan for the Somerville Landfill Site

A street and block system that represents a continuation of the existing traditional grid pattern could be mapped over the entire site to encourage incremental, mixed-use development of this area. The scale of the blocks and tax lots should mirror the scale of Somerville’s existing traditional neighborhoods. They should have a southwest, diagonal orientation towards the Raritan River in order to strengthen connections with the river and adjoining Raritan Borough neighborhoods. This would also enable some commercial development along Route 206. In this scenario, portions of the wetlands are restored and preserved, which then become an amenity for the new neighborhood.

Figure 14. Ground-level Perspective of Typical Housing for the Somerville Landfill Site

The proposed street and block system could accommodate a variety of housing types, subject to market forces and community needs. A consistent low-rise character similar to the three-story attached townhouses shown here could be applied to the site. The new buildings would create well-defined spaces along the streets and within the block interiors. The architecture can draw on the many traditional styles already present in the existing downtowns of Somerville and Raritan.
Redevelop the Raritan Woolen Mills as a mixed-use destination that both reinforces the downtown and provides a gateway to the Raritan River Greenway.

Dating back to the Civil War, the historic Raritan Woolen Mills is a direct link to the borough’s early industrial roots. This 10-acre brownfield site provides a significant redevelopment opportunity for Raritan’s core area. The Raritan Woolen Mills buildings could become the central feature of a new “village green” enclosed by the existing mill building, a new and more architecturally distinguished post office and two or more new buildings. The new buildings would flank the new public space, and could incorporate the senior housing development proposed for an infill parcel on Elizabeth Street opposite the mill. A theme or focus for the Woolen Mills would solidify its role as a new destination. This might include arts and antiques, specialty restaurants and retail, or a community theater. The architectural restoration of the Woolen Mills should include the clock tower, which could become a focal point for the village green and a symbol for a rejuvenated downtown and restored Raritan River Greenway.

Figure 15. The Raritan Woolen Mills

Figure 16. Worker Housing Adjacent to the Raritan Woolen Mills
The Raritan Woolen Mills area is an asset that can be exploited by creating a new village green between the mill buildings and Somerset Street, a gateway to the Raritan River Greenway and a new mixed-use center. This image shows the new village green flanked by a new, more architecturally distinguished post office and a matching building where the gas station presently sits. The mill itself is adapted as a mixed-use destination with perhaps an arts and crafts focus. The restored clock tower provides a focal point for the village green and serves as a symbol for Raritan’s revitalized downtown and the greenway. The connection to the greenway is enhanced by bringing the flood plain and riparian zone into the site and up to the front of the mill.
At present, the major highways that slice through the Regional Center divide its neighborhoods and downtown areas rather than connect them. In particular, the US Routes 22 and 202/206 corridors, currently the harbinger of high-speed traffic and sprawl, could become an armature for sustainable development in the future. Route 22 is an older U.S. highway that historically served as the major east-west corridor linking the Somerset County municipalities of Watchung, North Plainfield, Green Brook, Bound Brook, Bridgewater, Somerville and Branchburg. It provides access to Union and Essex counties to the east, terminating at the NJ Turnpike south of Newark. To the west, it provides access to Hunterdon County, where it joins I-78 in Clinton Township. As this area grew, a new interstate highway system comprised of routes I-78 and I-287 has reduced the role of Route 22, making it secondary in terms of the regional movement of people and goods. Route 22 connects with Route 202 just north of the Somerville Circle.

Development patterns and redevelopment challenges on the stretch of Route 202 within the Regional Center are similar to those affecting Route 22. For this reason, as well as the configuration of the Route 22/202 interchange and new circle “fly-over”, the design teams viewed the segments of Routes 202 and 22 which join within the Regional Center as part of one corridor for the purposes of this workshop.

The newer Bridgewater Commons regional mall and nearby “big box” retail complexes are out-competing established retail strip developments. This increased economic competition has created redevelopment opportunities in older retail strip development areas along Route 22. Increasing functional obsolescence and safety hazards also plague this corridor. Thus, the stage has been set to recreate this corridor as a suburban boulevard that can instill a sense of community that will unite rather than divide the Regional Center.
Figure 20. Plan Diagram of Road Network and Neighborhood Structure

This plan diagram shows how the road network suggests where neighborhoods begin and end within the Regional Center. It also shows neighborhood-scale commercial development at the crossroads of neighborhood arterials, and open space amenities within each neighborhood. The larger red areas depict higher density concentrations of commercial activity focused along major roads and within the existing core areas.

Figure 21. Overall Plan for the Regional Center by the Lines Team

This plan highlights the role that the major roads play in organizing the entire Regional Center. These roads can both connect the three core areas and reinforce connections to existing and new development at the east and west ends of the Regional Center. This plan shows the areas for which this team made more detailed recommendations as presented in the following images. These include: the redevelopment of the Chimney Rock Road area in the eastern portion of the Regional Center; the redevelopment of the light industrial sites in the western portion on Route 202; the creation of a new core area for Bridgewater; the reinforcement of downtown Somerville through the redevelopment of the landfill site; and the redesign of the Route 22/202 Corridor within the Regional Center as a suburban boulevard.
Portions of Route 22 and Route 202 that Traverse the Regional Center Should be Redeveloped as a Suburban Boulevard.

A balance between the two roles these roadways play, as both commercial corridors and regional highways, can be achieved by applying the alternative land-use and roadway design configurations that comprise the suburban boulevard concept embraced by all three design teams. A suburban boulevard would have a unified and architecturally pleasing treatment for lighting, curbs, signage and other road-related elements. This could be accomplished through the establishment of design standards for the boulevard that address height, setback and the location of parking and driveways. Parking lots, walkways and access drives should be reconfigured to promote pedestrian and automobile connections so as to minimize car trips. Land use intensities should be increased in order to promote transit usage.

Key intersections with north-south streets would be redesigned in order to connect the new boulevard to Somerville, Raritan and Bridgewater neighborhoods and downtown core areas. These intersections should be significant events along the way, with well-designed and clearly articulated pedestrian crossings connecting the north and south sides of Routes 22 and 202. Speed would be reduced to 40 mph, accomplished through signalization and other traffic calming measures.

Finally, the significant landscape resources within the highway corridor should be redesigned and managed in order to realize their potential as "green infrastructure." This would include a system of retention basins and plantings that could naturally filter out and break down pollutants from storm water run-off.
Figures 24 and 25. Aerial Perspective of Route 22 as a Suburban Boulevard (looking west), and Corresponding Aerial Photograph

In this drawing by the Lines Team, Route 22, as it traverses the Regional Center, is redesigned as a suburban boulevard. The expansive lawns of the corporate campuses along Route 22 become part of the boulevard environment. Enhancing the landscaping treatment of the high-way median further reinforces the suburban boulevard concept.
As with the other designs, Route 22 is rendered again as a suburban boulevard. In this version by the Lines Team, new commercial development at the intersections with local north-south roads reinforces the connection between redesigned Route 22 and adjoining neighborhoods. These major signalized intersections become important events along the boulevard, allowing traffic and pedestrians to cross safely.

This drawing by the Lines Team shows how the significant landscape resources within the highway corridor could be designed and managed to exploit their potential as “green infrastructure.” A system of retention basins, swales and plantings could “scrub” hard-surface runoff before it enters the natural water system. In this drawing, one of the large retention basins becomes a landscape feature at the redesigned intersection of Route 22 with North Bridge and Grove Street.

The development of corridor-wide design guidelines is recommended to promote uniform standards for setbacks and building siting. Connections between parking lots should be designed to promote walking, and landscaping techniques should be applied that are consistent with the suburban boulevard concept.
Figures 28 and 29. Aerial Perspective of Route 22 as a Suburban Boulevard (looking east), and Corresponding Aerial Photograph

Above, key intersections with north-south streets are redesigned by the Lines Team to connect the new boulevard to adjoining Somerville and Bridgewater neighborhoods. These intersections should incorporate well-designed and clearly articulated pedestrian crossings. Signalization and other traffic calming measures would reduce speeds to 40 miles per hour and make safer pedestrian crossings possible. The suburban boulevard should have a unified and architecturally pleasing treatment for lighting, curbs, paving and other road-related elements.
Figure 30. Short-term Recommendations for Enhancing Connections to the Mall

Extra space associated with the underpass is used to create a wide sidewalk for pedestrians, especially for students who walk from Immaculata High School in downtown Somerville and nearby neighborhoods to the Bridgewater Commons Mall.

Figure 31. Long-term Recommendations for Enhancing Connections to the Mall

The off-ramp from Route 22 and Route 202/206 is eliminated as part of this redesign of the interchange, and a pedestrian underpass is created below Cloverleaf Drive.
Redesign local arterial roads to strengthen community character and shape development patterns.

The traditional grid street patterns of Somerville and Raritan provide a neighborhood scale community structure that is an asset to the Regional Center. This street pattern should be enhanced with pedestrian, bikeway and auto amenities.

**Figure 32. Plan Detail for a Neighborhood Commercial Arterial**

This drawing shows how parking can be accommodated in a retail area where space for on-street parking is limited.

**Figure 33. Section Details for Neighborhood Arterials**

Shown here are a variety of prototypical cross sections of some of the neighborhood streets that have been emphasized in the over-all plan. These sections show different relative positions for buildings, side walks and street trees, depending on whether the road is a local shopping street, a residential street or an arterial. In all cases, the emphasis is on creating a sense of safety and enclosure and the clear articulation of public, semi-public and private realms.
Redesign areas around the former American Cyanamid properties and within the Chimney Rock Road corridor in order to strengthen connections among the train station, Somerset Ballpark, future sports park and residential neighborhoods west of Chimney Rock Road.

Opportunities for major large-scale development exist at the eastern and western perimeters of the Regional Center. Development pressures, particularly for the eastern parcels, are great due to their proximity and easy access to Interstate 287. With the completion of the new Somerset Ballpark (minor league baseball stadium) and the Bridgewater Promenade (“big box” retail center), the stage has been set for continued large scale commercial and retail uses within the Chimney Rock Road Corridor. Future development can be shaped to enable this area to serve as a gateway to the Regional Center. This can be accomplished through the design and layout of new buildings, and by creating new multi-modal transportation connections. Pedestrian amenities should also be incorporated, and innovative landscaping techniques should be applied.

The designs prepared during this workshop anticipate the future subdivision of these properties to allow for intermediate scale redevelopment of the parking areas. This could create new pedestrian connections and shared public spaces, which could then be connected to each other and to the surroundings. Easements for these connections should be discussed with the current and future developers. Three of the most significant connections are: from the center of the retail center to Kline Place; from the north end of the retail center to Union Avenue and an arc-shaped connection from the train station/stadium area to the intersection of Chimney Rock Road and Union Avenue.

Despite the tendency to think of the Chimney Rock Road corridor in terms of its significance as a north-south axis, the emphasis should be on the potential for development in this area to reinforce the east-west connections between Bridgewater, Somerville and Bound Brook along West Union Avenue and Main Street.

The scale of development should be graduated, decreasing from east to west in order to create a transition from the large-scale commercial development along the highway to the smaller scale, in-fill development of the residential neighborhoods. This could be accomplished through height, bulk and coverage restrictions. Chimney Rock Road should be developed at an intermediate scale. Commercial buildings should be arranged in campus-like settings and should incorporate low-rise to mid-rise residential facilities.

The residential neighborhoods to the west, particularly the areas between Chimney Rock Road and Finderne Avenue, should be revitalized through new in-fill development. The street, block and lot patterns here suggest that this area could become as vital and attractive as the best neighborhoods in Somerville. Creation of a greenway along the Middle Brook and Cuckholds Brook in this vicinity could provide the same kind of neighborhood amenity that Peter’s Brook provides for Somerville, albeit at a more modest scale.
Figure 34. Detail Plan of Sites in the Eastern Portion of the Regional Center

This plan illustrates how infill development in the eastern portion of the Regional Center can connect the Bridgewater Train Station, the retail center, Somerset Ballpark and the future park to the residential neighborhoods west of Chimney Rock Road. It illustrates how the future subdivision of these properties could allow for intermediate scale redevelopment of the parking areas. In this way, new connections can be made from the center of the Bridgewater Promenade retail complex to Kline Place, from the north end of Bridgewater Promenade to Union Avenue, and from the train station/stadium area to the intersection of Chimney Rock Road and Union Avenue.
Somerset County Regional Center Vision Initiative

Figures 35 and 36. Aerial Perspective of Sites within the Route 22 Corridor (looking west), and Corresponding Aerial Photograph

This view shows a graduated scale of development, decreasing from east to west, in order to create a transition from the large-scale commercial development along the highway to the smaller scale, in-fill development of the residential neighborhoods. Chimney Rock Road is developed here at an intermediate scale. Commercial buildings and low-rise to mid-rise garden apartments are arranged in campus-like settings. The residential neighborhoods to the west, particularly the areas between Chimney Rock Road and Finderne Avenue, can be revitalized through new in-fill development based on Somerville's existing street, block and lot patterns. Creation of a greenway along the Cuckholds Brook and Middle Brook adjacent to Bound Brook Borough could provide the same kind of neighborhood amenity that Peter's Brook provides for Somerville, albeit at a more modest scale.

Design Team Workshop Objectives
Figure 37. Somerset Ballpark, Bridgewater

Figure 38. Cuckholds Brook, Bridgewater
Redevelopment of the Harris Semi-Conductor and Fischer Scientific sites at the western edge of the Regional Center should create connections among a new train station, the Vanderhaven Farms residential neighborhoods and the large corporate campuses along Route 202.

Due to the tremendous amount of residential development and the numerous opportunities for commercial redevelopment at the western end of the Regional Center, there exists an opportunity to add a new train station or relocate the North Branch Station, which would serve as a focal point for a more compact development pattern. A station located in the vicinity of the Milltown Road/Route 202 intersection would be within walking distance of the Vanderhaven Farms neighborhoods and nearby existing and proposed commercial uses on Route 202. A park-and-ride facility located here could also capture transit users who would otherwise have to drive through the Regional Center to get to the stations in Raritan or Somerville.

Application of the suburban boulevard design concept along this portion of Route 202 would result in new cross streets that would be aligned to link the Harris Semi-Conductor and Fisher Scientific redevelopment sites that are located opposite each other on the highway.

As with the American Cyanamid properties in the Chimney Rock Road area, the community should anticipate the future subdivision of these properties to allow for intermediate and small-scale redevelopment of the large-scale “big box” retail and office uses that are currently proposed. Building on their proximity to the 3,000 +/- unit Vanderhaven Farms neighborhood, mixed-use redevelopment could include housing. Mixed-use redevelopment would also support pedestrian connections between the two redevelopment sites, as well as connections among the corporate campuses across and along Route 202, the Bradley Gardens neighborhood and the western-most residential sections of Raritan.

Design Team Workshop Objectives
Figures 41 and 42. Aerial Perspective of the Route 202 Corridor (looking north), and Corresponding Aerial Photograph

This aerial view shows how the redevelopment of the Harris Semiconductor and Fischer Scientific sites (totaling 163 acres) located within the western portion of the Regional Center, could create connections among a new or relocated train station, the Vanderhaven Farms residential neighborhoods and the large corporate campuses along Route 202. The new or relocated station would be within walking distance of the Vanderhaven Farms neighborhoods and other new developments along this portion of the corridor. A park-and-ride facility here could serve transit users who would otherwise have to drive to the stations in Raritan or Somerville where parking is limited. As with the American Cyanamid properties in the Chimney Rock Road area, this view shows the eventual subdivision of the large-scale “big box” developments that are currently proposed in order to allow for intermediate and small-scale mixed-use redevelopment. This scenario is also based on the application of suburban boulevard design concepts.
Reinforce the Role of Natural Resources

The Regional Center is framed by the Watchung Mountains to the north and the Raritan River to the south, east and west. The 2,700-acre privately held Duke Estate forms an oasis of green immediately to the south of the Regional Center. This area is viewed as an enormous environmental asset and major defining feature of the Regional Center’s southern boundary.

Natural systems should play a major role in shaping future development. Opportunities should be identified where greenways, stream and river corridors can knit the Regional Center together, provide neighborhood and regional scale amenities, promote sustainable forms of development and restore the ecology of the area.

**Figure 43. Natural Systems in the Regional Center**

Natural resources, including stream corridors and the Watchung Mountains, which have little presence on most typical maps, are rendered here to bring them into the foreground. In addition to the Raritan River, this drawing by the Planes Team highlights the significant topography north of the highway and the numerous small streams that wind through the Regional Center.

**Figure 44. Diagram of Natural and Man-made Systems**

These diagrams overlay natural systems with man-made systems, in particular, roadways and the natural drainage system. From these diagrams, one can identify the places where the two systems are coincident or in conflict. Opportunities to resolve conflicts and create synergies between these two systems should be addressed during the development and redevelopment processes. For example, swales could become part of “sustainable street” sections and be designed to direct “naturally scrubbed water” to rivers and streams.
Figure 45. Proposed Land-use Diagram

This diagram describes a range of land use recommendations, including: the new or relocated train station in the western portion of the Regional Center; new office development as part of the Route 22 suburban boulevard redesign; a new cinema complex as an integrated part of the Landmark Shopping Center; flex industrial space along the rail line; new housing along the proposed Riverside Drive and a velodrome as part of the park development at the former American Cyanamid properties.

Figure 46. The Raritan River Greenway
Create a new “Riverside Drive” and park along the Raritan River Greenway.

Community awareness of the Raritan River Greenway is surprisingly limited, due to the absence of pedestrian linkages and the existence of barriers created by roads, buildings and infrastructure. This greenway has been obscured by existing development patterns, and "rediscovered" by the design teams as the most significant natural resource and potential recreation amenity of the Regional Center.

Key components of this strategy include the following:
• Promote new development between the railway and the new Riverside Drive, including residences along the roadway frontage overlooking the new “Riverfront Park”, flex office-warehouse space behind the residential development along the railway, a school site, plus neighborhood commercial locations along Finderne Avenue.
• Provide a bikeway along the proposed “Riverside Drive”, as well as other pedestrian connections to the neighborhoods north of the railroad tracks.

Design Team Workshop Objectives

Create a new “Riverside Drive” and park along the Raritan River Greenway.

Community awareness of the Raritan River Greenway is surprisingly limited, due to the absence of pedestrian linkages and the existence of barriers created by roads, buildings and infrastructure. This greenway has been obscured by existing development patterns, and "rediscovered" by the design teams as the most significant natural resource and potential recreation amenity of the Regional Center.

Key components of this strategy include the following:
• Promote new development between the railway and the new Riverside Drive, including residences along the roadway frontage overlooking the new “Riverfront Park”, flex office-warehouse space behind the residential development along the railway, a school site, plus neighborhood commercial locations along Finderne Avenue.
• Provide a bikeway along the proposed “Riverside Drive”, as well as other pedestrian connections to the neighborhoods north of the railroad tracks.

Design Team Workshop Objectives

Create a new “Riverside Drive” and park along the Raritan River Greenway.

Community awareness of the Raritan River Greenway is surprisingly limited, due to the absence of pedestrian linkages and the existence of barriers created by roads, buildings and infrastructure. This greenway has been obscured by existing development patterns, and "rediscovered" by the design teams as the most significant natural resource and potential recreation amenity of the Regional Center.

Key components of this strategy include the following:
• Promote new development between the railway and the new Riverside Drive, including residences along the roadway frontage overlooking the new “Riverfront Park”, flex office-warehouse space behind the residential development along the railway, a school site, plus neighborhood commercial locations along Finderne Avenue.
• Provide a bikeway along the proposed “Riverside Drive”, as well as other pedestrian connections to the neighborhoods north of the railroad tracks.
Figure 48. Sketch of Sustainable Street Section
The "green infrastructure" principles that guide the Route 22 boulevard redesign can be applied at all scales. Here, runoff from a local arterial is directed to roadside swales before entering the aquifer.

Figure 49. Main Stem of the Raritan River, Borough of Raritan
The Raritan River is the Regional Center’s most significant natural resource and potential recreation amenity.
Figure 50. Detail Plan of Riverside Drive and Downtown Somerville Area

The redevelopment of the Somerville Landfill site shown here is based on a grid street pattern that could accommodate small-scale office buildings similar to the Courtyard development on Route 206, or a townhouse and garden apartment development adjoining a park. It is suggested that regional destinations, such as film theaters, be constructed on sites in downtown Somerville, such as the Landmark Shopping Center, rather than on the other side of the railway where there is little synergy with other downtown activities. The “parkside” development between the railway and the new Riverside Drive is shown as having residential buildings along the roadway frontage overlooking the new Riverfront Park, flex office-warehouse space behind the residential development along the railway, a school site, plus neighborhood commercial locations along Finderne Avenue.

Design Team Workshop Objectives
New low-rise housing would be developed in key places along proposed Riverside Drive. West of Finderne Avenue, housing would be part of a redevelopment effort aimed at reclaiming the properties between the railroad tracks and the residential neighborhoods. Building on the presence of the book distribution company, other light industrial or flex industrial uses could be part of the mix. Closer to the train station, new housing would create a link between the existing downtown and the new roadway. Here, commercial uses could occupy the ground floors. In both locations, the residential development along the roadway adds security by keeping “eyes on the park”. The scale of the housing is in keeping with the low-rise character of the surrounding neighborhoods.
The Somerset County Regional Center offers a microcosm of the transportation and land use issues affecting suburban America. Somerville and Raritan are older towns that grew up adjacent to railroad stations built near the turn of the last century. Each had a commercial center a short walk from the railroad station and an industrial base tied to the railroad and homes within walking distance of the station. Shopping was done in town. Commuting by rail was possible to Newark thirty miles away and to New York ten miles farther.

Following World War II, auto ownership grew rapidly after years of being stifled by the Great Depression and the war. Urban residents moved to single-family suburban housing, lured by the G.I. Bill of Rights, low-interest mortgages and the promise of open space.Auto-mobility made every piece of land with a road accessible and therefore developable. In Somerset County, areas beyond the town centers, such as Bridgewater, became options for development. Housing on larger lots could be built in undeveloped and formerly inaccessible areas, consuming forests and farms. Commercial strip malls were built along highways such as Route 22 as newfound customers could drive. These strip malls were each designed for their own vehicular access, resulting in reduced traffic capacity and added accident-inducing conflicts. The strips’ individual establishments, each seeking to lure the high-speed motorist, scream for attention with a cacophony of ugly signs. Later came the Bridgewater Commons, a 900,000 square foot shopping mall, made possible by the new interstate highways built in the 1970s, I-287 running right alongside it and I-78 just a few miles away.

Sprinkled throughout the new suburbs are “single-tenant office buildings” (STOBs) and corporate campuses, designed for easy auto access with enough free parking for every employee to drive alone, with room to spare. These employment sites are located in Bridgewater and in other new suburban towns along the I-287 corridor in communities such as Parsippany to the north and Piscataway to the southeast, clogging I-287 and connecting roads such as Route 22 in morning and evening peak periods. There are now signs that locally bound traffic is beginning to avoid these main roads by diverting onto residential streets, causing safety concerns. New STOBs are mushrooming along I-78 to the west too. STOBs are almost always isolated from each other and from other land uses that their occupants might use, such as shopping or restaurants, ensuring more auto trips and inhibiting the “muscle modes” of walking and biking.

The effect of the shift to the new suburbs has been to weaken the ability of local transit to function effectively. Fewer people are riding local buses to reach jobs, school or shopping. The buses themselves are less convenient as most destinations are separated from each other and are set back from the main roads. Buses cannot circulate efficiently to serve potential riders, and riders have difficulty negotiating the last (or first) segment of their trip, the walk to or from their destination. Often sidewalks are absent, crossing streets is dangerous and walking routes are circuitous. In residential areas, sinuous street patterns ending in cul-de-sacs extend walking (or biking) distances.

Initially, the shift of employment sites and retail establishments to the new suburbs weakened the older centers of Somerville and Raritan. With fewer potential customers, many shops either
closed or began looking for “niche” retail uses. Fortunately, because Somerville is the county seat, new county offices located there helped to stem the tide. Through the efforts of Somerville’s District Management Corporation, streetscapes were upgraded with pavement treatments, new lighting, plantings and benches. Somerville has also been helped with a wider range of restaurants and more interesting and unique stores than the mall's national chains, serving the walk-in employment base within an easy drive or walk of downtown.

The juxtaposition of the three corridor communities and their relation to the highway network has created still another problem. Raritan and Somerville are south of both Route 22 and I-287. This has the effect of cutting them off from Bridgewater Commons to the north. A walk to the mall from Somerville is a dangerous and circuitous trek across high-speed on-ramps and over unpaved, often muddy footpaths formed by the repetition of adventurous (and autoless) pedestrians.

Moreover, much of the new construction, including community facilities, such as the library and senior center, have been located to the north of Route 22. As a result, these sites are isolated from many of their clients. Even when new community facilities have been located south of Route 22, they have been placed at sites removed from downtown areas. For example, the new Somerset Ballpark is located in the vicinity of the lightly used Bridgewater (formerly Calco) Rail Station in the eastern portion of the Regional Center, close to the interchange of I-287 and Route 22.

The net result of these developments has been to isolate those who cannot use an automobile, either for reasons of age, infirmity or income. One in ten Somerville and Raritan residents does not have an auto available. One in six persons in those two towns is above the age of 75, for whom driving may no longer be the safest option. One in twenty persons is disabled. One in twenty is an adolescent too young to drive and too independent to prefer parental chauffeuring. While there is some overlapping of these categories, a good guess is that one in four residents of the Regional Center is disadvantaged by the absence of quality alternatives. To be sure, it is possible to take a bus to some places in Somerville and Bridgewater, and it is possible to walk or bike. But transit service is infrequent and pedestrians and cyclists are faced with long distances and unsafe conditions. Regular route transit services are limited to about once an hour over the course of the day. NJ TRANSIT's #114-117 stops at the Commons and Main Street but not at the Somerville Rail Station. It runs express to New York and has five morning runs that reach New York before 9:30 am and runs about once an hour at other times. The #88 WHEELS route connects Somerville to points west as far as Clinton, and has three peak period services and operates less than once an hour through midday. It stops at the Commons, and both downtown
Somerville sites - Main Street and the railroad station. The #989 WHEELS route has a similar frequency, connecting Hillsborough with a number of corporate campuses and STOBs to the north, stopping at Main Street in Somerville along the way. The local #65/66 to Newark is hardly an option for Regional Center residents or workers due to infrequent service. The amenities for transit riders are scant. Shelters are absent and ticket sales limited to the Hotel Somerset on Main Street in Somerville, separated from the Somerville Railroad Station by four blocks, leaving much of the bus and rail service uncoordinated. Only one route stops at both places.

The three existing railroad stations in the Regional Center are along NJ TRANSIT’s Raritan Valley Line in Somerville, Raritan, and Bridgewater, with about 550, 500 and 45 round-trip riders per weekday, respectively. Somerville and Raritan have 26 trains stopping on weekdays, but Bridgewater has somewhat fewer. Most riders arrive at the station by automobile. Parking at Raritan is scarce and those arriving after the morning peak period are often without a legal place to leave their car. Raritan Valley riders do not have a one-seat direct ride to Manhattan because the line is not electrified, preventing trains from entering New York City. Those destined for midtown Manhattan must transfer in Newark to reach Penn Station-New York, and those destined to Lower Manhattan must transfer to PATH.

The Regional Center is the site of a convergence of major roads. In addition to Route 22 and I-287 and nearby I-78, US 202 and 206 pass through the area. Combined, they create a jumble of highway connections and choices bewildering to the unfamiliar driver. The result is undoubtedly unnecessary circuitous routings, hesitant motorists, and more accidents. Arriving motorists are met not only with a profusion of confusion, but have little idea that they have arrived at a single place.

Figure 53. The Route 22 Corridor in Somerville Borough and Bridgewater Township
A Transportation Vision for the Regional Center

Is it possible to eliminate or at least to alleviate these problems? That remains to be seen. But what is not possible is to seek change without a prospect of what could be. If the citizens of the Regional Center are to be convinced that remedies to these problems are worthwhile, then they have to see that it is possible to have something different and better. Only then will they work to influence their elected and appointed officials to put the necessary changes in place. The following vision is based upon the discussions of the Transportation Focus Group:

The Regional Center would be a place where the arrangement and design of land and the mixes of its uses would make transit, walking and biking easier and safer. Buildings would be clustered and located close to streets. Uses with a natural affinity for one another would be closer to each other. Offices would be a short walk to shops, and housing would be near community facilities. Housing choices would include medium density units, clustered in nodes of activity that included the services needed by residents, making transit more feasible.

Transit service would be frequent enough to be attractive, even to those with automobiles. Routes would be added to stop at more places - shopping, community facilities, and schools, with connections to other regional centers such as Morristown and New Brunswick. "Reverse" commute services would be put in place. Bus routes would all converge at one location, making transferring a real possibility. Mid-day service connecting the Commons with Somerville would be instituted. Every bus stop would be well lighted with a shelter, an up-to-date schedule and route map. Bus fares would be paid electronically or with a proof-of-payment system, to eliminate inconvenient and costly ticket selling. Bike racks and storage facilities would be in place at all rail stations and bikes allowed on buses and trains. Walking paths to the stations would be clear, direct, and obvious. With better options to reach the railroad station, parking expansion would be unnecessary.

Sidewalks would be continuous, well lighted, provided with benches and connected to adjoining land uses. There would be a bike network throughout the area to serve both the recreational user and the traveler.

The Regional Center would be a place with less traffic congestion than today. Employers would offer their employees choices, including flexible work hours, telecommuting, transit checks, carpooling matching services, and cashing out of free parking to level today's uneven playing field. Employers would run vans to meet each train arriving at the Somerville Train Station. If employees must work late or leave early in a family emergency, employers would guarantee a ride home, eliminating a psychological (and real) barrier to using transit or car-pooling.

Developers, with the support of lending institutions, would provide fewer parking spaces at their sites, anticipating the success of alternatives to the single-occupant vehicle. Parking requirements would be keyed to the availability of transit; the more transit available, the less parking required. Shopping malls would offer their customers a discount if they arrived by transit.

Zoning policies and land use ordinances in the three communities would be established to support these land use policies. Transfer of development rights should be pursued. Parking ratios would be set at a maximum rather than at a minimum and they would be tied to transit availability. Setback requirements would be reduced and clustering required. Walk-in retail would be zoned at ground floor levels in non-residential buildings.
Height restrictions would be eased to promote modest increases in density, while still offering the suburban advantage of open space. Zoning would encourage clustering around the three rail stations, adding walk-in riders to the rail network without the need for more parking. All new construction and expansion projects would be required to install sidewalks, bikeway links and transit amenities, such as bus pull-outs.

The Regional Center’s highways would look better and operate more safely and efficiently. Low cost improvements such as median barriers, left turn lanes, jug-handles and ramp metering would be installed. Through traffic would be separated from local traffic in boulevards. Highways would be designed to provide “optic” widths, to reduce the sense of a monolithic and all-consuming concrete juggernaut. Strip malls would be cleaned up to eliminate the almost continuous and unsafe access and egress points of today. Design standards for commercial signs would be enforced. Calming features, such as neck-downs and speed humps, would slow residential street traffic. Truck traffic would be discouraged from roads where they were a visual blight or compromised safety. Cul-de-sac and mid-block cut-throughs would shorten walk and bike trips. Signs would help out of town drivers sort through the confusing web of highway “spaghetti” and direct motorists to key destinations in the area. Arrival in the Regional Center would be obvious to all.

In short, the Regional Center would be a place that was recognizable as one place, but with distinguishable, yet coordinated parts, a model for New Jersey, the most suburban state in America. New Jersey, in turn, would be a model for suburban America.

Transportation Vision Implementation

Strategies

In order to achieve the vision outlined by the Transportation Focus Group, the following are recommendations, principles and strategies that must be implemented to achieve this potential vision:

1. Setting Priorities
   - Focus Somerset County’s development in the Regional Center in accordance with regional hierarchy:
     - Somerville Center is the first among equals
     - Raritan Center, Bridgewater Commons, Route 22, two Gateways equal among seconds

2. Design Principles
   - The Center can have one identity although it is many places
   - The Center is a place where people should work, live and play
   - Transportation and land use must be dealt with together
   - All modes must be more attractive and improve quality of life
   - Natural resources in and around the Regional Center should be connected
   - Natural resources are the shaper of development
   - Transit resources should be exploited
   - Development should be shaped using non-residential activities
   - Modal hierarchy should be tailored to locations
   - Transit should be planned as part of the Regional Center, not as an afterthought

3. Transportation Principles
   - Separate local from through traffic
   - Make safer roads with fewer curb cuts to reduce weaving
Transportation Focus Group

4. General Guidelines
- Downtowns should be walkable
- Neighborhoods should be walkable
- Schools should be walkable
- The Regional Center should be bikeable
- Greenways and greenlinks should be accessible by walking, bicycling and automobiles.

5. Transit Recommendations
- Relocate or provide a new rail station at Route 202, with walking and auto access
- Design rail stations to serve as front doors, not back alleys
- Consider supplementary service on the Raritan Valley Rail Line within the center
- Start a bus circulator or shuttle connecting destinations

6. Road Recommendations
- Study the feasibility of a Route 206 connector to Somerville through the landfill site
- Calm the streets and add pedestrian amenities
- Provide gateway signing
- Upgrade signing in Raritan
- Reinforce connections between Bridgewater and Somerville
- Undertake an access management study of offending portions of Route 22
- Employ parking management strategies including park & rides and on-site shared parking

7. Bikeway and Walkway Recommendations
- Complete the bikeway network and add complementary facilities
- Complete the walkway network

8. Land Use Recommendations
- Extend the grid and connect the stations and the green way via the Somerville landfill site
- Rethink the Landmark Shopping Center to make traditional-scale spaces
- Participate in the “Transit Village Program” of NJ Department of Transportation
- Participate in the “Model Stations Program” of NJ Transit
IV. POLICY FOCUS GROUP

Implementation Issues

The overall goal of the Regional Center Vision Initiative Workshop is to recommend ways that this sprawling suburban center can be transformed into a place with a greater sense of place and the capacity for sustained growth. The designers and planners working on the project have developed strategies to:

• make the Regional Center more transit and pedestrian friendly and less congested,
• create mixed use centers within the center, and
• promote greater density in some areas while reducing density in others.

If these strategies are to be implemented, new forms of inter-municipal cooperation and tax base sharing will almost certainly be required. New approaches to zoning and subdivision review may also be needed. Additional state and county incentives may be required to encourage towns to participate in these mechanisms.

Specific questions addressed by the Policy Focus Group include:

1. What is the most effective mechanism to achieve inter-municipal coordination?
2. How can shared services and concepts like regional tax base sharing be advanced? Further, how can a regional tax sharing system be designed to discourage the “race for ratables”?
3. How can better state agency buy in and cooperation be achieved to advance the center's agenda?
4. What types of model ordinances and other implementation tools should be made available to the towns? How can these ordinances be designed to promote mixed-use centers, and provide the flexibility required to induce developers to build them?
5. What state incentives will be needed to promote adoption of these innovations? Can the State Development and Redevelopment Plan (SDRP) and related incentives help steer growth into the Regional Center and discourage it in other locations? Can development consistent with the regional center strategy be pre-approved through state environmental and other reviews?
6. How can we get the marketplace to site development in locations and densities and mixes of activities that are desired? How can we discourage development in places where its is not needed?
7. How can the models proposed here be incorporated into the new State Plan and other state policy, tax, regulatory and incentive programs to promote similar outcomes in other suburban centers?

The success of all these initiatives will depend on our ability to explain them to local officials, residents, developers and other stakeholders in terms they can understand and that address their needs and concerns. The designers working on the project have prepared visual images of the desirable outcomes they are looking for. This policy report sets out an equally clear, well-defined description of the planning, regulatory and tax changes needed to make these outcomes possible.
Findings of the Policy Focus Group

Building on a Foundation of Regional Cooperation and Economic Strength

The Somerset Regional Center has one of the strongest networks of government, business, and civic leadership of any similar suburban center in the country. For more than a decade, these groups have been collaborating to create regional institutions and strategies. This area is also extremely prosperous, with one of the highest per capita incomes in the nation, one of the highest levels of educational attainment and a significant number of Fortune 500 company headquarters.

It is recommended that this strong foundation be built upon, by utilizing existing institutions. This includes the non-profit organizations such as the Regional Center Partnership (RCP), Somerset Alliance for the Future (SAF), the Somerset County Chamber of Commerce, the Somerset County Coalition on Affordable Housing (SCCOAH), the Somerset County Coalition for Smart Growth, and county and municipal governments.

The Policy Focus Group has discussed providing a broad framework in which future development, redevelopment, open-space and infrastructure investments within the Somerset Regional Center should take place. This framework identifies three connected levels of issues, with each contributing to the strategies and investments that would further the policy objectives. Taken together, these three levels of consideration, described as follows, provides a broad framework for the work of the Design Teams, Transportation and Policy Focus Groups and the success of the Regional Center Vision Initiative:

The Edge of a Metropolis
The Somerset County Regional Center is at the edge of the greater Metropolitan Area - RPA's Tri-State Region centered on New York City and including northern New Jersey, the Hudson Valley, southwestern Connecticut and Long Island. Competition for major regional facilities in nearby communities outside of the Regional Center should be discouraged. The Regional Center is poised to accept facilities of regional significance, such as the new minor league ballpark and the regional Bridgewater Commons Mall.

The Center of a Region
This area is also the center of a smaller regional area comprised of Somerset County and surrounding communities. The Regional Center includes the county seat, the Borough of Somerville; the older developed Borough of Raritan and portions of rapidly developing Bridgewater Township. Quality of life is one of the Regional Center's major assets. It offers historic, cultural and recreational activities, and a strong and growing employment base. The Somerset Regional Center includes diverse residential neighborhoods and a variety of housing types. The traditional neighborhoods surrounding the downtown areas of Raritan and Somerville benefit from the diversity, density, mix of uses and pedestrian and transit amenities these communities offer, and should be preserved and enhanced. The Regional Center has a wonderful open space network centered on the Raritan River and its tributaries. The river greenways, together with the Duke Estate (Somerset's Central Park) which bordering the Regional Center to the south, provide recreational opportunities, unify the center and contribute to its sense of place. Local, county, state and federal open space acquisition programs have been utilized along the Raritan River Greenway to enhance these connections. It is recommended that further enhancement of this greenway system be vigorously pursued.
The Connection of Three Municipalities

The three communities that comprise the Regional Center must coordinate their planning efforts. The unique character and identity of each of the communities should be strengthened, and at the same time, the identity of the Regional Center should be reinforced. To accomplish this, an appropriate economic function or role for each community must be identified within the regional center framework. A Public/Private Partnership for coordinating planning efforts - or at least a foundation for it - exists in the form of the newly incorporated non-profit organization, The Regional Center Partnership (RCP). The municipalities comprising Somerset Regional Center need technical assistance, resources and leadership to aid them in planning, identifying, and prioritizing development and redevelopment opportunities, infrastructure improvements, greenway enhancements, and neighborhood revitalization within the context of the larger whole. There is also the need for certain investments in infrastructure, human capital and redevelopment to be planned and prioritized at the regional center level.

The Policy Focus Group recognizes that the potential to enhance and define the identity and character of the Regional Center and its communities offered by the sites identified through the Regional Center Vision Initiative is significant. They are comprised primarily of brownfield and redevelopment sites for which complex financing, planning, engineering and remediation issues may be involved. It is vital that a coordinated approach among the municipalities comprising the Regional Center be taken when determining which sectors they will attract, how they will develop, and how they can be integrated into their communities and the regional center as a whole - and that there be regional center-wide commitment and support for these projects.

A Plan for Action

Regional Center Strategic Plan

A Regional Center Strategic Plan should be developed which will shape the next generation of development within the Regional Center. The plan should: provide that growth takes place within the capacity of the center's man-made and natural infrastructure; prescribe how growth can be sustained; the densities and mix of uses that should occur; address connectivity and linkage enhancements within the center and to the region as a whole; include a watershed planning dimension and be responsive to demographic changes. The plan should be developed within the framework of the County as a whole, and its relationship to the Tri-state Metropolitan Region. The Strategic Plan should be consistent with the State Development and Redevelopment Plan, and plan endorsement by the State Planning Commission should be pursued. It is important that the Regional Center Strategic Plan identify opportunities for immediate action in order to build support for this initiative.

The Strategic Plan should identify new investment opportunities in open space, infrastructure, recreation, housing and business for both public and private (corporate, philanthropic, individual, etc.) sectors. The Plan should also identify development and redevelopment projects in all three communities that have implications for and can shape the success of the Regional Center and its three municipalities, and the region as a whole. The Plan should include detailed development strategies and design standards for these principal sites.

The development of the plan should be an intensively public process. The master plans and zoning ordinances of the municipalities of Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville should be made consistent with the Regional Center Strategic Plan.
Likewise, the County Master Plan, and county policies and programs should be supportive.

It is important that the plan be both proactive and selective regarding redevelopment. The region's current economic strength provides us with a unique set of opportunities that allows us to be selective in the kinds of development we wish to attract to the Regional Center. However, unless there is continued public attention to these opportunities, market forces will prevail and these opportunities may not be maximized in favor of the interests of the host communities and the Regional Center.

Inter-local Agreements

It is recommended that the three municipalities comprising the Regional Center, and Somerset County enter into one or more inter-local agreements whereby proportional commitments are made by each toward the development, promotion and implementation of the Regional Center Strategic Plan. In accordance with the agreements, each municipality would adopt consistent master plans, zoning ordinances and permitting processes. They would collectively agree to utilize one redevelopment entity that can provide the technical, leadership and financial resources necessary to develop and carry out the Regional Center Strategic Plan. They would agree to pursue financial support through Governor Whitman’s recently adopted REAP and REDI Program which provides $10 million for studying shared services, consolidation and regionalization initiatives and $25 million for implementation at the local, county and school district levels. They would also agree to jointly participate in the development review and approval process for projects of regional significance and with impacts that extend beyond municipal borders.

Redevelopment Entity

The Policy Group does not support the creation of new layers of government or bureaucracy. However, it recognized a number of deficiencies in the current local land use planning, zoning, regulatory, review and permitting processes which would seriously hinder implementation of the Regional Center Strategic Plan. As a way of overcoming these deficiencies, it is recommended that the Regional Center Partnership (RCP) be utilized as the entity for developing, building support for and implementing the Regional Center Strategic Plan, based on the outcomes of the Regional Center Vision Initiative. RCP, which is comprised of leaders and decision-makers from County Government, Raritan, Bridgewater and Somerville, and private sector representatives, has successfully demonstrated its commitment to furthering the interests of the Regional Center, the communities of which it is comprised, and the county as a whole. The RCP is willing to act in this expanded capacity. The options as to how the RCP can be legally and administratively structured, and its capabilities expanded as such should be explored.

In this capacity, RCP would assume many of the responsibilities traditionally carried out by a redevelopment entity. It would strengthen relationships with various State agencies to maximize access to state programs and resources. RCP would facilitate the establishment of Special Improvement Districts where appropriate, as well as facilitate the establishment of a TDD, currently proposed in the Regional Center Traffic Study undertaken by the County Planning Board. RCP would facilitate the development and redevelopment of major sites by identifying and packaging financial resources, facilitating with site assembly, clean up, and infrastructure enhancements, including parking, roads and utility links. The RCP would facilitate municipal and developer access to state brownfield and redevelopment programs and resources, and provide the necessary coordina-
tion and technical assistance. The RCP would also aid in the establishment of an expedited permitting and approval process, as in Red Bank, acquire sites for redevelopment, and apply for pre-approval from state agencies as in Long Branch. RCP should also identify and encourage changes in state and local regulatory requirements and processes necessary for the successful implementation of the Regional Center Strategic Plan.

In the longer term, the County, RCP and the Regional Center communities it represents should engage other county municipalities in a dialogue about future cooperative land use planning efforts required to focus regional facilities and development projects with regional significance in the Regional Center.

**Financing**

At the completion of the Regional Center Strategic Plan, a series of phased investments in sites, facilities and management improvements that would benefit the entire Regional Center would be financed through SIDs, shared resources or other mechanisms. The Policy Group discussed ways that the local share of infrastructure costs could be addressed with regional center-wide resources.

It was estimated by a Policy Group participant that the total ratables for the three towns is close to $6 billion, of which $3 billion to $4 billion are located in the Regional Center, and $1 billion to $1.5 billion are non-residential. These ratables provide an enormous foundation for a regional Special Improvement District or other regional management and financing district.

A further consideration for financing capital investments would be the establishment of a pilot program for a Tax Increment Financing district, which would dedicate the increment of new property tax revenues to finance infrastructure investments.

**Building Community Support**

The benefits of regional planning and cooperation must be explained to local officials in a compelling way. RCP should bring their ideas to the municipal officials by presenting at regularly scheduled municipal council and planning board meetings.

Developed through an intensive, inclusive public process, the Regional Center Strategic Plan will be advocated and communicated in various forms. Presentations of the plan could be made using videos, multi-media, and simulations. These presentations could be incorporated into a variety of forums, including curricula in regional public and private schools, public presentations, and other activities. The use of 3-D and GIS models was also discussed.

At least one short-term project with highly visible results, identified in the Regional Strategic Plan, should be implemented successfully in each of the municipalities comprising the Somerset County Regional Center.
V. NEXT STEPS

The next steps in this process include the development of the Regional Center Strategic Plan and convening a series of ongoing meetings with key stakeholders, which will shape the next generation of development within the Regional Center. The Plan will identify future investment opportunities in open space, infrastructure, recreation, business and housing for both the public and private sectors. Adoption of inter-local agreements to help coordinate planning efforts will also be pursued. Further discussions on redevelopment efforts and special improvement and tax increment financing districts should also be undertaken. The Regional Center Partnership will coordinate the extensive public education/input process necessary to ensure that this plan reflects not only the goals and objectives of the Partnership but the three municipalities and the general public as well. Only through a broad basis of support and cooperation can this vision for the Regional Center can become an reality.

For further information, please contact:

Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County, Inc.
c/o Somerset County Planning Board
P.O. Box 3000
20 Grove Street
Somerville, NJ 08876-1262
Phone: (908) 231-7021
Fax: (908) 707-1749
Email: planningbd@co.somerset.nj.us

Regional Plan Association
4 Irving Place, 7th Floor
New York, New York 10003
Phone: (212) 253-2727
Fax: (212) 253-5666
Website: www.rpa.org