



BRIDGEWATER • RARITAN • SOMERVILLE

A partnership for a better tomorrow

IN SOMERSET COUNTY, NJ

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A partnership for a better tomorrow

Township of Bridgewater • Borough of Raritan • Borough of Somerville * Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders
Somerset County Planning Board • Somerset County Business Partnership • Somerset County Park Commission

Private Sector Businesses in the Regional Center

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 12, 2019

REGIONAL CENTER OF SOMERSET COUNTY RELEASES REPORT OUTLINING THE SUBURBAN DISADVANTAGE

SOMERVILLE, NJ – Continuing its focus on environmental sustainability, infrastructure improvements, and private sector economic investment, the Regional Center Partnership of Somerset County, NJ (Bridgewater, Raritan and Somerville) has identified an opportunity to more closely connect state resources with local priorities.

The Regional Center Partnership, the governments of the three communities, the Board of Chosen Freeholders, and the Somerset County Business Partnership (SCBP) engaged outside professional services to examine the current Grow NJ business assistance program and advocate for reforms that will improve the competitive position of the Regional Center communities and Somerset County.

The initiative was based on an analysis of Grow NJ in anticipation of its expiration and renewal scheduled for 2019. The legislative action will create an opportunity to advocate for business and incentive reforms that address retention and attraction in Somerset County.

The study determined that the Grow NJ program benefitted Somerset County for job retention only, establishing a goal to make recommendations for opportunities to more closely connect the program with local planning, development, and redevelopment efforts and priorities.

A competitive analysis between Somerset County and Jersey City (areas with similar market conditions) showed that Somerset County receives a disproportionately lower amount based on the 90 percent “limiter” clause in the enabling legislation, creating a suburban disadvantage that is outlined in the complete report. The “limiter” clause stipulates that projects in “priority” areas (Somerset County) receive a lesser amount in tax incentives per job than the same project in a designated “urban” area (Jersey City).

Among the additional findings of the study are:

500 of 565 NJ municipalities are disadvantaged based on current program provisions.

Two case studies documented a disproportionate advantage to certain areas based on geography, not merit.

Job creation and private sector economic investment should be the determinant metrics for business assistance programs

Based on these conclusions, a combined effort to create awareness of the issue will be mounted by the Board of Chosen Freeholders, the SCBP, and the Regional Center Partnership communities. Targeted audiences include legislators, the NJ Business Action Center, the NJ Economic Development Authority, the NJ Association of Counties, and the NJ League of Municipalities.

Three specific requests will be forwarded to the elected official and state agencies to improve Somerset County's position including elimination of the "limiter" clause; continuation of job retention incentives; and establishing high priority to locally designated growth and investment areas including redevelopment and priority growth areas similar to the Regional Center.

"Grow NJ is a valuable program that simply is not balanced to satisfy the needs of Somerset County and similar communities," commented Troy Fischer, Chair of the Regional Center Partnership. "As a leader in taking initiative to preserve the standards for smart growth, Somerset County will work toward making a good program better for all while ensuring our own economic competitiveness."

The entire report may be viewed and downloaded at <https://www.scbp.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/The-Suburban-Disadvantage-min.pdf>.

BACKGROUNDER

The Somerset County Regional Center is the strategic center of the County consisting of 12.6 square miles encompassing Raritan Borough, Somerville Borough, and a portion of Bridgewater Township. The Center is bisected by U.S. Route 206, U.S. Route 202, U.S. Route 22, NJ State Route 28, and I-287 with public transit options and serves as the focal point of County government and the regional economy.

The Regional Center designation:

- encourages achievement of policy objectives in critical areas of growth
- enables development and redevelopment by providing priority funding for land use studies, the reclaiming of brownfields, and a broad range of planning and implementation initiatives
- makes available priority funding for economic and community programs that provide for assistance with redevelopment in existing downtown business districts, new infill development opportunities, and residential and non-residential development along major highway and mass transit corridors
- will foster establishment of more effective mass transportation linkages and will provide priority funding for key intersection and corridor improvements and improved pedestrian accessibility
- makes available support and funding for linear open space concepts, for the planning and design of new and existing active recreation facilities, for passive open space acquisitions, and for new and existing historic preservation and revitalization programs.

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