

Landfill Redevelopment Update 1/7/2008

Following two years of intense work by many members of the public, governing body, planning board and redevelopment committee on October 29th, 2007 a RFQ/P (Request for Qualifications and Proposals) was released by the Borough to the redevelopment community for the Somerville Landfill Redevelopment Area.

At the time of writing this update; 50 sets of the package have been issued to interested parties, the final date for submission of proposals is March 14th, 2008.

Following submission, all responses will be screened by the Redevelopment Committee (using a pre-defined set of criteria) and those deemed most suitable will be invited to make public presentations of their proposals. Once the public presentations are complete and public feedback received, a final determination will be made as to who will be designated as the Boroughs Redeveloper of the landfill area. New Jersey TRANSIT who is a partner with the Borough in this project will participate in the selection of potential developers and through this process it could be possible that more than one developer is selected, depending on expertise, qualifications and experience.

This RFQ/P is a detailed document that explains for potential developers the process for submitting proposals, the requirements they will have to meet to qualify, how proposals will be evaluated and the timing of responses. Among other details included in the package are detailed maps, environmental data and reports, and copies of the Vision and Redevelopment Plans.

Once designated the developer(s) will enter into a binding agreement with the Borough for the project, this agreement will detail the financial and other obligations of all parties involved and define the time-line for development. A separate agreement will be entered into with New Jersey TRANSIT for legal reasons, however the Boroughs redevelopment plan will be the control document for the entire area, meaning that NJT cannot modify nor change the Boroughs zoning or design criteria for the redevelopment.

We can reasonably expect that within 12 months of signing the redevelopment agreements the designated redeveloper will be presenting preliminary plans to the borough for review.

The following is a brief recap of significant events relating to this project:

October 2005

- Starting of an environmental evaluation of the property(s)
- Beginning of a Public Visioning Process
- Creation of an overall Strategy for Redevelopment
- Commenced working with the State to facilitate a quick turn-around on critical issues

Through November 2007

1. Public Visioning finished, resulting Vision Plan adopted by Borough Council January 2007
2. Revised Redevelopment Plan accepted by Borough Planning Board July 25th, 2007
3. Adoption of Redevelopment Plan August 20th, 2007
4. Vision Plan wins New Jersey Future Smart Growth award for comprehensive public outreach and participation
5. Vision Plan and Redevelopment Plan win New Jersey chapter of the American Planning Association award for Smart Growth Planning.
6. Somerset County starts feasibility study for design and construction of tunnel under NJ Transit Raritan Valley line to create access to site
7. Redevelopment Plan re-examined and revised to reflect initiatives and concepts contained in Vision Plan
8. Initial Environmental Characterization investigation complete
9. RFP/Q released October 29th, 2007
10. Every aspect of this project is conducted in a transparent and public manner, all relevant documents are posted on Borough web-site

Overview of Vision Plan/Redevelopment Plan - A case study for sustainable design

1. Vision Plan funded by; DCA/Office of Smart Growth, NJ Transit, NJ DOT
2. Collaborative effort between Borough and NJ Transit
3. Visioning Project led by Regional Plan Association of NYC
4. Comprehensive Public outreach resulted in a Vision of unprecedented depth of detail and community buy-in
5. The Vision Plan calls for:
 - Site to be divided into three areas, “The Hub”, the “Green Seam”, and “The Heights”.
 - The rehabilitation of 40+/- acres of stream and wetlands bisecting the site for passive recreation - Green Seam
 - A Transit Oriented Development focusing on the NJ Transit Railway station (the Hub) and adjoining areas (the Heights)
 - TOD will comprise of mixed use retail/residential/commercial spaces centered on open public space
 - Pedestrian linkages will create a seamless integration into the existing Main Street and Downtown Areas
 - Green Infrastructure; The plan will take a liability that is degrading the environment around the Raritan River and turn it into a demonstration project for best-practice storm-water management and environmental stewardship. (See attached map)
 - Architecture will be distinct while retaining the character of Downtown Somerville
 - Construction will be to LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) certification standards.
 - Shared Parking will be created within the TOD
 - The Heights will be a mixed-use area of less density than the Hub and contain a signature Gateway Area to the redevelopment from Route 206

Moving Forward

Throughout the Visioning, Planning and environmental activities we have worked with all relevant state agencies and bodies to assure success.

The DEP have provided funding through HDSRF for the characterization of the landfill, preparatory to the development of a remediation clean-up plan.

We have presented the project to many state officials and staff as possible and continue to do so.

The area comprises of 29 separate lots with various ownerships, the Borough, NJ Transit, Somerset County and the private sector.

Due to this fragmentation the environmental investigations to date have focused on the Borough owned Landfill portion and the definition of the “true” extent of the garbage limits, preliminary assessments have been conducted elsewhere.

Our request for one DEP case manager for the whole site with the authority to break through the clutter a project of this size and property mix was approved with immediate and positive results.

Our collaboration with NJ Transit continues with the creation of the Request for Proposals/Qualifications document currently in circulation.

It is our belief that this will be a signature project for the Smart Growth Concept, illustrating to all that through thorough planning, public participation and the partnering of municipal and state government can result in sustainable economic growth in a timely fashion.

It is our goal to appoint a designated redeveloper(s) by the end of June 2008.

Ongoing Support to the Borough:

The Borough's governing body, staff and professionals continually seek the support and assistance of many state and county officials and staff. We have formed excellent working relationships with a significant number of these.

Some of those we work with on a daily basis are listed here:

Somerset County Administration, Planning and Engineering

The relationship the borough has with the various county government agencies has always been exceptional, through this project the support in man-hours, facilities and materials has been nothing short of outstanding. We anticipate a continuation of this relationship beyond the completion of this project.

New Jersey TRANSIT, Planning and Real Estate Development

Aside from being the second largest property owner within the redevelopment area, NJTRANSIT has partnered the borough in the Visioning and Redevelopment Planning portions of this project, not only through funding a significant portion of both tasks, but through providing staff and man power to the myriad tasks needed to compile the extensive data and property information into a detailed and accurate RFQ/P in a timely manner. We expect this relationship to continue throughout the duration of the project.

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

The working relationship with the DEP we enjoy continues to put this project "out in front" of the traditional curve in planning a project of this complexity and scale. With elements such as "a green infrastructure strategy" and "LEED" certification among the many cutting edge concepts with this project we look forward to the collaboration and continued guidance of the DEP to assure that as we move towards designating a developer there are no misunderstandings, delays or conflicts.

New Jersey Department of Community Affairs and New Jersey Economic Development Authority

The continued collaboration and assistance from the DCA and EDA help us plan the financial aspects of this redevelopment, which are complex and critical to its success. We continually seek assistance in sourcing grants and other financial aid to pay for anticipated remediation and infrastructure costs that would be prohibitive to any potential developer through traditional sources.

New Jersey Department of Transportation

We have enjoyed the participation of DOT staff in the visioning and planning process, as we move forward it is essential that this relationship continues. Aside from permitting and approvals for the readily identifiable elements of this project, the DOT's input and early assistance in the planning for regional and local roadway impacts is essential

“Green Design” Concept for Redevelopment Area Overlay on TOD Land Use Plan

