



MAKING THE VISION A REALITY

An Implementation Toolbox

An Element of the Downtown Raritan Sustainable Economic Development Plan



July 1, 2021



BOROUGH OF RARITAN





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MAKING THE VISION A REALITY

Making the vision a reality will require a sustained effort by the Raritan community. To aid in this effort, this plan organizes recommendations into four categories that have been identified in the research as components that downtowns need to get right to develop sustained economic prosperity.

Economic Development: Generally, work in this category focuses on efforts to ensure there is a sustainable balance of uses that can contribute to sustained economic development. In addition, efforts in this area can focus on workforce development and on business support services.

Placemaking: These efforts focus on physical and programmatic improvements that make the Downtown a more attractive place to spend time. Although aesthetic improvements are often an important component, placemaking can also include land use changes.

Governing: Successful downtowns require a regulatory environment that supports economic development. Good governance will require high-quality regulations. Moreover, elected officials and Borough staff will need to promote a municipal culture that supports sustainable, equitable, growth.

Sustaining: Research has shown that successful Downtowns often have an entity that is responsible for coordinating or managing economic development strategies. These entities often pull together a variety of stakeholders and ensure that everyone is working towards the same goals.

Each category includes detailed recommended actions that the Borough, residents, business owners, and stakeholders can take to achieve the vision for the Downtown, as expressed in the Vision Plan element. This toolbox also includes a set of Focus Ons which provide more details on how to implement specific recommendations.

Downtown Revitalization Resources

The framework used in this plan is based on the following publications.

The Successful Few: Healthy Downtowns of Small Metropolitan Regions. Pierre Filion, Heidi Hoernig, Trudi Bunting & Gary Sands (2004). Journal of the American Planning Association, 70:3, 328-343

(Re)Building Downtown: A Guidebook for Revitalization. Smart Growth America (2015)

Downtown Revitalization in Small and Mid-sized Cities. Burayidi, Michael A. (2018) American Planning Association PAS Report 590.

Downtown Success Indicators: A Review of the Literature. Department of Urban and Regional Planning - University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (2014). North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Build Raritan's reputation as a good place to do business

Raritan has a mixture of businesses including Downtown merchants, highway retailers, and major industrial employers that represent both the Borough's history and its future for growth. Sending a clear message that the Borough supports these existing businesses, welcomes new startups, and embraces entrepreneurship will provide visibility and a boost in a competitive regional marketplace. The Borough can undertake the following actions in the short term to set itself apart:

Expand the Borough's public-facing presence: This should include updating the Borough website to provide information directly to existing and potential business, highlighting the Borough's assets, providing demographic and marketing data, offering a step-by-step guide to permitting, and giving clear, responsive contact information.

Upgrade staff or support services: Efforts should focus on building the Economic Development Committee's role in helping existing merchants improve their marketing, promotional, and programming efforts.

Capitalize on existing resources to target external audiences:

Raritan should take advantage of existing channels like local and regional networking groups, real estate brokers, and established State and County programs to reach new and potential business partners.

Develop a formal district management entity: This entity could continue plan implementation and build long-term capacity. A district management entity could take several forms and incorporate a variety of funding sources, including voluntary contributions, Borough funding, and supplemental property assessments. (See also "Organize to implement the plan" on page 17)

Capitalize on the Small Wins

In an established business district, short-term transformational change is unlikely – and undesirable. Highlighting the Borough's existing assets and initial improvements will build momentum, creating a phased strategy that will work incrementally, not overnight, to support sustainable economic development.

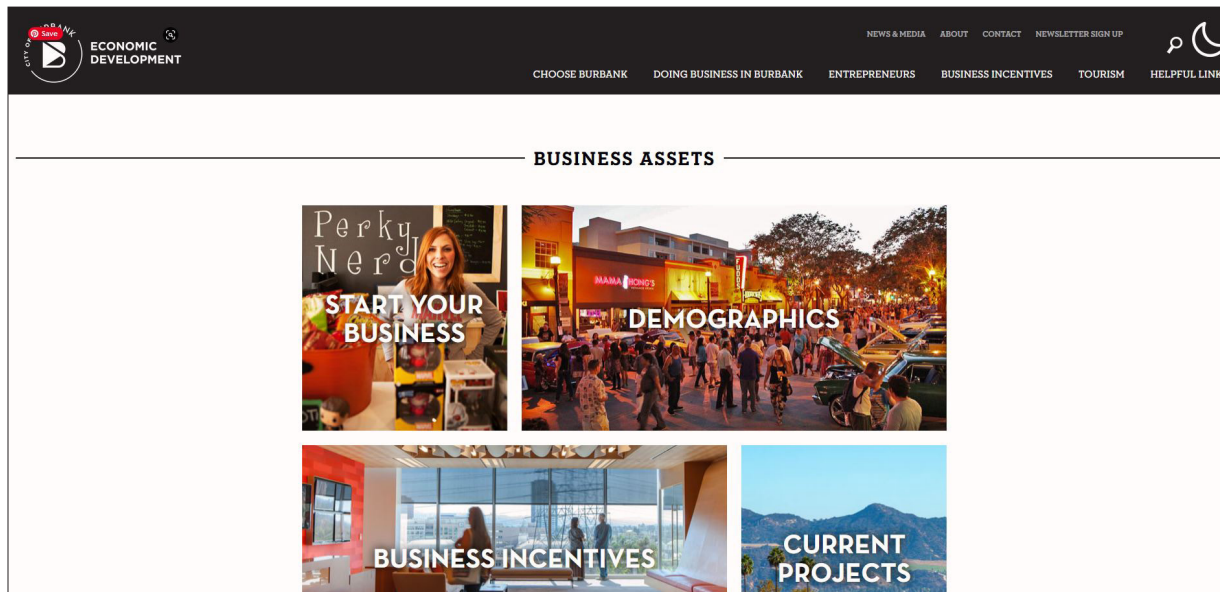


Figure 1. Burbank Website

The City of Burbank in California has an excellent Economic Development Website (econdevburbank.com) that includes key information about the City directs people to current projects, and has a portal for those interested in starting their business.

Highlight Somerset Street's strengths: This can be done through interim uses for vacant storefronts and promoting small retail spaces as entry points for entrepreneurship. Initial reuse and redevelopment should engage the existing community, rather than transform the area into something new.

Focus on filling vacancies before new commercial construction:

Ensure that existing spaces are being used to their potential will stabilize the Downtown area and set the stage for future public and private investment – including potential larger commercial redevelopment.

Publicize and promote new streetscape and public realm

improvements: The visual impact of certain early-stage improvements like bike racks and street furniture (discussed under Placemaking) can have a major influence on positive perception of a corridor or neighborhood. Raritan should celebrate these accomplishments via digital marketing and media opportunities, as well as integration with business-driven promotions.

Facilitate Owner and Tenant-Driven Improvements

Downtown commercial uses consist almost entirely of small, local businesses forming a patchwork of property ownership and land uses. While this is one of the Borough's greatest assets, it can present logistical challenges. The Borough should encourage coordination between the public and private sectors to make the most of investment opportunities.

Establish consistent, responsive communication between businesses and government representatives:

A Borough staff or a member of one of the Borough's committees should be the point person for questions, comments, and hands-on assistance. One step further is to schedule regular visit to local businesses along the Somerset Street or within high-priority merchant sectors.

Provide guidance and if possible, financial support, for small physical

improvements: Programs like the façade improvement program, signage guidelines, window displays, landscaping, and wayfinding can all benefit from economies of scale when coordinated at a higher level than an individual business. See Placemaking for more information on these, and similar programs.

Assist merchants in meeting consumer preferences: New residential development Downtown and the fast-changing retail environment underline the importance of matching products with consumers. Raritan should ensure that businesses are able to diversify their products or the way services are offered – i.e., curbside pickup, outdoor café windows – without running into permitting challenges.

Include a variety of merchants and stakeholders: As conversations continue about placemaking and Borough priorities, it will be important to include people representing a diverse group of interests. Public investment can drive private investment when property owners feel supported.

Support Equitable Economic Advancement for Residents

A sustainable Borough economy extends beyond just the needs of business owners and operators. A people-centered approach to economic development will give all residents— across a range of workforce skills, education levels, and financial resources— the opportunity to benefit from the local economy's strengths.

Include residents of all backgrounds, ages, and skill levels in

consensus-building: Often only a few established voices are the ones heard at public meetings, on boards and commissions, and in media coverage, which limits the inclusiveness and applicability of decisions.

Partner with outside organizations: Organizations like Raritan Valley Community College and Somerset County Business Partnership provide continuing and practical education programs (e.g., home-buyer education, small business marketing). Often, many residents are unaware that free or low-cost programs exist and that they may be held virtually.

Give residents the opportunity to work in Raritan – and vice versa:

Home occupations, residential-office conversions, and shared spaces are all ways to encourage sole practitioners or micro-businesses to keep their firm within the community they live. Further, exploring “live where you work” policies in relation to existing corporate tenants can bring new residents who already know and appreciate the Borough's assets.

Improve Raritan's Regional Connections

Raritan's transit largely provides access to New York City and its suburbs via rail. NJ TRANSIT and several Somerset County bus services bypass the Borough but terminate in Somerville, about a mile from Downtown Raritan.

Establish better shuttle connections: The Borough should collaborate with Somerset County Transportation to re-route service through the Borough. This would provide transit access to RVCC and job centers along the Route 202 corridor. More consistent, reliable routes between Somerville and Raritan would also encourage more commuters to use these services, reducing the number of single occupancy vehicles straining local roads during peak periods. More details can be found in Focus On Regional Access on page 21.

Advocate for System-wide Improvements: NJ TRANSIT has begun a phased redesign of the existing bus network. Raritan, and the regional center in general, is not well served by the bus system. When the network is modified, routes should better connect the Borough with regional job centers. The Borough should advocate for connections between Downtown Raritan, especially the train station, and the rest of the Central / North Jersey region. These would include Bridgewater Town Center, Bridgewater Commons, pharmaceutical companies off of Route 202 in Raritan, and others.

Advertise and Provide Training for Local Transit: The Borough should coordinate with County, RideWise TMA (the regional Transportation Management Association), and New Jersey Travel Independence Program (NJTIP) to advertise and provide training on how to use the bus system. Many residents may be unaware of current services. Since the bus network operates on a flag system, no bus stops are specifically marked, which leads to a lack of awareness about the system. Educational efforts should be coordinated with Somerset County, RideWise TMA, NJ TRANSIT, and the Raritan Senior Center.

Study how to provide high-quality service that connects residents to employment centers: The current shuttle service provides local

Figure 2. Examples of Transit Training Programs



Los Angeles County has an excellent transit training program for older adults, called On the Move Riders Club (metro.net/around/senior-tips/move-riders-club/) which connects residents to neighborhood organizations that provide training and go on test rides together.

access to the region. However, it is limited in frequency and routes do not currently align with employment destinations. NJ TRANSIT Bus Service provides access to major urban centers but does provide direct, reliable, and flexible access to key employment centers in the region.

A study should be funded to develop recommendations for a local transit service that would connect Downtown and Raritan Station to the major employers in and near Raritan (as demonstrated in Figure 3). The study should look for ways to provide improved access to

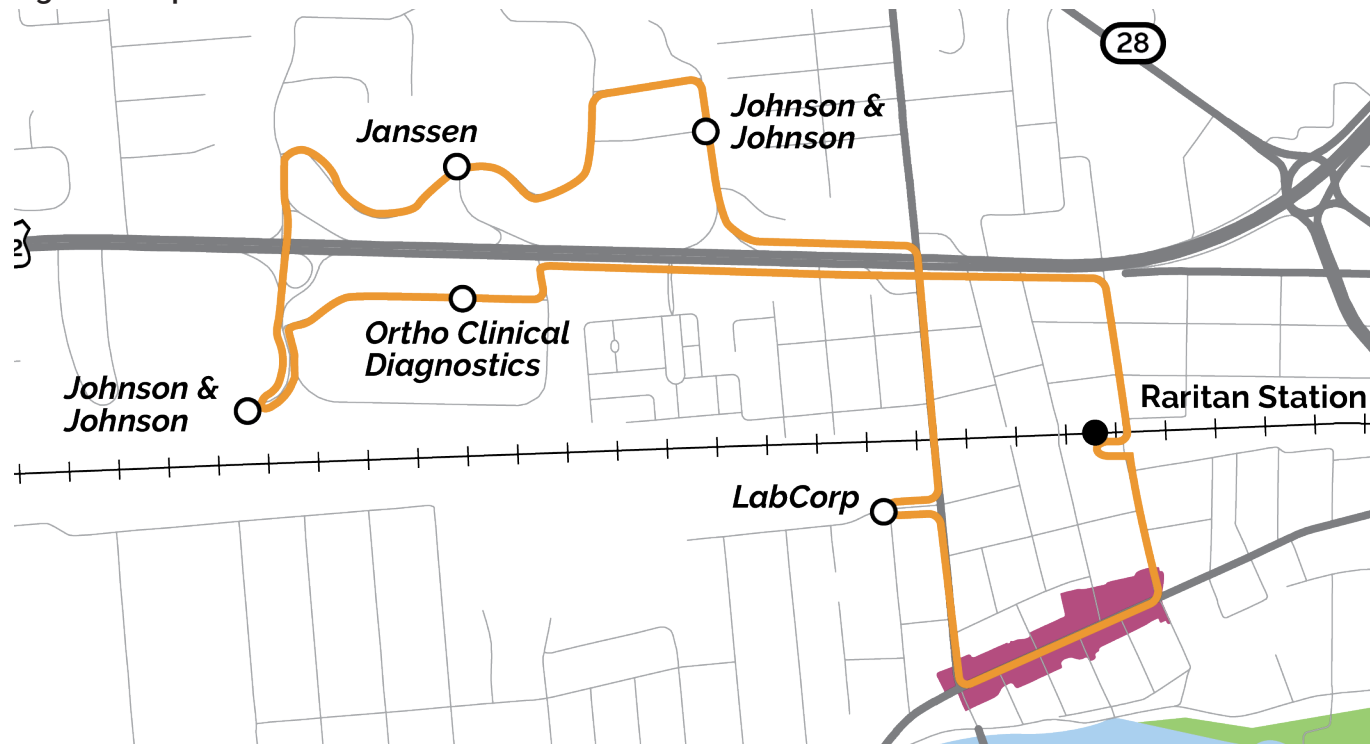
employment opportunities and/or to support significant mode shift. Peak morning and evening service should be included, as well as lunchtime service.

A system with more local control (and additional funding sources) would have increased ability to create linkages with the Downtown. This can provide benefits for employers looking for amenities to attract employees, and provide a reliable customer base for Downtown businesses. The effort should be coordinated with RideWise TMA, the County, and NJ TRANSIT.

Leverage Diversity and Demographic Change to Support a Vibrant Raritan

Raritan's diversifying population reflects generational shifts to different types of housing and a growing immigrant community with large populations of Filipino and Central American birth or descent. A sustainable economy will support varying ages, stages of life, and cultural background and in doing so, foster a culturally diverse community that attracts residents, visitors and shoppers of all backgrounds.

Figure 3. Proposed Raritan Downtown Shuttle Route



The proposed employer shuttle route should connect to both Raritan Station and the commercial district. Further analysis would be needed to determine feasibility of loading and turning locations.

Tailor outreach: The goal should be to engage a diverse coalition of businesses and residents, with a particular focus on cross-generational and multicultural voices. This will require providing outreach resources in multiple languages and using translators to support in-person communication.

Support Filipino and Latino communities: In addition to supporting a growing population, the existing Filipino and Latino restaurants and merchants can be a unique draw within the region. The Borough should work with business and community leaders to identify anchor attractions or festivals that could encourage visitors beyond eating and shopping.

Encourage collaboration between public and private institutions: Many public and private institution see Raritan as a place of opportunity. For example, programs in K-12 education or local colleges that may already pursue activities with Duke Farms can include Raritan's local businesses and cultural organizations to create new ties to the Borough that look to the future.

Figure 4. Lutong Bahay



Lutong Bahay, one of the Borough's many immigrant owned-businesses, is an example of a business that could become a draw and amenity for visitors.

PLACEMAKING

Make the Riverfront a Regional Destination

The creation of a high-quality amenity-rich riverfront is a core recommendation of this plan.

Raritan residents, stakeholders, and professionals consistently identified the riverfront as the community's most unique and underdeveloped assets. Raritan is the only community on the Raritan Valley Line with unobstructed access to the Raritan River. With more than a half-mile of water frontage, there is ample opportunity to leverage this asset to support community and economic development.

Raritan has already made substantial progress by opening the Nevius Street Bridge which provides excellent pedestrian and bicycle access to



Duke Farms. Moreover, the Borough recently approved a multi-family residential development just west of this project which includes an easement for the Raritan River Greenway. Combined, these two projects will help to activate the riverfront space.

Going forward, the community should focus on making the following high-quality public infrastructure improvements, as illustrated in Figure 5:

① **Complete the Raritan River Greenway in Raritan:** The Greenway is planned as a major regional amenity that has the potential to bring large numbers of visitors through Raritan. Moving quickly to complete the trail will establish a new connection to neighboring communities and bringing visitors to the Borough who could support the local economy.

② **Create a municipal riverfront park on municipal land:** The park should provide high-quality access to the river through amenities such as a kayak/boat launch, fishing pier, and picnic areas. Not only will this park be a much needed municipal amenity, it has the potential to be a major landmark along the Greenway. This will be one of many efforts that will help make Downtown Raritan a regional destination.



③ **Develop a Nevius Street Welcome Plaza at the foot of the Nevius Street Bridge:**

The opening of the Nevius Street Bridge was a major accomplishment. Raritan should create a welcome plaza in the area between the bridge and Orlando Drive to build off this success. Converting one of the pump-houses into a cafe would provide an important amenity to activate the space. A cafe would also help punctuate it as a place to stop along the trail, which will give people an opportunity to notice other opportunities to explore Downtown Raritan.

④ **Build a parking lot:** Creating a well-located parking lot on the waterfront has the potential to substantially increase the number of people who come to Downtown Raritan. Users of a shared lot will include:

- Visitors to Duke Farms who cannot find a place to park on site.
- Those who drive to use the Greenway.
- Riverfront Park visitors.
- Downtown business patrons who cannot find a parking space on Somerset Street.

Figure 5. Riverfront Recommendations



The parking lot will be more successful as an economic development strategy if there is strong wayfinding signage to direct visitors to key destinations. The Borough should also invest in high-quality public realm improvements - such as improved crosswalks, pedestrian scale lighting, and colored pavement - to create a strong connection from the parking lot to Somerset Street.

Transform Nevius Street into a Pedestrian Oriented Mixed-Use Corridor

The 389 feet between Somerset Street and Orlando Drive has the potential to drastically transform Downtown Raritan, creating a unique amenity that links the riverfront to the commercial corridor. As illustrated in Figure 5, Raritan should:

⑤ Convert Nevius Street into a pedestrian oriented shared street:

The Borough should redesign the street to make walking, socializing, shopping, and eating the priority street uses, effectively inverting the relationship between cars and pedestrians. The result would continue to allow for local automobile access while opening up the street to community and economic activity.

⑥ Encourage adaptive re-use of the structures along the street to attract eating, drinking, and retail establishments:

The redesign of the street will signal a substantive shift which must be accompanied by regulations that both permit and encourage new commercial uses to take up residence on the street. New users should be encouraged to leverage the street's existing assets - the front yards, porches, and curbside areas - to create an active street. The investment in high-quality planters and other green streetscaping elements will help distinguish the area from places such as Division Street in Somerville and re-enforce the Downtown's identity as the place to connect with nature.

⑦ Encourage Redevelopment of 80 W Somerset Street to Create Western Gateway:

The redevelopment of this site, as illustrated in the Vision Plan, will add new modern commercial space as well as key public amenities. This will help draw people from the Welcome Plaza to the Somerset Street business district.

Make Somerset a Great Street

Somerset Street can become a great downtown main street. To achieve this, the Borough needs to support three inter-related efforts.

Activate and Beautify Somerset Street between Nevius and Thompson Streets (Figure 6):

The Borough and the County have carved out several sections along Somerset Street where no parking is permitted (identified through white hatching on the pavement). The next step is for the Borough to take the lead in transform these areas into assets. Efforts should include parklets, plantings, bicycle parking, and the like. Parklets could be especially beneficial since they create opportunities for new community spaces, a desire expressed by many residents. In addition, the Borough should encourage business owners to take the lead on converting these spaces into outdoor dining spaces. Combined, the result will be a more lively and attractive downtown.

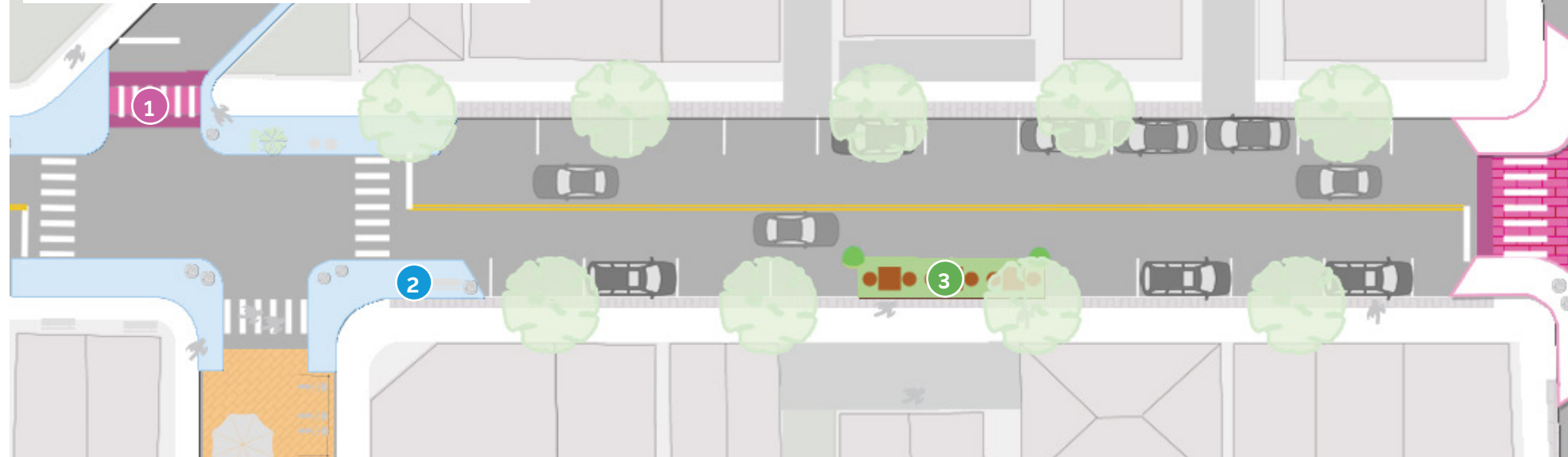
The efforts should be highly concentrated on the 1000 linear feet between Nevius Street and 9 E Somerset (just east of Thompson Street). By concentrating efforts in this area, Raritan will be able to show substantial change with lower levels of investment and in a short time frame.

The Borough and County should work together to undertake intersection improvements at Wall and Thompson Streets that support placemaking and safety. Stakeholders and workshop participants routinely identified the Wall Street intersection as the most asset rich and vibrant intersection. Likewise, the bicycle improvements at Thompson Street have the potential to make this the multi-modal center of the Borough.

Extending the curb at these intersections (also known as bulb outs) would shorten the crossing distance, making it safer for pedestrians, and creating space for greenery. Improvements could also include artistic treatments along the crosswalk or across the whole intersection. In the long term, the Borough and County should explore raised table intersections that would slow traffic and mark the entrance into the Downtown commercial district.

Figure 6. Somerset Street Mobility Enhancements: Wall to Thompson Streets

This diagram illustrates many of the recommended interventions on Somerset Street. It does not represent a specific section of Somerset Street.



- 1** Raised crossings reduce cut-through traffic and improve pedestrian comfort

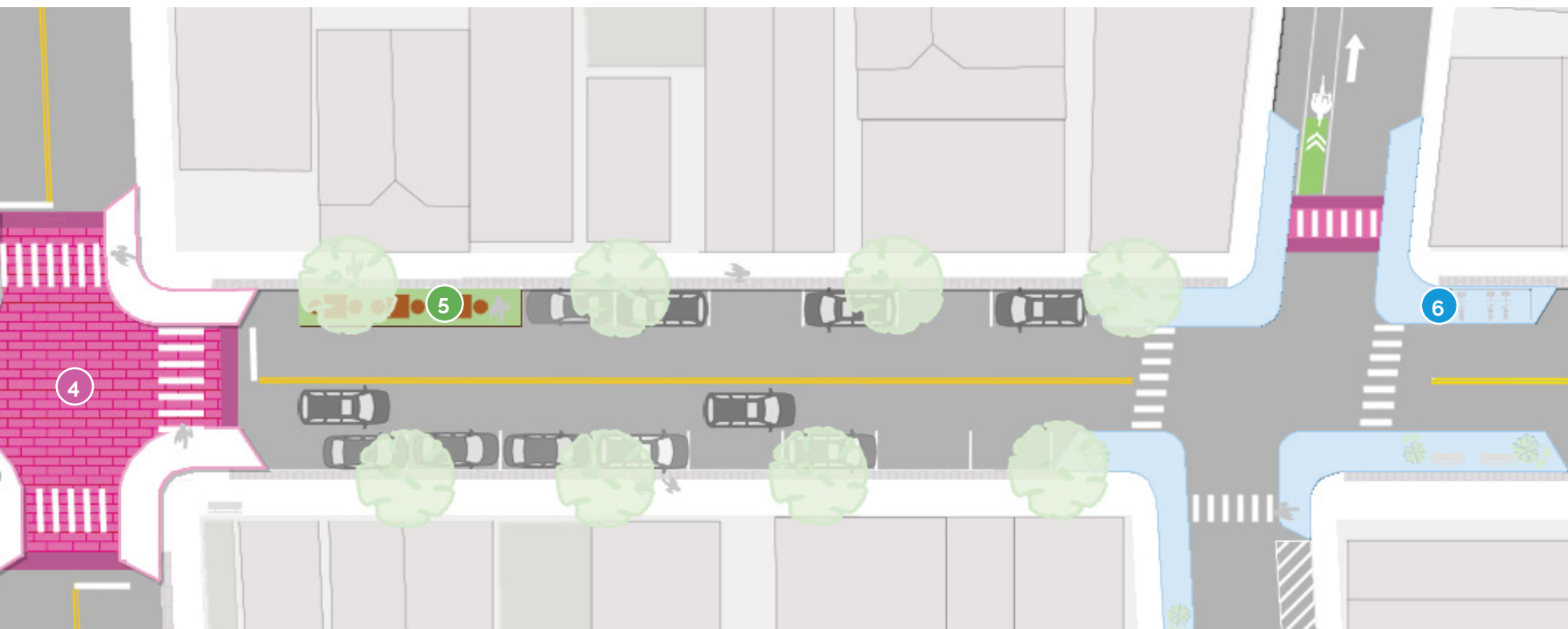


- 2** Curb extensions improve pedestrian visibility and add space amenities.



- 3** Parklets extend outdoor seating options for businesses.

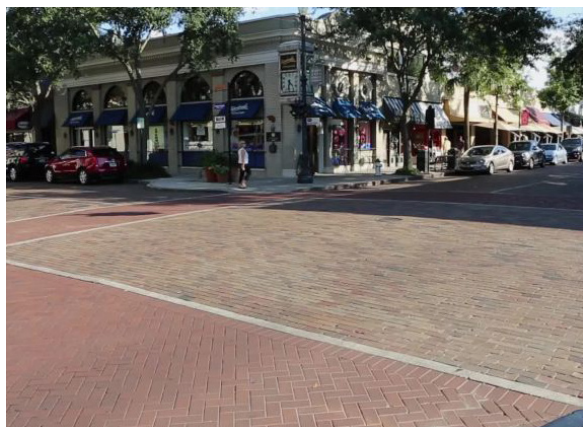




4 Stamped or raised intersection signals arrival in Downtown Raritan.

5 Parklets create opportunities for public seating and greening

6 Curb extensions create opporutniteis for bike and micromobility parking



Façade Improvement Program: The Borough should create a Façade Improvement Program that provides technical and financial support to Somerset Street property owners. The program should include two major components:

- Well-crafted, graphically-driven, façade improvement guidelines which identify what the Borough would like to see.
- Tax abatements on the value created through improvements, made possible by Area in Need of Rehabilitation Designation, to ensure that property owners are not penalized for their efforts.

The program can also include architectural support services, preferred contractor designation, and application fee elimination.

Downtown Greening Initiative

The abundance of attractive and well-maintained front yards in Downtown neighborhoods illustrates resident's pride in their community. Figure 8 shows some of the many ways that relatively small yards have been used to impressive results. The shallowness of the yards means that passersby can easily enjoy them, contributing to the walkability of the community.

Figure 7. Examples of high-quality wayfinding



Figure 8. Examples of high-quality front yards



This plan recommends that the Borough actively encourage such improvements through a matching grant program. The Borough should allocate \$1,000 each year to provide \$50 gift cards to the Raritan Valley Agway to residential property owners who wish to improve their front yards. This program would have relatively low barriers to entry and the results should be heavily promoted on social media.

Likewise, more plantings on Somerset Street would help re-enforce the message that Raritan values community connected with the natural environment. Figure 9 illustrates an example of such an impact. A similar planting program should be instituted to support local businesses efforts to plant and maintain greenery. This program could work in conjunction with efforts to create parklets on Somerset Street but may also serve to support placing planters at the property line and in windows.

Integrate Art in Placemaking

Each placemaking intervention creates an opportunity for the integration of public art. Wayfinding can integrate work from local artist and new public spaces (especially the Nevius Street project) are excellent opportunities to highlight Raritan's rich cultural diversity. Even pedestrian safety interventions, such as bulb outs, create opportunities for the community to artistically display its community pride (Figure 10).

Improve Access to the Downtown

Downtown will need to be more accessible to more people to realize the community-driven vision. Many participants identified the need to increase parking to allow more automotive access to support businesses. However, this is only one way to increase the number of visitors who come to Raritan. The following strategy outlines a multi-modal approach to sustainable economic development.

Leverage existing assets: The easiest and lowest cost option for improving access is to leverage existing assets. Raritan should install wayfinding signage that better connects visitors to the Downtown and parking, especially at key gateways. For example, people who visit the Nevius Street Bridge may not know that Downtown shops and restaurants

Figure 9. Examples of plantings on Market St in Selingsgrove, PA



Figure 10. Examples of plantings on Market St in Selingsgrove, PA



Curb extensions being installed along Central Avenue in Norwich, CT. Each corner represents a country from which residents of the Greenville neighborhood hail.

are just a block away. Likewise, it is difficult to find municipal parking lots, even if you want to use them.

In conjunction with these wayfinding efforts, Raritan should consider either charging for parking along Somerset Street in the business district or strictly enforcing time limits. This will help ensure that parking spaces in front of stores are available for customers and not being used by residents, business owners, or employees.

Finally, the Borough should establish and enforce regulations for existing municipal lots to ensure that they are being used for business customers and not by residents.

Continue bike and pedestrian improvement efforts: The Borough is in the process of converting Thompson and Anderson Streets into a one-way pair with protected bike lanes. This effort will establish safe, convenient bicycle connections to the residential areas between Route 202 and the Downtown. The Borough should focus on implementing the bicycle and pedestrian improvements that were identified in the Circulation Element of the 2020 Master Plan.

Look for Shared Parking Opportunities: The next step is to look for ways to better use the existing parking inventory. There may be opportunities for businesses to share rear-yard parking and/or for residents to lease spaces behind businesses to use in the evening. The greatest opportunity, however, may be for the Borough to work with one of the institutions on the east side of Downtown to lease parking spaces for employees to park. These lots sit largely empty during peak work times but may be too far away from business for customers to view them as convenient. The institutions may also be more comfortable leasing spaces to an identified group of people, rather than opening them up to public use. A partnership with the Borough Police department could help ensure that no unauthorized users park in these lots.

Build the Greenway through Raritan: As previously mentioned, building the Greenway through Raritan has the potential to draw people into the Borough. These visitors will not require parking and thus offer a win-win solution for local businesses.

Improve pedestrian connections to Nevius Street Bridge: As previously discussed, there is ample opportunity to improve Nevius Street between the bridge and Somerset Street. Even simple wayfinding and low-cost pedestrian improvements could pull more people into the commercial district.

Identify strategic locations for district parking: The Project Team has prepared four options for where additional parking could be provided (see Figure 11). Each location would require acquisition of some property and demolition of some structures. If parking lots were constructed on any of these lots, it is recommended that the Borough take a district parking approach, which would allow anyone visiting the Downtown to access this parking and would prohibit spaces being reserved for specific uses. A detailed design for the 60 shared parking spaces on Wall and Somerset Street is provided in the Focus On section which follows in this report.

A 2005 parking study, discussed in detail in the Existing Conditions Report, identified a deficit of approximately 65 spaces in the Downtown. That parking study did not account for the benefits of shared parking strategies or a district parking approach. So the actual demand for parking is likely lower than 65 spaces. However, the study also did not take into account

Figure 11. District Parking Options



projected future uses. As such, the Borough should conduct a more thorough parking study to determine how much parking would be needed to support more intensive use of existing structures Downtown.

In addition to municipal capital improvement funds, a parking lot could be funded through a payment-in-lieu of parking fund. In this approach, property owners who cannot provide on-site parking pay into a fund that supports parking improvements instead of providing parking on site. These funds are typically raised when property changes uses and is not imposed on existing property owners.

Enhance Downtown Neighborhoods

The Downtown neighborhoods are diverse, well-loved areas that residents and stakeholders want to see enhanced over time. The Borough should focus on the following three strategies to encourage investment in the neighborhoods while maintaining the current character:

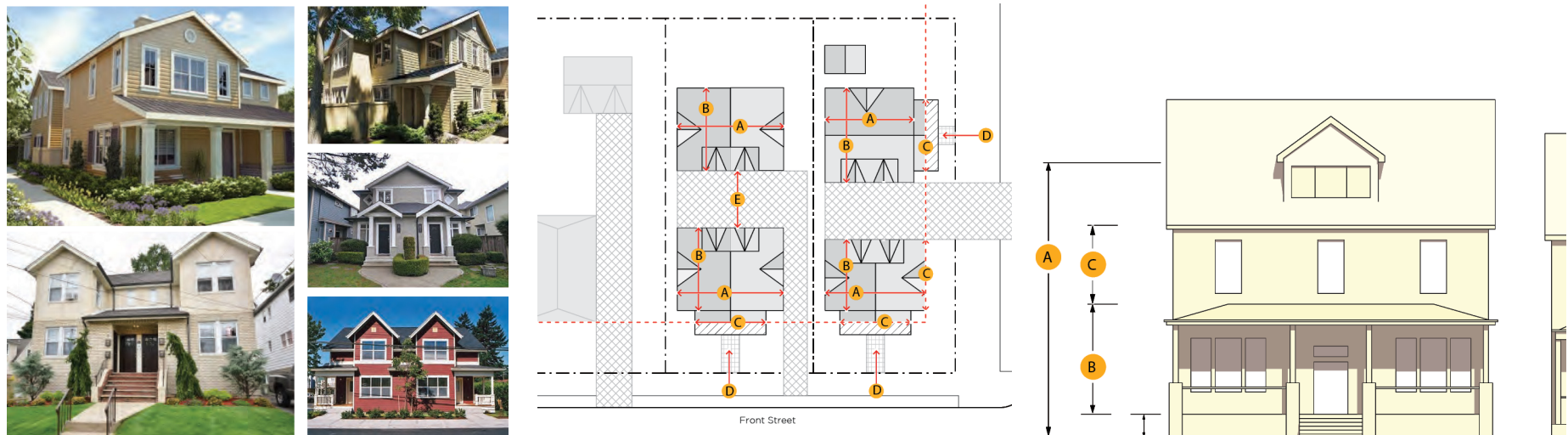
Permit small multi-family development: There are approximately an equal number of single-family homes and small two- to four-unit properties in the Downtown. This housing diversity has many advantages. For example, it:

- Allows people to move into the area at different stages of their lives.
- Permits a variety of family and household types to call Raritan home.
- Promotes economic diversity by offering housing that matches different incomes.
- Makes the area unique and varied, distinguishing Raritan from its competitors.

Permitting these uses should result in increased investment in the area. Multi-family property owners will be able to invest in their properties without a cumbersome regulatory process and without fear that they will not be permitted to make more changes in the future. As these properties are improved, single-family homeowners will likely see benefits in investing in their properties as well. Figure 12 illustrates an example of the type of small multi-family development that Morristown, New Jersey permits.

Regulate development through form-based code: Overwhelmingly, the multi-family units in the Downtown look similar to single-family homes, at least from the outside. Ensuring that new investment reinforces

Figure 12. Morristown Zoning Ordinance: Courtyard Building Typology (2 - 4 Units)



key neighborhood architectural characteristics, such as front porches and hipped roofs, will help support more investment in owner-occupied housing, which in turn should support investment in multi-family housing. The result will be a positive investment feedback loop that reinforces character without unduly restricting investment.

Permit Transformative Change on Key Sites

The strategic redevelopment of four sites, identified in Figure 13, could help Raritan achieve this plan's community-identified vision. These sites are either in strategic locations or are large enough to result in more dramatic change. Each of them is unique and the Borough will need to work in concert with property owners to ensure that development is sensitive to its context and contributes to the character of the Downtown. The sites include:

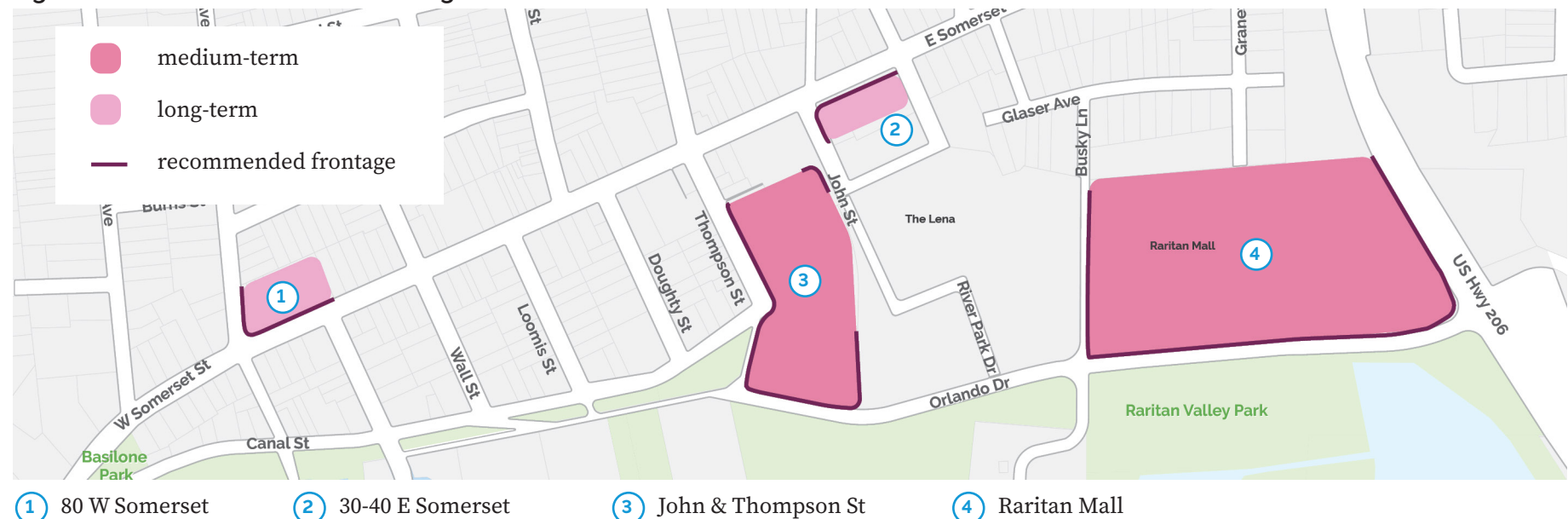
80 W Somerset St: Currently home to QuickChek and a liquor store, this auto-oriented development parcel could be transformed into an important gateway to the community.

30 - 40 E Somerset St: The uses on these sites - a post office, bank, and auto services - are all uses that have been undergoing substantial market changes. Their location in front of the Lena Luxury Residences and at the eastern gateway to the Borough create the possibility for high-impact redevelopment.

John and Thompson Street Properties: The large area south of Somerset Street and bounded by John, Thompson and Orlando Drive contains a mixture of land uses, including several legacy industrial uses. Although this area is not likely to redevelop as a single project, it represents an important opportunity to establish a land-use connection between Somerset Street and the proposed work on the riverfront.

The Raritan Mall: The Raritan Mall is not configured to support the Downtown. Going forward, Raritan should consider allowing a mixture of multi-family development and commercial uses that otherwise would not locate in Downtown. Equally important, redevelopment should be contingent upon establish strong multi-modal connections to Somerset Street to ensure that new residents contribute to the Downtown economy.

Figure 13. Sites for Transformative Change



GOVERNING

The following governance recommendations will demonstrate the Borough's commitment to sustainable revitalization and open up opportunities for increased private investment.

Adopt the Plan

The Planning Board should adopt this plan either as a standalone Downtown Element of the Borough's Master Plan or as a supplement to the Land Use Element. Either way, this will help to ensure that the community-driven vision and associated recommendations can serve as the foundation for future land use regulation changes.

Designate the Downtown as a Transit Village

The Transit Village Initiative is a program jointly sponsored by the New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) and NJ TRANSIT that supports municipalities seeking to revitalize areas around transit stations using transit-oriented development (TOD) principles. There is a formal application process the Borough can go through to seek designation.

Achieving designation can produce several benefits that will help support efforts to achieve the vision, including:

- Priority funding from some state agencies.
- Technical assistance from some state agencies.
- Eligibility for NJDOT grants.

The designation will help show investors that the Borough is committed to its vision and will literally put the Borough on the map: the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs publishes the **Community Asset Map**¹ which identifies all the Transit Village locations.

The Borough should coordinate with NJDOT and NJ TRANSIT before applying. The program is competitive and there may be benefit in waiting until Raritan has demonstrated successes. NJ TRANSIT'S Transit Friendly Planning program can provide assistance in applying for the Transit Village designation.

¹ <https://njdca.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=96ec274c50a34890b23263f101e4ad9b>

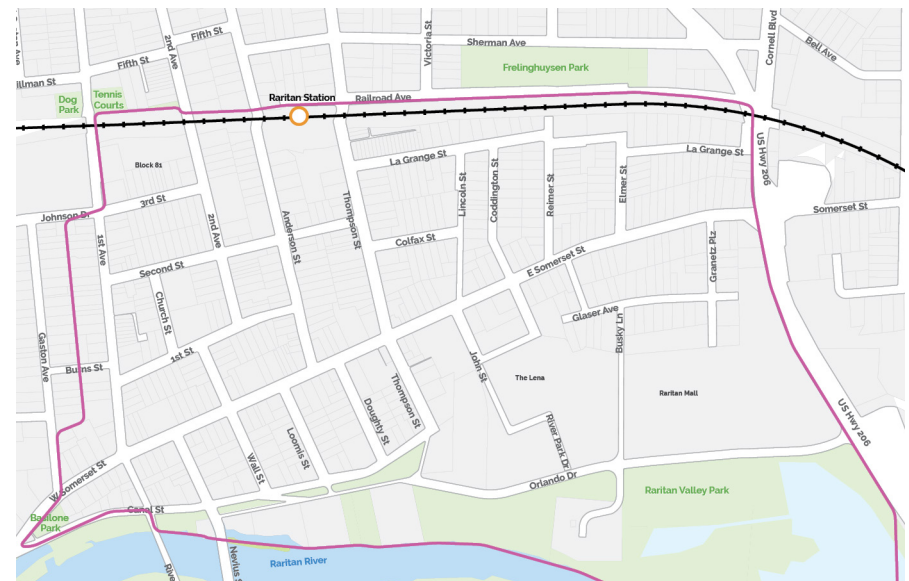
Designate the Downtown as an Area in Need of Rehabilitation and Adopt Redevelopment Plan

The New Jersey Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (LRHL) was created to empower municipalities with the ability to improve specific areas of the community that meet certain criteria. One tool that municipalities are empowered to use in that law is designating an "Area in Need of Rehabilitation." This designation allows a municipality to undertake a program of repair and improvement to structures and allows the municipality to:

- Create a "Redevelopment Plan" that provides a vision and regulations that control land uses in the area.
- Provide five-year property tax exemptions and abatements on improvements support redevelopment and rehabilitation of properties.

Rehabilitation designation does not imply that all or even most of the structures are "blighted" or in poor condition. Instead, the Downtown

Figure 14. Proposed Transit Village, Area in Need of Rehabilitation



Recommended Designated Area

would qualify simply because of the age of housing stock. Moreover, the designation does not give the Borough the power to acquire property through eminent domain nor can it provide long-term tax abatements.

Designating the Downtown, as defined in Figure 14, as an Area in Need of Rehabilitation will unlock key tools that the municipality will need to implement the following actions:

- Regulating Development through a Form-Based Code
- Façade Improvement Program

Once the Downtown has been designated an Area in Need of Rehabilitation, the Borough should adopt the Redevelopment Plan created as part of this project. Among other components, the Redevelopment Plan:

- Permits small multi-family development in Downtown neighborhoods.
- Includes detailed use, bulk, and form regulations for the redevelopment of 80 W Somerset and 30-40 E Somerset.
- Sets design standards for both Somerset Street development and neighborhood development.

Adopt Zoning Changes

Included with this plan is a zoning amendment that would:

- Update the list of permitted uses in the B1 to allow for emerging uses that would support the Borough's goals for the area.
- Reduce the minimum lot sizes in the B1 to reduce down the number of non-conforming lots.
- Allow accessory dwelling units in the residential areas surrounding the Downtown.

These amendments are consistent with the strategies intended to support the creation of new small businesses and to enhance Downtown neighborhoods. The Borough should make adopting these amendments an early action item.

SUSTAINING

At every point in the planning process, residents and stakeholders have noted the need for better coordination on economic development. Many suggested that Raritan needed an entity to oversee implementation of this plan's recommendations.

Organize to implement the plan

Continue the Plan Implementation Working Group: The Borough assembled a group of elected and appointed officials, technical experts, local and County staff, local and regional business stakeholders, advocates, and residents to form a Plan Implementation Working Group (PIWG). Many of the participants were people who heavily participated in the online workshop.

The group has identified a long-term goal of creating an organization that will be able to hire professional staff to manage economic revitalization in the Downtown. The group will work with the community and the Borough to identify an appropriate funding mechanism for the organization, which may include the creation of a Special Improvement District (SID). In the short-term, the PIWG will create subcommittees that work to implement the plan.

The group has identified the following early steps:

- As it relates to the plan's recommendations, help coordinate the many activities of several different entities including the Economic Development Committee, the Recreation Committee, Environmental Commission, Historic and Cultural Committee, among others.
- Work to increase awareness of the plan's vision and recommendation.
- Lead educational efforts that will help the public, as well as appointed and elected officials, understand the nuances of Redevelopment and Rehabilitation designation.

- Coordinate with larger regional entities to determine the ways they can support and be supported by plan implementation.

More details on the group can be found in the Plan Implementation Working Group Report.

Identify and energize volunteers: Not everyone who helps to implement a plan has to be involved in strategy development. Instead, Raritan will need a large and diverse group of volunteers who can help with everything from small one-off efforts to larger more complex projects. As such, the PIWG should cultivate a database of volunteers to contact when their services are needed. Efforts should be made to recruit Hispanics, Filipinos, younger-residents (including teens), older residents, renters, and people from both family- and non-family households, among many others.

Brand for Success

Branding is more than a combination logos, taglines, and color schemes. A brand should reflect Raritan's values, strengths, opportunities, and vision. A strong, easily identifiable brand can generate excitement, bolster a sense of community, and assign credibility to the Downtown. Consideration of the brand can be an early focal point of the PIWG to allow time for professional design and public recognition, so that the brand becomes an inherent component of the Borough's overall economic development efforts. Through careful consideration, the graphics signifying the brand identity will work in tandem with the actions detailed in this chapter to showcase Raritan.

WHERE TO START

The table provides readers with a sense of how implementation should be approached in each phase of the process: early (1 - 3 years), middle (3 - 6 years), and later (7 - 10 years). A more detailed implementation matrix is provided in the Plan Implementation Working Group Report.

	Early	Middle	Later
Economic Development	Start the process of opening the Borough for business, which could include expanding the Borough's public-facing presence and building a relationship with businesses and property owners.	Start to expand programs and offerings and establish more formal partnerships with regional entities. More aggressive marketing and business attraction will begin.	Work will focus on supporting businesses, helping them expand, and navigating changing economies.
Placemaking	Focus on enhancing existing assets. Demonstration projects and other low-cost high-impact improvements will effectively show progress and build support for more intensive work. Time spent on applying for grants and setting up property-assistance programs will pay dividends in later phases.	The Borough will look to implement one or two permanent improvements, likely along the waterfront and Somerset Street. Completing the Raritan Greenway will be a high priority. Property owners will be encouraged to take advantage of assistance programs that support façade and storefront improvements.	Substantial revitalization efforts will have taken root and placemaking efforts will focus on larger more substantive projects that reinforce the Borough's relationship to the riverfront and the surrounding community.
Governing	Adopting the plan, ordinances, and rehabilitation designation will establish a regulatory framework for revitalization.	The Borough will continue to pursue grant funding and encourage new context-sensitive rehabilitation efforts.	The Borough will work with property owners at strategic locations to support context-appropriate redevelopment.
Sustaining	The Plan Implementation Working Group (PIWG) will take on key tasks and focus on building a culture of success.	As efforts grow, the PIWG may re-evaluate its structure and determine if the initial model needs refinement. The Borough or the PIWG may hire paid staff. Efforts to connect residents with employment opportunities will become a key focus of the groups work.	The Downtown will have an effective and efficient management entity that supports local businesses, attracts new ones, and connects residents to employment opportunities.

FOCUS ONS

This section provides more detailed recommendations on several specific projects in the Downtown.

FOCUS ON REGIONAL ACCESS

Despite the close proximity of Downtown to Raritan's train station, residents (and workers) overwhelmingly commute by single occupancy vehicle, partially due to the lack of alternative ways to access the region's employment centers.

Raritan has the potential to be a transit rich node, with full multimodal access. This requires transit access at a variety of scales. Regional rail provides connection to major urban centers, and improvements to regional buses will create links between population centers and major destinations. **The missing third layer to this network is more local shuttle service that links the Downtown with area employers and office parks.**

By increasing the borough's connectivity to the region, Downtown Raritan can be a better option for residents working in the region and attract increased visitors, without having to supply additional parking.

Somerset County Transportation provides shuttle access to the region. Currently, only some routes run through the Borough and the bus only stops when flagged. As such, there are opportunities to improve service which will increase visibility of the burgeoning Downtown and provide increased access for residents. More reliable and frequent service within the Downtown is the first step. The following recommendations are illustrated in Figure 15, with a Raritan offset at opposite (Figure 16). These are preliminary routing proposals which require operational vetting.

The Borough should collaborate with RideWise TMA and Somerset County to explore funding opportunities that will unlock these improvements. In order to encourage use, shuttle service should be reliable with routes

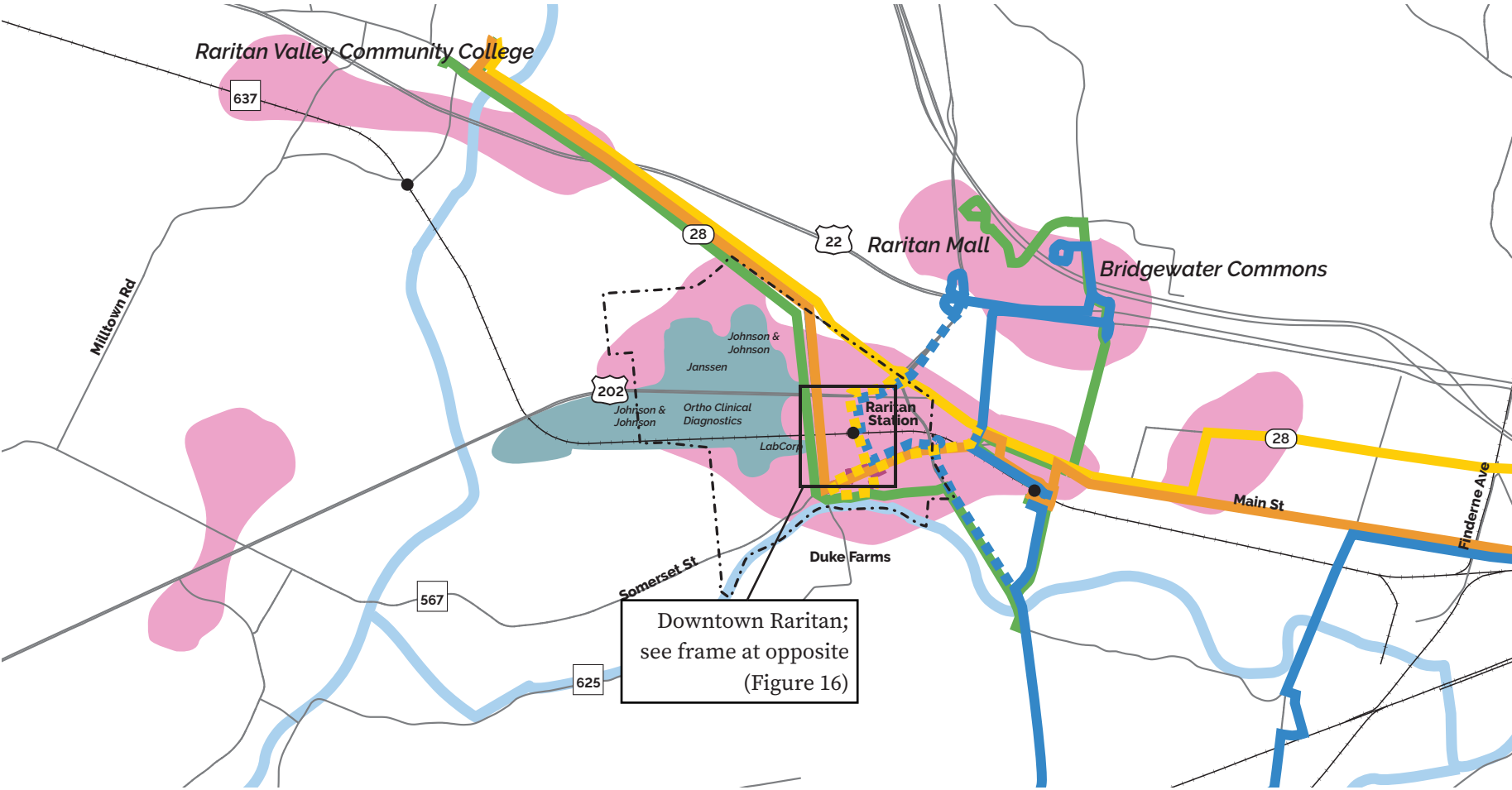
that are clear and direct. A shuttle study should be pursued to focus on optimizing the Somerset County bus system to balance access with run time and reliability of service for the customer, and propose phasing and funding strategies for expansion.

CAT 1-R's evening stops in New Brunswick should be restored. The route provides access to Branchburg, Somerville, and New Brunswick (including hospital and RVCC stops) for Raritan residents and workers, and travels through the heart of Raritan's commercial district.

Add Raritan Loop to CAT 2-R: This route currently bypasses Raritan, which is located between employment destinations that the route connects. Along this flaggable route, locations in the borough noted on the time schedule are Somerville Circle and the intersection of Route 28 and First Avenue. These locations do not encourage Raritan residents and employees to use the service - there are no sidewalks along high traffic streets, and shuttles cannot pick up riders off the route (unlike other shuttles). A loop through Raritan's Downtown should be evaluated as illustrated on Figure 15.

Expanding CAT 3-R to provide evening and weekend service will similarly connect the borough to RVCC and Bridgewater County. The routes connect Raritan to Bridgewater, Somerville, Branchburg, with notable destinations at the Somerville Train Station and Bridgewater Commons Mall. Currently the route only operates a weekday morning loop. A first phase would pilot an afternoon loop to provide a commute option for residents traveling to those destinations. The Borough and

Figure 15. Select Somerset County Bus Routes and Work Destinations for Raritan residents



Preliminary draft routing proposals developed based on employment concentration and travel patterns; additional operational analysis needed.
Data Source: RideWise TMA, NJDOT, U.S. Census Data, On the Map Application, LEHD Origin-Destination Employment Statistics

Map Legend

- | | | | |
|--------|-----------------------|----------------|----------------------------------|
| CAT-1R | CAT-3R | Existing Route | Concentrations of Area Employers |
| CAT-2R | SCOOT (858, 859, 860) | Proposed Route | |

Figure 16. Proposed Stops and Routes within Downtown Raritan



Preliminary draft routing proposals developed based on employment concentration and travel patterns; additional operational analysis needed.

Left Image: Aerial photo of Somerville Landfill site as of 2000 (with Route 206 at left and Somerville Station at right); Right image: Somerville Station Area Landfill Vision Plan. Photos: MyCentralJersey.com

County should identify Duke Farms in schedules as a destination along the route. Recognizing these recreational amenities along the Greenway would not require rerouting. A second phase should be evaluated that would pilot weekend daytime operation.

An express SCOOT (858, 859, 860) route (through Raritan) should be considered, to offer more direct service from end to end of the route, while stopping in the Borough. The route currently runs from Hillsborough to Bedminster by way of Manville and Bridgewater.

Additional Considerations

The Somerville Station Area and Landfill Redevelopment Plan for a transit village is under construction and will in the long-term shape the connectivity between Raritan and Somerville. The plan will include incorporation of interstitial streets between Route 206 and Somerville Station, including extending Orlando Drive east to Somerville Station (called Station Road). At that time, last mile connections between Raritan and Somerville will be much shorter and attractive, but will still involve crossing Route 206. The roadway should be designed as an attractive pedestrian, bicycle, and transit connection. The Somerset County bus routes which connect the two boroughs should be updated at that time.

Figure 17. Somerville Station Area Landfill Vision Plan



FOCUS ON RARITAN GREENWAY

FOCUS ON: RARITAN GREENWAY

The Greenway is a major regional asset which has not yet connected to the heart of Raritan. Once these links are completed, the trail will extend between Branchburg Township to South Bound Brook, and also linking to additional off-road trails that can be a major source of tourism for the Borough. The Greenway section would capitalize on recreational visitors already coming as far north as the Nevius Street Bridge, and encourage them to explore the side of the riverfront on the Raritan side, which offers the unique draw of direct access to the river. A phased approach to implementation will draw attention to the riverfront, while staggering local investment in the system.

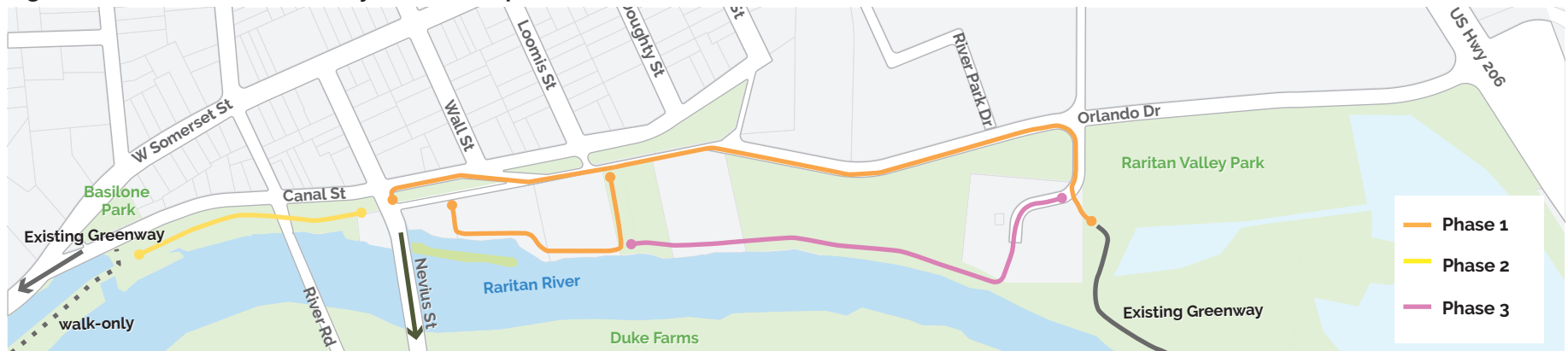
Phase 1. Nevius Street to Loomis Street and Orlando Drive On-Street Facilities

The first phase of the trail's extension through Raritan will activate the new plaza off the Nevius Street Bridge.

1A: Nevius Street to Loomis Street

Installation of a path around the development site at the corner of Nevius Street / Canal Street / Orlando Drive will help establish the trail along the river begins to build the regional amenity. It is anticipated to be completed as part of the residential development at Mill Drive.

Figure 18. Raritan River Greenway - Phased Implementation



1B: Orlando Drive

Orlando Drive is wide enough to accommodate a two-way cycle track, which should be installed on the south side of the street, adjacent to parkland. This approach would require no hard infrastructure changes, and could be achieved using paint. As such, it is an easy opportunity to establish a quick connection into a key Downtown focal point.

While providing a dedicated facility to connect users between the parks, this treatment would have an additional benefit of reducing overly wide travel lanes on the street which contribute to high speeds in the area. With few driveways or intersections, a cycle track is the preferred bike facility.

Cyclists should be directed into Busky Lane where they can connect to the existing trailhead, with a continuation of the trail as well as wayfinding signage, so that the facility ends before the Route 206 interchange. Since the on-street bike lane does not provide a direct connection to the waterfront, it is not the long-term goal.

Completion of this segment of the Greenway will contribute to the activation of numerous other strategies within this plan, including

development of the viewshed between Nevius Street Bridge and Somerset Street. It will also coincide with the installation of separated bicycle facilities on Thompson and Anderson Streets which connect residents and visitors between Route 202 and Somerset Street.

Phase 2. Basilone Park to Nevius Street and Orlando Drive

Foot paths already connect the existing trail parking area off of Colle Sannita Way, under the River Road Bridge, to Nevius Street Bridge. A fairly level pathway exists, without the need for significant clearing or grading. Paving of the trail in this section should be accompanied by wayfinding signage, waste receptacles and pedestrian scale, historic lighting especially in the vicinity of the River Road underpass.

Phase 3. Loomis Street to Busky Lane

The final section of the Greenway through the Borough will create park space and provide access to the waterfront for walkers, bikers, and park visitors. Further investigations into soil conditions in this area will be critical, as the area used to be a municipal landfill. The area is also in the floodway which will constrain the types of materials that could be use.

Figure 19. Cross Section of on-street Orlando Drive connection



Completion of this phase, the contiguous off-road connection between the riverfront at Loomis Street all the way to the existing trailhead at Busky Lane, is contingent upon property acquisition.

Continued Coordination

The County continues to coordinate development of the Raritan River Greenway as part of its 2019 Walk Bike Hike Plan. The Borough should maintain coordination with the Somerset County Parks regarding activation and maintenance of the parkland south of Orlando Drive, as well as additions to the trail outside of Downtown Raritan.

In particular, the segment of the Greenway between Duke Island Park and Basilone Park should be evaluated. The on-street shoulders along Old York Road are used by cyclists today, but traffic calming and additional signage should supplement this condition in order to encourage a wider swath of recreational users to use the connection.

Figure 21. Illustration of potential new trail segment in Phase 2



Figure 20. Phase 3 at the Raritan River



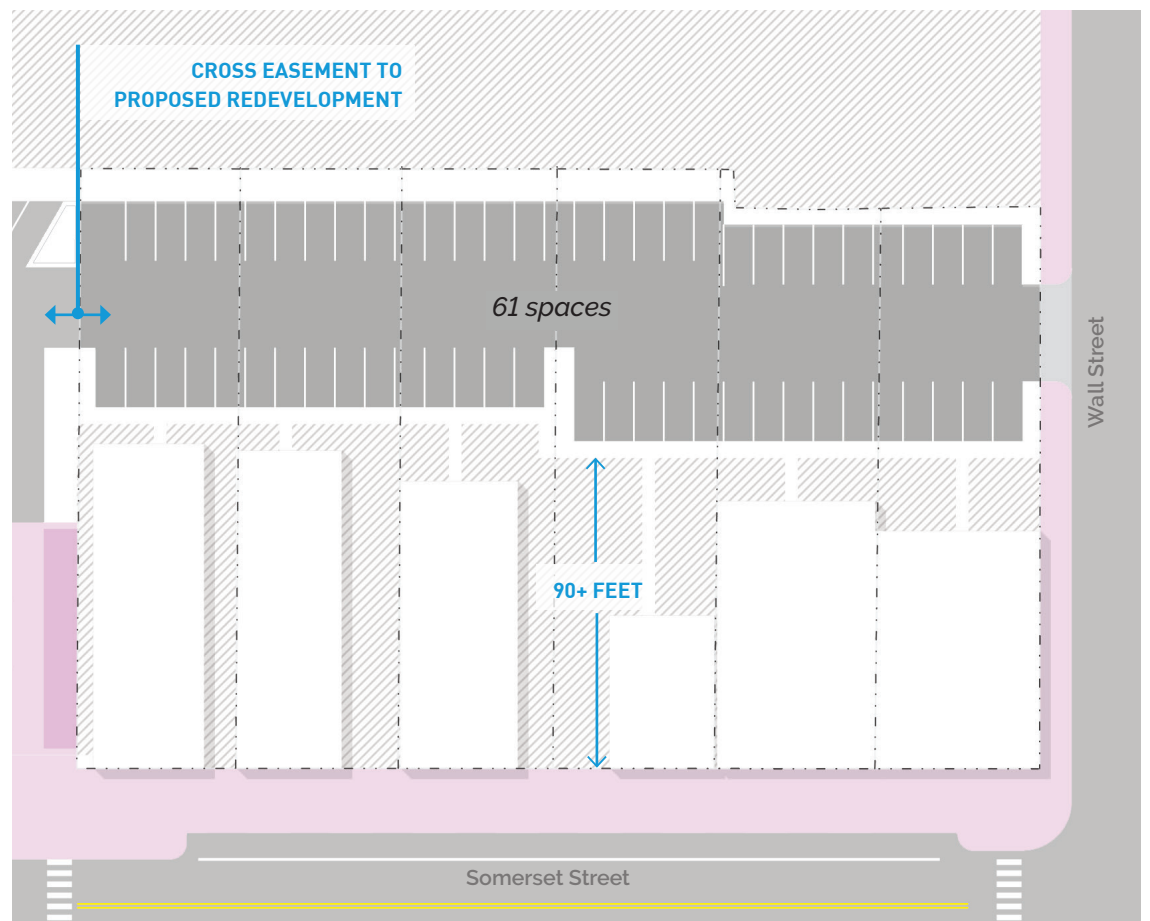
FOCUS ON SHARED PARKING

Limited space in the Downtown makes it difficult to provide on-site parking. This concept illustrates a shared parking strategy where property owners work together to maximize their benefit.

Under the proposed configuration, the lots could accommodate 61 spaces. Access would be provided on Wall Street. A cross easement would provide through access to the proposed redevelopment at the QuickChek site.

In addition to more parking Downtown, the configuration would make the four eastern most properties substantially more attractive for renovation or redevelopment. At least 90 feet of depth between the sidewalk and parking would maintain development potential.

For this project to move forward, the Borough would most likely have to initiate the effort, coordinate agreements amongst the various property owners, and fund at least some of the improvements. In exchange, the Borough could potentially receive dedicated public parking spaces which could be used by anyone visiting Downtown Raritan. High-quality wayfinding signage will be important, given the proposed access of Wall Street.



FOCUS ON RARITAN MALL

The size and location of the Raritan Mall make it a substantial opportunity to shape Downtown Raritan. The following principles should guide the Borough's work to support redevelopment on the site:

Have Three Fronts

The site should have high-quality frontage in three directions: towards Route 206, Orlando Drive, and Busky Ln. Each front creates an opportunity for a very different experience and therefore will require thoughtful design.

Route 206

The Route 206 frontage will have a major impact on drivers as they pass Raritan and could be an attractive place to locate auto-oriented commercial businesses. Nonetheless, drivers should be welcomed into the site and, to the greatest extent possible, see the mall as a gateway into Downtown Raritan.

Orlando Drive

The County and the Borough both see the former golfing range incorporated into a riverfront park system. As such, there is considerable opportunity to leverage public investments to support the creation of high-quality development, and likewise for private investment to support public improvements. Residential uses fronting onto Orlando Drive would benefit from some of the best views in the region.

Busky Lane

Busky Lane is currently the back of the Raritan Mall, but it does not need to be. Towards Glaser Ave, the street has a charming residential feel. The Lena's outdoor tennis courts and basketball courts are both located there. As such, this frontage has an opportunity to be a gateway from Downtown Raritan into the site while also taking advantage of some of the excellent views produced by the Lena's stormwater management system.

Make Multi-Modal Connections

The site should support the plan's goal of building a multi-modal network Downtown. Somerville is redeveloping the former landfill site and plans to establish a 1/2-mile connection between the Orlando Drive-Route 206 intersection and the Train Station in Somerville. This creates an opportunity for transit-friendly development not just in Raritan but also in Somerville.

At the same time, the property must connect to the Downtown. Reinforcing the exiting path through the Lena Development and Elizabeth Street will be critical. The Borough and developer may also wish to explore how innovations in micro-mobility might better connect the area to the commercial core of the Downtown.

Mix Uses but Don't Compete with Downtown

The site is large enough that it could easily accommodate a variety of uses on site. This could be a combination of residential, office, and commercial uses. However, the Borough should be careful not to permit uses that might compete with the burgeoning Downtown.

FOCUS ON JOHN & THOMPSON ST

The John & Thompson Street area, as illustrated in Figure 13 on page 15, is an area where transformative change could occur. Portions of the site lie within the floodway and 1% Flood Zone (See the Environment Section of the Existing Conditions Report for more details), which will make redevelopment complex. The following design principles will ensure that new development supports the goals and objectives of this plan.

Support connections to the river

Redevelopment of the site should support strong connections from Somerset Street to the Orlando Drive, and thus the river.

Thompson Street bicycle facilities

Any project should support the continuation of bicycle facilities down Thompson Street. The Borough and developer should explore the conversion of Thompson Street to a one-way southbound and the continuation of the protected bicycle lane to Orlando Drive and the Raritan Greenway. Northbound bicycle facilities may be required on Loomis Street.

Establish strong sightlines

Looking down Thompson Street, one's view of the riverfront is currently blocked by Skylands Energy building. A strong visual connection to the river should be established by creating an obstructed view of the riverfront and/or large and artistic signage.

Create high-quality pedestrian environment

Wide sidewalks, well landscaped buffers, attractive front yards, and quality pedestrian-scale lighting are all means by which redevelopment of this area could reinforce this plan's goal of creating strong connections between Somerset Street and the river. The creation of pedestrian crosswalks on both sides of Mill Street would be necessary to ensure access to the river.

Use context-sensitive design techniques

Thompson Street

Thompson Street is currently substantially similar in scale and form to the residential neighborhoods that surround the Downtown's commercial center. Context-sensitive approaches to redevelopment of the site would:

- Place a majority of the bulk towards River Park Drive and John Street.
- Prohibit parking from fronting onto Thompson Street, even if such parking occupied the ground floor of a building.
- Restrict building heights to three stories within 30 feet of Thompson Street.
- Leverage development types, such as townhomes, which permit higher density development that can be in dialogue with surrounding conditions.
- Use an architectural vocabulary that is consistent with the traditional neighborhood forms in the area.

South of Canal Street

Much of the site south of Canal Street is in a floodplain. This will make developing on this area difficult. The Borough should explore the possibility of some or all of this area being dedicated for public parking that would service the riverfront, Duke Farms, and the Downtown. Alternatively, this may be an opportunity for a high-quality open space that complements the proposed open space across Orlando Drive.

Some developers will place parking on the ground floor in flood prone areas. If this is proposed, dense, high-quality, landscaped buffers (as illustrated in Figure 22) should be used to minimize the visual impact of parking. In addition, buildings should be designed to mask the appearance of parking either through the use of screens and/or by creating the appearance that something else occupies the ground floor. Prohibiting parking within 20 feet of a sidewalk can also be an effective means for maintaining a quality pedestrian environment.

Figure 22. Vegetative buffers that screen parking



Figure 23. Architecture that hides ground floor parking

