

SOMERS POINT VISION PLAN 2012



Community vision and goals | Bayfront | Gateway to the Shore | Better Big Streets | Bayshore Campus Area Plan | Greenways, Parks and Open Space | Neighborhood quality-of-life

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Introduction

Community Vision and Goals 1

Chapter 1: Bayfront

Somers Point Landing 7
 Bay Front Village

Chapter 2: Gateway to the Shore

Gates ToThe City 1 5
 Branding
 Wayfinding
 First Impression

Chapter 3: Making the BIG Streets Better

Signs & Graphics 2 1
 Appearance
 Business Recruitment
 Safety
 Roadway Design
 Pedestrian & Bicycle
 Truck Routes
 Transit Stops
 Scenic Byways

Chapter 4: Shore Medical Campus Area Plan

Good Neighbor “Check Up” 3 7
 Shared Amenities
 Future

Chapter 5: Greenways, Parks and Open Space

Park Places 4 1
 Green Schemes
 ReCycle Underutilized Land
 Access Improvements

Chapter 6: QOL: Neighborhood Quality of Life

Neighborhood Names 4 5
 Incentives
 Apartment Management
 Residential Traffic Management
 Safe Route to School

Appendix: VIEWS REPORT 2011 civic visioning process





Somers Point as seen from Great Egg Harbor Bay

Picture Somers Point

Somers Point is a waterside community of about 12,000 residents, located in Atlantic County, New Jersey. The city is surrounded by water, with Patcong Creek, Great Egg Harbor River and Great Egg Harbor Bay helping to make up its boundaries. Bridges cross the bay to connect Somers Point to the popular beach destinations of Ocean City and Longport. Over the years, city leaders have often observed that Somers Point is well-positioned to participate in a vital seasonal market, that today draws from the estimated 125,000 weekly visitors to the nearby beaches. In addition to that remarkable advantage, it's a city that has a number of signature qualities, familiar to the residents and regular visitors.

A Waterfront that's working. The Somers Point bayside waterfront hosts a number of maritime businesses that provide mooring, sales and servicing for hundreds of private watercraft each year. The bayfront area also hosts seasonal dining, lodging, and recreation-related businesses. Year-round destinations include several well-known eateries and pubs, the local library, city hall, as well as galleries, shops, and over a dozen places of worship. The upland streets: Higbee, New Jersey, Anchorage, Delaware, Somers, Annie and George area, for the most part, lined by comfortable houses on small lawns; interspersed by a few parking lots and public uses.

Comfortable neighborhoods with lots of possibilities: Modest bungalows and apartments to extravagant mansions and waterfront condos. According to the 2010 Census, 4,655 households call the city home: approximately 2,800 in single family houses and about 1,800 in multifamily condos or apartments. Streets near the waterfront feature some of the older, historic homes in the city, as well as commercial buildings. Many of the houses built west of Route 9 are 1960's era one-story ranchers, split levels, or two story Cape Cod-style houses reflecting the period when the land adjacent to Greate Bay Country Club golf course was incrementally subdivided and developed over several years.

A shopping corridor with “most everything you need.” The Route 9 commercial corridor runs for 1.5 miles in the city, starting at the city's northern entrance coming out of the affluent neighboring community of Linwood. Heading south, there are two large shopping centers anchored by 'big box' grocery chains, a nationally recognized department store, and specialty chain stores and franchised eateries. At the midpoint of the corridor, it changes and is framed by strip centers, offices, apartment complexes and independent retailers. While the corridor is unattractive in places, residents of the town appreciate the convenience of being able purchase what they need so close to home.



a clear vision of a vibrant waterfront town that is quite a bit like Somers Point today, though different in several important ways...

A regional hospital, Shore Medical Center, is the area's largest employer. The hospital and related services "campus" occupies a roughly four-block area between Brighton Avenue and New York Avenue. The area includes many supporting business, parking areas and some private residences. The percentage of hospital/medical and related services jobs is greater than the jobs produced by tourism-related services. The hospital's recent 125 million dollar expansion project brings with it the promise of increased hospital services, the creation of new jobs and an improvement of the way the facility integrates into the city surroundings.

The state's biggest transportation project connects Somers Point with miles of Jersey beaches The Garden State Parkway/West Laurel Drive/MacArthur Boulevard entry access to Somers Point is the most traveled stretch of roadway in the city. It runs between Exit 30 of the Garden State Parkway through to the Route 52 bridge into Ocean City. The first stretch, Laurel Drive, carries a steady stream of cars during the summer tourist season. The first half-mile of this roadway lined residential properties with mature trees with small front yards. Given the high volume of traffic, it seems to be an unusual location for such a residential neighborhood. At the Route 9 intersection, there is a dramatic change as the roadway widens and the houses give way to businesses, commercial signage parking and new landscaping with attractive lighting, native grasses flanked by meandering pedestrian paths on both sides. This area of MacArthur Blvd has been subjected to concentrated construction activity since the demolition of the old circle and the reconstruction of the \$400+ million dollar Route 52 bridge project began in September of 2009.

A plan for the future. Close to half of the businesses that lined MacArthur Blvd prior to the commencement of construction have either failed or moved during the course of the project. Now, the project is nearly complete. Though the overall economic environment continues to limit new investment ventures, the city is hoping to use the lull in activity as an opportunity to create a blue print for the future. That was the genesis of the 2012 Vision Plan. The planning board is interested in seeing that everyone develops an understanding of the underlying choices related to commercial development, local recreation opportunities, and neighborhood quality of life. In 2011, the city engaged a team of planners, designers, and economic experts to assist with the preparation of their Vision 2012 Plan, a city-wide evaluation of physical conditions and underlying potential. The planning process invited citizens and business owners to provide insights through workshops, tours, surveys, and interviews.

What emerged from this community-driven, civic exercise is a clear vision of a vibrant waterfront town that is quite a bit like Somers Point today, though different in several important ways. Key differences would include the following:

- A better-looking and more successful Route 9 commercial corridor. This aspiration applies mostly to the section south of Groveland Avenue.
- A broader array of recreational opportunities, such as bikeway crossings, a kayak landing, dog-friendly parks, and a fishing pond.
- A more beautiful and more easily accessible waterfront and a bayside marina/landing that welcomes sailboats and day visitors.
- A livelier, more walker-friendly Bay Avenue with interesting shops and restaurants.
- A more homeowner-friendly environment that encourages residents to stay and improve their houses rather than relocate.



Bayfront and proposed Landing Walk (yellow) with area parking (blue)

The bayfront can become a regional waterfront destination





The proposed Landing Walk might have something of this character

These objectives are in keeping with the goals of the current master plan, which focuses on five themes that the 1979 Planning Board identified as the city's desirable qualities:

- its residential character;
- its recreational activities - passive and active;
- its open space and natural resources;
- its mix of land uses;
- its history and historical features.

Vision Plan 2012 Plan takes up some of the same themes as past planning initiatives – those that followed the 1979 Master Plan, as well as the 1989 and 1998 Reexaminations and the 1992 adoption of the Bay Front Historic District. The 1998 Reexamination Report defines clear objectives for the bayfront area:

- cultivate and promote the city's maritime heritage;
- protect historic resources;
- enhance parking, prevent traffic congestion, and provide for safe and efficient pedestrian movement and traffic flow.

The 1998 Reexamination Report further documents specific areas for future planning:

- modify the parking requirements for businesses in the Bay Avenue area to allow for existing properties fronting on Bay Avenue to change their use from residential to commercial without having to provide for on-site parking, in order to encourage the transformation of the Bay Avenue area into a thriving historic waterfront village from one end to the other;
- resolve issues involving Shore Medical Center and its zoning;
- review the zoning for the bayfront area with respect to permitted uses to be sure existing uses are included.

The 1992 designation of several city blocks as a historic district also necessitated creation of a historic commission and ordinance provisions intended to protect historic resources from demolition or modification that would compromise the integrity of a historic building or site.

The 2011-2 process takes up some of the same planning issues and brings today's considerations, decisions, and opportunities to the table for public deliberation and debate. Area residents, business owners, visitors, and city leaders participated in a months-long planning exercise that included town hall meetings, bus tours, planning workshops, lunch and breakfast presentations, a street festival, interviews, and working sessions with the Planning Board. The activities and input are vividly documented in Somers Point Views, appended to the end of this document.

The city's Vision 2012 Plan is place-based and focuses on each of the different kinds of places that make up the city: its neighborhoods, its thoroughfares, shore-town destinations, the bay front, the Shore Medical Center, and the city's shopping districts. The plan presents each Somers Point place and introduces the ideas, economic trends, and infrastructure considerations likely to shape its future.



Waterfront Village Bungalows



Possible development along the waterfront (Marina Del Rey, CA)



"Pop-Up" Retail (Asbury Park, NJ)



Gateway Theater - poised to reopen as a performing arts venue

someday...a Bay Avenue that is a great walkable street, connecting active seasonal and year-round mixed-use retail, residential, restaurant, outdoor dining, amusement, arts, and entertainment

Somers Point Landing: Much discussion during the city’s Vision 2012 workshops focused on the expectation that the bayfront area would someday become a more vibrant, attractive, year-round destination with a public, accessible, “destination waterfront.” There is the potential for Somers Point to benefit in both civic and economic ways from the creation of a continuous, high-quality, public waterfront walkway along the bay—docks connected by quay/wave-break walkways and more-accessible attractions that may include for-fee recreational opportunities such as a replica Intrepid, charters, and other Somers Point-based attractions. Waterside attractions could also be reached by boat or from a transformed Bay Avenue that is a great walkable street connecting active seasonal and year-round mixed-use retail, residential, restaurant, outdoor dining, amusement, arts, and entertainment venues. The vision for an improving waterfront builds on a series of principles:

- **A watercraft-friendly Point Landing Marina.** This public space could greatly benefit from the visual excitement of a marina and perhaps a replica boat as a tourist attraction. The potential for a replica boat will be examined below. A logical amenity would be improved access for boats. The boat landing docks have silted in over the last five years and are now accessible only to shallow-draft boats. Day visitors arriving by boat are a big part of the customer base in waterside towns such as Annapolis and St. Michaels. However, since the water is not deep enough for sailboats with keels and larger vessels, recreational sojourners are unlikely to visit Somers Point to patronize shops and restaurants. Plans for water taxi transportation between Somers Point and Ocean City could be programmed into marina operations.
- **A “bridge-to-beach” harbor walk.** Another logical improvement would be a waterside “bridge-to-beach” walkway linking waterside attractions to the new bikeway on the Route 52 bridge between Somers Point and Ocean City. It would be appropriate and desirable to incorporate compatible commercial uses, such as restaurants, boutiques, and seasonal retailing, on sites adjacent to this public waterfront walkway.
- **Bayfront attractions.** Interesting Bay Avenue shops, restaurants, and seasonal activities that are easy to walk to would be attractive to residents as well as visitors. Given the fact that much of the local demand for retail is seasonal, it may be that some offerings are “pop-up” shops that are dismantled in the off-season when the frontage could serve other purposes. Retail activities along a public bayfront walkway would emphasize dining, both limited service and full-service, in both seasonal and perhaps one or two year-round facilities. Additional retailing would focus on seasonal boutiques selling readily transportable items in small shops. The market potential detailed above suggests that good candidate shops would sell specialty (ethnic) foods; clothing, accessories, and jewelry; specialty books and electronics; antiques and collectibles; and leatherwork.
- **Include/support in-place businesses.** Whenever possible, certain existing venues such as restaurants and active boating support businesses (though not boat storage) should be incorporated into the revitalization effort. It is recognized that due to the narrow sites along the waterfront, there will be a need to develop off-site and shared parking strategies to maximize the utilization of the waterfront. Another suggestion is to push back the closing time for area bars and restaurants, which would allow Somers Point to compete better with Atlantic City.
- **A realistic approach to costs, phasing, and permitting.** The improvements anticipated here will likely happen incrementally over time and will involve the participation of local residents, property owners and the public agencies that support/regulate waterborne travel, access, and navigation. In an undertaking of this nature, public and private entities

Table 2: Small Ships

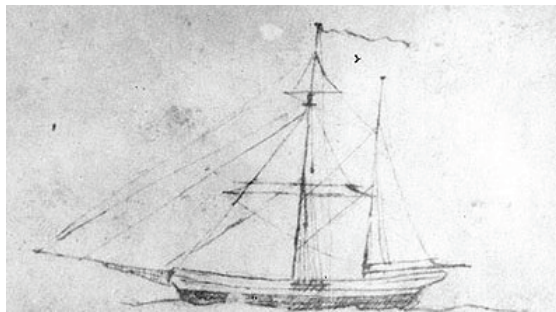
Name	Location	Size	Programming	Hours	Admissions
The Elizabeth II	Roanoke Island Festival Park, Manteo, NC	69 ft long, 17 ft wide	Modeled after the Elizabeth, built in the 1980s. Tour the ship with costumed guides. Exhibits at the nearby visitor center provide details on early exploration, life on the ship, and the lives of Native Americans. Student groups are welcome. In Park—Settlement Site, Roanoke Adventure Museum, the History Garden.	Nov-Mar: 10-5; Apr-Jun 15: 10-6; Jun 16-Aug 15: 10-7; Aug 16-Oct: 10-6	Adults: \$8; Students: \$5; Children<5: Free
The Santa Maria	Batelle Riverfront Park, Columbus OH	98 ft long, 26 ft wide	Offers guided on-board tours of the replica to explore every working part of the ship. Offers guided tours to school groups and overnight visits for adults and children. Can be rented out for private events.	Spring and Fall: Wed-Fri 10-3, Sat-Sun 12-5; Summer: Wed-Fri 10-5, Sat-Sun 12-6	Adults: \$4; Seniors: \$3.50; Children: \$2.50
Discovery Harbour	Penetanguishene Bay, Ontario, Canda	79 ft long, 15 ft wide; 124 ft long, 24 ft wide	Recreated 19th century community, home of the replica British Sailing Ship H.M.S. Tecumseth and H.M.S. Bee. Tour the restoration project of the Officers' Quarters, and learn about military life at this isolated outpost to defend Canada. Offers tours to student groups, self-guided and guided tours of the grounds and ships. Also at the Harbour – restaurants and King's Wharf Theatre.	May-Jun: 10-5 Mon-Fri; Jul-Aug: 10-5 everyday	Adults: \$7; Seniors: \$6.25; Students: \$6.25; Youth: \$5.25; Children: Free
The Schooner Fame	Pickering Wharf Marina, Salem, MA	45 ft long, 13 ft wide	Replica of Schooner Fame. Offers daily sailing trips throughout the summer and weekly during the spring and fall and summer camp for children. Can be rented for private parties.	May-Jun: 2, 4, 6pm Sat and Sun only; Jul-Aug: 2, 4, 6pm daily; Sep-Oct: 12, 2, 4pm Sat and Sun only	Adults: \$30; Seniors: \$20; Children: \$15
Sultana 1768	Chestertown, MD	97 ft long, 17 ft wide	Educational programs aboard a replica of a 1768 schooner. Programs include overnight trips, three-five hour classes, 90 minute dockside classes, and outreach education programs. The boat is only open to the public during specific days/times usually during festivals throughout the Chesapeake Bay area.	May-Oct: docked in Chestertown, has open houses, public sails (about 7 times/year), day sails (2 from Chestertown per year), can charter boat	Public Sails Adults: \$30; Children: \$15; Day Sails Adults: \$50
Sam Houston Boat Tour	Houston, TX	95 ft long, 24 ft wide	Offers free 90-minute round-trip cruises along the Houston Ship Channel; views of international cargo vessels, and operations at the port's Turning Basin Terminal. Boat leaves from pavilion with mosaic mural illustrating the channel's history.	Closed during Sept; Tues, Wed, Fri, Sat: 10am and 2:30; Thurs, Sun: 2:30 only; closed Mondays	Free



The Elizabeth II at Roanoke Island



US Ketch Intrepid 1804 Painting by G. Brooking



need to work collaboratively to ensure a project that contributes to high quality of life in the area and to municipal revenue. Permitting requirements, financing arrangements, and project phasing must be made clear early in the life of the project.

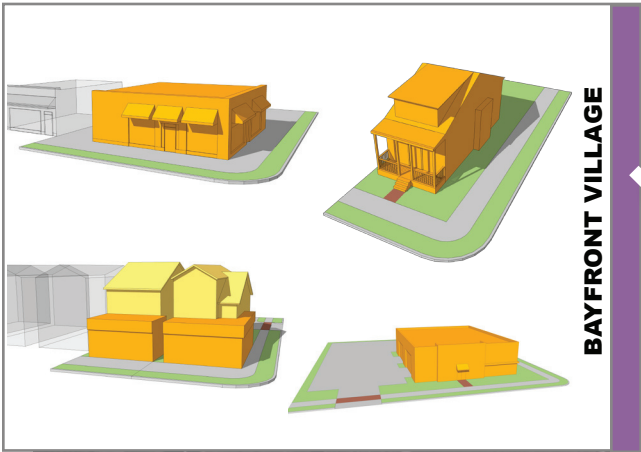
Intrepid Replica Vessel

One concept for drawing visitors and associated economic development to the Somers Point waterfront is creating a replica of the USS Intrepid to be used as a cultural attraction and public destination. The Intrepid was a frigate that exploded in Tripoli Harbor, Libya in 1804 during the United States' war against the States of North Africa. The significance of the Intrepid to Somers Point was that its Naval Master Commandant was Richard Somers, whose nearby home—Somers Point Mansion—is currently being restored as a heritage attraction. A replica Intrepid would aptly celebrate and memorialize Somers as an American war hero.

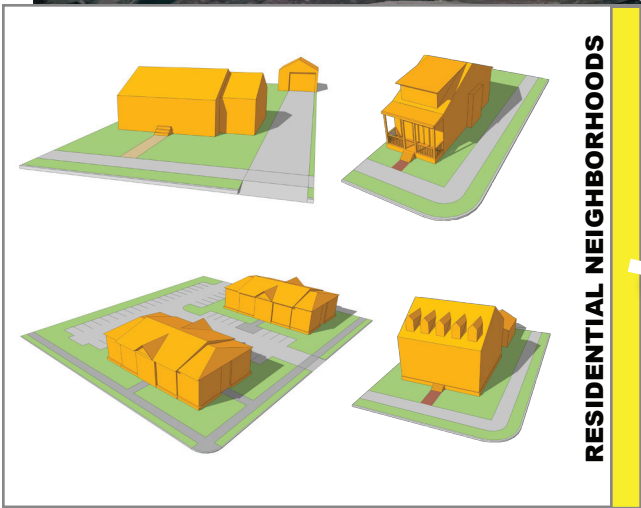
To assess the potential economic impact of such a replica boat along Bay Avenue, comparative research was completed on several small military and non-military vessels that are used as educational, historical, and cultural attractions (see Table 3). These comparative replica boats range in size from 45 feet to 98 feet, with an average size of 74 feet long and 20 feet wide. An accurate replica of the Intrepid would be 60 feet long and 12 feet wide.

A crucial issue in assessing the economic impact of the replica ship is the intended programming. Some ships emphasize stationary visitation, with admission priced in the \$5 to \$10 range; others focus largely on sailing excursions, which are priced at \$15 to \$50. The programming for most of the vessels includes guided onboard tours, overnight visits, and student group tours. Some can be rented for private parties and sails, and three of the vessels are open year-round. Many of the smaller ships do not have an attached visitor center on land; instead, all visitor information is available on the ship. However, some of these ships do have small booths for information, tickets, and/or a pavilion to wait to board. One exception is the Elizabeth II, which has a nearby visitor center that provides additional educational programming.

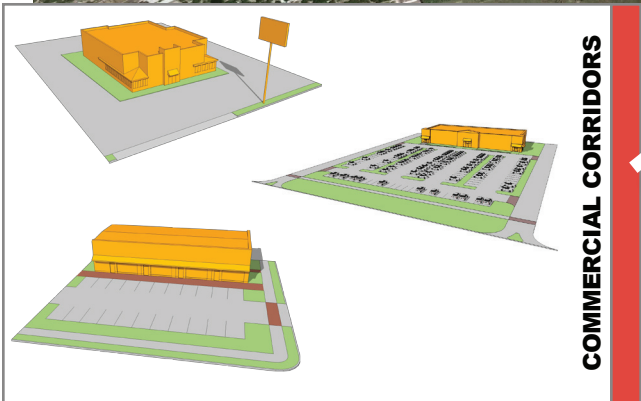
Due to its size and general location near seasonal beaches, the Elizabeth II offers a particularly interesting comparison. This 69-foot replica of a 16th century ship is located in Manteo, North Carolina, inland from the Outer Banks. The original ship transported English settlers to North Carolina. The Elizabeth II emphasizes stationary visitation along a waterfront area and attracts 100,000 visitors annually. It functions as part of other reenactment and history-themed activities.



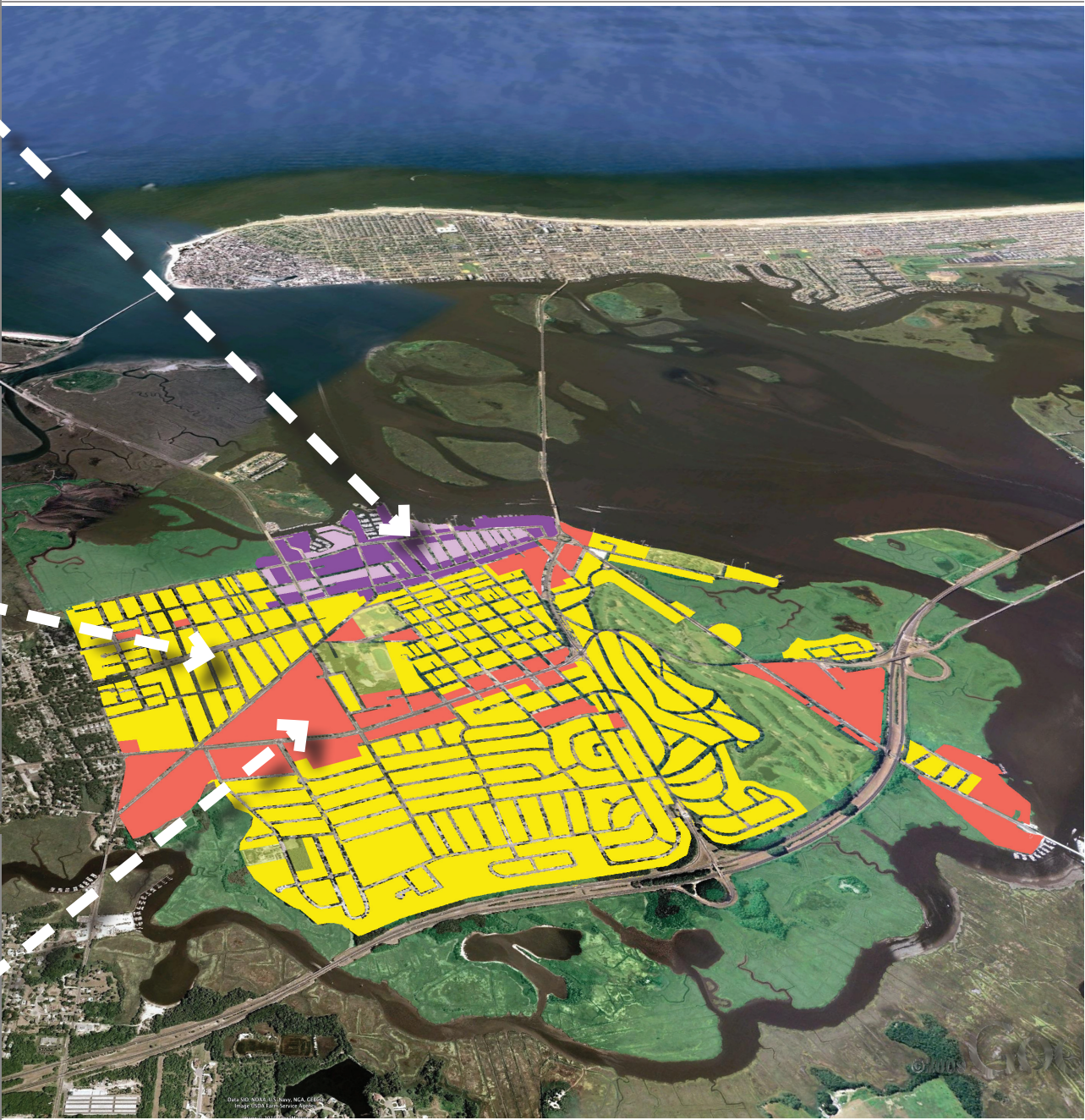
BAYFRONT VILLAGE



RESIDENTIAL NEIGHBORHOODS



COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS



Data © 2010 Google, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Image © 2010 Earth Service Images.

Character Districts and Building Types of Somers Point

New form-based zoning regulations in village areas (HVC, HVR, and HVW zoning districts) could be administered with increased clarity and predictability, an improvement that will be welcomed by Somers Point homeowners and business operators.

Bay Front Village: Just up from the bay is a traditional waterside community with a mix of houses, shops, and civic buildings. The “village” generally refers to a roughly 60-acre area of the city east of Shore Road and between Pleasant Avenue and Goll Avenue**. The upland streets—Higbee, New Jersey, Anchorage, Delaware, Somers, Annie, and George—are, for the most part, lined by comfortable houses on small lawns, with a few parking lots and public-use areas scattered throughout. Along the village’s main street, Shore Road, are eight or so blocks of attractive buildings. There are restaurants, houses, churches, businesses, offices, and apartments, as well as the town hall, the public library, and Shore Medical Center. All of these are in close proximity to Bay Avenue activities, such as waterside eateries, boat sales showrooms, condo development, a public beach, a small theater, and marina-related activity. Most would agree that these streets and places are central to the city’s identity, so future changes to buildings, signage, and landscape should respect the traditional village character. The spring/summer workshops focused on issues of keen interest to residents and business operators, such as the following:

- **Rules and regulations.** Homeowners and commercial property owners report difficulties in understanding the rules regulating building improvements, new construction, signs, and site work. This is an important problem to tackle because it can result in delays (plus added expenses) for the property owner and inconsistent results for the City. Discussions with board members and Historic Commission members point to the need to 1) provide better information on the permitting and review process, 2) simplify the permitting and review process, and 3) provide some new resources to the reviewers, the board members and committees that review plans for compliance, grant relief from a specific requirement, and that will award or withhold a certificate of appropriateness for a project in the Bay Front Historic District. The following suggestions are the result of those discussions:
 - o Illustrative design guidelines are useful, even essential, in compact, complicated places like Somers Point.
 - o Consider amending the city’s Historic District ordinances to provide the Committee a clear framework to gauge whether or not new construction is “in concert with the surrounding neighborhood” §114-98(C).
 - o The 1998 Reexamination Report suggests that the zoning code bulk provisions be recalibrated to reflect the typical dimensional characteristics of village streets and building lots. “The majority of properties average 30’ to 50’ wide. The present ordinance requires lot sizes to be 15,000 square feet or 100 x 150 feet in the Historic Village Commercial and the Historic Village Waterfront Zones. Also, the Historic Village Residential Zone requires lots to be 7,500 square feet or 70 x 110 feet. The creation of these zones with these bulk requirements has made most of the lots non-conforming, which makes it difficult for homeowners who wish to make additions to their properties.”
 - o New form-based zoning regulations in village areas (HVC, HVR, and HVW zoning districts) could be administered with increased clarity and predictability, an improvement that will be welcomed by Somers Point homeowners and business operators. This would provide an opportunity to reevaluate the code’s provisions for setbacks, parking, commercial signage, and site improvements.
 - o Review and update other municipal ordinances and policies; one example pointed out by Vision Plan participants is that outdoor and sidewalk dining are not permitted.
- **Parking.** Parking capacity, controls, costs, availability, and turnover are “hot button” issues in the Bayfront area. Importantly, there has been relief in some of the areas with the greatest demand by adding to the supply of available parking in the hospital area and through better management in the waterfront areas. Specific findings and suggestions are

** “Bay Front Village” is used here as a general place-name and refers to the walkable blocks near the bay. That would include the Bay Front Historic District and the several blocks to the north that are part of the village zoning districts.



Vibrant street life (Bethesda, MD)

Smart Parking Meter

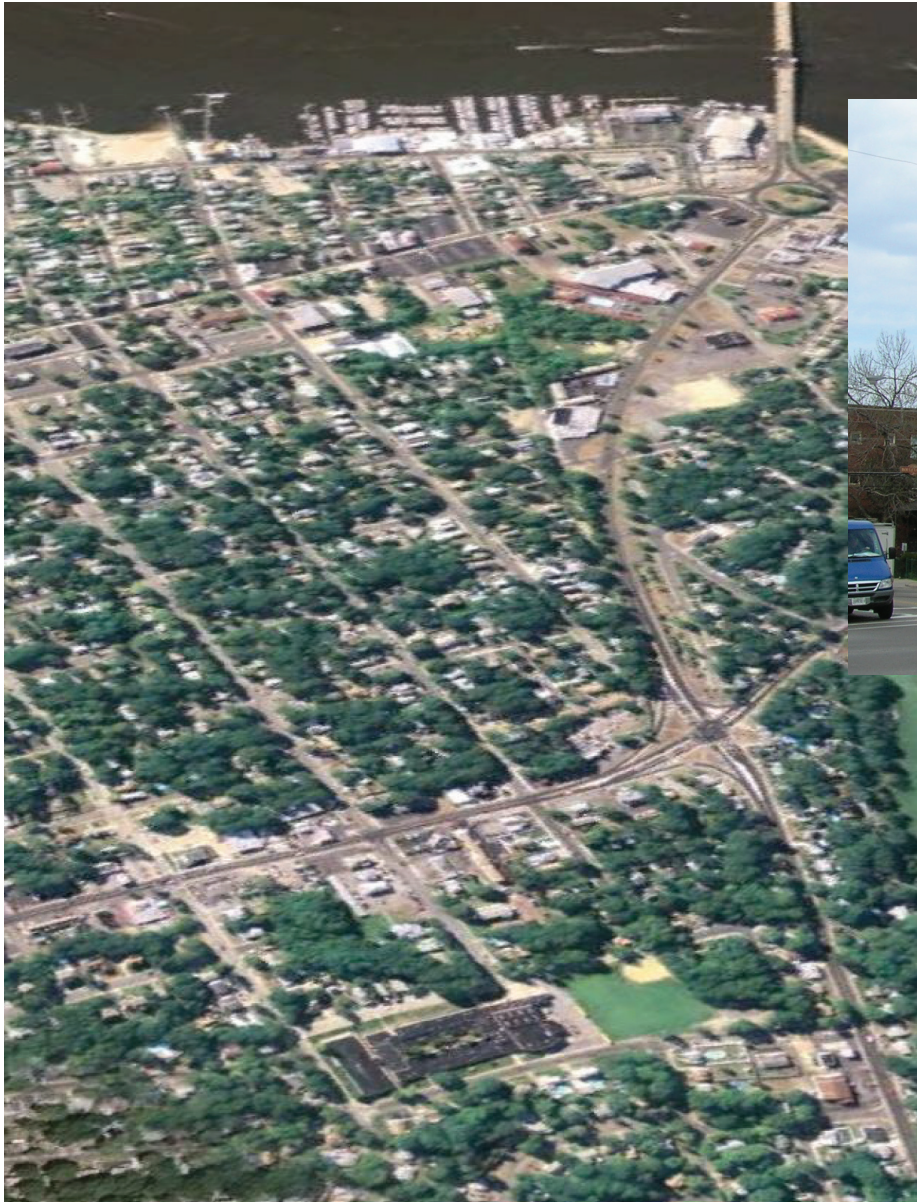


as follows:

- o Shore Medical Center has just completed construction of an 800-car garage as part of its \$125 million expansion project. The new spaces will be made available to neighbors and businesses at normal rates.
- o Permit parking has just been instituted along the mostly residential blocks of Higbee, Gibbs, New York, and 1st Street.
- o Municipal parking lots near the waterfront are receiving “smart” parking meters.
- o Next steps might include consideration of improvements that would add to the overall supply of parking spaces and better management of existing on-street and off-street spaces controlled by the municipality. Some additional steps to consider in support of strong businesses that are presently operating here or that may be attracted to Somers Point include the following:
 - A parking study to identify strategies to share parking and maximize parking resources.
 - Seasonal parking regulations that adjust to provide more flexibility during the peak summer season.
 - Permit valet parking on a case-by-case basis.
 - Evaluate opportunities to increase supply by providing new structured parking or by increasing on-street parking via highly efficient configurations such as back-in angle parking.
- **Traffic calming.** The streetscape improvements made along Bay Avenue—crosswalks, new pavement, pedestrian-scale streetlights, street signs, and new fencing—make for a much more inviting walking environment. These features also communicate to drivers that they should be cautious now that they are in a district where pedestrian accommodation is a high priority.

On the southern blocks of Shore Road are a number of popular restaurants and nightspots. The roadway is wide, but there is not enough excess for on-street parking. The street’s somewhat generous lane-width can make drivers feel comfortable driving at unsafe speeds in an area where there are numerous pedestrians on the sidewalks and crossing the street, particularly at night. The city could pursue several improvements, such as striping to create narrower lanes, illuminated crosswalks and speed bumps, additional landscaping and trees along the streets, and pedestrian-activated signals. These are modifications that would give drivers additional cues about the nature of the environment.

- **Bikeways and bicycle facilities.** A bikeway occupies the right-of-way (ROW) that carried the Shore Fast Line trolley that connected Atlantic City and Ocean City until the 1940’s. From the Linwood border, and through most of Somers Point, the trail has a broad planted lawn on each side. Until 2011, the trail ended at the corner of First Street and New Jersey Avenue, in front of the city hall. A new leg continues alongside the fire station and on to the historic Somers mansion, and by mid-2012, the trail will connect to the new bikeway across the Route 52 bridge and continue on to Ocean City. Ever since the trolley ROW was re-purposed in the 1970’s, area cyclists have enjoyed easy north and southbound cruising. By contrast, cross-town rides are frustrated by the lack of good places to cross Route 9. This would be somewhat improved by providing two additional pedestrian-activated signals. Accommodations that encourage cycling also include placing bike racks in the vicinity of waterfront attractions.



Gateway area today, bird's eye view



Building design can play an important role in creating a gateway

Somers Point has something close to a million and a half opportunities (each year) to make a great first impression on arriving visitors passing through on their way to beachfront vacations in Ocean City and Longport.

Gateways to the city. Between early May and late September, Somers Point has something close to a million and a half opportunities to make a great first impression on arriving visitors passing through on their way to beachfront vacations in Ocean City and Longport. The city can provide guidelines for the design of gateway landscapes, signage, public art, and building features that acknowledge and celebrate key aspects of its heritage and offerings at the multiple city gateways, such as the Garden State Parkway, MacArthur, Linwood/Route 9, Mays Landing Road, Longport Boulevard and other primary/secondary gateway locations.

- Located approximately 10 miles southwest of Atlantic City and surrounded by water on three sides, Somers Point is situated just off Interchange 30 of the southbound Garden State Parkway. Somers Point is framed by Great Egg Harbor Bay, Steelman Bay, and Patcong Creek. An overland approach connects the city to destinations north through neighboring Linwood, Northfield, Pleasantville, and Absecon via U.S. Route 9 and Shore Road. The other principal gateways consist of routes through and bridges over a salt marsh landscape:
 - o Mays Landing Road and Ocean Heights Ave from Egg Harbor Township,
 - o Somers Point Longport Boulevard from the shore communities of Longport, Margate, and Ventnor,
 - o Garden State Parkway Exit 29, heading North
 - o Route 52 Bridge from Ocean City in the area of the Shore Rd MacArthur Boulevard intersection.
- With its direct access across Great Egg Harbor Bay to Ocean City via Route 52 and Longport via Route 152, both major tourist destinations, Somers Point serves as a major gateway to the Jersey Shore. Because of Somers Point's strategic location, it has developed into a significant retail hub that serves both residents and visitors alike. This environment exists within a larger super-regional area that extends to Pleasantville and Atlantic City. However, despite its successes, portions of Somers Point have struggled to reach their economic potential. Particular concern is focused on four key areas: the southern portion of Route 9 (New Road), the Route 52 (MacArthur Boulevard) gateway to the shore, the waterfront area along Bay Avenue, and the area in the vicinity of Shore Medical Center.

Branding: sharpening the Somers Point message. Shore towns are not the only communities that invest in advertising to let potential visitors know about their special attractions. Communities across the county see themselves in competition with other destinations in their region. Somers Point is especially challenged to distinguish itself from the array of available entertainment and recreational choices. Advice from branding consultant Joanne Steele, who works with West Coast towns, is surprisingly relevant to Somers Point. She focuses on cultivating a simple, memorable brand identity. She observes:

- Ninety-six percent of all US counties market themselves as outdoor recreation destinations! .. Forget "historic", forget "outdoor recreation", forget anything that doesn't set your town off as unique, different.
- I have heard many small town business owners say, "We have so much to offer, people who come love it here. We just need to get the word out about all the things we have to offer." Marketing a town might start when business operators and residents gather to start listing all the town's assets. They end up with a long list of all the wonderful recreation, adventure, entertainment, cultural, historical, eco-tourism etc. activities they offer. People come away from these brainstorming sessions shocked that the town isn't packed with visitors, since they have so much to do and see. Brochures are created listing all the activities and adventures in and around the town, and still motels are half empty. The people are bewildered.



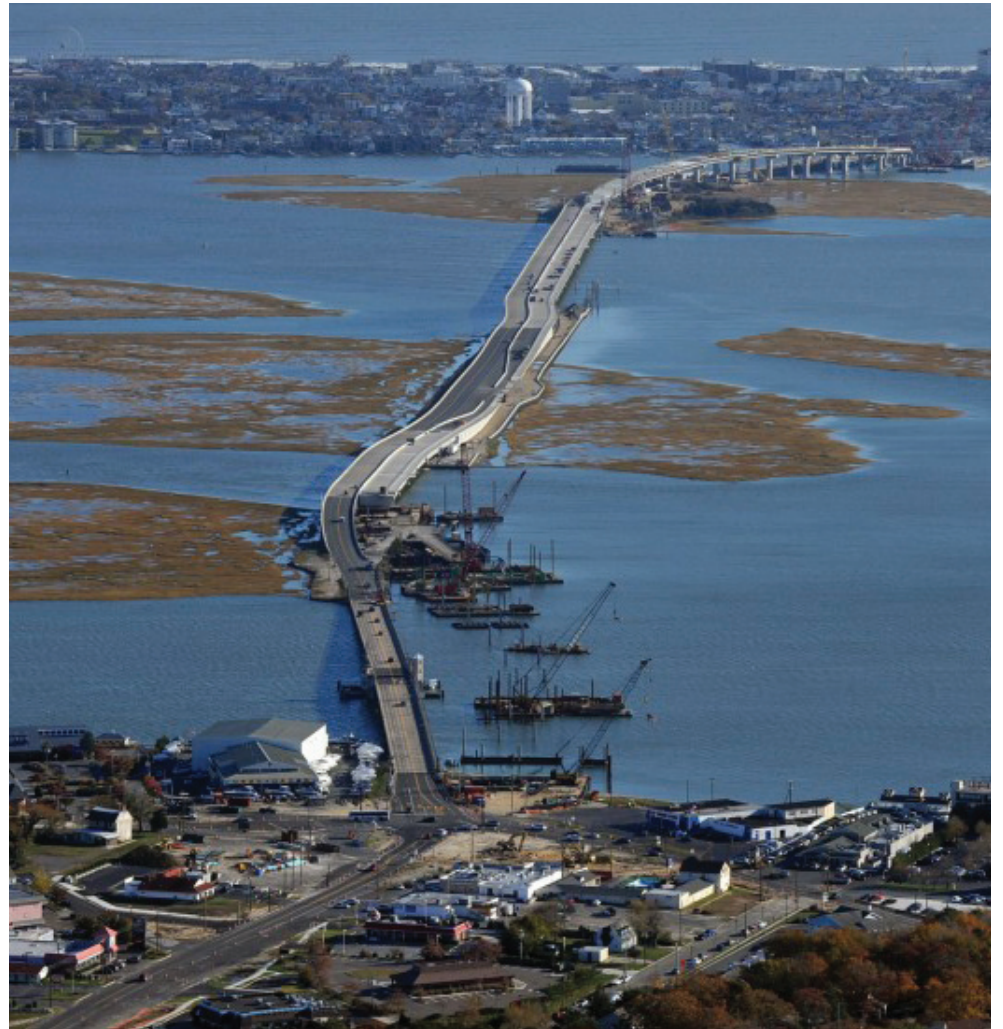
Somers Point Visioning Workshops

Wednesday - June 1, 2011
6:30pm - Jordan Rd. School

Tuesday - June 7, 2011
6:30pm - Dawes Ave. School



The beautiful new bridge over the bay is an iconic gateway to Somers Point and should factor into the city's promotion and identity campaign

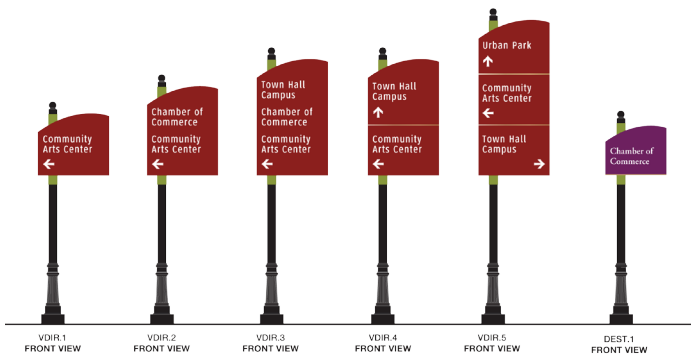




- Start simple. Ask yourself: What is the message for your town? Focus on one thing your town does well. *
 - o Do you have world-class fishing nearby?
 - o Do you have uncrowded country roads and bikeways that are great for cyclists?
 - o Do you have an architecturally interesting and important church, or downtown area?
 - o Do you have an interesting museum, or the birthplace or home of a famous person?
 - o Does your town have an unusual name?
 - o Do you have an unusual annual event or festival?

Branding goes beyond setting the message, more than a logo, or a slogan, successful destination-brand management is an exercise of coordination... where relevant variables; such as tourism support, quality of local services, signage, programming and other elements need to be managed in order to achieve a coherent and compelling destination-brand identity.** The city's Economic Development Advisory Commission launched its branding project in 2011. Next steps will engage the business community and municipal leaders.

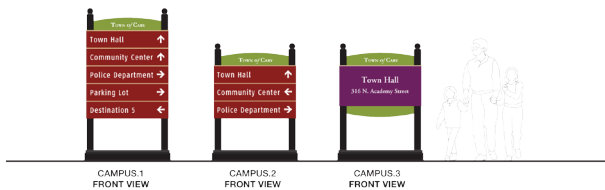
*Joanne Steele, *TourismMarketing.com*, **Joao R Freire, <http://www.palgrave-journals.com/pb/journal/v1/n4/abs/5990033a.html>



Signature wayfinding sign system

- A clear wayfinding signage system will be of value to Somers Point, as it is for any place that supports a lot of through traffic, hosts seasonal tourism, or has regional institutions, such as colleges or a hospital campus that see many new visitors.
- One goal of Vision 2012 is to develop a comprehensive wayfinding signage system for the city that will be installed following a phased implementation plan. Project objectives include:

- o Develop a vehicular and pedestrian wayfinding system for destinations throughout the city, with a focus on the bayfront village and marina areas.
- o Develop a wayfinding system (perhaps emerging from the ongoing branding project) that will create an overall identity for the city that is compatible with its waterside village character and that will also help to differentiate this place from the suburban corridors and beach-town resorts that surround Somers Point.
- o Provide signage that will direct visitors to area offerings and related parking lots, RV areas, boat tie-ups, kayak launch and landing locations, and trailheads.
- o Provide trailblazer signage connecting the parkway, roads, and primary bicycle trails, as well as major destinations within and outside city boundaries (Greate Bay Country Club, Ocean City Bayfront restaurants, seasonal attractions, etc.).
- o Reduce visual clutter and increase consistency of local signage.
- o Promote walking, bicycling, and use of transit through well-marked trails and visible signs.
- o Support the developing regional interpretive trail system and reinforce historical and regional trail themes by



Example of a comprehensive wayfinding signage system (Cary, NC)



STONE HARBOR



PROVINCE TOWN



CAPE MAY



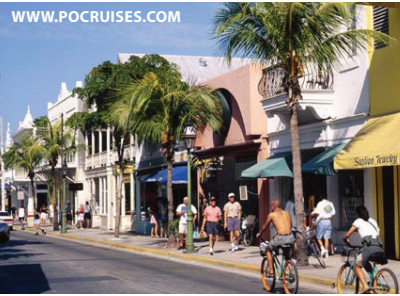
**PLACES PEOPLE SAY THEY
WISH THAT SOMERS POINT
COULD BE MORE LIKE**

SURVEY QUESTION - SUMMER 2011

CHESTNUT HILL



KEY WEST



AMELIA ISLAND



ANNAPOLIS



ST. MICHAELS



SEA ISLE



REHOBOTH



OCEAN CITY



HADDONFIELD



MONMOUTH



SARATOGA SPRINGS



NANTUCKET





incorporating regional trails and historic sites into city interpretive signage.

- The comprehensive wayfinding signage system will consist of the following:
 - o city gateways—signs or sculptural marker; landscaping,
 - o Bayfront Village identification sign,
 - o destination directional signs (to include commercial districts and cultural sites),
 - o destination identification signs,
 - o neighborhood identification signs,
 - o parking directional signs,
 - o parking identity signs,
 - o pedestrian directional signs,
 - o trailblazer signs,
 - o interpretive signs,
 - o directional kiosk directory (at three locations).

Welcome visitors with a good “first stop” impression

- In addition to devoting some attention to the appearance of gateway intersections, there should be a sense of welcome and hospitality at places where visitors actually arrive, leave their cars, and confirm intentions or make decisions about what to do next. First impressions matter. “First stop” places like parking lots need to be artfully signed, landscaped, and lighted to communicate a consistent, welcoming message.
- This project will establish design guidance for parking lots, RV areas, boat tie-ups, kayak launch and landing locations, and trailheads.



Attractively landscaped retail corridor (Marlton, NJ)



Attractive retail corridor (Marlton, NJ)

...the roadway character, travel speeds, parcel size, building types.... make it difficult for any one operator or property owner to invest in the kind of upgrades that could make an impact on the overall appearance of the area

The city's big streets, the three principal thoroughfares of Route 9, MacArthur Boulevard and Mays Landing Road, tell the only story many ever know about Somers Point. People that come only for the shopping centers or on their way through to someplace else have no other opportunity to get a positive impression of the town or its offerings. Each of these important roadways figure prominently in the regional network and each have a distinctly different character. While it is important to acknowledge that individual property owners do invest in making their individual frontages attractive to potential customers, making the corridor improvements that Vision 2012 participants describe will require a committed, multi-year collaboration between owners, NJDOT and the city. That way, existing signage, zoning, access/parking requirements, development patterns, natural features, peak travel patterns, economic trends as well as NJ DOT regulation can be re-calibrated to encourage incremental change toward more viable, enduring places.

Improve business identity signs and roadside graphics

- **US Route 9** traces an upland route parallel to the Garden State Parkway from Absecon to Somers Point. The 11-mile route is an auto-oriented commercial corridor interrupted here and there with broad vistas over salt marshes and waterways. This is a logical location for roadside advertising and signage, provided the quantity of signs does not become so great it completely blocks the sweeping scenic views. Old/decaying signs need to be removed or refinished and regulations put in place for new signs.

Appearance Upgrade

- **Route 9:** In general, commercial corridors where development patterns were set in the 50's and 60's are in need of some cosmetic improvements. A number could benefit from some major reconstructive surgery. This is true of US Route 9 (New Road) south of Groveland Avenue. Here the roadway character, travel speeds, parcel size, building types, and businesses that operate create a retailing environment that makes it difficult for any one operator or property owner to invest in the kind of upgrades that could make an impact on the overall appearance of the area. The smaller, solo operations and inline clusters control only their frontage, so any strategy to improve the presentation of the corridor as a retailing environment will have to be undertaken in collaboration with the city and the various state agencies that control public investment. However, if the city adopts new standards for parking, landscape, and sustainable best practices as part of a larger multi-year project, then the overall appearance of the corridor will incrementally improve over time. This effort will include coordination with NJDOT as part of an overall improvement and access management plan for the corridor.
- **MacArthur Boulevard:** During the “off season” (October to April), volume on this half-mile stretch is low. During summer it averages over 16,000 cars per day, with heaviest traffic concentrated on the weekends. Historically a place for roadside businesses catering to the beach-bound crowds heading over the Route 52 bridge, the MacArthur Boulevard “gateway to the shore” is hosted by Platts Furniture, Circle Liquor, Waterfront Marina, DiOrios Circle Café, Windjammer, Point Diner, Super WaWa (coming soon), three small motels and the proposed Richard Somers Inn. Most of these businesses have been here a while and have adapted to the seasonal swings in revenue and outlasted two other challenges that began almost simultaneously: the reconstruction of the roadway and a steep global recession; both had the effect of discouraging demand and limiting business activity.

The reconstruction of the circle and the approaching roadway did provide an opportunity to introduce a new high-



Far left: On Route 9 above Groveland, a grassy swale provides a green buffer and stormwater management.

Left: CJ's provides light fare to a walk-in clientele across from the Medical Center.

Below: South of Groveland the roadway character, travel speeds, parcel size, building types, and businesses makes it difficult for any one operator or property owner to invest in the upgrades that could make an impact on the overall appearance of the area.

Right: JR's Tavern is able to maintain a landscaped frontage because its site is wide enough for parking to the side.





amenity streetscape with curving walkways, lighting, and landscape elements designed around waterfront themes and using a plant palette associated with coastal environments. Provided by state and federal funds, these public improvements will be beneficial to the city’s image as well as to area businesses and property values. State funds are already allocated to ensure that the new “gateway landscape” will be maintained for a year after construction is completed. After May 2013, local businesses and the City of Somers Point must be ready with a plan to ensure that the area is policed, plants are cared for, trash removed, lighting maintained, and the walkways repaired as needed. Additionally, the city should provide design guidance for parking, landscape, signage, and sustainable best practices to new owners and operators along the corridor. This would be an expanded advisory function of the City’s early-action review process.

Four gateway markers follow the profile of the old traffic circle at the intersection of Shore Road and MacArthur Boulevard. The city and Somers Point businesses may want to add to that image of hospitality and welcome by placing some sort of positive message at the Braddock Drive intersection, as well as two others east and west at the approach to the Shore Road/MacArthur Boulevard intersection, and another at the Shore Road/Goll Avenue intersection. Doing so will provide visitors more detailed information about Somers Point attractions.

- see *Mays Landing Road* on page 33.

Attract and support businesses that can thrive

- **Route 9.** The city’s large format contemporary retail centers—Ocean Heights Center, Groveland Shopping Center, and Somers Point Plaza—have continued to thrive and to attract new operators and franchises. These properties are maintained and promoted by management companies that attend to the overall appearance and recruit a synergistic mix of retailers that benefit from the shared parking field and proximity of adjacent businesses in a “park-once-shop-twice” environment.

Further south on Route 9/New Road the solo operations and inline clusters that line the roadway are constrained by travel speeds, narrow parcel depth, obsolete building types, DOT regulation, and the present financial environment. City zoning provisions also prevent the area from creating a more attractive retailing environment that can compete for customers and quality tenants/operators.

In addition to adjusting regulations and providing some design guidance (as outlined above), some simple incentives and an overall market-driven approach could bring more success by acknowledging seasonal demand; understanding market opportunities; defining specific, shared market objectives; and by establishing recruitment capabilities. Some observations along those lines follow below:

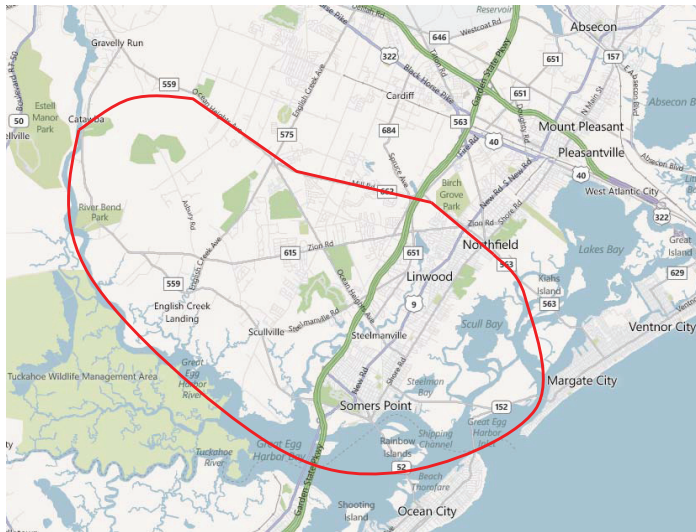
- **Retail trade area analysis.** The physical extent of the year-round market is generally determined by the spacing of the major anchors drawing customers to specific community shopping areas. For Somers Point, those anchors are the Shop Rite and Acme supermarkets and the K-Mart discount department store. For the year-round market, the determination of a logical retail trade area is influenced both by (1) the location of Somers Point in relation to other nearby retail hubs, particularly those with large supermarkets, and (2) key physical barriers such as the area’s bays, inlets, rivers, and creeks. Based on these considerations and using Census tract boundary delineations, we have defined a retail trade area for this



Table 1
*Estimated Resident Retail Store Purchases
 Somers Point Community Area
 Urban Partners 2011*

TOTAL POPULATION (2010 ESTIMATE)	36,058		
TOTAL INCOME (\$000)	\$1,248,699		
TOTAL RETAIL PURCHASES (\$000)	\$543,951		
COMMUNITY-SERVING GOODS & SERVICES	\$217,237	HOME FURNISHINGS & IMPROVEMENT	\$88,774
Supermarkets, Grocery Stores	\$61,615	Furniture	\$9,562
Convenience Stores	\$11,211	Floor Coverings	\$3,845
Meat Stores	\$762	Window Treatments	\$214
Fish Stores	\$182	Other Home Furnishings	\$3,112
Fruit & Vegetables	\$369	Household Appliances	\$2,353
Bakeries	\$156	Radio/TV/Electronics	\$7,508
Candy & Nuts	\$215	Home Centers	\$29,524
Other Speciality Foods	\$214	Paint & Wallpaper Stores	\$4,542
Liquor & Beer Distributors	\$3,977	Retail Lumber Yards	\$23,930
Drug Stores/Pharmacies	\$56,403	Nursery & Garden Centers	\$3,100
Cosmetics, Beauty Supplies, & Perfume	\$2,527	Antique Stores	\$1,083
Health Food Supplements	\$1,995		
Limited-Service Restaurants	\$30,154	OTHER SPECIALTY GOODS	\$53,726
Bars and Lounges	\$3,440	Luggage & Leatherwork	\$815
Dollar Stores & Other General Merchandise Stores	\$5,195	Computer & Software Stores	\$5,616
Jewelry Stores	\$10,586	Camera, Photo Supply	\$526
Optical Stores	\$3,678	General-Line Sporting Goods	\$5,325
Newsstands	\$488	Specialty Sporting Goods	\$6,137
Video Stores	\$387	Toys & Hobbies	\$8,228
Gift, Novelty, Souvenir Stores	\$8,290	Sewing, Needlework	\$1,820
Hardware Stores	\$7,780	Music Instrument Stores	\$2,174
Florists	\$3,749	Book Stores	\$7,077
Hair Salons	\$2,114	Record/CD/Tape Stores	\$3,826
Laundries; Dry Cleaning	\$1,747	Office Supply/Stationers	\$9,765
		Art Dealers	\$1,716
FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS	\$31,459	Collectors' Items & Supplies	\$703
		OTHER RETAIL STORES	\$30,354
DEPARTMENT STORES	\$55,803	Auto Parts & Accessories Stores	\$15,921
Full-Service Department Stores	\$17,371	Pet Supply Stores	\$3,141
Discount Department Stores	\$23,455	Tobacco Stores	\$1,754
Warehouse Clubs	\$14,977	Other Health & Personal Care	\$2,705
		Other Used Merchandise	\$2,373
APPAREL	\$66,599	Other Miscellaneous Retail Stores	\$4,460
Men's Clothing	\$5,641		
Women's Clothing	\$15,588		
Children's Clothing	\$2,652		
Family Clothing	\$25,617		
Clothing Accesories	\$1,219		
Other Clothing	\$4,134		
Shoe Stores	\$11,748		

1. Somers Point Community Retail Trade Area



assessment that incorporates Somers Point and Linwood, as well as portions of Census Tracts 118.01, 118.02, 118.03, 123.02, and 124.02 covering portions of Egg Harbor Township and Northfield (see Map 1). As shown on the map in red, this retail trade area is bounded by Mill Road/Margate Boulevard on the north, Skull Bay/Risley Channel on the east, Great Egg Harbor Bay on the south, and the Great Egg Harbor River on the west. Focusing on the full-year market, this market assessment describes the general supply of retailing located within this retail trade area and compares it to the year-round demand for retail goods and services. These comparisons, though limited at the current level of analysis, do suggest potential for commercial development of the four key geographic areas identified above.

- **Demand for retail goods and services.** The 2010 Census reported a population of 36,058 permanent full-year residents living within the Somers Point retail trade area (see Table 1). These 36,000 residents are estimated to have a 2011 income of nearly \$1.25 billion and to purchase \$544 million of goods and services in the 65 retail categories used for this analysis. These 65 categories include retail stores engaged in selling merchandise for personal and/or household consumption and establishments that render services incidental to the sale of these goods. Selected service establishments are also included, especially those businesses primarily providing personal services to individuals and households, such as hair and nail salons and laundry and dry cleaning establishments. For this analysis, retail establishments are classified by type of business according to the principal lines of merchandise sold and/or the usual trade designation. Banks and other financial establishments are excluded from this assessment because banking activities—deposits, loans, and other transactions—cannot be added to sales volume data for other types of retail establishments. Retailing included in this analysis generally involves establishments that are normally found in pedestrian-oriented retail shopping areas. This definition excludes the sales of automobile dealerships and repair facilities, service stations, fuel oil dealers, and non-store retailing.
- **Locally purchased goods/services.** As shown in Table 1, this \$544 million in retail purchases includes \$217 million in purchases from stores providing community-serving goods and services, such as supermarkets, other food stores, drug stores, limited-service restaurants, and more. These frequent purchases are almost always made as close to the residences of consumers as possible, as are the \$30 million of “other retail store” purchases such as auto parts and pet supplies. Another \$31 million is spent at full-service restaurants. These purchases are often within the retail trade area but sometimes leak out beyond the trade area due to the attraction of specific restaurants.
- **Local specialty goods/services purchasing power.** For the remaining \$265 million in more specialized purchases of apparel, home furnishings, and other goods, purchases may occur at certain stores within the community trade area but often occur outside the trade area in malls, power centers, outlet centers, and other specialty store concentrations.
- **Retail supply/development strategies.** This preliminary analysis did not undertake a comprehensive assessment of retail supply. However, the roster of retailers in Table 2 shows 235 retailers in 54 of the 65 retail categories. This represents a strong diversity of retail supply and suggests that the Somers Point Trade Area has developed a reasonably mature retail mix over the years.
- **Gaps in retail offerings: freestanding stores.** There are, however, a number of gaps or limitations in supply that may suggest opportunities for retail revitalization strategies for various locations within Somers Point. The key opportunities for retail growth to meet current year-round consumer needs include both stores requiring larger spaces—often

	Supportable Store Space (SF)	Current Stores	Potential New Stores	Locational Strategies				
TOTAL	1,687,500	235						
COMMUNITY-SERVING GOODS & SERVICES	524,000	129						
Supermarkets, Grocery Stores	112,000	2						
Convenience Stores	28,000	12						
Meat & Fish Stores	2,700	1						
Fruit & Vegetables	1,500	1						
Bakeries	600	2						
Candy & Nuts	600	1						
Other Speciality Foods	700		XX	Bayfront Boutique; MacArtl				
Liquor & Beer Distributors	7,200	3						
Drug Stores/Pharmacies	80,600	5						
Cosmetics, Beauty Supplies, & Perfume	9,000	2						
Health Food Supplements	5,700	1						
Limited-Service Restaurants & Bars	96,000	42						
Dollar Stores & Other General Merchandise Stores	32,500	3	XX	Route 9 Sites				
Jewelry Stores	27,900	5	XX	Bayfront Boutique; Route 9				
Optical Stores	12,300	6						
Newsstands	1,400	1						
Video Stores	2,000							
Gift, Novelty, Souvenir Stores	29,600	3	XX	Bayfront Boutique; Route 9				
Hardware Stores	32,400	2						
Florists	13,400	5						
Hair Salons	17,600	25						
Laundries; Dry Cleaning	10,300	7						
FULL-SERVICE RESTAURANTS	89,900	35	XX	Bayfront--Mostly Seasonal				
DEPARTMENT STORES	191,500	2						
Full-Service Department Stores	96,500							
Discount Department Stores	61,700	2						
Warehouse Clubs	33,300							
APPAREL	222,000	14	XX	Bayfront Boutique; Route 9				
HOME FURNISHINGS & IMPROVEMENT	354,200	26						
Furniture	68,300	7						
Floor Coverings	14,800	1						
Window Treatments	800	4						
Other Home Furnishings	11,100	5						
Household Appliances	7,800	1						
Radio/TV/Electronics	21,500	3	XX	MacArthur Blvd.; Route 9 S				
Home Centers	77,700							
Paint & Wallpaper Stores	13,400	1						
Retail Lumber Yards	125,900	1						
Nursery & Garden Centers	12,900	2						
Antique Stores	4,500	1	XX	Bayfront Boutique				
OTHER SPECIALTY GOODS	173,200	18						
Luggage & Leatherwork	2,100					XX	Bayfront Boutique	
Computer & Software Stores	16,000	1						
Camera, Photo Supply	1,500	1						
General-Line Sporting Goods	16,600							
Specialty Sporting Goods	19,200	6						
Toys & Hobbies	15,000	3						
Sewing, Needlework	9,600	1				XX	Bayfront Boutique; Route 9 Sites	
Music Instrument Stores	9,100					XX	Route 9 Sites	
Book Stores	29,500	1				XX	Bayfront Boutique	
Record/CD/Tape Stores	9,600							
Office Supply/Stationers	34,900	1						
Art Dealers	7,200	4						
Collectors' Items & Supplies	2,900					XX	Bayfront Boutique; Route 9 Sites	
OTHER RETAIL STORES	132,700	11						
Auto Parts & Accessories Stores	66,300	1				XX	Route 9 Sites	
Pet Supply Stores	11,200	4						
Tobacco Stores	4,600	1						
Other Health & Personal Care	9,700	1						
Other Used Merchandise	23,700	3						
Other Miscellaneous Retail Stores	17,200	1						
Urban Partners 9/2011								

Table 2
Supportable Retail Store Space / Store Potential
Somers Point Community Area
Urban Partners 2011

freestanding businesses that attract destination trips—and smaller opportunities that might be most effectively captured in “themed” collections of shops. Larger freestanding retail opportunities include:

- auto parts;
 - routine apparel such as family clothing, shoes, work clothes;
 - a musical instrument store;
 - outdoor (camping/RV/sporting goods) supply stores
 - sewing and needlework;
 - gift shops.
- **Gaps in retail offerings:** smaller shops and boutiques. Such stores, operating in retail environments aimed at both year-round and seasonal customers, could capture business in these categories:
- specialty (ethnic) foods,
 - clothing accessories,
 - jewelry,
 - gifts,
 - antiques,
 - collectibles,
 - leatherwork,
 - specialty books,
 - specialty electronics,
 - marine supply.
- **Route 9 sites.** The opportunities outlined above, together with other strategies aimed at the seasonal market, can provide the basis for development strategies aimed at the four key locations identified in the Vision Plan process. There are several vacant and/or marginally utilized retail sites along the southern portion of Route 9. These sites will need to capture year-round consumers and will need to provide goods and services that are either in very short supply in the area or do not excessively compete with the larger retail centers anchored by the Shop Rite and the Acme. Such stores will often be freestanding businesses attracting destination trips. Based on the preliminary analysis above, the best opportunities include:
- auto parts;
 - routine apparel such as family clothing, shoes, work clothes;
 - a musical instrument store;
 - sewing and needlework;
 - gift shops.
- **Business attraction strategies: recruitment targets and incentives.** During the course of the Vision Project there was discussion about several earlier municipal initiatives designed to encourage private investment and attract desired businesses. It was noted that some past efforts were met by shifting economic conditions or challenged by public opinion.

Payment in lieu of taxes (PILOT)

Looking ahead to an improving business environment and a growing interest in the planning of the bayfront and the city's commercial corridors - especially of Route 9 and MacArthur Boulevard, it seems like now is the time for city leadership to investigate recruitment and inventive strategies to attract synergistic businesses and to evaluate economic incentives likely to bring reinvestment in vacant or chronically underutilized sites. A PILOT-based approach should be considered. Payment in lieu of taxes, or PILOT, provides a municipality an annual payment instead of property and/or sales tax revenue from a real estate project/development. Instead of paying taxes, which would have to be shared with the county and school district, the developer pays the municipality an annual charge that the municipality can retain entirely. Municipalities can grant property tax exemption and abatements in Areas Need of Redevelopment or Rehabilitation or in Urban Enterprise Zones. This is a tool to apply where quality development and investment is not likely to happen without incentive. It is meant to be an incentive to both sides - public (the municipality) and private (developer) to guide reinvestment into areas that will benefit from a strategic "jump start" and public oversight of outcomes.

1. Governing body adopts resolution that authorizes the Planning Board to undertake an Area in Need of Redevelopment or Rehabilitation Study of a defined area pursuant to the Local Redevelopment and Housing Law (N.J.S.A. 40A:12A)
2. A licensed professional planner conducts Area in Need of Redevelopment or Rehabilitation Investigation.
3. If planner concludes that the area is in need of redevelopment or rehabilitation, the planner drafts a Redevelopment Plan.
4. The Redevelopment Plan is adopted by the governing body.
5. The municipality issues an RFP/RFQ for developers or directly selects a developer. This developer is the designated "redeveloper" through either a resolution or a memorandum of understanding.
6. A redeveloper agreement is prepared, which is a contract between the municipality and the redeveloper. The redeveloper agreement terms vary from project to project, but it must state that a redevelopment project has to conform with the adopted redevelopment plan, in addition to several other mandatory elements.
7. In order to be granted a tax exemption, the redeveloper must be designated an "urban renewal entity," which must be approved by the State of New Jersey.
8. To receive a tax exemption, the urban renewal entity submits an application to the municipality. The governing body approves the application through a resolution. The application has several mandatory elements, including a cost estimate of the project.
9. After the application is approved, the municipality and the urban renewal entity enter into a written financial agreement, which must be in place in order to grant the urban renewal entity any tax exemptions.
10. The municipality must have a public hearing before passing an ordinance granting the exemption.
11. The details of a PILOT agreement are spelled out in this financial agreement.

see: State of New Jersey Division of Community Affairs www.nj.gov/dca/divisions/codes/offices/urban_renewal.html

The Route 9 roadway south of Groveland is an area where access management planning would be beneficial, both as a safety measure and a business initiative

Ultimately, little was accomplished. Looking ahead to an improving business environment and a growing interest in the planning of the bayfront and the city's commercial corridors - especially of Route 9 and MacArthur Boulevard, it seems like now is the time for city leadership to investigate recruitment strategies to attract synergistic businesses and to evaluate economic incentives likely to bring reinvestment in vacant or chronically underutilized sites. Strategies that have generated positive outcomes for area communities include 1) tax abatements or agreed-to payment in lieu of taxes that sunset after a period of time (see explanation) and 2) redevelopment area designation for underutilized parcels that can help to bring new investment to publicly owned property that is providing little benefit.

Safety: High crash locations, access management

- **High crash locations.** Since at least the 1970's, city plans have reported high incidences of crashes at the circle and along the Route 9 corridor. In 2011, the reconfiguration of the circle was completed at great expense. In planning for the future of Route 9/New Road and MacArthur Boulevard, some consideration should be devoted to improving the safety of the roadway. In order to understand the existing safety situation along the corridors, preparation of the Master Plan Circulation Element should include a review of crash data, and remedies should be proposed for any locations showing a pattern of incidents.
- **Access management** is the process controlling the frequency, location, and width of driveways. There is a strong correlation between the high number of driveways in close proximity to other driveways and the number of crashes. The Route 9 roadway south of Groveland is an area where access management planning would be beneficial, both as a safety measure and a business initiative. City Vision Workshop participants pointed out that numerous driveways located close together make it awkward for drivers to pull off, so potential customers choose to go elsewhere for goods and services that they might have otherwise purchased from local businesses. The access management process should evaluate opportunities to connect parking lots and to introduce sidewalks that connect business entrances. Local ordinances should be updated to include provisions for shared parking cross easements, and to consider the potential of increasing development intensity where capacity can be increased by sharing parking. Also, as mentioned above, design guidance for signs, lighting, and landscaping should be provided to new and expanding businesses.
- **Other safety issues** of interest include the question of digital signs, which many municipalities have elected to regulate on the basis of location, brightness, and the frequency that the message is changed. Case law and common sense conclude that bright, highly animated, and frequently changing message boards can distract drivers at critical moments. Potential locations for digital signs should be evaluated along with the other topics to be taken up when the citywide sign ordinances are updated.

Roadway Design

- A driver's experience passing through any commercial corridor is related to the design of the roadway, and that experience will influence whether a vehicle operator and his/her passengers are likely to become customers on that particular day or even at some point in the future. The roadway cross-section, which includes the width and number of lanes, nature of any median, roadside landscape, and location and position of driveways, for all major routes will be reviewed by team transportation/traffic specialists during the preparation of the City's 2012 Master Plan.



City Vision participants noted that cyclists traveling from neighborhoods west of Route 9 have only two locations to cross the busy roadway

Pedestrians and Bicycles

- The experience of walking or biking in Somers Point varies: some areas are very accommodating, and others are less so. Places and ideas that are important to the City Vision Workshop participants include:
 - o the bike way,
 - o Ocean City connection,
 - o cross-town routes,
 - o bike racks,
- providing a safe route for school-age children to walk to school. “Missing links” discussed during the Vision Workshops included the following:
 - o a way to cross the golf course and get from Hickory Point to Jordan Road School.
 - o missing sidewalks on Route 9 south of MacArthur Boulevard. This is a logical way for anyone living on this side of town to walk to shopping, restaurants, school, or bayfront events.
 - o Shore Road, Bethel, and Route 9 were also cited as difficult to cross at times.
- **Safe Routes to School.** Municipal projects that will make walking a more common mode of local travel and a recreational activity of choice should look into accessing funding from the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program. The SRTS Infrastructure Grant Program funding is administered through the State Department of Transportation. <http://www.state.nj.us/transportation/business/localaid/srts.shtm>
- **Improvements to the regional bike network.** The Somers Point bike path runs for six miles, from Pleasantville through Somers Point, along the former trolley line that ran on the right of way, The Shore Fast Line. It connected Atlantic City and Ocean City until it ceased operation in the late 1940’s. Until recently, the bike path terminated behind the municipal building at the corner of First Street and New Jersey Avenue. A new leg continues alongside the fire station on Center Street to Somers Avenue. When resources are available, the trail will be completed across the Richard Somers Mansion site and continue on to connect with the new bikeway across the Route 52 bridge to Ocean City.
- **Gaps in the local bike/pedestrian network.** City Vision participants noted that cyclists traveling from neighborhoods west of Route 9 have only two locations to cross the busy roadway assisted by a traffic signal. An additional pedestrian-activated signal at an additional intersection along Route 9 would encourage biking and walking for cross-town trips with more convenient opportunities to cross Route 9 at regular locations. The city should develop a bikeway plan that includes pavement markings and signs that will encourage riders to follow the streets parallel to those crossings.

Truck Routes

- **Large trucks are regularly seen on some city streets.** The Exit 30 ramp off the Garden State Parkway often puts tractor trailers onto neighborhood-scale West Laurel Drive. City Vision participants pointed out that 18-wheelers making



NJ Transit bus



The city should ensure that preferred truck routes are followed by local companies, using the routes recommended by the city engineer.

deliveries often travel along Route 9, Shore Road, and neighborhood streets to make deliveries. Since large truck access is essential to area commerce, steps should be taken to develop a truck route system that will minimize disruption and property damage.

- In general, there are three possible options for setting up a truck route system:
 1. Designate certain roadways as truck routes in a city ordinance;
 2. Place weight restrictions on certain roadways in the ordinance, thereby encouraging trucks to use other, preferred roadways by default;
 3. Meet with representatives from the companies generating truck traffic and agree on the routes that they travel.
- **Somers Point has designated preferred routes** for trucks making their way through the city. These roadways can be or are designed to attract trucks, through elements such as larger curb radii and other design features. The city should ensure that preferred truck routes are followed by local companies, using the routes recommended by the city engineer. This was explored in detail in the 1979 Circulation Plan Element, which concluded that truck traffic follow county and state routes: Shore Road, Route 9, MacArthur Boulevard, Somers Point- Mays Landing Road, Bethel Road, and Bay Avenue.

Transit stops

- Bus Service: Somers Point is served by NJT bus routes 509 and 507.
 - o The 509 travels along Route 9 with stops at:
 1. Connecticut Ave
 2. Massachusetts Ave
 3. Pennsylvania Ave
 4. Groveland Ave
 5. Holly Hills Dr
 6. Village Dr North
 7. South Village Dr
 8. Mays Landing Rd
 - o The 507 travels along Shore Rd. with stops at:
 1. S. Bethel Rd
 2. Brighton Ave, Hospital
 3. Pleasant Ave
 4. Groveland Ave
 5. New Jersey Ave

Scenic Byway: Mays Landing Somers Pt Rd (County Road 559)

County Road 559 connects Route 322 to Ocean City and crosses through a unique coastal pinelands area, as well as a riparian



City Vision participants asked that changes to the roadway and new development observe design standards that enhance its “shore-zie” coastal character

cultural landscape, with ironworks, farms, fishing hamlets, and historic towns. City Vision participants asked if it could be designated a “Scenic Byway” by the state, a move that would bring resources, some additional tourism, and legislated protection from forms of development and off-premises advertising that would detract from the surroundings. City Vision participants asked that changes to the roadway and new development observe design standards that enhance its “shore-zie” coastal character.

The criteria for designating a scenic byway is “. . . a transportation corridor that is regionally significant in one of these qualifying areas: scenic, natural, recreational, cultural, historic, or archaeological. Each corridor should represent the uniqueness and diversity of the state with a unifying theme that tells a story about New Jersey’s heritage, recreational opportunities, history, and beauty.” Any organization can apply for state designation of a particular roadway. The process and eligibility are described on the NJDOT Website. It should be noted that any application would necessarily acknowledge and enhance the role of the Pine Barrens Byway route and bring its focus on different, but related, cultural assets.





Medical offices in a neighborhood setting (Haddonfield, NJ)

Hospital and related services provide a higher portion of city jobs than even tourism-related services do.

A regional hospital, Shore Medical Center, is the area's largest employer. The hospital and related services campus occupies a roughly four-block area centered between Brighton and New York Avenues. The area includes supporting businesses, parking areas, and private dwellings. Hospital and related services provide a higher portion of city jobs than even tourism-related services do. The hospital's recent \$125 million expansion project brought significant improvements to patient care and to the way the facility integrates into the city surroundings. City Vision participants described several topics of concern: medical staff and patients parking on neighborhood streets, the appearance of some of the buildings being out of character with the local context, and the fact that the institution does not pay regular municipal taxes.

Helping the neighborhood

- **Ways to make the neighborhood work better.** Each year, a high proportion of applications to the Zoning Board of Adjustments have to do with parking, signage, and occupancy issues related to medical facilities.
- **Update Zoning.** In 2010 the city passed an ordinance creating a new hospital-use zoning district. Shore Medical Center sought the creation of the district west of Shore Road to have flexibility to relocate medical services without having to receive variance approvals from the Zoning Board. The hospital already owned a majority of the property, most of which is used by medical-related businesses. The addition of the new zone will help to simplify land use in the area, but will not be enough to completely address community concerns about issues such as parking. It is important to the city that the operations of businesses and the quality of life for residents near the new zone be maintained.
- **Fixing parking problems.** Aware of the fractious conditions created by shift workers parking in surrounding neighborhoods and by additional competition for neighborhood on-street spots from patients, the Medical Center was an active supporter and participant in plans to better manage parking on four nearby city streets. Beginning in October of 2011, vehicles on Higbee and Gibbs Avenues and portions of East New York Avenue and First Street have had to display residential parking permits between 6 AM and 6 PM. Some residents argued that they were unfairly being charged for the right to park in front of their own homes, while others insisted the plan to curb on-street parking by employees of nearby doctors' offices and Shore Medical Center was doomed to fail. However, a month later, the streets were empty except for the handful of cars that have permits.
- Adding to parking capacity. The Center has made its newly-completed 24-hour, 640-car parking garage available to residents, restaurant clientele, and other Somers Point visitors.

Shared amenities

- The Medical Center has completed a \$125 million expansion project that brought significant improvements to the way the facility integrates into the city surroundings as well as to patient care.
- Gateway Theater. Shore Medical Center offered a \$100,000 matching-fund grant to help the Gateway Theater Playhouse reopen. The community-based non-profit Discover Jersey Arts have until September 30, 2012 to raise the matching \$100,000.
- A community garden. Though the empty lot at the corner of New York and Bay is approved for professional office



development for a doctor's office, no one has committed to opening a practice on the property. Assuming that it may be some time before a strong prospect comes forward, a popular suggestion was a temporary community garden or park. Either could occupy the parcel until displaced by a compelling development proposal.

A look at the future: Recommendations

- Further Zoning Updates. The new Hospital-use zone can better respond to community concerns, as well unify the medical complex with the surrounding area, with additional changes to the Zoning Code. However, it should be noted that hospitals tend to be somewhat insular, in that while there are hundreds of doctors, nurses, staff and visitors, very few ever venture out to nearby restaurants or businesses.



A marsh walkway invites bird-watchers and family adventures



Neighborhood Park (Fayetteville-Manlius, NY)



Landscaped trail along rail line (Hammonton, NJ)



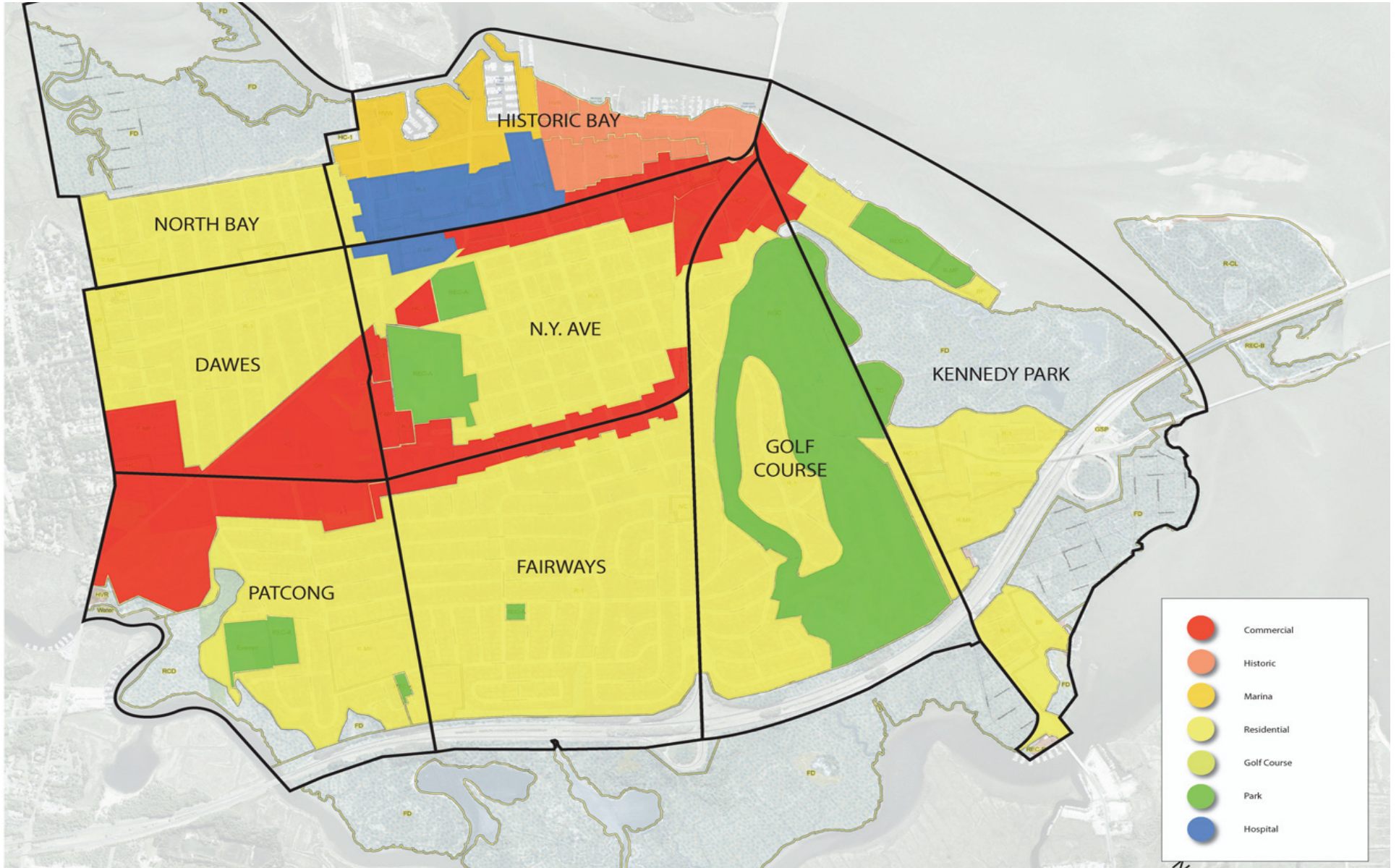
Boardwalk through marsh (Barrington, Ill)

The city should evaluate the economic re-use potential of the property. A development program conceived in concert with the potential commercial value of other publicly owned properties could bring the city significant economic benefit.

Access improvements: wetland walkways, bayside boardwalks, trailheads, and landscape maintenance

- **Marsh walk.** Along the northern half-mile stretch of Bay Avenue, from Maryland Avenue to East Ocean Drive, there is a beautiful view east over the march to Steelman Bay. A boardwalk running roughly parallel to the street would provide a popular place to walk, jog, observe marsh wildlife, and see the sun rise. Any proposal, however, would have to adhere to the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection dimensional standards for this type of facility, as well as municipal obligations for parking and access.
- **Other locations for wetland walkways.** As varied waterfront environments surround Somers Point, there are many opportunities for additional Marsh Walks or other wetlands walkways. Again, any proposal would have to adhere to the required standards and obligations.
- **Maintaining public natural landscapes.** The natural resources of the bay, the river and the creek are important assets that add to the quality of life for citizens and visitors alike. Their value is amplified when they are made accessible to the public, and the city should make the continued access and preservation of these natural landscapes a priority when considering any waterfront improvements.

The natural resources of the bay, the river and the creek are important assets that add to the quality of life for citizens and visitors alike. Their value is amplified when they are made accessible



Somers Point neighborhoods

Looking forward, neighborhood place names might become part of an overall strategy that would also inform a wayfinding signage system... and the “branding” exercise for commercial corridors and downtown

Neighborhood names and identity: Cities and towns are made of places: streets, landmarks, neighborhoods, districts, and buildings. Place names usually emerge from an intuitive association with a local landmark or other distinguishing characteristic; other place names are essentially invented and simply fall into common usage over time.

- Mapping Neighborhoods. Somers Point Realtors Judy Hanlin and Lou DeScioli have mapped the neighborhood names (see map 3) that they know and added a few for places that don’t have a name that people generally know yet.

Looking forward, the neighborhood place names might become part of an overall strategy that would also inform a wayfinding signage system (as discussed above) and the “branding” exercise for commercial corridors and downtown.

Incentives supporting property improvement. Residents participating in planning discussions raised the question as to whether tax abatements could be offered within single-family neighborhoods that are not in a redevelopment area. Another idea that was raised: an “Owner/Contractor Kit” that would provide procedural assistance and an incentivized permitting and fee structure.

- A tax abatement. Input during the visioning sessions has suggested that the current high tax rates may be discouraging incremental investment by homeowners in their properties. There are provisions under New Jersey law for tax abatements for one- and two-family dwellings to encourage such investments, and these should be explored for Somers Point. (See the following online reference and description for more information. www.state.nj.us/treasury/taxation/pdf/lpt/lptbenefitsbrochure.pdf) Some of the relevant stipulations are as follows:
 - Abatements cannot exceed 30% of the exemption amount. An existing one- or two-family dwelling must be more than 20 years old to be eligible.
 - New construction: Optional provisions may be specified for exemption of some portion of the assessed value of new dwelling construction or the conversion of other buildings and structures to dwelling use.
 - Abatements may be allowed up to 30% of the cost of the new construction or conversion alteration, provided that the total abatement granted over the five-year abatement period does not exceed the full cost of construction/ conversion.

Apartment management action project. During the Vision Plan process, a general dissatisfaction regarding the various sorts of trouble generated by apparently lax management of the older apartment complexes became known. Participants requested policy changes to establish consequences for persistently irresponsible management of nuisance properties.

- A big issue. The 2010 Census reports that 44% of housing units in Somers Point are renter- occupied. The strength of the rental market is supported in part by the frequent bus service connecting Somers Point and Atlantic City. Somers Point needs to be diligent in its code enforcement to ensure that the strength of this rental market is matched by the quality of property management and maintenance by landlords.
- New legislation. In this era of shrinking resources, some municipalities find it difficult to devote the manpower and administrative effort necessary to enforce ordinances that are on the books. Other cities are looking at new legislation, to mixed reviews. See for example Milwaukee’s Chronic Nuisance Ordinance and It’s Improper Use Against Landlords



American street scene

<http://petriestocking.com/blog/tag/nuisance-properties/> and Wildwood Passes Rowdy House Ordinance <http://www.capemaycountyherald.com/article/government/wildwood/76209-wildwood+passes+rowdy+house+ordinance>

Residential traffic management program. In the Vision planning sessions, the discussions about parking in the neighborhoods revealed long-standing conflicts around the medical center and a history of problems in the vicinity of popular nightspots. There was little discussion, however, about other neighborhood issues related to streets, travel speeds, short-cutting, problem intersections, or traffic congestion, topics that generate a great deal of interest in other towns. Somers Point's "small streets" – lined by comfortable houses on narrow, well-kept lawns – are working well.