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For Immediate Release.

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## **Rehabilitation Proposed for River Corridor in South Orange; Goal to Beautify and Improve Ecology, Recreation**

Representatives of Main Street South Orange will be presenting a proposal to the Village Board of Trustees at their December 9th meeting calling for rehabilitation of the river corridor through Meadowlands Park to South Orange Avenue. The goals of proposed project are to improve the ecological, recreational and aesthetic value of the presently neglected East Branch of the Rahway River and its adjacent lands, and to establish the River as an educational resource for the adjacent Middle School. Long-term goals include extending the improvements through Waterlands Park and the eventual development of continuous pedestrian and bicycle pathway from Meadowland Park to Memorial Park in Maplewood. This would help remedy the acute shortage of flat-surface recreational paths in Essex County for cycling, skating and pushing strollers.

The primary authors of the proposal are Robert Fisch, AICP, President, Main Street South Orange and Dr. Kirk Barrett, as Chair of the Design Committee. Fisch is a professional planner with Ricci Associates in New York with experience managing many large design projects, while Barrett is an environmental engineer with experience in the river restoration and the Research Director of Rutgers University's Meadowlands Environmental Research Institute.

Barrett contends, "The river and its corridor are presently degraded and underused. In Meadowland Park, stark asphalt pedestrian paths flank the river. Numerous large stormwater outfalls mar what natural beauty remains. Approaching South Orange Avenue, vegetated banks are replaced with tall raw concrete retaining walls topped by chain link fencing. The only pedestrian bridge is a decaying eyesore. This stands in stark contrast to neighboring towns of Maplewood and Millburn, where this same Rahway River is aesthetically pleasing, highly valued and integrated into the parks and business districts that it traverses."

Fisch continued, "We believe it's time make the River corridor a positive asset to our town. This would be consistent with the Village's efforts to improve the image, appearance and economy of South Orange. Because

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the River Corridor connects heavily used Meadowland Park and the Central Business District, improving the corridor is a natural complement to the improvements completed and planned for Downtown”.

The proposal calls for new landscaping and grading of the banks to beautify the River corridor, fix eroding banks and provide access points to the River’s edge. Vegetation type and management practices would be changed to improve bird habitat. Existing infrastructure would be improved: concrete retaining walls and culverts could be faced with stone or masked by vegetation; chain link fencing could be replaced with wrought iron, wood or other appropriate natural materials. The existing pedestrian bridge between the Middle School and pool would be rehabilitated or replaced with a more attractive and appropriately scaled structure. Barrett said, “There are many possibilities for improving ecology and aesthetics while maintaining the river’s flood control function.”

Improvements to the corridor for pedestrian and bicycle travel are envisioned, too. Paths and lighting would be upgraded for travel to and from the train station. The intersection of the river and South Orange Avenue would be redesigned to provide a positive and inviting pedestrian experience connecting Downtown to the Park. The proposal envisions taking advantage of the River’s proximity to the South Orange Middle School to incorporate the River into biology and earth science education. Stations for sampling the water, examining vegetation, and bird identification could be provided.

A grant was obtained by Barrett and Dr. JeanMarie Hartman, a Rutgers professor of Landscape Architecture from Rutgers University (with matching funds from Main Street) to study the River corridor and develop potential rehabilitation concepts. Two students developed conceptual drawings (below) to illustrate the possibilities of the redeveloped River Corridor. Barrett said, “I think the drawings are wonderful. They really show how the River can be transformed into a beautiful asset with high recreational and ecological value.”

The proposal, including selected drawings, is available on the Internet through <http://restorerahwayriver.homestead.com>

Fisch and Barrett will be presenting the proposal to the Trustees on December 9th. They will be requesting that the Trustees authorize the creation of a Project Supervisory Committee consisting of representatives from Main Street and various Village officials to prepare a request for bids for design services for the project. The Committee would review submissions and recommend the best submittal to the Trustees.

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# Conceptual drawings illustrating possibilities of beautifying and improving the River Corridor,

Prepared by Joseph Charles and Joanne Diaz, Landscape Architecture Students at Rutgers University

## Mead St. Bridge



## Fences and Pavement along River



## Riverbank

