

# New Isles HQ to be a big green powerhouse

People and Organizations | 1 day 20 hours ago | Comments 0

Tags: [green](#), [Hamilton](#), [Hamilton Township](#), [Isles](#), [Marty Johnson](#), [Mill One](#), [Oneegg](#), [Terracycle](#)

By [Diccon Hyatt](#)

A disused shirt factory building on Johnston Avenue near the Bromley neighborhood and the Trenton border will become Mill One, one of the “greenest” buildings in the state, if a plan by nonprofit group Isles comes to fruition.

The “sustainable” project would house an ambitious blend of homes, businesses and nonprofit groups.

Isles recently announced plans to transform the building, along with Ewing-based developer Modern Recycled Spaces, which owns about half the 6.5-acre site. Together they plan to turn the old factory into a super-efficient building that draws power from solar panels and wastes as little energy as possible.

Isles CEO Marty Johnson said the plan would mix businesses, artists studios and Isles offices, creating the opportunity for people to live, work and play in the same building, all while having a minimal impact on the environment.

The Recycled Spaces half of the project will consist of a “business incubator” space called Oneegg.

Danny Popkin, founder and principal of the company, said the business incubator concept is to give small businesses a flexible workspace to found and hopefully expand their businesses.

“It will be a mixed-use sort of sustainable urban village,” he said. “It will be fun and exciting to have a business in that environment ... the businesses that would be there would be creative businesses, design firms and artist-type businesses.”

Johnson said if all goes well, the \$14 million first phase project would begin by the end of the year, finishing before the end of 2010. The first phase includes turning a three-story arrowhead-shaped section of the factory into a headquarters for Isles, hosting the Isles Youth Build Institute school and the New Jersey Center for Energy and Environmental Training.

“The building will be very low cost to operate and a fun place to be,” Johnson said.

A 30,000 square-foot section of the building, separated from the “arrowhead” by a firewall, would house artists’ studios, an

Isles-operated culinary training facility and for-profit businesses.

Johnson said the project was looking for conscientious business tenants - companies that try to improve the environment as well as their own bottom line. Terracycle, the Trenton-based company that makes garden products from worm waste, is set to be one of the first tenants, Johnson said.

The next building over would house the 47-unit, residential section, but Johnson said plans for this side of the project haven’t been drawn up yet.

All of this activity would be powered and heated by “green” means. Johnson said the building was aiming to be the second one in the state to attain platinum-level LEED certification for its environmentally friendly features.

Johnson said the building’s many “green” features include a high-tech roof covered in solar panels, thermal solar tubes for heating water, and insulation that keeps heat in during the winter and lets it out in the summer.

It would be heated and cooled by a super-efficient climate control plant. Johnson said the exact nature of this system has not been decided yet, though it would be built using existing technology. It may involve beefing up the solar panels and running the whole thing on electricity alone, without the burning of any fossil fuels, he said.

Water will come from a 10,000-gallon underground tank that stores rainwater.

Unlike water, however, funding for this project is not falling from the sky. Johnson said funding the Mill One project is going to take about \$14 million. Funds raised so far include various state and federal grants, historic preservation funds, a small amount of stimulus package grants, and the fruits of Isles’ ongoing fund-raising campaign.

The collaboration between the for-profit Recycled Spaces and nonprofit Isle came about because of the friendship between

Popkin and Johnson, who were once neighbors in Trenton’s Mill Hill section.

“We just sort of bumped into each other and realized we were both on similar tracks,” Popkin said. “In a sense, we’re both in redevelopment work, and we thought it would be interested in a joint venture on something. We both found this building and decided it would be a great place to relocate Isles’ Trenton headquarters.”

Johnson said Isles was moving its headquarters out of Trenton for several reasons.

“We’ve been looking for a few years for a place to consolidate and to provide a base on which we could build over the next 25 years, and Mill One enables us to do that,” he said. “It is a couple hundred yards from the Trenton boundary and Isles as an organization is regionalizing all of our work. We are working in places ranging from Princeton to Hamilton and other locations. So our activities are regionalizing and this building is a great opportunity to save a beautiful old factory building and convert it into a high performing new one that is mixed use. We always wanted to have our headquarters be in a vital mixed-use setting, and this affords this. We also tend to think that people spend too much

time worrying about these municipal boundaries.”

The project has yet to win approval from Hamilton Township. Johnson said Isles is working to finalize a redevelopment plan to the township government, which has to approve its unique mix of business, education and residential uses.

Mike Angarone, the head of Hamilton Township’s Economic Development office, said the township is in favor of the project and will work to expedite the approval process.

“We see this as a catalyst, along with The Grounds for Sculpture, as basically being the two anchors of an arts and cultural district which will take into consideration that the whole area is in a redevelopment zone,” Angarone said.

Johnson said the plans would be presented at a public meeting within the next several months.

For more information about Mill One, go online to <http://www.isles.org>.