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DISTRICT

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into the district, ideas that could include trolleys running from the train station to the Grounds for Sculpture and bike and pedestrian paths for residents.

In his remarks, Bencivengo and other officials mentioned the "ripple effect" such an arts and culture-based district could have on the surrounding community and businesses like local restaurants, hotels and retail stores.

"Arts can be a powerful engine toward economic development," said David Miller, the executive director of the Grounds for Sculpture.

In a 2007 study entitled "Arts and Economic Prosperity III," nonprofit organization Americans for the Arts noted that the nonprofit arts and culture industry nets \$166.2 billion in economic activity across the country every year, including \$7.9 billion in local tax revenue, a promising sign for Hamilton, which has a history of tax woes.

Isles Inc. founder and CEO Martin Johnson praised the district and the efforts of the administration, calling the district a worthy complement to Isles' Mill One "sustainable urban village," which will anchor the south end of the district.

The site, a joint effort between Isles and Ewing-based developer Modern Recycled spaces, will house Isles' headquarters and numerous mixed-use art, business and residential spaces inside the old Atlantic Products mill on Johnston Avenue.

"We're not going to create an art district for outsiders, we're going to create an art district for insiders and outsiders," Johnson said, noting the district's proximity to the nearby areas of both Trenton and Lawrence.

"Look how close this is to Trenton, look how close to Lawrence Township," he said. "Look at the opportunity to transcend the municipal boundaries."

Because the district will be contained within commer-

cial and industrial zones, the township will create an overlay district over the existing areas that officials said will encourage and facilitate development without the need for re-zoning the entire swath of land. The concept of an overlay district, which has been used by the township in the past to foster new business ventures along the Route 130 corridor, will allow Hamilton to offer zoning and building incentives to businesses looking to establish themselves within the region.

Incentives may include relaxed or less-stringent zoning requirements for the development of facilities like theaters, studios, art schools and limited restaurants and shops, ventures whose use may not have been previously permitted in some of the commercial and manufacturing zones included in the proposed district.

Allowing such previous non-permitted uses in the area would benefit both the township and developers and businesses, according to community planning and compliance director Robert Warney.

Applying for use variances can prove to be a lengthy process for builders, and Warney said allowing such uses in the district would allow developers to appear with their plans in front of the planning board instead, freeing up the zoning board's often-lengthy agendas.

Bencivengo stressed the preliminary status of the project, noting it was "just a vision" of what the township would like to see.

How to fund facets of the ambitious district like the proposed signs, walkways and trolley system is still under consideration, Bencivengo said, noting that "state and federal help would certainly expedite the process."

The Land Use Amendment which will allow for the creation of the zoning overlay will be heard at tonight's planning board meeting. The plan must also be approved by the township's redevelopment agency and council, processes that should be finalized by sometime in late October, officials said.

Hamilton envisions cultural district

BY ERIN DUFFY
STAFF WRITER

HAMILTON — Theaters, galleries, dance studios and the increased visibility of public art — all are imagined in a new plan unveiled by the township yesterday to create an arts and cultural district centered around the popular Grounds for Sculpture attraction.

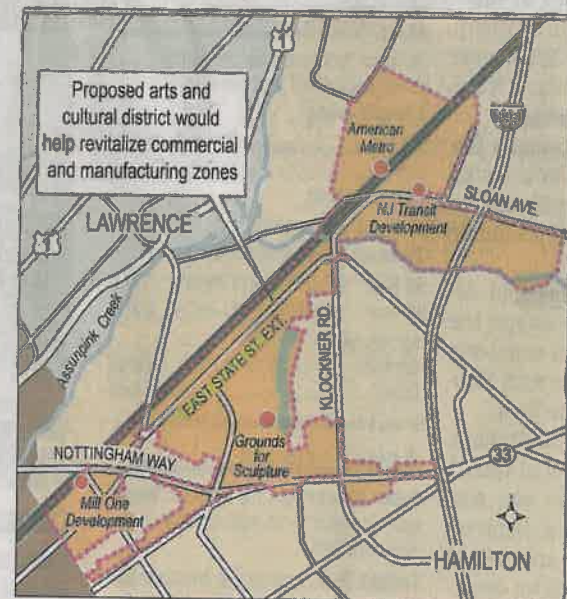
The new district will snake from Hamilton's busy NJ Transit train station down to nonprofit Isles' Mill One redevelopment project, and township officials hope the new area will not only foster a townshipwide appreciation of the arts, but revitalize commercial and industrial zones plagued by vacancies.

"Through our arts and cultural district, we are expanding economic opportunities in Hamilton, spurring investment and job creation, revitalizing commercial areas of our community that have been historically underutilized and encouraging art and cultural attractions that residents will be able to enjoy," said Mayor John Bencivengo at a news conference announcing the new district.

At the hub of the district will be the 35-acre Grounds for Sculpture, Hamilton's crown jewel that Bencivengo called an "ideal, existing attraction" around which to center the arts district.

The manicured grounds — and the upscale Rats restaurant — have long attracted out-of-town tourists interested in the destination's whimsical sculptures and lush gardens.

But in a Land Use Amendment plan set to be heard before the township planning board tonight, township planning consultants Clarke Caton Hintz said the Grounds "suffers from a lack of visibility and integration with the surrounding area," something the township hopes to rem-



edy with the creation of the new arts district.

With new, eye-catching blue and yellow signs announcing the arts and cultural district, the township hopes to usher residents and tourists into the district, and Bencivengo said he has been in talks with the Department of Transportation to install sculptures alongside Nottingham Way to help create an arts and culture corridor through the entire district.

Bencivengo also said township officials were weighing the idea of new modes of transportation to draw visitors

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