

# CREATIVE PLACEMENT

## Mayor says art district can spur jobs

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**HAMILTON** — A 921-acre swath in Hamilton that's littered with vacant industrial properties could soon be revitalized as an artists' paradise that fuels economic growth.

Mayor John Bencivengo yesterday proposed an arts and cultural district that will extend from the township's Bromley section to the Hamilton train station.

Bencivengo said his plan, which will be introduced and discussed at tonight's Hamilton Planning Board meeting, is an "exciting initiative" that will "spur investment and job creation" in the township.

The township consulted with the Clarke Caton Hintz planning firm to draft the 1.4-square-mile plan. Professional planner Elizabeth K. McManus said she believes the proposal will transform the district's vacant buildings into thriving enterprises and "improve" commercial and residential property values.

A key component of the plan is the "Mill One" redevelopment project at



Courtesy of Hamilton Township

Hamilton Mayor John Bencivengo (left) stands with Isles Inc. President Marty Johnson yesterday at Hamilton's Grounds for Sculpture, where Bencivengo announced a plan to create a 1.4-square-mile arts and cultural overlay district. The proposed district will be centered around the Grounds for Sculpture and will feature art signposts — like the one seen in this picture — that Bencivengo designed.

the corner of North Johnston Avenue and Nottingham Way. Community nonprofit group Isles Inc. is in the process of redeveloping that dilapidated 240,000-square-foot building into a "sustainable urban village" that caters to the arts community.

"It's very important that we build upon the assets that exist here," said Marty Johnson, co-founder and president of Isles. "A growing percentage of our economy is now being driven by this 'creative class,'" he added, referring to

artists.

Daraka Saunders, a community organizer and leader from the Bromley Civic Association, last night told *The Trentonian* she thinks the mayor's proposal will "encourage growth in the area" but that she hopes there are no eminent domain issues that could harm Bromley residents.

"My home is over 100 years old," Saunders said. "We hold some history with these buildings. We don't want to see them go."

A township press release said the planned district "will encompass various commercial and industrial (non-residential) zones of community, some of which have struggled or been underutilized over the years."

Bencivengo announced the revitalization plan during a press conference held at the Grounds for Sculpture, a 35-acre public sculpture park that sits at the center of the proposed arts and culture "overlay district."

By establishing the area as an overlay district, the township will have the "flexibility" to encourage new development or redevelopment without having to institute sweeping zoning changes, Bencivengo said.

The township will explore the possibility of running trolleys from the township's train station to the Grounds for Sculpture and other cultural sites, Bencivengo said, calling that component a "vision" that's part of the plan's early discussions.

The mayor said he envisions Nottingham Way serving as a traffic corridor into the proposed arts and cultural district between I-295 and the Grounds for Sculpture.

That stretch of Nottingham Way could be beautified with public art, but the state would have to approve that element because the state has jurisdiction over that portion of Nottingham Way, Bencivengo said.

Specific and technical details about the proposed arts and cultural district will be discussed at tonight's 7 o'clock planning board meeting at the township's municipal building on Greenwood Avenue.