



TRENTON ARTS IN

FOCUS
a shared vision and action steps
to celebrate creativity and culture

creek to CANAL and CITYWIDE

_INTERFACE STUDIO LLC

SEPTEMBER 2016

Trenton Arts in Focus is a public dialogue and planning process at two scales: citywide, considering the whole of Trenton, and zoomed in on the Creek to Canal Creative District. *Trenton Arts in Focus* aims to:

CELEBRATE and **ELEVATE** the local arts scene and creative energy pulsing in our city;

STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS and **PARTNERSHIPS** between Trenton's many arts and culture institutions, practicing artists, creative businesses, and arts advocates/appreciators;

MEANINGFULLY INTEGRATE arts and culture into the revitalization of Downtown Trenton;

EMBRACE ARTS-BASED COMMUNITY and **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** as catalysts of positive change and restored vitality within the Creek to Canal Creative District and along the Broad and State Street corridors;

RAISE RESOURCES to put this plan into action and to put local artists to work as leaders in the establishment of the Creek to Canal Creative District; and

DEMONSTRATE the transformative potential of arts-based and arts-supporting development such that our approach can be adapted and implemented elsewhere in Trenton, the region, and beyond.

Trenton Arts in Focus is a joint effort of Passage Theatre Company and Isles, Inc., with significant support from the City of Trenton, The College of New Jersey, and the nearly 50-member Steering Committee that guided the planning process. Funding for this project was generously provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and by New Jersey Manufacturers via the New Jersey Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit Program.

APPENDIX

under separate cover

- I DEMOGRAPHICS
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A key outcome of *Trenton Arts in Focus* is a recommendation to create Trenton's first Creative District and to link development of that district – both physically and psychologically – to arts across the city.



SETTING THE STAGE

RIGHT SAGE's Bloom Where You Are Planted mural in the Old Trenton Neighborhood

BOTTOM Photo from the first Public Workshop *Source: Interface Studio*



Trenton Arts in Focus is a dialogue about the past, present, and future of arts, culture, and creativity in Trenton. The fundamental questions underlying the conversation have been: **What role can and should creative pursuits – and the people who make, support, and consume them – play in Trenton's revitalization?** And, conversely, as positive change continues and accelerates in Trenton, how do we ensure that there is ongoing support, space, and appreciation for creative pursuits and those who undertake them? This plan documents the results of the dialogue so far, including a **shared vision and clear action steps for developing Trenton's first Creative District – the Creek to Canal Creative District.**

The focus is on arts. For the purposes of this plan, "arts" is shorthand for: visual arts, performing arts, fine arts, street art, outsider art, maker art, architecture, design, culture, history, literature, poetry, film, the list of creative pursuits could go on. **"Artist" is shorthand for anyone who does any of those things, anyone who considers her/himself an artist.**

The focus is on Trenton. That means all of Trenton and all of the valuable arts activities going on. It also means the specific part of the city that *Trenton Arts in Focus* proposes as the Creek to Canal Creative District. Centered on Downtown and the Old Trenton Neighborhood, many arts organizations and artists call this area home, and a number of catalytic redevelopment projects are planned or underway. With increasing attention from government and business leaders, along with significant existing assets, the Creative District is primed for targeted revitalization grounded in the arts, driven by strong relationships with the arts community and local stakeholders, and carried out in collaboration with residents to improve quality of life for all.

More than **750 people** contributed their ideas to ***Trenton Arts in Focus***, a dialogue about the past, present, and future of the arts in Trenton.

FIGURE 1 Creative & Cultural Organizations within proposed Creative District *Source: Interface Studio*

The dashed pink lines highlight two key **creative corridors** that intersect in the District.



The dashed orange line highlights the proposed **Creek to Canal Creative District**.

INSTITUTIONAL PRESENCE

- 01 Carver Youth & Family Center
- 02 Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Assumption
- 03 Trenton City Hall
- 04 First Presbyterian Church
- 05 Friendship Baptist Church
- 06 Isles, Inc. HQ
- 07 Isles Youth Institute and Incubator Garden
- 08 Mercer County Community College
- 09 Rivera School
- 10 St. Michael's Episcopal Church
- 11 TCNJ (TrentonWorks) - closing
- 12 Thomas Edison State University
- 13 Trenton Central High School
- 14 Trenton Friends Meeting House
- 15 Trenton Downtown Association (TDA) & Trenton Parking Authority
- 16 US Post Office

ARTS, CULTURE & TOURISM DESTINATIONS

- 17 A-Team HQ
- 18 Artworks
- 19 Battle Monument
- 20 Fire Museum
- 21 Gandhi Garden
- 22 Integral Sculpture Works
- 23 NJ State House & Museum
- 24 Old Barracks Museum
- 25 Orchid House
- 26 Passage Theatre and DanceSpura at the Mill Hill Playhouse
- 27 Shaolin Garden
- 28 The Studios @ 219, currently closed
- 29 Trentonian Room at the Trenton Public Library
- 30 Visitor's Center & Greater Trenton
- 31 War Memorial / Patriots Theater
- 32 Windows of Soul
- And, nearby: NJ State Library and Museum, The Conservatory Mansion, Sun National Bank Arena

BUSINESSES WITH A CREATIVE COMPONENT

- 33 1911 Smokehouse BBQ
- 34 Basecamp Trenton
- 35 Cafe 128
- 36 Classics Books & Gifts
- 37 Exit 7A Creative Services & Studios
- 38 Galeria Casa Cultura
- 39 Joe's Mill Hill Saloon
- 40 Modern Demand Dance Company
- 41 NJ Weedman's Joint
- 42 Settimo Cielo
- 43 South Rio
- 44 The Candlelight Lounge
- 45 Thomasena's Restaurant
- And, nearby: Trenton Makes, Trenton Social

BELOW Artist Illia Barger's Revolutionary War mural, in progress on East State Street, now installed on East Hanover Street
Source: www.nj.com

**"Make this plan permeable.
Create a structure by which it can
change and be fluid. As people
continue to hear about it for the
first time, let them also participate."**

– Community Participant



SETTING THE STAGE

This document summarizes the *Trenton Arts in Focus* conversation to date and emphasizes the rich opportunity we have – at this particular moment in time – to make the arts central to revitalization of both our Downtown and our neighborhoods.

Based on community-defined priorities for Trenton's citywide arts scene and its first Creative District, this plan presents a shared vision and strategies for action designed to attract the resources necessary for implementation, spur redevelopment that is grounded in the arts and explicitly supports artists, and foster continued conversation, collaboration, and action.

While many of Trenton's existing arts assets are identified and applauded here, this plan does not comprise a full history or inventory of arts, culture, and creativity in the city; one of the key recommendations highlighted below is to undertake a complete arts inventory and keep it up to date. The plan is intentionally short – designed to encourage a quick transition from planning to implementation – and is supported by robust appendices that detail the data, maps, analyses, public input, and prior plans that inform it. Importantly, this plan has been developed in the context of related efforts including the *Trenton250 Master Plan*, studies on specific topics such as economic development and parking, and current neighborhood plans.

Trenton Arts in Focus would not have been possible without the hands-on leadership of the nearly 50

people who formed a Steering Committee to guide the planning process. The Steering Committee included leaders active in the arts, business, government, education, and social services. (For a list of Committee members, see the inside back cover of this document.) Together we explored the potential of a creative district in Trenton, brainstormed about the features a local creative district should include, weighed the pros and cons of adopting a formal district boundary, considered possible district boundaries and how a creative district could help address neighborhood issues, and listened to make sure the plan would echo community priorities. After six months of discussion, debate, and research into best practices, we defined a boundary that makes sense for **Trenton's first Creative District** (see Figure 1 on page 2), and a framework for ensuring that development of the District benefits the residents and other stakeholders who currently call the District home, as well as the arts and artists across the city.

To maintain the interest and momentum built during the planning process, *Trenton Arts in Focus* partners and supporters must move quickly to carry out projects that elevate creative activity within the proposed Creek to Canal Creative District. While some strategies will be implemented over the long term, there are a range of shorter-term actions that can and should progress in the coming year. The next steps outlined at the conclusion of this document will help *Trenton Arts in Focus* transition from planning to action, sustain dialogue and a spirit of collaboration, and leverage existing partnerships and resources to bring about community-driven change.



CITYWIDE ARTS, CULTURE & CREATIVE ASSETS

AbOminOg Intl. Arts Collective
 Art All Day/ Art All Night
 Artifacts Gallery
 Artworks
 Boys & Girls Club Bike Exchange
 Both Hands: The Artlet
 Boys & Girls Club of Trenton / Mercer County
 Candlelight Lounge
 Capital City Farm
 Capital Green
 Carver Youth and Family Center
 Chambersburg Dance
 Champs Bar
 Classics Books & Gifts
 Contemporary Club
 DanceSpora
 Druch Studio Gallery
 Ellarslie (Trenton City Museum)
 Exit 7A Creative Services & Studios
 Fire Museum of Trenton
 Galeria Casa Cultura
 Gandhi Garden
 Integral Sculpture Works

Isles, Inc.
 Joe's Mill Hill Saloon
 Kate Graves Studio
 Mercer County Community College
 Mill Hill Amphitheater
 Mill Hill Playhouse
 New Jersey State Council on the Arts
 New Jersey State Museum
 NJ Weedman's Joint
 Old Barracks Museum
 Orchid House
 Passage Theatre
 Patriots Theater at the War Memorial
 Pearl Street Studios
 SLOW ART @ 750 Cass St
 The Studios @ 219
 Sun National Bank Center
 TCNJ TrentonWorks Gallery (closing)
 TerraCycle, Inc.
 The Conservatory Mansion
 The Garvey School
 The New Jersey Capital Philharmonic
 Thomas Edison State University
 Thomasena's Restaurant
 Trenton African American Cultural Festival
 Trenton Area Soup Kitchen
 Trenton Artist's Workshop Association
 Trenton Battle Monument
 Trenton Children's Chorus
 Trenton Circus Squad
 Trenton Coffee House and Roasters
 Trenton Community A-Team
 Trenton Community Music School
 Trenton Community Supported Art
 Trenton Downtown Association
 Trenton Makes
 Trenton Free Public Library
 Trenton Social
 Watson Johnson Dance Theater
 William Trent House Museum
 Zienowicz Sign Co.

FIGURE 2 Map of citywide arts assets with Creative District outlined in blue
 Source: Interface Studio

INSPIRATION

RIGHT African American Cultural Festival *Source: www.nj.com*



LEFT Trenton Arts Explosion *Source: www.youtube.com*



LEFT Passage Theatre Company *Source: jerseyarts.com*



BOTTOM SAGE Coalition working on Windows of Soul *Source: sagecoalitionnj.com*



Trenton Arts in Focus considers both the arts in Trenton citywide and the localized potential for arts-driven and arts-supporting redevelopment in Downtown and Old Trenton. The planning process unfolded against a backdrop of positive change taking root, from citywide master planning that reimagines Trenton as a regional hub of arts and culture; to Greater Trenton, a new public-private partnership bringing regional resources to bear on the economic development of Downtown; to ongoing arts and redevelopment activity. **Local talent, community support, political will, and resources to drive change are aligning. Now is the time for Trenton, its art scene, and its Downtown to enter the limelight.**

This plan was inspired by the wide range of arts organizations and artists that call Trenton home. As illustrated by the 2012 **Trenton Arts Explosion** press conference, which provided an opportunity for artists to learn about each other's work, more working artists and creative efforts exist here than is widely recognized. While people may be aware of flagship organizations like **Passage Theatre, Artworks,** and **DanceSpora,** or of flagship events like **Art All Night, the African American Cultural Festival,** and the **Punk Rock Flea Market,** Trenton's arts community is enhanced by several lesser known arts activities and organizations. For instance, beyond jazz aficionados, many people are unaware of the

weekly concerts hosted by the Jazz Disciples at the **Candlelight Lounge,** which draw audiences from around the region and beyond. The **Trenton Cultural Resources Network** works to strengthen connections within the arts community, and **City Arts** does so specifically among youth arts education providers. Indeed, the local community of makers, doers, and arts connectors is alive and well – **a source of pride among those in the know and a source of surprise for those just discovering what Trenton has to offer,** often thanks to tips from **Hidden Trenton.**

This plan was equally inspired by ongoing activity that has laid the foundation for sustained revitalization in the Creek to Canal area, and particularly in the Old Trenton Neighborhood. **Isles,** a Trenton-based nonprofit with headquarters in Old Trenton, has been spearheading redevelopment efforts there for the past 30 years. These efforts include housing rehabilitation, park upgrades and gardens, coordination of the Old Trenton Stakeholders group, and support to area social service and arts organizations including the **Trenton Community A-Team** and **SAGE Coalition.** Recently, Isles collaborated with SAGE on a mural arts project and the Windows of Soul project, redeveloped a vacant carriage house as the A-Team's first permanent home, and worked with development partner AJAX Management to rehabilitate 11 abandoned buildings as 28 apartments and a new coffee shop. Since 2008, Isles has secured \$3 million in New Jersey Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit (NRTC) funds to support redevelopment in Old Trenton, which has attracted significant additional investment. NRTC funding is one of the assets that make the Creek to Canal area a viable proving ground for Trenton's first Creative District.

INSPIRATION

The **Trenton Downtown Association** (TDA) has also supported redevelopment in the area. In recent years, it provided offices for arts organizations, including Passage Theatre, at 219 East Hanover Street, in the heart of both the Creek to Canal Creative District and Old Trenton. Beginning in 2012, the SAGE Coalition occupied **The Studios @ 219** and produced popular gallery openings and other events that drew diverse crowds from the neighborhood and the region. SAGE also converted a vacant City-owned lot next to The Studios @ 219 into the **Gandhi Garden**, and, working with **The College of New Jersey** (TCNJ), transformed another City-owned lot at the corner of North Stockton and Merchant Streets into the **Shaolin Garden**. SAGE events, as well as performances by Passage Theatre and others, at the Studios @ 219 and in the Gandhi Garden showcased local talent and demonstrated not only demand for creative live/work space, a performance venue, a gathering place, and a social life in Downtown Trenton, but also the power of art to bring people together to effect change. The Studios @ 219 are now closed due to repeated vandalism that damaged major

building systems. TDA is actively seeking ways to fund the rehabilitation of the building and to reoccupy it with artists and arts-related tenants.

TDA supported TCNJ's return to downtown in 2013

by offering competitive rent in a prime location at the intersection of Broad and State streets for space to house the college's community-based learning initiatives and a groundfloor gallery. Though this space is being decommissioned by TCNJ in 2016, its presence helped to reinvigorate discussions about the arts downtown, as did TDA's efforts to reestablish occupancy in storefronts along East State Street with temporary pop-up shops featuring local and emerging creative businesses, artists, and artisans.

Across from TCNJ along North Broad Street, **Mercer County Community College** (MCCC) has been expanding its footprint at the Downtown James Kerney Campus. In 2012, MCCC opened the new Trenton Hall to house MCCC's fashion and art programs. In 2016, MCCC will complete another new building, the 8,500 square-foot Trenton Hall Annex, which will host programs in security systems, cyber security, and health sciences. The ground floor of the Annex will feature a gallery for the display of works by students and local artists.

Steps away from MCCC on the 100 block of East Hanover Street, **The Orchid House** has just opened. This mixed-use facility is home to **Native Hill Records** recording studio, educational workshop programs, and live and work space for artists of multiple mediums. A café and arts venue is slated to open soon.

All of this encouraging progress will be complemented over the next three to five years by a series of catalytic redevelopment projects that are slated for East State, East Hanover, and Perry Streets.

LEFT Six Oh Nine Project Art + Product Gallery Pop-up Shop hosted by the Trenton Downtown Association on East State Street
Source: Interface Studio



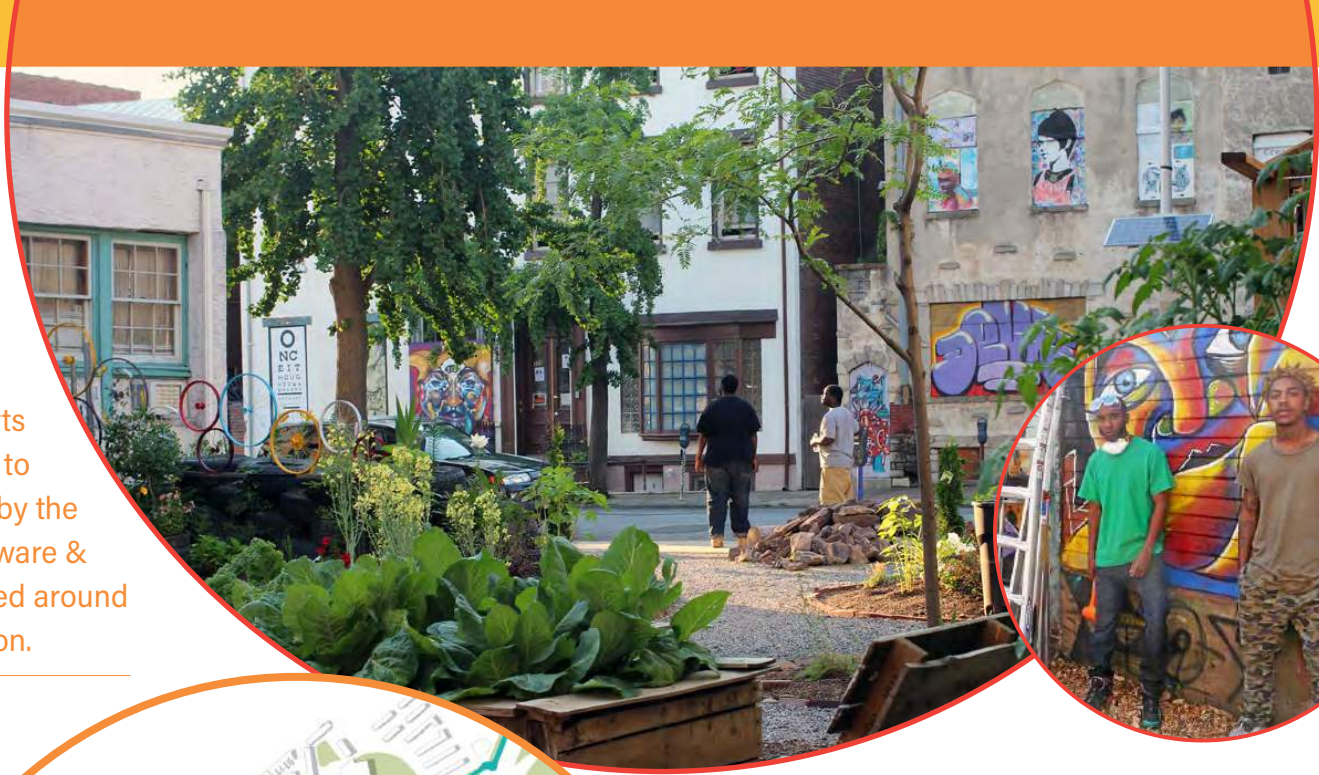
TOP Former Studios @ 219 building
BOTTOM Gandhi Mural (in progress)
Source: Interface Studio, sagecoalitionnj.com



RIGHT Gandhi Garden
Source: sagecoalitionnj.com

Trenton Arts in Focus

presents a shared vision and recommended actions for the development of Trenton's first arts and culture district - the Creek to Canal Creative District - framed by the Assunpink Creek and the Delaware & Raritan (D&R) Canal, and centered around Downtown and Old Trenton.



TOP 2016 Soul of the Message graffiti jam at The Orchid House
Source: trentonian.com



D&R Canal / East Coast Greenway



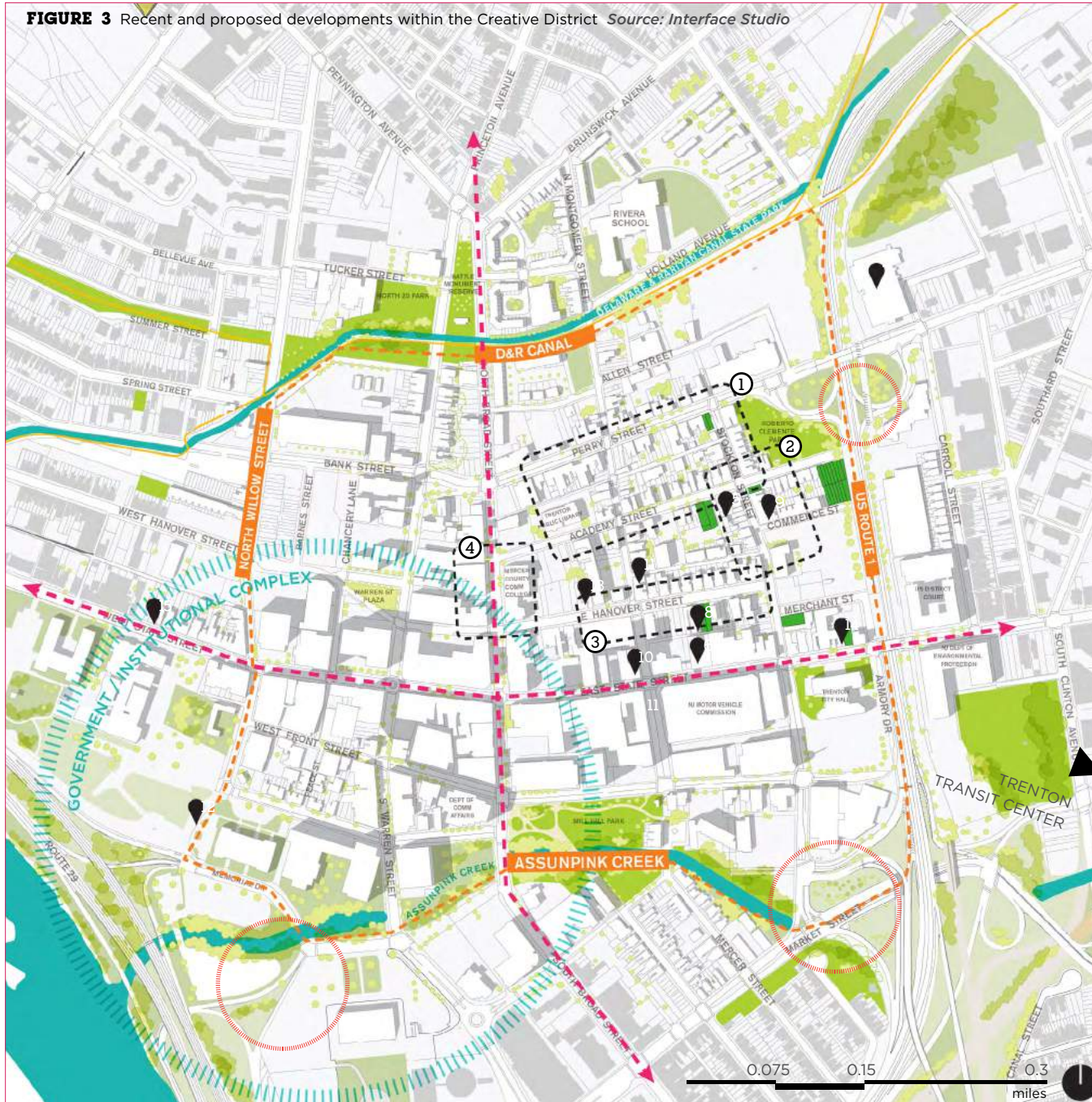
Assunpink Creek in Mill Hill Park



SAGE Coalition is a diverse group of community-minded artists – self-described “visual artists, engineers, fabricators, musicians, and teachers dedicated to the rebirth of Trenton.”¹

¹ www.sagecoalitionnj.com/about-us

FIGURE 3 Recent and proposed developments within the Creative District *Source: Interface Studio*



RECENT & PROPOSED DEVELOPMENTS

within the Creative District

- ① - Academy Place
15 buildings, 40 apartments
- ② - Stockton Street Apartments
11 buildings, 28 apartments & a coffee shop
- ③ - Hanover Redevelopment Focus Area
- ④ - MCCC Downtown Campus
- ⑤ A-Team HQ - 51 N Stockton
- ⑥ Bell Telephone Building - 216 E State
- ⑦ Trenton Times Building - 500 Perry
Int'l Academy of Trenton Charter School
- ⑧ The Studios @ 219 - 219 E Hanover
- ⑨ Cafe - 44-46 N Stockton
- ⑩ Commonwealth Building - 150 E State
- ⑪ Aleda Apartments - 202-204 E Hanover
- ⑫ Capital Park Master Plan
- ⑬ Orchid House - 134 E Hanover
- ⑭ Weedman's Joint - 322 E State
- ⑮ Cafe 128 - 128 W State

--- Broad & State Street Commercial Corridors

● Community Open Space

○ Highway Access

○ State Government Complex

WHY CREEK TO CANAL, WHY NOW?

While *Trenton Arts in Focus* highlights the citywide benefits of establishing a Downtown Creative District, the process zoomed in on the area spanning from Willow Street to Route 1, the Assunpink Creek to the D&R Canal. Encompassing the Downtown office and retail core and the Old Trenton Neighborhood, the Steering Committee selected these boundaries after consideration of both smaller and larger areas. Anchored by Broad and State Streets, which host cultural assets and creative allies in all directions, the Creative District's boundaries are intended to be permeable, as evidenced by recommended incentives and investments extending along these two important commercial corridors. This distinctive part of the city, at this particular moment in time, presents unique circumstances to capitalize on, as well as some serious challenges for Trenton's first Creative District to overcome.

- **Auspicious Timing** – Envisioning Trenton as a hub of the arts and 24/7 destinations, the City has promised to target attention and resources to Downtown and Old Trenton as a result of the new municipal master plan, which is slated for release in early 2017. TDA, Greater Trenton, and private investors are making similar promises, while residents and stakeholders are banding together to influence neighborhood revitalization.
- **Everyone Welcome and Encouraged to Stay** – Continued investment is helping to make the Creek to Canal area cleaner, safer, and more beautiful. As these improvements bring positive change and the pace of redevelopment accelerates, the Creative District must offer programs and policies that maintain community

continuity over time, helping artists and residents build wealth and remain in place to benefit as Downtown and Old Trenton become neighborhoods of choice. **We have an opportunity to model equitable, sustainable growth.**

- **An Eclectic Experience** – The compact area reflects different facets of Trenton and offers many key assets. From Downtown to neighborhood, historic to contemporary, urban to natural, established to emerging, there is something for everyone, residents and visitors alike.
- **One Destination, Many Characters** – Because Downtown meets neighborhoods, old meets new, city meets nature, and office meets the arts, all within the District, development of the District must both celebrate its diversity of urban character and experiences and also **embrace a unified identity that creates a cohesive sense of place.**
- **Accessible for All** – The rich variety of experiences all exist within a walkable, bikeable area, close to the train station and well-served by highways and bus routes.
- **Challenges Mask Opportunity** – The potential for the District – and sometimes even the positive change currently underway – is masked by dilapidated and vacant buildings, negative indicators of neighborhood health, and entrenched notions about what Downtown and Old Trenton are and can be. **We must redefine the image of this area, and of Trenton overall, for insiders and outsiders alike.**

Trenton Arts in Focus embraces arts-driven community development, arts-supporting redevelopment, and **arts-based economic development as catalysts of positive change** within the Creek to Canal Creative District and along State and Broad Streets, two major commercial corridors that intersect **at the heart of the city and the heart of the Creative District.**

"The **Trenton Community A-TEAM** supports, develops, and promotes self-taught local artists, because art can be transformative by reframing the artist's connectedness to self and others and by enhancing community pride."²

² <http://trentoncommunityateam.org/About>



WHY CREEK TO CANAL, WHY NOW?



LEFT Big Idea shared at a Public Planning Workshop
Source: Interface Studio

ABOVE Mural in the Arm in Arm Community Garden on East Hanover Street
Source: Interface Studio

RIGHT Visitors browse during Art All Day
Source: hiddentrenton.com

Located at the heart of the city, the proposed Creek to Canal Creative District includes many of Trenton's preeminent historic, arts, and cultural destinations – among them the War Memorial and Old Barracks Museum, Passage Theatre and Artworks – commercial corridors and a neighborhood fabric with ample room to host increased creative activity, and a community of innovative people working **to make art and change in the capital city**. It is home to a significant number of education, faith-based, government, and social services organizations that attract students, employees, and residents from other parts of the city and region. Furthermore, the District is well positioned to take advantage of New Jersey Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit (NRTC) funds earmarked for Old Trenton and the Trenton Historic Development Collaborative Neighborhood, which abuts the District at Willow Street. NRTC funding can support early action and attract additional resources.

Developers have taken note of the Creative District's redevelopment potential based on its existing assets and resources, prime location in Downtown, excellent highway and transit access, beautiful (if distressed) architectural bones and considerable vacancy, and wealth of engaged stakeholders. In addition to the projects detailed on page 6 and as shown on page 8, the City selected AJAX Management's proposal to redevelop the iconic Bell Telephone building on East State Street with 80 market-rate apartments atop 12,000 square feet of commercial space. AJAX has acquired additional buildings on surrounding streets for future

complementary mixed-use redevelopment projects. The City has acquired the stately Commonwealth Building, also on East State Street, with the intention of soliciting redevelopment proposals. Pennrose Properties recently rehabilitated 40 affordable apartments in 15 buildings. Isles is working on scattered-site infill redevelopment opportunities, and over the past six months, at least three private developers have purchased properties on East Hanover Street for smaller-scale rehab projects.

Such growth can be positive. More households will support more retail and services Downtown. More services will generate additional activity, and more activity translates to safer streets and increased vibrancy.

Despite this positive momentum, the 165-acre Creek to Canal District is punctuated by **107 distressed or vacant buildings, 28 vacant storefronts, 4 acres of vacant land, and 26 acres of underutilized surface parking**. Though the area boasts a strong governmental and institutional presence, an emerging local art scene, and many of the city's most well-known arts, culture, and tourism destinations, it is also home to a pocket of great need in the shadows of City Hall:

- **70% of residents** earn less than \$25,000 per year; **63% of families** live in poverty;
- **76% of renters** pay more than they can afford on housing, as do **48% of homeowners**;

- **88% of households rent**, resulting in a degree of transiency in the community;
- A significant number of homes and apartments are deed-restricted for low- and moderate-income residents;
- The **unemployment rate is 14%**, and 41% of adults aged 16 or older are not in labor force;³
- There is an active open air drug trade in pockets of Old Trenton, accompanied by instances of violence, theft, and intimidation that further compromise the community.

Currently, just **1,200 people** (or 510 households) live within the compact residential blocks of the Creative District – mostly in the Old Trenton Neighborhood. The area is a microcosm of the city, with a racial and ethnic mix that mirrors Trenton. The Creative District's racial make up is 51% Black, 33% White, and 16% Other or Multiple Races. Forty percent (40%) of residents are of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity. However, the area has been losing population at a far greater rate than the city overall, experiencing a 12% decline in population between 2000 and 2010, compared to a 1% decline citywide. Estimates suggest population in the Creative District has continued to fall since 2010, but the area is **on the cusp of redevelopment and growth**.

Local artists, residents, and community partners want to help shape coming change to ensure that as the Creek

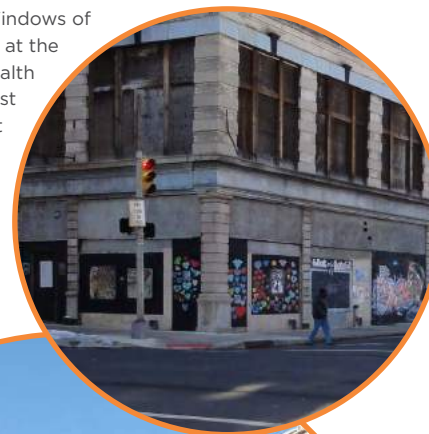
³ Adults not in the labor force are neither employed nor unemployed, including retired persons, students, people taking care of children or other family members, and people who are neither working nor seeking work.

to Canal Creative District welcomes new amenities, households, and a greater mix of incomes, the area retains its creative vibe, historic and authentic character, a commitment to affordability – particularly for live/work spaces for artists and creative entrepreneurs – and an intentional structure that helps artists and existing residents and businesses **build wealth and ownership** through this change. As Creative District partners seek resources for artistic and community projects to complement and balance market activity unfolding in the area, they enjoy support from prior arts plans at the State and municipal level, as well as a **keen focus on revitalization through arts and creativity** currently high on the City's agenda.

Arts-based, place-based, and community-driven investments in the Creek to Canal Creative District will be good for the city and the citywide arts scene, building the audience of arts supporters and fostering **enhanced visibility and connections** – both physical and psychological – between venues. Investments in the District will be good for Downtown and adjacent neighborhoods, good for artists, good for local businesses, and good for all who come to look and listen, stay and play, and **explore the full range of Trenton's historic assets and newest amenities and works of art**.

RIGHT Windows of Soul artwork at the Commonwealth Building on East State Street

BOTTOM
Recent rehabs along North Stockton Street
Source: *Interface Studio*



For more detailed demographic data, see [Appendix I](#). For an atlas of analysis maps, see [Appendix II](#).

THE ARTS PLANNING LANDSCAPE



ABOVE
Windows of Soul
artwork on East
State Street



RIGHT Historic
buildings on North
Montgomery Street
Source: Interface Studio

Arts planning at the state level began two decades ago when the New Jersey State Council on the Arts initiated conversations that led to *Arts Plan New Jersey*, published in 1998.⁴ The statewide vision then, still relevant today, described:

“a New Jersey that celebrates the arts and extends their benefits to all residents; promotes excellence, education, and diversity in the arts; encourages artists and arts organizations to excel, grow and be welcome partners and participants in the state’s advancement; abounds with vibrant, livable and attractive communities made so in part through the arts; [and] regards the **arts as a vital source and an indispensable part of everyday life.**”

Within 15 years, the original *Arts Plan New Jersey* resulted in:

- A new **DEDICATED FUNDING SOURCE**, the New Jersey Cultural Trust, as well as public and private funding programs, all of which support local artists and arts organizations;
- **ADVOCACY** for continued investments in arts and culture, history and tourism;
- **TOURISM CAMPAIGNS** and **MARKETING** to boost audience sizes and generate economic activity in cultural centers;
- An emphasis on arts **EDUCATION** and creative skills **TRAINING**; and
- Dozens of **COMMUNITY CULTURAL PLANS** for downtowns and neighborhood revitalization projects.⁵

In 2013, *Arts Plan New Jersey* received an update, this time with the following goals:

- Harness the power of the arts to create better, vibrant, thriving, and more attractive communities;
- Build a strong arts community and the capital base necessary to sustain that community;
- Increase access to lifelong arts education;
- Broaden, deepen, and diversify cultural participation through direct outreach, culturally relevant programming, new relationships, and increased marketing; and
- Foster a strong network of support for artists including recognition and job opportunities, professional development, technical assistance, and fair compensation.⁶



Source: Arts Plan NJ, 2013

Increasing support for the arts, artists, and arts-driven community revitalization is also evident in state legislation. In December 2015, Assemblyman Reed Gusciora introduced a bill to establish an Artist Bank (NJ Bill A4892)⁷ to provide interest-free loans to artist colonies in areas with an emerging art presence. In February 2016, Assemblymen Ralph Caputo and Raj Mukherji, together with Assemblywomen Gail Phoebeus

⁴ Peterson, Iver. “In New Arts Plan, an Appreciation for the Bottom Line.” *The New York Times*, April 5, 1998.

⁵ *2013 Arts Plan NJ*. p2.

⁶ *2013 Arts Plan NJ*. p 6-7.

⁷ <https://legiscan.com/NJ/bill/A4892/2014>

⁸ <https://legiscan.com/NJ/text/A2801/2016>



ABOVE Bloom Where You Are Planted mural by SAGE Coalition in Old Trenton *Source: Interface Studio*

and Valerie Vainieri Huttie, sponsored "Arts District" legislation (NJ Bill A2801)⁸, which empowers the New Jersey State Council on the Arts to establish an "Artist District" designation and define criteria by which up to 25 Arts Districts will be designated across the state.

At the local level, a complete overhaul of Trenton's comprehensive municipal master plan is underway. *Trenton250*, named for the 250th anniversary of the City's incorporation (upcoming in 2042), upholds arts and culture as defining drivers for Trenton's future.

"Trenton First: a premier economic and **cultural center built on arts, industry, and education.**"⁹

Trenton250's guiding principles call for:

- A preeminent arts and culture destination, where a culture of creativity attracts people and businesses;
- High-quality neighborhoods and a downtown that remains vibrant 24-7;
- Social and educational opportunities that support a more vibrant economy;
- A safe city; and
- Increased civic unity and pride.⁹

The City recognizes both the latent potential of the Creek to Canal Creative District and the fact that **arts and culture can be catalysts for community and economic development.** The City is prioritizing Old Trenton, in particular, for targeted arts-driven revitalization.

⁹ Trenton250.org

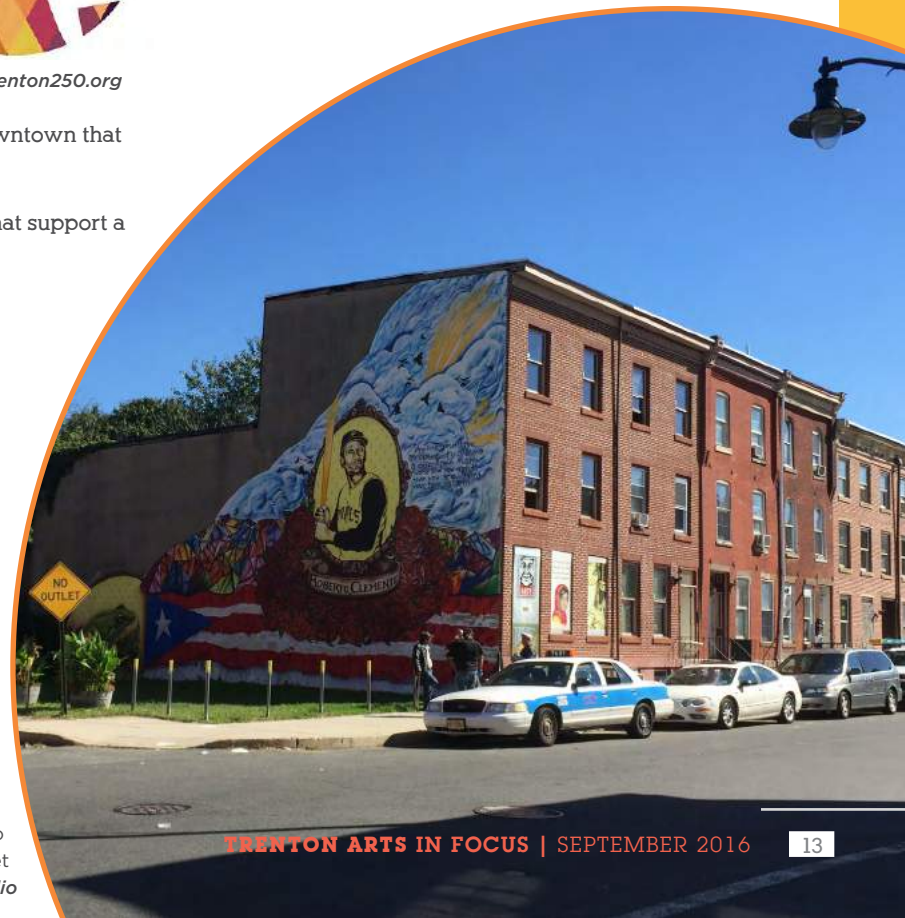


Source: Trenton250.org

Trenton Arts in Focus presents a series of place-based strategies to foster that revitalization, complemented by recommendations to **link the broad citywide arts and culture scene to the Creative District.**

Trenton Arts in Focus

—a vision for Trenton's first creative district—
DEBUTS WITH PERFECT TIMING



RIGHT SAGE Coalition mural of Roberto Clemente on North Stockton Street
Source: Interface Studio



LEFT Busy intersection of Broad and State Streets during lunch hour
Source: Interface Studio

The following milestones and plans touch the Creative District, conceptually, geographically, or both.
All of them inform *Trenton Arts in Focus*.

STATE

LOCAL

TRENTON ARTS IN FOCUS

1998

Arts Plan NJ

the first statewide plan for the arts

1986

Trenton Downtown Association

The Trenton Downtown Association is a non-profit organization that manages the Special Improvement District established for Downtown Trenton in 1986 and is funded through an additional tax assessment on commercial properties. For three decades, supporting Trenton's arts and cultural heritage has been central to TDA's work of promoting economic growth and development in the capital city. Current TDA activities include the Levitt Amp Summer Concert Series and a targeted effort to occupy vacant Downtown storefronts.

TDA also provides advocacy, technical, financial, and marketing assistance for local businesses, as well as street cleaning, among other roles in the revitalization of Downtown.

2000

Capital City Cultural Assessment

An "arts census" aiming to determine the size and breadth of Trenton's cultural community. Beyond the State Capital Complex with the State House, War Memorial, and State Museum, the census identified 130 working artists and 80 arts organizations with 371 paid staff and a volunteer base of more than 3,000 people.

One recommendation proposed live/work/play cultural districts with targeted marketing, arts corridors, adaptive reuse of buildings and lots, community programming, and arts education, which together would offer greater cultural access.

2001

Arts Build Downtown Trenton

A "Business and Cultural Blueprint for Action" and the first cultural plan for New Jersey's capital city. It addressed five key needs of the arts community and Downtown Trenton: facility development and design; public art and art programming; improved image and marketing; additional support and funding; and leadership and coordination.

2005

Canal Banks Redevelopment Area Plan

An official City of Trenton redevelopment plan that encompasses much of the Creek to Canal Creative District. It presents guidelines for sustainable design and identifies future land uses – primarily mixed residential/commercial, with some single-use residential and business areas, as well as recreational areas along the D&R Canal.



Gandhi Garden on East Hanover Street *Source: Interface Studio*

2015
Arts Bank
Legislation
(introduced)

2016
Arts District
Legislation
(introduced)

2013
Arts Plan NJ (update)

2007

Calhoun Street/ West Hanover Street Redevelopment Study

A redevelopment study focused on the blocks immediately west of the Creek to Canal Creative District, spanning from Willow Street to Prospect Street, West State Street to Bellevue Avenue. The study explores redevelopment potential, including residential infill, and offers recommendations for streetscape and intersection improvements.

Capital Park Master Plan

An open space master plan for the State Capital campus and grounds that extend south from Lafayette and State Streets to meet the Delaware River. These grounds provide the backdrop to many of Trenton's best known cultural destinations, including the Old Barracks and War Memorial. The plan recommends improvements for the Capital Green, Assunpink Park, and connective greenways that tie into the Creek to Canal Creative District.

Old Trenton Neighborhood Plan

A neighborhood plan for Old Trenton that is actively being implemented by Isles and others with major financial support from New Jersey Manufacturers via the NRTC program. Goals (and accomplishments) include: increased safety; improved public space; a cleaner, greener, and more beautiful neighborhood; mixed-income housing, support for small businesses, and capacity building among residents and stakeholders. The Old Trenton plan is substantially updated by this Creative District plan.

2008

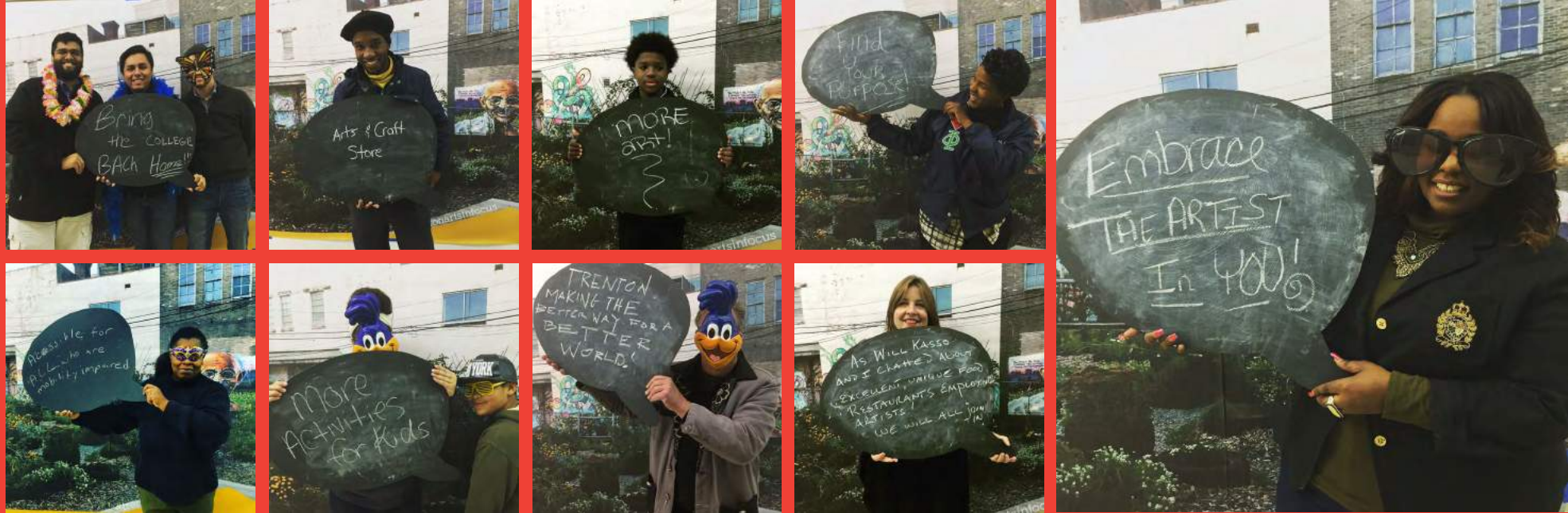
Downtown Capital District Master Plan

A plan encompassing Downtown and the historic Hanover-Academy neighborhood (AKA Old Trenton) that envisions Downtown as a hub of arts, culture, and entertainment.

2014

Trenton250 Comprehensive Master Plan Vision Element (plan ongoing, expected in 2017)

**For more about these prior plans,
see [Appendix III](#).**



what's your BIG IDEA?



ABOVE Residents, artists, workers, and stakeholders from all walks of life participated in two Public Planning Workshops, sharing many creative insights and ideas. *Source: Interface Studio*



Much like prior arts and revitalization plans, *Trenton Arts in Focus* is the result of a collaborative and **community-driven process**. Over the course of six months, **more than 750 different people** of all ages and walks of life shared their ideas for the kinds of arts and culture activities, redevelopment, and services that a local creative district should feature. They shared specific visions for an improved Creek to Canal area and for ensuring that development of the Creative District is **inclusive, equitable, sustainable**, and beneficial for existing residents and artists, as well as for those who relocate here in the future. People also made it clear that the Creative District must support existing artists and arts activity citywide, and model strategies for the future formation of other districts.

Trenton Arts in Focus collected public input through:

30 interviews or small group conversations

5 meetings of the Steering Committee (see a participant list on the inside back cover of this document)

3 meetings with Old Trenton Neighborhood residents and stakeholders

2 open Public Workshops

- The **first Workshop** launched with Art All Day 2015 and co-located with the Six Oh Nine Project's well-crafted and curated Art + Product Gallery Pop-Up Shop at 141 East State Street. The workshop included interactive exhibits that posed broad questions to capture people's vision and goals for a Creative District, and invited insights and ideas for both the Creek to Canal area and the city as a whole. Open for a full week, the workshop attracted more than 400 visitors.

LEFT Community members, artists, and arts advocates had much to say about the future of the arts in Trenton. *Source: Interface Studio*

FIRST PUBLIC WORKSHOP



STEERING COMMITTEE



SECOND PUBLIC WORKSHOP



ABOVE and RIGHT Gathering public input
Source: Interface Studio

EACH DOT = AN IDEA SHARED

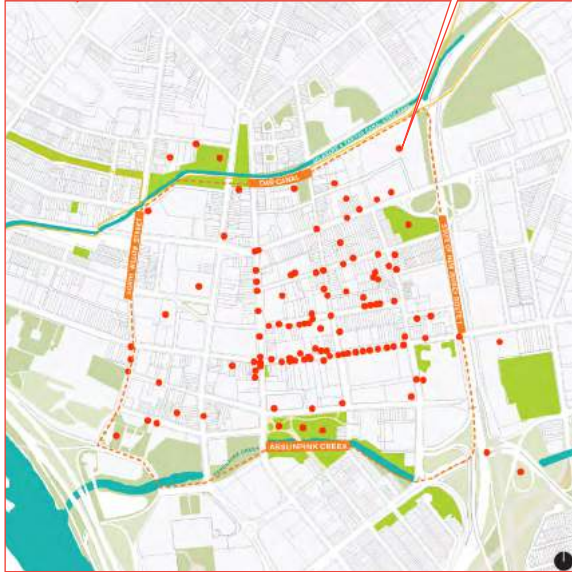


FIGURE 4 Collaborative mapping from the Public Workshop
Source: Interface Studio

- The **second Workshop** was hosted by The College of New Jersey at the TrentonWorks Gallery at 5 South Broad Street. This one-day workshop presented draft recommendations and invited feedback on priorities for implementation. More than 85 people – some repeat participants, some new to the process – stopped by to make their voice heard; others participated in workshop activities online.

8 sessions that brought the information and questions from the first Public Workshop to many who had missed it, visiting:

- Trenton Council of Civic Associations, North 25, Rowan Towers, Mercer Street Friends, A-Team/Trenton Area Soup Kitchen, Trenton Historic Development Collaborative, Trenton High Creative Arts Class, and an Isles staff meeting

377 surveys completed in person and online in both English and Spanish

Grounded in community priorities, informed by public input and guidance from the Steering Committee, *Trenton Arts in Focus* reflects our collective **values** and **vision** for the future of the Creek to Canal Creative District.

In the DIY Budgeting exercise, community members prioritized Housing & Safe Streets

Safe Streets received the greatest dollar amount, followed by **Housing**.

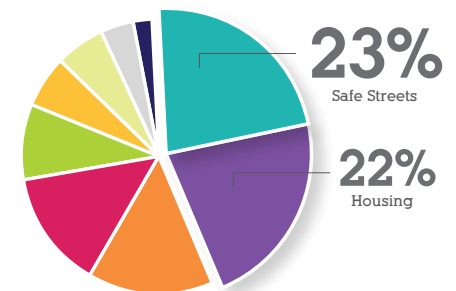
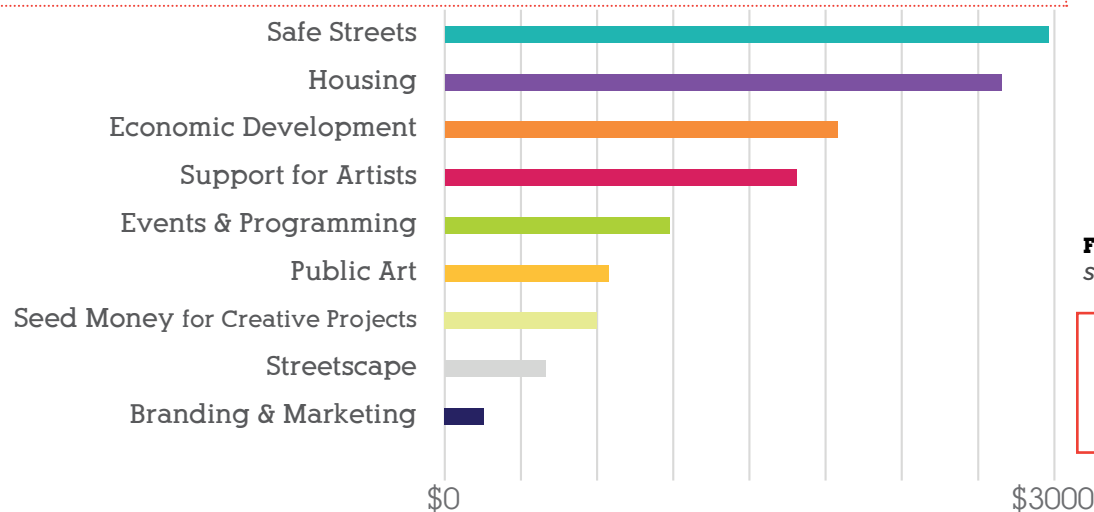


FIGURE 5 Results from the DIY budgeting exercise
Source: Interface Studio

For a full record of the public process and survey data collected, see **Appendix IV.**



REFLECTIONS ON ISSUES & OPPORTUNITIES



FIGURE 6 Current Conditions Diagram
Source: Interface Studio

Throughout the planning process, stakeholders cited concerns about how current realities in the Creek to Canal area might hinder development of Trenton's first Creative District. However, they also recognized important opportunities that can support success. Based on an analysis of existing conditions in the Creek to Canal area and refined by community input, the following summarizes major issues and opportunities related to the Creative District. Arts-based community development and neighborhood revitalization can help to address the issues, capitalize on the opportunities, and **change the course of and conversation about Trenton, Downtown, and Old Trenton.**

This summary draws from analysis and public input detailed in Appendices II and IV, and builds upon data describing neighborhood characteristics presented in the Why Now? section of this document, starting on page 9. Reflecting public sentiment, quotes shown below are from interviews, focus groups, and Steering Committee discussions.

ISSUES

Crime and perceptions of poor public safety –

The number one concern for local residents and visitors alike is crime and the unchecked gambling, drinking, prostitution, and open air drug dealing that dominates certain blocks and corners in Old Trenton.

Vacancy and abandonment – The distressed physical landscape and deteriorated building stock communicates a degree of chaos and neglect. Community morale and stewardship suffer accordingly, and buildings full of historic character are at risk.

"The arts will not thrive if people have a perception of danger. People won't come at night."

"People don't respect our neighborhood."

Lack of density translates to a lack of vibrancy

and job opportunities – With relatively few households living in the area and a government center that shutters after 5PM, the District lacks the critical mass required to support retail and services, which, in turn, results in a lack of jobs and leaves residents wanting for so-called "third places" to socialize outside of home and work. Parking regulations further restrict evening activity, with limited on-street parking for residents and visitors, and parking lots that close in the evenings.

"Artists need regular jobs in order to pay rent. Young artists need jobs before they are established and can make it as full-time artists."

"Today, there's no reason to spend leisure time in Downtown. We want to encourage people to leave their nucleus. We want them to come hang out."

Transiency destabilizes the community –

While there is an existing community of residents that already includes practicing artists, the area experiences high-turnover and transiency among vulnerable residents. There is strong agreement that in addition to attracting new residents, redevelopment must create opportunities for existing artists, residents, and businesses to build wealth through ownership that deepens roots in the neighborhood and serves to prevent displacement.

"There needs to be an infrastructure that welcomes artists who first come to play and then opt to plant. The artists who are already here are from Trenton."

"Arts districts trigger concerns about gentrification. This must come to be for and with the community. It must be accessible to the people who need it."



ABOVE There are persistent issues and need right in the shadows of City Hall. Source: Interface Studio

Trenton's arts scene is unknown or hidden –

Outsiders are largely unaware of Trenton's existing arts scene, and even Trentonians may not know about or take part in local cultural offerings and events.

"Building awareness requires resources. Support from the City – line item in the budget. Volunteer support too."

"Unique street signs could be one element. Signage and communications are necessary for residents and visitors; market the area."

"We need to help people find what's hidden and make it accessible."

Negative perceptions – The negative perceptions of Trenton, Downtown, and Old Trenton that result from these issues present an obstacle to attracting residents, artists, creative entrepreneurs, businesses, visitors, and patrons of the arts to the Creative District.

OPPORTUNITIES

Good bones, great location – Downtown location, proximity to highways and transit, stately buildings reflecting a range of architectural styles, and a significant concentration of organizations and institutions that can be marshaled in support of the District are four of the strongest assets among many in the Creek to Canal area. Catalytic redevelopment on the horizon confirms that developers see potential here.

Unique environmental features – The District is framed by two waterways: the Assunpink Creek, which passes through Mill Hill Park and for which plans exist to daylight the channeled portion between South

Broad and South Warren Streets, and the Delaware & Raritan Canal, which once tied Trenton to the region's commerce and transportation networks, and today guides the East Coast Greenway through the city. Together these waterways act as natural boundaries and, with appropriate care and investment, should become destinations in and of themselves.

Cultural treasures and creative people with a commitment to community – The Creek to Canal area hosts an eclectic mix of Trenton's traditional tourism destinations, sites steeped in history, and well established cultural institutions. What sets the area apart is that it also supports a diverse community of active artists who value Old Trenton's authentic character, sense of community, and commitment to effecting change through the arts.

"Familiarity is important for Trenton's diverse communities. Just connecting a face goes a long way toward making people feel welcome and that this work is for them."

Potential to expand the footprint of stability surrounding downtown – The office and government complex and the Mill Hill neighborhood south of the Creek are currently the safest and most stable portions of Downtown. Arts-based investments along the main commercial corridors and targeted in Old Trenton can grow the footprint of stability and add new vibrancy Downtown, while also adding appropriate services and resources for those in need.

"Make arts part of the commerce and part of the living."

Multi-faceted economic development – A Creative District can offer much more than access to arts and

business incentives; throughout the planning process, community members underscored the need to integrate arts education for all ages and cultivate creative skills and entrepreneurship within the community.

"We must create jobs, apprenticeship programs, opportunities to work alongside arts professionals. We need educational components – a makerspace, exposure to skilled trades, culinary arts, etc."

Ability to preserve affordability – The existing vacancy and concentration of income-restricted housing present opportunities to add new market rate housing while intentionally preserving affordability so that residents and artists can remain in place as the neighborhood improves.

Partners and partnerships – *Trenton Arts in Focus* convened a diverse group of artists, arts advocates, residents, institutions, and organizations supportive of the concept of a creative district in Trenton. Conversations revealed a desire to coordinate and collaborate rather than compete, and to harness each partner's strengths as we shift from planning to action.

Chance to change the narrative – Perhaps most powerful is the opportunity to change the narrative about Trenton, to **shine a spotlight on the assets and creative activity at work in our city** – for all the world to see, and for all of Trenton to take part in and, importantly, take pride in.

"The planning effort should be inclusive, but the name should be recognizable and tied to a specific place that builds identity within Trenton."

"Trenton pride is a priority."

SHARED VISION FOR A CREATIVE FUTURE



FIGURE 7 Summary of the one-word exercise from the Public Planning Workshop
 Source: Interface Studio

Developing the vision of *Trenton Arts in Focus* was itself a creative project, with ideas, priorities, and dreams crowd-sourced from our community. At the first Public Planning Workshop on East State Street, we asked people to describe – in one word or phrase – Trenton's art scene today and Trenton's art scene tomorrow. The words of today reveal a mix of critique and skepticism along with hope and opportunity, while the words of tomorrow reflect **optimism and inspiration**.

We also asked people to close their eyes, imagine the Creative District of their dreams, and write a postcard from the future, describing what they see in the Creek to Canal Creative District of 2025. The descriptions offer detailed and poetic visions for the future, describing a Creative District that is:

- **Home to a mix of uses**, with increased housing options and more households to support added businesses and entertainment venues;
- **Hard at work**, with new job opportunities, resources for creative production, and work spaces that enable art, creativity, and collaboration to thrive;
- **Rooted in the community** with opportunities for people young and old to engage in creative endeavors, and chances for artists and residents to build wealth through ownership and remain in place as change unfolds;
- **Diverse in population as well as in artistic genres**, with culturally relevant programs and events, and accessible facilities and shared public spaces;

- **Authentic to Trenton**, blending history with the contemporary and up-and-coming, and cultivating local talent while welcoming newcomers;
- **Vibrant day and night**, innovative and responsive, rich with excitement and local flavor; and
- **Clean, safe, and beautiful** and, at last, in focus and on the map for all to enjoy.

In your dreams and in your words, the Canal to Creek Creative District includes: live music and dance, galleries, museums, theater, restaurants and cafés, bars and night clubs, film screenings, festivals and markets, art and recording studios, shared makerspaces, rehearsal and performance space, public art, culinary arts, classes and workshops, housing for a mix of incomes, a range of housing types and job opportunities for artists and non-artists, historic preservation and contemporary design, gardens and gatherings, all **enhanced by a goal to build and maintain equity, and tied together by beauty, creativity, and a healthy drive to roll up your sleeves, get your hands dirty, and DIY as part of a community.**



RIGHT

Postcards from the future written by community members at the Public Workshop
 Source: Interface Studio

GOALS...

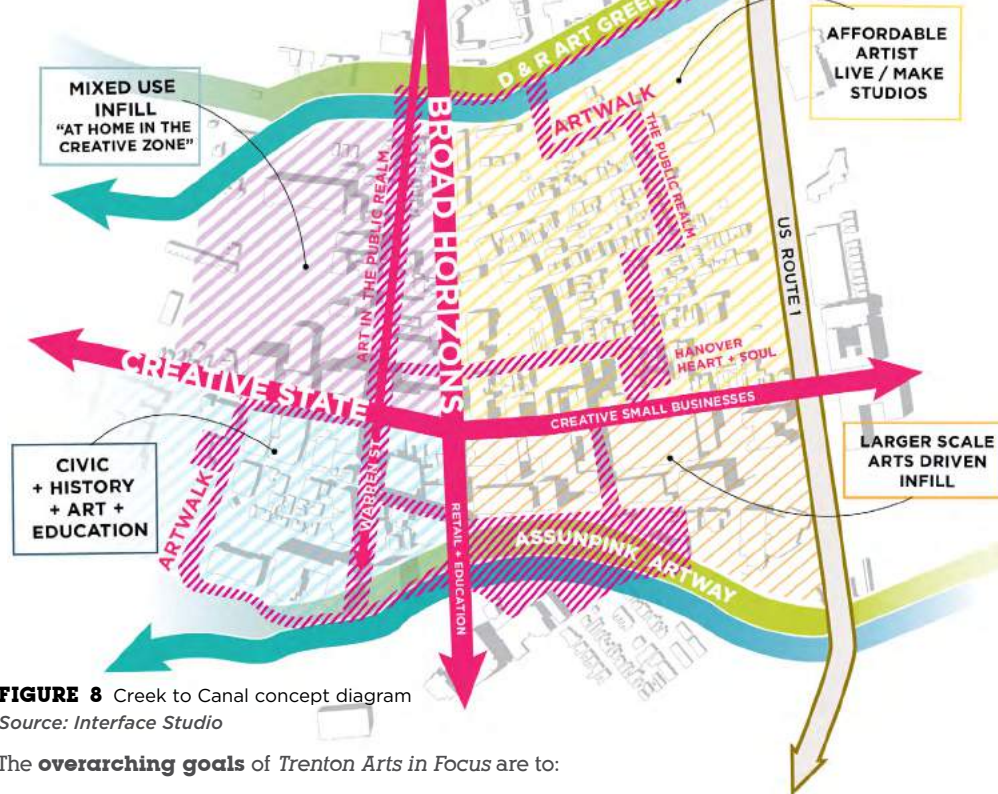


FIGURE 8 Creek to Canal concept diagram
Source: Interface Studio

The **overarching goals** of *Trenton Arts in Focus* are to:

- **CELEBRATE** and **ELEVATE** the local arts scene and creative energy pulsing in our city;
- **STRENGTHEN CONNECTIONS** and **PARTNERSHIPS** between Trenton's many arts and culture institutions, practicing artists, creative businesses, and arts advocates/appreciators;
- **MEANINGFULLY INTEGRATE** arts and culture into the revitalization of Downtown Trenton;
- **EMBRACE ARTS-BASED COMMUNITY** and **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** as catalysts of positive change and restored vitality within the Creek to Canal Creative District and along the Broad and State Street corridors;
- **RAISE RESOURCES** to put this plan into action and to put local artists to work as leaders in the establishment of the Creek to Canal Creative District; and
- **DEMONSTRATE** the transformative potential of arts-based and arts-supporting development such that our approach can be adapted and implemented elsewhere in Trenton, the region, and beyond.

...AND STRATEGIES

Strategies designed to achieve these goals and respond to public input fall within four categories:

Trenton STILL Makes – Citywide recommendations to bring *Trenton Arts in Focus* by building awareness of and support for the local arts, culture, and creative scene.

WHY? To make existing arts, culture, and creative opportunities more sustainable and accessible, and to improve outside perceptions of our city.

Make YOUR Art HERE – Recommendations to support local artists and creative entrepreneurs living and/or working in Trenton, and to encourage others from the region and beyond to choose Trenton's Creative District as their home base.

WHY? "We cannot have an arts district without artists!"

Creek to Canal Creative District – Recommendations that tie programs and policies to place with the Creative District as a testing ground for focused arts-based community revitalization in Trenton.

WHY? To strengthen Downtown, capitalize on the creative energy already at work in Old Trenton, and restore vibrancy to a walkable, mixed use, and diverse neighborhood.

Connect the Dots – Recommendations that strengthen physical and psychological connections between the Creative District and other hubs of art, culture, and creativity across the city and region.

WHY? To ensure that investments in the Creative District support the full complement of arts activity throughout the city.

As pointed out during the planning process,

TRENTON **STILL** MAKES

The **first set of citywide strategies** aims to bring *Trenton Arts in Focus* by building awareness of and support for the local arts, culture, and creative scene. These recommendations **focus on information, access, and advocacy** – collecting information about all of Trenton's creative players, making that information accessible to a range of audiences, developing a brand and buzz about the local creative landscape, and putting hidden or overlooked destinations on the map. Engaging in advocacy conversations at the state and local levels will only strengthen these citywide efforts to showcase the arts in Trenton.

The purpose of these strategies is to help residents and visitors access and **enjoy Trenton's arts scene**. Building a community that supports the arts and takes full advantage of Trenton's creative offerings is key to the success of this initiative.

Trenton has many existing resources to build upon as implementation of this plan moves forward. Members of the arts and culture community who remain involved in putting *Trenton Arts in Focus* into action should, as an early step, evaluate existing capacity and ongoing efforts by local organizations against these first six strategies to determine whether existing resources can serve both citywide and Creative District needs. Such citywide efforts in communication and advocacy should support not only the Creek to Canal Creative District, but also any future arts districts in Trenton.

The **Implementation Matrix** beginning on page A-95 in the Appendix provides a starting point and tool for partners who choose to collaborate on implementing *Trenton Arts in Focus*. The Matrix is a framework for organizing important details for each strategy, such as the type of actions required, timeline, potential partners, possible funding sources, and the corresponding Master Plan Elements that tie each strategy to *Trenton250*.

1



THE INVENTORY

Update the arts, culture, and creative inventory

Conduct a Creative Census, capturing cultural history and the full range and diversity of current creative activity in Trenton. Build on the Capital City Cultural Assessment, done in 2000. Inclusivity is key; identify organizations, classes, festivals, events, parades, practicing artists, and creative businesses, in addition to established museums and venues. Hire artists to help administer the Census by tapping into their networks. Bring surveys to any creative or cultural event – table at Art All Night, Jersey Fresh Jam, the Capital City Farmers' Market, the Punk Rock Flea Market – wherever there is a crowd.

CHECK OUT

DRWC WHERE TO GO - MAP
delawareriverwaterfront.com/places

SPACEFINDER CHICAGO
 where to rent space
chicago.spacefinder.org/

2



ONLINE HOME BASE

Build a website to share the Creative Census...*and more*

At present, Trenton lacks one central website that tells the story of the city's arts and cultural history and today's creative scene. Build one website that offers something for everyone, from hipsters to history buffs, visitors and patrons to artists themselves. With information from the Creative Census, incorporate an interactive map of venues and destinations with parking options and recommendations for nearby restaurants and retail. Include an inventory of rentable work, rehearsal, and performance spaces. Integrate a registry of artists for hire for people seeking creative services.

As an alternative to building a new site, explore opportunities to expand or tailor existing sites, such as Destination Trenton, Trenton 365, Hidden Trenton, or Planet Trenton.

3



CALENDAR

Consolidate and maintain a central creative calendar

As part of the new website or expansion of an existing website, integrate a central creative and cultural calendar – one landing page that holds the key to a creative social life in Trenton. Invite all creative partners to submit content and event announcements, and prioritize keeping the calendar up to date. Share content with and define relationships to existing blogs and websites that already have established audiences (see Strategy 2). In addition to the internet, plug calendar events via local radio (WWFM, WTSR, WIMG, WMCC), and provide content for inserts in playbills and menus, flyers at museums, postcards at bars, etc.

CHECK OUT

PHILLYCULTURE
 what's happening
www.philaculture.org/

PHILLY HAPPENINGS
www.uwishunu.com/

4

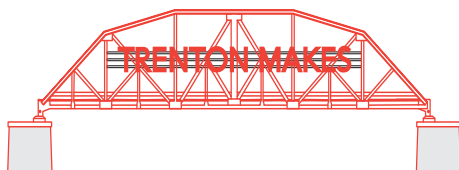


BRANDING

Develop open source branding

To truly generate buzz and interest about Trenton's creative scene, the information compiled must be presented and packaged with a recognizable brand and coordinated marketing plan (see Next Step number 5 on page 46). To kick-start the effort, seek local creative talent for help designing and developing a graphic identity, name, and slogan. Comb through the Library's Trentoniana Room for inspiration about Trenton's arts and maker past. Organize a competition to develop a name, slogans, and logos for use in branding arts, culture, and creative production in Trenton overall, and the Creek to Canal Creative District in particular. Convert the winning design into a sticker, seal, and digital branding tools for use by artists and artisans, in storefront windows, and for general marketing of the Creative District. Develop a line of Creative District swag for sale and for show.

5



STATEWIDE ADVOCACY

Join the statewide arts advocacy conversation

Take advantage of the Creative District's location adjacent to the State Capitol by engaging government officials and legislators on arts-related issues. An important next step for *Trenton Arts in Focus* partners is to become advocates for the proposed Artist Bank (NJ Bill A4892) and Arts District (NJ Bill A2801) legislation. Participate in the dialogue about what features or concentration of creative destinations will define an Arts District in New Jersey. Lobby for an Arts District designation for Trenton's Creek to Canal Creative District. Present *Trenton Arts in Focus* to the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, located just west of the Creative District in the State government center. Share precedents and pitch a suite of economic incentives or tools for the District tool box to increase the impact of District designation. Consider:

- A new class of liquor licenses, tied to the District, not the business owner (see Pawtucket, Appendix page A-94).
- Property tax abatements on building rehabs for creative uses or users (see Station North, page A-86).
- State income tax exemptions for artists or artisans (see Short North, page A-82).
- Revisions to state legislation governing commercial kitchens, which forbids licensing home kitchens for commercial use, to support creative entrepreneurs developing products to bring to market.

6



CITYWIDE ADVOCACY

Support the citywide arts advocacy conversation

As these citywide strategies to showcase and celebrate Trenton's arts, culture, and creativity take root, partners must develop and maintain a unified voice in local arts advocacy efforts. Advocacy avenues include:

- Work with Greater Trenton as the organization shapes its mission and workplan to ensure that the arts and the Creative District are central to its economic development efforts.
- Explore ways to lift the ban on food trucks in Downtown. Food trucks are currently allowed in the following select locations: North Broad and Perry Streets, north of Perry Street; South Broad Street at the Route 1 overpass; outside the main gate at Cadwalader Park; in the Old Wharf Area on Route 29; at West State and Prospect Streets, and on the sidewalk adjacent to the William Trent House. In all other locations within TDA's Special Improvement District, the vending or peddling of food, beverages, confections, or other merchandise is banned (with the exception of licensed restaurants operating a pushcart on the sidewalk adjacent to their premises). Mobile food markets created by food trucks can help existing businesses reach new customers and help start-up businesses test the market and take an important step toward a permanent storefront, all while enlivening streetlife and adding new flavors and choice to the local menu.
- Work with the City to develop incentives for resident artists, including low-interest loan and grant programs that can be paired with the City's proposed homesteading program to help existing local artists or outside artists looking to relocate to Trenton's Creative District become owners – of homes, work space, or live/work space.
- Participate in the City's current parking study to advocate for changes to parking regulations and shared parking arrangements to make on- and off-street parking more readily available in the evening hours for residents and visitors.
- Partner with efforts to bring a new venue or venues to town, be it an entertainment venue (perhaps Trenton Hops - a brewpub with movies or live music in the now-vacant Trenton Pops building) or educational, such as a pottery museum grounded in history. Work to match sites within the Creative District with concepts for new venues.
- Coordinate with City Arts and Young Audiences to help link Creative District resources with efforts, including Any Given Child, to enrich arts education in schools and other settings.

CHECK OUT

HOUSING PROGRAMS FOR ARTISTS – PADUCAH Artist Relocation Program

www.livable.org/livability-resources/best-practices/287-paducah-artist-relocation-program

CLEVELAND's Waterloo/Collinwood District

www.kresge.org/sites/default/files/report-Northeast-Shore-Cleveland-2014.pdf



LEFT Artist Bruce Lindsay explains his mold-making process at Integral Sculpture Works
Source: Interface Studio



RIGHT Studio and gallery space at Artworks
Source: Interface Studio

MAKE YOUR ART here

The **second set of strategies** is intended to support local artists and creative entrepreneurs already at work in Trenton, and to attract others from the region and beyond to choose Trenton (specifically the Creek to Canal Creative District) as a place to live and work. These recommendations emphasize **providing conducive spaces where creative people can live and work**, meet and collaborate; funding projects that put artists to work and infuse the Creative District with a unique and artistic character; and offering incentives that enable artists not only to make art in Trenton, but to **"make it" as artists** as well.

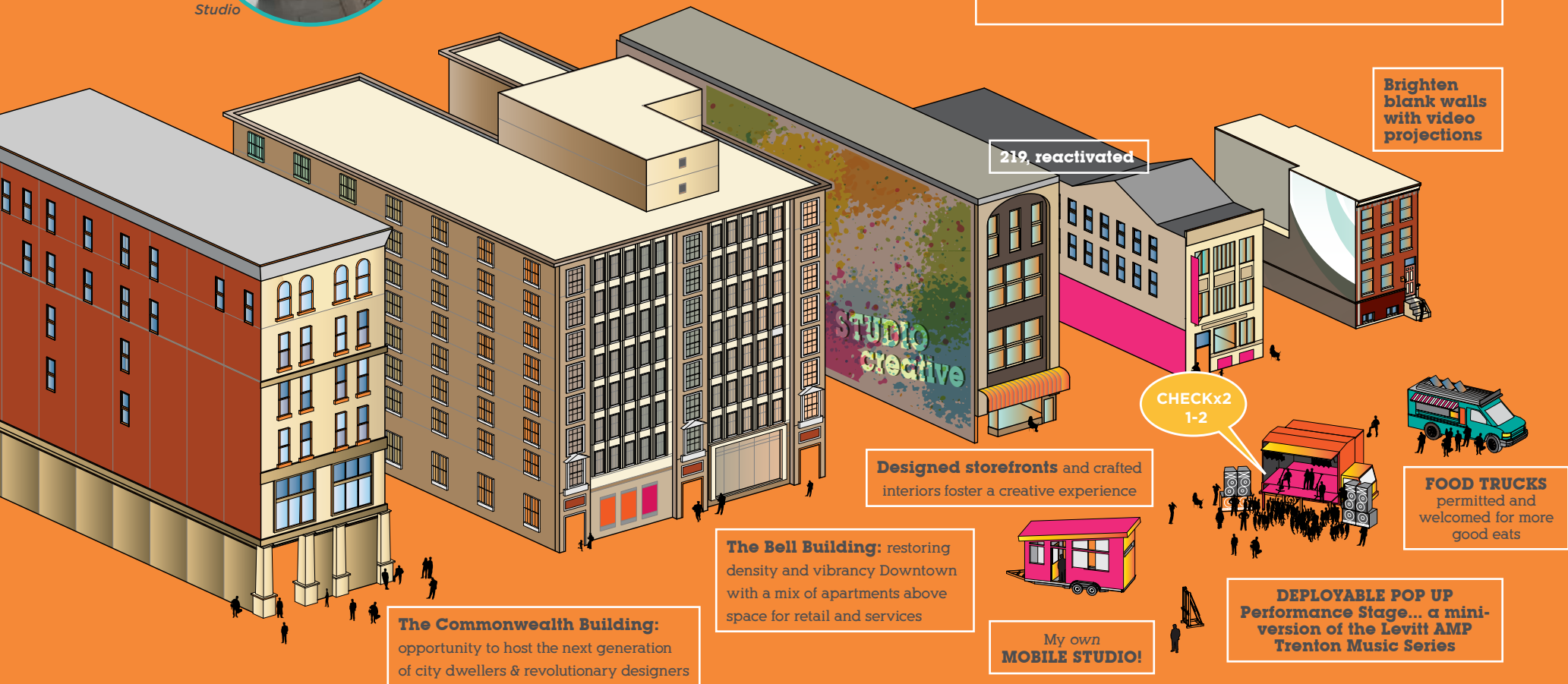


FIGURE 9 Potential catalyst developments in all shapes and sizes Source: Interface Studio

PLAY LIVE MAKE

CHECK OUT

NYC's ARTBUILT MOBILE STUDIOS
artbuiltmobilestudios.org/about/artbuilt-mobile-studio-info-sheet/

OMAHA's DO SPACE TECH LIBRARY
www.dospace.org

7

Foster a full-service community for artists and creative entrepreneurs

The Creative District already has a collection of unique spaces for creative production. For instance, **Artworks** hosts studios for visual artists, which are fully subscribed with a waiting list; **Integral Sculpture Works** operates a sophisticated foundry on Allen Street; the **Trenton Community A-Team** has a studio and gallery in a renovated carriage house; and **The Orchid House** is home to Native Hill Records recording studio and live/work space for other artists. The District also has both land and buildings that can accommodate new housing, live/work, and creation and distribution space for artists. The options range from small-scale rowhome rehabs and large-scale catalytic projects that embrace adaptive reuse of historic structures, to new construction of flexible and varied space available for mixed-use programming.

To make the area even more attractive to artists and makers, develop additional spaces where they can

"Do not displace. Well intentioned ideas can quickly get out of control."
- Community Participant

live and work – or live/work, saving on rent where living space can coexist with creative space. Include spaces that allow artists to show and sell their work. **Evaluate all vacant and underutilized buildings in the District for potential future uses that support implementation of the plan. Prioritize prominent buildings, such as the recently vacated YWCA on East Hanover Street, for rehab in the short- and long-terms. Do the same for vacant lots, and consider creative infill development options.**

Explore the potential of alternative models such as tiny studios (or tiny homes), which offer artists deep affordability, an ownership opportunity, and mobility. Reach out to **ArtBuilt Mobile Studios** and convene a DIY tiny home/studio workshop for artists interested in building their own live or work space. Work with the Trenton Parking Authority to carve out a portion of the Merchant Street parking lot fronting on North Stockton



ABOVE and RIGHT ArtBuilt Mobile Studios are "small mobile workspaces that let artists, social-service providers, and micro-businesses work in new ways and in new places." *Source: ArtBuiltMobileStudios.org*



ABOVE Potential tiny studio home base within Creative District
Source: Interface Studio

The **Trenton Arts Explosion** press conference organized by North Ward Councilwoman Marge Caldwell-Wilson in 2012 offered an open call to artists to come together for a dialogue about their craft, what it means to them, what it means for the city, and what it means for Trenton's youth. After the initial presentations, artists continued to meet at Trenton Social, which led to curated shows at there each month.

Street south of Stockton Arms Apartments as a home base for tiny studios.

In addition to the basic need of live/work space for creative people choosing to locate in the Creative District or elsewhere in Trenton, artists and the city as a whole will benefit from more spaces to meet and collaborate, such as **Basecamp**, which hosts a co-working office space on Front Street. Increase access to workspace and shared tools and equipment for multiple creative genres with a tool library and public makerspace. For inspiration, look to Omaha's **Do Space**, a technology library, workshop, and innovation playground that, unlike many makerspaces, is able to offer most services for free. Evaluate each redevelopment or development opportunity for the feasibility of integrating affordable, rentable flex space for collaborative creative activity, including display and distribution of artists' work.

Just as important, the Creative District must cultivate spaces that offer a built-in social life – so called “third places” outside of home and work where people can just hang out. As Trenton Social demonstrates, and as The Orchid House cafe and the new coffee shop on North Stockton Street aim to prove, these spaces will benefit entire neighborhoods, **bringing people together and adding vibrancy by establishing new destinations in the Creative District** that are open and appealing to all. The city, and in particular, the Downtown, needs more restaurants, bars, cafes, and outdoor gathering places.

8 Develop a welcoming and supportive creative community

Trenton's existing artist community has a reasonable level of connectivity, where some people know each other and cross paths. But, as the Trenton Arts Explosion press conference of 2012 demonstrated, connections and collaborations among artists can and should be enhanced. As the creative community grows, embrace a culture of sharing that opens doors to new relationships between existing resident artists and newcomers. Schedule a rotating dinner party once per season (hosted at a local restaurant or, even better, in the home or studio of a local artist) for the purposes of making introductions and strengthening relationships between existing local artists and welcoming emerging or relocating artists (or those Trenton might like to recruit).

Use these get-togethers to make new connections and share work, ideas, and skills.

In addition to social supports, provide opportunities for artists and creative entrepreneurs – especially those just starting out – to gain technical and professional development, including business planning, coordinated promotion, and handling insurance. Develop links between Trenton artists and art markets in the region, New York, Philadelphia, and beyond through a Trenton Makes Tour program that supports artists' travel expenses. Convene a rotating continuing education program in which different artists teach others their particular medium or creative approach.

RIGHT

Pork Roll Festival at Trenton Social **Source:** trentonporkrollfestival.com



Dear MOM,

You should see Trenton's Creative District now! It's...



“...cool, innovative, interesting, ever-changing. it feels safe to be here at night, walking around. you never know what you will find, but you know you will see someone you know!”

“rooted in the community and embraces the best grassroots artists of today. we can learn from the collaborative spirit of trenton's residents.”

“...it's finally becoming what it was always meant to be. we've created enough art outlets & studio spaces to give our folk the space and opportunity to create. you should come visit some day. it's much cheaper here.”

ABOVE Quotes from participants' Postcards from the Future
Source: *Interface Studio*

9

PUT ARTISTS TO WORK!

Integrate the arts in all aspects of programming and development

Both the citywide and the place-based strategies presented here intentionally highlight opportunities to put artists to work by imbuing the Creative District and the city with art – temporary or permanent, fine or applied. Challenge – and fund – artists to **activate underutilized and vacant storefronts, buildings, and lots**. Commission sculptural streetscape elements such as custom bike racks, benches, or bollards (for more details, see pages 40-41). Commission collectible screen-printed posters to advertise events and performances. Connect artists and designers with local businesses to create custom signage and window displays that **transform the look and feel of the Broad and State Street corridors**, as well as other commercial nodes. Encourage developers to invest in local art for the entryways and publicly accessible or visible spaces of new large-scale developments. Invite business owners to transform their walls into gallery spaces for display and sale of artwork. Develop an art loan program in which the Creative District's lead entity or partner organizations purchase work from local artists for loan and display throughout the District. Aside from visual art, seek ways to craft a more creative experience at area businesses through signage, menu, façade, and/or soundtrack design. The collective impact of these smaller scale art interventions will be powerful.

10

\$\$\$

Offer financial incentives to strengthen the appeal

In addition to commissions for creative community projects described in Strategy 9, financial incentives that support creative making and doing will help local artists do more of what they love, and may pique the interest of outside artists and creative entrepreneurs looking to put down roots amidst like-minded people. Support the **Artist Bank legislation** (NJ Bill A4892) that would offer interest-free loans to "artist colonies" in areas with an "emerging art presence." Partner with the **I Am Trenton Foundation** to raise funds for a **challenge grant program** to support creative community-based projects pitched through a competitive application process.

Develop an **Artist in Residence** program that invites visiting or local artists to live and work in the Creative District for four to six months. The financial incentive here might be live/work space and/or a stipend, particularly for community-based service projects such as those encouraged in Cleveland's Waterloo/Collinwood District (see Strategy 6). As further described in Strategy 6, work with the City to establish Resident Artist loans and grants that foster ownership among local artists interested in purchasing and renovating distressed properties, and remaining in the District for years to come. Because the Creative District

falls within the **Urban Enterprise Zone**, building materials for renovations can be purchased tax-free.

Partner with **Trenton Community Supported Art**, tying Creative District artists to this unique local art marketplace. In relation to Strategy 9, the Creative District's lead entity or partner organizations should purchase a share per season to build an art collection for public display in the Creative District. The collection can also be loaned or rented to area institutions or building owners seeking to fill their walls with art.

Finally, ensure that artists, creative businesses, and other potential investors have access to information about existing **economic incentives available at the State and City level**. Compile an easy-to-understand How-To guide that lists the programs and resources available to support redevelopment and investment within Trenton and the Creative District, along with information about how to enroll in or apply for each program.

PRACTITIONERS & EDUCATORS

Connect practicing artists with arts education providers

Community members of all ages expressed interest in creating opportunities for youth to learn through the arts. It's not just the youth who stand to benefit from arts education. Work with City Arts and Young Audiences, Passage Theater, and The Conservatory to connect practicing artists with opportunities to teach their craft and mentor, developing creative skills and capacity for self-expression among apprentices or students in visual arts, music production, graphic design, digital photography, video, dance, or theater, among other mediums. Once interested teaching artists have stepped forward, coordinate with youth program providers to follow the lead of Passage Theatre's State Street Project, Artworks, and Both Hands, which bring arts programs to where the kids already gather, rather than establishing a new dedicated venue.

Young Audiences can provide a link between artists and in-school programs and family programs at schools. Continue to build a relationship with Mercer Street Friends, which currently operates a Community School at Rivera Middle School, just north of the D&R Canal and the Creative District. Within the Creative

District, some Trenton Central High School main campus programs are currently offered in the former Daylight Twilight facility. Work with the Trenton Board of Education to move Trenton Central's Arts, STEM, and Hotel, Restaurant, Tourism, and Business programs to this location. Integrate these programs with Creative District initiatives and link students to related internship and hands-on learning experiences within the District.

Trenton Cultural Resources Network convenes regularly-scheduled artist get-togethers.

RIGHT
Trenton Arts Explosion
Source: trentonnj.org



RIGHT
Artworks Artist Flyer
Source: artworkstrenton.org



RIGHT
Artist and founder of Both Hands: The Artlet, Bentrice Jusu
Source: bothhandsartlet.org



CREEK TO CANAL CREATIVE DISTRICT

The **third set of strategies** is tailored to the Creek to Canal Creative District, outlining actions that tie programs and policies to place within Old Trenton and Downtown – designated testing grounds for focused arts, culture, and creative investments. The Steering Committee debated long and hard about the merits of a defined creative district with a fixed boundary, and ultimately settled on the Creek to Canal Creative District. To balance the fixed boundary with the recognition of arts activity outside of it, incentives and investments are also targeted to the Broad and State Street commercial corridors as they intersect in and extend beyond the District. And recommendations are offered to ensure that development of the District benefits citywide artists and arts organizations. (For details on the evolution of the District boundary, see Figures A-19 through A-21 in Appendix II.) This compact area can serve as a destination with a recognizable identity. **Strategic investments within a defined area will make change easier to see, experience, and replicate; boundaries will facilitate decision making about where to drive development and future investment.**

The Creative District hosts existing arts and cultural assets to build upon (see Figure 1 on page 2), interesting architecture, blank walls and vacant lots that can serve as canvases, the intersection of two primary commercial corridors, and significant amounts of underutilized surface and structured parking. It is walkable and bikeable. Developer interest in building market-rate housing in the area is increasing, though the District contains several housing options dedicated

for low- and moderate-income residents that will help preserve affordability and community continuity over time. The District is home to several organizations, institutions, and educational resources that can be enlisted as champions of District implementation. With its western boundary at Willow Street, the Creative District meets the Trenton Historic Development Collaborative Neighborhood (which, like Old Trenton, receives NJ Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit funding) and the State government center, where additional support and champions can and should be found. It is framed by two unique parks and waterways, and it is **at the very heart of Trenton – positive change within the Creative District will emanate outward.**

The strategies for the Creek to Canal Creative District focus first on Old Trenton, an area where the City has called for targeted investment and where some funding from both public and private sources already exists to kick-start implementation. The strategies include enhanced safety; a restored home base for the arts on East Hanover Street; a direction for residential, commercial, and live/work development; and a commitment to enhancing the public realm through art and improved connections that strengthen the area's creative identity and sense of place.

As these recommendations are implemented, and as detailed project plans are honed, it will be critical to activate spaces early and often. **It is anticipated that – as has been demonstrated in cities around the world – temporary uses will help to pave the way and build demand for permanent change.**

FIGURE 10 Creek to Canal Creative District *Source: Interface Studio*

Make the Creative District safe, first and foremost

Safety - both real and perceived - is the primary issue facing the Creative District. Yet, while everyone agrees that we must restore a sense of public safety, there is also widespread commitment to remaining an open, inclusive, and supportive neighborhood for all members of the community, including those who may have “fallen through the cracks.” A cleaner, safer, more communal public environment should benefit all District residents and stakeholders.

Reclaim and maintain the parks and gardens that took root early in Old Trenton's creative resurgence. Keep the spaces activated by people and programs that will help everyone feel welcome and comfortable. Bring Isles' Clean & Green service to the Creative District, replicating efforts underway in the nearby Trenton Historic Development Collaborative and East Trenton Neighborhoods, to help staff the maintenance effort over time. Alternatively, extend TDA's Clean & Safe coverage across the whole District, or divide responsibility between the two organizations. Address vacant lots along with parks and gardens.

Disrupt the crime and drug activity that occurs throughout Old Trenton with a streetscape improvement and beautification project that replaces the existing crumbling sidewalk, introduces bumpouts at the corners for art and plantings, and establishes a public realm worthy of respect (see Figure 12 on page 35). Build stewardship of the neighborhood by inviting community members to take part in the design process.

The Old Trenton Neighborhood Stakeholders have developed a Crime and Safety Statement and Request for Action by the Trenton Police Department.

Continue the coordination and organizing efforts of the Stakeholders and replicate them for the entire District. **Advocate for a Downtown Citizens-Police Advisory Council group**, as well as targeted police strategies designed to address the varied public safety concerns across the Creative District. Build resistance to crime and violence with creative twists on activities like a traditional neighborhood watch. Orchestrate neighborhood watch parades that bring music and dance to the streets each week, or a regular food truck rally that welcomes a different kind of activity. Look to Passage Theatre to bring back Stoop Theatre and offer productions in the neighborhood. Work with residential and commercial property owners to light up their stoops and facades with motion-activated lights. Coordinate these activities with TDA and/or Greater Trenton, and define roles for other partners.

13 Re-establish the arts on Hanover; explore development of a Downtown arts & education campus

Re-establish a home base for the arts on East Hanover Street to kickstart implementation of the Creative District. Renovate the former Studios @ 219 as a collaborative workspace that welcomes both artists looking to relocate to the District and local artists – especially those with strong and trusted relationships in the community, SAGE Coalition members among them. SAGE's creative process engages neighbors and establishes mutual respect that fosters peace and beauty. As a homecoming, consider refurbishing and relocating the now-obsolete HOME furnishings “ghost” sign from Warren Street to East Hanover Street where it can become a beacon and object of art. Alternatively,

refurbish and keep the sign in place as a link to the recent past. (Look for other ‘ghost’ signs to refurbish and repurpose as well.)

While 219's history and location make it a high priority for early action, **other vacant buildings full of character** in the Creative District also have **potential for adaptive reuse** as workspace or office space for designers, cultural organizations, or other creative users. As recommended in Strategy 7, **undertake a feasibility study of all vacant or underutilized buildings in the District, prioritizing key buildings with the greatest potential to impact the footprint of the Creative District**. Do the same for vacant lots.

The YWCA building on East Hanover Street, which offers amenities such as an auditorium that are not available elsewhere in the District, has been vacated and auctioned to a new owner. Reach out to key stakeholders – including the YWCA's new owner, the City, MCCC, TCNJ, the Library, and the Board of Education, which has a major facility (previously the Daylight/Twilight School, now part of TCHS) across the street from the former YWCA – to **explore opportunities for partnerships and the possibility of an all-ages arts and education Downtown campus**. Such collaboration could also spark the interest of other youth arts and arts-related education providers who may be looking to relocate given the appropriate space and setting.

Additionally, consider the Walter F. Smith & Co. building on North Montgomery Street, the former Trenton Pops building on North Broad Street, and the Nevius building on Perry Street. For these and all buildings with rehab potential, start with feasibility studies to determine the condition of the structures and the types of creative reuse that make financial sense.

Welcome residential development to restore critical mass in the Creative District

Second to safety, the community prioritized investments in housing within the Creative District, echoing the interests of the City and developers. Additional households will add vibrancy to Downtown, helping to support local retail and restaurants, and breathing new life into long-vacant buildings and lots.

Redevelopment plans are already in progress for the iconic **Bell Telephone** building, with AJAX

Management as developer of a proposal that includes 80 market-rate loft apartments above retail and commercial space. The Bell Building is an important catalyst project that signifies confidence in the Downtown market, paving the way for other developments, both affordable and market-rate.

Housing geared toward artists must be affordable and flexible, allowing – rather, encouraging – live/work space. Current zoning and the Canal Banks Redevelopment Plan allow for residential, commercial, and mixed uses. In the blocks designated solely for residential use, only pre-existing multi-family developments are grandfathered in. None of the existing zoning classes mention live/work space conducive for artists

and other creative types. Change area zoning to **encourage multi-family rehabs** and new construction, especially for structures designed to host live/work space (see Next Step number 3 for a description of proposed zoning changes).

Blend adaptive reuse with new construction to add density to the Creative District. Continue to **restore historic row homes**, creating move-in ready spaces along stable blocks. Work with the City and the Landmarks Commission to revise buildable lot regulations and guidelines for infill within the Hanover-Academy Historic District. While rehab of existing structures should aim to restore the front elevations and other visually significant elevations to their original appearance, new construction

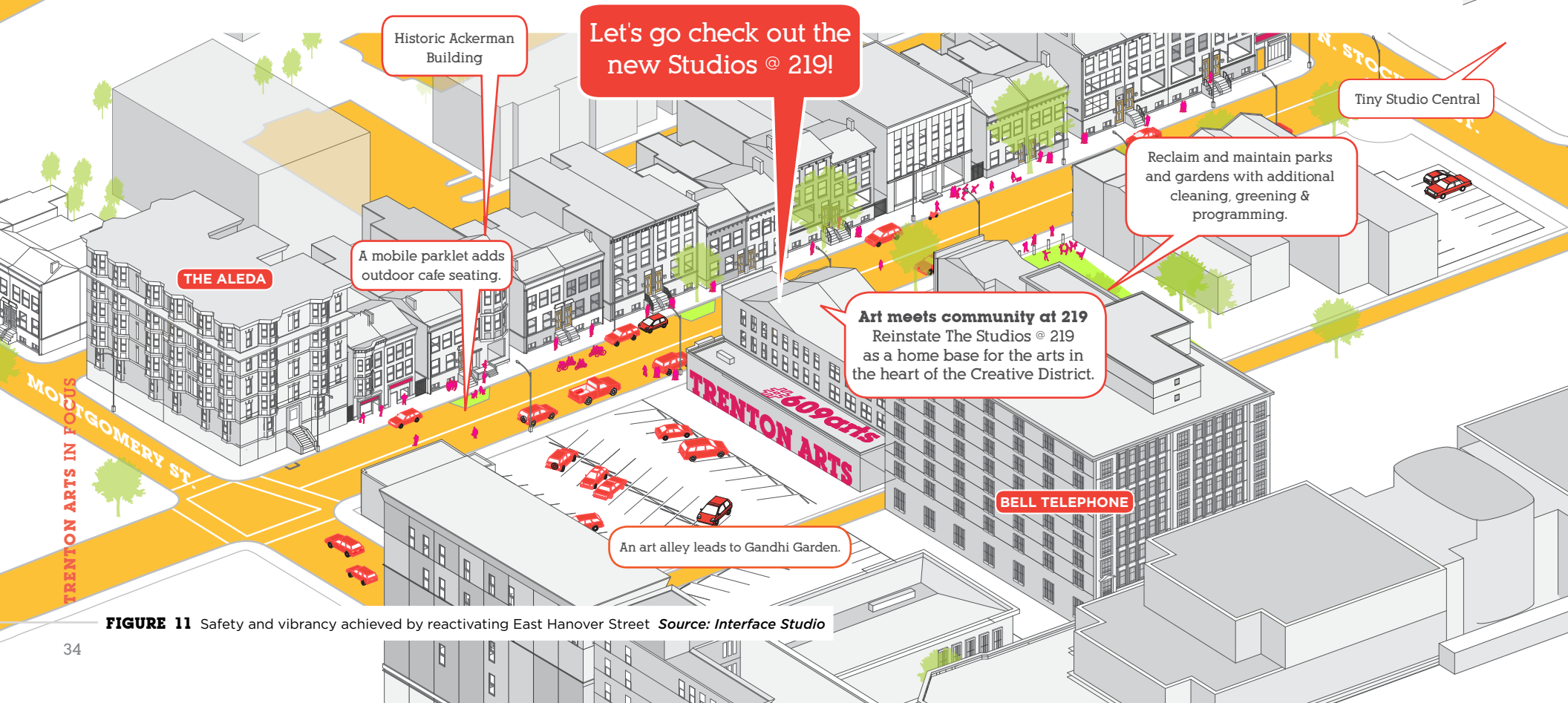


FIGURE 11 Safety and vibrancy achieved by reactivating East Hanover Street *Source: Interface Studio*

within the Hanover-Academy Historic District should aim to complement historic buildings with contemporary designs and new materials that add to the already eclectic collection of architectural styles. Building heights and façade rhythms and variation should reflect the surrounding context, while allowing for greater density and taller buildings at appropriate sites. Though the Creative District also touches the South Warren, State House, and D&R Canal Historic Districts, this recommendation to relax infill guidelines pertains solely to the Hanover-Academy Historic District at the heart of the Creative District.

Work with the City to **develop supplemental live/work design guidelines** as a resource to inform design and construction of projects geared toward creative production. These working spaces have special requirements that necessitate design considerations including but not limited to loading, fire rating, ventilation, provision of deep basin sinks,

and soundproofing. Addressing these design considerations will not only increase the utility and safety of new live/work and production spaces, but also mitigate potential conflicts with neighbors.

Put measures in place to **build wealth and maintain affordability as new residential development occurs** within the Creative District. Existing income-restricted homes already contribute to a base of affordability in the area. Create an inventory of deed-restricted affordable homes, including when the deed restrictions sunset, and develop a plan for strategic preservation of such existing homes as well as strategic development of new affordable homes. For appropriate new developments, row-home rehabs, or renovations of existing properties, consider a Community Land Trust model. Land Trusts preserve affordability and protect vulnerable uses like community gardens over time by holding land and providing long-term leases to households that own homes atop the land.

Not all artists will choose to own their properties, while some may never be in a financial position to take on that responsibility. Developers like Artspace, which operates nationally, ensure long-term affordability and **support stability and housing security for artist occupants**. For those artists who do wish to own properties, develop financial tools to be offered by the State, City, or nonprofits that facilitate such investment, as described in Strategies 6 and 10. Deed restrictions or liens tied to grants or loans can stipulate that if an owner opts to sell and move on within a set period of time, then a portion of the subsidy will be due back to the grantor or lender.

15

Integrate creativity into social services

Many current residents in and near the Creative District face serious challenges ranging from addiction, poverty, and poor housing conditions to re-entry, unemployment, and homelessness. As the Trenton Community A-Team has demonstrated, developing services around the arts and creative production has the potential to help address certain long-standing social issues. **In many ways, the success of the Creative District depends on the overall health of Downtown and surrounding neighborhoods.** It is critical to nurture partnerships with area service providers and continue to invest in arts programs and initiatives that **involve and empower community residents**. Leaders of Creative District implementation should secure resources to establish and reinforce programs that engage community members through social practice and creativity – especially at-risk youth and individuals with physical, mental, or emotional health challenges.



FIGURE 12 Rendering of new home base for the arts, on-street parklet, and streetscape improvements on East Hanover Street.
Source: Interface Studio

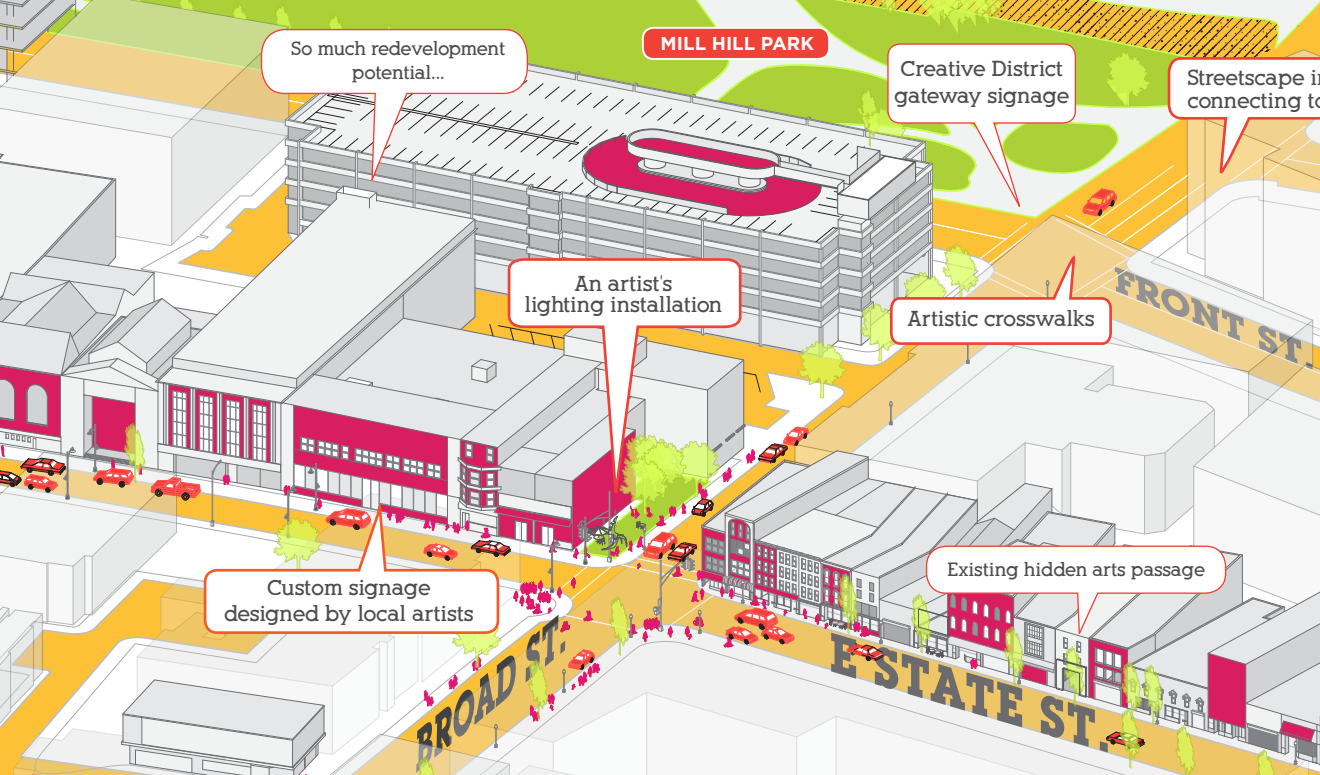


FIGURE 13 Streetscape opportunities at the intersection of Broad and State Streets *Source: Interface Studio*

Expand the Creative District's reach along Broad and State Streets, enabling marketing efforts, streetscape improvements, and economic incentives to extend north on Broad Street to the Battle Monument and south to Route 129; east on State Street to Chestnut Avenue and west to Calhoun Street. These **corridors draw people in and help connect the Creative District** with other arts and culture hubs within the city.

16 Infuse commercial corridors with creative energy, starting with East State Street

Warren Street has a cluster of restaurants between State and Lafayette Streets; in the past year, two new late-night venues have opened Downtown – South Rio and 1911 Smokehouse BBQ. Within the Creative District, South Warren Street, with its trees, cobblestones, and charming historic buildings, hosts the limited evening social scene. Conditions are different on State and Broad Streets, which intersect at the center of the District. These two major corridors are already home to a collection of institutions, cultural destinations, and a mix of independent and national retailers. The Downtown location puts these businesses footsteps away from government workers and college students during the day, but after 5PM, many businesses close and these main corridors are much quieter after dark. Weekends are quiet too.

While some businesses such as Family Dollar and Crown Fried Chicken remain open to serve the community, the lacking social life at the center of the Creative District leaves something to be desired for area residents, who view the Creative District as an opportunity to **restore vibrancy Downtown**. There is a desire for more people, more independent businesses, more restaurants (and bars with sit down dining), a night club, a coffee shop or daytime hangout spot, an art supply store... The wishlist is long – and right on point for the mix of uses to feed and be fueled by the Creative District.

This strategy builds upon ongoing TDA efforts and suggests different but complementary ways to activate State and Broad Streets – part streetscape improvements; part business attraction, retention, and small business support; part programming. **Undertake a lighting project to light up State Street and encourage evening hours**; explore façade and storefront lighting behind perforated security grates for businesses as well as a more artistic lighting installation that draws attention

and people. Develop a coordinated, block by block façade improvement and streetscape design program.

Work with property owners to activate vacant storefronts. Continue to host pop-up shops to incubate creative, independent businesses. Populate vacant windows with art to create temporary galleries. Adapt the storefront improvement grants offered by TDA to include interiors, or establish a new revolving loan fund for the Creative District to help white-box ground floor retail spaces so that they are move-in ready for potential new businesses. **Focus business attraction efforts on social spaces** – a café; restaurants open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner; a night club with live music; another bar. As noted in Strategies 5 and 6, advocate for economic incentives that bring added vibrancy to the Creative District and can be models for other arts districts statewide, such as a possible new class of liquor licenses tied to the Creative District and its outward reaches along State and Broad Streets.

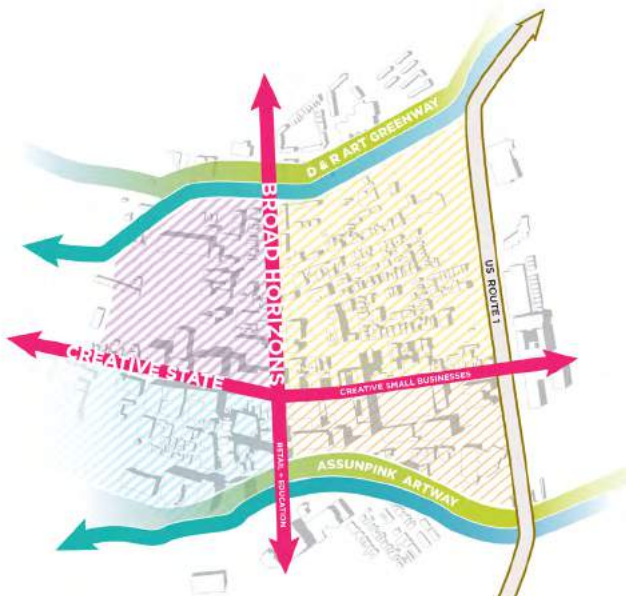


FIGURE 14 Extended reach for the Creative District along Broad and State Streets *Source: Interface Studio*

17 Populate the public realm with art

The public realm in parts of the Creative District is already rich with art and color, formal and informal. Murals exist on multiple walls within Old Trenton and on storefront grates visible after closing along State Street; Windows of Soul beautify, stabilize, and call attention to the many vacant and abandoned buildings in Old Trenton. While public art contributes to a creative vibe on certain blocks, the area needs a consistent sense of place, imbued with art throughout, demarcating the edges and entrances to the Creative District, and **encouraging exploration** of residential blocks and commercial corridors.

Grow the collection of high-quality murals on blank surfaces. Beyond walls and storefront grates, engage artists to re-imagine fencing and other street edges, incorporating greenery and sculptural elements that add beauty and visual interest to **encourage more pedestrian activity**. Mark the entrances to the Creative District with signage and painted crosswalks to provide visible cues alerting people that they have arrived in a place rich with art, culture, and creativity (see Figure

16 on page 38). Refurbish “ghost” signs as objects of art that retain local history and showcase local restoration skills (see Figure 12 on page 35). Commission and install functional art such as custom benches, bicycle racks, and trash bins, designed and fabricated locally (see Figure 18 on page 39). Encourage video and sound elements for a mix of media.

While much of the creative activity within the Creative District’s public realm has grown organically from grassroots efforts spearheaded by local artists, some future decisions about commissions of art – be it fine art or functional art – will require more consideration and conversation, particularly as the Creative District is inextricably linked to Downtown. **Diversity in style and medium will add richness and interest** to different pockets of the District, but a decision-making framework will be needed to help guide artist selection and the placement of works to ensure a blend of local and imported talent representing a range of styles.

The evolution of Miami’s Wynwood Walls offers lessons for Trenton’s Creative District. In Wynwood, local graffiti and street artists had an established presence before real estate developer Goldman Properties teamed with professional curator Jeffrey Deitch, former director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, and put Wynwood on the global art map with a curated selection of walls within a courtyard painted by artists from around the world. Wynwood continues to evolve, with artists – both local and visiting – taking on new walls and doors throughout the area, some commissioned by property owners, some working illegally and funding their own work. Walls already adorned are often painted over, making space for newcomers. Articles caution that Wynwood’s success has made it increasingly difficult for local artists to land high-profile walls.

Use art to create an enhanced sense of arrival and sense of place in the Creative District.

FIGURE 15 Rendering of activated storefronts after 5PM on East State Street *Source: Interface Studio*



Champions of the Creative District will need to work together to **define an artistic identity and a process for artist and project selection**. In Philadelphia, the Mural Arts Program selects its artists from within the city and around the world. At The Village of Arts and Humanities, a Philadelphia non-profit, a foundation grant provided funding for an African curator to guide the selection of two visiting international artists. Those who stay involved with the Creative District to help push for implementation will need to address the issue of curating art for the District head on, deciding between a local committee of artists and stakeholders charged with making selections, a more formal citywide Arts Commission, an effort spearheaded by the District's lead entity (or entities) with support from a professional in the art world, or some combination of the above.

A new mixed use building on Front and Montgomery Streets!

18

Establish physical connections with nearby institutions

Encourage visitors and newcomers to take the first step off the beaten path, linking established arts and culture institutions like Artworks, the Mill Hill Playhouse, the Old Barracks, and Patriots Theater at the War Memorial with lesser known and emerging creative destinations. Concentrate artful investments, greening, and cleaning along streets and sidewalks connecting these institutions with the 100 and 200 blocks of East Hanover Street, and then extending north through the District to pass by the A-Team Headquarters and Integral Sculpture Works. **Connect the District's unique green spaces and waterways with sculptural elements** or details embedded in sidewalks as trail markers along "artwalks" following the Assunpink Creek and the D&R Canal. Develop and implement clear, consistent, and, of course, creative wayfinding and signage throughout the District.

MILL HILL

Refurbish and maintain Mill Hill Park's natural amphitheater for outdoor performances.

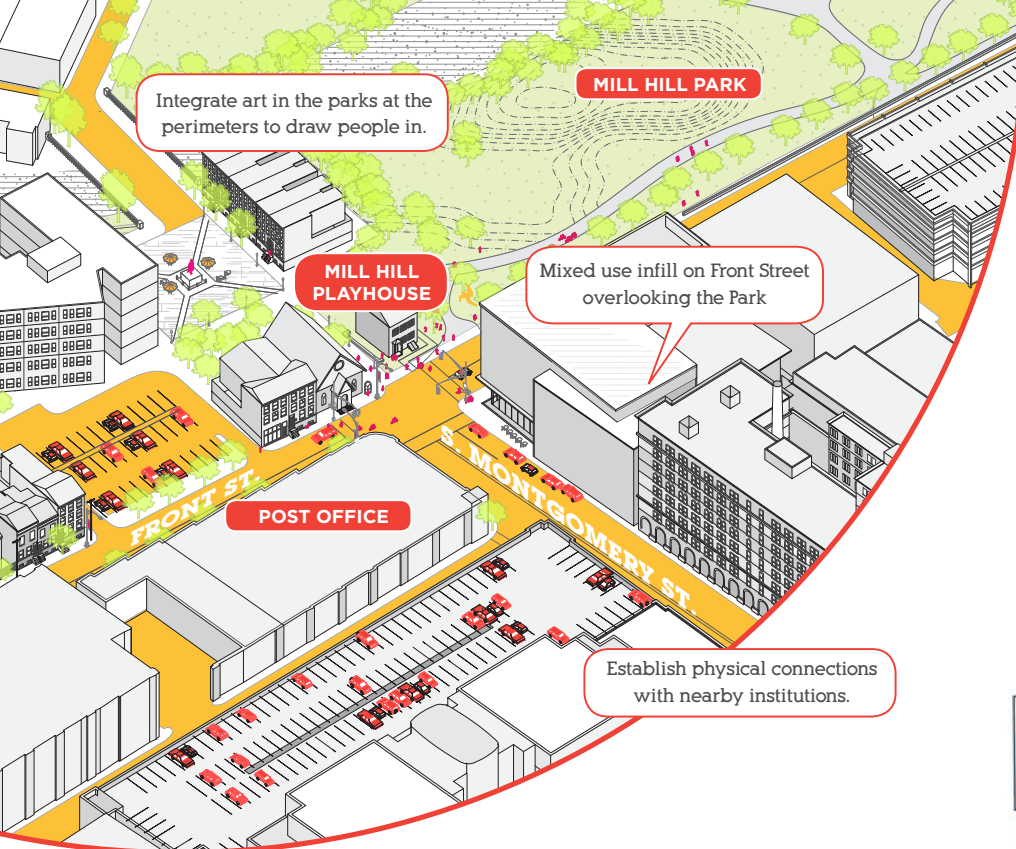
ARTWORKS

FIGURE 17

View looking south to the southern edge of the Creative District, integrating Strategies 12 to 19
Source: Interface Studio

Transform the intersection of Front and Montgomery Streets as a **gateway from Mill Hill to the Creative District**, with new housing, greening, and artful streetscape improvements.

FIGURE 16 Rendering of artwalk that connects Passage Theatre-goers to the Creative District
Source: Interface Studio



19 Integrate art in the parks at the perimeters to draw people in

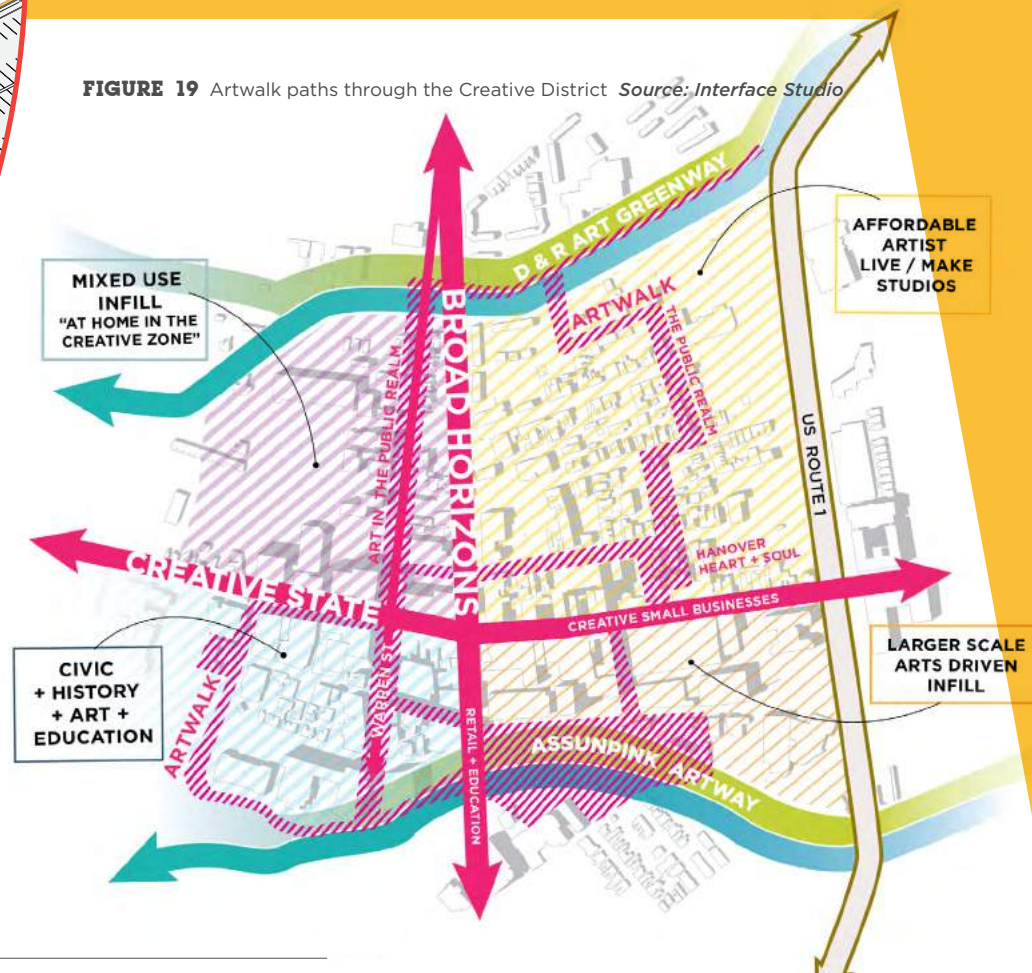
The unique green spaces and waterways at the edges of the Creek to Canal Creative District present interesting opportunities to draw people in with art. Increase programming at the Mill Hill amphitheater, from formal concerts and plays to informal film screenings and performances. **Integrate sculpture and signage as wayfinding** along a D&R Canal Artwalk. Residents, visitors, and those traveling the planned East Coast Greenway that follows the D&R Canal through Trenton will leave with **an artful impression of the city**. Also, beautify and activate empty lots and buildings, particularly near the intersection of Perry and North Stockton Streets that greets travelers approaching from Route 1.

An **Artwalk** — along which residents and visitors can explore the Creative District and its framing waterways, seeing art embedded as trail markers along the way — received many votes from residents, as did open-mic nights and block parties that bring people together.

FIGURE 18 Rendering of visitors to the District taking a leisurely walk along the D&R Canal Artwalk
Source: Interface Studio



FIGURE 19 Artwalk paths through the Creative District Source: Interface Studio



The **fourth set of strategies** is designed to strengthen connections – both physically and psychologically – between the Creative District and other hubs of art, culture, and creativity across the city and region. Recommendations include physical markers in the streetscape and near cultural institutions that serve to highlight all creative places of interest, complemented by programs designed to encourage exploration of all of Trenton's arts, culture, and creative destinations. These strategies will help ensure that investments in the Creative District support Trenton's larger arts and cultural scene, directing residents and visitors from the District outward into other neighborhoods.

CONNECT the DOTS

RIGHT Streetscape inspiration *Source: various*

20

Strengthen physical connections between arts and culture destinations

Highlight arts and culture destinations as points of interest in the community by commissioning sculptural beacons or markers to identify arts, culture, and creative venues. Deploy these beacons throughout the Creative District and also across the city, fostering visual and physical connections between arts venues in different parts of Trenton. **Embed artful elements in streetscapes and signage along key routes** to destinations; begin with the Broad and State Street corridors and expand out from there.

This strategy integrates ideas in Strategy 9 about putting artists to work creating fine and functional art for the Creative District, Strategy 12 about disrupting criminal activity on East Hanover Street (and elsewhere) with a streetscape improvement project, Strategy 16 about **infusing the streetscape along commercial corridors with creative energy**, and Strategies 18 and 19 about artful wayfinding throughout the Creek to Canal Creative District and along the waterways that define it. With artists as collaborators, the palette of options for streetscape improvements and street furniture is endless. The bubbles below provide inspiration as a starting point.



WASTE



GROUND



BIKE RACKS



BOLLARDS

Encourage exploration of Trenton's creative assets

Beyond branding, as discussed in Strategy 4, devise creative ways to showcase Trenton's collection of arts, culture, and creative destinations. The annual Art All Day event already does a fantastic job of connecting art lovers from across Trenton and the region with creative venues throughout the city. Encourage locals and visitors alike to get out and explore year-round, forming personal connections with Trenton's arts assets.

- Produce an arts, culture, and creative passport that offers discount tickets to destinations and events, as well as a reward for people who visit all venues within a set period of time.
- Collaborate with organizers of the Social Ride to host an arts and culture bicycle scavenger hunt; teams on wheels can cover more ground.
- Hold block parties near arts venues and feature local artists, musicians, food vendors, and others.
- Offer a "ghost" signs tour by bicycle that highlights past businesses as well as some creative newcomers, including TerraCycle.
- Organize a History Walk or guided historical or arts tours that build upon well known historic or arts assets and help people explore new blocks and destinations in the Creative District.
- Bring geocaching to Trenton's creative landscape, embedding artful clues at venues and public art sites to help art hunters uncover hidden local treasures.



PLANTERS

GAMES

PARKLETS

PROJECTIONS

INSTALLATION

BENCHES

ARTWALK

BEACONS

DRAWING LESSONS

Trenton Arts in Focus sought lessons learned from arts districts near and far – districts of all shapes and sizes, in small and mid-sized cities, both hot and weak real estate markets.

The case study research considered:

- **The relationship of each district to its city's downtown** (within, adjacent, or removed)
- **The distance to the nearest big city** (Trenton is 60 miles from New York City and 30 miles from Philadelphia)
- **The character or emphasis of each district**
- **The management structure** (or lack thereof)
- **Specific implementation tools adopted by each district**
- **How each district relates to Trenton and the Creek to Canal Creative District**

For more about each of the featured case studies, including how the Creek to Canal Creative District compares, see Appendix V.



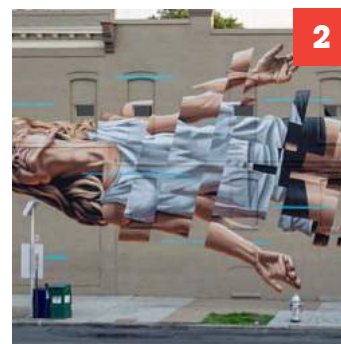
WYNWOOD WALLS

MIAMI, FL

WHY WYNWOOD? A street art mecca and example of an arts district creating a destination.

A former manufacturing district populated by warehouses ideal for murals, Wynwood Walls have been transformed as canvases for a massive collection of world-class street art.

Now an entertainment district with restaurants and bars amidst studios and galleries, Wynwood is a thriving off-beat tourist destination on any street art pilgrim's must-see list. The district has no formal boundaries and is managed by a non-profit, the Wynwood Arts District Association (WADA).



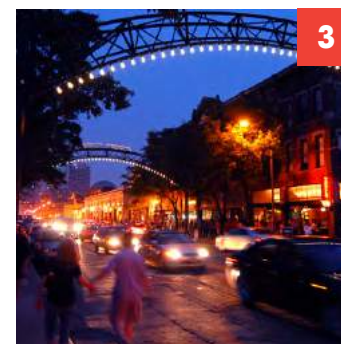
RICHMOND ARTS & CULTURAL DISTRICT

RICHMOND, VA

WHY RICHMOND? A capital city that chose inclusive boundaries for its district with incentives targeted in a sub-district.

This capital city has embraced place-based economic development as a means of downtown revitalization.

The City's Economic and Community Development agency is a lead partner, with financial resources made available through a City fund, ArtBusiness Richmond. The City designated a broad and inclusive area within Downtown to serve as an arts and cultural district and hub of civic and commercial activity. However, incentives for targeted economic development are constrained to a subset of the larger area.



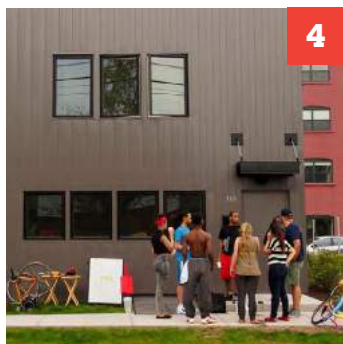
SHORT NORTH ARTS DISTRICT

COLUMBUS, OH

WHY SHORT NORTH? An example of a distressed neighborhood turned around through grassroots efforts by artists.

A grassroots arts-based revitalization of this once distressed and dangerous corridor has yielded a vibrant and balanced mixed use live/work/play district where art permeates throughout.

Over time, the once-grassroots effort morphed into a fully staffed non-profit, the Short North Alliance, charged with programming and marketing, visitor and business services. A Special Improvement District (SID) provides additional resources and support to address quality of life issues including cleaning and safety.

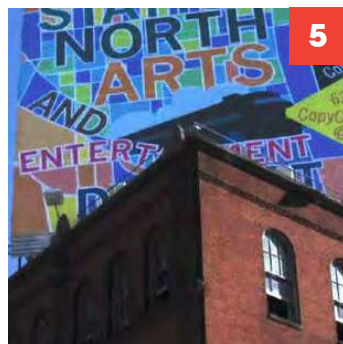


SALT DISTRICT SYRACUSE, NY

WHY SALT? An example of the power of partnerships, modern infill coupled with historic rehabs, and community ties.

Now a successful public-private partnership, Syracuse University together with area non-profit, the Near West Side Initiative, adopted a holistic approach to neighborhood stabilization.

The Syracuse Art, Literacy, Technology (SALT) District employs art, infill, historic rehabs, new modern construction, economic development, job creation, technology, creative entrepreneurship, and innovation, and leverages resources from the university, State, City, foundations, businesses, and non-profits to make a difference in the neighborhood and the lives of residents.



STATION NORTH ARTS DISTRICT BALTIMORE, MD

WHY STATION NORTH? An example of a diverse business mix and placemaking to strengthen an area's social life.

Run by non-profit Station North Arts & Entertainment, Inc., Station North has developed a creative hub spanning three neighborhoods that attracts a diverse mix of Baltimore residents as well as visitors.

The organization pursues revitalization and placemaking through quality public art projects, thought-provoking programming, oversight of growth and development, and facilitation of strong and supportive relationships with local artists, designers, residents, businesses, and institutions.



PENN AVE ARTS PITTSBURGH, PA

WHY PENN AVE? An example of a corridor improvement initiative fueled by physical improvements and special programs.

More corridor than district, Pittsburgh's Penn Avenue Arts District embraced the arts as a tool to revitalize a seven-block stretch of the Penn Avenue corridor.

The corridor's revitalization has unfolded since the late 1990s in concert with a broader community development strategy that includes residential and commercial development and cultural projects. Penn Avenue has received MainStreets funding and is now home to a mix of creative businesses and a popular monthly First Friday arts walk along the commercial corridor. Artists live and work in the area, and the corridor remains a community-serving shopping street.



WORCESTER ARTS DISTRICT WORCESTER, MA

WHY WORCESTER? An example of a gateway to downtown, retail corridor, and entertainment center, all in one.

The Worcester Arts District is a public-private project focused on economic development, the needs of the local arts community, and the revitalization of a disinvested portion of the city.

The District serves as a gateway to Downtown, a retail and entertainment corridor, and a former manufacturing district well positioned for reuse as live/work space and lofts. By establishing a downtown gateway, creating cultural and educational opportunities for families, and providing diverse dining options and a mix of housing typologies, Worcester became a destination for new visitors and residents.

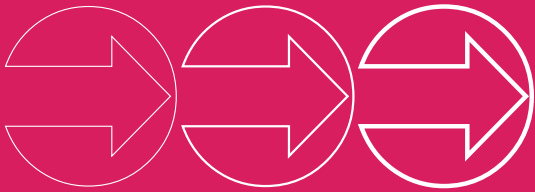


WATERLOO ARTS DISTRICT CLEVELAND, OH

WHY WATERLOO? An example of housing incentives for artists and art as key to community health.

One of Cleveland's several arts districts, Waterloo proudly offers "real art in a real neighborhood."

The district was built upon the draw of existing music venues and recruited artists to live and work in the community with a variety of housing programs and other incentives. Community leaders believe that arts are a key to community health, and local artists can apply for funding for community projects. A local non-profit, the Northeast Shores Development Corporation, and an arts organization, the Community Partnership for Arts and Culture, are joint partners.



NEXT STEPS

Rooted in a collaborative process, this plan acknowledges power in numbers. It embodies a coordinated approach to implementation that embraces each artist's, organization's, and individual's contribution to bringing Trenton's arts in focus.

To maintain interest and momentum, *Trenton Arts in Focus* partners and advocates must move quickly to advance early action projects and build support for the Creek to Canal Creative District. While some strategies will take years to implement, others can and should progress in the coming months. The following steps will help the Action Committee transition from planning to implementation, **sustain the spirit of collaboration** built during the planning process, and leverage partnerships and existing resources to produce tangible change in the short term.

For more about implementation tasks, partners, and funding, see Appendix VI.

STEP 1

Transition the Steering Committee into an Action Committee

The Steering Committee convened to guide *Trenton Arts in Focus* was large and diverse, with nearly 50 participants representing nearly as many organizations active in the citywide arts and culture community. The group wrestled with the possibility of forming a new entity to oversee implementation, but decided for now to continue the collaborative effort, seeking to build and capitalize on the capacity and strengths of existing organizations. In the long term, to support sustained momentum and action, development of the Creative District should be absorbed as a key program of either TDA or Greater Trenton, but full responsibility should not fall on that organization alone.

Many Steering Committee members agreed to continue meeting, evolving from a Steering Committee to an Action Committee charged with assigning supporting roles to advance elements of the plan and holding each other accountable for progress. As one of the lead conveners of the planning process, Isles will organize the Action Committee meetings until a lead entity or other convener has been selected.

As the Action Committee prepares to make vision become reality, ensure that all key players have a voice at the table. Recruit representation from multiple City departments and others from the arts and culture community who have both a vision

for Trenton and skills, connections, and/or resources to help get actions underway. Maintain a commitment to diversity in building the Action Committee; *Trenton Arts in Focus* events and programming must be representative and feel open and welcoming to all, citywide and in the Creative District. Ensure that the Committee includes stakeholders that have a citywide perspective as well as those with strong interests in the Creek to Canal Creative District.

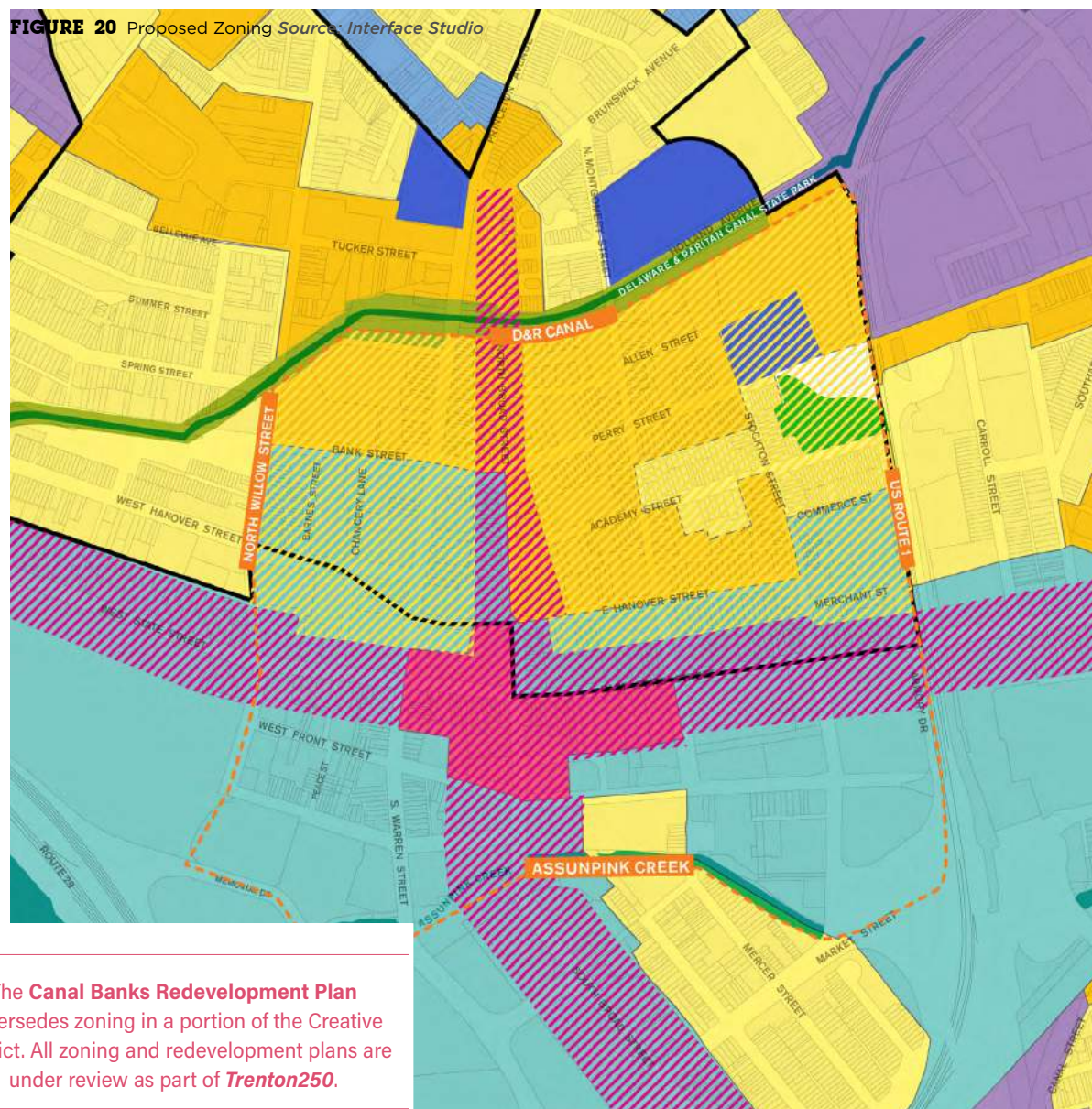
STEP 2

Map out an action plan for Year 1

With the Action Committee established, set a regular meeting schedule for year one. At the first meeting, identify ongoing activity that is already serving to implement the plan. Identify additional early action strategies using the Implementation Matrix (Appendix VI), prioritize them, and assign roles, responsibilities, and progress milestones to partners. Given the City's preference for focused revitalization in Old Trenton and the NJ Neighborhood Revitalization Tax Credit resources available there, phase implementation beginning with strategies in that portion of the Creative District, along with non-place-based actions – particularly activities related to marketing and branding – that can support the arts citywide. The Committee should choose whether to work together as a whole or with sub-committees assigned to each of the categories of recommendations or individual strategies.

To the extent possible, partner organizations – including TDA, Greater Trenton, Isles, and Artworks, among others – should dedicate staff and volunteer time for *Trenton Arts in Focus* implementation so that not a week goes by when the plan sits on the proverbial shelf. The Action Committee may opt to craft an MOU between partner organizations to delineate

FIGURE 20 Proposed Zoning Source: Interface Studio



The **Canal Banks Redevelopment Plan** supersedes zoning in a portion of the Creative District. All zoning and redevelopment plans are under review as part of **Trenton250**.

BASE ZONING

- RB - residential
- MU - mixed-use
- BA - business
- BB - business
- IA - industrial
- IB - industrial
- PM - pedestrian mall

CANAL BANKS LAND USE

- R - residential
- MU - mixed-use
- BA - business
- PF - public facility
- CZ - canal zone
- OS - open space

PROPOSED ZONING

- CDC - NEW Creative District Commercial Overlay
- L/W - NEW Creative District Live/Work Zone

responsibilities so that organizations can design work plans to meet their action targets. Depending on the ability to raise resources and allocate staff and volunteer time to further Creative District projects, the Action Committee should explore the need for a new Creative District Coordinator position in the future.

STEP 3

Make it official

One of the first benchmarks for putting the plan into action is to make it official. This requires coordination with the City of Trenton. **Work with the City to adopt Trenton Arts in Focus** as a **Trenton250** neighborhood plan. Track the progress of the Arts District legislation, and seek City support for an application to the NJ State Council on the Arts for the Creative District to receive Arts District designation.

Work with the City to **re-zone the Creek to Canal Creative District** (or amend the Canal Banks Redevelopment Plan accordingly) to make the area a neighborhood of choice for artists, creative entrepreneurs, and people who love urban living. Apply a live/work zone in place of all residential and mixed-use zones above State Street in the Creative District. In addition to existing permitted uses, explicitly encourage the following uses:

- Studios for a range of creative genres from visual art to music and dance;
- Multimedia galleries and performance spaces;
- Live/work studios in single-family and multi-family structures where artists can also sell their work;
- Independent retail, particularly goods and services related to the arts; and,
- Restaurants and eateries, cafes, bars, and nightclubs, should additional licenses become available.

**The Trenton Arts in Focus survey asked,
"Do you think a creative district in
Trenton will be successful? Why?"**

**63% said yes; 31% said maybe;
only 6% said no**

Their reasons for saying YES included:

We have the talent. We have dedicated people.

People will come.

Artists in Jersey need a platform.

It's an affordable city with an already existing art scene.

People need a place to be inspired.

Feel ownership of making something happen.

Everyone can relate to art.

Apply a Creative District commercial corridor zoning class or overlay to properties along Broad and State Streets tied to economic incentives for commercial and upper floor residential development in the Creative District (see Strategies 5 and 6). Zoning changes throughout the District can occur either as part of a wholesale zoning remapping following the Trenton250 Master Plan or at the District scale by working with the City to update zoning in concert with or in preparation for Arts District designation.

Work with the City and the Trenton Landmarks Commission to **craft design guidelines for the Hanover-**

Academy Historic District

(see Strategy 14).

Ease restrictions on building materials to

encourage a range of materials that complement the existing building stock. Open the door for new construction to depart from traditional architecture so long as building scale and façade rhythms respect and reflect the surrounding context. Revise the buildable lot restrictions within the District to facilitate residential or mixed use infill. Take a field trip to Northern Liberties and Fishtown in Philadelphia to learn from the eclectic building fabric that blends old and new, fostering an interesting and creative atmosphere.

STEP 4

Take the Creative District on tour

With a final document in hand, it is time to **spread the word and recruit new champions and resources** for Trenton Arts in Focus implementation. Share the plan with civic associations and neighborhood groups throughout the city, particularly the Trenton Historic Development Collaborative, since the District touches that group's focus area at Willow Street. As the Creative District also intersects with the State Capital district, share the plan with State government agencies and officials. Seek opportunities to present the plan to local and national foundations with an interest in the arts, placemaking, and economic development. Present the vision to private investors, ranging from real estate developers interested in land within the Creative District to area business leaders partnering with Greater Trenton. Present the strategies to local and regional arts organizations using the Trenton Cultural Resources Network and Trenton Arts Explosion as initial platforms, and bring information about the Creative District to community events.

STEP 5

Develop a marketing strategy for the Creative District

For the Creek to Canal Creative District to take hold, partner organizations must work on generating buzz and publicity about the District, its events and programs, and its incentives and opportunities for living, working, and playing (see Strategies 1 through 4). Commission a marketing strategy to **build brand awareness**, incorporating a set of communications tools from a website and social media to traditional press and outreach. Consider multiple audiences including local Trentonians, prospective artists, businesses, developers and investors, tourists and visitors, and arts patrons. In concert with a marketing strategy, organize a competition for a logo and slogan (and possibly a new name) for the Creative District, with prize money available for the winning artist/designer or team.

STEP 6

Take action in the Creative District

Last but not least, in the first year, it is critical to **take action in the Creative District** and with the community. Fundraise for and launch a challenge grant program for creative projects inspired by Trenton Arts in Focus. Host opening night events in concert with this year's Art All Day. Track progress this year and every year with an annual report and celebration of progress made toward brining Trenton's arts in focus.

As change continues to unfold and new opportunities arise, revisit and reprioritize the early action strategies. The list may change, and that is a good thing, signaling that the plan/process is alive and action is underway.

LEFT Modern infill meets historic building stock in Northern Liberties
Sources: *phillyliving.com*, *wework.com*



**Special thanks to the artists,
arts advocates, organizations,
institutions, residents, and Trenton
champions who participated in the
Steering Committee tasked with
guiding *Trenton Arts in Focus*.**

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DanceSpora, Artist

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Estate

John Laughton
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Bruce Lindsay
Integral Sculpture Works

Ruth Markoe
Theater To Go

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