



The Times

A fine case for Trenton

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STAFF WRITER

Trenton is, once again, at a crossroads.

About 230 years ago, a surprise attack by patriots turned the tide of the Revolutionary War that paved the way for a new nation.

This time around, the city is looking to that nation for help in re-establishing itself.

Plans for a massive makeover of the city's neighborhoods north of the train station and a stretch of land from the Delaware River to downtown have been submitted to the federal departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development as requests for grant money. If the approximate \$83 million in funding is approved, it will be in large part thanks to the efforts of Sen. Frank Lautenberg and Reps. Rush Holt and Chris Smith.

Perhaps they are able to see the potential of a city that so many others have written off. It's partially a problem of perception, recently illustrated on these pages with robust debate over Trenton's flaws and merits. Boosters tout the latter while others fear the former. The truth, of course, consists of a bit of both.

Luckily for the city, officials are convinced they can capitalize on the merits with a comprehensive plan to unearth neighborhoods buried under concrete and eclipsed by Route 29.

One aspect of the plan calls for demolishing the eyesore of the long vacant Miller Homes towers and building hundreds of more hospitable homes in their place.

A second grant would fund the rerouting of just under 2 miles of Route 29 away from the Delaware River and creation of new parkland, as Times writer Meir Rinde detailed in a Sunday story. This project would also involve taking down two state office buildings and turning sprawling state parking lots into a new neighborhood. Moving the road inland just north of Route 1 would open up land for recreation and development along the river. As a new, two-lane boulevard, that stretch of Route 29 would thread through a new grid of homes and businesses built on land used by state office buildings and parking lots. Heading north, it would curve left past the War Memorial and rejoin the road's current path.

Just as in 1776, there is a confluence of circumstances gathering against a dam of inertia. For one thing, the Route 29 plan seems to fit like a glove the Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery grant criteria. For another, the funds for which the city has applied would effect demonstrable and dynamic results, as Mayor Douglas H. Palmer has pointed out, a result that would be impossible in a larger city.

And, just as in 1776, there is a great deal of resolve to battle the odds -- and perception -- from Lautenberg, Holt and Smith, to the city leaders who have persevered on these plans for a better Trenton, to the residents who have stuck with the city.

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