Creative Perth Amboy

Enhancing Quality of Life and Empowering Economic Development Through Arts and Culture

IMAGINE - CREATE - CONNECT - BUILD

Imagine, Create, Connect, Build:

Enhancing Quality of Life and Empowering Economic Development Through Arts and Culture

Prepared for the City of Perth Amboy and the Perth Amboy Creative Team by:

Leonardo Vazquez, Denisse Ortiz, The National Consortium for Creative Placemaking
Leigh Anne Hindenlang, City of Perth Amboy
Perth Amboy Creative Team
Perth Amboy Arts Council

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Creative Team Members

Viviana Acuna
Maria Alvarez
Reinaldo Aviles
Geri Barcheski
Greg Bender
Olive Byran
Alfredo Carabajal
Randy Convery
Jorge Cruz
Yamillet Febo-Gomez
Nathan Fishman
Leigh Anne Hindenlang
Bill Kurzenberger
Lissette Lebron
Virginia Lugo
Olga Mercedes
Lisa Nanton
Ken Ortiz
Okenssy Peña
Caroline Pozycki
Lis Mery Ramirez
Janelle Rodriguez
Bienvenido Torres
Andrew Toth
Oscar Villareal
Tom Ward
Noelle Zaleski

City Council Members

Joel Pabon Sr.
Kenneth L. Gonzalez
Fernando Irrizarry
Lisa Nanton
William A. Petrick

Mayor Wilda Diaz

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Photo Credit: Caroline Pozycki

City of festivals. City of history. City of firsts. City of international food. City of music and art. City of immigrants. City of entrepreneurs. City of workers. City of neighborhoods. City by the Bay. Welcome to Perth Amboy!

Perth Amboy Creative Placemal

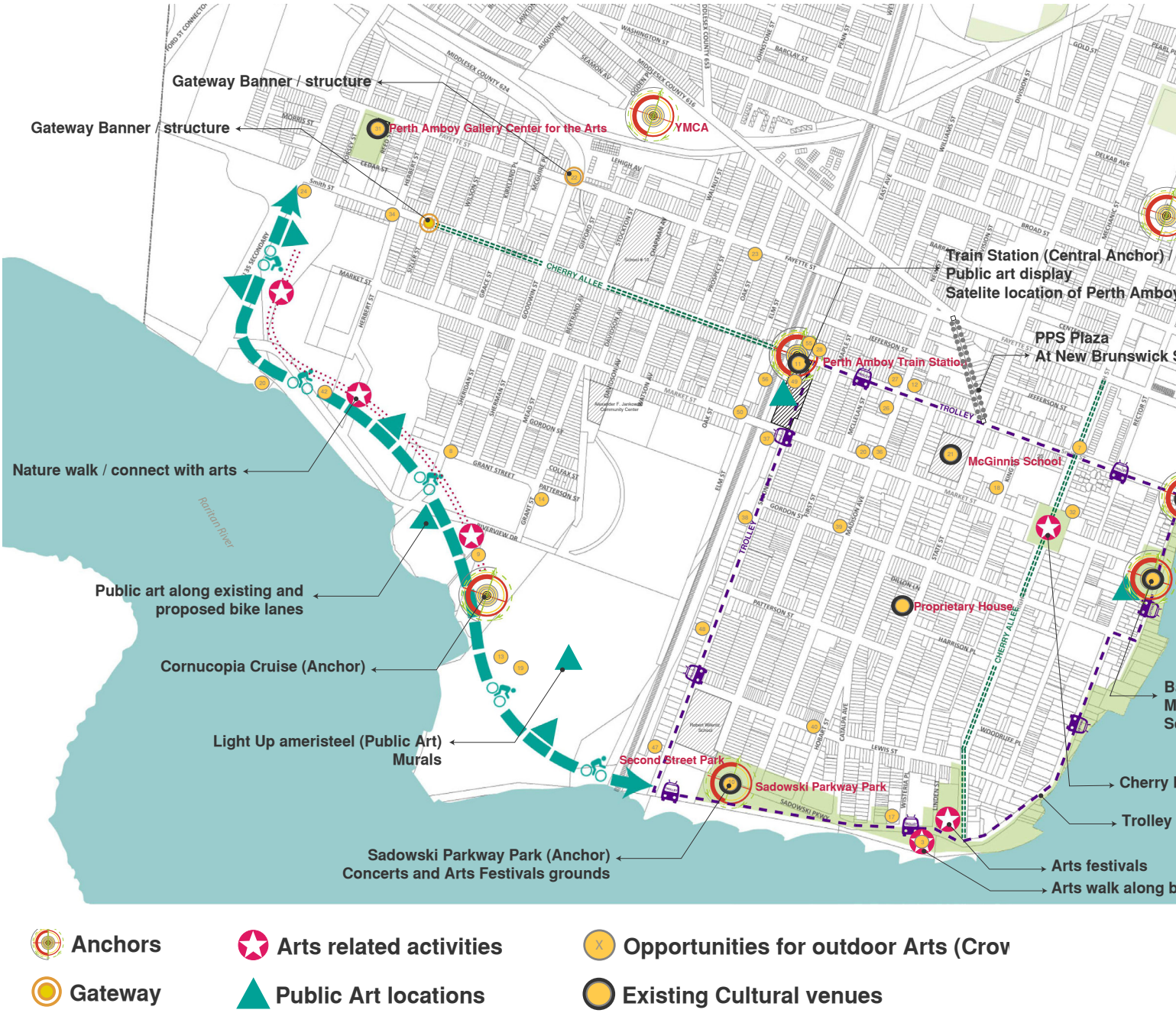


Figure 1: Creative placemaking strategies

INTRODUCTION

king Strategies

This is a place for history buffs, foodies, art lovers, weekend sailors, makers, music fans, outdoorsy types, entrepreneurs, and anyone who enjoys the intimacy and friendliness of a walkable, small city.

During the day, learn about Perth Amboy's rich history. From the historic train station in the center of town to the beautiful Victorian-era houses from when Perth Amboy was a manufacturing powerhouse, to the only remaining official Royal Governor's Mansion, where Governor William Franklin, son of Ben and loyal to King George, lived while ruling from this former capitol. See the historic City Hall where the first African-American voter in the United States cast his ballot and take in magnificent views of the Raritan Bay, home of the 2nd oldest Yacht Club in the country and the Ferry Slip nautical museum.

When you get hungry, have fresh seafood on the water or go to the city center, where you can enjoy foods from all over the globe or just a really good slice of pizza. If you're feeling more adventurous, you can hop aboard the Cornucopia Cruiseline and relax as you take in one of the best sailing bays in the country.

As the afternoon unfolds, join Perth Amboy residents, workers and visitors who liven up Smith Street, Perth Amboy's shopping center, for a great dinner and live music at one of the several great venues.

This is Perth Amboy today. Imagine what's next:

- *a vibrant arts district with galleries and public art that showcase the city's cultures, venues and outdoor places where you can experience Perth Amboy artists, writers and performers and hang out with other creative people;*
- *a more interactive and inviting waterfront, where you can enjoy free public art, performances and nature;*
- *a new Perth Amboy Gallery Center for the Arts downtown and other places where Perth Amboy residents can learn creative skills; and*
- *a new market for investment, jobs, businesses, stores – attracted to Perth Amboy's arts and cultural diversity*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
IMAGINING PERTH AMBOY 01

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This creative placemaking[1] plan is designed to make Perth Amboy a better place to live, work, play and visit through arts and culture.

Over the past several years, the City of Perth Amboy has been aggressively planning for its future to accommodate existing and expected growth. Several studies indicated that the City's unique culture and extensive history was one of the greatest underutilized assets. In 2013, the City applied for and received a National Endowment for the Arts' *Our Town* grant to develop an arts plan, create an arts council and develop a database of our existing resources and opportunities. The Perth Amboy Creative Team – nearly 20 Perth Amboy residents, including local artists, an elected official and representatives of business, educational and community groups – worked together for about a year to build strategies and collaborations to address social and economic issues through arts and culture.

This plan also builds on other community and economic development plans for Perth Amboy, including the Perth Amboy Bay City Transit District Strategy and the Gateway Neighborhood Collaborative revitalization plan. The focus of this plan is the southern tier of the City – from Fayette Street to the waterfront. However, the recommendations here can be used elsewhere in the City.

The work of the Perth Amboy Creative Team has already led to some successes, including:

- The changing of regulations to make outdoor murals legal in Perth Amboy.
- The creation of several murals, including one at the City's western gateway and others created by local students.
- A waterfront festival that highlighted both Perth Amboy's natural beauty and the work of local artists – both often another overlooked assets.
- The creation of a new Perth Amboy Arts Council, which has assisted with these projects and advises the City Council. Several of the key members of the Creative Team were appointed as founding members of the Arts Council.

1 Creative placemaking is an approach to improving quality of life and economic opportunity in communities through the strategic engagement of arts and cultures in communities. It differs from traditional approaches to arts by focusing on building diverse and sustainable partnerships, and by strategically organizing arts and cultural activities to address social and economic problems and opportunities.

After an extensive public outreach and creative coaching process, the Creative Team emerged with the following plan and established these priority goals:

IMAGINE	Make Perth Amboy a destination for arts and culture Foster economic development that is fair and compatible throughout the City Encourage residents to express their creativity and culture Identify and promote existing arts and cultural opportunities
CREATE	Develop a branding and marketing strategy for the City that highlights arts and culture Increase revenues, jobs and business opportunities by attracting more visitors to Perth Amboy Identify and develop opportunities for public art Preserve and promote the diverse heritages and history of the City Support and expand arts education and appreciation for school-aged children
CONNECT	Organize and establish leadership for the arts community Build support for and awareness of the Creative Perth Amboy plan Connect investment in the City by developers, businesspeople, funders and others who want to support the arts and cultural movement Enhance and integrate the work of earlier planning efforts, including the Gateway Neighborhood Collaborative, the Perth Amboy Bay City Transit District Strategy and the City's Master Plan
BUILD	Include a Visitor's Center in the new redevelopment project at the corner of Smith Street and Convery Boulevard Attract new residents interested in arts and culture Establish an arts and cultural anchor in the heart of the downtown Address the needs of artists for living and production Develop land use regulations that encourage and support artists and makers

Through the efforts of this planning process and the attainment of these goals, the City hopes to build a more creative, fun, future for residents to celebrate our diverse kaleidoscopic history and promote enjoyment and tolerance for all forms of expression for generations to come.

PERTH AMBOY **BACKGROUND** 02

BACKGROUND

Prior to the creation of this plan, the City has been investing time and money into promoting and expanding the arts in Perth Amboy under the leadership of Mayor Wilda Diaz. One of the key agencies carrying out this work is the Department of Recreation, which provides arts programming to youth and adults, staffed by local artists. These local artists provide a summer arts camp for youth, after school and weekend art classes throughout the year, and a free summer concerts series in Bayview Park, among many other programs. Many of these activities are held at the city art gallery that has a paid curator and hosts art shows throughout the year. This work is further supported by the many diverse private and nonprofit organizations that host arts and cultural events in the city. Additionally, many city restaurants and businesses are involved with the arts, hanging paintings by local artists, displaying impressive mural work and being host to live music and entertainment.

Perth Amboy's diverse cultural community also offers a wide variety of events that are well attended by the local and regional community. Perth Amboy is often called the "City of Festivals" due to the number and diverse array of festivals that take place throughout the summer. The Puerto Rican festival is held over 3 days in July and was attended in 2014 by over 30,000 people. The event features a stage with the best performers in Salsa and Puerto Rican Folk music. The Dominican Festival attracts tens of thousands of visitors and hosts a stage of the finest Bachata and Merengue bands. The Festival of the Andes is held in July and features musical and dance performances that celebrate the cultures in the Andes region of South America. The Greek festival held on the waterfront in May attracts visitors to sample homemade Greek cuisine and features music and art. Mexican Heritage events held in April and May feature Mariachi bands, art and food. The Ukrainian Festival features traditional Ukrainian food and drink, live bands, dancing and church tours. There are many other smaller festivals that fill every weekend throughout the summer.

This introduction barely scratches the surface on the arts and cultural activities in the City. A few years ago, the City arts coordinators worked to organize and understand the arts community and collected an artist registry of over 200 artists. Recognizing this existing group of artists, the already successful events and venues, coupled with the 2014 Bay City Transit District Strategy's recommendation for Perth Amboy to develop itself as a "niche market for Latino culture" the City sought funding from the National Endowment for the Arts to devise an arts and culture plan. The Perth Amboy Creative Team, a group of 20 artists and arts enthusiasts, were organized under the guidance of the National Consortium for Creative Placemaking through their community coaching[1] program to develop this Creative Perth Amboy plan. This plan was one of the first efforts to organize leaders in the arts community, understand the existing resources and plan for the future of arts and cultural opportunities in the City.

1 Community coaching is an intensive planning process in which a coach and creative team work closedly together on a creative placemaking plan. Team members meet with the coach about every three weeks and discuss creative placemaking, cultural development, community development and economic development. The team members create, develop and vet the ideas with the help of the coach. In Perth Amboy, the coach was Leonardo Vazquez, a community economic development planner. The deputy coach was Denisse Ortiz, an urban designer and landscape architect.

GETTING ON THE SAME PAGE IN THIS PLAN

What do the words 'art', 'artist' and 'culture' mean to you? Probably not the same things they mean to the next person. For the purposes of this plan, we define these words and others as follows:

An ***artist*** is anyone who produces goods or performances that others enjoy or value for their creativity or emotional appeal. Some of these goods or performances may be sold, or given away for free. The term 'artist' includes painters, sculptors, potters, designers, actors, writers, musicians, woodcarvers and makers of visually interesting objects. Art and arts are what artists create.

Culture refers to beliefs and behaviors shared by groups and reflected in their heritage. In other words, we don't make a distinction between culture and history. Each reflects and strengthens the other.

A ***cultural professional*** is anyone who works at least part-time as an artist, in an arts-related organization, on cultural matters, or in a cultural organization.

A ***district*** is an area with similar elements. A historic district contains historic buildings; a waterfront district contains water-related activities, such as boats and seafood restaurants.

A ***cultural district*** contains arts and cultural activities, such as galleries, theaters, public art, cultural organizations, heritage sites and events.

PERTH AMBOY AT A GLANCE

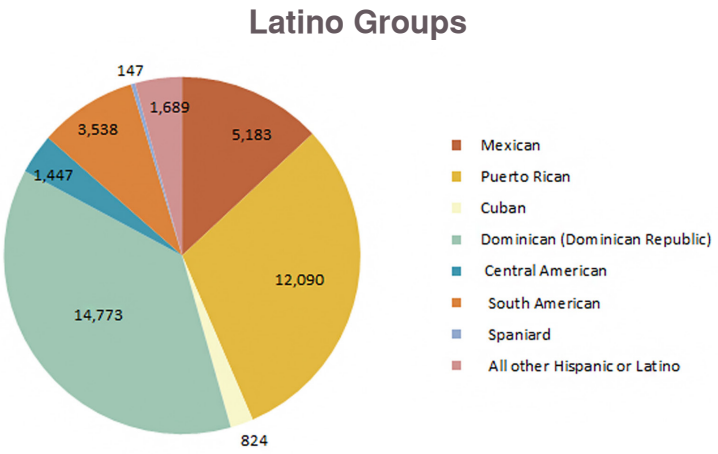
Perth Amboy is a growing riverfront community with a rich history and a large amount of cultural diversity. Its waterfront, at the intersection of the Arthur Kill and the Raritan River offers five miles of wide vistas and waterfront activities. The Garden State Parkway, Route 9 and Route 440, all near Perth Amboy, can bring visitors from New York, most of North Jersey and Jersey Shore to the city within an hour. Its train station, located downtown, provides service between New York Penn Station and Bay Head, New Jersey. Its neighboring towns are: Woodbridge to the North and West, Staten Island to the East and South Amboy to the South.

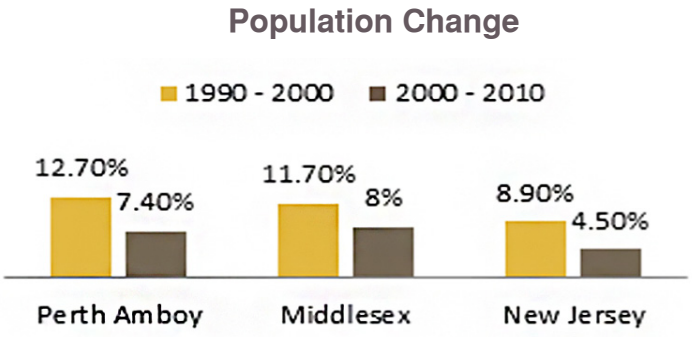
Since colonial times, Perth Amboy has been a magnet for many cultural and social groups. Its prime location offers access to the New York City metro area and New Jersey shore points, thereby making Perth Amboy a key hub for commercial and cultural activities. The city offers numerous activities to its visitors, including passive recreation such as strolling around the waterfront, historic landmarks and museums, festivals and cultural parades. Its main street –Smith Street, offers a variety of general and ethnic stores that reflects the diversity of the City.

Perth Amboy's rich history and architectural landscape is embedded on the city form. A walk on High Street provide a sense of its architecture with its 100 year-old Victorian houses, museums, landmarks and exhibits such as The Ferry Slip which celebrate Perth Amboy's maritime history.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Perth Amboy is a city of 51,000 residents, the majority of whom (78%) are Latino. In the last two decades (1990 to 2010), Perth Amboy's population has grown by 8,850 or a 20% increase. This outpaced Middlesex County's total population growth by more than 15%. This represents a total increase of 9,132 new residents. During this same timeframe, the city's share of families also increased by 5%. Youth population under 15 years old also decreased by 370 individuals. The working age group (15 to 65 years of age) represents 60% of the total population representing the majority of Perth Amboy's residents. The percentage of children decreased while the number of young adults and adults represent the majority of the population.





ECONOMICS

Perth Amboy has a diverse mix of economic activities: industrial services, manufacturing, wholesale trade an small retail businesses. Arts and culture play a small role in the current economic mix.

The City's economy is fused by a platform of entrepreneurial businesses in the retail, beauty services and restaurants businesses as well as mid-size business such as Ferrara Bakery and Vira Manufacturing. Among the city's largest business assets are Raritan Bay Medical Center, US Food Services, Tropical Cheese, and Vopak.

As of 2011, according to the County Business Patterns (CBP), there were 855 establishments with employees in Perth Amboy. Manufacturing, wholesale trade, waste management and remediation services, health care and social assistance and other services are the major industries offering employment in Perth Amboy.

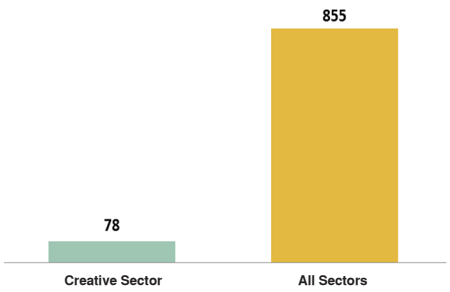
CREATIVE SECTOR

The creative sector refers to a set of organizations and entrepreneurs who are primarily involved with design, manufacture and distribution of products whose market value comes primarily from their aesthetic appeal. All of their work, as well as related work from other types of organizations, constitute the creative economy.

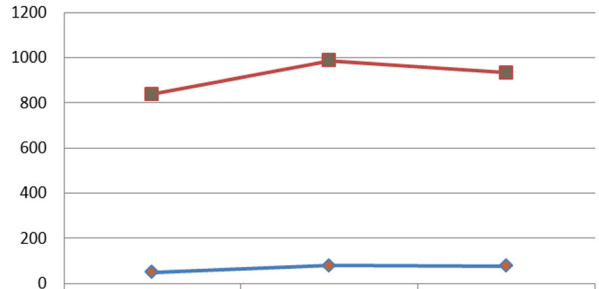
Perth Amboy is a vibrant city with a robust capacity to enhance the sense of place and pride of the community. With a rich history in the arts and culture, and the active encouragement of local goverment Perth Amboy affords a supportive scenario for creative placemaking.

Based on 2011 CBP data, in Perth Amboy, the creative sector consist of 78 establishments with employees. This reflects about 8% of Perth Amboy's economy. The majority of these establishments are spread across the following industries: jewelry stores, florists, full service restaurants and beauty services. The latter represents the largest figure in terms of number of establishments. There is a small presence of art dealers, book publishers, independent artists with employees and fine arts school. These industries represent 5% of the total number of establishments.

Number of Establishments



Creative economy organizations



	2001	2006	2011
all establishments	789	907	855
creative sector	49	80	78

KEY ISSUES IDENTIFIED IN PLANS FOR PERTH AMBOY

Several plans have been prepared for Perth Amboy since 1997. Some of the key social, economic and cultural issues identified in these plans include:

- Negative perception of the city's image
- Overcrowding
- Fragmentation and isolation of some city neighborhood
- Misleading crime rates
- The need for a gateway into the city and wayfinding
- The need for quality design and outdoor public spaces
- Streets do not encourage enough social interaction
- Deterioration and lack of maintenance
- The need for more community involvement
- The need to develop a positive identity that distinguishes the Gateway neighborhood
- Large numbers of vacant industrial lots, underutilized and neglected parcels
- Presence of unattractive facades and spaces due to vacancy and blight
- The demand for more shopping options

ABOUT PERTH AMBOY: ANALYSIS OF OPPORTUNITIES AND ISSUES

Perth Amboy is in a strong position to succeed through creative placemaking:

Location and Physical Features

- Located near the confluence of the Garden State Parkway and the New Jersey Turnpike, with a one seat train ride that goes to New York City and down the Jersey Shore, Perth Amboy is within an hour of travel from New York and most of New Jersey. The city is also within 90 minutes of travel from Philadelphia and eastern Pennsylvania, the Hudson Valley and Nassau County, NY.
- The vehicular entrance to Perth Amboy from the New Jersey Turnpike and Garden State Parkway goes directly to Smith Street, making it easy for drivers to find the city's commercial core.
- As a waterfront city whose street patterns date to the colonial period, Perth Amboy has a number of small, walkable blocks organized in a grid pattern. The blocks in the key commercial areas are close to the Raritan Bay or Arthur Kill. Large segments of the City's waterfront are freely accessible to the public. The Perth Amboy Waterfront is scenic and spectacular, and closely resembles a post card from New England. The city has sand beaches, a waterfront walkway, public parks and recreational areas, restaurants, a pier and a marina along the downtown riverfront. The waterfront neighborhood also boasts a garden club and several restaurants that feature live music.
- The NJ Transit train station – which connects Perth Amboy to New York, Newark Penn Station, Newark Airport, the Secaucus Junction transfer station and various destination towns on the Jersey Shore – is located at the center of Smith Street, the city's major commercial center. There is also extensive bus service connecting Perth Amboy to surrounding region.
- As of this writing, there were more than 45 small and underutilized commercial spaces in the Gateway neighborhood that would be suitable for galleries, rehearsal spaces, live/work spaces and small performing arts venues.
- Several buildings in the waterfront and historic districts, as well as some in the downtown commercial core, are historically interesting and attractive, which can help promote a more enjoyable traveling experience in the southern tier of Perth Amboy.
- While Perth Amboy is relatively easy to navigate, there are relatively few wayfaring tools, particularly for pedestrians, to help orient visitors as they near or come into the city. The downslope of the waterfront from the commercial area and the lack of strong viewsheds or architectural landmarks means that each is largely invisible to the other. As a result, team members said, many people visiting or living in Perth Amboy do not think of it as a waterfront city, despite it having two coast lines.

Economic Elements

- Perth Amboy is a destination for those who enjoy cultural festivals and international cuisine. Smith Street is an active shopping destination for visitors, diners and local residents. The business district is also home to salons and music stores. Outdoor music events and festivals are a regular occurrence during the warmer months in various waterfront locations.
- Perth Amboy has more than 200 working artists and 70 organizations and businesses involved in the creative and cultural economy (including restaurants, hair styling, and stores that sell culturally-specific items). Many of the businesses are concentrated along and around Smith Street and High Street.
- As with other communities, a number of Perth Amboy artists, writers and performers must take on additional work to support their artwork. This means there is a lot of creative talent available in Perth Amboy.

- To be successful in the market for the attention and interests of cultural tourists (those who enjoy arts and heritage-related activities), it helps if a place is seen as distinctive. Perth Amboy has a number of distinguishing elements: It has one of the largest and most diverse concentrations of Latino residents and businesses in New Jersey (about 78% of the city's 51,000 residents are Latino). There were an unusual number of 'firsts' – from having one of the first commercial art galleries in the New World to being the city where the first African-American voted in the United States, to electing the first Latina mayor in New Jersey. Several famous people (such as Bon Jovi's Richie Sambora) and famous characters (Daffy Duck and possibly Bugs Bunny) have called it home. More than 250 years of history are still visible in sites such as the Proprietary House, City Hall, the old Tottenville ferry dock and terra cotta enameled homes. With a large and open waterfront, the city can serve many different interests, from yachting to nature walks.
- Despite having such a strong concentration of creative and cultural entrepreneurs, Perth Amboy is not as well known by the general public for arts as are nearby communities like New Brunswick and Rahway. Compared to those communities, there are relatively few 'signals' of a vibrant arts community – murals, public art, notices of events, colorful storefronts or banners highlighting arts in the community.
- One of the key economic and social issues that arose in creative team and public engagement sessions was about perceived safety issues in Perth Amboy. This could discourage some visitors and residents from walking around the city, which makes it more difficult to sustain smaller stores that rely on shoppers who are not in cars.

Social Elements and Leadership

- Perth Amboy has the infrastructure to support new arts and cultural activities without significantly disrupting businesses that local residents and workers rely on. New arts activities in Perth Amboy are likely to locate along Smith Street. This coupled with new market-rate housing planned for the downtown corridor could increase property values and rents along the street. Business owners who do not want to pay increasing rents may be able to find space along side streets, or along Market or Fayette Streets, which tend to already be more oriented toward residents.
- Mayor Wilda Diaz and city councilmembers are vocal supporters of the arts. In fact, City Council President Lisa Nanton was one of the most active members of the creative team. To help institutionalize this support, the City Council in late 2014 formally established the Perth Amboy Arts Council.
- As another demonstration of the commitment of the City to growing arts and culture, Perth Amboy has a publicly-funded and managed arts gallery. The Perth Amboy Gallery Center for the Arts, currently on Read Street, displays the work of local artists, hosts performances of local musicians, provides classes in various art forms, and has hosted the Creative Team and Arts Council. To provide even more value to Perth Amboy residents and visitors, this plan recommends moving the existing gallery to a currently vacant part of the existing train station.
- Through this planning effort and the Arts Council, creative and cultural professionals, along with representatives and leaders of business groups, community-based organizations and City agencies, are collaborating more deeply and strategically than they have in the past. While these collaborations may be invisible to all but the participants, they provide the foundation for sustainable, adaptive and resilient strategies.
- There does not appear to be a large enough number of art patrons in Perth Amboy to support living wages for local artists. That means that Perth Amboy will likely have to bring in more visitors and businesses that cater to those visitors, as well as more higher-income residents to help support artists and arts activities on a year-round basis. This could generate the issues normally found with gentrification – tensions between newer residents and longer-term residents who may be upset or feel displaced by the changes in the community. Because Perth Amboy has a relatively high unemployment rate – in June 2015, it was 9%, while all of New Jersey was at 6.1% -- there may be additional tension if a significant number of new jobs made in the creative economy do not go to Perth Amboy residents

Photo courtesy: Perth Amboy Arts Council

PERTH AMBOY **STRATEGIES** 03

IMAGINE

STRATEGIES: IMAGINE

1. Make Perth Amboy a regional destination for arts and culture

There are many ways to make Perth Amboy a 'go to' place for visitors interested in arts and culture. An important early step will be designating a section of Smith Street near the train station a cultural district. This will provide a clear center and starting point for residents and visitors traveling by car, train, bicycle or foot. The district should start off compact – about three to four blocks long, plus side streets – and then expand as there are more arts and cultural activities in the City. As of this writing, the creators of the Bay City Transit Strategy were developing a zoning ordinance that will cover the area envisioned by the cultural district. The City should allow zoning regulations to be flexible and inclusive of many different uses, so that market forces can determine how large the cultural district should be.

Developing pedestrian wayfinding, signage and physical improvements will highlight the new cultural district and move visitors throughout the City easier. This will help visitors and residents feel more comfortable and encourage them to walk further. Some examples of these elements include

a. *Build allée of flowering trees (cherry, dogwood, magnolia, red bud) along Smith Street and High Street*

b. *Install a gateway arch or other large landmark at Smith Street at Herbert Street to signify the entrance to the City.* Good examples of these beacons include the bridge at the Union, New Jersey train station or the gates at the entrance of Rutgers University's Old Queens section.

Photo for illustration purposes only

2. Foster economic development that is fair and compatible throughout the City

Perth Amboy is in a good position to attract new businesses, jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities through arts. Ensuring that local residents benefit from these new opportunities will be more of a challenge. Most arts and cultural organizations and businesses are small, and executives in these types of establishments tend to hire people they know or who have similar backgrounds to them1. Another issue is whether there is a large enough pool of

1 Executives of small organizations often do not have the human resources staff, the time or expertise to conduct broad searches and training that leads to more diverse workforces.

Perth Amboy residents with the skills and knowledge that gallery owners, performing arts executives and cultural organization directors seek. As Perth Amboy succeeds in attracting more residents and organizations, local entrepreneurs will find more competitors from outside the City seeking to serve the growing market. More residents, businesses and organizations in the City will likely lead to higher rents and leases. In a city of many migrants and immigrants, certain restaurants and shops do more than provide services; they offer connections and a shared sense of community. Losing these places would make life even more difficult for some of Perth Amboy's more vulnerable residents.

To address these issues:

a. *Develop policies and programs to make it more likely that new jobs go to Perth Amboy residents.* Organizations like the Jewish Renaissance Foundation, the Business Improvement District, the Perth Amboy Public Schools and others should work on 'matchmaking' and training programs to make it easier for Perth Amboy residents to get new jobs in arts and cultural sectors.

b. *Develop programs to help businesses and residents in the cultural district to find new spaces if rents become too high.* There should be a current list of available apartment rentals and commercial spaces to make it easier for residents and business owners to stay in the community. The prices of housing rents and commercial leases in and around the Gateway neighborhood should be monitored to determine if there should be other strategies in the future.

c. *Encourage investment in arts and cultural throughout the City where feasible.* While the focus of this plan is on the section of Perth Amboy south of Fayette Street, arts and cultural activities should be present throughout the city. High Street and New Brunswick Avenue provide opportunities for growing the creative and cultural economy outside of the downtown business district. Neighborhood parks can be locations for performances and blank walls or large open spaces could be locations for public art.

3. Encourage residents to express their creativity and culture

The best way to develop great art and ideas is to create an environment that values and welcomes a different types of creativity. City officials took a significant step in 2014 by revising a local law to allow outdoor murals. But there are still some challenges for creative residents.

a. *Encourage and make it easier for local musicians, artists, and performers to exhibit and perform in the outdoor spaces along the waterfront.* Current ordinances – specifically Chapter 317 (Peddling and Soliciting) and 343 (Public Entertainment and Special Permits) can make it difficult for artists and performers to showcase their work. An artist who wants to sell original artwork on the street would have to pay $500 for a license, have insurance, go through an extensive background check including character references, and would only be allowed to operate 180 days. And that artist would not be allowed to set up a location on Smith Street, where visitors might expect to find artists. A musician who wants to play guitar in a park would have to pay $100, have insurance, and provide an extensive agenda of his or her work two weeks before going out to play. While the law is designed to protect consumers from corrupt vendors and prevent unwanted congestion in certain public areas, there should be exceptions for artists exhibiting their own work and those who do not charge audiences for their performances in designated locations.

b. *Work with the Business Improvement District to showcase artists' work in vacant storefronts.* Like all other businesspeople, artists need good visibility and access to consumers. Having artwork fill vacant storefronts is good for commercial areas; vacant storefronts have a negative connotation for shoppers. Active storefronts are attractive and engaging. Rules and procedures should be developed between the Business Improvement District and the Arts Council for this program.

4. Identify and promote existing arts and cultural opportunities

Places are dynamic. New development and vacancies will create new opportunities. As more people join Perth Amboy's arts community, they might see unrealized potential in some spaces. Checking Perth Amboy's landscape on a regular basis will help the Arts Council stay current. Similarly, the Arts Council and City should review and update their promotional efforts - as well as what audiences they want to reach - at least once a year.

Perth Amboy has a wealth of artistic and cultural organizations - and opportunities for more - as the maps of existing creative activities (Figure 2) and underutilized sites (Figure 3) shows. The activities inventory shows the presence of more than 60 types of organizations in the creative economy, including museums, music stores, fine dining restaurants, flower or gift stores, architecture offices and dance schools. The map of opportunity sites shows vacant or semi-vacant buildings that could be used for such activities as galleries, artist live/work spaces or performing arts venues. It also shows large open spaces that would be good locations for large public art, outdoor art exhibits or performances.

a. *Continue mapping existing and potential opportunities.* The analysis of existing creative activities (shown in Figure 2) and sites for arts and cultural activities (see Figure 3) were conducted in 2014. The City's Office of Recreation should conduct annual updates to these maps with assistance from the Office of Economic and Community Developments planning division and the Arts Council. These will help cultural professional, organizational and business leaders and developers who want to locate or expand in Perth Amboy.

b. *Create programming and promotional materials that highlight these opportunities.* A common calendar for arts and cultural activities would significantly help promote Perth Amboy to a much broader audience. It would also help organizations and artists collaborate to achieve greater impact and reduce unnecessary competition. City agencies and Perth Amboy organizations have been successful at promoting individual events. Because many of these are isolated 'one-offs', visitors might not have reasons to explore or return to Perth Amboy. The Arts Council should work with event organizers to schedule programming that encourages participants to travel through commercial and waterfront areas and stay longer in the City.

c. *Create events and tours that highlight and promote existing and potential opportunities.* Perth Amboy could support several types of tours – for those who enjoy colonial or industrial history, architecture, international foods, Latino and immigrant cultures, or natural beauty. These tours can also create jobs, business and teaching opportunities for residents. If Perth Amboy residents are organizing and leading tours, they are more likely to be authentic and respectful.

The Chicago neighborhood of Pilsen is a lot like Perth Amboy. It is a majority Latino community with an extensive immigrant history, a large working-class population, a growing community of artists – and a reputation among some for being unsafe. In the 1990s, Chicago's cultural affairs agency began developing bus tours and other group visits to the area. Key to this was training and working with Pilsen residents to lead the tours. Organizers expected most of the tourists to be from out of town. Some were, but many of them were from the Chicago area. The tours offered a 'safer' way for them to learn more about a community that they might not otherwise visit. Today, there are many types of tours of Pilsen; one of the biggest challenges the community faces today is gentrification.

Photo for illustration purposes only

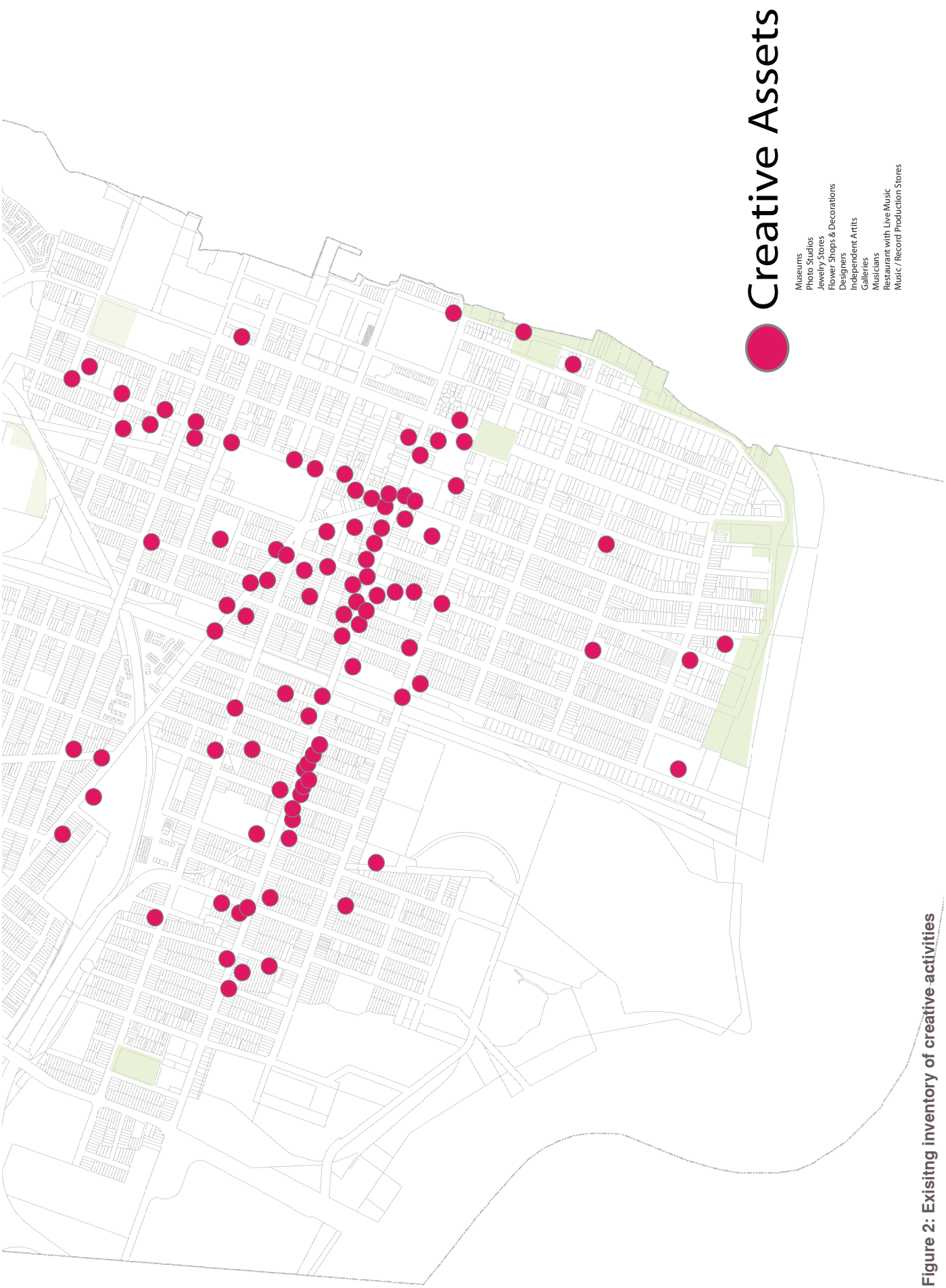


Figure 2: Exisitng inventory of creative activities

Appendix B-5

Potential Arts & Cultural Uses

Figure 3: Opportunies for creative activities
For more information information on opportunity sites, please see the Appendix.

CREATE

STRATEGIES: CREATE

1. Develop a branding and marketing strategy for the City that highlights arts and culture

Perth Amboy is in one of the most competitive areas of the United States for arts and culture. There are several communities within 25 minutes of the City that compete regionally for arts and culture: New Brunswick, Rahway, Woodbridge and Metuchen. Carteret is developing an arts district around an old theater, and Woodbridge is investing resources into building artists' communities and performance spaces near its downtown and Avenel train stations. Arts councils and organizations in other nearby communities, such as Keyport, are building their markets in the region.

Perth Amboy's marketing and branding strategy should focus on attracting visitors who would want a different experience than they can find in other communities: encouraging regional visitors and residents in Union, Middlesex and Monmouth counties to add Perth Amboy to their list when they travel in the area and encouraging residents to see and do more in Perth Amboy. This campaign could highlight Perth Amboy's complexity, but should promote key concepts in the minds of audiences: for example: Fun. Safe. Surprising. Inspiring.

The strategy should be completed within a year and the marketing should include multiple platforms: websites, apps, flyers, kiosk, and word of mouth. The messages and media do not have to be fancy, but they should be consistent.

2. Increase revenues, jobs and business opportunities by attracting more visitors to Perth Amboy

Make art visible in more locations more often during the year. Events help, but having permanent spaces and locations for art encourages people to travel more and return more often. Fitting the arts into areas dense with residents, workers and local shoppers is not difficult. For example, the City can:

a. *Put fun or artistic street furniture, such as bike racks, in the cultural district*
b. *Host arts festivals along the waterfront, parks and other large open spaces.*

3. Identify and develop opportunities for activities and public art

Murals and other forms of public art can do many things for a community: create pathways to ease navigation, build pride and a sense of belonging by reflecting the interests of area residents, and make an area more attractive and fun. When residents, local business people and workers are involved in making public art, they are more likely to support and protect it. To this end, the City should:

a. *Create a set of murals and other forms of public art throughout the area.*
b. *Create an arts walk along the waterfront, from Smith and Convery to the waterfront.*

4. Preserve and promote the diverse heritages and history of the City

Perth Amboy should promote the City's Latino communities and heritages, as well as the many other ethnic groups. Perth Amboy is one of only a handful of majority Latino communities, and this makes it distinctly different from other communities. (New Brunswick is actually a majority-Latino city, but there is little presence of Latino culture in the tourist areas of the city.) However, focusing too much on any one culture can cause resentment among members of other cultures, and could also discourage some visitors who are either uninterested in Latino culture, or wonder if they would feel welcome in the City. Ultimately, a key test of a city's fairness and equity is how it treats people who are not from majority or powerful groups.

To help promote an inclusive environment:

a. *Host a series of outdoor activities in the cultural district and throughout the city.* Some, like the Dominican, Ukrainian or Puerto Rican festivals, might focus on specific cultures. Others could be multicultural.
b. *Create an annual arts and musical festival that showcases a diverse array of backgrounds and expression in the City*. This would also help showcase the creativity within Perth Amboy.

5. Support and expand arts education and appreciation for school-aged children

Studies show that children who get involved in the arts are more likely to do better in life. Through the arts, children can develop better motor and language skills and become better at making decisions. Children involved in the arts tend to be more likely to graduate and to be involved with their communities. In Perth Amboy, where the local high school's graduation rate was less than 59% in 2014, increasing access to the arts can have a major impact on quality of life throughout the community.

To build stronger connections between youth and art:

a. *Create a youth enrichment program with the Rutgers University Mason Gross School of Arts and the Zimmerli Museum to expose children to the arts.*
b. *Establish an internship program for high school students to work in studios, galleries, museums, etc.*
c. *Partner with local organizations to bring art programming to the general public.*
d. *Encourage activities, like a recent mural project, that challenge young people to be creative and display their work publicly.*

Photo courtesy: Perth Amboy Arts Council

CONNECT

STRATEGIES: CONNECT

1. Organize and establish leadership for the arts community

Every community has creative people, interesting cultural elements and art. The communities that are most successful in creative placemaking have leaders who collaborate around shared visions, goals and values. To further this in the City:

a. *Build the Perth Amboy Arts Council as a hub and guiding force for creative placemaking in the City.* Becoming a key point of contact for anyone interested in arts and culture in Perth Amboy will help Council members provide better guidance to leaders in the City and to create more connections and opportunities. The Arts Council will also be in the best position to monitor changes in Perth Amboy's cultural environment and help address new issues as they arise.

b. *Develop a creative placemaking team among City departments and Perth Amboy organizations* to pursue funding and development opportunities with representatives from groups like the Business Improvement District, the Jewish Renaissance Foundation, the local public library and schools. Perth Amboy is in a great position to attract a wide variety of new investment and resources – from new forms of art to new development. Because other communities in the area and elsewhere in New Jersey are also trying to attract these resources, the City should have a team of city staff who can respond to questions and requests quickly. This will show investors and others that the City is committed to working with them and has the capacity to do so.

2. Build support for and awareness of the Creative Perth Amboy plan

Most people don't read plans. And even if they do, they often get busy or distracted. Promoting a plan such as this is more than just making it available; it involves ongoing conversations with key audiences. The Arts Council should take the lead in sharing the plan with artists, residents, businesspeople, and workers in the City, as well as anyone they want to attract to the City. The Arts Council and City should give others the opportunity to add to the plan during regular reexaminations for amendments – if they are willing to help support their own ideas.

a. *Help the community and arts world as a whole understand the vision and the importance of its implementation.* Build a buzz in the New Jersey arts world around Perth Amboy. Promote the City and this plan at arts gatherings and conferences; hold convenings in the City to encourage more people to visit Perth Amboy; invite developers who have worked in artistically-rich areas to see the City and consider investing in Perth Amboy.

b. *Identify and support leaders who are willing to carry out the actions of the plan.* A small group of people won't be able to reach and influence everyone. There are going to be audiences who won't respond to an 'arts' person, but would be influenced by others. Arts Council members should identify and build the capacity of these influencers to promote the plan.

c. *Work with local groups, the City and community members to incorporate the goals of the plan into planned and future work in the City.* The Planning Board could add this plan to the City's Master Plan under 40:55D-28(11) of the New Jersey Municipal Land Use Law. The Council should work with other City entities and organizations to incorporate the plan into their work (and update the plan to better suit the needs of partnering organizations).

3. Connect investment in the City by developers, businesspeople, funders and others who want to support the arts and cultural movement

One of the most important roles of both the Arts Council and City officials is to help build on the work that creative people and cultural organizations do.

a. *Create a trolley line that travels through the cultural, historic and waterfront districts.* A trolley can be a fun and safe way for visitors to explore the downtown and waterfront districts. While there needs to be more analysis of the best trolley route, the City should explore at minimum a route that travels from Smith Street to and along the Waterfront, then back through Second Street. This would allow visitors to get to the main commercial district, waterfront activities and Sadowski Park (which hosts several festivals) without disrupting most of the quieter neighborhood streets in the area.

b. *Create opportunities to engage Perth Amboy residents, workers, business owners and others to help enhance this plan and bring the ideas to life.* People tend to nurture what they help create. By involving people in the development and implementation of this plan, you secure its future.

4. Enhance and integrate the work of earlier planning efforts, including the Gateway Neighborhood Collaborative, the Perth Amboy Bay City Transit District Strategy and the City's Master Plan

The Creative Team was imaginative, but didn't start from a blank canvas. Team members responded to the recommendations of earlier plans, several of which encouraged growing arts and cultural activities in the Smith Street area. Connecting new ideas to existing plans - as long as those plans are still relevant - shows that leaders in Perth Amboy are consistent and share similar paths. This helps attract good investment and helps leaders make difficult choices.

a. *Support the reuse of the New Brunswick Avenue and Smith Street corridor for public space that can be used by artists for performance or market space*

b. *Support the creation of sidewalk cafés throughout the arts district to encourage visitors and residents to spend time in the district and downtown*

Photo courtesy: Perth Amboy Arts Council

BUILD

STRATEGIES: BUILD

1. Include a Visitor's Center in the new redevelopment project at the corner of Smith Street and Convery Boulevard

The intersection of Smith Street and Convery Boulevard is a visible entrance for anyone entering Perth Amboy from the Turnpike, Parkway, Route 9 or Route 35. The area currently has a number of highway-oriented uses (such as a car wash and a 7-Eleven store). The more walkable and attractive areas, as well as the waterfront, are east and south and not visible from the corner. A visitor's center at this gateway would help attract more visitors to downtown.

2. Attract new residents interested in arts and culture

Cities often encounter a chicken-and-egg situation in attracting art patrons. Artists and arts organizations need more patrons to succeed and grow; patrons often want to know that they will find a lot of art before investing much time in a place. The City could help attract more residents interested in arts and culture by incentivizing developers to provide units with more private and shared spaces for creativity and to support the growth of arts and cultural activities in the City. For example, Morristown recently enacted a 1 Percent for Art Program in a redevelopment area. Developers in this area must contribute a share of their project costs (up to $100,000) to support public art. The City should also consider providing tax abatements or other incentives to cultural professionals who move to or stay in Perth Amboy and engage in activities that support quality of life in communities. For example, in Paducah, Kentucky, artists in a downtown neighborhood were given property tax abatements and other incentives to repair blighted or abandoned housing.

3. Establish at least one arts and cultural anchor in the heart of the downtown

A central place (or several) for arts and cultural activities can give visitors and residents a starting point for their exploration. These places can also serve as hubs for artists and others to build connections and community. With the redevelopment of the train station and the Smith Street corridor, there are several opportunities to create arts and culture anchors in the downtown. To this end:

a. *Move the city's art gallery to the train station.* The current art gallery is across the street from an industrial facility and housed at Read Street near Convery Boulevard. This seems far away from the energy of Smith Street. Moving the gallery to the vacant side of the existing train station will make it one of the first arts venues that train riders see, and make it easier to serve Perth Amboy residents. Additionally, several bus lines run along Smith Street with stops at the train station.

b. *Create a venue in or near the proposed transit village for performance space.* Create a venue in an existing building – such as the old Canadian Furniture building – rather than building from scratch. With at least five large performing arts theaters within 30 minutes of travel, and a 500-seat theater at the McGinnis School, it would be expensive and risky for Perth Amboy to create and sustain a new performing arts center. But a smaller, flexible space, such as for dance, experimental theater, music and cultural productions, could enhance the arts environment in the area.

4. Address the needs of artists for living and production

A key element of growing a local arts environment is supporting local artists. Making a reasonable living as a working artist is challenging. It can be even harder when there are too few opportunities to show work and workspaces are expensive. Artists interviewed by the Center for Latino Arts and Culture for this planning initiative have said that they would also benefit from marketing and professional development support.

To help artists:

a. *Explore making the ground floor of an existing building along Smith Street into a place to hear music or see shows.*

b. *Create performance spaces around the cultural district to make it easier to hold regular art events.*

c. *Provide opportunities for artists to learn business and marketing skills.*

The city has a wide variety of commercial spaces and buildings that date to its manufacturing heritage, that have the potential for redevelopment as arts/creatives locations. Storefronts that are gallery size are available in the business district, while larger commercial buildings with high ceilings lend themselves to studios, dance rehearsal spaces, theater and music performance spaces. Many are within a several block walk from the historic train station (currently scheduled for a full upgrade) which, itself, could have as many as 4 performance spaces.

5. Develop land use regulations that encourage and support artists and makers

Creativity may be everywhere in a community, but creative activities tend to happen where creative people feel welcomed and valued. Local governments can help promote a healthier climate for creativity by encouraging art in open spaces and changing regulations that make it more difficult for creative professionals to work or express themselves.

a. *Along with changing the peddlers' license and performance regulations, conduct a study to formally establish a cultural district in downtown Perth Amboy.* The study can analyze in greater detail sites along and around Smith Street to grow the arts, as well as how best to integrate the arts into the commercial corridor and redevelopment of the area.

Photo courtesy: Perth Amboy Arts Council

PRIORITIES

PERTH AMBOY CREATIVE PLACEMAKING STRATEGIES BY PRIORITY

This set of priorities is designed to help Perth Amboy become a regional cultural center and arts destination more quickly and cost effectively. In the short term – by the end of 2016-- City officials and local leaders should focus on building wide-spread and real support for the plan and sending clear signals to cultural professionals and cultural patrons that Perth Amboy welcomes them. Stewards of this plan should encourage Perth Amboy residents, businesspeople and property owners to support and help make the strategies a reality to add to the plan if they are willing to help implement their own ideas. People tend to nurture what they create.

Over the next two to seven years, the City should focus on making physical improvements that show that Perth Amboy is committed to revitalizing through arts and culture over the long term.

As the cultural environment in the Gateway neighborhoods and waterfront gets more established and sustainable, the City should focus on larger physical projects (such as a waterfront artway) and creative placemaking north of Fayette Street.

Short term (within the next year)

- Build the Perth Amboy Arts Council as a hub and guiding force for creative placemaking in the City.
- Develop a creative placemaking team among City departments and Perth Amboy organizations
- Help the community and arts world as a whole understand the vision and the importance of its implementation
- Identify and support leaders who are willing to carry out the actions of the plan.
- Work with local groups, the City and community members to incorporate the goals of the plan into planned and future work in the City.
- Formally establish a cultural district along Smith Street.
- Begin developing policies and programs to make it more likely that new jobs go to Perth Amboy residents.
- Encourage and make it easier for local musicians, artists and performers to exhibit and perform in the outdoor spaces along the waterfront.
- Work with the Business Improvement District to showcase artists' work in vacant storefronts.
- Continue mapping existing and potential opportunity sites
- Create programming and promotional materials that highlight these opportunities
- Develop a branding and marketing strategy for the City that highlights arts and culture.
- Host arts festivals along the waterfront and in parks and other large open spaces.
- Create a set of murals and other forms of public art throughout the area.
- Host a series of outdoor activities in the cultural district and throughout the city
- Partner with local organizations to bring more art programming to the general public
- Encourage activities, like a recent mural project, that challenge young people to be

creative and display their work publicly.
- Create opportunities to engage Perth Amboy residents, workers, business owners and others to help enhance the plan and bring the ideas to life.
- Plan for physical improvements in the medium and long term.
- Support the creation of sidewalk cafes throughout the cultural district to encourage visitors and residents to spend more time in the district and downtown.
- Explore making the ground floor of an existing building along Smith Street into a place to hear music or see shows.
- Change regulations to make it easier to have outdoor performances and for artists to sell their original work in outdoor spaces.

Medium term (in the next two to seven years)

- Create an allee of flowering trees along Smith Street and High Street.
- Install a gateway arch or other large landmark at Smith and Herbert Streets.
- Implement policies and programs related to jobs for local residents.
- Develop programs to help businesses and residents in the cultural district to find new spaces if rents become too high.
- Encourage investment in arts and culture throughout the City where feasible.
- Put fun or artistic street furniture, such as bike racks, in the cultural district.
- Create an annual arts and musical festival that showcases a diverse array of backgrounds and expression in the City.
- Create a youth enrichment program with Rutgers University to expose more children to art
- Establish an internship program for high school students to work in studios, galleries, etc.
- Create events and tours that highlight and promote existing and potential opportunities.
- Support the reuse of the New Brunswick and Smith Street corridors for public space that can be used by artists for performance or market space
- Include a visitor's center in the new redevelopment project at the corner of Smith Street and Convery Boulevard.
- Attract new residents interested in arts and culture.
- Establish at least one arts and cultural anchor in the heart of downtown.
- Create a venue in or near the proposed transit village for performance space.
- Create performance spaces around the cultural district to make it easier to hold regular art events.
- Provide opportunities for artists to learn business and marketing skills.

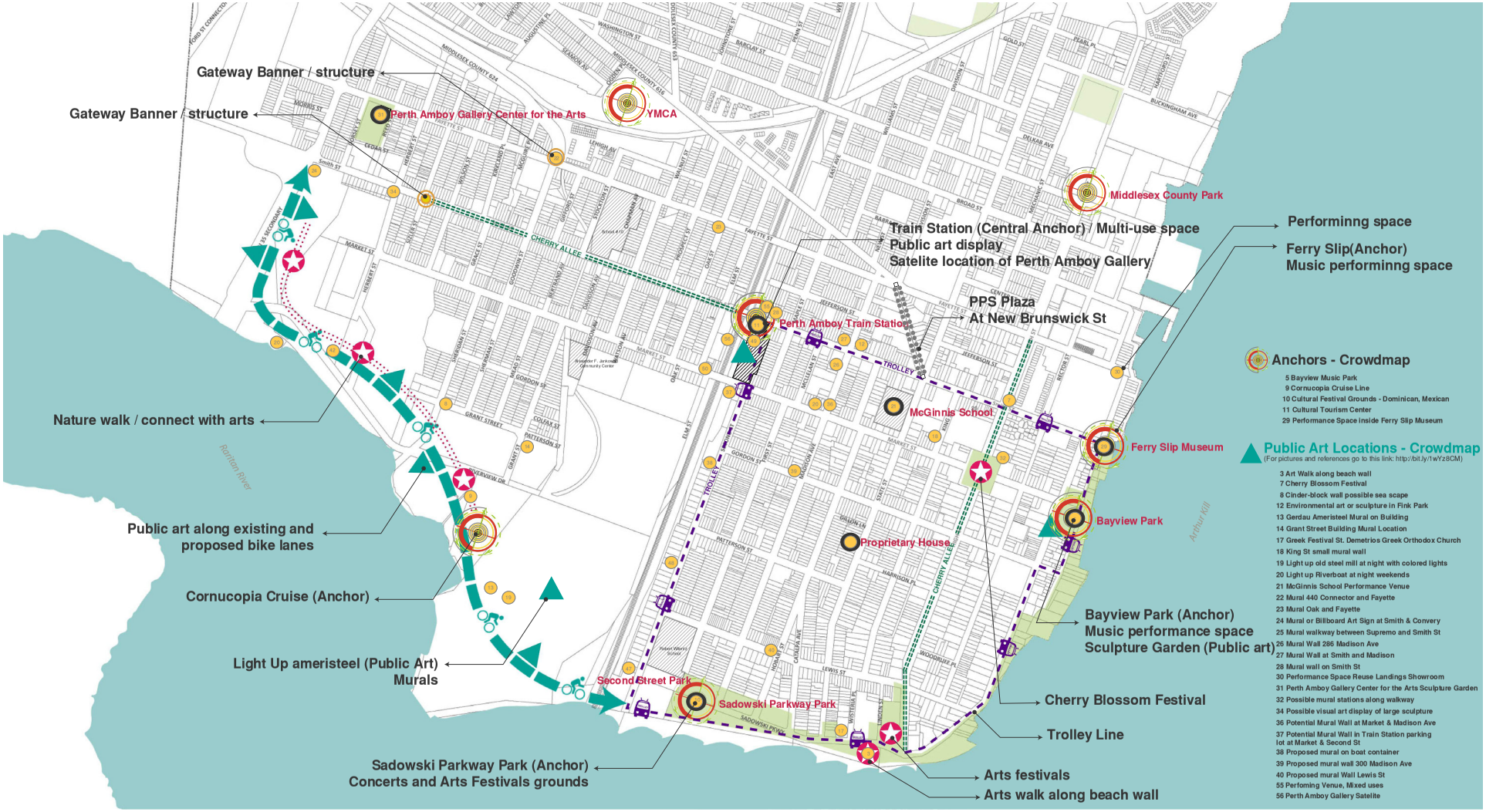
Long term

- Create an arts walk along the waterfront.
- Move the Perth Amboy Arts Gallery to a new location in the train station building.
- Create a trolley line that travels through the cultural, historic and waterfront districts.
- Work with Ameristeel to allow its facilities to be lighted at night, and become a new cultural icon for Perth Amboy.

Perth Amboy has great potential to become a major center for diverse cultures and a destination for arts. It has the infrastructure, space, and of course, a variety of cultures and talented artists. Now that residents, organizational leaders and city officials have come together to put together this plan and create an Arts Council, the City has the key ingredient for success – diverse leaders who share a vision.

Plans focus on the future, but no one can predict it. Every year, the stewards of this plan and City officials, along with the public, should review this plan and update it. Keep doing what works; change what doesn't. A plan shouldn't be like a still photograph. It should be like a good movie, which changes over time but stays true to the story.

Perth Amboy Creative Placemaking Strategies



Anchors

Gateway

Arts related activities

Public Art locations

Opportunities for outdoor Arts (Crowdmap)

Existing Cultural venues

Produced by The National Consortium for Creative Placemaking for the City of Perth Amboy Gateway Neighborhood Creative Placemaking Plan. November 2014

NOVEMBER 2015