

TV reality show "Big Brother 10" returns to its roots, sealing 13 strangers into a makeshift house together. ALT, E1



UNSTOPPABLE Robbinsville advances to state championships SPORTS, C1

Taxpayer costs out of control, Guhl says

Ex-administrator: Overhaul system

BY RYAN TRACY STAFF WRITER

After three decades spent building a reputation for efficiency in local government, Bill Guhl has trouble painting a rosy financial picture for communities in Mercer County and the rest of New Jersey.

Guhl, 61, the veteran administrator who ended a six-month stint in Hamilton last month, promised he's retiring for good, but not without offering a doom-and-gloom forecast for taxpayers and public servants in the Garden State.

Though union leaders took issue with his perspective, Guhl warned that without drastic action to slow the escalating cost of public employees, the government services residents expect and the jobs that provide them could be in real danger.

The former administrator in Trenton, Mercer County and Lawrence offered up Hamilton to illustrate a problem he believes will begin to tip the scales of government budgets statewide.

The "private sector is outstripping the public sector in terms of the inexpensive cost of labor," Guhl said, creating a situation where outsourcing, privatizing or cutting public services will be the only way to control tax bills.

"There was a time at the beginning of my public career that a public employee's expectation was that they would not get good pay, that they would have very good benefits and they would have job security," Guhl said.

"Well, that's not the case anymore. ... They're not low earners anymore," Guhl said.

The climbing costs will "force municipalities, counties (and) governments in New Jersey to do things radically different. We're not talking about working the margins. ... The system needs a complete overhaul. It cannot be sustained in the long term," Guhl said.

In Hamilton, for example, Guhl said about 150 of the 182 sworn police officers made more than \$100,000 in 2007, including salary and overtime wages, but not benefits, listed on the employees' W-2 forms.

"Five-sixths of the police department last year earned more money than the current mayor's salary," Guhl said, referring to John Bencivengo's \$98,676 [See GUHL, Page A7]

"This is a live and breathing document that will guide us as we move forward with opportunities."

SASA OLESSI MONTAÑO, CITY DIRECTOR OF HOUSING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ON TRENTON'S MASTER PLAN



MICHAEL MANCUSO/THE TIMES

City officials are working to change the Trenton skyline. A city master plan calls for a mix of new houses, offices, shops and parking garages, as well as a ribbon of parks that would curl through the downtown.

Plan envisions a bustling capital

BY ANDREW KITCHENMAN STAFF WRITER

TRENTON — State Street bustles with newly opened restaurants and shops, residents stroll along the Delaware River and state workers walk to work from attractive new townhouses.

These are scenes that haven't been common in downtown Trenton for decades, but they're envisioned by the crafters of a master plan that officials hope will guide a new wave of development in the city.

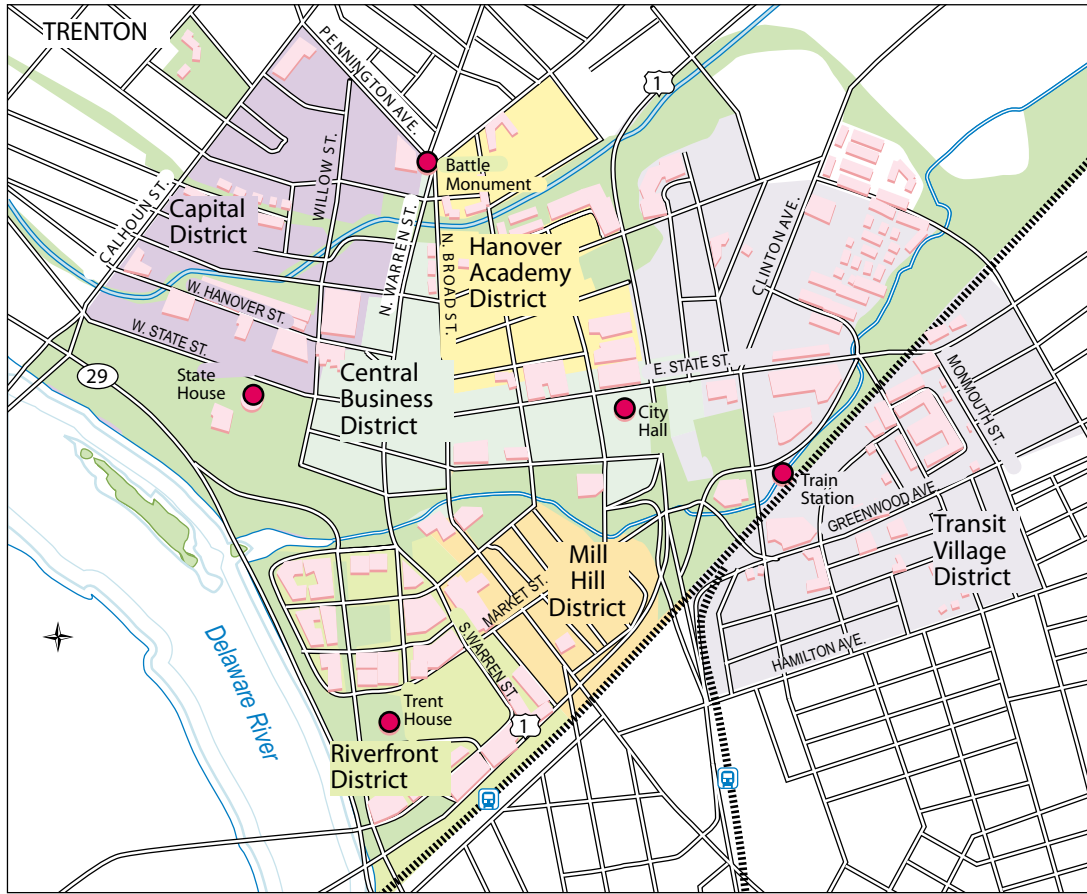
In the era after World War II, historic buildings were demolished and replaced with parking lots, downtown shops closed and Stacy Park was eviscerated by Route 29. The master plan's goal is "undoing the mistakes of 40 years ago," Mayor Douglas H. Palmer said.

Striking features of the plan include a mix of new houses, offices, shops and parking garages in nearly all of the six areas studied, as well as a ribbon of parks that would curl through the downtown.

Palmer has emphasized that the plan "couldn't happen at a better time," thanks to Gov. Jon Corzine's focus on advancing plans for Route 29 and a new park by the river. Escalating gasoline prices are encouraging those who work in Trenton to live in the city, Palmer said.

"It's important that private developers know exactly that there is a real plan that is thought out," Palmer said.

The plan covers an area stretching from Calhoun Street to the portion of Hamilton Avenue closest to the Trenton Train Station. It incorporates state plans to turn Route 29 into a boulevard [See PLAN, Page A6]



New Blueprint For The Capital City Trenton is putting together a master plan that seeks to organize downtown development around districts. Here are the highlights:

- Capital District - New town houses along West Hanover and Belvidere streets. New shops and garage on North Willow Street.
Mill Hill District - Possible retail and garage near Artworks off Stockton Street. Improvements to Mill Hill Park.
Central Business District - New uses for Commonwealth and former Bell Telephone buildings. New shops.
Hanover Academy District - A new park behind Mercer County Community College Kerney Campus. Offices behind fire headquarters.
Riverfront District - A new neighborhood of homes, shops and offices along reconfigured Route 29.
Transit Village - Up to three office towers, new town houses along Wall Street, Chestnut Avenue and at the former Miller Homes.
Greenways - A series of parks and trails that would link the Delaware River, Assunpink Creek and the D & R Canal.
Opportunity sites - The location of potential future houses, offices, shops and parking garages.

For more info, visit trentonnj.org, click on Departments, then Housing & Economic Development.

Costly repeat patients — 'super users' — are swamping the ER

BY CAROL ANN CAMPBELL NEWHOUSE NEWS SERVICE

Bean-thin and sallow, George tugged on a cigarette in the blistering parking lot of a Camden men's shelter. Standing on the pavement, his foot on a picnic bench, he recalled how he took his first drink at 13.

Cigarettes followed. "I wish I could take it all back," he said. The hard living shows in the lines of George's face — and in his medical history. When he gets sick, which is often, the 55-year-old has no place to go except one of

the city's emergency rooms. George is a "super user," a new name coined to describe people who turn to the ER with astonishing frequency and at an astonishing cost to a health system under siege on all fronts.

George said he has been admitted to a Camden emergency room 30, maybe even 40, times in the past year alone; sometimes with crushing chest pains, other times from shortness of breath, or surging blood pressure. Mostly, he said, it's the pain from cirrhosis of his liver that sends him there.

"I don't like going to the hospital," said George, who allowed himself to be photographed but asked his last name not be published. "But sometimes I have no choice. I get pain I would not wish on an enemy."

Researchers studying the crisis of America's overcrowded emergency rooms are beginning to focus on this largely undocumented phenomenon, the super users who turn to hospital emergency rooms dozens, even hundreds, of times.

Researchers say a seemingly intractable problem could be solved, in large part, by focusing on just the top 1 percent of emergency room users, who in Camden alone cost \$46 million over five years.

A small city and the nation's poorest, Camden is shaping up as a laboratory to study ways to fix this costly national problem. The figure behind the effort is Jeffrey Brenner, a family doctor motivated to reduce costs, but also to improve health care for some of the city's most difficult to treat patients.

"No one benefits when people overuse [See SUPER USERS, Page A8]

Free-wheeling adventure

Thirty-two rookies are among the cyclists who are taking on the 500-mile Ride for Runaways, which kicks off today. Page A3

Korea tensions mount

A defiant North Korea blamed South Korea for the shooting death of a South Korean tourist in the communist nation and refused to cooperate in an investigation. Page B1

Ex-Yankee Murcer dies

Bobby Murcer, a center fielder on the Yankee teams of the late 1960s and broadcaster, yesterday in his hometown of Oklahoma City after a 19-month fight with brain cancer. He was 62 years old. Page C1



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