



FY2024 DISTRICT IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

ARTS DISTRICT IN DOWNTOWN BLACKWOOD GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP, CAMDEN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

Submitted to the

NJ DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION PROGRAM

Submitted By:

TRIAD ASSOCIATES

January 2024





IMPLEMENTATION SUMMARY FOR YEARS I & II

Gloucester Township has a rich history dating back to the late 15th century. Today, Downtown Blackwood celebrates its heritage through various cultural events and historical exploration. Unfortunately, the transition to modern times has presented its own set of challenges, as highlighted by a public survey in 2021. The survey revealed critical issues: a lack of diverse dining options, limited retail variety, high vacancy rates in local properties, and insufficient public parking. Recognizing these concerns, the township has embarked on a transformative journey over the past two years, aiming to significantly improve the downtown experience.

RESIDENTIAL FAÇADE REHABILITATION GRANTS

Residential façade grants play a vital role in supporting low-income communities by facilitating essential home repairs and maintenance. In the past two years, this initiative has seen substantial success, with fourteen homeowners being awarded façade renovation grants, totaling \$50,000. The grants have enabled a range of exterior property enhancements, covering aspects such as roofing, gutters, siding, masonry, and the installation of new windows and doors. The overwhelmingly positive reception of this program within the community has led to the decision to allocate additional NPP funds to expand this beneficial initiative in the coming year.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT CATALYST PROJECT

Commercial facades are integral to economic growth, playing a significant role in enhancing the appeal of businesses, increasing property values, and reinforcing brand identity. While attracting customers and investors is important, overcrowded facades can lead to visual clutter and safety concerns.

Initially, the plan for this project was to use NPP funds to provide façade renovation grants of \$5,000 to six businesses, totaling \$30,000. However, after a thorough evaluation of the NPP district's needs, the project's direction underwent a strategic shift. The focus was reoriented towards a cohesive façade redesign of the businesses located at 2-20 North Blackhorse Pike (BHP). Consequentially, the services of Cindy Williams' Designing Firm were retained. Her objective was to revitalize the block's street-facing side to create a more inviting aesthetic. Property and business owners at 2-20 N BHP had the opportunity to review two design presentations in December and consult with Cindy Williams on specific enhancements for their properties.

Building on the success of the first phase, the project's second phase, executed last year, centered on installing new, custom-designed awnings to further define each business's unique identity and improve the overall appearance of their building facades.

PARKING

To address the issue of insufficient parking, a significant portion of the Gloucester Township Library parking lot was transformed into a public parking space, effectively increasing the availability of parking for the community. Additionally, to further enhance parking accessibility, new signage was installed at the Main Stage Center for the Arts' parking lot, clearly indicating its availability for public use. This effort was bolstered by the introduction and adoption of Ordinance No. 0-22-08. Introduced on July 11 and adopted on July 27, 2022, this ordinance specifically targeted the parking challenges in the township. These measures collectively represent a focused approach by Gloucester Township to alleviate parking constraints, thereby improving convenience for residents and visitors alike and contributing to the overall functionality and accessibility of the community.

WAYFINDING & STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

To enhance the district's marketing and aesthetic appeal, the NPP purchased blade signage for businesses. Due to the widespread success of this program, the initiative was extended into the second year, with further investment planned for the third year.

"WE ARE SO GRATEFUL TO HAVE BEEN GRANTED A NEW BLADE SIGN BY THE GT NPP! WE ARE BEYOND THANKFUL FOR THE REVITALIZATION EFFORTS BEING MADE BY GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP AND THE NPP. AS A LOCAL BUSINESS OWNER AND RESIDENT, I AM HONORED TO BE AN ACTIVE MEMBER OF THIS WONDERFUL COMMITTEE DEDICATED TO REVITALIZING OUR DOWNTOWN DISTRICT. TO US, THIS SIGN IS SYMBOLIC OF A SHIFT HAPPENING IN THE GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP ARTS DISTRICT. WE ARE THRILLED TO SEE THE EFFORTS MADE SO FAR AND ARE EXCITED FOR MORE TO COME!"

KELLIE D'ASCENZO, OWNER OF MYSTIC GINGER.



Moreover, the NPP District is undergoing various streetscape design improvements in alignment with the Blackwood West Redevelopment Plan. For example, in June, volunteers from the Gloucester Township Neighborhood Preservation Program, alongside local community members, painted the 93-year-old fence of the First Presbyterian Church's cemetery. This community effort was supported by the Department of Public Works, which prepared the site by power washing the retaining wall and sidewalks surrounding the cemetery. These collective efforts represent a comprehensive approach to enhancing the functionality, aesthetic appeal, and cohesiveness of Gloucester Township's community spaces.

MARKETING & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

In 2022, funds were used for the creation of a new website for the NPP Program in Downtown Blackwood. This online platform serves as a central hub for the district, showcasing its diverse array of shops, services, and dining options. It also provides access to valuable resources such as community survey results, market insights, and details of the NPP Implementation plan. This website has quickly become an indispensable tool for both residents and potential visitors, offering a comprehensive view of what the district has to offer.

Further advancing its digital presence, Downtown Blackwood saw the installation of a state-of-the-art digital information sign. This project, funded by the NPP, is more than just a communication tool; it also contributes to the aesthetic enhancement of the area.

In tandem with these marketing efforts, the district has been diligently supporting its small businesses through the SCORE program. This mentorship program educates business owners on things like accounting, marketing, and operations, and is customized for each participating business. The NPP program offered grants of up to \$1,000 per business to implement strategies advised by SCORE mentors. In a strategic effort to bolster the economic resilience and growth of the district's small businesses.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PUBLIC SPACES

HARWAN PARK REVITALIZATION PROJECT

Over the past two years, the NPP District has focused on enhancing community engagement and public spaces, with a particular emphasis on refurbishing Harwan Park, a popular venue for community events. The renovation began with a first phase that prioritized public safety, involving the removal of large trees, new lighting installations, landscaping, painting the gazebo, and upgrading surveillance systems. The second phase of improvements included removing tree stumps and roots, adding permanent seating, repairing the sprinkler system, seeding, and expanding the lawn area. A significant addition to Harwan Park was the relocation and unveiling of the Veterans Memorial, which had been previously located at the First Presbyterian Church Cemetery. This new setting in the park offers a respectful and comfortable space for individuals to honor fallen heroes.

"TODAY, WE DEDICATE THIS FLAGPOLE THAT WILL PROUDLY CARRY THE COLORS OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. THE COLORS THAT REPRESENT FREEDOM FOR SO MANY OF US AND HOPE FOR SO MANY OTHERS. COLORS THAT REPRESENT OUR DEMOCRATIC WAY OF LIFE AND COLORS THAT HAVE BEEN BROUGHT INTO BATTLE BY SO MANY SO THAT WE CAN ASSEMBLE HERE THIS MORNING PEACEFULLY. LET THIS FLAGPOLE STAND FOR AGES AND AGES TO COME, AND LET THE COLORS OF OUR NATION FLY FREE FOR AGES AND AGES TO COME. ALSO, LET THIS FLAGPOLE AND THE COLORS IT CARRIES REMIND EVERYONE WHO PASSES BY HOW FORTUNATE WE ALL ARE TO BE AMERICANS. I THANK ALL OF OUR VETERANS WHO ARE HERE TODAY FOR THEIR SERVICE AND SACRIFICE. I ALSO WANT TO THANK OUR DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS FOR THE GREAT WORK THAT THEY DID RENOVATING THIS PARK,"

MAYOR DAVID R. MAYER



GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP FARMERS MARKET

Community events are integral to the enrichment of communities, as they play a crucial role in fostering social connections, boosting local economies, celebrating cultural diversity, and enhancing health and well-being. Additionally, these events drive civic engagement, provide educational experiences, attract tourists, and breathe new life into public spaces. Over the past few years, the NPP has allocated funds for community events at the Gloucester Township Farmers Market for music and craft tables, thereby enhancing the social and civic morale of the area.



BANK BUILDING PROJECT: GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY CENTER

Community centers provide residents with convenient and affordable access to various services, including but not limited to recreational activities, social gatherings, volunteer opportunities, and educational offerings. For a considerable time, Gloucester Township has felt the absence of such a facility. Therefore, the municipality successfully acquired the First National Bank building with the intent to revitalize the property into the Gloucester Township Community and Arts Center. To further support this initiative, the township also acquired additional properties at 5 and 7 S Black Horse Pike in Downtown Blackwood.

BANK BUILDING PROJECT: GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY CENTER CONT.

Last year, the township secured a significant NJDCA Community Capital Needs Grant of \$200,000 from the NJ Department of Community Affairs through the NPP Program, specifically for this project. This funding, was further supplemented with an estimated \$550,000 from federal, state, and local sources. This has been a focal point for the NPP since its establishment and will continue to receive funding in the upcoming fiscal year.

"WE ARE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL TO RECEIVE THE GRANT FROM NJDCA. THE HISTORICAL BANK BUILDING IS LOCATED IN THE VERY HEART OF DOWNTOWN BLACKWOOD IN A HIGHLY VISIBLE AREA. THE PROPOSED GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY AND ARTS CENTER WILL SERVE AS A CATALYST PROJECT TO SOLIDIFY THE REVITALIZATION EFFORTS IN THE DISTRICT. WITHOUT THIS FUNDING GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP WOULD NOT BE ABLE TO REALIZE OTHER INVESTMENTS TO MAKE THIS PROJECT A REALITY,"

MAYOR DAVID R. MAYER

PUBLIC ART

In Gloucester Township, the implementation of temporary artwork has proven to be a transformative approach for neighborhood revitalization, particularly in enhancing vacant buildings and infusing them with cultural and historical significance. This innovative strategy has successfully transformed several spaces in the area, bringing a renewed sense of vibrancy and heritage.

During the first year of this initiative, a notable partnership was formed with the Arts at Camden County College, which led to the involvement of Damon Bain, a skilled portrait artist and muralist. Bain created a significant piece titled "Revitalization" at a building on 4 North Black Horse Pike. This artwork became a symbol of the community's collective efforts towards the renewal and rejuvenation of Downtown Blackwood, echoing the aspirations and spirit of the area.

The project's second year saw continued momentum and artistic growth. Local artist David Knauer was commissioned by the Neighborhood Preservation Team to paint a mural that captures a historical scene of the Blackwood Train Station in the early 1900s. Situated on a wall donated for this purpose at 21-23-25 N Black Horse Pike, Knauer's mural, inspired by historical photographs and aided by Rob Ortiz, was completed in just four days, offering a vivid snapshot of local history.





STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT



To foster effective engagement with stakeholders in the NPP District, regular monthly meetings are conducted. These sessions are crucial for updating stakeholders on the project's progress and for deliberating over any necessary adjustments or enhancements to the yearly budget. These gatherings play a pivotal role in ensuring clear communication and alignment among all members of the team.

Additionally, the Gloucester Township section of the NPP website features a blog that acts as an essential tool for engaging the wider community. Updated frequently, the blog provides the latest information on the project's advancements and the accomplishments of the NPP. This ensures that both the stakeholders and the broader community stay well-informed and actively involved in the district's ongoing development initiatives.

GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP

David R. Mayer – Mayor
 Orlando Mercado – Council President
 Michael Mignone – Council Vice-President
 Carolyn Grace – Councilwoman
 James Nash – Councilman
 Helen Albright Troxell – Councilwoman
 Tara Walters – Councilwoman
 Michelle Winters – Councilwoman

STAKEHOLDER TEAM

Ed Fiscella – Mainstage Center for the Arts
 Kellie D'Ascenzo – Mystic Ginger Salon
 Joe Bretschneider – Mainstage Center for the Arts
 Nicolas Rehrig – Cherry Hill Tattoo Expo
 Dennis Paris – Fox School of Business at Temple University
 Joseph Angeloni – Stanker & Galetto, Inc.
 Orlando Mercado – Township Council President
 Stephanie Roberts – Gloucester Township Historic and Scenic Preservation Committee
 Michael Van Stein – Spectracare Foundation
 Miranda Powell – Camden County College Arts Department
 Erica Harr – Mainstage Center for the Arts
 Sarah Gafgen – Mainstage Center for the Arts
 Regina Caristo – NPP Coordinator
 Stephanie Gonzalez Mena – Triad Associates





FY2024 BUDGET, GOALS, AND EXPECTATIONS



The 2021 NPP Community Survey revealed various issues in Downtown Blackwood, such as a notable shortage of restaurants, a restricted variety of retail outlets, extensive property vacancies, and a shortfall of public parking. Over the past two years, specific measures have been taken to address these challenges and enhance the downtown atmosphere. Yet, there remains considerable work to be done. The revitalization of Downtown Blackwood is ongoing, with plans for further projects in FY2024 as outlined below.

ARTS DISTRICT IN DOWNTOWN BLACKWOOD FY2024 BUDGET

*NJ Department of Community Affairs - Neighborhood Preservation Program
Gloucester Township, Camden County, New Jersey*

	NPP Grant Award		Municipal Match & OPM	
Residential Façade Rehabilitation Grants (8)	\$	40,000.00	\$ -	\$ 40,000.00
Business Improvement Catalyst Project	\$	25,000.00	\$ -	\$ 25,000.00
Streetscape Improvements & Wayfinding	\$	3,000.00	\$ -	\$ 3,000.00
Business Marketing & Recruitment	\$	4,000.00	\$ -	\$ 4,000.00
Community Engagement & Public Spaces	\$	10,000.00	\$ -	\$ 10,000.00
Bank Building Project: GT Community Center	\$	20,000.00	\$ 500,000.00	\$ 520,000.00
Public Art	\$	13,000.00	\$ -	\$ 13,000.00
NPP Coordinator	\$	10,000.00	\$ 5,000.00	\$ 15,000.00
NPP Technical Assistance	\$	-	\$ 20,000.00	\$ 20,000.00
TOTALS	\$	125,000.00	\$ 525,000.00	\$ 650,000.00

RESIDENTIAL FAÇADE REHABILITATION GRANTS

Residential façade grants support members of low-income communities by providing them with the means to carry out essential home maintenance and repairs. These improvements are particularly important as they might be otherwise unaffordable for these homeowners. Key benefits of such enhancements include improved energy efficiency, which can lead to reduced utility bills. In addition to the practical advantages, façade improvements also contribute to the aesthetic appeal of neighborhoods, fostering a sense of community pride and potentially increasing property values. Moreover, these upgrades often address critical health and safety issues, such as the removal of hazardous materials.

RESIDENTIAL FAÇADE REHABILITATION GRANTS CONT.

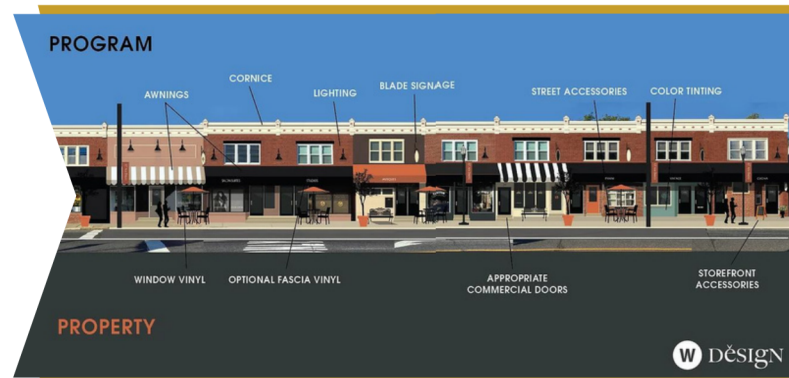
Over the last two years, façade renovation grants have facilitated a variety of exterior property improvements, encompassing roofing, gutters, siding, masonry, and the installation of windows and doors. The strong positive response from the community to this program has led to an allocation of \$40,000 in NPP funds for FY2024. This investment aims to continue and expand the initiative, extending the opportunity to an additional eight homeowners. Through this continued and enhanced support, the program is set to further contribute to the betterment and upliftment of the community, ensuring that essential home improvements remain accessible to those in need.

BUSINESS IMPROVEMENT CATALYST PROJECT

In 2022, the team brought in Cindy Williams, an expert in commercial façade improvement, for a project at 2 to 20 N. Black Horse Pike. Her goal was to redesign the commercial storefronts in the building and enhance the street's welcoming and aesthetic appeal. In December, property and business owners had the opportunity to review her design plans and discuss specific modifications for their buildings.

The project's second phase, carried out last year, concentrated on updating the project renderings and installing new awnings that reflected their distinct identities and contributed to the improved visual appeal of their façades.

The project will now progress into Phase III, which involves implementing further exterior enhancements as per the final design. This next phase aims to continue the trajectory of revitalization and enrichment initiated in the previous stages, building upon the success and positive momentum to further transform and uplift the area.



WAYFINDING & STREETScape IMPROVEMENTS

Blade signs provide businesses with exceptional visibility as they jut out from buildings and can be seen from multiple directions in busy areas. They are particularly beneficial as directional markers for businesses not located on main streets and offer a practical solution for advertising in urban areas where storefront space is limited. In densely packed commercial districts, blade signs give businesses a competitive advantage and usually conform to the strict signage regulations of historical or specially regulated zones.

To support the businesses in the downtown with their marketing efforts, the NPP has invested in the procurement and installation of numerous blade signs over the past two years. Given the success of the program, the Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) will be continuing this initiative into its third year. Additionally, the program plans to expand its scope to include the installation of parking and other types of signage, further aiding in the development and organization of the area.

MARKETING & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT

In response to the challenges highlighted in the community survey from Year I, particularly the need for a more diverse range of stores, shops, and dining establishments, the NPP district has allocated funds for a professional market analysis of the district. This analysis is centered on identifying the specific types of businesses and services that are most in demand in the area. The valuable insights garnered from this study will play a crucial role in the development of targeted marketing materials and strategies. These tailored approaches are aimed at attracting new entrepreneurs and revitalizing the district, injecting new life and energy into the local business landscape.

MARKETING & BUSINESS RECRUITMENT CONT.

This initiative is a key component of a broader marketing campaign and outreach program, designed to rejuvenate the NPP District. By understanding and responding to the community's needs and preferences, the district is taking proactive steps to create a vibrant, dynamic community atmosphere. The ultimate goal of this effort is to transform the district into a bustling hub of activity and commerce, reflecting the diverse tastes and requirements of its residents and visitors. This focused and thoughtful approach to economic development is expected to yield significant benefits for the district, contributing to its ongoing growth and vibrancy.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT & PUBLIC SPACES

GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP FARMERS MARKET

Community events are instrumental in fostering social connections, stimulating local economies, celebrating cultural diversity, and promoting overall health and well-being. These events also drive civic participation, offer educational opportunities, attract tourists, and rejuvenate public spaces. In Gloucester Township, the positive impact of community events has been particularly evident in recent years, especially through the activities hosted at the Gloucester Township Farmers Market. The diverse forms of entertainment, including music and craft tables, at the Farmers Market have successfully attracted a larger number of visitors to the market, serving as a platform for community members to engage, interact, and celebrate the many cultures within the township.

Recognizing the multifaceted benefits of these community events, the NPP Stakeholder team has decided to continue supporting this initiative. In F2024 NPP Budget, it has been agreed to re-fund this line item, ensuring the continuation and further development of community events in the district. This decision underscores the team's commitment to fostering a thriving, connected, and vibrant community through sustained support of such enriching activities.

BANK BUILDING PROJECT: GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP COMMUNITY CENTER

Community centers significantly contribute to the local economy of their host municipalities by offering residents accessible services; they function as hubs for various activities like community recreation, socialization, volunteering, and educational programs. Currently, Gloucester Township is in the process of developing its own Community and Arts Center at the First National Bank building, an architectural marvel dating back to 1911. This initiative not only preserves a piece of local history but also creates a dynamic space for residents to gather, socialize, and participate in various activities.

The proposed Community and Arts Center will be a multifunctional space featuring a black box stage with dressing rooms for performances, and versatile areas suitable for hosting events, meetings, celebrations, lectures, and family movie nights. Spanning 6,685 square feet, this historic building is envisioned to become a central hub for community and arts activities in Gloucester Township. The center is designed to be a shared space for different community entities, including the Library and the Mainstage Center for Performing Arts. It will host local artists' exhibitions, community classes, and meetings for non-profit organizations, thereby becoming a pivotal element of the Gloucester Township Arts District. The center will also house a Black Box Theater and offer free internet access and local information to the community. To support the new center, Gloucester Township has acquired adjacent properties at 5 and 7 S Black Horse Pike in the Downtown Blackwood section, which will be developed into a public parking lot.

The Neighborhood Preservation Program (NPP) has been a key financial supporter of this project since its inception and will continue its support in the upcoming fiscal year. An exciting future development includes the establishment of a performing arts council. This council will play a crucial role in initiating and managing theater operations at the Bank Building Community Center.

PUBLIC ART

In Gloucester Township, artwork has significantly updated the look and feel of the NPP Arts District, breathing new life into the Downtown Blackwood section. Notable works include Damon Bain's "Revitalization" and David Knauer's historical mural of the Blackwood Train Station, both of which infuse the area with cultural depth and historical consciousness. These artistic endeavors have done more than just beautify the district; they have instilled a sense of pride and connection among residents, underscoring the power of art in community development.

In light of the success of these initial projects, additional funding has been directed towards community artwork in the following years. This evolution from the original Implementation Plan provides artists with greater creative freedom in their choice of mediums, extending beyond vinyl. This change is anticipated to spur even more creativity and diversity in the artworks, thereby enhancing the ongoing beautification and cultural enrichment of the Gloucester Township Arts District. The artwork in the NPP Arts District has not only elevated the visual aesthetics of the area but has also played a pivotal role in representing and celebrating the community's heritage and aspirations.

ADMINISTRATION

The NPP Coordinator manages the program's operations day-to-day. This role is key for meeting the program's goals and ensuring the efficient execution of projects, tailored to the community's unique requirements. To support the coordinator, the township intends to maintain its collaboration with Triad Associates. Their extensive forty-year background in community and economic development will be particularly valuable during both the planning and implementation stages of future projects. The continued partnership with Triad Associates is expected to greatly enhance the program's overall effectiveness. Their methodical and professional approach to project management will refine the program's strategies and processes. This collaboration will not only help achieve the set objectives but also contribute meaningfully to the community's development and prosperity.



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ARTS DISTRICT IN DOWNTOWN BLACKWOOD

GLOUCESTER TOWNSHIP, CAMDEN COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

Submitted to the
NJ DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNITY AFFAIRS
NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION PROGRAM

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