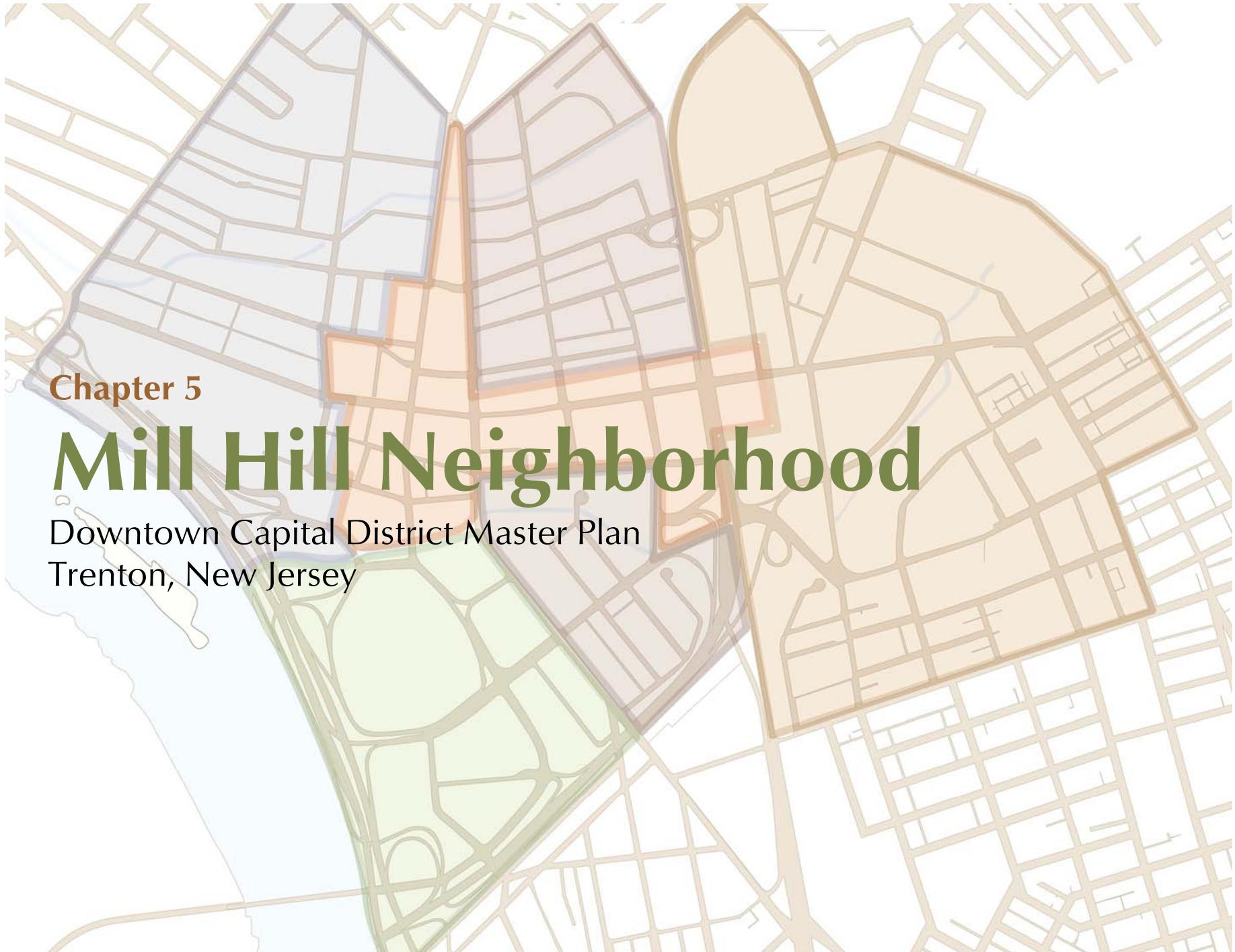




Chapter 5

Mill Hill Neighborhood

Downtown Capital District Master Plan
Trenton, New Jersey



Mill Hill Neighborhood

Mill Hill is Trenton's model for Downtown Renaissance.

Description

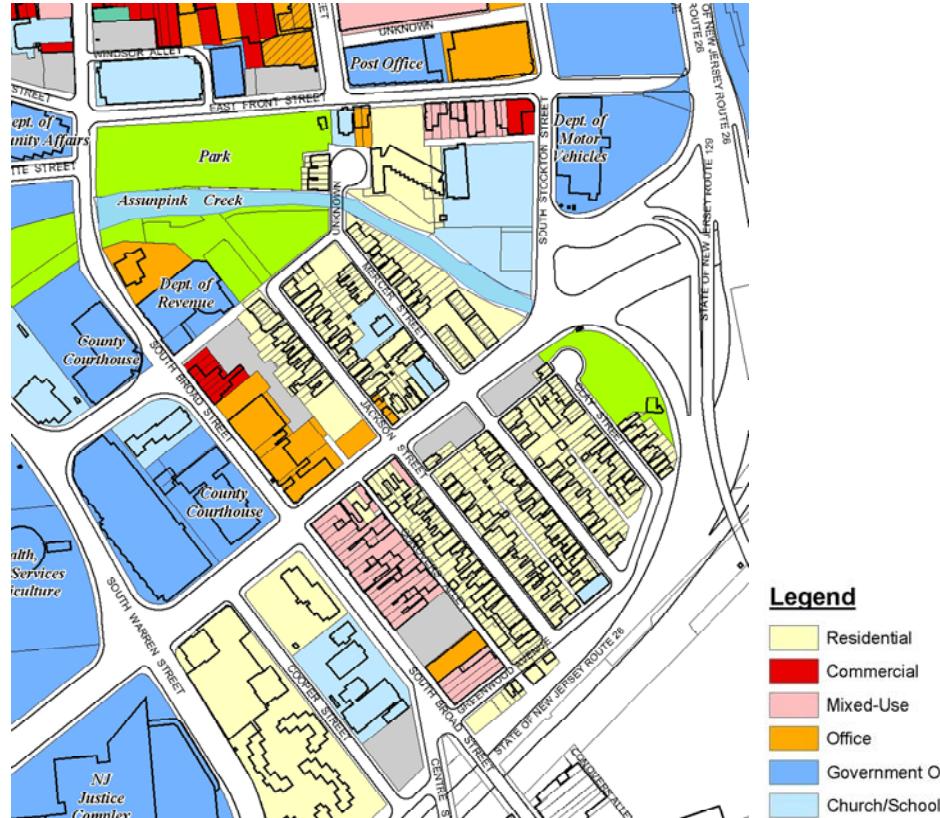


The Mill Hill Neighborhood is bounded generally by Front Street on the north, U.S. Route 1 on the south and east, and South Broad Street on the west. Residential is the primary land use, though it is also home to Mill Hill Park, the largest public open space in downtown. The Assunpink Creek runs through Mill Hill and is a significant greenway that links the neighborhood to the Delaware River.

Mill Hill is one of the most historic sites in Trenton, as it is located on the "high ground" alongside the Assunpink Creek. The historic significance of Mill Hill reaches back to the late seventeenth century when it became the area's first industrial site with a grist mill erected in 1679. During the American Revolution, General George Washington utilized Mill Hill as a defensive location for the Second Battle of Trenton, which was fought on January 2, 1777. The night before this battle, General Washington met with his leaders at the Douglass House, which has been relocated to Mill Hill Park to serve as an anchor attraction.

In the nineteenth Century, Mill Hill transitioned into an upper middle class neighborhood characterized by handsome Victorian brick townhomes and Gothic Revival wood-frame houses. Adjacent commercial areas developed in the same era; these remain today. Although not technically part of Mill Hill, the Mercer County Courthouse complex abuts it on South Broad Street, west of Market Street. It is included in this section of the plan because proposed redevelopment actions are mutually beneficial to the County and Mill Hill.

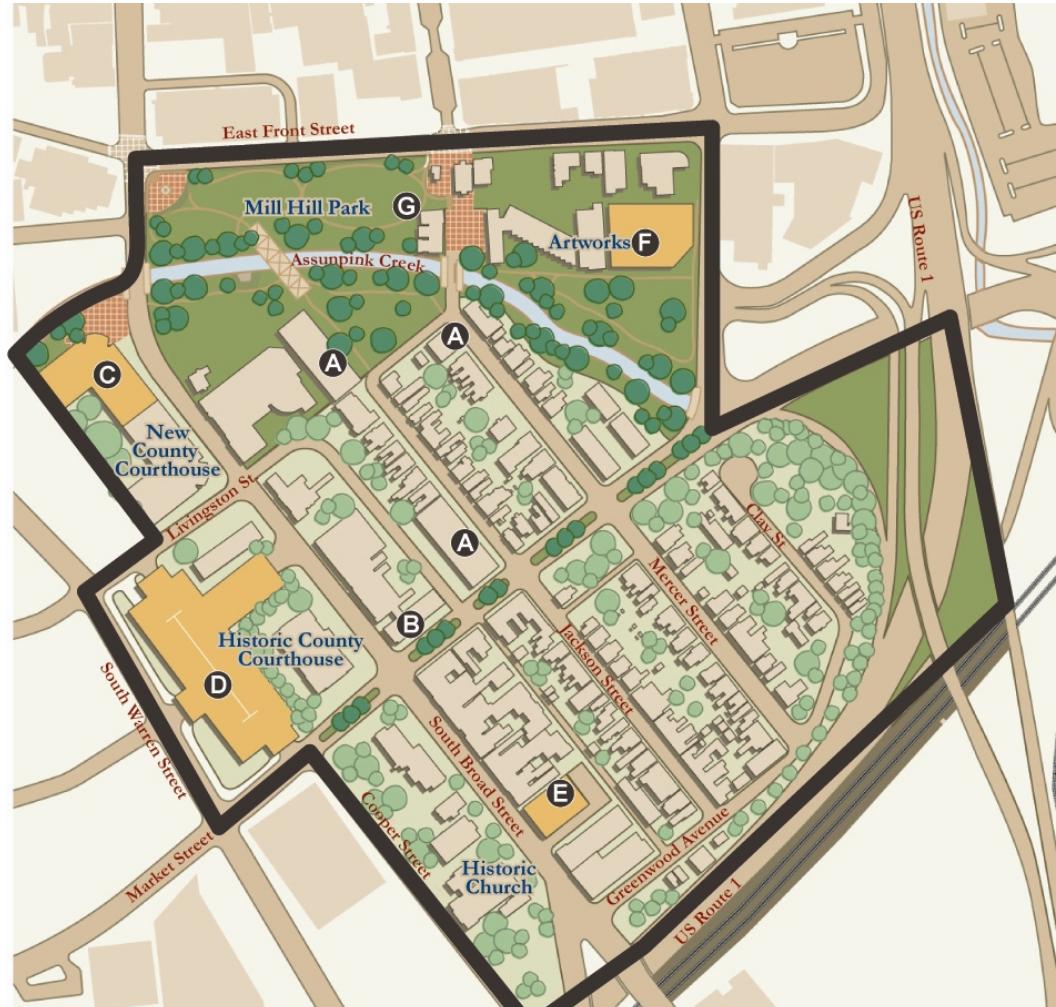




Existing Land Use - Land use categories within Mill Hill include residential, commercial, mixed-use, governmental, institutional and open space. There are a few vacant sites, and surface parking is provided in nodes distributed throughout the area.



Existing Configuration - Development within Mill Hill is tight and compact, and the majority of the area has been renovated. Enhancements to Mill Hill Park and upper-story utilization of mixed-use commercial structures are the development focus of this Downtown subdistrict.



Opportunity sites are depicted in orange.
Key sites and projects are keyed to the text that follows.

Improvement Program

High levels of private sector reinvestment in the Mill Hill neighborhood have made it the premier location for downtown living and a redevelopment model for other neighborhoods in Trenton. Restoration of existing buildings should continue in order to preserve the historic integrity of the neighborhood. Infill development on vacant parcels should reflect the scale of existing development. The mixed-use commercial structures on South Broad Street and East Front Street establish the public face of the neighborhood and should be renovated to enable upper-floor residential and/or office use. Physical and program elements of Mill Hill Park should be enhanced to improve the safety and function of this amenity.

The illustration at left depicts redevelopment opportunities in Mill Hill with opportunity sites depicted in orange. For the most part, the residential structures have either been renovated or are currently being renovated, and are very well maintained. However, a few parcels in the district are susceptible to change.

A. Residential Infill Sites

Infill residential projects are completed for these three sites. Design of the new structures, such as those shown in the photos below, should be based upon the historic architecture of Mill Hill both in terms of scale and construction materials.



B. Sun National Bank Building Adaptive Reuse

The former Sun National Bank Building is an attractive cut stone building that is ideal for adaptive reuse. This building is located on a highly visible corner at South Broad and Market Streets. Reuse of this structure is ideal for either office use, or a mixed-use that includes office, restaurant and/or retail uses. Parking for this building could be accommodated within the County parking structure proposed for South Warren Street.



C. Mercer County Courthouse Expansion

South Broad Street is home to the Mercer County Courthouse complex. This includes the turn-of-the-century courthouse located at the corner of Market and South Broad and a modern courthouse facility located one block north. Mercer County has expressed the need to expand the new courthouse to accommodate demand. An extension onto the new facility is the most desirable configuration, although construction at this site is complicated due to a private-utility land use located at the rear of the property. Design alternatives that should be considered include removal of the road segment that connects South Broad to South Warren (in order to expand the building footprint) and cantilevered construction above grade over a portion of the utility site. Innovative solutions should be sought for Trenton in order to make the highest and best use of land. The courthouse extension should have a plaza connection to the restored Assunpink Creek.

D. Mercer County Parking Structure

Parking is a key issue for the County Courthouse complex. Currently, the County is running a shuttle system to transport jurors from remote parking areas east of downtown. A new parking structure is proposed behind the Courthouse complex, fronting onto South Warren Street. This is the site of the vacant County jail facilities.

This site is an ideal location for a large parking structure. There is significant slope down from South Broad to South Warren Street, which is beneficial to the design and function of a large parking structure. The majority of the building mass will be lower than the courthouse structures, so that they remain the dominant buildings viewed from South Broad Street. The primary building mass will front South Warren, and can be designed as an impressive streetwall for this area of downtown. Utilizing the slope, entry may be provided into the structure from Broad and Warren Streets, as well as from Market and Livingston Streets.

Capacity for 800 to 1,000 spaces is feasible, based upon the number of levels constructed and whether an existing office building next to the old courthouse is demolished and incorporated into the scheme.



E. Commercial Mixed-Use Infill Site

This is an infill construction site for a mixed-use, ground level commercial structure with office and/or housing above. A small parking lot could be provided at the rear of this property for business district use with access provided from South Broad Street. The design of the façade of the structure should be based upon the scale and character of the existing buildings, as illustrated by the examples below, in terms of floor-to-ceiling heights, window configurations and construction materials.



F. Artworks/Theater Redevelopment Site

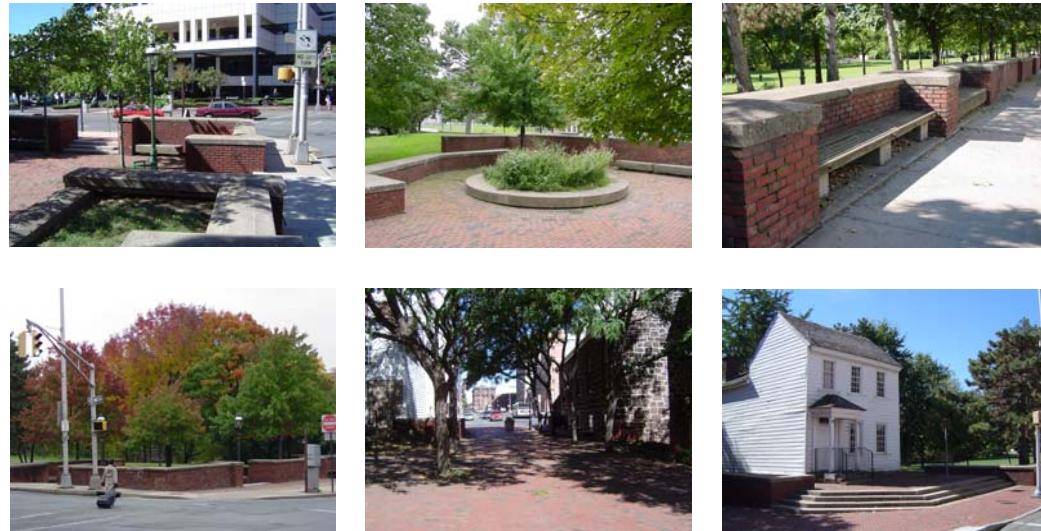
This site is currently comprised of surface parking lots (under multiple ownership), and Artworks, an artist co-op that houses studio space and classrooms. Consideration should be given to utilizing a portion of this site for redevelopment. A new structure is depicted adjacent to the Artworks building. It could be developed as a parking structure that is lined with office and commercial uses. This strategy allows for restoration of the park, which would benefit Mill Hill residents and area workers who might use this space during lunch, as well as provide a beautiful green image of Trenton to motorists exiting Route 1 at this location.

G. Mill Hill Park Renovations



Mill Hill Park is one of the primary public open spaces in Downtown Trenton. It serves the recreational needs not only of Mill Hill residents, but also of downtown workers and visitors. This five-acre park is designed for passive recreation. It is bisected into north and south sections by the Assunpink Creek. A Pratt Truss iron bridge provides access across the Creek and contributes to the park's visual character. Other features include a creekside amphitheater, walking paths, plaza area, seating walls and relocated historic structures, one of which is used as a theatrical playhouse.

Improvements are proposed to enhance visual and physical access into the park in order to strengthen the park's connection to downtown, as well as make it more inviting to use. The following actions are recommended to improve Mill Hill Park.



Improve Access into the Park

The park edges along South Broad Street and East Front Street are defined with brick seating walls. These are nice features that provide resting places for walking pedestrians and waiting areas for bus patrons. Located behind these walls at the corner of Broad and Front Streets is a small plaza, also of brick construction, that is rarely used. Unfortunately, views into the park are almost impossible for motorists to obtain, and the walled condition can make the park seem unsafe from a pedestrian point of view, especially to tourists and visitors.

Enhancements are proposed to establish a new front door to the park and to enhance its connection with the Downtown Core. Plaza entrance features could be constructed at the intersection of Broad and Front Streets, and at the terminus of Montgomery Street around the Douglass House and Mill Hill Playhouse buildings. These areas should contain public art and focal point features, as well as incorporate high-quality planting areas and shaded seating. These areas should be constructed at

sidewalk grade and step down to the park level and be sized large enough to accommodate moderate size gatherings for events such as neighborhood fairs.

Stabilize the Assunpink Creek Bridge Abutments

Remnants of the colonial-era bridge abutments are visible from the park and should be stabilized. This bridge is an important part of American history. General Washington held the British at bay here on this bridge during the second battle of Trenton in 1777. Later, during Washington's historic 250-mile trip from Mount Vernon to New York City to be inaugurated as the first President of the United States, he passed through Trenton, and it was on this bridge he was honored.



Daylight the Assunpink

Assunpink Creek is a defining element of Mill Hill Park. When the block between South Broad and South Warren Streets was redeveloped for the Department of Human Services, the Assunpink was piped into a culvert below grade. This disrupted the continuity of the greenway around which Trenton was founded. Assunpink Creek should be restored in this area, and the entire Creek corridor should be utilized as a pedestrian greenway to provide access to the Delaware Riverfront.



Assunpink Creek Current Conditions

Incorporate Interpretive Signage



Signage by Cloud Gehshan, Philadelphia, PA

The integration of educational features such as interpretive signage into public improvement projects invariably makes them better. Such features appeal to both children and adults, and are an effective way for a community to educate others about their history.

Integration of interpretive signage into neighborhood improvements throughout Downtown is an important economic development tool to promote historic tourism.



Mill Hill Park Photos