

106 SUCCESS STORY

Historic Preservation, Urban Design Provide Stage to Transform City

Newark, New Jersey



“As a Newark native, former high school principal, the city’s chief executive, poet, and writer, I am very aware of the immense impact the New Jersey Performing Arts Center has had on our city. Our leadership in the arts is helping to drive Newark’s transformation, and NJPAC is deeply involved in the positive changes taking place in our city. NJPAC is more than just one of New Jersey’s leading tourist destinations. Through its community and youth programs, it empowers young Newarkers with the tools and desire to grow their talents and creativity and hosts programs of specific interest to Newark residents.”

—RAS BARAKA
Newark Mayor



THE STORY

Military Park Commons served as a military training ground during the French and Indian War, Revolutionary War, and War of 1812. Central to Newark’s development, it later became a prestigious residential neighborhood and eventually an upscale shopping district. However, after the 1967 riots, Military Park Commons experienced a rapid decline along with the rest of the city, resulting in the abandonment and deterioration of historic properties and an increase in crime.

THE PROJECT

In 1987, then-Governor Thomas Kean announced plans to build a performing arts center in the Military Park Commons area hoping to revitalize the city through creating a hub for the arts, sparking further development in the area, and decreasing the crime rate. Public opinion of this project was positive from the beginning because of its probable economic impact in the area. The city ultimately proposed an area on the east side of Military Park, and in 1991, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority began acquiring 11 acres that would eventually include the project site and allow for further development. In addition, the local representatives lobbied for a \$1.2 million Special Projects Grant from the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), triggering the Section 106 process on this privately funded economic development project. As plans progressed, it became clear that the project would have an impact on historic properties in the Military Park area.

THE 106 PROCESS

HUD was responsible for conducting the Section 106 process under the National Historic Preservation Act. Section 106 requires federal agencies to identify historic properties and assess the effects on those properties of the projects they carry out, fund, or permit. Federal agencies also are required to consult with parties that have an interest in the historic property when adverse effects may occur. HUD regulations require Responsible Entities who receive funds to comply with Section 106 prior to initiating project activities. In this case, the Responsible Entity was the City of Newark.

Photos: Above, Prudential Hall stage (Robert Greco Photography), NJPAC lobby; Right, Prudential Hall (Robert Greco Photography); long-abandoned monument “First Landing Party of the Founders of Newark” after it was moved to the grounds of the NJPAC (photos courtesy NJPAC)



Photos: From left, NJPAC from above; (photo by Christopher Lotito/Wikipedia); birds eye view of Military Park (photo by Twothreebreak/Wikipedia)

Since the \$1.2 million federal government funding accounted for a small portion of the privately raised \$187 million project cost, preservation efforts needed to be proportionate to federal involvement in order to balance project needs and preservation concerns. Historic Trinity & St. Philip's Cathedral and its accompanying cemetery in Military Park Commons were listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1972. In 1992, the Superior Court of New Jersey determined the human remains in the cemetery should be disinterred and reburied at an alternative site. As preservation-in-place of the cemetery was not a viable option to mitigate adverse effects, consulting parties agreed that data recovery and recordation of both the cemetery and the adjacent William Wright archaeological site were the appropriate mitigation if the performing arts center was to be constructed in this area.

Consulting parties ultimately agreed that the project should move forward, and in 1993, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, City of Newark, New Jersey State Historic Preservation Officer (SHPO), and the New Jersey Performing Arts Center (NJPAC) negotiated a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) detailing the NJPAC's responsibilities including design guidelines, relocations and reburials, documentation, and any demolition activity for Phase I of the project. The MOA stipulated that five historic structures marked for demolition be documented through the Historic American Buildings Survey and architectural elements from one of the buildings be salvaged. Further, the Landing Place Park Monument, which commemorates the founding of the city and was within the proposed site, was relocated outside of the project. The SHPO played a crucial role in coordinating the post-agreement reviews and ensuring the public was kept informed as the project was designed.

THE SUCCESS

The NJPAC opened in October 1997 and has attracted approximately 400,000 visitors per year for music, theater, opera, and dance performances. The NJPAC has also built ties with artists as well as community and school groups in the area to promote use of the space by Newark residents. The project has been a catalyst stimulating further economic redevelopment activities in the Military Park Commons Historic District, including the preservation of the historic Hahne & Co. department store building, which has been reopened as apartments, retail space, and a multi-purpose space including a cultural center for Rutgers University-Newark.

The role of the Section 106 process can be credited to assisting the city in creating an arts center that could compete with the best in the country and illustrated that historic preservation, urban design, and archaeology could play an integral part in urban economic development activities.

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON HISTORIC PRESERVATION
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Consulting Parties:

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For more about
Section 106 and
the ACHP go to
www.achp.gov



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