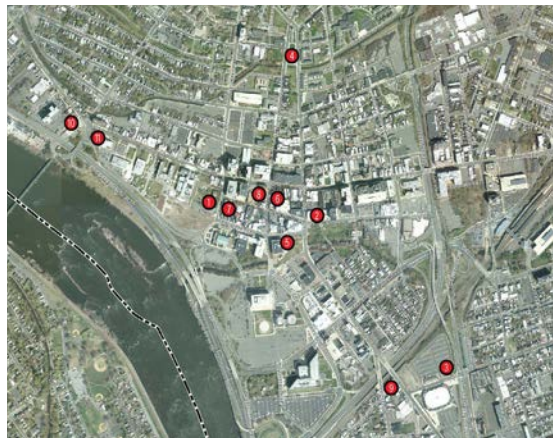


A REVOLUTIONARY WAR EXPERIENCE CENTER IN TRENTON: FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT AND CONCEPT DESIGN

DRAFT: NOVEMBER, 2021



Clarke Caton Hintz



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Concept site plan for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum and the N.J. State House; the design has been coordinated with the 2008 plan for the Capital State Park

A Revolutionary War Experience Center in Trenton

Introduction:

New Jersey is the site of more Revolutionary War military action than any of the other original colonies, and arguably includes more sites directly related to the American Revolution than any other state. More than 600 battles, clashes, skirmishes and naval engagements, either fought in New Jersey or originating from New Jersey soil, are noted in David C. Munn's "Battles and Skirmishes of the American Revolution in New Jersey." In addition to sheer quantity, some of the war's most important battles and events took place in New Jersey, representing key moments in the struggle for independence. These sites are scattered across the state with locations in almost every county and concentrated along the route between New York and Philadelphia.

Perhaps the most important battles were fought early in the war, at the end of 1776 and beginning of 1777. Known as the Ten Crucial Days, they include the First and Second Battles of Trenton and the Battle of Princeton, widely acknowledged to represent the turning point of the American Revolution. Without these first, key victories, the Revolution would arguably have failed, and the United States of America as we know it would not exist. More than just battles, though, New Jersey's experience tells a story of how the war impacted the lives of ordinary people, with experiences that can engage a diverse 21st century audience in ways that other Revolutionary War heritage destinations do not.

Given these rich historic and cultural resources directly relating to the Revolution, New Jersey should be a natural center for activities and tourism relating to the American Revolution and to the nation's 250th Anniversary. However, New Jersey has lagged behind other states, particularly Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Virginia, in this regard. Tourists, whether local, national or international, are much more likely to consider these other states when planning visits relating to our nation's founding and early history because these places tell and promote their stories as having national relevance. New Jersey has the same ability to tell a story with universal appeal that attracts domestic and international visitors. However, these other states are positioning themselves with new facilities and attractions to keep their places at the head of the line. The Museum of the American Revolution in Philadelphia, opened in 2017, is a good example of these efforts.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Pavilion on the grounds of the Old Barracks Museum; the New Jersey State House is in the background



The Douglass House at Mill Hill Park in Trenton; known as the “House of Decision,” this is where, during the Second Battle of Trenton, George Washington and his generals developed the strategy that led to the victory at the Battle of Princeton

Heritage tourists spend almost \$7.7 billion each year in Virginia. Virginia Commonwealth University’s 2017 report to Preservation Virginia on the “Economic Impact of Heritage Tourism in Virginia” further states that more than 105,000 jobs are supported by the direct and indirect impacts of heritage tourism spending in the Commonwealth. Heritage tourism also generates more than \$640 million in state and local taxes, and more than \$700 million in federal taxes.¹

The Revolutionary War Experience Center: Concept

In 2020, Clarke Caton Hintz, Hargrove International and Hunter Research completed New Jersey’s Revolutionary War Sites: Site and Visitor Readiness Assessment.² This report identified a major opportunity for promoting New Jersey’s Revolutionary War history and resources as being of national importance and visitor interest by providing a gateway Revolutionary War Experience Center in the City of Trenton.

Trenton is not only the state capital and located along key transportation routes, but is the site of two major actions in the war. It is also home to the N.J. State Archives, which houses an extraordinary collection of documents and artifacts relating to the Revolution and our early history, little known to the public. The development of a Revolutionary War Experience Center in Trenton is a key opportunity for positioning New Jersey as the state to experience the American Revolution. While New Jersey has a number of important sites with well-developed visitor centers, there is no central location where visitors can get a full sense of the scope of New Jersey’s inspiring role in the nation’s founding. In the 2020 assessment report, the consultant team recommended Revolution-specific upgrades to a wide range of key existing visitor centers and access points, including Morristown, Monmouth Battlefield, New Bridge Landing, the Dey Mansion, Fort Lee, East Jersey Old Town Village and Red Bank Battlefield, etc. The report also recommended the design and construction of a major Revolutionary War Experience Center in Trenton to provide an overview of the Revolution in New Jersey, present the important interpretive themes, and guide visitors to the other key sites around the state while fully interpreting the Ten Crucial Days. By providing state-of-the-art exhibit space, this Center for New Jersey’s role in the American Revolution can also put the state’s collection of extraordinary Revolutionary War documents and artifacts front and center.

¹ “The Economic Impact of Heritage Tourism in Virginia” by Accordino, J. and Fasulo, F. , Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Urban and Regional Analysis, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, (February 2017) for Preservation Virginia, https://cura.vcu.edu/media/cura/pdfs/cura-documents/HeritageTourism_FINAL_02-16-17.pdf

² <https://nj.gov/state/historical/assets/pdf/2020-site-assessment-report.pdf>

Feasibility Study and Concept Plans

In the spring of 2021, the Crossroads of the American Revolution Association, Inc. engaged the team of Clarke Caton Hintz, Trenton-based architects and planners led by John Hatch, FAIA; Hargrove International, Georgia-based heritage tourism consultants led by Cheryl Hargrove, CIG; and GWWO Architects, nationally known visitor center architects led by Alan Reed, FAIA, to complete a Feasibility Study and Concept Design for the center to be located in Trenton. This document is the culmination of that work. It includes a summary of the proposed Center's heritage tourism potential along with recommendations prepared by Cheryl Hargrove; a building program study and concept design and renderings for the proposed Center developed by Alan Reed; and a site selection and feasibility study, along with the overall report preparation, led by John Hatch.

Visitor Center Trends, Challenges & Opportunities: Recommendations for New Jersey

The proposed Center is designed to serve as a visitor information and experience center focused on New Jersey's unique roles in the Revolutionary War. While the proposed Center will provide the typical transactional services of a traditional visitor center (distribution of brochures, maps, event information, etc.), it is recommended that this facility transcend passive delivery to become a transformational attraction. The availability of "wow" experiences encourages visitors to linger longer, fosters sensory immersion and furthers educational exploration of the destination, which in turn promotes an extended itinerary and decision to visit additional attractions in the state.

A visitor servicing strategy recognizes the visitor center's role as a valued touch-point for learning how to experience the destination. Understanding what visitors need, providing those services via trained staff ready to assist with varying interests and inquiries, and then making other tools available, enhances the appeal and increases the frequent/repeat use of the Revolutionary War Experience Center. Moving from the obvious assistance of "bathrooms and brochures" into a multi-use facility also expands revenue generation opportunities, encourages repeat visitation and allows for greater collaboration with other sites and vendors.

The Revolutionary War Experience Center provides the state three key opportunities: 1) increase brand awareness as a heritage tourism destination; 2) expand customer knowledge of diverse stories, activities, events and attractions in New Jersey; and 3) create a hub for repeat visitation from key stakeholders. To be successful and sustainable, though, the Center must factor in how to complement the use of technology for trip planning and address operational and maintenance costs (to keep the site refreshed and competitive with other attractions).



The Trenton Battle Monument at North Broad and North Warren Streets commemorates the American victory at the First Battle of Trenton; the statue depicts George Washington directing cannon fire from this location. Alexander Hamilton and James Monroe both served with Washington in the Battle.



Aerial view of the parking lot adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum; this is the preferred site for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center

Criteria for Success and Sustainability

Five criteria are essential for the Revolutionary War Experience Center to be successful and sustainable. These elements leverage resources, maximize opportunities, and create a unique selling proposition/quality attraction for the state to compete with neighbors and other U.S. destinations for heritage tourists.

1. **Convenient Location:** Choose a high-traffic location that is accessible by car (and potentially other modes of transportation), affords free parking, and is in close proximity to other Revolution-era attractions. For the Revolutionary War Experience Center, a prominent, appropriate site in Trenton would be ideal.
2. **“Wow” Experience:** In order to lure visitors in – especially those travelers not seeking trip-planning assistance – the Center needs to be a destination attractor. This engagement is above and beyond the basic services and information offered in more traditional visitor/welcome centers.
3. **Diverse Storyteller:** While the Center can – and should – offer an orientation of New Jersey history to visitors, it also needs to connect people to other places where the story(s) unfold. Serving as a catalyst to connect visitors to other attractions around the state will enhance the potential to grow heritage tourism. Of course, central to this concept is the availability of visitor-ready attractions that expand upon the learnings offered at the Revolutionary War Experience Center. And the stories must be diverse, inclusive and relevant – where the visitor can relate to the content and context of the heritage experience.
4. **Stakeholder Engagement:** The Center must identify ways for visitors – residents, tourism industry companies, heritage organizations, elected officials, government agencies, the business community, and other key stakeholders – to utilize the facility. Planning meetings, events, and/or offering the venue for special uses and sale of New Jersey-made products can increase buy-in and support for the Center.
5. **Sustainability:** Determining revenue generation opportunities that contribute to the overall delivery promise of exceptional quality and diverse experiences is vital for long-term success.

The Building Program:

In order for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center to reach its full potential, it must be a state-of-the-art facility that not only meets the expectations of today’s travelers, but exceeds them. The

program for this feasibility study was developed based on experience with similar institutions, including George Washington's Mount Vernon and multiple National Park Service Revolutionary War sites. Trends in visitor centers nationally and internationally were also surveyed. The sizes of individual spaces and support requirements were established based on anticipated visitation data.

The program for the Center includes space for entry and orientation, permanent and changing exhibits, a theatre, community meetings, gift shop, cafe, etc. The areas of each space are identified in the base program with a suggested total building area of about 24,000 square feet.

Site Selection:

For this Feasibility Study, a wide range of stakeholders in Trenton was consulted and a wide range of sites, including vacant land and existing buildings, considered. Sites were ranked using a set of criteria developed during stakeholder discussions that include: Adjacency to significant Revolutionary War sites; ease of access via automobile; ease of access for tour buses; ease of access via train and other public transportation; access to parking; availability and likely cost of the site; prominence of the site; location close to amenities; location close to other cultural sites; potential to assist in Trenton's redevelopment efforts; and configuration and relative ease with which the recommended program can be accommodated on the site or in the existing space.

Twenty sites were considered using these criteria, and the three top-ranked sites were then explored in greater depth. The additional study included in-depth evaluation of the pros and cons of the sites and the preparation of conceptual site development plans. The three sites that received additional consideration are the parking lot and vacant land adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum along Barrack Street and across from the Trenton War Memorial; the site that contains the vacant and condemned parking garage at Front and Broad Streets, across from Mill Hill Park; and parts of the first floor and the site behind the building housing the N.J. State Archives on West State Street near Calhoun Street.

After this further evaluation, the site adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum was clearly the top choice. The Old Barracks Museum is a National Historic Landmark, and the building played an important part in the Battles of Trenton. Petty's Run, the adjacent archaeological site, is one of only five places in Colonial America where a plating mill and steel furnace were in operation. In addition, the site's prominent location; easy automobile and public transportation access; its proximity to important Revolutionary War and cultural sites; the availability of land for adequate parking; and its proximity to amenities all make this site ideal for locating the proposed Center.



Preliminary concept design for Site Option 1 adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum



Preliminary concept design for Site Option 2, the vacant parking garage across from Mill Hill Park



Site Option 3, using a portion of the lobby and a rear addition to the building containing the N.J. State Archives



Aerial view of the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center; the Old Barracks Museum and the State House are in the background



Concept design view of the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center from Route 29; the name of the Center as well as the copper cladding will be easily recognizable from a distance

Concept Design:

With the selection of the preferred site adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum and the New Jersey State House, GWWO Architects developed a concept design to show how a 24,000 sf state-of-the-art Revolutionary War Experience Center might fit and look on the site. The concept design is intended to serve as a gateway orientation and interpretation center for all the significant Revolutionary War sites in New Jersey, a nexus for unifying the Ten Crucial Days story and connecting all the nearby visitor sites, and a primary resource for engaging visitors on the impact of the American Revolution on a diverse population.

The recommended site is located south of the Old Barracks Museum and just east of the State House. Vehicular access to the site is provided at the intersection of West Lafayette and Barrack Streets. In addition, a drop off lane, on the west side of Barrack Street, provides access for those arriving by bus. The existing State House parking is reconfigured and located to the west of the Center and provides access to the Center's loading dock. Parking for the Center is located just south of the proposed structure and will also be used by those enjoying the future Capital State Park.

The concept designs for the proposed Center are a metaphor for the weight of responsibility felt by the Continental Army during the most pivotal time of the Revolutionary War. The building's distinctive form, clad in limestone and copper that will transform over time, is clearly a destination and beckons visitors inside to learn about the Revolutionary War in New Jersey and the Ten Crucial Days that changed the course of our history.

Once visitors have had an opportunity to avail themselves of necessities (comfort stop, orientation and ticketing), they have several options and are encouraged to create their own experience based on interests and time. Options include the theatre, permanent and changing exhibits, a gift shop and a cafe. A dividable multipurpose room is located to the west of the lobby, overlooking the Barracks site. This room can be programmed for many different activities, including lectures, school programs, public art shows, etc.



Concept rendering of the main entry for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center; the one story block on the right is clad in limestone and the second story block is clad in copper; both reflect historic materials used in the State House area.



Concept design view of the proposed Center from across Memorial Drive; the design proposes to clad the Center in copper and limestone



Concept design view of the main entry lobby of the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center

The proposed Center is ideally located in Trenton to tell the diverse and fascinating stories associated with the war throughout New Jersey, as well as the Ten Crucial Days. The prominent location and distinctive architecture of the building, with its limestone and copper cladding that relates to the historic architecture in the State House area, will attract visitors to this gateway site.

Estimated Cost and Timeline:

For this Center to serve its intended purpose, it must be completed well in advance of the official kick-off of the nation's 250th anniversary on July 4, 2026. Working backwards from this date, construction should be complete, including exhibit installation, by April of 2026. Because buildings of this type include complex systems and the need to install sensitive exhibits, construction will likely take two years. Construction should therefore begin in the spring of 2024, with construction bidding complete in early 2024. With buildings of this level of complexity, the design will also require at least one year. This means that time is of the essence: Site selection and design team selection should be complete by September of 2022.

Based on experience with recent similar facilities, the construction cost for a 24,000 sf Experience Center, including the immersive theatre space and state of the art exhibits, is in the \$21 million to \$22 million range, plus design and other hard and soft costs. The working budget for the Revolutionary War Experience Center project is therefore \$25 million.

The state should also use this opportunity to complete the Capital State Park Plan from 2008 to create an attractive campus that will encourage visitors to linger longer. Cost estimate – \$3 million.

Branded signage to ease wayfinding from all major access points and throughout the city, as well as to link the Center with other relevant American Revolution sites throughout the Trenton area will be needed. Cost estimate – \$250,000

The Center is designed to serve as a gateway for exploration of New Jersey's rich Revolutionary era heritage and to enhance economic activity in communities throughout the state. For this project to be successful, significant investment must be made to bring core American Revolution sites up to "visitor attraction" standards. These costs are detailed in other reports commissioned by Revolution NJ, but should be considered as a requisite element of the project.

Conclusion:

Trenton's key role in the first American victories in the Revolution, as an important stop between Philadelphia and New York, as the location of a number of evocative and important Revolutionary War sites, its easy automobile and public transportation access, and its role as the capital of New Jersey make it the right location for a Revolutionary War Experience Center to uncover the diverse and inspiring stories of New Jersey in the Revolution. This Feasibility Study has found that the best location in New Jersey's capital for this Center is adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum near the historic State House. With the coming 250th commemoration of the American Revolution in 2026, the stars are now aligned to put New Jersey in its rightful place as a leader in heritage tourism relating to the Revolution. But time is short! The process of site acquisition, design and construction needs to begin immediately and move quickly if this important deadline is to be met.



Concept design view of the proposed Center from the second floor



The New Jersey State House, view from site adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum

New Jersey's Growth Opportunity: Revolution NJ and Heritage Tourism

Overview

The 250th anniversary of America's Revolution affords New Jersey an economic and branding opportunity to grow its tourism industry by showcasing the state's distinctive stories and places associated with the Revolutionary War Era. Focusing on heritage tourism – defined as traveling to experience the places, artifacts and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past – New Jersey can increase its competitiveness and enhance its market share of this important industry segment. With a visitor profile that travels frequently, stays longer, and spends more than general tourists (pre-pandemic), the heritage traveler is a desired audience to cultivate. Attracting this customer away from better known heritage locations – Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, Virginia and other competitive states – will require history-based experiences focusing on authenticity, quality, and diversity.

Heritage tourists spend almost \$7.7 billion each year in Virginia. An additional \$430 million is spent annually by heritage tourism sites for operational expenditures, rippling throughout the state's economy, giving an additional boost of \$6.5 billion to the economy and generating \$1.3 billion in taxes. Virginia Commonwealth University's 2017 report to Preservation Virginia on the "Economic Impact of Heritage Tourism in Virginia" further states that more than 105,000 jobs are supported by the direct and indirect impacts of heritage tourism spending in the Commonwealth. Heritage tourism also generates more than \$640 million in state and local taxes, and more than \$700 million in federal taxes.¹

International visitors are also an important travel audience to cultivate. According to the 2020 Inbound Profile of Cultural-Heritage Travelers, a report produced by the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Travel and Tourism Office², 56% of all overseas visitors to the U.S. (almost 22.5 million) engaged in cultural heritage activities in 2019. More than 15% of overseas visitors to the U.S. engaging in cultural heritage activities in 2019 were from the United Kingdom; it consistently remains the number one inbound overseas market for cultural heritage sites/destinations. Newark

¹ "The Economic Impact of Heritage Tourism in Virginia" by Accordino, J. and Fasulo, F. , Virginia Commonwealth University Center for Urban and Regional Analysis, L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs, (February 2017) for Preservation Virginia, https://cura.vcu.edu/media/cura/pdfs/cura-documents/HeritageTourism_FINALE_02-16-17.pdf

² National Travel and Tourism Office (NTTO), International Trade Association, U.S. Department of Commerce: Inbound Market Profiles: Overseas Visitors to the United States, Activity Profiles: Cultural - Heritage, downloaded via <https://www.trade.gov/travel-and-tourism-research>

I. N.J.'s GROWTH OPPORTUNITY: REVOLUTION N.J. AND HERITAGE TOURISM



Exhibits in the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton

Liberty International Airport, with its 46 million passengers in 2018 (pre-pandemic), serves as an important gateway for New Jersey to lure these lucrative international travelers as they seek to discover their ancestral roots, explore National Parks, and understand the fight for liberty.

New Jersey has the competitive advantage of discovery – where visitors can learn diverse perspectives of the events leading up to, during, and resulting from our country's founding. As the location for pivotal battles recognized as the turning point of the Revolution, New Jersey must showcase sites associated with the “Ten Crucial Days” to provide a context of its importance to America's story. However, to expand heritage tourism and its economic impact, the state should utilize its geographic location as “the Crossroads” to offer broader educational opportunities ‘beyond the battlefield’ for school groups, heritage travelers, and life-long learning enthusiasts.

Focusing on often-forgotten stories of immigrants, African Americans, women, soldiers, Patriots, Loyalists and Native Americans, told at locations around the state, helps visitors experience history where it happened. The struggles, divisions, prejudice, and injustices experienced two centuries ago are relevant and relatable to issues of today. Stories of courage, triumph, perseverance, and self-reliance also resonate as a foundation of the American spirit. These diverse, inclusive stories provide a competitive edge for New Jersey; no other state can explore and deliver the breadth and depth of common every-day experiences where virtually every county and citizen was touched by war.

Growing both domestic and international visitation through heritage tourism will not only increase the economic impact for the state, it will also enhance New Jersey's brand as a recognized destination for important history-based leisure travel experiences. However, to achieve this growth, the state must offer compelling, visitor-ready experiences at heritage locations around the state. New Jersey must also provide a context for this education by helping visitors with an overall understanding of the state's important role in the Revolution as well as information on how to locate other places related to desired themes and stories.

The Nexus: A Revolutionary War Experience Center

For New Jersey to establish itself as a global heritage tourism destination, the state needs to offer visitors a starting point for orientation and information about the Revolutionary War Era. Visitor centers often serve this role. However, to compete with other states (particularly Pennsylvania and Virginia), New Jersey needs a more expansive attraction that not only provides information but also education in engaging and inclusive ways. A proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center, located in Trenton, satisfies both of these goals.

Visitor Centers: Overview

Visitor centers – also known as welcome centers and information centers – are typically the source for tourists and travelers to obtain information about the state's attractions and amenities. Often located at transportation gateways, major thoroughfares/intersections, and other high-traffic locations, visitor centers have evolved in their size, scope, and services since the first was built in 1935.

48 of 50 states have some type of official Visitor/Welcome Center. Pennsylvania has 30; New York has 25; New Jersey has 17; Massachusetts has 10.

According to the 2013 “Visitor information Centers (VIC) Study” by Destinations International, eight out of ten Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) offer some type of official VIC to visitors. With an average net cost per walk-in visitor at \$2.72, DMOs seek ways to make the VIC more relevant in high-traffic areas and also demonstrate a greater return on investment. Diversified revenue streams have become increasingly important to contribute to the DMO’s bottom line. Merchandise sales represents 48 percent of all direct revenues generated by VICs. Most prevalent merchandise includes: souvenirs (53%), clothing (42%), books (42%), local arts and crafts (31%), prints/posters (31%), jewelry (20%), and food and drink (20%).³

Types & Services

Several types of visitor centers exist today. Some are standalone structures branded by the state or local tourism office to serve as the official welcome and information center for users. Others are housed in existing attractions, transportation centers (airports, train stations, service plazas on turnpikes/interstates), or high-traffic attractions (such as shopping malls).

Information distribution is at the heart of all visitor centers; with the destination travel guide and maps as the key promotional materials. Depending on location, and space available, other visitor services may be provided:

- Destination brand ambassadors: staff available to offer visitors insider tips and informative interactions while providing personalized and hospitable service.
- Maps: for on-the-go reading or for a detailed route planning session in the Center.
- Visitor Guides: to offer information on the area’s tourism industry.
- Free Wi-Fi and power outlets: to allow visitors to recharge, check emails, search restaurant reviews, find attractions and other recommendations.
- Events list: to help visitors feel like locals and experience the one-of-a-kind events in the area.

³ Compilation of information from “Do Your Visitors Still Need Visitor Centres? Use These Four Criteria to Find Out” via Destination-Think (March 2018) by David Archer, <https://destinationthink.com/blog/visitor-centre-4-criteria-can-help/>, and “Visitor Information Centers & Services in the Digital Age” and other resources from Destination Development Association (2013) by Roger Brooks, https://www.rogerbrooksinternational.com/_files/ugd/742677_86588aed1a29495db9a67a9dc37f09da.pdf



First Presbyterian Church in Trenton; Hessian mercenaries, casualties of the First Battle of Trenton, are buried in the graveyard



The main entry of the Trent House looking towards the N.J. Justice Complex

- Restrooms: to provide relief to travelers who have been on the road for a long time.
- Printer access: to buy tickets to area attractions and print boarding passes.

Other services and amenities of increasing interest by visitors include Selfie Spots (iconic sculpture, displays or other branded elements to mark “you are here”), pet areas, electric car charging stations, picnic areas, and walking paths.

Ownership/Management

The local or state destination marketing/management organization (DMO) often owns or manages visitor centers. The building may be owned or maintained by state departments of transportation, especially if located along a major highway or turnpike, or by tourism offices. The responsibility of the facility’s owner is to maintain the building and grounds (including internet, telephone and utilities) and provide security (especially if the comfort station is open 24/7). The stocking of information is the DMO’s responsibility, along with the staffing for the facility with local travel counselors.

A welcoming staff is central to any VIC. Appealing and interesting displays can quickly be overshadowed if the staff is not hospitable and instructive. Friendly, knowledgeable staff is foundational for an effective VIC. According to a recent article in “tourGUNE Journal of Tourism and Human Mobility,” VIC staff particularly play a key role in urban tourism destinations, serving as local experts who can tailor personal information to visitor wants and needs. VICs act as a motivation element, affecting the destination’s competitiveness by offering added value: expert information with human interaction.

While technology – in the forms of apps and mobile guides – may aid in information delivery, nothing can replace personal interaction with the visitor. VIC staff provide the local knowledge – about the destination as well as everyday news – valued by the traveler. Often this personal interaction will result in an increased ROI.

Visitor Center Trends

In recent years, destinations have rethought the visitor center for both its influence and impact. As travelers’ use of technology increases for trip planning and navigation, the visitor center’s role in the customer journey has changed. Understanding when visitors need personalized assistance, and defining what other motivations will lure travelers off the road and into a visitor center are key objectives for developing a sustainable facility. Three trends can help guide the reimagining of the visitor center.

1. Transactional *becomes* Transformative

Visitor services typically focus on transactional behavior: the distribution of a brochure or map. However, with more information now available online, travelers need a different motivation to stop at a visitor center. Making it a destination attraction in its own right, where visitors are not only enlightened but also transformed by the experience, sets the stage for a more robust dialogue with on-site travel counselors and experts. The exhibits and visual elements pique the interest of travelers, and encourage exploration of interests through a dynamic exchange of information.

The availability of “wow” experiences encourages visitors to linger longer, fosters sensory immersion and furthers educational exploration of the destination – which in turn may result in an extended itinerary and decision to tour additional attractions in the state. New visitor centers transform interiors into place-based environments that entice travelers to explore the authentic destination nearby. Visitor centers that also interpret their destination use technology (AI, Holograms, etc.) to simulate experiences available around the state, educate patrons about relevant stories of the past, and help visitors locate additional places of interest.

According to a report prepared by Dean Runyan Associates for Travel Oregon in 2020: “Travelers who stop at welcome centers demonstrate greater engagement by utilizing in-person visitor services and considering additional recommendations from the welcome center staff. This engagement shows an impact in the spending of these travelers. On average, visitors to welcome centers spend 68% more on their entire trip in the state than other types of visitors. In actual amounts, this equates to an average spend of \$492 per trip versus \$293 per trip. The impact is even greater for overnight visitors.” The report goes on to state: “On average, visitors to welcome centers spend more on their full trip than the average overnight visitor that visits the state. Welcome center travel parties spend roughly 60% more per trip (\$1,155 versus \$718.)”⁴

2. Visitor Information *becomes* Visitor “Servicing”

The traditional visitor center focused on more passive engagement, where quantity of visitors served was the metric rather than the upselling and education of the traveler. The delivery of “bathrooms and brochures” satisfied the customer seeking a quick multi-purpose stop. Today, the travel journey is often more complex – ranging from travelers that are exploring without plans (and therefore need directions, suggestions) to more time-constricted travelers seeking specific assistance.

A visitor servicing strategy recognizes the visitor center’s role as a valued touch-point for learning how to experience the destination. Understanding what visitors need, and providing those services – via trained staff ready to assist with varying interests and inquiries, and availability of other tools – enhances the appeal, and frequent/repeat use, of the visitor center.

In June 2019, the Independence Visitor Center in Philadelphia completed an exciting renovation to welcome its 2.5 million visitors with an informative, interactive, and 21st-Century orientation experience. They enhanced the visitor experience and trans-

⁴ *Visitor Spending Calendar Year 2019, Travel Oregon Welcome Centers (July 2020), Dean Runyan Associates*

formed from a traditional visitor center to one for the future. Cutting-edge digital advancements were added, while maintaining personalized, excellent customer service through one-on-one interactions. The Center continues to drive traffic to arts, culture, historic, retail, and restaurant destinations, resulting in increased revenue for all in the Greater Philadelphia region. As the first impression for the Philadelphia region, the visitors to the center are more likely to frequent an average of two to three additional local businesses.

3. Single Purpose *becomes* Multi-Purpose

Moving from the traditional visitor services of “bathrooms and brochures,” a 21st Century visitor center seeks ways to engage visitors and also encourage repeat visitation from local residents and regional travelers. Newly designed visitor centers offer ways for all generations of travelers and motivations for travel to be accommodated.

For instance, many new visitor centers now include:

- Food service (café, coffee shop, vending) retail store (branded merchandise, locally made items and gifts)
- Temporary educational/interpretive exhibits, and
- Meeting space for tourism industry, government and nonprofit organizations to gather.

These multi-purpose facilities encourage repeat visitation. The flexible space can also position the center as a hub for special events and activities, further motivating visitors to stop and see and experience what is happening at the Center. Retail areas satisfy the traveler’s desire to take home a memento or branded souvenir. Cafes, printer access, and free wi-fi encourage extended stays, where visitors find a pleasing atmosphere to connect while on the road. Varying types of experiences available increase engagement of all ages, abilities, access, and interests.

From January through March of 2019, high season in Sarasota, FL, the Visitor Services staff and volunteers interacted with 17,671 visitors – a 46% increase compared to the same months in 2018. The visitors included residents seeking information for visiting friends and relatives, as well as “snow birds” (from Canada and the northern United States) interested in learning about new attractions, events and activities open for the season.⁵

Opportunities & Challenges

New Jersey’s current visitor/welcome centers are often housed in other locations rather than as a dedicated, stand-alone building. The state can leverage three key opportunities with a new Center dedicated to New Jersey’s role in the American Revolution, located at a gateway site close to key Revolutionary War attractions.

⁵ Haley, Virginia (July 22, 2019) “Visitor Information Centers: Is the future still bright for an age-old destination staple?” *Herald-Tribune*, <https://www.heraldtribune.com/story/business/columns/2019/07/22/haley-visitor-information-centers-is-future-still-bright-for-age-old-destination-staple/4641191007/>

1. Increase brand awareness for New Jersey as a tourism destination.

Most destinations use the opportunity to brand the visitor center as an official site for information, hub for educational experiences, and recognition of a knowledgeable team ready to assist with traveler inquiries. The opportunity for New Jersey goes beyond delivery of visitor information; the proposed Experience Center demonstrates how the war impacted the lives of ordinary people, with experiences that engage a diverse 21st Century audience in ways that other Revolutionary War heritage destinations do not.

External signage and attractive aesthetics welcome visitors with an invitation to enter and explore the destination. Branded merchandise for sale, especially if available exclusively at the location, further establishes the visitor center as a worthy stop on the travel journey.

2. Expand customer knowledge of the diverse and inclusive heritage activities/attractions in New Jersey – enhancing their potential stay and spend in the state.

A new trend is for a visitor center to be more inspirational with educational experiences that stimulate interests in learning more and seeking out additional attractions related to specific stories. Little-known attractions, events and communities located off-the-beaten path can often benefit from a recommendation from visitor center staff, as travelers learn about and seek out these places to continue their educational journey.

A valued visitor center solves problems for the visitor, and understands when the visitor needs direct assistance (or inspiration) from a knowledgeable, credible staff.

3. Create a hub for repeat visitation from key stakeholders.

Visitor centers often foster repeat visitation through special events, industry gatherings, purposeful activities (such as retail offerings) and meeting facilities. Residents, retail establishments, local tour operators, and other service providers are important stakeholders for any visitor center to engage. Identifying specific ways to attract these groups to the visitor center is important for keeping the facility top of mind with key influencers.

Some examples of engagement include monthly event videos, a “Friday Night Wine Tasting”, networking events, and a quarterly “treasure” hunt for kids to explore rotating exhibits.



Morristown National Historical Park, Washington's Headquarters Museum; Morris County



Entrance to the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton

Challenges to Address, Overcome

Two major issues have surfaced in the last decade, impacting the relevance of traditional visitor centers. These factors must be considered when planning a new visitor center to anticipate the changing needs/services of potential customers – and costs associated with hosting them.

1. Greater use of technology and smart phones for trip planning/maps.

According to Travelport's 2018 Digital Traveler Survey⁶, U.S. travelers rely on their smartphones for every part of their journey, using social media posts from friends and family to research leisure trips (62%) and in-route to the destination (64%). On average, U.S. leisure travelers use 7-8 apps throughout their searching, booking, and in-destination travel experience, with maps (52%), weather (51%) and branded airlines (50%). It is anticipated that smart phone usage will continue to be an important trip planning tool post-COVID.

2. Rising operational costs.

As visitor centers expand services and experience delivery, the costs of building and interior maintenance, as well as staffing, increase. Updating technology, expanding interactive touch points, acquiring inventory of goods for sale, and providing food service all have associated costs. However, the investment is often recouped in part by visitor sales (at retail store and purchase of tickets) as well as increased length of stay (and spending) in the destination.

Criteria for Success and Sustainability

Five criteria are essential for the Revolutionary War Experience Center to be successful and sustainable. These elements leverage resources, maximize opportunities, and create a unique selling proposition/quality attraction for the state to compete with neighbors and other U.S. destinations for heritage tourists.

1. Convenient Location:

Choose a high-traffic location that is accessible by car (and potentially other modes of transportation), affords free parking, and is in close proximity to other Revolution-era attractions. For the Revolutionary War Experience Center, a prominent, appropriate site in Trenton would be ideal.

⁶ "Travelport 2018 Global Digital Traveler Survey" (November 2018), <https://www.prnewswire.com/in/news-releases/travelers-say-technology-is-key-to-their-travel-experience-700359031.html>

2. “Wow” Experience:

In order to lure visitors in – especially those travelers not seeking trip-planning assistance – the visitor center needs to be a destination attractor. This engagement/ is above and beyond the basic services and information offered in more traditional visitor/welcome centers.

3. Diverse Storyteller:

While the Center can – and should – offer an orientation of New Jersey history to visitors, it also needs to connect people to other places where the story(s) unfold. Serving as a catalyst to connect visitors to other attractions around the state will enhance the potential to grow heritage tourism. Central to this concept is the availability of visitor-ready attractions that expand upon the learnings offered at the Revolutionary War Experience Center. And the stories must be diverse, inclusive and relevant – where the visitor can relate to the content and context of the heritage experience.

4. Stakeholder Engagement:

The Center must identify ways for visitors – residents, tourism industry companies, heritage organizations, elected officials, government agencies, the business community and other key stakeholders – to utilize the facility. Planning meetings, events, and/or offering the venue for special uses and sale of New Jersey-made products can increase buy-in and support for the Center.

5. Sustainability:

Determining revenue generation opportunities that contribute to the overall delivery promise of exceptional quality and diverse experiences is vital for long-term success.

Recommendations for the Revolutionary War Experience Center

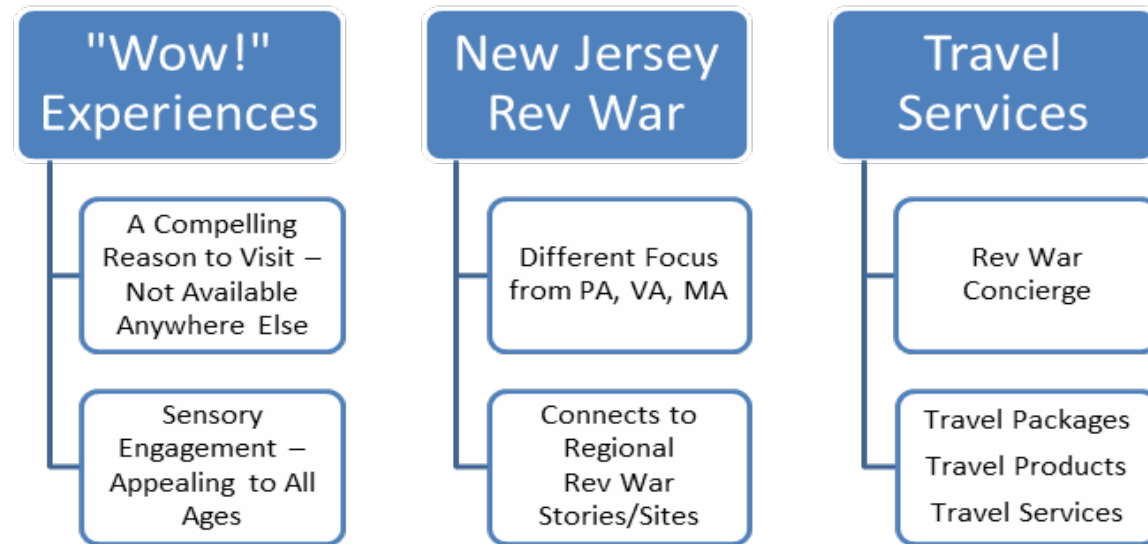
As other states focus on how to commemorate the 250th anniversary of America in 2026, New Jersey has an opportunity to capitalize on this upcoming event for a longer-term impact. Specifically, the development of a Revolutionary War Experience Center allows New Jersey to integrate all the benefits/services of a statewide welcome center with the “wow” attraction experiences valued by the 21st Century traveler.

Offering revenue generation opportunities through merchandise and product sales is a key strategy to increase sustainability. Perhaps the greatest potential – and reason to have a Revolutionary War Experience Center – is to serve as a catalyst for increasing heritage tourism in New Jersey.



The Quaker Meeting House in Trenton; the First Battle of Trenton ended near this site and George Clymer, a signer of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, is buried in its graveyard.

Prior to COVID, 7% of travelers to New Jersey participated/visited historic sites while the national average of visitors engaging in historic activities hovered around 13%. New Jersey's share of heritage travel lagged even more when compared to its closest competitor states (16%). During COVID, visitation to historic sites plummeted to 1% of day visitors and 2% of overnight visitors as many sites were closed. Given recent events, now is a prime time to educate travelers about New Jersey's history and its impact on our nation's birth and development. As tourism rebounds, New Jersey can focus on its unique stories to attract domestic and international visitors that typically stay longer and spend more than general leisure travelers. Both adult and student group tours will also be a prime market for the Experience Center, serving as an orientation hub for New Jersey history prior to exploring other destinations around the state.



Designed with “wow” experiences that tell the unique stories of New Jersey relative to the Revolutionary Era, and its significance/relation to contemporary issues, the Center affords engagement opportunities for all travelers. It also helps share how New Jersey is different from neighboring destinations and offers distinct ways to explore the state’s historic, cultural, natural and man-made activities and attractions. Interactive displays designed for all ages and accessibility provide a reason to visit again and again. As custodians of regional stories, the Center can curate and share relevant information on:

- People Stories: Indigenous, Early Settlers, Historic Figures, and Living Icons
- Place Stories: Indigenous perspective, Architecture, Geography, Geology, Flora, Fauna, History and Heritage
- Product Stories: Local Industries, Food, Wine, Beverages, Craft and Art

And while the focus will be on sharing Revolutionary War Era stories, the Experience Center can adopt and adapt to different themes of interest to travelers in future decades. Carrying the content into all aspects of the Center – exhibits (high and low tech), retail, literature, and special events – will also encourage repeat visitation.

Reasons for Visitors to Return	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Changing Exhibits• Seasonal Programs/ Events• Special Demonstrations/ Lectures• Offering Services not available online (connect visitors to activities, products in real time)
Community Uses	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting Space• Special Events• Café• Retail Store

Retail sales of branded merchandise can help stimulate revenue generation. Various opportunities exist to increase sales and contributions, including but not limited to:

- Advertising opportunities (posters, window projections, touchscreen exhibits, etc.)
- Promotional events for Experience Center visitors
- Booking commission for tour packages, products, event tickets, etc.
- Venue hire

Given that Trenton currently lacks ticketing services, particularly at the War Memorial, but also for planetarium shows at the New Jersey State Museum, timed tours at the Old Barracks, The William Trent House, the State House and the Trenton City Museum, this Experience Center can provide this centralized service and be an additional shopping destination for local, regional and statewide heritage products. The service charge from each ticket sale represents a revenue source for the Center.



The Trenton Battle Monument



“Reception to Washington on April 21, 1789, at Trenton on his way to New York to Assume the Duties of the Presidency of the United States,” 1930 painting by N.C. Wyeth on display at Thomas Edison State University in Trenton

The Albany (Australia) Visitor Center had a \$100,000 profit from the “Field of Light” Avenue of Honour” packages they developed and sold via OTAs (online travel agencies – Expedia, Travelocity, etc.) and traditional trade partners. They also have various advertising opportunities in the center for operators, such as advertising on their projector-lit visitor center windows each night.⁷

Conclusion

The proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center, if designed to meet the quality and service expectations of 21st Century travelers, will serve as a beacon for New Jersey to showcase its important role in the Revolutionary War. It will also help position the state as a leader in historic tour product and help expand the impact of heritage tourism in New Jersey. Using the five criteria to assess locations, identify the types of experiences and services necessary to deliver the exceptional quality experiences, and create a destination attractor valued beyond 2026 will help planners and funders determine the level of investment required to construct this facility. Understanding the need for knowledgeable staff and five-star customer service will inform the leadership and management necessary for the facility’s sustainability.



“Washington Crossing the Delaware,” by Emanuel Leutze, 1851; at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York

⁷ White, Rebecca (March 4, 2021) “12 Things Successful Visitor Centres Do Differently”, Tourism ESchool, <https://tourismeschool.com/blog/12-things-successful-visitor-centres-do-differently/>



Aerial of the Old Barracks Museum and the Petty's Run archaeological site. Constructed in 1758 to house British troops during the French and Indian War, the Barracks played an important part in the Battles of Trenton and the site is now a National Historic Landmark. The Museum is nationally known for its interpretation of early American history and the American Revolution. Petty's Run is also significant as one of only five places in Colonial America where a plating mill and steel furnace were in operation.



View of the Old Barracks Museum from Barrack Street; the State House dome is visible in the background. The Old Barracks, constructed in 1758 for the French and Indian War, is a National Historic Landmark and housed Hessian mercenaries prior to the First Battle of Trenton.

Building Program for the Revolutionary War Experience Center

Description of Spaces:

The building program for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center was developed based on experience with similar institutions including George Washington's Mount Vernon, and multiple National Park Service Revolutionary War sites. In addition, a benchmarking analysis of similar "Visitor Experience" visitor centers, as well as knowledge of trends with regard to this typology informed the types and number of spaces to be included in the facility. The areas of the individual spaces and support requirements were established based on an anticipated annual visitation of 100,000 people. For purposes of this study, it is assumed that 70% of annual visitors will visit between March and September and that the majority of those visitors (60%) will visit on the weekends (Fri-Sun). Dwell time (time on site and in the building) is anticipated to be two hours. It is anticipated that a minimum of 20% of visitors will arrive by bus. Parking requirements were established based on the above data, as well as the total existing parking currently located on the site.

The "net" area (minimum usable space) of each space is identified in the base program, with a "net to gross" factor added to allow for anticipated walls, structure and circulation, to arrive at the total building area of 23,965 square feet.

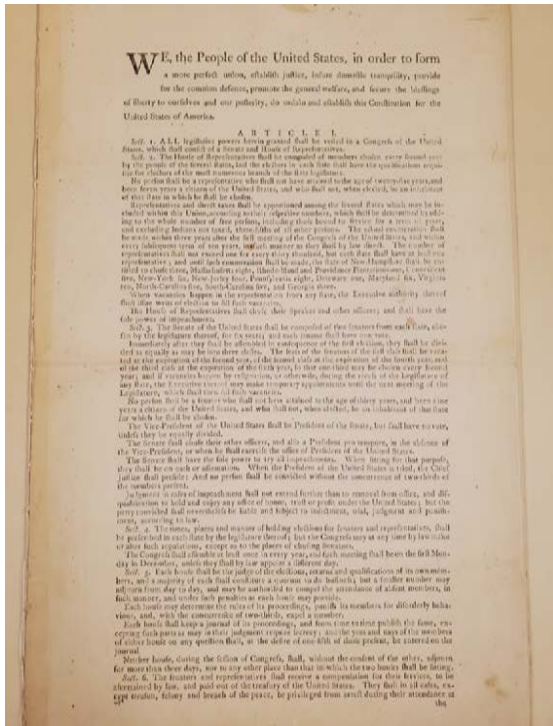
The building program summary is as follows:

Space:	Area:
Public:	
Lobby	1,300
Ticketing	221
Restrooms	511
Retail:	
Café	563
Gift Shop	471

2. BUILDING PROGRAM



Exhibits in the Old Barracks Museum, Trenton



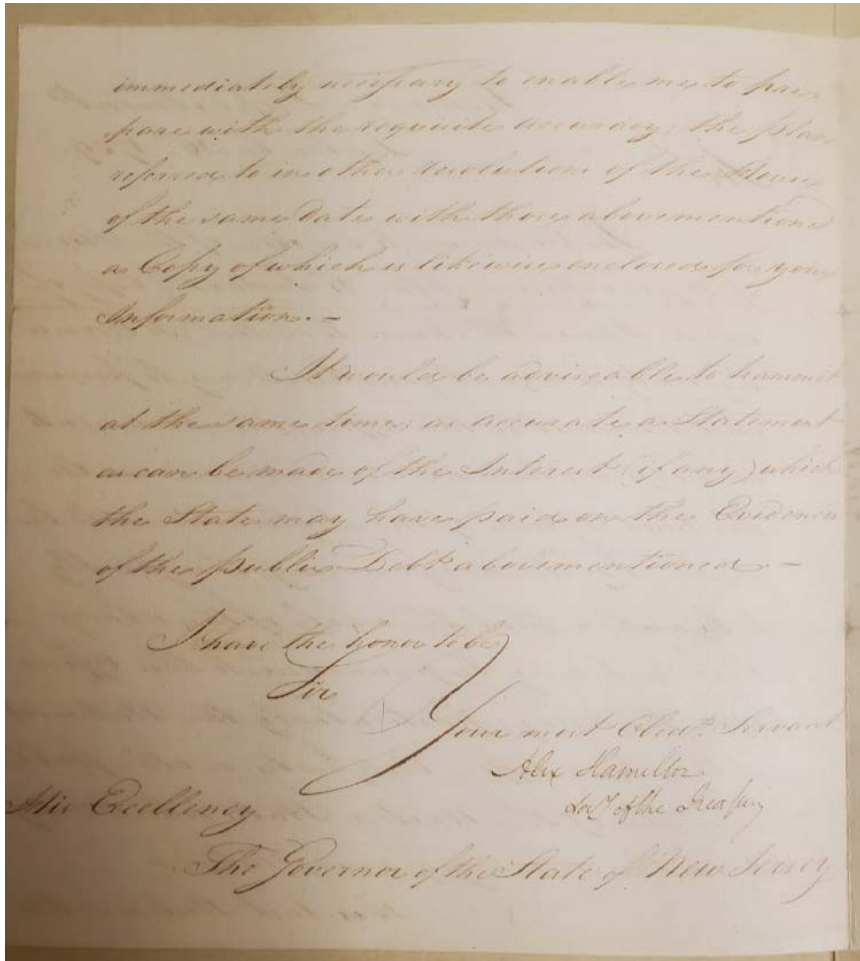
Early copy of the Constitution, currently housed at the N.J. State Archives

Interpretation:

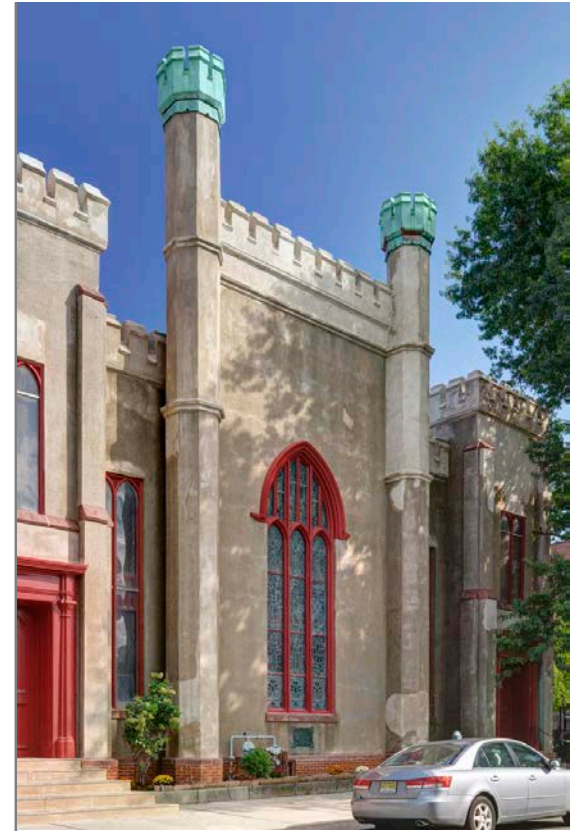
Theatre	2,400
Main Exhibit Hall	3,783
Changing/Traveling Exhibit	2,000
Community:	
Multipurpose Room (dividable)	800
Admin:	
Entry/Lobby	100
Offices (10 @ 120 SF)	1,200
Conference Room	300
Copy Room	100
Kitchenette/Break Room	150
Toilet(s)	160
Storage	100
Back of House:	
Storage	1,000
Janitor/Maintenance	100
Loading/Receiving	500
Mech./Elect./Plumbing Space	1,000
Subtotal Building Area:	16,759
Net-to-Gross Area Multiplier (@ 70% Eff. = x .43):	7.206
Grand Total Building Area:	23,965
Parking Spaces Required:	28
Bus Spaces:	2

Design Narrative:

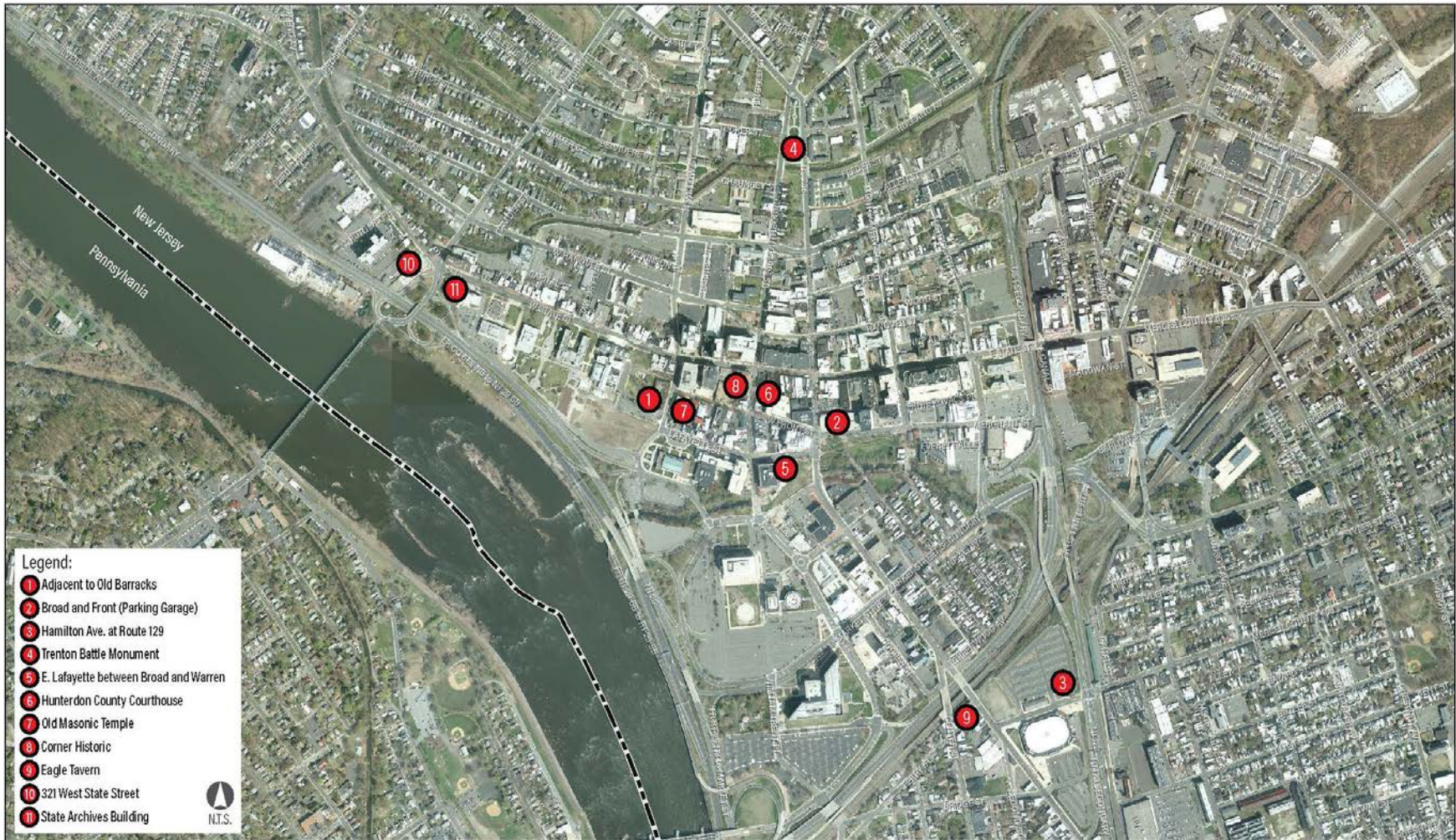
The Revolutionary War Experience Center will serve as a gateway visitor experience orientation and interpretation center for all the significant Revolutionary War sites in New Jersey, as well as provide an interactive experience that engages visitors in the impact of the war on a diverse population and its relevance today. The Center will also function as the principal location to interpret the two battles of Trenton during the Ten Crucial Days of the war.



Letter to the Governor of New Jersey signed by Alexander Hamilton; from the collection at the N.J. State Archives



St. Michael's Church in Trenton; the First Battle of Trenton took place, in part, around this site



Primary sites in Trenton considered for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center

Assessment of Potential Sites for the Revolutionary War Experience Center

Site Selection Process:

In May of 2021, Clarke Caton Hintz (CCH) began the process of identifying potential sites for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center to be located in Trenton, New Jersey, in two ways. First, the entire Feasibility Study team met to identify what characteristics are most important for selecting a potential site. An initial list of Preliminary Selection Criteria was created. Then, drawing upon its 40+ year history in the City of Trenton, CCH prepared a preliminary list of potential sites that could successfully address these criteria.

At the same time, CCH interviewed a number of key stakeholders in the City of Trenton. The stakeholders included:

- Richard Hunter, PhD; President, Hunter Research (Trenton-based cultural resource consulting firm)
- Anne LaBate, Principal, Segal LaBate; Commercial Realtor and a Trenton resident
- Richard Patterson, Executive Director of the Old Barracks Museum
- Roland Pott, Trenton resident and local realtor and developer; currently President of the Board of the Trenton Downtown Association
- George Sowa, Executive Director of Greater Trenton, Inc.
- Algernon Ward, retired; Trenton resident and activist; well-known Revolutionary War Battle Reenactor; Board Member of the Trenton Historical Society

These stakeholders were selected for their knowledge of state and local history, their familiarity with the City of Trenton and the region, and their understanding of Trenton real estate and the potential sites.

For these interviews, CCH elicited responses to the following questions:

1. Do you think locating a Revolutionary War Visitor Experience Center in Trenton is a good idea? Why or why not?
2. What features or characteristics would make it particularly attractive and successful?

3. SITE FEASIBILITY ASSESSMENT



Site adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum in Trenton; it is currently a parking lot



The rear of 321 West State Street, the former Gen. William S. Stryker House

3. In assessing potential sites, we are using the following criteria: Adjacency to a significant Revolutionary War site; ease of access by auto; ease of access by tour bus; ease of access by train; availability of parking; prominence of site; proximity to amenities (restaurant, retail); proximity to other cultural sites; availability of site and/or ease of acquisition; potential for spin-off redevelopment. Are there any other site characteristics that should be assessed? Which characteristics do you think are most and least important?
4. Given these (and any additional) criteria, do you have any potential sites in mind?
5. Do you think the New Jersey Revolutionary War Experience Center should be a new building or a renovation of an existing building? Or does it depend on the site and the building?
6. Any other thoughts and/or suggestions?

The interviewees almost universally responded that locating a Revolutionary War Experience Center in the City of Trenton is a good idea, using words like “wonderful”, “transformative”, “ideal”, etc. One respondent declined to provide feedback on potential sites for the Center, saying that they had concerns about the long-term costs of maintaining and staffing such a facility.

Based on the feedback, a more detailed list of Site Selection Criteria was developed:

- Revolutionary War Site Adjacency
- Auto Access
- Tour Bus Access
- Public Transportation Access
- Parking Access
- Availability and Cost of Site (for Acquisition)
- Prominence of Site
- Proximity to Amenities
- Proximity to Other Cultural Sites
- Redevelopment Potential

Also based on feedback from the stakeholders, a list of twenty potential sites was prepared. These were then assessed by the project team with additional comments provided by the stakeholders:

Potential Sites in Existing Buildings:

- Eagle Tavern: South Broad Street near Hamilton Avenue; vacant, city-owned building; constructed in 1765; adjacent to route that Washington took to Princeton after the Battles of Trenton.
- Old Masonic Temple: Near the State House and Old Barracks Museum; 1793 stone structure
- The Corner Historic (lower floors): Former bank at the corner of State and Warren Streets; site once housed the French Arms Tavern; Continental Congress met here; 1st Battle of Trenton swirled around this site.
- Department of State (State Archives Building) at the corner of West State and Calhoun Streets
- 321 West State Street: Gen. William S. Stryker House
- Taxation Building Site: Corner of West State and Barracks Street; vacant state office building
- Former Holiday Inn at State and Calhoun (would be demolished)
- First Presbyterian Church: East State Street; sanctuary is currently unused.
- NJBIA Headquarters: First floor of this office building on East Lafayette Street

Potential Sites on Vacant Land;

- Trenton Battle Monument (Between Warren and Broad Streets, location of First Battle of Trenton)
- East Lafayette Street, between Broad and Warren, along the Assunpink Creek (Adjacent to the site of the Second Battle of Trenton)
- Former parking garage at Broad and Front Streets (Vacant and slated for demolition; across from Mill Hill Park, site of the Second Battle of Trenton)
- Parking lot on South Warren Street (location of the original Hunterdon County Courthouse)
- Hamilton Avenue at Route 129 (George Washington traveled Hamilton Avenue to Princeton after the Second Battle of Trenton)



The side of the vacant parking garage at Front and Broad Streets, across from Mill Hill Park



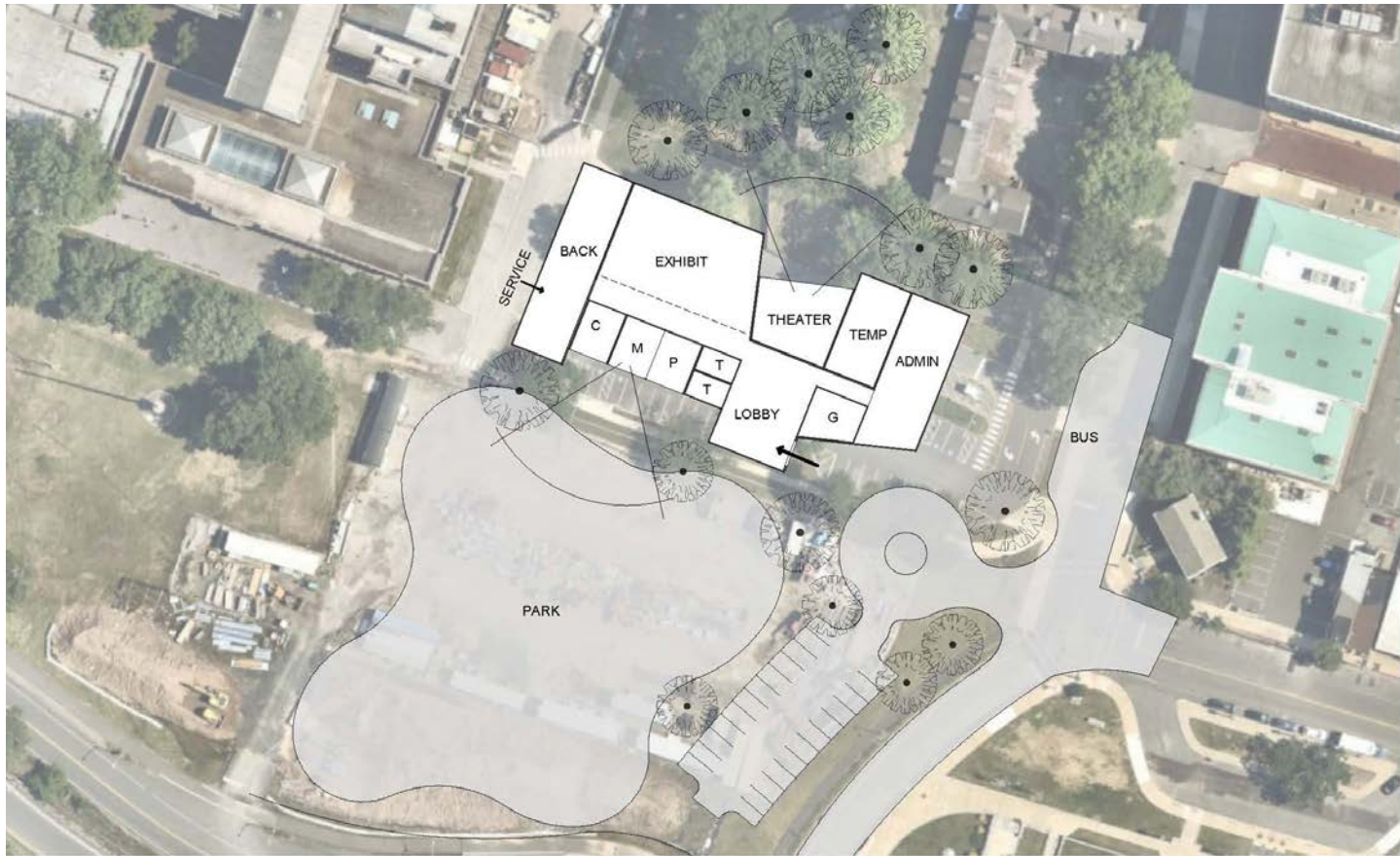
The rear of the building that houses the N.J. State Archives; Route 29 is to the left

- Adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum (1/2 of Washington's army arrived here for the First Battle of Trenton)
- Parking lots along North Willow and Passaic Streets; owned by the State and private developers
- The New Jersey State Museum; potential site on lawn in front of the State Museum and Library

Using feedback from the interviews, as well as rankings from members of the CCH/ GWWO/ Hargrove International project team, CCH developed a list of the most highly ranked sites. In order of ranking, they are:

1. Site adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum on Barrack Street
2. Broad and Front (parking garage slated for demolition)
3. Hamilton Avenue at Route 129
4. Adjacent to the Trenton Battle Monument (either along Pennington or along Canal)
5. East Lafayette Street between South Broad and South Warren Streets (along the Assunpink Creek)
6. Former Hunterdon County Courthouse Site (South Warren Street)
7. Old Masonic Temple
8. Corner Historic
9. Eagle Tavern
10. 321 West State Street
11. State Archives Building

On July 22, 2021, these findings were presented to the project team from Crossroads of the American Revolution Association. At that meeting, it was decided that three sites should be considered in greater detail: The site adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum; the site that currently contains a vacant garage at Broad and Front Streets; and the building on West State Street where the N.J. State Archives is housed. The first two sites were selected for continued consideration as they received the highest overall rankings. The N.J. State Archives building was included because of the extraordinary collection of documents and artifacts relating to the American Revolution housed there.



Preliminary Concept 1: Adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum

Pros:

1. Prominent location with easy auto and pedestrian access
2. State-owned site
3. Adjacent and close walking distance to significant Revolutionary War sites
4. Adequate space for the building and associated parking

5. Close to downtown amenities

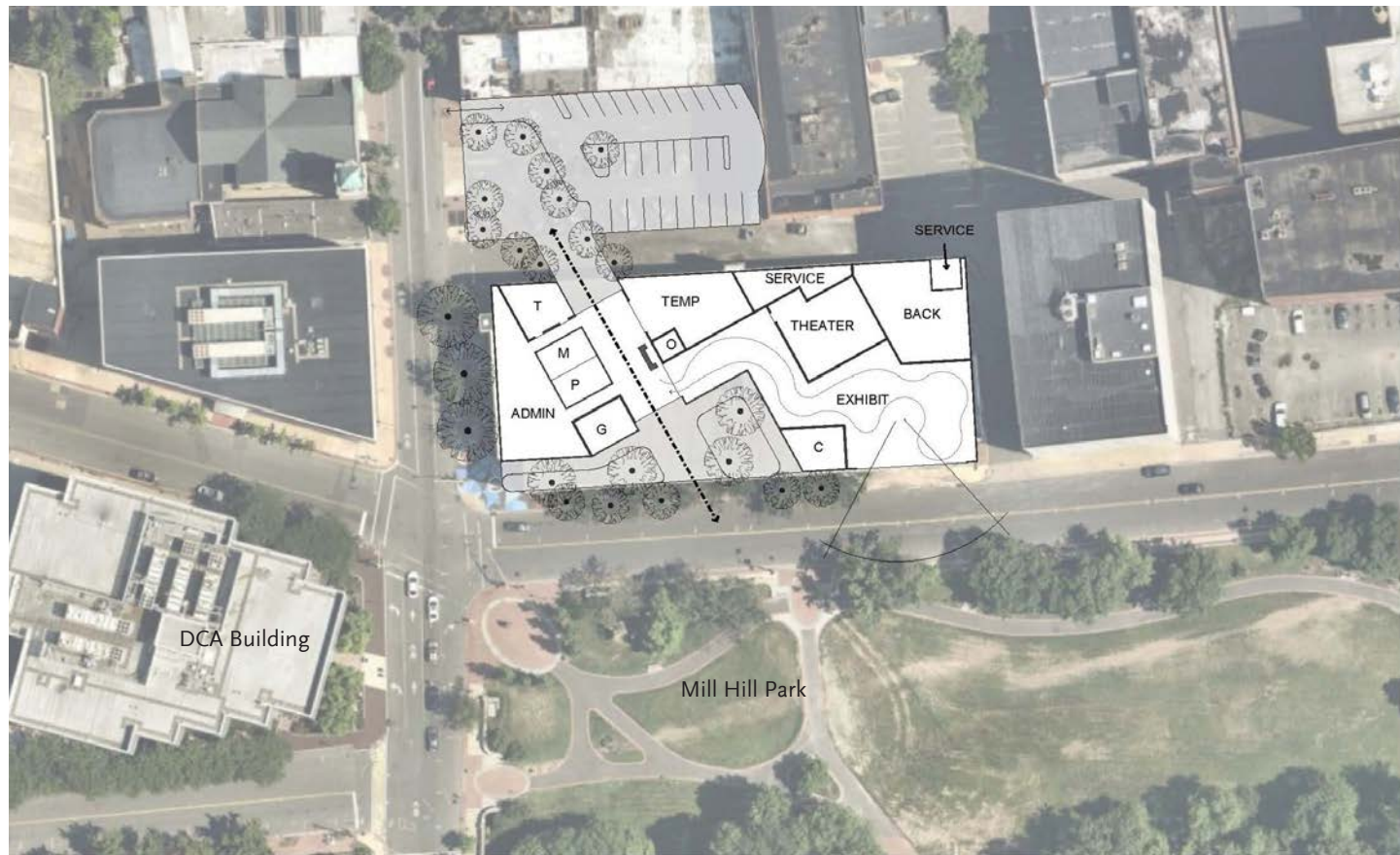
6. Close to the N.J. State Archives, the State House and to the planned N.J. Capital State Park

Cons:

1. Impacts existing State House parking



2008 design competition winner for the New Jersey Capital State Park with the potential location of the Revolutionary War Experience Center circled in red



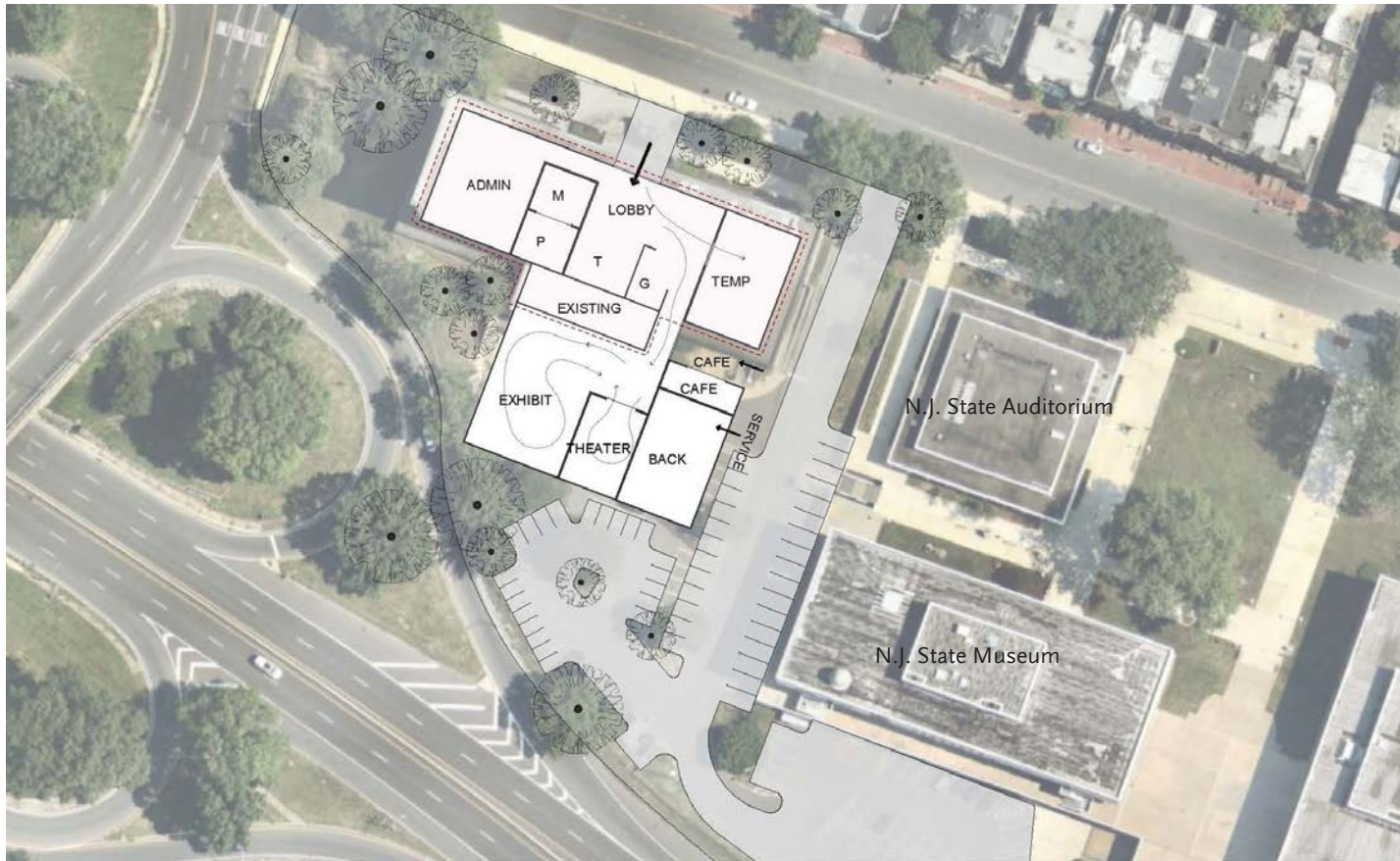
Preliminary Concept 2: Broad and Front Street

Pros:

1. Publicly owned site (Trenton Parking Authority)
2. Adjacent and close walking distance to significant Revolutionary War sites, including Mill Hill Park
3. Adequate space for the building and parking
4. Close to downtown amenities

Cons:

1. Existing parking garage needs to be demolished
2. Trenton Parking Authority already has redevelopment plans for this site
3. Auto access is more difficult and site is more difficult to find for first-time visitors



Preliminary Concept 3: N.J. State Archives Building

Pros:

1. State-owned site
2. In same building as N.J. State Archives

Cons:

1. Shared building, lack of clear identity and image
2. Access and location is more difficult for pedestrians and is a longer walk from downtown and to other Trenton Revolutionary War sites

Site Selection Conclusion:

After these three sites were chosen for additional consideration, the site selection criteria were reviewed in greater detail and concept plans were developed for each site to test their suitability for accommodating the program developed in Chapter 3. These concept plans were presented to the Crossroads project team on August 27, 2021. Pros and cons were discussed, as summarized on the three previous pages of this report. The team unanimously concluded that Option 1, the site adjacent to the Old Barracks Museum, is the best site for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center. GWWO then further developed the site plan and building massing to optimize the accommodation of the building program, site access, visitor parking, and site security for the secure parking adjacent to the State House. This concept design is further described in the next chapter.



Rear of the State Archives Building; this is the location of a potential addition that could house a portion of the Experience Center (Site option 3)



Rear of the parking garage at Broad and Front Streets; the view is looking towards South Broad Street, with the Turning Point United Methodist Church on the right (Site option 2)



The preferred site for the Revolutionary War Experience Center; the Old Barracks Museum is to the right, the State House dome is visible in the background; Route 29 is to the left



Concept rendering of the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center; the State House is to the left; the old Barracks Museum is above the proposed Center in this view

Concept Design for the Revolutionary War Experience Center

Site Design:

The site for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center is located south of the Old Barracks Museum and just east of the State House. The proposed Capital State Park, as envisioned in the 2008 design, borders the site to the south and will provide a beautiful, natural setting for the building. This location is ideally suited to the “visitor experience” function with its proximity to, visibility, and ease of access from Rte 29. In addition, adjacency to the Old Barracks Museum, with its rich Revolutionary War history, creates exciting opportunities to interpret the battles of Trenton and serve as a departure point for tours throughout the city and region.

Vehicular access to the site is provided at the intersection of West Lafayette and Barrack Streets. In addition, a drop-off lane, on the west side of Barrack Street, provides access for those arriving by bus. It is anticipated that buses will unload at the front of the Center and park remotely. The existing State House parking is reconfigured and located to the west of the building and provides access to the Center’s loading dock. Access to this lot will be gated and controlled, either through an electronic entry system or a manned security booth. Parking for the Experience Center is located just south of the Center and will also be used by those enjoying the future Capital State Park. The building enjoys ample setbacks from the entry drive and Barrack Street, allowing for a continuation of the landscape buffer in front of the Old Barracks Museum.



The site plan for the proposed Center shows vehicular and pedestrian access from Barrack and West Lafayette Streets, visitor parking, secure State House parking and the potential relation of the new building to the proposed Capital State Park to the south

4. CONCEPT DESIGN



Old Barracks Museum in Trenton; this major heritage tourism attractor and significant Revolutionary War site is located adjacent to the preferred location for the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center



View from Lafayette Street of the proposed entry to the Revolutionary War Experience Center; the State House dome is visible in the distance



Concept design view of the proposed Center from the west; the State House is to the left

Building Design:

Patrick Henry famously said, “Give me liberty or give me death,” a phrase that became a war cry of the Revolution and one that was repeated by Washington as he prepared to attack Trenton. The enormity of that sentiment was continually felt by those engaged to gain our freedom.¹

The Revolutionary War Experience Center is designed as a metaphor for the weight of responsibility felt by the Continental Army during the most pivotal time of the Revolutionary War. The heavy mass of the second level looms over visitors as they enter the building, representative of the crushing reality of war and the severity of the potential outcome. That feeling is reinforced as visitors enter the lobby and are greeted with an expansive view of the Old Barracks and immediately get a sense of the significance of this place with regard to the war and our freedoms as a fledgling country. The first floor of the building is clad with limestone, solid and steadfast, representative of our country’s foundation, while the upper level is clad in copper that will patina over time, representative of our ever-changing struggle about the meaning of democracy. Both materials are present on buildings throughout the Capital Complex and reinforce the Center’s civic nature. The building’s distinctive form is clearly a destination and beckons visitors inside to learn about the Revolutionary War in New Jersey and the Ten Crucial Days that changed the course of our history.

Once they have had an opportunity to avail themselves of necessities (comfort stop, orientation and ticketing), visitors have several options and are encouraged to create their own experience based on interests and time. First-time visitors are encouraged to visit the theatre, located adjacent to the lobby, for an immersive introduction to the Revolutionary War in New Jersey. A large temporary exhibit gallery is also located adjacent to the lobby and will offer rotating exhibits from the N.J. State Archives collection or traveling exhibits from other significant sites. In addition to providing exciting content, the temporary exhibit gallery promotes repeat visitation. The gift shop is highly visible, located adjacent to the entry, so that visitors are

¹ <https://emergingrevolutionarywar.org/2018/12/26/victory-or-death/>



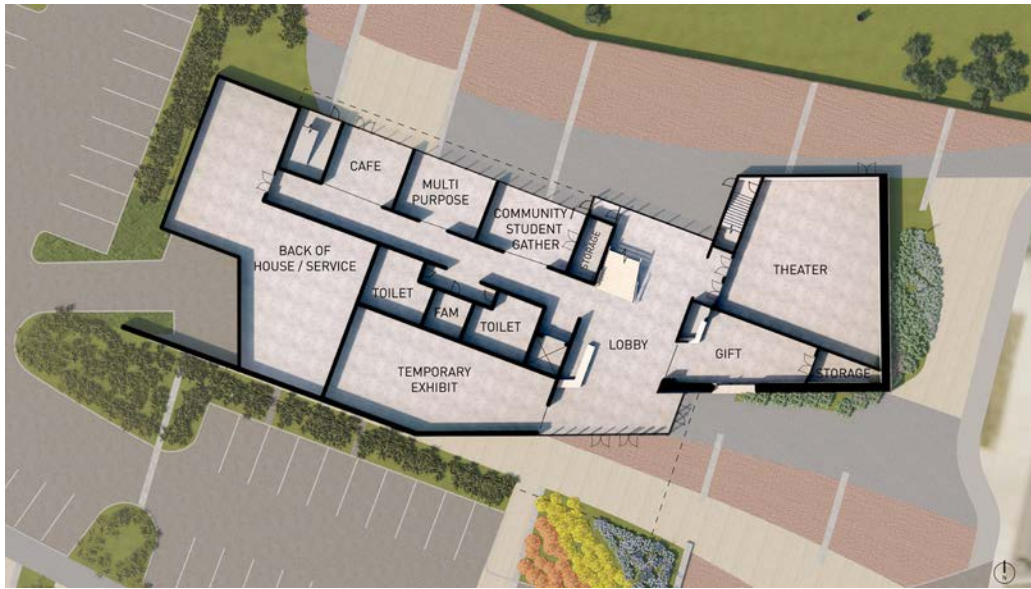
Concept design of the proposed main entry to the Revolutionary War Experience Center; the proposed building is clad in copper and limestone. Both materials reflect materials used in the State House Historic District.



Concept rendering of the main lobby of the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center

aware of retail opportunities both as they enter and exit the facility. This location also affords an opportunity for street presence and a potential after-hours entry. A dividable multipurpose room is located to the west of the lobby, overlooking the Barracks site. This room can be programmed for many different activities, including lectures, school programs, public art shows, etc. It is anticipated that this space could be rented out for private events or meetings as a supplementary form of revenue. A small coffee shop/café with indoor and outdoor seating is also planned for the first floor overlooking the Barracks site.

The second floor of the building is comprised of a permanent exhibit gallery, administrative offices and an events deck. The permanent exhibit overlooks and is visible from the lobby below, creating a visual connection and enticing visitors up to the exhibit. In fulfillment of its “visitor experience” function, the exhibit is anticipated to tell the story of the Revolutionary War with an immersive experience on the war’s impact on ordinary people and will refer visitors to the various sites located throughout New Jersey for more comprehensive/in-depth interpretation. An events deck is located to the north of the



Concept plan showing spaces on the first floor of the proposed Center, including the entry lobby, gift shop, theater, exhibit space, multi-use space, community and gathering space, etc.



Concept plan showing spaces on the second floor of the proposed Center, including extensive exhibit spaces and administrative offices



Exhibit space on the second floor of the proposed Center

exhibit space overlooking the Old Barracks. This space will provide interpretive opportunities related to the Old Barracks, but can also be used for special events, fundraising events and community groups. The administrative offices are located to the west of the permanent exhibit, are afforded copious amounts of natural light, and offer views both to the Barracks to the north and the future Capital State Park to the south.

The Revolutionary War Experience Center is ideally located in Trenton to tell the stories associated with the war throughout New Jersey, as well as the Ten Crucial Days. The distinctive architecture of the building is seen as a clear destination to visitors wanting to know more about New Jersey's role in the war and where and how to get more information on other sites throughout the state.

Estimated Cost:

Based on experience with recent similar facilities, the construction cost for a 24,000 sf Experience Center, including the immersive theatre space and state of the art exhibits, is in the \$21 million to \$22 million range, plus design and other hard and soft costs. The working budget for the Experience Center project is therefore \$25 million.

Other Considerations:

The state should also use this opportunity to complete other related heritage tourism projects in the City of Trenton. For example, completing the Capital State Park Plan from 2008 to create an attractive campus will encourage visitors to linger longer. Cost estimate = \$3.0 million.

Branded signage to ease wayfinding from all major access points and throughout the city, as well as to link the Center with relevant American Revolution sites throughout the Trenton area will be needed. Cost estimate = \$250,000.

The Center is designed to serve as a gateway for the exploration of New Jersey's rich Revolutionary era heritage and to enhance economic activity in communities throughout the state. For this project to be successful, significant investment needs to be made to bring core American Revolution sites up to "visitor attraction" standards. These costs are detailed in other reports commissioned by Revolution NJ, but should be considered as a requisite element of the project.



Concept rendering from the proposed second floor of the Revolutionary War Experience Center



View of the proposed terrace on the second floor of the Center; the State House will be visible from this deck.

Concept rendering showing the proposed Visitor Experience Center from Route 29; the signage and copper cladding will present an identifiable image for visitors arriving by car



Rendering of the 2nd floor gallery space; the outdoor space is to the left



Timeline and Next Steps:

For this Revolutionary War Experience Center to serve its intended purpose, it must be completed well in advance of the official kick-off of the 250th anniversary on July 4, 2026. Working backwards from this date, construction should be complete, including exhibit installation, by April of 2026. Because buildings of this type include complex systems and the need to install sensitive exhibits, construction will likely take two years. Construction should therefore begin in the spring of 2024, with construction bidding complete in early 2024. With buildings of this level of complexity, the design will take at least one year. This means that time is of the essence: Site selection and design team selection should be complete by September of 2022.

Next Steps and Preliminary Project Schedule:

- Feasibility study, including site recommendation, concept plans, initial budget and Heritage Tourism Study, complete December, 2021
- Site selected, acquisition begun, budgeting in motion January, 2022
- Site use acquired, funding in place by September 1, 2022
- Design team selected fall of 2022
- Design begins December 1, 2022
- Out to bid early January, 2024
- Construction begins spring of 2024
- Construction, including exhibit installation, complete by April, 2026



Concept rendering of the entry to the proposed Revolutionary War Experience Center; view is from Barrack Street, with the Old Barracks Museum visible on the right

Preliminary Cost Estimate: Revolutionary War Experience Center

	Area	Cost/SF	Total	Site Acquisition	\$0?
Building	24,000	\$650	\$15,600,000	Design Fees @ 10%	\$ 1,660,000
Site	1 LS	\$1,000,000	\$ 1,000,000	Exhibit Design Fees @ 20%	\$ 933,960
Immersive Experience (Theatre):	2,400	\$1,000	\$ 2,400,000	Soft Cost Total:	\$ 2,593,960
Exhibit	3,783	\$600	\$ 2,269,800	Anticipated Project Cost:	\$23,863,760
Construction Cost Total:			\$21,269,800	Working Budget:	\$25,000,000



4 Months



3 Years



10 Years



20 Years

Concept rendering for how the copper cladding on the Revolutionary War Experience Center will transform over time



The transformation of the copper cladding over time will be an important part of the story of the Revolutionary War Experience Center