



Shown above are Hunterdon County Freeholder William G. Mennen, Friends of Ely Park CEO Jim Hamilton and design committee members, Heather Martin, Michael Burns and Mark Shablin. Friends of Ely Park seeks to enhance and protect the park for future enjoyment by the community.

Officials applaud Ely Park plan

By Linda Seida
Staff Writer

LAMBERTVILLE — Jim Hamilton and the Friends of Ely Park last week took home a design award for their plan to improve Ely Memorial Park on North Main Street.

The Hunterdon County Planning Board singled out the plan with a special recognition award in the design category for commercial or public spaces.

The project has several connected goals. One of them is to make the park more appealing visually. Another aspect aims to improve safety.

The park is the only sizeable open space in the city of approximately 4,000 residents, and yet the side that fronts Main Street (Route 29) is "visually unappealing and uninviting," the nomination for the design award states. "Additionally, the northern edge presents an opportunity for the development of a visual gateway to the city for pedestrians, automobiles and bicycles entering from the north."

"The design committee and I appreciate the honor," said Mr. Hamilton, the Design Committee chairman and CEO of the Friends, a nonprofit organization. "It's said that 'from small beginnings come great things' and that certainly is our vision."

A lifelong Lambertville resident, restaurateur and set designer, Mr. Hamilton led the committee in over-

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seeing the creation of all design elements and architectural drawings. Committee members include architect Michael Burns, landscape architect Heather Martin and landscaper Mark Shablin.

In addition to the honor bestowed by the county Planning Board, the design also received a commendation from Lambertville officials. The City Council passed a resolution in February to recognize the Friends' ambitious project and the group's fundraising efforts that aim to ultimately bring the design to life.

The council noted the Friends want the project to be self-funding. According to the city, a mix of federal, state and local funding sources, will be tapped. The Friends also

plan to host fundraisers to pay for the upgrades and changes, including engineering and lighting plans.

The Friends goal is to raise \$2 million, according to spokeswoman Marcia Conrad. In the last year the Friends raised \$36,000. Another \$37,000 was donated over the course of a recent week and a half, she said.

"So it looks like our campaign has really taken a giant leap forward," Ms. Conrad said. "We have quite a few fundraising projects coming down the pike and should hopefully be on our way now that the word is really out there and the support is rapidly coming together."

Among the key design elements are 26 sections of fencing that will line the park

along Main Street. Pennsylvania bluestone will cap 16 brick columns. Columns will be connected with wrought-iron fencing. The enclosure is estimated to cost \$75,000. A \$5,000 donation would pay for one brick column and the adjoining fencing.

Mr. Hamilton said, "There's another truth — that 'beginning is easy, continuing hard.' Here's where we really look forward to others getting involved and lending financial support to a project that will benefit the whole community."

The plan calls for increased lighting, walkways and park entrances. Also, a re-facing of the Lambertville Public School with slate would create an open-air chalkboard for students. A revitalization of the baseball

field is also in the plan, along with a retrofit of the concession stand for cooking and refrigeration equipment to allow the serving of food during community events.

Caroline Ely, a descendant of Lambertville's first settler, John Holcombe, donated the field to the city in the 19th century.

Mr. Hamilton and the friends earlier this year won conceptual approval from the city's Recreation Commission. Along with the fence and its focal points, the plan includes a tile mural to line the children's play area and replacements trees for North Main. Also included is a firemen's memorial in front of the Union and Fleetwing Fire Company that was installed and dedicated in the fall.

Another Lambertville design also won recognition from the county Planning Board.

Don Hart, of the Hart Venture Group, of Stockton, received the award for a project called 45 Grand, located at 45 N. Main St.

The architect for this winning design is again Mr. Burns, who has offices in Lambertville.

Working from historic photographs, the exterior brick is being restored, and the metal and glass storefronts are being reintroduced. The site has a "distinctive horizontal division," according to the nomination, that is reinforced through new signs.

Additionally, a reconstruction and redesign of the existing 16-car parking area across the street from the building will provide much-needed off-street parking in the city.

The Planning Board recognized Mr. Hart for "his dedication to the vibrancy of the city's Central Business District by creating this mixed-use project which will enliven this part of the Central Business District. Additionally, for his sensitive reuse and restoration of this historically significant structure."