

BUCKS COUNTY

# Students present waterfront plans

An amphitheater and an art museum were among the proposals for Bensalem in a college project.

By Dwayne Campbell  
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

The secret to redeveloping Bensalem's riverfront might be found in the dozens of maps and charts tacked on a wall at the University of Pennsylvania's School of Design.

"These are very good ideas and visions," said Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo, who took the ride down Interstate 95 yesterday to look at the ideas students had come up with to transform the mostly ailing riverfront into an economic and cultural engine for the township.

Jennifer Wong, a student from New York, fancies a huge amphitheater at the waterfront where boaters at an adjacent marina could also watch the performances. Amy Seek, 26, from Tennessee, wants to convert an old steel mill into an art museum, a central part of her idea to bring people to the waterfront.

For them and 24 other graduate landscape architecture students, the reviews also meant grades from a panel of professors and professionals.

"Some of them are very feasible and could very well be incorporated into our plan to change the riverfront over the next 25 years," DiGirolamo said.

The presentations cap a semester-long project the students undertook as part of their studio program. It is a joint effort between Bensalem Township and Penn Praxis, the consulting arm of the design school led by executive director Harris Steinberg. Penn Praxis is collecting \$25,000 from the quasi-governmental Bensalem Economic Development Corp. for the effort.

"I'm sure we're going to be happy with the final analysis," said George Flocco, executive director of the corporation. "Some of these students didn't even know Bucks County before this, and look at what they have



Graduate student Brenna Herpmann speaks at a presentation on Bensalem's waterfront at the University of Pennsylvania. Twenty-six students spent a semester researching the area and drafting designs.

MICHAEL BRYANT / Inquirer Staff Photographer

come up with. Some of these are absolutely doable."

Parts of some of the plans will be formally presented to Bensalem officials at a meeting next month. About 50 Bensalem High School students who are assisting the Penn students with parts of the project will also be on hand for that meeting.

Flocco said that a final proposal would be given to the firm that the county selects to do a formal study of the Delaware riverfront in Bensalem and five other lower Bucks river towns.

Last week, a Bucks County Redevelopment Authority riverfront study committee reviewed presentations from five firms vying to do a thorough study of the 25-mile stretch along the water.

The chosen firm, which will

be announced next month, will be awarded a \$331,000 contract to do a yearlong analysis of the area then advise county and town officials how best to pursue redevelopment.

Working professionals also advised the graduate students. Cindy Sanders, a graduate of the program who is an adjunct professor and a principal at the Olin Partnership, headed the student studio. She said variations of some of the students' ideas had reinvigorated river towns across the country.

Megan Dougherty, 24, who called the exercise a "reality project," presented a community concept designed around riverfront parks, shops, houses and entertainment venues within walking distance.

Bob Braubitz, Leo Wesolowski, Bensalem Mayor Joseph DiGirolamo, and George Flocco listen to the presentations. Braubitz, Wesolowski and Flocco are members of the Bensalem Economic Development Corp.

Before students could zero in on development concepts, they had to research the history, topography, geology, current use, and other aspects of the area.

That information, as well as the leading themes — public access, open space, public attractions, overcoming I-95 as a barrier, drainage issues, and balancing housing and commercial development — will be valuable to professional architects.

"The mayor wanted the students' energy and vision," Steinberg said. "The results are really rich."

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