

EDITORIALS

Taxpayers pay for return to good ol' days

Nearly 80 years after opening its doors to the public, the Union County Arts Center in downtown Rahway is on its way back to the forefront, with a restoration project set to begin in the next year.

Because of a deal reached between the county and the Union County Arts Center Inc., it will be just a few weeks until final approval from the state allows for projects such as air conditioning and upgraded mechanical, plumbing and electrical systems to begin.

Other renovations such as a stage expansion for larger performances and improvements to dressing rooms are also among those items slated for repair.

The Arts Center will stand side by side with a host of redevelopment projects throughout downtown Rahway — the only difference being that the redevelopment projects are privately funded while the arts center is funded with our tax dollars.

Two years ago, we opposed the county acquiring the center, saying that private funding should be sought. Now the county budget has swelled to more than \$400 million. Freeholders should be tightening their belts, not taking on new projects.

But the center is now Union County government's property and yet another line item in the budget. The taxpayers had enough of a financial burden on their collective plates before the county took on this project.

The Arts Center first opened its doors in 1928 for vaudeville performances and silent movie showings. It's convenient location between New York City and Philadelphia made the theater a stop for travelers, and its impressive décor and modern amenities made visits to the theater all the more impressive to crowds.

While we hope to see the Union County Arts Center return to its former reputation as a desirable destination, bringing life back into Rahway, we regret the fact that taxpayers are paying the bill for the project.