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# Part Four: Enhancing The Physical Environment

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## INTRODUCTION

The condition of West Philadelphia's physical environment has declined over time in some sections of the district. In other sections, the appearance of the physical environment fails to reflect the importance of the location or the activities that are taking place there. In this part of The Plan for West Philadelphia, deficiencies and potentials in the district's physical environment are explored, and strategies for improvement are presented.

Creating a more attractive urban environment is a goal in The Plan for West Philadelphia because the quality of the physical environment has a direct impact on the livability and the economic health of the district. Here in Part Four of the Plan, the most promising opportunities for improving the quality of West Philadelphia's physical surroundings are addressed. These opportunities fall into five categories: (1) communities, (2) districts, (3) corridors, (4) nodes and landmarks, and (5) gateways and image-making locations.

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### Communities

Communities can project a positive appearance in many ways. Certain types of physical improvements are inexpensive and relatively easy for communities to implement on their own, and these actions can create a dramatic change for the better. Active and organized civic groups and block clubs are often the reason why particular areas are attractive and desirable places to live.

Community empowerment, and the pride and diligence of each property owner, are keys to enhancing the physical environment of West Philadelphia. In The Plan for West Philadelphia, community empowerment is seen as a big part of the solution to the problems of neighborhood decline and decay.

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### Districts

West Philadelphia contains four large districts that occupy strategic locations, and that are susceptible to considerable growth and change in the future. For the most part, the districts are not neighborhoods, but the interface with adjacent neighborhoods is an important issue. The four districts are "Schuylkill West Bank," the 46th & Market area, West Parkside Enterprise Zone, and the City Avenue corridor.

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### Corridors

The discussion of corridors is called "Corridors in Decline" because of a trend that characterizes the physical environment of many sections of West Philadelphia: conditions along major streets and major roadways are often noticeably worse than the conditions along other streets. From West Parkside to Cobbs Creek and from Walnut Hill to Overbrook, the smaller residential streets are generally in good condition, while the major arterials that residents must travel to arrive at their homes are in poor condition.

Deterioration along major roadways such as Market Street, 52nd Street, Lansdowne Avenue and Lancaster Avenue dampens the morale of many residents who keep their own homes in excellent repair; and it creates a negative image among people who are travelling through the area. The Plan for West Philadelphia proposes strategies to renew the physical environment along these highway corridors because a large proportion of West Philadelphia's population is affected by "Corridors in Decline."

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### Nodes and landmarks

These types of physical features are intrinsic, and in many cases unique, elements of West Philadelphia's physical fabric.

A "node" is a site that functions as a focal

point for community life. From among the dozens of nodes in West Philadelphia, five nodes have been identified which are major parks and squares in the neighborhoods of West Philadelphia. These parks and squares combine with adjoining streets, sidewalks, homes, shops and institutions to create special places in their respective neighborhoods.

"Landmarks" are physical structures that, by their significance, identify a particular precinct of West Philadelphia or lend identity to West Philadelphia as a whole. They exist in every section of West Philadelphia. They include churches, synagogues, schools, rail stations, museums and historical sites. Most have architectural and historical significance; and because West Philadelphia is so rich in historical and architectural features, there are many in the district. In the discussion of landmarks, seven West Philadelphia landmarks are given special mention.

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### **Gateways and Image-Making Locations**

In Philadelphia, the business community and local government recognized long ago that the experience of arriving in Philadelphia has a major impact on the way the City is perceived. In keeping with the saying that "the first impression is a lasting impression," projects affecting Philadelphia International Airport, 30th Street Station, the Market East rail station, Interstate 95, the Schuylkill Expressway and the Vine Street Expressway have succeeded in dramatically improving Philadelphia's "gateways."

West Philadelphia's gateways must also function effectively. West Philadelphia has attractive and noteworthy gateway locations such as the Philadelphia Zoo and Thirtieth Street Station. However, many gateways to West Philadelphia create a negative image from the outset. An example is Baltimore Avenue at its bridge over Cobbs Creek. Here the inbound trav-

eller sees a used tire vendor, a broken and graffiti-strewn "Welcome to Philadelphia" sign and parkland that is strewn with litter.

Improving the arrival experience along Baltimore Avenue and other key points of entry involves inexpensive and maintenance-oriented measures that may seem insignificant in the context of a 14-square mile district of the city, but this type of initiative will make a big difference in the way West Philadelphia is perceived by visitors and residents alike. Several important gateways and image-making locations are recommended for improvement in this Plan.

The Foundation for Architecture, as part of its "Direction Philadelphia" signage system that was recently implemented in Central Philadelphia, has installed a new welcome sign at the intersection of Marshall Road, Cobbs Creek Parkway and Spruce Street -- a gateway to West Philadelphia from Delaware County. This attractive sign, accompanied by new landscaping provided by the Philadelphia Green organization, is a prototype for signs that could grace many more gateways to Philadelphia. The Foundation for Architecture is seeking funding to install more of the signs, and the Marshall Road prototype demonstrates the effectiveness of the idea.

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### COMMUNITIES

West Philadelphia's physical environment is, in large part, defined by the condition of communities. In Part Three, "Neighborhoods and Housing," recommendations address site-specific problems that are encountered in West Philadelphia's residential and commercial areas. However, a more general course of action is also recommended: community empowerment.

Community empowerment refers to the capacity within a community for improvements to be accomplished through the initiative of local

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*In the nineties, community groups are challenged to take on more and more responsibilities.*

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residents. Community empowerment has important advantages. First, resident-initiated actions put the community in control; the community can control a plan, a project, or (in the broadest sense) its destiny. Second, the residents' accomplishments will cause a spirit of self-help and self-determination to become firmly established in the community. Third, this spirit represents a lasting community-based capability for positive change. Fourth, building greater self-reliance by communities is a safeguard against the kind of economic downturn and fiscal crisis that the City of Philadelphia is trying to overcome during the 1990's.

Community empowerment can happen at many levels: at a grass-roots level or through more sophisticated community-based mechanisms. Projects can be initiated by individuals, block groups, neighborhood groups and community development corporations.

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### **Community Empowerment at the Grass-roots Level**

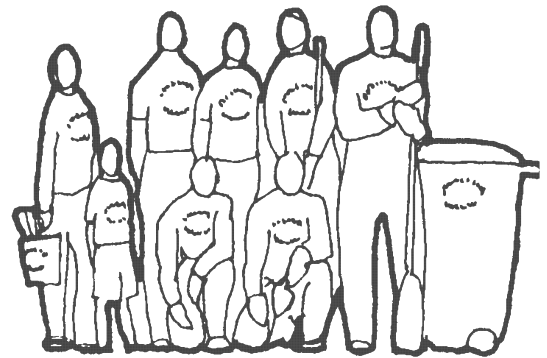
Personal commitment, at the level of the individual resident, is the bottom-line ingredient in community empowerment. Personal commitment is also the bottom-line challenge because individuals face so many competing demands for their time; but behind every creative neighborhood improvement is at least one resident who somehow managed to find the necessary time and energy.

Effective resident-initiated improvement strategies also require that residents become organized. Block clubs must be established. Block captains must emerge as leaders. Sustained effort is required. Persistence and patience are needed.

Community clean-ups can become periodic rituals for residents of a block. Block clubs can participate in the annual "clean block" contest sponsored by the Philadelphia More Beautiful

Committee. Brick houses can be repointed. Porches can be painted. Vacant houses can creatively be made to look occupied. Coordinated paint schemes, whether they are historically accurate or boldly designed, can be used on the exterior of homes.

Street trees can be planted and sidewalks can be repaired. Shrubbery, flower boxes and



Neighborhood Clean Up

planters can be placed in front of individual homes, along with lampposts that are both attractive and crime-detering. Gardens can be planted on vacant lots behind wooden or wrought-iron fences that stand alongside the sidewalk. Local store owners can erect awnings and signage that fits in with surrounding buildings, and the managers of apartment complexes can keep the week's trash neatly hidden inside enclosures. Billboards can be removed from rooftops and graffiti can be removed from walls. "Welcome to our Neighborhood" signs can be placed at major entrances to the neighborhood.

Most of these improvements are inexpensive, and many are "do-it-yourself" projects; but when they are undertaken for building after building, they will dramatically improve the appearance of a block. Another result is also guaranteed: community pride.

When special help or resources are needed

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*Community Empowerment refers to initiative, leadership and accomplishment by and for the citizenry.*

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for small-scale improvements, many sources can be tapped. The City can arrange for a street to be blocked-off; this may be needed for a day of repair work or for a block party that celebrates residents' accomplishments. When clean-up projects are organized, the City Streets Department can provide trash bags, clean-up tools and specially-scheduled trash pickup. The Community Affairs officer from the Police Department can advise the residents about security in the home and on the block. Residents can approach a nearby business, hospital or university for donations of supplies, labor, transportation or technical expertise.

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**Community Empowerment by Neighborhoods, Individually and Collectively**

Individuals and block groups can also turn to the local neighborhood organization for support in making physical improvements to their neighborhoods. Neighborhood organizations, which are listed in Part Three of the plan, are a critical resource for community empowerment. They are sometimes known as community groups, civic associations and neighborhood councils. They can coordinate the efforts of block clubs and they address issues at the neighborhood level.

Neighborhood organizations represent local residents in discussions with elected officials, government agencies and departments, property owners, for-profit and non-profit developers, investors and employers. The City Planning Commission has a long tradition of providing technical assistance to neighborhood organizations.

Neighborhood groups often communicate with each other and pursue common interests by joining "umbrella" organizations that work for the betterment of an entire district of the city. West Philadelphia is fortunate to have two effective organizations of this type: the West Philadelphia Coalition of Neighborhoods and

Businesses, and the West Philadelphia Partnership. These organizations interface with government and the private sector; they establish goals, and engage in planning. These "umbrella" groups also foster a spirit of self-determination and community control that is shared by all member organizations.

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**"CDCs" as a Vehicle for Community Empowerment**

Community development corporations (CDCs) are arguably the most sophisticated form of community self-help. These are community-based non-profit organizations created for the purpose of developing housing or community facilities. They are funded by government grants, donations from private businesses, and donations from philanthropic organizations. The City's Office of Housing and Community Development gives significant emphasis to supporting CDCs, and the Planning Commission supports CDCs by assisting in their planning and by sharing information and resources.

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**Ideas for Community Improvement Projects**

Some kinds of physical improvements will benefit any neighborhood. Most of these actions can be implemented by property owners and community organizations.

Neighborhoods can be beautified through the installation of shrubbery, flower boxes, lamp posts, gardens, attractive fencing, and murals. Street trees and lighting are also important. Street trees should be maintained in good health and new ones should be provided where appropriate. A variety of species and spacing can be used to identify special places.

Supplemental street lighting can be provided to improve safety and for its decorative possibilities where possible and appropriate. Height, spacing, intensity and the color of street lighting can be used to underscore the intended roles of

specific streets, either residential or commercial. And all curbs, sidewalks and street surfaces should be maintained in good condition.

In commercial areas, awnings on retail streets can be very effective in identifying and unifying the special character of the street. However, heavy rigid structures which are costly and have high maintenance requirements (like the shoppers' canopy at 52nd Street) should be avoided. Patterns and colors of awnings should be coordinated amongst the shop owners.

An excellent example of creative and effective signage is found in the Overbrook Farms neighborhood, where a community group designed and installed "welcome" signs at neighborhood boundaries. Neighborhood retail areas can also be identified as special with a signage program specific to the area. Care should be taken so that the signs are attractive and well placed and not simply add clutter to the

streetscape.

Bus shelters and benches that now serve as product advertising should be considered for their possibilities for giving identity to neighborhoods or commercial strips.

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DISTRICTS

In this part of the Plan for West Philadelphia, four districts are analyzed because of their unique importance to West Philadelphia's physical environment.

- Schuylkill West Bank, located between University City and the Schuylkill River
- The 46th & Market Area in the center of West Philadelphia
- West Parkside Enterprise Zone, bounded by 52nd Street and Parkside, Belmont, Girard and Lancaster Avenues
- The City Avenue Corridor, which is the boundary between West Philadelphia and Montgomery County

These districts are certain to experience significant physical change; and the manner in which they change will play a major role in shaping the future of West Philadelphia.

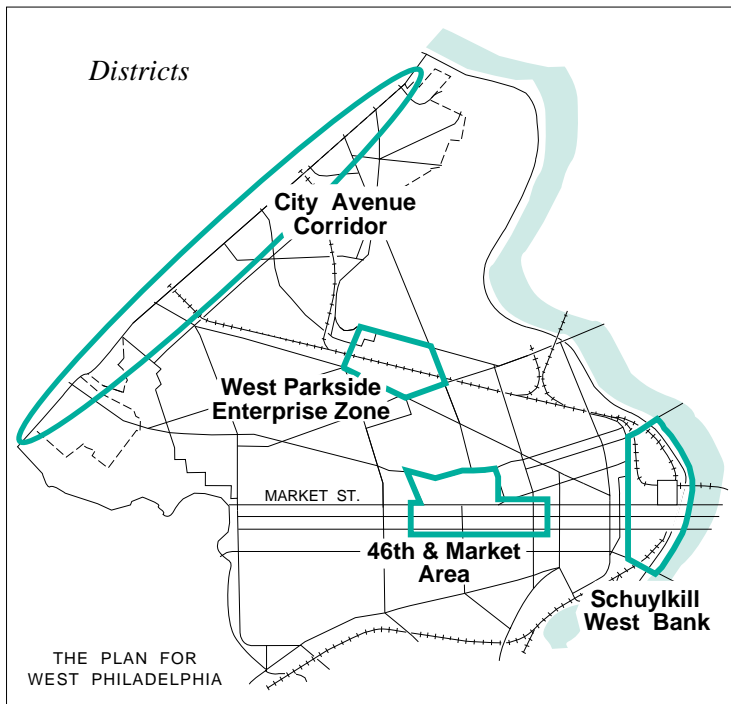
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DISTRICT: SCHUYLKILL WEST BANK

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**Introduction**

Schuylkill West Bank lies in the bow of the Schuylkill River between the Spring Garden and South Street Bridges. While it has been overshadowed in the past by the growth of Center City to the east and the excitement of campus life to the west, this area has considerable potential of its own for future development. With the presence of 30th Street Station, Schuylkill West Bank functions as the regional hub of the



AMTRAK Northeast Corridor rail lines and the suburban commuter rail lines. Additionally, the area is a major interchange location for the Interstate Highway System. The location of these combined uses ties Schuylkill West Bank to the rest of the eastern seaboard and lends considerable advantage to Center City as a competitive urban center.

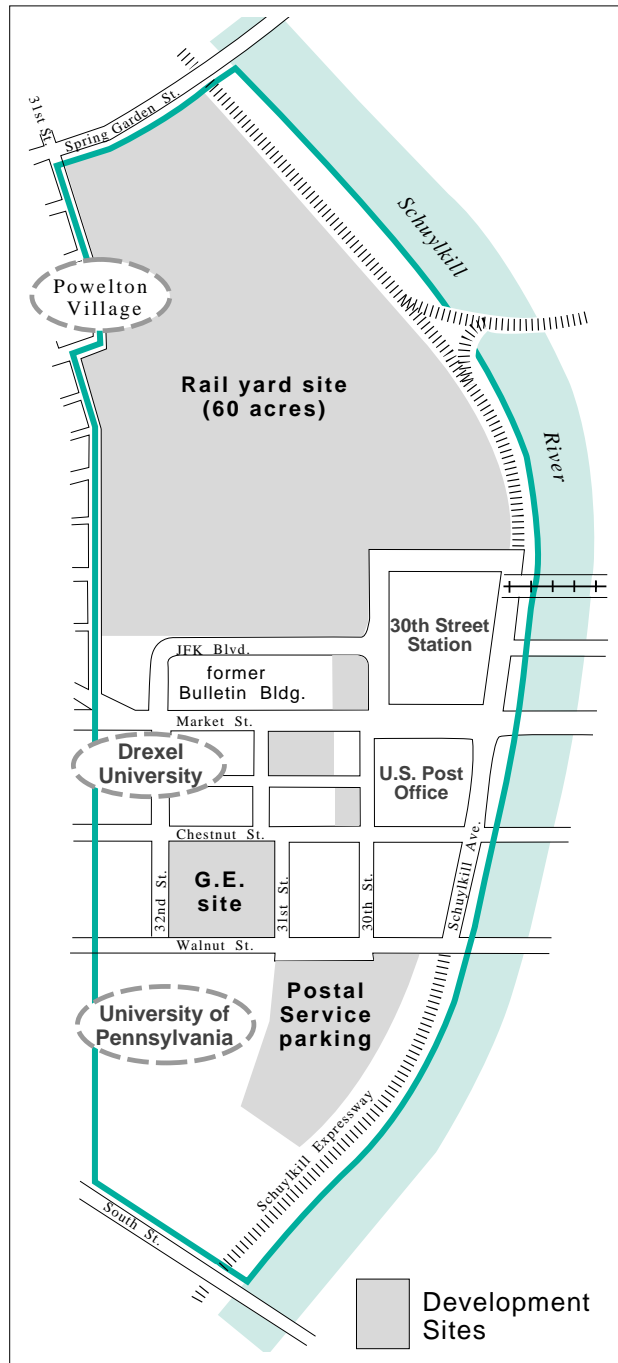
**Existing Conditions**

The district covers approximately one-third of a square mile, with the majority of the land dedicated to transportation and distribution. Most buildings and properties are very large. Railroad operations occupy most of the land north of Market Street, and the U.S. Postal Service uses the equivalent of four large city blocks for a post office, the regional headquarters, and parking, loading and vehicle servicing. The campuses of Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania are located on the western edge of the Schuylkill West Bank district.

In recent years, developments were planned, and then postponed, for two major sites in the district. The larger site is the 60-acre rail yard located immediately north of Thirtieth Street Station. The other site is a 14-acre surface parking facility on the south side of Walnut Street at Thirtieth Street which is owned and operated by the U.S. Postal Service. Despite the stops and starts on these projects, both sites are considered to be important development opportunities for the future.

Thirtieth Street Station is the major landmark in the Schuylkill West Bank district. An average of over 23,000 AMTRAK and SEPTA customers utilize the station every day, making it second only to New York's Pennsylvania Station in the number of inter-city passengers who get on and off AMTRAK trains. This makes it the busiest of all inter-city terminals remaining from

DISTRICT: *Schuylkill West Bank*



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*Schuylkill West Bank is a district where the growth of Center City and the universities will bring about a transformation that will be recognized by citizens throughout the region.*

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the years before World War II. The 58-year old station was recently renovated at a cost of \$80 million, and is our City's most attractive gateway. Upon exiting the beautifully restored waiting room on the 29th Street side, the traveller to Philadelphia sees the Schuylkill River with its series of highway bridges connecting to downtown, and in the foreground, a vista of the Center City skyline.

"The Market At Thirtieth Street Station" is a major new retail and food emporium that recently opened inside the station, between the waiting room and Market Street. It is a very attractive collection of over twenty retail shops and restaurants. The unique market serves travellers, nearby workers and residents, and it demonstrates the value and amenity of mixed-use development.

The headquarters building for the Postal Service is located just across Market Street from Thirtieth Street Station. The post office is a grand, monumental structure that is similar in scale to Thirtieth Street Station. Fifty-eight hundred (5,800) employees work at the Postal Service complex, and an additional 2,000 jobs are generated by Thirtieth Street Station. While employment is concentrated here at 30th and Market Streets, the remainder of the district generates little economic activity.

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### **Issues**

Underutilization of property is a key characteristic of the Schuylkill West Bank district -- especially in relation to its strategic location. Five large commercial/industrial buildings (all located between JFK Boulevard and Walnut Street) are vacant or available, and 52 acres of land is used for surface parking. Underutilization is also borne out by the recent plans for developing air rights at the rail yards and the Postal Service parking lot.

With recent improvements to the Schuylkill Expressway, the Vine Street Expressway and the

Walnut Street viaduct, car and truck traffic is well facilitated in the district. However, pedestrian movement is not well provided for, and pedestrians are often pitted against the vehicle. This is a significant problem. The pedestrian environment in Schuylkill West Bank is bleak and desolate. Students who are walking or bicycling between the universities and Center City experience a cold, windswept journey past parking lots, parking garages, blank walls and idle buildings. The thousands of employees who work here do not have attractive places to sit down outside or take a pleasant stroll. Area residents who want to walk to Thirtieth Street Station's new shops and restaurants have no alternative but to use routes that are unattractive and poorly lit. Storefronts and street trees, which can enliven and humanize the sidewalk environment, are non-existent in the area.

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### **Recommendations**

Recommendations for Schuylkill West Bank are intended to make the district look and function in ways that correspond to the importance of the location. The recommendations call for greatly increased economic activity along with major efforts to improve the aesthetic and pedestrian environments. In the future, Schuylkill West Bank should be a gateway to Center City and West Philadelphia both symbolically and functionally. The district should make an effective transition between University City to the west and Center City to the east.

#### ***1. The district must take on a new function.***

In the new land use concept for Schuylkill West Bank, two primary uses are recommended for the future: office/commercial and institutional. Office/commercial use will represent the expansion of Center City. The Schuylkill West Bank is the number one land resource for future growth of Center City's commercial core. Institutional

use represents expansion of the University of Pennsylvania and Drexel University. As the universities continue to expand towards the Schuylkill River, they will improve their visibility and their ties to the downtown area. In addition, expanding in this direction will avoid neighborhood conflicts in other parts of West Philadelphia.

**2. New development is recommended.**

New development that is well planned and well designed will play a very important role in reshaping the Schuylkill West Bank district. Medium-to-high densities are recommended. Dense development is appropriate here because of the public transportation and the close-in, central Philadelphia location. New buildings and developments should contain a mixture of uses. Retail services will be needed as more jobs are created here, and designs that create activity and visual interest at the ground floor will help improve the area's pedestrian environment. Pedestrian-friendly design is a key objective.

*The Rail Yard Overbuild*

The rail yard site should become an intensive urban center containing office buildings, housing, hotels, shopping and recreation. This site has the capacity to support 30 million square feet of new development. It boasts a dramatic setting on the Schuylkill River and excellent access to regional rail and highway networks.

As stated in The Plan for Center City, “developing the rail yards by building over the existing tracks will be one of the largest and most complex building projects in the history of Philadelphia.” This is an opportunity to build not just one or two buildings on a site but to create an entirely new urban area with its own streets and public spaces with new buildings, each containing a variety of uses. Buildings constructed over the rail yard should be designed to take

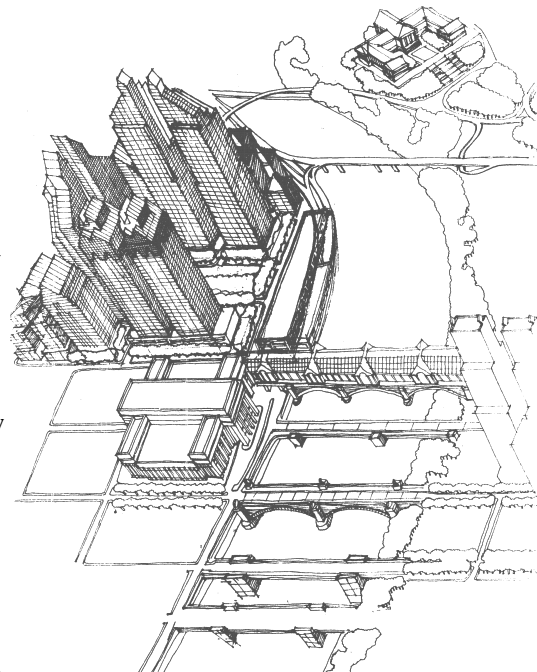
advantage of views of the Schuylkill River, the Art Museum and the Center City skyline.

Sites on the western bank nearest the river should be developed with relatively low structures such as hotels and residences and for public open space. The central part of the site is more appropriate for taller structures overlooking the lower-scaled buildings with panoramic views toward the east and west. A wide, landscaped street should be built to the north of the station to provide access to the site and to protect views of the Art Museum.

Of even greater significance to the community of West Philadelphia is the manner in which this large development physically relates to the existing neighborhoods, particularly Powelton and Mantua. The western edge of this new development must serve as the transition zone between the existing residential community and the higher density core of the development. Low-rise housing, shops and open space are recommended for this edge as a way of softening the impact of new development.

In order to provide continuity at the ground level, the City's traditional grid street pattern should be continued into this development area. This will ensure the integration of the new development into the fabric of the City.

Irrespective of when rail yard overbuild development begins, it is clear that full build-out will not be realized for a peri-



The Rail Yard Overbuild

od of many years, perhaps two decades or more. Implementing these goals within the context of such an ambitious, long-term project will require the creation of new zoning tools such as "Master Plan Zoning." Master Plan Zoning on the rail yard overbuild area would permit high-density, mixed-use development as part of a comprehensive development proposal. Within this Master Plan District there may be divisions into "Precincts" which would be subject to specific controls like building density and use, public space requirements, parking and loading. The "Master Plan District" may also encourage shared support facilities such as parking and service drives, with below grade truck and trash handling. Additionally, increased building density might be supported in exchange for the inclusion of amenities like public art and day care facilities.

*Postal Service Site, south side of Walnut Street at 30th Street*

Development at this 14-acre site will be large scale. The potential exists to create a new commercial or institutional "community" within the site. However, the new development must also be designed to relate to a heavily-used public street (the site has almost 700 feet of frontage along Walnut Street) that will be its principal interface with the existing urban fabric. This is a critical opportunity to improve an important pathway that is heavily used by pedestrians and bicyclists.

This site offers an exceptional opportunity for enhancing the sidewalk environment because of the presence of a lower-level street system beneath the elevated Walnut Street viaduct. Many vehicular movements, including service delivery traffic, can take place at the lower level and avoid conflicts with passersby. The pedestrian experience on Walnut Street can be further enhanced by (1) building to the street line, (2)

limiting the number of curb cuts, (3) maximizing ground floor retail space and (4) encouraging multiple building entrances to the sidewalk.

As development moves forward, it will become increasingly important to improve the north/south pedestrian connections to the rest of the district. The two most significant paths in this respect will be 30th Street and Schuylkill Avenue. The treatment of sidewalks should include the widening and landscaping of 30th Street from Market to Walnut Streets. Trees should be planted in a new border on the west side of the block between Market and Chestnut Streets. The sidewalk along Schuylkill Avenue should also be widened and landscaped, thus creating a pedestrian route of choice with views of the Center City skyline across the river's edge.

*NW corner 30th & Market Streets*

New development is recommended here as a way of further defining the "Grand Public Room" that is proposed for the space between Thirtieth Street Station and the Postal Service headquarters.

*NW corner 30th & Chestnut Streets*

A new building at this site would have street frontage at two levels. If it is designed with street-level amenities along 30th Street, the building will enhance the major north-south walkway that is proposed for the westerly sidewalk. This path will connect Thirtieth Street Station with new development on land owned by the Postal Service, just south of Walnut Street.

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*The outdoor area between 30th Street Station and the Post Office could function as a Grand Public Room.*

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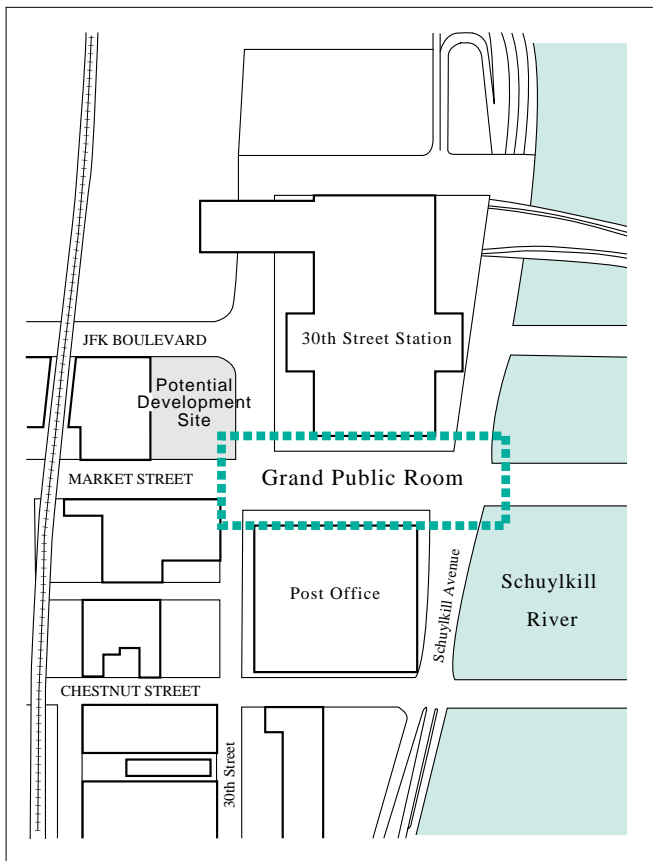
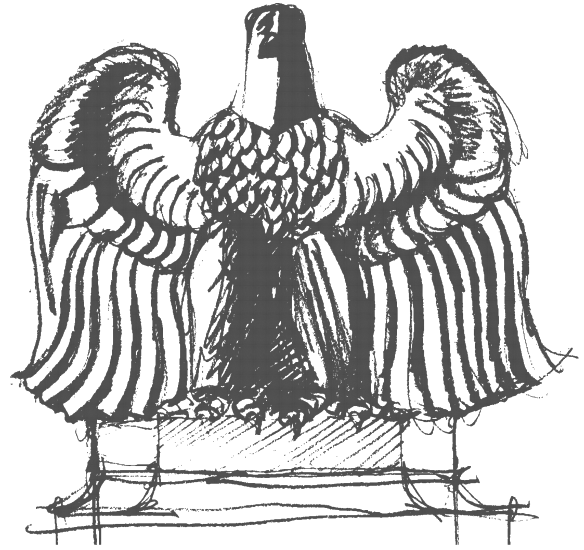
### 3. Improve Major Public Spaces and the Pedestrian Environment

#### *The Grand Public Room*

In the large poorly defined urban space between 30th Street Station and the Post Office, Market Street becomes problematic. Ideally this outdoor space could function as a Grand Public Room with Market Street (at Schuylkill Avenue) as the front door, 30th Street Station and the Post Office as the enclosing walls and the intersection of 30th and Market Streets as the closure of the room. Today while the space may be poorly defined, its major elements are visually strong and need only minimum treatment to achieve a more decisive impression of order.

Defining the side walls of this outdoor pub-

lic room has already begun with the improvements made to the 30th Street Station. However, the south side of Market Street at this location is cluttered with a motley collection of vendors and poorly organized movement systems for pedestrians and vehicles. At the eastern end of the Grand Public



Room, the Market Street Bridge is elegant but neglected.

The Flanking Eagle on the Street Bridge is elegant but neglected. Simple maintenance should improve the impression of the area as well as the importance of the bridge itself. A lighting plan should be designed to light the foot-way of the bridge and to highlight the remarkable socialist-realist sculpture of the flanking eagles located at both ends of the bridge.

In addition, a plan should be undertaken to redesign the sidewalk and drive that is situated between Market Street and the post office. Pedestrian use should be emphasized here and, at minimum, vendor businesses should be required to meet design standards and possibly relocated to Schuylkill Avenue. The south side of Market Street should mirror the improvements that were recently completed at Thirtieth Street Station. Flags and poles complementing those on the station should be added along the post office edge to strengthen the sense of

importance of the space. Plant material should be considered for both the north and south sides of the street and an overall lighting plan should be designed. The color of the lighting should be the same throughout the area, including the bridge, and should be considered in relation to the color of the surrounding architecture. Curbs and paving should also announce that this outdoor public room is in fact the ceremonial gateway to West Philadelphia.

Finally to complete the public room, a major development on the existing parking lot and plaza at the NW corner of 30th and Market Streets is recommended. A new building should be designed without a setback from the corner. The size of the building should be consistent with the large scale of nearby structures, and it should contain retail uses on the ground floor. This will add definition and closure to the public room, making it an impressive ante-chamber to West Philadelphia.

#### *Architectural Lighting for the Schuylkill River Bridges*

In the vicinity of Market Street, five bridges span the Schuylkill on a stretch of river that is only one-third of a mile long. Architectural lighting should adorn these bridges. This will create drama and interest in a presently barren nighttime environment. Pedestrians and motorists will look to the north from the Walnut Street Bridge and see an intricate pattern of lights and bridges, as well as the Postal Service building, Thirtieth Street Station and the Art Museum; these magnificent buildings have (or should have) lighting schemes of their own.

Many cities worldwide take greater advantage of their bridges as design objects: the Ponte Vecchio, La Fontanhka, Pont Alexandre III, London Bridge to name a few. In Philadelphia, the Schuylkill River bridges should be exploited for their potential as pedestrian bridges with cos-

mopolitan flair. Other Schuylkill River bridges could also be considered for this relatively inexpensive kind of civic improvement project.

#### *Site Improvements*

Full sidewalk treatment, to include new paving, curbs, street trees, plant material and lighting, should be installed along the four east-west arterials that cross the Schuylkill River between JFK Boulevard and Walnut Street. The bridge sidewalks should be included in this project. As recommended previously, two north-south routes will also require sidewalk improvements: 30th Street and Schuylkill Avenue (south of JFK Boulevard).

#### *"West Bank Greenway"*

The Planning Commission supports the concept of the community-initiated proposal for a "West Bank Greenway." This is envisioned as a system of pedestrian and bicycle routes that serves the Schuylkill West Bank and adjacent neighborhoods. The proposed trail system, which would utilize public sidewalks in some sections, will connect with other pathways along the Schuylkill River corridor. Further study is needed, and plans should be coordinated with area institutions and major landowners. Several specific recommendations for pedestrian improvements contained in this Plan can be viewed as part of this greenway concept.

One of the bridges that would be utilized in the trail system is the Spring Garden Street bridge. The sidewalks on this span are less than five feet wide, making passage dangerous. The City should help fund engineering studies that look at the feasibility of widening the sidewalks on this bridge.

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DISTRICT: 46TH & MARKET AREA

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### Introduction

The gold-domed office building that houses the Urban Education Foundation, located at NW corner 46th & Market, is a landmark in the heart of West Philadelphia. However, the area within a two-block radius of Urban Education Foundation contains many deteriorated or vacant buildings, vacant lots and parking lots. The area is underutilized and ripe for change. During the past ten years, several investors have purchased real estate and studied development options; this activity is soon expected to lead to construction and growth along portions of this corridor.

The site assembly activity is responding to the area's locational advantages. This section of Market Street is adjacent to the University City core. It contains two stations for the Market-Frankford El, and is easily accessible by auto. It is centrally located in West Philadelphia, and approximately 100,000 West Philadelphians live within a one mile radius. Investment interest is also responding to the presence of over 30 acres of land that is vacant or for sale. This is a significant concentration of developable land which generates the potential for major changes in the physical form and land use pattern of West Philadelphia.

Guidelines are needed to prevent haphazard development. Future growth should take place in an orderly and well-planned manner in the district.

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### Trends

Thirty years ago, this area contained retail stores, several manufacturing-related businesses, the Arena sports stadium, the nation's first television broadcast studio, a psychiatric hospital and the headquarters of the Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company. Today, the hospital is the

only large facility that continues its original function. The Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital at 111 North 49th Street, a major psychiatric facility with teaching and research functions, remains a viable institution in the area.

To the south and east of The Institute of Pennsylvania Hospital, business activity has declined over the past three decades. Small stores and industrial buildings have closed. The Arena has been demolished, and the television studios are no longer in use. By 1983, the Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company had moved out of its headquarters building at 4601 Market Street, and the insurance company donated the property to the Urban Education Foundation, to become the urban campus of Lincoln and Cheyney Universities. The Urban Education Foundation is finding it financially difficult to sustain this large campus.

Deterioration and obsolescence in this section of West Philadelphia has attracted private investors who, during the 1980's, started to purchase and assemble property in anticipation of new commercial and residential development. Some investors are simply holding onto the land and waiting, while other property owners are proceeding with development.

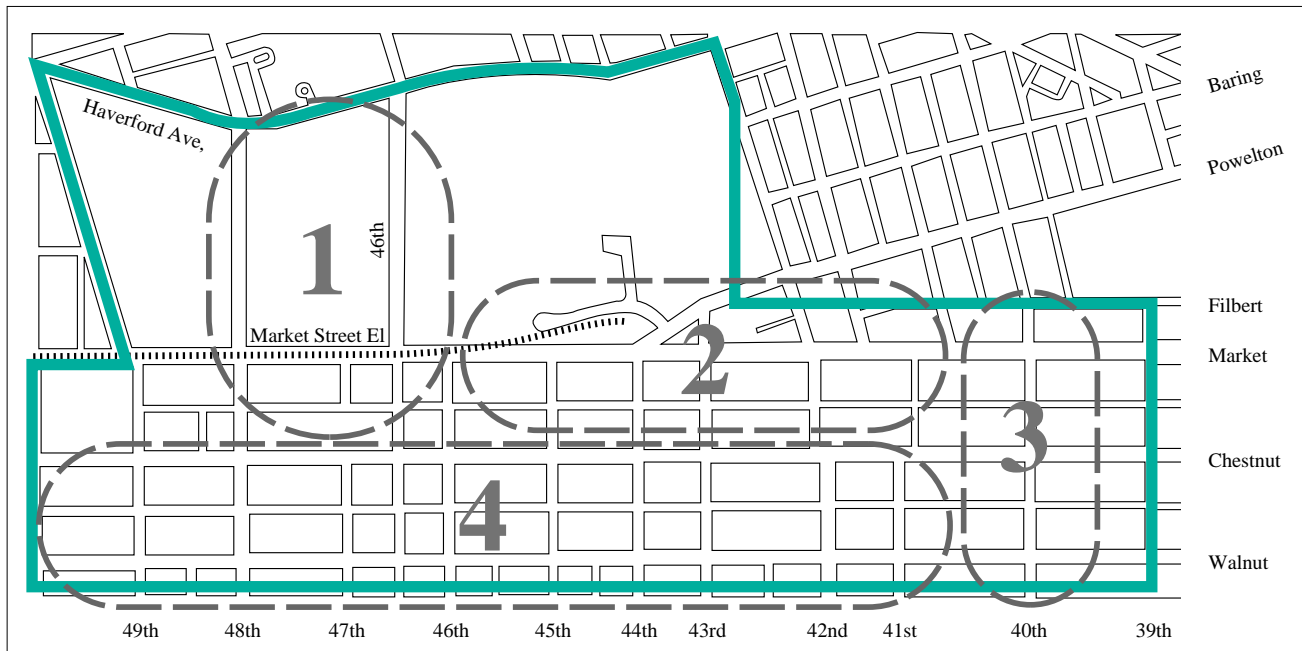
During the past ten years, the Penn Electric Company moved its retail operation to the 4800 block of Market Street. More recently, the School District of Philadelphia established its Parkway Gamma and Alternative Middle Years programs in the former West Catholic High School for Boys at 4801 Chestnut Street. One block to the east at 4702-22 Chestnut Street, a housing rehabilitation project was recently completed that produced 47 apartments for low and moderate income families. Directly across the street at 4725-31 Chestnut Street, Community College of Philadelphia has opened its new West Philadelphia campus. A new retail store was just constructed at 49th & Chestnut Streets. Large

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*The district that is centered at 46th and Market Streets will be an area of mixed-use development. Unlike the older areas that surround it, this zone will be able to accommodate the automobile. New housing, offices, schools and retail stores will have plentiful off-street parking.*

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DISTRICT: **46th & Market Area**



**46th & Market Area:  
Organization of the study area (see map)**

**1. Vicinity of 46th and Market**

- Large amount of land available for development
- 46th Street El station provides transit access
- Urban Education Foundation building is the key landmark

**2. Market Street, 40th to 46th**

- Predominant use is commercial
- Contains 17 vacant structures and many vacant lots
- 40th Street El station provides transit access
- The Elwyn Institute is the major employer

**3. South 40th Street, Market to Locust**

- A restaurant, entertainment and retail district
- Extends from the El station to the University of Pennsylvania

**4. Chestnut to Walnut Streets, 40th to 50th**

- Mixed use zone in the Spruce Hill and Walnut Hill neighborhoods
- The paired highways of Chestnut and Walnut Streets carry heavy traffic volumes, resulting in many auto-related commercial uses.
- Contains many architecturally valuable buildings

tracts of land along 46th Street just north of Market Street have been designated by a non-profit developer, Philadelphia Interfaith Action, as the location of a new townhouse community.

**Planning Context**

The task of studying the potential for future use of the important 46th & Market area requires that trends in a broader area be considered.

Therefore, a larger "study area" was examined because potential for significant development or other physical change in the surrounding area will affect core recommendations made for 46th & Market. The study area boundary extends generally from Haverford Avenue to Walnut Street and from 39th to 50th Streets.

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### **Analysis**

The study area is divided into four subsections, shown on the map on the preceding page. Each of these sections has a distinct identity which will have a bearing on its future use in relation to Market Street. Understanding each subsection's characteristics and trends is essential in preparing a plan that is responsive to the unique needs of the study area.

#### ***Vicinity of 46th & Market Streets***

The Urban Education Foundation should be the focal point for new activities in this area. This historic office building is known to most West Philadelphians. Its imposing size, grand entrance and gold dome make this building an important asset for the area. The 361,000 square foot office building and its site is expensive to maintain, and the non-profit owner is seeking additional income by increasing the number of tenants leasing space here.

#### ***Market Street, 40th to 46th Street***

This is an area of long-term opportunity that is currently in a state of transition. It contains some severely blighted blocks; it is unevenly developed; and it lacks continuity in terms of land use and function. The area near 41st Street is especially problematic. The former Modern Laundry complex at NE corner 41st & Market is vacant and vandalized, and a concentration of vacant properties exists directly across the street.

This section of the Market Street corridor does, however, have large and noteworthy residential uses at either end. To the east, the two subsidized housing developments in the 3900 block of Market Street are successful and well-maintained. To the west, the high-rise West Park Apartments in the 4400 block are easily recognized from a distance, although at ground level they have little presence or relationship to the Market Street sidewalks.

#### ***South 40th Street***

Commercial activity is relatively weak close to Market Street, but more intensive at 40th & Chestnut. The largest commercial concentration is at Walnut Street, where two movie theaters and other modern stores are located. A branch of the Free Library is also located here, at the southeast corner 40th and Walnut Streets. This commercial area will be bolstered by the planned construction of a multi-level University of Pennsylvania parking garage (with ground floor retail space) at the NW corner of 40th & Walnut Streets.

Fortieth Street is primarily an entertainment-oriented commercial area with movie theaters and many restaurants and bars. Many customers are affiliated with the university. Several of the restaurants specialize in international or ethnic cuisine, and draw customers from other parts of the City. While restaurant and entertainment uses are well established here, there is potential for more of the neighborhood's retail needs to be met in this commercial area.

#### ***Chestnut to Walnut Streets, 40th to 50th Streets***

The character of this mixed-use area is different from the residential sections of the Spruce Hill and Walnut Hill neighborhoods, which are located south of Walnut Street. The heavy traffic of Chestnut and Walnut Streets has spawned car washes, convenience stores and a new strip shopping plaza at various locations along these highways. Two gas stations exist at Chestnut & Farragut, and two more are located at 46th & Walnut. These auto-oriented uses do not contribute to the quality of the appearance of the Walnut Hill and Spruce Hill neighborhoods.

There are, however, many buildings along Chestnut and Walnut Streets that are positive elements of the neighborhood fabric. Beautiful historic buildings exist here; the fine 3-story semi-detached homes at 4042-60 Chestnut Street and

4300-34 Walnut Street are examples. During the 1980's, the Mercy Douglas organization built its Human Services Center on Chestnut Street and mid-rise housing for the elderly on Walnut Street. These new developments enhance the appearance of the area. In between these major thoroughfares, Sansom Street is predominantly residential.

The intersection of 43rd & Chestnut Streets displays the contrasts in this area. One corner is occupied by a group of one-story shops anchored by a large video store, with parking in the front and minimal landscaping. The other three corners are occupied by beautiful historic buildings: Christ Memorial Church, the Courtland Apartments and the Netherlands Apartments.

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### **Recommendations**

The character of the district will be vastly different in 15 years. The 46th & Market vicinity is planned to become an active mixed-use zone centered around the Urban Education Foundation and the 46th Street El station. To the north of Market Street and continuing along both sides of 46th Street to Haverford Avenue, Philadelphia Interfaith Action, Inc. will develop modern townhouses, creating a major new community of homeowners. The new residents will benefit from neighborhood-oriented commercial development to be located at the Northeast corner of 46th and Market Streets. Between Market and Chestnut Streets in the 4600 and 4700 blocks, Community College of Philadelphia will expand its West Philadelphia campus; and additional land will be available for a new community center (funded by private or non-profit sources) or for a retail store or restaurant. Closure of the 4600 and 4700 blocks of Ludlow Street should be considered as a way to make these projects more feasible.

Market Street between 40th and 46th Streets should gradually be redeveloped, primarily with

modern mid-rise buildings. The renewal of this corridor is an important goal for West Philadelphia in general, and the use of eminent domain to acquire and assemble development sites may be required to accomplish this objective. Depending on future trends in the surrounding area, land use alternatives including housing, offices or institutional development should be explored. Mid to high densities should be considered because Market Street is very wide and easily accommodates mid-rise buildings in nearby areas.

South 40th Street should be expanded as a restaurant, entertainment and retail district. A small concentration of stores adjacent to the 40th Street El station will function as the northern terminus of the retail area. Physical improvements are recommended in order to enhance the appearance of the commercial district: new sidewalks should be installed, and merchants should adopt design standards that will encourage facade improvements and ensure that they are made in a unified manner. The proposed University City Special Services District (see page 56) could take on the responsibility for planning and funding physical improvements along 40th Street, in conjunction with major institutions in the area. Existing organizations such as the West Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce, the West Philadelphia Partnership and the West Philadelphia Coalition of Neighborhoods and Businesses could also perform a role in this regard.

On the Chestnut and Walnut corridors, historic structures will be preserved. Historic district designation (see pages 56 and 60) and zoning remapping are recommended in order to encourage preservation and orderly development. Existing C-3 and C-4 Commercial zoning does not encourage the preservation of historic buildings in the area, and the Planning Commission will work with local property owners to rezone

the area to more appropriate classifications. Also, the Planning Commission will not support zoning actions that involve demolition of architecturally significant structures.

Rezoning is also recommended for the auto service uses located on Chestnut and Walnut, between 45th and 49th Streets. Currently zoned "C-2 Commercial," these properties should be rezoned to "C-7 Commercial" as part of the zoning remapping recommended above. The proposed zoning has more stringent requirements for landscaping and screening. Improved design and layout of these auto-related businesses is also needed to reduce noise and visual intrusion for the neighbors, and to improve traffic safety. The Planning Commission recommends increased use of landscaping, installation of planted buffers between commercial and residential properties, prohibitions on outdoor storage and non-accessory general advertising signs, and consolidation of curb cuts.

On Chestnut and Walnut Streets, additional strip commercial development should not occur. New construction of multiple storefronts (set back behind parking areas) has proven to be undesirable in older urban areas. These developments are rarely attractive from an aesthetic point of view, and unfocused commercial development will be damaging to West Philadelphia's existing commercial districts. The objective of discouraging future construction of randomly located mini shopping centers will become a basis for Planning Commission review of zoning variances and zoning remapping proposals.

Where historic preservation is not an issue, an alternative form of new retail development that is encouraged on Chestnut and Walnut Streets is a multi-story structure containing retail on the ground floor and apartments or offices above, with building height and setback matching that of adjacent buildings. Parking would be situated behind the building or off to one side.

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DISTRICT: WEST PARKSIDE  
ENTERPRISE ZONE

This district, generally bounded by Lancaster Avenue, Girard Avenue, Belmont Avenue and 52nd Street, is West Philadelphia's oldest and largest industrial area. The district covers approximately 180 acres of land along the "Main Line" railroad tracks that are used by AMTRAK and SEPTA trains. The district was designated as the West Parkside Enterprise Zone in 1983.

Eighty companies are located here. Most existing businesses occupy older industrial buildings on Lancaster and Parkside Avenues, but a new industrial park built on land previously occupied by a large railroad storage and switching yard promises to add many more new buildings and jobs to the Enterprise Zone.

The Enterprise Zone is surrounded by Fairmount Park and three West Philadelphia neighborhoods: East Parkside, West Parkside and Cathedral Park. Recommendations in this Plan call for residential renewal at several locations in Parkside and Cathedral Park (see Part Three: Neighborhoods and Housing).

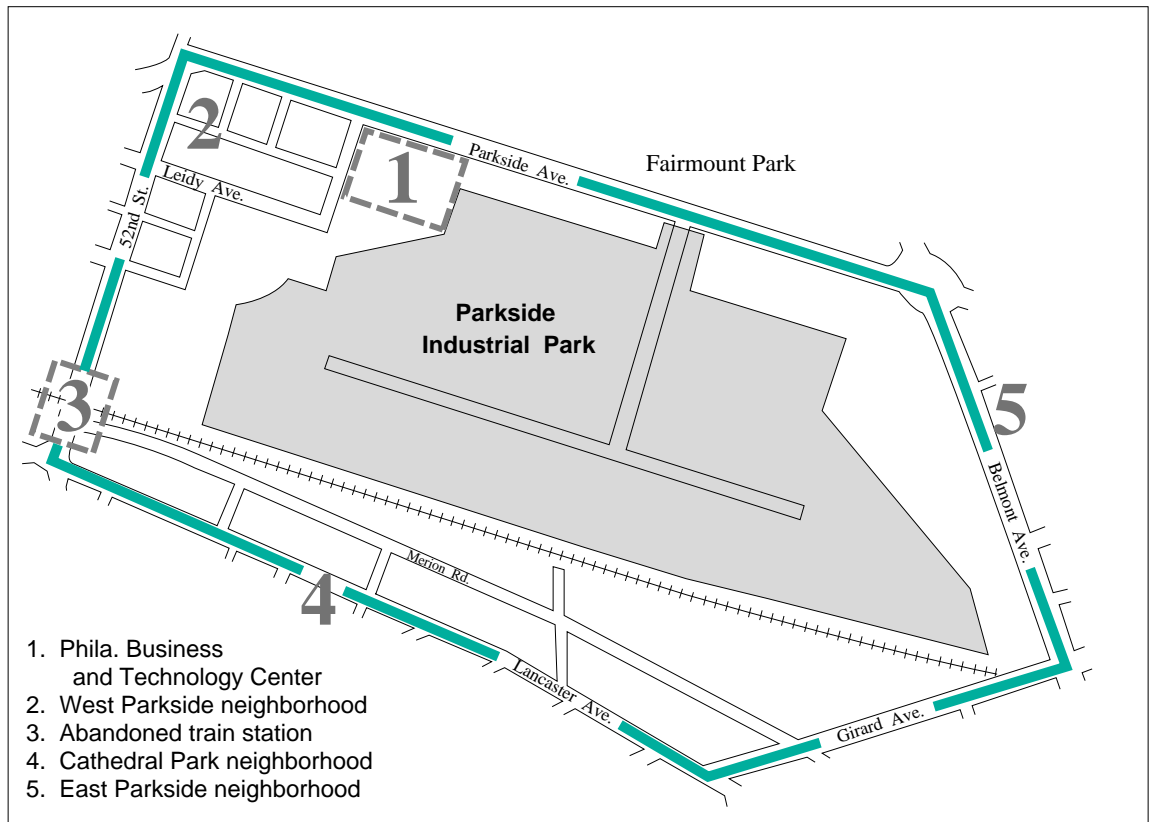
The State Enterprise Zone program focuses on the revitalization of this section of West Philadelphia using economic development and neighborhood improvement strategies in tandem. The goal is to create new jobs and retain existing jobs in the area. The neighborhoods that surround the Enterprise Zone can supply the labor that will meet the needs of local employers. People who move into new and rehabilitated housing will be able to walk to their place of employment. Longtime residents will also be able to find work in the Enterprise Zone.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has established four Enterprise Zones in the City, and businesses in each zone are eligible for special financial incentives provided by the Commonwealth. Job training and job placement

Enterprise Zones:  
Incentives to  
Businesses

- Low interest loans
- State tax credits
- Security rebates
- Utility discounts
- Job training
- Infrastructure improvements

DISTRICT: *West Parkside Enterprise Zone*



programs are also provided in each Enterprise Zone. In West Philadelphia, the West Parkside Job Resource Center was established for this purpose. The job resource center tailors its services to the needs of local businesses.

The 60-acre Parkside Industrial Park is the centerpiece of the West Parkside Enterprise Zone. This business park, managed by Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (P.I.D.C.), provides a resource that West Philadelphia had lacked: large, fully prepared building sites for light industrial development, located in close proximity to interstate highways. New streets and utilities have been constructed with state funds, and two companies have con-

structed new facilities (Bell of Pennsylvania and Wade Cablevision). Now, the City should focus on improving the entrance to the industrial park and increasing its visibility from Parkside Avenue. The entrance, which today is barely noticeable, could become an impressive calling card that would be noticed by regular passersby and by people who are visiting the nearby Mann Music Center.

The West Parkside Enterprise Zone contains another valuable resource that complements the industrial park. The Philadelphia Business and Technology Center, 5070 Parkside Avenue, is a 321,000 square foot "business incubator" facility that provides specialized support services for

start-up companies. Forty-eight businesses are currently located at the P.B.T.C. Flexible space is available in this six-story building, and much of the space offers beautiful views of Fairmount Park, the Mann Music Center and Center City Philadelphia.

Lancaster Avenue forms one of the boundaries of the Enterprise Zone. Industrial activity is appropriate along Lancaster Avenue, but the corridor's appearance is badly in need of improvement. A design competition should be conducted to identify ways to improve the streetscape along this corridor -- perhaps through the use of unified signage, landscaping, screening and sidewalk treatments.

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**Summary of Recommendations:**

**West Parkside Enterprise Zone**

(1) Parkside Industrial Park: entranceway improvements and edge treatment. The main entrance to the industrial park, at 49th & Parkside, should receive prominent signs and new landscaping; and SEPTA-owned land, located adjacent to the existing entrance, should be made available for this purpose. In addition, a Streets Department storage yard should be relocated in order to enhance the industrial park's presence on Parkside Avenue.

(2) Lancaster Avenue: screening and landscaping strategy; a design competition is recommended as a first step towards beautification of this historic corridor.

(3) Philadelphia Business and Technology Center: marketing support; all economic development-related agencies of the City and the Commonwealth should refer potential business clients to the P.B.T.C. management.

(4) Demolish abandoned train station located on overpass above 52nd Street.

(5) Construct a new commuter rail station in the future, as additional jobs are phased in.

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DISTRICT: CITY AVENUE CORRIDOR

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**Introduction**

Unlike the 46th & Market district, the City Avenue corridor does not contain deteriorated or obsolete buildings, and underutilization of property is not a major problem. The physical condition and economic health of the City Avenue corridor is generally very good. Therefore, The Plan does not call for major changes in the land use pattern of the district. Instead, the goal here is to look for ways in which each section of the corridor can function better today, to identify development opportunities that will enhance the corridor in the future, and to address the area's transportation needs.

***Organization of the Study Area***

For planning purposes, the corridor is divided into several distinct areas. Each of these areas represents a different land use concentration. The general description of each area applies to both sides of City Avenue -- the City side and the suburban side. The areas are located and identified on page 120.

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**Analysis**

The heavily landscaped residential zone between Haverford Avenue and 59th Street lends considerable prestige to the corridor. Historic houses and apartment buildings line the street. Large lawns and mature trees abound. For the most part, traffic moves freely and with relative safety through this zone.

Further north, St. Joseph's University has added several new buildings to its campus during the past several years; and the university's growth has enhanced the appearance of the City Avenue corridor. In the future, the university plans to redevelop the former shopping plaza located at 5400 City Avenue. The proposal is to

replace this row of stores with a major new addition to the campus that will house the National Center for Food Marketing.

Today, the intersection of 54th Street and City Avenue is clearly underutilized. The development potential at this intersection is far greater than is indicated by the single-story buildings located on the Philadelphia side of the street. Fifty-fourth Street has substantial traffic volumes, it carries a major bus route, and it is the gateway to the St. Joseph's campus.

City Avenue between 54th Street and Conshohocken Avenue is a "highway commercial" area. This is the only sizeable area within the corridor that suffers from problems of poor appearance, visual clutter and unsafe traffic patterns that are common along many highway commercial strips across the country. Each business has at least two curb cuts on City Avenue. The number of curb-cuts is excessive and creates an unsafe traffic condition by permitting frequent and uncontrolled turning movements along this busy four lane highway. Other problems include unsightly billboards, lack of landscaping, and noise conflicts caused by the proximity of auto service facilities to adjacent houses.

The predominantly commercial area between Conshohocken Avenue and Belmont Avenue is better organized and comparatively well planned; and this area is experiencing significant investment activity. The Bala Shopping Center has recently undergone a complete remodeling, including improvements to the parking lot and the addition of a free-standing restaurant at Belmont Avenue. Across the street, a new retail center has recently opened for business within the city limits. The Presbyterian Home, a residential facility for the aged containing historic buildings and plentiful lawn space, is a landmark in this area.

The northeastern end of the City Avenue corridor, near the Schuylkill River, is an employ-

ment intensive zone that plays an important role in the region's economy. While land for additional office development is scarce on the suburban side of City Avenue, there is space within the city for new development at the Adams Mark Hotel, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine and the Twelve Ceasars Conference Center. The traffic impact of new development is an issue that must be considered.

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### **Recommendations**

The most important planning objectives for the corridor: are (1) to realize the highest quality new development and the most appropriate uses on the opportunity sites that exist along the corridor; (2) to accommodate future development at a level that is consistent with the area's transportation capacity; (3) to enhance traffic safety and aesthetic qualities in the area between 50th and 54th Streets; and (4) to preserve the residential character of the corridor between Haverford and Cardinal Avenues.

#### ***Haverford Avenue to 59th Street***

A new zoning policy is recommended for properties bordering City Avenue between Haverford and Cardinal Avenues. As explained in the "City Line Neighborhoods" section of the plan, the Planning Commission will oppose zoning applications that propose commercial use of properties along this portion of the corridor, to preserve the residential character of the area. Commercial use of the existing storefront space in the apartment building at 6300-18 City Avenue will be permitted as an exception, subject to reviewing plans for the signs that would accompany a new store at this location.

#### ***59th to 54th Streets***

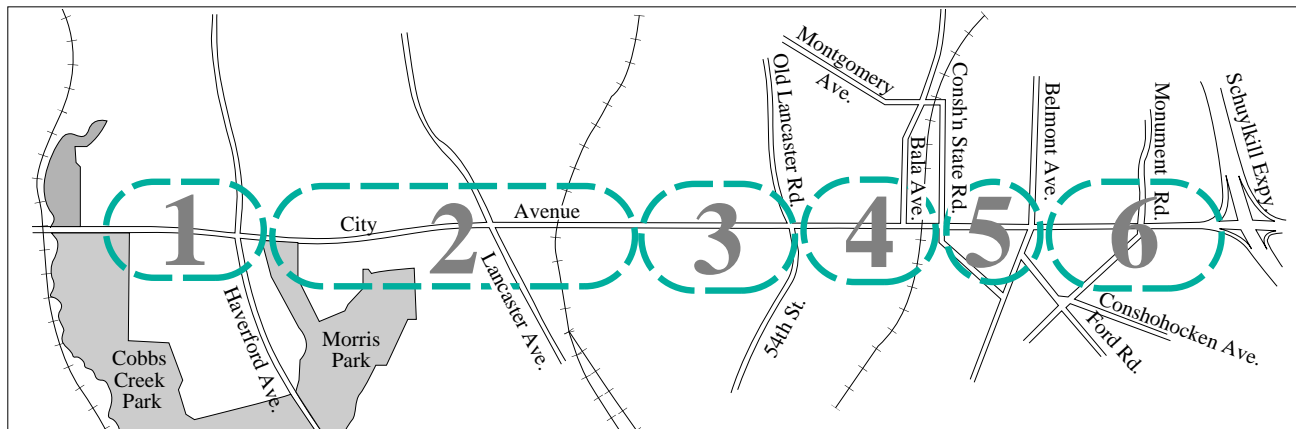
The Planning Commission supports the proposal of St. Joseph's University to construct a major academic building at 5400 City Avenue. The

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*Along City Avenue, the beautiful, landscaped residential zone will continue to lend prestige to the corridor. The busy and successful commercial zones are the subject of recommendations pertaining to transportation and design.*

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DISTRICT: *City Avenue Corridor*



**Organization of the Study Area**

- 1. Cobbs Creek Park to Haverford Avenue** - This area contains the City Line Shopping Center (which includes a supermarket and movie theaters) and other commercial uses that are part of the Haverford Avenue commercial area.
- 2. Haverford Avenue to 59th Street** - Residential use predominates on both sides of City Avenue in this zone. On the city side of the street, most of the homes are single-family detached structures located within the Overbrook Farms National Register Historic District. With large yards and mature trees, the appearance of this zone represents a sharp contrast with other sections of the corridor. The Overbrook station of the R-5 commuter rail line is located at 63rd Street & City Avenue. The station will soon be rehabilitated.
- 3. 59th to 54th Streets** - This is the campus of St. Joseph's University and other large institutional properties that are owned by the Archdiocese. The University is a principal travel destination and center of activity along the corridor.
- 4. 54th Street to Conshohocken Avenue** - This is a "highway commercial" zone, just over one-half mile in length, containing many free-standing commercial uses (auto repair, auto parts, fast food, convenience stores). The concentration of these uses, with each business having separate curb cuts on City Avenue, creates traffic congestion and unsafe vehicular traffic patterns. Excessive signage and a lack of landscaping creates visual clutter.
- 5. Conshohocken Avenue to Belmont Avenue** - With the exception of the Presbyterian Home, built in 1907, land use in this area is commercial. The Bala Shopping Center, including Lord & Taylor's, is the major shopping destination in this zone, which is bordered by arterial streets that provide direct access to the Montgomery County suburbs and West Philadelphia.
- 6. Belmont Avenue to Schuylkill River** - Containing the Bala Office Park, the Adam's Mark Hotel, City Avenue Hospital, Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine, and the television studios for WPVI and WCAU, this section of the corridor contains the most employment and the greatest density of development compared to the other sections of City Avenue. This area is adjacent to the Schuylkill Expressway interchange and is served by many bus routes.

### **City Avenue Corridor: Summary of Recommendations**

- 1. Cobbs Creek Park to Haverford Avenue** - The goal is to maintain the healthy retail area that exists here.
- 2. Haverford Avenue to 59th Streets** - Preservation of residential uses and the rehabilitation of the Overbrook Train Station will ensure that the very special character of this area remains intact.
- 3. 59th to 54th Streets** - New developments that are planned by St. Joseph's University will enhance the prestige of City Avenue.
- 4. 54th Street to Conshohocken Avenue** - Owners of commercial properties should be encouraged to change vehicular circulation patterns within their sites with the aim of increasing traffic safety. Improved landscaping and signage is also recommended for the commercial properties. Redevelopment at the intersection 54th Street & City Avenue should result in higher density buildings at this important location.
- 5. Conshohocken Avenue to Belmont Avenue** - High quality and well-planned retail facilities will continue to characterize this area in the future. The Presbyterian Home property, which provides much-needed contrast to the surrounding commercial activity, is a landmark that must be protected from inappropriate types of development in the future.
- 6. Belmont Avenue to Schuylkill River** - Well-planned new development, the elimination of billboard signs, and new pedestrian amenities will significantly improve this section of the City Avenue corridor.

### **Transportation Recommendations**

**Public Transit** - Public transit gives this corridor a competitive advantage over suburban employment centers. Public transit should be used to its maximum potential along City Avenue. Several recommendations are aimed at improving bus and trolley service to the City Avenue corridor, and another recommendation suggests that Light Rail Transit (LRT) service could be added in the long term.

**Traffic** - Traffic is often congested on City Avenue, but widening the highway will only serve to attract more vehicles to the corridor. In this plan, traffic recommendations focus on controlling the growth of traffic through employer-initiated transportation programs and through the increased use of public transit. Physical improvements to the avenue and to certain intersections are also proposed.

project will require zoning approval in the future. The existing zoning is "Institutional Development District." Mid-rise building height is recommended at this location, which is the point of arrival at a major university. Vehicular curb cuts should be made from 54th Street in order to minimize the traffic impact on City Avenue.

#### ***54th Street to Conshohocken Avenue***

The 1.5-acre property at 5320 City Avenue should be redeveloped in the future as a multi-story office building with ground floor retail use. The existing zoning is C-2 commercial; the recommended zoning is C-3 commercial, which would permit a higher density building up to five stories in height.

Other recommendations are directed at improving traffic safety and aesthetics in the "highway commercial" area located between 54th and 50th Streets. Changes in design, zoning and circulation are proposed. Property owners and developers are strongly encouraged to have vehicular ingress and egress from the existing side streets instead of directly from City Avenue. Rear driveways that connect to the side streets can also be used to reduce traffic hazards on City Avenue. Increased use of landscaping, landscaped buffer areas adjacent to housing, and tastefully designed signage are also recommended. Rezoning this area from existing C-2 commercial to C-7 commercial is also recommended. The proposed C-7 classification has the following advantages: it requires open space buffer areas adjacent to residential properties, landscaping on the commercial property, and off-street parking

#### ***Conshohocken Avenue to Belmont Avenue***

The Presbyterian Home property includes a two-acre lawn area at the east corner of City Avenue and Conshohocken Road. If this land is proposed for development in the future, the preferred use

is institutional. Residential or commercial development could also be compatible with nearby City Avenue development, as long as the site planning and design is of high quality.

#### ***Belmont Avenue to Schuylkill River***

The Adams Mark Hotel's parking lot (the lower-level parking lot fronting on City Avenue) is part of a potential development site that is seven acres in size. The proposed use for this site is commercial, at a density that is consistent with existing zoning. A previous proposal for an upscale retail development, approved by the city for UDAG funding in 1986, still merits support. A new health and fitness club is another example of a use that would be compatible with other uses in the area. The billboards that currently exist on the site impact negatively on the area's aesthetic qualities. If the landowners were to let the leases expire and remove these billboards, the public perception of this part of City Avenue and the image presented by the hotel would be enhanced.

Adjacent to the hotel, the Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine owns eight acres of open space and surface parking on Monument Road (opposite Stout Road). If this site is developed in the future, institutional expansion is the preferred use.

Several years ago, a new hotel was planned as an addition to the Twelve Caesars Conference Center (4200 City Avenue). The City approved a zoning variance and a special arrangement for parking, but the project was never constructed. The hotel was an appropriate use for this site and still merits support; it would serve the Twelve Caesars facility and the office park across City Avenue.

New street trees and landscaping are recommended along City Avenue and Monument Road. The sidewalks that connect the Presidential Apartments, the Adams Mark Hotel, City Avenue Hospital and the Pathmark shop-

ping center are used by thousands of employees and visitors every day. On City Avenue, the bus stops are heavily used. Consistent with the trees and landscaping that exist on the WPVI property, new planted material (installed by private owners) and street trees (installed by the City) are recommended in order to make these sidewalks more inviting to pedestrians.

#### **Transportation Recommendations for the City Avenue Corridor**

Traffic congestion is a significant problem on City Avenue. During peak hours, the volume of “through” traffic has reached or exceeded the highway’s carrying capacity at Belmont Avenue and at Presidential Boulevard. In addition, peak hour turning movements exceed the capacity of the intersections at Presidential Boulevard, Monument Road, Kings Grant Drive, Belmont Avenue and 63rd Street. Traffic is congested despite the fact that City Avenue has been widened and improved many times, lending credence to the theory that traffic volume will continue to grow until it has met or exceeded the capacity that is available.

Costly construction projects that increase highway capacity are inevitably followed by a corresponding increase in traffic. This cycle should not be repeated another time in the case of City Avenue. The Planning Commission does not recommend large-scale highway widening as a response to traffic congestion along the corridor. Instead, the task of keeping traffic moving along City Avenue should be accomplished by improving public transportation, by controlling the growth of traffic in the future, and by making certain traffic control and intersection improvements.

#### ***Public Transit Recommendations***

Public transportation is one of the advantages that the City Avenue corridor enjoys over other

suburban growth centers. There are two commuter rail stations on City Avenue, a station on the Route 100 light rail line, and many bus routes that connect this corridor with Center City, the Main Line suburbs, the 69th Street terminal, and with West, North, Northwest and Northeast Philadelphia. The following recommendations are aimed at maximizing the potential for public transit usage along the corridor.

#### ***Provide continuous bus service along the full length of the corridor.***

The Route 1 or the Route 65 bus line should be rerouted so that riders can travel the entire corridor, without transfer, between West Chester Pike and Presidential Boulevard. Currently, no single transit route runs the entire length of the corridor. Continuous bus service will benefit riders who are residents of Philadelphia, and it will also shorten trips between many suburban communities and the major employers along the corridor.

#### ***Increase the frequency of service on the Route 1 bus line.***

This bus route connects Northeast Philadelphia with the 69th Street terminal, principally using City Avenue and Roosevelt Boulevard. It runs only seven times in the morning and seven times in the evening, at half hour intervals. Increasing the frequency of service should reduce the amount of traffic going to and from Saint Joseph’s University, because a large percentage of the university’s student body resides in Northeast Philadelphia.

#### ***Establish a bus stop on City Avenue for Routes 124 and 125.***

These buses link Center City with King of Prussia, using the Schuylkill Expressway. They currently make an intermediate stop at the Wissahickon Transfer Center. Having this intermediate stop moved to a location near City

Avenue & Presidential Boulevard would be less time-consuming for the buses, and would bring the riders within walking distance of many large employers along City Avenue.

***Extend the Route 10 trolley to the Overbrook Station of the R-5 Commuter Rail Line.***

This improvement has been proposed in the past, but has not been implemented. Route 10 is a subway-surface trolley that runs between Center City and 63rd Street & Malvern Avenue. Extending this trolley line 1/3 of a mile to the Overbrook Station would facilitate “reverse commuting” and increase transit usage along the City Avenue corridor.

***Begin studying the feasibility of converting the R-6 commuter rail line to Light Rail Transit (LRT).***

Conversion to LRT will reduce the financial losses that have plagued the R-6 line by allowing for single person operation, smaller vehicles and more frequent service. The new line should be routed so that a larger market is served relative to existing R-6 service. One possibility that would dramatically improve access to City Avenue would be to extend the LRT line in a northeasterly direction from the Bala Station, along a new right-of-way that is parallel and adjacent to City Avenue, to the densely built-up area near Presidential Boulevard.

***Recommendations for Controlling Future Increases in Traffic Volume***

The Planning Commission recommends that in the future, traffic volume on City Avenue should be controlled through the introduction of employer-initiated transportation programs that act to reduce the number of autos used by the work force to commute to work.

*Transportation Control Measures (TCMs) should be implemented by major employers.* Consistent with the requirements of the federal Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, Transportation Control Measures should be devised and put into practice by City Avenue’s large employers. TCMs are alternatives or incentives, offered to commuters, that reduce the use of the automobile during peak hours. TCMs can include car pools, van pools, guaranteed ride home, subsidies of transit fares, charges for parking, subsidies of transit services or facilities, transportation information services, transit promotion programs, or on-site pedestrian amenities (such as paved or covered walkways, transit

Table 16  
Concentration of Jobs on City Avenue, 1994

(an opportunity for employer-initiated transportation programs)

Major Employer/Site	Estimated # of Jobs
Adams Mark Hotel	500
Bala Cynwyd Shopping Center	600
Bala Office Park	7,800
City Avenue Hospital	1,200
Holiday Inn	250
Phila. College Osteopathic Medicine	300
St. Joseph’s University	930
Saks Fifth Avenue	190
Total jobs at major sites	11,770

shelters or on-site bus stops).

TCMs represent the future direction of traffic management efforts in the United States, and the City Avenue corridor is especially well suited for this approach (see Table 16). Employment is concentrated along City Avenue, and there is already a high level of transit service compared to the other suburban centers in the region. Employers and building managers should organize together to help employees to use public transportation.

Under the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments, the area's largest employers -- those with 1,000 or more employees -- must prepare and submit commuter management plans by November 1994. Smaller companies, those with 100 or more workers, must submit their employee trip reduction plans by November 1995. A specific vehicle reduction target must be achieved by November 1997, according to the new federal requirements.

#### ***Recommended Traffic Improvements***

The first two recommendations represent additional ways to address traffic congestion on City Avenue without increasing the capacity of the roadway. The final recommendation, to create additional capacity at certain intersections, should be employed if all other measures fail to prevent gridlock.

*Extend the mountable concrete median from its current southern terminus at King's Grant Drive (near City Avenue Hospital) southward to 54th Street.*

This would eliminate the mid-block left turns which currently cause traffic disruptions and accidents. The resultant loss of access to businesses could be offset by establishing a system of signed alternate access routes using signalized cross streets and parallel streets.

*Install a high-technology signal system along the entire length of the corridor.*

The new signals would be automatically responsive to fluctuations in the traffic flows, and could be manually adjusted by traffic engineers from a central control center.

#### ***Intersection Improvements***

A 1988 study by Orth-Rogers Associates found that traffic volume exceeded capacity for certain turning movements at the following intersections: Presidential Boulevard, Monument Road, Kings Grant Drive, and Belmont Avenue. Planning Commission staff observation indicates that the 63rd Street intersection is also congested because of turning movements. Traffic engineering studies are recommended for these intersections so that physical improvements can be made in the future.

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#### CORRIDORS IN DECLINE

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#### **Introduction**

The appearance of West Philadelphia's major arterial corridors has deteriorated greatly during the past 50 years. Improving conditions along these major streets is a crucial part of enhancing the physical environment of the district.

Most of West Philadelphia's residential streets are free of blight. Vacancy is not a major problem, homeowners take pride in their homes and their blocks, and the residential environment is pleasant in most areas. Unfortunately, the person who is driving along Market Street or 52nd Street or Lancaster Avenue would never guess that West Philadelphia is in such good overall condition -- because the major streets of West Philadelphia are blighted. In general, the proper-

ties that line these streets have high vacancy rates and are untidy or even threatening in appearance. This is the image of West Philadelphia that greets visitors to the area; and this is the picture of West Philadelphia that residents must endure as they travel to and from their well-kept residential blocks.

This pattern of deterioration is widespread in West Philadelphia. The housing of the Cobbs Creek neighborhood is not blighted; it is the major streets and boundary streets where deterioration is most noticeable: Market Street, South 52nd Street, South 60th Street and sections of Baltimore Avenue. The same is true in neighborhood after neighborhood. The most blighted sections of Overbrook are along Lansdowne Avenue and on 63rd Street; the most blighted street in Carroll Park is 52nd Street; in Haddington, it is Market Street; in Garden Court, it is 52nd Street; in Cedar Park, it is another section of Baltimore Avenue.

Community pride is dealt a cruel blow when the most visible and most travelled streets are the most blighted ones. Corrective measures must be taken in order to maintain the desirability of the neighborhoods, in order to halt this deterioration before it spreads into the surrounding residential areas, and simply out of concern for the morale of the residents of West Philadelphia.

This section of The Plan for West Philadelphia proposes a long-term strategy for revitalizing the "Corridors in Decline." It proposes action by government, business associations and property owners.

One of the recommendations is to utilize the redevelopment process in blighted sections of these corridors. Through public or private action, groups of deteriorated structures would be acquired, demolished and replaced with new development. It is the Planning Commission's belief that some redevelopment is necessary along these corridors, that the result will be an

improvement over existing conditions, and that the integrity of neighborhoods and residential blocks will not be damaged. Extensive discussions with business groups and community organizations will be part of the process of identifying specific areas to be redeveloped, and additional public meetings will take place before the City begins the redevelopment process.

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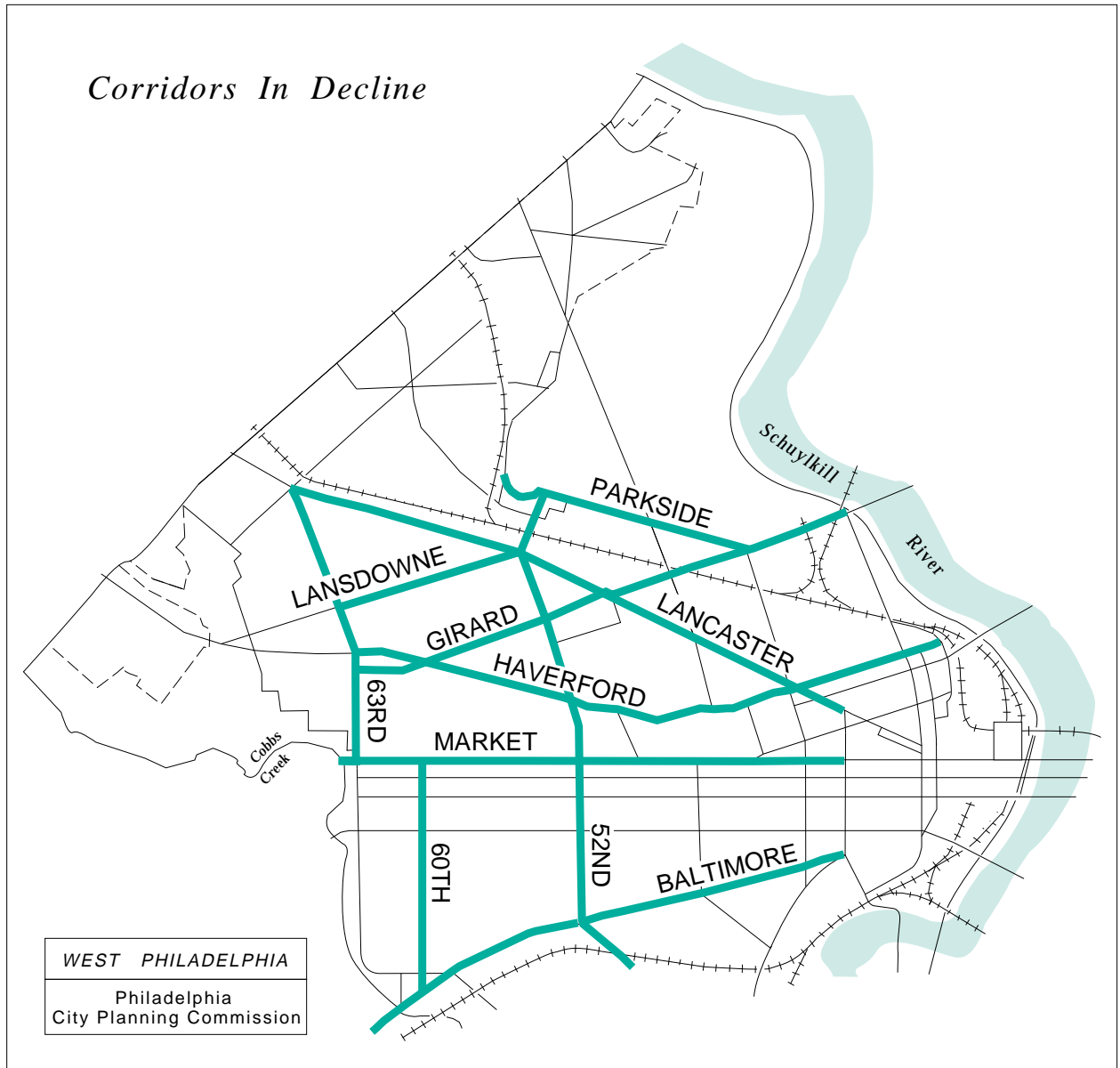
#### **Factors Contributing to Advanced Deterioration**

Why are the major highways more deteriorated than West Philadelphia in general? Many factors are involved.

- Decline in vehicular traffic - The dominance of West Philadelphia's major highways as travel routes was eroded first by the railroads and later by the interstate highways. The interstate highway system was not foreseen in the early 1900's when most of West Philadelphia's communities were developed. The modern expressway system ensures that roads like Baltimore Avenue and Haverford Avenue are now used solely by local traffic. This fundamental change has had negative impacts on property values, commercial potential and land use along the historic highway corridors.

- Decline in the district's total population - The 1990 population of West Philadelphia is only two-thirds of the 1950 total population. The reduction in population has weakened the demand for commercial services that traditionally have been located along the major highways of West Philadelphia. Demand for the housing that exists along these streets has also been weakened.

- Changing patterns of travel and mobility - When West Philadelphia's neighborhoods were originally developed, most residents walked to the nearest stores to do their shopping. This was the time when West Philadelphia's corner stores and shopping districts flourished. Today, the sit-



uation is totally different. Most families own cars and can travel to an almost unlimited number of shopping destinations. Far less disposable income is spent within the neighborhood than was originally the case. This has further weakened the demand for the retail establishments that occupy many of the buildings along the

major highways.

- Parking and security problems - Properties along these highways have become less attractive as business locations because off-street parking is so scarce. Where parking lots have been added to the neighborhood commercial districts, they often are not well used because of concerns

about security and safety. Most of the shopping districts were originally designed for pedestrian and transit access and not for the automobile.

- **Predominance of small storefronts** - The storefronts that line the major highways are usually 20 feet wide at the maximum. Generally, each storefront has a separate owner. While this pattern of development is ideal for the window-shopper, it is in conflict with one of the major changes in the retail industry -- the increasing dominance of larger chain stores that require more square footage than was originally provided along these streets. This makes the neighborhood retail districts, such as the ones along Lancaster Avenue and 52nd Street, less attractive for new commercial investment.

- **The reduced size of neighborhood commercial districts** - West Philadelphia's major streets have traditionally been the shopping streets, but all of the factors mentioned above have reduced the demand for commercial services in the communities. The neighborhood retail districts have gradually become clustered in fewer blocks, leaving many storefronts vacant on the blocks located outside of those clusters. Fifty-Second Street is a good example of this. Fifty years ago, retail was the primary use on 21 of the 25 blocks of 52nd Street in West Philadelphia. Today, however, retail use predominates on only 10 or 12 blocks. What has happened to the blocks that were abandoned by the retailers? The most noticeable change on those blocks is increased vacancy and blight.

- **Predominance of relatively large homes** - Some sections along the major corridors are residential, and the housing here is generally larger than the typical homes in West Philadelphia. Notable examples are Baltimore Avenue, Parkside and Girard Avenues and 52nd Street. Much of the housing along these corridors is three or four stories in height. This type of housing is more expensive for individual families to

maintain and to heat and is therefore more susceptible to disinvestment and abandonment. In addition, the City's housing rehabilitation programs are best suited to smaller row homes, so the buildings along the major highways have usually been bypassed by the rehabilitation efforts.

- **Multi-family land use and absentee ownership** - Many of the housing units along the highway corridors are apartments. They are located above stores, in houses that were converted into multi-family properties, and in numerous apartment buildings. Assuming that the apartments are well maintained, multi-family use is an appropriate element of the busy, urban atmosphere that has traditionally existed along the corridors. However, investors are less likely to invest in maintenance, especially under weakened market conditions resulting from population decline and reduced traffic volumes.

- **Land use conflicts and nuisance uses** - There are many bars, taverns, liquor stores and beer take-out establishments along West Philadelphia's major highways. The loitering and noise that accompanies these kinds of uses creates environmental and safety problems for shoppers and residents. These locations become less attractive as sites for businesses and housing, resulting in an increase in vacancy along the major highways. In other areas, auto repair shops create a noisy and unattractive environment for living and shopping. Market Street has a somewhat different problem in this regard: the structure of the Market-Frankford El cloaks the sidewalks in shadows, increasing safety risks and discouraging pedestrian activity.

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#### **A Strategy for the Renewal of the Corridors**

First, the best sections of the major corridors should be reinforced. Areas that are recommended as retail core areas (see Part Three of the Plan) should be strengthened. Public subsidies for

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*If West Philadelphia has an "image problem," the deteriorated condition of the major highway corridors is surely a factor.*

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*Concerted action is needed to redevelop large sections of the Corridors in Decline. This is a high priority recommendation.*

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commercial revitalization should only be offered to businesses located within (or moving into) these core areas. This will encourage full occupancy of storefronts in the core areas, making the retail districts more vibrant, more secure, and appropriately sized in relation to the customer population. In addition, merchants' associations are encouraged to take a more active role in managing and maintaining the retail core areas.

New retail developments proposed for locations outside the retail core areas are not encouraged. The Planning Commission will implement this in two ways: (1) by opposing variance applications that would permit retail uses outside the core at hearings before the Zoning Board of Adjustment, and (2) through the rezoning of these areas to limit retail uses to the core of each commercial strip.

The sections of the corridors that contain distinctive structures should be targeted for historic preservation. The Parkside Avenue and 60th Street corridors have special historical significance; and portions of the Parkside Avenue and Girard Avenue corridors are located in the Parkside National Register Historic District. Rehabilitation should be the goal in areas such as these.

Early in this century, when most of West Philadelphia's neighborhoods and retail corridors were developed, retail establishments occupied the ground floor of two or three story buildings. Living quarters were situated above the store. Gradually, much of the living space on the upper floors has become vacant or was converted to storage space. Returning this space to residential use is recommended as part of the strategy for Corridors in Decline.

Some of the corridors are particularly well suited for mixed-use occupancy of storefront buildings. In West Philadelphia, the retail core areas that are ideal for residential use above the retail stores are located on portions of Lancaster

Avenue and South 60th Street. Upper-floor residential use should be successful in these specific areas because of favorable architectural, aesthetic and locational characteristics.

Re-creating this traditional type of urban environment is the goal of a new commercial revitalization initiative being planned by the City's retail development agency. The Philadelphia Commercial Development Corporation's (PCDC) new program, called The Philadelphia Company Store, would add residential development incentives to the City's ongoing neighborhood commercial revitalization effort. The Planning Commission supports this program concept and suggests that Lancaster Avenue and South 60th Street are the sections of West Philadelphia that should be targeted for early implementation of the program.

Portions of the corridors, outside of retail core areas and historic preservation zones, should be redeveloped through the use of the power of eminent domain to facilitate property acquisition. Redevelopment is the cornerstone of the strategy for the Corridors in Decline. West Philadelphia's corridors require this type of aggressive action in order to improve conditions, and the redevelopment process should only be utilized in the most blighted sections of the corridors.

Some of the locations proposed for redevelopment are good investment opportunities for commercial developers: examples are 52nd & Lancaster, 63rd & Lansdowne, and 52nd & Baltimore. Non-profit and community-based organizations should also be encouraged to prepare redevelopment proposals for sites along these corridors. It is recommended that the Redevelopment Authority assist the developers, where requested, by utilizing the power of eminent domain to acquire properties for which a developer has a specific proposal. This type of assistance, where the Authority's administrative

costs are repaid by the developer, is called a "non-assisted project."

Where deterioration is more pervasive, publicly-initiated redevelopment is recommended. Here the power of eminent domain would be utilized by the Redevelopment Authority to acquire properties which are then offered for sale to private developers either "as is" for rehabilitation, or as cleared sites for new construction.

**Reuse Alternative**

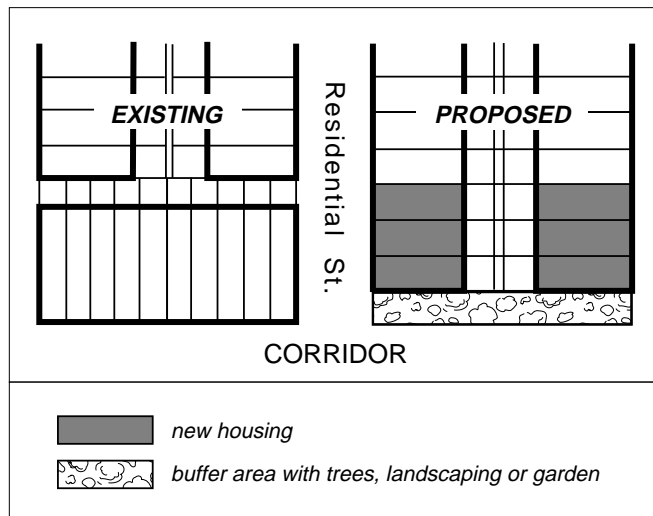
Identifying the types of new development that will be appropriate along the corridors requires that two planning objectives be considered: (1) the need to modernize sections of the corridors that are functionally obsolete; and (2) the need to minimize competition with the retail uses that occupy the core areas of the corridors. There are many examples of new facilities that will meet both of these objectives.

Full-service family restaurants are needed in many West Philadelphia communities, and they should be located along the major corridors. Outpatient medical clinics and medical offices will benefit from the public transit routes that use the corridors. Social service centers, treatment centers and large residential facilities for people with special needs also should have good access to transit; these facilities will be more acceptable to communities when they are located on the major streets instead of on the quieter residential streets. Day care centers are also recommended, and the extra land that is needed for play space is often available along the corridors.

Passive parks and other types of open space would be acceptable at many locations, and open plazas could be built at major transit stops. These type of facilities should be maintained by community organizations or business groups; or they can be "adopted" and maintained by a nearby hospital or school. Parking lots at transit stations can function as "park and ride" facilities. Public

parking may also be desired in the neighborhoods that have a shortage of on-street parking. A note of caution: past experience with public parking in the neighborhoods indicates that many parking lots are not well used because of security problems, and the parking lots often become an eyesore and a nuisance to the neighbors. Communities must develop a plan for safety, security and upkeep when considering this redevelopment option.

New construction of multi-family housing, including nursing homes, group homes and residences for the elderly, are also generally appropriate along the major corridors. Populating these major streets would have the benefit of creating a new customer base for the retail and service establishments located there. It is not recommended that single-family homes be built with frontage along the corridors because of the noise and activity that often exists. New single-family housing would be more successful if it fronted on the adjacent residential streets, as shown below.



Certain uses are clearly inappropriate to the task of renewing the "corridors in decline."

Additional bars, taverns and beer take-out establishments should be aggressively discouraged. These types of businesses already exist along the corridors in large numbers, and they are often a source of complaints from nearby businesses and residents.

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### **Recommendations for Individual Corridors**

#### **•Improvements to the Market-Frankford Elevated Structure -**

The structure that carries the El above Market Street extends from 45th Street on the east to the 69th Street Terminal on the west. While this structure is one of the defining physical elements of West Philadelphia, it does not make a positive impact on its surroundings. It is painted a dark rust color, its supports create a traffic hazard, most of its stations are in poor condition, and its shadows deter pedestrian activity and invite crime. The presence of the El structure is believed to be a factor in the high vacancy rate for properties along the corridor; and it has done little to encourage new investment in homes and businesses that are adjacent to the El and most of its stations.

Can this landmark structure become a more positive feature for West Philadelphia? The Planning Commission believes that it can, through painting, lighting, redesigned stations and new traffic controls. A bright, new and creative graphics scheme should be designed and put into place along the entire length of the structure. Architectural lighting and non-glaring sidewalk lighting should be integrated into the entire structure. The City should join SEPTA in seeking ways to soften the impact of the El structure. Concepts that could be pursued include the acquisition and demolition of adjacent vacant properties and the creation of landscaped entrance plazas at selected stations.

Some of the Elevated stations should be rehabilitated. The 46th Street and 60th Street Stations are most in need of improvement. The escalators at these stations are no longer functioning; these escalators should be replaced with more reliable equipment.

The 60th Street Station was rehabilitated during the 1970's. Unfortunately, its dark plexi-glass exterior is not in keeping with the older structures in the area; and the dark color scheme adds to the shadowy, unsafe feeling that is created by the structure in general. The 60th Street station should be redesigned once again, using the 63rd Street Station as an example. The attractively restored 63rd Street Station was designed to reflect the El's original appearance.

Traffic control measures are also needed along the route of the El structure. The Planning Commission recommends that a traffic engineering study should be undertaken by the Streets Department for Market Street. The study should address the unique traffic problems that relate to the presence of the El structure and its vertical supports: dangerous lane-switching between the support columns, left turn movements and double-parking in the outer lanes. It is anticipated that new signalization, traffic signage, lighting and parking enforcement measures are needed to improve traffic flow and traffic safety beneath the El structure.

The responsibility for funding the various improvements to the Market Street corridor is shared by three public entities: PennDOT, the City and SEPTA. Currently, SEPTA is evaluating different options for reconstructing the elevated tracks and extending the life span of the El in West Philadelphia. One of the options is the conversion of the El to a subway. The estimated cost for a subway is in the range of \$500 to \$600 million, a figure that would appear to be prohibitive in light of the long list of transit infrastructure repairs that are necessary throughout the

SEPTA system and the relatively limited amount of available funding. Instead of endorsing the subway option, the Planning Commission views SEPTA's plans for investment as a timely opportunity for implementation of our recommendations for aesthetic and traffic improvements along the route of the El. The Planning Commission will coordinate implementation as part of its role in preparing the annual Capital Program for the City of Philadelphia.

•*Aesthetic improvements along Lancaster Avenue* -

Much of the central section of historic Lancaster Avenue has an unattractive appearance. Junk yards, lumber yards, auto repair shops, vacant homes, vacant lots and poorly-maintained railroad embankments all contribute to the poor aesthetics along the corridor. The section of Lancaster Avenue between 44th and 63rd Streets (including the Lancaster Avenue edge of the West Parkside Enterprise Zone) should be studied in a design competition. The objective is to give the corridor a cleaner, more organized appearance; perhaps through the use of landscaping, screening and unified signage. A similar design competition, initiated by the New Breed Community Council, is planned for the Baltimore Avenue corridor.

•*Zoning Policy for 63rd Street corridor* -

Sixty-Third Street is a predominantly residential corridor which also contains small clusters of retail activity. With many large houses and churches, and the magnificent Monte Vista Apartments, 63rd Street is one of West Philadelphia's attractive and prestigious thoroughfares. The housing along this busy north-south corridor is gradually deteriorating, mostly because of conversions from single-family use to office, social service and multi-family uses. Many of the conversions have involved structur-

al and facade modifications that have downgraded the appearance of the buildings, and there has been a decline in the overall level of property maintenance along the corridor.

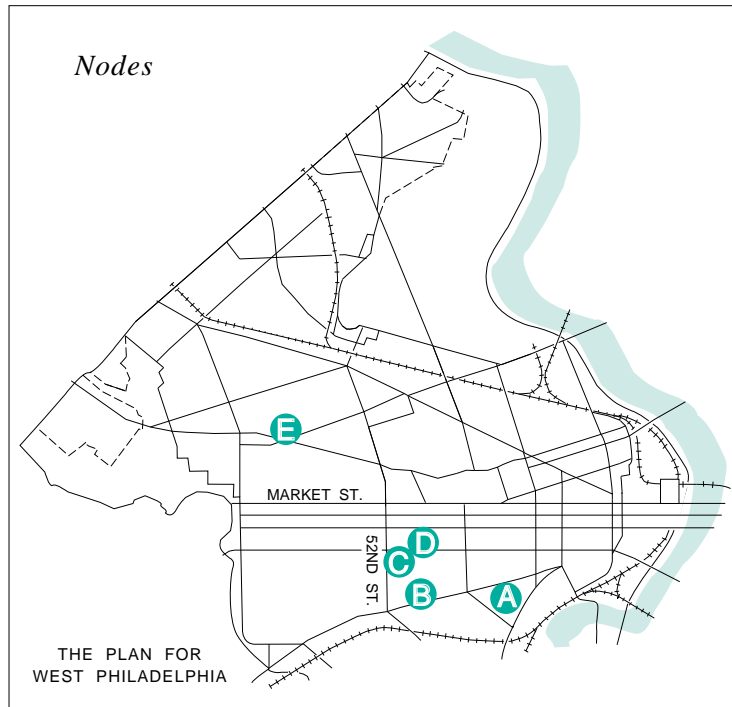
The strategy for this corridor is to control the trend towards conversions. Zoning remapping is recommended for neighborhoods along the 63rd Street corridor (Overbrook and Carroll Park) in order to better control land use. Because building conversions have already been so numerous along 63rd Street, the Planning Commission should not support applications for additional use variances (involving existing residential buildings) that are made to the Zoning Board of Adjustment.

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NODES AND LANDMARKS

An important part of a community's physical environment are small intense areas of activity composed of combinations of different uses. These "nodes" are often the functional centers of the adjoining neighborhoods. Such discrete areas are alive with public and private energy. In West Philadelphia many of these nodes developed along the old trolley routes and so include an extra level of hustle and bustle.

Where these "nodes" exist, they should be sustained because of the positive focus they give to the surrounding neighborhoods; where they may have vanished or never developed, they should be established. One happy example of a node in West Philadelphia is at the intersection of 50th Street and Baltimore Avenues where an old firehouse has been turned into a farmers' market. Two other corners of the 50th & Baltimore intersection contain a neighborhood park and a church. This positive community focus was accomplished with public and private



Legend  
Nodes

- A. Clark Park
- B. Cedar Park
- C. Black Oak Park
- D. Ben Barkan Park
- E. Carroll Park

cooperation. In the example of 50th and Baltimore, an active retail “node” was reestablished at the same time that the community was able to retain a local “landmark” through creative re-use of the old firehouse.

Along with the “nodes” that lend physical identity to West Philadelphia are its significant “landmarks.” Every community has particular buildings or monuments that contribute to the urban fabric because of their architectural, historic or social significance, their contextual novelty or their place identity. Sometime these “landmarks” are important only in the context of their own community, while others have broader recognition. West Philadelphia is rich in both. Our Mother of Sorrows Church at 48th and Wyalusing Avenue may not be well known outside of its community, but its towering spires and grand scale provide a physical focus and pride to the neighborhood. While 30th Street Station and

the Urban Education Foundation are landmarks in West Philadelphia, these buildings are also well known to the rest of the City, serving as a visual announcement of West Philadelphia from various distant views.

While much of the positive aspect of well functioning “nodes and landmarks” may be practical, there is just as important an aspect to their communities which is perceptual and aesthetic. Both aspects should be present for maximum effect. In this part of the plan we will recommend strategies for developing and improving “nodes and landmarks” as positive contributors to the urban form of West Philadelphia and its neighborhoods.

**Clark Park**

Clark Park is the site of the annual May Fair, along with various other official celebrations and festivals. This park is the most important public space in the Spruce Hill neighborhood. Clark Park is situated between a mix of residential and institutional land uses. The northern edge of the park is bounded by Baltimore Avenue and is exclusively residential along the park edge. The eastern edge of the park is bounded by 43rd Street which contains both residential and institutional uses. A City Health Center, a community garden and the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy are located along this 43rd Street edge (the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy assists in the maintenance and upkeep of the park). The western edge of the park is exclusively residential and the northwest edge is occupied by the Merciful Savior Home for Crippled Children. The park is divided into two sections by Chester Avenue.

The park is both a passive and active recreational resource for the neighborhood. It is well landscaped and has benches throughout. The area within the park consists of a network of walkways with the main arteries lighted. Both the

northern and southern portions contain toddler play areas and the southern park also contains basketball courts.

This park is particularly fortunate in that it enjoys active community support and interest. The Friends of Clark Park is a well organized group of neighbors and organizations which conduct regular park cleanup and maintenance. Additionally the Friends have established a Planning Committee which has developed a plan which aims “to promote varied uses of the park and to keep the park in good condition.” The plan is directed toward issues relating to: (1) how best to use the park; (2) pathway alignments; (3) active versus passive areas; and (4) landscape materials. The City should support the ambitious community effort at Clark Park and promote similar relationships with other communities and their parks.

With a combined effort by the City and the local community, this park will continue to be an asset for the neighborhood. Like the other public parks discussed in this plan, Clark Park is in need of an improved level of maintenance. This should include better care of the park’s interior and edges and the grass median strip between the sidewalk and the street. At the corners of the park are boards for the neighborhood to use for posting community news and notices. These boards are currently in disrepair and in need of replacement. If they cannot be replaced, they would be better removed. If funds become available, the park could be shown to advantage if the entry-ways at the corners were celebrated by arches or columns that could also be designed to accommodate community notices. Structures announcing the entrance ways to the park would enhance and reinforce its identity as a special and cared for neighborhood place.

Some of the paved pathways in the park are in need of repair, specifically in the northwest part of the park. Sidewalk improvements should

also be made to the park’s perimeter.

There is an overgrown vacant lot at 43rd and Chester Avenue. This is a blight in an otherwise well maintained neighborhood. The lot is privately owned and zoned for detached and semi-detached residential use. Any future development should be consistent with this zoning. In the interim, this lot needs to be better maintained by its owner. City codes should be enforced here.

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#### **Cedar Park**

This public open space is an active and passive recreational focus for adjacent residential, commercial and institutional users. This triangular park is bounded by Baltimore Avenue on the south, Catherine Street on the north and 50th Street on the west. Willows Avenue cuts diagonally across the city street grid and creates a five point intersection at 50th and Baltimore Avenue. The surrounding sidewalks and streets are busy with park users and shoppers, making this site the key node in the larger neighborhood.

Over the past ten years the City has invested capital funds for improvements to the park and economic development funds along the commercial strip which fronts the southern edge of the park. Improvements in the park include new toddler play facilities. Along the park’s Baltimore Avenue edge improvements are new sidewalks and benches. A new traffic island at the five point intersection adds to the rational flow of vehicles and the safety of pedestrians.

Private investment is also evident in this area; specifically in the reuse and rehabilitation of an old firehouse as a farmers’ market at the corner of 50th and Baltimore Avenue. The firehouse facade is handsomely decorated and well maintained. Tables are placed along the wide sidewalk in front of the farmers’ market creating an amiable setting for lunchtime gathering.

Another positive feature of the area is the

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*The Plan identifies nodes and landmarks that are truly public treasures. They are gathering points and focal points for West Philadelphians.*

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*These sites must not be neglected. Instead, they should be cared for with great civic pride.*

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police mini-station which adds to the perception of safety in the area and in turn increases the usage of the park. This contrasts with the nearby liquor store, located so close to the park that it poses a potential nuisance in the area

This marvelous little park clearly serves the neighborhood in a beneficial manner. Use of the park is high with play facilities being utilized by parents with young children and other adults as a place to meet and socialize. The play facilities are also available to the day-care center of the A.M.E. Church at the western end of the triangle.

It is an intent of this plan to reinforce this park as a gathering place for the local community. Success will depend on the mutual efforts of the city and the neighborhood.

Sections of the park have developed into a convenient place for local adults and those underage to drink. This activity is carried out while in the plain view of the adjacent police-mini-station. While there may be no incidence of trouble in this regard, drinking in the park is not conducive to the appropriate image of the park as a safe place for children. The liquor store should be relocated to an area like the vicinity of 52nd Street & Baltimore Avenue where the commercial strip is somewhat apart from the residential neighborhood and where there are fewer opportunities to loiter than there are in a park.

The park is in need of a higher level of maintenance than city resources alone are capable of providing. It is in the interest of the community to participate in the care of this park. Neighborhood volunteers are already helping in this regard.

The city should take the lead in initiating these joint city and community efforts with an emphasis on small projects with big impact and low maintenance needs. Such a possibility exists at 50th and Baltimore in landscaping the traffic island. Maintenance can be kept to a minimum with a landscape plan that relies on plantings and

furniture specifically chosen with maintenance in mind. Additionally, the city should continue to concentrate on the commercial revitalization of the Baltimore Avenue strip.

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### **Black Oak Park**

This large city park is a major focus for the surrounding communities, contributing positively to their specific place identity. The western edge of the park adjoins the 52nd Street commercial strip. The park's other boundaries (Pine Street to the north, 51st Street to the east and Larchwood Avenue to the south) are mostly residential streets. Although there is some deterioration to the residential fabric of the southern edge of the park, most of the surrounding homes are occupied and well cared for.

A mixture of land uses, a juxtaposition of quiet and active spaces and different types of pedestrian activity make Black Oak Park one of West Philadelphia's important nodes. A music festival and a community services fair are among the special events that have taken place on the site, which is also known as Malcolm X Park.

The park's primary function today is passive recreation, serving to relieve the dense row house neighborhood with a generous open space. The park's main structure is a network of walkways with landscaping, benches and lights. Increased maintenance along the park's edges, particularly 52nd Street, would enhance the appeal of the whole surrounding area. A noteworthy feature of the park is its gateway columns which announce the entry ways at each of the park's four corners.

A minimal expenditure of resources here would result in a considerable improvement to the surrounding neighborhood's image and esteem. The realization of these improvements will only be possible if there is a combined effort by the city, neighborhood and affected institutions. In addition to the local community associa-

tions, the Huey School and Misericordia Hospital may want to participate in the park's maintenance as its condition directly effects their own setting. At least two community organizations are already assisting with park maintenance, and the community is also working with the police to improve security in the park.

Much of what is needed in Black Oak Park are minor repairs. The railings on the perimeter of the park need repair or replacement; surrounding curbs and sidewalks need replacement; and the handsome entry columns need paint and repair. The lighting in the park needs repair and should be extended into the interior of the park for safety.

In addition to maintenance and repair, it may be of interest to the community to add more active recreational opportunities to this very large outdoor setting. Toddler play facilities and basketball and tennis would be appropriate here if funding were available.

This genteel but fading community node would also benefit from the improvement to the surrounding commercial area. The 52nd Street edge in particular is a negative force because of the high rate of vacancy there. This is in stark contrast to the surrounding well maintained neighborhood. The commercial vitality of this area is discussed more thoroughly in Part Three of this Plan.

To strengthen the residential nature of this node's surrounding residential community and compliment the physical improvements made to Black Oak Park, it is recommended that area property owners work with the Planning Commission to rezone the area through a zoning remapping program.

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### **Carroll Park**

As a good example of how closely a community can identify with its node or its landmark, the Carroll Park community derives its very name

from its gracious central open space, Carroll Park. Located on Girard Avenue between 58th Street and 59th Street with Thompson Street on the north, the area surrounding the park is mostly residential. This community is one of the more stable areas in West Philadelphia with a high percentage of home ownership. The majority of row-homes lining the park's edges are well preserved. Like Black Oak Park, this public space serves the community primarily as passive recreation, providing green openness in contrast to the surrounding tightly developed community.

With joint initiatives by the City and the Carroll Park community, a great deal can be accomplished here with a modicum of effort. Simple maintenance to the grounds, benches and utility building is a critical first step in this improvement process. Replacement of some older trees which have reached beyond their viable life should also be a priority.

The opportunity is also present to increase the use of the park with the addition of selective and compatible recreation facilities. More active recreation facilities in the park will certainly generate more concern and care for the park on the part of the neighborhood. With this in mind, the existing but non-functioning wading pool should be repaired and reopened. New play facilities should be designed to be compatible with the primary function of the park as a respite from the pace of everyday.

The positive contribution of the park can be further strengthened by the stabilization of the surrounding clean and orderly community. This includes maintaining the distinctions between the residential portions and commercial areas of the community by having the local civic association work with the Planning Commission to have the neighborhood rezoned so that the zoning more closely conforms to actual land use.

**Ben Barkan Park**

Located at the southeast corner of 50th and Spruce Streets, this small park is bordered on three sides by housing. A City-owned parking lot exists just to the east.

Ben Barkan Park is intended to be used for passive recreation, providing a green respite within the grid of dense residential development. In its current condition the neighborhood considers the park to be a nuisance, because its hilly terrain conceals and promotes illicit activity. The Planning Commission agrees with the Garden Court community that some physical improvements are needed here.

Improved lighting and the removal of visual obstructions will deter crime in the park. Rebuilding of the long-abandoned tot lot, which has been requested by the neighbors, is a sensible idea that should increase usage and security. Finally, storm water must be diverted away from

adjoining residential properties. Detailed plans should be prepared by the Recreation Department staff, with input from the community.

As another publicly-owned community facility, the adjacent parking lot is part of the node at this location. The lot is seldom used by shoppers, but it is used on Saturdays for a flea market and on Sunday by a nearby church. The parking lot is surrounded by a four foot masonry wall which obstructs vision just enough to create another popular spot for nighttime loitering. This wall should be removed by the City and replaced with a fence that simulates the appearance of wrought iron. The church should be encouraged to take over responsibility for maintenance and landscaping.

**Our Mother of Sorrows Church and Durham Park**

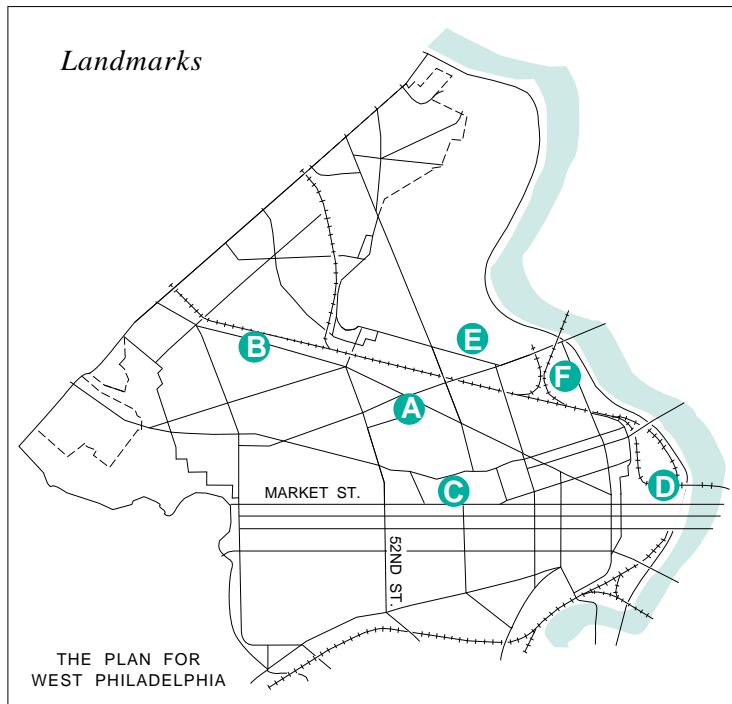
The church at 48th Street and Wyalusing Avenue, a half block from Lancaster Avenue, anchors the east end of Old Cathedral Cemetery. To the south across Wyalusing Avenue are residences and the Clara Muhammad School, formerly St. Thomas Moore Catholic High School. To the northeast is Lancaster Avenue and its attendant commercial uses, as well as several vacant parcels on or near the Avenue. One block beyond Lancaster Avenue, visible from the church, is Blankenburg Public School. A significant element contributing to the special setting of the church is Durham Park immediately across 48th Street, which is an excellent example of an urban park with mature trees, a tot lot and numerous benches. The grounds are in relatively good condition. Durham Park is also known as Clara Muhammad Park.

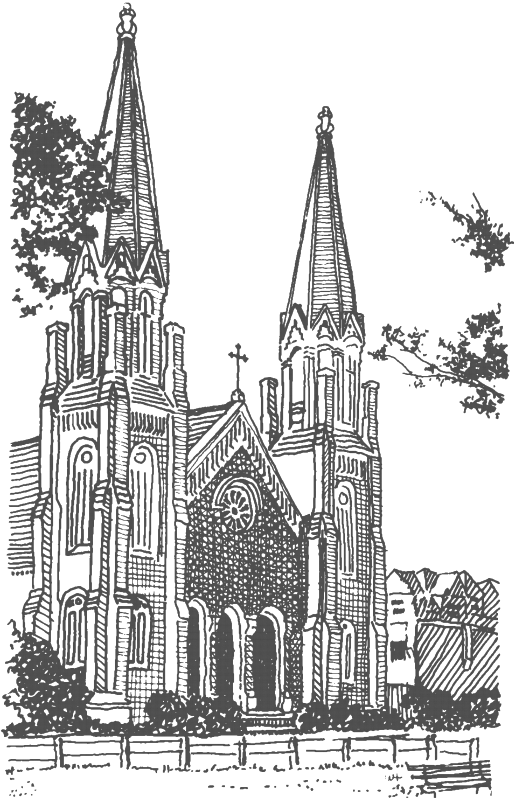
This combination of activities and significant architecture is just the kind of node and landmark mixture that gives a neighborhood

Legend

Landmarks

- A. Our Mother of Sorrows Church
- B. Overbrook High School
- C. Urban Education Foundation
- D. 30th Street Station





Landmark: Our Mother of

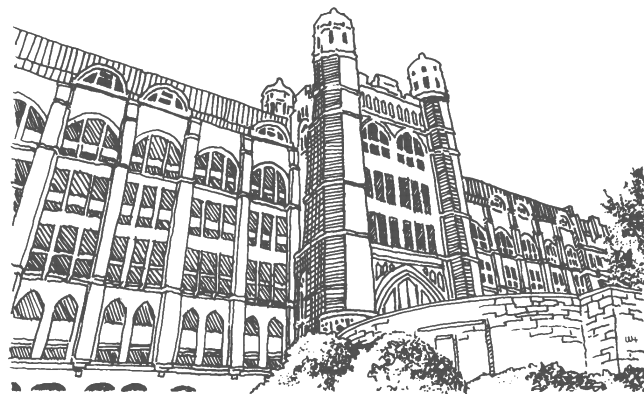
prestige and focus. We believe that public and private initiatives exerted here can reinforce and improve the surrounding community.

There are, however, some impediments to the realization of this area's full potential that must be overcome. The foremost of these negative images are the nearby vacant lots. If there is no economic imperative for the development of these lots, they should be cleaned and planted. The City should also replace broken curbs and sidewalks on the park block and the immediate surrounding blocks. Maintenance of the park and its equipment should be a renewed priority. The existing zoning should be reviewed with an eye toward the encouragement of appropriate development in the area. Finally, the local community group should be aided and encouraged to take an

active role in Durham Park as the kind of public place that people feel proud of as a positive image of their neighborhood.

### **Overbrook High School**

Overbrook High is located on Lancaster Avenue between 57th and 59th Streets on the edge of a stable residential community. This handsome landmark overlooks its surrounding community from a considerable elevation which raises the school's towers into the skyline of West Philadelphia. The school's importance as an architectural landmark is matched by its importance as a cultural institution. As one of the city's largest high schools, Overbrook also provides a center for community meetings and social activities. Students, alumni and faculty



Landmark: Overbrook High

provide connections to West Philadelphia and a broad community beyond.

Across Lancaster Avenue from the school are a railroad right of way and industrial uses. On a narrow strip of land between Lancaster Avenue and the railroad are a faculty parking lot, two vacant parcels and a furniture store. A triangular traffic island directly in front of the school's entrance is overgrown with weeds. The residential community abutting the school on Oxford Street and 59th Street presents a neat and cohesive appearance.

Enhancement of the setting of the school and surrounding residential community hinges on the ability to effect change along Lancaster Avenue opposite the school. A slope from the grade of the street upwards to the grade of the rail line forms a backdrop for much of the Lancaster Avenue frontage. This slope is overgrown and unattended, creating a negative impression on the surrounding area. The school's faculty parking lot is relatively unobtrusive and an appropriate use for the site. However, the parking lot is surrounded by a high chain link fence which, while intact, is showing signs of deterioration. Two vacant sites to the east and west of 59th Street are the result of demolition. As with many such sites, demolition has not left a completely clean site. Although trash is not a major problem on the sites, sections of foundation and some rubble remain. Poor maintenance of a furniture store at the northwest corner of 59th and Lancaster further detracts from a more positive image of the area.

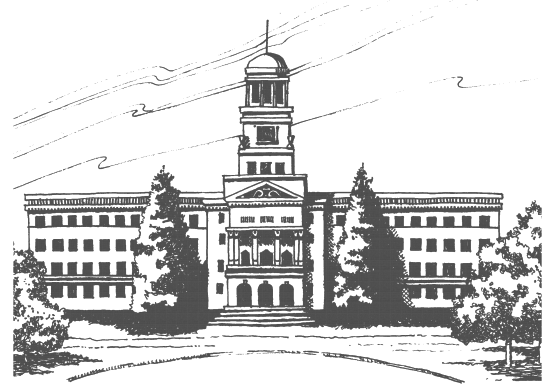
Immediate improvement to the school's physical setting would be realized if AMTRAK cleaned, maintained and landscaped its property along Lancaster Avenue. The Streets Department, perhaps with the assistance of an alumni class or school club, should improve and properly maintain the traffic island in front of the school.

The Planning Commission should implement a zoning remapping program, particularly to work with the community to examine the appropriateness of the G-2 Industrial classifications along Lancaster Avenue. And finally, the School District of Philadelphia should improve the faculty parking lot on Lancaster Avenue with new paving and replacement of the chain-link fence with a combination low wall and fence. Materials for the wall section, chosen to reflect those of the school, would tie the two together and soften the appearance of the lot. At a mini-

um, the existing fence should be painted and straightened.

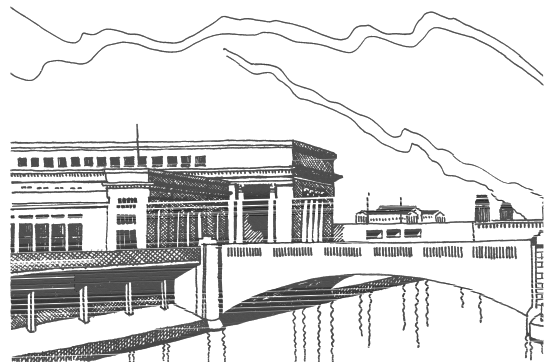
### Urban Education Foundation

Located on a 22.2 acre campus at 46th and Market Streets, the Urban Education Foundation occupies the former facilities of the Provident Mutual Life Insurance Company. This extraordi-

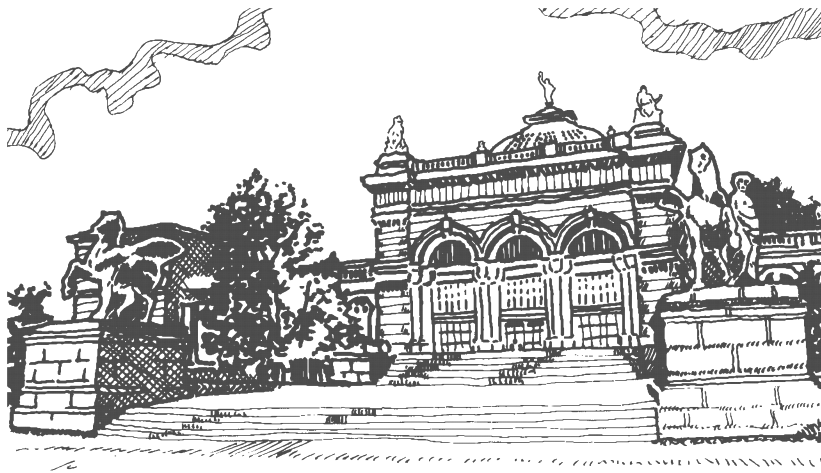


Landmark: Urban Education

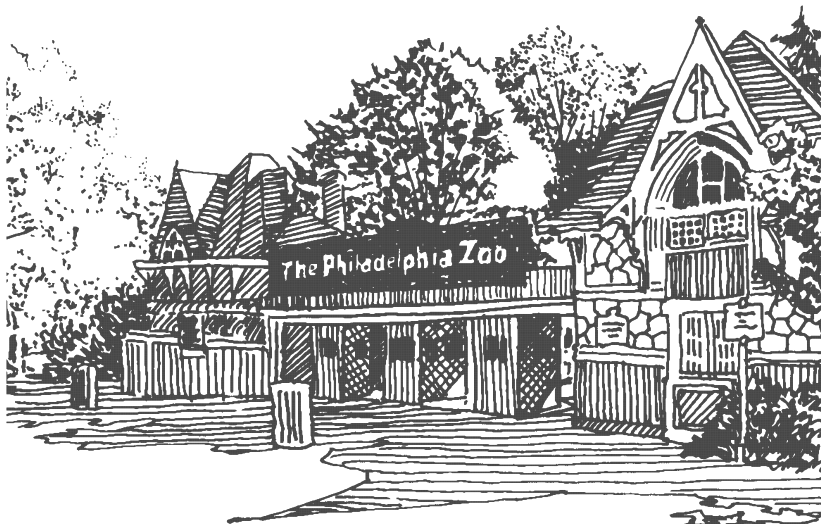
nary building has been a landmark structure in West Philadelphia for generations. Resembling a Georgian Revival state house, the building's projecting frontispiece is capped by a gold domed tower. Today, the office building is home to more than 35 organizations including institutions, non-profit community groups and small entrepreneurs.



Landmark: 30th Street



Landmark: Memorial Hall



Landmark: Philadelphia Zoo

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*The Philadelphia Zoo is a landmark in Fairmount Park. It is also located at one of West Philadelphia's gateways -- the Girard Avenue Bridge over the Schuylkill River.*

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GATEWAYS AND IMAGE- MAKING LOCATIONS

In addition to the major corridors that were discussed earlier in this section of the Plan, West Philadelphia contains many points of entry and several prominent hubs which establish either a positive or negative image for the larger area. Seven of these locations have been studied as Gateways and Image-Making Locations.

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**Schuylkill River Bridges**

The brochure of the Schuylkill River Development Council quotes the following newspaper headline: "The Other Waterfront -- Imagine the Schuylkill as Philly's Seine; it's not as farfetched as you think." The 1992 Inquirer editorial focuses more on Schuylkill River Park (in Center City) than on the bridges themselves, but the headline accurately reflects the Planning Commission's vision for the Schuylkill River bridges. A cluster of Schuylkill River bridges can be enhanced to create drama along the river.

Originally connected by ferries in the early 1700's, both banks of the Schuylkill have been connected by permanent bridges at Spring Garden Street (originally "Upper Ferry"), Market Street (Middle Ferry) and at Gray's Ferry Avenue (Lower Ferry), for over 200 years. The Market Street bridge is adorned with sculpture, and the bridge at University Avenue is a particularly beautiful example of the late architectural/engineering work of Philadelphia's Paul Cret.

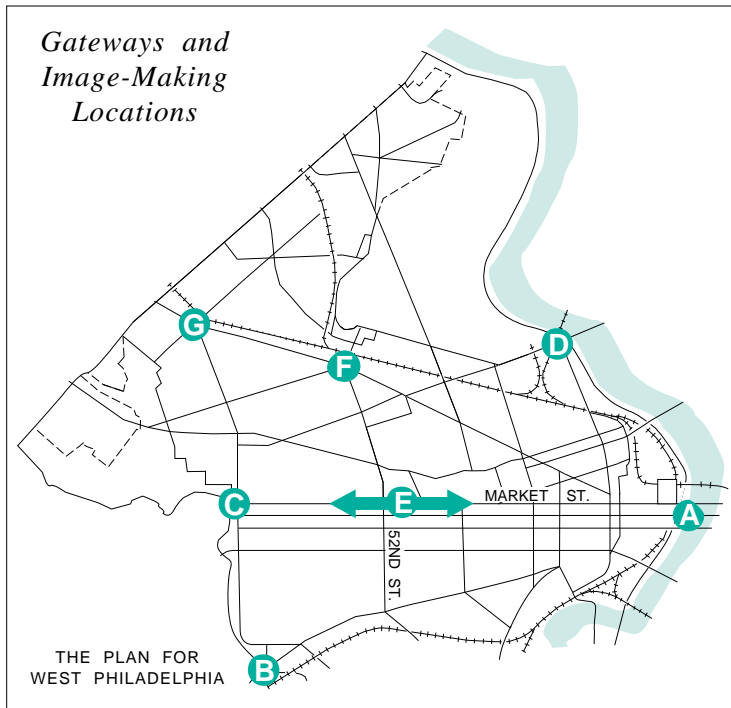
A lighting plan should be designed for the Schuylkill River bridges. This is an opportunity for aesthetic enrichment through the application of lighting beyond the functional. Well-designed accent lighting would mark these gateways in a celebratory manner.

Pedestrian improvements are also recommended along the bridges. Refer to "Schuylkill West Bank" for a more complete discussion of

recommendations for the bridges.

**Baltimore Avenue and Cobbs Creek**

When a major pathway crosses the edge of a district, a gateway is created. All too often these gateways are not recognized as significant places because their welcoming role is diminished by



- Legend
- Gateways and Image-Making Locations
- A. Schuylkill River bridges
  - B. Baltimore Avenue and Cobbs Creek
  - C. 63rd & Market Streets
  - D. 34th Street and Girard Avenue at the Zoo
  - E. Market Street

the shabby conditions surrounding them. Baltimore Avenue's bridge over Cobbs Creek (built in 1921) is a good example of this. On the bridge, half of the outbound traffic lane is used for storage for a tire shop located on the Delaware County side of the creek. For signage there is a broken and graffiti covered Welcome-to-Philadelphia sign on one side of the street and an advertisement for a roofer on the other side. An antique iron welcome sign stands broken and rusted behind some foliage as a testament to more prosperous times. Signs directing traffic to the Walt Whitman and Ben Franklin Bridges are

turned around so that no motorists can see them.

Further east on Baltimore Avenue, at 60th and 57th Streets, are two small parks on the north side of the street. The parks do not appear to be well used. Neither of these parks has an identifying sign -- an important feature of a healthy neighborhood park. Many benches are in need of repair.

Another urban design feature of this Baltimore Avenue gateway area is the Angora train station, located on 58th Street just south of the Avenue. This station has low usage, perhaps due to its inconspicuousness and lack of security. The SEPTA sign points only to the inbound platform, which would naturally have a low ridership due to the availability of the more frequent and lower priced trolley service on Baltimore Avenue. The station's greatest potential is for reverse commuting from city to suburb, but there is no sign for the outbound platform, and that platform has no amenities or evidence of caring.

This entire gateway experience lacks a "pride of place." This is unfortunate because the immediate area has great significance for many West Philadelphians. It contains various pieces of parkland, the Turner Middle School, a shopping center and a public library. A sense of pride could be restored with better maintenance of the public realm, enforcement of public ordinances dealing with zoning and litter, and a broad public/private effort that includes suburban neighbors and officials. The design competition for Baltimore Avenue that is planned by a local community group will be an important first step in this regard.

**63rd and Market Streets**

The gateway at 63rd and Market Streets, where Market Street crosses Cobbs Creek, features a beautiful cast iron sign, vintage 1909, marking the "West City Line: 4.5 miles to City Hall." This sign is on the wrong side of the street for

incoming motorists and should be moved to the inbound side of Market Street. The parapet of the bridge over the creek is so plain as to be barely noticeable. Lighting the parapet would add distinction. The modern Welcome-To-Philadelphia sign is, like many others, covered with graffiti.

The tastefully renovated 63rd Street El station helps to create a more positive image for the gateway. One peculiarity of this station is the way a set of stairs to the inbound side leads up from a traffic island, in the midst of heavy traffic. This unsafe situation needs to be addressed by removing the stairs or changing the layout of the roadways.

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#### **34th Street and Girard Avenue at the Zoo**

These two paths meet at the main entrance to the Philadelphia Zoo, a major landmark in West Philadelphia. The expressway interchange and the two Schuylkill River bridges are prominent features here, and the railroad bridge affords spectacular views for those who are travelling on AMTRAK, SEPTA and New Jersey Transit trains. Public actions have great potential for improving the urban design aspects of this gateway, because so much of what is needed is in the public realm and because the Zoo itself is a thriving institution and important destination.

The area would gain an enhanced image if 34th Street were renamed Frank Furness Boulevard in recognition of the famous 19th century architect who was responsible for so many of the Zoo's early buildings. Some selective pruning to the trees on the east side of 34th Street, with clearing of the undergrowth, would provide really handsome views of the Schuylkill River and Center City. The sidewalks on 34th Street, Girard Avenue, Lansdowne Drive and Sweetbriar Cutoff should be improved for the benefit of visitors to the Zoo and also for residents of West Philadelphia who are on their way to and from West River Drive. These types of

pedestrian enhancements were recently proposed in an application for federal Transportation Enhancement funds that was submitted by the City under the Intermodal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA); the proposal is entitled, "Zoo Streetscape."

A study for the Zoo has found that another enhancement for the 34th & Girard gateway, a new railroad station, is feasible. The station would be located on Girard Avenue, immediately to the west of the Zoo. It would serve passengers on the Chestnut Hill West and Trenton Lines directly and, by a transfer at Thirtieth Street, passengers on the rest of the system as well. It would alleviate weekend traffic congestion at the Zoo, while on weekdays it could serve commuters living nearby.

The Girard Avenue Bridge over the Schuylkill River should be improved as a gateway path with restoration of the ornamental iron railings of the remaining section of the original bridge; and by removing the chain link fence now obscuring these railings.

The charming and much slighted Letitia Street House should be reconnected visually to the fabric of the gateway area by removing unnecessary parking signs from its driveway and clearing underbrush from the hillside that slopes toward Girard Avenue.

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#### **Market Street and the Elevated**

The Elevated train structure that spans Market Street between 45th and 63rd creates a widely held image of West Philadelphia. Recommendations for improving the El structure appear in the "Corridors" section of this Plan. For an example of how a redesign of the structure could be handled, we need only to look at that section of the "elevated" that runs through Frankford. In the late 1970's and early 80's, The Philadelphia Commercial Development Corporation sponsored a joint public private

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*First impressions are lasting impressions. Enhancing West Philly's gateways is yet another element in a strategy to heighten the area's image.*

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*The metal structure of the Market-Frankford El could be made into a much more positive part of the visual landscape.*

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*The intersection of 52nd Street, Lancaster Avenue and Lansdowne Avenue has a "higher and better use" compared to existing development.*

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effort that included SEPTA and business interests in the area. Together they developed a plan of action that included physical improvements such as painting the "El" structure, creating distinctive signage, adding new lighting, replacing curbs and sidewalks and street repaving. This successful approach should be used for the area "under the El" in West Philadelphia.

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#### **52nd and Lancaster**

The area that surrounds this intersection has great potential. The short section of 52nd Street between Lancaster Avenue and Jefferson Street has traffic volumes that are among the highest in West Philadelphia. Fifty-second and Lancaster is where the Route 10 trolley turns off Lancaster Avenue onto Lansdowne Avenue. The route 52 bus also goes through the intersection. Both of these routes are among the most frequently and heavily used in the City. As part of a new City and SEPTA initiative called Transit First, plans are being made for improvements along both Route 10 and Route 52. At 52nd and Lancaster, the plans call for widening of the sidewalk for the entire block on the inbound side of Lansdowne Avenue. The plans also call for the consolidation of transit stops near this intersection, and for more efficient transit service and traffic flow. The Transit First program does not make any recommendations for the outbound Route 10 stop at 52nd Street.

Immediately north of Lancaster Avenue, there once were active rail yards to the east and west of the 52nd Street, connected by an extra wide bridge. Adjoining that bridge was a multi-level passenger station, also on a structure above the street. Now that the railyards have been eliminated and the station closed, there is an opportunity to demolish the train station structure and replace the existing bridge with a narrower, single level bridge. This will remove the blighted train station and reduce the tunnel effect beneath

the bridge.

The 52nd and Lancaster intersection is truly an image-making location for West Philadelphia. It is a hub for vehicular traffic and public transit, but the properties that adjoin the intersection are generally underutilized and unattractive. Redevelopment with modern commercial establishments is recommended at this intersection. The immediate area is badly in need of change because it relates to many important features in West Philadelphia: the 52nd and Girard commercial area, the Parkside Enterprise Zone, four adjacent neighborhoods and the Mann Music Center.

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#### **63rd & Lancaster**

This busy intersection is an image-making location in West Philadelphia. The location has considerable historical significance. Lancaster Avenue was one of the region's earliest highways, and the adjacent Overbrook Farms neighborhood is a National Register Historic District.

For people who are entering West Philadelphia from Lower Merion, the short passage through Overbrook Farms is a wonderful gateway experience, but when the inbound traveller reaches 63rd & Lancaster, the surroundings suddenly change for the worse. The commercial area at this intersection, occupying potentially attractive older buildings, exhibits early signs of deterioration. City agencies should work with community groups who are concerned about improving the condition of this commercial area. Specific concerns pertain to outdoor advertising signs, the granting of zoning variances, zoning enforcement, the condition of streets and sidewalks, and security. This commercial area should be compatible with its historic surroundings.

The Lancaster Avenue corridor to the east of 63rd Street provides needed services but suffers from poor aesthetics. It contains a poorly organized mixture of buildings and lots, and is gener-

ally unattractive. The Planning Commission agrees with community leaders in the Overbrook area that the corridor's appearance should be improved. Reference is made to the "Corridors in Decline" discussion, where a design study is recommended.