



# Callowhill Area

## Land Use & Existing Conditions Analysis

Prepared by:  
Clinton Randall  
Summer 2008

Prepared for:  
The Philadelphia City Planning Commission  
Community Planning Division





# Executive Summary

---

In 2004, The Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) partnered with Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) to create a ***Neighborhood Plan for Chinatown and Callowhill***. The project was a direct response to Mayor John F. Street's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, which identified 31 neighborhoods in Philadelphia where a comprehensive planning process would direct future investments. The plan, produced by a team led by Kise Straw & Kolodner (KSK), focused on addressing the development needs of the Chinatown community, and resulted in the rezoning of an area known as "Chinatown North", which extends from the Vine Street Expressway to Spring Garden Street, and from 9<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> Street.

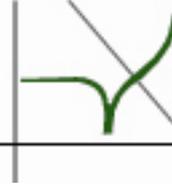
In 2008, Laura M. Spina, Center City Planner for PCPC, began the work of laying out a vision for the larger Callowhill area (I-95 to Broad Street, Spring Garden Street to the Vine Street Expressway). This land use and existing conditions analysis is a first step towards the creation of a comprehensive plan for this section of Philadelphia. Adjacent to Center City and other growing residential neighborhoods, it is an attractive target for private development. Its unique physical character and aging industrial infrastructure present challenges that must be addressed comprehensively. By undertaking this project, PCPC can proactively take measures to ensure that the redevelopment and growth of this area are contextual and appropriate.

This preliminary analysis will inform a remapping of zoning designations within the study area west of 11<sup>th</sup> Street. Ms. Spina of the Community Planning Division and Martin Gregorski of the Development Planning Division are actively working with Callowhill Neighborhood Association (CNA) to complete this remapping process. Ms. Spina is managing the overall project, with ongoing assistance from Clint Randall, an intern for PCPC and a second year master's student in the city planning program at the University of Pennsylvania.

Cover page images, clockwise from top left:

Plaza at the terminus of Ridge Avenue, near 9<sup>th</sup> Street;  
Looking east from 9<sup>th</sup> Street across an expanse of surface parking;  
Looking down to Café Lift and 13<sup>th</sup> Street from Noble Street .

Clint Randall contributed all photographs, maps, and other graphics unless otherwise cited.



# INTRODUCTION

## Study Area Location

This document describes the current conditions and land use patterns in the area bounded by the Vine Street Expressway (Interstate 676) to the south, Broad Street to the west, Spring Garden Street to the north, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street/Interstate 95 to the east.

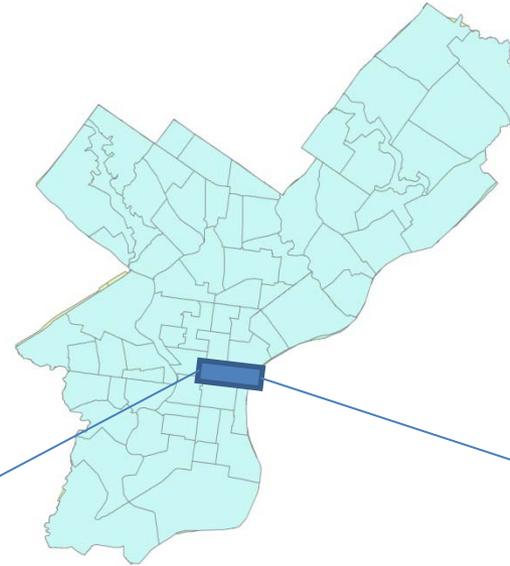


Figure 1.1: Study Area Context Map



# INTRODUCTION

For the purposes of this analysis, the study area is broken into three subareas:

- **Zone 1: The Callowhill Loft District** (11<sup>th</sup> Street to Broad Street between the Vine Street Expressway and Spring Garden Street)
- **Zone 2: Chinatown North** (9<sup>th</sup> Street to 11<sup>th</sup> Street between the Vine Street Expressway and Spring Garden Street, as well as the block bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Callowhill Street and the Vine Street Expressway)
- **Zone 3: The Callowhill Industrial District** (2<sup>nd</sup> Street to 9<sup>th</sup> Street between the Vine Street Expressway and Spring Garden Street, excluding the block bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Callowhill Street and the Vine Street Expressway)



Figure 1.2: Study Area showing analysis district overlays

Each of these subareas is addressed in the sections that follow.

## History and Context

A century ago, the study area was a thriving industrial district, most notably towards the western end where large factories and warehouses grew around the train viaducts of the Reading Railroad. The eastern end was rezoned and classified as an industrial district in the 1950s to create a consistency of uses throughout this section of the city. Through this action, the city hoped to attract and retain the types of businesses that had made this area a significant economic contributor in the first place.

The goal of turning the eastern end into a robust industrial district to mimic the western end never materialized. Heavy industry began its well-documented departure from US cities in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, lowering demand for industrial zones in the urban core. New uses began to replace what was there, creating an inconsistent mix of light industrial and commercial uses that continues to diversify to this day.



Figure 1.3: Colonial Electric at 4<sup>th</sup> and Callowhill Streets



Figure 1.4: Multiple tenants behind City Fitness at 2<sup>nd</sup> and Spring Garden Streets.



# INTRODUCTION

---

The complete lack of housing in the eastern portion of the study area left the Callowhill Industrial District with little oversight and few concerned stakeholders up until as recently as ten years ago. The border neighborhoods of Old City to the south and Northern Liberties to the north occasionally monitor the development activity in the area.

The effects of 20<sup>th</sup>-century urban deindustrialization are also plainly visible in the western end of the study area. Widespread abandonment of the older industrial structures and a relatively small number of existing housing units left the area with very few jobs or residents. Attempting to capitalize on the continuing growth of Center City, developers have begun to take interest in adaptively reusing some of the warehouse structures as residences in the western-most end of the area, creating the beginnings of what is often referred to as “The Loft District”.



Figure 1.5: Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corp. (PCDC) Headquarters

Community leaders and organizations in neighboring Chinatown have focused their development efforts between 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> streets, as the construction of Market East, the Convention Center, and the Vine Street Expressway have left the community with nowhere to grow but to the north. The result is a growing residential population slowly filling in an area lacking in neighborhood amenities and services.



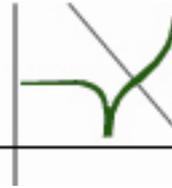
# INTRODUCTION

## Challenges and Opportunities

The area's location, physical infrastructure, and building stock give it a great deal of potential to thrive as a dense, mixed-use area that could help to connect growing neighborhoods to the north with Center City. Urban infill would also help to mend the physical and psychological gap created by the depression of I-676 and the overpasses of I-95, creating a node of activity between Center City, a re-imagined Delaware River Waterfront, Northern Liberties, and Broad Street.



Figure 1.6: At the intersection of 12<sup>th</sup> and Wood Streets looking east towards the Reading Viaduct.



# INTRODUCTION

---

Separate challenges and opportunities present themselves on either side of 9<sup>th</sup> Street. Viewed by many as an imposing and dilapidated relic of a bygone age, the abandoned Reading Viaduct west of 9<sup>th</sup> Street presents a unique opportunity to provide a new kind of open space for residents of Callowhill and Philadelphia at large. A strong fabric of sizeable and historic buildings provides a framework for a mid-rise, mixed-use neighborhood organized around a signature linear park system.



Figure 1.7: One spur of the Reading Viaduct slopes down to street level near 13<sup>th</sup> and Noble Sts.



# INTRODUCTION

East of 9<sup>th</sup> Street, the ‘megablocks’ created to form the defunct Industrial District have encouraged sprawling low-rise buildings and an expanse of surface parking lots, many of which are increasingly likely candidates for demolition and redevelopment as land values near Center City continue to rise. The under-built environment also means that the possibility exists to reinstate significant portions of the original street grid. A re-established Noble Street could act as a new spine and focal point for mixed-use development at a pedestrian and traditionally Philadelphian scale.



Figure 1.8: Willow Street runs east-west through the study area but public access is restricted on certain blocks, as shown here between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Sts.



# INTRODUCTION

---

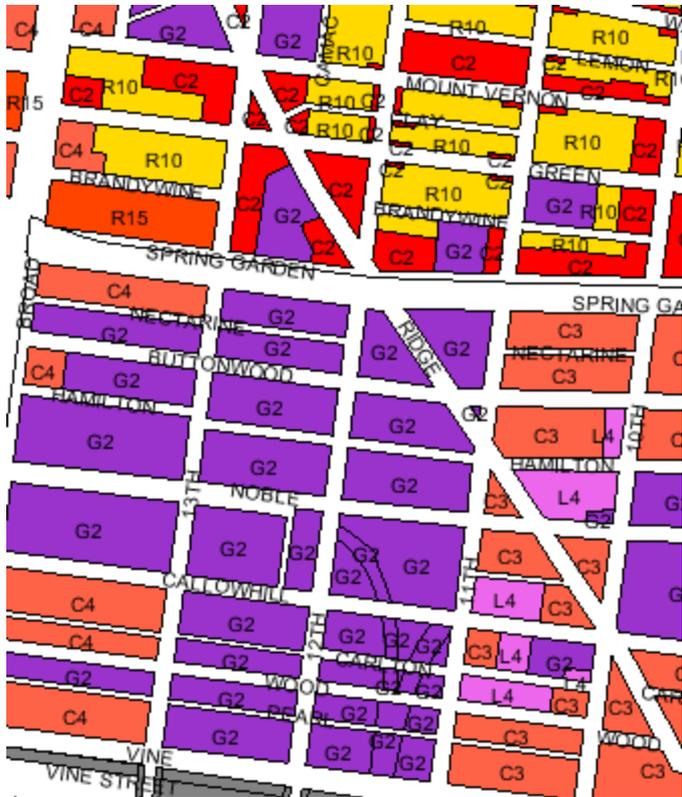


Figure 1.9: City of Philadelphia zoning map showing current classifications in an area roughly corresponding to Zone 1 (Callowhill West or “The Loft District”)

## Laying the groundwork for a Callowhill Master Plan

Through this comprehensive land use and existing conditions analysis, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) hopes to create a clear starting point that will help to:

- guide a zoning remapping of the area between 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Broad Street, Vine Street, and Spring Garden Street
- provide a starting point for a thoughtful and comprehensive planning effort that takes into account the entire Callowhill area

The goal of a remapping is to put zoning designations in place that more accurately reflect the current conditions of the area and the direction in which it is trending. A remapping of the Callowhill “Loft” District can support the midrise, mixed-use character of recent developments, and create a consistency between this area and the Chinatown North area, which underwent a rezoning in 2005.



# INTRODUCTION

---

A complete Callowhill Master Plan can serve as a reference for private developers as well as various city agencies as they examine how best to invest in this part of Philadelphia. Moreover, it presents a vision for the area that will incorporate the input and desires of a growing list of diverse stakeholders:

- PCPC
- Philadelphia Commerce Department
- City of Philadelphia Streets Department
- Callowhill Neighbors Association (CNA)
- Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC)
- Old City Civic Association (OCCA)
- Northern Liberties Neighborhood Association (NLNA)
- Reading International Inc.
- SEPTA
- PATCO
- private developers



# INTRODUCTION

A unified and rational vision is essential as funding sources are sought for community improvement and capital projects. In the absence of a modernized zoning code, design guidelines are crucial for streamlining the development process and ensuring community groups and developers have a common ground on which to base their discussions.

A thorough analysis of each of the three Callowhill subareas, or zones, follows, outlining existing conditions related to land use & zoning, urban design character, and circulation & transit, as well as an examination of site-specific strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and constraints.



Figure 1.10: Looking southwest across 6<sup>th</sup> Street near Spring Garden. A drive-through bank, a union hall, and large telecommunications punctuate the otherwise deserted streetscape.



## ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)

The Callowhill West/Loft District encompasses the area bounded by 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Broad Street, Spring Garden Street and the Vine Street Expressway.



Figure 2.1: Zone 1 (outlined in red) contains a dense mix of mid-rise buildings, some historically certified, and a substantial section of the deteriorated Reading Railroad Viaduct.



## ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)

### Current Land Use & Zoning Patterns

Of all the areas of Callowhill, the Loft District has seen the greatest number of conversions of formerly industrial structures to residential loft buildings of both rental apartments and condominiums. The mid- and high-rise character of the area promotes adaptive reuse and redevelopment as it is often less expensive than clearing parcels and starting over. Additionally, several of the structures in this area are historically certified, allowing developers to take advantage of special tax credits for redevelopment projects.

The half dozen or so residential conversions have begun to encourage more neighborhood-serving businesses in this area, but by and large light industrial and wholesale commercial businesses still occupy much of the ground floor space in the area. Food production, horse stables, electronic signage clearing houses and kitchen appliance suppliers coexist with a number of medical and social services which cluster largely along the spine of Spring Garden Street.

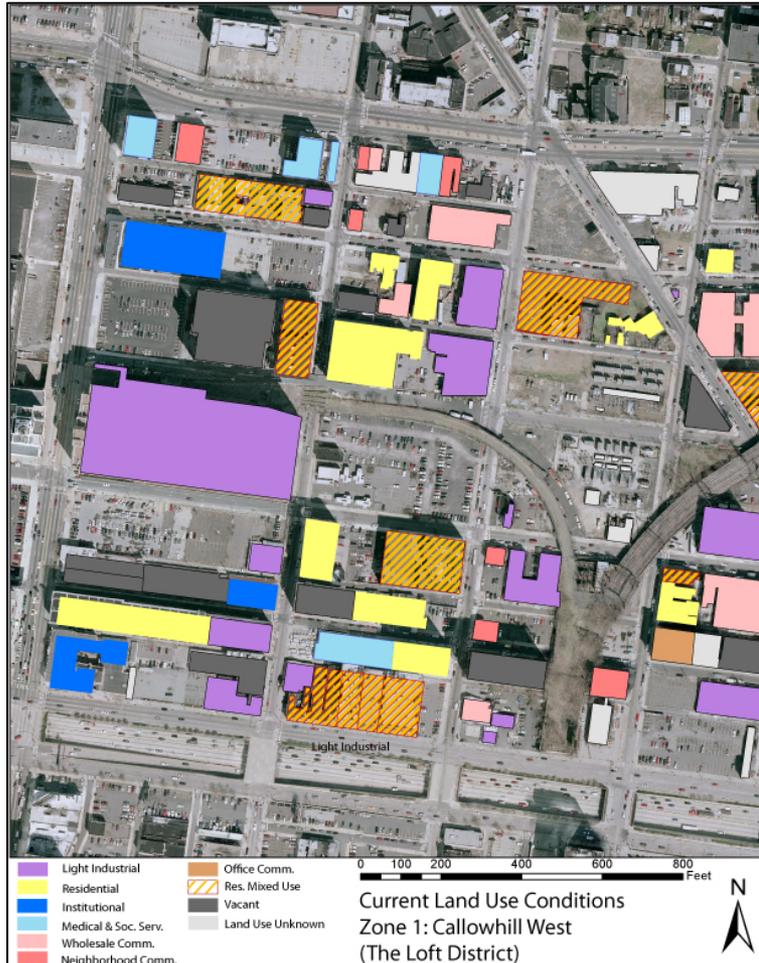


Figure 2.2: Current land uses in Zone 1 (The Loft District). Non-colored areas are either vacant or occupied by surface parking or machinery.



## ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)

While this zone is the most dense of the three discussed in this analysis, it still presents a large number of soft sites in the form of parcels where land values have risen far above what currently occupies the site. A handful of surface parking lots, including a block-long lot at Broad and Callowhill Streets owned by Parkway Corporation, would be likely candidates for infill projects if the housing market improves in 2009 and beyond.

Figure 2.3 Susceptibility to Change map showing the likelihood of the redevelopment of parcels within Zone 1. In general, buildings with low susceptibility have been recently converted into residences. Partially transparent color blocks indicate susceptibility to change on un-built land and/or surface parking lots.





## ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)

Aside from the Parkway Corp lot at Broad and Callowhill, the most significant site without a current proposal is an irregularly shaped parcel defined by Ridge Avenue, Buttonwood, 12<sup>th</sup>, and Spring Garden Streets. The owner is Lucky Garden, a Chinatown-based developer and construction business which recently completed a 4-story mixed-use project on an adjacent parcel. In the past, CNA successfully halted the construction of a drive-thru fast-food restaurant on this strategically-placed site. With frontage on two major arterials, this site is a potential gateway into Callowhill from the north and west.

A third site of interest is the surface lot on Broad between Noble and Hamilton. The Church of Latter Day Saints announced the construction of a new cathedral would begin on this site in 2009.

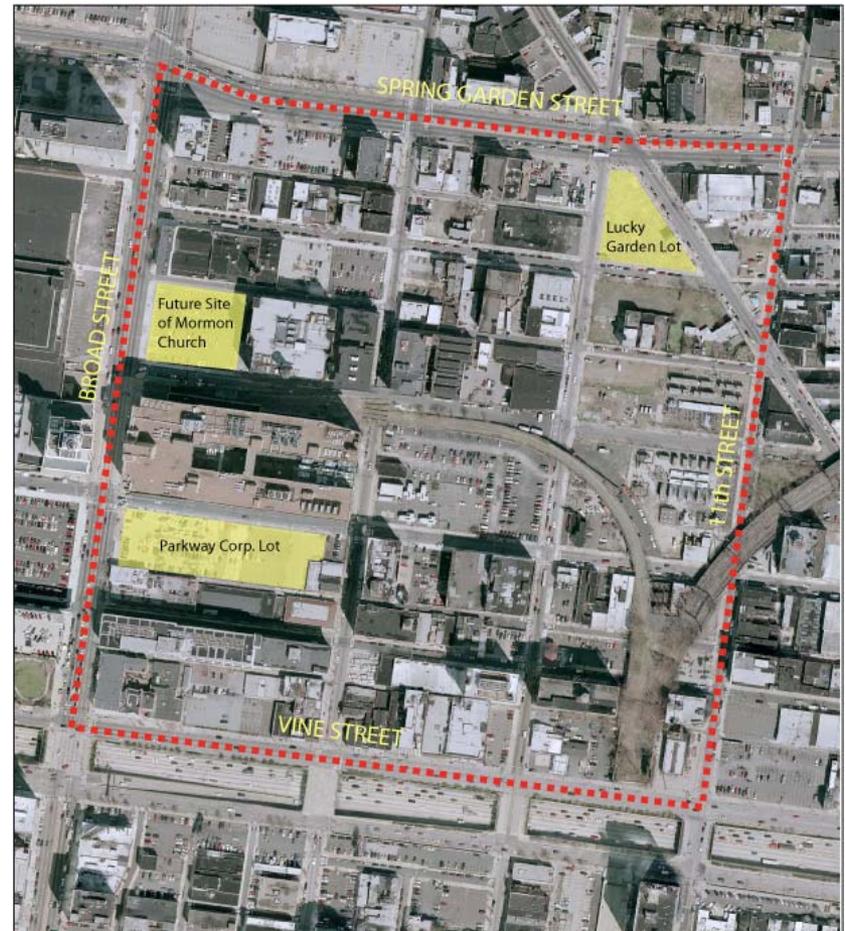


Figure 2.4: Major development sites in the loft district include Parkway Corporation's surface parking lot at Broad and Callowhill, Lucky Garden's irregularly shaped parcel where Ridge Avenue meets 12<sup>th</sup> and Spring Garden Sts, and the surface lot at Broad and Noble where a new Mormon cathedral is slated to rise



## **ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)**

---

### Defining Physical and Spatial Characteristics (Urban Design Character)

The Loft District has the most consistent urban design character of the three zones in Callowhill, as it contains a significant number of mid- and high-rise warehouse and factory buildings, many dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Several blocks of rowhouses remain towards the north of the area, and this mix of single-family homes and larger loft buildings creates interesting architectural juxtapositions and an enclosed but comfortable pedestrian experience.

The Reading Viaduct's secondary spur curves directly from 11<sup>th</sup> and Callowhill into the Loft District, gradually coming down to grade along Noble Street while passing over 13<sup>th</sup>. This graceful slope extends almost to Broad Street, and is already used informally by those curious to experience the views it affords. This spur connects with the main branch of the viaduct between 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup>, Callowhill and Wood, forming a massive juncture that, while currently neglected, would become a logical focal point of the viaduct's redevelopment as a park.

Figures 2.5 and 2.6: 13<sup>th</sup> Street dips below Noble Street in the heart of the Loft District, creating a visually interesting grade change. At the same intersection, the western spur of the Reading Viaduct comes down to equal grade with 13<sup>th</sup> Street, creating a clear sightline from the elevated structure all the way to Broad Street.





## ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)

### Accessibility, transit, and circulation

**Highways and Roads:** The existing street grid in the Loft District is quite underutilized relative to its potential capacity to move through-traffic. With two major arterials as boundaries (Broad Street to the west and Spring Garden to the north), and an exit from the Vine Street Expressway two blocks west, auto access into the area is unrestricted. A high concentration of secondary and tertiary streets divert and disperse auto traffic through the area, though currently the little traffic that exists is usually related to the businesses that occupy parcels along these streets.



Figure 2.7: The intersection of 13<sup>th</sup> and Wood Streets. Even with a larger residential population than either of the other two Callowhill zones, morning and midday traffic is light and infrequent, suggesting that residents may use alternative forms of transport as their primary means of traveling in and out of Callowhill.



## ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)

**Subway/Rail:** The Callowhill Loft District is very well-served by rail transit. The Broad Street Subway runs along the western boundary of the neighborhood, with stations at Spring Garden Street and Vine Street. The Broad Street Subway provides frequent and direct access to lower portions of Center City, South Philadelphia, Temple University, and North Philadelphia, with a spur that cuts over to Chinatown and 8<sup>th</sup> and Market. It runs 24 hours a day, though buses replace rail service between approximately midnight and 5am. This major transit line also provides direct connections to other subway lines and the regional rail network.



Figure 2.8: The Broad Street Subway and Route 23 bus provide the Loft District neighborhood with a level of transit service that exceeds current demand. Improved service along the Ridge Avenue Spur would give residents even greater choice for reaching destinations east of Broad Street, as well as points along PATCO.



## **ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)**

---

**Bus:** The Route 23 is a good option for Loft District residents who live near 11<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> and are therefore more than a comfortable walking distance from the Broad Street subway stations. One of the city's busiest bus routes, the 23 runs at short headways during peak hours and runs 24 hours a day. While its route more or less parallels the subway two blocks to the west, it also provides direct access to Northwest Philadelphia, as well as providing block-by-block service in areas where the subway only stops at certain intersections. In addition to the 23, the 43 also serves this area with east-west service along Spring Garden Street. Route 61 operates along Ridge Avenue and provides access into the heart of Center City East as well as direct service to Manayunk. The convergence of these routes makes this area of Callowhill one of the city's best-served transit zones.



## **ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)**

---

### **Strengths and Opportunities, Weaknesses and Constraints**

#### **High quality of existing urban fabric/historically-protected buildings:**

The Loft District's existing built environment is one of its visual strengths but also a potential constraint for developers looking to complete affordable projects. Many of these older structures would require substantial rehabilitation. Moreover, the sheer size of some buildings make them appealing to only a certain subset of the development community, most notably 440 N. Broad Street, now partially occupied by Sungard.



Figure 2.9: This mid-rise building near 12<sup>th</sup> and Wood has the high ceilings and large windows that have helped make 'loft-style living' so popular in Philadelphia and other cities around the world.



## ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)

**The Reading Viaduct:** The Loft District contains the most accessible portions of the Reading Viaduct, including the spur to Broad Street that offers a slope ideal for eventual conversion to public open space. At the same time, the southern-most section of the viaduct is also the most massive.

Currently, this creates some of Callowhill's least welcoming pedestrian areas, with low perceptions of safety. Successful transformation of the viaduct would hinge on the ability of the design to re-imagine the juncture of the two spurs as a major public square or open space, and significant attention would need to be paid to lighting, access, and programming.

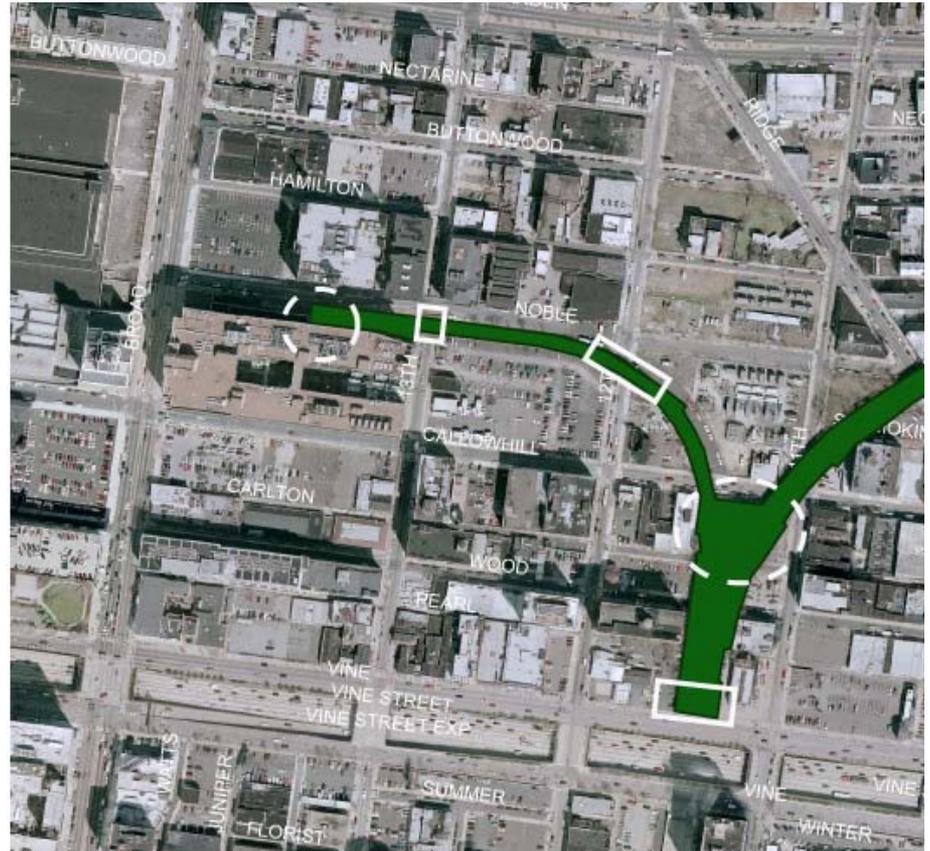


Figure 2.10: In reimagining the Reading Viaduct as a recreational public space amenity, it is important to consider the moments where the Viaduct crosses existing streets and creates the largest impact.



## **ZONE 1: CALLOWHILL WEST (The Loft District)**

---

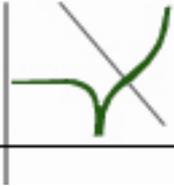
### **Incompatible and semi-permanent uses:**

A PECO power substation occupies two centrally-located parcels along either side of the 1100 block of Noble Street.

Sungard uses a key corner lot to house enormous energy generators that are difficult to relocate and frequently in use. These and other less than ideal uses of urban land are not alterable in the foreseeable future. Neighborhood infill will therefore have to happen around these sites, and special measures will need to be taken to minimize the negative impacts of these sites on the pedestrian environment (existing ideas include artistic/dramatic screening or lighting features).



**Figure 2.11: Sungard's large generators detract from the pedestrian experience in the heart of The Loft District. Grants and other monies could be pursued to fund a design competition to explore options for screening these parcels in an attractive, sustainable, and exciting way. Creative lighting and materials could turn these eyesores into well-known focal points of the neighborhood.**



## **NEXT STEPS: Zone 1 (The Loft District)**

---

The following recommendations for next steps emerge from this analysis:

- PCPC staff should continue to work with Callowhill Neighbors Association (CNA) on a remapping of zoning designations within CNA's boundaries.
- This rezoning should go before the Planning Commission and be introduced as an ordinance to City Council
- PCPC staff and the Commission need to consider interim development proposals in the context of the developing vision for the area and the growing need for neighborhood-oriented amenities and services
- CNA or some other organization needs to take an active role in advocating for the conversion of the Reading Viaduct into a signature open space by:
  - Pursuing grant monies to put towards the completion of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)
  - Approaching the Commerce Department and other agencies that seek to leverage private development within The City of Philadelphia
  - Engaging the development community around the Viaduct and the opportunities it represents to produce innovative and unique projects in the city
  - Identifying or creating a new oversight organization that could eventually take ownership of the Viaduct and the land on which it sits in order to ensure that its redevelopment occurs in a coherent and comprehensive manner (this assumes both that Reading Holdings no longer has any use for the property and that The City is not interested in taking on ownership of something that is currently regarded as a liability)



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

The Callowhill East/Chinatown North district encompasses the area bounded by 9<sup>th</sup> Street, 11<sup>th</sup> Street, Spring Garden Street, and Callowhill Street. It also incorporates the block bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Callowhill Street and the Vine Street Expressway.



Figure 3.1: The red-dotted line denotes the boundaries of Chinatown North. The Reading Viaduct and Ridge Avenue are strong diagonals that interrupt the grid significantly throughout this area, resulting in a physical character that is unique to this neighborhood.



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

### Current Land Use & Zoning Patterns

This area underwent a zoning remapping in 2005 which replaced outdated industrial designations with a mix of residential and commercial blocks. Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation's efforts to create more market-rate and affordable housing geared to the Asian market have created the beginnings of a residential neighborhood in the southern end of the area, though it should be noted that the largely single-family units are creating a residential density lower than that allowed by the C3 commercial designation that now applies to more than half of the parcels.



Figure 3.2: Existing land uses within Chinatown North.



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

The existing commercial uses center on auto-oriented wholesale and distribution services. A single office building – a historically certified former drug company building – occupies a key parcel at 10<sup>th</sup> and Spring Garden and could act as a future anchor for development centered on both Spring Garden Street as an arterial street and the Viaduct as a viable open space amenity.

The parcels adjacent to the viaduct are of an unconventional shape by Philadelphia standards and are largely left vacant or utilized for surface parking. Surface parking lots also dominate the landscape north of Hamilton Street.



Figure 3.3: Susceptibility to Change within Chinatown North.



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) is currently pursuing plans to construct a Chinatown community center on a large parcel at 10<sup>th</sup> and Vine which would include 13 floors of market-rate and affordable housing units. This would help to extend the identity of Chinatown across the Vine Street Expressway and provide a focal point for the existing PCDC developments in this area.



Figure 3.4: The future site of the Chinatown Community Center



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)



Figure 3.5: Currently vacant, the Center City Grocery and Produce building could accommodate a large-scale grocery store and residential units above, making it a development anchor for Chinatown North.

Figure 3.6: Adaptable buildings, pedestrian-scaled streets, and the unexpected spaces created by the Reading Viaduct are all ingredients for a neighborhood atmosphere unlike anywhere else in Philadelphia.

### Defining Physical and Spatial Characteristics (Urban Design Character)

9<sup>th</sup> Street marks a clear change in the urban environment within the larger context of Callowhill. The low-density superblocks east of 9<sup>th</sup> come up against the higher-density environment of older buildings lining the narrow street grid typically found in the city between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers, including Noble Street, Hamilton, and Buttonwood.





## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

---

The physical presence of the Reading Viaduct running north-south near 9<sup>th</sup> Street shortens sightlines and cuts typical city blocks into irregularly shaped parcels that are markedly different in scale than those found in the industrial district to the east. The viaduct is a striking presence in the area. Its industrial character and massive arches give this area an urban aesthetic that is unlike any other in the city. Operating on the assumption that the viaduct can be transformed into a unique open space asset, the short blocks, narrow streets, and triangulated parcels that it creates present interesting opportunities for urban designers and architects in the coming years.



Figure 3.7: The majority of sites bordering the Viaduct are more than adequately sized for residential or mixed-use development. While uncommon in Philadelphia, buildings on triangular parcels can be designed to be livable, functional, and architecturally interesting.

However, the plan produced by Kise Straw Kolodner for Chinatown called for the demolition of parts of the viaduct to create more developable parcels. PCDC sees the irregularly shaped lots created by the viaduct as too difficult to develop, especially for the affordable housing that the organization strives to provide.



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

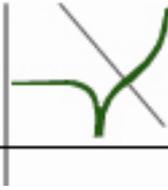
---

### Accessibility, transit, and circulation

**Roads and Highways:** Chinatown North is well served by Philadelphia's familiar street grid, but the overhead rail viaduct makes navigating the area confusing to those accustomed to a simple rectangular grid system. 9<sup>th</sup> Street has the distinction of being the only one in the entire study area that does not provide a crossing south into Center City over or under the Vine Street Expressway. For pedestrians and motorists alike, this creates a false sense of isolation in the Chinatown North area. Those accessing the area by either of the major highways are well-served by nearby exits.



Figure 3.8: The spaces between buildings and the Reading Viaduct are currently used for parking, despite ample on-street space.



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

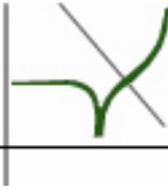
---



**Subway/Rail:** The Ridge Avenue Spur of the Broad Street Subway passes directly under this area but there are no stations within its boundaries. An abandoned station where Ridge Avenue meets Spring Garden and 12<sup>th</sup> Streets could eventually serve the area if residential infill reached a level that warranted its reopening.

**Bus:** The Route 23 bus provides consistent service through this part of Callowhill, running north on 11<sup>th</sup> Street and south on 12<sup>th</sup> Street. One of the busiest bus lines in the city, it runs 24 hours a day, with very short headways during peak hours. Its lengthy route provides direct connections between Callowhill and dozens of other neighborhoods, making it a valuable asset and a good reason to increase population and development density in this area.

Figure 3.9: The Ridge Avenue Spur of the Broad Street Subway (shown in orange) cuts under the area but does not stop there. Instead, the 23 bus provides the most reliable and frequent north-south connections



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

---

### Strengths and Opportunities, Weaknesses and Constraints

**The Reading Viaduct:** The portion of the viaduct running through this section of Callowhill is a major point of contention amongst the various stakeholders in the area. For those who see its viability as an above-grade linear park space, it is a unique asset and defining neighborhood feature that could eventually become a catalyst for creative mixed-use developments along its edges. For those who see its large footprint as limiting the possibilities for conventional developments, it is a major weakness for the area and the biggest reason for slow turnaround in the area.

A study produced by Urban Engineers in 2004 compared the costs of environmental remediation of the viaduct to the costs of demolishing it completely. The report revealed that demolition would cost between 35 and 36 million dollars, whereas remediation could be accomplished for as little as 5-7 million dollars. These numbers make a strong case for aggressively pursuing monies to assess the environmental condition of the viaduct, something that CNA is currently investigating at the urging of the Philadelphia Department of Commerce. With this information in hand, a new vision of the Viaduct could be presented to the development community and government environmental agencies to generate interest and, eventually, funding to recreate it as a new open space connecting several neighborhoods.



Figure 3.10: 5 un-built parcels abut the Viaduct directly, and could be developed to engage the structure as a recreational path. White circles denote logical points of entry and exit to and from the Viaduct.



## ZONE 2: CALLOWHILL EAST (Chinatown North)

---

**I-676:** I-676 makes a significant grade change between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets, partially to facilitate on-and off-access for the Ben Franklin Bridge. This creates a massive and confusing cluster of highway ramps and lanes that is impassable at 9<sup>th</sup> Street and unattractive from a pedestrian standpoint. It is unlikely that there is any cost-effective way to create a 9<sup>th</sup> Street crossing. Instead, crossings at 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> could be strengthened to reinforce the importance of these streets as commercial corridors in Chinatown. The intersection where 9<sup>th</sup> Street meets Vine Street should also be made a 90-degree T intersection to calm traffic and enhance the pedestrian experience along Vine Street.



**Figure 3.11:** Visual proximity to Center City can be a selling point for potential developers of parcels such this one above, at 9<sup>th</sup> and Vine.



## **NEXT STEPS:**

### **Zone 2 (Chinatown North)**

---

The following recommendations for next steps emerge from this analysis:

- PCPC staff should work to ensure that all new development proposals within this area work within the revised zoning and contribute to the increasingly mixed-use nature of the area
- PCPC staff should continue to engage with the Chinatown community to ensure that development proposals within this zone comply with the vision expressed in the 2004 Neighborhood Plan
- CNA and PCDC should maintain open communication channels as plans move forward to rezone the Loft District and issues surrounding alternatives for the Reading Viaduct emerge



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

The Callowhill Industrial District encompasses the area bounded by the Vine Street Expressway to the south, 9<sup>th</sup> Street to the west, Spring Garden Street to the north, and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street and I-95 to the east. It does not include the block bounded by 8<sup>th</sup> Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Street, Callowhill Street and the Vine Street Expressway (this block was rezoned with the rest of the Chinatown North area in 2005 and has been developed by PCDC).



Figure 4.1. The boundaries of the Callowhill Industrial District are denoted in red.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

### Current Land Use & Zoning Patterns

The Callowhill Industrial District contains a wide mix of light industrial and commercial uses in an area zoned entirely 'L4' for limited industrial. Medical & social services and audio-visual and electronics supply businesses are the most prevalent in the area, though the specializations of these businesses do not necessarily create commercial synergies or contribute to any sort of 'neighborhood identity'.

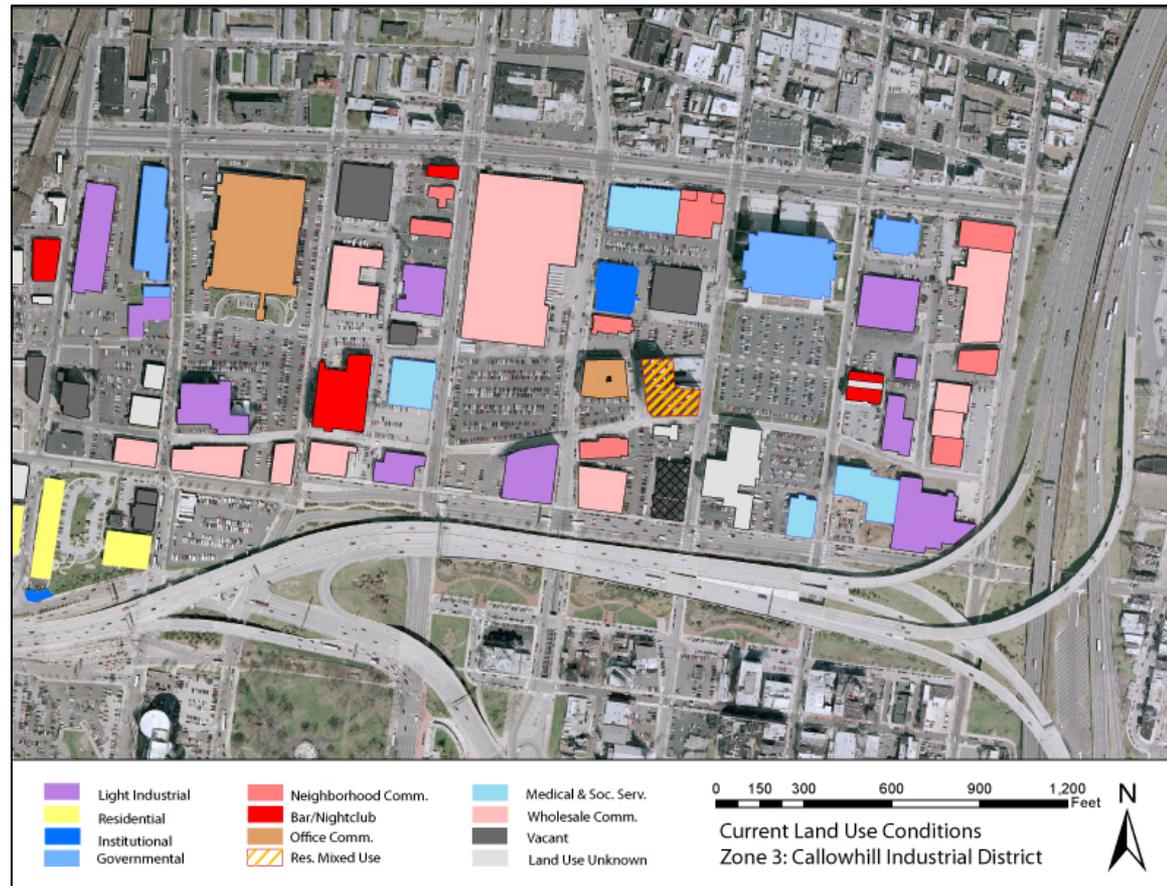


Figure 4.2: Land use in the Callowhill Industrial District varies widely. Medical services, wholesale suppliers and shipping centers dominate the area.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

With businesses such as dialysis centers, child counseling services, and Gift of Life organ donation programs, the area is not so much a destination for medical services as it is an area filled with businesses that cater to certain specific needs. The same can be said for the electronics businesses, which range from video production to contractor supply centers. The majority of these businesses are small-scale operations with single-floor offices and showrooms in a mix of mostly one- and two-story buildings scattered throughout the area.



Figure 4.3: The majority of businesses within the Callowhill Industrial District do very little to engage the street, with auto-scaled signage, few windows, and ample surface parking on all sides.





## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

Beyond these two principal uses, the area is beginning to see an increase in businesses that cater more to the daily needs of nearby residents in Northern Liberties. Concentrated mostly along the spine of Spring Garden Street, these include City Fitness Gym and a new supermarket with an emphasis on Asian food products. Additionally, the Callowhill Industrial District currently contains one residential building, redeveloped from former warehouse space at 444 N 4<sup>th</sup> Street. This same building contains the district's only sit-down restaurant, Café Estelle. On nearby 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, several nightclub/bars have succeeded in drawing customers from the nightlife hubs of Northern Liberties and Old City.



Figure 4.4 Recent openings of a fitness center and the area's first full-time residential building and sit-down restaurant are signs of a growing demand for housing and neighborhood-serving amenities in this part of the city. For now, these uses are exceptions to the rule.





## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

Finally, the Callowhill Industrial District is home to several larger employment centers, including the regional offices for the Social Security Administration between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Streets, Blood Services for the American Red Cross between 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Streets, and city departments including the Fire Department and Traffic Court. The single largest parcel in the area holds the offices and distribution center for Mother's Work, the parent company of maternity stores including Pea in the Pod and Mimi Maternity.



Figure 4.5 Mothers Work Inc and the American Red Cross are two of the largest landowners in the area.





## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

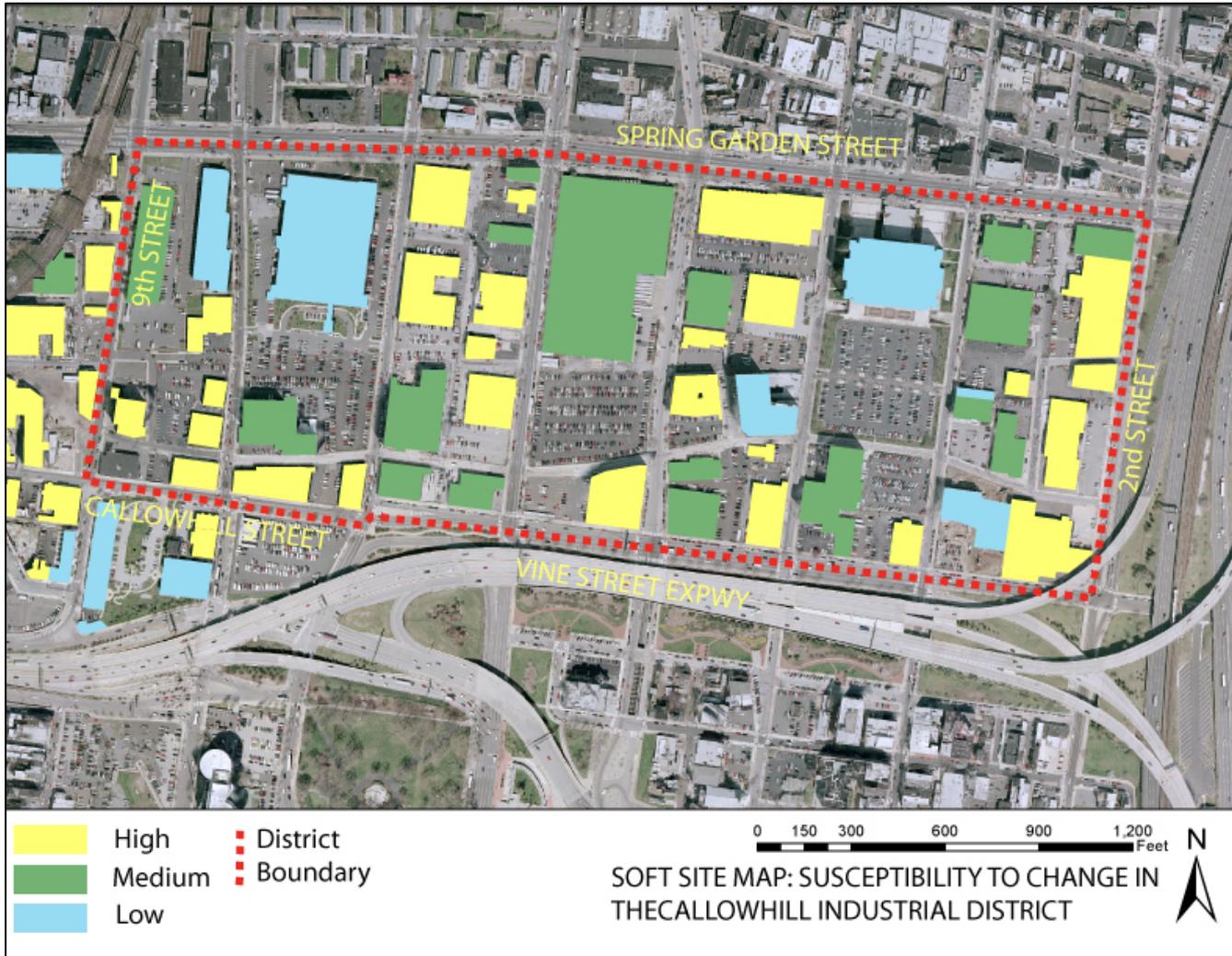


Figure 4.6: A susceptibility to change analysis reveals that the vast majority of the existing businesses are not place-based and could relocate to areas with comparable building stock. The majority of the existing structures are architecturally unremarkable, historically insignificant, and low-rise in character. Should property and land values achieve a certain threshold, many would be prime candidates for demolition.

With new zoning designations, new construction could occupy a higher percentage of the building parcels, eliminating the vast auxiliary parking lots that define the landscape.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

---

### Defining Physical and Spatial Characteristics (Urban Design Character)

The majority of structures within the Callowhill Industrial District are one or two-story warehouses with large loading areas and parking lots. Given the nature of the businesses that occupy these buildings, blank street walls are common, and access is often auto-oriented to the rear of the lot.

Many of the original east-west streets that currently pick up west of 9<sup>th</sup> Street were removed from the City Plan within this district to better accommodate industrial building footprints. Between Callowhill Street and Spring Garden Street, only Willow Street runs continuously from 9<sup>th</sup> Street east to 2<sup>nd</sup>, and it bends and jogs significantly from block to block. As such, superblocks of low-rise structures dominate the area. Approximately 50% of the privately owned land in this area is dedicated to surface parking, with fences and other barriers demarcating the lot lines between businesses.



Figure 4.7: The automobile has driven design and land use in the Industrial District. Despite this, the area experiences relatively little traffic volume at most times of day.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

No fewer than 2500 off-street spaces exist between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets and Callowhill and Spring Garden. While the employee parking lots for the Red Cross and Social Security buildings are fully utilized, many of the other parcels contain more parking than is required to accommodate drive-in business on the average weekday. After business hours, these parking expanses are mostly empty, though the scattered nightclubs in the area make use of their lots largely between 9pm and 3am.

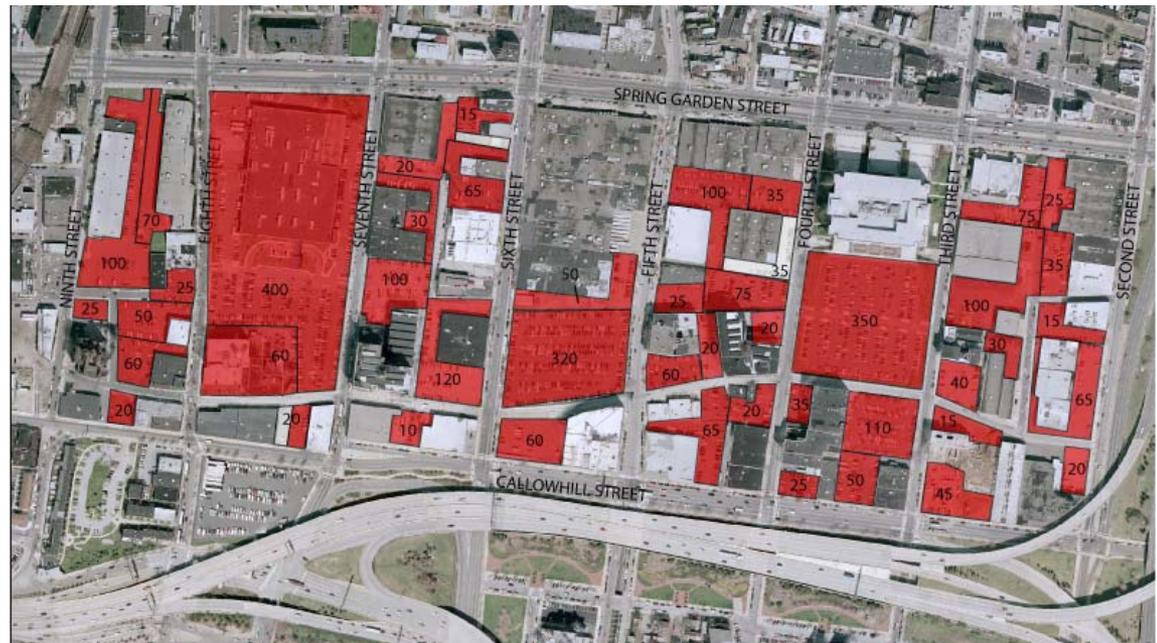


Figure 4.8: Parking lots (shaded in red, above) cover at least half of the buildable area of the Industrial District. A rezoning of many of these parcels to more mixed-use classifications such as RC4 and C3 would allow future developers to infill these empty spaces. The number within each area represents the approximate number of spaces currently provided.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

The pedestrian environment is largely deficient throughout the Callowhill Industrial District, and little has been done to ameliorate the streetscape on the numbered streets. The auto-oriented nature of most businesses creates little incentive for streetscape investments from the public or private sectors. A lack of pedestrian- and neighborhood-serving commercial uses results in very little pedestrian traffic generation across the study area in any direction. Observation of the area throughout the daytime hours confirms that pedestrian usage is limited.



Figure 4.9: Pedestrian traffic is virtually nonexistent throughout the Industrial District.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

---



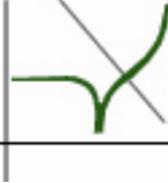
### Accessibility, transit, and circulation

**Roads and Highways:** The Callowhill Industrial District is well-served by highways and functionally connected to the city street grid. I-95 and I-676 create visual and psychological separations between this area and those surrounding it, but auto access is relatively unrestricted (9<sup>th</sup> Street is the only north-south street that does not have a crossing under or over the Vine Street Expressway).

Callowhill Street and Spring Garden Street are both wide streets capable of handling high volumes of auto traffic traveling east to west. Outside of rush hour, Callowhill is lightly used given the major east-west artery of the Vine Street Expressway immediately to its south. Spring Garden Street is a popular cross-town arterial, but rarely congested outside of rush hour. The numbered streets throughout the district are very lightly used by both cars and pedestrians.

The area is well-served by public transit, though it should be noted that current land use patterns and businesses operating within the study area are less than transit-friendly.

Figure 4.10: The existing road network could accommodate a much greater amount of automobile traffic in the future. Pedestrian and bicycle connections would need substantial improvements to adequately absorb residential growth.



## **ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT**

---

**Subway/Rail: The Market Frankford Subway-Elevated Line**, the city's busiest transit line, stops at Spring Garden Station in the median of I-95 just east of 2<sup>nd</sup> Street along Spring Garden Street. This station is convenient for residents of the southern half of Northern Liberties as well as for those attempting to access entertainment venues along the Delaware River waterfront.

Immediately south of the study area, the **Broad Street/Ridge Spur Line** makes a stop at Chinatown Station at 8<sup>th</sup> and Race Streets. Situated south of the Vine Street Expressway, the proximity of this station to the study area is likely unknown to many actual and would-be riders. Additionally, limited service hours and long headways on this line make it a less attractive option for reaching this part of the city.

The third and final subway service within easy reach of the study area is the **PATCO** line that connects Center City to southern New Jersey. Franklin Square Station, while currently not in use, is less than 500 feet south of Callowhill Street. If reopened, this could become an attractive way to access the study area.

Figure 4.11: See next slide for a map of subway and bus service in and near the Industrial District.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

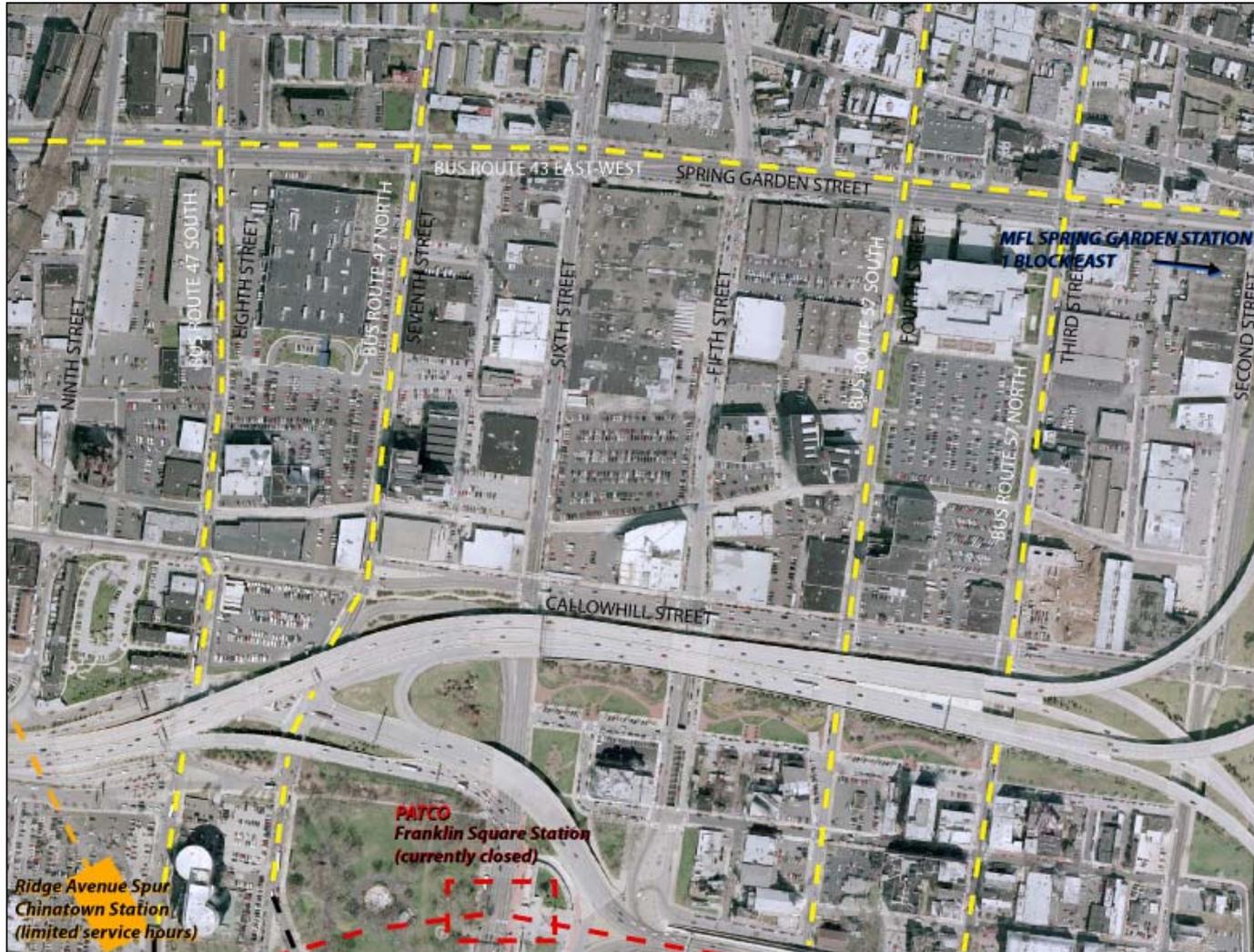


Figure 4.11 The Industrial District's existing transit service could easily meet the commuting and recreational needs of a sizeable residential population, but pedestrian connections to and from the stations would need reinforcement.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

---



Figure 4.12: A bus station along Spring Garden Street.

**Bus:** SEPTA bus routes 43, 47, 47M, and 57 serve the Callowhill Industrial District. The 47 and 47 M run north on 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> Streets (depending on the time of day) and run south on 8<sup>th</sup> Street, providing transit access to the western portion of the area farthest away from the Market-Frankford line. The 57 runs north on 3<sup>rd</sup> and south on 4<sup>th</sup> Streets, again providing options for those unwilling to walk as far as east as 2<sup>nd</sup> Street.

Both the 47 and 57 connect existing residential neighborhoods to the north with commercial centers in Center City and South Philadelphia. As such, they are popular routes with existing ridership bases that run at convenient headways directly through the Industrial District.

The Route 43 bus runs east-west along Spring Garden Street, connecting to both the Market-Frankford and Broad Street subways, as well as serving the neighborhoods of Northern Liberties, East Poplar, Brandywine, Fairmount, the Parkway/Museums area, Powelton Village, and Mantua. Despite the high utility of such a routing, the 43 runs infrequently (even at peak times it achieves only 15-minute headways).



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

---

### Strengths and Opportunities

**Spring Garden Street:** Spring Garden Street is a major east-west arterial and a logical seam between the Callowhill Industrial District and the neighborhoods of Northern Liberties and East Poplar to the study area's immediate north. Despite record numbers of new, higher-end residential units proposed and under construction in Northern Liberties, Spring Garden Street itself has seen very little development activity. Its wide right-of-way can accommodate the additional traffic that would be generated from higher-density commercial and mixed-use projects.



Figure 4.13: Currently a destination retail outlet for people across the region seeking Asian foodstuffs, Spring Garden Market could also come to serve a growing residential population in nearby neighborhoods.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT



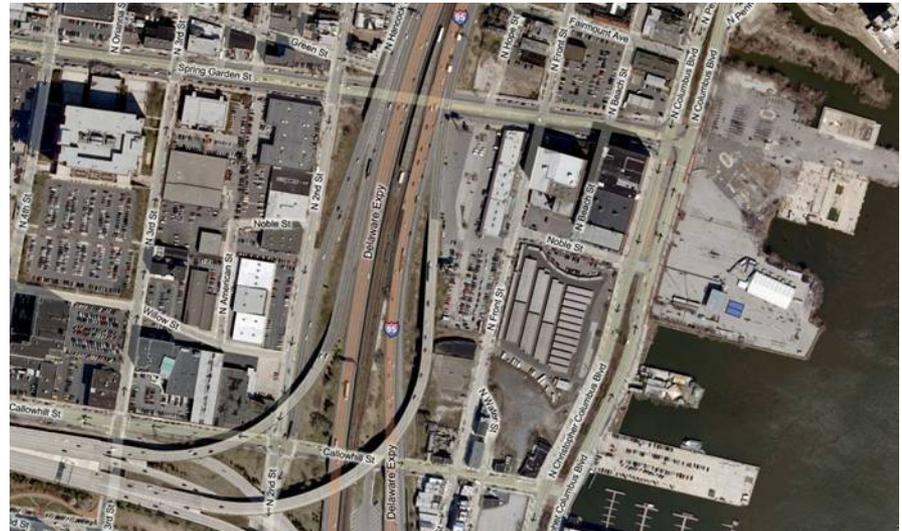
**Noble Street:** Currently, Noble Street exists east of 9<sup>th</sup> Street in only two places. Situated on opposite ends of the Industrial District, half blocks of Noble lead into a vast expanse of surface parking lots that run uninterrupted between the two road segments. In many of these lots, driveways and rights of way occupy the space where Noble Street once existed, offering a glimpse of what a reinstated Noble Street could offer the area in terms of improved circulation, as well as a new central spine that would bisect the existing superblocks into more pedestrian-scaled development parcels.



## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

### Weaknesses and Constraints

**I-95:** The elevated structures of I-95 and the Market-Frankford subway-elevated transit line eliminate nearly all sightlines (and any sense of connection) between the Delaware River waterfront and the district. While Callowhill Street and Spring Garden Street do continue directly to Delaware Avenue and the river, the pedestrian environment underneath the overpasses is unpleasant, poorly lit, and not well maintained. Overhead highway lanes and the elevated rail station create a continuous cover for over 250 feet above Spring Garden Street, while on Callowhill pedestrians must cross under four separate overpasses in order to reach the river. The westernmost of these, a flyover connecting I-676 to I-95, looms directly over parcels on the north side of the 200 block of Callowhill, reaffirming the dominance of the automobile over pedestrians throughout this part of the city.



**Figure 4.15:** The connection between the eastern end of the Industrial District and the Delaware River is severed by the overhead infrastructure of I-95 and Spring Garden Street Station, which sits between the highway lanes. Redesigning the station as a more iconic and visible landmark of the neighborhood might help to improve the mediocre pedestrian experience.

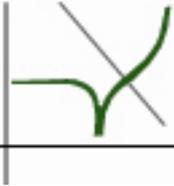


## ZONE 3: THE CALLOWHILL INDUSTRIAL DISTRICT

The Vine Street Expressway (I-676) similarly severs physical and psychological connections between the district and the neighborhoods to its immediate south, Old City and Chinatown. The stretch of expressway between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> streets is particularly challenging due to the significant grade change that takes the roadway from its overhead merge with I-95 to a below-grade underpass that continues across Center City to 22<sup>nd</sup> Street. A tangle of on- and off-ramps taking traffic to and from the Ben Franklin Bridge approach further complicates north-south visibility and pedestrian connectivity in this area.



**Figure 4.16:** The Vine Street Expressway is a large gash in the urban fabric between Old City and the Industrial District. The green spaces on the southern embankments are one example of attempts to soften the impact of the highway. A comprehensive system of lighting, signage, plantings, and other streetscape improvements along the underpasses would likely be necessary to make pedestrians comfortable with the experience of crossing underneath the highway.

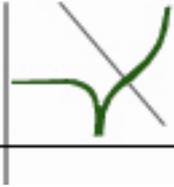


## **NEXT STEPS: Zone 3 (The Industrial District)**

---

The following recommendations for next steps emerge from this analysis:

- PCPC staff need to monitor closely the development activity that happens within the Industrial District to prevent further fracturing of uses and any projects that might prevent more coherent redevelopment of this area in the future
- To provide continuity throughout the entire Callowhill area and to show leadership in shaping the area's development and built form, PCPC staff should undertake a rezoning process as has been done in the other two zones of the study area
- Assuming the successful passing of a rezoning as a city ordinance, the city should gather relevant stakeholders as part of a larger planning process to begin discussion of how to integrate this area back into the city grid



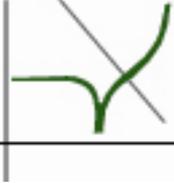
# CONCLUSION

---

In his June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2008 address to the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Mayor Michael A. Nutter stated emphatically that:

*“We need master plans for large underutilized areas...As our neighborhoods continue to change, we need the Planning Commission to develop thoughtful plans to guide growth...We need to link planning and eventual decisions to mass transportation investments...It falls to city government to act on behalf of all Philadelphians by engaging in the forward thinking that is the heart and soul of planning.”*

The Callowhill area represents a tremendous opportunity for the Planning Commission to perform the task that the Mayor describes, addressing all of the above mandates in a comprehensive plan that could significantly transform a strategic section of Philadelphia.



# CONCLUSION

---

Specific outcomes of such a comprehensive and context-sensitive plan could include:

- the creation of a dense, mixed-use neighborhood that would repair the urban fabric between the burgeoning areas of Old City and Northern Liberties;
- new residential areas attractive to young families and professionals, Center City office workers, empty-nesters, and the growing Chinatown community alike;
- The re-emergence of Ridge Avenue and Spring Garden as thriving neighborhood commercial corridors;
- Sufficient population to support appropriately dense development along the Broad Street spine, a major transit route and arterial road that can most logically accommodate large-scale projects;
- The impetus to remake the Reading Viaduct into a signature open space. This would serve not only to make the surrounding area more attractive for residential use; it would also put Philadelphia onto a short but growing list of cities that are reclaiming their industrial infrastructure and converting it into new uses that improve quality of life and drive economic growth.