

# 4 Ready for the Limelight

(RECOMMENDATIONS 1.0)

## WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

### ANALYSIS OF QUALITY OF LIFE CONCERNS

Subsequent sections present an analysis of the commercial marketplace and the look and feel of The Avenue. This section addresses first impressions – the basic conditions in the commercial district that influence public perception of the area as well as quality of life for merchants, shoppers, and residents, alike: a general lack of cleanliness and threats to public safety.



CLEANING

SAFETY

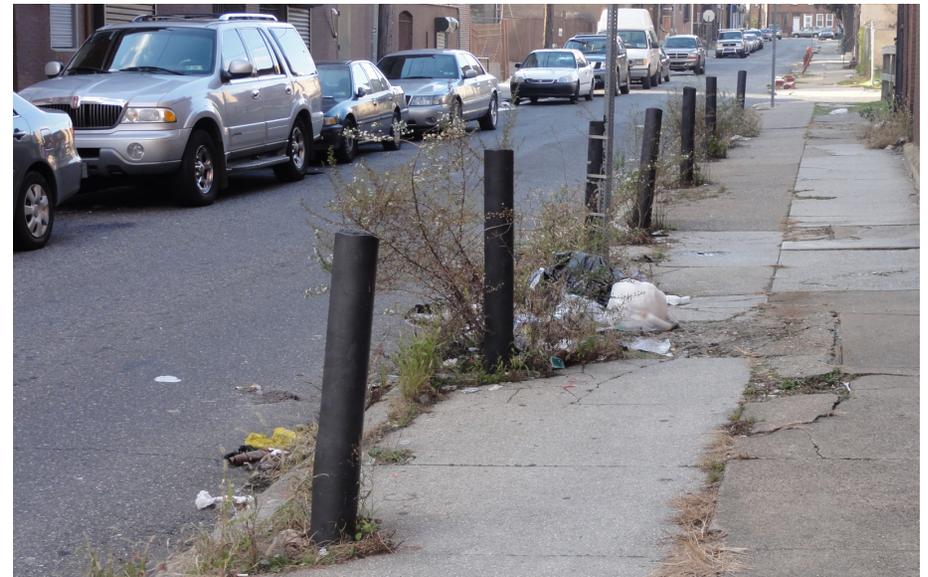


In the business survey of Avenue merchants conducted door-to-door by NET CDC and Interface Studio, concerns about the lack of cleanliness were among the most common issues cited. Residents agree that the litter deters shoppers and signals a general disrespect and decline in the area. Indeed, trash blows along the street, collecting in storm drains and in the weeds that grow within the sidewalk's cobblestone strip. Passengers on the 23 bus do not hesitate from

throwing garbage on the street upon exiting the bus, and trash cans are few and far between. Almost all of the merchants who participated in the business survey and raised the trash issue explained that they sweep their sidewalk daily, but that they cannot keep up with the volume of litter on the street. The illegal dumping that occurs on side streets just off The Avenue compounds the problem.



*Littered conditions are worst on trash day.*



*Of the 17 illegal dumping incidents recorded in the 311 system in the area during 2009 and 2010, six were on Lehigh or Germantown, and the remaining 11 were on side streets.*

**19 out of the 48 respondents on the business survey (40 percent) noted the littered appearance of Germantown Avenue as a major issue that is hurting their business, and corridor cleaning as a strategy and service that would help improve the business environment along The Avenue.**

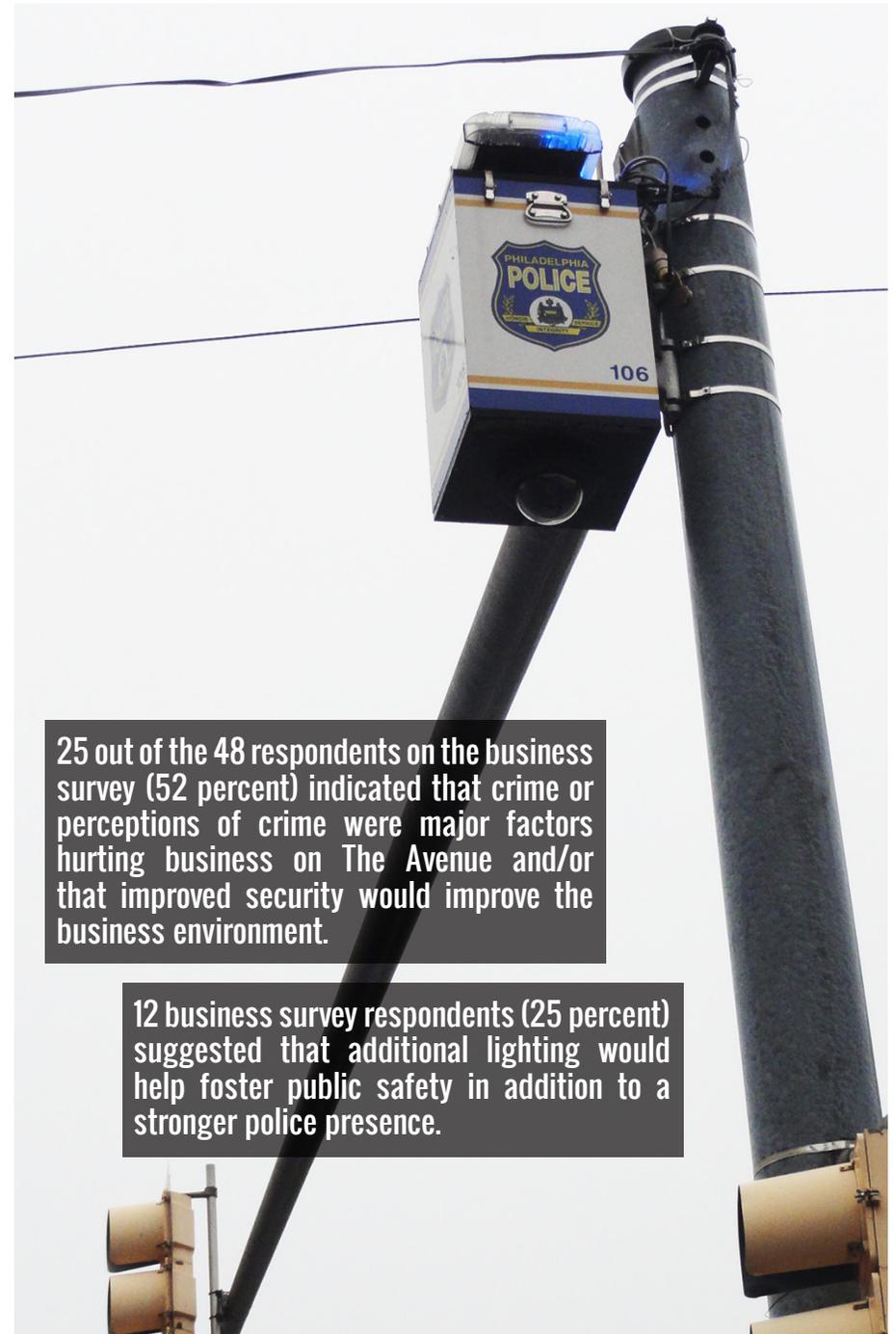
**25** Concerns about crime and public safety were the most serious issues cited by merchants in the business survey. Specifically, merchants spoke of armed robberies, particularly during the holiday season and after dark, and shoplifting as common. Merchants also noted the loitering, public drunkenness, and public urination that occurs on Huntingdon just west of The Avenue.

Crime maps depicting hot spots for property crime and violent crime throughout 2010 illustrate that while property crime clusters are present along Lehigh and at PHA's Fairhill Apartments, Broad Street and its transit stations are subject to the most intense concentrations of burglary and theft. While Broad Street registers on the violent crime map as well, several regions of the study area also register as problematic, most notably, three locations along Germantown Avenue – at Cumberland, Lehigh, and Indiana. Violent crimes mapped for the year include homicides, rapes, robberies, and aggravated assaults.

Three police districts cover the study area. The 25<sup>th</sup> District covers the portion north of Lehigh Avenue. The 26<sup>th</sup> District covers the area south of Lehigh and east of Germantown Avenue / 10<sup>th</sup> Street. The 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Districts, together with the 24<sup>th</sup>, comprise the Regional Operations Command (ROC) North: East. The southwest corner south of Lehigh, west of Germantown and 10<sup>th</sup> Street falls within the 22<sup>nd</sup> District, which is part of ROC South: Central.

The Mayor's Philly Rising program fostered a partnership between NET CDC and the police districts that touch The Avenue, which has resulted in the recent closure of dangerous nuisance businesses – including one at the northeast corner of Germantown and Lehigh, which should help to erode that hotspot. The partnerships are strong between NET CDC and the 25<sup>th</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup> Police Districts; relationships are still being solidified with the 22<sup>nd</sup> District.

Furthermore, Officer Williams of the 25<sup>th</sup> District has focused his efforts on commercial corridors, and has done much work to develop a Business Partnership to organize merchants, build capacity, and bring resources to Germantown Avenue at Broad and Erie. Officer Williams is working closely with NET CDC and has again reached out to area merchants at Germantown and Lehigh, offering to extend his energy, knowledge and resources to tackle cleaning and safety.



**25 out of the 48 respondents on the business survey (52 percent) indicated that crime or perceptions of crime were major factors hurting business on The Avenue and/or that improved security would improve the business environment.**

**12 business survey respondents (25 percent) suggested that additional lighting would help foster public safety in addition to a stronger police presence.**

*Surveillance at the intersection of Germantown and Lehigh*

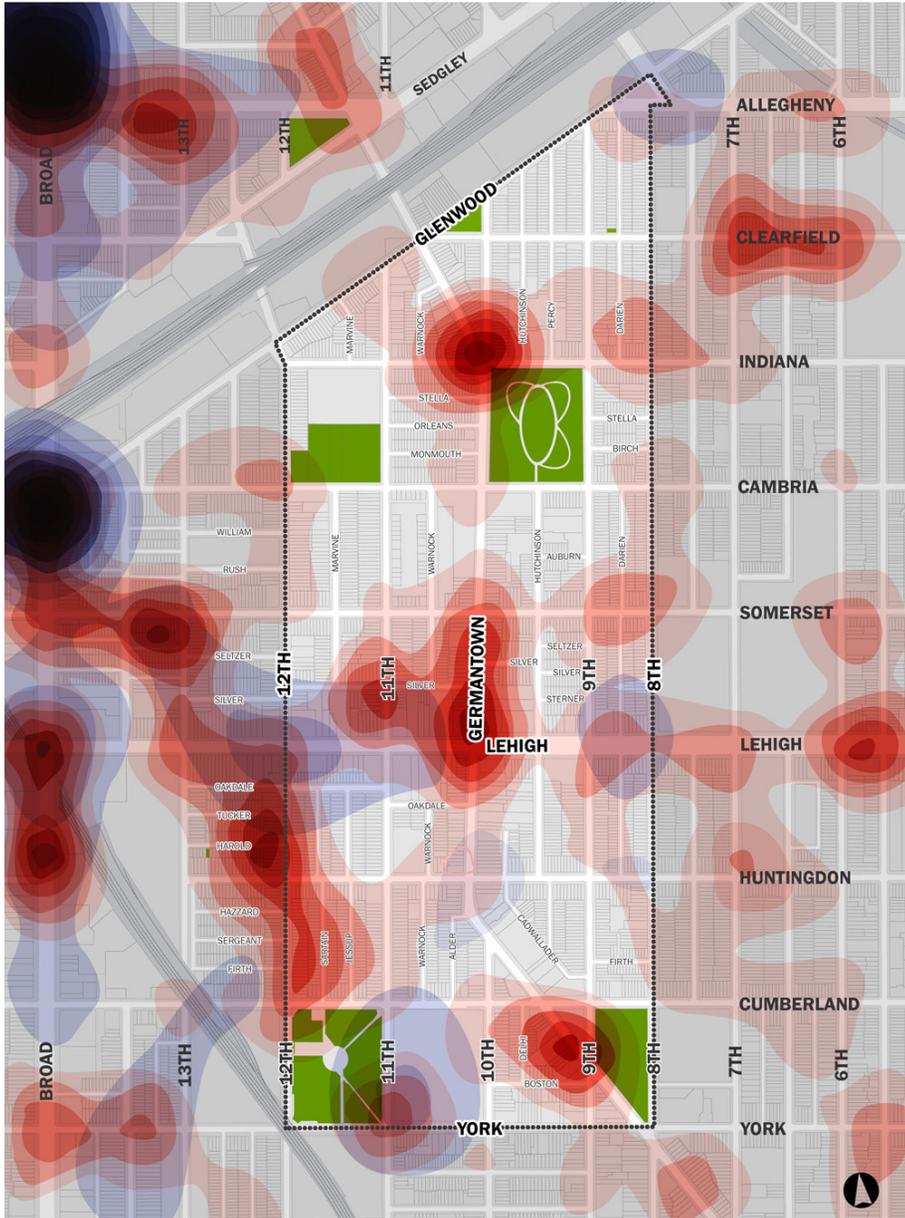


Figure 13: Crime Hot Spots

Source: Philadelphia Police Department, January 2010 - December 2010

Property Crime  
 Violent Crime

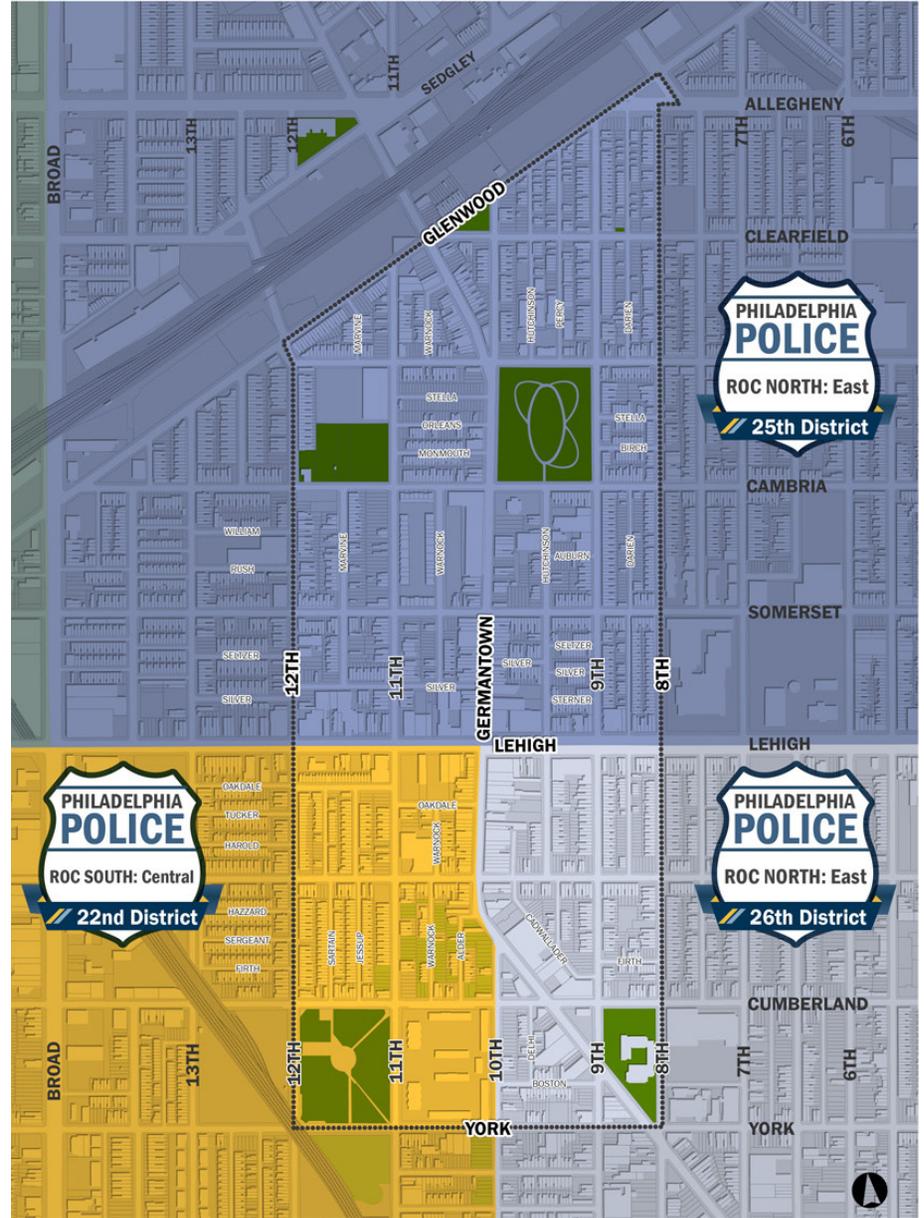


Figure 14: Police Districts

Source: City of Philadelphia

ROC = Regional Operations Command    ROC NORTH: East  
 ROC SOUTH: Central                      25th District  
 22nd District                       26th District

# CLEANING Along The Avenue

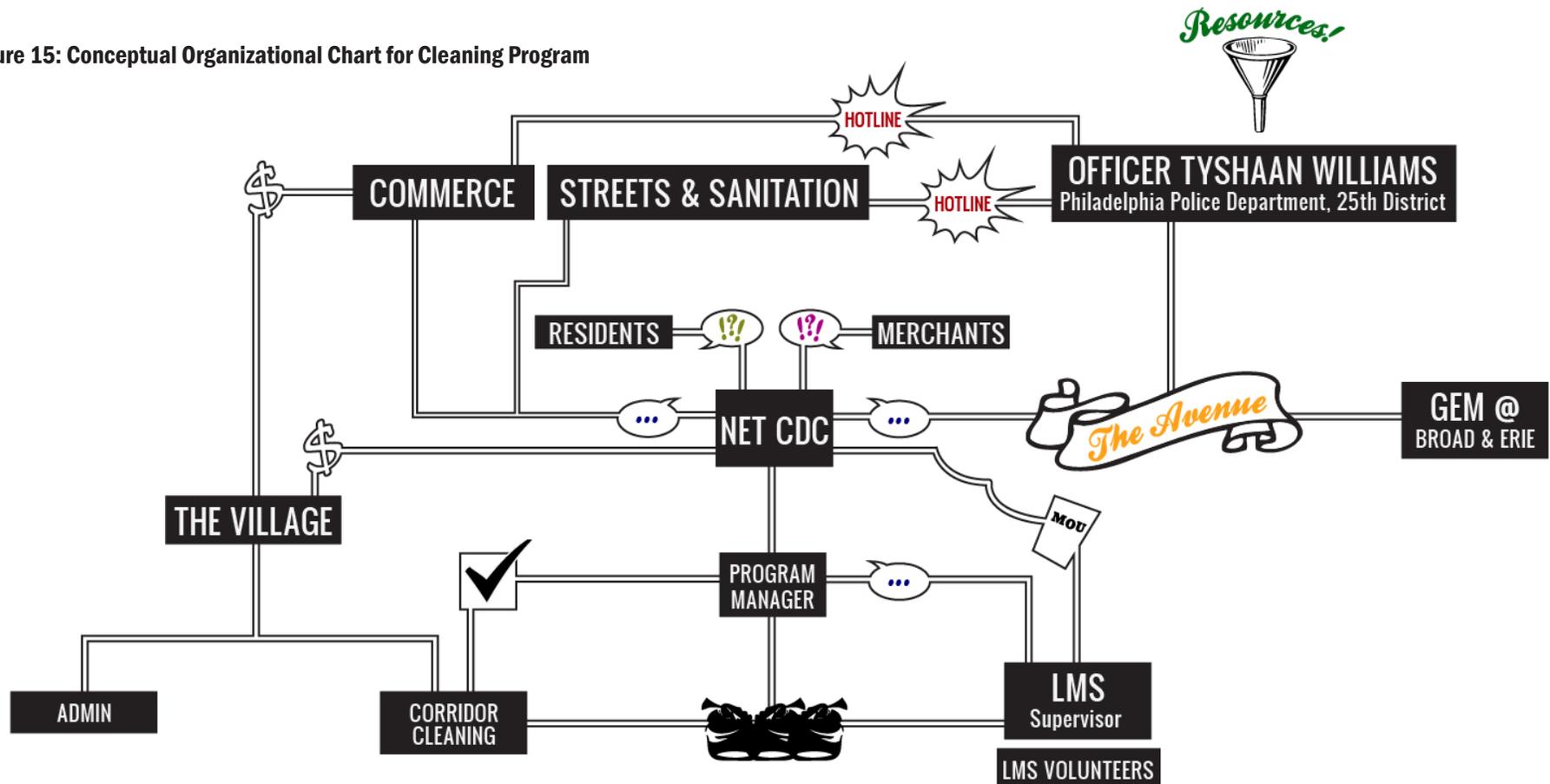
Corridor cleaning is necessary for strengthening the business district, and many resources exist within the community already. Putting the program infrastructure in place and securing a funding stream became a central focus of the *Early Action Plan*. An interim cleaning program, which launched in March 2012 promises to be an early success for *The Economic Development Strategic Plan*. The recommendations that follow describe next steps in ensuring that the program becomes sustainable past the six-month interim timeline and in working to change the mindset of people who travel along The Avenue so that once The Avenue is clean, it is kept clean through collective efforts.

## 1.1 Reinstatement the Cleaning Program

### >> EARLY ACTION

As the primary early action step, substantial collaboration between Commerce, Planning, Officer Tyshaan Williams of the 25<sup>th</sup> Police District, NET CDC, The Village, and the consultant team has already resulted in the launch of a six-month interim cleaning program. Beginning in March, and running through August, The Avenue's commercial core will be cleaned two times per business day by a team of Liberty Management Services volunteers and paid supervisor plus two employees of The Village, overseen by NET CDC and a staff person hired to manage the project. NET CDC will conduct quality control, field complaints and requests from merchants and residents, and coordinate with Officer Williams about materials, Streets and Sanitation about trash pickup, and Commerce about financial resources and program successes and challenges.

Figure 15: Conceptual Organizational Chart for Cleaning Program



## 1.2



This early implementation effort has created two jobs for people in the community, with temporary paid positions created or sustained at NET CDC, The Village, and Liberty Management Services. The other key benefit is that the program has yielded new relationships between City agencies and community partners as well as enhanced local capacity and credibility.

The Commerce Department funded the interim cleaning program, and competitive resources to sustain the program are available through Commerce's Corridor Cleaning Request for Proposals (RFP). The Village submitted an application for Corridor Cleaning funding. Officer Williams has contributed supplemental materials and supplies to the interim program and can facilitate equipment sharing between cleaning at Germantown and Erie and Germantown and Lehigh. General cleaning supplies must be procured, and community partners should submit a request to the Managing Director's Office. Because APM and LISC are undertaking a similar effort to clean and maintain the *SCI North* planning area to the southeast, The Village and NET CDC should coordinate if possible.

Beyond determining organizational roles, staffing needs, and obtaining funding and supplies, there are other elements that will help make the corridor cleaning program sustainable and self-perpetuating.

- **Progress Reporting** – call a meeting with The Village, NET CDC, and the Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee (PMBC) to discuss how PMBC tracks, measures, and evaluates the work of community cleaning programs (example: number of bags of trash collected), and develop a tracking and evaluation structure for the six-month interim cleaning program.
- **Outreach** – work with NET CDC to develop a flyer for merchants and residents introducing the new cleaning program, sharing information about City resources made available through the Streets & Sidewalks Education and Enforcement Program (SWEEP), and encouraging business owners to do their part to help Keep The Avenue Clean.
- **Coordinate with Complementary Efforts** – the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society's (PHS) Philadelphia Green program cleans and greens some vacant parcels in the area and has provided Community Land Care (CLC) grants to The Village to assist in this massive undertaking. The Village reapplies for the CLC grant annually. This year is especially important, as the work of the corridor cleaning program can easily be undone by the presence of trash-strewn lots on or near the corridor. Corridor cleaning and vacant land maintenance should be coordinated.

## Secure New Trash Cans for The Avenue

## EARLY ACTION

Garbage cans are a rarity along The Avenue. While maintenance of the bins and surrounding areas may have been an issue in the past, the new cleaning program can help to keep the bins neat and ensure timely trash removal. NET CDC should coordinate with Officer Williams of the 25<sup>th</sup> District to secure new trash cans for The Avenue from the Streets Department.



*Centro de Oro has four trash cans per intersection. Improvements were funded with ReStore program dollars, and corridor management is provided by HACE.*

At nearby Centro de Oro on North 5<sup>th</sup> Street, the commercial corridor has four trash cans per intersection, one per corner, with two solar-powered self-compacting Big Belly units located catty-corner from each other, and two traditional-style trash bins with hoods to prevent trash from blowing away in the wind. In the near term, basic wire bins will suffice at Germantown and Lehigh. Upgraded or corridor-specific trash bins can potentially be incorporated in the ReStore streetscape improvements described in Recommendation 3.9.

In between the corners and especially at convenience stores and take out places, merchants should be encouraged to “adopt a litter basket” or take on responsibility for maintaining a trash can, as recommended by the *SCI North* plan. NET CDC or The Village should contact LISC and APM to learn about the program's implementation progress, and extend the effort into this section of The Avenue.

**29** 1.3 Campaign to Keep The Avenue Clean

>> **EARLY ACTION**

Given the culture of littering present throughout Philadelphia, efforts to clean the corridor and introduce new trash cans must be accompanied by a campaign to change people’s mindsets and habits. A respectable environment is more likely to be respected, so daily cleaning will help, but City programs such as the UnLitter Us campaign and RecycleBank rewards program should find a presence in signage along the corridor and information made available where residents congregate – at The Village’s Free Library Hot Spot, for example.

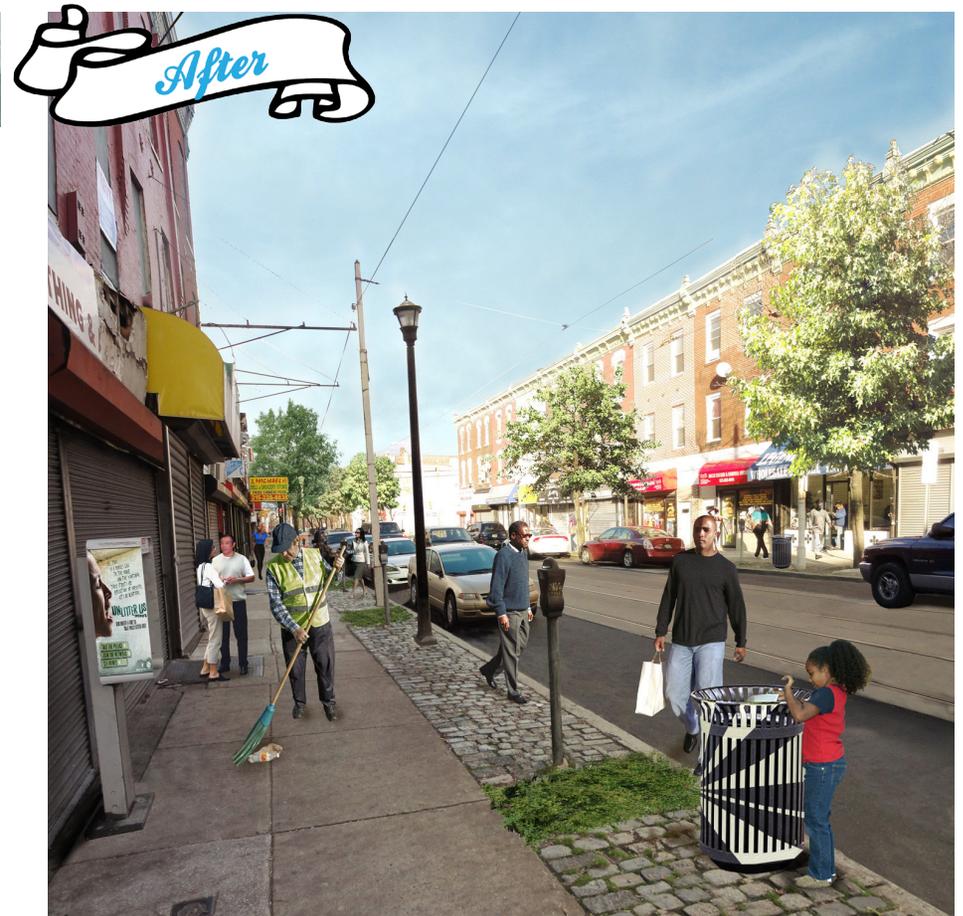


Source: <http://www.philadelphiastreet.com/unlitter-us-campaign>

Tackling short-dumping, a recurring problem on Germantown Avenue side streets, will require a campaign by SWEEP with the corridor cleaning program manager.



Existing conditions on The Avenue



**Figure 16: Rendering of A Cleaner Corridor**  
with new trash cans, UnLitter Us reminders, a daily cleaning

# SAFETY Along The Avenue

1.4  
>>

## Link Merchants with Resources for Combating Criminal Activity

### EARLY ACTION

A variety of City programs already exist to encourage partnerships between the Police Department, other enforcement agencies, and community stakeholders in combating and preventing criminal activity. Outreach to merchants should encourage their participation and use of the following programs and resources, which combine surveillance, self-reporting, and two-way communication for improved public safety:

The relationships and communication formalized by the interim cleaning program should lead to a strengthened beat cop presence and increased contact so that residents and merchants know their officers – who to call to report problems and file police reports – and the resources available through other City agencies.

#### Surveillance



#### Crowd-source reporting



- **Safe Cam** – a new program of the Police Department aims to deter crime and assist with investigations by registering the private surveillance cameras of businesses with the Police Department so the Police can quickly access surveillance footage should an incident occur in the vicinity. Commerce and Officer Williams should also partner with NET CDC, as the local liaison for merchants in the cleaning program, to provide information and resources for the installation, enhancement, and maintenance of interior security cameras, which can be linked in the Safe Cam program.
- **311** – best used as an advocacy tool for strict code enforcement, business owners and residents can call 311 to report dangerous structures, illegal dumping, or other quality of life issues or to request an inspection by Licenses and Inspection.
- **Old Fashioned Conversations** – using the lines of communication established for the cleaning program (Recommendation 1.1), community leaders can and should remain in close contact with the police officers who patrol the corridor. Officer Williams (of the 25<sup>th</sup> District) and Officers from the 26<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> Districts will partner with NET CDC to provide information about and resources for reporting criminal activity and public safety issues (like lack of lighting, illegal dumping, or code violations). The space secured by Officer Williams in the basement of Liberty Management Services at 1007 Lehigh can be used for regular meetings between three Police Districts and merchants.

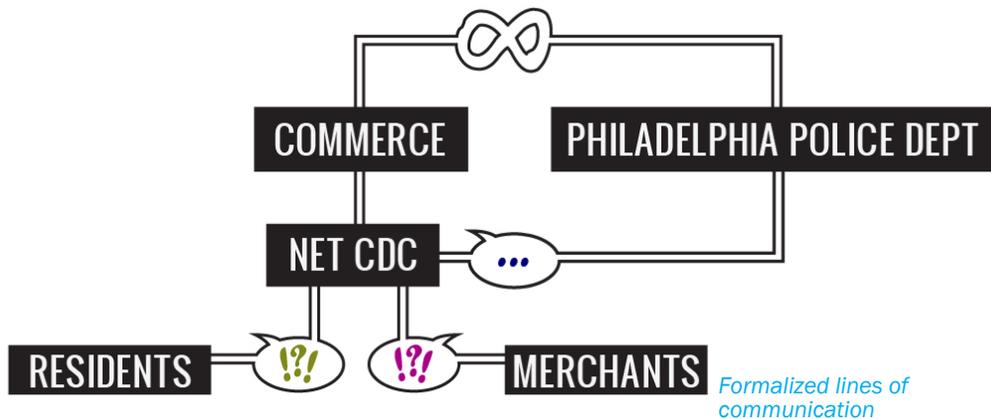


Figure 17: Tools for A Safer Corridor

## **31** 1.5 **Coordinate with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Police District on the Proposed Commercial Corridor Policing Pilot Project in ROC North: East**

### **>> EARLY ACTION**

The Commerce Department has been working closely with Police Department leadership to establish a special partnership focused on creating safe, clean, and secure commercial corridors. The program will bring together beat cops from the Police Department, Program and Corridor Managers at the Commerce Department, and the heads of Business Improvement Districts and business associations for training and information sharing. The Northeast Division (ROC North: East, encompassing the 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup> Police Districts) has been suggested as the pilot area for the new partnership, bringing heightened attention to the Germantown and Lehigh commercial district.

To ensure collaboration and comprehensive coverage of the Germantown and Lehigh commercial district, program coordinators for this policing initiative will also need to coordinate with representatives from the 22<sup>nd</sup> District because nuisance complaints by merchants and residents target Huntingdon Street west of Germantown Avenue, which falls within the 22<sup>nd</sup> District.

## **1.6 Improve Storefront Lighting**

Germantown Avenue has cobra street lamps lighting the roadway as well as pedestrian-scale lights at the sidewalk's edge, but the pedestrian-scale lights are 40 to 50 years old and do not effectively brighten the sidewalk or storefronts. With the solid security grates pulled down, and few businesses that remain open after dark, The Avenue is dark and deserted after hours.

New streetlights are a costly streetscape element, but façade, awning, or storefront lights offer a lower-cost solution to add more light after businesses close. As Commerce works with interested merchants on storefront improvements (see Recommendation 2.1), lighting and perforated security grilles that allow interior lighting to pass through should be emphasized as important features and worthwhile investments. The emerging Business Partnership (see Recommendation 5.3) or future corridor manager could also spearhead a larger-scale storefront lighting program, negotiating a bulk purchase and installation rate from selected vendors.

Mural Arts' large-scale *Philly Painting* initiative (see Recommendation 3.1) planned to transform The Avenue's image and reactivate its upper floors may also introduce new lighting to showcase the murals through a partnership with PECO and Local Union 98.

## **1.7 Enhance Street and Sidewalk Lighting at the Pedestrian and Street Scale**

In addition to a storefront lighting initiative The Avenue's pedestrian streetlights should be upgraded with more efficient and brighter LED technology. The Avenue is well positioned for new pedestrian lighting because of the older, existing pedestrian lights already in place. The underground conduits that power them are spaced appropriately, so an upgrade would require only the cost of buying new poles. There would be no need to dig up the street and lay the wiring, which is costly and disruptive.

The estimated cost for the 2600 and 2700 blocks (Huntingdon to Somerset) to replace sidewalks and pedestrian-scale street lights and integrate some landscaping in new tree pits within the cobblestone amenity strip is \$350,000, which could be covered using ReStore streetscape improvement dollars (see Recommendation 3.9).

## **1.8 Continue to Explore an Outdoor Surveillance Camera Plan for The Avenue**

At Germantown and Erie, Officer Williams of the 25<sup>th</sup> District is working with the Germantown Erie Merchants Association (GEMA), the Streets Department, and a private security company (ATS) to develop and implement an outdoor surveillance camera plan for the corridor. There are currently police-monitored cameras at the Germantown and Lehigh intersection, but a comprehensive surveillance plan for The Avenue would benefit merchants farther afield. As Officer Williams continues to explore possibilities for developing, funding, and implementing an outdoor surveillance plan to deter crime and support investigations, the City must account for obstructions from tree foliage and lighting conditions.



Example of a storefront on North 5th Street in Olney with interior lighting visible through a perforated security grille

Existing night-time conditions on The Avenue



Example of a storefront floodlights on North 5th Street in Olney

“It gets dark early in the winter, and The Avenue closes up because it’s dangerous after dark.”

**Figure 18: Rendering of A Brighter Corridor**  
with storefront lighting as well as improved pedestrian-scale lighting

## 5 *Open for Business* (RECOMMENDATIONS 2.0)

### WHY THIS IS IMPORTANT

#### ANALYSIS OF COMMERCIAL USES & THE AVENUE

The field survey located 145 active businesses within the study area employing an estimated 622 employees.<sup>8</sup> Twenty-five percent of storefronts in the study area (49) were vacant at the time of the field survey. The remaining businesses provide a mix of shopping opportunities and services. Residents and merchants emphasize that the commercial district would benefit from better quality and a greater diversity of goods and services. This sentiment underscores the commonly voiced concern that there is considerable overlap in the goods available for purchase in the neighborhood and that the business mix on The Avenue no longer meets the daily needs of local families.

**“Merchants need to have more respect for the customers and better quality goods.”**



**BUSINESS SUPPORT**

**COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

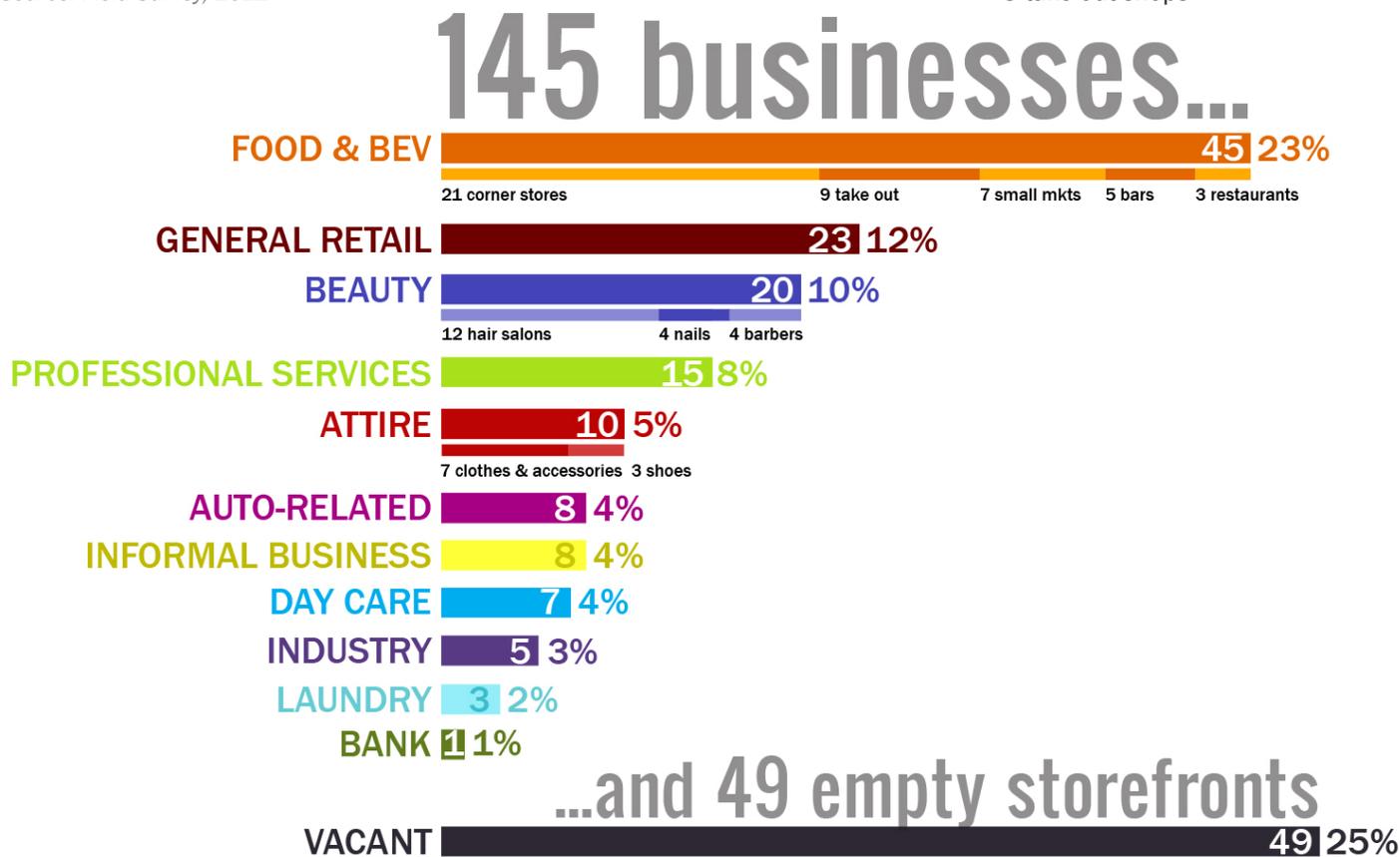
<sup>8</sup> Employee estimates from InfoUSA database

At the time of the business survey, the commercial core of Germantown Avenue (2500 through 2800 blocks) hosted 76 businesses including several vendors, which together employ more than 250 employees and generate an estimated \$22,500,000 per year in sales.<sup>9</sup> The open businesses on The Avenue included:

- 10 clothing stores
- 8 hair salons or barber shops
- 7 Islamic fashion and oil stores
- 6 dollar or variety stores
- 5 beauty or accessory stores
- 5 small grocers or produce vendors
- 4 convenience stores
- 3 dry cleaning or laundry businesses
- 3 sneaker stores
- 3 take out shops
- 3 nail salons
- 3 day cares
- 3 electronics stores
- 3 phone stores
- 2 jewelry stores
- 2 sit-down restaurants
- 2 music stores
- 2 health or medical offices (dentist and chiropractor)
- 1 wholesaler
- 1 check cashing business

**Figure 19: Commercial Mix Throughout the Study Area**

Source: Field Survey, 2011



Eight merchants (17 percent of those surveyed) noted that the lack of business diversity or repetition of goods and services is having a negative effect on their sales.

<sup>9</sup> Sales estimates of all businesses (retail and otherwise) from InfoUSA database

*2700 Block East***ISSUES ALONG THE AVENUE**

There were 27 vacant ground floor commercial spaces (26 percent) along The Avenue including three seasonal tax businesses. Upper floor vacancy is more ubiquitous. In the 2600 and 2700 blocks of Germantown Avenue on either side of Lehigh, the upper floors are vacant in 65 percent of buildings. These upper floors, which once housed the merchants who worked in the stores below, are unlikely to be repopulated, as most merchants no longer live in the neighborhood, and the older buildings have only one entrance – through the store to the upper floors. The handful of buildings with occupied upper floor residential units have carved out separate entrances to provide access to the apartments.

Vacancy along The Avenue disrupts the momentum and energy of the corridor, detracts from its overall appearance, and negatively influences the shopping district's public image. The window displays of many merchants are cluttered and chaotic, obstructing a clear view into their stores and confusing the message about the goods and services available within. The Dutch artists, Haas and Hahn, who are undertaking the *Philly Painting* project along the corridor (see Recommendation 3.1), note additional features that detract from The Avenue's overall appearance: the corridor is "cluttered by random material, obsolete signage, [and] rusty shutters;" it suffers from "boarded up windows, buckling and bulging walls at risk of collapse, cornices in poor condition, signage in many styles and colors that [together] look messy, [and] lower walls that are prone to graffiti."<sup>10</sup>

17 out of the 48 respondents on the business survey (35 percent) noted that commercial vacancies are hurting their business.

*2600 Block West*

Panoramas of the 2600 and 2700 blocks of The Avenue show the vacancy on the upper floors and the varied facade treatments throughout the commercial district.

10 Presentation by Dre Urhahn, at Merchant Meeting, March 1, 2012.

### 2600 Block East



## ASSETS ALONG THE AVENUE

But challenges aside, The Avenue also enjoys many assets, including “monumental architecture with detailed woodwork and antique signage that should be respected,”<sup>11</sup> institutional anchors at The Village of Arts and Humanities and PHA’s offices at Warnock Village, specialty stores such as Leo’s Apparel and Continuous Motion 2 that bring many additional people to the corridor, as well as businesses and community organizations working to revitalize The Avenue. SEPTA’s longest and most heavily utilized surface route, Route 23, runs from South Philadelphia to Chestnut Hill and along The Avenue through the study area, bringing a captive audience past area stores each day. Businesses also benefit from exposure to more than 13,100 cars that drive up and down The Avenue each day.<sup>12</sup>

Data from Econsult’s 2009 report, *Commercial Corridors: A Strategic Framework for Philadelphia*, tracking the number of retail establishment by corridor by year suggests that momentum has been building on The Avenue. Econsult’s study reports that there were 33 retail establishments in the Germantown and Lehigh area<sup>13</sup> in 1995, which grew to 75 in 2005. Though businesses come and go, the number of businesses on The Avenue is 75 today.

### 2700 Block West



11 Ibid.

12 ©2011 MPSI (Market Planning Solutions Inc.) Systems Inc. d.b.a. DataMetrix®

13 The Econsult boundary for Germantown and Lehigh covered roughly a square block on either side of Germantown Avenue between Boston Street in the south and Clearfield Street in the north.



View down The Avenue, looking south toward Lehigh

### SUMMARY OF THE BUSINESS SURVEY

In October and November 2011, NET CDC and Interface Studio conducted a door-to-door business survey along the 2500 through 2800 blocks of The Avenue, interviewing business representatives to obtain information about business conditions, trends, customers, and issues and opportunities on the corridor. Forty-eight businesses (64 percent) completed the survey. Twenty-seven businesses (36 percent) declined to participate or were not open at the time of the survey. Out of 37 businesses who answered the question, 41 percent own their buildings and 59 percent rent their spaces.

The businesses surveyed represented a mix of long-term and new; the newcomers had opened for business within one month of the survey, and the oldest had been present for nearly 60 years. The average life-span was 11.5 years. Most businesses are small, independent merchants with a single location. There are just six national chains and five smaller stores that have other locations in the city or region. The majority of stores are closed on Sundays, and almost all close by 7:00 PM or earlier, especially in the winter when it gets dark early.

Merchants reported that the corridor predominantly serves local customers who walk to The Avenue. However, the limited parking and enforcement by the Philadelphia Parking Authority (PPA) were common complaints among merchants.

Seventy percent of businesses surveyed said that sales were down “by a lot” in 2011. Owners noted prevalent commercial vacancies, the lack of a strong commercial anchor, and repetition of goods as major issues. They also reported that crime, trash, low foot-traffic, and the low incomes of residents were major factors in the market. When asked what they like about doing business on The Avenue, most merchants said, “the people.”

“I relate to the people. People hang out, keep an eye on me and my business.”

Figure 20: Business Survey Summary Statistics, About the Customers

Source: Business Survey, 2011



### ANALYSIS OF COMMERCIAL MARKET CONDITIONS

Real Estate Strategies, Inc. / RES Advisors (RES) completed a full *Analysis of Residential and Commercial Real Estate Market Opportunities at Germantown and Lehigh*. The RES report is an appendix under separate cover to this document.

To assess the area’s commercial market conditions, RES first assessed the current business mix, visibility and accessibility of the corridor, and volume of vehicular, transit, and pedestrian traffic.

RES then defined the Trade Area within a half-mile of Germantown and Lehigh, which encompasses the commercial along The Avenue and competition on North 5<sup>th</sup> Street at Centro De Oro and North Broad between Cumberland and Indiana. The seven supermarkets operating within one mile of The Avenue further complicates the dynamics of commercial competition in the area. RES analyzed ESRI data on Trade Area expenditure potential and leakage to quantify possible unmet demand. For this large Trade Area, the supply of retail trade and food and drink sales (\$93,552,765 per year) out-paces local demand (\$52,108,264), which translates to a surplus of retail sales and limited demand for new commercial services suitable for Germantown Avenue.<sup>14</sup>

This pattern of expenditures in excess of local demand, combined with the findings of the business survey, indicates the likelihood that certain stores along The Avenue are drawing customers from throughout the City, even though the vast majority of businesses serve a very local customer base within walking distance of The Ave.

RES defined a more focused Primary Trade Area to follow the boundaries of the study area (8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, York to Glenwood). Though here, too, the total supply of retail trade and food and drink sales (\$17,222,897) outpaces the total estimated demand (\$15,497,993),<sup>15</sup> the Primary Trade Area supply and demand analysis did yield evidence of limited retail sales leakage from The Avenue in the following categories:

- Limited-Service Eating Places & Specialty Food Services
- General & Specialized Merchandise
- Sporting & Hobby Goods
- Beer, Wine & Liquor Stores

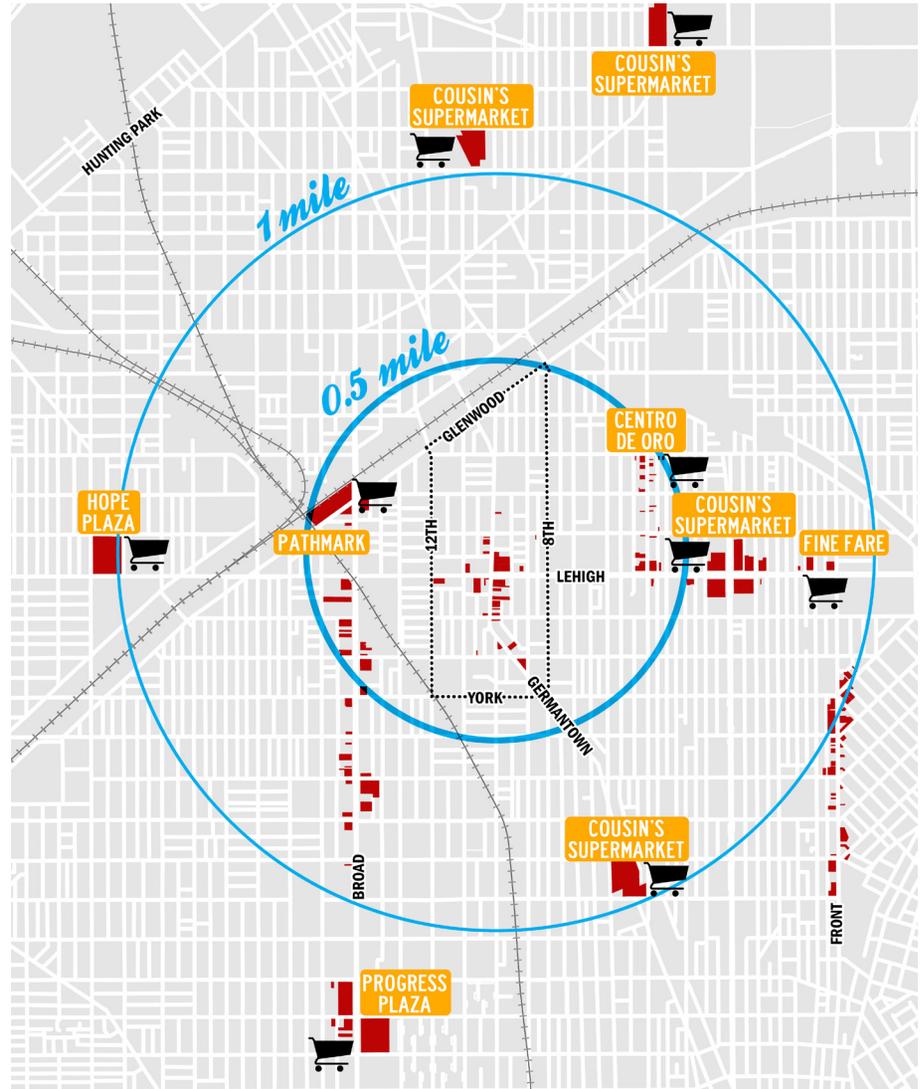


Figure 21: Commercial Context Map  
Source: Business Survey, 2011

14 Supply and demand estimates from ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile for the Target Area

15 Sales and spending estimates from ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile for the Primary Target Area

**39** Given the limited demand in the delineated Trade Areas, and the prevalence of vacant storefronts, attracting outside customers will be important for the health and sustainability of The Avenue. The market analysis also identified several demographic challenges and opportunities that influence the commercial market potential.

- The Primary Trade Area is home to a relatively small number of households, which translates to fewer customers in the area to patronize local shops.
- Household income is low overall, and according to the American Community Survey (2005-2009), 60 percent of households are living in poverty, which means that there is less money to spend at stores and lower spending power to support merchants.
- New residential development (see Recommendation 4.1 through 4.4) would generate additional retail demand in the area.
- Lastly, there is a high percentage of young people (36 percent are under the age of 19) in school; teens have fewer financial responsibilities, and many have disposable income which new businesses could capture with youth-oriented goods and services.

The recommendations that follow flow from Real Estate Strategies' demand and supply analysis and conclusions about market depth and breadth as well as expert recommendations for helping merchants improve their business performance.

## BUSINESS SUPPORT *Along The Avenue*

While commercial development and business attraction are necessary for revitalization of The Avenue, the crucial first step is to invest in existing businesses and improvements along The Avenue. In the near future, a corridor manager (see Recommendation 5.1) should fill the role of liaison between the Commerce Department, merchants, and Business Partnership. The manager should share information and facilitate merchant participation in programs, and should drive a marketing strategy to support businesses and revitalization.



The bend in The Avenue at North Alder street signals the start of the Germantown and Lehigh commercial core.

### 2.1 Link Merchants with Resources for Storefront Improvements and Interior Upgrades

#### >> EARLY ACTION

The Commerce Department offers a range of programs and services to help businesses improve their storefronts and interiors. As Mural Arts' *Philly Painting* initiative described in Recommendation 3.1 gets underway, now is the time for heightened outreach and communication with merchants to ensure that property and business owners are aware of available resources and take advantage of the Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) and Business Investment Tax Credit Program. Investment in the appearance of the vacant upper floors must be mirrored by investments in the ground floor commercial spaces.

Commerce staff is already working with property and business owners on The Avenue, targeting their efforts to enroll business owners in the Storefront Improvement Program where the "Philly Painting" project is scheduled to begin – first at the intersection of Germantown and Huntingdon, then at the intersection of Germantown and Lehigh. Façade work was recently undertaken at Extreme Sportswear and Leo's Apparel (2701 and 2705 Germantown Avenue). At a recent meeting with merchants, Commerce staff gave a presentation describing the SIP, which offers up to \$8,000 in matching grant money per storefront.

Commerce will provide Avenue merchants with technical assistance and information about resources available through other organizations including The Merchants Fund, which offers business stabilization and loan matching grants,<sup>16</sup> or the Community Design Collaborative,<sup>17</sup> which pairs businesses with design professionals, yielding pro-bono design work.



2701 Germantown Avenue, before Extreme 3 moved in and renovated.



Storefront make-over completed with assistance from the Commerce Department's Storefront Improvement Program (SIP) in December 2011.

16 <http://www.merchantsfund.org/grant-areas.html>

17 <http://blog.cdesignc.org/citywide-storefront-challenge-proves-%E2%80%9Cgood-design-is-good-business%E2%80%9D/>

## 41 2.2 Bring Merchandising and Marketing Assistance to Businesses

### >> EARLY ACTION

As explained by Commerce Staff at a meeting with Avenue merchants, “subtraction” can be an effective – and cost-effective – strategy to improve window displays and clarify the advertising message that a storefront sends about the goods and services available within. Reducing visual clutter, opening sight lines into the business, and presenting an appealing display of goods in the window and inside the store all fall under the umbrella of merchandising and marketing. Many Avenue businesses, especially those that have been in place for years, would benefit from a low-cost make-over facilitated by a merchandising expert.

Commerce should facilitate a meeting with The Merchants Fund to determine whether the Fund could provide technical assistance to area businesses looking to improve their merchandising. Commerce should also reach out to Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) to discuss the possibility of a partnership in implementation related to LISC’s *Sustainable Communities Initiative* in North Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup> Alternatively, the Fox School of Business’ Small Business Development Center could pair merchants with Temple business students and faculty to develop marketing strategies and business plans.

Once the technical assistance has been established, NET CDC and the emerging Business Partnership (see Recommendation 5.3) should help Commerce set up a group workshop or individual sessions with business owners as resources permit.

*Merchandising and marketing could dramatically improve The Avenue’s appearance at street-level without a hefty price tag.*



18 The SCI North boundaries do not capture the *Philly Painting* target area (2500-2800 blocks of Germantown Avenue). *SCI North*’s extend north to Lehigh and west to 9<sup>th</sup>.

## 2.3 Reach Out to Vendors and Include Them in Business Improvement Discussions

### >> EARLY ACTION

The Avenue is home to a handful of sidewalk vendors, some of whom, such as Rodger’s Newstand and AJ’s Fruit & Produce, have been there for nearly 30 years. At least two current owners with storefronts (Timco Fashions at 2607 Germantown and GloShoe Center at 2616 Germantown) are former vendors who grew their businesses into available commercial spaces.

The vendors represent a segment of the marketplace and should be included in improvement discussions facilitated by Commerce and encouraged to participate in the emerging Business Partnership. Certain vendors could thrive in an available storefront space, helping to reduce vacancy on The Avenue, with financial and technical assistance and possibly a graduated rental arrangement as they grow into their new space. Some vendors are new immigrants who could benefit from learning from other local vendors and merchants about City regulations and license requirements. In some cases, the sidewalk merchants are a source of controversy because they can afford to sell the same goods at lower prices than storefront merchants. Discussions among merchants about the market findings of this study can help business owners tweak their merchandise to diversify commercial offerings and meet market demand.

## 2.4 Develop a Multi-Media Marketing Approach

### >> EARLY ACTION

Beyond helping merchants enhance the appearance of their businesses and improve their merchandising strategies, a critical aspect of supporting business owners is to advertise the retail goods and commercial services that exist. Especially with the coming public art installation, which has the potential to draw throngs of visitors and press attention, The Avenue needs a brand and a multi-media marketing approach.

The marketing strategy for The Avenue should start with a website, developed by teens enrolled in The Village’s Web Design class. The website should be used to showcase existing and new businesses as well as the unfolding *Philly Painting* project and could include a newsfeed from the corridor, a calendar of events, a business directory, and special stories that feature businesses on The Avenue – their good eats and unique offerings. There should be a tab that provides information about how to get there for first-time visitors and one that invites viewers to learn more and get involved in revitalization. Links to project partners and Spanish translations should also be incorporated.

The marketing strategy should also seek coverage for the positive changes and painting in the free weekly papers (*CityPaper* and *Philadelphia Weekly*) and on the radio on Spanish language stations, WURD, Temple University’s WHIP, and WHY?’s *Newsworks* program.

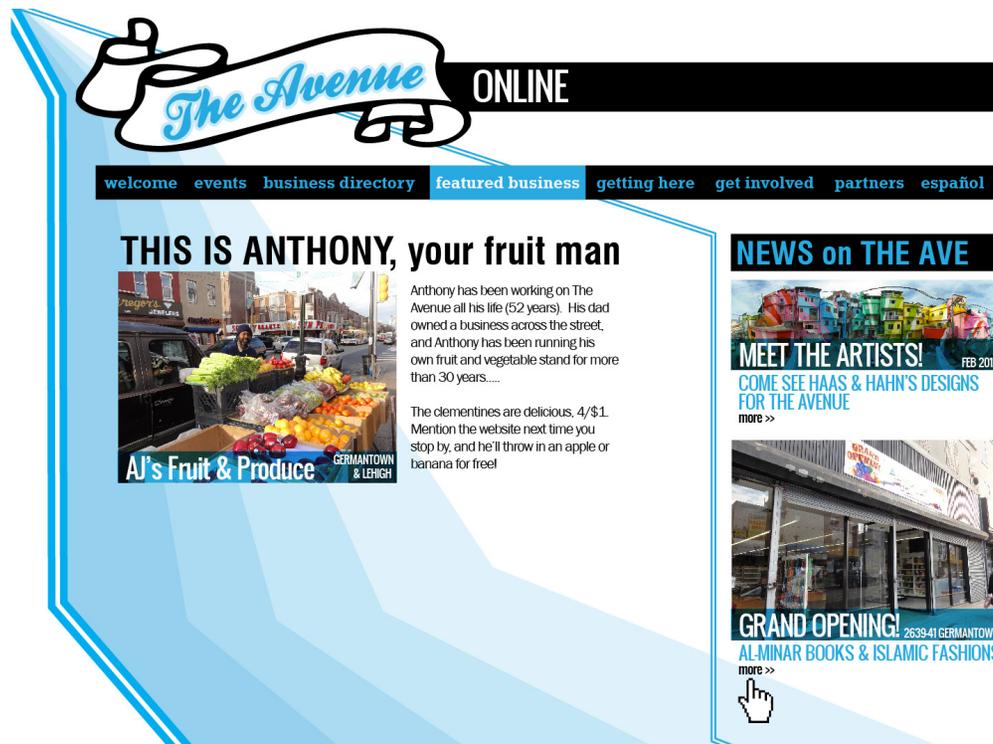


Figure 22: Business District Website Mock Up showing recommended categories for content

## 2.5 Use the *Philly Painting* Design to Brand The Avenue

Mural Arts’ *Philly Painting* project will transform the image of The Avenue. The colors and patterns proposed by artists Haas and Hahn (see Recommendation 3.1) should be employed in the design of a new logo to help brand and market The Avenue. Artists Haas and Hahn and teens in The Village’s Graphic Design programs should collaborate in the development of the new logo, which should then be deployed throughout the city on a variety of surfaces to bring attention, pride, and visitors to Germantown Avenue and the surrounding community.

The logo should be incorporated in the website design, pasted in vacant storefronts to highlight available commercial spaces, and silkscreened on reusable tote bags given or sold to shoppers on The Avenue. The logo, along with information about the *Philly Painting* project, should wrap the 23 bus and be printed on advertisements inside. Lastly, logo signage should be an element of the streetscape at Lehigh as well as at the commercial district bookends (see Recommendation 3.5)



Figure 23: Strategies for Better Branding The Avenue

**43** 2.6 **Host Events to Bring People Back to The Avenue**

Events on the corridor can also be used to generate positive buzz about revitalization efforts underway at Germantown and Lehigh and bring people back to The Avenue. These events, to be coordinated by a corridor manager along with community partners at NET CDC, the emerging Business Partnership, and The Village could encompass annual holiday celebrations, customer appreciation days, and unique arts and music events tailored to highlight local talent.

An example of one such festival is the Philadelphia Night Market, which fills commercial corridors throughout the city with specialty food trucks, closing the street to traffic, drawing a big crowd, and encouraging merchants to stay open late. However, an evening event attracting visitors from across the City requires an atmosphere that is at once alluring, unique, and safe.



# DEVELOPMENT *Along The Avenue*

The recommendations that pertain to commercial development along The Avenue reflect Real Estate Strategies' suggestions for broadening the retail mix to offer a range of goods and services that meet customer needs, create jobs for residents, and cluster a critical mass of stores to "bring people back to The Ave."

**2.7 Recruit New Businesses to Fill Key Commercial Vacancies**

>> **EARLY ACTION**

Business attraction and retention are a central part of the Commerce Department's work along Germantown Avenue. Commerce recently helped finalize a deal with Extreme Sportswear, which opened at the end of 2011 at the northeast corner of Germantown and Lehigh. Conversations are ongoing with the owner of the former Rite Aid at the southeast corner (2649 Germantown Avenue), which represents the largest vacant commercial square footage on The Avenue.

To continue this, Commerce staff should coordinate with the corridor manager hired for The Avenue, and property owners – particularly those who own vacant structures or land. Utilizing an up-to-date inventory of commercial vacancies maintained by the corridor manager, Commerce should help match interested business operators and entrepreneurs with available properties.

**"More eateries, more ethnic food to attract diverse customers; food will bring people in."**

**"LOTS of stores. Give people something to go to The Ave for!"**

*Source: Business Survey – responses from merchants asked what would strengthen The Avenue*

The RES market study identified the following potential commercial opportunities based on current demand potential:

**Figure 24: Potential Commercial Opportunities Based on Current Demand Potential**

Source: Real Estate Strategies

TYPE OF BUSINESS	SIZE square feet
GREEN GROCER	800 - 1,500
RESTAURANT/CAFÉ (2) (with seating)	1,000 - 2,500
BAKERY/ICE CREAM/WATER ICE (targeting youth)	750 - 1,500
UNIFORM STORE (for medical offices, etc.)	800 - 1,500
CITY BLUE (OR SIMILAR)	1,000 - 2,000
SERVICES (could fill upper floor space & draw people to The Ave)	
BEAUTY/BARBER SCHOOL	1,000 - 2,000
OPTOMETRIST	800 - 1,000
CHILDREN'S DENTIST	1,000 - 2,000
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>7,150-14,000</b>
<b>RENTS: \$12-\$15 PER SQUARE FOOT, TRIPLE NET</b>	

The total supportable square feet is 7,150 – 14,000. Rents are likely to range from \$12 - \$15 per square foot, triple net, which means that tenants will pay their own real estate taxes, utilities, and insurance. The core of the commercial district currently has approximately 40,100 square feet of commercial vacancy, with nine storefronts smaller than 1,000 square feet, 10 that are between 1,000 and 1,500 square feet, eight that are between 1,500 and 2,000 square feet, and one (the former Rite Aid) that is greater than 6,500 square feet.

Improvements in streetscapes and storefront appearance, along with marketing and merchandising assistance for existing businesses, may attract new shoppers, enhance sales, and support expansions of these establishments. Encouraging merchants to expand into lines of businesses lost on The Avenue, such as hardware, can help to fill recent market voids. Over time, the success of these activities will generate added demand. Similarly, as revitalization takes hold, additional food-oriented uses – ethnic restaurants and food stores, specialty stores including seafood and poultry, and others offering fresh groceries and produce may

be attracted, responding to successes and improvements on The Avenue. Moreover, the presence of linkages among businesses in the same cluster (e.g., restaurants, specialty foods) creates synergies that attract additional customers.

Since the more immediate retail and commercial opportunities will not fill all vacancies along The Avenue, business attraction must target priority properties such as those at corners with greater visibility or those with interior features that would support opportunities such as a cooking hood for restaurants or an oven for a bakery.<sup>19</sup>

Creating jobs on The Avenue for local residents and young people must be a central theme as Commerce facilitates discussions between potential business operators, property owners, and representatives from the corridor. Any new business on The Avenue should be strongly encouraged to hire locally, and community partners must be prepared to link new businesses with eligible candidates.

<sup>19</sup> The following vacant storefronts should be evaluated for their marketability to potential restaurant, café, or bakery operators: 2603 Germantown (the former T&J's Family Restaurant, which closed in summer 2011), 2636 Germantown (the former Toto Fish & Chips, which closed in October 2011), 2737 Germantown (the former Silver Spoon Family Restaurant), or 2749 Germantown (the former Dave's Bakery)



**Figure 25: Commercial Vacancies**

Source: Business Survey, 2011

- 9: < 1,000 SF
- 10: 1,000-1,500 SF
- 8: 1,500-2,000 SF
- 1: > 6,500 SF

## **45** 2.8 Investigate the Possibility of a Mixed Use Infill Development in the 2800 Block, just North of Somerset

### >> EARLY ACTION

The core of the Germantown Avenue commercial district, from the bend at North Alder to Somerset, has very little vacant land for redevelopment. The 2800 block marks a distinct break in energy and vibrancy, in part because of the concentrated vacancy on both corners on the north side of Somerset. On the northwest corner of Germantown and Somerset, there are four PHA-owned vacant, surplus parcels – three structures (2800, 2802, and 2804 Germantown Avenue) and one vacant lot (2806) before Continuous Motion 2's retail establishment (see site 1 in Figure 26). On the northeast corner, there are two contiguous collections of vacant or unbuilt land – four vacant parcels that front on Germantown, and eight unbuilt parcels that have been fenced off and re-programmed as private park space (see site 2 in Figure 26).

These collections of vacant land create an opportunity for limited mixed use development of The Avenue to bring new residents and, importantly, introduce commercial space with larger square footage and a wider floor plate than typically found along the corridor, which could draw different retail tenants. Redevelopment here would also improve the overall image of the corridor and better link the commercial district with the new residential development to the north at Warnock Village. The 3,800 square foot site on the northwest corner could host four to six apartments ranging in size from 540 square feet to 1,000 square feet each above one or two commercial spaces totaling about 3,000 square feet. Leaving the park space on Huntingdon intact, a comparable building could still be replicated on the northeast corner.

The first steps in advancing the redevelopment of the vacant, surplus PHA properties on the northwest corner are moving forward, beginning with a building tour and assessment to be scheduled for the three structures to determine the feasibility of renovation versus demolition and new construction. Ongoing coordination between Commerce and PHA will be required to reactivate these vacant blocks and fill the current gap in Germantown Avenue, as will the participation of a local nonprofit able to take on a substantial role in the project.

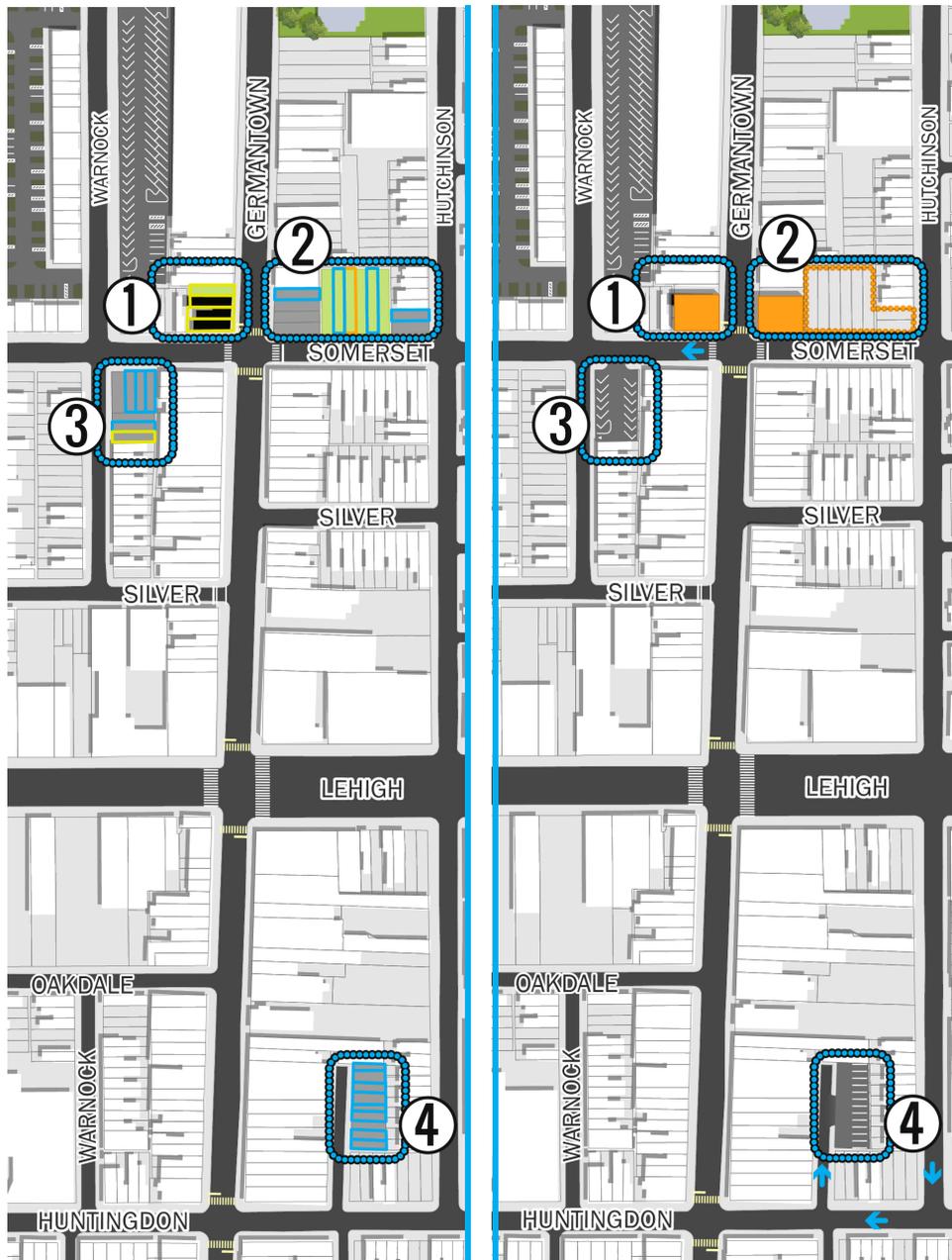
## 2.9 Encourage Merchants to Purchase Vacant City-Owned Lots as Accessory Parking Spaces

Commonly voiced frustrations from merchants during the business survey suggest that Avenue businesses miss potential customers driving along the corridor due to limited parking and vigilant Parking Authority attendees who ticket aggressively, deterring shoppers. Avenue merchants also indicated that they spend money to park in the metered parking along the corridor.

While it is unlikely that the Philadelphia Parking Authority (PPA) will drastically cut back on meter fees or ticketing, there are two vacant sites on small streets just behind The Avenue that could be transformed into 25 off-street parking spots for merchants, freeing up on-street spaces for customers.

The first collection of vacant lots is in the 2700 block at the southeast corner of Somerset and Warnock, a half-block off The Avenue (see site 3 in Figure 26). Thirteen parking spaces could fit on seven vacant parcels, four of which are City-owned, and one of which is PHA-owned. The second collection of lots is in the 2600 block on an alley street, just north of Huntingdon and east of The Avenue (see site 4 in Figure 26). This site could host 12 parking spaces on nine parcels, eight of which are City-owned.

With sufficient interest and pooled resources, merchants could purchase the vacant City-owned lots for reuse as accessory parking spaces to be managed by the Business Partnership or corridor manager and maintained by the cleaning crew. However, a security, safety, and surveillance strategy would be necessary to ensure that parked cars are not vandalized and people are not targeted when coming or going from the lot, particularly at site 4, which is tucked away and out of site. Site 3 is much more visible.



Existing vacancy and public-ownership

Proposed infill sites (1 & 2) and off-street parking sites (3 & 4)



Looking north up Germantown Avenue at Somerset, with vacancy in the foreground and Warnock Village in the distance. The vacancy puts an abrupt end to the commercial district.

Figure 26: Opportunity Sites for Infill and Off-Street Parking

- Vacant Lot
- Vacant Building
- Yard
- Infill
- Possible Additional Infill
- Off-Street Parking

- 1** 4 parcels, all PHA-Owned  
4 PHA-Owned  
3,800 SF
- 2** 4 - 12 parcels  
1 - 4 City-Owned  
0 - 1 PHDC Owned  
3,700 - 13,200 SF
- 3** 7 parcels  
4 City-, 1 PHA-Owned  
13 PARKING SPACES
- 4** 9 parcels  
8 City-Owned  
12 PARKING SPACES

## **47** 2.10 Foster New Business Development at the Southern Gateway of The Avenue

Two exciting redevelopment proposals are under consideration for the southern gateway to the business district. NET CDC and The Village plan to transform vacant property in the 2500 block. These organizations are proposing programs and services that will foster new business development and creative entrepreneurship.

The building at the southeast corner of Germantown and Huntingdon, 2565 Germantown Avenue, has been vacant for more than three years. In 2011, the property came back into City ownership, and NET CDC has been working to take ownership. NET envisions the ground floor housing 1,000 square feet of retail space for business start-ups and entrepreneurs and 1,000 square feet of office space to provide constituent and business support services (including copy machines, computers and scanners, fax machines, etc.).

Commerce and NET CDC have worked closely in preparation for Vacant Property Review Committee meetings and have gained access to the building. They will analyze the building's structural integrity and systems and assess costs and feasibility of redevelopment. Commerce and NET CDC have also initiated conversations with the Community Design Collaborative to investigate a pro-bono architectural and engineering evaluation. They have also collaborated with LISC and other consultants.

On the west side of the 2500 block of Germantown Avenue, The Village of Arts and Humanities has completed a master plan for its campus, entitled *The Creative Village*. The master plan envisions a new main building for the organization at North Alder and Germantown, a new workshop and environmental center along with an urban agriculture program on North Warnock Street, four rehabilitated rental homes in currently vacant structures, and new studio spaces for performing arts, sound production, and creative business incubation on North 10<sup>th</sup> Street where it meets Germantown. These ambitious plans will allow The Village to grow its program offerings and serve more youth in North Philadelphia while dramatically reinventing its campus, strengthening its institutional presence and keeping the arts flourishing in the area long after the murals are complete. More importantly, the elements of the master plan intend to nurture new skills and creative thinking and expression among the young participants at The Village, readying the teens not just for jobs, but for careers.

The Village has initiated conversations with the Housing Authority regarding the transfer of vacant PHA-owned land and buildings, but achieving the full vision of the *The Creative Village Master Plan*, like the rehabilitation of 2565 Germantown, will require partnerships between community organizations, City agencies, foundations, and/or private investors, much time and coordination. Both proposals are in keeping with the vision for The Avenue put forth by this *Economic Development Strategic Plan* and merit support, technical assistance, and resources from the City.

## **2.11 Stay Involved in Discussions about the Reuse of the Vacant Salvation Army Building**

When the Salvation Army opened the new Kroc Center in Nicetown in 2010, it closed several older, smaller facilities including the former recreation center at 2601 N 11<sup>th</sup> Street. The building at 11<sup>th</sup> and Huntingdon, now closed and gated, contains a meeting space, classrooms, a full kitchen and gymnasium, all in good working condition. These render this 28,000 square foot structure ideal for reuse should the Salvation Army opt to sell the property. The organization also owns a sizable vacant lot catty-corner to the building, which could be used for parking or an outdoor playground.

While private parties will ultimately drive the real estate decisions, City agencies and community advocates can, and should, continue to keep this unused asset in mind, able to match interested developers with new uses for the building.

The building is located along a segment of Huntingdon Street prone to illicit activity. To support the future reuse of this building, community partners should be vigilant about using the 311 system to report dilapidated and dangerous structures along Huntingdon that host criminal behavior.

## **2.12 In the Long-Term, Consider Live-Work at the Former ACME Wire and Breyers Buildings**

While the market is not yet strong enough, and neither property is posted for sale, these vacant buildings in the 2500 block of Germantown represent strong candidates for potential reuse as live-work facilities. As mentioned in the housing section in Recommendation 4.3, the industrial architectural bones of 2519-37 Germantown Avenue and 2501 Germantown Avenue are suited for conversion to live/work units that would appeal to artists and creative businesses, given the proximity to The Village of Arts and Humanities and their ambitious plans to include a creative business incubator.

# FORMER SALVATION ARMY

SCHOOL  
JOBS TRAINING  
SPORTS



**2565**  
MIXED USE  
business support & small business startups  
PLUS  
6 apartments above

# THE CREATIVE VILLAGE



main building, workshop, performing arts, sound production, creative business incubator, environmental center, urban agriculture, 4 rental units

# ACME WIRE / BREYERS

LONG TERM:  
live / work, day care, school, cultural facility, religious assembly, performance space, multi-family residential, retail sales

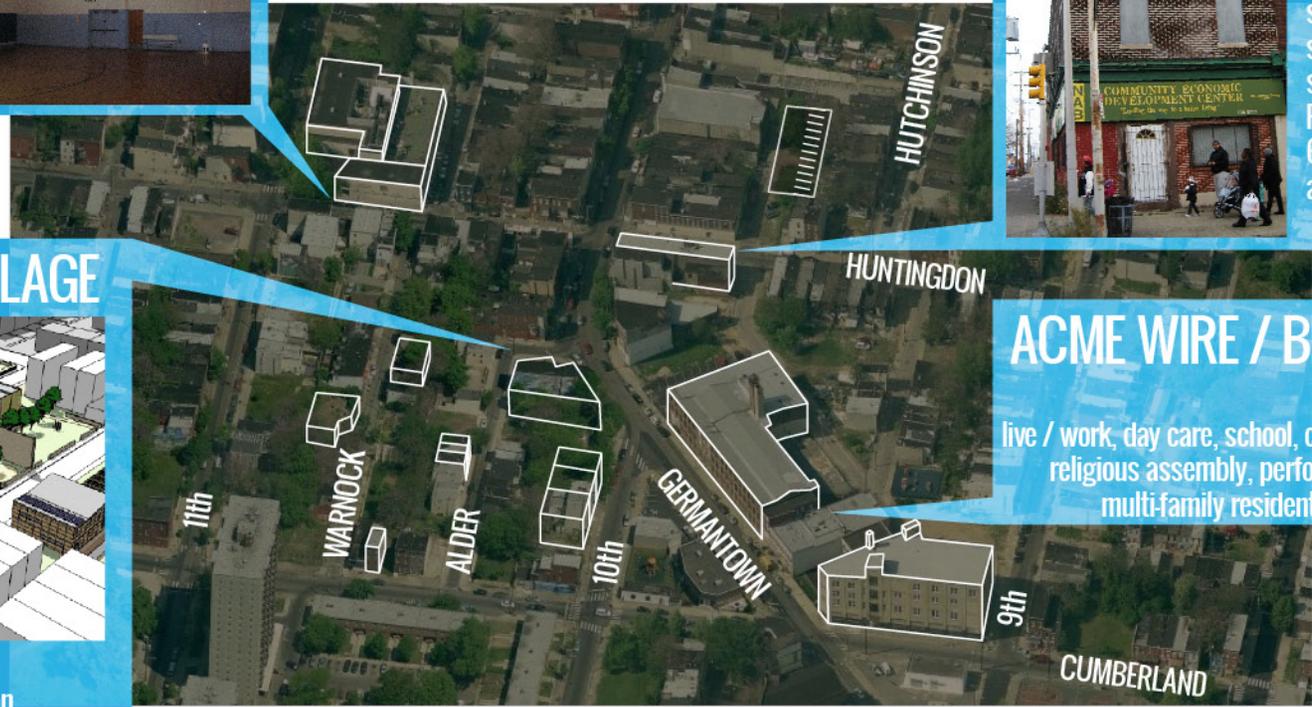


Figure 27: Opportunity Sites at the Southern Gateway

## 49 2.13 **Rezone for a More Vital Commercial District Surrounded by Housing and Open Space**

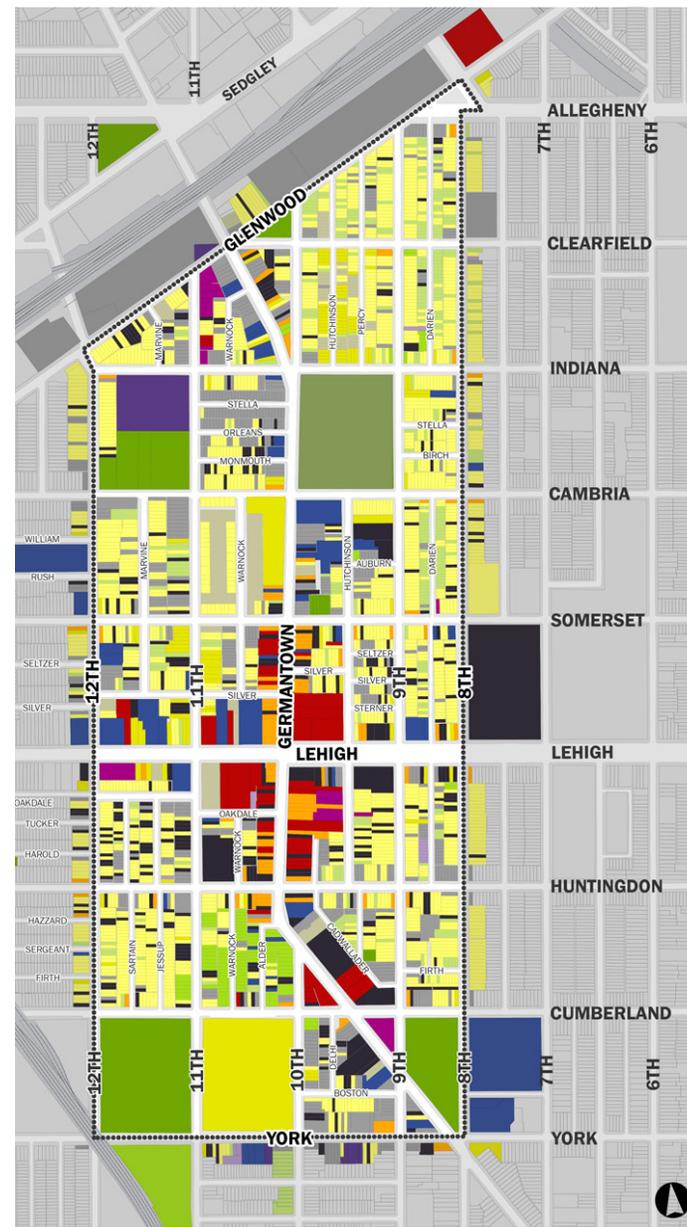
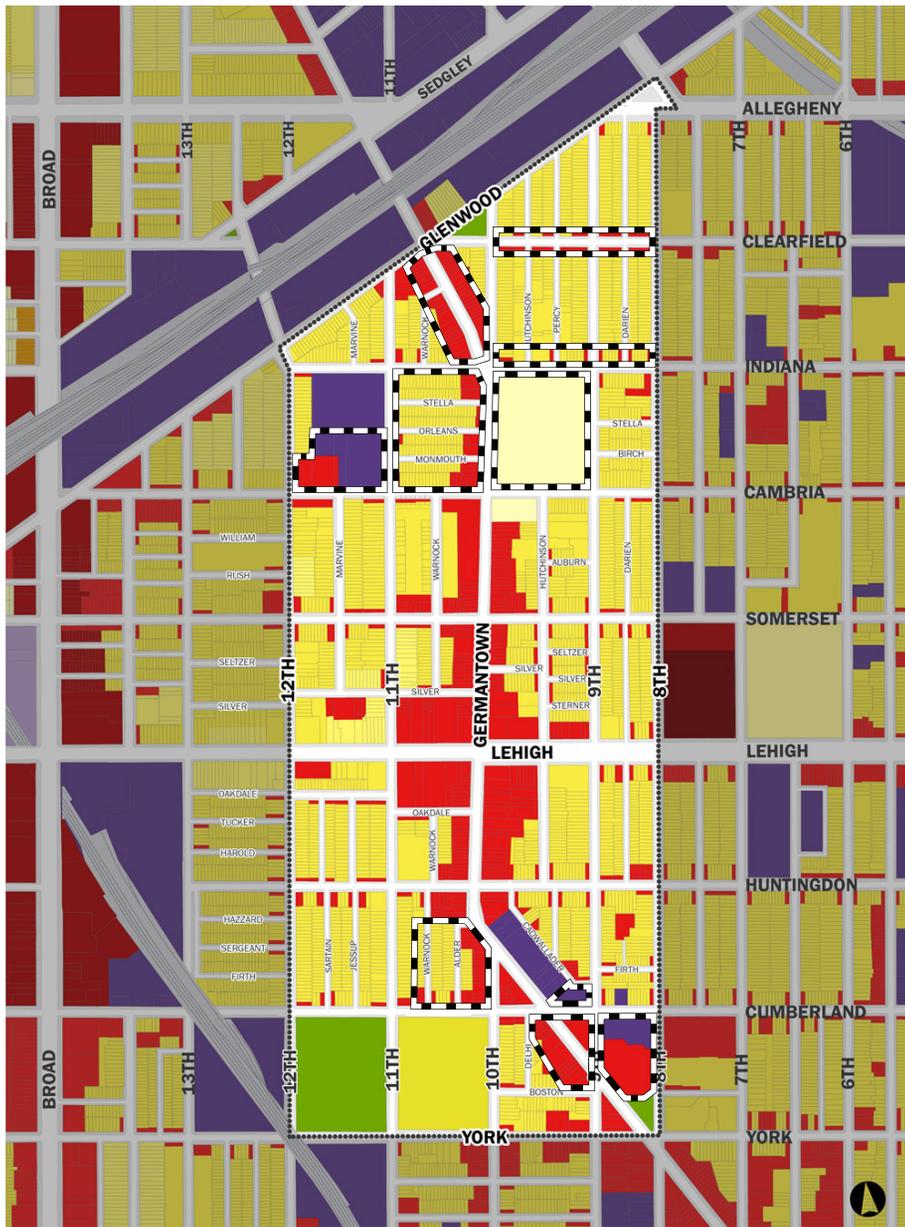
In 2013, the Planning Commission will undertake the plan for the Lower North District as part of Philadelphia 2035, the City's comprehensive plan. The District planning process will include a zoning remapping that updates the existing zoning to reflect current land use patterns, city land use policies, and desired outcomes. The zoning remapping will include public input and should address the following proposed changes in keeping with this plan for The Avenue and surrounding blocks:

- **Support a compact and vibrant commercial node** by removing commercial zoning along Germantown Avenue south of Cumberland and north of Cambria. Retain any active commercial uses in these blocks, but change the zoning of other parcels to a residential zoning classification.
- **Further focus commercial uses on The Avenue** by removing commercial zoning for corner stores at Indiana and Clearfield, where minimal commercial remains. Preserve the current zoning classifications of existing active businesses
- **Support redevelopment of industrial buildings.** Consider changing the zoning classifications in the 2500 block of Germantown Avenue from industrial to a medium density mixed use classification permitting commercial and residential uses. 2519-37 Germantown should retain its zoning classification but could be a candidate for mixed industrial residential.

Subsequent chapters discuss the preservation of open space and creation of new housing. The following zoning considerations support recommendations in Chapter Five (Expressive of Local Creativity and History) and Chapter Six (Surrounded by Good Homes and Neighbors):

- **Preserve existing open spaces** by bringing their zoning classifications into conformance. Historic Fair Hill is currently zoned for residential use; consider rezoning the burial ground for open space. The 12<sup>th</sup> & Cambria Recreation Center, currently zoned for a mix of commercial and industrial uses, should be rezoned for recreational use. Hartranft Recreation Center is also currently zoned for commercial and industrial uses. As a daycare currently operates on site, this facility should be rezoned to remove industrial zoning and allow a medium density commercial residential mix, which would still permit daycares, artist studios and artisan industrial, market or community-supported farms, community gardens, passive and active recreation, multi-family housing, and other commercial uses. The Village of Arts and Humanities gardens should also be preserved through conversion to open space zoning, though low intensity commercial classifications should be assigned where The Village hopes to build new educational facilities, and classifications that permit Urban Agriculture should be assigned on the west side of Warnock Street where The Village intends to develop an environmental center and raised bed garden as documented in the 2012 *Creative Village* master plan.
- **Encourage housing development on Germantown Avenue across from the burial ground** by considering a rezoning of the area bound by Germantown and 11<sup>th</sup>, Cambria and Indiana to residential multi-family, again preserving the zoning of existing active commercial and institutional uses.





- Single-Family Residential
- Multi-Family Residential
- Mixed Use
- Commercial
- Auto-Related
- Industrial
- Garage
- Institutional
- Cemetery
- Park
- Garden
- Yard or Driveway
- Parking
- Vacant Land
- Vacant Building

Figure 28: Areas Where Current Zoning Should Change

 Areas to Consider for Rezoning

- |   |     |   |      |   |     |
|---|-----|---|------|---|-----|
|  | C-2 |  | R-4  |  | L-1 |
|  | C-3 |  | R-5  |  | G-2 |
|  | ASC |  | R-9  |  | REC |
|   |     |  | R-10 |   |     |
|   |     |  | R-13 |   |     |

2011 Land Use Map for comparison