Lancaster Avenue Study
Strategies for Corridor Revitalization

Philadelphia City Planning Commission
June 2000

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NOTE: The original printed report contained several 11" X 17" fold-out maps and drawings. This online version of the report does not contain the large fold-outs. To obtain any missing pages, contact the Planning Commission.

Special thanks to the following:

- State Representative Louise Bishop
- All of the members of the Lancaster Avenue planning group
- City Councilman Michael J. Nutter
- Barbara J. Kaplan, former Executive Director of the Planning Commission

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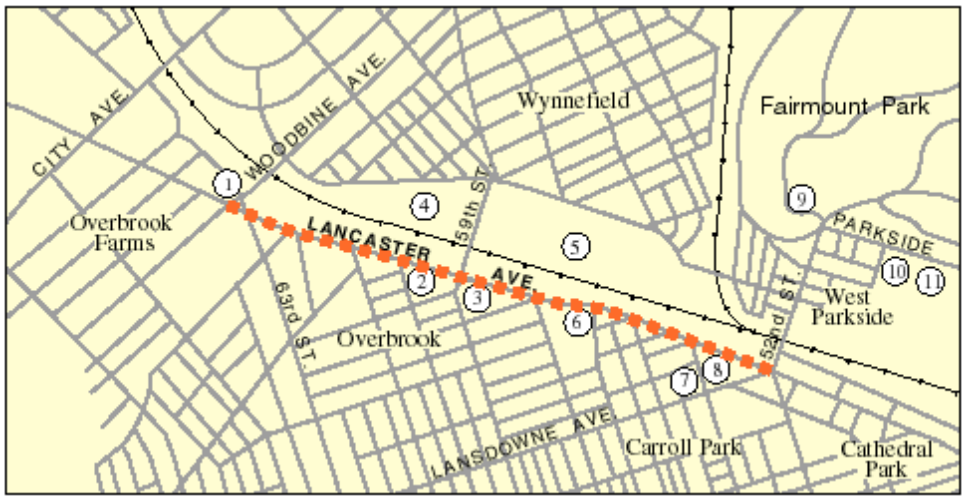
Location of the Lancaster Avenue corridor, 52nd Street to Woodbine Avenue



Major Features

1. Our Lady of Lourdes Church/School
2. Tustin Recreation Center
3. Overbrook High School
4. Pierce-Phelps Co.
5. ACME Markets Distribution Facility
6. Boas Box Company
7. Hestonville Apartments
8. Heston Elementary School
9. Mann Music Center
10. Phila. Business & Technology Center
11. Parkside Industrial Park

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Introduction

The Plan for West Philadelphia, published by the City Planning Commission in 1994, refers to Lancaster Avenue as a "Corridor in Decline." The Plan states that Lancaster Avenue has too many sections with accumulated trash and litter, auto repair shops, vacant homes, vacant lots and poorly-maintained railroad embankments all contributing to the poor aesthetics along the corridor. The 1994 Plan recommends that further study is needed for Lancaster Avenue to identify ways to create a cleaner, more organized environment on the corridor.

This plan, covering the section of Lancaster Avenue between 52nd Street on the east and Woodbine Avenue on the west, is a response to the 1994 recommendations; and it also responds to the interest that has since been expressed by community leaders, elected officials and businesspersons who live and work near Lancaster Avenue. These area leaders believe that Lancaster Avenue should be improved in terms of its appearance and its function.

Goals

1. Corridor beautification---create a more visually attractive corridor.

2. Encourage and establish proper stewardship and maintenance of property.

3. Promote a more unified appearance.

4. Generate a strong identity for the corridor, in part by fostering an awareness of the rich history of Lancaster Avenue.

5. Promote commercial development and expand retail services.

6. Enhance the "sociability" of the corridor; make it compatible with the neighborhood and its culture; and ensure that local residents see the Avenue as part of their community.

7. Eliminate obsolete buildings and obsolete ownership patterns, which place this area at a disadvantage.

Background and Context

The Rich History of Lancaster Avenue

Philadelphia and Lancaster are two of Pennsylvania's former capital cities, and they are linked by Lancaster Avenue (also known as Lancaster Pike and U.S. Route 30). Lancaster Avenue is recorded as the first road opened in West Philadelphia. In Colonial times, this was one of the long distance roads that facilitated the movement of food and supplies from the Schuylkill River wharves and bridges to cities located far to the west. Lancaster Avenue was the nation's first turnpike, and was opened in 1795 as the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike. Conestoga wagons traveled the 62-mile-long turnpike,

which had nine toll stations along its route. The private company that operated the road prospered greatly during the early 1800s before the emergence of railroads led to a gradual decline in business. The Philadelphia portion of the turnpike was sold for $10,000 in 1867 to the Philadelphia and Hestonville Railroad Company, which was authorized to lay tracks upon the bed of the roadway.

One of the villages that grew along the Lancaster Pike was Hestonville, founded by Colonel Edward W. Heston, a Revolutionary patriot who later served as a State Senator for eight years. The original town plot of Hestonville comprised approximately 100 acres near 52nd Street. The Heston Mansion, located near the current Heston School, was built in 1800 and was purchased by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1872; it was demolished in 1901 to make way for railroad tracks. One of Edward Heston's daughters was Mrs. Louisa Paxon, and the present-day Paxon Street (a small street in West Parkside and other sections of West Philadelphia) bears her name.

Overbrook High School, 59th Street and Lancaster Avenue

Hestonville is located at the extreme eastern end of the study area; at the western end is the Overbrook Farms neighborhood, which has also made important contributions to Lancaster Avenue's history. Overbrook Farms is a National Register Historic District, flanking Lancaster Avenue between Woodbine Avenue and City Avenue. Its roots go back to 1858 when the Pennsylvania Railroad first built the Overbrook Railroad Station, designed as a Gothic style cottage, and then purchased a 166-acre farm and turned it into Philadelphia's first planned suburban community. The large detached homes of Overbrook Farms, built in the early 1890s and shortly thereafter, include many fine examples of Renaissance Revival architecture.

Historical property atlases give us a glimpse into Lancaster Avenue's past. The 1895 Baist Atlas shows a saw mill and a coal yard between Lancaster Avenue and the railroad, just east of 56th Street. At 62nd Street where PECO Energy owns land today, there was a large pond between the Avenue and the railroad. The 1910 Bromley Atlas shows that the 52nd Street Railroad Station had been constructed. Additionally it shows a "Door and Sash Mill" on the north side of Lancaster Avenue opposite 54th Street, and a larger "Overbrook Carpet Company" at SW corner 56th & Lancaster (this is currently a box manufacturing company). By 1910 the commercial and mixed-use buildings of the 6200 block of Lancaster Avenue had been constructed, along with the fire house at 63rd Street. The housing to the south of Lancaster Avenue, between 52nd Street and 56th, was partially built by 1895 and was fully complete by 1910; the area to the west of 56th Street was still largely farmland in 1910. The rest of the housing in the neighborhood was constructed about 1920, and Overbrook High School was built in 1925.

Destinations and Travel Patterns

Lancaster Avenue functions as an arterial highway that connects neighborhoods and allows motorists to enter and exit the surrounding neighborhoods. At the same time, the Avenue carries a considerable amount of commuter auto traffic, largely between residential areas of the suburban "Main Line" communities and Center City Philadelphia; this is a remnant of the much more substantial commuter

traffic that used Lancaster Avenue prior to the construction of the Schuylkill Expressway in the 1950s. Lancaster Avenue also carries significant truck traffic, especially related to the nearby ACME Markets distribution facility at 59th Street. In 1996 the average daily traffic on Lancaster Avenue was 14,300 vehicles (total, in both directions of travel, near 59th Street), compared with 1996 traffic counts for these other arterials in the West Philadelphia area:

- 6,067 on Haverford Avenue near 46th Street
- 7,900 on Baltimore Avenue near 52nd Street
- 6,400 on 52nd Street near Baltimore Ave.
- 17,850 on Market Street near 52nd St.
- 34,840 on City Avenue near Lancaster Ave.

Across from the Overbrook High School, this uncared-for landscape is typical of Lancaster Avenue's problems.

Neighborhoods and Surroundings

The Overbrook neighborhood borders Lancaster Avenue to the south. Overbrook's major landmark is the Overbrook High School at 59th Street & Lancaster Avenue, situated on the crest of a hill. Well over 90% of the population is African-American, and there is a high rate of homeownership (approximately 70% based on 1990 Census data). Attached row homes predominate in the local housing stock, but there are also blocks of semi-detached and detached homes in Overbrook. The local population can be characterized as "middle class"; the median family income (1990 Census) for the census tracts within Overbrook ranges from $29,012 to $31,904, compared to a City median of $30,140. The far eastern section of Overbrook is known to many residents as "Hestonville."

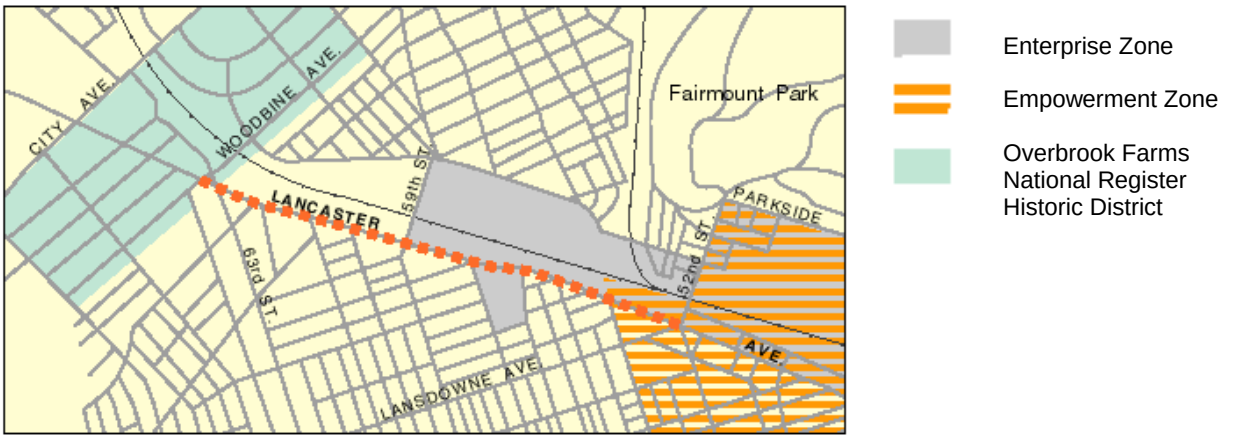
Additional neighborhoods that border the study area include Overbrook Farms, Wynnefield, Carroll Park, Cathedral Park and West Parkside. These neighboring areas have widely varying characteristics, but residents in all of those neighborhoods have occasion to use Lancaster Avenue on a frequent basis.

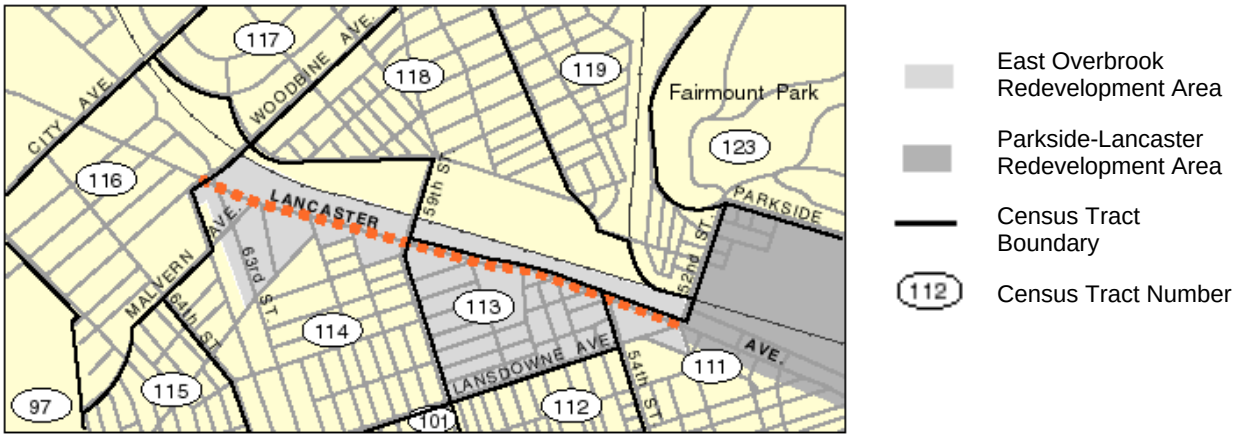
Program Area Boundaries

Empowerment Zone: The West Philadelphia/ Parkside Empowerment Zone includes a portion of this study area to the east of 54th Street. This zone is a federally funded urban initiative focusing on economic and community development activities.

Enterprise Zone: The southeast portion of this study area (east of 59th Street) is within the West Parkside Enterprise Zone. This is a Commonwealth of Pennsylvania program aimed at assisting businesses and promoting business expansion.

Overbrook Farms National Register Historic District: This district is immediately west and north of the study area. National Register designation recognizes the historical integrity of the neighborhood and makes certain types of rehabilitation projects eligible for federal tax credits.





East Overbrook Redevelopment Area: The entire study area for the Lancaster Avenue corridor is located within this redevelopment area, created in October 1997. As part of a Redevelopment Area, the corridor is eligible for urban renewal activities as defined by an Urban Renewal Plan to be prepared by the Redevelopment Authority and approved by the Planning Commission and City Council.

Existing Conditions

<u>Land Use Patterns</u>

A Land Use map is shown on the opposite page. The north side of Lancaster Avenue, alongside the railroad, is exclusively commercial in land use (except for certain vacant properties). Most of the businesses are auto-related, including vehicle parking and storage. On this side of the street, the properties tend to be larger in terms of street frontage, although the depth of the properties is constrained by the presence of the railroad.

On the south side of Lancaster Avenue, there is a different land use pattern. Properties are generally smaller and they are intermingled with (or adjacent to) residential uses. The numerous street intersections where Lancaster Avenue diagonally crosses the grid on the south side create awkward triangular property configurations at many locations.

Another pattern that is evident is the large amount of vacant or underutilized land that exists along the corridor. This is true for both sides of the Avenue. It suggests that portions of the corridor are susceptible to change. The "Susceptibility to Change" map (see page 8) presents a generalized picture of the corridor with all properties being divided into two basic categories:

1*) Susceptible to change:* includes uses which do not appear to have great value for the long term; they are seen as potentially "expendable"; they generally do not represent a substantial investment, and they could be redeveloped. Examples: vacant buildings and lots, auto repair facilities that abut residential uses, and parking lots.

2) *Stable Properties* (not susceptible to change): properties which have a high value in their present condition and function; they are most likely to be preserved. Examples: Overbrook High School, Heston School, the church and fire station at 63rd Street, and the row of storefront commercial/residential buildings at 63rd & Lancaster.

Zoning

The zoning along Lancaster Avenue follows a pattern that closely resembles existing land use. Zoning on the north side of Lancaster Avenue is mostly industrial, with some commercial zoning. Zoning on the south side of the street is a mixture of residential classifications (including the playground and the schools) and commercial classifications. There is one large industrially-zoned property at SW corner 56th & Lancaster. This zoning dates back to the early 1950s. The community has not been rezoned on an area-wide basis in the intervening years.

Oxford Street, adjacent to Overbrook High School, displays the area's solid housing.

Streets and Sidewalks

Lancaster Avenue is generally 100 feet wide, including sidewalks, but the motorist encounters a variety of different roadway configurations while traveling this stretch of Lancaster Avenue. Striping of travel lanes is minimal. Some sections of the road appear to accommodate two moving lanes in each direction, but the lack of striping can make this practice dangerous. Most sections of the road carry one moving lane in each direction with parking on both sides of the street. On-street parking is permitted in most areas, although the parking spaces are not marked.

Sidewalks are in generally poor condition throughout the study area. Also, sidewalks are nonexistent in many sections (east of 59th Street and on the north side of the street), or they are overgrown with weeds.

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Pedestrian Amenities

Pedestrians are not well provided for on Lancaster Avenue, evidently because the Avenue is an arterial highway on the edge of a neighborhood. Pedestrian crossing of Lancaster Avenue appears to be dangerous in most areas. Autos travel along Lancaster Avenue at higher speeds than on a typical neighborhood street, and the width of Lancaster Avenue is imposing for pedestrians. Crosswalks are very few in number. One of the busiest intersections for pedestrians is the corner of 59th & Lancaster,

6000 block Lancaster, north side

at Overbrook High School. The 6200 block of Lancaster Avenue is an exception; it is inherently "friendly" to pedestrians, since this block functions as a traditional neighborhood commercial area on both sides of the street. Pedestrian and public transit conditions are pertinent to this study because according to the 1990 Census, fully 40% of the households in Overbrook do not own automobiles.

Public Transportation

Although there is no one transit route that travels the full length of Lancaster Avenue in this study area, transit service is provided by the following intersecting routes:

The Route 10 Subway Surface Trolley travels Lancaster Avenue from University City to 52nd Street, where the trolley turns onto Lansdowne Avenue, turns again on 63rd, and terminates at 62nd & Lancaster. This route can be boarded at two locations in the study area.

The "52" bus travels along 52nd Street and serves West and Southwest Philadelphia.

The "G" bus uses 56th and 57th and 59th Streets and serves West, Southwest and South Philadelphia.

The "46" bus terminates at 62nd & Lancaster and serves West Philadelphia.

The "105" bus also terminates at 62nd & Lancaster, and serves the "Main Line" suburbs along Lancaster Pike.

The "65" bus crosses Lancaster Avenue at 63rd Street, and serves Germantown, Roxborough, City Avenue; it terminates at 69th Street.

Trends

Population and Income Trends (see Census Tract map on page 4)

According to the U.S. Census, total population of the two census tracts in Overbrook (tracts 113 and 114, just to the south of Lancaster Avenue) was 10,777 in 1990. Between 1960 and 1990, the total population in these census tracts decreased by 19%; population loss was far greater (-31%) in tract 113, east of 59th Street. However, the area is still densely populated with an average of 55 persons per acre, as compared to the City rate of 18.3 persons per acre. This is a relatively stable community, but many upwardly mobile middle-class families have been moving to the suburbs or to other parts of the City in search of larger homes and better shopping and schools. More than 90% of Overbrook's residents are African American and median family income closely matches the City median of $30,140. The percentage of families living below poverty level ranges between 11.7% and 13.2% for the census tracts in Overbrook, and while cause for concern, it is less than the City rate of 16.1%.

Business Trends

Lancaster Avenue is a predominantly commercial corridor in an area that is "under-retailed" in many respects. As stated in The Plan for West Philadelphia, studies have shown that most of West Philadelphia's consumer demand for convenience goods is satisfied within the local area, while most of the residents' spending for other goods, including clothing, gifts, and shoes, has been captured by shopping destinations outside of the area. Particularly lacking at the present time in West Philadelphia are stores selling electronics, sporting goods, appliances and office supplies. There is a need for these types of stores the area. Retail pharmacies continue to seek new sites for their stores, which sell increasing amount of groceries, gifts and household supplies in addition to traditional drug store items. There is also a demand for restaurants in the area, and fast food chains continue to be interested in the West Philadelphia market.

Large, modern supermarkets do not exist in a wide surrounding area, although there are currently several proposals to build new supermarkets in nearby sections of West Philadelphia. Large home improvement or building-supply stores are non-existent in West Philadephia. These types of stores would probably be successful if located within this study area, but they require large tracts of land which are not available along Lancaster Avenue. In general, builders of large retail stores ("big box" stores with large parking lots) are being frustrated in their attempts to serve the West Philadelphia community by the shortage of large tracts of land under single ownership.

NE corner 63rd Street & Lancaster Avenue

The local population does have substantial buying power because of population density and a median income that mirrors the City median. The desire to respond to this opportunity by providing new large scale retail services must be balanced with the need to revitalize older retail corridors in West Philadelphia. Traditional retail commercial strips like the ones at 60th & Lansdowne and 52nd & Girard are local assets that are plagued by obsolete facilities and deteriorating conditions. They are also essential and desirable elements of the urban landscape in relation to their location within their

respective communities and the continuing need by many local consumers for pedestrian and transit accessible retail. As detailed in The Plan for West Philadelphia, these traditional retail centers need to be preserved and strengthened so that they may continue to serve their immediate neighborhoods.

Housing Trends

The housing stock immediately to the south of Lancaster Avenue is attractive and well constructed, and the conventional real estate market is operating normally in the section of Overbrook located to the west of 56th Street. Prices for single family row homes are currently in the $35,000 to $60,000 range in this area (The Realist, 1997). However prices in residential area east of 56th Street are much lower, and many vacant homes exist here. This eastern section of Overbrook, which contains older housing, needs intervention to prevent further deterioration and neighborhood decline.

There is reason to believe that effective and timely intervention is taking place. Philadelphia Neighborhood Housing Services, Inc. (PNHS), a non-profit organization, provided home improvement

Hestonville Apartments, 5400 block Lansdowne Avenue

and community improvement programs throughout the 1990's. PNHS continues to rehabilitate houses in the eastern sector, providing new homeownership opportunities, and PNHS in conjunction with the Overbrook Neighborhood Improvement Council was a partner in the rehabilitation of the Hestonville Apartments (at Conestoga Street & Lansdowne Avenue) in 1995. In addition, an even larger housing rehabilitation initiative is being planned by the City's Office of Housing and Community Development and independent developers, investors and the local community organization. This latest housing proposal would rehabilitate all of the approximately 70 vacant houses east of 56th Street, primarily for sale to moderate income households.

Public Investment

The two public facilities on Lancaster Avenue at 59th Street, the Tustin Playground and Recreation Center and Overbrook High School, are slated for improvements through the City's Capital Program. At Tustin, the basketball courts were recently repaired and repaved by the Department of Recreation, and the building's entrance was made more accessible in keeping with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). At the high school, $1,480,000 was allocated in Fiscal Year 1998 for general renovations; construction has been delayed but is expected to begin in the year 2000.

Opportunities and Constraints

The characteristics of the Lancaster Avenue corridor and its adjoining neighborhoods (see map of neighborhoods opposite page 1) present various opportunities for growth and change in the future, along with certain constraints or limitations.

Opportunities

Traffic volume and visibility
High traffic volumes and the resultant visibility of corridor properties create an opportunity for new facilities, services and amenities to be noticed by the public. Large traffic volumes and visibility offer a marketing advantage for any business that might locate here, and consequently contribute to development potential.

Public Transportation
Bus and trolley stops exist along the Avenue at 52nd, 56th, 57th, 59th and 62nd Streets. The availability of public transit is an asset for the corridor.

Demand for retail services with parking
The shortage of certain types of stores in West Philadelphia, and the desire of many residents to have free and convenient parking associated with retail uses, points to an opportunity for new commercial development to occur along this auto-related corridor.

This vacant land is located in the 5300 block of Lancaster Avenue, adjacent to a railroad portal that is visible in the background.

Most properties are susceptible to change
Most of the properties along the corridor are susceptible to change in the long run. This is an opportunity in the sense that there is a degree of built-in flexibility here, and widespread impediments to change do not exist. See map on page 8.

Constraints

Property configuration
Most of the properties that abut the railroad are not very deep, with only 60 to 100 feet separating

Lancaster Avenue from the railroad property. This shallow configuration limits the ways in which the land can be used.

Street pattern and the location of the street
Because Lancaster Avenue slices through the grid pattern on the diagonal, it creates a large number of diagonal street intersections on the "community side" of the street. This street configuration, which is best shown on the color fold-out maps, reduces the amount of private property that is available on the south side of Lancaster Avenue, and it is a liability in terms of traffic and pedestrian safety. It is one of the reasons why Lancaster Avenue's layout diminishes the potential for the Avenue to function as most streets do, with complementary uses on both sides of the street.

Another reason why Lancaster Avenue is less suited to a normal integrated "two-sided" character is that the Avenue is an "edge street" or boundary street. The railroad creates a lengthy, near continuous barrier through this section of West Philadelphia, and Lancaster Avenue's location adjacent to the railroad makes it the northeastern edge of the Overbrook neighborhood. Since there is no resident population on one side of Lancaster Avenue, the land use pattern has evolved differently on the north versus the south side of the corridor.

Noise, dust, litter
The high volume of auto and truck traffic, combined with the frequent passing trains, creates a significant amount of noise, dust and litter along Lancaster Avenue, especially when compared to nearby residential streets. The many auto repair businesses add to these negative environmental impacts. These environmental disadvantages make the Avenue less desirable for housing (especially single family housing).

Pedestrian qualities are not favorable
With the exception of the 6200 block of Lancaster where there are storefronts abutting the sidewalk, a busy bank and an attractive fire station, most of Lancaster Avenue is not well suited to the pedestrian, and consequently not often used by pedestrians. The width of the street, the grid slicing street pattern, the edge location and the noise levels all contribute to the difficulties that pedestrians face on Lancaster Avenue.

56th & Lancaster looking west along the Avenue.

Recommendations

A Concept for Revitalizing the Lancaster Avenue Corridor

Rebuilding the public right-of-way of Lancaster Avenue
A new streetscape should be created along Lancaster Avenue. The travel lanes and parking lanes of the street (the "cartway") should be reconstructed or fully resurfaced, and the cartway should be striped in an organized and coherent manner. It is recommended that there should be one moving lane in each direction with on-street parking, turning and stacking lanes at major intersections, and a bicycle lane. Sidewalks should be redesigned, made continuous on both sides, and rebuilt. New lighting, street trees, banners and transit shelters should be installed to further beautify the Avenue.

Beautifying the properties that front on Lancaster Avenue
Just beyond the sidewalks, edge plantings should be combined with low wrought-iron-type fencing to beautify properties along the corridor, soften the appearance of the Avenue and establish visual continuity along the corridor. Small squares and triangles of green space, publicly-owned but not well tended, should be adopted by neighboring schools and businesses and made into colorful, well-maintained flower gardens or parks. Embankments that are currently overgrown with weeds should be maintained and cleaned on a regular basis, and kept in a "green" state. All property owners, private and public, should be encouraged by community leadership to maintain their properties so that Lancaster Avenue can become known as a clean, cared-for place to visit and shop.

New fencing and landscaping, approximately four feet in height, should be installed just inside the sidewalk wherever buildings are set back from Lancaster Avenue. The same materials and plantings should be used uniformly throughout the corridor. Maintenance and cleaning will be of paramount importance. Paid for by individual property owners, including public agencies owning property, this project will foster visual continuity and aesthetic enhancement. This illustration was adapted from a 1996 Planning Commission report entitled, “Design Guidelines for Off-Street Parking.”

New commercial / retail development
Four locations, spread evenly along the corridor are recommended as priority sites for new retail or office facilities: in the 5200 block, the 5600 block, and in the 5900 and 6200 blocks. These areas should be developed as small or medium-sized commercial project clusters with off-street parking and landscaping, ranging in type and scale from a single convenience store to a sizable (30,000 sq. ft.) major-chain appliance or sporting goods store.

Redevelopment of blighted or obsolete buildings and uses
In addition to the locations recommended above for commercial or retail development, there are many sections of the corridor where the assembly of properties by the Redevelopment Authority is recommended to eliminate blighted or inappropriate uses, assemble properties in fragmented ownership, and replace them with uses compatible with the revitalization concept described herein. The Recommendations map indicates those areas which are recommended for this type of public intervention.

A "north side" and a "south side" approach to corridor revitalization and land use
The land use pattern that has evolved, where uses on one side of the street are not necessarily complementary to those on the other side, should be formalized and reinforced and used to its best advantage.

The south side of Lancaster Avenue, abutting community housing, should be resident-oriented and pedestrian-oriented with shopping and services that people can walk to. Sidewalks on the south side should therefore be wider or more attractive than on the north side of the Avenue. Businesses engaging in auto repair and outdoor storage will be assisted (through the urban renewal process) and encouraged to relocate to the north side, where noise, visual clutter and other environmental impacts can be further separated from residential uses. Billboard signs should not be allowed on this side of the street.

The north side of the Avenue, along the railroad, should be automobile-oriented, with stores and parking designed with the motorist in mind. The shallowest parcels of land near the railroad should be maintained properly, and used creatively as open space, gardens, or seasonal outdoor flea markets. The existing property owners (AMTRAK and the School District) need to perform these maintenance, greening and reuse functions.

Land Use Guidelines

Examples of uses to be encouraged on the south side --
Food store, hardware or clothing store, insurance or auto tag office, medical office, parks, playgrounds and sitting areas.

Examples of uses to be encouraged on the north side, along the railroad –
Stores selling electronics, sporting goods, appliances and office supplies; also auto repair, auto body, gas station, businesses that utilize many small trucks or vans, ice cream or water ice stand, outdoor flea market or farmers' produce stall, parking lot, flower garden or vegetable garden, miniature golf and other commercial recreation.

Examples of uses to be encouraged in all areas -- restaurant, bank, pharmacy, groceries, flower beds or flower gardens.

Examples of uses that are not desirable along the corridor -- beer and wine cooler take-out stores. Activities often associated with these establishments will be a detriment to area safety and security.

Zoning Options

Zoning Remapping

Zoning Remapping could accelerate positive changes in Overbrook and the Lancaster Avenue corridor. Zoning remapping is a community-initiated process that is a joint undertaking with Planning Commission staff that evaluates the existing zoning of a neighborhood, recommends new or updated zoning at multiple locations, and results in the designation of new zoning categories by City Council. The new zoning for this area would reflect the land use changes and redevelopment actions recommended in this Plan.

One type of zoning change that will be generally important along Lancaster Avenue is to change Industrial zoning classifications (on the north side of the street) to C-7 Commercial which will prohibit new industrial uses and outdoor storage, while permitting commercial uses and requiring landscaping and parking.

Zoning Overlay

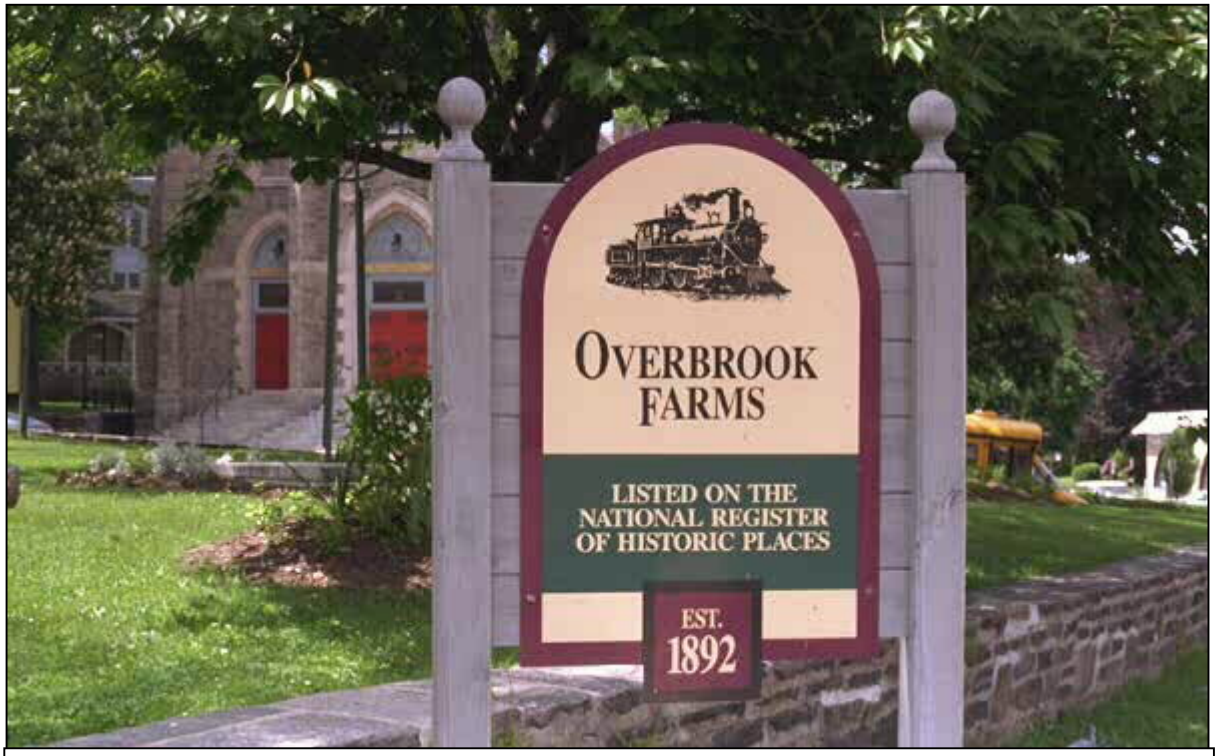
A zoning overlay is also an option for properties fronting on Lancaster Avenue. A zoning overlay, also known as a Special Controls District, is a set of specific zoning controls that are added to existing zoning; the added controls are put into place with an ordinance of City Council. Along the Lancaster Avenue corridor, specific objectives of the Special Controls District would be as follows:

• *Hold the "street wall:"* On the south side, to enhance the pedestrian environment, a new zoning control will require that all new buildings be constructed in a manner that maintains the "street wall," meaning that a setback from Lancaster Avenue will not be permitted.

• *Require additional landscaping*: In order to promote the visual continuity and aesthetic enhancement described earlier on page 14, parking lots and front yard setbacks shall be required to include a landscaped strip and decorative fencing alongside the sidewalk and street. This provision will encourage installation of an edge treatment similar to that illustrated on page 14. The new zoning requirement will apply only to new construction, additions and alterations in the future; however the Planning Commission is encouraging this edge treatment for all existing Lancaster Avenue properties that have setbacks or parking lots abutting the sidewalk and street.

• *Billboards prohibited on the south side:* In keeping with the residential surroundings, billboards will not be permitted on the south side of Lancaster Avenue.

• *Certain uses will be prohibited*: In order to protect the integrity of the adjacent residential communities, certain uses will be prohibited: the retail sale of packaged alcoholic beverages shall be prohibited in all areas of the Special Controls District; and auto dependent establishments (e.g. auto repair and service and auto sales) shall be prohibited on the south side of Lancaster Avenue.



The triangular park at 63rd & Lancaster is owned by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. The park is well tended and it includes this sign that announces entry into the Overbrook Farms neighborhood, located to the north. This is an excellent example of how Lancaster Avenue can be beautified with open space and upkeep.

Open Space Recommendations

Open space is already a positive element along Lancaster Avenue, and additional properly maintained open space will be required in the future. Today, the triangular mini-park outside the Our Lady of Lourdes Church (a mini-park bounded by Lancaster Avenue, Woodbine Avenue and 63rd Street) is a perfect example of how open space can help beautify the Avenue. This park contains a sculpture and a neighborhood identification sign along with trees, shrubs, flower beds and a stone retaining wall. It is a beautiful, welcoming element along the corridor.

The street pattern in the area has created other triangular mini-parks on the south side of Lancaster Avenue at 59th and 61st Streets. While not unattractive, these additional mini-parks should be further enhanced with landscaping and flowers. Owned and maintained by the City, the mini-parks at 59th and 61st Streets ideally should be "adopted" by a nearby business (the car wash, for example) or the adjacent school (Overbrook High School); and the new caretakers should perform the plantings and ongoing maintenance and cleaning.

Finding community-based caretakers for maintaining open space is essential. The types of community-based organization that could take control of open spaces to help beautify the corridor are community development corporations, land trusts or merchant associations. If a suitable organization does step forward, it is recommended that its volunteers can be trained through the Public Landscapes Program of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society.

The railroad embankments and lots, which in many areas appear to be uncared for, should be re-landscaped. Scrub vegetation on the hillsides should be replaced with formal plantings that are designed to be visually appealing and also easy to maintain. The embankments could become wildflower displays of the type sometimes seen along interstate highways; or at the very least, these embankments should be cleaned and maintained on a regular basis. This work should be undertaken by the landowners or by contractors or lessees designated by the landowners.

Enhance the Sociability of the Corridor

Lancaster Avenue could be negatively described as a "speedway" or an "industrial backwater." However in more hopeful and positive terms, it is an historic thorofare that is situated on the edge of a strong, viable neighborhood. Can Lancaster Avenue become more inviting to local residents? Can pedestrians and motorists alike be drawn to the corridor? Can the corridor create a more positive impression of West Philadelphia ? The Planning commission staff and local community leaders believe the answer to these questions is "yes." There are a variety of ways in which the sociability of this corridor can be enhanced, and a number of suggestions toward that goal are outlined below.

• *Stewardship:* keeping properties clean on an ongoing basis --
--grounds maintenance
--picking up litter
--paint up / fix up
--graffiti removal
--improve the appearance of store facades
Responsible parties: private owners, public owners, city clean-up crews, community volunteers

• *Connect Lancaster Avenue to the community more effectively, inviting people to walk to Lancaster Avenue*
--provide services that local residents want and need
--rebuild the sidewalks and provide better lighting on Lancaster Avenue
--renew existing mini-parks and add additional parks

--place public art in the mini-parks and in other public facilities
--make provisions for bicyclists on the roadway and at businesses along the corridor
--establish seasonal outdoor activities for properties that are not well suited for permanent buildings
--encourage merchants to reduce the severity of in-store security measures such as bulletproof glass, thereby improving customer relations

Responsible parties: City and State government, community-based organizations, business association, individual businesses

• *Create a Cultural Connection with West Philadelphians*

--nurture new businesses that cater to the unique tastes and preferences of local residents; and target PCDC programs to these kinds of businesses. The Philadelphia Commercial Development Corporation (PCDC) can help with financing, technical assistance, facade improvements and security improvements.
--nurture new businesses that are established by local residents, using the same incentives.
--promote an awareness of the rich history of Lancaster Avenue, using public art, welcome signs or gateway markers to evoke thoughts of the Avenue's historical stature.

Responsible parties: City government including PCDC, State government, business association, individual businesses

Implementation Strategies

Capital Expenditures

The reconstruction of the street and sidewalks, including street trees, lighting and sidewalk furnishings, should be funded through the capital budgets of the State and the City, utilizing federal transportation monies for a major share of the cost since Lancaster Avenue (Route 30) is a state highway, therefore eligible for state and federal funds.

Concerted Action by Property Owners and Community Based Organizations

Local stakeholders, along with government, must become more involved in the care and maintenance of the corridor. Strong leadership will be required to organize and encourage this effort. The leadership can come from the owner of a major business, from an elected official or from a community based organization that wants to pursue the beautification of the corridor. Property owners need to keep the area clean and attractive -- this includes sidewalks, parks and playgrounds, embankments and buildings -- the built environment and the natural environment. As stated earlier, landscaped edge plantings should be combined with low wrought-iron-type fencing to beautify properties along the corridor; this will need to be paid for and installed by individual property owners, preferably acting in unison in an effort to establish a continuous "look" and visual identity for the Avenue. Community organizations, business organizations and volunteerism must become stronger and more involved in the ongoing maintenance and upkeep of the Avenue.

Urban Renewal

Where redevelopment is unlikely to be initiated in a timely and efficient manner by private market entities, the use of urban renewal and the condemnation of property by the City's Redevelopment Authority should be utilized. There are four locations where urban renewal action may be needed to eliminate blighted or inappropriate uses, consolidate fragmented properties and ultimately replace them with uses that are more compatible with the revitalization concept described herein. The four locations are:

1. 5238-50 Lancaster Avenue
2. 5435-5511 Lancaster Avenue
3. NW corner 59th Street & Lancaster Avenue (5901-57 Lancaster Ave.)
4. 6016-26 Lancaster Avenue

Once prospective redevelopers and funding sources have been identified, an Urban Renewal Plan for East Overbrook should be prepared by the Redevelopment Authority for approval by the Planning Commission and City Council.

Zoning Actions

The neighboring community organizations should submit a request to the Planning Commission for staff assistance to undertake a rezoning of the area through the Zoning Remapping Program. This will begin a process of workshops, area surveys and meetings of residents and business owners which will ultimately result in the passage of a rezoning bill for the area by City Council. Development of a Special Controls District ordinance, or zoning overlay, can also be part of this community-wide process.

Possible Additional Funding Sources and Programs

In addition to City, State and federal funds already described for streetscape improvements and redevelopment actions, there are additional resources, mostly designed for use by community based organizations, that could be employed to implement small-scale projects that are consistent with the recommendations contained in this Plan. Targeting these kinds of programs to Lancaster Avenue could make a big difference in the appearance and vitality of the corridor. The community-driven nature of many of these resources points out the need for committed caretaker organizations (neighborhood and business organizations or coalitions) to take hold of the future of the Lancaster Avenue corridor.

• PURP: The Philadelphia Urban Resources Partnership provides grants for treatment of vacant land and for greening, trees and vegetation projects.
• William Penn Foundation's Small Grants Program: Streamlined processing for grants under $10,000; the other major foundations also have grant programs that could benefit Lancaster Avenue.
• TEA-21: The Transportation Equity Act for the 21st Century makes federal transportation funds available for projects that benefit pedestrians and bicyclists.
• Philadelphia Green: This program, operated by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, helps communities plan for and tend gardens and trees.
• Penn State Cooperative Extension Service: Their Urban Gardening Program works with communities to build and maintain food gardens.
• New Land Marks: This pilot invitation for proposals program (the application period recently expired) may continue into the future with additional rounds of funding. New Land Marks is a public art program run by the Fairmount Park Art Association that engages artists and community organizations in the planning and creation of enduring works of art. Projects should promote community identity, pride and history, while also invigorating public spaces and improving the community's environment.
• Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee: PMBC provides services, materials, programs and contests aimed at supporting block captains and keeping blocks clean. (Streets Department)
• Anti Graffiti Program: Offering a variety of programs to help residents keep their neighborhoods graffiti-free. (City of Philadelphia, Managing Director's Office)
• Mural Arts Program: Working with communities and businesses to design and implement community murals. (City of Philadelphia, Recreation Department)
• Operation Clean Sweep: The City's Managing Director's Office has coordinated intensive clean-ups along Lancaster Avenue in the past, in support of community volunteers, and this can occur again in the future. Operation Clean Sweep responds to requests by civic groups, elected officials and local schools.
• PA Urban and Community Forestry Council Grants: Providing small grants for "greening partnerships" that seek to beautify community public spaces. (Montgomery County Cooperative Extension Center)

• Youth Are Resources (YAR): A non-profit organization providing grants to groups of young people to design and carry out community improvement projects
• EPA Environmental Justice (EJ) Small Grants Program: For projects involving environmental cleanup, gardens, education and training.
• Philadelphia Cares: A non-profit partnership that mobilizes people to address local social, educational and environmental needs through volunteer action.

Testing the Impact of the Recommendations: Three Site Studies (on the following pages)

In order to help visualize the positive impact of some of the streetscape, landscape and redevelopment recommendations for beautification of the Lancaster Avenue corridor, the following site studies have been undertaken.

NOTE: The original printed report contained several 11" X 17" fold-out maps and drawings. This online version of the report does not contain the large fold-outs. To obtain any missing pages, contact the Planning Commission.

Site Study – 56th & Lancaster

The front portion of the Boas Box Company property can be used for retail or office use, either through rehabilitation or new construction. Across the street, the little barbecue restaurant is an example of a community-service establishment that should be nurtured and supported with technical assistance and business incentive programs. This restaurant could be expanded to include outdoor seating and a landscaped parking lot. If the currently struggling restaurant is not successful, the adjacent telecommunications business could expand in that direction. Opposite 56th Street near the railroad, there is an attractive stone arch (pictured below right) that should be excavated, cleaned and illuminated with architectural lighting and properly maintained. These historic engineering features should be made into positive and attractive elements of the corridor's environment.

Existing barbecue restaurant

Existing stone arch beneath the railroad tracks

Site Study – 59th & Lancaster

The partially-vacant, single-story building near the northwest corner of 59th & Lancaster should be joined with the vacant properties that exist on both sides to create a new development site that is large enough to attract a medium sized retail chain store with on-site parking; stores selling such product lines as appliances, sporting goods or office supplies would satisfy consumer needs in the area that are not now being served. Across 59th Street on the northeast corner, the vacant lot (pictured below) should be purchased by the School District for expansion of parking. The entire school parking lot should be rebuilt with new and improved landscaping.

NE corner 59th & Lancaster, including the edge of the School District's parking lot.

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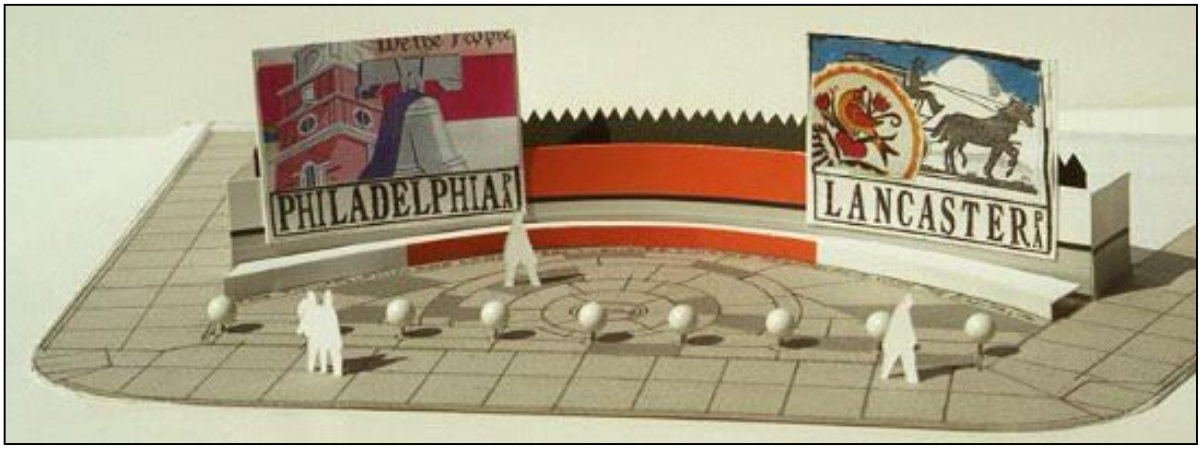
Site Study – 62nd Street, Lancaster Avenue and Malvern Avenue

A sizable vacant site, backing up to the railroad, can be used for a new retail development while the vacant lot on the edge of the SEPTA property can become a public plaza containing public art. One idea from the site study is to use the vacant lot on the edge of the SEPTA property (pictured here) for a mini-park that uses commercial-type artwork borrowed conceptually from the U-Haul Corporation, which operates a rental center across the street. The U-Haul-type images can evoke a sense of Lancaster Avenue's history and function. A photo of a model of the mini-park is shown below.