4 Grow a Green Future

Proposed plantings for designated green streets.

4: Grow A Green Future

As a front door to Fairmount Park, Brewerytown should evoke the qualities of a green community on the park. Integrating new landscaping, tree planting, and emphasizing green construction has many related benefits, from adding beauty, increasing the "urban forest," providing shade and cooling the streets in the summertime, and helping to manage stormwater run-off, which negatively impacts all of Philadelphia's neighborhoods. Since Brewerytown's original planning process in 2006, a growing number of neighborhoods in the City have placed an emphasis on growing greener, and Mayor Nutter has introduced an Office of Sustainability charged with transforming Philadelphia into the "greenest city in America." Due to the large amount of vacant land and significant development potential of the area, Brewerytown is poised to be a leader in environmentally sensitive growth and revitalization.

4.1 Work with Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) to Start a Local Tree Tenders Group

In 2005, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society (PHS) provided funds for over 150 trees and worked with the Sharswood Civic Association to implement the plantings mostly in the area around the Reynolds School at 24th and Jefferson. Since then, GBCDC has partnered with Fairmount CDC and the Fairmount Tree Tenders for planting initiatives funded by PHS's TreeVitalize grants. Because there still exist among Brewerytown residents some reservations about trees and tree maintenance, GBCDC should host a community meeting all about the benefits of trees to combat misperceptions and provide interested property owners with TreeVitalize applications for having a tree planted in front of their homes or businesses in the next planting season.

As neighborhood support for added plantings grows along with local know-how for planting and maintaining trees, GBCDC should revisit the idea of forming a Brewerytown or Brewerytown-Sharswood Tree Tenders group to better focus on the neighborhood(s). Recommendation 4.2 proposes areas for targeted streetscape improvements including tree plantings.

Key vacant corners on the designated green streets should be improved for passive open space where feasible. GBCDC and block captains need to develop plans for ongoing maintenance.

4.2 Undertake Focused Streetscape Improvements

Streetscape improvements can go a long way towards improving a block's character, increasing housing values, and improving the quality of life for residents. As illustrated in the analysis, the community lacks basic street amenities such as street trees, which would significantly improve the overall feel of the area. In addition, key corner lots that, in many cases, are too small for redevelopment are opportunities for small plazas that can be maintained by the GBCDC and local residents (see renderings on prior page).

To maximize impact and investment, all public improvements should be focused on specified key streets. These streets, described below, form the basis of a community "green network" that geographically links existing residential areas with neighborhood parks and Fairmount Park and unites the community across boundaries such as 29th Street.

Streets to be targeted for initial improvements include:

MASTER FROM 25TH TO 31ST STREETS

This corridor is a major east-west connection across the community, linking investment at Brewerytown Square and the Lofts at Brewerytown to Athletic Square and the Sharswood Townhomes east of 25th Street. However, vacancy is rampant along much of Master Street, and as renovations and scattered developments begin to infill the corridor, these investments should be coupled with street trees. Greening and tree planting along this street will promote the concept of "one neighborhood" across physical boundaries, as will a continued tree planting partnership between GBCDC and the Sharswood Civic Association.

27TH STREET FROM POPLAR TO ATHLETIC SQUARE

27th Street links an important development site on Girard (see Recommendation 5.2) directly with Athletic Square. Combined with the potential redevelopment of the "Backstreets" as described in Recommendation 3.4, 27th Street is a major north-south link that, if improved, could have a significantly positive impact on the area. New tree plantings will reinforce investments in housing rehab along 27th and construction within the Backstreets area.

POPLAR STREET FROM 27TH TO FAIRMOUNT PARK

As the community's main link to Fairmount Park, plantings along this corridor would help blur the divide between the neighborhood and the park. Plantings should be coordinated with roadway adjustments proposed in Recommendation 5.7, but need not wait if interested property owners welcome the opportunity to green this stretch of roadway sooner than later.

OXFORD STREET FROM 29TH TO FAIRMOUNT PARK

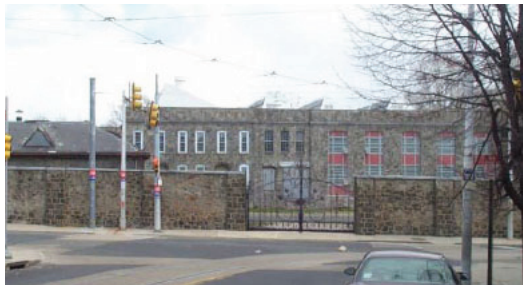
As the other major link to Fairmount Park, Oxford Street should represent a green link to the park. Although a critical link, the other streets identified above are higher priorities in terms of uniting the community and linking key assets.

GIRARD COLLEGE WALL ALONG 25TH AND NORTH COLLEGE AVE

The Girard College wall lining the streets of the southeast corner of the neighborhood has long been an impenetrable boundary. Although attractively crafted from Wissahickon Stone, its scale can be overwhelming. Simple improvements should be considered to activate the wall. As seen at the walls of the Eastern State Penitentiary, simple lighting could enliven the wall at night, improving the space aesthetically while also discouraging unwanted activity. Additional improvements should include repairing any structural issues and investigating the use of sidewalk space – particularly on the north side of Girard College, where the sidewalks are spacious – for public art. As a fist step, Mural Arts, working with GBCDC and FCDC, will be painting a mural on the façade of the furniture store at 25th and Girard to brighten the gateway to West Girard Avenue.

Priority streets for greening

Further improvements suggested by University of Pennsylvania graduate planning students in 2003 included a new controlled entry to the College at West Girard Avenue, thereby creating a direct link to the retail district by Girard College employees.



Suggested Girard College wall improvements by University of Pennsylvania graduate planning students, 2003.

Secondary priorities include:

THOMPSON STREET FROM 29TH TO 32ND STREET

Although all of Thompson Street would benefit from more street trees, initial plantings should seek to enhance the experience of walking from Brewerytown Square to the bus stops along 29th Street. This area is gaining pedestrian traffic from the new development, and the walk to 29th Street should feel safe and cared-for. Greening these western blocks of Thompson Street would also help link the neighborhood with a more off the beaten path route into Fairmount Park's Rock Garden.

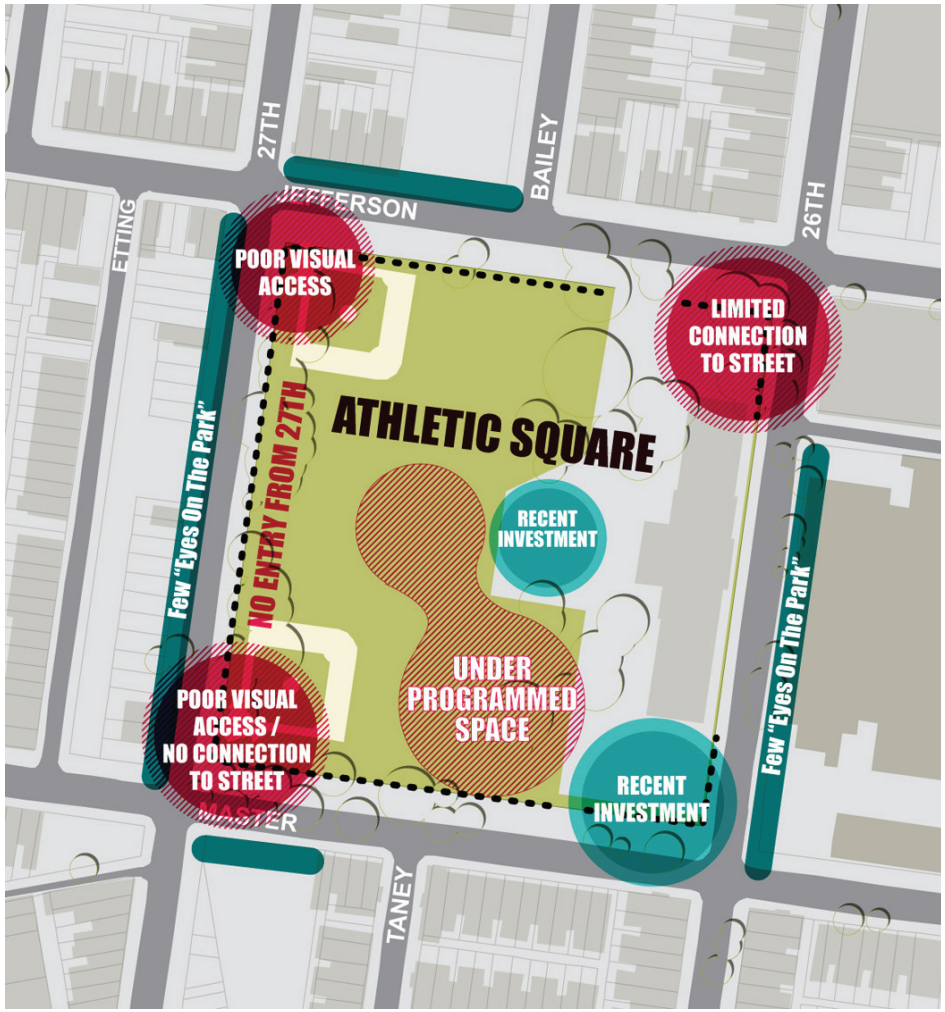
JEFFERSON STREET FROM 25TH TO 31ST STREETS

Like Master, this is a major east-west connection across the community, leading people to and from Athletic Square and the pool.

SCREEN THE PECO SUBSTATION

The PECO substation west of 32nd Street is an eyesore that decreases property values and inhibits visual and physical access to Fairmount Park. Plantings to screen the substation were proposed originally by University of Pennsylvania graduate students in Spring 2004. The concept was reiterated in the original draft Neighborhood Plan, and it appears that some progress has been made. New trees are in the ground, but half of them appear to be dead or dying, suggesting the need to consult an arborist about tree and soil health.

Secondary priority streets for greening



Physical issues at Athletic Square

4.3 Improve Athletic Square

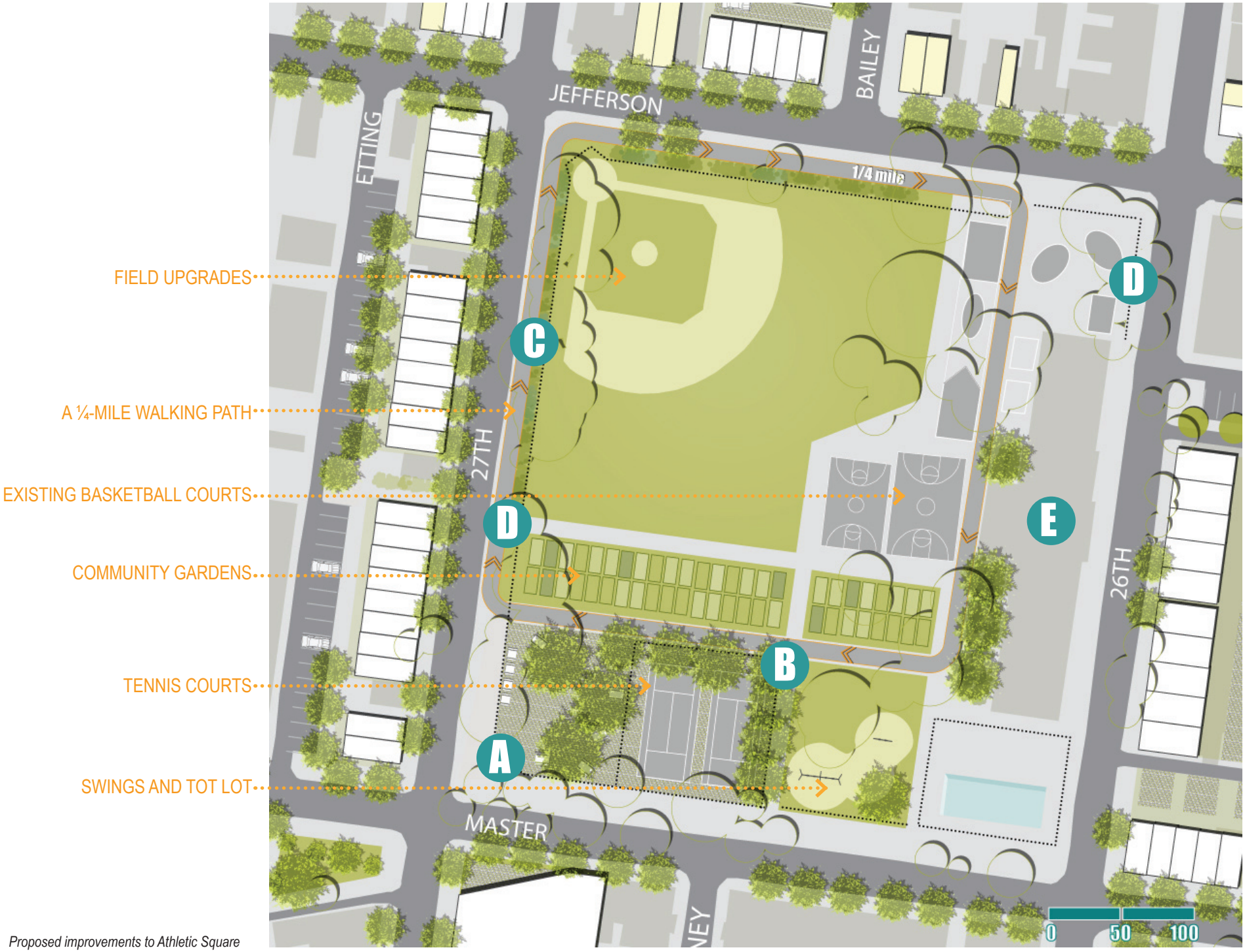
The 4.5 acre park, known as Athletic Square, was once a vibrant heart of the community. As the community lost population and vacancy set in, the land around Athletic Square followed suit. Vacancy now exists where homes once stood on the northern and western edges of the park. Key corners such as 27th and Master Streets and Bailey and Jefferson Streets are marked by large vacant lots. On the eastern edge of the Square south of the Boone School is a City-owned automobile repair facility. The vacancy coupled with the auto-repair facility results in few "eyes on the park" and inactive edges along 70% of its perimeter. Although much of the park's interior space is well maintained, illegal dumping is common and is often visible at the corner of 26th and Jefferson Streets. Due to the layout and size of the (2) baseball fields, much of the park is difficult to program with alternative activities, limiting the number of users able to benefit from Athletic Square's size. The tall fencing surrounding the Square offers few park entries, creating both a physical and perceived barrier between the park and community residents.

There has, however, been some recent investment in the park. The basketball courts have been replaced with sponsorship provided by the Philadelphia 76ers, and the rehabilitation of the community pool has met with strong community support and relief. Brewerytown and Sharswood should build on this momentum while considering new recreational and open space opportunities, re-estabishing the park's role as a community center. To accomplish this, the layout of the park was re-considered in terms of how people access, experience, and use it. Providing a more formal layout and overlapping varied uses will help to encourage interaction among different types of users, strengthening community ownership and investment opportunities.

As the City decreases the budget for improving recreation centers throughout Philadelphia, the challenge is to define a range of strategies that can be implemented incrementally over time and as funding allows. These strategies range from cost effective short-term solutions to comprehensive, long-term improvements and include the following concepts:

Proposed new entrance to the southwest corner of Athletic Square

Existing conditions at southwest corner of Athletic Square



Proposed improvements to Athletic Square

A **Create a new open plaza at the corner of 27th and Master Streets to invite people into Athletic Square**

Currently, Athletic Square feels unwelcoming. Tall fencing meets the sidewalk, and there are few entrances into the park. Though the 2 baseball fields are well-used by the community, future park improvement projects should consider replacing the southern baseball diamond with an open entry plaza that invites park-goers into Athletic Square. As illustrated on prior pages, this change would dramatically transform the relationship between the park and the community and would also make possible a wider range of activities at the park, encouraging different users to explore Athletic Square's offerings. Because this change would remove one baseball diamond, the remaining field would require upgrades.

B **Re-program the space surrounding the proposed plaza described above at 27th and Master Streets**

To strengthen the importance of the plaza, it should be connected to a wider range of activities that serve the full range of neighborhood needs. A new tot lot, community gardens, tennis courts, and a 1/4-mile path for walkers and joggers are all proposed to better maximize the use of the park. The inclusion of these new uses does not require the relocation of other existing uses such as the basketball courts or the pool. Only one existing tree would need to be removed to accommodate this program.

C **Create new fencing on the northern and western edges of Athletic Square**

The new fencing should be located closer to the ball fields thus creating more space along 27th and Master Streets for plantings that feel more accessible to the surrounding community.

D **Create new entries to the Square**

In addition to the entry plaza on the corner of 27th and Master (A), one along 27th Street north of Master Street and another next to the existing recreation building at the tot lot will greatly improve access – in essence opening the park to the larger community and providing a more welcoming experience.

E **Undertake a feasibility study of the existing recreation center to determine its future potential**

Concerns have been raised that the existing building is too deteriorated and inundated with environmental contamination in the form of asbestos and lead paint to be restored. A full feasibility study is necessary to determine the future possibilities of the structure. Whether rehabilitation is possible, or, alternatively, whether the structure must be demolished and replaced, an indoor structure is needed to house the neighborhood's recreation programs that are known City-wide (boxing, for instance) and offer play and gathering space that is usable year-round. With growing numbers of elderly living in Brewerytown and a lack of space for senior activities, the Athletic Square recreation center is an opportunity to combine multiple programs into one structure.

4.4 Integrate Baseball History at Athletic Square

As the physical improvements to Athletic Square move forward, GBCDC and the Sharswood Civic Association should work together to ensure that the park's revitalization integrates some of the area's rich baseball history in its redesign and signage. Before the Philadelphia Phillies, the home team was the Philadelphia Athletics, and the Athletics used to practice in North Philadelphia at the Columbia Avenue Grounds originally located on the 2900 block of Oxford Street.

While a baseball museum was once proposed for the vacant land across 27th Street facing the park, such an endeavor would be an extremely costly and long-term initiative. The incorporation of inventive and informational signage throughout the park, however, is an achievable short-term recommendation, which would underscore the continuity of baseball's role in the community – today, three Little League teams, a mens softball team, and a girls softball team practice at Athletic Square. To get started, GBCDC and Sharswood Civic Association should contact the Philadelphia Athletics Historical Society and organize a meeting of local baseball historians and neighborhood artists interested in helping with the design of the signage.

Historic photos, logos, and signage about Brewerytown's baseball history should be integrated into the improvements at Athletic Square.

The park at 30th and Jefferson should be named!

4.5 Name the Park at 30th and Jefferson

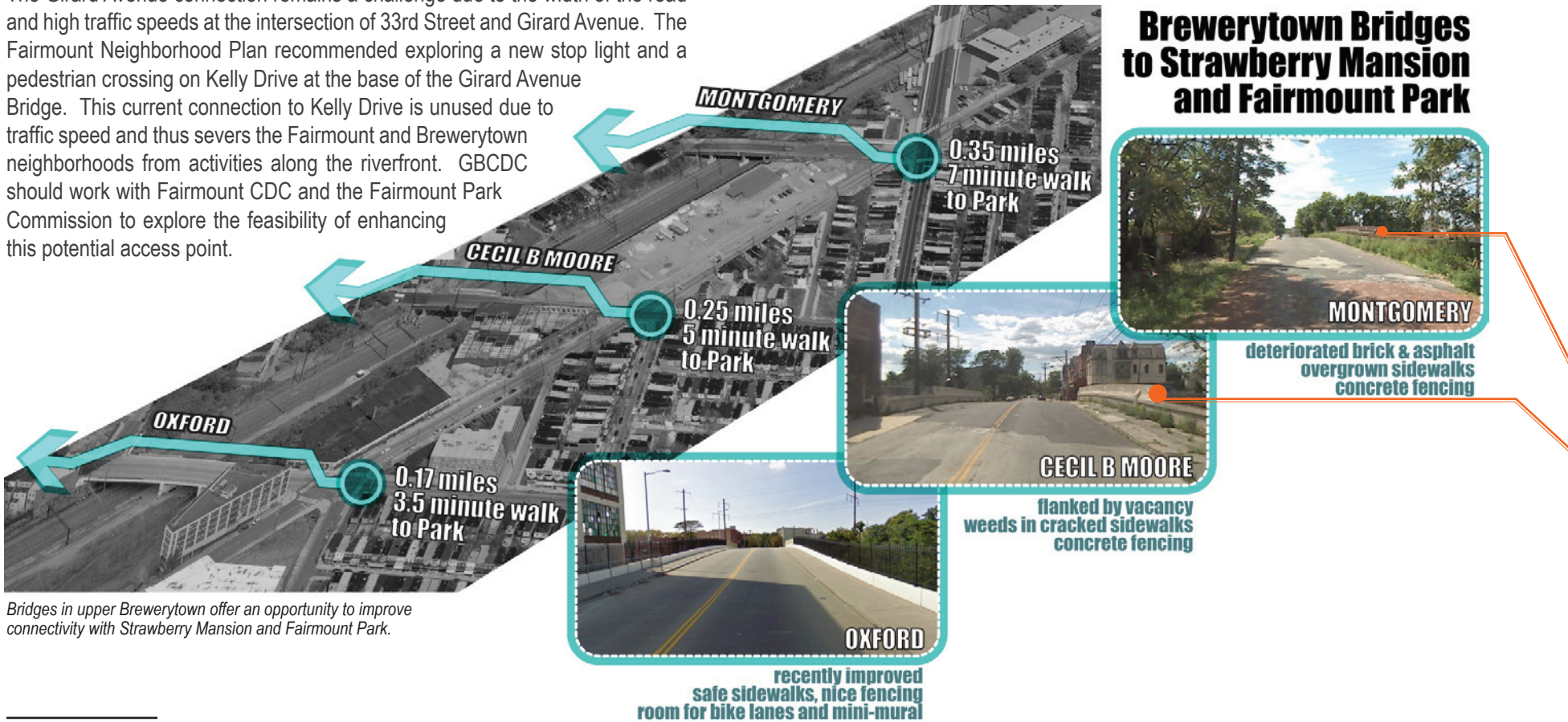
The park space at 30th and Jefferson struggles not only because of its challenging design, which lies, barely visible, sunken below street-grade. The park space at 30th and Jefferson struggles because it has no name, no way of identifying itself, no acknowledgement on the map. The neighborhood has a rich history of talent, leadership, and volunteerism of which people today remain fiercely proud – many famous musicians and civic leaders grew up in the neighborhood and continued to perform locally or work to improve the place of their roots via their leadership positions. Naming the park after one of these homegrown celebrities and role-models would not only bolster community pride and awareness, but will also put the park at 30th and Jefferson on the map for everyone's use and enjoyment.

4.6 Improve Access to Fairmount Park

Reclaiming Fairmount Park as a neighborhood asset can be accomplished by creating expanded access via safe pathways. Oxford and Poplar Streets have the only established connections, with well maintained bridges over the rail tracks to the Park. Both would improve greatly with additional tree plantings approaching the bridges and reinvestment in existing structures where necessary. The recently painted murals on the bridge at Poplar Street (see page 105) enhance the connection between Brewerytown, Fairmount, and the Park, and bike lanes along this corridor would further encourage use of this access point (see Recommendation 5.7 and Philadelphia's recently completed Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan[19]). Like Poplar, the Oxford Street Bridge would benefit from a mini-mural on the concrete base of the wrought-iron fencing and bike lanes to help cyclists arrive in the Park safely.

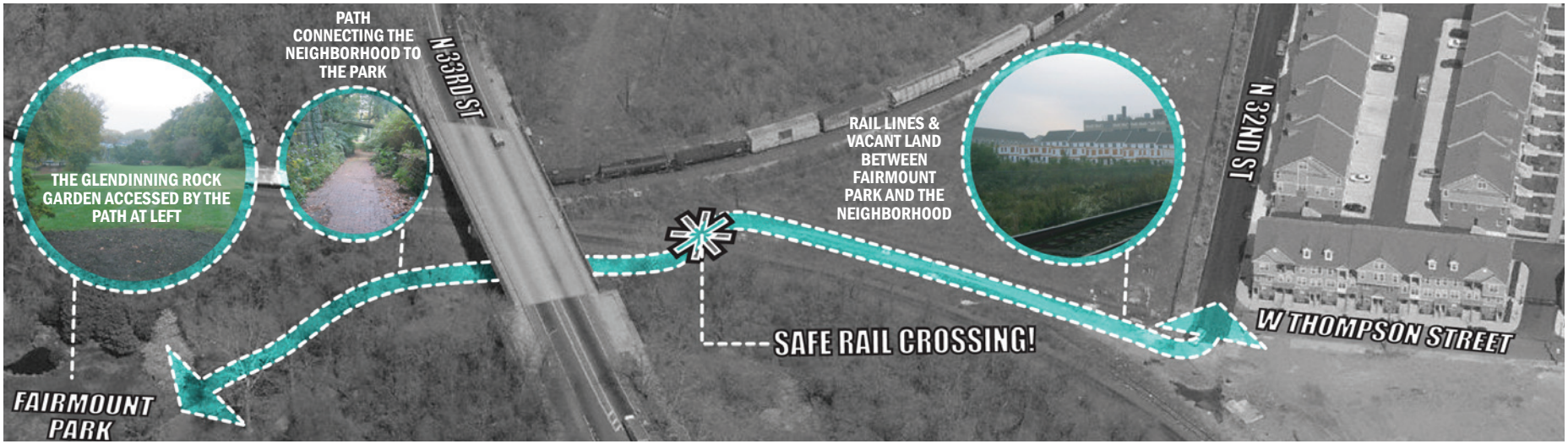
The Girard Avenue connection remains a challenge due to the width of the road and high traffic speeds at the intersection of 33rd Street and Girard Avenue. The Fairmount Neighborhood Plan recommended exploring a new stop light and a pedestrian crossing on Kelly Drive at the base of the Girard Avenue Bridge. This current connection to Kelly Drive is unused due to traffic speed and thus severs the Fairmount and Brewerytown neighborhoods from activities along the riverfront. GBCDC should work with Fairmount CDC and the Fairmount Park Commission to explore the feasibility of enhancing this potential access point.

In northern Brewerytown, the bridge conditions at Cecil B. Moore and Montgomery Avenues deter travel from Brewerytown into Strawberry Mansion and the Park more so than encourage it. The Cecil B. Moore bridge is flanked by vacancy on either end and has deteriorated sidewalks with weeds growing through the cracks and concrete Jersey barriers that serve as fencing. Similarly, the Montgomery bridge has sidewalks that are very overgrown, Jersey barriers for fencing, and irregular paving that allows original brick to peek out on the east and west ends of the bridge from underneath the layer of asphalt that covers the middle portion. While bridge re-engineering is a costly and long-term solution, low-cost, interim fixes can improve the experience of crossing from Brewerytown into the Park in the near-term. A team of volunteers or a vacant land maintenance crew could tackle the weeding of the sidewalks in just one morning, and a simple mural treatment, like artist Tattfoo Tan's Jersey barrier *Concrete Jungle* installation in Lower Manhattan, would add a splash of color and dramatically improve the existing concrete fencing.



Bridges in upper Brewerytown offer an opportunity to improve connectivity with Strawberry Mansion and Fairmount Park.

19 http://www.tooledesign.com/philadelphia/planDocuments.php



The Thompson Street connection to Fairmount Park should be improved for safety and better Park access.

Concrete Jungle by artist Tattfoo Tan, New York City.
Sources: www.tattfoo.com/projects and www.nytimes.com

Lastly, the most direct opportunity for connecting Brewerytown to Fairmount Park is to forge a pedestrian linkage to the Glendinning Rock Garden. This proposed connection faces many obstacles, from the existing freight rail corridor to an overgrown and underused pathway that extends under 33rd Street and empties into the Rock Garden. Currently, neighborhood youth cross the CSX tracks here, which is risky and dangerous.

The only potential linkage sits at the end of Thompson at 32nd Street where one of two possibilities exist:

- A small pedestrian bridge can be constructed to leap the rail tracks and create a seamless link to the existing pathway. This is an expensive, and therefore long-term, option.
- Alternatively, an at-grade crossing of the rail tracks can be considered as a cost-effective link. While the costs may be lower, CSX has proven to be hesitant in allowing at-grade access to riverfront locations. This option is only viable if CSX and the City can work out an agreement for ensuring pedestrian access while protecting the company from insurance liability. The at-grade rail crossing at Race Street in Center City serves as a valuable precedent for this idea.

Either alternative requires that the pedestrian link be safe and attractive. Continued development of Brewerytown Square will bring additional “eyes” to the area, transforming what is now perceived as a no-man’s land into an extension of the community. New lighting, tree pruning (to enhance visibility), and improvements and upgrades to the existing walkway are also necessary to guarantee that the linkage is actively used by community residents.

As these improvements will benefit all neighborhoods in the vicinity located east of Fairmount Park, GBCDC should collaborate on this initiative with Sharswood Civic Association, Strawberry Mansion CDC, East Park Revitalization Alliance, and Fairmount CDC.

4.7 Use Greening to Spruce Up Northern Gateways to Brewerytown

Beyond the three east-west bridges in upper Brewerytown (Oxford Street, Cecil B. Moore Avenue, and Montgomery Avenue) that link the neighborhood with Strawberry Mansion and Fairmount Park, there are two additional sites in northern Brewerytown that could be spruced up to foster improved gateways to this portion of the community:

29th Street Bridge

The 29th Street bridge is the fourth bridge in the upper reaches of Brewerytown. It too serves to bring pedestrian and automobile traffic over the rail tracks below. The north-south bridge is lengthier than its east-west counterparts, however, and has a very different feel and purpose. While Oxford, Cecil B. Moore, and Montgomery link the neighborhood with Fairmount Park, 29th Street is Brewerytown's major north-south corridor, hosting multiple bus lines and some commercial uses, and serving as a major entry and exit to the neighborhood. In its current state, the 29th Street bridge does little to announce Brewerytown's presence at the south side of the bridge, and even less to brand the neighborhood as a green community near Fairmount Park or an organized community working together for positive change.

The following improvements to the 29th Street bridge would help reinvent this key neighborhood gateway:

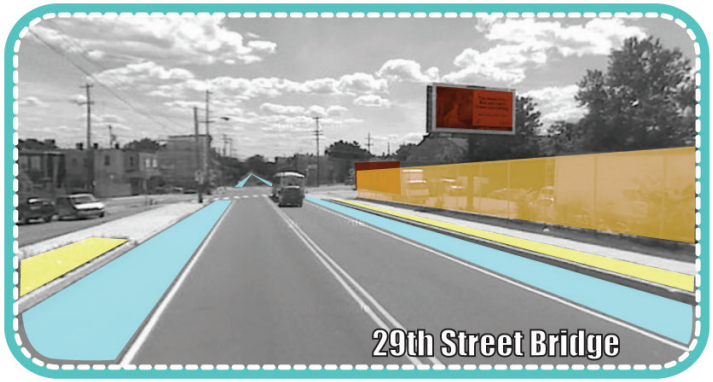
- Painted bike lanes extending from north of the bridge through Brewerytown and Fairmount would create a safer space for cyclists along this busy corridor and link residents with lower Fairmount Park and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Bike lanes would also encourage traffic to slow down by narrowing the roadway dedicated solely to cars.
- A simple striped paint treatment on the chain link fences that flank both sides of the bridge would add a splash of color in an affordable and subtle way (see photo of Poplar Street bridge, page 105).
- Signage on the Billboard or murals on the blank surfaces at Glenwood should point to the neighborhood and offer a friendly greeting -- Welcome to Brewerytown or Entering Brewerytown!
- During the growing season, the planting strips on the sidewalk must remain well kept, weeded, and mowed. Native wildflower seeds would offer a brighter ground cover during the summertime, underscoring Brewerytown's proximity to the Park and new efforts to grow greener.
- Because of the topography at this northern tip of Brewerytown, a planting strategy to introduce tall trees such as Cypress or Gingko trees at the south side of the bridge would create a big, green frame for Brewerytown - visible to all those entering or exiting.

31st and Glenwood

The triangular parcel at the intersection of 31st and Glenwood marks the other opportunity for an improved gateway at Brewerytown's northern edge. There has been some investment in this parcel - it was cleaned and greened by Westrum in conjunction with Brewerytown Square's construction. At the tip of the triangle, there is a low-lying sign that says "Welcome to Brewerytown." Several trees and a row of shrubs surround the sign. A large blank wall forms the backdrop to the grassy area.

The following simple improvements would spruce up this parcel as a more striking gateway to Brewerytown:

- The shrubs surrounding the existing sign must be pruned annually. As the photograph illustrates, new growth obstructs the sign's welcoming message.
- Sunflowers or wildflowers planted at the edges of the parcel would pick up the colors in the mural on the east side of 31st Street just south of Oxford. As the parcel directly adjacent to that mural is vacant, floral plantings in the triangular parcel should be mirrored by plantings in front of the vibrant mural, creating a true, two-sided gateway for those traveling along 31st.
- When Westrum first improved the parcel with some greening and signage, the northern tip of the sidewalk was also improved. However, the sidewalk condition deteriorates quickly as you move south along either 31st or Glenwood. While full sidewalk improvements were likely scheduled to accompany future development planned for this parcel, the uncertainty of these development plans suggest that perhaps sidewalk improvements should occur sooner than later.
- Lastly, the large blank wall at the triangle's southern edge could benefit from a simple white-washing or subtle, light-colored paint treatment. As the slope of the parcel affords natural stadium seating, this wall could be used for outdoor movie projections.



painted bike lanes
wildflowers in the planting strips
simple paint treatment on chain link fence
welcoming signage on billboard and blank walls

pruning around signage
sunflowers at parcel edges
improved sidewalks
white-washed wall

Diagrams of surface treatments to improve northern gateways to Brewerytown

4.8 Integrate Stormwater Management Practices into Streetscape Design

Stormwater management design strategies minimize the proportion of precipitation that is converted to surface runoff by maximizing the water volume that evaporates or infiltrates. Planting more trees throughout Brewerytown is one good way of increasing permeable surfaces that can help absorb rainfall, thereby lessening the burden placed on the City's aging sewer system. In some places, however, the introduction of specific tools and plantings can greatly improve the neighborhood's stormwater management capabilities – and make the community's streets more beautiful. These tools include:

Rain gardens
Rain gardens are vegetated depressions that store and infiltrate runoff.

Vegetated swales
Shallow vegetated swales simultaneously serve as drainage, infiltration, and storage devices.

Dry wells
Dry wells are aggregate-filled pits that promote infiltration into the surrounding soil.

Tree box filters
Located below grade, tree box filters provide "bioretention in a box" along road curbs.

Permeable pavements
Permeable asphalt, concrete, or paving blocks allow runoff to infiltrate into the underlying soil.

Rain gardens and swales are proposed at the intersection of 29th and Girard. See Recommendation 5.4.

Rain gardens and swales can be added to the base of buildings and within new curb bumpouts designed to calm traffic. GBCDC should work closely with the Philadelphia Water Department to introduce new bioswales and rain gardens in Brewerytown, targeting the prominent intersection of Girard and 29th Street as an initial project (see Recommendation 5.4 for more detail).

4.9 Encourage Green Development Solutions from Developers

Recommendation 3.5 focused on creating a transparent, community-based zoning review committee. To forge a green future for the community, the Zoning Committee, once active, should develop a range of guidelines to promote "low-impact development" – in other words – development that addresses stormwater runoff, protects and creates open space, and encourages the use of recycled materials.

The Brewerytown Zoning Committee should review developments with an eye toward green building and managing stormwater. The design for new and rehabilitated structures of a certain scale (10 units or more) should be encouraged at a minimum to address the following three aspects of eco-friendly design:

Stormwater Management – projects should employ Low Impact Development (LID) techniques that aim to preserve or restore predevelopment hydrology systems and water quality by introducing a series of interventions that provide hydrologic and pollution control for small, frequently occurring storms. Stormwater management techniques, described in Recommendation 4.7, should minimize stormwater runoff by maximizing the water volume that infiltrates (sinks into the soil or green roof on site) and evaporates (from the ground or plant matter).

Green Building – projects should adopt green building techniques resulting in projects that use energy and water efficiently; use renewable sources of energy, like solar and wind; use building materials that are energy efficient, have high recycled content, low toxicity, and good durability; and reduce the waste from construction, renovation, and demolition when possible.

Site Design – projects should promote walkability in Brewerytown, contributing to an environment that prioritizes the pedestrian and makes walking (and walking to transit) easier and more comfortable than driving. Where possible, parking areas should be designed with light colored, permeable paving materials to lessen the urban heat island effect and allow for stormwater absorption and filtration.

As the City of Philadelphia takes big steps toward becoming a more environmentally sounds and ecologically friendly city, new resources, guidelines, technical assistance, and programs are emerging for use by communities, residents, and investors. The Zoning Committee should look to the Greenworks Plan[20] published by Mayor's Office of Sustainability as a starting point for understanding the benefits and potential of sustainable development.

Sustainable building techniques include permeable paving, green roofs, bio-swales, recycled building materials, and solar panels.

Green affordable housing in Boston

20 http://www.phila.gov/green/greenworks/PDFs/Greenworks_OnlinePDF_FINAL.pdf

4.10 Embrace Greener Habits to Save some Green too

As Brewerytown becomes greener and builds a healthier environment at the community level with more trees, improved stormwater management, and green building expectations for new major developments, residents of all ages should also learn about ways to alter habits at the individual scale. The cumulative impact of many small decisions will help reinforce an image of Brewerytown as a green urban neighborhood adjacent to Fairmount Park while also raising awareness and increasing respect for the environment throughout the community.

Some small-scale interventions cost very little, but the perceived cost as well as the lack of knowledge about the impact and usefulness of green investments often prevent individuals from going green. The same is true for businesses which sometimes view green investments as an irrecoverable cost. But organizations like the Green Restaurant Association (www.dinegreen.com) are demonstrating that going green is also profitable.

This recommendation is intended to help community members save money and reduce waste by showing them how to thoughtfully go green and get excited about, and personally invested in, sustainability. The GBCDC should host a community meeting with presentations about a number of smart investments for going green and information about existing resources and programs to help implement a range of green basics at the individual scale. A range of green basics includes:

- **Fluorescent bulbs** – GBCDC should consider buying them in bulk directly from a distributor and offering discounts or distributing them for free to those who attend a community meeting about small scale green home improvements.

- **Composting** – Thanks to new and inexpensive equipment, urban composting is now a reality. Residents and businesses could significantly reduce the waste that goes to the landfill and reuse some of it for local gardening efforts.

- **White coating** – Green roofs are expensive on a house by house basis, but white coating flat roofs can significantly reduce energy loss and save the owners money. The GBCDC should compile a list of approved contractors to complete the work and market the improvement to property owners.

- **BioBags and Bio Paks** – For anyone concerned about plastic bags, BioBags and Bio Paks represent one step toward a solution. The West Girard Business Association could purchase these biodegradable, compostable bags and to-go food containers in bulk and sell them at a discount to local stores and restaurants. BioBags would also come in handy for waste disposal if the neighborhood opts to create a dog park.

- **Rain barrels** – Rain barrels are generally 55 to 57 gallon food grade barrels made of recycled plastic that are used to collect stormwater directly from a structure's roof gutter and store the water for later use in the garden or yard. The barrels have spigots for hose or irrigation attachments as well as overflow tubes that redirect runoff to the garden when the barrel reaches capacity. Beyond their function as a buffer between rainfall and the sewer system, rain barrels reduce internal flooding by directing stormwater away from structure foundations. They also improve plant health by providing a supply of natural, not municipally treated, water.

A selection of green basics

5 Live/Work (& Play) along West Girard

5: Live / Work (& Play) along West Girard

50% of survey respondents cited trash and litter among their top three concerns about Girard Avenue.

47% cited the limited selection of stores.

45% cited SAFETY issues at night,

& 44% cited the vacant storefronts.

Brewerytown began as an integrated community of diverse uses nestled within close proximity to one another. Even as late as the mid-20th Century, a mixture of residential, commercial and industrial uses formed the basis of each block. Since the community's decline, many of the commercial and industrial uses have been replaced by vacant land and buildings. With emerging new interest and investment in housing, the community needs to balance this growth with an emphasis on improving the commercial environment. New jobs and services are necessary to prevent Brewerytown from becoming something it has never been – a bedroom community.

This is a good time to be proactively planning for commercial corridors in Philadelphia. The Philadelphia Department of Commerce's ReStore Philadelphia Corridors initiative as well as services offered by the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) and the Enterprise Center are channeling dollars and implementation assistance to traditional commercial streets. This portion of the report is grounded in these larger trends, seeking to guide Brewerytown toward a mixed-use and vibrant future.

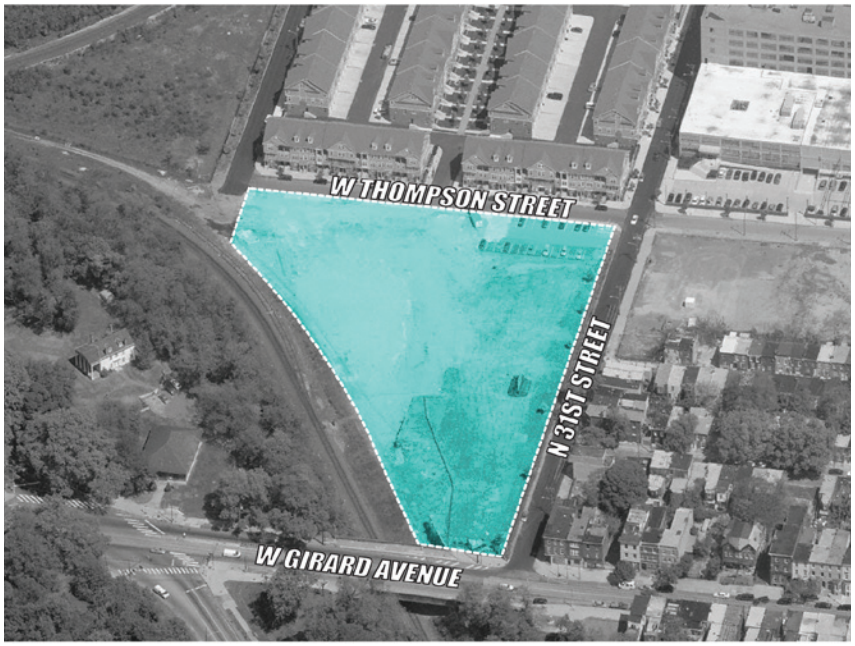
At the heart of Brewerytown's commercial renaissance is Girard Avenue. Girard Avenue has always captured the imagination and hopes of local residents. Once serving as the main street for Brewerytown, Girard Avenue has since struggled to compete with other neighborhood centers, Center City, and larger big box commercial developments. Vacancies dot the corridor on both the ground level and upper floors. The deterioration has instilled negative perceptions relating to safety, which reinforces Girard Avenue's primary role as a major physical, social and economic boundary in lower North Philadelphia.

Improved storefronts poised to welcome new businesses to West Girard Avenue

Today, West Girard Avenue is at a tipping point. What were once vacant storefronts have been redeveloped over the past few years for new restaurants and stores including Rita's Water Ice. The work by MM Partners to strategically improve and market empty storefronts coupled with new events like Art + Soul Food has generated a buzz about the street resulting in the upcoming grand opening of a new coffee shop (Mugshots) and a proposed Mexican restaurant.

A coalition of community groups have also made a shared commitment to bringing West Girard back. These groups – GBCDC, FCDC, Girard Coalition, the West Girard Business Association and the West Girard Community Council – have worked closely together to bring about targeted streetscape improvements, new lighting, and façade improvements. Coming soon is a renewed park which will serve as the Corridor's western gateway along with the Metamorphosis sculpture dedicated in 2004.

The strategies described below were developed to reinforce and augment these initiatives.



The two sites that have long been considered for development of a supermarket on West Girard

5.1 Continue to Advocate for a Supermarket and Healthy Food on West Girard

For years, Brewerytown residents have expressed a need for a supermarket in the community. For years, hopes were pinned on transforming the vacant site at 27th and Girard into a supermarket, but the size of the parcel made it difficult to attract a retailer. About four years ago, the Westrum Development Company offered their site at 31st and Girard for a potential supermarket. While that possibility generated a lot of enthusiasm, their site also presented problems in attracting a grocery due to its location, shape and limited street frontage on Girard. To help sort through the issues, a Supermarket Coalition was formed with representatives of local civic groups and CDCs to market both sites to potential grocers and serve as a community liaison between City representatives, residents, property owners and potential retailers.

Today, the potential of attracting a supermarket is very much in flux. Some grocers have expressed interest, but nothing has substantively moved forward. Complicating matters is the recent completion of the Fresh Grocer at Progress Plaza on North Broad Street, which offers shuttle service to shoppers.

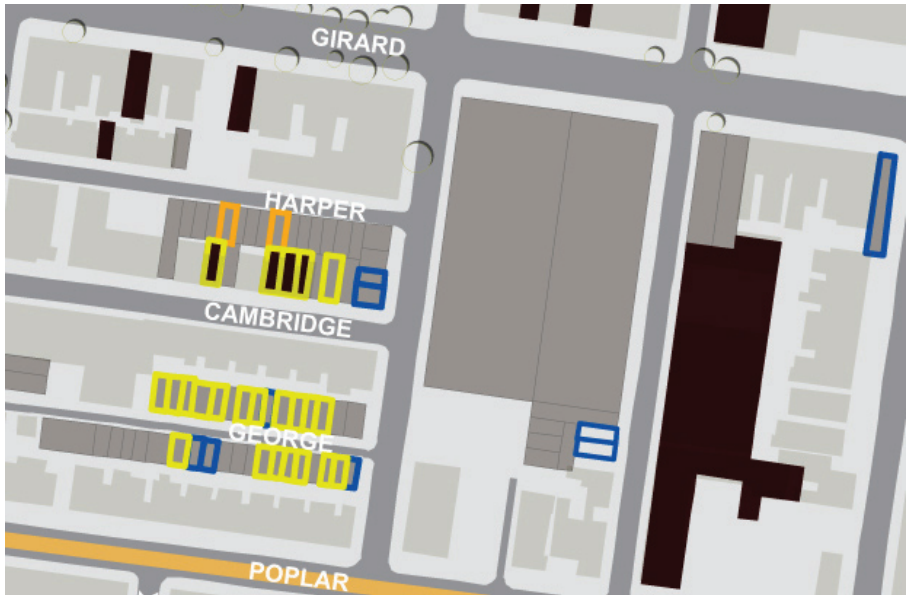
Every effort should be made to ensure that a supermarket is developed. Continuous coordination with local officials and developers will be needed by the Coalition as well as each of its individual partners including the GBCDC. At the same time, the GBCDC should also work to bring healthy food to the community by coordinating closely with the West Girard Community Council and citywide organizations like Farm to City to explore the possibility of a larger farmers market on one of these sites as an interim strategy.

5.2 Have an Achievable Back-Up Plan for Mixed Use Development at 27th and Girard

As the single largest tract of vacant land fronting on Girard Avenue, this site has garnered widespread interest from residents and politicians alike. Since successfully defeating a McDonald's proposal, the site has been actively promoted for a new supermarket. As discussions are still ongoing regarding the potential for a supermarket on the 31st and Girard parcel, the community should have a back-up plan if in fact a supermarket is developed elsewhere.

In keeping with community desires, the site should be redeveloped for a dense mix of uses. The objective is to add density, promote opportunities for residential use which will fuel added demand for retail, and sensitively provide adequate parking accessible to West Girard Avenue without being visually obtrusive. There is potential for 12,000 to 15,000 square feet of new retail facing Girard Avenue with 3 floors of residential use above resulting in approximately 50 units of housing. As indicated in the market overview completed for West Girard Avenue, potential retail uses could include a mix of the following: pharmacy, small bookstore, restaurants, clothing store, jewelry store, computer store, florist, garden center, and coffee shop. Parking for the development is proposed behind the development, accessed from 27th Street. 80 to 90 spaces could be provided to serve both the retail and residential uses.

An additional opportunity is to couple new infill development along 27th and Taney, Harper and George Street with the redevelopment of this site. The currently vacant properties along these streets could result in 39 new homes, 4 rehabilitated structures and 1 new retail spaces with two apartments above on the corner of Taney and West Girard. There has long been interest and a development plan proposed for vacant properties along George Street which was put on hold pending a decision regarding a supermarket. A mix of market-rate homes and affordable homes would help to erase this visible gash between the Fairmount and Brewerytown neighborhoods.



Existing vacancy and ownership at the 27th Street site and proposed conceptual site plan

5.3 Improve Gateway Signage to Make West Girard a Destination

West Girard Avenue is a clearly defined commercial corridor – Fairmount Park frames one end, and the Girard College Wall frames the other. However, the entrance experience from either end is confusing and chaotic. On the west, the Metamorphosis sculpture has helped to make a statement but the upcoming improvements to the small park across from 31st Street will significantly improve the experience of entering the corridor.

Proposed concept for improving the gateway toward 25th and Girard

Existing conditions at 25th and Poplar

To the east, the majority of traffic flows through the 25th and Poplar intersection. A small sign on a traffic island directs people to turn right toward West Girard Avenue. This sign, buried between traffic poles, is less visible than the sign that directs people to the Zoo. This traffic triangle should be improved with new landscaping and a visually stunning sign that welcomes people to West Girard in a graphic and playful manner. Close coordination with the Streets Department will be needed to ensure that improvements do not impede the safety of the intersection or operations of the existing traffic lights.

Proposed improvements to the intersection of 29th and Girard

Existing conditions at 29th and Girard

5.4 Make West Girard Safe and Beautiful

Clean and safe are regular slogans for commercial corridors. Residents have clearly expressed that these basic amenities are what West Girard needs to encourage activity. GBCDC, FCDC, the Girard Coalition and the West Girard Business Association have successfully lobbied for initial streetscape improvements for the corridor which included new pedestrian street lighting. The following recommendations build upon this recent success with an emphasis on additional improvements and ongoing maintenance.

Focus on the 29th and W. Girard Intersection

29th and West Girard is an important center in the community where two major streets cross. It is also a source of concern with regards to pedestrian safety. According to the Philadelphia Pedestrian and Bicycle Plan, this intersection is one of the four most dangerous intersections in the community in terms of pedestrian collisions between 1990 and 2005. New streetscape improvements should be targeted in this area to reinforce the role of this intersection and improve safety. Proposed recommendations include: introducing planted bumpouts to ease pedestrian crossings, slow traffic and help call attention to this major intersection; advocating for new Big Belly trash cans; installing new bike racks; planting new trees; improving crosswalks; and installing new signage. GBCDC and their partners should coordinate with the Philadelphia Water Department to explore the possibility of integrating raingardens into the proposed bumpouts to help manage stormwater.

Recent lighting and signage introduced along West Girard Avenue

Expand the lighting along West Girard

The new pedestrian lights set a positive tone for the corridor but additional opportunities should be explored to improve the nightscape of the Avenue. Solar LED lights should be installed in the trees to add a playful and decorative touch along West Girard. New Kensington CDC has installed these lights along Columbia Avenue. In addition, exterior LED fixtures should be explored for businesses to illuminate their sidewalk, and solar LED spotlights should be installed to highlight the Metamorphosis sculpture in the evenings.

Coordinate ongoing streetscape maintenance

There should be a continued effort to sustain and expand the scope of the streetscape improvements already implemented along West Girard. Necessary maintenance includes: annual tree pruning to improve safety along the corridor and ensure that store signage remains visible; teaching and reminding business owners to weed their sidewalks; and advocating for Big Belly solar compacting garbage cans along West Girard.

Create information display boards along West Girard Avenue

Two information display boards should be installed on West Girard Avenue to create a public space to disseminate community and retail information. The boards would serve two audiences: local residents/ business owners and visitors to the community. Information on redevelopment projects and community initiatives could be posted to keep residents and businesses informed and to entice them to become more involved in the revitalization process. A map of the neighborhood's retail offerings and a list of stores would provide visitors a way to learn more about what Brewerytown has to offer. The plan recommends locating these information boards in the improved park space on the south side of Girard at 31st and at the proposed development at 27th and Girard (Recommendation 5.2). Interim strategies for getting this information out publicly along the Avenue should explore the installation of large posters or video projections in storefront windows.

Continue to improve façades: Critical to bolstering West Girard's physical presentation is in maintaining and improving building facades. FCDC in partnership with GBCDC and the Girard Coalition have successfully improved a number of façades on the corridor. This activity should continue and include upgrades to business signage.

5.5 Reinforce the Growing Arts Scene

Years ago, a few artists took up residence in and around Brewerytown. These artists found inexpensive space and the opportunity to make a difference in a struggling community. Today, there are a growing number of artists living in the community as represented by the Art + Soul event as well as the successful Fairmount Arts Crawl which extends into Brewerytown and includes many Brewerytown artists.

The opportunity is to better integrate artists into planning, designing, and implementing public improvements along Girard Avenue thereby imprinting their talent and vision on the physical character of the corridor. To make the most of this opportunity, West Girard (and Brewerytown) will need to advocate for artist work space, coordinate marketing, and provide opportunities for artists to create and display their work publicly. Specifically, GBCDC, FCDC, the Girard Coalition and the West Girard Business Association should pursue the following:

Market the upper floors to college students and artists

Upper floor apartments above retail uses are often difficult to rent or sell to families. As rents have increased in Fairmount, there has been a steady stream of artists and Temple University students renting space along, or near Girard Avenue. The Business Association can play a key supporting role in this growing trend by working with realtors to directly target students and artists for upper floor space. A promotional flyer that lists the local arts resources and events as well as an on-line presence that provides relevant information should also be explored.

Put out a call for artists to populate participating stores with art

Existing businesses are opportunities to showcase local art. This can be done for a special day or event or for longer term arrangements. The benefit is more publicity for artists, developing a stronger connection between local businesses and artists, and as often experienced, increased patronage of local stores.

Explore opportunities to temporarily reuse vacant storefronts for art and artist workspace

When market forces are not enough to fill vacant storefronts, they often sit vacant. One to two vacant storefronts should be identified as opportunities for new artist studio space or storefront art. GBCDC, FCDC, the Girard Coalition and the West Girard Business Association should explore funding opportunities to incentivize property owners to make space available for short-term leases for this purpose until such time as a new store can be attracted to occupy the space. There are potential yet substantial benefits to this strategy. Viable businesses on West Girard that are currently deadened by empty storefronts will benefit as artists replace “For Lease” signs with original works of art and generate additional foot traffic. In addition, building owners will begin to realize a modest return on their investment (as opposed to maintaining a vacant storefront), and as traffic increases, can attract the conventional retail and service tenants for whom the spaces were originally conceived. Such mutually beneficial arrangements should be encouraged, formalized, and marketed.

Vacant storefront art exhibit on South Street by the Philadelphia Dumpster Divers, March 2009

Source: www.ravenswingstudio.com

Continue to expand the Art + Soul Food event

In addition to the Fairmount Arts Crawl, this event has the created the foundation to further establish the community as a growing scene for the local arts. Efforts should be made to coordinate “gallery” openings and public art along the corridor with this event.

Link up with Design Philadelphia and Philagrafika

Design Philadelphia and Philagrafika are recognized nationally as innovative events that promote Philadelphia’s arts and design culture. As Brewerytown further expands its arts offerings, West Girard should play a prominent role in hosting events and art installations associated with these events. Using businesses and vacant storefronts as described above would provide fertile ground for local artists to make a statement in their own backyard while promoting business activity along West Girard.

5.6 Use Paint as a Cost-Effective Branding Tool

The potential streetscape improvements described in Recommendation 5.4 are necessary but also expensive. While it would be ideal to install curb bumpouts at every intersection along West Girard similar to what is proposed for the 29th Street intersection to help improve pedestrian safety, the reality is that an alternative, and less costly, approach is necessary.

The existing no parking boxes at each intersection represented by a nondescript white "X" are opportunities to combine the intent of more aggressive streetscape recommendations with the talent and energy of artists described in Recommendation 5.5. The recommendation is to re-imagine these no parking boxes as colorful street murals designed by local artists. If coupled with basic crosswalk improvements, these new splashes of color would act as low-cost bumpouts encouraging drivers to slow down. Most importantly, each intersection along West Girard, each of which could receive a different street mural approach, would help to brand the Avenue in a unique way.

Cost-effective opportunity to brand Girard with paint using local talent.

Existing no parking, no stopping boxes on Girard.

As there are limitations to using paint on streets, this idea is intended as a pilot project and a temporary installation. Despite the limitations, this is a cost effective means to help brand and generate some buzz for West Girard and should be tested. If successful, community partners can decide whether to re-paint or further improve these spaces in the future. New Kensington CDC is currently moving forward with a street mural in Fishtown which will provide some valuable insight into the challenges of undertaking this improvement.

5.7 Expand the Activities of the Business Association

Underlying most successful business districts is a strong business association that undertakes coordinated improvements and marketing and provides useful information specific to the needs of each business. The West Girard Business Association has long advocated for improved business activity along West Girard Avenue. With the recent momentum stemming from new businesses and events, there is a renewed opportunity to reinforce the activities of the Business Association and help new and old businesses network together for a stronger retail corridor. Suggested activities include:

Develop a directory of local businesses

A comprehensive directory of local businesses would be useful to residents, old and new. The directory, coupled with joint marketing efforts, would help to form the identity of the West Girard Avenue corridor. Maps should be included that identify all places of business and all pertinent information for each business. Advertising of local business is one method of offsetting the cost of printing and distribution. All materials should also be posted on-line.

Coordinate marketing efforts among local businesses

Businesses located on West Girard Avenue have much to be gained by coordinating marketing efforts. A coordinated effort could lead to cost savings and create an identity specific to the corridor, which will be a key step in its revitalization. The Girard Avenue Business Association and the Girard Coalition need to take the lead in this regard by bringing business owners together and developing promotional packages. The Business Association should also reach out to major institutional partners in the area including the Philadelphia Zoo and Girard College to pursue joint marketing initiatives.

Assist existing businesses with merchandising and window displays

Outside expertise is needed to work with the Business Association and their partners to reach out to existing businesses and assist them with merchandising and window displays. A clean and well designed window display will help make the corridor more attractive to shoppers. In this spirit, the FCDC has formed a partnership with the Enterprise Center which has chosen West Girard as the only commercial corridor outside of West Philadelphia where it will direct technical support and resources. FCDC and the Enterprise Center have already held their first workshop for businesses which attracted eight local owners. This partnership should be reinforced and marketed to entice other businesses to participate.

Create a monthly Brewerytown networking forum

A monthly networking forum for business owners could lead to a more cohesive vision for West Girard Avenue. Simply getting multiple business owners together to meet one another is an important first step towards creating better relations along the corridor.