

## CHAPTER 2: EXISTING CONDITIONS, OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

### HISTORY

Chinatown has long been one of Philadelphia's most well established and vibrant neighborhoods. The origin of the community dates to just after the Civil War when the first Chinese-owned business, a laundry opened by Lee Fong at 913 Race Street, was established in 1870. Today, Chinatown is a bustling and diverse neighborhood, home to a growing population of over 4000 residents and a variety of business and commercial enterprises. It is important to note that the success of Chinatown significantly predates the much-heralded renaissance of neighboring Center City Philadelphia. While Center City has experienced a dramatic increase in residential population in recent years, Chinatown, through the leadership of the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation, has a 20 year track record of creating new residential developments and housing opportunities.

Chief among the many factors contributing to the success and prosperity of Chinatown is strong cultural and community bonds and impressive community leadership. As has often been the case in urban neighborhoods, formal community leadership emerged in 1966 in response to a proposed highway project, the Vine Street Expressway, which threatened the destruction of highly valued community assets, including the Holy Redeemer Church – an important community and social focal point.

Since the late 60s, Chinatown has been affected by a series of urban renewal and redevelopment projects, including the development of an enclosed urban shopping mall in the 1980s: Gallery I and Gallery II; the construction of an expressway ramp at 9th Street; the development



*The Friendship Arch at 10th & Arch Streets*

of Pennsylvania Convention Center in the 1990s (for which a significant expansion is currently planned); and, a proposed Federal prison at 8th and Callowhill Streets (ultimately defeated). Most recently, a proposal for a baseball stadium in Chinatown North/Callowhill (ultimately defeated) galvanized the community in opposition and provided new impetus for developing this comprehensive plan for the future of the area.

The Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation (PCDC) estimates that approximately 25% of Chinatown's land area, housing and commercial stock has been lost to urban redevelopment projects. More recently, new trends and development initiatives, such as the overall economic revival of Center City, the increasing demand for housing in Center City, the proposed expansion of the Convention Center, and the redevelopment of Independence Mall present new challenges as well as opportunities for Chinatown.

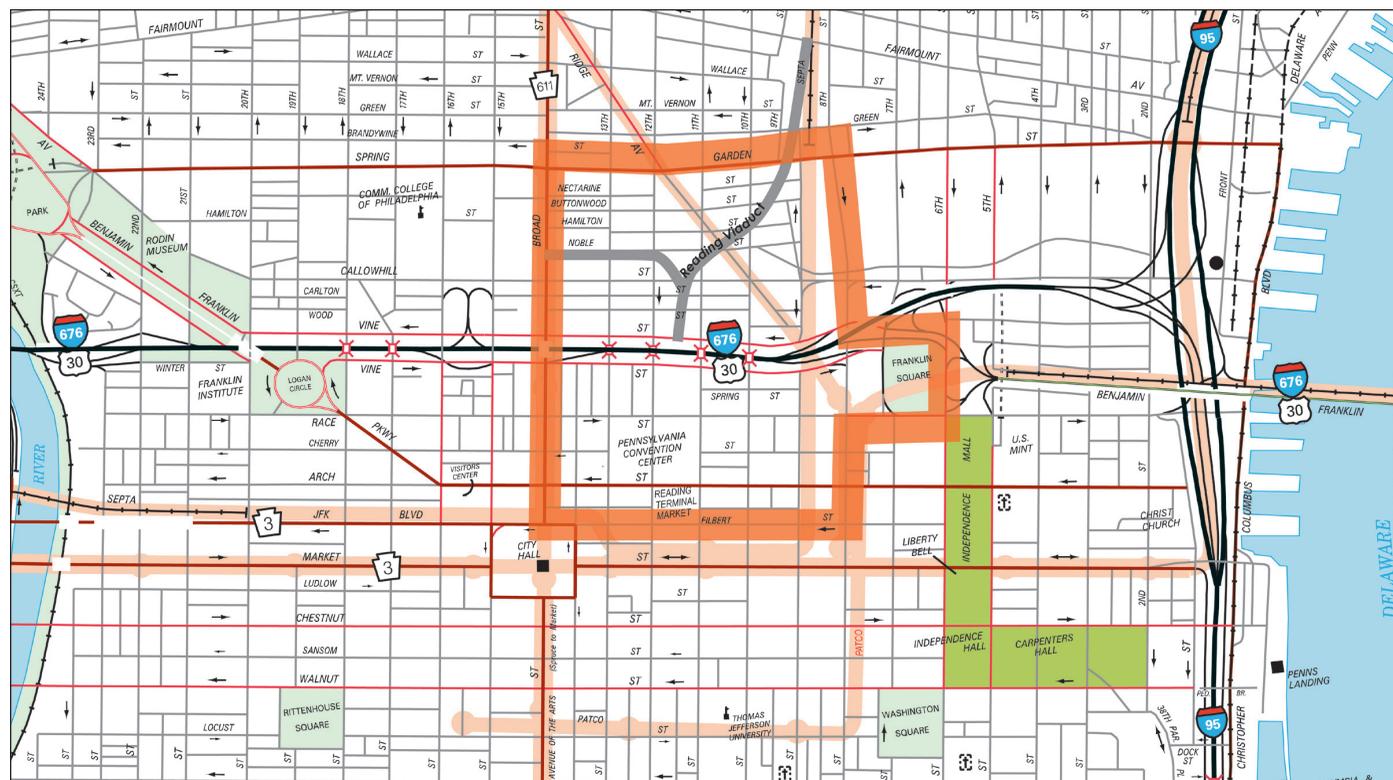
The cultural bonds that have helped to shape and sustain Chinatown over the years extend beyond the immediate neighborhood and today Chinatown serves as the social and cultural heart of a much larger regional Asian-American community. Furthermore, Chinatown continues to perform a vital role as an important entry point for new Asian immigrants to United States. Thus, Chinatown is simultaneously a vibrant local neighborhood, a regional hub, and an international destination. Together, these many and overlapping roles create tremendous demand for new housing, business and employment opportunities. To accommodate the many demands placed upon Chinatown, and to maintain Chinatown's unique role in the city and region as an ethnic and cultural center, a compelling strategic vision for the future of Philadelphia's premier international neighborhood must be developed.

## STUDY AREA LOCATION, BOUNDARIES AND EDGES, MAJOR PHYSICAL FEATURES, AND CONDITIONS

### STUDY AREA BOUNDARIES

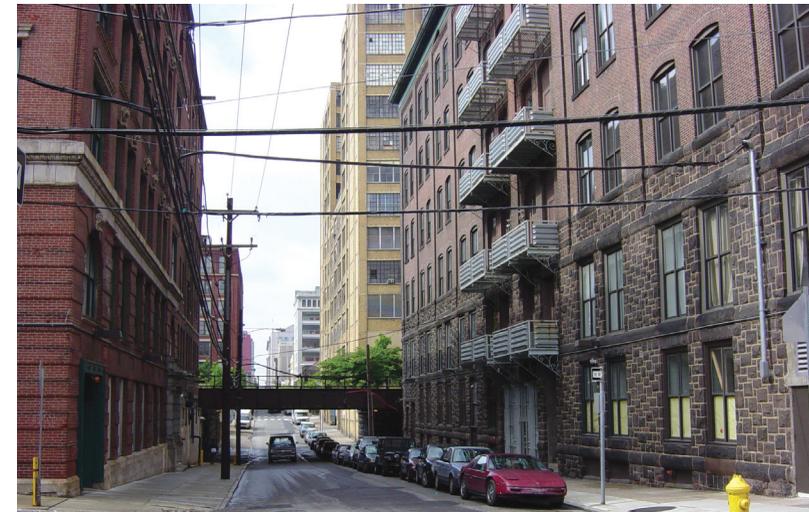
The traditional boundaries of Chinatown extend from 8th Street west to 13th Street and from Filbert Street north to Callowhill Street. For purposes of this planning effort, a study area boundary somewhat larger than the traditional boundaries of the neighborhood is being utilized. The traditional boundaries of the neighborhood have been extended westward to include Broad Street, northward to include Spring Garden Street (including properties on the north side of Spring Garden) and below the Vine Street Expressway, the study area boundary has been extended to Franklin Square at 6th Street. The total area of the neighborhood is approximately 0.38 square miles or roughly 244 acres.

### Philadelphia Neighborhood Plan: Chinatown — Context Map



### THE CALLOWHILL NEIGHBORHOOD

As a result of extending the neighborhood boundaries west to Broad Street and north to Spring Garden Street, the study also includes Callowhill Neighborhood. The non-profit, incorporated Callowhill Neighborhood Association was formed in 2000 after the defeat of the baseball stadium plan. CNA members worked closely with members of the Chinatown community and concerned citizens citywide in that effort. CNA, a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation is a community organization that is dedicated to neighborhood improvement in the Callowhill community. It aims to promote a cohesive community of residents, businesses and institutions while retaining the diversity and character of the area. CNA aspires to enhance the quality of life for all members of the community, and its immediate environs, a better place to live, work, and pursue educational, cultural and recreational activities through cooperative actions of the residents.



*The Callowhill Loft District (13th Street)*



*The Callowhill Loft District*

Reflecting the growing popularity of Center City and the resurgence nationally of interest in urban living, Callowhill now has a critical mass of residents and is developing a unique, and exciting neighborhood that overlaps with Chinatown North in the area north of Vine Street. The Callowhill Neighborhood Association was formed to provide leadership and a focus for community activities and improvement.

*Situation map showing the location of Chinatown in Center City Philadelphia*