

of the existing building presents a significant physical barrier between Chinatown and Franklin Square, leaving Chinatown without direct physical or visual access to this much needed park space with a long overlooked but invaluable legacy from Philadelphia's founder. The reuse and repopulation of Metropolitan Hospital should contribute to activating the square.

Directly adjacent to Franklin Square is the new National Constitution Center – the capstone of the redevelopment of Independence Mall. Projected to attract 1 million visitors a year, the National Constitution Center together with the recently completed Independence Mall Gateway Visitor Center, and the new Liberty Bell pavilion represent a tremendous economic development opportunity for Chinatown. However, as with Market Street, there are extremely poor visual and physical connections between Independence Mall and Chinatown, despite their proximity.

Containing approximately 1.3 million square feet of floor area, the mammoth Pennsylvania Convention Center consumes practically the entire southwestern quadrant of the core of Chinatown, stretching currently from 11th Street to 13th Street, with a planned expansion to Broad Street. Although not related to the Convention Center, the Criminal Justice Center is also a major



Hing Wah Yuen development for first time home-buyers

physical presence in this part of the study area. Flanked by the Convention Center to the west and Independence Mall to the east, Chinatown is well positioned to function as a linkage between these two national tourist destinations.

The historic core of Chinatown is effectively hemmed in on all sides, except perhaps to the north. Chinatown North/Callowhill, across the wide divide of the Vine Street Expressway appears to represent the most logical direction for a significant expansion of Chinatown. A series of significant footholds have already been gained by the community in this area, including the development of 51 housing units on the north side of Vine Street between 8th and 9th Streets to be shortly joined by a second phase. Perhaps most symbolically of all, the Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation's offices are now located on the north side of the Expressway, next to Holy Redeemer Church – the very flashpoint that nearly 40 years ago galvanized Chinatown residents into coordinated action to defend their neighborhood. Within the area north of Vine Street, the conversion of former industrial buildings to loft housing has been a part of an emerging new residential neighborhood, Callowhill, that overlaps Chinatown North.

MAJOR PHYSICAL FEATURES

The physical feature that most significantly defines and, unfortunately, divides Chinatown is the Vine Street Expressway. The Vine Street Expressway is a depressed limited access arterial that links Interstate I-95 along Philadelphia's Delaware riverfront to the Schuylkill Expressway on the west side of Center City. The traditionally recognized core of Chinatown is located south of the expressway and the area north of expressway includes Chinatown North and the Callowhill neighborhood. With only four crossings within the boundaries of the study area, the expressway



The Vine Street Expressway cuts a wide swath through Chinatown

represents a substantial barrier to community connectivity. Compounding the division caused by the canyon-like character of the highway, the adjoining one-way surface streets (Vine Street Local) are designed and function more like expressway ramps than city streets.

A recent study funded by the William Penn Foundation and undertaken by the Project for Public Spaces and the Center City District identified a range of both short term and longer-term physical improvements designed to reduce the barrier effect of the expressway. These recommendations were revisited during this study



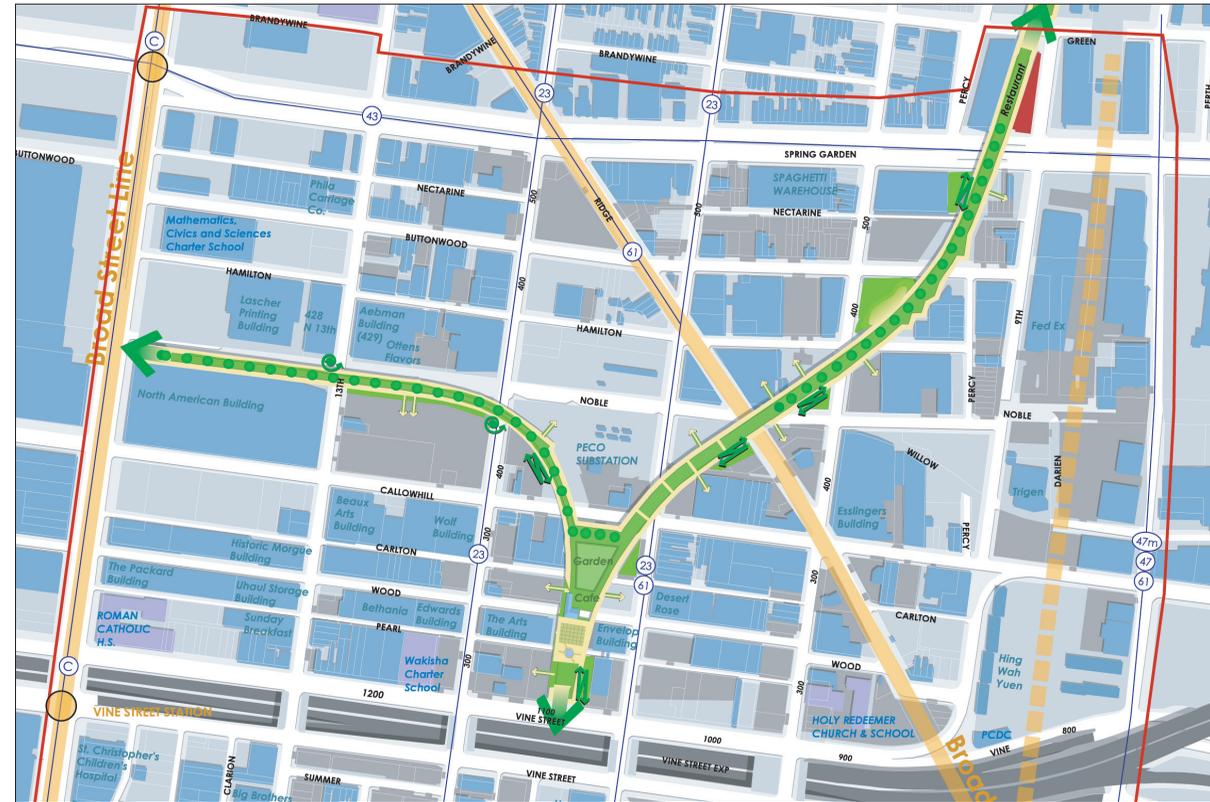
The Reading Railroad Viaduct



View of the Center City skyline from the Reading Railroad viaduct

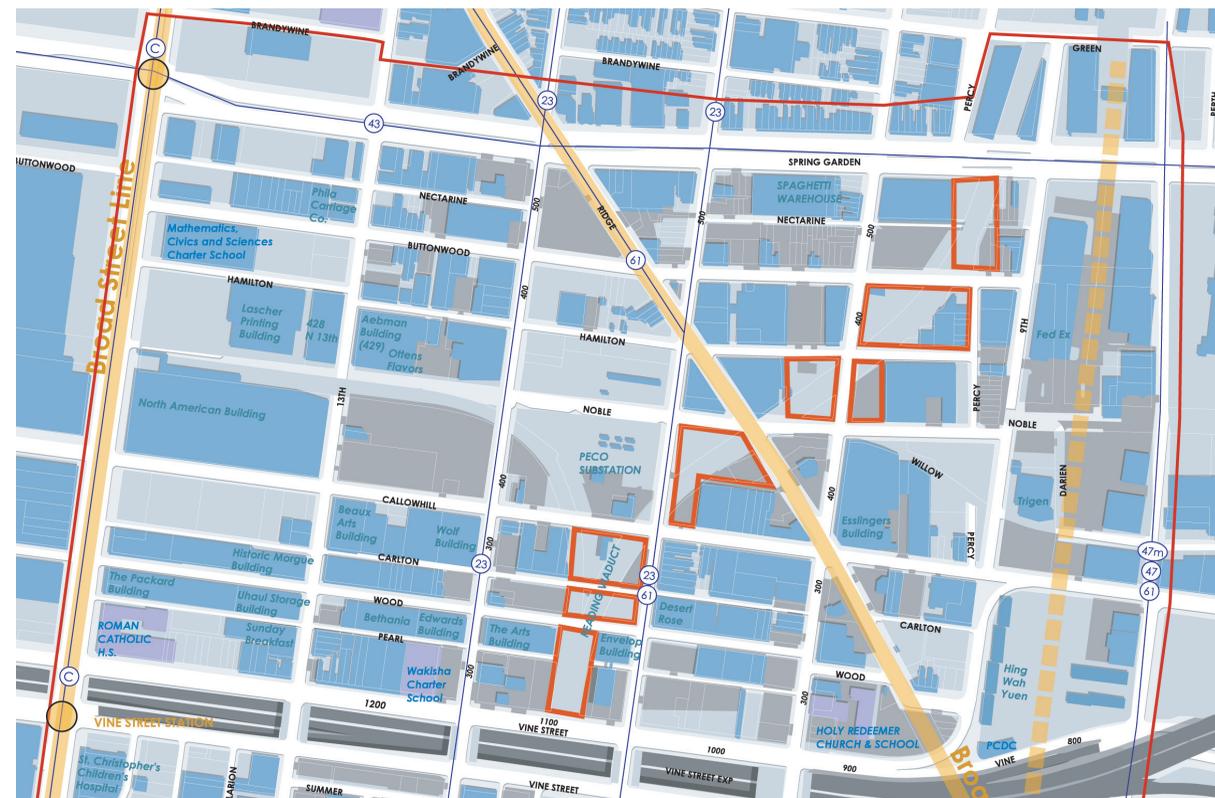
and incorporated into the overall community development strategy and recommendations.

Another important and distinctive physical feature of the study area is the former Reading Railroad viaduct. Constructed at the turn of the last century, the viaduct originally carried rail traffic across Vine Street to the Reading Terminal, located at 12th and Market Streets. The portion of the viaduct between Vine Street and the Reading Terminal was removed during the development of the Pennsylvania Convention Center. Presently the viaduct begins at Vine Street Local (westbound) with two spurs diverging below Callowhill Street, one sweeping westward for one third mile and terminating at Broad Street, the other extending two thirds of a mile northward and terminating at 9th and Brown Street adjacent to the East Poplar Playground. The Broad Street spur is roughly aligned with Noble Street and is not particularly disruptive of the underlying block and lot pattern of the neighborhood. The northern spur, however, cuts diagonally through the center of Chinatown North, creating a chain of irregularly shaped parcels.



Map showing the course of the Reading Railroad viaduct and possible reuse as a linear park

Map showing possible development sites that would be made available if the viaduct is removed



The viaduct is constructed of massive masonry walls with steel trestles bridging over local streets. Although suffering from a lack of maintenance, the viaduct is an impressive artifact of Philadelphia's industrial heritage and a visually interesting physical component of the urban fabric. Moreover, as an elevated one-mile long viewing platform, the viaduct offers extensive vistas of the surrounding landscape especially of Center City and could potentially be redeveloped as a linear park and recreation facility. Buildings still abut the structure such as the former industrial building located at Ridge and Noble Streets and the vacant Spring Garden Railroad Station building complete with an intact passenger platform.

Another major physical feature in the study area is the PECO Energy electric sub-station. Nestled in the split between the two spurs of the viaduct the substation property occupies an entire city block, from 11th Street to 12th Street, Callowhill to Hamilton, although actual equipment and operations appear to be limited to little more than half of the site. While the PECO property is fairly clean and well maintained, the site is not screened and large scale transformers and other equipment are in full view and very unsightly. The PECO site is not conducive to community revitalization and seriously diminishes the attractiveness of adjoining areas. The PECO substation, together with the barrier caused by the expressway, and the viaduct, represent the major physical challenges to northward expansion and community development in Chinatown North/Callowhill.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS AND AESTHETICS

Although most structures in Chinatown and Callowhill are in good condition and well-maintained, pedestrian amenities, streetscaping,

parks and public spaces are generally lacking. Although sidewalks exist throughout the neighborhood, they are often in poor condition and in some cases somewhat narrow, limiting opportunities for outside dining or outdoor markets. The lack of loading areas often results in truck delivery occurring on sidewalks, which together with occasional curbside retail further reduces the available pedestrian passage way. Uncontrolled and unsightly trash and refuse storage along streets and alleys further diminishes the quality of the pedestrian environment.

There is evidence of prior streetscaping efforts, including special pavement marking and some tree planting, however, these improvements have not been well maintained and do not appear to have a significant visual impact. Additionally, there is no pedestrian-oriented lighting or way finding system in Chinatown. A comprehensive streetscape improvement, including pedestrian lighting and way finding appears warranted. Chinatown does contain two significant and architecturally unique streetscape elements, the impressive Chinese Friendship gate at 10th and Arch Streets and noise walls along Vine Street that incorporate Chinese "Shou" medallions and calligraphy panels. These elements, especially the Friendship Gate (the first authentic gate built in the United States by artisans from China) could be adapted and used as models to identify gateways into Chinatown and reinforce the boundaries of the neighborhood.

As to be expected in an area transitioning



Sidewalks are narrow and in poor condition



Wholesalers in Chinatown North



Typical streetscape in Chinatown North

Due to its proximity to Broad Street, the presence of a large number of residents, and the less-obtrusive alignment of the viaduct in this area, overall conditions in the western area of the Callowhill neighborhood appear to be somewhat better. However, even here, pedestrian amenities are generally poor or entirely absent. It appears that to properly guide the redevelopment of Chinatown North/Callowhill, urban design guidelines will be necessary to identify which buildings should be preserved and restored and the general character, function, design, and configuration of new structures and in-fill development. Urban design guidelines for Chinatown North/Callowhill should also identify the location and general design of new parks and public spaces as well as streetscape improvements and way finding systems.

from industrial to other land uses, conditions in Chinatown North/Callowhill vary widely, from adequate to hostile, including vacant land, derelict buildings, scattered debris, trash and solid waste, and outdoor commercial storage and operations (see “Potential Environmental Constraints” below for more detailed information). Building types also vary widely from historic loft structures to nondescript warehouses and commercial buildings. The streetscape in Chinatown North/Callowhill, where it exists, is generally dilapidated with broken curbs and sidewalks, inadequate lighting, and few street trees. The Reading Viaduct, which is potentially a very interesting and visually compelling component of the urban fabric is generally derelict, overgrown and not maintained. The portions of streets that pass beneath the viaduct are especially gloomy and unattractive and subject to water leakage from the structure above. Overall, pedestrians tend to feel unsafe in this environment, especially at night.