

OTTO U. HOFMANN
WELDER

II. OVERVIEW OF EXISTING CONDITIONS



Ice skating in Hunting Park
Source: Ayuda, Flickr

A. HISTORY AND CONTEXT

GROWTH AND INDUSTRY

The Hunting Park planning area actually covers two neighborhoods: Hunting Park to the west and Feltonville to the east. Both neighborhoods have rich histories steeped in the rise and decline of North Philadelphia as an industrial powerhouse. Throughout periods of economic prosperity and poverty, the residents of Hunting Park and Feltonville have been shown to be endlessly resilient and active in the work of re-imagining their personal futures, as well as that of their environment.

The neighborhood of Hunting Park owes name to the 87-acre park that is its centerpiece. This park was once the property of James Logan, the secretary of Pennsylvania’s founder, William Penn.¹ It also served as the country’s first trotting track, but was later converted to a pleasure park, due to gambling restrictions set in law by 1854.² Along with James Logan, notable figures like Philadelphia Mayor James Hugh Joseph Tate and celebrated actress Grace Kelly resided in

Hunting Park at certain points.³ Feltonville, prior to urbanization, was lush, rolling agricultural land just outside Philadelphia’s boundary. By 1890, the small town that emerged was called Wyoming Village. Later, the neighborhood began to be identified as Feltonville.

During the late 19th century and into the Post-War era, North Philadelphia was the “Workshop of the World” and was home to an industrial manufacturing cluster that produced everything from car parts to packaged pastries. The Proctor Electric Company produced household appliances near the intersection of Hunting Park Avenue and American Street, and the Philadelphia Thermometer Company was based at Cayuga and 6th Street in Hunting Park.

Important transportation and health institutions were also located in study area. Where Thomas Edison High School sits now was once home to the Philadelphia Hospital of Contagious Disease, which during its time, was the largest hospital for contagious diseases in the world.⁴ The Philadelphia Transportation Company,

1 Carl Dahlgren. 1854 – Hunting Park – 1999. Friends of Hunting Park. <http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze286rj/HuntingPark/index.htm>. Website. Accessed on February 17, 2012.

2 Carl Dahlgren. 1854 – Hunting Park – 1999. Friends of Hunting Park. <http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze286rj/HuntingPark/index.htm>. Website. Accessed on February 17, 2012.

3 Joshua McAdams. Hunting Park: A History of Working Together. Philadelphia Neighborhoods. www.sct.temple.edu. Website. Accessed on February 17, 2012.

4 Reading Eagle. Hospital for Contagious Diseases Recommended. March 7, 1935



Left to right: Proctor Electric manufactured appliances at its factory in Hunting Park, the Philadelphia Transportation Company, SEPTA's predecessor, had its shop on Wyoming Avenue, a view of businesses on 5th Street (Source left to right: <http://www.toaster.org/proctor45.html>, <http://rides.webshot.com>, <http://phillyhistory.org>)

a predecessor to SEPTA and on the site that SEPTA now occupies, desegregated transit labor during the Philadelphia Transit Strike in 1944.⁵ Passengers and goods were transported from North Philadelphia to Reading, Pennsylvania along the Bethlehem Branch of the Reading Company Railroad, which ran parallel to North 5th Street.

The economic boom in the Post-War years prior to the mid 1960s began an evolution in the make-up of the population in these two neighborhoods. Initially, Hunting Park and Feltonville were comprised of Polish and Italian immigrants.⁶ Lured by employment opportunities and better housing, the African-American and Hispanic population, primarily from Puerto Rico⁷ and Colombia,⁸ began to grow

5 Allan M. Winkler. The Philadelphia Transit Strike of 1944 from *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 59, No. 1 (Jun., 1972), pp.73.

6 Carl Dahlgren. 1854 – Hunting Park – 1999. Friends of Hunting Park. <http://members.bellatlantic.net/~vze286rj/HuntingPark/index.htm>. Website. Accessed on February 17, 2012.

7 The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Latino Philadelphia at a Glance. www.hsp.org.

8 Marisa Casellas. *El Barrio: Latino Relationships in North Philadelphia and Impacts on Puerto Rican Businesses*. University of Pennsylvania. 2007. pp. 8

between the 1950s and 1970s. These areas were racially integrated in a city where neighborhoods had long been demarcated by race. However, as soon as these new groups relocated here, economic opportunity would begin to decline.

A CHANGE IN FORTUNES

The decentralization of American manufacturing that began in the early 1960s left an indelible mark on Hunting Park and Feltonville. Manufacturing firms like Proctor Electric began moving their operations outside of North Philadelphia to more optimal profit-maximizing locations in the suburbs and overseas. This left residents who had worked at these firms with diminished employment opportunities and the hope for a better life amongst the newly migrating populations was brought into question.

Seeking to stem the emergent decline, the Rizzo Administration sought federal funding from HUD to implement an economic development plan for portions of Hunting Park.⁹ But Rizzo's plans were unexpectedly thwarted by both HUD and Hunting Park residents. Initially, HUD held back the requested \$18 million community development block grant citing the administration's "poor record in

9 Walter F. Naedele. City in Peril of Losing \$18 Million From HUD. *Philadelphia Bulletin*. January 23, 1978.



Mayor Nutter at the Grand Opening of the Esperanza Health Center on December 1, 2011. Source: Esperanza Health Center.



“If we work together, we will build a better community and strong community in all the areas.” - resident vision



Esperanza Academy opened in 2004. Source: Esperanza.



A mural sponsored by Ayuda commemorating the founders of the Hunting Park Community Garden: Andy, Jeff and Luis.

housing the poor and minorities.”¹⁰ Black, white, and Hispanic residents believed that the administration’s plan was too narrow in scope and should deal with deteriorating housing stock evenly across the neighborhood.¹¹ While the Rizzo Administration eventually obtained funding, to the chagrin of residents, it was primarily used to purchase vacated industrial facilities with the intent of selling them to private interests. The concerns of the majority of Hunting Park residents - employment and housing rehabilitation - were left unresolved.

Feltonville saw a surge in juvenile delinquency during the early- to mid-1970s. Reports of vandalism of storefronts and homes stoked fear and left many wondering if they should look elsewhere for a safe living environment.¹² In the vacuum created by decreased economic opportunity, racial animosity began to arise and culminated in the tragic firebombing of a Puerto Rican family’s home by two white men during the fall of 1975, which shook Feltonville to its core.¹³ The once uniquely integrated neighborhood was changing overnight, as white middle-class residents began to move to other sections of the city.

By the 1980s, both neighborhoods were still reeling from industrial disinvestment and economic isolation. Poor educational and employment opportunities, drugs and crime, and deteriorating housing conditions threatened to turn once vibrant communities into places of fear and neglect. But, residents and community groups would not let that happen, they began to speak out and advocate for the betterment of their neighborhoods.

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

In 1987, Esperanza emerged as a strong voice against drugs and violence in the Hispanic community of North Philadelphia.¹⁴ Since its inception, Esperanza has supported lower-income residents with educational, housing, and workforce programs. Esperanza has also set its sights on strengthening commercial development in Hunting Park, particularly around the North 5th Street Corridor. In 1992, the Spirit and Truth Fellowship Church created the Reese Street Community

10 Walter F. Naedele. City in Peril of Losing \$18 Million From HUD. Philadelphia Bulletin. January 23, 1978.

11 David Kushma. Hunting Park Battles Plan For ‘Narrow’ Renewal Site. Philadelphia Bulletin. May 26, 1977

12 Larry McMullen. Feltonville: Broken Glass – and People. Philadelphia Daily News. September 18, 1974.

13 Joe Davision. Hate, Fear Stalk Feltonville: Who Is Next? Minority Asks. Philadelphia Bulletin. October 12, 1975

14 Esperanza. About Us. <http://www.esperanza.us>. Website. Accessed on February 24, 2012

Center to address the needs of poor families and children in Hunting Park.¹⁵ In 1997, the name of the center was changed to Ayuda Community Center. In 2009, Hunting Park United was founded as a resident-driven effort to revitalize Hunting Park and strengthen the community. More recently, in December of 2011, Esperanza Health Center celebrated the opening of its new Hunting Park Health and Wellness Center. These are just a few of the many organizations located in the planning area, who are committed to resolving the legacy of economic disinvestment and social isolation that began half a century ago. Great gains have been made and are apparent in the pride of residents in their homes and blocks, and the new investment that is changing the neighborhoods for the better.

B. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES DRIVING THE PLAN

As the details in this plan attest, there are many assets upon which the community in Hunting Park can build. From attractive and well-kept residential blocks with on-the-ground leadership in place, to strong neighborhood-oriented businesses and larger, good-neighbor industries based here and employing community residents, to community-based institutions offering services to residents, Hunting Park is resourceful and well-positioned as it continues to evolve and grow. These conditions notwithstanding, there are some real challenges and opportunities emerging and illustrated throughout this report that, left unattended, will only constrain Hunting Park’s growth and maturation and limit its ability to strengthen what resident surveys, focus group discussions and stakeholder interviews suggest is a neighborhood with both a clear sense of identity and place and an abiding sense of community.

The primary issues, needs and priorities playing out here and that present themselves as opportunities to be embraced are introduced in the next section and detailed throughout the report. Expanding access to education and employment, while simultaneously promoting systems that foster healthy environments and people are essential elements to establishing sustainable and equitable neighborhoods; this plan acts as a road map helping guide residents to these goals. With time and commitment, many of the great gains initiated by community groups and residents, will be extended to every single resident of this area.

15 Ayuda Community Center. History. <http://www.ayudacc.org/about/history/>. Website. Accessed on February 24, 2012.

C. COMMUNITY AT-A-GLANCE

Demographic Profile

POPULATION, RACE AND ETHNICITY

The study area population grew 4% between 2000 and 2010, a faster rate than the city as a whole. This growth trend is mirrored in the responses to the Community Survey, where over half of the respondents had moved to the neighborhood in the last 10 years. The racial and ethnic composition has remained fairly constant over the last 20 years with the neighborhood retaining its strong Hispanic character. Situated just north of Centro d'Oro, the heart of the city's Hispanic community, 65% of the residents in the study area identified as Hispanic in the 2010 US Census, compared to 12% for the city as a whole. The US Census also showed approximately 22% of residents identifying racially as White, 33% as Black, or African-American, 38% as Other, and the remaining 7% as multiracial.

AGE AND GENDER

The study area is home to a considerable concentration of young people, with nearly 34% of its residents under the age of 18, while the city's total youth body is only 22.5%. People over the age of 65 only make up 6% of study area residents, half of the senior population of the city.

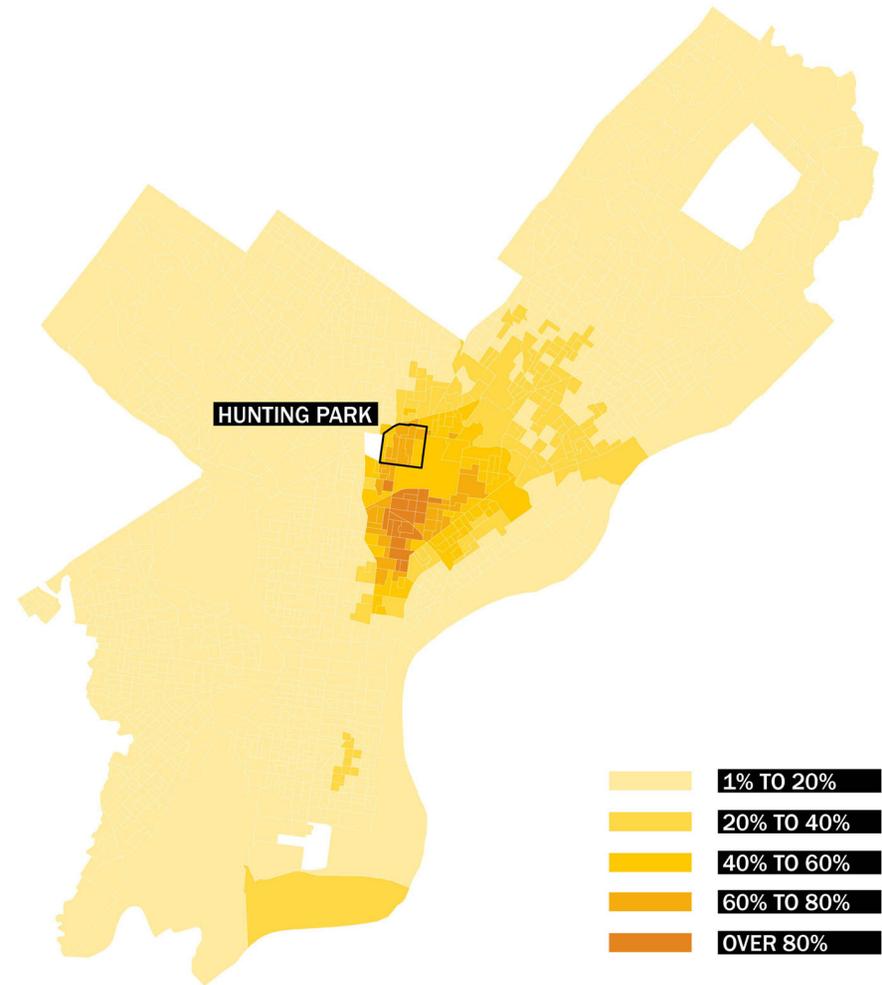


Fig. 3 Distribution of Hispanic population in Philadelphia, 2010

Source: U.S. Census Summary File 1 (2010)

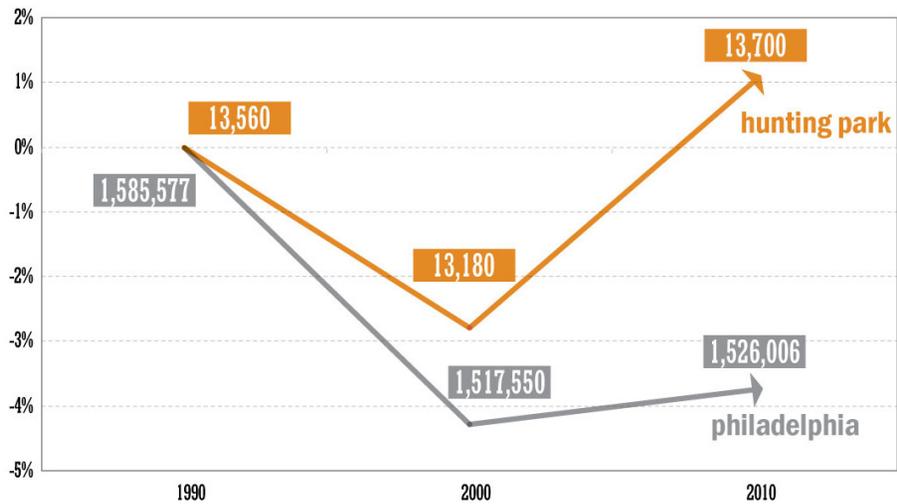


Fig. 4 Population change, 1990-2010
 Source: U.S. Census Summary File 1 (1990, 2000, 2010)

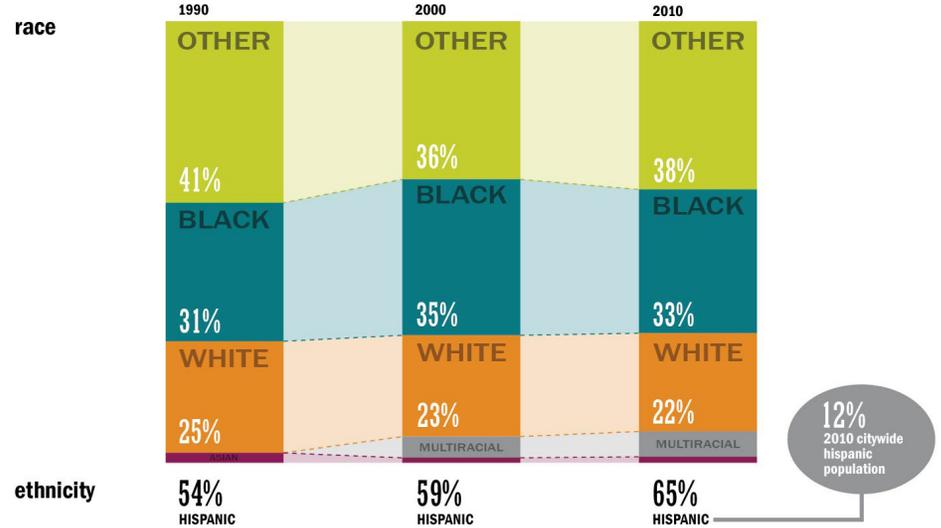


Fig. 5 Race and ethnicity, 1990-2010
 Source: U.S. Census Summary File 1 (1990, 2000, 2010)

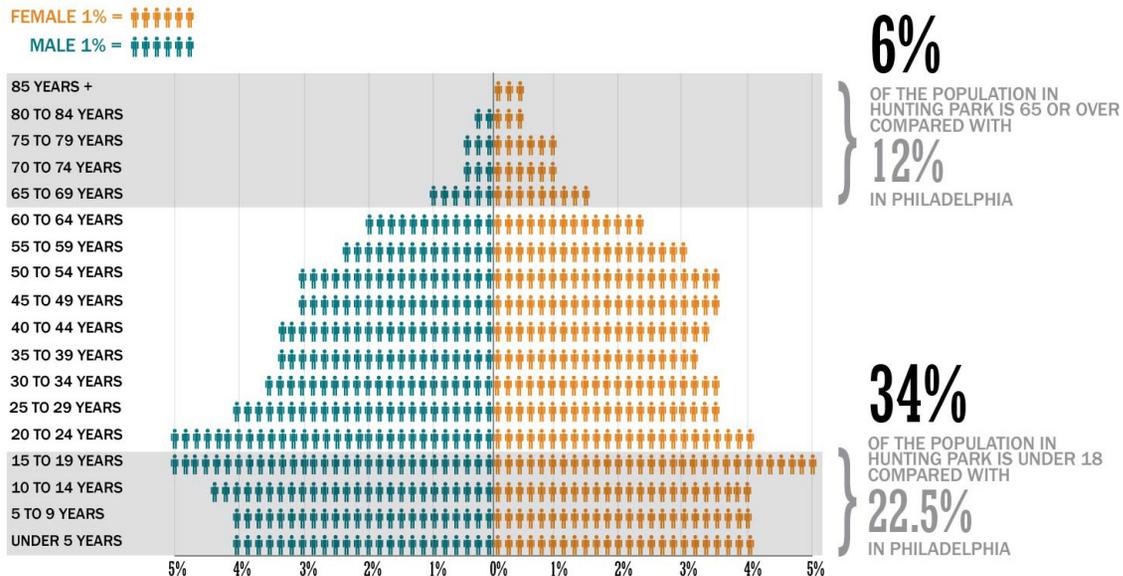


Fig. 6 Age distribution by sex, 2010
 Source: U.S. Census Summary File 1 (2010)



2010 SCHOOL PERFORMANCE INDEX (OVERALL RANKING)

TOP 10%

1 MCCLURE

2

3 CAYUGA

4

5

6

7 FELTONVILLE ARTS AND SCIENCE

8

9 OLNEY EAST

10

CLEMENTE OLNEY WEST

BOTTOM 10%

Fig. 7 School catchment map
Source: Philadelphia School District

EDUCATION

There are a number of schools and educational institutions within the study area. However, this does not lead to inherent academic success for the area's children. Various social and economic factors and parental engagement at all educational levels (pre-k, primary, and secondary) factor into low graduation and achievement rates. While the public elementary schools, Cayuga and McClure, rank high in the 2010 school performance index, by middle school, the rankings drop to the lowest third. Graduation rates in 2010 for the public high schools serving the study area - Olney East (38%) and Olney West (41%) - were markedly lower than the citywide average of 58%. Several charter and private schools operate in the study area, and have had a positive impact on educational choice and performance.

EMPLOYMENT AND INCOME

Most of the employed residents of the study area work within the manufacturing (14%) or the health care/social assistance sector (22%), while another 36% are employed in various service sectors. Institutional and industrial employers dominate the landscape within the study area. Yet, 60% of the employers in the study area employ less than 10 employees, meaning most residents work outside the study area, incurring costs that restrict their use of time and money in order to commute to their employer by car or transit.

Community residents are making 45% less than the city median income; between 2005 and 2009, the median income of residents in the study area was \$20,014, while the median income of Philadelphia was \$36,339. This coupled with transportation and housing costs, means that many households in the study area are struggling to make ends meet.

RESIDENT PERCEPTIONS/QUALITY OF LIFE

Most residents expressed satisfaction with living in the community and believe that it is a relatively safe place with a strong sense of community. Nevertheless, they do acknowledge the existence of pockets of criminal activity, and are concerned about the negative impact this has on the quality of life of law-abiding residents who live nearby. Residents asked to rate different aspects of the community ranked access to transportation, the friendliness of neighbors and the variety of goods and services available the highest, while safety, cleanliness and the physical condition of the public realm ranked the lowest.

estimated percent of people age 16 years or older who are employed

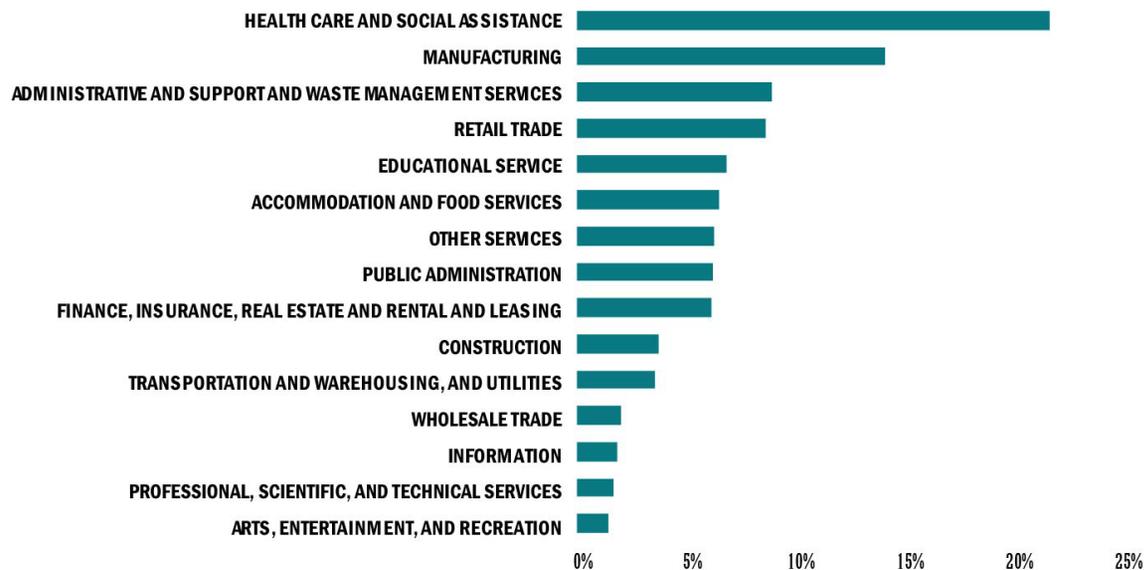


Fig. 8 Employment by industry
Source: Nielsen, TRF PolicyMap

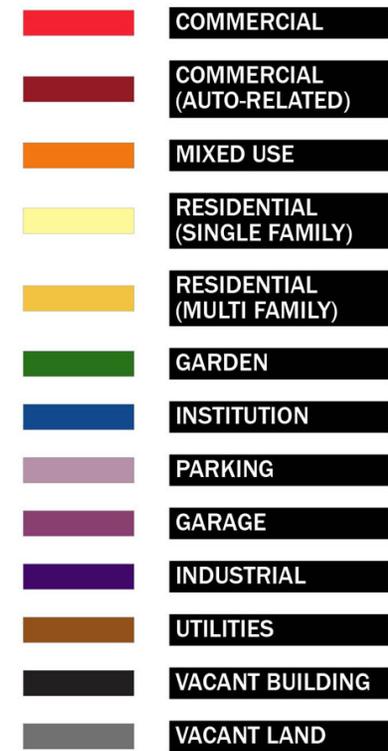
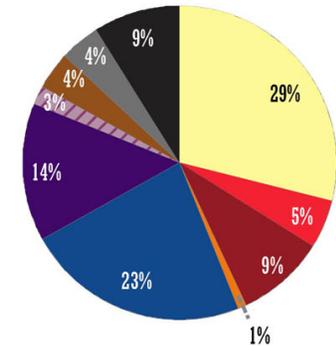


Fig. 9 Land use map
Source: Field survey (2011)

Built Environment

LAND USE AND ZONING

The character of the Hunting Park study area is dominated by residential (29%), institutional (23%) and industrial (14%) uses. West of North 5th Street is mainly residential in character, with institutions and auto-related businesses located along the unused Reading Bethlehem rail corridor. Pockets of residential blocks are also interspersed to the east of North 5th Street in the center and northeastern corner of the study area where they are surrounded by larger industrial and institutional parcels. The biggest former industrial parcels in the southeast quadrant of the study have now mostly been taken over by institutions. The highest concentration of remaining industry is located along Rising Sun Avenue.

Although vacancy is not substantial – 4% of the land area consists of vacant land while 9% consists of vacant buildings – almost every residential block is affected by a vacant property, which inherently depresses the area's overall housing values.

Land use patterns are consistent with the zoning for the most part, with the exception of the conversion of many of the large industrial blocks in the southeastern corner and along the former rail corridor into institutional and auto uses.

COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

The main commercial corridor is concentrated on the northern and southern portions of North 5th Street. Most of the commercial uses are pharmacies, convenience stores, takeout restaurants, and beauty shops. Notable commercial investments on this strip are Tierra Colombiana and Rite Aid both located on the same block at the corner of Raymond and 5th. There is another small hub of commercial activity in northeast corner of the study area at Wyoming and Rising Sun, but as you travel south down Rising Sun Avenue, the mix of auto shops, car sale lots, and salvage yards give the Rising Sun corridor a uniquely gritty feel.

Former Clemente School Building



On the border of the study area at 5th and Luzerne Street, the hulking shell of the former Roberto Clemente School building has been vacant for over a decade and has posed a safety hazard to the surrounding community. Built in 1916 as a factory, the building was used by the School District until 1998. The School District put the building up for sale in February 2012 and its redevelopment will have a major impact on the neighborhoods in the study area and beyond.



Fig. 10 Building conditions scale

HOUSING/BUILDING CONDITIONS

The majority of the housing and building stock of Hunting Park/Feltonville is in decent condition. Most of the area’s housing and buildings (69%) are livable and average in appearance, yet they may require serious cosmetic improvement, like façade rehabilitation, or structural restoration, i.e. foundation settlement repair. In terms of maintenance, tenure becomes a serious concern. Since 1990, homeownership has fallen 16 percentage points from 70% to only 54% in 2010. There are perhaps a variety of reasons for this: owners have decided to convert their single-family homes to multi-family rentals, the downturn in the economy has forced more residents to become renters, some are relocating to other parts of the city and renting their homes, etc.

PUBLIC REALM/PUBLIC SPACES

The area’s industrial legacy has left behind unused or derelict infrastructure that diminishes the pedestrian experience. The abandoned Reading Company’s Bethlehem Branch rail corridor cuts right through the core of the study area, forming a formidable physical barrier that divides the neighborhood. Its susceptibility to overgrown vegetation and dumping creates unsafe and unsightly

environmental conditions at and below street level for pedestrians, neighboring residents, and workers and visitors at the numerous institutions nearby. Leftover retaining walls obstruct views and feel like barriers at street level.

Tree cover is extremely low in the study area. At less than 4% it is far below the city’s goal of reaching 30% coverage by the year 2035. Combined with the impact of industrial and auto businesses on the neighborhood, the lack of green makes the neighborhood feel more barren than it needs to be. Additionally, the lack of tree cover means that during the summer months, the neighborhood is uncomfortably hot which increases energy use and utility bills.

Residents have a huge green space asset in Hunting Park, which is one of the largest parks in the city. Most residents are within a 10-minute walk of Hunting Park, but for those who do not fall within this walk shed, there are no other parks within the study area. During the field survey, 11 “Play Streets” were observed scattered throughout the study area. This demonstrates the importance of having play space close to where kids live and where parents can keep an eye on them.

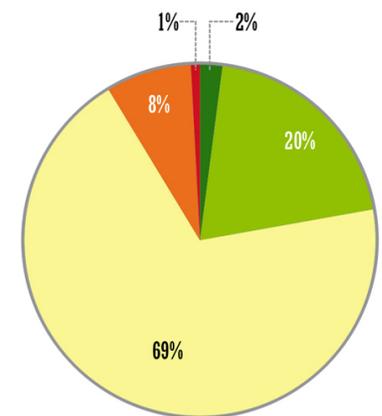


Fig. 11 Building conditions map
Source: Field survey (2011)

TRANSPORTATION AND STREET NETWORK

North 5th Street is the transportation spine of the area. Yet, due to its lack of marked travel and parking lanes, travel down the street can be chaotic with cars sometimes making two lanes out of one, and many double parking along the side. Truck traffic is concentrated mainly in the industrial segment of the study area along American, Rising Sun and Front Streets. The former rail corridor interrupts the street grid, resulting in discontinuity in major streets such as Wingohocking and Bristol. A high percentage of residents commute to work using public transit, an estimated 35%, and the neighborhood is served by six transit routes: 1, 47, 57, 75, C and R. Respondents in the resident survey also ranked access to public transit as one of the best things about the community.

ESTIMATED COMMUTE TIME

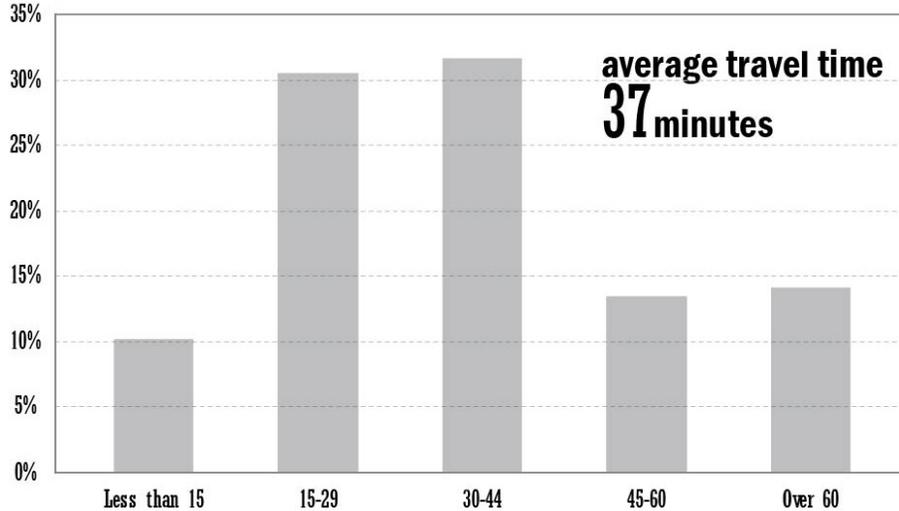


Fig. 12 Commute to work (estimated)

Source: Nielsen, TRF PolicyMap

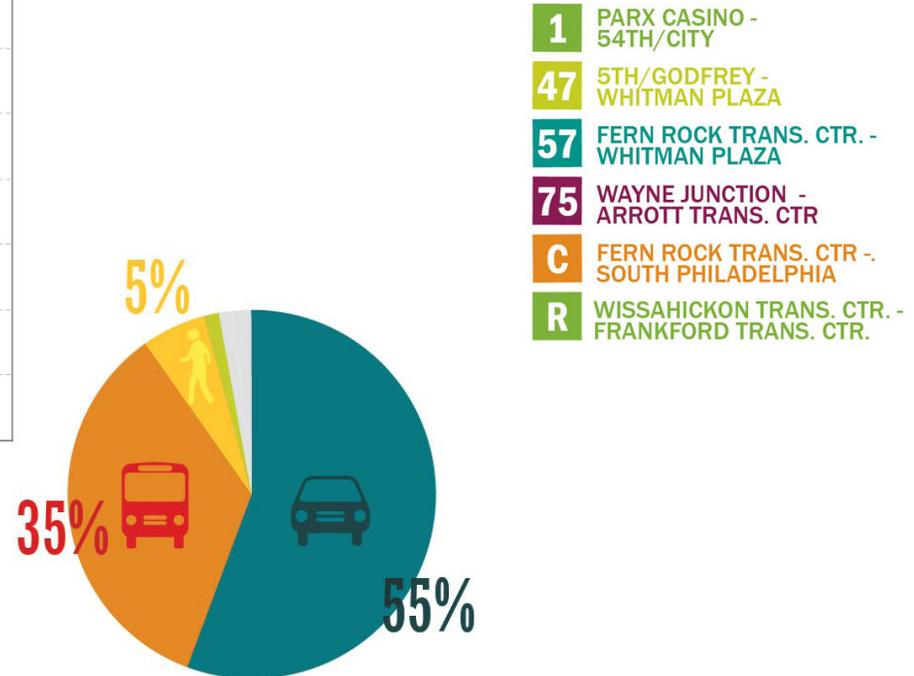




Fig. 13 Street network map
Source: Field survey (2011)