HISTORIC PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE LOWER NORTHEAST PLANNING DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission has requested that the Philadelphia Historical Commission review the historical development of the Lower Northeast Planning District and ongoing historic preservation initiatives in the area and then offer recommendations for enhancing those initiatives that might be incorporated into the plan, one of the 18 district plans that will accompany the overall Comprehensive City Plan, Philadelphia2035. In response to the request, the staff of the Historical Commission offers the following informal recommendations. Please note that the 14-member Historical Commission itself has not vetted this document.

THE LOWER NORTHEAST PLANNING DISTRICT

The Lower Northeast Planning District occupies a large area that roughly coincides with the southern and western sections of Oxford Township, the area’s primary historical political subdivision before the consolidation of the City and County of Philadelphia in 1854.

Beginning at the southernmost point of the Lower Northeast Planning District and moving clockwise, the planning district boundary runs from the intersection of the Frankford Creek and the Amtrak Northeast Corridor railroad right-of-way to the northwest along the Frankford and then Tacony Creek to the Montgomery County line; north along the county line and SEPTA Fox Chase railroad right-of-way to Martins Mill Road; southeast along Martins Mill Road to Unruh Avenue; east primarily along Unruh Avenue to Castor Avenue; briefly north along Castor Avenue to Knorr Street; east along Knorr Street to Roosevelt Boulevard; southwest along Roosevelt Boulevard to Bustleton Avenue; south along Bustleton Avenue to Cheltenham Avenue; southeast along Cheltenham Avenue to the Amtrak Northeast Corridor railroad right-of-way; and southwest along the right-of-way to the origin.


**CURRENT HISTORIC PRESERVATION ACTIVITIES IN THE LOWER NORTHEAST PLANNING DISTRICT**

Created by City Council ordinance in 1955 and reorganized in 1985 under Section 14-2007 of the Philadelphia Code, the Philadelphia Historical Commission is responsible for ensuring the preservation of historically significant buildings, structures, sites, objects, interiors, and districts in the city. The Commission identifies and designates historic resources, listing them on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. It regulates preservation through the City’s building and other permitting processes. Currently, there are no historic districts within the Lower Northeast Planning District listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. There are 16 properties within the Lower Northeast Planning District individually listed on the Philadelphia Register. An additional three properties that are related to the history of the area, but stand just beyond the district’s boundaries, are listed on the Philadelphia Register. There are approximately 12,000 properties (22,000 if condominium units are included) on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The 19 properties in (1-16) and near (17-19) the Lower Northeast Planning District on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places are:

1. 930 Adams Avenue, Greenwood Knights of Pythias Cemetery
2. 1905 Bridge Street, Mount Sinai Cemetery Chapel
3. 4500 E. Fishers Lane, house
4. 4501 E. Fishers Lane, Harvey Rowland House
5. 4315 Frankford Avenue, Presbyterian Church of Frankford
6. 4278 Griscom Street, John Ruan House
7. 1651 Kinsey Street, Campbell AME Church, aka AME Church of Frankford
8. 4276 Orchard Street, Comly Rich House
9. 1500 Orthodox Street, Orthodox Friends Meeting House
10. 4641 E. Roosevelt Boulevard, Friends Hospital
11. 5120 E. Tabor Road, Whitaker Mills House
12. 5122 E. Tabor Road, Whitaker Mills House
13. 5124 E. Tabor Road, Whitaker Mills House
14. 5126 E. Tabor Road, Whitaker Mills House
15. 5132 E. Tabor Road, Whitaker Mills House
16. 4371 Waln Street, Friends Meeting House
17. 2275 Bridge Street, Frankford Arsenal - Buildings #1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 11, 14, 15
18. 917 E. Wyoming Avenue, house
19. 6901 Rising Sun Avenue, aka 6900 Oxford Avenue, Old Trinity Church, Oxford

The federal government in tandem with the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, a state agency, maintain the National Register of Historic Places in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. The state and federal governments protect historic resources by factoring historic preservation into their decision-making whenever they are involved with construction projects directly or through funding, permits, licenses, or other indirect means that may impact historic resources listed on and eligible for the National Register.

There are no geographically-based National Register Historic Districts within the Lower Northeast Planning District, but there are three areas identified as eligible for National Register Historic District status within the Planning District. They are:

1. Aviation Supply Office District, at Oxford Avenue and Robbins Street
2. Hill Creek Public Housing District, at Rising Sun and Adams Avenues
3. Oxford Village District Public Housing District, at Oxford Avenue and Benner Street

The following public school buildings within the Lower Northeast Planning District are listed on the National Register as elements of the Philadelphia Public Schools Thematic Historic District,
which is based on theme, not geography.

1. David Wilmot School, 1734 Meadow Street
2. Lawndale School, 600 Hellerman Street
3. William W. Axe School, 1709-33 Kinsey Street
5. Benjamin Franklin School, Rising Sun & Cheltenham Avenue
6. Henry R. Edmunds School, 1101-97 Haworth Street
7. Warren G. Harding Junior High School, 2000 Wakeling Street
8. Franklin Smedley School, 5199 Mulberry Street
9. James J. Sullivan School, 5300 Ditman Street
10. Thomas Creighton School, 5401 Tabor Road
11. Laura H. Carnell School, 6101 Summerdale Avenue

The Friends Hospital at 4641 E. Roosevelt Boulevard is certified federally as a National Historic Landmark, the highest level of federal historic designation, indicating a historic resource of exceptional value and national significance.

The John Ruan House at 4278 Griscom Street in Frankford, an impressive late eighteenth-century house, is listed individually on the National Register.

The Adams Avenue Bridge over Tacony Creek in Tacony Creek Park is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Fishers Lane Bridge over Tacony Creek has been determined eligible for the National Register.

Several other properties within the Lower Northeast Planning District are eligible for individual listing on the National Register, but are not yet officially listed. They are:

1. 4276 Orchard Street, Comley Rich House
2. 1500 Orthodox Street, Frankford Friends Meeting House
3. 1507 Orthodox Street, Frankford Historical Society
4. Elements of the Frankford Transportation Center, Frankford Avenue at Bridge Street
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE LOWER NORTHEAST

Swedish and Finnish subsistence farmers settled the lands along the Frankford Creek in the middle of the seventeenth century. By the 1660s, they had constructed a grist mill along the creek, marking the beginning of Frankford’s industrial development. In the 1680s, the farmers transferred their lands to William Penn, the Proprietor of the Colony of Pennsylvania. The area that makes up the Lower Northeast Planning District was incorporated as Oxford Township by 1693. With the construction of Frankford Avenue, originally called King’s Broad Highway, at the end of the seventeenth century, the village of Frankford began to grow in the triangle of land bounded by Frankford Creek at the southwest and Little Tacony (or Tackawanna) Creek at the southeast and bisected by the north-south King’s Broad Highway.

Frankford, c. 1750

Oxford Township, 1808

Frankford remained primarily a farming village until the middle of the eighteenth century, when it began its transition to an industrial center with the establishment of small-scale artisans’ and craftsmen’s shops. Evidencing its growth, the village of Frankford was incorporated as a Borough in 1800. In the early nineteenth century, industrial enterprises flourished in Frankford. At first, the mills clustered around the creeks, which drove the machinery, but, with the advent of steam power, the mills moved inland. Many of Frankford’s mills produced textiles and carpets and products such as dyes used in the industry. Just outside the Lower Northeast Planning District, the Frankford Arsenal at Bridge and Tacony Streets was established in 1817 and developed into an enormous industrial complex that manufactured armaments for the U.S. military. In 1834, the Philadelphia and Trenton Railroad was laid across the southern edge of Frankford, connecting the village to suppliers and markets to the north and south. In 1849, Whitehall Borough, a small area east of Frankford Borough and the Little Tacony Creek, at the southeast edge of the Planning District, was carved out of Oxford Township. In 1854, Frankford and Whitehall Boroughs and Oxford Township along with all other political subdivisions in Philadelphia County were consolidated into the City of Philadelphia.
As Philadelphia began to be called the Workshop of the World, Frankford developed into a major industrial center. In 1870, about 40 mills were located in Frankford. By 1910, that number had increased to about 150. Its built environment became a dense and chaotic mix of factories and workers’ housing on the slopes leading up from the Frankford and Little Tacony Creeks toward Frankford Avenue; commercial and industrial enterprises along the Frankford Avenue spine; institutions primarily along the major cross streets such as Orthodox Street; and mill owners’ houses at the peak of the hill around Leiper and Arrott Streets. The workers’ houses were primarily 2½-story, two-bay, brick rowhouses, but some of the less expensive ones were wood-framed with clapboard or stucco cladding. The mill owners’ houses were grand, architect-designed residences in the styles of the day.
From its settlement in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries until its suburban development in the very late nineteenth and early to mid twentieth centuries, the large area to the north and west of Frankford was primarily open farmland traversed by rural highways and dotted with villages at key intersections. The first road to traverse the area, Frankford Avenue, also known as King's Broad Highway and later Bristol Turnpike (northern sections), ran to the northeast, parallel to the Delaware River. The village of Rocky Hill took root on Frankford Avenue north of Cheltenham Avenue, just outside the planning district. Surrounded by Cedar Hill Cemetery and Wissinoming Park, Rocky Hill is still identifiable as a village, even though most of its early buildings have been replaced. Oxford Avenue, also known as the Oxford Plank
Road, was an early important byway that ran from its intersection with Frankford Avenue north of the center of Frankford to the northwest across Oxford Township and into Montgomery and then Buck Counties. Volunteer Town, one of the earliest outlying villages in Oxford Township, grew up around the intersection of Martins Mill Road and Oxford Road. Old Trinity Church, Oxford, the second oldest church in Philadelphia, was erected about 1711 along Oxford Road, to the north of the planning district. Adams Avenue, also known as Adams Road, connected Frankford with Grub Town on the west bank of the Tacony Creek in what is now Olney. Adams Avenue was often referred to as Asylum Road after 1813, when the Friends Hospital was established west of the Borough of Frankford. The village of Cedar Grove took root in the early nineteenth century south of Adams Avenue, where Tabor Road now crosses the Tacony Creek. The small settlement grew up around Whitaker’s Mills, a textile mill established in 1813. The village of Five Points, at what is now Oxford Circle, grew around the intersection of Castor’s Road and Hartshorne’s Road, both now called Castor Avenue, Cheltenham Avenue, which was known at times as Taconey Lane and Dark Run Lane, and Oxford Avenue. Other early roads in Oxford Township were the Bustleton and Smithfield Turnpike, now Bustleton Avenue, and the Oxford and Kensington Turnpike or Second Street Road, now Rising Sun Avenue.
In addition to farms, country seats, which were the estates and summer homes of Frankford’s and Philadelphia’s wealthy, once dotted the countryside around Frankford. Nearly all of the country seats that stood in and near the planning district, including Port Royal, Chalkley Hall, Waln, and the Overington Estate, have been demolished. Cedar Grove, the grand house erected by Elizabeth Coates Paschall, survives, but was moved from Harrowgate, just south of Frankford, to Fairmount Park in the late 1920s. Although a large farmhouse, not a country seat, the house in Greenwood Cemtery on Adams Avenue, which was erected in the 1830s, best represents the large houses that once stood in the rural areas of Oxford Township.
For the same reason that many Philadelphians established country seats in Oxford Township, a group of Quakers founded Friends Hospital on Adams Avenue west of Frankford in 1813; the area provided a bucolic rural setting in close proximity to the city. Known as The Asylum for Persons Deprived of the Use of Their Reason and then Frankford Asylum for the Insane, the Friends Hospital was the first private psychiatric hospital in the United States. Owing to the abundance of open land and proximity to the urban core, like the country seats and Friends Hospital, many major cemeteries were located in Oxford Township, including Cedar Hill Cemetery (1850), Mount Sinai Cemetery (1854), Adath Jeshurun Cemetery (1861), Greenwood-Knights of Pythias Cemetery (1869), Oakland Cemetery (1881), and Har Nebo Cemetery (1890). Three, Mount Sinai, Adath Jeshurun, and Har Nebo, are Jewish cemeteries, presaging the development of Oxford Circle as a Jewish center in the middle of the twentieth century.

Development in Frankford Borough and Oxford Township followed the two separate and distinct trajectories throughout most of the nineteenth century. The Borough of Frankford continued to evolve as a dense industrial center. Outside Frankford, Oxford Township remained rural, with farms dotting the landscape and small villages clinging to major crossroads. At the end of the nineteenth century, that pattern of development, which had persisted for more than a century, was abruptly broken, primarily for two interrelated reasons: the explosive growth of Philadelphia and concomitant expansion of the transportation system. Philadelphia's population exploded from 565,000 in 1860 to 1,300,000 in 1900. During the second half of the nineteenth century, urban development marched north, south, and west from Philadelphia’s central core, reaching
the Tacony Creek before 1900. In Frankford, the area to the east of Northwood Park, bounded by Arrott, Horrocks, Harrison, and Rutland, was subdivided for suburban houses by 1894. However, interestingly, much of the early suburban development in the old Oxford Township occurred at the western edge, along the Montgomery County line. Lawndale, the area around Levick Street from Lawndale Street to the County Line, was platted for suburban development by 1895. Lawndale’s suburban street grid was an island unto itself, surrounded by farmland, for many years, but it was connected to the city through the Lawndale Railroad Station, which was just across the border in Montgomery County. A second subdivision was platted at about the same time just to the south, bounded by Rising Sun, Comly, Lawndale, and Devereaux. A third early subdivision was created by 1910 at Crescentville, bounded by Godfrey, Cheltenham, Rising Sun, and Newtown.

Roosevelt Boulevard, originally called Torresdale Boulevard, the most significant catalyst for suburban development in Northeast Philadelphia, was constructed between 1903 and 1914. Running from Broad Street at Hunting Park in North Philadelphia to the Rhawnhurst neighborhood to the north of Oxford Township, the multi-lane parkway, a predecessor to the limited-access highway, opened the Northeast’s vast tracts of land for suburban development. Evidencing the rapid development, one study showed that the total assessed value of the land along the Boulevard between Tacony Creek and Oxford Circle jumped from $238,000 in 1908 to $2.5 million in 1920 to $23 million in 1930. Although few Philadelphians owned automobiles when the roadway was first conceived, by the early 1920s, inexpensive, mass-produced automobiles were easily accessible to the growing middle class. And those who were unable to afford a car could commute inexpensively on the burgeoning streetcar system. By the turn of the twentieth century, the walking-city form of development, of which the Borough of Frankford was a prime example, was obsolete. Workers no longer needed to live within an easy walk of their places of employment. The completion of the Frankford Elevated in 1922, which connected the emerging suburbs to the downtown Philadelphia, marked the end of the industrial village. The demolition of older housing and the construction of small apartment buildings for commuters in Frankford in 1940s likewise marked the major shift.

By the 1930s, a new breed of suburban developers led by Hyman Korman and Alfred Orleans were erecting suburban houses on former farmlands in the Northeast at a frantic pace. The developers engineered a highly efficient building type, the Airlite, which was replicated in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s across hundreds of blocks of new subdivisions north and west of the urban sections of Frankford. The Airlite, which could be constructed as a rowhouse or twin, was typically set up on an artificial grassy berm back from the street, brick or stone-faced, two
stories in the front and three at the rear, with a basement garage at the rear opening onto an
alley. The front façade was typically ornamented with elements abstracted from period
architectural styles, for example a mansard, bay, or faux gable. The ubiquitous garage indicates
that house was designed for automobile-based homebuyers. Most, but not all new
developments in the Lower Northeast had garages. Two subsidized housing developments in
the area, Hill Creek Houses (1938), off Adams at Rising Sun, and Oxford Village (1942), off
Oxford between Comly and Devereaux, provided housing for those who without the financial
means to participate in the new car culture.

Airlite houses in the Lower Northeast

Hill Creek Apartments, 1938, looking north toward Summerdale

The developers not only erected houses, but also built commercial districts directed at the new,
mobile residents. Korman, for example, built blocks of commercial buildings along Castor
Avenue between Levick and Knorr Streets. With storefronts at the ground floor and offices and
storage above, the simple, two-story, brick-faced retail buildings with parking at the curb and the
rear, were the perfect commercial counterpart to the residential Airlite rowhouses. Between
1939 and 1951, more than 200 stores opened along this stretch of Castor Avenue, creating a
major shopping district. The mid-century Modern Penn Fruit grocery store (George Neff, 1954) at Frankford Avenue and Pratt Street targeted both car owners and transit users. Other automobile-oriented development accompanied the new shops including gas stations, which sprung up on many corners. The automobile service center at 6300 Oxford Avenue is an exuberant example of an early gas station. Just outside the planning district, the Tacony Palmyra Bridge, completed in 1929, likewise exemplifies the emerging car culture and the expanding infrastructure to support it.

Cas tor Avenue, 1951

P enn Fruit, 1954

Atlantic Service Station, Roosevelt Boulevard

Sears Service Station, Roosevelt Boulevard

In addition to commercial enterprises, other facilities including schools, libraries, fire and police stations, parks and recreation centers, and houses of worship were constructed and created to support the new residential communities.
Not all of the open land in the old Oxford Township was dedicated to residential and commercial development. The openings of the Philadelphia and Frankford Railroad in 1892, which ran from Crescentville to central Frankford bisecting the old Oxford Township on an east-west line, and the Philadelphia and Bustleton Railroad in 1896, which bisected the old Oxford Township on a north-south line, initiated a new phase of industrial development in a vast, inverted-T-shaped zone stretching along Roosevelt Boulevard and Adams Avenue and north to Oxford Avenue. The construction of Roosevelt Boulevard provided additional advantages to this new industrial area, which quickly superseded the cramped, old industrial zone in Frankford along the creeks. Typified by the Sears and Roebuck Co. Plant and the enormous Naval Support Activity, these new industrial developments were predicated on large, open sites, easy train and truck transportation, and a mobile, commuting workforce.

Excepting that some of the manufacturing and warehouse facilities inverted-T-shaped zone have given way to strip malls and big-box retail developments, the built environment of the suburban Lower Northeast has remained stable since it was built out in the middle of the twentieth century.
1933 Zoning Map with inverted T-shaped shaded industrial area crossed by railroad tracks
**HISTORICAL THEMES AND PRESERVATION RECOMMENDATIONS**

As shown above, the historical development of the Lower Northeast Planning District can be divided into three overarching, overlapping trajectories:

1. The Frankford Industrial Village, 1660-1922
2. Rural Oxford Township, 1693-1890
3. Suburban Development in the Lower Northeast, 1890-1960

The Historical Commission recommends the exploration of three thematic historic districts to represent, interpret, and preserve these three distinct historical trajectories. Thematic districts as opposed to the more common geographically-based districts are recommended because the historic resources are widely dispersed across a very large area and because many of the resources have lost their original contexts. The following recommendations include lists of properties that should be considered for the proposed districts, but one should not assume that all of the listed properties will eventually be deemed eligible for the districts. The lists are a starting point for research and survey work, not an endpoint. Only the most important and most representatives sites should ultimately be included in the proposed districts. Significant research and survey work beyond the scope of this exercise must be undertaken before nominations for such districts can be prepared and presented to the Historical Commission, which does not currently possess the staff capacity or resources to undertake the tasks proposed herein. The enclosed preservation plan is a long-range plan intended to guide subsequent research and survey work; it is not intended for immediate implementation. However, the current exercise has uncovered several very significant sites that may merit individual designation and protection before the overall plan is implemented. Those sites are listed at the end of these recommendations. The Historical Commission also notes that traditional historic preservation regulatory may not be the most appropriate mechanisms for regulating the preservation of some aspects of the diverse built environment found in the Lower Northeast. It therefore recommends, as part of the development of the proposed plan, the exploration of alternative preservation measures such as zoning restrictions and conservation districts.
A Frankford Industrial Village Thematic Historic District would include a diverse array of buildings, structures, and sites documenting and representing Frankford’s significant industrial heritage as it unfolded from the late seventeenth to the early twentieth century. It would include several important mill buildings and complexes. Some sites worthy of research, survey, and consideration for inclusion in the district are:

- Aramingo Mills, 1412 Unity Street
- Bromley Mills, 1300 Adams Avenue
- Frankford Arsenal, 2275 Bridge Street (outside LNEPD)
- Frankford Woolen Mills, 1244 Adams Avenue
- Frogmire Mills, 1523 E. Wingohocking Street (outside LNEPD)
- Globe Dye Works, 4500 Worth Street
- Spring Mills, 4355 Orchard Street
- Tremont Mills, 1196 Adams Avenue
- Sykes & Geiger Yarn Mill, 1604 Vandike Street

Tremont Mills, 1196 Adams Avenue  Aramingo Mills, 1412 Unity Street

Sykes & Geiger Yarn Mill, 1604 Vandike Street  Globe Dye Works, 4500 Worth Street
A Frankford Industrial Village Thematic Historic District would also include infrastructure related to manufacturing. Some sites worthy of research, survey, and consideration for inclusion in the district are:

- Frankford Creek between Castor Avenue and the Amtrak railroad right-of-way
- Remnants of the Philadelphia and Frankford Railroad, especially stone bridge piers
- Torresdale Avenue and the Little Tacony Creek sewer

In addition to considering extant mill buildings and infrastructure, a nomination for a Frankford Industrial Village Thematic Historic District should consider the potential for archaeological remains of mills, infrastructure, and other features, especially in the areas along the Frankford Creek, where the first mill was constructed about 1660.

A Frankford Industrial Village Thematic Historic District would also include workers' housing. Although much of the older housing in Frankford has been demolished or significantly altered, many houses dating from the early eighteenth century through the late nineteenth century survive with some integrity. A comprehensive survey should be undertaken. Some sites worthy of survey and consideration for inclusion in the district are:

- 1548 Adams Avenue, c. 1728, possibly oldest surviving structure in Frankford
- 1202 and 1204 Adams Avenue, early nineteenth-century, three-bay houses
- 1300-block of Church Street, early nineteenth-century houses
- 1525 and 1527 Deal Street, early nineteenth-century frame houses
- 4287-89 Frankford Avenue, stone rubble house facing Church Street
- 4300-block of Leiper Street, early nineteenth-century houses
- 4803 and 4805 Leiper Street, early nineteenth-century houses
- 4276 Orchard Street, Comly Rich House, first mortgage in US (already designated)
- 4677-79 E. Wingohocking Street, early nineteenth-century house with hipped roof
- 5120, 22, 24, 26, and 32 E Tabor Road, Whitaker Mills houses (already designated)
A Frankford Industrial Village Thematic Historic District would also include a sampling of the most significant and best preserved houses of mill owners and other business and civic leaders, which are primarily centered on Leiper Street between Orthodox and Foulkrod. A comprehensive survey of these houses as well as the nearby residences of middle managers should be undertaken. Sites worthy of survey and consideration for inclusion in the district are:

- 4278 Griscom Street, John Ruan House
- 4647 Leiper Street, Greenwood Mansion
- 4651 Leiper Street, Blumhaven
- 4704 Leiper Street, Bromley/Garsed Mansion

A Frankford Industrial Village Thematic Historic District would also include representations of the commercial enterprises and financial institutions that supported the mills and residents. These entities were almost exclusively located on Frankford Avenue. Owing to its complexity, density, and layering, Frankford Avenue from Frankford Creek to Cedar Hill Cemetery should be carefully surveyed and researched. Some sites worthy of research, survey, and consideration for inclusion in the district are:
• 4318 Frankford Avenue, Liberty Bell Hosiery Mill
• 4400 Frankford Avenue, Frankford Trust
• 4510-14 Frankford Avenue, Frankford Mutual Fire Insurance Company
• 4645 Frankford Avenue, Western Savings Fund Society

A Frankford Industrial Village Thematic Historic District might also include the best examples of schools, churches, and other sites that served the mill community. Some sites that should be researched and considered for inclusion are:

- 1734 Meadow Street, David Wilmot School, 1874
- 1501 Sellers Street, John Marshall School, 1909
- 1709 Kinsey Street, William W. Axe School, 1903
- 4442 Frankford Avenue, St. Mark’s Church, 1907
- 4533 Leiper Street, Seventh United Presbyterian Church
- 4315 Frankford Avenue, Presbyterian Church of Frankford (already designated)
- 1651 Kinsey Street, Campbell AME Church (already designated)
- 1500 Orthodox Street, Orthodox Friends Meeting House (already designated)
- 4371 Waln Street, Friends Meeting House (already designated)
Little built fabric or open land survives to document the pastoral character of Oxford Township before suburbanization began about 1890. However, enough survives to justify the creation of a Rural Oxford Township Thematic Historic District to preserve and interpret the important history of the countryside from 1693 to 1890. As noted above, for the two hundred years following the establishment of Oxford Township in 1693, the area was primarily farmland crossed by country roads and turnpikes and dotted by farm houses, country seats, and occasional crossroads villages. Later, in the mid and late nineteenth century, several cemeteries were established in the area, owing to the abundance of open land.

The area along Fishers Lane to the west of Ramona Avenue, where the country road crosses Tacony Creek, best retains the pastoral appearance that Oxford Township must have presented in previous centuries. Surrounded by Tacony Creek Park, Juniata Golf Course, Greenwood and Oakland Cemeteries, and the Friends Hospital, the bucolic area largely retains its pastoral viewsheds. Four properties adjacent to Fishers Lane are already designated as historic and should be included in the Rural Oxford Township Thematic Historic District. They are:

- 4500 E. Fishers Lane, house
- 4501 E. Fishers Lane, Harvey Rowland House
- 917 E. Wyoming Avenue, house (outside LNEPD)
- 4641 E. Roosevelt Boulevard, Friends Hospital
- 800 Adams Avenue, Greenwood Cemetery with 1830s farmhouse

The Fishers Lane Bridge, a stone arch dating to 1796, should be designated as historic and serve as a centerpiece for the Rural Oxford Township Thematic Historic District. Oakland Cemetery (1881), which is adjacent to the Fishers Lane area, should be surveyed for historic resources. For example, the caretaker’s house may warrant inclusion in the thematic district.

Beyond the rural corner of the Lower Northeast at Fishers Lane, other sites within the former Oxford Township merit research and surveying for potential inclusion in the Rural Oxford Township Thematic Historic District. The Whitaker Mills houses at 5120, 5122, 5124, 5126, and 5132 E. Tabor Road, which are already designated as historic, should be included in the thematic district.
In general, all of the historic roads and turnpikes, including Frankford Avenue, Cheltenham Avenue, Oxford Avenue, Adams Avenue, Tabor Road (southern section), Castor Avenue, Bustleton Avenue, Rising Sun Avenue, and Bridge Street (eastern section), should be surveyed for surviving features that represent their histories as rural thoroughfares. Bridges, landscapes, and other features in addition to buildings should be considered. Historic turnpike milestones at the Frankford Historical Society could be designated as objects as part of the thematic district. The Adams Avenue stone arch bridge over Tacony Creek in Tacony Creek Park, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, should be considered for the district. Although outside the Lower Northeast Planning District, Old Trinity Church, Oxford (6900 Oxford Avenue), which was constructed in 1711 and is the second oldest church in Philadelphia, should be included as a centerpiece in the district. In addition to Old Trinity, three nearby structures at the northwest corner of Oxford Township should be considered for the thematic district:

- 6920 Oxford Avenue, house (outside LNEPD)
- 7032 and 7034 Oxford Avenue, houses (outside LNEPD)
- 6700 Rising Sun Avenue, house or tavern (outside LNEPD)
Although just outside the Lower Northeast Planning District, the vestiges of the village of Rocky Hill along Frankford Avenue north of Cheltenham Avenue, adjacent to the northern section of Cedar Hill Cemetery, should be carefully researched and surveyed, as it is perhaps the only place in the former Oxford Township that maintains a semblance of its earlier village appearance. The following houses may be good candidates for inclusion in the Rural Oxford Township Thematic Historic District:

- 5722 Frankford Avenue, house (outside LNEPD)
- 5760 Frankford Avenue, house (outside LNEPD)

Numerous cemeteries were established in the open, pastoral lands of the Lower Northeast in the mid and late nineteenth century. Although cemeteries are difficult to regulate through Philadelphia’s current historic preservation ordinance and should only designated with great care, the Lower Northeast’s cemeteries should be surveyed for specific historic landscapes, buildings, structures, and objects. Three Jewish cemeteries, Mt. Sinai Cemetery (1854), Adath Jeshurun Cemetery (1861), and Har Nebo Cemetery (1890), should be surveyed for historic resources. The Frank Furness-designed chapel at Mt. Sinai is already designated as historic. Both sections of Cedar Hill Cemetery (1850), to the north and south of Cheltenham Avenue between Bustleton and Frankford Avenues should be surveyed. At a minimum, the Italianate gate house and caretaker’s house in the southern section (in LNEPD) and the stone gate and
caretaker’s house in the northern section (outside LNEPD) appear worthy of inclusion in the Rural Oxford Township Thematic Historic District. Also, the adjacent Friends Burial Ground at 5913 Bustleton Avenue should be considered. Greenwood Cemetery on Adams Avenue is already designated as historic. Its neighbor to the north, Oakland Cemetery (1881), should be surveyed for possible resources that might be included in the district.

Tacony Creek Park should be surveyed for eighteen and nineteenth-century historic resources, both above ground and archaeological. Also, the Lower Northeast Planning District should mandate an artificial boundary on the historic district. All of historic Oxford Township should be surveyed.
LOWER NORTHEAST SUBURBAN DEVELOPMENT THEMATIC HISTORIC DISTRICT

Between 1890 and 1960, the Lower Northeast rapidly developed as suburb. This aspect of the area’s history should be preserved with and interpreted through a Lower Northeast Suburban Development Thematic Historic District. First and foremost, the thematic district should incorporate significant aspects of Roosevelt Boulevard, the primary catalyst for the conversion of the endless acres of farmland into a string of suburban communities. Although the Historical Commission cannot directly regulate Roosevelt Boulevard because it is a state route maintained by the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation, which is exempt from local preservation regulation, the Boulevard should be surveyed and significant aspects of the historic roadway included in the district, if only to guide consultations during Section 106 reviews. Likewise, the Frankford Elevated Railroad line, which opened in 1922 and played a major role in the suburbanization of the areas to the north and west of its Bridge Street terminus, should be surveyed and important elements included in the district. Much of the elevated line has been reconstructed, but a few historic elements have survived. For example, the Orthodox Street El entrance may merit inclusion in the district. Likewise, elements of the Frankford Transportation Center such as the Bridge Street Terminal may merit inclusion.

Many historic residential areas survive intact, even if most houses have been modified and updated over the years. These areas should be surveyed to better understand the historic resources they may hold. In general, the traditional historic district designation approach does not appear to be the appropriate mechanism for preserving historic streetscapes and neighborhoods in the Lower Northeast. Although there is certainly significant historic value in the area’s many residential communities, and that value will only grow over time as the neighborhoods age, the traditional preservation regulation approach, which measures muntins and brickmolds by the 1/8 inch, will not be successful in areas where resources have been broadly modified from their original conditions, are spread over large areas, and are interspersed with non-historic developments and streetscapes. The Planning and Historical Commissions should work together to identify regulatory mechanisms, perhaps more akin to zoning, that can protect streetscapes and neighborhood density and scale of communities such as those in the Lower Northeast.

At the western edge of the planning district, large sections of Lawndale and Crescentville were subdivided and developed with suburban houses from the 1890s to World War I. These areas should be surveyed for outstanding residential and other examples of the suburban development. One or two of very best examples of turn-of-the-century suburban housing and
streetscapes might be considered for inclusion in the thematic district. The Northwood section of Frankford was developed from about 1900 to 1930. It too should be surveyed for historic resources and a few outstanding residential examples considered for inclusion in the Lower Northeast Suburban Development Thematic Historic District.

After the establishment of suburban communities in Lawndale, Crescentville, and Northwood, many sections of the Lower Northeast were developed with Airlite and Straight-Thru rows and twins by Hyman Korman, Alfred Orleans, and others from about 1930 to 1960. Given the ubiquity of the Airlite in the Lower Northeast, as well as the Far Northeast, Roxborough, East Mt. Airy, Cedarbrook, East and West Oak Lane, Melrose Park, Overbrook Park, Southwest Philadelphia, Lower South Philadelphia, and numerous other neighborhoods throughout the city, its significance in the development of Philadelphia should be highlighted by Lower Northeast Suburban Development Thematic Historic District.

Some of the earliest and best preserved examples of Airlites can be found in Oxford Circle, where the two-story brick and stone rows are set between sloped yards at the front and alleys with garages at the rear. Some of the larger residential streets like Devereaux are boulevards, with grassy strips separating the traffic lanes (cover image). Commercial strips like Castor Avenue, with their two-story brick retail buildings, were designed to complement the nearby
Airlites. The Airlites with garages and the commercial buildings with curbside and rear parking, for example the Korman and other developments on Castor and the cross streets between Oxford Circle and Knorr Street, typify Philadelphia’s World War II-era, automobile-based development that marked a major break from walking and streetcar developments of the older parts of the city. The Oxford Circle neighborhood may not be a good candidate for traditional historic district designation, but the area should be surveyed and the very best examples of these residential and commercial building types considered for inclusion in the Lower Northeast Suburban Development Thematic Historic District. Other, less restrictive mechanisms should be considered to promote the maintenance of the area’s character-defining features, such as the boulevards, setbacks, lawns, rear alleys, and consistent height, massing, configuration, and materials.

Two developments for people of moderate means, Hill Creek Houses at Adams and Tabor (1936) and Oxford Village on Oxford between Comly and Devereaux (1942), should not be overlooked. While most of the suburban development of this era was predicated on the automobile, these two housing developments were not; their residents instead relied on public transit. These complexes should be evaluated for historic significance and integrity.

Hill Creek

Oxford Village

To support the new suburban residential neighborhoods constructed in the Lower Northeast in the first half of the twentieth century, the City of Philadelphia erected numerous civic buildings including libraries, fire stations, and schools. The planning district should be surveyed for historically significant civic buildings and sites and the very best examples included in the Lower Northeast Suburban Development Thematic Historic District. The Bushrod Branch of the Free Library at 6304 Castor Avenue, for example, appears very significant when viewed within the context of the surrounding, contemporary, brick Airlites and commercial buildings. Some sites that should be researched and surveyed are:

- 6304 Castor Avenue, Bushrod Branch of the Free Library
- 6000 Rising Sun Avenue, Lawncrest Fire Station
- 6000 Rising Sun Avenue, Lawncrest Branch of the Free Library
- 4800 Langdon Street, Engine 70 Fire Station
- 1652-54 Foulkrod Street, Frankford Fire Station
- 5021 Rutland Street, Frankford War Memorial, Paul Cret, architect
- 5741 Rising Sun Avenue, Benjamin Franklin School
- 600 Hellerman Street, Lawndale School, 1903
- 6101 Summerdale Avenue, Laura H. Carnell School, 1930
- 5199 Mulberry Street, Franklin Smedley School, 1927
- 2000 Wakeling Street, Warren G. Harding Junior High School, 1923
- 5300 Ditman Street, James G. Sullivan School, 1929
- 1101 Haworth Street, Henry Edmunds School, 1923

The area should also be surveyed for historically significant houses of worship and other community-oriented sites. The area includes numerous sites significant in the city’s Jewish and Roman Catholic histories. Some worthy of consideration for inclusion in the Lower Northeast Suburban Development Thematic Historic District are:

- 400 Senter Street, Crescentville United Methodist Church
- 6200 Rising Sun Avenue, St. Williams Church
- 5450 Roosevelt Boulevard, St. Martin of Tours Church
- 5560 Harbison Avenue, St. Bartholomew’s Church
- 6700 Roosevelt Boulevard, Our Lady of Ransom Church, 1966
- 6632 Bustleton Avenue, Beth Emth Synagogue
- 1147 Gillham Street, B’Nai Jacob - Dirshu Tov Congregation, converted Airlite
- 435 E. Roosevelt Boulevard, Brith Israel Synagogue, 1930 (outside LNEPD)
- 260 E. Roosevelt Boulevard, Congregation B’nai Yitzchok, 1950 (outside LNEPD)
- 1011 Unruh Avenue, Oxford Circle Jewish Community Center
The Lower Northeast should be surveyed for other sites demonstrative of the area’s newly minted suburbs and its automobile-oriented culture. Three examples of such sites worthy of consideration for inclusion in the Lower Northeast Suburban Development Thematic Historic District are:

- 5129 Frankford Avenue, Penn Fruit (see also 5921 Rising Sun Avenue)
- 6300 Oxford Avenue, automobile service station
- 5800 Bustleton Avenue, Bell Telephone Building

Finally, as the Lower Northeast was developed as a series of suburban enclaves, the historic center of Frankford transitioned from an industrial village to an entertainment and commercial center adjacent to the mass transit hub. Three examples of such sites worthy of consideration for inclusion in the Lower Northeast Suburban Development Thematic Historic District are:

- 4652 Frankford Avenue, Circle Theater, Hoffman & Henon, architects, 1929
- 5231 Frankford Avenue, Forum Theater, William Harold Lee, architect, 1928
- 4670-72 Frankford Avenue, Art Deco storefront

Again, the Lower Northeast Planning District should mandate an artificial boundary on the historic district. All of the Lower Northeast should be surveyed.
CONCLUSION

The Lower Northeast is home to many significant historic resources. Those resources tell us much about the Frankford’s development as an early and important industrial center and its residents, rich and poor, who owned the mills and labored in them; about Lower Oxford Township’s pastoral lands, where farmers toiled, the wealthy summered, and the mentally ill sought treatment; and about the suburban communities of Lawndale, Northwood, Oxford Circle, and many others, where World War II-generation Philadelphians sought the American Dream. From an historic preservation perspective, the Lower Northeast presents both opportunities and challenges. Long overlooked by preservationists, the Lower Northeast is home to many sites that merit historic designation, especially as we reassess the history of the twentieth century from the perspective of the twenty-first. However, its vast neighborhoods of relatively-recent, speculatively-constructed, mass-produced residential and commercial buildings do not fit easily into existing regulatory structures conceived to preserve venerated structures that are ancient, museum-quality, architect-designed, or hand-crafted. New, more flexible, less restrictive mechanisms will need to be devised to protect and preserve those characteristics that make much of the built environment of the Lower Northeast significant and worthy of safeguarding.

As noted earlier, this is a long-range plan that will require a significant investment in resources and may not produce the proposed thematic districts for several years. In the interim, some immediate steps may need to be taken. The current exercise has uncovered several very significant sites that may merit individual designation and protection before the overall plan is implemented. The following sites should be considered for nomination for designation as historic in the coming months:

- 1548 Adams Avenue, c. 1728, possibly oldest surviving structure in Frankford
- Fishers Lane bridge
- 1734 Meadow Street, David Wilmot School, 1874
- 6304 Castor Avenue, Bushrod Branch of the Free Library
- 4800 Langdon Street, Engine 70 Fire Station
- 1652-54 Foulkrod Street, Frankford Fire Station
- 5021 Rutland Street, Frankford War Memorial, Paul Cret, architect
- 6920 Oxford Avenue, house (outside LNEPD)
- 7032 and 7034 Oxford Avenue, houses (outside LNEPD)
- Italianate gate house at Cedar Hill Cemetery
- 6300 Oxford Avenue, automobile service station