PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING COMMISSION MEETING

December 17, 1998

PRESENT: Richard Rueda, Chairman
Jeffrey S. Batoff, Vice-Chairman
Lynette M. Brown
Duane Bumb, representing Stephen P. Mullin
James L. Coleman, Jr., representing Joseph C. Certaine
Marcia Moore Makadon
Mamie Nichols
Peggy Van Belle, representing Ben Hayllar

ABSENT: Ignatius C. Wang

Executive Director            Barbara J. Kaplan
Deputy Executive Director     David A. Baldinger
Chairman Richard Rueda convened the December 17, 1998 meeting of the Planning Commission to order at 1:10 p.m.

1) Minutes of the Meeting of November 19, 1998.

Upon motion by Mr. Bumb, seconded by Mrs. Nichols, the Planning Commission approved the Minutes of the Meeting of November 19, 1998.

2) Presentation and release of *At Home: A Strategic Plan For the Seventh Street Neighborhood.*

Ms. Kaplan commented that she was pleased to present this report to the Commission and have the report released to the public and the community. The Seventh Street Roundtable, representing various organizations interested in community improvement in the vicinity of the South Seventh Street neighborhood in South Philadelphia, had approached Planning Commission staff to work with them to organize their thinking, and to come up with new ideas as part of the process of preparing a plan. Ms. Kaplan thanked the Roundtable for their input and their effort spent in developing this plan.

Ms. Linda Dottor, South Philadelphia Community Planner, stated that the Seventh Street neighborhood was a good candidate for a strategic plan because it was surrounded by stable neighborhoods, close to Center City and the Naval Business Center and Shipyard, and had had little recent reinvestment. *At Home: A Strategic Plan For The Seventh Street Neighborhood* will help to identify redevelopment priorities and introduce the neighborhood to funders and developers. The Planning Commission staff worked on the strategic plan with the Seventh Street Roundtable to draft the strategic plan, and consulted with Snyderville CDC and United Communities CDC during the strategic planning process.

The Seventh Street neighborhood is located in South Philadelphia. The strategic plan covered an area bounded by Mifflin Street, South Fourth Street, Wolf Street, and South Ninth Street. The neighborhood is primarily residential, but contains other land uses as well. The Seventh Street retail district is active on the 2100 and 2200 blocks of South Seventh Street and the 600 and 700 blocks of Snyder Avenue. Currently, the Philadelphia Commercial Development Corporation defines a larger boundary for the retail district. Two active neighborhood institutions, the Ford Recreation Center and Houston Community Center, create an informal “village center” between South Sixth and South Eighth Streets along Snyder Avenue. Snyder Avenue is the neighborhood’s public face because it is used heavily by residents living east of Broad Street. High vacancy sets the Seventh Street neighborhood apart from the surrounding neighborhoods. Vacancy is scattered. Vacant buildings outnumber vacant structures 2:1. The fabric of the neighborhood is mostly intact but even stable blocks contain vacant properties. Approximately 50 vacant lots have been reclaimed for residential use as house additions, private parking, or side yards.

The Seventh Street neighborhood contained approximately 4,000 people in 1990. The population was diverse (45% African American, 35% Caucasian, 14% Asian, 6% Other), and has grown more diverse over the course of the last decade. It is likely that the population has also declined. Seventy percent of both African American and Caucasian households were homeowners. In contrast, Asian and Latino households were predominantly renters in 1980, although more Asian buyers have entered the housing market in the 1990’s.
The following community development issues shaped recommendations for improving the Seventh Street neighborhood:

- Housing quality is uneven.
- There is a lack of large redevelopment sites. Consequently, individual improvements must play the largest role in revitalization.
- Current residents will be the best source of future residents.
- Improving the Seventh Street retail district will require an interagency approach. Commercial and housing redevelopment must be coordinated.
- Both the influx of Asian families and welfare reform have created a greater demand on education, recreation, and social services programs and space.

The Planning Commission staff recommendations for the Seventh Street neighborhood were organized around nine long-range goals in the text of the neighborhood strategic plan:

- Encourage people and businesses to remain and reinvest in the neighborhood.
- Sharpen the community’s public image and make it an attractive destination.
- Target blocks for improvements in the next five years.
- Develop the capacity to address community development needs effectively.
- Build relationships to tackle community problems together.
- Provide support and personal development opportunities to adults.
- Expand the scope of available youth activities and social outlets.
- Respond to the special needs of the growing elderly population.

Ms. Dottor presented a sampling of recommended actions tied to supporting existing residential blocks and making physical improvements. Several initiatives were associated with the goal of encouraging people and businesses to remain and reinvest in the neighborhood. It was recommended that alliances be made to give residents access to Individual Development Accounts and lower insurance rates. The choice and quality of housing available within the neighborhood could be improved through redevelopment. Redevelopment priority should be on replacing substandard apartments for families and conveying vacant lots to residents for private use. Businesses could benefit from the redefined agenda resulting from the creation of a community-wide business association and a market study that takes a fresh look at the neighborhood’s retail and non-retail base.
The informal village center within the Seventh Street neighborhood should be strengthened in order to sharpen the community’s public image and make it an attractive destination. It is recommended that a committee be organized to look at expansion options for the Ford Recreation Center, a feasibility study be commissioned for the Grand Theatre, and a conceptual plan and first phase tree farm be developed for a village garden.

It is also recommended that four to five residential blocks be targeted for improvements within the next five years. These blocks would be the focus of an outreach initiative to get broader participation in Home Prep and other housing consumer education programs, and to engage more residents in one-on-one counseling during home improvement projects. These blocks would also pursue physical planning, block plans, and matching vacant lots to interested residents.

Ms. Dottor then acknowledged the people who gave so much of their time to this plan: Bill Jamison, Director of the Houston Community Center and Vice President of the Seventh Street Roundtable; Eleanor Rogers, President of the Houston Community Center Board of Directors; Tom Guiltinan, Director of United Communities CDC.

Ms. Kaplan thanked the representatives of the community, people who were present, and also those who were not able to be at the meeting, and stated that the Commission staff is available and ready to work with the community to help implement this plan.

Upon motion by Mrs. Nichols, seconded by Mr. Coleman, the Planning Commission approved the release of this report.

3) Southwest Germantown:

a) Blight Certification - to approve the certification of blight for the area generally bounded by Hansberry Street, Greene Street, Windrim Avenue, Roosevelt Boulevard, and Pulaski Avenue.

b) Southwest Germantown Redevelopment Area Plan - to adopt a Redevelopment Area Plan for the area generally bounded by Hansberry Street, Greene Street, Windrim Avenue, Roosevelt Boulevard, and Pulaski Avenue.

Mr. Paul Curran, Community Planner, explained that the area to be certified contains 136 acres as shown on the context map. The neighborhood is primarily residential; however, a concentrated commercial district is located on Wayne Avenue, from Manheim Street to Wyneva Street, and a small cluster of commercial and industrial uses are located north of the Wayne Junction transportation hub. Institutional and recreational uses include the Fitler Elementary School and Happy Hollow Playground.

Of the seven criteria established by State law for evaluating blight in a particular area, conditions consistent with two of the criteria were found to be present in this study area:

1) Unsafe, unsanitary, and inadequate conditions;

2) Economically undesirable land use.

These two criteria are documented in the Blight Certification report. The vacancy and tax delinquency map shows vacant structures and lots, and the illustrative photographs in the Blight Certification Report and Redevelopment Area Plan show structures in deteriorated, unsafe, and inadequate conditions. An October, 1998 field survey conducted
by Planning Commission staff has determined that the area contains 101 vacant structures, many of which are in dangerously deteriorated condition, and 37 vacant lots, many overgrown with weeds or covered with litter and other debris. Additionally, City tax records indicate the owners of more than 240 properties are two or more years delinquent in the payment of real estate taxes. Therefore, it is concluded that blight does exist in the study area, and Planning Commission staff recommends that the area be certified as blighted.

In recent years, a dramatic increase in property abandonment has become a major threat to the stability of various sections of Southwest Germantown. The purpose of this Blight Certification and Redevelopment Area Plan is to establish a redevelopment area, thereby permitting public acquisition of vacant and deteriorated property. This property will then be conveyed to local non-profit, community-based organizations for redevelopment. In May 1995, The Greater Germantown Housing Development Corporation Neighborhood Strategic Plan was released. This Strategic Plan, which was funded by the Office of Housing and Community Development, includes the Southwest Germantown neighborhood and was prepared under the direction of the Greater Germantown Housing Development Corporation, a community-based developer, to provide new and rehabilitated housing for low and moderate-income buyers and renters, primarily in Northwest Philadelphia. Freedom Square, a retail development of approximately 20,000 square feet, was sponsored by GGHDC and is located one block east of the proposed certification area at Germantown Avenue and Wister Street. The adjacent Elder’s Place senior housing complex and nearby, newly constructed and rehabilitated townhouses form a solid core of residential use immediately adjacent to Freedom Square. The serious degree of deterioration on some blocks in proximity to these recent developments is of great concern to GGHDC and other community-based organizations, area residents, and elected officials.

Project concepts that have been proposed by GGHDC include:

- Improving economic conditions on Wayne Avenue by acquiring, rehabilitating, and reoccupying vacant residential properties adjacent to the Wayne Avenue commercial area.
- Eliminating vacant houses through rehabilitation.

The general goal of the Southwest Germantown Redevelopment Area Plan is to provide a framework for the implementation of redevelopment proposals that may be ready to proceed in the near future. Redevelopment will be in accord with the requirements of any Urban Renewal Plan prepared by the Redevelopment Authority for this area, and will comply with the Code of General Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia. All plans and proposals prepared by the Redevelopment Authority will be subject to the recommendations of the City Planning Commission and the approval of City Council. Staff also recommends that the Southwest Germantown Redevelopment Area Plan be adopted.

Upon motion by Mr. Coleman, seconded by Ms. Van Belle, the Planning Commission approved both the Blight Certification and the Redevelopment Area Plan.

4) Routine

a) Bill No. 980888 - to strike from the City Plan and vacate legally open portions of Alter Street, from Broad Street to a point approximately 99' west of Broad Street, and reserving and placing on the City Plan a certain right-of-way for drainage and water main purposes within the lines of Alter Street.
(Introduced into City Council on November 19, 1998.)
Mr. Michael Thompson, Projects Planner, stated that the purpose of this Bill, introduced by Councilwoman Verna, is to secure an unneeded dead-end street and allow for future business expansion in the Point Breeze section of South Philadelphia. The party-at-interest is Alex Barabuscio, owner of Alex's Auto Body. The staff of the Planning Commission previously reviewed and tentatively approved this action on September 21, 1998. Staff recommendation is for approval.

Upon motion by Mr. Bumb, seconded by Ms. Makadon, the Planning Commission approved Bill No. 980888.

b) **Bill No. 980926** - to strike from the City Plan Mayland Street, from Stenton Avenue to Crittenden Street.  
(Introduced into City Council on December 3, 1998.)

Mr. Michael Thompson stated that the purpose of this Bill, introduced by Councilwoman Miller, is to secure and restrict access to the area by removal of this unimproved paper street. The block, bounded by Washington Lane, Crittenden Street, Tulpehocken Street, and Stenton Avenue, is located in the West Oak Lane section of Northwest Philadelphia. The party-at-interest is Francis E. Gleeson, Esq. for Pep Boys and Lindy Properties. City Planning Commission staff previously reviewed and tentatively approved this action on September 21, 1998. Staff recommendation is for approval.

Upon motion by Ms. Brown, seconded by Ms. Van Belle, the Planning Commission approved Bill No. 980926.

c) **Bill No. 980897** - to relocate portions of the northerly curb line of Clover Street, between 12th Street and Carnac Street, and the southerly curb line of Market Street, between 12th Street and 13th Street.  
(Introduced into City Council on November 19, 1998.)

Mr. Michael Thompson stated that the purpose this bill, introduced by Councilman DiCicco, is to permit the construction of a vehicular drop-off and parking garage access areas that will support the conversion of a vacant PSFS office building into a 585-room hotel. (Mr. Thompson displayed computer-generated graphics of the plan that the architect, Bower Lewis Thrower, furnished to the Commission.) The location of this proposal is in the Center City area on the block bounded by Market Street, 13th Street, Clover Street, and 12th Street. The party-at-interest is 12th Street Hotel Associates. Previously, the City Planning Commission recommended approval of a Tax Increment Financing District to support this development proposal. The Planning Commission staff recommendation is for approval.

Upon motion by Ms. Van Belle, seconded by Mr. Bumb, the Planning Commission approved Bill No. 980897.

d) **Bill No. 980929** - to strike from the City Plan and vacate legally open portions of Nectarine Street, from 10th Street to a point approximately 240' eastwardly therefrom.  
(Introduced into City Council on December 3, 1998.)

Mr. Thompson stated that the purpose of this Bill, introduced by Councilman DiCicco, is to construct a handicapped entranceway in the bed of an unneeded street in the Callowhill Industrial District of North Philadelphia. The precise location is the block bounded by Spring Garden Street, 10th Street, Buttonwood Street, and 9th Street. The party-at-interest is David Grasso. City Planning Commission staff previously reviewed
and tentatively approved this action on October 21, 1998. Staff recommendation is for approval.

Upon motion by Ms. Brown, seconded by Ms. Van Belle, the Planning Commission approved Bill No. 980929.

e) **Bill No. 980921** - to authorize the purchase of 7790-7800 Dungan Road. (Introduced into City Council on December 3, 1998.)

Mr. Martin Gregorski stated that this Bill, introduced by Councilman O'Neill, proposes to consolidate and relocate the Police Internal Affairs Unit and the Ethics Accountability Division to 7790-7800 Dungan Road. This location consists of a 32,000 square foot building with parking for 225 vehicles. The City will purchase this land and the improvements thereon. The Internal Affairs Division personnel are presently located at 323 Race Street, which is structurally unsound, and the Ethics Accountability Division is located at 17th Street and Pattison Avenue. This centralized location will allow for privacy, security, and seclusion from other police units required as a result of the sensitive nature of the duties of the IAD. Additionally, this Bill will allow for the facility at 17th and Pattison to be returned to the Fairmount Park Commission for community reuse. This Bill had a hearing in City Council before the Committee on Public Property and Public Works, and was reported out with a favorable recommendation on December 9, 1998. Second reading and passage of this Bill is expected today. The City Planning Commission staff recommendation is for approval.

Upon motion by Ms. Van Belle, seconded by Ms. Brown, with Mr. Batoff abstaining, the Planning Commission approved Bill No. 980921.

f) **Revised Preliminary Plat** - located in the Rhawnhurst neighborhood of Northeast Philadelphia on the westerly side of Algon Avenue across from Fox Chase Road. To subdivide an 11.48-acre parcel of land into 40 lots to allow for the construction of 40 single-family dwellings, and a storm water detention basin along with 3 new city streets.

Mr. William Erickson, Projects Planner, stated that this revision is to allow for the construction of 31 single-family, detached dwellings, and storm water detention basin, along with 3 new city streets; namely, Dorcas Street, Arnold Street, and Kendrick Street. The existing zoning is R-5 Residential, and the party-at-interest is Bethany Builders, Inc. On July 23, 1998, the Planning Commission had previously approved a revised preliminary plat to allow for the construction of 9 single-family dwellings along the Algon Avenue frontage. The Planning Commission had also approved a preliminary plat on December 1, 1994 to allow for the construction of 84 semi-detached, single-family dwellings. This proposal will be returning to the Planning Commission as a Streets Bill and a final plat. The Planning Commission staff recommendation is for approval with the proviso: that the final plat show the entire development tract, and that deed restrictions on lots #2 through #8 be incorporated in each deed to prohibit curb cuts on Kendrick Street, and to place a "living fence" on the Kendrick Street property line.

Mr. Erickson added that staff had met with the developer today, who has agreed to deed restrict Lots #2 through #8, and install a living fence as a buffer. The developer has sold one lot and has received deposits on three lots with an option to purchase.
Upon motion by Mr. Bumb, seconded by Mr. Coleman, the Planning Commission approved the Revised Preliminary Plat, with the proviso.

Upon Ms. Brown’s query verifying that this preliminary plat had previously been approved, Mr. Erickson explained that this particular development was submitted as a large preliminary plat for 84 semi-detached, single-family dwelling units back in 1994. Due to community opposition and councilmatic suggestions, the site plan was revised to allow only detached, single-family dwellings. The developer then purchased the front portion of the tract, the Algon Avenue frontage. However, the larger, rear portion of the tract remained under option for purchase. The plans for the front parcel moved forward and were approved for the 9 single-family dwelling units along Algon Avenue because they all had legal street frontage. The Commission staff retained some control over the rear portion of the site because of the Subdivision review process. This new preliminary plat for the rear portion of the site shows a new proposed street which created a condition where some lots had frontage on two streets. This condition necessitated the proposed deed restriction and the planting of a buffer as a living fence along the rear property line.

Mr. Brian Cleere, Esquire, representing Tom Clauss, stated that Lots #4, #5, and #6 are OK; Lot #9 ingress and egress is through the front of the property; and deed restricting Lots #2 through #8 is agreeable, along with no curb cuts. Installing a living fence in the rear of the property is also acceptable.

Ms. Makadon inquired if there is a curb cut on Lot #9, whereby Mr. Erickson responded that there is a service drive across the front and a curb cut to Algon Avenue. There is no requirement for a deed restriction because it does not reach the street.

Mr. Coleman questioned why this information was not known initially, which would have prevented this present situation.

Mr. Erickson explained that this particular development came in as a large preliminary plat of 84 units. The Streets Bill was never introduced. This is a matter-of-right development for the units on Algon Avenue because they all have legal street frontage. The Commission staff has some control over the rear portion of the site. The question of double frontage lots is only coming up because Kendrick Street is coming in now.

Ms. Kaplan added that it is fortunate that the rear portion of this site is being developed at the same time as the properties on Algon Avenue in that the Commission staff has the opportunity for a better site plan because new streets are required for development of the major portion of the site.

Mrs. Nichols asked where city services would be provided and where the living fence would be located; Mr. Erickson replied that all services are off Algon Avenue, with vehicular entrance off the service drive, and the living fence would be on the property line of Units #2 through #8. Mr. Erickson pointed out these locations on the site plan that was displayed.

Upon motion by Mr. Rueda, the Planning Commission meeting of December 17, 1998 adjourned at 2:00 p.m.
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