

## West Oak Lane Redevelopment Area Plan

---

**Philadelphia City Planning Commission**  
**May 2005**



CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

John F. Street, *Mayor*

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Jeffrey S. Batoff, *Chairman*

David Adelman

Lynette M. Brown-Sow

Patrick J. Eiding

Vincent Jannetti

Gloria Levin

Marcia Moore Makadon

Stephanie Naidoff

Pedro A. Ramos

Maxine Griffith, AICP, *Executive Director*  
Richard L. Lombardo, *Deputy Executive Director*

**Community Planning Division**

Victoria Mason-Ailey, *Division Director*

Richard Redding, *Deputy Director*

Report by:  
Esther Ibarra, *Northwest Philadelphia Planner*

Contributions by:  
Michael Thompson, *Community Planner*  
Brian Wenrich, *Community Planner*  
Manisha Gadia, *Student Intern*

Contributor from the GIS/ Graphics Division:  
Brian Lightner, *GIS/Graphics Specialist*

## Redevelopment Area Plan for West Oak Lane

May 2005

### INTRODUCTION

The Redevelopment Area Plan for West Oak Lane covers over two square miles of Northwest Philadelphia including West Oak Lane and sections of Upper Mt. Airy. The boundaries include the area bounded by Ivy Hill and Upsal Street, Cheltenham Avenue, Old York Road and Broad Street, and Stenton Avenue. Properties abutting either side of the boundary streets are included except for Cheltenham Avenue (City limit).

To the west of Upsal Street, four additional areas are included in the boundaries:

- Cheltenham Avenue corridor: Properties abutting the 2500 through 3200 blocks of Cheltenham Avenue, from Upsal Street to Ivy Hill Road.
- Stenton Avenue corridor: Properties abutting the 6400 through 8300 blocks of Stenton Avenue, from Upsal Street to Ivy Hill Road.
- Wadsworth & Cheltenham commercial area: Properties abutting the 1500 and 1600 blocks of Wadsworth Avenue, also including 8301-49 Pickering Avenue.
- Vernon Road & Greenwood Street area: The predominantly commercial block bounded by Vernon road, Greenwood Street and Fayette Street; also including the area bounded by Cheltenham Avenue, Mt. Pleasant Avenue, Michener Avenue and Vernon Road (former Temple Stadium site).

Two previous redevelopment areas are included within the boundaries of this redevelopment area: (1) Stenton Avenue and (2) Ogontz Avenue Redevelopment Areas. The two previous redevelopment area plans are superseded by this plan.

The impetus for this redevelopment area is an ongoing intermunicipal planning effort involving Cheltenham Township, Montgomery County and the 9<sup>th</sup> Councilmanic District in the City of Philadelphia and the State of Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development. In coordination with this planning effort the Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation has been working with local public officials on housing redevelopment throughout the area and a team of consultants is also looking at commercial corridor issues. The team of consultants includes the firms of Brown & Keener Bressi Urban Design/Place Planning and Kise Straw & Kolodner. The consulting team will prepare reports for the commercial corridors of Cheltenham Avenue, Stenton, Wadsworth and Washington Lane. Some of the team's initial redevelopment schemes and redesign suggestions are referenced in our report, namely in the illustrative site plan section. The consultant studies are ongoing and final recommendations are not available at this time.

The immediate purpose of the redevelopment area plan is to make the area eligible for publicly assisted acquisition of vacant commercial and residential properties. Properties would be acquired, assembled and conveyed to community-based and private organizations prepared to establish new businesses and rehabilitate existing homes. In the long term, this eligibility can be useful to various community and economic development initiatives, namely those brought forth as a result of the intermunicipal planning effort and the concepts discussed in this report. Although specific sites have been referenced in detail the intention of this redevelopment area plan is to encourage housing renewal and commercial investment, improved pedestrian and vehicular circulation, signage, and appeal, and general revitalization applicable throughout the entire area.

BOUNDARY MAP & PREVIOUS  
REDEVELOPMENT AREAS



Homes on Stenton Avenue



Sign on Stenton Ave



Ogontz Avenue businesses

The West Oak Lane neighborhood comprises the majority of the redevelopment area including most of the residential area and commercial corridors. The total population is 30,563 and 96% of residents are African-American. West Oak Lane was settled initially in the 1700s with farms and mills. The introduction of the Broad Street Subway in the 1920s spurred the first population and commercial boom in West Oak Lane including the development of row homes and commercial corridors along Ogontz Avenue, Broad Street, and Stenton Avenue. Not until the 1940s and 1950s in Post World War II years did large-scale housing development dominate the area, creating a walkable neighborhood of brick row homes with scatterings of detached and semi-detached homes filled with White and African-American middle class residents. Unfortunately, during the same time, two of the major mills in the area closed. Later, the 1960s brought social and economic unrest driving many out of the city and into the suburbs. West Oak Lane experienced a loss in the White middle class population, many of which abandoned their homes and shops and were replaced by middle and working class African-Americans. Today the occupied homes are generally in stable condition and some sections have increasing property values. However there are pockets of vacancy, poorly maintained properties, and lower property values have a deteriorating affect on the rest of the area. The commercial corridors are consistently occupied however they are in generally poor condition, worn and aging, suffering from neglect, and in some cases incompatible with today's consumer demands. The commercial corridors could benefit significantly if redevelopment, investment, and urban design elements are introduced. The scattered residential and commercial vacancy and pockets of properties in decline threaten the continued stability of the area and is the driving force for this redevelopment plan.

## SUMMARY OF BLIGHT CERTIFICATION

The West Oak Lane area is being certified as blighted by the Planning Commission concurrent with the approval of this Redevelopment Area Plan. Designation for redevelopment is warranted by the following criteria having been satisfied:

- Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate conditions
- Faulty street and lot layout
- Economically undesirable land use

These conditions have a deteriorating effect on the neighborhood.

There are 247 vacant properties scattered throughout the area, many of which have unsafe and unsanitary conditions. Evidence of economically undesirable land use is exhibited by 159 tax delinquent properties and 1,459 properties with code violations, which illustrate a lack of investment, upkeep, and maintenance. Faulty lot layout conditions are evident on several residential streets with lots smaller than the 1,440 square feet permitted under the City Code. Additionally, low property values in 3 of the 5 census tracts within the area are indicative of disinvestment, economic distress and blight.

## EXISTING CONDITIONS AND TRENDS

The area is in need of redevelopment. Despite sections of the area that exhibit strong homeownership rates and have rising property values, they are threatened by the blight that exists in nearby areas. The aging housing stock, deferred maintenance, and scattered vacancy threaten the stability of the entire residential core. The commercial areas are in need of reinvestment as they have become





Setback shops with front end parking on Stenton Avenue

outdated and worn, are poorly managed, and in some instances have poor design, landscaping, and parking elements. Many of the shopping areas were developed in the post WWII era and are no longer attractive and competitive in relation to today's consumer demands. Being so close to the county border with Montgomery County poses other challenges, mainly competition with suburban scale development and modern style buildings. As they stand right now many of the buildings are a blighting influence since they lack attractive design, signage, and curb appeal. The commercial corridors are walkable and the dense housing arrangement makes them strong candidates for redevelopment and market

success. Proximity to public transit is another advantage that creates considerable potential for commercial success.

## OBJECTIVES

The general goals of this Redevelopment Area Plan are to (1) enable publicly -assisted acquisition in support of community development projects, and (2) provide a framework for present, planned and future redevelopment proposals. Clear land use policies and development priorities will permit the full potential of the study area to be realized. The plan has three specific objectives:

- To eliminate the blighting influence of undesirable land uses by encouraging rehabilitation of vacant homes and vacant commercial buildings,
- To encourage the investment and beautification of residential and commercial properties throughout the area, and
- To redesign and/or redevelop outdated, worn, and poorly designed commercial strips and centers throughout the area.

The Redevelopment Area Plan for West Oak Lane contains reuse proposals that are intended to maintain the quality and character of the community and rehabilitate the housing while adding some new mixed-use and commercial uses at appropriate locations.

## EXISTING LAND USE

Residential is the predominant land use. Commercial uses exist along Cheltenham Avenue, Wadsworth, Vernon Road, Ogontz Avenue, Limekiln Pike, Washington Lane, Broad Street, Old York Road, and Stenton Avenue. Public facilities include the West Oak Lane Branch Library and Post Office on Washington Lane, the East Germantown Post Office on Cheltenham Avenue, the Logan Post Office at Broad Street, and Fire Company 73 on Ogontz Avenue. There are three cemeteries in the area including Northwood, National, and Cheltenham Hills. Public schools include Holy Angels on Broad Street, Wagner Middle School on Cheltenham Avenue, Rowen Elementary School on Haines Street, St. Athanasius and Kinsey Elementary School on Limekiln Pike, Martin Luther King High, Hill Freedman School of Humanities and West Oak Lane Charter School on Stenton Avenue, and Pennypacker Elementary School on Washington Lane. The Simons Recreation Center on Walnut Lane, Wagner Park on Stenton Avenue, and temporary fields at the former Temple Stadium site on Cheltenham Avenue provide the only recreation and open space for the area. There are vacant properties scattered throughout the residential area and along commercial corridors.





EXISTING LAND USE MAP

## PROPOSED LAND USE

There are no major changes in land use proposed in this plan. Neighborhood and commercial revitalization can be realized with the existing land use framework. It is anticipated that scattered housing rehabilitation will return formerly vacant houses back into productive residential use. The expectation of commercial revitalization is to reinvest in the physical design and appeal of worn, outdated, and poorly designed properties so that the commercial corridors can be used to their full development potential and realize a more current and competitive edge. Redevelopment of commercial corridors may require demolition of existing properties to create better site design or to accommodate ancillary parking, landscaping or buffering which do not warrant a change in land use.

## PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES

No changes in zoning are proposed at this time. The projects envisioned will require more planning and design work before the appropriate zoning strategies can be determined. Therefore, zoning changes by ordinance or use certificates or variances from the Zoning Board of Adjustment may be required depending on the specific development plans that are ultimately prepared. Housing rehabilitation and commercial redevelopment, major goals of this plan, are generally allowed under existing zoning.

## PROPOSED STREET CHANGES

In the long term, commercial redevelopment proposed for Cheltenham Avenue, Wadsworth Avenue, Washington Lane, Ogontz Avenue, and Stenton Avenue may involve new street or traffic patterns, depending on final designs. For instance the recommended revitalization at Ogontz Avenue and Washington Lane involves a minor street closure. However in general, street changes should wait for further planning and design work for specific development projects.

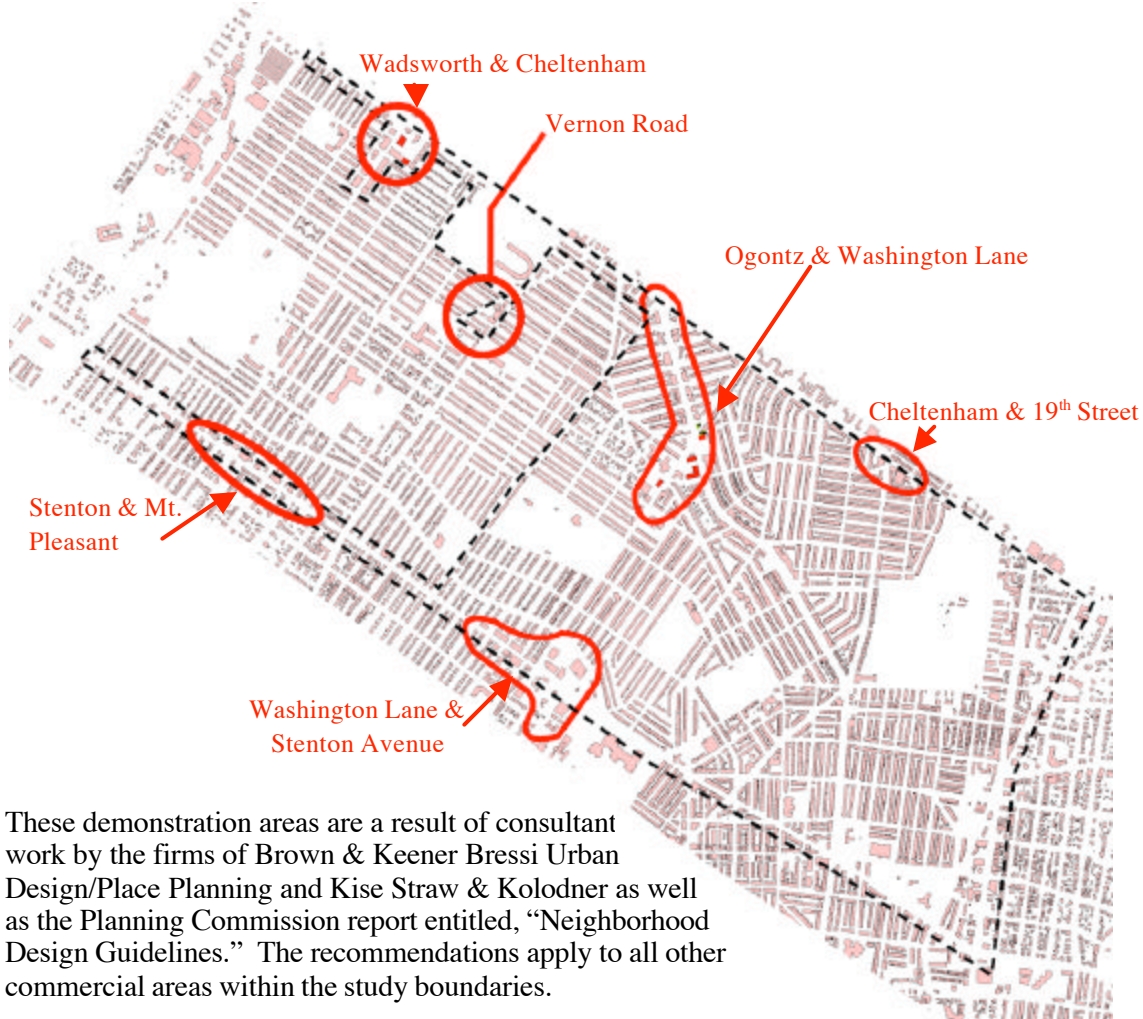
## RELOCATION

No relocation is proposed at this time. If relocation is needed in the future, it will be accomplished in accordance with the terms and conditions of the Federal Uniform Relocation Act.

## ESTIMATED COSTS OF REDEVELOPMENT

Estimated redevelopment costs will be determined as development plans become better defined.

## ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN



These demonstration areas are a result of consultant work by the firms of Brown & Keener Bressi Urban Design/Place Planning and Kise Straw & Kolodner as well as the Planning Commission report entitled, "Neighborhood Design Guidelines." The recommendations apply to all other commercial areas within the study boundaries.

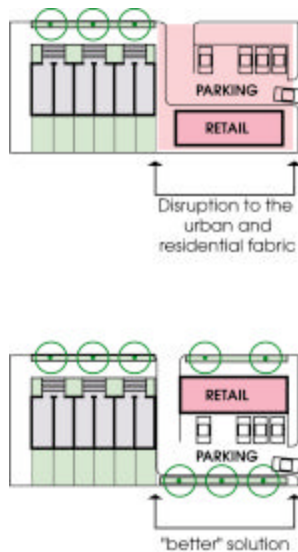
## ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN WITH DEMONSTRATION AREAS



The Illustrative Site Plan is a conceptual plan showing new buildings on major opportunity sites, in accord with the land use recommendations. Major commercial intersections and strips have been identified as demonstration areas with recommended treatments applicable to all of the local commercial districts. A few of these commercial areas are highlighted in this report because they best reflect the revitalization goals and strategies designed to transform aging, neglected commercial corridors and make them more competitive and attractive to today's consumers.

Some of the main issues being studied include poor design, underutilization of properties and wide sidewalks, disjointed properties on the same block, lack of landscaping and directional signage, and poor circulation and landscaping of pedestrian paths and parking lots.

### Wadsworth Avenue & Cheltenham Avenue



The retail center and parking lot at the intersection of Cheltenham Avenue and Wadsworth is poorly designed, underutilized and disjointed from the rest of the commercial and residential activity occurring in its immediate vicinity. It is recommended that two new buildings be introduced consistent with the existing setback in order to better connect this shopping center to the rest of the shopping district creating a continuous street line.

Adding improved directional signage, facades and business signs, awnings, landscaping, lighting, walkways and paving will complete the revitalization of this retail center.



### Ogontz Avenue & Washington Lane

The commercial and public facilities located in the vicinity of Ogontz Avenue and Washington Lane are disjointed and many of the parcels are underutilized. Introducing new buildings along Ogontz Avenue frontage and mini parks on the triangular parcels at the intersection can transform this area into an attractive and walkable community hub. Maintaining the pedestrian friendly atmosphere to the south of the intersection could be done by adding a mixed-use storefront building at the street frontage of the existing parking lot.



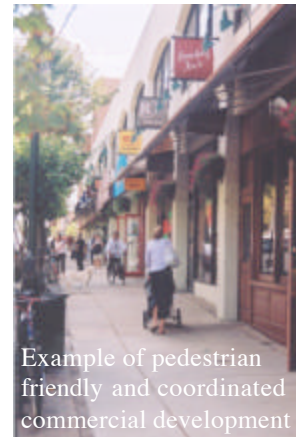
### Washington Lane & Stenton Avenue

1. **West Oak Lane Plaza** (map code 1) is an outdated shopping plaza poorly designed with non existent directional signage and striping for parking areas, no landscaping, and uneven paving. The potential of this area needs to be realized, particularly because it is strategically located at a key intersection and has pedestrian friendly buildings fronting wide sidewalks. Modifications that can be introduced to best enhance this area include converting front parking and paved areas into landscaped paths and outdoor café seating,



placing new directional signs for rear parking, and creating better façades for businesses. The West Oak Lane Charter School has occupied a vacant supermarket on the site. It has minimal landscaping and play space.

2. **Retail plazas on Stenton Avenue** (map code 2) suffer from a lack of uniformity in design, creating confusion and clutter resulting from different setbacks and parking arrangements for each block. The businesses have a neighborhood scale that is pedestrian friendly and benefit from off-street parking, however they are showing signs of wear, deferred maintenance, and are poorly managed. Establishing a more uniform appearance and reorganizing the vehicular access and parking could go a long way in making this area more appealing. Outdoor restaurant seating is another possible improvement.



3. **1300 Block of Washington Lane** (map code 3) has an excess of pavement combined with a lack of upkeep and is developed in a haphazard manner on a triangular block. Parking lots can be combined, reducing curb cuts and improving pedestrian flow. New landscaping, coordinated property management and improved maintenance and security are needed.

All new construction and rehabilitation should be designed to fit with the existing qualities of the area. In general, new housing should be designed and constructed at densities compatible with the surrounding neighborhood fabric.

Although not specifically shown on the Illustrative Site Plan, site improvements are recommended to support the various redevelopment projects that are implemented. New sidewalks, street trees and other similar public improvements should accompany new housing and commercial construction.

## PROPOSED STANDARDS AND CONTROLS

Standards and controls for uses, density, land coverage, building area, parking and off-street loading will be established by the Philadelphia Zoning Code. All impacts of redevelopment on the surrounding residential community will be minimized through development controls regulating site design, building materials and landscaping. These controls will be established by the Redevelopment Authority, and reviewed and approved by the City Planning Commission.

The Pennsylvania Urban Redevelopment Law of 1945, as amended, and the United States Housing Act of 1949, as amended, regulate redevelopment and urban renewal in the City of Philadelphia. Redevelopment in the West Oak Lane Redevelopment Area will be in conformity with the provisions of this Redevelopment Area Plan and with the requirements of any Urban Renewal Plan prepared by the Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia 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 the Council of the City of Philadelphia.