

East Overbrook Redevelopment Area Plan
Philadelphia City Planning Commission
October 1997

I. Introduction

The East Overbrook Redevelopment Area is a 155-acre section of West Philadelphia. The precise boundary is shown on page 3: the northern boundary is the right-of-way for the AMTRAK/SEPTA R-5 railroad. The eastern boundary is 52nd Street. The western boundaries are Wynnwood Road and 63rd Street. The southern boundary is irregular: it begins at 52nd & Warren Streets, follows Warren Street to Lansdowne Avenue, follows Lansdowne to 59th, turns north along 59th to Columbia Avenue, and then uses Columbia, 60th, Hazelhurst, 61st and Lebanon Avenue to connect with the western boundary at 63rd Street. Properties on both sides of 63rd Street and Lansdowne Avenue are included in the redevelopment area.

Portions of the East Overbrook Redevelopment Area are within the Philadelphia/Parkside Empowerment Zone and the West Parkside Enterprise Zone.

The East Overbrook Redevelopment Area has been created to facilitate property rehabilitation and redevelopment in a portion of the Overbrook neighborhood. The major impetus is a proposal from the Overbrook Neighborhood Improvement Council in conjunction with the Boas Box Company for rehabilitation of vacant houses in the eastern section of the neighborhood. The rehabilitation proposal is supported by the Office of Housing and Community Development.

The redevelopment area includes two distinct sub-areas. First is the residential area east of 56th Street, sometimes referred to as "Hestonville." Originally developed in the late 1800's, some 30 years earlier than blocks to the west, this small village-like area has a street pattern that differs noticeably from surrounding areas; the blocks have a different size and configuration, and some of the streets do not match with the wider grid system. Hestonville also has a variety of house types, indicating that the area was built up in several small sections as opposed to being part of a large subdivision with a consistent pattern of development. While the Hestonville section contains most of the vacant properties found in the redevelopment area according to a 1997 field survey, this section has also seen investment in housing rehabilitation during recent years. On Lansdowne Avenue, Allison Street and Hunter Street, houses and apartments have been rehabilitated and vacant lots have been turned into gardens or play areas. The success of these improvements has established a solid basis for initiating additional redevelopment projects east of 56th Street that will be facilitated by this Plan. This area is recommended for neighborhood renewal in The Plan for West Philadelphia, published by the Planning Commission in 1994.

The second major section of the redevelopment area is the Lancaster Avenue corridor. This is one of the areas identified in The Plan for West Philadelphia in the "Corridors in Decline" section. This corridor is recommended for beautification, redevelopment and further design studies. In the East Overbrook area, much of the property along Lancaster Avenue is characterized by litter, graffiti, overgrown weeds, vacant land and

buildings and a generally low level of property upkeep and stewardship. But Lancaster Avenue also has strengths: high traffic volume, Overbrook High School (an imposing landmark at the crest of the hill), and a healthy neighborhood commercial district in the 6200 block that includes a bank, a fresh foods market, and several other businesses.

Lancaster Avenue also has a rich history: from 1795 to 1867 it was the "Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike." This was the first turnpike in the nation and the first road opened in West Philadelphia. The turnpike had nine toll stations along its 62-mile route. In 1867, faced with financial losses caused by deterioration of the roadway and competition from the railroads, the Philadelphia portion of the turnpike was sold to the Hestonville and Mantua Railroad Company, which was authorized to lay tracks in the bed of the street.

Today, it is clear that Lancaster Avenue is functioning below its potential. Properties, both vacant and occupied, must be better cared for; this includes publicly-owned land and the railroad property that forms an unsightly visual backdrop in some areas. Sidewalks, curbs and lighting should be upgraded along the Avenue. Individual businesses should each do their part towards creating a cleaner, more attractive environment along Lancaster Avenue. And at strategic locations, vacant or underutilized properties should be redeveloped so that new commercial services and new buildings and parking facilities can be introduced into the corridor. This redevelopment area plan is one element of the renewal strategy for the Lancaster Avenue corridor, moving the West Philadelphia Plan recommendations closer to implementation.

This Redevelopment Area Plan contains reuse proposals that are intended to maintain the quality and character of the community and rehabilitate the housing while adding some new residential, mixed-use and commercial uses at appropriate locations. These proposals are in accordance with The Plan for West Philadelphia and the City's Comprehensive Plan.

II. Objectives

The general goal of the East Overbrook Redevelopment Area Plan is to provide a framework for present and future redevelopment proposals. Clear planning policies for land use, zoning and capital program investment will permit the full potential of the study area to be realized.

The plan has three specific objectives:

(1) to encourage rehabilitation of vacant homes; (2) to eliminate the blighting influence of undesirable land uses by encouraging the redevelopment of vacant land and buildings, and underutilized properties; and (3) to replace substandard or economically obsolete buildings with new construction where rehabilitation is impractical.

III. Existing Conditions

The East Overbrook Redevelopment Area was certified as blighted on October 9, 1997 by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. Designation for redevelopment is warranted by the following criteria having been satisfied:

- Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate conditions
- Economically undesirable land use

These conditions have a deteriorating effect on the neighborhood. Of the 1,737 properties in the study area, 172 are vacant. The vacancy is concentrated along the Lancaster Avenue corridor and in the residential area east of 56th Street. Vacancy is evidence of unsafe and unsanitary conditions, and many properties also exhibit related safety problems such as broken and unsecured windows and doors, trash, litter, debris and overgrowth. Tax delinquency is pervasive (21% of privately-owned properties are two or more years tax delinquent). Property values are low in most of the East Overbrook area. There are 50 census blocks within the redevelopment area, and the median value in 44 of those blocks is less than the City median of \$49,400; and there are 10 blocks (most are located east of 56th Street) where the median value is less than half the City median. In fact, the highest median value for a block east of 56th Street is \$36,000, and the lowest is \$14,300. These statistics indicate that there are economically undesirable land uses in the East Overbrook study area.

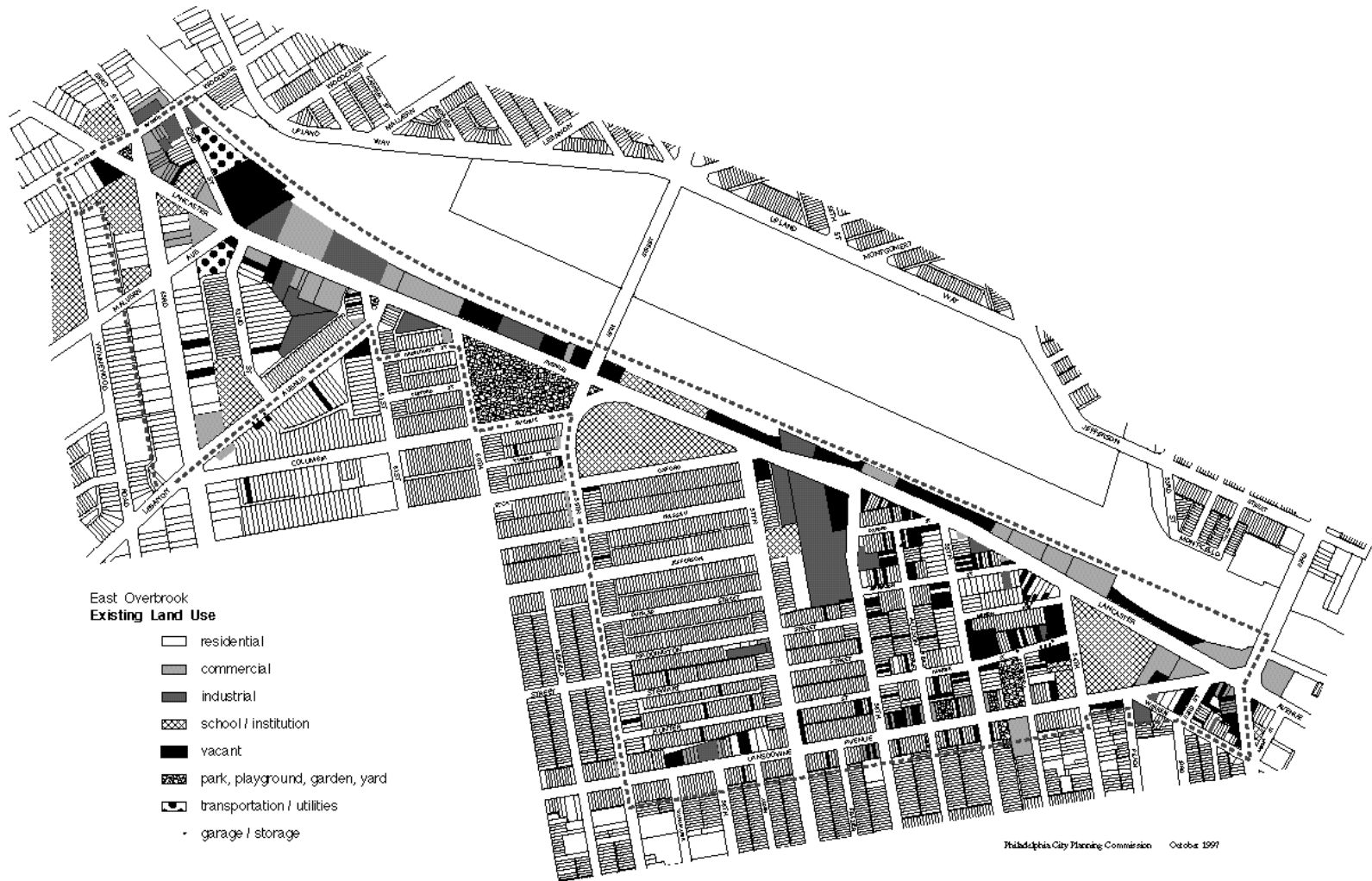
IV. Existing Land

Existing land use is predominantly residential except for the Lancaster Avenue corridor, which contains a mixture of commercial, industrial, institutional and vacant uses.

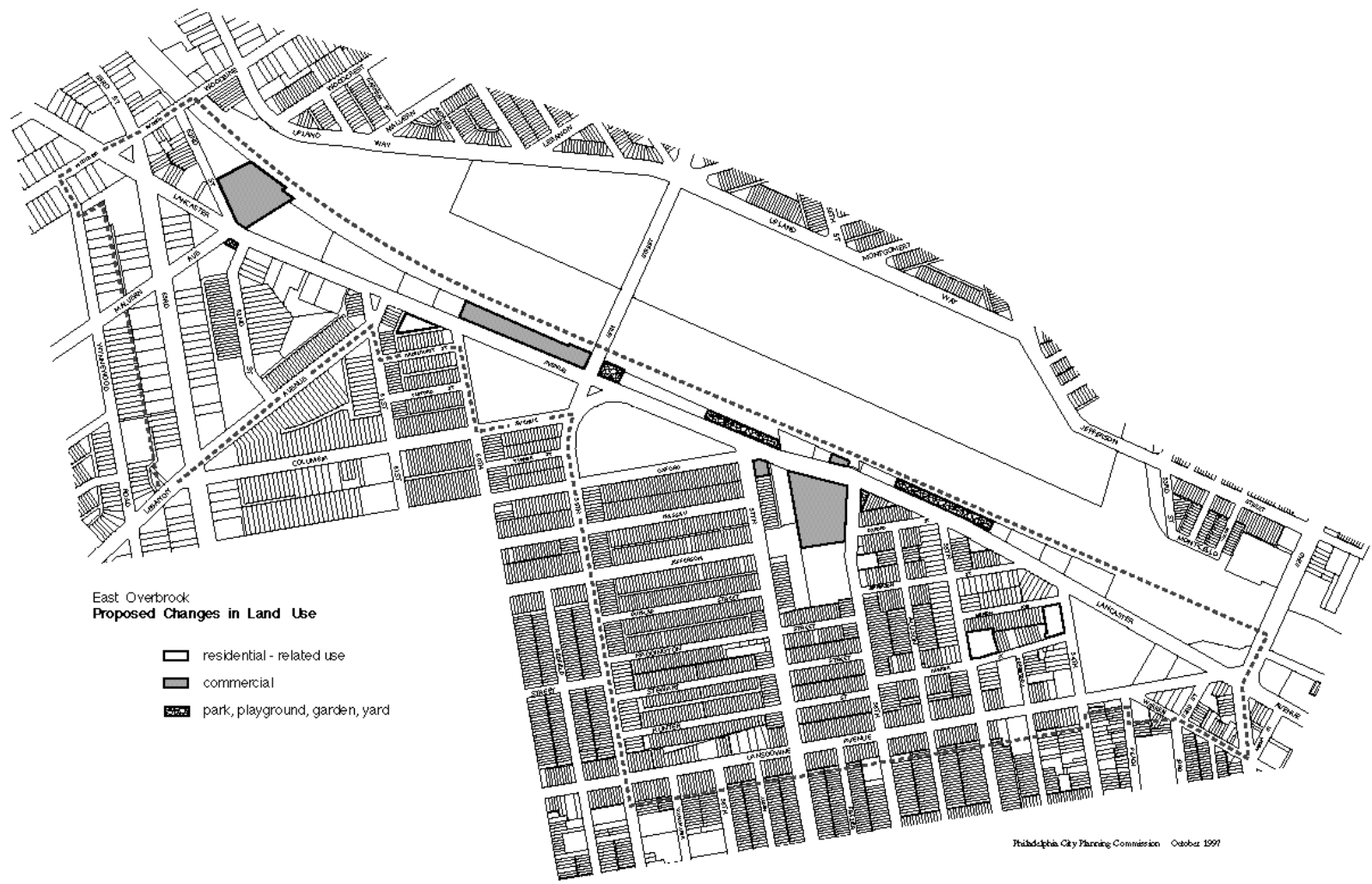
V. Proposed Land Use

This Redevelopment Area Plan is designed to facilitate housing rehabilitation, while also laying the groundwork for appropriate treatment of the major opportunity sites. The plan anticipates that the vacant homes scattered throughout the neighborhood will be rehabilitated or in a few cases demolished and redeveloped.

The large vacant lot at NE corner 55th & Hunter Streets is centrally located amidst the highest concentration of vacant houses. This lot is proposed for residential-related use, including the development of public facilities or open space of a type that is compatible with surrounding residential use. Another large vacant lot at NW corner 54th & Hunter is also proposed for residential-related use.



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Along Lancaster Avenue, the vacant lots and buildings will be redeveloped for commercial use. The industrial property at 5610 Lancaster Avenue is proposed for commercial use along its Lancaster Avenue frontage. Additional commercial redevelopment is proposed at 2101-27 N. 62nd Street (at Lancaster), and 5915-99 Lancaster Avenue. Other proposals along Lancaster Avenue involve open space beautification and a small amount of residential-related redevelopment.

VI. Illustrative Site Plan

The Illustrative Site Plan depicts the rehabilitation of most vacant properties, a new retail center with parking at 5610 Lancaster Avenue, and two new retail-and-parking developments on Lancaster Avenue--one at NE corner 62nd & Lancaster, and another at NW corner 59th & Lancaster. In the residential sections, the Illustrative Site Plan depicts new residential-type structures at two locations on the 5400 block of Hunter Street.

Although not shown on the Illustrative Site Plan, site improvements are recommended in the future as the various redevelopment projects are implemented. This will involve improvements to the sidewalks and streetscape along Lancaster Avenue and in the residential area where housing rehabilitation will be concentrated. New sidewalks, street trees, landscaping, bus shelters, lighting and various street furnishings and amenities are envisioned for the corridor.

VII. Proposed Zoning Changes

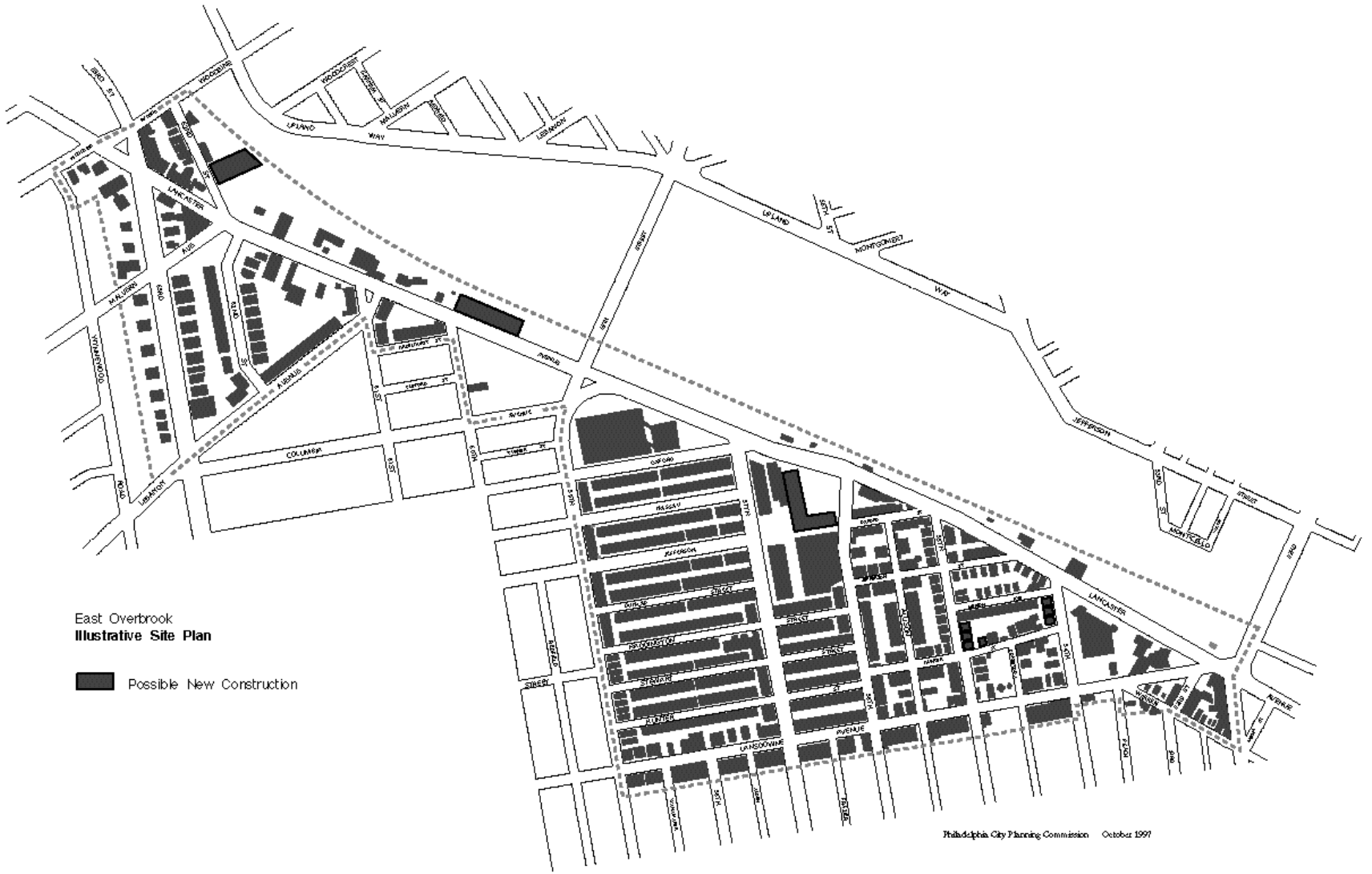
No changes in the existing zoning are proposed. Housing rehabilitation, a major goal of this plan, is generally allowed under existing zoning. The Zoning map shows suggested areas of rezoning, but this is not definitive and the various sites will require more planning and design work before the appropriate zoning strategies can be determined. Therefore, zoning changes (via City Council) or use certificates or variances (from the Zoning Board of Adjustment) may be required depending on the specific plans that are ultimately prepared.

VIII. Proposed Street Changes


No changes in street layout are proposed in the East Overbrook Redevelopment Area. However, a City Plan change for 56th & Lancaster (involving the narrowing of a small section of Lancaster Avenue) was recently approved by City Council and the Mayor. The revision to this intersection will be constructed in the near future.

IX. Relocation

No relocation of residents, either homeowners or renters, is proposed in this Plan. Business relocations are possible on portions of the 5400, 5900 and 6000 blocks of Lancaster Avenue. As many as six business could be affected.



East Overbrook
Illustrative Site Plan

 Possible New Construction

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X. Estimated Costs of Redevelopment

The initial project to be advanced under this Redevelopment Area Plan is the acquisition and rehabilitation of up to 84 scattered vacant houses in the area generally located between 54th and 56th Streets. The total project cost is estimated at \$8.5 million. The cost of the other potential redevelopment projects will be determined at a later time. These proposals are conceptual, the sponsors have not prepared specific plans, and the details of the projects are subject to change at this time.

XI. Proposed Standards and Controls

Standards and controls for uses, density, land coverage, building area, parking and off-street loading will be established by the zoning code regulations. 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 East Overbrook Redevelopment Area will be in conformity with the provisions of this Redevelopment Area Plan. It will be in accord 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.

NOTE:

This version of the report is incomplete. When we tried to convert the original 1997 report into .pdf format, major errors were discovered in the text and graphics. This is because of software compatibility problems. This version of the report uses all of the text but fewer graphics, and will serve as a summary of the original plan.