

Parkside National Register  
Historic District  
Redevelopment Area Plan

Philadelphia City Planning Commission  
February 2000



The Lansdowne, 41<sup>st</sup> Street & Parkside Avenue

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

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## Parkside National Register Historic District Redevelopment Area Plan

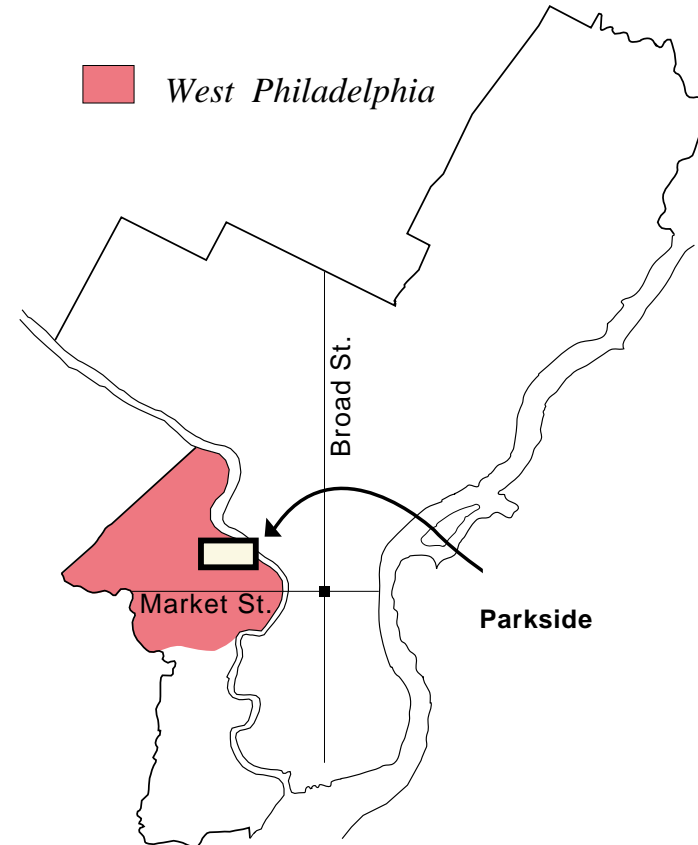
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### INTRODUCTION

The Parkside National Register Historic District is a 105-acre section of West Philadelphia, adjacent to Fairmount Park and the Philadelphia Zoo. The precise boundary of the Redevelopment Area is shown on the map on page 3. The northern boundary is Parkside Avenue and Girard Avenue. The eastern boundary is a Conrail freight railroad line running east of and parallel to 38<sup>th</sup> Street. The southern boundary is also formed by railroad tracks, including the Main Line of the former Pennsylvania Railroad (now used by AMTRAK and SEPTA R-5/R-6 trains). The western boundary is Belmont Avenue.

This Redevelopment Area has been created to facilitate property redevelopment and rehabilitation in the Parkside National Register Historic District. The initial project to be advanced under this Plan is a proposal from Philadelphia Health Management Corporation, in a joint venture with Parkside Historic Preservation Corporation, to construct a new facility for “Interim House West.” It will contain transitional housing units, a day care center for the residents of Interim House West and the community at large, and classrooms for adult education and job training.

This Redevelopment Area Plan also reflects proposals made by the Parkside Historic Preservation Corporation as it continues to rehabilitate and develop housing for rental and homeownership. This community-based corporation sponsored the application for historic district designation, approved in 1983. The historic district, and the tax incentives that accompany it, are partly responsible for the



investment and renewal that has transformed Parkside Avenue from a blighted corridor into a stunning, award-winning collection of restored mansions and houses. In the vicinity of the 4100 block of Parkside Avenue, more than \$20 million was invested during the 1980's and 1990's by Parkside Historic Preservation Corporation in partnership with the City and other private and non-profit entities. This investment began with the renovation of the Lansdowne Apartments pictured on the cover of this report, and has resulted in the restoration of 15 structures, many of which are large multi-family buildings. The most recent building to be finished is The Marlton,

pictured on page 4. The next project will be the construction of Interim House West. Current plans call for the renovation of an additional 90 units on Parkside and Belmont Avenues, and the development of a 50-to-70-unit residential community in the area bordered by Leidy, Viola, 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Streets. These future plans will involve an estimated \$16 million of new investment in the area.

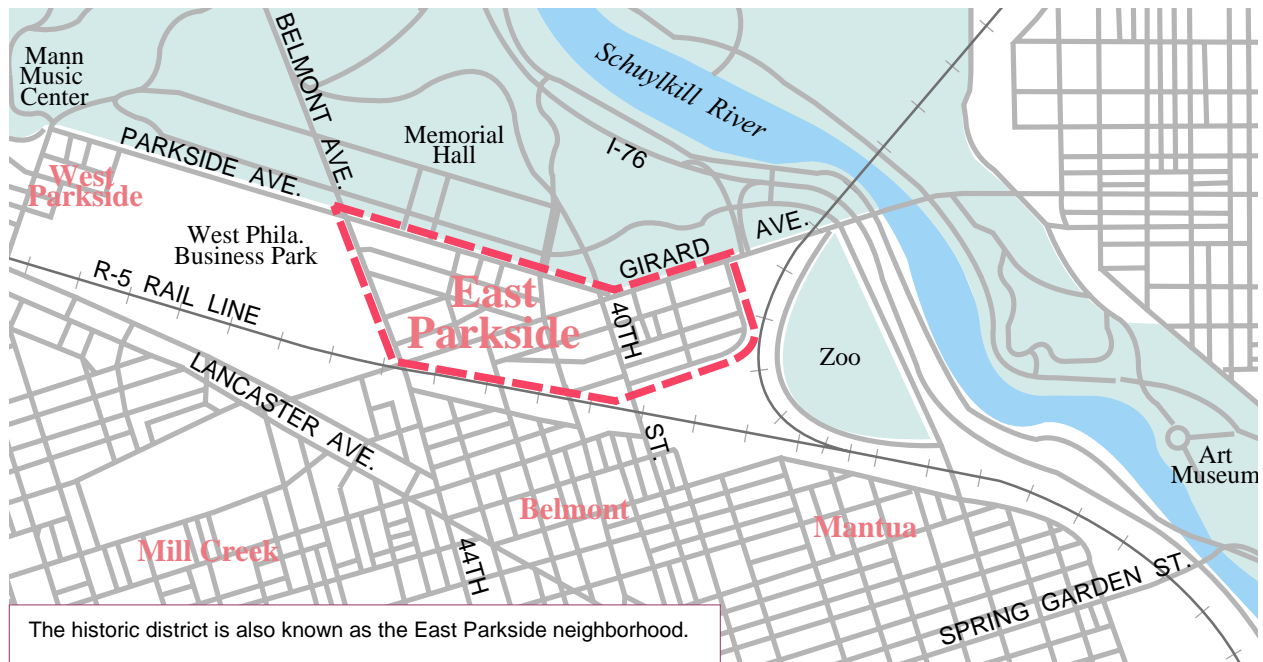
The historic district is also known as the East Parkside neighborhood. It is a residential area containing approximately 4,500 residents. In addition to the ongoing investment activity detailed above, East Parkside has numerous strengths. It has proximity to the employment centers of Center City and University City, and it is adjacent to the Empowerment Zone and the West Philadelphia Business Park. The neighborhood has good highway access and bus/trolley service. Residents have excellent recreational opportunities nearby at

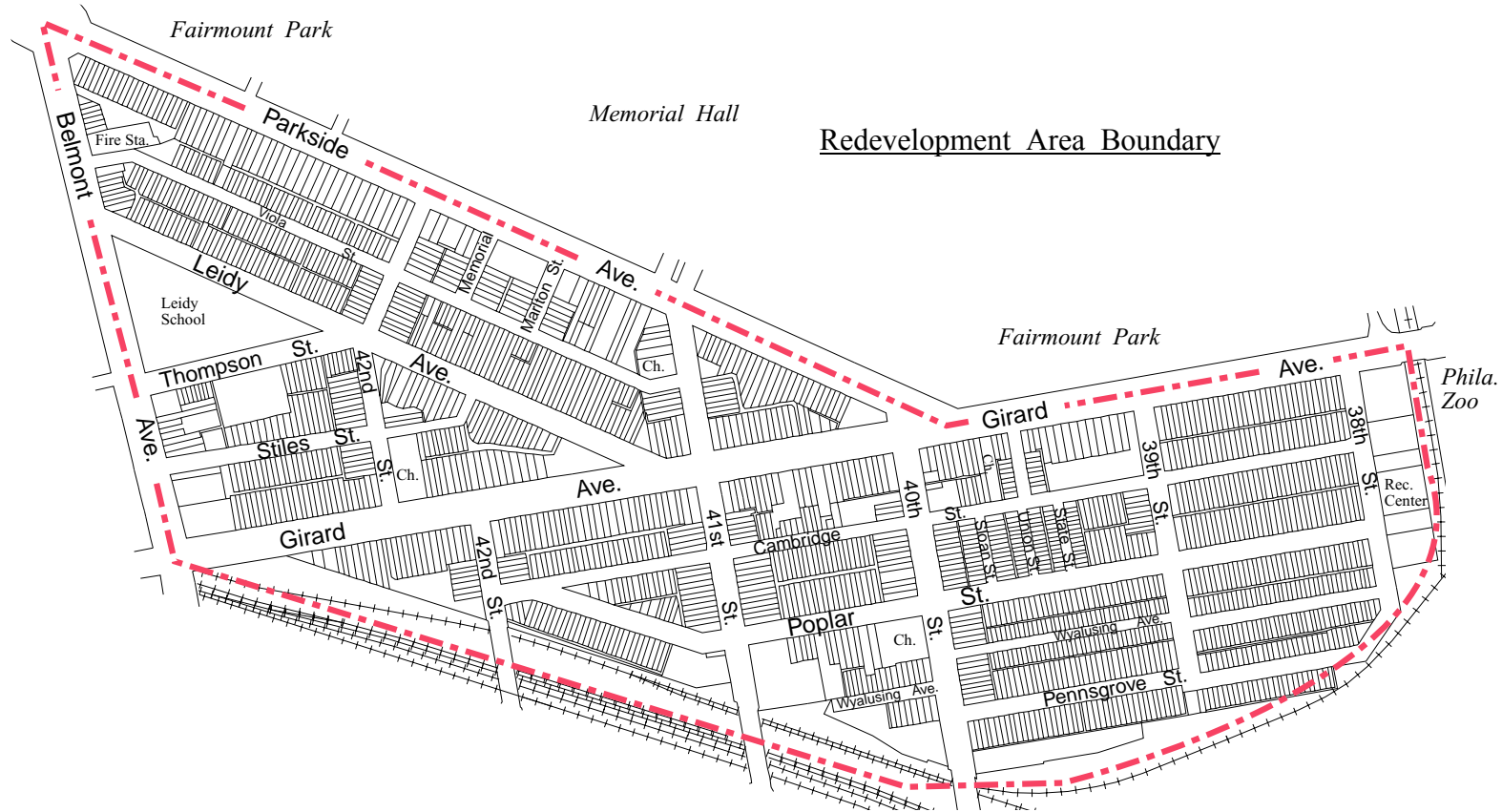
Fairmount Park, Memorial Hall and the Zoo. East Parkside is fortunate to have some of the most beautiful and ornate residential buildings to be found in all of West Philadelphia.

This neighborhood also has significant problems that need to be addressed. Vacant houses and lots are scattered throughout the area, vacancy is especially severe along sections of Girard Avenue, Leidy Avenue, Viola Street, 40<sup>th</sup> Street and Wyalusing Avenue, tax delinquency is at a high level, and the estimated 70-to-100-year-old housing stock is increasingly difficult to maintain. The traditional commercial area in this neighborhood, located near 40<sup>th</sup> & Girard, has been reduced to just a half dozen viable businesses which are now outnumbered by the vacant stores in their midst. The declining conditions are related to the significant loss of population that this neighborhood has experienced in recent decades. Since 1970,

population has decreased almost by half, and an estimated 28% of the current residents are living in poverty.

The Parkside National Register Historic District 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, social service, mixed-use and commercial uses at appropriate locations. These proposals are in accordance with The Plan for West Philadelphia which constitutes the City's Comprehensive Plan for this area.





Redevelopment Area Boundary

**OBJECTIVES**

The general goal of this 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:

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

## EXISTING CONDITIONS

The subject properties were recertified as blighted on February 3, 2000 by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission. Designation for redevelopment is warranted by the following criteria having been satisfied:

- Unsafe, unsanitary, inadequate conditions
- Inadequate Planning
- Faulty Street and Lot Layout
- Economically undesirable land use

These conditions have a deteriorating effect on the neighborhood.

Of the 1,596 properties in the study area, 520 are vacant. Many properties have unsafe and unsanitary conditions which are representative of economically undesirable land use. Tax delinquency is pervasive (43% of privately-owned properties are two or more years tax delinquent). Property values are low: the value of single family homes in the Redevelopment Area is less than one-third of the city-wide median value.

## EXISTING LAND USE (see map on page 5)

Residential is the predominant land use. Commercial use is clustered near 40<sup>th</sup> & Girard, and contains a high degree of vacancy. Industrial properties are located near the railroads at the edges of the neighborhood. A fire station and elementary school are situated on the east side of Belmont Avenue, and churches are important features in the neighborhood. However, vacant land and vacant buildings also



The Marlton, at 1721-31 Marlton Ave., between Parkside Ave. and Viola St.; renovated in 1999

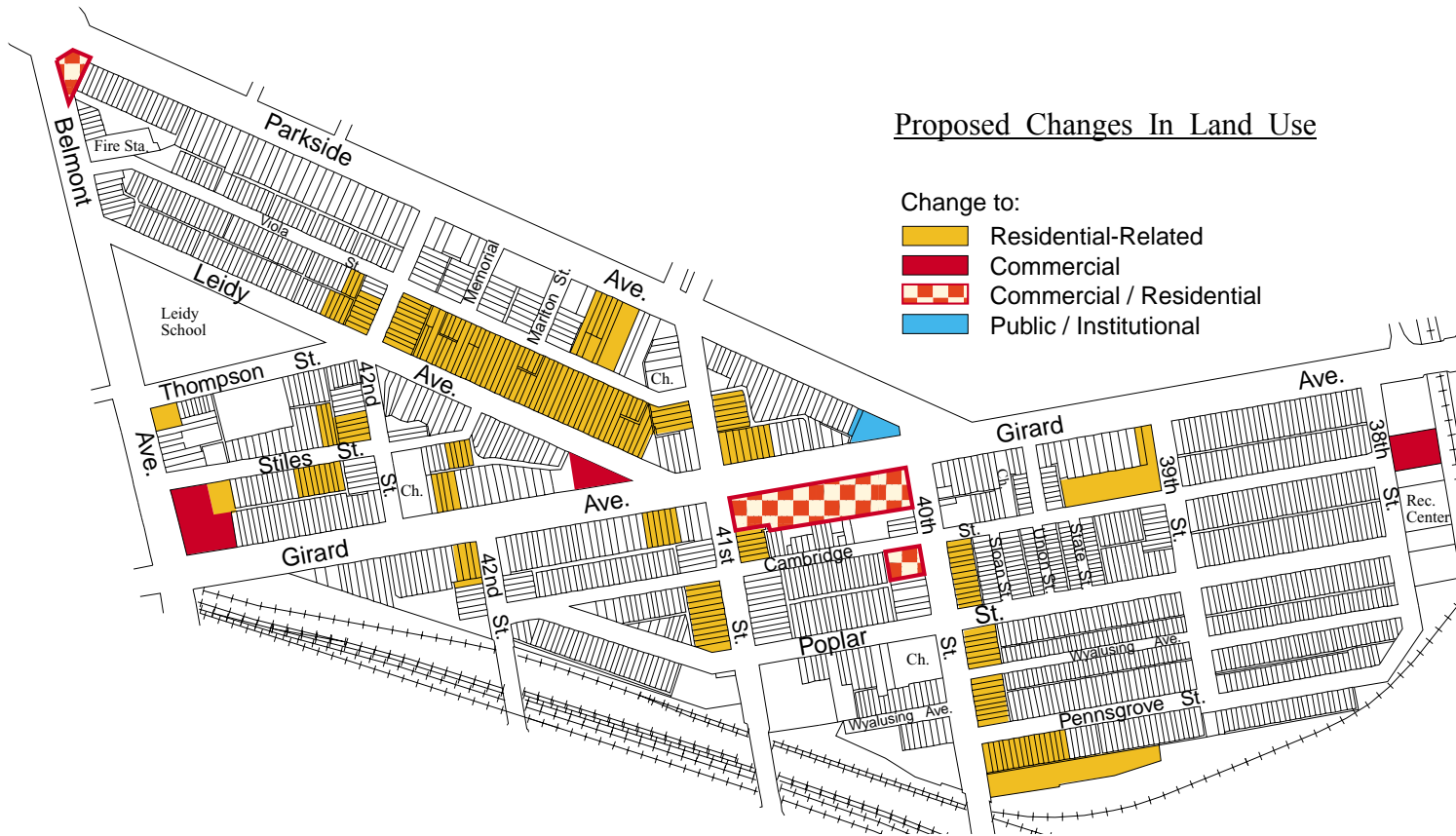
comprise a sizable portion of the area, and significant vacancy exists in all sections of the neighborhood.

## PROPOSED LAND USE

The "Proposed Changes in Land Use" map on page 6 has been prepared to lay the groundwork for appropriate treatment of the major opportunity sites. The Plan also encourages housing rehabilitation, and anticipates that many of the vacant homes scattered throughout the neighborhood will be rehabilitated and brought back into productive residential use.

Existing Land Use





On the 4100 blocks of Parkside and Leidy Avenues, largely vacant areas are proposed for residential-related use, as are other areas of high vacancy. This land use category allows for new housing, rehabilitated housing, community and social service centers, gardens, landscaped open space and parking lots (provided that the parking lots are well landscaped and meet all provisions of the Philadelphia Code).

40<sup>th</sup> & Girard should be the focus for neighborhood commercial services in the future. This commercial area should be renewed, but

not expanded. This neighborhood will benefit from having a small commercial area that is safe and in good condition, rather than a larger commercial area with deterioration and high vacancy. On 40<sup>th</sup> Street, commercial uses should be limited to a smaller zone near Girard Avenue.

A block to the east at 39<sup>th</sup> & Cambridge Streets, a large vacant bakery building should be reused or redeveloped for residential use. Along the east side of 38<sup>th</sup> Street, there is an opportunity to expand the commercial use that already exists at 38<sup>th</sup> & Girard.





**ILLUSTRATIVE SITE PLAN**

All new construction and rehabilitation in the Parkside National Register Historic District should be designed to fit in with the historic qualities of the area. New housing should be designed and constructed at lower densities than existed in the original development of the neighborhood.

The Illustrative Site Plan depicts the rehabilitation of scattered vacant houses in the historic district, and the construction of new buildings

on the major development sites. On the 4100 block of Parkside Avenue (through to Viola Street), a new residential / social service facility is proposed, completing the renewal of the 4100 block of Parkside Avenue. The 4100 block of Leidy Avenue (north side, extending to Viola Street) is proposed for a new residential community with ample and well-landscaped open space. Multi-family or elderly housing is proposed for large sites at 39<sup>th</sup> & Cambridge and 40<sup>th</sup> & Pennsgrove.

Commercial buildings are proposed near 40<sup>th</sup> & Girard, along with new surface parking lots to support shopping activity. The commercial buildings should be multi-storied, and upper-floor housing (above the storefronts) is encouraged. The triangular site at Parkside & Girard is proposed to become a public plaza with public art or a fountain. Beautifying this highly visible parcel (already the site of a mural) could effectively welcome motorists to “West Philly,” and reinforce this location as a transit stop and neighborhood focal point. A seasonal outdoor farmer’s market is also recommended for this site.

Several blocks to the west, expanded commercial development is encouraged at the N.E. corner of Girard & Belmont Avenues, but the commercial uses should be planned in a way that protects the livability of nearby homes.

Although not shown on the Illustrative Site Plan, site improvements are recommended in the future to support the various redevelopment projects that are implemented. This will involve improvements to the streetscape, including new sidewalks, street trees, landscaping, bus shelters, lighting and various street furnishings and amenities. Care should be taken to ensure that these site improvements are in keeping with the architectural character of this historic district.

#### PROPOSED ZONING CHANGES

No changes in the existing zoning as shown on the map on page 9 are proposed. The projects that are 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



4200 block Parkside Avenue

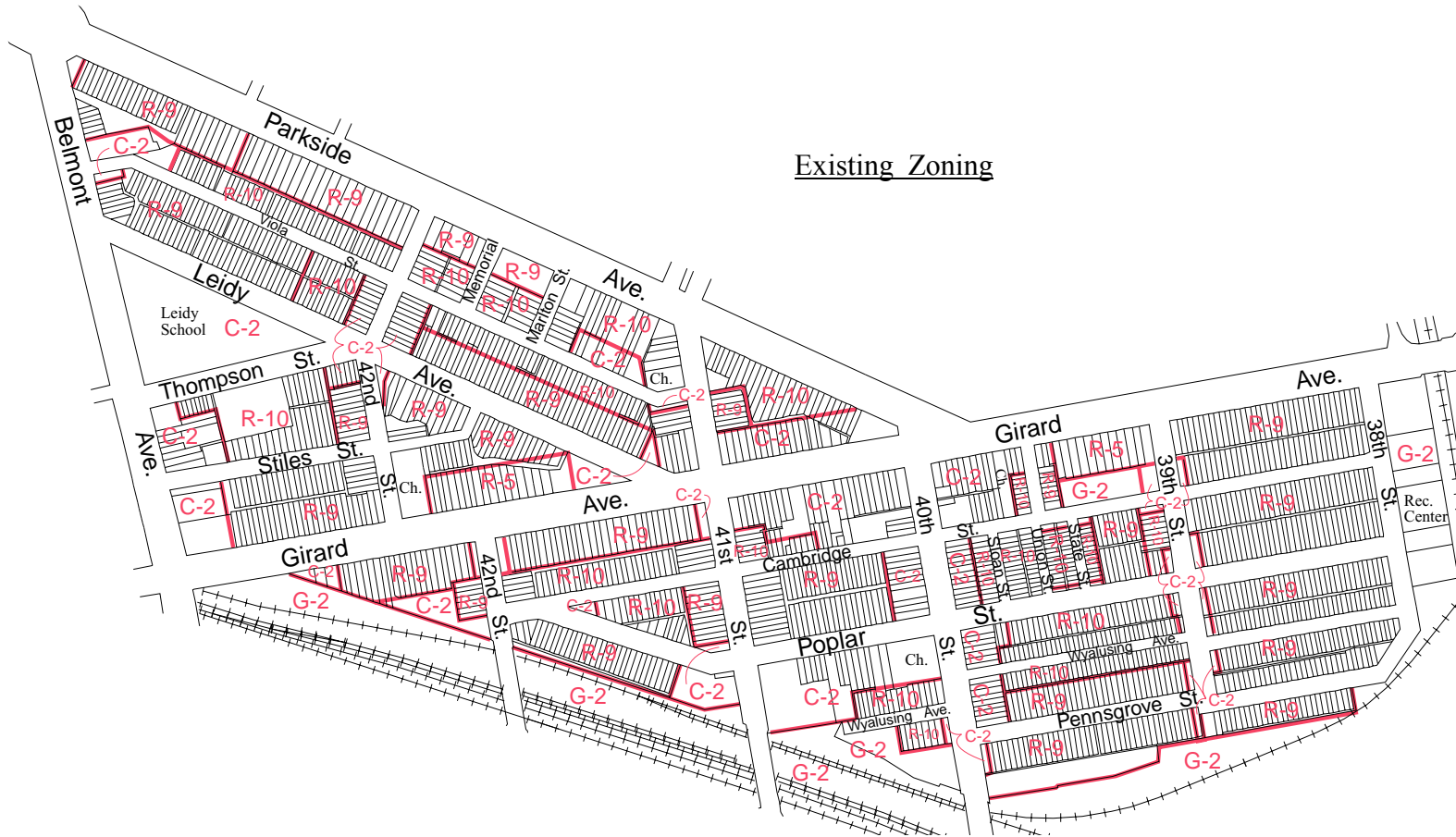
ultimately prepared. Housing rehabilitation, a major goal of this plan, is generally allowed under existing zoning.

**PROPOSED STREET CHANGES**

No changes in street layout are proposed.

**RELOCATION**

The new residential / social service facility proposed for the south side of the 4100 block of Parkside Avenue (through to Leidy Avenue) will require relocation of one auto repair business at 4109-11 Viola Street. All relocation will be accomplished in accordance with the terms and conditions of the federal Uniform Relocation Act.



## ESTIMATED COSTS OF REDEVELOPMENT

The initial project to be advanced under this Redevelopment Area Plan is the residential / social service facility described above. The total cost of this project is estimated at \$2.25 million.

## 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 Parkside National Register Historic District 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.