Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future

a neighborhood project built on listening and learning

July 2016
Prepared for
Women’s Community Revitalization Project and Community Partners and Neighbors in Germantown
Prepared by
Interface Studio LLC
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PREPARED BY
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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Matt Wysong, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Many thanks to the 95 community members who participated in the community gatherings, sharing their ideas, thoughts, and concerns about Germantown’s unfolding future.

Special thanks to our gracious meeting hosts:
The First Presbyterian Church in Germantown, 35 West Chelten Avenue
Germantown Life Enrichment Center, 5722 Greene Street
Harambe Baptist Church, 5648 Chew Avenue
Luther Rogers Center for Education and the Arts, 4809 Germantown Avenue

Lastly, thanks to staff at the Philadelphia City Planning Commission for providing data on current land use, property rehabilitation, and new construction in Germantown.
Dear Germantown Neighbors,

As members of the Advisory Committee tasked with overseeing this community-driven project, we are excited to share this final report with you.

Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future documents a neighborhood process built on listening to each other as neighbors and learning together about our neighborhood. The report contains up-to-date data about how our neighborhood is changing. It also includes quotes that echo the thoughts and concerns shared by fellow Germantown residents and community members.

We encourage you to read the report, study the maps and charts, look for familiar faces in the photos, and compare your sense of how Germantown is changing with the stories told by the data and the people who participated in this process.

The community process that created Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future was significant because it invited neighbors from across Germantown to come together and talk about our neighborhood’s past, present, and future. The outcome of the process, this report, is important because it highlights the common themes uncovered through community dialog and concludes with a set of shared values to guide discussions about planning and development in our neighborhood. Our shared values establish ground rules for change.

Thank you to everyone who attended a community gathering to lend their voice to the process, and thank you for your interest in Identifying Shared Values. We hope you’ll get involved and/or stay involved in our neighborhood’s unfolding future.

Sincerely,

Members of the Advisory Committee, representing:

Faith CDC
Friends of Vernon Park
Germantown Artists Roundtable
Germantown United CDC
Greene Street Artists Co-Op
Greene Street Friends Meeting
Harambe Baptist Church
Jumpstart Germantown
Office of Councilwoman Bass, 8th District
Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Settlement Music School
Women’s Community Revitalization Project
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Introduction

**Identifying Shared Values for Germantown’s Future** is a neighborhood project built on listening to our neighbors in Germantown and learning together about our beloved neighborhood. Convened by the Women’s Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) and guided by an Advisory Committee representing a range of perspectives across Germantown, this community effort aimed to establish common ground among the people who live, work, and worship in different parts of our neighborhood.

Though Germantown is a big place, enriched by history, with deep community roots, and a diverse population, our collective listening and learning uncovered much overlap in the reasons we love our neighborhood and the aspects of Germantown we wish to preserve. Through our conversations, we have also discovered a shared desire to continue working together to steer future change in our neighborhood according to our shared values.

The goals of this project, *Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future*, were to:

- Build deeper relationships among community members and between the many organizations active in Germantown
- Better understand how our neighborhood is changing in preparation for upcoming planning efforts, such as the Planning Commission’s Philadelphia2035 District Plan for the Upper Northwest, which includes Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill and is slated to begin in 2017
- Share the research collected through this study to inform the work of local organizations and raise additional resources for improvements and investments in Germantown
- Clarify the values shared by community members and document those values to guide future development and ensure that redevelopment unfolds in a responsible way that preserves all that we love about our neighborhood and the community itself

A series of questions framed the community discussions and research inquiries that together inform the findings and community values documented in this summary report. As a community we shared our thoughts and reacted to data to answer the following framing questions:

- **What are the things we value most in Germantown? How do we work to preserve them?**
- **What is the extent of the need for affordable housing in Germantown? How can we begin to address that need given current resources?**

Community discussions also explored our relationships to Germantown’s beloved parks and open spaces, our schools and public education system, and our access to healthy, fresh foods.

This summary report, *Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future*, includes a record of the community process undertaken, presents the research findings that informed community discussions, and concludes with the shared values established through our work together and a series of next steps to guide our efforts in the coming months and years.
WHO IS WCRP?

The Women’s Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) conceived of and facilitated *Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future*. For 30 years, WCRP has been developing high-quality affordable rental housing for low-income women and their families. Much of WCRP’s work has been in Eastern North Philadelphia, where the organization has built nearly 250 new homes in 10 different developments. In 2013, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) reached out to WCRP to explore possibilities for WCRP to undertake an affordable housing development on vacant land in Germantown to meet a community need.

PCPC saw WCRP’s affordable housing expertise and capacity as complementary to the missions and skills other established organizations in Germantown. As an active partner in advocacy coalitions over the years, WCRP is most comfortable working alongside partners to improve communities holistically. A central part of WCRP’s process is to build relationships with community leaders and residents to better understand neighborhood context; once the context is understood and trust has been established, WCRP can work to meet the affordable housing needs of the community.

WCRP thus began to meet with community leaders to share information about the organization’s history of community development work. WCRP also started establishing relationships with and fostering leadership among neighborhood residents. Since 2014, WCRP has been knocking on doors, meeting neighbors, listening to their stories about life in Germantown, and establishing a network of active and engaged advocates for community-driven change.

WCRP is developing its first affordable housing development in Germantown, named the Nicole Hines Townhomes. The development consists of 35 townhouses on East Wister Street. The 35 units will be rentals for the first 15 years, after which tenants will have an option to purchase the homes, becoming homeowners.

WCRP continues to explore additional opportunities to build new affordable housing in Germantown, and therefore, conversations with the community have continued. In 2016, WCRP took part in discussions about the possibility of developing a vacant site near the Germantown Train Station on the Chestnut Hill East Line, located between Chelten and Armat Streets. WCRP is also exploring a site on Locust Avenue.

WCRP is committed to social and economic equity for low-income women and their families. We develop affordable housing, provide supportive services, advocate for policy change, and promote leadership, dignity, and justice in our communities.

For more information: [www.wcrpphila.org](http://www.wcrpphila.org)
The study area for *Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future* is the Germantown neighborhood. Neighborhood boundaries follow Wissahickon Avenue in the west, Wister and Stenton in the east, Berkley Street to the south, and Johnson Street and Washington Lane to the north. In 2014, the large neighborhood was home to 44,550 people living in 17,450 households. Residents often refer to the portions of the neighborhood as “East Germantown” and “West Germantown,” with Germantown Avenue, the neighborhood’s main commercial corridor, as the dividing line between east and west.

In 2014, 44,550 people called Germantown home.

**Figure 1. Germantown**

- **NEIGHBORHOOD BOUNDARY**
- **OPEN SPACE**
- **BROAD STREET LINE**
- **REGIONAL RAIL**
THE PROCESS

The five-month study and series of community conversations took place March through July 2016, culminating with an open community celebration and report-back on what we learned through the process – both from the data and from our Germantown neighbors.

This process Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future builds upon a 2014 Listening Project undertaken in Germantown by WCRP and other community partners to foster relationships within the community and gather information regarding the strengths and needs, experiences and hopes of neighbors living in Germantown.

WHAT IS A LISTENING PROJECT?

A Listening Project is a comprehensive listening and organizing process conducted by grassroots community organizations, non-profits, or faith-based organizations that includes multiple one-on-one interviews in a community. A central goal is to capture often unheard or underrepresented voices that can bring new perspectives, energy, and ideas to local problems and solutions.

In Germantown, WCRP and community partners interviewed 44 neighbors, asking questions about local history, access to fresh and affordable food, the mix of businesses and services, access to jobs and job training, opportunities for homeownership, access to high-quality and affordable rental housing, concerns about housing affordability, access to youth programming and services, public safety, and general questions about neighborhood challenges and priorities.
A COMMUNITY EFFORT

WCRP convened an Advisory Committee representing 10 neighborhood organizations and institutions plus the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and Councilwoman Bass’s Office. The Advisory Committee met monthly to oversee the process, review research findings, ask good questions, and help plan the community gatherings.

WCRP also facilitated three Community Gatherings open to anyone who lives, works, or worships in Germantown. Each meeting included interactive introductions during which people shared about themselves and their relationships to Germantown, building new connections among neighbors and learning about community joys and concerns in different parts of the neighborhood.

A presentation of the research findings followed introductions, and the meetings concluded with another interactive exercise in which meeting participants could reflect and respond to the data and link the research to their own personal experiences and life stories.

Advisory Committee members spread the word of the gatherings among their neighborhood networks. The turn-out for each was excellent, and the conversations were rich. Ninety-five (95) different individuals participated in one or more of the gatherings. The quotes sprinkled throughout this report echo their voices, their thoughts and concerns.

IDENTIFYING SHARED VALUES TO SHAPE GERMANTOWN’S FUTURE

Community Gathering 1
WEDNESDAY, APRIL 6 FROM 6:00 TO 8:00 PM

Fifty-one (51) people attended the first community meeting, which was held at the Germantown Life Enrichment Center at 5722 Greene Street.

Meeting participants broke into four groups in which they were tasked with drawing a map of Germantown and identifying the places and intangible aspects of life in Germantown that group members treasure and wish to see preserved. Groups also discussed the need for affordable housing and open space in Germantown.
Community Gathering 2
TUESDAY, APRIL 26 FROM 6:00 TO 8:00 PM

Despite heavy rains and the primary election that day, 13 people attended the second community meeting at the Luther Rogers Center for Education and the Arts at 4809 Germantown Avenue.

Meeting attendees participated in a “spectrum activity” in which the meeting facilitator read a series of statements and asked people to move to one side of the room or the other based on whether they agreed with the statement, disagreed, or had mixed feelings. Discussions followed, and people could move along the spectrum if they changed their minds based on the comments of their neighbors. The three statements were:

- What do you love about Germantown that you want to see preserved?
- What are the housing needs of the people who live in Germantown?
- How easy is it to get healthy, affordable food, and why?

Community Gathering 3
TUESDAY, MAY 24 FROM 6:00 TO 8:00 PM

Forty (40) people attended the third community meeting, which was held at Harambe Baptist Church at 5648 Chew Avenue.

People worked in pairs, and then in groups of four and eight to answer three questions, with the goal of finding commonalities among community members.

- The things I love about Germantown are at risk of disappearing.
- If I had to move tomorrow, I could find safe, quality, affordable housing.
- There is a link between what is happening to our schools and what is happening to the housing in our community.

- What do you love about Germantown that you want to see preserved?
- What are the housing needs of the people who live in Germantown?
- How easy is it to get healthy, affordable food, and why?

Participants on the same side of the “spectrum.”

Introductions at the third community gathering.

Group work at the third community gathering.
THANK YOU to all of the Germantown community members who lent their time and ideas...
In addition to the conversations, listening, and learning that occurred during the Community Gatherings, this study is framed by three research inquiries.

- DEMOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT – Who lives in Germantown now, and how is the local population changing?
- INCOME AND AFFORDABILITY – How do household incomes in the neighborhood compare to housing costs? Is the market shifting, and if so, how and where?
- CHANGES ON THE HORIZON – What is the landscape of prior plans for Germantown? What recent or proposed developments are changing the landscape?

The data collected reinforce the knowledge and perceptions of resident experts, strengthening our shared understanding of Germantown. The next chapter presents the research coupled with the key themes that emerged from conversations with community members.
Germantown was established as an independent borough in 1683 and was absorbed into Philadelphia in 1854. The neighborhood’s history is central to its identity and one of the greatest sources of pride for neighbors. When neighbors brainstorm about what they love about Germantown, the area’s rich history, beautiful historic architecture, and unique historic sites along Germantown Avenue top the list. But the people and families of Germantown are also a part of the history and central to the neighborhood’s unfolding story.

“Our roots are so deep, we wouldn’t be the same without them.”

“We have people from varied ethnicities and backgrounds, artists, jugglers, and performers.”
One of the key neighborhood assets is its diverse population. Beyond the people and the historic neighborhood fabric, neighbors love Germantown’s:

- Excellent transit access and walkability
- Arts and cultural community
- Local businesses and historic commercial corridors
- Central green space at Vernon Park
- Access to the Wissahickon and Fairmount Park system
- Community gardens and local wildlife
- Libraries and recreation centers
- Religious institutions
- Public schools

“Germantown is a family-oriented neighborhood. We share a sense of family with our neighbors.”

Figure 2. Neighborhood Assets
At present, Germantown is home to roughly 45,000 people or 17,500 households. Between 2000 and 2014, the neighborhood’s population dropped by 10 percent, losing nearly 4,500 residents. The remaining population is growing older. In 2000, 29 percent of the population was under 18, and 33 percent of the population was over 45. In 2014, only 24 percent of the population was under 18, and 40 percent of the population was over 45.

Neighborhood residents reported that some families with school-aged children have been moving out of Germantown due to a lack of quality public education, while families with young children (under five) have been moving in. The data confirm these observations by residents.

• Between 2000 and 2014, Germantown experienced a dramatic 36 percent decline in residents ages 10 to 14, 15 to 17, and 35 to 44 (school-aged children and their parents).

• More recently, between 2010 and 2014, Germantown experienced an 11 to 12 percent increase in residents under age five and between 25 and 34 (young families with children not yet in school).

“The quality of our public schools is in part to blame for the lack of community continuity; many families with school-aged children move away.”

AN AGING NEIGHBORHOOD

![Figure 3. Age Breakdown of Germantown Over Time](image)

Source: US Decennial Census, 2000; American Community Survey 2009-2014 5-Year Estimates

1The demographic data presented in this report reflects data pulled from the 2000 and 2010 Census as well as the 2009-2014 Five-Year Estimates from the American Community Survey.
Similar to residents’ observations about shifts in family composition in Germantown, the data confirm observations about changes in racial composition. In 2014, Germantown’s population was 83 percent African American, down from 86 percent in 2000. East Germantown is predominantly African American, while West Germantown is more diverse, marking a transition to the bordering East Falls and Mount Airy neighborhoods, which have higher proportions of White residents.

“Germantown has invisible walls that are difficult to permeate.”

Figure 4. Percent African American by Census Block Group, 2014
Source: American Community Survey 2009-2014 5-Year Estimates

East Germantown is predominantly African American.
As noted previously, between 2000 and 2014 the number of black residents fell by roughly 5,500, a decrease of roughly 13 percent of the total African American population. During the same timeframe, the number of white residents increased by about 750, representing an increase in the Caucasian population of 15 percent.

"The fabric of the community would be lost if the people are lost."

The map to the left shows how much the black population has fluctuated in each Census Block Group between 2000 and 2014. Because the overall population of Germantown has decreased, a drop in black population does not necessarily mean that African Americans comprise a smaller proportion of the population. However, the total loss of black residents is significant.

Figure 5. Percent Change in African American Population by Census Block Group, 2000-2014

Between 2000-2014, total population fell by 10%

The African American population fell by 13% (~5,500 people)
The Caucasian population grew by 15% (~750 people)
“We’re losing senior homeowners, often black. Young white families are moving in.”

The neighborhood, which prides itself on diversity, appears to be at a turning point. Germantown has evolved over time from a predominantly white neighborhood in 1950 (88 percent) to a predominantly black neighborhood beginning in 1970 (54 percent). Since 2000, the white population has been on the rise, as have residents who self-classify in the Census as Asian, American Indian, bi-racial, multi-racial, or other.

Figure 6. Resident Race in Germantown Over Time


“We need to make connections between neighbors and keep the community a community.”
Germantown is located where North Philadelphia meets the more affluent Northwest neighborhoods of Mount Airy and Chestnut Hill. Household incomes in Germantown reflect this transition point in the city, and the neighborhood is home to a mix of incomes. Nineteen (19) percent of households earn less than $10,000 per year. Twenty-seven (27) percent earn between $10,000 and $25,000 per year. At the same time, 27 percent earn more than $50,000 per year, with 20 percent earning between $50,000 and $100,000 per year and seven percent earning over $100,000 per year.

Overall, Germantown’s median household income is $27,500, 73 percent of the City’s median household income of $37,500. However, as Figure 7 illustrates, median incomes by Census Block Group range from roughly $11,000 per year to nearly $60,000 per year, according to the 2014 American Community Survey.

Adjusting for inflation, household incomes are declining. Between 2000 and 2014, the median household income in Germantown decreased by 24%, in contrast to area housing costs, which are on the rise.

A household’s earning power informs how much its residents can afford to spend each month on housing. The US government uses 30 percent of household income as the threshold for what is affordable or an acceptable amount of money to spend on rent or housing costs each month, leaving enough resources for a household to cover other basic necessities such as food and transportation. Examples of homeowner costs include mortgage payments and property taxes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If your HOUSEHOLD INCOME is</th>
<th>Then 30% of your MONTHLY INCOME is</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$10,000</td>
<td>$250</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$15,000</td>
<td>$375</td>
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<td>$1,875</td>
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<td>$100,000</td>
<td>$2,500</td>
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</tbody>
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Figure 7. Percent of Population by Household Income in Germantown, 2014

Source: American Community Survey 2009-2014 5-Year Estimates
Figure 8. Median Household Income by Census Block Group, 2014

Source: American Community Survey 2009-2014 5-Year Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Income Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>Less than $10,000</td>
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<td>$10,000 - $24,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>$25,000 - $49,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>$50,000 - $99,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greater than $100,000</td>
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Overall, Germantown's median household income is $27,500, compared to the City's $37,500.
Neighborhood-wide, 45 percent of households (nearly 7,900 households in total) are housing-cost burdened and forced to spend more than they can afford on their housing. Cost-burden is a growing problem in Germantown. In 2000, 37 percent of the neighborhood could not find an affordable place to live. Over 15 years, between 2000 and 2014, the incidence of housing-cost burden increased by 20 percent, which translates to an additional 1,000 households.

Housing cost burden is higher among renters. In Germantown, more than half of all renters (53 percent) spend more than 30 percent of their income on rent. This amounts to roughly 5,400 households according to the ACS. Though there are pockets in which few renter households are cost-burdened, there is little difference between East Germantown and West Germantown. Housing affordability is an issue felt among renters across Germantown.

“There is tremendous need for affordable housing.”

Figure 9. Percent of Renter-Occupied Households that are Cost Burdened by Census Block Group, 2014
Source: American Community Survey 2009-2014 5-Year Estimates
*Same legend as Figure 10*
Thirty-five (35) percent of all homeowners in Germantown spend more than 30 percent of their income on housing (about 2,500 households). In two Census Block Groups, more than 80 percent of homeowners are cost-burdened. Housing cost-burdens are less prevalent among homeowners in West Germantown.

“If I had to get up and move tomorrow, I don’t believe I could find a decent affordable house for me, my daughter, and my granddaughter.”

Figure 10. Percent of Owner-Occupied Households that are Cost Burdened by Census Block Group, 2014
Source: American Community Survey 2009-2014 5-Year Estimates
HOME SALES

Historic data on rents in Germantown are not readily accessible, which makes it difficult to measure the change in rental rates across the neighborhood. The Census and American Community Survey do record median rents, and between 2000 and 2014, the median rent in the neighborhood increased by 9%. However, this statistic fails to capture the full range of rents and how they are changing. Alternately, historic data is available for property sales. This study examines the sale of owner-occupied residential properties over time (sales between 2000-02, 2010-12, and 2013-15).

In the following maps, each dot represents a sale of an owner-occupied home. The color of each dot corresponds to the sale price – maroon dots and red dots represent lower sale prices, while green dots represent higher sale prices.

The sale prices of owner-occupied units in West Germantown are higher and rising faster than in East Germantown; though prices are on the rise in both portions of the neighborhood. As the pie charts below illustrate, higher priced sales comprise a larger portion of total sales in more recent years.

Figure 11. Range of Sale Prices for Owner-Occupied Homes by Year and Area
Source: Philadelphia Office of Property Assessment, March 2016

Figure 12. Sales of Owner-Occupied Homes by Price, 2000-2002

Two year timeframes are used to ensure sufficient data points on each map. The three time periods displayed were chosen to coincide with the decennial Census data collected for this report (2000 and 2010) and to capture the most recent data available.
Neighborhood-wide, the median sale price for an owner-occupied home more than doubled between 2000-02 and 2013-15, increasing by 106 percent. The median sale price of properties in West Germantown rose by 117 percent over the same time frame, reflecting the influence of an increasingly popular Mount Airy neighborhood to the northwest. In East Germantown, the median sale price rose by 60 percent. The pace of sales for homeownership increased by 27 percent in the past 15 years.
Beyond the shifts in demographics and the neighborhood’s housing market, other changes are afoot in Germantown. There are a host of prior plans for the area, some of which have grown into real projects that are taking root in the local landscape.
The prior plans that touch the neighborhood include:

- **2008 Germantown Nicetown Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) Plan** – A Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) study, which explored the redevelopment potential of vacant or underutilized sites surrounding three neighborhood SEPTA Regional Rail Stations: Wayne Junction, Wister Station, and Queen Lane Station.

- **2010 Wayne Junction Public Safety through TOD Study** – A Neighborhoods Now study, which analyzed threats to public safety in the public realm surrounding Wayne Junction that could be at least partially addressed by transit-oriented development and increased activity in the area.

- **2012 Central Germantown Business District Beautification Plan** – A PCPC plan for beautifying the public realm along Germantown’s two main commercial corridors – Germantown and Chelten avenues.

- **2014 Vernon Park Improvement Plan** – A comprehensive make-over of this beloved neighborhood park through a collaboration between Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, Councilwoman Bass’s Office, and Friends of Vernon Park.

- **2014 Maplewood Mall Reconstruction Project Plan** – A concept that grew out of the 2008 TOD plan and was refined in the 2012 Beautification Plan; this project to create a more park-like setting along the Maplewood Mall is fully funded with significant support from the Commerce Department and currently in design and engineering.

- **2014 Wayne Junction Station Renovation** – A SEPTA historic preservation project that restored Wayne Junction’s structures originally built in 1901; the multi-modal transfer point that serves more than 190,500 riders per year is now fully ADA accessible, and major renovations to the station building, Germantown Avenue headhouses, platform canopies, and customer amenities further support revitalization efforts in the surrounding neighborhood.

- **2014 Germantown Community Charter School Plan** – A community-driven effort to explore the possibility of repurposing the now-vacant Germantown High School campus as a community school.

- **2016 Chelten and Greene Plaza Plan** - Another fully-funded public realm improvement project that emerged in the 2012 Beautification Plan through much public input; with support from the Commerce Department, construction documents were completed in 2016, and this new and improved plaza and bus stop will begin construction in 2017.

There are additional neighborhood planning efforts on the horizon such as the Planning Commission’s Philadelphia2035 District Plan, which will commence in 2017.
In preparation for the upcoming PCPC Philadelphia2035 District Plan, the Planning Commission completed a full land use survey of Germantown in 2015. The neighborhood is primarily residential today, as it has been throughout its history. Eighty-one (81) percent of all parcels are residential.
Vacancy

Vacant lots and structures interrupt the neighborhood fabric today, with the greatest concentration between Germantown Avenue and Chew Avenue. Roughly 2,000 lots across the neighborhood are vacant or host a vacant building. **About 12 percent of all parcels are vacant** (six percent vacant lots and six percent vacant buildings).

Some of the most prominent vacant sites in the neighborhood are closely tied to peoples’ hearts and image of the neighborhood. The Old Town Hall, the YWCA, and Germantown High School are all located along Germantown Avenue and at the forefront of the community’s mind in terms of preservation and reuse.

“We’ve got to address the vacant lots and vacant buildings.”

“We don’t need another vacant school house.”

Figure 17. Vacant Parcels and Buildings

Source: Philadelphia City Planning Commission Field Survey, August 2015

- Vacant Lot
- Vacant Building

The vacant Germantown High School

The vacant YWCA building
The effects of vacancy are felt more broadly along the neighborhood’s key commercial corridors. In the mid-20th Century, Germantown and Chelten avenues were densely packed commercial streets that also hosted a range of large institutional uses. In Figure 18, the red lots represent commercial storefronts in 1951 and 2015, and the blue lots represent institutional uses. The diagrams on the following page show how those commercial and institutional land uses, which once served as the backbone for Germantown’s social life, have disappeared.

Germantown and Chelten are still the neighborhood’s main commercial corridors today, but vacant lots and buildings now interrupt the string of once-connected storefronts. In some cases, new institutional uses have stepped in to fill the gaps. Residents are nostalgic about the range of shopping and commercial services once available along the avenues, and there is great interest in repopulating the storefronts with local businesses that serve the community and create jobs in the neighborhood.
“Jobs. We need to be talking about jobs.”

Views along Germantown Avenue, 1960s. Source: PhillyHistory.org
Rehab activity is also changing Germantown’s physical landscape as well as the housing market as once-dilapidated properties are improved. Many existing owners have sought to significantly expand or alter the use of their properties in the past ten years, especially along the neighborhood’s main corridors – Germantown and Chelten.

Renovations and additions have been both large and small. In recent years, developers have undertaken major renovations on large-scale apartment complexes along Germantown’s western edge. Meanwhile, many small additions – added stories, new rooms, sunrooms, and other alterations – appear throughout the neighborhood.

Rittenhouse Hill, a newly renovated apartment complex offers studios and apartments for $1,100 to $1,900 per month. Elsewhere in the neighborhood, most apartments and houses for rent range from $700 to $1,600 per month, with some exceptions.

**Figure 19. Permits for Major Additions or Change of Use, 2006-2016**

Source: Licenses & Inspections via City Planning Commission, May 2016

- Major Additions
- Use Change, Partial
- Use Change, Total
Despite the roughly 2,000 vacant properties in Germantown, the neighborhood has seen limited new construction in recent years. The following map illustrates new construction building permits for all land uses over the past ten years (2006-2016). As the map depicts, new construction has been distributed evenly across the entire neighborhood.

“Development is good, but tearing down buildings is a loss for our neighborhood.”

Figure 20. New Construction Permits, 2006-2016
Source: Licenses & Inspections via City Planning Commission, May 2016
Shared Values

Through this process of listening to our neighbors and learning together about our neighborhood, we have found much common ground in our hopes and dreams, concerns and priorities for Germantown. We have synthesized our collective comments around eight key themes to guide future planning and development work in Germantown. These are our shared values, and they are all interrelated. As our neighborhood’s history continues to evolve, we will navigate change together and advocate for growth and revitalization in keeping with these principles.

Preservation and History
Germantown is a historic neighborhood with a proud tradition of preservation.
As a community, we value our local history, historic sites, architectural character, and beloved green spaces, and we are committed to preserving the neighborhood fabric and finding new uses for existing buildings.

Affordability & Affordable Housing
Germantown is a mixed income community, but we have learned that housing affordability is a concern faced by thousands of households in all parts of our neighborhood.
As a community, we need safe, high-quality, affordable and accessible homes for both renters and owners that allow families and artists to thrive here and seniors to age in place. We are committed to the repair and renovation of existing homes and to new affordable developments that reflect the area’s historic character and charm. We will work together to prevent gentrification and displacement.

Resident Diversity
Germantown is a diverse neighborhood, home to a mix of residents for many decades.
As a community, we cherish our diversity in age, race, income, interests, and talents, and we are our strongest when we are working together as a community of friends and neighbors.

Education
Germantown is a neighborhood of many families, and our shared sense of family calls for services that support children and parents.
As a community, we require quality public education and a network of community schools that are points of pride and service provision, anchors that build strong foundations for the success of our youth, and assets that keep families here over time.
Community Connection & Solidarity

Germantown is a neighborhood of deep roots, a strong belief in community service, and much community pride. As a community, we value connections among neighbors and organizations, and we will work together to build upon each group’s strengths and capacity. We are committed to enhanced communication and collaboration toward a vision for the future built upon all of our shared values.

Quality of Life

Germantown is a neighborhood with many assets that contribute to enjoyment in our daily lives, but there are also some issues that threaten our quality of life. As a community, we value our public transit and public facilities – among them our libraries and recreation centers. Above all, we value a sense of safety for all as we move through our daily lives in Germantown. We are committed to reducing the drug-related activity and gun violence that compromise our community’s well-being, and we seek to tame traffic, improve sidewalks, and increase lighting for enhanced pedestrian safety and walkability.

Jobs and Economic Development

The heart of Germantown is its historic commercial corridors and creative/cultural institutions.

As a community, we value our local businesses and hubs of creativity. We need stores that cater to a range of income levels so that people can meet their daily needs within the neighborhood and choose to do so, buying local and circulating wealth locally. We want businesses and developers to hire locally, and we require living wage jobs, opportunities for residents to work and learn here in the neighborhood, and access to jobs farther afield, via public transportation and employment services. We look to our community of artists, makers, and doers to build a culture of entrepreneurship and connections to the creative economy for residents throughout the neighborhood.

Health and Sustainability

Germantown is a green neighborhood, with access to nature and the outdoors right here in the city.

As a community, we value our beloved parks, our trees and birds, and our community gardens. We are committed to growing healthier together as individuals, through access to quality, affordable food coupled with nutrition and exercise efforts. We seek to grow healthier as a neighborhood, too, through stewardship and shared responsibility for the maintenance of our environment.

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Source: PhillyHistory.org

a neighborhood project built on listening and learning
Next Steps

This summary report, *Identifying Shared Values to Shape Germantown’s Future*, underscores the multiple ways in which Germantown is changing. Many of the 95 community members who came together to lend their thoughts and ideas to this project are already actively involved in neighborhood projects, their plates full with work and volunteer efforts to better the community. Most of the community members who participated expressed a sense of urgency, a readiness to roll their sleeves up and take action.

We want to maintain the momentum and keep community members engaged in a series of next steps for the neighborhood.

1. **Remain active in PCPC’s Philadelphia2035 District Plan for the Upper Northwest**
   - Share the data and community value statements documented in this report with PCPC as a jumping-off point for the portions of the District plan that focus on Germantown. Attend meetings and participate as a unified voice to ensure that issues and opportunities unique to Germantown are addressed.

2. **Consider opportunities to undertake a smaller-scale comprehensive neighborhood plan**
   - The District Plan will cover Mount Airy and Chestnut Hill in addition to Germantown. Explore funding opportunities for a community-driven neighborhood plan squarely focused on Germantown. This process provides a rich foundation to inform future work. A full neighborhood planning process can tackle additional issues such as crime or building conditions in greater depth, and will ultimately result in a detailed series of recommendations customized to community capacity and interests.

3. **Continue open and regular communication via the community networks strengthened through this process**
   - Formalize a listserve for email updates and schedule quarterly meetings among organizations and individuals representative of the full neighborhood. Keep community partners up to date about local initiatives, events, and celebrations that bring people together and give people a voice.

4. **Seek vacant sites for development of new affordable housing, community gardens, and green spaces**
   - Explore the Philadelphia Land Bank’s interactive map for vacant sites that are candidates for redevelopment or reuse. Coordinate with community partners to submit expressions of interest for projects that have broad support among neighbors and community partners.
5. Engage with new programs of the Kenney Administration – Use your unified voice and shared values to advocate for resources for Germantown as the City moves forward in implementing its Universal Pre-K, Community Schools, and Rebuild programs.

6. Don’t wait – There is no need to wait for the District Plan or future neighborhood planning efforts before the community starts to take action. As community partners, consider where your organization’s mission aligns with our neighborhood’s shared values. Develop a list of community-driven projects, and seek volunteers to help push these initiatives forward.