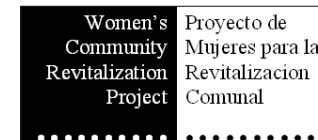


Our Community Plan:



a shared vision for our neighborhood in Eastern North Philadelphia

executive summary



Wilson Associates, Inc.
_INTERFACE STUDIO LLC

Summer 2009

1 Executive Summary

This community plan which focuses on a 60 square-block area (pictured at right), was developed in a joint effort by the Women's Community Revitalization Project (WCRP), members of the Eastern North Philadelphia Coalition (ENPC) and representatives from other neighborhood organizations.

Over the past year, **435 people have participated** in 37 formal and informal meetings to discuss the future of this neighborhood and how to make it a stronger, healthier community in which to live, work, worship, learn and play.

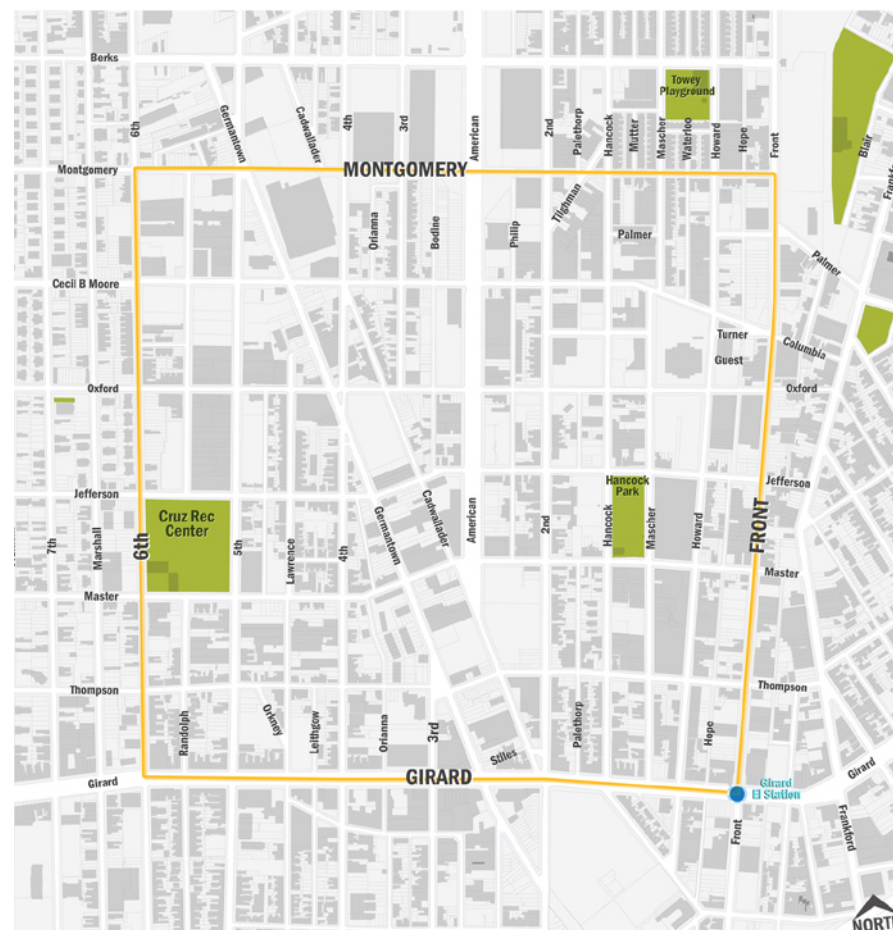
"...connecting the community by involving the community."

"It gave me a chance to feel like a real part of the community, and to talk to other people that I wouldn't have talked to otherwise. I am one of the statistics, someone that had to move out because my rent became too high. I want to give a voice to people like me."

There are several principles and values that guided this plan, all centered on one key idea: **lower-income residents and other people who care about the community want to see their neighborhood improve. They are determined to be involved in its future development for the benefit of those who live here now and those who will come in the future.**

Our plan has a special appreciation for the people of the neighborhood and the institutions that serve it, as well as a genuine understanding of the value of teamwork between them. This final document recommends a set of programs, projects and activities for the next five years that balance vision with realism.

This plan acknowledges that this work will require human, financial, and political resources. WCRP and ENPC are committed to finding and combining all three categories of resources, starting with their own, to ensure successful management and implementation of the neighborhood plan.



Neighborhood plan area

Community Challenges and Opportunities

Diversity

This is a remarkably diverse neighborhood in terms of ethnicity and race, income, religion, and tenure.

Public Transit

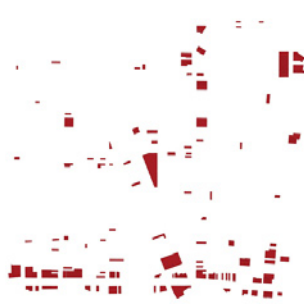
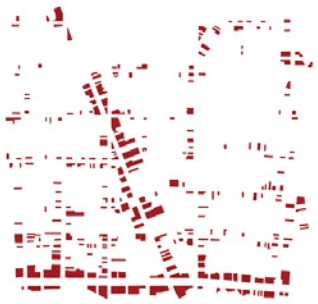
Multiple bus routes serve the neighborhood. Nearly the entire community is within a ten-minute walk of an elevated train station.

Historic Buildings

The neighborhood has a large supply of historic factory and warehouse buildings. Investment has begun to convert these unoccupied spaces into new residential and creative work spaces.

1947 → 2008

Commercial



Warehousing / Industry



"There used to be a lot more businesses in the community and a lot more people."

"... a unique opportunity with Girard Avenue to have a vibrant street life."

Loss of Jobs

The shift from heavy industry and manufacturing to a service economy has had an enormous impact on this community. Many people lost their jobs when the factories shut down. The neighborhood now suffers from low educational attainment and high poverty and unemployment rates.

New Development Brings Rising Prices

New market-rate homes have brought welcome new residents, but they have also brought rising housing costs, which pose a threat to long-term and lower-income residents.

Vacancy and Abandonment

Vacancy and neglect have created a fragmented neighborhood with long stretches of empty land and broken windows. This takes away from community morale and public opinion and contributes to a sense that the neighborhood is not safe. Such high levels of vacancy can also be seen as a unique opportunity.

"Hope – that people are moving in, not just leaving."

"If we allow too many condos, we will be unable to control gentrification."



Market pressures from nearby neighborhoods threaten affordability.

Comparison of past and present commercial and industrial use
Source: 1947 Sanborn Map and 2008 Field Survey

As time goes on, the main challenge will be to manage change in a balanced way that meets the needs of all residents while building community among neighbors, new and old. Opportunities to do so include:

- Organizing residents as proactive participants in neighborhood change
- Building the sense of community among neighbors
- Celebrating and preserving local diversity
- Welcoming change while protecting existing residents and assets

“People used to sit on the porch all night, and there was more of a sense of community. It was safer. Now there is more crime and less togetherness.”

“The vacant lot next door was a huge problem until we greened it and put a fence around it.”

Action Steps

Below is a summary of the plan’s action steps for the early phases of implementation. The total costs associated with completing predevelopment work for all the priorities range from \$215,000 to \$325,000. The funding is to be raised from sources that have traditionally supported WCRP and ENPC members, as well as new sources that will be identified in the months and years ahead.

Action steps are categorized in five areas:

To Do:

- ☒ Vacant Land and Abandoned Buildings
- ☒ Housing
- ☒ Economic Development
- ☒ Youth and Services
- ☒ Quality of Life



The plan’s development process was a major step in community organizing and empowerment.

Vacant Land and Abandoned Buildings

The shift away from heavy industry and manufacturing left vacant holes where massive factories once operated and prompted the hollowing out of worker housing and small businesses. Almost every block has at least one piece of vacant land or an abandoned building. Vacant land in the neighborhood makes up 19% of the total land area (equivalent to 32 acres). Another 4% is vacant buildings.

Interviews with community members revealed that **70% of residents considered vacant land to be a problem for them or their neighbors**. With such high levels of vacancy, the neighborhood lacks uses of land that support a healthy community such as green space, affordable housing, commercial retail, and community facilities.

Strategies for reducing the amount of vacant land and abandoned buildings should use a two-step approach: first, stabilize and manage select sites. Second, reclaim the sites for redevelopment purposes. It makes sense to focus initially on areas with existing investments and community assets.

The following action steps are a community effort to influence land uses, vacant public land reuse, and vacant land maintenance:

- Create a Vacant Parcel Database to catalogue vacant lots according to how easy it will be to acquire them. The database will help neighborhood organizations enter into negotiations with public and private owners to receive ownership and/or commit property for uses that help facilitate goals of this plan.
- Support ENPC's current research to identify best practices of community land trusts across the country. This research will help ENPC assess the feasibility of creating a formal Community Land Trust to help manage vacant land and redevelop properties in the neighborhood.
- Form a Land Maintenance Collaborative to explore potential relationships with the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society and their contractors for maintaining and transforming vacant lots.
- Sustain the work with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission to remap and rezone the neighborhood to achieve the priorities reflected in this plan.

Projected Predevelopment Costs: \$25,000 to \$40,000



The neighborhood has 32 acres of vacant land. This is equivalent to 35 football fields.



The challenges of vacancy also present an opportunity.



Plan already in action:
ENPC-organized community
clean up builds momentum
for plan implementation and
achieves positive change.

5 Affordable Housing

In recent years, a new wave of investment has reached into the neighborhood stemming from development pressure from Northern Liberties to the south, Temple University to the west, and Fishtown to the east. Several former factory buildings in the neighborhood have been converted into residences. While reusing the area's historic structures is a welcome trend, new market-rate housing also has made the neighborhood less affordable to many existing residents.

Home prices and rents rose dramatically between 2001 and 2007. On average, sales prices jumped \$90,500 over this period. **More than 7 out of 10 people surveyed did not believe there were affordable places to live in the neighborhood.**

The action steps aim to preserve existing affordable housing and create new affordable and mixed-income housing opportunities in the neighborhood:

- Form a Housing Preservation Collaborative to identify information about resources that could be distributed to residents through ENPC members and block captains. Advocate for new resources and preservation of existing resources. Target those resources to residential blocks near vacant sites identified for redevelopment.
- Begin predevelopment for affordable and mixed-income housing on the 6th Street to Randolph Street site (between Jefferson and Oxford), including starting negotiations with public and private owners to secure site control.

Projected Predevelopment Costs: \$45,000 to \$75,000



Existing vacant land could be used for residential development.



Vacant land along 6th Street between Jefferson and Oxford could be transformed with affordable housing.



Economic Development

The neighborhood suffers from low levels of educational attainment, high levels of unemployment, and high levels of commercial turnover and vacancy.

Census data from 2000 shows that:

- 10% of the neighborhood's adult population was unemployed, and 51% of adults were not in the labor force.
- One out of every three (33%) youth aged 16 to 19 had either dropped out of school or graduated from high school but remained unemployed or not in the labor force. This is more than double the citywide rate of 15%.
- The neighborhood's dropout rate of 22% was more than twice the City average.
- 45% of the adult population did not have a high school diploma.

While these statistics are alarming, people who work in the community believe they underestimate the problem.

The following action steps seek to address the goals of job training, employment, affordable retail opportunities, and healthy commercial corridors:

- Secure resources to support an Economic Development Coordinator to provide staff support to help operate two task forces:

A Workforce Development Task Force to:

- Identify existing resources for clean and green jobs and training programs for residents.
- Identify clean and green business opportunities for entrepreneurs.
- Create a Local Jobs Clearinghouse.

A Business Support Task Force to:

- Explore, in collaboration with Greenpoint Manufacturing and Design Center (GMDC), opportunities to redevelop abandoned industrial properties.
- Identify under-used kitchens in local churches and day care centers that may be appropriate for converting into commercial kitchens.
- Explore, in collaboration with The Food Trust, the possibility of launching a Corner Store Initiative to engage local stores in providing inexpensive, fresh and healthy products.

Projected Predevelopment Costs: \$75,000 to \$105,000



Neighborhood residents say the community needs more jobs, fresh food, and places to shop.



Strategic approaches for the neighborhood's commercial corridors

Youth and Human Services

While the neighborhood has many service providers, a lot of residents are not aware of all the services. This leads to services being under-used.

Youth services are particularly important because the neighborhood has so many young people. **In 2000, nearly one out of every three people in the neighborhood was under the age of 18, far higher than the city average.** However, many school-age youth performed poorly on State tests and had high dropout rates. Additionally, 70 school-age children in the neighborhood are currently served by unlicensed after-school programs.

To address these issues, the following actions steps are suggested:

- Support youth development programs operated by the Friends Neighborhood Guild and the Eastern North Philadelphia Youth Services Coalition to help expand and enhance apprenticeship and other skill-building activities.
- Provide support to daycare advocacy groups and WCRP's facilities development to:
 - help unlicensed daycare centers satisfy health and safety codes and remove other barriers to licensing; and
 - help licensed facilities improve and expand their programs to better meet the needs of the families in the neighborhood.
- Form a task force to catalogue and distribute information on social and human resources available to neighborhood residents.
- Provide support to Kensington South NAC's greening activities to improve maintenance, safety and functions of open space throughout the neighborhood.



Neighborhood programs mentor and support young people as they progress into adulthood and create a way for youth to shape the future of the community. Source: Harvey Finkle and WCRP



Existing Cruz Recreation Center entrance at 5th and Jefferson and rendering of proposed improvements.

Projected Predevelopment Costs: \$45,000 to \$60,000

Quality of Life

The neighborhood is viewed as a friendly, supportive, family-oriented place. However it also has many quality of life issues, including:

- **Safety:** While most residents reported that they felt safe in the neighborhood, crime is thought by residents to be one of the biggest problems in the neighborhood.
- **Cleanliness:** Litter, trash dumping and graffiti are common. One out of two residents surveyed said these are a problem in the neighborhood.
- **Trees:** There are not enough trees in the neighborhood. At 5% tree coverage, the neighborhood falls far short of the recommended 30% for the City.
- **Gathering spaces:** Residents said that the neighborhood's lack of meeting places or gathering spaces is a challenge for new neighbors interested in building a sense of community with longer-term residents.

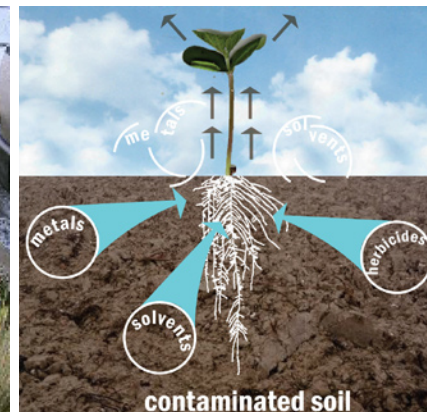
The action steps seek to encourage greater community engagement and preservation, and to improve public health and safety:

- Seek support from the City Planning Commission for urban design services through Green Streets/Green Plan. These resources could be used to improve 4-6 priority locations by:
 - Improving and/or raising crosswalks and sidewalks
 - Raising curb heights with accessible ramps
 - Planting or installing street trees, planters, and bollards (short posts) to prevent vehicles from entering pedestrian space
 - Incorporating pedestrian scale lighting and Safe Routes to School signs
 - Introducing rain gardens and phyto-remediation projects, which use plants to help clean and remove harmful materials from the soil
- Engage in community-building activities that enhance quality of life:
 - Reactivate existing community gardens spread throughout the neighborhood and/or explore doing larger-scale urban agriculture on suitably-sized land plots.
 - Sponsor events celebrating local ethnic diversity.
 - Organize a block captain communication network to distribute information and gather feedback on the implementation of this plan's action steps.
 - Create a safety/security initiative working with block captains and the police district office serving the neighborhood.

Projected Predevelopment Costs: \$25,000 to \$40,000



Youth participant at ENPC-organized clean up of vacant land at 6th and Oxford.



Rain garden between sidewalk and curb; phyto-remediation diagram



New Growth and Reclamation



Overgrown and Forgotten

Gardens in the neighborhood range in level of care and character.

Acknowledgements

This comprehensive community-driven planning effort was organized by the Women's Community Revitalization Project (WCRP) and the Eastern North Philadelphia Coalition (ENPC) and made possible by a Neighborhood Planning Grant from the Wachovia Regional Foundation.

Special thanks to:

Eastern North Philadelphia Coalition

Catholic Worker House
Circle of Hope Church
Congreso de Latinos Unidos
Drueding Center/Project Rainbow
Friends Neighborhood Guild
Kensington Gardens Homeowners Association
Kensington South NAC
Liberti Church
Mt. Tabor AME Church
Service Employees International Union 32BJ
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Community Support and Participation

Many neighborhood residents and other concerned individuals participated in the completion of this plan. The plan reflects the myriad views expressed at community meetings, in interviews, and in surveys. Thanks to all who volunteered their time and opinions.

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"[We need to create] anything that gets the community involved and gives power to the people. I'm for anything that gives the community a voice."