

MT. AIRY

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN *Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations*

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Mt. Airy Neighborhood Plan: Opportunities, Challenges and Recommendations

The Mt. Airy Neighborhood Plan was undertaken in response to Mayor John F. Street's Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, which identified 31 neighborhoods in Philadelphia where a comprehensive planning process would direct future investments. Mt. Airy is one of three neighborhoods in Philadelphia where the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission (DVRPC) directed those plans, with financial assistance from the William Penn Foundation, and in partnership with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

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Councilwoman Donna Reed Miller, 8th District, and Vernon Price of her staff
Mt. Airy USA, Farah Jimenez, Executive Director and Richard Gilbertie, former Deputy Director
East Mt. Airy Neighbors, Derek Green, President
West Mt. Airy Neighbors, Marc Stier, President
Mt. Airy Business Association, Jocie Dye, President and Pete Kelly and George Butler, Past Presidents
Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Maxine Griffith, Executive Director and Victoria Mason-Ailey, Director of Community Planning

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OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

Chapter 1: OPPORTUNITIES AND CONSTRAINTS

BACKGROUND

LOCATION AND SIZE

Mt. Airy has a population of approximately 40,000, which is divided almost equally between East Mt. Airy and West Mt. Airy. The seam that joins these two neighborhoods is Germantown Ave., a historic road that has always linked Philadelphia to its northwest counties.

These neighborhoods are located in the northwest portion of Philadelphia, between Germantown and Chestnut Hill. Germantown is the oldest community in this part of the city. It is greatly varied in its condition and its economic status, varying from pre-Revolutionary War homes and Victorian homes that are well kept to large areas of poverty. The shopping areas tend to serve the nearby neighborhoods only. Chestnut Hill is one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the city, and includes an extremely successful shopping district that serves a very wide region.

The total geographic area of the two Mt. Airys is about 1 mile by 1.5 miles (or about 22 short blocks by 18 long blocks).

HISTORY

Mt. Airy began as a location of country estates, farms, and a few homes and inns along Germantown Pike, between the more developed centers of Germantown and Chestnut Hill. In many ways, the pattern of being “between” remains



Map 1a: Mt. Airy



today and is perhaps the root of the challenges that the community faces.

The oldest remaining buildings in Mt. Airy were constructed throughout the Eighteenth Century; the earliest was Cresheim Cottage (now at the north end of Germantown Ave., at Gowen Ave.), which was built in 1700. Cliveden, built in 1764 at the corner of what is now Cliveden St. at the south end of Germantown Ave., is the most famous of the historic buildings, since it was the site of the Battle of Germantown in the Revolutionary War. There are at least ten other buildings that now remain from that era, all of them along Germantown Ave.

The area received its name from the home of Chief Justice William Allen's country estate, "Mt. Airy," which was built around 1750 and was located on Germantown Ave. near what is now Allens Lane—near the center of the existing main shopping district.

As the community grew in the nineteenth Century, two commuter train lines were built, on the east (the R7) and west side (the R8) of Germantown Ave. The completion of these lines and their eight stations spurred the residential development that took place through the end of the Nineteenth Century and in the entire Twentieth Century.

Today, the neighborhood shopping that evolved in the early parts of the Twentieth Century has declined, as is discussed below regarding the Physical Form of the Commercial Centers. This decline is one of the major challenges of this work. The individual community neighborhoods that have developed vary considerably in character and condition; these, too, are described below. No matter the condition of shopping or living—whether it is successful and viable or in need of improvement—the fundamental quality that makes Mt. Airy of such importance is its diversity. As *U.S. News & World Report* stated in an article on communities in America: "Mt. Airy is

an oasis of diversity and tolerance and a source of genuine pride.... Mt. Airy stands out as one of just a few urban neighborhoods that are truly integrated by choice.... This is a very unusual slice of urban America; it works because the people have decided to make it work. They have refused to let fear and division take over Mt. Airy.... if people aren't talking about integration (there) it may be because they're too busy trying to make it work—and perhaps writing a prescription for the rest of America...."

COMMUNITY ASSETS AND CHALLENGES

Demographics

The very special character of Mt. Airy is its racial, ethnic, and socio-economic diversity, of which the neighbors are fiercely proud, and for which it is nationally recognized.

Its overall population is 72% African American, 25% White, 1.5% Asian and 1.5% Other. In addition to this overall diversity, the same diversity exists throughout the neighborhood at the block level.

The current home ownership rate is 52%, which mirrors the citywide rate.

The educational attainment of the residents is higher than city average, since over 83% of Mt. Airy adults have at least a high school diploma, in comparison to a 71% citywide rate.

Physical Form: Boundaries and Edges

Mt. Airy is clearly defined on its north and west edges by the Wissahickon Creek and its tributaries. The entire community essentially slopes down to the ravines created by those creeks. On the other hand, its east and south edges are occasionally in dispute. (Note that, while Germantown Ave. travels southeast to northwest, the very clear understanding in Mt. Airy is that the northeast side is East Mt. Airy, and southwest side is West Mt. Airy.



Upsala Mansion:
Site of Revolutionary War battles.

This is important in understanding the locations of everything in the two communities.)

The south edge of Mt. Airy is the most unclear. The zip code says Washington Lane, but many Germantown residents identify it as Johnson St. The streets and residences in both places look very similar, so there is no vivid distinction to be made, but for the purposes of this study Washington will be the southern boundary. The east edge is marked as Stenton Ave., which has greater clarity than the south edge, but some blocks and individual neighborhoods in that area claim differing locations: East Mt. Airy versus West Oak Lane, for example.



A large twin home in the Pelham Park district, which was designed by famed landscape architect Frederick Law Olmstead.



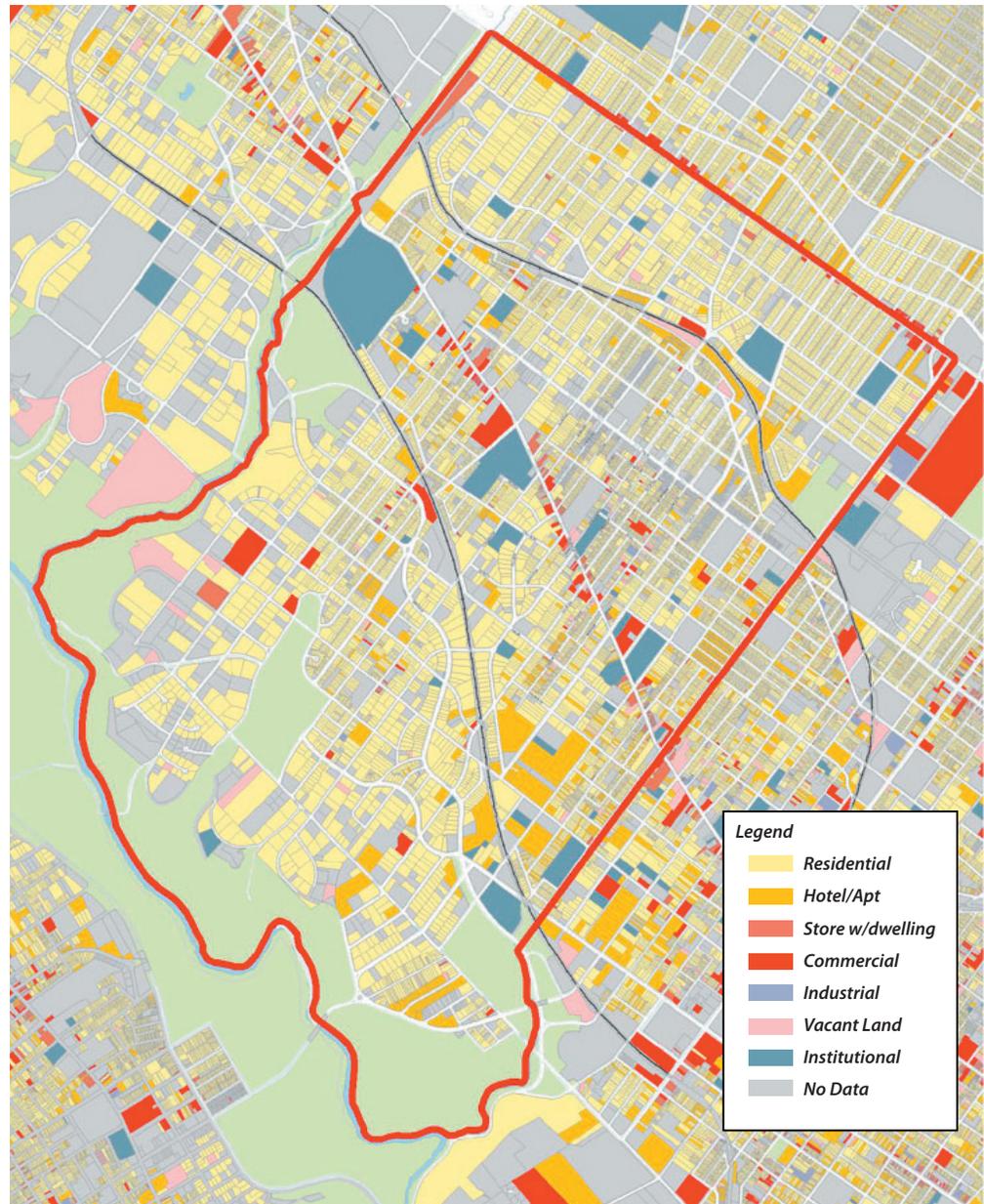
The primary shopping area of Mt. Airy.



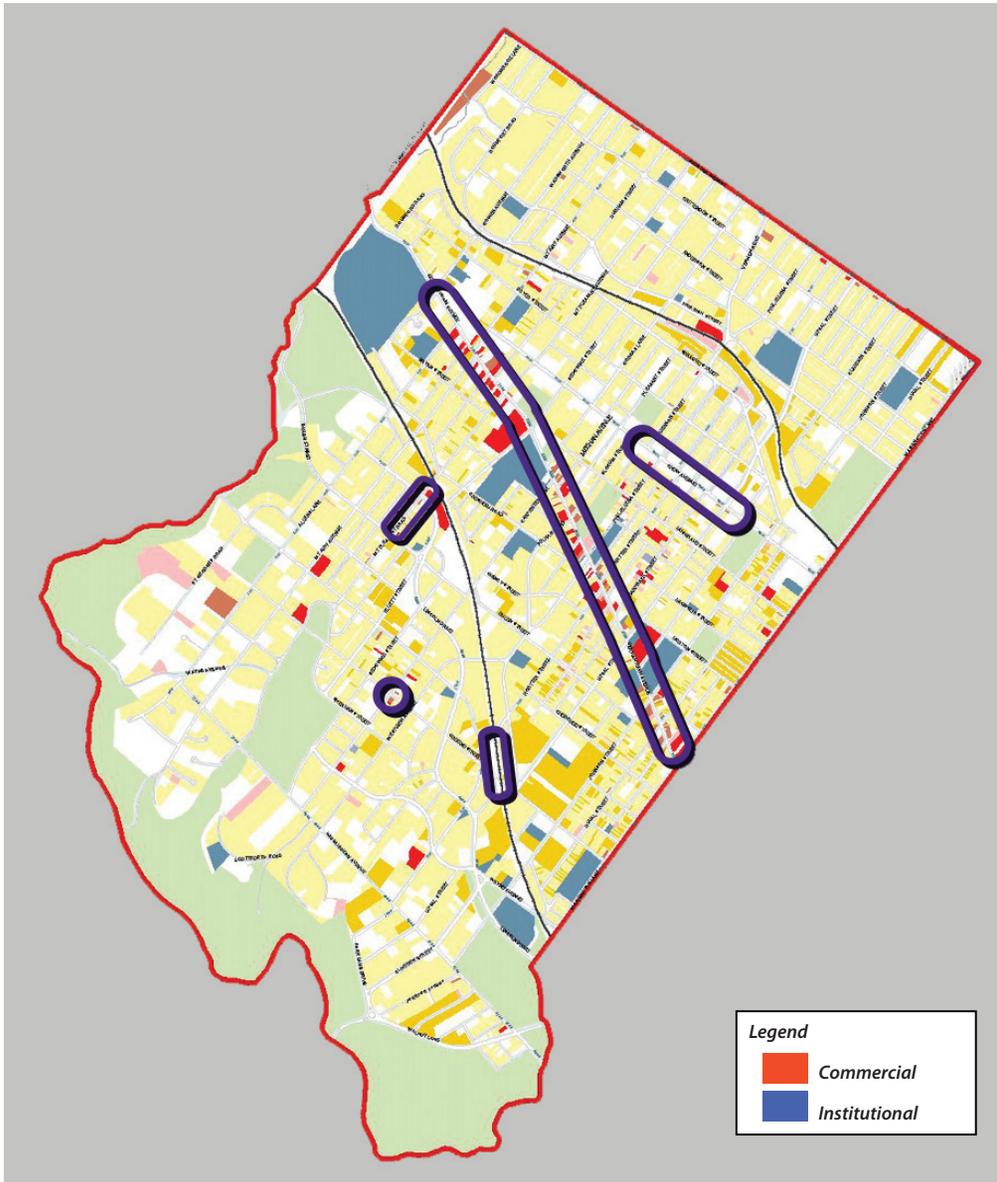
Living on Germantown Ave.



An office in the primary retail area.



Map 1b: Land Use.



Map 1c: Commercial Nodes.

Physical Form, Physical Conditions: Commercial Areas and Centers

Within Mt. Airy, there are several concentrations of commercial activity. The largest and most important is the overall length of Germantown Ave. In addition, four other commercial places are indicated on the Commercial Nodes map (map 1c): Chew St., Mt. Pleasant Ave., Pelham Plaza at the Upsal RR Station coffee shop and nearby strip center, and Weaver's Way at Carpenter and Greene St. (Weaver's Way, although not a real center, is a small but memorable business node in the Mt. Airy community.)

Germantown Ave. is located at the center of all of these neighborhoods, and is about 1.1 miles long. It therefore is naturally divided into zones of both residential and commercial uses. However, due to changes of building use and to the deterioration of



Handsome mixed use building on Germantown Ave.

the structures that have taken place over the years, the divisions between the zones are not always clearly distinguished. On the other hand, two of the zones do have the density and continuity that marks them as distinct places: between Johnson St. and Washington Lane, and between Allens Lane and Mt. Pleasant Ave.. While the Johnson/Washington area is clearly a special place, it is not

Map 1d:
Germantown Ave.
Vacancies.



now succeeding commercially. In contrast, in the Allens Lane/Mt. Pleasant blocks there is actually a very clear sense of a commercial and shopping center, with a compact and walkable street that is lined with a variety of businesses and a handsome collection of buildings. Although this area does have the sense of a “center,” it has too many service uses rather than retail to maintain the vitality of a shopping place, and there is some building deterioration. It is the place on Germantown Ave. with the greatest, but still unrealized, potential.

Of special interest is the recently completed and occupied retail/office building at the corner of Slocum St., called Phebe Commons. It was developed by Mt. Airy USA as part of its ongoing improvement policies; in addition, the existing

buildings across Germantown Ave. have been discussed as opportunities for civic action to transform those buildings for commercial uses. The location of these new and existing buildings is between the currently identified nodes; this may suggest that the node definition is to be adjusted.

The pattern of vacancies on Germantown Ave. is indicated on the Germantown Ave. Vacancies map (Map 1d). Note that there are three types of vacancies that were observed: vacant ground floor with occupied upper floor, vacant upper floor with occupied ground floor, and, vacant on all floors.

Certain of the buildings on Germantown Ave., including those that are occupied, are in need of investment and improvement. Map 1d indicates



Vacant buildings on Germantown Ave. planned for reuse.

the results of a windshield survey, which identifies vacant buildings, and buildings that are occupied but are in very deteriorated condition.

The act of identifying specific shopping and business zones also implies that there are equally special places between those zones. In general, along Germantown Ave. those “between” places are either stable residential blocks or large institutions; in a few places there are remnant businesses, but not in sufficient concentrations to make a real shopping district.

Physical Form, Physical Conditions: Neighborhoods

Within the framework of these edges, there are many very distinct neighborhoods. The neighborhoods vary in size and character, ranging from extremely expensive homes on large properties (e.g. along the Wissahickon Creek), to very large homes on medium sized properties (e.g. in the northern corner of East Mt. Airy, and on Pelham Rd. and its adjacent streets), to modest detached and twin homes, to small homes in a great variety of conditions. All of the neighborhoods are based on the typical Philadelphia block structure; the curving streets along the Wissahickon Creek, Lincoln Drive, and the roads in Pelham Park are counterpoints to that



fundamental structure. As might be expected, the larger homes are on the larger blocks, the smaller homes are on the smaller blocks.

In particular, the small homes can be either very well maintained or in states of great deterioration. These diverse conditions can be readily seen even in a cursory visual overview of the neighborhoods: tree-lined streets and front porches and well-kept lawns and gardens, where it is evident that the neighbors love and take care of their streets. Yet, there are some blocks where the opposite is true: abandoned lots and homes, and properties in disrepair. In addition, there has been an ongoing concern about the future of the largest residences in the Pelham Park area.

The Mt. Airy neighborhood has a significant number of extremely large older homes having over 4,000 s.f. of living space. Examination of recent sales identified those that sold for less than \$60/s.f. (*Map 1h*)—a fact that might indicate insufficient property value to allow for the financing of costly building and system maintenance and improvements. These low-priced large homes are clustered in the Pelham Historic District as well as in several other locations throughout the neighborhood. The community's sense is that some of these large potentially problematic properties are being purchased by individuals priced out of the more costly Chestnut Hill market but with adequate resources to maintain/rehabilitate these Mt. Airy

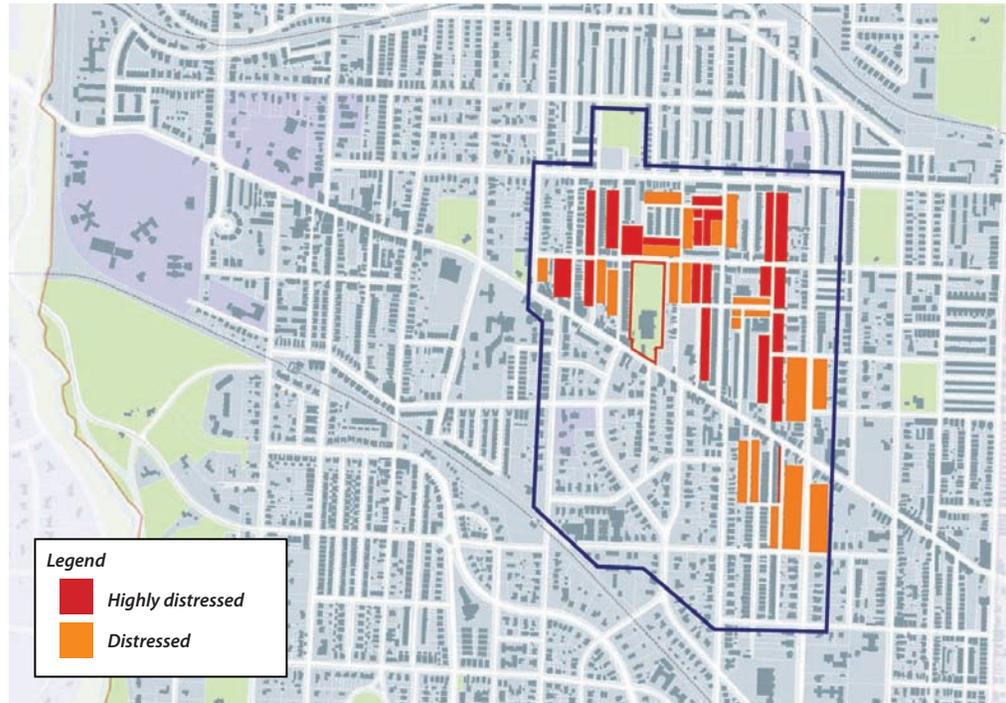
homes. Will these residences remain as single family homes? Or, will their size create a pressure to change them to institutional uses, or to multifamily dwellings? What would be the impact on the community if such changes did take place?



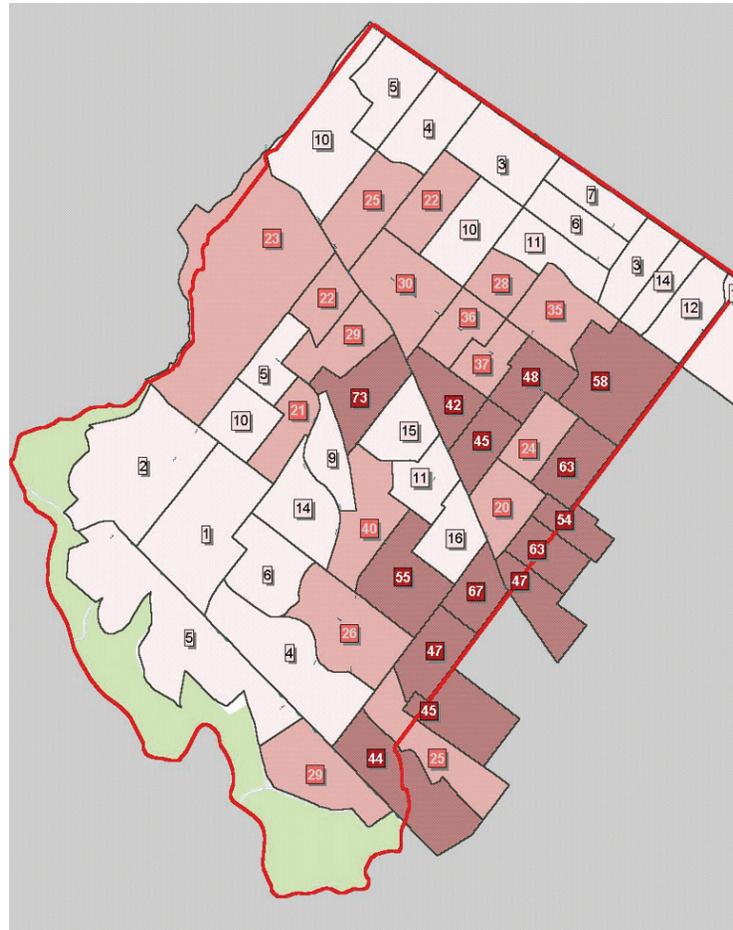
Small Homes on Springer St.



Large home in the Pelham Park neighborhood.



Map 1e: Housing Focus Area.



Map 1f: Vacancies by Census Block.

Evident Patterns

There are vacant lots and homes in a few of the neighborhoods in Mt. Airy. Vacancies by Census Block (*Map 1f*) indicates the number of vacant properties in the various census block groups. Note the pattern that indicates a much greater amount of vacancy in the southern and eastern blocks.

Like the vacancies, there is a greater concentration of poverty in the southeastern neighborhoods. While there are concentrations of poverty within those neighborhoods, overall, Mt. Airy's poverty rate of 13% is lower than the citywide rate of 22%.

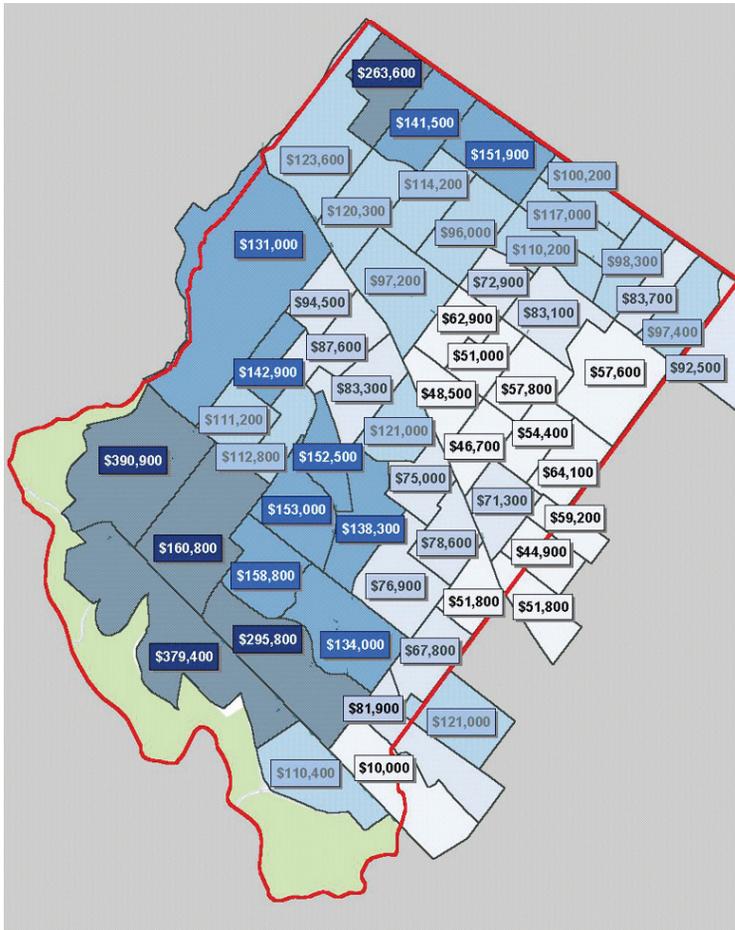
Median Housing Value Map (*Map 1g*) indicates the median home prices in the census block groups within Mt. Airy. Again, note the lower values in the southeast. This is in part due to the housing stock of this portion of the neighborhood — largely row homes and small twins. However, blocks with similar housing stock in other portions of the neighborhood to the north and west are appreciably higher.

One result of the evident patterns on these maps is a clear focus on a specific set of neighborhood areas, generally between Gorgas Lane and Upsal St. The boundary of this overall area is indicated on Housing Focus Area (*Map 1e*). Within that area, the overall patterns of deterioration are also indicated on the map.

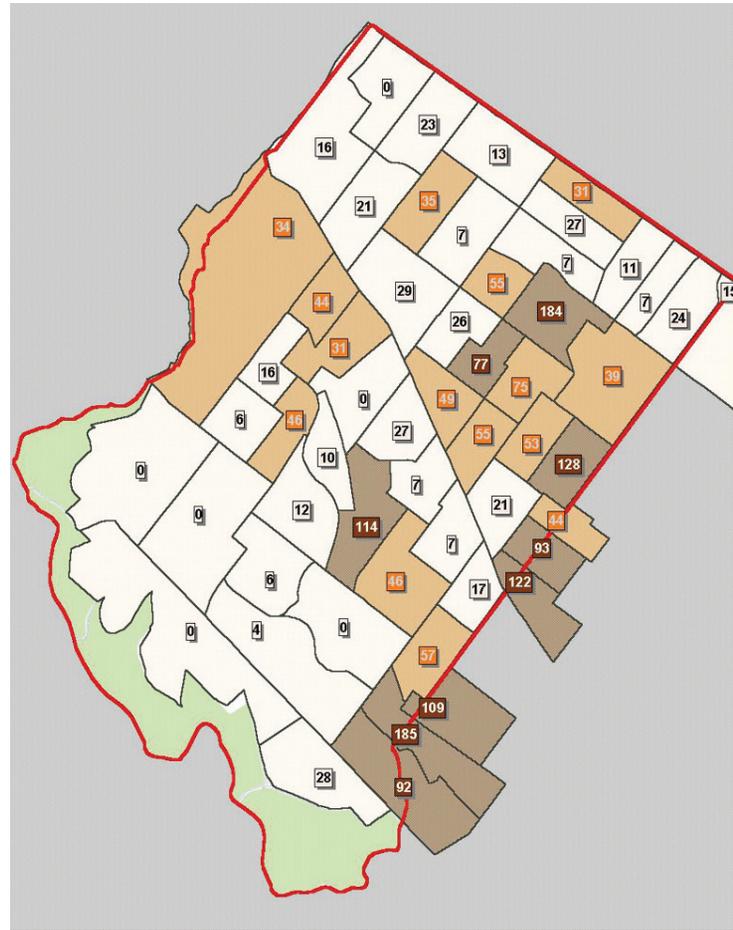
The red blocks are in states of great disrepair; with most of the block in a deteriorated condition. The orange blocks indicate a large percentage of deterioration, but imply that the improvements would be made on a building-by-building and lot-by-lot basis only.



MT. AIRY



Map 1g: Median Housing Value by Census Block.



Map 1h: Sales at less than \$60/s.f.



Map 1i: Primary Public Transportation Routes.



Upsal Station on the R8 Regional Rail line.



Visitors board a historic Route 23 trolley car for a special occasion.



Route 23 today is served by buses.

Community Resources

Although the western and northern boundaries of Mt. Airy are extensions of the Wissahickon Creek and Fairmount Park there is not an extensive open space fabric within the streets of the community. There are three public playgrounds, several school grounds, and cemeteries, but the significant sense of openness and green is created by the many handsome tree-lined residential streets.

Mt. Airy is the home of a remarkable set of institutions: educational, religious, and many

community organizations. They are located throughout, and include several public, private, and parochial schools, churches of many faiths, the Germantown Jewish Centre, and the Commodore Barry Club (for shows, parties, and dances).

Mt. Airy is extremely well-served by public transportation. The most notable systems are indicated on the Primary Public Transportation Routes map (*Map 1i*): two commuter train lines, and the famous No. 23 Trolley line on Germantown Ave. The trolleys, which are valued by the



community, are now served by buses. Ongoing efforts continue to promote the return of the trolleys, for both historic and functional reasons. The Route 23 trolley track includes a loop near Carpenter Lane. This loop is an essential part of the future of functioning trolley service. The loop passes through a large property owned by SEPTA, which once was a trolley yard and now is the location of parked small buses.

There are eight commuter rail stations in Mt. Airy. Two stations (Upsal and Allens Lane) have been transformed by the addition of coffee shops. The reasonable walking distances to each station are indicated on this map; the one place on Germantown Ave. that is within walking distance of a station is actually served by two stations, and is also the primary commercial district that is described above.

There are a large number of historic buildings along Germantown Ave. within Mt. Airy, but other than Cliveden, they are not well known to the wider Philadelphia community. In addition, Mt. Airy is known to have been part of the Underground Railroad, and it's flanked by Germantown and Chestnut Hill which are, indeed, historic and shopping and tourist destinations. This combination of nearby historic attractions and the history that is evident within Mt. Airy suggests a very special opportunity to take advantage of this resource to stimulate the commerce of the entire community.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

Business Districts

As suggested in *Physical Form, Physical Conditions: Commercial Areas and Centers* (pg. 1.6), an analysis of the patterns of existing retail and commercial businesses on Germantown Ave. reveals that there are now six groups, or nodes, of retail activity. There are four major concentrations: between Allens Lane and Mt. Pleasant Ave.; between Gorgas Lane and Phil-Ellena St.; near Hortter St.; and between Johnson St. and Washington Ave.. As also observed above, the Allens Lane and Johnson St. nodes are visually and architecturally clear. The Johnson St. node, however, includes many vacancies and therefore is not as economically viable as it might appear. The Gorgas Lane and Hortter St. nodes, on the other hand, will require both an infusion of new businesses and the physical improvements to clarify these areas as a successful commercial place.

The remaining two nodes, at Gowen Ave. and Sedgwick St. (the ACME site), are smaller and are groups of uses at a single intersection.

In summary, while all of these nodes contain some concentrations of commercial activity, and while some contain significantly more than others, none provide the level or range of retailing to act as real community-serving convenience or shopping districts.

Phebe Commons is a mixed-use project developed by Mt. Airy USA.

As indicated above, the Phebe Commons development, plus the possibility of new development across Germantown Ave. and on the SEPTA site, may create enough new activity so that the definitions of the Gorgas Lane and Hortter St. nodes should be reconsidered. Indeed, they may be joined to make a better, single, vital place for business.

Most of these nodes appear to coincide with the patterns of vacancy and buildings needing improvement that were indicated on the maps in *Physical Form, Physical Conditions: Commercial Areas and Centers* (pps. 1.6-8). This coincidence of patterns implies considerable opportunities to make positive change in each place.

Parking Opportunities in the Nodes

In identifying these nodes it was assumed that, for future success, adequate parking must be made available. While Germantown Ave. and Mt. Airy as a whole has a pleasant pedestrian environment and is served by public transportation, the relatively low density and large area of the neighborhood dictate that most commercial users will arrive by car. There is continuous on-street parking along the length of



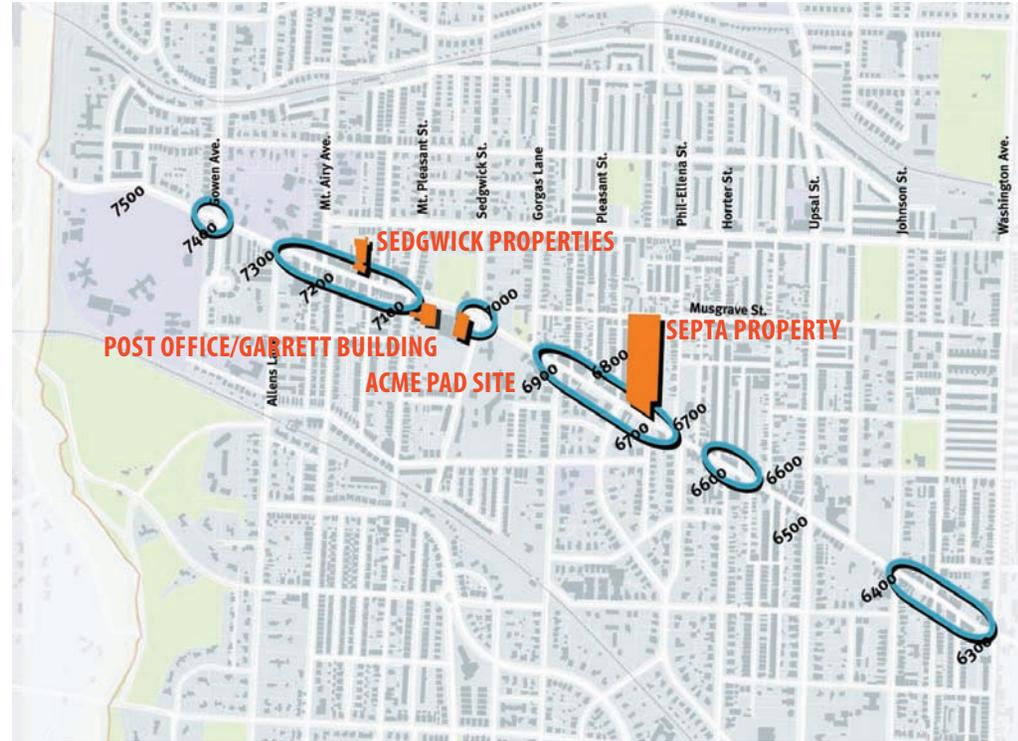


Possible site for parking behind the Sedgwick Theater.

Germantown Ave., but the type of parking varies: in the Allens Lane and Johnson St. nodes there are parking meters, but in the Gorgas Lane and Hortter St. nodes there are none. The presence or lack of meters reflects the pattern of business. In any node, however, the number of on-street spaces will ultimately be inadequate as the commercial



Germantown Ave. facade of the historic Sedgwick Theater before 2004 improvement.



Map 1j: Locations of four possible development sites on Germantown Ave.

businesses grow. Therefore apparently open and unused lots have been identified in the three large nodes, and are noted on the Germantown Ave. Nodes map. The Sedgwick lot is in the rear, so a pleasant walk and stairway must be created to link the shops with the parking. The lots in the other two nodes face the avenue, and are large enough to accommodate small parking lots.

Four Possible Development Sites

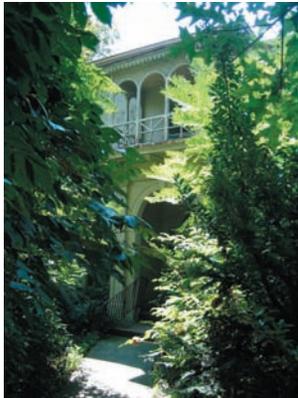
As described above (Map 1j), four specific properties have been identified by their locations and sizes, as possibilities for various types of development and improvement.

Sedgwick Properties

The owners of the Sedgwick Theater also own several other properties on that block face of Germantown Ave. (the northern commercial district). The theater building itself includes the very large theater hall, which is now empty, and a very large open parking lot in the back. Recent investment within this block includes the Sedgwick Cultural Center, the North by Northwest restaurant and the InFusion coffee shop. Additionally, several professional offices are located on the upper floors of the theater property.



The former Post Office is being redeveloped.



The Garrett/Italianate Building.

Post Office/Garrett Building

The "Italianate Villa" on the west side of the 7000 block of Germantown Ave. presents a redevelopment opportunity. The community is concerned that this site may be developed as auto-oriented retailing, such as a large pharmacy (with drive-through and front parking lot), which would be inappropriate for the character of the existing retail district. If properly developed, this property could also link the Allens Lane/Mt. Pleasant node with the Sedgwick (ACME) node, thus extending an important concentration of retail activity in Mt. Airy.



ACME redevelopment site at the corner of Germantown Ave. and Sedgwick St.

ACME pad site

A new ACME Supermarket is being built at the corner of Germantown Ave. and Sedgwick St. At the corner of the development is a pad site that is reserved for a small-scale development. Agreements with ACME will enable Mt. Airy USA to have a part in the development of the site, adjacent to a playground, the library, and residential neighborhoods.



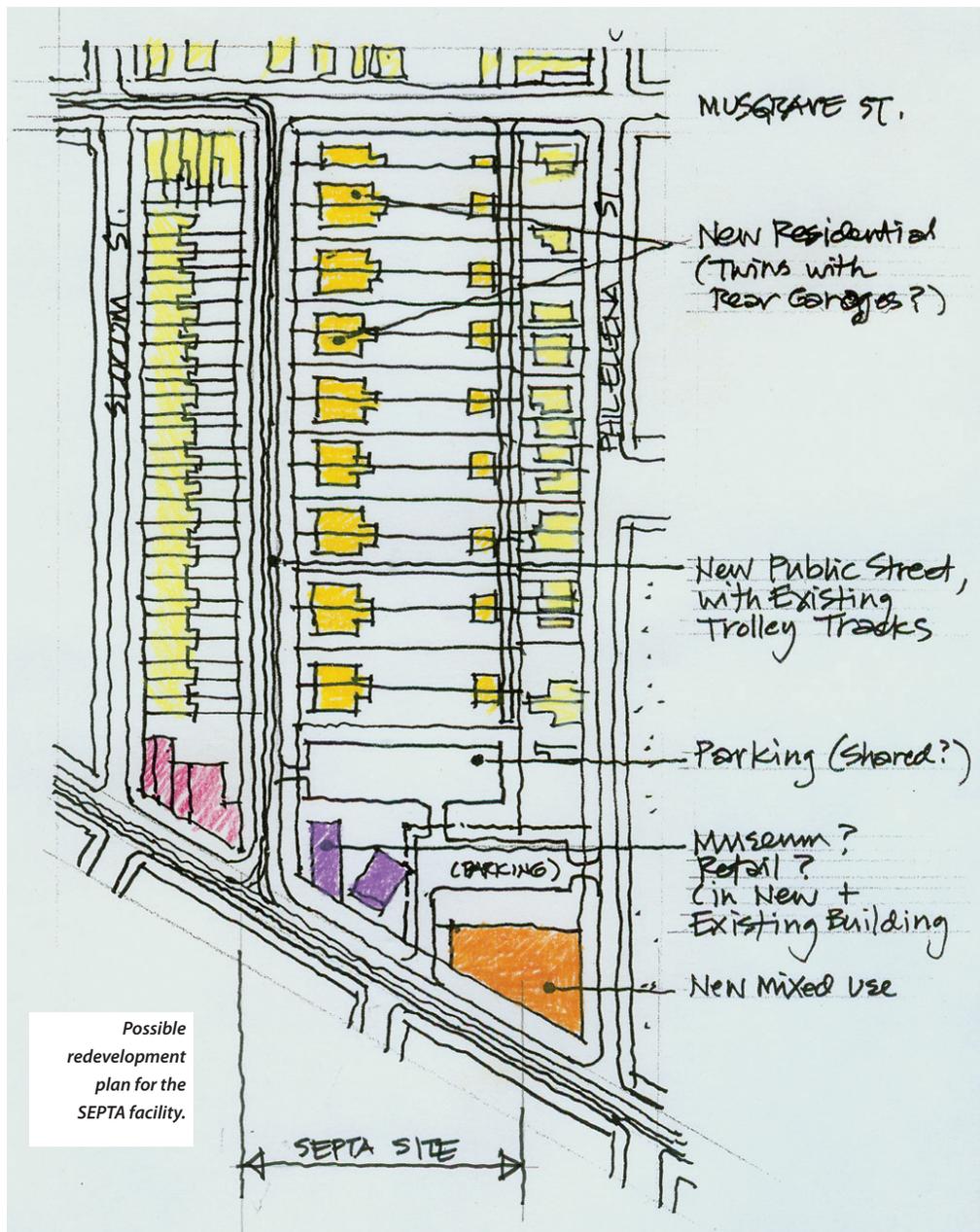
The SEPTA facility does not present a friendly appearance to Germantown Ave.

SEPTA property

The SEPTA property near Phil-Ellena St. is now used for the storage of some of its vehicles, and is in a poor state of maintenance; a sign that says "Armed Guard" definitely does not signal a welcoming place. The residential neighborhoods that adjoin the property are, not surprisingly, generally in distressed conditions. Considerable interest has been expressed within the wider Mt. Airy community to create a trolley museum here, by taking advantage of the original building and site facing Germantown Ave., and perhaps by displaying trolleys in the yard where the buses are now parked. An alternative to this institutional use, and as a test of the commercial development capacity of the site, the accompanying site sketch indicates that about 19 large twin homes could be built along a new street that includes the existing trolley turnaround tracks. Either a museum or retail development are possible facing Germantown Ave. as a companion to the adjacent Phebe Commons; these two retail/office/institutional developments could also share parking.

Residential Districts

Also as indicated in Physical Form, Physical Conditions: Neighborhoods, above, a "Study Area" has been preliminarily identified as the focus of residential improvements and new residential developments. The map Distressed Blocks (*Map 1e*) shows those blocks with the greatest deterioration within the area; this map is supported by a focus on the median home values and vacancies in that specific area. Note the apparently random pattern of the distressed blocks within the study area, where one block can consist of a long series of row houses with front porches that is totally cared for (and with young children playing and mothers and fathers on the front porches). At the same time, a nearby block with similar characteristics is in great need of repair. Two observations have been made so far, concerning this condition: in the well-tended



The Pelham Park neighborhood is characterized by very large, historic homes.

blocks there appears to be strong individual leadership; in the less well-tended blocks there often is no small front yard to care for, since the houses are located right at the sidewalk. More accurate analysis may be required, but there does seem to be a consensus about the identification of the individual blocks in need of improvement.

In addition to distressed blocks it has been observed that there are individual buildings whose condition or form present a challenge to their possible improvements. These buildings fall into the following categories:

- Those houses that are in very poor condition, no matter the quality of their block or the size and character of the house.
- Those houses that appear to be much too small in building area to serve the residential markets of Mt. Airy.
- Those small houses that are located on such small lots that there is virtually no private outdoor open space, and are on such small streets that there is no place to park the car. The photograph on the next page shows such a condition: the small house is at the sidewalk, (and the car is parked on the same sidewalk). These conditions suggest that houses of this



Small houses with insufficient parking present both a challenge and an opportunity for redevelopment.

size and on these locations may well no longer have a viable place in the Mt. Airy residential neighborhoods.

- Those houses that appear to be too large, and that therefore would be too difficult for an individual family to adequately maintain. The criteria described above, regarding houses larger than 4,000 s.f. that have sold for less than \$60/s.f., imply just that. Although there is no significant evidence of deterioration in these houses, the facts may justify the community's concern.

Community Life

In the many meetings held with the neighbors throughout the beginning of this process, gaps in key services were identified as important to all of Mt. Airy. Although the basic recommendations in this plan will focus on physical transformations and developments, it must be recognized that some actions that do not necessarily include building are part of overall community life.

Mt. Airy is home to many seniors, in their own residences and in institutional facilities. As part of their attitude toward diversity and inclusiveness, the neighbors welcome this part of society into the



Very large houses in the Pelham Park area.



The Sacred Heart Manor Nursing Home on Germantown Ave.

community. They feel, however, that public and institutional services that can help their elders are inadequate. For example, it should be possible to age in place, and so the question of mobility must be answered, and various services should be available to those at home. It is important that the recommendations that arise from this plan should acknowledge the need to improve all of these conditions.

The same is true of the youth in the community. Greatly increased activities, services, and even facilities are needed to make a healthy environment for the community's young. The existing recreation centers only begin to address this issue. Education, recreation, and so on should

be an ongoing part of the life of the youth, and there are gaps in the provision of those activities.

Links to city services are not always reliable. Calls to the police are apparently not entirely reliable; requests to city departments for appropriate code enforcement often go unanswered; street cleaning is not adequate; and, trash pick up can be messy and sporadic. The neighbors asked: Where can we turn to bring these services to us?

One answer to that question has already begun to evolve: There are many organizations and institutions that can and are helping, such as West Mt. Airy Neighbors, East Mt. Airy Neighbors, Mt. Airy USA, the offices of various elected officials, and the many places of worship. Most of them have offices, staff, and web sites that give information and advice. Mt. Airy is blessed with much active civic engagement, but more remains to be done.

CONCLUSION: "PROMOTING MT. AIRY LIVING"

Mt. Airy's renown as a place that is accepting of all peoples is an inspiration to us all, and a comfort to its residents. One remarkable action is now taking place, which seeks to demonstrate the great quality of life that is available here, and therefore to encourage others to join in this peaceful mission of inclusive and welcoming living. Large, illustrated advertisements are being placed in the real estate sections of the local newspapers that explain the quality of life in the entire Mt. Airy community. The headline says "Mt. Airy Young and Old. Black, white and brown. Spanish, English, Japanese. And those are just the houses." It further says, "To find your way home in Mt. Airy, visit www.phillyathome.com!"

MT. AIRY

*LOCAL COMMUNITY WORKSHOP
SUGGESTIONS AND
OBSERVATIONS*

Chapter 2: LOCAL COMMUNITY WORKSHOP SUGGESTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

RESULTS FROM WORKSHOP ON 7/22/03

A community visioning workshop was held on July 22, 2003, to discuss the issues now facing Mt. Airy. This workshop was attended by various stakeholders in the community and the city, by community leaders, individual neighbors, and retailers and business people. The project team gave a brief overview of the analyses and observations of this large and diverse community; this presentation was followed by breakout sessions that focused on three broad topics: "Housing and Community Development," "Economic Development," and "Circulation." The observations, comments, and recommendations of the participants are recorded here.

HOUSING/COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

Large House Issue

- Prevent conversion of larger houses to institutional uses.
- Encourage the designation of the Pelham Park area as a National Historic District (the nomination has not taken place yet).
- Address nuisance crimes in the Pelham Park area; e.g.: theft of patio furniture/potted plants.
- Need to find means of improving blocks of poorly maintained small houses that are adjacent to the large houses.

- One opinion that is held by many people is that this is not really an issue, since most houses appear well cared for.
- Observation: Many large houses have illegal 3rd floor apartments, or "granny flats", which are acceptable to most people in Mt. Airy, since these apartments help finance the maintenance of the large property without changing the appearance of the area.
- Observation: 30–40% of these large houses are owned by retired people.

Small House Issue

- Means need to be found to make the existing small houses habitable, since they offer an affordable opportunity to be part of the Mt. Airy community. For example, provide convenient parking nearby; remove abandoned houses and warehouses in the neighborhoods, make the streets attractive, and so on. We need to find ways to maintain diversity.
- Need to educate community about funding availability for housing assistance.
- Need to add senior centers/outreach programs to meet needs of elderly – to help keep them in their (small) homes and avoid nursing homes. Extensive senior and youth services may compensate for constraints of very small homes.

Deteriorated Houses and Streets (in the lower area of East Mt. Airy)

- Sharpnack St. (100 block, West) could be model block development project. 75 homeowners, but many deteriorating homes. Owners cannot afford to maintain homes. Also, there are many vacant lots, which suggest the need for new infill homes.
- Is there potential for senior park at 91 W. Sharpnack St. associated with Senior center on Germantown Ave.?

- Address the problems of Section 8 landlords who don't maintain their properties. In addition, it is necessary to determine who owns multiple properties of this type.
- Add a public open space at Allens Lane and McCallum St.
- Need to get people involved in quality of life improvements to neighborhood: keep it clean, watch out for each other, etc.
- Observation: A large handsome house on Lincoln Drive is so deteriorated that it will be torn down; the community and the city should be able to prevent such a waste from occurring in the future.

Needed Services

- Community organizing is more important than bricks and mortar — need professional staff and funding for community organizing.
- Create a program of volunteers who go house to house — a community organizing effort — to determine needs of each resident. The area needs social workers, and targeted community services.
- Need to provide assistance to grandparents who are raising children in these houses.
- Need a senior center in Mt. Airy; the center in the Park and the senior housing on Cheltenham Ave. is not sufficient.
- Observation: Many houses are passed down to children who do not have capacity to maintain them (lack of education or drug problems can have an effect on the owner's ability to maintain). Drug counseling facilities and programs will therefore help.
- Need to promote a positive image of neighborhoods, both inside and outside community, to make us all proud of our community.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Vacancies, Deterioration, Conditions

- Improve the maintenance, which is not good. Clean the sidewalks. Empty the trash containers. (“Need to be mean to keep it clean.”)
- Need to find means of making property owners and merchants care for their properties and the sidewalks in front of them. Some merchants, seem to have no pride in their properties, or their sidewalk; they make no repairs, don’t clean sidewalks, etc. (One merchant who took part in the meeting said that he picks up trash everywhere and takes it with him: he “gives trash a home.”)
- Find tenants to fill the vacant shops. Such vacancies are deterrents to investment in other properties. Find tenants for vacant upper floors.
- Increase the diversity in the mix of businesses to attract local residents, and their diverse needs and interests.
- Why not try small “splashes”? Try small community actions, instead of “big splashes.” Support entrepreneurship. For example:
 - Install a community “agitator/helper/organizer.” (A full time “nag” was a phrase used in the Workshop.)
 - Promote art (both artists and purchasers): galleries, museums, actors, painters, etc.
 - Get businesses that are needed by the community, such as shoes, gourmet groceries, music.
- Observation: There is considerable potential for the main Germantown business district, and there are some signs of improvement.

Businesses’ Needs

- Conduct “Shop Mt. Airy” campaign. The neighbors do not shop here: there appears to be a disconnection between residents and businesses. Note the following, as examples of good shops which can and should serve the Mt. Airy residents:
 - Restaurants (e.g. North by Northwest)
 - Coffee shop
 - Fitness center
 - Florist
 - Liquor store
 - Family and young peoples bar (McMenamin’s)
 - Hats
 - Groban’s Seafood
- Small businesses, in particular, have these specific needs:
 - They are undercapitalized, but don’t fit into banks’ typical categories for lending.
 - Professional operational support: owners “have enough trouble making it through the day.”
 - Work is hard enough; imagination is also needed.
- Clarify Mt. Airy’s image: explain the place, change the perception. Create a clear vision of what Mt. Airy shopping should be like, so investors have a guide to invest in the right businesses.

TRANSPORTATION

Traffic

- Signal timing needs coordination in 7000 - 7400 block of Germantown Ave.
- Improve the drop-off traffic movement at Allen Lane Station, since it is impacting the neighborhood.
- Reduce cut-through traffic to Germantown Ave. on Pelham Rd.
- Note these unsafe intersections; determine if they do need improving, and what kinds of improvements are possible:
 - Emlen and Nippon
 - Durham and Cresheim
 - Pelham and Hortter
 - Lincoln Drive at Westview and Cherokee
- Upsal and Sedgwick streets lack lighting.

Parking

- Need for additional carefully placed new parking lots to serve Germantown Ave. businesses.
- Specifically, add a new public parking lot in the primary shopping area on Germantown Ave. (Allens Lane to Mt. Pleasant Ave.); the lack of adequate parking hampers business, and also results in a spill-over effect throughout the adjacent neighborhoods.
- Consistently enforce parking regulations; the enforcement is not consistent now, which is frustrating for both merchants and customers.



Walking, Biking

- Improve the unsafe intersections in key places, which pose a hazard to pedestrians (see the list above, in Traffic).
- Add bike lanes (create an entire biking route system), and more bike racks — especially on Germantown Ave.

Public Transportation

- Don't abandon R8 service, and don't increase headways from 1/2-hour to -hour.
- Add more suburban bus route connections.
- Reinstall the Route 23 Trolley service.
- Observation: The SEPTA trolley lot on Germantown Ave. is used to store suburban vehicles, yet it has a negative impact on the surrounding residential neighborhoods. Find a new a better use for this property, which will add to the quality of life in Mt. Airy.

MT. AIRY

CONCLUSIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 3: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION: ORGANIZATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS

The people of Mt. Airy are remarkably proud and protective of their quality of life, which is embodied in the pleasure that is taken in the great variety of its neighbors — family types, household sizes, ages, incomes, races, religions — and of the resulting variety of its neighborhoods. This cherished quality of life is at the core of the recommendations made here, in that the fundamental goals are to maintain all that is so cherished, but at the same time to identify those places and policies that require change to make the entire community even better.

This valued quality makes Mt. Airy of unique importance in the city. As a neighborhood of choice, it provides the most significant place in the region for everyone who enjoys the vitality and diversity of urban living, and understands the need to be part of a true community, where neighbor cares for neighbor and where there is a complete commitment to the entire caring community.

Chapter 1: Opportunities and Constraints (pps. 1.3-15) of this report has identified the areas that can and should change. This plan describes the changes that are possible, and the priorities in making those changes. For clarity, the plan organizes the recommendations into the following four categories.

Housing

Certain streets and properties have been determined to be in need of various types of change; all of these streets are in the southern part of the Mt. Airy community. In addition, a set of deteriorating influences which touch many neighborhoods have been separately identified.

Economic Development

Economic Development in Mt. Airy focuses principally on the nature of the various shopping/commercial districts. Germantown Ave. is the primary shopping district, but there are also small concentrations of shopping within the neighborhoods. Included in this plan are recommendations for entire areas, as well as key specific sites.

Circulation

The uses of all types of movement are addressed: pedestrian, public transportation, walking, and parking. The gateway entrances are also part of the larger movement system.

Building Community

Certain key issues were raised in this process which reached beyond new developments, and which focused on other ways to continue the ongoing process of building a sense of community within the various Mt. Airy neighborhoods. These issues included the value of making public meeting places — in the form of small parks and gardens, support for youth and the elderly (including the ability to age in place), and crime prevention.

PROCESS OF THE WORK

The process for developing these recommendations began with an open-ended Community Visioning Workshop in Mt. Airy in July, 2003, which addressed the basic issues raised in *Chapter 1: Opportunities and Constraints* (pps. 1.3-15) of this plan. Included in that workshop were planning experts invited to give a special view of what has happened in other communities, and what could happen here. These same experts led a Best Practices Forum the following day, where they made suggestions and observations specifically for Mt. Airy.

Throughout the course of the work four meetings of the Advisory Working Group were held; this Group consisted of leadership from a wide variety of community organizations from throughout Mt. Airy, DVRPC, and the consultants. They gave advice regarding the next steps to be taken in the process, the structure of future meetings, and the issues to be addressed, and made suggestions regarding the recommendations that were evolving.

Four meetings were also held with the Study Steering Committee, a group which included representatives of key public agencies, citywide non-profit organizations, and private sector representatives; these meetings took place throughout the planning process.

During the development of the Recommendations, working meetings were held with Mt. Airy USA, representatives of West Mt. Airy Neighbors, East Mt. Airy Neighbors, and key business people and property owners. Some meetings were held with all of these representatives together in one place, others were held one-on-one, and by telephone.

A community Open House was held at the conclusion of the work, in late 2004, which enabled the neighbors to understand all of the recommendations being made.



FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES

Although this plan is organized into four separate parts, it is essential that all housing, economic development, circulation, and “building community” actions are integrated into a single, cohesive set of accomplishments. The fates of Germantown Ave., and the residential streets it intersects, are inextricably tied together. Accordingly, it must be understood in the implementation process of this plan that improving the Germantown Ave. shopping street will improve the adjacent residential streets, and that improving the neighborhoods will create a better environment for investment in the nearby shops and businesses. This is a unified plan with basic symbiotic relationships among its parts.

The primary focus of these recommendations is on physical changes. However, the community was adamant that, to preserve the unique Mt. Airy quality of life, there are other supporting systems, policies, and programs that support the neighbors and neighborhoods with services that in many cases are as important as any construction. This is not merely a physical plan.

Finally, all of the recommendations must be realistic, and achievable, no matter in what sequence they are implemented, and in what time frames.



A typical neighboring porch-lined street.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

RECOMMENDED PRIORITIES

All of the recommendations made in this plan are extremely important to the future of the Mt. Airy community. Because they are so important, and because there are such a large number, a sequence of actions must be established. Therefore the priorities that have been listed with each of the four categories of improvement — economic development, housing, circulation, building community — are recommended as the first steps that should be taken. A subsequent determination must therefore be met to establish the next set of priority actions, after the first are completed. Each of these recommendations are described more fully in the next chapter and the implementation strategies are explained in detail in the final chapter.

CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING THE PRIORITIES

- Recommendations must be realizable and developable.
- Projects must be approvable by various agencies and the community.
- First projects must have the most positive impacts on the commercial and residential communities.
- All improvements — residential, retail, circulation — must be integrated with each other, to make a unified set of accomplishments.
- Improvements and actions must be fundable, by various agencies and institutions.
- There must be an identified organization capable of implementing the recommendations.

HOUSING PRIORITIES

- Improve and redevelop these five streets and blocks:
 - E. Sharpnack St., and the adjacent large interior block, between Germantown Ave. and Chew Ave.
 - E. Phil-Ellena / Springer Sts., between Germantown Ave. and Musgrave St.
 - E. Montana St.: the large assembled development site near Chew Ave.
 - W. Upsal St. / W. Weaver St., between Germantown Ave. and Cherokee St.
 - Mt. Airy Commons/Edgewood buildings
- Remove or improve the nuisance uses in those blocks.
- Determine the priority sequence for the improvements.
- Redevelop and improve these large sites:
 - E. Montana St. lot, now owned by Mt. Airy USA
 - Lot between Hortter and Sharpnack Sts, as part of the Sharpnack St. improvements.



Example of a large deteriorated house.

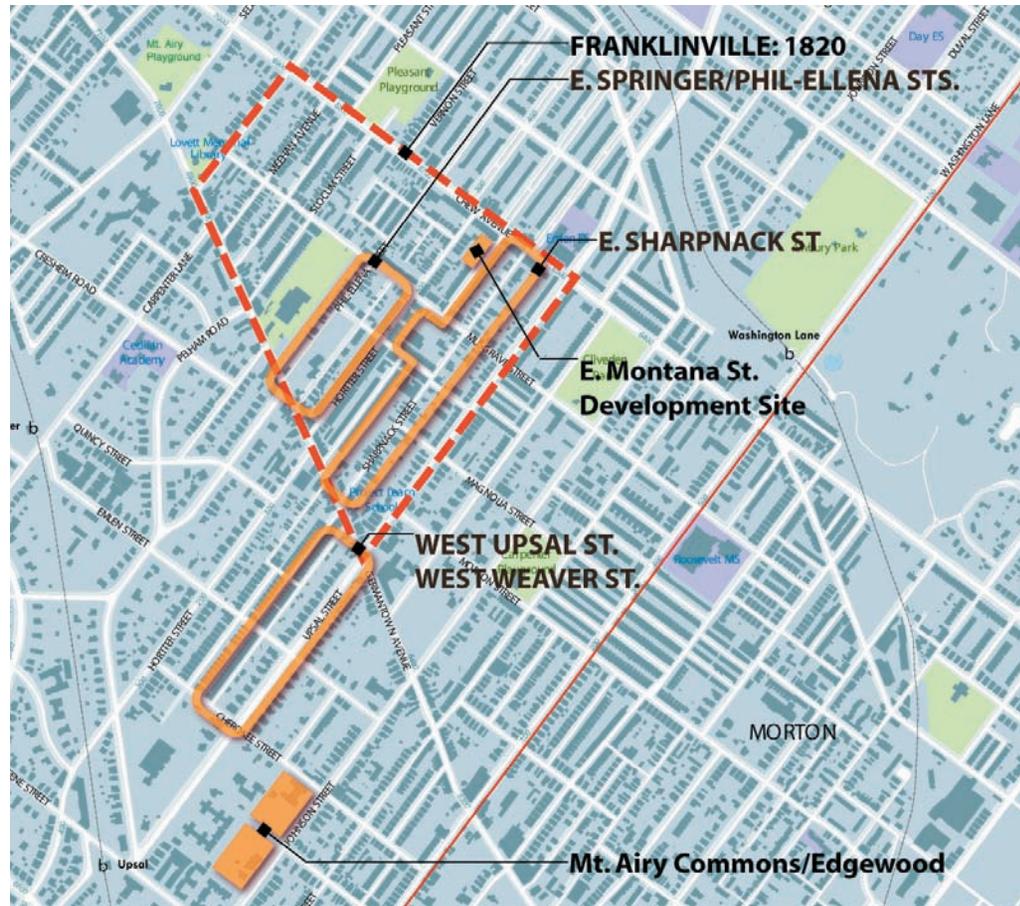
As seen on this pleasant street, shade trees add a handsome sheltering quality to the neighborhood.



Sharpnack St. has many deteriorated and vacant homes along most of its length.



Sharpnack St. also has several vacant and littered lots.



Map 3k: The locations of recommended primary housing improvement actions.

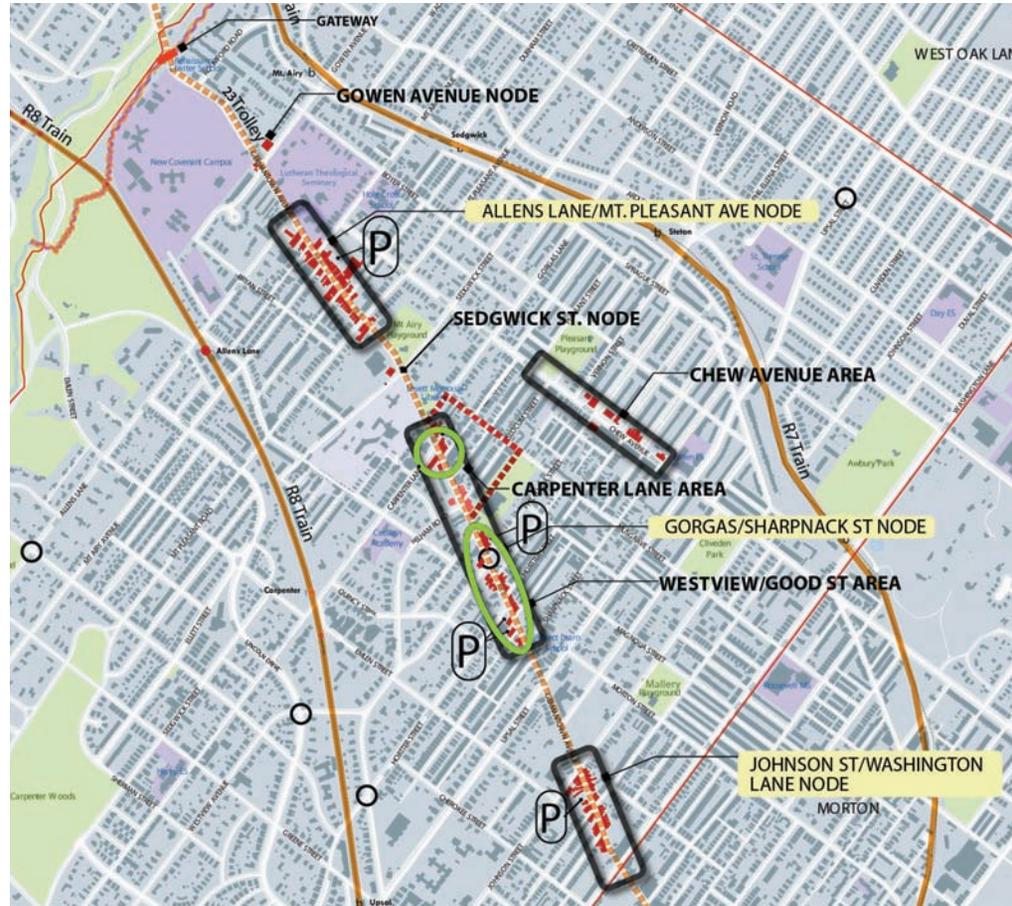


Examples of new urban twin houses that will easily fit in Mt. Airy.



ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES

- Improve these three Germantown Ave. retail nodes:
 - Allens Lane /Mt. Pleasant Ave.
 - Gorgas Lane/Sharpnack St.
 - Johnson St. /Washington Lane
- In the Gorgas/Shapnack node, specifically, complete the development of the Pelham Professional Building, and begin the process to redevelop the SEPTA site, and the two blocks of buildings near Hortter St. that have several vacancies.
- Make these general improvements to all three retail nodes:
 - Retail recruitment for the shopping areas, including an overall strategy for accomplishing this.
 - Construction of streetscape improvements (including special lighting in the shopping areas).
 - Creation of new, shared, parking lots and a parking system.
 - Support and expansion of the facade, and sign improvement program
 - Attraction of historic tourism



Map 31: Detailed analysis has identified three “nodes” of retail activity of Germantown Ave., and one on Chew Ave., where retail improvement activities should be focused.



Shops and offices in the heart of the main shopping area.



Allens Lane/Mt. Pleasant Area.

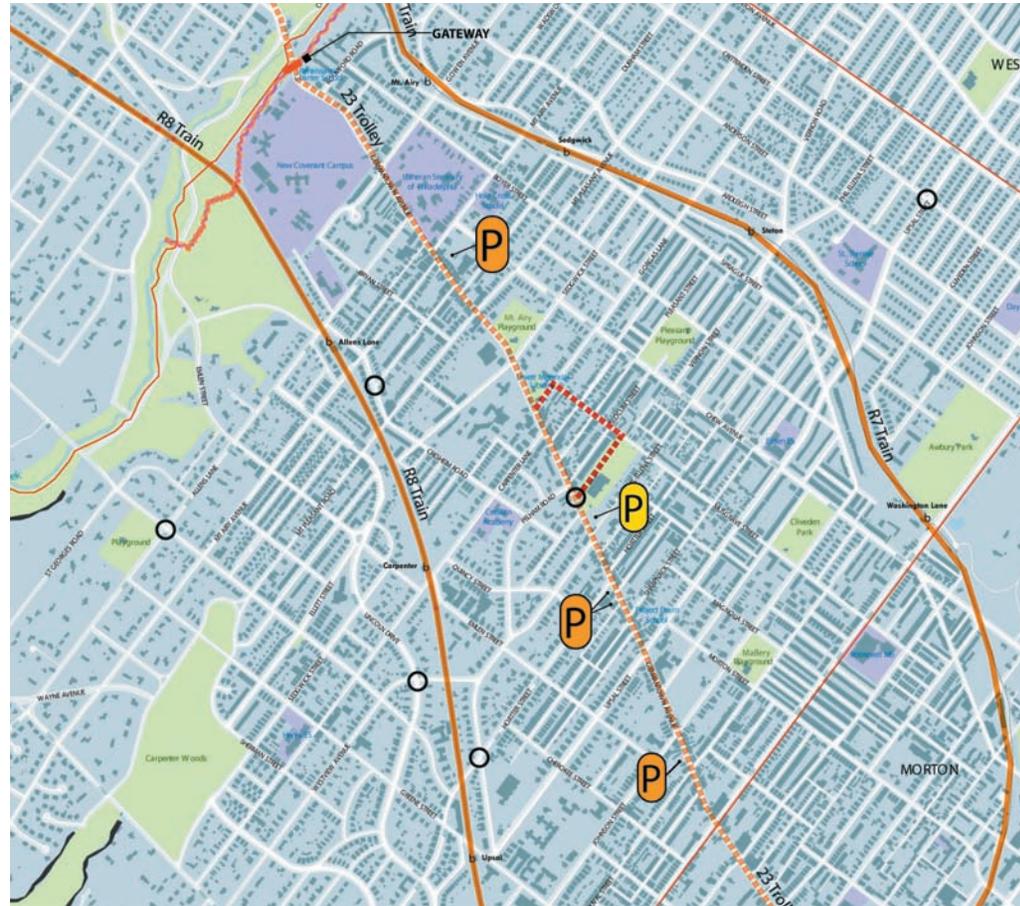


A mixed use building on Chew Ave.

- Transform and improve the Chew Ave. retail area and the Pleasant Playground, see *Recommendations: Housing, Residential Development* (pgs. 3.31-39) for more information.
- Undertake these business support actions:
 - Develop a “Shop Mt. Airy” marketing program.
 - Establish management support system.
 - Extend the cleanliness campaign.
 - Expand and support the facade/signage improvement program

CIRCULATION PRIORITIES

- Create three new parking lots for the retail areas.
- Establish a shared parking system within the retail areas, including the use of the three new lots, the existing Phebe Commons lot, Germantown Home and other area parking lots.
- Create a gateway at the railroad bridge, as an entrance to Mt. Airy, and to Fairmount Park.
- Create the walking/bike trail on the abandoned railroad tracks.
- Continue to pressure for the return of the 23 Trolley; plan for the public improvements and developments that will follow.
- Add a shared car rental system to the community.
- Continue to pressure the city to maintain the Belgian block paving on Germantown Ave.



Map 3m: Locations of primary public transportation and public parking areas.

This billboard has since been removed and a new development is taking place.

Route 23 - As a trolley (right photo).





BUILDING COMMUNITY PRIORITIES

- Common Ground: Public Open Spaces
 - Complete the sitting park at the Lovett Library.
 - Fully improve the Pleasant Playground.
- Activities and Services for the Young
 - Establish job training, assist in finding jobs.
 - Complete the Pleasant Playground.
- Support Services for the Elderly
 - Promote residential development (new, rehabilitation) that accommodates the walking, living needs of the elderly.
 - Continue to support Meals on Wheels.
 - Establish home health care assistance programs.
- Improved Safety and Security
 - Expand bicycle police patrols.
 - Promote new residential developments that remove the blank walls and vacant lots of “nuisance uses.”
 - Develop, expand drug education programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS: HOUSING, RESIDENTIAL DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY GOALS

The special quality of Mt. Airy living — the comfortable place for people of various means and various family types — must be promoted and preserved as changes in the physical character of the neighborhoods are improved and changed. Therefore a mix of dwelling types must be created, ranging from small to large and inexpensive to expensive, providing for both ownership and rental (and for various maintenance needs), and provide places for the young and able as well as for the elderly and less able.

Comfortable, secure, and supportive as the quality of life is here, there remain a few small neighborhoods in distress, which makes it more difficult for those residents to fully enjoy those community qualities. Vacancies, incompatible uses, and deterioration of some houses and properties do exist in these neighborhoods. The recommendations here therefore focus on those neighborhoods that could be improved; an important characteristic of most of these neighborhoods is that they contain many mid-sized and smaller homes that provide a great number of options for living here.

A close relationship exists between the neighborhoods on either side of Germantown Ave., and the quality of the shopping in the community. Some blocks of the avenue also include vacancies and deterioration, and therefore do not provide the retail services needed by the community. The economic development recommendations include specific ideas for the avenue, including the need for more parking, but proximity and accessibility by walking is essential. As a result, the improvements to the neighborhoods will add shoppers to the

avenue, and improvements to the retail offerings will significantly improve the value and quality of living in the adjacent neighborhoods. Thus there is a fundamental symbiotic relationship between the living and shopping areas that requires simultaneous actions in both areas to assure that the community's goals are met.

The means for accomplishing the maintenance of residential diversity requires actions on all fronts: take advantage of all possible public programs, but also attract as many private development initiatives as possible.

MARKET CONDITIONS

Housing market conditions within most of Mt. Airy are very strong. Even within the distressed target area, market rate and near market rate development opportunities exist. New sales housing development within the target area could also include some subsidized and affordable market rate units, within the framework of the larger goals of the community. The most recent housing construction in the area occurred on Musgrave St. in 1997. Adjusting the construction costs of these units to reflect price escalation that has occurred for newer-constructed housing in Mt. Airy as a whole, one would expect new construction within the area to be priced in the \$90-\$95/s.f. range. Relatively small units in this price range (assuming the same 1,400 s.f. size as the Musgrave St. units) would sell for \$130,000 and might require a small subsidy. However larger units (2,000 s.f. and up) would be priced close to \$200,000 and could be fully market-rate developments.

THREE TYPES OF DETERIORATING INFLUENCES

Analysis of the most deteriorated streets has indicated that there are three categories of conditions that have deteriorating effects on the

adjacent properties and blocks. The transformation or removal of those conditions will have great and positive impacts on these aspects of Mt. Airy.

Non-residential Nuisance Uses

There are various non-residential uses located within the most deteriorated blocks, whose condition and activities have discouraged care and investment on properties all around them. Primarily they are either auto body shops, auto repair shops, or just abandoned small industrial buildings.

Vacant Houses and Lots

The abandonment of individual houses is one of the major conditions that brings down the quality of life in residential neighborhoods. In some cases in Mt. Airy there are examples of several such buildings on one block, which has virtually eliminated any investment in the other homes there; the result can be an entire neighborhood with the appearance of disrepair.

In other cases, a single house can be vacant and derelict in a block that is otherwise well cared for. This, too, has a negative impact on the larger neighborhood, and if it were occupied and improved, it would transform everything around it.



The blank wall of an auto body shop, which is a nuisance use on a residential street.

These vacancies are opportunities that must be taken advantage of, either by renovation and re-occupation or by demolition and the creation of larger new development opportunities.

Vacant lots are often located in areas that also include vacant houses, since substantially deteriorated buildings are frequently demolished. They are either overgrown with weeds, littered with trash, or are parked with cars, which are often abandoned. They are obviously opportunities for development, as well as improvement.



Abandoned house — a deteriorating influence.



Abandoned car on Sharpnack St.

Inappropriate Design Conditions

- Badly designed and oriented street corners, where no buildings face the street and no residents are present to monitor the street activities.
- Too narrow streets, which have no nearby on-street parking: a great inconvenience for residents in the Twenty-first Century.
- Sidewalks too narrow for walking or sitting, which limits the opportunities for a safe and interesting neighborhood life.
- Poor design and maintenance of fences, walls, and landscapes across the street from existing houses, which diminishes the quality of residential life.
- Poor maintenance and a broken public environment: sidewalks, streets. In certain neighborhoods — especially those with higher levels of abandonment and that include the incompatible buildings and uses — the sidewalks have not been repaired, dead street trees remain, weeds grow in the cracks, the street lighting is inadequate, and so on. These conditions discourage those homeowners that do live here from caring for their own properties. Any new residential developments, whether small or large, must include the repair of these conditions.



Parking on the sidewalk, walking in the street.



“Good fences can make good neighbors . . .”

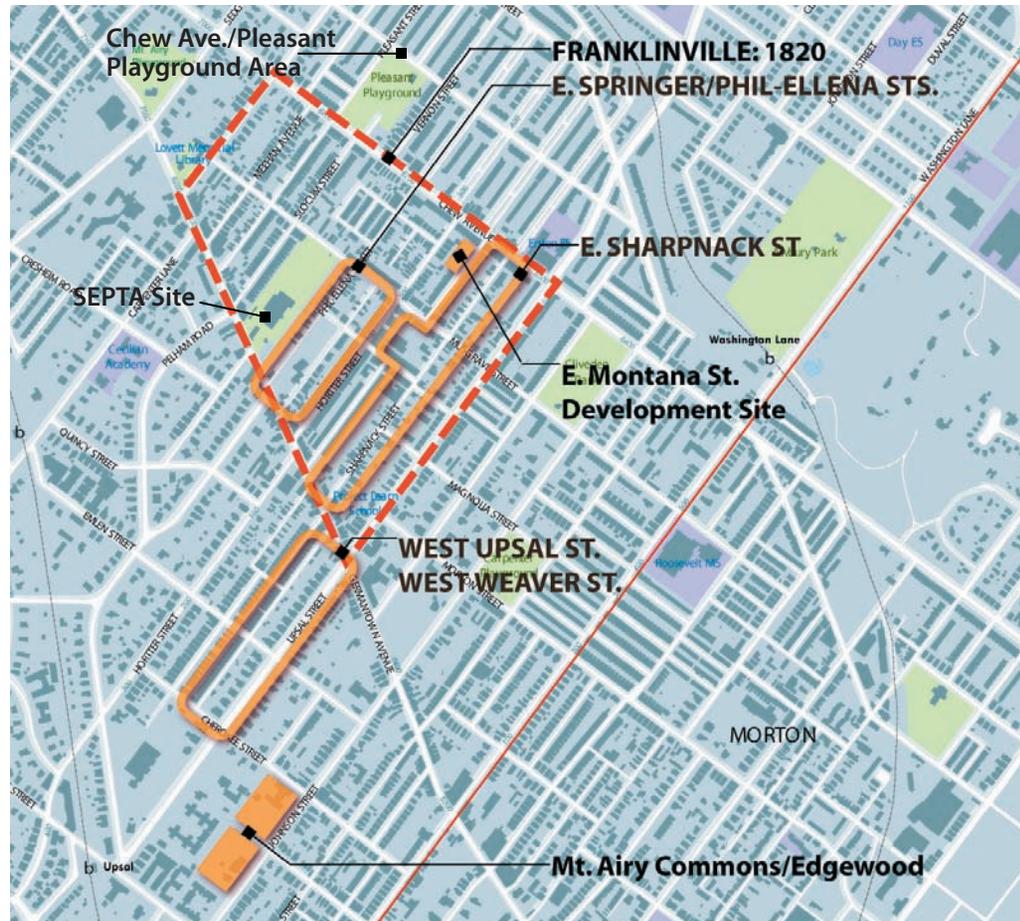
HOUSING PRIORITY AREAS

Analyses by census tract of various characteristics, including vacancy counts and median house values, reveals a concentration of deterioration in the area on the east side of Germantown Ave., between Gorgas Lane and Upsal St.

This area coincides with the original site of “Franklinville,” (known to some residents as “Dogtown”) which was built as workers’ housing for the Franklin Mills in the Nineteenth century. In addition, as stated in *The Divided Metropolis* (Cutler / Gillette), “Settlement in the Mt. Airy region began in the eighteenth century . . . to provide power (and employment) for mills . . . Two churches were associated with the early Mt. Airy . . . both of which served the poor, and around which a community developed. The vestiges of this community are still visible on the streets immediately adjacent to those churches where the traditions of poverty and hardship established in the eighteenth century have persevered into the twentieth.” And, “By the 1860s this area had expanded to become a mill village known as Franklinville which included Franklin Mills . . . Throughout the nineteenth century this community provided a pool of cheap labor . . .”

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS: IMPROVE KEY BLOCKS AND SITES

Seven areas, six of which are located within or adjacent to the “Franklinville” section, have been identified as those with the highest incidences of the three deteriorating conditions described above. They are also adjacent to the Springer/Phil-Ellena and Hortter St. retail centers on Germantown Ave. As has been observed throughout the planning process for this plan, there is an intergal link between the health of these neighborhoods and the adjacent shopping and shopping on Germantown Ave. Thus, as the

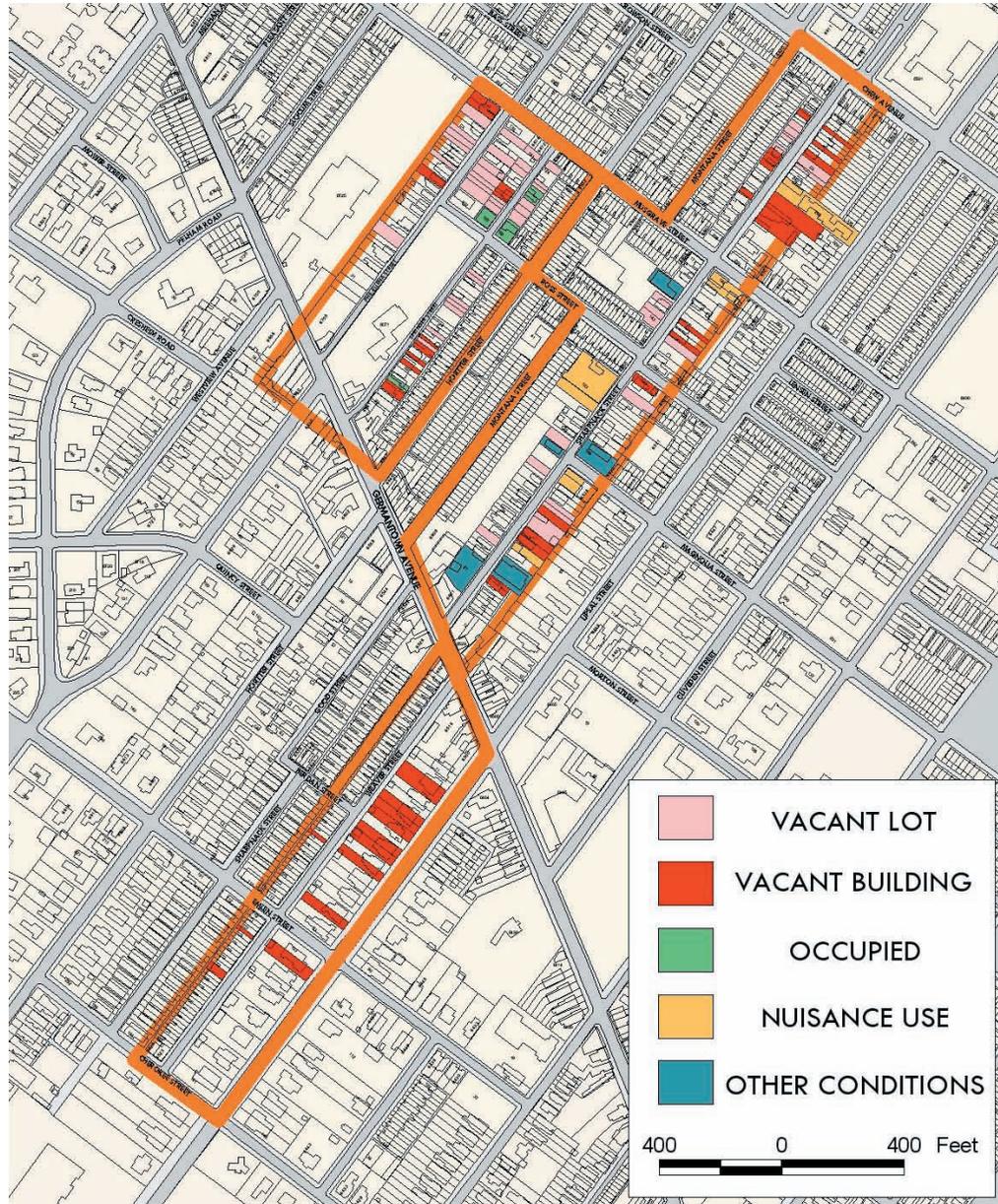


Map 3n: Specific streets and sites recommended for housing improvements.

residences and their streets improve, the shopping will improve; if the shopping area looks better and serves the neighborhood better, the nearby residential streets will also be so transformed. Both efforts of improvement must therefore take place simultaneously. The following are the seven areas recommended for the primary residential improvements, plus three additional secondary areas.

E. Sharpnack St., (Germantown Ave. to Chew Ave.)

This two-block area has the highest concentration of vacant homes and vacant lots in Mt. Airy: there are 18 vacant houses and 14 vacant lots here. One abandoned residential building is an older apartment building. The area also includes a large abandoned lot and building in the center of the



Map 30: Vacant houses and lots in the housing study areas.



A vacant lot and vacant house on Sharpnack St.

block between Horttter and Sharpnack Sts., with a driveway access from Horttter St. (and a steep wall and bank between Sharpnack St. and the lot). There are the following non-residential uses in these blocks also:

- One small church.
- The Douglas Political Club building.
- The Col. Young Post of the VFW, that is well used and well cared for; it does require significant parking at times.
- A branch of the Eastern Star, which is also well cared for and requires parking for meetings.
- A large blank walled industrial/warehouse building with a badly cared for parking and service yard. This is one of the nuisance uses that are present in these neighborhoods.
- An auto repair business that includes a poorly maintained parking and service yard, an empty house on the street, and a concrete-block building set back from the street. This, too is a nuisance use that harms the neighborhood.
- A cared-for parking lot for a church fronting on Germantown Ave.

Recommendations

- Remove the nuisance uses from the area.
- Redevelop appropriate abandoned homes and apartment buildings.
- Assemble lots and buildings for relocation, demolition, and larger development opportunities.
- Develop the large empty mid-block parcel and link it to the adjacent neighborhoods.
- Improve the public streets and sidewalks so that they are in good repair.
- Consider renovating warehouse uses into artist live-work loft-type spaces.

E. Springer / Phil -Ellena Sts., (Germantown Ave. to Musgrave St.)

The houses on these blocks are often rather small. If they were in good condition and if various improvements were made in the general neighborhood, they could serve an important market in Mt. Airy. Smaller family groups, and people with less income, could find this a convenient and attractive place to live.

The streets are narrow, so that on-street parking is limited; parking in general is limited. The sidewalks



Springer St. could be a pleasant neighborhood.

are narrow, there are few front porches, and some cars are parked on the sidewalks; as a result there is less room for outdoor neighborly public activities. There are two sizable vacant lots on Springer St., among the houses, and there are 9 vacant houses, and three or four large vacant lots (consisting of 34 individual properties.) The space between the two streets is the Lutheran Church and cemetery — a pleasant green space in the heart of the neighborhood. Unfortunately, the fences and curbs around the property are not well maintained, which creates an unattractive edge to the residential blocks.

The most deteriorating influence in this neighborhood are the two properties at the two corners of Springer and Ross Sts., which are an auto body repair shop and parking/storage yard. It is in such disrepair that adjacent houses have been abandoned, and the quality of life on all these blocks is diminished.

Recommendations

- Remove the blighting nuisance uses from the area.
- Rehabilitate and occupy the abandoned houses.
- Consider using the existing larger vacant lots as community parking areas; if this is to be considered, some legal mechanism for ownership, identification of those who can park here, and maintenance must be established.
- Improve the sidewalks.
- Improve the cemetery fences and curbs.
- Redevelop and occupy the abandoned houses.



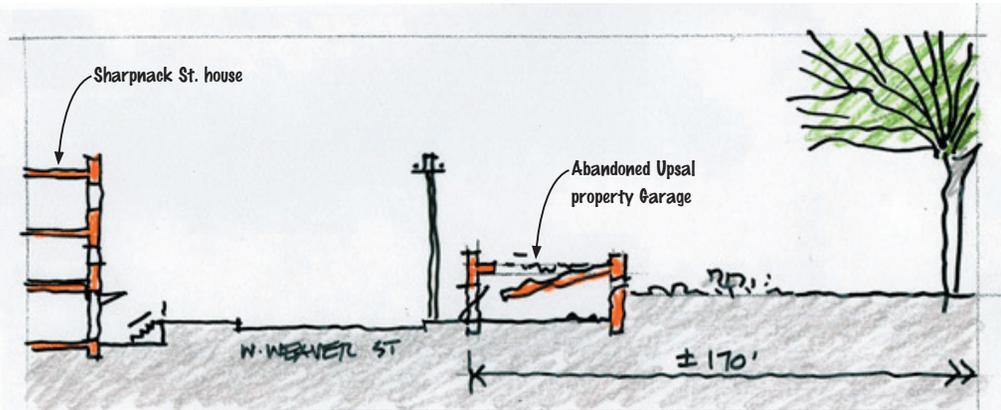
Half of a large twin remains on Upsal St.

W. Upsal /W. Weaver Sts. (Germantown Ave. to Cherokee St.)

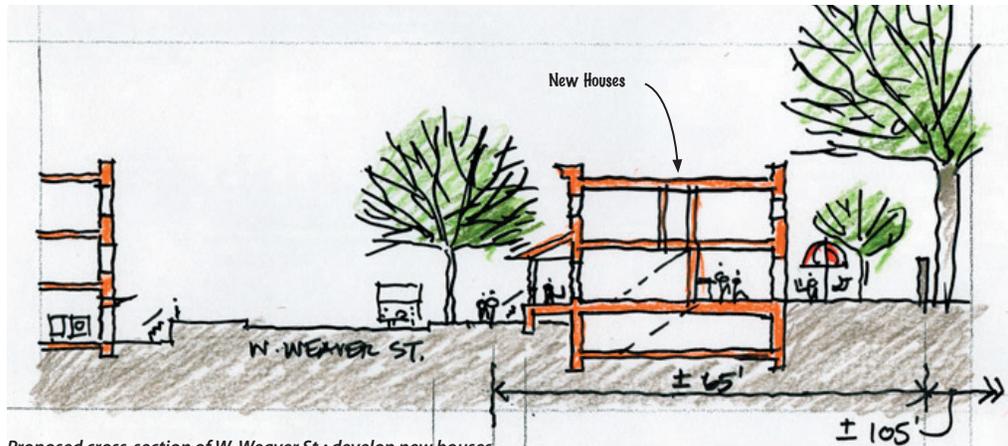
The blocks of W. Upsal St. include a large number of abandoned and greatly deteriorated houses on the north side of the street: there are a total of 9 vacant and broken houses, and one vacant lot (where one half of a large twin was demolished, leaving the other half in poor condition). In contrast, the houses on the south side are all occupied and well maintained.



The abandoned Upsal St. garages that face Weaver St.



Existing cross-section of W. Weaver St.



Proposed cross-section of W. Weaver St.: develop new houses.



Two examples of house types that could fit on W. Weaver St.



The properties are about 170 feet deep and have small garages at the rear facing Weaver St. Almost all of these garages are either in poor repair or are collapsed. Clearly the residents of any houses on Upsal St. are not using these buildings. They are, as a result, a significantly deteriorating influence on Weaver St.

The first block of W. Weaver St., off Germantown Ave., has no residences facing the street, only the back doors of the row houses on W. Sharpnack St. The south side of the street is lined with Upsal St. garages in dreadful condition.

Two of the row houses on the second block are vacant; the south side of the streets has the same type of deteriorated Upsal St. garages as the first block.

The third block has one vacant house, but the other row houses are in fine condition, and it appears that the neighborhood has worked very hard to maintain their community. There are fewer Upsal St. garages here and they are less deteriorated; between the garages are tall handsome stone walls.

Recommendations

- Acquire the properties and remove all of the deteriorated garages in the first two blocks. Evaluate the few garages in the third block for renovation and reuse — as bases of new small houses or as parking for the Weaver St. residents.
- Rebuild, occupy the vacant houses on both streets.
- Build on the vacant Upsal St. lot, or use as side yards for the adjacent houses.
- Consider redevelopment of the rear portions of the Upsal St. lots (created by the demolition of the garages) as new homes on the first two blocks of Weaver St. This could be especially valuable on the first block, by creating a new and active neighborhood where none exists now.

E. Montana St.: Large Open Lot

This large lot has been acquired by Mt. Airy USA for redevelopment as affordable mixed-use residential townhomes. Returning this property to productive residential use would also serve to buffer the relatively stable blocks to the west and north, and to improve the more distressed blocks to the east and south. The rest of this block of Montana St. is a well-maintained neighborhood, so such a redevelopment could have a significant improving and stabilizing effect on the surrounding community. Also, while Mt. Airy's housing stock ranges from small 900 s.f. rowhomes to large estates, there are few opportunities for low and

moderate-income families to acquire 1,600 s.f. units, like the ones proposed in this project.

Recommendations

- Enable Mt. Airy USA to redevelop the vacant lot with townhomes, in a plan that locates the parking areas along an alley in the back, and all front doors facing the street. The basic design purpose must be to continue the pedestrian-friendly, neighborly quality that exists on the rest of the street.
- Improve the sidewalks in that area, also, to complement the pleasant front yards that already exist here.

therefore be evaluated for rehabilitation and reuse, and for some new development. Unfortunately, there is a proposal at this time to demolish Mt. Airy Commons to create a site for new building development. The neighbors and preservation groups have strongly objected. Instead of demolition, options for the use of each of these buildings include residences of various types (market-rate rental or condominiums, senior housing), and offices. The potential for historic certification and tax credits must be explored. Alternate methods of using private developers should also be considered.

The SEPTA Property

As described in detail in the commercial development section of this plan, this large property that is now used to store suburban buses is having a continually deteriorating effect on the surrounding retail and residential areas. Immediate improvements to the fence and signs on Musgrave St. would have a short-term positive effect on that neighborhood, for example. Beyond that, the redevelopment of the entire site for new uses should be explored; two options are described in the commercial development section.

Chew Ave./Pleasant Playground Block

As indicated in the recommendations for Chew Ave. in the commercial development portion of this plan, most of the existing commercial businesses in this area should be removed, since they are either deteriorated or vacant. In addition, the Pleasant Playground is not well used or maintained. It is not very visible from any street (because of the depth back from Chew Ave., and because of the tall retaining walls on the three street edges).

Two options were considered to correct this situation:

- Option 1: Rebuild the park, improve the appearance and access along all street edges,



Existing developable lot on Montana St.

Mt. Airy Commons / Edgewood Buildings

These two large older apartment buildings (originally developed as the Presser Home for Retired Musicians and the Nugent Home for Baptist Ministers) on Johnson St. have large, open lawns around them. They are an excellent redevelopment and new development opportunity, because of their size and condition. Often such older buildings have handsome details, but some rooms can be too small, the kitchens, bathrooms, and heating/air-conditioning systems do not meet Twenty-first Century standards, windows have deteriorated, and so on. The buildings and properties should



Existing SEPTA building on Germantown Ave.



Mt. Airy Commons is a residential development opportunity.



The Pleasant Playground is in disrepair.

- Option 2: Develop a row of twin houses facing Boyer St., which will add activity to that side of the street. These houses can have rear parking access. Rebuild the remaining park area, as in Option 1, but with less open space. Use the revenue from the development of the houses to fund the park improvements.

put forward in the planning process, at least 1,000 signatures were obtained in questionnaires in support of the largest park plan!

The remaining blocks of this portion of Chew Ave. should be redeveloped to be consistent with the recommendation to rebuild and sustain the Playground. As described in more detail in the Economic Development Recommendations, all of the existing deteriorated commercial uses should be removed, and new houses should be developed on those sites. The one stable block of retail should be retained to serve the neighborhood, but the redevelopment of the rest of Chew Ave. as residential will transform the street back into its historic roots as a place to live.

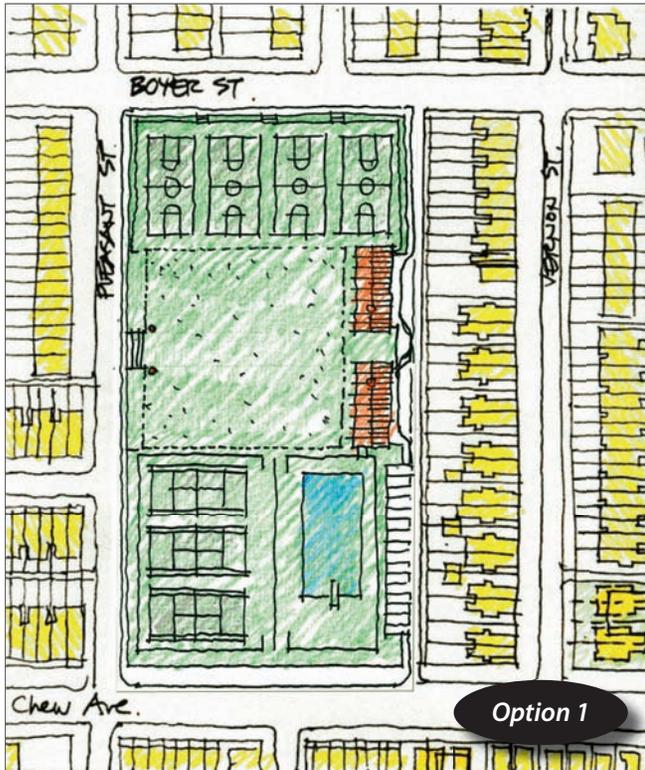
Recommendations for the Pleasant Playground

The neighbors were very clear in their preference: Option 1, with the largest public playground and open space area. Strong commitments were expressed to make this happen, including seeking support from the city, and creating an on going management structure. When these choices were

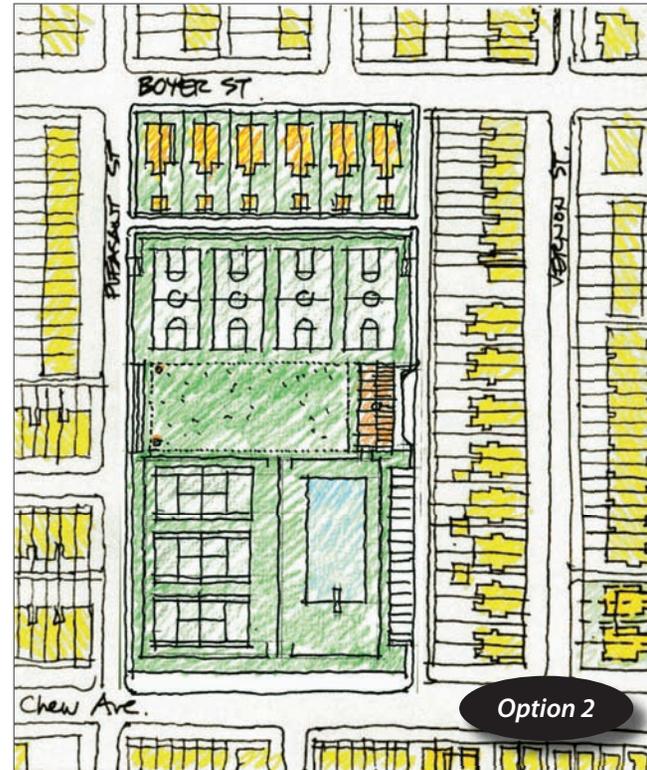
add new recreation facilities (including support buildings), a large green open space, and create an effective and durable management and leadership organization. Add a service lane between the existing Vernon St. houses and the park.

Option 1: Improve the playground.

Option 2: Develop new houses and create a smaller playground.



Option 1



Option 2

SECONDARY IMPROVEMENT AREAS

Devon St.

The neighbors refer to the area bounded by Boyer, Sydney, Devon, and Durham Sts. as the “Devon St.” area. The R-7 rail line adjoins Devon St. This area has a significantly higher concentration of vacant lots and structures (compared to the surrounding areas), along with reputed drug-dealing and “problem” households.

However, some recent redevelopment activity has taken place, so it should be considered as an opportunity for both infill housing and rehabilitation developments, which will help transform both the physical and social problems that now exist here.

The Pelham Neighborhood

This neighborhood consists of very large homes, most of which are located on Pelham Rd. It has long been of concern to the community because of those large homes. Some houses are of such great size that there is a lingering concern that the homes will be poorly converted to other uses, such as apartments or institutions. Indeed, there has been some evidence in other communities that if a house of more than 4,000 s.f., is sold for

Pelham Rd. is a gracious, curving tree-lined street.



less than \$60 per square foot the owner may not have the financial resources to maintain the property; several such properties have been sold in this area. Although this concern remains, there has been no evidence of any such changes taking place. Clearly, the area and the issue should continue to be monitored by the community.

W. Good St.

This is a small, single-block neighborhood just off of Germantown Ave. that has experienced considerable demolition that left several large vacant lots. Although the neighbors appear to have taken over the care of several of these lots by maintaining the landscaping and using them, the level of deterioration indicates that this could be a small but effective location for redevelopment and new infill development. It is near the W. Weaver St. blocks that are affected by the deteriorated Upsal St. garages, so a change to Good St. could have a positive effect on a much wider area.

GENERAL NEIGHBORHOOD CONDITIONS

In addition to the specific blocks and neighborhoods that should be improved, there are a few public conditions that the residents observed should be addressed everywhere: sidewalks, curbs, and the retaining walls that hold up the front yards next to the sidewalks. While they are in poor shape in many places, all are legally the responsibility of the property owner. However, there is a home owner repair program administered by the city that could assist neighbors who will improve their properties.

In addition, it must be noted that many of the worst conditions are located in the blocks where



Good St. as a play street — the neighbors do care!



Good St. vacant lots.

extensive new and rehab residential development is recommended; in all of those conditions the curbs, sidewalks, and walls will be repaired or replaced. One unique condition affecting certain homeowners in far West Mt. Airy is failing septic systems. A new public sewer system extension is needed to serve these homeowners in the vicinity of Wissahickon Avenue and Westview Street.



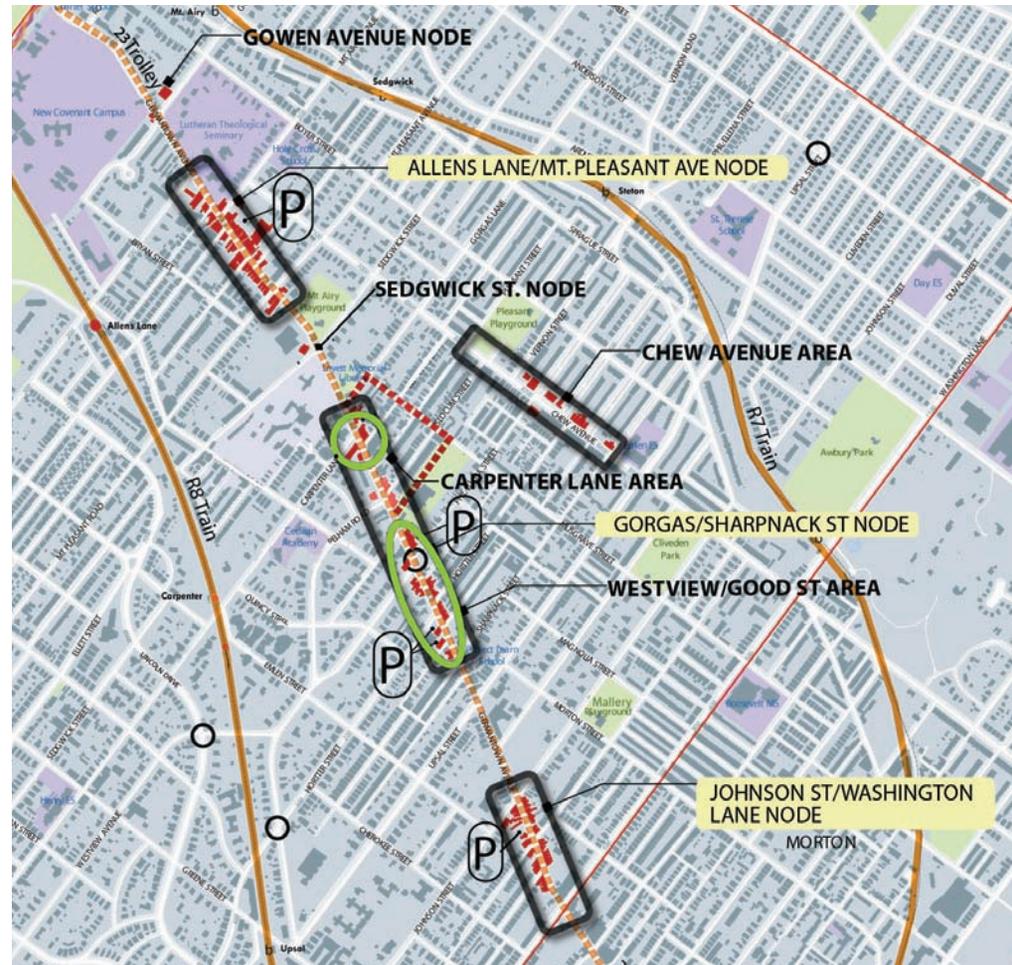
RECOMMENDATIONS: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

COMMUNITY GOALS

The shopping areas of the community, especially those on Germantown Ave. are central to the vitality and sense of belonging of all of Mt. Airy. They are the gathering places that bring all the neighbors together, and they provide the services needed that can make living here convenient and exciting. The success of the Germantown Ave. shopping areas relies significantly on the success of its adjacent neighborhoods. As noted in the Housing Recommendations, the opposite is equally true: the success of the neighborhoods is inextricably linked to the quality of the shopping. As also indicated earlier, the remarkable quality of Mt. Airy is the diversity of its neighbors. The shops of the community must therefore serve the diverse needs of everyone.

On the other hand, most of the shops cannot thrive based only on the buying power and needs of Mt. Airy residents. For the retail community to thrive, and to fully serve all of the neighbors, visitors from other places must also be attracted here. Mt. Airy should become a shopping destination, based on the quality and variety of retail offerings, on the handsome appearance of its various retail centers, and on the (now mostly hidden) asset of its history.

Therefore, the shops should provide all of the retail services needed by the neighbors, so that they can choose to not shop elsewhere (as they do now). At the same time the shops must provide goods that are attractive to the market of a very wide region. To accomplish this, the appearance of Germantown Ave. must be improved, a greater variety of shop types must be attracted, and the quality and convenience of coming here by



Map 3p: Summary of Economic Development activities: retail focus nodes and shopper parking.

walking, driving, and transit must be improved. Germantown Ave. must become a great shopping place that is valued by the neighbors, is known throughout the city and even the region, and is, finally, the center of community life.

COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT/RETAIL CONDITIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Mt. Airy community generates significant retail activity, making more than \$600 million in retail purchases each year. At present, only a small fraction of these sales are being captured by businesses located within the area. Numerous opportunities exist to expand the level of retailing along Germantown Ave. — the main commercial street of Mt. Airy — to provide a more comprehensive array of goods and services to residents of Mt. Airy and nearby neighborhoods that will, in turn, aid in the revitalization of the corridor’s vacant and underutilized ground-floor space. Higher utilization of ground-floor space could, over time, generate greater demand for upper-floor activity as well.

Certain retail uses are incompatible with pedestrian-oriented commercial districts because of their space, parking, or highway access requirements. These include department stores, warehouse clubs, large home centers, and lumber yards. Certain uses, such as women’s apparel, tend to locate in clusters, where other such uses already exist. Some uses, such as supermarkets, are already present along Germantown Ave. and in nearby commercial centers and are adequately meeting local demand. Together, these incompatible and saturated retail categories account for approximately \$200 million of Mt. Airy residents’ annual retail spending.

However, even excluding these inappropriate retail categories, Mt. Airy residents spend an additional \$400 million for retail goods that is only marginally being captured by Germantown Ave. businesses. Much of this spending is leaving the area because such retail opportunities are not available locally. While it is unrealistic to expect Germantown Ave.-based businesses to capture all of this resident retail demand in these categories, even capturing 20 to 30% would result in the creation of several hundred thousand square feet of retail space in the community.

Given these conditions, opportunities exist for the following retail uses:

- Convenience retailing (small grocery stores, bakeries, specialty food stores, restaurants, taverns, drug stores, etc.), as compliments to the newly built Acme at Sedgwick St.
- Shopping goods retailing (men’s and children’s clothing, shoe stores, jewelry stores, furniture and other home furnishing stores, appliance stores, electronics, computer and camera shops, optical stores, sporting goods stores, toy stores, hobby shops and sewing stores, music stores, book stores, gift shops, etc.),
- Other retail stores (hardware stores, florists and nurseries, antique stores, art dealers, etc.).
- Personal services (hair salons, spas, barber shops, dry cleaners, laundromats, etc.).

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS: ORGANIZATION OF THE RETAIL AREAS

The fundamental purpose in identifying the concentrations of retail activity (called “nodes”) is that these areas are to be the focus of the retail improvement priorities: marketing, recruitment, filling of vacancies, facade improvements, special street lighting and streetscapes, and a public parking system. It is essential that these priorities are focused on the distinct areas identified here, and not elsewhere, in order to assure their future success.

In general, the northernmost portions of Germantown Ave. (the Allens Lane to Mt. Pleasant Ave. node), with its existing complement of convenience and destination retailing, is an appropriate location for the full spectrum of retail opportunities identified for Mt. Airy. New retailing can build upon the role this district currently plays as a cultural, restaurant and entertainment zone by expanding the array of leisure-oriented shopping experiences, including art galleries, craft and gift

shops, specialty clothing and accessories stores, a music store, a book or used book store, cafes, nightclubs, etc. While this district lacks several key retail uses that typically anchor destination shopping areas, such as a full-service drug store and a name-brand fast food restaurant, such uses are probably not appropriate at this location.

The lack of anchor retail establishments and the fragmented nature of retailing on Germantown Ave. between Gorgas Lane and Sharpnack St., may discourage the attraction of certain retail types. The Gorgas Lane to Sharpnack St. node, perhaps because of this fragmented nature, currently acts as a neighborhood-serving convenience retail district and the business attraction strategy for this node should build upon this character and market demand. Independent retailers that can attract customers to their location without requiring significant complementary retailing around them could also be appropriate for this node.

The Johnson St. to Washington Lane portion of Germantown Ave. is a very cohesive retail node that already contains several independent retailers that thrive without the support of significant complementary retail activity. The business attraction strategy for this area should focus on its role as a neighborhood-serving convenience retail center as well as on expanding its variety of small, freestanding specialty shops.

The organization of the following specific recommendations, therefore, is based on the inherent organization of these retail centers:

- Germantown Ave.:
 - Three major nodes
 - Two smaller nodes
- Chew Ave.
- Neighborhood Centers



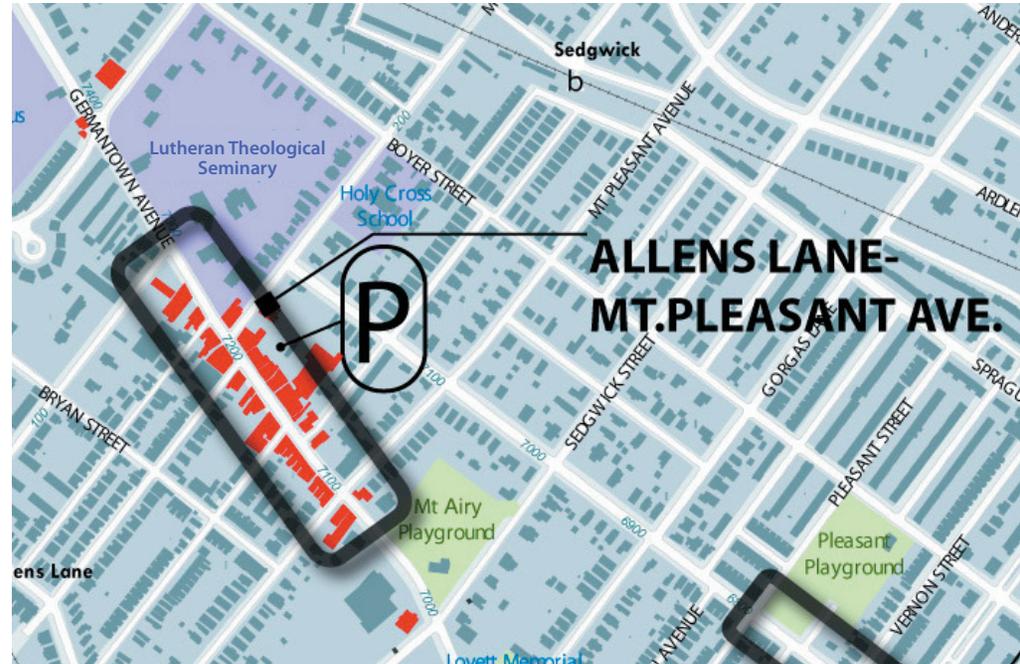
SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS: THREE MAJOR NODES ON GERMANTOWN AVE

Allens Lane/Mt. Pleasant Ave Node

The concentration of retail uses and buildings here makes this area the real downtown of the community. Because of the total area of existing retail, the condition and appearance of the various buildings, the existing mix of retail uses, and the opportunities for providing additional parking, improvements to this node can have the greatest long-term and near-term impacts on the life of the community.

The specific actions that are recommended are:

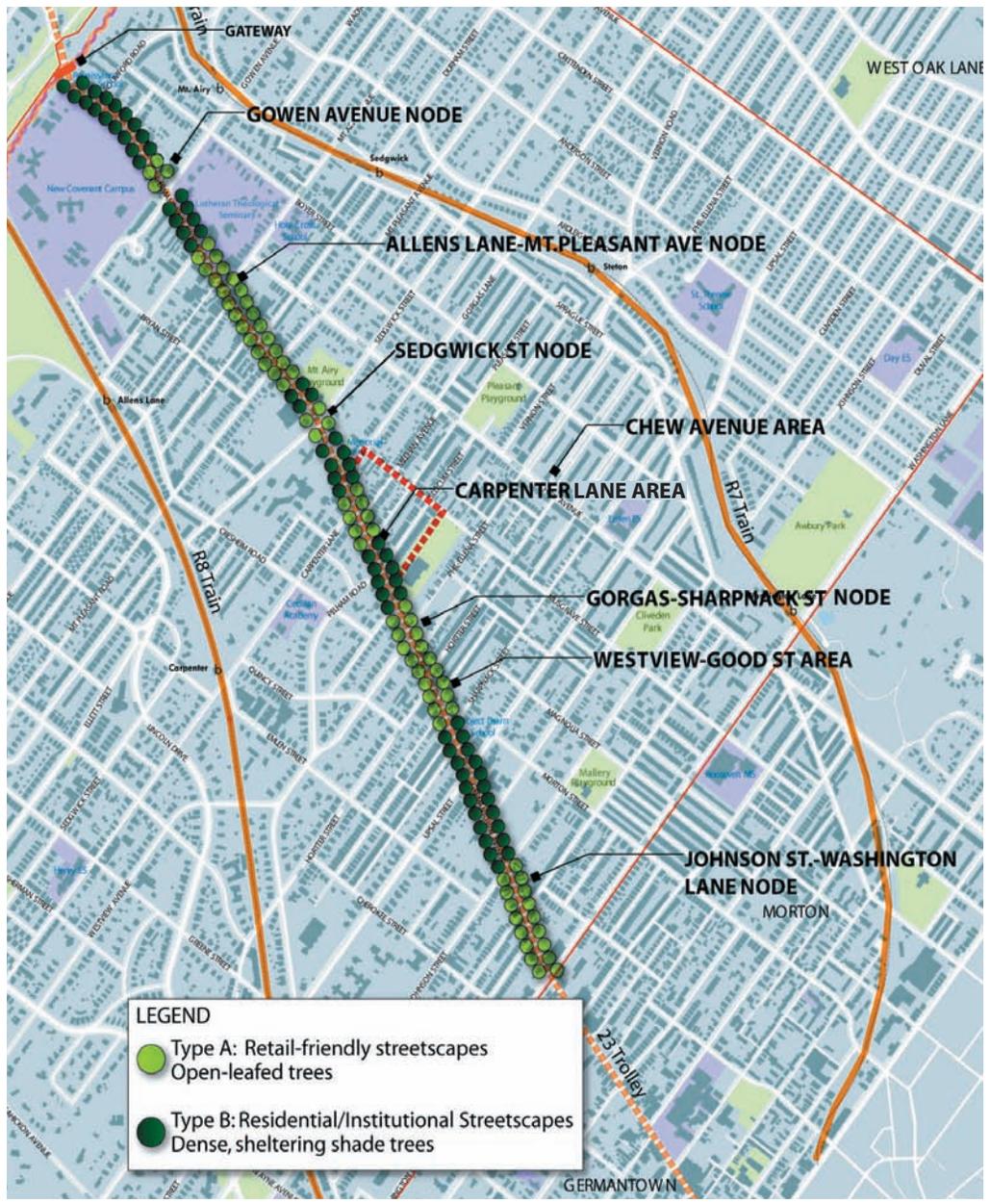
- Add retail tenants to the ground-floor spaces (replace vacancies; increase retail uses, rather than ground-floor professional offices); identify specific uses that will create the shopping mix. As stated above, such uses could include an eclectic mix of independently owned art galleries, craft and gift shops, specialty clothing and accessories stores, a music store, a book or used book store, cafes, nightclubs, and perhaps a full-service drug store.
- Add a parking lot in rear of east side of the Ave. (including the open portion of the Sedgwick Theater site, and the other rear open properties). Such a parking lot, however, is only the minimum that can take place here. This is a real opportunity to add density of development that will add life and business to the center of the community. The sloping site will permit new uses; housing, offices, retail, to be built at the same level as the shopping sidewalks of Germantown Ave., and still permit the construction of parking under those uses, with access from the rear and side streets. The owner of this property has expressed interest in this idea.



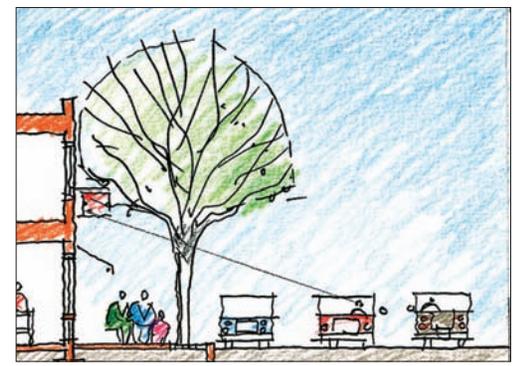
Plan of the Allens Lane/Mt. Pleasant Ave. Retail Node.



Plan of a possible public parking lot, behind the shops and theater.



Map 3q: Germantown Ave. Streetscapes: Two types, for two conditions.



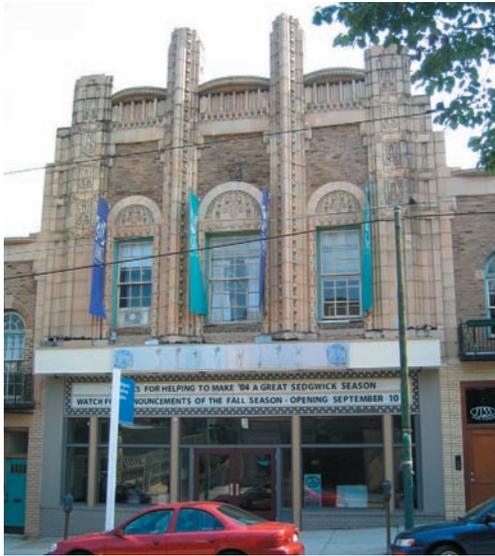
Type A: An open-leaved tree is to be used in the retail areas.



Type B: A spreading shade tree protects houses.



Typical houses facing Germantown Ave.



An excellent facade transformation of the Sedgwick Theater.

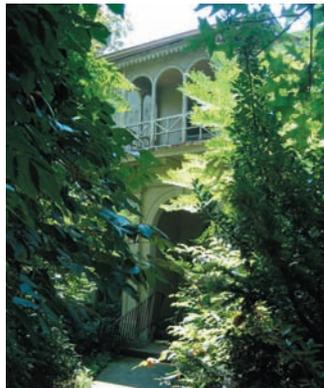
The private parking lots adjacent to the main lots could also be included in such a development, if the property owners had reason to coordinate.

In any such development, three characteristics are essential: evident, attractive, and safe walking links must be created to the avenue; and, any parking that is provided must be a shared facility, for use by all of the merchants and shoppers in the area. Signs must be posted along the avenue to tell drivers that parking is, indeed, available here.

- Add clear signage that gives direction to all available parking (the existing public lot and the recommended new lot).
- The Garrett house, near Mt. Pleasant Ave., is a development opportunity. Suggestions for its use include a bed and breakfast, offices, retail, or residences. This is the second opportunity for increasing density near Germantown Ave. The site must be studied to understand the

real development capacity, since an increased density will add workers or residents as shoppers. The only constraint might be the fact that the old house is handsome; it should be studied to determine if it could be renovated to dramatically accommodate the new uses, while still retaining its architectural quality and its relationship to the street. Parking for any new use must be resolved as part of the larger parking policy for this node.

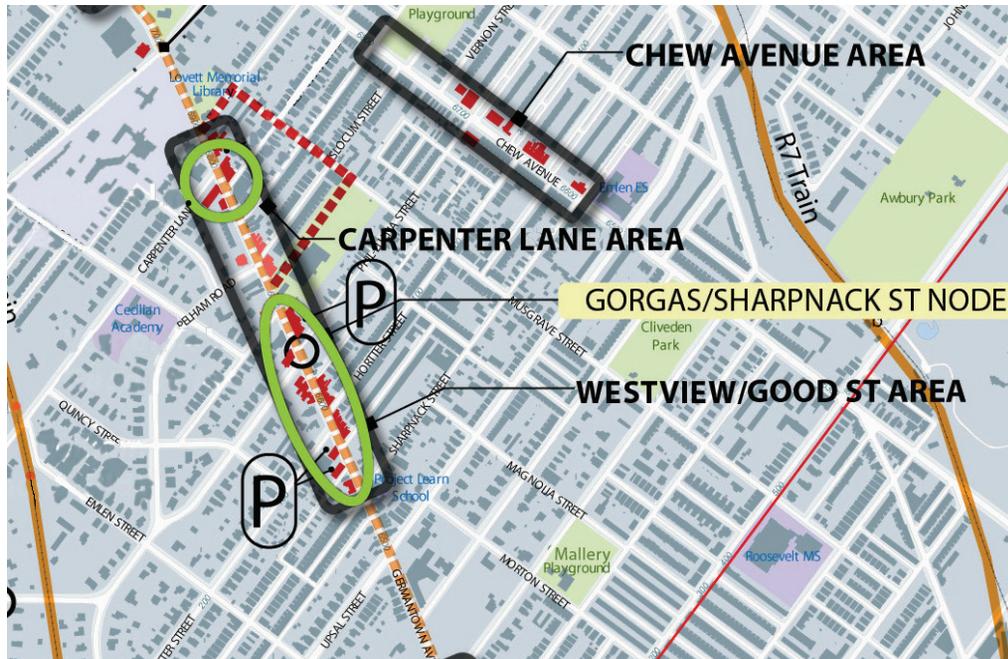
- The arts are an important part of the life of Mt. Airy. Many residents are artists, painters, film makers, sculptors, photographers, writers, musicians, and so on, and there are several galleries in the community. The Sedgwick Theater is a major center in the arts community, and has recently had its handsome facade renovated. Art can support business and business can support the arts, so the addition of art-related businesses and facilities can reinforce the entire commercial development objectives of the community. Indeed, there are musicians performing in clubs and restaurants, and one craftsperson makes fine violins!
- Mt. Airy USA has created guidelines for its facade and signage improvements program. This program should be enforced and properly funded and, if possible, codified to support its enforcement. The city's zoning regulations



The Garrett house near Mt. Pleasant Ave. also includes a 1794 barn in the rear.

should be studied to determine if they are adequately serving Mt. Airy's shopping areas.

- A well-designed streetscape has been shown to help increase business when the improvements take place within the framework of a larger marketing and retail recruitment strategy, and of facade and sign improvements on the buildings. On Germantown Ave, these improvements should take place (note that these recommendations will apply to all retail areas on Germantown Ave.):
 - Install new concrete sidewalks to match those at Phebe Commons. Note that the Phebe Commons streetscape is a perfect model for all other retail centers on Germantown Ave.
 - Plant "retail friendly" street trees about 35 ft. to 40 ft. apart and in horticulturally correct planting pits that are about 4 feet by 8 ft. in area. The selected species of tree must be high branching, and have an open (not dense) canopy of leaves so that the shops can be seen. Honey Locusts have been planted at Phebe Common; this is a perfect species for these retail locations.
 - Pave the tree pits with bricks that are identical to those installed in front of Phebe Commons.
 - Add "pedestrian friendly" street lights in the areas of retail concentration, where most pedestrian activity takes place. The 16 ft. high lights installed in Center City are handsome, and provide the most comfortable and safe feeling light on the sidewalks. Remember, the quality of the light is even more important than the appearance of the pole and fixture.
 - Add new bus shelters that are designed to reflect the qualities of Mt. Airy. These shelters could establish a symbolic visual theme for all of Germantown Ave.!



Map 3r: There are two retail centers within the larger Gorgas/Sharpnack Node.

- Add new crosswalks at every possible intersection. Many intersections on Germantown Ave. now are made of concrete, but other options do exist: concrete pavers, which are durable but expensive and not very visible from a moving car; paint is cheaper and more visible, but requires constant maintenance; and the new white-lined pattern pressed into macadam, which is both affordable and visible (see the example at 15th and Market in Center City). Paint on existing (or new) concrete crosswalks is the most consistent with the Belgian block and concrete pattern that already exists.

Gorgas Lane /Sharpnack St. Node

This area is the geographic center of Mt. Airy's Germantown Ave. It has several specific new and renovated development opportunities, it includes several existing viable retail shops, and has a mix of uses that includes houses facing the Ave. Also, it is adjacent to the residential areas that require the most improvement (see Housing Section for a description of those areas). Unlike the other two nodes, however, it is longer than a normal shopping walking distance. It is about 2,200 feet long, which is substantially longer than other successful shopping places (such as the Allens Lane/Mt. Pleasant area at 1,200 feet, or Chestnut Hill at 1,500 feet, or a typical shopping mall at 1,500 feet). Therefore a more detailed plan that groups certain activities is recommended.

The groupings of retail activity that should be built upon are located in these two sections of Germantown Ave:

- At Carpenter Lane, a small shopping area which includes a hat store, the famous Groben's fish market, a luncheonette/pizzeria, and the existing offices of West Mt. Airy Neighbors and East Mt. Airy Neighbors.
- The larger shopping area located between Vernon Rd. and Good St. (from Phebe Commons to the laundromat), that includes a wide variety of uses and buildings. Included in this walkable area are the shops in Phebe Commons (and the offices of Mt. Airy USA), medical offices and the offices of U.S. Representative Chaka Fattah, the proposed new mixed-use development in the historic Pelham buildings, a laundromat, a dry cleaners, a funeral home, an auto body shop, and the partially vacant blocks of buildings on the East side of the avenue adjacent to Hortter St.

Outside of these two retail centers is a variety of uses, including residences, churches, schools,



Groben's Fish Market is a wonderful example of an active retail space on Carpenter Lane.



and a few individual businesses. The remarkable character of this node is this mixing of uses, which should be preserved.

The recommendations for these retail, and the non-retail, areas are:

Carpenter Lane Retail Area

- Add retail tenants to the ground floor vacant shop spaces. As stated above, the businesses that are appropriate for these centers are small, serve the community, are individually owned and operated, and perhaps provide unique services or goods that draw customers from the wider region. Be certain, however, that the new businesses do not become sources of noise, trash, and disruptive behavior of their customers. This was a strong opinion held by many in the community, based on their experience with a few existing businesses that do just that.

- Improve the streetscapes, just as recommended for the Allens Lane/Mt. Pleasant node: new concrete sidewalks, retail friendly street trees, brick edging, pedestrian-scaled lights, Mt. Airy-style bus shelters, and improved crosswalks.
- Enforce and support the Mt. Airy USA facade guidelines and improvement program.

Westview /Good St. Retail Area

- Add retail tenants to ground floor and upper floor vacancies, including especially the Pelham Professional Building complex (a project of Mt. Airy USA.), and the underutilized buildings on the east side of the Avenue between Springer St. and Montana St. These three larger building groups are excellent redevelopment opportunities that, taken together, would have a dramatic impact on the vitality of this shopping street.

- Like the Carpenter Lane retail center, the businesses that are appropriate for this center are small, serve the community, are individually owned and operated, and also provide unique services or goods that draw customers from the wider region.
- Improve the streetscape by following the precedent already set in front of Phebe Commons, with new sidewalks, retail-friendly street trees, brick edges, pedestrian-scaled street lights, Mt. Airy-style bus shelters, and improved crosswalks.
- Assure that the Phebe Commons parking lot can be shared by the new uses that will be attracted here. In addition, add a new public parking lot at the corner of Hortter St. (as indicated on the accompanying sketch) and create a shared public parking system that includes the existing private parking lot at the laundromat at Good St.



A medical facility is being constructed on the vacant lot that formerly contained two billboards.



Shopping in the Westview/Good St. retail area.



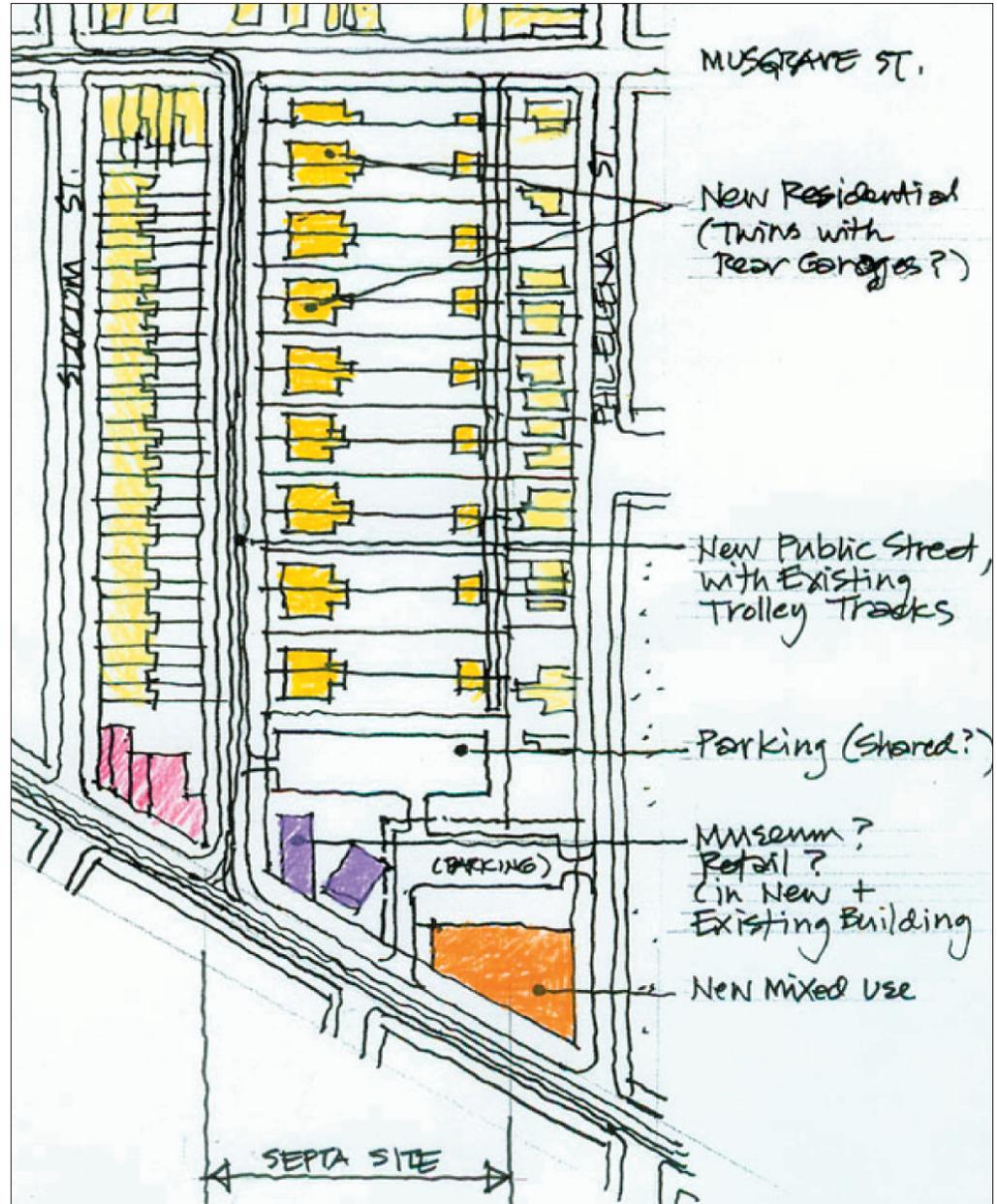
These historic structures will become the Pelham Professional Building.



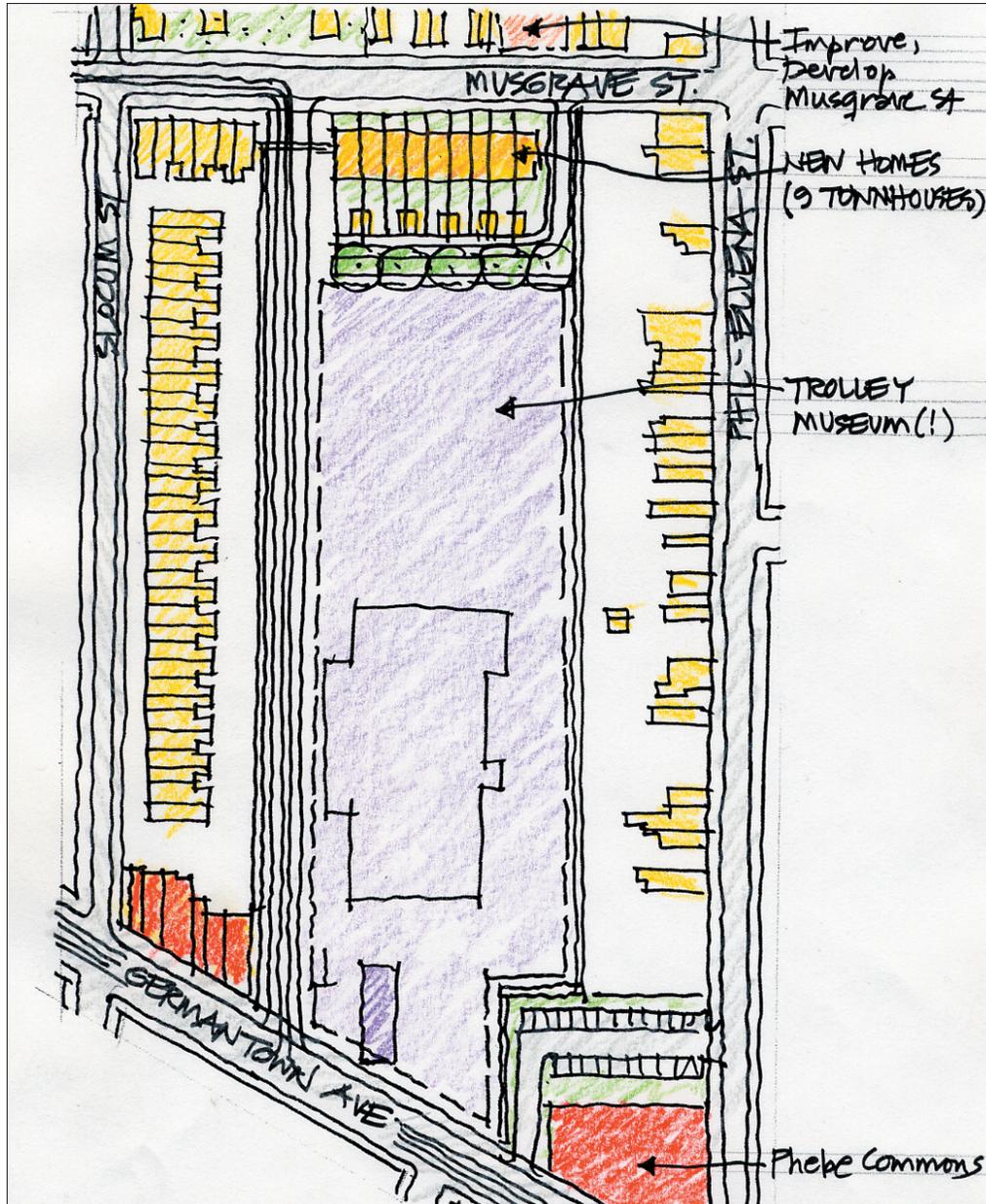
Phebe Commons sets standards for future developments.



The streetscape in front of Phebe Commons is the model for all future Germantown Ave. landscapes.



Option 1: -SEPTA property redevelopment, residential.



Option 2: SEPTA property redevelopment, museum and houses.

- Redevelop the SEPTA site, especially along Germantown Ave. Institutional uses would be appropriate at this location on the Avenue, since it is the edge of the Vernon/Good retail center. Two options can be considered for the remaining area of this large site; each will improve both the adjacent neighborhoods and the life of Germantown Ave.:

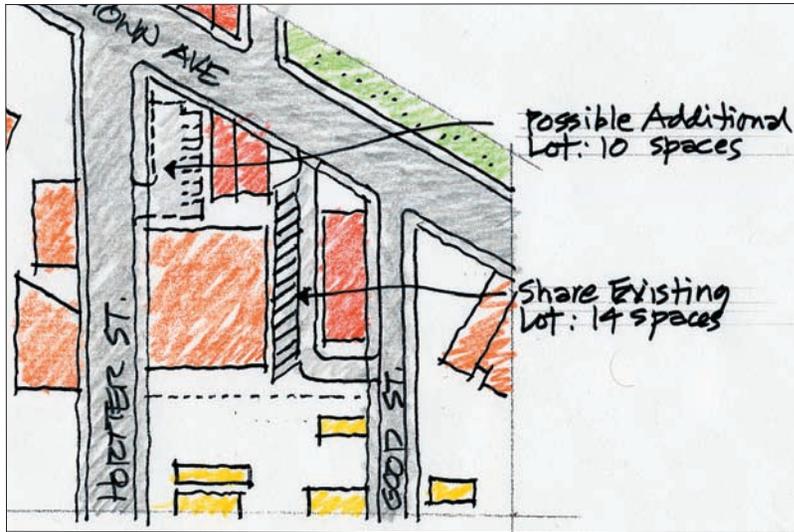
Option 1

Add a new through street linking Germantown Ave. to Musgrave St., containing the existing trolley tracks that are part of the track loop. This new street will give access to new residential development that fills the site behind the existing Germantown Ave. buildings. Create additional parking that would be shared with the adjacent Phebe Commons development.

Option 2

Add new residences along Musgrave St., and use the remaining site area as a trolley museum. This museum would not only include exhibits on the site and in the existing older building, but could also be accessible by an active trolley line!

- Add a new parking lot at Hortter St., and create a shared parking arrangement in the existing lot near Good St. (See accompanying plan sketch).
- Improve the landscape and design of the existing auto body shop, as described on page 3.53, regarding all auto body shops.
- Enforce and support the Mt. Airy USA facade guidelines and improvement program.



Plan of parking at Hortter and Good Sts.

The Blocks Between these Retail Areas in the Gorgas/Sharpnack Node

- Maintain the pattern of non-retail uses, including residences, schools, churches, and isolated businesses. Remember that these areas are not retail centers.
- Improve the streetscapes to make comfortable walking places. The sidewalks here are quite different from the retail centers: the trees should be dense shade trees that provide a sense of shelter between the various uses (especially the houses) and the busy street. The intention is to create a pleasant walking experience for all of the

parts of the 2,200 foot-long avenue, so that the neighborhoods can all be linked to shopping, to schools, to churches, and to each other. (See *Landscape Type B* on p. 3.43)

Johnson St. /Washington Lane Node

The southern edge of Mt. Airy, this node has the architectural feeling of a distinct place, with attractive buildings that make a cohesive whole of the entire block. It includes retail/residential mixed use buildings that were typical earlier in the Twentieth Century, as well as several historic homes, including the Johnson House; it is also adjacent to historic Cliveden. Unfortunately, the area also has a high level of vacancy and, according to some of the participants in the public process, an apparent lack of concern on the part of some retailers.



This property at Hortter St. can become a public parking lot for shoppers.



Map 3s: Plan and photo of the Johnson St./Washington Lane Retail Node.



Plan and photo of a vacant lot near Johnson St. that can become a public parking lot.

The specific actions that are recommended are:

- Add retail tenants to the ground floor vacant shop spaces. The types of shop and service businesses can and should be similar to that recommended for the Gorgas — Sharpnack node: small shops and cafes that serve the community, are individually owned and operated, and, perhaps, provide unique services or goods that will draw customers from the wider region.
- Specifically, tourist-related and cafe tenants should be sought, that can serve the needs of visitors to Cliveden. There are no businesses in this area that meet these needs now. If such shopping and dining were provided here, they could help to increase visitor levels to that historic building. (See “History and Tourism,” p. 3.53, re: the entire historic opportunity that exists in Mt. Airy.)
- Add residential and/or office tenants to the upper floors.
- Improve the streetscapes, with new sidewalks, retail friendly street trees, brick tree pit pavers, new bus shelters, pedestrian-scale lighting, and new crosswalks, just as is recommended for the Allens Lane — Mt. Pleasant node.
- Enforce and support the Mt. Airy USA facade guidelines and improvement program.
- Add a new parking lot on the vacant lot located on the west side of the avenue; assure that this lot is for the use of all merchants and shoppers in this area. (See the sketch above.)

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:
TWO SMALL NODES
ON GERMANTOWN AVE.

Gowen Ave. Node

A beer distributor, a small fine cafe, and a dentist’s office are the only commercial uses at this intersection. They are all valued by the community, and are generally in good repair. Therefore the only actions recommended are:

Improving the streetscapes by:

- creating a planting screen at the edge of the beer distributor parking lot,
- adding a few pedestrian-scaled light fixtures, as symbols of this place as one of the several shopping places in Mt. Airy, and
- not permitting expansion of commerce into the neighborhoods.

Sedgwick St. Node

This intersection now includes a public playground, the lawns and buildings of the Germantown Home, and the Lovett Library. At the completion of the construction of the new ACME supermarket, a development site will be created at the southwest corner. The recommendations for the development of that site are:

- Assure that the design creates a walkable development, and not a typical drive-up highway-type use.
- Attract a retail use that serves the neighborhood; remember that the nearby Lovett Library will bring shoppers and patrons to the area.
- Locate a new retail building at the corner, and not behind a parking lot.
- Provide an area and a shelter for those waiting for a bus.



This is the only stable and attractive block in this area of Chew Ave.

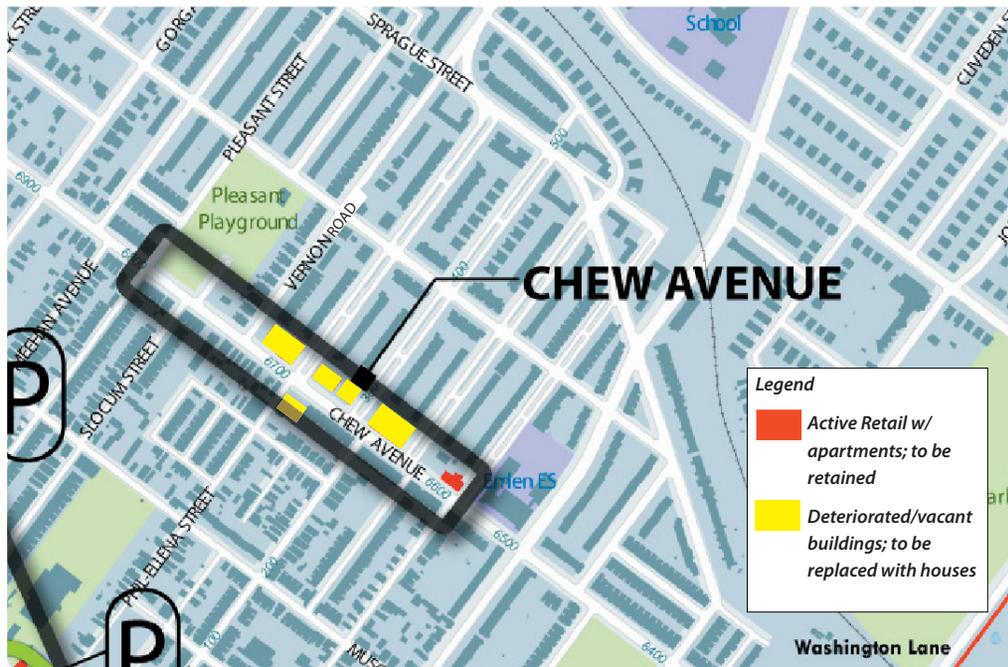


Blank walls have a deteriorating effect on shopping; this store is actually open for business, in spite of its negative appearance.

**SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:
CHEW AVE. RETAIL / RESIDENTIAL AREA**

There are several businesses (including vacant buildings, auto body shops, badly maintained businesses, and one small group of active stores) on Chew Ave., in the blocks between Sharpnack and Vernon Sts. The only set of shops that are well-cared for, and that appear stable, are located in a handsome two story building located at the corner of Sharpnack Street. The upper floor is fully occupied by apartments.

Because all other commercial buildings fit the classification of “nuisance uses,” they should be removed, but this one good set of shops should be retained to continue to fill its role of service to the neighborhoods. As described in the Housing recommendations, the blocks of commercial nuisances should be replaced with homes, which is consistent with the overall residential character of the rest of Chew Ave.



Map 3t: The area of Chew Ave. recommended for improvement.



The residential streets adjacent to Chew Ave. are comfortable and stable.



**SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:
NEIGHBORHOOD RETAIL AREAS**

Mt. Pleasant Ave. at Lincoln Drive

This area includes a new CVS and a few small shops on Mt. Pleasant, which appear to serve the neighborhood. There is one small well-regarded restaurant. There is also an auto repair shop on Lincoln Drive which is in a historic building, but which has its cars parked on the surrounding streets. Although the building is handsome, the location of the parked cars does not meet the guidelines recommended (*see the following page*) for all auto repair and body shops. In addition, the CVS parking lot location at the corner is an inappropriate standard to set for the walkable character of Mt. Airy. Therefore the attractive landscaping plan developed by West Mt. Airy Neighbors for that corner should be implemented. The attached plan shows the current plan for this area.

Mt. Pleasant Ave. and Lincoln Drive Landscape Plan



The existing CVS and its open parking lot on Lincoln Dr.

Emlen St. at Carpenter Lane

This small retail block has always had an interesting mix of uses in a handsome set of buildings. It now includes a coffee shop and a fine old antique shop. Unfortunately, at the corner there is a open lot used to park limousines. This is clearly not an appropriate use for a neighborhood retail center, or for any residential street. Therefore, a new use should be found for the site that is compatible both with the shops and the nearby houses. One possibility might be a mixed-use building with retail on the ground floor and apartments above.

Upsal Station and the Shopping Center at Upsal and Greene Sts.

These two places each serve the community in their own way. The station coffee shop takes advantage of an otherwise empty train station (there are five such stations remaining) and is well used by the neighbors and commuters. The nearby shopping center appears well maintained and is largely occupied with businesses that seem to serve the community. The location near a train station is an asset, but the large front parking lot is contrary to the basic walkable character of the rest of the community. One recommendation, therefore, is to establish a complete landscape of shade trees and low bushes along the sidewalks, to make them more shaded and comfortable.

Greene and Carpenter Sts.

This corner contains a dry cleaner and Weaver's Way market. The market is a community icon that is an integral part of the entire Mt. Airy neighborhood.



The coffee shop in the old Upsal train station



The auto repair/auto body shop on Germantown Ave.

**SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:
AUTO BODY SHOPS**

Since the neighbors realized that these uses can serve the needs of the community, and in some cases are locally owned, these guidelines are recommended for their design and location. Their basic intentions are to shield the activities from the adjacent streets and neighborhoods, and to make the sidewalks feel comfortable and safe for walking.

- They should absolutely not be permitted within residential neighborhoods; they are businesses and should be located in business areas. Even if they are located within business areas, their locations, designs, and landscaping are essential to their compatibility with their business neighbors.
- Given the recommendation to be located within business areas, it is necessary to enforce these design and planning criteria:
 - Contain all sounds and smells within buildings.
 - Storage of vehicles must be on private property, not on public streets.

- No blank building or masonry screen walls should be permitted along the sidewalk property lines (these have been the source of community troubles in other locations). All such walls should be set back at least four feet from the sidewalk, and the four foot area should be fully planted with small trees, ground cover, and low shrubs. The sidewalk must appear both attractive and safe.
- If located at a corner, the site must include landscaping (especially shade trees) and visual screening (fences, evergreen shrubs) along the cross street.
- The site must include visual screening along the property lines, between the shop and the adjacent uses.
- The sidewalk along Germantown Ave. must include shade trees at the curb, and a visual screen along the property edge consisting of a continuous three to four foot evergreen shrub row, flowers and other ground covers, and perhaps some fencing of the same height.
- Signs should be externally illuminated, just as is expected of other businesses and shops along the avenue.
- While it is understandable that the outdoor work areas must be illuminated for safety, the lights must not shine onto adjacent properties.
- Curb cuts should be limited to that permitted by law; one 24 foot curb cut per street side is desirable to make the sidewalks comfortable to walk on.

**SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS:
HISTORY AND TOURISM**

The surprising collection of historic buildings along Germantown Ave. — surprising because they are not well known or publicized — can be a great resource for Mt. Airy. Visitors can be attracted to come here, and then learn about the shopping, dining, and living opportunities that exist here. The list is long, and includes Cliveden, Upsala, the Johnson House, St. Michaels and its cemetery, a number of smaller preserved colonial-era houses, and the presence of the Underground Railroad. Philadelphia's Historic Northwest Coalition has identified about 35 historic sites on Germantown Ave. alone. There obviously can be a great many places and events to visit.

Nearby Chestnut Hill and Germantown have historic destinations; Mt. Airy can take advantage of its central location between them. As the Coalition has written, "Philadelphia's Historic Northwest is truly a place where history and culture come to life. The combined communities of Germantown, Mt. Airy, and Chestnut Hill offer a unique wealth of historic, architectural, cultural and natural features



The historic Church at Mt. Pleasant Ave. and Germantown Ave.



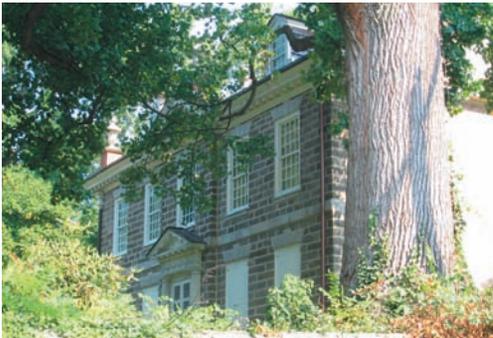
supported by outstanding retail and commercial resources." It has also been determined that the Northwest has the second largest collection of historic properties, after Center City. The major difference between the Northwest and Center City is the difference in access: there is not a well-known means for coming to the Northeast.

Several steps should be made, to take advantage of this great resource:

- The ongoing efforts of the Northwest Coalition should be supported.
- A program to advertise this condition should be created.



Upsala is beautiful, across Germantown Ave. from Cliveden, and has few visitors.



Cliveden is the largest tourism draw in Mt. Airy.

- Promotion of historic visits must include easy directions for coming here — by both car and transit.
- Promotion of historic visits must also include spreading the word about the dining, shopping, and entertainment venues that exist in Mt. Airy.
- The various sites that are now open to the public do not coordinate their opening hours, their events, or their publicity. Such coordination must take place.
- Discussions about a trolley museum on the SEPTA site could include consideration of a new visitors center facing Germantown Ave.



The 23 Trolley running up Germantown Ave.



The Johnson House, at Washington Lane, is one of the oldest homes in this part of Philadelphia.

RECOMMENDATIONS: BUSINESS SUPPORT ACTIONS

In addition to planning for the physical improvements suggested here, it is essential also to provide the following support actions for existing and new businesses:

- Establish a professional management support system for small businesses.
- Extend and reinforce a cleanliness campaign. The recently established Ambassadors cleaning program should be supported and strengthened.
- Develop a "Shop Mt. Airy" advertising program, especially focused on Mt. Airy residents. A "First Friday" program for Mt. Airy with later hours and special events is a recent development and could serve this function.
- Create and/or expand a facade and signage improvement grant program as administered by Mt. Airy USA.
- Investigate the possibility of creating a wireless Internet access system for all the businesses on Germantown Ave. Such a system has recently been established in Center City. This remarkable suggestion by a community leader could be a real attraction for businesses to locate in Mt. Airy!

RECOMMENDATIONS: CIRCULATION

BASIC INTENTIONS

Mt. Airy is a walking, biking, and transit-oriented community. While cars are important to the quality of living and shopping here, the real character of this diverse community is supported by the opportunities to meet the neighbors in all of Mt. Airy's public places — the sidewalks, the parks and sitting areas, and the transportation system.

As explained in the Housing and Economic Development Sections, the vitality and health of the community must be based on the successful interactions between the residential neighborhoods and the Germantown Ave. shopping places. Therefore the circulation systems that link them are fundamental to their success. Walking to shop, taking the bus to other parts of the larger community, and driving and parking when necessary, must all be integrated into the overall planning for the future.

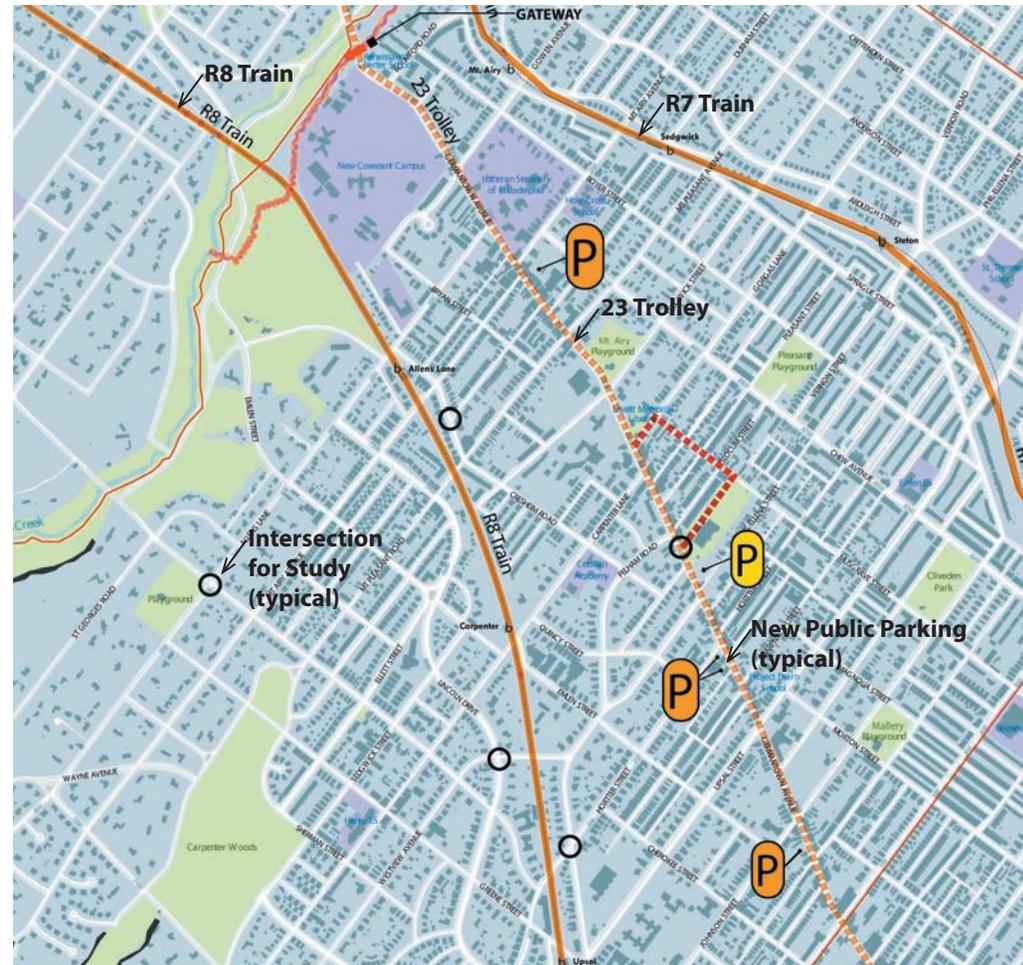
ORGANIZATION OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS AND THEIR SPECIFIC GOALS

Pedestrians and Bicycles

Since Mt. Airy is fundamentally a walking community, all circulation improvements should be based on the basic premise that the pedestrian environment — sidewalks, crosswalks — should be comfortable and safe for people of all ages and abilities.

Transit

The people of Mt. Airy use public transportation as a basic part of their lives. The area is served by two train lines, a central bus/trolley line, and various other bus lines. Unfortunately, the Rte 23 trolley



Map 3u: Summary of the circulation issues and recommendations in Mt. Airy.

has been changed to buses, and the R-8 train is continuously threatened with closures or cutbacks. The trolley is especially important to the success of the shopping areas, since there has been great evidence of a correlation between the presence of an active and attractive trolley line and the economic health of the shops along the route. The tracks are visual evidence that the trolley is there, the character of the trolleys add a liveliness

to the shopping street, and visitors may come here from other communities for the opportunity to ride these old, but modern, vehicles. More comprehensive analysis is still needed, however, to determine the feasibility of re-establishing the trolley and determining the optimum route and operations.



Parking

Much as the residents of Mt. Airy walk and use transit, parking is now an essential ingredient of successful retailing. There is a shortage of public parking in some shopping areas along Germantown Ave. and, if other retail areas are to improve, other retail locations will require new, convenient parking lots.

Gateways

Improvement to any physical entrance to the community will improve the sense of Mt. Airy as a destination for shopping. This is especially true along Germantown Ave.

SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

Pedestrians and Bicycles

Improve the quality of the pedestrian environment on Germantown Ave. in the retail districts, as described in Recommendations: Economic Development (pgs. 3.40-54). This is a basic recommendation, in that walking along Germantown Ave. is an essential part of the neighborly quality of Mt. Airy. New, clear sidewalks, appropriate street trees, flowers, and ground covers in the tree pits, and pedestrian scale lights in the retail centers will add up to a physical transformation of the heart of the entire community.

Improve the pedestrian crossings at key intersections in the community. One intersection that has been noted by the community is the complex situation where Phil-Ellena St. meets Germantown Ave. It has been experienced as a busy intersection that is difficult to walk across, and has no signal. Since this is at the heart of the Phil-Ellena/Springer retail center, such a crossing should be improved, and traffic movement should be made simple and clear. Other intersections that



Mt. Airy is truly a walking community, so its sidewalks are an essential part of its circulation system.

were suggested for evaluation and improvement include Upsal and Crittenden Sts., Pelham and Hortter Sts., Lincoln Drive and Westview St., and Allens Lane and McCallum St. Note that all of these are located within residential neighborhoods.

On the western edge of the community, where Wissahickon Ave. borders Fairmount Park, sidewalks are lacking along much of the Avenue. In order to improve access to the Park and to calm traffic along Wissahickon Ave., a system of sidewalks or bike-paths should be explored, particularly near streets that lead to the Park such as Westview St. and Kitchens Lane.

Take advantage of the abandoned rail line that crosses Germantown Ave. between Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill. It can be transformed into a walking/biking trail that will be an entrance to the entire Fairmount Park trail system.

Transit

The Mt. Airy community has joined with Germantown and Chestnut Hill in strongly urging SEPTA to maintain the R8 commuter train service. This service was reduced in 2003, and has been discussed as a candidate for removal by the funding-strapped transit system.



The Phil-Ellena/Germantown Ave. intersection has been noted to be the most difficult in Mt. Airy.



The Allen Lane Station is but one of the eight commuter Rail Stations serving Mt. Airy; it also includes a coffee shop.

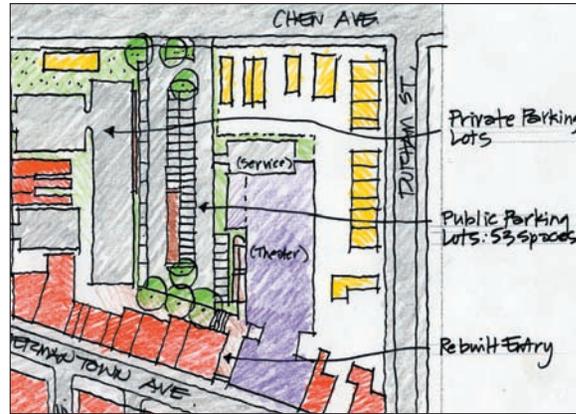


The 23 Trolley still runs on special occasions; buses serve the trolley route now.

There is interest within the community to also bring back the 23 Trolley. It has been acknowledged that the existing bus service has more flexibility in traffic than the trolley, but it is also pointed out that trolleys can be historic attractions for visitors, and for shoppers from other communities. The possibilities, costs, problems, and virtues of this should be studied further.

Traffic and Parking

- As also stated in *Pedestrian and Bicycles* (the previous page), improve the traffic and pedestrian movements at various intersections throughout the community, with a special focus on the Germantown Ave./Phil-Ellena St. intersection. The other problem intersections identified by the community are all within the residential neighborhoods: Upsal and Crittenden Sts., Pelham and Hortter Sts., Lincoln Drive and Westview St., Durham and Cresheim Sts., and Allens Lane and McCallum St.
- Add public parking lots on Germantown Ave. Three potential locations have been identified:
 - Behind the shops on the east side of the Allens Lane / Mt. Pleasant node; this lot can be made of two existing private lots, and have a capacity of about 53 cars. A new public walkway and stairs must be created in the existing alley adjacent to the Sedgwick Theater.
 - At the corner of Hortter St., where an existing private lot is enclosed with chain link fence. In addition, the lot used by the nearby laundromat should be opened for public use by shoppers in this retail center.



Parking lot near the Sedgwick Theater.



Parking lots at Hortter and Good Sts.



Parking lot near Johnson St.

- In a vacant lot on the west side of the Avenue south of Johnson St., where a large tree hides the existence of a vacant lot. About 45 spaces can fit here.
- In addition to developing these three new parking lots, the existing Phebe Commons parking lot should be managed so that it serves the retail and businesses in the area around it. This is an excellent resource that must be capitalized on.
- Support the continued operation of a shared car system, such as Philly CarShare. Approximately 35% of Mt. Airy's residents do not own cars, for various reasons (cost, availability of public transit, ease of walking), so the addition of easily rented, inexpensive, cars for short trips could be a great added convenience to community life.
- Continue to honor and maintain the city's historic street paving statute regarding the maintenance of the Belgian block surfaces of Germantown Ave.

Possible site for parking behind the Sedgwick Theater.



Gateways

The most prominent gateway to Mt. Airy is the abandoned railroad bridge at the boundary between Chestnut Hill and Mt. Airy. As has been accomplished in other similar situations, this bridge can be cleaned and painted with symbols and signs that represent the best of Mt. Airy: its people and its shopping.

The entrance to Mt. Airy from Germantown, on Germantown Ave., is remarkably distinguished from the adjacent Germantown commercial area by the presence of several colonial-era historic homes. Therefore signs, that are compatible in scale and character with those homes, could be installed on both sides of the Avenue, that say "Welcome to Historic Mt. Airy."

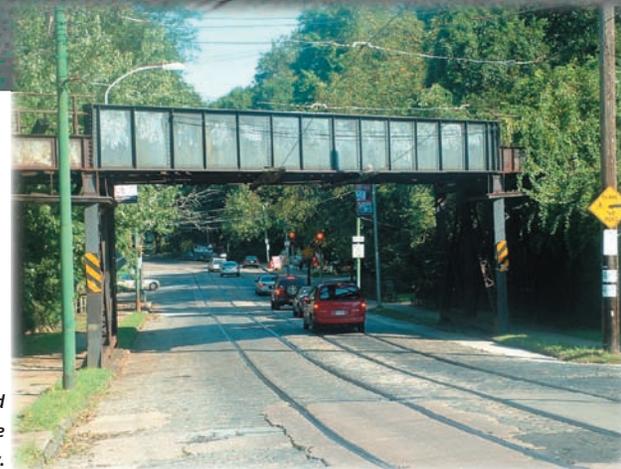
The Belgian block paving on Germantown Ave. gives great distinction to the shopping areas of Mt. Airy. This detail acts, in subtle and valuable ways, as a gateway symbol. It therefore must be preserved.

Germantown Ave. in the vicinity of Cresheim Valley Drive is actually constructed as a bridge. This bridge structure is in need of rehabilitation and funding must be secured in the city and state capital budgets to undertake this work.

The recently replaced Belgian Blocks of Germantown Ave.



An artist's vision of the transformation of the railroad bridge.



The existing railroad bridge can become a gateway to Mt. Airy.

RECOMMENDATIONS: BUILDING COMMUNITY

Certain steps were identified in this process that did not focus on development improvements, but which were found to be just as important to the future of Mt. Airy. As a result of meetings held with the neighbors, certain ideas were very clearly addressed. Basically they focused on issues that related to improving and maintaining the sense of community in all of the neighborhoods. Those issues addressed the following general topics.

COMMON GROUND: PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

The community recognizes the great importance of these small places, in that Mt. Airy has a real culture of sharing. There is a civic dimension in these shared places, where neighbors can meet neighbors, of all ages and of all walks of life. They are indeed the common ground for everyone. Therefore each of these places must be cared for with great attention and affection:

- A new park and sitting garden at the Lovett Library is now being created in the large lawn south of the library building.



The lovely open space adjacent to the library is being transformed into a public sitting area.

- Sitting parks for small children and the elderly should be created within the individual neighborhoods, especially those in blocks that are recommended for improvement, where new small public places can be created.
- Within the retail nodes on Germantown Ave. small public sitting areas can be found and created as new developments and redevelopments take place. Shopping will be improved while shoppers can rest, and a sense of community can be established as neighbors join their neighbors in the true center of all of Mt. Airy.
- The Mt. Airy Playground on Germantown Ave., and Pleasant Playground on Chew Ave. are each separated from the streets and neighborhoods around them by tall retaining walls. This condition isolates the activities of those who use the playgrounds from those who walk and live around them. In order to comfortably join these people, it is necessary to make visual and walking links between the parks and the streets. If these links are created, each park will add to the pedestrian quality of their streets and neighborhoods, will add a feeling of safety by including everyone in the activities of the streets, and will significantly improve the appearance of everything around them.

To accomplish these improvements, the community should require all private developers to contribute to the creation and improvement of such open spaces, and should identify funding sources for the public improvements that cannot be made by developers. In addition, there may be some specific instances where neighborhood volunteers can — and in some places they already have — improve their common ground.

ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES FOR THE YOUNG

Outdoor/Indoor Recreation

The recommendations made, regarding improvements to the playgrounds, can be vital steps in making the natural activities of the active young into natural aspects of community life. Instead of being separated and isolated, the youth will add energy into the streets and neighborhoods. In turn, they will be easily supervised by the normal patterns of community life.

Also, these improved facilities and connections will create opportunities for more and better programs and activities, all of which will add to the quality of life of Mt. Airy's young.

Improvements to these parks are the city's responsibility, so Mt. Airy and its neighbors must pressure city agencies, and must assist in finding funding sources in addition to city agencies and programs: e.g., the business community, neighborhood groups, and philanthropic organizations.



Pleasant playground.



Jobs and Job Training

Unemployment of the urban young has been noted as a problem throughout America's cities. Mt. Airy must look for all possible sources to enable job training to take place, to teach the patterns and work methods of employment, to assist in submitting job applications, and to identify real employment opportunities that will lead to rewarding futures. This effort must go beyond low-pay, fast-food jobs, and reach into teaching skills for a lifetime.

Some of this is already taking place, by the great efforts of churches and other local organizations. These organizations must be encouraged and supported, as the community seeks other funding sources and programs.

Volunteer Activities

Mt. Airy believes in the strength of its community life, much of which is expressed by the volunteer efforts of its neighbors. If young people can be convinced to also volunteer, they will gain a respect for their neighbors, and will feel a true sense of accomplishment in what they do.

The activities of the various volunteer organizations (churches, business organizations, neighborhood leadership, etc.) should be coordinated for this purpose, imaginative thinking should be applied so that interesting and useful tasks are offered to the young people, and funding sources that can assist the organizations must be sought from all possible sources — government agencies, philanthropic organizations, etc.

SUPPORT SERVICES FOR THE ELDERLY OF THE COMMUNITY

One set of actions can expand the means for supporting the neighbors as they age, in addition to the existing housing for the elderly within the community: support for continued living at home.

"Aging in place" is often desired not only by the seniors themselves, but also by their families. It is not uncommon that the elderly are still living in the family home and in the old neighborhood, which develops a strong attachment to the place. Unfortunately, these homes often are not supportive of elderly living, so key improvements must be made:

- Walking must be made easy, so that the less strong can get around within the house, and can move out into their neighborhood. Ground-floor master bedrooms and bathrooms should be installed, front porches should be retained or created (what great places to continue to be part of the neighborhoods!), and comfortable steps to the sidewalk must be built.
- Home health care must be available, since many elderly cannot go to the doctor.
- Programs that assist friends (often elderly themselves) to come and visit — even to help — should be supported.
- Meals on Wheels programs should be encouraged and supported.
- Provide driving services — to shops, churches, clubs, etc. — so that the elderly can get the goods they need, so that they can visit their friends, so that they can remain part of the larger Mt. Airy community.

To institute these actions, the community should identify many different funding sources and support programs, and should take its own steps to coordinate them. This is important: our fathers, our mothers, and our elders should be kept here, and kept well.

IMPROVED SAFETY AND SECURITY

A calm and peaceful life is sought throughout all of Mt. Airy's neighborhoods, so a significant and ongoing effort must be maintained to enable that to always exist:

- Bring the Community Life Improvement Program (CLIP) to Mt. Airy. CLIP addresses quality of life violations like graffiti, vandalism and property maintenance and neglect. The program also streamlines code enforcement and imposes strict fines for violation of health and safety ordinances.
- Bicycle police are already adding the sense of safety in the shopping areas. Their presence should be expanded, especially as the shopping activities expand on Germantown Ave.
- The recommended physical linkages between the existing playgrounds and the surrounding streets, and the proposal to add small playing and sitting areas, will put "eyes on the street", which is a subtle but successful means for creating a sense of safety.
- Drug education is an important part of our times. Methods for teaching everyone in the community about drugs must be supported, so that the neighbors understand, and that their children understand.
- It has been observed in the *Recommendations: Housing, Residential Development* (pgs. 3.31-39) that there are several "nuisance uses" still existing on neighborhood blocks. The physical characteristics of these buildings include abandoned cars, weed-filled overgrown yards, and ugly blank walls facing houses across the street. These badly cared for places give opportunities for crime and drug dealing, right within the streets of the community. These uses, and places should be either removed or greatly transformed.

All of these actions require steady community support. Existing programs for the various recommendations must be sought, new funding sources must be identified, coordinated plans must be made. Each recommendation may require different funding, or the support of different agencies, but they must be thought of as parts of a single Mt. Airy effort.

IMPLEMENTATION, PRIORITIES, RESPONSIBILITIES

HOUSING

Implementation

Mt. Airy has a long history of economic diversity, and the community has clearly stated its desire to maintain this unique characteristic. Housing development activity within the identified target areas should provide a range of residential opportunities that are attractive and available to families large and small, individuals young and old and households across the income spectrum. Accomplishing this objective will require the maintenance and development of smaller houses on smaller lots that are appropriate in size for small families and affordable to individuals with modest incomes. Development of such homes will likely require provision of guaranteed loan financing and/or public subsidy of some level.

The development of condominium units may be attractive to older Mt. Airy residents who desire maintenance-free living as well as to other individuals and smaller households. Depending on unit sizing and amenity levels provided, condominium development could occur either as a publicly supported activity or as an entirely market rate project. Similarly, based on current market conditions, the development of larger residential units (2,000 s.f. and up) could occur at market rate without the need for public subsidy. The residential rehabilitation and development opportunities identified within the target areas can occur at several scales of activity by multiple possible actors — including individual homeowners or homebuyers, entrepreneurial turnkey developers, non-profit housing developers such as Mt. Airy USA and larger scale private developers.

Individual Homeowners/Homebuyers

Existing and potential new homebuyers may qualify for Redevelopment Authority loans of up to \$25,000 through the PhilLoan program to fund physical improvements to residential properties. Such funding provides a very affordable incentive to invest in a residential property to increase its livability and market value. At current program interest rates, the maximum loan requires a monthly payment of \$138/month and provides the ability to deduct \$8,000 in interest expense from personal income taxes over the life of the loan. Qualifying new homebuyers may receive up to \$2,000 in closing cost assistance from the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Authority, providing further incentive for investment.

Entrepreneurial Turnkey Developers

There is already evidence of entrepreneurial turnkey housing rehabilitation occurring on units in and near the identified housing target areas that require moderate rehabilitation work. The availability of additional units in need of moderate rehabilitation suggests that such activity can continue on an incremental, project-by-project basis. Recent activity has resulted in affordable resales in the \$50,000 to \$60,000 range and has involved no public subsidy. These private efforts are valuable to the community and provide an affordable market of housing to moderate-income buyers. However, the rehabilitation and resale of a single unit of housing on a particularly troubled block could potentially constrain larger scale redevelopment efforts. Additionally, future rehabilitation efforts of this type could begin to target renters rather than homeowners. Mt. Airy USA should monitor this activity, to the extent possible, and help steer potential investors to properties that will not impact the ability to undertake larger-scale development projects.

Non-Profit and Private Developers

New construction and housing rehabilitation can also occur at various scales of production. Development sites can be marketed separately or packaged to promote a master housing development program for the area. While independent marketing of sites to multiple developers may create a broader diversity of pricing and housing type, the packaging of sites to a master developer could create efficiencies of scale and the best opportunity for the community to influence the quality and nature of development. Such development could be market rate or require a small subsidy, depending on the size of the units constructed.

Based on current market pricing of Mt. Airy's most recent sales housing construction, it is estimated that new construction of residential units under 2,000 s.f. would require some subsidy. Most financing through the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency (PHFA) is geared toward homebuyers with incomes less than 120% of the state median income. This currently translates to \$75,960 for a family of four and \$60,720 for a family of two. However, a new PHFA program, Homeownership Choice allows more diversity of income type in larger scale developments. Through this program, non-profit agencies working with private developer partners spread subsidy dollars across affordable and market rate units, using local and federal funding to subsidize affordable units and PHFA funds to develop market rate units included in the same development.

Nuisance Properties and Uses

Since it is the basic intention of this plan to eliminate the negative impacts of certain non-residential uses that are located within neighborhoods, two alternate possibilities must be considered:



1. Determine the actions needed to remove and/or relocate the uses, so that the properties can be redeveloped for residential uses. This is clearly the most positive action for the neighborhood. Therefore community leadership such as Mt. Airy USA should determine the legal sources available to implement this policy, and should identify funding and governmental mechanisms to acquire and demolish the properties. Upon completion of acquisition, the properties should be sold to selected developers who will be redeveloping the specific neighborhood in which the uses are located.
2. Assuming that the uses will remain, but will be transformed into assets for the residential neighborhood, Mt. Airy USA should coordinate with city agencies to assure that these (auto-oriented) uses, and other nuisance properties in the residential neighborhoods, conform to all applicable zoning and code requirements. Mt. Airy USA together with East and West Mt. Airy Associations should also develop a procedure through which offending properties are identified, possible zoning or code violations researched and appropriate city officials alerted to the presence of and concerns over specific problem properties. If necessary, community residents should be engaged in phone and letter campaigns to key city agencies urging their response to identified problem properties.

Housing Development Strategies, Actions

Within the framework of the community's objectives for a range of housing types and affordability, existing market conditions impacting housing development in Mt. Airy and the characteristics of the specific residential blocks and sites targeted for improvement, the following strategy development must occur:

- Identify nuisance uses within the target neighborhoods and research ownership (see *Recommendations: Housing, Residential Development*, pgs. 3.31-39, for a complete discussion of the types and locations of nuisance uses).
- Identify individual abandoned houses in otherwise stable neighborhoods and research ownership.
- Identify occupied houses requiring moderate rehabilitation efforts and research ownership.

Clarify the specific residential redevelopment options and needs that apply to each specific situation, e.g.:

- Provision of rehabilitation support for individual owner/buyers' improvements to individual properties.
- Redevelopment of single properties.
- Assembly of properties for medium-sized developments (e.g. a group of existing vacant homes and lots on one block).
- Assembly of groups of vacant homes for rehabilitation by Mt. Airy USA or a private developer
- Assembly of properties for large-scale redevelopment by Mt. Airy USA and/or private developer (e.g. multiple assemblies of property on several blocks, with a target of as many as 100 residential units).
- Improvement to the public landscape in each targeted block (sidewalks, streets, street trees) to give a sense of care in the community, improve the appearance, set a standard for maintenance of private yards and gardens, and increase rather than decrease the value of the private homes and properties.

Clarify the specific residential redevelopment policy support actions necessary within each target area and on a broader community level to prevent additional dis-investments and deterioration of housing stock:

- Strengthening of community organizations, to reinforce the obligations and possibilities of home ownership (maintenance, etc.), and to find out the detailed needs of the individual residents.
- Education of homeowners about available housing assistance funding.
- Provision of youth and senior services, drug counseling.

Based on the block and site-specific findings above, Mt. Airy USA will create a phased housing rehabilitation and development strategy that establishes a sequenced implementation plan for provision of homeowner assistance, property acquisition, solicitation of funding for various rehab and development activities, and identification of project developers or partners.

Housing Priorities

The criteria for establishing priority actions are listed in *Executive Summary: Recommended Priorities* (pg. 3.26) at the beginning of this plan. These priorities are also listed in that executive summary:

- Improve and redevelop these five streets and blocks:
 1. E. Sharpnack St., and the adjacent large interior block, between Germantown Ave. and Chew Ave.
 2. E. Phil-Ellena / Springer Sts., between Germantown Ave. and Musgrave St.
 3. E. Montana St.: the large assembled development site near Chew Ave.



- 4. W. Upsal St. / W. Weaver St., between Germantown Ave. and Cherokee St.
- 5. Mt. Airy Commons/Edgewood buildings redevelopment
- Remove or improve the nuisance uses in those blocks.
- Redevelop and improve these large sites:
 1. E. Montana St. lot, now owned by Mt. Airy USA.
 2. Lot between Hortter and Sharpnack Sts, as part of the Sharpnack St. improvements.
- Determine the priority sequence for the improvements.

Housing Recommended Responsibilities

- Redevelopment Authority: redevelopment planning, land acquisition, removal of nuisance uses.
- Planning Commission: overall planning, approvals
- Dept. of Recreation: improvement, maintenance of Pleasant Playground
- City Council Office: provide leadership in obtaining funding, public approvals
- East, West Mt. Airy Neighbors: build community agreements
- Mt. Airy USA: promote development and public improvements, establish priority sequence of developments
- Private Developers: development, streetscapes, parking

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Implementation

Retail

Implementation of this strategy requires both the recruitment of new retailers and the retention of Germantown Ave. retailers that have traditionally provided services to the Mt. Airy community. Mt. Airy USA has already convened a Business Recruitment Committee composed of area retailers and property owners and the efforts of this committee must be intensified and expanded. Mechanisms must be developed by Mt. Airy USA to improve communications regarding retailer recruitment and retention, including: (1) greater responsiveness to prospective desirable tenants approaching the district about possible store opportunities; (2) actively seeking desirable retailers for Germantown Ave.'s commercial nodes; (3) better coordinating communication among the many individuals and organizations representing specific properties, and (4) identifying and addressing specific issues impacting the ability of existing retailers to do business on Germantown Ave. As part of these efforts, Mt. Airy USA will explore opportunities to attract appropriate regional and national retailers to locations on Germantown Ave. and any urban design and circulation requirements that are necessary to assure that such retailers fit the scale and character of the commercial district.

Meeting these objectives will require greater responsibility and commitment of time by the Business Recruitment Committee as well as the allocation of significant staff resources by Mt. Airy USA in pursuing recruitment efforts, providing timely response to prospective new tenant interest

in the area and nurturing the retention of existing Germantown Ave. retailers. Because of the diversity of need among retailers these retention efforts will need to be quite broad in scope, with Mt. Airy USA serving as both an organizing agent and a clearinghouse of information about technical and financial resources available to area retailers.

Business Improvement District formation

Mt. Airy USA will lead efforts to establish a Business Improvement District (BID) for the core commercial areas of Germantown Ave. The Mt. Airy Ambassadors Program has recently been established to provide street cleaning services and is supported through voluntary contributions made by Germantown Ave. property owners and merchants. Currently, approximately 30% of Germantown Ave. properties contribute to the Ambassadors program, many at levels higher than would be assessed through a BID.

Creation of a Germantown Ave. BID will provide a long-term and reliable source of financing for the Mt. Airy Ambassadors as well as the organizational structure through which additional marketing and promotion efforts can be undertaken. In the future, a Germantown Ave. BID may be the appropriate entity to assume business recruitment and retention services that are currently being assigned to Mt. Airy USA.

Economic Development Priorities

The criteria for establishing priority actions are listed in *Executive Summary: Recommended Priorities* (pg. 3.26) at the beginning of this plan. These priorities are also listed in that Executive Summary:



- Improve these three Germantown Ave. retail nodes:
 1. Allens Lane – Mt. Pleasant Ave.
 2. Gorgas Lane – Sharpnack St.
 3. Johnson St. – Washington Lane
- In the Gorgas/Sharpnack node, specifically, complete the development of the Pelham Professional Building, and begin the process to redevelop the SEPTA site, and the two blocks of buildings near Hortter St. that have several vacancies.
- Make these general improvements to all three retail nodes:
 1. Retail recruitment for the shopping areas, including an overall strategy for accomplishing this.
 2. Construction of streetscape improvements (including special lighting in the shopping areas).
 3. Creation of new, shared parking lots and a parking system.
 4. Support and expansion of the facade and sign improvement program.
 5. Attraction of historic tourism.
- Transform and improve the Chew Ave. retail area and the Pleasant Playground, see *Recommendations:Housing, Residential Development* (pgs. 3.31-39) for more detail.
- Undertake these Business Support actions:
 1. Develop a “Shop Mt. Airy” marketing program.
 2. Establish management support system.
 3. Extend the cleanliness campaign.
 4. Expand and support the facade/signage improvement program.

Economic Development Recommended Responsibilities

- BID, Mt. Airy USA: retail recruitment
- BID: Shop Mt. Airy Campaign, management support system, cleanliness campaign (with Mt. Airy USA).
- BID, Mt. Airy USA: implementation of facade and signs grant/guidelines program
- BID, Mt. Airy USA: streetscape improvements
- BID, Mt. Airy USA, Redevelopment Authority,: assemble land for public parking lots, creation and management of a shared parking system.
- Merchants: participation in shared parking system, facade and sign improvements, assumption of personal responsibility for cleanliness of their sidewalk and business.
- Mt. Airy USA: complete the development of the Pelham Professional Building.
- Mt. Airy USA: determine process for redevelopment of other key blocks: the two blocks near Hortter St., and the SEPTA site.
- Recreation Department, Redevelopment Authority, Mt. Airy USA: on Chew Ave., removal of nuisance uses, redevelopment of housing on the avenue, improvements to the Pleasant Playground, redevelopment of housing near the Playground (as an option).
- BID, Mt. Airy USA, (and various other organizations that support historic preservation and visitation): promotion of historic tourism actions.

CIRCULATION

Implementation

The community needs to continue conversations with several local agencies, such as the Philadelphia Streets Department and SEPTA to see what is feasible.

Circulation Priorities

The criteria for establishing priority actions are listed in “Executive Summary: Recommended Priorities” at the beginning of this plan. These Priorities are also listed in the *Executive Summary* (pgs. 3.26-30):

- Create the three new parking lots for the retail areas.
- Establish a shared parking system within the retail areas, including the use of the three new lots, the existing Phebe Commons lot, Germantown Home, and other available parking lots.
- Create a gateway at the railroad bridge, as an entrance to Mt. Airy, and to Fairmount Park.
- Create the walking/bike trail on the abandoned railroad tracks and the gateway across Germantown Ave.
- Continue to pressure for the return of the 23 Trolley; plan for the public improvements and developments that will follow.
- Support and expand shared car rental system in the community.
- Explore the creation of sidewalks on parts of Wissahickon Ave.
- Continue to pressure the city to maintain the Belgian block paving on Germantown Ave.
- Secure funding for the rehabilitation of Germantown Ave. where it exists as a bridge near Cresheim Valley Drive.



Circulation Recommended Responsibilities

- BID, Mt. Airy USA, Redevelopment Authority: assemble land for public parking lots, create and manage shared parking system.
- Merchants: support the shared parking system
- BID, Mt. Airy USA: pressure to return the 23 Trolley service, and to increase service on the R-8 commuter train.
- Streets Department: maintenance of the Belgian Block paving, installation of crosswalks, resolution of the traffic controls of the Upsal/Germantown Ave. intersection, and rehabilitation of Germantown Ave.
- Fairmount Park: creation, maintenance of a new trail on the abandoned RR tracks.
- WMAN, EMAN, Mt. Airy USA, Chestnut Hill Community Association: creation of the gateway on the abandoned RR bridge.
- BID, Mt. Airy USA: bring the shared car rental system to Mt. Airy.

BUILDING COMMUNITY

Implementation

There are two types of priorities listed here: support for services and programs (e.g. drug education, home health care, job training), and community physical improvements. Implementation of the services and programs requires funding and government agency support, both of which must be sought by the various community leadership organizations. The physical improvements can partially be implemented by establishing the criteria for private investors as they create new residential developments (e.g. small public open spaces, housing that accommodates the elderly at home), partially by government funding (e.g. playground improvements), and partially by community initiatives (e.g. Lovett Library sitting park).

Building Community Priorities

- Common Ground: Public Open Spaces
 - Complete the sitting park at the Lovett Library.
 - Fully improve the Pleasant Playground.
- Activities and Services for the Young
 - Establish job training, assist in finding jobs.
 - Complete the Pleasant Playground
- Support Services for the Elderly
 - Promote residential development (new, rehabilitation) that accommodates the walking, living needs of the elderly.
 - Continue to support Meals on Wheels.
 - Establish home health care assistance programs.
- Improved Safety and Security
 - Initiate the CLIP program.
 - Expand bicycle police patrols.
 - Promote new residential developments that remove the blank walls and vacant lots of “nuisance uses.”
 - Develop, expand drug education programs.



FIVE-YEAR PLAN AND COSTS

FIRST STEPS: FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Year 1

- Plan for Montana St. lot, including approvals, funding
- Plan for Pelham Professional Building, including approvals, funding
- Plan for Parking Lot #1, with owner (behind Theater), including approvals, funding
- Acquisition on Springer and Phil-Ellena Sts.
- Create overall plan for streetscapes in all retail nodes on Germantown Ave.
- Expand retail recruitment
- Institute business support policies (cleanliness, management, etc.)

Year 2

- Develop Montana St. lot
- Develop Pelham Professional Building
- Develop Parking Lot #1
- Design, plan for Springer/Phil-Ellena, including approvals, funding
- Document, install streetscapes from Allens Lane to Mt. Pleasant
- Retail recruitment
- Continue business support policies

Year 3

- Develop Springer/Phil-Ellena (new homes, rehab homes, new neighborhood parking lot, removal of nuisance uses, fix the cemetery fence and curbs, repair sidewalks, etc.)

- Acquisition on Upsal/Weaver
- Plan for Upsal/ Weaver, including approvals, funding
- Document, install streetscapes from Vernon Rd. to Good St. (in the Gorgas/Sharpnack retail node)
- Retail recruitment
- Continue business support policies

Year 4

- Develop Upsal/Weaver (fix houses on Upsal, remove garages, new houses on Weaver)
- Document, install streetscapes from Johnson St. to Washington Lane
- Acquisition on Sharpnack
- Design, plan for Sharpnack, including approvals, funding
- Retail recruitment
- Continue business support policies

Year 5

- Develop E. Sharpnack St.
- Document, install streetscapes at Carpenter Lane
- Retail recruitment

Notes:

"Plan for" means design, documentation, cost estimating

"Develop" means bid and build the project

"Document, install" means both design and construction

"Acquisition" means completing all the steps (approvals, funding, condemnation, purchase, etc.) needed to acquire vacant properties

CRITERIA FOR ESTABLISHING THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN

- The first housing improvements, at E. Springer/E. Phil-Ellena Sts. and on Montana St., will complement the current Mt. Airy USA redevelopment projects at Phebe Commons and Pelham Professional Building.
- The first economic development improvement, of the Pelham Professional Building, is an ongoing project of Mt. Airy USA, and will complement the already completed Phebe Commons and the renewed housing on Springer and Phil-Ellena Sts.
- The first streetscape and parking improvements will support the existing primary Mt. Airy shopping area, between Allens Lane and Mt. Pleasant Ave.
- The second streetscape improvements, between Vernon Rd. and Good St., are an extension of the existing streetscape in front of Phebe Commons.
- The second housing improvements, on W. Upsal/ W. Weaver Sts., will create new neighborhoods on the west side of Germantown Ave., to complement the first actions on the east side.
- The third streetscape improvements, between Johnson St. and Washington Lane, will bring all the energies of Mt. Airy shopping to the southern edge of the community.
- The third housing improvements, on E. Sharpnack St., will complete all of the major housing recommendations of this plan, and will complement the improvements to Germantown Ave. between Vernon and Good Sts.
- The final streetscape improvements will be in the Carpenter Lane retail center.

- Throughout the entire Five-Year Plan there will be an ongoing set of business improvement and support actions: retail recruitment, facade improvements, “Shop Mt. Airy” campaign, business management support, and so on. This is a fundamental part of the entire plan, that reaches beyond physical development to direct support of the vitality of the shopping area that is the heart of the community.

POSSIBLE CONSTRUCTION, DESIGN COSTS OF THE FIVE-YEAR PLAN

Germantown Ave. Streetscapes

- Allens Lane/Mt. Pleasant Ave: \$728,000
- Vernon Rd./Good St.: \$564,000
- Johnson St./Washington Lane: \$477,000
- Subtotal: \$1,769,000

Housing: Springer/Phil-Ellena

- 26 new, renovated houses: \$3,900,000
- Neighborhood parking lots (18 cars): \$36,000
- Sidewalks \$42,500
- Curbs, fence improvements: \$114,500
- Subtotal: \$4,093,000

Housing: Montana St. lot

- 16 new houses: \$2,400,000
- Sidewalk improvements: \$60,000
- Subtotal: \$2,460,000

Housing: Upsal/Weaver

- 20 renovated houses on Upsal: \$4,000,000
- 18 new twins onWeaver: \$2,700,000
- Improved sidewalks \$40,800
- Subtotal: \$6,740,800

Housing: Sharpnack

- 32 new, renovated houses: \$4,800,000
- Sidewalk improvements: \$108,000
- Subtotal: \$4,908,000

(Note: Acquisition costs are not included)

CONCLUSION

The cherished quality of life in Mt. Airy is based on its pride in the many diversities of the community. It is a beautiful place, with some supporting shopping, and a great variety of places to live. In order for all of the values to be preserved, in order for the community to continue to flourish, in order to improve those portions of the physical environment that need to be improved, all of the priority steps recommended here must be taken. This effort must be a mission for everyone involved: neighbors, community leaders, community organizations, civic agencies, and the city. Mt. Airy is one of the great neighborhoods of Philadelphia, and deserves all of the commitment that can be given to it.



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