

FOOD ACCESS



How can innovative design improve food access in urban neighborhoods?



AN INITIATIVE OF THE **COMMUNITY DESIGN COLLABORATIVE**
IN PARTNERSHIP WITH **THE REINVESTMENT FUND AND THE FOOD TRUST**



LETTER FROM THE HONORABLE DWIGHT EVANS

Who doesn't love to eat? Growing up in North Philadelphia on what was then Columbia Avenue, one of my favorite spots was the neighborhood market. No more than a quick walk away, it was a place to pick up bread, milk, and fresh produce. But more than that, it was also a place where people could look forward to running into their neighbors; a place to catch up on community news and activities.

Sadly, experiences like mine have nearly disappeared in today's city neighborhoods. In many parts of Pennsylvania, particularly urban communities, a fresh food market is a thing of the past. The problem is far more than just an inconvenience for those living in communities without access to fresh foods. Research indicates these same neighborhoods—known as “food deserts”—are suffering from the effects of a nutrient-deficit diet, with obesity, diabetes, heart disease, and hypertension on the rise.

I believe that access to fresh, nutritious food is an essential element of creating strong communities. The development of community-based sources of fresh food is a recipe for not only better public health, but also a stronger economic environment. For that reason, I led the effort to make supermarket development in underserved areas a priority through the Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI). The program provides grants and loans to aid in the development of supermarkets and grocery stores in underserved areas and has received national recognition for innovation.

Infill Philadelphia: Food Access is a joint venture of the Community Design Collaborative, The Reinvestment Fund, and The Food Trust, supported by the FFFI. Through this innovative initiative, I have seen how design can contribute to the cause of improving food access. The design strategies that appear on the following pages will help us realize several new food retail projects in Philadelphia and Chester. In the longer run, they will provide thoughtful models for retooling and redeveloping older buildings and underutilized land into a new generation of supermarkets and grocery stores.

I applaud the collaborative effort that drove these innovative solutions and look forward to a day when more city residents can experience what it means to “run to the market” again. Quality urban life should not be without both the health and social benefits of what I view as one of the greatest features of a community—access to fresh food and the company of neighbors.

Representative Dwight Evans
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

Infill Philadelphia: Food Access brought together design practitioners, community development experts, policymakers, grocery store operators, funders, and neighborhood leaders to explore how design can help address fresh food access in low- and moderate-income urban communities. Through the conceptual designs of three teams of architects and the diverse group of experts who reviewed their work, *Infill Philadelphia: Food Access* identified some key **design principles** for developing food retail in urban neighborhoods:

- **Design urban food markets to perform multiple roles.** The grocery stores of previous generations provided fresh food, neighborhood gossip, and eyes-on-the-street. Today urban food markets can also be catalysts for healthier lifestyles, sustainability, and a stronger sense of community through amenities like meeting spaces, demonstration kitchens, cafés, green roofs, and community gardens.
- **Create a clear, attractive identity.** Crafting a compelling “brand” is not about introducing an entirely new identity or transplanting a successful design from another site. Instead, the most vibrant solutions draw from existing characteristics and assets of the surrounding neighborhood.
- **Provide well-sequenced spaces and integrate multiple modes of access.** City dwellers get to the store on foot and by transit, bicycle, or car. Urban food markets can accommodate all their customers by enhancing transit stops, buffering parking lots, and providing canopies, produce stands, sidewalk seating, or public plazas. These design elements will help make the transition from neighborhood to store and create a shopping experience that offers more than the purchase of food.
- **Make visual connections between the inside and outside.** Use design elements like windows, lighting, and interesting vantage points to give shoppers and residents inviting views, promote activity, and build a sense of community.
- **Use design as a tool for business innovation and growth.** In order to bring fresh food to underserved communities, innovative solutions will be necessary to adjust standard retail formats to fit available development sites. In cases where urban food retailers are start-up businesses, design can be used to provide strategies for future phases as operators diversify their merchandise or add community-oriented uses.

These principles focus on physical design—but larger-scale policy and financing considerations are equally important in bringing fresh, healthy food to underserved urban communities. A supportive web of community leadership and planning, coordinated marketing, knowledgeable financiers, and progressive developers is necessary to transforming the conceptual designs in these pages and future urban food retail proposals into a reality.

The designs brought to life through this design initiative highlight the possibilities for improving food access in three distinct neighborhoods. The concepts are as inventive as they are practical, with each uniquely responding to the question behind this challenge—“Can innovative design improve food access in urban neighborhoods?” Each of the designs—**Storefront Reuse, Warehouse Conversion, and Urban Supermarket**—appear to answer yes, it most certainly can.



WEAVERS WAY

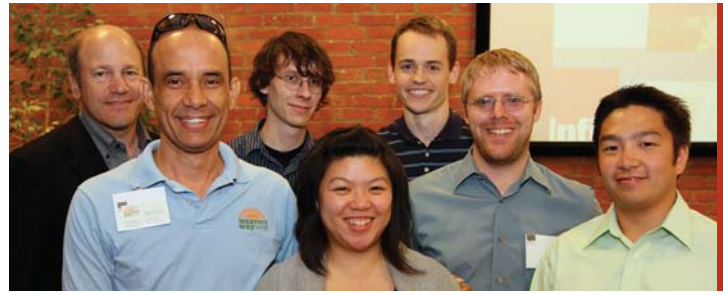
STOREFRONT REUSE



The Charge: Rebrand a typical small-footprint storefront building into a fresh food alternative and create a community anchor.

“We want to help residents in the community feel like they own a piece of the co-op.”

Alexander Chan, Agoos/Lovera Architects



2129 N. 72nd Avenue
West Oak Lane • Philadelphia, PA 19138

**Weavers Way Community Programs and
Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation
Agoos/Lovera Architects**

THE SITE

A prominent five-way intersection marks the heart of West Oak Lane, surrounded by a strong residential neighborhood and numerous community institutions, including the West Oak Lane Community Senior Center and the Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation.

While an established, stable community, West Oak Lane offers minimal options when it comes to fresh food. Convenience stores and fast food, to the contrary, are more than easy to find. The nearest fresh produce requires an 11-minute walk from the neighborhood's center and is sold from the back of a truck.

Mount Airy-based Weavers Way, a member-supported cooperative market, was given the opportunity to lease a two-story storefront building in West Oak Lane as a pilot location for a new network of small “satellite” co-ops designed to bring fresh, locally-grown food to underserved neighborhoods. In addition to offering residents locally-grown food, the co-op also plans to contribute to the growth of the surrounding area by providing community education and promoting the environment.



THE SOLUTION

The design team's goal was to maximize the use of the existing storefront building and to expand square footage and programming possibilities through the development of the site's adjacent vacant lot. The team proposed a phased plan for growth, with each phase building upon the previous and responding to increased community support.

The first phase investigates a small footprint prototype for a fresh food retailer that retrofits a conventional storefront building and rebrands it as a fresh food alternative. Phase two studies the incremental growth of the store by developing the second floor once a strong community base and reputation has been established. Finally, the third phase considers full expansion onto the adjacent vacant lot to optimize the co-op's potential as a community anchor.

The design allows for a number of inventive features, including a security grille of perforated metal panels that folds out into a combination open-air produce stand, community bulletin board and overhead canopy during business hours. After hours, the grille collapses into a single transparent plane that secures the store and lights the streetscape. The metal panels from the front façade continue around the side of the building and become the support structure for native plants, vines, and vegetables, creating a living green billboard. A publicly-accessible green roof is also part of the ultimate scheme, providing additional green space and an outdoor classroom.

While Weavers Way, in the first phase, will only be 700-square feet in area, smaller does not necessarily mean easier when it comes to design. Phased growth and striking the right balance of retail and support spaces will be essential to the success of the co-op.

DESIGN STRATEGIES

- Create a signature design element that helps to brand the store and create a sense of place.
- Design spaces to complement retail with programs and activities that promote community.
- View the building as a living organism that grows and evolves to meet the needs of local businesses and the community.



CHESTER'S COMMUNITY GROCERY CO-OP

WAREHOUSE CONVERSION



The Charge: Create an identifiable new home for a community co-op that is integrated into the Chester City retail fabric and provides an engaging, sustainable grocery shopping experience.

“When shopping in a traditional supermarket, the shelving is so high that you often retreat into your own personal universe. We designed this co-op space to let people see one another.”

David Zaiser, KSS Architects



805-813 Edgmont Avenue
Central Business District • Chester, PA 19013

The Chester Community Charitable Corporation
KSS Architects

THE SITE

Chester’s Community Grocery Co-op (CCGC) started with thirteen member families and operates out of a garage. Over the years, membership has grown to more than 100 and forecasts show a strong potential for new members. The co-op serves the city of Chester, located just outside of Philadelphia, in Delaware County, with a predominantly low-income population. Chester has lacked a supermarket or other fresh produce source for more than seventeen years. Responding to an obvious need, the co-op hopes to double its current member base, and improve the quality of nutrition in Chester. The co-op’s long-term goals are to expand access to produce and groceries and to build a healthier Chester by improving sustainability of food access.

Increased demand and plans for continued growth have pressed CCGC to search for a new home. A former furniture store and warehouse—with 32,000 square feet of interior space—could be the ideal next spot. The three-story Art Deco building is located on the corner of a key intersection and is flanked by two vacant lots that are roughly 8,000 square feet each. The site will help to restore the currently frayed fabric of Chester’s central business district.



THE SOLUTION

The team developed a solution that is both operationally and economically feasible, paying careful attention to community-wide needs and possibilities for future investment. The design allows for phased growth, to give the co-op adequate time to develop. The first phase utilizes only a portion of the first floor, with plans to expand to the full use of the first floor and then to ultimately incorporate the second floor.

In the proposed design, the co-op’s retail floor is intended to promote community interaction. Co-op shoppers enjoy low shelving that allows views across the retail floor. Produce bins move on and off the retail floor from cold boxes at the rear of the grocery. A café offers baked goods and other items, as well as dining inside or outside under an outdoor canopy.

Ultimately, the center of the second floor is removed to create a mezzanine level with meeting and classroom space for health and nutrition programs and a view of the co-op space below. Large windows in the warehouse’s south façade transform the co-op into a light-filled atrium space. The vacant lot to the south becomes a community garden and plaza while the vacant lot to the north offers off-street parking buffered by a generous flower and sculpture garden.

All of these design features foster the ultimate goal of the project: to integrate the renovated building into the Chester community retail fabric. CCGC benefits from being the focus of the renovation, but the real beneficiaries are the residents of Chester.

DESIGN STRATEGIES

- Strategically add new elements to repair and refresh façades and convey the co-op’s presence and promise.
- Utilize adjacent vacant parcels to redefine and reconnect the surrounding urban fabric.
- Open up the building, inside and out, to encourage new community engagement and healthy living.



GIRARD AVENUE

URBAN SUPERMARKET



The Charge: Demonstrate that a supermarket can be developed on a complicated urban site while connecting neighborhoods in a diverse context.

“The experience happens before
you even enter the store.”

Leesa Conley, Conley Design, Inc.,
Resource Advisor



N. 31st Street and Girard Avenue
Brewerytown/Fairmount • Philadelphia, PA 19121

**Girard Coalition, Inc. and
Westrum Development Company
Interface Studio Architects**

THE SITE

Girard Coalition is made up of more than 50 neighborhood groups with a mutual interest in revitalizing Girard Avenue. The Coalition has been eager to attract a supermarket to anchor the Brewerytown/Fairmount portion of the commercial corridor and bring fresh produce and groceries back to both communities. The 2.8-acre vacant parcel—triangular, steeply sloped, and with limited Girard Avenue frontage—provides few clues as to how it can help stitch together its diverse context. Although it presents many challenges, the site, owned by Westrum Development Company, appears promising because it is within walking distance to both neighborhoods and is located on a major thru-street.

The site is situated next to the Girard Avenue Bridge and abuts Westrum’s Brewerytown Square development with 144 new townhouses to the north; several old-style row house blocks to the east; and wide, heavily-travelled Girard Avenue to the south. Given the scale and complexity of the site, Interface sought volunteer civil, structural, mechanical, electrical, and plumbing engineering advice from CMX, CVM Engineers, and Bruce E. Brooks and Associates.

THE SOLUTION

The design team proposes a mixed-use development that turns challenging physical attributes into assets. A supermarket, several small stores, and loft housing are organized around a backbone of public circulation that draws people into the heart of the site, creates new gathering places, and reconnects neighborhoods. The overall effect is a new urban precinct that acts as a bridge between existing areas.

From Fairmount, a public plaza at the corner of Girard Avenue and 31st Street draws pedestrians into the development and offers birds-eye views into the supermarket. From Brewerytown, a small plaza at 31st and Thompson Streets acts as a neighborhood threshold.

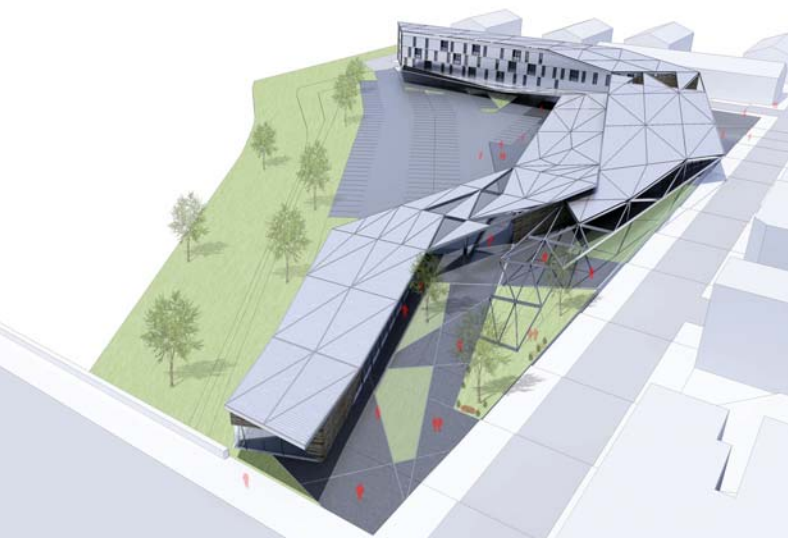
To address the site’s slope, the design team breaks the development into two interconnected layers. The upper layer accommodates the new street-level retail stores and plaza at Girard Avenue. Its roof hovers above the promenade and engages with the lower layer of development—a 35,000 square-foot supermarket and loft housing along the north edge of the site.

Rather than working against the neighborhood’s context with hard edges and a formal layout, the design team imagines the new development as a pavilion on the edge of America’s largest urban green space, Fairmount Park. The project’s design maintains a low-slung, sculptural profile that fits within a context of two- and three-story housing and storefront buildings. Yet it can also be seen as a distinct element within the neighborhood.

Every edge of the site is considered in the design, with Girard Avenue gaining much-needed activity and visibility. The site-driven approach creates not only a new supermarket for the neighborhoods, but a significant urban amenity with distinctive visual characteristics and truly civic spaces. In responding to the immediate neighborhood context, the design team has created a new destination with fresh food access at its center.

DESIGN STRATEGIES

- Break down the “big box” by separating program elements into components that relate to the surrounding context.
- Give pedestrian, transit, and automobile access equal weight.
- Use a public promenade as a unifying element to reconnect neighborhoods and link the elements of the mixed-use project.





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PROJECTS AND PARTICIPANTS

WEAVERS WAY: STOREFRONT REUSE
 Weavers Way Community Programs and
 Ogontz Avenue Revitalization Corporation
 Agoos/Lovera Architects

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 WAREHOUSE CONVERSION**
 The Chester Community Charitable Corporation
 KSS Architects LLP

GIRARD AVENUE: URBAN SUPERMARKET
 Girard Coalition, Inc. and Westrum Development Company
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For more information about Infill Philadelphia, visit: www.infillphiladelphia.org



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Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI)

Community Design Collaborative is a volunteer-based community design center that provides pro bono pre-development design services to nonprofit organizations in greater Philadelphia; promotes best practices in community design and development; and offers design professionals a unique way to volunteer their skills in service of neighborhoods. Founded in 1991 as a program of AIA Philadelphia, the Collaborative is an independent 501(c)(3) with a network of more than 600 volunteers.
www.cdesignc.org

Pennsylvania Fresh Food Financing Initiative (FFFI)
A partnership between the State of Pennsylvania's Department of Community and Economic Development, The Greater Philadelphia Urban Affairs Coalition, The Reinvestment Fund, and The Food Trust, FFFI is a public/private venture that supports the financing needs of supermarket operators that plan to operate in underserved communities where infrastructure costs and credit needs cannot be filled solely by conventional financial institutions. FFFI has put the spotlight on the issue of food access and sparked a powerful dialogue about how to tackle the significant gap in urban and low-income communities.
www.trfund.com/financing/realestate/supermarkets.html



Capital at the point of impact.

The Reinvestment Fund (TRF) is a national leader in the financing of neighborhood revitalization and recognized throughout the Mid-Atlantic region as a progressive, results-oriented, socially responsible community investment group. Combining expert knowledge with innovation and determination, TRF delivers capital where it's needed the most—where it can best transform lives and rebuild neighborhoods.
www.trfund.com



The Food Trust Founded in 1992, The Food Trust is a nonprofit organization working to ensure that everyone has access to affordable, nutritious food. The Food Trust works to educate the public about good nutrition and to increase the availability of fresh food in neighborhoods by working with school districts, supermarket operators, corner store owners, farmers, and policy makers.
www.TheFoodTrust.org