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COMMUNITY DESIGN
• COLLABORATIVE •
BUILDING NEIGHBORHOOD VISIONS

Community Design Collaborative is a volunteer-based community design center that provides pro bono preliminary design services to nonprofit organizations; 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.

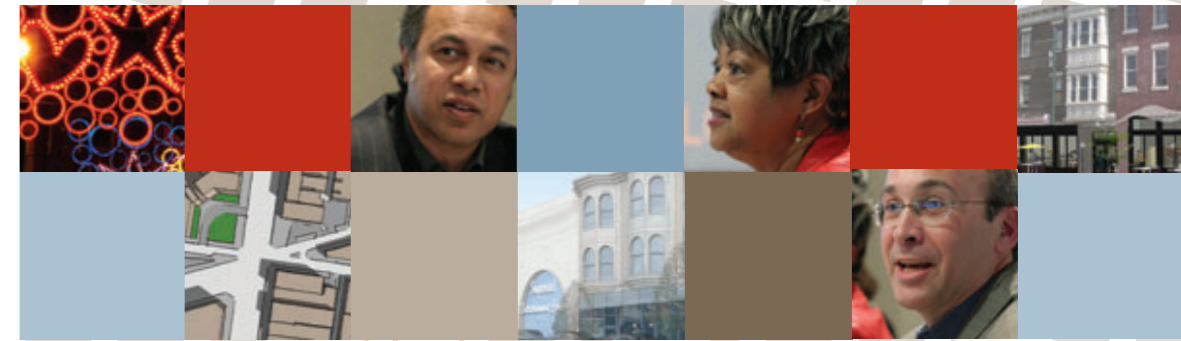


Philadelphia Local Initiatives Support Corporation helps resident-led, community-based development organizations transform distressed communities and neighborhoods into healthy ones—good places to live, do business, work and raise families. By providing capital, technical expertise, training and information, LISC supports the development of local leadership and the creation of affordable housing, commercial, industrial and community facilities, businesses and jobs.

COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS



Revitalizing urban neighborhoods through innovative design.



Sponsored by the **Community Design Collaborative**
in Partnership with
Philadelphia Local Initiatives Support Corporation

A new approach to a common development hurdle in urban neighborhoods...

Infill development sites are best characterized as neglected public spaces and clusters of vacant or nearly-empty buildings and land. Over time, these sites can obstruct community development plans and even threaten neighborhood stability and growth.

The launch of *Infill Philadelphia: Commercial Corridors* comes at a very opportune time. Following decades of rapid decline, commercial corridors are reclaiming the national spotlight and, once again, being recognized for their historic value as essential centers of urban life. And essential they are—bringing neighborhoods together and keeping shoppers and their dollars local.

This promising initiative creatively addresses many of the challenges surrounding infill development through innovative design. The timing is particularly relevant as the launch of this project coincides with the City of Philadelphia's broader plan to step up commercial corridor revitalization. As part of its Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, the city recently launched *ReStore Philadelphia Corridors*, which will direct approximately \$65 million from the recently approved Cultural and Commercial Corridors bond to make commercial corridors more welcoming and to attract and retain businesses.

Infill Philadelphia: Commercial Corridors complements this work perfectly, responding to a widespread desire to rediscover the elements of urban life that make city living exciting and convenient, with central places to shop, work, meet neighbors and enjoy art, culture and nightlife. The initiative demonstrates how inventive design can open up new possibilities while also preserving the wonderful context and fabric of Philadelphia's neighborhoods.

Revitalizing Philadelphia's neighborhoods is critical, and requires diverse expertise and a collective commitment from both the private and public sectors. The success of *Infill Philadelphia: Commercial Corridors* proves how collaboration can generate new ideas and fresh approaches. We are pleased the Community Design Collaborative is lending a unique voice to the process and commend both the Collaborative and Philadelphia LISC for their promising partnership and the collaborative process that gave life to the inventive designs on the pages that follow.

Eva Gladstein
 Director of Neighborhood Transformation
 Office of the Mayor, City of Philadelphia

Infill Philadelphia

Infill Philadelphia, a first-of-its-kind, five year initiative, was launched in January 2007 by the Community Design Collaborative—a nonprofit driven by the philosophy that design matters in every neighborhood. This unique initiative brings together design practitioners, community development experts, policymakers, funders and the media to address urban infill development, a significant neighborhood revitalization strategy for Philadelphia and other older American cities.

The initiative was created to help older communities re-envision their neighborhoods, leverage existing assets, rethink the use of older spaces, and address practical concerns of specific sites and the community. The results will help illustrate how well-designed infill development can renew Philadelphia communities, knit them back together and return a better quality of urban life to more Philadelphians.

Infill Philadelphia uses a design-centered approach that hinges on collaboration and promotes innovation, from start to finish. Guiding the *Infill Philadelphia* approach is an intensive, interactive design process, or "design challenge," in which volunteer design firms simultaneously develop conceptual designs for three real-life sites selected by community-based organizations.

Infill Philadelphia will be implemented in three phases, each addressing a specific type of infill development. The first phase of the initiative focuses on commercial corridors.

Infill Philadelphia: Commercial Corridors

Vibrant commercial corridors have long been indicators of healthy neighborhoods. They have historically served as the centers of neighborhood life, providing residents with access to shopping, jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities. Even today, commercial corridors remain critical "zippers" that bind neighborhoods together and keep resident and business dollars local.

In Philadelphia, after decades of decline, public officials, private developers and local community leaders are placing new emphasis on revitalizing commercial corridors, recognizing their power to promote local investment, keep property values strong, and preserve the social and physical fabric of older neighborhoods.

To ensure the designs created through the first phase of the initiative can move from concept to development, the Collaborative sought out the expertise and support of Philadelphia Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), a national leader in the area of commercial corridor development. The two joined forces and sponsored a design challenge, which explored revitalization projects for three distinct commercial corridors in Philadelphia and result in three highly innovative designs.

Each site represents a different scale of development and a design challenge characteristic of many corridors. Design concepts were developed to respond to each site's unique requirements: converting an existing building into a full-service restaurant, reusing a vacant theater, and enhancing a corridor gateway.

Goals:

Generate workable solutions for under-utilized space in Philadelphia neighborhoods.

Promote systems change by developing exciting ideas that will help Philadelphia leaders rethink the future of the city's neighborhoods.

Foster an understanding of the value of good design among community leaders and developers.

The Design Challenge:

Teams. Three community-based organizations and three volunteer design firms team up to address a site selected by the community-based organization.

Site visits. Each team visits the site and surrounding corridor to better understand its challenges and opportunities.

Juried mid-review. A jury of experts in the fields of design, development, funding, and policy provide feedback to the teams.

Juried public presentation. The firms present final design concepts to the jury and a larger audience.



The Lancaster Avenue elevation of the New Angle Lounge. ■ The Furman family wants to bring a full-service restaurant to the corridor. ■ A sculptural canopy wraps around the building and unifies old and new architectural features.

“What a great way to introduce the corridor—with the windows open, music playing, and a view of the people and the band inside.” —Jim Hartling, *Infill Philadelphia* Juror

At night, activity and light spill out onto Lancaster Avenue.

Lancaster Avenue Commercial Corridor

People’s Emergency Center CDC

CICADA Architecture/ Planning, Inc.

The New Angle: Strategies for a Restaurant Retrofit

Context for Change

The Lancaster Avenue Commercial Corridor cuts a diagonal path across West Philadelphia, north of Market Street. It’s a popular shortcut through West Philadelphia and the route for SEPTA’s #10 trolley, but it can be daunting to cross on foot because of its width, steady traffic and complicated intersections. Wide and heavily traveled, the corridor serves West Powelton and Saunders Park, a mixed-income area with nearly 10,000 residents. While household income and home values are high at the eastern end of the corridor, they dip to the west and south.

The corridor has declined considerably in recent decades, yet it contains many 19th century buildings still rich in original architectural detail. The growing stability of the adjacent neighborhoods, strong community commitment and reinvestment by Presbyterian Medical Center, the University Science Center and University City High School, have presented the corridor with great possibilities for revitalization. Further bolstering the corridor’s potential for change is the fact that it’s located within a five-minute walk of Drexel University and the University of Pennsylvania.

Opportunity for Revitalization

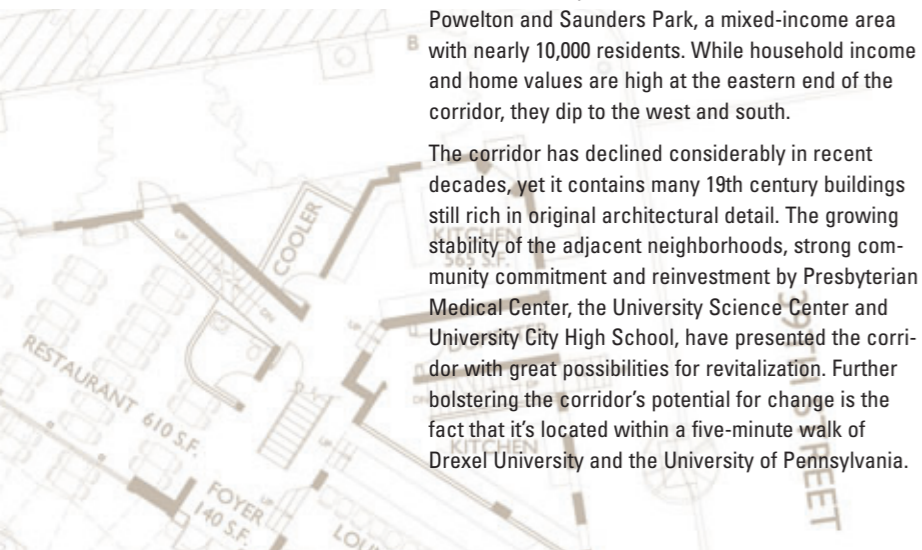
Recently, the section of Lancaster Avenue between 36th and 42nd Street has become the focus of revitalization funding and support through Philadelphia LISC’s Commercial Corridor Revitalization Program, Pennsylvania’s Main Street Program and the People’s Emergency Center Community Development Corporation (PEC-CDC).

The People’s Emergency Center, a social services agency which provides comprehensive services to homeless families, has invested more than \$20 million in the neighborhood over the last ten years through its community development arm. Investments include the development of more than 100 units of affordable housing and several social service facilities. PEC-CDC is a visible leader in the revitalization of Lancaster Avenue, as one of six Philadelphia commercial corridors funded through Pennsylvania’s Main Street Program. Its strategy is to promote mixed-use development, arts-related projects and new retail (especially full-service restaurants) that can add more evening activity and attract a diverse audience from both the neighborhood and nearby institutions.

The Site

LaTonya Furman, second-generation proprietor of the family-owned New Angle Lounge, is inspired by the prospect of the corridor’s renaissance and wants to turn her family’s local taproom into a restaurant and jazz club. The restaurant, Trilogy, would be the Furman family’s third enterprise.

The project site is made up of three separate buildings located on a triangular island block at the intersection of Lancaster Avenue, 39th and Spring Garden Streets. Trilogy’s location at the east gateway to the corridor helps to draw customers from both the surrounding neighborhood residents and nearby institutions.



The Charge: Create a sense of fun and openness on the sidewalk level, enhance the visibility of the new business and the Lancaster Avenue gateway, and reconfigure the existing buildings for reuse as a full-service restaurant.

Design Strategies

- Introduce contemporary elements that complement original architectural features and establish the building as a beacon for the corridor
- Open up the ground floor to reconnect retail with the sidewalk and street
- Combine first floors to create a larger, more marketable retail space

The Design Solution

Central to the team’s design are new, large first-floor windows allowing activity within the restaurant, club and lounge to spill out onto Lancaster Avenue. The windows would provide natural light for lunchtime patrons while illuminating the sidewalk at night.

Glowing vertical signs on the southeast and southwest corners, placed at the acute angles of the building, would make Trilogy stand out as a beacon and provide a counterpoint to its long Lancaster Avenue façade. The jazz stage would occupy the southeast corner, visible from the outside to call attention to the restaurant and club and mark the east gateway for the corridor.

The design calls for the upper stories to be renovated and the finely-detailed existing bays and cornices to be preserved. On the ground floor, a sculptural, curvilinear canopy would wrap around the southeast corner to provide cover for outside seating and a contrast to the restored upper stories. The evanescent quality of this translucent canopy would be accentuated at night by strings of LED lights.

The fluid design of the exterior would extend inside, by opening up the walls separating the three existing structures to allow views to the jazz stage throughout the restaurant. The main entrance would be centered on the Lancaster Avenue facade. The less-visible northern side of the reconfigured building would house the kitchen, with access to an exterior cooler and storage area and a prep kitchen in the basement. Upper floors could be renovated as apartments to generate revenue for the owner.





The Imperial's archway entrance is mid-block, with the main theater space tucked behind four storefronts. ■ The owner of Beans, Greens, and Souful Things, a thriving new business nearby. ■ Restoring the original theater entrance and upper-story bays would preserve the rhythm of the block.

“A design study is a great way to spark interest by property owners and help them reconsider their properties. —Stephanie Scott, The Partnership CDC

An entertainment center would draw neighborhood families to 60th Street.

60th Street Commercial Corridor

The Partnership CDC

Terra Studio, LLC

The Imperial: Strategies for Theater Reuse

Context for Change

The 60th Street Commercial Corridor is located in the heart of Philadelphia's Cobbs Creek neighborhood, extending north to south from Arch to Catherine Streets. This 11-block corridor serves a moderate-income, African-American community where more than two-thirds of households are homeowners. Once a vibrant stretch of busy city blocks, the corridor is now confronting high vacancy—the result of competition from newer retail centers in the nearby suburbs.

Adding to the challenge is the reconstruction of 60th Street Station of the Market-Frankford Line. The corridor has always been a daily destination for SEPTA passengers using the station. However, reconstruction has left it shuttered for several years and today residents make only ten-percent of their purchases along the corridor. Together, these factors have accelerated the corridor's decline.

The Charge: Explore reuse alternatives for a neighborhood theater, consider options for preserving the theater structure and the integrity of the existing block, and reassemble and re-imagine smaller commercial properties to support new, multi-use retail.

Opportunity for Revitalization

60th Street is currently receiving revitalization funding and support through Philadelphia LISC's Commercial Corridor Revitalization program and The Partnership Community Development Corporation (The Partnership CDC), who both recognize the corridor's potential to change. The West Philadelphia Economic Development Strategy, a step-by-step plan for strengthening neighborhoods through the revitalization of major commercial corridors, is instrumental to this change.

Supporting this plan is a redevelopment strategy created for the corridor through a 2003 study funded by Philadelphia's Department of Commerce. The study's recommendations include consolidating the corridor between Arch and Spruce Streets, where nearly two-thirds of the 150 active businesses are clustered. Reinvestment on these blocks can help 60th Street regain its role as a viable, walkable corridor, especially with 60th Street Station's recent reopening.

The Site

The immediate focus for The Partnership CDC is creating an identity for the corridor that reflects the community's African American, Caribbean, Asian and African roots and strengthening retail closest to the station. One of the sites integral to the corridor's revival is the vacant Imperial Theater, located on the 200 block of 60th Street. Constructed in 1914, the Imperial's large, white terra cotta archway anchors the block, with the main theater space tucked behind four adjacent storefront buildings. Remarkably, the upper stories of the Italianate buildings that line the theater block still retain their original architectural character. However, at the ground floor level, the original storefronts have been covered up over the years by wood siding, security grates and small windows.

The team's project site consisted of two parcels—the first comprised of the theater structure and the adjacent storefront buildings and the second combining five additional vacant lots and buildings fronting 60th Street in addition to a partially-occupied warehouse on Chancellor Street. When assembled, the property represents the largest commercial redevelopment opportunity within the corridor.

Design Strategies

- Combine properties to support the adaptive reuse of a signature commercial building
- Selectively preserve architectural elements to maintain the context of the corridor
- Open up the ground floor to the street to encourage activity and public safety

The Design Solution

The repair and preservation of the theater's façade was the team's primary concern because of the historic and social value of the building and its unique presence on 60th Street. Unfortunately, upon closer inspection, the team concluded that there were no interior elements to save. The concept calls for the ground floors of the four adjacent storefront buildings being joined into one, larger retail space with generous windows to the street. The upper story bays and cornices would be restored to protect the integrity of the block.

Two reuse options were explored: mid-rise housing and a family entertainment center. The mid-rise housing option did not support the Partnership CDC's strategy to focus its residential development plans on blocks south of Spruce Street. However, the family entertainment center concept fit perfectly with its goals to re-establish 60th Street as a fun destination while meeting the current needs of neighborhood families.

The new venue would be entered through the historic theater archway, with the main theater space refitted as a roller-skating rink—the anchor attraction. The team's research indicated that successful family entertainment centers rely on multiple attractions, so the team's two conceptual plans demonstrate how the theater building, when combined with adjacent parcels, could accommodate dining and party areas, a snack bar, a softscape play area, a video arcade, an indoor amusement ride and accessory parking on the development site.





The intersection of Broad Street and Passyunk Avenue, looking east. ■ Inside the Avenue—a warm welcome. ■ Colorful lighting over streets in Madrid can be adapted for use on East Passyunk Avenue.

“Unless you are from South Philadelphia, you can’t find Passyunk Avenue easily. Something is needed that says ‘This is Passyunk.’”
—Earni Young, *Infill Philadelphia* Juror

A conceptual plan recommends sidewalk reconfiguration (black); public art (red); mixed-use development (blue), and a combination of façade lighting, over the street lighting, and “urban chandeliers” (yellow) to create an engaging gateway.

East Passyunk Avenue Commercial Corridor

East Passyunk Avenue BID

Brown & Keener Bressi—Urban Design and Place Planning

Broad and Passyunk: Strategies for a Gateway

Context for Change

Passyunk Avenue has long been an integral part of South Philadelphia. Best known as Philadelphia’s signature Italian neighborhood, the community has grown increasingly diverse in recent years with a new generation of homebuyers and a new wave of immigrants.

East Passyunk Avenue runs diagonally across South Philadelphia east of Broad Street and is colorfully marked by several intimate, engaging and walkable intersections. At Federal Street and Passyunk Avenue, neon-lit Pat’s Steaks and Geno’s are outstanding South Philly icons. At Tasker Street and Passyunk Avenue, a new piazza provides a place for special events and a farmer’s market. In stark contrast, East Passyunk’s gateway intersection at Broad Street and Passyunk Avenue is difficult to navigate and lacks the flavor of the rest of corridor.

The Charge: Address vehicle and pedestrian traffic, recapture critical corners and pedestrian space, and extend East Passyunk Avenue’s unique identity all the way to Broad Street to create a strong corridor gateway.

Opportunity for Revitalization

The East Passyunk Avenue Business Improvement District (the BID) extends from Federal Street to Broad Street and includes 150 independent retailers. Customers from both the immediate neighborhood and greater Philadelphia region flock to the corridor seeking great Italian food and famous specialty items.

Organized in 2002, the BID has developed a marketing strategy for the corridor, renovated individual storefronts and built the piazza at Passyunk and Tasker. In addition to a modest revenue stream from the improvement district, the BID receives support through Pennsylvania’s Main Street Program.

Now the BID is looking at the bigger picture. Central to its plans are streetscape improvements to add continuity to the corridor and accentuate key intersections. The leadership of the BID sought preliminary design advice from the Community Design Collaborative to address improvements at Broad and Passyunk.

The Site

Broad and Passyunk is anchored by St. Agnes Hospital, Wachovia Bank and Citizens Bank. Passyunk Avenue bends northward after it crosses Broad Street, effectively cutting off the view of the East Passyunk Commercial Corridor from Broad Street.

Where Broad and Passyunk meet can be confusing, even intimidating, for both drivers and pedestrians due to the present configuration and traffic patterns at this five-point intersection. The sheer width of Broad Street and the setback of buildings at key corners make Broad and Passyunk an unusually sprawling urban space. Older, multi-story structures occupied by Citizens Bank and Verizon hold their corners; but a small lawn maintained by St. Agnes Hospital at the northwest corner of Broad and Passyunk and Wachovia’s one-story, drive-through bank at the northeast corner break up the continuity and sidewalk at the intersection.



Design Strategies

- Create gateways to enhance commercial corridor visibility
- Redesign intersections and public areas to create outdoor amenities and improve the pedestrian experience
- Use the vernacular and neighborhood culture to convey community identity and create a sense of place

The Design Solution

The team recommended re-engineering the Broad and Passyunk intersection to permit left-hand turns by southbound drivers, making the Avenue easier to access. Their design scheme also added bump outs to shorten walking distances for pedestrians crossing Broad Street and slow down drivers entering the East Passyunk Avenue Commercial Corridor. To more effectively use the McKean Street and Passyunk Avenue corner, the team recommended closing a short section of Juniper Street and extending the sidewalk at the point of McKean and Passyunk to create space for public art, plantings or a kiosk.

Because South Philadelphia has a unique vernacular—which includes lights strung over residential streets, bold and playful neon signs, quilted metal building features, and corner buildings wrapped with “skirts”—the team provided examples of how vernacular-inspired lighting and public art installations could be used to tell visitors that “Downtown South Philly” is just around the corner. Lights would be strung over the blocks at the bend in East Passyunk Avenue. More elaborate fixtures, or “urban chandeliers,” could be placed in strategic points to draw the eye towards the corridor. A piece of public art could be placed in the undeveloped St. Agnes parcel on the northwest corner of Broad and Passyunk.

Among the recommendations was a longer-term project: redeveloping the northeast corner of Broad Street and replacing the one-story bank building with a multi-story, mixed-use anchor that provides parking for East Passyunk Avenue and re-establishes the corner.



As directors of the organizations that partnered to create a new dialogue and vision for commercial corridors in Philadelphia, we can confidently report back to our board members, funders and many volunteers that the return on investment for this program is significant. The hours and dollars spent to bring this idea to life have been well worth the commitment.

The design professionals, community development leaders and jury members who gave hours from their over-extended schedules to participate have told us the same—time well committed. Not all volunteer experiences give you the opportunity to use your creative talents, meet new people who can enrich your professional and personal lives, and learn—all while giving time and talent to contribute to Philadelphia’s future success.

While this publication summarizes the fruits of everyone’s efforts in this first stage, we want to stress the value of partnerships and collaborations in our closing message. This program would not be successful if it weren’t for the many different volunteers, organizations and funders coming together to brainstorm ideas and create concepts that can be taken to scale—and ultimately developed.

Infill Philadelphia: Commercial Corridors is just the beginning of an initiative with plans to develop two more components over the next few years. We’re only now beginning to realize the impact that this program can have in Philadelphia, and we are hopeful that even more potential partners and volunteers will contribute their great ideas and energy to Philadelphia’s growth and prosperity.



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