

cheltenham township / northwest philadelphia joint planning initiative

cheltenham avenue

*a plan
for
bridging
the
communities*



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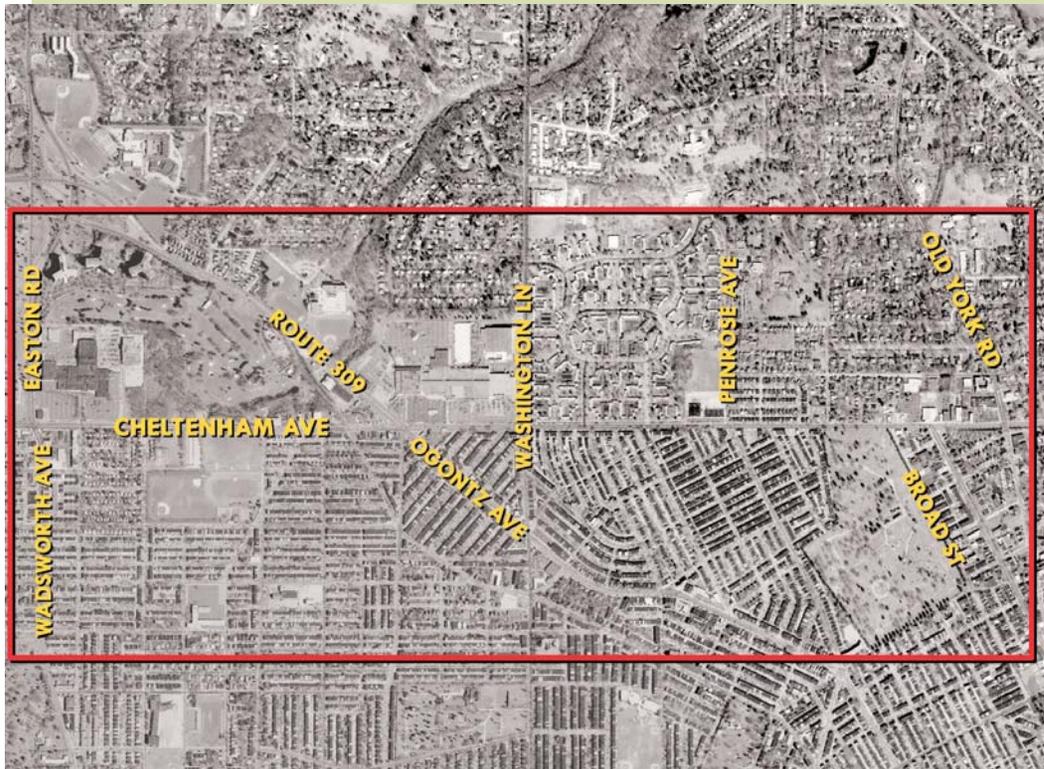
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As part of a wider look at improving municipal cooperation between the City of Philadelphia and Cheltenham Township, this study focuses on the principle commercial corridor of Cheltenham Avenue and adjacent commercial nodes, between Easton Road and North Broad Street. The Avenue here plays many roles: its location marks the political boundary between Philadelphia and Cheltenham, its four-lane, cross-section forms a major transportation arterial, and with two shopping malls and large commercial strips, it contains one of the densest concentrations of retail businesses in the area.



Cheltenham Avenue study area

Yet the corridor has been slow to attract new high-quality retailers, the public environment is in poor condition, and pedestrian safety is a major issue. Moreover, the wide difference in development controls in each community has led to uneven growth. However, the time for change is ripe. Opportunities exist for more intensive development at major intersections and within retail shopping center parking lots that are often oversized for the retail uses. Furthermore, with several development and planning efforts underway, including the "Fairways" residential development of the Cedarbrook Country Club, and PennDOT's transportation improvements for Route 309, a comprehensive vision for a renewed Cheltenham Avenue is well-timed.

project approach

The project to create an effective plan for improving Cheltenham Avenue consists of three phases. This document is the major thrust of Phase 1, which consists of recommendations to address the physical issues and create uniform development controls along the corridor. Phase 2 will focus on a plan for creating a special services district along the Avenue. Finally, Phase 3 will examine nearby neighborhood retail centers.

the cheltenham avenue corridor

towards a plan for cheltenham avenue

The next decade will bring significant change to Cheltenham Avenue corridor. Already, there are several major private developments under construction or being planned:

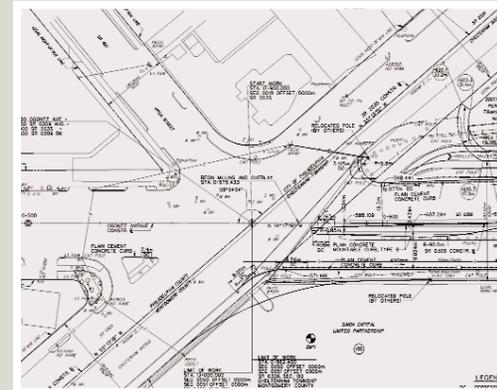
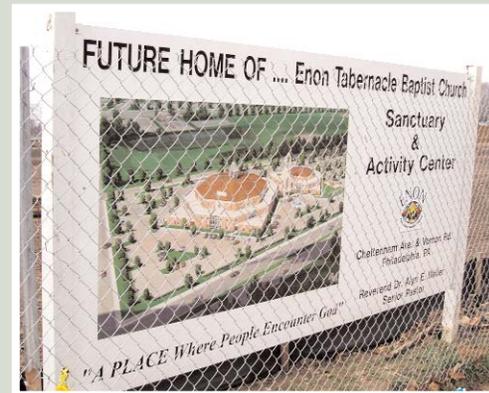
- ◆ 198 townhouses and possibly a hotel around a reconfigured executive course at Cedarbrook Golf Course.
- ◆ Two large pad retail developments at Cedarbrook Shopping Center, including an Old Country Buffet, and a clothing store.
- ◆ A 3,000+ seat church for Enon Tabernacle Baptist at the former Temple University practice field.
- ◆ \$20 million worth of investment in grounds and buildings of Lynnewood Gardens apartments.
- ◆ The removal of the Tyler School of Art to Temple University's main campus.
- ◆ Investment in lower Ogontz Avenue, including the Ogontz Grill restaurant.

In addition, several public initiatives and investments are occurring along or near the corridor:

- ◆ PennDOT's reconstruction of Rt. 309, including roadway realignment, intersection improvements, and the addition of sidewalks to link Easton Road at Cheltenham Avenue with downtown Glenside.
- ◆ Cheltenham's completed update of their Comprehensive Plan, adopted February 15, 2005.
- ◆ Public investments in northwest Philadelphia, including new charter schools and changes to MLK High School.
- ◆ Pennsylvania's TRID legislation, which allows for stronger mechanisms for investment in transit-oriented development.

There is also anecdotal evidence of commercial investment in the area, as several banks and restaurants have expressed interest about locating on Cheltenham or Ogontz Avenue and reinvestment in neighborhood housing, as stories about families "moving back" abound.

Clearly, the time is right for a comprehensive planning effort along the Avenue. This plan seeks to create an overall framework for development, in



Various development and public investment efforts along the corridor are currently underway

cheltenham avenue planning concepts

Overall, the concept behind the plan is to improve and expand commercial uses along the corridor in order to create a series of vibrant retail destinations that attract high-quality investment and better serve the area's diverse market. To achieve this, the following planning strategies will be implemented:

- ◆ Focus investment at key areas along the corridor where the largest concentrations of commercial uses already exist.
- ◆ Connect the two sides of the Avenue at these key areas so that City and Township commercial corridors may mutually benefit.
- ◆ Densify these key areas, by encouraging infill development of oversized parking lots and redevelopment of underutilized properties. Encourage mixed-use development where possible.
- ◆ Weave transit and pedestrian facilities intimately into the key areas to support a multi-modal experience and create a sensation of "place."
- ◆ Beautify the Avenue with landscaping and streetscaping, while tidying up the visual chaos that currently exists. Implement these aesthetic and streetscape improvements along the length of Cheltenham Avenue.

key areas

The plan focuses effort along the Cheltenham Avenue corridor at five key areas:

- 1 Cheltenham at 309/Ogontz Ave
- 2 Cheltenham at Easton Road
- 3 Cheltenham at Penrose Ave
- 4 Ogontz Ave at Washington Lane
- 5 Vernon Road

The remainder of this report concerns specific plans for these key areas and general implementation strategies.



cheltenham ave at route 309 / ogontz ave

The heavily-trafficked intersection of Rt. 309 and Cheltenham Avenue, and surrounding area is the largest and most complex of the key areas. It should be the priority area for investment as it serves as a regional center as well as a major gateway into both communities. Any improvements here will have spillover effects along the rest of Cheltenham and Ogontz Avenues.



site analysis

Several issues are factors in any planning effort in this key area:

- Cheltenham Square Mall is aging and has some potentially weak anchors. The mall's management has noted that up to 15% of its traffic comes from pedestrians and SEPTA riders, yet the mall is far from the street and surrounded by large amounts of under-used parking areas or lots.



Parking oversupply existing conditions.

cheltenham ave at route 309 / ogontz ave



Vehicle / pedestrian conflicts

- ◆ The intersection encourages rapid automobile movements and is extremely hazardous to pedestrian movements, despite the large numbers of pedestrians in the area.
- ◆ The SEPTA bus transfer site is a major transit link to and from the nearby job and shopping opportunities, but it occupies a prominent corner location that could be a useful redevelopment site. The transferring operation should be more intimately tied into the key site, creating a real opportunity for transit oriented development.
- ◆ The intersection is a major gateway into the City and Township, and while gateway signs exist, they are completely overshadowed by the many large billboards, freestanding signs, and other visual clutter.
- ◆ There are some problematic retail uses and poor building conditions along Cheltenham Avenue to the west of the intersection, including a nightclub, some forlorn buildings, and a church complex that has taken over a variety of buildings that once housed businesses.



Problematic retail uses



Visual clutter dominates gateway

goals

The goal for this key site is to create a real regional "center", identified and marketed as a distinct place, with transit as a hub of development. Strategies for doing this include densely developing the intersection, creating strong pedestrian and transit linkages across the main roads and between retail areas, and beautifying the area with new street trees, lights, banners, landscaping, and façade improvements to existing buildings.



cheltenham ave at route 309 / ogontz ave

the intersection

Specific actions for the intersection of Route 309 and Cheltenham Avenue are listed below:

Street geometry improvements:

- ◆ Construct a small slip lane from southbound Rt. 309 to westbound Cheltenham Ave.
- ◆ Remove the right turn-only lane on westbound Cheltenham Avenue to calm traffic and provide room for a widened sidewalk and curbside planting strip.
- ◆ Extend curbs at the main crossing points on Cheltenham Avenue to calm traffic and facilitate easier pedestrian crossings.
- ◆ Paint prominent crosswalks to create safe pedestrian crossings.
- ◆ Create pull-off lanes for buses making stops at the intersection.

Transit improvements:

- ◆ Move SEPTA bus transfer activities to two places - the 22 and 80 buses would intersect the other routes at the intersection; while the terminating routes would continue to a new bus transfer center within the mall parking lot (see below).
- ◆ Create pull-off lanes for buses making stops at the intersection.
- ◆ Construct well-lit, well-buffered waiting areas at the intersection's bus stops, featuring attractive shelters and easily-understood transfer information.

Development

- ◆ The removal of the SEPTA bus transfer activity from its current location will create a valuable corner development site, perfect for an 18,000 SF retail and/or office site and parking lot. An attractive building, close to the curblines, will help "close in" the wide spaces around the intersection.
- ◆ Center infill development of the Cheltenham Mall's parking lot on a new "street", thus creating a prominent link between the mall's entrance and the major intersection crossing to the retail on Ogontz Avenue.
- ◆ Create a central green space, "Cheltenham Square", to serve as the focal point for the "town center" and be a visual invitation to pedestrians and passing automobile traffic.
- ◆ Redevelop on the Philadelphia side to replace dilapidated retail buildings along Cheltenham Avenue and Ogontz Avenue with attractive new mixed-use buildings, with apartments or condos above retail or office uses. Place parking in the rear to emphasize the pedestrian qualities along the street.



Mall parking lot before



Mall parking lot after improvements.

cheltenham ave at route 309 / ogontz ave

Streetscape Improvements

- ▶ Plant trees throughout the Mall area to beautify, shade, and green the large parking lots. Build sidewalks where safe pedestrian paths are needed.
- ▶ Create planting strips along all prominent streets to act as a buffer for pedestrians, and to allow the planting and growth of street trees.
- ▶ Implement a joint City and Township facade improvement program to encourage property owners to upgrade existing building facades and storefronts. Awning specifications, architectural details, appropriate colors and materials, and appropriate window and door treatments on historic buildings should be outlined in a set of guidelines.
- ▶ Create sign ordinances to limit the amount and size of signage. Billboards, rooftop signs, and free-standing signs should not be permitted.
- ▶ Encourage outdoor cafes and retail use of the sidewalk.



Cheltenham Ave. at Route 309 / Ogontz Ave. site plan: intersection detail



Ogontz Avenue gateway existing conditions



Ogontz Avenue gateway after improvements.

cheltenham ave at route 309 / ogontz ave

parking lot infill

Specific actions for the Cheltenham Square Mall parking lot are listed below:

South parking lot development:

- Develop several retail pad sites available along Cheltenham Avenue. These developments should face the Avenue and be close to the curbline to encourage pedestrian activity and animate the street.

West parking lot development:

- Terminate SEPTA's XH, C, H, and 6 buses at a specially-designed facility near the supermarket loading docks. Most of the transfer activity and bus idling should occur here in an attractive, well-lit, well-landscaped amenity with clear schedule and transfer information available. Depending on the character of development of parking areas to the north, there may also be potential for a park-and-ride destination.
- If needed in the future, expand parking opportunities with a parking deck along Rt. 309 at the grade change between the supermarket and Burlington Coat Factory.

North parking lot development:

- The vast unused parking area behind the Mall presents the best opportunity for large-scale infill development. Possibilities include an office park, medical complex, and possibly apartment buildings or age-restricted residences, or a combination of these. Pedestrian connections with the relocated SEPTA bus transfer center and the Mall are vital to reinforce the concept of a walkable "town center".



Cheltenham Ave. at Route 309 / Ogontz Ave. site plan: west and north parking lot detail

cheltenham avenue at limekiln pike

Specific actions for the township side of Cheltenham Avenue, west of Limekiln Pike follow:

Redevelopment:

- ◆ Encourage Bethel Deliverance Church, which currently owns most of the properties here, to relocate to another site. Possible sites include the Faith Theological Seminary or the (soon-to-be-emptied) Tyler School of Art, as these sites are handsome, large and already tax-exempt.
- ◆ Explore several redevelopment possibilities for the then-vacated parcels. As a reflection of existing uses across the Avenue, residential apartments or townhouses make the most sense, and would capitalize from the views of the Cedarbrook Golf Course. Another possibility is the relocation of many of the township's functions to this site, as it would be centrally located and already mostly tax-exempt. Retail uses are another suggestion, and would be tax-ratable.

Streetscape improvements

- ◆ Set any new development back from the Avenue by 60 feet to match the opposite side and provide a transition from the dense area to the east and the golf course and wooded area further west.
- ◆ Create planting strips along Cheltenham Avenue to act as a buffer for pedestrians, and to allow the planting and growth of street trees.



Cheltenham Ave. at Route 309 / Ogontz Ave. site plan: west of Limekiln Pike detail

cheltenham ave at route 309 / ogontz ave

ogontz avenue

Specific actions for Ogontz Avenue, just south of Cheltenham Avenue:

Redevelopment:

- Redevelop the several underutilized properties along this section of Ogontz Avenue, particularly the auto repair places between 78th and 79th Avenues.
- Construct new construction as mixed use, with apartments above retail or office space, and of a scale similar to the other 2-3 story buildings along Ogontz Ave.
- Place new construction close to the curb, but far enough back to preserve the generous sidewalk widths here. Place parking in the rear whenever possible.

Streetscape improvements

- Create planting strips along all prominent streets to act as a buffer for pedestrians, and to allow the planting and growth of street trees.
- To help create a more inviting passage into Philadelphia, add attractive, pedestrian-scale lighting along Ogontz Avenue.
- Implement a façade improvement program to encourage property owners to upgrade existing building facades and storefronts. Awning specifications, architectural details, appropriate colors and materials, and appropriate window and door treatments on historic buildings should be outlined in a set of guidelines.
- Create sign ordinances to limit the amount and size of signage. Billboards, rooftop signs, and free-standing signs should not be permitted.
- Encourage outdoor cafes and retail use of the sidewalk.



Cheltenham Ave. at Route 309 / Ogontz Ave. site plan: Ogontz Avenue detail

implementation

Recommended Zoning Changes and Design Controls

Existing zoning differs widely between the Cheltenham Township and city side of Cheltenham Avenue in this target area. On the Cheltenham Township side of the Avenue, Cheltenham Square Mall is zoned C2 Commercial. This zoning classification is designed to encourage large-scale automobile-oriented retail centers with parking between the buildings and street. Residential uses are not permitted. Minimum front yard setbacks of 40 ft. are required, with a 15 ft. landscaped buffer zone between the street lot line and parking. Minimum lot size is 30,000 sq.ft. The area between Rt. 309, Limeklin Pike and Cheltenham Avenue is also zoned C2, except for the Walgreens parcel, which is zoned C4. The C4 zone permits similar uses to the C2 zone, but there is no minimum lot size. The area fronting Cheltenham Avenue in Cheltenham Township, west of Limeklin Pike is zoned C3. The C3 zone permits a wider range of uses, including offices, institutions, and single-family and 2 family dwellings. However, multi-family residential is not permitted. As with the C2 and C4 zones, a 15' wide landscaped setback is required between parking and the street lot line. In Cheltenham Township, retail space and offices require 1 parking space per 200 sq.ft. leasable area.

To encourage the higher intensity, high quality mixed-use development envisaged in the planning concept, modifications to the existing zoning in Cheltenham should be considered, through an overlay or other means that might include the following:

- ◆ Include multi-family dwellings as a permitted use throughout the target area.
- ◆ Reduce setbacks from a minimum 40' to a 15' maximum from the street line, where buildings front public streets.
- ◆ Prohibit parking lots between the building and street where buildings front a public street.

- ◆ Reduce required commercial parking requirements from 5 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft. to 3 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft.
- ◆ Reduce residential parking requirement to 1 space per unit.
- ◆ Reduce minimum lot size of 30,000 sq.ft.

Establishment of design guidelines for new buildings and rehabilitation is particularly important in a pedestrian oriented environment, where design details are more exposed to close up public view. Design guidelines should cover such issues as:

- ◆ Limitations on blank facades, facing public streets, through requirements for a minimum percentage of fenestration.
- ◆ Requirements for horizontal and vertical articulation of building facades facing streets.
- ◆ Minimum requirements for quality of façade materials.
- ◆ Requirements for building details, including awnings, lighting and plantings.
- ◆ Guidelines for signage that reflect a pedestrian scale and orientation, including guidelines relating to size and materials.
- ◆ Requirements for landscaping, including survey of service areas.

On the City of Philadelphia side of Cheltenham Avenue/Route 309 development area, parcels are generally zoned C2, neighborhood commercial. The Philadelphia C2 zone permits a mix of uses on small lots, and there are no parking requirements.

cheltenham ave at route 309 / ogontz ave

As in Cheltenham Township, to encourage the higher intensity, higher quality mixed-use development envisioned in the planning concept, modifications to the existing zoning should be considered, through an overlay or other means that address the following:

- ◆ Prohibit parking between the building and public street.
- ◆ Include design guidelines that address character of new development and building improvements.
- ◆ Include design guidelines for improvement of building signage.

The goals of the recommended zoning modifications in both the City and Township will be to:

- ◆ Encourage a mix of residential, commercial and office development close to transit stops, to encourage pedestrian activity
- ◆ Discourage automobile-oriented building uses
- ◆ Include design standards that create a scale and character for the new development that contributes to a pedestrian-friendly environment

Acquisition

In the City of Philadelphia, in contrast to Cheltenham Township where larger lots predominate, consolidation of existing small parcels will be required to implement the proposed plan. The Philadelphia portion of the Cheltenham Avenue/Route 309 development area is located within the West Oak Lane redevelopment area. The Philadelphia City Planning Commission has prepared a Blight Certification for the area bounded by Ivy Hill, Broad Street, Cheltenham Avenue, and Stenton Avenue, as well as the West Oak Lane (WOC) Redevelopment Area Plan. Properties are potentially eligible for publicly assisted acquisition. Assembly of parcels for redevelopment will require acquisition and relocation of existing businesses. While most properties may be acquired through negotiation, publicly assisted acquisition through eminent domain may be required to consolidate larger development parcels. A high priority will be acquisition of the number of billboards that

detract from the appearance of this important gateway to Philadelphia. New billboards are not legal under the C2 zoning. A detailed inventory of billboards should be completed to determine that all existing billboards are in fact legal. Funds should be identified to acquire the legal billboards through negotiation or eminent domain.

Streetscape Improvements

Publicly funded streetscape improvements to foster pedestrian activity will support private investment in the Cheltenham Avenue/Route 309 project area. Road improvements to Route 309 north of Cheltenham Avenue will be completed under the PennDOT funded Rt. 309 improvement project. Improvements to the intersection of Cheltenham Avenue, Route 309/Ogontz Avenue, and Upsal Street will be included under this Rt. 309 project. The construction also promotes pedestrian mobility by installing sidewalks in some of the project area.

Work will include streetscape improvements along both sites and Cheltenham Avenue between Vernon Road and Washington Lane, a distance of 3,200 feet or over a half mile. Proposed streetscape improvements include new curbs and sidewalks, new consistent street lighting on both the city and Cheltenham Avenue sides of the Avenue, and street tree plantings. Sidewalks will be extended at key intersections to shorten pedestrian crossing distances. Sidewalks will also be extended across asphalt paved driveways to assert pedestrian priority over vehicles. The cost for these improvements would be approximately \$3.0 m.

Work will also include streetscape improvements on Ogontz Avenue from Cheltenham Avenue to 79th Avenue, a distance of approximately 600 feet. Improvements would include new lighting, street trees, curbs and sidewalks, and gateway signage. Estimated cost of improvements would be approximately \$600,000.

State and federal capital funds should be sought to implement these improvements.

TRID Designation and TRID Plan Funding

This key area, with its redevelopment centered on transit as outlined above, is ripe for TRID designation. Signed into law in December, Pennsylvania House Bill 994 established the Transit Revitalization Investment District Act (TRID). The legislation allows public transportation agencies, including SEPTA, to partner with local municipalities to create TRIDs within an area (generally 1/4 to 1/2 mile) around a rail or transit station in order to foster transit oriented development or redevelopment within the community, as well as promote public transportation improvements. This district, called the "value capture area", is permitted to retain any increased tax revenues from real estate development within the district, to be used for funding the development and needed infrastructure improvements. The steps toward TRID designation are as follows:

1) Working together, the local transit authority, municipal government, and the county designate an area around a transit station under consideration for a TRID. The municipality and transit authority enter into an agreement that defines the activities and financial commitments of each party.

2) A TRID planning study must then be completed to determine exact boundaries and parcels included in the TRID. The study also considers the need for improvements to transit and public infrastructure, as well as opportunities for private sector real estate development or redevelopment. The study must also describe the ways in which improvements, services, and development will be financed through the increments in tax revenues from the properties. The study must involve a number of participants, including the transit authority, the municipal governments, and the counties involved. Typically, Business Improvement Districts, redevelopment authorities, and the public are involved as well. Multi-municipal approaches are highly encouraged. Up to \$75,000 is available from DCED for TRID planning studies, with a 25% match from the participating municipalities. The township, on behalf of the intermunicipal planning effort, could also consider

sponsoring a grant application from DVRPC under the Transportation and Community Development Initiative (TCDI) to undertake a feasibility planning study for relocating the SEPTA facilities and creating a TRID district.

3) Once the planning study has been completed and approved by the municipalities, the TRID is implemented through addition to the municipal comprehensive plan, and the transit authority gains the land acquisition powers needed to implement the plan. A local manager is designated to oversee dispersal of the tax revenues, as well as construction and maintenance of improvements. A Business Improvement District, with municipal oversight, may act as manager.

In the case of the Cheltenham and Route 309/Ogontz Avenue key area, it is recommended that a TRID be established to include the Cheltenham Mall, the current SEPTA bus depot site, and the parcels lining the south side of Cheltenham Avenue designated for redevelopment by the above plan.

cheltenham ave at easton rd / wadsworth ave

This key area looks at the intersection of Cheltenham and Wadsworth Avenues, including the Cedarbrook Plaza and Wadsworth commercial district. Implementing changes here would be fairly easy because of the few landowners involved, and would benefit the entire retail district south to Michener Avenue.



site analysis

Several issues are factors in any planning effort in this key area:

- ◆ Cedarbrook Plaza is separated from the pedestrian-scaled Wadsworth Avenue retail by its large parking lots and a significant grade change at Cheltenham Avenue.



Separation of retail districts

cheltenham ave at easton rd / wadsworth ave



Auto-oriented creep on Wadsworth Ave



Intersection design encourages dangerous speeds and turning movements

- ◆ With its many slip lanes and large lane size, the intersection encourages rapid automobile movements and is extremely hazardous to pedestrian movements, despite the large numbers of pedestrians in the area.
- ◆ Auto-oriented retail is creeping down Wadsworth Avenue, disturbing its older, pedestrian-friendly mixed-use fabric.
- ◆ The intersection draws a sizable number of transit users, yet there are no shelters or other transit facilities.



Lack of pedestrian and transit facilities

cheltenham ave at easton rd / wadsworth ave

site plan

Street geometry improvements:

- ◆ Construct curb extensions at the main intersection to calm traffic and facilitate easier pedestrian crossings.
- ◆ Paint prominent crosswalks to create safe pedestrian crossings.
- ◆ Install signage declaring pedestrians have the right of way.

Transit improvements:

- ◆ Construct well-lit, well-buffered waiting areas at the intersection's bus stops, featuring attractive shelters and easily-understood route and schedule information.

Development

- ◆ Center infill development of the Cedarbrook Plaza parking lot on a new "street," creating a prominent pedestrian and visual link between the mall and the intersection. The existing Hollywood Video would form part of this development.
- ◆ On the Philadelphia side, redevelop the parcels between the new Dunkin Donuts and the CVS on the east side of Wadsworth. Replace the current strip of stores with a new 2-3 story building that lines Wadsworth Avenue with retail and offers apartments above. This will serve to reinforce the pedestrian friendliness of Wadsworth Avenue and visually reinforce the new connection to Cedarbrook Plaza.
- ◆ Consolidate the parking area internal to this block into a shared parking lot with several entrances and exits. Excess space could support a small multi-family residential development and a small playground shared by residents of Mt. Airy Arms.

Streetscape and façade improvements

- ◆ Plant street trees throughout the Cedarbrook Plaza shopping center to beautify, shade, and green the large parking lots. The collector roads within the parking lot should be narrowed to slow traffic and accommodate wider sidewalks.
- ◆ Implement a façade improvement program to encourage property owners to upgrade existing building facades and storefronts. Awning specifications, architectural details, appropriate colors and materials, and appropriate window and door treatments on historic buildings should be outlined in a set of guidelines.
- ◆ Create sign ordinances to limit the amount and size of signage. Billboards, rooftop signs, and free-standing signs should not be permitted.
- ◆ Encourage outdoor cafes along Wadsworth Avenue and retail use of the sidewalk.

implementation

Recommended Zoning Changes

In Cheltenham Township, Cedarbrook Plaza is zoned C2, Commercial. As for Cheltenham Square Mall, this zoning classification is designed to encourage large-scale automobile-oriented retail with parking between the buildings and street. Minimum lot size is 30,000 sq.ft. Five parking spaces per 1,000 sq.ft. of retail are required.

New development is proposed within the mall parking area. Modifications to the existing zoning, through a zoning overlay or other means, will be required to accommodate the proposed development. These modifications should include reduction in the commercial parking requirement from 5 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft. to 3 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft. Design guidelines will also be required to assure that the scale, and character of the proposed development is consistent with creating a pedestrian-friendly link between Cheltenham Avenue at Easton Road, and the Cedarbrook Plaza entrance.

Within the city, the Wadsworth Avenue section of the target area is zoned C2. Modifications to the zoning code should be considered similar to those discussed for Cheltenham Avenue at Ogontz Avenue, including:

- ◆ Prohibition on parking lots between the buildings and public street for new development.
- ◆ Development and detail design guidelines for new construction and rehabilitation that address building materials, signage, storefront windows, and landscaping.

Acquisition

In the city of Philadelphia, in contrast to Cheltenham Township where larger lots predominate, consolidation of existing small parcels will be required to implement the proposed plan. Wadsworth Avenue is included in the west Oak Lane Redevelopment Area Plan, and properties are potentially eligible for publicly assisted acquisition. On the Cheltenham side, the cooperation of the owners of Cedarbrook Plaza will be necessary for implementation.

Streetscape Improvements

Publicly funded streetscape improvements will foster pedestrian activity and support private reinvestment in the Cedarbrook Plaza area. The target area work will include streetscape improvements along both sides of Cheltenham Avenue between Gowen Avenue and Pleasant Avenue, a distance of 1,800 feet. Improvements will include modifications to the intersection of Cheltenham Avenue and Easton Road to shorten pedestrian crossing distances, and slow traffic. Other improvements will include new curbs and sidewalks, pedestrian crosswalks, consistent new street lighting on both sides of the Avenue and street tree planting. Estimated cost of improvements will be about \$2 m.

Within the City of Philadelphia streetscape improvements are proposed on Wadsworth Avenue, between Michener Avenue and Cheltenham Avenue, a distance of 1,200 l.ft. Estimated cost of improvements is approximately \$1 m. State and federal funds will be sought for these improvements.

cheltenham ave at penrose ave

This key area focuses improvements at the intersection of Cheltenham and Penrose Avenues, including the Korean owned shopping center on the northwest corner and the small blocks of retail on the Philadelphia side of the Avenue. One benefit would include the strengthening of the image of the historic LaMott community, which served as Pennsylvania's only Civil War recruitment center and training camp for black Union soldiers.

site analysis

Several issues are important factors in this key area:

- ◆ The small Korean shopping center has had many problems concerning signage and property maintenance. It also has a large unused parking area behind it.
- ◆ There are several underutilized commercial sites on the Philadelphia side, particularly to the west of 19th Street.
- ◆ The former theater site offers a large convenient parcel for infill development.



Signage and maintenance issues

cheltenham ave at penrose ave

goals

The goal for this key site is to create a neighborhood-scale retail center that could serve as historic LaMott's "village visitor's center" and allow an opportunity to showcase local initiatives, interpretation and historic and cultural events concerning the history of the district, in accordance with the local management and preservation alternatives listed in the U.S. Department of the Interior National Park Services's, "Feasibility Study of Historic LaMott", dated September 1988. Strategies for doing this include creating strong pedestrian links across Cheltenham Avenue, infill development of vacant lots and excess parking areas, redevelopment of underperforming properties, and beautifying the area with new street trees, lights, banners, landscaping, and façade improvements to existing buildings.



site plan

The site plan detailing the proposal for Cheltenham at Penrose Avenue and includes the following:

Street geometry improvements:

- ◆ Reconstruct the intersection across from Andrews Avenue to bring the parking entrance/exit and the Lynnewood Gardens access road out at a single point.
- ◆ Extend curbs at the main intersections to calm traffic and facilitate easier pedestrian crossings.
- ◆ Paint prominent crosswalks to create safer pedestrian crossings.

Shopping center infill and redevelopment:

- ◆ Retain the existing grocery store for its landmark tower, but facilitate façade improvements.
- ◆ Redevelop the eastern strip of shops, creating a 2-3 story building that better addresses the street, with ground floor retail and residential or office uses above. Parking should be placed in the rear.
- ◆ Create a small "LaMott Plaza" in the front of the new building to act as a central focus for the LaMott area. This site could also house interpretative signage describing the unique history of the LaMott neighborhood.
- ◆ Develop a new street and row of twin houses at the rear of the property of a scale similar to other LaMott houses, capitalizing on proximity to Russell Park.

City-side infill and redevelopment:

- ◆ Using the former theater site and the auto repair shop to the east, develop a 2-3 story building with a 20-foot setback and parking in the rear.

The building should be mixed-use, with retail on the ground floor and apartments or offices above.

- ◆ Rehabilitate the existing retail on the west side of 19th Street to address the street better with a more attractive façade.

Streetscape and façade improvements

- ◆ Plant street trees along Cheltenham Avenue and the new "street" next to Russell Park.
- ◆ Implement a façade improvement program to encourage property owners to upgrade existing building facades and storefronts. Awning specifications, architectural details, appropriate colors and materials, and appropriate window and door treatments on historic buildings should be outlined in a set of guidelines.
- ◆ Create sign ordinances to limit the amount and size of signage. Billboards, rooftop signs, and free-standing signs should not be permitted.
- ◆ Encourage outdoor cafes and retail use of the sidewalk.

cheltenham ave at penrose ave

implementation

Implementation Recommended Zoning Changes

The redevelopment parcel on the Cheltenham Township side of the area is zoned C3, Commercial. While the C3 zone permits a range of commercial, and institutional uses it does not permit multi-family mixed-use development as envisaged on the concept plan. To encourage the development consistent with the planning concept, modifications to the existing zoning should be considered through a zoning overlay or other means that might include the following:

- ◆ Include multi-family dwellings as part of a mixed-use development as a permitted use.
- ◆ Prohibit parking between the building and street line for any new development.
- ◆ Include design controls that address issues and building scale, materials, facade articulation, fenestration, etc., as well as building signage.
- ◆ Reduce parking requirements from 5 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft. to 3 spaces per 1,000 sq.ft.
- ◆ Reduce residential parking requirement to 1 space per unit.

Streetscape Improvements

Streetscape improvements are proposed for both sides of Cheltenham Avenue between Andrews Avenue and Easton Road, a distance of approximately 1,500 feet. Improvements will include widening of sidewalks at the intersection of Cheltenham Avenue and Penrose Avenue/19th Street, as well as new curbs and sidewalks, crosswalks, street tree planting, and consistent

street lighting treatments. Budget cost of improvements would be approximately \$1 m. As for the Rt. 309 and Easton Road target areas, state and federal funds will be sought for these improvements.

Programming the Site

Since part of the plan's goal is to create a visible center for the LaMott neighborhood in which to showcase the area's unique history, programming the new plaza will be important for creating awareness of this area. The township should work with local historians to design and create interpretive signage for the plaza, with funding available from local history groups as well as the Philadelphia and Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureaus. Area school groups, living history groups, and amateur residents should be brought in to create a series of activities centered on historic themes.

ogontz avenue at washington lane

The quality of the buildings, land uses, and physical infrastructure of the Ogontz Avenue and Washington Lane commercial corridors has gradually declined over the past three decades. The parts of these commercial corridors examined in this section consist of many small and odd-shaped parcels, many of which, over time, have become occupied with auto-repair shops and gas stations. While they provide important services to the thousands of motorists that pass through the corridors every day, these businesses are located very close to libraries, churches, medical offices, and homes, and their design conflicts with the corridors' pedestrian-oriented fabric.



site analysis

Several issues are important factors in this key area:

- ◆ The parking lot on Ogontz Avenue is underutilized and provides more space than is needed for the pharmacy. Part of this lot can be used for development.
- ◆ The vacant building on Ogontz Avenue presents a redevelopment opportunity.
- ◆ Most of the newer development in this area consists of auto-related businesses whose sites were configured for automobiles, not pedestrians. They are also the most visible buildings in the area and serve as unattractive, de facto gateways into the community.



The U-Haul site offers an infill development possibility

ogontz avenue at washington lane

goals

The proposed redevelopment scenario is designed to strengthen the Ogontz Avenue/ Washington Lane "triangle" as a mixed-use neighborhood center. This will help enhance this area as a node for community activities, building on the church, library, medical offices, and shops. New housing will create synergies with these retail and community uses. The plan complements this concentration of neighborhood services in a more attractive, pedestrian-friendly environment, while also providing sufficient on-site parking to support these new uses.



site plan

Development

- ◆ Through use of a community development corporation or eminent domain, acquire truck rental property for development of medical offices and senior housing.
- ◆ Attract a new 5,000 s.f. retail/restaurant to occupy the northern corner of the underutilized Rite-Aid parking lot.
- ◆ Acquire vacant building and adjacent structure at the corner of Ogontz and Washington Lane and develop a new 10,000 s.f. restaurant with outdoor seating.

Streetscape and Facade Improvements

- ◆ Add pedestrian-scale lighting along Washington Lane and also on the ends of the streets that feed into Washington Lane.
- ◆ Encourage property owners to upgrade existing building facades and storefronts by providing financial incentives and technical assistance to augment the in-place facade improvement program administered by the Township Main Street Program and the City Commerce Department. Awning specifications, architectural details, appropriate colors and materials, and appropriate window and door treatments on historic buildings should be outlined in a set of guidelines.
- ◆ Create a well-landscaped gateway in front of the Sunoco station at the corner of Ogontz and Washington.

General Design Guidelines

- ◆ Site buildings with frontage along sidewalks and with (shared) parking at side and rear.
- ◆ Design buildings to accommodate changing uses over time.

- ◆ Blank walls along the street are not appropriate. Facades with street frontage should have transparent windows and shopfronts similar to other good buildings on the street.
- ◆ Plant street trees along sidewalks in tree pits (25 s.f. min.) that should be located every 40' or so where possible. Alternatively, trees may be clustered in linear pits. Plant shade trees in parking lots.

General Signage Controls

A combination of technical guidance, incentives and regulatory controls should be deployed to incrementally upgrade the quality of business identity graphics along Ogontz Avenue. In general:

- ◆ Signs should be vivid, interesting and fun, but they should not cover over architectural features or obstruct shopfront windows.
- ◆ Signs parallel to the frontage should be integrated to the design of the façade.
- ◆ Projecting signs that are shaped to symbolize the nature of the business (i.e. A shoe for a shoe shop) are encouraged.
- ◆ Internally illuminated signs are generally not appropriate.
- ◆ Create ordinances to guide sign design. Billboards should not be permitted. Rooftop signs, free-standing signs, as well as internally illuminated box signs and awning signs should be subject to design review.
- ◆ Text-based messages should be limited to the business name and logo.
- ◆ Refer to forthcoming document [Shops, Street, Centers - Revitalizing Commercial Districts in NW Philadelphia](#) for detailed guidance and proposed revisions to regulations regarding size, design and content.

ogontz avenue at washington lane

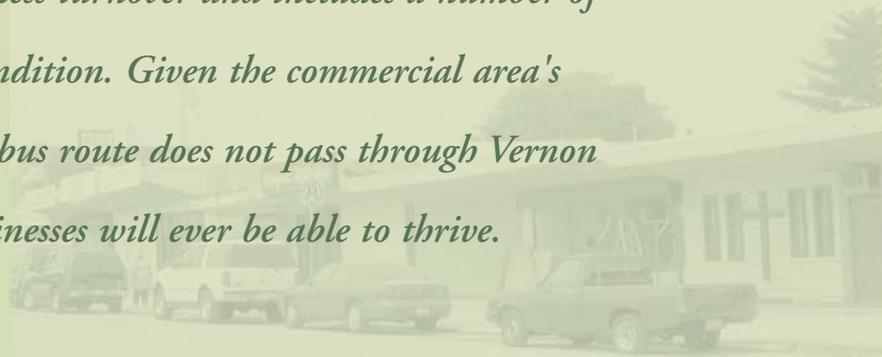
implementation

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission prepared a Blight Certification and Redevelopment Area Plan for West Oak Lane. In May 2005, the "Blight Certification for the Area Bounded by Ivy Hill, Broad Street, Cheltenham Avenue, and Stenton Avenue" was passed, which makes the area eligible for publicly-assisted acquisition of properties in support of community development projects. The subsequently passed "West Oak Lane Redevelopment Area Plan," contains redevelopment and design concepts for the area, noting that commercial redevelopment is generally allowed under existing zoning. While acquisition is one tool that may be used by the City, reinvesting in building structures, facades, landscaping, and lighting will play significant roles in commercial revitalization. Landscaping is currently not an eligible cost under the Township facade enhancement program. For the redevelopment sites, it is hoped that the concepts presented below, and illustrated by the accompanying conceptual site plan, will be incorporated into a developer RFP or Solicitation of Interest.



Deteriorating facades and signage

This commercial strip experiences high business turnover and includes a number of underutilized properties in poor physical condition. Given the commercial area's small size and isolated location, and that a bus route does not pass through Vernon Road, it is unlikely that the majority of businesses will ever be able to thrive.



Deteriorating facades and signage

site analysis

Several issues are important factors in this key area:

- ◆ The southern three-quarters of the block consists of retail buildings in average-to-poor physical condition, while the rest consists of a mix of businesses and residents housed in buildings with fairly interesting architecture.
- ◆ A large church being developed within walking distance of this area and more intense mixed use development on a portion of the site could add to the customer base and help support some better retail uses in this corridor.



Lingering vacancies

vernon road

goals

The changes suggested here transition this commercial strip from strictly commercial use to both residential and commercial uses. Structures that are in poor physical condition and too small for quality retail should be acquired and redeveloped with a mixed-use building consisting of ground-floor retail and upper-floor apartments or offices. Facade improvements on the existing retail buildings would help enhance the attractiveness of the area.



site plan

Development

- ◆ Acquire small commercial properties in order to develop a three-story building with 6,000 s.f. of ground-floor retail space and 20 units of apartments on the upper floors. Secure parking is to be located behind the building.

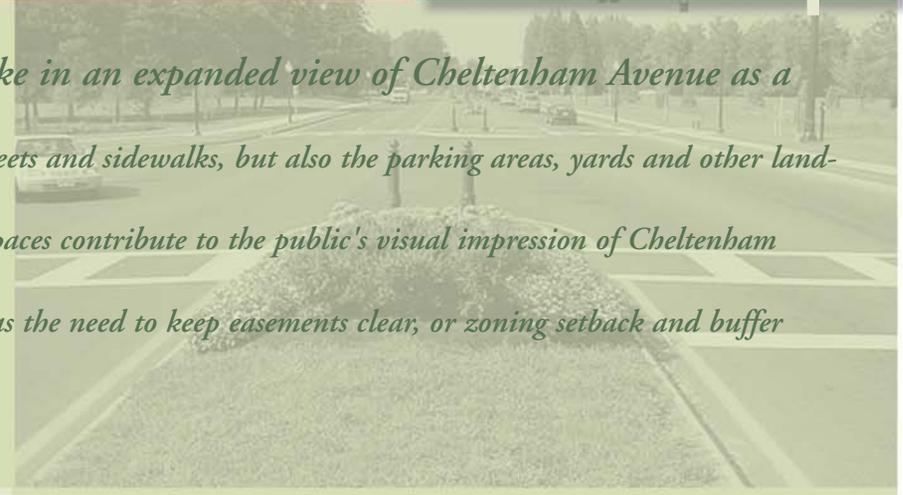
Streetscape Improvements

- ◆ Implement a facade improvement program to encourage property owners to upgrade existing building facades and storefronts. Awning specifications, architectural details, appropriate colors and materials, and appropriate window and door treatments on historic buildings should be outlined in a set of guidelines.
- ◆ Create sign ordinances to limit the amount of size of signage. Billboards, rooftop signs, and free-standing signs should not be permitted.
- ◆ Install pedestrian-scale lighting fixtures.

implementation

The "West Oak Lane Redevelopment Area Plan," contains redevelopment and design concepts for the area. While reinvesting in building structures, facades, landscaping, and lighting will play significant roles in commercial revitalization on Vernon Road, acquisition will also be one tool that may need to be used by the City. It is hoped that the concepts presented below, and illustrated by the accompanying conceptual site plan, will be incorporated into a developer RFP or Solicitation of Interest.

This analysis and the following recommendations take in an expanded view of Cheltenham Avenue as a public space and civic asset. They consider not only the streets and sidewalks, but also the parking areas, yards and other landscapes between the street and the buildings along it. All of these spaces contribute to the public's visual impression of Cheltenham Avenue, and most of them result from public requirements, such as the need to keep easements clear, or zoning setback and buffer rules, or parking requirements.



Cheltenham Avenue's patterns of development and visual appearance send a clear signal: This is a place that is not living up to its potential and perhaps it is a place that is not working well at all. From a physical point of view, the Cheltenham Avenue corridor is organized primarily to facilitate the movement of cars. It is not a pleasant place to walk, so the ability of people who live nearby, or who use transit to walk to shops - or even from shop to shop - is limited. From a visual point of view, the corridor sends that message that it doesn't care about whether would-be visitors stop to shop, or simply move along. There is little that is welcoming, enticing or memorable; there are few amenities that make the experience of shopping in the area, living there or even passing through more pleasant. At their worst, the signals Cheltenham Avenue sends can be downright discouraging. Crosswalks that lead to nowhere; signs warn you that your car is likely to be stolen; worn-out and left-over spaces don't provide any incentive to stop and explore.

Cheltenham Avenue's development patterns and visual appearance are the result of countless public and private decisions made over the years by landowners and public agencies. Clearly, property owners do not intend to convey such ambivalence to their neighbors and potential customers. These decisions were framed by two sets of municipal planning regulations whose fundamental purpose is to protect one land-use from another, not to imagine how the whole can be greater than the sum of its parts.

the general character of cheltenham avenue's public realm

This analysis and the following recommendations take in an expanded view of Cheltenham Avenue as a public space and civic asset. They consider not only the streets and sidewalks, but also the parking areas, yards and other landscapes between the street and the buildings along it. All of these spaces contribute to the public's visual impression of Cheltenham Avenue, and most of them result from public requirements, such as the need to keep easements clear, or zoning setback and buffer rules, or parking requirements.

It is safe to say that this amalgam of spaces has never been considered as a coherent visual space, or as a potential public realm. Yet all these spaces are viewed, experienced and used as one place by people coming to the area.

The expanded public realm of Cheltenham Avenue can best be described as a series of zones that range from most public to least public, starting with the street itself. The street is a public realm, used here primarily for moving vehicles above ground, and for routing utilities below. It includes a median, travel and turning lanes, and parking or shoulder lanes. Each of these features deserves specific design attention.

streetscape improvements to cheltenham avenue

The next zone, just beyond the curbline of the street, includes **pedestrian space**, green space, and a zone of urban infrastructure that supports the street - signage, lighting, bus stops and above-ground utility routing. In this area, it is possible to outline a comprehensive strategy for public improvement that will have significant impact on pedestrian comfort and the visual character of the area.

Beyond this comes a **transition zone**, consisting of spaces like parking lots, front yards and landscape buffers. This is usually private land but it has a contradictory character: It is not always differentiated clearly from the public realm, yet it is easily visible from the street and sidewalk, and is very often used by the public. As such, it forms the bulk of our impression of the character of the area.

Last are the **facades** of the buildings themselves, the final transition between the public and private realm. In most cases, the buildings are too low and too far from the street to create a sense of enclosure in the conventional sense, but they have active edges with doors and windows that have a relationship to pedestrian circulation in the pedestrian and transition zones.

What people see as they drive along the Avenue - buildings, signs, lot layouts, landscaping, sidewalks, lighting - changes constantly. There are some clusters or patterns, though, with the result that the experience of driving or walking through the Avenue involves traveling through a series of "character zones." Each of these zones contains a unique set of physical characteristics, such as street configuration, building setbacks and building type, and has different kinds of commercial signs, lighting, landscaping, etc.

Approximately twelve such "character zones" exist along Cheltenham Avenue between Wadsworth Avenue to Old York Road. Along corridors like this, it is typical to recommend a consistent set of infrastructure elements and design guidelines; because of the variety of conditions along Cheltenham Avenue, aesthetic and streetscape improvements also must be made, taking into account the differentiated context of the Avenue's "character zones."

recommended aesthetic and streetscape principles for all of cheltenham avenue

Each area of the public realm - the street, the pedestrian realm and the transition zone, could be improved by following the basic strategies outlined below. The strategies apply to the length of Cheltenham Avenue, and some elements, such as lighting and signage, should be consistent along the way. But for other elements, the specific design approaches would necessarily vary from character zone to character zone, and from property to property, because of the changing nature of the surroundings. Nevertheless, these principles would give the public realm a better balance between the specific nature of each place and an overall sense of coherence.



Photo simulation before



"This photo simulation illustrates how the aesthetic and streetscape principles described in this section could look when applied to a part of the Avenue"

streetscape improvements to cheltenham avenue

The Street

Upgrade the medians. Concrete and painted medians divide Cheltenham Avenue at various places. The concrete medians are bare and the painted medians are fading. These could be replaced with raised landscape medians, which would help fill unused area of the pavement, introduce a new element of vertical scale, and make the Avenue look more attractive. The plantings could be staged by color to indicate differing areas of the avenue, and the places where the medians meet cross streets could be turned into pedestrian refuges. In addition, the medians might be a location for monuments, markers or clusters of poles and banners that indicate entrances into different areas.



Adding trees, flowers, and shrubs to medians helps beautify a corridor

Put the street on a "road diet." In some areas, Cheltenham Avenue could function just fine with a bit less asphalt. In particular, in areas where an outer lane is used as a shoulder with no parking, the road could be narrowed or a bike lane could be added. Any area where a lane is used solely for parking could be repaved with pavers that allow rainwater to soak into the ground.



The medians along Cheltenham Avenue are barren strips of pavement

Be creative. Think beyond trees and lighting and find more creative ways to make Cheltenham Avenue an interesting corridor. At the least, banners can be installed on light poles to give people a sense that they are in a special place. Perhaps Cheltenham Avenue could host a public art project, with art installations located at various points along the Avenue.



Art can help brighten up an otherwise bland highway overpass



These flags announce to motorists and pedestrians the entrance to an important destination.

Pedestrian Space

Establish a continuous green band and a continuous walkway for pedestrians on both sides of the street. Even though automobiles dominate the area, many people walk along Cheltenham Avenue, and the walkways should be upgraded so they are safe, uninterrupted and pleasant to walk along. In most places, sidewalks line the street, and in many places they are separated from the street by a narrow grass planting strip. The walkways and green strips should be continuous and should have a more generous width. At curb cuts, the pedestrian way could be marked with striping, changes in material and "yield to pedestrian" signage.



Parts of Cheltenham Avenue require hiking boots



Other parts of Cheltenham Avenue have generous, welcoming sidewalks to a retail complex

Make the street lighting consistent. The street lights along Cheltenham Avenue are anything but consistent: they have different fixtures, are placed at different heights and are mounted on different kinds of poles. Because street lighting is ubiquitous, it is an infrastructure element that can lend a great deal of consistency to the appearance of the street. The street lighting fixtures along both sides of Cheltenham Avenue should be of the same type and color. The silver cobra-headed light fixtures should be replaced with similar height, but more attractive and sturdy city standard brown, round fixtures. Some lights are attached to utility poles that also carry electric wires. Ideally, the overhead electric wires should be buried, and the utility poles replaced with light poles. In places where this is cost-prohibitive, the fixtures that are attached to the utility poles should resemble those across the street.



Inconsistent lighting gives Cheltenham Avenue a chaotic appearance



Consistent, context-sensitive lighting helps places look more attractive and organized

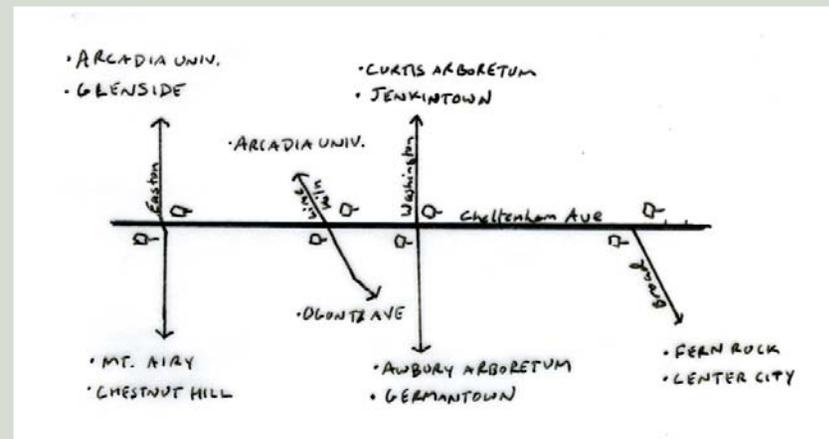
streetscape improvements to cheltenham avenue

Add pedestrian lighting. There is no infrastructure along the street that is specifically designed for the purpose of serving pedestrians, or which relates to the pedestrian scale. We recommend a "kit-of-parts" pedestrian infrastructure that includes pedestrian-scaled lighting, directional and safety signage, and celebratory markers such as banners or medallions. Specially designated pedestrian lighting would light the sidewalks better, reinforce the continuity of the pedestrian realm and introduce a new, visually attractive element to the streetscape. Lights could be mounted on low poles, which could also support pedestrian signage or banners, or be mounted to walls where sidewalks pass directly by buildings. The spacing should generally be consistent, though lights could be placed more closely in urban areas than suburban, and in rural areas, bollard-style pedestrian lights might be more appropriate.



Lighted bollards help illuminate the path for pedestrians at night

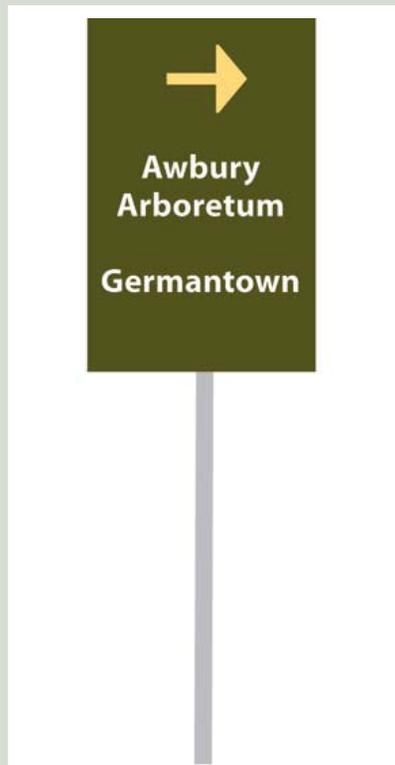
Orient motorists and pedestrians with wayfinding signs. Cheltenham Avenue has very few signs that indicate to motorists and pedestrians what might be coming up ahead or what landmarks, neighborhoods, or commercial centers are nearby in both Cheltenham Township and Philadelphia. Three types of wayfinding signs would be useful: placemarkers, which indicate the name of the neighborhood located on either side of the Avenue; directional signs, which indicate destinations that cross streets lead to; and preview signs, which indicate destinations along the Avenue that motorists and pedestrians are approaching. The signs should highlight institutions (e.g., Arcadia University), commercial centers (e.g., Ogontz Avenue and Cheltenham Mall), and neighborhoods (e.g., La Mott and West Oak Lane). Placemarkers could be located in the median or in the pedestrian realm; they could be designed as simple pylons or as a family of public art totems. Pedestrian signage could be placed on new light-poles in the pedestrian zone. Vehicular directionals and preview signs would require their own system of poles and could be an extension of the "Direction Philadelphia" system.



A conceptual scheme for wayfinding signs that direct motorists on Cheltenham Avenue to destinations in Philadelphia and Cheltenham Township

Give bus riders a place to sit and stay dry. Just about every block has a bus stop. But, excluding the bus depot next to the Cheltenham Mall, there is only one bus shelter in this section of Cheltenham Avenue-and not a single bench. Bus shelters should be placed wherever there is room, such as in front of Lynnewood Gardens. New shelters could be thought of as experiments in small-scale civic architecture - distinctive structures by day, colorful beacons by night - that reverse the street's identity as an in-between place. Otherwise, benches should be placed wherever possible.

Reinforce the public-private edge. In some places along Cheltenham Avenue, the public-private edge is indicated by features such as fences, retaining walls and hedgerows; along most of its length, this edge is also differentiated by a slight change in grade. This public-private edge can be made into one of the visually appealing features of the street; a rich vocabulary of fences, walls, retaining walls, and landscape elements could create a continuous public-private edge along the street.



Bus shelters come in many shapes, sizes, and colors, but they all give riders a place to sit and stay dry



The stone retaining wall helps define the boundary between public and private space

streetscape improvements to cheltenham avenue

The Transtion Zone

Use monument signs. Many commercial establishments have pole-mounted identification signs. They are placed haphazardly in terms of their height, distance from the street and size, and contribute greatly to the sense of clutter and confusion along the street. We recommend that the preferred identification signage be monument style, built on a masonry base that is placed in the ground. The signage should have a consistent height limit and be lit externally by ground mounted spotlights. The base can be surrounded by landscaping.



Lynnewood Gardens provides a good example for low mounted signage along Cheltenham Avenue

Plant more trees. Trees create a sense of enclosure along the street and provide benefits in terms of cooling the area and diminishing stormwater problems. In some areas, it is possible to plant more trees along the street, but in most cases, tree-planting will be easier and more effective on private property. For residential properties, trees have the added benefit of creating privacy and buffering traffic noise. For commercial properties, trees have the advantage of cooling parking lots or marking pedestrian paths to mall entrances.

Improve lateral pedestrian connections. Pedestrian circulation connecting the street to commercial properties such as mall entrances, is critical for serving a dense population and streets that have ample transit service. Convenient, separated walkways should be provided through parking lots between public sidewalks and building entrances; they should be designed with landscaping and shade trees where possible. Crossings with parking alleys should be marked clearly, and pedestrian crossing controls should be implemented across interior circulation roads.



The front yards of these homes along Cheltenham Avenue would be ideal for planting trees