

Girard Coalition Insights *Approaches for Stability and Change*

Summary – Workshop notes

Supported by the project team, two series of four workshops each took place during 2003. In the Spring, the initial series of four workshops tackled the theme of economic development and strategic investment. Note that the logical order of the workshops order disappeared by Workshop #2 due to schedule changes. In the Fall, stakeholders reviewed their earlier inputs and began to identify specific elements they would want to see reflected in draft design guidelines. Additionally, in the fall, one workshop focused entirely on the specific contributions Public Art and other cultural amenities could and should make throughout the entire Corridor. The public participation component for the Girard Avenue Corridor Study had three objectives:

- Systematically inform and educate the public about the objectives, opportunities and challenges of the study.
- Create a neutral environment in order to encourage and document written and verbal expression of a diverse range of public opinion.
- Construct a public constituency for the short and long-term objectives of the Study.

To increase public participation, JSA launched and maintained an interactive project website located at www.publicspaceforum.org. To assure full and effective public information and education, the JSA team identified stakeholder groups and individuals, having a potential interest in the study. The team's efforts targeted at least three distinct groups of stakeholder audiences.

- Near neighbors and residents of physically affected neighborhoods including “Advisory Neighborhood Commissions”, churches, schools, community based organizations and businesses in the study area.
- Special interest advocates
- Institutional actors

The goal of public information and education was to provide the public with accurate, understandable, pertinent and timely information so that the public could contribute effectively to the study, especially by attending the public Workshops. Methods included:

- publicspaceforum.org website
- FAQs and fact sheets
- Community calendar announcements
- TV and radio interviews
- Newsletters (electronic and print)
- Flyers

East Girard Public Workshop *April 22, 2003*

6:30 – 8:30 pm, Lutheran Settlement House

Community Input Notes

Issues

Inadequate parking

- Participants specifically noted problems at the 26th Police District Building, as well as the 400 and 300 blocks of Girard avenue. Double parking was also noted.

“Also mentions”

- Dangerous traffic attenuators, “scary shops”, too many vacant lots,

Ideas

Community Development Corporations

- Catalogue vacant properties, serve as clearinghouses and property marketers, provide matching development funds

SEPTA

- Re-define rate structure to support short hop riders

Destinations

- Create “gateway” at Front Street
- Create a Girard Avenue Arts Festival a la Main Street

Small Businesses

- Bring in coffee shops
- Target immigrant community business people for development support
- Very well organized and encouraging.

West Girard Public Workshop, May 6, 2003

Location 6:30 – 8:30 pm Girard College

Community Input Notes

Issues

- What about security?
- How long is time line?
- What about trees?
- What are plans to work with community?
- Community Members should be included in work on upcoming projects-statement in plan
- Existing biz should be reflected in rendering.
- How will Biz who aren't in coalition be represented?
- Timeframe for street scope improvements?
- Big box not appropriate
- More local Biz
- Community should be 1st priority more community support in plan
- Focus on Food
- Delivery Service for Groceries
- Tax-EXEPT org. Could support garage
- Increase variety of retail Biz/No Chains
- Survey Residents about buying habits
- Neighborhood Clean-up
- Trash Cans
- Use Manhattan as a retail example
- Use people who visit anyway to support Biz
- Take advantage of pedestrian nature of Ave
- Burns: example is good i.e. Fresh Grocer
- Trash Ball i.e. Baltimore

- Visit area @ different times
- Use current buildings
- Focus on kids-20BS, Rec. Biz should employ kids after school
- Biz Parking
- Special Lots
- Passes
- Tree Trimming
- Reinforce Community ability to
- Biz financing new and existing

Ideas

- Limit to weekly – people will only walk 2 or 3 blocks.
- Economics of market
- Cost of product. Owns market \$ from adjustment rent. Philly profit marking that – don't want to pay full freight rent!
- Types of grocery (modest)
- Franchises stores take opportunity from community
- Also – Take out the competitions
- How do you know where people shop?
- Organize individual efforts.
- What about clean up?
- W/O basic needs and food available - All will need to drive.
- Re clean – the issue is us.
- Go on Friday – Parking
- Parking – no alleys access
- Business getting tickets
- Vouchers?
- A farmers market crosses all neighborhood needs and a very good idea.
- I like to see a shoe, and more dresses and Jewel stores and a skating at 30th street.

What do we need for Girard Avenue?

- Supermarket – there are no good supermarkets within marking distance except Whole Foods which serves a niche market.
- Trolley – I just found out the trolley will be restarted this year. Thank you.
- Trees – They make a neighborhood out of streets.
- Adequate Street Light – They make the streets safer.
- Trash Sweepers and Waste Baskets – Who wants to live in a dump?
- Athletic Fields for League Sports – Keeps people occupied with healthy activities and builds relationships.
- Bike Lanes – I know there are some already. More where needed please.
- Shops – Bakery, butcher (or at least a grocery store with these facilities).
- Economic Incentives to buy and rebuild Old Houses – So I and others like me keep my business and technical skills in Philadelphia and in the neighborhood. We love living here; help us want to stay!
- Thanks for working on this!!

Broad and Girard Public Workshop *May 15, 2003*

6:30 – 8:30 pm, Girard College

Community Input

Ideas

- Put Restrictions on BIZ types
- Focus on cultural aspects
- BIZ retention in commercial nodes?
- Do research based on current needs.
- What about residents with property on Girard – desire cultural uses?
- Issue – Y is target property 1500 block.
- Tools for mixed use owner occ. units.

Issues

- Q - What about historical dollars?
- Q - Tax incentives?
- C - Need committee to make historical \$proposal.
- Q - Any Historical Money in renewal package?
- Q - Ownership by city of property?
- Q - Any measure of the amount of speculative activity?
- C - Property value increased
- Opportunity for area residents to do revitalization on Girard.
- Focus on finance and development.
- Make sure current residents can stay.
- Use residents as part of development team.
- “Do nothing owners” a problem
- Few know what development is.
- Few know what financing is.
- “Local resources not tapped?”

Mid-Girard Public Workshop *May 21, 2003*

6:30 – 8:30pm, Rodriguiz Branch Library

Community Input

Issues

- 401 Criminal Area
- 400 Block is filthy
- U-Haul Business has no parking lot
- 100 Block “empty lot vacancies”
- There is no Girard Ave Business Association
- Trash is an issue
- Where are street Cleaners
- Current businesses near El are not transit dependent
- 5th street is dangerous
- 300 blk recent properties purchased
- Q-What is the time frame for streetscape improvements
- Q-Do residents have a say in the work that will be done?
- Visitors are concerned about trash
- Q-Are there laws about cafes on sidewalks?
- 500 blk Store front corner for sale
- Q-What are the plans for the Iberian Center
- Residents are not shopping at the places that are considered competition
- Model for retail demand is not realistic in this area

Ideas

- Girard Ave could follow the same evolution of South street, focus on artists and galleries to draw people together
- Changes on Girard ave are parallel to those in Brooklyn , NY

- North side of 400 block should be transformed to a park
- Girard Ave could follow the same evolution of South street, focus on artists and galleries to draw people together
- Changes on Girard Avenue are parallel to those in Brooklyn , NY
- Restaurants should be included
- At Triangle Theater there is an element of danger (suburbs to city) that excites visitors.
- Be aware of other plans

Public Art Workshop *Sept 20, 2003*

6:30 – 8:30pm, North Philadelphia Health System

Community Input

Principles for public art

- Work with what is there e.g. architecture, the environment, lighting, sidewalks
- Negative comments expressed by some participants, Murals do not reflect African American experience or speak to the soul of Af/Am
- Art plan needs to be full scope, diverse, with a variety of projects
- Public art is about communication, Girard Ave—topographically, geographically, represents a clear divide in racial demographic

Opportunities

- Neglected spaces as an opportunity for sculpture/ public art that reflects the character of the neighborhood
- Create a map that acts as the basis for an arts resource database
- “walk the route”
- how to tap into natural gathering places like Girard College/eastern state to increase access, activity opportunities

Questions to consider

- What percentage should be visible from the street inside vs. outside
- Call for artists may unearth ideas that are outside the box
- How to effectively communicate to the community and to the artists about the project
- Principles will guide the process

Key axis 31st & Girard- demarcation between fabric of the community and Fairmount park.

- Is this a good site?
- What would you do?
- Maintenance component must be a part
- Lighting and seeding is key as an adjunct to the art piece, i.e. to create the setting for the art piece
- Oral history how would it inform
- How will all components be integrated
- If you create the place the opportunities will come

West Girard Public Workshop Oct 2, 2003

6:30 – 8:30pm, Girard College

Community Input Notes

Public Art

Amy Johnston, reporting.

- A diversity of people, artists, arts organizations, CDC representatives.
- First, we reviewed the principles that came out of the first meeting to see if we got it right. They seemed to reflect the views of people who have been involved in the process.
- In addition, it was urged to work with what is there, to add to existing resources and revitalize them.
- Also, public art must include a wide range of different projects, and reflect the character of the variety of neighborhoods and their histories.
- Also, public art is about communication, and we should use it to communicate those histories and stories.
- The group considered opportunities, geographic and types of projects. We talked about neglected spaces as opportunities for sculpture and other art that reflects nature of the neighborhood.
- We discussed the possibility of a clearinghouse for artists and others to come together, to communicate opportunities and help people become involved no matter what their vantage may be.
- Must art be visible from the street, or can it be inside buildings or on the college campus?
- How will we communicate what is going on, gather all the resources here to make certain we have the widest involvement?
- Lighting, for safety, for creating identity, is a key issue. Lighting, lighting, lighting!
- Whatever we do, there has to be a maintenance component. The hard work and ideas, the creativity and design, should be something that people return to again and again.
- Lighting and maintenance were made clear priorities, as well as community and character.
- 31st and Girard is a key opportunity as a gateway and a gathering place. It is a demarcation place between community and the park. Does it work as a gathering place? As a gateway? We think that if a gathering place is built, people will come. But we need to make certain it is maintained well, so it can become a destination, for trolley riders, for concerts. It can become a communication place for the community, with banners and information.
- Question: At the last workshop, idea of trolleys along the street as repeated icons came up and was very very popular.

Appearance

Spokesperson: Sean McCaney

- What should Girard Avenue look like, and if we developed guidelines, what should they guide?
Overall aesthetics should relate to streetcar era of 30s, make the street a tourist destination that people come back to.
- To greatest extent possible, preserve existing architecture. There should be strict demolition controls. When new development occurs, try to limit size of buildings to limit big box retail, except for the supermarket. Even if larger retail chains emerge, break down the scale to match the historic character. Infill should respect context and use traditional materials, brick and masonry. New buildings should be built to street, parking and deliveries to the extent possible should be behind.
- How do we encourage this kind of redevelopment? There could be incentives such as façade groups. Three principles: transparency, see inside buildings, security measures should not block transparency
- Signage should contribute to attractiveness of corridor, signage should communicate what's inside
- It is important to illuminate the inside of buildings, both storefronts and upstairs.
- Is it possible to open up views through the college walls, to create vistas that spill out to street?
- How do we get some of this to happen right away? A can of paint can go a long way, so perhaps small grants can help. Technical assistance and guidance could be useful as well.
- Another topic: vertical mixing of uses in buildings. Retail on the ground floor, offices or residential above. Activate the street for more of the day.
- Streetscape should contribute to the 1930s streetcar era identity.
- How to guide restoration/renovation? Start with Secty of Interior standards, and develop a brochure that explains what to do in more people.
- How to manage all this? Maybe Girard Avenue could have a Main Street program. Somebody needs to be running the show.
- Question: Did you take a position on whether historical commission should have jurisdiction?
A: We thought there should be some advisory body providing guidance.

How Things Work, Park

Marc Zaharchuk, reporting

Other than corner of 27th and Girard, what other sites are of interest and why? - What other retail is missing?

- The Veterans park, gateway at 31st Street, where Westrum is. Then the east end, Poplar, Girard, 26th.
- But there was also a concern about the middle, Thompson/Poplar/27th. There is blight in there. A concern about the core.
- Renovate the upper levels of buildings above retail frontages.
- Look at everything that feeds into the corridor. There are some minor economic opportunities on cross streets, such as 29th Street.
- The second question, bank, shoe repair, library, professional offices came up.
- The mix included restaurants, toys, hobbies, garden stores, people interested in fix up, auto repair, electronics. There was a great electronics store years ago.
- Traffic, parking, walking, circulation:
- Major concern was loading zones, and how accommodated, and when parking will be allowed during the day, and whether there will be congestion with trolley and traffic. When the trolley loops at turns, those are going to be choke points. So there will be enforcement issues.
- Trash pickup, will trash trucks block traffic? Why can't Girard Avenue get two pickups per week, like Fairmount Avenue?
- Discussion of design of curb bump-outs, particularly on western end of the street.
- The big issue is street signs and directional signage: is it there?
- Walking and bicycling: How can the street be friendly for walking and biking? How can you get people to walk and bike to the street?
- Comment about wish list: Internet café has been discussed. Perhaps a non-profit supported by Comcast. Good for people without computers at home.
- Comment: Wild double parking at 26th and Poplar. Only way to stop it is to build curb bump-outs. Enforcement won't work.

Broad & Girard Public Workshop Oct 22, 2003

6:30 – 8:30pm, North Philadelphia Health System

Community Input Notes

Session 1: How Things Work (Economic Development, Traffic, Parking, Real Estate, Walking & Transit on Girard Ave)

Properties of Concern

- 1200 Block of Girard - Opening Seafood Takeout
- Broad & Girard demo a concern - Trade union Expanding to fill entire bldg
- Marshall St. - History of Marketplace
- Church next Kessler's stays
- Tried to Control lot @ 13th & Girard--- unsuccessful
- Prioritizing Sav- A-Lot site at at 110 block
- Quaker Storage at 9th
- Like idea of place to go on Broad----- A restaurant/diner
- Need parking to deal w/ growth
- Broad & Parrish lot good for Parking? Diner?
- Bank Building next to McDs? - Broad St. Trust
- No lights or lit stores once you come around to N. Broad
- Entertainment?
- Complex at Cecil B Moore
- At Ridge - likes triangle, no retail from 26th to Broad
- Old hotel on 600 block next to Fine Fare
- Approach St. Joe's about lot (s)
- Old YMCA on 1500 block - B+B?

Parking

- Traffic w/ new biz
Needs to be accessible, left hand turns off Broad onto Girard
- Keep traffic off Poplar

- Open subway stairs at Broad S. side of Girard
- Widen trolley Island West Bound at Girard
- Parking behind Stores

How things look

- Historic Character
- Neighborhood I.D
- Color
- Trash Cans that Look Good
- Greenery
- Pavements (Historic)
- Scale
- Mixed Use (Balcony)
- Color/Cultures/
- Street Gateway/Barriers
- Railroad Bridges/Business ID Signs

Principles and Topics

- 1) Bad make-overs
- 2) Maintaining historic architecture
- 3) Honoring neighborhood identity
- 4) Color palette as an expression of cultural identity
- 5) Trash receptacles
- 6) Community greening
- 7) Pavements
- 8) Scale of buildings
- 9) Mixed-use (retail vs. residential - balconies)
- 10) Iconography (banners, gateways, archways)
- 11) Business identity signs

Neighborhoods

- It was clearly expressed that this stretch of Girard Ave. includes a diverse group of neighborhoods (Northern Liberties, Fishtown and Francisville) and cultures (African American, Asian American and Latin American). This diversity will present special challenges in terms of public art and “branding” – particularly in the area of color palette – as we work to assure that each culture has a voice while fitting that into the overarching theme for the corridor.

Maintenance

- Concern was expressed surrounding responsibility for maintenance of frontage.

Safety

- Concern was expressed about safety as it relates to lighting, where to park and blight abatement.

Greening

- Greening is seen as a very important way to reverse the sense that this section of the corridor is “a concrete jungle” particularly East of Broad.

An interest was expressed in partnering with existing, local organizations, including:

- Community Land Trust – Includes an Environmental Camp with both youth and adjudication components.
- Penn State’s Horticulture Department
- Liberty Land
- Yorktown CDC

Locations

The group worked in sections to identify areas of key concern and/or opportunity along the corridor from 19th Street to 6th Street. These areas and ideas were noted in detail on the design boards.

WORKING SESSION NOTES – “PUBLIC ART”

Principles

- 1) Public art should **include** participation by local artists
- 2) Public art should **reflect** all ethnic groups (African American, Asian American and Latin American) working together
- 3) Public art should **connect** to green or retail space or transportation hubs
- 4) Public art should **be durable** and **low maintenance**

Ideas

- Murals depicting the histories of each neighborhood; for example,
- How Fishtown got its name.
- The significance of the grape vine to Francisville – William Penn planted a vineyard there.
- Create a Farmer’s Market in vacant lot at 13th and Girard where the Amish now have an “unstructured” market two days a week.
- How might trolley shelters be used to tell the stories of these neighborhoods?
- Historic markers (plaque, kiosk, directory of neighborhood organizations).
- Is there an application for fabricated metal elements (such as those used in the McKinley School project) to enhance trolley islands, thereby making them more visible and safe while creating an opportunity to incorporate themes like fish, clusters of grapes, sheaves of barley, etc.

Locations

- 18th and Girard – Build a Plaza – Site of former Farmer’s Market – Good public space without needing a major investment.
- Girard and Ridge – Triangle Square – Entrance to Francisville. How might Girard Ave. redevelopment foster redevelopment of the Ridge Ave. commercial corridor?
- 13th and Girard – Create a Farmer’s Market in vacant lot where Amish now have an “unstructured” market two days a week.

East/Mid-Girard Public Workshop Oct 23, 2003

6:30 – 8:30pm, Presbyterian Church

Community Input Notes

How Things Work

- Supermarket
- Leopard and Girard
- Proposed KFC/ Long John next to artist studios
- Office is a good idea
- Marlborough Inn
- Speculation while bldg deteriorates
- Interest in Pegasus theater space for Kids and Adults
- 1k/ month rents;90-100k to buy a small bldg
- Bigger, taller office bldg
- Problem of meeting the El?
- Surface parking needs
- Residential real estate bubble
- Appraisals lag w/ comparables
- Penn Treaty mkt for sale
- Not street friendly
- Berks and Girard
- tore bldgs down only pizza remains
- Parking behind buildings
- Underneath el to south?
 - Stat land under I-95
 - Reintroduce angled parking

Parking

- Too many stripes on ave
- Parking too narrow w/ traffic
- Tough to open doors
- Double parking
- Dangerous for people exiting to cross two lanes
- Street sidewalk grade problems
- How to implement needed changes
- Alternative truck route?
- PA Dot Reconfiguration?
- New Kensington done parking study
- Add parking under El south of Girard
- Add Parking Behind Avant Gardens
- Beware cutting off trolley access
- Splash guards and shelters
- Bike Racks

How Things Look

- Public Art
- Functional Art
- Durable
- Tell Drivers to slow down
- Themes that Connect and Define
- Driving
- Walking
- Biking
- Clustering the action places

Special Places

- Nature of Neighborhoods
- More restaurants, artists
- Conflict between Modern retail and this place
- Trees Landscape
- Unique Features (the river
- Public lighting, Glare
- Above Ground utilities
- Maintenance
- Makeovers Bad
- Scale: Pedestrian scale
- Bike parking
- Green living things
- Color
- Trash
- Infill (Horrid design)
- Pavement (too much)
- Sidewalk merchandising & cafes
- Better sidewalks
- Encourage Ownership

Scale:

- Can street be more unified, river to river?
- Want to mediate scale of the street, width of street versus height of buildings, but don't want to crowd out pedestrians.

Streetscape elements:

- Lack of bike parking
- Lack of trash cans
- Excessive pavement
- Public lighting could be better. Design of light, glare is problem. Storefronts and facades are dark in many places.

- Underground the wires.
- Could sidewalks be designed differently from neighborhood to neighborhood?
- Sidewalk merchandising, can it be increased to make the street more lively?

Greenery

- Green spots and gathering spots; there should be more trees along the avenue, and a greater variety of trees

Color

- There is not enough color along the street in terms of buildings, signage, etc. Not just the right color, but not enough

New Development Patterns

- Concerns over new development to fill in. Lack of decent architecture in new projects. Big box stores don't fit in, contemporary stores conflict with the scale of existing buildings.

Building blocks

- Are certain blocks a good target for starting out? A finite area that has a positive character that you can build on?
- There are some unique features of East Girard that aren't being capitalized on, such as connections to the river, and views of center city. How might they be framed?
- Save what's there! We lost two beautiful art deco stations at the El. There are wonderful buildings, but they've been covered over.
- What is the neighborhood identity of places that aren't Fishtown, places with a name or strong identity already?
- How do you get the community to respect the design changes and investments that are being made?

Art ideas

- Functional elements, such as bike racks or benches sponsored by the New Kensington CDC
- Art should "slow you down," traffic is too fast, can there be a gateway that slows drivers down?
- Art that connects the street from end to end is important. Something more than signage. It could be a framework that changes from neighborhood to neighborhood.
- Maybe lighting could be artistic and unique.
- Art should be durable! It should stand up to wear and tear.