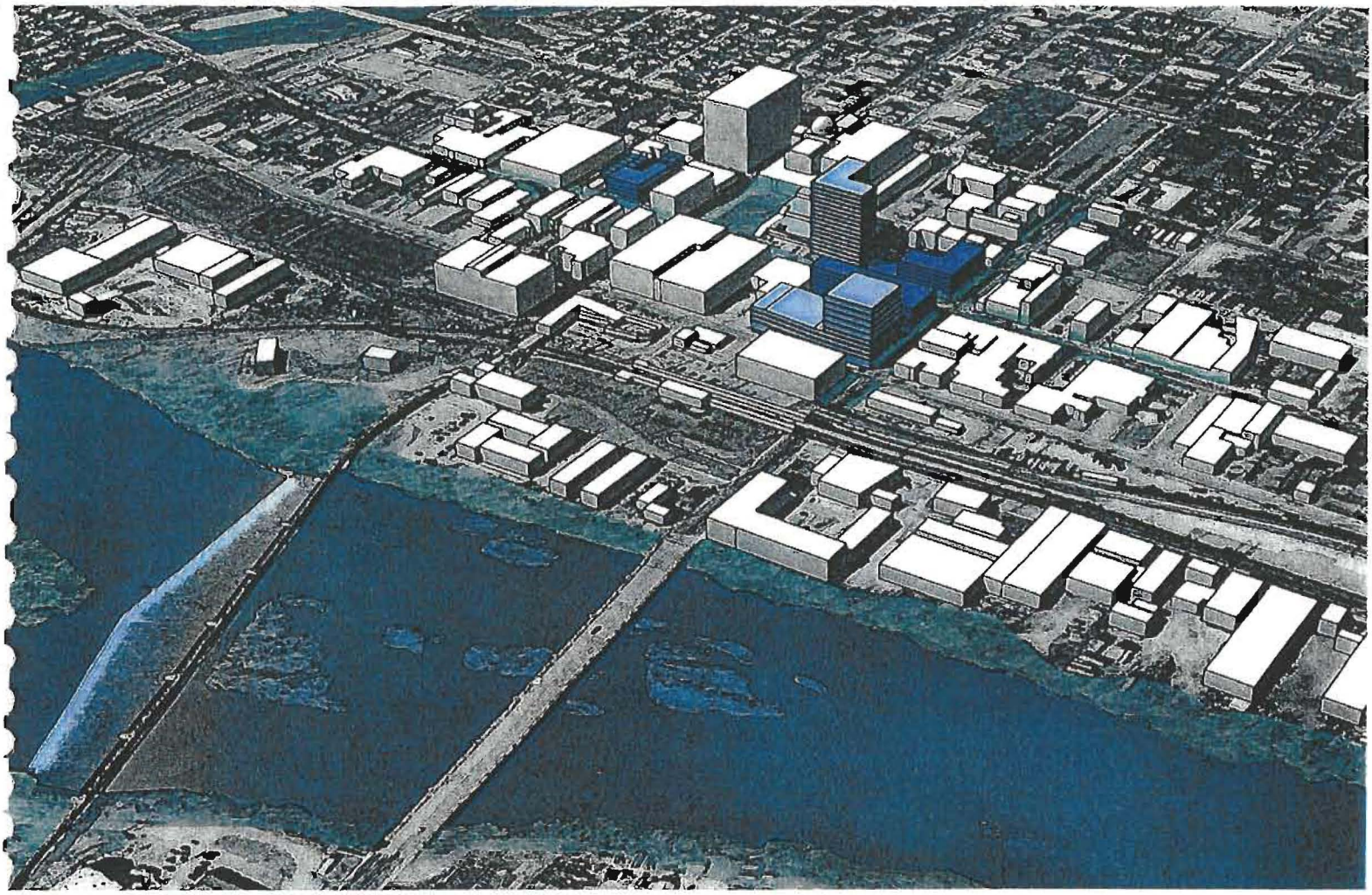


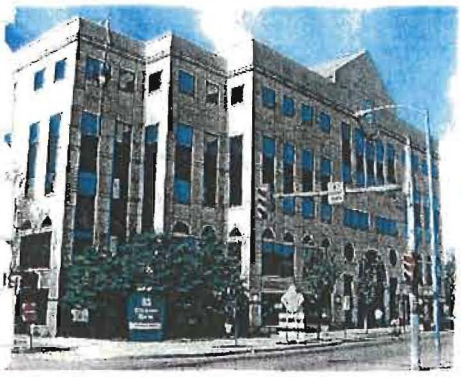
Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC
with ECONSULT, Inc.

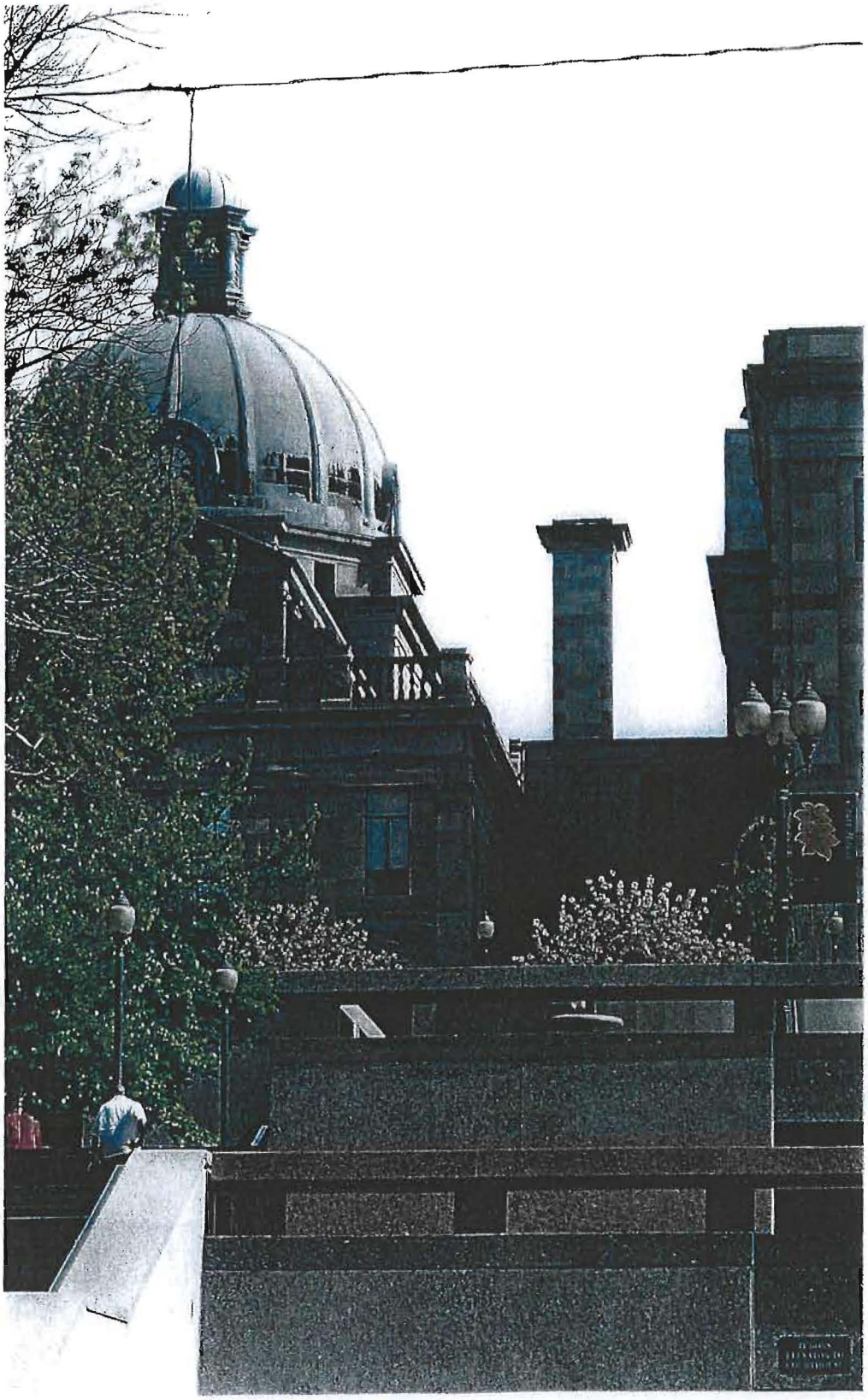
Downtown Norristown Strategic Development Plan

Business In Our Sites

Pennsylvania Department of Community & Economic Development
Commonwealth Financing Authority

June 30, 2007





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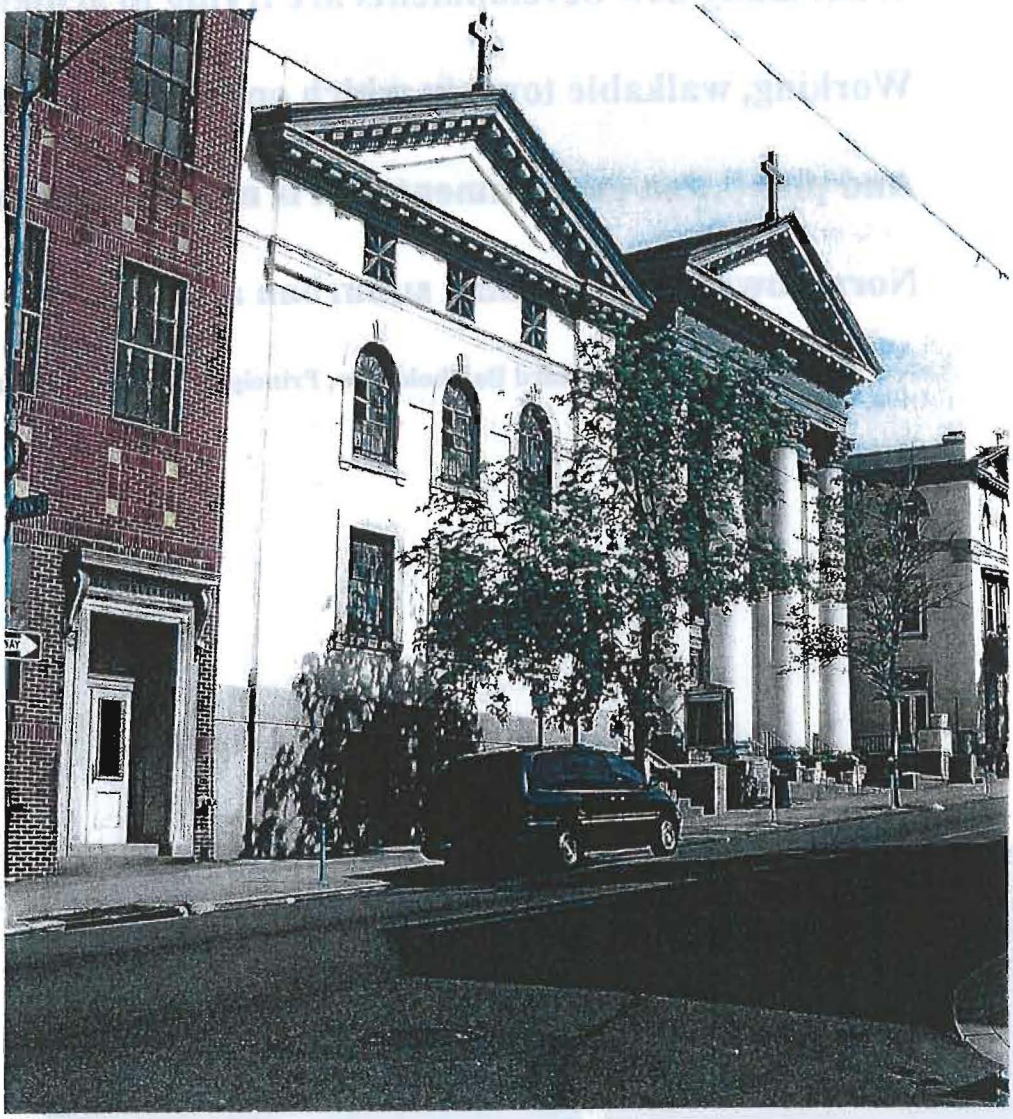
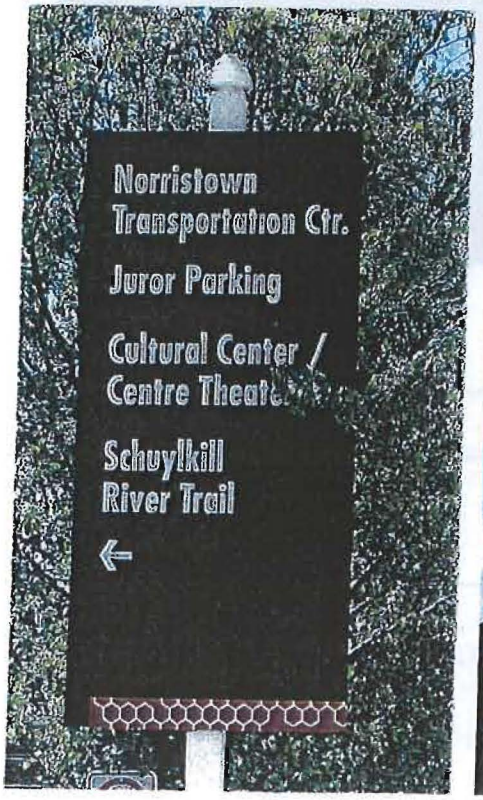
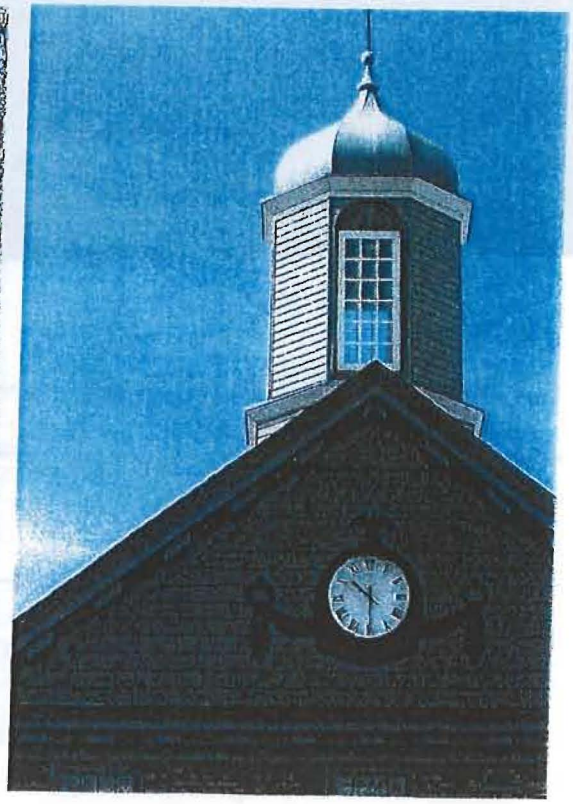


"Norristown has the potential to be a fine example of What many new developments are trying to achieve – a Working, walkable town in which one can live, work And plan … an environment that is not easy to achieve in Norristown's surrounding suburban areas."

- Richard Bartholomew, Principal, Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC

executive summary





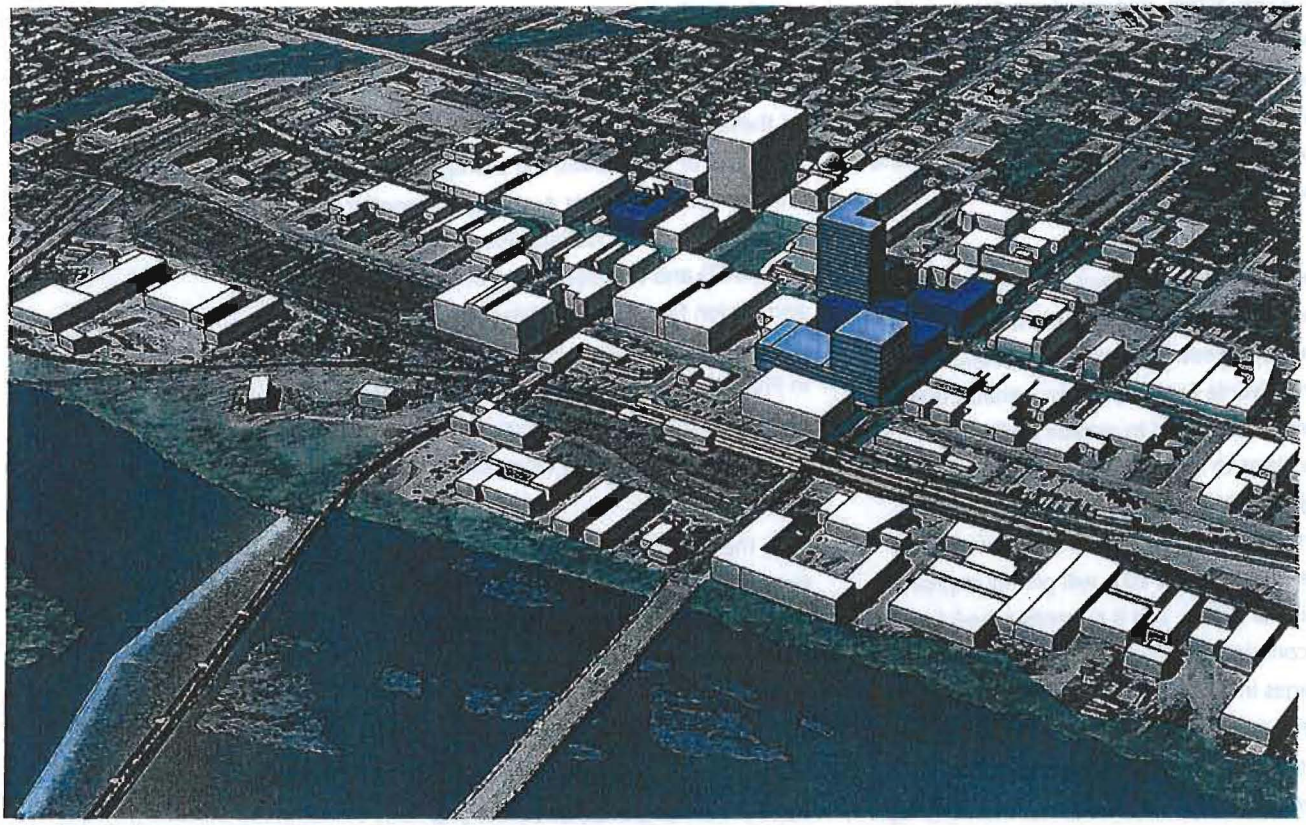


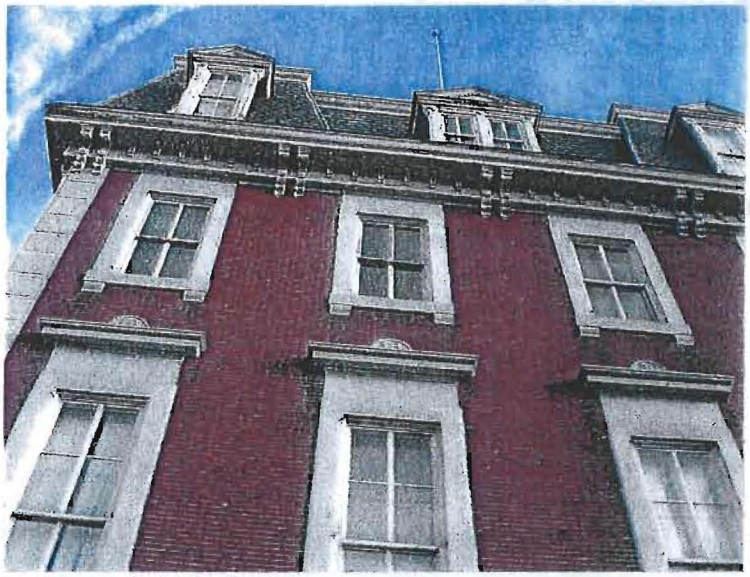
Figure 1 | A vision for downtown Norristown

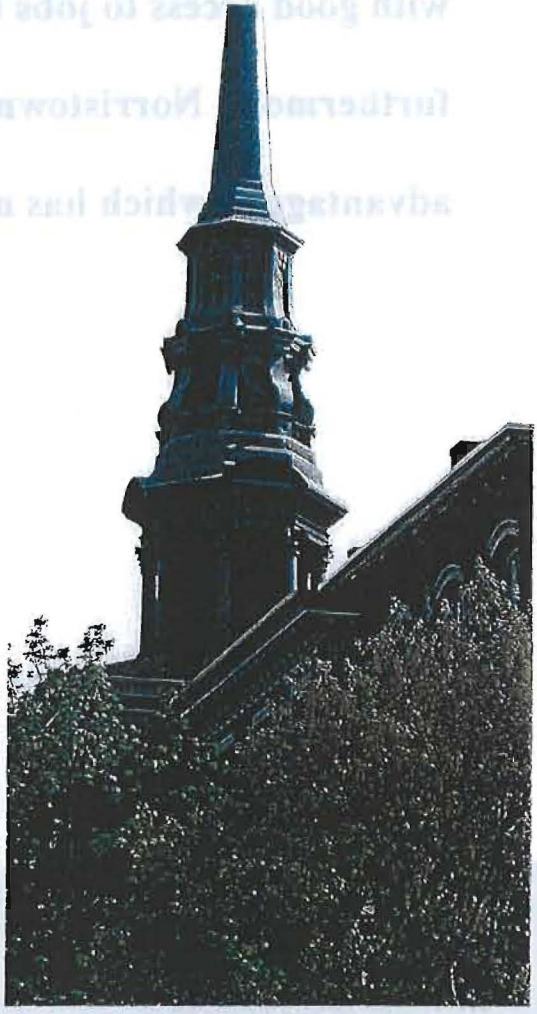
For over a decade Montgomery County has been working to revitalize its county seat, Norristown. Located along the scenic Schuylkill River, Norristown has major, under-utilized assets in the heart of suburban Philadelphia. However, numerous issues have presented significant challenges to Norristown's redevelopment efforts, including vehicular access, depressed conditions in the community that negatively impact investor confidence, vacant industrial property and rail lines separating Norristown's downtown from the Schuylkill River, and diversity of land ownership.

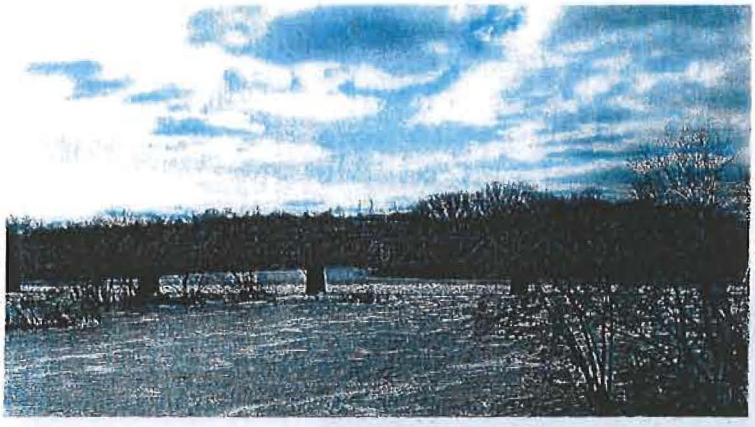
Steady progress has been made to overcome Norristown's development obstacles. A Riverfront Redevelopment Area (2002) and Pennsylvania Enterprise Zone (exited 2004) were both created to provide additional incentives to investors. The Lafayette Street Project, a proposed road linking downtown Norristown with a new PA Turnpike interchange and Route 202, will greatly improve vehicular access, and is currently scheduled for completion in 2013. Two new parking garages in Norristown's central business district are currently being finalized to improve the supply of downtown parking. Also, several recent development projects, including the renovation by local attorneys of the Montgomery County Bar Association and the construction of the regional "green" office of Pennsylvania's DEP, have brought a new momentum for change to the municipality.

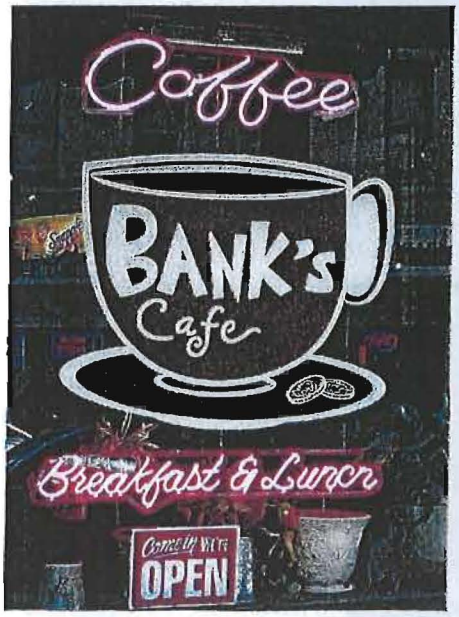
Late in 2006, the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority was awarded a planning grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development, under its "Business in Our Sites" (BIOS) program. The program is designed to focus on particular sites for economic development. In the case of Norristown, three sites were initially identified as the focus for analysis and future development. Two of these sites are in the heart of downtown, and a third site (comprised of three contiguous parcels under single ownership) is located on the Schuylkill riverfront. In order to address the development potential of these sites, and to develop a strategy for leveraging the development of these sites into a broader revitalization program for downtown, the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority engaged a consulting team of Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC (WRT) and Econsult, Inc. WRT, a planning and design firm based in Philadelphia, served as the lead consultant. Econsult, also based in Philadelphia, provided the team with real estate market analysis and pro forma financial analysis for the proposed development projects.

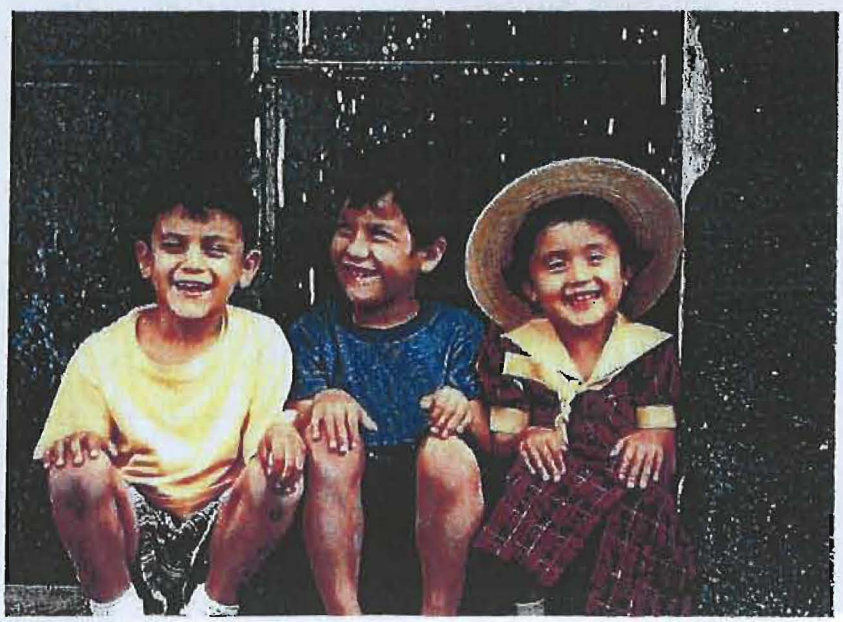
With the successful implementation of the recommendations of this strategic development program, Norristown has the potential to become a revitalized regional activity center in suburban Philadelphia. Connecting Norristown's major administration and legal sectors, flow of commuters using the Norristown Transportation Center and improved roads, the Borough's diversity of cultures, and its historic riverfront location with high suburban demand for these unique urban places will result in dramatic downtown residential, entertainment, and commercial development. Achieving this revitalization of Norristown will also result in a special, vibrant place that will be a source of pride for all of Montgomery County's citizens.





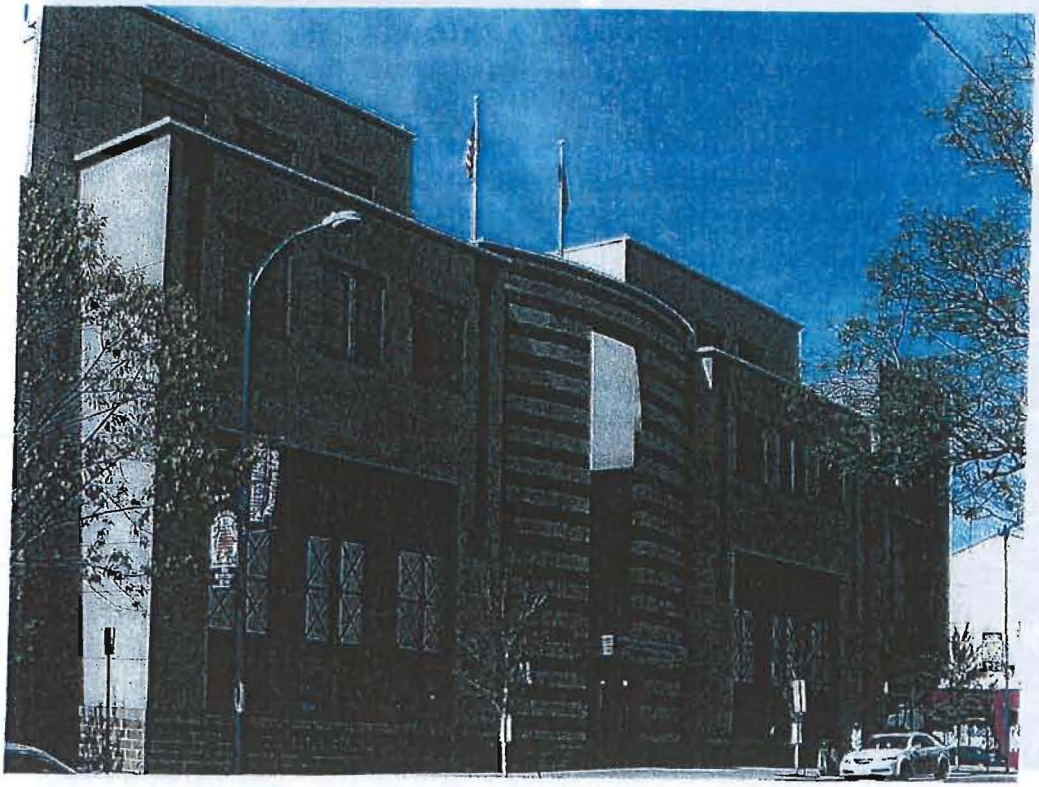



Coffee
BANK's
Cafe
Breakfast & Lunch
OPEN



"Norristown is well positioned as a residential location, with good access to jobs throughout the region. furthermore, Norristown is a true transit hub. The advantage of which has not been effectively exploited."

norristown today



Historical Context

Incorporated in 1812, the municipality of Norristown encompasses 3.6 square miles and is situated 20 miles from Philadelphia in the heart of Montgomery County. As the county seat, it functions as a regional center for government, law, and health services.

Norristown's strategic location along the Schuylkill River shaped the town's early development, with textile and paper mills lining the riverfront, taking advantage of the established shipping corridor. The advent of the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroads, running along the Schuylkill, in addition to an early commuter rail line that connected Norristown to Philadelphia, further strengthened the municipality's regional location and encouraged industrial and residential growth.

Designated as the county seat in the 18th century, Norristown's county offices and courthouse generated activity downtown and served as the main focus of the municipality, anchoring businesses along Main Street and DeKalb Street. The town also enjoyed a thriving retail environment that served the broader region. Fine Victorian homes, impressive public buildings, and a waterfront lined with active industry testified to Norristown's prosperity.

Unfortunately, subsequent transportation improvements in the 1950s and 1960s bypassed Norristown. As the use of the automobile and freight transport by truck increased, Norristown suffered from the lack of a direct connection to the Pennsylvania Turnpike (I-276), Schuylkill Expressway (I-76), and later to the Blue Route (I-476). As a result, Norristown struggled to take advantage of the region's exponential growth.

More accessible regional employment centers in King of Prussia, Conshohocken, and Plymouth Meeting attracted economic growth and development away from the county seat. Similarly, a changing retail model witnessed the establishment of expansive new malls in Plymouth Meeting and King of Prussia, which replaced Norristown as a retail destination. Norristown with its narrow streets, old buildings, traditional retail, and row houses simply could not compete with the pace, scale or amenities of neighboring development. Similarly, new office and industrial parks were developed near highway interchanges while single family detached housing spread over the surrounding countryside.

Since the 1960 census, Norristown's population has declined in sharp contrast to the dramatic rise in population and residential and commercial development experienced throughout the rest of Montgomery County. While much of this growth resulted from factors such as highway expansion, it was also fed by migration from the City of Philadelphia. Norristown must now find a way to reposition itself and share in the prosperity of the surrounding region.

Regional Context

Montgomery County is a growing, dynamic and wealthy county. Norristown, however, has not fully shared in the county's growth.

Population and Income

Demographic and economic data clearly illustrate the diverging fortunes of the county as a whole and Norristown. While the population of Montgomery County increased by 15 percent from 1990-2005, Norristown's population was essentially flat. Moreover, population in

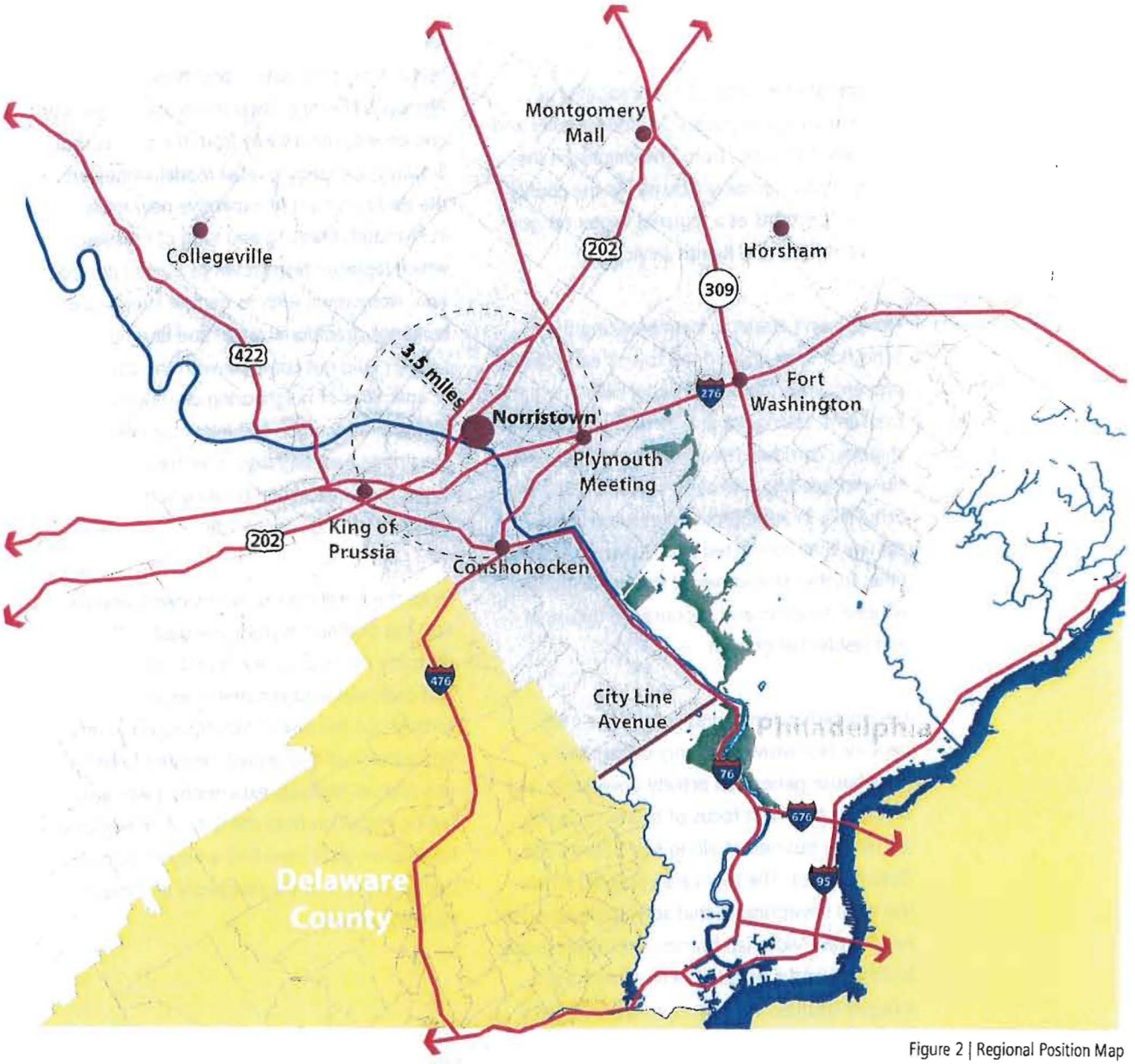


Figure 2 | Regional Position Map

Norristown appears to have declined in the last five years.

Economically, the average income of a Norristown resident is only 54% of the average income of a Montgomery County resident. Not surprisingly, there is also a much higher percentage of families with incomes below the poverty line in Norristown than in the County. The income differential between the County and the municipality continues to diverge because the rate of income growth in Norristown is less than half of that of the County.

Education, Race/Ethnicity, and Age

Consistent with the modest income levels, Norristown residents tend to have slightly less education than the typical Montgomery

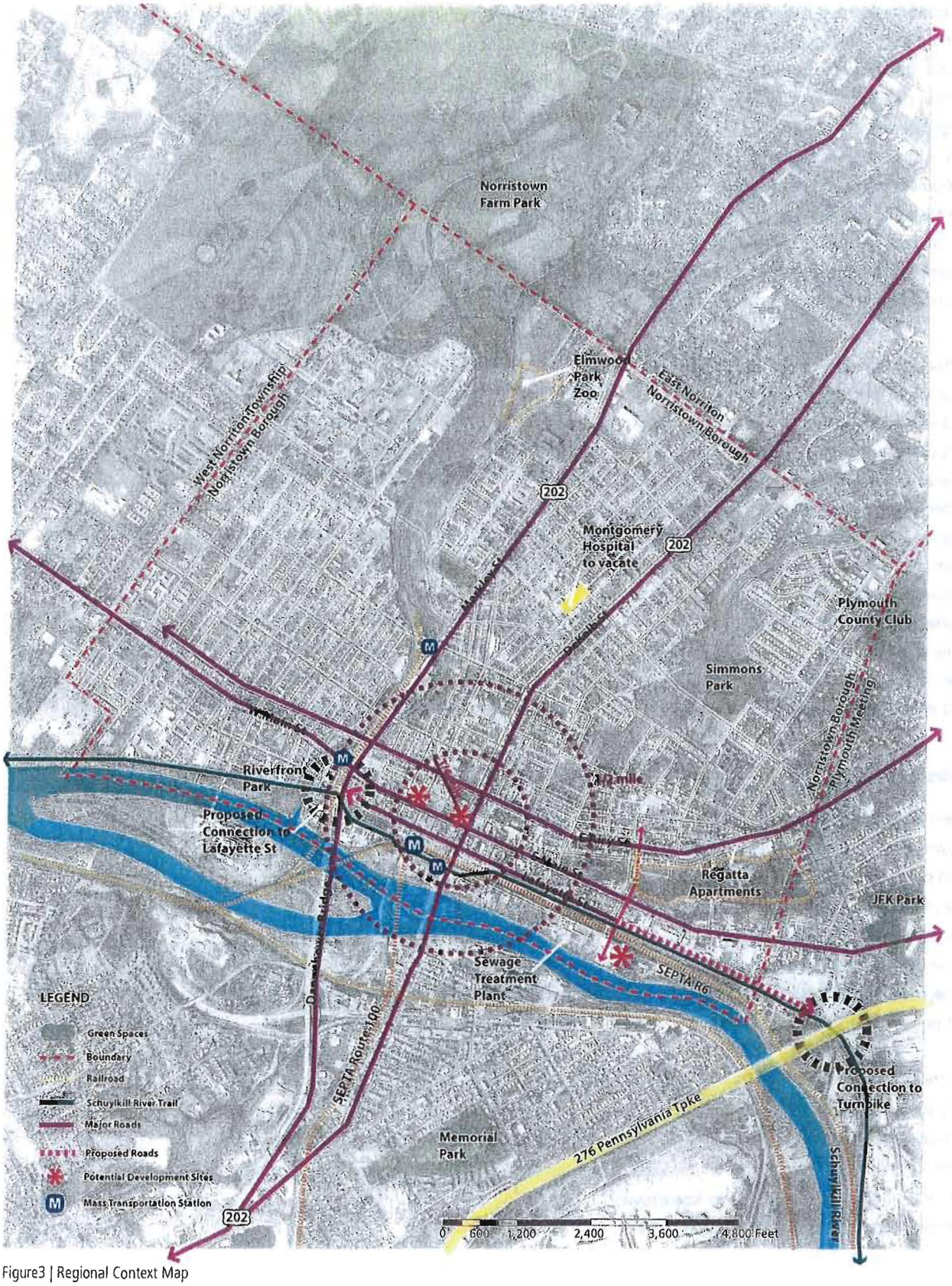


Figure3 | Regional Context Map

County resident, a larger minority population, and a larger immigrant population – 10.2% total. Interestingly, the increasing Hispanic and Asian population appears to be contributing significantly to the vitality of the municipality. Although their absolute share of total population is still modest, the growth rates of Hispanic and Asian residents constitute a small boomlet for Norristown. In fact, some of Norristown's most vibrant neighborhoods are significantly Hispanic.

Although Norristown does not share the affluence of Montgomery County, one demographic factor—the age distribution of the population—is a positive contributor to the overall vitality of the municipality. Unlike many older urban areas in Pennsylvania, Norristown has a relatively young population, younger than that of Montgomery County as a whole. In particular, Norristown has significantly higher percentages of the population, both male and female, that are less than 40 years of age. This is a key demographic for both retail and entertainment venues.

Housing Market

Given income levels and the lack of population growth in Norristown, it is not surprising that both owner-occupied and rental housing are very affordable, especially compared to the County overall. Over 75% of owner-occupied housing have prices less than $100,000 while in the county overall (including Norristown) that percentage is only 13%.

The trends in Norristown's owner-occupied housing market have been positive, although the rate of price growth has lagged that of the county overall. From 2000-2005, the median price of a single-family residence in Norristown increased from $112,300 to $150,000, a 33.6 percent increase. Prices in the county rose from $168,000 to $235,000, a 39.9 percent jump.

There has been a modest amount of new construction in Norristown. From 2000-2002, an average of 35 new residential units per year were constructed. Not surprisingly, new houses constructed in Norristown are much larger, 60 percent, than existing houses. In addition to being much larger, new houses sell at a considerably higher price per square foot.

Because the houses are both larger and are 20% more expensive on a per square foot basis, new home sales prices are much higher than the sales prices of Norristown's existing homes. This differential is very important when examining the economic viability of new home construction in the municipality. Assuming that these per square foot prices increased at the rate of existing home sales from 2001-2005, the price per square foot of a new home is now likely to be greater than $121 per square foot. This indicates that construction of new housing with relatively modest amenities may be profitably developed—if land acquisition costs are not too high.

Economic Activity

In 2000, Norristown was home to over 20,000 jobs, based on DVRPC's analysis of employment centers in the region. Although Norristown is a smaller employment center than either King of Prussia, Plymouth Meeting or Conshohocken, it remains a significant center. King of Prussia is the dominant employment center while Plymouth Meeting and Conshohocken have also experienced robust employment growth. Norristown, in contrast, failed to compete with its regional peers, and lost almost 10% of its jobs from 1990 to 2000.

The overall weakness in employment in Norristown has continued, despite the fact that other urban areas such as Conshohocken have seen considerable growth. Norristown is also confronting the loss of another major employer—Montgomery Hospital Medical Center, which is planning to develop a new site outside the municipality in Whitpain Township. Montgomery Hospital, which is the municipality's largest employer with 1,300 current employees, will offer all employees jobs in the new facility. Although it is expected that the establishment of the new hospital will generate more employment (50-75%), the target destination is not easily accessible without automobile transportation, making it difficult for Norristown residents who rely on public transportation/walking to get to the hospital. When the hospital moves, other ancillary businesses are likely to be adversely affected, resulting in a further negative impact on employment. Currently, over 4,300 people are employed in Norristown in health care and social assistance services.

Overall, Norristown has undergone some business growth. Between 2002 and 2006, Norristown experienced an increase in the number of businesses located in the municipality. Manufacturing and Industrial businesses increased 34%, Norristown's retail trade sector rose 38%, and the service industry increased by 153%. Although more businesses were established in the area, employment remains low because most of these businesses are small-scaled, requiring fewer workers.

Commercial Real Estate

Despite the fact that employment has been relatively weak, commercial real estate vacancies are low in Norristown. Cushman and Wakefield reports that the overall vacancy rate is 7.6% in 2007, with about 122,489 square feet available. Rental rates for this space range from $10 to $18 per square foot. With these relatively modest asking prices for commercial space, vacancy rates have been kept low because it is not profitable to undertake new commercial development except, perhaps, in clearly defined, special niches.

Norristown's Development Goals

A successful Strategic Development Plan for downtown Norristown will:

- Revitalize downtown Norristown
- Implement mixed-use development projects that include housing
- Establish economically viable projects for immediate development
- Strengthen and expand Norristown's civic core
- Reconnect downtown Norristown to the surrounding region
- Reconnect downtown Norristown to the Schuylkill River
- Foster a healthy and sustainable community and urban environment

The Development Sites

This study originally focused specifically on three sites located in downtown Norristown - two parcels on Main Street and a site comprised of three contiguous parcels on the Schuylkill riverfront. Below is a summary for each parcel, based on information from the

PARCELS	Lot Total Acreage	Zoning
Main Street Parcels		
69 – 87 E Main St	0 70 acres	UDOII
31 W Main St	0.75 acres	UDOII
Riverfront Parcels		
500 E Washington St	3.30 acres	UDOI
600 E Washington St	3.50 acres	UDOI
700 E Washington St	4.16 acres	UDOI

Montgomery County Board of Assessment.

As a result of further analysis, it was determined that two additional parcels, one adjacent to the site at Main and DeKalb Streets (43 East Main Street) and the other across the street on the southwest corner of Main and DeKalb Streets also represent key potential redevelopment opportunities. Because of their high visibility, their proximity to the redevelopment site on the northwest corner of Main and DeKalb, and their location in the downtown, redevelopment of these additional sites is important for the revitalization of Norristown's downtown core.

Characteristics of these additional sites are summarized below.

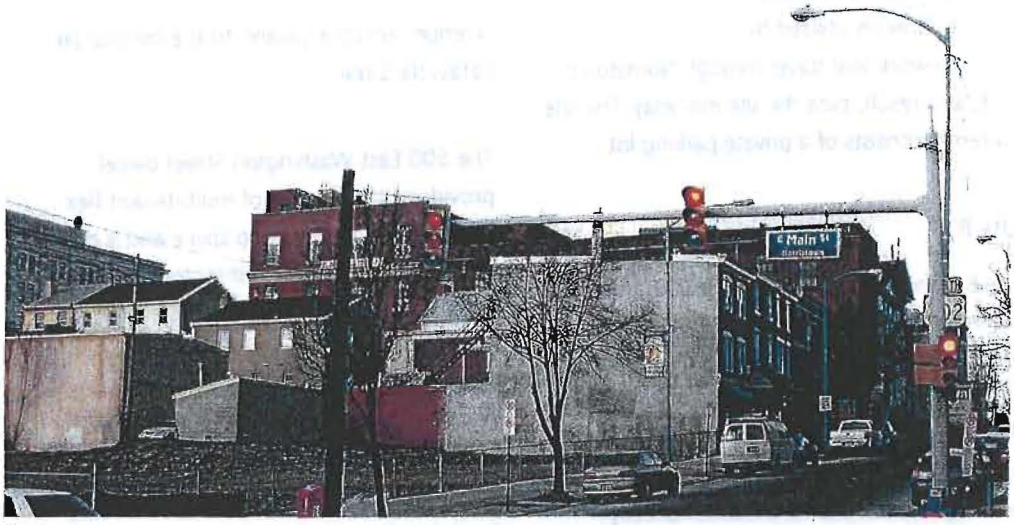
ADDITIONAL PARCELS	Lot Total Acreage	Zoning
Main Street Parcels		
43 E Main St	0.90 acres	UDOII
52 - 90 E Main St	1.71 acres	UDOII
201 – 223 DeKalb St	↓	↓
73 E Lafayette St		

In summary, the strategic development plan is focused on four separate sites. Three of them are in the downtown core, and are referred to collectively as the "Main Street Sites." The fourth site is outside the downtown core, and is referred to as the "Riverfront Site." (See Fig. 3 for a general location of these sites.)

Main Street Sites

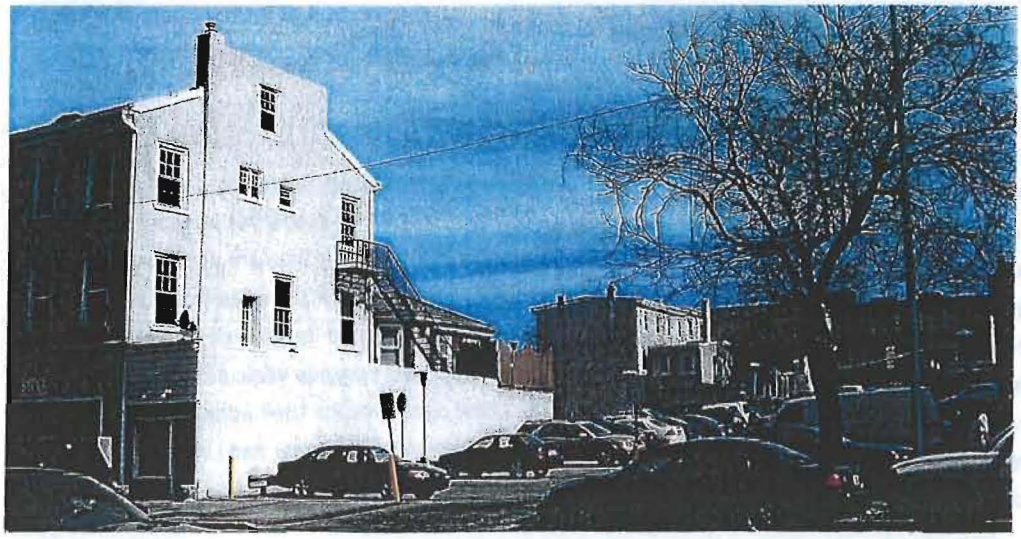
Site A

The first site (69-87 East Main Street), owned by Dilucia Companies, is located on the northwest corner of Main and DeKalb Streets, comprising 1.5 acres. The site is a few blocks from SEPTA's transportation center and also is a block away from the county courthouse. This site is crucial to the improvement of city conditions and attraction of more people to the downtown area because of its surroundings



Site A

Site B



Site C

and also because it intersects DeKalb Street. DeKalb Street is utilized by many who commute to work and travel through Norristown and, as a result, pass the site everyday. The site currently consists of a private parking lot.

Site B

Site B is the parcel of land located on the southwest corner of Main and DeKalb. It is within the Redevelopment Area, but consists of several parcels in multiple private ownership. Much of the site is currently used for surface parking; there are also some one story buildings on the site. It is located directly across Main Street from Site A.

Site C

The third site, until recently owned by O'Neill Properties Group, is located on the northeast corner of Main and Cherry Streets. It has an irregular shape, and is primarily used as surface parking. There is an historic stone house on the corner. Montgomery County recently approved the funding of a municipal parking garage at the northwest corner of Main and Cherry Streets. It is anticipated that construction of the garage will begin construction in July 2007.

Riverfront Site

The Riverfront sites, located on the eastern part of Norristown's riverfront area, is approximately 11 acres. Located directly across the river from Bridgeport, the Riverfront site is currently the home to underused and vacant industrial buildings adjacent to the existing municipal sewer plant that is being considered for replacement and relocation. The property is owned by O'Neill Properties Group. The site is directly accessible from the north via a level crossing of the CSX rail line from Lafayette Street and from the west via Washington Avenue, which is parallel to the railroad (and Lafayette Street) on the river side.

The 500 East Washington Street parcel provides 119,000 GSF of multi-tenant flex office and manufacturing space and is directly adjacent to 600 East Washington Street, which provides 120,000 GSF of multi-tenant flex office space. The latter parcel, previously leased by Nicolet Industries, underwent an extensive environmental cleanup in 1998 through the Commonwealth's Hazardous Site Cleanup Fund. This was the first such partnership to fund the cleanup of a hazardous waste site in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The DEP Land Recycling Program recognized these specific parcels on the waterfront as areas highly desirable for economic redevelopment and close to existing markets, a qualified workforce, and with established transportation corridors.

Existing uses on the three parcels provide jobs to employees of Boehringer Labs, a manufacturer of heart valves. The warehouse structure presently sits vacant. The property at 700 East Washington Street is presently a vacant lot. These sites are candidates for multi-tenant flex office and manufacturing space.

While the Schuylkill riverfront is a prime area for redevelopment, the proposed waterfront properties are isolated from the rest of Norristown by the sewer treatment facility and railroad tracks. The properties are accessible by two roads but at this time are not integrated into either the rest of the waterfront or the downtown. Planned improvements to Lafayette Street will upgrade vehicular accessibility to these sites. Despite their adjacency to the R6 Norristown Commuter Rail Line, the sites are not particularly transit accessible, because

they are approximately 0.6 miles from the closest station at the Norristown Transportation Center. In addition, the entire site is located approximately seven feet below the 100-year floodplain, which constrains development. Finally, the adjacency of these sites to the municipality's sewage treatment plant both isolates the site and reduces its attractiveness for development.

Local Context

Any new development in downtown Norristown is subject not only to the municipality's regional context but also to Norristown's current strengths and weaknesses. An understanding of these factors is important in order to take full advantage of each site's development potential.

Access, Transportation and Parking

Despite the absence of immediate connections to the region's major highways (the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the Schuylkill Expressway, and the Blue Route), Main Street and U.S. Route 202 (which passes through the municipality) provide Norristown with good regional highway access. Vehicular access to downtown Norristown will be dramatically improved with the implementation of the Lafayette Street Improvement Project, which will transform Lafayette Street to an urban boulevard that will connect to a new four-way (EZ Pass only) interchange with the Pennsylvania Turnpike on the east, and to a new interchange with Route 202 to the west.

Lafayette Street, which is parallel to Main Street, is located one block to the south of Main Street on the north side of the CSX/R6 rail corridor, and when completed will improve regional access to the study's sites, enhancing their potential for development.

In addition, Norristown has excellent mass transit connections. Downtown is the location of SEPTA's Norristown Transportation Center, which serves as the terminus of the Route 100 trolley, which connects Norristown with Philadelphia's Main Line and Upper Darby's 69th Street Terminal. SEPTA's 69th Street Terminal provides direct connections to Philadelphia's Market –Frankford Subway/Elevated line and a variety of suburban and city trolley and bus routes. Downtown Norristown is also served by SEPTA's R6 regional rail service, with a station located a block from the heart of downtown. In addition, a regional bike and hiking trail, which connects central Philadelphia with Valley Forge, passes through downtown Norristown; a new trailhead facility is planned at the intersection of the R6 line and DeKalb Street.

Downtown Norristown has an increasing supply of off-street garage parking. SEPTA is currently building a 450-space parking garage adjacent to the downtown regional rail station and transportation center. In addition, Montgomery County plans to start construction in July 2007 on a new 483-car garage and retail development on the northwest corner of Main and Cherry Streets.

Downtown Employment

Norristown is the county seat of Montgomery County. Government activity also attracts others into downtown, such as lawyers, consultants, and users of various county government services. In addition, the state's Department of Environmental Protection and Citizen's Bank have office buildings in downtown Norristown. Overall, downtown employment approximates 6,000 persons, providing a solid

base for downtown activity during working hours.

Health Care

Norristown is home to major businesses such as Auxilium Pharmaceuticals Inc, Healthaxis Inc. (which specializes in health care related computer programming services), and Integrated Circuit Systems Inc. (a company that develops and markets silicon timing devices). Quest Diagnostics, which provides health care testing services, and Mercy Suburban Hospital are some of the leading employers in the municipality. Merck and Company, Inc., Prudential, Jefferson Health System, and Abington Memorial Hospital are some of the many corporations located in Montgomery County outside of Norristown.

Main Street

Trends across the country indicate a renewed interest in distinctive main streets with a definite sense of place that offer a mix of uses scaled to the pedestrian. Norristown has the potential to be a fine example of what many new developments are trying to achieve – a working, walkable town in which one can live, work and play. Higher density development combined with access to mass transit provides downtown Norristown with the ability to function as a traditional transit and pedestrian oriented environment, an environment that is not easy to achieve in Norristown's surrounding suburban areas.

Urban Architecture

Enriching Norristown's culture and streetscape are many buildings and sites of historical value. The Montgomery County Courthouse dates back to 1904, the St. George Coptic Orthodox church boasts Tiffany stained glass

windows, and the post office's WPA murals honor the nation's industrial age. The Norristown Farm Park originally belonged to William Penn. There are numerous other historical sites in the Central Norristown Historic District. The plentitude of mill buildings offers tremendous opportunities for conversions into residential lofts, artist live-work space, and unique commercial or office spaces.

Waterfront

The riverfront shaped Norristown's early history and could play an invaluable role in its revitalization. The waterfront is currently underutilized with little public access, complicated by the physical barrier posed by the train tracks and industrial structures. High demand for unique urban places, as seen in nearby Manayunk and Conshohocken, could stimulate the extension of Norristown's commercial core towards the river, resulting in dramatic downtown residential, entertainment, and commercial development. Access to the water and a connection to the existing bike trail present abundant recreational opportunities as well.

Although Norristown's riverfront area is included in the designated redevelopment area, there are several impediments to redevelopment, particularly in the near future. Riverfront properties are currently in multiple private ownerships and need to be assembled. In addition, the area is large, and has limited regional access, until the completion of the Lafayette Street Improvement project. Also, it is possible that a portion of the sites, which have a history of industrial use, may need environmental remediation before they can be redeveloped. Finally, the sites along the river are in the 100-year floodplain, which does not prohibit development, but does pose a constraint.

Green Infrastructure

The regional "green" office of Pennsylvania's DEP, located on Main Street in downtown Norristown symbolizes momentum for change in the way urban areas are developed in a sustainable way. "Recycling" existing buildings, reclaiming green spaces, establishing verdant corridors, preserving the waterfront, and connecting to existing parks are among the many steps Norristown can take towards sustaining its ecological, social, and economic future.

Immigration

Norristown has experienced a recent increase in its immigrant populations, particularly Asians and Latinos. With their arrival have come new additions to the mix of retail and cultural offerings serving these populations and Norristown as a whole.

Cultural Amenities

Located on DeKalb Street in downtown Norristown, the Montgomery County Cultural Center contains an award-winning theatre called the Centre Theatre. The Montgomery County Cultural Center hosts many programs, shows, and workshops, including Kids: The Heart of the Arts, a program held for children annually. The Centre Theatre presents a number of productions and was recently renovated to seat more people. Norristown residents are beginning to show more interest in and embrace the arts, as an increasing number of art galleries and studios are sprouting up in the downtown area. The Elmwood Park Zoo is part of Elmwood Park, originally constructed in 1924. With a wide variety of wildlife, the Zoo provides educational entertainment for people of all ages, attracting more than 130,000

people annually. The zoo is currently in the process of expanding from 16 to 42 acres

Public Perception

Despite its attractions and assets, Norristown suffers from a perceived high crime rate and low quality of life. Because it is home to the county's courthouse, any high-profile criminal activity in the County is unfairly associated with downtown Norristown. The fact that Norristown's downtown employment is not complemented by downtown residents and nighttime activity adds to the perception of downtown as an unsafe environment. This negative perception is perpetuated by the physical conditions of the municipality, which in places is characterized by vacant lots, distressed neighborhoods, and a sparse street presence after working hours.

Yet, the key to Norristown's revitalization is to build on its many strengths and opportunities and there are a number of thriving neighborhoods scattered throughout the municipality. These include areas along West Marshall Street and East Main Street, the prosperity of which serve as models for the municipality's underutilized areas.

Economic Context

Roughly 31% of Norristown employment is located in the downtown, making it the economic center within the municipality. In the downtown, there are over 4551 jobs in only 0.6 square miles (excluding Bridgeport). Moreover, the neighborhoods surrounding downtown are relatively dense as well. The waterfront, which is directly adjacent to downtown, is an underutilized, primarily industrial area.

In order to understand the economic context in which the study's development sites exist, Econsult aggregated and analyzed business data for all commercial activity within a half-mile radius of the midpoint of the two downtown locations, and performed the same analysis for the riverfront site. Understanding the current business activity in and around the downtown and waterfront areas can help determine where opportunities for development will be most successful.

Because the Montgomery County Courthouse dominates downtown Norristown, by far the largest group of businesses within a half-mile radius of the two downtown sites is law firms: 92 in total, out of a total 600+ businesses. More than half of these law firms, however, had sales of less than $500,000 per year, and only two percent had sales of more than $5 million. The courthouse itself employs 500 people, and there are over twenty additional county offices in the vicinity, including Special Services, which employs 150 workers. Total employment within a half-mile radius of the downtown sites is 5,321.

The second largest group of businesses within the half-mile circle of the downtown sites is restaurants. However, 26 of the 27 restaurants generate less than $500,000 in sales per year, and 26 of 27 have less than 20 employees. Mexican restaurants make up about a third of all restaurants in the downtown area, and have become quite popular among Norristown residents.

Turning to the riverfront site, there are less than 300 establishments within a half-mile radius of this location, many of which are accounted for in the downtown study area, as the half-mile buffers for the sites overlap each other. Employment in the waterfront area is 2,066, with 268 businesses in occupancy generating a total of $403,093,000

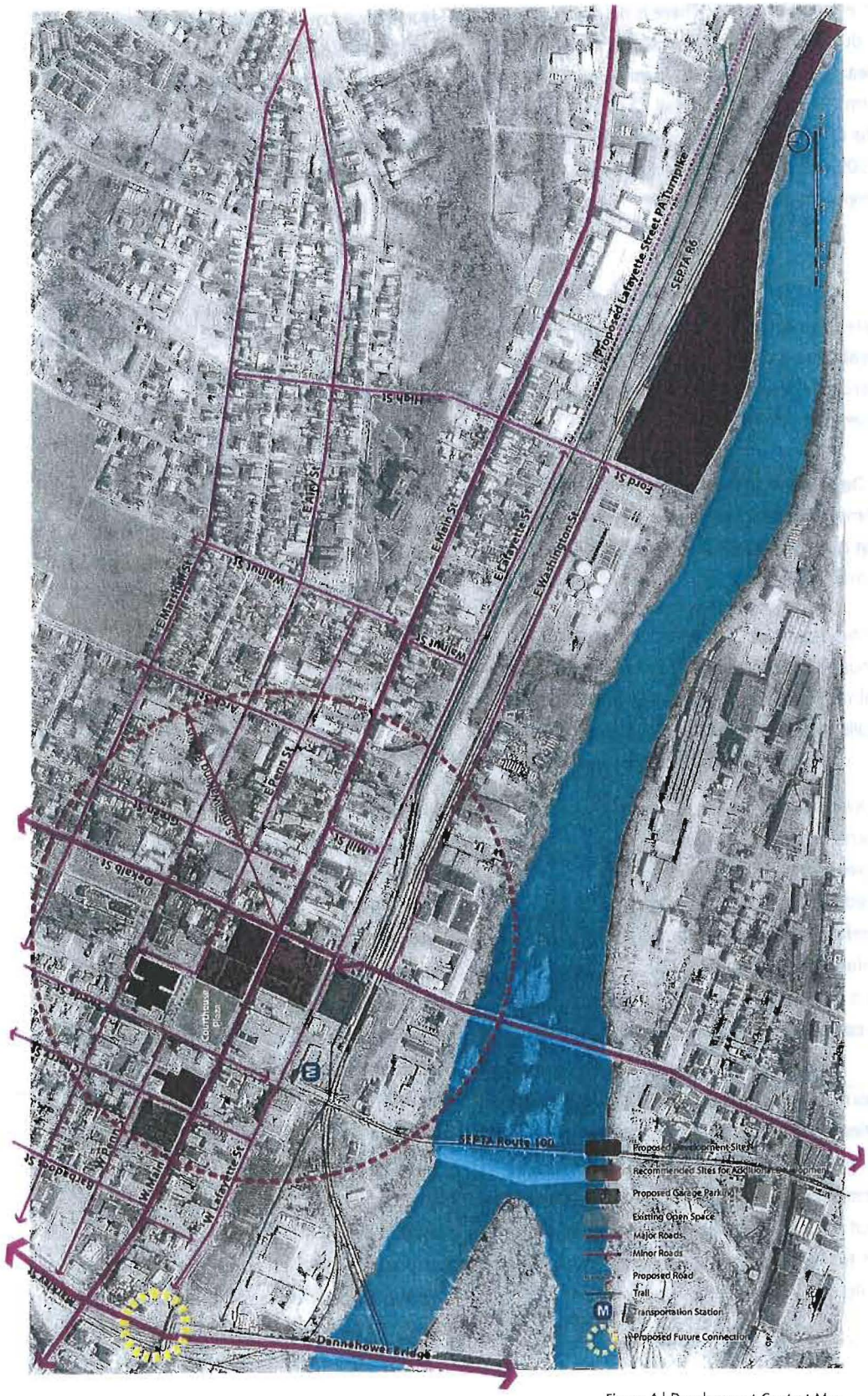


Figure 4 | Development Context Map

in economic activity. There is no dominant industry cluster, as the waterfront area is not nearly as populated with professional services, firms, restaurants, or retail. Over two-thirds of the waterfront area firms generate less than $500,000 per year in sales, and over 80% employ less than ten people.

Planning Implications

Based on Norristown's current strengths and weaknesses, the following statements summarize implications for future planning and development.

1. Despite the lack of growth in Downtown Norristown, it remains an economic center that is relatively dense with over 6,000 jobs in a small area.

2. The density of the area is both a plus and a minus. Density is one of the keys for achieving a vibrant urban experience, but inevitably it results in access challenges, especially parking.

3. Downtown development is likely to be expensive on a per square foot basis relative to green field development, especially when considering the costs of structured parking. Therefore long-term economic health is dependent on creating an attractive environment that is differentiated not only from its suburban competition, but also other urban areas.

4. Norristown is well positioned as a residential location, with good access to jobs throughout the region. Residential development has proven economically feasible within the municipality, but to date there has been no sustained effort to create a residential component in downtown or on the waterfront.

5. The current modest land valuations in Norristown could make it more attractive for younger households seeking an urban lifestyle at lower cost than in other suburban areas.

6. Increasing the number of households, especially higher income households will, in itself, result in improving amenities downtown for all residents.

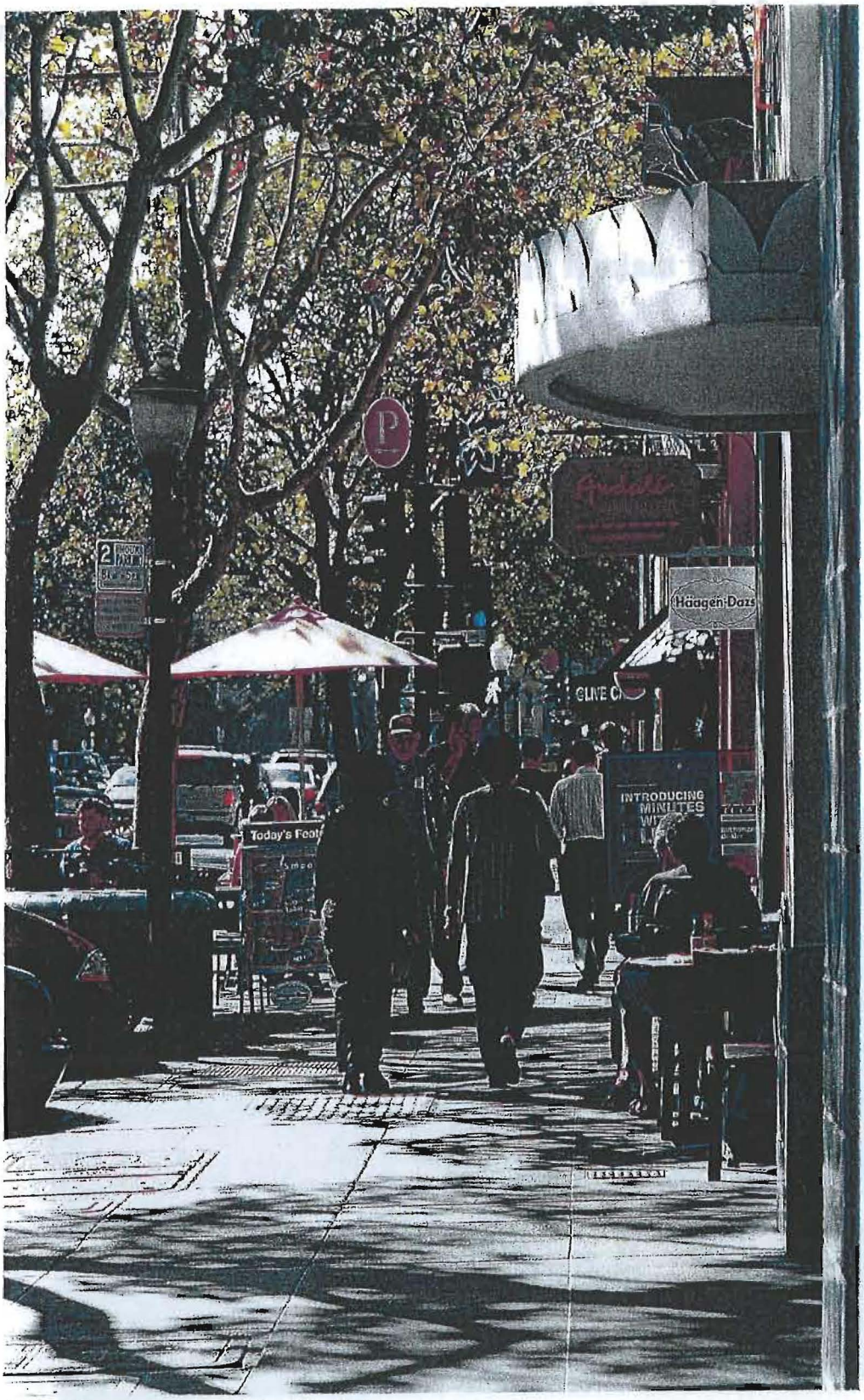
7. One important accessibility advantage of Norristown is that it is a true transit hub. This advantage has not been effectively exploited.

8. The waterfront is segmented into two areas by the municipal sewage treatment plant. The waterfront could provide an amenity to Downtown; unfortunately the three waterfront parcels included in this study are farthest from the downtown and difficult to integrate.

9. It is important to carefully evaluate the three waterfront parcels of this study. In terms of commercial development, they are likely best suited to auto-oriented office or flex space, or in terms of retail, an auto-oriented strip center. Unfortunately, these types of development may make downtown development more difficult.

10. Major retailers follow demographics, and therefore are unlikely to lead revitalization in Norristown. Successful retail development is likely to be niche retail, restaurants, and entertainment, and in part focused on the daytime office workers. An increase in residential population downtown will enable greater retail and restaurant activity.

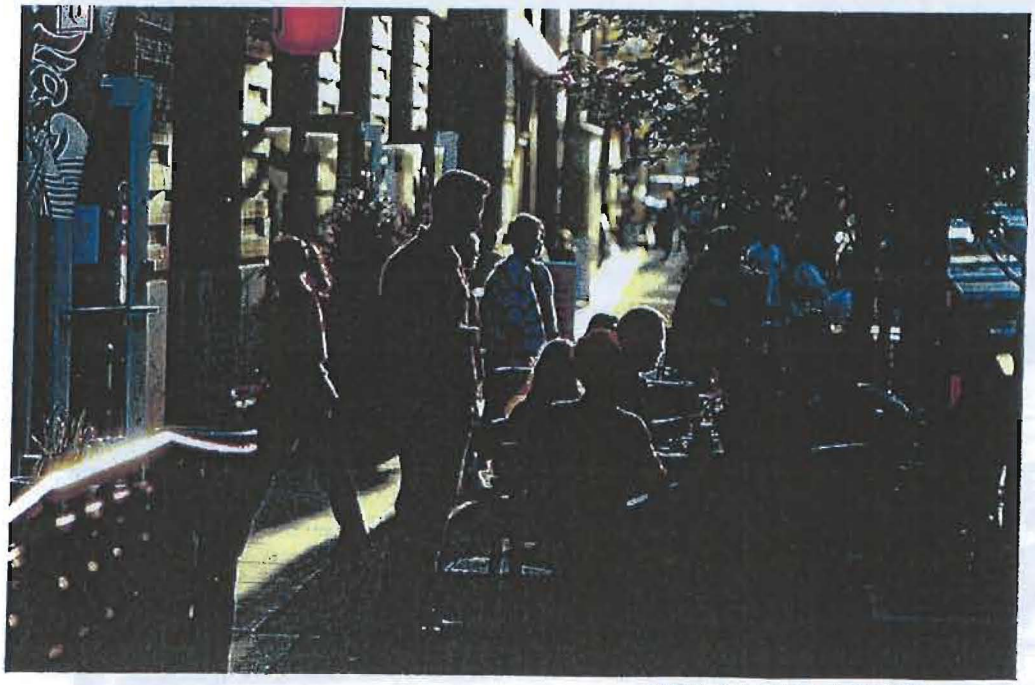
11 Because a key to successful revitalization of Downtown is dependent on being competitive in terms of amenities, it is important to maximize the waterfront's contribution to the overall attractiveness of Downtown.



Palo Alto Streetscape Improvement Project | Palo Alto, CA

"An overriding strategy is to get more people on the streets during the day and at night and then expand the momentum to the waterfront. Norristown has a real chance to capitalize on its close proximity to the Schuylkill River, something that would make it unique to the entire area."

norristown tomorrow



Washington Avenue Loft District | St. Louis, MO

Norristown's Future Image

Every city has an image—the sum of its setting, institutions, businesses and most of all, its citizens.

Years of poverty and decline have left Norristown with an image problem. Looking forward, Norristown can transcend this image by building on its inherent and increasingly marketable strengths—a culturally rich, diverse population; a strategic location along the 202 corridor in Montgomery County; a striking array of historic buildings and a potential for waterfront development overlooking the Schuylkill River.

Together these strengths represent Norristown's best chance to "re-brand" itself and to foster a vital, mixed-use urban community unique in a largely suburban part of Montgomery County. The municipality's many resources will also help it to project a dynamic new image, one that appeals to several emerging markets— younger professionals, recent graduates and mid-income city-dwellers priced-out of the region's traditional urban neighborhoods—that have a natural affinity for Norristown's diversity, history and location.

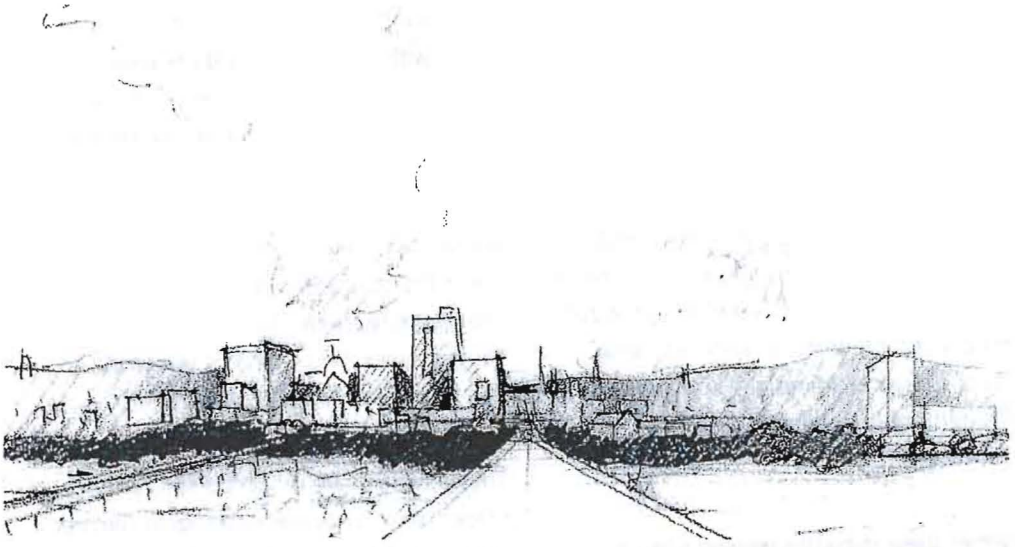
To realize its full potential, Norristown must adopt coherent aesthetic and cultural imagery for its future growth. This imagery— updated building characters, a variety of new target tenants/uses and improved streetscapes—when applied to a few key projects will be a realistic and attainable "first step" to restarting the municipality's growth.

Norristown isn't alone—many successful mid-size urban areas have faced similar challenges attracting new residents and tenants. Consider the next two towns down the Schuylkill: Conshohocken and Manayunk. Despite common origins as 19th-century mill towns, each area today has evolved a distinctly different identity. Conshohocken projects an almost "Sunbelt" image with its corporate mid-rise towers, structured parking and discreet, multi-family housing. In contrast, Manayunk presents a less corporate, "edgier" image based on the trendy shops, galleries and restaurants that line its Main Street. Perhaps most striking about this comparison is the fact that both images are relatively "new"—the result of strategic marketing efforts by several public and private development partners.

These contrasts are very important to Norristown since it has several things in common with both Conshohocken and Manayunk. Like Conshohocken, Norristown will share regional highway access (particularly with the completion of the Lafayette Street improvements), a riverfront setting, and corporate/institutional tenants. It also shares characteristics with Manayunk: a historic Main Street, strong transit amenities, and a riverfront location. Yet unlike either, Norristown also has a real chance to capitalize on its close proximity to the Schuylkill River, something that would make it unique to the entire area. On the following pages, four development paradigms, or future images, for Norristown are outlined: Regional Landmark, Town Square, Metropolitan Streetscape and Eco-Loft District. Each illustrates specific conditions or possibilities that arise in Norristown's cityscape.

Identifying a suitable and appropriate theme or development paradigm for downtown Norristown will help forge a marketable image for revitalization. Aspects of each of the above paradigms may be incorporated into an identity that positions Norristown within the region.

Paradigm 1 | Regional Landmark



Norristown skyline with new mixed-use developments at Main & DeKalb

Keywords – Pinnacle Tower, Skyline, Regional Node, Velocity...

Downtown Norristown is a key node along the Route 202 Corridor.

Proposals for tall structures at the Main & DeKalb sites will transform the Norristown skyline and its regional image to motorists heading north from King of Prussia. Tall buildings offer key opportunities to re-brand Norristown as an emergent community. These sites also offer a strategic location to businesses that need to service clients both north and south of the King of Prussia area.

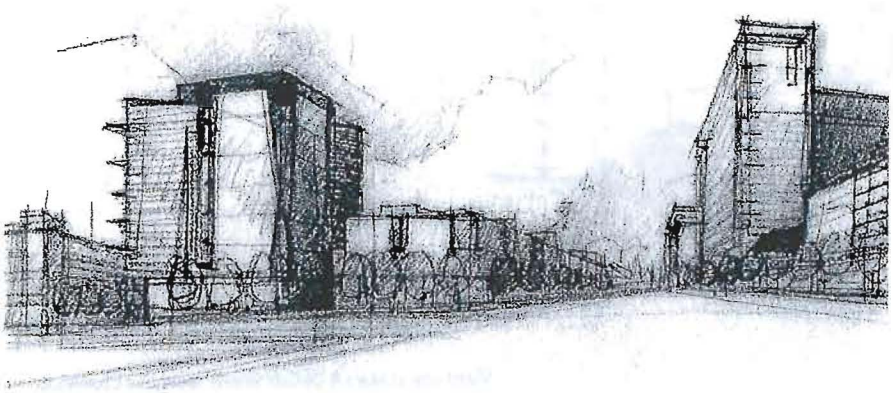
With its mix of high and low-scale development and strong riverfront presence, Alexandria, VA is a potential physical/urban model for Norristown's long-term potential.

Possible Retail Tenants – Pottery Barn, Banana Republic

Alexandria, VA

1 http://www.journal-topics.com/photos/2006/TR-Alexandria.jpg
2 www.twofrog.com/images/oldtown25.jpg

Paradigm 2 | Metropolitan Streetscape



New Streetscape along Main St as seen from DeKalb

Keywords – Shopping District, Cafe, Pedestrian

Taken as a whole, the three study sites will redefine Norristown's Main Street, especially in the blocks between Cherry and DeKalb.

In the American tradition of broad, tree-lined shopping streets leading in a central Town Square, Norristown has the infrastructure—Courthouse Square, historic shop fronts and a major thouroughfare—to sustain a vital, pedestrian-oriented commercial environment.

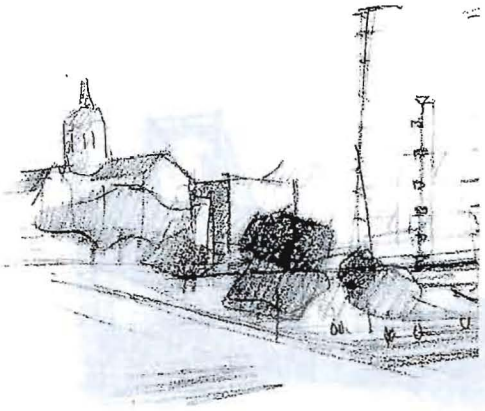
Two critical components of the new developments should be the provision of ground-level retail and the creation of coherant and beautiful streetscape amenities along Main.

Possible Retail Tenants – West Elm, The Gap,

Richmond, VA

1 http://richmondthenandnow.com/images/41-Now-big.jpg

Paradigm 3 | Town Square



Mixed-Use at Main & DeKalb Streets, facing the Courthouse

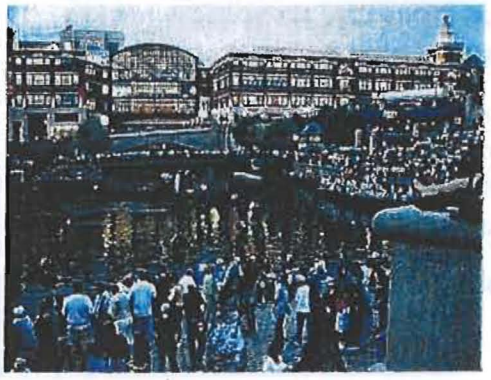
Keywords – Civic, Downtown, Workplace..

In many ways, Norristown is Montgomery County's "Town Square"—and the civic nature of the Courthouse and Town Green suggests a more monumental character in some of the new buildings.

This is especially true for the proposed development at Main and DeKalb Streets which will form the fourth side of Norristown's center square. Particular care must be given to how this large residential facade "frames" the square and to how it might connect to the adjacent plazas in ways that animate these largely empty spaces.

Since this design paradigm accentuates the city's institutional past and historic architecture, it would likely appeal to an older demographic.

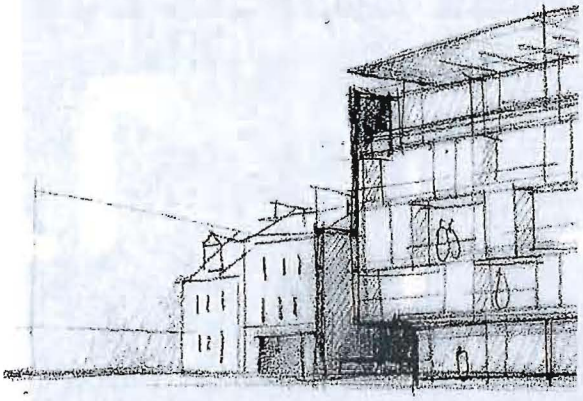
Possible Retail Tenants – Brooks Bros, Ann Taylor Loft



Providence, RI

1 http://www.friendshipvalleyinn.com/providence.jpg
2 http://www.pps.org/graphics/gpp/providence_ri_waterfire3_large

Paradigm 4 | Eco-Loft District



5-Story Lofts at Main & Cherry Streets

Keywords – Loft, Warehouse District, Hip...

Downtown Norristown has several fabulous industrial buildings & historic warehouses.

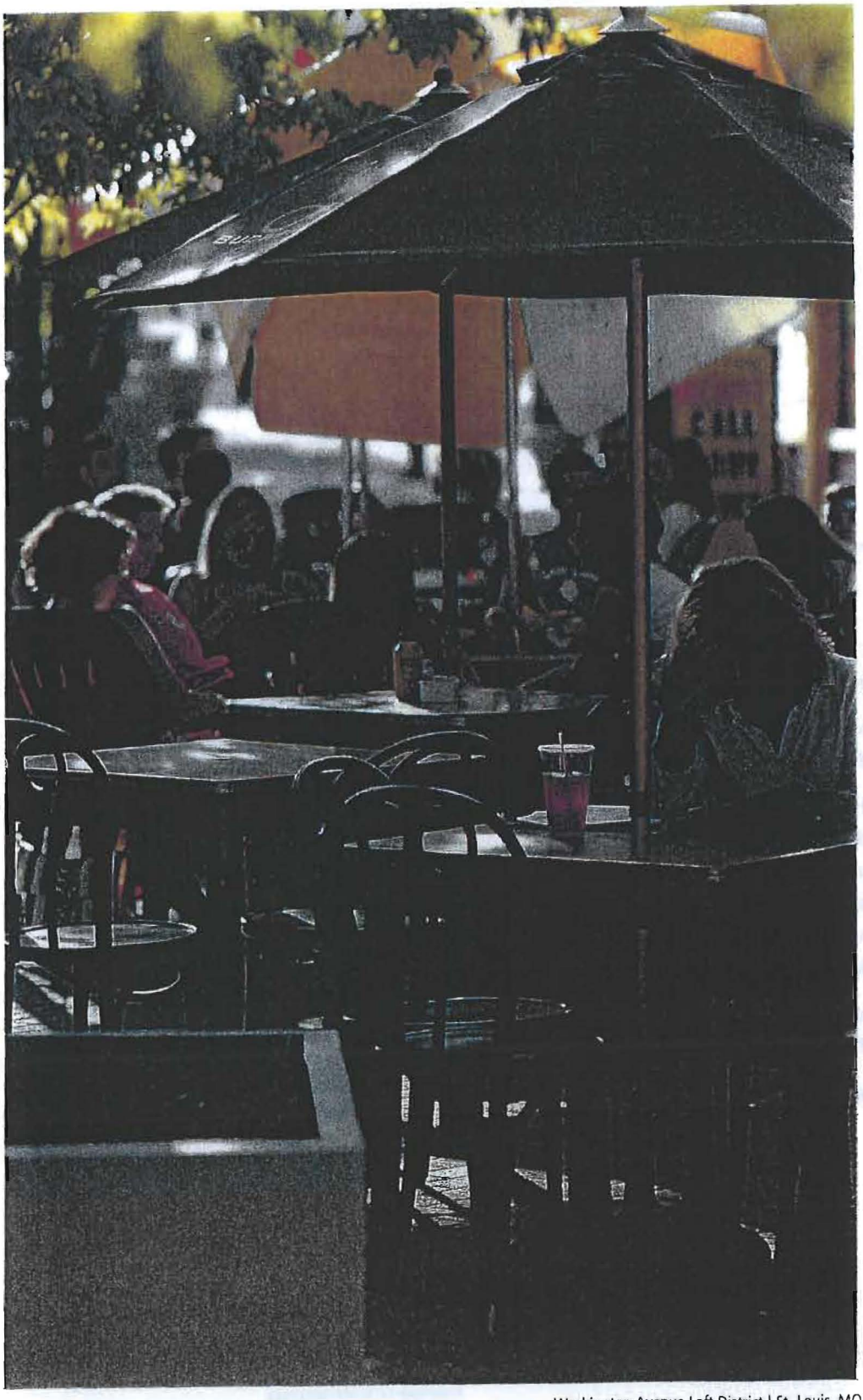
This aspect of the town's character and its architectural diversity are very attractive to a younger, more mobile demographic. In this design paradigm, rehabilitated warehouses would mix with new buildings that have a wide range of materials and uses.

Possible Materials – Industrial Materials, Color, Dark Metals

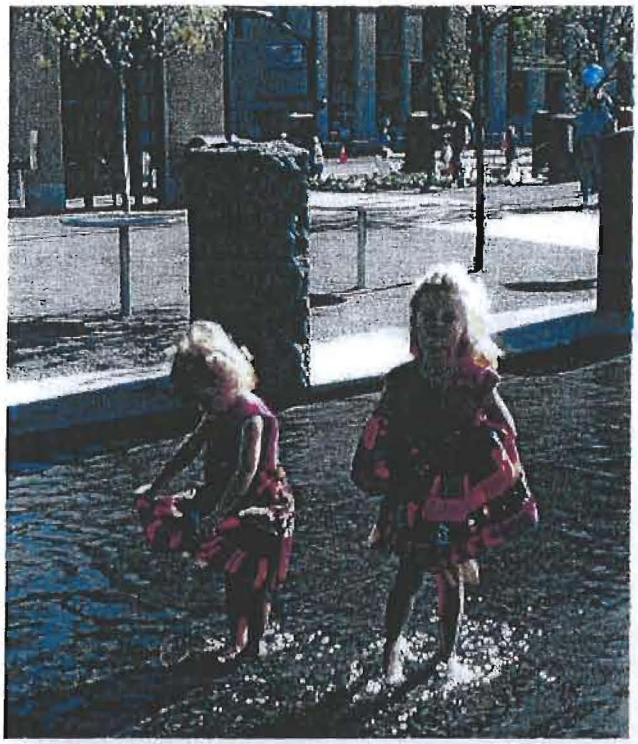
Possible Retail Tenants – REI, Urban Outfitters

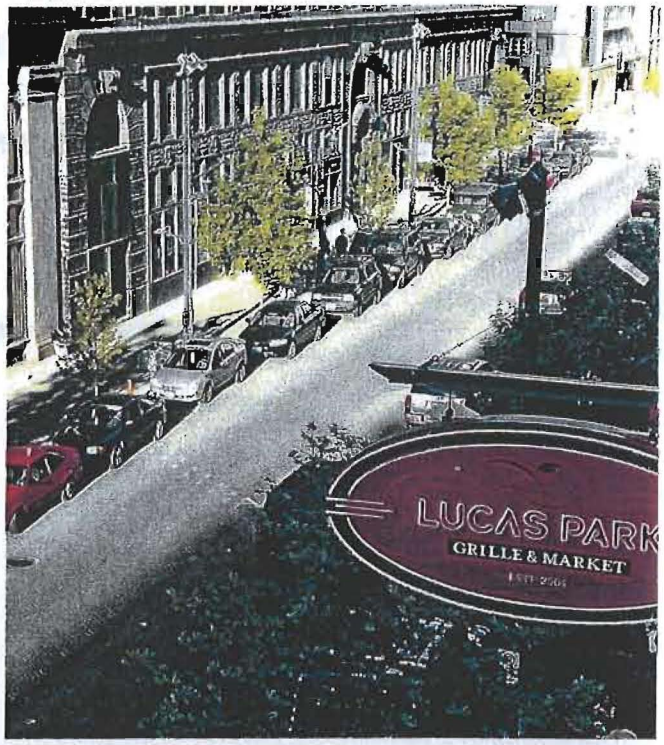
Portland, ME

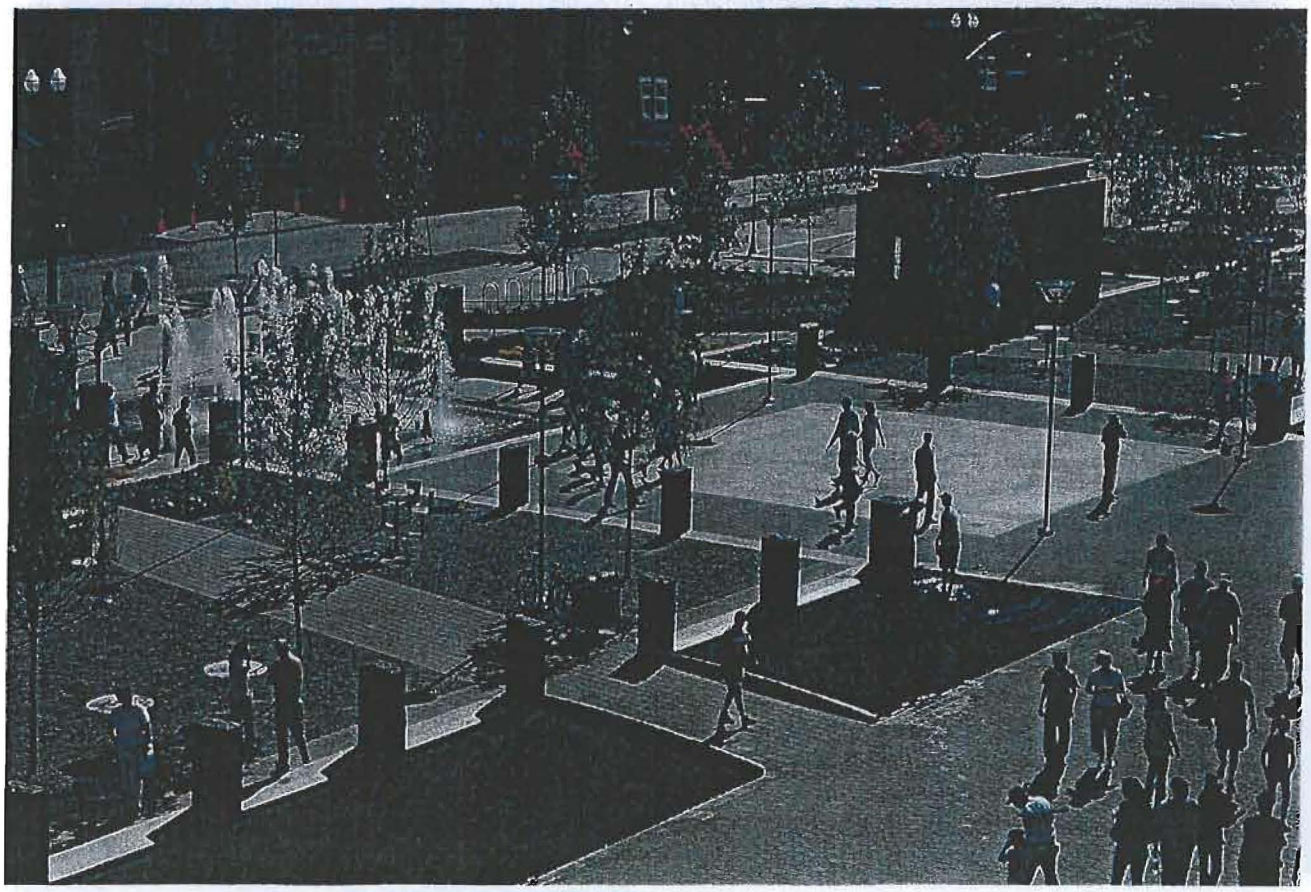
1 http://www.flickr.com/photo_zoom.gne?id=183688290&size=m
2 http://www.flickr.com/photo_zoom.gne?id=201991306&size=m
3 http://www.flickr.com/photo_zoom.gne?id=183688250&size=m&context=set-72157594190127840



Washington Avenue Loft District | St. Louis, MO





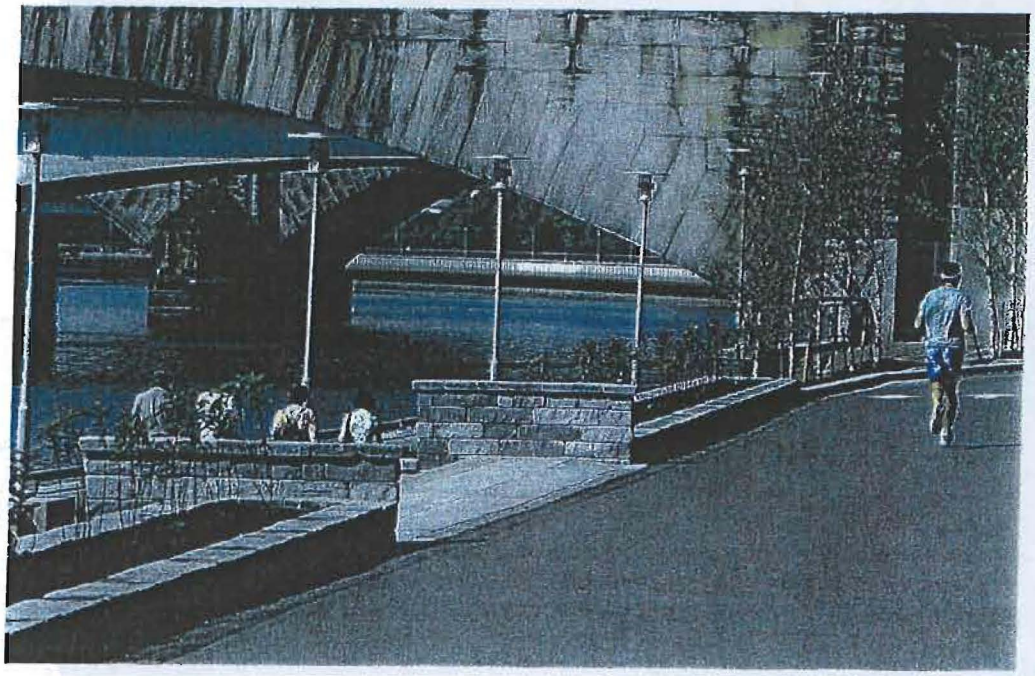


Nashville Courthouse Square | Nashville, KY and Washington Avenue Loft District | St. Louis, MO

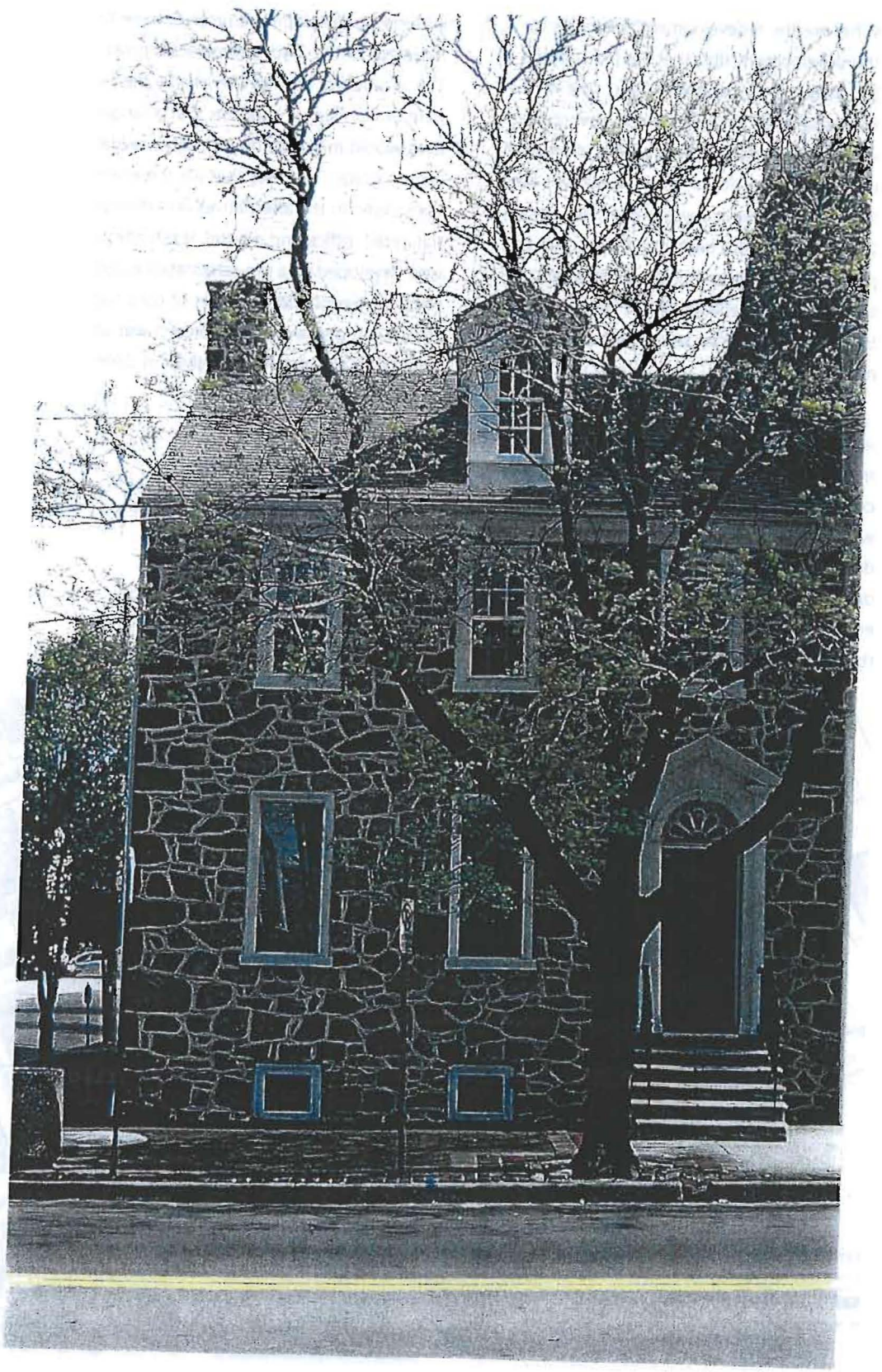
"Norristown's civic core is the location of many existing assets, including significant office space, amply parking, mass transit access and a historic urban fabric. Development of the three downtown sites identified in this study will build upon these assets and transform the image of downtown."

Robert Kerns, Planner, Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC

site development alternatives



Schuylkill River Park | Philadelphia, PA



What are the redevelopment potentials for the development sites that are the subjects of this Strategic Development Plan? One of the key issues with all of the sites is timing, that is, how immediate is the prospect of redevelopment of a particular site? Norristown has had a designated redevelopment area since 2002, yet little has been developed. Are there projects that represent immediate opportunities within the Redevelopment Area that can be used to jump-start revitalization and create momentum?

A major factor that will impact the development climate in downtown Norristown is the completion of the Lafayette Street Project that will link the Pennsylvania Turnpike directly with downtown. Completion of this project will dramatically change the market for and the economics of development in downtown Norristown and the riverfront.

Alternative development projects were formulated for the study's three downtown sites. The location of each of the sites in the civic core of Norristown suggests that a range of uses would meet the municipality's revitalization goals. The uses that are therefore considered in the alternatives include residential, retail, office and a hotel. Each alternative was developed as a pre-schematic design, and order of magnitude estimates of construction costs were prepared. Each project was also subjected to a pro forma analysis by Econsult to test financial feasibility.

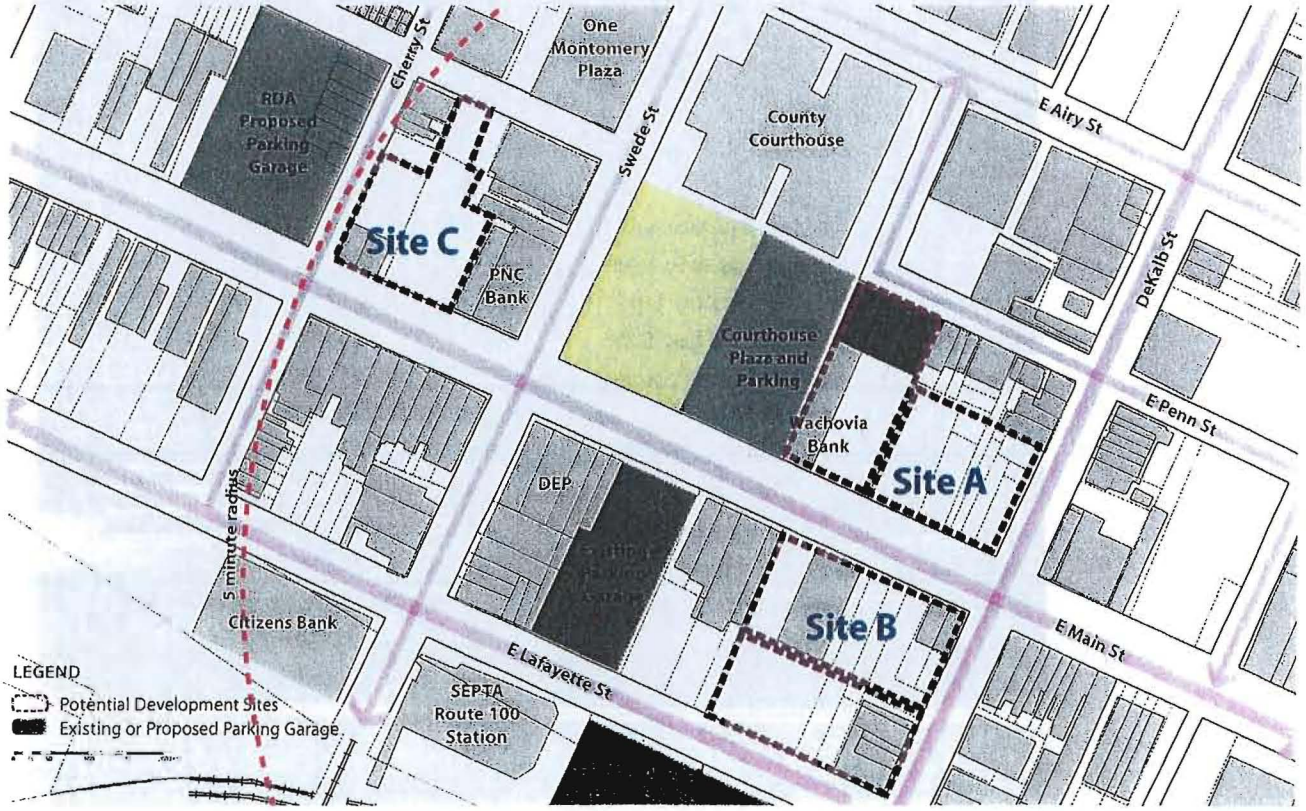


Figure 5 | Downtown Sites Map

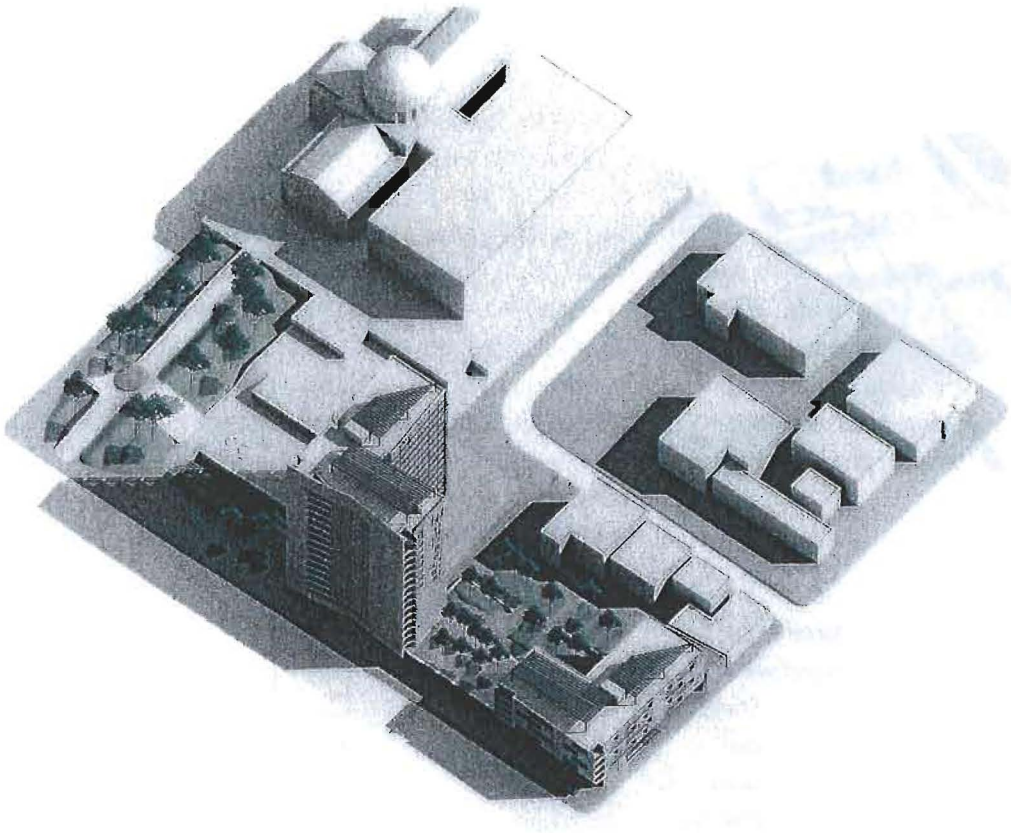


Figure 6 | Axonometric rendering of proposed buildings on Site A

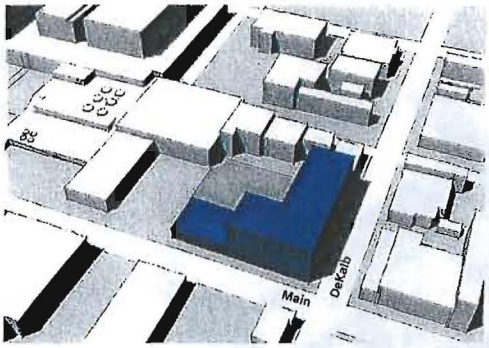
Downtown Sites

Site A

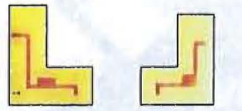
Site A is comprised of two separate but contiguous parcels that can be developed separately in phases or at the same time. The parcel that is easiest to develop first is the one on the east, at the northwest corner of Main and DeKalb Streets, the 0.7 acre Delucia parcel. The second parcel comprising Site A is currently owned by Wachovia Bank. It consists of a bank building, surface parking lot, parking garage and an unused drive-thru bank to the north, facing Penn Street. This parcel is approximately 0.9 acres; redevelopment would require demolition of the existing structures and possibly the relocation of the bank.

Two options were prepared and tested for the combined site, a Residential Option and an Office Option. Each option, however, shares a common first phase, which consists of a five story mixed-use (retail and residential) project with surface parking. It would, of course, be possible to execute either option without the need to phase construction; however the preliminary financial pro forma analysis suggests that the inclusion of structured parking (which is assumed for the development of the second phase parcel) would not be feasible without appreciation in current land values and/or a subsidy. Therefore the assumed strategy for this site is to execute the first phase (which appears to be feasible under current market conditions) and then develop the second phase Wachovia site when real estate market conditions improve.

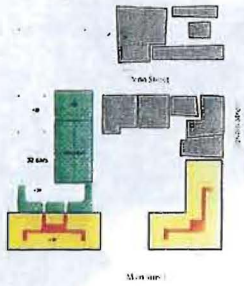
Common First Phase



Phase 1

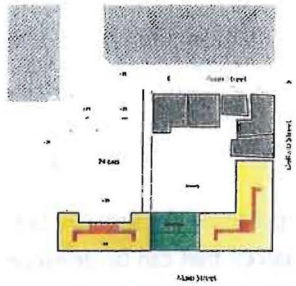


4~17th Level 4~5th Level



3rd Level

In the first phase, the Delucia parcel would be developed as a mixed-use project with retail on the ground floor facing Main Street, and four levels of L-shaped housing above the retail, served by an elevator and a lobby facing Main Street. Parking would be provided on a surface lot to the rear of the parcel, with access from DeKalb Street. This project minimizes construction costs through the use of "stick" construction for the housing and surface parking, while meeting the goal of increasing the supply of housing on a highly visible site in downtown Norristown. This development could be a stand-alone project or could be an initial phase of a two-phase development that includes the Wachovia Bank site to the west. The retail component of the first phase of the project could be designed to accommodate a relocated Wachovia branch bank.



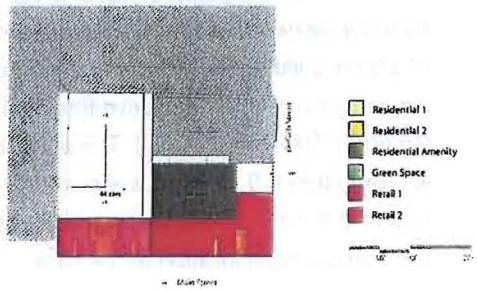
2nd Level

The development program for this common first phase is:

Retail 13,340 gsf

Housing 50,380 gsf (44 dwelling units)

Parking 44 surface spaces

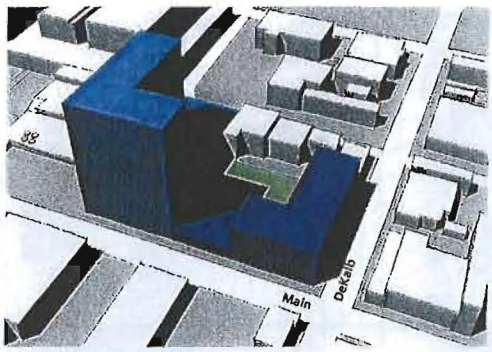


Ground Level

Figure 7 | Site A Residential Option Plans

Expanded Residential Option

Assuming the incorporation of the Wachovia Bank property, the development of Site A could be extended to include the Wachovia site to the west. The existing bank property can be redeveloped into a denser, mixed-use structure with garage parking tucked into the hill toward Penn Street. This option adds a 17-story residential tower with ground level retail facing Main Street, and a 224-space above grade parking garage toward the rear of the lot. The garage is designed to accommodate one parking space per dwelling unit for both phases of housing. This would allow the conversion of the first phase surface parking lot to landscaped green space for the residents, if the project is phased. Because of the difference in elevation between Penn Street and Main Street, the garage could be entered from Penn Street at an upper level. The residential tower would occupy a prominent location in downtown Norristown, and overlook the County Courthouse and Courthouse Square.



Phase 2 | Residential Option

The combined development program for this option is:

Retail 19,700 gsf

Housing 263,020 gsf (224 dwelling units)

Parking 224 garage spaces

Open Space

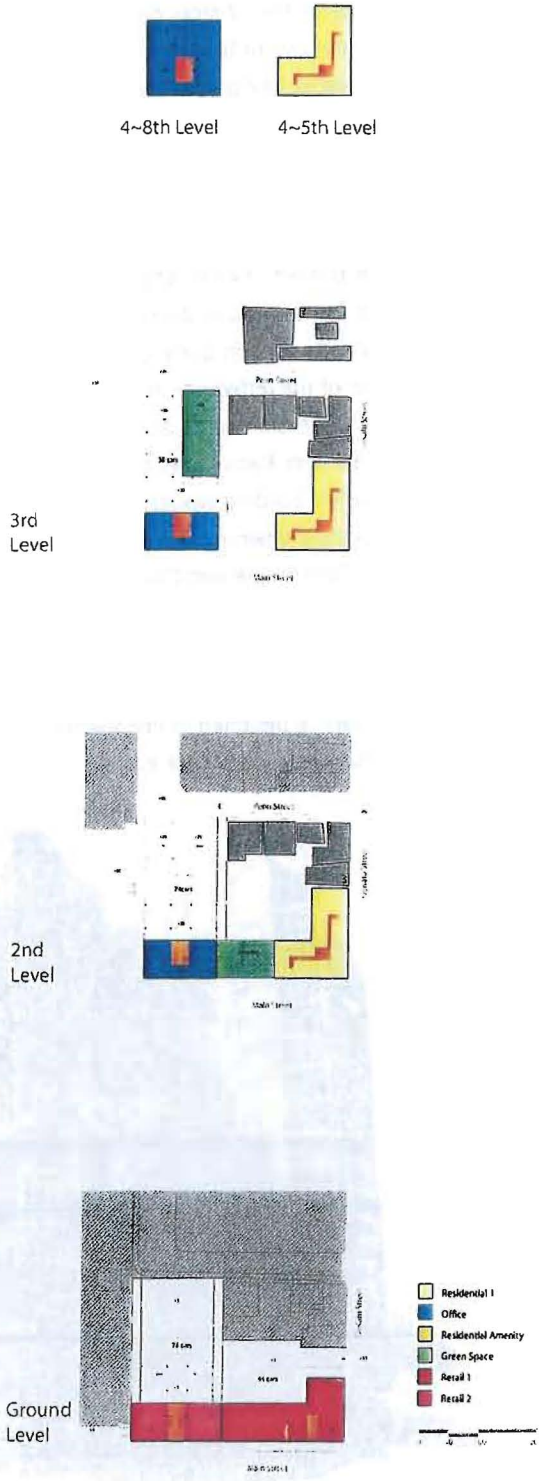
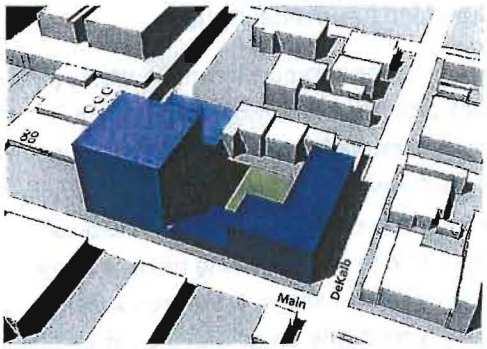


Figure 8 | Site A Office Option Plans

Office Option

This option substitutes an 8-story office building (88,200 gsf) for the 17-story residential structure in phase two of the development of Site A. A total of 262 garage parking spaces would provide three spaces per 1,000 gross square feet of office; residential parking (which is in highest demand in the evenings and weekends) would share the office parking. If the project is phased, the first phase surface parking lot can be replaced or decked over by an amenity such as open space or tennis courts. Because of the difference in elevation between Penn and Main Streets, the garage could be entered from Penn Street at an upper level. The office building would occupy a prominent location downtown, overlooking the County Courthouse and Courthouse Square, a location that would be attractive to law firms and others who want a location close to the seat of County government. The office building can be designed to engage the currently underutilized Courthouse Plaza.



Phase 2 | Office Option

The combined development program for this option is:

Retail	20,540 gsf
Housing	50,380 gsf (44 dwelling units)
Office	88,200 gsf
Parking	262 garage spaces (4 levels, continuous split-level ramp)
Open Space	

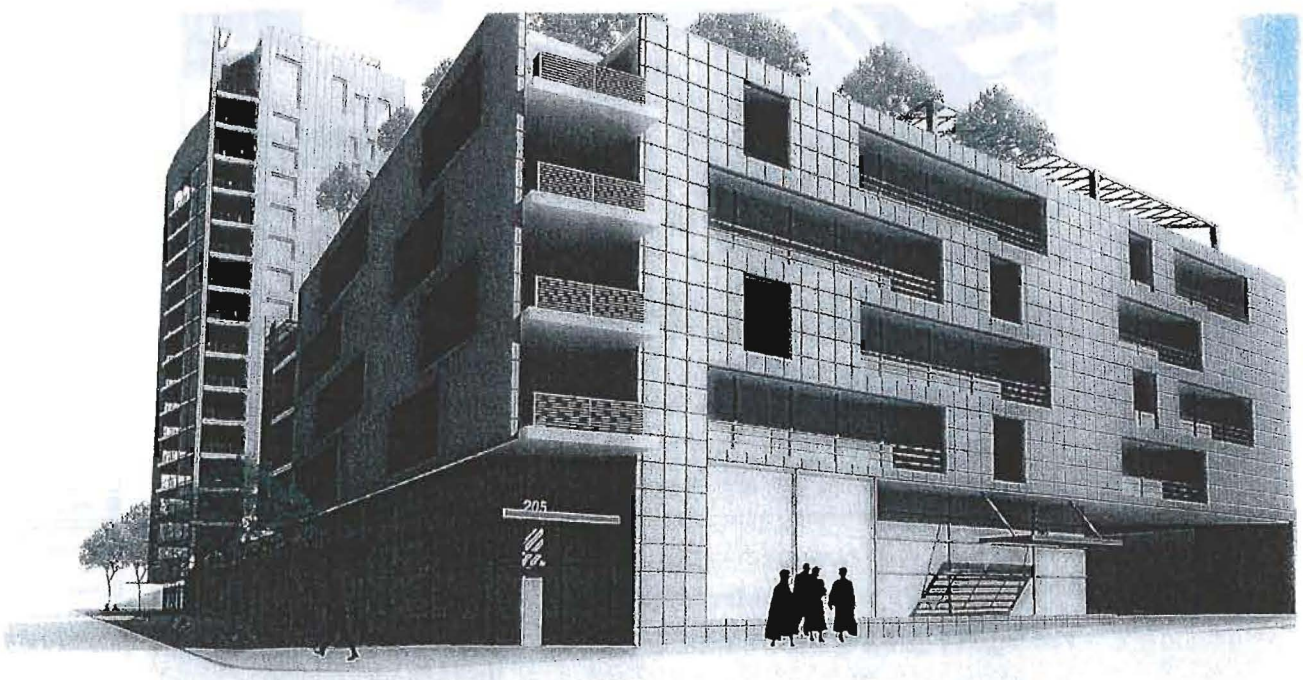


Figure 9 | Street-level rendering of proposed buildings on Site A

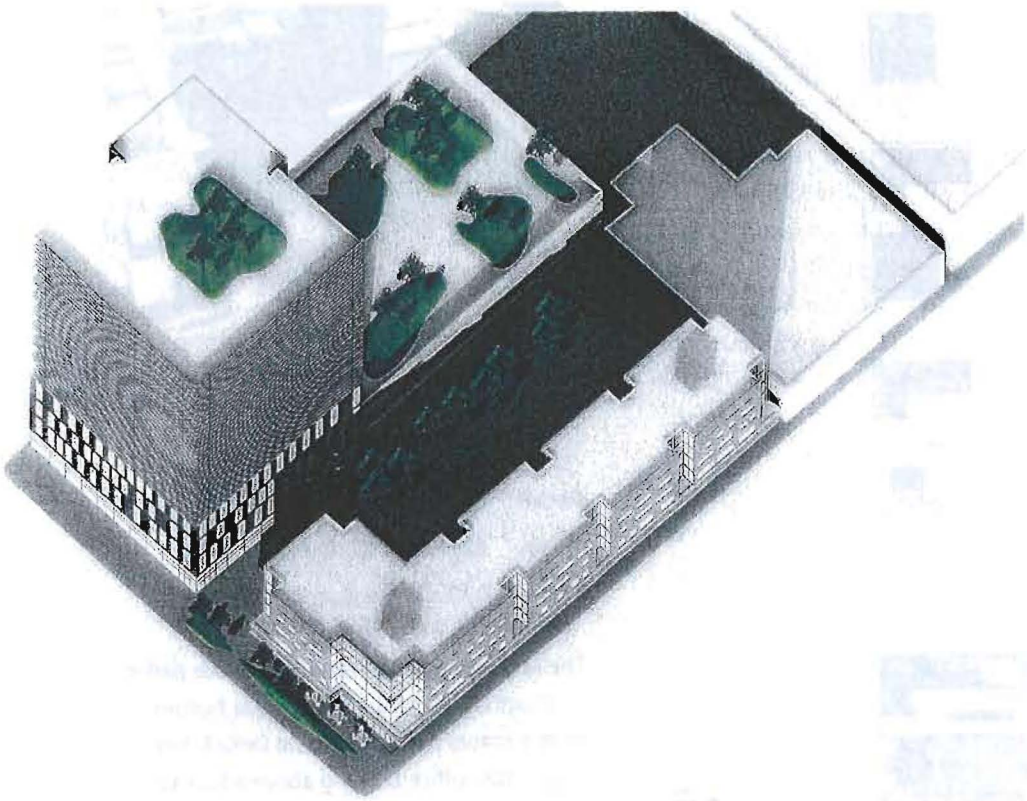


Figure 10 | Axonometric rendering of proposed building on Site B

Site B

Development of Site B will complement development of Site A, resulting in a transformation of Main Street on both sides at the key intersection of Main and Dekalb Streets. Development of Site B can also be phased. The part of the site facing Main Street can be developed first, with the southern part of the site, which faces Lafayette Street, developed as a second phase, when surface parking would be converted to structured parking and a new office building. Use of surface parking in the first phase will improve project feasibility. The second phase, which requires structured parking, will be more feasible following completion of the Lafayette Street connection project when site visibility, access, and land value will be improved.

Two alternative programs were tested for the first phase Site B: Residential/Retail and Hotel/Retail. Each alternative has a similar second phase, the development of structured parking with an office building. The offices, when combined with either hotel or residential use, are compatible in terms of the sharing of parking. (It is also conceivable to consider a second phase of housing rather than office, although a combination of housing with either hotel or additional residential use on this site will increase the demand for parking since parking cannot be shared.) On the other hand, the SEPTA garage currently under construction across Lafayette Street has excess capacity that could be used in relation to this site.

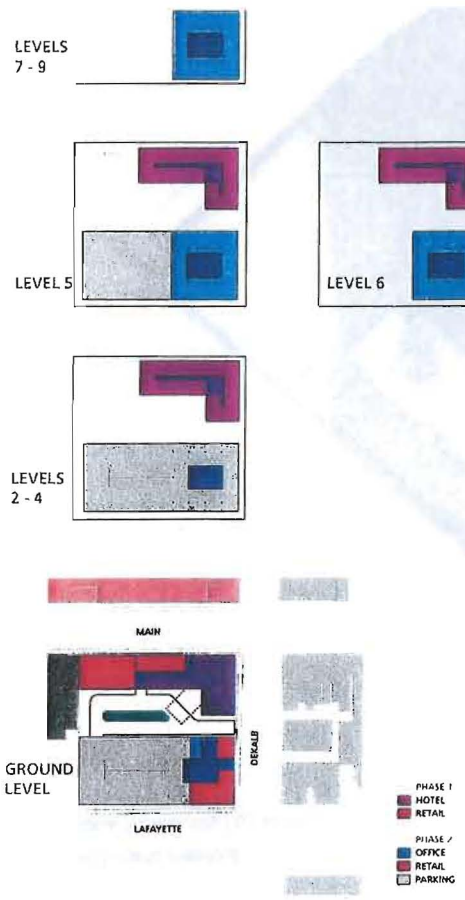
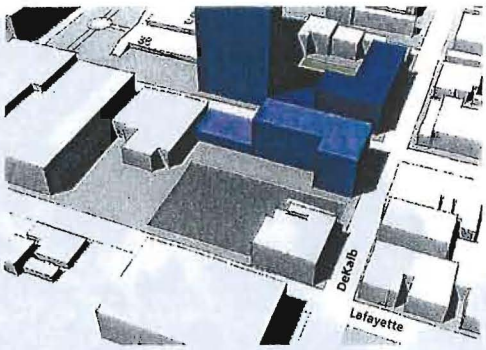


Figure 11 | Site B Hotel Option Plans

Hotel/Office Option

The hotel/office option includes a first phase 6-story, 120 room hotel building modeled after a Hyatt Place prototype. The ground floor of the hotel includes a lobby, bar, two meeting rooms, and 8,700 GSF of retail space along Main Street. The hotel can be accessed by pedestrians via its entrance on Main and DeKalb or via its porte cochere behind the building, which is accessed from DeKalb Street. Surface parking would be provided during the first phase on the southern portion of the site.



Phase 1 | Hotel Option

The development program for the first phase is:

Retail	8,700 gsf
Hotel	80,000 gsf (120 rooms)
Parking	120 surface spaces

The second phase converts the surface parking to structured parking and an office building on the corner of Lafayette and DeKalb Streets. A five story office building above a four story parking garage is proposed in this option. There is 77,000 GSF of office space served by a lobby along DeKalb Street. The parking garage can accommodate 365 cars; 120 of these parking spaces will serve the residential development of Phase 1, leaving 235 spaces for the office development. At three spaces per 1,000 gsf, a total of 78,300 gsf of office space could be accommodated. This assumes that the residential spaces will not be shared with the office spaces. Sharing would allow an increase in either the parking ratios or the size of the office building.

The development program for the first and second phases together is:

Retail	13,700 gsf
Hotel	80,000 gsf (120 rooms)
Office	77,000 gsf
Parking	365 garage spaces (4 levels, continuous split-level ramp)

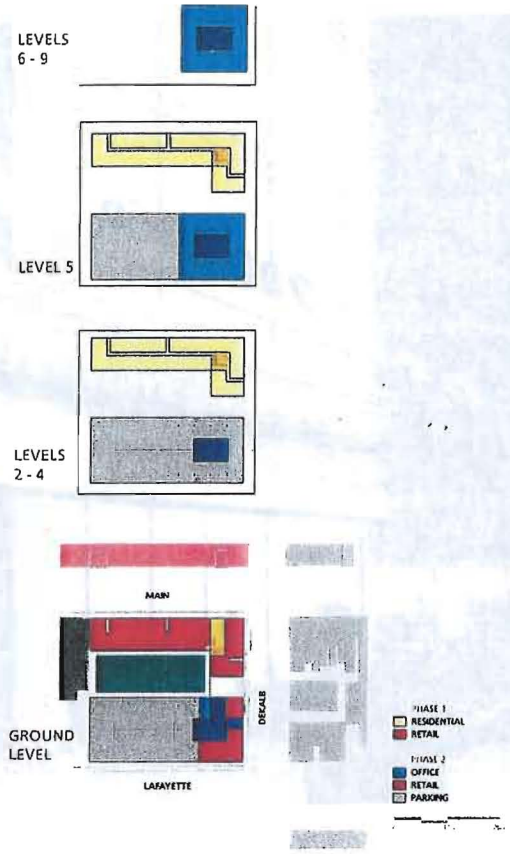
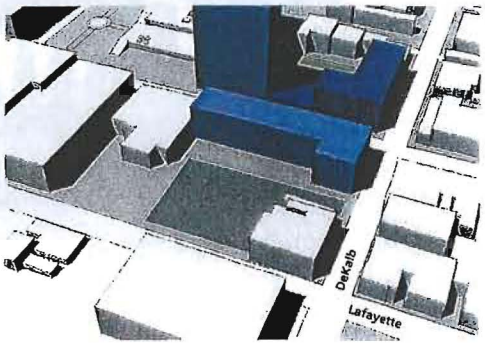


Figure 12 | Site B Residential Option Plans



Phase 1 | Residential Options

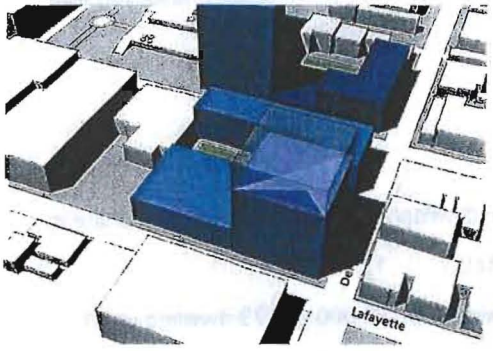
Residential/Office Option

This first phase option is similar to the proposal for the first phase of Site A. It consists of ground floor retail facing Main and DeKalb Streets with four stories of "stick built" housing above, and surface parking in the rear of the site. A total of 17,000 square feet of retail and 73 housing units can be accommodated.

The development program for the first phase is:

Retail	17,000 gsf
Residential	80,000 gsf (73 dwelling units)
Parking	73 surface spaces

Figure 13 | Street-level rendering of proposed building on Site B



Phase 2

The second phase converts the surface parking to structured parking and an office building on the corner of Lafayette and DeKalb Streets. An office building above a four story parking garage is proposed here. The parking garage can accommodate 365 cars; 73 of these parking spaces will serve the residential development of Phase 1, leaving 292 spaces for the office development. At three spaces per 1,000 gsf, a total of 97,000 gsf of office space could be accommodated. This assumes that the residential spaces will not be shared with the office spaces. Sharing would allow an increase in either the parking ratios or an increase in the size of the office building. The image below shows a taller office building "ghosted."

The development program for the first and second phases together is:

Retail	22,000 gsf
Housing	80,000 gsf (73 dwelling units)
Office	97,000 gsf
Parking	365 garage spaces (4 levels, continuous split-level ramp)

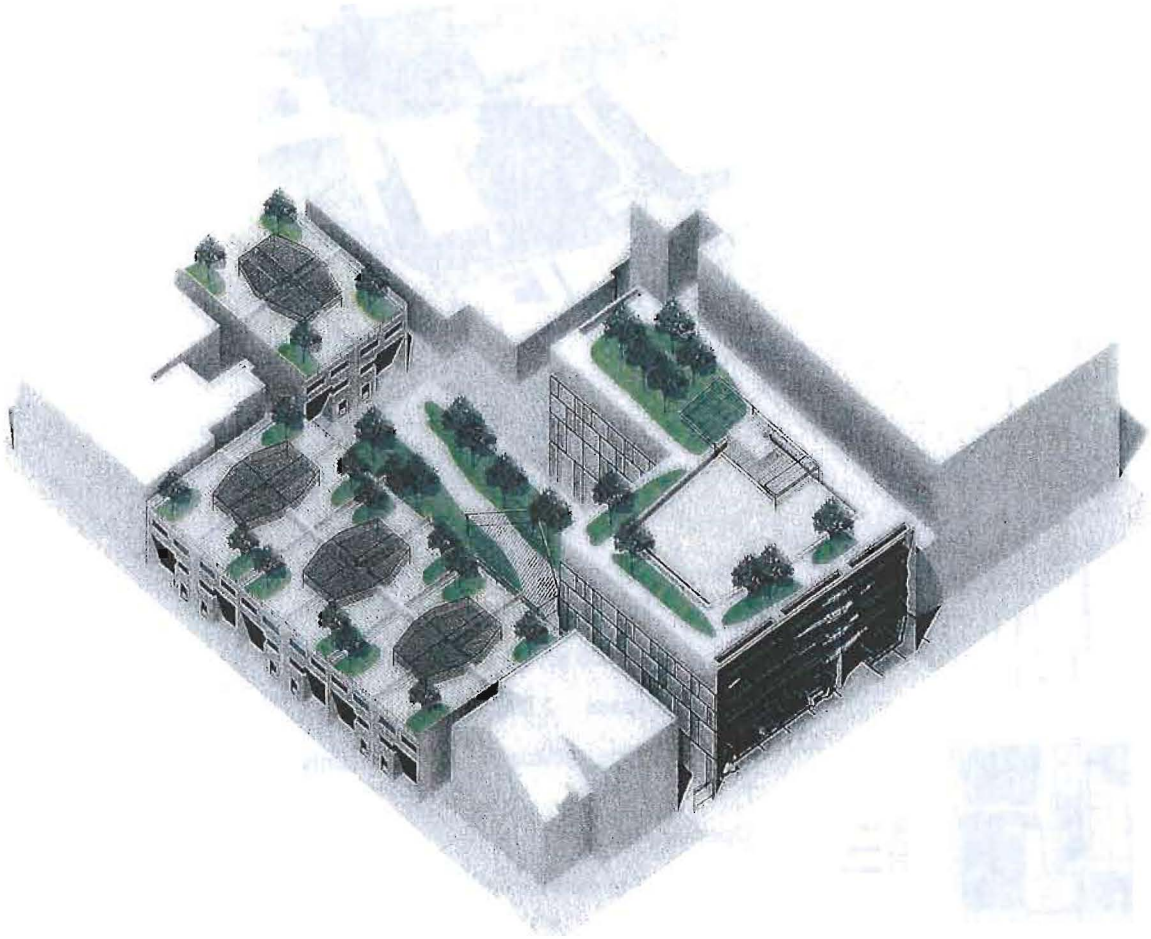


Figure 14 | Axonometric rendering of proposed building on Site C

Site C

Site C is an urban infill opportunity in the core of downtown Norristown. The 0.75 acre site is bounded by Main and Cherry Streets and stretches back toward Penn Street. Due to the small size and irregular shape of the site, only one alternative program was considered for redevelopment, a mix of ground floor retail facing Main Street with housing above, and infill housing that faces Cherry Street and Penn Street. All buildings would face the surrounding streets and an internal landscaped courtyard. One of the advantages of this site is the parking garage being constructed by Montgomery County across Cherry Street. This provides the opportunity to build housing on this site that can use the parking in the County garage.

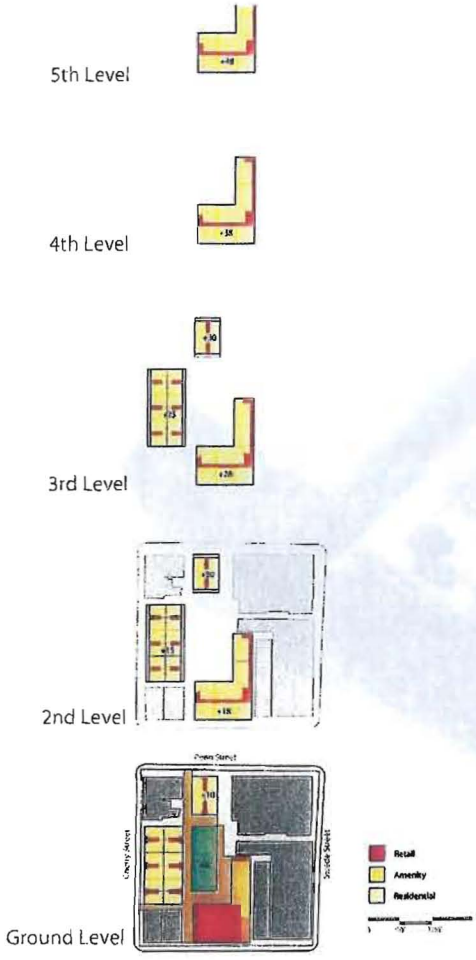
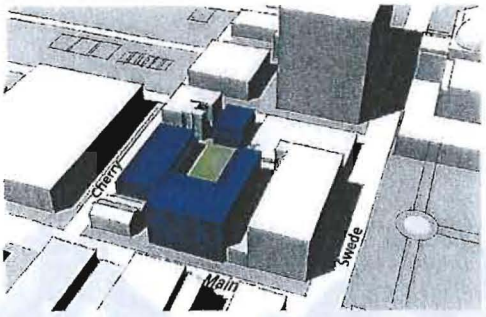


Figure 15 | Site C Plans



Site C | Infill Buildings

The development program is:

Retail 4,500 gsf

Housing 33,200 gsf
(28 dwelling units above retail)

25,600 gsf (32 Duplex units)

Amenity space 2,800 gsf

Parking None; provided in the new County garage

Open Space

The proposed design includes two types of residential buildings. The building facing Main Street has retail on the ground level and four stories of "stick built" residential above, with elevator service. The other buildings are three story stick-frame structures accommodating back-to-back duplex apartments.

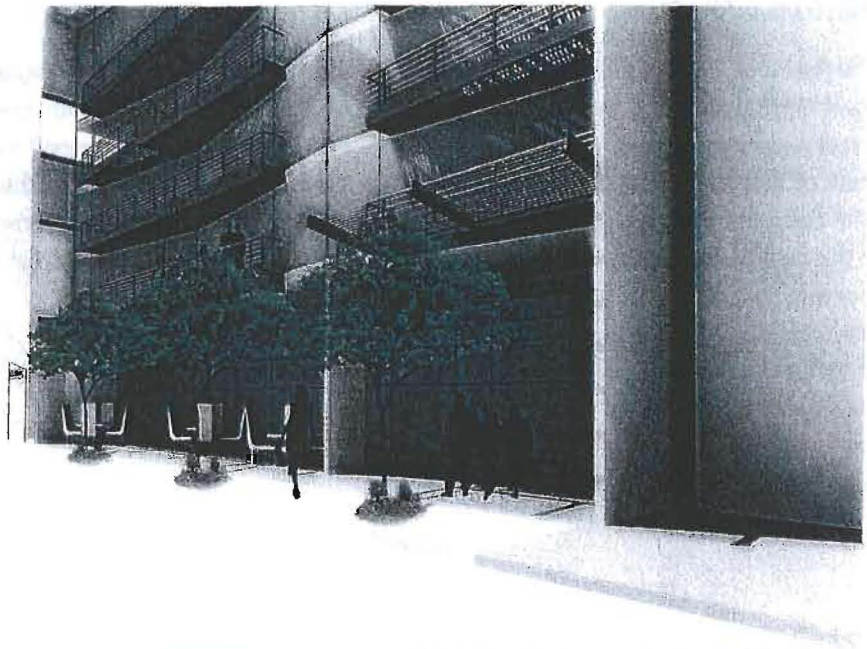


Figure 16 | Street-level rendering of proposed building on Site C

Figure 17 | Courtyard area rendering of proposed building on Site C

Illustrative Site Plan

The Illustrative Site Plan in Figure 18 of downtown Norristown shows one possible vision for a redeveloped Main Street corridor. Redevelopment of Sites A, B, and C should be integrated with public improvements to the streetscape in this area, as well as landscape improvements to the Courthouse Square. Existing alleyways such as the pedestrian path south of the Courthouse Plaza can be landscaped to draw pedestrian traffic into Main Street. Green roofs, rooftop patios and open space amenities on the 3 sites can help reduce heat island effects. Main Street can be designed as a more pedestrian friendly street with recessed street parking and storm water runoff mitigating greenscapes. The existing Courthouse Plaza can be redesigned into a more inviting space with a possible water feature that engages the steep topography.

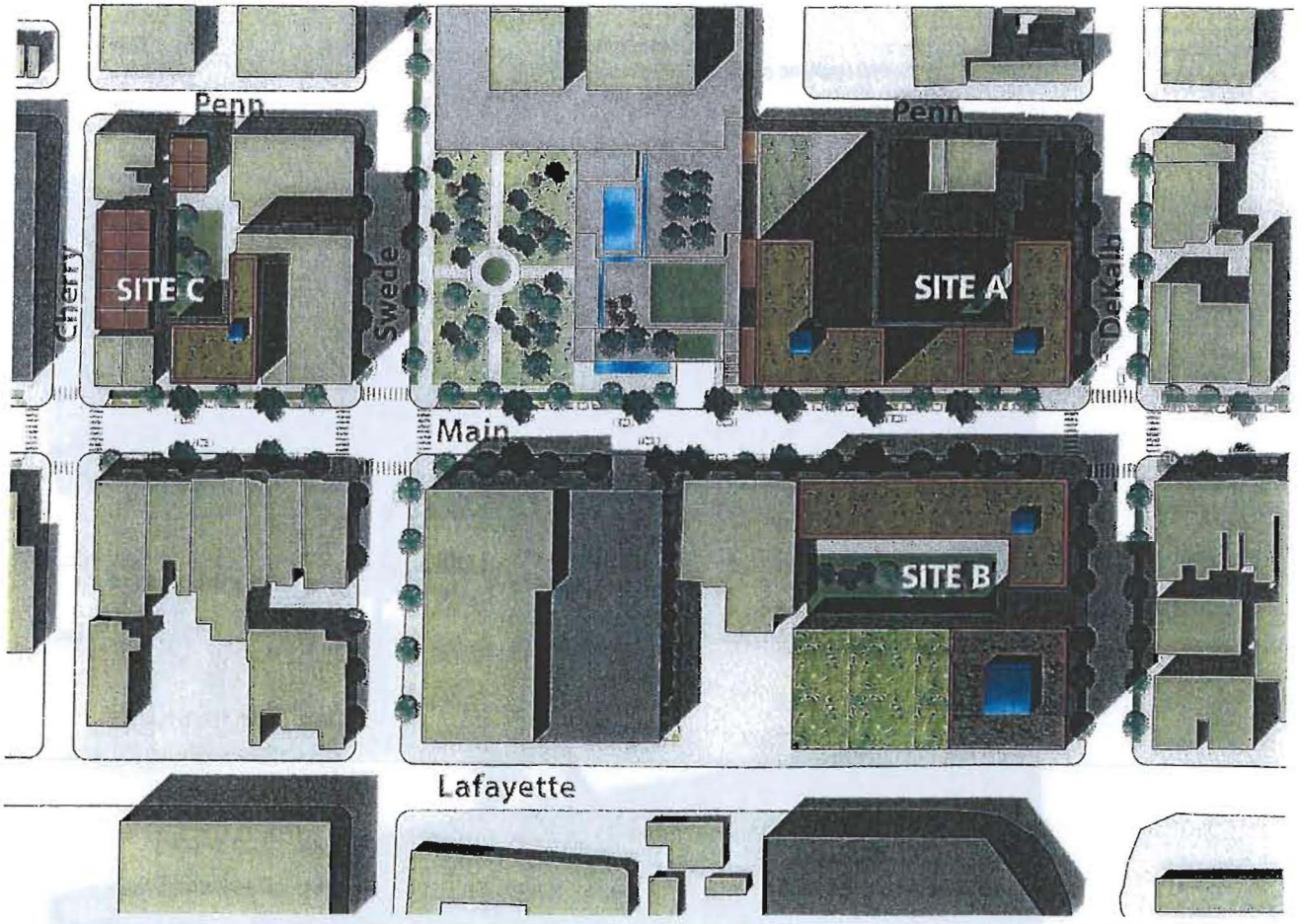


Figure 18 | Illustrative Site Plan of Downtown Sites

Conceptual Site Sections

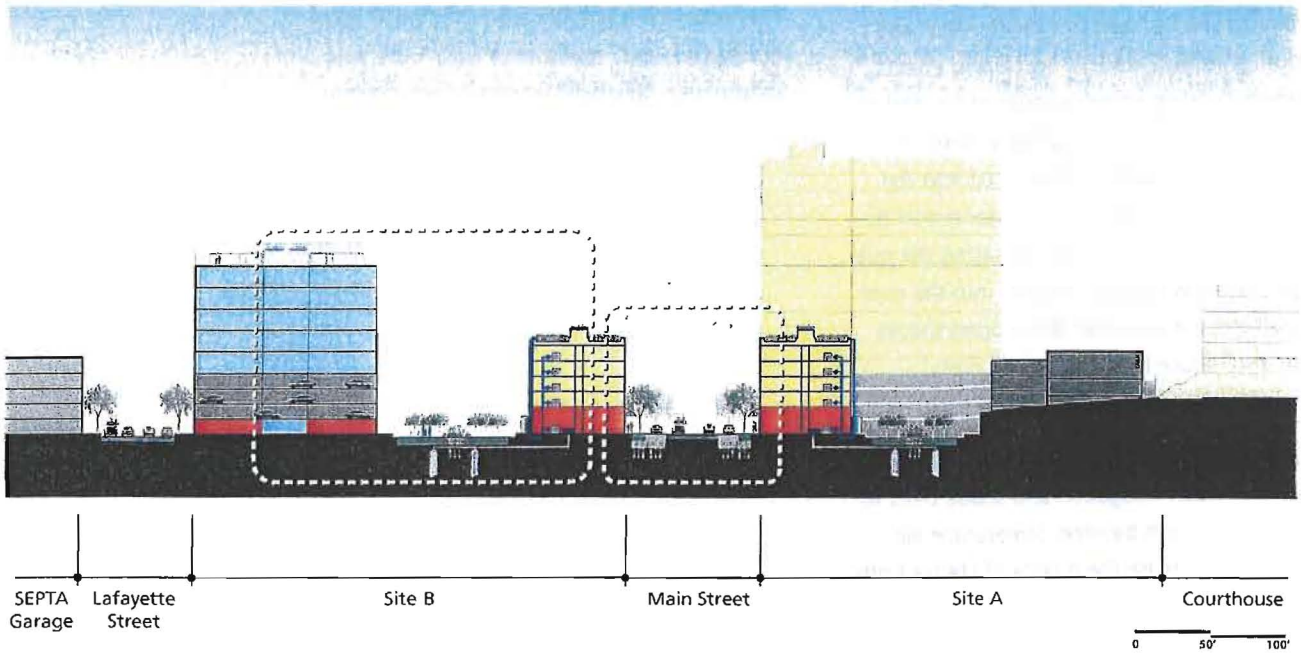


Figure 19 | Conceptual Site Section

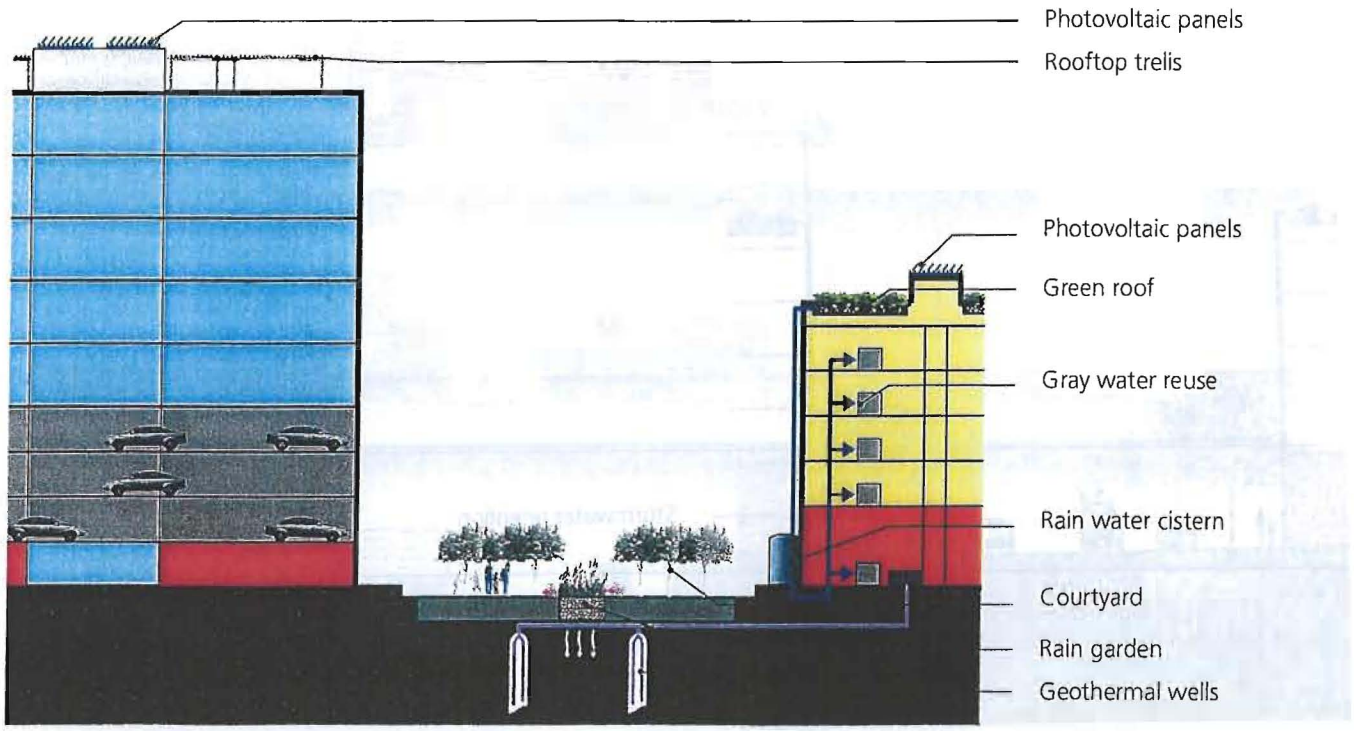


Figure 20 | Site B Section

The Riverfront Sites

Several factors strongly affect the development potential of Norristown's riverfront. The Lafayette Street Improvement Project has already been mentioned. Another factor is the presence of the municipal sewage treatment plant in the eastern portion of the riverfront. There are current discussions regarding the relocation of the treatment plant, including a possible relocation to the O'Neill Properties site, which is on the eastern most boundary of the municipality. The uncertainty of the future location of the sewage treatment plant (and its current negative impact on the Riverfront site targeted in this study), combined with the site's relatively remote location from downtown and its location within the 100-year floodplain of the Schuylkill River, suggest that the redevelopment of the Riverfront site is a longer-range opportunity compared to the redevelopment of the Downtown sites. In addition, the size and extent of Norristown's riverfront strongly suggests that the redevelopment of the Riverfront site should be part of an overall redevelopment plan for the entire riverfront, which should be tied to the revitalization of downtown Norristown. In summary, once the downtown has been strengthened and the Lafayette Street Project has been completed, the next logical step is to shift attention to the riverfront, particularly the area adjacent to downtown. Once the sewage treatment plant has been relocated, the op-

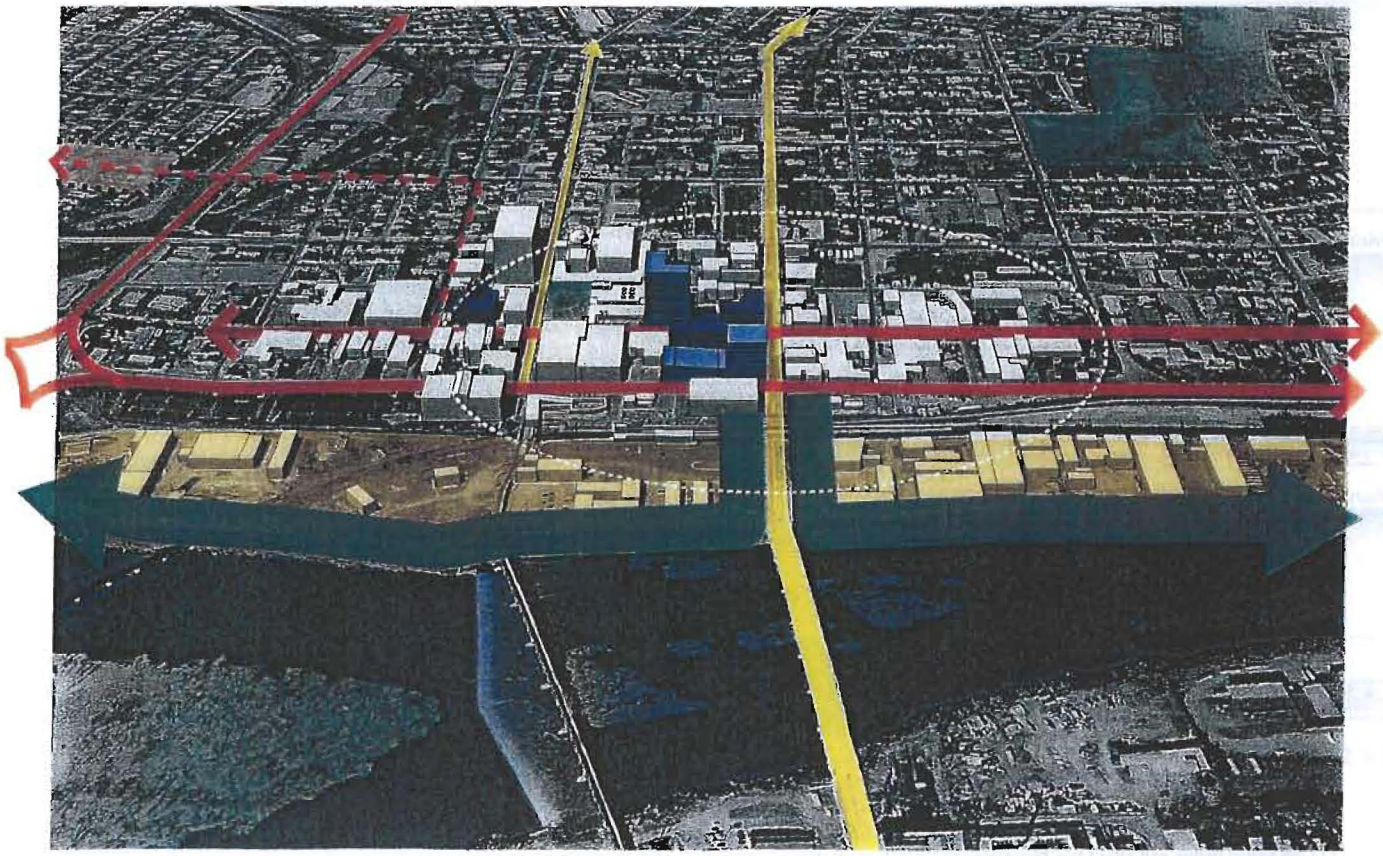


Figure 23 | Development momentum from core to riverfront

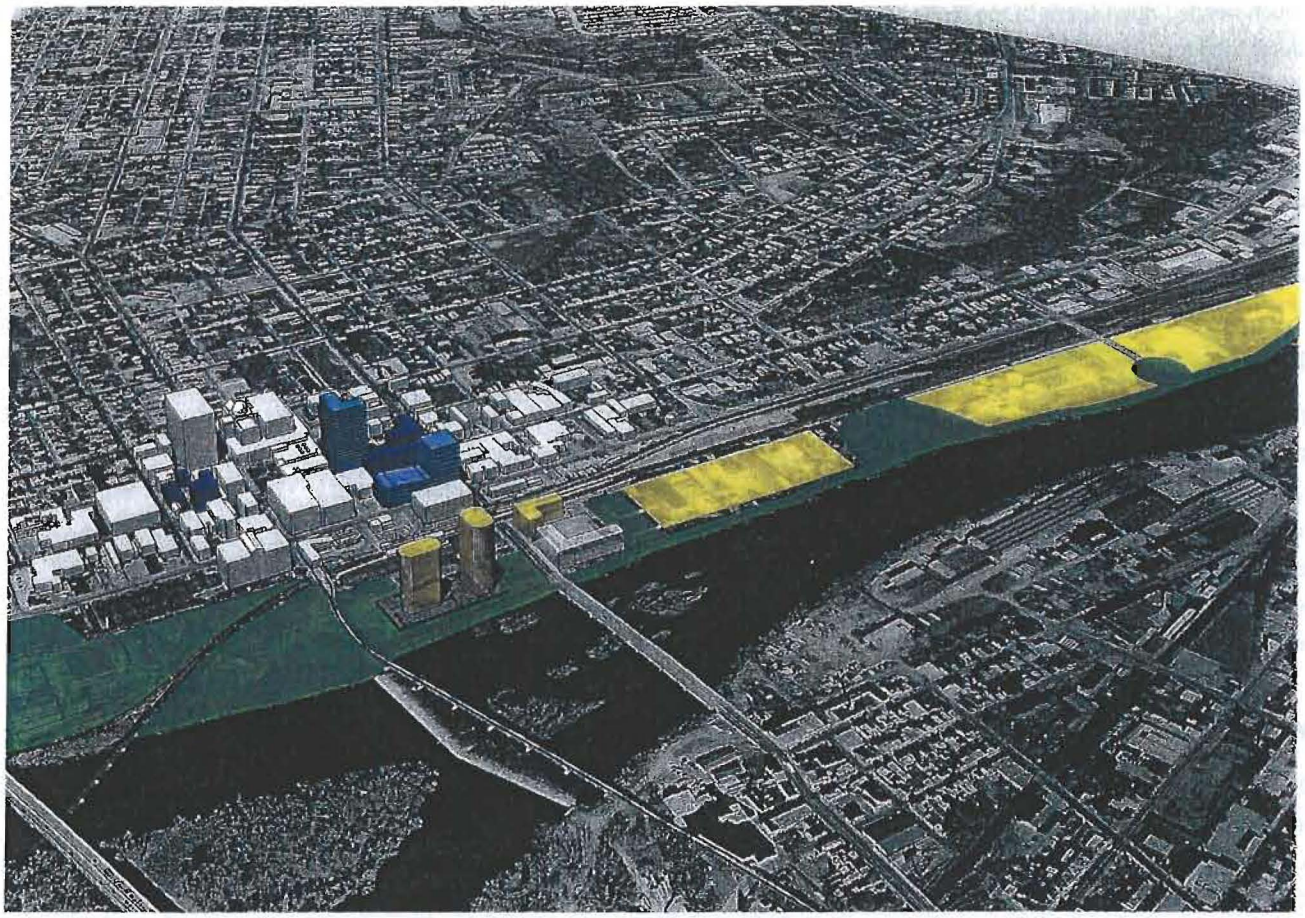


Figure 24 | A vision for Norristown's waterfront

portunity to redevelop the eastern portion of Norristown's riverfront will be improved.

When a detailed overall riverfront revitalization plan is developed, it should be based on the following concepts.

Pinnacle Buildings

Two pinnacle buildings, ten to fifteen stories in height, situated on the waterfront between Swede and DeKalb Streets, would extend "downtown" to the water's edge, physically and visually. The Lafayette Street Land Use Access Study, prepared by Edwards and Kelcey and A.D. Marble & Company in June 2006, indicates residents' concern for tall buildings that would disrupt the historic feel of the town and create additional barriers to the river. However, a few key structures would provide much needed residential space while increasing density and adding to the visual interest of the skyline as seen from surrounding highways as well as to the "weight" or "importance" of the town itself.

Green Corridor

A continuous green corridor extending the entire length of the waterfront would provide

much needed open space to the highly developed municipality as well as access to and scenic views of the historic riverfront via a walking and biking trail. The corridor would also preserve valuable wildlife habitat and delicate ecological systems through a 60' no-build buffer around the floodway in compliance with federal regulations.

Trail Head

The parcel of land at Swede Street encircling Schuylkill Avenue presents a significant opportunity for a community park offering substantial green space. Its strategic location pointing towards the town's central core makes it ideal for use as a trail head, ceremonial green space, or natural gateway.

Minor League Ballpark

On the other side of the freight tracks abutting Route 202 and West Washington Street is a site with tremendous potential for a large-scale development. The site could accommodate big box stores or even a minor league ballpark with scenic views of the city's skyline that would capitalize on the site's highly visible location and be in keeping with residents' interest in creating an urban river park.

Residential Loft Space

East of DeKalb Street is the historic uniform building. An invaluable remnant of Norristown's past, the building offers an exciting opportunity to adaptively reuse the historic structure as residential loft space while preserving the fabric of the existing town. The transformation could serve as a local example of similar developments sweeping the country.

Lafayette Street Improvements

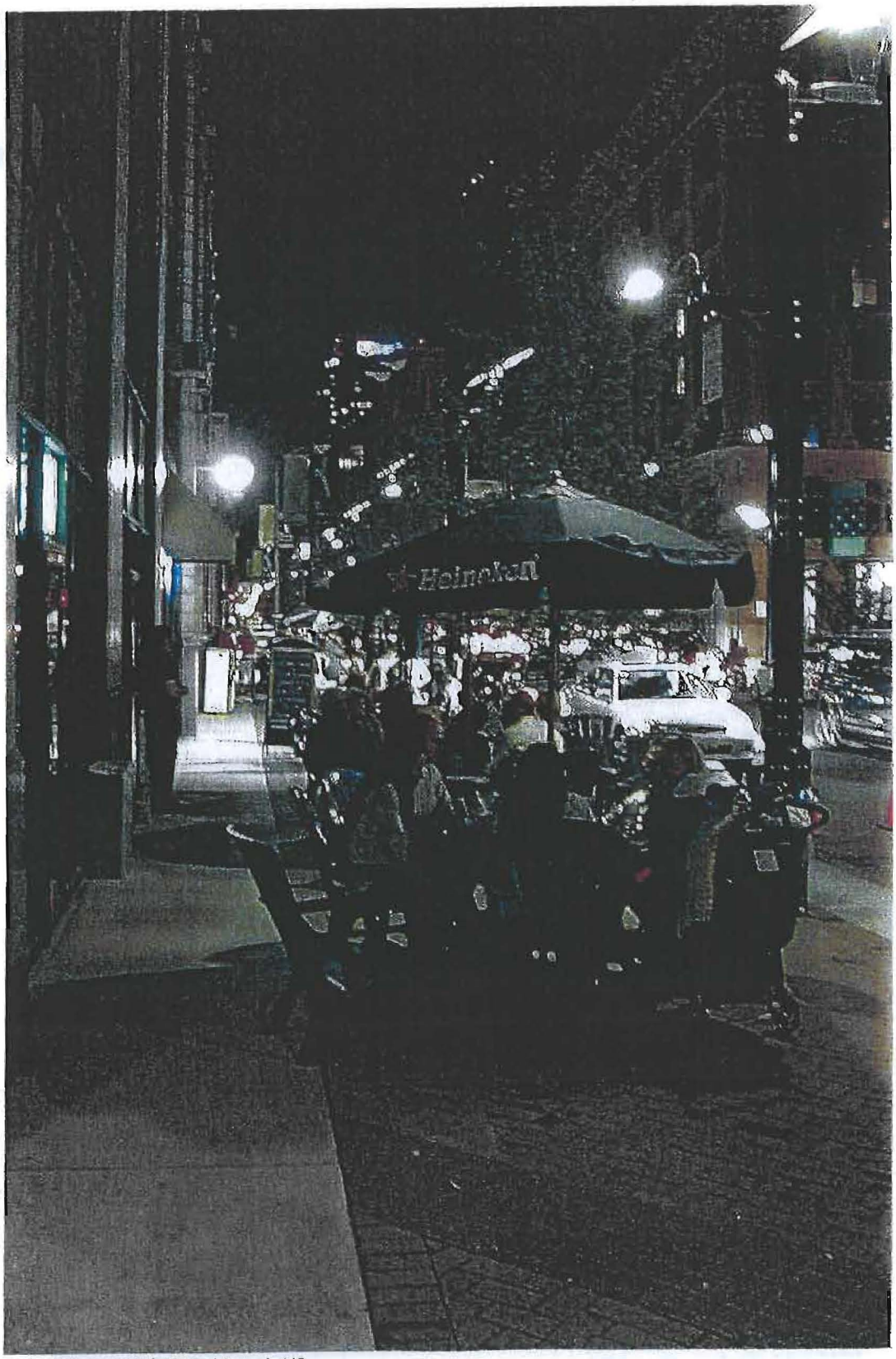
The Lafayette Street Improvement Project will dramatically increase access to downtown and the sites along the waterfront east of DeKalb Street. Among the many alternatives is the potential for several 4-6 story office buildings that would be mindful of the town's scale and character and well-situated to take advantage of Norristown's regional location and proximity to transportation.

Sawmill Run

Sawmill Run is a natural amenity that should be restored and preserved by expanding the wetland area surrounding the Run. This would extend the green corridor and expand the amount of open space.

Ford Street

An established connection from Main Street and Lafayette Street to the waterfront, Ford Street will serve an increasingly important role upon completion of the Lafayette Street Expansion. The parcels of land on either side of Ford Street will also increase in value. While development of these parcels will most likely occur late in the overall development process, these parcels offer considerable opportunities for mixed-use development of modest, low-rise structures that would preserve views of the river. Adding a stop on the R6 regional rail line in this area could create an opportunity for Transit-Oriented Development. A green terminus where Ford Street meets the waterfront would mark the importance of this connection and establish an appropriate gateway at the eastern end of the town to the waterfront.

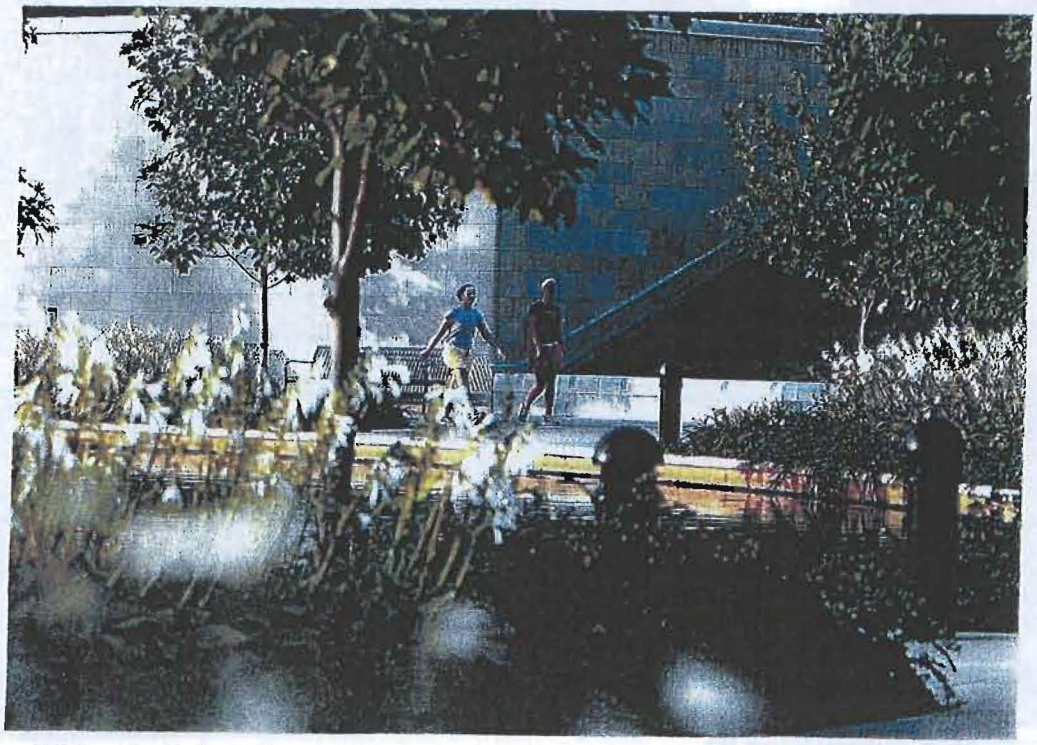


Washington Avenue Loft District | St. Louis, MO

"The key to Norristown's revitalization is to build on its many strengths and opportunities. Achieving this vision requires a series of steps over an extended period of time."

-Richard Bartholomew, Principal, Wallace Roberts & Todd, LLC

the path forward: implementation



North Canal Extension | Indianapolis, IN

Zoning Requirements

The requirements of Norristown's Zoning Ordinance provide standards for the type and intensity of development desired by the municipality within the downtown and waterfront locations. Two Unified Development Overlay ("UDO") Districts, UDO I and II cover the plan's study area. Both Overlay Districts permit and encourage uses with an urban and pedestrian-oriented design that are compatible with the existing historic fabric of the community. The recommended development strategies in this Plan are generally consistent with the Overlay District's standards, with the exception of the height restrictions provided in the UDO II. Our redevelopment assessment on several downtown sites concludes that in order to provide the on-site parking and other amenities needed to attract the preferred type of development, higher buildings are necessary to make these potential developments viable. In addition, the heights of the current PNC Building and One Montgomery Plaza provide an existing context for several taller buildings in Norristown's downtown. This additional height could effectively be achieved with some new height bonuses for innovative architectural proposals, preservation of important viewsheds, and utilization of sustainable building elements.

Design Guidelines

The plan outlined in this report is based on a series of principles that are fundamental to the design and planning of lively, prosperous, and safe communities. The first set of principles pertains to Mixed Use Centers (MUC) and the second set encompasses sustainable design guidelines.

Mixed Use Center Principles

Principle #1: Mixed Use

Each Mixed Use Center should include a complementary mix of uses within a defined, walkable area that functions as a hub of activity for surrounding neighborhoods.

Complementary uses include community-oriented retail, services, and offices; residential at higher densities than in surrounding neighborhoods; and community facilities such as a school, library, or post office that can be integrated with or connected to the center. These uses can be either horizontally (i.e., located in separate buildings with strong pedestrian and vehicular connections between them) or vertically mixed (i.e., within the same building, such as apartments over ground floor retail). While development patterns in MUCs are typically more compact than adjacent areas, the scale and character of the center should be compatible with the surrounding context, including transitions from higher intensity uses at the core to lower uses at the periphery. In the MUC core, nonresidential uses are preferable on the first floor of structures to promote an active street life.

Principle #2: Quality Development

New development in Mixed Use Centers should contribute to establishing an attractive, pedestrian-oriented environment and distinctive sense of place.

"Context-sensitive" design standards should be established to shape new development to achieve a walkable urban form that is consistent in scale and form with surrounding neighborhoods and the City. These standards should address issues such as building mass, scale, and "build-to lines" to create a pedestrian-oriented street wall; parking (behind

rather than in front of or between buildings and public streets); and design of streets and sidewalks.

Principle #3: Multi-Modal Circulation

Each Mixed Use Center should be served by a multi-modal transportation network with safe and convenient vehicular, pedestrian, transit, and bicycle connections to surrounding neighborhoods and the City.

Each center should be served by an interconnected road system ranging in function and scale from upper level (arterial) roadways to medium scale "shopping" streets to local neighborhood streets. Upper level roadways should accommodate multiple modes of travel, including through vehicular movements, transit service, pedestrians, and bicyclists. In some centers retail activity may focus on "shopping" streets accessible from the upper level roadways. All roads and streets should provide a distinctive sense of place and a quality setting for pedestrians. Local streets should provide vehicular, pedestrian, and bicycle connections between neighborhoods and the MUC while discouraging cut-through traffic. A parking strategy should be developed for each center that accommodates automobiles while reinforcing its pedestrian-oriented character (surface parking oriented away from public streets, shared or structured parking solutions, etc.).

Principle #4: Public Realm

Each Mixed Use Center should be distinguished by a quality public realm that reinforces its identity as a community activity center.

The public realm should include pedestrian-friendly streetscapes (sidewalks, street trees, benches, lighting, etc.), places for outdoor activities (public plazas, dining areas, etc.), and other improvements to establish a special identity for the center (gateway features that demarcate entry to a distinctive place, signage, banners, etc.).

Principle #5: Public-Private Partnerships

Mixed Use Centers should be implemented through a synergistic combination of public and private investment.

This principle goes beyond a physical description of the desired attributes of a MUC to address how the concept can be implemented. The role of the public sector is to make capital investments that generate momentum for private investment, to clearly define expectations for development quality and form, and to provide incentives for property owners/developers to achieve the expectations. The role of the private sector is to contribute to building the MUC through new development. "Catalyst" projects in the form of priority public investments and private developments on key parcels should be identified for each MUC.

Sustainable Design Principles

Principle #1

Encourage the whole-building sustainability approach of LEED New Construction Certification by recognizing performance in five key areas of human and environmental health:

- sustainable site development
- water savings
- energy efficiency
- materials selection
- indoor environmental quality.

Principle #2

Promote design, construction, and operation of buildings and sites that are healthy places to live, work and recreate.

Principle #3

Improve both the quality of life of people inside buildings as well as the whole community.

Strategic Development Plan

This report outlines an overall vision and strategy for the revitalization of downtown Norristown, and includes specific recommendations for the redevelopment of three sites in the downtown civic core as the key projects that can serve as catalysts for the revitalization plan.

Achieving this vision requires a series of major steps over an extended period of time. These steps comprise the strategy for revitalization and the agenda for future action.

Step One: Strengthen the Core

Step Two: Expand the Core to the River

Step Three: Redevelop the Riverfront to the East

Step One: Strengthen the Core

Norristown's Civic Core is the location of many existing assets, including significant office space, ample parking, mass transit access, and an historic urban fabric. Development of the three downtown sites identified in this study will build upon these assets and transform the image of downtown. The addition of housing and retail space will add life and activity and complement the existing employment base in this area. Two of the three sites are located at the highly visible intersection of Main & DeKalb. Development of these sites will positively affect the image of Norristown in the region. Actions needed include:

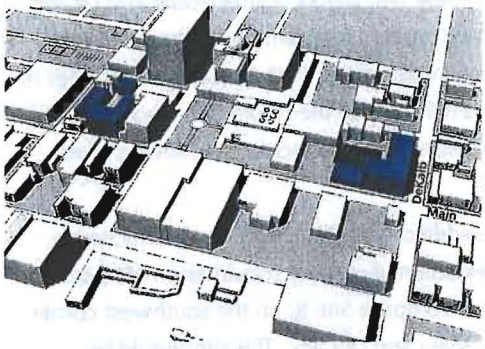


Figure 25 | Immediate Development Opportunities

Focus on redevelopment of Sites A and C as immediate development opportunities. These projects involve retail space on Main Street and low-rise housing above, using "stick" construction and non-structured parking. Both projects appear to be economically feasible in today's market, and both sites are controlled by owners interested in redevelopment.

In addition, discussions should be held with the Wachovia Bank to include their site in an

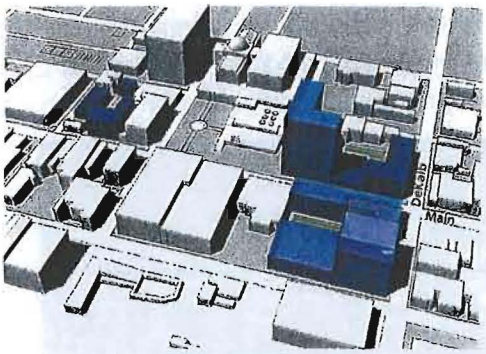


Figure 26 | Coherent Urban Environment

expanded Site A. This would allow denser development and a more significant project at this site. Sites A and C (and the adjacent new County parking garage at Main and Cherry Streets) form anchors at the east and west ends of two blocks of Main Street in the civic core. To create a coherent urban environment in these two blocks, a streetscape and façade improvement program should be developed and implemented in this area, on both sides of Main Street. In the future this program could be extended to adjacent downtown streets.

In addition, the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority should assemble parcels that comprise Site B, on the southwest corner of Main and DeKalb. This site should be redeveloped to complement development on Site A across the street, either for retail with housing above, or for a hotel. The rear of the site on Lafayette Street could be used for surface parking until the Lafayette Street Improvement Project has been completed, at which time a higher density development, such as structured parking and office space, might be developed in relation to improved regional access.

Step Two: Expand the Core to the River

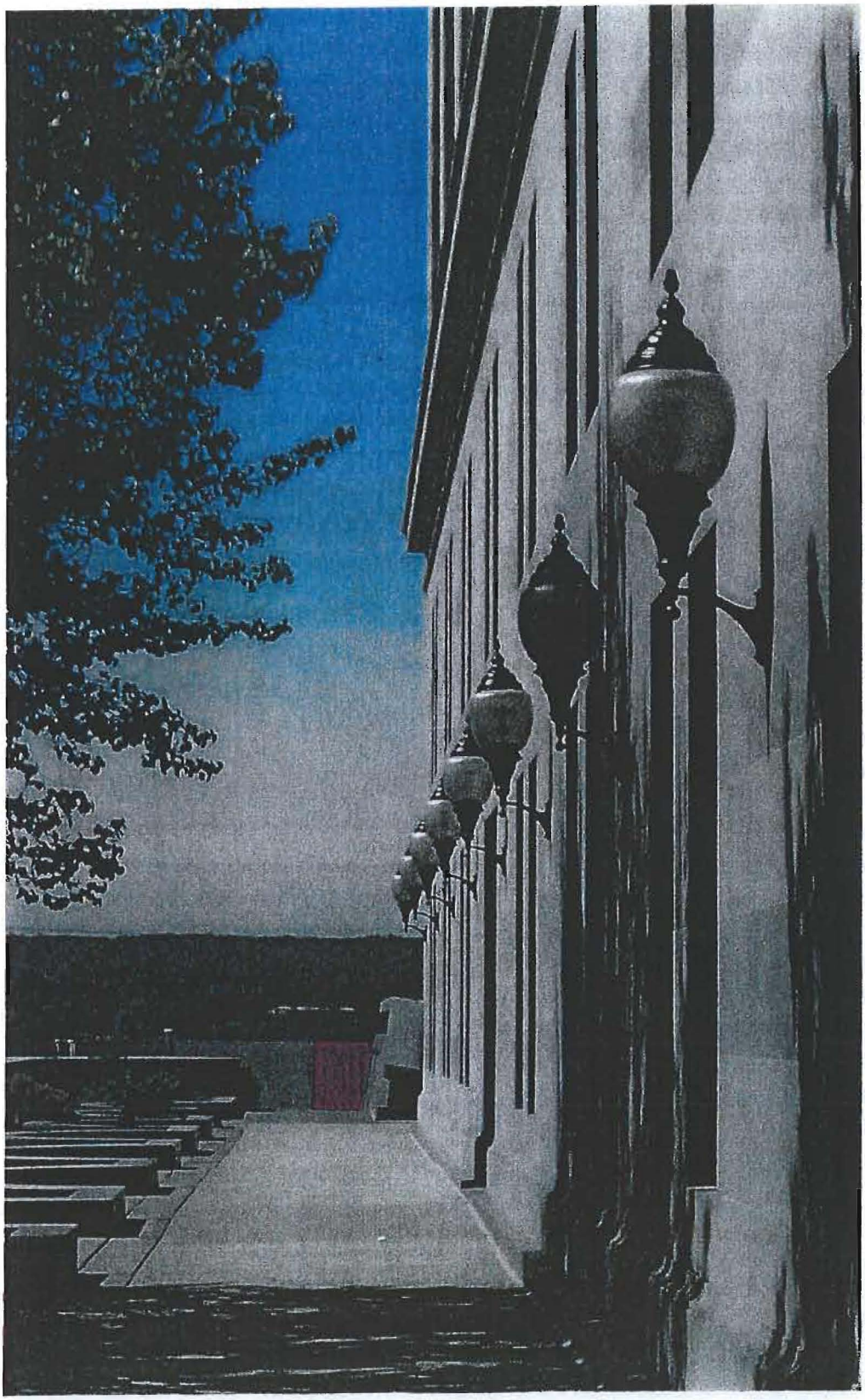
Once the downtown core has been strengthened and the Lafayette Street Improvement Project implemented, redevelopment should focus on the parcels adjacent to the core along the riverfront. This will require assembly of these parcels and further detailed planning in this area. It will be important to provide public open space along the river's edge and to connect this parkland back to the downtown core.

Figure 27 | Step 2

Step Three: Redevelop the Riverfront to the East

Once the central waterfront has been redeveloped, the area to the east along the riverfront can be addressed. Successful development of this area will require completion of the Lafayette Street Improvement project, site assembly, and relocation of the borough's sewer plant (particularly if residential uses are to be developed). Environmental remediation of particular sites may also be needed.

Figure 28| Step 3



Next Steps/Marketing

This Technical Report provides recommendations for the redevelopment of three sites in Downtown Norristown, and a step-by-step revitalization strategy for the downtown and the adjacent Riverfront. These recommendations should be reviewed and adopted by local authorities, and next steps implemented.

Since none of the subject sites is currently controlled by the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority, steps must be taken to gain control of the sites, through acquisition or through agreements with the current owners. In general, there are two alternative approaches to consider. One scenario is to target each of the sites as a separate development opportunity, and to redevelop each site in turn, as the opportunity presents itself. For example, development of Site C and the first phase of Site A appear to be immediate development opportunities, based on the facts that these sites appear to have few owners and relatively clear sites, and that feasible projects have been identified as part of this study. Development of Site B will involve more complex ownership and site control issues, and may take more time to resolve before development can proceed. Similarly, the second phases of Sites A and B appear to be less immediate since their redevelopment involves structured parking, which has a significant economic impact on the projects. In this scenario, it is conceivable that multiple developers could be involved.

A second scenario is to gain control of all three of the sites and to package all three sites to a single developer. This would be ideal in terms of creating maximum impact and the ability to attract a wide variety of developer interest.

Once the recommendations of this report have been accepted and a redevelopment approach determined, the Montgomery County Redevelopment Authority should prepare Requests for Proposals for Redevelopment of the defined projects. This may also involve development of marketing brochures and other materials to help generate interest in the development community.