

## Present Context: Introduction

As the Statement of Significance asserts, it is the connection between Tacony's past and present that supports its significance and contributes to its unique sense of place. While the major objective of this plan, then, is to recognize and preserve the history and architectural fabric of Historic Disston, it is understood that the value of such preservation lies in its contribution to the contemporary community. Preservation of Historic Disston and the community's unique characteristics will help to improve the quality of life of today's residents and support Tacony's successful growth into the future.

In order to understand how preservation priorities should be incorporated into future plans, it is important to first establish the present context of Tacony. Tacony is an active neighborhood that is poised for change in the coming years, and it is important that it be assessed as such. How is Tacony included in plans for the greater Philadelphia region? What issues affect Tacony today? How is Tacony changing? Who lives in Tacony and what are their concerns and needs? These are just several questions that need answering before appropriate recommendations can be made.

The purpose of this section is to present the research gathered in answering such questions. First, the current policy and planning context is discussed, through presentation of the current zoning ordinance and analysis of Tacony's incorporation into recent city planning documents that plan for such diverse issues as redevelopment, green space and transportation improvements. Next, the community context is presented first through demographic research, and next through the results of community surveying. Demographic research presents objective data on today's population and neighborhood statistics, while the community survey allows the residents themselves to express how they experience Tacony, and how they hope to see it change in the coming years.

*Kate Ritson*

# Current Policy and Planning Context

## Zoning

### *Introduction*

With the purpose of regulating both design (bulk/height) and use of land and buildings, zoning is a significant component of city planning. Through this regulation zoning policy has the power to affect the physical and social characteristics of a place, and how that place may change in the future. If properly suited to a neighborhood, zoning can have a positive influence on growth, but in contrast, incompatible zoning can encourage unwanted design and land use patterns in an existing neighborhood. The objective in studying Tacony's current zoning, then, is not only to gain an understanding of existing land use patterns, but to identify potential threats as well as areas for positive future growth.

### *Zoning Classifications in Tacony*

In general, current zoning classifications in Tacony can be identified by their groupings within distinct geographical divisions in the neighborhood. While there are some anomalies within the pattern, residential, commercial, recreational and industrial zoning are clearly defined into separate sections of the neighborhood. Below, each of these main classifications will be described by geographic location and the basic uses such classifications follow.<sup>1</sup> Special zoning designations at the waterfront will also be discussed. See Zoning Map (Fig. 4.1.1).

### *Residential Zoning*

Residential zoning in Tacony is generally found in the northern section of the neighborhood, separated from the industrial area by Disston Park and the I-95 and rail line transportation divide. Within the proposed historic district boundaries, the main residential classification is R-5 for single family dwellings. Several parcels of land within the traditionally industrial portion of Tacony at the waterfront have also recently been rezoned as R-5. Outside of the his-

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1 Specific bulk and height limitations will not be described, but further information can be found at: <http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/zoning.pdf>.

# CURRENT ZONING MAP



Map by: Kate Ritson

Map Key	
	Tacony Boundary
	Historic Disston
	G2 - General Industrial
	G1 - General Industrial
	L3 - Limited Industrial
	C7 - Neighborhood Retail Commercial
	C1/C2 - Neighborhood Retail Commercial
	RC6 - Planned Residential Development District
	R8/R9 - Two-Family and Multi-Family Dwellings
	R5 - Detached/Semi-Detached Houses
	REC - Recreational District

All current zoning information based on that published by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission in October 2008.

Important changes include rezoning of the area bounded by State Road, Milnor Street, Princeton Avenue, the Delaware River and Unruh Avenue, as a Waterfront Redevelopment District. Additionally, rezoning of the commercial area along Torresdale Avenue has been proposed, which would change all C-1 zoning to C-2.

Parcel image source: <http://citymaps.phila.gov/zoning/>



toric boundaries, R-8, R-9, and R-9A zoning are more common.<sup>2</sup>

<b>R-5 Single-Family Dwelling</b>	Single-family detached and semi-detached (twin) houses and specified professional offices, places of worship, galleries, museums, libraries, railroad passenger stations and utility substations in enclosed buildings. Other specified non-residential uses may be permitted if a Zoning Board of Adjustment certificate is granted.
<b>R-8 Two-Family Dwelling</b>	The uses permitted in “R-7” [Attached (row) two-family (duplex) dwellings in groups of not more than 10] and the uses permitted in “R-5”.
<b>R-9 Multi-Family Dwelling</b>	Detached, semi-detached and attached multi-family dwellings and the uses permitted in “R-8”.

### *Commercial Zoning*

Commercial zoning is mostly designated for a T-shaped section within the proposed historic district boundaries, where sections of Torresdale Avenue and Longshore Avenue are zoned C-1 and C-2. Outside of these boundaries, a scattering of C-2 zoning can be found on Torresdale and near the rail station. At the Tacony Civic Association meeting of November 11, 2008, it was announced that a proposal has been made to change all C-1 zoning along Torresdale to C-2, in order to protect existing commercial buildings from being converted to residential at the ground floor.

<b>C-1 Neighborhood Retail Commercial District</b>	Commercial activity is restricted to the first floor of the building. A limited list of retail and personal service commercial uses are permitted. Upper floor residential use is limited to that of the most restrictive abutting residential district. The first floor commercial space can be converted to an apartment after which it can no longer be used commercially.
<b>C-2 Neighborhood Retail Commercial District</b>	Retail sales, restaurants, offices, personal and business services are permitted. Automobile repairs (exclusive of body and fender repairs and painting), service stations, take-out restaurants, entertainment uses, outdoor uses, and Laundromat and dry cleaning require the granting of a Zoning Board certificate. Residential uses are those permitted in any residential district.
<b>C-7 Neighborhood Retail Commercial District</b>	Most of the same that are uses permitted in “C-2”, however, off-street parking for customers must be provided. Residential uses are not permitted.

<sup>2</sup> All zoning descriptions in the following section from: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, *Zoning Remapping in Philadelphia*; available from <http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/zoning.pdf>; Internet; accessed October 2008.

*Recreational Zoning*

Recreational zoning is scattered throughout Tacony, and is least defined by placement in specific sections of the neighborhood. The largest grouping of recreational zoning is the parcels making up Disston Park, the boundary between the residential and industrial sections of the neighborhood. Other significant recreational areas include Vogt Park, to the north, and open space along the river.

<b>REC Recreational District</b>	This district is intended to be used for land under the jurisdiction of the City’s Recreation Department or Fairmount Park Commission, the Department of Forests and Waters of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the National Park Service.
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*Industrial Zoning*

Industrial Zoning in Tacony is limited to the area between I-95 and the Delaware River. The zoning classifications here are: L-2, L-3, G-1, and G-2, for light or limited industrial use.

<b>L-3 Limited Industrial</b>	The Limited Industrial districts permit warehousing, distribution, truck terminals, food processing and light manufacturing (the product produced may not exceed 2,000 lb. in weight and equipment can not be rated in excess of 20 tons) of products from purchased materials. The uses permitted are the type that do not emit noise, odors or vibrations. Operations must be conducted within completely enclosed buildings. Off-street parking for employees must be provided (except in “L-4”).
<b>G-1 and G-2 General Industrial</b>	The General Industrial districts allow all of the industrial uses permitted in the Limited Industrial districts (except retail uses) with a greatly expanded list of items that can be manufactured or processed without the requirement that work be conducted within buildings. Also there are no limitations on the size of the products manufactured or on the equipment used. Commercial uses are not permitted.
<b>LR Industrial District</b>	This district allows all of the uses permitted in any industrial district (except commercial uses) plus all of the manufacturing and processing uses not permitted or expressly prohibited in the other industrial districts. Manufacturing and processing and can be outdoors.

*Special Zoning District Designations*

Two rezoning classifications recently passed in Tacony warrant special attention due to their departure from traditional zoning patterns and to their emphasis on encouraging redevelopment. Traditionally

industrial parcels of land along Tacony's riverfront have recently been rezoned as either a RC-6 Planned Residential Development District or a Waterfront Redevelopment District (WRD). Such rezoning is a prime example of how zoning can be used as a tool to guide future change.

The Waterfront Redevelopment District (WRD) zoning classification was approved in 2005, intended to encourage the orderly redevelopment of large parcels of formerly industrial, utility and port related land located near rivers and other bodies of water. Bill. No. 050466, approved in May 2005, rezoned the area in Tacony bounded by State Road, Milnor Street, Princeton Avenue, the Delaware River and Unruh Avenue. This designation includes the site of the former Tacony Army Warehouse. This zoning designation is not prescriptive, instead, it permits the owner to propose a master plan that meets the general criteria of WRD zoning. It is essentially an optional zoning classification then, with the intention to give more flexibility to the planning and development of larger sites. Permitted uses are various, but include for example, hospitals, residential development, schools, cultural institutions, recreational centers, retail sales and so on.

Similar to the WRD is the RC-6 Planned Residential Development District. In Tacony, the site of the former Dodge Steel plant has been rezoned for this use. This district is intended to encourage mixed use development of large tracts of land in accordance with a plan which preserves existing topography, vegetation, surface water bodies, and other amenities unique to the property. The plan must be fully detailed in terms of existing and proposed topography and vegetation, location and size of all proposed buildings and parking areas, and any other information required by the Planning Commission. Once approved by the Planning Commission and City Council this plan becomes the "zoning" for the property. Commercial uses may be approved but the district is intended for any type of single-family, two family or multi-family detached, semi-detached or attached dwellings.

### *Conclusions*

Through its zoning and resulting land use pattern, Tacony retains an important physical and visual connection to its past. Continued maintenance of this traditional layout can be accomplished through appropriate zoning. One such example is the connection between the industrial work area and the historic residential area. While se-

lective rezoning of the waterfront is necessary for redevelopment and encouraged as positive growth for the entire Tacony neighborhood, maintaining a connection to Tacony's industrial heritage can be accomplished by maintaining the waterfront area as a work and recreational space, with the historic residential district providing a stable housing base for new workers. Another example is the traditional commercial corridors of Torresdale and Longshore Avenues. Its current zoning, which supports small businesses at the first floor with residential occupation above, encourages a walkable community with strong "main street" characteristics. Again, selective rezoning is appropriate, such as to perhaps consolidate commercial uses to a core area of Torresdale Avenue, but zoning should also be used as a tool to maintain and encourage its traditional role in the neighborhood. The proposed Disston historic district is another important form of zoning that will further reinforce these ideals. Overall, the current zoning in Tacony, both within the proposed historic district boundaries and within the neighborhood as a whole, supports the continuation of traditional land uses in Tacony with some rezoning along the waterfront allowing for redevelopment potential and positive growth in the future.

## Planning for Tacony

Tacony has been included in a number of recently published planning documents as part of planning for redevelopment of the Delaware River waterfront in northeast Philadelphia. As interest in redevelopment of the waterfront continues to grow, it is likely to gain more attention as an important area for planning and design initiatives. See *Planning for Tacony: Complete List of Published Planning Documents* (Fig. 1) for a comprehensive list of all recently published plans that concern Tacony, as well as documents pending publication.

As discussed in the previous Zoning section, Tacony can generally be divided into its commercial, residential and industrial areas. In order to clearly understand where, and how, planning initiatives may affect Tacony, key documents were studied with an eye toward how they would affect each of these areas, or elements of Tacony. Lastly, each key report was analyzed for how it incorporates historic preservation into its planning goals and recommendations. Below, a summary of planning initiatives for each element is provided. For more detailed information on each key planning document, see the *Key Plans Matrix* (Fig. 4.1.2).

**Planning for Tacony:  
 Complete List of Published Planning Documents**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Author</b>	<b>Date Published</b>	<b>Accessible From</b>
<i>North Delaware Riverfront: A Long Term Vision for Renewal and Redevelopment</i>	Field Operations Consultants.	September 2001	<a href="http://www.drcc-phila.org/reports/ndrsum1.pdf">http://www.drcc-phila.org/reports/ndrsum1.pdf</a>
<i>Tacony Neighborhood Strategic Plan</i>	Urban Partners and Gannett Fleming	October 2002	Office of the Tacony Historical Society
<i>Cottman Riverview Redevelopment Area Plan</i>	Philadelphia City Planning Commission	May 2005	<a href="http://www.philaplan ning.org/plans/">http://www.philaplan ning.org/plans/</a>
<i>Cottman Riverview Redevelopment Area Plan; Tacony Extension</i>	Philadelphia City Planning Commission	September 2005	<a href="http://www.philaplan ning.org/plans/">http://www.philaplan ning.org/plans/</a>
<i>Cottman Riverview Blight Certification; Tacony Extension</i>	Philadelphia City Planning Commission	September 2005	<a href="http://www.philaplan ning.org/plans/">http://www.philaplan ning.org/plans/</a>
<i>North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan</i>	Greenways Incorporated	2005-2006	<a href="http://www.drcc-phila.org/plans.htm">http://www.drcc-phila.org/plans.htm</a>
<i>GreenPlan Philadelphia</i>	City of Philadelphia	2006- present	<a href="http://www.greenplanphiladelphia.com">www.greenplanphiladelphia.com</a>
<i>North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study</i>	Interface Studio LLC, Philadelphia City Planning Commission	April 2008	<a href="http://www.philaplan ning.org/plans/">http://www.philaplan ning.org/plans/</a>
<i>Year 33 Preliminary Consolidated Plan (Fiscal Year 2008)</i>	Philadelphia, Office of Housing and Community Development	2008	<a href="http://www.phila.gov/ohcd/">http://www.phila.gov/ohcd/</a>
<i>Industrial Land Policy: Interim Report</i>	Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation	March 2008	Office of PIDC
<i>Industrial Land Use Policy Report to PIDC</i>	Economic Research Associates	November 2008	Publishing pending.

Fig. 4.1.1: Matrix of previously completed planning studies for Tacony.

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### *Intended Purpose of Plans*

The majority of planning initiatives that include Tacony in their work are focused on the industrial waterfront or transportation areas in Tacony. Some, like *GreenPlan Philadelphia*<sup>3</sup> and the *North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan*<sup>4</sup> focus on green and open space within the city, and recognize Tacony as an important area due to its location along the Delaware River. Others focus on the potential of Tacony as a development area, like the *Cottman Riverview Redevelopment Area Plan*<sup>5</sup> and the *North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study*<sup>6</sup>. In most cases, planning for Tacony is included within broader planning initiatives for the city of Philadelphia or for the greater northeast region of the city. Focused planning for Tacony specifically is found in the *Tacony Neighborhood Strategic Plan*, published in 2002<sup>7</sup>. Recently, the Major Artery Revitalization Committee (MARC) of Northeast Philadelphia, has begun to enact physical improvements along Torresdale Avenue, incorporating several design recommendations first proposed in the *Strategic Plan*.

### *Residential Element Summary*

The majority of published plans focus goals for residential issues on development of new residential housing along the waterfront, either by building new on the large proportion of vacant land, or by adaptively reusing the older warehouses. Specific development planning has focused on the former Tacony Army Warehouse site and on the former Dodge Steel site. The existing residential area is generally included in broader planning proposals by somehow ty-

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3 Philadelphia City Planning Commission, *GreenPlan Philadelphia*; available from <http://www.greenplanphiladelphia.com/>; Internet; accessed October 2008.

4 Greenways Incorporated, Econsult Corporation and Schelter and Associates, *North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan and Cost Benefit Analysis* (Philadelphia, 2005-2006); available from <http://www.drcc-phila.org/plans.htm>; Internet; accessed October 2008.

5 Philadelphia City Planning Commission, *Cottman Riverview Redevelopment Area Plan; Tacony Extension* (Philadelphia, September 2005); available from <http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/areaplans/cottmantaconyrap.pdf>; Internet; accessed October 2008.

6 Interface Studio, LLC, Lager Raabe Skafte Landscape Architects, Jaskiewicz Transport International and Nina Liou, *North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study* (Philadelphia, April 2008); available from <http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/ndelrailfull.pdf>; Internet; accessed October 2008.

7 Urban Partners and Gannett Fleming, *Tacony Neighborhood Strategic Plan* (Philadelphia, October 2002).

ing it to the newly developed area, either physically or by economic impact. For example, the *North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan* proposes connecting the two areas through designed connector streets and emphasizes the affect waterfront development would likely have on increasing residential property values. The *Tacony Neighborhood Strategic Plan* has more specific concerns for the existing residential neighborhood, with suggestions such as rehabilitation and improvement in rental housing quality.

### *Commercial Element Summary*

Much like the existing residential area, there is less emphasis on the existing commercial corridors of Torresdale and Longshore Avenues as there is on potential commercial and mixed-used development along the river. None of the recently published plans focusing on redevelopment of the waterfront seriously considers the existing commercial area. The only focused planning for the existing commercial area seems to come from the *Neighborhood Strategic Plan*. The *Strategic Plan* recommends such ideas as commercial use consolidation to central blocks and the encouragement of locally owned specialty shops and restaurants. Incorporating several design recommendations first proposed in this Plan, MARC has recently begun enacting improvements along the Torresdale Avenue commercial corridor, through its Torresdale Avenue Project (TAP). MARC is a non-profit organization focused on improving quality of life in neighborhoods through aesthetic improvements to major streets and residential districts in Northeast Philadelphia. In the summer of 2008, MARC began work on TAP, putting forth \$2 million dollars for improvements. The initial phase has increased lighting on the Avenue, and the second phase of work will focus on intersection and crosswalk improvements. Banners and hanging flower baskets will also be installed.<sup>8</sup>

### *Industrial Element Summary*

As implied in the residential and commercial element summaries, the real focus of the majority of recent planning initiatives is the area bordering the Delaware River. Some plans are focused on green and open space priorities at and around the waterfront, while others are focused more intensely on redevelopment plans. Each of the key plans emphasizes the large area of underutilized or vacant properties within Tacony's industrial area. The *Cottman Riverview Area Plan*

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<sup>8</sup> Major Artery Revitalization Committee; available from <http://www.marc-cleansweep.com/>; Internet; accessed October 2008.

includes a separately published *Blight Certification*<sup>9</sup> which emphasizes vacant areas and inadequate conditions at sites along the riverfront. The *Area Plan* itself focuses on meeting the development potential of the site by improving these conditions. This *Area Plan* was the first to encourage rezoning as a WRD. The *North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan* proposes residential development at former industrial sites, but is mainly focused on street, corridor and gateway improvements and on creation of a riverfront trail. The *North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study* recommendations evaluation of conditions at the industrial warehouse sites.

### *Historic Preservation Element*

The majority of recent planning initiatives do not necessarily propose concrete plans for historic preservation, but all recognize Tacony's strong history and its significant industrial heritage. Specific steps to be taken are not commonly found in the plans, but most recommend reuse of historic resources, especially of the industrial warehouses. The *Greenway Master Plan* specifically names historic preservation as an opportunity in developing the greenway and encourages developers to preserve and renovate historic buildings that have architectural significance and can be converted to new uses. The *Urban Design Study* in particular emphasizes Tacony's historical roots and identifiable building fabric. It recommends reuse of historic warehouses around the river for live/work space, but recognizes that deterioration exists and a detailed conditions survey should be completed. Unique to all the plans concerned with broader Philadelphia planning efforts, this study also recognizes the importance of renovating existing historic homes, and emphasizes the community's concern for preservation. The *Neighborhood Strategic Plan* has the most concentrated interest in preservation, putting forth recommendations such as a designation as a historic conservation district and creation of renovation guidelines.

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9 Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Cottman Riverview Blight Certification; Tacony Extension (Philadelphia, September 2005); <http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/areaplans/cottmantaconybr.pdf>; Internet; accessed October 2008.

## *Conclusions*

The variety of documents which include Tacony in their planning efforts indicate that it is a neighborhood gaining attention due to its potentially promising future through redevelopment. Study of each of these planning initiatives has helped the project team to identify what are important issues and goals for Tacony in the coming years, and how and where Tacony is likely to change.

The preceding plan summaries show that most planning attention is currently focused on development along the Delaware waterfront. This area shows obvious potential as a scenic waterfront location which can also accommodate considerable redevelopment as a mixed-use site. Significantly less consideration is given to the existing residential and commercial elements. This intense focus on the industrial area implies a belief that true revitalization of Tacony is possible only through waterfront revitalization, without recognizing the potential of the existing resource base within the historic residential area and along the traditional commercial corridors.

For the purposes of this Preservation Plan, the most important consideration in analysis was incorporation of historic preservation into planning recommendations. This study demonstrated that there is a decided lack of concrete planning for historic preservation in most current planning efforts. While most planning initiatives recognize Tacony's history and state that it should be considered and sometimes used in revitalization, none have directly focused on specific historic resources and how they can be used to improve Tacony's future and quality of life for residents.

As a result of this analysis, the project team was able to take further steps and eventually make recommendations that take into account and are compatible with current and planned initiatives, while also identifying and filling gaps in the planning literature. These gaps were generally identified as insufficient planning for the existing residential and commercial areas; a lack of identification of historic resources and specific recommendations for their use; and not enough consideration given to the opinions of the current Tacony community.

This led to surveys of the industrial, residential and commercial areas, where historic fabric was identified as well as assessed by current condition and use. An important part of this work was considering how new uses might fit into this historic building fabric. Finally, the project team considered it necessary to conduct a com-



munity survey, which would provide residents with the opportunity to express their own opinions about the neighborhood and vision for its future. Each of these components plays an important role in supplementing existing planning literature, providing support and encouragement for existing redevelopment plans, while promoting historic preservation and community-focused planning as additional tools to accomplish this revitalization.

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## Key Plans Matrix | Current Policy and Context

Title	Intended Purpose	Geographic Area of Concern	Area of Tacony Affected by Plan	Residential Components	Commercial Components	Industrial Components	Preservation Components	Key Accompanying Maps or Images
<b>North Delaware Riverfront: A Long Term Vision for Renewal and Redevelopment;</b> <i>Summary Report. Field Operations consultants. September 2001</i>  <a href="http://www.drcc-phila.org/reports/ndrsum1.pdf">http://www.drcc-phila.org/reports/ndrsum1.pdf</a>	To reconnect the city to the Delaware River; part of comprehensive urban design effort to revitalize 10 miles along the River.	North of the Ben Franklin Bridge north to County line at Poquessing Creek. Comprises mostly industrial land uses - at time of report, 1/3 of land vacant, publicly owned, or potentially vacant/public.	Portion along the Delaware Riverfront.	<i>Full report unavailable.</i>	<i>Full report unavailable.</i>	<i>Full report unavailable.</i>	<i>Full report unavailable.</i>	Site map: public open space; pub. owned land; private rec. sites; vacant/available sites; longterm available sites; private/active sites: residential, commercial, institutional, utility, and industrial.
<b>Tacony Neighborhood Strategic Plan;</b> <i>by Urban Partners and Gannett Fleming, October 2002</i>  <i>Courtesy of the Tacony Historical Society.</i>	To establish an organized approach to the overall improvement of the neighborhood. Guidance to public agencies and neighborhood organizations.	Tacony neighborhood.	Plan focuses primarily on residential area defined by historic Disston estate and the Delaware River waterfront.	Identifies 4 housing goals in area: 1) rehab vacant houses 2) convert/rehab subdivided houses 3) improve existing occupied housing 4) improve quality of rental housing.	Identifies problems (ex.: vandalism and low quality new businesses) and offers recommendations like consolidation of commercial uses to central blocks and locally owned specialty shops.	Recommends that Tacony encourage more detailed planning for this area by the Planning Commission and the creation of a development strategy [this has since occurred].	Recommends rehab vacant historic buildings; designation of Tacony as historic conservation district; creation of renovation guidelines; referral list; rowhouse block strategy.	Demographic maps; zoning and land use maps; residential improvement map; Torresdale Avenue improvement concept; waterfront development concept.
<b>Cottman Riverview Redevelopment Area Plan; Tacony Extension;</b> <i>Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Sept. 2005</i>  <a href="http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/areaplans/cottmantaconyrap.pdf">http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/areaplans/cottmantaconyrap.pdf</a>	Redev. Area created to help develop former industrial properties. Riverfront revitalization; mix uses; public accessibility; connection to nearby communities; maintain views; blight removal.	111-acre section of Philadelphia located along the Delaware Riverfront, expanded to include Tacony.	Delaware Riverfront in Tacony.	Proposes "residential and mixed use" for industrial area. No plans for existing residential area.	N/A	Proposes conversion of industrial area to residential mixed use. Proposed zoning: 'Waterfront Redevelopment District' [has since occurred]. Also proposes public zone along river.	Describes Disston Saw history, recommend new uses take advantage of hist. resources. States that hist. residential homes can become attractive elements in new communities.	Existing Zoning Map (in 2005), and Illustrative Site Plan including identified areas for adaptive reuse of historic buildings.
<b>Cottman Riverview Blight Certification; Tacony Extension;</b> <i>Philadelphia City Planning Commission, September 2005</i>  <a href="http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/areaplans/cottmantaconybr.pdf">http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/areaplans/cottmantaconybr.pdf</a>	Report on evaluation of blight for portion of North Delaware Riverfront located to the north of Unruh Avenue and south of Cottman Avenue.	Boundaries: (1) Delaware River, (2) Cottman Avenue, (3) Milnor Street, (4) New State Road, (5) Unruh Avenue.	<i>See Plan's Geographic Area of Concern.</i>	N/A	N/A	Blight in industrial area: vacant lots; contaminated sites/inadequate conditions; faulty street/lot layout; economically/socially undesirable land use - development potential not met.	N/A	Maps identifying vacant lots and blight indicators.
<b>North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan;</b> <i>by Greenways Incorporated; 2005-2006</i>  <a href="http://www.drcc-phila.org/plans.htm">http://www.drcc-phila.org/plans.htm</a>	Recommends implementing "Public Greenway": accessible open space, greenway amenities, continuous riverfront trail system and neighborhood connector streets.	Approximately 8 mile long corridor along Delaware River from the Betsy Ross Bridge in Bridesburg to Pleasant Hill Park in Holmesburg close to City's border with Bucks County.	Tacony neighborhood district: Tacony/Palmyra Bridge to Pennypack Park boundary. About 46 acres of greenway in this segment made of public corridors and borrowed landscape.	Great potential for development. Investment could increase residential property values. Proposes 2 residential developments including at former Tacony Army Warehouse site.	N/A	Underutilized/vacant properties largest area completed parcels: Dodge Steel, Northern Shipping, Dodge Army Warehouse, Northern Shipping. Greenway Connector Sts. to industrial - Unruh, Princeton.	Industrial heritage: Disston Saw, Tacony Iron & Metal, Northern Shipping, Dodge Steel. Preservation as opportunity, encourages adaptive reuse of buildings with arch. significance.	Public Greenway map: parkland, existing trails, trails in design, proposed trails, river road in design, connector streets, proposed public greenway. Existing land use map and phasing plan map.
<b>North Delaware Riverfront; Rail Stations Urban Design Study;</b> <i>Philadelphia City Planning Commission, Interface Studio, LLC, April 2008</i>  <a href="http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/ndelrailfull.pdf">http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/ndelrailfull.pdf</a>	Focus on 5 stations, including Tacony, along R7 line, each close to the North Delaware Riverfront. Objective to transform stations into resources that encourage increased rail ridership.	Stations and their surrounding areas along R7 line: Bridesburg, Wissinoming, Tacony, Holmesburg Junction and Torresdale.	Improve station entrance; light Disston Park; link Longshore Ave. to station; extend Longshore Ave. to Riv., redevelop Saw Works; street to connect Dodge Steel and Army Warehouse; reuse historic warehouses; redevelop east of station.	Accounts for residents in redeveloped riverfront. Mentions North Delaware Plan's ideas for redevelopment - since, 2 proposed developments- 500 units for Army Warehouse and 650 units for Dodge Steel.	Acknowledges identifiable historic character of Tacony as enter town through Torresdale Avenue entrance.	Concerned with condition of industrial buildings. Recommend evaluation of deteriorated properties as part of redevelopment plans. States that majority of surrounding land is privately owned.	Emphasizes history, building fabric, community concern for preservation. Recommends warehouse reuse. Characterizes "good" conditions for residential, recognizes deterioration. CDC should renovate vacant, historic homes.	Use/zoning; conditions; transportation corridors; access to waterfront; areas susceptible to change; models including residential redevelopment, reuse of historic buildings along waterfront, station area.

Matrix by: Kate Ritson

# Transportation & Circulation

## Historic Context

Tacony's location along the Delaware River and at the end of a rail line was an important factor in attracting industrialist Henry Disston to Tacony in the late-1800s. The river and rail provided the means to ship his goods as well for passenger travel to and from the town. The railroad extended to the north allowing passage to New York and beyond. Once travelers arrived at Tacony's grand station house (Fig. 4.2.1), completed in time for the centennial in 1876<sup>1</sup>, they would need to transfer to the ferry service along the Delaware River or hire a carriage to continue to Philadelphia.

Few of Disston's workers had carriages due to the ban on stables in the community and lack of carriage houses. Most of Disston's employees rarely traveled far beyond Tacony on a regular basis. This was an ideal situation for Disston who drew his workers from community residents. In turn, Tacony's residents were provided with Disston-built or subsidized housing, banks, entertainment. Stores in the town, mostly along Longshore Street, offered most of the basic necessities within easy reach.

In 1901 Peter Costello established the Holmesburg, Frankford and Tacony Railroad Company (Fig. 4.2.2) which dramatically expanded the area to which residents could commute on a daily basis. Nicknamed the "Hop Frog and Toad" line, it ran on a single track on Rhawn Street, State Road and Orthodox Street and provided transportation to the Disston plant and the Frankford Arsenal for people from these communities. In 1903 a new trolley line was completed by the Rapid Transit Corporation of Philadelphia. This came to be known as



Fig. 4.2.1: Tacony RR Station after Windstorm March 27, 1911. Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives

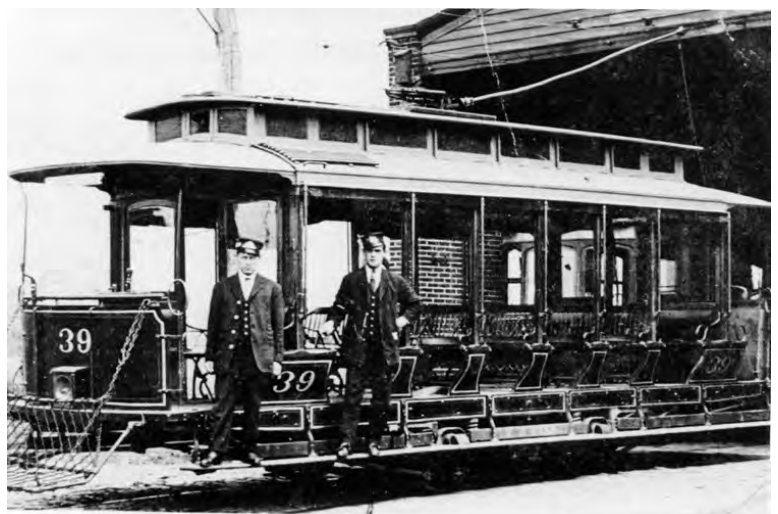


Fig. 4.2.2: Frankford Tacony & Holmesburg Street Railway #39 Open air Trolley (electric) Fth (sic) Barn State Rd. Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives

1 Iatarola, Louis Sr. & Lynn-Carmela T. Iatarola. *Lower Northeast Philadelphia, Then and Now*. Charleston, South Carolina: Arcadia Publishing, 2008.



the No. 56 trolley and traveled along Torresdale Avenue on two tracks. The line connected in Frankford with the steam trolley line that went to Center City.<sup>2</sup>

Life changed in Tacony as a result of these new transit systems. Disston's workers could now travel from Frankford or Holmesburg to work at the Saw Works and those living in Tacony had more options as to where they could reasonably travel for jobs.

No longer were residents dependent on ferries or the railroad for access to Center City and beyond.

The trolley lines also shifted Tacony's focus away from the Delaware River. Longshore Avenue had functioned as the main street of Tacony and the commercial and social center of the community. Seventy two percent of the businesses that supported a 1907 Decoration Day Program were located on Longshore Street compared to eight percent on Torresdale Avenue. In addition, the Tacony Music Hall, Trust Company, Liberty Movie House, police and fire stations were all located on Longshore Avenue. By 1930 Torresdale Avenue was the Tacony's commercial and social hub (Fig. 4.2.3). The New Liberty Theatre relocated there along with banks and stores, all joining a the public library which was built on the avenue in 1906.<sup>3</sup> The Delaware River and the Disston Saw Works were no longer the focal point of the neighborhood. Rapid transit had refocused the community's attention toward other locations and opportunities.

## Current Conditions

Today regional and local rail lines, four bus routes and Interstate 95 provide Taconyites



Fig. 4.2.3: Image of Torresdale Avenue at Knorr Street, c. 1930. Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives



Fig. 4.2.4: Tacony station in 2008 showing southbound station to right and edge of northbound station to left; industrial buildings beyond.

<sup>2</sup> Silcox, Harry C. *A Place to Live and Work: The Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia. Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1994: 63-65.*

<sup>3</sup> Silcox: 66.





Fig. 4.2.5: Tacony Transportation Map.



with easy access to Center City, Lower Bucks County and south/central New Jersey. Pedestrian circulation throughout the residential portion of the neighborhood is fostered by narrow streets, small alleys and tight turns that serve as traffic-calming measures. However, both pedestrian and vehicular connections to the riverfront are hampered by railroad and interstate underpasses, grade changes, discontinuous streets, on-ramps and a maze of poorly maintained or vacant industrial buildings.

In recent years SEPTA has considered a number of changes to transit routes in the neighborhood including terminating rail service to Tacony Station. Community opposition and a trend towards increased ridership, staved off the closing. Recently Tacony secured additional funds for station improvements. The visibility of the station, parking and drop-off accommodations and site furnishings and lighting all require attention. (Fig. 4.2.4)

SEPTA also indicated a desire to reactivate the Route 56 trolley service<sup>4</sup> as implemented on other historic trolley corridors in the city. Residents were concerned about accommodating the trolley on Torresdale Avenue and felt that the trolley turnaround station at the intersection of Torresdale and Cottman is unsightly.<sup>5</sup>

Interstate 95 provides Taconyites with good regional access but creates traffic problems in the neighborhood. The connection between the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge and I-95 is not direct; that traffic is directed onto local streets. One-way streets at Princeton Avenue and Cottman Street serve as ramp connectors to the Interstate make both pedestrian and vehicular navigation difficult. Some traffic problems will be eliminated when the access ramps to and from I-95 are relocated, returning Princeton Avenue to a two way street with pedestrian and bike



Fig. 4.2.6: Map showing proposed changes to Cottman Princeton Interchange from 95 Revive.com <http://www.95revive.com/cottman-princeton-interchange-overview.aspx>



Fig. 4.2.7: Knorr Street looking east toward the river shows narrow right of way between industrial buildings, 2008.

4 Urban Partners & Gannett Fleming. *Tacony Strategic Neighborhood Plan*. Philadelphia: Office of Housing and Community Development, 2002: 14.

5 Urban Partners, et. al.: 15.

lane improvements. Construction of the reconfigured on-ramps is scheduled to get underway in 2009 (Fig 4.2.6).

Vehicular access through the riverfront industrial parcels consists of a maze of narrow drives between the large buildings and abandoned lots. Unruh Street is the only public street shown in the Historic Disston industrial area on most city and GIS maps. Despite the mapping, tractor trailers use a continuation of a narrow extension of Knorr Street to pass from New State Road to warehouses on the riverfront (Fig. 4.2.7). Access to most buildings in this area is poor, turning radii and roadbeds are inadequate for large trucks bearing heavy loads.

Recent streetscape improvements along Torresdale Avenue including lighting, crosswalks and street trees foster a safer, more cohesive pedestrian experience (Fig. 4.2.8). In addition, the Delaware River City Corporation is spearheading the construction of a portion of the East Coast Greenway Trail that will run along Tacony's riverfront. To serve the trail, Unruh Street and Princeton Avenue have been designated as green connectors between the neighborhood and the riverfront. Plans for the connector streets include bike lanes, crosswalks, lighting and shade trees, all of which should improve multi-modal connection between the neighborhood and the riverfront. (See DRCC Greenway Plan for Tacony in appendix)

## Analysis and Recommendations

Plans to improve vehicular access to Interstate 95 and return Princeton and Cottman Avenues to two-way streets will serve Tacony well. The addition of a waterfront trail and establishing Unruh Street and Princeton Avenue as green connector streets will improve pedestrian, bike and vehicular connections between the neighborhood and the river. The lighting, street trees and crosswalks installed along Torresdale Ave-



Fig. 4.2.8: 6800 block of Torresdale Avenue looking north with new street trees and lights, 2008.



Fig. 4.2.9: Plan for new development at the Disston Saw Works site as published in the *North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study*.



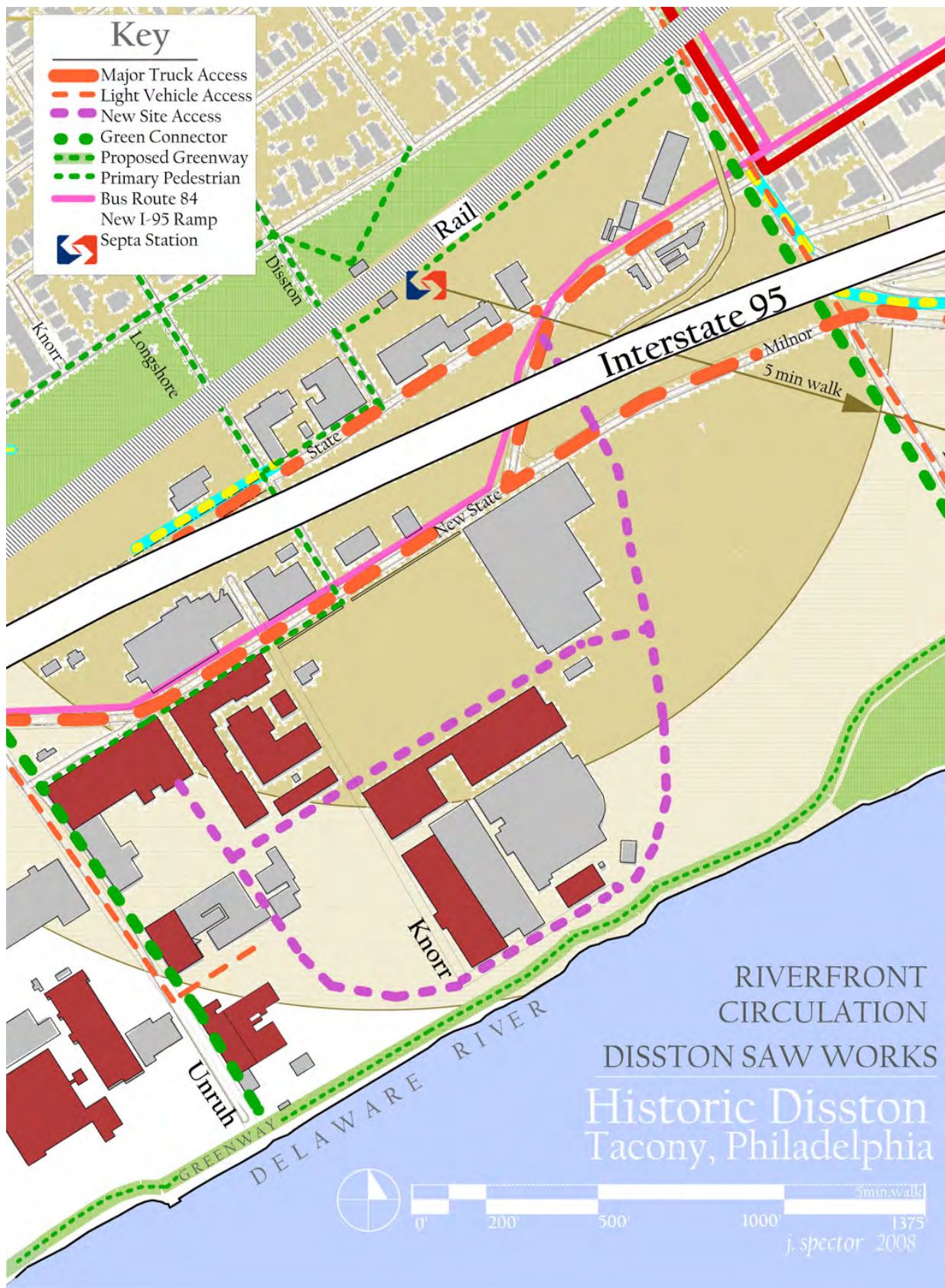


Fig. 4.2.10: Disston Industrial Map.



nue provide the infrastructure for a pedestrian-friendly Main Street.

Improving the access to and visibility of the rail station will capitalize on Tacony's accessibility for employers and residents. The recently published *North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study*<sup>6</sup> recommends additional improvements to foster rail ridership and improve neighborhood circulation. The recommendations focus on upgrading station safety amenities and linkages. Specifically, for Tacony, the report recommends extending the street grid to the river and creating a live/work community in the center of Disston's former industrial area (Fig. 4.2.9).

Based on the 2001 *North Delaware Riverfront Long Term Vision for Renewal and Redevelopment*<sup>7</sup> plan, the city, has established a commitment, supported by the Delaware River City Corporation, to establish Unruh Street and Princeton Avenue as east/west green connector streets to the riverfront greenway in the Tacony area. During the last five years, the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation has been working to establish the importance of preserving uninterrupted parcels of industrial land and attracting manufacturers to the city as a crucial part of establishing a sound economy. Together these plans and strategies would indicate that pedestrian and recreational traffic should be directed from the neighborhood and the train station to Unruh and Princeton Avenue. (Fig. 4.2.10) Infrastructure funds and efforts should be focused on safe, pleasant routes that will direct pedestrians and recreational visitors to the designated connectors around the perimeter of the existing industrial site to deliver visitors to the new greenway. This approach would allow the city to concentrate funding and policy efforts on building strong connectors by concentrating the development of appropriate creative industry, institutional and commercial uses along these corridors. Streetscape improvements and land use buffering around the existing industrial parcels would serve to improve the access to the parcels that are currently zoned for residential uses along Princeton Avenue and at the terminus of Unruh Street.

The central portion of the industrial site is in need of service roads with heavy-duty roadbeds and adequate turning radii if it is to serve existing and upgraded industrial uses. Industrial infrastructure im-

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6 Interface Studio, Lager Raabe Skafte, Jaskiewicz Transport International & Nina Liou. *North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 2007.

7 Field Operations. *North Delaware Riverfront, Philadelphia: A Long Term Vision for Renewal and Redevelopment*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 2001.

provements should also include the provision of safe, serviceable pedestrian access for workers from the rail station and neighborhood to the industrial businesses. Concentrating industrial uses and infrastructure at the site interior would avoid diluting the streetscape improvements and pedestrian-friendly land uses along Unruh and Princeton

The entire riverfront Historic District is within a seven minute walk of the train station. Local bus routes and a sizable local jobshed would support an argument for reduced on-site parking requirements for new development. Such approaches would foster a transit-oriented village and prevent the environmental and aesthetic downside of excessive surface parking lots.

*Jayne Spector*

# Economics

The economy of Tacony has evolved since its inception during the time of Henry Disston. When Henry Disston’s Keystone Saw Works matured, more than 3,000 workers entered the complex gates into the works every day to make saws. From the Saw Works, employees took their wages to buy homes in Tacony, and patronize local Tacony businesses. It was this dynamic, the relationship between the company and the neighborhood that made Tacony a “company town.” Tacony enjoyed a period of industrial growth led by the Disston Company from its founding in the 1870s until the 1940s and 1950s. As the Disston Company changed and declined, the relationship between work and the neighborhood changed.

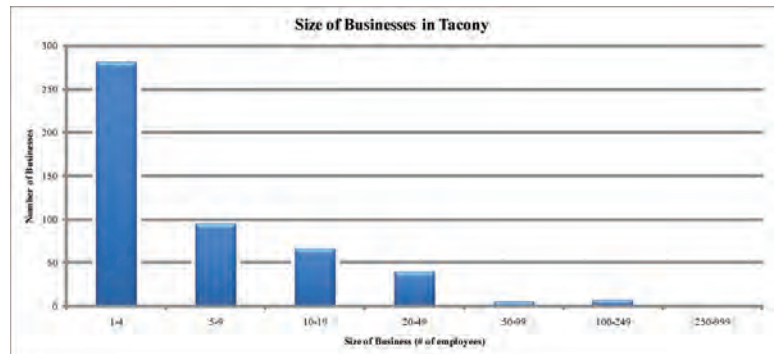


Fig. 4.3.1: Most businesses in Tacony employ 1-20 people. *Source: Alexander Balloon, University of Pennsylvania.*

The end of the Disston saw works and industrial work changed the economic dynamics of Tacony. As industry diversified and shifted away from the Disston Company, the economics of the company town diversified. While this economic landscape changed dramatically, the physical landscape of Industrial Disston remained. An analysis of the leading economic and demographic indicators helps to quantify and understand the economic and demographic character of the area.<sup>1</sup> Central Disston has a population of 6,900 people, while Tacony (the extended area) includes approximately 35,000 people.

Particularly in recent years, Tacony has transitioned to a post-industrial economy. Today, the largest numbers of businesses in the 19135 Area Code (Greater Tacony) are service related. Service, retail, and health care make up the largest three sectors. Manufacturing ranks sixth behind these sectors. Manufacturing jobs still exist in Tacony today, but they pale in comparison to the era of Henry Disston. Only one business in Tacony employed between 250-500

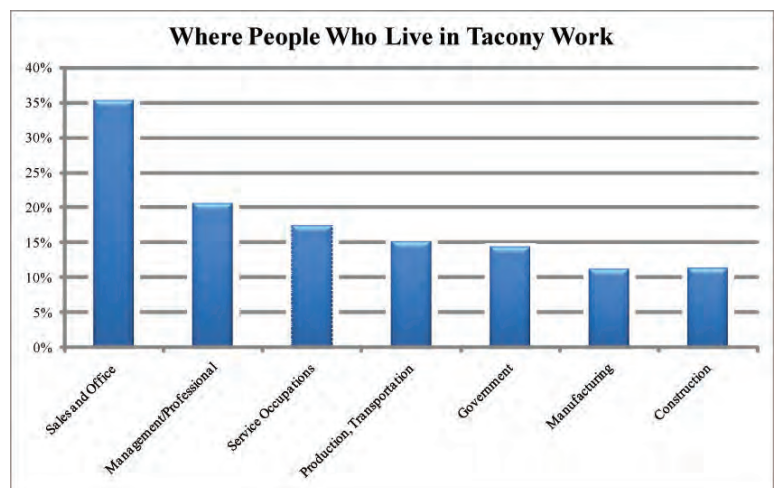


Fig. 4.3.2: Many of the people who live in Tacony work in sales, office, and service-related sectors. *Source: Alexander Balloon, University of Pennsylvania.*

<sup>1</sup> This report refers to two statistical tabulation areas Disston, the approximate boundaries of the Disston Estates Historic District, and Tacony, the extended area encompassed by the 19135 area code. Data for this entire section is taken from Census 2000 and the Bureau of Labor Statistics. ([www.bls.gov](http://www.bls.gov))

people. (Fig. 4.3.1) The majority of businesses in Tacony employed between 3 people and 49 people. People in Tacony typically work in the service sector. 35% of Tacony residents work in sales and office positions, and 20% work in management and professional jobs. (Fig. 4.3.2) And many of these residents work outside of the immediate neighborhood. The average commute time to work for a Tacony resident is 30 minutes.

The people of Tacony today still reflect the demographic of the Disston Company's industrial workforce. Tacony is largely a working-class and blue collar community. 59% of residents are actively involved in the labor force. Tacony is more than 90% white. The typical educational attainment is a high school diploma, 72% of Tacony residents. In terms of employment options, high-tech professional jobs typically require higher educational attainment. A minority of Tacony residents, 8% have earned a bachelor's degree and 1% a professional degree. The median age is relatively young at 36 years. Just 15.6% of residents are older than 65% and 38% of households have children.

The quality of jobs in Tacony has been mixed during recent years. Over the past ten years, the number of jobs in Tacony has grown 10%, from 4,800 to 5,300. (Fig. 4.3.3) While jobs have grown in Tacony, the number of businesses in the neighborhood has dropped by 5%, from nearly 520 businesses to 490. (Fig. 4.3.4) And real wages have remained stagnant over the last seven years at \$38,000. (Fig. 4.3.5) This trend mirrors a national trend of wage stagnation. But, when comparing Tacony to the city of Philadelphia, wages in Tacony are above the average.

The historic housing stock of Tacony represents a significant opportunity. Housing in Tacony has a median sale price of \$130,000. Compared to the city of Philadelphia, the median housing sale price is below the city average. (Fig. 4.3.6) This contrasts with the median income and suggests that housing may be under-valued. Homeownership is relatively high in the area, two-thirds of housing is own-

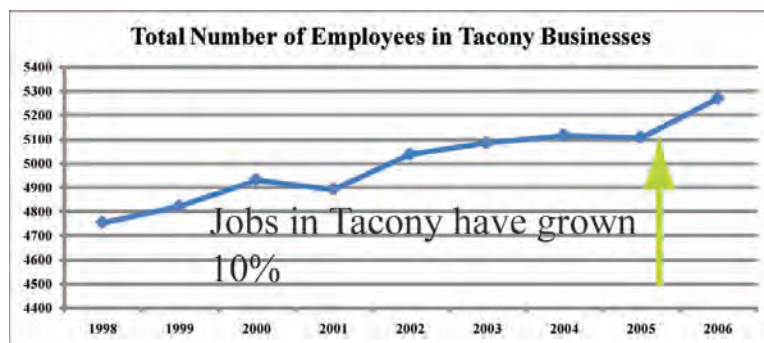


Fig. 4.3.3: Source: Alexander Balloon, University of Pennsylvania.



Fig. 4.3.4: Source: Alexander Balloon, University of Pennsylvania.



er-occupied. Housing in the neighborhood is older, with nearly all structures built before 1945. Rowhouses and twin houses comprise more than 87% of all housing stock, and detached houses make up 9%.

The economic character of Tacony and the company town has changed dramatically since the time of Henry Disston and the Keystone Saw Works. What was a company town of large-scale industrial manufacturing has evolved to a post-industrial economy of service-sector jobs and smaller firms. While the physical fabric of the company town remains, the economic fabric is largely gone. The area has transitioned to a new post-industrial economic landscape.

*Alexander Balloon*

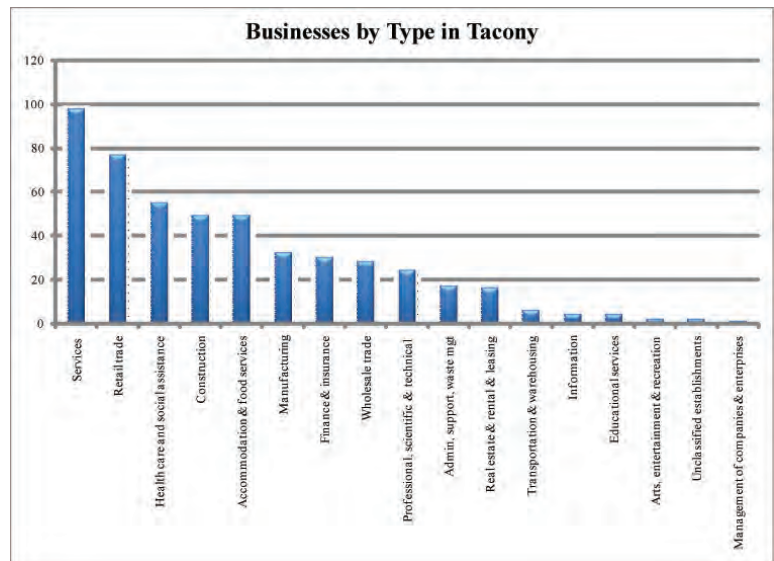


Fig. 4.3.5: There is a concentration of service, retail, health care, and construction-related businesses in Tacony. Source: Alexander Balloon, University of Pennsylvania

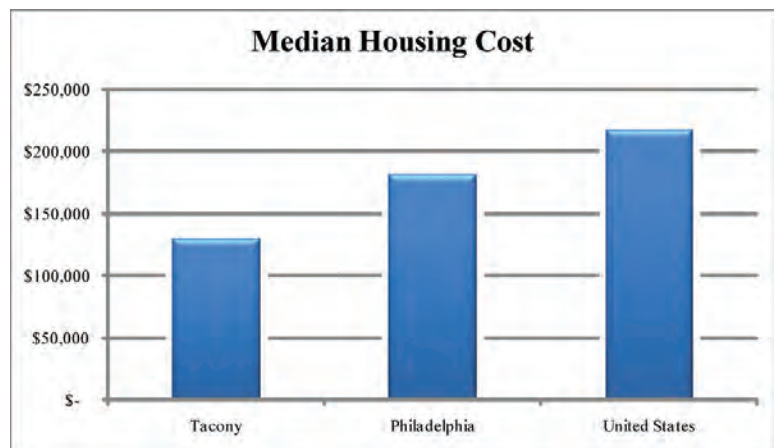


Fig. 4.3.5: The median housing price in Tacony rests below the average for the city of Philadelphia and the United States. Source: Alexander Balloon, University of Pennsylvania

## Community Survey

Studio members administered written clipboard surveys to better understand how Tacony residents view their history, identify their community's current challenges, and communicate a vision for the future of their neighborhood. Preservation cannot be effective in a vacuum and community opinion is an important component of any planning exercise. The results of these 121 community surveys have directed our studio recommendations for Historic Disston: Tacony's Company Town.

Surveys were completed at different locations on four separate dates:

October 19, 2008: Tacony Baptist Church & St. Leo's Catholic Church

October 25, 2008: Athenian Restaurant & Tacony Public Library

October 30, 2008: Torresdale Avenue, Henry Disston School, & Tacony Public Library

November 11, 2008: Meetings of the Tacony Historical Society & the Tacony Civic Association

To achieve as realistic a sampling as possible, the Civic and Historic Society surveys are analyzed separately from the October surveys (hereafter known as the Street survey) for those questions related to history and respondent profile. Respondents from these community meetings know more about Disston history than a randomly selected resident and reflect an older and less racially diverse demographic. Questions that ask about the future of the neighborhood are analyzed as a whole.

## Street Survey Respondent Profile

Sample Size: 51

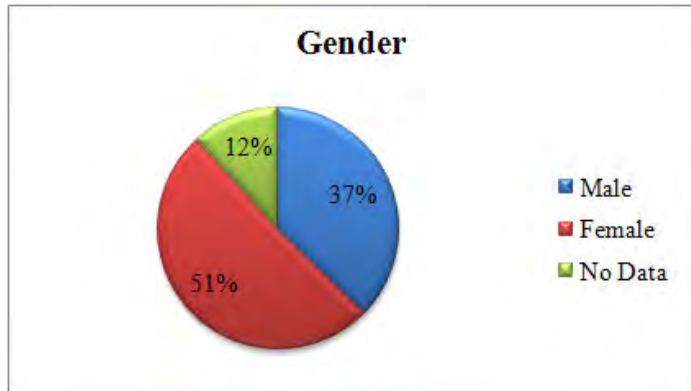


Fig. 4.4.1

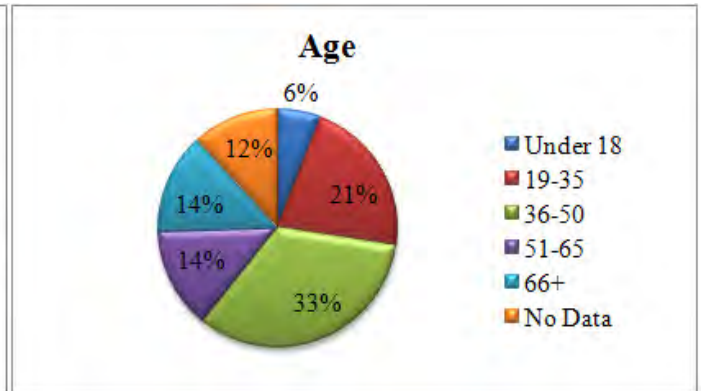


Fig. 4.4.2

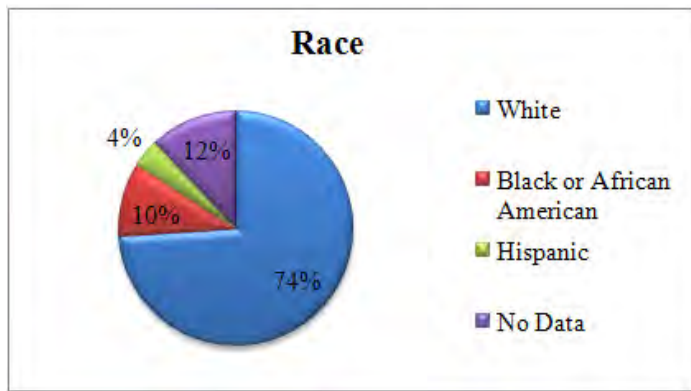


Fig. 4.4.3

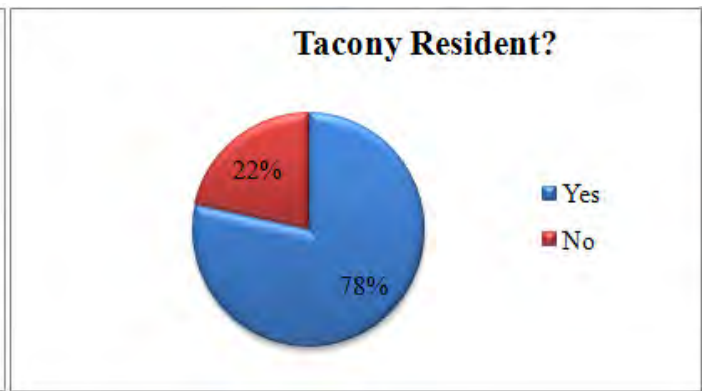


Fig. 4.4.4

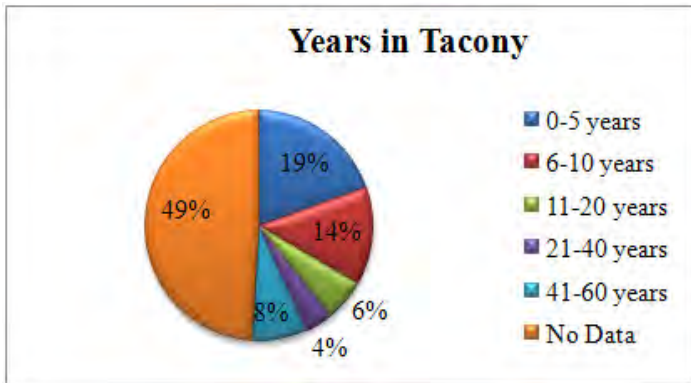


Fig. 4.4.5

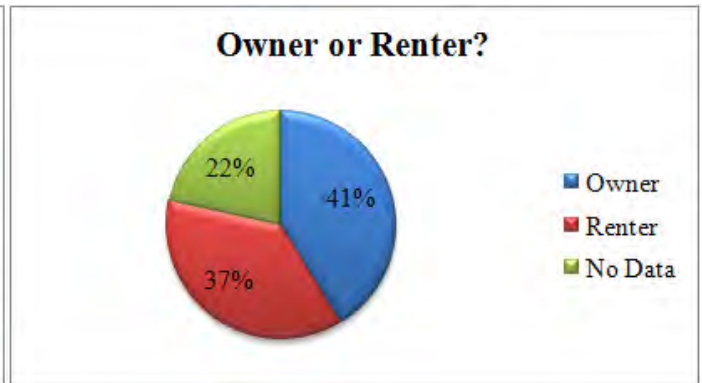


Fig. 4.4.6

## Civic Survey Respondent Profile

Sample Size: 70

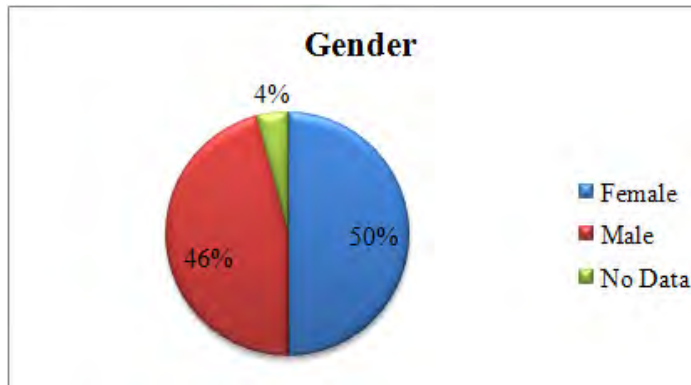


Fig. 4.4.7

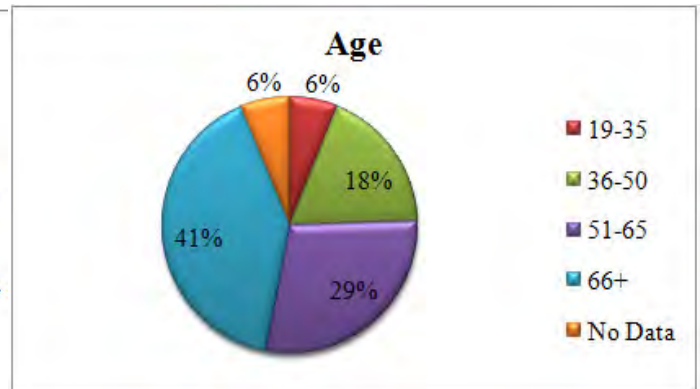


Fig. 4.4.8

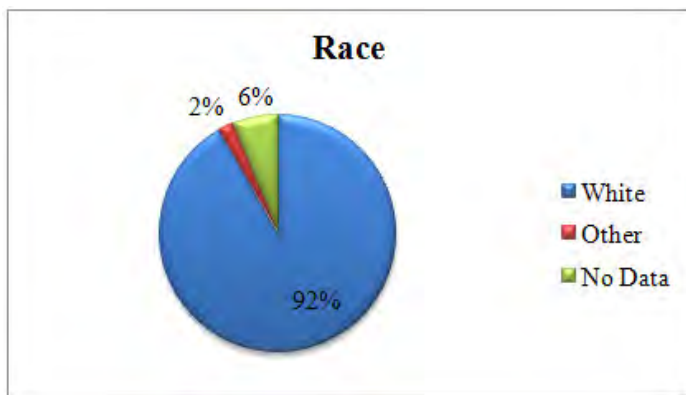


Fig. 4.4.9

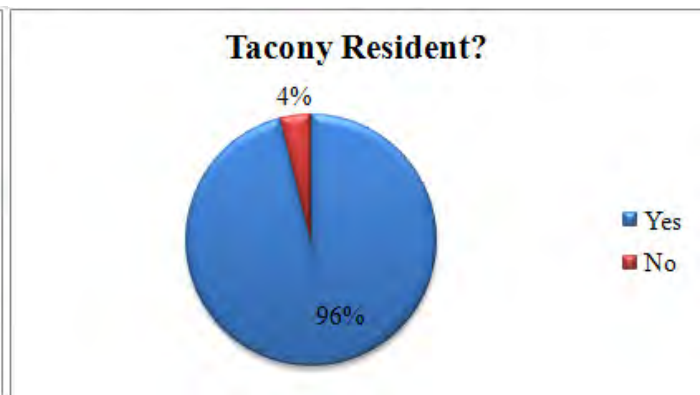


Fig. 4.4.10

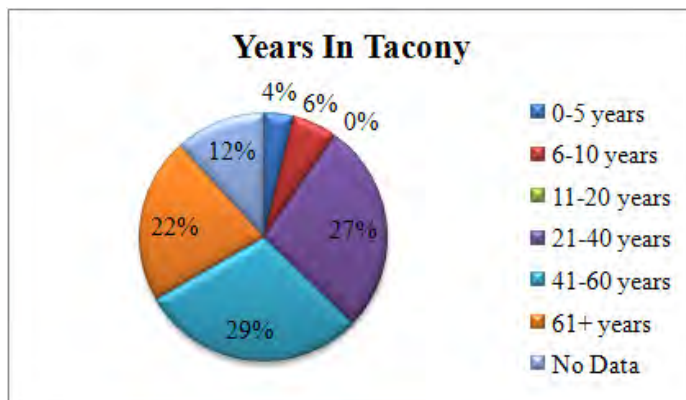


Fig. 4.4.11

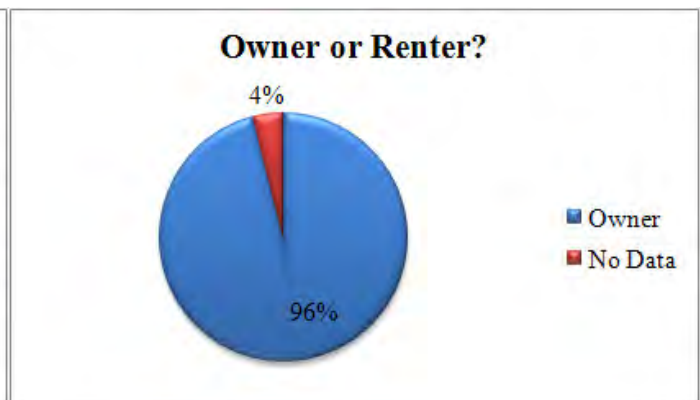


Fig. 4.4.12



These significantly different respondent profiles show two distinct populations sharing a neighborhood. Those randomly surveyed on the street are younger, more racially diverse, and have lived for less time in Tacony. This group also represents renters, a population that is perceived as potentially problematic by leadership in the Civic Association, due to their transience and lack of community involvement. This data shows that newer, younger, and more racially diverse residents are not taking part in civic meetings. Leadership should investigate the reasoning behind this trend. If these residents are not interested or do not feel welcome, community leaders need to take steps to create more inclusive programming. It should also be noted that of the 22% of street surveys that indicate residence outside of Tacony, a significant amount of respondents, when asked for their zip code, were found to reside within the Tacony boundaries outlined for this project. There is a stigma associated with Tacony for some residents who are concerned with increased crime and drugs. These residents prefer to say they live in a neighboring community. Preservation and a revitalized interest in Disston's history could increase civic pride, which could create a more positive association for the Tacony community.

Respondents were also asked the following questions. A selection of survey responses follows each of these questions, further supporting the difference in perception of Tacony between those involved in the civic associations and the general public.

*If you had a friend from out of town visiting Tacony, where would you take him?*

Street: Athenian Restaurant, Boston Market, Currans, Chink's Steaks, Tacony Library, Music Hall, St. Leo's Catholic Church, Tacony Baptist Church

Civic: Music Hall, Disston Park, Currans, My Street, Delaware River, Historic Tours

*What word would you use to describe Tacony to that friend?*

Street: Close-knit, Complicated, Dirty, Historic, Nice, My Place, Middle Class, Old Neighborhood

Civic: Historic, Great Place to Live, Friendly, Comfortable, Convenient, Changing, Welcoming, Revitalization, Livable, Historic Green Space

*Are there any landmarks in Tacony?*

Street: Churches, Disston Estate, Tacony Library, Music Hall, Disston School, Tacony-Palmyra Bridge

Civic: Music Hall, Disston Factory, Keystone Street, Disston Recreation Center, Older Homes

## Comparative

The Civic and Historical organizations' community involvement shows a higher awareness of neighborhood history. Approximately 90% of those surveyed indicate that they know the history of the Disston company and their products. Of those surveyed on the street, only 43% know about Disston and 35% know of the company's product line. When asked about Tacony landmarks, 90% of the Civic surveys believe such landmarks existed, compared with 59% of Street surveys. On a scale of 1-10, the average amount of preservation support from Civic surveys is 9.3, while the Street surveys is 7.6.

These surveys show that a significant portion of the population is unaware of the neighborhood's history and that an audience exists for a strategic marketing and branding plan. Preservation support from the Street surveys is still relatively high and shows an interest in the neighborhood's physical fabric. However, if the greater community does not know the significance of Disston, they cannot be expected to invest in their neighborhood and preservation initiatives will not succeed. Similarly, if residents do not care about preservation, then why should an outside population? A need exists to better communicate the significance of Disston's history and building fabric and how they can be sustained through preservation.

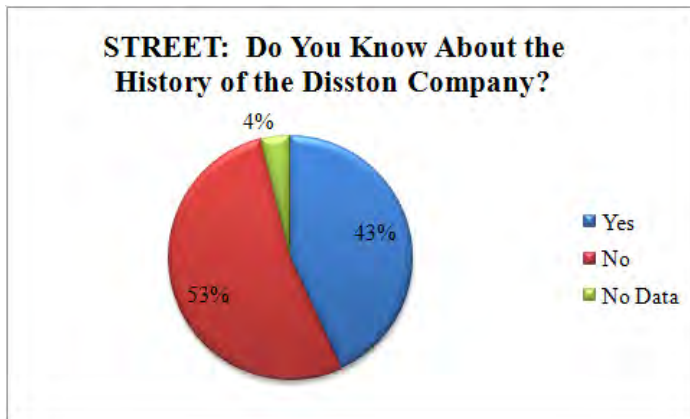


Fig. 4.4.13

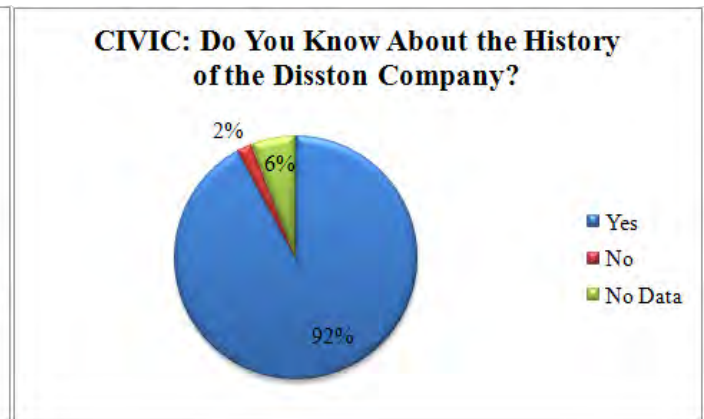


Fig. 4.4.14

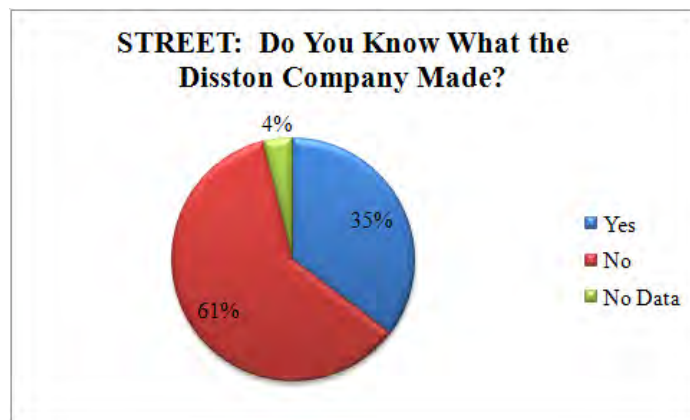


Fig. 4.4.15

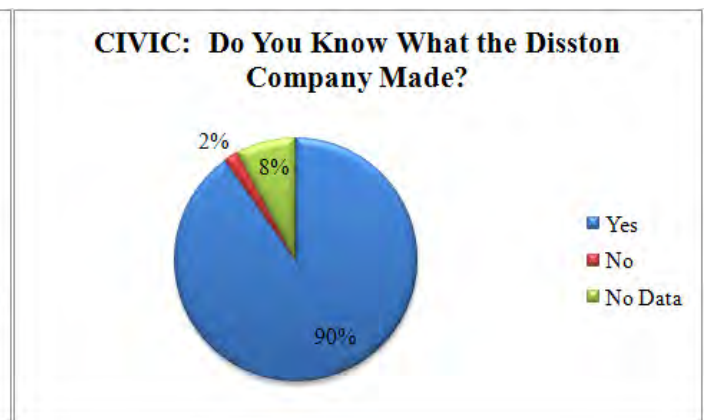


Fig. 4.4.16

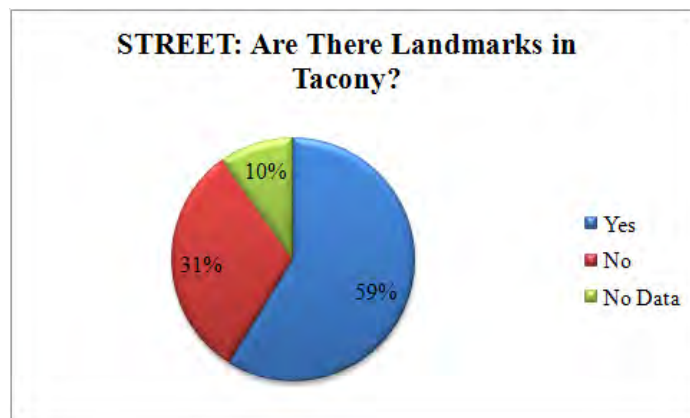


Fig. 4.4.17

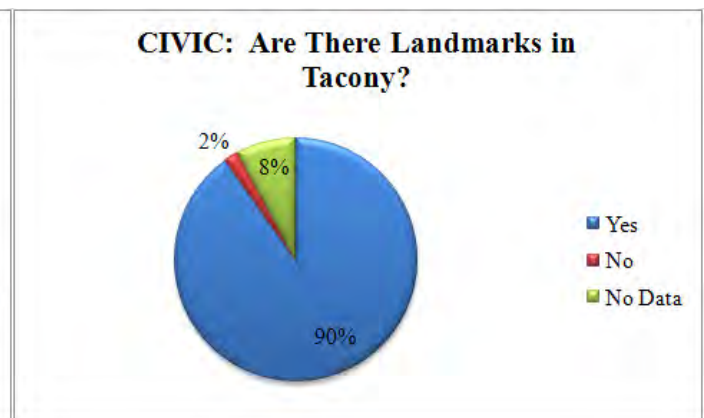


Fig. 4.4.18

## Street and Civic Surveys Combined

Sample Size: 121

Combined data shows that while only 40% of respondents believe their homes are historic, 75% think the neighborhood is historic. Support for preservation of neighborhood building fabric already exists, and targeted education workshops and marketing could strengthen community pride by increasing awareness of historic residences and their management. Respondents also indicate that 61% of their parents do not live in Tacony and approximately half do not have dependent children. These numbers perhaps indicate a shifting away from a once family-centered neighborhood to a younger and more diverse residential demographic.

72% of respondents shop on Torresdale Avenue, but while being surveyed, many stated that they only go to one or two specific stores and expressed a desire to see a more diverse and revitalized commercial corridor. 73% believe waterfront redevelopment would benefit Tacony and preferred uses included Recreation (30%), Mixed Use (22%), and Residential (21%). 78% of respondents state they would use the proposed riverfront bike trail and 67% currently go to Disston Park. These statistics indicate a willingness to accept change in the form of a rehabilitated commercial corridor and waterfront. There also exists a potential to bring stronger use and attention to Disston Park and surrounding green space.

Respondents were also asked what challenges exist in Tacony and what changes they would like to see in the next 10 years. Below is a sample of responses:

Challenges: Crime, Drugs, Prostitution, Violence, Trash, Business Closings, Unemployment, Absentee Landlords, Maintaining Buildings and Residences, Section 8, Influx of Renters, Need for Preservation

Desired Changes: Movie Theatres, Coffee Shops, Restaurants, Bookstores, More Community and Children's Activities, Cleaner, Better Standard of Living, Less Drugs, More Police, Torresdale and Riverfront Redevelopment, Preservation



## Street and Civic Surveys Combined

Sample Size: 121

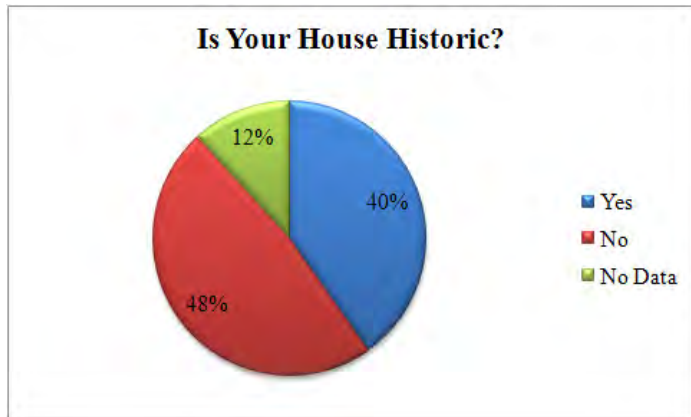


Fig. 4.4.19

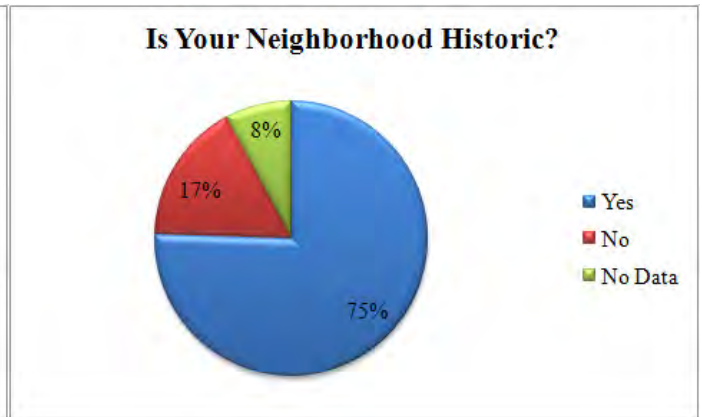


Fig. 4.4.20

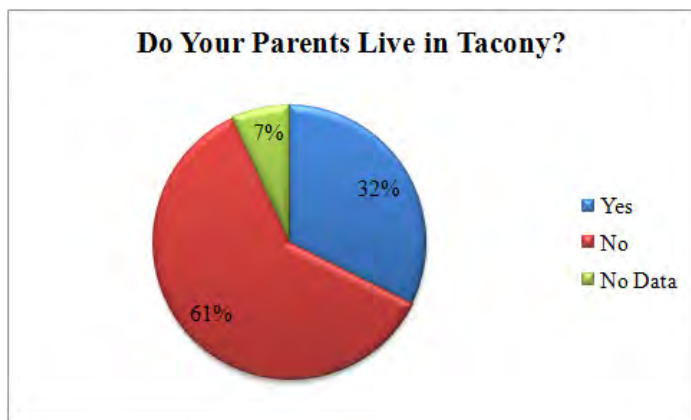


Fig. 4.4.21

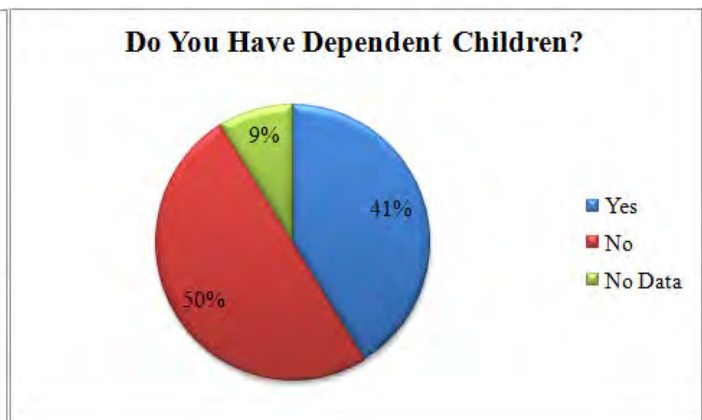


Fig. 4.4.22

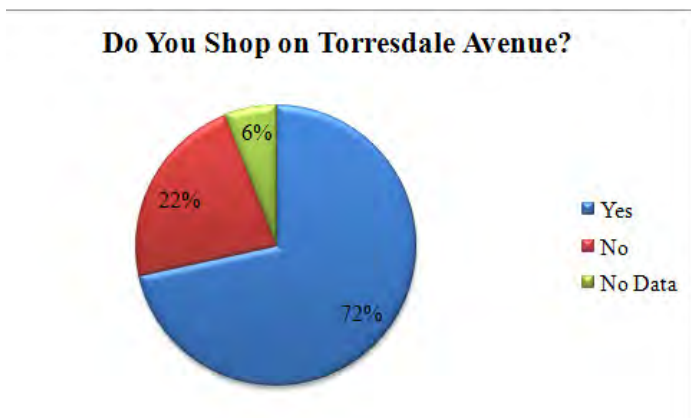


Fig. 4.4.23

# Street and Civic Surveys Combined

Sample Size: 121

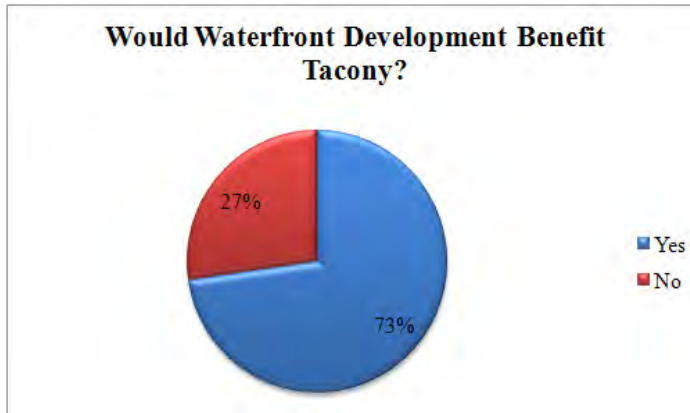


Fig. 4.4.24

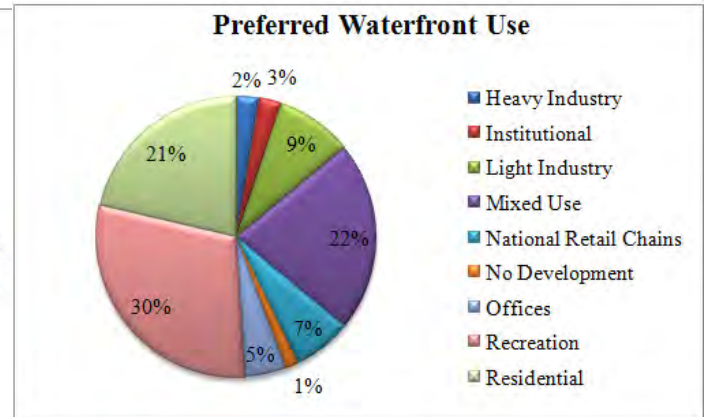


Fig. 4.4.25

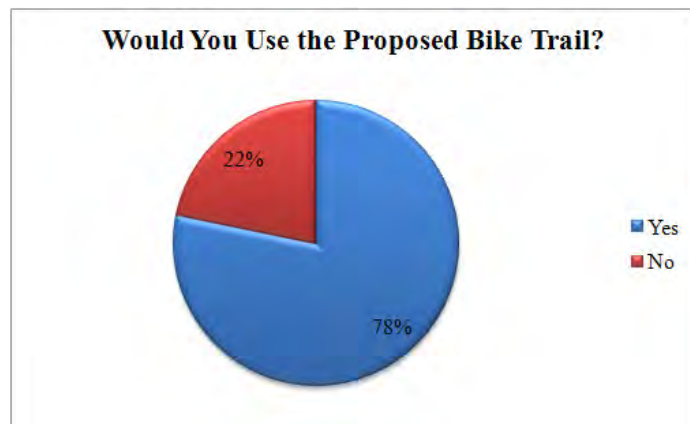


Fig. 4.4.26

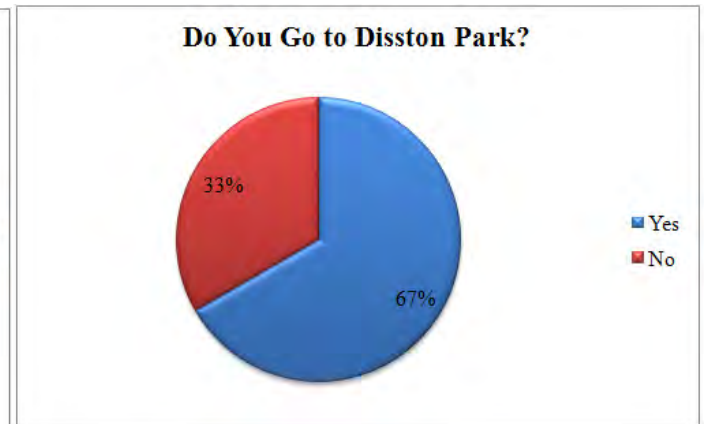


Fig. 4.4.27

## Conclusion

While Tacony has strength in its community organizations, the Civic Association, Historical Society, and other groups need to identify ways to increase involvement from younger, more diverse, and newer residents. Awareness needs to be raised about Disston's history and the preservation of the significant amount of existing building fabric. Surveys do not suggest that residents do not care, but that they do not know about the historical and physical assets possessed by the Tacony and Disston neighborhood.

Respondents want commercial and waterfront redevelopment, which will provide employment opportunities, work to eradicate crime and drug problems, and increase awareness about the potential for historic building fabric and green space. The neighborhood is going through a transformation and only planned intervention in the form of preservation and other tools will create a clean, safe, and livable environment. As one respondent writes, what I want for Tacony and Disston is "to be put on the map."

*Caitlin Kramer*



## Physical Surveys: Introduction

The studio was broken up into the categories Industrial, Commercial, Residential, Institutional and Parks and Open Space for study and survey. After examining historic and current maps, land use and zoning and the existing planning context of Historic Disston, these five categories became markedly self-evident. The area that lies within the specified boundaries of Historic Disston can be easily divided between Industrial and non-Industrial uses; they are neatly separated by Route 95 and the Septa R7 rail line. The region to the west of the highway and rail line is used for the other four areas of study, and these can be distinguished through a zoning map. This non-Industrial area was promptly assessed through a windshield survey whose results on building use also informed these categories.

As previously discussed, the studio also examined the existing planning and policy context of the Tacony neighborhood. Plans such as the Tacony Neighborhood Strategic Plan by Urban Partners and Gannett Fleming, the City of Philadelphia's GreenPlan and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study address Industrial, Commercial, Residential and Open Space individually, setting a precedent for study of each of these categories.

*Elise Kemery*

# Industrial Physical Survey

## Industrial Site Evolution

As mentioned in the Historical Context section, Henry Disston began relocating his saw manufacturing company to Tacony in 1872. New factory buildings were added to the site as the company expanded, reaching the greatest density by the 1920s (Figs. 5.2.1, 5.2.2, and 5.2.3). Since the sale of the company in the 1950s, several of the earliest factory buildings have been demolished (Fig. 5.2.4).

An overlay has been added to the historic bird's eye view of the site (Fig. 5.2.2) to indicate the Disston buildings that are still standing. The colors indicate three general categories based on location and condition. The green overlay includes the buildings that face the public right of way on Unruh Avenue. Many of these have had significant amounts of demolition, as well as large infill and additions. However, the main façade along Unruh is relatively intact (Fig. 5.2.5).

The blue overlay includes the buildings currently occupied by Disston Precision, south of Knorr (Fig. 5.2.6), as well as the buildings immediately east of the capped brownfield (Fig. 5.2.7). These buildings are in relatively good condition with no significant demolition and few additions or infill.

Finally, the orange overlay includes the large, mainly vacant buildings in the northeast corner of the site (Fig. 5.2.8), as well as two small buildings in the center of the site (Fig. 5.2.9). These buildings have suffered the greatest deterioration and most insensitive alterations, likely due to the lack of consistent use and upkeep. For a more detailed discussion of the historic site evolution and a preservation plan for contributing historic buildings, see the section titled, "The Disston Saw Works: An Industrial Preservation Plan."

Other historic buildings within the boundaries of the proposed Historic District include the U.S. Steel plant in the northwest corner, and the Erben & Search Wool Mills and Sears Warehouse south of Unruh. While these buildings were never part of Disston opera-

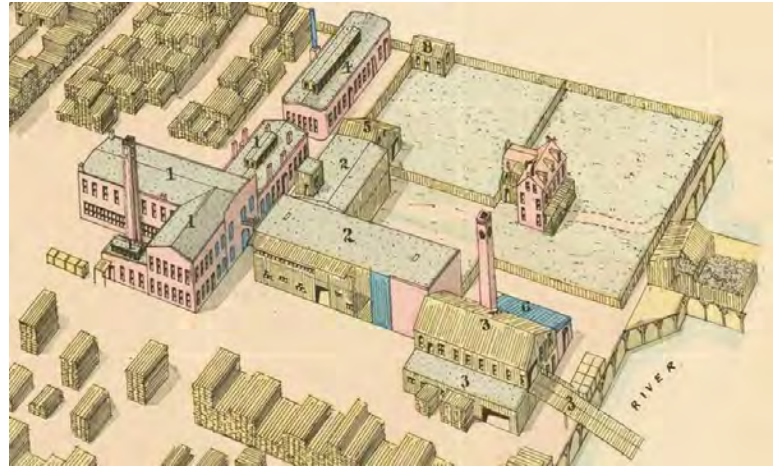


Fig. 5.2.1: 1875 Hexamer Survey of Henry Disston & Sons. Source: Free Library of Philadelphia.

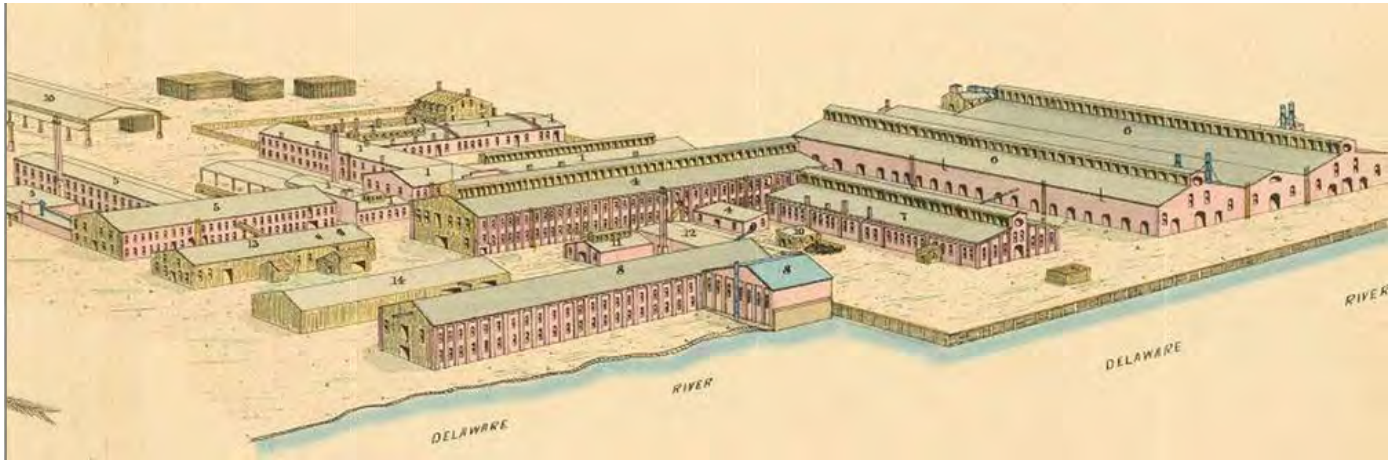


Fig. 5.2.2: 1883 Hexamer Survey of Henry Disston & Sons. Source: Free Library of Philadelphia.



Fig. 5.2.3: Bird's eye view of Henry Disston & Sons, c. 1917. Source: The Disstonian Institute.



Fig. 5.2.4: North Side of Unruh Avenue.





Fig. 5.2.5: Current view looking north at the former Disston Saw Works. Source: Microsoft Virtual Earth.



Fig. 5.2.7: Buildings façade along capped brownfield.



Fig. 5.2.8: Large, mainly vacant buildings in the northeast corner of the site.



Fig. 5.2.6: Disston Precision Buildings along Knorr.



Fig. 5.2.9: Small building in the center of the site, potentially one of the earliest Disston buildings.



tions, they represent the industry that came to the area during the Disston era.

For further discussion of the current site layout and how future development can fit within the historic and present context, see the sections titled, “Brownfield Redevelopment at the Disston Saw Works” and “Preserving Industrial Land.”

*Sarah Van Domelen*

## Current Tenant Mix

The current Disston industrial site has a mix of tenant uses. These tenants are primarily concerned with the structural stability of the building envelope rather than cosmetic maintenance. Some tenants do not need basic building services like heating, ventilation, and air conditioning in their rental space. This level of maintenance and stewardship has resulted in a deterioration of the physical fabric of the site. Most alterations, like fiberglass and vinyl coverings, while visually detrimental, reinforce the security and enclosure of a building envelope.

The current tenant mixture includes “active” manufacturing uses, job and income generators, and “passive” storage and warehousing uses. For example, Disston Precision is a major tenant of a complex of buildings. Disston Precision is a secondary metal fabrication firm, machining tools and saw blades for custom clients. Their space is used in active manufacturing and fabrication projects. As a typical part of “active manufacturing” the ratio of workers per square foot is relatively high. Over time, the tenant has altered the building to enclose and cover windows and doors. As an industrial tenant, Disston Precision has a lower emphasis on the cosmetic appearance of the building (Fig. 5.2.10). In contrast, Superior Moving and Storage occupies a former Disston building and uses their current building to store contents from moving. As a “passive” use, the number of employees per square foot is relatively low, lower than an active manufacturing use (Fig. 5.2.11). For further discussion of the benefits of active industrial uses, see the section titled, “Industrial Redevelopment.”

Overall, the current tenant mix has an ethic of stewardship unconcerned with architectural appearance and detail. Property maintenance and alterations are executed on a basis of necessity and convenience (Fig. 5.2.12).

*Alex Balloon*



Fig. 5.2.10: Disston Precision currently occupies a complex of buildings on the site.



Fig. 5.2.11: Superior Moving and Storage occupies a large building on the site.



Fig. 5.2.12: Years of industrial stewardship have accumulated at the site, with many layers of alteration at some buildings.

## Conditions Survey

### *Methodology*

Similar to the conditions surveys conducted for the residential and commercial sectors of Tacony, project team members assessed the present physical condition of the extant industrial buildings to:

- 1.) Identify common construction types, distinguishing characteristics, and accessibility.
- 2.) Identify and differentiate between historic fabric and non-contributing alterations that have taken place during the building's service life.
- 3.) Identify typical conditions that have altered the physical and/or aesthetic state of the building.
- 4.) Identify present building uses and the programs' impact on the fabric.
- 5.) Help determine the number of extant buildings original to the Disston company, as well as to help inform the evolution of the site (in terms of those which remain).

Using a survey methodology based on the aforementioned goals, the project team members surveyed the entirety of the industrial site to provide present context as well as to inform future studies on possible rehabilitation and reuse. Rather than use the Disston assigned building numbers – determined by the order in which the buildings were constructed – a map was devised based on the buildings that currently occupied the site, historic or modern. The Disston Site was identified as being bounded to the south by Unruh Street, to the north by a rail spur that runs behind the U.S. Steel Building, to the west by New State Road, and to the east by the Delaware River. Across Unruh Street, to the south, are the previously mentioned Erben & Search Wool Mills and Sears Warehouse; while the buildings were outside of the site deemed a part of the Disston Company, they were briefly surveyed in order to provide additional context and information for possible incorporation into future plans.

### *Materiality*

The principle building material within the outlined industrial site was brick, aside from the U.S. Steel Building – which is a steel and corrugated metal structure – that has been incorporated into the site despite its lack of direct ties to Disston. The majority of the buildings are composed of traditional timber (Fig. 5.2.13) and steel (Fig. 5.2.14) framed structures faced in brick, with industrial wood-frame





windows, and both flat roofs and pitched roofs with clerestories. The ground level of each building has a poured-in-place concrete floor, while each additional story has a wood floor set directly on the timber beams (no sub-floor). During a tour of Building 7, it was pointed out to us that many buildings have a series of internal rail spurs set into the concrete floor to allow for the internal movement and manipulation of the large machinery. The southern portion of Building 8 is the only segment that differs from the rest; the building is constructed of reinforced concrete slabs faced in brick with a terra cotta firebacking. It is said that the building was constructed in this manner because it housed gun powder at one point and needed to provide enough internal security so that any explosion would be contained and not harm adjacent workers.

### *Distinguishing Characteristics*

The majority of the buildings that populate the site have some degree of architectural detail to them, distinguishing them from simply utilitarian structures by giving them a level of sophistication and identity. In some ways, the identified characteristics mirror those found throughout the residential sections of the neighborhood; none of the characteristics are particularly unique, but they do create a cohesion between the two sections of town. It must be noted that there was no study undertaken to determine whether the residential architecture influenced any industrial styles, or vice versa.

The most common element found was the brick corbelling found along the cornices of many buildings, specifically Buildings 1, 7-South, and 15 (Fig. 5.2.15). Some buildings had a decorative terra cotta parapet cap that, in many cases, had been tarred over during recent re-roofing campaigns. Building 1 also had a sandstone watertable that ran along only certain sections of the base of the building. Another interesting aspect of Building 1 is that the southern façade has a rectilinear building – which has been identified as a Power House – that is not in kind and was built directly up against the older structure at some point.

Along Unruh Street, a half-octagonal bay window protrudes from the planar brick façade of Building 13 (Fig. 5.2.16), the only such instance of such a departure from the typical industrial architecture. The formalism of the bay window piqued our interest, causing us to

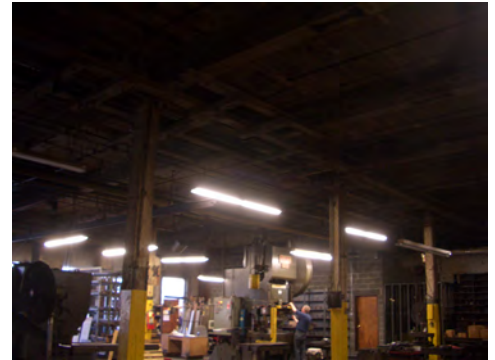


Fig. 5.2.13: Interior of Building 7, showing the typical timber framing members.



Fig. 5.2.14: Interior of Building 7, showing the steel-framed clerestory roof structure.

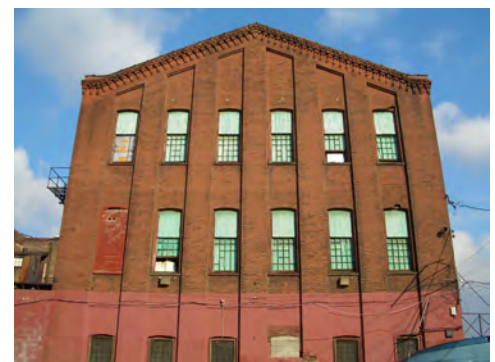


Fig. 5.2.15: Typical brick corbelling.



seek out an answer from various building tenants, many of whom attributed the element to Disston himself. Ring Lardner, Director of Engineering for Disston Precision, Inc. – the only remaining company on site that has direct ties to the original Disston Company – informed us that the bay window was the location of Disston’s office. Disston asked that the bay window be constructed off his office so that he could look down the river for boats approaching from the south. Apparently the office cannot be presently accessed as all means have been damaged or destroyed throughout the years. In addition to the bay window, many of the original terra cotta Disston-Keystone Saw Works logos are located on the exterior façade.

While not particularly significant from an architectural standpoint, Building 20 has been mentioned to contain a time capsule of some sorts from the Disston Era. The building is said to have a collection of period objects buried behind the date stone that is located along the south façade.

### *Existing Conditions*

The extant fabric of the historic Disston industrial site is in remarkable condition considering the time that has elapsed since the dissolution of the company and the current stewardship ethic of recent tenants. As was likely the case from the beginning, the programs of each structure require little attention to the exteriors; the industry that takes place within is sold away from the site, placing little or no importance on the appearance of the buildings. The few businesses that are strictly based on the site are focused more on auto repairs and thus the company’s ability to create a sound final product, once again relatively immune from the negativity of a neglected aesthetic.

Presently there are a number of existing conditions that are found throughout the industrial site. The following is a brief description of the identified conditions:

***Friable Brick:*** The surfaces of the brick have been reduced to small granules likely as a result of weathering, typical wear-and-tear, and poor maintenance practices (Fig. 5.2.17).

***Mortar Loss:*** Found throughout the site, many of the brick courses exhibit mortar loss near grade, likely as a result of moisture transfer and poor maintenance practices (Fig. 5.2.17).



Fig. 5.2.16: Half-octagonal bay window along Unruh Street, identified as Disston’s Office.



Fig. 5.2.17: Typical friable brick and mortar loss found along base of industrial buildings.

*Atmospheric/Industrial Soiling:* Found throughout the neighborhood, atmospheric and/or industrial results in the ‘blackening’ of porous surfaces – in this case stone and brick. Many of the stone walls located within Tacony exhibit this soiling, likely a result of past coal-burning and heavy industry exhaust (Fig. 5.2.18).

*Ferrous Staining:* An orange-colored staining typically found adjacent to and below a metallic surface likely containing iron that has oxidized and been transported by way of moisture (Fig. 5.2.19).

*Modern Stucco:* The use of the term ‘modern’ does not imply any type of chemical composition of the stucco itself – as a differentiation between a lime-based stucco or a Portland cement-based stucco – but simply as an identification that it is not original to the building(s). It is unknown as to why the stucco was applied to the brick facades, but it can be presumed that it had something to do with a desire to limit exterior maintenance of the building. Depending on the chemical composition, the stucco may or may not be adversely affecting the masonry’s ability to transport moisture into and out of the structure, which can lead to possible deterioration (if it has not already).

*Window Infill:* Three types of aperture infill were identified in the industrial area, all of which appear to be solutions to minimizing maintenance costs. The most prevalent infill material is a corrugated asbestos or fiberglass paneling, typically light green or white in color (Fig. 5.2.20). Not only does the material starkly contrast with the brick facades, but it minimizes daylight penetration and could be a health hazard. In addition to the corrugated material, ‘blueboard’ insulation was identified both as a supplemental material to the corrugated infill and also as a substitution (Fig. 5.2.21). This would point to an issue of heat loss through the openings, either before or after the removal of the industrial windows. The third infill material was concrete masonry units, blocking predominately larger openings that house heavy industry or storage (Fig. 5.2.22). Not only do the CMU’s provide additional security, but they deal with the aforementioned insulation problem in a much more efficient manner. The major drawback of this solution is its uninviting aesthetic, evoking a feeling of enclosure and security rather than an open dialogue between businesses. From a positive standpoint, all three materials are reversible and don’t appear to have adversely affected the historic fabric.

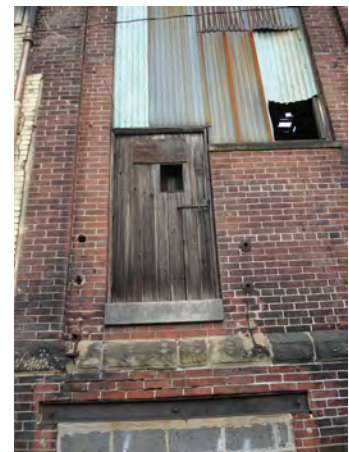


Fig. 5.2.18: Typical industrial soiling found along the stone belt course of Building 1.



Fig. 5.2.19: Typical ferrous staining on Building 2.



Fig. 5.2.20: Typical corrugated asbestos aperture infill.



Fig. 5.2.23: Cut opening to allow for a modern garage door along north west facade of Building 4.



Fig. 5.2.21: Blueboard infill within second story window of Building 7.



Fig. 5.2.24: Modern alteration to the roofscape of Building 3.



Fig. 5.2.22: CMU aperture infill along south side of Building 1.



Fig. 5.2.25: Lean-to addition to the north side of Building 1.

*Cut Openings:* Along Unruh Street, specifically Buildings 10 and 13, openings have been altered to suit present programmatic needs. In three instances, existing window openings were enlarged to become doorways. In addition, the utilization of Building 10 as car and truck repair business has resulted in the removal of the majority of the west façade to incorporate wide-bay openings for lift-access. Not only was a large amount of historic fabric removed, but the overall character of the building was altered beyond repair (Fig. 5.2.23).

*Roof Alterations:* In two separate instances, original roof structures were altered to suit changing needs; Building 3, originally a flat roof, now has a serrated roof structure composed of brick and glass (Fig. 5.2.24), while Building 1 has been enlarged both vertically and horizontally while maintaining its original form.

*Lean-to Additions:* Similar to the identified roof alterations, the lean-to additions appear to have been a response to the changing programmatic needs of the building inhabitants. Typically, the additions were not in-kind, but did retain many of the overall forms that were original to the building. As previously mentioned, Building 1 had multiple additions, some of which were composed of steel framing on a CMU foundation with corrugated metal facing (Fig. 5.2.25). The neighboring structure, Building 2 had similar alterations imposed on it over the course of its service life; presently, the building sits in an extreme state of disrepair as many of the metal panels have fallen off of the façade, leaving the building open and susceptible to weathering. Along with the lean-to additions, a number of connecting additions were added between buildings – Buildings 7, 8 and 9 – to create a protective shelter and added storage space.

For further discussion of the conditions of surviving historic buildings, and how they will affect plans for future development of the site, see the section titled, “The Disston Saw Works: An Industrial Preservation Plan.”

*Pierson Booher*



## Torresdale Avenue Survey

Project team members completed a survey of Torresdale Avenue, the current commercial corridor in Tacony, in order to record and understand:

1. What commercial uses exist along Torresdale Avenue and where are they located?
2. What historic resources exist?
3. What is the condition of these historic resources?

These questions were answered through the surveying method in order to provide a focus on the existing commercial area that was not found in previous planning efforts. This gap provided the project team with the opportunity to produce information that could not be found through other sources. While some planning and work for the commercial area has been accomplished through the Tacony Neighborhood Strategic Plan and recent MARC implemented improvements, most work has focused on streetscape improvements. No previously published planning effort has specifically focused on the historic resources and building fabric on Torresdale Avenue and how such resources are being utilized.

197 total addresses were surveyed as part of the survey, on Torresdale Avenue between Magee Avenue and Princeton Avenue, keeping within the boundaries of the proposed historic district. It is important to note that surveying was performed by street address, not by building. For example, many twin row homes exist in the residential areas of Tacony, such buildings were treated as separate addresses rather than as one building in conditions assessments. Surveying was completed between September and November of 2008. Project team members completed the survey by filling out prepared forms for each address. See Appendix II to view a copy of the survey form and all survey records.

### Building Use and Utilization of Space

The first portion of the survey focused first on building use, divided into broad categories of commercial, residential, institutional, or place of worship. Secondly, this portion focused on how well that building is being utilized. For example whether or not the building is vacant, or if it is a commercial building, does the building provide services that residents need or is it open for evening hours? Previous surveying of Torresdale Avenue focusing on building use has

been accomplished, but the most recent survey was found in the Tacony Neighborhood Strategic Plan of 2002. The goal here in surveying building use was to provide the most up-to-date information and also to provide additionally useful information on utilization issues like evening hours and upper floor occupation which was not found elsewhere.

### Building Use

The first question to begin with was that of basic building use. Out of the 197 recorded addresses between Magee and Princeton Avenues, surveyors found that residential use was most common at 53%. This is due to the residentially zoned sections towards the outer limits of our survey boundaries. This R-5 zoning classification allows for professional offices, churches, galleries, museums, libraries and railroad stations. Given that such uses are allowed, surveyors considered these blocks appropriate for inclusion in the commercial survey, but their inclusion does skew the data heavily toward residential use in the “commercial” area. With this qualifier in mind, commercial buildings (with residential occupation at the second floor) made up 35% of the survey area. There was also a notable amount of vacant space at 11%. [See Fig. 5.3.1]

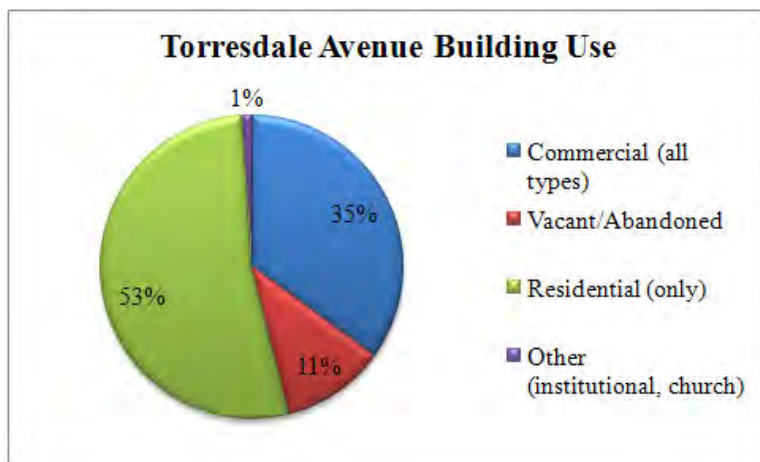


Fig. 5.3.1

### Commercial Business Variety

Within the identified commercial businesses, the variety of business was also identified. Out of the 68 identified commercial addresses, 50% were identified as service oriented, with professional office and retail equally present at 18%. [See Fig. 5.3.2]

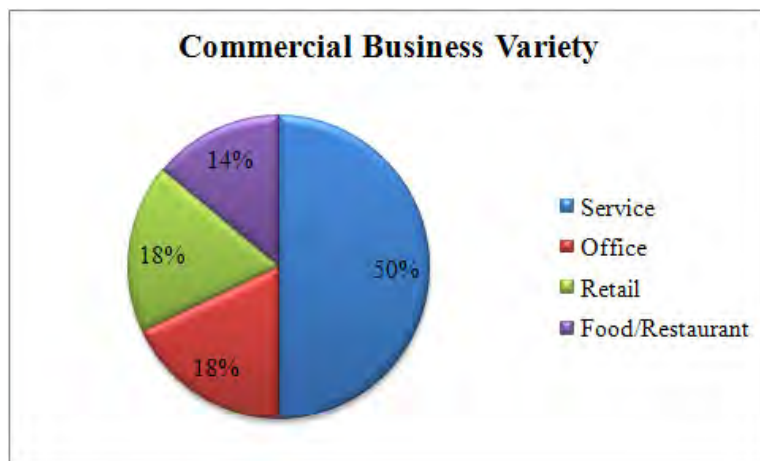


Fig. 5.3.2

Key to commercial corridor, or “main street” success is a variety of businesses that serve the community. The disproportionate number of service oriented businesses does not necessarily serve the needs of the community, or contribute to a lively commercial area. The corridor would benefit from a greater variety of commercial uses. For example, the category with the smallest number of locations was food

or restaurants at 14%. A greater proportion of restaurants or retail businesses could help to contribute to greater street life, as opposed to a high number of office spaces, which generally do not draw the community in to a great degree. These thoughts are supported by community desires for greater commercial variety. The Community Survey performed for this Preservation Plan found that while 72% of surveyed residents shopped on Torresdale, they frequented only 1 or 2 stores, and expressed a desire for greater diversity. One respondent, for example, hoped to see a local bookstore open in the future.

### *Business Ownership*

The survey found that the vast majority of commercial businesses in Tacony are locally owned. While having a strong local ownership base is important in attempting to revive a traditional “main street” type corridor, it is important that those businesses have interesting characteristics that attract customers while serving their needs. A bookstore, as mentioned above, or coffee shop that draws customers can help to enliven the Avenue in a way that another service or office space may not. Furthermore, well-placed regional or national chains that respect the context of the existing commercial corridor may be an appropriate addition to Torresdale and could attract residents and people passing through on the Avenue. [See Fig. 5.3.3]

### *Evening Hours*

Among the commercial businesses, the surveyors recorded which businesses have evening hours. The commercial businesses were placed into two categories, either 1.) evening hours posted, or 2.) no evening hours or no hours posted at all. Surveyors included institutional buildings (like the library) but not places of worship in this category. [See Fig. 5.3.4]

The survey found that 77% of commercial businesses either did not have evening hours or hours were not clearly posted. Evening hours

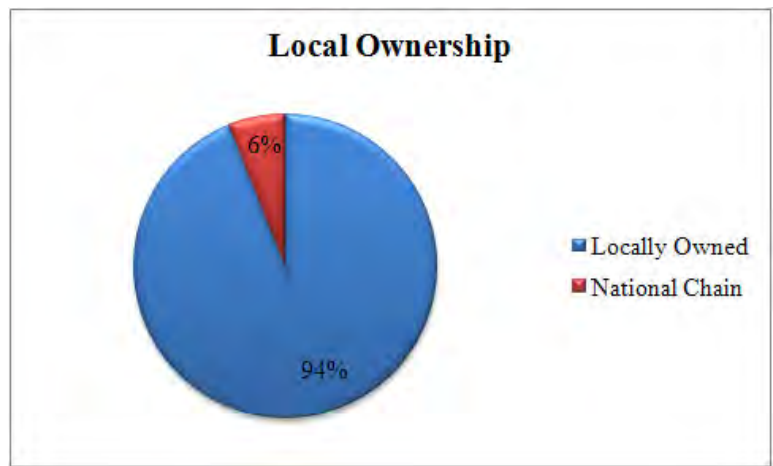


Fig. 5.3.3

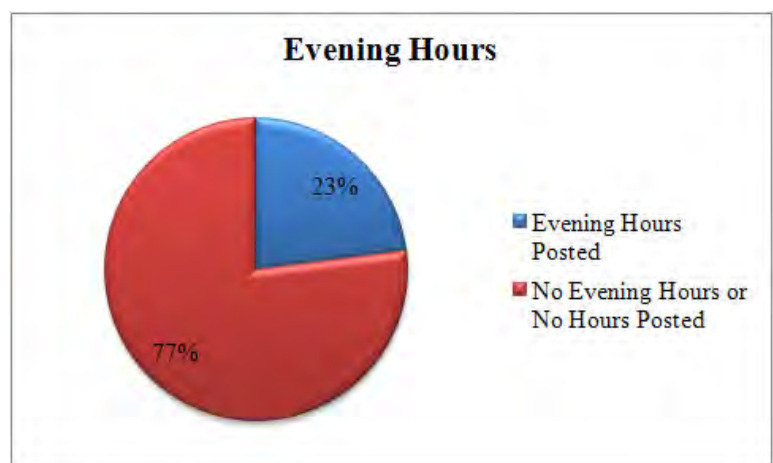


Fig. 5.3.4

are an important indicator of street life and therefore also feeling of safety. Businesses with evening hours not only cater better to the needs of residents, but also keep people on the street at all hours, encouraging a more active, safe community. The small number of businesses with evening hours indicates that Torresdale Avenue likely has little street life at night, and that this lack of activity may create a feeling of unease for residents. Businesses with “no hours posted” is also considered problematic, as residents are discouraged from shopping along the Avenue if they are unsure of hours or feel that the business is not accessible.

### *Second Floor Occupation in Commercial Buildings*

Second floor residential occupation of commercial buildings is another way to assess if buildings are being utilized to their maximum potential. All commercial buildings were included in the assessment, but those buildings with only one story were counted as not applicable. [See Fig. 5.3.5]

In this category, Torresdale Avenue performed very well, with it appearing that 81% of commercial buildings are occupied at the upper floor for residential use. 3% of commercial buildings appeared to be vacant at the upper floor. One potential issue with this assessment was difficulty in accurately assessing this indicator. Generally surveyors based “occupation” on obvious decorations in upper floor windows such as banners or flags, or on air conditioners in the windows (the survey was first performed in September). Vacancies on upper floors were generally assessed by “for rent” signs placed in the windows. There is a possibility, though, that some of the buildings assessed as occupied may currently be vacant.

### Historic Fabric and Building Condition

The second major portion of the Torresdale Avenue Survey focused on recording the presence of historic resources, and next on assessing the condition of building fabric along the Avenue. Tacony has shown a clear interest in revitalizing its commercial corridor through its work with MARC on streetscape improvements, but there has not been a focus on building fabric as yet. By identifying historic resources and assessing conditions issues, the project team hopes to

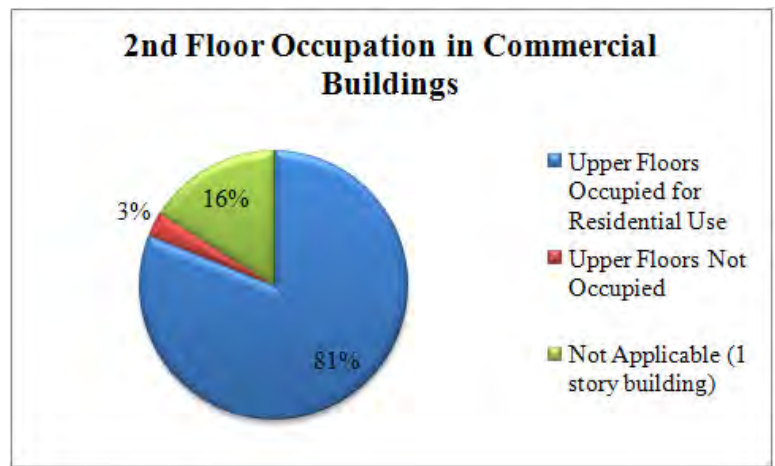


Fig. 5.3.5



provide a focus for future improvements along Torresdale, combining historic preservation with other revitalization efforts.

### *Historic Resources*

To begin this section of the survey each address within the study area was assessed as historic or non-historic. In accordance with the statement of significance of this Preservation Plan, “historic” was defined as pre-1950. [See Fig. 5.3.6]

Surveyors assessed 80% of all buildings as historic. 10% were judged not historic. Several of the buildings assessed as not historic may be “older” or technically historic buildings under the definition set by this survey, but have been so altered as to have lost all integrity. An additional 10% of buildings could not positively identified by surveyors as historic or not historic at the time this survey was performed. In these cases surveyors wrote in “unsure” or refrained from filling out the question on the survey form. Despite these issues, the commercial area clearly has a strong base of historic buildings. If properly maintained, these historic resources could play an important role in the revitalization of this commercial corridor.

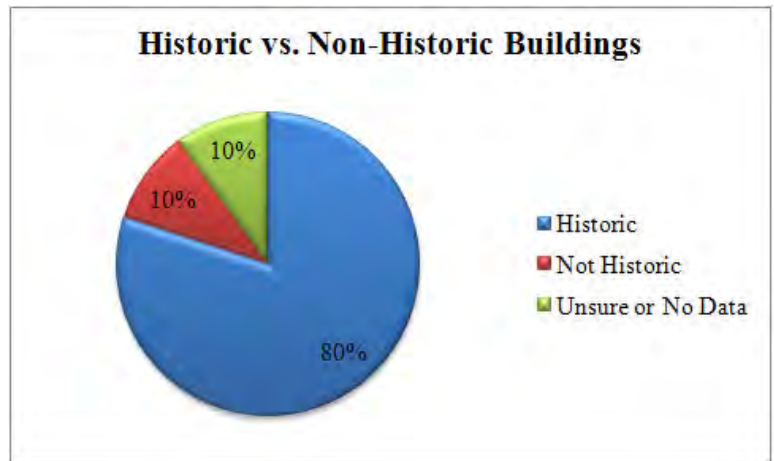


Fig. 5.3.6

### Building Condition

The next step was to record the condition of these buildings, so that the project team could assess how they might currently be underutilized, or how they could be used in future redevelopment. On the survey form a question titled condition/maintenance directed surveyors to assess each building as in poor, fair, good or excellent condition. These responses will not be analyzed here, but for visual analysis of the responses, see the *Commercial Improvements* individual project in Section II. Another response that has not been analyzed here is the field for “brick deterioration” on the survey form. Again, surveyors were inconsistent in recording and found that assessment of this particular condition was particularly difficult to accomplish in the limited time allotted for the survey assessment. All survey entries can be found in Appendix I for further reference.

A more objective approach to condition assessment was accomplished through observation of specifically listed categories. Ini-

tial observation found certain conditions that seemed to be particularly prevalent and these were incorporated into the survey form as specific questions. These conditions are: major first floor façade modification; roll-downs or grates over 1st floor commercial windows; and vinyl siding covering historic or architectural details on historic buildings.

*Major First Floor Façade Modification*

Surveyors observed that a large percentage of buildings in the commercial area had major façade modifications at the first floor which obscured original details of the front façade. Additionally, a scattering of buildings in the residential area had major façade modifications and appear to have once been commercial business locations. [See Fig. 5.3.7 & Fig. 5.3.8]

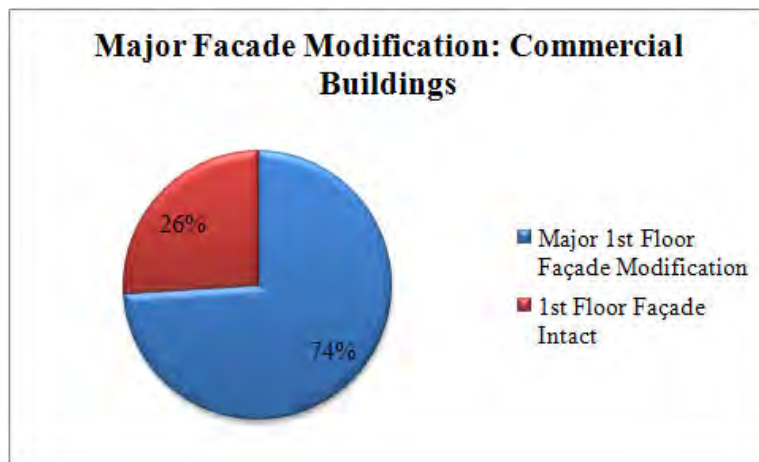


Fig. 5.3.7

Out of all buildings (including residential and institutional) 41% had 1st floor façade modifications. With only commercial buildings and vacant buildings in the commercial area assessed, 74% had major façade modifications. Out of only residential buildings 13% had major façade modifications. The high number of façade modifications in the commercial area is an important issue that should be discussed in revitalization plans for the Avenue. Restoration of original façade features as much as possible would project a more welcoming and aesthetically pleasing appearance to customers. The number of residential buildings with façade modifications is also a pressing issue. Most of these modifications lie at the fringes of the core commercial blocks, with a scattering found at the office locations in the heavily residential areas. These facades are particularly unattractive as residential exteriors and face an unwelcoming exterior to the street. It appears that this issue has begun to be addressed by the Tacony Civic Association. At its meeting of November 11, 2008, Association leaders spoke of current efforts to rezone C-1 zoning along the Avenue to C-2 zoning, as the current classification allows commercial buildings built before 1982 to be converted to residential use at the ground floor. Tacony leaders

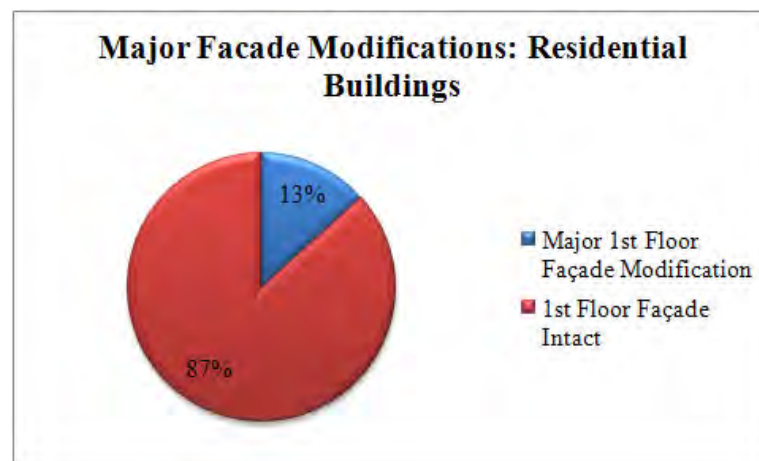


Fig. 5.3.8

are currently looking to close this loophole in the zoning ordinance. This is an admirable and smart first step in correct façade modification issues along Torresdale and should be supplemented in the future by direct focus on restoration of original façade features.

### *Roll-Downs and Grates*

Another identified issue was the prevalence of roll-downs or grates covering windows as protection at the first floor façade. Such roll-downs are generally employed after dark, but project team members witnessed a number pulled down during daylight hours as well. [See Fig. 5.3.9]

Surveyors found that 47% of commercial storefronts have solid grates or roll-downs over their front windows. Roll-downs can be a complicated issue for neighborhoods. While the owners' desire for protection is understood, roll-downs present an unattractive and unwelcome exterior to the street and actually make the commercial area feel less safe to pedestrians and therefore discourage shopping and street activity.

### *Vinyl Siding*

Vinyl siding was the final condition assessed in the commercial area and was focused on historic buildings (including residential and commercial). [See Fig. 5.3.10]

52% had vinyl siding covering historic architectural details usually at the cornice or upper story bay or dormer windows. It was also observed that many of the buildings without vinyl siding had significant paint and wood deterioration. Such conditions should be assessed and recommendations made before remaining facades are covered. Torresdale Avenue has a strong base of historic fabric, but its unique characteristics are destroyed or lost through alterations like façade modification and vinyl siding.

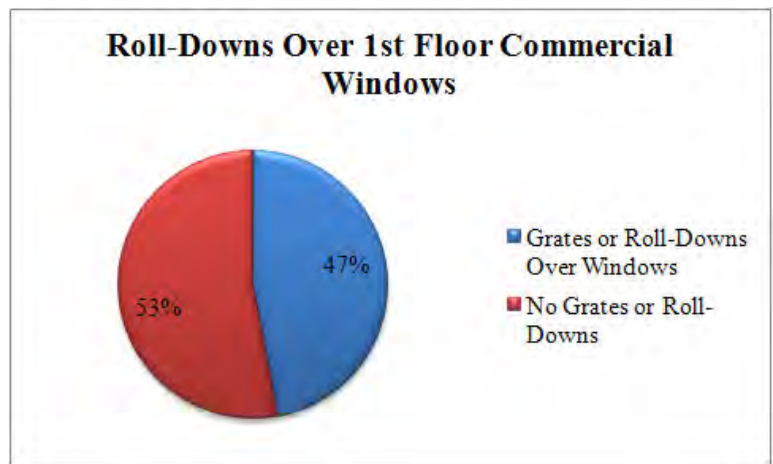


Fig. 5.3.9

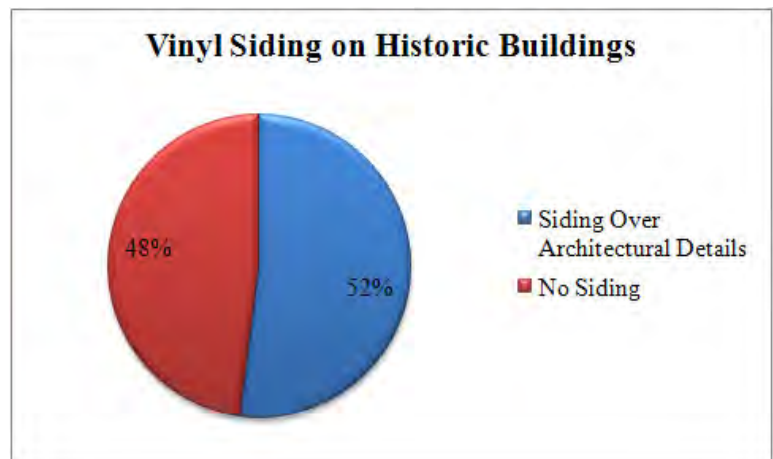


Fig. 5.3.10

## Conclusions

The recorded observations of the Torresdale Avenue Survey reveal that while Tacony's commercial area demonstrates several significant issues such as a lack of business variety and inappropriate additions to historic buildings, it also has a strong base of historic resources and traditional commercial corridor characteristics that could help in future revitalization efforts. Torresdale Avenue actually exhibits many of the traits considered important by the "main street" approach as advocated by the National Trust for Historic Preservation including historic architecture, walkability and strong local ownership. This approach finds that historic preservation can be used as part of a comprehensive approach to encourage successful economic development.

As Torresdale Avenue is currently used and maintained, though, it is not being utilized to its full potential. Recent streetscape improvements are a notable step towards revitalization of Torresdale and demonstrate the community's desire to revitalize the commercial area. Future steps should include physical improvements to the buildings themselves, both to restore historic features and also to make all storefronts more attractive and welcoming to potential customers. While injecting new uses into the Avenue may be the most difficult task ahead, it is also especially important to encourage a variety of new businesses to locate in the area. Further analysis and specific recommendations for these issues are explored in the *Commercial Improvements* individual project found at the end of this Preservation Plan.

Finally, the project team recommends several ideas for future survey efforts along Torresdale Avenue. First, future surveying could focus on pre-selected buildings that have a known history and then assessing their condition and how the buildings have changed over time. Secondly, the project team recommends that the survey results be updated periodically. The project team noted that many changes, such as vacancy locations, occurred on the Avenue between the two months it took to complete this survey. In order to focus future work on the most pressing issues, it will be important to keep up-to-date with use and conditions issues along Torresdale. Finally, the project team recommends future survey of Longshore Avenue, the traditional commercial corridor in Tacony where several business uses remain today.

*Kate Ritson*





Fig. 5.3.11: Many important historic resources, like the former Liberty Theatre located at 6814 Torresdale Avenue, are currently underutilized but exhibit potential for future renovation and adaptive reuse in commercial corridor redevelopment efforts.



Fig. 5.3.13: This image, of 6807 Torresdale Avenue, exhibits many of the issues observed in the commercial area. To the left, a major first floor façade renovation closes the exterior to the street while the vinyl siding above covers architectural details at the cornice line. To the right, historic details are maintained at the second story, but the first floor window projects an unwelcoming façade with the addition of a roll-down window protection.



Fig. 5.3.12: The residential structures included within the boundaries of the Torresdale Survey generally exhibit good condition and upkeep. Here, vinyl siding obscures architectural details at the nearest house, while historic details can be seen down the street at the upper story bay windows.



Fig. 5.3.14: This 7-Eleven, located at 6927 Torresdale Avenue, is one of the few national chains located within the study area. In the future, selective placement of national chains may be appropriate in order to attract more activity, but careful design within the context of the Avenue's historic resources and traditional "main street" appeal will be important.

# Residential and Institutional Physical Survey

## Introduction and Methodology

The studio performed a physical survey in order to better understand the Tacony neighborhood and determine whether the history of the Disston company town remains visible in its physical fabric. The physical survey was designed to evaluate the following aspects of Tacony's visual landscape: its architectural types, the level of intactness of the historic fabric and the boundaries of the Disston company town.

A windshield survey was first used to form a general impression of the neighborhood and understand its layout and physical conditions. It was determined that most blocks are dedicated to residential use with some commercial buildings along Torresdale Avenue. While a significant amount of alterations and additions are visible, it was determined that they are generally superficial and easily reversible.

Using the windshield survey data as well as historic maps and photographs (*See Appendix I*), specific blocks and buildings were identified as contributing to the area of physical fabric that continues to reflect the history of the Disston company town. A detailed survey captured both historical and physical information about these contributing buildings. This includes known historic names, architectural typologies, current use, building materials and landscape features. It was determined that a substantial amount of historic fabric is still intact, but is in varying states of condition (*See Appendix I*).

The physical survey data is stored with the data from the industrial, commercial, and community surveys in an Access Database. For information on how the database is organized and how to use it, please see Appendix I.

## Preliminary Windshield Survey Results

One of the first steps of the studio was to grasp a basic understanding of the composition of the Disston estate through a preliminary windshield survey. A windshield survey is a visual assessment of physical elements that can be viewed and determined by driving through a specified site. Survey criteria and blocks to be surveyed were selected before surveying. This survey encompassed the residential area of the Disston estate as defined by boundaries given

to us by the Tacony Historical Society; the boundaries of Historic Disston would later be redrawn on the basis of evolutionary mapping and intactness of the site today. The residential area of the neighborhood, as defined by the studio, is the entire section west of Route 95 and Septa R7 rail line; the area east of this same boundary is what the studio designated the industrial area of the neighborhood).

Basic categories of ostensible building use, residential building type and building material were examined in the preliminary windshield survey. These categories were chosen because they lend themselves to a fundamental yet overall representation of the residential fabric of the neighborhood. The survey also included a simple yes/no assessment of whether buildings had noticeable alterations or additions; noticeable alterations or additions were those deemed to be conspicuously dissimilar to what appeared to be the original building and/or those that employed materials conspicuously dissimilar to original building materials.

Results of the survey showed that about 75% of what was designated the residential area of Historic Disston is comprised of residential buildings. 10% of this area has a commercial use, and 5% of this area is comprised of institutional buildings such as schools and places of worship (Fig. 5.4.1). While commercial buildings are concentrated along Torresdale Avenue and parts of Longshore Avenue, institutional buildings are scattered throughout the neighborhood. Of the residential buildings, almost half are doubles/twins, 29% are rowhouses and 2% are triple houses. 18% of the residential buildings are singles, many of which are large residences on Keystone Avenue that face Disston Park. Notably, only 1% of residential buildings surveyed were modern infill among historic structures. This figure is one of the most significant from the windshield survey as it shows that the neighborhood is remarkably historic (Fig. 5.4.2).

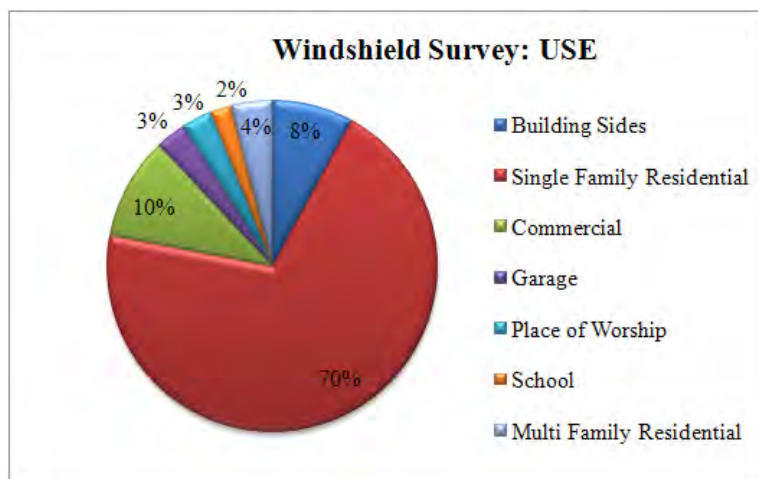


Fig. 5.4.1: Result of Preliminary Windshield Survey, Building Use

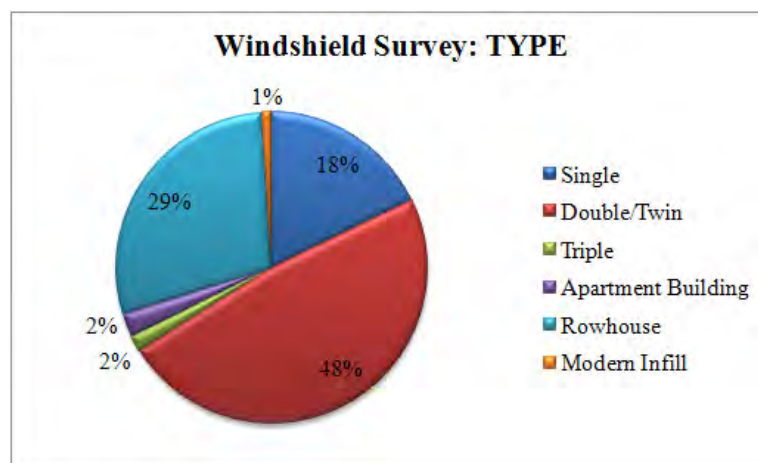


Fig. 5.4.2: Result of Preliminary Windshield Survey, Residential Building Type

While the windshield survey considered both primary building materials as well as secondary building materials, results were only calculated for primary building material because secondary building materials were often the result of modern alterations or additions. Like much of Philadelphia, brick is a prominent building material in Historic Disston, and almost 70% of buildings in the residential area are constructed of brick. 10% of buildings are constructed of stone; 11% of buildings have a primary construction material of stucco and therefore may have stone and/or brick foundations and/or walls underneath the stucco (Fig. 5.4.3).

The most remarkable figure from the windshield survey is that 54% of buildings surveyed have noticeable alterations or additions (Fig. 5.4.4). Alterations may be significant or minor, but despite the extent of alterations or size of additions, they utilize materials or are stylistically disparate or insensitive to historic fabric. While many buildings were found to use vinyl and concrete as secondary construction materials, as much as 8% of structures surveyed have a primary building material of vinyl, showing the degree of some modern alterations and additions. In a locally designated historic district, alterations and additions of this nature would be regulated, and historically sensitive alterations to historic buildings would be implemented.

### Residential Typologies

Among the residential structures of Historic Disston, there are several housing typologies that are found street-by-street or block-by-block. After the Preliminary Windshield Survey, buildings were selected that are either representative of these typologies or that are architecturally unique and therefore architecturally interesting. Not unexpectedly, the number of typologies per type of residence (double/twin, rowhouse and single) is loosely proportional to their incidence within the residential area of Historic Disston.

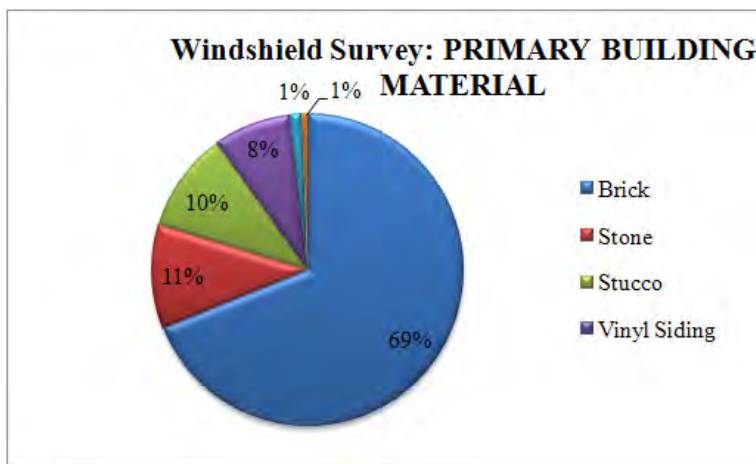


Fig. 5.4.3: Result of Preliminary Windshield Survey, Primary Building Material

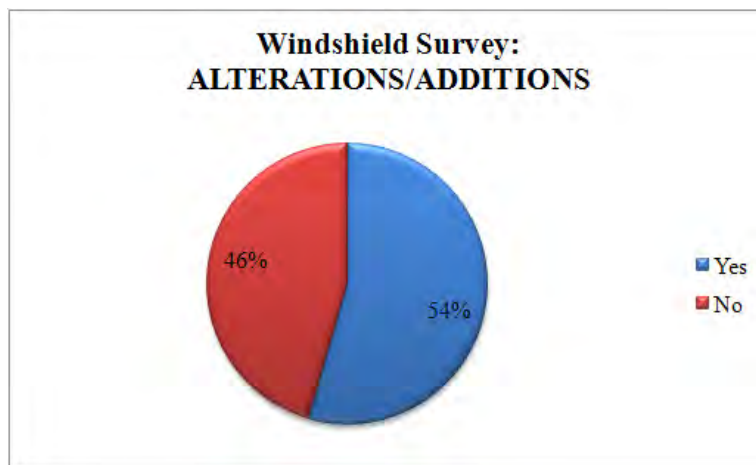


Fig. 5.4.4: Result of Preliminary Windshield Survey, Alterations/Additions



Layout of buildings by typology throughout the neighborhood reveals clues as to the development of the neighborhood, for example, which blocks were likely built at the same time or where various classes of workers may have lived. Structures within each of these typologies would be included in a National or local historic register nomination as buildings contributing to the historic nature of Historic Disston. Each typology is described below as well as the specific structure that has been chosen as representative of the typology. Images of each representative building can be found in the Tacony Surveys Database.

Although there are several diverse typologies, many of them do share common characteristics that are characteristic of Historic Disston architecture. These elements include corbelled brick cornices, decorative brick corbelling and decorative brackets (Fig. 5.4.5, Fig. 5.4.6). This type of ornamentation can be seen on twin, rowhouse and single buildings throughout the Disston neighborhood (Fig. 5.4.7).

#### *Double/Twin*

Type T1: 2 ½-story, brick twin, hipped roof with intersecting gable front, hipped roof front porch

4703 Disston Street has two-story tower on west side of gable end, pediment/gable at center of hipped porch and two-story bay on west elevation.

Type T2: 2 ½-story, brick twin, cross-gable roof, hipped roof front porch

4709 Disston Street has a masonry foundation, two second story bay windows on front gable end and flat arch brick lintols (Fig. 5.4.8).

Type T3: 2 ½-story, brick twin with decorative brickwork at front elevation second story, clipped gable roof, hipped roof front porch, dormers

4730 Knorr Street has a central brick chimney on the front slope, double window at second story center of front elevation and window under gable at gable end on side elevations. Some houses of this typology have both open and enclosed altered porches and have been covered with either stucco or vinyl on some elevations.

Type T4: 2-story, brick twin with flat roof, hipped roof front porch, brick brackets

4805 Knorr Street has chimney at non-party wall side elevation and double window at second story center of front elevation. Some



Fig. 5.4.5: 6710 Keystone Street, detail of corbelling and brackets



Fig. 5.4.6: 6820 Hegerman Street, detail of corbelling and brackets



Fig. 5.4.7: 6824 Hegerman Street, detail of cornice and brackets

houses of this typology have altered porches and have been covered with either stucco or vinyl on some elevations.

Type T5: 2 ½-story, brick twin with mansard roof, hipped roof front porch, two dormers

4806 Disston Street has front door with transom, defined lintols and sills, decorative brackets under cornice and decorative brackets visually supporting dormer gables. Some houses of this typology have altered porches either with or without brick piers supporting the porch and varying roof materials at the mansard half story.

Type T6: 2 ½-story, brick twin with gable roof, shed roof porch  
4810 Knorr Street has a brick chimney on front slope.

Type T7: 2-story, brick twin with flat roof, wrapping hipped roof porch, corbelled brick cornice, central brick bracket, brick lintols

4820 Rawle Street has brick chimney at center of twin, double windows at first and second stories of the front elevation. Some houses of this typology have altered porches either with or without brick piers supporting the porch (Fig. 5.4.9).

Type T8: 2 ½-story, brick twin with cross gable roof, flat roof porch and chimney at ridge of front gable.

4901 Knorr Street has brick covered with vinyl. Some houses of this typology have both open and enclosed altered porches and have been covered with either stucco or vinyl on some elevations.

Type T9: 2-story, brick twin with low slope gable roof, shed roof front porch, denticulated cornice, brick corbelling, decorative brackets, stone sills and lintols

6710 Keystone Street has front door with transom, porch supported by brick piers and corbelled brick chimney. 6712 has wrapping porch atypical of this typology and lacks door with transom characteristic of this typology.

Type T10: 2-story, brick twin with flat roof, hipped roof front porch, corbelled brick cornice, decorative brackets, decorative brickwork at front elevation second story

6820 Hegerman Street has double window at second story center of front elevation, chimney at non-party wall side elevation and defined lintols and sills. Some houses of this typology have altered porches either with or without brick piers supporting the porch and varying materials used for lintols and sills.



Fig. 5.4.8: 4709 Disston Street



Fig. 5.4.9: 4820 Rawle Street

Type T11: 2-story, brick twin with low slope gable roof, shed roof front porch, wood cornice with decorative brackets

6824 Hegerman Street has front door with transom, windows with painted stone lintols and sills and corbelled brick chimney at non-party wall side elevation. Some houses of this typology have been altered and have been covered by stucco or vinyl on some elevations.

Type T12: 2-story, brick twin with flat roof, small side shed roof porch, corbelled brick cornice, central decorative bracket, flat arch brick lintol

Rawle Street/Hegerman Street has central bay window on first story of front elevation and double window with flat arch brick lintol on second story of front elevation. Some houses of this typology have been altered and have been covered by stucco or vinyl on some elevations.

### *Rowhouse*

Type R1: 2 ½-story brick rowhouse with mansard roof with gabled dormer, shed roof front porch, front door with transom, arched lintols

4902 Knorr Street has stone lintols and sills. Some houses of this typology have been altered and have been covered by stucco, vinyl or perma-stone siding. Many of the mansard half-stories have been covered by vinyl as well.

Type R2: 2- to 2 ½-story, brick rowhouse with flat roof, distinctive decorative corbelling, belt coursing above masonry water table and between first and second stories, flat arch brick lintols

“Castle Row,” 6646-6666 Tulip Street has windows of varying shapes and sizes, chimneys throughout the row and a pyramidal hipped roof at south end of row. These rows have undergone various alterations and additions in stucco, vinyl and perma-stone siding. Shutters and awnings have been added in some places and distinctive ornamentation has been removed in others (Fig. 5.4.10).

Type R3: 2-story, brick rowhouse with flat roof, shed roof front porch, denticulated cornice, brick corbelling below cornice, decorative brackets, corbelled chimney

“Battleship Row,” 6700 Marsden Street has masonry water table that supports porch, front gable detail on porches, flat arch brick lintols over first story double window and second story windows and flat arch brick lintol over front door with transom. This description applies to the south section of the row. The north section of the row



Fig. 5.4.10: “Castle Row,” 6646-6666 Tulip Street



is slightly set back from the south section and has stone retaining walls with shallow grass front yards. The porches in this section are supported by brick rather than stone. The first story has a single window and door with transom, and the second story has two windows; all windows and doors in this section have flat painted stone lintols and sills.

Type R4: 2-story, brick rowhouse with flat roof, wood cornice, decorative brackets, stone sills, flat arch brick lintols over basement window, first story double window, front door and two second story windows.

6750-6754 Hegerman Street has masonry water table with four steps up to doorway. Some of the houses in this typology have been altered, and many of the decorative cornices have been covered with vinyl.

### *Single*

Type S1: 2 ½-story, brick single with mansard roof, gabled dormers flanking pyramidal hipped roof central tower on front elevation, bays and gabled dormers on side elevations, stone sills and flat arch brick lintols over single and double windows and front central entry  
4810 Disston Street has been recently rehabilitated.

Type S2: 2 ½-story, brick single with mansard roof, masonry water table, decorative wood cornice with decorative brackets, gabled dormers with decorative brackets, flat arch brick lintols and stone sills  
6702 Keystone Street has five steps up to the doorway, which has an arched transom. The exterior walls of the building, lintols, sills and transom have been painted over. Roof appears to be slate.

Type S3: 3-story, brick single with intersecting hipped and gable roof, corner tower, wrapping porch, hipped inset dormers, corbelled chimneys

6942 Keystone Street is predominantly brick but employs half timbering and shingles at the third story level. The house has windows of various shapes and sizes and displays various alterations (Fig. 5.4.11).

Type S4: 2 ½-story, wood siding single with mansard roof, shed roof front porch with fine woodwork, gabled double dormer, ornamentation and decorative brackets under cornice

7032 Keystone Street may have once been a twin and remains one of the few structures whose predominant building material is wood.



Fig. 5.4.11: 6942 Keystone Street



## Contributing Building Survey

The Contributing Building Survey is meant to jump start a historic district nomination for Historic Disston and can also serve as the basis for nominations of individual buildings for designation to the National Register of Historic Places or to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The Contributing Building Survey not only includes the residential structures listed above but all of the institutional buildings and landmarks listed below.

### *Schools and Churches*

Disston Memorial Presbyterian Church  
Hamilton Disston School  
Holy Innocent/St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
Our Lady of Consolation Church  
Our Lady of Consolation School  
Saint Josephat School, formerly Mary Disston School  
Saint Leo's Church  
Saint Petri Evangelical Lutheran Church  
Saint Stephen's United Church of Christ  
Star of Hope Baptist Church  
Tacony Baptist Church  
Temple Menorah Keneseth Chai

### *Institutional Buildings and Landmarks*

4832 Longshore Avenue, former Tacony Pharmacy  
6911 Torresdale Avenue, former Maranath Baptist Church, former Post Office  
"Castle Row", 6646-6666 Tulip Street  
"Gun Battery Row", 6700 Marsden Street  
Disston Recreation Center  
Dr. David Umstead Residence, 6928 Tulip Street  
Frank Shuman House, 4600 Disston Street  
Frank Shuman Laboratory, 6913 Ditman Street  
Free Library of Philadelphia, Tacony Branch  
John Rapp Residence, 4701-4703 Disston Street  
Jonathan Marsden Residence, 4921 Longshore Avenue  
Tacony Music Hall  
Tacony Savings Fund  
Tacony Club, 4619 Longshore Avenue  
Thomas W. South Residence

The Contributing Building Survey is not meant to provide figures and statistics that give an overall picture of Historic Disston like the Preliminary Windshield Survey did. This more in-depth survey gives each selected contributing structure record that informs the kind of information required for National or Philadelphia Register designation. This information includes both historic and current data. Historic data includes a building's date of construction, historic name, architect/builder, associated individuals, associated events and historic use. For many of the vernacular buildings, the date of construction and architect/builder are unknown. Collection of historic use versus current use data shows how historic buildings have been reused.

The Contributing Building Survey encompasses all of the criteria surveyed in the Preliminary Windshield Survey. Physical survey information that required a more extensive survey than the original windshield survey includes material information like foundation and roofing materials, site information like ancillary structures, landscape features and sidewalk material, and general architectural information like number of stories and presence of chimneys. Most importantly, the survey includes architectural style and distinguishing characteristics of each selected contributing building; along with historical data, it is this information that gives Disston its significance as historic district.

Some of the architectural styles present in the residential area of Historic Disston are Gothic Revival (St. Leo's Church), Italianate (7024 Keystone Street), Queen Anne (4703 Disston Street) and Second Empire (4806 Disston). Historic Disston also has its own vernacular style that features brick corbelling and decorative brackets (4820 Rawle Street, 6646-6666 Tulip Street, the 6700 block of Marsden Street, 6710-6712 Keystone Street, 6750-6764 Hegerman Street). Elements of this Disston vernacular style are often the distinguishing characteristics of these structures.

Other distinguishing characteristics can be found in Historic Disston's churches, schools, institutional buildings and landmarks. The Hamilton Disston School has stone belt courses, doric columns, porticoes, roman arches and decorative brick quoining. The Free Library of Philadelphia, Tacony Branch has limestone quoins, a parapet with balustrade, composite Ionic/Corinthian columns and a heavy denticulated cornice (Fig. 5.4.12). The Tacony Saving Fund, Safe Deposit, Title and Trust Company retains its original signage, original wrought iron window grates and fine terracotta work.

*Elise Kemery and Jessica Kottke*



Fig. 5.4.12: Free Library of Philadelphia, Tacony Branch

# Parks and Open Space

## Historic Context

Henry Disston provided his employees a healthy community setting and well-planned open spaces in laying out his company town. Single homes, twins and row homes and businesses were set along tree-lined streets (Fig. 5.5.1) among dooryards, alleys and side yards that provided homes and businesses with adequate light and ventilation. Disston also set aside a linear park to serve as a scenic barrier between the residential community and the factories and to establish a sense of cleanliness and order in the community.<sup>1</sup> Playing fields served as gathering spaces for the athletes and fans of Tacony's baseball, soccer and cricket teams. In addition to the parks and fields within the town, the lands around Disston's holdings were relatively undeveloped through the early 20th century likely conveying an impression that Disston's company town was set in a clearing in the woods.



Fig. 5.5.1: Keystone Street in undated photo; Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives

<sup>1</sup> Iatorola, Louis Sr. Tacony Civic Association Website <http://taconycivic.org/history.html>





Fig. 5.5.2: 1910 Open Space Map.



Disston Park is a linear open space located between the west side of the rail line and Keystone Street. It extends from Princeton Avenue to the north to Levick Street at the south end. The park was established in 1894 and named in honor of Jacob Disston, the donor of the parkland.<sup>1</sup> Before the area was formally established as Disston Park, a portion of the park between Longshore and Disston Streets was laid out as a field for Tacony's first cricket players in 1876-1877.<sup>2</sup> No landscape plans for the park exist, however, a few archival images on file at the Tacony Historical Association show the park to be well-tended, and furnished with flowerbeds, fountains, trees, strolling paths, benches and gaslights (Fig. 5.5.3). The park served as a pastoral setting for some of Tacony's grandest residences (Fig. 5.5.4) and an impressive gateway to the town's rail station (Fig. 5.5.5 & 5.5.6).

Tacony was home to many organized sports teams and playing fields were an important gathering space for Taconyites. While some games were fielded at Disston Park, the Tacony Athletic Association, formed by members of the Tacony Club, rented a plot of land between Unruh Street & Magee Streets to the East of State Road from the Disston Family to field their teams. The land was filled and leveled, and grandstands were constructed for paying crowds.<sup>3</sup> This field was also used by Disston company teams but it is important to note that the field was originally established by a club team and not the Disston family, though they rented the land to the Tacony Athletic Association at a reduced rate (Fig. 5.5.7).

William Dunlap Disston established the Disston Recreation Center in 1912. The center was established to promote the town's "community life" and was originally home to less competitive activities such as maypole dances and group exercises that helped children develop into happy, healthy and productive citizens.<sup>4</sup> By 1933 the recreation center was reportedly home to baseball, soccer, volleyball and basketball games for young men waiting for jobs to open up during the depression (Fig 5.5.8).

Tacony's location along the Delaware River was an important factor in attracting industrialist Henry Disston to the area in the mid-



Fig. 5.5.3: *In Disston Park, Tacony, PA*; Portion of undated image printed by Standard Post Card & Novelty Co., 4 N.O. 5th St. Philadelphia; Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives



Fig. 5.5.4: *Spring Flowers in Disston Park, Tacony, PA*; Portion of an undated image; Au verso: "Disston Park between Disston and Longshore" Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives



Fig. 5.5.5: *Disston Park from Longshore*; Portion of undated image showing former rail station;. Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives

1 Parksourc.org." Disston Park" Find a Park. <http://www.parksourc.org/findapark/parks/disston.html>

2 Silcox, Harry C. and Newman, Jerry. *A Living History of Tacony Holmesburg and Mayfair: An Intergenerational Study*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Abraham Lincoln High School Press, 1990: 71.

3 Silcox: 72.

4 Silcox: 85.



Fig. 5.5.6: Disston & Keystone Streets Looking East showing large wooden stairway leading to larger train station; Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives

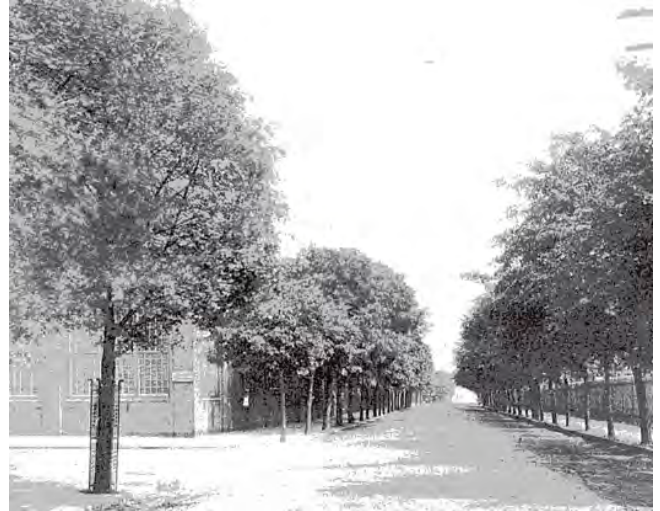


Fig. 5.5.9: Image and article from undated Disston Bits page titled “An Avenue of Fine Maple Trees” describing paving and planting improvements in this walkway to the riverfront factories, presumably Unruh Street; Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives



Fig. 5.5.7: Men from Disston Factory playing baseball in 1916; Original image from *Disston Bits*; Copy from *A Place to Live and Work*.



Fig. 5.5.8: Children taking part in organized play outside the Disston Recreation Center in 1916; Image courtesy Free Library of Philadelphia, Tacony Branch



Fig. 5.5.10: Robin Melsh at Tacony Bathhouse; Image Courtesy Tacony Historical Society Archives



1800s. The river provided water for processing and a mode of transportation in addition to the rail line. While Samuel Horace Disston (Henry's grandnephew) planted an avenue of maple trees along the approach to the factories, provide shade for workers on their way to and from the riverfront factories the Disstons did not set aside any space for public gathering along the riverfront (Fig. 5.5.9). Unlike the Bridge Street Pier to the south in Bridesburg there is no mention of a waterfront gathering space for Disston workers or their families. The Tacony Cottage Association to the north offered a private boat dock and there were bath houses to the south at Lardner's point for Taconyites who wanted to enjoy the water (Fig. 5.5.10).

### Current Conditions

The Parks and open spaces of Tacony are very much a part of the neighborhood fabric today. While some street trees have been cut down and the occasional garden has been paved over, a 2007 aerial image of the town shows the blocks to the north of Knorr Street to be well planted (Fig. 5.5.11). The residential streetscapes are defined by a variety of fences, dooryard gardens, porches and two and three story buildings that together create a cohesive neighborhood landscape (Fig. 5.5.12).

Torresdale Avenue serves as a main street for the neighborhood. The wider roadway and sidewalks, especially the blocks with intact storefronts offer a noticeable scale and use contrast to the narrow streetscapes of the residential areas. The streetscape improvements underway on Torresdale Avenue will provide better night lighting and restore the shade tree canopy which once defined this street. The canopy trees will reinforce the first story cornice line, creating a well-scaled pedestrian realm.

Disston Park has endured and continues to serve Tacony residents today as a buffer for the SEPTA regional rail line and Interstate 95 to the east of the rail line. Like many parks maintained by city agencies, the fountains and flowerbeds have been replaced with mown lawns by the Philadelphia Department of Recreation. Grand staircases, delicate benches and gas lights have been replaced with

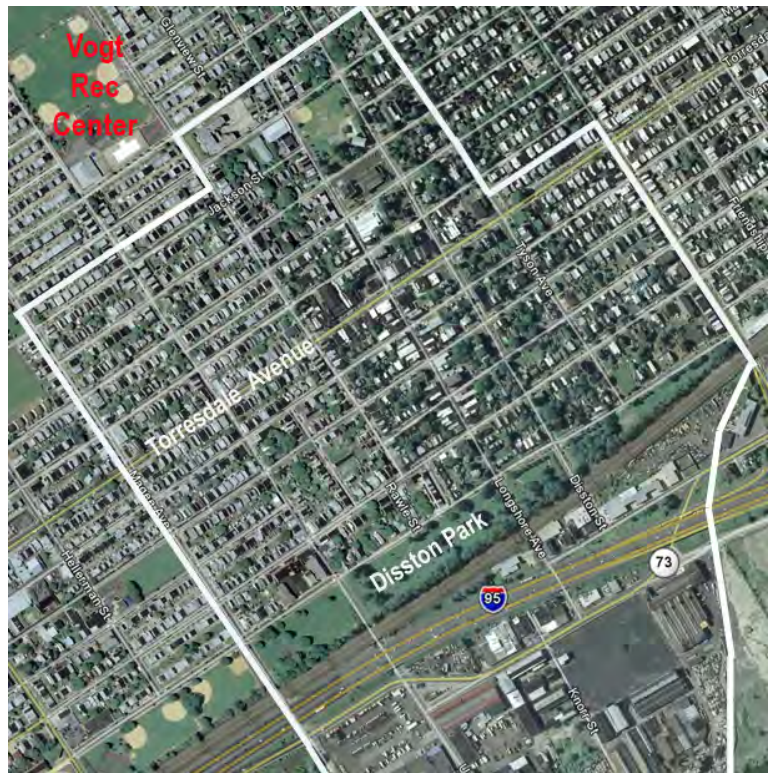


Fig. 5.5.11: 2007 Historic Disston outlined on 2007 Aerial Map. Note greener core of district indicating heavier tree planting than perimeter sites.



Fig. 5.5.12: 2007 Dooryards, Tacony Philadelphia, August, 2008



simpler, sturdier site elements in light of budget and vandalism concerns. The pathways in the park north of Longshore Avenue appear to maintain the alignment seen in archival photos. The location of the former fountain is marked by a recognizable depression in the lawn at the center of the pathway between Longshore and Disston Streets.

The north end of the park is now home to the Christa Lewis Memorial Arboretum. Community groups have been actively involved in the maintenance and planting projects at the arboretum which is clearly seen in the carefully planted gateway (Fig 5.5.13). The north end of the park continues to serve largely passive users and creates a pastoral gateway to the Tacony R7 rail station that sets Tacony apart from the neighboring communities. The replacement of the large station building with small transit shelters makes it hard for newcomers to find the station. This is compounded by the narrow stairway entrances on either side of the underpass and the overgrown shrubs and exotic invasive plants bordering the rail corridor.



Fig. 5.5.13: Entrance to Christa Lewis Memorial Arboretum, November 2008

Playing fields and basketball courts are more predominant at the more open, sunny south end of the park. A new firehouse is planned for the corner of Keystone and Magee Streets at the south end of Historic Disston. This will be the first major structure built in Disston Park since it was established and will interrupt the view between the north and south ends of the park.

While Historic Disston's riverfront landscape sets it apart from Mayfair and adjacent inland neighborhoods it is little recognized or visited by Tacony's residents. This river access was an essential to Henry Disston selecting Tacony as the site for his factories and company town. When Disston's Saw works ceased employing the large number of workers from Tacony and route 95 was built the quarter mile distance between the residents and the river was rarely crossed. Railroad and Interstate underpasses, grade changes, discontinuous streets, one-way on ramps and the large scale of windowless factory walls all serve to discourage all but the most motivated pedestrians, cyclists and even drivers. Today, few residents walk, bike or drive to the nearby waterway or think of it as a vital part of the neighborhood.



Fig. 5.5.14: Conceptual plan for Transit Oriented Development at Tacony train station showing connection to industrial waterfront from the 2008 North Delaware Riverfront Rail Stations Urban Design Study published by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

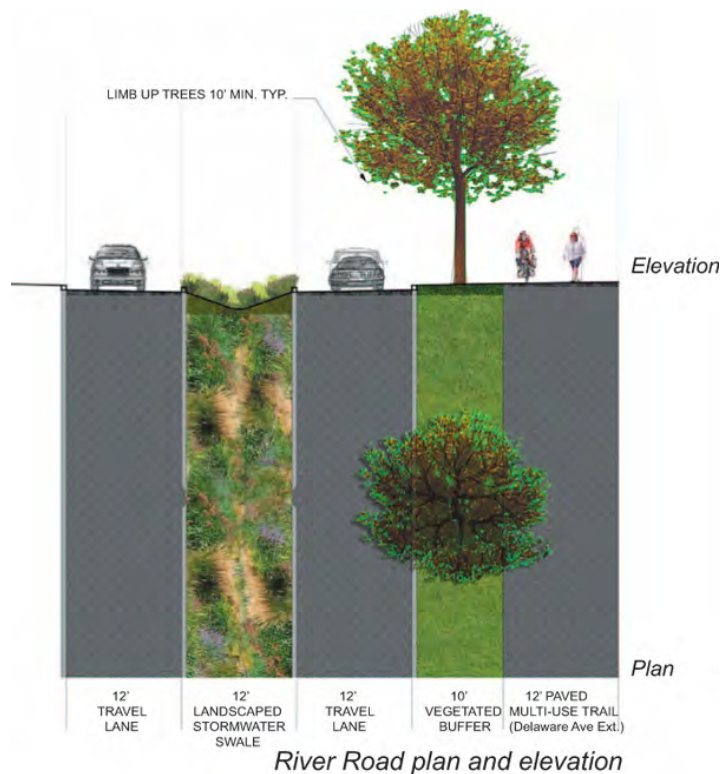


## Analysis and Recommendations

This cohesive and walkable neighborhood of narrow streetscapes, punctuated by a wider main street, parks and a rail station all sits within less than a mile from the Delaware River. The detail and scale of these streetscapes can be appreciated by walkers and bikers but present challenges to cars. Many of these challenges, in the form of narrow streets, small alleys and tight turning radii, serve as traffic-calming measures and work to improve walkability as well as to reinforce historic building patterns and should be preserved. Programs that are used to promote maintenance and restoration of buildings in a historically sensitive manner should include seasonal workshops and incentive programs that promote the restoration of historic fences, porches, and gardens.

Disston Park should be preserved and promoted as an example of how Disston employed a simple buffer to separate the industrial and residential realms. The park serves as a gateway to the residential community and new development proposed for the rail station and the industrial waterfront parcels (Fig. 5.5.14). Building encroachments in the park, like the planned firehouse, should be delegated to other sites such as Torresdale Avenue where setting and circulation are more conducive to this use. The current walkways, mature stands of trees and memorial arboretum are appropriate passive uses for this park and should be fostered. The involvement of community volunteers and gardening groups such as those promoted by the institution of the Christa Lewis Memorial Arboretum are critical to raising local awareness and appreciation of this community asset.

The proposed North Delaware Riverfront Greenway will serve as the newest open space asset in Historic Disston and a vehicle for reconnecting the residents with the river. In addition to the greenway, State Street will be rede-



*River Road plan and elevation*

Fig. 5.5.15: Proposed State Road cross section from the 2005 North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master plan by Greenways Inc., Econsult; & Schelter & Associates.

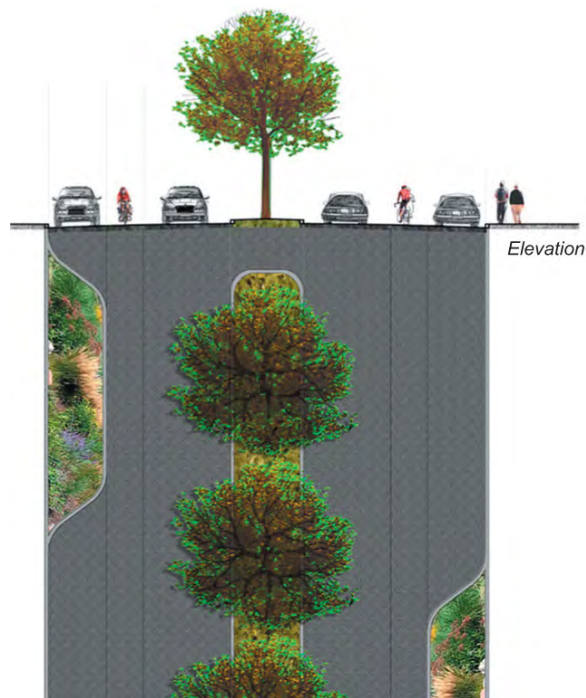


Fig. 5.5.16: Green Street cross section from the 2005 North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master plan by Greenways Inc., Econsult; & Schelter & Associates.

signed as ‘River Road incorporating trees, medians and other traffic calming and stormwater management devices (Fig. 5.5.15). The re-alignment of Interstate 95 ramps will return Princeton Avenue to a two way street and foster the development of major east-west connector to the greenway employing a ‘Green Street’ design model with bike lanes (Fig. 5.5.16). A second greenway connector is proposed at Unruh Street. Lighting, street tree plantings and stormwater rain gardens will be employed to define these east-west connectors. Such improvements would restore the concept of Samuel Disston’s 20th center tree-lined walk, to connect Historic Disston with its 19th century industrial roots and its 21st century riverfront trail.

*Jayne Spector*



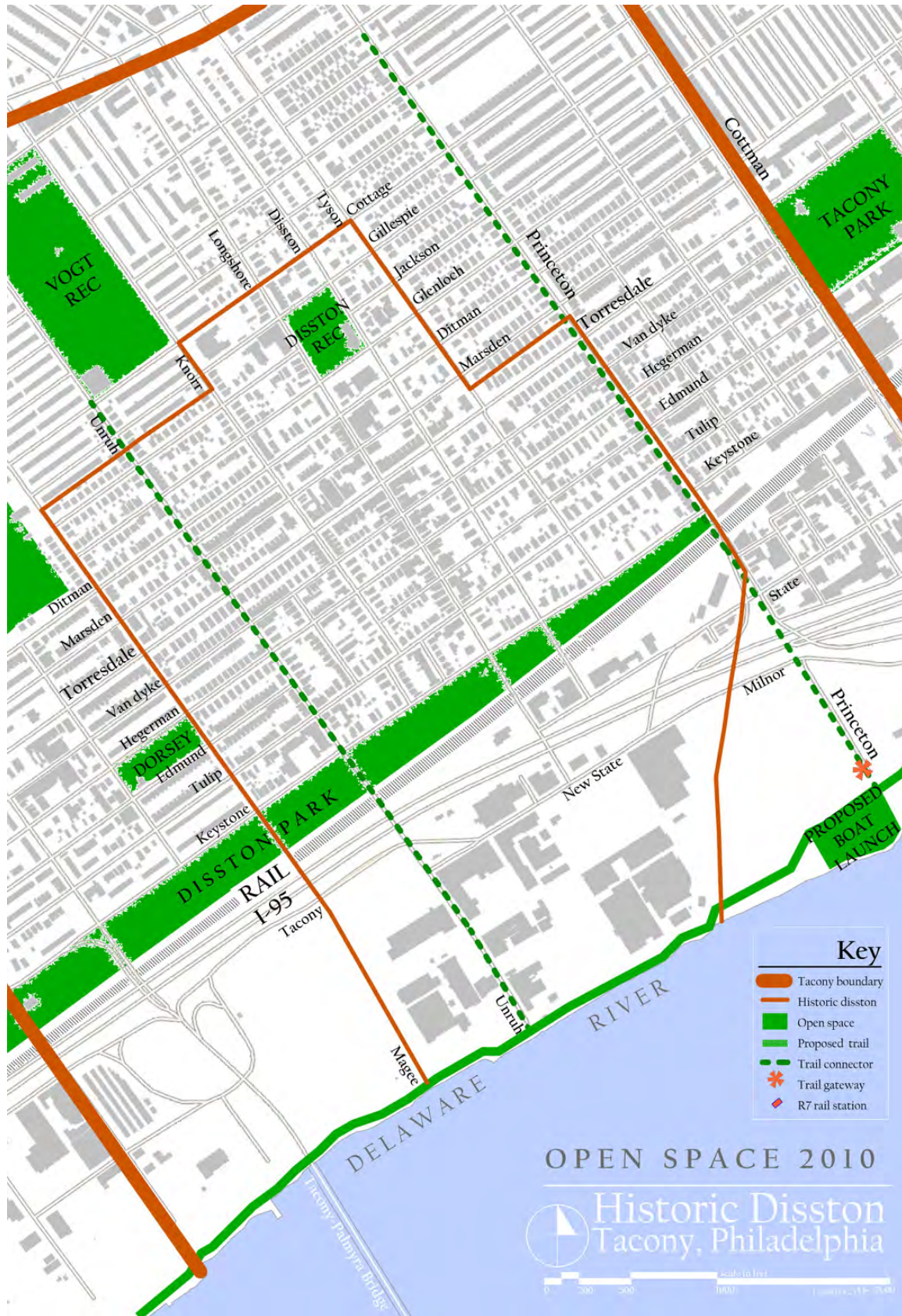


Fig. 5.5.17: 2010 Open Space Map.



## SWOT Analysis

To better assess the current forces within Tacony and those they may face in the future, the team conducted a SWOT Analysis (Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats). This was held mid-semester after researching the history of the area, completing numerous site visits, consulting with key stakeholders, surveying local residents and conducting in-the-field architectural surveys. Below is a summary of the major and immediate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the Historic Disston neighborhood as identified by the studio team.

### Strengths

Tacony's strengths lie in the relationships that exist between its historic fabric and physical landscape. Strong urban form, street patterns and green spaces work together to create a walkable neighborhood and an identifiable feeling of community. The historic Disston industrial buildings along the Delaware River are within blocks of the Disston residential and commercial district. Access to transportation, including rail, bus and trolley lines, as well as I-95, creates opportunities for commuting throughout Philadelphia, to New York and the airport.

### Weaknesses

Tacony's weaknesses result from of a lack of local employment opportunities and absentee landlords and property owners. Undesirable outcomes of these weaknesses include crime, drugs, prostitution, litter, and building neglect. The commercial corridor and waterfront industrial sites are underutilized and include a significant amount of vacant buildings. The visual unity of the historic brick twins, row houses and larger single homes has been damaged by unsympathetic additions and repairs.

### Opportunities

Tacony's opportunities center on the open developable space in the industrial area and the adaptability of industrial and iconic buildings. The residential and commercial areas offer a variety of building stock upon which property owners and potential businesses could capitalize. The historic commercial corridors of Tacony survive, and revitalization efforts should focus on Torresdale Avenue to address unmet market needs. The neighborhood's rich history

and connection to the Disston factory provide an opportunity for branding and an interpretation of significance related to Tacony's enduring building fabric.

## Threats

Tacony's threats are related to deferred maintenance and potential demolition, especially in the waterfront industrial area. Damage to and loss of the historic fabric threatens Tacony's sense of community, connection to its history and a source of neighborhood identification and pride. A lack of preservation education and awareness in the community could further threaten historical significance and architecture. Challenges for commercial development, such as a lack of business incentives, stability and evening hours, could also negatively impact the future of Tacony as a walkable, livable neighborhood.

*Caitlin Kramer & Taryn D'Ambrogi*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strong Urban Form – Neighborhood Feel, Walkability</li><li>• Historic Fabric</li><li>• Industrial Infrastructure</li><li>• Proximity to Waterfront</li><li>• Access to Transportation; Proximity to Philadelphia, NY Train Lines</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of Local Employment Opportunities</li><li>• Underutilization of Commercial and Waterfront Industrial Sites, Including Vacant Buildings</li><li>• Unsympathetic and Inappropriate Additions and Renovations – Particularly on Residential Buildings</li><li>• Absentee Landlords and Property Owners</li></ul>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Opportunity for Branding</li><li>• Open Developable Space and Adaptability of Current Industrial Buildings</li><li>• Variety of Building Stock for Housing and Economic Purposes</li><li>• Potential Revitalization of Commercial Corridors – Particularly Along Torresdale – to Address Unmet Market Needs</li></ul>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demolition or Property Speculation to the Industrial Sites</li><li>• Deferred Maintenance to Both Industrial and Residential Areas</li><li>• Lack of Awareness and Education on Preservation, Historical Significance and Historic Architecture</li><li>• Challenges for Commercial Development (Lack of Incentives, Business Stability and Evening Business Activities)</li></ul>

(Fig. 6.1.1) Matrix of the major and immediate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats facing the Historic Disston neighborhood as identified by the studio team.



# Preservation Policies & Strategy Approaches

## Local Historic District Designation

Local Historic Designation to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places offers the greatest protection for the historic resources in the Disston Estate. By designating the residential and industrial areas as one Historic District, the enduring physical expression of the area as a company town will be protected. The inclusion of the industrial area is critical to protect the historic factory buildings from the potential threats of future demolition or insensitive development, while the inclusion of the residential, commercial, and institutional buildings west of the railroad will help encourage maintenance and historically sensitive alterations. It should be noted that while Local Historic Designation provides regulatory protection from demolition and insensitive alterations for historic buildings within the district, it does not regulate new construction.

The recommended boundaries for the Local Historic District are based on the original landholdings of the Disston Estate. As seen on the map below (Fig. 6.2.1), the boundaries include the Delaware River to the east and Magee to the south. The northern boundary follows the historic railroad track in the industrial section, Princeton from Keystone to the alley between Torresdale and Marsden, and Tyson from that alley to Cottage. The western boundary, which approximates a creek that served as the original western edge of the Estate, follows the alley between Jackson and Gillespie from Magee to Knorr, Cottage from Knorr to Tyson, and the alley between Torresdale and Marsden from Tyson to Princeton.



Fig. 6.2.1: Historic Disston Boundary Map.

## National Register District Designation

In addition to a designation as a Local Historic District, designation as a National Register of Historic Places District would benefit the area as well. Unlike local designation, National Register status does not provide legal protection from demolition or alterations, except in cases of government projects requiring Section 106 review under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966. However, it does qualify contributing historic buildings for applicable federal preservation funding and tax incentives for rehabilitation. Projects must follow the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties to utilize the tax incentives.

By using the same boundaries for a National Register District as those recommended for a Local Historic District above, preservation funding and tax incentives could be available for redevelopment of the industrial area, as well as for individual commercial, institutional, or residential buildings.

## Historic Branding & Awareness

A large component of a preservation approach for the Historic Disston Estate should include an emphasis on promoting awareness of the area's unique history as a company town. Designation as a Local Historic District should help to promote the area locally, and National Register status will give Disston national credibility as an historic place, for residents as well as outsiders and visitors. Additional efforts towards "historic branding" will increase residents' awareness of the historic significance of their neighborhood and homes, encouraging maintenance and improvements. Branding can also attract new residents and businesses to fill vacancies, development opportunities for the industrial waterfront, and visitors to the historic area.

While the area is known today as the "Historic Disston Estate," discussion regarding the selection of a name to be used for historic branding may yield suggestions that better represent the area as an historic company town. Historic interpretation and marketing should then be based on whatever "brand name" is chosen.



## Industrial Area

The historic Disston factory buildings in the industrial area will likely face the greatest threat of future demolition, resulting from both “demolition by neglect” as well as potential large-scale redevelopment. Because the physical expression of the Disston Estate as a company town is reflected by the connection between the industrial and residential areas, loss of the industrial fabric would be devastating to the historic integrity of the place. For this reason, the industrial area should be included in the Local and National Register District designations as discussed above.

However, in addition to these designations, a preservation-friendly development strategy is necessary for the area. This should begin with the identification and conditions survey of historic Disston buildings that should be preserved, as well as those areas of the site that could be cleared and used for new development. To encourage the adaptive reuse of the existing historic buildings, incentives in the form of grants or tax credits should be offered to fund a visible seed, or catalyst project that would showcase the sustainable use of a historic building. Instituting an interim plan to support the existing businesses and employees in the area to encourage upkeep and maintenance should protect the buildings from further degradation.

Before the acceptance of any proposed redevelopment schemes, the appropriate mix of industrial, commercial, and residential uses for the site should be examined. In part, the retention of successful traditional light industrial and manufacturing companies, as well as the addition of similar new uses, will not only stay true to the historic nature of Disston, but will bring new jobs to the Tacony area. Commercial or institutional development of parts of the site, including restaurants and retail, would also attract visitors and maximize the waterfront and historic attributes of the area. These uses could also line access ways and buffer adjacent industrial uses. Finally, residential development should be minimal or absent within the boundaries of the Disston site, as neighboring tracts have already been zoned for this type of redevelopment and the historic housing stock west of the railroad and Disston Park provides an existing residential base.

## Commercial Area

The commercial corridors in the Disston Estate area of Tacony are Torresdale and Longshore Avenues. Originally, Longshore Avenue was the major commercial corridor, but the introduction of the trolley line in the early 20th century led to a shift to Torresdale. Today these commercial areas suffer from vacant storefronts, storefronts that have been filled in for first floor residential use, a lack of business variety, and insensitive alterations to the historic fabric.

To encourage commercial revitalization of these corridors, a plan that focuses on a “cross-shaped” area centered at the central intersection of Torresdale and Longshore should be developed. This area should extend one block west and a few blocks east of Torresdale along Longshore, as well as several blocks in either direction along Torresdale. Led by a Main Street manager or other dedicated staff at the Tacony Community Development Corporation, a seed development project at this critical intersection could set an example for further improvements. Priorities should include filling vacancies with a greater variety of businesses that are less service and more retail oriented, promoting visually appealing storefront designs with fewer security grates and roll-downs, and restoring some of the historic retail façades.

## Residential Area

The buildings in the residential area of the Historic Disston Estate exhibit a wide variety of insensitive façade alterations and signs of deferred maintenance. By designating the area as a Local Historic District, any demolition or new alterations or additions will be subject to review by the Philadelphia Historic Commission to protect the historic integrity of the neighborhood. Better enforcement of existing codes would also help encourage maintenance.

Beyond regulatory control, educating residents about the historic nature of their neighborhood and homes should lead to an increased desire to maintain their properties. Renovation workshops and neighborhood design awards would encourage historically sensitive improvements. Finally, homeowners may be eligible for federal preservation funding under a National Register designation, as well as city-wide incentive programs for historic homeowners.

## Institutional Buildings

There are several “iconic” institutional buildings within the boundaries of the Disston Estate including the Music Hall, the Tacony Savings Fund and Trust building, and several schools and churches. As evidenced by the restoration of the Music Hall in the 1990s, a historically sensitive adaptive reuse of an iconic building can encourage property improvements in the surrounding neighborhood, in addition to saving an important historic resource.

If Disston in its entirety (according to the boundaries described previously) is not included in a Local Historic District, individual local and national historic designation of especially important iconic institutional buildings is recommended. This would provide regulatory protection for these structures, and could promote private investment through the utilization of preservation funding and tax incentives. Adaptive reuse of those buildings that are currently underutilized or suffering from deferred maintenance should be encouraged as catalytic projects.

## Parks & Open Spaces

As noted previously, it is the combination and the connections between the industrial and residential areas of the Disston Estate that reflect the unique history as a company town. In the original layout of the town, Disston Park was created to the west of the railroad tracks to buffer the residential community from the industrial area. It has endured through the construction of I-95 and still serves Tacony residents today. Efforts should be made to preserve this space as a park. The introduction of buildings in the park, such as the proposed firehouse, should be avoided. The park also presents an opportunity to welcome visitors arriving by rail, and the gateway to the rail station should be accessible, well marked, and well maintained.

Disston neighborhood streets are defined by the variety of fences, dooryards, porches and the two and three story buildings that line them and create a cohesive historic vernacular landscape. The detail and scale of these streetscapes can be appreciated by walkers and bikers, but may present challenges to auto circulation. Many of these challenges, in the form of narrow streets, small parking spaces and tight turning radii serve as traffic calming measures, which improve walkability and reinforce the historic building patterns, and they should be preserved.



The connections between the residential and industrial areas also deserve attention as part of any potential redevelopment plan. Examining traffic patterns on the many one-way streets, as well as lighting and landscaping in areas such as the railroad underpasses are important to encourage positive interaction between any redevelopment of the industrial waterfront and proposed waterfront recreational trail and the historic residential and commercial areas. These connections should keep the area walkable and encourage residents to shop and spend time in the neighborhood. Several plans have addressed these issues in detail, such as the North Delaware Riverfront Greenway Master Plan (prepared in 2005-06 by Greenways Incorporated and Econsult Corporation), which in addition to planning for a greenway along the river, has emphasized recommendations such as neighborhood connector streets. Additional plans have been discussed in the Current Policy & Context section.

*Sarah Van Domelen*

*Further discussion of these recommendations can be found in  
"Volume 2"*

