

Germantown Avenue Preservation Planning Studio

Midterm Report

Team C

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## **I. Introduction**

Team C's contribution to the data gathering phase of the Germantown Avenue study has been:

- identification of areas of relative homogeneity
- categorization of buildings and illustration of preservation concerns related to these typologies
- examination of Philadelphia zoning codes for sections relevant to the study area
- evaluation of zoning and other regulatory tools for their utility in furthering preservation goals in the study area.

Figure 1 diagrams this process.

## AREAS OF HOMOGENEITY:

defined by: Demographics  
Economics  
Density  
Building Types  
Activity Levels  
Institutional Influence  
Environment/Landscape  
Building Functions

**TYPOLOGIES:** dictated by  
building type & zoning class

•VARIANCES  
•DEMOLITION PERMITS  
•BUILDING PERMITS

### SITES

Currently Undergoing Change

#### TYPLOGY

Commercial  
Mixed Use  
Post Automobile Commercial  
Apartments  
Institutions  
Row Houses  
Duplex Residential  
Large Lot Residential

#### THREATS

loss of neighborhood anchor  
encroachment  
incompatible rehabilitation  
vacancy  
loss of vitality  
parking lot expansion  
neglect  
deterioration  
unsympathetic additions  
loss of open space  
incompatible neighbors  
red-lining  
abandonment  
cheap rehab/modification  
subdivision  
high maintenance costs

### PRESERVATION CONCERNS

### PLANNING TOOLS



## **II. Areas of Homogeneity**

The areas selected by Team C will provide a useful reference point for planning efforts in the second half of the semester. Furthermore, identification of areas of homogeneity within the study area will provide teams in the second half of the studio with the perspective that various regions of the study area may have different preservation concerns.

Team C identified thirteen areas of relative homogeneity within the study area. A description of the process used to arrive at this conclusion will aid in the understanding of the team's findings.

Prior to making field visits, the team discussed a number of factors which it thought might have an influence on the various areas within the study site. These included:

### **1. Demographics**

The team determined the location of census tracts in the study area, and, using the demographic information from census statistics, compiled a chart containing such information as the racial composition, income, and percentage of homeowners in each tract.

### **2. Governmental divisions**

Although the study area all falls under the jurisdiction of the city of Philadelphia, the team examined the divisions made by agencies such as the postal service and the census bureau for their potential relevance to neighborhood boundaries.

### **3. Transportation networks**

The development of the study area as a residential suburb of Philadelphia has historically been connected to the excellent trolley and rail service to the area. Recognizing that Team A will be providing more detailed information about the historic role of transportation, Team C identified current automobile transportation corridors, such as the Germantown Avenue, Lincoln Drive and Cheltenham Avenue, and noted the location of each train station on what are now SEPTA's R7 and R8 lines in order to ascertain what impact these transportation networks had on any particular area.

### **5. Institutions**

Institutions ranging from schools to churches can have key roles in defining a neighborhood or community. Some provide an architectural motif followed in the area, while others provide open space, or a needed community service. Others may be gathering places, or the center of community social activity. With all this in mind, Team C worked to identify the major institutions in the study area.

#### 6. Open space

A general identification of public parks and large tracts of private open space was made in consultation with Team A in order to evaluate the role of open space in defining communities or dividing regions within the study area.

Observation of the study area during field visits led the team to consider these additional factors:

--Building typologies and the prevalent characteristics of use. Had many conversions taken place? What was the density of the area?

--Level of activity. Was there a lot of commercial or social activity? Was it neighborhood or area wide in nature?

--Appearance. What was the overall character of a section? Were people able and interested in investing time or money in their property? Was the landscape tended, the streets clean, repairs done?

The group weighed these various factors in assigning boundaries to the areas. However, because a mix of uses and building typologies characterizes almost all "homogeneous" areas, and the level of activity or upkeep can vary significantly from block to block, one must keep in mind that the term "homogeneous" can only be understood in the most general sense.

For the geographic boundaries of the areas described below, please refer to the map. The following paragraphs identify the primary characteristics of each area.

#### 1. Chestnut Hill -- Large Lot Residential.

Single family homes or large duplexes characterize this area. The majority of these buildings are historic, and all are well maintained. Bounded by the Wissahikion to the south, and carrying over the park's characteristic mature vegetation, trees surround the homes in this area. The region contains institutions and public spaces such as the Philadelphia Cricket Club, the Chestnut Hill Academy, and Pastorious Park, all of which contribute to the feeling of open space. Zoning in this area is mostly R1 and R2, the lowest density residential zoning, with some R3 and R4 lots. It is thus the least intensively zoned area within the study region.

#### 2. Chestnut Hill Commercial/High Density Residential.

The commercial uses along Germantown Avenue are contained in this site, as well as the rowhouses and apartments which have developed within several blocks east and west of the Avenue. Commercial uses are primarily found in two story buildings fronting on Germantown Avenue and sharing a common street line. The buildings generally maintain their historic facade and provide attractive displays oriented to the pedestrian. Parking is primarily on-street, or discreetly hidden behind the buildings. The shops cater to a local market, but increasing numbers of chain stores, albeit tailored to affluent clientele, are locating stores in this region.

#### 3. Cresheim Corridor

This relatively narrow, green, open space, extending north from Lincoln Drive, serves as a visual buffer and dividing line between Chestnut Hill and Mt. Airy. It is a noticable contrast to the sections of Germantown Avenue where buildings line the sidewalks. Some institutions have been included in this region because they contribute to the overall sense of large wooded or open areas. The corridor is marked by suburban commercial developments to the east and west on Germantown Avenue.

#### 4. Mt. Airy/ Lincoln Drive Residential

This residential region is oriented around the southern SEPTA rail line and is composed mainly of large residences and duplexes. It differs from the

Chestnut Hill residential region because it contains a number of small neighborhood commercial areas. In addition, this area becomes more diverse in its housing types as it spreads eastward. Because this region borders the Wissahickon on the south, it maintains much of the heavy vegetation characterizing Chestnut Hill.

#### 5. Mt. Airy/Germantown Avenue & Dense Residential

This area is marked by small commercial uses and rowhouses oriented for easy access to Germantown Avenue shopping. Holes in the commercial fabric are found throughout this region, seen in vacancies and a decline in neighborhood-oriented commercial uses. Some rehabilitation is visible. The area between Mt. Pleasant and Phil-Elena Streets reflects an influx of residential and institutional structures uncharacteristic of the region.

#### 6. Mt. Airy Rowhouse/Duplex

This region is marked by a high density of small rowhouses. Abandonment and, consequently, incompatible commercial and industrial uses, is common. Schools appear to be predominant in the area, located along Chew Avenue, an arterial road which interrupts the continuity of the surrounding neighborhoods. Cliveden sits in the middle of this region and thus serves as a potential anchor or focus.

#### 7. East Mt. Airy Duplex Residential

Wide streets and heavy vegetation characterize this area of single family homes and duplexes. Blocks are longer and yards are larger than in the region directly to the south. The residences are oriented around the northern SEPTA rail line and the area is similar to area 4, but with more recent buildings and more continuity. Stenton Avenue forms a definite northern boundary as a heavy arterial, and the rail line serves as a southern boundary or buffer against the generally less affluent areas to the south.

#### 8. West Germantown Commercial

This region is largely low-density commercial and mixed use in two story structures, but is broken in places by more modern, facade-less buildings. It is separated from Chelton Avenue by Vernon Park, and occupies the part of Germantown Avenue which ascends the hill to Mt. Airy. Historic properties such as Wyck also serve to break up the character of this region.



#### 9. Southwest Germantown Residential

Rowhouses and duplexes are predominant in this area, but larger residences, churches, institutions, and historic properties serve as neighborhood anchors. These anchors are typically located on large corner lots, and if they are found derelict, the surrounding neighborhood is usually in a similar condition. The Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion is an example of an successful and influential anchor in this region.

#### 10. Cheltenham Avenue Commercial Strip

With the exception of a few key buildings, this area does not contain historic fabric. It does contain the most intensive commercial zoning in the study region, and serves as an important transit access. Pavement appears to be dominant because the road is wide, there are several large parking lots, and few trees. The area has great vitality, however, and facades are continuous and well maintained.

#### 11. Southeast Germantown Residential/Transitional

This region is one of unpredictable neighborhoods. The northern parts are largely rowhouses, while the southern areas contain more duplexes and apartment buildings. Throughout the region, rehabilitation projects are visible, but more money seems to be invested in the southern areas, which also have significantly more vegetation. Neighborhood vitality is frequently defined by the presence of a neighborhood commercial or church anchor. Areas directly adjacent to Germantown Avenue are included in this region because they no longer form a continuous commercial fabric.

#### 12. Colonial Germantown/Friends School

This small region is the only distinctly colonial area. Market Square and the restorations which surround it read as a separate section largely because they do not provide street level conveniences that cater to the community. The area is well-kept and supports vegetation, but is not reflective of the surrounding community and does not seem widely used by local residents.

#### 13. Northeast Germantown Residential

A mixture of densities is found in the region, from old worker rowhousing to relatively large-lot historic residences, presumably catering to the nearby mills at Wayne Junction in the past. Variations in the character of these

neighborhoods can be found from block to block, but the area is completely residential. Greenery is more noticable among these rowhouse areas than others described above because many of the abandoned lots have been overtaken by vegetation. Some small rehabilitation projects are visible, but most blocks are in need of general maintenance.

### **III. Building Typologies**

The complex mix of building types and the diverse characters seen from block to block in some parts of the study area led the group to begin to identify building typologies. These typologies were based on the physical structure of the buildings and the buildings' uses. The building typologies used by Team C are:

- A. Single Family Residential
- B. Duplexes
- C. Rowhouses
- D. Apartments
- E. Institutions
- F. Mixed Use and Commercial Development

The following reports discuss several sites for each typology. The sites presented here vary in condition and in geographic locations. The team does not suggest that these sites are statistically representative--rather, these examples illustrate issues the team decided needed to be addressed after field visits to the study area.

#### **A. Single Family Residential**

##### 7611 St. Martins Lane

This subdivision site is located in a large lot residential area, characterized by single family dwellings and open space. The owner of a large historic house unsuccessfully petitioned to divide the house into several apartments, but he did receive a variance to subdivide his property and construct two additional homes on the site. This necessitated the removal of a portion of the original house. The final result of this project--two small new homes, more driveways, and removal of a chunk of the original house-- have a greater impact on the character of the neighborhood than the impact from apartments ever could have.

If the community values preservation of the open space created by large lots, it must have a way to overcome residents inevitable arguments that taking care of these stately homes is too taxing on a family budget in the 1990s. By raising the amount of land needed to subdivide, and by making it

easier to divide the homes into apartments, one would have a useful carrot and a useful stick. In order to address community concerns about the preservation of social character, one could develop strict standards--outlining the square footage requirements, changes visible from the exterior (such as additional entrances, and the placement of parking places). Owner occupancy of one of the units could even be a requirement. It is important to note that many of the Houston homes area actually duplexes, but that the quality of design minimizes any feeling of increased density. Neighbors concerned about noise and parking problems can be reassured by having strict and enforceable nuisance regulations and off-street parking rules.

In an era of smaller families, later marriage, and a growing elderly population, conversions such as the ones addressed here may be an increasingly important tool for preserving community character, by providing an opportunity for people to find attractive, affordable housing in the communities where they have roots.

#### 5214-5218 Germantown Avenue

In contrast to the St. Martins' Lane site, these homes on Germantown Avenue have been converted from single family dwellings to three and five unit apartments. Increasing the population density at this site has had no diminishing impact on the site or neighborhood. In fact, it stands out noticeably from its neighbors because of the level of maintenance and the historic appearance of the structures.

*7141 McCallum*

#### 7021 Lincoln Avenue

This property is a large dwelling which appears to have been built originally as a single family dwelling. Located in a neighborhood of similar properties, on a tree-shaded corner lot surrounded by a low hedge, this property has been used as an institution for some time, because various additions have been made to the sides and rear of the house. The property, which had been vacant for some time, had recently been improved at an expense of 90,000 and reopened as an AIDs hospice. According to the press, the neighborhood has been supportive of this usage, even when the lengthy process of gaining government support and funding led activists to encamp at the site.

Group homes are needed to serve a variety of people. Their impact on the single family neighborhoods where appropriate properties are most likely to be located will need to be regulated by performance standards, and perhaps

by rules limiting the number or spacing of such institutions in any given community. The level of care taken by an institutional property undoubtedly has an impact on neighbors' perception of the property. Supporting this type of conversion will further the preservation of these large homes and the open space around them.

## **B. Duplexes**

### 5229-31 McKean Avenue, Germantown:

This duplex is one of several look-alike buildings on McKean Avenue. The street is characterized by large trees and a lot of greenery, and is curious in that it is paved with brick. Of the surrounding structures, several are abandoned and others are occupied but in only moderate repair. A permit was granted for residential alteration and conversion of this property which would invest \$60,253 into each half of the duplex, presumably converting it into a series of apartments.

Abandonment is the main concern on this block, and it is a preservation threat in its indication of both the relative instability of the neighborhood and the potential loss of derelict structures. Preservation planning in the form of financial incentives for rehabilitation could restore residents to the structures and thus help to return economic vitality to the neighborhood. The large sum to be invested in this duplex indicates an upward trend which may consequently encourage the restoration of other abandoned properties nearby.

One interesting aspect of this block is that trees and shrubs obscure the abandoned structures, disguising the true character of the neighborhood in a way which would not be possible in a tightly-packed rowhouse area.

### 235 West Schoolhouse Lane, Germantown:

This property is a large lot site on the fringe of an area of well-preserved large residences. The building is unique in its style for the neighborhood and is much larger than the average duplex in our study area. The permit granted was for \$59,500 worth of residential alteration and conversions, likely creating numerous apartments as in the above example.

In this case of a relatively stable neighborhood where abandonment is not the issue, one preservation concern is that of unsympathetic alterations. Significant visible exterior alterations would have an impact on the neighborhood's character and would mark this building as one which does not belong. The money spent on this site, however, seems to be employed in interior alterations and a general sprucing up of the site, working to enhance its value to the neighborhood.

### **C. Rowhouses**

#### 63 and 122 Sharpnack Street, Mount Airy:

These are demolition sites across from each other in the same block where incompatible uses have crept in among old rowhouse neighborhoods. One lot is used for holding tractor-trailer containers, and the other serves as a junkyard. The surrounding blocks have many abandoned buildings and the remaining inhabited structures as in a state of decline.

Here, the issue of incompatible neighbors is the major preservation concern. The existence of the more industrial uses amongst the residential fabric has encouraged a downturn in the community. The value of the properties will decrease, the community will fragment, and the result will be further destruction of residences. Low-cost housing stock is lost here while simple zoning regulations could prevent some of these problems. Preservation planning tools could employ better monitoring of the area to assure that incompatible uses do not infiltrate, and could encourage investment in abandoned properties in an effort to increase the value of the properties as homes rather than as vacant lots.

#### 5000 block of Wakefield Street:

The continuity of the rowhouses on this street has been broken by abandonment and demolition, but the character of the rowhouse development continues to shape the street. Judging by the several abandoned properties and the serious neglect of others, the many open areas are likely demolition sites from the past few years. In contrast to the Sharpnack Street properties, the abandoned lots in this neighborhood have not been taken over by incompatible uses. Instead, they have been left to nature and are largely covered with saplings and greenery. For this reason, this rowhouse area has a significantly different character from than described above.

This part of Wakefield Street is within several blocks of a well-preserved large lot residential area, but its main threat is a lack of economic base for rehabilitation or simple maintenance. This problem is sometimes manifested in the form of "red-lining," a process where area banks essentially draw a red line around a mapped low-income area and determine not to finance property loans within the red boundary. The result is rapid deterioration, as prospective home-owning residents are forced to move elsewhere. Preservation in this area should encourage investment, perhaps through creation or restoration of neighborhood anchors, and acquired ownership and restoration of abandoned and derelict properties. These buildings lie within one of the few areas of Philadelphia which has not been rezoned by the Zoning Remapping Program. This may indicate the need for a neighborhood community group which could work in the residents' best interests.

#### **D. Apartments**

##### The Germantown Apartments

Like institutions, apartment buildings are highly influential ingredients of community character. They are threatened by neglect, deterioration and abandonment. Encroachment occurs when apartment are built without sensitive regard for the character of the surrounding area. Because of its immense size and design, the Germantown apartments, a high rise complex, shaped in an arc, and drawn back from the street line,

##### 500 West Queen Lane

Many apartments in the study area however, exert a positive influence on the surrounding community. The sensitive rehabilitation of 500 W. Queens lane greatly improves the aesthetic qualities of the neighborhood and provides housing. Both these qualities revitalize the spirit of the area. Rehabilitation at this site may encourage others in the neighborhood to invest in their own property.

#### **E. Institutions**

The extensive number of institutions close to or on Germantown Avenue area influential in the creation of character within neighborhoods. These institutions range in size from large college campuses to the numerous

neighborhood churches. When institutional development occurs in an area the changes made can have both positive and negative results. Institutional development must therefore be carefully monitored by neighborhood preservation groups and city planning officers.

Institutional development in an area can have both positive and negative results. Therefore, it must be carefully monitored by city planning officers and neighborhood groups. When institutional development occurs two potential threats to the community can be the loss of green space and encroachment on the surrounding neighborhood. This encroachment can lead to the destruction of historic structures

Institutions with extensive green space within the study area include: the Chestnut Hill Hospital, Germantown Friends School, the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf, the Lutheran Seminary, and Spring Garden College. The zoning for most of these institutions is R-2, which allows for thirty percent of the site to contain buildings, the remaining seventy percent must be open space. The city considers parking lots as open space, therefore by definition open space is not always green space. By zoning most institutions R-2, the city does not sufficiently protect the vast amount of green space owned by institutions in the area.

Many institutions in the study area exert a positive influence on the surrounding community. Stable and successful institutions provide a neighborhood anchor. The Institutional Development District Designation, part of the zoning code which allows institutions to develop a long range plan which guides their land use planning, is a means for the institution to cultivate a bond with the community. (See Section IV, C) However, since not all institutions adopt these plans, preservation of open space and historic structures near institutions depends largely on advocacy by concerned citizens.

#### Germantown Friends Academy

Institutions needing to expand their facilities may encroach on the surrounding neighborhood at the point when they build. Although Germantown Friends rests in a neighborhood of less economic prosperity, it is not isolated from its surrounding neighborhood, is not isolated from its surrounding neighborhood. Their recent demolition of several historic buildings and construction of a fence and parking lot on Germantown Avenue created controversy in the area. The Friends School appears to have



made an effort to develop attractive and non-intrusive elements in the surrounding streetscape.

Church at corner of Wister Avenue and Wakefield Street

Abandoned institutions pose a threat to the character of the community. The church on the corner of Wister Avenue and Wakefield Streets imbue the neighborhood with a sense of loss and hopelessness. The surrounding large stone houses reflect a time when the neighborhood thrived with the church a central focus. When a neighborhood anchor disappears it is likely that stability and shared pride in the community will disappear as well.

## **F. Commercial and Mixed Commercial Uses**

### **Introduction**

With the exception of the lower Germantown Avenue area, between Queen Lane to Hugh Street and Schoolhouse Lane to Rittenhouse Street, all of which is designated Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization Areas; the rest of Germantown Avenue is regulated by the Planning Commission. Because of the limited restriction concerning contextual design, commercial structures tend to at best make only limited gestures toward the existing context, and most of the commercial and mixed use structures are often unsympathetic to the historic fabric in which they are in. One does find, however a few examples of reuse or continued use which shed light on possible planning goals for commercial structures.

### **Dawn One Hour Cleaners - Germantown Avenue, Germantown**

This business clearly shows how mix-use or reuse of an existing structure can be destructive to a historic building. In this structure the conversion from colonial house to cleaners is unsympathetic because the owner felt that he had to advertise his business in the way commercial shopping strips advertise their business-- by using large signage to attract automobiles that are racing by. The only catch to this approach is that automobiles can only drive thirty-five miles per hour and usually only go at about twenty-five miles per hour on Germantown Avenue. This condition enables a business owner like this one to reuse historic signage practices that may attract more customers because it would accent the historic building that it is on.

### **Billboard near Washington Street and Germantown Avenue**

Advertisement on the streets of an urban area gives an extra layer of interest, charm and vitality when it is appropriately designed in regard to the traffic speed (as mentioned in the earlier example) and

in terms of the historic character. This example clearly does not consider any of the above.

#### Mt. Airy Shopping Center 6543 Greene Street

This example clearly shows how planning can regulate and help projects coexist with the historic fabric. In this example, the greenery that is in front of the shopping center greatly enhances the project. Moreover, the signage is sympathetic to the historic context, the only problem is the fact that the developer in this project did not use materials, motifs that are appropriate to Mt. Airy, choosing brick over the ubiquitous Wissahickon schist or similar stone.

#### Chestnut Hill Mobil Station

This example clearly shows how arbitrary corporate design can be. This example has no relationship to the historic context around. It can be in Chestnut Hill or in Cleveland, Ohio, to Mobil Oil Company--the difference is irrelevant. This site clearly demonstrates that in order for a community to witness the construction of sympathetic structures, it must have a well-defined sense of what its character is, and a way to convey that, whether through codes or citizen pressure to interested developers.

### 100 W. Cheltenham

This large four-story commercial building on a visible corner lot in the Cheltenham Avenue commercial area has recently been rehabilitated by the College of North Philadelphia at the cost of \$450,000 for use as a branch campus. The street level stores are currently occupied. This site represents a situation ideal for preservation--the adaptation of an building for new use, preventing a process of decay. This building, which is highly visible, and larger than other buildings in the surrounding blocks, would have a very negative impact on the entire area if it were vacant and derelict.

### 8101-03 Germantown Avenue

This site, an old gas station converted to a video store, represents the opposite of the situation described above. The building is now vacant, and its location on a visible corner lot one passes while climbing the hill to the western end of Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill, sends a message that the area is not prosperous. The rapid failure of a small business suggests that planners should remember that communities need more than just good structures to prosper--and that perhaps small business support services need to be made available.

### Chestnut Hill Wa-Wa, Germantown Avenue

One thinks a convenience store outside an urban area typically sits in a sea of parking, and has uninspired architecture and nuisance problems. The willingness of Wa-Wa to use an existing structure demonstrates that given appropriate zoning tools and incentives, even a convenience store can respect a neighborhood's historic character.

#### **IV. Preservation Tools**

The Philadelphia Municipal Zoning Code is presently the principal land use regulation shaping the pattern of development in the study area. With this in mind, Team C focused on the zoning code in its study of preservation planning tools. In addition to studying the various district regulations, the team tried to ascertain whether the zoning code, as written and applied, seemed to have a positive or negative impact on the preservation of existing structures. Finally, the team evaluated aspects of the code which might be changed or adapted to further preservation concerns.

##### **A. Zoning in the Study Area: An Overview**

Zoning developed as a planning and regulatory tool with the suburban growth of the early twentieth century, and the maturation of the City Beautiful movement. The Supreme Court validated the legality of zoning in the famous case of *Euclid vs. Ambler Realty*. Zoning's principle purpose was to separate "incompatible uses." While the definition of "incompatible uses" is highly subjective, "incompatible" typically refers to situations where there is a strong divergence in use characteristics between two adjacent sites, such as housing located next to an industrial areas. Keep in mind, however, that a single family residential neighborhood may find a duplex incompatible, while other neighborhoods tolerate a mix of uses is welcomed. While zoning's contribution to health, safety and welfare is its primary legal justification, it also serves an important role in protecting property values.

The theory underlying zoning, and, in fact, the concept of a "zone" itself imply that this regulatory tool will be used over a large tract of land. A typical zoning plan will divide an area into uses such as residential, commercial, industrial, and recreation. Then, each of these categories will be further divided according to the intensity of intended use. For example, residential zones might be divided into low density areas for single family detached homes, and high density for row houses or apartments. For each zone, specific standards will be set regulating the minimum lot size, the allowable height of buildings, the relationship of the buildings to the street, the proximity a building can be from any property line, and the amount of a lot that can be covered by the building or parking lots.

The communities along Germantown Avenue developed long before they were ever zoned. Consequently, the zoning one sees today in the study area reflects the use which was existing when the area was zoned, and so varies

from the pattern one would find in a newer suburb or city. The most significant zoning characteristics of the study area are as follows:

1. Commercial areas are spread linearly along the corridor rather than clustered in one area. While one finds a concentration of commercial uses on Chelton Avenue, even this is relatively diffuse.
2. Residential uses are of a mixed density throughout most of the area
3. In keeping with historic development patterns, residential zones in some areas border on industrial sites.
4. Public open space, often a required feature of contemporary zoning regulations for the development of raw land, is substantially lacking in the portions of the study area which developed earliest

#### Conditional Use Permits and Variances

Two other aspects of the zoning ordinance have bearing on our study. These are the granting of conditional use permits and variances. Conditional uses are specific uses which the zoning code will allow in a zone if certain standards are met and the project receives a higher than usual level of scrutiny during the approval process. A home office in a residential zone, or a commercial use that might create more noise in a commercial zone, such as a dog grooming salon might require conditional use permits.

If someone wants to use their property in a way which is not in accordance for the zoning in their area, they may apply for a variance. The variance process is always included in the zoning code to protect the governing body from accusations that they are depriving a property owner of all profitable use of his or her land.

Variances may be granted to benefit the owner, or avoid a lawsuit, but they also may be granted to gain a facility the community wants but did not plan for in the zoning, such as elderly housing at a higher density than the surrounding homes.

The team needed to identify whether the allowed zoning seemed to have an impact on preservation, either by encouraging use compatible with the neighborhood character, or by creating incentives to alter the existing use by either demolition or new constructions. In order to gain some insight into this situation, the group surveyed:

1. Sites where the owners had received, in some cases, used demolition permits. (30 sites)
2. Sites where owners had obtained building permits (18 sites)

City of Philadelphia planning department records provided the information for this study. The time span covered by this study was January 1990, to March 1991. The appendix contains complete lists of the sites visited by Team C.

The team also made field visits to sites where zoning had constrained the owner's ability to use his or her property as desired, and the owner had applied for a variance. Since city records identified 244 variance and conditional use permit applications in the study area between August 1989 and October 1991, the team decided to concentrate on the 36 sites along Germantown Avenue.

Visiting the sites identified throughout the permit and variance applications provided the team with insight about the various preservation concerns as related to zoning. The group reached the following general conclusions:

1. Incompatible neighboring uses, particularly industrial uses, tended to detract from the surrounding residential district.
2. New commercial uses tended to have designs which valued accommodating the automobile over integrating the site into the streetscape.
3. The majority of permits were for rehabilitation, remodeling, or adaptive reuse projects. Consequently, the zoning as existing did not seem to pose a substantial threat to preservation of specific structures. Deterioration seemed to pose a much greater threat to preservation.
4. Conversions seemed to be a common project, both from single family dwelling to mixed use or to multi-family dwellings.

#### Attempts to alter the land use patterns through zoning

The Germantown Redevelopment Area Plan, written in 1967, which applies to Germantown and Mt. Airy, provides interesting perspective on the role zoning was to have on the development of that area. Identifying too much land devoted to commercial activity, too much density of residential areas,

and too much incompatible land use as among the principle problems with the area, the plan proposed rezoning in order to concentrate commercial activity into tidy clusters around the intersections of Chelton and Washington Avenues with Germantown Avenue.

Of interest for preservation, this plan proposed the addition of three new zoning classifications, the R2-C, the R5-C, and the R-9C, which would facilitate the conversion of single family homes into multi-unit residences, while limiting new construction to the equivalent single family use. This would encourage the preservation of housing stock by allowing owners an easy means to convert large and expensive to maintain properties to ones more appealing to the contemporary housing market.

Making a general contrast between the 1967 plan and the current conditions, one finds that commercial activity has become more diffuse and spread out along larger sections of the avenue.



## **B. The Zoning Remapping Project**

The Zoning Remapping Project can offer several things to preservation, both of communities and of historic structures. Between 1965 and 1988, 60% of Philadelphia was remapped/rezoned through this program, including almost the entire region of our study site. The area north of Germantown Avenue, east of Cheltenham Avenue, and within the arc of the SEPTA tracks is essentially the only area which has not been rezoned.

The rezoning process is usually initiated by a community organization which approaches a District Councilperson or the Planning Commission. Their goal is a stabilization of communities through recognition of their current character and readjustment of the zoning to prevent use changes which could threaten this stability. The end product is most often a zoning map which reflects the extent of current use in an area. The program does more, however, in that it also fosters a zoning-literate community group which can continue to work toward positive planning and zoning development in their region.

The actual remapping process requires the community group to represent the interests of all zoning categories with the questioned region (residential, commercial, and industrial, if applicable). This group prepares a rezoning proposal, which is discussed with the planning commission staff and then prepared for presentation to the community at large. Three maps are prepared; one showing the existing zoning, one marking the proposed zoning, and one highlighting those properties which are proposed to undergo zoning changes. The proposal is reviewed and its acceptance is voted on at community meetings, where the region's diverse interests and needs may be expressed. This process requires that a large segment of the population become exposed to zoning practices, and thus learn how they might better serve their community.

An important aspect of this program is the role of the community organization. Since the process is usually begun by the local organization, areas which do not have a strong group will be most in danger of incompatible uses which may occur without a zoning remapping. Many remappings have been done in Chestnut Hill, and the Planning Commission attributes that partially to the fact that influential people who are informed about zoning have typically inhabited the area.

Though this program was not designed with historic preservation in mind, it is obvious that a community group could request rezoning which would

preserve the physical or structural character of the neighborhood. Philadelphia overhauled its 1933 zoning ordinance in 1962 to include 43 different zoning classifications. Since 1962, the number of classifications has expanded to 54, largely as a result of issues raised during the Zoning Remapping Program. The remapping program is a good way to approach the introduction of new zoning classifications which deal more specifically with the historic preservation of a neighborhood.

### **C. Special Zoning Districts**

Aspects of the Philadelphia Zoning Code can be utilized to promote preservation planning. The sections in the code that are relevant to the preservation of the Germantown Avenue studio site are:

1. Historic Building Designations
2. Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization Areas
3. Institutional Development Districts (I.D.D)
4. Residential-Commercial Six Zoning
5. Environmental Controls for the Wissahickon Watershed.

#### 1. Historic Buildings Designation

In its mission statement, the Historic Buildings designation clearly specifies its preservation goals. The statement reads: "The purpose of this section is to promote the public welfare, by preserving historic buildings which are important to the education, culture, traditions, and the economic values of the city, and to afford the city, interested persons, historical societies or organizations the opportunity to acquire or to arrange for the preservation of such buildings." (Philadelphia Zoning Code, p. 220-1) Team D has focused on this tool, but it is mentioned here because it is important to understand it is part of the Zoning code. The Department of Public Property with the aid of the Philadelphia Historical Commission develops a list of buildings that the Commission deems historically significant to the city. No building can be demolished on the list unless a permit is obtained from the Department of Licenses and Inspections.

#### 2. Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization Areas

Germantown Avenue between Queen Lane and High Street and Green Street between School House Lane and Rittenhouse Street are designated Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization Areas. The designation was developed to provide tools for the revitalization of deteriorated neighborhood commercial areas. With the intention of improving the aesthetic qualities of the neighborhoods, the designation strictly limits the design and size of signs in the Revitalization areas.

#### 3. Institutional Development District (I.D.D.)

The I.D.D. is intended to encourage the carefully planned development of institution. For institutions that biggest incentive of this designation is that each change within the area does not need approval after the grand scheme has been devised and approved. In terms of preservation, the I.D.D. can be advantageous because community groups are often involved in and aware of the establishment of long term plans and can lobby for preservation concerns. Also, the I.D.D. establishes limits on future development. However, the for institutions unsure of their future plans, the I.D.D. designation may not appeal. For example, a hospital which wanted flexibility to move their site, chose not to develop an I.D.D. Also, in the case of hospitals, which are highly competitive with each other, one hospital may not want other hospitals knowing their long range plans. The public nature of the I.D.D. process threatens the privacy of their growth plans. In cases where a permanent site has been established, where significant growth is expected overtime, and the institution want to establish bonds with the surrounding community, the institution may chose to utilize the I.D.D. planning process.

#### 4. Residential-Commercial 6 Zone (RC-6)

Like the I.D.D. , the RC-6 designation was devised for districts interested in developing a long term plan. Both the RC-6 and the I.D.D. are applied for by the interested party. RC-6 was instituted to "permit development of ground with the view toward preservation, to the extent possible, of existing topography, trees, natural waterways and other natural amenities unique to the property." (Phila. Zoning Code, 87) Like the I.D.D., development must occur in accordance with an approved development plan. The RC-6 zone is applicable to parcels of land larger than five acres. In areas where extensive development has already occurred the RC-6 designation as it is written now is not an appropriate growth management tool. However, with revision the idea of the RC-6 zone could be adopted to direct new construction in areas with significant manmade as well as natural environments.

#### 5. The Environmental Controls for the Wissahickon Watershed

These controls establish "development standards to control surface-water runoff, erosion, and sedimentation during construction as well as criteria that would prohibit development that could damage the ecology of the watershed." (Phila. Zoning Code)

The controls establish the amount of slope which may be built on and setback between swales and streams. Usually engineers must be hired for

these projects and that adds to the developer's costs and often slows down the process of development, which, indirectly, benefits preservation.

While, with the exception of the Historic Building designation, none of these zoning tools directly address preservation, one can clearly see that they contain elements which could be revised and adapted to further specific preservation goals.

## **V. Freedom Plaza: Preservation and Community Planning**

Freedom Square is a shopping center and memorial park that is currently being developed by the Greater Germantown Housing Development Corporation (GGHDC). Since its inception in 1974, this non-profit community revitalization organization has concentrated on housing residents of the low income community that inhabits the Northeast Germantown area, north of Germantown Avenue between Colter Street and Logan Street.

Freedom Square is the first commercial venture that the GGHCD has undertaken. The site is located on the corner of Wister Street and Germantown Avenue. On this site, the first German inhabitants settled in the New World, and moreover, this site was where the first protest against the concept of slavery. The original colonial structures of that period were condemned and torn down by the city only twenty years ago by the city after years of neglect. Behind the site is an abandoned dye factory which is made out of Wissahickon Schist, a native stone in the region. The factory takes up the upper half of the site.

The Freedom Square Project consists of a twenty thousand square foot shopping center that will sit perpendicular to Germantown Avenue. It will house one large anchor store, People's Drug, a liquor store, and several other small retail merchants. In front of it there will be a small sitting plaza which will commemorate the first Abolitionist protest and a large parking lot to accommodate the cars of patrons using the shopping center. Behind this complex, in the center of the site there will be a forty-seven apartment unit, and a five-story brick elderly home. On the back side there will be nineteen rehabilitated and/or new rowhouse units.

Obviously, the shopping center has the most influence on the streetscape and genius loci of Germantown Avenue. The shopping center will be a one story structure with the structural capability of supporting an additional storey at a later date. The materials which were selected with the consultation of the Historical Commission are stucco, glazed concrete block and glass with a gabled metal roof. The senior citizen home, a brick structure with facades that follow the same articulation of the typical Germantown rowhouse, will attempt to

fit in with the existing context.

Several issues have arisen concerning the conception and manifestation of the Freedom Plaza project. The majority of the people in this neighborhood have limited access to transportation, and a shopping center within walking distance of the residential areas is clearly needed for Germantown. Moreover, a shopping area that can be policed against loitering is important. The liquor store located across the street from the site has created a problem with loitering which deters potential customers from the areas retail services. . The senior citizen home answers the ever growing problem of senior citizen homeless that exists in Germantown.

The problems which had to be confronted in the process of planning this project to be a reality have been numerous as well diverse. One of the ever present problems facing a non-profit group is a limited budget. The G.G.H.D.C must direct their funds to build projects that fulfill the most basic needs, and Freedom Square is no exception. With its strict budget this project could not afford to address all of the preservation issues present in Germantown. Moreover, this group had to face the more drastic problem of an environmental cleanup of the abandoned factory on the site which will cost two million dollars.

In conclusion, the Freedom Square Project is a perfect example of the needs of the people of the community over-ruling most of the issues of preservation--as preservation is traditionally understood. In an area that has sizable low income population with a forty-two percent unemployment rate, Freedom Square can answer the problems of safe convenient shopping and also give additional jobs in this area of Germantown. However, the plans reclamation of the site, and its conversion to a neighborhood shopping area raise issues in community preservation. Furthermore, participation of the Historical Commission in the planning process, working to develop a project that is in keeping with the community to the extent possible while at the same time recognizing the practical demands for design and materials in this area points to a possible way to incorporate preservation ideas into other planning processes.

## *Building Permits*

Address	Zoning	Type	Cost
215 W. Walnut	R5	Resid. alt. & conversion.	
333 W. Upsal	R4	non-resid. alt. & convers.	83,900
6460 Greene	R4	non-resid. alt. & convers.	94,500
6620 Germantown	C2	non-resid. alt. & convers.	50,000
100 W. Chelton	C2	non-resid. alt. & convers.	50,000
700 W. Walnut		Resid. alt. & conversion.	57,350
7021 Lincoln Dr.	R5	Resid. alt. & conversion.	90,000
5323 Newhall	R5	5+ unit dwelling	1,300,000
6301 Chew		retail	500,000
7700 Germantown	C7	retail	512,000
6543 Greene	C2	non-resid. alt. & convers.	750,000
100 W. Schoolhouse	R3	non-resid. alt. & convers.	396,821
6826 Ardleigh	R2	Churches	250,000
11 W. Mermaid Lane	C7	single family detached	150,000
710 W. Allens	R1	Resid. alt. & conversion.	180,000
828 Carpenters Lane	R2	Resid. alt. & conversion.	55,000
5429 Lena	G2	Resid. alt. & conversion.	94,500
8623 Germantown	C2	non-resid. alt. & convers.	58,000
7141 McCallum	R4	non-resid. alt. & convers.	550,000
11 W. Upsal	R4	Resid. alt. & conversion.	72,220
215 W. Walnut	R5	Resid. alt. & conversion.	732,700
217 W. Chelton	C	non-resid. alt. & convers.	450,000
235 W. Schoolhouse	R4	Resid. alt. & conversion.	59,500
5229-31 McKean	R5	Resid. alt. & conversion.	120,603
500 W. Queen Lane	R5A	Resid. alt. & conversion.	200,407
5429 Germantown	R4	non-resid. alt. & convers.	57,000
610 E. Mt. Pleasant		non-resid. alt. & convers.	98,000



## Demolition Permits

Address	Zoning	Type
6620 Germantown	C2	partial
103 Duval	R5	partial
107 Harvey	R5	partial
40 W. Chelton	C3	non-residential
5424 Germantown	C2	partial
5354 Germantown	C2	non-resid.
38 Manheim	R10	partial
15 W. Penn	C2	non-resid.
278 Bringham	R9	residential
5325 Germantown	R9	non-resid.
704 Locust	R9A	residential
242 Dorset	9A	residential
265 E. Hottel	R9A	residential
6719 Musgrave	R5	residential
63 E. Sharpnack	9A	residential
122 E. Sharpnack	9A	non-resident.
7001 Wissahickon	R2	residential
7003 Wissahickon	R2	residential

# Zoning Variance Permit Applications for Germantown Avenue

ADDRESS	Zoning Action	SUMMARY	Zoning
4800-10	denied	auto repair	C2
4811	approved	residential facility for female offend	C2
4811	approved	school, day care	C2
5208	approved	3 family residence, conversion	R5
5214	approved	six family dwelling, conversion	C2
5218	approved	five family dwelling, conversion	C2
5325-33	approved	used car lot	C2
5354-58	approved	accessory parking lot	C2
5422	approved	1 story add, 6 family dwelling & day	C2
5424-26	approved	private parking lot, 8' fence	C2
5729-35	remanded	open air flea market	C2
5847-51	approved	social hall	C2
6330	approved	4 family dwelling, conversion	C1
6338	approved	photo studio and 2 family dwelling	C1
6364	remanded	28 unit 3 story apartment, 10 parki	R9
6370	approved	doctor's office & two family dwellin	C1
6526-30	approved	subdivide two lots, 2 C1 uses	C1
6833-35	approved	addition, fish market, 3 family dwell	C2
7136-38	approved	addition, restaurant /bar	C2
7301	approved	addition	
7600	approved	construction office	R2
7611	approved	subdivision, 4 C2 stores	R5
7611 St Martin's	approved	subdivision	R2
7700	approved	retail stores, parking	C7
8030	approved	take out restaurant 1st floor, social	C1
8100-02	approved	pet grooming service	C1
8101-03	denied	retail coffee, tea	C1
8101-03	denied	retail video	C1
8108	approved	real estate office	R5A
8234-36	approved	one story add, doctors' office	R5
8400	approved	demolish and reconstruct, parking	C7