



REVITALIZING THE *Garden Court* BUSINESS DISTRICT

February 2006

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KEENER
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INTRODUCTION

The Garden Court Business District of West Philadelphia consists of approximately two blocks of commercial establishments along Spruce Street, 48th Street, 47th Street, and Pine Street. The stores sell a variety of convenience goods from pizza and donuts to seafood and auto parts. Some offer services such as video rental, auto repair, and dry cleaning. While located at the edge of the historic Garden Court residential neighborhood, and adjacent to a number of other neighborhoods, the Garden Court Business District does not capture a substantial share of business from nearby residents. This plan identifies some of the reasons for this and suggests activities that aim to revitalize the Garden Court Business District into a unique, appealing neighborhood commercial district. This plan recognizes that the character of the business district could change significantly once the West Philadelphia High School relocates and if plans for redeveloping the Croydon Apartments and the adjacent high school athletic fields come to fruition. As such, this plan also identifies a number of design principles to help guide future development in the area so that it complements plans to revitalize the business district.



PROJECT TIMELINE

Feb 2003:	Received \$7,000 Citizens Bank planning grant
Jun 2003:	Retained marketing consultant (Market Knowledge)
Sep 2003:	Received \$9,500 City Commerce Dept. planning grant
Dec 2003:	Conducted consumer and merchant marketing surveys
Mar 2004:	Community meeting to discuss preliminary survey results
Jun 2004:	Retained urban design consultant (Brown & Keener)
Aug 2004:	Received \$10,000 State Community Development planning grant
Sep 2004:	Discussion of initial urban design recommendations
Nov 2004:	Met with Councilwoman Blackwell to discuss recommendations
Jan 2005:	Community meeting to discuss preliminary urban design recommendations
Sep 2005:	Received \$9,000 Citizens Bank grant for tree planting



Commercial Areas



Emmanuel Church



High School Athletic Fields



Community Tennis & Garden Facilities

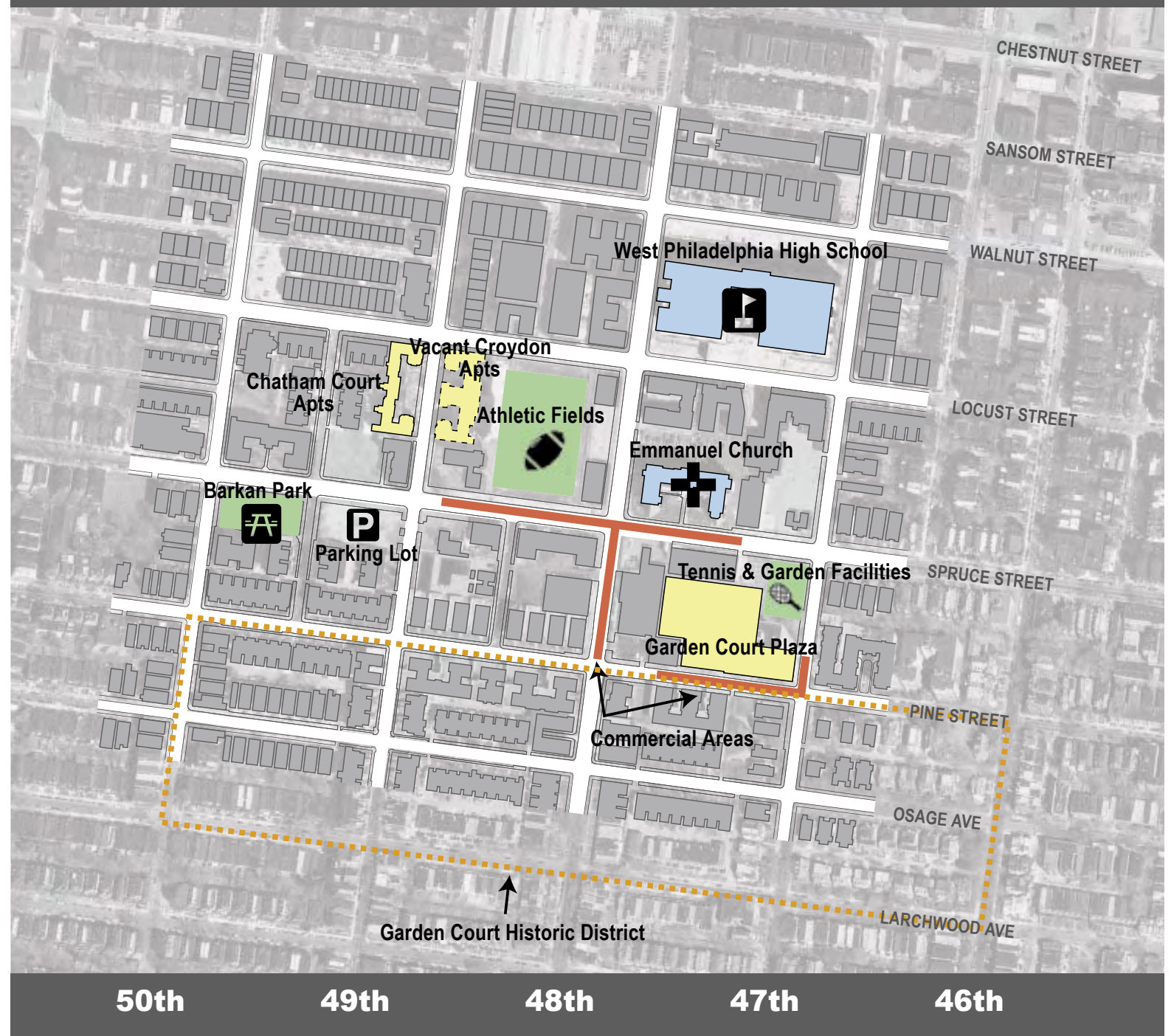


Municipal Parking Lot

LOCATIONS & LANDMARKS

Garden Court

This map highlights certain places and buildings that have a strong visual presence in the community. These locations and landmarks often contribute to a neighborhood's distinct identity. They could also simply be places that residents and visitors often frequent, such as a café.



LOCATIONS & LANDMARKS

Commercial Areas

The Garden Court Business District has several small pockets of commercial areas. The first runs east/west between 47th and 49th Streets along Spruce. It contains many eateries, including a crab house and pizza place, in addition to a dollar store, beauty salon, chiropractic office, beauty salons, medical offices, auto repair shops, and laundromats, all located on the south-side of the street. Wide sidewalks and street trees separate businesses from traffic, offering significant potential for a lively pedestrian space.

A second commercial area in Garden Court runs from Spruce to Pine Streets, along 48th Street. A grocer, beer distributor, dollar store, and video store line either side of the street. The third commercial area stretches half a block north and half a block west from the corner of 47th and Pine Street. Ground level caterers, gift shops, laundromats, and convenience stores sit beneath one of the tallest buildings in the neighborhood, an apartment complex.

Garden Court is also home to several educational and religious institutions that have a strong visual presence in the area, including the Emmanuel Church and the West Philadelphia High School. The high school's athletic fields are adjacent to the primary commercial corridor along Spruce Street and is currently being considered for development.

Community Gardens and Tennis Courts are located at 47th and Spruce, at the entry to the Garden Court neighborhood from Spruce Street. The tennis courts are free and open to local residents.

This quiet, tree-lined residential neighborhood was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1984. Built in the 1920s as one of the first automobile suburbs in the city, the neighborhood represents an important contribution to the history of planning and architecture. It is also a very pleasant place to live.



West Philadelphia High School

Emmanuel Church

Athletic Fields

Community Gardens & Tennis Courts

Garden Court Historic District



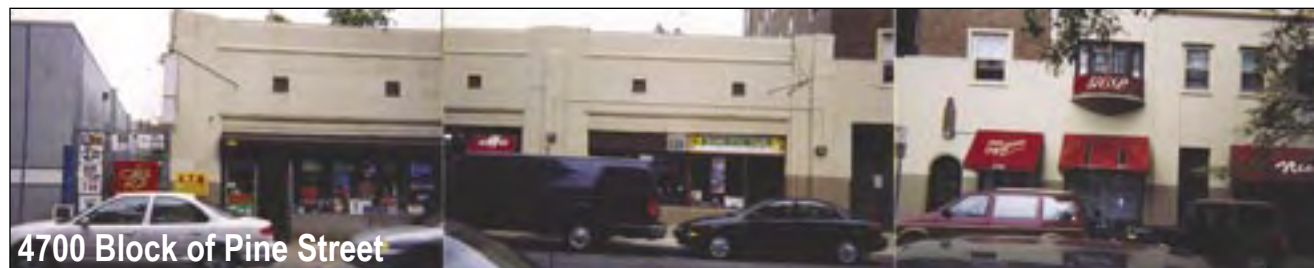
4700 Block of Spruce Street



4800 - 4822 Spruce Street



4832 - 4846 Spruce Street



4700 Block of Pine Street



300 Block of S. 47th Street (West side)



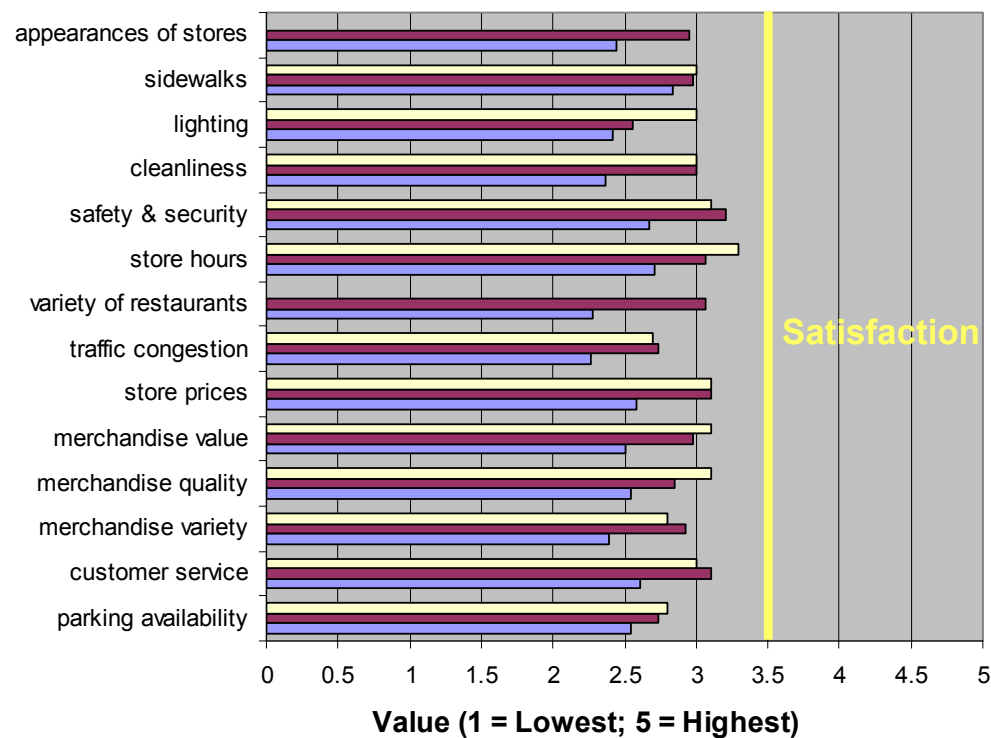
300 Block of S. 48th Street (East side)



300 Block of S. 48th Street (West side)

MARKET STUDY

Customer Satisfaction



The Garden Court Civic Association hired Market Knowledge, a market research firm, to study the business district. Market Knowledge conducted demographic analyses and customer surveys, which revealed the following:

Customer Base

Typically young, female African-American customers. It is not drawing many customers from south of Spruce Street, who are primarily homeowners with more disposable income. This group primarily shops on Baltimore Pike in Springfield or on Delaware Avenue in Philadelphia.

Assets

Contains a good mix of businesses and convenience offerings.

Challenges

Poor lighting, unattractive facades/signage, vandalism, loitering, parking problems, overall customer dissatisfaction.

Most Desired Businesses

Bakery, sit-down restaurant, cafe

Key Recommendations

- Fill vacancy at 4806-4808 Spruce Street and expand retail offerings within the district.
- Add a cafe/restaurant where people can hang out.
- Improve aesthetics and resolve sidewalk issues at auto repair shops.
- Improve lighting and signage.
- Target niche customers (renters, sport enthusiasts, pet owners, local employees, commuters).
- Seek channel partners to attract more customers (e.g., senior centers, swim club, property management companies, school groups).

Most Wanted Businesses

Customers

All Surveys			Intercept Surveys		
Product or Service	Count	Index	Product or Service	Count	Index
bakery	78	2.7	pet supplies	19	2.0
sit down restaurant	66	2.3	café/coffee shop	18	1.9
café/coffee shop	65	2.2	bakery	18	1.9
x book store	53	1.8	* legal office	18	1.9
x hardware	51	1.8	eyeglasses shop	16	1.7
florist	44	1.5	clothing	14	1.5
? grocery store	43	1.5	sports wear & goods	14	1.5
pet supplies	39	1.3	shoe store (repair)	13	1.4
shoe store (repair)	33	1.1	x book store	13	1.4
cards & gifts	33	1.1	* sit down restaurant	12	1.3
eyeglasses shop	31	1.1	* doctors office	12	1.3
x music store	30	1.0	x music store	10	1.1
clothing	29	1.0	electronics	8	0.8

Theme: "A place to be with my neighbors & get my chores done"



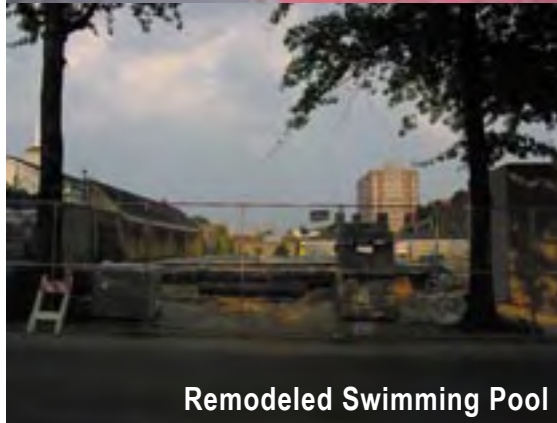
COMMUNITY ASSETS & RESOURCES

Garden Court

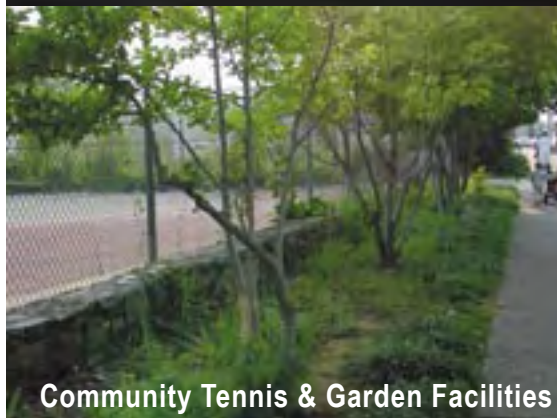
As a community plans for the future and addresses its challenges, it should leverage its strengths. This section highlights some of the community's assets and resources that draw people to the neighborhood and contribute to its unique identity. It also highlights some of the assets that are currently being underutilized.



Barkan Park



Remodeled Swimming Pool



Community Tennis & Garden Facilities



Garden Court Historic District



Neighborhood Diversity

COMMUNITY ASSETS & RESOURCES

West Philadelphia High School

West Philadelphia High School has a tremendous physical presence in the neighborhood and is a source of significant pedestrian and automobile traffic to the Garden Court Business District.

Remodeled Swimming Pools

The University City Swim Club has remodeling its swimming pool facility. This refurbished amenity will draw many people to the neighborhood in the warmer months who could contribute to the customer base of a revitalized Garden Court Business District.

Garden Court Community Association

The Garden Court Community Association is a resident-powered action group committed to neighborhood enhancement and maintenance. With strong ties to University City District and University of Pennsylvania, they have many civic and institutional resources, in addition to the dedication and work ethic of its board and members.

University City District

The University City District “builds effective partnerships to maintain a clean and safe environment and to promote, plan, and advocate for University City’s diverse, urban community.” The Garden Court Business District is located within the UCD’s service area. The University City District offers residents and business districts a host of services, many extending vastly beyond those offered by the City of Philadelphia, including greater police patrols, streetscape services, and neighborhood image and branding.

Neighborhood Diversity

The architects and developers of the Garden Court residential neighborhood included a variety of housing types, which, during the 1920s, made the neighborhood diverse both in terms of income and ethnicity. The combination of apartments, condominiums, rowhouses, twinhomes, and single-family homes maintains Garden Court’s diversity to this day.

Municipal Parking Lot

As parking is a commodity in the Garden Court Business District, it is fortunate to have a municipal parking lot at the corner of 49th and Spruce. However, the lot has no sign and is underutilized.

Transit Hub

Thousands of drivers, pedestrians, and riders of SEPTA buses pass through the Garden Court Business District everyday. Merchants could try to make their stores more appealing to commuters. Public realm improvements could also help attract more commuters.



Blocked Sidewalks



Uninviting Fencing



Litter; Uncleaned Sidewalks & Streets

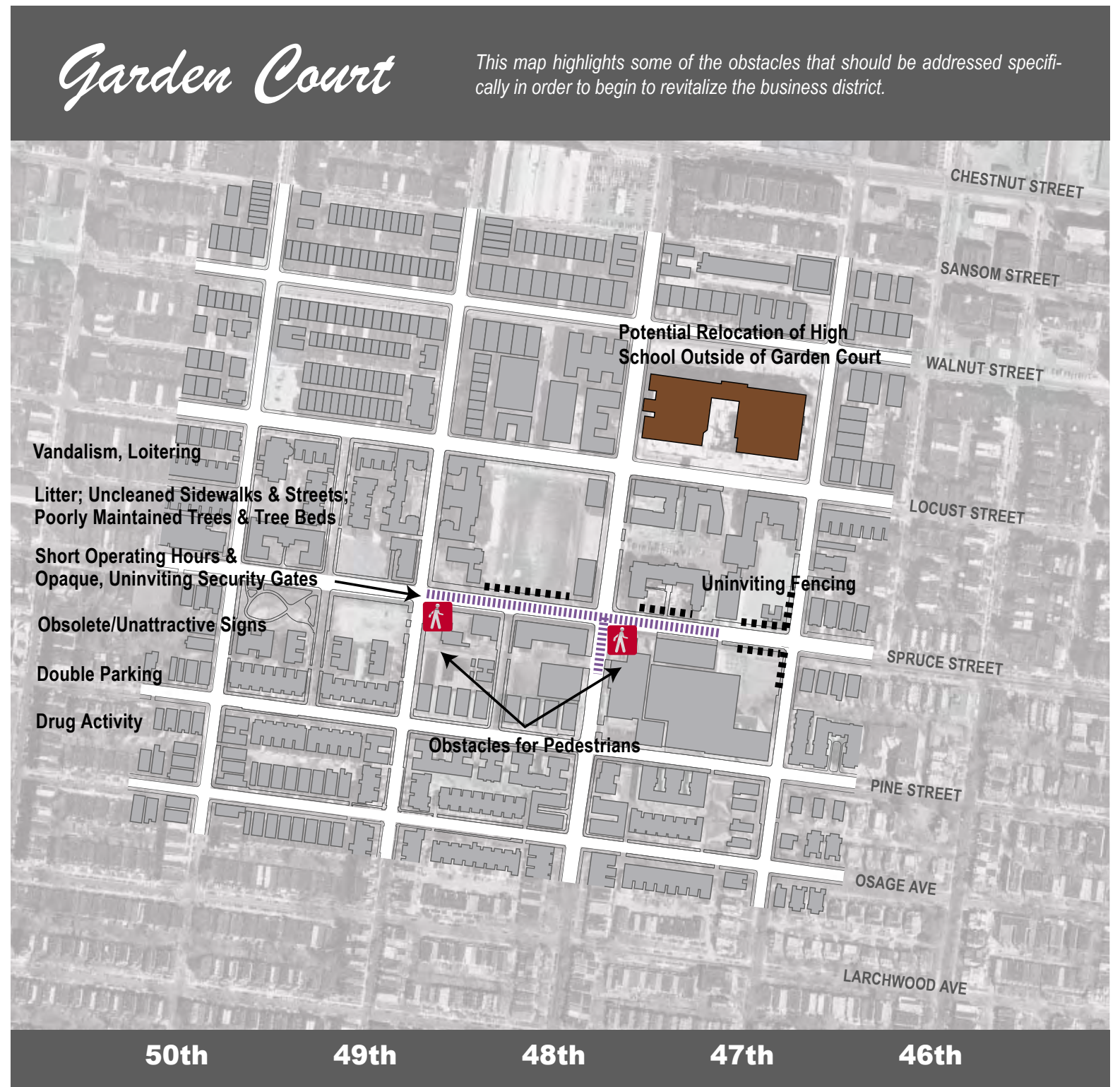


Short Operating Hours & Opaque/Uninviting Security Gates



Obsolete/Unattractive Signs

CHALLENGES & ISSUES



CHALLENGES & ISSUES



Obstacles for Pedestrians

Though Garden Court has many commercial, civic, and institutional spaces to benefit its citizens, enjoyment of these resources can be hampered if the adjoining public spaces do not foster the sense of a clean, safe, and organized environment desired for successful pedestrian use.

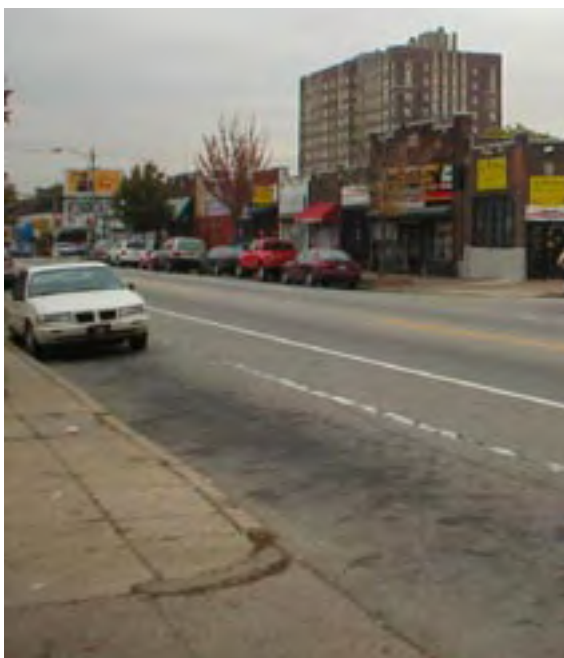
The auto shops, especially the one located at 48th and Spruce Streets, often park cars on the sidewalk. This blocks pedestrians and creates a confusing and unsafe environment. Furthermore, sidewalks typically are not designed to support the weight of vehicles. Sidewalks bearing the weight of vehicles are more likely to crack, which can cause significant problems due to winter weather.

Uninviting Fencing

The *de facto* gateways to the Garden Court Business District are a group of tall, metal fences. They are in sharp contrast to the rows of trees that welcome visitors into the historic Garden Court neighborhood, and they do not signal to passersby that they are entering the Garden Court Business District.

Litter; Uncleaned Sidewalks & Streets; Poorly-Maintained Trees & Tree Beds

While a few waste disposal bins are on the street, trash still litters the sidewalks. The presence of litter encourages people to continue to litter. In addition, the sidewalks and areas of the street near the curb have accumulated considerable dirt and grime, and the trees and tree beds appear unkempt.



Short Operating Hours & Opaque/Uninviting Security Gates

Though many of the businesses located in Garden Court's commercial areas have products and services useful to residents past early evening, many shops close around 5 o'clock—the same time people are coming home from work and potentially interested in acquiring those goods. Further, when the shops do close their doors, they unveil opaque security gates that suggest the area is unsafe past business hours.

Obsolete/Unattractive Store Signs

A dizzying array of sign designs advertise Garden Court's businesses, which does not contribute to the idea of a unified community commercial corridor. Attractive signs draw prospective customers to stores.

School Relocation

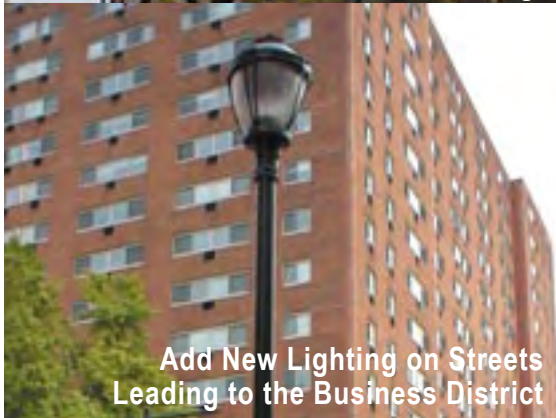
The West Philadelphia High School brings thousands of students, teachers, and staff to the area daily. Some business within the district might rely heavily on this customer base. As of the printing of this report, a new high school was being planned for an undetermined location. The eventual decision could impact the customer base for the business district.



Remove Litter &
Pressure Clean Sidewalks/Streets



Add More Street Plantings



Add New Lighting on Streets
Leading to the Business District



Attract New Neighborhood Cafe/Restaurant



Improve & Unify Store Signs

INITIAL RESPONSES & RECOMMENDATIONS



INITIAL RESPONSES & RECOMMENDATIONS

Address Fencing; Create a Gateway to the District

An important step toward revitalizing the Garden Court Business District is to create an aesthetically pleasing gateway that lets people know they are entering the district. The gateway could consist of, for example, a series of banners that cover the existing fencing.

Address Sidewalk Blockage

Auto repair shop owners should be engaged in the process of improving the business district and should work with the community to find ways to keep the sidewalks clear for pedestrians.

Add New Lighting

Installing more streetlights can help improve the perception of safety within the business district and dissuade people from loitering or conducting illegal activity. Increasing the perception of safety will be critical for attracting more customers to the district. In addition to improving the lighting within the business district, new lights should be installed on streets leading to the business district.

Improve/Unify Store Sign Designs & Targeted Facade Improvements on 4800 Block of Spruce Street

While most store facades are unattractive and in poor condition, the 4800 block of Spruce Street should be targeted specifically for facade improvements. The building lining this block—underneath the wear-and-tear, unattractive signs, and peeling paint—is architecturally beautiful and historic. The facades of the crab house and the pizza place are in good condition, and so improving the auto parts store facade and a few others would help begin to reveal and enhance the qualities of this magnificent building better. Lighting could be installed along the top of the building to reveal its shape and help light the sidewalk.

Remove Litter & Pressure Clean Sidewalks/Streets

A few waste receptacles for trash disposal are provided, yet empty food containers, plastic bags, and paper litter the streets and sidewalks. The business district can do more to foster an environment that promotes a zero-tolerance crime policy. Litter often begets more litter. UCD does pick up litter a few days a week. Also, the sidewalks and streets need to be pressure cleaned. These activities are critical for retaining existing customers and attracting new ones.

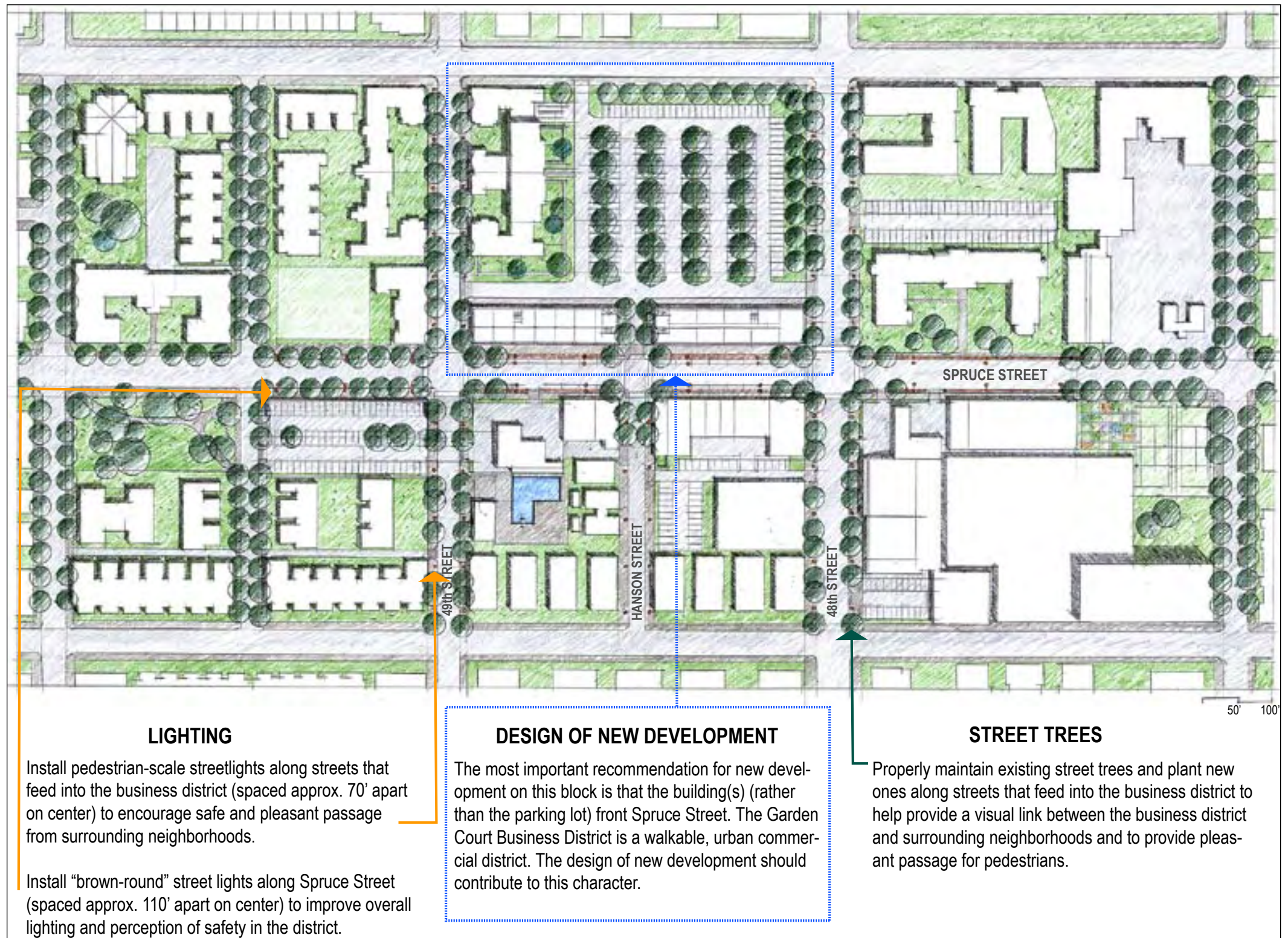
Maintain Existing Trees & Tree Beds; Add More Trees

Adding new street trees and shrubs, in addition to maintaining existing ones, will help make the business district look more welcoming and more suitable for leisurely strolls and shopping, which, in turn, would help bring more customers to the district's stores. Adding more greenery would also help the business district begin to look more consistent with the tree-lined, well-landscaped neighborhood to the south. UC Green could provide assistance with this.

Install Sign to Advertise Parking Lot


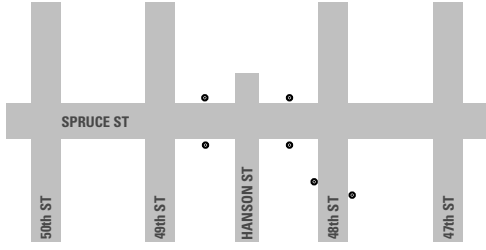

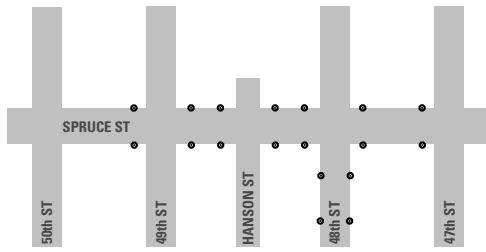

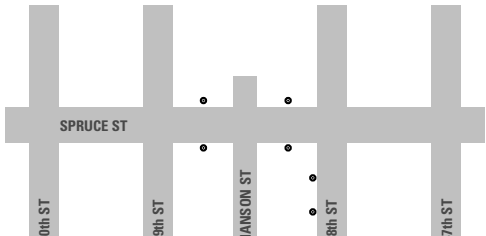

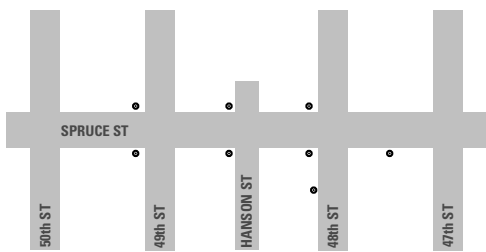
Installing a sign to advertise that the municipal parking lot is, indeed, not a private parking lot but a public one might help discourage people from double-parking and ease the perceived parking shortage in the district.

STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS



STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

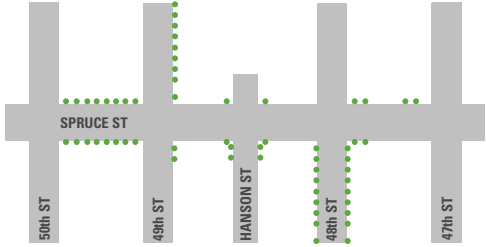


MENU OF RECOMMENDED STREETSCAPE ENHANCEMENTS for GARDEN COURT BUSINESS DISTRICT

ITEM	PHOTO	QUANTITY / TYPE	PLACEMENT	UNIT COST	TOTAL COST
BENCHES		6 5-foot		\$1000	\$6000
BANNERS		18 custom designed 2'x6'		\$450 (incl. brackets)	\$8100
BICYCLE STANDS		6 "U" rack		\$200	\$1,200
TRASH RECEPTACLES		8 32-gallon		\$800	\$6400

Suggested quantities, types, sizes, placement locations, and costs are approximate. Total cost for each item does NOT include costs of permitting, labor, installation, and maintenance.

STREETSCAPE IMPROVEMENTS

MENU OF RECOMMENDED STREETSCAPE ENHANCEMENTS for GARDEN COURT BUSINESS DISTRICT

ITEM	PHOTO	QUANTITY / TYPE	PLACEMENT	UNIT COST	TOTAL COST
TREES		55		\$750	\$41,250
STREETLIGHTS		20 “brown rounds” + poles		\$6000	\$120,000
STREETLIGHTS		54 post-tops + poles		\$6000	\$324,000

SKETCHES



48TH STREET BETWEEN SPRUCE & PINE LOOKING SOUTH



This sketch of 48th Street illustrates how various public and private investments can improve the shopping environment. For example, adding trees helps reduce the visual contrast between the business district and the adjacent well-landscaped neighborhood. Installing street lights can help improve the perception of safety of the district. These public improvements, along with improvements to storefronts, would help draw more residents from adjoining neighborhoods to frequent the business district.

SKETCHES



Athletic Fields

Suggested Placement
of New Development On
Athletic Fields



SPRUCE STREET AT HANSON LOOKING EAST

This sketch of Spruce Street illustrates how various public and private investments can improve the shopping environment, thus helping to attract customers to the business district. It also suggests how new development should be placed on the athletic fields. The sketch suggests that rather than have parking lots fronting Spruce Street, buildings should front the street. Simply configuring new development in this manner would create a sense that this commercial area is a pedestrian-friendly, mixed-use urban district.

TARGETED FACADE IMPROVEMENTS: SPRUCE STREET BETWEEN 48th STREET AND HANSON STREET

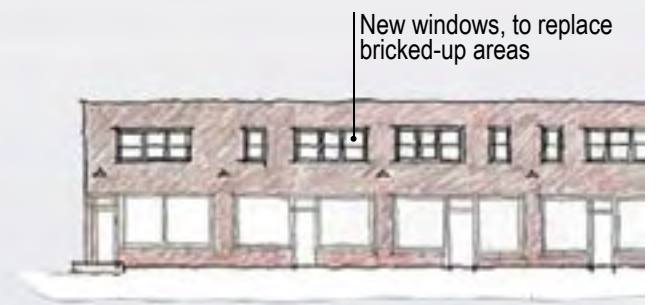
SKETCHES



Current Conditions

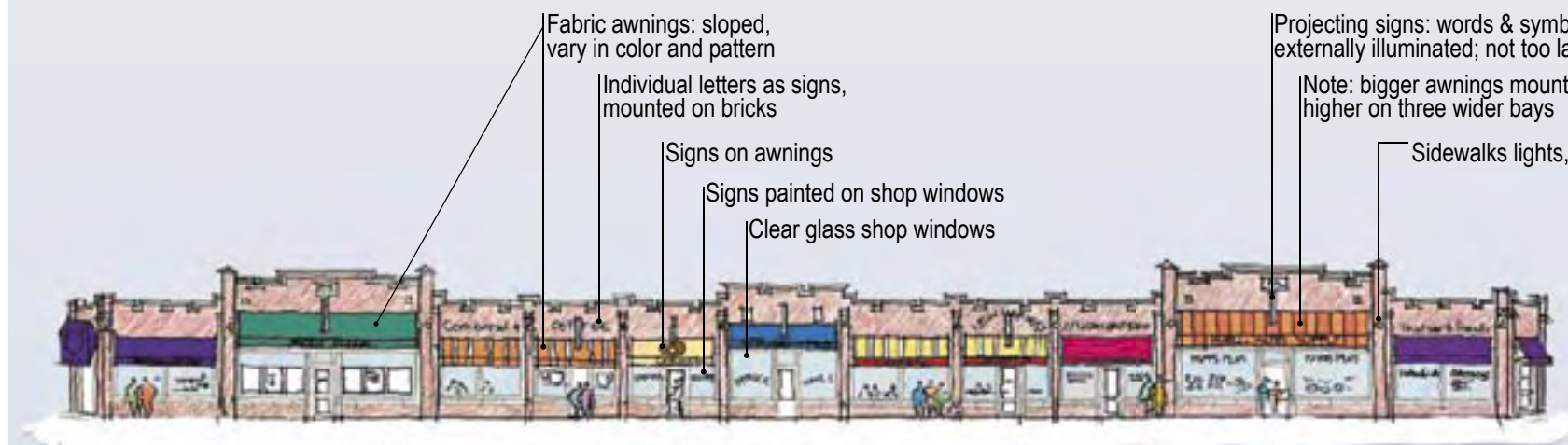


Uncover the bricks and all the ornaments
(remove plaster, big signs, etc.)



New windows, to replace
bricked-up areas

Architectural potential: Restore original brickwork to reveal the beautiful 1930s building



Fabric awnings: sloped,
vary in color and pattern

Individual letters as signs,
mounted on bricks

Signs on awnings

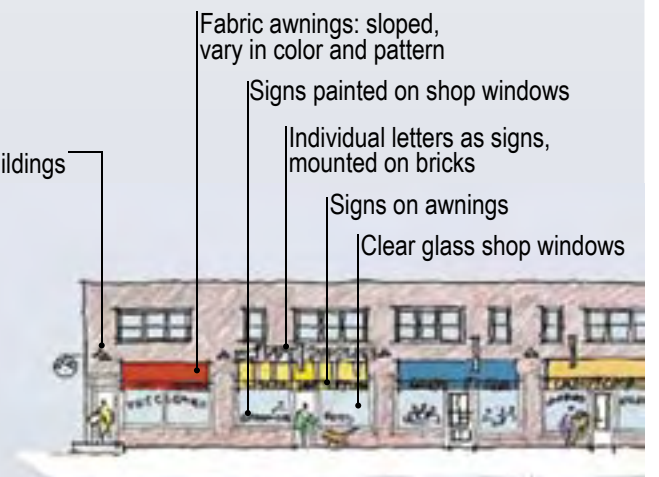
Signs painted on shop windows

Clear glass shop windows

Projecting signs: words & symbols,
externally illuminated; not too large

Note: bigger awnings mounted
higher on three wider bays

Sidewalks lights, on the buildings



Fabric awnings: sloped,
vary in color and pattern

Signs painted on shop windows

Individual letters as signs,
mounted on bricks

Signs on awnings

Clear glass shop windows

Possibilities: Develop facade standards to encourage a string of colorful and lively shopfronts

While the Garden Court Business District is not part of the National Register of Historic Places, some of its buildings were built in a similar architectural style and during the same period as many of the residential structures listed on the National Register. The building that lines the south side of Spruce Street between 48th Street and Hanson Street is one such building. The building is divided up between at least 8 different owners and, over time, deferred maintenance, additional coats and colors of paint, and signs/awnings have obscured the beauty of this building. The first sketch above shows what the base building looks like with all signs and awnings removed and with a consistent brick color. The bottom sketch suggests how new signs and awnings can be sized and placed to work with the existing architecture of the building.

SKETCHES

TARGETED FACADE IMPROVEMENT: 4828 SPRUCE STREET



Garden Court Façade Improvement

Shatzer & Sheridan
4828 Spruce St.



- | | |
|---|-------------------------|
| • Remove old signs; if necessary, repoint brick behind signs. | ESTIMATED COST
\$800 |
| • Install hardback canvas awnings, evenly aligned and printed with business name or logo. | \$1800 |
| • Affix decorative light fixture for illumination of awning and safe, pleasant ambience. | \$300 |
| • Paint concrete base in complimentary color. | \$300 |

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TOTAL ESTIMATED INVESTMENT \$3200



A woman recently purchased this property and is planning to move her law firm from Baltimore Avenue to this location. She attended a meeting of the Garden Court Community Association, where she was excited to hear about the Garden Court Business District Revitalization Plan. She has yet to undertake renovations on this property, so Brown & Keener Bressi created this concept design as part of the planning process to suggest how her facade can be modified to complement the architecture of the building. Cost estimates were also provided.

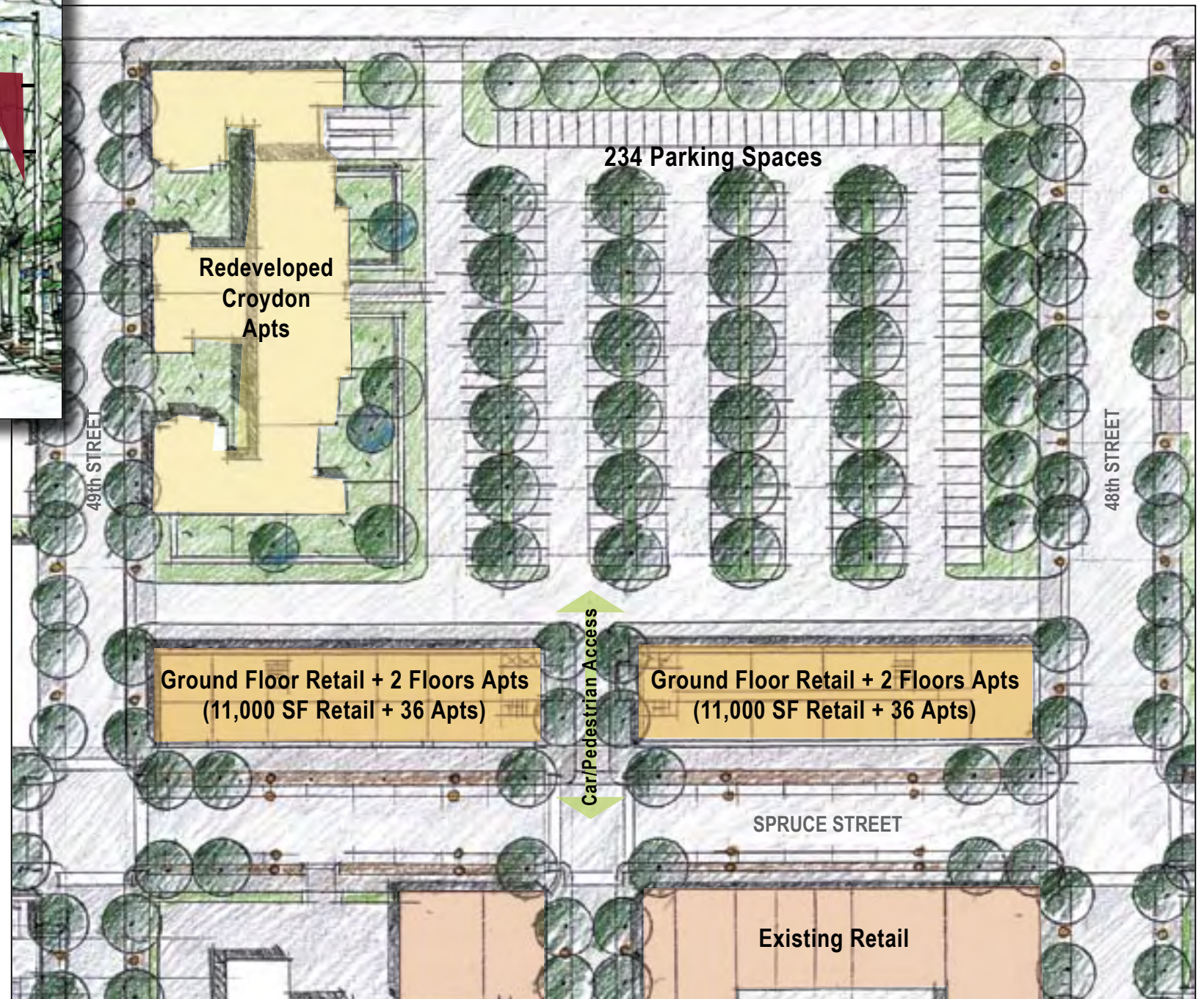
DESIGNING NEW DEVELOPMENT



With careful attention to design, the addition of new real estate on the existing athletic fields represents a great opportunity to contribute to the revitalization of the Garden Court Business District and to serve as a model for mixed-use development in large cities. The sketch site plan on the right shows the recommended configurations, sizes, and uses of buildings, and parking, on the site.

The key design recommendations for the site include:

- New buildings should face Spruce Street and have no set-back from the sidewalk
- The parking lot should be well-landscaped and located behind the buildings.
- Given the large size of the block, a path should be created midway to give cars and pedestrians convenient access to the businesses on Spruce Street.



ACTION PLAN

2005-2008: Clean Up & Organize

- Work with UCD for regular litter clean-up (COMPLETED)
- Begin to encourage businesses to take part and organize (IN PROGRESS)
- Work with UC Green for first round tree planting (IN PROGRESS)
- Follow potential Fresh Grocer development carefully (i.e., parking, response of other businesses, etc.) (IN PROGRESS)
- Make design principles for new development known (IN PROGRESS)
- Seek participants for facade demonstration projects (IN PROGRESS)
- Work with UC Green to clean up tree beds and improve maintenance of trees
- Remove plants from sidewalk cracks
- Pressure clean streets and sidewalks
- Work with auto-shops to remove cars from sidewalk
- Plant new trees; replace dead or wrong species trees with new trees
- Install decorative trash receptacles branded with “Garden Court”
- Add perimeter landscaping/fencing around Blockbuster parking lot
- Encourage sidewalk eating options on Pine Street

2008-2010: Recruit and Rehab

- Work with UCD to oversee corridor management
- Begin installing new lighting, benches
- Continue promoting facade improvements, beginning with Shopping Section I
- Seek to acquire vacant building at 4806-4808 Spruce Street
- Recruit more businesses to serve the neighborhood (per Market Study recommendations)
- Seek channel partners to recruit more customers (e.g., UCNet)