

LOWER NORTHWEST DISTRICT

First Public Meeting Summary



The first of three public meetings for the Lower Northwest District Plan took place on April 15, 2014 at the William Penn Charter School. The meeting attracted over 90 attendees to the school located at 3000 West School House Lane in East Falls.

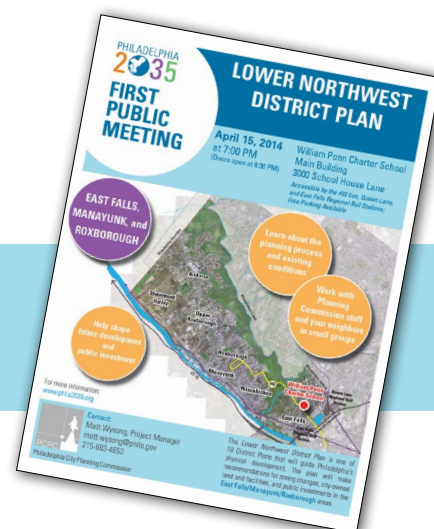
This meeting served a dual purpose. The first was to educate the public about the District Planning process and the existing conditions of the Lower Northwest. The second was to obtain community input on planning preferences and priorities to create a foundation for district plan content. Planning Commission staff utilized both the Share Your Vision and Group Mapping Exercises to garner community input.

The Share Your Vision Exercise provided residents with an opportunity to share their priorities, values, and ideas for specific geographic areas located within the District. These areas included Ridge Avenue, Shawmont Valley and Upper Roxborough, and the Schuylkill Riverfront.

The Mapping Group Exercise enabled residents to identify the important physical attributes of their community. We asked groups to identify destinations/landmarks, barriers, areas that will remain the same (or areas of stability), areas that will change, and desired Planning Focus Areas within the Lower Northwest District. The input obtained from both exercises will inform the recommendations of this plan.

Participants were also asked to identify Planning Focus Areas through the mapping exercise. These are areas where multiple layers of public intervention (e.g. zoning changes, land sales or acquisition, infrastructure improvements, business incentives, etc.) can come together to create positive momentum and revitalize specific intersections, corridors, or neighborhoods.

The second of three public meetings held in mid-June, 2014.

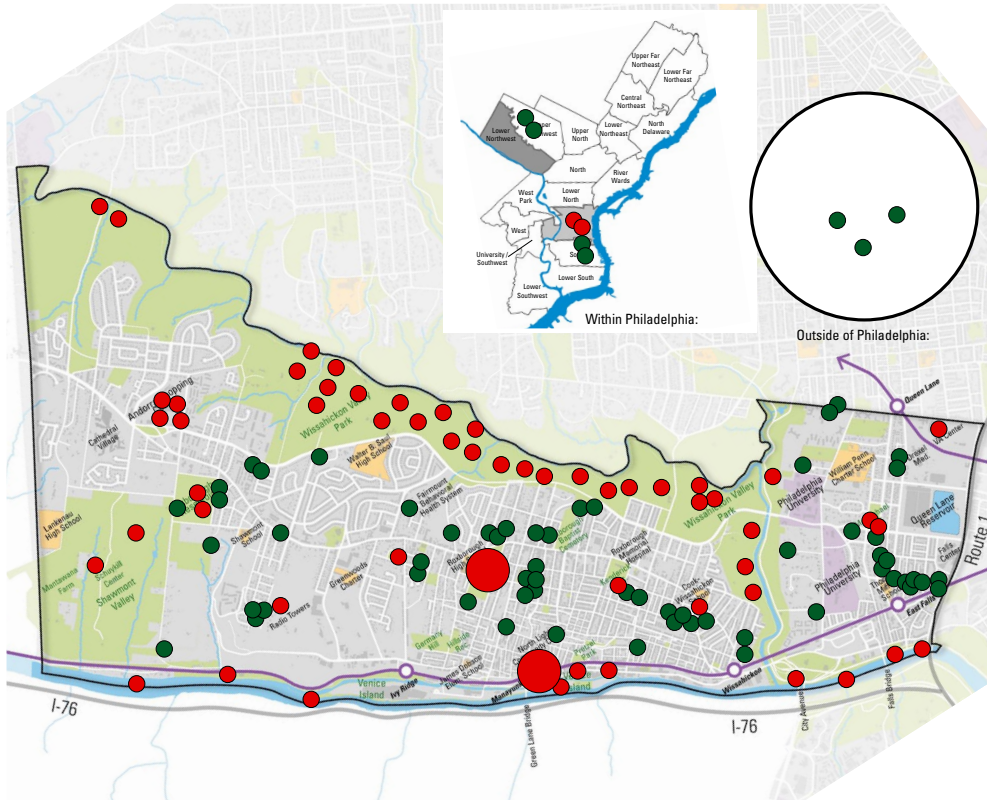


April 15th, 2014

William Penn Charter School



WHERE DO YOU LIVE AND PLAY?

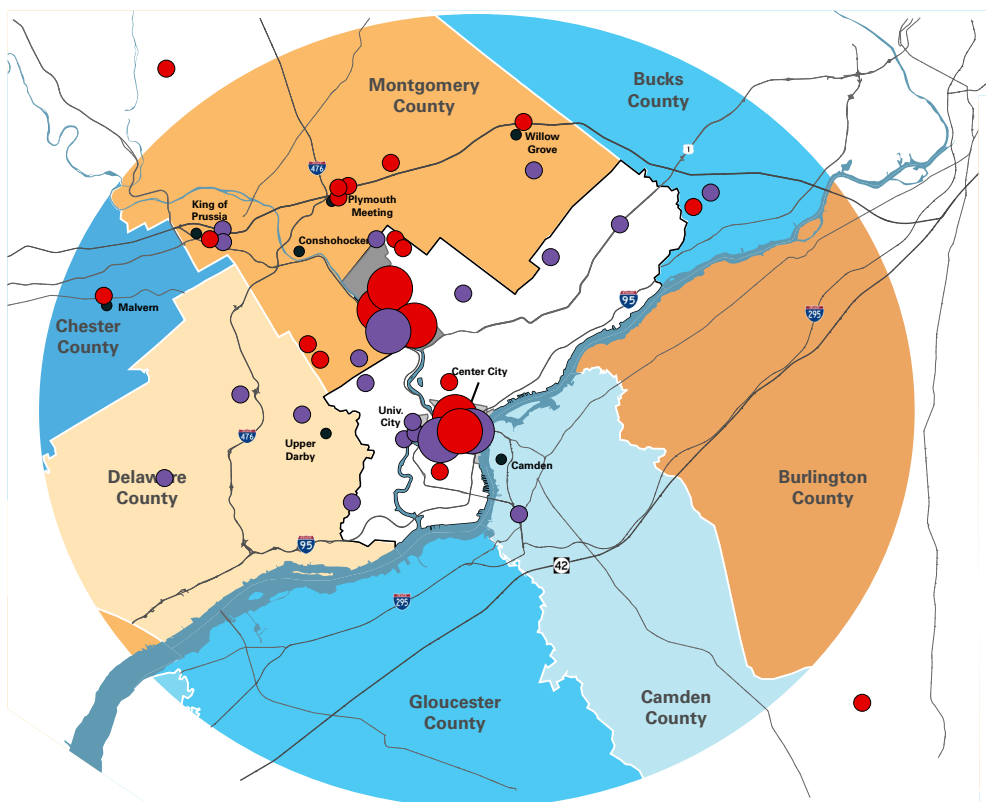


Where Do You Live, Work, and Play?

Prior to the Lower Northwest District Plan presentation and the facilitated group exercises, residents were asked to participate in the “Where Do You Live, Work and Play” welcoming exercise. The purpose of this exercise was to gauge and assess what areas residents were coming from, where they spent time for leisure activities, and worked professionally.

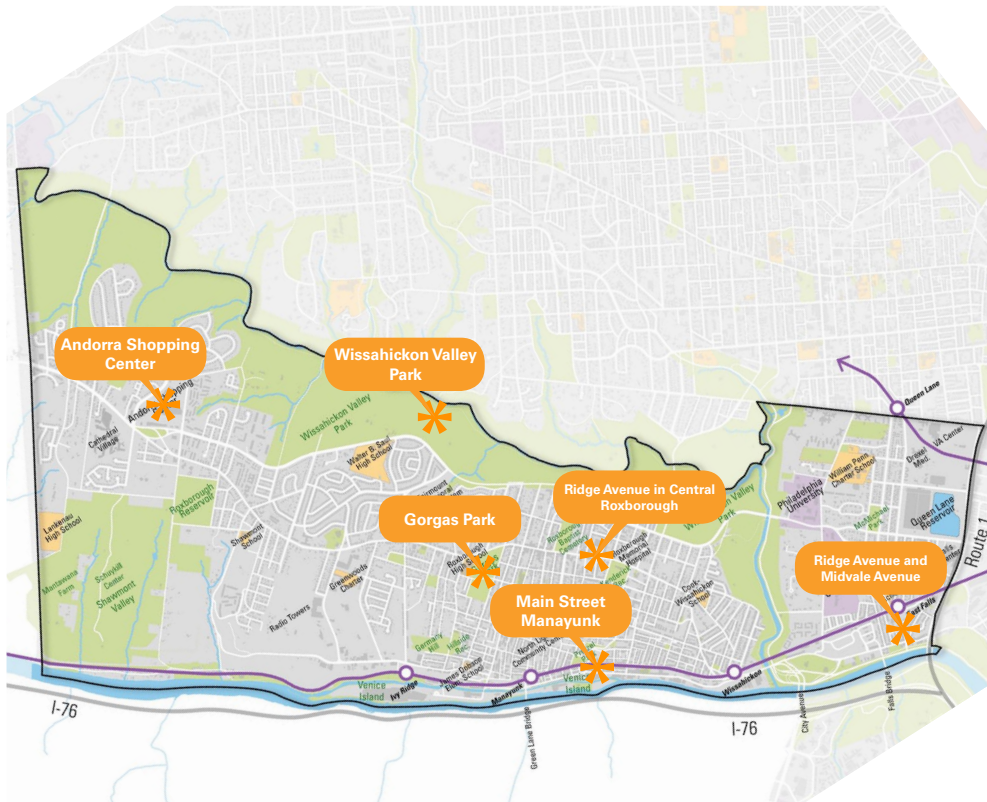
The results were across the map. Residents who participated in the exercise came from various areas within and outside of the district. Large concentrations of participants resided in Central Roxborough, East Falls, and the Wissahickon neighborhoods. Areas of play within the district included Wissahickon Valley Park, Main Street Manayunk, Gorgas Park, and Andorra Shopping Center.

WHERE DO YOU WORK AND PLAY?



Residents predominantly worked within the Center City area and the Lower Northwest District. Areas of play outside of the district included Plymouth Meeting and Center City.

TOP DESTINATIONS



Destinations and Barriers

Participants in the April meeting were asked to share their most frequented destinations, the factors (environmental, physical, social) that create barriers within the district, areas that they imagine will stay largely the same over time, and areas that they feel are poised for change, be it positive or negative.

These activities help PCPC take the temperature of the district, and understand local perspectives about recommendations that might emerge as part of the plan. Popular destinations might warrant additional public investment or other attention, while barriers might be physical attributes that the city could work to improve over time through engineering interventions, better urban design, or other changes.

The following were the most commonly identified destination areas:

1. Andorra Shopping Center
2. Wissahickon Valley Park
3. Gorgas Park
4. Ridge Avenue in Central Roxborough
5. Ridge Avenue and Midvale Avenue
6. Main Street Manayunk

The following were the most commonly identified barriers:

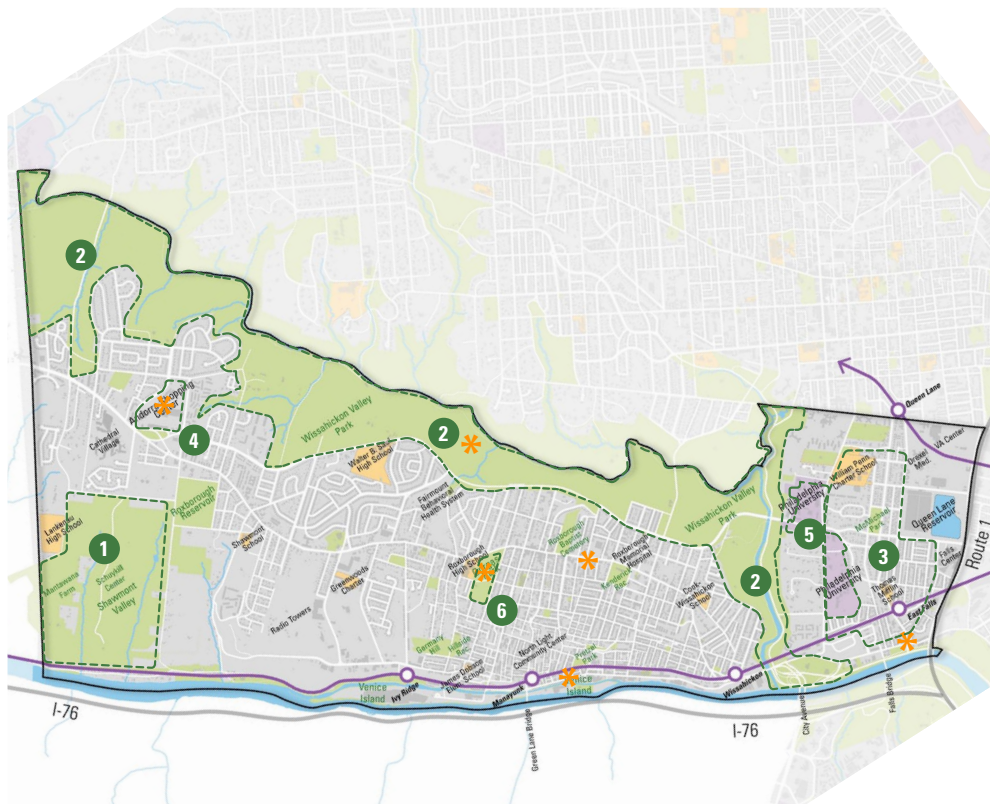
1. Henry Avenue
2. Lincoln Drive
3. Route 1
4. Schuylkill River
5. Topography
6. Manayunk-Norristown Regional Rail Line*

*The Manayunk-Norristown Regional Rail Line was identified as a barrier for primarily two reasons. The first is that the physical rail infrastructure creates a barrier to riverfront access. Second, the limited headways create a barrier to Center City access.

TOP BARRIERS



TOP AREAS OF STABILITY



Stability and Change

Stability and change often come with both positive and negative connotations. This exercise attempts to unpack these assumptions and illustrate that preserving current conditions is a positive thing in some locations or neighborhoods while it might be counterproductive in other places. Similarly, change might be less desirable in areas that perform well economically, socially, etc, but might be sorely needed in locations that experience losses in population, jobs, or a change in identity.

Some areas will change or stay the same due to ongoing trends and factors out of government's control. In other cases, government can establish policies, change regulations, or alter incentives to be the driver of change (or preservation).

TOP AREAS OF CHANGE



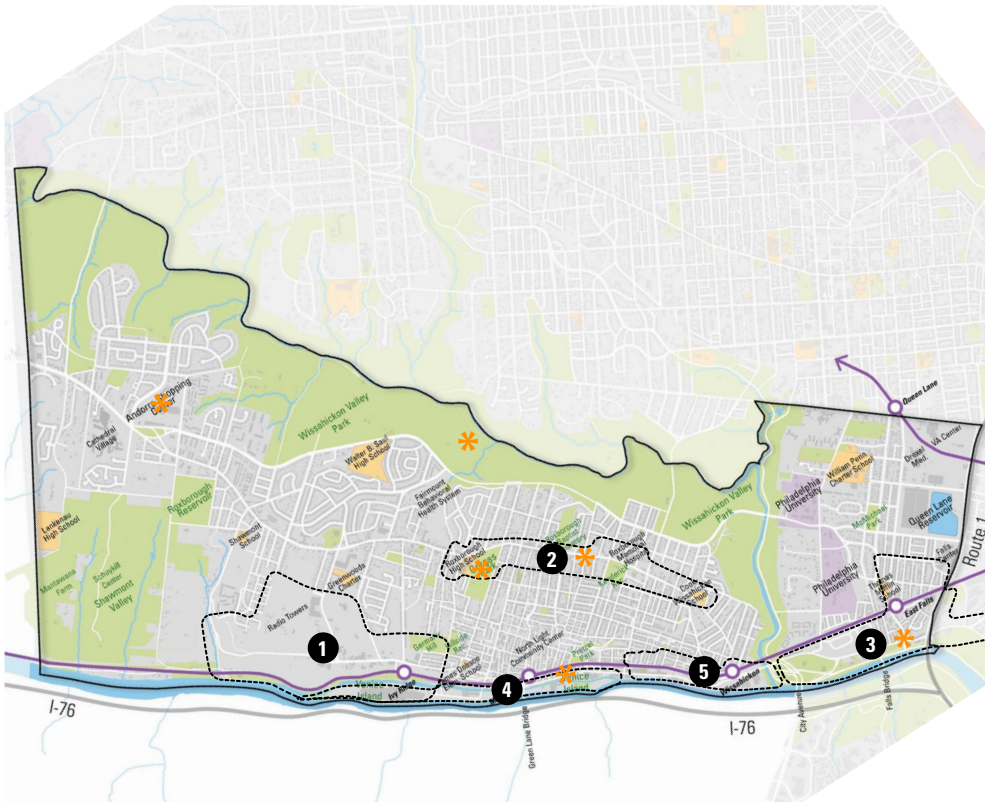
The following were the most commonly identified areas of stability:

1. Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education
2. Wissahickon Valley Park
3. East Falls Neighborhood
4. Andorra Shopping Center
5. Philadelphia University
6. Gorgas Park

The following were the most commonly identified areas of likely or desired change:

1. Upper Roxborough/Shawmont Valley
2. Central Roxborough
3. Venice Island
4. Wissahickon Gateway
5. Ridge and Midvale Area

PLANNING FOCUS AREAS



Focus Areas

The Planning Focus Area exercise allowed residents to identify areas that are in need of public intervention (e.g. zoning changes, land sales or acquisition, infrastructure/capital improvements, business incentives), preservation (e.g. historic buildings, open space), or civic improvements on specific intersections, corridors, or neighborhoods.

During this process, there were opportunities to combine and align suggested focus areas for consideration.

The following were the most discussed areas to focus planning efforts on:

1. Ivy Ridge Station and Umbria Street
2. Ridge Avenue in Central Roxborough
3. Ridge and Midvale Area
4. Venice Island
5. Wissahickon Gateway



APPENDIX OF COMMENTS

General Comments from Group Exercises:

- Mifflin School vulnerability to condos, concern
 - Infill development scale = contrast, too big vs. too small
- Philadelphia University should grow only within its campus – not beyond
- Put Philadelphia University in a SP-INS district
- Build pedestrian walkway connection to Center City
- Queen Lane Reservoir Area
 - Needs a supermarket
- Restaurants going out of business along Midvale, concern
 - Parking is tough
- Renters/students are gone during summers and holidays
- Poor quality of schools, concern
- Want FIOS provided
- Single family homes purchased for college students have absentee landlords
 - City does not enforce the household size in the zoning code
- “Transition town self reliant community”
- Wissahickon Transfer Station is overcrowded
- Main Street is tough on bikes
- Main Street is desolate (Lower Main Street)
- Main Street high rise “gold coast,” concern
- Main Street from Ivy Ridge Station to Bike Trail connections needed
- Main Street sidewalks too narrow to accommodate strollers and wheel chairs
- Lower Main Street needs:
 - Streetscape improvements
 - Bike and pedestrian improvements
- Extend Main Street bike path for continuous use (both NW and SE extensions)
- Main Street Manayunk is difficult to bike
- Lower Main Street and high retail turnover rate
- Lower Main Street parking issues for both residents and businesses
- Congestion (traffic) on Green Lane to Main Street
- Green Lane Bridge repairs needed
- Green Lane is used for commuters and backs up daily, it needs better “flow through”
- Ivy Ridge Train Station
 - Parking lot too small
 - No bike racks available
- Rehab Ivy Ridge Train Station
- Additional Parking needed at Ivy Ridge Train Station
- Add appeal to Ivy Ridge Train Station and make a destination
- Strengthen connections between East Falls and the rest of the district
- Bus and truck traffic on Ridge is barrier between Shurs Lane and Fairthorne St
- No connection to bike trail to get into Center City along Lincoln Drive
- Extend 32 bus route to City Ave.
- DuPont Street too narrow and windy for cars
- Sidewalk at Ridge and Main is dangerous (near Wissahickon Transfer Station)
- East Falls station has too narrow parking: 2-level parking could alleviate parking on Cresson Street
- Wissahickon Valley Park needs maintenance
- Additional parking needed in East Falls Business District
- Sidewalk access from North to Forbidden Drive improvements needed
- Henry Avenue is hard to cross
- Henry Avenue speeding concerns

- Henry Avenue in totality is a barrier
- Henry Avenue around Andorra Shopping Center needs streetscape Improvements
- Henry Avenue has high heavy speed traffic and is difficult to cross
- Henry Avenue in East Falls, difficult to cross due to car speed
- Henry Avenue in Roxborough traffic is too fast
- Henry Avenue has heavy traffic, concern
- Henry Avenue Bridge over Lincoln Drive could use pedestrian fencing for safety
- Intersection of Ridge and Henry, improve traffic
- Upgrade Ridge Avenue commercial between Gates and Roxborough
- Uninviting surface parking lots for ACME and Roxborough Hospital; and on Ridge Avenue from Roxborough Avenue to Gorgas Park
- Ridge Avenue needs streetscape between Parker and Domino Lane
- Improve Ridge Avenue biking safety
- Ridge Avenue in Central Roxborough should be mixed-use
- Roxborough and Ridge Avenue:
 - Improve business attraction
 - Businesses are replacing residential
- Extend Ridge Avenue corridor from Righter to Roxborough Avenue
- Ridge between Hermit and Main, too steep
- Ridge from Wigard To Parker, sidewalk needs improvement
- Ridge Avenue Central Roxborough retail turnover is high and needs diversity
- Ridge Avenue along Gorgas Park sidewalk is used for car parking, frustration
- Ridge Ave and Umbria St, how to develop to relieve pressure on rest of district?
- Historic preservation needed on Ridge Avenue
 - 5200 Ridge example
- Midvale and Ridge improvements needed (zoning overlay should be preserved)
- Ridge Avenue East Falls
 - Flood mitigation
 - Better parking
 - Commercial amenities
 - Better exploit Falls bridge No transit connection/access through Wissahickon Valley Park
- East Falls lack of supermarkets
- East Falls Train Station needs:
 - Parking
 - Renovation
- No sidewalk on Wissahickon Avenue where Wissahickon Avenue crosses Wissahickon Park
- Umbra Street cleaner industry
- Steep and limited sidewalks on Shurs Lane
- All stairs need maintenance and repair and are a barrier to bikes
- Narrow one-way streets and bridges, dislikes
- Andorra Shopping Plaza area improvements to parks needed
- Shawmont Avenue between Ridge and Rail is a barrier to bikes and cars
- Protect last three 1st order streams
 - Along Shawmont, through the Schuylkill Center, through Manatawna Farm
 - Reserve for light recreation, due to it not having public sewer, no CSO's
- Shawmont Valley, balance open space protection with development
- Wissahickon Transfer Station major bike trail barrier
- Kelly Drive is a barrier to get to the river
- Improve junction for bikes and Pedestrian circa Kelly Drive and Ridge Avenue
- No link from the Wissahickon Valley Park to the river trail
- Parking issues everywhere
- Have to drive to train station, no public transit available to reach it
- Valley Green needs more parking
- Integrate former Venice Island restaurant with recreation uses
- Bells Mill Road Park parking needed
- Take down older housing in Manayunk and build new structures
- Acquisition of land for parking needed
- Vicinity of Pechin and Lyceum:
 - Tear downs = compromised walkability
 - "Slum lords"

- Improve industrial area along Umbria Street
- Parking issues throughout the area
- More traffic calming measures
- Better access needed to Wissahickon Park (noted in two areas)
- Better acute care needed at Roxborough Hospital
- More cohesive East Falls Business District with a better sense of place
- Trail access to Venice Island needed
- Kendrick Recreation Center needs interventions
- Upgrade Kendrick Recreation (pool)
- Areas North of Roxborough Baptist Cemetery
 - Improve gateway to Wissahickon Park
 - Add connecting trail
 - All privately owned, get conservation easements
- Potential reuse of Roxborough Reservoir
- Shopping Center conversion? From Domino to Dearnley
- Regional rail, not enough late hour trains
- Upper Roxborough, high housing demand, consider density, residents don't want over development
- Regional Rail inhibits Schuylkill crossing (barrier)
- Manayunk, high number of renters subject to change
- Conrad Street needs diversity in retail, improve retail along Ridge Avenue in East Falls
- Improve McMillian Park
- Central Roxborough, likely to see more housing
- Large trailhead with parking needed for Wissahickon Park
- Route 1, bad off ramps
- Route 1 and Hunting Park Industry
 - Poor pedestrian access
 - Bad auto traffic pattern
 - Vacant industrial property
 - Needs beautification
- Bad signage for Manayunk Regional Rail Station
- No suburban development (Kingsley Court)
- We want new homes to blend in with existing (especially size)
- Use/reuse existing structures (character)
- No more corner stores – nice to have but are they sustainable?
- No new homes built at Paoli/Parker (none built similar to this development)
- North Light Community Center needs more parking
- Not enough parking along Ridge in Central Roxborough
- Preservation for focus area @ at Central Roxborough Ridge to Boone
- Roxborough along Ridge – highway commercial vs. local retail
- McMichael Park, oppose tot lot, prefer open space
- Want pedestrian friendly design for focus area at Ridge between Domino and Paoli
- Develop parking at Kendrick Recreation
- Traffic calm Ridge Avenue, Kendrick Recreation to Gorgas Park
- Create gateway at Ridge Avenue and Righter
- Bad intersection at Queen and Fox
- Commercial areas need differentiation
- Midvale/Conrad Commercial Corridor
 - Dead space spotty commercial
 - Gateway to community
 - Lack of parking
 - Lack of residential density
 - Capture commercial of East Falls
- Manayunk, services to local trails, access to canals
- Retirement community, growth of NORCs (Naturally Occurring Retirement Community)
- Ivy Ridge and Umbria, guide development for responsible watershed protection
- Umbria street, kind of a mess
- Add bridge north of Minerva Street
- Andorra Shopping Center, outdated, not enough parking
- Venice Island, how to develop?
- Venice Island, what is the response to the floodplain?

- Venice Island has residential/development potential
- Extreme development pressure in Wissahickon neighborhood, maximize land efficiency/develop in Venice Island maintain existing homes
- Wissahickon Valley Park, too much access to park
- Improve pedestrian safety at Wissahickon Gateway
- Lower Main Street and Wissahickon Gateway, desire
 - o River access and views
 - o Bike and trail access
 - o Eliminate break in bike trail
 - o Landscape beautification
 - o Housing

General comments from Share YOUR Vision for Ridge Avenue:

- Add more shops and new development from the Gorgas Park to the Henry Avenue intersection
- More mixed use on Ridge Avenue, more foot traffic
- Use vacant land on Ridge Avenue for sit down restaurants (i.e. churches can be repurposed)
- Location for new development (Central Roxborough/Ridge Avenue)
- Food Co-op needed
- Better stores, free parking lots, more trees, be as nice as CH
- Needs more sit down restaurants, more variety, higher end
- Restaurants and cute boutiques (fewer dollar stores and nail salons)
- Make Ridge more like a main street
- More interactive activities for the school are children at Gorgas Park
- Library as community center (Roxborough Library) , There has been tremendous increase in use and more resources are needed
- Ridge needs more consistency
- Long-term retail, single marketable brand for the street (Ridge Avenue)
- Extend the Ridge Avenue area/boundary to Righter and Rock Street (drawn on the board)
- Gorgas to Kendrick has a disjointed suburban feel to other look (i.e. Crossroads café)
- Avoids Ridge Avenue, congestion, uses Henry Avenue
- Shuttles between Main Street and Ridge Avenue
- Don't reroute Ridge Avenue traffic to Henry Avenue
- A bike sharrow on Ridge Avenue would be great if it is not already there
- More biking and walking paths around the Gorgas Park
- Traffic concerns with over-building
- Need better train and bus access
- Congestion on Ridge worst Green Lane to Leverington
- Walking not a huge issue
- Free parking helps the stores? Especially DuPont
- Use of the city lots for parking during snow storms?
- Clarify Wissahickon entrances, especially at Jeannette and Green lane
- Roxborough, a transition town
- Check zoning for Green and Mitchell
- Do something to lower the crime rate around the Green Lane
- Concern with open spaces, conservation (golf course being sold)
- Concern with demolitions (Edwardian)
- Regulate stray light from commercial development, controlled community development, conformity in residential and commercial design

General comments from Share YOUR Vision for Shawmont Valley and Upper Roxborough:

- Indoor shopping center should expand
- Ridge Avenue is already build up enough, no new development please
- Dearnley Park maintain current density, do not crowd us out
- Roxborough a transition town!
- Upper Ridge more pedestrian development with parking in the rear, along Ridge Ave (arrow by Ridge and Domino)
- Better planning on Umbria Street, semi-industrial, possible to have residential?

- Maintaining and making open green space a priority, no development (sticky notes on Shawmont Valley)
- Maintain green space around Port Royal Ave and Nixon St
- Preservation of Wissahickon Valley Park
- Sidewalks needed on Henry Avenue
- Traffic calming on Henry Avenue, the entire length
- Henry Avenue needs landscape restoration, lacks a community vision
- Henry Ave too fast, dangerous, and missing landscaping
- Henry Avenue is deteriorating aesthetically, making it a super highway to many drain posts
- The more dense the development the more traffic

General comments from Share YOUR Vision for Schuylkill Riverfront:

- Exciting destination from Center City
- Protect light industrial at the Mills and Scotts
- Future plans for aging industrial stretch of road
- Use old Duron space for Trader Joes or Fresh Grocer, great for East Falls and Manayunk
- Super market within walking distance of Manayunk
- Recognize East Falls as an upcoming strong center, Healthy foods
- Main and Ridge general area a no man's land, opportunity for development
- Recognize this as historically important to the development of East Falls and river economy, location of the "Falls" submerged and original location of Ft. St. David's fishing club during Revolutionary War
- Orient stores and restaurants to canal and river (2 people agree)
- Better access to bike trail along canal, more ways to get into Main Street (2 people agree)
- Add greenery along roadways
- Need more green space along the river, housing is a barrier, river should be more accessible to the general public
- Complete bike trail to connect to Kelly Drive
- Boat dock location along Kelly Drive, major Civil War encampments, history to be told there
- Add small excursion boats on the river as tourist attraction
- Buses great for East Falls and Manayunk
- Get rid of the PPA
- Boundary is arbitrary, breaks up community east of East Falls
- More neighborhood children attending Mifflin School
- Emergency hospital services
- EPPI is an important job center, Falls Center, new geriatric industry, high end medical, long-term care