

ULI Washington

A Technical Assistance Panel Report

Rhode Island Avenue, Northeast
Washington, DC

Sponsored by:
Premier Community Development Corporation (PCDC)

September 10-11, 2008

Rhode Island Avenue, Northeast Washington, DC

A Retail Revitalization Strategy for the Rhode Island Avenue, NE Corridor: 20th Street to 24th Street, NE

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About ULI Washington A District Council of the Urban Land Institute

ULI Washington is a district council of ULI—the Urban Land Institute, a nonprofit education and research organization supported by its members. Founded in 1936, the Institute today has over 40,000 members worldwide representing the entire spectrum of land use planning and real estate development disciplines, working in private enterprise and public service.

As the preeminent, multidisciplinary real estate forum, ULI facilitates the open exchange of ideas, information, and experience among local, national, and international industry leaders and policy makers dedicated to creating better communities.

ULI's mission is to provide leadership in the responsible use of land and in creating and sustaining thriving communities worldwide. ULI Washington carries out the ULI mission locally by sharing best practices, building consensus, and advancing solutions through its educational programs and community outreach initiatives.

About the Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) Program

The objective of ULI Washington's Technical Assistance Panel (TAP) program is to provide expert, multidisciplinary advice on land use and real estate issues facing public agencies and nonprofit organizations in the Washington Metropolitan area. Drawing from its extensive membership base, ULI Washington conducts one and one-half day panels offering objective and responsible advice to local decision makers on a wide variety of land use and real estate issues ranging from site-specific projects to public policy questions. The TAP program is intentionally flexible to provide a customized approach to specific land use and real estate issues.

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Acknowledgments

On behalf of the Urban Land Institute, the panel extends its appreciation to Premier Community Development Corporation (PCDC) for convening the panel to make recommendations for revitalizing Rhode Island Avenue, NE, between 20th Street, NE and 24th Street, NE. The panel especially thanks Stephanie Rones, Executive Director of PCDC, and the PCDC board members for their dedication to working together to revitalize the commercial district, and for their efforts in preparing for the panel.

The panel would like to extend a special thanks to Ward 5 District of Columbia City Councilmember Harry L. Thomas, Jr. for leading the study area tour and for treating all participants to Rita's Italian Ice – his time, insights, and hospitality were appreciated. The panel would also like to thank Phyllis Love, director of DC Main Streets, and Deborah L. Crain, Ward 5 Neighborhood Planner, for their informative presentations.

The panel also extends its appreciation to the many stakeholders who shared their time, insights, concerns, and hopes during the roundtable discussions and final presentations. Participants included:

- Milton Colquehoun, Manager, Tropicana Eatery
- Ms. Angela Brock, Rita's Ice
- Evelyn Telusma Boney, RI Ave Liquor Store Owner
- Bo Menketi, Owner and Developer, Menketi Real Estate Company
- Kemetrick Nesmith, Ward 5 Architect
- Idryis Abdulla, DC Dept of Insurance, and PCDC Advisory Board Member
- Cyril Crocker, Real Estate Developer, former Staff, DC Deputy Mayor's Office of Economic Development
- Dennis Kinnard, PCDC Board
- Eddie Harrison, PCDC Board Member
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- Uzeke Nelson, Artist
- Edward Johnson, Architect Edward Johnson & Associates
- Vicky Leonard Chambers, Councilmember Thomas' Office
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The findings and recommendations provided in this report are based on the collective expertise of the panel, along with the briefing materials, and information gleaned from the tour and roundtable discussions conducted during the panel's one and one-half day effort. ULI Washington hopes that the following information will help guide PCDC as it begins efforts to revitalize Rhode Island Avenue, NE.

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Foreword: Overview and Panel Assignment

As a means to foster relationships and spur redevelopment in the region's emerging neighborhoods, ULI Washington issued a request for proposal (RFP) to provide a series of complimentary Technical Assistance Panels (TAPs) following the district council's 2007 Urban Marketplace Conference and Expo. Funded by a grant from the ULI Foundation's Community Action Grant program, the RFP resulted in the awarding of three TAPs, one of which was awarded to Premier Community Development Corporation (PCDC). PCDC requested guidance as they begin to revitalize Rhode Island Avenue, NE, between 20th Street and 24th Street, NE.

While once a thriving commercial district that served the surrounding neighborhood in Woodridge with restaurants, cleaners, tailor shops, shoe repair shops, banks, hair salons, and bakeries, the corridor is now dominated by store-front churches and vacancies. Residents now drive outside of their community to purchase the goods and services that this area of Rhode Island Avenue, NE once provided.

The surrounding community is stable, however, and the long-term, established households that live on residential side streets off of Rhode Island Avenue, NE would like to see this commercial corridor revitalized. This charge has been led by PCDC, a community membership organization formed in 1999 to improve housing, economic development and the quality of life in Ward 5.

PCDC has evolved over time as a 501(c) (3) organization, with a full-time, paid Executive Director. PCDC is seeking grants to support operating costs, and has pursued funding from DC Main Streets, a program implemented by the District of Columbia with guidance from the National Trust for Historic Preservations' Main Street Center. The Main Street program was developed to blend historic preservation with economic development in order to revitalize downtown and neighborhood business districts. While this designation was pending at the time of the panel, Ward 5 Council member Harry L. Thomas, Jr. has earmarked funding for the commercial corridor's revitalization to implement the goals of the Main Street program.

Rhode Island Avenue, NE is also fortunate to be a part of the District of Columbia's Great Streets Initiative. The District Department of Transportation (DDOT) has committed more than \$100 million over the next four years for public space improvements including street and sidewalk restoration, improved transit services, and streetscape upgrades including the addition of lighting and trees. The goal of the program is to create communities that attract new residents, new jobs, and new retail establishments - places that generate commerce, enhance job opportunities, expand the District's population and tax base, and improve the quality of life for various communities across D.C.

The Assignment

PCDC and the community have a vision for the corridor that incorporates a mix of locally owned retail shops and housing into a “Main Street enclave.” While PCDC appreciates how other communities have thrived with national retailers as their anchors, their vision focuses on providing the local entrepreneur – whether it is a businessman, artist or craftsmen – with a storefront along Rhode Island Avenue, NE where they can provide needed goods and high quality services to the local community.

With a proactive community development corporation and the potential to receive technical assistance through both DC Main Streets and the Great Streets Initiative, Rhode Island Avenue, NE is positioned for revitalization. The question becomes how to begin to instill change in the community and specifically where to begin. To respond to these issues PCDC submitted a proposal and invited a panel of eight ULI members with diverse expertise to spend a day and a half touring the corridor with Councilmember Harry Thomas, Jr., meeting with stakeholders, taking a full day to talk through the issues and opportunities, and determining what role PCDC should play in revitalizing the retail district. Specific questions that the panel addressed include:

1. How can the Rhode Island Avenue, NE corridor between 20th Street and 24th Street, NE, become a vibrant, pedestrian friendly, commercially competitive boulevard?
2. What is the market potential for retail and residential development on the corridor?
3. What mix of uses will attract residents and visitors to the corridor?
4. What streetscape improvements would make an immediate impact on the boulevard and help create an identity for the corridor?
5. Parking is currently limited on the corridor – what can be done to increase parking?
6. What areas along the corridor should PCDC focus on to catalyze redevelopment?
7. How does PCDC bring an identity to the corridor?
8. How can PCDC alleviate development and uses (e.g. car lots) that negatively impact the corridor and contribute little to the revitalization effort?
9. How can the designation of the corridor as a Main Street and Great Street assist in the redevelopment of the corridor?
10. What resources are available to enable current businesses to buy their buildings and stay on the corridor?

11. What additional policies and government programs are available and may be necessary to revitalize the corridor?

12. What should be PCDC's role in the redevelopment of the corridor?

Executive Summary: The Panel's Recommendations

Rhode Island Avenue, NE is in an enviable position. As a major boulevard designated under Pierre-Charles L'Enfant's plan for Washington, Rhode Island Avenue, NE has multiple travel lanes, wide sidewalks and mature trees. The corridor is also fortunate to have a passionate community filled with stable, single-family households who are eager for the corridor to transform to its historic role as the neighborhood-serving commercial district as it once was in the 1950s and 1960s. With PCDC at the forefront for implementing the community's vision for revitalization, the panel developed recommendations to help guide PCDC as they begin their revitalization effort. During the course of a day and a half, the panel focused on the market potential for the commercial district, planning and design elements that should be incorporated into the corridor's streetscape, as well as appropriate development and implementation strategies.

Market Potential

In order to understand how study area businesses are performing today, it is critical that substantial market-related data be collected and analyzed. For example, a detailed understanding of the overall health (i.e. sales performance) of existing businesses is paramount, and tracking the amount of retail inventory, vacancies, and changes in rents by tenant type, over time is considered a critical marketing tool that PCDC can use in its tenant recruitment efforts.

Based on some initial analysis, the panel concluded however, that with few exceptions, many current businesses are not able to generate sufficient sales revenues to support current rents and expenses. As a result, a number of undercapitalized businesses are likely to fail – something that occurs in the normal cycle of urban retail redevelopment – if assistance is not provided – especially because redevelopment requires higher rents. PCDC should plan for the likelihood that a number of existing, undercapitalized businesses will leave as redevelopment emerges, and determine whether, and how, to help those tenants considered important to the community, to remain in business.

While this further suggests that current tenants have not successfully captured the significant levels of disposable income of nearby residents, the panel determined that the communities that represent the commercial district's "trade area" are sufficiently affluent, and comprise roughly \$65 million in annual spending power. These neighborhoods include Brookland, Woodridge, Michigan Park and Brentwood. The most affluent households are located in the "northern" fringes of the trade area, particularly in Michigan Park to Brookland. To draw these households to Rhode Island Avenue, a carefully-crafted, retail tenant recruitment strategy will be necessary.

Planning and Design

The panel understands the overall vision for the corridor and through its streetscape design recommendations worked to create a sense of place and a social center for the commercial district in order to reinforce a sense of pride in the community. The

commercial district will be most successful if an attractive streetscape draws potential customers and ensures that they will want to spend time on the corridor by providing benches, a contiguous (and clustered) retail experience, outdoor seating, lighting, art, and landscape elements. Implementing a façade improvement program is critical as the panel believes it is absolutely necessary to upgrade existing facades by removing security bars, painting buildings and adding attractive signage.

The panel also recommends investing in significant infrastructure improvements within the commercial district. The panel recommends that DDOT install raised medians along Rhode Island, NE in selected locations, and that these raised medians be “greened” by adding trees and plantings to what is now simply asphalt. Narrowing the intersections by bumping out the sidewalks into the parking lanes will also increase pedestrian safety. These “bump-outs” –also referred to as “nubs” – could incorporate landscaping elements to help improve the sense of place along the corridor.

Development and Implementation Strategies

Business Plan. The first step that Premier CDC should take is to update its business plan for the CDC that includes a mission statement for developing the RI Ave Main Street, with a growth plan, and realistic goals to achieve over the next one, two, five and ten years. The panel recommends that the updated business plan include methods to empower PCDC, increase its visibility in the community, and further develop its reputation.

Development Plan. To catalyze development, the panel recommends that PCDC focus its revitalization efforts initially on one block within the study area of Rhode Island Avenue, NE between 20th Street and 24th Street, NE. The panel recommends that Premier CDC focus its efforts on the northwest block of the retail corridor where there are already a number of successful tenants, including Rita’s Italian Ice and Carl’s Sandwich Shop.

Membership and Sponsorship Program. As a means to garner more support, raise money, and engage both community members and businesses, the panel recommends that PCDC expand and develop its membership and sponsorship program.

Business Advisory Board. PCDC should institute a Business Advisory Board for member businesses as a means to bring together the merchants along the corridor

Branding and Communications. The panel recommends that PCDC work with the community and its councilmember to brand the retail area and develop a marketing plan that delivers a consistent logo and slogan to the community, and current and prospective business owners. As part of the branding strategy, it will be important that PCDC continue to develop a communications plan that expands PCDC’s email list-serve, website and newsletter.

Marketing Events and Activities

A key to heightening the profile of PCDC to both businesses and the community is to organize events and fundraising activities that have the goal of bringing together the community. The panel recommends an ongoing series of programs and events such as house or garden tours as well as an annual Arts Festival that features local and regional artists to reinforce the corridor's overall identity.

Façade Improvement Program for the Retail District. One of the first steps towards achieving a sense of progress and change on the corridor is to improve storefront façades. PCDC should look to the DC Main Streets program and other established façade improvement programs, and ensure that annual funding is secured for this purpose.

Technical Assistance. As a requirement for those applying for façade improvements, and as a means to provide ongoing continuing education for business and property owners, PCDC should offer a series of educational workshops. Workshops should be lead by topic experts and should cover important subjects including: navigating the permit process; merchandising and product placement strategies; construction; leasing and marketing of retail and office space; finances and cash flow management; and best practices for start-ups.

Nonprofit Organization Outreach. The panel recommends that PCDC engage the VFW, Teamsters, Masons and St. Francis Catholic Church, all of whom are located within the study area. PCDC should work with these organizations to persuade them to become members, educate them on the goals of PCDC, encourage them to maintain their properties, and engage their members in community programs.

University Partnerships. Area universities may be able to provide technical assistance in architecture, planning and law. Catholic and Howard University, as well as Trinity and Gallaudet University, should be looked to as valuable resources.

Comprehensive Parcel Inventory. PCDC should develop a profile of each parcel within the commercial district that includes information on each parcel's ownership, current tenants (by retail category), lease terms, commercial rents, property taxes, operating expenses, floorplate square footage, conversion potential to other uses, and any other relevant market information to inform tenant recruitment strategies and to provide critical information for businesses considering investment in the corridor.

Liquor License Inventory. While the panel understands that there is a liquor license inventory in place for Ward 5, it will be important that PCDC obtains that information so that they track and maintain liquor licenses (by license type) within the study area and work to keep those licenses within the commercial district.

Expedited Approval Process. Known as fast-tracking or a green-tape process, PCDC should work with their Councilmember to have priority projects expedited through the permitting process.

Funding Tools and Resources. The panel recommends that PCDC look to the following additional tools and resources to build their capacity and provide ongoing operating support as they move forward:

- Main Street Program / Great Streets Initiative
- Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- MacArthur Foundation
- The District of Columbia's Neighborhood-Based Activities Program
- Micro-Loans
- New Market Tax Credits
- Community Development Block Grants

Market Potential

To comprehend realistic market potentials for various uses along the corridor, it is first important to understand business conditions among existing retailers as well as demographic characteristics and stability of the surrounding trade area. Key to understanding the market includes: calculating existing inventory (in square feet) by type of retail; tracking overall sales performance of existing retailers and businesses; estimating spending potential in the surrounding neighborhood trade areas; identifying gaps in specific merchandise categories; and locating appropriate areas to cluster complementary tenants.

It was evident to the panel through the nature of the assignment and conversations with business owners that many retailers within the study area are struggling. However, the panel strongly urges PCDC to gain a better understanding of exactly how retailers are performing today. A thorough inventory of existing businesses, including their square footage, rents and operating costs, and annual sales are critical to understanding future market potentials. While initial information was provided to the panel, it will be important that PCDC work diligently to develop a more thorough understanding of the commercial corridor. This is proprietary information, and will be difficult to obtain from all business owners, but the more forthcoming PCDC can get business owners to be, the more successful, and more effective specific revitalization strategies will be.

Preliminary Estimates

The panel conducted a preliminary retail market analysis, and based upon general quotes, estimates that annual rents average in the range of approximately \$25 / square foot (utilities not included). In order to have a financeable, successful business, retailers must achieve ten times their square foot rents, or \$250 / square foot per year in sales. The panel observed that in most cases annual sales levels fall far below this threshold, and very few businesses appear to be thriving.

The next step in understanding market potentials is to determine what the surrounding neighborhood spends on retail to help identify prospective gaps, and to determine what the market will support in two to five years once physical improvements are made and redevelopment opportunities along the corridor are identified.

Trade Areas

The panel suggests that two trade areas for Rhode Island Avenue, NE— a northern and southern trade area – are appropriate. The first trade area north of Rhode Island Avenue, NE runs from 14th Street, NE, to Michigan Avenue, NE, to the District line, and includes the Brookland, Woodridge and Michigan Park neighborhoods. This potential trade area includes 4,100 residents in 1,715 households (based on 2007 census information).

Considering the weakened state of the corridor's retail inventory, the panel found it remarkable that households in these neighborhoods are generally quite affluent with

significant levels of disposable income. These neighborhoods are also very stable, with an owner-occupancy rate of 83% and an average household income of \$82,300 per year. This translates into an annual retail spending of more than \$35 million per year or \$20,800 per household. Demographic forecasts suggest that these neighborhoods will experience a moderate level of growth over the next five years, totalling 4,220 residents in 1,745 households by 2012. More importantly, average annual household incomes are expected to jump to \$96,000 as these neighborhoods transition with an increasingly greater share of new, younger households with higher incomes.

The second trade area is located south of Rhode Island Avenue from Brentwood Parkway to the railroad tracks, to the District line, and includes Brentwood and Woodridge south. This is a slightly larger and less affluent trade area that includes 4,800 residents in 1,723 households with an average household income of \$64,200. The southern trade area has a greater share of renters with 74% of the households owner-occupied, and lower annual retail spending in the range of \$28 million per year, or \$16,600 per household. The panel attributes this to a higher percentage of elderly households that do not have the same spending habits as younger households.

Moreover, the trade area below Rhode Island Avenue, NE is not anticipated to gain any additional residents over the next five years, but will remain a solidly middle-class neighborhood, with anticipated household incomes forecast to grow to \$75,700 in 2012.

A potential third trade area includes the more than 30,000 commuters that traverse Rhode Island Avenue, NE every day, as well as others (known as “in flow”) outside of the established trade areas who come to Rhode Island Avenue, NE for a specific reason. Given the sponsor’s vision to create a commercial corridor for the residents of the community, this trade area was a less important focus for the panel.

Market Opportunities

While it was not possible during the panel’s time onsite to draw specific conclusions and recommendations on the amount of retail potential that the two trade areas could support along Rhode Island Avenue, NE, today these trade areas collectively generate \$65 million in annual retail spending. The panel estimates that retailers on the corridor today are underperforming (in many cases significantly), with an estimated capture of 5% or less of current trade area spending. Several factors will likely determine the degree to which penetration of trade area spending can be increased, including:

- Recruiting viable retail tenants and other businesses;
- Reducing crime and other disincentives to business location and expansion decisions;
- Undertaking extensive physical improvements in public realm / infrastructure and on private properties;
- Identifying opportunities to assemble parcels for redevelopment;
- Ensuring the availability of business capital / financing; and

- Securing commitments from city agencies, PCDC staff, private property owners, and other stakeholders to work together to address these issues in order to enhance the corridor’s retail (and business) market potentials over the next five years.

As noted, any number of independently owned stores (“mom and pops”) on the corridor that are undercapitalized, are likely to go out of business as redevelopment of the corridor will require higher rents. PCDC needs to develop strategies to assist current tenants, and offer incentives that will be needed to keep those tenants valued by the community, in operation. As is characteristic of the natural cycle of commercial revitalization, once the commercial district achieves a “critical mass” of success, it is likely that those businesses that remain will be fewer, higher performing, higher quality tenants occupying less space. This suggests that redevelopment opportunities – particularly in locations where narrow parcels / lots can be assembled – should consider other uses such as mixed-use residential, and perhaps a limited amount of other supporting uses such as professional office space, cultural / arts-related uses and the like.

It will also be critical that PCDC prepare marketing materials that fully and effectively illustrate the advantages of the surrounding trade areas – including disposable household incomes, spending levels and the like. These demographic characteristics are critical in guiding location decisions among both regional and national retailers across the United States.

Planning and Design

Designed as one of Pierre L'Enfant's grand avenues, Rhode Island Avenue, NE is fortunate to have wide travel lanes, ample sidewalk space, and mature trees. When L'Enfant designed Rhode Island Avenue, NE it was done with the idea that the city of Washington would evolve over time, and the sizeable avenue could therefore allow for densification and changes in scale of the buildings that flanked the avenue.



An example of Rhode Island Avenue's wide sidewalks and mature tree canopy.

The panel therefore saw an opportunity to take advantage of the attributes of the avenue to create a true sense of place along Rhode Island Avenue, NE that reinforces the pride of the community. The panel believes that nodes of retail will work over time and sees an opportunity to create synergies between existing and future retailers as well as opportunities to assemble vacant properties.

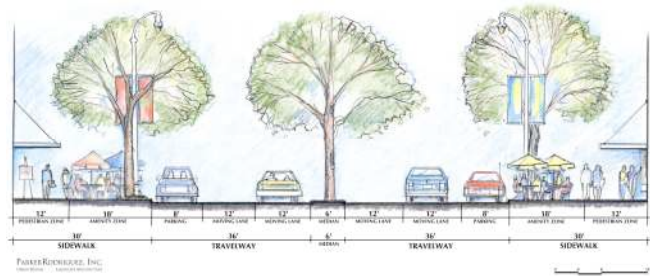
The panel would like to see the retail corridor become a destination for the local community. The revitalized area should become a place where neighborhood residents who choose not to walk to Rhode Island Avenue, NE, can park once and shop for a variety of their needs. The commercial district should get people out of their cars and allow them to linger. It is important that the retail experience provides a series of contiguous shops at street level with limited vacancies.

Infrastructure Improvements

The panel would like to see above ground utilities undergrounded to open up the viewsheds along the corridor and allow the trees to grow uninterrupted. Given the width of Rhode Island Avenue, NE, the panel would like to improve pedestrian safety and recommends that the streetscape incorporate "nubs" also known as "bump-outs" into the revitalization project. "Nubs" are extensions of the sidewalk into the parking lanes at intersections (where parking is not allowed) in order to shorten the distance one has to cross the street. Another infrastructure improvement that the panel would like to see is the greening of the median between north and southbound traffic. While a cement median is already in place, the panel would like to incorporate bushes and trees into the median to help create a sense of arrival to the commercial district.

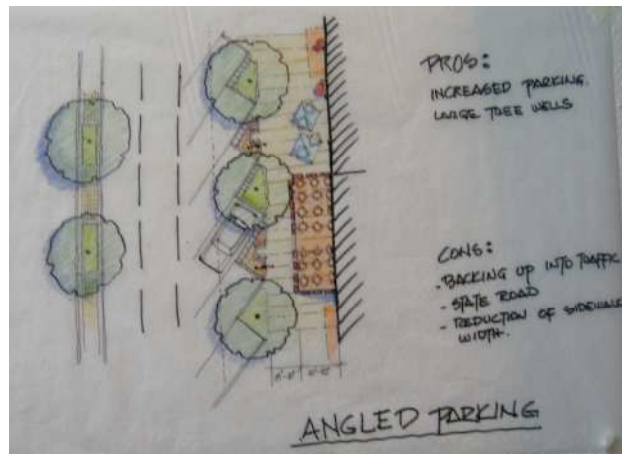
Streetscape

The retail corridor must become more pedestrian friendly, safe, and comfortable to attract the community. The panel envisions 20th to 24th Street, NE becoming an “Awning District” where storefronts all have awnings that advertise their business names while at the same time providing shade and shelter to shoppers and visitors. Lighting along the corridor must be improved and street furnishings including benches, trash receptacles, trees, signage, and banners should be incorporated into a comprehensive streetscape and branding scheme. The panel would also like to see gathering nodes along the corridor for people to sit and visit.



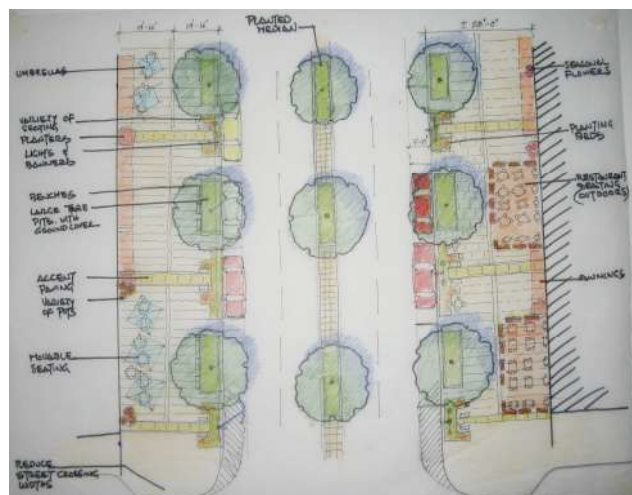
Angled Parking Streetscape Scenario.

To increase the amount of parking along Rhode Island Avenue, NE, the panel developed a streetscape scenario that incorporated angled parking. While this scenario is feasible in terms of functionally being able to achieve angled parking, other than the potential of creating large tree wells for the corridor, the scenario presents a number of difficulties. Rhode Island Avenue, NE is a federal road that serves 30,000 commuters daily, and the panel was unsure whether one could get approval for angled parking. Secondly, angled parking requires vehicles to back into oncoming traffic when leaving, creating a potentially dangerous situation. Finally, to accommodate parking spaces with appropriate depths, one would have to reduce the sidewalk widths.



Parallel Parking Streetscape Scenario.

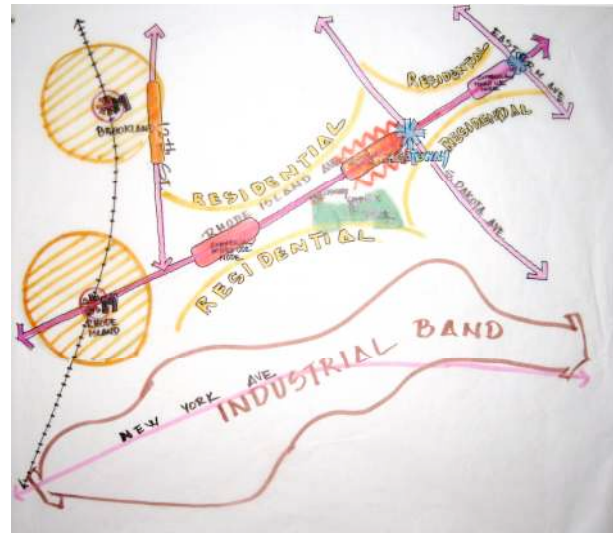
The panel's preferred scheme illustrates what the corridor could look like with parallel parking and recommended streetscape improvements. Cars will continue to park on both sides of the corridor. Sidewalks and median have underground utilities, trees, and banners that run the width of the retail corridor to draw attention to node. A variety of outdoor seating, umbrellas, and al fresco dining enlivens the corridor and attracts pedestrians. To further differentiate the



retail district, the panel recommends incorporating bricks or pavers into the sidewalks. The rendering also illustrates the benefit of “nubs” to make the pedestrian experience safer.

Gateway

The panel recommends that the park at the intersection of South Dakota Avenue and Rhode Island Avenue, NE become a gateway for the retail district, incorporating sculpture or art. Rita’s Italian Ice, which currently serves as a gateway for many, can enhance its image by upgrading its parking areas with pavers that match those used along the sidewalks as well as a seating area at the point where cars do not have room to park.



Façade Improvements

One of the keys to reinventing the corridor will be improving the façades of the existing storefronts. PCDC should create a vision and guidelines for façade improvements in order to help brand and identify the corridor. The panel would like to see bars removed from the storefront windows, buildings painted, and signs placed on all retail shops.

Vacant Store Beautification

The panel would also like to see vacant storefronts treated in a different way. The panel recommends painting vacant buildings, and identifying artists in the community to paint murals on the windows.

Parking

While the panel understands that parking is a key issue for the community and PCDC, the panel felt that parking was not something that PCDC should worry about in these initial stages. With the exception of Sunday’s influx of cars that come to the area to attend the corridor’s many churches, the panel feels that there is sufficient on-street parking to serve the retail. Should parking become an issue, the panel recommends that restaurants provide valet parking services and contract with local churches to use their parking lots. To help attract shoppers and diners to the area, the panel would focus on metered and zoned street parking to make sure that visitors can remain parked for two hours without having to move their vehicles.

Development and Implementation Strategies

Business Plan

The first step that PCDC should take is to update its business plan for the CDC that includes a mission statement for starting a Main Street, a growth plan, and realistic goals to achieve over the next one, two, five, and ten years. While Premier CDC has been in existence for nine years as a volunteer organization, it has taken the next step to employ a full-time Executive Director and seek outside funding sources. This maturation of the organization must be recognized by the community and businesses alike, and the panel recommends that the updated business plan include methods to empower PCDC, increase its visibility in the community, and further develop its reputation.

Development Plan

The study area, which runs along Rhode Island Avenue, NE from 20th Street to 24th Street, NE, while small, contains many vacancies, and encompasses numerous blocks. To catalyze development and show the community that progress has been made, the panel recommends that PCDC focus its revitalization efforts initially on one block. The panel recommends that PCDC begin on the northwest block of the retail corridor where there are already a number of successful tenants including Rita's Italian Ice and Carl's Sandwich Shop. The panel recommends that PCDC target initial funding for streetscape and façade improvements to this block. This will create a catalyst for change and will provide an immediate impact on corridor, showing members of the community and daily commuters that the commercial district is becoming a vibrant, pedestrian friendly, retail corridor.

Membership and Sponsorship Program

As a means to garner support, raise money, and engage both community members and businesses, the panel recommends that PCDC develop a membership and sponsorship program. There will be many opportunities where PCDC will provide technical assistance and grants to businesses. The panel believes that these benefits should be made available only to those who in return are committed to PCDC by supporting the organization through membership or sponsorship.

It will be important for PCDC to develop a list of member benefits – including the types of technical and financial assistance that individuals and organizations can take advantage of – as well as different levels of membership and sponsorship to reach a broad audience. While the panel recommends that PCDC look to established community development corporations for direction on how to organize their membership packages, the panel was able to point to successful organizations that have offered individual memberships between \$25 and \$500 as well as business memberships that are segmented by the company or organization's budget.

Branding and Communications

Although the panel noticed green Woodridge banners on some of the light posts within the commercial district, the panel did not feel as though the logo or slogan was strong enough to brand the retail corridor. The panel recommends that PCDC works with the community and the Councilmember to create an identity for the retail area, and develop a branding strategy that deliver a consistent logo and slogan to the community, current and prospective business owners. Within the branding strategy, the panel would like to see PCDC develop both marketing materials for brokers and prospective investors, as well as a tenant recruitment strategy to begin to jumpstart the revitalization process.

As a part of the branding strategy, it will be important that PCDC update its communications plan. One of PCDC's strengths and purposes should be as a disseminator of information. It will be important for PCDC to foster communications with businesses and community members and to transmit this information through its email list-serve, website and newsletter.

The website should be updated regularly with information for community members, business and property owners, as well as prospective retailers and investors. The website should highlight the assets of the community and the corridor – including the data provided in the *Marketing Potential* section of this report. It is also a suggestion of the panel, that PCDC profiles its members on a monthly basis to draw attention to the goods and services that those who support PCDC provide to the community.

Marketing Events and Activities

A key to heightening the profile of PCDC to both businesses and the community is for PCDC to organize events and fundraising activities that have the goal of bringing together the community. The panel recommends events such as house or garden tours, as well as an annual Arts Festival that features local and regional artists. While the panel supports the idea of an arts festival, it cautions against pursuing the retail corridor as an arts district. Art districts have been successful in Hyattsville and Mt. Rainier because they are unique to the community; an additional arts district within a few miles will only dilute its originality and success.

There may also be an opportunity to introduce memorial bricks or pavers into the commercial district's sidewalks. This proven fundraiser could be a way for community members to contribute to the revitalization of the corridor while be recognized for their commitment.

Façade Improvement Program for the Commercial District

The panel recommends that one of the first steps towards making progress and implementing change on the corridor is to improve storefront façades. PCDC should look to the Main Street program and established façade improvement programs to create a funding source. Like the Georgia Avenue Gateway CDC, PCDC should be responsible for managing grant funding for façade improvements along the retail

corridor. PCDC should develop a vision and design guidelines for the program (with the help of local architects and designers); promote the program and explains the requirements among store owners; enroll property owners in the program; and manage subcontracts with architectural and construction firms to accomplish the design upgrades.

Technical Assistance and Workshops

A core component of the Main Streets Program is the ability to provide technical assistance to those in need. The panel sees one of PCDC's roles as being a convener to provide educational workshops on topics of importance to new and existing businesses, and property owners.

Workshop topics should include: merchandising, product placement, navigating the permit process, construction process, leasing and marketing space, finances and cash flow management, and best practices for start-ups. The panel understands that no one person can be an expert in all of these topics, and recommends that PCDC bring in guest speakers for each session.

The panel would like to see these programs as a requirement for those who avail themselves of the resources available through the façade improvement program as a way for PCDC to ensure that the investment that they are making in these storefronts will be carried through to the inside of the stores by creating more productive businesses.

Business Advisory Board

PCDC should institute a Business Advisory Board for member businesses as a means to bring together the merchants along the corridor. The panel is aware that there was once an independent business association that has become defunct, however rather than reviving this separate association, the panel would instead like to empower the CDC and have an advisory board as a program within PCDC.

Comprehensive Parcel Inventory

One of the most important things that PCDC could do to make themselves valuable to prospective businesses, property owners, investors, and developers, is to have comprehensive information on each of the parcels within the study area. PCDC should have a profile of each parcel that includes the owners, tenants, lease lengths, rents, taxes, square footage, potential uses, and any other relevant information that those looking to invest in the corridor may find important.

Liquor License Inventory

While the panel understands that there is a liquor license inventory in place for Ward 5, it will be important that PCDC obtains that information so that they may track and maintain an inventory of liquor licenses within the study area. It should be a goal of the CDC to keep any transferred licenses within the commercial district. There is also the question of regulations that prohibit the issuance of liquor licenses within 500 feet of a church or educational facility. Given the number of storefront churches along the

corridor, it will be important for PCDC to understand how that regulation relates to these tenants.

Nonprofit Organization Outreach

The panel noted that there are a number of nonprofit organizations located within the study area that are important to the future of the corridor's revitalization. The panel recommends that PCDC engage the VFW, Teamsters, Masons, and St. Francis Catholic Church. PCDC should encourage these organizations to become members, educate them on the goals of PCDC, persuade them to maintain their properties, and encourage their members to volunteer in community programs.

The panel would also like to see a PCDC board member assigned as the "Religious Relations Liaison." There are over twenty churches within the study area, many of them storefront churches, all of whom should be responsible for maintaining their properties. It will be an important element of the recommended comprehensive parcel inventory as well as to the overall health of the corridor for PCDC to understand each church's timing, including the length of their leases, and their landlords' future intentions. For those with short term leases, PCDC should be proactive in engaging the landlords to educate them on how to re-tenant.

University Partnerships

PCDC, while having a strong community volunteer base, will at some point find itself in need of technical assistance to help implement their revitalization vision. The panel recommends that PCDC look to area universities, including Catholic and Howard University as well as Trinity and Gallaudet University for technical assistance in architecture, planning, and law.

Expedited Approval Process

PCDC should work together with their councilmember and the Office of Planning to implement an expedited approval process for the retail corridor. Known as fast-tracking or a green-tape process, the goal would be to have priority projects expedited through the permitting process so that these projects are completed within a reasonable timeframe.

Funding Tools and Resources

The panel recommends that PCDC look to the following additional resources and funding tools to build their capacity and provide ongoing operating support as they move forward:

Main Street Program / Great Streets Initiative. DC Main Streets and the Great Streets Initiative are two District of Columbia urban revitalization programs that offer Rhode Island Avenue, NE opportunities to implement the key revitalization goals. PCDC should work to take advantage of the grants, technical assistance, and initiatives offered through these programs in order to implement their revitalization plan.

Local Organization Support. The panel recommends that PCDC seek out the support of the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), and the MacArthur Foundation. There are also community development corporations locally, regionally, and nationally that could provide advice and guidance as PCDC evolves. It will be important for PCDC to find a mentor and develop relationships with similarly situated community development corporations with whom they can share best practices in order to grow most effectively.

Neighborhood-Based Activities. The District of Columbia's Department of Housing and Community Development provides a broad range of programmatic initiatives as part of its Neighborhood Based Activities programs. These initiatives are carried out through neighborhood community development organizations working in their local service areas. Grants are tailored to match community needs. While a majority of the programmatic components are focused on affordable housing, the program includes small business and commercial corridor development assistance as well as a storefront façade improvement program.

Micro-Loans. Under the Micro-loan program, the Small Business Administration makes loans of up to \$35,000 available to nonprofit community based lenders (intermediaries). These intermediaries then make loans to eligible new and growing small business, in order to help spur revitalization.

New Market Tax Credits. The New Markets Tax Credit Program provides tax credits to those who make qualified equity investments in designated Community Development Entities (CDEs). Substantially all of the qualified equity investment must in turn be used by the CDE to provide investments in low-income communities.

Community Development Block Grants. The Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) program provides annual grants for projects that meet one of three national objectives: principally benefits persons of low- and moderate- income; eliminates slum and blight; or meets an urgent need of recent origin threatens public health and safety. The panel is aware that this is currently one of PCDC's sources of funding, and the panel recommends that it continues to seek block grants as it moves forward.

Conclusion

Rhode Island Avenue, NE has the fundamentals to be transformed into a viable, neighborhood-focused commercial district, providing the surrounding community and nearby neighborhoods with a pedestrian friendly, neighborhood retail center, where residents can dine, shop, and visit. The affluent, stable, predominantly single-family households of Woodridge, Brookland, Michigan Park, and Brentwood are lacking the convenience goods and services that the commercial district has the potential to provide. The avenue's wide sidewalks, mature trees and potential for landscaped medians provide a strong foundation upon which to develop a pedestrian friendly streetscape.

PCDC is also in a unique position to take advantage of well regarded government programs that will help move forward the projects and initiatives necessary to rebuild the identity of the commercial district. By focusing efforts one block at a time, beginning with the block that currently has the most energy, PCDC can start to implement fundamental changes in the commercial district.

Moving forward, there will be a number of issues and opportunities that PCDC will encounter, and to be best able to position itself, the panel recommends that PCDC continue to seek guidance from mature, respected, community development corporations who have had past similar experiences. The panel has no doubt that working together with DC Main Streets, the Great Streets Initiative, and Councilmember Harry L. Thomas, Jr., Rhode Island Avenue, NE's commercial district will again emerge as a vibrant, pedestrian friendly place for local businesses to thrive and for area residents to live, shop and dine.

Appendix

Illustration 1: This illustration depicts recommended streetscape improvements, including those which would enable 20th to 24th Street, NE to become an “Awning District” where storefronts all have awnings that advertise their business names while at the same time providing shade and shelter to shoppers and visitors.

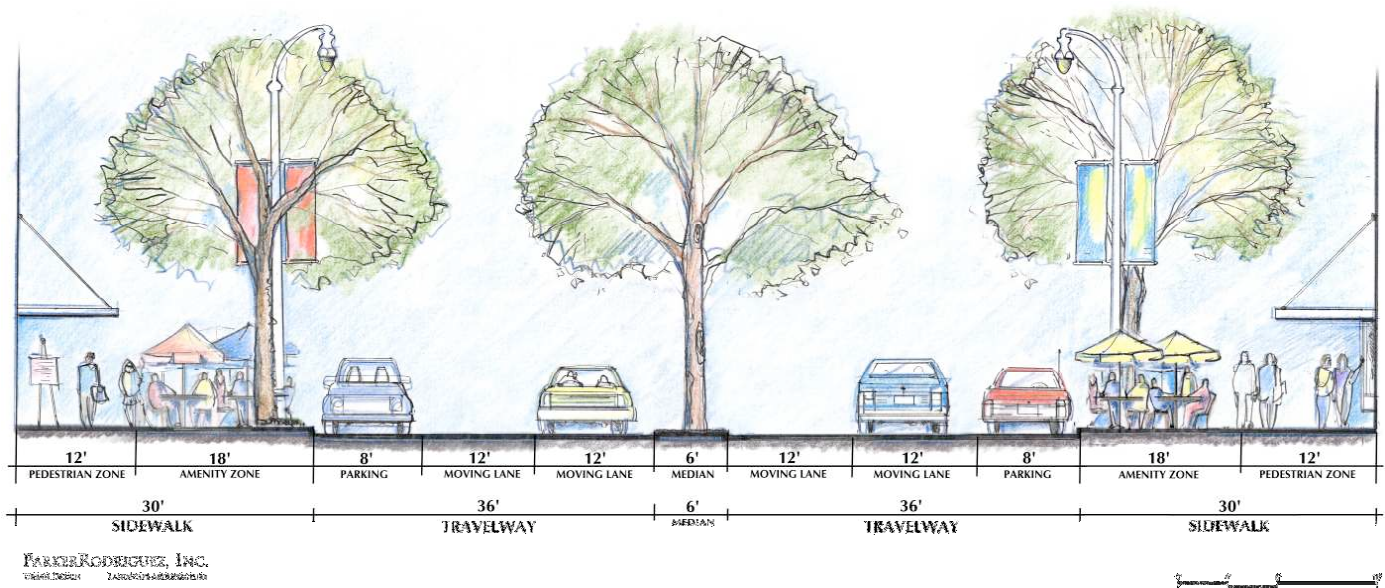


Illustration 2: Angled Parking Streetscape Scenario

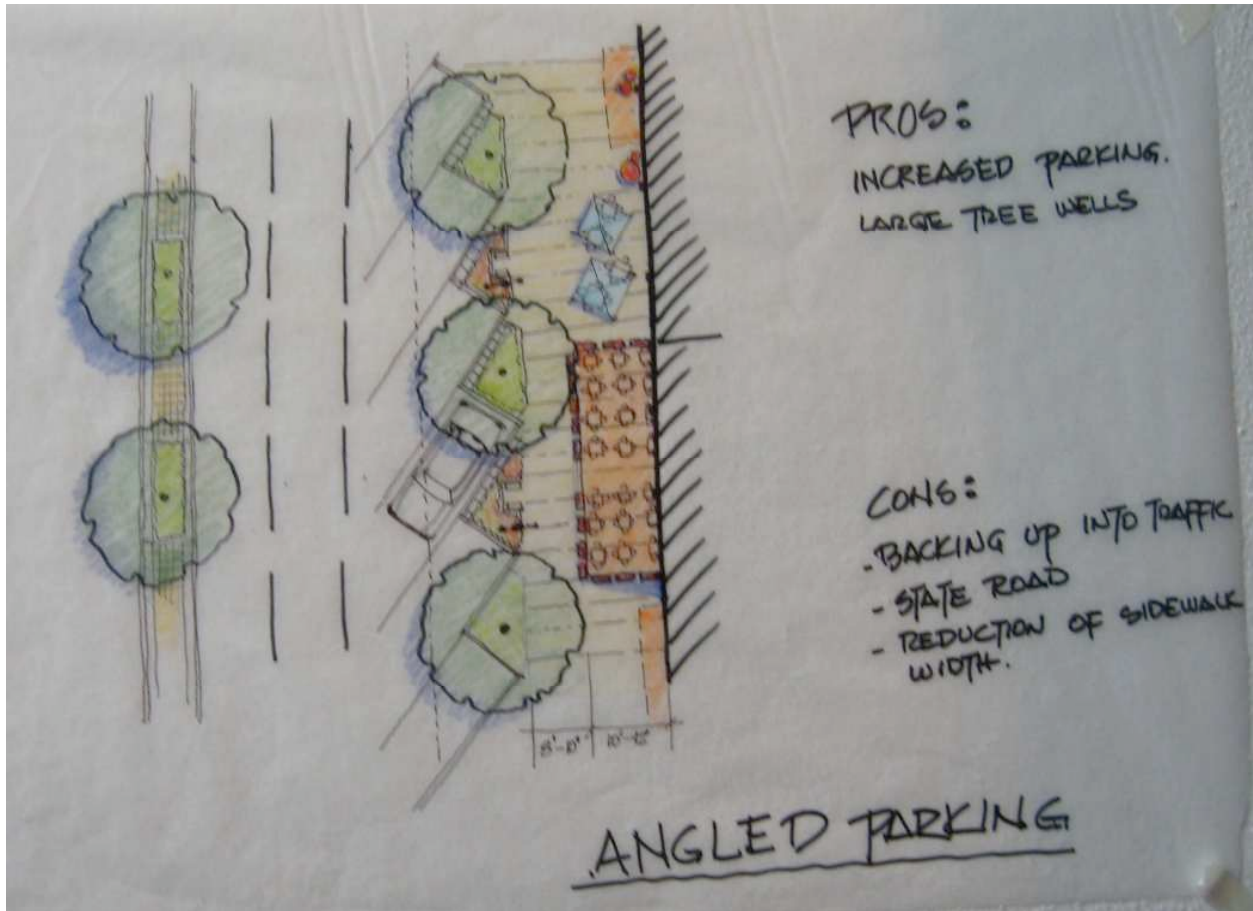


Illustration 3: Parallel Parking Streetscape Scenario

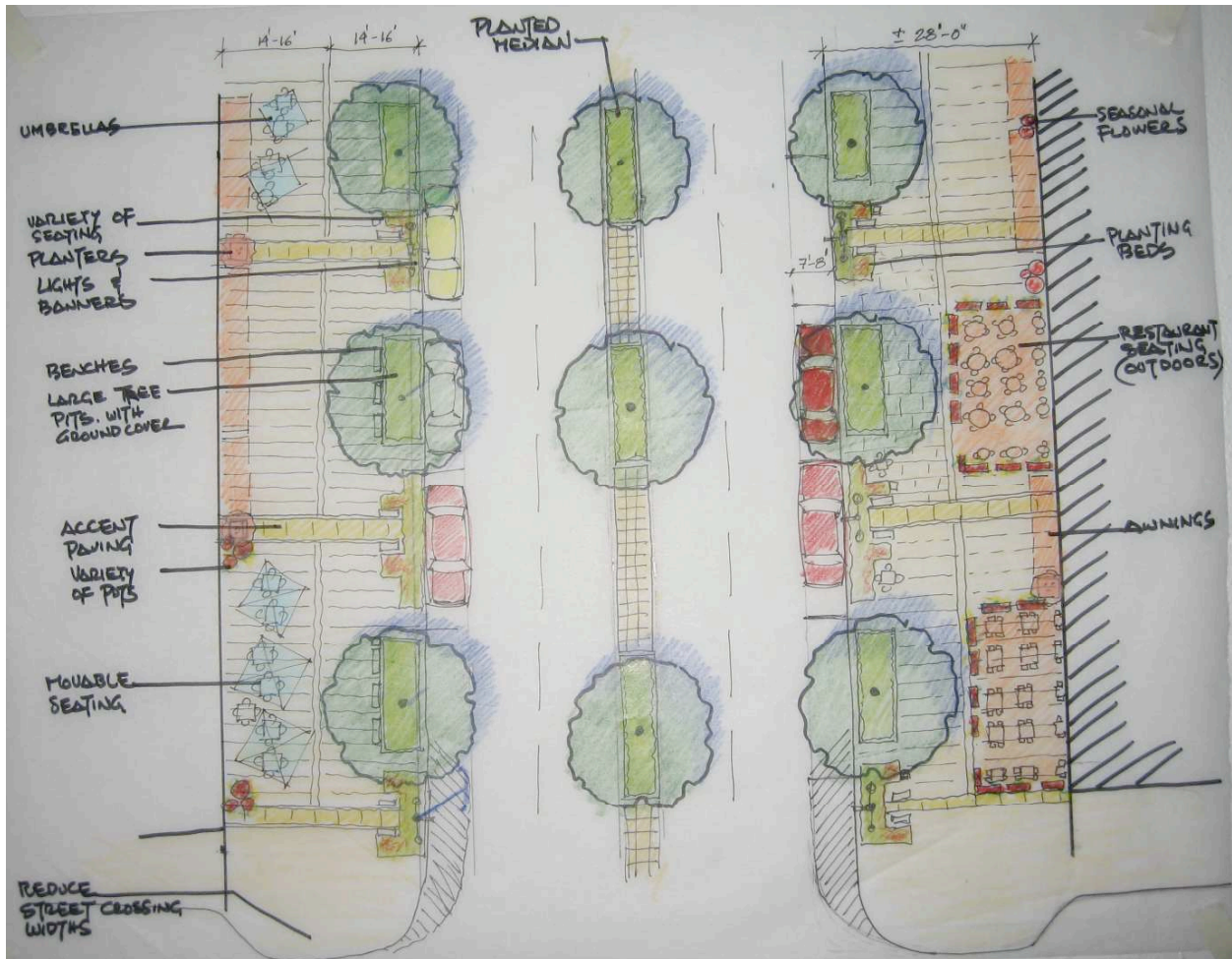
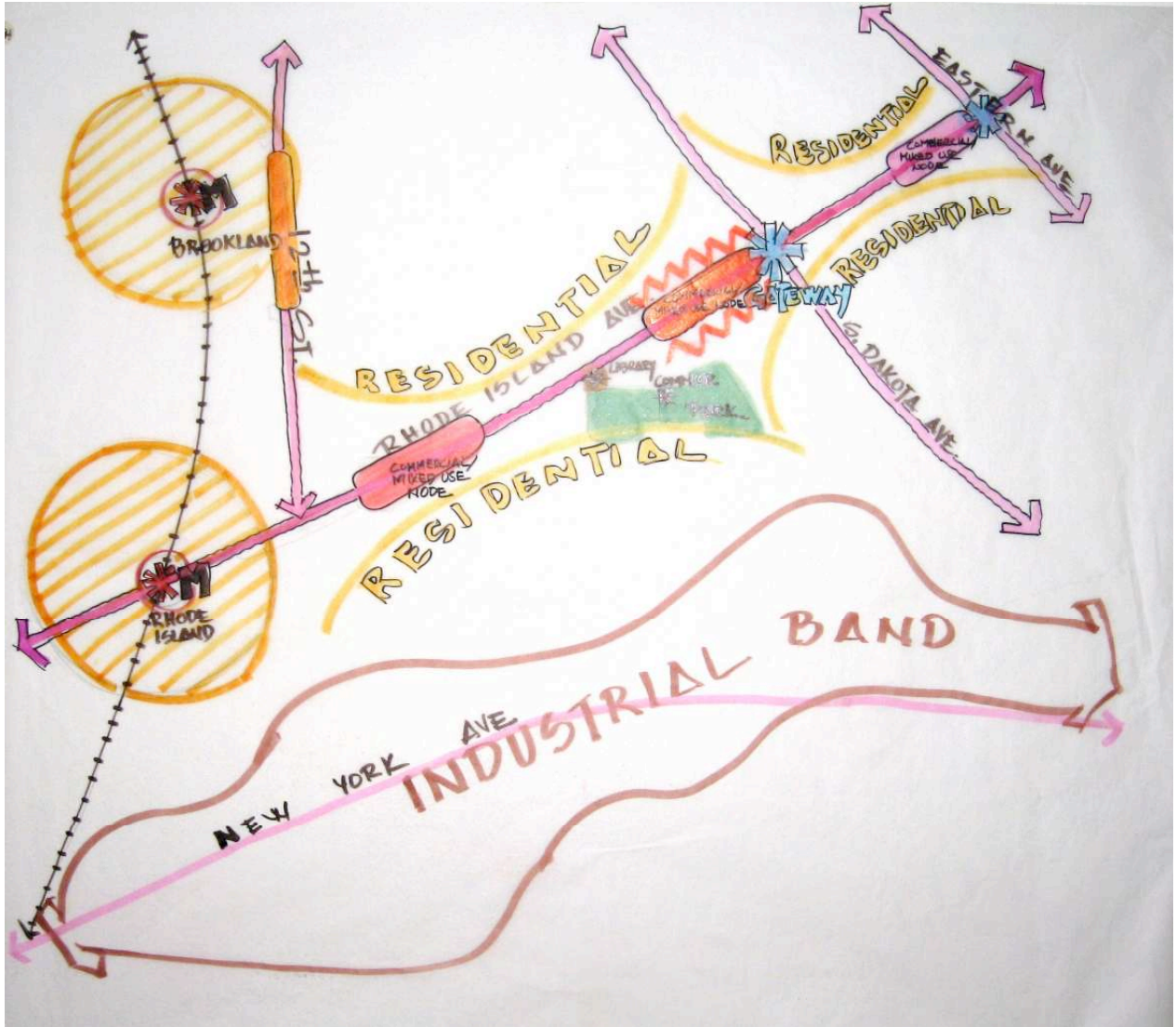


Illustration 4: Diagram of area, recommending improvement of the park at the intersection of Rhode Island Avenue and South Dakota Avenue in order to create a gateway for the retail district.



About the Panel

Sandy Silverman, AIA
Dorsky Hodgson Parrish Yue Architects
Washington, DC

As the founding partner of the Washington, DC office which opened in 1999, Mr. Silverman is responsible for the design of projects in the residential, commercial and senior living studios. Award winning projects delivered under his direction have been published nationally. He regularly speaks at conferences on recent design and development trends.

Mr. Silverman serves on the Executive Committee of the Urban Land Institute (ULI) Washington District Council and on ULI's Senior Living Council. Through multiple ULI Technical Assistance Panels, he lends his expertise to evaluate and recommend development options for challenging neighborhoods, facilities, and sites. He provides expert testimony and presents planning, urban design, and rezoning proposals before many of the major government jurisdictions in the Washington, DC Metropolitan Area.

Mr. Silverman's 35 years of experience reflects his substantial range of expertise in feasibility analyses as well as site planning, design and development of commercial, hi-rise residential, senior living, institutional and mixed-use projects. He has been responsible for the design of over ten thousand multi-family housing units, and one and a half million square feet of office space. His commitment to quality design, coupled with a disciplined adherence to project budgets and schedules, has been essential to his successful relationships with clients, government agencies, and communities.

With the rebirth of urban housing, Mr. Silverman has focused his time on the development of many mixed-use high density, rental and condominium residential projects along Washington, DC's Metro corridors and other urban downtown areas such as Boston's Waterfront, Downtown West Palm Beach, Fort Lauderdale, and Jacksonville, Florida. Since the recent housing boom, he has been responsible for the design of over 5,000 residential units in more than 20 buildings.

Mr. Silverman has his Bachelor of Architecture and Masters Certificate from Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri, and was the recipient of the James I. Steedman Memorial Scholarship. He is a member of the American Institute of Architects, ULI, the DC Building Industry Association, and the American Association of Homes and Services for the Aging.

W. Thomas Lavash
Economics Research Associates
Washington, DC

W. Thomas Lavash joined Economics Research Associates in 1994. He brings to public and private clients 23 years of experience and focuses his work in two of ERA's core practice areas—urban real estate and economic land planning. He directs engagements dealing with all property sectors, with an emphasis on downtown and waterfront projects, commercial district redevelopment initiatives, and large-scale master land planning projects. Mr. Lavash conducts these assignments throughout the United States and, as a partner in the firm, leads the urban redevelopment practice in Florida.

Selected public clients include many municipal and regional governments across the United States; the U.S. General Services Administration; Florida Department of Transportation; and the Massachusetts Port Authority. In Florida, he assists numerous community redevelopment authorities across the state.

Selected private clients include General Growth Properties, Hines Interests, Icahn Enterprises, Michael Swerdlow Companies, Prudential Realty, Terrabrook, Wells Fargo, Bank of America, and regional and national developers. He works with many national and regional urban planning firms as part of multi-disciplinary teams focusing on market analysis, development programming, financial feasibility, and economic impacts.

As a Senior Associate with the Washington, D.C. office of RCDH, Inc. between 1991 and 1994, he appraised Class A commercial and residential properties and advised on acquisition and disposition strategies for institutional clients throughout the Northeast Corridor. He served as Vice President of Research for the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) International in Washington, D.C. in 1991. From 1986-1991, he was a Senior Associate and project manager at Halcyon Ltd., completing market assessments of residential and commercial projects across the United States. He was an urban planner with EDAW Inc. from 1984-1986.

He is a member of the Urban Land Institute, active in the District Council, Washington, D.C., and is listed in *Who's Who in the East*. He has served on multiple ULI advisory services and AIA panels across the United States, and has participated in multiple speaking engagements on market fundamentals, commercial revitalization, and public-private financing.

Mr. Lavash holds a Master of City Planning degree from the University of Pennsylvania with a certificate in Real Estate Development from its Wharton School of Business (1983), and a Bachelor of Arts in Urban Studies, *cum laude*, from the University of Massachusetts at Dartmouth (1980). He is a 23-year resident of Washington, D.C., including Adams-Morgan and, more recently, Michigan Park in Northeast Washington.

Rufus S. Lusk, III
Port Towns Shopping Center at Colmar Manor
Colmar Manor, MD

Rufus has been a partner in the Port Towns Shopping Center at Colmar Manor since 1989, a 60,000SF neighborhood shopping center, anchored by Shoppers, CVS, Bank of America, IHOP, Burger King and Subway, and including 8 local “mom and pop” tenants. He helped plan and oversee a \$500,000 renovation in 2004. The center has been fully leased for the last 10 years and in 2008-2009 the Shoppers, CVS, BK and IHOP will all be renovated. Rufus is active in all areas of this property's ownership and management and serve as partners' representative with community and public safety officials.

Rufus is a board member and real estate chair of the Port Towns Community Development Corporation; an ICSC member, currently serving on the Maryland State Government Affairs Committee, and a ULI member. He has also served as a committee member for the 2007 and 2008 Urban Edge Conferences, sponsored by the Gateway, Hyattsville and Port Towns CDCs, along with the Prince George's County Economic Development Department.

Currently Rufus is also working on the steering committee for the Port Towns CDC's development of the Riverview on the Anacostia River, which includes a 175 unit mixed use apartment/townhouse project along with community based retail. The project is currently in the RFP phase.

Previously, Rufus was president of Rufus S. Lusk & Son, Inc, a Baltimore-Washington public records real estate information company that was sold to TRW-Redi in 1994. Rufus is proud to be a 4th generation Washingtonian and honored to be a part of ULI's Rhode Island Avenue, NE TAP work. He graduated from Georgetown and Yale. He resides in the Federal Hill area of Baltimore City. Rufus is married to the artist Jessica Damen and they have three children -- Daughter Rebekah, a Catholic University law student, currently serves as the chair of the Port Towns Community Development Corporation.

Martin Mellett
Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC)
Washington, DC

Martin joined LISC in 1996. Martin is a Senior Program's Officer, and in that role manages all aspects of the Community Development Support Collaborative a multi-year funders collaborative and project of the Washington Regional Association of Grantmakers administered by LISC. Responsibilities include fundraising, grant making and management, technical assistance, and training and internships; management of Steering Committee and Sub-Committees, program evaluation and advocacy/education; ongoing technical assistance and guidance to CDC leadership.

Prior to LISC, Martin worked as the manager of a grants program with the Archdiocese of Washington and also served as a partner in a small law firm specializing in matters of immigration law. Martin has a law degree from Antioch Law School and is licensed to practice law in Maryland and the District of Columbia. Martin has an undergraduate degree from the University of Notre Dame.

Carla Merritt
LeDroit Park Development Company
Washington, DC

Born in Washington, DC and a District of Columbia resident, Carla Merritt has a vision and passion for providing more viable retail options to the city through her venture company LeDroit Park Development Company, LLC. The company derives its name from the LeDroit Park neighborhood where she currently resides with her family.

Carla Merritt's experience includes retail leasing, development, redevelopment and repositioning in over 3 million square feet of retail shopping centers in Maryland, Virginia and the District of Columbia. She has worked for top notch firms such as Insignia ESG, Jones Lang LaSalle, and The Rappaport Companies.

LeDroit Park Development Company specializes in landlord representation, retail consulting, retail place making, retail development, retail master leases, mixed-use retail, retail ground leases, community revitalization, public / private partnerships, retail property management, facilities management, retail investment property, and construction management.

Carla Merritt is a graduate of Hood College in Frederick, Maryland with a BA in Pre-law. Her real estate memberships include: the Real Estate Associate Program (REAP), for which she is a constituent board member; the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC); African American Real Estate Professionals (AAREP); Women In Retail Real Estate (WIRRE); and the District of Columbia Building and Industry Association (DCBIA). Additionally, LeDroit Park Development Company is a member organization of the District of Columbia Chamber of Commerce, LSDBE certified by the Department of Small and Local Business Development, and MBE/DBE certified by the Maryland Department of Transportation.

Maurice Perry
Banc of America Community Development Corporation
Washington, DC

Maurice Perry is a Senior Development Manager responsible for the development and rehabilitation of multi-family apartment communities in the Washington, DC metro area. As Senior Development Manager, he is responsible for site acquisition, project finance and day-to-day project management.

Before joining Bank of America's community banking team, Maurice worked for East of the River CDC as Vice President of Real Estate Development where he managed a team of project managers responsible for the acquisition and development of affordable rental, condominium and single-family projects in southeast Washington, DC. Prior to East of River CDC, Maurice was a Senior Development Manager with Simpson Housing Solutions, LLC (SHS) in Long Beach, California, one of the nation's largest real estate investment and development firms. While at SHS, he was responsible for the development of over 800 units of affordable housing.

Maurice has over 13 years of extensive experience in community housing development. He has special expertise in assembling complex financing to develop affordable housing utilizing tax-exempt bonds and Low Income Housing Tax Credits. Maurice has developed projects that include adaptive re-use, new construction and extensive renovation. He is skilled in community relations and has worked extensively with neighborhood associations and tenant groups.

Maurice earned a B.A. in Business Communications from Loyola University and an MBA from The Anderson School at UCLA. He serves on the boards of the Washington, DC's Coalition for Nonprofit Housing and Economic Development and Mi Casa, Inc., a local nonprofit affordable housing development corporation.

Trini Rodriguez, RLA, AICP
ParkerRodriguez, Inc.
Alexandria, Virginia

Ms. Trini Rodriguez is a registered landscape architect and land planner, with degrees in architecture, landscape architecture and urban design from the University of Venezuela and University of Pennsylvania. She is principal of ParkerRodriguez, a landscape architecture and land planning firm of over 20 professionals. Ms. Rodriguez has nearly twenty years of experience managing the planning and design of large-scale, mixed-use projects throughout the United States and abroad. Her interdisciplinary expertise has served a broad spectrum of public agencies, institutions, private developers and corporations.

Ms. Rodriguez has been responsible for planning and design of Disney's *Celebration*, EYA's *Clarendon Market Common*, Greenvest's *Cameron Station*, Xerox's *Lansdowne*, Lerner's *Dulles Town Center*, Shooshan's *Liberty Center*, and landscape guidelines for Peterson's *National Harbor*. She is currently planning and designing LCOR's *North Bethesda Town Center*, UTC's *University Town Center*, Magruder's *Summerfield Metro* in Prince George's County, Mill's *Potomac Center* in Prince William County and a score of urban infill projects throughout the Washington metropolitan area.

Trini is fluent in three languages, is LEED certified, and is an active member of the Urban Land Institute as well as the ASLA, and AICP.

**Michael Sponseller
The Hogan Group
Annapolis, MD**

Mike Sponseller is a land broker with the Hogan Group Land Division. Mike grew up in Frederick County, Maryland, the child of the Sponseller Homes family, learning the basics of residential development. Later, Mike spent time in the commercial leasing field, working for CB Richard Ellis and Julien J. Studley in Denver, Colorado. During that time Mike represented landlords and tenants such as The Amstar Group, Morgan Stanley Dean Witter, Experian, the URS Corporation, Toshiba, and many others.

At The Hogan Group, Mike has worked representing buyers and sellers in the discovery and development of new projects throughout the state, with a focus on Anne Arundel, Frederick, and Prince George's Counties. Mike has placed specific emphasis on tracking established and emerging trends and how those trends are changing the direction of the development industry. Some of Mike's current clients include Drees Homes, Trammell Crow Residential, JBG Rosenfeld, K Hovnanian Homes, Federal Capital Partners, and Abbey Road Development.

Mike is a graduate of the Leeds School of Business at the University of Colorado, and recently received his Masters in Business Administration from the Graziadio School at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. He is a member of the Urban Land Institute, and the MNCBIA State Government & Legislative Affairs Committee.