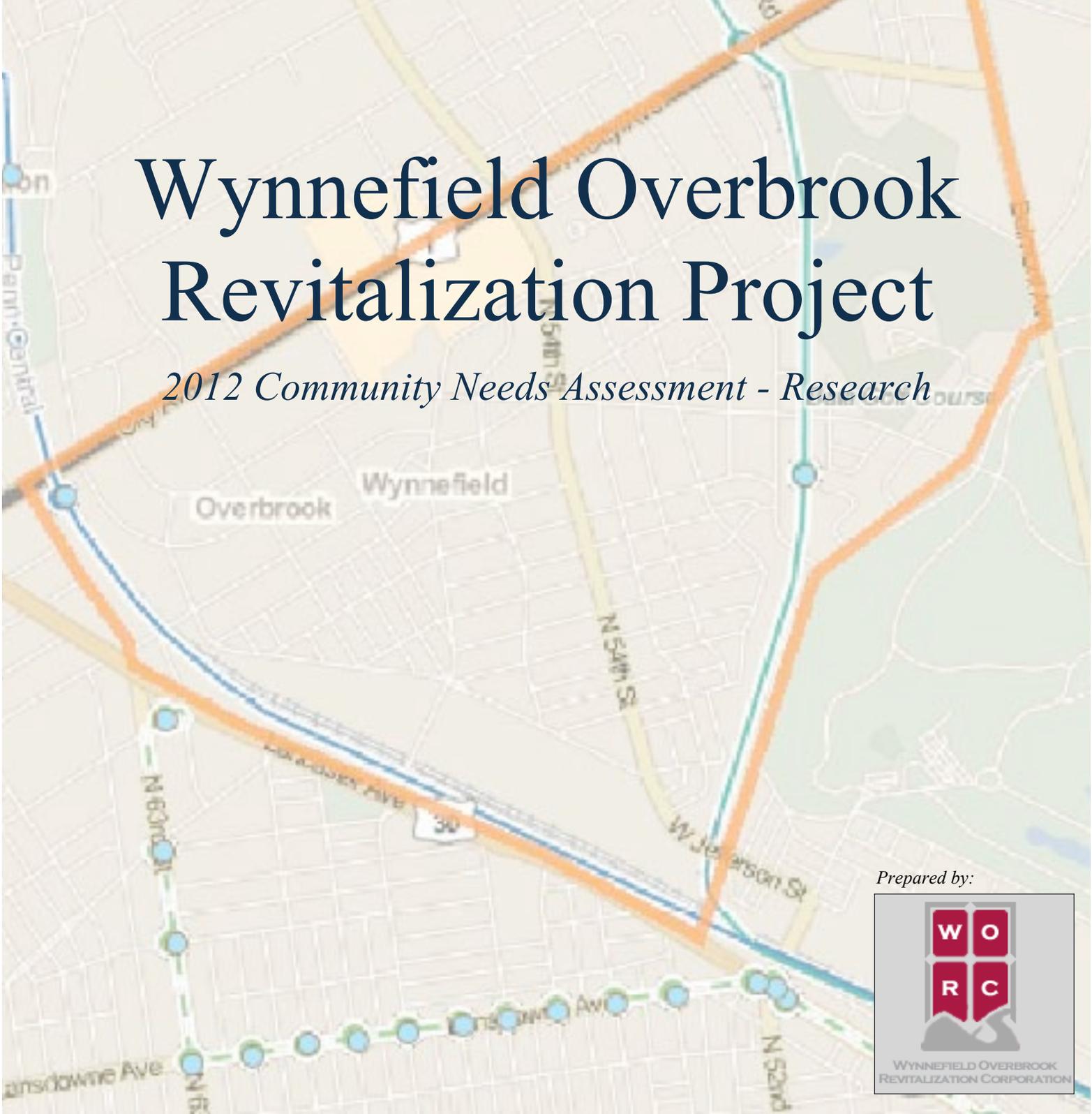


# Wynnefield Overbrook Revitalization Project

*2012 Community Needs Assessment - Research*



Prepared by:

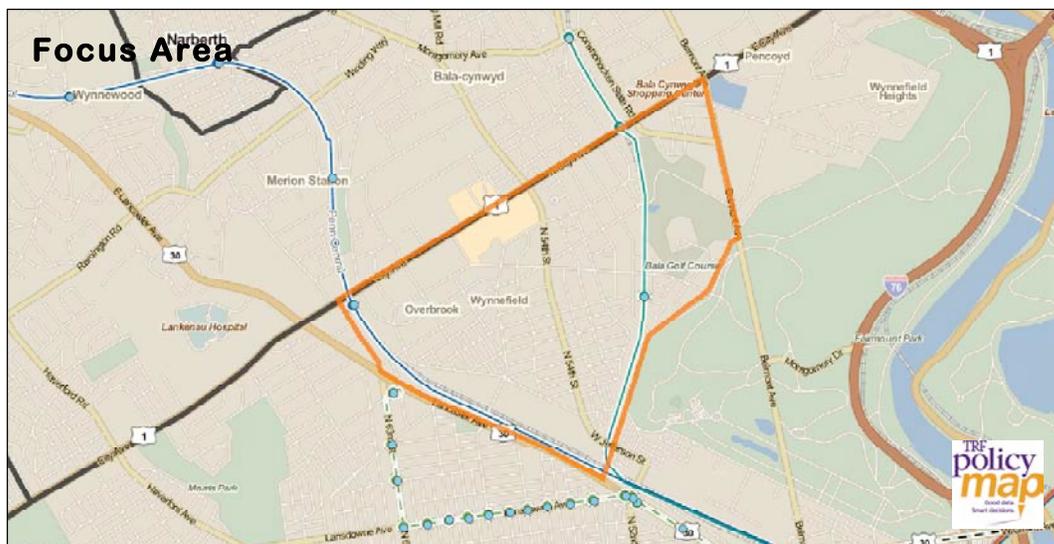


# Wynnefield Overbrook Revitalization Project

The Wynnefield Overbrook Revitalization Corporation (WORC) seeks to improve the distressed Philadelphia neighborhoods within the 19131 and 19151 zip codes – bounded by City Avenue, the Schuylkill River, Fairmount Park, and Cobbs Creek. The creation of WORC was an outgrowth of efforts by Mayor Michael Nutter, then the 4<sup>th</sup> District Councilman, Saint Joseph’s University (SJU), and other neighborhood anchors that have become increasingly active in working with the community to better the area.

This research report was prepared by WORC in 2012 to help assess community needs. Although thorough, additional community outreach and planning work is required to more comprehensively guide revitalization efforts through a Neighborhood Plan. The report is useful, however, to begin to strategically and sustainably advance the area’s revitalization. WORC has already begun to coalesce and leverage a diversity of existing and potential efforts to improve housing, commercial areas, and quality of life issues. Potential projects to address identified needs are detailed in the last section of this report.

Within WORC’s large service area, its primary initial focus is on the Wynnefield and Overbrook Farms areas in closest proximity to SJU, outlined in orange in the map below. Two regional rail lines, Fairmount Park, and the major thoroughfares of Belmont and City Avenues border this Focus Area, which is transected by 54<sup>th</sup> Street.



The Focus Area is a beautiful, historic and diverse community with many amenities and strong assets. Covering roughly 1.5 square miles, an estimated 21,528 people lived here in 2009, an increase of more than 3% from 2,000<sup>1</sup>. SJU has made significant investments in the improvement of its Philadelphia campus, which dominates the northwestern edge of the Area, and the City Avenue Special Services District has led efforts to re-imagine City Avenue and encourage beneficial development along this regional corridor.

Unfortunately, like many once-stable Philadelphia communities, the Area is seeing the signs of decline – deteriorating housing, a population increasingly burdened by housing costs, struggling commercial areas without revitalization plans, and too few community and green spaces. Long-abandoned properties along the once-thriving 54<sup>th</sup> Street and Bryn Mawr neighborhood commercial areas contribute to the perception of an area at a critical transition point.

<sup>1</sup> Source: 2010 US Census

<sup>2</sup> Source: RealtyTrac data, collected October 2012

<sup>3</sup> Source: PolicyMap, The Reinvestment Fund

<sup>4</sup> Source: West Park District Plan, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

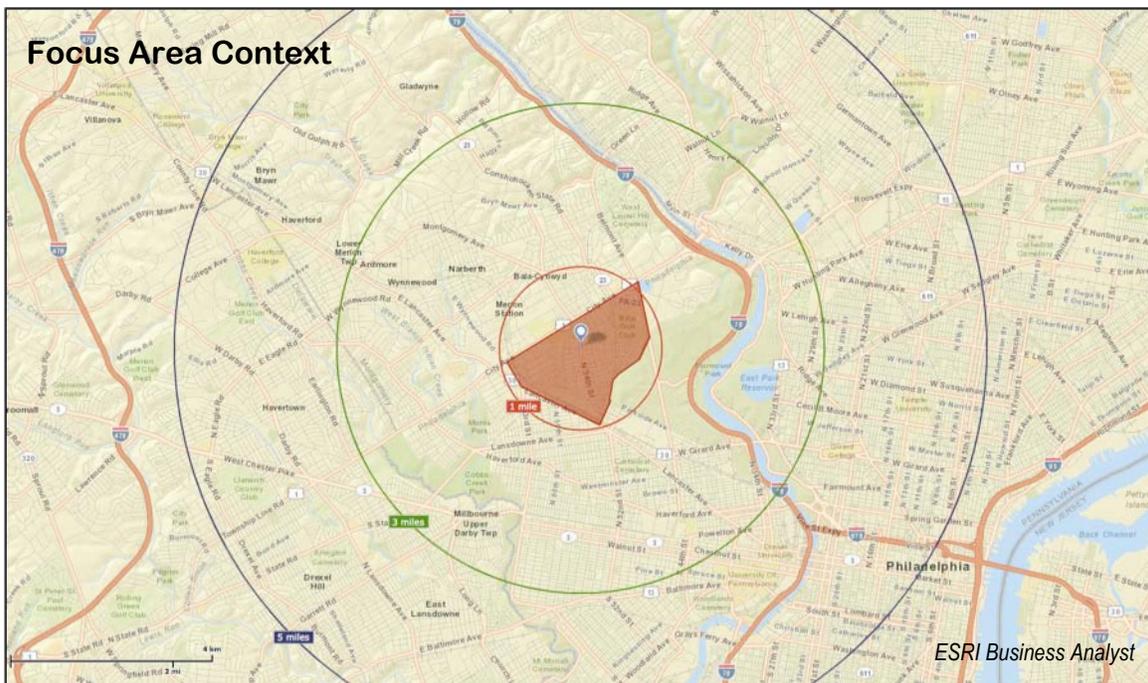
<sup>5</sup> Source: ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile, ESRI and InfoGroup, run October 2012



# Wynnefield Overbrook Revitalization Project

## West Park District Plan

WORC's service area corresponds to the West Park District as defined by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission for its West Park District Plan. The Planning Commission has endorsed the Wynnefield Overbrook Revitalization Project as a logical and essential implementation of the West Park District Plan. This Plan, which was crafted by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and a Steering Committee of key community stakeholders, was adopted in March of 2012 after a series of public meetings. The West Park District Plan will serve as the Neighborhood Partnership Plan for the purpose of the Neighborhood Partnership Program.



An examination of past US Census Surveys and analyses by The Reinvestment Fund, ESRI, RealtyTrac and the City of Philadelphia reveals three immediately evident categories of community need – housing stability, commercial vitality and quality of life improvements.

<sup>1</sup> Source: 2010 US Census

<sup>2</sup> Source: RealtyTrac data, collected October 2012

<sup>3</sup> Source: PolicyMap, The Reinvestment Fund

<sup>4</sup> Source: West Park District Plan, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

<sup>5</sup> Source: ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile, ESRI and InfoGroup, run October 2012



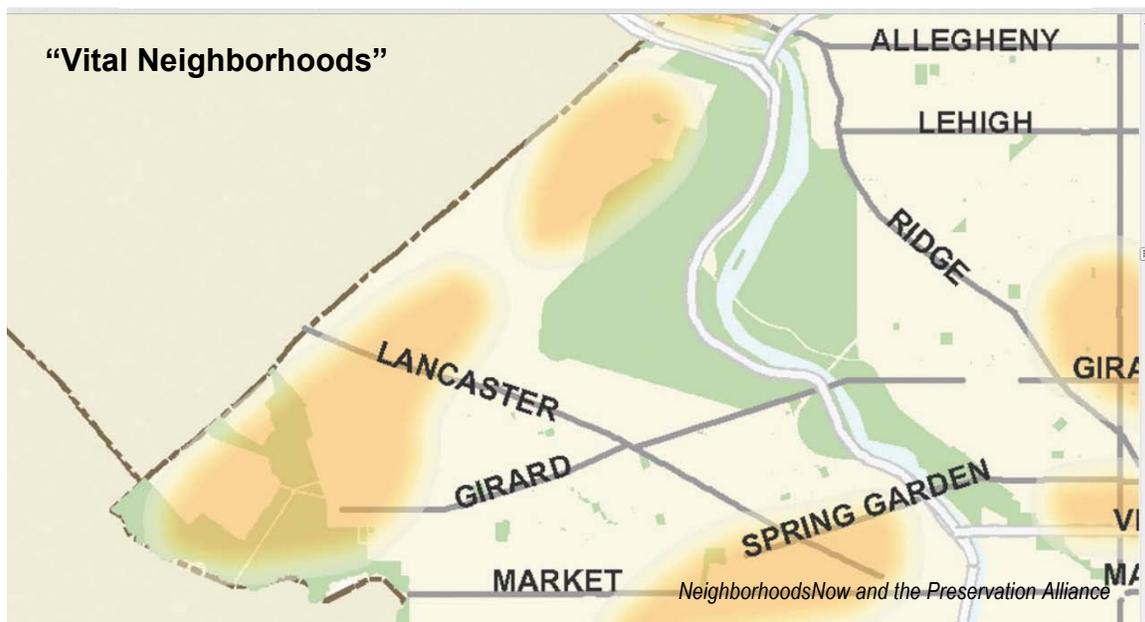
## Housing Stability

The Area is comprised of predominantly low-income census tracts (80% or less of AMI)<sup>1</sup> In 2009, 59% of households had an annual income of less than \$50,000, and 29% had annual incomes less than \$25,000.<sup>1</sup>

### Low-Income Census Tract Status (80% or less of AMI), 2006-2010



The Area also includes “Vital Neighborhoods,” identified by The Reinvestment Fund as neighborhoods that appear stable but that are under enormous stress with aging homeowners, deferred maintenance and high foreclosure rates.



These and the following measures identify an area quietly approaching a critical tipping point.

<sup>1</sup> Source: 2010 US Census

<sup>2</sup> Source: RealtyTrac data, collected October 2012

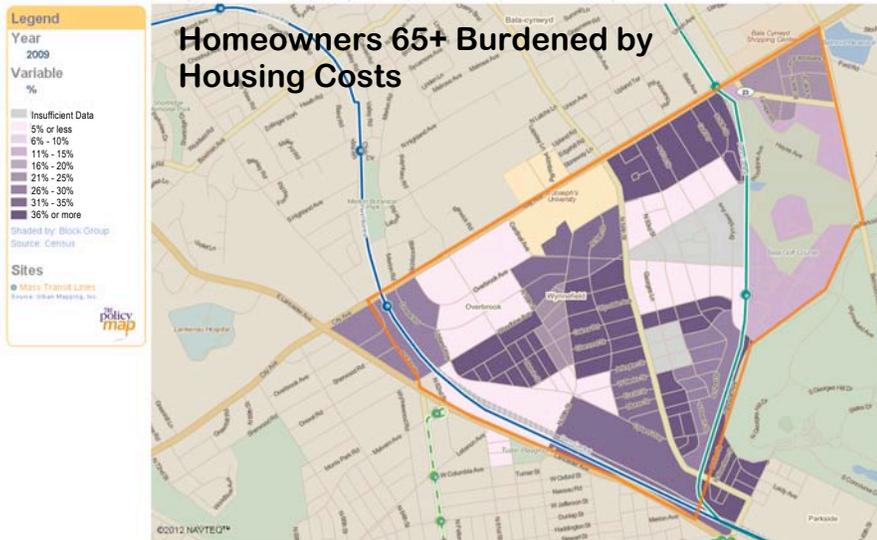
<sup>3</sup> Source: PolicyMap, The Reinvestment Fund

<sup>4</sup> Source: West Park District Plan, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

<sup>5</sup> Source: ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile, ESRI and InfoGroup, run October 2012



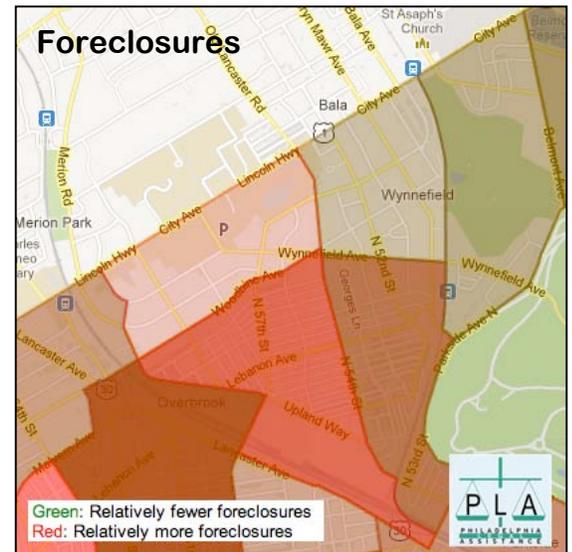
- Many homeowners are increasingly burdened by housing costs, a problem that is worse among those 65 and older:



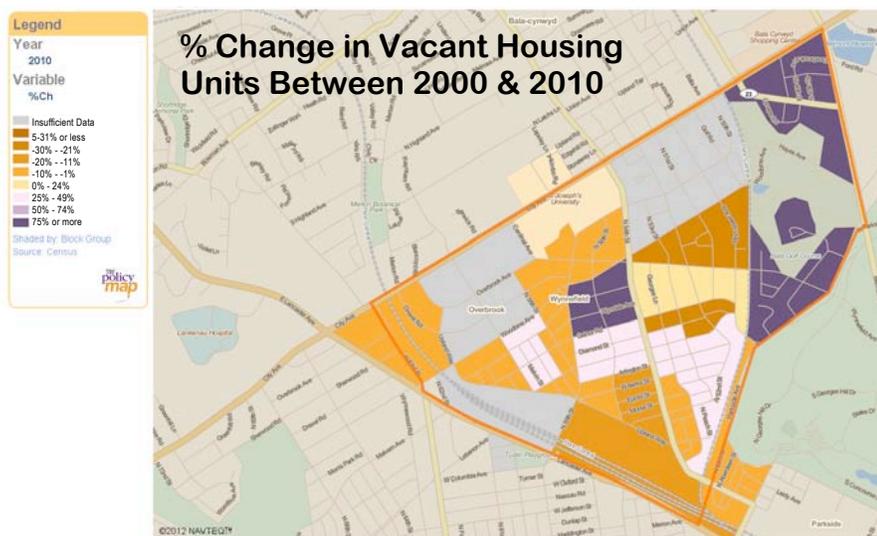
The vast majority of homes in the area were built more than 50 years ago, and many have suffered from deferred maintenance and inefficient weatherization.

In addition 7.69% of loans originating in this area were high-cost loans in 2010, compared to 2.23% of loans in Pennsylvania and 2.15% nationally.<sup>3</sup>

- **Foreclosures Threaten:** In zip codes 19131 and 19151, more than 4,600 homes are in pre-foreclosure, for sale as foreclosures, or bank owned.<sup>2</sup> According to PLA, about 400 households in Wynnefield and Overbrook contact Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA) each year seeking help to avoid foreclosure. Since the middle of 2008, almost 300 owner-occupied homes in the 19131 and 19151 area codes have been lost at sheriff sales.



- Some sectors have more vacant houses:



11% of Area housing units were found to be vacant by the 2005-09 Census. Vacancy trends noted by the US Postal Service found a 62% increase in the area's property vacancies from Q4 2008 to Q3 2010.<sup>3</sup> An estimated 59.77% of Area households owned their home between 2005-2009, compared

to 71% in PA and 54% in Philadelphia (in 2010).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Source: 2010 US Census

<sup>2</sup> Source: RealtyTrac data, collected October 2012

<sup>3</sup> Source: PolicyMap, The Reinvestment Fund

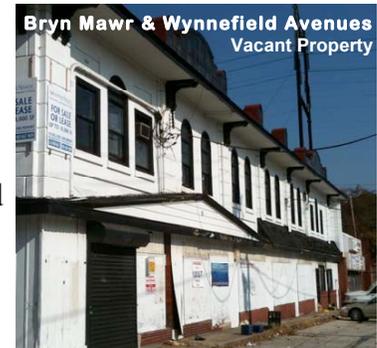
<sup>4</sup> Source: West Park District Plan, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

<sup>5</sup> Source: ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile, ESRI and InfoGroup, run October 2012



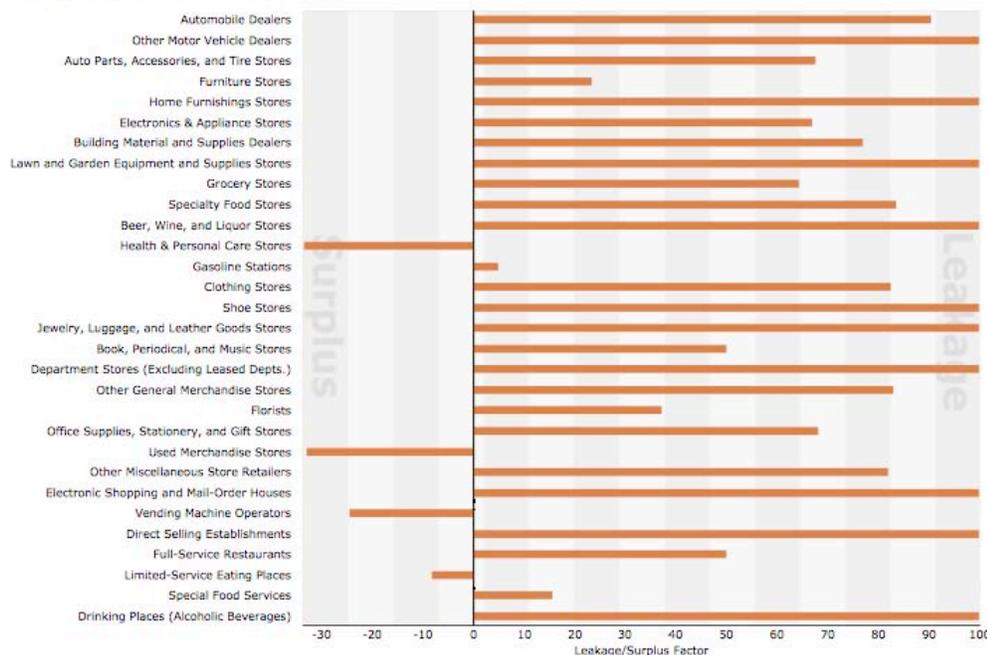
## Commercial Vitality

- Long-vacant properties in key locations:** The Wynne Ballroom, in the middle of a struggling community retail district on 54<sup>th</sup> Street, has been vacant since 1997; the former Eckerd Drugstore at Bryn Mawr and Wynnefield Avenues closed in 2000; the 61,000 s.f. Beeber-Wynnefield School Annex facility was closed in 2004; and the former Kirschner Fuel Oil site at 54<sup>th</sup> Street and Columbia Avenue – now a vacant lot certified as blight as long ago as 2004.
- Troubled commercial areas:** According to the Philadelphia Planning Commission, the 54<sup>th</sup> Street Corridor suffers from a 28.9% store vacancy rate. The community corridor was ranked as fair-to-poor based on this vacancy rate and other variables such as condition of the sidewalks and public realm, retail mix, and private investment.<sup>4</sup> This corridor and the clutch of commercial properties adjacent to the Wynnefield Train station at Bryn Mawr and Wynnefield Avenues are challenged by low retail density and vacancies, but also feature such assets as promising architectural character, excellent access to public transit, and strong merchant-to-community connections.
- Untapped Potential:** A Retail Marketplace Profile of the Project Area finds “leakage/surplus” in almost every market sector.<sup>5</sup> Residents leave the neighborhood to spend the majority of their disposable income – an especially significant fact considering that these are community-scale commercial areas.



Leakage/Surplus Factor by Industry Group

ESRI Business Analyst



<sup>1</sup> Source: 2010 US Census

<sup>2</sup> Source: RealtyTrac data, collected October 2012

<sup>3</sup> Source: PolicyMap, The Reinvestment Fund

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## Quality of Life Improvements

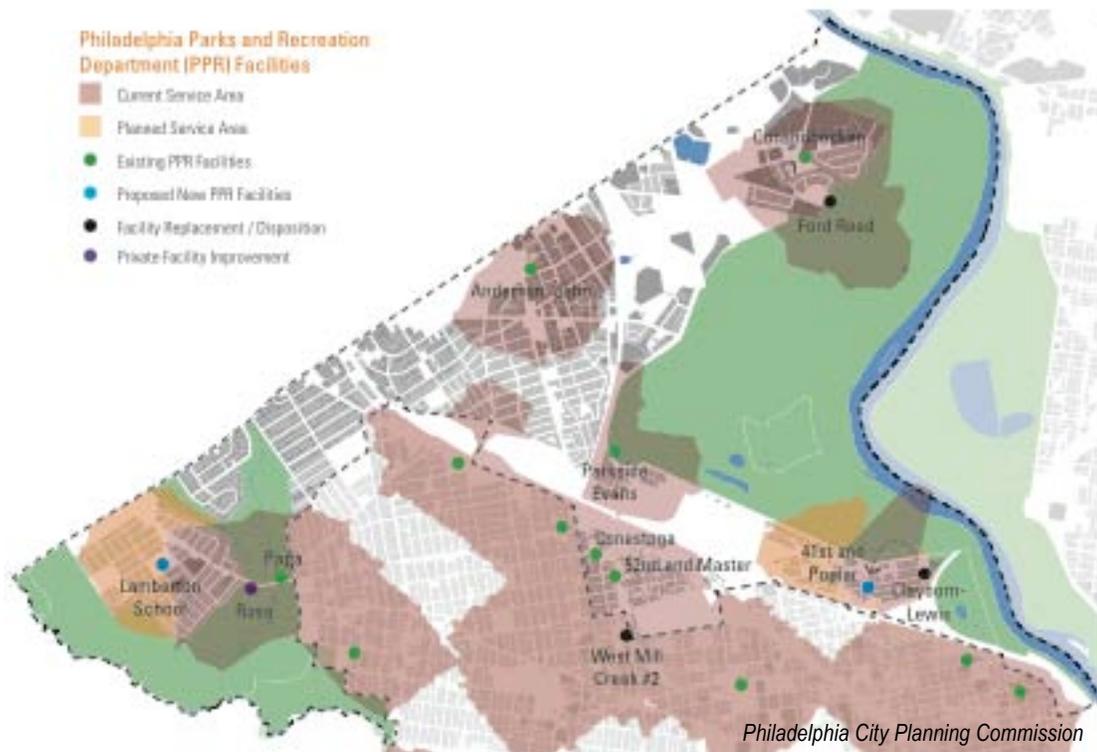
- **Insufficient tree canopy coverage in southeastern section of neighborhood:** Tree mapping reveals a large section of the Area has very few trees.<sup>4</sup>

The *Park West Green Trails Initiative*, created by the American Cities Foundation, contains many ideas to make this area the forefront of sustainable design and energy conservation.



- **The area has too few neighborhood centers and municipal/community support facilities.** This map illustrating “how well served the neighborhoods of the West Park District are today clearly demonstrates the need for community support facilities within the Project Area. The West Park District Plan also described a need to focus scarce resources and forge creative partnerships.<sup>4</sup>

## Neighborhood Centers: Municipal / Community Support Facilities



<sup>1</sup> Source: 2010 US Census

<sup>2</sup> Source: RealtyTrac data, collected October 2012

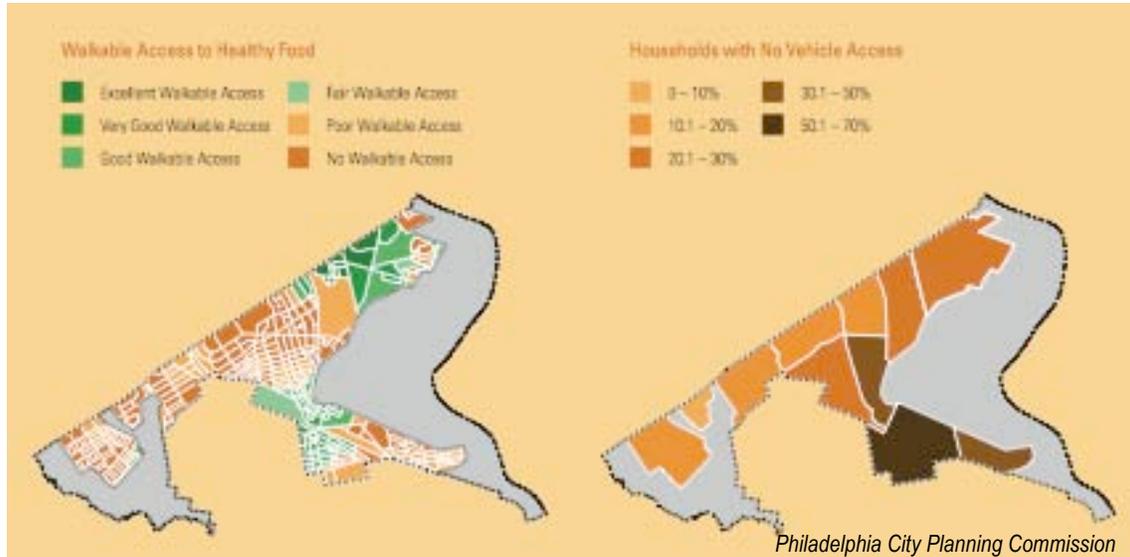
<sup>3</sup> Source: PolicyMap, The Reinvestment Fund

<sup>4</sup> Source: West Park District Plan, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

<sup>5</sup> Source: ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile, ESRI and InfoGroup, run October 2012

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**Access to Healthy Food is difficult for many:** Comparing walkable food access and vehicle access levels reveals that many residents have few to no sources of healthy foods within walking distance, and are also less likely to have access to a vehicle.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>1</sup> Source: 2010 US Census

<sup>2</sup> Source: RealtyTrac data, collected October 2012

<sup>3</sup> Source: PolicyMap, The Reinvestment Fund

<sup>4</sup> Source: West Park District Plan, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

<sup>5</sup> Source: ESRI Retail MarketPlace Profile, ESRI and InfoGroup, run October 2012



The needs identified in this Assessment may be summarized as follows:

## Housing Stability

1. Homes of many of the Area's low- to moderate-income residents require repairs to basic systems, roofs, and walls.
2. Deferred maintenance of these predominantly older properties has also eroded the ability of homes to efficiently maintain comfortable temperatures, leading to higher than necessary energy costs.
3. As a result of housing costs and other factors, some sections of the Area have experienced high vacancy rates and foreclosure pressures. Older residents are disproportionately burdened by these housing costs. The Project Area's many strengths, including high architectural character and proximity to many amenities, could be leveraged to much greater community benefit.

## Commercial Vitality

4. Market analysis-based business attraction and retention strategies have not been developed for these sites. As a result, Area residents must go outside of the district to meet their needs (and spend their money), and sustainable businesses meeting these needs have not been identified and pursued.
5. A relatively low level of public and private investment in physical improvements negatively affects the businesses operating within these districts; a lack of streetscape and other planning diminishes the likelihood of investment and collaborative action at these sites.
6. Long-vacant properties along the 54<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor and Bryn Mawr and Wynnefield Avenue commercial area promote a perception of blight and disinvestment, crippling revitalization efforts.

## Quality of Life Improvements

7. The southeastern part of the Project Area has too few street trees.
8. The Project Area is underserved by community support facilities.
9. Healthy food access is difficult for many in the Project Area.



## **Potential Projects to Address Needs**

WORC seeks to employ a strategic and collaborative approach to address neighborhood challenges in stable housing, commercial vitality, and quality-of-life issues. The projects proposed here would engage several strong and eager partners in new cooperative efforts, sustaining and growing through these natural collaborations. As these initiatives must begin manageably in order to grow sustainably and truly address identified problems, initial outcomes would be the creation of several strategic recommendations reports to refine future work.

The following program describes proposed approaches to address each of the nine problems outlined above, including goals, descriptions, outcomes, project partners and collaborators, possible expansion opportunities and budget:

### **Housing Stabilization**

#### **1. Provide basic systems repairs**

- a. In partnership with Rebuilding Together Philadelphia (RTP) and Saint Joseph's University (SJU), provide basic systems repairs for at least one low-income homeowner per year.

RTP brings volunteers and communities together to improve the homes and lives of Philadelphia homeowners in need. RTP will partner with WORC to organize SJU students, faculty, staff and others to help improve housing conditions in the Wynnefield and Overbrook neighborhoods. These volunteers will work alongside homeowners and their families to make essential home repairs ranging from carpentry, plumbing, and electrical to painting and reorganizing. Home modifications for older adults and people with disabilities are priorities, and have become a routine component of our work scopes.

This program could be expanded by WORC in partnership with RTP and SJU by securing additional corporate house sponsors and volunteer teams to provide these essential repairs.

The program costs \$5,000/year in house sponsorship, \$200/year in meetings and outreach expenses, and program management by WORC staff. According to RTP, the value of skilled and unskilled volunteer labor, in addition to the value of materials contributed to each house, amounts to \$20,000.

- b. Continue to provide basic systems repairs through the Targeted Housing Repair Program (THPP) if this program is continued.

THPP provides up to \$20,000 to homeowners (with clear title and whose income does not exceed 115% of AMI) for basic repairs to facades, windows, doors, roofs, and other basic systems. WORC acts as local sponsor for this



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program of the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation, working directly with homeowners and contractors to manage these projects. PHDC contributes approximately \$20,000 for basic systems repairs and \$5,000 for administration per house. Six home rehabs are expected to be completed by January 2013, and WORC is working with four additional homeowners.

The current THPP program focuses on one of several possible sections in need of this program within the Project Area. If the THPP program funding is continued by the City of Philadelphia, these new areas may be added to the program.



## 2. Provide weatherization assistance, older home maintenance workshops, and develop age-in-place and homeownership strategies:

- a. In partnership with the Energy Coordinating Agency (ECA), lower housing costs for homeowners through energy conservation measures. ECA estimates an average of 20-30% energy savings per home, significantly reducing monthly expenses.

ECA maintains a staff of qualified home energy analysts and contractors to evaluate and construct energy conserving measures in homes. Based on House Energy Assessments, ECA and WORC will work with homeowners to select and construct the highest impact energy conservation measures within budget. Approved scopes of work will guide improvements.

WORC has applied for funding through DCED's Special Projects Program (SPP) to initiate this project with up to two weatherization projects by 2014. ECA will work with WORC to consider expansion of these weatherization services to more in the community through the creation of a Neighborhood Energy Center (NEC). NECs are "one-stop-shops" for all low-income energy services including financial guidance and assistance, home repair programs for weatherization and other measures.

- b. Provide guidance to owners of older and historic homes about the care and maintenance of older properties through Preservation Alliance's Homeowner Workshops.

The Workshops are comprised of interactive, hands-on demonstrations and lectures covering masonry and pointing, windows, roofing, and one other subject that we would chose together such as energy efficiency, working with architects and contractors, paint, etc. Eight planned Workshops would be produced in partnership with WORC, held in a series of four evenings during the Fall of 2013 and the Spring of 2014. To ensure excellent participation and attendance, WORC would offer small grants to homeowners who have attended at least 3 of the 4 series workshops if funding for these grants is secured.

With up to 200 attendees anticipated throughout the series, and small grants of \$500 potentially distributed, at least 10 homeowners are expected to make informed and pragmatic renovations to their older houses.

Although the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and the Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust incur the cost to provide lecturers, WORC would be required to pay a \$2,000 participation fee and secure (hopefully donated) workshop space.



### **3. While addressing basic repair and weatherization needs for housing stabilization, provide additional resources to address foreclosure pressures, age-in-place, and to take better advantage of existing community strengths.**

- a. Coordinate foreclosure assistance workshops by Philadelphia Legal Assistance through local civic associations. Philadelphia Legal Assistance (PLA) provides legal services, advice, and referrals for income-eligible homeowners. PLA covers the cost of their staff time, and WORC has sought SPP funding to help coordinate and advertise workshops.

When notified of possible foreclosure, homeowners are recommended to contact PLA. Although PLA can offer assistance to homeowners prior to foreclosure proceedings, many are not aware of the organization until they are in pre-foreclosure. This program would better connect homeowners in need to PLA.

With the advice of PLA, OHCD and other, WORC will evaluate additional measures to help residents avoid and to assist with foreclosures, including connecting to existing Housing Counseling Agencies, creating a NAC, becoming a Housing Counseling Agency, etc.

- b. Provide supplemental funding for essential repairs beyond those covered by the RTP, THPP, and ECA programs described above. These excellent programs do not always have the budget to cover all necessary repairs. WORC hopes to secure supplemental funding for this program to make additional funds available for this essential work.
- c. Facilitate the development of some vacant properties for affordable senior housing. WORC is a member of the development team seeking to redevelop the vacant lot at 1717-1725 North 54<sup>th</sup> Street for senior affordable housing. WORC's role is to be a conduit between the community and the Philadelphia Presbytery Homes and Services for the Aging, assisting with zoning and site control issues, and helping to secure resources where appropriate. The project is expected to break ground in late Spring 2013, and to be completed by 2014. The facility will provide 48 affordable senior housing units.
- d. Develop other long-term housing stabilization strategies. In order to best serve community housing needs in a manageable way, several strategies must be developed and implemented based on best practices. These strategies include ageing-in-place, absentee landlords, weatherization and housing counseling.

If additional general operating funding is secured, WORC staff will research and produce recommendations for ageing-in-place, absentee landlords, weatherization and housing counseling. Implementation of these strategies would allow for more of this aging population to safely remain in their homes, better participation by absentee landlords in community programs, and improved access to weatherization and housing counseling services.



## Commercial Revitalization

- 4. Produce an Economic Development Plan and related marketing materials** for business attraction and retention for the commercial sections of Wynnefield: 54<sup>th</sup> Street from City Avenue to Upland Way, and at Bryn Mawr & Wynnefield Avenues. **Strengthen the Wynnefield Business Association (WBA).**

The Economic Development Plan would provide a blueprint to increase the economic viability of these areas by:

1. enabling existing businesses to thrive in the community,
2. identifying an optimal and sustainable business mix,
3. encouraging greater public and private investment,
4. supporting activities that benefit the community and
5. promoting increased civic participation

The Plan would identify trade area strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, challenges, and positive trends through a retail trade analysis, business owner and customer surveys, community and focus group meeting. Trade areas' studies would identify age, stage, condition, competition, synergy, current and desired uses, zoning and land use, transportation and parking, crime, vacancy and real estate trends, neighborhood characteristics

This Plan would describe commercial and retail development potential, and also detail viable implementation strategies for business attraction and retention. In addition to a discrete set of actions, these prioritized strategies would identify leaders, partners, participants and schedules. Marketing materials would be produced to target and draw both optimal businesses and consumers to the sectors. WBA would grow its current membership and continue its activities.

WORC is seeking support for this Plan from the City of Philadelphia.

- 5. Produce Façade Improvement and Streetscape Design Plans for the two community commercial sectors in the Project Area: 54<sup>th</sup> Street from Arlington to Montgomery and the area at Bryn Mawr and Wynnefield Avenues.**

Area store and property owners would work collaboratively with design and planning professionals to create a realistic vision for the neighborhood's commercial areas that will encourage and help guide public and private investment.

Façade improvement recommendations would include general recommendations for masonry, windows, doors, bays, parapets, and signage, and opinions of probable cost for each of the existing building types in the defined areas. Recommendations would provide pragmatic solutions that also preserve and enhance the character of the properties.



Renderings produced as part of these recommendations could be utilized to produce descriptive brochures. Streetscape design plans would also illustrate appropriate locations and design of public improvements such as bus shelters, trees, bumpouts and signage, as well as possible locations and design of private investments.

WORC intends to seek support for this Plan and for marketing brochures from a variety of sources including the Community Design Collaborative, Foundations, the City of Philadelphia.

## **6. Facilitate the development of long-vacant properties along the 54<sup>th</sup> Street commercial corridor and Bryn Mawr and Wynnefield Ave commercial areas.**

Prominent, vacant properties such as the Wynne Theater, the former Kirschner Brothers Fuel Oil site, the Beeber Annex, the former Acme Distribution Center (partially vacant) and the former pharmacy at Bryn Mawr and Wynnefield must be redeveloped if this community is to revitalize.

Different approaches and partnerships have been engaged for each site, but revitalization efforts would be aided by better marketing materials. Updateable marketing sheets would detail each location, some including renderings of potential redevelopment possibilities.

The Community Design Collaborative and the Urban Land Institute have expressed interest in providing professional guidance with the redevelopment of the Beeber Annex and the Acme Distribution Center, respectively. The success of this work requires at least two experienced, full-time employees at WORC; the organization is seeking general operating support from a variety of sources.

## **Quality of Life Improvements**

### **7. Work with the Philadelphia Horticultural Society, the City of Philadelphia and property owners to identify and install new street trees in priority areas.**

Tree locations have been identified for 54<sup>th</sup> Street, although property owners have approved not all of these. Up to 20 new street trees will be planted in areas highlighted in the West Park District Plan as “priority tree locations.” With program support by WORC staff, the cost of the trees and their installation will be covered by the Horticultural Society and the City.

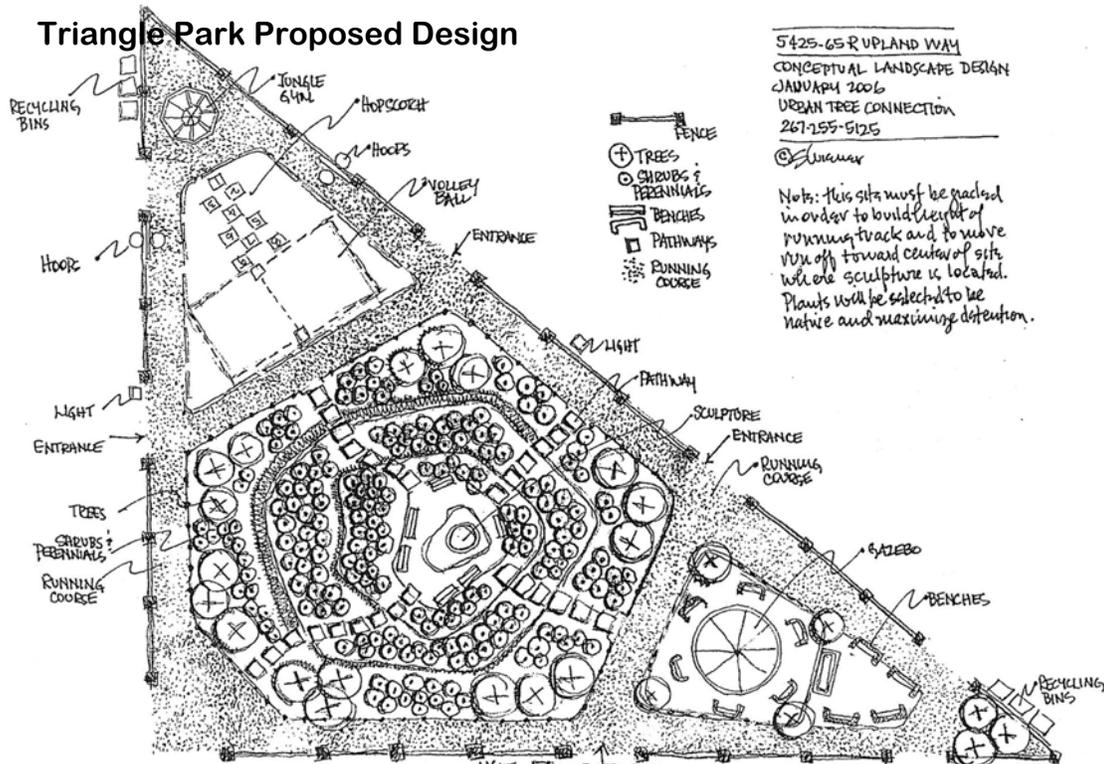
### **8. Create new/improve existing community activity spaces.**

- a. Continue to support efforts community underway to create “Triangle Park” as a sustainable and functioning community green space. WORC will help with the creation of “Triangle Park” by funding volunteer work through Rebuilding Together\*Philadelphia, facilitating a community meeting to help define programmatic needs, providing a small grant for improvements, and helping to connect Parks and Rec to the effort.



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- b. Facilitate the creation of after school and community meeting spaces within the community. Locations for these spaces might include the Wynnefield Library, redeveloped vacant properties, and new parklets created from transformed impervious spaces.



## 9. Improve access to Healthy Food in the Project Area, either by increasing purveyors of healthy foods or by improving vehicle/pedestrian access.

Many municipal, nonprofit and institutional agencies are already focusing attention on this issue, most of which are presently disconnected from each other. Existing programs include the Philadelphia Department of Public Health’s Healthy Corner Store and Healthy Produce Cart Programs, Farm-to-City’s neighborhood farmers markets, and the Overbrook Environmental Center’s expanding work in this area. In addition, Saint Joseph’s University is considering making its new Institute for Environmental Stewardship (which counts access to healthy food among its highest priorities) a permanent part of the University.

This program would help people in the Area to gain easier access to healthy food through a combination of approaches including healthier food options within the neighborhood, and improved transportation options. With full staffing, WORC could provide essential support to ensure facilitate “good walkable access” to healthy food.