

AN ADVISORY SERVICES PANEL REPORT

Ardmore Pennsylvania



Urban Land
Institute

Ardmore Pennsylvania

Revitalization of Historic Ardmore: Finding the Tipping Point

September 19–24, 2004
An Advisory Services Panel Report

ULI—the Urban Land Institute
1025 Thomas Jefferson Street, N.W.
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About ULI—the Urban Land Institute

ULI—the Urban Land Institute is a non-profit research and education organization that promotes responsible leadership in the use of land in order to enhance the total environment.

The Institute maintains a membership representing a broad spectrum of interests and sponsors a wide variety of educational programs and forums to encourage an open exchange of ideas and sharing of experience. ULI initiates research that anticipates emerging land use trends and issues and proposes creative solutions based on that research; provides advisory services; and publishes a wide variety of materials to disseminate information on land use and development.

Established in 1936, the Institute today has more than 25,000 members and associates from 80 countries, representing the entire spectrum of the land use and development disciplines. Professionals rep-

resented include developers, builders, property owners, investors, architects, public officials, planners, real estate brokers, appraisers, attorneys, engineers, financiers, academics, students, and librarians. ULI relies heavily on the experience of its members. It is through member involvement and information resources that ULI has been able to set standards of excellence in development practice. The Institute has long been recognized as one of America's most respected and widely quoted sources of objective information on urban planning, growth, and development.

This Advisory Services panel report is intended to further the objectives of the Institute and to make authoritative information generally available to those seeking knowledge in the field of urban land use.

Richard M. Rosan
President

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About ULI Advisory Services

The goal of ULI's Advisory Services Program is to bring the finest expertise in the real estate field to bear on complex land use planning and development projects, programs, and policies. Since 1947, this program has assembled well over 400 ULI-member teams to help sponsors find creative, practical solutions for issues such as downtown redevelopment, land management strategies, evaluation of development potential, growth management, community revitalization, brownfields redevelopment, military base reuse, provision of low-cost and affordable housing, and asset management strategies, among other matters. A wide variety of public, private, and nonprofit organizations have contracted for ULI's Advisory Services.

Each panel team is composed of highly qualified professionals who volunteer their time to ULI. They are chosen for their knowledge of the panel topic and screened to ensure their objectivity. ULI panel teams are interdisciplinary and typically include several developers, a landscape architect, a planner, a market analyst, a finance expert, and others with the niche expertise needed to address a given project. ULI teams provide a holistic look at development problems. Each panel is chaired by a respected ULI member with previous panel experience.

The agenda for a five-day panel assignment is intensive. It includes an in-depth briefing day composed of a tour of the site and meetings with sponsor representatives; a day of hour-long interviews of typically 50 to 75 key community representatives; and two days of formulating recommendations. Many long nights of discussion precede the panel's conclusions. On the final day on site, the panel makes an oral presentation of its findings and conclusions to the sponsor. A written report is prepared and published.

Because the sponsoring entities are responsible for significant preparation before the panel's visit, including sending extensive briefing materials to each member and arranging for the panel to meet with key local community members and stakeholders in the project under consideration, partic-

ipants in ULI's five-day panel assignments are able to make accurate assessments of a sponsor's issues and to provide recommendations in a compressed amount of time.

A major strength of the program is ULI's unique ability to draw on the knowledge and expertise of its members, including land developers and owners, public officials, academicians, representatives of financial institutions, and others. In fulfillment of the mission of the Urban Land Institute, this Advisory Services panel report is intended to provide objective advice that will promote the responsible use of land to enhance the environment.

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On behalf of the Urban Land Institute, the panel extends its sincere appreciation to the panel sponsor, Lower Merion Township, for convening the panel to review re-development plans for the Ardmore business district. Our work would not have been possible without the open-minded leadership and commitment to Ardmore's revitalization offered by Board of Commissioners President Joe Manko, Vice President Matt Comisky, and the entire board. The panel also would like to thank township manager Doug Cleland, Building and Planning Department director Bob Duncan, and the township staff for their thoughtful support and for graciously serving as our hosts, including at a lovely opening reception at the Merion Cricket Club. The continued involvement of all of these officials will be essential to the success of the Ardmore revitalization effort, and the township is lucky to have such dedicated leaders.

The panel is particularly indebted to Angela Murray, assistant director of the Building and Planning Department, for her skillful management of all facets of the panel project, including preparing the panel's extensive briefing book, arranging for site tours and a full day of interviews with stakeholders in Ardmore, and making the arrangements for an additional community meeting at the YMCA. The panel also recognizes the contributions of the township's consultant team, led by Anish Kumar of Hillier Architecture and including financial adviser Dick Voith and Econsult Corpo-

ration; traffic planner and engineer Miomir Ivanovic, and Sue Gibbons of Gannett Fleming; and parking management adviser Barbara Chance of Chance Management Advisors. Together with Murray, this group gave the panel the benefit of having a skilled and professional team of staff and consultants to present the issues and analysis associated with the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan.

Finally, the panel was quite taken with the eloquent and perceptive input it received from members of the Ardmore community. In pictures, conversations, and written comments, residents, building and business owners, developers, transit providers, community activists, and others openly shared their hopes, concerns, and expectations for their community. More than 110 stakeholders took the time to meet individually or in small groups with panel members, and many other members of the community attended the community forum at the YMCA. Their passionate commitment to improving the quality of life and business climate in Ardmore while retaining the special historic character of the community was inspiring. The energy, creativity, and determination of this community in support of a consensus-based revitalization plan will be the foundation on which the future vitality of Ardmore is built.

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Foreword: The Panel's Assignment and Summary of Recommendations

The Urban Land Institute was invited by Lower Merion Township, Pennsylvania, to examine revitalization strategies for the Ardmore business district and, in particular, the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan and its proposed Town Center Gateway project. For the past 15 years, the community, through numerous studies and various planning efforts, has sought to arrest the decline of Ardmore's historic main street business district. Despite the expenditure of federal and state funds for streetscape improvements and the concerted efforts of the Ardmore 2000 business improvement authority and other groups to enhance the appearance of the district and better market its offerings, the district has continued to display the symptoms of decline, including the loss of its movie theater, rapid turnover in businesses, and rising vacancy rates.

After considerable study and extensive consultations with affected stakeholders, the township developed the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan to address these conditions. When the township encountered significant public opposition to elements of the master plan, the ULI panel was brought in to assess the situation and to make recommendations as to how the township can best use its limited resources to achieve its revitalization goals.

Finding the Tipping Point

As the panel considered the specific challenges facing Ardmore, it also discussed the nature of change and how it can be fostered. In this regard, the panel was reminded of the work of Malcolm Gladwell. In his book *The Tipping Point*, Gladwell examines how seemingly small changes catch on and lead to a sea change in opinion or a big difference in market acceptance of a product. The trick to finding a tipping point is to identify the key changes that will enhance the assets already in place in such a way as to create momentum that



Above: Location map.
Left: Regional map.

reverses the forces of decline. After spending a week walking the streets of Ardmore and talking to building owners, business owners, elected officials, township staff, residents, and developers, the panel became convinced that the tipping point for dynamic main street shopping and downtown living in Ardmore is close at hand.

Sometimes the perspective of outsiders is helpful in clarifying the assets a community has at its disposal. The panel saw Ardmore as a community with a rich history and an extraordinary sense of place offering a distinctive urban character in a lovely suburban setting, a walkable main street

with good connections to the surrounding neighborhoods, and access to a wealth of regional destinations through the frequent Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) and Amtrak train service at the Ardmore train station. The panel saw a historic and uniquely eclectic business district featuring buildings of varying architectural quality and style that together are much more than the sum of their parts. In the panel's view, these buildings are essential to the authentic character of the place. Authenticity is an extremely attractive element in the development marketplace today: new town center developments strive for, and often fail to achieve, an atmosphere of authentic character that distinguishes them from the cookie-cutter environments that we all have had our fill of.

For this reason, one of the panel's principal recommendations is that the township avoid projects that require demolition of existing buildings and focus instead on encouraging their renovation and reuse. In coming to this conclusion, the panel was influenced by the thinking of renowned planner Jane Jacobs in her seminal 1961 book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. "Cities need old buildings so badly it is probably impossible for vigorous streets and districts to grow without them," she wrote. "By old buildings I mean not museum-piece old buildings, not old buildings in an excellent and expensive state of rehabilitation—although these make fine ingredients—but also a good lot of plain, ordinary . . . old buildings."

The panel agrees with Jacobs and believes that Historic Ardmore's existing buildings are an important asset that supports the incubation of eclectic local retailers, restaurants, galleries, and workshops. While some buildings certainly can benefit from facade restoration and retrofitting to permit higher-value uses, especially on the upper floors, demolition of otherwise functional buildings would be a double loss to the district—both in terms of architectural character and in the lower rent structure that supports distinctive local businesses. With this perspective in mind, the panel focused on ways that the township could find its tipping point and accomplish the objectives rightfully advocated by the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan without having to demolish buildings.

The Panel's Recommendations

The panel recommends that the township focus on five high-priority projects that can be accomplished within five years and with the township's existing financial resources. These projects focus on improving the quality and quantity of the public spaces in Historic Ardmore, including the sidewalks, pathways and alleys, streets, plazas, and public gathering places. In the same spirit as that contained in the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan, the panel recommends construction of a new train station building and public plaza along Station Avenue, new mixed-use residential development on the Cricket and Ruby's parking lot sites, and a new shared-use parking facility at the Bernicker/Honda site. The panel also recommends that a new village green be located on the current site of the Schuffele parking lot and that a number of actions be taken to improve traffic circulation, pedestrian connections, and parking availability in the downtown area.

In making these recommendations, the panel emphasizes the importance of finding the right project champions and encourages the township not to assume primary responsibility for most of the projects. Where possible, the township should delegate this role to other stakeholders whose skills and interests make them natural champions. This will allow the township to avoid overextending its financial and project management resources. The panel also recommends that the projects be phased over time, starting with projects selected for their potential to create momentum for revitalization. Finally, the panel recommends that the township direct considerable effort to harnessing the energy, ideas, and commitment of the Ardmore community to support the revitalization program. The panel believes that only by working together in a spirit of open communication and renewed trust can Historic Ardmore reach its full potential.

This report summarizes the panel's conclusions and recommendations, which were delivered to the township during a public presentation on September 24, 2004. The panel hopes that its recommendations will contribute to the successful revitalization of Historic Ardmore.

Market Potential

Lower Merion Township is a first-ring suburb of Philadelphia with a population of roughly 60,000 residents. Located in a region north-west of Philadelphia commonly referred to as the Main Line, the township saw development first spurred by construction of the Lancaster Turnpike in 1796, and a century later by rail service provided by the main line track of the old Pennsylvania Railroad. SEPTA continues to provide frequent commuter rail service on the line, and Amtrak provides intercity rail service to Philadelphia, Harrisburg, and points beyond from the Ardmore train station.

Ardmore is one of nine neighborhoods in Lower Merion Township and is the site of the Township Municipal Government Complex. It also is home to Suburban Square, an outdoor shopping center that is one of the oldest retail and commercial centers in the country; it continues to be the largest retail complex in Lower Merion, with more than 300,000 square feet of commercial space.

The Ardmore business district is the historic main street of the neighborhood, extending along Lancaster Avenue from Woodside Avenue to Church Road and including the Ardmore Historic District. For purposes of this report, the term “Historic Ardmore” will refer to the panel’s study area within the Ardmore business district. Suburban Square is separated from Historic Ardmore by the railroad tracks, and the only vehicular connections between the north and south sides of the tracks in the area are Church Road and Anderson Avenue.

Due to its proximity to the major employment centers in Philadelphia and its stock of relatively large and attractive single-family housing, Ardmore is characterized by upscale demographics. In 2003, the average household income within a three-mile radius of Historic Ardmore exceeded \$117,000, compared with a national average household income of \$64,000. Demand for housing at all price points is high, and property values continue

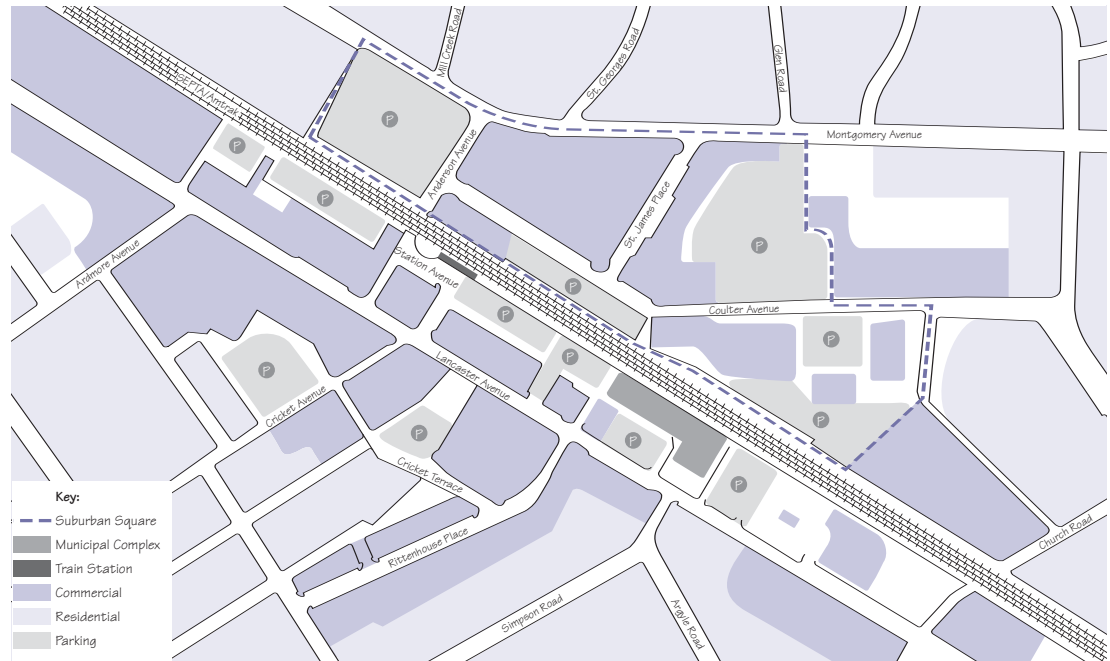
to rise. Several important educational institutions are nearby, including Bryn Mawr College, St. Joseph’s University, Haverford College, and Villanova University. The quality of life enjoyed by residents of Ardmore is also enhanced by easy access to local cultural institutions such as the Barnes Foundation, and the wealth of museums, theaters, and other arts organizations in Philadelphia.

Because the Ardmore area is virtually built out, development opportunities are limited to the redevelopment of underused properties such as surface parking lots. This constraint means that each redevelopment opportunity must be carefully considered for the contribution it can make to the vitality of Ardmore. The township has identified several parcels for possible redevelopment, some owned by the township and some held privately. The panel believes there is strong market support for additional residential development in Ardmore, but limited demand for additional office or retail space.

Residential Demand—Downtown-Living Lifestyle

The potential market for residential development in downtown Ardmore presents a significant opportunity for the revitalization of Historic Ardmore. Downtown living is a lifestyle that has shown market appeal in many places—both locally and across the country. In conversations with panel members, local real estate agents emphasized the unmet need for this type of housing in Lower Merion Township. They said they have buyers who would jump at the chance to live above a store, near the train station, or around the corner from their favorite pizza café. This demand for downtown living cuts across demographic categories and encompasses young adults just out of college, middle-aged empty nester couples whose children no longer live at home, as well as senior citizens

Panel study area.



who wish to stay in their community but want a smaller house to maintain and closer access to everyday services. These potential buyers are single and married, young and old, men and women, and many have longtime ties to the area and are united in their interest in having a walkable community just outside their door. The downtown living lifestyle offers the potential for the creation of a vibrant, multigenerational, downtown community whose residents will increase market demand for the neighborhood retail and entertainment businesses in Historic Ardmore.

The panel reviewed some work done by Real Estate Strategies, Inc. (RESI), which was provided as part of the background material for a recent ULI panel for the nearby community of Bryn Mawr. RESI defines the market area for Ardmore as extending beyond Lower Merion Township into Haverford Township, Radnor Township, and Narberth Borough. This larger market area had an estimated population in 2003 of 143,490 people, with an average age of 39.8 years and an average annual household income over \$124,000.

The estimated median value of all owner-occupied housing in this area is \$230,566, and prices for downtown-type attached housing, where it is available, range from \$250,000 to over \$1 million. Thus, RESI estimates that for-sale, multi-family housing units in Historic Ardmore would sell for \$300,000 to \$500,000.

Because the panel believes that the market demand for residential living in Historic Ardmore greatly exceeds the land available for such devel-

opment, it recommends that Lower Merion Township encourage the construction of both apartments and condominiums wherever possible. The specifics of this recommendation are explained in greater detail in the Development Strategies section of this report, but the panel emphasizes that the Cricket Avenue parking lot owned by the township and the Ruby's lot owned by Suburban Square present two key opportunities for the development of mixed-use projects that include retail, parking, and residential space. The more intensive the development provided on these sites, the better it will be for establishing engaging on-street activity, enhancing the perception and reality of safety for residents, creating a vibrant town center atmosphere, and maximizing the support for local restaurants and other businesses. The township, of course, will need to balance these benefits with the need to respect the historic context of the town and to avoid overwhelming residents on adjacent properties.

Retail Potential

Abundant retail stores are easily accessible to residents of Ardmore, including at the large regional mall at King of Prussia, Suburban Square, and neighborhood centers in Wynnewood, Rosemont, Haverford, Bala Cynwyd, and Ardmore West. Additional retail activity is clustered along Lancaster Avenue in Historic Ardmore, Bryn Mawr, and Wayne, among other areas. The panel believes that in Ardmore, Suburban Square will continue to be a regional draw offering upscale "lifestyle center" tenants, including the larger national

chains, and Historic Ardmore will provide a more eclectic selection with local merchants, restaurants, and service providers.

While only limited potential exists to add new retail space in Historic Ardmore, there is considerable potential to improve the quality and mix of retail offerings in the district through upgrading existing buildings, providing a more active and attractive streetscape, and adding clusters of tenants that would appeal to customers of existing anchors, such as the sports club. This tenant strategy seeks to extend the length of stay of visitors to the district with complementary uses (such as a juice bar, health food store, athletic apparel/footwear specialty shop, or a bike/sporting goods shop) and amenities (bike parking for those who wish to ride to their workout, jogging stroller storage for those arriving on foot with small children, benches to enjoy the passing scene while cooling down with a juice drink, etc.).

This type of targeted selection of tenants can only be achieved if an organized marketing plan is in place. A savvy marketing consultant—with leasing experience—should be hired to work with building owners and existing merchants to develop and implement the plan. In addition to building on the strength of existing anchors, the plan should focus on the opportunities created by gaps in the existing merchandise mix and on attracting uses that are activity generators. Arts-oriented uses are one example of this latter category, including spaces for a children's dance school, a paint-your-own-pottery workshop, a craft shop with space for lessons and workshops, or even a cooking school.

As the marketing plan is implemented, it should be reinforced with coordinated programming to increase awareness of the new identity of the district. These programs can be held inside shops, on the sidewalks, or in other public spaces and can feature performances, displays, and sales of the work produced by customers or professionals. One person should be given specific responsibility for this programming function, and a mechanism for funding this function must be identified in order for it to be successful in attracting traffic to the district and adding value to the businesses there.

Hotel, Office, Entertainment, and Arts

The panel does not believe that a national hotel operator would be interested in the Ardmore market. However, interest has been expressed in a boutique hotel, if a suitable site can be located. This could be a real asset to Ardmore. While Ardmore should not make this use its first priority as it considers redevelopment plans, it should remain open to a new lodging use, perhaps even on the scale of an upscale bed-and-breakfast.

While the panel did not review detailed office market information, the overall subregional office market appears to be soft, and thus any new office space most likely would be built to specification for a specific user.

Historic Ardmore already has a strong base of restaurants that serve a variety of ethnic cuisines. It may be possible to enhance this asset with entertainment-oriented uses such as a live music club offering jazz, folk, etc., perhaps aimed at an older audience, or a community theater. Retailers willing to remain open during evenings also offer a nice synergy for a restaurant district—a video rental store for example. It did not appear likely that Historic Ardmore would be able to attract a first-run, multiscreen movie theater, nor is it clear where such a theater could be located. However, the panel did not rule out a smaller-screen “cinema and drafthouse”-type theater showing vintage or alternative films and serving food and beverages. Local regulation of alcohol licenses may limit both live music and cinema venues, but there may be creative ways to support the financial viability of businesses even if they don't serve alcohol.

A Vision for Ardmore

Ardmore already is a successful community whose residents enjoy a high quality of life, but the panel believes there is the potential for the Historic Ardmore district to develop an enhanced identity as a place with a distinctive urbanity in a suburban setting. Adding expanded lifestyle choices to the already unparalleled access—by train, bus, automobile, bike, or foot—to high-quality local and regional destinations would be a powerful draw. To be able to do so in a village setting with enhanced public spaces—public plazas, expanded sidewalks,



Historic Ardmore includes buildings that add considerably to the authentic character and visual appeal of the streetscapes.

pocket parks—would create a unique market niche for the district. This vision of “suburban urbanity” does not pit Historic Ardmore against Suburban Square. Instead, it capitalizes on the differences between these two districts. There undoubtedly will be enduring appeal to the predictability of the Starbucks experience in Suburban Square, but there is also room for the personal touches of a local entrepreneur who greets his customers by name and knows their drink orders in the Historic District. While it is desirable to provide attractive and easy-to-use connections for both walkers and drivers between Suburban Square and the Historic District, the different identities of the two areas should be celebrated and exploited to gain a richer experience for the overall community.

The Opportunity Is Place Making

Place making is an art, not a science, but it is informed by simple principles. People gravitate to places where other people are. The design of public spaces affects the activities that these spaces will support; focused spaces that make it comfortable for people to linger, interact, and observe each other are likely to attract and sustain higher

activity levels. Mixed-use places are more vibrant than single-use spaces: a healthy mix promotes a diversity of residents and visitors using the place throughout the day and into the evening, creating a sense of safety and purposeful activity. Streets with a scale that offers a sense of enclosure, ample sidewalks, and buildings that address the street with pleasing visual interest will encourage pedestrian activity and multipurpose trips to the district. A well-marked system of parking and pathways contributes to easy circulation and a pleasant experience for all patrons. On the other hand, simply adding parking to a place that lacks sufficient activity generators does not improve the situation and may even make it worse. Authentic character is an irreplaceable component of a special place.

Together, these principles explain why places that offer a diverse community of people enjoying shops, restaurants, coffee houses, bookstores, music, film, art, and creative entrepreneurial activities are so successful and why so many suburban communities and developers across the country are working to establish main street- or town center-style places.

Historic Ardmore is in the enviable position of already possessing the building stock, street scale, and genuine historic character that are hard for communities that lack these elements to create. All that is needed for Historic Ardmore to find its tipping point and reach its full potential is to enhance its public spaces and enliven the mix of uses within the district. The panel believes that this task is well within the reach of the township and the community if they work together with the energy and creativity they have demonstrated over the past year.

Planning and Design

Lower Merion Township can help Historic Ardmore to fulfill its excellent market potential and to attain its ambitious revitalization goals by working closely with local residents, property owners, and other stakeholders to preserve and enhance the community's extraordinary sense of place. This sense of place, which is justifiably a source of pride for the town's residents, is associated with Ardmore's compact form, its human scale, its appeal to pedestrians, and its orientation around the train station. These attributes combine to give Historic Ardmore a distinct urban character that contemporary suburban communities rarely achieve. However, today that urban character is vulnerable to neglect and poor choices. To create a more vital business district, the township and the community must now reinvest in Historic Ardmore's built environment and make sound decisions about a variety of land use, urban design, and transportation issues.

Promote Transit-Oriented, Mixed-Use Development

Communities can derive important social and economic benefits from development that appropriately mixes residential and commercial land uses, and that takes full advantage of proximity to transit. The benefits of transit-oriented, mixed-use development include the convenience of urban living, a stronger market for local businesses, increased pedestrian activity and transit ridership, reduced traffic congestion, and an expanded tax base for local governments. Lower Merion Township clearly recognizes these benefits, as shown by its initiative in drafting the proposed Mixed-Use Special Transit (MUST) Overlay District ordinance.

The proposed MUST ordinance would be applicable to commercial property within convenient walking distance of the various train stations in Lower Merion Township. Among its most significant provisions are that it would prohibit certain

automobile-oriented land uses that are generally incompatible with pedestrian environments, establish design standards to ensure that new development is architecturally compatible with existing business districts, provide density bonuses as incentives for the provision of open space and moderate-income housing, and permit off-site and shared parking as incentives for the adaptive use of existing structures.

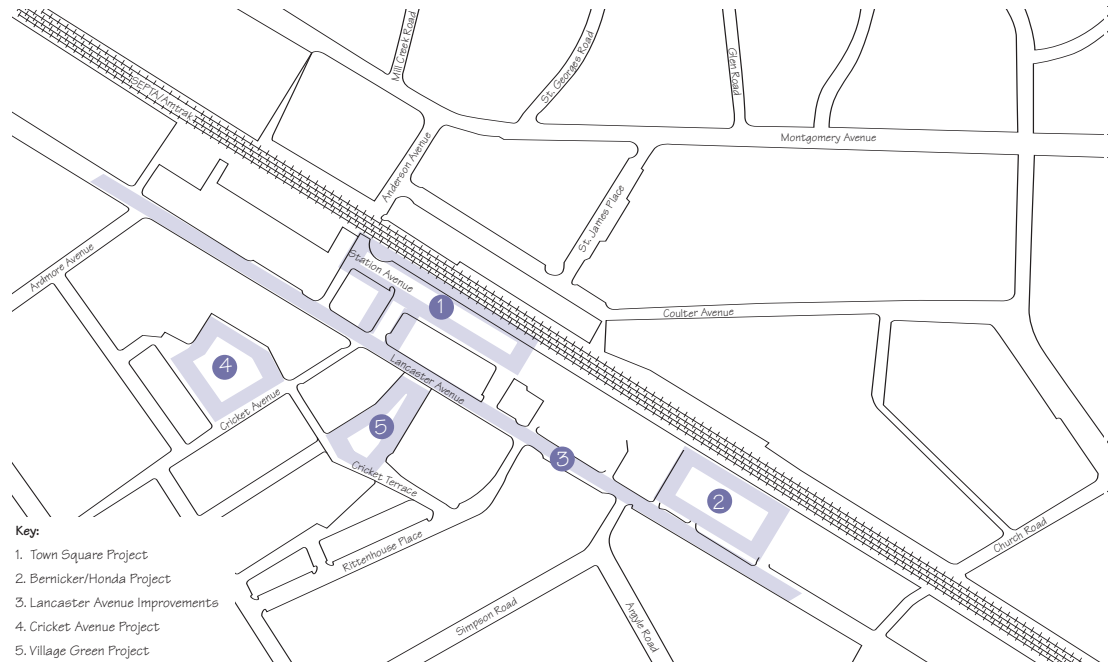
Because the proposed MUST ordinance is an outstanding example of public policy to promote transit-oriented development, the panel encourages the township to support it. Before adopting the ordinance, however, the township should review it carefully with design professionals and prospective developers, residents, and business owners in order to ensure that its provisions will effectively accommodate desirable land uses on Historic Ardmore's most important development sites.

Preserve Urban Character and Create Active Public Spaces

High-quality urban design is inextricably linked to the economic vitality of a place. As local officials and citizens have come to understand, the success of Ardmore's revitalization efforts will depend in large measure on preserving the town's urban character and creating active public spaces that unite the community.

The proposed MUST ordinance, together with the Ardmore historic district ordinance, would provide the township with appropriate regulations to preserve Ardmore's urban character. Beyond these regulatory tools, the township has established excellent incentive programs to assist property owners in preserving their historic buildings. Despite the availability of these incentives, however, many of the structures that contribute to the district's historic character show signs of significant deteri-

Priority projects.



oration. These conditions lower the town's visual quality and suggest a need for the township to market its incentives more actively.

The current condition of some of the buildings in the historic district does *not* suggest to the panel that there is a need to demolish these buildings to make way for new development. On the contrary, the panel believes strongly that the town should work within the existing structural fabric of the district to restore building facades and to retain the eclectic, historic character of the existing buildings. Adoption of more flexible rehabilitation codes may be needed to assist building owners in maximizing the use of upper floors. Wherever possible, first-floor uses should be encouraged to pro-

vide visually interesting window displays. However, the panel believes that the overall value of the interesting mix of building styles outweighs the possible benefits of replacing with new construction even those buildings that do not contribute to the district's historic nature.

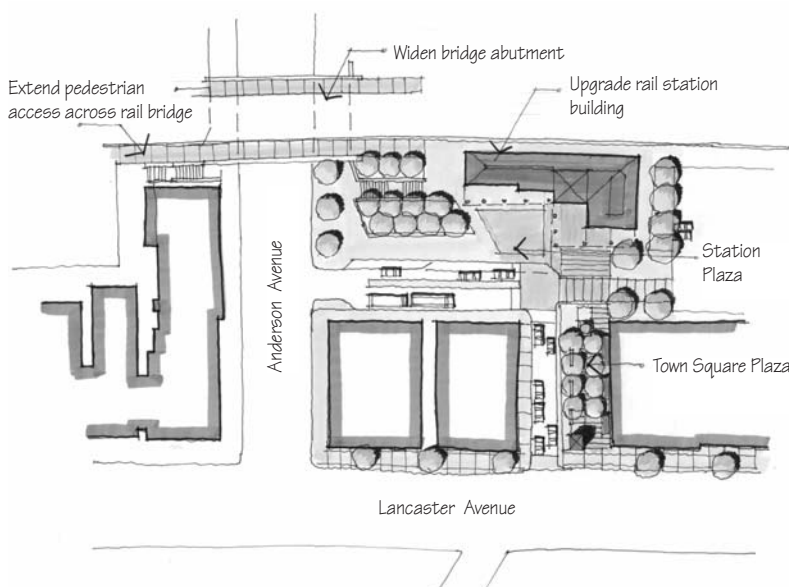
Similarly, while a streetscape enhancement project has been commissioned and is moving forward, more work remains to be done to increase the number and utility of public spaces within Historic Ardmore and to improve the sidewalks, pathways, and streets that provide connections among these spaces and other destinations in the district. The creation of high-quality gathering places, even if they are small, cannot be overestimated as a source of vitality and animation for a community.

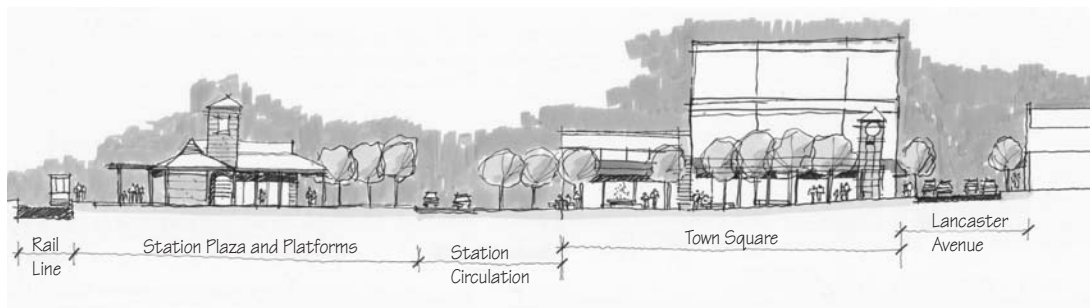
In order to achieve these objectives for the revitalization of Historic Ardmore, the panel recommends that the township undertake five high-priority projects that:

- can be completed within the next five years;
- are within the township's existing financial capabilities; and
- do not require demolition of any existing buildings.

For the purposes of this report, these five high-priority projects are called the Town Square project, the Bernicker/Honda project, Lancaster Avenue improvements, the Cricket Avenue project, and the Village Green project.

Town Square plan.





Town Square sectional elevation.

Town Square Project

Among the many urban design projects the township might consider undertaking in Historic Ardmore, none is likely to be more beneficial or have more lasting impact than development of a town square that includes a signature train station and a public plaza at the station's entrance. Throughout their rich history, Ardmore and other Main Line communities have drawn much of their identity and character from their relationship to the railroad—a relationship that Ardmore has continued to cultivate despite the loss of the original train station building in 1957 and its replacement with a “temporary” cinder-block structure several years later.

The current prospect of federal funding for a new train station presents the community with an exceptional opportunity to celebrate its railroad heritage and to create a true town center that will attract local residents and visitors for a wide variety of public events and informal activities. The panel recommends that the township, SEPTA, and Amtrak consider sponsoring a design competition for this important project in order to seek creative ideas from outstanding architects and urban designers while stimulating public discussion about Ardmore's past, present, and future. The nationally acclaimed architecture school at the University of Pennsylvania might be ideally qualified to manage this competition on behalf of the sponsors. The goal of the competition would not be to develop grandiose or overly expensive designs; neither does the station need to be a replica of 1880s station designs. However, because the station will be a primary touchstone of Ardmore's design identity, considerable thought should be given to development of a design that is both contextually and financially appropriate and that can galvanize broad support within the community.

The Town Square plan (see facing page) shows the improvements recommended by the panel, including the new train station building sitting roughly on the same footprint as the existing station, but expanded to the east to line up with the



Town Square character sketch.

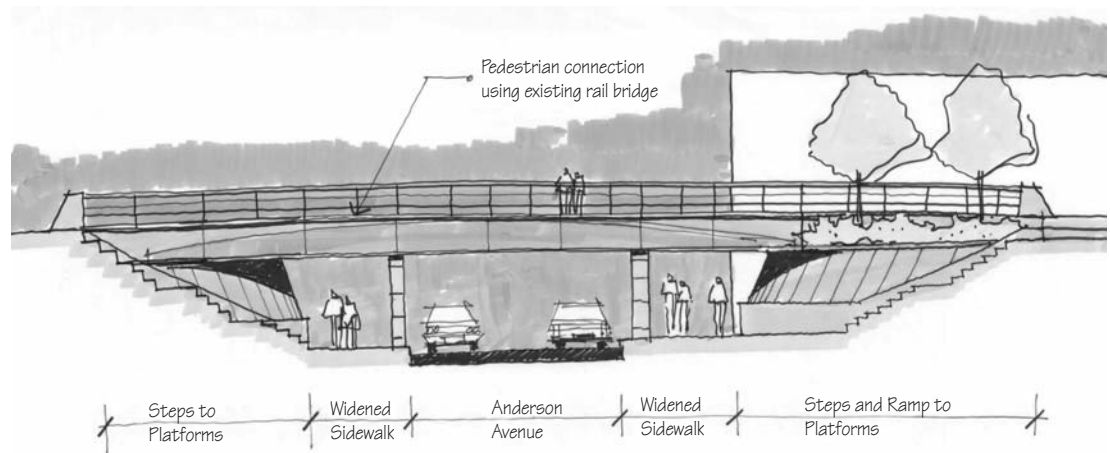
new Town Square Plaza along Station Avenue. This Town Square Plaza presents one of the most important opportunities in Ardmore for creating a public gathering place, and the panel believes that even the modestly sized space it has carved out of the existing Station Avenue right-of-way will add significantly to the quality of public spaces in Historic Ardmore.

The panel envisions a hardscaped area with a tree canopy, benches, and other street furniture, as well as possibly kiosks, street vendors, and convenience retail that would be attractive to commuters. Even limited outdoor dining may become possible as tenants in adjoining buildings change. Station Avenue could be closed to traffic for special events in order to enlarge the available space.

The train station is set back from the roadway in order to provide a courtyard that extends the flow of public space from the plaza. The Town Square sectional elevation (see above) provides a view of the Town Square improvements looking eastward, and the Town Square character sketch (see above) provides a rough view down Station Avenue to the new train station building.

The Town Square project also represents an opportunity to address the need to enhance pedestrian connections between the north and south sides of the railroad tracks. The Anderson Avenue bridge sectional elevation shows the widened sidewalks that would be possible along Anderson Avenue if the rail bridge abutments were pulled back. Ultimately, the existing pedestrian tunnel

Anderson Avenue bridge sectional elevation.



on the east side of Anderson Avenue should also be upgraded. (As described in the Development Strategies section of this report, the panel believes that these two sets of improvements should be undertaken in Phase II of the Town Square project.)

Town Center Circulation

The Town Square project improvements require a reworking of the vehicular circulation patterns in the area, and the panel has a number of recommendations to better accommodate kiss-and-ride, pedestrian, and car traffic to and from the station. The panel carefully reviewed the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan and the accompanying traffic studies showing intersections in the train station area that will need modification based on existing traffic levels and to create reserve roadway capacity to accommodate anticipated growth in travel demand in the area. The panel's recommendations are intended to address these overall traffic capacity issues as well.

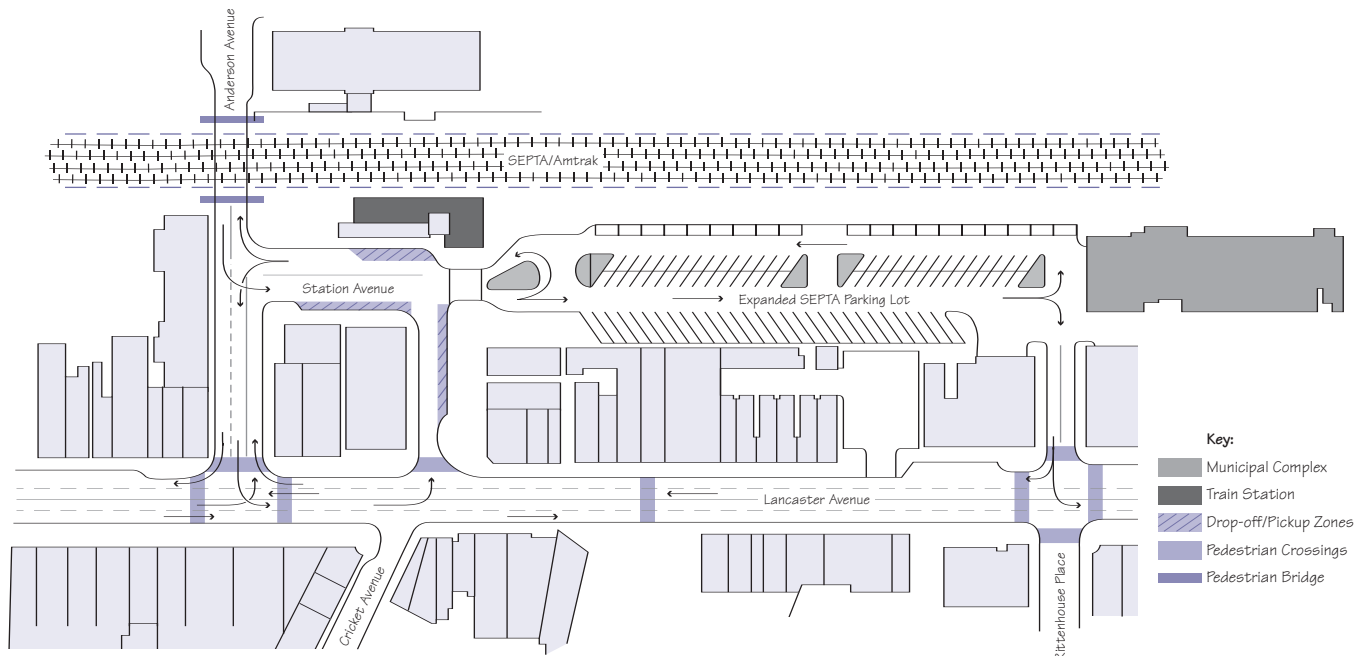
In the oral presentation of its findings to the township, the panel presented two traffic circulation alternatives—one that requires no additional right-of-way and one that would widen Anderson Avenue to three lanes at the approach to the Lancaster Avenue intersection. The panel has had subsequent conversations with the affected property owner, and he has indicated his openness to a voluntary right-of-way negotiation with the township in exchange for enhanced development rights for the affected property. Therefore, the panel urges the township to explore this opportunity be-

cause it would support Historic Ardmore's revitalization goals without requiring condemnation of the affected property. Given the apparent opportunity for a voluntary, negotiated right-of-way dedication at this location, the panel has simplified its traffic recommendations in this report to a single alternative.

Station Access: Vehicular

Anderson Avenue, Station Avenue, and Lancaster Avenue constitute the central traffic grid for train station access. While all three are two-way streets, there are turn restrictions at two locations that dictate traffic patterns in the station area. Currently, motorists southbound on Anderson planning to go east on Lancaster first have to turn left onto Station Avenue, drive past the station and turn right to intersect Lancaster. They then turn left at this signalized intersection. Although the reverse trip—west on Lancaster to north on Anderson—does not have turn restrictions, turning right from Lancaster at Station Avenue is preferred by about half the drivers over turning right at Anderson because many motorists perceive that it may be quicker than going through the tight geometry of the congested Lancaster/Anderson intersection. This northbound through-traffic mixes with Amtrak and SEPTA parkers, kiss-and-riders, and others with destinations in the station area.

The panel's transportation recommendation is designed to provide convenient train station access and improve performance of Lancaster Avenue by removing one of the two closely spaced traffic



Town center circulation.

lights at Station Avenue while still creating room for a public plaza on part of the existing Station Avenue right-of-way. Keeping these priorities in mind, the panel recommends a *counterclockwise circulation pattern* through the station area because this would support conventional right-side passenger drop-off and loading at the train station.

The addition of 12 to 15 feet of right-of-way along the eastern side of Anderson Avenue between Lancaster Avenue and Station Avenue would allow for a three-lane Anderson Avenue in this section, *two* lanes southbound and one lane northbound. The northbound lane would handle non-station northbound traffic from both directions on Lancaster. (Motorists traveling west on Lancaster and headed for northbound Anderson would continue to be able to choose whether to turn right onto Station Avenue and go through the train station area or to turn right on Anderson Avenue.) The key elements of the recommendation, shown on the town center circulation map (see above), are the following:

- The north-south leg of Station Avenue would be reduced to one lane and operate *one-way northbound*.
- Anderson Avenue would be widened on the east side to provide a new southbound left turn lane.
- Left turns for traffic eastbound on Lancaster would be permitted at both Anderson Avenue and Station Avenue (as they are today), but the left turn onto Station Avenue would no longer be protected by a traffic signal.

- Right turns from westbound Lancaster could be made either at Station Avenue or at Anderson Avenue.

Advantages of this circulation pattern include:

- All train station passenger drop-offs would occur on the station side of the roadway, which would be safer for passengers and more efficient for vehicles.
- SEPTA buses would all follow a one-way counterclockwise loop through the station area. A common passenger loading area would be created, enhancing the convenience of bus-to-bus transfers.
- *Two* lanes of southbound traffic would move on the Anderson Avenue green signal phase, one turning right and one turning left, instead of the current one right-turn-only lane. This should reduce queuing delays on Anderson Avenue.
- By eliminating the need for a traffic signal at the Station Avenue/Lancaster Avenue intersection, traffic would be able to proceed uninterrupted along this section of Lancaster. The first traffic signal east of Anderson would be a proposed midblock pedestrian signal about 350 feet from the intersection.

Southbound Anderson traffic that is headed to the train station would turn left onto Station Avenue as it does currently—the leg of Station Avenue that parallels Lancaster Avenue would be two way in that block—but traffic volumes primarily

would be station traffic, including SEPTA lot parkers. The block of Station Avenue that parallels Anderson Avenue would be one way north-bound and thus could be reduced to one travel lane and one passenger loading lane in width, allowing more space for the Town Square Plaza.

The signal at the Station Avenue/Lancaster Avenue intersection could be eliminated because there would be no traffic entering Lancaster from Station Avenue. This would improve the performance of Lancaster Avenue for through-traffic and remove the existing short queuing space between Anderson Avenue and Station Avenue that can delay left turns from Anderson Avenue. The removal of this traffic signal also would create an opportunity for a new pedestrian crossing/speed control signal at Schaufele Plaza midway between the signals at Anderson Avenue and Rittenhouse Place. This would provide a much safer point of pedestrian access across Lancaster on the east side of downtown Ardmore.

Finally, the SEPTA permit parking entrance would shift east slightly to accommodate an enhanced passenger drop-off and turnaround area. This turnaround area would provide an outlet for larger-wheelbase vehicles that enter the station area from Anderson Avenue so they do not get trapped in the tight geometry in front of the station. If required by future parking needs, the east end of the SEPTA surface parking lot could be extended to Rittenhouse Place after space currently devoted to township staff parking is relocated to the Bernicker/Honda lot.

Station Access: Pedestrian

Under the panel's traffic circulation recommendations, pedestrians coming from the north side of the tracks would reach the station much as they do currently—either using the pedestrian tunnel or the sidewalks along Anderson Avenue under the railroad bridge. Recommended enhancements to either of these somewhat constricted pathways include:

- widening the bridge underpass (pushing back the bridge abutments) to better accommodate pedestrian movements along Anderson Avenue; and

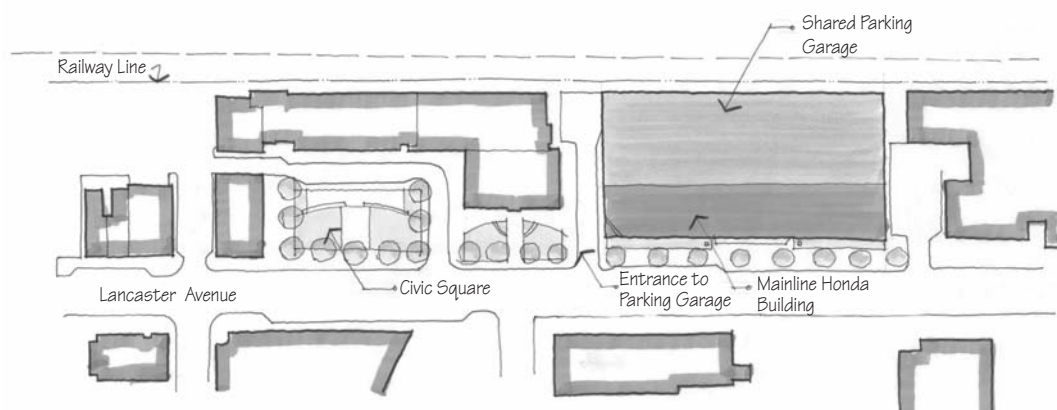
- boring a wider, higher, and more contemporary pedestrian tunnel.

As stand-alone projects, these may be beyond the scope of the initial Town Square project, unless the township is successful in receiving a federal grant for the train station that includes this type of improvement. Alternatively, the township should explore the availability of state funding for pedestrian enhancements with the Pennsylvania Department of Transportation as well as other possible federal funding sources with the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission. Pedestrian improvements do qualify for funding under some federal multimodal transportation programs.

The panel recommends that pedestrians destined for the Town Square Plaza and the train station from the Rittenhouse Place/Schaufele Plaza neighborhood cross Lancaster at a new signal-protected, midblock pedestrian crossing across from Schaufele Plaza. Those walking north along Cricket Avenue to the station area would cross Lancaster at the Anderson Avenue intersection.

The panel is aware that there is a perception among some people that Lancaster Avenue presents a formidable barrier to pedestrians. However, the panel believes that crossing a four-lane, 40-foot-wide, 20,000-vehicle-per-day roadway like Lancaster Avenue at *signal-protected* locations is not unusual and relatively safe, particularly during peak traffic times when vehicles tend to travel slower and in platoons.

The panel does have some concerns about pedestrian crossings that are not signal protected, such as the one near the fitness center because it sends an ambiguous message to drivers, is unusual, and therefore may surprise or confuse drivers. It also may give pedestrians the impression they have more protection from traffic than they actually do. The panel recommends that the township consider modifying this crossing by providing a pedestrian-activated signal that fully protects those on foot. Implementation of the panel's recommendations would provide three signal-protected opportuni-



Bernicker/Honda site plan.

ties for pedestrians to cross Lancaster Avenue in the Town Square area.

Finally, to better serve pedestrians headed to or from the train station from the west side of Anderson Avenue, the panel recommends that walkway extensions at the west end of the platforms be added beyond the Anderson Avenue bridge on both sides of the tracks as illustrated in the Town Square plan (see page 14). This would allow rail passengers to connect directly to parking areas and neighborhood destinations to the west along both sides of the tracks. The township should explore whether these walkway extensions could be included in the train station project and thus receive federal funding.

Station Access: Bus

Until the Anderson Avenue bridge is replaced, SEPTA buses will not be able to cross between the north and south sides of the tracks on Anderson. Therefore, the SEPTA route serving the north side of the station (route 44) will continue to use the Coulter Avenue bus stop in the Suburban Square area. On the south side of the tracks, there are three routes (103, 106, and 115) that could use the station as a schedule recovery stop. Route 105 Lancaster Avenue buses would turn left onto Station Avenue, stop at the station, and then follow the one-way loop back to the left turn onto Lancaster Avenue at the signal-controlled intersection at Anderson Avenue. The panel recommends that careful thought be given to bus route signage and bus shelter accommodations in the station area to encourage use of the SEPTA bus service by train passengers.

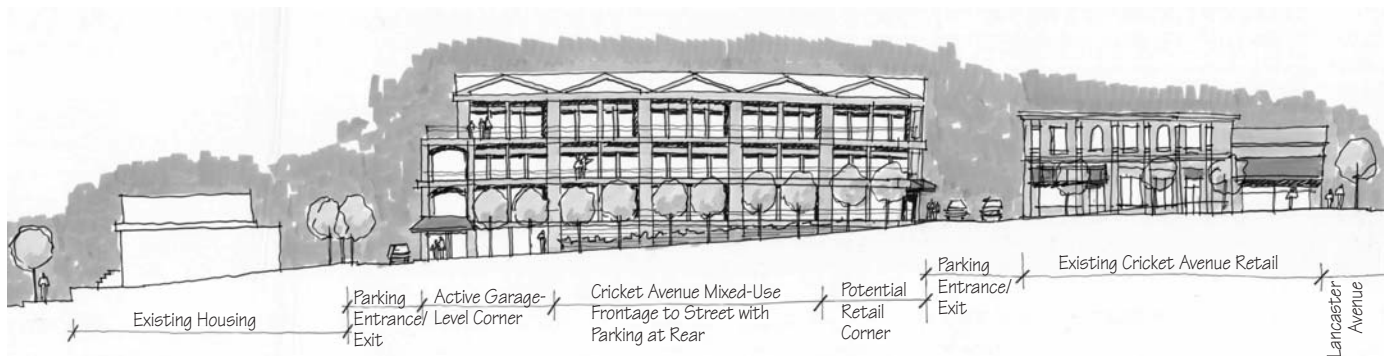
Bernicker/Honda Project

A project that would be less complex and that could be executed more quickly than the Town Square project would be construction of a mixed-

use building at the Bernicker/Honda site. Under the panel's proposal, Main Line Honda, with township support, would develop a parking garage with street-level commercial space at the Bernicker/Honda site on Lancaster Avenue just east of the Township Administration Building. This project would provide consolidated off-street parking for dealership and township employees and visitors while allowing the Honda dealership to consolidate storage of its inventory and expand its showroom space. The current practice of making parking available to the public after 4 p.m. on weekdays and on weekends to support the parking needs of Historic Ardmore should be continued.

The panel recommends that the township negotiate an agreement with Main Line Honda whereby the dealership becomes the developer of the Bernicker/Honda project. The township would contribute the Bernicker lot land and receive in exchange township parking spaces. The exact value of each partner's contribution as well as the value of each township parking space would need to be negotiated; the panel recommends that the township hire a skilled real estate lawyer to handle the negotiations.

From a design perspective, the proposed building should complement the Township Building's architectural character and be pulled up to the sidewalk with 15-foot-high showroom windows so that it extends the commercial edge of Lancaster Avenue. The parking facility would be located at the rear of the building with an entrance alley running alongside the Township Building. The Bernicker/Honda site plan (see above) shows how removal of the surface parking lot in front of the Township Building would allow creation of a civic square green space, providing a much more attractive setting for the beautiful municipal center.



Cricket Avenue—typical elevation.

Lancaster Avenue Improvements Project

Lancaster Avenue defines Historic Ardmore as a place for the thousands of motorists who travel the roadway daily. In the panel's view, preservation of this street's character and scale is essential to the business district's revitalization. The Development Strategies and Implementation sections of this report contain more detailed recommendations on how building facades can be improved, upper-story uses renovated, and sidewalks, alleys, and streetscape elements enhanced. A key component of this project is installation of signalized pedestrian links from the proposed Town Square to the south side of Lancaster Avenue, as described earlier in this report. The panel recommends that Ardmore 2000 be the champion of this project, working in concert with all of the affected stakeholders and with the full support of the township.

Cricket Avenue Project

One of Ardmore's best opportunities to promote transit-oriented development is available at the Cricket parking lot, which is only two blocks south of the train station. This property offers many advantages for higher-density, mixed-use development, including the lot's large size, its nearly square shape, its location adjacent to both the Lancaster Avenue commercial corridor on the north and the South Ardmore neighborhood on the south, and its current ownership by the township. The property thus is almost ideally suited for a four- or five-story building that would contain market-rate housing, structured parking for residents and Historic Ardmore businesses, and a limited amount of street-level retail space along Cricket Avenue.

The panel recommends that, as landowner, the township take a leadership role in finding an experienced developer to implement this project. However, the township should not take on the role of developer itself. Instead, it should establish a detailed set of development parameters and guidelines to be incorporated in a request for proposals (RFP) for the project. The RFP should include a requirement that the project developer provide parking sufficient both to meet the needs of on-site residents and to replace public parking spaces that would be lost through the proposed redevelopment of both the Cricket and the Schaufele parking lots.

To facilitate the Cricket Avenue mixed-use development project, the township should ensure that before construction begins, the Bernicker/Honda parking garage is already available to dealership and township employees. Removal of these employee automobiles from metered and street parking in the area should expand the supply of parking available to displaced Cricket lot parkers during construction of this project. The township also should work with South Ardmore residents to create a building design that respects the scale and character of that historically significant neighborhood. The panel's concept for this mixed-use project is shown in the Cricket Avenue—typical elevation illustration (see above).

One of the opportunities this site presents is the change of grade from north to south, reducing excavation costs and allowing direct street access to the south for a partially below-grade parking level. Direct street access for a second level of at-grade parking would also be available to the north. Parking that would replace current public

spaces could be provided on these levels where it would be convenient to the businesses along Lancaster and Cricket avenues. The parking structure should be wrapped with residential and retail uses and could be designed so that residents of the upper floors of the building have direct access to their parking spaces on the same level as their unit. This “doughnut” configuration is a format that is growing in popularity for mid-level and upper-end multifamily residential projects. The panel believes that a four- to five-story building could be designed that would provide a financial return to the township, meet the township’s needs for parking south of Lancaster Avenue, reinforce the historic character of the district, and deal sensitively with the townhouse neighborhood across the street to the south.

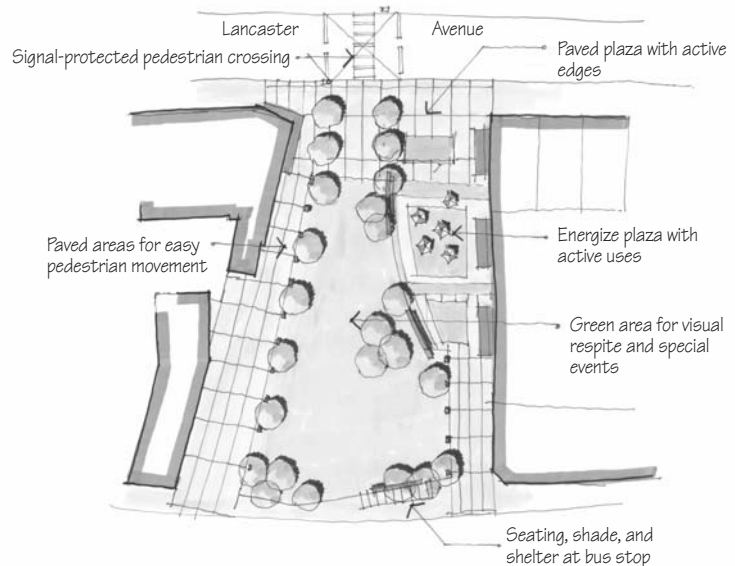
Village Green Project

As adequate parking becomes available at the proposed Cricket Avenue project, the township should also consider creating a village green at the site of the existing Schaufele parking lot on the south side of Lancaster Avenue. This project represents an opportunity for the township to create an expanded open space connected to Schaufele Plaza that would provide an attractive and appropriate transition from the Lancaster Avenue commercial corridor to the South Ardmore neighborhood. This space also would create another central gathering place where community activities could occur.

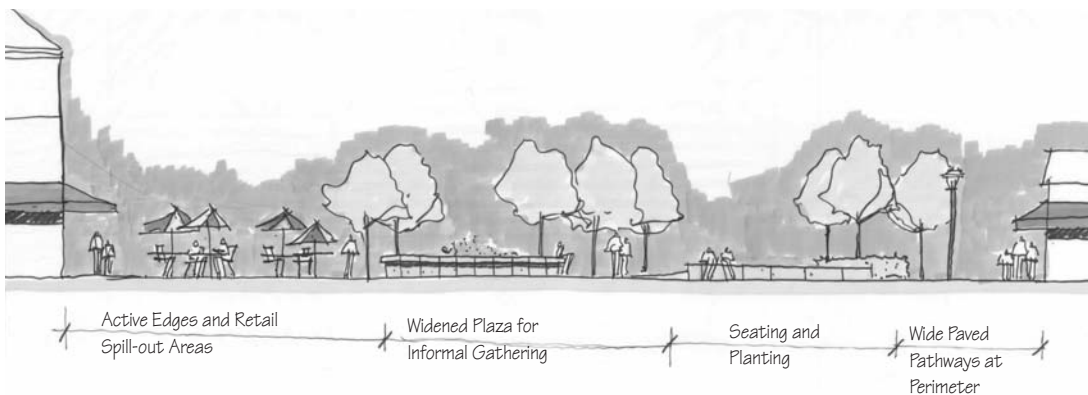
To activate the Village Green area, the township should work with adjacent property owners to reconfigure or redesign their building edges as

necessary to frame the public space. The township also should encourage these property owners to consider restaurants with outdoor dining for first-floor uses in their buildings, as well as encourage first-floor retail shops to bring merchandise displays out to the sidewalk when the weather permits.

The panel’s Village Green detail plan (see above) and sectional elevation (see below) show the design concept for this space. At the center of the plan would be a green area for passive recreational use as well as weekend or seasonal events. Ringing the green space would be a wide paved area serving pedestrians and providing space for retail pavilions, kiosks, and outdoor dining. Seat-



Village Green detail plan.



Village Green sectional elevation.

ing, shade, and shelter would be provided at the bus stop on the south end of the green; at the north end would be the pedestrian-activated traffic signal, providing a protected way to cross Lancaster Avenue for those headed to the Township Building, the train station, or the businesses on the north side of Lancaster Avenue.

Parking Strategy

All of these projects will have impacts on the location and amount of parking available in Historic Ardmore for township employees and visitors, business district customers and employees, as well as train station users. While the perceived need for additional parking seemed to be driving the design of the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan, a number of individuals familiar with the parking situation in Ardmore told the panel that there is not an overall shortage of spaces, but that spaces are not always available in sufficient quantity at the desired place and time. Because it is very expensive to provide parking, especially in a setting where users expect to make only minimal payments toward its cost, the panel devoted considerable time to considering how the township could minimize its parking expenditures while still serving community needs.

The town first should take care of the immediate needs of township employees and visitors, which the panel has proposed be addressed at the Bernicker/Honda project. The panel's preference would be to consolidate all township parking in this lot, including the police and emergency services parking on the west side of the Township Building.

This consolidation would allow both creation of a civic plaza in front of the municipal complex and the future expansion of the SEPTA lot to the east. The township spaces in this lot should continue to be available after 4 p.m. for customers of the businesses north of Lancaster Avenue, relieving the parking crunch that now occurs at the 7 p.m. police shift change. This lot also would serve to bring Main Line Honda into compliance with its parking requirements, including provision of off-street parking for its employees, who now tend to park in residential neighborhoods or to feed meters in

spaces that should be used by customers patronizing Historic Ardmore businesses. This project should proceed as an immediate priority.

Several opportunities exist for expanded SEPTA/Amtrak-designated parking spaces, including at the township-owned, metered parking area behind the shops west of Anderson Avenue and south of the railroad tracks, as well as at the Ruby's lot in Suburban Square.

In the first instance, the parking west of Anderson Avenue would be enhanced by a clear way-finding system and expansion of the rail bridge over Anderson to include adequate pedestrian walkways to the west side of the avenue. The Ruby's lot project would need to be the subject of negotiations between the railroads and the management of Suburban Square. The township could choose to play a role in those discussions by providing development density bonuses or other incentives to support decked parking that would accommodate train station users as well as retail customers.

It also may be possible to designate some spaces in the Cricket lot redevelopment project for train station users, although these spaces are likely to be needed to accommodate the automobiles of business district employees and customers that otherwise would be displaced by the Cricket and Schauffele lot projects.

If none of these locations becomes available for rail parking, the township could expand the SEPTA permit surface parking lot to incorporate the area now used for township staff parking. The panel considered whether some spaces dedicated to Amtrak overnight parking could be reserved in this expanded lot as well, although the different parking price structures used by SEPTA and Amtrak—heavily subsidized versus market rate, respectively—present parking management concerns if these two types of parking customers are combined in a single lot. In any event, further study would be needed to assess whether these two needs could be accommodated at this location while some spaces in this lot were reserved for priority police/public safety vehicle parking, if this is desired by the township.

Parking Management and Wayfinding

The panel believes that reconfiguration of the township's parking supply as described will meet the needs of the Historic Ardmore business district and train station patrons. However, the township will need to increase the amount of attention it pays to and the resources it devotes to addressing the issue of parking management and to developing a clear signage system directing motorists to the most convenient parking. In addition, the MUST ordinance introduces a new opportunity for achieving the township's revitalization goals through expanded use of shared parking strategies that will require monitoring. The panel recommends that the township create a parking management staff position to help ensure that parking policy development, implementation, and enforcement issues receive sufficient focus, both in Ardmore and in other areas of the township.

Development of a clear system of wayfinding should be among the first priorities for the new parking manager, working in concert with the building and planning department staff. A successful parking plan that provides a pool of diverse parking opportunities with good pedestrian connections requires a strong signage program to direct drivers to the appropriate parking location and then walkers to their ultimate destination.

Continual direction reinforcement is necessary to build confidence among patrons that the township has anticipated their needs and can deliver them safely to their destination.

This wayfinding system can incorporate SEPTA's trailblazer logo, the standard blue on white "P" sign that the township currently uses, and new identity markers that reinforce the Historic Ardmore "brand" while providing needed information to guide motorists and pedestrians to their destinations. The township can supplement these signs with eye-catching name plaques identifying each important public space, major building, and other destinations. The location of other amenities should also be identified with signs, such as public restrooms, drinking fountains, and bike parking or storage facilities.

Conclusion

The panel believes these recommended high-priority projects—a new train station, additional residential development, improved vehicular and pedestrian circulation, new parking facilities, streetscape improvements, a clear wayfinding system, and attractive and lively public spaces—will bring Historic Ardmore to a new tipping point in its revitalization efforts.

Development Strategies

Lower Merion Township is a relatively small suburban jurisdiction with a government that is correspondingly small. However, the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan is an ambitious plan for the revitalization of Historic Ardmore, including five highly complex real estate projects. Cities several times larger than Lower Merion become strained when they take on even one such project. The panel believes that it is too much to expect the township to tackle these projects all at the same time. To do so would create an unnecessary financial burden on the township and its taxpayers, and likely also would overextend the project management resources of its staff.

While the panel has also recommended that the township undertake several major development projects, its solution to the resource limitations is to recommend that the township do two things: a) sequence the projects, doing first the project that is clearly a winner and has the most potential to create the aura of success and momentum to drive subsequent successes; and b) assign responsibility and authority wherever possible to others who are capable of championing a project.

The panel has prioritized the components of its revitalization plan as follows:

1. Bernicker/Honda project. This project will create the parking capacity in the study area to enable the other projects to move forward. The township and the dealership appear to have a strong mutual interest in seeing this project come to fruition. The township should limit its role to putting its land into the deal and receiving the parking spaces it needs to satisfy all of its parking requirements.

The township should hire a real estate lawyer to negotiate the deal on behalf of the town. *Main Line Honda should take on the leadership of this project, become its champion, and make it happen as soon as possible.* This will free the township's

staff time and financial resources for championing another project.

2. Town Square project. The train station is the emotional soul of Ardmore. Residents view it as the center of town—and so it should be. Throughout America and Europe, the train station has been viewed as central to the identity of a town. It is no accident that the first thing visitors see when they enter Disneyland is a train station.

The panel believes that the train station project should be started immediately. The township should focus its energies on working with Amtrak and SEPTA to design a new station and to create the Town Square public space adjacent to the station. The scope of the first phase of this project should be just the station house and the immediate environs.

Included in this phase will be intermodal linkages such as bicycle racks, kiss-and-ride areas, and bus facilities. Improvements not included will be the parking areas immediately east of the station, parking on the Ruby's lot, or the proposed improvements in pedestrian and vehicular linkages to the north side of the tracks or the west side of Anderson Avenue. (These Phase II improvements are discussed later in this report.)

Potential funding for the station building includes the \$7.3 million earmarked for intermodal station improvements currently pending in federal transportation legislation. However, because this project is so important as the visual manifestation of Historic Ardmore's new vitality and as the kick-off revitalization project, the panel believes that the township should be the financier of last resort and build the new station even if there are no other funds immediately available.

3. Lancaster Avenue improvements. The building owners and merchants must become the champions of this project—the driving force for facade



The current train station building fails to provide a focal point for the Town Square area.

improvements, sidewalk beautification, and implementation of a unified leasing strategy for the district. They should be assisted by Ardmore 2000, the township, the Historic Architectural Review Board (HARB), the Historical Commission, and the Ardmore Business Association to drive the completion of this project, but ultimately it is the collective responsibility of the building owners and the merchants to make these improvements happen, not the township's.

The building owners and merchants should get organized and get moving. The township can and should respond to needs as they are articulated, but there is no substitute for leadership by those who have the most at stake. This responsibility cannot be relegated to others: now is the time to champion this project and make it successful. There are many resources available to support this effort. The building and business owners, with the support of the township, should make full use of the Main Street program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and consultants experienced in assisting main street associations with retail merchandising, leasing, and marketing.

4. Cricket Avenue project. After construction has begun at the train station, the township should turn its attention to redevelopment of the Cricket Avenue parking lot. The township's role should be as landowner seeking to realize revenue on the Cricket lot from the sale of development rights while maintaining the current number of parking spaces on both the Cricket and Schaufele lots. The adjacent residential neighborhood should be recognized as a key stakeholder and brought into the design process as a first step in preparing this lot for development. Based on current residential



The township's Cricket parking lot offers an excellent opportunity for residential/mixed-use development.

development economics, a developer should be able to produce a high-quality residential building, replace the displaced public parking, and pay the township an additional amount to acquire the land. The township, in turn, can use these additional funds to support other revitalization projects.

5. Village Green project. The panel has recommended that the Schaufele parking lot be turned into a village green through the efforts of the town with the active involvement of the abutting landowners. Over time, the green should be bordered by shops and restaurants created by changing uses in the surrounding buildings. The panel believes that the township should support this evolution in edge uses not only here, but also in other areas of Historic Ardmore where the streets off Lancaster Avenue could emerge as miniature retail/entertainment/civic clusters.

The lost Schaufele parking spaces are to be replaced through development of the Cricket Avenue project. The panel notes that there is a special opportunity here to marry the Cricket and Schaufele projects through the proposed MUST



Enhanced pedestrian and vehicular linkages between the north and south sides of the railroad tracks are an important component of the Town Square Phase II project.



ordinance that gives a developer a density bonus for creating public green spaces.

6. Town Square Phase II—SEPTA and Amtrak parking. The panel understands that SEPTA desires 167 additional parking spaces to accommodate projected ridership growth, and Amtrak would like 40 spaces available for overnight parking. These additional spaces could be provided in several different locations: immediately east of the new train station behind the stores, on the Ruby's lot, across Lancaster Avenue on the Cricket lot (or in the new mixed-use Cricket Avenue project, if available), or west of Anderson Avenue adjacent to the railroad tracks. This parking requirement could be divided among two or more of these properties. The ultimate location of the parking should depend on the outcome of negotiations among SEPTA, Amtrak, Suburban Square, and the township. The township should not feel obligated to drive these discussions, but should support these other parties in working out a feasible plan. Decisions on the ultimate location of the additional SEPTA and Amtrak parking will provide a framework for setting priorities among the improvements needed in the pedestrian and vehicular linkages between the north and south sides of the rail line and the pedestrian connections across Anderson Avenue.

7. Ruby's lot and SEPTA lot north of the tracks.

The township should make clear that it considers development of these sites north of the railroad tracks to be linked to the overall parking needs in Ardmore. Its insistence that the parking situation be resolved before redevelopment can proceed may help to create the necessary incentive for the negotiations to take place. Once the SEPTA and Amtrak parking plans have been negotiated, then and only then should the town consider, in its traditional approval role, redevelopment of the Ruby's site and the SEPTA site adjacent to Suburban Square.

8. The area immediately east of the new train station.

As discussed earlier in this report, the panel believes that demolition of buildings on Lancaster Avenue will diminish the character of Historic Ardmore and harm revitalization efforts. Given the narrowness of the publicly owned portion of the Gateway site, the panel also believes that it is almost impossible to construct a proposed 450- to 600-space structured parking garage on the site without such demolition. All of the options for creating deck parking on the Gateway site that the panel reviewed represent very expensive, complex, and high-risk development projects for the township. However, the panel believes that through the strategies discussed earlier, Ardmore's overall parking needs can be met without structured parking on the Gateway site. Therefore, the panel recommends that the township hold this parcel in reserve as a possible site to accommodate surface parking demand not otherwise met on other sites.

In summary, the panel's development strategy is straightforward: divide up the work, share the responsibility, keep things simple, stay focused on the task at hand, and reap the rewards.

Implementation

In order to implement the panel's recommended priority projects, the township and community first need to organize for success *based on co-operation and not confrontation*. This involves changes to the process used by the township to review proposed projects as well as changes in the amount and type of communications used by the township to inform and engage the citizens in the revitalization process. It also involves a rethinking of which public or private entities assume responsibility for each project, as described earlier. The best projects are successful because each is championed by one driving force that takes psychic ownership of its success and has the resources to accomplish the task. Each of the projects of the Ardmore revitalization plan must have its own champion.

Enhanced Communication

One positive outcome of the redevelopment process pursued by the township over the past year or so is that now the whole community is engaged and focused on the revitalization of downtown Ardmore. Residents understand that the township is serious about implementing projects and making progress toward having a reinvigorated downtown business district. The panel recommends that the township build on the attention generated by the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan by creating a new communications structure among the township, the businesses, and the residents to keep all parties informed and up-to-date on progress.

An extensive community outreach program should be implemented that includes periodic face-to-face meetings with each group of stakeholders, as well as regular written communications such as a monthly newsletter, both mailed to residents and businesses owners and posted on the township Web site. It will be the township's responsibility to produce the newsletter on a timely basis and to include as content a status report of events and

projects; it will be everyone else's responsibility to read the newsletter and respond as moved or required.

However, when events directly affect a resident or business, the township should always communicate directly—face to face—with the affected party. This may be time consuming, but in a situation where it is necessary to rebuild trust, there is no substitute for direct communication. At a minimum, this approach will help the township to avoid reactions based on fear and caused by a lack of knowledge. The community outreach program needs to be reevaluated over time so that any necessary adjustments can be made as the projects go forward and issues change.

The panel applauds the township for holding the inclusive public visioning workshops used to evaluate alternatives for the Ardmore Transit Center Master Plan. Both the Ideas Workshop and the Design Workshop produced a wealth of ideas and a sense of engagement on the part of participants. The panel suggests that the township continue to use this type of community participation format as each of the revitalization projects moves forward.

At each step in the process, the township should communicate with residents and business owners about how their ideas are being incorporated into the design and development process and how tradeoffs are being resolved. It is remarkable how a constructive consensus can emerge when people believe that their concerns are heard and their ideas are appreciated. This kind of process also generates increased energy for the shared work of revitalization projects such as is needed along Lancaster Avenue.

Historic District Improvements

The township appears to be unified in its support for a series of improvements designed to revitalize the Lancaster Avenue business district. Wayne,

Panel members meet with township stakeholders to discuss redevelopment ideas for Historic Ardmore.



Manayunk, and Chestnut Hill were mentioned to the panel as great “main street” places that should be models for Historic Ardmore. Given the many strengths of the Ardmore community, the panel agrees that Ardmore should set its sights on offering a main street experience that is just as compelling and unique as these models.

There are well-established challenges facing Historic Ardmore: blank or vacant storefronts, poorly performing businesses, a lack of synergy among businesses to create a multiple-destination center, too few businesses open in the evenings, a lack of clarity about where to park for different purposes, impediments to easy pedestrian circulation, and absentee building owners who have allowed their properties to decline.

Merchants mentioned to the panel that they experience difficulty in expanding and improving their stores. They also reportedly have had trouble with the existing building and zoning codes or even with obtaining the correct code information. Multiple layers of inflexible regulations, including the HARB process, may be impeding rehabilitation or conversion of underused space to higher-value uses.

However, some businesses have used their historic building facades to great advantage, and the district has made important strides. Formation of Ardmore 2000, a business district management organization, has resulted in several improvements, including sidewalk enhancements, a pocket park located next to the Schaufele lot, and events that draw patrons to the district, such as the successful Cricket Avenue parking lot Movie Night.

In order for the township to further this progress and to address the multiple layers of regulation over the business district, the panel makes the following recommendations:

- In order to streamline the process for those desiring to improve their buildings, the township should establish a one-stop desk for businesses to obtain regulatory information and approvals for improvements. This will be necessary because there are at least two regulatory standards that will govern rehabilitation of existing buildings and construction of new buildings in the historical district—HARB regulations and the proposed MUST ordinance.
- The township should work with HARB to simplify and coordinate the design review process to create a quicker, more business-friendly regulatory environment. Time is money, especially for a small business.
- The proposed MUST zoning overlay should be carefully integrated into the overall regulatory framework so that it does not add a new layer of requirements that discourage the very types of development it is designed to promote. The MUST ordinance should be adopted, but with provisions that increase flexibility to allow performance-based compliance with MUST requirements.
- The township should produce an illustrated design guidelines document that contains in one place all the regulations, design standards, and processes that apply to buildings in the Historic District, including those arising under HARB and the MUST ordinance. These guidelines should include standards for building facades and awnings that are consistent with the historic context and add to the color and vitality of the place; for street furniture such as benches, tables, and chairs; for lighting; and for public and private signs. These guidelines should also encourage the use of seasonal plantings for color, a consistent street tree design, and the installation of public art throughout the district. Renovation and preservation of the unique and wonderful alleys off Lancaster Avenue should also be encouraged to enhance pedestrian connections throughout the district.

- The township should continue to contract with a design professional familiar with the goals of the historic district, as it does now with architect Dominique Hawkins, to assist the township with the review of the historic design regulatory process and development of appropriate design guidelines.

Implementation Tools

While the panel does not recommend use of eminent domain to acquire property for development, except under very limited circumstances, the designation of the Ardmore Redevelopment Area provides the township with a number of revitalization implementation tools—besides eminent domain—that are part of Governor Edward G. Rendell’s recently adopted economic stimulus package for Pennsylvania. These tools include tax increment financing for facade and street improvements, and housing redevelopment assistance. The township also should work with the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s Main Street program.

Tax Increment Financing for Facade and Street Improvements

At present, there are two programs available to businesses and property owners for facade improvements. Ardmore 2000 administers a Montgomery County grant program that provides matching funds of up to \$5,000 for partial facade improvements and up to \$10,000 for full facade improvements. Since 2002, 15 individuals have taken advantage of this program. The second program, which is administered by Lower Merion Township, involves zero-interest loans, but no one has used this program to date.

With designation of the Ardmore Redevelopment Area, the township also can use tax increment financing (TIF) to fund facade improvement grants using bonds that are paid off by the additional, incremental property taxes generated by the increased

property values accruing as a result of the facade improvements. Facade improvement grants, which do not require repayment, would be more attractive for current property owners than the loans now available from the township for facade improvement. In addition, the TIF program can be used to fund street and sidewalk improvements that have been proposed for Lancaster Avenue.

Housing Redevelopment Assistance

Grant funding would also be available with redevelopment area designation for the acquisition, rehabilitation, and restoration of older or underused buildings for housing. This could provide an important incentive in facilitating creation of affordable housing in existing buildings with upper-level vacancies.

Main Street Program

The township should coordinate its efforts with the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has worked in communities all over the country, including Philadelphia, to restore America’s traditional commercial main streets. This kind of program can be used to assist local business owners in advancing Historic Ardmore’s revitalization effort in four areas:

- design—rehabilitating historic buildings and promoting new construction that supports the historic context;
- organization—building consensus among the participating groups;
- promotion—marketing the district’s assets to customers; and
- economic restructuring—strengthening the existing district economy and building capacity to embrace new opportunities.

Conclusion

It is often noted that people today are bombarded by information from too many sources, including the broadcast media, newspapers, the Internet, personal digital assistants, cell phones, E-mail, and much more. Although this overload of information has led to the labeling of this era as the information age, Danish futurist Rolf Jensen contends in his book *The Dream Society* that in reality we have moved into the “era of storytellers.” We are hungry for stories that help us to filter and piece all of the information we receive into a coherent framework. In the development world, this trend means that those places that tell the most compelling “stories” will reap the biggest rewards.

At the Urban Land Institute, the art and skill of development storytelling is called place making. The Institute has devoted numerous conferences, books, and publications to providing guidelines for communities and developers describing how a place can develop an authentic identity that reveals itself in fresh but consistent ways for each visitor. People of all ages and economic circumstances now want to live, work, shop, and play in places that are animated with purposeful activity and visual interest, are designed to be comfortable at a human scale, and provide a rich variety of stimulating experiences. Increasingly, a yearning for human connectedness and community is driving people to search for “third places” in addition to the home and workplace—comfortable public places where they can “see and be seen.” The most successful communities will be those that provide places that meet these needs and tell a coherent story about what to expect to all who participate in the experience of being in that community.

The panel believes that Ardmore is well positioned to create a compelling story about the dynamic opportunities for downtown living, main street shopping, and “third-place” gathering that Historic Ardmore can offer. This story begins with

a clear sense of identity that captures the best of the past and the potential of the future. The panel has suggested a theme of “eclectic urbanity in a suburban setting,” but those who live and work in Ardmore must work out the precise details of the script. The panel has further recommended that the community use this identity to create a unified marketing program for the Historic Ardmore business district to target potential tenants and attractions that will reinforce and add depth to the district’s story.

Recognizing that Ardmore’s buildings and streets function as the stage set for its story, the panel has recommended that the district’s stakeholders collectively take the initiative to ensure that the set provides the right visual cues. In this regard, the township should assume primary responsibility for providing the hallmark civic spaces—the new train station building, as well as the public plazas, village greens, streetscapes, and pedestrian pathways. Building and business owners should contribute facade improvements and engaging window and sidewalk displays to the mix.

With the script and set in place, the focus can shift to adding actors to the scene. The panel has recommended that the township encourage transit-oriented, mixed-use residential development that will add to a vibrant town center atmosphere by increasing the number of people who live in and walk through the district. How to incorporate the parking necessary to accommodate those who drive to Historic Ardmore to work, shop, or take the train should be worked out in negotiations with key stakeholders. The township should take the lead on providing visitors with clear directions and information about the destinations that can be explored.

As Ardmore sets out to tell the next chapter of its story, it is lucky to have leaders throughout the community who are not afraid to think big and who have the passionate dedication and willing-

ness to work hard that will be needed to bring the story to life. The panel hopes that its recommendations and outside perspective on the many choice assets that are already in place will be helpful in bringing together all the threads of the story in a vital, compelling, and economically winning way—a way that will lead Historic Ardmore to its own tipping point.

About the Panel

Charles R. Kendrick, Jr.

Panel Chair

Boston, Massachusetts

Kendrick, managing director of Clarion Ventures, LLC, is an urban redevelopment expert with more than 25 years of experience as a developer, investment banker, and strategic adviser specializing in urban projects and portfolios. During the early 1990s, he started Clarion Ventures to attract capital to urban communities. His institutional clients have included the Bank of America, the Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC), the Fannie Mae Foundation, and the Danforth Foundation, as well as public entities such as the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, and the St. Louis Development Corporation.

As a trustee of the Urban Land Institute, Kendrick's activities include membership on the Executive Committee (vice chairman for district councils) and on the Public/Private Partnership Council. In 2003, he received the O'Donnell Award for outstanding contributions to the ULI Advisory Services Program. Kendrick is on the national board of directors of the Initiative for a Competitive Inner City and the board of directors of Access Capital Strategies, LLC.

Kendrick holds a bachelor of arts degree from Princeton University and a master of business administration degree from George Washington University.

Fernando Costa

Fort Worth, Texas

Costa, planning director of Fort Worth since 1998, previously served for 11 years as planning director of Atlanta, and for another 11 years as a planner in Macon, Georgia. He has extensive experi-

ence in economic development and land use planning, including the formulation of public policy to promote transit-oriented development.

Costa currently is chairman of the Development Excellence Steering Committee for the North Central Texas Council of Governments, which promotes smart growth in the Dallas–Fort Worth metropolitan area, and of the Regional Visioning Committee for ULI North Texas. He also is active in the American Planning Association, for which he has served as a chapter president, division chair, accreditation board member, and journal editorial board member. He previously has served on ULI Advisory Services panels for Kansas City, Trenton, Phoenix, and Washington, D.C.

Costa received degrees in civil engineering and city planning from Georgia Tech, and was an officer in the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Winston E. Folkers

Cincinnati, Ohio

Folkers, president of Folkers Associates since 1980, develops and manages rental property in the Cincinnati and Dayton, Ohio, and northern Kentucky markets. Before working in private real estate development, he was development director of Cincinnati and Toledo, Ohio, and Lansing, Michigan.

Folkers has been a ULI member since 1983 and started ULI Cincinnati, of which he served as chairman for six years. He has participated on ULI panels for urban development in Kansas City, Kansas; San Francisco and Sacramento, California; and Columbus, Ohio. He has served with many other organizations, including the advisory committee to the University of Cincinnati real estate program.

Folkers graduated with a degree in economics from Hamline University and received his mas-

ter's degree in public administration from the University of Minnesota.

Andrew Irvine

Denver, Colorado

Irvine, senior design manager at EDAW, Inc., is a senior landscape architect with a broad range of project experience throughout the United States and Australia. He recently relocated from the Melbourne office to the Denver office, bringing more than 15 years of experience in landscape architecture and urban design.

Irvine has specialized skills in site planning, master planning, and development of urban design guidelines. His projects have included major infrastructure, urban renewal, public domain, and traditional park designs.

Irvine received a bachelor of landscape architecture degree from the University of New South Wales and he is a member of the Australian Institute of Landscape Architects.

Victor Karen

Boston, Massachusetts

Karen is director of advisory services for RF Walsh Company, Inc., a Boston-based development and construction management firm providing clients engaged in complex real estate projects with a wide range of services from concept development through construction. As part of RF Walsh's predevelopment planning team, Karen focuses on urban projects requiring a balance of public and private interests. His experience includes managing entitlements for the Channel Center mixed-use project in the Seaport District adjoining downtown Boston, and assisting Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, located in Boston's Longwood Medical and Academic Area, in the creation of a partnership with a private developer under which excess medical center property will be developed into a biomedical research center.

Before joining RF Walsh, Karen was director of real estate development for MassDevelopment, a state development finance agency, where he over-

saw state involvement in reuse planning for a 1,500-acre naval air station closed by the federal government in 1995. He also was deputy director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority, the city's planning and development agency, where he managed public review and approval of downtown and waterfront revitalization projects, including the 100-acre Charlestown Navy Yard. He has served on previous ULI Advisory Services panels for Treasure Island in San Francisco; St. Juliens Creek Naval Annex in Chesapeake, Virginia; and Lowell, Massachusetts.

Karen is a registered architect with bachelor's and master's degrees from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Sandra Kulli

Malibu, California

Kulli, president of Kulli Marketing Company, creates marketing programs for builders and developers. She has worked with 89 companies on 128 communities with a sales volume of \$2.8 billion throughout the United States and in Japan, New Zealand, and England. Kulli Marketing consults with residential builders and mixed-use developers on marketing strategies from high concepts to turnarounds. On residential projects, Kulli works closely with builder/developer staff, most often as the leader of outside marketing resources. She also has worked on large mixed-use projects, including the Naval Training Center base conversion in San Diego, Playa Vista in Los Angeles, the Hoxton urban infill project in London, and the Pinehills in Plymouth, Massachusetts, which won the National Association of Home Builders (NAHB) Master-Planned Community of the Year award for 2002.

Before forming Kulli Marketing, she was vice president of marketing for a large homebuilder, sold homes for Coldwell Banker in Pasadena and San Marino, and taught in inner-city schools.

Kulli is a frequent speaker for audiences such as the Harvard Graduate School of Design, University of Southern California Masters Program in Real Estate Development, Pacific Coast Builders Conference (PCBC), National Association of

Home Builders, the Urban Land Institute, and the Presidential Seminar for CEOs. She also contributes to industry publications, and serves as a judge for Member, Institute of Residential Marketing (MIRM); Gold Nugget awards; Best in American Living; and the Vancouver, San Francisco, and Seattle Major Achievement in Marketing Excellence (MAME) awards. She serves on the boards of KCRW, National Public Radio, the PCBC, and LAMP, an organization providing housing for the homeless.

A native of southern California, Kulli is a graduate of Wellesley College and holds a master's degree from Boston University.

Christopher W. Kurz

Baltimore, Maryland

Kurz is president and CEO of Linden Associates, Inc., a regional real estate services and mortgage banking company engaged in the financing, acquisition, development, and management of commercial property. The firm also consults for corporations on real estate matters.

He was a cofounder, chairman, and CEO of McGill Development Company, which grew into the fourth-largest commercial real estate development company in the Baltimore area, and was chairman of the board and cofounder of Columbia Bancorp and the Columbia Bank, a \$500 million, publicly traded bank holding company. As a principal at Alex. Brown Real Estate Group, Inc., he acquired investments for pension fund clients. Other companies that Kurz has been involved with are J.G. Smithy Company, Maryland National Corporation, and the Rouse Company.

A ULI member, he has been chair of ULI Baltimore, vice chair of the Small-Scale Development Council (Blue Flight), and a National Program Committee member. He is also a member of the International Council of Shopping Centers; a past member of the National Association of Industrial and Office Properties, and the Mortgage Bankers Association; and past board member of the Catherine McAuley Housing Foundation in Denver.

Kurz holds a master of business administration degree from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and a bachelor of arts degree from the University of Pennsylvania.

David D. Leahy

Denver, Colorado

Leahy, P.E., a principal of TDA Colorado, Inc., is responsible for all aspects of the firm's activities in the Rocky Mountain region. During his 30-year career as a transportation engineer/planner, Leahy has been involved in a variety of transportation and land use projects.

Leahy's public sector experience includes freeway corridor planning, design, and operation, as well as public transit service and facility planning and development. As a private consultant, his focus has been traffic and transit operation analysis, downtown and institutional parking studies, transit operation, development traffic impact assessment, and transportation system development for major resorts. He has served as consultant on call for a number of small municipalities and metropolitan districts in the Rocky Mountain region, including Cherry Hills Village, Glendale, and Beaver Creek Resort. Leahy also served on the Golden, Colorado, planning commission.

Before joining TDA, Leahy was director of transit management for the Regional Transportation District (RTD) in Denver, where he was responsible for park-and-ride site selection and operational design, as well as the transportation aspects of the 16th Street Transit Mall project. He came to RTD from Boston, where he was the consulting project engineer for the original I-93 bus/HOV lane design project and performed the parking and access analysis for alternative John F. Kennedy Library and Museum sites. Leahy began his career with the California Department of Transportation in Los Angeles and Sacramento.

He is a civil engineering graduate of Drexel University and holds a certificate from the Chicago Transit Authority Technical Institute.

Susan Whittaker

Irvine, California

Whittaker is a senior associate at Sapetto Group, Inc., a development consulting and community outreach firm in southern California, where she works in the development process and community outreach projects. She is currently managing community outreach for a proposed golf course on a closed Los Angeles County landfill, and recently created and implemented a successful community outreach program for the Community Redevelopment Agency of Los Angeles and the Metropolitan Transportation Agency in North Hollywood.

Whittaker has 21 years of experience as an urban planner. She was city planner for Irvine, California, where she led development of zoning and procedures for the Irvine Business Complex, an area changing from primarily industrial land use to a multiuse urban area consisting of more than 55 million square feet of development.

For more than 13 years, Whittaker was the director of entitlement and property operations for Trammell Crow Company's 135-acre Park Place development in Irvine. The property, developed in the early 1970s as the Fluor Corporation headquarters, in the late 1980s was transformed into a multiuse development with residential, retail, and office space, plus amenities such as child care, a health club, and a theater. She was involved in all aspects of the redevelopment, including construction, retail tenant leasing, and infrastructure management.