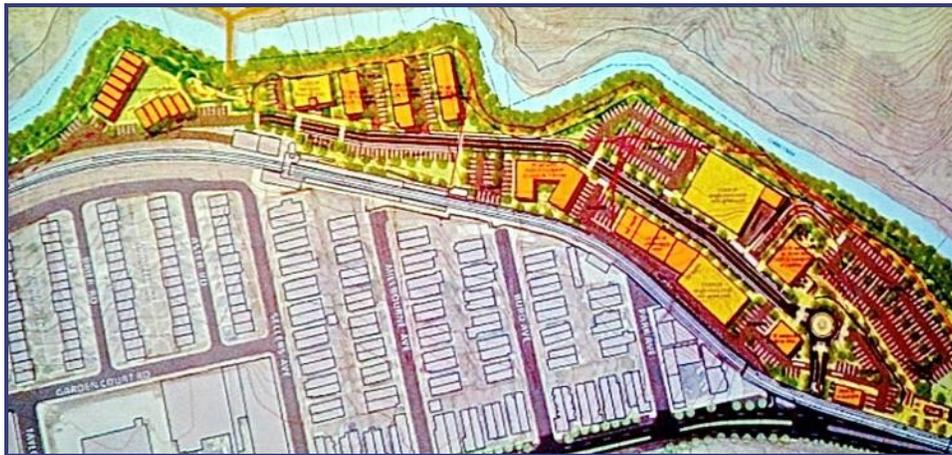


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New - and reused - recommendation for West Market Street

Thursday January 17, 2013 • By Kellie Patrick Gates



A new Philadelphia City Planning Commission report finds that mixed-use development centered around transit stops, replacing large surface parking lots with more active uses and the relocation of some city services could help strengthen West Market Street as a commercial corridor.

Richard Redding, director of community planning for the PCPC, presented the Market Street Corridor report to the commission earlier this week. The report stemmed from a 2011 discussion between the city administration and City Councilman Curtis Jones, who was promoting transit-oriented development near 60th and Market, and also had other ideas about revitalizing the corridor.

A task force of representatives from governments, civic associations, community development organizations, non-profits and businesses was assembled and met regularly for a year to determine what should be done to improve West Market. The resulting document will inform both the University/Southwest District portion of the city's comprehensive plan, work on which is underway, and the West District portion, work on which will begin next year.

The group focused its work on the areas where the Market-Frankford El has been refurbished. Focusing efforts near the transit line makes sense considering it only takes 12 minutes to get from 63rd Street to 15th Street in Center City by train, Redding said.

The report recommends four signature projects to generate momentum: New West, a transit-oriented development at 59th and Market streets. Renovation of an existing building at 4601 Market Street, which would be used to house police administration and other city services including health department labs and the morgue. Redevelopment of the large Fresh Grocer parking lot at 56th and Market. And, just outside the city in tiny Millbourne Borough, a commercial and mixed-use development at a former Sears site. Millbourne's city council president participated in the study, Redding noted.

Planning Commission Chairman and Deputy Mayor Alan Greenberger noted that while the city is very keen on reusing the building at 4601 Market, it's a very expensive proposition. "We are looking for funding strategies," he said.



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Greenberger also noted that the decrease in population around the West Market Corridor “makes demand for housing pretty tough.” He said considering that, it might be wise if housing wasn't part of the mix in mixed-use development there. However, certain kinds of retail or commercial development could work very well, he suggested. Greenberger noted that rising property values around Washington Avenue might entice some of the building supply businesses there to sell their property. Perhaps they would be interested in relocated to West Market, he said.

Redding said the next steps to make the plan real include the work in the two related district-level plans, revisions to zoning maps, outreach to property owners, and exploration of the use of tax credits.

He also noted that in addition to new recommendations, the plan gathers many recommendations from previous studies done on the area.