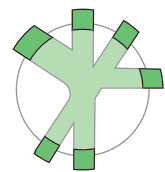


# Passyunk Square Village Center Urban Design Recommendations



**CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**

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The Honorable Frank DiCicco, 1st District Councilman

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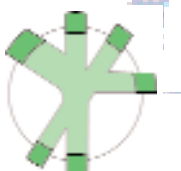
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**Approved by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission 1.16.2007**

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Passyunk Square Village Center  
City Context



Founded in 2004, **The Passyunk Square Civic Association (PSCA)** serves a densely populated area of South Philadelphia bounded by Washington Avenue, Tasker Street, Broad and 6th Streets. Though less than a square mile in area, 14,000 residents make this neighborhood their home. Approximately 7,000 households dwell in almost 6,000 housing units, most of them constructed in the 19th century. The Passyunk Square Civic Association maintains an excellent web site that addresses a multitude of issues that neighbors will want to know about, from play groups to town watch patrols and safety, tree planting and beautification as well as community and public relations. The Association currently has approximately 500 members, and holds monthly meetings at the South Philadelphia Older Adult Center on Passyunk Avenue.

The **Citizen's Alliance for Better Neighborhoods** was established to better serve the community by subsidizing City services anywhere in the City of Philadelphia. The Alliance headquarters is located on Wharton Street near Columbus Square in the Passyunk Square neighborhood. The Citizen's Alliance has grown since its 1991 charge of responding to citizens' complaints concerning inadequate trash removal. Although that function is still part of the Alliance's mission, its focus has grown to include clean-up and maintenance of vacant lots, the conversion of abandoned buildings to functioning ones – especially for commercial use, unified neighborhood clean-ups, planting and maintaining street trees, food drives, emergency assistance and support of any of the City's other Civic Development groups. The Citizen's Alliance has further established the Christopher Columbus Charter School, aided in the expansion of Christian Street Elementary School, as well as given assistance in the Jefferson Square housing program.

The **East Passyunk Business Improvement District**, a Neighborhood Commercial Revitalization Program since 1982, encourages and supports businesses along the East Passyunk Avenue Corridor from Snyder Avenue to Federal Street through its efforts to keep the avenue clean and attractive. This BID has partnered with the Citizen's Alliance for Better Neighborhoods to realize its efforts to enhance and maintain the avenue. The business community strives to encourage full participation of retail owners on or near East Passyunk Avenue. Commercial and retail owners of establishments along Passyunk Avenue have been invited to share ideas that will assist in creating an expanded vision for the corridor to further development possibilities. The East Passyunk BID was responsible for the design and construction of the handsome new park and fountain at the intersection of Passyunk Avenue, 11th and Tasker Streets.



-  Passyunk Square Civic Association Service Area
-  Citizen's Alliance for Better Neighborhoods Headquarters
-  East Passyunk Avenue BID
-  Neighborhood Core Study Area
-  Study Recommendations

## Passyunk Square Village Center Study Area



**Some Background:**

For nearly one-hundred and forty years the Moyamensing, or New County, Prison dominated the intersection of Passyunk Avenue, 10th and Reed Streets in South Philadelphia. This eclectic, romantic structure, that included a particularly fine Egyptian-Revival wing, was destroyed in 1968. Its designer was Philadelphia architect Thomas Ustick Walter who went on to design the dome of the United States Capitol as well as the Senate and House wings of the Capitol as we know them today. There is but a low stone wall remaining from the prison of the 1830's on the site along Reed Street.

The large parcel of land that remained after the demolition of the prison was given over to a commercial use that would benefit a dense urban neighborhood. The commercial use remains today. When constructed, the food market was set back on its site and fronted with a large surface parking lot along both Passyunk Avenue and Reed Street. The siting of the food market in this manner reflects a typical suburban model and affords those arriving at the market by automobile a high level of convenience. To the east of the intersection of Reed and 10th Streets, immediately across from the market's surface parking lot, are several more commercial structures fronted by yet another surface parking lot. Because a significant amount of land at the intersection of Reed, 10th and Passyunk Avenue is given over to parking, the pedestrian's sense of the continuity of any streetscape at this intersection is heavily compromised.



Acme Supermarket



South Philadelphia Older Adult Center

**The Purpose of the Study:**

This study of a key intersection in South Philadelphia seeks to offer remedies to disruptions in the streetscape, and to offer new definition to Passyunk Avenue, 10th and Reed Streets through landscaping, screened parking, historical interpretation, and even the introduction of a new pad commercial structure. These measures are particularly appropriate because Passyunk Avenue has historically been a strong commercial corridor in South Philadelphia.

Residential and recreational enhancements are already regenerating South Philadelphia. Much of the district around the Passyunk Avenue, Reed and 10th Street intersection was built in the 19th century and is distinguished by a grid that was scaled to pedestrians and horse-drawn wagons. Residential architecture in this district is uniform, attractive and holds the street line. Furthermore, the dense residential streets are interspersed with attractive green squares and recreational facilities, and afford easy proximity to Center City Philadelphia. In order to keep pace with the ongoing regeneration in the neighborhood, we propose enhancements to one of most challenged intersections along Passyunk Avenue in order to redefine it as a vital and attractive commercial node.



**Passyunk Square Village Center  
Background and Purpose of the Study**





An aerial view of the study area showing 19th century streetscapes and urban density.



**Land Use:**

Passyunk Square is primarily a residential neighborhood with a good mix of commercial and institutional uses; and a sparse scattering of industrial uses. For the purpose of this study, we are focusing on commercial land use. There is a heavy concentration of commercial use along Passyunk Avenue. This corridor acts as the commercial spine supporting the surrounding residential neighborhoods, functioning as a “downtown main street.”

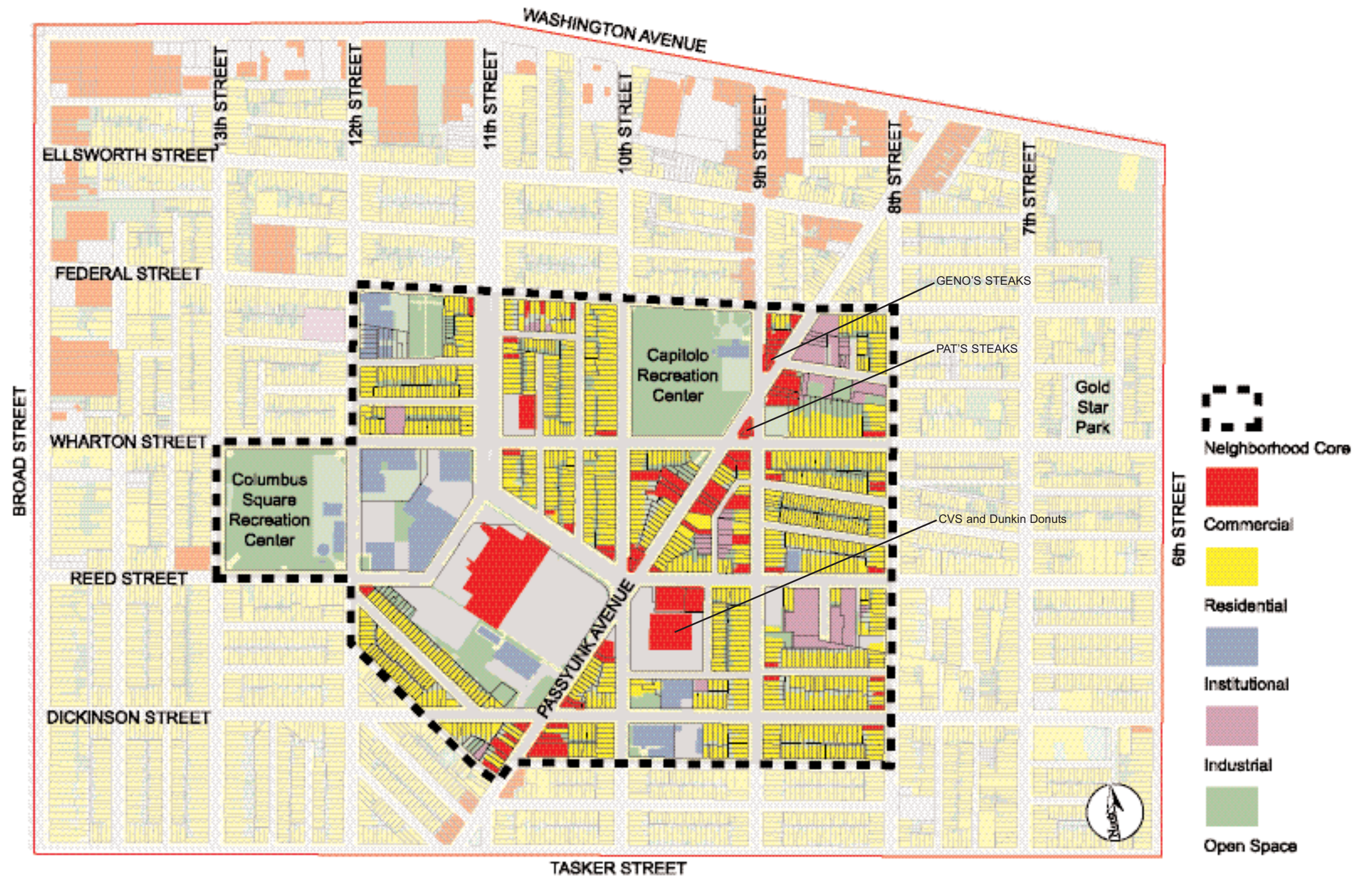
At the northern end of the East Passyunk shopping district is the site of the former Moyamensing prison which is now occupied by a supermarket. This block offers no buildings that hold the street line and an overabundance of unbuffered surface parking.



A CVS Drugstore and Dunkin Donuts provide 24 hour services on Passyunk Avenue



“Geno’s Steaks” is directly across the street from “Pat’s Steaks,” and are neighborhood landmarks known regionally. These two establishments hold down the two opposing corners of 9th Street and Passyunk Avenue. Both are open 24 hours a day.





**Andrew Jackson  
Public School**  
built 1924

**Capitolo Playground  
& Recreation Center**



**Columbus Square  
Recreation Center**  
built 1960 and 2006



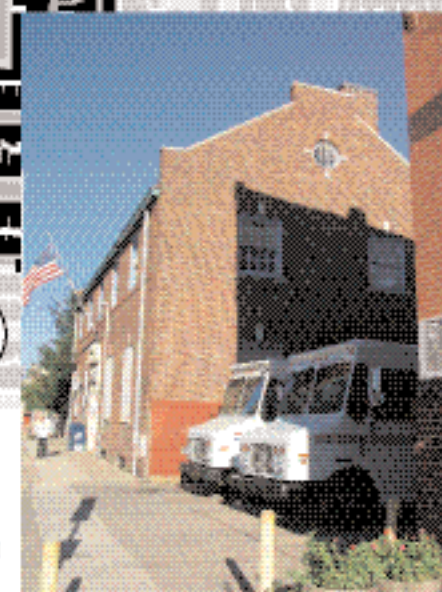
**Philadelphia  
Municipal Bldg.  
3rd & 4th Police  
District** built 1960

**Philadelphia  
Fire Department  
Engine Co. No. 10  
Ladder Co. No. 11** built 1963



**South Philadelphia  
Older Adult Center**  
built 1979

**U.S. Post Office  
Southwark Station**  
built 1935



The importance of the intersection of Passyunk Avenue, Reed and 10th Streets is underscored by the number of public buildings located nearby. A police station, fire station, a health center (now an older adult center) and a public school are within easy walking distance of this intersection. Most of these buildings were constructed in the early 1960's, though the Andrew Jackson Public School is a fine example of 1920's Gothic Revival architecture. In addition, the Southwark Station Post Office is an unaltered example of New Deal architecture featuring public mural art within.

Passyunk Square Village Center  
Public Buildings in the Core

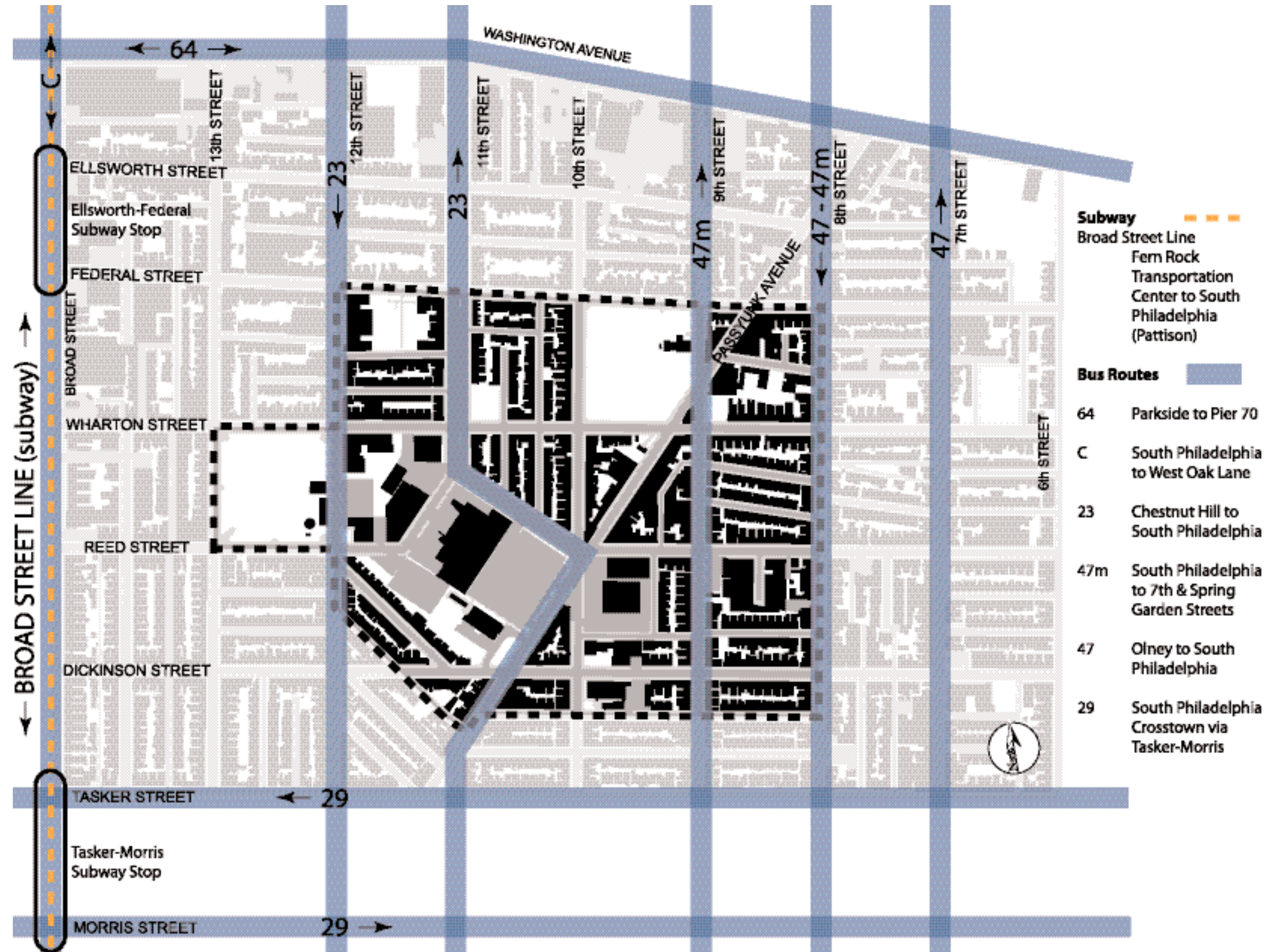






Route 23 Trolley

SEPTA'S Route 23 trolley connecting South Philadelphia with the Chestnut Hill neighborhood in far Northwest Philadelphia, was the longest trolley route operating on a city street in any transit system in the world. The route was nearly 13 miles long. Service on the Route 23 trolley was suspended in 1992. SEPTA made a public commitment at that time to revive the trolley route in the future. Many communities located along this route anticipate the renewal of the service.

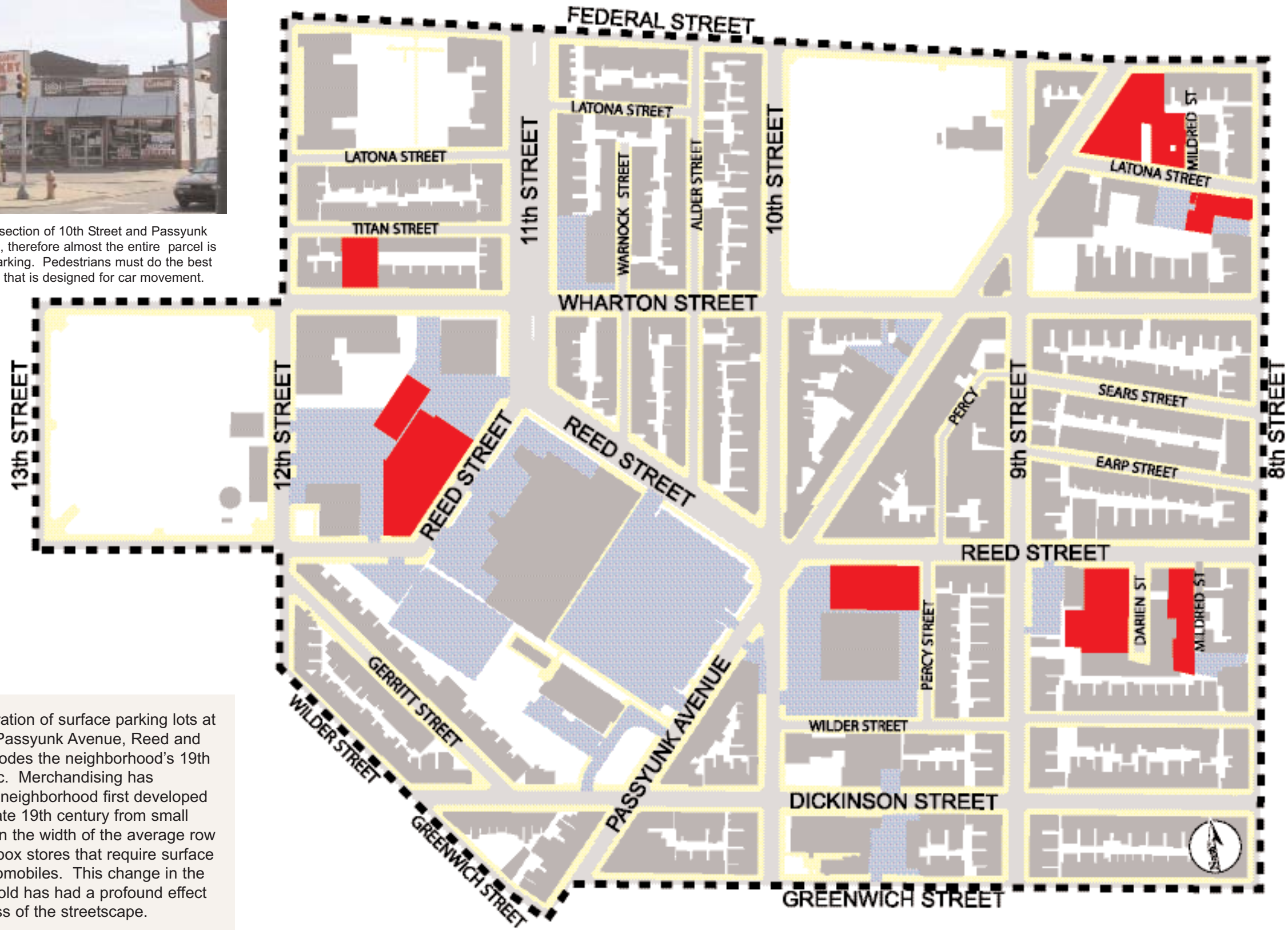


Passyunk Square Village Center  
Transit Routes





Large curb-cuts at the intersection of 10th Street and Passyunk Avenue preclude sidewalks, therefore almost the entire parcel is given over to automobile parking. Pedestrians must do the best they can in an environment that is designed for car movement.



There is a concentration of surface parking lots at the intersection of Passyunk Avenue, Reed and 10th Streets that erodes the neighborhood's 19th century urban fabric. Merchandising has changed since this neighborhood first developed in the middle and late 19th century from small stores no wider than the width of the average row house to large big-box stores that require surface parking lots for automobiles. This change in the way products are sold has had a profound effect on the attractiveness of the streetscape.

Passyunk Square Village Center  
Surface Parking Lot Distribution



These photographs demonstrate the manner in which automobiles have compromised and impinged upon the pedestrian environment. These situations are not unusual throughout the city, but are particularly problematic in a very dense urban setting that was completed before automobiles were invented. Accommodation of the automobile has in many instances 'hollowed-out' the fine grain of the neighborhood to its detriment.



Because three major streets - Passyunk Avenue, Reed and 10th Streets- converge here in South Philadelphia, a vast paved surface results that accommodates vehicles, whether they be automobiles, trucks or buses. Pedestrians move through this intersection the best they can, often times ignoring established crossings.



Cars cannot by law, be parked on Philadelphia sidewalks. When this happens, pedestrians are forced to walk in the street, placing them in a potentially hazardous encounter with a moving automobile. A solution to this problem is lining the street edge with bollards providing separate dedicated space for both pedestrians and cars.



On this sidewalk the pedestrian is sandwiched between the moving traffic of Passyunk Avenue, to the left and bumpers of the parked cars on a surface lot to the right. The streetscape here is defined by cars and offers no refuge for the pedestrian.



Bumpers of automobiles overlap sidewalks, encroaching on the pedestrian realm.



In this photo, cars are parked on a sidewalk, when in all probability, they could just as easily be parked at the curb. Again, this situation puts pedestrians in danger of being hit by moving automobiles.





## Assets

### 19th Century Urban Context

#### Historical “Depth of Place” for Interpretation

**Landmark Buildings:** Church of the Annunciation, Southwark Post Office, City Repair Shop, Andrew Jackson Public School, Annunciation Parochial School



**Green Space:** Columbus Square Recreation Center, Capitolo Recreation Center, Older Adult Center and Mikveh Israel Second Cemetery



**Commercial Establishments:** Passyunk Avenue commercial corridor

**Public Institutions:** clustered around Passyunk Avenue, 10th and Reed Streets



Passyunk Square Village Center  
Neighborhood Assets





## Liabilities

Pedestrian / Vehicular Interface Problematic

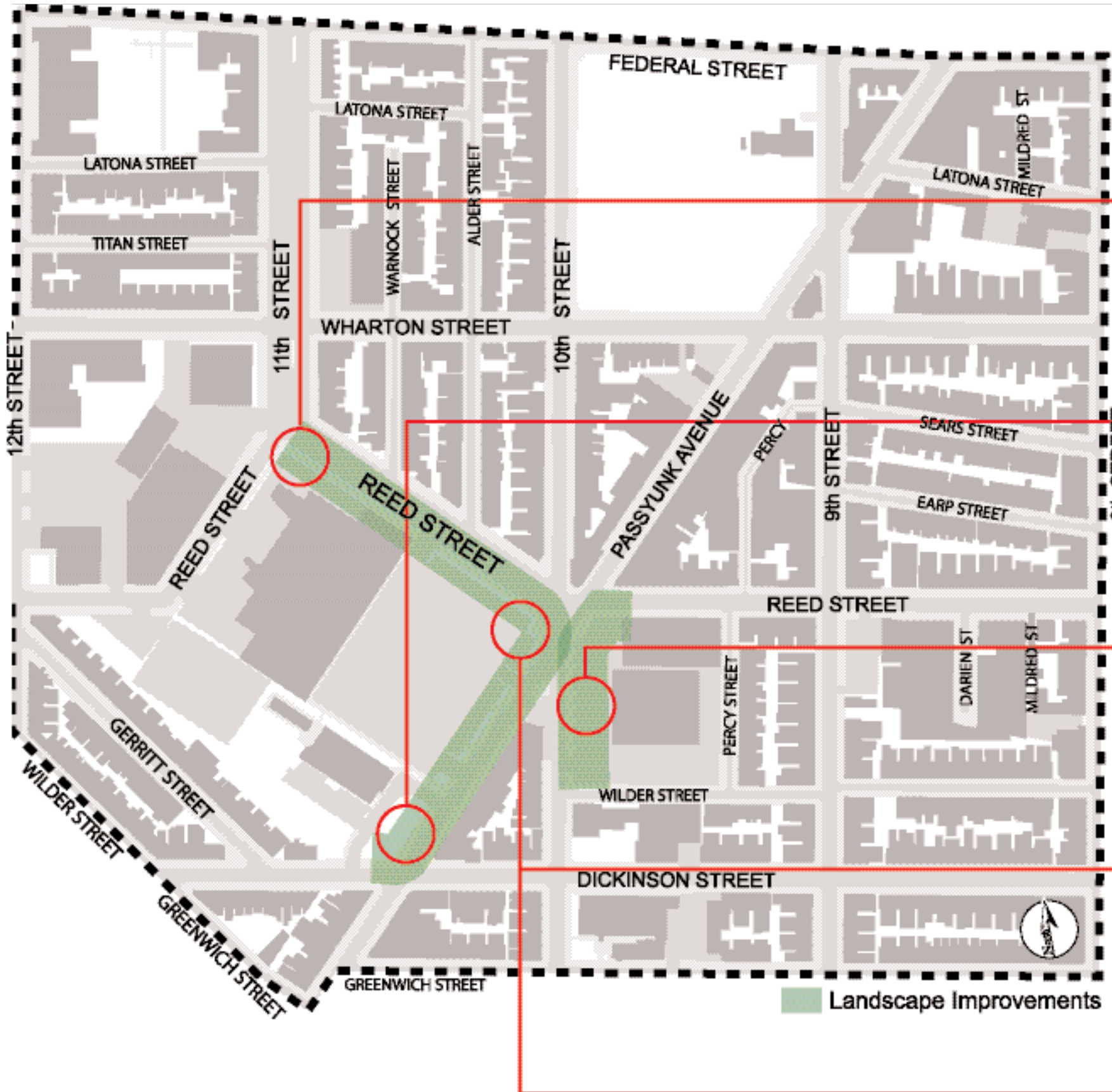
Complex Alignment of Streets



Litter on Sidewalks and Streets

Retail not Approachable by Pedestrians





**1. HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION:**  
of the Moyamening Prison and screening of Acme service area "The New Termination of 11th Street at Acme Market"



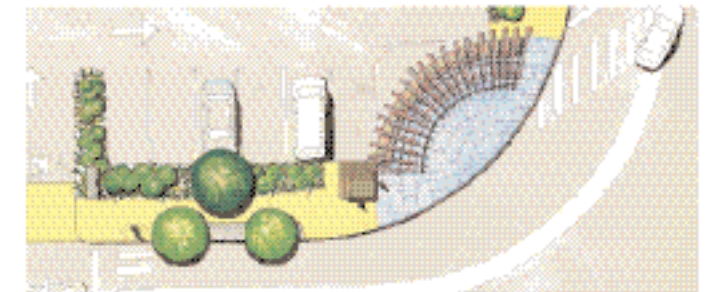
**2. LANDSCAPE:**  
Redefine corner of Passyunk Avenue and Dickinson Street with an enhanced public green space



**3. LANDSCAPE:**  
Planting buffer around the perimeter of a surface parking lot



**4a. NEW PLAZA OPTION:**  
Redefine intersection at the center of the neighborhood. Passyunk Avenue, 10th Street and Reed Street with an enhanced public plaza



**4b. NEW BUILDING OPTION :**  
Redefine intersection at the Center of the neighborhood. Passyunk Avenue, 10th Street and Reed Street with a new building: pad store / office / business start-ups





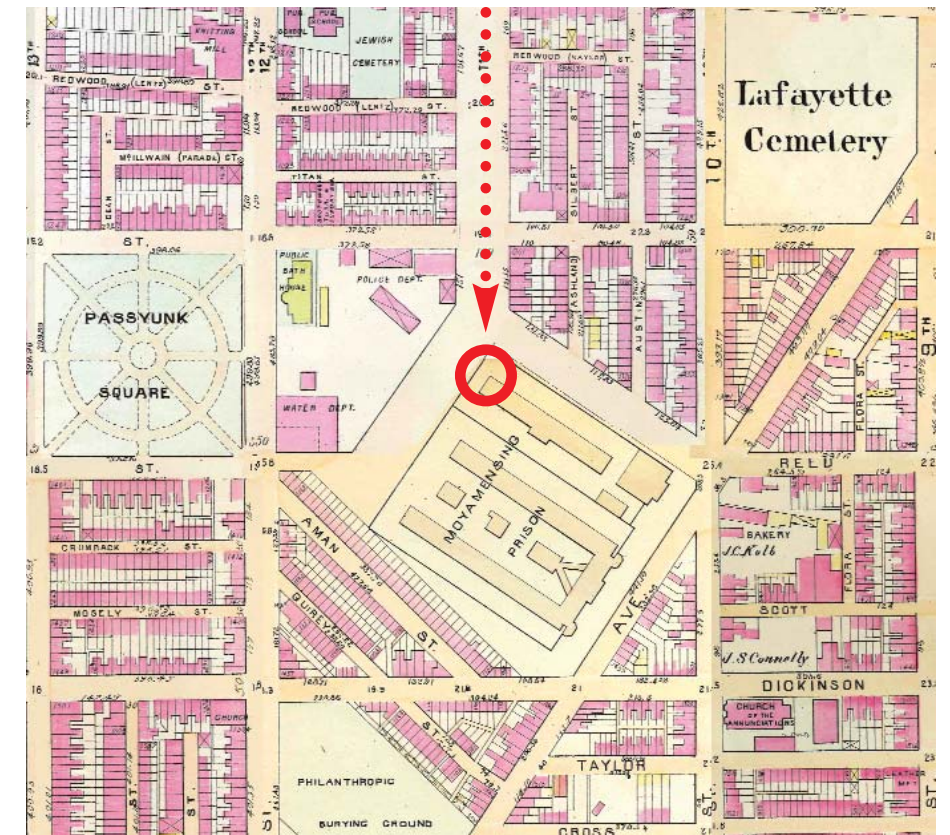
Proposed sign that explains site history (material: porcelain enamel sign with lighting)

**Acknowledgement of the history of the ACME site:**

The remaining heavy masonry walls of the Moyamensing Prison along Reed Street should be acknowledged as a reminder of this significant monument in the city's history. With this goal in mind, a handsome sign that will show a vivid depiction of the prison in the mid-nineteenth century should be placed above the ruins of the prison wall, screening the market loading docks beyond. The sign should be a contemporary landmark that commingles architectural history with bold, colorful graphics that support, and are derived from, the relatively new marketing function.

Positioned in a manner that can focus the termination of 11th Street at Reed Street as one drives or walks toward the south, the sign not only screens the loading docks, but explains several urban conditions: the longstanding disruption of 11th Street at a massive building, site history, and the legacy of eclectic Romantic Revival styles for which Philadelphia was famous. Since this node is truly the core of the Passyunk Square neighborhood, a significant illustration of the history of the neighborhood should be on display everyday.

At night, the sign as well as the vestigial stone wall should be lit, and because it will become so much a part of the streetscape, it will become a neighborhood icon. In addition, it serves the commercial function just behind it because it amplifies the meaning of the site. Color derived from the logo of the market and even the name of the market should be a welcome element in the composition of the sign. These elements speak to site history as well.



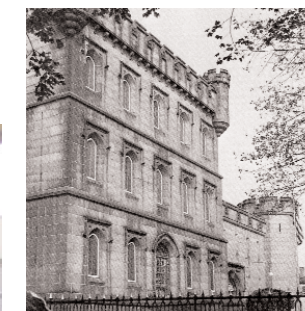
The Moyamensing Prison once occupied the block where the Acme and the South Philadelphia Older Adult Center now stand. The red arrow points to the terminus of 11th Street (looking from the north) which is the most appropriate location for historic signage. Map image from 1895 Atlas of Philadelphia



Location of proposed interpretive sign over ruins of the prison wall



Existing Moyamensing Prison ruins (Recommendation: replace chain-link fence and repoint masonry)



Moyamensing Prison (demolished 1968)



Moyamensing Prison, Debtors' Wing (demolished 1968)



Proposed ornamental fence to replace chain-link fence

Passyunk Square Village Center  
Historical Interpretation of the Moyamensing Prison





Existing condition: Chain-link fence and verge between SPOAC and Acme Market parking



A blank building wall can be utilized for public art



Existing conditions at SPOAC, November 2005



Example of public art and new landscaping on the corner of Passyunk Avenue and Dickinson Street with new street trees

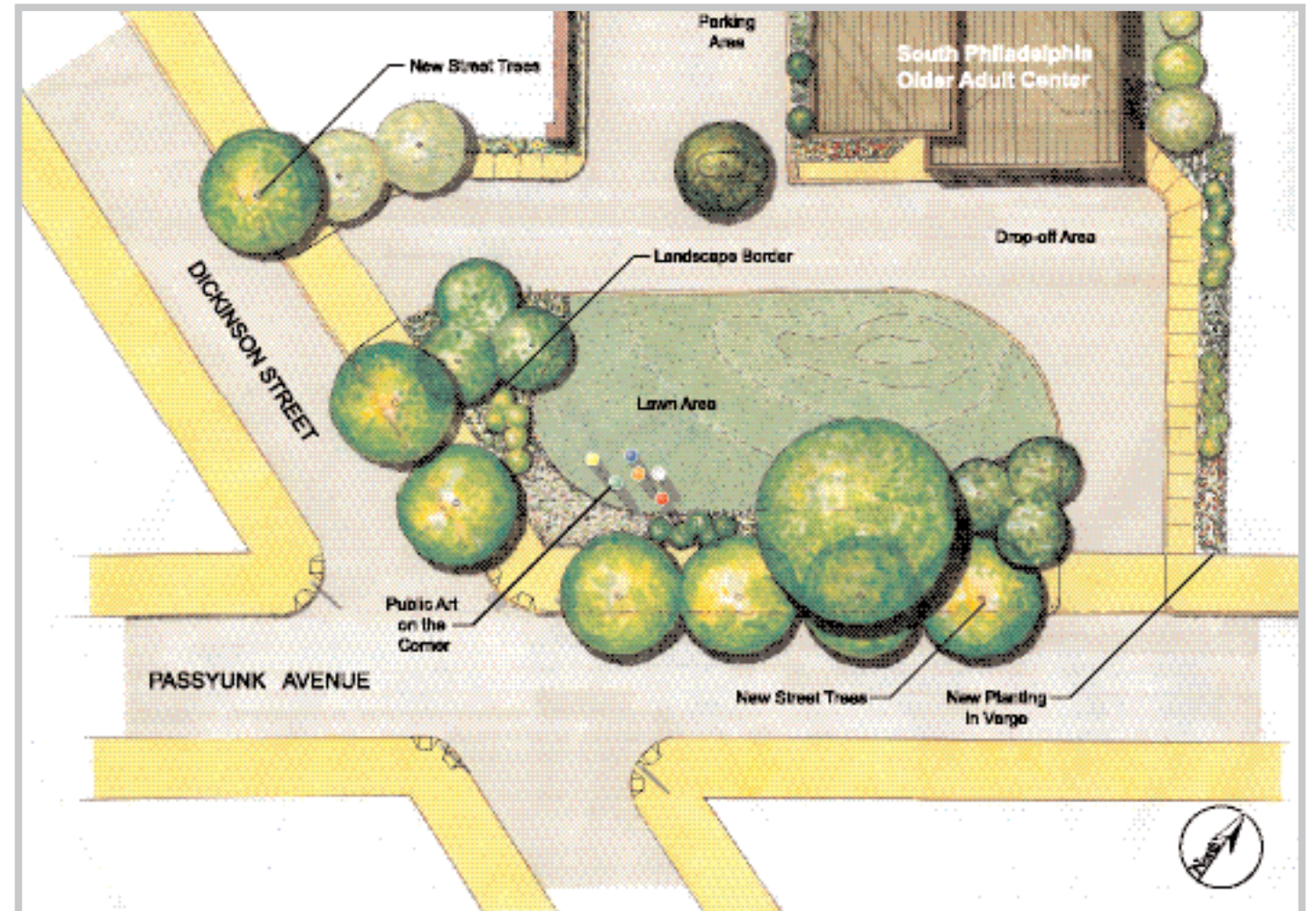
**The South Philadelphia Older Adult Center (SPOAC)** is an important public institution on Passyunk Avenue. This Recreation Department-owned facility provides the only publicly accessible green space along the East Passyunk corridor.

Passyunk Avenue functions as a “main street,” densely lined with commercial establishments serving the surrounding neighborhoods. The density of Passyunk Avenue is interrupted from Dickinson Street to Reed Street; the west side of Passyunk Avenue is uncharacteristically devoid of buildings that meet the street line. The SPOAC park and the Acme surface parking lot negate the street’s hospitable density.

However, the underutilized green space at the corner of Passyunk Avenue and Dickinson Street provides an opportunity for enhanced amenity for the community.

**Recommendations for Public Green Space**

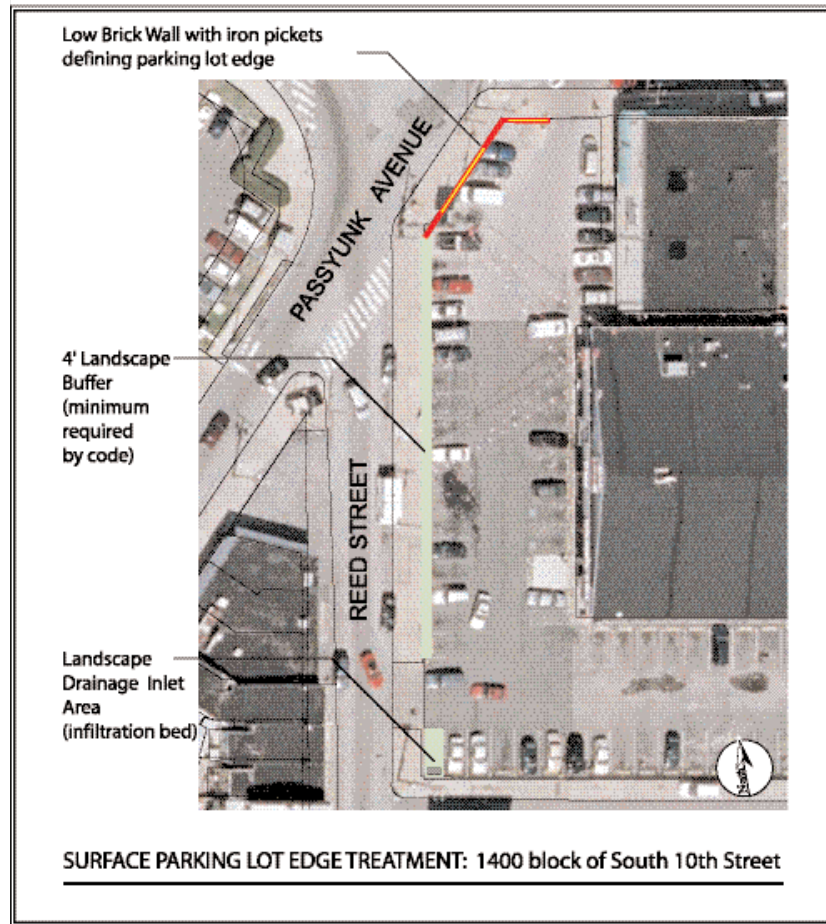
1. Organize the smaller groupings of plants scattered throughout the lawn in a unified landscape border inside the decorative fence. Maintain an open lawn area in front of the building.
2. Provide a place for public art on the corner of Passyunk and Dickinson Streets created by local artists.
3. Utilize blank walls on the building for display of public art created by local artists.
4. Provide landscape buffer between SPOAC and the Acme surface parking lot.
5. Plant new street trees.



**Passyunk Square Village Center  
Redefine Corner at SPOAC**







Drainage inlet in an unused parking spot. Current regulations would require this area to be landscaped.



Reed Street (foreground) abruptly changes its direction at Passyunk Avenue. The existing CVS parking lot (beyond) has no visual buffer. The street and the surface parking lot blend into a confused auto-oriented environment. A low brick wall with iron pickets would screen headlights of cars within the parking lot and provide an appropriate termination of this view.



10th Street at Passyunk Avenue, looking north.  
Existing condition: A landscape dominated by automobiles lacking spatial definition, amenities for pedestrians and charm.



10th Street at Passyunk Avenue, looking north.  
Proposed streetscape improvements: spatial definition and enclosure resulting in separation of pedestrian and vehicular environments.

### Enhancements of Surface Parking Lots

Because so much of the area south of Reed Street at Passyunk Avenue is dedicated to surface parking, mitigation of the deadening effects of parking might be instituted. Prior to 1991, the City of Philadelphia didn't require landscaping or screening around surface parking lots. Now the design of these lots are routinely reviewed because parking lot design is regulated by the Philadelphia Zoning Code.

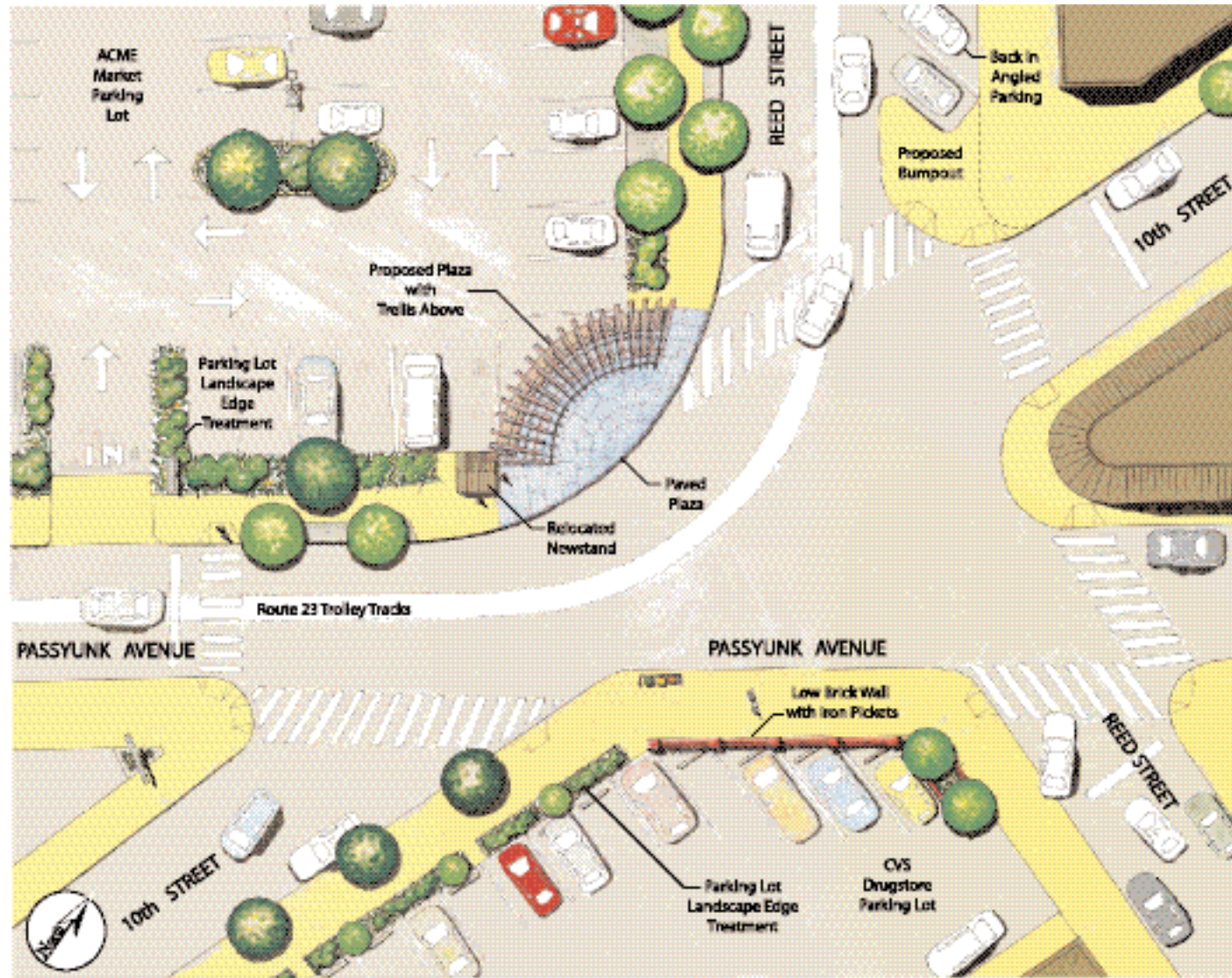
Amendments to the Zoning Code were enacted to improve the design and function of both surface parking lots and garages. The goal of the amendment to the Code was to enhance and preserve the character, appearance and value of the areas surrounding these parking facilities, as well as to create a more healthy and pleasant environment. These requirements provide for visual buffering between lands uses, reduction of noise and glare from automobile headlights, and a lessening of the negative impacts of exhaust fumes and dust. Because the commercial developments at Passyunk Avenue, Reed and 10th Street

predate this Zoning Code amendment, surface parking lots do not reflect design enhancements that are now routine in the City – but, they could.

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission has prepared a document entitled "Design Guidelines for Off-Street Parking" that describes the kinds of screening – both landscape screens and attractive fencing that must be used at the perimeter of proposed parking lots in the City. At a minimum, the adoption of remedies proposed for surface parking lots throughout the City – that are now a matter of legal responsibility – would greatly enhance the commercial environment of this key intersection in South Philadelphia.

In addition to screening surface parking lots, landscaping should include new street trees which would buffer the pedestrian from active automobile traffic and provide shade at many times of the year. The harsh microclimate of an asphalt street and parking lot could be ameliorated by street trees that border Passyunk Avenue, 10th and Reed Streets.





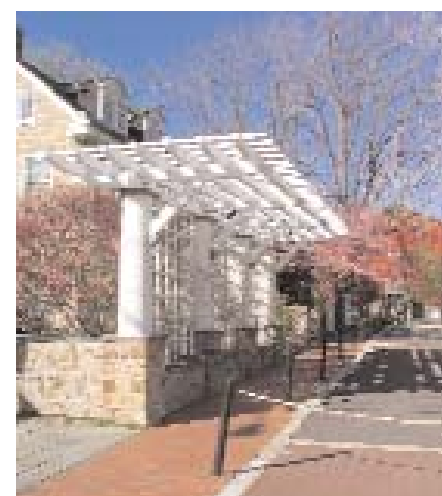
**A New Plaza becomes an element of the intersection**  
 Of the six corners that result from the intersection of Passyunk Avenue, Reed and 10th Streets, all are of acute or complex angles except for one. The corner that describes a full 90 degrees is the southwest corner of Reed and Passyunk Avenues where the Acme market surface parking lot is located. Currently, heavily overgrown shrubs echo the geometry of portions of the surface lot. The plantings, probably as old as the store itself, overwhelm the intersection and even obscure the commercial function beyond. The arrangement of the original plantings, however, did acknowledge that this one corner, of all six corners, was a special one, in that it was orthogonal and that it had a special role to play in enhancing the market's setting.

This study has already proposed a more complete landscape screening of surface parking lots at the intersection of Passyunk Avenue, Reed and 10th Streets. A crescent-shaped public plaza adjacent a relocated news stand, positioned so that it does not block pedestrian movement, will complement this effort. The trellis of the new plaza replaces the existing overgrown shrubs, not only serving a functional purpose, but screening a parking lot and capturing one's attention before the sea of cars

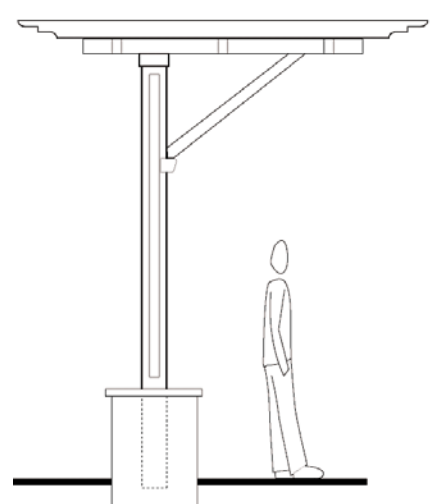
beyond is visible. In this manner, the corner at 10th and Reed is more compatible with buildings north of Reed Street where buildings are positioned in a typical urban alignment, at the street line.

Good quality paving material, sign boards, and a trellis canopy above would be a contribution to the streetscape. This gesture is meant to be a modest one. The sheltered trellis area underscores the fact that pedestrians belong here. The structure gives this corner a measure of human scale. The newsstand is a major activator of this corner. People want to be here for services they can get quickly.

In addition to this functional and humane civic gesture, the addition of a "bump-out" sidewalk on the north side of Reed Street immediately adjacent 10th Street would allow for a much shorter pedestrian crossing of a very wide street. In addition, this "bump-out" allows for the "back-in" angled parking as opposed to the current "nose-in" parking on the north side of Reed Street. The Streets Department of the City recommends "back-in" parking as a safer driving condition when the motorist leaves his or her space. No parking spaces need be lost, and a safer configuration of the street results.



Temple Ambler Campus. Example of Trellis



Section through Proposed Trellis



Passyunk Square Village Center  
 Redefine Intersection - New Plaza Option



**Introduction of New Commercial Use at Passyunk Avenue, Reed and 10th Streets**

The surface parking lot of the Acme market along Passyunk and Reed Streets prevents interaction of pedestrians with the store. A remedy for the lack of pedestrian-oriented functions could be established. A “pad” store of approximately 10,000 to 12,000 square feet might be introduced along Passyunk Avenue where it crosses Reed and 10th Streets. The building

should offer only commercial functions at ground level, it should hold the street line of both bordering streets, and it should remove as little surface parking from the existing lot as possible. At the same time this new commercial function should support the retail energy of the Acme market, and enhance its attractiveness.

A new two-story building at this corner would support the scale of the 19th century buildings that are typical

of the neighborhood. The building might be similar to size, height and materials as the older structures just across the street from it. The important thing about this proposed construction is that it be a commercial use that serves the community well, and that it literally will “hold” this very important corner as a landmark, in the same manner as “Pat’s” and “Geno’s” hold their corners only one block to the north. This physical street definition will add to the continuity of the pedestrian

experience along Passyunk Avenue. In addition to the commercial function at ground floor, there might be the possibility of introducing office functions for start-up businesses or non-profits on the second floor, or that space might be used for residential units in a very popular neighborhood.



Existing Condition  
Passyunk Avenue at Reed and 10th Streets looking west



New Building Option  
Passyunk Avenue at Reed and 10th Streets looking west

**A new building that holds a corner:**



An example of this kind of structure is offered in the Mt. Airy section of Philadelphia, where CDC “Mt. Airy USA,” has recently constructed “Phebe Commons” on Germantown Avenue at Phil-Ellena Street. On the ground floor are a new US Post Office and the office of an insurance company. On the second floor, are offices of the CDC itself, as well as a credit agency and other miscellaneous small businesses.

**Why intersections matter.**

*Corners matter. Vital components of the urban context, they are crossroads that signal arrival, change and opportunity. Corners are essential nodes, links and connectors between places, people and context within the hierarchy of the street grid. Traditional city-making understood this intuitively, for corners are the end of the run where we literally turn the corner in the urban fabric. It is at the corner where the great variety, density and energy in a metropolis coalesce -- small alleys flow into larger streets which run to boulevards, squares and avenues.*

*Harris Steinberg*

