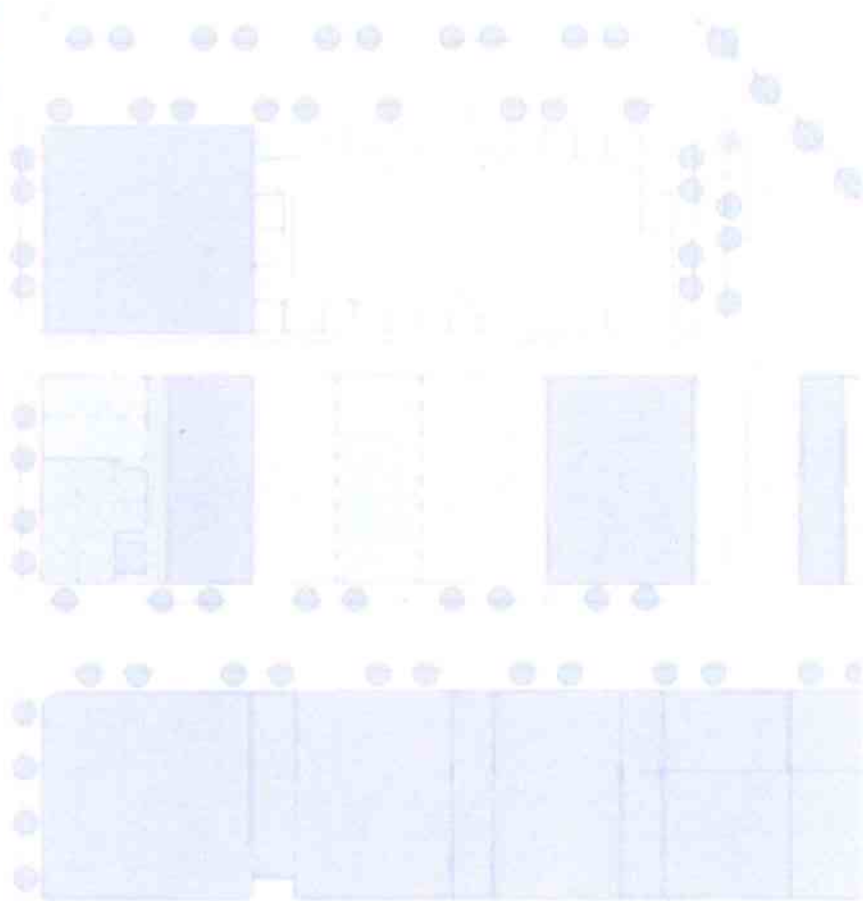


MAYNES ASSOCIATES · ARCHITECTS

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West North Loft District Study

25 June 2007



EXISTING HISTORIC DISTRICT

for Allegheny West Civic Council

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ALEGHENY WEST CIVIC COUNCIL
West North Avenue Loft District Study
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INTRODUCTION

STUDY AREA, BOUNDARIES, AND DIVISIONS

Maynes Associates • Architects is pleased to present this summary of findings and recommendations for the West North Loft District Study. Performed for the Allegheny West Civic Council and funded by the Community Design Center of Pittsburgh, the study examines the design potential of creating a multi-unit residential district bounded by Buttercup Way on the south, Galveston Avenue on the west, Behan Street on the north, and Brighton Road and depressed railroad tracks to the east.

The study area can be divided into three primary corridors: the West North Avenue Corridor (see Figure 1), the Galveston Avenue Corridor (see Figure 2), and the Behan Street Corridor (see Figure 3). Existing conditions, or challenges, for each of these areas are listed. Itemized recommendations define strategies to enhance and extend the unique historic charm of the adjoining residential streets to the loft district, mitigate the weaknesses of an inconsistent pedestrian infrastructure, and improve the visibility of the entrance to the neighborhood from Brighton Road. Each recommendation is intended to achieve a more cohesive architectural fabric. Land use recommendations will warrant individual study. A graphic representation of the recommendations in the form of a Master Plan for the West North Avenue Loft District of the Allegheny West community accompanies this summary report.

LOCATION WITH CHARM AND CHARACTER

The primary strengths of Allegheny West are its prime location, its historic character, and the prevalence of green spaces.

Allegheny West enjoys immediate proximity to the regions' major business district, sports stadiums, and entertainment and recreational facilities. The community is due north across the Allegheny River from Pittsburgh's Central Business District. Moreover, the North Shore of the Allegheny River is undergoing a significant transformation with the addition of mixed-use commercial development, two new sports stadiums, and an anticipated casino complex. The North Side is home to many Pittsburgh amenities including the Carnegie Science Center, the Community College of Allegheny County, the National Aviary, the Children's Museum, the Mattress Factory, the Warhol Museum, and Allegheny General Hospital. The neighborhood of Allegheny West is conveniently situated to serve as a residential area adjacent to all of these employment, educational, and recreational institutions. Further, the community is served by public transit.

The majority of Allegheny West is designated as a City of Pittsburgh Historic District. A proposal to expand the historic district is in process. The current designation is in recognition of the predominance of excellent examples of late Victorian residences. The vast majority of existing buildings, commercial as well as residential, are brick or stone masonry structures. A richness of scale, detailing, and fenestration exists throughout the neighborhood. But the visual appeal of this neighborhood is not only fostered by the presence of attractive historic buildings but the public infrastructure is also intimately scaled and well maintained through all but the industrial areas of the neighborhood. Indeed, Allegheny West is best enjoyed on foot. Two-lane streets flanked by parking lanes and sidewalks provide a public scale most suited to neighborhood traffic only. City blocks dominated by 2-1/2 to 3-story buildings achieve an efficient use of land. These features achieve an attractive pedestrian infrastructure.

Further, the neighborhood is typified by the integration of green spaces and landscape features, which add to the intimate beauty of the community. Street trees bordering both sides of the streets, raised planting strips which extend between stone entry stoops and along sidewalks, iron fences bordering small front yards, and window boxes are found in abundance.

Zone 1 - West North Avenue Corridor



Figure 1

- There are no strong visual cues of the existing Allegheny West residential district from the eastern entry at Brighton Road.
- West North Avenue is used as a commuter path through the neighborhood.
- Vehicular traffic sometimes speeds through changing traffic lights.
- Existing building stock is typified by 3- and 4-story brick commercial structures that are under-occupied or vacant and boarded up.
- Properties along the south side of the street are at the lot line and are ganged together without any breaks in building mass.
- Several vacant sites on the north side of the street are used as un-maintained parking lots or commercial staging areas.
- The existing overhead electrical distribution system creates a significant eyesore and physical obstruction along the north side of the street.
- The majority of the existing commercial structures are poorly maintained and/or poorly renovated.
- Historic nomination of 836 W. North Avenue seeks to save the Allegheny City Stables building. Both the north and south facade of this structure are unstable.
- ADA compliant curb cuts and cross walks are lacking.
- Street trees, planting beds, and green space are lacking.
- Pedestrian-scaled decorative lighting is lacking, although it exists elsewhere in the neighborhood.
- Street furnishings - benches, bicycle racks, trash receptacles - are non-existent.
- Decorative brick sidewalk paving, a dominant condition through out the neighborhood, is lacking.

Zone 2 - Galveston Avenue Corridor



Figure 2

- In the two blocks south of the study area, the existing building stock is typified by 2-1/2-story brick row houses.
- Within the study area, 2-1/2-story brick row houses are interspersed with 2-story large floor plate institutional or industrial structures.
- Vehicular traffic sometimes speed through changing traffic lights.
- ADA compliant curb cuts and cross walks are lacking.
- Planting strips and green space is lacking, although a discontinuous line of street trees is present in the study area.
- Pedestrian-scaled decorative lighting is lacking on Galveston Avenue, although it exists elsewhere in the neighborhood. Street lighting is provided by cobra head fixtures.
- Street furnishings such as benches, bicycle racks, and trash receptacles are non-existent.
- Decorative brick sidewalk paving, a dominant condition through out the neighborhood, is lacking.

Zone 3 - Behan Street Corridor



Figure 3

- Existing poorly maintained warehouse industrial structures are anchored at the southeast corner of Galveston Avenue by a 2-story brick commercial structure.
- Noisy and dirty industrial occupancies create an undesirable condition along the northern edge of the predominantly residential community.
- The industrial occupancies encroach into the public right-of-way using the street as a parking, loading, and storage zone. Sidewalks and curbs do not extend along Behan Street.
- ADA compliant curb cuts and cross walks are lacking.
- Street trees, planting beds, and green space are non-existent.
- Pedestrian-scaled decorative lighting is lacking.
- Street furnishings such as benches, bicycle racks, and trash receptacles are non-existent.
- Decorative brick sidewalk paving, a dominant condition through out the neighborhood, is lacking.



Figure 4a



Figure 4b



Figure 4c



Figure 4d

Take note of:

- Brick and stone facades
- Front porches or bay windows
- Stone stoops
- Front and/or side gardens
- Brick sidewalk
- Wrought iron fences
- Street trees
- Pedestrian light fixtures



Figure 5a

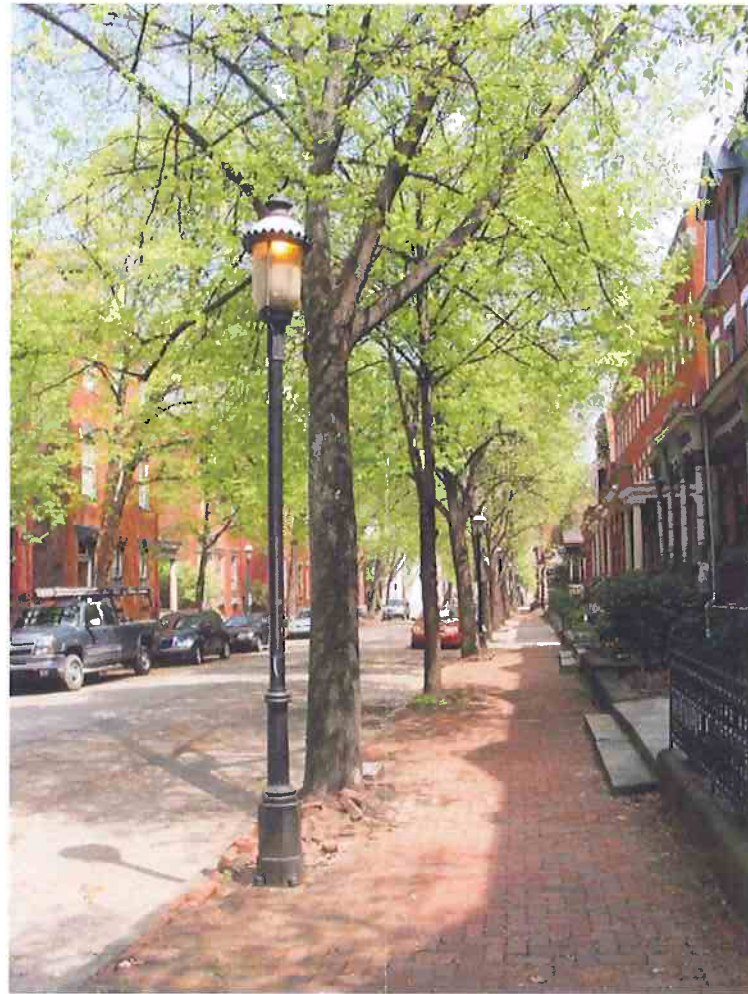


Figure 5b



Figure 5c

Homes set back from the sidewalk edge with raised planting beds, a dominant building rhythm.



Figure 6a



Figure 6b

Street trees contribute to the green character of the neighborhood.

Pedestrian-Scale Light Fixture



Figure 7



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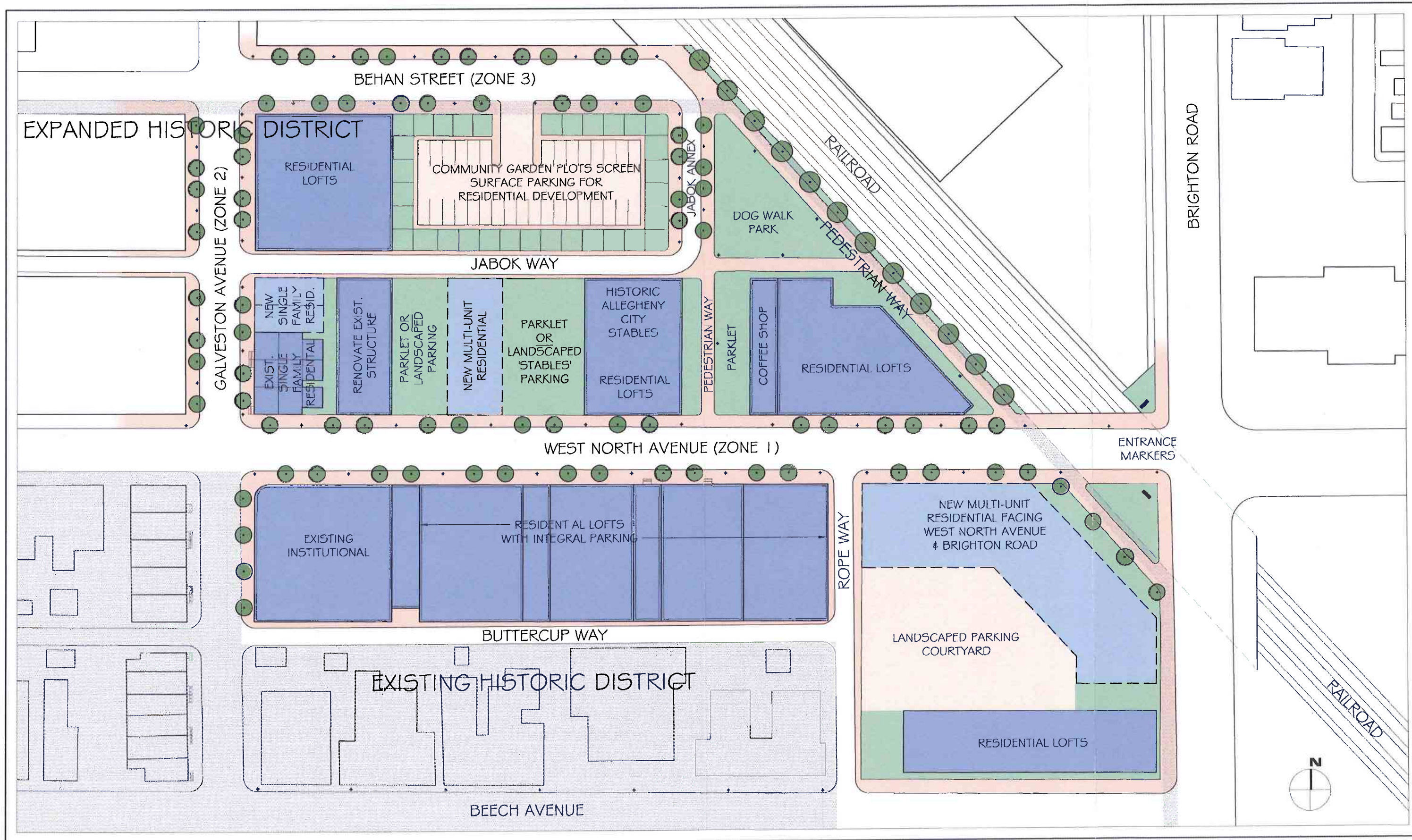
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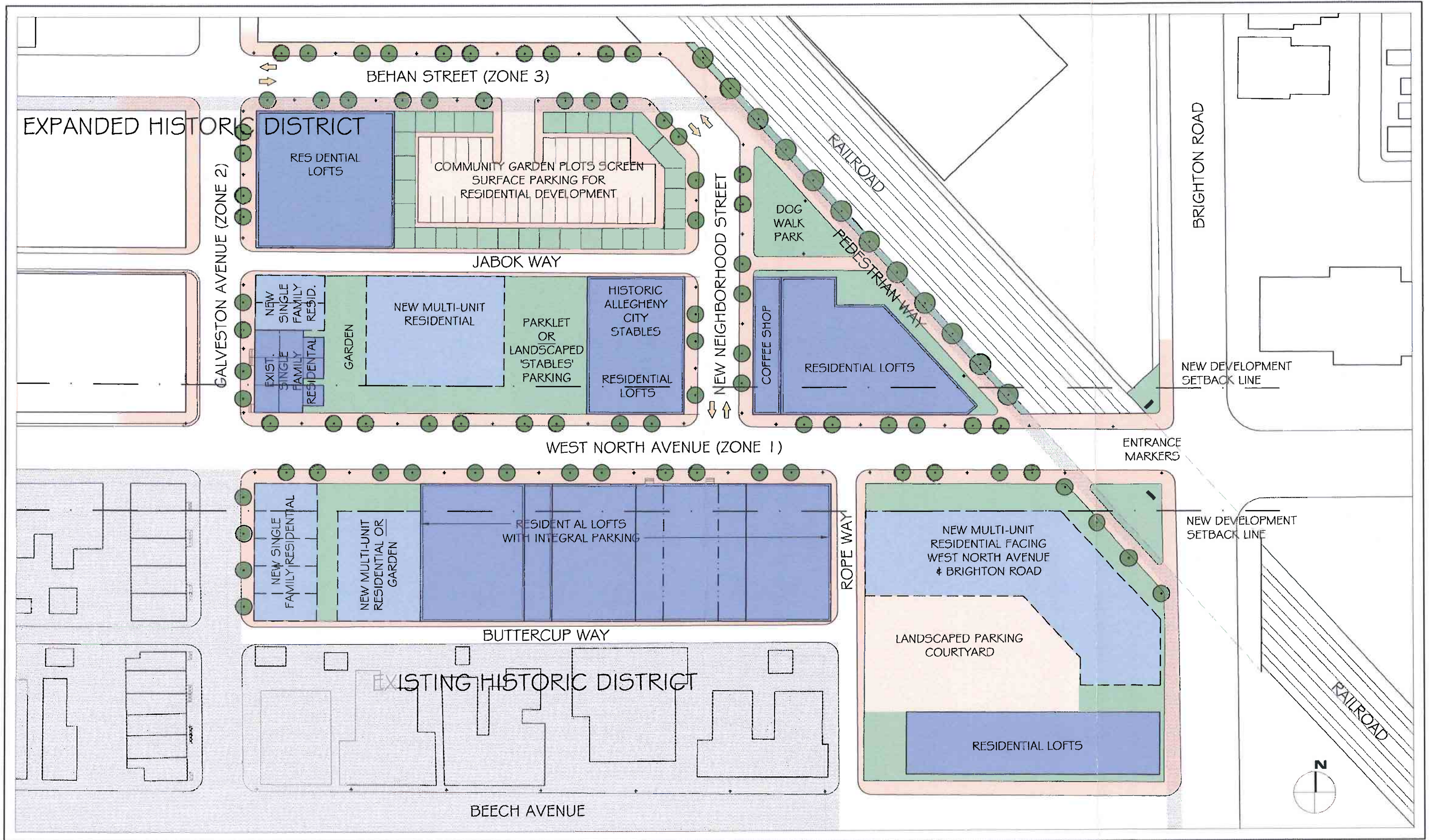
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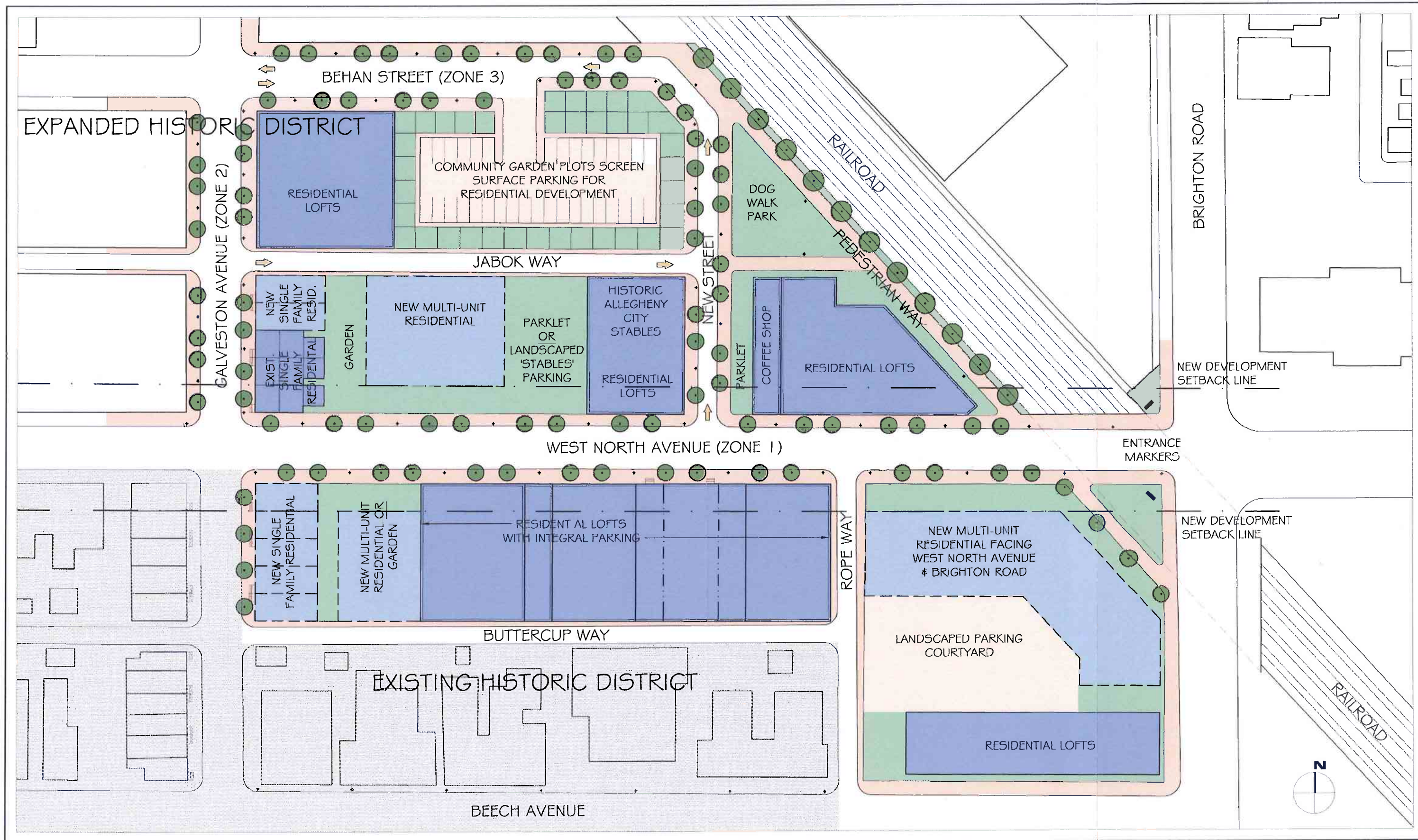
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BEECH AVENUE PRECEDENTS

West North Loft District Study
Proposed Development Recommendations







ALEGHENY WEST CIVIC COUNCIL
West North Avenue Loft District Study
Proposed Development Recommendations

BUILDING REHABILITATION & LAND USE RECOMMENDATIONS

DISTRICT-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Residential District Expansion – The expansion of the residential district of Allegheny West as a Loft District will most likely be carried out in a series of significant and exciting projects over many years. Adaptive reuse or rehabilitation of a building should be evaluated as part of a market study. Whether it is comprised of a new or renovated structure, the scale and detailing of a development project should be carefully crafted to complement the existing fabric of the residential district. Most significantly, any new buildings should fit with the existing rhythm and massing to suggest a connection among a series of addresses and should be of a scale proportional to the existing residential buildings.

Zoning Enforcement – The proposed West North Avenue Loft District is currently zoned UI – Urban Industrial, formerly M2 & M3. Current zoning, building codes, and municipal regulations should be enforced to discourage existing hazards such as sound disturbances, infringement of private storage and staging activities into public right-of-ways, and the illegal burning of materials.

Streetface Improvements – Many of the existing commercial structures within the district are currently eyesores as a result of inappropriate renovations, such as closing window openings with solid infill. Fortunately, the historic character of most, though not all, the structures along West North Avenue are intact.

- Renovate visible elevations in a manner consistent with Secretary of the Interior Standards for Historic Restoration in order to maintain the character of the community.

Building Maintenance – Few buildings, if any, have had the benefit of annual maintenance improvements. Generally, many of the existing buildings should have the masonry cleaned of dirt or paint. Given the age of the structures, other building shell maintenance items are likely to include mortar joint re-pointing, door and window repair or replacement (with historically accurate materials and operation), roof drainage system repair, and roof replacement. Other maintenance activities will require the individual assessment of interior finishes and building structural, mechanical, and electrical systems.

ZONE 1 – WEST NORTH AVENUE CORRIDOR

A multi-family residential corridor

See the “District-wide Recommendations” itemized above.

Land Use Improvements – Parcel numbers referenced are as per the *W. North Avenue Loft District: Master Plan & Property Profiles* (MP). Please see attached Area Plans A, B1, and B2 for illustrations of the following recommended land use improvements along West North Avenue:

- Proposed new development and green space at 840 through 856 West North Ave., parcels 22-S-166, 22-S-167, 22-S-169, and 22-S-172 (MP pages 20-23).
- Proposed neighborhood road and green space at 23-N-133 next to the Coffee Building (MP page 18).
- Proposed new development and green space at 1003 & 1007 Brighton Road, parcels 23-N-173 and 23-N-170 (MP pages 8 and 9).

**Allegheny West Civic Council
West North Loft District Study
Proposed Development Recommendations**

Front Yard Setback Line – Along both the north and south sides of West North Avenue, a front yard setback line is recommended for any new construction. This setback line is to match and mimic the existing neighborhood setback condition. The setback zone may contain raised planters, front porches, and/or front yards fenced with wrought iron railing to match similar details that characterize the Allegheny West neighborhood.

Existing Building Redevelopment – Redevelopment of the following vacant or under utilized buildings as residential lofts are recommended:

- 825 through 851 West North Avenue, parcels 23-N-144, 23-N-143, 23-N-142, 22-S-91, and 22-S-94 (MP pages 10-14).
- 810, 828, and 836 West North Avenue, parcels 23-N-130, 23-N-131 and 23-N-135 (MP pages 16, 17, and 19).

District Parking – Where feasible, provide parking within the first floor level of existing structures.

ZONE 2 – GALVESTON AVENUE CORRIDOR

A single-family residential corridor

See the “District-wide Recommendations” itemized above.

Land Use Improvements – Please see attached Area Plans A, B1, and B2 for illustrations of the following recommended land use improvements along Galveston Avenue:

- Proposed row houses at 22-S-161 and 22-S-162 (MP pages 27 and 28).
- Proposed row houses at 857 West North Ave, parcel 22-S-100, the Salvation Army building (MP page 15).

ZONE 3 – BEHAN STREET CORRIDOR

A neighborhood amenity corridor

See the “District-wide Recommendations” itemized above.

Land Use Improvements – Please see attached Area Plans A, B1, and B2 for illustrations of the following recommended land use improvements along Behan Street:

- Proposed parking at 837 Behan Street, parcels 23-N-125, 22-S-177, and 22-S-183 (MP pages 31-33).
- Proposed parking at proposed parklet, parcel 23-N-186 (MP page 29).

Existing Building Redevelopment – Redevelopment of the following vacant or under utilized buildings as residential lofts are recommended:

- Behan property 22-S-187, Value Added Food (MP page 34).

District Parking – It is recommended that a common parking area, a surface parking lot, be located at 837 Behan Street, parcels 23-N-125, 22-S-177, and 22-S-183 (MP pages 31-33) to serve development that cannot accommodate parking on site. Further, this lot is to be bordered by a community garden, as described earlier, providing a buffer to the neighborhood.

ALEGHENY WEST CIVIC COUNCIL
West North Avenue Loft District Study
Proposed Development Recommendations

IN CLOSING

It has been the pleasure of Maynes Associates • Architects to visit the neighborhood of Allegheny West. We have enjoyed observing and analyzing those urban and architectural features that characterize this charming and unique community. We look forward to working with the AWCC in the future in its mission to enhance and protect Allegheny West, a genuine Pittsburgh asset.

NEXT STEPS

Infrastructure Development and Enhancement -

- Enforce zoning, building code, and municipal regulations to reduce nuisance occupancies.
- Design and implement a Public Space Improvement Plan.
- Property acquisition of parcels designated as district-wide parking, pedestrian paths, and parklets, including the dog walk park and community garden.
- Traffic study and implementation of traffic calming measures.
- Property acquisition of parcels designated as new neighborhood roadway(s).
- Electrical power line relocation or concealment.
- Development of neighborhood logo or brand and implementation of identification signage.

Building Site Development and Enhancement -

- Encourage annual maintenance of all existing structures to remain.
- Conduct market studies for both existing structures to be renovated and new buildings to be constructed.
- Recruit the development community.
- Property acquisition of parcels designated as new Residential Lofts or Multi-unit Housing.

Loft District Expansion -

- Conduct urban design analysis of adjoining Urban Industrial zones to identify expansion opportunities of the residential neighborhood.
- Amend Master Planning Guidelines in stages to eventually document a plan of entire Allegheny West residential neighborhood.

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West North Avenue Loft District Study
Proposed Development Recommendations

PUBLIC SPACE IMPROVEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

DISTRICT-WIDE RECOMMENDATIONS

Lot Coverage & Green Space – One of the most visually rich characteristics of Allegheny West is the prevalence of green space. Both residential and commercial streets are typified by either of two conditions. The first building rhythm can be described as by freestanding structures with front and/or side yard gardens, often bounded by decorative wrought iron fencing interspersed throughout rows of zero-lot-line structures (Figures 4a, 4b, 4c, and 4d). The second dominant building rhythm is the presence of rows of historic homes set back from the sidewalk edge with raised planting beds occurring opposite zero-lot-line row houses (Figures 5a, 5b, and 5c). In both cases, green space provides relief to the density of the built structures. In order to carry these dominant traits of the neighborhood lot coverage and green space into the loft district zone, the following recommendations are made:

- Discourage solid blocks of zero-lot-line building structures flanking the longer east-west running streets of West North Avenue and Behan Street.
- Extend the pattern of zero-lot line, single-family, 2-1/2-story row houses along Galveston Avenue at vacant small parcels. Consider the redevelopment of the east side Galveston Avenue between West North Avenue and Beech Avenue as single-family row houses.
- Allow redeveloped sites or series of adjacent parcels to include open side yard gardens.
 - At private side yards, provide wrought iron fencing in height and detailing similar to historic example within neighborhood.
- Allow new structures along the east-west running streets of West North Avenue and Behan Street to be sited with a small front yard setback with raised planting beds along the front façade. The setback is to match existing setbacks at Beech Avenue.
 - The height and detailing of raised planting beds should match historic examples found along Beech Avenue.

Sidewalk Landscaping – In addition to the prevalence of green space in the form of front and side yard gardens described above, the frequency of street trees bordering both sides of neighborhood roads contributes significantly to the green character of the neighborhood (Figures 6a and 6b). The paired trees frame the public street zone while softening the pressing geometry of two- to four-story building facades. The following landscaping recommendations are made:

- Extend the pattern of street trees flanking both sides of the road along West North Avenue, Galveston Avenue, and Behan Street.
 - Lines of existing street trees should be extended utilizing species that match the existing.
 - The species of trees selected should be hardy enough to withstand exposure to significant amounts of road salts.
 - Provide ornamental tree grates.
- Encourage property owners and tenants to provide supplemental plantings of annuals in window boxes or planters.

**Allegheny West Civic Council
West North Loft District Study
Proposed Development Recommendations**

Parklets and Landscaped Pathways – The safety of any urban neighborhood is partly dependant on the presence of visually open, well-lit pedestrian connections. Dead end alleys and paths should be avoided for the safety of pedestrians. Currently, Jabok Way, the alley between and paralleling West North Avenue and Behan Street is a narrow dead-end alley. Behan Street also terminates at a dead end, a condition that is currently relieved by an adjacent vacant parcel used as a parking lot. In order to eliminate dead ends, coupled with the objective of extending the neighborhood green space, the following recommendations are made:

- Provide a landscaped pedestrian path along the eastern edge of the neighborhood and the railroad tracks.
- Provide a fenced, pet-friendly, neighborhood “Dog Walk Parklet” at Behan.
- Provide a series of public parklets or private gardens, along the north side of West North Avenue. Alternate existing building massing with green open spaces.
- Provide an area where residents without yard space can cultivate garden plots in the form of a “Community Garden.”
- Design considerations for parklets and landscaped pathways –
 - To establish a year-round landscaping scheme at new parklets and courtyards, plant indigenous species of evergreens and perennials. Supplement plantings with annuals. Select low shrubby shapes and sizes that maintain an open view for visibility and safety.
 - The species of plants selected should be hardy enough to withstand exposure to significant amounts of road salts.
 - A maintenance program including the identification of manpower should accompany any plans for new public realm spaces so that they themselves do not become eyesores for the community.
 - Include site furnishings such as decorative pedestrian scaled light fixtures, benches, trash receptacles, and bicycle racks.
 - Make the parklets and pathways pet friendly. Include grassy areas and trash receptacles.

Public Space Improvements – Additional sidewalk furnishing and materials are recommended and should be consistent with those functional yet decorative features that exist throughout the neighborhood. Of particular note is the presence of decorative, pedestrian-scale light fixtures (Figure 7) and brick-paved sidewalks (Figures 4d and 5b).

- Provide decorative street lighting along sidewalks at a spacing matching the existing pattern such as that located on Beech Avenue.
- Provide benches, trash receptacles, and bicycle racks.
- Provide brick sidewalks or decorative brick banding along the curb line. Restore missing sections of sidewalks. Repair damaged or missing concrete curbs.
- Provide ADA compliant curb cuts and ramps, preferably in brick paving.
- Provide street line painting or markers including stop lines and crosswalks to enhance pedestrian safety.

Allegheny West Civic Council
West North Loft District Study
Proposed Development Recommendations

Infrastructure Maintenance and Upgrades –

- Reduce the negative visual impact of the overhead power distribution system, comprised of power poles, transformers, and cables that are currently located along the north side of West North Avenue. (Figure 1) Buried power lines are preferred. Reducing the size, location, and clustered density of cabling would also be an improvement.
- Upgrade the existing guardrails on the bridge spanning the railroad tracks along the eastern boundary of the district. Currently, the bridge guardrails may not meet code requirements, show wear and tear and are unattractive. A historic appearing guardrail design meeting current regulations is preferred.

Traffic Calming – Vehicles passing through Allegheny West often speed. A traffic study is recommended to determine opportunities for introducing traffic calming measures, enforcing posted speed limits, and enforcing traffic laws. The study is to examine the benefits of replacing traffic signals with stop signs. Further, the traffic analysis is to examine the use of West North Avenue and Galveston Avenue by heavy vehicles and is to identify appropriate truck weight limits to be posted within this residential district. Please note that the elimination of through-traffic is not recommended. Isolating a neighborhood from traffic can discourage visitors from exploring the neighborhood and, consequently, from learning of investment opportunities within the neighborhood.

New Neighborhood Street – Recommendations to eliminate dead-end conditions in order to increase pedestrian safety were described earlier. In general, streets that are animated with both pedestrian and vehicular activity are more viable, discouraging illicit activity. Dead end roads can be quiet, however they discourage exploration of the neighborhood and restrict the type of circulation that can enliven a neighborhood. To accommodate a better flow of pedestrian and vehicular traffic accessing Jabok Way and Behan Street, the addition of a new neighborhood street is proposed.

- Attached Area Plan B1 illustrates the new neighborhood street as a two-way road extending from parcel 23-N-133 West North Avenue across Jabok Way and parcel 23-N-124 to Behan Street. The two-way configuration runs the length of the new roadway from West North to Behan. Pedestrian sidewalks would line the new neighborhood street.
- Alternatively, attached Area Plan B2 illustrates the new street as a one-way segment beginning at parcel 23-N-133 West North Avenue, continuing across Jabok Way and parcel 23-N-124, and turning onto a narrowed Behan Street as a one-way street. The one-way condition on Behan Street would extend to the entrance of a new community garden and parking area. West of the parking entry, Behan would remain a two-way road. Further, Jabok Way would be posted as a one-way road heading eastward. Pedestrian sidewalks would line the new neighborhood street.

Signage and Way-finding – Announce each entrance of the community with signage. Signs or a signage system should be consistent and easily identifiable as a brand, specific to the community. Identification signage should be clearly visible from each primary access artery including Brighton Road, which borders the study area.