



Italian Market

revitalization project summary

for the

Passyunk Square Civic Association

_INTERFACE STUDIO LLC
ECONSULT CORPORATION

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Executive Summary

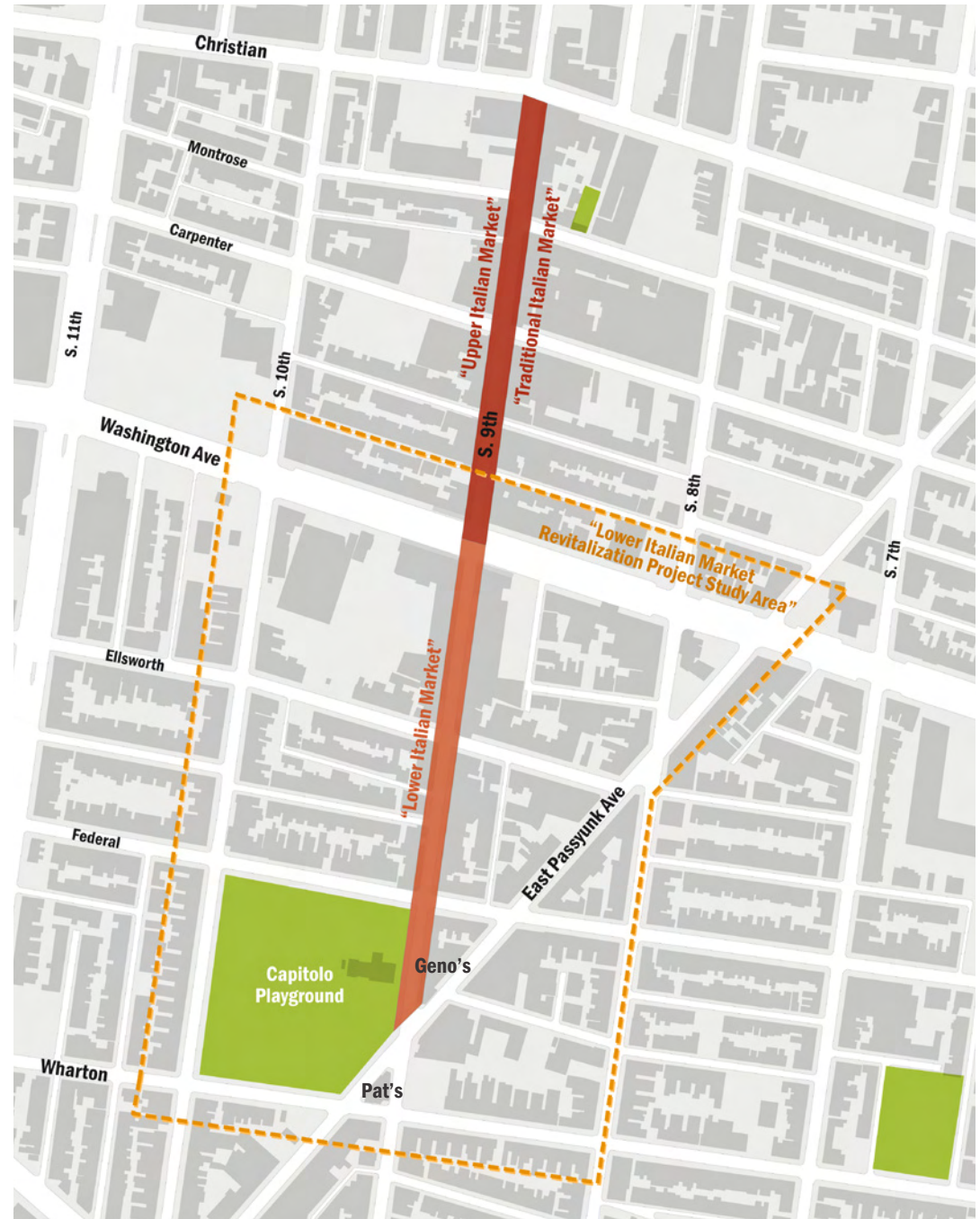
The Italian Market is a nationally recognized brand name that artfully integrates the local and the global. Tourists mingle with long-term residents, high-end cheese and other delicacies are sold only doors away from produce that continues to nourish families of all incomes throughout South Philadelphia. The common thread is the familial identity expressed through the Market's seemingly ad-hoc station of stalls and the intense mixture of activity unique to 9th Street. The Market remains relevant because it is gritty, tactile, and uncompromising.

The Lower Italian Market always drummed to a beat of its own. Less oriented toward food than its northern counterpart, through history, the Lower Italian Market was a blend of a wide-range of neighborhood-serving retail mixed with manufacturing and distribution. But once the Italian Market started to make the transition from a local, daily shopping market to a shopping destination, the Lower Italian Market was the first to decline and the hardest hit, as evidenced by its vacancies and underutilized storefronts.

Today, the Lower Italian Market faces a new set of challenges and opportunities. New residents and rising home prices are driving growth around 9th Street. The neighborhoods surrounding the Italian Market have always been diverse, but they are currently becoming more so – both economically, racially, and ethnically. The expanding Vietnamese population and growing Latino presence are visibly reshaping the look and feel of the Market's storefronts.

Amidst these shifting market dynamics, the Passyunk Square Civic Association (PSCA) recognized a need to create a community-driven strategy to revitalize the Lower Italian Market – a plan that will enable the Lower Italian Market to embrace and strengthen its own evolving character and to develop as a place at once grounded in but distinct from the traditional Market, which lives north of Washington Avenue. The PSCA secured a grant to jump-start the planning process, and this study is the result of six months of dialog, research, thinking, and imagining directed toward creating both short- and long-term strategies for change that respect and reinforce the Lower Italian Market's uniqueness and vibe.

Study Area Map





View down South 9th Street
from Washington Avenue.



Plan Goals:

- 1. Get to know the neighbors**, their memories and histories, their priorities for the future. Learn to depend on them to help you reinvent the southern end of the 9th Street Market.
- 2. Take a look in the mirror.** Recognize and strengthen the Market's identity. Adopt a market-based identity for local business. Build upon its reputation as a destination for specialty foods, but broaden its offerings with complementary retail uses that add variety and character, especially in the vein of arts and culture. Nurture an identity that is reflective of the traditional Market, but at the same time fresh and independent, off-beat and distinct.
- 3. Broadcast the Market's identity to put South 9th Street back on the map in new ways.** Begin to attract new visitors independently of the traditional Market and the cheese steak joints, Pat's and Geno's.
- 4. Reinforce the Market's local flavor and authenticity.** Encourage and support small, local, and/or family-owned businesses along the corridor.
- 5. Reinforce the Market's long-term viability.** Strengthen the corridor's links to surrounding neighborhoods, the City, and the region.
- 6. Facilitate peoples' arrival in the Lower Italian Market.** Lessen the perceived physical boundary created by Washington Avenue. Promote travel to and from the corridor by multiple modes, particularly by bicycle and on-foot.
- 7. Don't wait for a catalyst project to jump-start this change.** Initiate temporary uses to activate the corridor *now*.
- 8. Embrace the corridor's urban marketplace.** Promote mixed use development that brings new density and activity to South 9th Street, new shops and new venues, new residents and new customers. Mix some green and some green development into the corridor's mixed use equation.
- 9. Balance lived-in with livable.** Savor the grit and the rhythms that are inherent in the Market's operation, but improve South 9th Street's cleanliness and appearance enough to encourage people to linger a little longer and return a little sooner.

The following recommendations form a comprehensive strategy for the corridor and promise to put the Lower Italian Market back in business and back on the map as an eclectic and evolving hub of living history and a vibrant collection of shops and eateries, serving the neighborhood, the City, and the region.

1 Building Community

The Italian Market has always been a melting-pot, a sponge absorbing growing immigrant communities, and a nesting place where newcomers live, work, and shop together – a home away from home. As the Italian Market has endured over a century of change and flux, a central tenet of the Lower Italian Market's future must be to integrate and embrace diversity in ways that reinforce the larger identity of the Market. For this to occur, all populations must have a voice at the table and play an active role in the coming future. The recommendations for Building Community detail ideas for increasing communication, trust, and pride within the Lower Italian Market community.

2 Developing Identity (and flaunting it)

The Lower Italian Market is wedged between the long-standing, well established, and marketable Italian Market and an iconic intersection of cheese steaks. But the Lower Italian Market is also in close proximity to the emerging Passyunk Avenue hipster scene, while strangely situated among a mixture of auto garages, auto-oriented specialty markets, dense residential blocks, and a growing number of Latino businesses. The question of identity must somehow navigate this mixture of powerful images.

Ultimately, the corridor's reinvigorated commercial mix will, in large part, form the basis for the Lower Italian Market's revitalized identity, branding, and marketing. Recommendations to enhance the area's identity include an emphasis on food, the arts and the corridor's role as a bridge between local and global influences. These themes must also be expressed, and this plan recommends putting the Lower Italian Market on the map through joint marketing opportunities with Passyunk Avenue, promoting new events and placing signage in visible locations.

3 Guiding Change, Igniting Change

The Ice and Coal site as well as a handful of other spaces along 9th Street are either vacant or underutilized and awaiting a strengthened market to push new businesses through their doors. An activated streetwall offering visual interest and contiguous shopping opportunities is important along an urban retail corridor like South 9th Street,

but redevelopment of the Ice and Coal site could take years, and the commercial market for the smaller retail spaces will take time to build too. Recommendations oriented toward igniting change are directed toward developing clear expectations for development that the PSCA Zoning Committee can use in future negotiations as well as developing ideas for short-term and temporary uses of vacant sites until they are redeveloped.

4 Getting There, Getting Around (and enjoying it)

In true South Philly-style, the automobile typically dominates the street, the curb, and the crosswalk or median, despite the fact that it is the area's pedestrian-scaled environment that makes this corridor appealing to small shop and open-air market patrons. The Lower Italian Market should more safely accommodate and offer additional amenities for pedestrians and cyclists, incorporating designs that enliven and reward the travel experience for those moving at slower speeds. Recommendations to enhance the pedestrian (and bicycle) environment include shrinking the expanse of the Washington Avenue and 9th Street intersection, redesigning the awnings, encouraging new stalls or alternative sidewalk uses, and making room for bike parking.

5 Growing Green

Despite the PSCA's recent tree plantings and community efforts to improve the neighborhood's urban forest, much of the study area remains sparsely planted. The lack of permeable land prevents effective stormwater management, and many have expressed the desire for the Market to grow greener. Design solutions should incorporate a greening strategy that accounts for the narrowness of blocks and the limited amount of sun exposure by introducing natural elements in areas that preserve and enhance the integrity of adjacent properties. But for the Market to truly grow green, a major emphasis must be placed on reinvigorating Capitolo Playground as an attractive green oasis. This plan advocates for new recreation facilities, new park entries, expanded programming, and a softer edge that moves the chain link fence back to allow for new landscaping.

6 Sparkling Clean (and kept that way)

Despite recent improvements to curb-side garbage pickup and improved City management, trash continues to saturate conversations with local residents and business owners. From insufficient garbage pickup, to litter along the curbs, antiquated and unhealthy means of waste disposal, and some lack of diligence by corridor businesses, trash plagues 9th Street. Recommendations intended to clean up the Market are oriented toward a combination of better enforcement, more grass-roots involvement, new trash bins, education and outreach, and coordinated street sweeping.

crosswalk island



mixed use development



redesigned awnings with skylights



zebra-striped crosswalks



signage



food



Proposed improvements for the intersection of 9th and Washington and the gateway to the Lower Italian Market.





elevated park over the
carriage houses



bicycle parking



planted median



striped bike lanes



Implementation Approach

The Lower Italian Market Revitalization Project plan outlines the direction for 9th Street and the surrounding community over the next decade, and although the plan contains multiple strategies for PSCA and its partners to pursue, each recommendation requires a different set of partners, enabling many proposals to be addressed concurrently. In addition, many of the recommendations are tailored to low-cost solutions that can be implemented by volunteer efforts and through the capacity of local organizations.

Attached is an Implementation Matrix that details the timeframe, responsibility and partners, and potential funding sources for each recommendation to help guide and keep track of the neighborhood's progress in implementing the plan's components. The spreadsheet should be actively used, updated, and changed once implementation commences.



On your marks, get set, GO!

What do we do tomorrow?

PSCA's first action item is to submit the plan for approval by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and Department of Commerce. A copy of the plan should also be delivered to Councilman DiCicco, Andy Altman – the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Commerce, and Rina Cutler – the Deputy Mayor for Transportation. The intent is to get the plan recognized by the City and to raise awareness that significant strides have been made to organize and improve the community. This should occur as soon as the PSCA Board adopts the plan.

The immediate next step is to organize a guiding Implementation Committee comprised of PSCA Board members, its general membership and other key stakeholders. The Implementation Committee should divide the task of implementing the plan's six key recommendation areas into six sub-committees charged with raising funds, organizing volunteers, and lobbying the City and other agencies for improvements. At the second public meeting held to discuss this plan's recommendations, many expressed a strong interest in helping to spur implementation and further investment in the area.

The range of recommendations for the Lower Italian Market's revitalization will require coordination and financing well beyond what PSCA can organize locally. City and State agencies, local institutions, and interested developers must form an active dialog about these recommendations. As with any implementation strategy, PSCA should seek to blend dollars from both public and private sources to maximize impact. Foundation dollars and grants should also be sought for specific efforts. This means that the plan should also be hand-delivered to local partners like the East Passyunk Avenue BID and the Italian Market Merchants' Association as well as the Wachovia Regional Foundation and William Penn Foundation.

Phasing and Priority Projects

Discussions with the PSCA Planning Committee, local residents, and business owners emphasized a number of clear priority projects. These priority projects are defined as critical investments that can have a transformative impact on 9th Street over the next 1-2 years. While some of these projects will not be fully implemented within that time frame, it is important that significant progress be made toward their implementation.

Priority projects for the Lower Italian Market include:

- Get to know the new neighbors and make them a part of the PSCA
(1.1 – Welcome the Neighbors);
- Distribute information on trash pick-up, local stores, and the area's unique history
(1.2 – Create an Information Brochure);
- Begin interviewing (and recording) local stories for an on-line oral histories project
(1.3 – Develop Web-Based Artworks Dedicated to the Exploration of Contemporary Immigrant Experiences (at least get started on moving the process forward));
- Reach out to the Crab Shack to create a new sign to advertise the area
(2.6 – Advertise in Visible Locations to Put the Lower Italian Market on the Map);
- Create a stronger link with the East Passyunk Avenue BID
(2.7 – Pursue Marketing Opportunities with the East Passyunk Avenue BID);
- Create temporary uses for the Ice and Coal site until it is developed
(3.2 – Explore the Ice and Coal Building as a Site and a Surface);
- Get started on changing the look and feel of the Washington and 9th intersection
(4.1 – Shrink the Expanse of Washington Avenue);
- Work with the developer of the Ice and Coal site to create new awnings in-line with the objectives described in this plan
(4.2 – Shed a Little Light on the Scene);
- Find at least one area on-street for bike parking
(4.7 – Make Room for Bikes);
- Continue the tree planting and forge strong links with PHS
(5.1 – Adopt an Area-Wide Greening Strategy);
- Organize 9th Street clean-ups
(6.1 – Let's All Pitch In); and
- Test the waters in creating a BID or hiring a street sweeping service
(6.3 – Consider a Business Improvement District to Coordinate Improvements).



... to see what happens.

