

# MID ATLANTIC REAL ESTATE JOURNAL

## MID YEAR REVIEW

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### ZONING

## Terrence Foley, City Avenue Special Services District New zoning spurs transformation on City Avenue

It's been a five-year journey for the City Avenue Special Services District; and it's had its share of bumps in the road. But, as of April 30th, Lower Merion commissioners have approved a new zoning ordinance that has the potential to transform City Avenue from the "Golden Mile" it was formerly to the Urban/Suburban destination it now has the potential to become. Philadelphia commissioners approved the ordinance in 2009, but Lower Merion took longer.



Terrence Foley

This corridor has a bit of a unique history. Spanning several West Philly neighborhoods on the city side of its border, and Lower Merion on the other, this stretch of land was known as the "Golden Mile" because it was formerly home to a number of small shops and boutiques that thrived alongside anchors Bonwit Teller and Lord & Taylor. Betty's Hat Shop was a popular destination for the Main Line elite and Jackie Kennedy fans. Suburbanites would bring their families to spend the day shopping and to enjoy a meal at local favorite Horn & Hardart.

As both business and residential demographics changed, so did City Avenue. But in the early 1990's a unique partnership between the City of Philadelphia and the Township of Lower Merion became the City Avenue Special Services District. One of the region's first true Public/Private Partnerships--the brainchild of Lita Cohen, Jim Ettelson, Joe Manko, and Michael Nutter--brought elected officials, property owners, institutional leaders, and business leaders together to develop a new concept for the future of City Avenue.

Its main goals were simple: to enhance the safety of the neighborhood, to improve the area's image, and to attract and shape development.

Those goals have, over time, morphed into a more tangible vision: To transform the City Avenue corridor from an auto oriented drive-through to a pedestrian friendly, diverse, vibrant, and highly desirable community.

Addressing the challenges posed by both the Philadelphia and the Lower Merion township ordinances delayed that

vision, until now. The new zoning ordinance (as of April 30, 2012) states: the intent of the two-district ordinance is to "encourage development that combines residential, institutional, and commercial uses in close proximity thus decreasing auto dependency, encouraging pedestrian access, transit-use and shared parking and accessways, and mitigating congestion, vehicular traffic and pollution."

"While getting the ordinance passed was a lengthy process, the zoning is now designed to promote the growth, attractive-

ness, convenience and stability of the City Avenue area, and it does that extremely well," said Terrence Foley, President of the City Avenue Special Services District. "Along with the expected new development we anticipate re-investment in existing buildings with the ability to add retail and residential uses," he added.

The area already has a solid foundation. A recent report by eConsult shows the high per-capita income of its neighboring communities. Its proximity to Center City via multiple modes of transit is second to none. But

the portion of the ordinance that will likely cause the biggest transformation is the segment that encourages pedestrian-friendly conditions. Widened sidewalks, plazas, public spaces and lots of landscaping are all expected outcomes of the road to revitalization.

"As a local property owner, we see Bala Cynwyd as a terrific location that has only gotten better," said Richard Gottlieb, Senior Vice President of Keystone Property Group and a Board Member of the Special Services District. "We look forward to making enhancements

to our investments here."

Gottlieb continued, "In addition, the new zoning provides for residential development in what has traditionally been solely a business district in Lower Merion. So now multifamily developers with the confidence and vision to see the opportunities will be attracted to the area. With two Universities right on the avenue, there's no shortage of young, well-educated professionals along with empty-nesters seeking a modern, upscale rental in a vibrant live-work-play community." ■

*Now's the time.  
City Ave's the place.*

The vibe is approaching.

The transformation is at hand.

The shift from a dated, drive-through area to a pedestrian friendly, vibrant, and highly desirable, diverse community is nearly here. Be part of the shift. Bring your optimism along.

Our "quiet revitalization" offers major opportunity. Superior public transportation and easy parking, high density, an abundant well-educated workforce, and new zoning initiatives. A playground for a savvy real estate pro.

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