

Testimony
City Council Committee on Commerce & Economic Development
November 30, 2005

Good morning honorable Councilmen and women. My name is Andrew Toy and I am here to testify in regard to the state of neighborhood commercial corridor development and the effort my organization has been making in this area over the last three years in Philadelphia. I represent the Local Initiatives Support Corporation in Philadelphia, which is a nationwide funder and supporter of community development that helps nonprofit community development corporations (CDCs) transform distressed neighborhoods into healthy communities of choice and opportunity - good places to live, work, do business and raise children.

As the largest non-profit community development supporter in the nation, LISC brings a broad perspective and understanding of best practices that should be helpful in organizing, directing and implementing programs to build better communities. Before going into specifics, I wish to state that we appreciate the opportunity to comment before Council on this very important subject in a public hearing thanks to Councilman Goode.

LISC began its Philadelphia Commercial Corridor Redevelopment Initiative in 2002 in response to an assessment survey that highlighted the need for additional support for neighborhood commercial corridors. To date, LISC's commitment in Philadelphia totals over \$2 Million as we continue into Year 4 of the Initiative. LISC's investments, program design and advocacy have also attracted other funding, including the State Main Street Program that is now in 5 neighborhoods.

With the support of LISC, the City and other partners, many of our neighborhood commercial corridors are showing great signs of improvement with new businesses, more shoppers, improved and greener streetscapes, rising property values and a renewed sense of pride. Places like Ogontz Avenue in West Oak Lane, Germantown Avenue in Mt Airy and 5th Street above Lehigh are just three examples of places where LISC has partnered with local CDCs to make a real difference.

With NTI making a more deliberate effort towards commercial corridor revitalization, we see a great opportunity to work more closely with the City to leverage our efforts. As an example, recently, we have been discussing a citywide assessment of corridors that would help both LISC, the City and other stakeholders better focus efforts on strategies that work and on areas where our efforts will have the greatest impact, rather than spreading resources around thinly with little real impact. Over the past 3 years we have already worked closely with the Empowerment Zone to improve the Girard Avenue corridor to take advantage of the return of the Trolley and the growing neighborhoods nearby.

There are many lessons learned over the past 3 years and I can discuss them at greater length with you, but in order to be brief, here is a short summary:

- Invest and coordinate support rationally where there is capacity - of the commercial core, the neighborhood market potential and local leadership

- Ensure consistency of support for full-time operating and planning at the ground level rather than a top down approach
- Safety and Cleanliness are critical and good lighting, cleaning and policing are necessary
- Good pedestrian oriented design and streetscapes are worth the investment
- Nearby residential development and density are closely related to corridor health
- Provide technical assistance and information at the ground level - LISC has held many workshops and worked with Corridor Managers around a modified Main Street approach and has provided market analysis tools for planning
- Aim for measurable outcomes that help Corridor Managers stay focused and demonstrate progress
- Funding commercial acquisition and improvements as well as upstairs residential redevelopment is important in impacted neighborhoods
- The need to find and attract good retail businesses to neighborhood corridors is a continuing challenge
- Understand and build upon the neighborhoods' assets and niches, both physical (for example, buildings and transportation) and social (for example, ethnic, arts, education and other market niches)
- Sometimes the best lessons learned are those shared between neighborhood Corridor Managers

LISC looks forward to building our partnership with the City and others and we appreciate the leadership of Councilman Goode in this effort. Thank you.