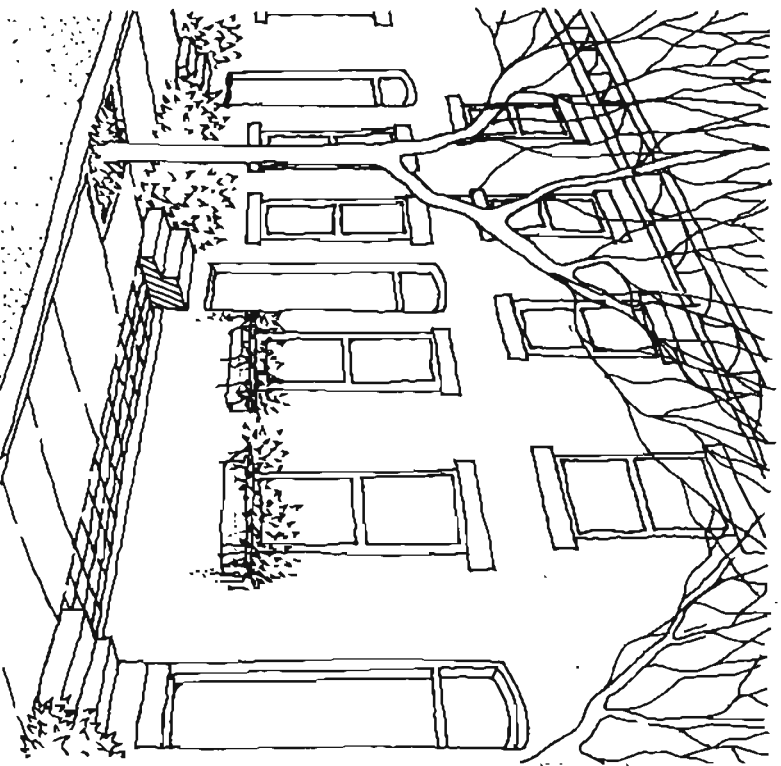
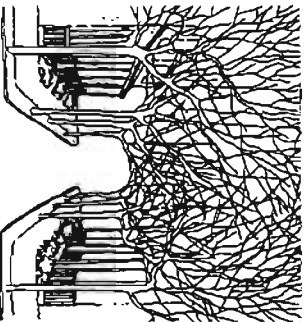
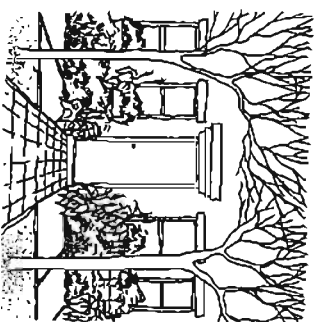
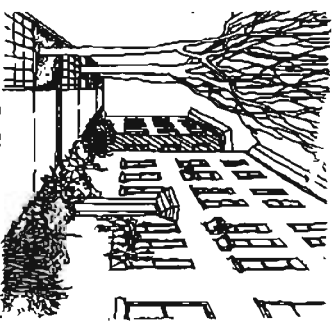
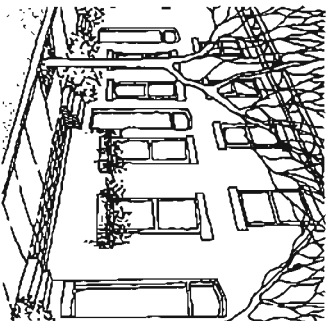
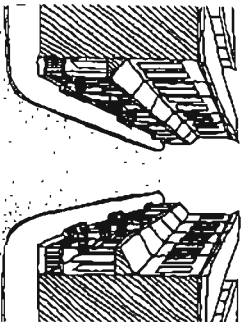


SHAPING THE BLOCK



SHAPING THE BLOCK

REDESIGNING SMALL URBAN NEIGHBORHOODS

A Publication of the West Philadelphia Landscape Plan

Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning

University of Pennsylvania

Supported by a Grant from the J. N. Pew Charitable Trust

1991

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The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan and Greening Project is a three-year community development and research project funded by the J. N. Pew Charitable Trust and conducted by the Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning at the University of Pennsylvania, The Organization and Management Group, and Philadelphia Green, under the auspices of the West Philadelphia Partnership.

PUBLICATIONS IN THIS SERIES

- I. *The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan: A Framework for Action*
- II. *Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development*
- III. "This Garden is a Town." *Shaping the Community Garden*
- IV. *Vacant Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods*
- V. *Shaping the Block: Redesigning Small Urban Neighborhoods*
- VI. *The Computerized Data Base: A Guide to the West Philadelphia Landscape Plan*

OVER VIEW

West Philadelphia is a multi-racial, multi-cultural, inner-city neighborhood. Poverty, unemployment, and the physical deterioration of housing and public infrastructure are pressing issues. These are fundamental problems that any plan for West Philadelphia must address, including landscape development alone cannot solve these problems. However, even small, incremental improvements to the urban landscape can produce major improvements in the function and appearance of the city and in the quality of urban life. Successful landscape projects can serve as catalysts for other community development projects and as important adjuncts to a wide variety of social programs, such as education, job training, employment, and community organizing. The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan addresses these social issues as well as serious environmental problems, such as land subsidence and flooding in areas over buried streams and filled land.

The scope of this plan is more comprehensive than what are commonly referred to as "greening" projects, for the landscape of West Philadelphia is more than parks, gardens, and street trees. The urban landscape embodies the total physical environment within which built structures fit. It includes hills and valleys, rocks and earth, and rivers and underground streams upon which the city is built. It includes the framework of streets, sidewalks, and public utilities which structures the city and through which people, water, wastes, and energy flow. And it includes the playgrounds, parking lots, plazas, private yards, and vacant lots that fit within that larger framework. The plan addresses the major transportation and stream corridors which

provide a neighborhood-wide structure and which serve both local and regional needs, as well as smaller, more discrete projects tailored to suit the needs of local residents.

The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan is based upon the conviction that individuals, small groups, and local organizations all have a role in shaping the landscape of the city, a role as important as public agencies and private developers. Incremental improvements to the urban landscape made by individuals and small groups can have an enormous, cumulative, effect on the city and how it looks and functions. The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan seeks to identify, encourage, and support such incremental improvements, and to propose large-scale projects that can be accomplished only by neighborhood-wide organizations and city-wide or regional public agencies. Landscape planning and the design and construction of small, neighborhood landscape projects have proceeded simultaneously over the past three years and have informed one another throughout the project.

The products of the West Philadelphia Landscape Plan are six reports and a computer database that integrates text, statistics, maps, and drawings. This report, *Shaping the Block*, focuses on the block as a significant unit of neighborhood and explores how residents can reshape the block they live on to better support their needs, values, and activities.

The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan: A Framework for Action, provides an overview of the entire plan. *Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development*,

describes examples of successful projects that have already been built and draws lessons for similar projects that could be undertaken in West Philadelphia. *"This Garden is a Town"* explores existing community gardens as models for neighborhood-based planning. *Vacant Urban Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods* analyzes the different types of vacant urban land that occur in West Philadelphia and how they can be reclaimed for a variety of uses tailored to fit the needs of particular people and places. *The Computerized Landscape Plan: A Guide* describes the computer database and its potential uses.

These six reports may be used independently or in combination, depending upon the reader's objectives and scope of concern. *"This Garden is a Town"* and *Shaping the Block: Redesigning Small Urban Neighborhoods* are of particular concern to individuals and small groups who wish to make improvements to their own immediate neighborhood and to organizations, such as Philadelphia Green who work with such individuals and groups to support their efforts. *The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan: A Framework for Action, Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development, Vacant Land: A Resource for Shaping Urban Neighborhoods*, and *The Computerized Landscape Plan: A Guide* all cover broad scales of concern from garden and block improvements to large public works spanning many neighborhoods. These reports will therefore be of interest to public agencies and other organizations, as well as to individual citizens.

THE BLOCK IS A NEIGHBORHOOD

People use the word "neighborhood" rather loosely. A city planning commission may refer to an entire district of the city as a neighborhood, but we also speak of the block we live on, together with those immediately adjacent, as a neighborhood. The term "neighborhood" refers to the quality of being near one another and to a place with some distinguishing characteristics.

The block is the smallest unit of neighborhood. It is where the private domain of the home meets the public domain of the city. The private space of stoops, porches, yards, and houses and the public space of street and sidewalk define the character of the block.

Traditionally, the block has been the focus of daily, public life. For young children, it is a playground; its boundaries may also define the child's world during the pre-teen years. For adults, the block is a meeting place and a stage. Stoops, porches, and front windows provide prospects from which to watch and engage in the theater of street life. At the heart of the block is the street which links each house with the next and with the rest of the city, part of the network of streets that structures the city and knits it together.

The block affords the most direct opportunity to shape the community we live in. Here, a small group of people can decide how to mold the character of their block, and an individual can clearly see his or her mark. Beautification, recreation, neighborhood renewal, defense against crime, safe play for children, and control of traffic through the neighborhood are all issues that may motivate residents of a block to invest time and energy in changing it.

The basic structure of a block is set by the width of its street and sidewalk, the size of yards, and types of buildings. Within that structure, there is a great deal that can be done to reshape the block by additions to the private domain of building face and front yard and to the physical character of the block and the needs and values of the people who live there will determine the scope and character of potential changes. While some changes may be made to the buildings, the landscape of yard, sidewalk, and street offers the greatest opportunity for shaping the block.

A few individuals can make a dramatic change to the appearance of their block by what they do on their own properties. Well-tended front gardens improve the appearance of a block, but the benefits extend far deeper. Such gardens also communicate a sense of caring for one's own property and for the block. Working in the front garden also provides an opportunity to meet and socialize casually with neighbors, as well as to keep an eye on children's play and people passing through.

Where houses are similar, the treatment of front yards and porches provides a clue to the kinds of people who live on the block and their interests. Even a tiny front garden provides the opportunity for each household to create their own world: an arbor of roses, a bed of colorful flowers, a small patch of lawn, or a dry garden of arranged stones. Taken together, such diverse gardens give a block an identity particular to the people who live there.

Changes to the public domain of street and sidewalk are more difficult to accomplish than improvements to private property because this requires agreement among neighbors and even the permission and assistance of public agencies like the Streets Department or the Fairmount Park Commission. The benefits in safety, comfort, and appearance, however, may well be worth the effort. Changes to the street, for example, particularly at the ends of the block, can reduce through traffic and make the street and sidewalk a safer place for children's play. Trees on the sidewalk and front yards make street and houses more comfortable on a hot, summer day or night. Blocks that are completely paved, with no trees, are much hotter in the summer, particularly at night, than blocks that have street trees and gardens.

This report is about how existing blocks can be reshaped to better support the needs, values, and activities of the residents who live there. It describes important features of the block as they affect social life and identifies different types of blocks that occur in West Philadelphia. It outlines the opportunities and limitations these pose for change and suggests general design ideas that may be tailored by residents of a block to serve their own needs.

ORGANIZING THE BLOCK

The success of any project to reshape the block depends upon the people who live there. Block improvements can begin only with initial interest by residents and will only grow and be sustained through their participation. It is the residents of a block who know their own needs, relationships with others on the block, and shared interests and values.

Although block projects may require the cooperation and assistance of public agencies like the Streets Department or the Fairmount Park Commission, most are initiated by the people who live or work there. A single, energetic person with well-defined goals and an idea for a specific project who persuades neighbors to join in is often the primary ingredient for a successful block project. Blocks may work on their own or apply for assistance from a variety of sources.

There are programs that provide advice and resources to blocks that wish to undertake improvement projects. The City of Philadelphia sponsors several programs. The Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee, for example, provides equipment to keep the block clean; the only requirement is that a block elect a block captain. Another program--Lot Beautification--is administered by the Department of License and Inspections. This program provides for the cleanup, fencing, and planting of vacant lots owned by the City of Philadelphia. In recent years, License and Inspections has contracted with Philadelphia Green to collaborate in the Lot Beautification Program.

Philadelphia Green is a community outreach program of the Pennsylvania Horticultural

Society. It was established in 1975 with proceeds from the Philadelphia Flower Show. Today, the Flower Show continues to supply about 40 percent of the budget for Philadelphia Green; funding from foundations and contracts with the City make up most of the remainder.

Philadelphia Green sponsors a variety of programs for block projects that offer technical advice, materials, and help with construction. Philadelphia Green has found, through experience, that it is often best for newly-formed groups to proceed gradually; they therefore offer a series of programs that permit a block to take on successively more ambitious projects. The Street Tree Program and the Garden Block Program, for example, permit a block to get started with a relatively simple project. The Garden Block Program helps blocks plan and obtain window boxes and planters for porches or sidewalks, and the Street Tree Program provides street trees. The Blockscape Program helps residents of a block design more extensive improvements tailored to their values and needs. Often a block starts out as a "Garden Block," gets organized and demonstrates the ability to install and maintain the improvements, then applies for the Blockscape or Lotscape Program.

A "lotscape" involves the transformation of a vacant lot into a community garden, siting place, or playground. Philadelphia Green provides plants and furnishings such as benches, technical assistance, and labor to install a fence around the property and recondition the soil. The community group responsible for the project clears the lot, plants the flowers and vegetables, and maintains the garden.

Most blocks start with a relatively simple project with well-defined goals, typically started by a block resident who persuades others to help.

The successful completion of a small project often leads to a series of other, progressively more complex projects. The 4100 block of Pemasgrove Street, for example, started out by petitioning Fairmount Park for street trees in 1985. Next, as participants in the "Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee," residents cleaned up the street. Spurred on by their success, the block then applied to Philadelphia Green's Garden Block Program and, in Spring 1988, received window boxes and whiskey barrels which they filled with flowers. In 1988, the block obtained the help of Philadelphia Green to create a community garden on a corner vacant lot and the services of the Anti-Graffiti Network to paint a mural on the adjacent building wall. Today the clean street and sidewalks, the street trees, flower-filled window boxes, and the new mural and colorful garden, all provide a striking contrast to nearby blocks.

Enthusiasm for such projects is infectious. One block gets started, makes some improvements, and then adjacent blocks get interested in doing the same. Over the years, Philadelphia Green has found that single, pioneering projects spawn other projects in the neighborhood. As these grow in number, they can dramatically change the appearance of a neighborhood. The greater the concentration of projects within a relatively small number of blocks, the greater their collective impact. Neighborhoods that have sustained multiple, successful projects can apply to become "Greene Countrie Townes," a program where investment in many greening projects is concentrated in a single neighborhood. There are

now eight Greene Countrie Townes, each with flower-filled gardens and sidewalks, shady streets, and reclaimed vacant lots, fulfilling in their own locale William Penn's original conception of Philadelphia as a "Greene Countrie Towne."

In 1982 West Shore became the third Greene Countrie Towne. West Shore is a small ten-block neighborhood in West Philadelphia. Nearly every block has meeting places whose uses vary: playlot, barbecue pit, vegetable garden, or sitting garden. Many of the blocks in West Shore have new sidewalks and street trees; all have window boxes and/or flower planters. There are few vacant houses, and those that do exist are securely boarded up. The sense of community and the physical evidence of this spirit are the product of efforts by residents who have lived here over the years.

The first "greening" projects were flower-filled urns made from old tires that were placed along the sidewalk. In 1977 the Penn State Urban Gardening Program developed a demonstration community garden in West Shore. In 1979, several blocks in West Shore participated in Philadelphia Green's Street Tree Program. The West Shore Civic Association then went on to sponsor many other projects, including the renovation of vacant housing, an initiative supported by the Enterprise Foundation. Together, the rehabilitation of housing and landscape contributed to the city's decision to invest in new streets, curbs, and sidewalks in a part of the neighborhood where residents had been petitioning for years. West Shore is an inspiration to other neighborhoods. The individual projects, in themselves, can be achieved readily by others; the

whole gives an appreciation for what many individual projects can accomplish together.

Although successful models like Pennsgrove Street or the West Shore Greene Countrie Towne may seem daunting to a block just getting started on its first project, it is important to realize that the first project is often the most difficult. Once a block has gotten organized and achieved its first or second successful project, subsequent projects are much easier, even though they may be larger in scope.

There are several keys to success: key individuals; well-defined goals and objectives; community involvement; a successful and visible product; good design; collaboration; ownership or control of land; and broad-based resources. Some of these ingredients of success are important for accomplishing the initial project, all are essential for sustaining and managing that project and others over time. These are described in more detail, along with numerous success stories in *Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development*.

The following pages discuss the different types of blocks that occur in West Philadelphia, some ideas for improvement, and the features that are common to all. For blocks that are starting a project, "How to Get Started" and "Who Can Help," both appendices to this report, provide some suggestions for organizing the block, brainstorming ideas, making a design, and implementing a project, as well as some important contacts for help with specific problems.

FEATURES OF THE BLOCK

The nature of the block and its social character vary greatly. This is largely influenced by the physical form of the block, including the width of the street, the size and type of buildings, and the kinds of activities that take place. Blocks with stores, churches, schools, offices, or factories have very different social activities and temporal rhythms than blocks that are entirely residential. Residential blocks with houses facing each other across narrow streets are likely to have a more intimate social life than rows of houses divided by a wide street with heavy traffic. Comings and goings are likely to be noted by other residents in the first type of block, while it is easier to be more anonymous on the second type of block.

Despite their variety, blocks have common features. All blocks, except those that are entirely vacant, have a street, sidewalk, and building face. A porch or stoop marks the entry to each house. If houses are set back from the street, there will also be a front yard, a path to the door, a fence along the property boundary, and a gate. Some types of blocks have all of these features; others have only a few. The forms these features take varies with type of block, but the role they play in the social life of a block remains similar.

The Block as a Territory. The block is made up of multiple, individual properties that abut public property. The public domain of street and sidewalk connect the block to adjacent blocks and to the rest of the city. This is open-ended territory, unbounded on at least one end. Bordering this public territory are multiple private properties. Buildings, fences and gates, or gardens mark the boundaries between them. The "boundaries" of each private territory may also

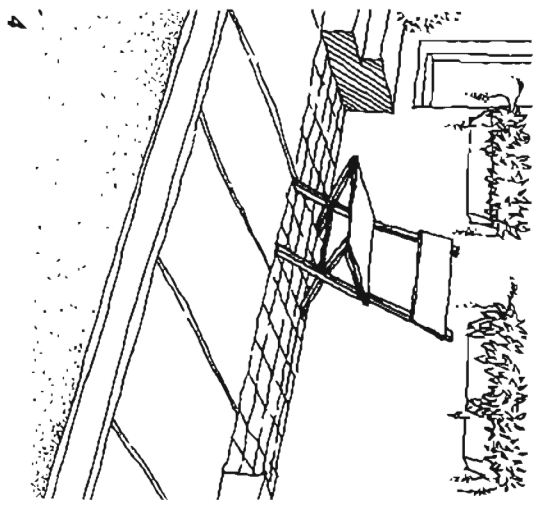
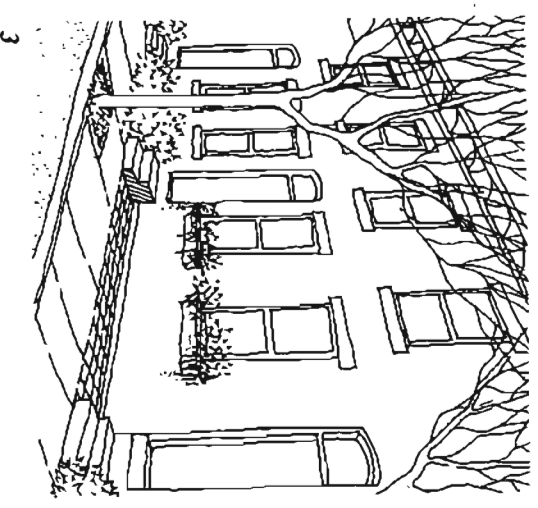
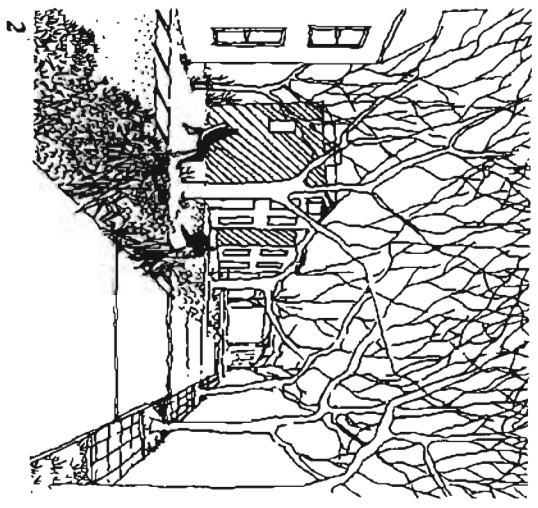
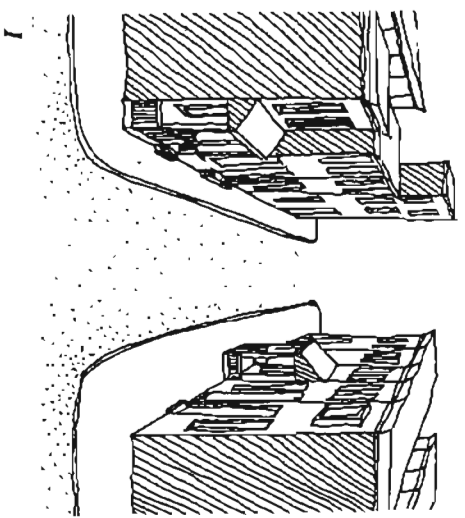
extend beyond the property line onto the sidewalk and even into the street. Particularly in a narrow street of rowhouses with no front yards, the area immediately around the stoop and the parking space in front of the house may be considered semi-private territory, "belonging" to those who live in that house.

To what extent the block becomes the domain of its residents rather than those passing through, depends upon the form of the block and the type and intensity of activities that go on there. The width of the street and how close the houses are to the street, for example, influence whether the block feels like a semi-public, rather than a public territory; narrow streets with buildings on the property line seem more private than wide streets with buildings set well back from the street. Certain kinds of modifications to the block can contribute to the identity of the block as a unit: a sense of gateway or threshold at the ends of the block and signs of personalization, such as window boxes, well-tended front gardens, and sidewalk sitting areas, for example.

When neighbors sit out on stoops and porches or work in their front yards, when they use the street and sidewalk for a meeting place, for play, for teaching children such skills as bike riding and roller skating, or for car repair and car washing, they appropriate the street and sidewalk as a shared territory that "belongs" to the block. When there is little sustained activity by residents or when there is heavy through-traffic by cars, trucks, buses, or pedestrians, then the block will have less of an identity as a separate territory. This is the case on wide, busy streets like Market and Chestnut.

THE BLOCK AS A TERRITORY

1. The block is a territory composed of multiple, private properties that border the public property of street and sidewalk.
2. When neighbors sit out on stoops, porches, or front yards and when they use the street and sidewalk for meeting and play, they appropriate the street and sidewalk as a shared territory that "belongs" to the block.
3. Public property immediately in front of a house or next to a front yard may be considered semi-private territory that "belongs" to the people that live in that house.
4. Residents may "claim" the sidewalk outside their house by marking it with their own belongings.



FEATURES OF THE BLOCK

The Street and the Sidewalk. To the people who live on a block, the street is their address. The street is where they park their car, and perhaps also where they repair and wash it. It is the place where children play and where neighbors gather to talk.

But the street and sidewalk are also a right-of-way for cars, buses, trucks, pedestrians, and for public utilities, such as sewers, gas, electric, water and telephone lines. Seen from this perspective, the primary function of street and sidewalk is for movement and for connecting all parts of the city to each other. This is the way that most city agencies think about street and sidewalk.

To the city, then, the street is part of a very large system; to the resident, the block is a place in itself. Sometimes these two ways of looking at the street conflict with one another, such as when traffic makes it dangerous for children to play in the street or when residents find it difficult to park their car, because patrons or workers at nearby stores, schools or other institutions use the block to park their cars. In such cases, annoyed residents may petition the city for the right to close off their block to traffic, either for special events or to create a play street during the middle of the day. Sometimes block residents may even take things into their own hands and fashion a gate at the ends of the street by placing garbage cans, saw-horses, or other large objects to create an obstacle to cars.

There are many ways to slow cars down or to discourage them from using the block as a through-street without closing the block entirely. Installing road bumps at both ends of the block or narrowing the street at both ends through widened

sidewalks or plantings, for example, creates a sense of threshold or gateway that signals drivers that the street on this block has other functions besides traffic movement. (For many examples of such modifications, see Donald Appleyard's book, *Liveable Streets*.)

"Gateways" at the ends of a block serve other functions besides traffic control. Gateways give people the sense that they are entering or leaving a place. Marking the boundaries of the street by creating a sense of gateway conveys to those who drive or walk through the block that its residents feel a sense of ownership and that although they are travelling on a public street or sidewalk, they are also, in a way, passing through semi-private territory. This feeling is reinforced when there are signs that the residents themselves have developed and maintained the public sidewalk, when planters filled with flowers line the sidewalk, or in wider streets, where residents tend flowers in the planting strip between sidewalk and curb.

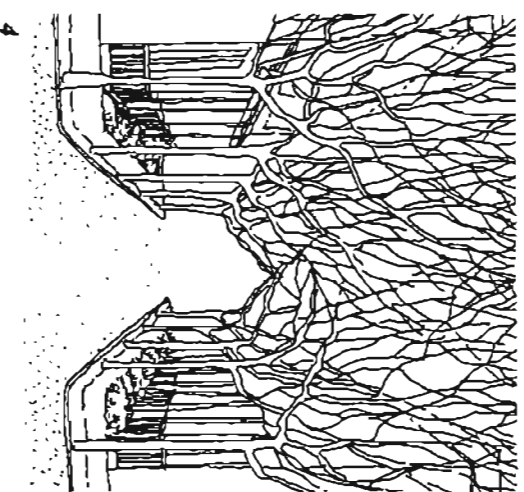
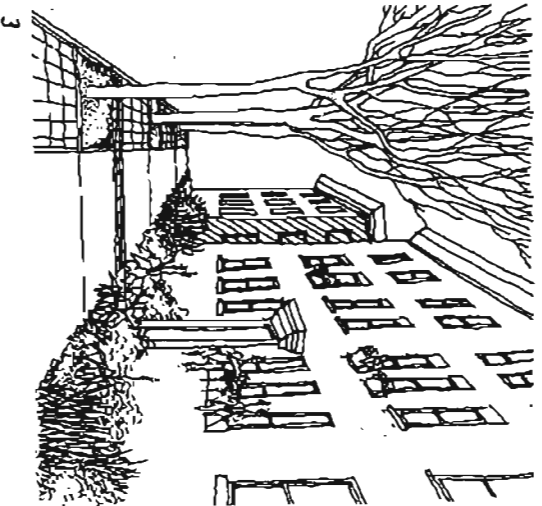
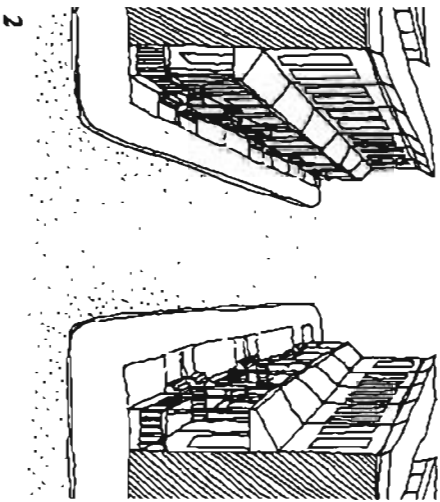
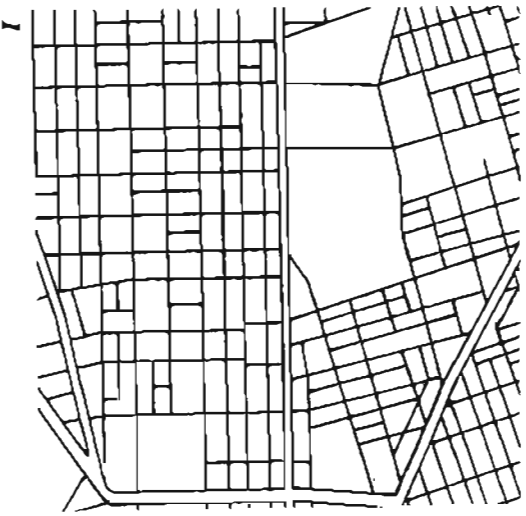
Street trees provide shade and shelter. The canopy of mature street trees forms a leafy ceiling over the street and sidewalk and creates the sense of an outdoor room. By shading the street and sidewalk and even the walls of adjacent buildings, mature trees make the block much cooler in summer. While younger, smaller trees may not achieve these effects, newly planted street trees are nevertheless a sign of investment in the block by residents.

All these types of improvements to street and sidewalk--street trees, flowers in planters or planting strips, and special gateway treatments at

the ends of a block--convey the impression that a particular block is a territory with special identity, that the residents of the block know one another and work together, have set goals and achieved them, and that the block is, in fact, "together".

THE STREET AND THE SIDEWALK

1. To public agencies, the street is a part of a large, city-wide system for transportation and public utilities.
2. To the people who live on a block, the street is the place where they live.
3. Flower-filled window boxes and gardens lining the sidewalk convey to those who drive or walk through the block that residents care about the block and feel a sense of ownership in it.
4. A canopy of mature street trees forms a leafy ceiling over the street and sidewalk and creates a gateway to the block and a sense of an outdoor room. By shading buildings, sidewalk, and street, mature trees make the block much cooler in summer.



FEATURES OF THE BLOCK

The Faces of Buildings. The front of a building is its public face, and it conveys a lot about the people who live or work there. Taken together, the faces of buildings that line the street and how far the buildings are set back from the sidewalk determine the physical character of the block.

Rowhouses have a relatively plain building face compared to detached, larger houses, which are more likely to have bay windows, shutters, pitched roofs, or other decorative features. Rowhouses, all alike, create a block with a common identity. On narrow streets with no front yards, blocks of rowhouses have a sense of intimacy, and outsiders may feel that they are trespassing on private territory. On a wide street with front yards, however, rowhouses can give the block an anonymous quality, and outsiders may feel that they are passing through territory that belongs to no one. Blocks of detached houses, each with a different form and separated from the sidewalk and other houses by yards, are neither so anonymous nor so intimate as blocks of rowhouses.

When residents decorate the face of their house with window boxes or improvements to porches and stoops they are not only keeping up their own property, they are making a public gesture. When many houses on the same block have similar improvements, such as identical window boxes, this is a sign that the residents of the block share a desire to improve their block.

The faces of the buildings lining the street form an important boundary on the block between the privacy of life within and behind the house, on the one hand, and the public life of the street, on

the other. The door is the threshold or gate between the public life of the street and the private life of the home. It is usually marked by a porch or a stoop. When there are no front yards, and houses are set very near the sidewalk, the private life of the house is more likely to spill out onto the street, especially in summer when doors and windows may be open and when people may be sitting out on the sidewalk, stoop, or porch.

The Porch and Stoop. Porches and stoops are an extension of the house. They are private and public, the place where the private life of the house meets the activity of the street. Stoops and porches serve as a prospect from which to view the street. If set right on the sidewalk, the stoop or porch is also a gateway between house and street. The porch is a refuge from the elements and from the public activities of the street, a protected area within the shelter of the house. Some porches are large enough to serve as outdoor rooms, where families sit on an evening with a drink or snack and where neighbors may socialize.

The Front Yard. The front yard separates the front door and porch from the sidewalk and may function as an outdoor room, depending upon its size and the way it is used. The front yard can be a place for children to play, for residents to display their gardens, and for neighbors to gather and talk. The yard is a gateway and an extended path from the sidewalk to the front door. It can be a refuge from the public life of the adjacent sidewalk and also serve as a prospect from which to watch the activity of the street. The yard is often separated from the sidewalk by a short fence or, when the yard is higher than the level of the sidewalk, by a low wall. Fences, walls, or flower borders along

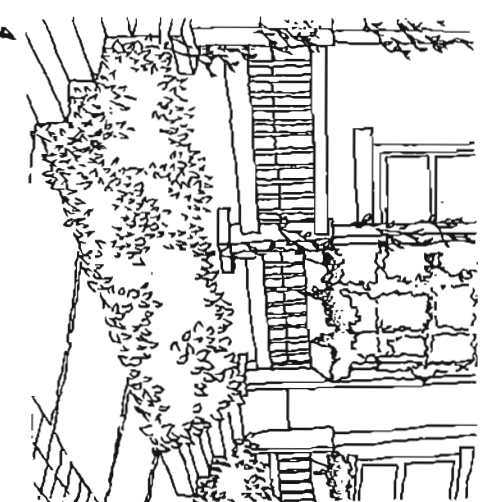
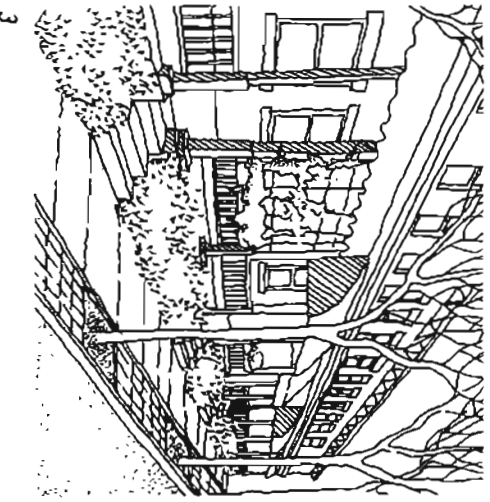
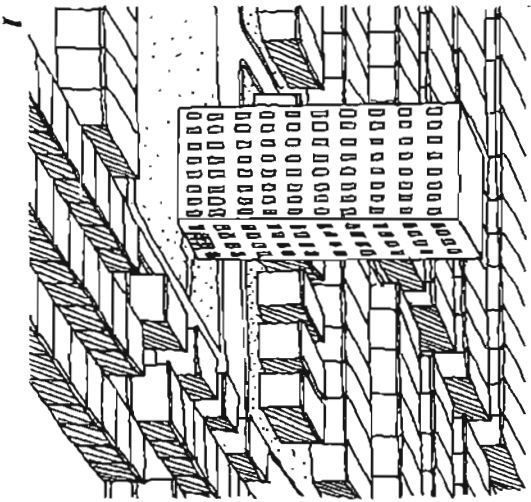
the sidewalk mark the boundary of the yard and signal that it is a different, more private territory than the street.

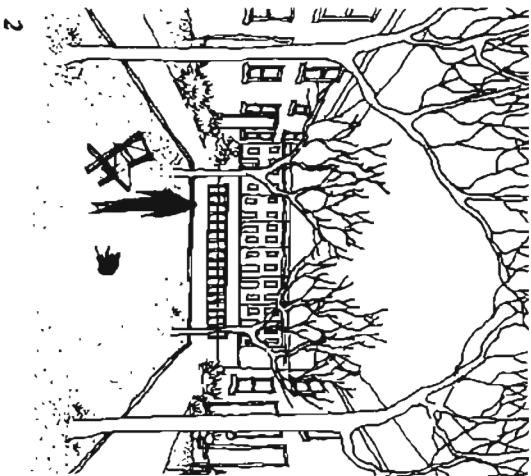
A front yard may be a tiny border, a few feet wide, that separates the house from the sidewalk, or it may be a large yard, up to 50 or 60 feet deep. When yards are tiny, residents may treat the sidewalk as an extension of their yard and decorate it with planters of flowers or shrubs; when yards are large, residents may tend to invest less energy and resources in sidewalk improvements.

The character of the garden--whether it is formal or wild, whether flowers are planted or vegetables, or whether it is paved or just a grassy lawn--depends upon the personality and interests of the people who live in the house. The front yard provides an opportunity for residents to create a display that expresses who they are or to remain anonymous.

FACES OF BUILDINGS

1. Many modern, high-rise towers have a building face that is relatively anonymous, that gives little clue to the personality and habits of the people who live there, and that affords few possibilities for personalization.
2. The faces of buildings lining the street form a boundary between the private life within and behind the house and the public life of the street.
3. Porches and stoops are both private and public places. They are protected areas within the shelter of the house, but they also serve as a prospect from which to watch the street.
4. When residents decorate the face of their house with window boxes or improvements to porches, they are not only keeping up their own property, they are making a public gesture.





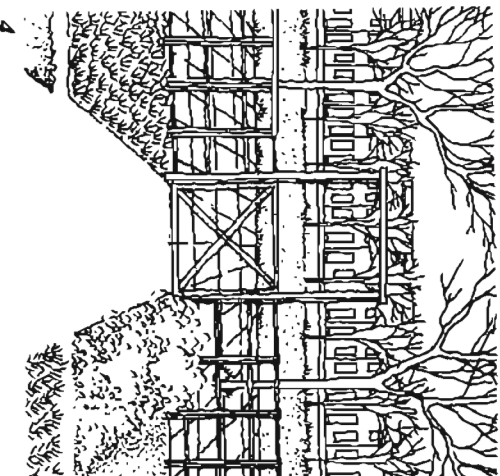
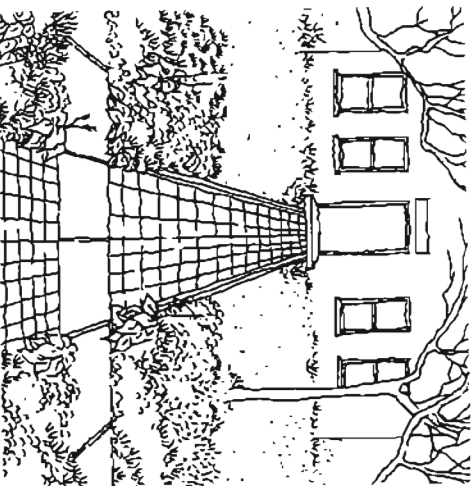
FRONT YARDS AND COURTYARDS

1. A front yard can have flowers, vegetables, or shrubs, it can be orderly or wild, it can be paved or just a grassy lawn. The front yard provides an opportunity for residents to create a display that expresses who they are or that preserves their anonymity.

2. Like a front yard, a courtyard is private territory, but it is a space shared by all the residents of the buildings that bound it. A gateway between courtyard and sidewalk reinforces the sense that the courtyard is private.

3. The path between the sidewalk and the front door links the public realm of the street and the private territory of yard and house. Paving the path in a different material from the sidewalk emphasizes this transition; lining sidewalk and both sides of the path with a border of flowers forms a gateway to the yard and house.

4. A gate marks the threshold between the public realm of the sidewalk and the private realm of the garden.



The Path. The path between the sidewalk and the front door links the public domain of street and sidewalk with the private realm of the house. The path may function as a place for children to play games that require a paved surface or as a boundary between one property and another. Depending upon the size of the yard and how it is planted and maintained, the path may be open and inviting or overgrown and forbidding.

The point where a person steps from the sidewalk to the front path is a threshold that is often marked in some way--by a gate which must be opened, an arbor that is walked under, or a border of hedges or flowers through which one walks. A distinct boundary between sidewalk and front yard gives visitors a sense of entering the owner's domain before they have even reached the front door.

The driveway is another kind of path and is an important feature of most suburban neighborhoods. Driveways are very rare in inner-city neighborhoods like West Philadelphia, however, which were mostly built before World War I, when people travelled mainly by foot or by street car rather than by automobile.

The Courtyard. Courtyards occur most frequently in association with apartment houses built since 1900 and in more recent redevelopment projects where townhouses were built on vacant blocks. The courtyard is a space bounded on at least two sides by buildings. The courtyard may open out onto the sidewalk, such as an entrance to an apartment house or cluster of houses; or it may be separated from the street and sidewalk, enclosed in the interior of an apartment house or group of

houses. Like a front yard, the courtyard is private territory that belongs to the buildings that bound it. When shielded from the street by buildings, the courtyard becomes more like a private backyard. Sometimes the courtyard replaces the street and sidewalk as the locus for outdoor social activity; on such cases, the street and sidewalk tend to remain a public territory unclaimed by residents.

The block as a territory, the street and sidewalk, faces of buildings, porch and the stoop, front yard, path, and courtyard are basic features of the block that can be found not only in West Philadelphia, but across Philadelphia and other cities. In varying forms and combinations, these features give rise to distinctively different block types.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

The character of the block depends upon both the nature of the public domain of street and sidewalk and the private domain of building face and stoop, porch, or front yard. Variations in width of street and sidewalk, height and setback of buildings, and the presence or absence of porches and front yards combine to form distinctly different block types.

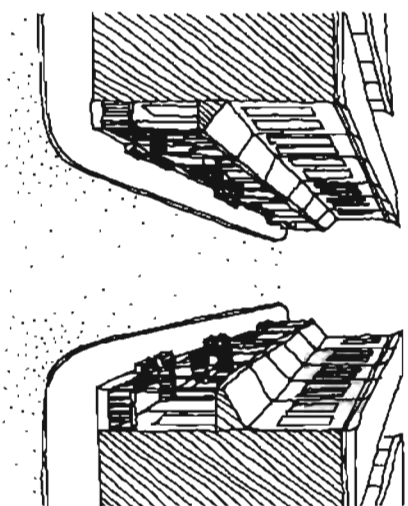
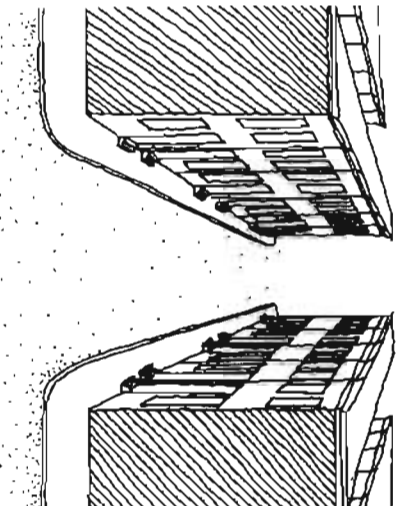
Similar types of blocks are usually clustered, forming small neighborhoods that afford a certain style of living. Taken together, the different types of blocks comprise the habitats of the city. West Philadelphia is a very large, mostly residential neighborhood that is distinctly different from South Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, Center City, or the Northeast. Within West Philadelphia, however, are dozens of smaller neighborhoods--Manua, Mill Creek, Oak Park, Cobbs Creek, Spruce Hill, Powelton, and Belmont, to name just a few. Each of these smaller neighborhoods has a distinctive character that arises largely from the types of blocks of which they are composed.

There are ten basic block types that occur in West Philadelphia: rowhouses with stoops; rowhouses with porches; rowhouses with tiny front yards; detached houses with yards; sides of houses; apartment blocks; rows of stores; large free-standing buildings; and a mixture of these types.

Rowhouses with stoops, porches, or tiny front yards, often in combination with one another, are the most common block types, particularly north of Market Street. Detached houses with front yards is another common block type in West Philadelphia, particularly south of Market Street in

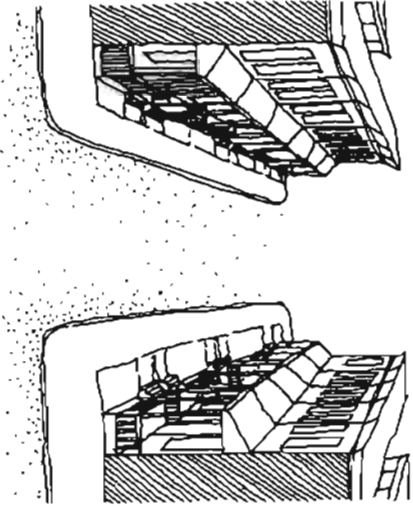
Spruce Hill and garden Court and north of Market in Powelton Village. Sometimes a street is flanked by the sides of houses, rather than front doors, yielding "sides of houses." Blocks lined by large apartment buildings occur throughout West Philadelphia. Rows of stores, usually attached buildings, form commercial blocks, sometimes with apartments in the upper floors. Large, free-standing buildings, whether for offices or apartments, are a relatively new block type, built since the 1950s, and are a distinct departure from surrounding, older neighborhoods. Finally, there are some blocks that are a mixture of several of these other block types.

There are variations within each block type; nevertheless, each type represents a specific environment with particular opportunities and limitations for change. Suggestions for improvements are made in the following pages, but should be viewed only as a starting point. It is our hope that they may inspire residents to explore further how the special qualities of their block might be expressed and how their own particular needs might best be met.

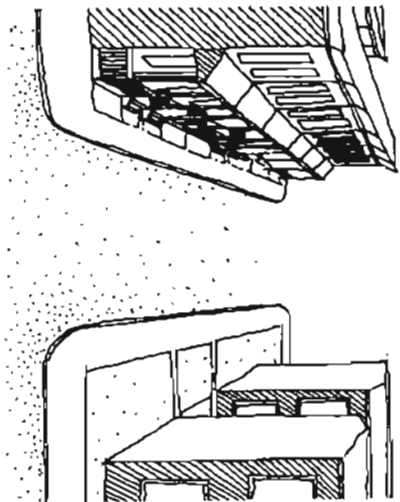


1. *A block of rowhouses with stoops*
2. *Rowhouses with stoops: distribution in West Philadelphia*
3. *A block of rowhouses with porches*
4. *Rowhouses with porches: distribution in West Philadelphia*

TYPES OF BLOCKS



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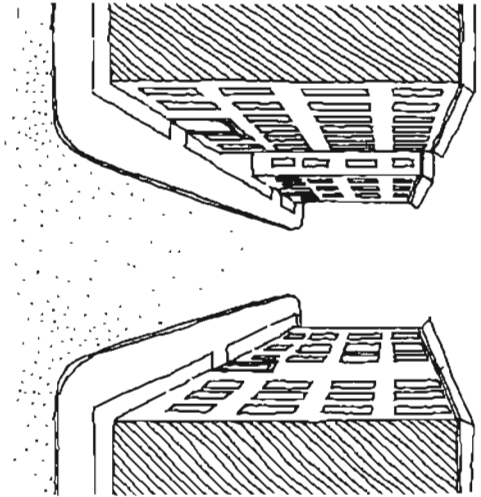
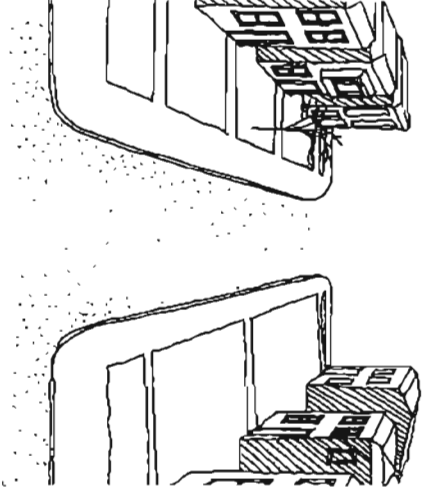


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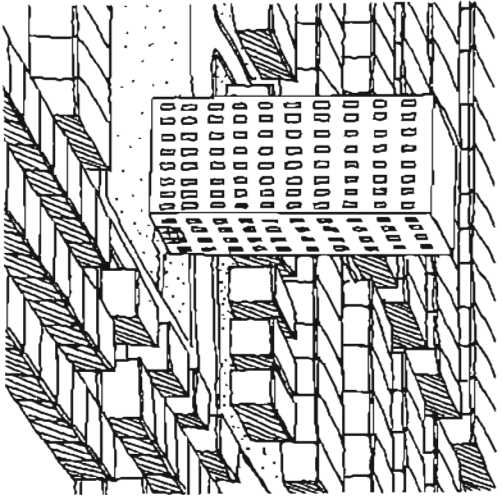
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1. A block of rowhouses with front yards
2. Rowhouses with front yards: distribution in West Philadelphia
3. A block of rowhouses in courtyards
4. Rowhouses in courtyards: distribution in West Philadelphia

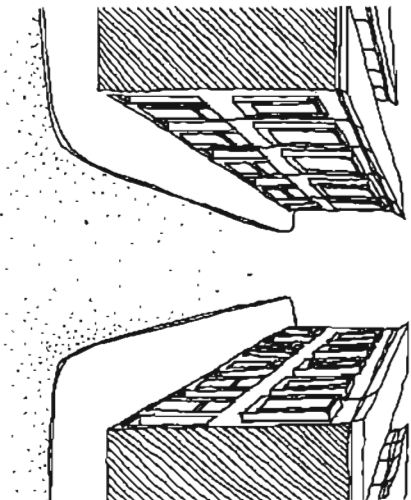


1. A block of detached houses with front yards
2. Detached houses with front yards: distribution in West Philadelphia
3. A block of apartment buildings
4. Apartment blocks: distribution in West Philadelphia

TYPES OF BLOCKS



1



3

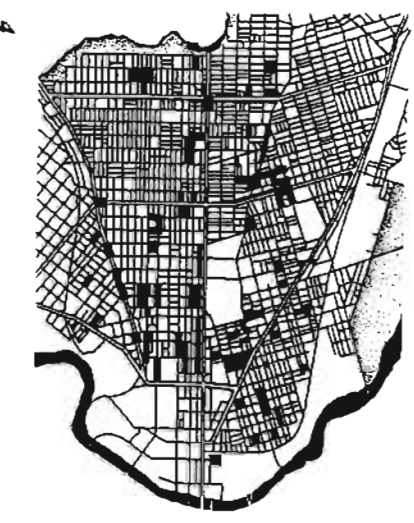
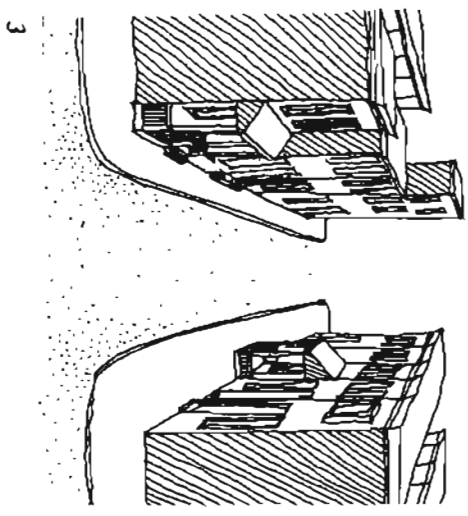
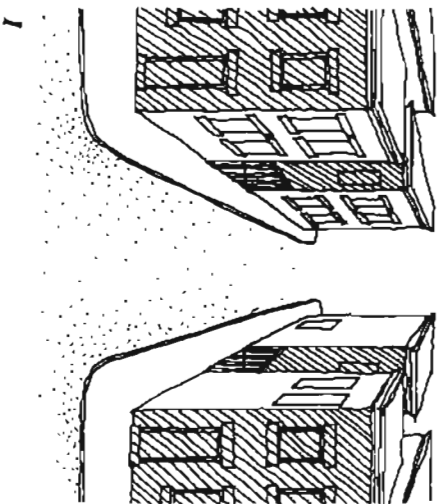


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4

1. A block with a large, free-standing building
2. Large, free-standing buildings: distribution in West Philadelphia
3. A block of rows of stores
4. Rows of stores: distribution in West Philadelphia



1. A block of sides of houses
2. Sides of houses: distribution in West Philadelphia
3. A block with a mixture of building types
4. Mixture of building types: distribution in West Philadelphia

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Rowhouses with Stoops

This block type consists of attached rowhouses with front steps or stoop directly on the sidewalk. The houses typically border a narrow, two-lane street with parking on one side and a single lane of one-way traffic on the other. There are no front yards or porches and only tiny backyards behind the houses. The stoop, the sidewalk, and the street provide the only space outside the house for play, for socializing, and other outdoor activities. The narrowness of the street and fact that the houses border the sidewalk brings people into close contact with each other. This is the most intimate block type. It is difficult to remove oneself from the theater of the street.

In West Philadelphia, this block type occurs mainly north of Market on intermediate streets and alleys. This type is usually found in combination with rowhouses with porches, where the houses on one side of the street have stoops and on the other have porches. Blocks composed entirely of rowhouses with stoops rarely occur.

There are a number of variations that influence the opportunities for improvement on this type of block. Sometimes vacant lots occur within the block or at the corner. This is most likely to happen in the Belmont, Mantua, and Mill Creek neighborhoods. In some cases, the street is bent or angled. Such blocks are found primarily north of Market Street, linking an angled commercial street like Lancaster Avenue to streets running north-south and east-west. When cars use such blocks as a short cut, the resulting traffic poses a nuisance to residents of the block. In other cases a store, church, or apartment building may occupy the corner of the block, insulating it from the intersection.

Improvements to the Block

The intimate, enclosed scale of the street provides both opportunities and limitations to improvements. On the one hand, a few, small additions, such as street trees, window boxes, or planters can make an enormous difference to the appearance of the street. On the other hand, there is relatively little space between street and buildings in which to plant flowers or trees. Unless there is a vacant lot within the block, opportunities for improvement are limited to the building face, the stoop, and the street and sidewalk.

The faces of buildings. Personal touches such as window boxes, climbing vines, paint color, decorative house numbers, names of residents, or display of objects significant to the resident all introduce a sense of identity to the street-face of the house.

Window boxes provide a place for planting flowers or herbs. A planter along the base of the building or on either side of the stoop will provide sufficient soil for flowers, shrubs, or vines. Vines can be trained around the front door, creating a gateway to the house and framing the stoop. Vines on the building face provide other advantages; they shade the building walls from the sun so that the house will be cooler at night. Vine-covered walls also reflect and radiate less heat to the street, making it more comfortable during both day and night.

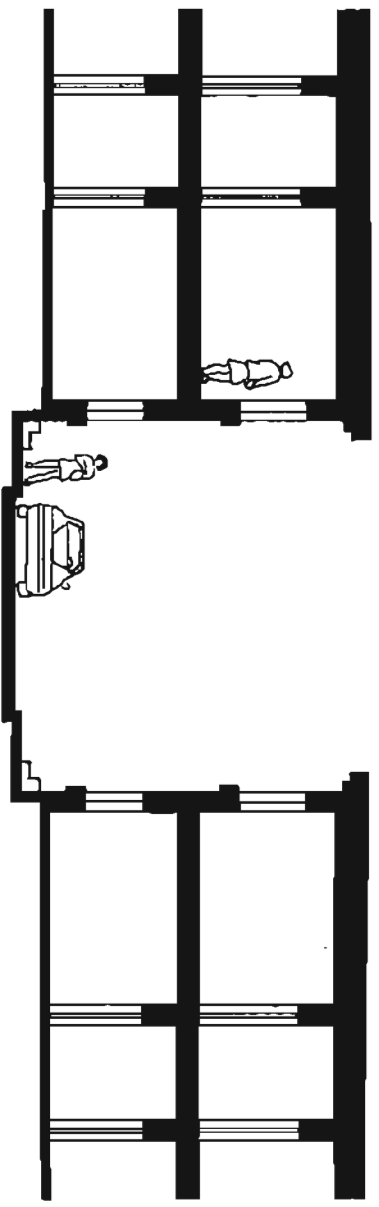
The stoop. The stoop provides a place for people to sit and watch the street. It is also a meeting place where neighbors tend to gather and talk.

Large planters filled with flowers can be set on the sidewalk to define this sitting space around the stoop.

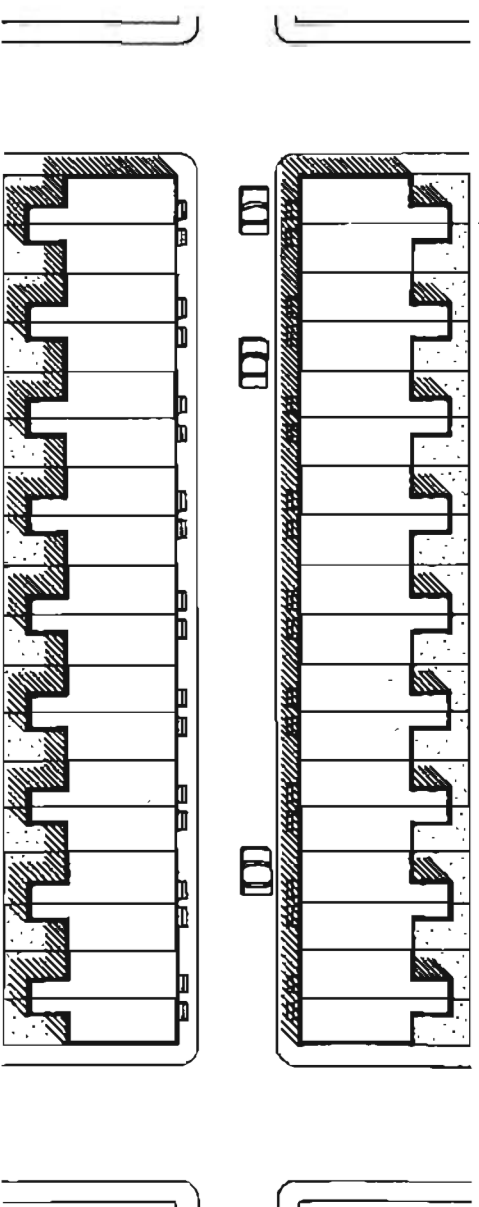
The sidewalk. Sometimes residents bring chairs out on the sidewalk next to the stoop to make a "patio." If the sidewalk is replaced, the zone between the stoops of each house can be defined by a different paving material from the rest of the sidewalk. Alternatively, that area could be transformed into a planting bed. Since the sidewalk is usually narrow there is otherwise limited opportunity for planting except in planters.

If the sidewalk is wide enough for street trees, they will provide valuable shade and shelter. On a narrow block, as the trees mature, they may even create a canopy over the entire street. The small amount of soil available to street trees in this block type limit the species that can grow here, and great care must be taken to plant and maintain them properly. The open soil surrounding the base of a street tree can also be used as space to plant flowers. These may be more easily cared for if the planted area is slightly raised from the sidewalk and protected by edges of brick or stone. When there is not enough space for street trees or when the trees are newly planted and still quite small, large planters filled with flowers may be placed outside each house.

The Street. Through-traffic is a great annoyance on narrow streets, and residents may wish to close off the street at times for a children's playblock or for a block party. Through-traffic can also be discouraged by installing road bumps at both ends of the block; there is, however, currently no program in Philadelphia for this type of



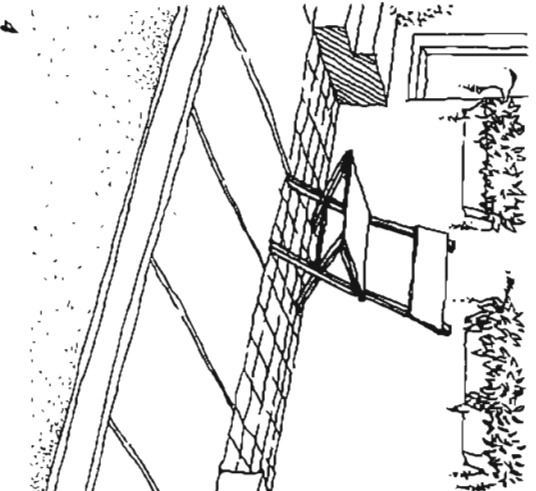
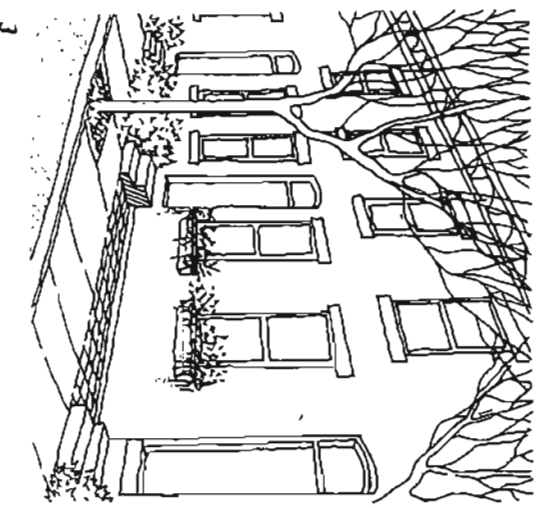
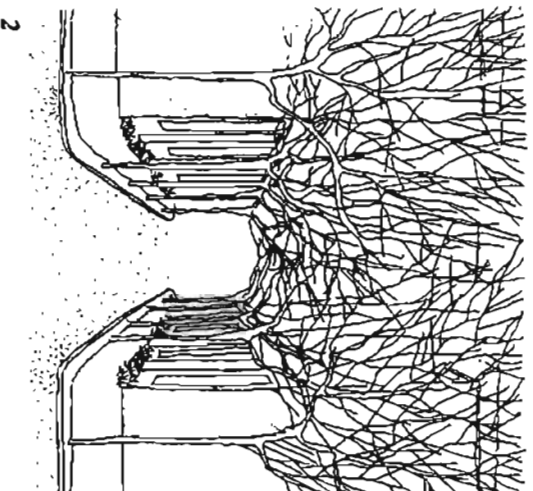
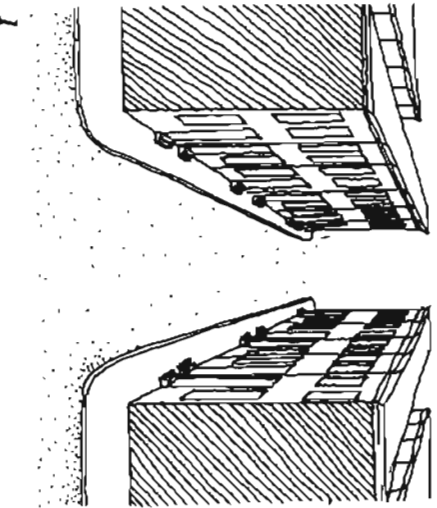
A BLOCK OF ROWHOUSES WITH STOOPS



PLAN OF ROWHOUSES WITH STOOPS



TYPES OF BLOCKS



1. Rowhouses with stoops
2. Trees shade houses, sidewalks, and street, and form a gateway to the block.
3. Flowers are planted in window boxes, the area between stoops, and at the base of street trees.
4. The area between stoops is marked as a zone belonging to the house--a place for sitting, watching the street, and meeting friends.

improvement. Alternatively, the street could be narrowed at both ends by the addition of large, movable planters placed on the street next to the sidewalk. These must be large enough so that they would not be knocked over by cars. Other cities have experimented with these types of street improvements. (See *Liveable Streets* by Donald Appleyard for a description of many projects).

Vacant lots on the block. A corner vacant lot provides additional opportunity to create a gateway to the block, as well as providing a place to sit, meet, play, and garden. When a vacant lot occurs mid-block, it may be adopted or purchased by the owner of an adjacent house for a side garden, a parking lot, or an outdoor working area. It may also be developed by a group of neighbors to provide a garden or outdoor social space off the sidewalk. See *Vacant Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods* for suggestions and examples of new uses for vacant lots.

Other Variations. On blocks where the corner is occupied by a store, church, or school, residents may be annoyed by outsiders using the street for parking and by increased littering. Improvements to the block may influence outsiders to be more mannerly. Proprietors or members of the corner establishment may also be persuaded to participate in block improvements.

Examples

The 2500 block of Hope Street is a narrow street of row houses, each with a stoop. The stoop and surrounding sidewalk form an extension of the house, while the street itself is a pathway, a common meeting place, and a

playground. Hope Street is in North Philadelphia. The gardens, curbs, sidewalks, street trees, and street surfaces are new. In 1984, this block was like many others in the neighborhood, with half of the house lots abandoned and collecting trash. In 1985, residents of Hope Street cleaned up the vacant lots on their block, installed chain-link fences and planted gardens. For improving this previously vacant property, they were able to buy the lots from the city for the cost of the paperwork involved in processing them, a total of about \$40, and the street received new curbs and sidewalks.

Hope Street is now a block of houses and gardens. Some of the lots have vegetable gardens, others have a play area, swimming pool, or picnic table. Murals have been painted on the blank walls overlooking some gardens. Although the gardens provide new outdoor space for individual families, they have not replaced the activity and life on the street. Instead, they are open and connected to the street, adding new dimensions to the possibilities of both public and private life.

See *Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development* and "This Garden is a Town" for more details about Hope Street.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Rowhouses with Porches

This block type consists of rowhouses with porches raised a few steps above the sidewalk. The houses typically border a narrow one-way street, with parking on one side and a lane for traffic on the other. There are no front yards and only small back yards or garages. The porch is a place to play and to sit and talk. It provides a place of refuge and shelter as well as a prospect that is open to the daily life of the street. Even when the porches are very small, they allow a person to remove themselves from the activity of the street while still being able to watch.

In West Philadelphia, this block type occurs mostly on intermediate streets, primarily in Mill Creek, Belmont, and Manutta. Entire neighborhoods are composed of rowhouses with porches, sometimes with tiny yards in front. In fact, these two block types--rowhouses with porches and rowhouses with tiny front yards, individually or in combination, comprise the majority of blocks north of Market Street and in the Cobbs Creek neighborhood.

There are a number of variations that influence opportunities for improvement on this type of block. Sometimes vacant lots occur within the block or at the corner. Such blocks are found throughout West Philadelphia, but especially in the Belmont, Manutta, and Mill Creek neighborhoods. In some cases, only one side of the street has houses, while the other side is vacant or occupied by the a commercial or institutional building. In other cases, the street is bent or angled. Such blocks are usually located adjacent to angled commercial streets like Lancaster and Haverford Avenues. Sometimes a store, church, or apartment building may occupy the corner of the block,

insulating the houses from the intersection. Other blocks have smaller streets intersecting at mid-block, which can separate the block and increase traffic.

Improvements to the block

The combination of raised porches and the intimate scale of the street offer both opportunities and limitations to block improvements. On the one hand, a few small additions, such as street tree and planters on the sidewalk or hanging baskets on the porches can make an enormous difference to the appearance of the block. On the other hand, there is no front yard between the sidewalk and the porch in which to plant flowers or trees. Unless there is a vacant lot within the block, opportunities for improvement are limited to the porch, the stoop, and the street and sidewalk.

The Porch. Personal touches, such as window boxes, climbing vines, decorative house numbers, names of residents, or the display of objects significant to the resident all introduce a sense of identity to the street face of the house.

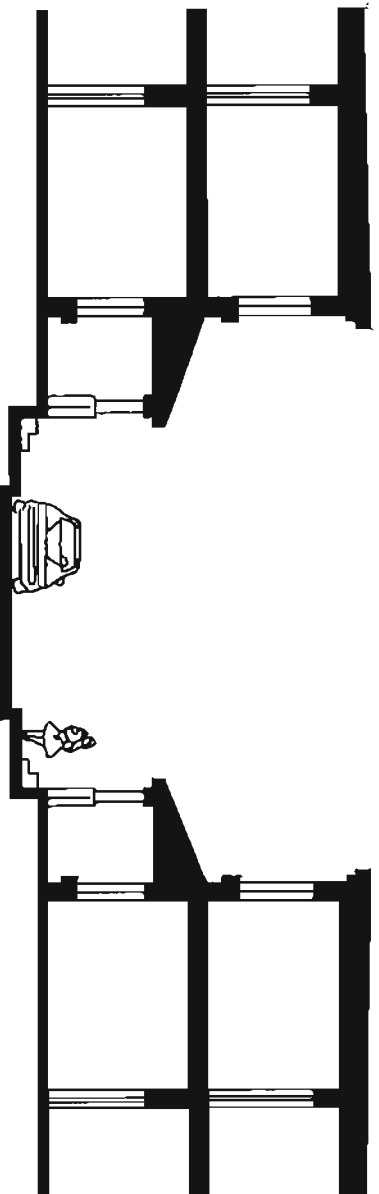
Window boxes anchored to the porch rail provide a place for growing flowers and herbs. Vines can be trained to grow up the porch columns that surround the front entrance, creating a gateway to the house and framing the doorway. When vines grow on a lattice along the front of the porch, they shade the inside of the porch and provide a cool, fragrant place to sit. A vine-covered lattice will also give the porch a greater sense of privacy. A planter along the base of the porch can provide sufficient soil for the vines.

Front Steps. The front steps are an intermediate spot between the porch and the sidewalk. They are a gateway between the public life of the street and the private life of the porch and house. Large planters filled with flowers can be set on the sidewalk bordering the front steps to define the entrance.

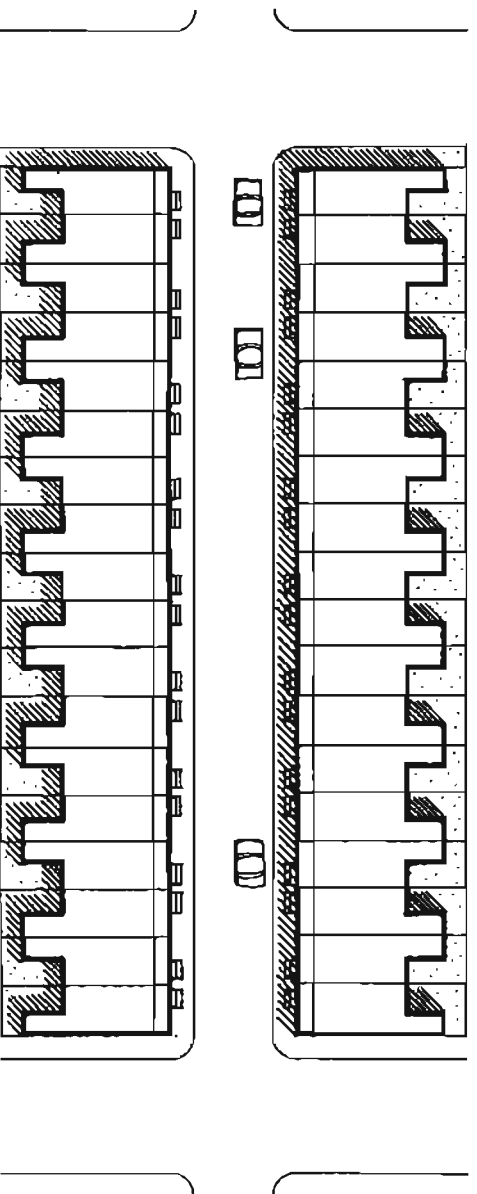
The sidewalk. Since the sidewalk is usually narrow there is limited opportunity for planting except in planters. If the sidewalk is replaced, the area between the steps of each house could be left unpaved and used as a planting bed.

There is sometimes a planting strip between sidewalk and curb. This affords an opportunity for residents to appropriate the strip in front of their house for a tiny garden.

If the sidewalk is wide enough for street trees, they will provide shade and shelter. On a narrow block, as the trees mature they may even create a canopy over the entire street. The small amount of soil available to street trees in this block type limits the species that can grow here, and great care must be taken to plant and maintain them properly. Leaving an area of open soil around the base of each tree will improve its health and can also be used as space to plant flowers. These planting areas may be more easily cared for if they are slightly raised from the sidewalk and protected by edges of brick and stone. If there are existing street trees, the sidewalk to either side of each tree can be removed to provide better soil conditions and a space for planting flowers or ground cover.



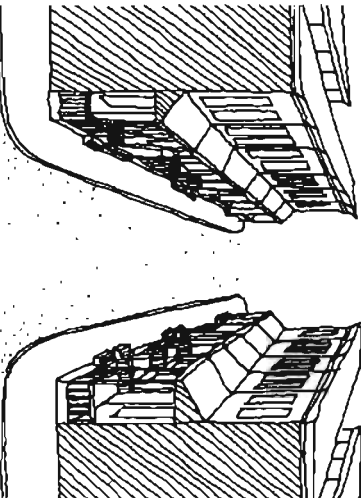
A BLOCK OF ROWHOUSES WITH PORCHES



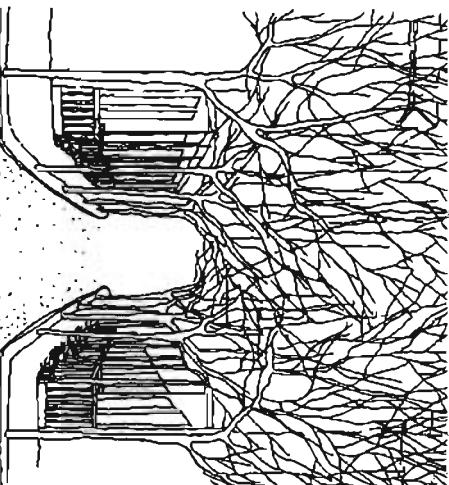
PLAN OF ROWHOUSES WITH PORCHES



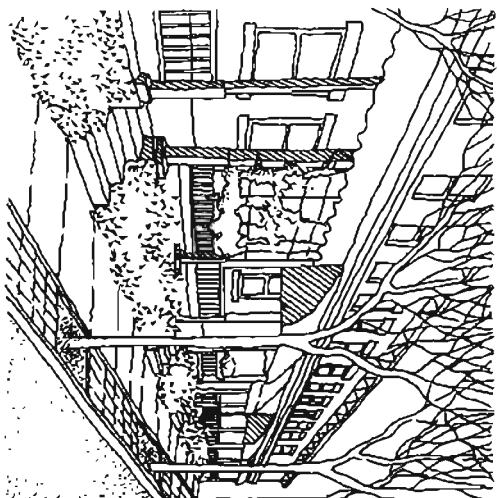
TYPES OF BLOCKS



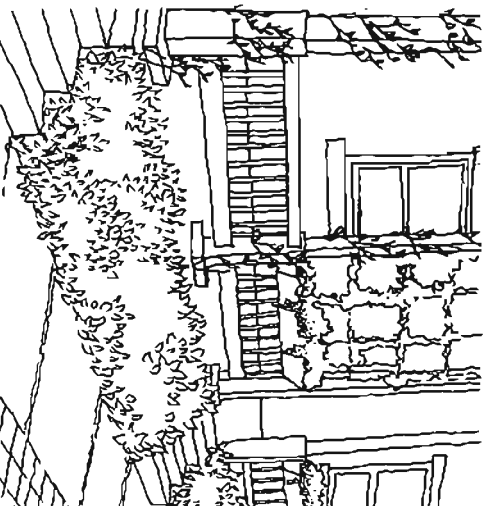
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1. Rowhouses with porches
2. Trees shade houses, sidewalks, and street, and form a gateway to the block.
3. Flowers, vines, and shrubs are planted in window boxes and the area between front steps. New street trees line the sidewalk; a strip between the trees is paved with bricks or cobbles to permit air and water to reach the roots.
4. The area between front steps is taken over for planting flowers, herbs, ground cover, or shrubs. Flowering vines climb the porch columns, framing the doorway, and other vines grow on a wire lattice, shading the porch.

The Street. Through-traffic is a great annoyance on narrow streets, and residents may wish to close off the street at times for a children's playblock or for a block party. Through-traffic can also be discouraged by installing road bumps at both ends of the block; there is, however, currently no program in Philadelphia for this type of improvement. Alternatively, the street could be narrowed at both ends by the addition of large, movable planters placed on the street next to the sidewalk. These must be large enough so that they would not be knocked over by cars. Other cities have experimented with these types of street improvements. (See *livable Streets* by Donald Appleyard for a description of many projects).

Vacant lots on the block. A corner vacant lot provides additional opportunity to create a gateway to the block, as well as providing a place to sit, meet, play, and garden. When a vacant lot occurs mid-block, it may be adopted or purchased by the owner of an adjacent house for a side garden, a parking lot, or an outdoor working area. It may also be developed by a group of neighbors to provide a garden or outdoor social space off the sidewalk. See *Vacant Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods* for suggestions and examples of new uses for vacant lots.

Other variations. On blocks where the corner is occupied by a store, church, or school, residents may be annoyed by outsiders using the street for parking and by increased littering. Improvements to the block may influence outsiders to be more mannerly. Proprietors or members of the corner establishment may also be persuaded to participate in block improvements.

Examples

In 1975, the 4800 block of Olive Street was chosen to become one of Philadelphia Green's Garden Blocks. Residents of the block began by cleaning up their street. Since then they have made improvements to the street, sidewalks, and porches. On one side of the block, porches abut a narrow sidewalk. Because there was little room for trees, residents have added awnings which shade the porch and the sidewalk and give an added sense of shelter. During summer days this provides a cool place to stop and talk.

On the north side of the street, where the houses have small, sloping front yards, Hawthorn trees were planted along the curb with new soil pits edged in Belgian-block pavers. Flowers, shrubs, and vegetables have also been planted in many of the front yards. On certain days, the narrow street is blocked off to create a play area for children. The street, sidewalk, porches, and yards are shared and enjoyed by all the residents of the block, in fact, they still get together twice a year to clean the block.

Paschall Street, in the West Shore neighborhood, is a dead-end street that is only one-block long. The distance between porch and street is generous, with a planting strip between curb and sidewalk that is several feet wide. Residents have appropriated this strip for tiny gardens. One garden has a bird bath surrounded by flowers; another is filled with roses; and still another has evergreen shrubs. All the gardens are different; together they give a sense of vitality to the block.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Rowhouses with Porches and Front Yards

This block type consists of attached rowhouses with a porch, separated from the sidewalk by a small front yard. In some cases, the yard is only a few feet wide; in others it may be slightly larger. The streets tend to be wider than the previous two block types, with parking on both sides and either one-way or two-way traffic. The small front yards form a boundary between the porch and sidewalk. They provide space for a garden but are rarely large enough to be used for sitting or playing. The porch is a place to play and to sit and talk. It provides a place of refuge and shelter as well as a prospect that is open to the daily life of the street. Even when the porches are very small, they allow a person to remove themselves from the activity of the street while still being able to watch.

In West Philadelphia, this block type occurs mainly on secondary streets in the Cobbs Creek and Mill Creek neighborhoods. Entire neighborhoods are composed of rowhouses with porches with small yards. Many of these blocks have paved alleys with parking in the year for automobiles. For the most part, these blocks were built after World War I. This block type, together with rowhouses with porches and no front yards, individually or in combination, comprise the majority of blocks north of Market Street and in the Cobbs Creek neighborhood.

There are a number of variations that influence the block and its opportunities for improvement. Sometimes a vacant lot occurs within the block or at the corner. Such blocks are found throughout West Philadelphia, but particularly north of Market Street in Mantua, Belmont, and Mill Creek. In some cases, only one

side of the street has houses, the other side consisting of vacant land, commercial establishments or institutions. Sometimes a store, church, or apartment building occupies the corner of the block, insulating it from the intersection. Other blocks are interrupted by the intersection of smaller streets mid-block, which tends to divide the block and increase the traffic on the street.

Improvements to the block

The added bit of land in front of the porch creates both opportunities and limitations to block improvements. On the one hand, the small front yard makes the porch more private and defines a boundary between sidewalk and house. It also provides a place to garden. On the other hand, the wider streets and increased distance between the front door and sidewalk reduce the social intimacy of the block. If the street has two lanes of parking and two or more lanes of traffic, there may be little communication between residents on opposite sides of the street. Unless there is a vacant lot within the block, opportunities for improvements are limited to the porch, yard, path, and sidewalk.

The Porch. Personal touches, such as window boxes, climbing vines, decorative house numbers, names of residents, or the display of objects significant to the resident all introduce a sense of identity to the street face of the house.

Window boxes anchored to the porch rail provide a place for growing flowers and herbs. Vines can be trained to grow up the porch columns that surround the front entrance, creating a gateway to the house and framing the doorway.

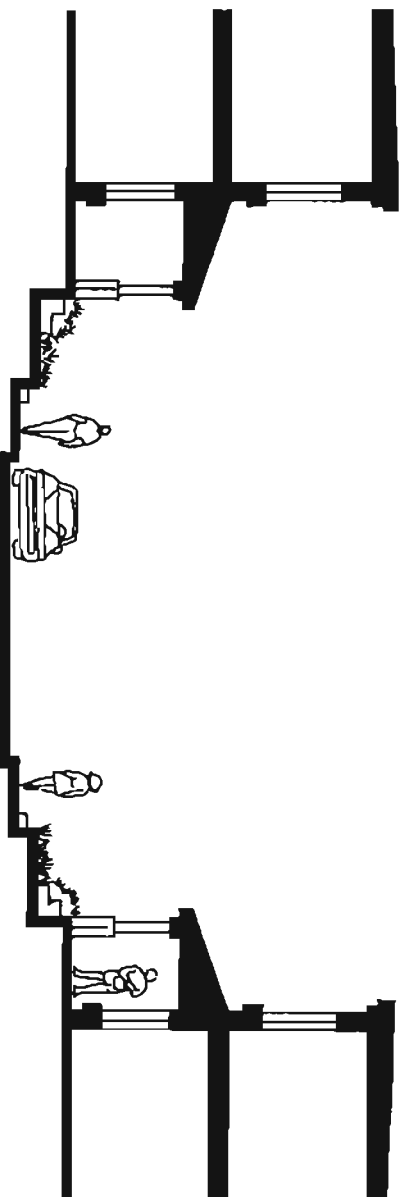
When vines grow on a lattice along the front of the porch, they shade the inside of the porch and provide a cool, fragrant place to sit. A vine-covered lattice will also give the porch a greater sense of privacy. A planter along the base of the porch can provide sufficient soil for the vines.

The Front yard. A front yard affords a larger garden space than planters and planting strips on the sidewalk. This means that a greater variety of plants can be grown, including shrubs and trees. Even a tiny yard may still be large enough for a small herb garden, vegetable garden, or wildflower garden, for the traditional roses and azaleas, and even for a small flowering tree. All of these form a lively border to the sidewalk.

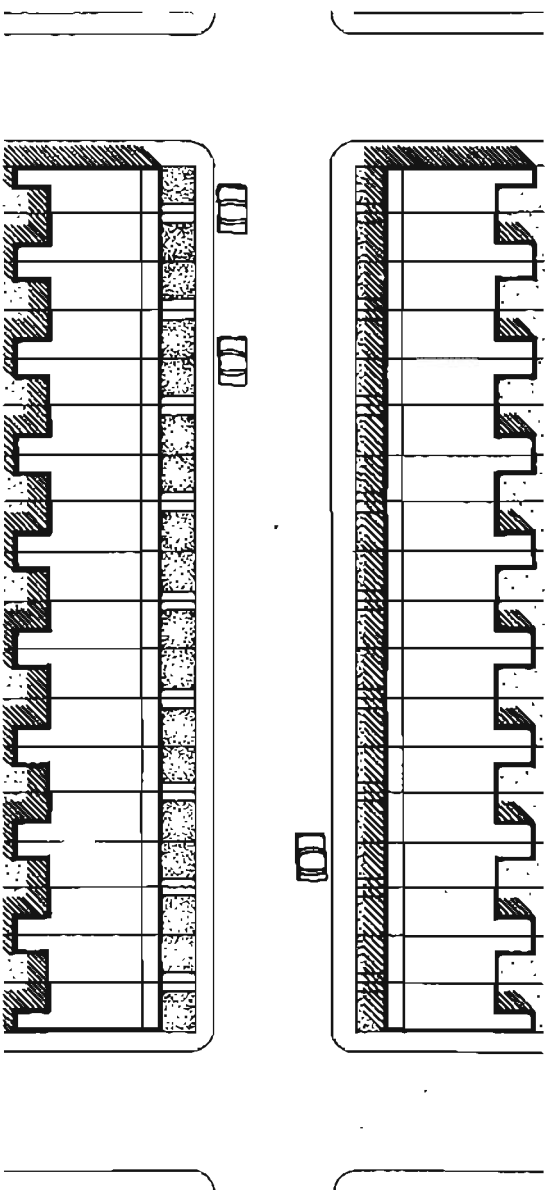
The character of the garden--whether it is formal or wild, whether flowers are planted or vegetables, or whether it is paved or just a grassy lawn--depends upon the personality and interests of the people who live in the house. The front yard provides an opportunity for residents to create a display that expresses who they are or to remain anonymous.

Small, understory trees, such as dogwood or cherry, planted in the yard, will shade the porch and the sidewalk. Flowering trees will also provide seasonal color. The front yard provides healthier conditions for tree growth than along the curb.

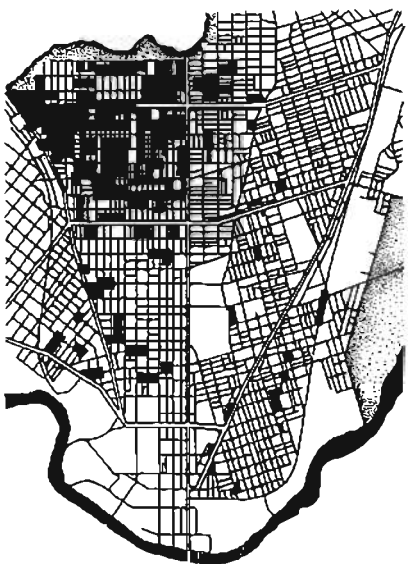
The Front Path. In small yards, the front path is like an extension of the front steps. It is mainly for passing through and provides little space for children to play or adults to sit. The transition from sidewalk to front path is often marked by a



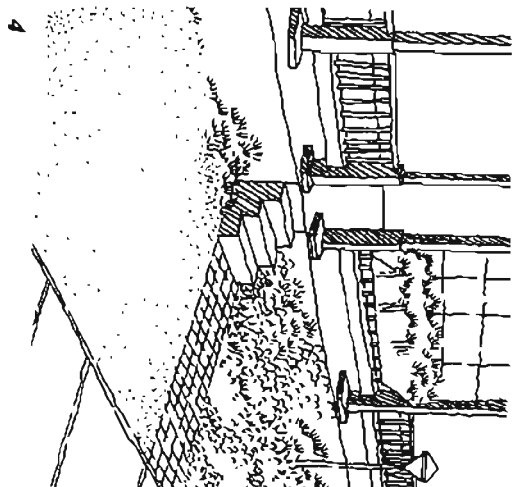
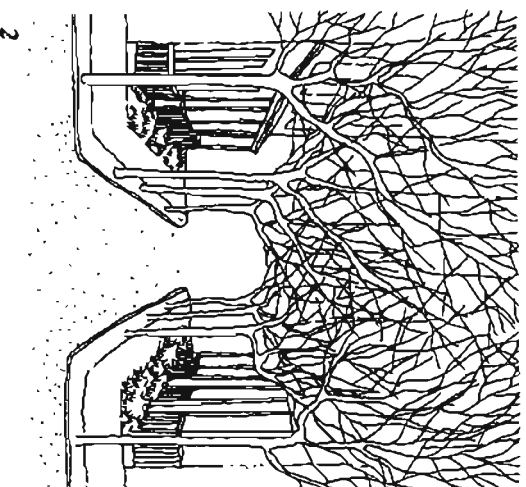
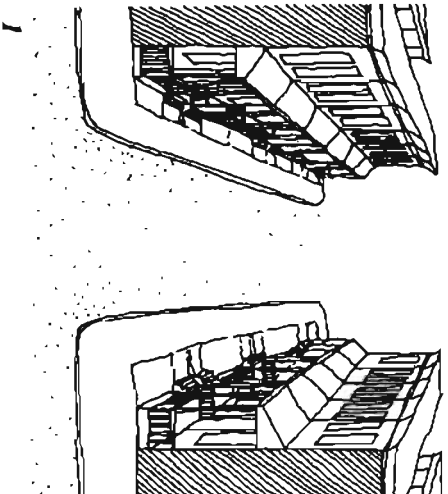
A BLOCK OF ROWHOUSES WITH PORCHES AND SMALL FRONT YARDS



PLAN OF ROWHOUSES WITH PORCHES AND SMALL FRONT YARDS



TYPES OF BLOCKS



1. Rowhouses with porches and small front yards
2. Trees shade houses, sidewalks, and street, and form a gateway to the block.
3. Gardens of flowers, ground-cover plants, or shrubs are planted in front yards. Identical lamps light the front path to each house. New street trees line the sidewalk; a strip between the trees is paved with bricks or cobbles to permit air and water to reach the roots.
4. The front yard is a tiny garden. The short path to the porch is paved with a different material than the sidewalk. Vines grow on a wire lattice, shading the porch.

Rowhouses with Porches and Front Yards

gate: a gate which must be opened, an open arbor to walk through, or hedges, flowers, or markers placed on either side of the path or steps. On many blocks in West Philadelphia, residents have installed identical lamps beside the front paths of most or all of the houses.

The Sidewalk. There is sometimes a planting strip between sidewalk and curb. This affords an opportunity for residents to appropriate the strip in front of their house for a tiny garden--an extension of the front yard.

If the sidewalk is wide enough for street trees, they will provide shade and shelter. On a narrow block, as the trees mature they may even create a canopy over the entire street. If the sidewalk is narrow, the species that can grow well will be limited, and great care must be taken to plant and maintain them properly. Leaving an area of open soil around the base of each tree will improve its health and can also be used as space to plant flowers. These planting areas may be more easily cared for if they are slightly raised from the sidewalk and protected by edges of brick and stone. If there are existing street trees, the sidewalk to either side of each tree can be removed to provide better soil conditions and a space for planting flowers or ground cover.

The Street. Through-traffic is a great annoyance on narrow streets, and residents may wish to close off the street at times for a children's playblock or for a block party. Through-traffic can also be discouraged by installing road bumps at both ends of the block; there is, however, currently no program in Philadelphia for this type of improvement. Alternatively, the street could be

narrowed at both ends by the addition of large, movable planters placed on the street next to the sidewalk. These must be large enough so that they would not be knocked over by cars. Other cities have experimented with these types of street improvements. (See *Liveable Streets* by Donald Appleyard for a description of many projects).

Vacant lots on the block. A corner vacant lot provides additional opportunity to create a gateway to the block, as well as providing a place to sit, meet, play, and garden. When a vacant lot occurs mid-block, it may be adopted or purchased by the owner of an adjacent house for a side garden, a parking lot, or an outdoor working area. It may also be developed by a group of neighbors to provide a garden or outdoor social space off the sidewalk. See *Vacant Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods* for suggestions and examples of new uses for vacant lots.

Other variations. On blocks where the corner is occupied by a store, church, or school, residents may be annoyed by outsiders using the street for parking and by increased littering. Improvements to the block may influence outsiders to be more mannerly. Proprietors or members of the corner establishment may also be persuaded to participate in block improvements.

Examples

Most of the Cobbs Creek area of West Philadelphia consists of rowhouses with porches, set back a few feet from the sidewalk by a small yard. The 5700 block of Hazel Street is a good example of how improvements to these small yards can give a unified identity to the block.

Low, clipped hedges form a border to most entry steps, and residents have installed identical lanterns in front of each house. There are also many examples of individual expression. Some yards have roses, others have dogwood trees; there are many different types of flowers and ground cover. Awnings and flower boxes, added to porches, also increase the sense of shelter, shade, and diversity along the sidewalk.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Rowhouses in Courtyards

This block type consists of attached rowhouses facing a courtyard space on at least two sides. The courtyard may open out onto the sidewalk, or it may be separated from the street and the sidewalk, enclosed within the interior of a group of houses. Like the front yard, the courtyard is private territory, belonging to the houses that bound it. When shielded from the street by buildings, the courtyard becomes more like a backyard. The street and sidewalk, in this case, tend to remain a public territory unclaimed by the residents, especially if the sides of houses, rather than the front doors, face the street (see "Sides of Houses" block type).

In West Philadelphia, this block type occurs mainly in the Mill Creek, Haddington, and University City neighborhoods where townhouses were built in the 1960s and 1970s on vacant lots. These usually occur on secondary streets and sometimes encompass several blocks. In West Philadelphia, most rowhouses in courtyards have plain, flat fronts, with neither porches nor stoops. Many courtyards are shared open space, claimed by none of the residents. Except for a central area of grass, other plants--generally shrubs--are confined to a strip along the building foundations or near the courtyard entrance. While the courtyard provides ample common space, there is often no private space, differentiated from the larger courtyard, in front of the house.

There are a few variations that influence the opportunities for improvement. Sometimes vacant lots occur across the street from the block. This situation occurs mainly in the Manua and Mill Creek neighborhoods.

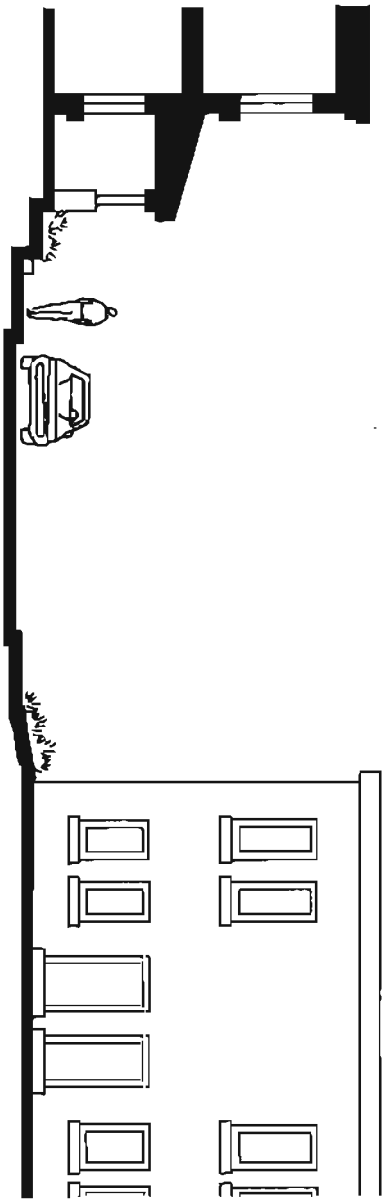
Improvements to the block

The enclosed, private nature of the courtyard space provides both opportunities and limitations for block improvements. On the one hand, the courtyard is like a front yard, and can accommodate gardens, meeting places, paths, and gateways. On the other hand, the courtyard may replace the sidewalk and the street as the locus of outdoor activity, leaving the public territory unclaimed by the residents. In this block type, opportunities for improvements center around the building face, the courtyard, the front path, and the sidewalk.

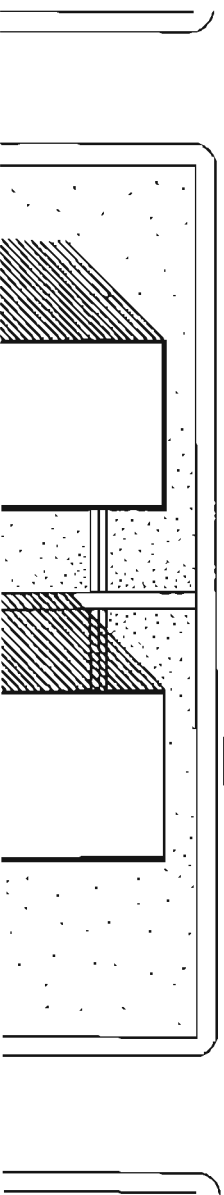
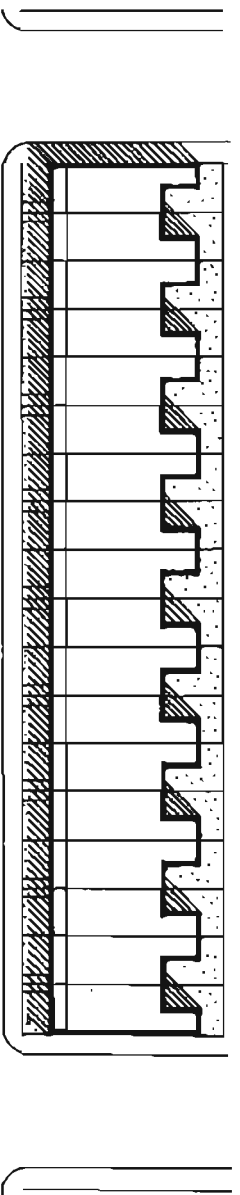
The Face of Buildings. Personal touches such as window boxes, climbing vines, decorative house numbers, names of residents, or display of objects significant to the resident could all introduce a sense of identity to the face of the house.

Window boxes provide a place for planting flowers or herbs. Vines can be trained around the front door, creating a gateway to the house and framing the doorstep. Vines on the building face provide other advantages; they shade the building walls from the sun so that the house will be cooler at night. Vine-covered walls also reflect and radiate less heat to the courtyard and sidewalk, making these outdoor areas more comfortable during both day and night.

The Courtyard. The courtyard is similar to a front yard, except that many people share the space. Most courtyards are underutilized. Depending upon the ages of residents and their interests, the courtyard may include a play area, meeting place, or even private gardens.



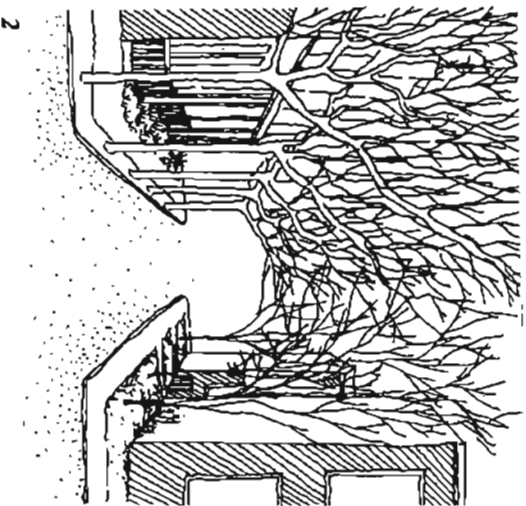
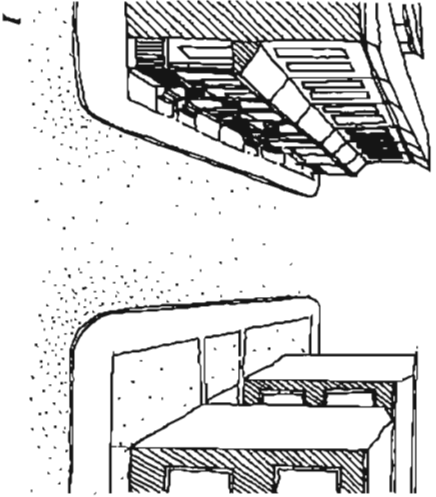
A BLOCK OF ROWHOUSES IN COURTYARDS



PLAN OF ROWHOUSES IN COURTYARDS



TYPES OF BLOCKS



1. Rowhouses in courtyards
2. Trees shade houses, sidewalks, and street, and form a gateway to the block.
3. Flowering trees shade the central area of the courtyard—a place to play, sit, and meet. A low fence borders the sidewalk, and two openings form gateways to the courtyard.
4. Window boxes and small front gardens provide a place for residents to plant flowers, vegetables, herbs, or shrubs.

A courtyard affords a larger garden space than planters and planting strips on the sidewalk. This means that a greater variety of plants can be grown, including shrubs and trees. Small, flowering trees will shade the courtyard and the adjacent sidewalk and provide seasonal color. The courtyard provides better conditions for tree growth than along the curb.

Many courtyards are unattractive and poorly maintained. Small gardens in front of each house might contribute to a more attractive, better maintained area. These would also provide an opportunity for residents to create a display that expresses who they are or to remain anonymous. Even a tiny planting area around the front door would be large enough for a small herb garden, vegetable garden, or wildflower garden, or for the traditional roses and azaleas. In some cases, the gardens could extend into the courtyard, reducing the common space to a path and sitting area in the center. Such individual gardens could enliven the courtyard and adjacent sidewalk.

The Front Path. In this block type, the front path functions much like a sidewalk; it is a path shared by many people, a meeting place, as well as a route from street to front door. The path therefore deserves special attention. It should be wide enough to be used as a play space by small children and should have places for sitting and talking, for watching people come and go.

A gateway that marks the place where a person steps from the sidewalk onto the front path and into the courtyard will reinforce the sense that the courtyard is a semi-private place. Such a gateway need not be a closed gate with fence; it

can be an open arbor through which one walks or hedges or flowers planted on either side of the entrance path.

The Sidewalk. If the sidewalk is wide enough for street trees, they will provide shade and shelter. On a narrow block, as the trees mature they may even create a canopy over the entire street. If the sidewalk is narrow, the species that can grow well will be limited, and great care must be taken to plant and maintain them properly. Leaving an area of open soil around the base of each tree will improve its health and can also be used as space to plant flowers. These planting areas may be more easily cared for if they are slightly raised from the sidewalk and protected by edges of brick and stone. If there are existing street trees, the sidewalk to either side of each tree can be removed to provide better soil conditions and a space for planting flowers or ground cover.

If the sides of houses face the street, rather than the front doors, flowers in planters may be placed at the entrance to the courtyard rather than all along the street.

Examples

New townhouses on a former vacant block on Market Street between 39th and 40th Streets were arranged to form interior courts that open out onto the street, each with a playlot and a place to meet. The front doors and windows of each house face the court and overlook the play area. Unlike many other redevelopment projects, there was an attempt here to differentiate the houses by varying the design of the building faces.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Houses with Front Yards

This block type is characterized by detached single or twin houses, with or without porches, separated from the sidewalk by a wide front yard. The houses often have bay windows, shutters, and decorative details. The houses border streets with parking on both sides and two lanes of traffic. The yard is large enough to include a lawn, trees, garden or place to play, and a front walk to the doorway. When the street is wide, particularly when there is heavy traffic, opposite sides of the block may be socially separate, since it is difficult for neighbors to speak to one another across the street.

In West Philadelphia, this block type occurs mainly west of 40th Street and south of Market Street on both primary and secondary streets. Entire neighborhoods, such as Spruce Hill and Garden City, are composed of detached houses with front yards. Scattered examples of this block type can be found within other neighborhoods of West Philadelphia, particularly in Powelton Village.

There are a number of variations that influence the opportunities for improvement on this type of block. Vacant lots rarely occur in this block type. Sometimes a store, church, or apartment building may occupy a corner of the block, insulating the houses from the intersection; these may also be located in the interior of the block, especially in the wider, primary streets. Other blocks are interrupted by the intersection of smaller streets mid-block, which tends to divide the block and increase the traffic on the street.

Improvements to the block

The wide sidewalks and larger yard space associated with this block type provide ample opportunities for block improvements. The front yard can accommodate a great variety of gardens and social spaces, and the wider sidewalks allow for larger street trees. On the other hand, large yards distance the private life of the houses from the public life of street and sidewalk, and these blocks may lose the quality of a territory shared by residents. The identity of the block as a shared territory may be reinforced by focusing improvements on the sidewalk and front border of the yard.

The Front Yard. The character of the front yard—whether it is formal or wild, whether flowers are planted or vegetables, or whether it is paved or just a grassy lawn—depends upon the interests of the people who live in the house. The front yard provides an opportunity for residents to create a display that expresses who they are or to remain anonymous.

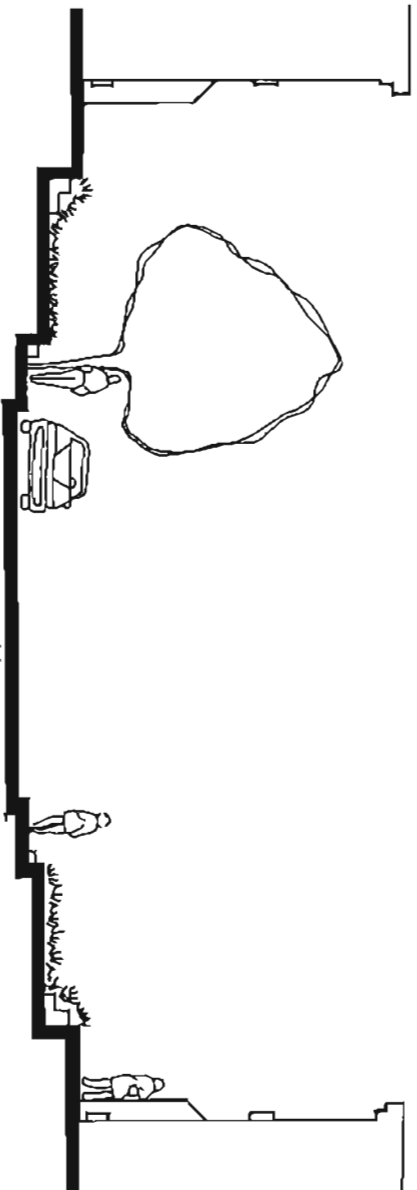
The front yard can serve many functions, depending upon the activities of the household and the character of the backyard. In many suburban neighborhoods, there are large backyards, and front yards are primarily used for display. In urban neighborhoods, however, backyards may be too tiny or too shady for some activities, and front yards may then assume many of the functions of a suburban backyard. The front yard can provide space for play, for gardening, for sitting and talking, for meeting neighbors; sometimes it is just a place to pass through on the way to the front door.

The way that residents use their front yard will determine many of its features. Families with young children may want a play space. A small patio can also be made in the front yard for sitting and talking with family, friends, or neighbors. Avid gardeners may wish to transform the yard into a garden.

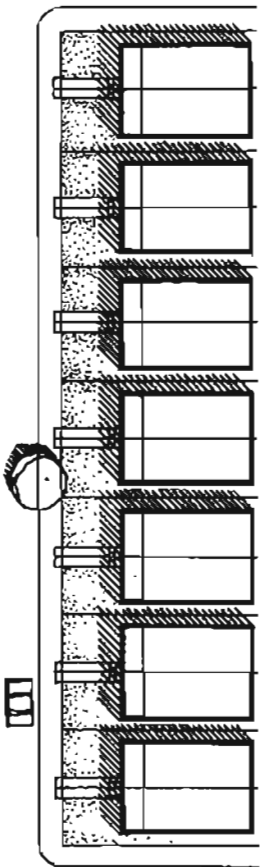
A front yard affords a larger garden space than planters and planting strips on the sidewalk. This means that a great variety of plants can be grown, including trees and traditional shrubs such as roses and azaleas, or even herbs, vegetables, and wildflowers. All of these can form a lively border to the sidewalk.

Most blocks of this type in West Philadelphia already have large trees in front yards and along the sidewalk. The shade provided by these trees creates a much more comfortable environment within house and yard and on street and sidewalk during hot summer days and nights than on blocks with no trees. But many of the street trees in West Philadelphia are diseased or dying, their life cut short by the stresses of survival along street and sidewalk. The front yard provides healthier conditions for tree growth than along the curb. Large, canopy trees, planted along the front edge of the yards have more root space and are less likely to interfere with vehicular traffic and utility wires than trees planted along the curb. Canopy trees will provide shade for both the house and the sidewalk. Small, flowering trees, such as dogwood or cherry, planted in the yard, will provide some shade, as well as seasonal color.

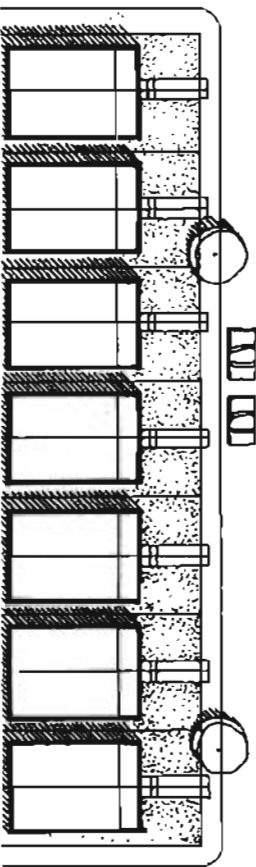
The Front Path. Since the yard is large, the front path may be relatively long. It can be both a place



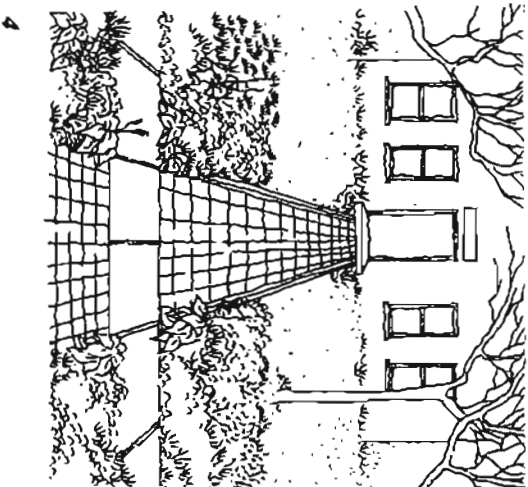
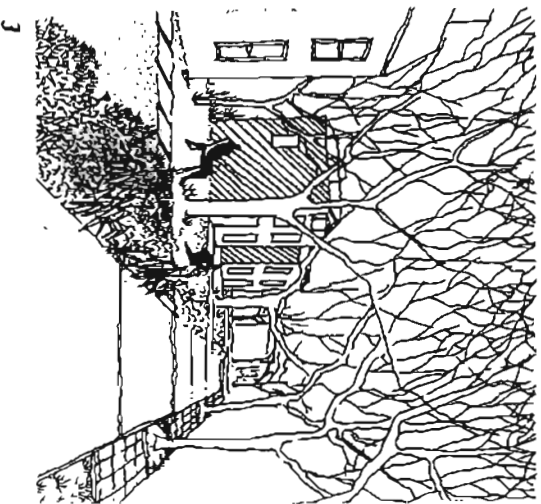
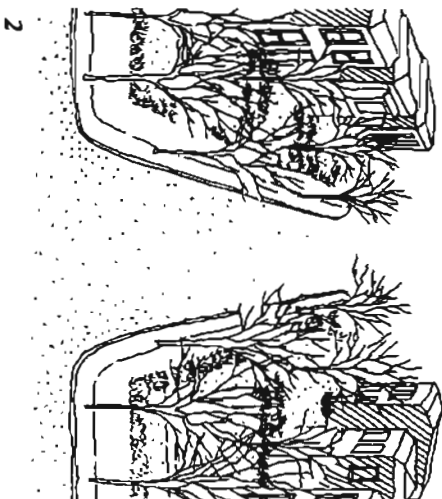
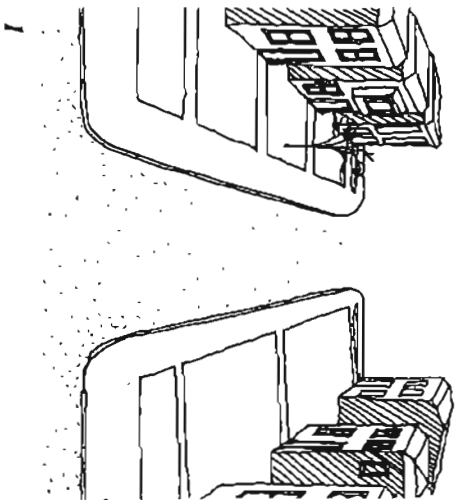
A BLOCK OF DETACHED HOUSES WITH FRONT YARDS



PLAN OF DETACHED HOUSES WITH FRONT YARDS



TYPES OF BLOCKS



1. Detached houses with front yards
2. Trees on sidewalks and front yards shade houses, sidewalks, and street, and form a gateway to the block.
3. Gardens of flowers, ground-cover plants, shrubs, and flowering trees are planted in front yards. A flowerbed forms a border along the sidewalk. New street trees line the sidewalk; a strip between the trees is paved with bricks or cobbles to permit air and water to reach the roots.
4. Flower beds on both sides of the path to the front door form a gateway to the yard. The pavement of the path is a different material from the sidewalk.

to pass along and a place to sit and enjoy the garden or for children to play.

The transition from sidewalk to front path is often marked by a gate: a gate which must be opened, an open arbor to walk through, or hedges, flowers, or markers placed on either side of the path or steps. This passage can also be marked by a change in pavement at the boundary of path and sidewalk: a border of brick or tile, for example.

The Sidewalk. The sidewalk is usually fairly wide and may even have a planting strip next to the curb. On blocks with large front yards, however, the sidewalk is rarely used as intensively for sitting, talking, and meeting as on blocks where the sidewalk affords the only outdoor space in front of the house. There may therefore be less motivation to devote energy and resources to improving the sidewalk space itself. A border of flowers, shrubs, or trees along the boundary between front yard and sidewalk, however, makes the sidewalk environment more pleasant for all.

On blocks where there are street trees, residents are frequently concerned about the health of the trees. Even when there is no planting strip, there is usually room for street trees. The wider streets and sidewalks also increase the variety of street tree that will grow well. Great care must still be taken in planting new trees and maintaining existing trees. In fact, this block type frequently has mature street trees which need pruning or replacement. Conditions for existing trees can be improved by enlarging the open soil area available to tree roots and protecting that area from trampling. The open soil surrounding the base of the street tree can also be used as a space to plant

flowers. They may be easily cared for if they are slightly raised from the sidewalk and protected by edges of brick or stone.

Vacant lots on the block. A corner vacant lot provides an opportunity to create a gateway to the block, as well as providing a place to sit, meet, play, and garden. When a vacant lot occurs mid-block, it may be adopted or purchased by the owner of an adjacent house for a larger yard. It may also be developed by a group of neighbors to provide a garden or outdoor social space off the sidewalk. See *Vacant Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods* for suggestions and examples of new uses for vacant lots.

Other variations. On blocks where the corner is occupied by a store, church, or school, residents may be annoyed by outsiders using the street for parking and by increased littering. Improvements to the block may influence outsiders to be more mannerly. Proprietors or members of the corner establishment may also be persuaded to participate in block improvements.

Examples

In Spring 1989, residents of Woodland Terrace in Spruce Hill decided to improve the condition of their existing street trees and also asked the city for additional trees. The block also applied to Philadelphia Green for assistance and became one of the first blockscapes as part of the West Philadelphia Landscape Plan and Greening Project. Workshops produced several design proposals, including improving the health of the street trees with enlarged tree pits and planting strips along the curb, adding gateways to the

block, and providing an arbor structure for the sidewalk.

The residents of the block decided on a proposal that increased the size of the tree pits and used this space for planting flowers, as well as the addition of the new street trees. Residents joined together one Saturday to install the work and provided a cook-out lunch for each other and the outside helpers from Philadelphia Green and Penn's Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Apartment Blocks

This block type consists of large apartment buildings, three or more stories high, with little or no yard space. The sidewalks tend to be wide, with the entrance on the same level as the sidewalk or a few steps above it. Although most apartment buildings about the sidewalk, some have a narrow strip of soil along the building, and some are entered through an interior courtyard that forms a gateway and common space for meeting. The street and sidewalk tend to remain a public territory unclaimed by residents.

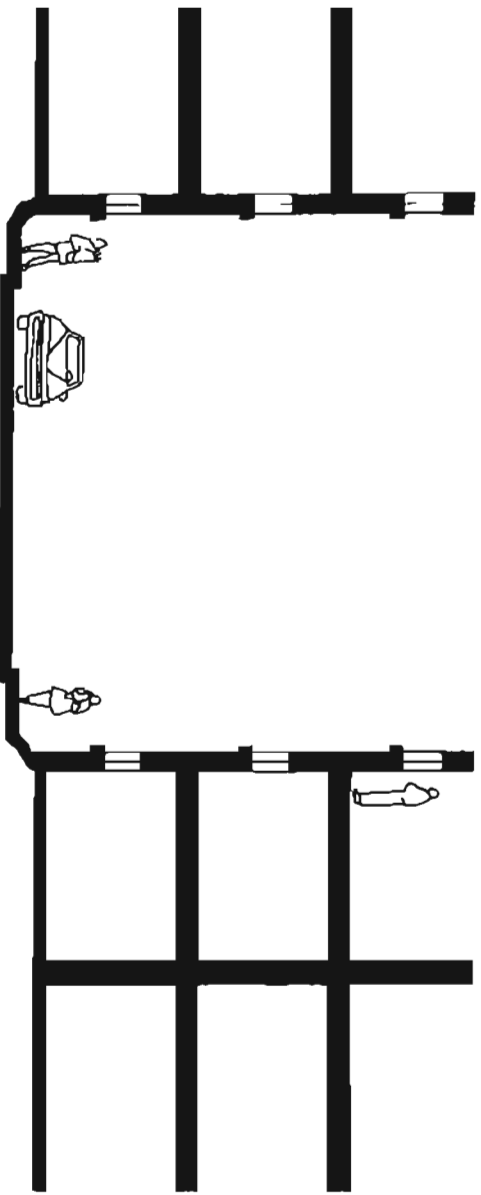
In West Philadelphia, this block type occurs mainly in the University City, Walnut Hill, Garden Court, Spruce Hill, and Powelton neighborhoods. Except in Walnut Hill, where they comprise a majority of the blocks, apartment blocks occur within neighborhoods composed largely of rowhouses or detached houses. The apartment blocks were generally built after 1910, either on previously undeveloped land or on the grounds of former large, single houses or estates. Apartment blocks are mainly located on wide, major streets, but they sometimes occur on smaller streets, except for the smallest one-way, two-lane streets.

There are a number of variations that influence the opportunities for improvement on this type of block. In some cases, only one side of the street has apartment buildings, with houses or businesses on the other. In other cases, a store, church, or school may occupy the corner of the block. If vacant lots occur, they are usually located on a corner where a store or business once stood. Vacant lots rarely occur on the interior of this type of block, since a single apartment building often takes up most of the block.

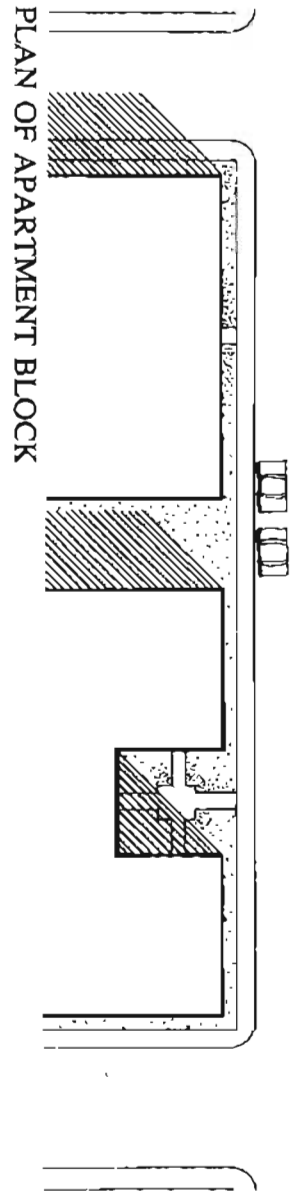
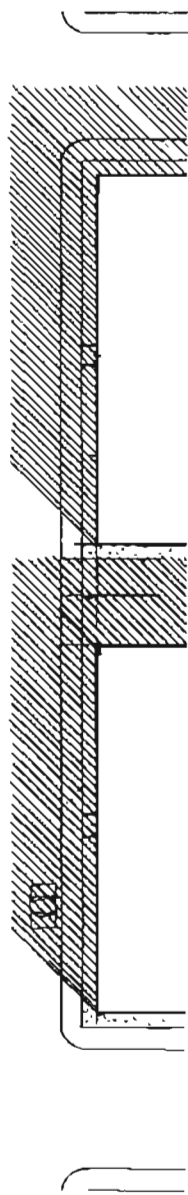
Improvements to the block

The tall building wall encloses the sidewalk and poses both opportunities and limitations to block improvements. On the one hand, a few small additions, such as street trees, window boxes on first floor windows, or planters filled with flowers can make an enormous difference to the appearance of the street. On the other hand, there is usually little space between the street and the apartment building in which to plant flowers, shrubs, or trees. On blocks where the street runs east to west, the sidewalks adjacent to buildings on the south side of the street will be shadier and colder than the sidewalk on the north side of the street, limiting the kinds of flowers or trees that will grow there. The sidewalks on the north side of the street will be sunnier, warmer, and drier. If apartment residents are transient, there are additional limitations. Short-term renters and absentee landlords feel little commitment to the block, and may not wish to install and maintain landscape improvements. Unless the apartment building has a courtyard, opportunities for improvement are limited to the building face and the sidewalk.

The Faces of Buildings. Window boxes provide a place for planting flowers and herbs when there is no yard, and flowers in planters on balconies add color in unexpected places. Vines can be trained to surround the front entrance, creating a gateway to the apartment building. When vines are grown on the building face, they shade the outer walls from the sun so that the building will be cooler at night. Vine-covered walls also reflect and radiate less heat to the sidewalk, making it more comfortable during the day and the evening.



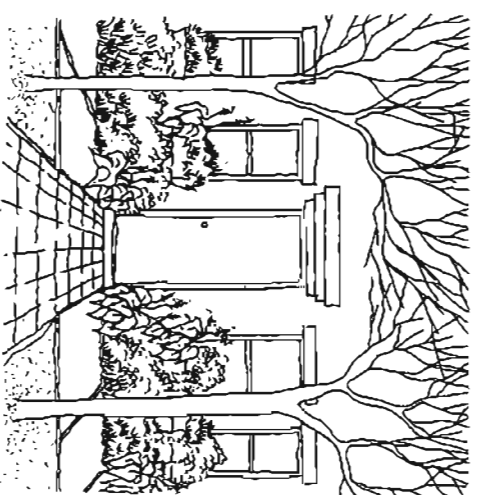
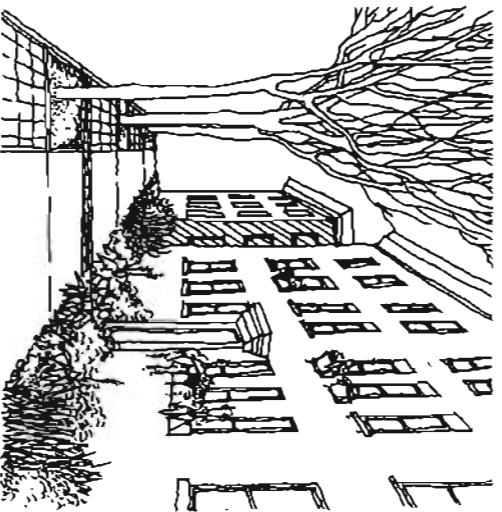
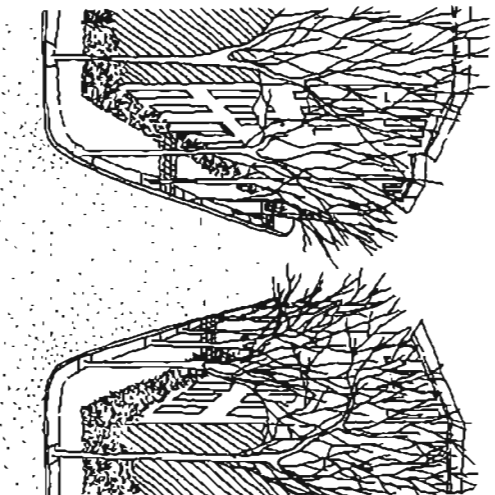
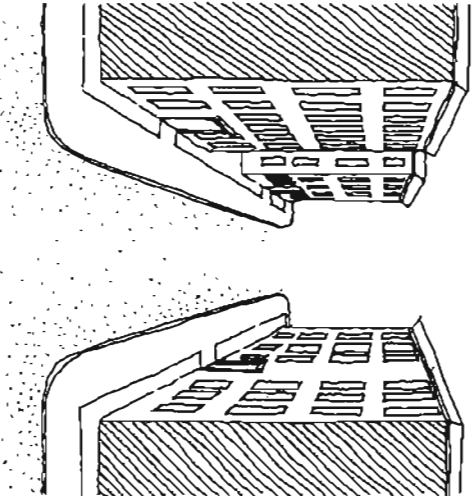
A BLOCK OF APARTMENT BUILDINGS



PLAN OF APARTMENT BLOCK



TYPES OF BLOCKS



1. A block of apartment buildings

2. Trees shade buildings, sidewalks, and street, and form a gateway to the block.

3. New street trees line the sidewalk; a strip between the trees is paved with bricks or cobbles to permit air and water to reach the roots.

4. The short path from the curb to the front door is paved with a different material than the sidewalk. Flowers and shrubs are planted in a linear garden between sidewalk and building; these frame the front door, forming a gateway.

A narrow planter along the base of the building will provide sufficient soil for vines.

The Courtyard. The courtyard is similar to a front yard, except that many people share the space. Depending upon the residents' ages and interests, the courtyard may include a play area and sitting or meeting place.

A courtyard affords a larger garden space than planters and planting strips along the sidewalk. This means that a greater variety of plants can be grown under healthier conditions, including shrubs and trees. Small, flowering trees will shade the courtyard and the adjacent sidewalk and provide seasonal color.

The Front Path. In this block type, the front path functions much like a sidewalk; it is a path shared by many people, a meeting place, as well as a route from street to front door. The path therefore deserves special attention. It should be wide enough to be used as a play space by small children and should have places for sitting and talking, for watching people come and go.

A gateway marking the place where a person steps from the sidewalk onto the front path and into the courtyard will reinforce the sense that the courtyard is a semi-private place. Such a gateway need not be a closed gate with fence; it can be an open arbor or hedges or flowers planted on either side of the path.

The Sidewalk. On some blocks the sidewalk is narrow, and there is no space for planting flowers or shrubs except in planters or in a narrow strip of soil along the building.

If the sidewalk is wide enough for street trees, they will provide shade and shelter. The amount of soil available to street trees in this block type will determine the type of trees that can grow there, and care must be taken to plant and maintain them properly. An area of open soil surrounding the base of a tree will improve its health and can also be used as a space to plant flowers. Flowers are more easily cared for if they are slightly raised from the sidewalk and protected by edges of brick and stone. If there are street trees, the soil area around the base of the tree can be enlarged to provide better soil conditions and a space for planting flowers or ground cover.

Examples

A row of apartment buildings stands on one side of the 4500 block of Pine Street. The steps leading to each entrance are flanked by raised planters filled with flowers. These planters provide a colorful and fragrant border between the building and the sidewalk. The raised planters protect the flowers from being stepped on and provide better control of soil mixture and depth. The planters also form a gateway to the entrances, with different flowers grown in front of each entrance. This block was mentioned by several residents from surrounding blocks as one of their favorites.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Large, Free-Standing Buildings

This blocktype is consists of large residential, institutional, or commercial buildings set back from the sidewalk and surrounded by an open area of lawn or pavement, sometimes with trees, shrubs, or flower beds. The buildings are often more than several stories high, and may be high-rise towers. This block type is usually located on a wide, primary or secondary street with parking along both curbs. The street and sidewalk tend to remain a public territory unclaimed by the residents.

This blocktype occurs throughout West Philadelphia, and includes schools, hospitals, dormitories, and public housing projects. Many of these large, free-standing buildings stand out in contrast to surrounding blocks of rowhouses. Many are the product of urban renewal programs of the 1960s, where blocks of older rowhouses and detached houses were torn down and replaced by institutions and public housing.

The most important variable that influences the opportunities for improvement on this type of block is the use of the buildings. This report focuses upon improvements to residential neighborhoods and the institutions and commercial districts that serve their immediate needs. Large corporations and institutions like universities and hospitals serve constituencies outside the immediate neighborhood, and are beyond the scope of this report. (For a review of the roles corporations and institutions can play in West Philadelphia, see *The West Philadelphia Landscape Plan: A Framework for Action and Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development.*)

There are other variables that influence opportunities for improvements to this type of block. Sometimes there is vacant land on the block. Such blocks are found in the Mill Creek and Mantua neighborhoods, where apartment towers replaced the previous neighborhood fabric of rowhouses. Other blocks have smaller streets that intersect them at mid-block.

Improvements to the block

Suggestions for improvements are limited here to residential and institutional uses, like public housing and schools, which serve the immediate neighborhood. The open space surrounding free-standing buildings provides both opportunities and limitations to block improvements. On the one hand, the large, open area affords space for large-scale planting and activities, such as community gardens, sitting areas shade by trees, or play areas. On the other hand, if it is not used for such activities, the open space can appear left-over and uncared for, belonging to no one. Opportunities for improvement lie in the open space around the building, the courtyard, entrance path, and the sidewalk.

Open Space Around Buildings. The open space around the buildings is similar to a front yard, except that many people share the space. This space is usually underutilized. In the case of public housing, the open area generally is claimed by none of the residents. While the common space is ample, there is often no private outdoor space differentiated from the common area around the building. Except for lawn, other plants--usually shrubs--are confined to a strip along the building foundations or near the building entrance.

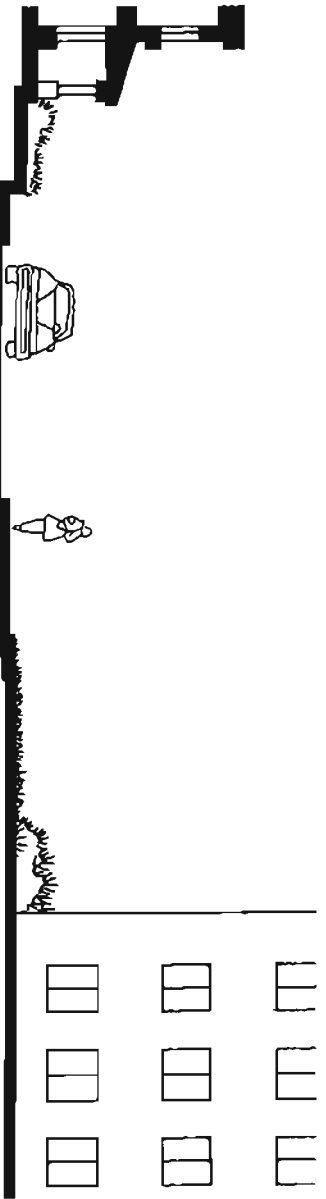
Depending upon the residents' ages and interests, the open land around apartment towers and elderly housing projects should incorporate play areas, meeting places, and even a community garden. These semi-private places, if well-used, will animate the open space so that it begins to take on the qualities of a front yard.

Community gardens afford an opportunity for residents to have their own outdoor space to grow flower, vegetables, or herbs. Such individual gardens also enliven the adjacent sidewalk and make the space seem less anonymous. Community gardens provide a reason for people to spend time outside, and the gardeners are effective monitors of comings and goings around the building.

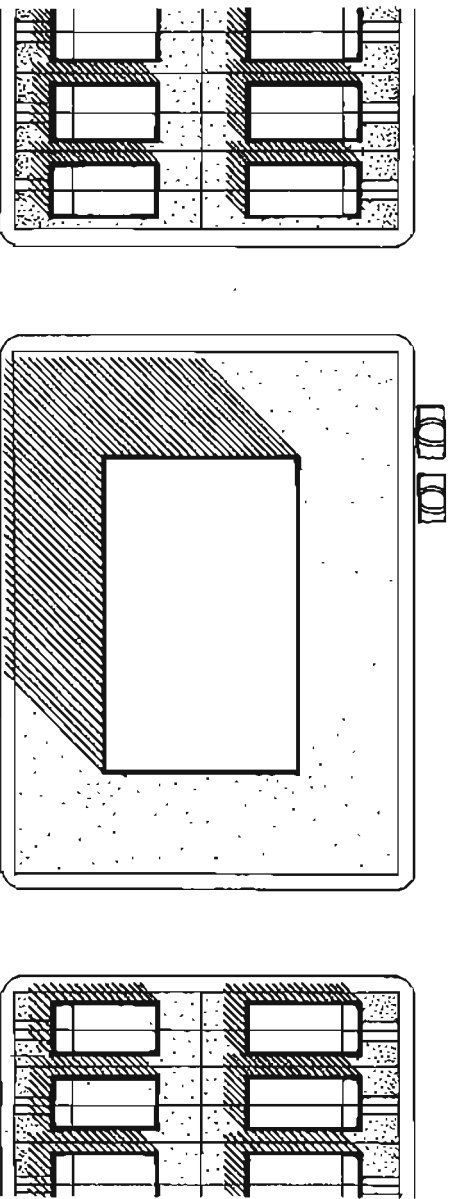
The open area affords a large garden space, and a great variety of plants can be grown, including shrubs and trees. Small, flowering trees will shade the ground and the adjacent sidewalk and provide seasonal color. Conditions for tree growth are better in the open area than along the curb. These trees will have more root space and be healthier and less likely to interfere with overhead wires and vehicular traffic. A garden, fence, or row of trees along the boundary of the open space will also mark the boundary between the public sidewalk and the semi-private yard. The addition of gateways will also help make the open space seem more like a territory that belongs to someone. Such gateways need not be a closed gate with fence; they can be open arbors or trees planted on either side of the entrance path.

The Front Path. In this block type, the front path functions much like a sidewalk; it is a path shared by many people, a meeting place, as well as a

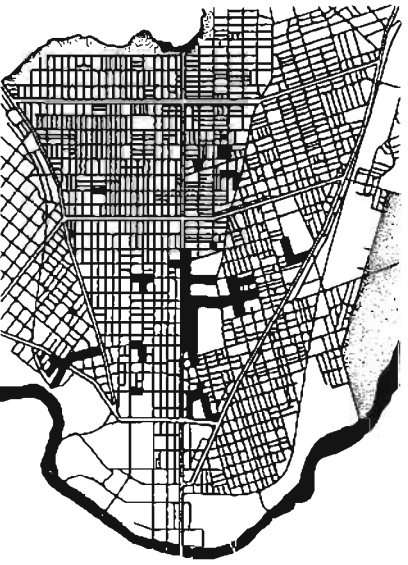
Large, Free-standing Buildings



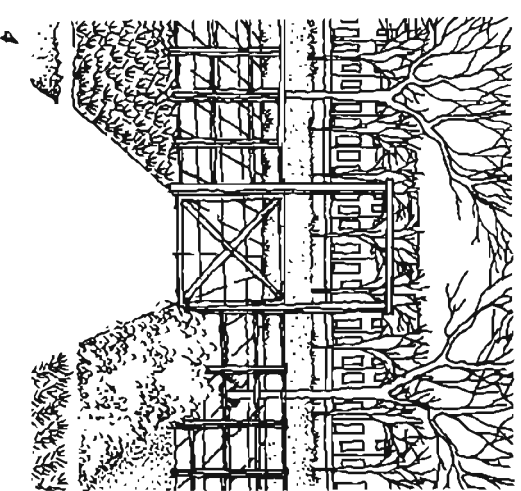
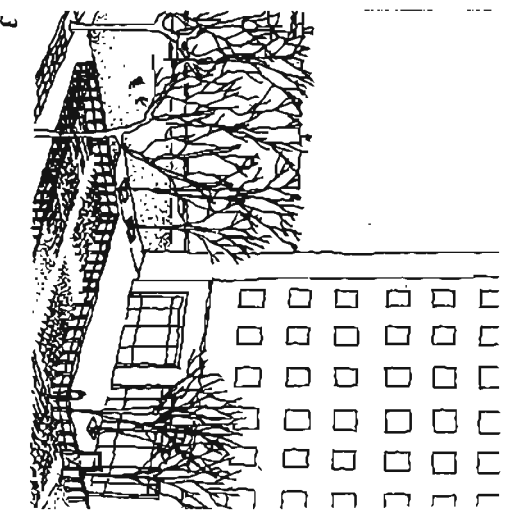
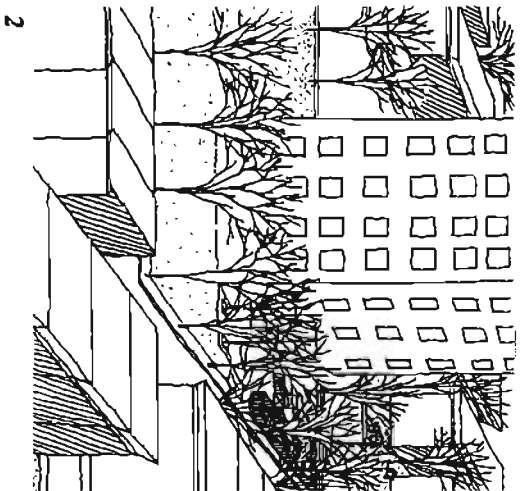
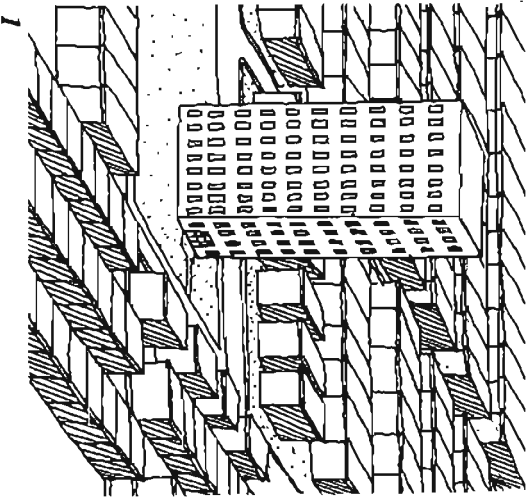
A BLOCK WITH A LARGE, FREE-STANDING BUILDING



PLAN OF BLOCK WITH A LARGE FREE-STANDING BUILDING



TYPES OF BLOCKS



1. A large, free-standing building within a neighborhood of rowhouses
2. New street trees line the sidewalk on both sides of the street and help bridge the gulf between the low rowhouses on one side of the street and tall building surrounded by land on the other.
3. Community gardens provide residents with private outdoor space for gardening and define a common space next to the building entrance for play, sitting, meeting friends, and watching people come and go. Children use an area of grass on the other side of the building as a playground.
4. Looking from the community garden through a gate to the entrance path and grassy play area.

Large, Free-Standing Buildings

route from street to front door. The path therefore deserves special attention. It should be wide enough to be used as a play space by small children and should have places for sitting and talking, for watching people come and go. Where the front path broadens at the entrance to the building, there is an opportunity to create a small sitting area or courtyard.

The Sidewalk. The sidewalk is usually wide and provides an opportunity for planting along both the edge of the open space and the curb. Street trees will provide valuable shade and shelter, especially for the sidewalk. A greater variety of trees will be able to grow along wider streets. In addition to providing shade, street trees on both sides of the street will also help bridge the gulf between the scale of the large buildings and smaller houses.

Examples

In Boston, tenants of several public housing projects have transformed the previously unclaimed, open area around the buildings into shared common space of meeting areas and community gardens. Several public housing projects of this type have also been renovated with new, low-rise houses, gardens, and play areas built in the open space around the older high-rise buildings.

The West Philadelphia Improvement Corps (WEPIC) has accomplished landscape improvements to several schools, including the Bryant Elementary School, the Turner Middle School, and West Philadelphia High School. The first project, in the summer of 1985, involved the employment of a corps of students who painted

murals and planted trees in the Bryant schoolyard. Two years later, a work crew of students installed garden beds and cleaned the school grounds at the Turner Middle School. For more details about these programs, see *Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development*.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Rows of Stores

This blocktype consists of attached rows of stores and businesses, sometimes with apartments on the upper floors. The buildings about the sidewalk and have no front yard, while the rear of the stores usually borders a small alley which contains loading areas or parking. The businesses border heavily travelled streets with parking on both sides. The sidewalk is important to the image of and access to the adjoining stores.

This blocktype occurs throughout West Philadelphia. Major commercial streets like Market and Lancaster cut across many neighborhoods and connect West Philadelphia to Center City and the suburbs. Chestnut and Walnut Streets and Baltimore and Haverford Avenues have blocks with houses, apartment blocks, and free-standing buildings, as well as rows of stores. 52nd and 60th streets are important north-south streets with blocks of stores. Most commercial districts in West Philadelphia are composed of local businesses which serve the neighborhoods around them.

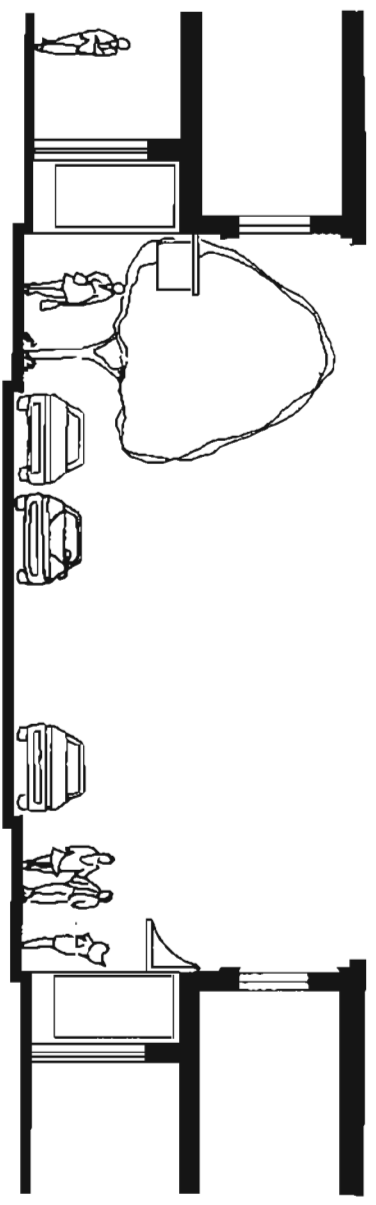
There are a number of variations that influence the opportunities for improvement on this type of block. Sometimes vacant lots or abandoned buildings occur within the block or at the corners. Such blocks can be found throughout West Philadelphia. In some cases, gas stations, fast food restaurants, or convenience stores that are set back from the street, usually with parking in front, have been built on previously vacant corners. This opens up the corner and means that cars passing in and out of the parking area cross the sidewalk.

Improvements to the Block.

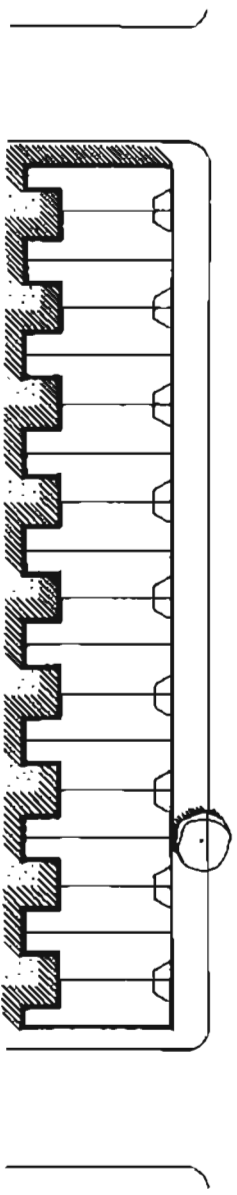
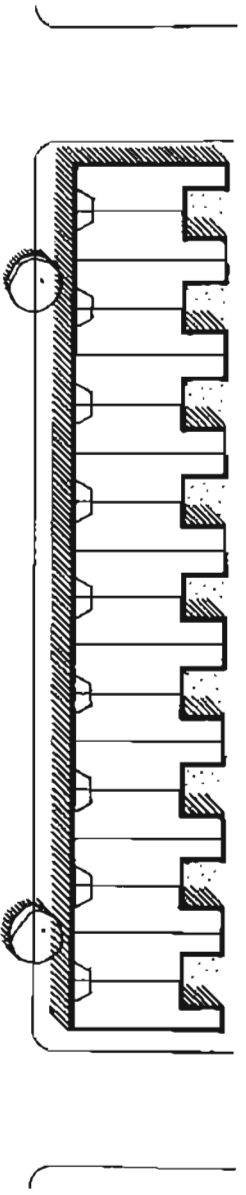
The highly public nature of the commercial street provides both opportunities and limitations for block improvements. On the one hand, small additions such as street trees, awnings, planters, and sidewalk paving can make an enormous difference to the appearance of the block. On the other hand, the street is more crowded and collects more trash and traffic fumes. The need for parking spaces along the curb and for visibility of storefronts limits what can be planted at the curb edge. Unless there is a vacant lot on the block, opportunities for improvement are limited to the faces of buildings and the sidewalk.

The Faces of Buildings. The function of the storefront is to convey what kind of merchandise or services are offered and to welcome and entice prospective clientele. It is important to most owners that their business be clearly visible from the street and sidewalk. Awnings, entrance lights, signs, and flower-filled window boxes or planters call attention to the storefront and can be an attractive addition to the block. Awnings also provide refuge for shoppers from sun and rain. Well-lit storefronts may enhance a sense of security and lead to increased use of the commercial street in the evening.

The Sidewalk. The sidewalk is the common area of the block; it connects and unifies the rows of stores on a commercial street. The more pleasant the sidewalk area is to be, the more likely that shoppers will be attracted to the block and linger there. If the sidewalks are wide enough, public benches can allow people to rest and to watch the comings and goings on the block.



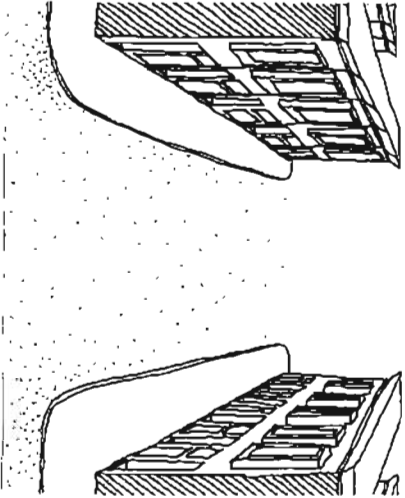
A BLOCK OF ROWS OF STORES



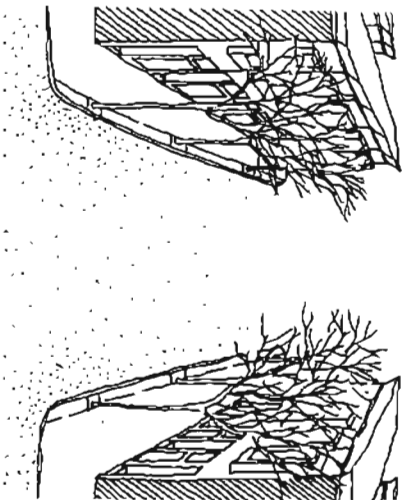
PLAN OF ROWS OF STORES



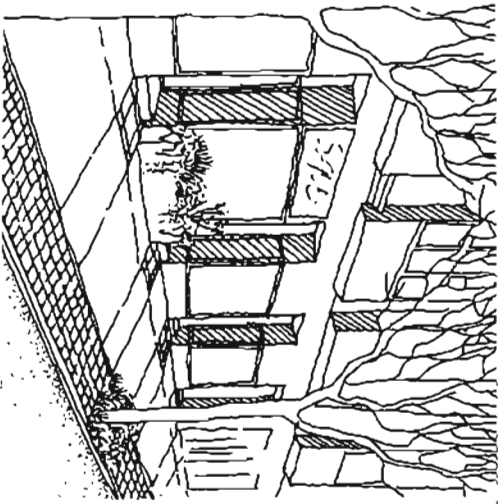
TYPES OF BLOCKS



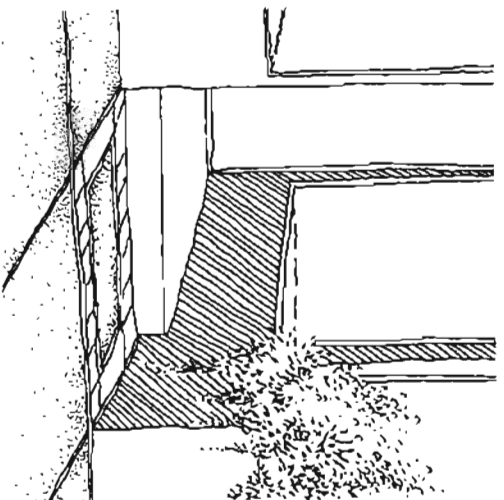
1



2



3



4

1. A block of stores

2. Trees shade storefronts, sidewalks, and street, and form a gateway to the block.

3. Planters beneath the store windows are filled with flowers. New street trees line the sidewalk, but are spaced further apart than on residential blocks in order to increase visibility of storefronts. A strip between the trees is paved with bricks or cobbles to permit air and water to reach the roots.

4. Flowers in planters and tiles in pavement mark the entry to stores.

Street trees provide shade and shelter, these should be high-branching trees that will not obscure the storefronts. The large number of people and cars and the small amount of soil available to trees limits the species that can grow here, and great care must be taken to plant and maintain them properly. Open soil around the base of the trees, protected by tree grates or slightly raised from the sidewalk, will provide better growing conditions and can also be planted with flowers. If there are existing street trees, the sidewalk on either side of the trees can be removed to provide better soil conditions and a space for planting.

When there is not enough space for street trees or when the trees are newly planted and still quite small, large planters filled with flowers may be placed outside each store.

Vacant Lots on the Block. Unless it is cared for, a vacant lot contributes to a sense of decline on the commercial block. A vacant corner lot provides an opportunity to create a gateway to the block. Eventually, a plaza or new store may be built on the property. In the meantime, an interim use such as a parking lot that is available for occasional use for a farmer's market or flea market or a space for small carts that sell food will enhance the block. Another use that does not require expensive building construction is a garden center.

Examples

A row of buildings along the south side of the 3600 block of Lancaster Avenue were renovated as the Lancaster Mews between 1987

and 1989. Shops, restaurants, and a delicatessen occupy the first floor, with apartments on the upper two floors. New storefronts with large display windows provide views into the restaurants and shops and enliven the block. New lights and signs above each entrance are the similar, but each owner has installed a sign that reflects the character of their business. A four-foot wide brick band along the building and the curb echo the brick storefronts and mark the block as a special district. New street trees provide a boundary that separates people on the sidewalk from parking and traffic. This newly renovated block of stores is a gateway to the Powelton neighborhood.

The Germantown Avenue business district in Chestnut Hill was not always so successful as it is today. In the 1950s, this was a retail district in trouble, with many vacant stores and vacant lots. Local merchants banded together and formed the Chestnut Hill Development Group. The CHDG transformed vacant lots into a series of parking lots and installed special street lights and flower-filled planters. Over the years, these early plans have evolved and expanded into other collaborative projects, all of which have contributed to making this eleven-block retail district a thriving commercial center. For more details about this project, see *Models of Success: Landscape Improvements and Community Development*.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Sides of Houses

This block type consists of the sides of houses whose front doors face an adjacent street. Typically, these are short blocks with no building entrances along the sidewalk. With the doorway removed from the street, there is little interaction between the inside of the house and the sidewalk, except through windows. There are usually no sideyards bordering the sidewalk, particularly when the adjacent buildings are rowhouses, but there are often backyards separated from the sidewalk by a fence or wall. Although no houses face the street, some blocks contain garages with doors on the street.

This block type is typically found throughout West Philadelphia, on two-way, secondary streets with parking on both sides. There is sometimes an alley leading from the street to parking behind the houses.

There are several variations that influence the opportunities for improvement on this type of block. Sometimes a vacant lot occurs on one or more corners. Since the long side of the vacant lot borders the sidewalk on this block type, a vacant lot takes up a large portion of the block. In other cases, the sides of a store, church, or apartment building may occupy the corner of the block.

Improvements to the block

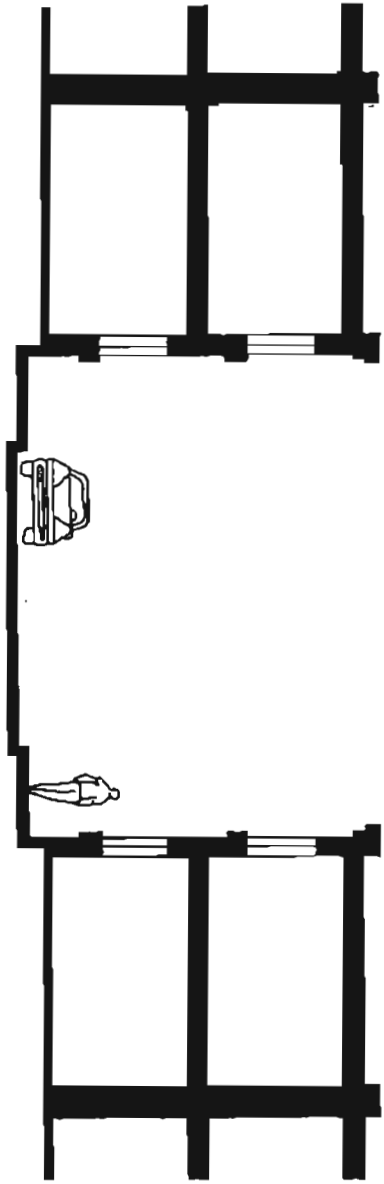
Most people feel a stronger commitment to the fronts of their houses than to the sides, especially if the side of the house abuts the sidewalk. People who live in corner houses tend to identify with the neighbors with whom they share the front sidewalk and street, rather than

with the houses that are behind them or across the street. Attention is therefore rarely given to this type of block; time and money are spent around the corner in the front yard instead.

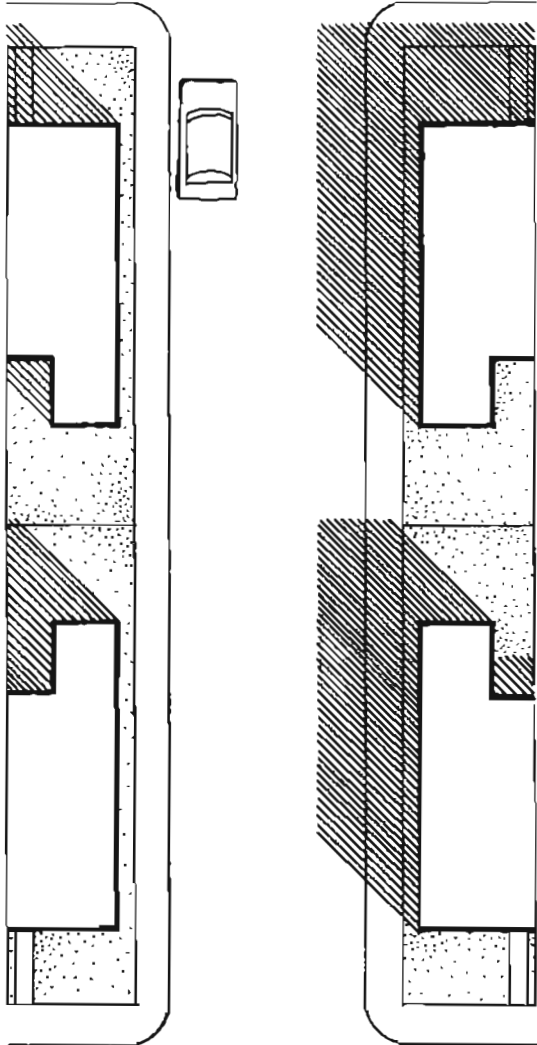
Yet small additions, such as street trees, window boxes, or planters can make an enormous difference to the appearance of the street on this type of block. Unless there is a vacant lot on the block, opportunities for improvement are limited to the sides of the houses, the backyard, and the sidewalk.

The Faces of Buildings. Window boxes, climbing vines, and planters introduce an identity to what may otherwise be a rather anonymous block. Window boxes provide space for planting flowers and herbs when there is no side yard. Vines grown on the building face shade the outer walls so that the house will be cooler at night. Vine-covered walls also reflect and radiate less heat to the sidewalk, making it more comfortable during both day and evening. A narrow planter along the base of the house will provide sufficient soil for vines and flowers. A raised planter also protects plants from pedestrian traffic along the sidewalk.

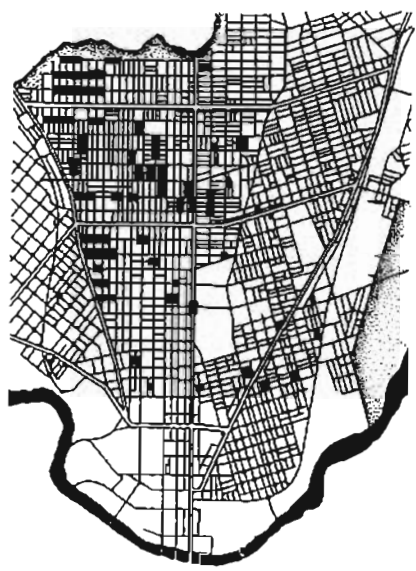
The Sidewalk. If the sidewalk is wide enough for street trees, they will provide shade and shelter. The amount of soil available to street trees will determine the types of trees that can grow here, and care must be taken to plant and maintain them properly. An area of open soil surrounding the base of a tree will improve its health and can also be used as space for planting flowers. Flowers are more easily cared for if they are slightly raised from the sidewalk and protected by edges of brick and stone. If there are existing street trees, the



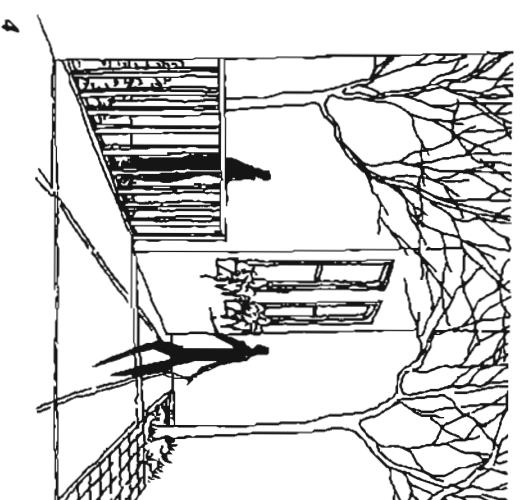
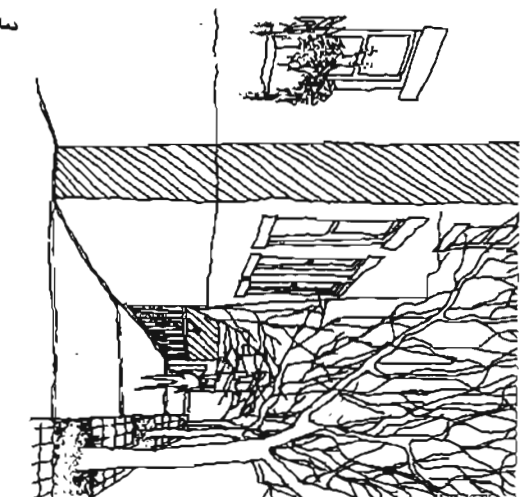
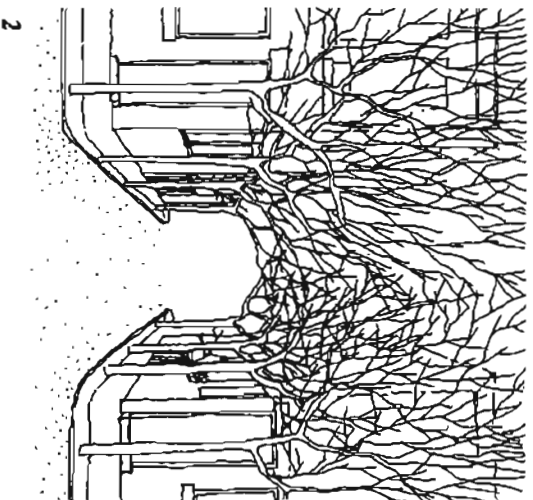
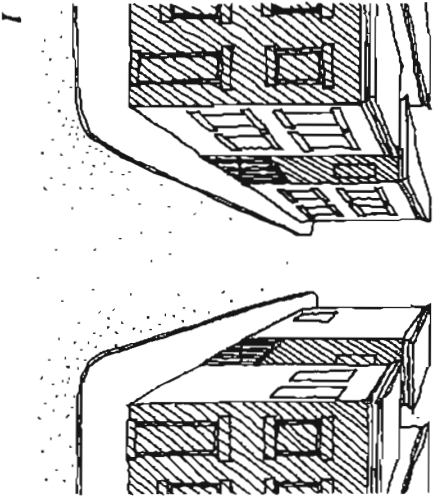
A BLOCK OF SIDES OF HOUSES



PLAN OF SIDES OF HOUSES



TYPES OF BLOCKS



1. A block of sides of houses
2. Trees shade buildings, sidewalks, and street.
3. Flowers are planted in window boxes. Trees in the backyard garden shade the sidewalk. New street trees line the sidewalk: a strip between the trees is paved with bricks or cobbles to permit air and water to reach the roots.
4. The backyard garden provides a place from which to watch the street and talk to people walking by.

sidewalk on each side of the tree can be removed to provide better soil conditions and a space for planting flowers or ground cover.

The Backyard. The backyard is adjacent to the sidewalk in this block type and provides an additional area for planting that can be appreciated by people walking or driving by. Trees planted in the backyard provide shade for the sidewalk. The backyard is a healthier and more protected place for trees than along the curb.

Vacant lots on the block. A vacant corner lot provides a place to sit, meet, play, or garden. A vacant corner may be adopted or purchased by the owner of the adjacent house for a side garden. It may also be developed by a group of neighbors to provide a garden or off-street parking. (See *Vacant Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods.*)

Other variations. On blocks where the corner is occupied by a store, church, or school, residents may be annoyed by outsiders using the street for parking and by increased littering. Improvements to the block may influence outsiders to be more mannerly. Proprietors or members of the corner establishment may also be persuaded to participate in block improvements.

Examples

The owners of Lancaster Mews at 36th Street and Lancaster Avenue, described earlier in "Rows of Stores," built a parking lot behind the stores along 36th Street. Trees and grass planted between the sidewalk and parking area provide an attractive edge to the street.

On 47th Street, between Spruce and Pine, the sides of a house and an apartment building face a tennis court and community garden across the street. Residents from surrounding blocks, supported by the West Philadelphia Landscape Plan and Greening Project, planted flowers in the narrow strip between tennis court and sidewalk and built the community garden. These now serve as an attractive gateway to the Garden Court neighborhood.

TYPES OF BLOCKS

Mixture of Types

This block type consists of a combination of different types on a single block; often the buildings are of different heights and setbacks and contain a mixture of uses. The street and sidewalk usually provide the main unifying features.

This block type occurs throughout West Philadelphia, mainly on primary and secondary streets in the transition zone between two neighborhoods or at the edge of a commercial district.

There are several variations that influence the opportunities for improvement on this type of block. In some cases, the street is bent or angled. Such blocks are found adjacent to angled commercial streets like Lancaster Avenue and Baltimore Avenue; often businesses will occupy one end and houses the other. When a smaller street intersects at mid-block, it further separates the block. Sometimes vacant lots occur within the block or at the corners.

Improvements to the block

For more detailed recommendations, refer to the sections of this report on the different types that occur on a specific block.

The faces of buildings. Window boxes, climbing vines, decorative house numbers, names of residents, or the display of objects significant to the resident all introduce a sense of identity to the street face of the house. Window boxes provide a place for planting flowers or herbs when there is no yard.

Vines shade building walls so that the house will be cooler at night. Vine-covered walls also reflect and radiate less heat to the street, making it more comfortable during both day and evening. A narrow planter along the base of the building provides sufficient soil for vines. Such plantings around an institution or commercial establishment will help make these buildings seem less obtrusive on a residential block.

The Porch. Window boxes anchored to the porch rail provide a place for growing flowers and herbs. Vines can be trained to grow up the porch columns that surround the front entrance, creating a gateway to the house and framing the doorway. When vines grow on a lattice along the front of the porch, they shade the inside of the porch and provide a cool, fragrant place to sit. A vine-covered lattice will also give the porch a greater sense of privacy. A planter along the base of the porch provides sufficient soil for the vines.

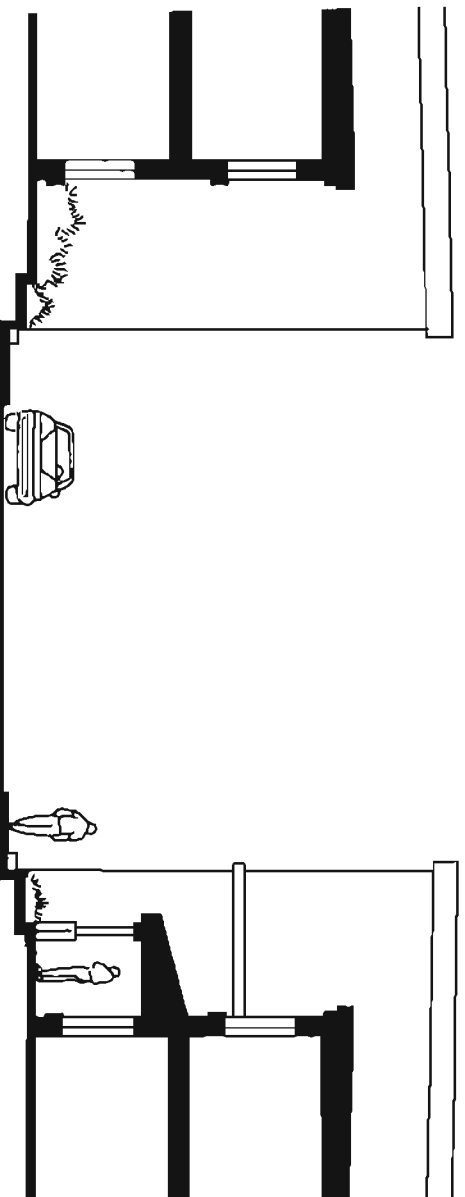
The Front Yard. The front yard can serve many functions, depending upon the activities of the household. It can provide space for play, for gardening, for sitting and talking, for meeting neighbors; sometimes it is just a place to pass through on the way to the front door.

A front yard affords a larger garden space than planters and planting strips on the sidewalk. This means that a great variety of plants can be grown, including trees and shrubs, or even herbs, vegetables, and wildflowers. Canopy trees provide shade for both the house and the sidewalk. Small, flowering trees planted in the yard, will provide some shade, as well as seasonal color.

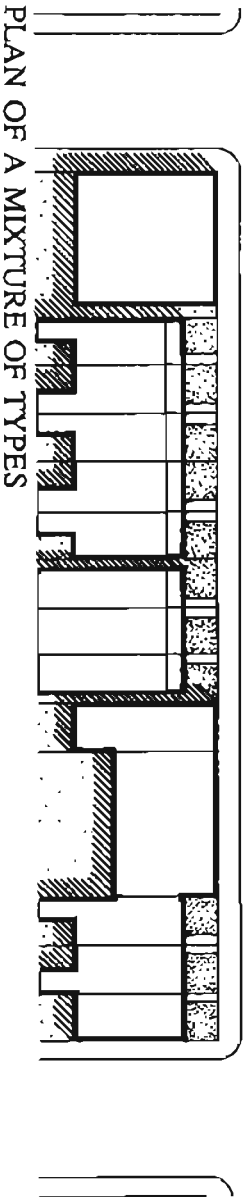
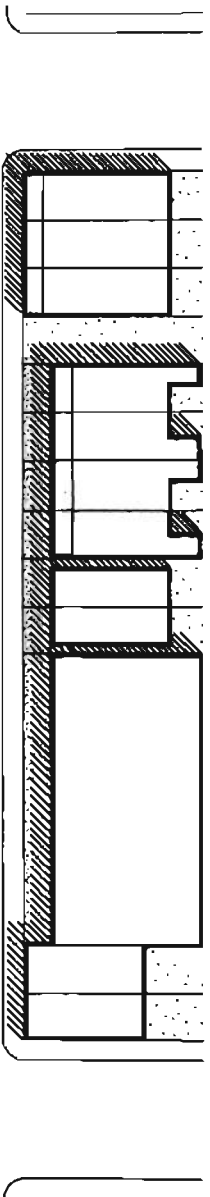
The sidewalk. The sidewalk provides an opportunity to give unity to a block that may otherwise seem a jumble of disparate buildings and uses. If the sidewalk is wide enough for street trees, they will provide shade and shelter. On a narrow block, as the trees mature they may even create a canopy over the entire street. If the sidewalk is narrow, the species that can grow well are limited, and care must be taken to plant and maintain them properly. Leaving an area of open soil around the base of each tree will improve its health and can also be used as space to plant flowers. These planting areas may be more easily cared for if they are slightly raised from the sidewalk and protected by edges of brick or stone.

Examples

The biggest problem in achieving successful improvements to this type of block is gaining agreement and participation among residents. The following experience provides a cautionary example. In the summer of 1989, the West Philadelphia Landscape Plan and Greening Project worked with residents of the 4500 block of Spruce Street to develop a blockscape. This block is a mixture of types, including houses with yards, apartment buildings, and a condominium complex whose rear faces Spruce Street. Residents who owned their houses and residents of the apartments and condominiums felt different levels of responsibility to the public space of sidewalk and curb. No agreement could be reached for improvements to the public space that gave unity to the differing conditions on the block and satisfied each resident's particular situation. In the end, too few residents were committed to the project, and nothing was installed.



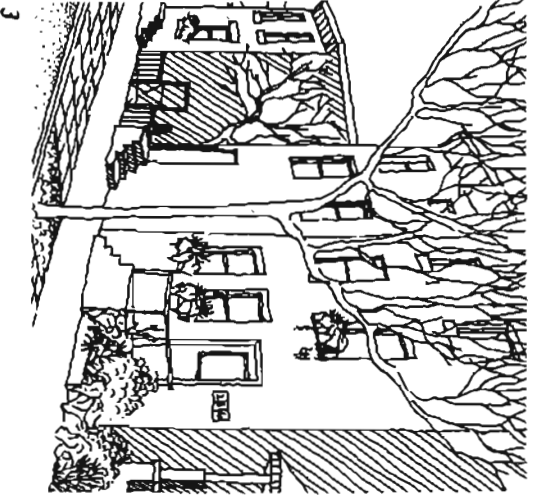
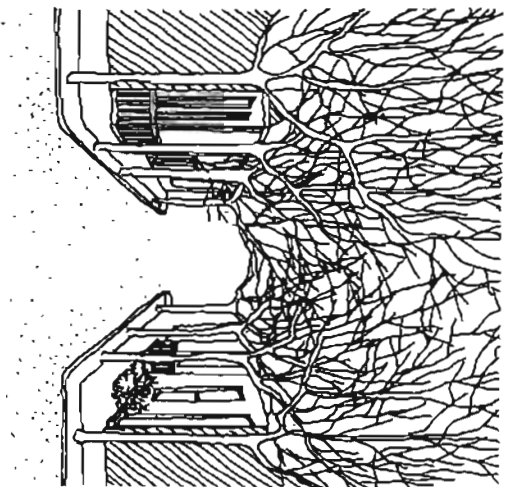
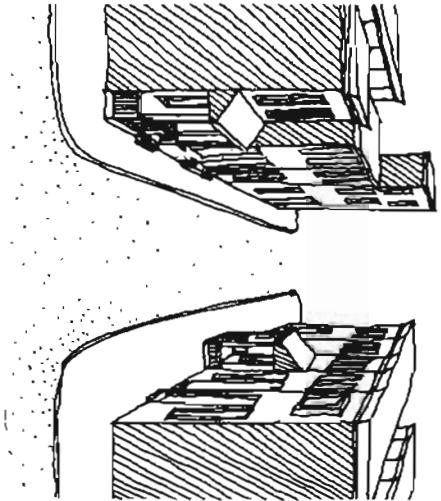
A BLOCK WITH A MIXTURE OF BUILDING TYPES



PLAN OF A MIXTURE OF TYPES



TYPES OF BLOCKS



1. A block with a mixture of building types and setbacks
2. Street trees on both sides of the street help unify the block.
3. Flowers and shrubs are planted in the area between sidewalk and buildings. New street trees line the sidewalk; a strip between the trees is paved with bricks or cobbles to permit air and water to reach the roots.
4. Flower-filled window box and planting bed border the front steps.

Variations

These variations that may occur in all block types and influence the opportunities and limitations for improvements to the block.

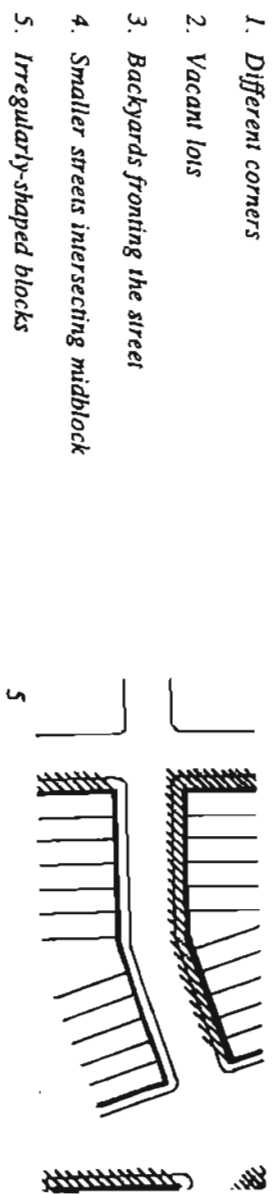
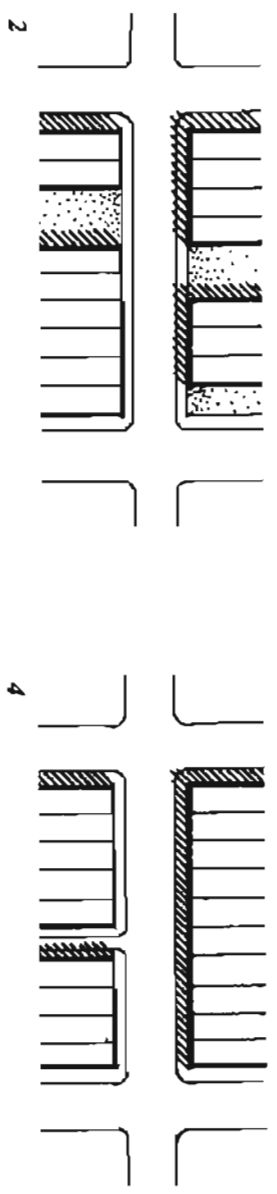
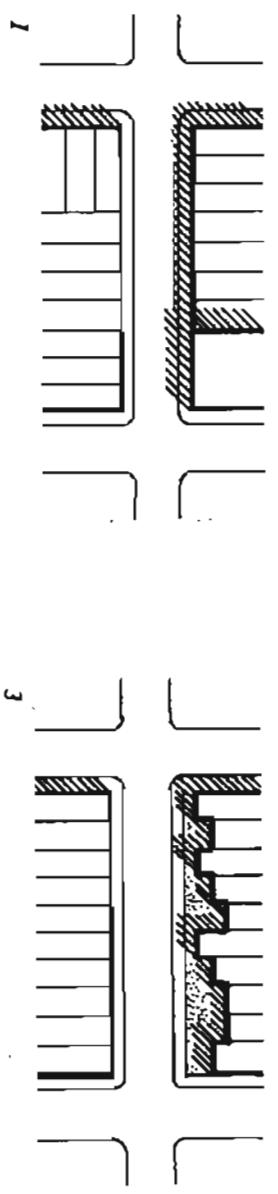
Different corners. Sometimes apartment buildings, churches, stores, or the sides of houses occupy the corner of a block. Such corners tend to insulate the block from the intersection.

Vacant lots. Sometimes there are vacant lots on the corner of the block or in its interior. These vacant lots afford an opportunity to develop new open space. (See *Vacant Land: A Resource for Reshaping Urban Neighborhoods*.)

Backyards fronting the street. Sometimes there are houses on one side of the street and backyards or garages on the other. This variation is found throughout West Philadelphia, typically on small alleys and narrow streets.

Smaller streets intersecting midblock. Some blocks are divided by small one-way streets or alleys. In many cases, this segments the block into two parts. The added corner, however, also joins the two perpendicular streets.

Irregularly-shaped blocks. Bent or angled streets and triangular intersections form blocks of irregular, distinctive shape. Such blocks provide variety within the rectilinear grid. The corners of such blocks may become a focal point for the larger neighborhood. These blocks are found primarily north of Market Street in the Belmont and Manua neighborhoods, and south of Baltimore Avenue.



1. Different corners

2. Vacant lots

3. Backyards fronting the street

4. Smaller streets intersecting midblock

5. Irregularly-shaped blocks

THE BLOCK AND THE CITY

How can communities be designed to meet basic human physical and social needs and to express the values and dreams of the people who live there? How can individuals shape the neighborhoods within which they live? What are the personal qualities, skills, and knowledge that someone needs to assert effective leadership in shaping his or her community, and how can these be developed? What are the respective roles of individual citizens and public agencies in shaping the city and how can the energy and knowledge of individuals be tapped? What is the role of the professional designer or planner in shaping the city? What role can landscape change play in addressing the social, economic, and environmental problems of the inner city?

The city may be viewed as a community, but it is really composed of many smaller communities, which are, in turn, composed of individual blocks. One cannot begin to answer the above questions without an understanding of both the block and the city as a whole. The block is probably the smallest unit of neighborhood, and in this lies its importance. It is here that an individual can most easily shape the neighborhood within which he or she lives.

The importance of small, successful projects at the scale of a block extends far beyond beautification and recreation. Such projects bring a group of neighbors together to articulate and achieve common goals. They provide tangible evidence of what can be accomplished by working together. They provide a model for children of the power of individuals to shape their own destiny. They also provide experience in working with a municipal bureaucracy to get things done. They

may even provide the momentum and the organization to tackle larger community development projects.

There is a limit to what individual residents of a block can accomplish without the help of public agencies or sponsoring organizations. Programs like The Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee are important for encouraging the efforts of residents, and such programs should be extended. Funds for public improvements should also be set aside specifically for blocks which take the initiative to shape their destiny. Cooperative programs between the city and nonprofit organizations such as Philadelphia Green extend the potential of what each could accomplish alone. Recent collaboration between Philadelphia Green and Licenses and Inspection is an example of such a collaboration.

The appropriate roles of individual citizens, public agencies, and private organizations depend on the nature of the block. On small side streets, neighbors are likely to know one another and therefore to be successful in joint activities. On blocks along major transportation routes or in blocks that are gateways to a larger neighborhood, however, the city should take the initiative in proposing and designing improvements.

Reshaping a block to meet the needs of its residents will not solve all or even many of the city's problems. It can, however, serve as a catalyst for larger physical, social, and economic renewal. Changes to one block often inspire residents on another block to do the same. Residents of the first block become a resource of skills and knowledge for nearby blocks. Even

with minimal investment, people with relatively few resources, can, within a short time, transform the appearance of their block and the way they live within it, thereby shaping their own local community.

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APPENDICES

1. Award-winning Blocks in West Philadelphia
2. For Individuals and Small Groups: How to Get Started
3. Who Can Help

APPENDIX 1: AWARD-WINNING BLOCKS IN WEST PHILADELPHIA

The following blocks in West Philadelphia won awards in the Annual City Gardens Contest in 1983-1989. The contest is sponsored by the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. The addresses of more award-winning blocks in other parts of Philadelphia are available from PHS.

"The Greenest Block in Town"

6100 block Washington Street (1st prize, 1984, 1985, 1986, 1987; second prize, 1989)

6200 block Ellsworth Street (1st prize, 1988)

2900 block N. Felton Street (2nd prize, 1988)

6100 block Sansom Street (3rd prize, 1988)

4200 block Parrish Street (3rd prize, 1983)

5800 block Sansom Street (3rd prize, 1986)

"Philadelphia Green Garden Block"

200 block N. 59th Street (2nd prize, 1986)

6200 block Ellsworth Street (2nd prize, 1987)

Unit block N. Felton Street (2nd prize, 1989)

1500 block N. 61st Street (3rd prize, 1985)

Unit block of Conestoga Street (3rd prize, 1987)

4000 block Reno Street (3rd prize, 1989)

FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS: HOW TO GET STARTED

General Recommendations

Getting started on a project is often the most difficult step. While interest in participation may already exist within the block, a way of organizing the project may not. This is the function of the workshop process described below which was developed for Philadelphia Green's Blockscape Program by Philadelphia Green staff and faculty and students from Penn's Department of Landscape Architecture and Regional Planning.

The term "workshop" refers to both a type of meeting and a type of process. While most people are familiar with a workshop as a meeting for brainstorming ideas and then taking some kind of action, a workshop is also a way of running a meeting. In planning and running actual blockscape workshops eight steps seem to recur:

1. Organize the block/neighbors
2. Set an agenda for the meeting
3. Identify needs and desires
4. Determine key players
5. Understand the opportunities and limitations
6. Make a design
7. Discuss the design
8. Implement the design

There are several types of workshop meetings: one to decide what the residents want to do, who will do it, and what can be done; another to design the improvements; and a third to plan how to implement them. The following section outlines the workshop process as it might be encompassed by two meetings of the entire group and one design session. In order to maintain interest and participation, this number seems to be optimal. Depending on who might be involved, however, more than two meetings may

be needed. This can only be determined in the case of an individual block.

Participation of a whole block is crucial to a successful project. Although there may only be a few, core organizers, each resident must feel that his or her opinion and help is important. Since it is also necessary to maintain a high degree of momentum and interest in the blockscape, the time between the initial meeting and implementation should be as short as possible. Attendance seems to be best when meetings are either Saturday morning or weekdays in the early evenings, when people are most likely to be home with no other specific plans. Finally, it is helpful to have an incentive to attend the meeting. Philadelphia Green sometimes gives away plants and flowers to all who attend. A barbeque is another way of getting residents together in an informal setting. A successful workshop is the first step toward a successful project.

The Workshop Process

Meeting No. 1: Planning Session

1. Organize the block

The first steps in organizing a block are to set up a meeting and set an agenda. This can be done by block captains or a small group of residents. A place to hold the meeting should be found, and a date and time determined. Flyers can then be posted or placed in all the residents' mailboxes, preferably ample notice of the meeting to help insure that everyone is invited and feels welcome.

2. Set an agenda for the meeting

The agenda should define the structure, order, and time frame of the meeting. Determine what you want to talk about and in what order. An initial idea session should run no more than one hour: it is important to follow the agenda to cover all important items, as well as to reduce irrelevant side discussions which may sidetrack the meeting. The meeting should be run by two or three people, one being solely responsible for taking notes during the discussion. It is helpful to have a large pad of paper and a fat marker to write down ideas and issues so that everyone can see them. If possible, have a drawing of the block with houses and the vacant land identified so that residents can orient themselves by where they live. Finally, make sure there are enough chairs for everyone.

The meeting should begin with a review of why the meeting was called and an introduction--"What is a blockscape?" Next ask everyone to introduce themselves and where they

live (you may be surprised how many neighbors do not know each other). Outline the agenda and time frame so that everyone understands the time constraints and topics of discussion. The remainder of the meeting should be spent in discussion, with a summary at the end. Before the meeting is adjourned, determine what the next step will be, who will be involved, and when.

During the discussion, elicit everyone's needs and desires and identify key players. These are the next two steps of the process.

3. Identify needs and desires

People may know that they want to do something with a vacant lot, but not know exactly what. By talking about how they use their yards, where they garden or talk with each other, or what parks or play areas are nearby, a clearer picture of potential uses can be formulated. Participation and cooperation are important to this step. Each person should have the chance to express an opinion and to be heard; no idea or problem is too dumb, too small, or too trivial.

Many people find it difficult to describe how they use their block and interact with their neighbors. Often this attempt leads to complaining about problems such as trash, noise, and pot holes. Although these problems are important, valuable time is wasted by reiterating these concerns. A good strategy is to deal with tangible, concrete examples and infer from those. For example, answers to questions concerning use of space can be gotten by asking people what their favorite community garden or play lot is, to describe their garden, or where they like to talk with neighbors.

At one workshop for the 4500 and 4600 block of Spruce Street, residents identified some raised flowerbeds along a nearby apartment block that they liked. This gave everyone a clearer picture of what people wanted and were having difficulty describing. Discussion of these "likes" and "dislikes" yields many ideas which are more clearly understood by everyone. A list of potential questions and categories to consider during a workshop is included at the end of this appendix.

4. Identify key players

Closely related to identifying needs and desires is determining to what extent there is interest in improving the block. A small turn-out at the initial meeting may require some additional recruiting of residents or a rethinking of the scope of work. Key players should be identified during these discussions. These are the people who will lead in the latter stages of the project--the design, implementation, and maintenance. Without the active participation of key players, the project is not likely to succeed.

5. Understand opportunities and limitations

What were major topics of discussion? Were the health or addition of more street trees an issue? Were people concerned with safety? Trash? Noise? Was there a strong interest in additional planting space? Does the block have private yards? Porches? Was money a concern? The bridge between the idea session and the design is to understand the opportunities and limitations of a block--what people want and what is possible.

It may be helpful to list the opportunities and the limitations of the particular block under discussion. This can serve as both a summation of the first meeting and an outline for the design session. Opportunities and limitations are not black and white issues. Much overlap exists; a limitation for one person may be an opportunity for another. Limitations should not be considered barriers, but neither can they be ignored. Limitations, along with opportunities, must be thought through in a creative manner during the design of the blockscape.

Meeting No. 2: Design Session

6. Make a design

The design session should consist of a smaller group of people, generally those key players identified at the first meeting. It is their responsibility to translate the ideas of the group into a drawn proposal or design. Begin with a review of the last meeting, including the notes taken during the discussion and the list of opportunities and limitations. These can serve as a guide and checklist during the design of the blockscape. Most importantly, have a rough plan of the block, drawn to a scale (such as 1/8"=1'0") that is easy to see and work with. Include buildings with addresses, sidewalks, yards, existing street trees, or any other plantings. This will serve as a base to work from.

Overlay the base plan with a sheet of tracing paper. Work out the design ideas on this sheet. Don't be afraid to use more than one sheet, ideas may only become clear after many tries.

FOR INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS: HOW TO GET STARTED

Don't throw away any ideas either; they may be useful in the end. When a consensus of the group is reached, draw a final plan, identifying what the new work or changes will be. This should be clear and legible since the blockscape will be constructed from this drawing.

Meeting No. 3: Discussing the Design

7. Discuss the design

Call a third meeting to present the plan to the entire block. Final agreement and any additional changes can be made at this time, along with setting the date and determining work assignments for implementation.

Meeting No. 4: Implementation

8. Implement the design

The final phase of this process is to implement the design. As with the initial planning session, it is important to have the entire block involved, since they will be maintaining the project upon completion. Depending on the scope of the work (new streets, replacement of sidewalks) an outside contractor or city agency might be involved. Try to make the work day a community event or party, with some people responsible for beverages and food. An annual block party might grow from this, celebrating the work done. Satisfaction and pride will come from everyone being able to say "I built this."

Workshop Questions

The purpose of a workshop is both to brainstorm ideas and to come to a better understanding of what you would like the block improvements to accomplish. It is important to ask questions that will identify people's concerns and wishes. Listed below are a few questions to consider during a workshop. These can be divided into four categories: identity/image; daily life(use); territory/boundary; and gardening/maintenance. Many more questions can be asked; these are only a starting point.

Identity/Image:

What are your favorite blocks in West Philadelphia? ...Philadelphia? ...elsewhere? Why? Describe what you like.

What specific yard/garden do you like or admire? Why? Describe it.

What do you think makes your block/street special?

If you could change anything about your block, what would you change?

Daily Life:

How do you use the street? ...the sidewalk? ...the front yard? ...the porch?

How do the children use these spaces?

Do you have a backyard? How do you use it?

Where do you socialize?

Where do you hang out?

Where do the children play?

Territory/Boundary:

What do you consider "your space?" the sidewalk or the curb? the front yard? porch? steps/stoop?

What do you feel is shared space? With whom do you share it?

Do you have a fence/ledge/wall?

Do you have a gate?

Do you have a shrub or flower border?

What are the boundaries to your block?

Gardening/Maintenance:

Do you consider yourself an active gardener? ...a sporadic gardener?

Would you like to garden, but don't have a place to? ...or could you care less about gardening?

Do you have friends that garden?

What do you garden or plant? Why?

Do you like/want street trees?

Would you be willing to care for street trees?

APPENDIX 3: WHO CAN HELP

Streets Department		
Alley and Driveway Paving	686-5511	Philadelphia Green
Trash Collection	686-5560	
Garbage	686-5564	Urban Gardening Program, Penn State Cooperative
Pot holes/Street repair	868-5508	Extension
Street lights fixed	592-5683	
		625-8280
Fairmount Park (District#4)		
Street trees planted/removed	352-6844	
Tree Inspector	686-8646	
Recycling Center	686-0108	
Water Department		
Fire Hydrants	686-1641	
Water Problems	592-6300	
Health Services		
Rat Control	686-1919	
Other:		
Anti-Graffiti Network	686-4570	
Neighborhood Services (Managing Director's Office)	686-3488	
Sewer Repair	592-6300	
Abandoned Car	686-3180	
Parks Clean-Up	686-2254	
Abandoned Houses/Vacant Lots	685-2463	
Mayor's Office of Community Services	686-9022	
Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee	978-3969	
Philadelphia Electric Co.	841-4000	

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Principal Investigator: Anne Whiston Spirn
Project Managers: Mark Cameron (1990)
Michele Pollio (1989-1990)
W. Gary Smith (1987-1989)
Research Assistant: Mark Cameron (1989-90)

This publication was written by Anne Whiston Spirn and Mark Cameron, but it represents the summary of work to which many others contributed.

This investigation of blocks as a unit of neighborhood development began in winter 1989 as part of a new program initiated by Philadelphia Green, the Blockscape. The block has long been the focus of several Philadelphia Green programs, including the Garden Block Program and the Street Tree Block Program. Since 1989, the Blockscape Program has provided the possibility of more extensive landscape improvements. This study was conducted in two parts: a series of workshops with the residents of various blocks in West Philadelphia, culminating in design and construction of improvements in several blocks, and the overview of the block types that occur in West Philadelphia and the opportunities and limitations they pose for landscape projects.

The initial formulation of ideas about the block as a locus of community change and the role of landscape in that change was explored by Anne Whiston Spirn and Heidi Cooke Shusterman in a master's thesis on Powelton Village at the University of Pennsylvania in 1974. This study extends that work.

Anne Whiston Spirn and W. Gary Smith conducted the first workshop in the Spruce Hill neighborhood in Spring 1989. Michele Pollio supervised the conduct of subsequent workshops by graduate students in Landscape Architecture. Research assistants Wei Xu, Aditya Pal, and John Widrick attended workshops in the Mill Creek neighborhood and prepared designs in Spring 1989. In Summer 1989 Michele Pollio and Mark Cameron worked with Sally McCabe of Philadelphia Green to develop and refine the workshop process and conducted a series of workshops in the Spruce Hill neighborhood. These suggestions are summarized in Appendix 2. Many of the design ideas generated during that period were incorporated into the recommendations made in this report. Research assistants Elissa Sharp, Kacey Constable, Geoffrey Anderson, and Sharon Fitzgerald Principato assisted with blockscape workshops in Summer 1989.

The investigation of block types, their distribution in West Philadelphia, and the limitations and opportunities they pose for landscape projects was undertaken by Mark Cameron, in consultation with Anne Whiston Spirn and Michele Pollio, in summer and fall 1989. This work was subsequently further developed in collaboration over the following two years. Tarna Agrawal prepared the drawings of blocks and the map of block types.

Many of the successful blocks identified in the text and Appendix were built under the auspices of Philadelphia Green and the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. One of these blocks--Woodland Terrace--was designed and constructed as part of the West Philadelphia

Landscape Plan and Greening Project. Many of the ideas for block improvements have already been implemented by Philadelphia Green as part of their Garden Block and Street Tree Block Programs. Many other ideas presented in this report were developed in collaboration with Philadelphia Green Staff, including Blaine Bonham, Sally McCabe, Michael Groman, Denise Jefferson, and Susan Ross, and with Gerri Spilka of The Organization and Management Group.