

A Vision for Ardmore -- Final; 5.28.2013

Ardmore is our town center. We envision a town center encompassing public space, green space, residences, shops and restaurants. We see a place that is not frustratingly congested, but compact enough to encourage pedestrians and a healthy street life. We envision low-rise buildings surrounded by wide, comfortable sidewalks adorned with trees and plants and safely separated from traffic. We would like our town to be environmentally responsible. We want smooth vehicle circulation and places to park for residents and visitors, but we would like to move away from a street-scape that is dominated by motor vehicles.

An ideal vision, but with possible revisions to the MUST ordinance inspired by the Dranoff Cricket Avenue project and a re-vamped transit center we have an opportunity to get a little closer to the ideal. With this in mind, we present the following proposals for an improved zoning overlay in Ardmore. We are eager to be involved in the process from the beginning. Our proposals divide into two categories, first, general ideas about the overlay, and second, specific thoughts about particular parcels/areas we consider to be key opportunities for Township planners.

Overlay Zone -- General.

1) **Overlay Boundaries.** We want to maintain Ardmore's character and encourage responsible development of the core. We recommend replacing the map of concentric circles with a linear one that eliminates residential areas and conforms to the commercial area included in the overlay. We want to include only existing ASDD-1, C-1, C-2 and CL commercially zoned districts. We recommend the revised ordinance specifically exclude any parcels currently zoned in whole or in part residential. If a parcel falls partially with MUST's bounds, we recommend that more than 50% of the parcel should be within MUST boundaries in order to be developed under MUST.

This arrangement spreads development more evenly across the actual Ardmore business district. It brings the benefits and protections of the ordinance to places not within the current bounds of MUST (i.e. Ardmore West and north Greenfield Avenue). Applying MUST solely to ASDD-1, C-1 and C-2 districts also spreads congestion away from the Anderson Avenue choke-point. Denser development would still be within walkable distance of the train station, central Ardmore, and Suburban Square; and would also be centrally contained. MUST currently encourages high-rise development right in the center, where logic dictates against encouraging further dense residential building. Residents do not want to encourage a high-rise urban style core.

2) **Height.** Height is key to the more spread out vision. Residents do not want to see buildings taller than five stories in Ardmore. We suggest replacing the three height and density sub-zones with one zone having a base height allowance of four stories with five stories abutting the railway line. Strengthen the current ordinance's height limitations protecting existing residential areas. Two-story residential communities of long standing would feel threatened by massive four-plus story buildings next door. We feel the eight stories pictured in one Dranoff proposal would overwhelm the South

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Ardmore houses and businesses along Cricket Avenue. However, please note that isolated tall buildings are not necessarily objectionable. We are not in favor of exchanging increased building height allowance for increased public gathering space on private property.

- 3) **Setbacks.** Require upper story setbacks for all buildings that reach a certain height, not just those on major arteries. The height from the street at which a setback would be required and its depth should be calculated based on the width of the street and the building heights that already exist in the area. We recommend that new development correspond in general scale and form with existing development. Front yard setbacks should be based on the prevailing setback on the street. We would like flexibility without ambiguity. In general, we would support setback requirements that a) prevent a canyon effect on narrow streets, b) respect the scale of existing residential neighborhoods, c) provide a more pedestrian friendly environment on the side streets and d) encourage wider sidewalks. The discussions surrounding the front yard setback in conjunction with the development of 112 Sibley vividly demonstrate the inflexibility of the current MUST requirement.
- 4) **Montgomery Avenue Greenway.** Montgomery Avenue's "boulevard" effect depends upon its wide, landscaped setbacks. It is important that this green corridor, an amenity that benefits the entire Township, be preserved intact. Allowing the split-zoned "Ruby's Lot" at Suburban Square to be redeveloped with a tall building (such as the seven-story building proposed in years past) covering 100% of the lot and extending to the sidewalk would severely compromise the character of this major artery.
- 5) **Affordable Housing.** While affordable housing is commendable, we do not favor increased height and/or density as a way to achieve these goals. In addition, we consider the parking allowance for affordable housing unrealistic.
- 6) **Parking.** We are in favor of limiting parking structures to lots abutting the train tracks; residents do not want tall parking structures located right next to residential buildings. We envision modestly sized parking structures in various areas along the tracks.

We support MUST's transit-oriented outlook and its attempt to discourage the car by constricting parking; however, practically, thoughtful provision for car storage is imperative. Public transit is not sufficiently developed in Lower Merion to make life without a car a reasonable option for most residents. The discussions surrounding the number of parking spaces at 112 Sibley demonstrate the friction caused by the current MUST requirement.

We urge a formal, comprehensive traffic study addressing motor vehicle traffic issues facing Ardmore. The problem should be considered more broadly geographically than typically possible in a traffic study commissioned in conjunction with land development. We suggest this large scale traffic study be undertaken prior to the

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Dranoff Cricket project. This project will impact traffic patterns and parking all over Ardmore and neighboring communities on a broad scale.

Ideally parking provisions should encourage subterranean parking and wrapped parking structures where and when possible. We are generally in favor of regulations that support buffering the look, noise, dirt and smell of parking garages. In addition, for purposes of storm water management, buffering and aesthetics, we urge the Township to encourage green roofs on such utilitarian buildings.

6) **Emphasize improvement of existing infrastructure.** MUST's goals of a mixed-use transit-supportive neighborhood fostering economic growth, pedestrian activity and a sense of community can also be achieved by improving existing infrastructure in and around the Ardmore business district. Improved (in terms of safety, ease of use, and pleasantness) pedestrian and bicycle facilities (i.e. sidewalks, bike lanes, bike racks) will encourage residents in existing neighborhoods in and around the business district to walk or bike to Ardmore's shops, restaurants and train station, thereby decreasing traffic congestion and fostering lively pedestrian activity. Residents currently living in and around Ardmore want to walk and often do not because walking here can be dangerous and unpleasant. Potential projects that would further this goal include: sidewalk rehabilitation along Montgomery Avenue and elsewhere, a lowered speed limit along Montgomery Avenue in the "walk zone" (Cherry Lane to Woodside Road), more traffic calming measures on Lancaster Avenue (such as lights that restrict vehicle movement when pedestrians have a walk light, that is, no right turns on red, left only with an arrow), more pedestrian access points between Suburban Square and Lancaster Avenue (for instance in the area near the shops along Anderson Avenue near the railroad bridge) and liberal tree planting.

Specific Parcels/Areas.

- 1) **Montgomery Avenue.** The residential appearance of Montgomery Avenue from Narberth to the western boundary of the Township positively impacts the quality of life of the entire Township and needs to be preserved with its substantial setbacks and landscaping. Preservation of Montgomery's current green aspect can be achieved by leaving the current R-7 zoning in place and applying to split-zoned parcels the same exclusion from future overlay coverage that applies to wholly residential parcels. Current zoning on the north side of the railroad tracks provides ample opportunity for appropriate redevelopment. We are determined that any changes include strong protection of existing, mature shade trees.
- 2) **Car Dealer Lots.** In general, with the exclusion of the sidewalk around the Infiniti dealership at Woodside Road, the sidewalks fronting car dealer lots in Ardmore are not in accordance with our hopes for the MUST overlay. Cars, parked and in motion, inches away from the sidewalk on both sides do not encourage lively pedestrian activity or a sense of community. We suggest improving the sidewalks, parking dealership cars further from the sidewalks on the lot side, and encouraging

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the planting of trees and bushes. We also recommend that car carriers be discouraged from making deliveries during the day that block Lancaster Ave.

- 3) **Bernicker lot next to the Township building.** This would be a good place for a modestly-sized parking structure.
- 4) **Ardmore West.** In this area, we are frustrated by the pedestrian-unfriendly and unsightly parking lots along Lancaster. Over the long term, we believe the storefronts should be moved closer to the street with parking in back along the railroad tracks. Of course provision should be made for adequate sidewalks and more street trees. This area could be developed more densely, with two to three story shops/apartments with multiple story parking in back.
- 5) **Greenfield Parking Lots.** We appreciate and want to preserve the protection provided to the residential area behind the Greenfield shops by locating the parking between the shops and the street. However, we would like the street to be a safe and pleasant link between downtown Ardmore and the neighborhood. Plantings, imaginative landscaping and the improvement of existing sidewalks located along the street are simple measures we feel would contribute to the success of this area.
- 6) **Low building next to Primavera Pizza Kitchen.** We are dismayed by the presence of this lackluster building right in the center of town. We feel this corner is a good candidate for potentially taller infill development that would balance the Primavera Pizza Kitchen building next door. We do like, however, how the retail spaces line the sidewalk around the corner on Anderson and in the back of the building.

Wishlist.

The following is a short list of things we would like to suggest and/or encourage in conjunction with development in Ardmore.

- a. A central green space. There is no public green space in central Ardmore where visitors and pedestrians can stop and enjoy the town or a community festival. A town square was suggested in 2004 in the ULI report -- this idea deserves another look. Schuffele Plaza is a possible location.
- b. A green space in the vicinity of Station Road in conjunction with a re-vamped train station would also go far toward improving the center of Ardmore.
- c. Access between Suburban Square and Lancaster Avenue via foot in places other than just Anderson Avenue. Ideas include stairs from Anderson Avenue up to the parking lot behind the Lancaster Avenue shops to the west of Anderson and a pedestrian tunnel from Lancaster into Suburban Square somewhere in the vicinity of Starbuck's Coffee. Improved pedestrian access across the Anderson railroad bridge and down from the parking lot behind Lancaster west of Anderson was also suggested by the 2004 ULI report: again, a good idea worth another look.

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- d. A theater space or other cultural use. One idea is to include some sort of Main Line history museum.
- e. An initiative for pedestrian and bicycle provision along roadways in order to encourage and facilitate alternate forms of transportation in general and particularly to schools, especially Lower Merion High School.