

To: **Becca Hertz, Liz Price**
From: **Lisa Chiblow, Joseph Giangrandi, Angelica Gonzalez, Surina Singh, Daniel Solomon, Sara Brandt-Vorel**
RE: **Friendship Heights Mini Technical Assistance Panel (mTAP) - ULI Leadership Institute**

June 30, 2020

Problem Statement

Friendship Heights has a lack of identity and struggles to compete on a regional basis. The growth of e-commerce, demographic consumer spending changes and the rise of other regional destinations have all had a detrimental impact on Friendship Heights as a regional retail center resulting in vacant retail spaces above ground and underground. Housing stock and local amenities no longer meet the needs of the community. There is insufficient affordable housing within the community. Families are a rising demographic which results in changing needs, e.g child care services, child-oriented activities, and rising demand for two and three bedroom units. Friendship Heights is situated within two jurisdictions: District of Columbia (“DC” or “District”) and Montgomery County with different development regulations and political decision-makers.

Approach and Research

The approach began with a stakeholder presentation, multiple study area walking tours, team collaboration meetings followed by additional stakeholder interviews. The team reviewed regulatory governing documents, market conditions as well as retail redevelopment case studies and literature.

Recommendations

Through a collaborative process, our team developed the following recommendations. The following guiding principles shaped the recommendations:

- Address **LOCAL NEEDS BEFORE REGIONAL**
- Establish a **STRONG COMMUNITY IDENTITY**
- Reduce reliance on cars and **PROMOTE MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY**
- Implement better **INTERMIX OF RETAIL**
- Address **HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND DEMAND**

ADDRESS LOCAL NEEDS BEFORE REGIONAL

Our proposal relies on a simple principle: if we plan for cars and traffic, we will get cars and traffic. Alternatively, if we plan for people and places, we will get people and places. Recommendations focus on strengthening the local neighborhood first and then striving to be a regional draw. Our vision is to **emphasize the idea of Connecting—Connecting Place to Place, People to Place, and People to People**. First, destinations within Friendship Heights should be connected physically and visually. Walkability, ease of access, and sightlines should be improved where ever needed. Second, we need to ensure that people that live and around the neighborhood, use the places regularly. Establish a strong sense of community and ensure pride that the local community has in the places. Finally, the stakeholders, residents, and businesses will need to work together, play together, and live together. Once the local connections are sound, connecting this unique place to the region can be visualized in a more streamlined manner.

ESTABLISH A STRONG COMMUNITY IDENTITY

Embracing and strengthening the unique character of Friendship Heights can economically differentiate it from others and make it a destination. Community identity can be expressed through programming, art, and design. A community-driven process and a comprehensive public space plan can help strengthen the social fabric and jump-start economic development. An active Business Improvement District (BID) creates opportunities to collaborate with community leaders, community groups, local government agencies, and property owners to create a unified vision and implement creative placemaking strategies. It would be beneficial to identify funding opportunities or community grants to encumber funds for a non-profit such as Better Block Foundation or Neighborhood Design Center to organize events. Other focused measures such as branding and wayfinding strategies, temporary place activations, supporting local art and artists, implementing pilot projects to analyze success, and developing a coordinated retail strategy can also facilitate a strong community identity.

REDUCE RELIANCE ON CARS AND PROMOTE MULTIMODAL CONNECTIVITY

Friendship Heights was designed as a regional center with the car in mind. For a neighborhood with a Metrorail station and bus terminal at its center, Friendship Heights is overparked (an inventory of publicly available parking spaces showed approximately 5,500 parking spaces), with underutilized surface parking lots comprising approximately 10 acres of space within the neighborhood. The removal/repurposing of surface parking lots is key to maximizing the potential of the neighborhood. In addition, during our multiple site visits, and through stakeholder interviews, we realized multi-modal connectivity to the surrounding neighborhood and community could be improved, and that traffic calming measures were needed to foster a better experience for those living, working, and visiting Friendship Heights, as opposed to prioritizing those that travel through it by car. Key recommendations include: implementing Complete Streets principles and design to enhance and promote multi-modal connectivity within and around the Friendship Heights neighborhood; improving bicycle connectivity to existing facilities by bridging the gap between two regional bicycle trails (Rock Creek Trail and Capital Crescent Trail); upgrading sidewalks along approaches to Friendship Heights by reallocating right-of-way; and implementing interim design strategies to improve roadways and public spaces in the near-term.

IMPLEMENT BETTER INTERMIX OF RETAIL

Retail adaptation and resiliency strategies include the BID, mentioned above, and facilitate a detailed retail strategy to identify missing retail. Currently, there is high-end retail which is a regional draw but local and community retail is in short supply. Retail resiliency strategies include identifying niche submarkets or uses that are one of a kind in the DMV to increase foot traffic. Also, increase draws for foot traffic by including a “restaurant row” and collaborating placemaking efforts across both jurisdictions. Momentum and energy builders include experiential uses and entertainment uses. The retail model should allow for adaptability and flexibility as e-commerce continues to shift retail trends and demand for brick and mortar spaces. Examples include adaptable floor-plans, on-site and in-store co-tenancy, and allowing the integration of restaurants into retail and recreation uses.

ADDRESS HOUSING AFFORDABILITY AND DEMAND

There is a significant lack of affordable housing in the region, and Montgomery County and the District have indicated creating additional affordable housing is a priority in the coming years; specifically the District has identified the upper northwest as an area of DC that provides less affordable housing than other parts of the city. The overarching recommendation is to target a range of policy and zoning regulations to increase density in the heart of Friendship Heights. The proposed policy changes which could help prime the private market include additional density and height allowances or a reduction in parking requirements may be favorable given the high concentration of multi-modal transportation in Friendship Heights (refer to the table below). Other changes, such as the physical redevelopment of underutilized sites, such as the GEICO or Lord & Taylor properties would directly introduce additional affordable housing units in the neighborhood. Increasing the residential base and density in Friendship Heights will also facilitate the ongoing retail and commercial revitalization by increasing local demand for neighborhood serving goods and services.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Transportation	Sector Plan & Zoning Ordinance	Retail	Housing
Institute Area-wide Demand-Responsive Parking	Update MoCo 1998 Friendship Heights Sector Plan	Draft Comprehensive Public Space Plan	Promote Bonus Density
Re-Examine Parking Minimums/Requirements	Create Cross-Jurisdictional Zoning Overlay District	Permit Ground Floor Retail in Mixed-Use Buildings	Increase Building Heights
Reduce Speed Limits	Simplify Zoning Process/Amendments in Montgomery County	Permit Restaurant Uses within Retail or Recreation Uses	Create Residential Opportunity over Retail
		Permit Outdoor Restaurant Seating	Provide Opportunities for Diverse Housing Stock
			Create Permanent Shared-Equity Homeownership Opportunities.
			Promote Inclusionary Zoning
			Explore Redevelopment Potential within Publicly Owned Properties.