Introduction to Kensington Avenue
Design Guidelines

Kensington Avenue is a vibrant and diverse commercial corridor that extends 22 blocks through the city’s Kensington and Port Richmond neighborhoods. While the full length of Kensington Avenue is an important element of the city; these design guidelines will be focusing on the southern gateway corridor. This encompasses the 2400 through 2600 blocks of Kensington Avenue. The recommendations made in the following pages will also prove helpful to the remaining corridor portions not represented in the gateway.

How will you benefit from reading these guidelines?
This guide was created with you, the business owner, in mind. You will be provided with tips and information on how to utilize and upgrade your building to help grow your business.

Why were these guidelines created?
Kensington Avenue is a diverse and engaging community. Because the Market Frankford line runs through the heart of the commercial corridor, Kensington Avenue is in a unique position having the potential to attract business from other neighborhoods in the city. These guidelines offer suggestions about changes you can make to help improve your business’ competitive advantage.
NEIGHBORHOOD ASSETS:

- Two Market Frankford El stops lie within commercial corridor
- Community Center
- (4) neighborhood schools
- Community garden with potential to grow food locally.
- Social services
- Historic vacant buildings that new business ventures can occupy.
- Diverse business base along corridor serves many needs of area residents.
- Public art and mural presence that can be expanded.
- Transitional Housing
- Temple Episcopal Hospital Campus
- Visitation Blessed Virgin Mary Church
- Mixed Use-Residential and Industrial
**AWNINGS**

**Variety**
There are a variety of awning styles available on the market. Careful consideration should be given to deciding which style best fits your business image.

**Fabric**
Using Sunbrella fabric on your awnings is recommended. Long term this material is more durable than vinyl, and is better guaranteed against fading and tearing.

**Text & Graphics**
Keep text and graphics on your awning to a minimum, as this makes it easier for people on the street to quickly learn what your business is all about.

**TRANSMOS & DOORS**

**Maintain**
Replace transoms over doors and windows that have been boarded up or filled in over the years. This helps restore the historic integrity of the corridor.

**Light**
Transoms allow more natural light into your business, creating a pleasant environment for customers, and saving on energy costs by reducing lighting electricity needs.

**View**
Entry doors should have glass viewing panels. This allows customers to see inside, and increases safety by preventing the door from opening into another person.

**SECURITY GRILLS**

**Open Grills**
Open security grills like those shown are recommended instead of solid gates.

**Visibility & Security**
Open grills increase security by providing visibility into and out of your business. Open grills are also less likely to be hit with graffiti. Most graffiti artists prefer to tag solid surfaces where their images will show clearly.

**Hidden Housing**
Security grill cases should be placed up inside awnings whenever possible. This creates a sleeker and more inviting storefront look.
Storefront: Elements

Lighting

Visibility
Adding exterior lighting to your business creates visibility after hours, highlights unique architectural features, deters crime, and increases safety for sidewalk traffic.

Direct Down
Select light fixtures that are similar in style to those on other buildings along the corridor, and direct light down towards the sidewalk or building face. Avoid fixtures that spread a lot of light in all directions, this creates light pollution.

Environmental Cost
Outfit light fixtures with compact fluorescent or LED bulbs to save energy costs.

Accessibility

Rails
Provide sturdy railings at steps leading into your building. This makes it easier for seniors, and those with limited mobility, to enter and give you their business.

Space
Avoid placing display racks or merchandise where it will encroach on the building entrance. This is a safety issue and can make it hard to enter and exit your business.

Ramps
Provide ADA compliant ramps whenever possible. Ramps like those at right have a shallow 1:12 slope; making it easy for individuals to travel up and down them.

Exterior Display Elements

Retractable Awnings
Retractable awnings provide a simple solution for protecting merchandise, such as produce or mobile clothing racks that are outside temporarily, and increase customer comfort while looking at merchandise. These awnings also work well for outdoor dining.

Security Grill Display & Awnings
An innovative design solution, (shown at far left) created by Agoos/Lovera Architects with the Community Design Collaborative, creates a clean comprehensive storefront display and security system. Parts of the grill, that cover the window after hours, fold out and up to form a protective awning and display space for merchandise. Meanwhile, the door grill opens out and becomes a message center for neighborhood activities.
SIGNAGE: ELEMENTS

Building Signage

Architectural Details
Avoid placing signs over architectural details. This detracts from your building's natural character, making it look less appealing.

Maintenance
Keep all signage in good repair, and set up a maintenance schedule. Investing in quality materials when purchasing new signage contributes to less frequent replacement over time.

Exterior Illumination
Avoid using internally lit plastic box signs. Instead, hang signs and illuminate them with attractive exterior lights. This adds a cohesive element to the corridor.

Window Display Signage

Open
Completely covering windows with advertisements is against code and makes the business less inviting to potential customers. Leave the majority of the window area clear.

Clean & Clear
Signage in windows should be clean, easy to read, and memorable. Leave room around the text or graphics to allow people passing by to see into the business.

Protect
Graffiti resistant coatings can be applied to glass to make it easier to clean if it does get tagged; saving business owners time and money.

Murals as Signage

Appeal
Murals can be a fun and bold way to advertise the nature of your business, while also increasing the aesthetic appeal for the entire neighborhood.

Local Artists
Hire or involve local artists whenever possible, select artists with a strong knowledge of mural making and the local community. The City of Philadelphia Mural Arts Program is a great resource.

Community
Be creative. Use designs that reflect Kensington's unique history and character.
Upper Levels: Elements

Cornice: A decorative moulding found along a building’s roof or above a storefront

Restore
Cornices should be restored and repaired whenever possible. This maintains the historic character of the neighborhood.

Color
Carefully selected complimentary colors add a lot of appeal to your business.

Replace
Placing siding or plywood over existing cornices that are in poor repair detracts from the building’s character, and interrupts unity along the corridor. Damaged cornices should be replaced with new ones that reflect the style of surrounding original cornices.

Windows

Pattern
Looking down the length of Kensington Avenue, it is easy to see a historic window pattern appear.

Replace
Boarded up and in-filled windows make a business look unwelcoming to the public and to potential customers. Such windows should be replaced.

Light & Ventilation
Windows provide natural light and ventilation to the building interior, and also increase security by allowing police and passersby to see inside.

Materials

Brick
Kensington Avenue has an abundance of brick buildings. This brick is beautiful when properly maintained. It is a reminder of Kensington’s history and visually unifies the Avenue.

Paint & Stucco
Invest in cleaning and repointing brick instead of painting or stuccoing over it. Paint and stucco may look nice for a short time, but can deteriorate much faster than brick.

Maintain
A maintenance schedule for cleaning, re-painting, etc. should be established for all exterior materials to maximize your investment and keep your business looking its best. Using historically sensitive materials in new construction is recommended.
Before:

This building has a lot of promise. The original roof and storefront cornices are still intact. In addition, the brick is in good shape and just needs some cleaning. The biggest challenges are the missing upper story windows and the storefront that needs to be entirely replaced. Restoring the storefront in a similar style to what was originally there helps reestablish this building’s historic integrity. The renovations also lend an inviting and eye pleasing feel to the facade.
Case Study: Group of Row Buildings

Before:

This Case Study focuses on what can be done when a series of adjacent row buildings are owned by the same individual. As they stand, nothing ties these three buildings together.

The owner replaced the existing shingle and aluminum awnings with new matching fabric ones. He also painted the cornices and window headers attractive, bold colors across all three buildings. The new colors highlight the historic architectural character of these structures. These changes will increase these businesses’ street presence.

Attractive contrasting cornice and lintel colors across all three buildings increase the business’ street presence and highlights original architectural details.

Matching Sunbrella fabric awnings increase pedestrian interest and create a unified look. Simple, clear text on the awning faces makes it easy to locate and identify the businesses inside. The awnings also hide the housing for the store’s security grills.

Exterior lights highlight the buildings’ storefronts while increasing store security and pedestrians safety.

Brick on all three buildings has been maintained and repointed where necessary. Details like star anchor bolts have also been preserved and not covered up.

Open store windows allow ample room for display space and invite customers to enter.

A simple, graphic mural on the side of the building, done by a neighborhood artist, advertises the services offered while playfully dressing up a vacant wall adjacent to an empty lot.
Case Study: Big Box Building

Before:

A large "box" type building like this offers a great opportunity to create a stronger street presence. Re-opening covered or bricked in windows makes a more pleasant and engaging environment on the street.

Adding colorful graphics to windows in storage areas helps advertise the business inside, hides unsightly contents behind windows and unifies the overall design. It is important to invest in see-through window graphics in place of opaque window graphics to maintain visibility and natural light inside your building.

Exterior lighting highlights the new graphic over the existing window.

Awning protects customers from weather while open, clear doors and transom make an inviting entrance. A level transition from the sidewalk into the store makes this business universally accessible to the public.

Bricked over windows have been replaced. This energizes the streetscape for pedestrians, increases safety, and encourages customers to enter.
This Case Study focuses on the unique single story buildings that occupy the corridor. These buildings differ from the traditional three story row-buildings with stores at street level.

While in good repair, this building gives passersby little clue as to what sort of services it offers. It also appears that additional protection from the elements is desired. The slope of the sidewalk in this area creates a step between sidewalk and floor level. These types of steps can be hard to see and makes it easier for individuals entering and leaving the building to trip.

Before:

Retractable awning provides cover for merchandise and pedestrians outside of the store. Durable fabric is printed to match the mural on the building’s front, this creates a clean, cohesive look when the awning is open.

A locally sourced mural gives this building a strong street presence while doubling as advertising for the flower and produce store inside.

Open store windows allow ample room for display space; making it easy to identify the business inside. Decorative boxes above the windows hide security grills when the awning is closed.

Glass shop door allows views inside and encourages pedestrians to enter. The sidewalk has also been gently sloped up to the entrance to make the store fully accessible.
In the fall of 2009 BAU Architecture was retained to establish a set of design guidelines for the gateway portion of Kensington Avenue’s commercial corridor; specifically the 2400, 2500, and 2600 blocks. The focus of the guidelines was to establish a road map for business owners and community members to follow when planning renovations and construction projects along the corridor. BAU met with the Kensington Avenue Business Association to discuss owners’ primary concerns and desires for the corridor’s future.

Main goals were established as a means to unify the corridor and promote this vibrant area as a destination to the surrounding neighborhoods:

- Increase foot traffic
- Increase security through open grills and decorative exterior lighting
- Deter loitering
- Maintain and enhance Kensington Avenue’s historic character
- Unify the corridor

These guidelines outline BAU Architecture’s final conclusions after studying the Kensington Avenue gateway region and its unique assets and opportunities. This region has the potential to share in the revitalization, and popularity that neighboring communities have experienced in recent years. By investing in upgrades and improvements to their buildings’ facades; business owners can take an active hand in bringing this growth to the corridor. Both the businesses and surrounding community will profit from these efforts.
APPENDIX A: RESOURCES:

FUNDING SOURCES

Storefront Improvement Program
Philadelphia Department of Commerce
A City program that reimburses business owners for up to 50% of the cost to make approved storefront improvements. The program can reimburse up to $8,000 for a single commercial property or up to $12,000 for a corner property or multiple address business.
Requirements can be found online at: http://business.phila.gov/Documents/Guidelines.pdf
Contact: 215-683-2025
One Parkway Building
1515 Arch Street, 12th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102

GreenWorks Small Business Energy Efficiency Program
Philadelphia Department of Commerce
A program that encourages business owners to improve the energy efficiency of their operations; resulting in lower operating costs and increased competitive advantage in the local marketplace. The program reimburses owners of commercial buildings and businesses who make energy efficiency improvements up to 50% of the cost of eligible improvements, up to a $10,000 limit.
Contact: Jeremy Thomas
Program Manager
jeremy.thomas@phila.gov

DESIGN RESOURCES

Office for Community Development
Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Community resource for design development of facade improvements, and finding funding with which to make improvements. Also a good resource for help completing the design review and funding application process.
Contact: Mary Zagar-Brown
Corridor Development Manager
2646 Kensington Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19133
215.425.4856
http://www.ocd-phl.org/

Design Guidelines for Commercial Façade Improvements
Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Design Guidelines issued by the City of Philadelphia to guide business owners through the design and implementation of building improvements.
A copy of the guidelines can be found online at: http://www.philaplanning.org/plans/designguide.pdf
Paper copies can be obtained at the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

Mural Arts Program
City of Philadelphia
Excellent resource for mural information and planning. Call 215.685.0750 or visit http://www.muralarts.org

CODES /ZONING/ PRESERVATION

City of Philadelphia Licenses & Inspections (L&I)
For all questions regarding zoning, permits, construction, inspections, signage, etc. L&I can assist you.
Municipal Services Building
1401 John F. Kennedy Boulevard, 11th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102
Call 311 inside Philadelphia or 215-686-8686 from outside the City.
Online at: http://66.179.23.19/DP1/Metroplex/Philadelphia/customerservice/selectbyservno.asp

Community Preservation Program
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission
For questions regarding renovations and revisions to historic buildings.
Contact: Michel R. Lefèvre (Southeastern PA)
717.787.0771
Online at: http://www.portal.state.pa.us/portal/server.pt/community/phmc_home/1426

Nation Parks Service Historic Preservation Guide
Excellent guideline for renovations and restorations of historic buildings.
http://www.nps.gov/hps/TPS/standguide/preserve/storefronts.htm
APPENDIX B: 2500 BLOCK CASE STUDY:

AFTER:

BEFORE:
APPENDIX B: 2500 BLOCK CASE STUDY:

AFTER:

BEFORE: