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CITYSPACE

Market Least



On The Wrong Track: The city must find a better way to use the space above the station. Photo By: Michael T. Regan

The shopping district between Eighth and 12th streets is in serious need of an overhaul.

by Bruce Andersen

Now that the new Constitution Center has opened, something has become quite obvious: The area called Market East is sorely in need of some attention. The stretch of blocks between the Convention Center and the Loews Hotel running to Independence Mall is an inhospitable blight.

This is ironic because most of the visitors the city tried to attract are channeled to this stretch of the street. Tourists coming to the city take their impressions of that walk home with them.

It seems that several trends have come together to bring us to where we are today. First, the types of businesses on that stretch of street aren't very attractive. Between Eighth and 12th there are two Rite Aid and two CVS stores and a Walgreens being installed. There are no great places to sit and eat. There aren't any restaurants at the street level. There are few places to sit on that stretch of Market, fewer trees to soften the effects of hot summer days. People moving up and down the street are

often hot and dragging.

Second, the last time this area was redeveloped, The Gallery was put in place. The architecture of The Gallery is a huge problem. It is ugly and unfriendly. With all due respect to Ed Bacon, The Gallery sits on the street like some sort of troll exacting a toll on all those who pass. I doubt that anyone is going to tear it down but something should be done to open up that building at the street level.

Third, the intermodal connection between the trolley, the subway and the light rail at Market East Station doesn't work as effectively as it could. I think SEPTA does a poor job of promoting the businesses at their key stations. More often than not SEPTA doesn't even put up adequate signage for its own services. Because of that, mass transit in this area is underappreciated, and the businesses are underused.

Someone once told me that the intersection of Eighth and Market was the busiest retail center in the nation, with three department stores sitting on that corner. That, of course, is no longer true. When The Gallery was built its target market was meant to be the working-class population of Philadelphia. But The Gallery seems to have sucked the life out of the rest of the area. People who work there don't want to linger; people who visit leave as soon as they can.

The big problem seems to be the lack of an integrated plan that draws the street between City Hall and Penn's Landing together. I have some ideas to offer.

Something should be done to make the walk friendlier. There should be more places to sit in the shade. However the various blocks are redeveloped one theme should be kept in mind: Make the walk inviting, friendly and pleasing.

The Gallery is aging, and not well. Open up the building at the street level. A good place to start would be where the window displays currently sit. This may require some alteration of the building, but something could be done to retrofit some inviting restaurants into the street level.

The Reading Terminal Market is a hidden jewel. It is an integral part of the neighborhood -- more should be done to promote it and its relationship to the rest of Market East.

Strawbridge's is a great asset to the street, both its retail and office space. More of that kind of redevelopment needs to be inserted into the street.



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ed but how many world-class streets have check-cashing stores next to

be made into a park. Something that people who use the street can
parking and residential building. Whatever is done, don't encroach on
the street.

With Penn's Landing at one end; Old City and Independence Mall in between, and City Hall, the Convention Center, Reading Terminal Market, Loews Hotel and City Hall at the other end, Market East could truly be world-class.

The Freedom Trail in Boston is a great attraction. Philadelphia has a great downtown in that it is compact and walkable. The city could develop a Liberty Trail on the eastern side of Market Street and Old City that could highlight all the great attractions mentioned before.

The stretch of Market Street between City Hall and Penn's Landing could be one of the great streets of this nation. Like many things in Philadelphia, the potential is there but there is not a lot of movement toward using that potential.

Bruce Andersen is a community activist and holds a master's degree in public policy from the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.



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