



KENSINGTON

PLANNING PROCESS

History, Context, Voices

Report 1 of 3: Alignment Report and Implementation Report coming next year

December 2023

INTRODUCTION

We did not get here by accident. Disinvestment, racial inequities and failed strategies imposed from outside the community have left Kensington with intersecting crises. This report is a step toward a resident-driven framework for change.

Building on past efforts that include previous neighborhood plans, community organizing, and an exploration of strategies, **Kensington Planning Process: History, Context, Voices**, is another step in an ongoing, flexible, and participatory engagement process centered on Kensington, Philadelphia.

The first of three reports, this report contains historical context on Kensington, a set of data points that illustrates the social and economic conditions of the neighborhood today, and the results of a broad and inclusive community engagement process that was transparent and intentional in growing participation across our study area.

Later in the winter, we will work with stakeholders to release a second report, **Kensington Planning Process: Alignment**, that reflects feedback on this report and aligns the community's priorities with other current planning efforts. Beginning this winter, we will spend 6-8 months convening stakeholders on each of the top priorities with a goal of co-creating comprehensive and trauma-informed strategies to sustainably and effectively address the greatest challenges facing Kensington. In the summer and fall, we will release a third report – **Kensington Planning Process: Implementation** – and begin implementation of the co-created strategies.

This report will emphasize that our current challenges did not happen in a vacuum. Historical challenges led to intersecting crises that have been made worse by failed strategies imposed from outside stakeholders. This report also aims to convey the most urgent priorities for the neighborhood, as self-defined by residents and Kensington stakeholders. Over 50 pockets of people comprising 500+ individuals identified 6 priorities for Kensington that included mitigating the narcotics trade, safety of public spaces, economic development, investing in human capital, affordable housing, and resident health. This participation is significant, as it represents approximately 10% of all those who voted in the last election within the service area sitting down for multiple hours to discuss our community.

This report also symbolizes the effort to help as many stakeholders as possible find a seat at the table that allows them to work from their strengths in a way that is most beneficial for Kensington. This process allows residents to serve as organizers of their neighbors, facilitators of conversations, and collectors of hopes and experiences. It allows funders such as the Neubauer Family Foundation, [Spring Point Partners](#), the [Green Family Foundation](#), [The Pew Charitable Trusts](#), and more to work collectively to directly support an innovative and challenging participatory process. Additionally, this process allows for the City of Philadelphia Health Department and Opioid Response Unit, and the District Attorney's 57 Block Initiative (DataLab) to share data that is relevant to form a better understanding of current conditions in Kensington.

This process and the findings throughout this report also allows the City of Philadelphia to play a supportive role by identifying and supplying resources that encourages increased participation by residents with an end goal of co-creating solutions and distributing resources to Kensington.

What this report is not

This report is not intended to be a list of solutions or recommendations for all of Kensington's challenges. Rather, this report is one of many steps towards true community participation where solutions are co-created and center those most impacted by the outcomes. Our intention is to continue bolstering engagement surrounding the results in the following pages.

We also note that our historical analysis and data sets are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather a snapshot executed to the best of the current capacity and ability of those facilitating this process. As Kensington's challenges are complex and multifaceted, there will always be more context to connect and understand. But as with all sustained progress and processes, we need a framework for people to respond to and build from that centers equity, community voice, and a trauma-informed lens.

As part of this ongoing, flexible, and participatory process, we look forward to your participation so that we can continue to build a comprehensive and transparent strategy for Kensington. Our collective goal is to create solutions and long-term community transformation - we hope that you will join in and commit to that as well.

What did we find?

The historical context and datasets tell us that we did not get to this moment by accident. The intersecting crises that left Kensington an island of isolation are the direct result of a history of disinvestment followed by a series of failed intervention strategies.

Historically, policymakers have approached the complexity of Kensington with single strategy approaches (such as policing or street cleaning) and a lack of expertise in the core issues that Kensington faces, often leading to failed or worsened outcomes for residents.

But the result of this engagement is evidence of why residents need to be centered in any community development and revitalization process. When asked to identify priorities for Kensington, community members brought a lived understanding that most who hold power and resources do not have and were able to see not only the intersection of challenges in their community, but the need for comprehensive strategies to address them.



OUTLINE

01

Kensington Then and Now

Kensington in the past
Kensington today
Quality of life issues for long term residents

02

The Previous Way of Doing Business

Previous planning efforts by the City of Philadelphia
Intersecting crises and fragmented solutions
The need for a new path forward

03

The New Path Forward: Results from Participatory Engagement Process

Methodology
Community-defined priorities
New priorities that emerged
Next steps



While Kensington can be defined in many different ways geographically, we have focused on this study area as it is arguably most impacted by intersecting issues including poverty, lack of affordable housing, the opioid epidemic, and violence, yet also sustains active and important community engagement and resilience.

KENSINGTON THEN & NOW

Kensington in the past

Kensington today

Quality of life issues for long term residents

01

KENSINGTON IN THE PAST

How did we get to where we are today?

This excerpt is pulled from the Philadelphia Encyclopedia - Textile and Manufacturing Workers

"Of the many areas of the city where these products were made, the largest by far was Kensington, the sprawling industrial neighborhood to the northeast of Center City. Home to hundreds of textile mills, large and small, and a vast, primarily immigrant workforce, Kensington boasted one of the greatest concentrations of textile activity in the world. By 1910 there were four hundred textile firms employing thirty thousand workers in Kensington. Manufacturing in Philadelphia, 1683–1912, noted that from the tower of the Bromley Mill in Kensington there were more textile mills within the range of vision than in any other city in the world.

In the 1920s and 30s, Philadelphia was a destination in the Great Migration as northern factories called for more laborers and southern Black people moved to fill the need.

Philadelphia's textile industry remained strong through the mid-twentieth century, but, like much of the city's industrial sector, it declined significantly in

the post–World War II period. A number of economic and social factors—cheaper labor and energy costs in other parts of the nation or world, competition from producers of lower-cost products, changing urban demographics—led to most Philadelphia textile factories closing or moving out of the city in the latter part of the century. Some stayed local, however; scores of mills transferred operations to surrounding counties, especially in expanding areas of South Jersey.

At a postwar height in 1953, 359,000 Philadelphians were employed in manufacturing jobs -, 45 percent of the city's labor force. With the passing of the Highways Act in 1956, Philadelphia saw a 25% decline in employment. From 1955 to 1975, three quarters of its industrial jobs left. By 2011 the number of industrial jobs has dramatically fallen to below 30,000, 5 percent of the total."

A View in the Kensington Mill District - Public Ledger

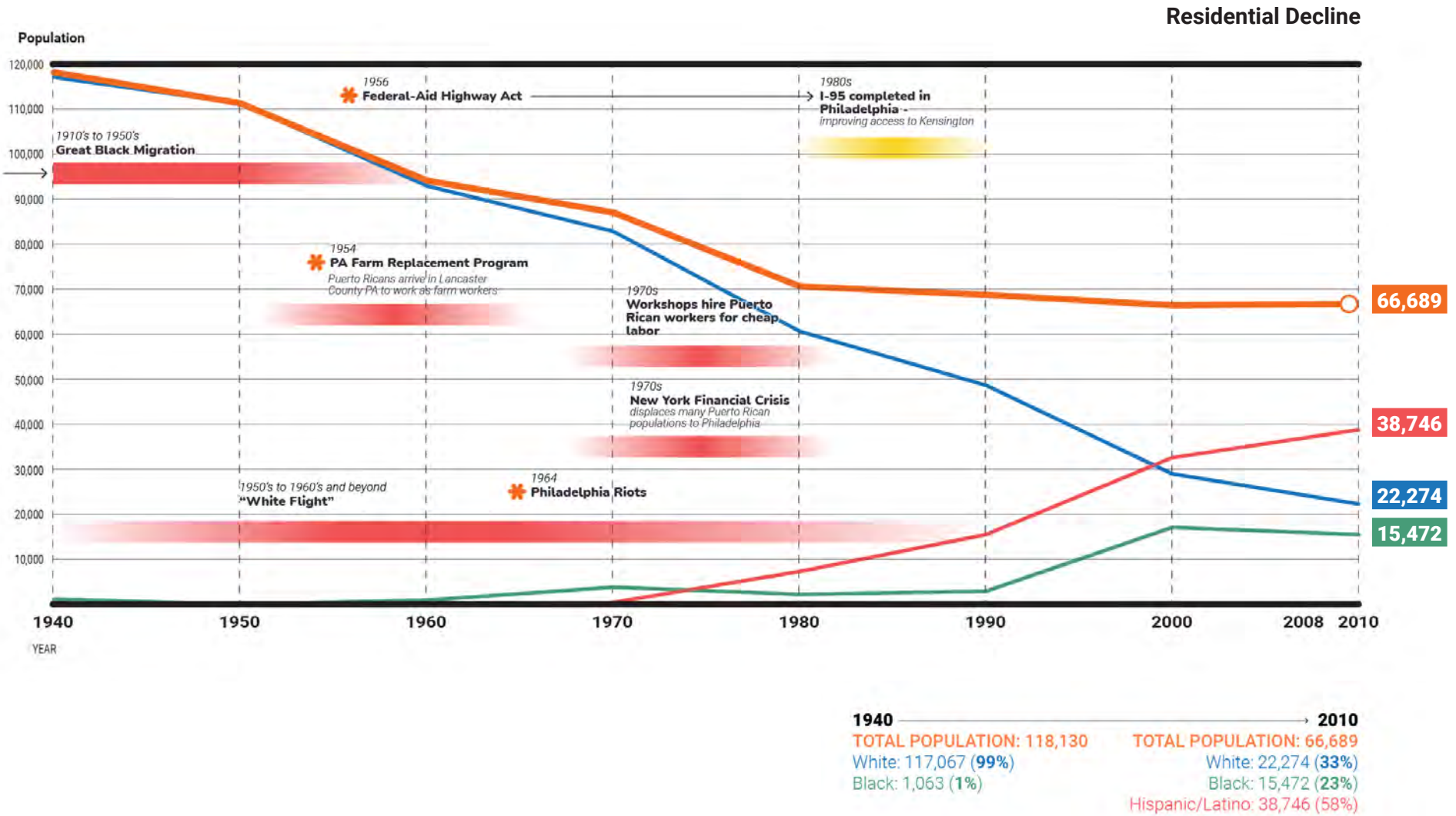


PUBLIC LEDGER PHOTO

A VIEW IN THE KENSINGTON MILL DISTRICT

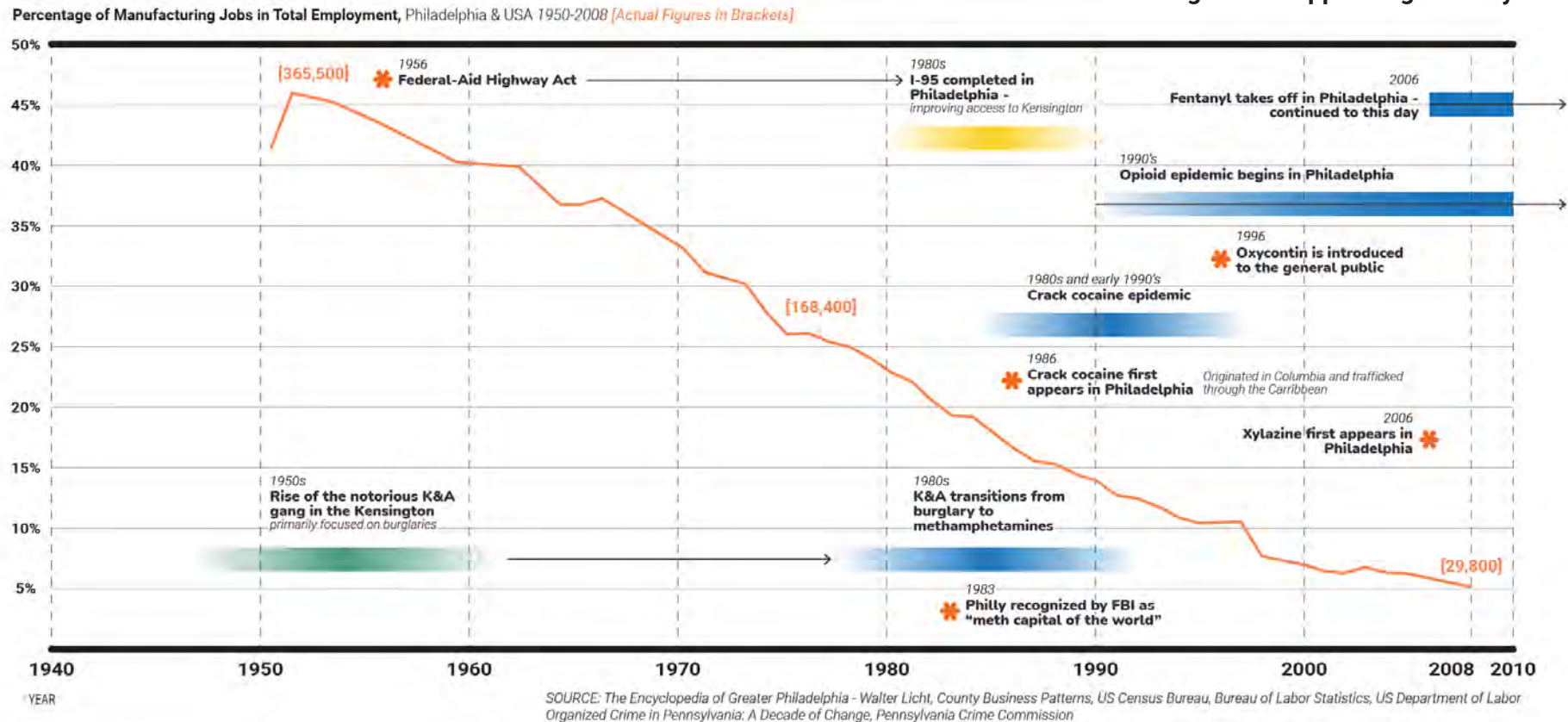
Most of the mills shown in this picture manufacture textile goods. Two wards, in the northern section of the city, produce more carpets than the whole of Great Britain and Ireland. Philadelphia is primarily a manufacturing city, the greatest manufacturing city on earth—the "World's Greatest Workshop," but she lays a special emphasis upon her prestige as the world's largest manufacturer of textiles.

Kensington's residential population started its slow and steady decline in the 1940s and with the passing of the Highway Act in 1956 and a decline in the manufacturing economic base of Kensington which came with it, the racial & ethnic makeup of the community transformed from a majority white population to a majority Latino and Black population.



As industry declined, the Latino and Black population were the last to arrive and were stranded on an island of disinvestment in Kensington. Soon after, the drug trade supplanted it as the primary economic driver of Kensington.

Drug Trade Supplanting Industry



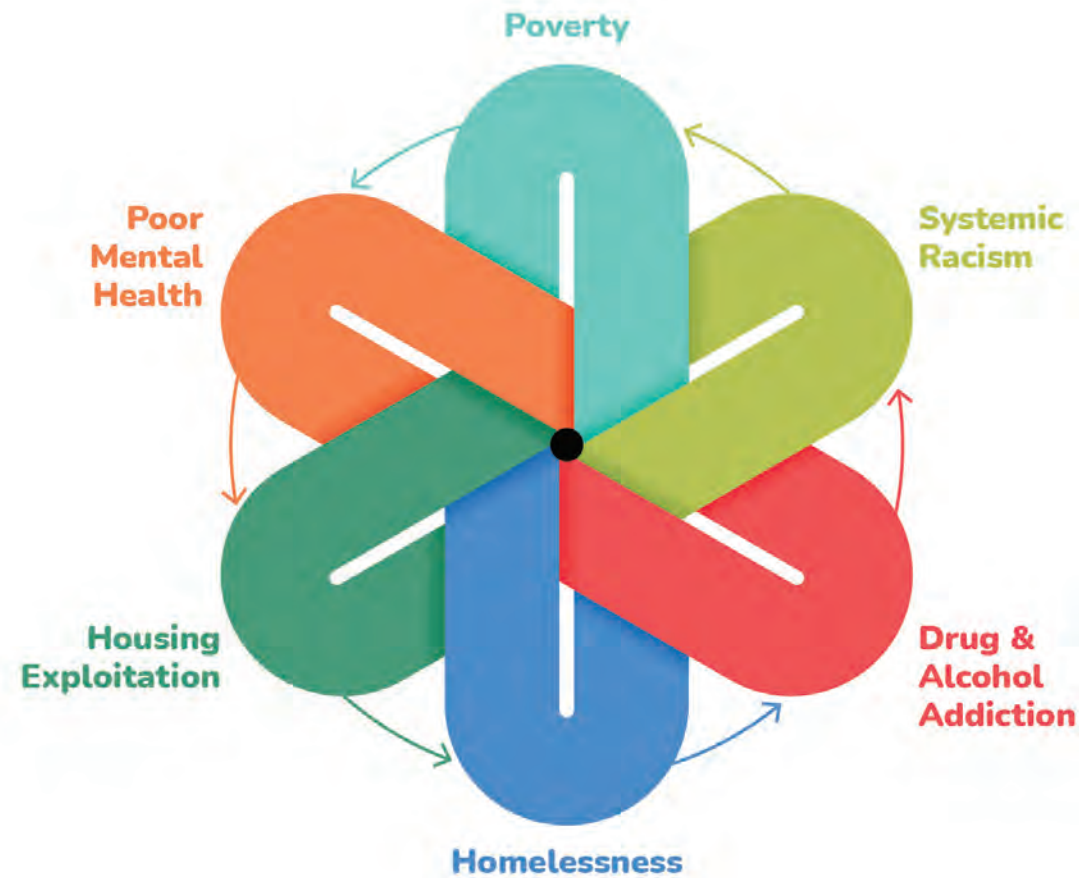
1950 → 2008
 Industrial jobs as a percent of all jobs in Philadelphia: **40%**
 Industrial jobs as a percent of all jobs in Philadelphia: **10%**

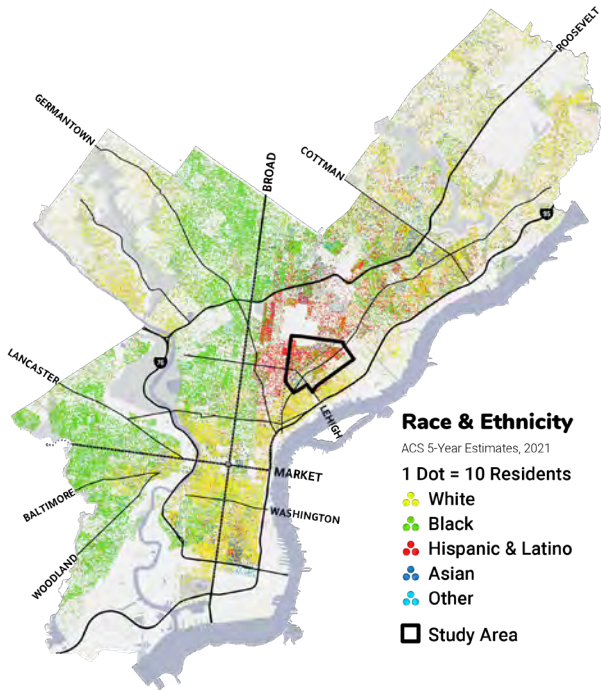
KENSINGTON TODAY

What are some of the major issues impacting Kensington and its residents today?

INTERSECTING CRISES

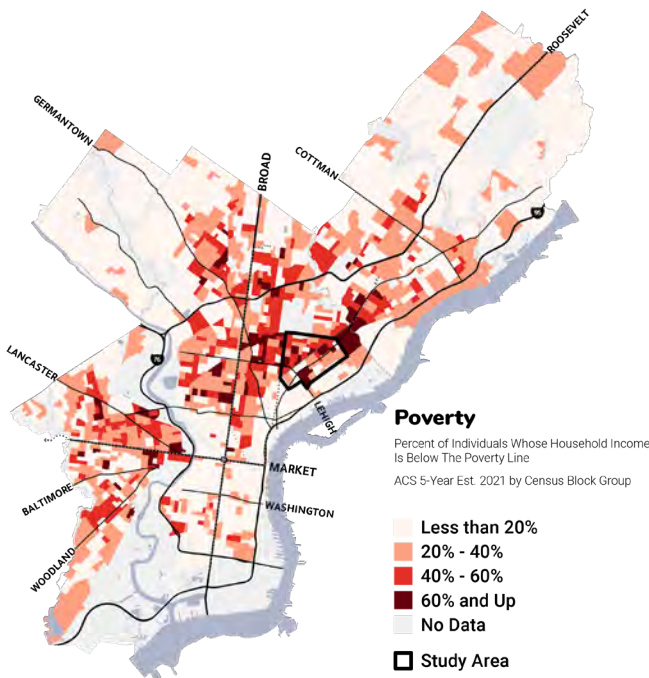
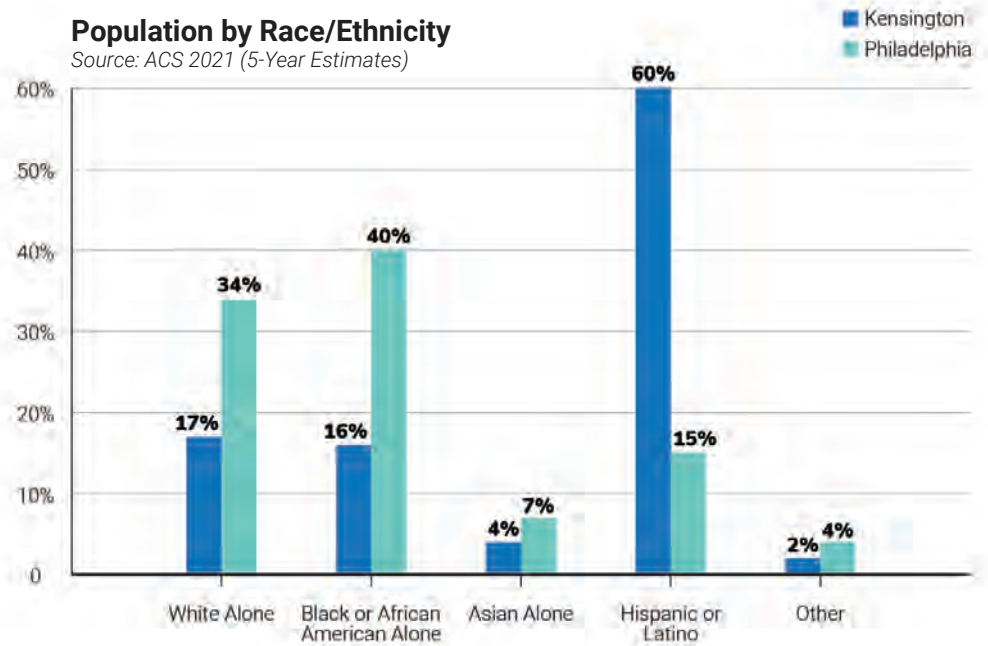
Kensington is suffering from poverty, systemic racism, homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction, gentrification, housing exploitation, and a lack of support for mental health. While the narcotics trade is not the root cause of these conditions in Kensington, it does reinforce and create a cascade of profoundly destructive effects on safety and the quality of life in the neighborhood.





Population by Race/Ethnicity

Source: ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates)



Poverty Rate

Percent of individuals whose household income is below the poverty line.

Kensington

45% in poverty 55% not in poverty

Philadelphia

23% in poverty 77% not in poverty

Source: ACS 2021 (5-Year Estimates) by Block Group

Barriers to education and a lack of investment in equitable educational opportunities in Kensington compared to the rest of Philadelphia have contributed to Kensington having one of the highest poverty rates in the city.

About 23,000 study area residents live in households that earn less than the poverty rate out of about 51,000 total residents. In 2021, a family of four was considered in poverty when they earned an annual income of less than \$26,500.

INCOME OF RESIDENTS, HOUSING TENURE, AND HOUSING SECURITY FOR RESIDENTS

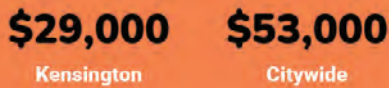
A number of factors contribute to housing insecurity for Kensington residents. Many city programs are geared towards 80% Area Median Income, but 48% of all renters and 68% of all homeowners in Kensington make less than 80% AMI. Combining this with some of the oldest housing stock in the city which requires cost-prohibitive upkeep, repairs, and maintenance, residents are at a higher risk of displacement. Meanwhile, these conditions create a housing market in Kensington that is ripe for private developers who are looking to exploit this situation.

Key Factors that Influence Housing

1. The Income of Residents

Median Household Income

Determined by the American Community Survey 2021, 5-year Estimates

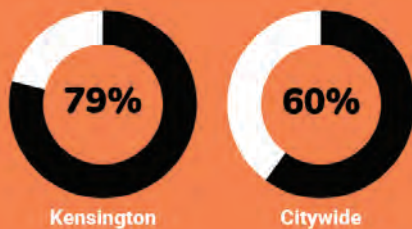


Area Median Income (AMI)

AMI refers to HUD's Area Median Family Income (HAMFI) used to determine eligibility for HUD programs. In 2020, the HAMFI for a family of four in Philadelphia was **\$96,600**, and 80% of HAMFI for a family of four was **\$77,300**.

Percent of families make less than 80% of AMI (\$77,300)

Percent of Households in each category, HUD CHAS 2020

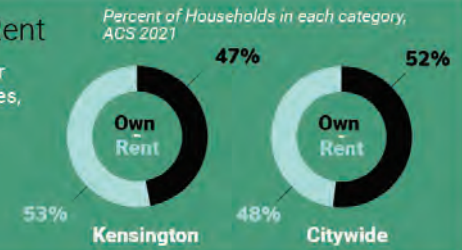


* Please note that making over 80% of AMI does not mean housing is affordable for residents as the cost of housing is multifaceted

2. Housing Tenure - Own vs. Rent

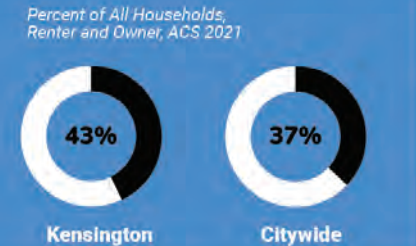
Owning a home and renting a home offer different challenges around rent increases, taxes, and home maintenance.

* Residents in Kensington have a lower rate of homeownership than the city as a whole (47% vs. 52%)



3. Housing Cost Relative to Income - Cost Burdened

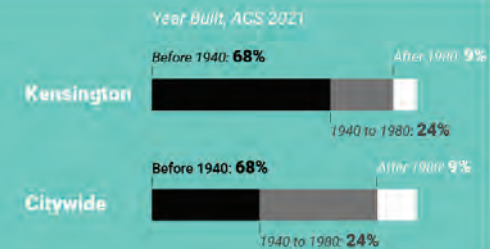
* Residents in Kensington are cost burdened at a higher rate than the city (43% vs. 37%) - despite some of the lowest home prices and rents citywide.

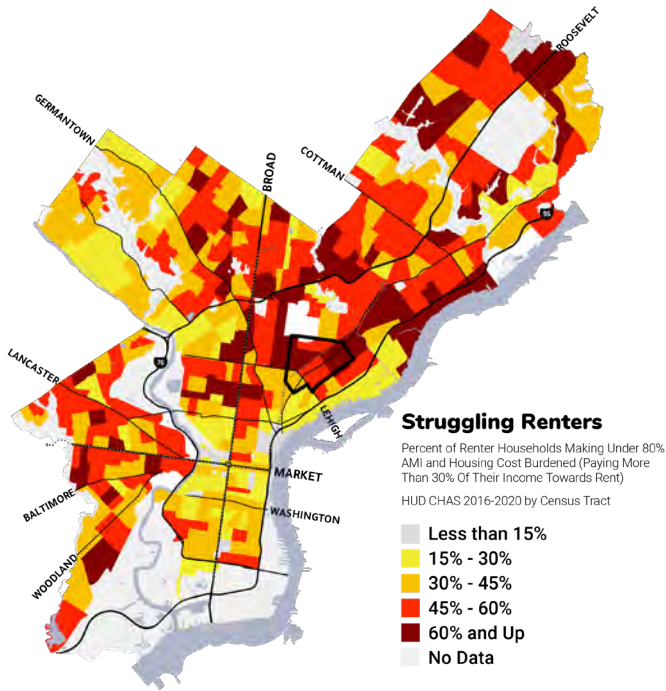


4. Age of Homes

Older homes require more maintenance, upkeep, and repairs, which are often cost prohibitive.

* Residents in Kensington live in older homes than the city as a whole



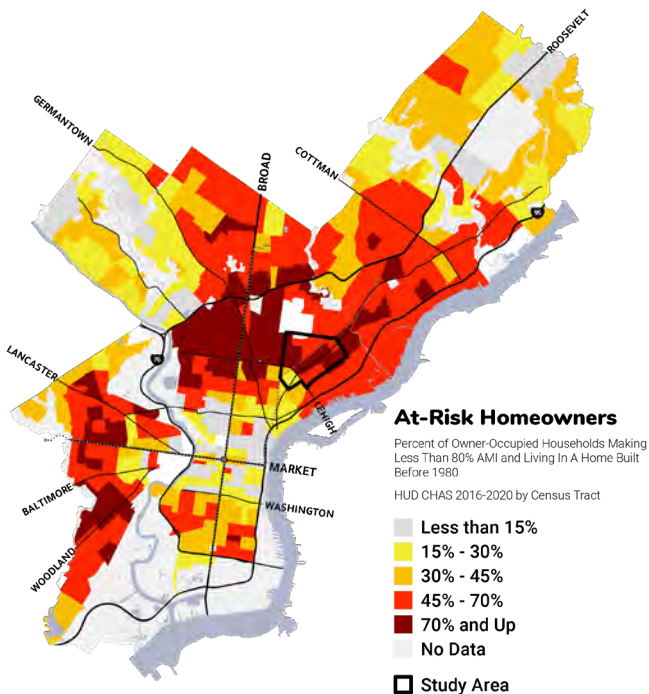


Struggling Renters

Many local residents struggle to afford rent or live in aging homes that may require significant repairs.

How many renter households may need additional help to afford their homes?

Approximately **5,678 renter households make less than 80% of the Area Median Income and pay more than 30% of their income towards rent** out of about 11,900 renter households (48% of all renters; Citywide: 40% of all renters).



At-Risk Homeowners

Many local residents struggle to afford rent or live in aging homes that may require significant repairs.

How many owner-occupied households may struggle to afford needed repairs?

Approximately **7,275 homeowner households make less than 80% of the Area Median Income and live in a home that was built before 1980** out of about 10,660 homeowner households (68% of all owners; Citywide: 48% of all owners).

About **5,580 homeowner households make less than 80% AMI and live in a home built before 1940** (52% of all owners; Citywide: 23% of all owners).

Who is particularly at-risk?

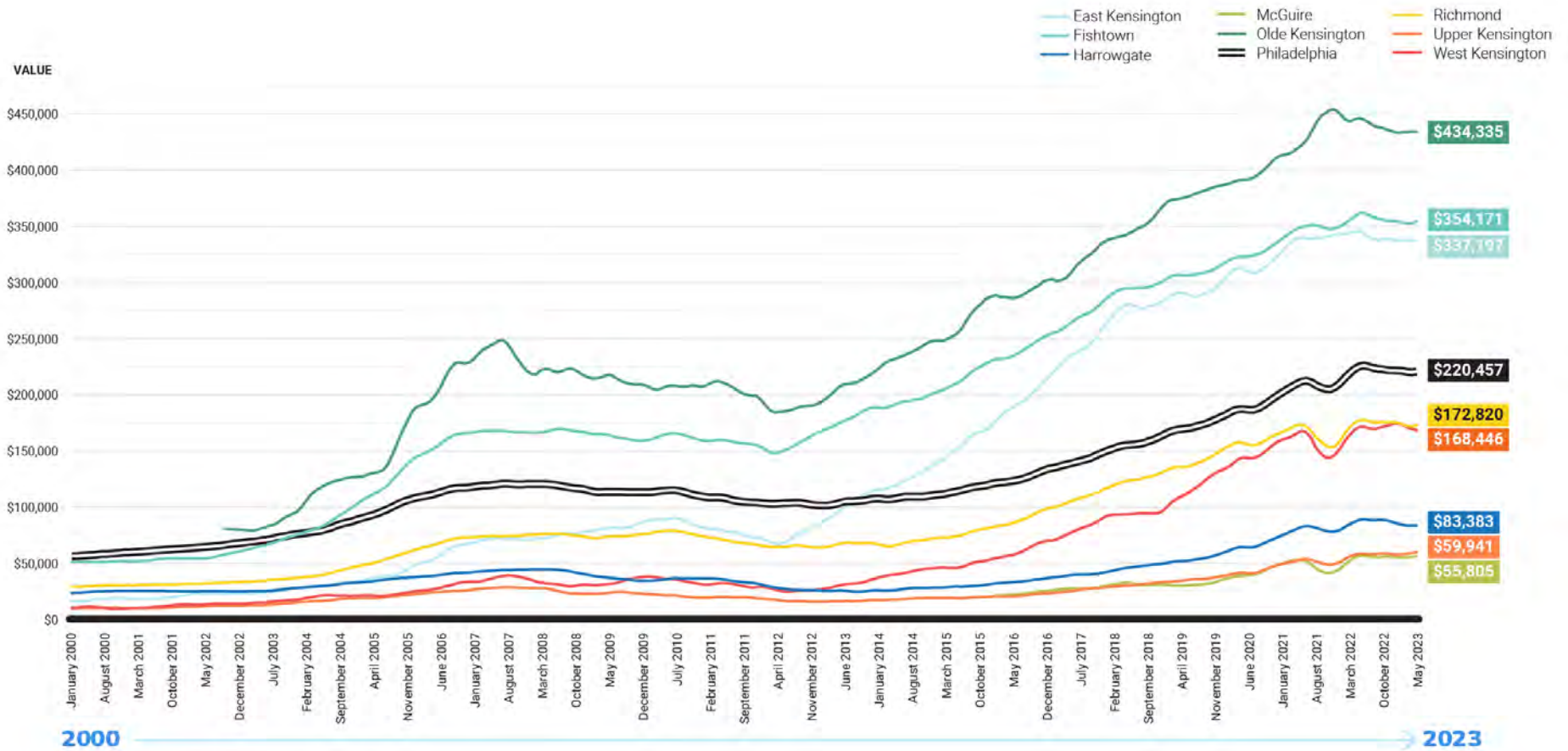
76% of Senior homeowners make under 80% AMI totaling about 2,846 households. (Citywide, 59% of Senior households make under 80% AMI).

Most residents who are lower income and housing cost-burdened are Hispanic or Latino.

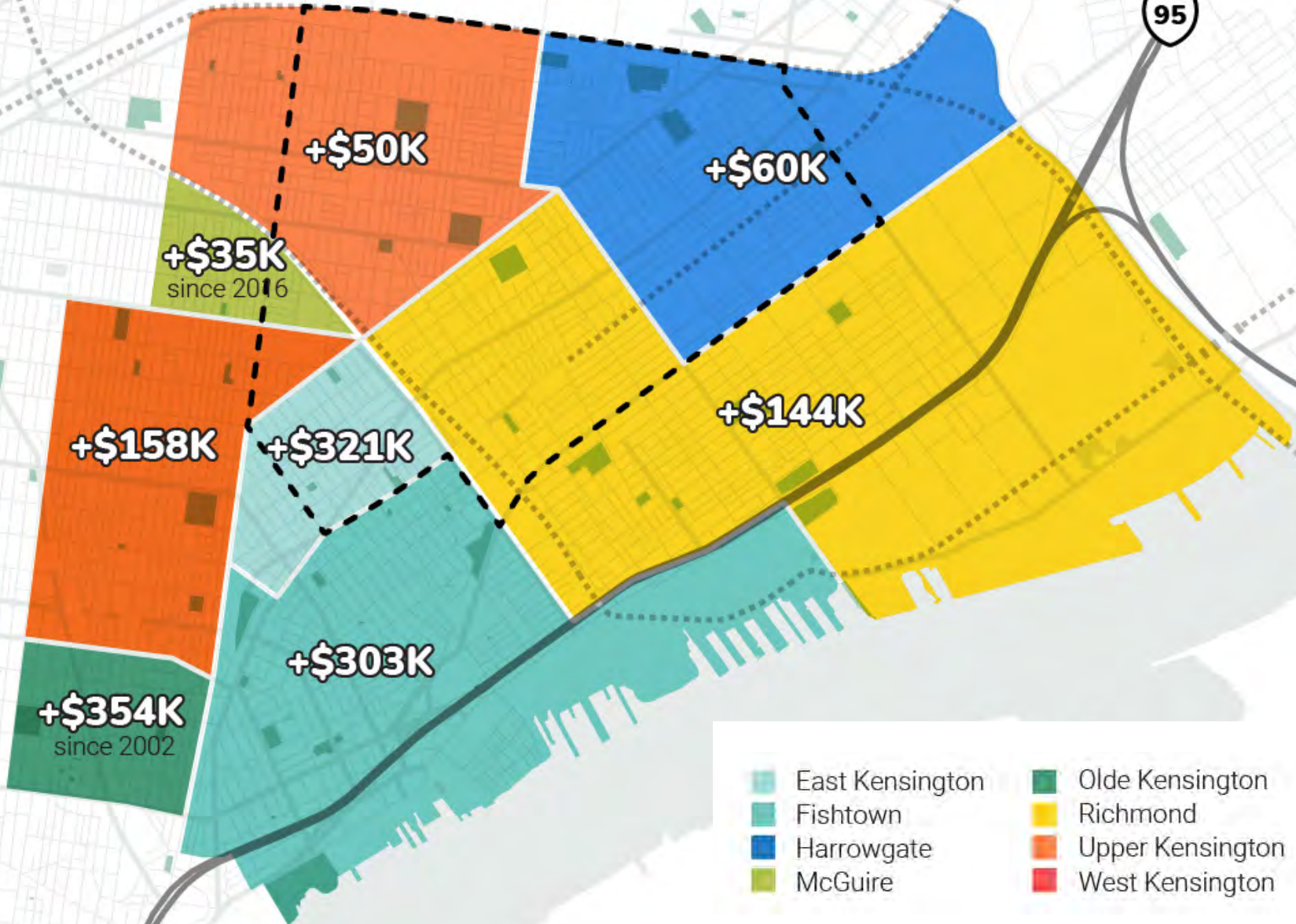
INVESTMENTS IN THE HOUSING MARKET

Both the private sector and the city are making investments in Kensington, but in regard to housing, these are not to the benefit of most long-term residents. These investments are particularly damaging when operating under a theory of change that the positive impact of the creation of market rate (and 80% AMI) housing will trickle down to those most housing insecure.

Zillow Home Value Index - Typical Home Value



INCREASE IN HOME VALUES SINCE THE YEAR 2000



New construction permits have been following the Market Frankford Line

Despite a disproportionate percentage of homeowners and renters in Kensington whose income is below 80% AMI, over 4,100 new units have been built or are proposed in the area.



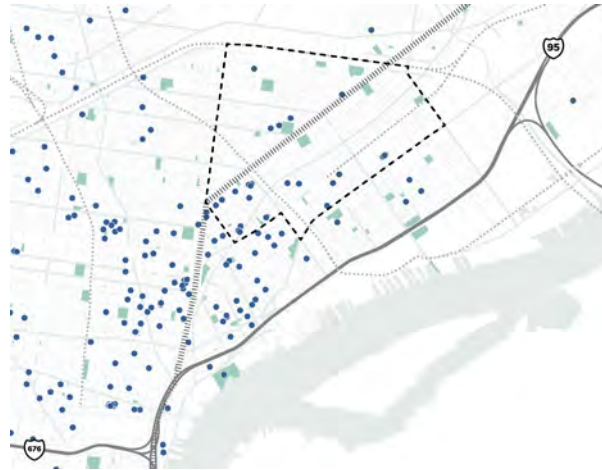
Over 4,100 new units have been built or are proposed in the area.

The majority are 1 & 2 bedroom market rate rentals and single family units for sale.

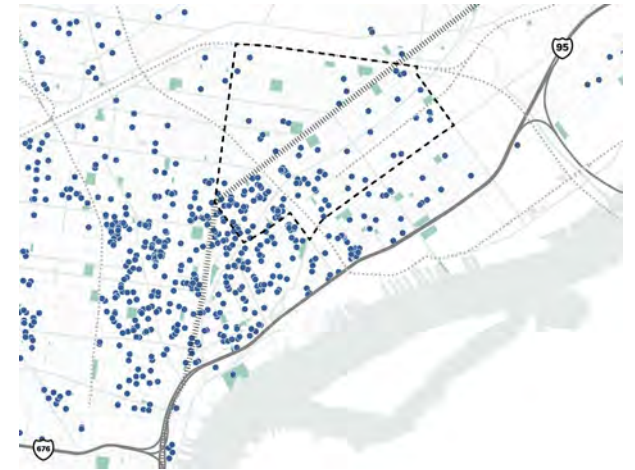
2017



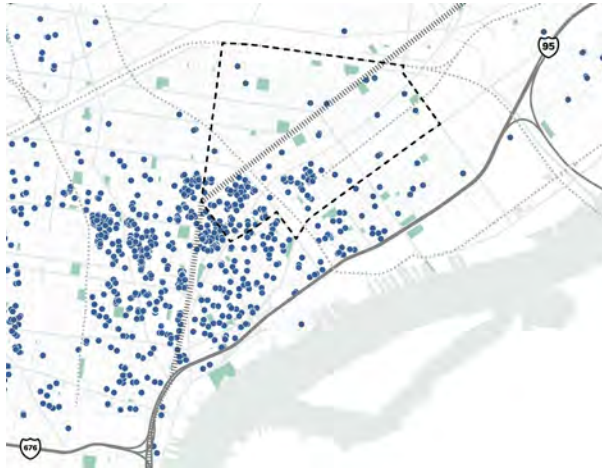
2018



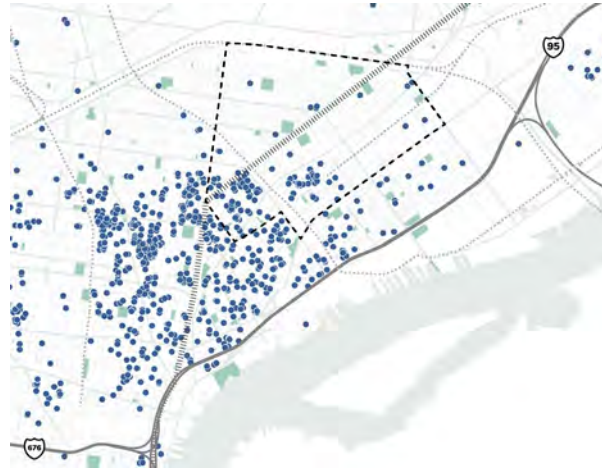
2019



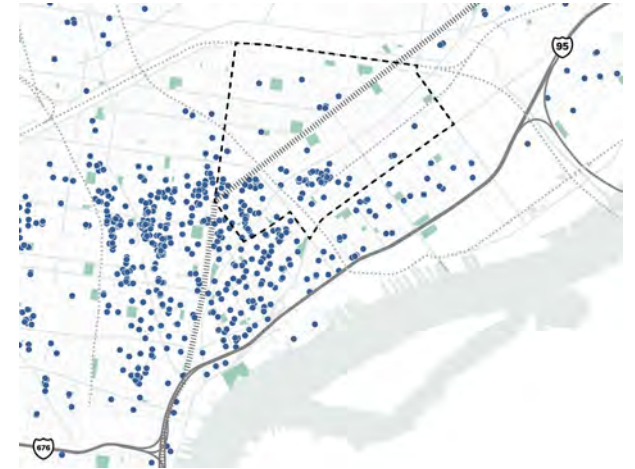
2020



2021



2022



KENSINGTON TODAY

*What are the impacts
of the drug trade?*

Kensington is the center of Philadelphia's drug trade and has been for decades.

The departure of industry, decades of disinvestment, and compounded social inequities have created conditions for a drug economy to thrive. The drug trade permeates every aspect of life in the neighborhood, creating hardship for long-term residents and businesses, and concentrating those who suffer from addiction in one densely packed area. This containment strategy has led to a billion-dollar drug market which impacts every facet of life for residents.

HOW KENSINGTON GOT TO BE THE CENTER OF PHILLY'S OPIOID CRISIS

A neighborhood once devoted to work now finds itself caught up in drugs and despair. Can a proposed safe-injection site restore hope?

Philadelphia Inquirer - January 23, 2018

BUSINESS AND BLOODSHED

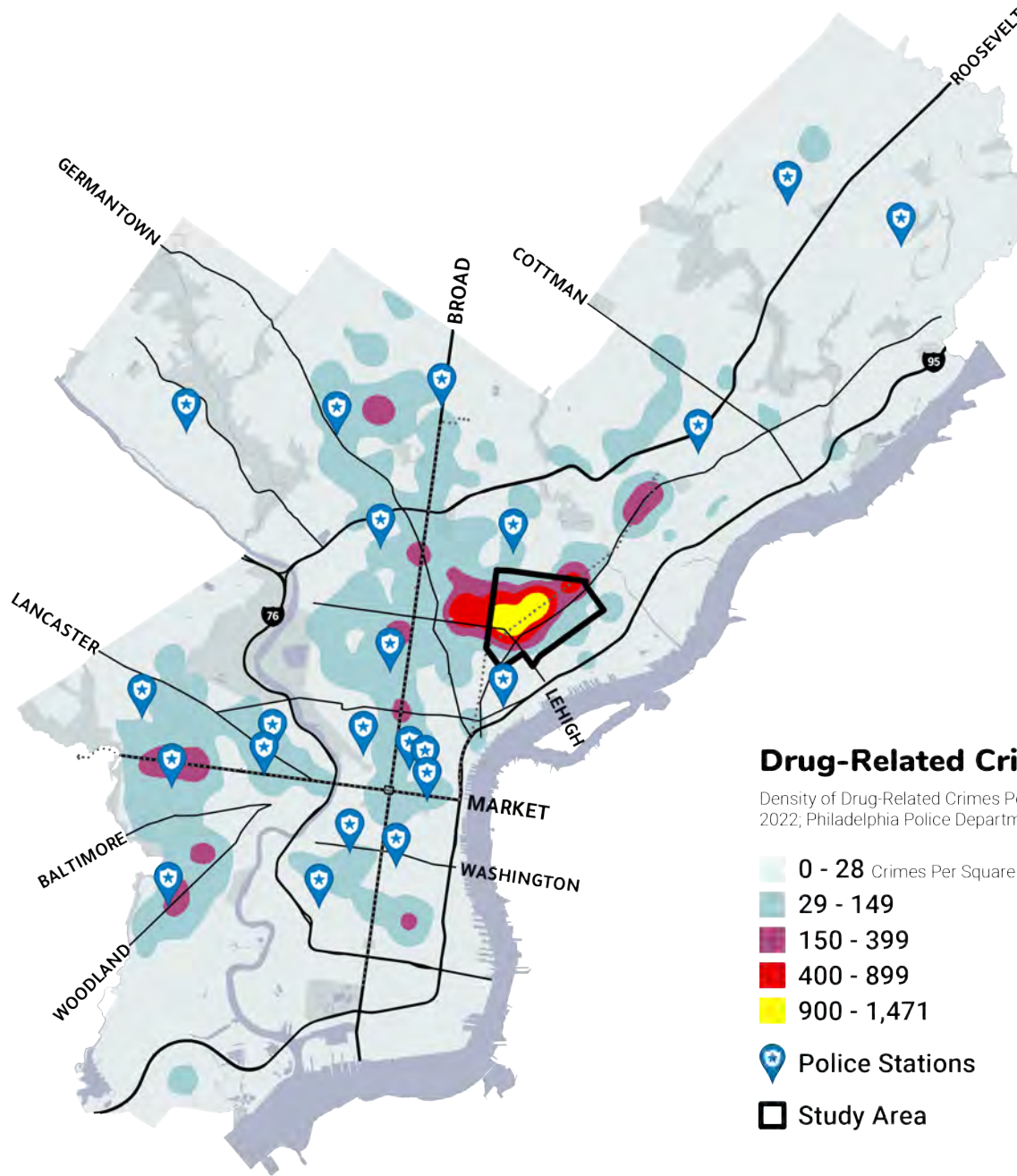
Even as pandemic lockdowns ease, Kensington's heroin economy thrives, along with the endless gun violence it fuels. And the neighborhood's pain is plainer than ever.

Philadelphia Inquirer - May 20, 2021

WHY PHILLY KEEPS A BILLION-DOLLAR OPEN-AIR DRUG MARKET CONTAINED IN KENSINGTON

The containment of Kensington's drug market demonstrates the systematic racism that plagues Philadelphia

WHYY - August 26, 2021



Drug-Related Crimes

Density of Drug-Related Crimes Per Square Mile, 2022, Philadelphia Police Department

- 0 - 28 Crimes Per Square Mile
- 29 - 149
- 150 - 399
- 400 - 899
- 900 - 1,471
- Police Stations
- Study Area

In 2022, the Philadelphia Department of Public Health recorded 1,413 unintentional overdose deaths. This is an 11% increase from the previous high of 1,276 in 2021.

Overdose Deaths in City of Philadelphia, 2010-2022



SOURCE: Philadelphia Department of Public Health

Over one-third of unhoused & unsheltered individuals in the City are on Kensington Streets

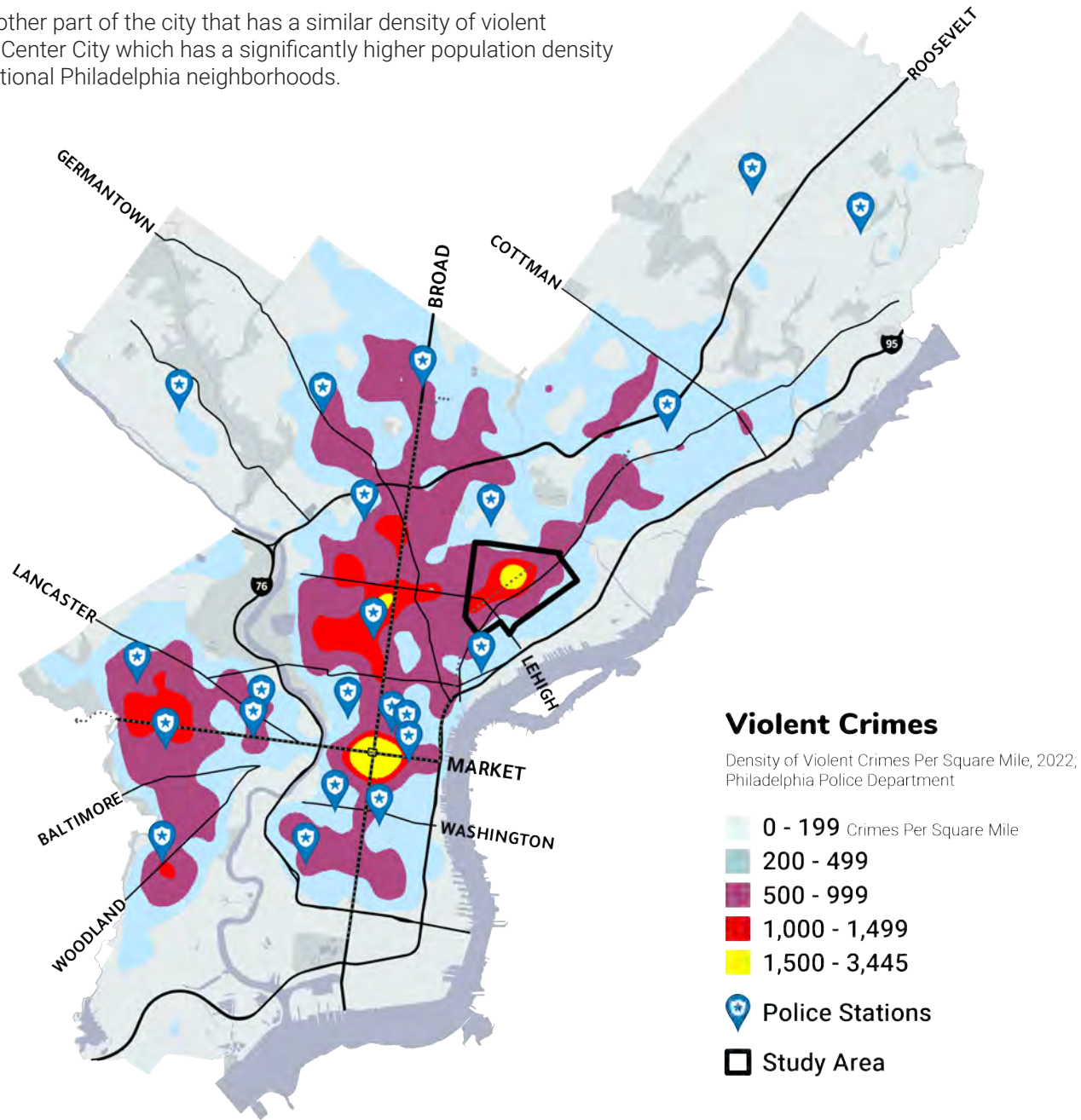
Homelessness in Kensington, 2019-2022



SOURCE: Philadelphia Office of Homeless Services Unsheltered PIT Count; Philadelphia Police Department Homeless Count

The illicit drug trade results in a high rate of violent crime.

The only other part of the city that has a similar density of violent crimes is Center City which has a significantly higher population density than traditional Philadelphia neighborhoods.



QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES FOR LONG TERM RESIDENTS

How does the drug trade impact everyday residents?

The impacts of the drug trade are felt way beyond those suffering from addiction and the violence associated with illicit activity. This isn't only a Kensington issue, communities across the country are suffering similar downstream challenges.

Amenities common in other neighborhoods are lacking investment or are inaccessible in Kensington.





Public Library

“Kensington petitions for repairs at McPherson: ‘Many children in the neighborhood ... have nowhere else to go to stay warm or to eat’

Kensington library patrons and workers are pushing the City for critical repairs and renovations at McPherson Square Library. The group is asking for emergency building repairs to address the building’s lack of ADA accessibility, the deteriorating foundation, the leaky roof, and the outdated plumbing and electrical systems.

Kensington Voice Article - December 9 2022

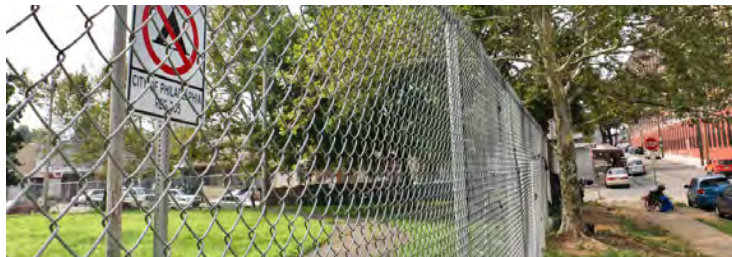


Play Streets

“After concerns of violence closed a pool and several Playstreets, neighborhood groups are working to shift perceptions of Kensington.”

Police cite safety concerns, but these losses eliminate some of the safe spaces for children in the neighborhood. It becomes a community effort to keep things up and running for the kids.

Inquirer Article - August 7, 2022



Parks

“These Kensington organizations offer safe spaces for the neighborhood’s children.”

Closures of pools and other public programs lead to community organizations having to fill in the gaps. In many cases, these organizations are the ones getting involved in creative ways to ensure that families in Kensington have safe spaces.

Inquirer Article - August 7, 2022



Transit Station

“SEPTA to temporarily close Kensington’s Somerset Station over safety issues”

Located in an area hard hit by Philadelphia’s opioid crisis, the MFL station’s elevators were destroyed by urine and needles, SEPTA officials said.

WHYY Article - March 12, 2021



Schools

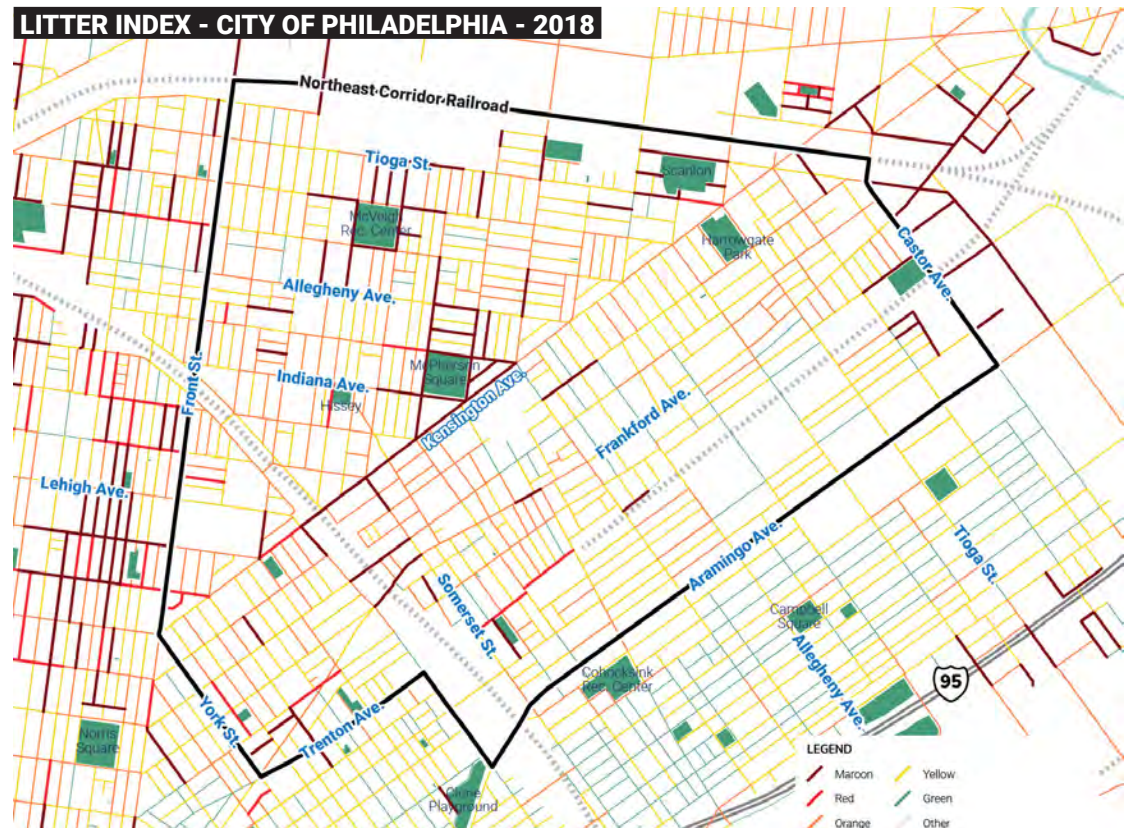
“Triple Shooting Outside Philly School Leaves Teen Hurt, Bullet in School”

The shooting took place when the Frances E. Willard School in the Kensington neighborhood was closed very early Wednesday morning.

NBC Philadelphia Article - August 31, 2022

The outdoor drug market leaves a lasting challenge related to trash

In the span of a year, 376 tons of trash and 126,000 syringes are removed from Kensington Streets



Commercial Corridor Health

48% of spaces surveyed within the Kensington Study Area are vacant (Impact Services Survey)

Less than 10% vacancy is generally considered healthy

Inventory of Commercial Properties along Kensington Ave.
2400 - 2800 Blocks (York Street to Cambria Street)

Vacant - 99 properties

48%

15%

Food - 25 properties

12%

Retail - 14 properties

10%

Service - 20 properties

7%

Residential - 10 properties

5%

Other - 31 properties

3%

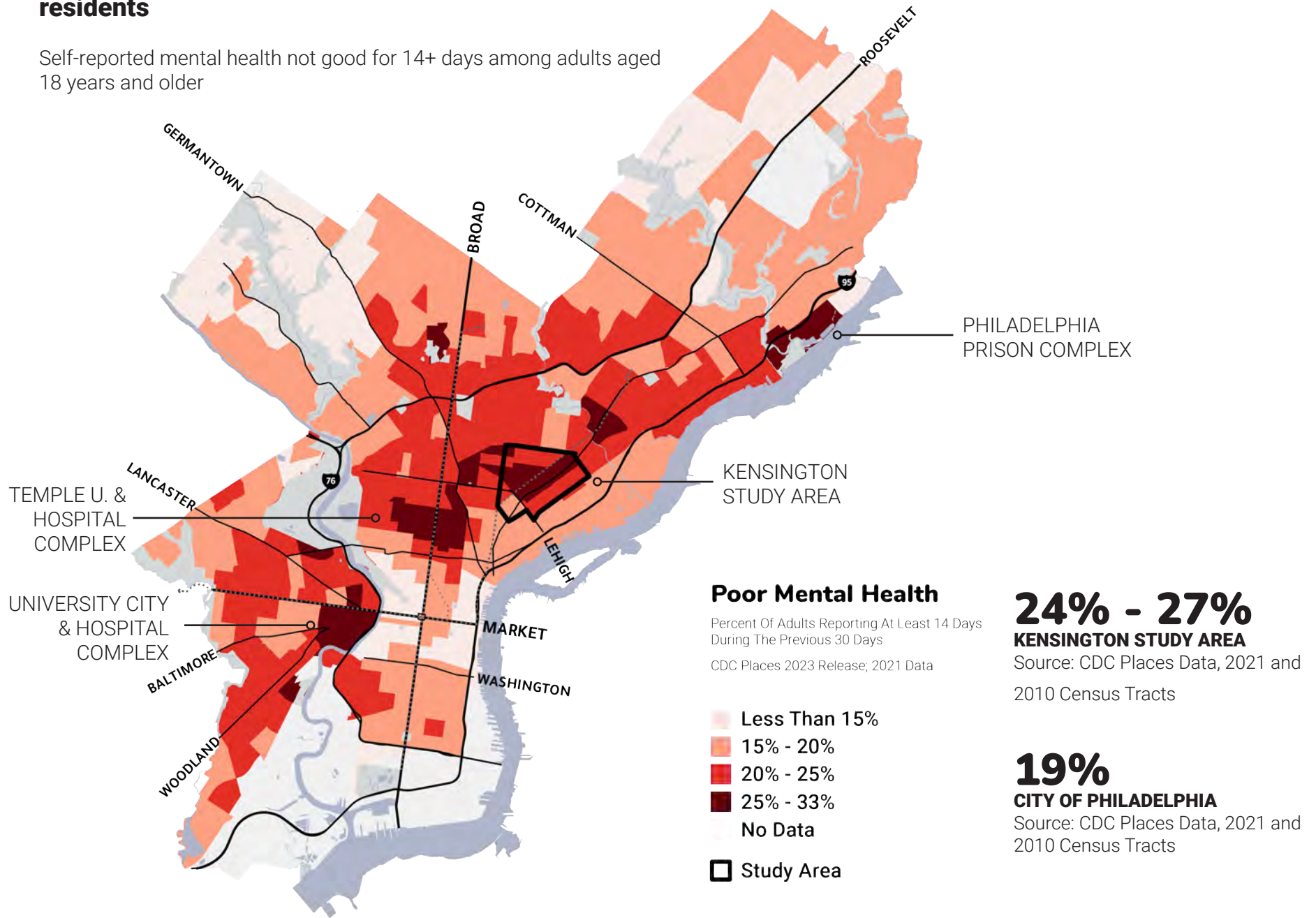
FROM HORSE BUGGIES TO MODERN CARS: 100 YEARS WITH MORRIS AUTO PARTS

In recent years, the opioid epidemic has exacerbated Kensington's challenges. Additionally, Harris said that the COVID-19 pandemic has left the corridor isolated and in a worse state than he's ever seen it before. However, he's committed to keeping Morris Auto Parts in the neighborhood.

Kensington Voice - November 17, 2022

These lead to daily stress and poor mental health for residents

Self-reported mental health not good for 14+ days among adults aged 18 years and older



THE PREVIOUS WAY OF DOING BUSINESS

Past efforts by the City sought to address one or another of Kensington's struggles in isolation, but none of those efforts have noticeably altered the neighborhood's trajectory nor meaningfully included residents in the solution.

**PREVIOUS PLANNING EFFORTS
BY THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA**

**INTERSECTING CRISES &
FRAGMENTED SOLUTIONS**

THE NEED FOR A NEW PATH FORWARD

02

Past Efforts Examples

In Kensington, there have been a series of police centric efforts to address challenges that have been pervasive for decades. These challenges have had peaks and valleys but no long-term solutions. The following police centric intervention strategies happened during peaks in 2003 and in 2011 with no improved outcomes for conditions in Kensington, affirming that single-strategy approaches won't yield sustained solutions and that we need comprehensive strategies that consider the intersection of factors.

Mayor
Ed Rendell
1992-2000



*Police in the streets
of Kensington*

Operation Sunrise - 1998

"[Operation Sunrise] was like stop and frisk on steroids,"

Mayor
John Street
2000 - 2008



*Police Commissioner
Sylvester Johnson*

Operation Safe Streets - 2002

Operation Safe Streets aimed to address the increase in gun violence

Mayor
Michael Nutter
2008 - 2016

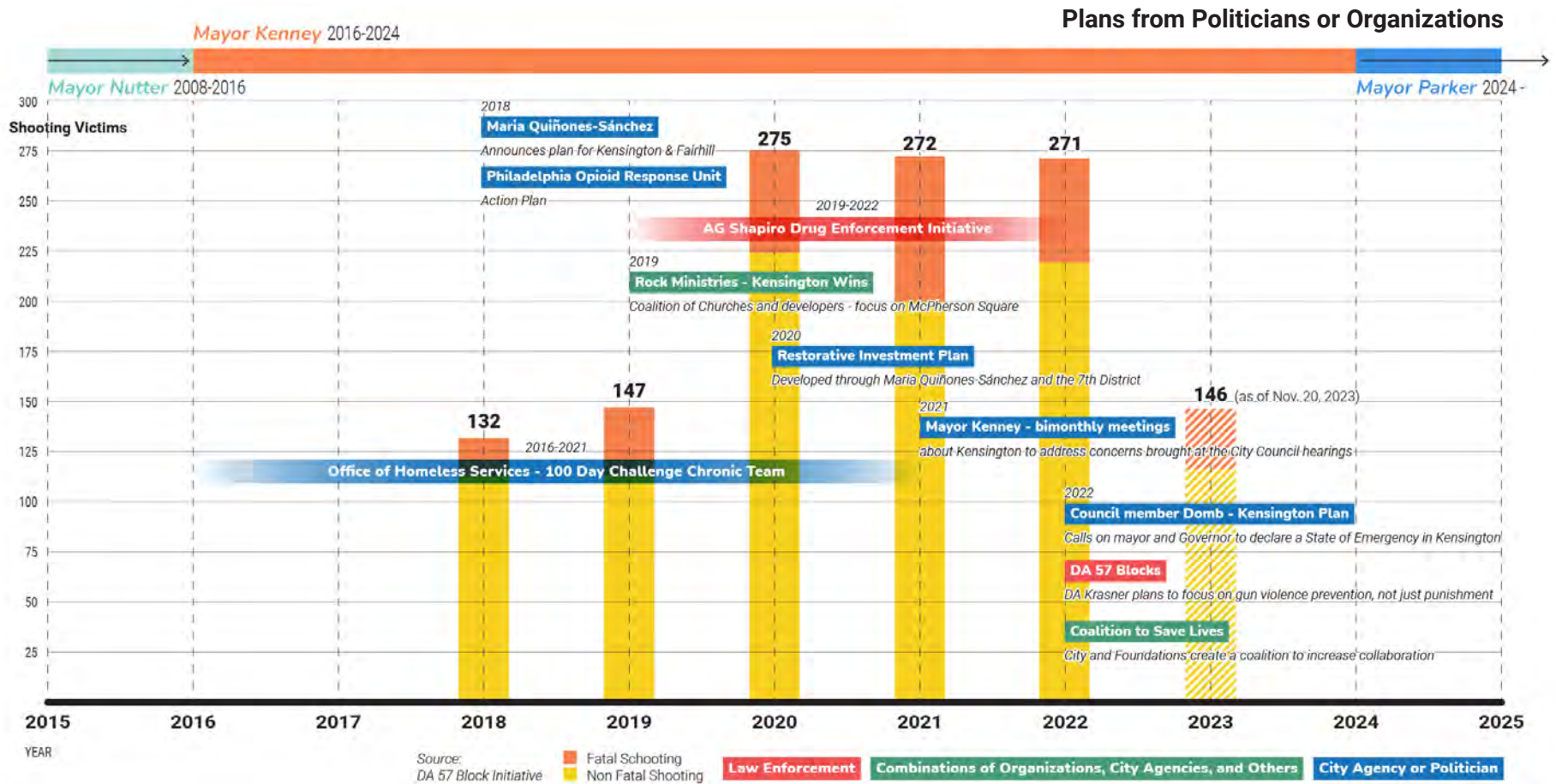


*24th Capt. Charles Vogt on
Hartville St. in Kensington*

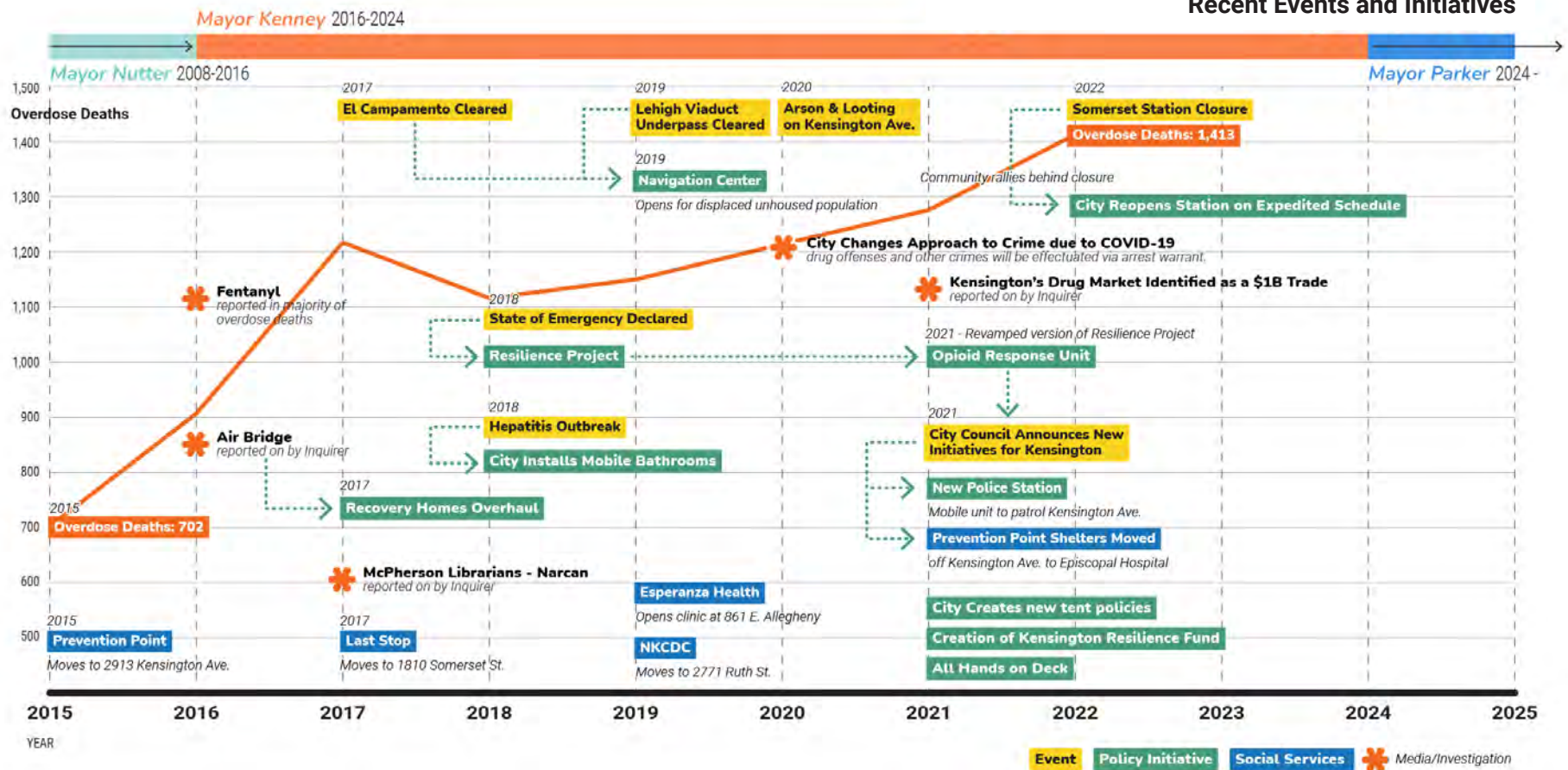
Block-By-Block Approach

Block by block approach aimed to address the opioid epidemic and violence such as the Kensington strangler.

Previous Planning Efforts & Initiatives



Recent Events and Initiatives



As the previous two charts indicate, 20+ years of top-down strategies have not yielded any measurable change or sustainable solutions. The past 8 years have seen multiple investments, yet we see little to no significant sustained change to the unsheltered population, overdose deaths, and fatal and non-fatal shootings.

A large crowd of people is gathered on a city street in Kensington. The crowd is diverse in age and appearance. Many people are wearing blue shirts with "PUSH CAN" printed on them. A sign in the crowd reads "SAVE OUR EL CAFE". In the background, there is a building with a sign that says "Esperanza" and a multi-level structure, possibly a transit station or parking garage. The scene is set during the day with some overcast lighting.

**History is repeating
itself in Kensington,
but we can't afford to
repeat the mistakes of
the past.**

→ If there had been success from investments made in Kensington, we would not see the peaks and valleys in regard to violence and overdose deaths and would not need a new intervention effort every 5-7 years.

→ After more than 20 years of single-issue City-driven actions, racial disparities in areas ranging from housing to health outcomes have only increased. While every effort has claimed success at some point, none have had any form of measurable or sustained improvements for residents, only for those leading the efforts.

→ Efforts run through the city's Managing Director's Office or through centralized efforts of the Philadelphia Police Department lack the expertise and resources to implement strategies to address poverty, addiction, violence, and helping the unhoused population.

→ Strategies to address issues in Kensington have lacked the expertise and collaboration of residents and individuals with lived experience. Without an ongoing and participatory community engagement process that acknowledges that every issue is impacted by the other, nothing will be effective in the long-term.

→ A new path forward will require stakeholders across industries and sectors, from state and city offices to non-profit organizations, to align with the community's self-defined priorities.

A NEW PATH FORWARD

Results from participatory engagement progress

METHODOLOGY

COMMUNITY DEFINED PRIORITIES

NEW PRIORITIES THAT EMERGED

NEXT STEPS

03

A new path forward will require a truly participatory framework that acknowledges the expertise of residents and their lived understanding of the collective history of the community.

Sustained solutions will require bringing as many stakeholders and resources to the table to push forward community-defined priorities and strategies for transformation.

Community development corporations, city leaders, and other stakeholders should align strategies for development and resources with the community's self-defined priorities.

This is the first step of an ongoing, flexible, and participatory process



Introduction to Results Section

The historical context of Kensington, combined with a series of imposed failed strategies over the past several years, have made solutions to Kensington's challenges ineffective. One of the downstream impacts of the latest Kensington peak which began to take form in 2017 and was amplified by COVID and the 2020 summer of racial reckoning was when SEPTA suddenly announced in March of 2021 that a critical source of transportation for Kensington residents - the Somerset El stop - was closing 'indefinitely.' In response, residents, organizations, civic groups, city workers, and more rallied together to demand safety and solutions, also noting that instead of pushing problems elsewhere, we needed to collectively work on solutions. Within two weeks, the station was open again as repairs continued.

Later that summer, stakeholders throughout our community came together and created a list of self-defined priorities to share with the City of Philadelphia. In an effort to continue a dialogue to guide efforts from the city to align with the community's priorities, community groups reconvened six months later and reviewed and updated their list of priorities.

As part of an ongoing process, we have been building on existing community organizing and plans of the past. During the most recent addition to this process, we engaged over 50 pockets of people in Kensington which comprised over 500 residents and stakeholders both to revisit the priorities defined in 2021 but to also identify new priorities and new strategies. Unlike most of the single-issue strategies imposed on Kensington in the past, the results of this section will outline that when asked to define priorities and visions for transforming Kensington, residents understand the complexity of problems and offer comprehensive solutions.

Methodology

Our goal was to engage as many people as possible who live, work, or play in Kensington to drive forward comprehensive, community-driven, and trauma-informed strategies for transformation in Kensington. It was necessary to put into place a broad and inclusive engagement strategy through a trauma-informed lens. The following results came from ongoing community engagement that took place over several months and centered transparency in a community and peer driven participation processes. This process also recognized cultural differences and similarities to build collaboration and increase community voice.

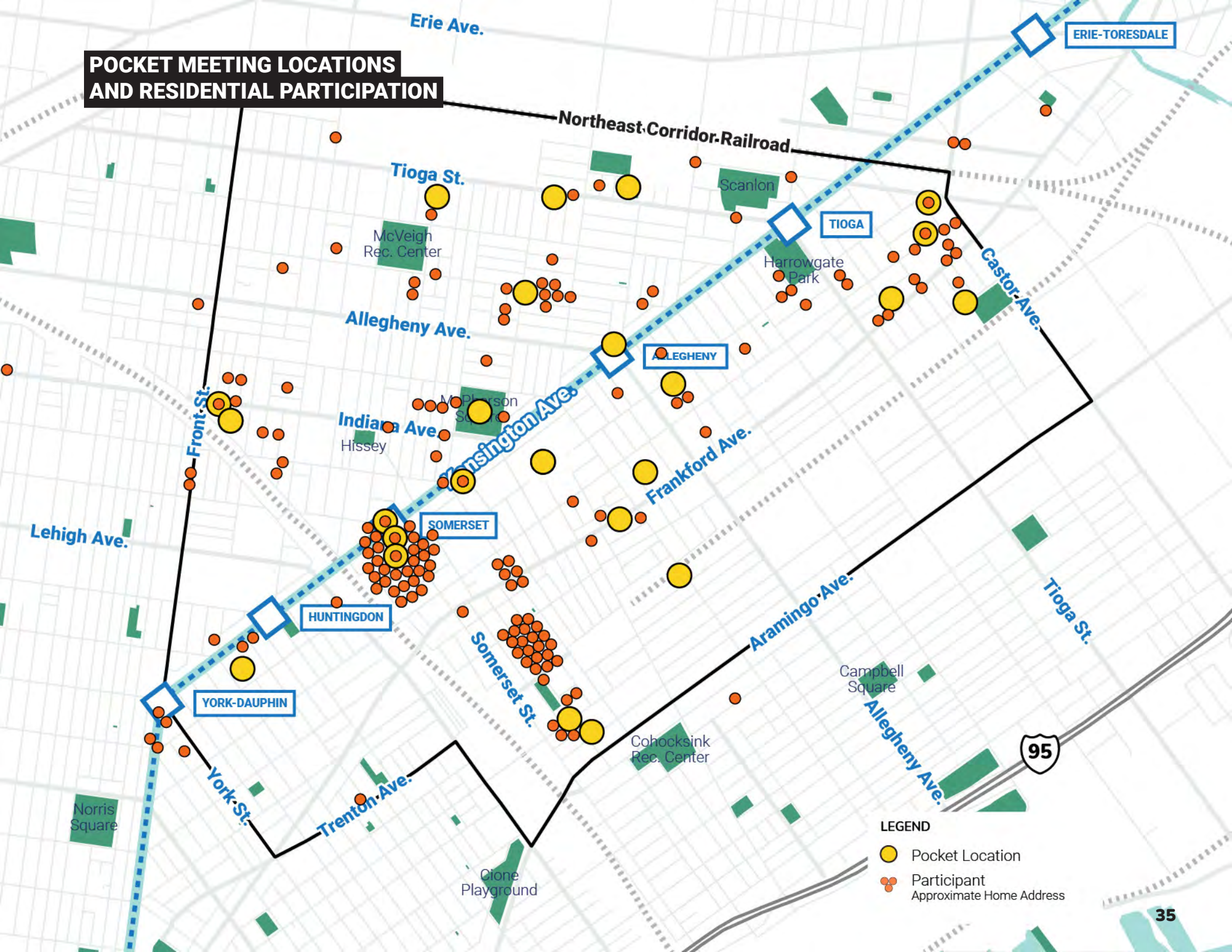
In September of 2023, we published a Pockets Toolkit to help pockets of people throughout Kensington have productive conversations about their concerns and priorities for the community. Made available in several languages including English, Spanish, Khmer, Vietnamese, Simplified Chinese, and Korean, we wanted to ensure that conversations were culturally representative of voices throughout the community.

This process also drew on years of previous engagement efforts and community relationships to ensure that engagement is ongoing, flexible, and truly participatory. This Toolkit and the questions posed to Pockets were based on past community defined priorities and neighborhood plans. Published on our website and made available to groups throughout the community, over 50 pockets of people utilized the Toolkit and were convened, comprising more than 500 individual participants across our service area – averaging about 12 individual participants per pocket. Groups included entire blocks, civic associations, faith-based organizations, friends groups, businesses, cultural institutions and nonprofit organizations, school communities, and other stakeholders. These Pocket meetings often took place over a shared meal for multiple hours and were organized and facilitated by residents and stakeholders.

A Ladder of Community Participation



POCKET MEETING LOCATIONS AND RESIDENTIAL PARTICIPATION



- LEGEND**
- Pocket Location
 - Participant Approximate Home Address

Community-defined priorities

During this process, we asked community members to define their priorities and share new ideas for transforming Kensington. In the summer of 2021, Philadelphia City Council held a public hearing at Lewis Elkin Elementary school to address unsafe living conditions in Kensington. [Kensington Voice](#) reported that at least six dozen Kensington community members marched through Clearfield and D Streets to the hearing.

The group continued to organize and grow community voice through increased participation by bringing to light “the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the community” and to identify [priorities and solutions they expected the Kenney administration to address](#).

Those past priorities included:

- Eliminating Kensington as a destination for narcotics use and to support the reunification process for those from outside the area
- Parks and Rec Centers are immediately designated and enforced safe spaces for children and families
- Sanitation and usability of public spaces (sidewalks and parks) in Kensington is given priority
- Provide housing for all
- Provide treatment for all
- Establish a concise reporting mechanism (i.e. dashboard) to demonstrate progress on implementation of actions listed above

As part of this step in the engagement process, we shared those priorities with participants to which they immediately agreed they were still priorities and began sharing what they felt were potential solutions. Among the priorities are mitigating the narcotics trade, safety of public spaces, economic development, investing in human capital, affordable housing, and resident health.

Social Determinants of Health

Unlike most strategies imposed on Kensington in the past, residents offered comprehensive solutions and recommendations when engaging with one another and discussing past community-defined priorities.

Their feedback recognized the need for socio-ecological approaches that consider the intersection of individuals, community, and society. Additionally, their stated priorities took a social determinants of health approach - looking at the economic and social conditions that have a profound effect on an individual and community's health. For instance, residents recognized that to address crime and violence, not only is policing a strategy but so is employment, treatment for addiction, education, and youth engagement.

It is with this in mind that we need to listen to residents and their lived understanding of what is taking place in their community and prioritize them being at the table when identifying comprehensive and evidence based approaches to the six priorities - mitigating the narcotics trade, safety of public spaces, economic development, investing in human capital, affordable housing, and resident health.



SIX PRIORITIES

**Mitigating the
Narcotics Trade**

**Safety and
Cleanliness of
Public Spaces**

**Economic
Development**

**Investing in
Human Capital**

**Affordable
Housing**

Resident Health

Mitigating the Narcotics Trade

Unlike most single-issue strategies imposed on Kensington in the past, residents offered comprehensive solutions and recommendations when engaging with one another and discussing the narcotics trade in Kensington.

When asked 'What does mitigating the narcotics trade mean to you?' resident responses took a social determinants of health approach that reflected the complexity of this issue - identifying both the urgency and the impact that the drug trade has on all aspects of life in the community - from safety, to cleanliness, to economic opportunities.

The graph represents the repetition of mention or reference to these themes by pockets, with each pocket averaging about 12 individual participants per pocket. Among the results from Pockets feedback, four topics became apparent: the presence of drugs and its impact on life and safety in the community, concerns over safe passage for youth, the need for employment opportunities to provide alternative financial options, and the impact of police presence on mitigating the drug trade.



One pocket identified that mitigating the narcotics trade "is of most urgency as it affects many aspects of our community, safety, and quality of life." Another pocket noted that this is "a nationwide issue that is a problem mainly in our neighborhood, but we are ignored because there is no opportunity to give money to a low income area."

Key Themes



The graph represents the number of pockets that referenced each theme, with a pocket averaging about 12 individual participants

Safety of Public Spaces

When asked what ‘Safety and cleanliness of public spaces such as streets, sidewalks, public transit stations, parks, recreational centers, and reclaiming vacant land’ means to residents, they identified both the urgency and the necessity of it for overall community safety, health, and quality of living.

While many initiatives geared towards safety, cleanliness, and greening in Kensington have been single strategy approaches, residents continued to see safety and cleanliness of public spaces through a social determinants of health perspective and were able to identify the need for comprehensive and ongoing solutions and support from city and state agencies.

The graph represents the repetition of mention or reference to these themes by pockets, with each pocket averaging about 12 individual participants per pocket. Among the results from the Pockets feedback, four topics emerged: that the presence of needles and the presence of drugs caused trauma and prevented safety in public spaces throughout Kensington, that shelter for the unhoused population would be necessary to ensure lasting safety and cleanliness, and that gun violence is an ongoing concern and priority to address.



Responses from the Pockets feedback reflect the complexity for which the community understands safety of public spaces. One pocket noted that “because of the drugs and violence, kids cannot walk to the school or even play in the neighborhood because of the homelessness and drugs laid out on the street,” also stating that “families and children need to have a clean neighborhood and good education.”

Another pocket identified that “many others are developing mental issues having to be stuck inside” due to safety and health concerns related to the conditions of public spaces in Kensington.

Key Themes



The graph represents the number of pockets that referenced each theme, with a pocket averaging about 12 individual participants

Economic Development

When asked what 'economic development (programs, policies, or activities that seek to improve the small businesses' well-being and quality of life for a community)' means to residents, pockets identified how police presence and the presence of drugs impacted safe passage for residents and the need for workforce opportunities to improve the economic conditions in Kensington.

The graph represents the repetition of mention or reference to these themes by pockets, with each pocket averaging about 12 individual participants per pocket. Among the results from Pockets feedback, many identified that economic development could not happen without more employment and workforce opportunities as well as accountability and enforcement from police. Additionally, pockets noted that without addressing the presence of the drug trade, the health of the corridors and opportunities for economic equity would not be possible. Pockets also identified that without addressing safety concerns in the neighborhood, efforts to improve economic conditions would be futile.

One pocket noted that "people won't go to a small business if they don't feel safe going there," and that it "will be hard to make safe with people not trusting each other or the police anymore," noting



that "it's the drugs primary reason why people feel unsafe/unwilling to shop on Kensington Ave."

Another pocket noted that local businesses "cannot perform well in an area where nationwide it is known for drug abuse and homelessness" and that to improve economic development in the area, we must replace the drug/underground economy, provide meaningful employment, and that the city must commit to supporting residents.

Key Themes



The graph represents the number of pockets that referenced each theme, with a pocket averaging about 12 individual participants

Invest in Human Capital

When asked what ‘Investing in human capital (providing professional and personal growth opportunities)’ means to residents, pockets identified the need to provide opportunities for youth, the need for more employment opportunities, and the necessity for mental health support in order for the community to personally and professionally grow.

The graph represents the repetition of mention or reference to these themes by pockets, which averaged about 12 individual participants per pocket. Among the results from Pockets feedback, residents noted that programming for youth and teens, safe school activities, and a lived environment that kids feel safe in is a priority, noting that “youth here don’t have enough of a sense of what they could become.” One pocket noted that “we need programming for teenagers, such as internships and job training, volunteer opportunities, and personal finance education” because youth want and need guidance.

Another pocket noted that “this is extremely important because it is key to ending extreme poverty” and that “we need better health care services all together” as well as “housing, job training, opportunities, transportation to and from job interviews, resources for mental health issues and domestic violence concerns.”



Key Themes



The graph represents the number of pockets that referenced each theme, with a pocket averaging about 12 individual participants

Affordable and Stable Housing

When asked what 'Housing: affordable rental, affordable home ownership, low-income rental units, renovation of residents' homes, housing for all, and transitional housing' means to residents, pockets identified several conditions that prevented housing stability as well as solutions for how to secure affordable housing and housing for all.

The graph represents the repetition of mention or reference to these themes by pockets, which averaged about 12 individual participants per pocket. Among the results from Pockets feedback, residents noted that the cost of living for residents prevented them from achieving stable housing. In Kensington, the poverty rate is nearly double Philadelphia's and many city programs for housing are geared towards 80% Area Median Income (AMI), yet 48% of all renters and 68% of all homeowners make less than 80% AMI.

Residents identified some of the complexities and historical challenges that lead to insecure housing in Kensington. One pocket noted that "people become homeless when housing is torn down to build new expensive homes" and that losing a home will lead to people living on the street and an increased chance of forming a substance use disorder.



Many pockets identified that high cost of rent, property values rising, the general cost of living, a lack of employment opportunities, and private development is causing displacement in the community.

When asked what this means to them, pockets also identified several solutions, including "some type of affordable rent programs funded for families and single mothers" that will also "alleviate poverty and cease violence in the community."

Key Themes



The graph represents the number of pockets that referenced each theme, with a pocket averaging about 12 individual participants

Resident Health

When asked what ‘Resident health (changing health outcomes by providing access to resources)’ means to residents, pockets identified several intersecting crises that contributed to poor health in Kensington as well as the need for comprehensive solutions to improve health outcomes for residents.

The graph represents the repetition of mention or reference to these themes by pockets, which averaged about 12 individual participants per pocket. Among the results from Pockets feedback, residents noted many of the social and economic conditions that lead to poor physical and mental health in Kensington, describing that the presence of drugs in the community, a lack of affordable health care, and a lack of opportunities for youth all contributed.

When asked, residents identified several intersecting crises that prevented good health for residents in Kensington, including pollution and air quality, community distrust in healthcare systems, and a lack of mental health resources. One pocket noted that “chemicals of drug use is escalating/causing mental health issues” and that we need a “community center to offer these mental health services.” Another pocket identified that “if you don’t trust people, people won’t share about health needs or talk about feelings,” noting the necessity of accessibility to safe and supportive services to improve health.



Key Themes



The graph represents the number of pockets that referenced each theme, with a pocket averaging about 12 individual participants

New Priorities that Emerged

While Pockets re-engaged in past priorities defined by the community and agreed that these were still priorities that required urgency, the results from Pockets meetings also revealed new priorities had emerged. As residents discussed the complexities and intersection of crises in Kensington, they cited the need to address the police presence in the community, the need to address addiction, the need to intervene and prevent gun violence, and the necessity for safe passage for youth.

As we move into the next steps of the Kensington Planning Process over the coming months which will include re-convening stakeholders and aligning these results with other plans for Kensington and entering into an implementation phase, we will also engage pockets and stakeholders around these new priorities to identify comprehensive strategies to address them.



Subgroups

As part of an intentionally inclusive engagement process, we supported the gathering of stakeholders and groups to contribute to a collective and comprehensive strategy for development in Kensington. Of over 50 pockets, we specifically convened harm reduction groups, businesses, and youth to bring a better understanding of their priorities and topics of interest to ensure our strategies for transformation are as comprehensive as possible.

Several harm reduction groups and organizations engaged in this process. A few priorities emerged from the feedback from these Pockets meetings. Across the harm reduction groups that engaged, they understood the complexity of Kensington's challenges and the need for comprehensive strategies to address them. One Pocket identified that in order for individuals to have stable housing, there also needed to be sufficient mental health resources. Another pocket noted that the presence of needles led to increased trauma in the community. Multiple groups identified across priorities that getting unhoused individuals off of the street would be necessary to achieving any solutions to Kensington's challenges.

Multiple businesses throughout Kensington, including along the commercial corridors, engaged in this process and acknowledged that challenges in Kensington impact the economic development and wellbeing of the business community, but also the safety and wellbeing of youth and residents. Kensington businesses saw the urgency of all priorities, identifying across them that the presence of drugs and safety impacted sustained solutions. A noted recurrence was the necessity of services, resources, and opportunities for businesses and residents to ensure any solutions are sustained. One pocket noted that "safety is a major issue in our community. Kids should be able to go to the parks etc. without having to worry about gun violence and business owners shouldn't have to worry about getting shot, robbed, etc."

For too long, strategies to address Kensington's challenges have focused on single-issues and have lacked inclusivity and wrap-around approaches. Our goal is to continue aligning efforts and to work with anyone committed to comprehensive solutions so we can tie priorities across groups, such as youth, harm reduction, and businesses, into a larger strategy for transformation in Kensington.

In the early winter, we will continue to engage with these groups and any others who would like to come to the table to push forward a comprehensive, community-driven, and trauma-informed strategy for Kensington.

Harm Reduction

Educational Opportunities
Stable Housing
Shelter for Unhoused Population
Employment Opportunities

Businesses

Safe Passage for Youth
Employment Opportunities
Access to Resources and
Programs for Small Businesses

Summary

When this stage of the larger engagement process began a couple of years ago, it was clear that the challenges created by the history of the community, which had manifested in the current conditions outlined in this report, would not be solved by the current flawed strategies and that a different approach was necessary.

From what we learned, it was clear that a comprehensive, community-driven, and trauma-informed strategy is what needed to be developed and implemented to ensure sustained improvements in Kensington. We started with a simple idea that we needed to focus on Five P's: we knew that we needed to bring more Pockets of people to the table so that they could share their Priorities with Politicians and Policy makers so that there could be a proper deployment of resources through appropriate Programs, all culminating in a Plan for Kensington.

The process has yielded greater engagement, increased resources, proper strengths-based roles, and clear support for the concept that residents understand the complexities of their lived conditions and therefore should be active drivers in future processes and deployment of resources.

We have found this to be very possible through the distribution of Opioid Settlement funds to local parks, where hundreds of residents took part in a process facilitated by local community development corporations to define their priorities and determine the use of funds.

Investment is key and recognizing, as the City did, that priorities for residents included access to public spaces, education, and housing insecurity and connecting resources through a greater process to those desires is the appropriate role and action.

Proof of Process

As an example of proof of process, from March to September, NKCDC and Impact Services engaged park groups to discuss the implementation of Opioid Settlement Funding. These groups included: Friends of Harrowgate Park, Friends of Trenton and Auburn Playground, Friends of Hope Park, Friends of Hissey Playground, Friends of Scanlon Playground, and Friends of McPherson Park.

Our goal was to engage as many people as possible with a stake in the outcome of the parks to ensure Opioid Settlement Fund spending reflected the needs of the entire community. Historically, an average Friends meeting ranged from 6-12 attendees, but during this process we saw participation at parks meetings rise to ranges of 20-46 attendees over the course of engagement. During our peak engagement month, we saw that reach a high at a unique 182 people and an overall 4.5X increase in community participation. This example shows that when there is a connection between engagement and resources, sustained improvements and solutions are possible.

6 Parks
28 Meetings
128 People Engaged
270 Surveys

Friends of Harrowgate Park

Friends of Trenton & Auburn Playground

Friends of Hope Park

Friends of Hissey Playground

Friends of Scanlon Playground

Friends of McPherson Park

Next Steps

Building off the momentum of this report will be several next steps:



Feedback

Over the next couple of months, we will share this report widely and receive feedback from all who would like to provide it. This has always been and will always be an iterative process focused on learning from the previous step. We will add to the history, we will update language, we will learn from and make changes to the report based on your feedback.



Survey

While we made the Pockets process accessible and transparent to all that wanted to participate, we recognize that there still were some voices that were not captured. With that in mind, we have also developed a short survey that will allow continued participation in the process.



Alignment with Other Plans

We are under no illusions that this is the only plan that is being developed for Kensington and with that in mind we intend to spend time this winter aligning what was shared during this process with other plans. As part of the mayoral transition, our incoming mayor has convened a number of transition committees which will help to identify the goals and best tools for the Parker administration to utilize. This process will yield a report and when that is issued, we will work with stakeholders to align their report with the community's priorities outlined in this report so that it is clear what resources from the City's executive branch can best serve Kensington. In the winter, we will update and share a second report - **Kensington Planning Process: Alignment.**



Convene, Co-create, and Implement

With an engaged community, a shared set of data and context, a set of priorities from the community, and resources identified by government as well as the private and non-profit sector beginning this winter, we will spend 6-8 months convening stakeholders on each of the top priorities, as well as focus areas identified such as revitalization of business corridors and harm reduction strategies, with a goal of co-creating comprehensive and trauma-informed strategies to sustainably and effectively address the greatest challenges facing Kensington. In the summer and fall, we will release a third report - **Kensington Planning Process: Implementation.**

We will also continue implementation of Opioid Settlement Funds with the deployment of the Housing Stabilization Strategies (Home repair and eviction/foreclosure prevention) this Winter and further engagement on School and Park funds throughout the winter and spring. Later in the winter, we will publish an updated version of this report as part of our Alignment Process. In the summer, we will publish a third report around co-implementation on the priorities Kensington residents identified. We look forward to aligning all efforts through a community driven, comprehensive, and trauma informed approach to secure an equitable future for Kensington.



Thank you for participating in this step in an ongoing process.

To get involved, head to our website at [kensingtonplan.org](https://www.kensingtonplan.org). The Alignment report and Implementation report is coming next year.



NKCDC

IMPACT