



# MT. AIRY 2025

an action plan for our future



NEIGHBORHOOD RETAIL & COMMERCE

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

SENIOR LIVING

COMMUNITY SAFETY & PLACEMAKING

HOMES & HOUSING

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Background

In the fall of 2014, Mt. Airy USA and its partners (East Mt. Airy Neighbors, West Mt. Airy Neighbors, Chew and Belfield Neighbors, the 6300 Alliance, and the Mt. Airy Business Improvement District) submitted a collaborative proposal to the Wells Fargo Regional Foundation for a Neighborhood Planning Grant. The group recognized that much of the work outlined in the 2004 *Mt. Airy Neighborhood Plan: Opportunities, Challenges & Recommendations* plan had been accomplished, and that it was time to assess the needs of the neighborhood again. Wells Fargo awarded the new planning grant in spring 2015 and the planning process kicked off soon thereafter.

Dubbed “Mt. Airy 2025,” this plan will include a 10 year vision for the future of the neighborhood and implementation goals for the first five years (shown in Appendix A). The plan will identify and prioritize various neighborhood revitalization strategies and also provide cost estimates and a timetable for implementation.

The Mt. Airy 2025 Study Area was determined in consultation with the Wells Fargo Regional Foundation, which recommends that neighborhood planning areas are compact to facilitate tracking of progress and outcomes after the plan starts being implemented. While the Study Area does not include all of Mt. Airy (**Figure A**), all residents of the entire neighborhood were welcome to participate in the planning process. As illustrated in this report, many of the discussions will focus on issues that affect the entire neighborhood.



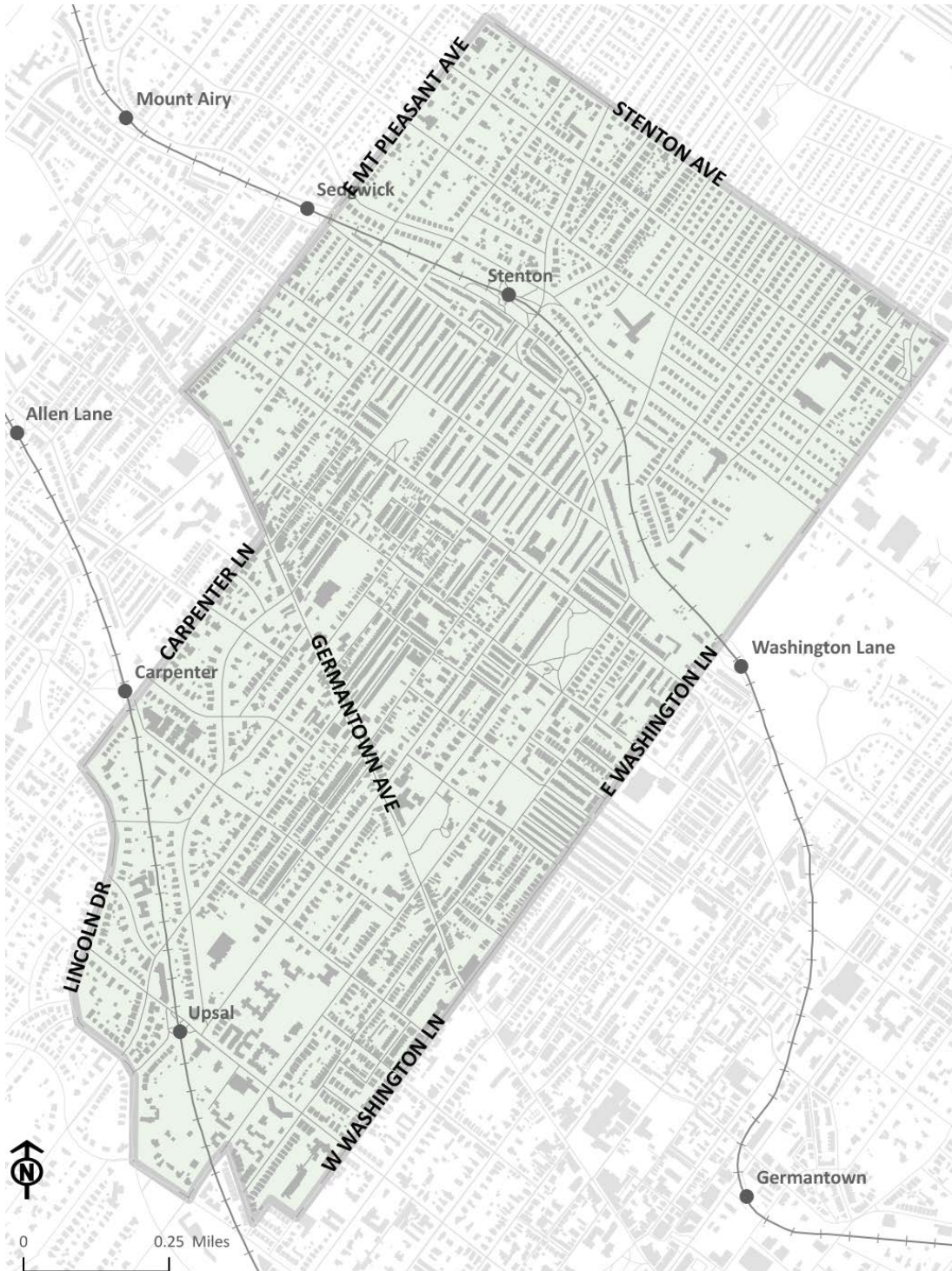
Figure A: Map of Study Area Context.



Specially, the Mt. Airy 2025 Study Area is bounded by:

- Stenton Ave. to the east
- E. Washington Ln to the south
- Lincoln Dr. to the west, and
- Carpenter Ln and E. Mt. Pleasant Ave. to the north (see **Figure B**).

**Figure B: Mt. Airy 2025 Study Area**



## Planning Process

At the heart of Mt. Airy 2025's planning effort is resident and stakeholder engagement. As the project kicked off, the planning team consulted with the steering committee regarding effective outreach strategies and devised a multi-pronged approach in obtaining resident and stakeholder feedback. The public outreach strategy included the use of public meetings and visioning workshops; focus group meetings; stakeholder interviews; a dedicated project website (*mtairy2025.org*), and a social media campaign (i.e. the utilization of #mtairy2025 on Facebook and Twitter).



Figure C: Neighborhood residents providing comment at the Open House.

The planning process also involved the review and evaluation of previous planning efforts conducted in Mt. Airy, including:

- *Mt. Airy Neighborhood Plan: Opportunities, Challenges & Recommendations (2004)*
- *Mt. Airy Placemaking & Streetscape Improvement Plan (2008)*
- *Mt. Airy Schools Coalition Strategic Plan*

In the years since these plans were developed, a \$3.5 million streetscape improvement project and nearly 80 façade improvements have transformed the appearance of Germantown Avenue. New businesses have opened on the Avenue, safety has improved, and pedestrian traffic has increased. MAUSA has also added to the neighborhood's affordable housing stock, begun a transformative park project in partnership with the Free Library, and started the Mt. Airy Business Improvement District as well as the Business Association of Mt. Airy. The Mt. Airy Schools Coalition has worked with all six local public elementary schools to launch a multi-site, multi-year, multi-million dollar schoolyard redesign initiative with the School District of

Philadelphia and has also received over \$250,000 in grant funding to support technology updates and professional development to support the Mt. Airy Reads initiative for grade level reading.

Also important to note is that Mt. Airy itself is part of a larger Northwest Philadelphia region. Public officials are thinking and planning regionally, even examining cross-municipal collaborations, such as:

- Chestnut Hill Regional Mobility Study
- Shops, Streets, Centers: A Guide to the Revitalization of Commercial Corridors in the 9th Councilmanic District
- Philadelphia2035, Comprehensive Plan for the City of Philadelphia (the Upper Northwest District Plan is scheduled to kick off in 2017)

Public Meetings

On June 24, 2015, the planning team facilitated a public meeting that was held at Mt. Airy Presbyterian Church. Approximately 70 individuals participated in this meeting and rotated through three discussion stations organized into the following topics: Economic Opportunity, Housing, and Quality of Life (see **Appendix B** for detailed summaries of the discussions).



Figure D: *Planning team member facilitating discussion at the first public meeting.*

Midway through the planning process, as background analysis was completed and initial themes began to emerge in regard to Mt. Airy 2025’s goals and objectives, an Open House event was held at Germantown Church of the Brethren on October 29, 2015. 46 community members attended throughout the course of the event. There were no formal presentation made by the planning team at this event; rather, it was a chance to present the background findings and initial ideas for action on presentation boards. Participants were asked



to vote on which ideas they thought were the highest priorities and which others were missing from the list.

Finally, a third public meeting was held at Pleasant Playground on December 17, 2015. At this meeting, a set of proposed action items were presented to the general public. 43 residents took part in the process. Comments providing feedback were evaluated and have subsequently been incorporated into this document.

Figure F: the resident engagement process for Mt. Airy 2025 leverage existing community events to gather information and input. On September 17, 2015, planning team members attended the Mt. Airy Street Fare and interacted with dozens of residents about their aspirations (or BIG IDEAS) for the neighborhood



### Resident Survey & Physical Conditions Survey

Working with NeighborWorks America—a community development organization that has been collaborating with the Wells Fargo Regional Foundation on community planning initiatives—Mt. Airy USA coordinated a team of surveyors to complete 258 resident surveys. In all, the survey team visited nearly 1,000 homes in the Study Area soliciting resident input on a variety of topics. Detailed analysis of the Resident Survey is attached to this report as **Appendix C**.

Lastly, a physical conditions survey of all 6,620 properties in the Study Area was conducted and subsequently analyzed by the consultant team.

### **Key Issues Task Forces**

Key concerns raised by the aforementioned community input gathering methods were organized into categories. Task forces were created for each category and community members and stakeholders met several times in October and November of 2015 to address these concerns. Recommended actions from these task forces were sent back to the steering committee and are set forth in this report. Mt. Airy 2025's action strategies are organized in six (6) major categories with these vision statements:

- Neighborhood Retail & Commerce: Mt. Airy has vibrant, clean and thriving commercial areas that meet the needs of its residents and attracts/nurtures entrepreneurs.
- Early Childhood Education: Mt. Airy offers accessible, affordable, and high quality early childhood education opportunities that prepare children for succeeding as they enter the school system.
- Senior Living: Mt. Airy is a multi-generational neighborhood with deep social connections that offers a variety of services and housing options for its seniors.
- Community Safety & Placemaking: Mt. Airy is a neighborhood where residents feel comfortable and safe and are actively engaged in neighborhood-wide public safety efforts.
- Homes and Housing: Mt. Airy is a diverse, mixed-income, affordable neighborhood with a wide range of housing types and sizes available for residents of all stages of life.
- Youth Engagement: Mt. Airy has actively engaged youth who come together to advocate for their needs and aspirations for the neighborhood.

In addition to the six major categories, there is a detailed strategy for developing the communications plan is outlined in support of these action strategies (**Appendix A**).