



PRINCETON FUTURE

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RENDERING OF THE NEW PRINCETON PUBLIC LIBRARY AND ADJACENT "MADISON SQUARE." DRAWING BY ROBERT BROWN.



BALANCE • DIVERSITY • VIABILITY • AFFORDABILITY

PRINCETON FUTURE

ANNUAL REPORT

February 2002

INTRODUCTION

Two years ago, the three of us began talking about our community of Princeton, New Jersey, and where it might be heading. Our immediate concerns focused on how downtown development could affect the quality of life for people in adjacent neighborhoods and for others who live or work in Princeton and the surrounding region. In a few short decades we had seen Princeton change from a sleepy college town to a dynamic commercial and cultural center. To be sure, much of this change has been for the better — walk down Nassau Street today and you feel an energy and vitality unknown 25 or 30 years ago, even if you no longer recognize everybody you pass — but it has also generated problems of traffic, parking, and high rents that have displaced many small businesses and people of modest means. These problems seemed to be getting worse, and it was a trend that troubled us.

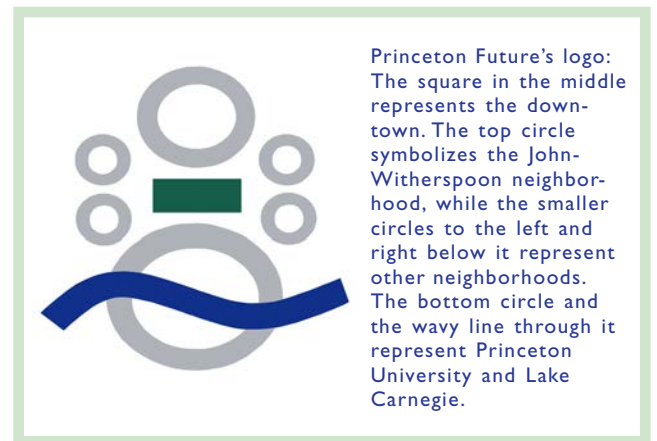
We realized that the economic and demographic forces driving change would continue, perhaps even accelerate, and we believed that, somehow, citizens and their elected representatives had to do a better job of working together to ensure that Princeton will remain a diverse, livable, and enjoyable place — as one of us phrases it, “a garden city with a downtown core.” These early, informal talks led to meetings with residents, borough and township officials, and members of the business and university communities, and ultimately to the creation of the citizens group Princeton Future.

Launched in September 2000 and incorporated that December as a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, Princeton Future has accomplished much in 16 months. It has fostered an ongoing dialogue between neighbors and officials about the development of the downtown. Equally important, it has created a structure for future dialogue that will enable other neighborhoods to address issues affecting them as Princeton evolves in the years ahead. Princeton Future is helping officials arrive at a solution to the borough’s parking problems which will result in an inviting new commons — we are tentatively calling it Madison Square — with attractive retail and residential space. It is facilitating discussions between

members of the Arts Council and the contiguous John-Witherspoon neighborhood about the council’s expansion plans, and between the borough and the owners of Palmer Square about the construction of affordable housing at Hulfish North.

Much remains to be done, and we recognize that many of the issues Princeton faces will not yield easily to solutions. But all of us working together have made a start. This annual report reviews what has been accomplished to date and looks at what Princeton Future hopes to do in the year ahead. It is also an opportunity to thank the Borough Council for its willingness to listen and the many people and organizations who have given their generous time and support. We especially thank the citizens of Princeton, whose participation in more than 40 public meetings to date has made all this possible.

Robert F. Goheen, honorary chair
Robert Geddes, co-chair
Sheldon B. Sturges, co-chair
Princeton, New Jersey
January 15, 2002



PRINCETON: A PLACE OF THE LEAF AND THE STONE

In the words of Robert Geddes, an architect and member of Princeton Future’s steering committee, Princeton is “a place of the leaf and the stone” — of tranquil open spaces like Marquand Park and the Princeton Battlefield and of soaring gothic towers and historic buildings like Nassau Hall. It is a place with acclaimed centers of learning like the Institute for Advanced Study and with a historical legacy second to none. Princeton played a significant role in the American Revolution and in 1783 served briefly as the nation’s capital. George Washington slept here, James Madison studied here, and Thomas Jefferson got his hair cut here. Princeton’s residents have included John Witherspoon, Grover Cleveland, Woodrow Wilson, Albert Einstein, John O’Hara, Thomas Mann, and Paul Robeson.

Princeton is also a place with a long history of diversity. Robeson, the great baritone and actor, grew up in an African-American community whose heritage dates from the 1680s, when free blacks first settled in Princeton. The university’s collegiate-gothic dormitories and lecture halls were built by stone cutters who came from Italy a century ago and stayed on. In recent years, Eastern Europeans, Asians, and Hispanics have further enriched Princeton’s cultural and ethnic mix.

Princeton is a place of national and international reach. For Katherine Kish, a steering committee member and the immediate past chair of the Chamber of Commerce of the Princeton Area, it is “a state of mind” known around the world: “If you’re overseas and tell someone you live in Princeton, there is instant recognition.” Kish, a marketing consultant, lives and works in Cranbury, one of 14 communities in what she thinks of as “Bigger Princeton” — a region stretching from Trenton to South Brunswick and from Hightstown to Hopewell and beyond. Bigger Princeton is an economic juggernaut, the home of major corporations and high-tech startup firms, many located along the bustling Route 1 corridor. More than 120,000 people live in Bigger Princeton, and many more commute there from

as far away as Bucks County, Pennsylvania, and Monmouth County in northeastern New Jersey.

“There is also Smaller Princeton — the borough and its downtown core,” says Kish. “The state master plan has designated Smaller Princeton a regional center. It is Smaller Princeton that makes Bigger Princeton possible. Smaller Princeton is Bigger Princeton’s capital, its heart and soul. Smaller Princeton’s beautiful setting, its restaurants and shops and cultural activities, draw people from all over. Maintaining that wonderful vitality is essential not just for the borough’s sake but for much of central New Jersey.”

A key element in that vitality, and in the healthy and sustainable economy it represents, is diversity in its broadest sense — economic, physical, and social. The future of downtown Princeton depends on creating an “affordable balance” of shops, services, building types, and green spaces that appeal to residents and visitors across the income spectrum. Achieving that goal requires thoughtful planning with meaningful, ongoing input from all members of the community. This is the credo of Princeton Future and why it came to be.

A key element in Princeton’s vitality, and in the healthy and sustainable economy it represents, is diversity in its broadest sense — economic, physical, and social.

PRINCETON FUTURE'S BEGINNINGS

On February 22, 2000, Robert Goheen joined Robert Geddes and Sheldon Sturges for lunch at the Institute for Advanced Study. Geddes and Sturges had invited Goheen so they could talk about plans for the development of downtown Princeton. Those plans involved a new parking garage, a new and larger library to replace the existing one at the corner of Witherspoon and Wiggins streets, and the proposed expansion of the Arts Council, located on the northwest corner of Witherspoon Street and Paul Robeson Place.

All three had lived in Princeton for many years — Sturges, the president of a Web-based publishing company, since 1970; Geddes, a former dean of architecture at the university and a principal in Geddes Demshak Architecture & Planning, since 1965; and Goheen, a former president of the university, since 1945. Geddes and Sturges were concerned about what they viewed as a lack of overall planning in the downtown and inadequate input from borough residents, particularly those in the area most directly affected, the largely black and Hispanic neighborhood between John and Witherspoon streets. Goheen shared their views and was also worried about the impact of tax increases on the downtown's long-term economic viability: "It seemed to me that the borough needed to increase its tax base. I thought the amount of open and semi-open space in the downtown core offered the possibility of including some well-planned, locally compatible rental properties for housing and shops."

Recalls Sturges, "We were concerned that perhaps the borough, the township, and the university weren't thinking in a sufficiently coordinated way about these projects and related issues — how they connect with each other and their impact on the community — or with sufficient input from residents and merchants. Everything seemed to be done in a piecemeal manner. Our elected officials are smart, dedicated, hard-working people, but by the nature of their jobs they are often very pressed. Likewise, the Regional Planning

Board's professional staff is very busy. We thought there was a lot of talent in the borough and greater Princeton which might be tapped to help on some of these strategic issues."

To marshal that talent Goheen suggested the creation of a citizens group modeled on one that he and Henry Chauncey, the founder of Educational Testing Service, had organized in the 1960s to restructure higher education in New Jersey. "Our group, which was self-appointed, set up task forces to look at various issues and made recommendations that resulted in substantive changes," recalls Goheen. "It made me realize that if you got the right people involved they can come up with ideas that make a difference."

The idea for a similar organization to benefit Princeton took shape over the next few months as Goheen, Geddes, and Sturges talked to merchants, architects, civic activists, and corporate executives. As admirers

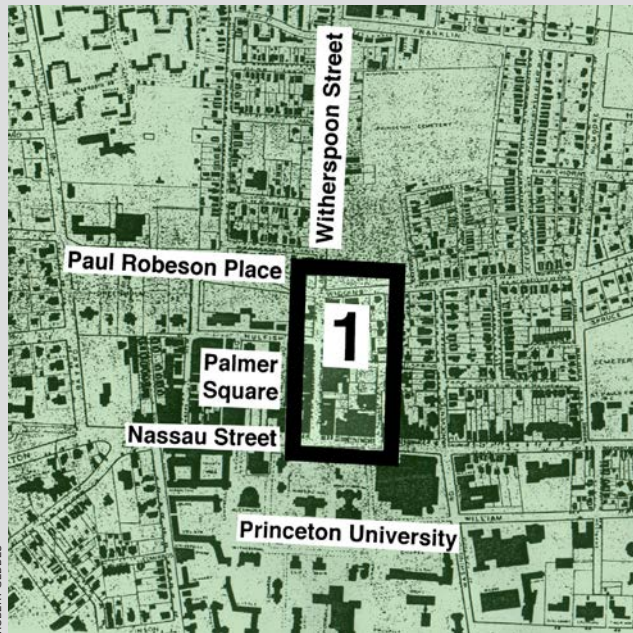
of New Jersey Future, a statewide nonprofit planning body, they decided to call their fledgling group Princeton Future. They came up with a logo that stylistically represented the primary community elements — the neighborhoods, the downtown core, and the university — and their interconnectedness. They sketched out some broad concepts to underpin Princeton Future's efforts: it would strive for a balance for the downtown based on economic viability (of municipal revenues, mixed-use development, and services), diversity (of

The downtown's future depends on creating an "affordable balance" of shops, services, building types, and green spaces appealing to people across the income spectrum.

PF ZONE 1

The Downtown Core

Plans (diagram, right) approved by the Borough Council call for walkways (red lines with arrows) between Nassau and Wiggins streets and Witherspoon and South Tulane streets. They link two squares (massed green circles) — a small one in the



center of the block south of Spring Street and a larger one (“Madison Square”) south of the new public library (blue) on land now occupied by a parking lot. A third square, not shown, will be built on the site of the PSE&G substation (located directly east of the library) if and when the substation is moved or placed underground. Dark red spaces represent new shops and residential space. ■



people and community, ownership, activities, building types, and green spaces), and affordability (of housing, commercial rentals, and parking). The physical plan had to be grounded in a social plan.

“We began to see that the key would be listening to people in small groups to find out what they liked and disliked about today’s Princeton and what they would like it to be in the future,” Sturges recalls. “We had to have a process for generating a social vision to inform and direct planning.”

“Many people seemed to share our concerns that the downtown, and Princeton generally, was becoming increasingly gentrified at the expense of diversity,” says Goheen. “There are more high-end chain stores but fewer locally owned, moderately priced places for students and people of limited means to patronize. The downtown needs an appropriate variety of commercial enterprises as

well as affordable housing, and it has to present a friendly face toward the John-Witherspoon neighborhood.”

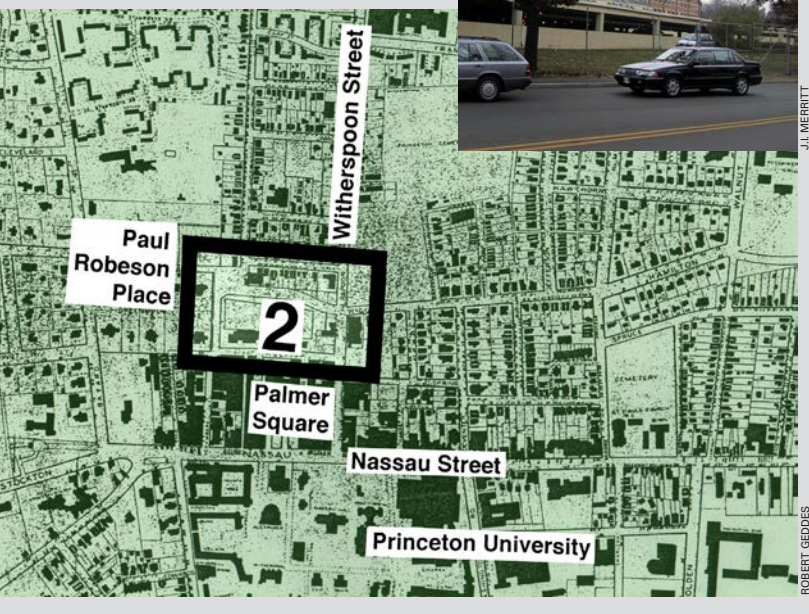
MASTER PLAN UPDATE

Their efforts were also driven by a bit of fortuitous timing. The current Princeton Community Master Plan dates from 1996, and state law mandates that it must be revised every six years. The Regional Planning Board would begin reviewing the plan in late 2001 and submit a revised version later in the following year. “We realized this was a real opportunity,” says Geddes. “The existing master plan asks for the creation of a town center master plan, but for various reasons the planning board has never developed one. The plan also talks in broad generalities and policy statements but isn’t very specific about particulars.”

PF ZONE 2

Paul Robeson Place

Encompassing the block between Chambers and Witherspoon streets and Hulfish Street and Paul Robeson Place, Zone 2 includes two parking garages completed a decade ago. The site remains unfinished due to a dispute between the borough and the owners of Palmer Square over the inclusion of affordable units in apartments that were intended to be built over the garages. Princeton Future envisions a development that might include a mix of low- or mid-rise apartments, offices, and retail space, with roof gardens or a garden court. ■



Geddes saw five areas of town needing attention. The first, which he designated Zone 1 (the “Downtown Core”), runs south-north from Nassau Street to Wiggins Street and west-east from Witherspoon Street to Tulane Street and includes the borough’s central parking lots. Next to this is Zone 2 (“Paul Robeson Place”), bound on the north by Paul Robeson Place and on the south by Hulfish Street, and on the east and west by Witherspoon and Chambers streets. Zone 3 (“Green Hill”) is a large area on the borough’s west end; bordered on the east by John Street and on the west by Bayard Lane (Route 206), it encompasses the YM/YWCA buildings and grounds, the Medical Center at Princeton’s Merwick

Rehabilitation Hospital, and the university’s Stanworth Apartments. Zone 4 (“Witherspoon Street”) is a linear stretch running the length of Witherspoon Street from Wiggins Street to Valley Road. Zone 5 (“the East End”) is the commercial strip of Nassau Street from the corner of Washington Road and Vandeventer Avenue to Maple Street.

“All these zones have at least one thing in common,” says Geddes. “They are ripe for commercial or residential development that has the potential to affect neighborhoods, either positively or negatively. There is real concern about ‘commercial creep’ into neighborhoods. Take Zone 5, for example. Over the last 10 years the East End has emerged as a thriving commercial entity with a unique character. It’s less upscale than the downtown, and almost all the businesses are locally owned. Right now the commercial activity is a plus for the neighborhood that backs up on this part of Nassau Street. But what happens if the East End develops to the point where it needs a parking garage and there’s no place to put it but in the neighborhood? It’s the kind of issue residents will have to address sooner or later.”

WHAT KIND OF TOWN?

Geddes put down his thoughts in an opinion piece published by the two local papers, *Town Topics* and the *Princeton Packet*, in July. A manifesto of sorts, it began by noting that debate about the library, parking garage, traffic, taxes, and related matters boiled down to the question, “What kind of town do we want to be?” Complicating the question, he wrote, was “the fact that Princeton is not a town anymore” but a city, part of a regional corridor stretching 25 miles along Route 1. Geddes asserted that Princeton has the potential to be a “garden city,” but this hinged on creating an effective downtown master plan and integrating it into the regional Princeton Community Master Plan.

Among other things, Geddes suggested, the downtown plan should call for creation of “a new community square” (which Sturges proposed naming for James

Madison) adjacent to the new library. The library itself should front on both Witherspoon and Wiggins streets and be part of a multilevel building with parking and apartments facing the square. He urged development of the downtown so that it has “not one but two fronts — one along Nassau Street and a parallel one along Paul Robeson Place/Wiggins Street.” He took aim at the unfinished development along Hulfish North (the south side of Paul Robeson Place) — a project surrounded by a chain-link fence and in limbo for a decade — calling it “a profound community insult” that ought to be “fundamentally redesigned.” He advocated a downtown of greater diversity and somewhat greater density, with a modest height limit and “a balance of underground and structured parking, always in support of life at the sidewalk level.”

Finally, he recommended that neighborhoods become engaged in the development of their own neighborhood plans and that a “citizens council” be created in partnership with neighborhood and business associations, the university, and other institutions “to discuss, review and advise on Princeton’s future.”

HIT THE GROUND RUNNING

That citizens council — Princeton Future — was officially launched on Friday, September 29, at an inaugural breakfast in Prospect House on the university campus. By then, the organization had raised seed money from Dow Jones, Inc., Summit (now Fleet) Bank,

Listening to people in small groups is key. The neighborhood meetings are part of a process for generating a social vision to inform and direct planning.

the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and Princeton University; more funds would be forthcoming from other foundations and corporations, the borough, and individuals, giving Princeton Future \$226,000 to accomplish its goals in its first year. The meeting brought out 150 people, including Marvin Reed and Phyllis Marchand, the mayors of Princeton Borough and Princeton Township, respectively, and representatives from a broad spectrum of the community who had signed on as supporters of Princeton Future or as members of its Steering Committee and task forces.

Among those present was James Floyd, who in 1971 had become the township’s first black mayor, and 98-year-old Albert Hinds, the African-American community’s oldest resident. Both expressed a mix of optimism and skepticism about Princeton’s Future’s goals and its ability to achieve them. “I have to say,” said Hinds, “that there is a general feeling that the intention has always been to move us out so that the town can be lily white.” That assessment, said Floyd, reflected the view of “90 percent of the African-American community.”

In agreeing to serve on the Steering Committee, Floyd hoped Princeton Future would foster discussion that might mitigate grievances going back at least to the 1930s, when the development of Palmer Square had leveled scores of African-American homes. More black housing fell to bulldozers in the 1960s, when the borough eliminated Jackson Street to create Avalon Place, a thruway linking Hodge Road and Wiggins Street. Later, in a belated tribute to Princeton’s most distinguished African-American son, it was renamed Paul Robeson Place.

Princeton Future was organized into five task forces concerned with finance, legal matters, development and construction, planning and design, and neighborhood preservation. Starting in November, the Neighborhood Task Force organized a series of meetings in homes and churches — some 34 were eventually held — with groups from various neighborhoods and the business community, asking residents what they liked about

Princeton and what they would like to see changed or preserved. It also made a point of asking young people what they would like to see downtown, and it gathered more information from a questionnaire passed out in April 2001 at Communiversity, the annual town-gown street fair.

Chairing the Neighborhood Task Force was lifelong Princeton resident Yina Moore, an architect and urban planner and a member of the Regional Planning Board. Moore, Barbara Blumenthal, and Elyse Pivnick set up a process to develop a “social vision” for Princeton. Neighborhood coordinators were trained to lead small-group conversations, and the comments of participants were captured, categorized, and later presented to the Regional Planning Board by one of the Neighborhood Task Force coordinators, Rosemary O’Brien.

With the help of Moore and Shirley Satterfield, a retired high-school guidance counselor and fourth-generation Princetonian, James Floyd led four discussions in the John-Witherspoon neighborhood. Participants aired their historic concerns about the effects of urban renewal, which too often had amounted to urban removal, and their anger over recent zoning and health-code violations related to overcrowding. The findings of the John-Witherspoon meetings were later published by Princeton Future in a two-page advertisement in *Town Topics*.

For John-Witherspoon residents, says Moore, “dis-

cussion about Princeton future is clouded by Princeton past and Princeton present. Some doubted that meaningful change could occur. Still, people generally were positive about the meetings, and what we learned was valuable to the downtown planning process. Residents told us they liked the small-town feel of Princeton and wanted to keep it that way to the extent possible. They were concerned about increasing traffic congestion and about growth and its threat to the neighborhoods.”

Floyd was struck by the similarity of views expressed by residents throughout the borough: “There’s a great deal of agreement among all the neighborhoods and a shared sense that they’re all part of this edge that will be affected by whatever is done downtown and along Nassau Street.”

Meanwhile, the architects and urban planners on the Planning and Design Task Force held a series of brainstorming sessions to explore different design visions for the spaces designated by Princeton Future as Zones 1, 2, and 3. As co-chair Alan Chimacoff told the Regional Planning Board at a presentation in December 2000, the group looked at the spaces in an interrelated way that took into account economics, open space, traffic and parking, and the borough’s housing needs. They also

The five zones have at least one thing in common: They are ripe for commercial or residential development that can affect neighborhoods positively or negatively. “Commercial creep” is a real concern.



Neighborhood discussion groups like this one have played an important role in citizen involvement in planning issues. In its first year of operation, Princeton Future organized more than 40 such meetings.

assumed that plans for the library and the Arts Council would go forward as proposed.

THE DOWNTOWN CORE

The task force focused particularly on Zone 1 and efforts to solve Princeton's chronic parking problems. Desman Associates, a New York City-based consulting firm hired by the borough to draft a parking feasibility study, had recently presented three options for downtown development, each accommodating a mix of parking, retail, offices and housing, and open space. All three options included a parking garage to replace the existing park-and-shop lot. In the view of the Planning and Design Task Force, Desman's plans placed too much emphasis on a parking structure at the expense of an integrated design that would foster an active street life. Says Geddes, "Desman worked with the mandate it was given, but we wanted to explore other options to create a real community space that gives primacy to the pedestrian."

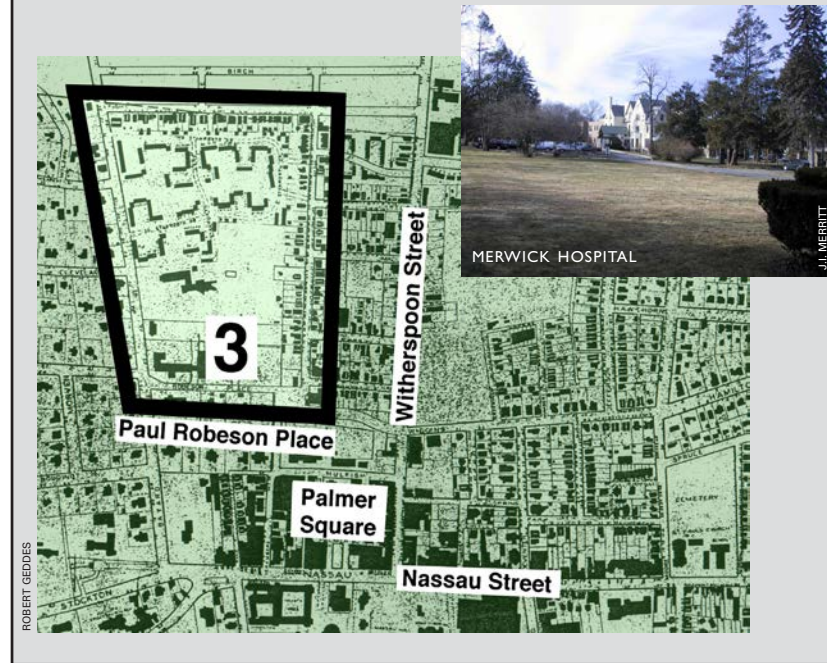
Geddes, Chimacoff, Michael Mostoller, Juliet Richardson, Jerry Ford, Ronald Berlin, and Henry Arnold came up with imaginative proposals that dealt with parking by placing it in mixed-use developments in the downtown core and satellite centers. Berlin's plan called for a new driveway linking Nassau and Wiggins streets, while Ford, Geddes, and Richardson each envisioned new walkways connecting new public squares. All the plans included housing and shops around a public square next to the public library. The options were eventually placed before the Borough Council, which at Princeton Future's suggestion obtained the services of the Philadelphia firm of Brown & Keener Urban Design to review all proposals — both Princeton Future's and Desman Associates' — and help borough officials create a downtown development plan.

In consultation with the Borough Council, the Regional Planning Board, and Princeton Future, and informed by residents' views collected by the Neighborhood Task Force, Robert Brown of Brown & Keener further

PF ZONE 3

Green Hill

Now occupied by the YM/YWCA, the university's Stanworth Apartments, and the Merwick Rehabilitation Hospital, Green Hill represents the borough's largest remaining block of semi-open space. One possible development concept entails razing the Merwick-Stanworth buildings and replacing them with a new neighborhood of freestanding homes, townhouses, and apartments. Parking could be in an underground garage on the Y property or in an above-ground garage adjacent to the residential development. ■



developed the plan that essentially follows the "three squares two walkways" concept of Princeton Future [diagram, page 3]. Geddes calls it "an appropriate balance between competing interests" — one that enhances the downtown's attractiveness and diversity by providing sufficient parking (483 spaces, some in a multilevel above-ground garage and others below street level) while creating new public walkways and green spaces (including "Madison Square" immediately south of the new library) as well as shops, apartments, and a possible food mart. The Borough Council approved the plan and is now seeking to convert it into a finished design.

"Neighborhood input was key to this planning process," says Geddes. "It worked because the commu-

nity spoke out on what it wanted, and Princeton Future helped translate it into a concept plan.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Since its launch in September 2000, Princeton Future has also hosted discussions on a range of other topics, including municipal finance, affordable housing, open space and recreation, and historic preservation. It has helped the Arts Council begin a dialogue with the community after residents of the John-Witherspoon neighborhood objected to the scale of its proposed expansion. It has explored with consultants the feasibility

of relocating or burying the PSE&G substation on Wiggins Street, an eye sore and impediment to creating an optimal downtown space. It has begun discussions with the principal owner of Palmer Square in an effort to end his decade-long objection to building affordable housing at Hulfish North.

Princeton Future will continue these activities in the year ahead. It will move forward with planning and discussion related to Zones 3-5

(Green Hill, Witherspoon, and the East End). It will also work with Brown & Keener Urban Design, which it has hired to develop a downtown plan to be integrated into the revised Princeton Community Master Plan. Beginning in January, Robert Brown began holding monthly public meetings to discuss elements of the plan, with the goal of delivering a completed document to the Regional Planning Board and Borough Council in July.

As observers have pointed out, resolving the issues related to the downtown core have been relatively easy because the borough owns most of the land and wants to act in the best interest of the community. The other four zones present more difficult problems, in part because they are in private ownership. Notes Goheen, “Developing Hulfish North with an affordable-housing component is especially knotty because the owner believes strongly that his property rights precede the affordable-housing mandate arising from the state

Residents say they like Princeton’s small-town feel and want to keep it that way to the extent possible. They are concerned about increasing traffic congestion and about growth and its threat to the neighborhoods.

PF ZONE 4

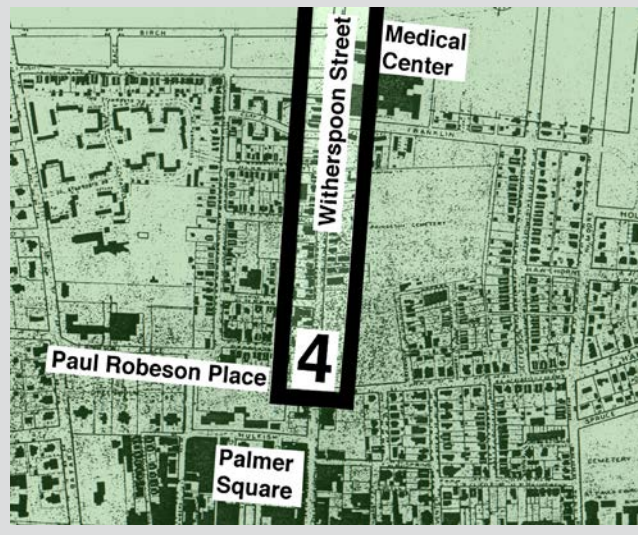
Witherspoon Street

Zone 4 — Witherspoon Street from Paul Robeson Place to Valley Road — could become a linear extension of the downtown, with locally



JULIE MERRITT

owned shops and restaurants mixed in with the existing stock of houses and apartments. Parking could be accommodated by a garage at the zone’s north end, in the vicinity of Valley Road, with a shuttle bus linking to the downtown. ■



ROBERT GEDDES

supreme court's Mount Laurel decision."

The challenges and complexities of fostering appropriate, community-based development beyond the downtown core raise a question: Does Princeton need some sort of quasi-public agency with the legal authority and financial clout to implement decisions? Says Moore, "Princeton Future has been successful in creating an open process for public input into important issues, but it's not a governmental body with any sort of official executive or even advisory role."

Discussions of the future of Princeton Future have included the possibility of the organization's spinning off, or evolving into, a community development corporation. In the year ahead, Princeton Future will explore this question while continuing to generate discussion on other matters of community concern. Says Goheen, "As an organiza-

"A town center master plan is needed to provide a concise picture of the mix of retail business and residential uses for a viable and dynamic center. ...

A pedestrian-friendly environment should be created which includes amenities such as benches, public art, and pocket parks."

— Princeton Community Master Plan, 1996

tion, I think it's appropriate for the time being that we remain focused on thinking, consulting, planning, and facilitating."

"One of the exciting things about Princeton Future is that we *don't* know exactly where we're headed," says Geddes. "The Borough Council may have had concerns about our becoming some sort of shadow government, but that was never an intention. We're an independently funded and self-selected body. Mayor Reed and the other members of the Borough Council are the elected officials, not us. Our role is to help them by bringing people and ideas to the table."

— J. I. MERRITT

Graphic design by Margaret Davis Design.

PF ZONE 5

The East End

During the last decade the East End of Nassau Street from Washington Road to Maple Street has emerged as a thriving linear community of shops, small businesses, and restaurants. Further unplanned development, however, could lead to "commercial creep" into the adjoining neighborhoods and create parking and traffic problems. ■

