

East Falls

RECONNECTS TO THE RIVER

A Public Improvement Plan for the Riverfront District



Image courtesy of Sabina Louise Pierce



A new vision for East Falls' Riverfront District at Ridge and Midvale Avenues.

Credits

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

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THE PROCESS:

The EFDC led a community-based design process to plan improvements for the district. The design professionals began by reviewing the numerous studies that have been developed over the years for the Riverfront District, including the EFDC's 1998 Riverfront Master Plan. In June, 2003, the team presented a draft plan in the first community charrette meeting that had been broadly advertised through newspaper articles, emails, and hand delivered flyers. The resulting input was then used to refine the plan. This refined plan was then reviewed by appropriate governmental entities. Included in the review were the Planning Commission, Streets Department, the Redevelopment Authority, the Philadelphia Housing Authority, PennDOT, and the Mayor's Office. Also, specialized reviews were made by bicycle organizations, East Falls Tree Tenders, and other local developers and business owners. A revised plan was then presented in the second community charrette. Support was enthusiastic. The East Falls Community Council overwhelmingly endorsed the plan in October, 2003.

The result was two booklets, this one and a second that addresses private improvements such as facades and signs, entitled: "East Falls Reconnects to the River: Design Guidelines and Goals for Facades and Signs."

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Rivage Block

A special study was done of the Rivage block, at Calumet and Ridge, because of its location at the Falls Bridge and because it will be available for development through the Redevelopment Authority.

The study is conceptual and shows only suggestions for building locations. The Rivage block will include a parking lot that must be part of the bigger shared parking system. In addition, on-street parking will be created on Ridge Ave. Fairmount Park could lengthen its parking lot on Kelly Drive which would have walking access by new crosswalks at the new two-way street via a pedestrian activated signal.



Photos showing site for potential development.



Sunoco Station

A special study was undertaken of the Sunoco Station because of its prominent location at the Gateway of East Falls, and because it disrupts the walking route to the River. The following recommendations are made:

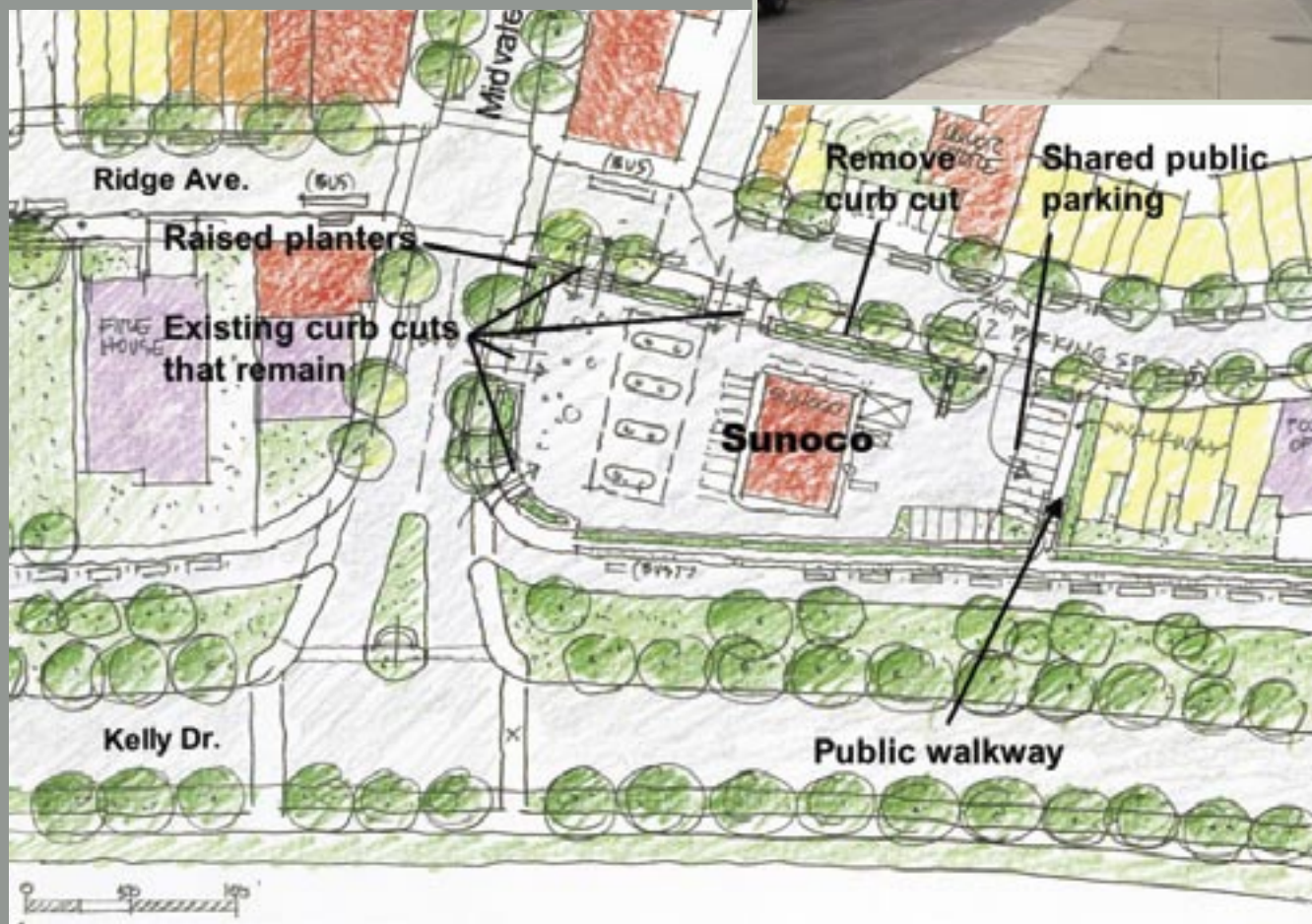
1. Define the sidewalks to allow clear and safe pedestrian ways. Possible defining elements include attractive planters, benches, and bicycle racks. These changes will prevent driving and parking on the sidewalks, and will control entrance/exit movements across the sidewalks.
2. Add a pedestrian walkway behind the station that connects Ridge Ave. to East Park Drive.
3. Direct the canopy lighting downward to maintain safety on the lot while limiting glare into nearby buildings and restaurants.
4. Shared public parking.



Attractive plantings at another gas station.



The recommended plan for Sunoco and a picture of the existing sidewalk.



Introduction and Goals

East Falls is unique in Philadelphia because of its mile of riverfront park along the Schuylkill River, and because the downtown commercial district is located on that riverfront. While the commercial district has suffered from disinvestment for many years, it is now being transformed into a dynamic area that will serve the diverse community of neighbors and visitors from the entire metropolitan region and the Schuylkill River Heritage Trail.

This plan sets out the public improvements that should be made to bring the public infrastructure up to a standard that responds to and encourages the private investment and potential investment of millions of dollars in the Riverfront District.

GOALS FOR PUBLIC IMPROVEMENTS:

The following goals should guide public improvements:

- 1) Add gateway and other signs to tell people East Falls is here and that it is great.
- 2) Connect East Falls to the River and Schuylkill River Trail.
- 3) Create an open quality, visually linking East Falls to the River.
- 4) Make sidewalks comfortable, attractive, and safe.
- 5) Calm traffic on Ridge Avenue by slowing it down to the speed limit.
- 6) Make driving through East Falls easier only during morning and evening 'rush hour.'
- 7) Maximize parking opportunities for residents, customers and recreation users and make the search for parking clear and easy.
- 8) Establish links between pedestrians and parking and the various streets and modes of transportation to make a compact, walkable area.

These goals are addressed in three sections:

- Gateways
- Driving and Parking
- Walking and Biking



Image courtesy of Sabina Louise Pierce



The beautiful Schuylkill River and Fairmount Park are now physically and visually separated from East Falls. Reconnecting these remarkable natural environments to the community will have a transforming effect on all of the neighborhoods, and the downtown shopping streets.

Gateways

East Falls is one of Philadelphia's hidden jewels. The scenic Kelly Drive passes alongside the community but there is little sense that the Riverfront District is even there – or that there is a handsome and varied community on the hillside and beyond. For the Riverfront to thrive once again, the entrances to East Falls must be marked with distinctive gateways. Visitors must know they are here, and residents must feel the pleasure of arriving home.

Gateway signage must contain a unique 'icon' that projects the image of the community. Gateways here will take many forms; there are many opportunities to locate them:

- Gateway Island: a new entrance sign and plantings at a transformed Kelly / Midvale intersection.
- New pedestrian-scale lights on the two Park Drive blocks: at night these lights will be a dramatic announcement that "East Falls is here!" and during the day they provide a distinct image of a walkable area.
- A welcoming sign and landscaping at the Kelly/Ferry parking lot. Landscaping, sign, and painted columns at the foot of the Rte 1 ramp, at Ridge Avenue
- A special new building at the Kelly/Calumet intersection
- Signs on the Ridge Avenue – at the railroad bridge and near the City Ave. ramps
- A sign on the Midvale Avenue railroad bridge
- Light the Falls Bridge



Gateways Are Opportunities to Welcome



Abutments under Rte 1 present an opportunity for public art, and the paved ground can be landscaped with ground cover and flowers.



The existing and deteriorated railroad bridge over Ridge Ave. is a significant opportunity to create a positive image for the downtown shopping area beyond – requiring little more than paint, planting, and cleaning to create a memorable gateway.

A fresh coat of paint and signage can create a sense of welcome.

East Falls RECONNECTS



The new vision for Ridge and Midvale Avenues.

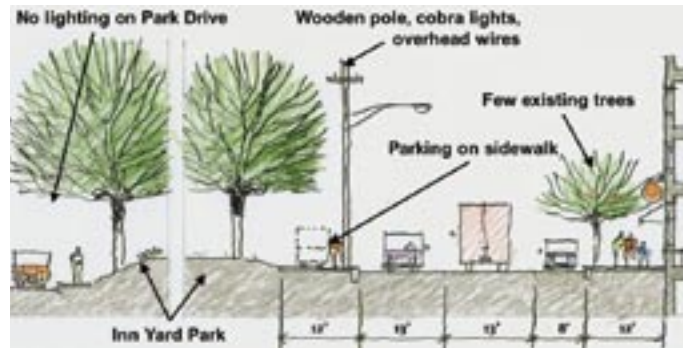


The existing intersection of Midvale and Ridge.

As one neighbor said, "If we don't make the intersection of Midvale and Ridge lively, we will have not succeeded." The recommendations for wider sidewalks, and street trees - and new stores, signs, and awnings - will make all of the Riverfront District and its main intersection, a great place to be.

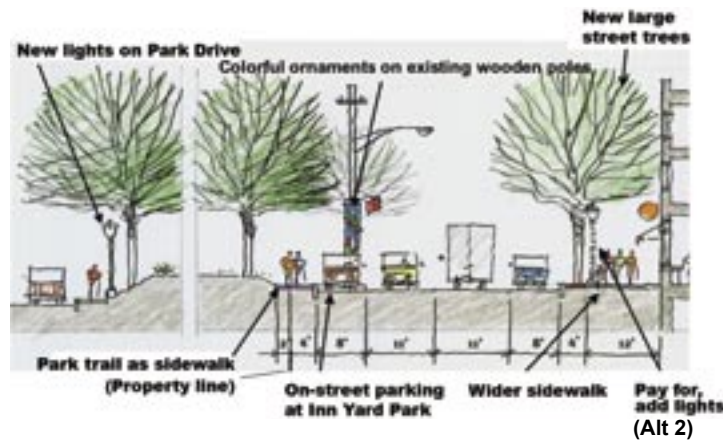
Walking and Biking

- Alt 1. Plant large spreading and open (and “retail friendly”) street trees along Ridge Ave. Pave the tree planting edge with granite blocks, to match those on Midvale Avenue. Keep the overhead wires, utility poles, and cobra-head street lights. Install colorful signs, banners, and ornaments on the utility poles.
- Alt 2. Add pedestrian-scaled lights on the north side of Ridge Avenue, to the same set of improvements listed in 1.



The existing conditions on Ridge Avenue include overhead wires, broken sidewalks, poor lighting, and few trees.

Alternate 1 assumes the overhead wires and the existing lights remain, but the north sidewalk is maintained, and street trees are added. Alternate 2 adds pedestrian-scaled lights on the wider sidewalk.



- Consider banners or other distinctive pole decoration along the primary improvement area.
- Secondary Improvements would continue the visual theme established in the Primary area, yet at a less dense level. This area would be along East Park Drive, Scotts Lane to R6 Railroad Tracks, Midvale Avenue above the East Falls Station to Conrad Street, and Ridge Avenue to Arthur Ashe Tennis Center and Hunting Park.
- Crosswalks across Kelly Drive are essential to “Reconnect” East Falls to the River. Two sets are required at three intersections: the new street in the 4300 block, Calumet St., and Midvale Ave (this is the major walking link between East Falls and the River; two crosswalks are fundamental to this link). One new crosswalk is planned at Ferry Street.
- Because of the street width, no new bike lanes are possible on Ridge Avenue. Discussions with bicycle organizations and experts indicate that it is preferred to narrow the lanes on Ridge Avenue to slow traffic. This works also because off-street biking is along the Schuylkill River Trail, parallel to Ridge Avenue throughout the Riverfront District.
- Modify the ramps and light timing at the North Ferry exit ramp (remove the split and re-angle the intersection with Ridge Avenue.)
- Create connection from Dobson Mills to the Mills at East Falls on Scotts Lane along the railroad where no buildings can be built.
- Add a river dock near the new street and Fairmount Park parking lot with the potential for boat launching.

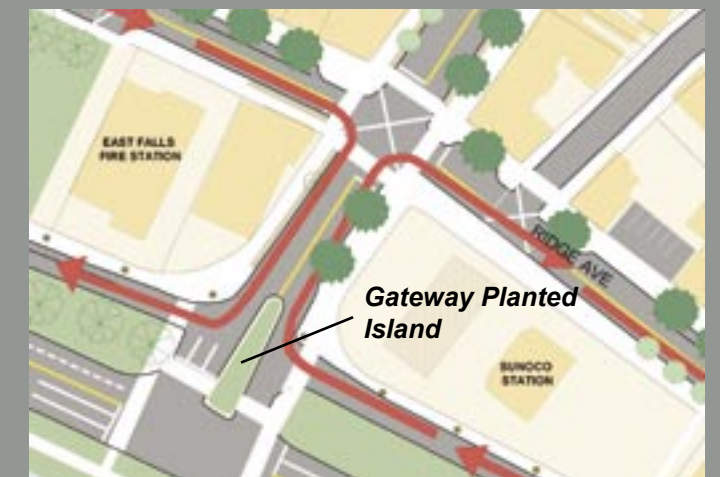
East Falls RECONNECTS



A new vision of Midvale Avenue at Kelly Drive. A planted island, with an “East Falls” sign and a pedestrian area, will make a dramatic gateway, and will make the walk to the river pleasant and safe.



The lack of a gateway at Midvale Avenue makes the entrance to East Falls not only dangerous but unattractive.



The revised circulation plan highlighting the gateway island.

Gateways

A WAY TO IDENTIFY THE COMMUNITY AND WELCOME PEOPLE



East Falls RECONNECTS

SUMMARY:

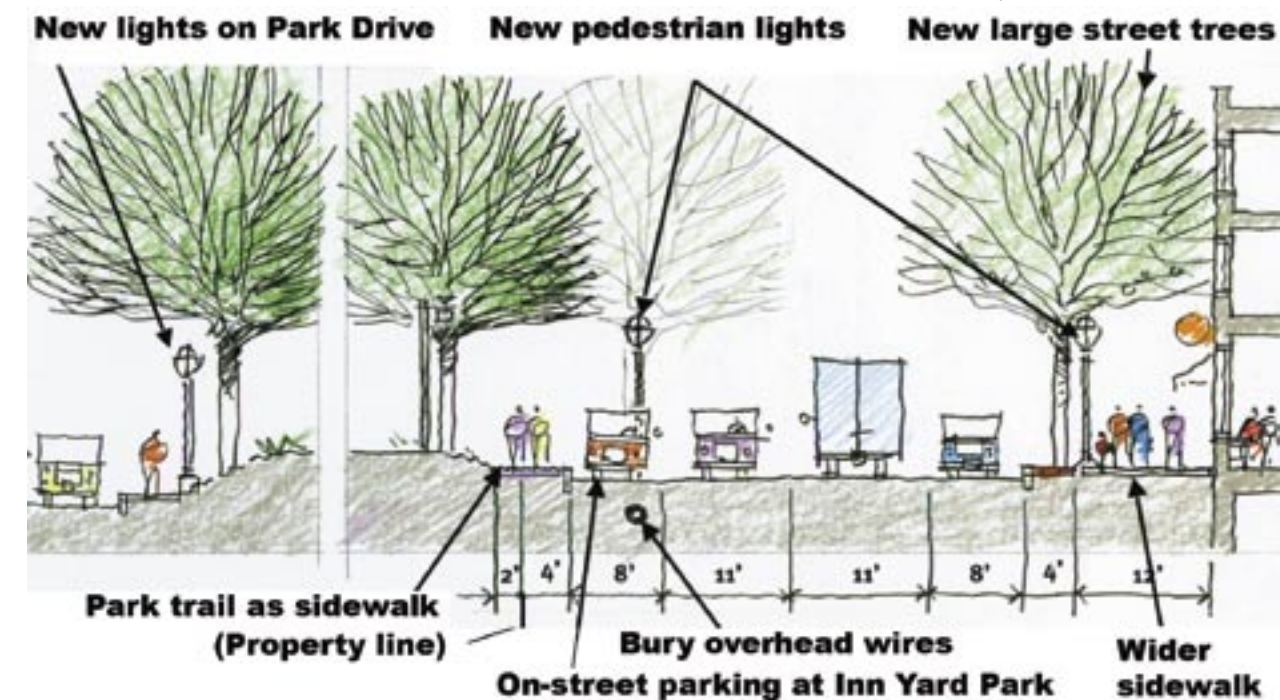
The recommendations directly address these principles:

- Widen the sidewalk on the north side of Ridge Avenue sidewalk, by narrowing the two moving lanes. This change will create a 16' wide sidewalk, which will provide room for large street trees, bicycle racks, outdoor dining, and adequate dimension for strolling and window shopping.
- Install new pedestrian-scale lights on the two Park Drive blocks. This illumination will make the parking spaces feel safe and useful and the poles in the daytime will create a sense of a pedestrian area.
- Create pedestrian bump outs at side streets.
- Add clear pedestrian crossing at lights.
- Add "No Right on Red" from Route 1 ramp to Ridge Avenue.
- Place bench or other attraction on Midvale near R6 Station to encourage use of SEPTA.
- Improve pedestrian crossing on Midvale at R6 Station

entrance for safety of commuters and students at St. Bridget's. Make the light out of the station signalized.

- Create a new street between Ridge Avenue and Kelly Drive near West River Japanese Restaurant with pedestrian activated light across Kelly Drive.
- The Primary Sidewalk Improvement Area is defined as: Ridge Avenue from City Avenue ramp to Scotts Lane. On Scotts Lane new lights are possible, but trees are not. The trees on Midvale Avenue are healthy, and the granite blocks are attractive; the concrete sidewalk needs replacing.
- Make these streetscape improvements in the Primary Area:
 - Plant large spreading and open (and "retail friendly" street trees along Ridge Avenue.
 - Pave the tree planting edge with granite blocks, to match those on Midvale Avenue.
 - Bury the overhead wires and remove the cobra head lights.
 - Install pedestrian-scaled lights on both sides of Ridge Avenue.

Two alternatives to burying the utilities were considered which cost less, but are far less attractive:



The recommended street and sidewalk improvements, along Ridge Ave., and Inn Yard Park

Walking and Biking

East Falls RECONNECTS

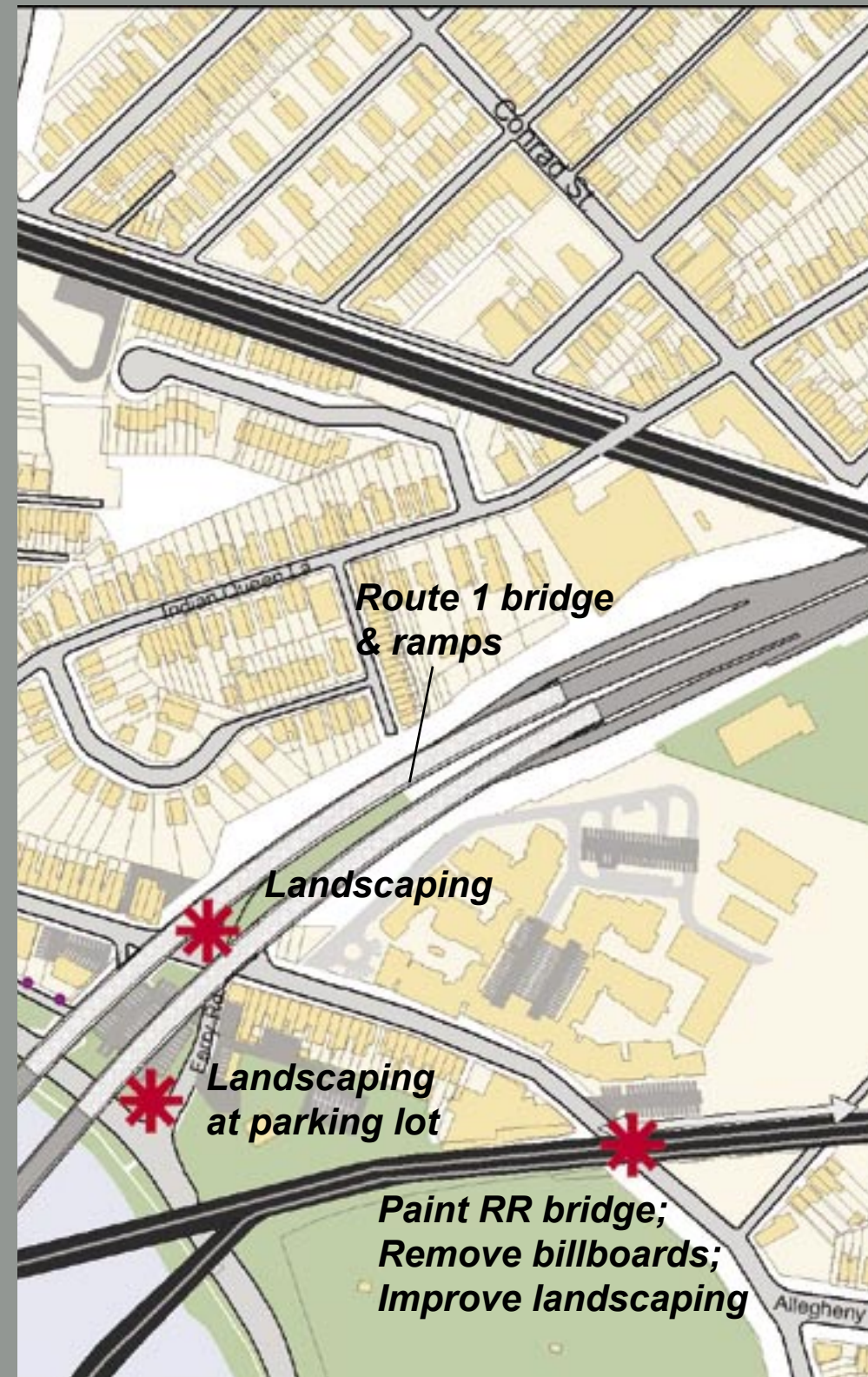
PRINCIPLES:

Five Principles guide the planning recommendations for improving walking and biking:

- Connect East Falls and the River for pedestrians, bicyclists, and roller-bladers.
- Create an open quality, visually linking East Falls to the River. Reconnect East Falls to the river, including the opportunity to see Fairmount Park, and the Schuylkill River.
- Make a compact, walkable shopping area. Shoppers will only walk short distances from their parked cars. For example, the distance between the Rivage Block and Ferry Street is a normal shopping street length.
- Retain and enjoy the mix of ground floor uses. Another of East Falls' unique qualities is that people work and live in the heart of downtown. This variety adds to the vitality of the shopping street.
- Make sidewalks comfortable and safe. The Ridge Ave. sidewalks are too narrow for shopping comfort, in contrast to those on Midvale, which are wide and spacious enough for outdoor dining, trees, street furniture and bike racks.



The sidewalks on Ridge Avenue are not comfortable and attractive, now. The improvements recommended will change all of that.



Seven opportunities have been identified as entrances into the riverfront downtown area of East Falls. The location of this part of the community, at the foot of steep hills and along the banks of the river, creates a unique three-dimensional quality that enables the creation of simple gateways that will dramatically announce the presence of this special place.

 Gateways

 New Pedestrian Lighting

Wayfinding

Gateways will welcome visitors to East Falls. They must clear direction to the parking, the shops, and the historic sites. A system of wayfinding signs must be located throughout the community. Examples of these signs that have been used elsewhere, and that can be models for East Falls, are shown in these photographs.



Wayfinding signs can take many forms. They may be oriented for automobiles and pedestrians. They also can include maps and opportunities to publicize events and businesses.



East Falls RECONNECTS



The widened, tree-shaded sidewalks in the "primary sidewalk improvement" areas will make walking comfortable, will link all the shops, and will create connections to the river.

- Visual Linkage to River
- Primary Sidewalk Improvements
- Secondary Sidewalk Improvements
- Main Pedestrian Links
- P Shared Parking Opportunities
- New Pedestrian Lighting

Walking and Biking

CONNECTING EAST FALLS AND THE RIVER



East Falls RECONNECTS

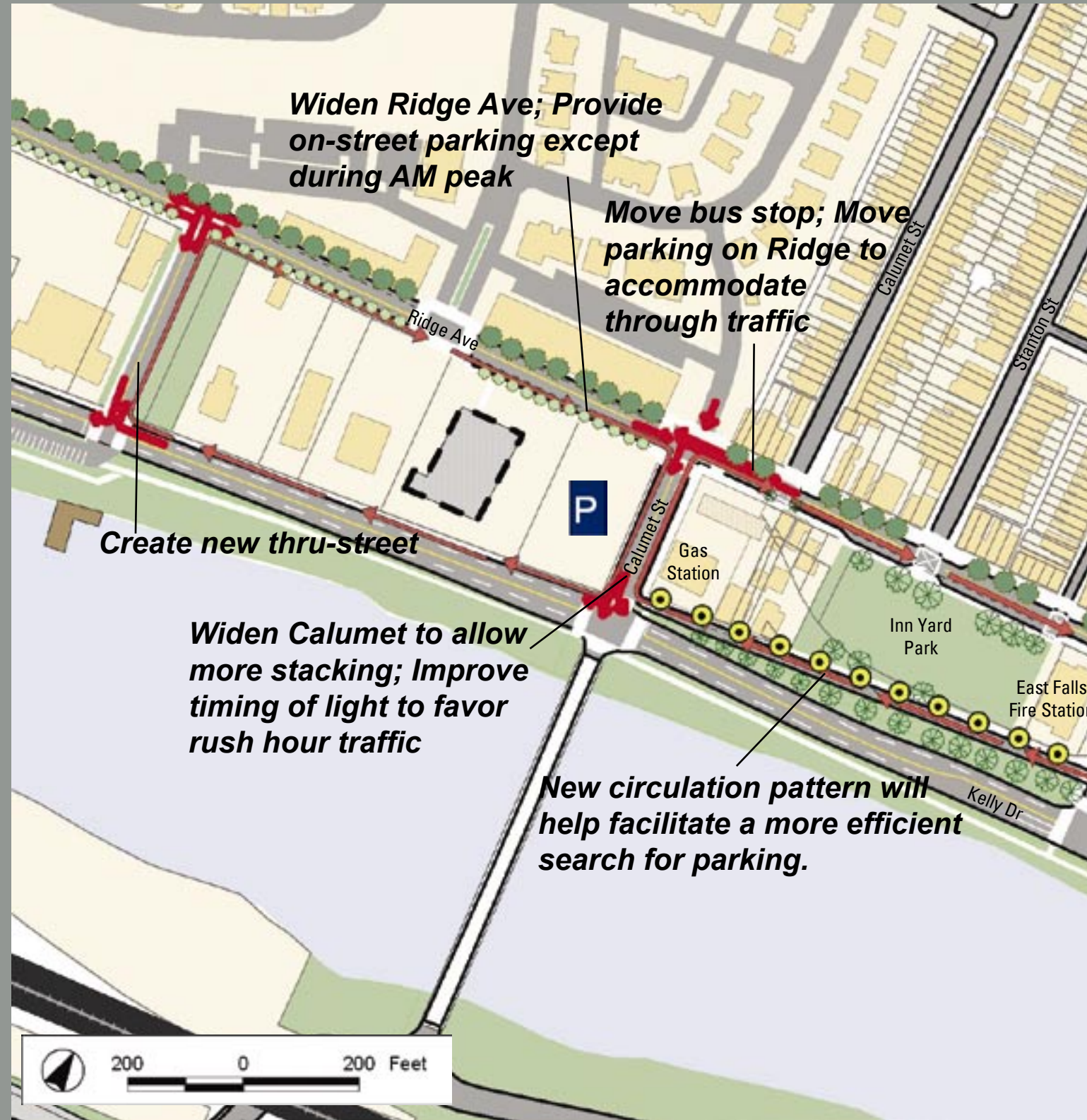


- district identity signs and banners
- wayfinding signs and destination markers
- orientation "you-are-here" district directory system
- coordination with gateway signs

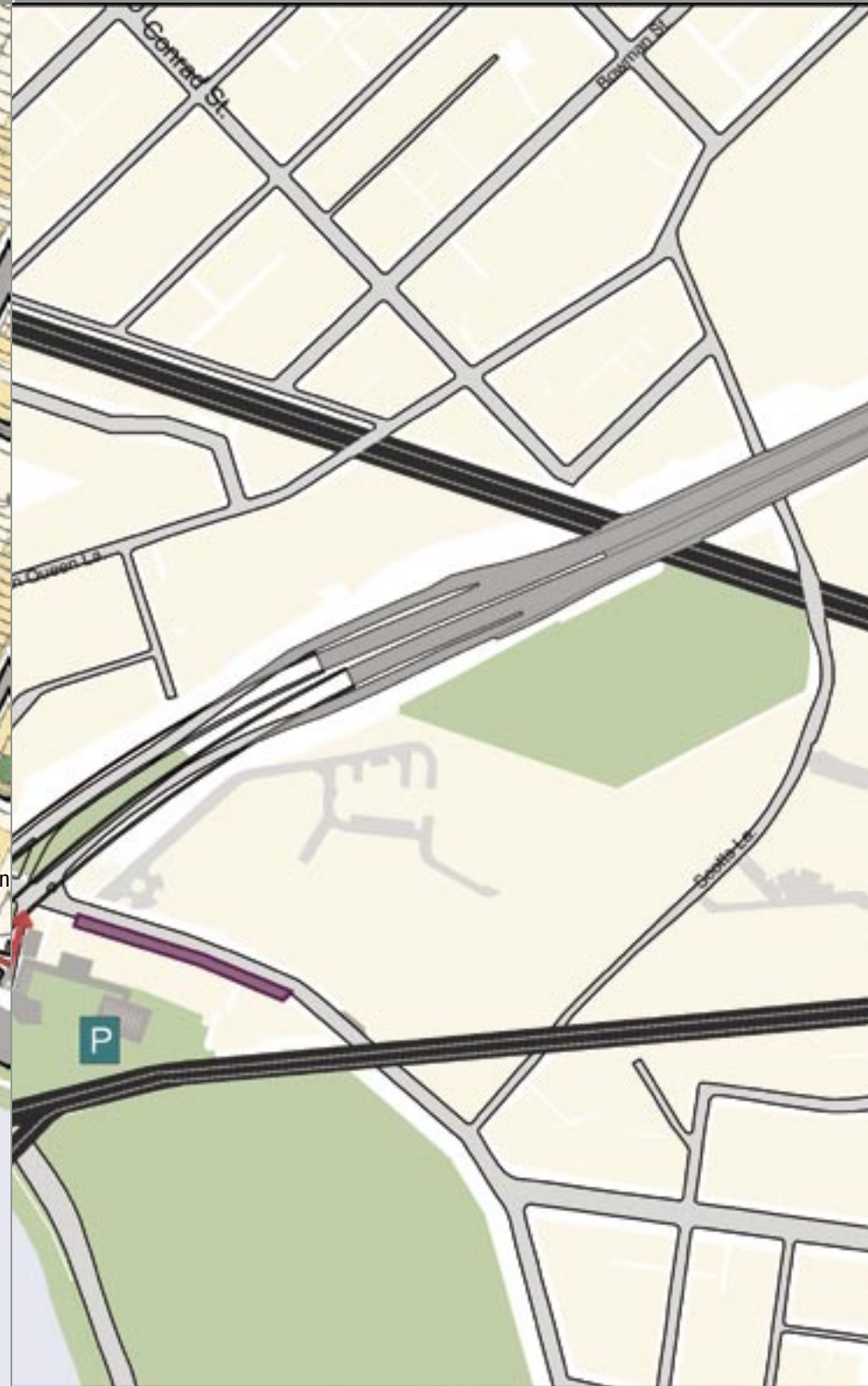


Driving

CALMING TRAFFIC IN THE RIVERFRONT DISTRICT



East Falls RECONNECTS

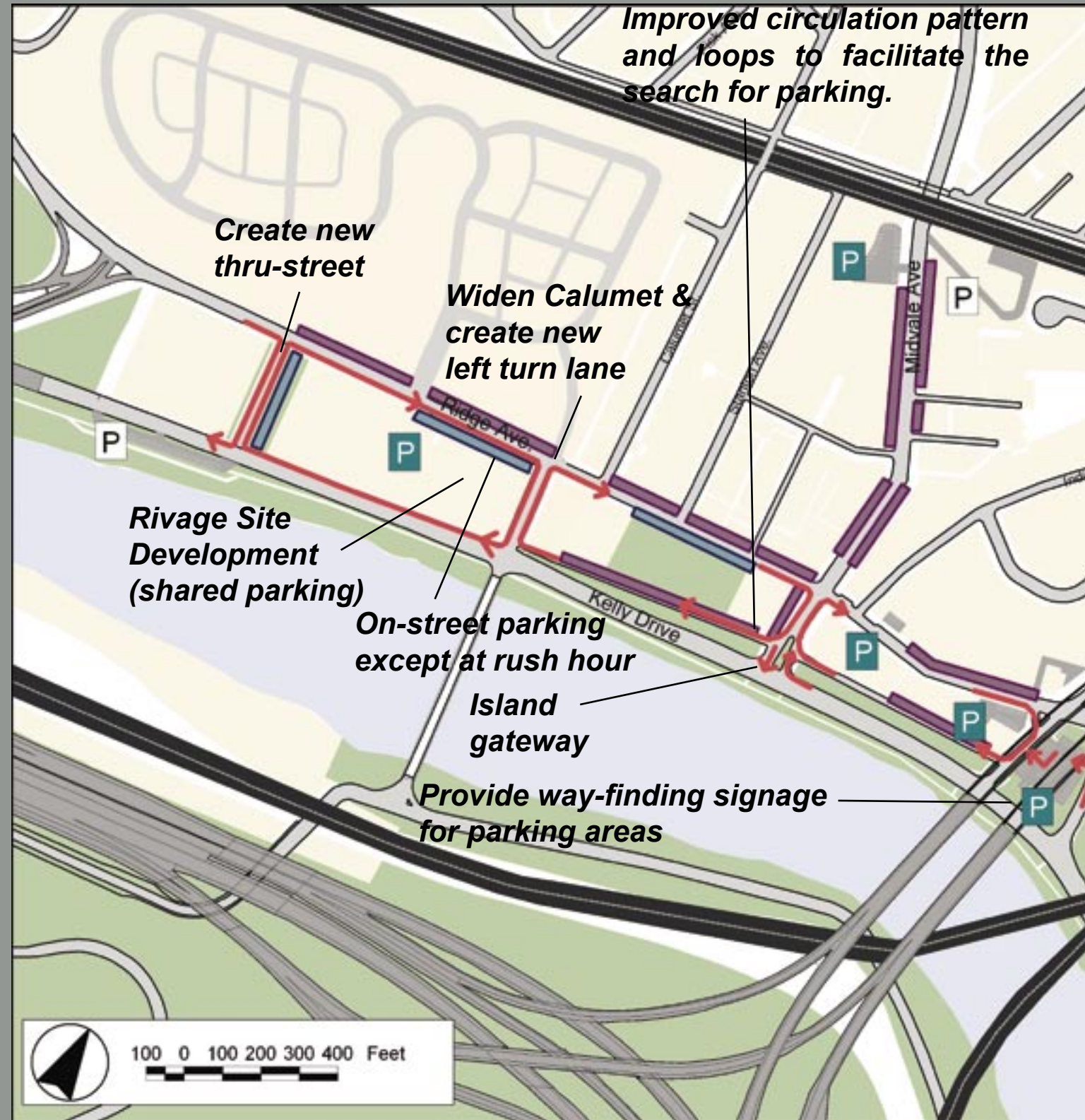


There is a real parking shortage in East Falls; finding the existing spaces is also difficult. This map shows new on-street parking, parking lots that can be part of a shared system, and a simple loop driving pattern to search for parking.

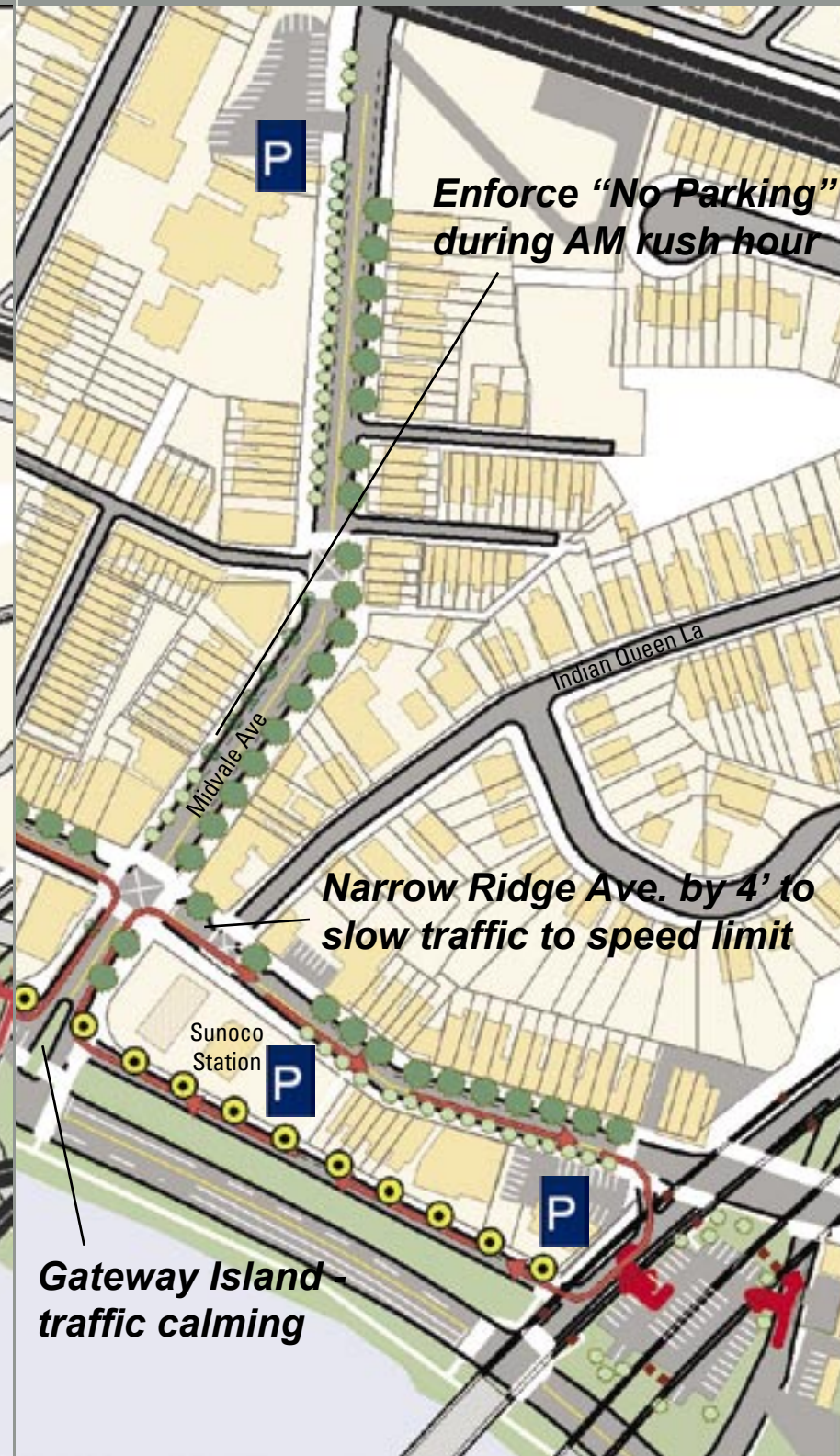
-  New Circulation Pattern/ Parking Search
-  Existing On-Street Parking
-  New On-Street Parking
-  Existing Off-Street Parking Opportunities
-  New Off-Street Parking Opportunities

Parking

MAXIMIZING PARKING FOR RESIDENTS, CUSTOMERS AND VISITORS



East Falls RECONNECTS



Simple changes to the street system will provide added turning lanes at rush hour, added parking on the streets, and an easy search for parking spaces.

- New Circulation Pattern/
Parking Search
- P New Shared Parking
Opportunities

Driving and Parking

PRINCIPLES:

Currently trucks, buses and passenger cars take advantage of the wide lanes to race along Ridge Avenue at excessive speeds. At the same time, traffic moves haltingly in the rush hours. The public parking is insufficient (cars are often parked on the sidewalks), and it can be difficult to drive to the limited available spaces.

Five Principles guide the recommendations for Driving and Parking:

- Assure that through traffic on Ridge Avenue is slowed to make walking safer and to encourage drivers to see the shops and restaurants.
- Ease rush hour congestion.
- Increase the parking supply on and off street: Create a shared and managed parking system. Make sure that it can be used by everyone (for restaurants, shops, offices, and residents, and for recreation visitors). Private use parking lots are not efficient, and are not welcoming. (Avoid signs saying "No Parking or You Will be Towed Away: Welcome to East Falls!").
- Make the search for parking clear and simple.
- Improving traffic flow must make the sidewalks more pleasant and make crossing the street safer.

SUMMARY:

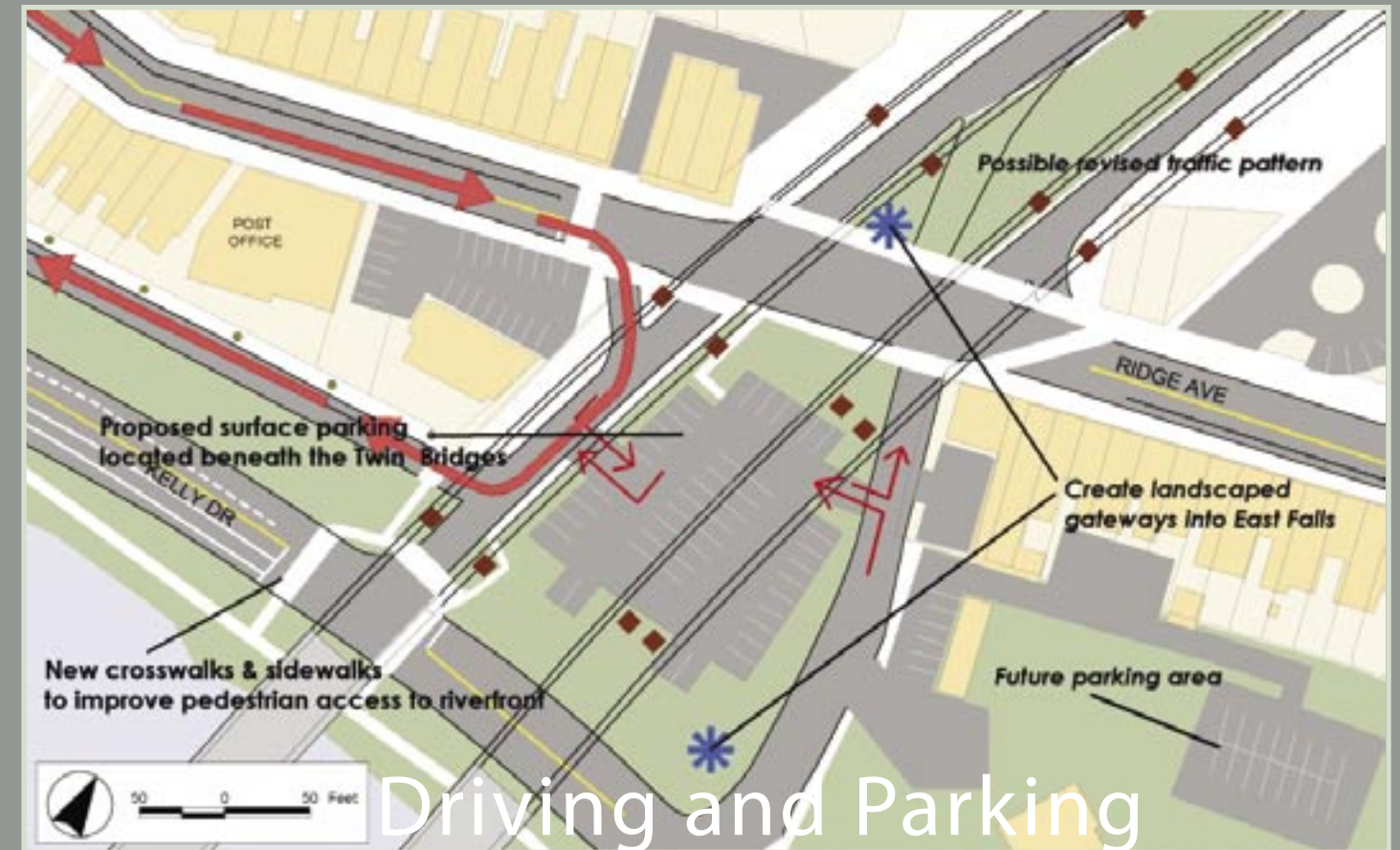
These changes directly address the principles:

- Each of the travel lanes on Ridge Avenue are 2' wider than needed for such a surface street. By narrowing the roadway by 4', cars will be slowed to the speed limit, pedestrian crossings will be shorter and safer, and the north side sidewalk in front of the shops and restaurants will be wider.
- Add a planted traffic island at Midvale Avenue and Kelly Drive to better guide the movement of traffic on this too-wide stretch of asphalt, to stop dangerous exits from the gas station, to make pedestrian crossings safer and easier and to create a dramatic gateway entrance.
- Make the search for parking clear and easy by creating 3 clear parking 'search loops' using East Park Drive behind the post office, behind the fire station (changing the

traffic direction), and utilizing the new road between Ridge Avenue and Kelly Drive on the 4300 Block.

- This new road which will be right in and right out only on Kelly Drive - will also give more access to future development in the area. It can have on street parking.
- Create on-street parking along Ridge at the Inn Yard Park.
- Widen Calumet Street between Ridge and Kelly to add a travel lane heading toward the Falls Bridge. This will allow stacking of cars to ease the morning rush.
- Enforce "no parking" regulations on Midvale Avenue in the morning rush.
- Create a bypass for through traffic on westbound Ridge Avenue by relocating the existing northbound bus stop to the corner of Calumet St.
- Add a southbound lane on Ridge Avenue along the Rivage site to provide on-street parking. With "no parking" regulations in the morning, this lane will increase the Ridge Avenue capacity for turns onto Calumet St.
- Paint stripes and add signs at the Ridge Avenue/Indian Queen Lane; Ridge Avenue/Stanton Street; Ridge Avenue/Calumet Street; Ridge Avenue/Eveline Street and at the Midvale Avenue/Frederick Street that say "Don't Block the Box." Morning rush traffic stops in those intersections and prevents neighbors from entering through traffic.
- Study traffic light at Falls Bridge to favor outgoing traffic in the morning and incoming traffic in the evening.

East Falls RECONNECTS



The new parking lot under the Rte 1 bridges will serve customers, employees, residents and visitors to the Kelly Drive trail. It also will create a large and handsome landscaped area at the entrance to East Falls.



New parking opportunities are needed to keep cars like this one off the sidewalk.