

THE NEWS of BELLA VISTA

Spring 2016

SPONSORED BY BELLA VISTA NEIGHBORS ASSOCIATION INC., A REGISTERED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION

BELLA VISTA NEIGHBORS ASSOCIATION

The Bella Vista Neighbors Association is an organization that serves residents of Bella Vista, which is bounded by 6th and 11th Streets and South Street and Washington Avenue. BVNA encourages civic involvement, provides a neutral and public discussion forum, preserves and augments our institutions and character, supports the delivery of government services, and promotes dialogue with elected officials. We are an independent and nonprofit organization.

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Civic Association Update

Spring is here and Bella Vista neighbors are out in force enjoying the sunshine, cleaning up sidewalks, planting flowers, and visiting with friends on stoops, in parks, and at cafes. It's one of my favorite times of the year to be living in this diverse neighborhood. Despite our close-knit blocks of row homes we don't see each other as much in the winter, so it's always great to see what's changed over the past few months. Kids grow taller, babies start walking, living rooms get redecorated, front doors get fresh paint, new pets are adopted, and more.

From the BVNA President

All you have to do is walk outside of your home and say hello to start a conversation and possibly a friendship. Attending civic meetings and volunteering in the neighborhood are other ways to get connected to your neighbors. I've been active on the BVNA board for the past 3 years and it's been a great way to meet people. My term as president ends in May, but I will be staying involved and look forward to seeing YOU around the neighborhood. Happy Spring! ■

— Claudia Archer

A View of History through Our Neighborhood

By Donald D. Groff

As a fellow Bella Vistan, you might know that feeling that comes when you're skimming the daily news and unexpectedly see an item about the neighborhood — you zoom in more intently. That happens when I'm on the job editing essays for the online Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia, where Bella Vista and environs often pop up.

Bella Vista has been quite the staging ground for historical trends and events — some that are celebrated and others that, well, are on the wrong side of history. The swatch of the city bordered by South Street, Washington Avenue, Sixth Street and Eleventh Street has seen immigration, innovation, integration, abolitionism, assassination, mass contagion, and near demolition. You can read about some of it on sidewalk historical markers, but the details are often left to the historians and those with a family interest. What follows here are Bella Vista's historical highlights and lowlights for the rest of us.

Paragraphs in italics are excerpts from the Encyclopedia. You can read more about each topic by searching the Encyclopedia at www.philadelphiaencyclopedia.org.

Immigration

You don't need an encyclopedia to know that the Italian Market, which celebrated its centennial last year, is

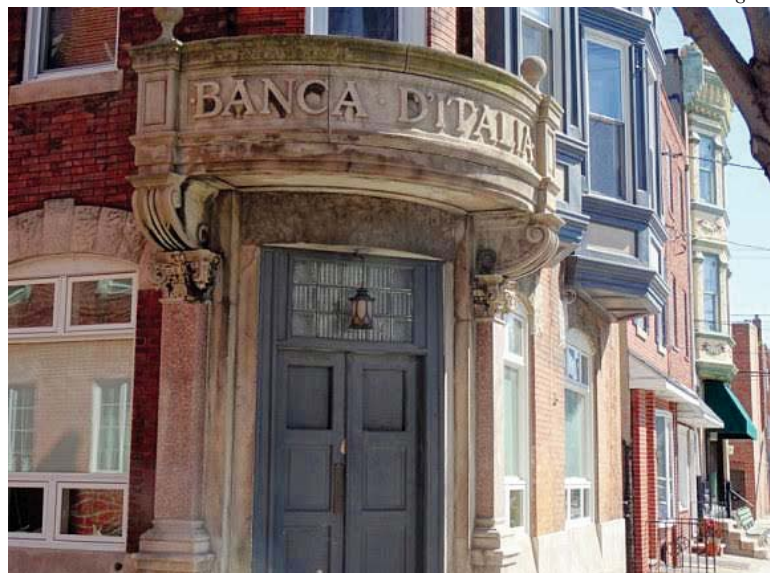
a constant reminder that the sons and daughters of Italy arrived here in massive numbers beginning in the 1870s.

The number of Italians in Philadelphia skyrocketed from only 516 in the 1870 census to 18,000 by 1900. The surge continued with 77,000 Italian immigrants and their children living in Philadelphia in 1910, 137,000 in

1920, and 182,368 by 1930 — making Italians the second-largest ethnic group in Philadelphia.

Philadelphia's Little Italy was the second largest in the country — surpassed only by New York. Immigrants from the province of Catanzaro, in the Calabria region, lived along Ellsworth Street, while the territory around Eighth and Fitzwater Street was home

See **HISTORY**
Continued on Page 3



Dollars to lire: Architectural firm Watson & Huckel designed and constructed Banca D'Italia in 1903 on Seventh Street near Fitzwater. Banks like this, whose employees spoke Italian, gave Italian residents of Philadelphia a way to send money back to their families in Italy. Photo by D. Groff

The Yellow Townhouse of Art

By Robert Bershad

The next time you walk down the 700 block of Catherine Street, look for a townhouse with yellow door and window frames. That's the Da Vinci Art Alliance. It's the great long time neighbor you never knew you had, until now.

The Da Vinci Art Alliance started in 1931 exclusively as an organization for male Italian artists and artisans. Internationally

renowned photographer Severo Antonelli was one of its founders. During that time, many immigrants with common interests banded together for work and social opportunities. It moved to its current location at 704 Catherine Street in 1959. By then the Alliance had opened its doors to women and non-Italians, according to Linda Dubin Garfield, the current president of its Board of Directors.

Today the Da Vinci Art Alliance, whose Leonardo-inspired motto is "Where Art is Genius," is open to everyone to see its exhibitions, a new one opening every month. Exhibitions cover all two and three dimensional art media, and each exhibition has a different theme. May's theme is "Home and Away." Even though the Alliance is a member-driven organization, often its exhibitions are open for non-member artists'

submissions.

The Alliance's door also opens to the public the third Thursday of every month for a free-wheeling discussion series on such topics as the analog/digital nexus in contemporary art, legal issues facing artists, and Duende and Flamenco. Attendees of these salons come from Philadelphia, New Jersey, and Wilmington. Dubin Garfield is always looking for more Bella Vistans to attend. That's you!

The Alliance extends its reach well past its yellow-framed door and windows. It works with neighborhood art galleries and institutions to create multi-venue shows. A recent exhibition, "A Celebration of Color," appeared simultaneously at the Alliance, the Jed Williams Gallery, and the Dupree Gallery. Look out for future cooperative efforts between the Alliance and other locations, including B Square Gallery, Fleisher Art Memorial, Pageant Soloveev, Paradigm, and Philadelphia's Magic Gardens.

For more information about the Da Vinci Art Alliance, visit www.davinciartalliance.org. Better yet, next time you're walking down the 700 block of Catherine Street, pop into the townhouse with yellow door and window frames and visit the great neighbor you never knew you had, until now. ■

Robert Bershad is a contributor and managing editor of The News of Bella Vista. To advertise or submit an article for the Fall edition please email bob.bershad@gmail.com.



The Da Vinci Art Alliance, 700 block of Catherine Street. The Alliance opens a new art exhibition every month and presents a topical public discussion every third Thursday of the month. For exhibition openings, public discussion dates, and gallery hours, visit www.davinciartalliance.org/calendar



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A first: St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi Roman Catholic Church (712 Montrose Street), the first Italian national parish in the U.S., established in 1852. Photo by D. Groff

HISTORY *Continued from Page 1*

primarily to people from Abruzzi. These settlers split in even smaller districts in which specific streets had settlers from specific towns in Abruzzi.

Not made to feel welcome at the Irish Catholic churches, in 1852 the community established the first Italian national parish in the U.S., St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi Roman Catholic Church (712 Montrose Street). This helped cement an Italian national identity out of the regional identities held by most Italian immigrants, who at the time of their arrival considered themselves as Abruzzese or Pugliese, rather than Italian. They forged strong social ties in South Philadelphia as they founded churches, gathered in bars, and spoke their native tongues.

Culinary Innovation

The Italian celebration of the mother country and home-cooked meal no doubt had a role in the establishment of the market, as well as culinary innovation over the years. Formal establishment of the Ninth Street curb market [in 1915] was timely and progressive, for it secured a year-round market for fresh produce, imported goods, quick meals, restaurant supplies, processed foods, and household goods, all within close proximity to pur-

veyors and customers. Customers, too, remained devoted to the market's traditional character and product offerings.

In the midst of the Great Depression, Pat Olivieri (1907-74) created the cheesesteak at his South Philadelphia hot dog stand in 1932, ultimately making that sandwich synonymous with the city. Small, family-owned Italian restaurants remained numerous in South Philadelphia. Philadelphia's Dante and Luigi's (est.1899), Ralph's (est.1900), and Wilmington's Mrs. Robino's (est.1940) continue to thrive in the first decades of the twenty-first century.

Integration

In the late nineteenth century, Bella Vista North was the southern edge of what then was then the Seventh Ward, the focal point for W.E.B. Du Bois's landmark *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, the first scholarly race study of an urban center.

Site of the city's oldest African American community, dating to the colonial era, the Seventh Ward by the 1890s was home to nearly a quarter (roughly 9,700) of Philadelphia's 40,000 blacks (the largest such population in any northern city). Incredibly diverse, the ward mingled af-

fluent whites on its western fringe, one of the nation's densest concentrations of black elites at its center, along Lombard Street (west of Ninth), and multitudes of the poor of both races on the ward's eastern front, where lay the city's most notorious black ghetto.

Abolitionism and Assassination

Even earlier, residents in our section of the city participated in the abolitionist and civil rights movements that percolated before and after the Civil War.

Octavius Catto (1839-71), one of Philadelphia's first African American civil rights activists, migrated from the South and became a teacher at the Institute for Colored Youth (Tenth and Bainbridge Streets). In addition to raising regiments of black soldiers for the Union Army in the Civil War, he, along with other activists, battled for the desegregation of the streetcar lines. Catto's murder in 1871 after the first desegregated mayoral election made this victory bittersweet. His funeral, the largest to date in the city's history, helped accelerate the rise of the Republican Party, which ruled Philadelphia until the mid-twentieth century.

In the years prior to the election, Catto had worked to help the nation realize its founding democratic vision through actions to increase educational opportunities, desegregate trolley cars, increase voting opportunities for African Americans, and (as a notable local athlete) integrate baseball. Fierce opposition to Catto's activism and the gen-



Octavius V. Catto, 19th century civil rights activist, taught at the Institute for Colored Youth (Tenth and Bainbridge Streets), which became Cheyney University.

eral progress of African Americans contributed to his eventual murder. At the time of the election, he was an instructor at the Institute for Colored Youth (later Cheyney University).

Technological Innovation

Some of the trolley tracks that occasionally peek up from below the street during roadwork in Bella Vista go back to Catto's century, and their history ties into many story lines, such as civil rights, labor fights, and the forward march of technology.

See **HISTORY**
Continued on Page 5

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BVNA monthly meetings

Zoning

1st Tuesday, 7:30 pm, Palumbo Rec Center, 10th & Fitzwater. Open meetings for community input on building and renovation projects requiring variances to the zoning code.

Beautification

2nd Tuesday, 6:30 pm, Palumbo Rec Center. Volunteers working together to support cleaning and greening initiatives.

PSA1

1st Wednesday, 6:30 pm, Santore Library, 7th & Carpenter. Meeting between police leadership and stakeholders in Police Service Area 1 of the 3rd District. Review of monthly crime statistics.

BVNA Board

1st Monday, 7:30 pm, Palumbo Rec Center. Board of directors' monthly business meeting.

All meetings open to the public. Check our website and social media for schedule changes.

Upcoming events:

BVNA After Dark: Bowling Night at PEP Bowl, April 29, 6-8 pm. Tickets \$15 and \$25. Info on our website.

BVNA Cookie Swap, May 11, 6:00 pm, Santore Library. Registration required: info@bellavistaneighbors.org

BVNA Annual Meeting, May 18, 7:00 pm, Palumbo Rec Center. Meeting agenda includes an update on the city bike share program, an introduction to the Philly 311 Neighborhood Liaison program, presentation of the annual Distinguished Community Service Award, and elections of BVNA board officers and directors.

BVNA Night at the Phillies, Friday, June 3, 7:05 pm, Citizens Bank Park. \$28 per person. Tickets available on our website.



Italian Market
Festival
May 21 & 22

Other neighborhood events

South Street Spring Festival, May 7, 11am - 8 pm

Jackson School Benefit, May 13, 7-11 pm, friendsofjackson.org

Nebinger School Flea Market, May 21, 8 am - 3 pm, 6th & Carpenter

Italian Market Festival, May 21 & 22, 9th Street, Federal to Catharine

Third Police District Community Day, June 4, 11 - 4, 11th & Wharton. Music, games, prizes, refreshments.

HISTORY *Continued from Page 3*

By the mid-1880s, the electric trolley was invented and it was clearly the technology of the future. Unfortunately, Philadelphia Traction's investment in cable cars and the small size of most other companies contributed to Philadelphia's slow adoption of trolleys (as did safety and aesthetic concerns among the public). Following the conservative Kemble's death in 1891, [co-owner Peter] Widener decided to abandon cable operation for electrification. The first electric line on Bainbridge and Catharine streets opened in 1892, and the horse [trolley] cars made their final runs in Philadelphia just five years later.

Mass Contagion

While trolley evolution was running its course, the city faced various health threats, including cholera epidemics in 1832, 1849, and 1866, which were aggravated by lack of water quality.

In the Black and Irish districts south of South Street, the death rate from cholera was three to four times greater than in the city. While the College of Physicians attributed these deaths to the poverty and "racial"



Cent'anni +1: The Italian Market, seen here on April 3, 2016, celebrated its Centennial in 2015. Photo by D. Groff

character of the population, in reality, these areas had very limited access to Fairmount (waterworks) drinking water and consequently suffered far more affliction than those with such resources.

Near Demolition

Happily, sometimes history takes a positive turn when a plan falls through, as when Bella Vista

dodged a highway-development bullet in the 1960s. City planners wanted to build a cross-town expressway on a route that would've taken out South Street.

A swath of land running from the Schuylkill to the Delaware Rivers along South Street was found to be "blighted" and ripe for demolition, providing space for a major traffic

artery.

The argument that the Crosstown would separate South Philadelphia from Center City increasingly gained attention for its racial implications. Opponents dubbed the Crosstown the "Mason-Dixon Line," describing it as a mechanism to divide white Philadelphians north of the highway from African Americans to the south.

By the early 1970s, highway opponents won and the Bella Vista North has grown as a commercial and residential corridor instead of becoming an expressway, to the regret of nearly no one.

With all the changes and new construction occurring today in Bella Vista, it is easy to overlook or forget the neighborhood's history. I hope this article has helped jog the memory of longtime residents and the imagination of the newly arrived. ■

Donald D. Groff, who lives on Bainbridge Street in Bella Vista, is managing editor of The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia, published by the Mid-Atlantic Regional Center for the Humanities at Rutgers-Camden. The essays whose excerpts are used here with permission are also available in full at www.phila-delphiaencyclopedia.org.

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Breathable, Walkable, and Safe

By Robert Bershad

Front-loading garages and oversized houses require zoning variances under Philadelphia's zoning code as of August 2012, according to Larry Weintraub, an architect and Bella Vista's Zoning Committee co-chair. That may come as a surprise to longtime residents or neighborhood newcomers who desire or despise these suburban-style amenities. As the Stalingrad-style block-by-block fight over these variances continues, it's helpful to know why they are required.

The zoning code discourages – and so requires variances for – front-loading garages and oversized houses for three reasons: safety, walkability, and breathability.

Safety

A safe neighborhood depends on neighbors looking out for each other. First floor windows let residents see directly outside, adding eyes on the street and deterring crime. Installing a suburban style front-loading garage means there's no place for first-floor windows, taking eyes off the street, making it more hospitable to criminal activity. If it was dusk, Weintraub asks, would you feel safer walking on a street lined with closed garage doors or a street lined with homey, lit, first-floor windows?

Walkability

Planners designed Bella Vista



A front-loading garage requires a zoning variance under Philadelphia's zoning code as of August 2012. That may come as a surprise to longtime residents or neighborhood newcomers who desire or despise this suburban-style amenity.

in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, long before the invention of the car. Unlike the car-centric roads of twentieth century suburbia, streets here are narrow and short. It's a walking neighborhood. Weintraub notes that Bella Vista scores a "Walker's Paradise" rating on Zillow. It's also a charming neighborhood, due in part to tree-tending Bella Vistans

who have worked for almost three decades planting trees that make sidewalks cooler, less barren, and more pleasing to the eye. Driveways disrupt all that – they eliminate tree planting opportunities, place moving cars in the walker's path, and reduce already scarce street parking. Driveways are well suited for the suburbs. Not so much for high density urban neighborhoods.

Breathability

The zoning code discourages oversized houses because they take air and light away from neighbors. In the code are detailed limits on a house's height and footprint. Weintraub explains that together the height and the footprint are called "the bulk." A house with oversized bulk looms imposingly over its neighbors, blocking out sunlight and eating up scarce space. Nobody wants to live next to an imposing, pushy neighbor who vacuums up all the light and air.

The allure of a townhouse with suburban style amenities in Bella Vista is easy to understand. It's a great neighborhood for living

comfortably. But the city and the suburbs are not the same, due mainly to population density. Considerations like safety, walkability, and breathability are far more pressing in the city. They add a real and significant dimension to the lives of neighbors.

People planning to seek zoning variances ought to know that the process under the new zoning code is costly and time consuming. The submission and notice requirements are onerous. Before embarking on a zoning variance adventure, it might be worth consulting an architect for professional advice. A variance might not even be the best solution. An architect may achieve the roomy benefits of an oversized house by deftly redesigning the space planning of the floors. In the right hands, a house can be built or built out into a dream house while still keeping Bella Vista breathable, walkable, and safe. ■

Robert Bershad is a contributor and managing editor of The News of Bella Vista. To advertise or submit an article for the Fall edition please email bob.bershad@gmail.com.



First floor windows let residents see directly outside, adding eyes on the street and deterring crime.

Cianfrani Park Update: Tree Watering Volunteers Needed!

Cianfrani Park's capital improvements project has resumed and is progressing. Four large Kentucky Coffee trees were planted on April 11. The root balls were surrounded with biochar and mycorrhizae, which are fertilizing materials purchased by Friends of Cianfrani Park. They increase drought tolerance and create ideal garden soil structure that drains, breaths, and retains optimum moisture levels.

Pavers have been laid in the center square that not only provide beauty, but also help the trees receive plenty of rain-water. While they establish themselves, the trees will need daily watering - volunteers are needed! If you want to help, please contact the Friends at cianfranipark@gmail.com.

The City Seal Statue will be installed on the east end when certain electrical issues have been resolved. There will likely be other delays because it is too late in the season to plant the five remaining trees and repair the badly compacted turf. For these reasons, we expect some work to be postponed until the fall. But we expect the park to be ready for our Fridays in June Concert Series. More information: www.cianfranipark.com. ■



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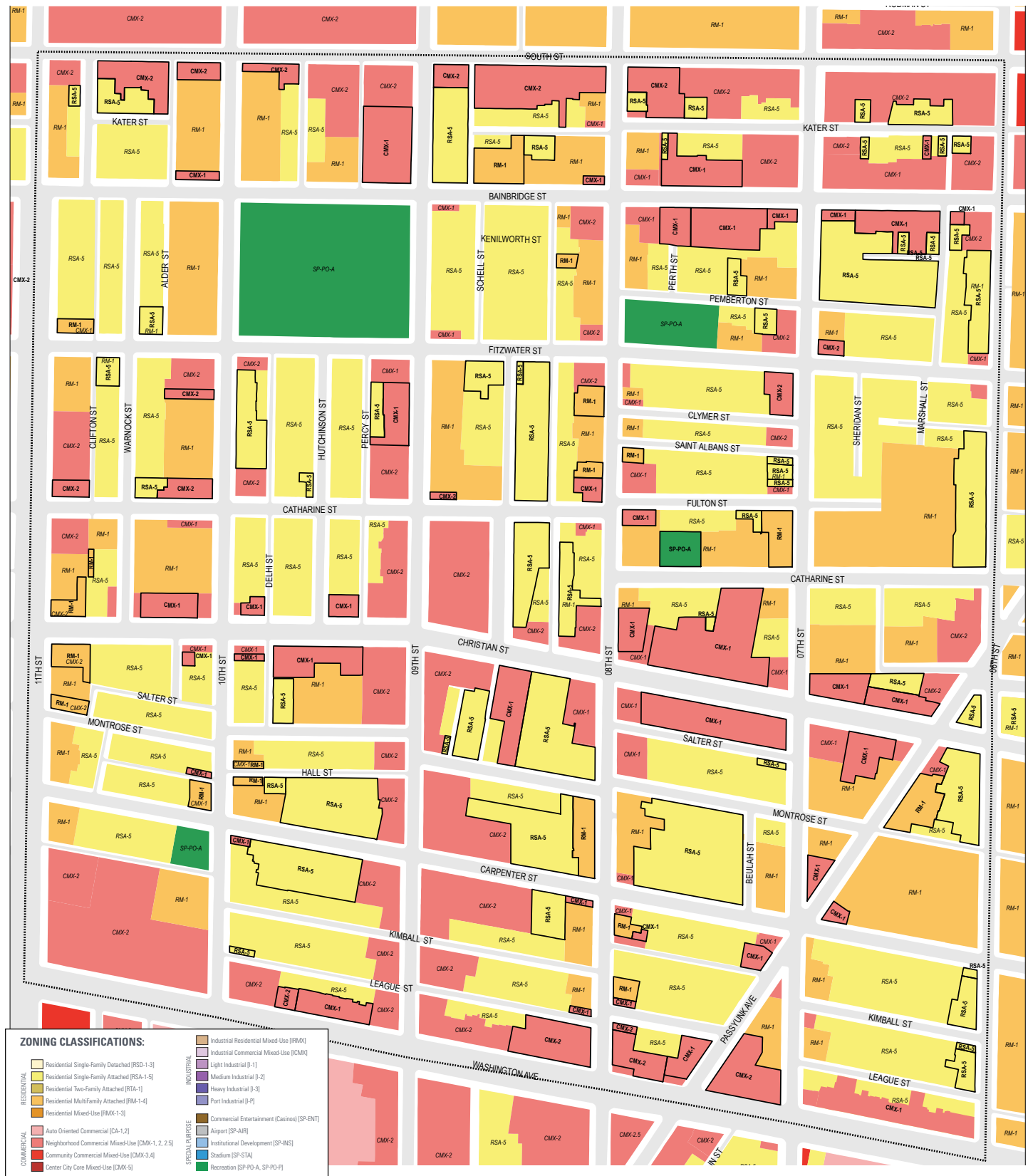
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Bella Vista's New Zoning Map

This map shows how your Bella Vista home is zoned now. Bella Vista's zoning recently changed as part of the citywide remapping effort following the adoption of the 2012 zoning code. Mayor Nutter signed the ordinance adopting this map into law on December 23, 2015. To understand the zoning classifications search the web for: The Basic Zoning Guide: A Super Simple Guide to Zoning in Philadelphia or visit www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/resources/Publications/Super_Basic_Guide.pdf



To our dear neighbors,

Almost 10 years ago, my family opened Boutique Nails and Hair at 901 South Street we instantly fell in love with this lovely neighborhood and the amazing people. We

feel so lucky to be a part of this community. We want to see our neighborhood improve further and to pay it forward we want to contribute to our community.

After overcoming many obstacles, we are finally coming close to opening our family restaurant, "Banh Mi and Bottles" at 712-714 South Street. The restaurant's menu was designed with the help from my father who is the head chef at Pho Ha on 6th

Street and Washington Ave for the last decade. We will bring to your table our Vietnamese "street bites," or Vietnamese tapas. Extended from that we will have Banh mi, pho, salad rolls, and other authentic Vietnamese dishes that we grew up with. For craft beers lovers, B&B offers over 300 varieties of craft beer bottles, most of which are from Philadelphia and Pennsylvania microbreweries. Our bar will embody house-made organic cocktails with a Southeast Asian influence.

The ultimate goal is to bring to you a new way to experience Vietnamese food that requires all of your senses once you step into our door. Our opening date will be towards the end of May but we will have two soft opening nights prior. We would like to invite you to follow us on Facebook, Instagram or Twitter for updates on these events. We will randomly select some followers to join us on our soft opening nights for a sneak peek into "Banh Mi and Bottles" Vietnamese-licious menu!

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Construction work began recently at the parking lot at 7th between Bainbridge and South, which will become seven "dwelling units" with parking, slated for completion November 2017, according to the posted sign.

Photo by D. Groff

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Be a Bella Vista Block Keeper!

Do you enjoy chatting up your neighbors? Are you the go-to person when someone has questions about Bella Vista or city services? Do you regularly call 311 to report trash or other problems?

BVNA is building a network of "Block Keepers" to be our eyes and ears in the neighborhood. Block Keepers will work alongside existing block captains, acting mainly as communicators.

Block Keepers can:

- *Inform neighbors about trash day, block clean ups and neighborhood schools
- *Post flyers about meetings and events
- *Bring neighbors to meetings and events
- *Report issues to 311

Block Keepers can be longtime residents or newer neighbors. BVNA hopes that connecting with key communicators around the neighborhood — together — we can build up the community as a whole.

Contact us at info@bellavistaneighbors.org to volunteer.

BVNA SUPPORTS POLICE MINI-STATION



Did you know that BVNA is a partner in supporting our local police with the Friends of the South Street Police Mini-Station? BVNA works with local civics and businesses together with the Friends to improve safety in the area.

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BELLA VISTA NEIGHBORS ASSOCIATION 2016 annual meeting

WEDNESDAY, May 18, 2016
7:00 PM

Palumbo Rec Center
10th & Fitzwater

BIKE SHARE

Update on Bike Share and new station installations from OTIS (Office of Transportation and Infrastructure Systems)

PHILLY 311

Information about the Philly 311 Neighborhood Liaison Program

BVNA AWARD

Presentation of the annual BVNA Distinguished Community Service Award

BVNA ELECTIONS

Elections of BVNA board & officers

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Around the neighborhood



Cafe Rally opened for business in March at 7th and Bainbridge, previously the Bean Exchange.

You know the season has changed when a line forms at John's Water Ice.

Photos by D. Groff

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Clean Your 16

By Robert Bershad

Clean Your 16 is a Bella Vista Neighbors Association initiative intended to beautify the neighborhood. Look for Clean Your 16 information and tips in the weekly News of Bella Vista email. (Subscribe to the email newsletter for free at www.bellavistaneighbors.org/home/newsletter).

Clean Your 16 means keeping the 16 feet in front your home clean. Why 16? Because 16 feet is the width of many Philadelphia row homes.

Clean sidewalks look great and even help keep your street safe. "Criminals avoid clean, well maintained streets in favor of vandalized and poorly maintained ones, which signal that residents have resigned themselves to crime," according to the Philadelphia Rowhouse Manual.

Clean Your 16 will provide tips for keeping your sidewalk clean. And it will feature neighborhood heroes and heroines who lead by example.

Marianne Squillaciotti is one such heroine. A longtime Bella Vista resident, Fitzwater Street block captain, and committee person, Squillaciotti has been keeping the sidewalk in front of her home clean for so long that it has become "automatic." She enjoys keeping it clean because it looks nice and it's rewarding to see work pay off so quickly - and visibly. Squillaciotti also recruits neighbors to join in Philadelphia's Cleanup Events. She is someone who makes Bella Vista a great place to live.

Clean Your 16 wants your suggestions for neighborhood heroes and heroines and your tips to making Clean Your 16 easy. Send your candidates and tips to info@bellavistaneighbors.org, and look for them in upcoming e-newsletters.

In the meantime, Clean Your 16! ■



Marianne Squillaciotti, neighborhood heroine.

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