6. RISING REAL ESTATE VALUES
Rising real estate values are an indicator of incoming gentrification, or the class restructuring of an area. Once initiated, this phenomenon has the potential to grow exponentially, rapidly transforming the fabric of a neighborhood and displacing the existing residents that comprise its community. Communities can look for a number of identifiable signsifiers before the change is fully realised and then organize resistance and counter-action.
This early juncture is an important moment for Rescued Spaces and Mural Arts to work with communities towards such concerted mobilization. Coordinating intervention works to shift the socio-spatial boundaries that define neighborhoods and communities, properties and their inhabitants as separate and insular. For example, the South Seventh is a demonstration of this kind of area in flux as a city buffer boundary, Washington Avenue, has thorned for many to abate sweeping gentrification, making it a prime candidate for a Rescued Spaces Intervention and for Mural Arts projects. Signs of gentrification also indicate renewed private and public interest in an area. Similarly, the form of incentives and funding for arts and culture initiatives in an area can gauge the health and stability of the community. Mural Arts in light of anticipated changes to a neighborhood. Rescued Spaces has the opportunity to work with communities to mobilize long-term public agency over their neighborhood’s development (see figure 3.1.2).

7. DEVELOPMENT PRESSURE AND INCENTIVES
Development pressure and incentives emerge from a similar process of rising real estate values and gentrification. As aforementioned, such changes demonstrate interest in an area from a variety of stakeholders including the city, whether they are incentivized, the state, tax breaks, rezoning proposals, citywide plans, local projects, or federal funds channelled towards specific, area-based initiatives such as Empowerment Zones and Enterprise Communities. The incentives that the city has put in place, such as those described above, utilize fiscal instruments to incentize development in a specific area. These incentives, along with Redevelopment Certiﬁed Areas, expose the limited ability of the urban planning department and City Council to have a positive impact on populations in distressed areas. Here lies a critical opportunity for Mural Arts, as an established citywide organization, to have the organization to act as a mediator between city and smaller local civic organizations. This kind of positioning allows for greater agency and representation of the public (see figure 3.1.3).

8. PUBLIC TRANSPORT CONNECTIVITY
Well-developed public transport infrastructure correlates with rising real estate values, economic pressures, and gentrification. A certain level of public transport connectivity, however, is necessary for mobility and enables greater access to employment, social services, and amenities. An area that is not fully connected to main transportation lines or completely geographically isolated achieves a far greater balance between accessibility and gentrification. The South Seventh is one such area, as it is currently located but does not benefit from a wide variety of public transportation options. Such a situation also provides Mural Arts projects with a good level of exposure but means such projects will not necessarily work alongside and enhance the gentrification process.

9. ECONOMIC DISTRESS WITH POTENTIAL FOR RESILIENCE
An area of economic distress signals disinvestment by the city and private interests, but areas like the South Seventh, which border rapidly developing neighborhoods and existing affluent communities, are poised for renewed investment. Such development is a threat to existing populations but can also be an impetus for organized resilience. In this area, most of the parameters align, since concentrated civil organizations exist, street activity, city-owned properties, and vacant land use all help develop alternative models of cooperation, coexistence, and construction. Such at-risk communities are an opportunity for Mural Arts to build alliances and networks for sustained resilience (see figure 2.1.2).

10. CITY-OWNED PROPERTIES
City-owned properties are important resources for an area, as they can be developed differently than privately-owned properties. New strategies are needed to preserve and activate this public resource. With the involvement of the community, Rescued Spaces and Mural Arts can be at the forefront for pushing an agenda that promotes a sustainable, long-term plan of action. Maintaining public ownership is critical to retaining economic influence over decisions around land use and community planning. When city-owned properties are sold at a rapid pace, the ensuing loss of control experienced by the community can ultimately result in reactive rather than proactive engagement. The South Seventh currently has a number of city-owned properties, but as interest rises, this number has been declining at a rapid rate. This is a timely issue for Mural Arts’ engagement. Action and public involvement are at the utmost importance to secure agency over this decision-making process affecting Philadelphia’s neighborhoods. Art can be a vital tool to incite conversations around alternative development strategies.

11. AVAILABLE VACANT LAND
Vacant land in a neighborhood can have negative implications for an area and its residents, but also represents positive possibilities. Vacant land signals disinvestment and economic distress; when inactive, these vacant spaces can also be transformed into public assets for community gain. Their vacancy means economic gain need not be the main driver of their development. Such flexibility allows communities to engage with proposals for alternative ways to manage communal or common space that can improve existing neighborhood benefits. Some examples of the types of projects that can be initiated on vacant land include art installations, community gardens.
12. IMPACTFUL CULTURAL MANIFESTATIONS

Areas like the South Seven that host multiple minority populations represent Philadelphia's everyday lived culture. This can disrupt the more popular, homogeneous culture promoted in redevelopment strategies. Overlapping minority expressions of difference and injustice reproduce cultural traditions that are new, under-represented, or repressed in the environments where such groups reside. A Mural Arts project can harness this multiplicity and provide a platform for equitable cultural representation of such diversity. Here lies an important opportunity for interventions to take on an increasingly participatory role in bringing varied cultural initiatives to the fore. Having more critical, alternative minority voices in the public realm can counter the cooptation of difference that often takes place in tandem with gentrification processes (see figure 2.14).

13. RECENT/ACTIVE PHILADELPHIA MURAL ARTS INVOLVEMENT

Working in areas in which the organization already has a presence is a great asset for Mural Arts, as it enables it to draw on existing resources, alliances, and networks it has built over time with local communities, stakeholders, businesses, and small enterprising initiatives. Having an established foundation at a project's outset allows the bulk of the organization's resources to be directed for the greatest effect rather than expending energy on logistics, coordination, and outreach. In areas such as the South Seven, the Restored Spaces Initiative can continue its involvement in highlighting the ongoing cultural and economic struggles of distressed minorities, many of whom are non-citizens. Having a concentration of projects in an area allows Mural Arts to develop a network of artistic interventions like Journeys South and Southeast by Southeast, for example, that showcase the layered and evolving immigrant histories of South Philadelphia (see figure 2.15).

14. TENURE SECURITY

Tenure security is an important condition for Restored Spaces and Mural Arts involvement, as the instability associated with a continuous rotation of renters, inhabitants, and squatters impedes a project's potential long-term social impact. Some areas of Philadelphia such as those in the north have experienced frequent turnover in tenants due to affordability issues and lack of economic and social security. This is also reflected by a shortage of structural policy measures that ensure greater housing security for low-income tenants. Therefore, the criteria of ownership and secured tenure, though not absolute, is beneficial for the type of work Mural Arts engages in, as it requires on-the-ground established communities and networks. Such security offers a cohesive structure for sustained engagement.

15. PUBLIC HOUSING SHORTAGE

A public housing shortage in an area enables advocacy and experimentation with alternative housing models. Low-income housing that is not public is at risk of being bought by an incoming population and can jeopardize the affordability of existing housing stock. This represents an opportunity for Mural Arts to further expose this issue through public art interventions and community engagement. One such initiative can involve envisioning alternative housing models.
3. EXPLORING LOCAL NEEDS, AGENCY, PRACTICES, AND ASSETS IN THE SOUTH SEVEN

Over a five-month period from February to June 2915, we conducted ethnographic research in the South Seven area and its surrounding environs with the goal of understanding the everyday conditions and relations between people living and working in the area. Research included more than 100 unstructured and semi-structured interviews, numerous informal interviews, and participant observation of community meetings, public forums, cultural activities, city-sponsored events, and everyday interactions at the 1275 Post Office. The research was supported by an additional 12 interviews with civic leaders and community organizations.

These narratives give context to divergent experiences and illustrate how the area has changed over the past 15 years. Stiff in population include: immigration of white ethnic communities such as Italian and Irish Americans in western suburbs and New Jersey due to deindustrialization; migration of African Americans to the city and the "Great Migration" from the South to northern cities; a diverse influx of refugees from Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia due to US military intervention in Southeast Asia starting in the 1970s; ongoing immigration of Chinese, Mexican, and Central American people to the area; and waves of refugees from Nepal, Burma, and Bhutan.

This section illustrates some of the challenges produced by these changes by focusing on community needs, services, and convergences. Additionally, it outlines some of the local practices and cultural values that are most closely related to religious, community- and economic activities. Finally, we describe territorial assets and potential

3.1 COMMUNITY NEEDS, SERVICES, AND CONVERGENCES

COMMUNITY NEEDS

While the South Seven area boasts an economically and socially diverse population, it also faces challenges typical of an urban area that has more needs than resources. Monies for public programs as such libraries, recreation centers, and city parks are in short supply. Tensions persist between native South Philadelphians and newer immigrants as well as between different immigrant groups. Often people seek community through particular organizations, churches, or cultural group activities, which provide little opportunity for cross-cultural interactions. According to a youth organizer from Asian Americans United, linguistic and cultural barriers remain difficult to surmount. For recent immigrants, children who learn English often act as translators for parents attempting to navigate new MR relationships. According to Nicole Paur at Migrant Education, newly arrived refugees are given a giant stack of paperwork but little time to figure out how to manage the bureaucracy of social benefits.

During one conversation, the principal of South Philadelphia High School, Osis Hackney, remarked, "While people say that they are getting along in South Phila, in reality they are not talking to each other." Francis Carney, Director of United Communities of Southeast Philadelphia, believes that in this neighborhood, "having community members at the table" has always been a missing piece. It is challenging to have conversations "that are inclusive of all the communities within our community." Similarly, it is difficult to bring community members and service providers into the same conversation. For example, despite collaborative efforts at the organizational level,

there is no sustained neighborhood-level response to recent housing inflation and gentrification, in part because of the challenge of overcoming barriers between native populations and newcomers. The closure of the Edward Rusk Technical High School and its purchase by a private developer has generated some community response and concern about housing and "redevelopment." Yet without an active community development corporation, affordability conversations remain difficult.

Local community organizations are very cognizant of how a lack of "community space" affects their constituents’ wellbeing. Many organizations formed outside of a need to establish a physical presence as such tele-meetings between community members, as well as providing programs to what sector do not serve the elderly people. Local service providers are concerned about how social isolation can work and contribute to mental health challenges. According to Shadok Basu, an organizer in the Bhutanese community, Nepali and Bhutanese refugees have a nationwide suicide rate twice the national average.

Programs for children and elderly community members at Southeast by Southeast reduce isolation for Nepali and other newcomers. Similarly, Dina O’Gorman, director of Casa Vemarca, believes that programming at this organization helps reduce feelings of isolation in the Mexican community.

Promoting physical and emotional well-being is especially vital for community members who have little to no access to the normal health care system. Many immigrant communities and endowments residents lack health insurance (see Figure 3.1.1). Local hospital emergency rooms are obligated to help those without documentation, and Puentes de Salud provides health services at their clinic. Other organizations have dedicated staff members who assist newcomers and those with language barriers in enrolling in the Affordable Care Act. Newcomers can then access care at Refugee Health Partners at Jefferson Hospital or a local health clinic. However, language and literacy barriers remain challenging even for those who have insurance.

UNINSURED RESIDENTS

- Neighborhoods
- South Seven
- Parks
- Rivertown

- 0-10%
- 10-20%
- 20-25%
- 25-35%
COMMUNITY SERVICES

A significant concentration of social service organizations occurs in this small area (see Figure 3.1.2). While there are many points of convergence between these agencies, community needs tend to outweigh, leaving less time and fewer resources to build alliances between organizations. According to Andrea D'Mella at United Communities of Southeast Philadelphia (UCSEP), there is an urgent need for basic social services and often a lack of funding for organizations to do much more than provide those services. As one of the oldest organizations in the area, UCSEP has witnessed significant community change from its time serving Irish and Italian immigrants to now.

UCSEP's main office is housed in the Houston Center, a historic building on the corner of South 12th Street and Snyder Avenue, and is at the hub of community activity (see Figure 3.1.1). UCSEP convenes monthly meetings at its office for the Southeast Philadelphia Collaborative (SEPC), a consortium of seven core organizations (UCSEP, Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia, Caring People Alliance, Pennsylvania Migrant Education, Fleisher Art Memorial, Saince of Philadelphia, and Variety) and numerous affiliated agencies. According to SEPC members, increased diversity in the area has inspired discussions among service providers about how best to meet the needs of newcomers and to find solutions to language and literacy barriers.

UCSEP also convenes a monthly Equal Partners in Change (EPC) meeting at the Houston Center to bring community members together around shared concerns. In addition to UCSEP, there are several long-standing community-based organizations that operate in the area. The Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia (CAGP), Hose People SOI (HPSO), and the Southeast Asian Mutual Assistance Associations Coalition (SEAMAAC) emerged to serve the different needs of newly arrived Southeast Asian refugees (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Hmong, and Ethic Chinese) in the late 1970s and early 1980s. CAGP provides bilingual programs and services to meet the combined social, economic, health, and educational needs of Cambodians in Philadelphia, many of whom are survivors of the Cambodian genocide or are descendants of survivors. BPSOS is the key, community-based branch office of a national Vietnamese-American non-profit organization established in 1990 to address the plight of Vietnamese "boat people." BPSOS now provides health promotion, civic engagement, and youth organizing, among other programs. SEAMAAC provides services to all refugee groups, including recently arrived Bhutanese, Nepalese, Burmese, and Cambodian families, as well as all other groups in Philadelphia regardless of race or national origin. Their health and social service department, for example, provides ESL classes, health promotions, case management, advocacy, community programs, and collaboration with other providers.

To differing degrees, these organizations have evolved from providing services to their respective communities to providing services to the general population. Over the years, these agencies have worked together in various capacities, reflecting the changing needs of the community and leadership at the organizational level. Nearly all are involved to some extent with the SEPC. Some have partnered with other institutions to provide unique programs. In addition, some of these organizations ally with other citywide initiatives or issue-based concerns including the Love Movement, which started in Philadelphia in 2016 as a response to the city's degrading and dehumanizing the Cambodian Americans, and the 215 People's Alliance, a multi-racial collaborative dedicated to fighting for fair funded public education, raising the minimum wage, and ending stop-and-frisk. Several organizations, including UCSEP, are members of the Philadelphia Coalition for Affordable Communities (PCAC), a citywide coalition of groups fighting for accessible affordable housing through legislative change. These alliances suggest a strategic use of limited resources, sophisticated analysis of city politics and power, and an overarching concern with social justice.
There are three refugee resettlement agencies in Philadelphia: Nationalities Service Center (NSC), the Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service (LIRS), and Lutheran Children and Family Services (LCFS), all of which have a strong presence in the neighborhood due to their collaborative work with refugee populations. LCFS, NSC, and HIAS are all participating members of the Philadelphia Refugee Mental Health Collaborative (PRMHC), a group of resettlement agencies, mental health providers, physicians, and other organizations that work to link refugees to culturally and linguistically appropriate mental health care.

PRMHC supports Southeast by Southeast, a Moral Arts project created and organized by artist Shira Wolinsky that operates from a storefront on South 10th Street (see Figure 3.1). Developed in 2012 in partnership with the city’s Department of Behavioral Health and Intellectual Disability Services, Southeast’s Southeast provides a support community space for immigrant and refugee families to access social programs, including language classes, weekly gatherings for elderly persons, and after-school art programs for neighborhood children. This space serves as a hub for the refugee community.

Three organizations—Juntas, Puebres de Salud, and Casa Monarca—each take a different approach to advocating for the Latino community. Juntas, a Latino immigrant community-based organization, combines leadership development, community organizing, and focused collaboration with other community-based and advocacy organizations. Casa Monarca promotes and preserves Mexican culture and traditions through social, cultural, and educational programs on topics including Mexican folk dance, music, and history. Puebres de Salud is a community-based health service organization that provides health and educational programs.

COMMUNITY CONVERGENCES
Art and greening initiatives, inclusive collaborations between organizations, and interactive community programs work to reduce isolation within and between different constituencies. Continuous engagement from community-based organizations and schools creates opportunities for long-term and newly arrived residents to learn from one another. The articulation of a home and sense of belonging, making a safe space in a new country, is vital to individuals and groups who have left their country of origin never to return, experienced trauma or genocide before leaving, crossed international borders under duress and left family members behind, or lived for many years at refugee camps prior to moving to Philadelphia. Casa Monarca’s Italia O’Gorman stated that she started her organization to create a “safe space for people from Mexico to come together and feel safe.” This need for safety, community continuity, and cultural identity in a new place remains important, as evidenced, for example, by the Cambodian Association of Greater Philadelphia’s Legacy Project, which brings together elders who survived the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia and first-generation American-born Asian youth. Similarly, a project by local Lao artist Caziee Viliyaphom, Laos in the House, collects and archives digital stories about the Lao diaspora in America and showcases performances in Philadelphia by Lao-American artists.

Likewise, it is vital for newly arrived residents to learn about each other as well as the history of different groups in South Philadelphia. Some community-based organizations, including SEAMAAC and BPSOS, generate programs that serve the interests of multiple groups. BPSOS has a summer program for Vietnamese high school students with the goal of educating them about US imperialism and connecting the legacies of the Vietnamese War to the American Black Power movement. As a staff member from BPSOS explained, one purpose of this program is “to have students understand the importance of Asian-Black cooperation and share anti-racist work.”

In an interview, Theol Nguyen, CEO of SEAMAAC, suggested that the succession of ethnic/racial groups as they immigrate to South Philadelphia is inevitable. However, the way that other residents, including former refugees, treat newly arrived immigrants, is not predetermined. Among other programs, SEAMAAC convenes a multi-ethnic elders group for immigrants from different countries, many of whom learned English in order to speak and interact with community members. In addition, they created the Hip Hop Heritage afterschool program, which brings together other students from across the city with interests in hip-hop culture including rapping, deejaying, breakdancing, and graffiti writing.

While community needs are vast, organizations collaborate to secure basic resources for South Seven residents and to provide innovative solutions to barriers that tend to create inter-group isolation. Social programs work to build community power and civic engagement. Despite points of convergence, racial and ethnic tensions as well as tensions between newcomers and long-term residents persist.

**FIGURE 3.1**
Furthermore, some organizations are working to break down barriers and support each other and report that they have little idea about the actions of other area groups. This is especially apparent with the civic associations that operate in this neighborhood.

3.2 LOCAL PRACTICES AND CULTURAL VALUES

Local practices are highly related to cultural values in South Philadelphia. During our ethnographic research, we discovered that diversity is manifested in religious venues and represented in local business and other spaces created by community groups to satisfy their own needs. This section describes some of the local religious practices that take place in the over 40 temples and churches located in the South Seven, as well as community gardens and other green initiatives generated by locals out of necessity (see Figure 3.2). Additionally, local practices related to small economic initiatives and representing hidden local skills and knowledge are described. Some local economies, beyond celebrating culture, have the potential to generate economic power.

**FIGURE 3.2**

**RELIGIOUS PRACTICES**

According to a community organizer with years of experience in South Philadelphia, descendants...
of Italians and Irish immigrants have long held political power in the area through churches, local governance, and organized labor. Before many Jewish families left the area, Jewish business owners also held considerable economic power. At this point, Congregation Shilshom Teshuva, founded in 1948, is the only remaining "row house shul," or storefront synagogue, a type of establishment once prevalent in South Philly. In 2011, the Jacob and Eshele Stolier Senior Center, the last vestige of once-vibrant Jewish community, closed its doors.

At one time, Catholic residents identified wherever they lived by their local parish. Nowadays, with shifts in demographics and the closing and merging of many parishes by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, residents are more likely to identify with the nearest par or school. Catholic schools and churches, however, remain a vital source of community for many residents, including a majority of recent immigrants from Mexico and Central America, many of whom worship at Annunciation Church at 10th and Dickinson. Due to economic necessity, this parish recently leased some of its property, thereby eliminating its capacity to hold community events. Catholic residents who live on the east side of Broad also worship at St. Thomas Aquinas at 17th and Morris and attend events there. In 2013 the Aquinas Center, a nonprofit organization, opened in the former convent at St. Thomas and has become an integral and vibrant space for community-building, in particular for Catholic residents who live in or near the South 7th Street corridor. According to Director Bethany Welch, the Aquinas Center is a "generative space," one that brings together long-term and more recent residents around shared interests.

Communitics, as well as some places of worship, host religious diversity. For example, the Snyder Avenue Congregational Church houses three minarets: the Cambodian Baptist Church, the Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal Church, and the New Life Church (Lucretia N. St. Joseph). For Buddhist Cambodians, the Preah Buddha Rangsan Temple on South 6th Street and River is a place to worship as well as a minaret of Cambodian cultural practices. Likewise, Buddhist
Community Gardens

Gardens have long been important to South Philadelphia residents, providing supplemental food and a space for community gatherings. The tradition of community gardens in the area extended to newly arrived populations, many of whom arrive in the United States malnourished. A staff member from the Nationalities Service Center (NSC), one of the refugee resettlement organizations, shared that the first “Growing Home Garden” in the South Camden area was intended to support newly arrived refugees from Burma. By 2005, the garden expanded to include Bhutanese and Nepalese groups serving in the area. Along with providing food, these gardens became an avenue to build community, improve mental health, and increase financial stability.

Adam Forbes, who assisted in the creation of the first six gardens and worked for NSC, commented in an interview that they asked refugee families in a survey what they wanted to see in their neighborhood, and many of them said, “I want a space to garden.” So he went to get our hands in the dirt.” At that time, Forbes was also working for the Philadelphia Urban Agriculture program and pushed for the gardens. Community gardens started as a collaboration between NSC and FISH. According to Forbes, the initial idea was to create a much larger farm in a South Philadelphia park next to the street, but Forbes, with his connections in the neighborhood, obtained support from the community and managed to activate small gardens, starting from Emily Street between South 7th and 4th Streets, where all the drug dealers have been picked up, and most of the houses that were then abandoned are now removed.

When the first gardens emerged, there was a wave of isolation in the neighborhood with large sections of the population newly arrived. The garden broke through this isolation. According to Forbes, they were expecting 30 families at the first garden meeting, but 80 families showed up, in particular ones of Bhutanese and Hmong origin. The gardens were eventually organized into them, with each family working a small plot. According to Forbes, 104 families are currently involved, many of whom grow seeds from their original country. Food from the gardens is distributed equally among the people who grow and bring it to the produce home, but they are required to provide 10% of their produce to newcomers. Forbes was going to city farms to collect extra vegetables because he knew the garden’s produce was insufficient to cover the refugees’ needs. He also got food donations every year for three years to supply this need. Trucks were driving to the garden and food was distributed, but it was time consuming. Community leaders began organizing the food redistribution for each family and organizing the handout. The vegetables were also distributed to elderly African-American. What about the work they were doing being very quick so fast that over 950 people were coming each Monday. The demand was too high, and so fruits were ripped.
between communities when there was not enough food for them all.

Forbes is currently working to involve what he terms “garden leaders” in South Philadelphia, but because of language barriers, garden leaders have struggled to make in long discussion meetings and simply want to grow their plants. Regardless of the difficulties, Forbes performed the small community garden model in the one proposed by Weaver’s Way Farms, a city that offers working farms in Northeast Philadelphia. From Forbes’s perspective, they have never managed to involve neighbors, as their food is often sold in farmers’ markets or brought to other neighborhoods. He believes the South Philadelphia gardens are better organized even if they are small community gardens. In the summer many extra vegetables are produced, and residents give them to new families or newcomers in need but don’t reverse a farmers market. For example, Barren community members have been able to organize a system that provides food to new families even before the food stamp process starts.

Following the gardens, more diverse projects emerged, including Southeast, South East, and West Philadelphia, and in efforts to school programs, etc. Unfortunately, in recent years, the expansion of community gardens has not been easy. In fact, community gardens are at risk. The answer is to keep homes on public land, and private land is being sold at a rapid pace. Recently, in an effort to combat the threat of encroaching new development, NSC began working with the National Garden Trust to permanently secure vacant properties they have been maintaining as a test. For more information visit: http://ngtrust.org.

In addition, NSC started a new community garden this year in the Point Breeze neighborhood west of Broad Street. Brookside and immigrant families from the South Syrian will travel to this garden. Barren, Nepalese, and Bhutanese families will garden three alongside Point Breeze residents as well as a new group of refugees from the Congo who have settled in Point Breeze.

In July 2015, a participatory neighborhood survey was organized in collaboration with Asian Americans United and their summer camp youth group in order to learn more about the current condition of community gardens. Summer camp students, mostly young Asians recently arrived to the city, investigated different aspects of formal and informal gardens occupying over 30 neglected lots in a sample area from Forge to 34th Streets and from South 4th to 8th Streets (see figure 3.2). They discovered that all most lots without construction, around 19%, are actively growing food, hosting community and private gardens, and providing safe spaces for playgrounds. They also found that around 30% of the lots are in good conditions maintained, 45% are in bad condition neglected, and 20% in very bad condition abandoned. This means that most of the lots holding private and community gardens are promoting a clean and healthy environment. The survey revealed that although 74 out of the 101 surveyed lots are fenced and 14 partially fenced, litter is a problem on 72% of the properties. Most of the inactive lots represent a problem to community members.

LOCAL ECONOMIES
In informal economies and what we call “shadow economies” are quite active in the South Seven. In South Philadelphia, economies are developed individually, collectively, and sometimes by entire households, mainly in homes, due to a lack of commercial space or economic resources. These are activities that operate illegally, “under the table” or without permits, including childcare, domestic work, household maintenance, and the buying and selling of goods such as handicrafts or bottled water. These activities include drug sales and sex work. Households shadow economies often find ways into public spaces, as is the case with vendors who sell food at Mifflin Square (see figure 3.4.4). Starting in the late 1990s, families (mostly Cambodian) began to sell home-cooked food in the park without city permits (see figure 3.2.5). Over the years, local social service organizations have attempted to organize the vendors in an effort to legalize their activities. According to Eddy Sukhita at CAPOP, most park vendors get fined by the city but are abstained in obtaining permits as these cost more than paying the fines.

The prevalence of vendors in Mifflin Square to legalize raises questions about the area’s path for future economic development. In an interview, Thi Thuy Nguyen pointed out how members of the local Mexican business community have formalized involvements, creating a base of
The local economies stimulating community development have become established mostly along South 7th Street and South 9th Street. A participatory neighborhood survey on local economies organized in collaboration with Asian Americans United was conducted simultaneously with the community garden survey (see Community Gardens on page 59) to learn more about the local businesses along South 7th Street (see Figure 3.3). Asian students from a summer camp organized by AU became actively involved in investigating a sample area from Pierce to Porter Streets. This stretch is one of the most active pedestrian commercial corridors in the area. Small markets represent half of the surveyed commercial spaces. Some of them identify as selling ethnic goods, while the remaining businesses offer a diversity of products including a plumbing/furnace supply store, a home door/window store, and other home product stores. A travel agency, a dry cleaner, a nail salon, a coffee shop, as well as a number of laundromats, pharmacies, and restaurants were identified. During our neighborhood survey, participating youth found that 40 of the 47 commercial spaces surveyed are active, and that families own over half of those businesses. Moreover, more than half of business owners live in South Philadelphia, but most of them are not natives. The survey showed that 15 business owners who responded declared themselves as originally from Cambodia. Another 15 business owners declared themselves as from other Asian countries, including China, Korea, Laos, and South Vietnam. A significant number of business owners, seven in total, declared themselves to be from a Hispanic background, mostly from Mexico. 30% of the surveyed facades were in bad condition, and 20% of the surveyed interiors were not well maintained. Only 2 facades and 7 interior spaces were recently renovated. This participatory neighborhood survey invited us to inquire for public plats, programs, and funds provided to stimulate economic development through the revitalization of commercial corridors in the South Seven Area (see section 4.4).

3.3 TERRITORIAL ASSETS AND POTENTIALS

Vacant land has been an important issue citywide for city officials for decades. In the South District, there are approximately 110 acres of vacant land, comprising 4% of all land use (Philadelphia City Planning Commission 2015). Within the South Seven, vacant land is spread across most neighborhoods, but there is a conspicuous north-south axis of vacant lots with a significant concentration of over 300 undeveloped lots in its central area (see Figure 3.4). However, this does not mean that these lots are not in use since residents and local groups have transformed some vacant, neglected, and underutilized lots into community gardens.

Community members have looked after vacant land along their blocks in recent years. Neighbors already taking care of vacant lots adjacent to their properties were granted property titles. Other vacant properties were squatted on in a friendly manner for community purposes, and others were acquired through agreements with city officials and with private owners unwilling or unable to maintain their own properties. Over time a few small community gardens, plazas, and other community spaces have emerged as alternative spaces for the community. (see Figure 3.5).

Today, there are still hundreds of vacant lots in this changing area. These spaces could serve to increase the number of community gardens, but most importantly, they also have the...
The South District Plan represented a potential tool for engagement when it was announced. LICENSING, however, city officials did not truly engage community-based planning, to stimulate an inclusive process or wider participation, through two-way communication to take place through public meetings. Participation from immigrant residents and community groups was low, most likely due to language barriers and lack of awareness about the plan. LICENSING, Economic, social, and physical changes in the area are a reality, but slow for many residents, especially immigrants. Creating awareness of local assets and threats is necessary to stimulate civic engagement. In this case, the plan, which was developed and approved in only two months, represents voices from only part of the community, and although it addresses some key improvement and development areas for the South Seven, it does not tackle some of the central issues and potential threats. LICENSING 3.5.4.6

The Land Bank, a new agency that seeks to consolidate public land owned by different entities and return vacant and underdeveloped properties to productive use, was identified as another powerful tool to plan and stimulate equitable development. LICENSING. The South District Plan is considering the Land Bank for affordable housing development. However, there is neither a specific plan nor partners looking at public land in the area yet. Envisioning the development of public land and working with the Land Bank and other public institutions is crucial, since most of the open land is being acquired by private developers for the development of market-rate housing.

Urban development spreading from Center City towards this area has attracted attention of developers and investors, often with visions different from those of community members. These entities do not have interest or responsibility for the development of affordable housing, green space, community centers, recreational spaces, or other facilities to satisfy community needs.

The city must step forward and use its resources, in this case public land, according to local demands, especially in this area that is growing, already crowded, and in need of community facilities and affordable living and working spaces. The Land Bank and some of the South District Plan’s recommendations represent a great opportunity for non-profit housing corporations, community-based organizations, green space groups, and residents to formulate their own, community-based plans for the development of public land. If these initiatives give priority to community needs and visions rather than those of the real estate industry, they would stimulate and facilitate collaboration between local stakeholders and city officials to create just, diverse, and sustainable neighborhoods.
4. CURRENT ISSUES AND LATENT THREATS IN THE SOUTH SEVEN

Current issues and latent threats in the South Seven are feared to have a long-term effect on community development. Residents and businesses are concerned about increased housing prices and property taxes along with overcrowding and gentrification. Many are worried about the rising cost of living in the area. The housing market is competitive, and competition for housing has increased in the past year. Increased housing costs are a major concern for residents across the board, from younger renters to homeowners. Some long-term residents are afraid that their children will be unable to afford to buy houses in the area, especially with the increased cost of living. The rising cost of living has driven many families to look for more affordable housing options.

4.1 DEVELOPMENT IMPACTING HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

The eastern side of South Philadelphia is an area in transition. Urban development and investment from Center City have spread south and crossed Washington Avenue, an important east-west artery dividing Center City and South Philadelphia. As a result, housing displacement is no longer a distant concern for community members but has become a reality. Housing prices have skyrocketed with the development of both the East Passyunk and Pennsport neighborhoods. In the past 10 years, Passyunk Avenue has transformed from a working-class commercial corridor with mom-and-pop clothing stores and pizza shops to an upscale destination shopping district, replete with coffee shops, yoga studios, and fine dining. The area retains some of its original businesses, but its transformation has affected hundreds of new residents who have purchased homes or are renting apartments in the surrounding blocks. The majority of waterfront newcomers are white, middle-class, and not originally from Philadelphia. These changes have extended south on Passyunk Avenue into a neighborhood called "Newbold," a residential area of the Point Breeze neighborhood west of South Broad Street.

Residents in the South Seven are fearing the impact of these changes, with increased housing prices and property taxes along with increased competition for housing. The rising housing prices are rising and are distributed throughout the South Seven area. While median housing prices in eastern and southwestern neighborhoods range from $100,000 to $225,000, in Passyunk Valley and the northern neighborhoods of East Passyunk, prices range from $200,000 to $2,000,000 (US Census). Housing values and the number of homes for sale are rising rapidly. From 2013 to 2014, the median square footage value increased from $5,900 to over $17,500. The market is competitive, and competition for housing in the area is fierce. These trends are concerning for some of the native community at the same time as the resettlement of refugees in the area decreases.

The rising cost of housing has increased in the area, affecting both renters and homeowners. According to the Point Breeze Community Civic Association, rising property values are anticipated to range between $2,000 and $2,110 per year. In 2013, property tax estimates for homes in the area were lower, between $1,000 and $2,110, per year. However, some fear that these estimates are too low, as the rising cost of housing is expected to increase.

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The South Side's increasing housing prices and vitality, as well as its strategic location and development capacity, have generated real estate speculation in recent years even in the most underdeveloped areas.

The research focused on one specific census tract, which serves sections of the Greentree, Lower Moyamensing, and Whitman neighborhoods. This census tract holds the largest concentration of vacant lots in the area.

The research showed that 72 of the 730 vacant lots in this area are owned by real estate entities (21.4%), 36 by non-profit organizations (10.7%), 52 by private owners (15.5%), and 174 by individuals (23.4%).

Ownership changes were also investigated. We discovered that 66 (19.6%) of the lots in this small area have been bought within the last two years. Additionally, we found that of these 66 lots, 47 were acquired by entities associated with the real estate industry and 19 were sold by similar entities. Some real estate companies are buying connected lots to increase profits when developing those properties.

This information prompted us to look at the top landlords in this specific area. Private entities that earn from 3 to 18 lots, Innovative Button LLC, a New York limited liability company, has bought 18 vacant lots in the last two years. Another eight vacant lots have been bought in the same period by Y2 Properties LLC, a Philadelphia-based real estate development company, which, according to its website, provides "services with investment options that couple risk tolerance with income objectives to consistently deliver high rates of return that far exceed other investment vehicles with similar or higher levels of risk." Other companies associated with housing development such as AGANG Inc., Hong Da Development, IV Homes Inc., WCC Group, and Sophisticated Investments each own between three and eight vacant lots in the same area.

A few years ago, we discovered IV Homes Inc., with over 50 properties in Philadelphia, ranked as one of the top 100 property owners in the city in 2013 by Philadelphia Daily News as "Developers: Philadelphia's 10 biggest (PhillyDailyNews 2013). IV land is experiencing rapid development and urban revitalization, sometimes between the same entities.

According to public records from Philadelphia's Office of Property Assessment, IV Homes Inc. sold a vacant lot to V2 Properties LLC in our research area over the last two years, while AGANG Inc. sold two lots to Innovative Button LLC in the same period. Vacant land is becoming a precious asset for the portfolio of some development companies, and prices are rising with the increasing demand.

Our research in land ownership also revealed that in most new sales, land has been sold for two, three, and even four times the estimated market value. This is happening not only in vacant lots, but also in old housing structures. Residents refer to this process as "flipping" houses. Buying, gutting, redeveloping, and reselling homes for multiples times the original price.

During a conversation with neighbors on the 700 block of Jackson Street, homeowners expressed shock that newly constructed houses sell for more than $300,000. Long-term residents shared that they had bought their homes for less than $10,000 thirty years ago. Several community residents expressed the opinion that new and "flipped" houses are not intended for people who already live in the neighborhood, but to attract new, higher-income residents. Additionally, during an interview with a local community organization, the residents who are responsible for hearing zoning ordinances, shared the opinion that some development is bypassing RCO channels and thus any avenues for community input. In
other words, residents feel that some private development is happening without proper permits from the city. This and other conversations with community members reveal a sense of disconnection between residents and the recent development boom. In this densely settled area, construction vehicles, hammering, ladders, and machinery work is present on every block, yet residents feel this construction is not for them.

The main issue we identified was the city and citizens’ tolerant position towards this accelerated development and speculation. While development is highly desirable, it needs to be equitable. The city is not directly involved in this area’s housing development, but it is supporting, non-profit and for-profit developers in construction and rehabilitation of housing through zoning and tax abatements. A common concern shared that tax abatements allow developers to sell at lower costs. However, this is not always the case; these properties are likely to be unaffordable for future generations, and they can easily be flipped in the coming years. In reality, current housing development is mostly market-rate with prices far above what community members can afford. If we consider that affordable housing should cost no more than 30% of median household income, housing should not cost more than $500 per month based on the area’s median household income of about $35,000 (The Pew Charitable Trust 2013). Additionally, although the recently approved South District Plan recommends housing development and the transformation of abandoned institutional and industrial buildings into affordable housing, affordable housing is not the current trend. In fact, two abandoned structures, an institutional and an industrial one, have been sold to developers for a “makespace” and “luxury housing” respectively (Figure 4.2.2).

These spaces are targeting young “creative” professionals and middle-class young families. Therefore, new residents will most likely be from other areas in and outside the city rather than community members.

4.2 SCARCITY OF GREEN AND COMMUNITY SPACES

The core area of the South Sector comprises a heterogeneous set of housing blocks, housing age and family "townhomes," where green community, and recreation spaces are sparse (see Figure 4.2.2). Small-scale parks, with an area under 5 acres, provide spaces for the community to meet and spend time together mostly in the area’s periphery. There are very limited public spaces in the central neighborhoods, especially in Greenwich, the northern area of Lower Moyamensing, and the southern area of East Passyunk. Mifflin Square and Woolwich Park, which is a small square formed by the intersection of two main streets, are the only public spaces at a comfortable walking distance of under ten minutes (see Figure 4.2.2). In seeking green space, people may visit Mansion Flats at Broad Street and Oregon Avenue, or travel further south to TJ Park at Pattison Avenue to access playing fields there.

Long neglected by the city and provided with minimal funding, Mifflin Square is an important asset to community members as well as a site of contention. Despite its aging infrastructure, the park remains a popular gathering place during the warm months for pick-up soccer games and sepak takraw (a sport similar to volleyball and played with the feet). Residents of the surrounding neighborhoods—mainly people from Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, China, Mexico, Bermuda, Haiti, and Nepal—are this space for family events and cultural gatherings (see Figure 4.2.2). Having food from local vendors at the park is a popular activity for some local residents. Mifflin Square is also the site of the largest Cambodian New Year’s Celebration on the East Coast. Friends of Mifflin Square Park, a volunteer group of residents, collaborates with local community-based organizations and churches to organize events for children, clean-up days, gardening, and other workshops. Many residents expressed that interactions between different groups of people in the neighborhood.
have improved in the past five years in part because of Mifflin Square. Local resident and organizer Carmen Fuentes Sanchez believes Mifflin Square is key to the community: a "place that is essential to learn cultural difference, and learn to get along." At the same time, other residents express frustration that it is difficult to keep the park clean and safe, a place where children can play, and where all locals feel equally welcome.

Due to the lack of green spaces, residents from this area have responded to their own needs by occupying vacant land and developing community gardens. This has been important to long-term residents and newcomers alike. For example, during an interview Nicole Perez from Migram Education expressed that local gardens have had a huge positive impact on different refugee communities as a place of "connection across difference." Outside of gardens, churches, and events at Southeast by Southeast, an art program that provides services and education for refugees, there are few opportunities for refugee community members to interact with each other, let alone with non-refugee communities.

Community and green spaces are not only limited but are also declining in large numbers. Urban development spreading south from Center City is threatening collective green spaces, especially those located in Greenwich and its southern neighbors. This core area currently holds the highest concentration of vacant lots and community gardens in eastern South Philadelphia. However, the status of vacant land is changing. Though observation, interviews, and research on land stewardship, we confirmed that the increasing real estate speculation has recently spread to the gardens. The research on land stewardship, which was conducted in the summer with the highest concentration of vacant land, already shows ten facts that were formerly gardens have been sold. Residents have expressed concern about the rapid disappearance of community gardens (see figures 3.5-6).
CASE STUDIES: COMMUNITY GARDENS

RECENTLY SOLD

In most new sales, land has been sold for two, three, and even four times the estimated market value.

CASE STUDY 1: COMMUNITY GARDEN PRODUCING FOOD AND PROVIDING COMMUNITY SPACE

Location: 215 and 217 Marcy Street
Former Owner(s): David Wasser and Unknown
New Owner(s): V2 Properties LLC

Story: This community garden served the area for many years. Neighbors grew up taking care of it, and the whole block enjoyed its use. Even school-aged children visited the garden for hands-on learning projects, and it was open to anyone who wanted to participate. Patricia Banks, a resident born and raised in the neighborhood, proudly explained that she loved growing her own vegetables and that grocery store vegetables could not compare. Unfortunately, some of the lots have been sold for housing development, destroying most of the garden without notice. Neighbors lost their community space. They were unable to prevent construction or have a say in the use of the land. Housing is now under construction by a company that is developing market-rate housing in the area using the same housing typology. These single-family houses constructed on Marcy Street are on sale for $279,000 each (see figure 4.8.2).

Threats: This community garden is made up of a number of lots owned by diverse entities, such as a non-profit organization, the city, and private owners. Speculation is pushing owners to sell their properties.
CASE STUDY 2: COMMUNITY GARDEN PRODUCING FOOD

Locations: 704, 706, 708, and 710 Cornell Street

Former Owner(s): AGANO Inc. and South Philadelphia Area Redevelopment

New Owner: Innovative Basket LLC

Story: For over nine years these lots have been used by an Asian family for growing boutique orchard. The former owner John Tallalillo explained: "We Tallalillos own the business John Tallalillo Guns on Cornell Street. Lots number 704, 706, 708, and 710 were sold by AGANO Inc. to Innovative Basket LLC, a New York-based real estate company that has bought 18 lots in the area over the last three years. South Philadelphia Area Redevelopment Corporation recently sold Lot 706 to AGANO Inc. When follows the trend, this property will likely be sold to Innovative Basket LLC soon (see Figure 4.26)."

Threats: Community members are not aware of ownership changes in most of the cases. They keep using the land while lots are sold one by one until construction disrupts their use of the property.

CASE STUDY 3: COMMUNITY GARDEN WITH A PLAYGROUND

Location: 715, 717, 719 and 725 Milton Street

Former Owners: AGANO Inc.

New Owner: Innovative Basket LLC

Story: Long-term residents Florence and Jerry revealed the history and importance of these lots. Across the street, in these lots until the city tore them down in the seventies. The lots remained vacant for a long time until about two years ago, when a city representative made some improvements in the space that allowed it to be used by community children. Since then, children living on this street and the surrounding blocks have enjoyed the playground. Neighbors from Asia and Mexico, and long-term residents have worked together to keep it clean and safe. For many years, this space has been the neighborhood playground. After a shooting earlier this year on South 8th Street, children and parents had a sleepover on the playground to show that it was a safe place. Unfortunately, it will not be around for very long. Most of the lots have been recently sold, and only a few community members are aware of this and are worried about the fate of this community space. The remaining two lots have been owned by the same residents since the 1970s (see Figure 4.27).

Threats: These lots were sold by AGANO Inc. to Innovative Basket LLC in the last 2.5 years. It is likely that these real estate companies are pushing owners to sell. Neighbors have been asked to sell their houses, but they refuse to do so.