

## Letters

## Blight? Hardly

I almost fell off my chair after reading Jeff Hurvitz's commentary about a possible blight designation for Jenkintown ("It's blemished in name only," July 22). Ardmore, on Philadelphia's Main Line, also is moving quickly toward being tagged with a blight designation so "revitalization" can take place.

Ardmore needs a transit center and a face lift, not a wrecking ball. Pennsylvania, however, has created a land-grabbing, gold-rush environment where developers can move into fiscally sound neighborhoods (Lower Merion receives AAA bond ratings regularly) and build on land that has been forcibly taken from successful owner-merchants by local politicians.

I can only think that control of valuable commercial property is the primary issue in Ardmore, certainly not blight. I believe Bryn Mawr is next on the local hit list.

I wish an investigative journalist would start connecting the dots sooner rather than later.

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Ardmore

## MONTGOMERY COUNTY

# Revitalization plan for Ardmore district faces crucial step

By Matthew P. Blanchard  
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The battle for downtown Ardmore continues tonight with a crucial vote on the Ardmore Transit Center Plan, a proposed \$140 million project designed to remake this timeworn shopping district into a vibrant urban village.

At 6:30 p.m., the Lower Merion Planning Commission will meet at the Haverford School to discuss the creation of an official redevelopment zone out of 10 blocks of Ardmore — a first step that would strengthen the township's ability to secure state grants and take properties by eminent domain.

Another protest march is expected from a coalition of merchants who last month led 200 demonstrators down Lancaster Avenue. The outrage stems from a chief component of the proposal, the Gateway parking garage and retail hub, which would necessitate the demolition of 11 buildings housing long-established businesses, including Brownie's 23 East nightclub, the Pennywise Thrift Shop and Suburban Office Supply.

But in recent weeks there have been some important shifts on the battlefield.

Commissioners have lately insisted they are not committed to the Gateway proposal. Yesterday, Commissioner Matt Comisky said it was just one idea that should not stop the broader effort to revitalize Ardmore.

"We have no specific plan. Or rather I should say, we have many plans. But there is no one approach everyone is ready to get behind," Comisky said. "There is no consensus."

To build that consensus, the township has called in a team of experts from the Urban Land Institute, a Washington nonprofit that will conduct a weeklong study of Ardmore beginning Sept. 19. Opponents demand a guarantee that their buildings will not be demolished.

"If they are not going forward with the Gateway plan, why don't they just take it off the table?" said Joe Rufo, the owner of Brownie's. "If this was a plan that didn't involve eminent domain, we wouldn't be opposing it."

Tonight's meeting of the Planning Commission, which is open to the public, will not deal directly with the demolitions. It is narrowly focused on one question: Does Ardmore meet any of seven criteria under state law to be declared a blighted area, or in modern parlance, an "area in need of revitalization."

The criteria are broad: Traffic congestion, crowding, dilapidated or obsolete buildings are all qualifications.

Opposition attorney Glenn A. Zeitz, who berated the Planning Commission at a meeting in June, has recruited traffic and planning experts to testify that Ardmore meets none of these criteria.

But in telephone interviews yesterday, some business owners spoke in support of the plan.

"All the marches and banners and lawyers, it's all nonsense," said Stephen Gaylon, manager of Jacques Ferber Furs and owner of seven buildings in Ardmore. "Anybody driving through here knows Ardmore needs help. We've been talking about it for 40 years."

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