

# East Falls

## RECONNECTS TO THE RIVER

Design Guidelines and Goals for Facades and Signs



# Credits

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

Funding assistance has been provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources through the Schuylkill River National & State Heritage Area Reconnections Grant Program as well as the generosity of residents and businesses including: Roxborough Manayunk Bank, Daniel I. Bernstein, Winther Properties, Sherman Properties, Resources for Human Development, the East Falls Business Association, ValHal Corporation, MCP Hospital, Golden Crust Pizza, Dotty Gorman, Barbara Battista, Travel by Pat, Man's Best Friend, Sunoco A Plus Mini-Market, William Ross, Conrad Laundry, Bill Murphy, The Bicycle Club of Philadelphia, Apollo's Pizza, Major Wing Lee's, and the East Falls Pharmacy, and a number of individual donors and Board Members of the East Falls Development Corporation (EFDC).

### Board of Directors

Carolyn Sutton  
Kevin Duffy  
Vanessa Williams  
Matthew McClure  
John Grady  
Sharon Jaffe  
G. Geoffrey Cromarty  
Peggy Gertz  
Edward DeLisle

Daniel Bernstien  
Maria Iaquinto  
Roberta Ginsburg  
Jeffrey Friedman  
Tamara Grossett  
Mark Green  
Glenn Fink  
Michelle Webb  
Gilbert Rowe

## 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 public improvements for walking, biking, driving, parking, and streetscapes entitled: "East Falls Reconnects to the River: A Public Improvement Plan for the Riverfront District."

### PREPARED BY:

The East Falls Development Corporation  
3654 Midvale Avenue  
Philadelphia, PA 19129  
215-848-8084

### CONSULTANTS:

Brown & Keener, Urban Design  
2300 Chestnut Street, Suite 400  
Philadelphia, PA 19103  
215-751-1133

Kise Straw & Kolodner, Architects  
123 South Broad Street, Suite 1270  
Philadelphia, PA 19109  
215-790-1050

# Introduction and Goals

East Falls is a special place because of its one mile of publicly accessible edge along the Schuylkill River, and because the business district is a true riverfront commercial district. Moribund for many years, the riverfront is now beginning a transformation into a place that will serve the diverse community of neighbors as well as visitors from other parts of the city.

In order to guide and stimulate this transformation, The East Falls Development Corporation led a community-based design process to plan improvements for the business district.

This work builds on the EFDC's 1998 "East Falls Riverfront Master Plan" and several additional studies. This planning led to these four Design Goals:

- "Reconnect" East Falls to the River. Make it possible to easily walk and bike to the River's edge from the neighborhood; and open vistas to the River from Ridge Avenue and from the neighborhood streets.
- Improve the walking environment on Ridge and Midvale Avenues to make shopping pleasant and interesting. Clarify the bike routes to and through the downtown.
- Make driving easy and safe throughout the downtown. Add to the parking supply, while making the search for parking clear and simple.
- Create a "visual theme" for the downtown, using its buildings and signs to express the unique quality of East Falls.

This document presents the guidelines for improvements to the stores and commercial buildings in the East Falls business district.

Four categories of design are addressed:

- Buildings with ground floor retail and restaurants.
- Buildings with ground floor offices
- Color in East Falls
- Signs



*Johnny Manana's demonstrates effective use of color and projecting signage.*

## OVERALL GUIDELINES:

Five specific principles evolved that guide all of the basic guideline recommendations:

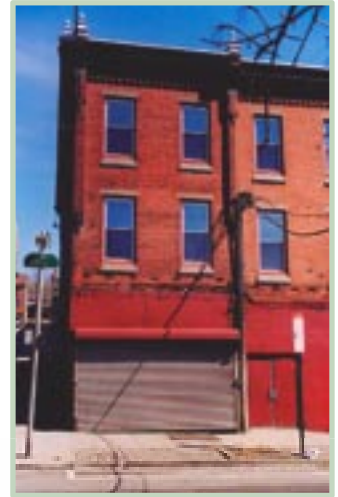
- Take advantage of the character of existing architecture. East Falls has an excellent collection of buildings, so new designs should not hide or change them.
- Retail and office ground floors should be transparent and open: no "fortress mentality" should be evident. East Falls can be an exciting place that shows off its best qualities to the public street. Even offices should convey openness; some day they might even be converted to stores.
- Awnings are fine elements that add a human scale to the sidewalk, add shelter, add to the colorfulness of the street, and give opportunities for additional signs.
- Bright colors create a special quality that already exists. Continued and expanded use of these colors will make East Falls unique in Philadelphia.
- Be imaginative - show that East Falls is truly special!

# Facade Design

## GUIDELINES: BUILDINGS WITH GROUND FLOOR RETAIL AND RESTAURANTS

- Keep the architectural details on the upper floors. Clean the bricks, clean and paint the cornices, maintain the windows.
- Storefronts should be large clear windows. Don't add mullions, window panes or other Colonial details to "Colonialize" the storefronts, since the buildings are basically early 20th century style.
- Awnings; both fabric and metal are desirable; straight slopes are strongly suggested. Plastic-like awnings are unacceptable, since they commonly symbolize lower quality retail. Replace shingle awnings with fabric or metal.
- The base of the building should be made of masonry (tile, bricks, etc.). Stucco, which has been used in some cases, quickly becomes dirty and stained.
- Signs should be located on cornices above the storefront, on the store window, or hung perpendicularly from the upper floor wall. Absolutely do not cover any of the upper floor walls or windows with large flat signs.

*A number of buildings in the district represent development opportunities. Their structure and original design should be maintained but enlivened with improvements.*



Upper Floors:  
Architecture  
Remains  
- clean  
bricks, retain  
windows

Projecting Icon  
Sign

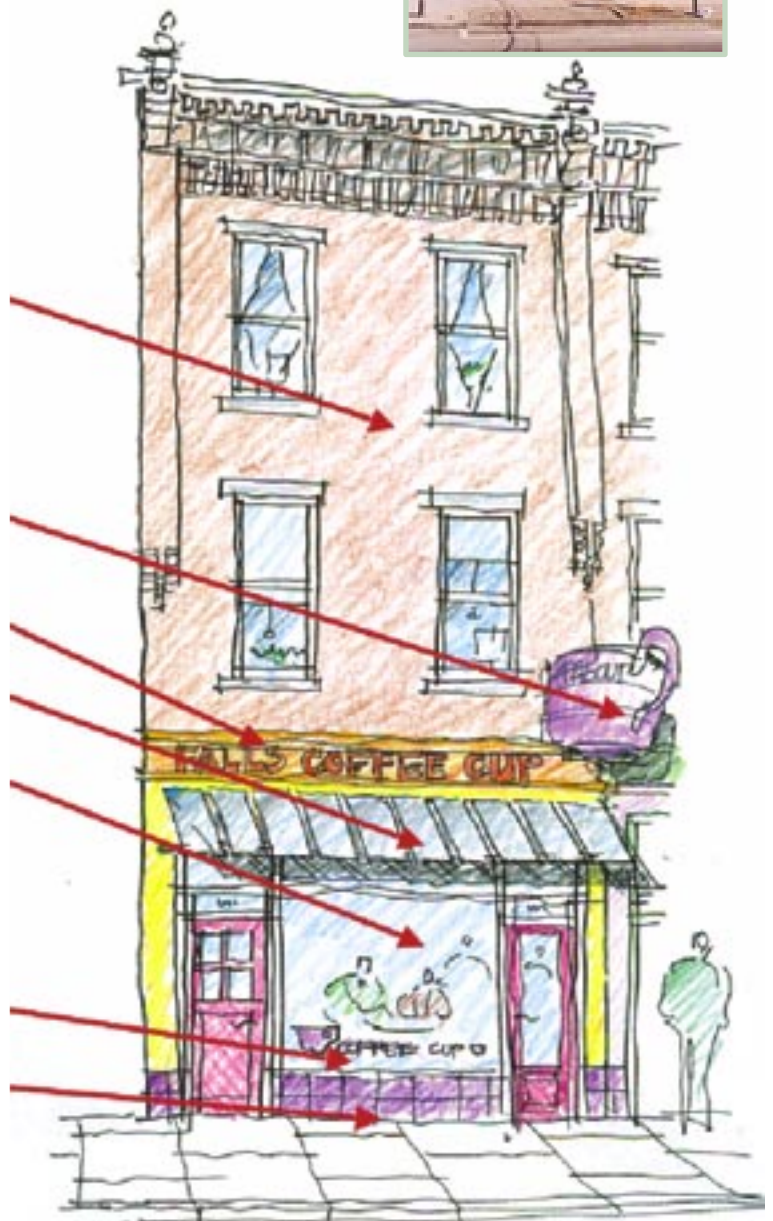
Cornice Letter  
Sign

Metal Awning

Large Window

Stenciled or neon  
Sign on Window

Masonry Base



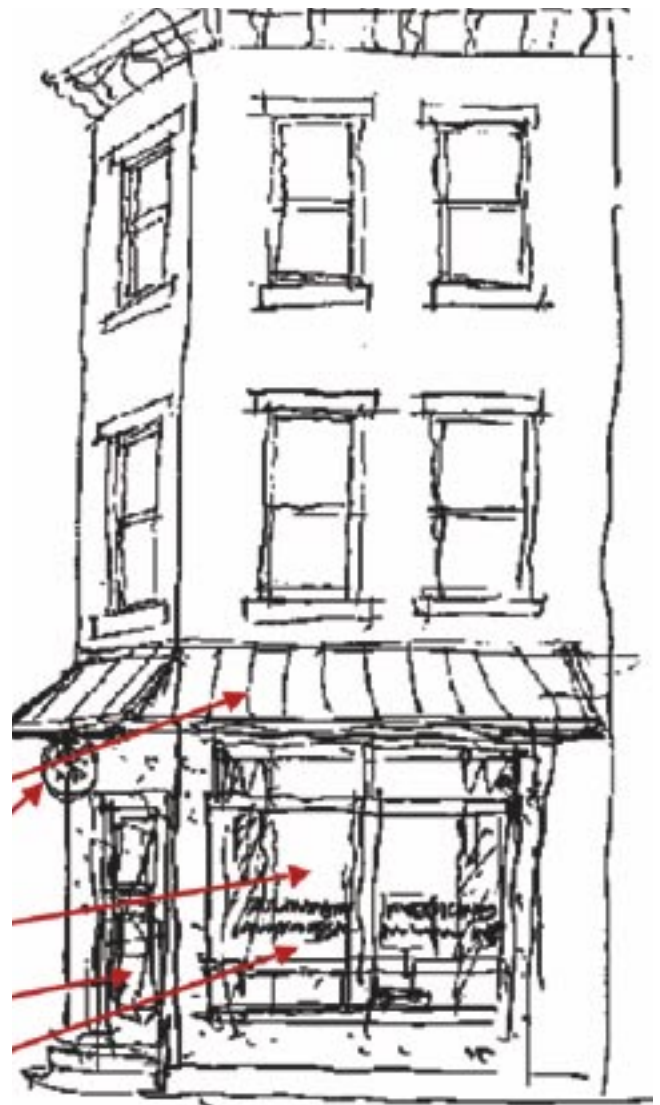
*Add large storefront signs that fit into the architecture, and colors - and make a real "East Falls" building.*

# East Falls RECONNECTS

## GUIDELINES: BUILDINGS WITH GROUND FLOOR OFFICES

- Keep the architectural details on the upper floors. Clean the bricks, clean the cornices, paint the windows.
- Ground floor windows should be large clear windows, even if they are screened on the inside by curtains. The building should be designed as if a shop will locate here in the future. Don't add "Colonial" details to the storefronts, since the buildings are basically early 20th century style.
- Front doors should be designed to appear open, just like the store fronts.
- The base of the building should be made of masonry (tile, bricks, etc.). Stucco, which has been used in some cases, quickly becomes dirty and stained.
- Signs can and should be small, whether as hanging shingle-style signs, or on the window. Professional offices don't require the same advertising as shops and restaurants.

*Over time, buildings have been modified with architectural elements not in keeping with the original structure. Here, small colonial window panes and a shingled roof have been added to a simple victorian building.*



*The three story early 20th century building with a professional office on the first floor is transformed by a compatible metal roof, and a large shop-like ground floor window.*

# Facade Colors, Materials

## GUIDELINES: COLOR

Colors have already been used to announce retail in downtown. Johnny Manana's uses a combination of several bright colors that complement each other, and that add great vitality to the appearance of all of downtown. Some rather bright colors have been used on bay windows on the upper floors. The new coffee shop Well Ground has chosen a palette of rust and gold.

Each new shop or restaurant should develop a palette that includes more than one color; some of the colors should have an intensity that highlights the best features of the business and the building. The colors should extend into complementary signs.

Bright colors on building surfaces and details must only be used on the first floor (remember – preserve the good architecture of the upper floors). The only use of bright color above the store front should be in a large symbolic sign, like Johnny Manana's red pepper!



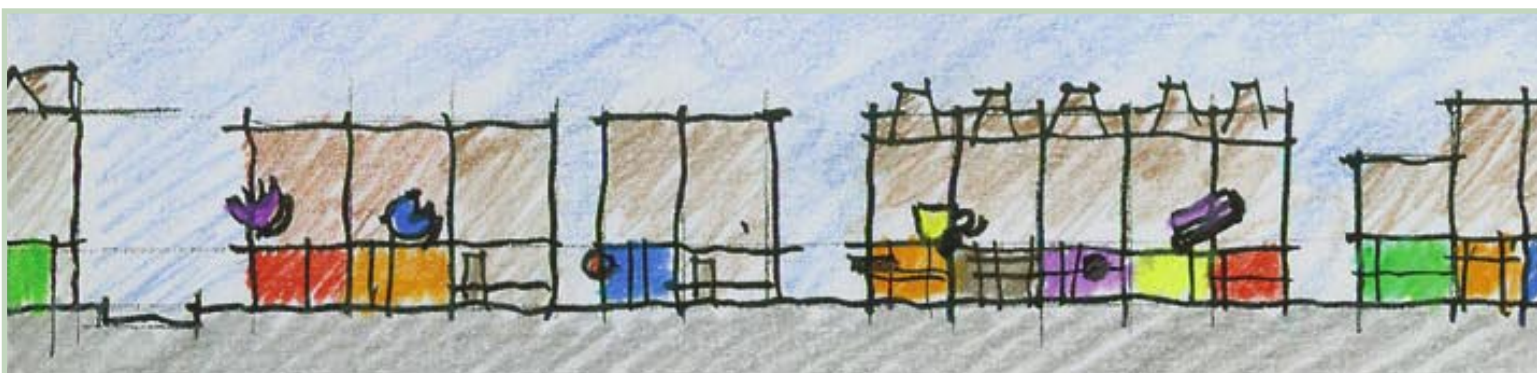
*The first floor of Johnny Manana's Restaurant includes at least six bright colors all of which relate in a single vivid design.*



*Imagine these existing ground floor facades transformed with large storefronts, signs that fit within the building architecture, and the addition of several colors!*

The diagram below of the buildings facing Ridge Avenue illustrates the fundamental principles about the use of colors and materials:

- Preserve the upper floor original materials and windows (no paint on the bricks; no fake materials)
- Use many colors around the storefronts, on the first floors
- Encourage large, colorful, symbolic signs projecting out from the building
- Keep materials clean (i.e. no dirty brick)
- Do not allow metal grates that hide building storefronts



# East Falls RECONNECTS



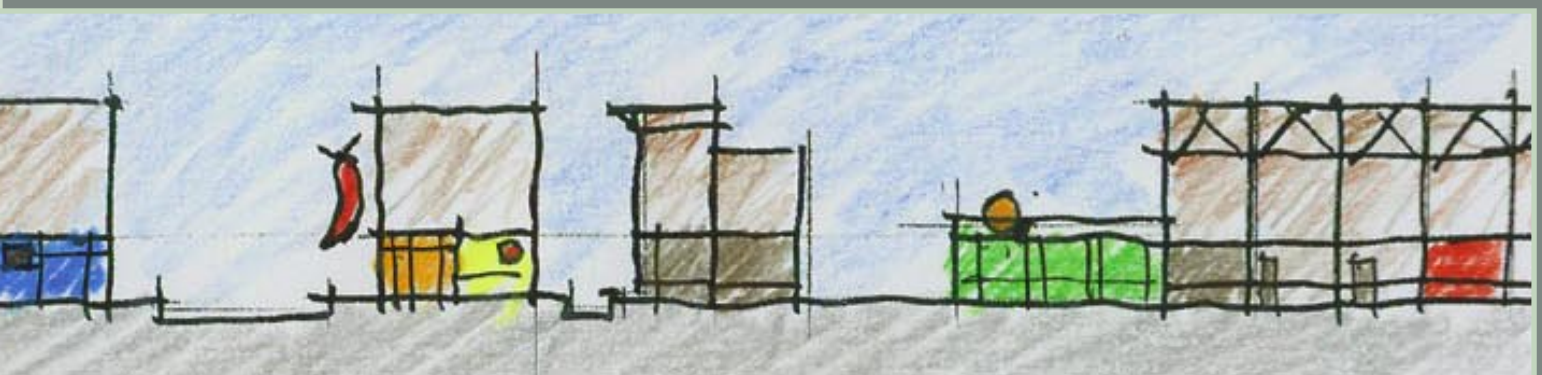
The Well Grounded Coffee Shop uses burgandy and cream as its signature colors.



Sketch of a possible facade of a mens clothing store, which shows orange and yellow painted trim, and green tiles and door.



Many colors - less bright - have already been used to highlight the details of the upper level of buildings of the East Falls Riverfront District.



# Signs

## GUIDELINES:

These Principles will set the standards for sign design in East Falls:

- Signs should complement the architecture.
- Signs should convey their messages simply - make the words legible.
- Individual letters and symbols are better than big boxes.
- Words and symbols in shops can be bigger than those in offices.
- External illumination of signs is more in keeping with the scale and character of East Falls.

## YES:

These sign types are *appropriate* in East Falls:

- Projecting signs
- Projecting symbols
- Signs painted on walls
- Signs painted on windows
- Individual letters on walls and cornices

## NO:

These signs are *inappropriate* for East Falls:

- Large signs that cover upper floor areas
- Plastic internally illuminated signs
- Signs with too much information, that become illegible to the driver
- Signs that fill the storefront window- and eliminate the openness

## YES: PROJECTING SIGNS



*Sprig's combines a symbol – the spoon – with a simple painted hanging name sign.*



*Johnny Manana's hanging painted sign uses several bright colors, and external lighting.*



*A handsome ornamental bracket holds a symbol – the spool – and a carved and painted wood sign.*



*Too many signs in the windows; wall signs are too big and are internally lit.*



*Projecting sign that is too big and is badly lit.*



# East Falls RECONNECTS

YES: SIGNS WITH LETTERS INDIVIDUALLY MOUNTED



*Letters painted on the wall, externally illuminated.*

YES: SIGNS PAINTED IN THE WINDOW



*Small, simple, legible letters painted on the window.*



*Individual letters fit into a sign cornice.*



*Letters painted at the pedestrian level on the shop window.*



*Large simple mounted letters, with exterior light fixtures, cast strong shadows and are easily read.*



*A large amount of information can easily be conveyed to the pedestrian shopper with a small amount of lettering on a shop front window.*

# Signs

YES: SYMBOLS



*A baby carriage and a neon coffee cup readily tell the shopper what is being sold in these shops*



*Johnny Manana's famous red pepper and the painted coffee cup of Well Grounded are great precedents that already exist in East Falls.*



*A painted boot ("leather sold here!") and a teapot combine color and three dimensional shapes.*

# East Falls RECONNECTS



The map above shows proposed improvements in East Falls. Widening the 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.



See the future: colorful signs and storefronts in new shops along wide tree-lined sidewalks!



**EAST FALLS**  
development corporation