

# Cheverly, Maryland Community Rejuvenation

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## Introduction

### What is Tactical Urbanism?

Arts and urban consultant, Cara Courage, describes tactical urbanism as making small but impactful changes to the cultural and physical fabric of a city or town to improve the “urban lived experience.” These improvements can involve elements of art, nature, or community, among others. The elements are planned and introduced as part of strategic rejuvenation efforts. Unlike major gentrification construction projects, tactical urbanism elements can be introduced quickly and at a low cost. Additionally, tactical urbanism seeks to build on the preexisting characteristics of a community without stripping away what makes it unique.

### The Town of Cheverly

The town of Cheverly, Maryland features a mix of residential, industrial, and some commercial areas. After research, site visits, and communication with stakeholders, it was determined that the town could benefit from improved pedestrian accessibility and community-engaging spaces.

Cheverly’s industrial parks are critical to its economy, providing jobs and income for town’s residents. For this reason, it is a priority to preserve the industrial areas while making them more accessible for workers and pedestrians. Specifically, access to public transportation can be improved with elements such as additional sidewalks, pedestrian bridges, bike lanes, and bike racks.

Cheverly’s residential areas lack buffers from nearby industrial activities. Trees and fences should be added throughout the town to mitigate the negative impacts of industrial uses. The residential areas could also benefit from improved community recreation and gathering spaces. Local parks lack features that attract regular community use such as picnic tables, gardens, or other functional elements. It will be a priority to improve Cheverly’s residential areas to make best use of their existing spaces and foster greater community interaction.

Finally, Cheverly’s commercial areas are dated and relatively inactive. The restaurants along Maryland Avenue don’t attract as much business as in the past and the once popular Friendly Inn is now largely unused. In an effort to revive these spaces, small projects such as creating patio space, safe pedestrian walkways, and improved parking locations can have a great impact. It is important to the town that the local businesses can thrive. Therefore, any tactical urbanism projects will aim to bring more foot traffic to the existing commercial areas and create spaces that community members will feel comfortable using.

### Community Theme

It is important that the tactical urbanism elements introduced in Cheverly have a unifying theme that creates a sense of intention behind the improvements. For that reason, the community will

be given the opportunity to select a theme for each of the proposed projects. It is additionally important that the community members feel that they have a role in rejuvenation efforts and that any changes are perceived as beneficial and welcomed.

### **Outreach Efforts**

As noted, it is critical that any changes throughout Cheverly are made in consultation with community members and align with their needs. In the planning phases of this proposal, the team was in frequent contact with Cheverly's Mayor Laila Riazi, owner of the Friendly Inn, Otto Siebel, and owners of other Maryland Avenue restaurants. The team visited the town, spoken to individuals at Town Hall meetings, and coordinated with Cheverly Planning Department officials.

Prior to implementation of these proposals, the team recommends undertaking a community survey to gauge levels of interest, areas of concern, and collect ideas for a potential theme to guide project implementation. We predict that this survey will be most effective if conducted at local schools and churches to capture the perspectives of the widest range of residents.

## Site 1 Proposal: Friendly Inn



Figure 1

### Background

The Friendly Inn, on Tuxedo Road, was, in its prime, a popular restaurant and bar frequented by Cheverly residents. It was owned by Charles (Charlie) and Magdalene (Magda) Warner, who were beloved in the town. When his wife fell ill, Charlie spent most of his time caring for her until she passed, and the restaurant subsequently deteriorated. After Charlie passed away, the property was purchased by Otto Siebel, who is hoping to sell to a savvy and dedicated businessperson who can successfully revitalize it.

On a site visit with Siebel, we found that though the building hadn't been well maintained, it still had its old menus, posters on the walls, and original booths. Despite the deteriorating exterior, the inside of the old bar is almost like a time capsule; it's not difficult to see its potential.

The Friendly Inn's parking lot is small and can't fit many cars, but the property is within walking distance for many Cheverly residents. It is conveniently located near an interchange of I-495 and Route 50, making it a potentially ideal stopping place for travelers as well as locals.

### Issue and Goal

Because it is private property, the proposed changes must be initiated by the owner, not the town of Cheverly. The plan includes several ways to revitalize this place rich in community history so it can continue to serve as a gathering place. We hope the owner will be inspired to implement minor and inexpensive improvements that can increase the property's value and create a desirable place for residents to unwind after work and spend leisure time with friends and family on the weekends.

We learned that there are few locally-owned restaurants, and our hope is that improvements to the Friendly Inn might prompt a chain reaction that inspires other local entrepreneurs to open businesses that will benefit the community.

### **Site Proposal: Food Truck Event**

The town of Cheverly lacks a local establishment where residents can come together and socialize. To increase foot traffic and use of the space, the Friendly Inn should host a food truck event. Three or four food trucks, ideally from local establishments, would gather in the Friendly Inn parking lot to sell meals and snacks. The event should include outdoor seating, such as picnic tables or similar outdoor furniture, and outdoor décor to add to the area’s visual appeal. This could include outdoor lights, plant fixtures, and possibly a tent or overhang to protect guests from the weather. All of these can be obtained and provided by the community Planning Department at a low cost.

Ultimately, the temporary space created during the food truck event will help town officials and potential investors envision how this site can be transformed into a lively community place, and motivate them to invest in this goal.

### **Timing and Other Details**

The food truck event could be hosted at any time or day of the week the town of finds most convenient. However, the team envisions hosting this event on weekends when most residents will be able to attend. Additionally, late summer or early- to mid-autumn would be ideal times for good weather. While a one-time food truck event will have positive effects, it would be more productive if it could be a regular event, monthly or biweekly.

To host a food truck event, Prince George’s County requires the host to submit a food truck hub application to the Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement (DPIE). Food truck hubs must be within half a mile of a Metro station, or have special approval granted by the County Council. The Friendly Inn is a half mile from the Cheverly Metro Station. Approval must also be granted by the municipality, in this case, the Town of Cheverly, and owner of the property where the food trucks will be operating.

As well, the County requires the property to provide restroom facilities, or that facilities are located nearby; renting portable restrooms would fulfill this requirement. Further details about these requirements can be found on the County’s website at <https://www.princegeorgescountymd.gov/2368/Food-Truck-Hubs>.

### **Stakeholders**

Otto Siebel, the current owner, is a primary stakeholder. In our meetings, he seemed more interested in selling than in investing, hoping to find a buyer with the money and ideas to restore the Friendly Inn to what it once was. After we explained our proposals and noted that

many of the suggestions would not be too costly, he expressed some interest, as improvements and small investments would likely help him sell the property for a greater return.

The people most affected by the proposal are Cheverly's residents. There are few local restaurants and gathering places, especially for Cheverly's youth. There is a clear opportunity for growth and development that would benefit local residents.



Figure 2

### **Implementation Challenges**

Because the Friendly Inn is privately owned, the project's success is contingent on the cooperation of the property owner. If the current or future owner doesn't wish to install light fixtures, planting or outdoor seating and a patio, there are limited options to proceed. The town might consider funding the project or the owner could host a fundraiser. The owner could consider renting the lot space to food truck operators. This resulting revenue could fund exterior improvements that make it conducive to outdoor seating. The prospect of creating a community gathering space at a relatively low cost could motivate the current or future owner to eventually improve the inside of the restaurant as well.

Another challenge is the neighboring Winner Auto Service, located next door to the Friendly Inn. There are cars needing repairs parked close to where outdoor seating would be located, making it unattractive for patrons wanting to sit outside. A taller fence or trellis could partially hide the view of the cars.

Also, the Friendly Inn parking lot needs repairs to ensure it is in good condition for the event. Site visits, revealed mud and water in the lot, likely due to wear and tear on the pavement. While re-paving isn't

necessary, the lot should be cleaned, perhaps blocking off a side area prone to collecting water (see Figure 2).

It may also be a challenge to advertise the event. Certainly, the goal is to attract customers, and it will be essential to publicize the event effectively. We recommend posting flyers in well-trafficked places, such as the Cheverly Community Center, Metro and bus stops, and local grocery stores.



## Site 2 Proposal: Kilmer Park

### Background

Kilmer Park is one of Cheverly's newest parks; it was purchased by the town in 2015 and annexed in 2017. There have been significant improvements including a dog waste station, berry bushes, and a fruiting persimmon tree. Suggestions from Cheverly residents regarding use of the park have been collected and those suggestions are the primary tool guiding this proposal. The overall goal for Kilmer Park is to make it a place for community building. This could be accomplished by making park space for all to spend time with one another.

### Issue and Goal

As one of Cheverly's few green spaces, it is important to residents and city officials that the park be used effectively. In its current state, the park is largely deserted; during each visit we did not observe any residents using it. The goal of this proposal is to ensure that the park is a comfortable and welcoming place for the residents of Cheverly.

### Site Proposals

#### *A Space for All Ages*

To create a meeting space for users of all ages, it's important to address the needs of current and future Cheverly residents. Renovation should include wheelchair-accessible park benches, wide eco-friendly walkways, and landscaping with low-allergy plant materials.

Wheelchair-accessible park benches are a more inclusive option that include room for those using a wheelchair within the seating line and not only on the end. Ginkgo Biloba, Willows, Geraniums, Sunflowers, and Hydrangea plants are low-allergen and low-pollen producing plants that could be introduced in the park. Walkways made from recycled rubber tires and other permeable walkways designs are eco-friendly alternatives to cement and are softer and more comfortable for older walkers as well as safer for families with small children.

#### *A Place of Nourishment*

A community garden could be developed to educate and nourish Cheverly residents. Low maintenance and seasonal edible plants include echinacea, potatoes, peppers, onions, garlic, pea pods, plums, mulberries, rhubarb, black raspberries and more. Community members could stop by the garden and pick up any available produce.

The garden plans could be presented at the Friendly Inn food truck event, and perhaps include a food item made with community garden produce.

Samples would be shared with residents who would learn that the ingredients come from the Kilmer Park's shared garden and will be available for seasonal consumption.

The shared garden could also host monthly lessons in the summer for children to learn about the process of plant growth and gardening in Cheverly. The program could include teaching children the basics of maintaining their own garden and allow the children to plant fruits and vegetables in the garden. At the conclusion of the course, the children would be encouraged to prepare a meal to share with their families using the garden's ingredients.

### **Stakeholders**

If implemented, these interventions could greatly benefit the residents of Cheverly. Parents, children, elderly, and disabled residents will all feel welcome to enjoy Kilmer Park. Other stakeholders include the community planners whose job is to rejuvenate Cheverly's public spaces.

### **Implementation Challenges**

There are several challenges to revitalizing Kilmer Park. First, funds are needed to purchase new park benches and installing new walkways. If the town chooses to take on these projects, cost estimates can be determined in consultation with the County's Community Planning Department following completion of this PALS project.

For the shared garden, the town will need to establish a maintenance plan for the plants and soil. The garden may need to be an enclosure to prevent animals from eating the produce. There will need to be measures in place that ensure the garden is not over-harvested and that it can continue to grow for years to come.

Finally, to successfully host a community garden lesson for local children, an instructor must be willing to volunteer time and expertise. Ideally, the instructor could be a neighbor or local teacher who is familiar with the subject matter.

## Site 3 Proposal: Maryland Avenue Restaurants



Figure 3

### Background

The 3000 block of Maryland Avenue in Cheverly is home to the DeRanch Restaurant, an African and Caribbean restaurant owned by Mr. Agubuzo; and Afrik International Food Market, a produce and spice store next door to the restaurant. Agubuzo also owns a plot of land, on a slight incline behind the properties currently used as the location of the restaurant's dumpster.

The two businesses share limited parking with little separation from the surrounding commercial and industrial areas. These unappealing aspects are compounded by a worn pedestrian path from this block to Cheverly Station Apartments. Though conveniently close to Route 50, the block is near high traffic routes of Old Landover Road and MD-202, which limit the site's potential to serve as a vital sector of Cheverly's economy and a community gathering site for Cheverly's residents.

### Issue and Goal

Cheverly officials are seeking to revitalize the town's gathering places and ultimately to strengthen the connection between its residents and businesses. The DeRanch Restaurant and Afrik International Food Market are in a favorable location for such community development but suffer from a lack of accessibility and limited service space, which in turn, hamper the location's economic capacity.

The goal is to help the venues owners and Cheverly residents to fully realize the block's community and economic potential by increasing the sites' allure and accessibility through temporary placemaking projects. After establishing a temporary desirable use that promotes redevelopment, improves economic opportunities, and catalyzes community interest in the area, we hope to inspire permanent infrastructure changes that offer long-term community benefits.

## Site Proposal: Pedestrian Accessibility and Parking Lot Renovation

DeRanch has two potential spaces for an outdoor patio that will establish the restaurant as a meeting community place and attract business. The first option (point 1 on Figure 4), is a temporary patio area in front of the restaurant utilizing the three parking spaces for tables and chairs. This would require shifting parking onto Maryland Avenue and potentially repaving the uneven front lot. Converting this area into a patio may fit only about a dozen patrons.

The second option (point 2 on Figure 4), is a patio area behind the restaurant in the empty lot owned by Agubuzo. This larger area could eventually be developed into an even larger project. Mr. Agubuzo expressed interest in developing a “bush bar” in this location where customers could eat, drink, and socialize. This could generate more traffic and money in the community. The area could serve a larger number of patrons than a space in the front and wouldn’t require restructuring parking in front of the restaurant.

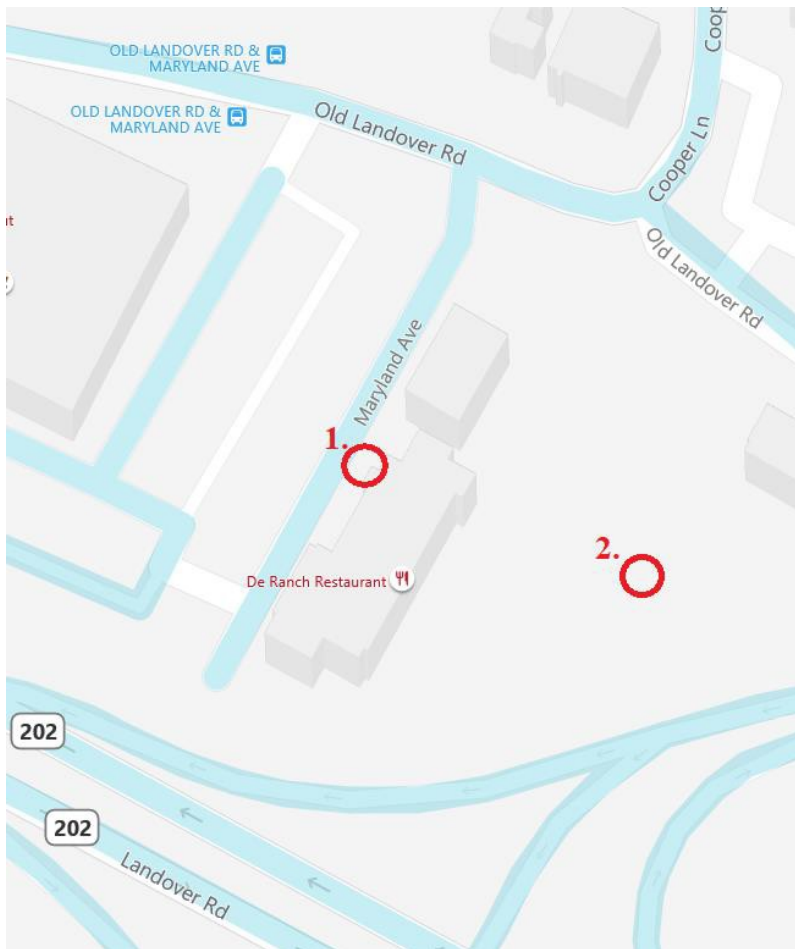


Figure 4

## **Benefits**

Transforming a parking-focused storefront into a open seating will produce several benefits. First, increased seating along heavily trafficked pedestrian areas invites people to stop, increasing economic opportunities for store owners. Another benefit of this proposal is its low cost and low level of required maintenance. Once constructed, the owner will only need to clean the space, care for any garden installations, and secure temporary seating. Members of the surrounding community with limited access to public space also stand to benefit from increased access, making this block more useful.

## **Stakeholders**

The owners of DeRanch Restaurant and Afrik International Food Market are the most influential and affected stakeholders. Unfortunately, attempts to reach the owner of Afrik International Food Market, even with the help of Mayor Riazzi, were unsuccessful. The owner of this establishment has shown no interest in expanding the business through cooperation with town officials. This may be due to a competitive environment between the adjacent businesses. Both are selling African dishes and produce, have been said to compete for customers.

Mr. Agubuzo however, has shown interest in working with the town to develop a placemaking project at his restaurant. He is a native of Nigeria and has established DeRanch as a restaurant, but also as a place where African immigrants can meet and socialize. Mr. Agubuzo has considered an outside patio for his restaurant to increase customer traffic, but has held off on the idea, due to the risks of such an investment. With help from the Community Planning Department and PALS, this proposal aims to provide Mr. Agubuzo with guidance, including a comprehensive review of legal issues, documents to be cleared, and a cost estimate for creating such a site.

Like this report's other proposals, these interventions will affect the residents of Cheverly. The further development of DeRanch should provide residents with a nearby location to purchase meals. It could bring more business and a sense of community to the diverse town through its African and Caribbean food that is an ideal benefit for the community.

## **Implementation Challenges**

The first proposal calls for converting parking spaces in the front into a sidewalk that could expand to function as a patio. The resulting loss of parking spaces would require new spaces to be established on Maryland Avenue. To do this, DeRanch must submit permit applications to Prince George's County's Department of Permitting, Inspections, and Enforcement (DPIE). Because the project seeks to restructure the road, the restaurant will likely have to complete both the [Site/Road Permit](#) and [Building Permit](#) application forms (on the Prince George's County website). Notably, while both require the submission of a permit fee prior to permit issuance, the site/road submittal also requires a filing fee. After these applications have been completed, DeRanch can then submit the building plans to DPIE for review through the government's ePlan online application.

Specifically, because this proposal is a renovation and repaving of parking spaces to provide space for tables and chairs, DeRanch will be required to submit seven site/plot plans, two architectural drawings, and two structural drawings to DPIE.

If the building plans are accepted, the restaurant can then repave. Based on the estimated area of the three parking spaces, between 1,137 and 1,458 square feet, and an average price of \$1-\$2 per square foot to repave, this could cost between \$1,138 and \$2,916.

The second proposal, to establish an outdoor dining area in the rear of the building, requires DeRanch to submit the [Building Permit](#) applications and building plans listed under a Commercial Exterior Grading Case to DPIE through ePlan.

Once the project is approved, the restaurant then must clean up and renovate the area. Currently, the back lot is littered with trash and weeds that would need to be removed to make the site more attractive. The dumpster would need to be moved to directly behind the restaurant or another location.

Additionally, this location is clearly visible from a residential backyard to the north and MD-202 to the south, which may warrant the addition of fencing and greenery to buffer the sitting area. Lastly, the site is slightly sloped and currently paved with gravel, which prevents chairs and tables from being placed evenly on the ground. To create a level foundation for outdoor dining, the site would need to be paved with a smooth surface. Cost estimates for a concrete surface range from \$7.38 to \$8.21 per square foot, and a 1,000 square foot patio could cost between \$7,380 to \$8,210.

The costs of either of these renovations may be beyond the business's capacity, and Cheverly should investigate a grant from the County's Redevelopment Authority (RDA) as a part of their Community Impact Grant Program. Although RDA's funding availability has not yet been posted for fiscal year 2021, we can estimate that the County will offer a provision similar to the 2020 funding of \$497,000 available.

## Conclusion

These proposed elements of tactical urbanism interventions will significantly improve the “urban lived experience” in Cheverly. The proposals could engage community members in the projects, incorporating their needs and their ideas for a community theme that guides each of the improvement projects.

Together, the proposed elements will create spaces for Cheverly residents to interact productively and for local business to expand and thrive once again.

## Resources

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