

An aerial photograph of the Brookland neighborhood in Atlanta, Georgia, showing a grid of streets, trees, and buildings. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

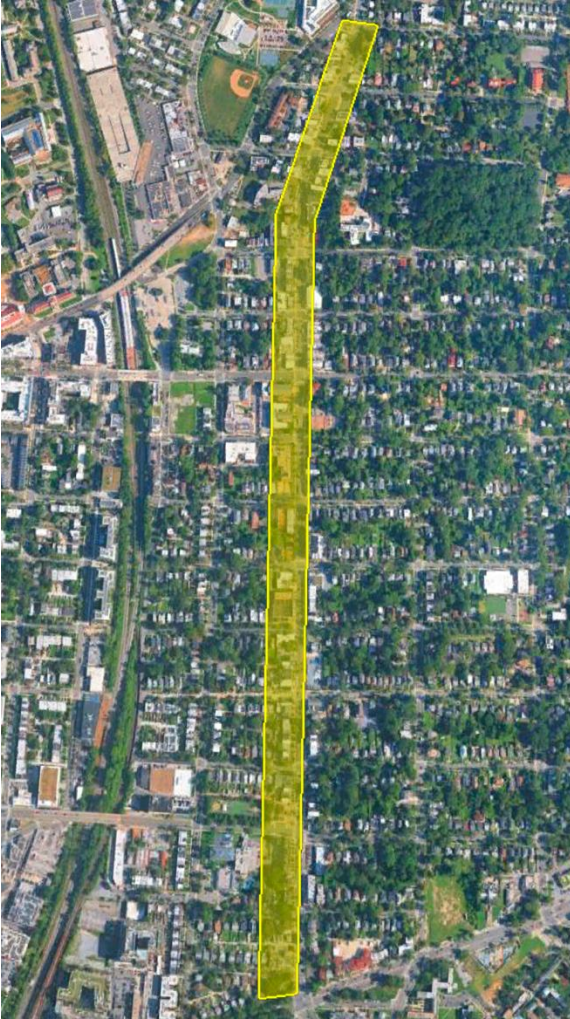
**12 St
NE**

Say “Yes” to 12th Street

Strengthening Brookland’s Historic Retail Corridor

Brookland Neighborhood
Civic Association
March 17, 2026

Overview



- 12th Street NE has functioned for more than a century as Brookland’s walkable main street
- Many locally-owned “mainstay” businesses continue to serve the neighborhood and have loyal customer bases
- Yet, the corridor has faced challenges in recent years, similar to other neighborhood corridors across the District
- Our report documents current conditions and recommends a practical path to strengthening 12th Street in the years ahead
- Focus is on 12th Street NE between Rhode Island Ave and Michigan Ave

BNCA Research Process

- The report is a culmination of extensive research and neighborhood outreach:
 - May 20, 2025: roundtable with current and former 12th Street proprietors
 - Interviews with property owners, leasing agents, and longtime business owners
 - Neighborhood survey with 340 responses conducted September 5–28, 2025

Assets of the Corridor

- Existing stalwart restaurants and neighborhood businesses
- A loyal and civically engaged community
- Adjacency to Metro, Monroe Street Market, Catholic University
- Walkability, bikeability, commutability

Insights from Business Owners

- Operating costs including payroll, food inputs, utilities, and insurance have increased
- Weekday demand is weaker due to remote work and reduced after-work activity
- Service-oriented businesses such as salons report stronger demand
- Loyal regulars and neighborhood ownership coexist with difficult operating conditions
- Evening safety perceptions depend on lighting, cleanliness, and street activity
- Irregular street activation and lack of nightlife impact foot traffic and social connection

Insights from Property Stakeholders

- Property owners highlight rent affordability gaps versus "deal-ready" space costs
- Tenant improvement (TI) costs range from \$200 to \$500 per square foot
- Landlords prefer tenants with proven success for TI incentives, requiring long leases
- Vacancy concerns arise from speculative improvements and redevelopment parcels
- Brookland lacks a clear retail message and anchor tenants to attract customers
- Regional peers show benefits of coordinated branding, consistent hours, and events

Neighborhood Survey Themes

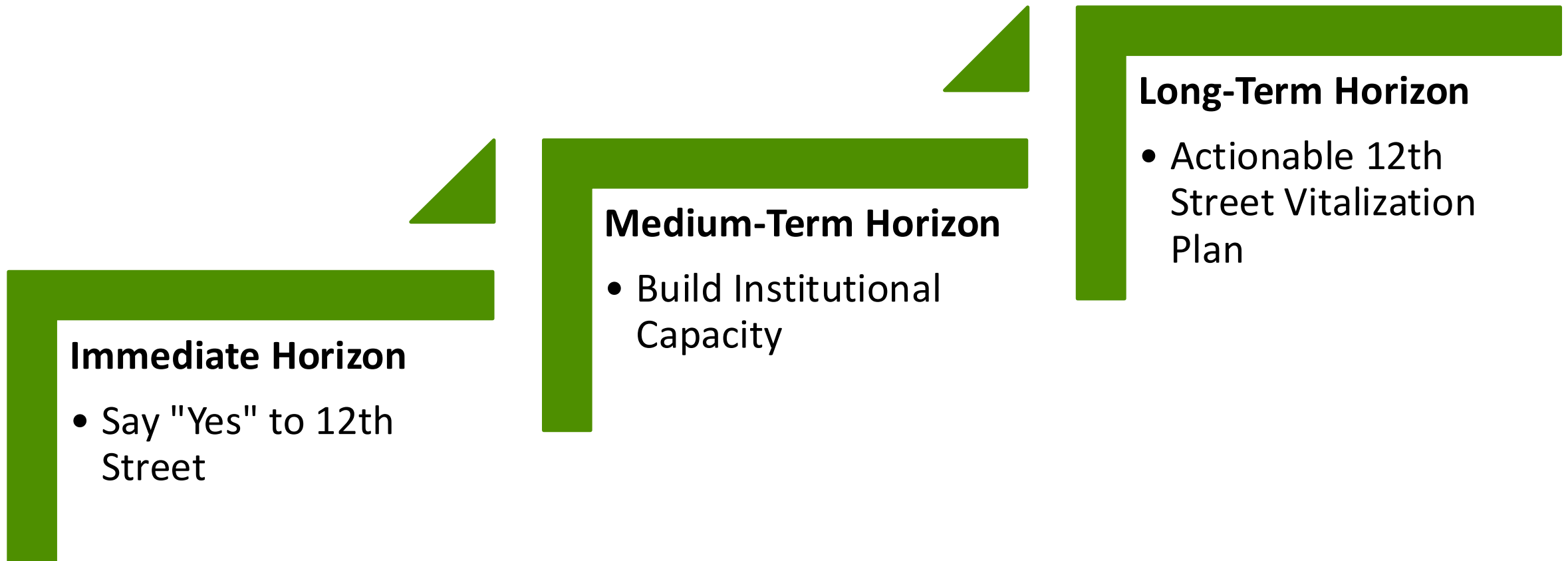
(See October 2025 BNCA Presentation for more detail)

<i>Street Safety and Traffic Control</i>	12th street can feel unsafe to pedestrians
<i>Family-Friendly Amenities and Activities</i>	Residents want more family-oriented venues like cafes, salons, and spaces for kids
<i>Development, Growth, and Density</i>	Support for mixed-use and moderate growth to boost foot traffic and business viability
<i>Local Identity</i>	Strong attachment to past venues and preference for local over chain businesses
<i>Streetscape and Aesthetic Appeal</i>	Desire for trees, greenery, lighting, and improved pedestrian crossings
<i>CVS and Problematic Nodes</i>	The CVS and nearby properties are seen as unsafe or underperforming anchors
<i>Vacancies and General Vitality</i>	Vacancies and turnover dampen confidence in the corridor
<i>Operating Hours and Consistency</i>	Limited or unpredictable hours reduce reliability of local retail options
<i>Need for Retail Cohesion</i>	The corridor could benefit from a more cohesive retail mix
<i>Economic Vision for the Corridor</i>	Call for planning and marketing under a Main Street-style model

Key Challenges Facing 12th Street

- 1. Vacancies** (~30% among storefronts on 3500 block)
- 2. Changed Customer Habits** (shifting towards online, delivery)
- 3. Rising Costs** (rent, cost of goods, labor)
- 4. Aging buildings** (deferred maintenance, facades)
- 5. Lack of Coordination** (among merchants)
- 6. Lackluster Public Realm** (identity, pleasantness, “vibe”)
- 7. Real Estate Trends** (Gaps, Risk of Corridor Collapse)

A Three-Horizon Strategy for 12th Street



Immediate Horizon: Say “Yes” to 12th Street

Establish a **12th Street Committee** with named representatives of businesses, property owners, and community members. Coordinate small but meaningful actions, for example:

- Convene 12th Street business owners monthly
- Coordinate weekday business hours
- Manage a basic cleanliness, lighting, and tree box maintenance checklist
- Publish and regularly update an online Brookland business directory / map
- Work with existing neighborhood groups (e.g., BNCA, Garden Club) on beautification events

Medium-Term Horizon: Build Institutional Capacity

Convene a **founding board and incorporate a nonprofit dedicated to corridor management**—a 12th Street Main Street or functional equivalent. Year one priorities for the organization might include:

- Take over management of the “Say Yes to 12th Street” Committee
- Raise money to fund a part-time Executive Director and for *ad hoc* projects
- Develop a simple, legible 12th Street brand, website, and social media channels
- Formalize a “campus-to-corridor” partnership with Catholic University
- Develop a neighborhood loyalty program
- Act as concierge for prospective 12th Street tenants

Long-Term Horizon: a 12th Street “Vitalization Plan”

Secure public and private funding for a professional planning and placemaking study envisioning an augmented 12th Street experience built on the neighborhood’s authentic identity, diversity, and history. Key elements might include:

- **Streetscape improvements** such as public art features, planters, etc.
- **Infrastructure improvements** such as utility undergrounding, curb management strategies, traffic safety improvements, etc.
- **Shared services functions** (e.g., supplemental street cleaning or safety monitoring) to the extent practical
- **A “retail refresh” program** to procure and coordinate a “blitz” of targeted (and subsidized) façade and interior renovations for participating 12th Street tenants

Policy Recommendations

BNCA, ANC, and Ward 5 leadership should advocate for **District-wide public policy tools to invigorate neighborhood retail corridors like 12th Street**. Key policy levers might include:

- Expanding the small retail property tax credit
- Establishing a tenant-improvement loan or guarantee program
- Streamlining permitting for new retail businesses and for temporary uses (e.g., pop-ups)
- Amending zoning to make retail a required or preferred use on 12th Street, at least between Monroe and Newton Street NE, to protect against “corridor collapse”
- Calibrating the vacancy tax at the storefront level
- Dedicating funds to support the 12th Street organization and vitalization plan programs (e.g., street improvements, storefront grants)

Next Steps

1. Socialize report with neighbors, businesses, public officials, and other stakeholders
2. Organize a 12th Street Committee to initiate “Near-Term Horizon” activities – volunteers needed!
3. Advocate for public policy changes and funding



Thank you!

The full report can be found in BNCA's "Reading Room" at
<https://www.brooklandcivic.org>

Contact: brooklandcivic@yahoo.com