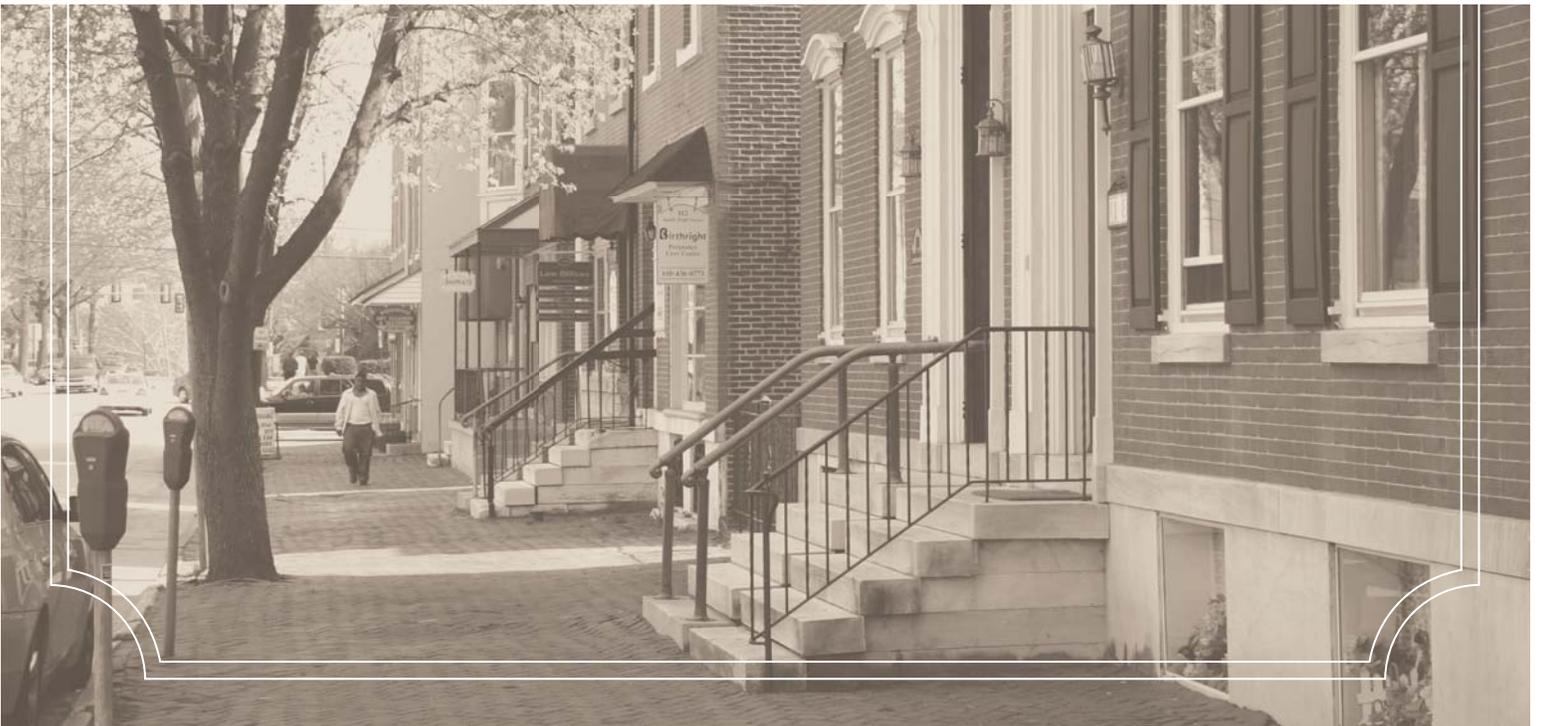




CLASSIC TOWNS OF GREATER PHILADELPHIA 2008-2010 STATUS REPORT



Character, culture, and convenience are the characteristics that define a Classic Town. Ranging from colonial settlements to college towns, streetcar suburbs to waterfront communities, Classic Towns are sprinkled throughout the Greater Philadelphia region, providing a quality of life that is often not found in this age of suburban sprawl.

Created in 2008, the Classic Towns of Greater Philadelphia initiative of the Delaware Valley Planning Commission (DVRPC) is designed to foster the growth of the region's timeless communities by promoting what makes each location a wonderful place to live, work, and play! DVRPC has identified the following guiding principles as the framework for the Classic Towns program:

Identify niche markets. Classic Towns target markets that are appealing to homebuyers and business owners. Highlighted amenities include access to transit, pedestrian friendliness, housing options, and well-established neighborhoods.

Invest in and build on quality of place. The DVRPC region is rich with communities that are unique, attractive, exciting, and welcoming to residents and visitors. Building upon these amenities makes individual communities and the region a more attractive place to live, work and play.

Create new partnerships. New partnerships unite residents, businesses, and local governments to provide the synergy and momentum necessary to bring new ideas to fruition.

Think regionally, act locally. The Greater Philadelphia region is more competitive when communities work together. It is difficult for any single community to measure the enormous opportunities and amenities that a region can provide. Regional cooperation can strengthen local initiatives.

Many communities in the Greater Philadelphia area realize the benefits of marketing and currently have ongoing local initiatives. "Classic Towns designation" complements ongoing local efforts. The Classic Towns regional campaign promotes the inherent benefits of choosing to locate in mature communities and marketing activities are sustained over long periods of time. For communities that have not yet created a brand for themselves, Classic Towns provides the tools and training needed to launch individualized local marketing campaigns. The regional Classic Towns of Greater Philadelphia campaign seeks to strengthen existing local marketing campaigns and encourages the creation of new initiatives.

This status report details some of the highlights of the Classic Towns program, as well as evaluating analytical measures of success, since the program's inception in July 2008. For the last two years, DVRPC staff has sent out a Classic Towns survey to better gauge participants' opinions and technical assistance needs, and has asked for suggestions to improve the program. While the sample size is very small, DVRPC received an 85% response rate for the 2010 survey, a big improvement over the 2009 return rate of 50%. Aggregated responses are included throughout this report.

Workshops

As part of the Classic Towns designation, communities are invited to participate in workshops and engage fellow Classic Towns representatives. Workshop topics are chosen from the Classic Towns annual survey and other sources.

Held in October 2008, the initial workshop focused on media strategies. Speakers from Bellevue Communications and Paragraph, Inc. highlighted ways to use the free media (news articles) to highlight positive attributes of communities. Sample press releases and article writing tips are available on the password-protected area of the website. Approximately 20 people attended.

Hosted by the West Chester Business Improvement District (WCBID) in December 2009, the second workshop focused on promoting energy efficiency in communities. Phil Ehlinger from the Borough of Doylestown discussed a new Green Building Ordinance that had been recently adopted. Dianne Herrin, from West Chester Borough's Leaders United for Emissions Reduction, discussed the borough's EnergyStar ordinance. To gain perspective on how communities can do more to employ sustainable practices, Paul Spiegel of Practical Energy Solutions spoke about solutions to reduce utility costs for local governments, including energy audits. The Classic Towns representatives were then treated to a tour of downtown West Chester. With strong representation from the West Chester business community, nearly 50 people attended this workshop.

2010 Survey respondents ranked the following workshops as most interesting:

- "Marketing and Branding to the Experience Economy"
- "Using Social Media to Market Your Community"
- "Zoning and Planning Tools to Sustain a Vibrant Downtown"

Write-in responses had a general theme of acquiring more skills to undertake or utilize market analysis for business recruitment and/or attracting developers.

Outreach to the Real Estate Community

DVRPC project staff members attend various events geared toward the real estate community throughout Greater Philadelphia to promote the Classic Towns program and our designated communities. In 2009 and 2010, DVRPC staff attended the Bucks County TEXPO in Bensalem, PA to meet and talk to local realtors about the benefits of using Classic Towns marketing materials. Staff presented the Classic Towns program and the benefits of “livable communities” to realtors at the Suburban West Realtor Association, serving Chester, Delaware and Montgomery counties, in May 2010. Feedback from realtors has been positive and new partnerships are underway. While DVRPC has reached out to other realtor associations, staff welcomes suggestions for additional opportunities to promote Classic Towns.

Staff also traveled outside the region presenting the program to other planning and development professionals. In October 2009, DVRPC showcased the Classic Towns program at the Vacant Properties Conference in Louisville, KY. The audience in Louisville included developers who are interested in downtown living and reinvestment. In April 2010, DVRPC staff traveled to New Orleans to present the Classic Towns campaign at the American Planning Association’s national conference.

Marketing

Marketing and advertising activities for Classic Towns include local, regional, and national ad buys. The program was designed to target an online audience; therefore, a majority of the advertisements is found on the following websites: www.yahoo.com, www.nytimes.com, www.realtor.com, www.philly.com, and www.nj.com.

In March 2010, Classic Towns placed an ad in the Best Places to Live edition of Philadelphia Magazine. DVRPC has also purchased print advertisements in county-based real estate magazines. The marketing campaign is constantly revised throughout the year in response to online traffic, advertising opportunities, and other analytical and qualitative feedback. Approximately 83% of the Classic Towns are satisfied with the advertising designs and placement of ads.



Web Banner Ad

Marketing the Classic Towns program is intended to leverage the individual activities that member towns are undertaking. Twelve percent (12%) of Classic Towns communities have advertised their participation in the Classic Towns program in print ads for local newspapers and magazines.

Style Guide

The Classic Towns Style Guide and other campaign elements can be utilized by individual member towns in various forms of communication. Consistent messaging at the local level builds the Classic Towns brand. Approximately 75% of the Classic Towns have downloaded the Style Guide and logos. A majority (61%) of the Classic Towns are utilizing the Classic Towns logos for banners on their homepages and in newsletter stories. Approximately 39% use the logo for street banners.

Individual brochures were also created and distributed to each Classic Town; in addition, individual street post banners, posters, stickers, and web banners were provided. Since 2008, DVRPC has distributed at least 15,000 member town brochures, 7,000 program overview brochures, 2,000 Classic Towns pins, and 1,500 store decals. Member towns can provide these marketing materials to visitors, residents, and businesses to help promote the program.



Outdoor Banner



Poster



Overview Brochure



Web Banner

Media Coverage

News coverage in various media is the best advertising. DVRPC program staff, as well as the Commission’s Public Affairs staff, spends a large part of their time on public relations. DVRPC’s Executive Director, Barry Seymour, has appeared on the Fox 29 News Morning Show, CBS3, and Comcast Newsmakers, specifically promoting the Classic Towns program. The program has also been featured on NBC 10 and KYW news radio.

Over 29 articles referencing Classic Towns have appeared in print between July 2008 and June 2010. Print articles include several features on the entire Classic Towns program in Philadelphia Inquirer, as well as articles in local papers, such as the Daily Local News and Gloucester County Times, and cover individual town’s participation in the program. Over 15 web-only articles have appeared during the same time period.

Website

All advertisements and marketing efforts bring potential homebuyers and other interested people to the Classic Towns website. It has was created to introduce these wonderful communities and to ask web visitors to “take action” by learning more about individual member towns, by visiting a member town, by supporting a downtown business, or by choosing to relocate to a member town.

To help promote community events and make it easier for web visitors to visit a member town, an event calendar was added to the website in 2010. The event calendar provides Classic Towns with a chance to show potential visitors the type of community events that are ongoing. DVRPC staff has received mixed feedback about the calendar. Approximately 44% of the Classic Towns utilize the calendar feature on the website.

DVRPC checks and analyzes website activity on a monthly basis. The Classic Towns program targets all demographic groups, from first-time homebuyers to empty nesters. However, market research has revealed that nearly all demographic groups, regardless of age, race and socio-economic status, conduct online research before contacting a realtor. Therefore, Classic Towns advertisements are strategically placed, and geographically targeted to the New York Metro area, central Pennsylvania, and an expanded Greater Philadelphia metro area. Since the launch of the program in 2008, the Classic Towns website traffic continues to grow. Averaging just over 37,000 visitors per quarter, over 50% of the traffic to the website is clicking through a referral site or online ad. Another 26% access the site by typing the address directly into the browser. This signifies that the website is developing brand recognition. Even more exciting is that 82% of classictowns.org visitors are unique (new visitors)! To put this in perspective, only 32% of visitors to DVRPC’s website are unique.

Visitors to classictowns.org are exploring at least five to six pages on the website, while average visitors on many sites view only two pages. In addition, visitors to classictowns.org spend almost three minutes searching the website, compared to fewer than two minutes on dvrpc.org. Since the launch of the Classic Towns website in July 2008, the time visitors spend on the website varies dramatically depending on recent media coverage. In October 2009, after a special event welcoming new Classic Towns to the program, and after considerable media coverage, the average visitor’s time on the website increased to over 5 minutes.



Classic Towns Website

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