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Promoting **CIVIC DESIGN EXCELLENCE** *IN PHILADELPHIA*

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The City's investment in the Avenue of the Arts and the Kimmel Center (left) attracted additional private investment like the Symphony House (far left). The University of Pennsylvania's investment in its neighborhood attracted new, private development like the Domus apartment complex with ground-level retail (right).

Executive Summary

Philadelphia's civic design is the result of hundreds of years, layers-upon-layers of planning and development decisions. The places we build, the urban experiences we shape for Philadelphia's residents, employees, and visitors impact our quality of life every moment. Civic design is less about the skyline, and more about our neighborhoods, homes, streets, sidewalks, and businesses. It is about how we travel, what we see, where we go, and how we live. Civic design determines what kind of place Philadelphia is, and what kind of place we want it to be.

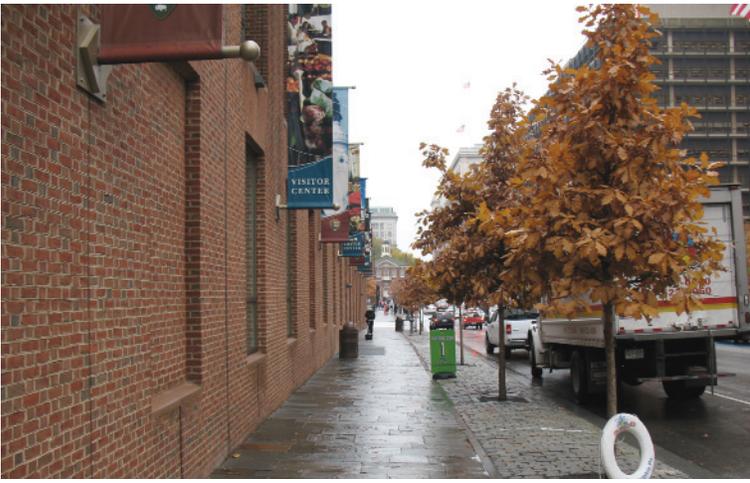
Great cities have great civic design. Cities with a strong design culture are famous for their well-built and livable neighborhoods and their extraordinary public spaces. Civic design excellence not only creates a stronger city for its own residents, but is critical for a city's development and business climate, tourism, and international reputation.

Just as Chicago's recent investment in Millennium Park has brought further attention and investment to that city, the City of Philadelphia's investment in the Avenue of the Arts or the University of Pennsylvania's investment in their community has created an attractive environment that has leveraged far more investment.

It is critical for the City to now enact policies and programs that encourage strong civic design in every neighborhood. Improving civic design can impact many factors of a community, such as safety, attracting new residents and businesses, and changing perceptions.

Civic design includes the impact of architecture and planning, development and zoning, public art, transportation planning, historic preservation, and sustainability. Civic design excellence requires an attitude, a culture, an understanding, and a priority placed on the relationship between people and their built environment. It requires education and commitment shared by the public, municipal government, foundations, civic groups, and the development community. It comes through a realization that great cities foster great design — that art, architecture, planning, transportation, and an awareness of civic space are critical for quality of life and a world-class international image. This is the promise for Philadelphia's future.

Philadelphia, a historic leader in civic design, has recently emerged from a period of decline to enjoy the beginnings of a new urban renaissance. The city has seen a building boom, new national interest, the revitalization of many communities, and the formation of numerous civic and nonprofit groups



There are a host of examples of new development that fails to contribute to a positive public realm, such as buildings that turn a blank wall to the street (left) and numerous townhouse developments with garage entrances cutting up the sidewalk (right).

focusing on the future of our communities and the city at-large. This is an exciting and promising time for Philadelphia; with a new mayoral administration coming in January, the city is also at a turning point.

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As attention has shifted to how the city is growing, many Philadelphians do not always like what they see. While some new development is very good, other projects highlight a lack of regulations and coordination, attention to detail, and neighborhood needs. Institutional and systemic flaws have enabled new buildings that do not value the public realm, create connectivity with their surroundings, honor the pedestrian, or contribute to a cohesive and livable city.

A multitude of departments, organizations, and individuals make decisions that impact civic design.

These range from the Mayor to residents' associations, from small nonprofits to strong civic groups and service districts, from SEPTA and the School District, to the Historical Commission and the Streets Department.

Some of these entities have a strong understanding and focus on the value of design. There are some policies and working relationships that function well, such as when developers voluntarily approach community organizations and the City Planning

Commission about improving the quality of their project. Some civic groups have worked closely with City departments to realize strong design elements — like the addition of pedestrian lighting in Center City.

However, there are other policies and interactions that stand in the way of quality development, community input, and good design. These include flaws in the Zoning Code, lack of design guidelines and design review, and department policies that may actually discourage good design. There are also too few venues for community input, a permitting process that favors informal deal making, a lack of coordinated community investment, and numerous agencies that build projects without oversight or coordination.

As a result, public and private projects emerge with inconsistent attention to design. Projects can be constructed without ever consulting the City Planning Commission. Developers can get projects of sub-par design approved and built. Neighborhoods are left on their own to raise funds and support for planning and local investment.

It is time for Philadelphia to once again look positively toward the future. It is time to invest in a strong design focus to give every neighborhood the opportunity to grow.



Civic design determines what kind of place Philadelphia is, and what kind of place we want it to be. It impacts the city on a variety of levels, from the shape of the skyline and the architecture of new buildings like the Comcast Center (left), to the cleanliness of Philadelphia's streets and sidewalks (right).

It is the City's job to ensure that design is part of its regulations and the development review process, and that the regulations and resources exist to promote good design citywide. Other cities have set strong precedent for how this can be done. A value on design begins with the Mayor, but must also be embraced by City Council, business and civic leadership.

Achieving quality civic design requires more than just new legislation. Not all of the development taking place is private. Much of it is built by the public sector. The City needs to set an example through its own investments that will establish high standards for private construction. The City must make good civic design the core of civic pride, starting with elements as small as litter control and ending with the skyline.

It is also critical to educate City leadership and the public about civic design issues. Cities that can boast civic design excellence have developed a leadership and populace well informed in planning and design issues. Philadelphia needs to think about design on a citywide basis, and empower all communities, not just those with means.

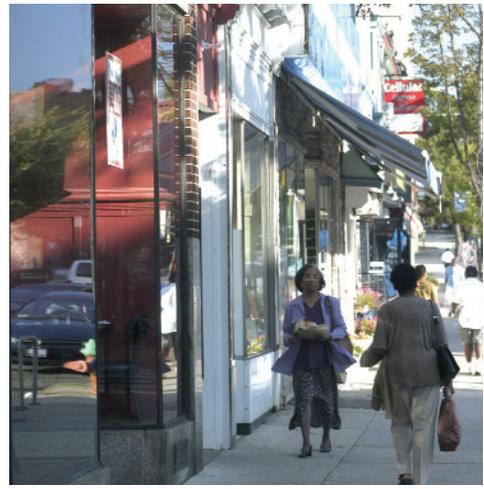
With the promise of the coming new mayoral administration and the successes and opportunities

of Philadelphia's recent urban renaissance, the time is right for the city to forge a new direction. If Philadelphia wants to capitalize on its potential, attract new economic development, and improve the livability of its communities for all of its residents, then the City must commit to change. Philadelphia needs a culture shift, to value civic design in all of its departments and initiatives.

This report focuses on some big ideas for promoting civic design excellence:

Design Review: Philadelphia's Art Commission performs design review for publicly funded structures, but Philadelphia does not have design review for most private development. Design review of private development is utilized in cities across the U.S., including Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Nashville, Pittsburgh, Portland, and Seattle.

Design Guidelines: Design guidelines are published, often pictorial resources that allow cities and neighborhood groups to communicate to developers, stakeholders, homeowners, and businesses a set of values for positive growth and development. Design guidelines have been adopted in places like Austin, Pittsburgh, Seattle, and Tampa.



Civic design is important in a variety of settings, from the monumental Benjamin Franklin Parkway (left) to the city's residential and shopping streets, such as Germantown Avenue in Mt. Airy (right). (Right image: Mt. Airy USA)

Design Education and Advocacy: Philadelphia has a number of design-based organizations; however, none fulfills the role of a well-funded, independent resource that can engage in widespread advocacy and public education to promote a strong design culture for the city. Such education and advocacy organizations exist in Chattanooga, Chicago, New York, Nashville, Pittsburgh, and San Francisco.

Change must start from the Mayor's Office. This change must be reflected by City Council and by department and agency heads. Change must also come from civic groups, nonprofits, advocacy organizations, foundations, and from a public that understands the essential elements of civic design and why it matters. There are a number of important policy changes that Philadelphia could consider to improve its civic design. Here are a few critical first steps:

1. Articulate a Vision from the Top

- The mayor and city council must take the lead in establishing civic design as a citywide priority.
- The mayor should make it clear that design matters in all policy areas, and should put his weight behind key civic projects.
- The mayor should benchmark Philadelphia's

programs and investments that impact civic design against other major cities.

2. Make Qualified Appointments

- The mayor should appoint individuals to all boards and commissions who understand and value civic design, and appreciate how design impacts economic development and quality of life.
- The mayor should develop an internal education program, like a local Mayor's Institute on City Design for himself, department heads, and members of City Council, to ensure an understanding of civic design principles and policy.

3. Develop Partnerships and Engage the Civic Sector

- The mayor should develop an advisory roundtable comprised of civic and community leaders to build a linkage between the planning and development efforts of Philadelphia's active civic groups and those of the public sector.
- The City should create a structure and incentives for local groups to engage in a public process to plan for their community's future.
- The City should support the creation of a resource center to encourage the work of civic and nonprofit organizations.



Civic design encompasses everything from the quality of our sidewalks and streetfronts (left) to public art, parks, and fountains, like the one on East Passyunk (right).

4. Lead the Change from the Mayor's Office

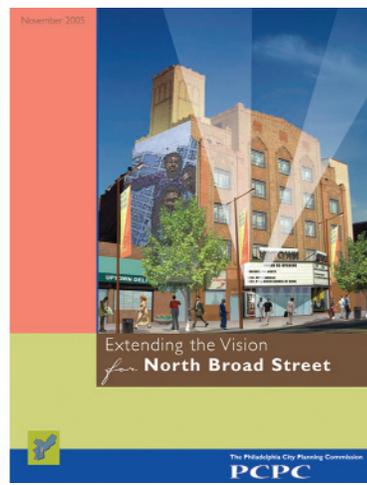
- The Mayor should appoint a Development Coordinator or Deputy Mayor for Planning and Development to facilitate quality projects.
- The Mayor should select departmental representatives to participate in a regular development roundtable.
- The Mayor should create a new Department of Transportation, Office of Sustainability, and restore the Office of Arts and Culture.
- The Mayor should better fund existing departments and agencies that impact design and the public realm (e.g., the Streets Department and Historical Commission).

- The Mayor should direct the City Planning Commission to create a new Comprehensive Plan for the City.
- The City should renew its commitment to rewriting the Zoning Code, with classifications responsive to Philadelphia's changing landscape, incorporating form-based elements.
- The Mayor should support a community planning process to update the city's zoning map.

5. Empower the City Planning Commission & Reaffirm Zoning Reform

- The Mayor should stand behind the City Planning Commission and renew its authority to undertake major planning efforts.
- The Mayor should work to connect planning efforts with sound economic analysis and funding sources.

This report, funded by the William Penn Foundation, and developed by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, looks at the state of civic design in Philadelphia in 2007 and makes recommendations as to how the City can strengthen its own functions to improve the quality of civic design that defines our urban landscape. The need for this report comes not from failure, but from success. As a result of Philadelphia's recent urban renaissance and building boom, we are now faced with rapid development and revitalization, unprecedented in recent history.



The work of numerous organizations and initiatives informed this report. They include (left to right) the BIA's report on the development review process, the reports and studies of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, and the Reform Agenda of the Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia.

A Note on Methodology

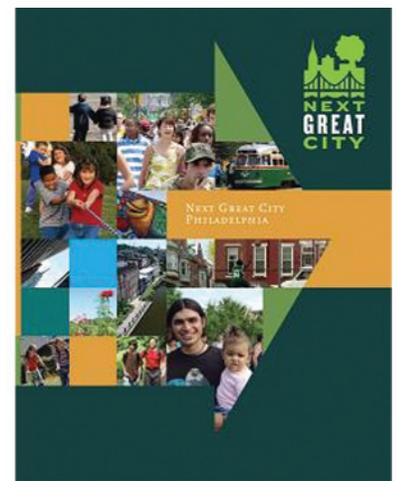
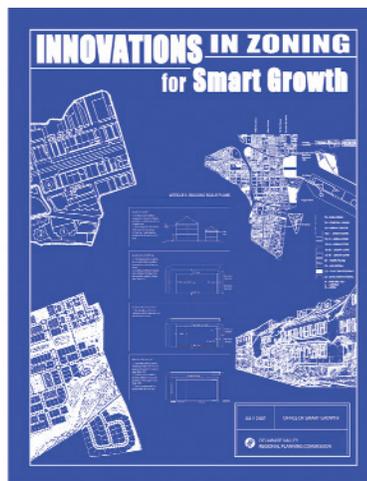
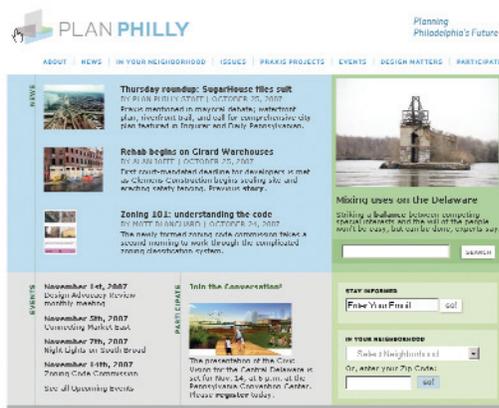
This report is based on months of research regarding the functions, processes, and stakeholders involved in design, planning, and development in Philadelphia, as well as best practices and precedent in other cities. The research drew heavily from personal interviews. Dozens of individuals from other cities were interviewed, including governmental contacts, design experts, and directors of design nonprofits and civic design centers.

All of the interviewees in Philadelphia have been kept anonymous in order to protect individuals whose views may be controversial. Philadelphia interviews included governmental contacts from various departments, design and development consultants, leaders of design-based nonprofits and community development corporations (CDCs), developers, architects, planners, and funders.

The creators of this report were aware of the existing resources that have been produced related to this topic, and have made every effort to refer to these outside efforts, rather than repeat work that has already been carried out.

Below is a list of some of the existing initiatives that deal with issues of design and development in Philadelphia:

- **Next Great City:** An action agenda for the next mayor, backed by a diverse coalition of stakeholders. The report recommends ten simple policies to enhance environmental quality, strengthen neighborhoods and increase economic competitiveness. The project is staffed by PennFuture, an environmental advocacy organization, and funded by the William Penn Foundation. It is available online at www.nextgreatcity.com
- **If We Fix It They Will Come:** A report produced by the Building Industry Association of Philadelphia. This report focuses on the flaws in the city's development permitting process, and lays out a substantive list of reforms that could be made by the City to improve the process. It is available online at www.biaofphiladelphia.com/pdf/FinalReportFinal9_241.pdf
- **Reform Agenda:** This brief policy paper, published by the Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia lays out several broad policy initiatives for improving the quality of design in Philadelphia. It is available online at <http://designadvocacy.org/advocacy/projects.asp>
- **Zoning Code Commission:** In the May 2007 primary election, voters approved a ballot



This page left to right are Planphilly.com; one of DVRPC's recent studies, "Innovations in Zoning for Smart Growth;" and the Next Great City's report.

question creating a Zoning Code Commission to modernize Philadelphia's Zoning Code. The Commission's efforts are currently underway.

- Central Delaware Waterfront Planning and Planphilly.com:** In October, 2006 the Mayor signed an executive order inviting Penn Praxis to lead a public planning process for the Delaware Waterfront. Planphilly.com is a website funded by the William Penn Foundation as a portal for city planning issues and news. It is also managed by Penn Praxis and is currently heavily focused on the waterfront planning.
- DVRPC Reports and Studies:** DVRPC has produced a set of toolkits for municipal governments on a number of smart planning approaches. The agency has looked closely at the casinos issue and released recommendations in its Impacts of Gaming study. DVRPC has studied the issue of transit-oriented development in several reports and inventories. Additionally, DVRPC studies new approaches to land-use regulation, such as form-based codes and hybrid codes in its report "Innovations in Zoning for Smart Growth."
- Philadelphia City Planning Commission Reports and Studies:** PCPC has completed several important publications recently that are relevant for this study. These include streetscape plans, like those for Lancaster Avenue and Avenue of the Arts North; the

Center City Parking Policy Statement; Design Guidelines for Commercial Façade Improvements and Neighborhood Design Guidelines.

- GreenPlan Philadelphia:** This City initiative is a community-based planning process, in progress, to create a citywide open space plan for Philadelphia, serving as one component of a comprehensive plan for the City. The process is characterized by strong collaboration among City departments, other government agencies, and private partners, as a model for future planning efforts.

This report acknowledges that it cannot be comprehensive, as this topic is extensive and ever-changing. For these reasons, this publication is to be viewed as a working resource towards future best-practices studies and implementation approaches to help take Philadelphia in a positive direction.



A multitude of elements comprise civic design and affect the way people experience the city. The public art on some SEPTA shelters downtown (left) is an example. Exciting storefronts like the colorful Johnny Mananas in East Falls (right) give neighborhoods their distinctive character.

Study Advisory Committee

The recommendations in this report were developed with the help of a study advisory committee. Without these important voices in planning, design, development, and civic leadership, this report would not have been possible. The authors, however, bear final responsibility for the findings and recommendations of this report, which may not reflect the views of all committee members.

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Civic design encompasses everything from new construction and the way that buildings can enliven the street (left) to the quality of materials and especially the preservation of cherished historic resources (right).

List of Acronyms

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act	DCED	Pennsylvania Department of Community and Economic Development
AIA	American Institute of Architects	PCDC	Philadelphia Commercial Development Corporation
BCA	Building Contractors Association	PCPC	Philadelphia City Planning Commission
BIA	Building Industry Association	PennDOT	Pennsylvania Department of Transportation
BID	Business Improvement District	PHA	Philadelphia Housing Authority
BOMA	Building Owners and Managers Association	PHDC	Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation
CCD	Center City District	PHFA	Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency
CCRA	Center City Residents' Association	PIDC	Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation
CDC	Community Development Corporation	PMBC	Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee
DAG	Design Advocacy Group	RDA	Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority
DVRPC	Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission	SEPTA	Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority
FAR	Floor-Area Ratio	TRF	The Reinvestment Fund
GPTMC	Greater Philadelphia Tourism Marketing Corporation	TRID	Transit Revitalization Investment District
LEED	Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design	UCD	University City District
L&I	Department of Licenses and Inspections	ULI	Urban Land Institute
LISC	Local Initiatives Support Corporation	ZBA	Zoning Board of Adjustment
NID	Neighborhood Improvement District		
NTI	Neighborhood Transformation Initiative		
OHCD	Office of Housing and Community Development		
OHNP	Office of Housing and Neighborhood Preservation		
OCD	Old City District		



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A TURNING POINT FOR PHILADELPHIA



Civic design includes everything from the character of our communities to the shape of the skyline, to the quality of our public art.

What Is Civic Design Excellence?

Every day residents across Philadelphia meet in their homes, schools, and community centers to discuss how they can improve their neighborhoods. Every day developers come forward with new plans, make transactions and apply for permits. Every day hundreds of thousands of people walk and drive the streets of Philadelphia, frequent its businesses, ride transit, sit in its parks, visit its tourist sites, and experience the impacts of hundreds of years, layers upon layers of civic design.

The decisions we make, the places we build, the urban experience we shape for Philadelphia's residents, employees, and visitors are the impact of civic design. It defines the range of elements that we may not even be aware of, but that impact our quality of life every moment. Civic design is less about the skyline, and more about our neighborhoods, our homes, streets, sidewalks, and businesses. It is about how we travel, what we see, where we go, and how we live. Civic design determines what kind of place Philadelphia is, and what kind of place we want it to be.

This is why we must strive for civic design excellence. Great cities have great civic design. There is no way around it. The greatest cities are famous for their

design culture — a pervasive understanding of the benefits of good design, and a value on design in all decisions that impact the city and its quality of life. Cities with a strong design culture are famous for their well-built and livable neighborhoods and their extraordinary public spaces. Increasingly civic design excellence not only creates a stronger city for its own residents, but is critical for a city's development and business climate, tourism, and international reputation.

Civic design includes the impact of architecture and planning, development and zoning, public art, transportation planning, historic preservation, and sustainability. In order to achieve civic design excellence, we need to look at who impacts the face of our city, and how. Who are the stakeholders and decision makers and how do they interact to shape the environment in which we live? We need to look at what is happening in other cities, and how can we pay for it all. Civic design is not just about aesthetics, but about process, implementation, values and results.

The bottom line is that civic design excellence is an attitude, a culture, an understanding, and a priority placed on the relationship between people and their built environment. It requires education and commitment shared by the public, municipal



Chicago's Millennium Park is an example of a City making a large public investment to attract local economic development, enhance its national image, and improve the quality of life for its residents. (Image: City of Chicago)

government, foundations and grant makers, and the development community. It comes through a belief and realization that great cities foster great design — that art, architecture, planning, transportation, and an awareness of civic space are critical for quality of life and a world-class international image. This is the promise for Philadelphia's future.

An Economic Development Generator

Chicago recently spent and leveraged over \$475 million to create a beautifully designed park and entertainment venue in Millennium Park, with structures and public art by some of the nation's top architects and artists. Why did the city invest so much money into quality design for its citizens? The answer came from Mayor Richard M. Daley: "In developing this project, the City and the private sector came together to present a defining vision... Chicago is determined not to stand still, and opens the 21st century with this visionary destination for the use and pleasure of Chicagoans and visitors from around the country and around the world."

Of course, Chicago is not alone. Cities across the nation are investing in their public buildings, spaces, and neighborhoods in order to create a more robust urban economy, attract visitors and bolster their

tourism economy, and build a stronger city for their residents, businesses, and visitors. This concept is no stranger to Philadelphia where the City and surrounding institutions invested close to \$1 billion to construct and market the Avenue of the Arts. The concept re-enlivened South Broad Street not just for arts institutions but for restaurants and other businesses. Recent new, private residential and commercial development at Symphony House and elsewhere along the Avenue is a direct result of this public investment. Philadelphia invested in outstanding design for the long-term economic development of a major destination.

The University of Pennsylvania is another local example of an institution investing millions into urban design. The goal was to bolster the local housing and business climate around the university. Penn's investments were diverse — housing, commercial, streetscaping, sidewalks — but the impact was singular in its transformation of the University City neighborhoods into safe, attractive, and desirable communities and commercial districts.

The Penn example shows how investing in design is not just about marketing a particular destination, but how it can impact many factors of a community. Penn's investments improved local safety, brought



New development like the row of suburban-style “big box” stores in South Philadelphia along Columbus Boulevard (left) are inappropriate for an urban context. Likewise other smaller “strip mall”-style developments (right) are equally out of place in dense, urban contexts.

new residents and businesses, and completely changed the perception of a part of the city. It is critical for the City to extend this kind of thinking to every corner by enacting policies and programs that encourage strong civic design.

How can we expect to have outstanding schools when students see blighted and unattractive neighborhoods outside the school doors? How can we expect to attract businesses to local corridors when their streets are bland and rundown? How can we hope to attract new residents and developers to transitional parts of the city when the neighborhoods look shoddy and un-cared for?

Civic design is about changing the look of our environment to impact the market, perception, development potential, and quality of life in all of our communities. It is about the City providing the capital investment through its programs and processes to ensure that all communities have access to the tools to move their neighborhoods forward as exemplars of strong civic design. Only in this way will we truly improve the long-term housing market, business climate, educational environment, and safety of our communities.

New Challenges

Philadelphia, a historic leader in civic design, has recently emerged from a period of decline to enjoy the beginnings of a new urban renaissance. The city has seen a building boom, new national interest, the revitalization of many communities, and the formation of numerous civic and nonprofit groups focusing on the future of our communities and the city at-large. This is an exciting and promising time for Philadelphia, but we are also at a turning point.

With new development and growth, attention has again begun to shift to how we are growing, and Philadelphians do not always like what they see. With the growth, change, and potential of our city’s recent renaissance, a number of issues relating to Philadelphia’s planning and design have come to the forefront of public discourse.

A look at the new development that has sprouted up in recent years shows the physical results of institutional and systemic flaws, and a lack of value on civic design. Philadelphia’s new development simply does not live up to a high standard of design. Many new buildings do not value the public realm, create connectivity with their surroundings, honor the pedestrian, or contribute to a cohesive and livable city. Many buildings that are proposed or built



New development across the city is sometimes out of place, and inappropriate for its context. These new homes in South Philadelphia above have little relation to the older homes around them, in terms of height, massing, window placement, and garage entrances.

do not fit with their neighborhoods and fail to make a positive contribution to the city at-large.

Some examples of a lack of design value and awareness include:

- Condos and publicly funded buildings built with ground-floor parking garages and blank walls facing the sidewalk.
- There is limited design regulation of major new projects like the two proposed casinos.
- New row homes have front garages, cutting up the sidewalk for pedestrians.
- Surface parking lots occupy prime real estate in Center City, and detract from the pedestrian environment throughout Philadelphia.
- The Delaware waterfront has become cluttered with suburban-style, big-box stores, and auto-centric activity.
- Developers are building projects that adhere to the zoning code but are still inappropriate for their context.
- Little effort has been made to orient new development to existing transit and other infrastructure. In some instances, non-transit-oriented development has been permitted adjacent to transit stations.

- The city is littered with vacant lots and abandoned homes, held by speculators, without penalty for their blighted condition or incentive for their reuse.
- There is insufficient public planning and expenditure to accommodate the growth and revitalization of neighborhoods.
- Some major downtown civic spaces are poorly planned and designed, and therefore little used. Efforts to make them more lively have been met with resistance from the City.

The blame cannot be put solely or even primarily on developers. Builders clearly have a range of experience and understanding of how to do business in a major city. However, ultimately it is the City's job to ensure that design is part of its regulations and the development review process. Other cities have set strong precedent for how this can be done. The value on design must come from the mayor, City Council and other leadership.

Achieving quality design and improving the public realm require more than just new legislation. Not all development taking place is private. Much of it is built by the public sector (capital projects, maintenance projects), as the result of public-private partnerships, or implemented through quasi-public agencies. The City needs to set an example through





A parking lot, like the one on the left in Chinatown, can destroy the continuity of a block, and create a void in a community. Non-transit-supportive uses, like the suburban-style supermarket by the 46th Street stop on the Market-Frankford Line, shown at right, ruin the potential afforded by transit stops, and create unattractive environments.

its public investments that will establish high standards for private construction. The City must make good civic design the core of civic pride, starting with elements as small as litter control and ending with the skyline.

administration that will bring fresh leadership and an opportunity to address a new set of priorities.

16

Civic design is also essential to address the public's values and understanding of community planning and design. An overall focus on design and policies that value design must be linked with the education of the public, City leadership, and the private sector as to what constitutes good design. Cities that can boast civic design excellence have developed a leadership and populace well informed and educated in planning and design issues. We need to think about design on a citywide basis, and empower all communities, not just those with means.

Philadelphia has a long way to go before the City truly supports strong planning and design excellence. The public also has a long way to go to develop a base of knowledge of design issues that will allow residents to effectively lobby for design-based goals. This study looks at the elements that comprise design culture, investigates who the stakeholders are who impact design in Philadelphia, and makes recommendations for the City to consider. This study is of particular significance because of the upcoming new mayoral

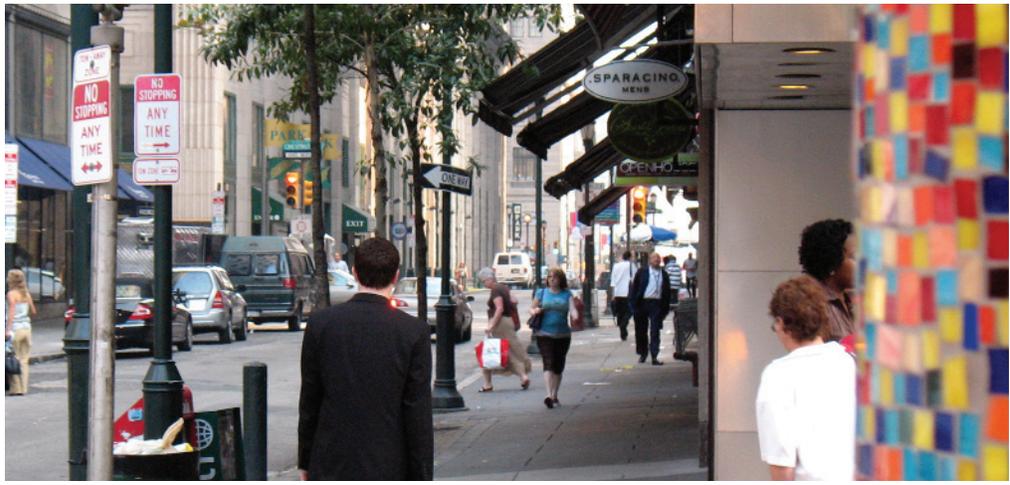




2

THE ELEMENTS OF CIVIC DESIGN





An important element of strong civic design is a focus on the public realm. Great cities have exciting and activated streets, sidewalks, and plazas. The images above show 13th Street in Center City, recently redeveloped as Midtown Village, with an uninterrupted row of shops, and restaurants, enlivened with interesting facades and signage, creating an exciting pedestrian experience.

Civic Design Basics

Design is highly subjective; something that one person loves, another may hate. That said, there are some basic guidelines for what works in a city and what does not. Many of these concepts have also been shown to increase the potential for economic development, improve local safety, raise the quality of life, increase residential and retail market values, and positively impact a neighborhood's and city's image.

There is no template for good design — merely principles and values. This is the wonderful feature of city living, that each neighborhood has its own identity, its own ideals, and its own direction for the future. This is also where public education comes into play, and where it is critical to develop a culture that values good design. It is up to every member of our city to insist on design excellence, from the mayor down. Only in this way will we truly develop public buy-in, and achieve civic design excellence in every decision, on a citywide level.

Value the Public Realm

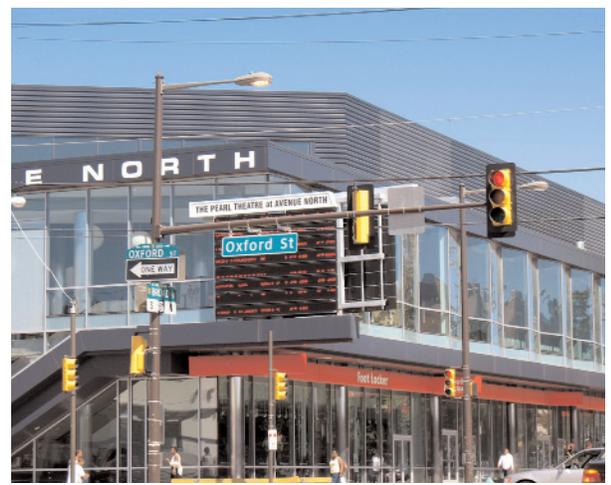
The core principal of building great spaces is understanding how people use them. The most important element of civic design is to look at how

decisions affect the public realm — the space that is open to all — including sidewalks, streets, parks, plazas, concourses, courtyards, trails, bridges, and outdoor cafes. Does a building turn a blank wall to the street, or does it have things to do along the sidewalk creating a favorable pedestrian experience? How wide is the sidewalk, and are there amenities like pedestrian-scale lighting, benches, and street trees? Are public spaces attractive and well-maintained? Do stores have inviting facades with awnings and interesting shop windows? Are public spaces really public, and are they easily accessible? These are just a few of the questions that indicate the quality of the public realm. A variety of decisions impact the public realm in ways we may not even realize. These include the design of buildings, the placement of parking, regulations governing property ownership, and the installation of public utilities.

Balance the Big Picture and the Community Level

Planning happens on multiple levels: comprehensive planning, district planning, corridor planning and neighborhood planning. It is important to bring the stakeholders to the table and to make plans that reflect local values and future development trends. Neighborhood planning is an opportunity for local





Mixed-use development is a critical element for creating great urban places. Examples of new mixed-use developments include The Hub at Chestnut, in University City, by Teres Holdings (left), and Avenue North near Temple University, by Tower Investments (right). Both projects combine apartments and ground-level retail. Avenue North also contains a multiplex movie theater.

groups and individuals to voice their vision of the place where they live. Neighborhood planning must be connected to bigger picture comprehensive planning, and given teeth through a direct connection with implementation, rezoning, and major capital investments.

Look at the Sky and the Street

A major misunderstanding of civic design is that it is all about the skyline. A city's skyline and the way buildings look from their approach is very important, especially to the city's international image. However, design affects many more people from a daily quality of life perspective in the way that it impacts the ground level. A building may look wonderful from the sky, but at the ground has a parking garage entrance cutting up the sidewalk, blank walls facing the street, and no connectivity to the other uses, structures and places around it. This building does not succeed from the ground, and largely fails to promote civic design excellence.

Respect the Context and Build Continuity

Developers are not expected to be planners; it is the job of the City, to insist that new construction respond to its context. Development in the city is

about creating a structure that should be a seamless part of hundreds of years and layers of development that together create a destination or neighborhood. New buildings should be "sympathetic," acknowledging the look and feel of their surroundings, while making their own statement. Buildings should also fit in and contribute to the "continuity" of what is around them. As we walk along a city sidewalk, each shop, home, and park keeps us interested and engaged (even more so if they are well designed, themselves). However, poorly designed buildings, blank walls, surface parking lots, vacant and overgrown parcels, and blighted and abandoned homes are examples of elements that break up the continuity and hurt the public realm.

Encourage Mixed-Use

Urban areas are lively places because of their dynamic mix of land uses — residential, live-work housing, retail, and office space. Parks should encourage both passive and active recreation. The best spaces are ones with a variety of uses, a wide spectrum of people who use the spaces, and a multiplicity of urban excitement.





Historic preservation and adaptive reuse are important for retaining Philadelphia's cherished character. The Please Touch Museum is currently renovating Memorial Hall, in Fairmount Park, as its new home (left). In East Falls, Sherman Properties restored historic mill buildings into Sherman Mills, a mixed-use community with apartments, commercial spaces, and artist studios (right).

Design for the Pedestrian

Philadelphia is a famously walkable city, and its small streets and public spaces have been hailed by numerous individuals and sources. In planning and design, the pedestrian's needs must top the list. There must be ample sidewalks, ground-floor retail, interesting spaces, parks and plazas. Parking should be hidden underground or with access points along secondary streets and alleys. Townhouses should not be permitted to have front garages. Buildings should be built up to the street wall, not set back with parking lots in front. Other cities have insisted that even "big box" stores and suburban-type uses respect the street wall — forcing retailers to design an urban model for their development, which many have done. In planning streets, bridges, plazas, highway access, and other features, priority should be given to calming traffic and creating highly visible and convenient paths and amenities for pedestrians.

Preserve Our Past

Philadelphia has a deep and cherished history that surrounds us with old buildings, streets, narrow roadways, and fragments of our heritage. Our history is critical to our neighborhoods' identities, our public image, and our understanding of who we are. It is

necessary to, whenever possible, value preservation over demolition and new construction. Development should respect and respond to the materials, dimensions, and presence of historic structures. Further, respecting history is not just about token gestures, like cladding a modern building in brick or naming it after some aspect of the past. It is about understanding that what we build today can have a direct link with the past. In addition to buildings, preservation also focuses on sites, landmarks, roadways, historic businesses, and overall character.

Adaptively Reuse Spaces

Oftentimes it is difficult to see the potential of a space. Other cities have taken former industrial sites and turned them into hip, vibrant neighborhoods. Other cities have redesigned strip malls into new urban centers, and filled in parking lots with transit-oriented development. An important part of civic design excellence is thinking about how to transform a space into something new and innovative. This type of transformation is done by rezoning and building a new type of development pattern.

Build a Sense of Place

Much of our impression of the public realm comes from its sense of place. What kind of place are you





Certain elements like this banner in Old City (left) and this gateway park in Queen Village (right) give character and identity to their surrounding community. Together, a series of elements can make a location attractive, welcoming, and can build a sense of place.

passing through? Does it seem to have character, identity, and cohesion? When we look at existing spaces or think about recreating our old spaces and building new ones, it is important to look at the elements that give a place character. It must be connected to other areas around it. It must have a variety of uses and destinations. It should be safe and inviting. These types of elements can be impacted by the form of buildings, the pedestrian experience, access by different modes of travel, wayfinding signage, colors and textures, marketing and branding, and elements used to define a space such as street furniture, pedestrian lighting, banners, crosswalks, sidewalks, and awnings. Equally important to building a strong public realm is providing the resources to maintain it.

Connect With Other Systems

The city is a complicated space where different systems meet – transit, pedestrian paths, roadways, highways, bridges, bicycle routes, concourses, and local amenities. It is important for good design to reflect an understanding of these systems and to make them work together wherever possible. Roadways should be multi-modal. New buildings should connect to below-ground concourses, transit, and trail systems. Public spaces and structures should not turn a blank face to a major system path,

rather embrace it and build connectivity. Philadelphia has an extensive (if under-funded) transit system. Construction in Philadelphia must connect with transit if possible, and encourage its usage. Transit-oriented development is integral to this kind of connectivity, building density and new uses around transit stops. Bicycling is another important network that should be acknowledged and accommodated through public and private development by including bike lanes and off-street bicycle networks where possible. On streets where it is necessary to share the road, the roadways should be clearly marked to alert drivers. The City and developers should also focus on the needs of bicyclists by installing bicycle racks and/or bicycle parking structures in prominent locations.

Focus on the Details

Just as important as the broad thinking of comprehensive planning, is the focused attention on the details – materials, plantings, colors, ornament, public art, amenities, pocket parks. We should strive to create spaces with quality materials in all of our neighborhoods. When we build, we should focus on the details – the elements that, together, create a diverse and interesting public realm. Each developer, architect, and City department that builds should strive to do more than the bare minimum,





One Crescent Drive in the Navy Yard (left), developed by Liberty Property Trust and designed by Robert A.M. Stern Architects, received a LEED Platinum rating. The School of the Future (right) designed by the Prisco Group has numerous energy-saving components, including a “green roof,” rainwater collection, and efficient lighting control.

creating wonderful, quirky, and unexpected surprises that make the city vibrant. Public art is an especially important element of the urban environment. Art in public places, along sidewalks, trails, and on bridges brings a sense of creativity, identity, and excitement to the public realm. Think of the great public spaces in Philadelphia, like Kelly Drive and Rittenhouse Square, where public art is a critical element to why they work so effectively.

the profile, image, and potential of neighborhoods and the city as a whole. Cities and developers that dare to think big, that invest in new and exciting types of buildings and spaces are often those that are lauded for their results. Design excellence requires not just plans and drawings, but real results that impact the public realm. Design excellence, innovation, and great places require new ways of thinking about how to connect planning and implementation, and new funding sources. Cities that think outside the box, that focus on implementation and creativity to achieve greater results will be the exemplars of civic design excellence.

Embrace Sustainability

Cities across the globe have been focusing more heavily on sustainability, alternative energy, green building, and a lower consumption of resources. Incorporating sustainability not only lowers costs in the long-term and preserves our resources, but it also impacts design in many ways. Sustainable design is clearly reflected in the building and construction choices we make. It impacts how we balance modes of transportation, and how buildings relate to a community. Sustainability is an important aspect for civic design excellence, defining the future of our city’s identity and urban context.

Imagine the Possibilities

Civic design excellence is about imagination. It is about taking risks to create great spaces that boost





3

**HOW BUSINESS
AS USUAL IMPACTS
CIVIC DESIGN**





The Zoning Board of Adjustment is an example of a “structurer,” as a significant component of the current development review process.

Who Affects Design in Philadelphia?

This section begins to focus on the challenges and opportunities for Philadelphia, based on the way the City addresses (or fails to address) the elements of civic design. Throughout this report, it is clear that a focus on design comes from the top. However, in Philadelphia there are multiple actors and organizations that affect civic design and the public realm in a variety of complicated ways. This section will identify the stakeholders involved in affecting design, then present case studies that show the players in action, pointing out the relationships and interactions that impact civic design.

Philadelphia’s realm of stakeholders is broad. The current roles and relationships between stakeholders are not necessarily ideal, but it is important to describe the status quo to understand its strengths as well as its shortcomings. There are four types of major stakeholders: 1) Structurers, 2) Implementers, 3) Designers, and 4) Impactors.

These four groups comprise the major actors who both engender and are responsible for advancing design culture and a design agenda. As with all topics that involve governmental entities, corporations, politics, and funding, individual players are also critically important. The way that these

stakeholders interact, and the roles that they currently play, and could potentially play, holds the key to understanding who makes and impacts design decisions in Philadelphia.

Structurers

This group includes public agencies that create policy, structure guidelines, requirements, and process for planning and development. This group includes:

- The mayor and City Council
- City boards and agencies involved in the development process (e.g., L&I, ZBA, Historical Commission, PCPC, Art Commission, Streets Department)
- Quasi-public agencies that develop land and establish their own project review process (PIDC, RDA, PHA)
- State agencies/boards (PennDOT, PA DCED, PHFA, State Gaming Control Board)
- The State General Assembly (through enabling legislation)





University City District (UCD) serves as an “implementer” for its community in West Philadelphia. It engages in clean and green programs, community planning, and in investments to enhance the experience for residents, businesses, and visitors. Above is a rendering created by Kise Straw & Kolodner for UCD, showing strategies for improving 40th and Market Streets. (Image: UCD)

Implementers

These stakeholders actually fund and build capital projects. They have to follow the structure and processes established by other entities, and are greatly influenced by yet other groups. However, in the case of quasi-public agencies, they often work very much in isolation, with their own policies and procedures. This is the group of stakeholders that ultimately needs to support a strong design agenda, in order to have that vision realized on the ground. They include:

- Private developers
- City agencies and departments that build capital projects (e.g., Streets Department, Capital Program Office)
- Other agencies and departments that build capital projects (SEPTA, School District, PennDOT)
- Community development corporations (e.g., Mt. Airy USA, New Kensington CDC) and special service districts (e.g., CCD, UCD, OCD)
- Nonprofit organizations that engage in public realm investments (e.g., Penn’s Landing Corp., Schuylkill River Development Corp.)

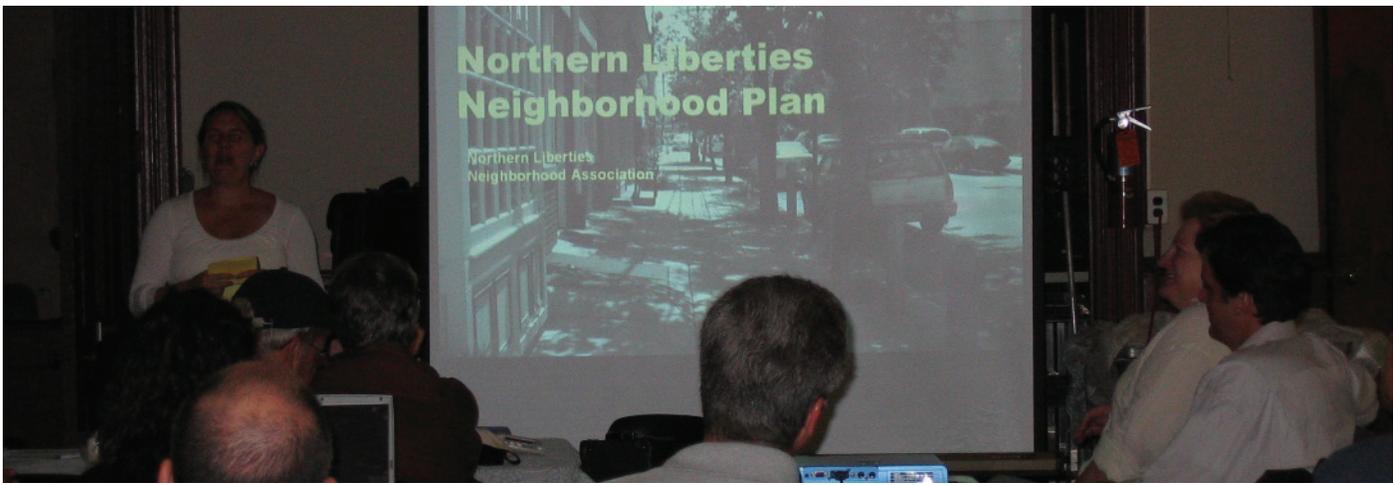
- Quasi-public agencies that develop land and build public realm projects (e.g., PCDC, PHA, PIDC, RDA)
- Major corporations and institutions that develop land and structures (e.g., Comcast, University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia Museum of Art)

Designers

This group is responsible for the planning and design of physical projects that impact the public realm. This category includes groups that may not traditionally be responsible for design, but that have come to make plans and affect actual design decisions. They include:

- Architecture, planning, and engineering firms
- The Philadelphia City Planning Commission
- Agencies and departments that set their own policies for the physical form of projects (e.g., Streets Department, Water Department)
- Boards and commissions that have taken on a design-review role (e.g., ZBA, Historical Commission, RDA’s architecture review committee)





The Northern Liberties Neighbors Association is one of Philadelphia’s most active community organizations. (Image: Northern Liberties Neighbors Association)

- Some civic groups that maintain local plans, and have highly active zoning committees (Center City Residents Association, Northern Liberties Neighbors Association)
- Some CDCs and special service districts
- Nonprofit design organizations (e.g, Community Design Collaborative, Penn Praxis, DAG’s design review capacity)
- The media
- Professional organizations (AIA, ULI, BOMA, BIA, BCA)
- Trade unions (IBEW, Carpenters Union)
- Major community stakeholders and institutions (universities, museums, hospitals, churches)

Impacters

The primary role of these stakeholders is to directly influence implementers, and shape design priorities – through creating ideas, exerting leadership, producing publications, and providing funding. Some organizations can span categories. CDCs, for example, are very powerful in influencing private development in a particular community, while they may also fund and build their own projects. For the most part, however, impacters are influential entities but do not directly build projects. They include:

- Funders (The William Penn Foundation, Pew Charitable Trusts, DVRPC with its grants/funding programs)
- The City (as a funder)
- CDCs and some powerful residents’ associations

- Elected officials (including District Council members)
- Advocacy organizations (DAG, Preservation Alliance, SCRUB)
- Think tanks and policy organizations (Economy League, 10,000 Friends)
- DVRPC, the designated metropolitan planning organization for the nine-county region
- Other regional municipal governments (Camden, Delaware County, Lower Merion Township)

How Do the Stakeholders Interact?

A key to understanding the strengths and shortcomings in Philadelphia’s design culture and process is to study how stakeholders interact in the course of project development. There are some relationships that work very well, such as when



Quasi-public agencies have their own processes for developing capital projects. Sometimes they turn out relatively well like the Frankford Transportation Center, built by SEPTA. However, in many cases these projects do not effectively contribute to their communities or to the city at-large.

developers informally and voluntarily approach community organizations and the City Planning Commission early in the development process about improving the quality of their product. There are some legislated public processes that work well, such as when Historical Commission and Art Commission hearings lead to a better final design.

A host of nonprofit organizations currently play a critical role in planning, advocacy, and education. Center City District, for example, has produced a set of planning documents, focusing on four districts. These functions may fill in a void left by the City, while also exhibiting a need for a more active City Planning Commission. Based on the active role of the civic sector, there also appears to be a need for the City to more effectively partner with these groups to maximize resources and connect initiatives with implementation dollars.

There are other interactions that stand in the way of quality development, community input, and smart design. For example, developers wishing to receive permits for a project that conforms to the Zoning Code may be forced to have their architects create a sub-par design to meet the letter of the code.

The Zoning Board of Adjustment may have the public good in mind, but may also overstep its bounds,

favoring an informal deal-making process. City Council may step in, also with altruistic intent, but instead creating an even more complicated process for developers and the public, and encouraging spot zoning solutions.

Strong community groups may prefer relying on the influence of a City Council member to ensure developer concessions, rather than consulting with the City Planning Commission. Licenses and Inspections (L&I) has a fairly simple process for obtaining a building permit; however, this process falls apart in practice, and the actual (unwritten) process is complex, unpredictable and expensive.

The School District, SEPTA, the Streets Department, Fairmount Park Commission, PHA and other agencies each have their own process for developing capital projects, thus creating inconsistency in benchmarks, standards, policies, and results. Projects paid for with City money or on City land must go before the Art Commission; however, its actual purview and level of enforcement is not consistent. Other quasi-public agencies like PIDC have their own, insular process for development that may or may not contain a level of design review. The Redevelopment Authority has architectural review as part of its development process, however it is not mandatory, and is largely not valued by the





The existing Best Western hotel on the site of the proposed Parkway 22 development. Local residents were initially opposed to a 47-story tower on this site, though the Zoning Code allows it.

leadership of the RDA, giving it minimal impact. Also the Historical Commission has an architecture committee that is advisory to the Commission; however, again this committee's scope is fairly limited in the greater scheme of citywide development.

Case Studies: Where Stakeholder Decisions Affect Design

Several case studies illustrate how the interaction between stakeholders needs to be clarified and strengthened, based on current successes and shortcomings. For stakeholders who wish to influence the design culture in Philadelphia, it is not enough just to reach the implementers, because oftentimes it is the other groups who actually dictate or influence design decisions. Developers, for example may feel pressure to meet with local community groups and to make concessions, in exchange for City buy-in. This relationship may be maintained through political influence of the local District Council member, or through a relationship between the community group and the ZBA, rather than following a predictable and transparent, legislated route.

These case studies focus specifically on where decisions affect design. They do not cover the

complete range of issues involved in stakeholder interactions, but do demonstrate the complexity of some of these interactions.

Parkway 22

Parkway 22 began as “the Barnes Tower,” a 47-story condominium, proposed for the site of the current Best Western Hotel, between 21st and 22nd Streets, bounded by Hamilton and Spring Garden Streets. The developers initially had their architects design the structure to adhere to the Zoning Code, and obtained an over-the-counter (by-right) permit from L&I. The controversy began because it is rare in Philadelphia today for projects of this scale to be able to adhere to the Zoning Code. As such, most major projects require a variance hearing at the ZBA. Residents have become accustomed to having this venue for voicing public opinion of a project, and so Spring Garden residents were livid when they learned of the development only after public notices were posted.

The residents felt that the structure was too tall, and were enraged that a project this significant could legally be given a permit without the developer having to come to the community. State Senator Vince Fumo, who lives in the vicinity, also came out against the development proposal.



The final proposed design includes a combination of the main tower and a smaller building containing lofts (left), as well as street-level townhomes (right). (Images: Burt Hill Architects)

Despite the fact that the project could be built by-right, the ZBA agreed to hear an appeal filed by the community group. When the day of the hearing arrived, however, instead of hearing the appeal arguments, ZBA Chairman, David Auspitz, told the parties that the tower was not going to be 47-stories and that they needed to work out a compromise. Ultimately, after much negotiation, the developer and the community group worked out a compromise design with a shorter tower, ground-level retail, and townhomes. The developers returned to the ZBA that gave the necessary variances for the project to proceed. It is interesting to note that while the original project did not need a variance, the new scheme required several.

The developers had to compromise their initial design significantly. However, the new design, reborn with the name of Parkway 22, has gained praise from design-related organizations and the media as much improved. The new scheme includes a 35-story tower, a smaller building with lofts, and street-level townhomes, clad in brick to be sympathetic to the older homes around them.

In the meantime, Councilman Darrell Clarke proposed a zoning overlay district for the area containing the Barnes Tower, stretching down to areas within the central business district along JFK

Boulevard. The overlay established a 125-foot height limit for new development within its boundaries. This overlay was enacted, and although it would not affect the Barnes Tower (that had already obtained its permit), it would impact numerous other developers for years to come.

The Lessons

This was a very expensive and confusing process for the developers, who initially did nothing wrong, legally. The unspoken and unlegislated delays created over a year-long setback. The irony is that the end product that needed a variance was considered better, in a design sense, than what the Zoning Code allowed by-right.

This case study highlighted the role of elected officials who are not part of the legislated process. Senator Fumo assisted the community group in getting a ZBA hearing, even though the project did not require a variance. Councilman Clarke's zoning overlay was one of numerous recent instances of City Council usurping the role of the City Planning Commission and passing retroactive, arbitrary zoning overlays, as a form of spot zoning. The City Planning Commission was hardly involved in this case, whatsoever.





Baltimore Avenue (above at 45th Street) is a dense, urban corridor in West Philadelphia, with a mix of residential and commercial properties, transit access, and significant pedestrian activity.

It is also clear that the legislated development permitting process has no place for community input. The community has come to rely on the inevitable ZBA hearing — the result of a broken process. When faced with the rare project that met the letter of the law and did not need a variance, the community was upset. Also, the ZBA has become the de facto design review board for the City, often telling developers to work out a compromise with the community. This process is frustrating and unclear for developers and community groups, leaving everyone stranded outside of the legislated procedures.

Baltimore Avenue Pedestrian Lighting

In 2004, University City District, a special services district in West Philadelphia, created a plan to install pedestrian lighting in certain corridors, beginning with five blocks of Baltimore Avenue. UCD learned that the Streets Department's policy is to only pay for overhead lamps to light the cartway, not pedestrian lighting. UCD decided to proceed regardless, believing that pedestrian-scale lighting is critical for the improvement and safety of major corridors. UCD applied for grant funding, and received a total of \$880,000 from PennDOT's Hometown Streets Program, the William Penn Foundation, and from the City's Neighborhood

Transformation Initiative — enough to pay for the studies and installation costs for just five blocks of pedestrian lighting.

Next UCD learned it needed an insurance policy; however no company was willing to insure UCD, leaving no choice but to find a way to turn the lamps over to City ownership and maintenance (as the City is self-insured). UCD worked out a deal with the Streets Department where UCD would pay for the lamps and their installation, then turn ownership over to the City. The Streets Department agreed, under the condition that the existing overhead lamps for the roadway would have to be removed, as the Streets Department would not allow both overhead and pedestrian lamps along the same roadway. Also, in order for the overhead lamps to be removed, it would have to be proven that the new pedestrian lights could also adequately light the roadway.

Like the City, PennDOT is not accustomed to dealing with pedestrian lighting. Part of its Hometown Streets grant requires a costly full-area impact analysis. UCD engaged Urban Engineers to develop a design plan and submit all necessary documents. As of the publication of this report, UCD was still waiting for the necessary approvals. UCD hopes to address pedestrian lighting in other corridors like Lancaster Avenue, but sees that this will be an



The image on the left shows another view of Baltimore Avenue, with the Route 34 trolley. The image on the right shows the 4000 block of Locust Street, where pedestrian-scale lighting is currently an important element in building a safe and attractive environment.

enormous challenge. After three years and with nearly \$900,000 raised, UCD is nearing the end of its journey towards installing a mere five blocks of pedestrian lighting.

The Lessons

Pedestrian lighting is an important community development investment that other cities have supported for many years. Nonetheless, the Streets Department has yet to support funding the installation of pedestrian lighting. The Department's policies are unwritten, and the City has no formal set of policies or guidelines on the subject. Additionally, while the Streets Department does not support pedestrian lighting, the Commerce Department does, allocating commercial corridor dollars for this project. This seems to indicate some conflict within the policies of the City's departments.

The other important fact that emerges from this case study is the enormous capacity required of a local organization before it can support something as basic and necessary as pedestrian lighting. The NTI office is working, on behalf of the Commerce Department, with other smaller community groups to fund some limited pedestrian lighting. However, NTI's approach embraces a one-time grant, rather than developing a long-term, sustainable program for supporting local groups.

This is a clear example of where the City's policies discourage good design and make organizations have to privately raise large amounts of funding and spend years jumping through hoops just to implement small but important public realm investments. These are investments that the City should actively be supporting both financially and through its policies. Again, it is notable that the City Planning Commission was not substantively involved.

1352 Lofts

In 2004, Rimas Properties, a local developer, bought a parking lot at 1326-52 South Street to build a six-story condominium tower with ground-floor retail space. 1352 Lofts broke ground near the end of 2005, designed by Granary Associates.

In the summer of 2007, local residents and members of the Hawthorne Empowerment Association noticed that the developer had constructed a concrete platform along the entire South Street side of the building that extended six feet into the sidewalk, effectively narrowing the sidewalk to about three feet. This stretch contains pedestrian light poles, and at the points with these lamps, the sidewalk is barely wide enough for a single pedestrian.





Rimas Properties' 1352 Lofts encroaches on the sidewalk, providing a narrow path for pedestrians. Although it is a well-designed building, in general, at the street level it hurts the public realm. (Image: George Clafien)

Inga Saffron, Architecture Critic for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, wrote about the issue in June, reporting that “If you’re traveling in a wheelchair or pushing a baby stroller, you may have no choice but to cross to the north side of South Street.” A number of groups began discussing the issue, including Design Advocacy Group (DAG) and Young Philly Politics. DAG called the development “an outrageous taking of the public sidewalk by a private developer,” and launched a petition campaign to pressure the City to take action.

The developer insisted that the terrace was a handicap ramp and that the City had approved it in plan. However the Streets Department denied that the City had approved the developer’s plans, and issued the developer a letter requesting the problem be fixed. The developer seemingly ignored the letter as construction continued.

City Councilman Frank DiCicco proposed a bill to legalize the terrace, but community opposition led DiCicco to subsequently withdraw the bill. The City refused to issue occupancy permits to the retail tenants until the issue was resolved. On July 12, the City held a court hearing to rule what legal action, if any, the City would take, and concluded that the developer would have to reduce the six-foot terrace by one foot.

The developer would be required to treat the remaining, five-foot terrace as a handicap ramp for the first-floor commercial spaces. As such, cafe tables and seating are expressly forbidden on the entrance plaza. At least six feet of the sidewalk must remain free and clear for the public to use. Councilman DiCicco has introduced a bill that outlines the agreement and permits the five-foot encroachment in the right-of-way.

At the time of this report’s publication, the developer had submitted plans to L&I for approval, and workers have begun to demolish one foot of the existing terrace with jackhammers.

The Lessons

1352 Lofts provides insight into how the City balances its desire to cater to developers while valuing the public realm. There was actually question as to whether the City would seek enforcement of its own laws. The Streets Department first watched as the developer ignored its letter. The City did refuse to issue occupancy permits, but the course of action that would reverse this refusal was unclear.

The City eventually ordered action from the developer, rather than permitting this public realm





These images show the impact of 1352 Lofts on reducing the sidewalk width. The developer is currently correcting the situation, as per an agreement with the City. (Images: Steve Playo)

encroachment. However, the decision was largely focused on handicap (ADA) accessibility, rather than fully restoring the width of the sidewalk.

There was no directive from the Mayor or others in leadership that it is unacceptable to ignore the law. Early on, Councilman DiCicco believed it was necessary for him to step in and protect the developer, even in the face of community opposition. His first bill would have created an individual exception from the law (a solution that has, in fact, been used in other less controversial locations). This is clearly not an appropriate means for City Council to be involved in design and development decisions.

Without public outcry from residents, advocacy groups, and the media, it is possible that the developer would have finished the building with no repercussions. The inability of agencies to monitor construction and ensure that the approved plans are carried out is troubling. As it was, thanks to heightened public awareness and advocacy for attention to design, the City has made the developer correct the building and the developer is complying.

Other than the issue of the ramp, 1352 Lofts is an attractive building, and although the public realm was compromised from the original 12-foot sidewalks, overall 1352 Lofts will likely contribute positively to its urban context.

Conclusions

In each case study the legislated process was obscured or ignored altogether in favor of an ad hoc solution. In the current system achieving good design is much more time-consuming, expensive, and complicated than settling for poor design. City policies often do not value or enforce strong design principles. A number of stakeholders, like City Council, have inserted themselves into the process, while the City Planning Commission's role is minimal. Finally, much of the design we get is the result of a compromise, rather than a consistent legislated process.

The problems and challenges facing design and development seem to disadvantage just about everyone involved. The public has no legislated venue for participation. Developers have to maneuver a complex and frustrating maze of deal making and unwritten rules. Elected officials spend significant time weighing in to protect citizens from the City's own laws and policies. In the end there is no way to know what results will emerge. The current process is entirely unpredictable and inconsistent, and does not engender good design.





4

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES





It will take a culture change and a shift in priorities if Philadelphia wants to deal responsibly with removing billboards and other forms of “urban blight,” ensure a stronger pedestrian realm, and improve the quality of new, private construction.

An Opportunity

Philadelphia has an opportunity to again become a leader in innovation and civic design excellence. The city will soon have a new mayoral administration that may embrace civic design as a priority when dealing with issues such as development, planning and zoning, community investment, and realigning the role of various departments. Philadelphia has a variety of groups that have brought civic design back into the dialogue, such as the Design Advocacy Group, Mural Arts Program, Community Design Collaborative, and SCRUB.

Philadelphia needs a culture shift to resolve the challenge of its weak value on design, broken processes, unclear priorities, and sub-par results. It must start from the top — from the Mayor’s Office. Change must be reflected by City Council and by department and agency heads, who oversee entities that affect the physical development of our city. Change must also come from a public that understands the essential elements of civic design and why it matters. Following are some of the major challenges facing our city, with associated opportunities and action steps that will start Philadelphia on the road towards reform.

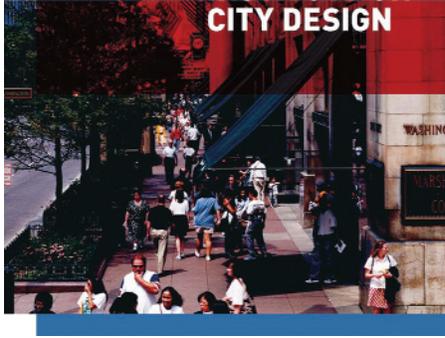
Challenge: Leadership Does Not Value Design

Philadelphia’s leadership has not fully capitalized on the city’s current urban renaissance. Key leaders still view the city as desperate for development, and view design as an impediment to growth. This hinders long term progress, ignoring the fact that cities with a strong design culture also have a stronger development and business climate.

When Philadelphia’s leadership gets involved in planning and development projects it is often reactively, to support community groups fighting a particular development project. The City’s leaders need to become proactive through a legislated process, rather than as promoters of a deal-by-deal approach that favors spot zoning, one-time fixes, and reactive ordinances.

A lack of value on design is pervasive in City government. For example, the City Planning Commission’s lack of prominence has to do with priorities coming from City Hall. The Redevelopment Authority has an Architectural Review Committee (left over from an era past), but it has little real impact. Community-based and independent civic groups working to improve the quality of design in Philadelphia are constantly challenged by the lack of

THE MAYORS' INSTITUTE ON CITY DESIGN



Jerry Abramson
Mayor of Louisville, KY

A little more than a decade ago, downtown Louisville was isolated from the Ohio River and its heritage by an interstate highway, industry on the waterfront, and decades of neglect. The today Waterfront Park has become the "living room for the city," where locals and tourists come to connect with the city's history, stroll along the river, board riverboats, and enjoy outdoor festivals.

The rebirth of the riverfront began with the decision of Jerry Abramson as mayor in 1989 and picked up momentum when he attended the Mayor's Institute on City Design. Mayor Abramson was elected to office in a city nicknamed "River City," but Louisville's problems and potential across the Ohio River was second in 1972 when an elevated highway along the waterfront was constructed.

From the beginning, Mayor Abramson believed that the fabric of Louisville's downtown had to be stitched back together for it to function here. It earned the Mayor's Institute its guidance.

As a participant in the twelfth national Institute in 1992, the Mayor discussed his vision for Louisville's downtown with the design experts around the table. These included urban designers, park planners, and experienced developers from other cities with revitalized waterfronts who were excited about the opportunity to bring their expertise to Louisville.

In a lively 90-minute brainstorming session of the sort that has become a hallmark of the Mayor's Institute, these experts, Mayor Abramson, and the other invited mayors




Jerry Abramson
Mayor of Louisville, KY
1989-2011, 2017

"From my experience with the Mayor's Institute on City Design, I've gained a greater appreciation for the value of design and the importance in improving communities. As Mayor, you're not creating a vision for your community without including design as a critical component."

proposed design alternatives and spread their minds, in hope that the best ideas would be incorporated into the city's plan.

Mayor Abramson returned to his city with renewed vision and vigor. The Mayor, the 11-member Louisville Waterfront Development Corporation that he created, and the firm KlingStubbins Associates that he hired to develop a master plan began to decline on the promise of the Mayor's Institute discussion.

"We made smart design decisions working with a great designer," the Mayor said. "We assembled a strong team and involved the community in the planning. The park's scale and use of space make it an appealing and long-lasting part of our local landscape."

To reconnect downtown to the waterfront, streets were reconfigured and a highway on-ramp was moved to open up views. Despite those changes, the river was still too remote from most downtown spaces. To correct this problem a new park was gradually shaped toward the river, allowing for direct views and acting as a visual focal point. New lighting, public art, and water features were added to enhance the waterfront.

The project continues. At this time, 72 acres of waterfront have been converted from substandard to public space. Underwriting for an additional 13 acres is underway, and there are plans to build a pedestrian bridge across the river.

The Mayor's Institute on City Design, supported by the National Endowment for the Arts, is a national program that works to train mayors how to be the "chief urban designers of their cities." (Images: The Mayor's Institute on City Design)

awareness and priority given to issues that impact civic design.

Opportunity: Value Design from the Top & Educate the Public and Leadership

In Chicago, Boston, Portland, and other cities known for high-quality design, the mayor is the city's main design advocate. Philadelphia's next mayor must establish design excellence as a core value of the administration, realign department functions, revise the development review process, and empower staff to implement this process without undue political interference. The mayor should step in when part of the process breaks down, or during the course of a major civic project, to raise its profile and ensure outstanding results. The mayor needs to be confident enough to believe that we can have both a robust development market, while requiring and ensuring outstanding planning and design.

The mayor appoints the heads of numerous agencies, boards and commissions that have a voice in planning, development, zoning, design, and community investment. A mayor who understands the importance of strong design and its economic, social, and physical impacts on the urban environment can, through appointments, significantly

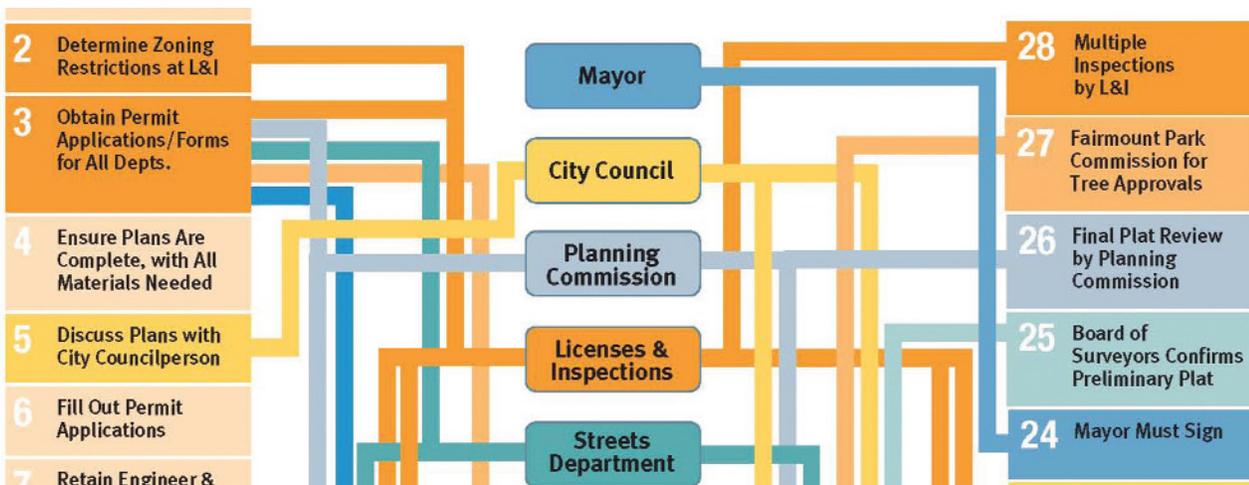
change the value structure influencing the city. Appointing individuals to agency heads, boards and commissions with technical expertise who can communicate the importance of design, may have the greatest single impact in changing Philadelphia's priorities in the years to come.

The most important aspect for encouraging civic design excellence is the development of an overall design culture — where the mayor, department heads, City Council, business leaders, and the public share an understanding of what constitutes good design, and why it matters. This design culture must be built gradually through education. Philadelphia needs an organization to educate civil servants, the public and community groups, and business leadership regarding civic design, land use, transportation, architecture, and community planning, similar to efforts in other cities. Philadelphia has existing organizations that could fill this role if given the opportunity to effectively combine their efforts.

Action Steps

- The mayor and City Council should take the lead in establishing civic design as a citywide priority.





In its 2004 report, "If We Fix It, They Will Come," the BIA included a flow chart showing the complicated process of development permitting and review. (Image: BIA of Philadelphia)

- The mayor should appoint qualified professionals who value design to department heads, boards, and commissions.
- The mayor and other leaders should financially support the creation of a Civic Design Center (perhaps built by unifying existing organizations) as an independent institution dedicated to public education and advocating for protecting the public realm. The City should take steps to integrate the Center into existing City programs.
- The mayor should develop a regular internal education process, like a Mayor's Institute on City Design for him/herself, department heads, and members of City Council, to ensure an understanding of civic design principles and policy.
- The mayor and City Council should make a commitment to seek education and advice on subjects of planning, design, and development, to trust the opinions of trained professionals on the City's boards and commissions, and to step in only in support of the legislated process.

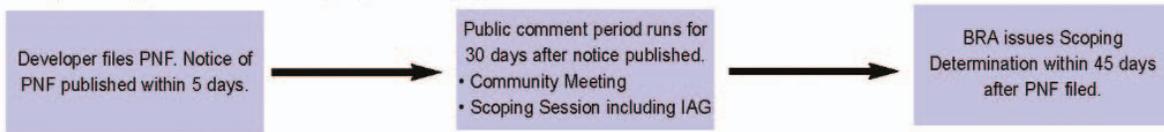
Challenge: The Process of Development Permitting and Review is Broken

The process of development permitting and review has a critical impact on the city's design, and on the market climate that will determine the quality of construction and architecture our city will attract. Developers, architects, planners, and the public have voiced the opinion that our development permitting and review process needs reform. All along the way, the process breaks down into an unwritten course of deal making and reactive solutions. This is not a sustainable way to attract development, empower communities, and build a city that promotes design excellence.

The first challenge is the code itself. When developers decide to follow the Zoning Code, they often end up with an inferior building of sub-par design. The code requires a number of antiquated elements like blank walls, large setbacks, and complicated equations to maximize floor-area ratio (FAR). The code often allows and encourages undesirable development like suburban-style strip malls, blank walls and parking lots, while missing urban essentials like mandating street-wall development and ground-floor retail.

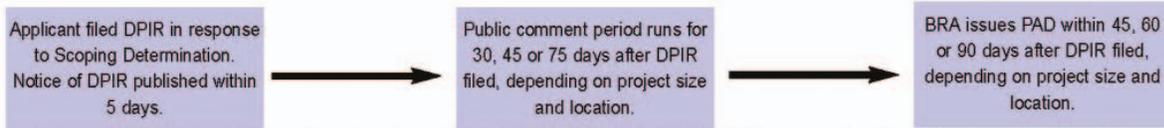
The following flow chart illustrates the Large Project Review Process:

Step 1. Project Notification from (PNF) and Scoping Determination



The Scoping Determination may waive further review, and require mitigation commitments, if the BRA Board finds that the PNF and Public Comments provide adequate information about the project's impacts.

Step 2. Draft Project Impact Report (DPIR) and Preliminary Adequacy Determination (PAD)



The PAD may waive further review, and require mitigation commitments, if the BRA Board finds that the DPIR and Public Comments provide adequate information about the project's impacts.

Above is an excerpt of an image taken from Boston's user-friendly "A Citizen's Guide to Development Review." The guide, published in 2004 begins with a letter from then-Mayor Mark Maloney stating, "Article 80 of the Boston Zoning Code is the vehicle by which every resident is given a voice so that Boston is shaped by all of those who care about its future." (Image: City of Boston)

The City's Zoning Code Commission is now looking at rewriting the code; however that is only half the battle. The City has not been effectively updating the Zoning Map — the place where the code meets reality and guides development. In the late 1990s the City Planning Commission increased its process of zoning remapping, on a case-by-case basis. However, its impacts were scattered, focusing only on communities that took initiative. It was often too little too late, and resulted sometimes in piecemeal overlays rather than actual remapping. Also, these efforts often came to the fore only after a clash with a proposed development — reactionary, rather than preventative. As a result of this lack of overall remapping, many developments require variances, turning the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) into a necessary step. The ZBA is supposed to be a fairly minor board, handling small, routine variance requests and only hearing large projects when extreme hardship makes it impossible for a developer to build what the code and map dictate.

City council has also become a necessary stop for developers, and Council members regularly weigh in before the ZBA. Members of City Council have taken it upon themselves to approve zoning overlays, rather than taking their lead from the City Planning Commission, as is the process set forth in the city's Charter. City Council lacks the expertise to be

advising on design decisions, and hurts the overall process by encouraging "spot zoning" — a practice that is illegal and can be considered a taking.

A final issue is that there is no position to coordinate development and guide it through the permitting process. Philadelphia used to have a Development Coordinator position, and in some administrations there was an effective development roundtable that would meet regularly to bring department heads together and keep everyone on the same page. Today the City has developer services groups (one managed by PIDC and one through the Managing Director's Office); however, they seem to be on a much lower priority level than those of past administrations.

Opportunity: Fix the Permitting Process

Other cities have shown that by creating a streamlined, efficient, and predictable process of development permitting and review, it is easier to inject a greater focus on planning and design. The permitting process should be streamlined through a single department, rather than through numerous disconnected agencies and boards. Other cities have strong precedent for how to do this, such as Boston's Article 80 process. The Boston





PIDC instated a special process for development coordination and design review for the development of its land at the Navy Yard, by Liberty Property Trust, based on a master plan by Robert A.M. Stern Architects. Enhanced development coordination should be exercised by the City for all major projects. The image above shows the new headquarters of Urban Outfitters at the Navy Yard.

Redevelopment Authority (BRA) is the exclusive agency in charge of development review from start to finish. Interestingly, while the process is streamlined, it is not simple, as it has many steps and agency sign-offs, but they are efficiently coordinated and easily navigable by developers and their architects.

Philadelphia needs to restore the Development Coordinator position, as well as a regular development roundtable with representatives from the major departments that deal with development and construction. The City should also establish an easy-to-use online interface for looking up zoning and applying for permits, as well as clear and effective guidelines for development procedures.

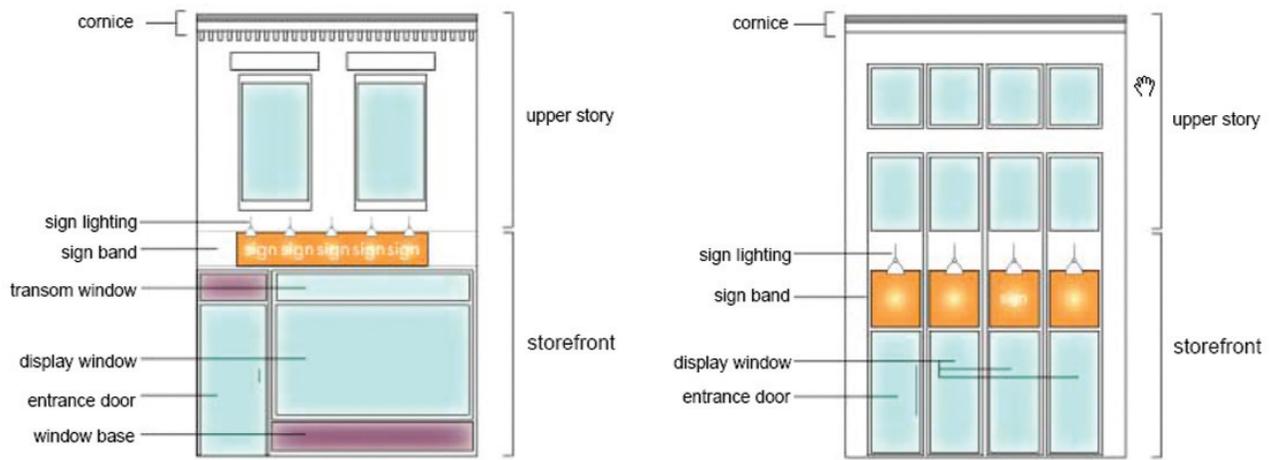
Once the permitting process is reformed, and the zoning map updated, most parcels will not need a variance, reducing the caseload at the ZBA. The ZBA's role should be narrowly defined so that minor variance requests (like adding a deck) can be handled by a staff review, rather than having to go before a formal hearing. While much attention has been paid to the ZBA's composition, reform of the permitting process will have a much greater effect on the ZBA. The City should insert additional, more appropriate, review steps into the process (like site plan review and civic design review) so that

developments are held to a high standard and the public has the opportunity to participate.

Building this new permitting process will require commitment from stakeholders who are used to brokering individual deals to circumvent a flawed process. This type of activity should no longer be necessary, nor should it be tolerated.

Action Steps

- The City should streamline the private development permitting and review process, under a single agency, adding predictability, while also including site plan and design review as mandatory steps.
- The mayor should appoint a Development Coordinator or Deputy Mayor for Planning and Development, and should appoint representatives from each operating department to participate in regular development roundtables.
- The mayor's appointed Development Coordinator should work with L&I and other agencies that manage the entitlement process to create and market a streamlined review process.
- The City should reform the role of the ZBA, greatly reducing the number of projects that it reviews. For smaller projects there should be a staff-level review and sign off.



The Philadelphia City Planning Commission’s “Design Guidelines for Commercial Facade Improvements” is one of several documents that provide design guidelines, but there is no comprehensive set of guidelines, and enforcement is weak. (Image: Philadelphia City Planning Commission)

- The City should publish clear and predictable guidelines for developers, listing whom to contact, the necessary sign offs, benchmarks and a timeframe that will be adhered to.

Challenge: Lack of Design Review

Other cities have used design review as an effective tool to enhance their level of design quality in new development. Philadelphia has design review, but only for specific types of projects. The Art Commission hears publicly funded projects, the Fairmount Park Commission hears those that are on or near its land, and the Historical Commission hears projects that are locally designated historic sites, or that fall within local historic districts. Other quasi-public agencies like the RDA and PIDC have their own internal design review. However, there is no design review for most private developments.

Agencies not specifically empowered or qualified to carry out design review for private development take on that role simply because they are the only stop along the way to a permit. The Zoning Board of Adjustment hearings are known to be confrontational, and often end with the ZBA directing the developer to work out a deal with the community, or requiring certain design elements — like arbitrary heights and setbacks — in order for the

application to receive a variance. This is not a reliable and consistent design review process.

Philadelphia currently lacks a set of citywide or neighborhood-specific design guidelines, relying instead on a complicated set of zoning overlays and advisory documents. The City Planning Commission does have advisory design guidelines for storefronts, with which projects requesting funding through the City’s small business improvement program are supposed to comply. However, these guidelines are fairly specific in their scope, and this review rarely happens in a consistent and serious manner.

Opportunity: Legislate a Design Focus

Other cities have shown that it is acceptable to have hurdles to development and layers of review, but they need to be clear and predictable, yield positive change, and engage the stakeholders. Many U.S. cities have a mandatory sign-off role for the planning department, ensuring that all major developments undergo site plan review. Many American cities also have mandatory design review either at a local or citywide level. The Design Advocacy Group has begun independently undertaking design review at the invitation of developers or community groups, setting a model for the City to adopt in filling this void.





The future of the Delaware waterfront is of particular concern to many. Philadelphia needs to legislate a design focus through improved zoning, design guidelines, and design review. The City could turn Columbus Boulevard into a walkable destination, rather than the auto-centric corridor reflected in the Regency Hyatt (left) and the proposed Foxwoods casino (right). (Right Image: Foxwoods)

Other cities also have clear and accessible design guidelines, expressing a set of values, and physical illustrations of how to build in a way that will contribute positively to the urban landscape. Philadelphia needs to develop either citywide or locally based guidelines.

The Zoning Code Commission has the potential to develop a vastly simpler code, but also one that promotes strong design through new classifications. Cities that have recently rewritten their codes have incorporated elements of form-based zoning — a modern approach that designates classifications based on the way a block or community looks, rather than on the particular uses of a parcel. Philadelphia’s rewritten code could adopt a “hybrid” approach, including form-based and traditional elements.

In addition, the City Planning Commission needs to remap the city, in concert with the effort to rewrite the code. Remapping the city will be a long process, working closely with communities and elected officials, and conveying large-scale goals as well as community-based input. In the long term, however, remapping can lead to the end of most spot zoning. The City Planning Commission also needs to develop a new citywide Comprehensive Plan, to guide the rezoning and remapping effort.

Action Steps

- As the City proceeds with its Zoning Code Commission to rewrite the code, it should focus on creating classifications that are responsive to Philadelphia’s changing landscape.
- The City Planning Commission should engage a community planning process to remap the city. City Council should pass a bill mandating that all new community plans coming from the City Planning Commission must, within a reasonable timeframe, be reflected through zoning remapping so as to inform coming development.
- The City should give the City Planning Commission mandatory site-plan review and sign off in the standard permitting process.
- The City should create a design-review entity, either expanding the powers of the Art Commission or through a new panel that would inform the development review process.
- The mayor should direct the City Planning Commission to create a new Comprehensive Plan for the City.
- The City should draft a set of clear Design Guidelines, either citywide or neighborhood-based that are upheld through the design-review process, or within a form-based code.





The Germantown Avenue Bridge (left) and the 42nd Street Bridge (right) are examples of how high-quality bridge repair and design can impact the public realm. The Streets Department needs adequate funding to build projects that include pedestrian amenities, lighting, and high-quality materials.

Challenge: Decentralized Community Planning and Investment

In the mid-1980s, Philadelphia was sinking into increasingly challenging fiscal circumstances. As the City became less capable of delivering adequate local services, numerous communities formed community development corporations (CDCs), neighborhood and civic organizations, and business or neighborhood improvement districts (BIDs, NIDs) to fill this services void and attract new resources. During the 1990s, under the Rendell administration, the City began to embrace a much more hands-off approach to planning, focusing instead on brokering individual development deals. This approach worked in attracting significant new projects, but it also left a void in community planning, zoning remapping, and local allocation of resources for planning and civic design.

Neighborhood groups began independently contracting with private planning firms to do the work that in previous eras the City Planning Commission had either spearheaded or actually carried out. Plans became disconnected from any larger planning effort, without consistency from neighborhood to neighborhood, and often without City approval.

The positive impact of the efforts of these CDCs and BIDs cannot be understated. However, the challenge of acquiring enough capacity for such organizations is significant. Each of these organizations has had to form its own fundraising and managerial framework, starting from scratch to make itself viable and respected enough to gain major grants and effectively lead a community. This challenge has left many communities devoid of active and well-funded organizations to ensure community planning and leverage resources for local investments.

The nonprofit and private sector should not be solely responsible for community planning, streetscaping and commercial corridor enhancements, for coordinating local development, and for delivering local services. It will be a challenge for the City to determine how to provide resources to these groups while re-establishing the public sector's role in community planning and local investment.

Opportunity: Invest in Communities & Define The Public-Sector Role

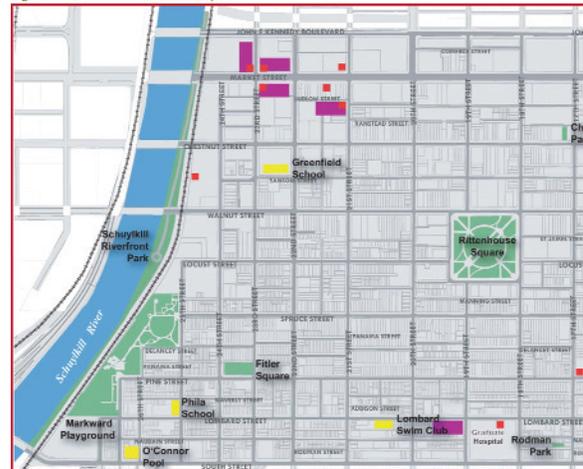
Community and civic groups must be involved in local planning and development efforts, but as part of a larger public planning process. Community groups should participate in community planning and remapping, working directly with the City



1900 BLOCK WALNUT STREET DEVELOPMENT GOALS - DEVELOPMENT ZONE 2



Figure 5.4 - Potential future tot lots and parks



In January, 2007 the Center City Residents' Association released a 121-page plan for its community. The plan, produced by the firm of Kise Straw & Kolodner, was paid for with private dollars, and the City was only marginally involved in the process. (Images: CCRA)

Planning Commission, not petitioning the ZBA every time a new project arises. However, as long as petitioning the ZBA is the most effective route, it will be the preferred alternative.

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The City Planning Commission needs to have the mandate and the capacity to undertake true community planning, and to add the results of community plans immediately to the Zoning Map, so that it can inform future development. We need to put in place substantive steps in the development permitting process to enable community input, such as design review, site-plan review, or community panel review. In addition, designing a more effective and reliable role in the process for the community gives City Council members a new legislated avenue to get involved in projects that will impact their districts. The bottom line is that each party involved, be it elected officials, community groups, the City Planning Commission, or the ZBA needs its legislated role reaffirmed and redefined.

The City must build effective connections with Philadelphia's strong civic groups and nonprofit organizations, like the Center City District, the Center City Residents' Association, and the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. These are examples of a BID, a community group, and a civic organization that have the capacity to engage in

significant planning, raise funds, produce documents, and shape Philadelphia's future outside of the public sector. Rather than favoring a parallel public process, or allowing planning to remain entirely decentralized, the solution is forging stronger connections with these well-established civic groups, whereby they can continue to engage in planning, advocacy, and education, while the City can leverage their work by funding and implementing their initiatives.

A number of CDCs and BIDs have come to do more than just supplement City services; they have come to provide them. Currently, only neighborhoods with stable and well-funded local organizations can have clean sidewalks, support for local businesses, amenities like pedestrian lighting, and a say in their local planning and development. These resources should be accessible to every neighborhood, supported through the public sector. The City should support programs to provide communities with funds and resources for local planning, as well as capital improvements for streetscaping, façade improvements, and clean and green programs.

The Community Design Collaborative currently provides an important service, giving community groups the ability to obtain professional services for local projects at minimal cost. The City should



The ability to obtain funding and professional design support for quality facade improvements, like those shown on the left in Center City and those on the right in Mt. Airy, is critical. The City could partner with community-based organizations to encourage good design that impacts local economic development.

support this role while promoting true community planning from the City Planning Commission. In addition, the City could create a program to offer design assistance to local organizations, like the Community Design Center of Pittsburgh, or a “design excellence fund” to support the additional costs of using design professionals and high-quality building materials, as in Columbus, Indiana. The Commerce Department should revive an effective façade improvement grant program, and provide more effective marketing support to local groups, small businesses and property owners.

Finally, the City should create a resource center and staff to provide managerial and financial support for CDCs, BIDs, and service districts, so that each community need not start from square one in building infrastructure and raising funding. This office could handle administrative tasks, while also providing supplemental funding and grant writing assistance.

Action Steps

- The mayor, City Council, and department heads, when reforming the development process, should create substantive steps for community input and review.
- The mayor, City Council, and department

heads should establish new connections between the public sector and civic/community organizations to the benefit of both.

- The mayor should find new funding to connect planning and local reinvestment, to provide funds to directly impact the public realm in ways that are currently served by CDCs and BIDs, exclusively.
- The City should establish an Office of Community Resources to assist CDCs and BIDs in fundraising and administration.
- The City and the grant-giving community should provide funding either through the City or a third-party organization to award grants for design assistance to local organizations.
- The City should invest in a “design excellence fund” to support the additional costs of using design professionals and high-quality building materials.

Challenge: A Weakened City Planning Commission

The City Planning Commission has seen its role weakened time and again, to the point that it currently cannot spearhead effective planning and advocate for strong urban design. The Commission used to have substantial control over the Capital





CDCs and BIDs deliver important services for communities across the city. The City should support their efforts in a way that connects with and informs a public process. The image on the left shows volunteers working with the CDC Mt. Airy USA. On the right a University City District employee removes graffiti. (Images: Mt. Airy USA/UCD)

Budget and Program, ensuring that major planned projects would be linked with funding. Today the City Planning Commission lacks this kind of connection, making it difficult to implement plans. This shift was not the result of specific policy, rather it came about because of gradually changing priorities and a decentralization favored by the Mayor's Office, City Council, and various agencies. Today funding has become extremely decentralized, with a number of public and quasi-public agencies carrying their own projects forward without consulting the City Planning Commission, or adhering to its community plans.

The City Planning Commission lacks a mandatory sign-off role in the development permitting process. Often developers seek the City Planning Commission's endorsement, but mainly because they feel that it will help their case before the ZBA. Many cities make planning department sign-off on permits mandatory.

Finally, the City's Charter states that zoning ordinances must originate with the City Planning Commission, and that the Commission shall review all bills that "in any manner affect any zoning ordinance, the Physical Development Plan of the City, or the capital program, or which would authorize the acquisition or sale of City real estate." Currently, City Council does not often honor this role,

creating zoning overlays and other one-time fixes as a reactive approach to halting specific developments. This process of City Council usurping the City Planning Commission's role in originating zoning, and creating uninformed legislation without the City Planning Commission's input, further contributes to the Commission's reduced role, and inability to enforce its own Charter-defined purview.

Opportunity: Reconnect Planning and Implementation

The common complaint heard today is that nobody is planning. However, the real problem is that the public and non-profit organizations who plan do not have funds to implement; meanwhile the private sector developers who implement are not compelled to plan. Philadelphia needs to reconnect the City Planning Commission with the Capital Budget and Program and other sources of funding. Planning and economic development should be inherently connected, with the City Planning Commission more involved in economic development, and expanded economic development expertise added to the Commission.

When the City Planning Commission approves neighborhood plans, its zoning recommendations should be immediately mapped, with real-time





These images illustrate the connection between good planning and the potential for economic development. 40th Street in University City (left) and Germantown Avenue in Chestnut Hill (right) are both cases where pedestrian-friendly development activates the sidewalk and creates a desirable urban environment.

updates of the Zoning Map dynamically available online. The Commission needs to have a mandatory role in the development permitting process. The City Planning Commission also needs to play a heavier role in allocating other sources of public funds. When the City floats bond issues, receives grants, approves tax-increment financing, and spends sources of funds in community development capacities, the City Planning Commission should be heavily involved in ensuring that these funds are spent in accordance with its comprehensive and community planning efforts.

City officials and the public should be made aware of the City Planning Commission’s Charter-mandated role. City Council needs to respect the importance of good design and the ability of the City Planning Commission staff to prepare zoning ordinances and review bills that deal with related issues. The City Planning Commission will have to take a stronger role, supported by the mayor, to ensure that the process of enacting legislation that will impact zoning and planning is based on informed analysis.

Action Steps

- The mayor and City Council should return stronger control of the Capital Program and Budget to the City Planning Commission, connect the City Planning Commission more

heavily with funding sources and implementing agencies, and return the Commission’s role as the originator of all legislation that impacts planning and zoning.

- The City Planning Commission should make an effort to create an open dialogue with elected officials to resolve planning and development issues.
- The City Planning Commission should include at least one expert on economic development.

Challenge: Lack of Centralization and Coordination for Capital Projects

Philadelphia has numerous agencies that develop land, and run programs that impact planning, design, and allocation of capital dollars; however, they act independently and carry out capital projects through their own internal processes. This creates vastly different criteria and benchmarks for investments throughout the City, leading to a range of results, and a reduced overall impact on the City’s spending.

The Capital Program Office ensures some level of consistency for a number of the City’s built structures and investments. However, the Philadelphia Housing Authority (PHA), the





The Neighborhood Transformation Initiative suffered from a lack of early planning and integration with the City Planning Commission. It has resulted in the removal of thousands of structures, replaced by vacant lots that will likely be around for a long time.

Redevelopment Authority (RDA), and Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) each have their own development processes to fit their own goals and needs. SEPTA, the School District, and the Streets Department are other entities that build capital projects without true oversight or a consistent review process.

This lack of communication and coordination between departments, agencies, and other entities that implement capital projects is a major challenge. There is little oversight to ensure a shared set of values and design standards for public projects. Philadelphia needs a consistent process of review, oversight, and design standards for all major public projects. The Art Commission currently serves as a design review body for publicly funded projects. However, it lacks objective and consistent standards, and it yields different results from project to project. In addition, it is not enough just to rely on one commission to ensure a level of design quality from a vast array of departments, agencies, and entities.

Philadelphia also lacks focus on ways to connect funding with necessary public realm improvements. When the City floats a bond issue, creates a value capture area, or receives a grant, it is directed through one of several departments, based on which

has the resources to administer it. Other cities have a single department responsible for administering and overseeing a variety of funding sources for capital expenses.

Philadelphia has a number of agencies and programs that affect communities and the public realm. These include the Commerce Department (Main Street, Housing Assistance, NTI, ReStore Philadelphia), the RDA (condemnation, tax exempt bonds), LISC (commercial corridor program), PCDC (business loans and corridor improvement programs), and others. These programs are not integrated with each other, causing redundancy, inefficiency, and reducing their shared overall impact.

Opportunity: Develop a True Implementing Agency

The City could consolidate its land-holding agencies and its programs that impact corridor enhancement into a single “implementing agency.” Pittsburgh’s Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA), for example, acts as financial and program manager for most of the City’s residential and commercial development (not industrial development), as well as economic development, community development, and homeowner assistance. Its functions include:



Projects like Schuylkill Falls show the need for more design review and development coordination between departments. A Hope VI project, Schuylkill Falls was built by the Philadelphia Housing Authority and a private developer. The complex of homes has been criticized for looking far too suburban for its urban context.

pursuing and managing all state and foundation grants, acquiring redevelopment sites, assisting developers, floating tax-exempt bonds, structuring development incentives, constructing infrastructure for large-scale developments, implementing streetscape improvements, and lending low-interest mortgages. Pittsburgh’s Planning Department handles the entire permitting process, including design review, and maintains a collaborative relationship with the URA, in order to streamline development efforts.

The URA handles, within one agency, the functions of numerous entities carried out separately in Philadelphia. The URA describes itself as “more than a redevelopment authority — it is the City of Pittsburgh’s economic development agency.” In Philadelphia this agency could be created by consolidating existing programs managed by the RDA, PCDC, PHDC, OHNP, OHCD, NTI, PCDC, the Commerce Department, LISC, and the Streets Department’s Philadelphia More Beautiful Committee (PMBC), and funded with a mix of city, state, and foundation dollars.

For those entities that may not become consolidated into the implementing agency, Philadelphia needs a shared and consistent process of development and design review for the public sector. This process

should work closely with the City Planning Commission, and should respond to a consistent set of design goals and values. Agencies must be forced to become less insular with greater oversight on their development processes. The goal of leading by example will only be achieved by holding each of these entities to the same process and oversight.

Action Steps:

- The City should consolidate agencies into a single “implementing agency” that would oversee and administer all residential and commercial development, corridor programs, and would receive and administer a variety of funding sources.
- The City should incorporate the aforementioned community resource office, for CDC and BID assistance, into this implementing agency.
- The City should create a single, consistent development review process for all public and quasi-public development that is held to higher standards than private development.

Challenge: Lack of Policies and Resources to Promote Good Design

The City’s departmental structure shows a lack of attention to important areas that impact the public realm, such as transportation, arts and culture, and





The City's current policies through its Zoning Code, Building Code, and procedures for permitting review through L&I not only permit but encourage projects like those on Front Street that have massive, windowless walls.

sustainability. Some existing departments and commissions that impact design, like the Historical Commission, are underfunded and unable to effectively operate at an optimal level.

Currently numerous departmental and agency policies have the effect of making good design more difficult. The Streets Department, as highlighted in the case study, will not pay to install pedestrian lighting, and generally will not support it where there are existing overhead lights.

Another problem is that when City departments build capital projects or make repairs, the quality is often sub-par. When the City makes road repairs, for example, oftentimes they are with low-quality materials that blatantly stand out. Sometimes roads are left with ugly patches, new sidewalks are shoddy and uneven, and bike lanes are not re-stripped after roadway repairs. Likewise, when City departments and quasi-public agencies build, their quality of construction and attention to design are not as high as they should be.

There are numerous cases where the City cuts corners for short-term gain, ignoring the higher long-term consequences of using sub-par materials and insufficient maintenance. Pedestrian lighting is an example of this issue. Most U.S. cities, including New

York, Boston, and Washington D.C. use cast-iron pedestrian lighting poles. Philadelphia uses aluminum lighting poles, which are lighter for the maintenance crews to install, but have a much shorter life than the cast-iron alternative.

Another challenge is that existing City policies allow an unacceptable number of surface parking lots, blighted properties and abandoned lots to exist. The City allows developers to create parking lots as an interim use while waiting for property values to rise, and allows speculators to sit on vacant land while paying very little in taxes. These elements can have a major negative impact on the quality of the public realm.

Opportunity: Adjust Policies, Create Incentives, Build Partnerships

A number of city policies and procedures can be adjusted to incentivize good design, in ways that are revenue neutral, while others should be connected with current sources of funding that are currently spent case-by-case, but could be spent in a more long-term, sustainable manner.

Increasingly, implementing outstanding civic design requires public-private partnerships, particularly working with the private sector to fund larger capital



Sometimes repair of roads and sidewalks by the City is subpar, such as a road repair in the Parkside neighborhood where the new paving covers over the crosswalk, and where the bicycle lanes were not re-striped after the repair (left). The image on the right shows another unattractive repair to a street and sidewalk.

projects. The City should consider the impact of public expenditures in attracting private growth through efforts like transit-oriented development, targeted community reinvestment, and the renewal of open space. Other cities have focused on the \$1 theory – how does \$1 in public investment multiply itself over time? Such thinking takes leadership and vision.

Other cities have forged public-private partnerships, creating better projects. The City of Atlanta is funding a massive park system in a ring around its downtown core and a new light-rail line (the Beltline project) through a bond to be repaid with tax increment financing (TIF). This public expenditure has attracted substantial private development.

To reduce the number of surface parking lots and vacant parcels, the Zoning Code can be amended to include stricter parking standards, requiring enclosed garages with ground-floor retail, creating incentives for underground parking and shared parking. The City could actually prohibit the construction of new parking lots and the creation of new vacant lots (like the City of Denver). Policies that restrict parking should be coupled with new efforts to improve and fund transit service and access.

To address blighted properties, the City should assess equal or heavier property taxes on blighted properties than those that have been repaired. This could be achieved by valuing land more heavily and property less. There could also be tax credits or other funding for homeowners who make repairs that impact the public realm. These tools could also encourage developers to build on their parking lots.

The City could also develop incentives in the 10-year tax abatement and bond issues to encourage strong design in private development. Likewise, the Zoning Code should include additional incentives to encourage off-street parking, ground-level retail, and transit-oriented development. The City should also require LEED certification for public buildings and create incentives for sustainable design in private development.

Philadelphia is one of the few major cities in the country that does not have a Department of Transportation (there used to be an Office of Transportation under Mayors Goode and Rendell). Cities that have a Department of Transportation include New York, Boston, Washington D.C., Chicago, and Seattle. Philadelphia should create a Department of Transportation to facilitate coordinated planning and policy to balance the needs of cars, transit, bicycles, and pedestrians.





Surface parking lots located at central, downtown locations hurt the public realm.

Additionally, many American cities have established agencies to deal with sustainability, such as New York City's Office of Sustainable Design and Seattle's Office of Sustainability and Environment. Philadelphia has its Local Action Plan for Climate Change, released in April, 2007. However, the City needs to more fully understand the importance of comprehensively incorporating sustainability as a citywide priority, and facilitating new policies by creating such a department, office, or agency.

Lastly, Philadelphia should re-create the office of Arts and Culture and should better fund entities that impact design, such as the Historical Commission, the Art Commission, and the Streets Department.

Action Steps

- The City should amend the Zoning Code to include incentives for smart design. The City should turn existing tax credits and sources of public funding into incentive-based programs, only attainable through certain public realm investments.
- The City Planning Commission, Commerce Department, and other agencies should undertake a comprehensive study of where tax-increment financing, transit-oriented development and other public-private investments could make the greatest impact.

- The City should develop methods for rewarding individuals who make home repairs, and penalizing owners of blighted properties and vacant lots. This could be achieved through the City's tax assessment or other means.
- The City should amend the Zoning Code or pass legislation making large surface parking lots illegal, and incentivize below-ground parking. This measure should especially focus on temporary parking lots.
- City Council should pass an ordinance that all publicly-funded structures must achieve LEED certification, and create an incentive program for LEED certification in private development.
- The mayor should create a new Department of Transportation, Office of Sustainability, and Office of Arts and Culture. The mayor should also better fund existing agencies that impact design and the public realm.

A Final Opportunity: Assess Our Progress and Tout Our Successes

Cities that are true leaders in design excellence continue to strive for even higher benchmarks. Philadelphia should regularly assess its planning, development, and civic design efforts against other cities in the U.S. and across the globe. This periodic review would focus on areas where the City leads in



Philadelphia could do a better job not just measuring itself against other cities, but in touting its successful design-based organizations and initiatives. For example, the Mural Arts Program has created over 2,700 murals in Philadelphia, including the mural at the Negro Leagues Memorial Park (left) and a mural at Germantown and Girard Avenues (right).

innovation, while identifying missed opportunities and national best practices.

This review could serve as a marketing tool, to share Philadelphia's successes and raise our city's international profile. Philadelphia already has some areas in which it leads in design excellence, such as public art, thanks to organizations like the Mural Arts Program. The City needs to work with other groups like the Greater Philadelphia Tourism and Marketing Corporation (GPTMC) to more effectively market our successes, and develop a stronger global reflection of Philadelphia as a city with a strong design culture.

Action Steps

- The mayor should instate a regular review of Philadelphia's level of civic design excellence, as compared to best practices identified from other comparable cities.
- The mayor and department heads should collaborate with GPTMC, and/or other groups to create a marketing strategy to promote Philadelphia's successes in design excellence.





5

IDEAS FOR PHILADELPHIA: DESIGN REVIEW





The Austin Design Commission is comprised of nine citizens at-large, and is advisory to City Council. Its role involves offering policy recommendations on urban design, developing design guidelines, reviewing development projects, and providing a venue for citizen input. (Images: City of Austin)

Introduction

The following three sections present ideas for Philadelphia that have been recommended throughout this report: Design Review, Design Guidelines, and Design Advocacy. They are ideas that will likely have a major impact on Philadelphia's level of civic design, if implemented. They are also ideas that are widely utilized in numerous U.S. cities, but that have not been adopted in Philadelphia. As such, these ideas are described and accompanied by examples based on best-practices research in over 30 cities. These sections are intended to provide more explanation and stronger guidance in how to implement some of the most significant recommendations of this report.

What Is Design Review?

Design review is a process intended to improve the aesthetic quality of development and its contributions to the public realm. Typically design review is carried out by one or more commissions, boards, or panels comprised of design professionals and citizens, who assess projects based on an established set of design criteria. Design review is utilized in cities across the U.S., including Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Nashville, Pittsburgh, Portland, and Seattle. There are some notable examples of

cities that do not have a design review board or commission, such as Chicago, Houston, New York and San Francisco. With the exception of Houston, these cities rely on strong and effective zoning codes and guidelines to ensure a certain quality of by-right development.

Most commonly, design review takes the form of a single commission of five to 11 members appointed by the mayor, City Council, or the Planning Director. Generally at least a few of the members are required to be design professionals. The commission typically only hears projects of a certain scale or cost, and meets one to two times monthly. Projects generally go before the commission one to three times at different project stages (e.g., conceptual, project design, final). The commission usually either approves, declines, or approves the project with changes. Often the commission is advisory, forwarding its recommendation to another body that has mandatory sign-off on building permits, like the Planning Commission, Redevelopment Authority, or City Council.

Variations on Design Review

While the above is the most common form of design review, different cities apply the concept in vastly different ways, customizing design review to work





The 11-member Atlanta Urban Design Commission reviews projects proposed for Landmark, Historic, and Conservation Districts, and bases its decisions on established design guidelines specific to each district. (Images: City of Atlanta)

most effectively for their urban context, stakeholders, and development climate. Below are some major variables:

Scope of Review: A number of cities like Baltimore, Boston, and Seattle have citywide design review. Others like Atlanta, Cincinnati, and Portland have design review only for their central business district or specific overlay zones. Still others like Cleveland, Nashville, and Sacramento have a number of separate community-based design review boards, with jurisdiction over a certain neighborhood.

Composition of the Commission: Austin's Design Commission comprises nine citizens at-large, at least two registered architects, and at least one registered landscape architect. The Baltimore Urban Design and Architecture Review Panel (UDARP) has six members who are experts in architecture, planning, and landscape design. They are appointed by the mayor, and are supposed to be objective, outside voices, not involved in local design and politics. The Cincinnati Urban Design Review Board has five members, generally architects, who are chaired by a business leader — typically a retired CEO with an interest in the arts. On the Indianapolis Metropolitan Development Commission, the nine members are appointed by party affiliation, to remain bipartisan. Three of the nine members of the

Jacksonville Design Review Committee must be downtown property owners. On Seattle's Design Commission, there are nine members of various design professions including two architects, two landscape architects, a fine artist, engineer, urban planner, urban designer, and a citizen member selected through the local Get Engaged Program.

Types of Projects Reviewed: Boston's Civic Design Commission reviews private developments of 100,000 square feet or more, or projects that are deemed to have special civic significance. Cleveland's Design Review Committee hears most private developments of any scale, including exterior alterations, subdivisions, and new construction. Hartford's Design Review Board hears different types of projects depending on the zone in which it is located. For one zone it hears projects over a certain development cost; for another, projects over 150,000 square feet are reviewed. Nashville's Design Review Committee hears all projects that require a permit. Pittsburgh's Contextual Design Advisory Panel has an internal decision-making process on projects that have significant public impact. Portland's Design Commission hears all projects within overlay zones.

Process: In Baltimore, the Planning Department meets with developers and determines whether to





Cleveland's Design Review Committee hears private projects in the downtown and public projects citywide. The city also has 15 local review committees that hear private projects for each local area. The Design Review Committee holds hearings the day before the Planning Commission meets, so that its input can inform the Commission's decisions. (Images: City of Cleveland)

send a project to the Review Panel. The Panel reviews projects in three stages: conceptual, preliminary, and final review. Recommendations go to the Planning Director. In Boston, civic design review is just one step of the lengthy Article 80 permitting process, coordinated by the Boston Redevelopment Authority (BRA). The Design Commission reviews plans in the conceptual stage and makes recommendations to the BRA. In Cleveland, the Planning Commission has mandatory sign-off on all permits. A local review committee or citywide committee hears the design the day before the Planning Commission meets and makes recommendations to the Planning Commission the next morning. In Pittsburgh, the architect and developer make a presentation to the panel, then leave the room while the panel makes its recommendations — sent in a letter to the Planning Director. Portland's Design Commission has two sets of guidelines for developers for a major review and a minor review process, depending on the type of project.

Addressing Potential Problems with Design Review

Cities have had diverse experiences with design review. There are two issues when assessing the impact of design review: Does it yield better design?

Does it unduly burden or deter development? The answer in both cases is that it depends on the form of the design review and how skillfully it is custom-fitted to its particular urban environment and development climate.

Design review can not and should not be viewed as a substitution for a strong zoning code and map. Most of the groundwork for ensuring good design should be implemented through the zoning code. This saves time and cost, and reduces the amount of subjective input, thus holding up better under legal challenge.

The greatest criticism of design review is that it is too subjective. Members on the commission may hold up a project because of personal preference. As the argument goes, the developer and architect end up producing a mediocre design because it is the compromised conglomeration of several people's ideas and preferences. Cities can address this issue by, first of all, ensuring a strong zoning code and map, so that the projects that go before the review commission are basically sound, to start with. Secondly, the role and purview of the design review board should be very specifically laid out. It is not the board's role to design the building, but merely to encourage and enforce previously decided upon and adopted design guidelines.





The Boston Civic Design Commission (BCDC) is comprised of 11 professionals appointed by the Mayor. It reviews projects of more than 100,000 square feet or of special significance, in the conceptual stage, and makes recommendations to the director of the Boston Redevelopment Authority. (Image: Boston Redevelopment Authority)

The committee should be guided by specific criteria, and the members' judgments should not be personal taste; rather they should always refer back to an adopted principle or concept in the city's design guidelines and zoning code. By creating an easy-to-read, visual manual of core urban design concepts, design guidelines, and application and review procedures, the city creates much greater transparency, provides a written guide of the review commission's purview and duties, reduces the legal challenge to the commission's decisions, and improves the efficiency of the permitting process for all parties involved.

Design Review and the Development Community

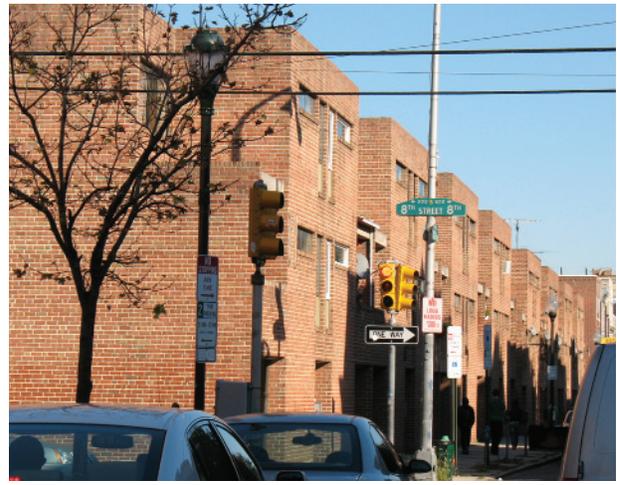
It is critical that the design review commission have a positive and productive relationship with the development community. The potential for such a relationship has as much to do with the structure and form of the commission as it does with the individuals who staff it.

Cities with the most successful design review commissions have reported that skeptical developers were put at ease, and admitted that the process was helpful in producing a better product. One strategy that several cities have identified to aid

in this relationship is to ensure that the review sessions have the feeling of a private meeting and dialogue, rather than a formal hearing. Although most cities are required to open the sessions to the public and the media, a number of cities have found it useful to try and retain an informal air. Since many design review commissions are advisory and report to another body, it is possible to maintain such an informal atmosphere.

All application and review procedures and criteria should be clearly and simply laid out in writing. The process should not be difficult to understand, and developers and architects must not feel that they are at the mercy of an arbitrary body and process. Some cities have found success in including developers and members of the business community on their design review commissions. Some cities like Indianapolis, Las Vegas and Cincinnati, have demonstrated that design review can work in a very pro-business, property rights environment. In Cincinnati, for example, the Urban Design Review Board is always chaired by a business leader. The business community frames the need for design in terms of protecting the city's investment and stimulating local economic development activity. This framework is appropriate for that city's development climate and allows the process to run more smoothly, in concert with developers.





Some of Philadelphia's recent development projects exhibit the clear need for a greater degree of design regulation. Like the two structures shown above on South Street, a number of developments have blank walls, bland architecture, and are fortresslike, making pedestrians feel unwelcome. Design review may be a positive approach to attain a higher quality of development.

Design Review for Philadelphia

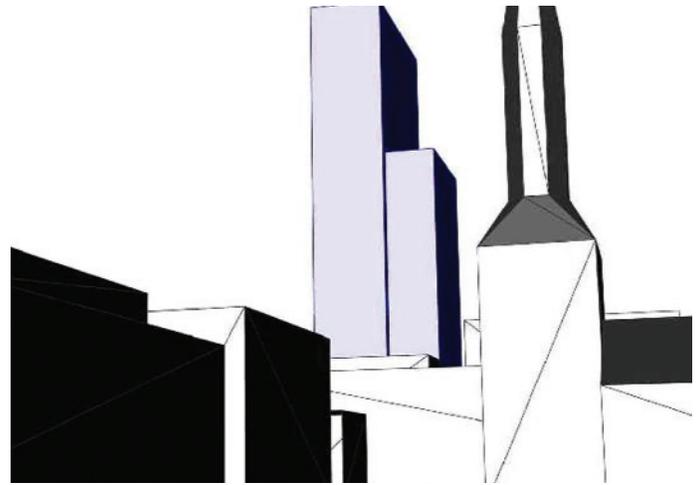
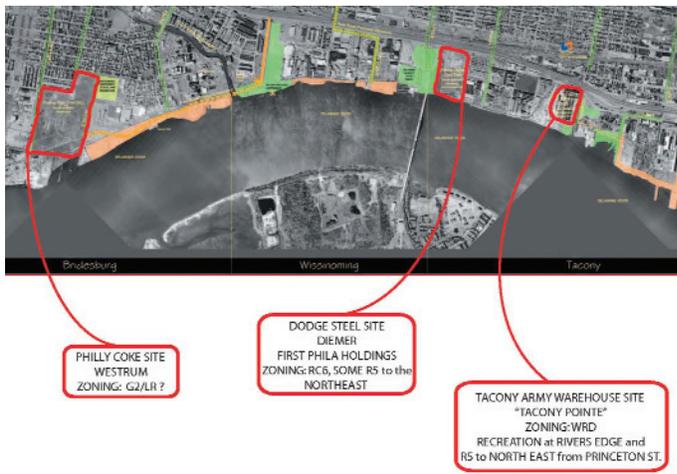
Philadelphia's top design-based priorities should be its Zoning Code, Zoning Map, permitting process, interaction between agencies, and design guidelines. However, design review could be a valuable tool for Philadelphia in bringing a degree of expert guidance into the permitting process to ensure accordance with a set of values and design standards. If created and operated in a way that complements existing agencies and facilitates dialogue with developers and their architects, a design review commission or panel could prevent the development of projects that demonstrate poor civic design, and could strengthen the quality of Philadelphia's public realm. Below is one potential form for establishing a design review process for Philadelphia:

Design Review Under the Umbrella of the Planning Commission: A design review body could be incorporated into the permitting process, rather than being a parallel step. The Planning Commission should be given mandatory review and sign-off responsibility for all major projects, and a Design Review Panel could serve as an advisory body to the Planning Commission, to inform this mandatory sign-off capacity. The Planning Commission staff would have to add at least one full-time position to

undertake small-scale design review, and report the recommendations of the Design Review Panel to the full Planning Commission, when it reviews projects for permit sign-off.

Panel Review of Major Projects: Most projects seeking a permit should have to undergo some level of design review. For smaller projects (like home renovations), the project could go through a simple staff review. Projects of over 100,000 square feet or deemed significant by the staff would go to the Design Review Panel. Since this process would add a level of design review to most projects, it would relieve other boards and commissions that currently go beyond their purview, from having to deal with design review.

A Panel of Designers and Citizens: A common and seemingly effective make-up of design review entities seems to be about 11 members, with at least one of the following: architect, landscape architect, engineer, urban planner, developer, contractor, and director of a CDC or service district. The other members could be citizen representatives, with special attention paid to placing at least one major business leader on the panel. As the body would be advisory to the City Planning Commission, members should be appointed by the Commission's Executive Director.



In 2006, Design Advocacy Group (DAG) began accepting invitations from developers to independently engage in design review for their projects. The image on the left shows waterfront projects in Northeast Philadelphia that DAG has reviewed. The image on the right shows a rendering DAG created to assist in its review of 218 Arch Street. (Images: Design Advocacy Group)

Monthly Meetings and Review at Two Stages: The Design Review Panel should meet at least monthly, so that it can report to the Planning Commission each month. It should review projects at the conceptual and project-design phases. Its recommendations to the Commission should be to approve, approve with changes, or decline. The City Planning Commission’s decision to sign off on the building permit should be strongly advised by the panel’s recommendations.

Recommendations Based on Adopted Design Guidelines: The purview of the Design Review Panel should be specifically to make recommendations to the Planning Commission based on a project’s adherence to a set of priorities and standards laid out in a clear and accessible publication of design guidelines. It is critical that the Design Review Panel not become an open-ended critique of a project, changing at the whim of the personal tastes of its members. This problem has affected design review in other cities where the purview is more generalized, without specific, published criteria. Any change or update in the design guidelines should be approved by the City Planning Commission. The City could publish the design guidelines in an annual Developer Guide that also includes application materials and panel hearing procedures. In addition, the panel would also review plans in accordance

with what is allowed by the Zoning Code, and as to whether the project fits the overall vision of any City-adopted community plans.

Required Documents: The design review panel’s recommendations to the City Planning Commission should include a set of submitted documents before each review. For the conceptual review, it should require an aerial view and photographs of existing conditions, an inventory of adjacent uses, preliminary site plan and elevations, and a basic explanation of circulation, parking, and ground-level uses/treatment. For the project-design review, the panel should require a site plan, elevations, renderings (including a street-level view), façade materials, landscape and lighting plans, parking and circulation plans, and a street-level/streetscaping plan.

Balance the Needs of the Public, Developers, and Architects: Design review seems to work most effectively when developers and architects feel they can be honest and open, and when the intent is ultimately to improve the quality of their product. Every effort should be made to keep the hearings advisory and informal. Of course, it is critical that this not become a new venue for backroom dealing. As such it is necessary to keep the meetings open and transparent with a public record. Balancing the





Sometimes, in the current system of decentralized planning and review, community groups are able to work with willing developers and capable architects to create quality projects like those shown above in Northern Liberties (left) and on South Street (right). The City should seek a process that ensures this kind of quality through its zoning, guidelines, and design review.

needs for transparency and the informality of a peer review is a challenge, but one that must be taken seriously to ensure the success of civic design review as a productive element of the development process.

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Adapting the Art Commission: Philadelphia already has the Art Commission undertaking design review for public projects and signage. The Art Commission already functions under the City Planning Commission, and technically it could be adapted to take on the review of private development as well, rather than creating a wholly new entity. In order for the Art Commission's purview to be expanded to private development, the City may need a charter amendment, and the City Planning Commission would need increased staff. It is, however, a potential solution worth considering. The Fairmount Park Commission also has design review authority over projects a certain distance from its boundaries — giving it purview over a significant amount of the city. Its role should be considered and perhaps consolidated into the Art Commission. It would be counterproductive to develop a situation with various design review entities of overlapping purview and differing opinions, battling over design review authority. The process of design review needs to be clearly defined, consistent, and reliable.





6

IDEAS FOR PHILADELPHIA: DESIGN GUIDELINES



Urban Design Guidelines

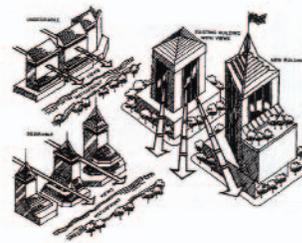


New Structures



6. Parking structures shall be designed to contribute positively to the aesthetic quality of downtown and pedestrian activity through the use of innovative landscaping and screening elements by:
- Parking structures should include pedestrian oriented uses on the first floor.

Major Views and Open Spaces



4. The design of new buildings should be sensitive to the impact on important views from existing buildings and from the streets.

The City of Tampa's guidelines are written to communicate the City's values and code requirements about design for developers, in the central business district only. (Images: City of Tampa)

What Are Design Guidelines?

Design guidelines are a tool for cities and neighborhood groups to communicate to developers, stakeholders, homeowners, and businesses a set of values and a visual structure for positive growth and development. Design guidelines have been adopted in places like Austin, Pittsburgh, Seattle, and Tampa. Other cities like Los Angeles have created effective design guidelines through outside organizations. New York takes a different approach with a highly-technical Design Consultant Guide, produced through its Department of Design and Construction, only applicable for consultants of municipal development projects.

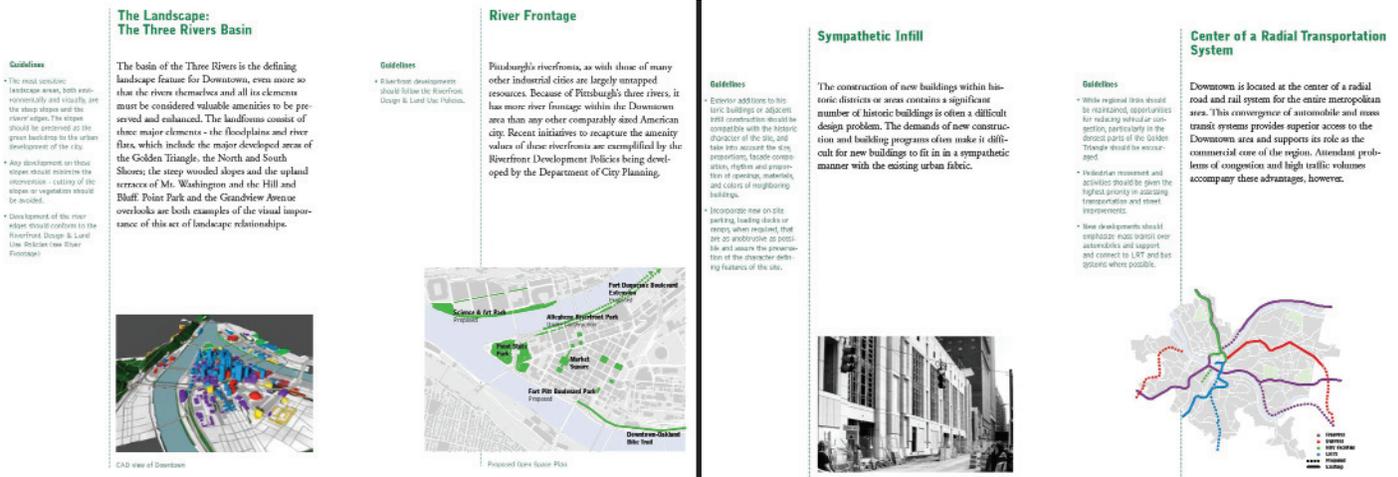
Guidelines come in a variety of formats, and can be targeted for several types of stakeholders. Design guidelines can be citywide and incorporated into the Zoning Code, or as a supplemental reference guide. Some design guidelines contain very general values and priorities like "avoid blank walls," and "design at a human scale." Others can be very technical, dealing with specific dimensions and building material recommendations.

The form of the guidelines depends on how it is to be used, and who it is intended to assist. In some cities with design review, the guidelines structure the

basis of the review process. In others it is part of the zoning code, defining by zone what uses and building forms are appropriate. In some cases, the guidelines emerge from a community planning process. They could be used to inform developers, individual property owners, the public, a review board, or community groups. There are a number of variables that must be weighed when a City decides to adopt design guidelines. These include:

- Will they be a mandatory part of the development process, or are they advisory? How will they be distributed, utilized, and enforced?
- Are they directed at laying out guidelines for the Planning Commission or design review board process, or are they primarily to inform developers?
- Are they providing a general set of guidelines, or are they more specifically structuring a form-based approach?
- Are they only for the downtown and neighborhoods, or are they meant to address citywide design issues?
- Are they written for developers, architects and planners, or the general public?
- Do they emerge from a City effort, a community planning process, or an independent organization?





Pittsburgh’s guidelines are produced by the City and directed at informing developers. They are citywide in scope, expressing general concepts for good design and development. (Images: City of Pittsburgh)

Sample Approaches – Tampa

The City of Tampa’s guidelines are written to communicate the City’s values and code requirements about design for developers, in the central business district only. It has two sections. The first section is a collection of single pages with illustrative drawings of positive design approaches, and a set of broad goals. For example, one page has a clear image of a parking garage with a well-designed pedestrian retail façade. The text reads:

“Parking structures shall be designed to contribute positively to the aesthetic quality of downtown and pedestrian activity through the use of innovative landscaping and screening elements...Parking structures should include pedestrian oriented uses on the first floor.”

Other pages deal with building shadows, massing, planning for a human scale, avoiding blank walls facing the street, view corridors, streetscaping, designing in context, and pedestrian/disabled accessibility.

The second section of the document contains portions of the City Ordinance that address development regulations. This section has no graphics, except for a district map and view corridor

map. Different districts receive their own section in the ordinance, with unique guidelines and restrictions. The Ordinance speaks to design review in the development process, procedures for permitting, streetscape design standards, public art requirements, open space requirements, parking provisions, and design use and regulations for specific districts.

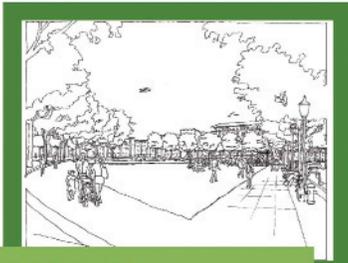
Sample Approaches – Pittsburgh

Pittsburgh’s guidelines are also produced by the City and directed at developers; however, they are focused on the entire city and are much more general than Tampa’s. They do not contain sections of the City’s ordinance or zoning code. The document’s format highlights major issues like “sympathetic infill,” and then has bullet point guidelines to address them, such as:

“Exterior additions to historic buildings or adjacent infill construction should be compatible with the historic character of the site, and take into account the size, proportions, façade composition, rhythm and proportion of openings, materials, and colors of neighboring buildings.”

The topical issues fall under the broader headings of: Pittsburgh’s Context and Character, Civic Art, Pedestrians First, and Design Standards.

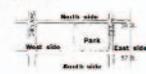




BALLARD
municipal center master plan area
Design Guidelines
Effective January 15, 2001

A-2 Streetscape Compatibility

Development Surrounding The Park



West, North and East sides of the park:

Translucent signs should be appropriate at street level adjacent to the park. Residential developments near private streets that directly access the park should be designed to enhance the street environment. Sidewalk related spaces should appear safe and welcoming.

South side of the park:

If mixed-use development occurs around the park, it is desirable to provide active storefronts along the entire main edge of NW 5th Street west of 22nd Avenue NW, and a consistent block wall with a low-story maximum height.



A maximum 10 foot setback is allowed for the desired transition from translucent signs to the public edge of any face of a building between 5th Avenue and Street or street edge.



Site Planning

B. HEIGHT, BULK AND SCALE

B-1 Height, Bulk and Scale Compatibility

Development Surrounding the Park

West, North and East sides of the park: In general, the overall development massing should maximize the solar access to the park through careful massing arrangement of the upper levels. Set back above a two-story base containing townhouse style units.

South side: One and a half stories are appropriate to the development along the south edge of the park. However, if mixed-use development does occur, it should provide a consistent street wall with a low-story maximum height. Development should be set back above the two-story height and maintain the facade to enhance solar exposure to the park.

Translucent sign related separation is provided along streets through design treatments such as significant modulation and setbacks above storefront units, the design should limit new corner building an additional four feet (not to exceed 9 ft) in height.

If mixed-use storefront units are shown along the mid-block connection with active facades and street-level entries, the Board may consider an additional four feet (not to exceed 9 ft) in height provided that the additional height is not hard wall does not obstruct solar access to the park.

Mixed Use Development on North-South Avenues

Buildings should maintain a consistent street wall up to a maximum of two stories and provide a setback, particularly on the west side of the avenue, beyond three stories to enhance solar access to the street and avoid a "canyon" effect.

Mixed Use and Residential Development on East-West Streets

Buildings should maintain a consistent street wall with setbacks particularly on the south side of the street beyond three stories to enhance solar access to the street. Buildings should provide facade modulation that breaks down the scale of larger developments to meet the underlying original 30' street width.

The Board may consider exceptions of up to 10 ft, from the recommended consistent street wall for public usable open space. Design should provide facade modulation that breaks down the scale of larger developments to meet the underlying original 30 ft street width.



Building setbacks should be back above a consistent street wall or other modality.



Height, Bulk and Scale

Height, Bulk and Scale

In Seattle, the Department of Design, Construction and Land Use produced citywide Guidelines, as well as a set of guidelines for the downtown and 19 neighborhoods. Above are sample pages from one of the neighborhood guidelines, meant to supplement the citywide design guidelines that inform the design review process. (Images: City of Seattle)

Sample Approaches – Seattle

In Seattle, the design guidelines are created to assist the Design Review process. The Department of Design, Construction and Land Use produced citywide Guidelines for Multi-Family and Commercial Buildings, as well as a set of guidelines for the downtown and 19 neighborhoods. Each set of local guidelines are meant to provide material that explains the context and values of a specific community, to supplement the citywide design guidelines that inform the design review process.

Seattle's guidelines are primarily written for developers and their architects. The citywide guidelines begin by describing the design review process, how to apply for review, and required documents. They then describe the criteria and priorities of design review. The rest of the document contains the actual guidelines, with fairly specific images and descriptions. This 68-page document is more technical than Tampa's or Pittsburgh's, addressing a variety of issues like:

- Building configurations
- Alternative site plans to save mature trees
- Siting on slopes to preserve view sheds

- Providing pedestrian-oriented entries
- Siting of buildings to protect residential privacy
- Driveway and access configurations
- Designing corner building entries
- Sympathetic rooftop forms
- Façade modulation
- Consistent cornice lines
- Articulated intervals
- Interrelation of streetscape elements to promote a human scale

Unlike Tampa's guidelines, however, while Seattle's guidelines are specific and technical, they do not quote required ordinance elements. The neighborhood-based guidelines are much shorter than the city-wide guidelines, with diagrams about important community corridors and assets, and brief descriptions of local priorities and values.



downtown
Austin
design
guidelines

City of Austin
Design Commission



Area Wide 13
Provide Lighting Along Pedestrian Paths

Issue
Taking advantage of Austin's natural beauty by preserving the pedestrian paths is one of the big attractions of our city center. Naturally, these paths can be dangerous at night if proper lighting is not provided. While discouraging crime, lighting will also engender long-term use and enjoyment of the paths by increasing public awareness of their value as their amenities.

Values Supported
Human Character
Safety

Examples
Entrance to the City Court Plaza and the walkway between the city square and the street.

Recommendations
- Pedestrian paths should be lit with production-quality light fixtures which create a warm light.
- The path should be lit with a warm white color temperature (2700K-3000K) and a color rendering index (CRI) of 90 or higher.

Building 2
Provide Multi-Tenant, Pedestrian-Oriented Development at the Street Level

Issue
The street level of buildings holds the greatest potential for pedestrian use and walk-in commercial activity. The lower two levels of a structure building should provide a framework for exploiting these potentials.

Values Supported
Human Character
Sustainability
Character
Economic Viability

Examples
The street level of a building should be designed to be pedestrian-oriented.

Recommendations
- Buildings should provide ground-level pedestrian-oriented spaces at street level.
- Buildings should provide ground-level pedestrian-oriented spaces at street level.
- Buildings should provide ground-level pedestrian-oriented spaces at street level.

The Downtown Austin Design Guidelines is a 109-page document created by the City of Austin's Design Commission. (Images: City of Austin)

Sample Approaches – Austin

The Downtown Austin Design Guidelines come in the form of a 109-page document created by the City of Austin's Design Commission. The final section of the guidelines contains a discussion of implementing the guidelines into the City's code and processes. It is also targeted at developers and individual homeowners.

The first section addresses major values for the city of Austin, including "sense of history," "authenticity," "sustainability," and "civic art." Following these broad values are 18 bullet-point "Goals of the Guidelines." These include "Develop the public nature of downtown and reinforce the sense that downtown belongs to everyone," "Encourage intense street-level activity," and "Promote downtown residential uses."

Next come the actual design guidelines, divided into sections focusing on the area-wide downtown, streetscape, open space, and buildings. There is also a section addressing "areas adjacent to the downtown core." The guidelines take the form of issues, addressed either in one- or two-page spreads. Each of these pages/spreads lists the issue in the heading, gives a description, lists values supported, provides some brief examples with

illustrations, and puts forth recommendations. This is a very simple and clear format that does not become too technical, but does cover a range of topical areas.

Examples of these issues include:

- Recycle the existing building stock
- Avoid historical misrepresentation
- Acknowledge that rooftops are seen from other buildings and the street
- Provide lighting along pedestrian paths
- Protect the pedestrian where the building meets the street
- Minimize curb cuts
- Enhance key transit stops
- Screen mechanical equipment
- Provide generous street-level windows
- Provide visual and spatial complexity in public spaces
- Control on-site parking
- Create quality construction

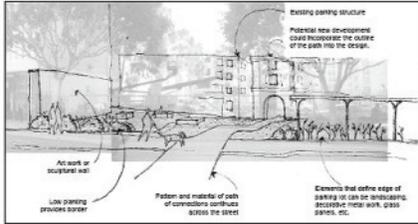
After the guidelines section, the publication highlights eleven "districts adjacent to the downtown



The adjacent photograph and sketch illustrate how parking lots can provide other uses if necessary.

The development of pedestrian spaces should serve to provide inter-block connections by activating existing vacant lots.

Open spaces should not be created by the removal of historic buildings, but rather by utilizing already existing vacancies.



STREETSCAPES

APPROACH TO INFILL



Approach One: Not Recommended

This approach does not take into consideration the common building heights, fenestration pattern, or storefront openings common to the adjacent historic structures. As such, this building design does not fit with the character of the block and is Not Recommended.



Approach Two: Recommended

This design takes into consideration the common building heights, fenestration pattern, and storefront openings common to the adjacent historic structures. Overall, it responds to the historic context of the street and is Recommended.

NEW CONSTRUCTION

JULY 2002

The design guidelines for Los Angeles were not produced by or for the City. Rather they were sponsored by a consortium of interest groups, including the Los Angeles Conservancy and three business improvement districts, funded through a private grant. (Images: Los Angeles Conservancy)

core.” Each of these receives a two-page spread, listing the area’s district designation, intention statement, and a list of added and amended guideline issues, as well as which of the downtown guideline issues do not apply to this particular district.

preservation incentives, and recommended additional incentives.

The guidelines can get somewhat technical, addressing issues like materials, scale, lighting, and façade design. It is, however, overall a very readable and straightforward guide that addresses a large number of issues.

Sample Approaches – Los Angeles

The design guidelines for Los Angeles were not produced by or for the City. Rather they were sponsored by a consortium of interest groups, including the Los Angeles Conservancy and three business improvement districts, through a grant from the Getty Grant Program.

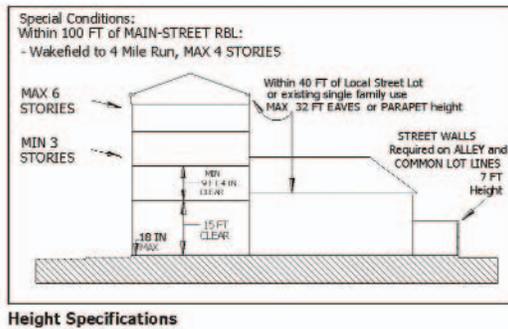
Design Guidelines for Philadelphia

The Philadelphia City Planning Commission has produced several documents that fulfill components of advisory design guidelines. These include:

These guidelines are largely targeted at assisting the BIDs and developers who are building in the historic downtown core. The guidelines address issues of preservation, infill development, and physical improvements (pedestrian lighting, façade treatments, signage, streetscaping). They are divided into four major sections: Storefront Guidelines, Historic Building Guidelines, New Construction Guidelines, and Streetscape Guidelines. There are also case studies and appendices of items like the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties, signage ordinance summary, existing

- Center City Parking Policy Statement
- Design Guidelines for Commercial Façade Improvements
- Neighborhood Design Guidelines
- Parks and Plazas
- Planning Philadelphia’s Open Spaces
- Planning Standards for Neighborhood Transformation
- Recommended Planting List for Off-Street Parking
- River Greenway Design Guidelines

B. BUILDING ENVELOPE STANDARDS: MAIN-STREET SITES



Height Specifications

Building Height

1. Principal building height is measured in STORIES. These parameters preserve appropriate STREET-space and allow for greater variety in building height.

2. Each building shall be between 3 and 6 STORIES in height, except where otherwise noted here or in the REGULATING PLAN.

Parking Structure Height

No parking structure within the BLOCK shall exceed the EAVE height of any building (built after 2002) within 40 feet of the parking structure.

GROUND STORY Height

1. The GROUND STORY floor elevation shall be between 6 inches below and 24 inches above the sidewalk elevation at the front of the building.

Upper Stories Height

1. The maximum floor-to-floor STORY HEIGHT limit for STORIES other than the GROUND STORY is 14 feet.

2. At least 80 percent of the upper STORIES shall each have at least 9 feet 4 inches clear (floor to ceiling) height.

Mezzanines and Podiums

Mezzanines and podiums greater than 2/3 of the floor area footprint shall be counted as full STORIES.

Street Wall Height

1. Any unbuilt ALLEY and/or COMMON LOT LINE frontage shall have a STREET WALL built along it, 7 feet in height.

2. STREET WALL heights are measured relative to the adjacent sidewalk or to the ground elevation.

Arlington, Virginia's Columbia Pike form-based code shows how form-based zoning can incorporate design guidelines. (Image: City of Arlington)

These resources could be adapted into a larger citywide, or neighborhood-based set of guidelines that would inform, and perhaps regulate, the development permitting process. However, the City needs to deal with several issues about design guidelines before it can move ahead with drafting and adopting them.

The most significant issue is how design and development are legislated, and how to incorporate guidelines into the development and permitting process. With so many agencies overseeing development, and no clear process of permitting, design guidelines would probably fall by the wayside in the current environment. Since the City Planning Commission is not required to sign off on building permits, developers may not even consult the Commission to discover that these guidelines exist, let alone should be adhered to. Below are a few approaches to dealing with the problems of legislating and enforcing design guidelines:

Advisory Guidelines: Guidelines could be a strictly advisory document of citywide issues and values that the City Planning Commission or another agency would routinely distribute to developers, individuals, and local groups. If the City wished to enforce the guidelines, its contents could be part of the criteria for the City Planning Commission to sign

off on permits (This approach, of course, requires that the City give the Planning Commission a mandatory sign-off role on building permits).

Guidelines as Criteria for Design Review Panel: The guidelines could serve as the criteria for a design review panel's decisions. This approach solves two problems: it gives the guidelines teeth, and also uses them to keep the role of the review panel in check, restraining its judgments to the scope of the written guidelines. Seattle currently uses this approach, and its guidelines inform developers and structure their architects' decisions, and are also the basis of the design review board's hearings and recommendations.

Guidelines Incorporated into Form-Based Zoning: Design guidelines could be incorporated into a form-based zoning code or hybrid code. This relies, of course, on the City rewriting its code, and adopting a form-based methodology. There would be guidelines either in the code itself, or as a supplementary document, providing descriptions and criteria for each separate zone classification.

Citywide or Neighborhood-Based Guidelines: Design guidelines could be drafted citywide or for specific areas, such as Center City or other neighborhoods. The City could work with CDCs to create shorter





Queen Village will soon be the first community to utilize the newly adopted Conservation Districts. Working with the City Planning Commission and the Historical Commission, local stakeholders will develop a set of design guidelines to inform new development.

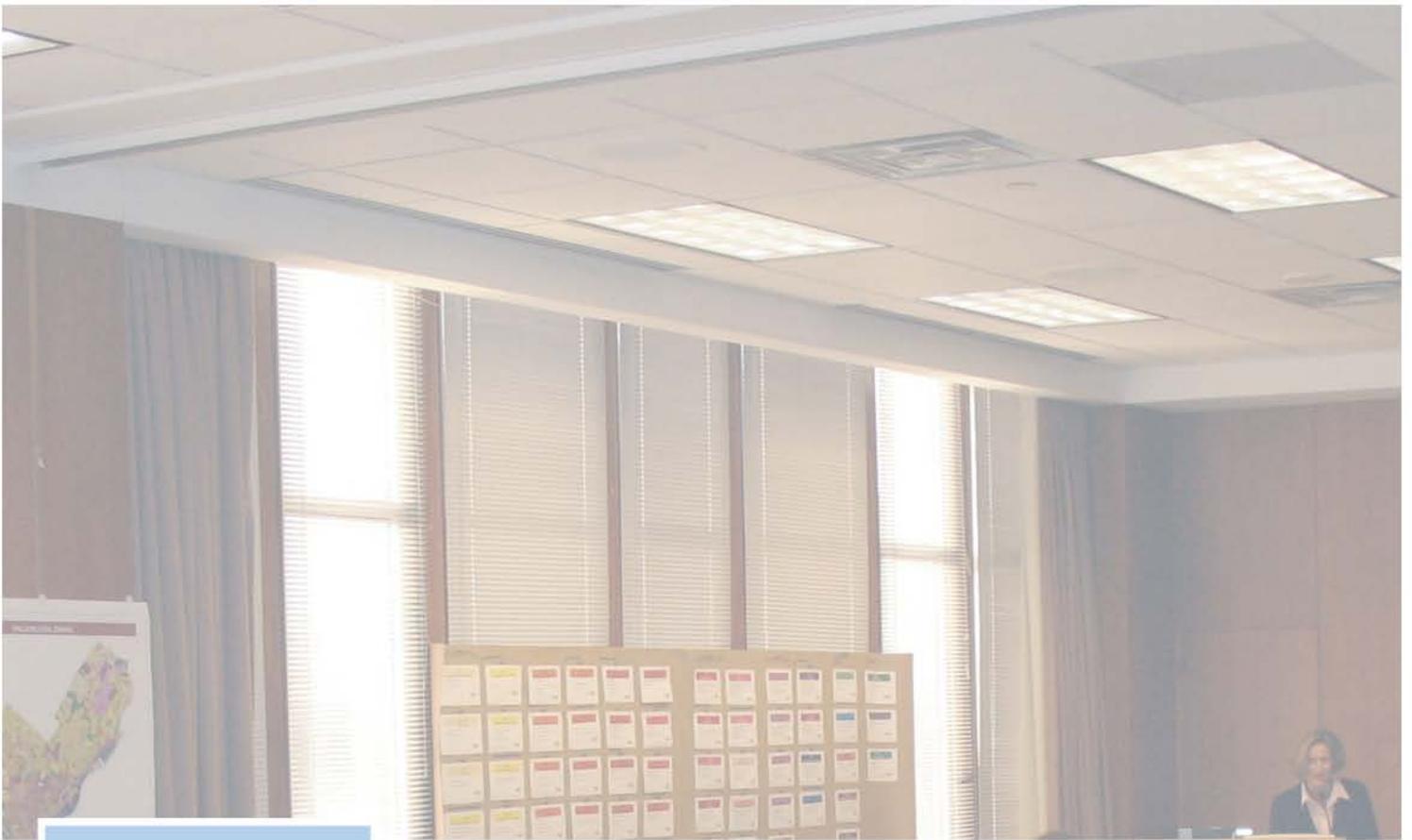
guidelines on a neighborhood level. The City already legislates a type of design guidelines through its many zoning overlays and through the concept of Conservation Districts. Clearly it is not desirable to rely on a multitude of zoning overlays; rather good design should be codified in the classifications of the Zoning Code. Conservation Districts offer an interesting model of how the City could create neighborhood-based design guidelines. However, the City would have to be committed to creating them for a number of neighborhoods, and linking them to a legislated means of enforcement (e.g., through a design review board).

In any case, the guidelines should be fairly specific, though in a form that is not onerous. The point is for developers, homeowners, and architects to consult the guide readily as they move ahead through permitting. Guidelines should incorporate the work that the Planning Commission has done to-date. The guidelines should address historic context, massing and scale, façade improvements, infill construction, pedestrian environments, streetscaping, access and parking, waterfront construction, and open space, among other issues.

The process of drafting design guidelines is one that will need to involve many stakeholders and community groups, working closely with trained

professionals and the City Planning Commission. One thing is clear, however: the City needs design guidelines. They should be clear and usable, should be part of the development process, and should address maintaining and creating a vibrant urban context.





7

IDEAS FOR PHILADELPHIA: DESIGN EDUCATION AND ADVOCACY





Philadelphia has a number of design-focused groups, including the Community Design Collaborative – a volunteer-based organization that provides pro-bono preliminary design services to nonprofits in the Philadelphia region. (Images: Community Design Collaborative)

Why Education and Advocacy?

An essential component of promoting design excellence is that of public education and awareness. The public cannot actively engage in neighborhood planning if not aware of the options and opportunities that exist. Officials will not draft progressive policies without understanding the fields of planning and design, and the existing precedent of best practices. A design agenda will not prevail without an understanding of why it matters. These issues are critical to ensuring a well-planned, well designed city, with a favorable development climate. Cities across the country have addressed these issues through the combination of advocacy and public education, often advanced through an independent organization like a civic design center.

Design education and advocacy organizations have proven valuable for expressing expert insight, lobbying governmental entities, communicating public values, and creating a single source of contact to represent the public in discussions of planning and development. Importantly, these organizations have also been successful in improving the level of public dialogue through an education strategy. A public well-informed about design, planning, and architecture will be able to work much more effectively with planners and other

municipal officials to support decisions that are best for their own community. When City agencies step in to work with the public, there is a basic level of understanding of design issues, heightening the degree of discourse, and raising the efficiency of the public process.

Education and advocacy organizations are viewed as public resources and independent third parties in major civic issues. They have the capacity to remain impartial from the City’s stance, and to leverage outside resources, not available to governmental entities. These organizations vary substantially from local to statewide, from think tanks to civic design centers. Their tasks are also varied from lobbying to exhibitions, from public forums to field trips. Some of the nation’s most effective design-based education and advocacy organizations include the Riverfront/Downtown Planning & Design Center in Chattanooga, the Chicago Architecture Club, the Municipal Art Society in New York, the Nashville Civic Design Center, the Community Design Center of Pittsburgh, and the Greenbelt Alliance in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Philadelphia has a number of design-based organizations, including the Design Advocacy Group, Community Design Collaborative, Penn Praxis, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia,





Each year the Design Center at Philadelphia University hosts *Design Philadelphia*, a “citywide cultural initiative” that involves a week of dozens of design-related events across the city. These events deal with architecture, planning, and urban design, as well as industrial design, fashion, and product design. (Images: The Design Center at Philadelphia University)

SCRUB, and Philadelphia University Design Center. However, no organization fulfills the role of a well-funded, independent resource that can engage in widespread advocacy, public education campaigns, and lobbying functions to promote a stronger design culture for the city. Such an organization could be of great benefit for Philadelphia in educating both the public and leadership.

The Importance of Partnerships

Many cities that have design education and advocacy organizations also have professional organizations like the American Institute of Architects or the Urban Land Institute (Each of these organizations has an active Philadelphia chapter). Additionally, many of these same cities also have universities with design programs and institutes. It is important to note that these organizations and the advocacy organization are not mutually exclusive, by any means. It is rare for these professional chapters and organizations affiliated with a university to fulfill the same role as an independent civic design center or similar organization.

The goal of a design education and advocacy organization is to remain independent from the municipal government, professional organizations, and universities. Oftentimes there are partnerships

between organizations, and a sharing of resources; however, the overall goal is a degree of autonomy, so that the education and advocacy organization can represent objective ideas, is free to criticize the public and private sectors, and can gain accountability to represent the public.

The partnerships created between design education and advocacy organizations and other groups can be critical and valuable. For example, the Nashville Civic Design Center has a positive relationship with the City and a local university contributes a professor, at no cost to the center, to teach its community planning courses. At the Municipal Art Society of New York, the members of its board are very close with decision makers in the City and State, and leverage these relationship to advance policy goals and initiatives.

Model Organizations

Design education and advocacy organizations are varied in their scope, funding structures, and mission. Overall their goals seem to often focus on advocating for specific design issues, and engaging in a strategy of public education. Following are three different models, each with lessons that could be utilized in forming an effective organization for Philadelphia.





The Municipal Art Society of New York is a well-established organization, focusing on design advocacy and public outreach and education. (Image: Steven Tucker, Municipal Art Society of New York)

Municipal Art Society of New York

The Municipal Art Society of New York (MAS) is a nonprofit organization, over 100-years-old, with a well-connected board of directors, and stable private funding sources. It focuses on issues of planning, design, and preservation, with a staff of 29.

MAS runs its Urban Center — a physical space with areas for exhibitions, programming, and a bookstore — and leads public forums and seminars across the city on civic design issues. MAS assists community groups, maintains a reference library, and provides online resources, including interactive maps with property zoning and ownership information. In addition, it offers public courses on design issues and leads city walking tours.

On the advocacy front, MAS works closely with City agencies to get involved with projects at an early stage. It engages legal staff to write amicus briefs and occasionally brings suit against specific developers. It assesses and creates reports on public policy relating to design, and seeks to bring public awareness to areas where specific projects may be detrimental to the civic good. MAS provides a voice to design professionals to express public opposition to specific developments. Its work over the years has saved a number of historic buildings

from demolition, and contributed design insight into the planning process for some of New York’s major civic spaces.

Nashville Civic Design Center

While MAS is a long-standing, well-established organization, Nashville’s Civic Design Center provides a strong model of a newly-established, successful design center. Its approach is based on the Riverfront/Downtown Planning and Design Center in Chattanooga, which forged a public visioning process for that city’s waterfront.

The Civic Design Center in Nashville emerged from an informal group of design professionals that began meeting regularly in 1995, in the wake of opposition to a municipal project that would have built a highway through the city’s downtown. The group successfully halted the highway’s construction. In 2001 it received its nonprofit status and opened its doors with a \$100,000 grant from a local foundation. Ongoing funding for the center comes from the City’s Metropolitan Development and Housing Agencies, private donations, event revenue, and in-kind support from the University of Tennessee which provides a part-time design director. It maintains a board of directors, and a staff of four employees.





The Nashville Civic Design Center engaged the community in a large-scale planning effort to produce “The Plan for Nashville.” (Source: Nashville Civic Design Center)

The center’s major accomplishment is the Plan of Nashville — the result of a two-year process of public meetings, workshops, and charrettes. It represented a huge grassroots and volunteer effort. While the intent was not for the City to adopt the plan, it presented a major vision of citizen voices on the future of the city. The first phase of its implementation is in progress through the City’s Riverfront Development Master Planning Process.

The center hosts a series of urban design courses and house tours. It also holds a monthly forum of design professionals, where between 30-100 members discuss pertinent subjects and review plans by developers who voluntarily seek the group’s input. The center’s policy is that it will not actively advocate for or against a developer’s project. This allows the meeting to serve as a constructive roundtable discussion, for developers to improve the quality of their projects.

The center has been cited as an important force in promoting public awareness of design issues in a city with a notably weak design culture. The center seems to be relatively stable, and seeks to become a permanent institution that can adapt to changing and ongoing local needs.

Community Design Center of Pittsburgh

The Community Design Center of Pittsburgh is another example of a stable design center with an array of programming. CDCP was founded in 1968 as the Pittsburgh Architects Workshop, and adopted its current name in 1987. CDCP is run by a Board of Directors and a staff of six full-time employees.

CDCP’s major program is its Design Fund, a grant program to provide resources for community-based organizations to allow them to fund design projects. Examples of projects supported by the Design Fund include an exterior renovation of a row of homes; a historic renovation creating affordable artist housing, studio space, and galleries; several community master plans; and a riverfront development strategy. Grants have totaled over \$1 million since 1987, awarded to over 55 organizations. CDCP also connects organizations with design professionals to carry out their projects.

CDCP also runs a program called RenPlan, which connects homeowners with educational resources and volunteer design professionals, to assist them with affordable home repair and renovation. Another of CDCP’s programs is Pedal Pittsburgh, an annual bicycle ride that attracts over 2,000 riders. The ride





Penn Praxis, of the University of Pennsylvania School of Design, engages in community planning efforts. Currently its work focuses primarily on the master planning process for the Delaware waterfront. This sort of community-based planning and outreach is typically one of several major functions of a civic design center. (Images: Penn Praxis)

“highlights the neighborhood and design landmarks that make Pittsburgh unique,” while “celebrating design, health and fitness, and urban lifestyles.”

Effective Design Education and Advocacy for Philadelphia

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Philadelphia already has a number of design-related organizations, some of which carry out one or more of the programs that would be incorporated into a civic design center. However, these programs are currently each run separately, and none of Philadelphia’s existing organizations has the mission and capacity of a true design education and advocacy organization. Philadelphia’s design culture would be greatly aided by the creation of an independent organization with stable funding, and the mission of engaging in public education and advocacy activities to improve the city’s level of design quality, and awareness of design issues.

It is not unusual to have a design education and advocacy organization as well as an array of other groups. New York, for example, has more design-related organizations than Philadelphia, but none that plays the role of MAS, working as a public advocate and educational outlet for the city. This role is currently a major void in Philadelphia, and a substantial barrier toward achieving a greater

awareness of design issues. This recommendation could be endorsed by the City, but would have to be established and funded through some sort of partnership with extant organizations, foundations, and/or with in-kind support from a university and the private sector. Below are some major components involved in creating an effective design advocacy organization for Philadelphia:

Don’t Start from Scratch: Philadelphia has a culture in its nonprofit sector that favors creating new groups, rather than consolidating and building the capacity of existing organizations. Philadelphia’s Design Advocacy Group (DAG) resembles the group of professionals who met leading up to the incorporation of the Nashville Civic Design Center. The Community Design Collaborative currently runs one of the major functions of CDCP by connecting community organizations with design professionals. These and other groups could, perhaps, be merged or could collaborate in a way to combine their various efforts into a larger structure.

Funding Comes First: Models in other cities have shown that funding is a major impediment to creating an effective design education and advocacy organization. In order for this effort to be effective, the organization must have a fairly stable long-term funding strategy. In the case of the organizations in



Many projects in Philadelphia, like the Murano (left) and 108 Arch Street (right), are designed through a delicate balance between the interests of the developer and community groups. Lacking a strong public planning and design process, success of development in Philadelphia often hinges on the developer's and the community's understanding of what constitutes good design.

other cities, their major sources of funding seem to have come from foundation grants, and support from the public sector or universities. Long-term funding can come from continued programmatic grants, event revenues, memberships, workshop and course fees. Funding can be creative, as in the case of Nashville, where the university support comes from its contribution of a part-time professor to teach the public design courses.

Build Partnerships: The design education and advocacy organization should not be viewed as being in competition with the public sector, universities, or professional organizations. Its role should be separate from that carried out by these existing groups, and its programs should be carefully laid out in concert with existing efforts. One way to ensure this type of support is to have a steering committee comprised of the heads of these other organizations. In this way the education and advocacy group promotes the issues identified by these other groups and can be the major mouthpiece for all of the city's design-based issues.

Work with the City: MAS, Nashville, and CDCP are all examples of groups whose success relies on their connection with the public sector. In Nashville, the City is now moving ahead with a public planning process to carry out part of the result of the Design

Center's massive visioning work. MAS continually fights undesirable proposals through its significant connections to decision makers in the city and state government. CDCP acts as the city's ambassador for design, for example, engaging in a civic design exchange with Chattanooga.

Focus on Public Education: Philadelphia suffers from a weak design culture. Neighborhood planning efforts are met with a basic lack of background knowledge, and a misguided set of priorities. Philadelphia has some organizations working to cure this problem. Currently the Community Design Collaborative empowers communities by giving them access to volunteer teams of designers to create preliminary plans and drawings. The Delaware Valley Smart Growth Alliance is an organization that advocates for quality design through the region. Penn Praxis incorporates community charrettes and meetings in its process of outreach. However, there is no organization like MAS, Nashville, or CDCP that undertakes frequent neighborhood-based public efforts with the goal of broad-based civic design education. Philadelphia would be well-served by a permanent organization with the resources to engage in a wide campaign of public education about design and planning issues.





Another of Philadelphia's active design-based organizations is its local chapter of the American Institute of Architects that hosts an annual *Design on the Delaware Conference*. A number of cities have active professional organizations like the AIA as well as an independent civic design center. The two do not often seem to overlap in their initiatives. (Image: AIA Philadelphia)

Remain Independent: In Philadelphia, as elsewhere, initiatives connected with the City or a university are met with greater skepticism than an independent effort. Penn Praxis, for example, has done exemplary work both in its past efforts and in the current waterfront planning process. However, its work is sometimes overshadowed by the perception that it represents the University of Pennsylvania or the City, rather than an impartial third party. The success of MAS and Nashville, especially, rely on their organizations' independence and ability to approach the public on their own, retaining credibility.





CONCLUSIONS





It will be important for the next mayor to communicate a set of values and priorities to every city department, to the business community, and to the residents of the city, at large.

New Direction for Philadelphia

With the promise of the coming new mayoral administration and the successes and opportunities of Philadelphia's recent urban renaissance, the time is right for the city to forge a new direction. While the next administration will have much to focus on, it is clear that the issues of civic design will be crucial for defining the quality of life for Philadelphia's residents, the future of its communities and businesses, and its international image and reputation.

This study has looked at a variety of issues, focusing on the stakeholders who impact design in Philadelphia, the systemic challenges to promoting design excellence, and a set of recommendations for reform. The key element, as has been often repeated in this report, is building a culture that values design. Ultimately, civic design need not be explained; rather it should be pervasive in the thinking of every resident, civil servant, developer, and stakeholder in the city. Civic design should be appreciated as a necessary and critical element to building the urban experience we cherish, and in carrying Philadelphia forward as one of America's great places to live, work, locate a company, or take a vacation.

The first step in promoting civic design excellence is having a leadership that understands how critical civic design is to the success and livability of the great cities of America. The next step is having that leadership communicate this value to every member of City government, to the business community, and to the people of the city. Without this leadership, this understanding that change must come from the top, the rest of the recommendations in this report will be difficult if not impossible to implement. With this kind of active public-sector leadership, strong organizational support from the private and nonprofit sectors, and with a public will, Philadelphia can carry out the recommendations in this report, embrace reform, and begin our city's rise to becoming known as a place that truly promotes and realizes civic design excellence.

Who Will Bring Reform?

As was discussed earlier, there are a large number of stakeholders, with complicated relationships who impact the quality of design in Philadelphia. The City administration and elected officials ultimately control their own destiny. A new mayor provides a key opportunity for positive change. This change does not rely on the mayor alone. City Council has recently become very involved in the processes of planning, development, and civic design. This new role was





The Centennial District Master Plan, prepared by MGA Partners, Architects in 2005 for the Fairmount Park Commission was a major planning effort undertaken by a coalition of institutional and neighborhood groups to plot out a course for transforming over 700 acres into a regional destination. (Image: Fairmount Park Commission)

perhaps due to the disjointed legislated process that lacked accountability. However, with reform will come new accountability and a process that is dependable and makes sense. It will be critical for City Council to embrace and promote a new, reformed process.

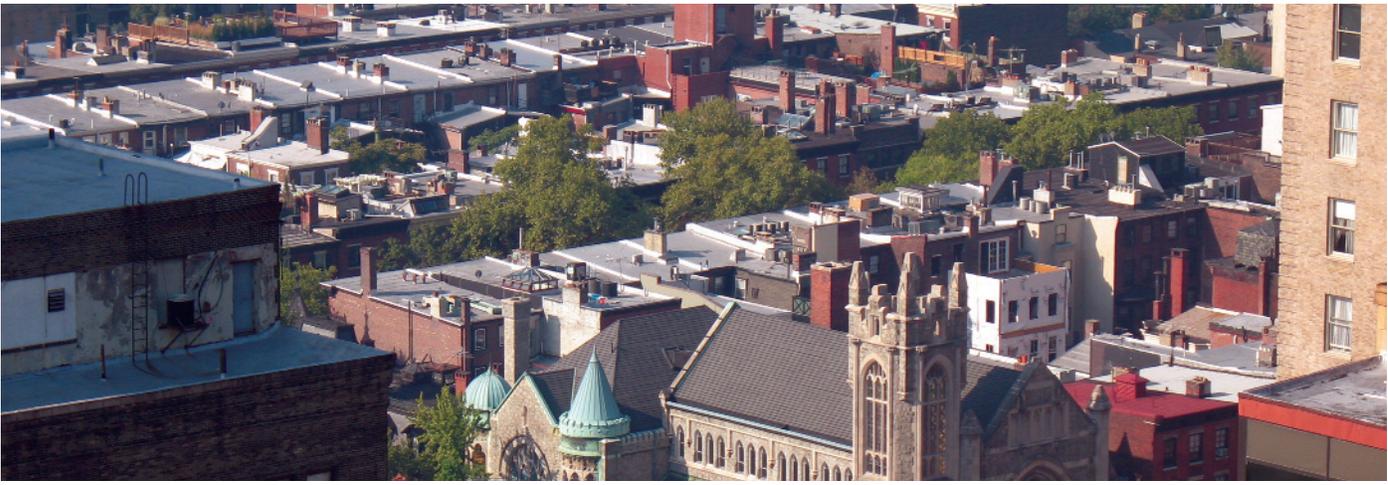
Reform cannot come without a popular mandate. Philadelphia is far behind other cities in terms of appreciating the importance of civic design and protecting the public realm. It will be up to the city's numerous nonprofit and civic organizations, as well as the public at-large, to support an agenda that values design, provides the necessary information and guidance for our public officials, and works with the public sector to change the way we do business. For many community groups that are used to deal-by-deal relationships, this will take a commitment to reforming the familiar process for the benefit of Philadelphia's overall future.

Design excellence in other cities requires a commitment of major support and resources from foundations, institutions, and the private sector. Civic design has much to do with a city's economic development, business climate, image and reputation. Leadership cannot just come from within the public sector, it will have to come from business leaders, from the development community, and from

the city's major institutions. All of these groups will have to be ready and willing to commit time and financial resources to building a public realm infrastructure that we can be proud of, and to fostering public-private partnerships necessary to build truly exceptional capital projects.

It is clear that some of this support is already in place. Institutions like universities and museums have been putting substantial resources into their communities for years. Local foundations have committed their resources and strategic giving to issues of neighborhood investment and civic design. Some local businesses have created programs for supporting community planning. The key will be for these groups to combine their efforts, and come together with an enlightened leadership to truly transform Philadelphia into a world-class city.





Civic design is shaped by the combined efforts of the public sector, the civic sector, the private sector, and local citizens. Partnerships and effective use of resources are critical to build great places to live and work.

Major Recommendations

This report has already laid out a long list of recommendations and big ideas that will put Philadelphia on the road to reform. Below is a summary of some early steps the next Mayor and the city can take to start Philadelphia on the road to reform:

Articulate a Vision from the Top

- The mayor and City Council must take the lead in establishing civic design as a citywide priority.
- The mayor should make it clear that design matters in all policy areas, and should put his weight behind key civic projects.
- The mayor should benchmark Philadelphia's programs and investments that impact civic design against other major cities.

Make Qualified Appointments

- The mayor should appoint individuals to all boards and commissions who understand and value civic design, and appreciate how design impacts economic development and quality of life.
- The mayor should develop an internal education program, like a local Mayor's

Institute on City Design for himself, department heads, and members of City Council, to ensure an understanding of civic design principles and policy.

Develop Partnerships and Engage the Civic Sector

- The mayor should develop an advisory roundtable comprised of civic and community leaders to build a linkage between the planning and development efforts of Philadelphia's active civic groups and those of the public sector.
- The City should create a structure and incentives for local groups to engage in a public process to plan for their community's future.
- The City should support the creation of a resource center to encourage the work of civic and nonprofit organizations.

Lead the Change from the Mayor's Office

- The mayor should appoint a Development Coordinator or Deputy Mayor for Planning and Development to facilitate quality projects.
- The mayor should select departmental representatives to participate in a regular development roundtable.





Great civic spaces like Rittenhouse Square provide a model for how to plan and maintain spaces that enhance Philadelphia's image and quality of life. Philadelphia is on the road to developing a stronger design culture. This appreciation of how our spaces and buildings impact our city will be critical for Philadelphia's future.

- The mayor should create a new Department of Transportation, Office of Sustainability, and restore the Office of Arts and Culture.
- The mayor should better fund existing departments and agencies that impact design and the public realm (e.g., the Streets Department and Historical Commission).

Empower the City Planning Commission & Reaffirm Zoning Reform

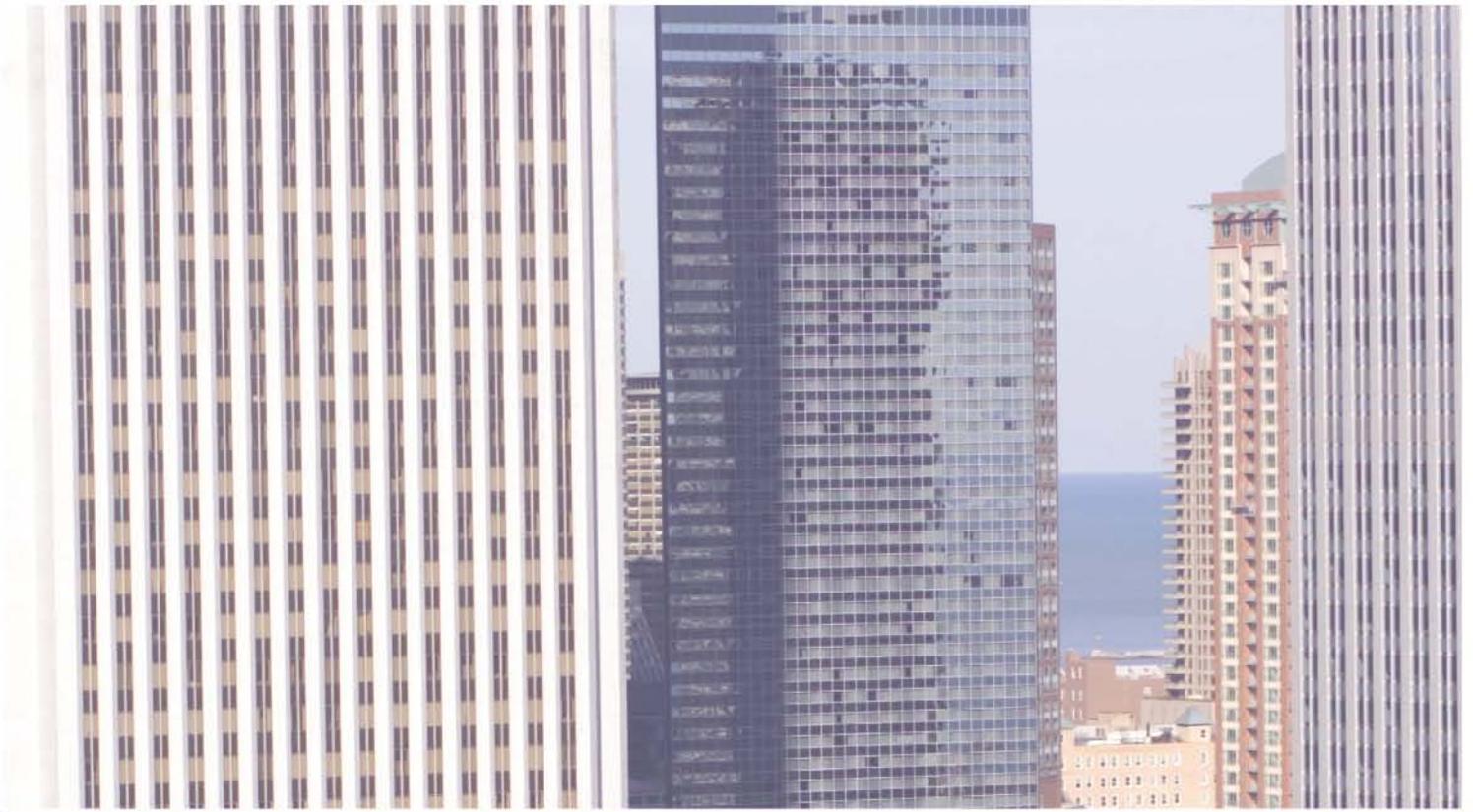
- The mayor should stand behind the City Planning Commission and renew its authority to undertake major planning efforts.
- The mayor should work to connect planning efforts with sound economic analysis and funding sources.
- The mayor should direct the City Planning Commission to create a new Comprehensive Plan for the City.
- The City should renew its commitment to rewriting the Zoning Code, with classifications responsive to Philadelphia's changing landscape, incorporating form-based elements.
- The mayor should support a community planning process to update the city's zoning map.

Where Do We Go From Here?

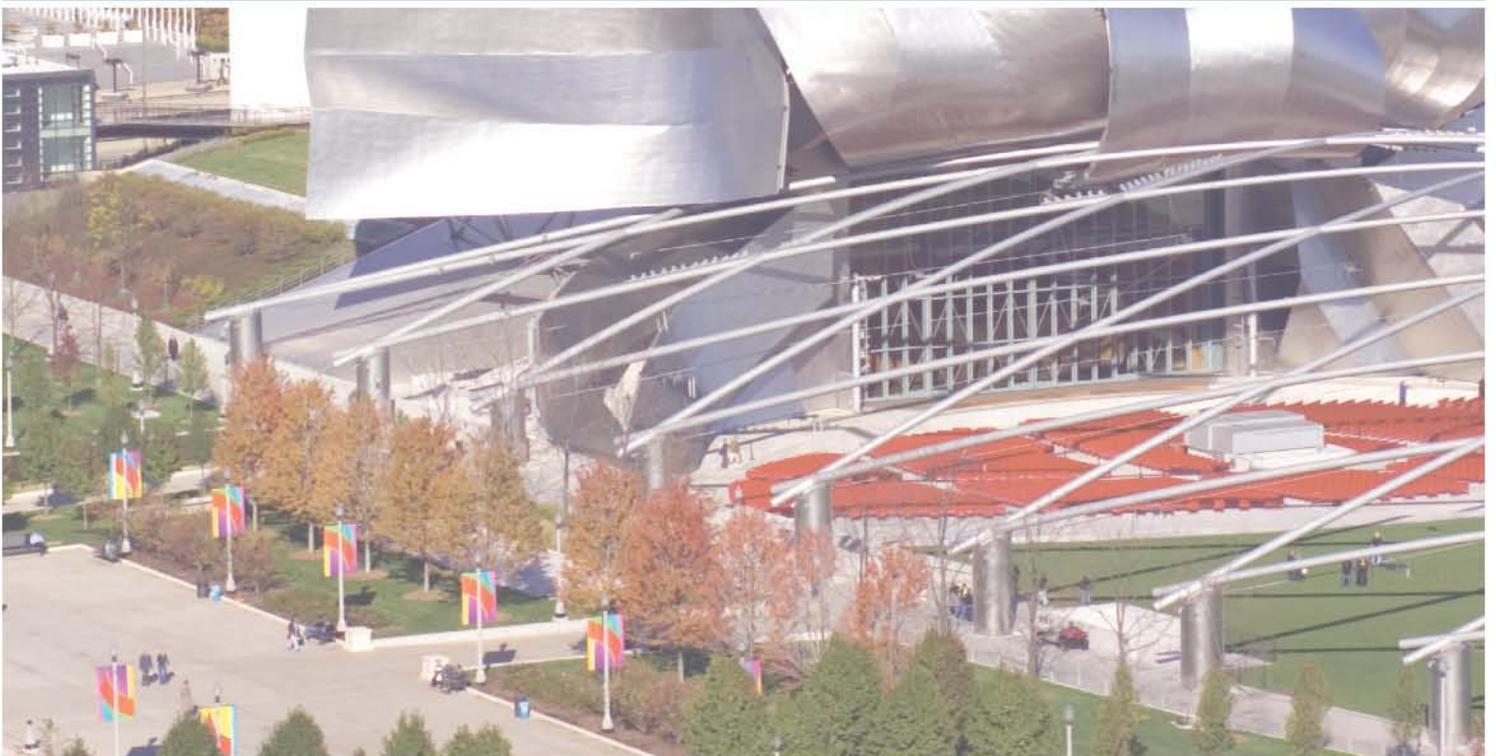
This report lays out an in-depth discussion of the issues and recommendations surrounding Philadelphia's pursuit of civic design excellence. A number of other organizations have produced reports on similar topics and aspects of reforming the City's processes of planning and development. With a new mayor coming, it is time for action. It is largely up to the public and civic groups to exert pressure on their elected officials to lead the charge in building a strong design culture. It is up to the mayor and City Council to adopt design excellence as a major priority.

We need to bring the stakeholders to the table and plan a true course of action for drastically shifting the way we do business in Philadelphia. It will take commitment, public education, and a belief that reform is truly possible. Philadelphia has come a long way in recent history, overcoming adversity and proving its critics wrong. It is time to do it again by forging a new climate of cooperation and a shared commitment to excellence. We have a window of opportunity to change our mindset, our priorities, and the way the world views our city. It is time to get started.





APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF CIVIC DESIGN EXCELLENCE





A rendering of a new neighborhood along Atlanta's Beltline loop (left) and a street scene from the Lowell Artist Overlay District (right).

Examples of Civic Design Excellence

Philadelphia has a number of examples of civic design excellence, ranging from some new buildings, to the work of its major design organizations to projects that transform a corner or a block. However, Philadelphia has a long way to go, and can benefit from the lessons that other cities have to offer.

Examples of civic design ranges from a city's overall design culture, to individual projects, to its policies, to the quality of its development. Cities with strong examples of civic design have a leadership, business community, and populace that recognize its importance.

There are a number of national examples of cities that have realized examples of civic design excellence. The following are just a few:

In July of 2004, the City of Chicago unveiled **Millennium Park**, a 24.5-acre public venue with art, open space, and a music amphitheater, designed by some of the nation's foremost architects. It was built through a public-private partnership at a cost of \$475 million, and has garnered wide international acclaim.

The City of Atlanta, in partnership with the regional transit agency, is developing the **Beltline Loop**, a 22-mile rail loop around its downtown, lined with open space, bicycle and pedestrian trails, and creating 1,400 acres of new parkland. It will be maintained through an innovative increment financing structure, with tax revenue generated by the new, mixed-use development constructed around the Beltline loop.

In 2003, the City of New York permitted artists Christo and Jean Claude to construct **The Gates**, their 23-mile public art installation, in Central Park. Opening in February of 2005, the center of Manhattan was transformed by 7,503 16-foot-high saffron-colored "gates," built with 5,290 tons of steel and 315,491 miles of vinyl tube.



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The Gates (left), as seen in New York’s Central Park, the exterior of the Walker Art Center (right) in Minneapolis (Right Image: Walker Art Center).

The City of Chicago provides **expedited building permits for projects that meet certain green building criteria**, including LEED certification, and certain elements of a “green menu,” including green roofs and use of renewable energy sources. New York City’s Department of Design and Construction has an **Office of Sustainable Design**. A New York City law passed in 2005 requires new public buildings to attain a LEED Silver rating or higher.

The Pittsburgh Civic Design Coalition undertook a **Civic Design Exchange** in 2005, where 30 Pittsburgh design leaders traveled to Chattanooga to “connect with its leadership” and study the outcomes of Chattanooga’s waterfront and downtown planning and economic development work.

Lowell Massachusetts added an **Artist Overlay District** into its zoning code, permitting live-work spaces in its historic downtown. The overlay has stimulated millions of dollars invested into adaptively reusing older structures, and has effectively led to the creation of a vibrant 24-hour neighborhood, based around its robust arts community.

For years a center of the design industries, **Minneapolis** is home of the innovative Walker Art Center, and is a magnet for world-renowned architecture. Minneapolis’s design culture led *Metropolis* magazine to feature the city in 2005 as “design capital.” **The Minneapolis Design Institute**, founded in 1998, was funded in part by the State Legislature to become a design think tank and public education center.

PROMOTING CIVIC DESIGN EXCELLENCE IN PHILADELPHIA

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Abstract: This report, funded by the William Penn Foundation, and developed by the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, looks at the state of civic design in Philadelphia in 2007 and makes recommendations as to how the City can strengthen its own functions to improve the quality of civic design that defines our urban landscape. Topics covered include elements of civic design, design review, design guidelines, design education and advocacy, and best practices from across the country.

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