



The ARAMARK Tower  
1101 Market Street  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107-2994

HOWARD M. NEUKRUG, P.E.  
Commissioner

**Subject: Existing Buildings in 50 foot Stream Buffer**  
**Date: November 6, 2012**

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On October 31, 2012, Philadelphia City Council's Rules Committee held a hearing on Bill Number 120654 regarding the issue of waterfront setbacks. During the hearing, an amendment was introduced that would:

"Permit non-conforming buildings located within the waterfront setback to expand so long as the distance between the building and the waterfront is not decreased. This would permit existing buildings that are located in the 50 foot buffer to expand in width and height within the waterfront setback, and such building may expand in depth to the portions of the lot that do not abut the water. This amendment would allow businesses to grow and expand their facilities and keep jobs in the City. "

As requested at the hearing, the Philadelphia Water Department (PWD) conducted an analysis of water fronting parcels with buildings within the proposed 50 foot setback buffer. The results provided from this analysis are an approximation given the potential accuracies of using geographic information system mappings over large areas with such small distances. Therefore, this analysis is only intended to inform City Council and the Philadelphia City Planning Commission to understand the impacts of any potential amendments regarding expansion and grandfathering of structures within the setback buffer area. The results of this research are:

- Overall there are 1,412 parcels of the roughly 546,459 parcels in the city that are located along water bodies intersecting the 50 foot buffer.
- 414 of those 1,412 parcels, or roughly 29% of parcels, have buildings within the 50 foot buffer.
- About 40-45% of the parcels along the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers have buildings within the 50 foot buffer.
- About 20-30% of the parcels along the Pennypack, Tacony/Tookany/Frankford, and Poquessing have buildings within the 50 foot buffer.
- About 10% of the parcels along the Wissahickon and Darby Cobbs have buildings within the 50 foot buffer.
- There are still over 243 parcels with buildings that are within a 25 and 10 foot buffer of a water body.

Tables 1 and 2 on the following page provide the detailed breakdown of the number of parcels and percentages within varying setback distances from each specific water body in Philadelphia.

**Summary Table 1: Number of Parcels With Existing Buildings Within Setback Distance From Water Body**

Parcel Relationship to Buffer	Total Number of Parcels	Delaware River	Schuylkill River	Poquessing Creek	Penny-pack Creek	Tacony Tookany Frankford Creek	Wissahickon Creek	Darby Cobbs Creek
Total Parcels in Philadelphia	<b>546,459</b>							
Parcels intersecting 50 ft buffer	<b>1,412</b>	126	266	369	428	99	104	20
Parcels intersecting 50 ft buffer with building in buffer	<b>414</b>	56	111	84	122	27	12	2
Parcels intersecting 25 ft buffer	<b>1,038</b>	115	227	217	321	56	84	18
Parcels intersecting 25 ft buffer with building in buffer	<b>180</b>	38	61	11	48	14	7	1
Parcels intersecting 10 ft buffer	<b>867</b>	113	184	185	254	39	76	16
Parcels intersecting 10 ft buffer with building in buffer	<b>63</b>	28	17	3	9	2	3	1

**Summary Table 2: Percentage of Parcels With Existing Buildings Within Setback Distance From Water Body**

Parcel Relationship to Buffer	Delaware River	Schuylkill River	Poquessing Creek	Penny-pack Creek	Tacony Tookany Frankford Creek	Wissahickon Creek	Darby Cobbs Creek
Intersecting 50 ft buffer with building in buffer	44%	42%	23%	29%	27%	12%	10%
Intersecting 25 ft buffer with building in buffer	33%	27%	5%	15%	25%	8%	6%
Intersecting 10 ft buffer with building in buffer	25%	9%	2%	4%	5%	4%	6%