



An Action Plan for the Central Delaware: 2008-2018

Progress Report - June 2010

In June 2008, the Central Delaware Advocacy Group (CDAG) launched the *Action Plan for the Central Delaware 2008-2018*, a 10-step, 10-year strategic plan to achieve key objectives of the *Civic Vision for the Central Delaware*. Mayor Michael Nutter embraced the Action Plan and began following its recommendations by announcing the reformation of the Penn's Landing Corporation and a Master Planning process for the Central Delaware. Progress made thus far by the City is both encouraging and impressive, but no assessment is final until we achieve our goal of a world-class waterfront. Following is the first of CDAG's periodic assessments of progress toward that goal:

1.) Appoint an open, accountable, effective waterfront manager:

Mayor Nutter abolished the Penn's Landing Corporation and appointed a reform board to form the Delaware River Waterfront Corporation (DRWC). The new organization's mission is to create and manage public space, and is obligated to operate under state sunshine laws.

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The reform board has adopted policies inclusive of public input and is transparent in practice, but the DRWC also has an opportunity to exercise strong leadership on key issues like riverfront public transit, traffic management programming, and sustainability practices.

2.) Adopt clear zoning, a detailed master plan, and a coordinated regulatory policy:

In 2009, City Council, led by Councilman Frank DiCicco, passed interim zoning which would enforce some of the guidelines called for in the Civic Vision, and the DRWC has commissioned a master plan, based on the Civic Vision, to be completed in 2011 that will guide development and public investment.

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Since the interim zoning overlay will yield to the master plan, the specific standards included in the master plan will be crucial to realization of the Civic Vision.

3.) Build a continuous, 7-mile trail along the Delaware riverfront:

Councilman DiCicco's interim zoning overlay calls for a setback with a recreational trail and public access along the river, and a public/private partnership has built a .9-mile mixed-use trail along a portion of the southern section.

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The master plan will establish the standards for the permanent, 7-mile trail. Much will depend on the Planning Commission's Plan of Development standards and evaluation of each riverfront development proposal. Also, the City has yet to develop a comprehensive liability policy for the recreational trail to allay landowners' concerns and help ensure the future of the trail.

4.) Create new parks and improve two existing parks:

The Race Street Pier has been dedicated by the Mayor as a new public park, and a design by James Corner Field Operations is expected to be implemented by 2011. A design/build park project for Pier 53 near Washington Ave. is also underway. Penn Treaty Park and Pulaski Park have received design upgrades and master planning treatments.

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The city-owned, incinerator/festival pier site remains an important future priority, as per the Action Plan.

5.) Guarantee public access to the riverfront and make it easier for residents to walk and bike to the river:

Access was a key part of the interim zoning overlay, but the master plan will identify key connections from neighborhoods to make sure access is appropriately spaced, high-quality and safe.

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It will be important to watch how quickly the City and DRWC will act to ensure frequent access from streets to the trail across the casino parcels, as well as the Conrail and Anderson parcels in the northern central Delaware.

6.) Extend transit to the river:

The Delaware River Port Authority (DRPA) and the city have selected a preferred plan for trolley service along the riverfront and East Market Street corridor.

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DRPA investment in waterfront transit is welcome but the DRWC master plan should drive this process. Resolving the all-important connection across I-95 at Market Street and ensuring that the new transit line investment serves riverfront neighborhoods, and is more than a casino connection for the Convention Center, is vitally important.

7.) Extend key streets to the river:

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The master plan process should focus on the key streets identified in the Action Plan (Tasker, Reed, Pier 70 Boulevard, Washington, Brown, Shackamaxon, Beach and Lehigh) as well as others that should be added to the city plan to integrate the riverfront with neighborhoods. City planners must stand up to development interests and extend the street grid to the river. The City has failed to call for the opening of Shackamaxon on the SugarHouse site as a real street for public access and as a control against further sprawl by the casino, and Reed Street on the Foxwoods site may suffer the same fate.

8.) Manage traffic and parking on the central Delaware:

Councilman DiCicco's interim zoning overlay provided a step in a positive direction.

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However, thoughtful and integrated transit stop-gap measures are necessary now. The proposed casino parking garages would be gargantuan structures that would wall off the riverfront, and the casino's interim surface parking will resemble the stadium district and could last for a decade or more.

9.) Create a 100-foot greenway along the water's edge:

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Although the interim zoning overlay will allow for setbacks approaching 100' to be achieved in some areas, the 100' greenway recommendation was not included in the zoning overlay. There will be opportunities within the current zoning code re-write process and master planning process to press for the 100' greenway standard of the Action Plan.

10.) Create a natural river's edge and restore habitat:

Mayor Nutter has actively promoted sustainability policies and the DRWC Pier 53 project is an example of ecological restoration and habitat preservation.

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The master plan will define the character of the river's edge, but the benefits of a vegetated buffer that filters pollutants and manages stormwater fits with the goals of the City's *Greenworks* sustainability plan and should continue to be aggressively pursued by the DRWC as it manages the master planning process.