

**Draft Large-scale Development Memo – For discussion purposes**

Central Delaware Waterfront Planning Process

23 April 2007

Page 1 of 7

**Objective**

This memo addresses the impact of large-scale development on building parcels along the central Delaware River project area (Allegheny Avenue to Oregon Avenue and the river to I-95) and puts forth planning guidelines to integrate large-scale development into the civic vision for the central Delaware. These guidelines are based upon the ongoing civic engagement and public planning process being led by PennPraxis for the central Delaware.

The central Delaware riverfront represents a significant development opportunity for the city of Philadelphia as a major natural, historic and commercial resource. **These guidelines demonstrate how sound planning and regulatory controls can create a world-class waterfront along the central Delaware that will attract both residents and businesses to Philadelphia through targeted public investment designed to both support and stimulate quality private urban development.**

**Background and Overview**

Historically, this area of the city housed maritime-related port and industrial uses with large building tracts supporting manufacturing, shipping and rail-related activities. The waterfront was integrally connected to adjoining neighborhoods such as Pennsport, Old City and Fishtown as dockworkers, stevedores and laborers lived and worked in the river wards. With the downsizing of the port to the southern section of the project area and the loss of industry in Philadelphia after World War II, the waterfront began to lose its historic reason-to-be. The construction of I-95 beginning in the 1960s leveled a strong blow as it cut the city and its neighborhoods off from the river, leaving behind large abandoned post-industrial development parcels in its wake.

The size and scale of these remaining industrial parcels exert a powerful and often negative influence over the physical form of the landscape of the central Delaware today. Unaided by a plan or clear rules for appropriate riverfront development, retail and residential developers throughout the project area often choose design models that are not appropriate for the Delaware riverfront and are antithetical to the principles and values defined by this project.

Much of the development in the area has largely followed suburban-style, automobile-dependent models such as the big-box sites at the southern end of the project area. While developers of these structures have made this part of Columbus Boulevard a local shopping area, they have missed the opportunity to create an animated urban center. Rather, they have built horizontal, largely single-story, temporary (think 20 years) structures that disregard the significance of the waterfront location, include extensive surface parking lots and are inconsistent with the fine-grained, well-constructed residential and historic character of the city found just to the west of I-95. Residents complain about traffic jams on the weekend and flooding in nearby homes as a result of unchecked, large-scale, big-box development.

The area also includes large, gated communities that cut off public waterfront access and a variety of as-yet-built-upon large-scale development parcels ranging from the 200-acre Conrail freight transfer yards at the northern end of the project area to the 12.5 -acre city-owned former incinerator site and Festival Pier at the foot of Spring Garden Street. In addition, the commonwealth of Pennsylvania issued gaming licenses in December 2006 to two development

**Draft Large-scale Development Memo – For discussion purposes**

Central Delaware Waterfront Planning Process

23 April 2007

Page 2 of 7

teams who plan to build two 5000-slot machine casinos on large parcels (16 and 23 acre sites) within the project area. Along with the dozen high-rise condo towers currently in the pipeline, upcoming development will change the face of the central Delaware waterfront, likely following the auto-dominant design that the large parcels and outdated zoning code allows.

Rather than expecting large-scale developers to intuit what is appropriate for the riverfront and the city as a whole, it is time we provide clear standards and hold the development community to those standards. **In order to protect and enhance public access to the waterfront and to ensure a vibrant central Delaware, establishing regulatory guidelines for large-scale development along the central Delaware is an imperative.**

**The Central Delaware Riverfront Planning Principles**

Mayor John Street's executive order of October 12, 2006 charges PennPraxis with working with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and the citizens of Philadelphia create "a civic vision for the central Delaware that balances the public good, access to the waterfront, open space and quality urban development." To accomplish this, PennPraxis has been working with the Central Delaware Advisory Group and the citizens of Philadelphia on creating a civic vision that is based on citizen-derived and expert-informed planning principles.

It should be noted that throughout the civic engagement portion of the project to date many citizens expressed significant concern about how these principles could be applied to the two potential casino developments planned for the project area. Many citizens felt that the presence of casinos along the Delaware would violate each of the principles.

To date, over 3,000 Philadelphians have participated in the planning process, which has yielded the following abridged set of planning principles (see attached full set of principles):

***Reconnect the city to the river's edge.***

Build Philadelphia back to the river. Split up the sprawling super-block-style street layout that currently undermines the character of the central Delaware, and increase and enhance the quality of the physical and visual connections between the waterfront and adjacent neighborhoods.

***Honor the river***

The Delaware River is a significant regional resource. Acknowledge both the historical role the river played in shaping Philadelphia as a leading American city as well as its importance to the city today. Support the needs of the shipping industry and Philadelphia's working port as a vital part of the city's current and future economic base. Create enhanced public access for boating, recreation and leisure and maintain the health of the river for future generations.

***Design with nature***

Remember that the Delaware River is a giant watershed. Plan development along the river's edge carefully so that natural sites can co-exist harmoniously with other uses such as residences, businesses and the working port Construct a sound mass transit system along the waterfront to reduce pollution and congestion from automobiles.

**Draft Large-scale Development Memo – For discussion purposes**

Central Delaware Waterfront Planning Process

23 April 2007

Page 3 of 7

***Strike the right balance***

Create a 24-hour livable and walkable community along the entire water's edge by encouraging a healthy mix of urban development and public improvements. Design Delaware Avenue/Columbus Boulevard to be one of the great boulevards of the world that artfully manages traffic, encourages a mix of uses with ground-level activity that will activate the streetscape and includes a variety of lively public spaces.

***Take the long view***

Do not be seduced by short-term gains in developing the central Delaware. Think big and create bold plans for the future of I-95 at Penn's Landing, the connections between the river and the neighborhoods and the possibilities for creating a world-class waterfront. Seize the opportunity to create a visionary civic roadmap for large-scale public investment in Delaware Avenue/Columbus Boulevard, mass transit and the creation of generous public spaces.

***Protect the public good***

Connect city neighborhoods to the waterfront through a new and distinct network of public places that tells the story of Philadelphia and the Delaware River. Develop innovative public policy that encourages a variety of housing opportunities for citizens of mixed income levels and backgrounds and protects the quality of life for local community members.

***Make it real, Philadelphia***

Honor Philadelphia's illustrious past and promising future through the design of the central Delaware. Make the riverfront a real place based on local values by ensuring that the implementation of the civic vision for the central Delaware is based on sustained civic engagement.

**Lessons from the March 2007 Central Delaware Design Workshop**

From March 1 through 3, 2007, PennPraxis, in collaboration with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission and the professional planning firm of WRT, held a public design workshop that included over 75 leading design professionals, government officials, academics, and citizens. The workshop used the citizen-derived planning principles to help shape ideas for future land use and public infrastructure investment policy. The results of the workshop were widely published in the press and presented on local TV and radio. Important lessons for both public agencies and private developers include:

**Extend the existing city grid.**

Extend Philadelphia's parallel street structure across large-scale development parcels both east and west of Columbus Boulevard and Delaware Avenue. This will reduce the physical, visual and psychological impact of large-scale development and help create a pedestrian-scaled environment while enhancing and encouraging public access to the waterfront.

**Encourage sound mix of uses.**

Encourage development that allows for a mix of uses over a 24-hour cycle. This will help create a denser and safer urban environment. Do not let one single use dominate. Stimulate the creation of urban neighborhoods with a full range of amenities (shopping, dining, and

**Draft Large-scale Development Memo – For discussion purposes**

Central Delaware Waterfront Planning Process

23 April 2007

Page 4 of 7

services) to encourage a pedestrian-friendly environment and discourage additional automobile traffic.

**Landscape neighborhood connections.**

Landscape the major connecting streets such as Spring Garden Street and Washington Avenue to serve as generous and inviting connections from adjacent neighborhoods to the river.

**Construct a park space for every neighborhood.**

Create waterfront public spaces every 2000-feet affording public waterfront open space to each neighborhood along the project area. Connect the open spaces with a waterfront trail.

**Link development to mass transit.**

Invest in and support transit and transportation infrastructure that encourages mass-transportation and discourages additional car use. Link large-scale development to mass-transit.

**Develop considerate, urbane parking.**

Create remote parking options and creative parking strategies so as to minimize the impact of the automobile on the future of the public spaces along the central Delaware. Do not allow large-scale, visible parking structures and surface parking lots that deaden their surroundings.

**Provide for multi-modal riverfront access.**

Provide public right-of-ways for access by foot, bike, and public transit.

**Save waterfront's few remaining historic assets.**

Preserve the historic building fabric in the project area through the city's existing Historic Preservation Ordinance. Encourage the retention and adaptive re-use of historic industrial buildings and structures.

**Build a pedestrian-friendly boulevard.**

Create an elegant urban boulevard that artfully balances pedestrian activities, quality urban residential and commercial development with state-of-the-art traffic management techniques.

**Make I-95 less of a barrier.**

Pay special attention to I-95 and investigate measures to adapt or reconfigure it in order to reconnect the city with the river. Enhance the existing I-95 overpasses with public art and lighting to create gateways to the river from the adjacent communities.

**Draft Large-scale Development Memo – For discussion purposes**

Central Delaware Waterfront Planning Process

23 April 2007

Page 5 of 7

**Guidelines for Large-scale Development**

Based on the civic planning principles and the lessons learned in the March 2007 design workshop, **the following guidelines for large-scale development will ensure that the central Delaware is planned and implemented so as to protect the public good while encouraging quality urban development.**

For the purpose of this memo, we define “large-scale development” as a parcel that is a minimum of 2.5 acres in land area.

**Public Development Guidelines**

To ensure that the central Delaware is developed in accordance with the civic planning principles, the city of Philadelphia must establish a rational street structure, an open space framework, and a form-based regulatory code.

**Street Grid**

Before private development is to occur, the city is to plat the extension of the existing Philadelphia street grid over the development parcels in the central Delaware project area. This will connect the neighborhoods with the waterfront, ensure a pedestrian-scaled environment and disperse traffic through a fine-grained network of streets. The grid will include the establishment of a central, organizing boulevard that parallels the river, and will anticipate (and not preclude) measures to adapt or reconfigure I-95 at the central portion of the project area.

**Mass Transit**

The city and the state will create and implement a mass transportation program that addresses the increased needs of the project area at full build-out. The city and the state will provide incentives to developers to build transit-oriented developments that diminish automobile use.

**Parcel Size**

Through the establishment of the new street grid, the city will establish a maximum parcel size in order to create a pedestrian-scaled environment. To accomplish this, no parcel size in the project area will exceed 420' x 240' (100,800 square feet), with the shorter dimension oriented to the river's edge. On the water side of the project area, parcel size will be 240' x 240' maximum to allow for openness and transparency at the river's edge. Exceptions to this will be made for buildings of a civic nature (both new and adaptive re-use of existing structures) that support and enhance the urban character of the emerging waterfront district. Developers seeking to build on parcels in excess of the above dimensions will disperse the building program across multiple sites along the new city streets in a manner that is consistent with traditional urban fabric using multi-modal pedestrian networks and green spaces to connect smaller-scale buildings as well as any adjacent public space and riverfront trail.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Society Hill, Temple University, and the University of Pennsylvania are local examples of sites that use pedestrian pathways and open space to make a dense mixed-use urban environment more humane.

**Draft Large-scale Development Memo – For discussion purposes**

Central Delaware Waterfront Planning Process

23 April 2007

Page 6 of 7

**Public Waterfront Access**

The city shall establish a zone of continuous public access to and along the waterfront. Access is to be provided in the form of a 100-foot minimum public easement along the river's edge for a multi-purpose (walking, biking, rollerblading) riverfront trail as well as a two-lane "river road" that is connected to current city streets, increasing access parallel to the river's edge.

**Open Space**

Citizens shall have access to public spaces at the water's edge at approximately every 2,000 feet, the design of which is a public responsibility. These public spaces will be connected by a continuous waterfront trail and bikeway. Public boat slips, launches and fishing piers will be provided. Ecological restorations of the river's edge and the "day-lighting" of existing streams will be pursued.

**View sheds**

The city will plan to protect and create view sheds that provide unimpeded visual access to the river from the city. It will provide incentives to private developers to encourage elegant vertical development over big-box horizontal development. Maintain and enhance existing views from the major perpendicular connecting streets such as Spring Garden Street and Washington Avenue. Locate public spaces at the termini of major connecting streets.

**Private Development Guidelines**

The following guidelines will apply to all private development along the central Delaware so as to ensure that the public good – access to the water, public amenities, urban design character and quality of life – is ensured.

**Setbacks**

Private development shall comply with urban design guidelines that support and enhance the creation of a vibrant, urban community. To accomplish this, buildings will generally be built up to the sidewalk edge (this can either be a landscape buffer along the central boulevard or the sidewalk itself on secondary streets). Both public and private development will be designed to encourage a lively pedestrian atmosphere. This should be achieved either through shops and other urban amenities along the sidewalk or landscaping that connects with the riverfront trail. Buildings will be sited so that the short dimension faces both the street and the river, affording views of the river from the street edge.

**Parking**

Parking shall be designed to adhere to the highest standards for riverfront development. Parking shall be designed to enhance public access and views of the river as well as augment and support the pedestrian scale of the urban street environment. Parking shall be designed to minimize the negative impact on the quality of life of the surrounding context. Innovative parking solutions shall include remote parking with shuttle service, automated garages, underground structures, and parking designed within a building footprint.

**Draft Large-scale Development Memo – For discussion purposes**

Central Delaware Waterfront Planning Process

23 April 2007

Page 7 of 7

**Open Space**

Open space is an important component of a well-designed community. Private developers will work with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission on an integrated open space program on private development sites that complements the public open space network along the river. See “Public Waterfront Access” and “Open Space” above.

**Urban Design**

Buildings are to be built to the highest urban design standards with materials of lasting quality and consequence. All architecture is to reflect the highest quality contemporary design standards. The massing, heights, scale and form of all buildings and structures will support and enhance the land-use and form-based zoning regulations for the central Delaware riverfront district.

**Sustainability**

All buildings and sites will be designed in accordance with contemporary sustainable design principles and best practices including site water management, energy use, parking, mass transportation, adaptive reuse of historic structures, and signage.