



PCPC
Philadelphia City Planning Commission



2007

Planning Roundtable Series

Synopsis of Proceedings
Draft October 10, 2007



One Parkway Building
1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19102
www.philaplanning.org

City of Philadelphia

John F. Street, *Mayor*

Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Marcia Moore Makadon, *Acting Chairperson*

David Adelman

Lynette M. Brown-Sow

Patrick J. Eiding

Vincent Jannetti

Gloria Levin

Stephanie Naidoff

Pedro Ramos

Janice Woodcock, AIA, AICP, *Executive Director
and Secretary of Strategic Planning*

Gary J. Jastrzab, *Deputy Executive Director*

Contributors

Executive Office

Shari Cooper

Community Planning Division

Richard Redding, Director

Laura Spina

Development Division

Paula Brumbelow

Martine Decamp

Strategic Planning & Policy Division

Alan S. Urek, AICP, Director

John Haak, AICP

Octavia Hall

Janani Narayanan

Devorha Moultrie

Anthony Santaniello

Office of Strategic Planning

Andrew Dalzell

Urban Design Division

Bennur Koksuz, Director

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>Executive Summary</i>	1
Chapter 1: The Roundtable on Economic Development	5
Chapter 2: The Roundtable on Housing & Community Development	9
Chapter 3: The Roundtable on Mobility	13
Chapter 4: The Roundtable on Preservation	17
Chapter 5: The Roundtable on Public Services	19
Chapter 6: The Roundtable on Regulatory Reform	21
Chapter 7: The Roundtable on The Role of Community Groups	23
Chapter 8: The Roundtable on Urban Design	27
Proposed Citywide Goals	31
<i>Appendix: Roundtable Participants</i>	33





Executive Summary

By a resounding margin, the citizens of Philadelphia approved the creation of a Zoning Code Commission (ZCC) in a May 2007 referendum. During the months of June and July, the Philadelphia City Planning Commission (PCPC) staff hosted a series of roundtable discussions to identify the range of issues that the ZCC might address. The roundtables brought together small groups of experts in an informal setting to define and discuss these issues.

The Roundtable participants represented a cross-section of

Roundtable Comments:

- Key Issues for Philadelphia
- The Role of Planning
- Issues & Goals for the Zoning Code Commission

backgrounds, organizational missions, and areas of expertise. Included were economic development and transportation professionals, architects and urban designers, elected officials, community representatives, and real estate developers. The listening sessions revealed a synergy of thought concerning the City's future, with comments falling in three general categories:

- Critical issues facing the City;
- The role of planning in addressing these issues, and;
- Goals and objectives for zoning reform

The critical issues included a range of ideas about the economy, population, and prospects for growth. The discussion surrounding planning revealed strong support for broad based, coordinated problem-solving throughout government and the private and non-profit sectors. The goals and objectives identified for the ZCC revolved around the need for community involvement in the future, and streamlining the development process so that Philadelphia becomes a City open to investment and growth.

These Roundtable discussions represent a small part of the City Planning Commission's work to support the newly formed ZCC. The PCPC is also in the process of mapping the City's existing land uses and analyzing how those uses relate to current zoning classifications, reviewing the pattern of variances granted from existing zoning, and pursuing resources to support a citywide planning process as the

basis for future zoning remapping.

The City Planning Commission believes that the work of the ZCC will be incomplete if comprehensive planning does not accompany Zoning Code reform – there needs to be a framework for the application of zoning as a “planning tool.” This is due to the fact that land use conflicts need to be resolved by examining competing uses for remaining sites, rather than on a piecemeal basis.

In the past few years, cities nationwide have rediscovered the value of comprehensive planning, with cities like New York, Baltimore, Washington D.C. setting a high standard for such work. Throughout the Roundtable discussion series, participants emphasized the need for planning to set ambitious, yet realistic, goals for economic growth and quality-of-life improvements. An observation concerning this renewed interest in planning is that it is not only the analysis and large-scale problem solving that is important, but also the articulation of agreed upon solutions that serve to promote a city’s identity and progressiveness: Philadelphia must become a “location of choice for individuals and businesses,” and we must communicate “what we want” if we are to achieve these goals.

The Roundtables made clear that any plan must carefully consider the concerns of Philadelphia’s neighborhoods. There is a strong tradition of community planning in Philadelphia, and an extensive grass-roots network of community associations that actively participate in neighborhood

betterment. We heard repeatedly that Philadelphia must capitalize on this “community infrastructure” and seek to maintain and protect existing neighborhood fabric and character.

However, these individual neighborhood needs must also be balanced with broader, citywide issues of “the public good,” as one Roundtable participant put it. A comprehensive plan should include neighborhoods as components linked by transportation networks and well-served by a variety of community and municipal facilities.

Both the PCPC staff and Roundtable attendees acknowledge that to improve the City’s economic potential and quality-of-life, stubborn “structural” problems affecting Philadelphia’s population must be addressed. In 2007, Philadelphia ranked 96th out of the nation’s 100 largest cities in resident labor force participation, and ranks 92nd in college-educated residents. A comprehensive plan will need to consider strategies to combat these problems; as one attendee said, “The City, through planning, must look to and influence the future.”

From a business perspective, Roundtable participants advised the City to restructure its development approval process into one that is predictable, easily navigable, and welcoming. Following the lead of cities around the country, Philadelphia should create a zoning classification for transit-oriented development and provide zoning incentives for “green” development. Given the opportunity provided by the prospect of zoning code reform, Roundtable participants felt that the time had come “to strengthen the plan

ning function within government.”

The following pages present more detailed comments from the participants of the PCPC’s 2007 Roundtable discussions. Each Roundtable addressed a different planning or zoning-related topic, including economic development, housing and community development, mobility, historic preservation, urban design, the provision of public services, regulatory reform, the role of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission, and the role of community groups in the planning process. In reviewing these summaries, some repeating themes remain in the text, as different groups voiced similar concerns.

The Roundtable on Economic Development

ON OUR REGIONAL ASSETS

Several participants in the Roundtable on Economic Development emphasized that the City's location in the northeast corridor, mid-way between New York City and Washington, D.C., provides a unique and favorable market opportunity for Philadelphia. Philadelphia's most competitive advantage relative to these two cities is its affordability. One participant noted that CBD office rental rates in Philadelphia are \$24 per square foot compared to nearly \$100 in mid-town Manhattan. Philadelphia's excellent rail connection to both of these economic powerhouses is also a distinct advantage for the city.

Roundtable participants noted that the City's universities,



Satellite Image of the Philadelphia Region

hospitals, museums, parks and civic spaces, philanthropic organizations, and professional sports teams enrich life and business in Philadelphia. These institutions and amenities, in addition to an extensive transportation network that includes Philadelphia International Airport, Delaware River

port facilities stretching from Wilmington to Trenton, the Amtrak Northeast Corridor, and City and suburban transit lines, provide benefits to residents throughout the Greater Philadelphia region. Because Philadelphia is both a city and a county, many traditional county functions – such as courts and prisons – must be supported by the City’s overburdened tax base. Participants noted that the Commonwealth has not to supported court costs in Philadelphia, unlike other Pennsylvania counties. These additional costs to Philadelphia severely constrain the City’s ability to provide other municipal services.

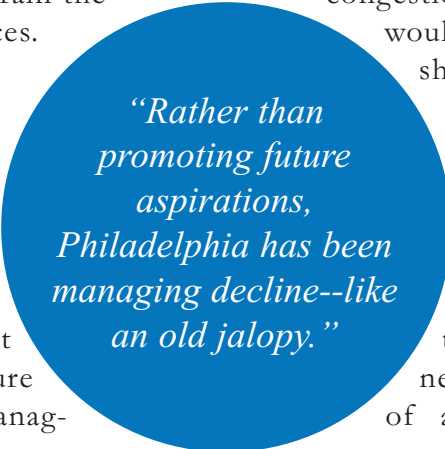
ON MARKETING PHILADELPHIA

Participants stressed the importance of both continuing to improve and market Philadelphia’s assets more aggressively. One participant lamented the fact that few people are aware of the positive initiatives that the City currently has underway. One participant commented that rather than promoting future aspirations, Philadelphia has been simply “managing decline.”

ON EMPLOYMENT

Several participants noted that in many respects Philadelphia is competes with, rather than reinforces the position of surrounding counties. They suggested that the City’s focus should be on positioning itself to sharpen its competitive edge, while reinforcing its relationship to surrounding municipalities. According to one participant, “Nationally,

34% of metro employment is in central business districts, while in Philadelphia only 27% of metro employment is located downtown.” It was also suggested that public transportation has trouble fulfilling the commuting needs of Philadelphia residents who need to travel out of the City to work; the relocation of these companies inside the City would ease this problem. Growing jobs within the City’s boundaries should be a priority for the future. Eliminating commuting challenges would produce environmental, traffic congestion, and economic relief, as fewer individuals would be forced to rely on personal vehicle ownership.



“Rather than promoting future aspirations, Philadelphia has been managing decline--like an old jalopy.”

In order to strengthen businesses attraction to Philadelphia, the participants felt it will be necessary to eliminate the perception of paperwork and tax disincentives for business development in the City. There was consensus that some firms simply choose not to do business in Philadelphia because of the perception of an unpredictable and complex development process. Eradicating these real or perceived roadblocks, and improving coordination between City departments will strengthen Philadelphia’s ability to attract industry and deliver dependable service and leadership to its residents and to the region.

ON WORKFORCE INVESTMENT

Several Roundtable participants lamented the lack of educational achievement and vocational training among



Philadelphia residents. To attract and retain businesses in the City, much less thrive in a rapidly changing global economy, concerted action is needed to improve the basic skills and knowledge of City residents. The City's average level of educational attainment does not match the job opportunities offered by the City's economy.

Roundtable participants cited the educational disparity between Philadelphia and suburban county residents who have completed college. There was also a consensus that a similar disparity exists in vocational training.

It was suggested that an initiative to build workforce capacity in Philadelphia should focus on helping those residents who have started college to complete their goal. According to one participant, there are currently 80,000 people in Philadelphia who have started college, but were not able to complete a degree-granting course of study.

A recent publication by the Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board reported that the City would add 32,189 more people to active employment, increasing the City's wage base by \$1.8 billion, if educational attainment in Philadelphia could be raised to the State average. One participant noted the importance of including existing workers in a workforce training and development effort, noting that most of the people who will be in Philadelphia's workforce in 10 years are already employed here today.

ON THE ECONOMIC IMPACT OF LAND USES

Roundtable participants urged caution when making land-use allocation decisions. Philadelphia should place an emphasis on attracting and preserving land uses that contribute to the economic base of the City. One participant referenced a land-use study conducted in neighboring Chester County, which found that residential uses create the greatest municipal service burden when compared to commercial and industrial uses.

It was also pointed out that a common trend in Philadelphia is the conversion of industrially-zoned properties to other

uses. Considering that an inappropriate balance of land uses could render the City less able to adapt to economic changes, the participants stressed the importance of utilizing thorough economic analyses as justification for planning and land-use decisions in the City. According to the panelists, reliance on sound data and research could ensure that the City's initiatives were "in sync" with global economic trends.



*The Roundtable
on
Housing
&
Community
Development*

ON COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

The Housing and Community Development Roundtable focused on achieving and maintaining the balance between comprehensive and community planning approaches in Philadelphia. One rationale presented in support of continued neighborhood planning efforts was the likelihood of residents' opposition to any community plan unless they are informed of, and have the opportunity to contribute to, the planning process.

Without community buy-in for a plan, it is unlikely to garner the political support necessary for implementation. The consensus was that “top down” planning is an unwise, if not unacceptable, approach to planning in Philadelphia.

Many of the Roundtable participants shared the view that planning should be done at the neighborhood level. “Grassroots planning,” as one participant referred to it, is the only way to ensure that issues that are small, but important to neighborhood residents, are addressed during the planning process. The group agreed that planning at the “macro level” cannot effectively address neighborhood concerns.

In spite of the stated preferences for community-based planning, the group agreed that Philadelphia needs to strike a balance between comprehensive and neighborhood planning. The group acknowledged the following limitations to a neighborhood-only planning approach:

- Neighborhood plans, while effective at addressing community-level issues, are ineffective at addressing concerns of citywide concern (i.e. economic development, environmental sustainability, and transportation systems).
- Plans commissioned by neighborhood groups are prone to certain weaknesses because community groups are often not equipped or able to balance competing visions of community members, real estate investors, developers, and the City as a whole.
- Sole reliance on plans commissioned by neighborhood groups fails to address the needs of areas where civic associations are weak, absent, or compete with each other for control over the same geographic area.

Roundtable participants advocated the continued involvement of City Planning Commission staff in filling gaps left through a community-initiated planning process. A variety of suggestions were discussed as models for PCPC involvement. Roundtable participants felt that planning efforts should be supported by better public-private coordination to ensure that recommendations have strong community support and concrete links to implementation.

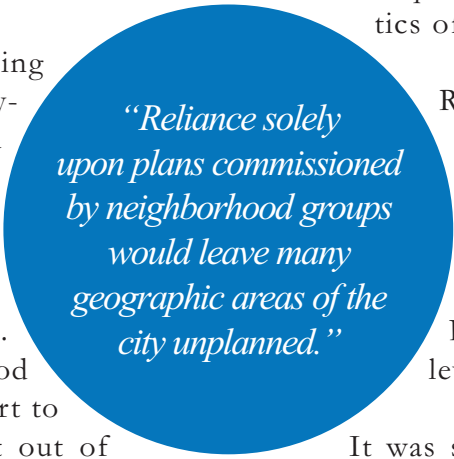
One suggestion was that the City Planning Commission prepare a comprehensive, city-wide plan to ensure quality, consistency, and continuity among smaller community plans. Participants support the idea that community-initiated planning efforts could be encouraged to incorporate citywide goals and objectives into their own neighborhood plans. Some endorsed the idea that neighborhood plans should be connected by a citywide effort to fill the geographic gaps that have been left out of recent community planning activities.

One view stated was that a citywide comprehensive plan might be unnecessary if the City Planning Commission staff could be involved in the development of every community-initiated plan from its inception. It was quickly pointed out that such a goal would be impracticable from a staffing and workload point-of-view. A more realistic approach would be for PCPC community planners to coordinate the planning efforts of groupings of community organizations to prepare

larger-area or district plans.

ON PLANNING FOR HOUSING

The Housing and Community Development Roundtable discussed how the Zoning Code Commission should address residential development in the City. The participants suggested that the Zoning Board of Adjustment consider variance requests and infill based on the unique characteristics of each neighborhood.



“Reliance solely upon plans commissioned by neighborhood groups would leave many geographic areas of the city unplanned.”

Roundtable participants agreed that the Zoning Code Commission should consider incorporating inclusionary housing provisions as part of zoning code reform. They stressed the importance of creating incentives for the development of housing that is affordable to Philadelphia residents at the diverse income levels present within the City.

It was suggested that the City’s inclusionary housing measures be driven by research that documents housing needs and the projected cost of meeting those needs. As one participant noted: “data collection is critical.” Further, it was pointed out that some of the necessary data are already in our possession; it is essential that the City agencies use these data to drive decision-making.

Issues and Goals for the Zoning Code Commission

Viewpoints

In order to create a development friendly city, planning should first address economic development, infrastructure development and quality of life issues.

The Zoning Code and the related development review process are merely the mechanisms by which solid city plans are implemented.

Issues

There is no coordinating agency that enforces all of the codes regulating development in Philadelphia.

Existing regulating documents often undermine stated planning goals and city Initiatives

Goals

All of the documents that regulate development in the City of Philadelphia should promote shared goals, visions and priorities

The Zoning Code Commission should prioritize community engagement during the zoning revision process; this should reduce variance requests under the new code

The Zoning Code should be simplified to eliminate the excessive number of overlays and special districts

The Zoning Code Commission should explore the use of form-based code as a means to regulate infill development

The Zoning code should guide new construction to existing vacant areas and encourage maintenance of the existing fabric of the city

Industrial land preservation should be a priority

The Zoning Code should incorporate design considerations

The new Zoning Code should outline inclusionary housing provisions

A Zoning Code revision should include some pedestrian friendly zones where parking is prohibited

The pedestrian scale of commercial corridors should be preserved. These corridors should prohibit blank walls, drive-thrus and other breaks in the walking experience



The Roundtable
on
Mobility

ON LAND USE PLANNING

Participants in the Roundtable on Mobility shared the position that transportation decisions must be proactive, holistic, data-driven, and informed by interagency coordination. Plans for transportation should exist as one of the most important elements of a Comprehensive Plan. The group discussed the importance of linking transportation goals to land use policy.

One specific suggestion was to encourage Transit-Oriented Development (TOD) by limiting the current 10-year tax abatement for new residential construction to TOD zones that meet specific density requirements placed within a one-quarter mile radius of existing transit stations. Another suggestion involved charging developers impact fees to fund future transit extensions to large-scale, auto-dependent

developments. Roundtable participants felt that financial incentives and development impact fees were necessary for the implementation of sustainable transportation policies.

ON TRANSPORTATION PLANNING LEADERSHIP

Participants in the Mobility Roundtable repeatedly expressed the need to reinstate an Office of Transportation within municipal government. This office would perform a policy-oversight and coordination function, and be responsible for operational aspects of the City's transportation systems. When asked to identify critical improvements that a central transportation agency should tackle, the group made the following suggestions:

- There should be a single, universally acceptable fare instrument for a variety of transportation modes: a SmartCard of sorts for SEPTA, NJ Transit, PATCO, the Philadelphia Parking Authority, Philly CarShare, taxicabs, private garages, and potentially, bike-sharing. Roundtable participants noted that any such instrument must be compatible with systems already in use in the Northeast to facilitate seamless travel across great distances.
- The group recommended that the fabric of the City be reconnected to the Delaware Riverfront by applying context sensitive design principles to a reconfiguration of I-95 and Delaware Avenue. The group noted that such transformations of waterfront areas are possible, as demonstrated by new development in Boston, Chicago, and San Francisco.

- The reauthorization of federal surface transportation legislation is due in 2010, and if the past is a guide, will likely be a long, drawn-out process. It is not too early to begin lobbying for new provisions needed in this legislation. One recommendation is that funding for transportation infrastructure maintenance and transit operations be included in any new legislation.

ON NON-MOTORIZED TRANSPORTATION

Roundtable participants urged the City to make streets in Philadelphia “complete streets” that serve all users, including pedestrians, bicyclists, and automobiles. One participant reported that progress in this area is already being made, with improved accommodations for wheelchair users on City sidewalks. Initiatives on behalf of bicyclists have also been positive – Philadelphia has the most bike lane miles of any city on the East Coast. One participant suggested that a Philly BikeShare program, similar to the bike sharing initiative recently implemented in Paris, may be introduced in Philadelphia.

The attendees urged the PCPC to take special measures to protect one of the City’s most attractive assets – its walkability. The group felt that sidewalk space is too easily surrendered to curb cuts, vendors, and outdoor seating for restaurants and cafes. While outdoor seating creates a vibrant and urbane street life, in many locations they become obstructions that hinder the pedestrian right-of-way. As a result, permission for such encroachments should be carefully reviewed and controlled.



Another factor diminishing the pedestrian experience is the visual intrusion of surface parking lots and structures. To address the problems that parking presents (inactive street frontage, conflicts with pedestrians at driveways, etc.), it was suggested that certain zoning districts impose “parking space maximums” or prohibit parking altogether. Densely developed areas well-served by transit might be one possibility for this type of approach. As one participant noted, “People should not feel afraid to park their car themselves, ditch the valet, and walk a few blocks to their destination at nighttime.”

ON TRANSIT

Many of the Roundtable group's suggestions concerning transit focused on making the transit system easy to use and more attractive in order to expand ridership. Participants supported the view that an active transit system would support the City's goals for reducing traffic congestion, improving air quality, preserving the pedestrian scale of the City, and promoting environmental sustainability. Among the suggestions were to:

- Enhance and simplify connections between highway and transit hubs to encourage commuters to “park and ride” to Center City.



- Ensure that general maintenance, cleanliness, security, and beautification become priorities in transit stations and connecting concourses.

- Create predictable funding streams for the transit system. This should include adequate and sustained funding from the Commonwealth, increased local support from within the region, private sector contributions, and a mechanism to annually adjust transit fares to keep them in step with consumer price indices.

On Automobiles

Thinking of the long-term, several participants envisioned a Center City with far fewer cars, and effectively utilized park-and-ride, Philly CarShare, parking rate reform, congestion pricing, and other vehicle reduction strategies.

As participants discussed the notion of restricting auto access into the Central Business District in the future, it was agreed that the impacts and feasibility of these ideas should be explored in a planning exercise. One long-standing transportation issue involved increasing penalties for delivery trucks that violate traffic restrictions in the CBD.

One respondent said that parking tickets have proven to be an ineffective solution, particularly for delivery trucks. Some companies budget for ticket fees as a cost of doing business. To achieve more effective compliance, it may be necessary to begin towing these vehicles, to prevent the blockage of already congested Center City streets.



The Roundtable
on
Preservation

ON DEFINING PRESERVATION

Throughout the meeting, Roundtable attendees reiterated the need to recast the City's approach to preservation. Philadelphia is composed of many distinct neighborhoods. It is important to ensure that development pressures and permissive regulations do not put the identity of these neighborhoods at risk. One attendee observed that 75-80% of the City is already built in a desirable form. New construction simply should be an augmentation of the superior built environment that already exists.

An effective preservation strategy must consider the context of the area where new development is proposed. It must acknowledge the contribution that existing buildings and other neighborhood assets make to community character, and carefully determine how new development best fits into

that community.

Participants expressed concern that the concepts of "development" and "urban renewal" are either completely or mostly oriented toward new construction rather than a combination of new construction and saving existing buildings.

ON WHAT SHOULD BE PRESERVED

Roundtable participants agreed that over the next decade, the City should focus on preserving commercial corridors and public rights of way.

Commercial streets must be continuously interesting to pedestrians, with no blank walls, drive-thrus, or surface parking lots along the sidewalk. Strengthening these corridors will also help stabilize and sustain neighborhoods throughout the City. Convenience stores, for example, should not be set back from the street with parking between the sidewalk and the building. Edges and entryway to City parks should be clearly legible, well maintained, and inviting. Existing park and street trees should be better maintained, and tree coverage increased citywide in an effort to create a more attractive and sustainable city.

ON COMPREHENSIVE PLANNING

Attendees spoke warily of "top-down" comprehensive plans because they felt such initiatives overlook important neighborhood issues, such as the preservation of older buildings and the integration of new building projects into existing blocks. Roundtable participants also felt that a overly simpli-

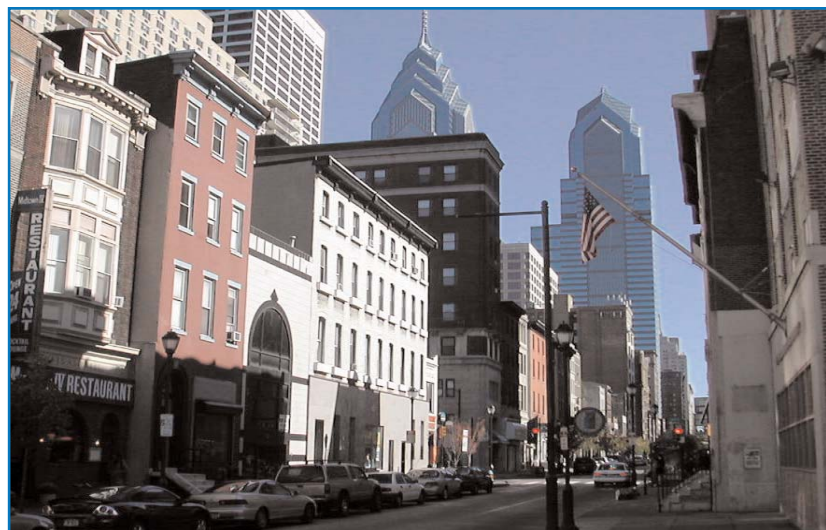
“The current zoning code actually encourages demolition”

fied and uniform zoning code would not effectively address preservation concerns. It was stressed that Philadelphia’s rich history and architecture are among its most attractive characteristics—the City cannot afford to allow growth and change to erode these assets. Participants shared the view that the current Zoning Code actually encourages the demolition of valuable structures.

ON GOVERNMENT COOPERATION

Roundtable participants felt that government does not adequately support preservation, and neglects to consider preservation when making decisions about new development. Any new process should allow for the exchange of viewpoints to better balance preservation and growth. The participants agreed that the review process conducted by the ZBA and Historical Commission inflates developer costs and often has a chilling effect on development within the City.

There was general agreement that the Zoning Code Commission should form and consult with a preservation advisory group. Participants thought that working with the Zoning Code Commission could be beneficial to the preservation community, because the Historical Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) struggle with a heavy caseload, limited staff, and reliance on commissioners who



lack specific technical expertise.

Participants noted that a Comprehensive Plan and Zoning Code reform could link financial incentives to preservation-oriented developments, address the maintenance of the existing fabric of the City, and guide new construction to existing vacant sites. Participants thought that a new Code should promote preservation, rather than simply govern and regulate it.



*The Roundtable
on
Public Service
Facilities*

ON PRESERVING PUBLIC SERVICE FACILITIES

Many buildings used to provide public services in the City of Philadelphia are older structures, with a significant number over one-hundred years old. The City maintains these facilities rather than constructing new buildings. While many support preservation, many participants understand the current practice of piecemeal repairs is costly and ineffective.

Old buildings often have superior structural characteristics, but suffer from incremental repairs. Inter-departmental competition for limited capital resources makes it difficult to ensure that all building systems receive regular maintenance. The practice of deferring maintenance rather than undertaking complete renovation shortens the effective life span of otherwise durable systems, and creates an environment of reactive capital spending. This use of capital resources cre-

ates waste and inefficiency.

According to Roundtable participants, updating and refurbishing a building—especially when dealing with Green/LEED standards—can be more expensive than starting from scratch.

And while repairs of existing buildings may be costly, the construction of new facilities brings other, equally challenging problems. Neighborhoods can be inconvenienced during the construction period and many residents do not want to see existing buildings demolished as part of a new project. For example, libraries and recreation centers are iconic in their neighborhoods, and many communities want to see these facilities preserved.

ON GUIDING ORDERLY REDEVELOPMENT

Participants understand that consolidation of facilities would be prudent: “We have an infrastructure for two million people but a population of 1.4 million.” A common solution in the face of financial constraints would be to consolidate facilities that provide the same service. For example, if two recreation centers are located in close proximity to one another, a better choice might be to close one facility, combine the resources of the two, and operate an upgraded and enhanced facility.

Participants noted that such consolidation usually runs into political opposition and is extremely difficult to implement. Most neighborhoods do not support the closing of any facil-

ities, even if a consolidated facility would be in better condition.

As in other chronic problems, consulting with the public could change this dynamic. When making decisions about public facility closure, consolidation, or reconstruction, participants noted that communities must be consulted in the process so that the benefits of changing service can be understood and tailored to fit the situation. The most popular suggestion for future public facilities revolved around the idea of what one attendee called a “cluster” – locating many departments or services in one complex, such as combining a public school and health center in one building.

“Clustering” could work as an interim or permanent solution during replacement or major renovation of older facilities. At the very least, the participants felt that the idea of pooling funds could be extended to maintenance and janitorial services.

Participants urged the creation of a trial cluster prototype to determine how such a development would benefit citizens citywide. They suggested that large developments, especially

those with sizeable impacts on public services (e.g. casinos) be required to provide space—or funding—for public service clusters. They indicated that planning would be critical in selecting viable locations for these clusters. Identifying cluster sites should be a part of a comprehensive plan or incorporated into a strengthened capital programming process.



One participant noted that clustering and consolidation of City facilities should not be considered a “fix-all” solution. One “can only get so clever in using money. It gets to the point where you just need more dollars. One participant involved in the implementation of the current capital budget noted, “I think we are there right now.” All agreed that the City must devote additional resources to maintain physical infrastructure and community service facilities.



*The Roundtable
on*

*Regulatory
Reform*

ON THE ROLE OF PLANNING

Participants in the Roundtable on Regulatory Reform stressed the importance of planning as a driver for development in the City. They felt that all aspects of planning, including job creation & retention, educational improvement, poverty alleviation, transit access, sustainability and neighborhood retail services, should be addressed in order to create a development-friendly city.

The group cautioned that both the City Planning and the Zoning Code Commissions should engage the community in the initial stages of planning and Zoning Code reform. They also indicated that a more cooperative relationship between City and its suburban counties is desirable for the health of the entire region. The participants indicated a belief that

regulations and their enforcement are simply the means to make solid plans a reality.

While the group recognized the importance of planning, they also felt that there are too many organizations promoting unilateral and uncoordinated plans, and seeking to influence development decisions. There are multiple visions and no single point of contact that can create and enforce guidelines.

Participants discussed the need for a single, lead agency responsible for development planning, a role that the City Planning Commission has historically fulfilled. The group also discussed the creation of a “Mayor’s Development Cabinet” that would arbitrate, convene, and advocate for City developments and plan for the “big picture”. Another idea was the introduction of a development coordinator for the Mayor who would oversee and facilitate communication between all of the departments that are involved in development decisions.

ON SIMPLIFYING REGULATION

Overall, participants felt that a lack of predictability and consistency is a deterrent for investment and development. Specific suggestions for Zoning Code revisions included simplification to eliminate an excessive number of overlays and special districts, incorporating flexible design considerations, and exploring the use of form-based code for infill development.

They also urged the City to establish synergy between the City's stated priorities and the codes, review process, and financial incentives that guide development. Occasionally the relationship between property sales, development, and approvals does not currently reflect stated planning goals. For example, projects that include the preservation of buildings, transit-oriented development, sustainability, and affordable housing should be consistent with the Zoning Code, benefit from a fast track permit process, and receive financial incentives to encourage such development.

"We have an infrastructure for 2.0 million people but a population of 1.4 million."

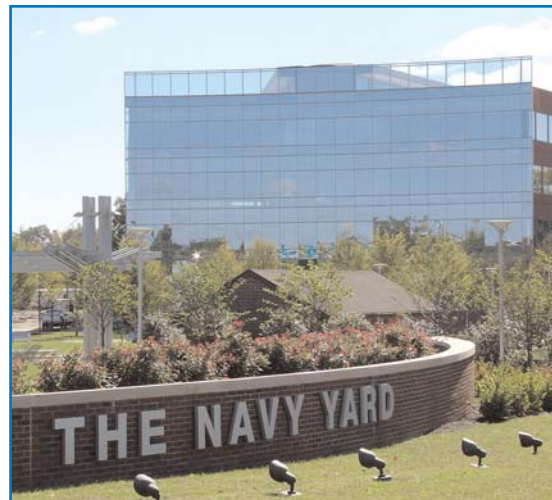
and knowledge-based economies.

The remaining land-use suggestions focused on embracing the City's urban character and history. The group stated that the City should prioritize transit-oriented and mixed-use development, as well as the preservation of open space and the city's older housing stock.

ON LAND USE

Maintaining an adequate supply of industrial land emerged as a priority during Roundtable discussions. One attendee emphasized the finite nature of waterfront land for Port of Philadelphia use. Some encouraged the City to partner with the Commonwealth to return industrial sites back to productive uses.

It is difficult to create new sites for industrial uses, and the City was cautioned carefully evaluate requests to convert industrial parcels to retail and residential use. Participants also urged the City explore new options for economic development, especially those involving the creative-





*The Roundtable
on*

*The Role of
Community
Groups*

ON REVISING THE ZONING CODE

The Roundtable on *The Role of Community Groups* included the zoning committee chairpersons from ten community groups in the City. This group was concerned that an attempt to streamline the Zoning Code would not be in the City's best interest. Their assessment was that that an over-simplified code would be inadequate to regulate the City's diverse built environment. Participants felt that a code capable of maintaining the unique character of each of Philadelphia's neighborhoods would be inherently long and complex.

The consensus was that Zoning Code reform should not focus on reducing the number of zoning classifications or the word count of the document, but should instead make

the Code more user-friendly – easy to read and understand by professionals and laypersons alike.

The participants stressed the need to update use categories within the Zoning Code to reflect modern uses. Many common uses do not appear in the Zoning Code; instead, the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) often must interpret the definitions of specific uses outlined in the code. This practice, due in part to its case-by-case nature, and part by changes in the impacts of land uses, leads to inconsistent application of the Code and prevents mixed-used projects or developments with positive attributes.

In addition, Roundtable participants expressed concern that some uses incompatible with residential districts are permitted as-of-right. The group felt the Zoning Code should be updated to improve compatibility of uses within districts. They also felt that there should be a mechanism to review the placement of cell-phone towers rather than allowing them to be placed as-of-right. The group commented that under current regulations, nuisance uses (such as pawn shops or check-cashing businesses) are permitted in neighborhood commercial districts; these are viewed as undesirable uses that displace businesses that would better serve the neighborhood.

Participants felt that the Zoning Code Commission should consider utilizing separation distances or similar tools to ensure that undesirable uses are not concentrated in one area.

The zoning chairpersons pointed out that incompatible uses are not the only factor that compromise neighborhood character under the current system. The group mentioned how the current Code allows new construction that does not conform to the existing character of a block. According to one participant, there has been an increasing incidence of three- and four-story row homes being approved as-of-right on intact blocks of two-story row homes.

The group felt that decisions relating to parking frequently compromised design, neighborhood continuity, and block aesthetics. On this issue, some were concerned that parking was required where it should not be, and others were concerned that parking in some areas is insufficient. The participants discussed the parking dilemma presented when homeowners are permitted to convert their street-facing garage into living space. The group agreed that a new code should explore innovative parking solutions that are responsive to both community character and changing auto-ownership trends.

The group also discussed the merits of utilizing “Conservation Districts” to preserve community character. They noted that at least one community in Philadelphia has utilized a conservation district approach to regulate design considerations including parking management and façade standards. The group agreed that such an approach should not be applied on a citywide basis; doing so would result in an overwhelming patchwork of regulations. The participants

endorsed the view that the community should have an opportunity to directly contribute to zoning decisions during the code rewrite. Allowing residents to contribute to the process would ensure that new regulations are sensitive to the preservation of community character.

ON REVISING THE DEVELOPMENT REVIEW PROCESS

On the subject of the City’s development review process, concern focused on streamlining the process and ensuring community input. As evidence of the need to revise the manner in which the City handles requests for zoning adjustments, one attendee highlighted the fact that he spends an estimated three to four hours per week at the ZBA. The group agreed the frequency and length of his visits was not unique, but common, and a reflection of the broken system.

While the group agreed that code revision would result in fewer cases being presented at the ZBA, they also felt the need to create another mechanism to filter the cases addressed in this forum. They advocated another more accessible and smaller approval board to support the work of the ZBA. As proposed, this entity would handle neighborhood level cases, freeing the ZBA to handle larger and more controversial cases. The group posited that better coordination between municipal government agencies would greatly improve development review, and that more rigorous inspections and enforcement is paramount to regulating development.

The community group representatives were uncomfortable

with the lack of a formal mechanism to involve community groups in development review. Presently, L&I does not require developers or owners to consult with members of the community before it issues permits; conversely, community endorsement is often a condition for variance approval at the ZBA. This group advocated for case-by-case review and a mandatory public comment period for all development in the City. It was pointed out that there are neighborhood groups in the City that already conduct a case-by-case review of all permits, including as-of-right applications, and actively oppose unwanted development. The group recognized that the degree of input on permit approvals varies from neighborhood to neighborhood, depending on the citizens involved and their knowledge of the system.

One participant cautioned that this level of community control could be in violation of land-use laws. PCPC staff also expressed concern that case-by-case project review would lack legal integrity because restrictions surfacing from such a process would be inconsistent, from project to project. It would be difficult to prevent a community from making unfair demands or politicizing approvals, and could easily make desired development more difficult.

Concerning the role of City Council in development review, the group posited that Council involvement encouraged politicization of land-use decisions and gave an appearance of conflicts of interest. Other disadvantages of Council involvement were the practice of “holding a development hostage” over an unrelated issue, and the practice of with-

holding information about developments favored by Council when review by neighborhoods could otherwise block or modify the project. The zoning chairs argued that case-by-case review, done systematically, would reduce—not increase – the politicization of land-use decisions.

Some zoning chairs in attendance indicated that Council involvement was not a widespread problem and pointed out that the merits of Council involvement in the process depended on the relationships between a particular City Council office and the affected neighborhood group.

The participants in the Community Roundtable agreed that a follow up meeting would be desirable, especially after the Zoning Code Commission was underway. Participants noted that hearing from their counterparts in other neighborhoods was a new and valuable experience.



*The Roundtable
on
Urban Design*

ON DENSITY

The focal point on the *Roundtable on Urban Design* concerned the density of development. One area of discussion involved the role of public parks in promoting the City's vitality. Most Roundtable participants underscored the importance of parks as vital to neighborhoods. Some participants contended that parks interrupt the vibrancy of urban spaces and should not be a part of a dense city. This view yielded to the assertion that "Philadelphia should be creative about how we think about and create density. The City must be measured by its success on foot—who feels good walking around. One

must feel "safety among strangers."

As an example of this ideal, Rittenhouse Square was cited as a successful urban park that does anything but reduce urban vibrancy. It was agreed that the vibrancy of this downtown park is attributable to the mix of residential, office, retail, and restaurant uses that surround it and provide it with a constant flow of users throughout the day. A third view on parks and urban spaces was that it is important to accept the value of passive open spaces on their own merit because they contribute to the visual quality of the environment and they increase the market value of properties surrounding the space.

ON THE PUBLIC REALM

The discourse on the value of open space led the participants to examine the importance of the protection and maintenance of the "public realm." This initially focused on formal open spaces. However, the group eventually expanded this view to include streetscape, undeveloped lots, and big-picture ideals including quality of life, healthy design, balancing modern preferences with the City's existing infrastructure and buildings, and how to reuse the existing fabric of the City in light of a shrinking population. The group agreed that these issues must be addressed through a large-scale strategic planning effort.

The primary example given for deficiencies in the current procedures for maintaining the public realm were the City's streetscapes. The group pointed out that no specific organi-

zation is held responsible for maintaining streetscapes. Streetscape projects are often funded through community groups without consideration of future maintenance. The group suggested that funding for improvements for shared spaces should include a portion earmarked for future maintenance. Although many community groups attempt to care for these projects in the initial phases, it often becomes difficult to sustain over time.

This can also plague larger citywide initiatives. Too frequently, projects initiated in one Mayoral administration do not continue to receive funding when a new administration takes office.

ON DEVELOPMENT REVIEW

In response to needed changes in Philadelphia's method of applying urban design standards, the group pointed out two areas where reform is needed. Currently, no civic design review process is in place. Although the City Planning Commission has prepared design guidelines, there is no legal mechanism for enforcement. The group indicated a desire to make design guidelines more powerful. They suggested that a citywide education campaign to demonstrate how design guidelines could be used to

communities' best interest would be very beneficial. Community support for environmental quality would strengthen the design guidelines in the absence of enforcement authority. Another suggestion was to require design review in specific circumstances, such as if a project exceeds a certain size.



In current practice, the projects that are reviewed are typically seen and commented on by community groups and City Council people long before a formalized planning or design review is conducted. The participants felt that the amount of discretionary approval currently required of developers is excessive, particularly because those granting such approvals are usually acting outside of their areas of expertise. The group lamented

that the current system empowers community groups and leaves developers with no basis for predictability.

Concerning the current development-review process, the participants emphasized the need for communication and leadership. They suggested that it would be fruitless to focus on any specific agenda unless efforts were made to improve dialogue and cooperation within municipal government,

between the City and the Commonwealth, and between the City and community groups.

Participants indicated that many of the City's initiatives receive inadequate support from these stakeholders and, as a result, lose potency and reduce the success of implementation efforts.

Moreover, it is essential that each of the City's partners has an appreciation for Philadelphia's strengths. The group pointed out that many Philadelphians tend to speak negatively about the city rather than boasting about the city's many positive attributes.

ON COMMERCIAL CORRIDORS

The final discussion of the meeting surrounded the importance of revitalizing corridors to revitalize the neighborhoods that surround them, and enhance the experience of the people who depend on them. Corridors like Germantown Avenue are essential to the city but they are undervalued. "These corridors are the health of a neighborhood".



Proposed Citywide Goals

The city should create and sustain initiatives that protect quality of life, social diversity and economic development in Philadelphia. Initiatives that effectively promote these goals should be guaranteed continued support and funding throughout mayoral administrations.

The City needs to promote its priorities through developer and resident education and should establish synergy between the its stated priorities and all of the financial incentives, codes and review processes that influence development in the city.

Philadelphia should make a concerted effort to protect its communities from excessive investor speculation and moth-balling as these practices threaten community character and eventually damage property values.

The City needs to market its assets and sharpen its competitive edge in the business and residential markets while also working to increase synergy and collaboration with its suburbs

Philadelphia should explore new industries including those in the creative and knowledge economies in order to promote economic development in the city.

Philadelphia should aim to improve its ranking among the 100 largest cities in terms of college-educated residents and labor force participation rates. Currently the city is in the bottom 10%.

The city should use a three pronged approach to workforce development by facilitating college completion for the 80,000 Philadelphia residents that have already started, but have dropped out of college improving the educational and vocational attainment of the city's existing workers promoting target industries and their curriculum in the city's high schools.

Roundtable Participants

Economic Development Roundtable

Laurie Actman, Select Greater Philadelphia
Vincent Dougherty, Mayor's Business Action Team
Andy Frishkoff, Neighborhood Transformation Initiative
Lawrence Agulnick, University City Science Center
Stephen Singer, Central Philadelphia Development Corporation
Peter Longstreth, Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation
Eric Nelson, Philadelphia Workforce Investment Board
Dianne Reed, Office of Budget and Program Evaluation
Indira Scott, Department of Commerce and Office of the City Representative
Janice Woodcock, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Moderator: John Haak, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Housing and Community Development Roundtable

Beverly Coleman, Neighborhoods Now
Andrew Frishkoff, Neighborhood Transformation Initiative
Eva Gladstein, Director of Neighborhood Transformation Initiative
John Kromer, Camden Dept. of Development and Planning and U.Penn
Melissa Long, People's Emergency Center CDC
Deborah McCullough, Office of Housing and Community Development

Tim McDonald, Plumbob, LLC
Rick Sauer, Philadelphia Association of CDCs
Kay Sykora, The Schuylkill Project
Harold Thomas, T.J. Properties, New Life Affordable Housing LP
Janice Woodcock, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Moderator: Richard Redding, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Mobility Roundtable

Mike Boyer, Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission
John Boyle, Bicycle Coalition of Greater Philadelphia
Rick Dickson, Philadelphia Parking Authority
David Fogel, SEPTA
Denise Goren, Michael Baker Jr., Inc.
David Perri, Dept. of Streets
Joan Schlotterbeck, Commissioner Dept. of Public Property
Bob Wright, Urban Engineers, Inc.
Janice Woodcock, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Moderator: Anthony Santaniello, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Preservation Roundtable

Jeff Cohen, Bryn Mawr College/ University of Pennsylvania
Mary DeNadai, John Milner Architects
Jonathan Farnham, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Adrian Fine, National Trust for Historic Preservation
Michael Fink, Department of Licenses and Inspections
Jim Flarhety, Neighborhood Transformation Initiative, Office of the Mayor
John Gallery, Preservation Alliance
Robert Jaeger, Partners for Sacred Places
Randall Mason, University of Pennsylvania
Hyman Myers, Vitetta Group
Sarah Merriman, Commerce Department
Theresa Stuhlman, Fairmount Park Commission
Robert Thomas, Campbell Thomas Architects
Janice Woodcock, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Moderator: Laura Spina, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Public Services Roundtable

Ray Convery, Philadelphia Police Department
James Diaz, Mayor's Office
Bill Flemming, Free Library of Philadelphia
Stephen J. Furtek, Philadelphia Water Department
Tina Ginnetti, Department of Finance
Ernest Hargett, Jr., Philadelphia Fire Department
Joe Joseph, School District of Philadelphia
Walter Korn, Parkway Council Foundation
Richard Tustin, Philadelphia Capital Program Office

Janice Woodcock, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Moderator: Janani Narayanan, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Regulatory Reform Roundtable

Ron Bednar, PA Department of Community and Economic Development

Julia Chapman, Former Chief of Staff to former Councilman Michael Nutter

Thomas Chapman, Blank Rome, LLP

Linda Dottor, Community Design Collaborative

Bill Hankowsky, Liberty Property Trust

Paul Lonie, Westrum

Greg Pastore, Bella Vista Town Watch

Stephen Pollock, Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, LLP

Kevin Smith, Stantec Engineers

John Wright, Klehr, Harrison, Harvey, Branzburg & Ellers, LLP

Janice Woodcock, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Moderator: Paula Brumbelow, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Role of PCPC Roundtable

Brian Abernathy, City Councilman Frank DiCicco's Office
Eugenie Birch, University of Pennsylvania School of Design
Bart Blatstein, Tower Investments

Santiago Burgos, Neighborhood Transformation Initiative
Richard Lombardo, Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, LLC
Deborah McCullough, Office of Housing and Community Development

Craig Schelter, Urban Land Institute

Michael Sklaroff, Ballard Spahr Andrews & Ingersoll, LLC

Lewis Wendell, University City District

Earni Young, The Philadelphia Daily News

Moderator: Janice Woodcock, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Role of Community Groups Roundtables

Stephen Anderson, West Mount Airy Neighbors

Lorraine Brill, Upper Northwood Community Council

John Chin, Philadelphia Chinatown Development Corporation

Patricia DeCarlo, Norris Square Civic Association

Fred Druding Jr., Whitman Council

Lou Farinella, Parkwood Civic Associatio.

Brett Feldman, Spruce Hill Neighborhood Association

Mike Hauptman, Queen Village Neighborhood Association

Timothy Kerner, Center City Residents Association

Claudia Sherrod, Point Breeze Coalition

Richard Thom, Old City Civic Association

Janice Woodcock, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

Moderator: Laura Spina, Philadelphia City Planning Commission

