



Testimony of the Central Delaware Advocacy Group
Matt Ruben, Chair
Bill #130274, Central Delaware Waterfront Overlay
Rules Committee, June 5, 2013

The Central Delaware Advocacy Group, a coalition of 20 waterfront civic and stakeholder organizations, supports this bill. By creating a permanent zoning overlay, it implements principles of the *Master Plan for the Central Delaware* – which already has improved the waterfront since the Planning Commission adopted it unanimously last year.

The Master Plan came out of an historic six-year public process. This overlay bill serves the public by giving the Plan teeth. It promotes mixed-use economic development, port-industrial growth, public access, and public open space along the waterfront.

But this overlay also is measured, reasonable, and practical. Anyone who says it's pie-in-the-sky, or will stifle development, is either misinformed or trying to deceive you.

This bill is a compromise. CDAG is troubled, for example, by the exclusion of Berks and Cumberland from the list of “river access streets”: northern communities deserve waterfront access like everyone else.

And many other major compromises have been made:

- The old, interim overlay mandated a 100-foot waterfront setback. But this bill uses the smaller, citywide setback of **50 feet**.
- Earlier versions of the overlay caused some to worry that it might restrict port uses. But this bill **totally exempts all port-industrial land from the overlay**.
- Earlier drafts gave the Planning Commission broad, undefined discretion to grant building-height waivers. But this bill includes a **clear, predictable height-bonus system**, like the proven F.A.R.-bonus system, allowing developers to build up to more than double the base height limit.
- Early drafts didn't let developers use height and F.A.R. bonuses at the same time. But this bill does.
- The original draft included 11 river access streets. But this bill includes only eight, and their paths are allowed to angle or turn on their way to the waterfront.
- Earlier versions prohibited parking garages on the river side of Columbus Blvd. But this bill allows them.

And this bill **does not require** any property owner to donate or sell any land, or spend a single dime, for a trail or river access street.

OVER→

Delaware River City Corporation • Dickinson Narrows Civic Association • Fishtown Neighbors Association • Franklin Bridge North Neighbors • Neighbors Allied for the Best Riverfront • New Kensington Community Development Corporation • Northern Liberties Neighbors Association • Old City Civic Association • Old Swedes Court Homeowners Association • Olde Richmond Civic Association • Penn Future • Pennsport Civic Association • Pennsylvania Environmental Council • Pennsylvania Horticultural Society • Port Richmond on Patrol and Civic Association • Queen Village Neighbors Association • River's Edge Community Association • Society Hill Civic Association • Society Hill Towers Homeowners Association • South Street Headhouse District • Whitman Council •



So the bill already balances multiple competing interests and concerns. Further compromise would render it toothless, effectively killing the Master Plan.

Councilman Squilla has convened multiple working meetings on this overlay, and I've heard every objection you're likely to hear today – and then some. Every objection either:

1. Already is addressed in the bill; *or*
2. Is irrelevant to this bill, because it concerns something in the underlying, citywide zoning code; *or*
3. Concerns the fact that the overlay discourages the kind of super high-rise, overly dense, gated residential development that's already proven unsustainable, and antithetical to a good waterfront.

If you believe planning is a legitimate City function, and that Councilman Squilla has worked in good faith to get the best possible compromise, then please support this bill. The Race Street Pier; the Penn Street Trail; the Race, Spring Garden, and Columbia Connectors; Washington Avenue Green; the new Fringe/Live Arts headquarters; new Columbus Blvd. apartment projects in Old City and South Philly; a large, multi-block Delaware Ave. project in Fishtown; the acquisition of long-mothballed waterfront property near Pier 70: if these all sound like a refreshing change from years of stagnation, then please support Councilman Squilla and recommend this bill favorably out of committee.

Thank you for your consideration.