

Testimony to City Council : Zoning Reform

DECEMBER 7 2011

The Design Advocacy Group urges City Council to vote unanimously on December 15, 2011, to adopt Bill 110845 and take a historic step forward for the City of Philadelphia.

Philadelphia has reached this important juncture after long, well-considered, and open consideration.

In 2006 DAG published its Reform Agenda for Planning and Design Review in Philadelphia, which called for extensive revision of both the zoning code and the planning and design approval processes associated with it. In 2007 Philadelphia voters approved, by an extraordinary majority, the establishment of the Zoning Code Commission that undertook a complete reformulation of the zoning code in a public and highly transparent process. Commission members and community, design, and development advocates have voluntarily dedicated thousands of hours to this project. Bill 110845 is the fruit of this work and merits the support of Council.

DAG supports the bill in its entirety, but we believe that several features of the new code deserve special mention:

- A. The bill includes an innovative Civic Design Review Process that has been carefully developed to balance the interests of the public, developers, and individual neighborhoods. We must all work together to make sure that this process is successful from the start.
- B. It includes an optional means of bulk control called "Skyplane Controls," which are an innovative method of shaping larger buildings to the benefit of the public.
- C. It reduces the complexity of the previous code.
- D. It incorporates zoning incentives for Transit Oriented Development (TOD).
- E. In general, it integrates planning efforts, both public and private, with the zoning process.
- F. It incorporates the innovative protections in the previous code for the Wissachickon and Pennypack watersheds.
- G. It establishes the right of city-wide, issue-oriented public interest groups such as DAG to offer testimony at the ZBA.
- H. It establishes stronger sustainability incentives and requirements.
- I. It encourages income diversity through incentives for affordable housing.

While celebrating the truly unprecedented achievement that this new code embodies, DAG also notes that zoning is but one of many tools needed for the development and conservation of our great city. We look forward to offering comments on the Comprehensive Plan, the unified property disposition process, and other major initiatives that serve the public interest.