

## **A Transformed City, by Design**

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Today's Philadelphia story is a tale of two cities. In recent years, Center City and nearby areas have been transformed, but we remain the poorest of American big cities, and many neighborhoods live in a yesterday of unequal opportunities and services. Our elected leaders have the chance to make us one city, transformed by design. "Design Equity" is what the Design Advocacy Group (DAG) calls this idea - that we can plan for a city that works for all of us. We ask the new mayor and new City Council to take up these six challenges: Plan for everyone. For the first time in a generation, Philadelphia now has a comprehensive city plan - "Philadelphia 2035" - an inspiring document that promises to change the lives of all the citizens of a great and growing 21st-century city. This cornerstone of planning for everyone, as egalitarian and durable as William Penn's 17th-century grid plan, has been created by the dedicated staff of a seriously underfunded City Planning Commission. The new mayor and Council should ensure that this fair vision of the city is kept in view and implemented by giving the commission the mandate to lead - resisting efforts to bury it in layers of bureaucracy - and giving it the resources and the independence it needs. Finish zoning reform. Philadelphia has a new zoning code intended to speed development and to strengthen citizen voices in the process. If given adequate funding, the Planning Commission can complete the mapping of the new code for all neighborhoods in two years, to make sure everyone reaps those benefits. Council's tinkering with the new code - however well-intentioned - will slow the progress of equitable development. Not just restructuring, but new thinking. Recent tragedy has taught us that we must improve the performance of the Department of Licenses and Inspections, and we also need better coordination in development, transportation, and housing. We should draw the right lessons from our problems and failures, and City Charter change should not be the first thing on the agenda. City departments must be properly supervised, creatively led, and adequately funded. This may require restructuring, but that should be done thoughtfully and with ample professional study and public discussion. Make sure our past is ready for the future. The recent losses of unique, emblematic buildings and neighborhood landmarks demonstrate the unsatisfactory state of historic preservation in this most historic city. The new mayor and Council can lead the fight on two fronts. To conserve our landmark historical resources, the Historical Commission needs the independence and the staffing to make a citywide survey of our architectural treasury, lead us in making plans for its best use, and oversee its protection. They should also conserve irreplaceable affordable housing and keep low-income residents in their homes with a housing policy that expands repair programs for Philadelphia's signature rowhouses. Give us the riverbanks we deserve. A good place to begin design equity is at the rivers that embrace our city on both sides. One

piece of the new comprehensive plan is a visionary, widely supported blueprint for the Delaware waterfront, but there is still far too little to show for it. If we do not implement that blueprint, it will be wasted. On the other side of city, we face the opposite problem: Development is booming on both sides of the Schuylkill, but without the benefit of overall planning. The Schuylkill River Development Corp. has given us a world-class pedestrian infrastructure, and we need to make sure that the quality of the projects that connect to it matches this promise. In short, our planners need to give shape to those efforts, or this energy, too, will be squandered. Keep the public in our public places. At Dilworth Plaza, along North Broad Street, in Washington Square West, and throughout University City, Philadelphia has benefited from the recent city-building work of our great institutional citizens and foundations. But the new mayor and the Planning Commission have to ensure that these various contributions come together to make a pattern and not a puzzle - that they make an overall picture of the future of our city. And we should not imagine that we can count on these good citizens to give us everything we need in the places where we need it. Our democratic leaders have the responsibility to lead a discussion that defines our public interests and then champion those interests. That is how design equity is defined and achieved.

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