INTRODUCTION TO PLANNING IN PHILADELPHIA

This brief overview of planning in Philadelphia has been developed as a primer for participants in the Citizens Planning Institute (CPI) course. This should be reviewed prior to coming to the first class in the course.
WHAT IS PLANNING?

• How we think ahead about the future, and give a vision to that thinking
• How we protect and enhance our neighborhoods, cities, regions, history, and environment
• How we re-create communities that offer better choices for where and how we live
• How we ensure our money is well spent
• How we create a playbook for building the future

WHY DO WE PLAN?

• To start the process of improving our communities
• To guide the future and avoid reactive responses
• To keep everyone on the same page and to allow communities to speak with one voice
• To focus on issues that affect us now and later
• To make sure that everyone’s interests are represented
• To attract investment and funding

WHO PLANS?

• Federal, state, and local government
• Community groups
• Business associations
• Private developers and land owners
• YOU! Citizen Planners

Short answer: Everybody! The key is for all of these entities to talk to each other so the various plans work together.

Planning involves creating a vision for where we want to be in ten, twenty or thirty years. It maps out the path to create that vision. Professionally-trained city planners can help lead this process, but it requires the participation of all the stakeholders in a community to be meaningful and sustainable.
DIFTERENT SCALES

Different scales of plans are necessary – we don’t live in a vacuum. We must see how our goals and needs are tied to larger issues and geographies. For example: the development of the suburbs around Philadelphia affects the health of everyone, including those of us who live in the city. Loss of green space affects the environment which can affect our drinking water.

On the other end, many regional or city-wide plans can’t get detailed enough for some issues in specific districts or neighborhoods. These smaller-scaled plans can plan for projects that affect a smaller group of residents. However, any smaller-scale plan should ensure that it also conforms to and can help form larger plans.

REGIONAL PLAN: 9-County Plan
Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission “Connections2040”

CITYWIDE PLAN: Philadelphia2035

DISTRICT PLANS: Philadelphia2035

Types of Plans:
- Regional plan
- Bicycle/pedestrian plan
- Comprehensive plan
- Historic resource plan
- Neighborhood plan
- Vision plan
- Corridor plan
- Development plan
- Transportation plan
- Affordable housing plan
- Open space plan
- Transit-oriented development plan

Regional 9-county plan: www.dvrpc.org
Citywide Plan & District Plans: www.phila2035.org
Neighborhood Plans: http://phila.gov/CityPlanning/plans/communityplans/Pages/default.aspx
TYPES OF PLANS

OPEN SPACE PLAN: East Kensington Green Spaces
An open space plan focuses on how to preserve existing open space and manage future development.

NEIGHBORHOOD PLAN: Project Reclaim
This plan focused on the 4200 block of Viola Street with a plan for a single block and neighborhood revitalization.

A bigger scale of neighborhood plan, this one involved a task force of over 50 organizations to guide future growth and revitalize a cultural asset.
The citywide bike/pedestrian plan coordinates the planning and construction of biking and pedestrian trails. The plan inventories existing trails and recommends over 60 new trail segments citywide.

A “commercial corridor” plan focuses on strategies to improve business districts. It looks at economic factors that allow businesses to thrive in addition to improvements to streetscape and buildings that will attract customers and businesses.

Transit-oriented development (TOD) simply means encouraging higher density around transit stations to support the use of mass transit and reduce dependence on the automobile.

Find plans on the City Planning website: www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/plans
PHILADELPHIA’S PLANNING HISTORY

1683 - A “Greene Countrie Towne:” Planning for a New City

Early History

Philadelphia is grounded in planning with this original plan by William Penn and his chief surveyor, Thomas Holme. Philadelphia stretched from Vine Street to South (Cedar) Street, river to river. This was the city until the middle of the 19th century. Penn witnessed the great fire in London and wanted to create a new community that would not suffer the same fate. He and Holme laid out the grid of streets and from day-one incorporated civic space and green space. He also declared that no wood structures could be built — again for fire safety — so even from the very beginning we had brick and stone buildings.

On the right side, you see a diagram of the four quadrants in Center City, between the Schulykill and Delaware Rivers, that reflect Penn’s plan, organized around city “squares” or parks, which still exist today. The center square was set aside for civic uses. In the early 19th century, it was the site of a water pumping station. In 1871, the present City Hall building construction began.

By the mid-19th century Philadelphia was teeming with residents, businesses and industry. The surrounding townships and neighborhoods were also growing but many were struggling. The consolidation of 1854 merged the boundaries of the County of Philadelphia with the City of Philadelphia. A major driver for this was the need for municipal services — not all areas had a police force or fire fighters or a department that built and repaired roads. The consolidation ensured that these types of services extended throughout the area.
Parks and Sanitation

People were beginning to make the connection between clean drinking water and uses along the rivers that provided that water. Through the 19th century, there was a regional effort to limit toxic uses along the Schuylkill River (such as factories and tanneries). The city slowly purchased land on either side of the river to preserve it and limit what was happening along its banks. The Fairmount Park system was founded on this principle.

From 1860-1910 the population of the US tripled in size. Cities stretched to accommodate these millions and deteriorated in the process.

In the 1930’s the city created the first comprehensive plan for future development. This was the basis of the first zoning code. Zoning provided a legal way to regulate what building uses can go where.
The City Beautiful Movement was meant to deal with these rising issues of sanitation, crime, and over-population of cities. Nothing captured this better than the Columbian Exposition (also known as the Chicago World’s Fair) of 1893. The lakefront showcase was visited by more than 27 million people—half the US population at that time(!) and left with different expectations of what a city could be.

The Parkway
Philadelphia was influenced by the City Beautiful movement as well and this spurred the vision of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. The vision wasn’t just a boulevard that connected City Hall to the park, but to also be lined with institutions and museums that would help educate the public. Much of that vision has been realized.
Showcase: 13 sections that rotated to display a model of how Center City could look by the year 1982 (the City’s 300th birthday).

Better Philadelphia Exhibition

These images are from 1947 Better Philadelphia Exhibition – where Philadelphia was at the forefront of a new movement to get citizens involved in the planning of their city. Philadelphia was also a leader in emphasizing the role of professional city planners, who represented the part of government that focuses on how we want our communities to grow in the long term and what kinds of decisions will take us there.

Edmund Bacon was the director of the City’s Planning Commission from 1949-1970 and became one of the most well known city planners. The Exhibition took up 2 floors of then Gimbel’s Department Store and attracted 385,000 visitors. The theme was: What City Planning Means to You and Your Children.” It contained movies, murals, dioramas and a 30x14 foot model.

Here’s the model showing sections that flipped over as a narrator revealed planners’ future vision for the site—highlighting open space and planning for pedestrians.

In the postwar years of optimistic growth, instead of wholesale demolition, as was happening in NY and Chicago, Bacon emphasized small-scale demolition to eliminate blight and restoration of older structures interwoven with the existing landscape. Areas of the city that were “reconstructed” included Society Hill and Market East.
We now are dealing with a legacy of population loss and vacancy. While the city’s population is slowly on the upswing (projected growth of 100,000 over the next 25 years), we will not have the population to occupy all of the land we have today. The new Land Bank will be one way to put vacant land and buildings back to use in the most beneficial way for the surrounding communities.

Population Decline

In 1960, the Planning Commission undertook a new comprehensive plan for the City of Philadelphia. At the time, the population was about 2 million people and that plan projected growth of 500,000. As a result, the city built new facilities, such as fire houses, libraries, and recreation centers to meet the expected growth in population. The far northeast and southwest sections of the city were developed to help meet the demand for more suburban style housing.

What actually happened was a decline of about 500,000 people. So today we are left with an infrastructure that does not have the population to support it.

40,000 Vacant Lots

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A comprehensive plan is an attainable vision of what we want the city to be in the future and then maps the way to achieve that vision. “Philadelphia2035 – A Citywide Vision” is Philadelphia’s new comprehensive plan. You have a summary version in your handouts.

Long-term Shared Vision
= Investment
  Beauty
  Sustainability
  Mobility
  Preservation

DREAMS DRIVE PLANNING AND PLANNING CHANGES THE FUTURE.