



Summary of Public Forum #1: June 7, 2010

Our consultant team presented the results of the analysis phase of the planning process on Monday, June 7. DRWC President Tom Corcoran opened the meeting by acknowledging organizations that have done previous planning work for the Central Delaware and also serve as DRWC's partners on this project, including PennPraxis, the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, and the Central Delaware Advocacy Group.

Mayor Nutter spoke next, noting that several of the recommendations outlined in the 2008 Action Plan for the Central Delaware had been implemented, including the creation of the DRWC and the implementation of the Race Street Pier and Pier 53 early action projects. Mayor Nutter also pointed out that the City of Philadelphia is supporting the Central Delaware master planning process by assigning staff members from various city agencies to work on the project in an advisory role. He closed his remarks with the inspiring message that "Planning matters...and the results will be spectacular."

Next, Marilyn Jordan Taylor, Dean of University of Pennsylvania's School of Design, outlined the evening. She presented the following key themes of the initial findings to the audience:

- The project area is large enough to accommodate many diverse uses, if they are properly planned in a cohesive way that includes input from all stakeholders.
- Redevelopment of the waterfront is a long-term project, with a time-line measured in decades. In the short term, the master plan will identify 'nodes' for targeted public investment.
- I-95 is one of the greatest barriers to waterfront access. While the Civic Vision presented the option of burying the highway, the political and economic climate has changed and there is little or no support an infrastructure project of that scale. One significant early finding is that a large number of streets – 47 of them, in fact – pass over or under I-95. Improvements and creative treatments to these existing connections can rebuild neighborhood connections to the waterfront.
- The waterfront has many historic buildings and structures. Preserving and reusing these important resources can enhance the authentic character of the waterfront and invites new commercial opportunities through heritage tourism.
- The Delaware River has two sides each with some exceptional amenities and there is a great opportunity to create greater connections between Philadelphia and Camden to leverage the assets on both sides of the river.

Dean Taylor also noted that the second phase of the master planning process would address various transportation issues, such as light rail, connector streets, and the character of Delaware Ave./Columbus Blvd., in-depth.

The presentation then got underway, with the principals from each of the consulting teams presenting their findings. Alexander Cooper of Cooper Robertson & Partners started off the presentation and discussed the characteristics that make the Central Delaware waterfront unique. He also told the audience that the future development along the waterfront would be consistent with the character of the adjacent neighborhoods and the city of Philadelphia. Transportation and streetscape issues will be examined to reconnect the city to the waterfront.

James Timberlake of KieranTimberlake spoke next and expanded on Philadelphia's unique character and said that improving the connection to the waterfront depends on understanding the direction, scale, and character of connecting streets. KieranTimberlake's analysis also looked at the "interstitial" spaces between the waterfront and the neighborhoods as opportunities for bridging between the waterfront and adjacent neighborhoods. Finally, he discussed the unique qualities of each of the 10 "flavorhoods" that abut the waterfront and how those qualities can influence the character of the waterfront to add diversity along the waterfront.

Cindy Sanders of OLIN followed James Timberlake and discussed OLIN's work on the ecological and landscape aspects of the waterfront. She noted that the existing resources, both recreational and ecological, are fragmented. To both reconnect the waterfront to the city and strengthen its ecological value, we must build on the existing momentum along the waterfront. To accomplish this it will be necessary to leverage existing funding for ecological and street improvements. Finally, she said that we can and will celebrate Philadelphia's authentic resources of emerging ecologies, industrial legacy, and unique neighborhoods.

John Alschuler of HR&A Advisors concluded the presentation by discussing the economic conditions of Philadelphia and the Central Delaware waterfront. Mr. Alschuler said that development must start at certain nodes of public land that has the strongest connections to existing upland neighborhoods. He went on to say that both public and private investment will be needed to create a market on the waterfront. This cannot be done only through open space construction but must also include readying sites for development through assemblage, street and utility connections, and pier fill or stabilization. He also informed the audience that initial development should be low to mid-rise to meet Philadelphia's market demand and to create a sense of place.

Following the presentation, a panel made up of the presenters and Alan Greenberger, Deputy Mayor of Commerce and Economic Development, and moderated by Marilyn Jordan Taylor addressed questions from audience members. The answers to those questions, as well as to questions submitted but not answered that night, will be posted on this website.