

**SPEECH TO THE PHILADELPHIA CITY PLANNING  
COMMISSION, ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES,  
TUESDAY JUNE 17, 2008**

Thank you President Brown for the introduction.

Before I begin, I'd like to introduce the members of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission: Alan Greenberger, Vice Chair; Patrick J. Eiding; Bernard Lee; Natalia Olson de Savycky; Nilda Ruiz; Joseph Syrnick; Managing Director Camille Cates Barnett; Finance Director Rob Dubow; and Deputy Mayor and City Planning Commission Chairman Andrew Altman.

Within two weeks of taking office, I named these members of the Planning Commission as well as new members to the Zoning Board of Adjustment and the Zoning Code Commission. As a group, they are highly qualified people who bring to the table a range of planning and development expertise along with common sense community values. We are extremely fortunate as a city to have such a group of talented people. I thank each of you for serving and I promise, we'll keep you busy.

I also want to point out that we took such quick action with these appointments because we don't have a minute to spare in preparing the city for the healthy, sustainable growth that we want. But before I begin my address, I want to offer a special birthday greeting to Beverly Beltz, the Planning Commission's administrative assistant who is in charge of taking minutes. Happy Birthday, Bev. You are definitely going to be busy tonight!

**The City Planning Commission Reborn**

We're here tonight because we all love our city and the people who live in it.

We're here for our children and our grandchildren, for all the people who built this beautiful city and for the coming generations who will renew it in ways we can't imagine.

Our job is to position the city for its grand leap into a prosperous future.

Now, in the past, some complained that Philadelphia was a humble valley between the lofty peaks of New York's financial clout and Washington's political power. They pointed to our loss of population and jobs in the last 50 years and argued that government's task was to manage decline.

That's not the Philadelphia I see and we're putting an end to that chapter of our story.

I say we're the fourth largest metropolitan region in population and employment

in the United States and that we sit strategically at the center of the East Coast economy.

Our goal, as I pledged in my budget address to City Council last February, is to grow the city by 75,000 residents in the next decade. It's Philadelphia's time to aspire, to compete and to restore its greatness.

A tangible example of the change I'm talking about is the city's current efforts, together with the vigorous support of the Commonwealth and Gov. Rendell, to attract BlackRock, the investment management firm, to a new gleaming skyscraper at 30th Street Station.

This development would mean an immediate infusion of more than 1,000 high paying jobs and the ripple effect of related development will increase the links between Center City and West Philadelphia.

But, as you might have guessed, tonight is not just another regularly scheduled meeting of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission.

I'm here tonight to say as emphatically as I can that I want the Planning Commission to return to its historic, Charter-based leadership role in shaping our vision of the future and managing the development of our city. The Renewed Planning Commission will light the path to the prosperous, healthy, inclusive, sustainable future that we want for all Philadelphians.

As a city government, we reject the "Let's make a deal" mentality that dominated the past. Monty Hall has left City Hall and the MSB and One Parkway and all of our other buildings -- those days are over!

We reject a development process that left city residents:

- confused about the rules of engagement,
- fearful that a new unknown project could destroy the character of their neighborhood
- suspicious that powerful developers had gained special treatment, and
- on the other side of the equation, left developers with an unpredictable process risking their fortunes.

Planning is not a luxury nor is it a jargon-filled veneer obscuring a deal-making process that slices up a city's assets in a disorganized rush.

Planning is our way to preserve the past and anticipate the future. It's rational, transparent and democratic.

It places the community at the table with the city's expert planners and the developer in a partnership for progress. It's not a passive system, simply responding to developers' proposals; it's proactive and sets high standards of

design.

It's an absolutely essential prerequisite for any city that aspires to compete in the national and international marketplace.

But good planning does not happen in a vacuum. It gains strength and direction from a city's core values and from the built environment, the facts on the ground.

We hold these values to be self-evident:

We are a walkable city, increasingly home to bicycles. We want to preserve our urban form. We do not want the automobile and its design requirements to dominate the landscape and our decision-making. We are mass-transit, bike-sharing, power-walking proud.

We are a city steeped in history and blessed with an incredible physical context, a city of distinct neighborhoods, each with its own character. We prefer to revitalize existing structures where possible and carefully integrate new development into our existing environment. For us, design matters. It's not a luxury. It speaks strongly to our sense of pride as Philadelphians.

We revere our open space and our parks and are committed to further greening in our green country town. We will make our Fairmount Park system the best urban park in the world.

We are committed to sustainability, which means meeting our current needs without compromising future generations meeting their needs. We will focus on best practices in green building and energy efficiency and promote the growth of green-collar jobs.

And we believe in the equitable sharing of responsibilities that comes with urban living. "NOT IN MY BACKYARD" is a knee-jerk response from people standing outside a process they deem lacking in credibility, but a transparent and inclusionary process will encourage shared responsibilities. We will demand from ourselves a commitment to stay true to our name – the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection. We look out for each other.

These are our values, these are our principles, these are our standards of excellence and expectation.

Of course, one of our most important values is the very idea of planning. Philadelphia has a proud tradition in this regard. It was William Penn, whose visionary plan for Philadelphia laid out four beautiful squares in an urban grid that gave the city its elegant form. We became an inspiration to cities around the world.

And there was a time when the city was a national leader in planning. During the 1940s when Philadelphia's first planning board was established, our city leaders well understood the linkage between planning and prosperity.

Business and civic leaders successfully pushed for the creation of a Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority in 1945, four years before the federal government established a federal urban renewal mechanism.

And in 1947, business leaders and the new Planning Commission sponsored an astounding event, the Better Philadelphia Exhibition, which imagined a city of the future, making the transition from an old industrial port city to a post-industrial service economy.

Finally, the authors of our city's 1951 charter put it all together, charging the city Planning Commission with the task of creating a comprehensive plan for the city.

But over the years, for reasons of expediency, both political and economic, we've strayed from relying on the Planning Commission as the arbiter of planning expertise. I want to return the Commission to its rightful position.

Daniel H. Burnham, the great Chicago architect and urban planner, once said, "Make no little plans." As mayor, I say, "Make big ideas work."

And so tonight, I want to make it crystal clear that the Philadelphia City Planning Commission is the City authority on planning and shaping the development of Philadelphia.

It's my expectation that the commission will live up to what the City Charter provided in Chapter 6, Sections 4-600 and 4-601. Returned to its former place of prominence and authority, the Planning Commission will not only plan better but also play an active role in rezoning issues.

Planning and land use management require the appropriate tools, and the Zoning Code Commission is working on the first comprehensive code reform in 35 years.

I am pleased to announce that after careful deliberation, the city has secured the services of Clarion Associates and Duncan Associates, two firms that have done excellent work in the area of zoning reform. I also expect to name a Zoning Code Commission executive director later this month.

Our new zoning code must accommodate the realities of a fast-changing world. The Zoning Code Commission will survey best practices nationwide and address the most advanced proposals for sustainable development and green design, for transit-oriented development and for strategies to maintain equity and balance in the city's development.

And, as the Zoning Code Commission moves forward with its work, I ask all of my colleagues, particularly on City Council, to use the Zoning Code Commission as the central clearinghouse for new ideas because the proposed new code will be a giant puzzle that must be put together in a way that makes sense – for all of us.

I'm thinking of the good work done by Councilmen Brian O'Neill pushing for a Design Review Advisory Board to provide guidance to the Planning Commission;

Councilman Jim Kenney and Councilwoman Blondell Reynolds Brown on green, sustainable development;

Councilman Frank DiCicco on comprehensive waterfront development;

Councilman Bill Green on historic preservation;

And Council members Jannie Blackwell and Darrell Clarke for their concern that institutional developments be fairly distributed throughout the city.

To ensure the best outcomes, we want to fit these good ideas into a comprehensive approach being followed by the Zoning Code Commission rather than piecemeal actions that could confuse or complicate the new code. And where appropriate, the new ideas should also be sent to the Planning Commission because it's the place for vetting broad policy proposals.

I want the Planning Commission to focus on the big picture and the whole city.

You know, I was about 6 years old when the commission completed its last comprehensive plan in 1963. Now, 45 years later, a new plan is way past due.

But this is a new day and we demand a NEW WAY. The Planning Commission will work very closely with our new sustainability director, Mark Alan Hughes, to conceive a city plan that rivals in scope and depth the recent New York City plan. This new plan will place us squarely in a new era of urban sustainability.

In addition to its forward-thinking work, the Planning Commission must play a central role in the hundreds of daily decisions related to new development. From now on, the Commission will be the FIRST STOP for developers who are proposing exciting new projects.

Moreover, the Commission must be seen as more than an advisory body and function as a true independent commission with real authority to shape development. I will ask City Council to work with me to develop legislation that will give the Commission a greater role with more authority in the development process.

I have asked Gary Hack, the former dean at the School of Design at the University of Pennsylvania, to lead an effort with the American Association of Planners, to bring best practices to the city for our implementation.

For example, under the City Charter section I mentioned earlier, the Planning Commission can propose zoning legislation rather than simply reacting to the vagaries of developers' requests.

Instead of simply looking at individual parcels on an ad hoc, "what should we do with them" basis, the commission can rezone areas encompassing many parcels as a way of spurring development and preserving our heritage.

And I am asking the Zoning Board of Adjustment to give "great weight" to the recommendations of the Planning Commission.

With its new mandate, I want the Planning Commission to take on the big issues we face as a city and to show leadership:

For years we've talked about the incredible opportunities that the waterfront offers. I want the Commission to take the thoughtful vision developed by Penn Praxis and transform it into a practical framework for development.

We need master plans for large underutilized areas, such as Hunting Park/Allegheny West where residents have been strongly urging the city to create a plan for a mixed use development that would bring jobs, commercial development and affordable housing to an area sorely in need.

The Planning Commission must work in active partnership with our higher education institutions, Temple, Penn, Drexel, University of the Arts, LaSalle and St. Joseph's, which all have either recently completed or are currently undertaking master plans with development proposals cumulatively valued in the billions of dollars.

Too often, city residents assume that planning is really a Center City phenomenon related to high-rise buildings and mega-projects and that's just not so.

There have been a number of extremely well-planned neighborhood developments:

- West Parkside in my former Council district in West Philadelphia;
- The Pradera Homes development in North Philadelphia;
- The Arbours at Eagle Pointe in the Northeast;
- Winston Commons in the Northwest, and
- Jefferson Square in South Philadelphia.

As our neighborhoods continue to change, we need the Planning Commission to develop thoughtful plans to guide growth.

And as the city continues to transform itself into a cultural oasis, the Planning Commission needs to be a full partner in planning on the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, with the eventual arrival of the Barnes Foundation, the expansion of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Free Library addition. The Commission must also play a similar role on the Avenue of the Arts, both North and South Broad.

The Planning Commission must work with the Philadelphia School Reform Commission, which has millions of dollars in proposed capital investments in the pipeline.

For years, there's been sporadic discussion regarding the distribution of municipal facilities throughout the city. We are a city of about 1.5 million people with municipal infrastructure designed for a city of roughly two million. In the past, the Commission concluded that the city has seriously under-invested in maintaining its facilities. We need a strategic plan that offers alternatives to right-size our city assets.

With \$4 a gallon gasoline on everyone's mind and the prospect of paying \$5 a gallon very real, we need to link planning and eventual development decisions to mass transportation investments.

I've asked Andrew Altman, Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, and Rina Cutler, Deputy Mayor for Transportation and Public Utilities, to make absolutely certain that Planning Commission decisions have the full benefit of the very best thinking on the transportation consequences of proposed development.

With strategic efforts like these, we can address neighborhood concerns over major projects such as the proposed waterfront casinos ... from the beginning, not the middle or the end of the process.

Consequently, I'm asking that the Commission no longer approve projects before considering a transportation and mass transit study that seriously sets out the pros and cons of the project's impact. The Planning Commission, on the basis of their own expert study, will make independent decisions with recommendations to guide our path to progress.

We're also way past due in developing a coordinated master plan for one of our greatest assets, a true engine of economic development, the Philadelphia International Airport. It will become a premier hub in the Northeast, servicing the country and the world. We need to plan for the inevitable growth.

The Planning Commission should also take the lead to develop standards and

zoning processes that ensure institutional, social service and other types of facilities are equitably distributed throughout our neighborhoods.

As I said a couple weeks ago when I announced my strategy to deal with our City's growing homeless problem, we are ALL Philadelphians, and we ALL have an obligation to help our fellow Philadelphians in need.

Finally, I am charging the Planning Commission to establish a Design Review Advisory Board to provide guidance to the Commission in evaluating the aesthetics, form and community context of a proposed project. Design is critical to the quality of life in our city and the Planning Commission will need the very best advice available on these issues.

I understand that there are a dizzying array of initiatives here and quite a few working parts, but the issue of planning and the role of the Planning Commission are critical to our future.

We must not sit back and allow the whims of development to determine the location and pace of our future growth. It falls to city government to act on behalf of all Philadelphians by engaging in the forward thinking that is the heart and soul of planning.

Last January, I said that we were commencing the Renaissance of a great American city:

- Where citizens will stand in a new relationship with their government by sharing civic responsibilities,
- Where young people will have the opportunity to learn, to work and be safe;
- Where businesses will have the incentive to invest, tourists will have the desire to experience history and culture;
- And where residents will respect each other, will keep their city clean and will participate fully in our economic success.

Without a strong Philadelphia City Planning Commission, these goals will be forever out of reach.

Fortunately, we now have a Commission on the job and fully engaged. Planning has been restored to its rightful place as the source of our collective vision for a Philadelphia that will fulfill our dreams.

This is our time. Philadelphia is our place.

Let the planning of our great future begin...RIGHT NOW!

Thank You.