

## MONTHLY MEETING REPORT

January 2007

Meeting Date: January 4, 2007  
Location: Temple Center City  
Present: Joanne Aitken, Matt Bergheiser, Tim Bosworth, Ed Bronstein, George Claflen, Danielle DiLeo, David Feldman, Alan Greenberger, Greta Greenberger, Eric Grugel, Gregory Heller, David Hollenberg, Lee Huang, Caryn Hunt, Daniel Hunter, Mary Isaacson, Frank Jaskiewicz, Christopher Jurek, Gersil Kay, Tim Kerner, Robert Kettell, Mark Kocent, Bennur Koksoz, Ashley Metz, Beth Miller, David Miller, Karin Morris, Stephen Mullin, Peta Raabe, Douglas Robbins, Craig Schelter, Bruce Schimmel, David Searles, Neil Sklaroff, Laura Spina, Edward Swenson, Charles Thomson, Andrew Toy, Mary Tracy, Richard Tyler, Elise Vider, Ziaodi Zheng

### 1. Open Discussion

**Preservation.** Gersil Kay expressed concern that the City is selling off its architectural heritage to developers although it needs both old and new in order to flourish. As an example., another attendee reported that the Sugar House casino site is said to be the actual site of Penn's Treaty.

**DAG Announcements.** Incoming DAG chairperson Alan Greenberger announced plans to broaden the DAG leadership to meet the challenge of DAG's increasing activity and DAG's desire to become a better and more effective organization. He has asked George Claflen and David Brownlee to serve as vice-chairs. Both have been active members of the steering committee. George will have oversight of projects, which is especially needed now that DAG will have funding to hire consultants to work on projects. David will advance DAG's outreach, especially by speaking to other groups and in public forums. James Templeton, with Chris Jurek, will continue to operate the web site and Joanne Aitken will continue to provide meeting reports. The steering committee will continue to explore ways to increase membership and to involve DAG members more actively in DAG activities. All current members are urged to recruit others to join, which will increase DAG's strength and networking possibilities.

**Infill Philadelphia.** Beth Miller, of the Community Design Collaborative, announced a joint CDC/LISC initiative that focuses on design of Philadelphia's infill sites. The kick off presentation, open to the public, will be on January 18, from 8 – 10 a.m., at PNC Bank at 16<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets. LISC's director and Dick Voith of Econsult will present.

**Old House Fair.** The Preservation Alliance will be bringing back the Old House Fair this year on Saturday, March 17 at the Germantown Fiends School field house. For more information see [www.preservationalliance.com](http://www.preservationalliance.com) or contact George Hoessel at 215-546-1146.

**Andrew Toy for City Council.** Andrew Toy, long-time DAG member, announced that he will be running for an at-large seat on City Council. Among other things, Andrew wants to bring to the table the issues of physical planning, design, and transit.

### 2. Ongoing Issues.

**Gambling Facilities.** As has been well reported in the press, two Delaware River sites have been selected for the two Philadelphia casino sites. DAG will continue to advocate for better design

of the buildings and their sites. George Claflen floated the suggestion that, with the decision to book-end the waterfront, the time is ripe to reconsider sinking I-95 in Center City. Econsult and the Delaware River Port Authority have produced studies on this issue in the past, identifying several points in favor of the plan. Comparison with Boston's Big Dig, according to George, shows that the concept is feasible. He invites comments about the idea at [gclaflen@claflenassociates.com](mailto:gclaflen@claflenassociates.com).

Alan Greenberger report on progress by the Central Delaware River Planning Process (the Penn Praxis/City Planning Commission) in Harris Steinberg's absence. The next event will be a presentation of the Williamsburg/Greenpoint (New York City) waterfront plan by Howard Slatkin of the NYC Planning Commission. It will be held at WHYY on January 8 at 8 am. The Williamsburg/Greenpoint plan features a balance of mixed uses – e.g., it is still a working industrial site but it accommodates recreational uses. The process by which NYC achieved this plan is intended to serve as a starting point for discussion about how a plan could be successfully developed in Philadelphia.

Laura Spina reported on the community forums that were held in December. A total of about 850 persons attended the sessions, whose goal was to identify a set of values that will be used as design principles for the waterfront master plan. During January and February there will be presentations by planners and architects to introduce a range of professional ideas to the public for consideration. For more information, see [www.planphilly.com](http://www.planphilly.com).

**Zoning Code Reform – IMPORTANT ACTION FOR DAG MEMBERS.** As reported at last month's meeting, DAG testified before City Council in support of a bill authorizing zoning reform and the re-writing of the City's out-of-date zoning code. At that time, the bill was unanimously voted out of committee to the full Council. Since then, the vote by Council has been tabled till February on the basis that that the process is moving too quickly. Among possible reasons for the delay is the concern on the part of some Council members that reform would deprive neighborhoods of any say about development within their boundaries. There is consensus among many that this is as good a zoning reform bill as is likely to appear before Council. DAG members are urged to contact their council person and Councilpersons at-large – see [www.phila.gov](http://www.phila.gov) for addresses – asking them to support this important bill. See the DAG website [www.designadvocacy.org](http://www.designadvocacy.org) for DAG's testimony before Council and for other information about the bill. For those willing to share their communications with representatives, please forward information to George Claflen at [gclaflen@claflenassociates.com](mailto:gclaflen@claflenassociates.com). In particular, those living in districts represented by Jannie Blackwell, Brian O'Neill, Darrell Clarke, and Marian Tasco are encouraged to contact their council persons since these representatives have expressed concern about the bill.

**Mayoral Forum.** Elise Vider reported that DAG will join AIA Philadelphia, the Preservation Alliance, and the Host Committee for the upcoming convention of the American Planning Association in organizing a mayoral forum to focus on issues relating to Philadelphia's built environment. The forum is planned for March, prior to the May primary. A free Center City venue is being sought. Planning will move quickly. Those who wish to help or who know of any places where the forum could be held should contact Elise.

### 3. New Issues.

**DAG Design Review.** DAG is in the process of working out details to provide design review services for the Pennsylvania Environmental Council on four projects planned for the Delaware River (all located north of the Penn Praxis/Planning Commission study site). George Claflen will be overseeing the project. Because the review will require a major time commitment on the part of participants, an honorarium will be awarded. This is a new venture for DAG, which has

completed two previous non-paid reviews. This challenge was undertaken as an opportunity to assist community groups, to help them to evaluate developer proposals for their neighborhoods, and to bring the perspective of experts to a community which rarely has such resources available. The results of the review will be published on the DAG web site.

A footnote about one of DAG's previous reviews at 218 Arch Street: The building was granted zoning variances exactly as proposed. The Old City Civic Association and others are considering whether or not to appeal the ZBA's decision. DAG's review, which questioned several aspects of the design including its infringement of Christ Church's view corridor, is available on the DAG web site.

**Impact of Gaming in Greater Philadelphia.** Greg Heller arranged for Karin Morris and Eric Grugel of the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission to present the DVRPC's recent report *Impact of Gaming in Greater Philadelphia* that addresses potential transportation, land use, and visual quality consequences stemming from the planned gambling venues.

The DVRPC is the metropolitan planning office (MPO) for the nine county Philadelphia area. All metropolitan areas have an MPO, which is responsible for conducting the region's transportation planning and for receiving and distributing Federal transportation funding. Transportation planning, particularly in progressive MPO's such as Philadelphia's, includes land use, economic development, and environmental issues. The DVRPC has a staff of over 100, which completes several studies and sponsors various programs throughout the year. The DVRPC also administers grants to fund their own planning studies to communities that would not otherwise have the funds to do so with the intention of reversing the effects of local disinvestment and decline. Community development corporations are now eligible to apply for such funding.

The DVRPC web site makes available aerial photographs of Philadelphia at five year intervals along with on-line mapping. See [www.dvrpc.org](http://www.dvrpc.org).

The commission's new study of the potential effects of gambling venues in Philadelphia has just been completed. The paper copy, which runs over 200 pages, has not yet been published but is available on line.

The study examined all the proposed casino sites. Since it was begun 1 ½ years ago, it does not reflect the December site selection by the Gaming Commission. All the developer proposals were evaluated on their submitted traffic impact studies. Unfortunately, since there were no clear submission guidelines, many of the submissions were preliminary, information provided varied between proposals, but all indicated that traffic impact would be minimal. The DVRPC relied on DAG's design principles for gambling facilities and sites as part of its evaluation process.

Now that two Delaware River sites have been selected, the DVRPC recommends that a comprehensive study is needed. It is clear that I-95 will be significantly used. Casino developers' proposals indicate that a total of 88,000 – 93,000 trips/day will be generated by the four Philadelphia area gambling sites. The four include the two on the Delaware and those in Philadelphia Park and Chester. Although casinos are traditionally a land use dominated by cars, the DVRPC feels that this could be different in Philadelphia with proper planning.

Signage issues are a new subject area for the DVRPC even though they are related to land use issues. New signs, including those using new digital technology, will be coming and City codes

are not ready for them; in addition, Philadelphia enforcement of current signage laws has been non-existent. The study predicts that more signs will be added, including new signage to additional roads, as well as wayfaring signage. The study notes that removal of signage in Pennsylvania is particularly difficult.

Following general comments, detailed findings regarding transportation, neighboring communities, current zoning, size and amenities, and design quality were presented for Philadelphia Park, Harrah's in Chester, Sugar House in Northern Liberties/Fishtown, and Foxwoods in Pennsport. Note: The information presented was extensive; it can be found in its entirety on the DVRPC web site in the on-line report.

Overall recommendations to the municipalities were the gambling facilities are to be located include updating zoning and signage ordinances, requiring site and additional urban design, and mandating shared parking. Specifically regarding signage ordinances, the study recommends consolidating signage ordinances, making them non-content based, including regulations on new types of signs (digital, wall wraps, street furniture, etc.), and updating the ordinance every other year to keep up with emerging technology. The study also recommends that the Commonwealth develop standardized way-finding signs such as those used for cultural attractions.

The DVRPC is working with Penn Praxis on traffic studies for their study of the Delaware River waterfront. They hope to be able to re-evaluate traffic effects of the casinos one year after the facilities are up and running.

During the question and answer period, the following was discussed:

The current study attempted to examine a moving target. In light of the changes to the casino designs, there should be further study of the current reality and of the interaction of all four sites, now that they have all been identified. The unfortunate fact is that an in-depth study would require a year to complete.

No one knows what the consequences will be for I-95 traffic, given the prohibition of new ramps on I-95 within Center City. Concerning what might be done about the highway, it was reported that the Department of Transportation currently favors traffic calming over expensive highway improvements. In any case, funding for new ramps would be far in the future.

The DVRPC submitted its findings to the Pennsylvania Gaming Control Board, which has been involved in the study during its development, but as an a-political body they did not testify. Information has also been made available to interested neighborhoods.

### **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of DAG will be Thursday, February 1, 2007, at 8:00 am at Temple Center City, 1515 Market Street. Check the reception desk for the room number.

Joanne Aitken  
January 11, 2007