

May 19, 2009

Testimony to Philadelphia City Planning Commission regarding Bill 090170

The Design Advocacy Group supports the Civic Vision for the Central Delaware and we are pleased that the Philadelphia City Planning Commission recently adopted this vision, which is the product of a comprehensive, citizen-driven process.

The Civic Vision's Action Plan calls for an interim overlay for the waterfront. DAG feels this is a prudent step to ensure that nothing occurs along the river that will preclude the realization of the Vision before the actual re-zoning of the waterfront is completed. It must be understood, however, that this is a temporary measure and that long-term growth along the waterfront needs to be guided by the Central Delaware Riverfront Master Plan soon to be undertaken by the Planning Commission. The Master Plan must be based on the same open and comprehensive process that created the firm foundation of the Civic Vision and Action Plan.

While DAG supports the creation of an interim overlay, we are concerned that the proposed legislation does not directly address the density recommended in the Vision Plan. We therefore recommend that the Planning Commission use its powers to permit well designed, higher-intensity development along the waterfront as depicted in the Vision Plan. While the real estate market is now weak, it is essential that development be guided by the patterns of height, density, and intensity of use that participants agreed upon for the Vision Plan.

The overlay seeks to insure access to the waterfront and the creation of a public right-of-way at the water's edge. These are crucial to the Civic Vision. Although this is a sensitive issue because of its affect on private property, a generous public waterfront trail at the water's edge will greatly improve the public realm and increase the beauty and value of adjacent development parcels. Therefore, we urge the City to seek a generous public right-of-way, while ensuring a structure to adequately address the concerns of property owners.

The Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia is a volunteer organization whose 1000 members come from a broad spectrum of disciplines and share an interest in design, development, and planning. DAG's mission is to encourage public discussion about design and to advocate for design excellence.

DESIGN
ADVOCACY
GROUP

of Philadelphia

The fact that an interim overlay is required to protect the long-term future of the Civic Vision highlights the urgent need to proceed with the development of a comprehensive, thorough, and well-crafted master plan as quickly as possible. We applaud the City for moving forward on the concepts established in the Vision Plan under the oversight of the City Planning Commission and look forward to the completion of the Riverfront Master Plan.

Timothy Kerner, AIA

Design Advocacy Group of Philadelphia