

# The Philadelphia Inquirer

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Waterfront Development

## Editorial | Move quickly on a plan

If Philadelphia is ever going to successfully develop the rest of its waterfront, the city needs to quickly create a broad master plan that includes a contiguous public promenade along the river's edge, protected sight lines, and incentives for private interests to improve public space.

These are minimal goals for any good waterfront plan, says Alan Greenberger, cofounder of the Design Advocacy Group, a volunteer organization made up of architects, city planners and developers.

Mayor Street deserves credit for moving forward with his New River City Initiative, which encourages residential and commercial use of largely deserted industrial waterfront property. A redevelopment-district bill that Street has signed smartly requires all new waterfront developers to preserve at least 50 feet of undeveloped land, including a public right-of-way, on the water's edge. Regardless of lot size, a development must maintain 40 percent of its land as open space.

The city does have other regulations for development of specific waterfront areas, but it has no broad master plan that provides a vision for the entire river's edge.

With developers racing to feed the appetite for condos near the water, the city can't afford to not have a master plan that guards against overdevelopment. Otherwise, it could be left with a mountain range of concrete towers that block waterfront views and gobble land that might be set aside for parks.

At least eight proposals for construction along the Delaware River are already in various stages of consideration for approval by city officials. These plans include nearly 6,000 planned housing units, according to William Kramer, a senior planner in the Planning Commission's zoning division.

A Bucks County developer, Louis Cicalese, plans to begin building the first of three condominium projects this fall. The first is a high-rise tower just north of the Benjamin Franklin Bridge; another project is at Pier 34, a few blocks south of Penns Landing; and a third is at Pier 40.

Four other major waterfront projects are in the works, not counting the \$350 million proposal by Ceasar's Entertainment (recently bought by Harrah's) to build a slots casino and hotel off Columbus Boulevard between Tasker and Reed Streets. It must compete with other proposals before the state gaming board for two city slots licenses.

Much of the proposed new development is being spurred by the city's 10-year tax-abatement program. The goal is to attract more retail and entertainment venues to the underpopulated waterfront.

To help that happen, the Philadelphia Regional Port Authority, which controls much of waterfront south of Penn's Landing, should be working hard with the city to move port-related warehouse and pier operations south of Oregon Avenue or to Navy Yard sites. Gov. Rendell, who still controls the leadership of the Delaware River Port Authority, can aid this effort by directing state economic development funds toward moving port facilities.

The city must proceed very carefully if it is going to attract the best ideas for residential and commercial waterfront development, and the higher tax rates that would come with it. The crying need right now is for Mayor Street to create a broader riverfront plan that focuses his River City initiative.

Philadelphia cannot allow developers to build high-rise towers and other commercial and residential structures without more thought and public input.

Permits allowing construction should be linked to commitments from developers to invest in a landscaped public walkway along the waterfront, with lighting, benches and other amenities. An enlightened master plan should stipulate that proposals for waterfront development must include corridors that allow scenic views as well as investments in public park space.