

# Fishtown :



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## **Valuing Continuity, Managing Change**

Studio - Fall 2006

Graduate Program in Historic Preservation  
University of Pennsylvania

School of Design



# FISHTOWN STUDIO

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# Part 1: Fishtown Studio Report

## INTRODUCTION

Fishtown, a subset of Kensington, is a neighborhood in Philadelphia located northeast of center city. It is nestled at the edge of the city where the Delaware River cants to the east. The Historic Preservation studio of The University of Pennsylvania studied this community bound by Norris Street to the North, Frankford Avenue to the West and the Delaware River to the East in order to formulate a value centered preservation plan for this evolving neighborhood. [image map of fishtown- neighborhood scale and in Philadelphia context]

Fishtown once known for its abundant fishing industry (for which it is named) is now more widely recognized as an historic neighborhood gaining unsolicited attention for its opportunities in real estate and development. Fishtown is a multi-generation family community where traffic comes to a halt for children playing wiffle ball in the street, where the lady who owns the corner hair salon holds the key to the gate of the local cemetery, and where people sit on their steps chatting with neighbors to pass the time.

Current economic, social and political trends are pushing this neighborhood to change while the residents are resistant in fear of losing what they call home. Though this neighborhood has evolved several times in history, it is the haste of the current pressures of real estate and casinos that challenge this studio to assess the next stage for Fishtown.

The goal of the studio is to chart a long-term vision based on value centered preservation - to retain the sense of place while managing change and development. The plan is formulated with the latitude to change according to the evolution of values over time. It is inevitable that the plan will be reassessed and revised once it is created; similar to the adage that a building begins to deteriorate once construction is complete. Additionally, in order to execute the plan, it must include provisions for short-term action thereby addressing the question of how to begin. Our intent is develop recommendations to guide change in a manner that respects the historic built environment, but reflects the realities of the community. Integral to the process is the understanding the many layers of Fishtown, and how it came to be.



Fishtown mural  
Source: David O'Malley

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The value of Fishtown is inherently tied to its tangible and intangible qualities. This neighborhood's living history is rooted in its strong sense of community, its connection to the Delaware River, and the integrity of its built heritage. Fishtown is a survivor. Though Fishtown has weathered enormous change, the place has retained its distinct identity. Fishtown's self-sufficiency, physical geography and existing social networks make the community unique and resilient, as well as a functioning place.

Fishtown is in a decisive moment of opportunity, on the precipice of change. As Fishtown looks to its future, the values that define it—community, historicity, location and built fabric—become even more important.





**Geographic:**

To understand Fishtown’s history and culture, it is imperative to understand its geography, in particular the relationship to the Delaware River. The area was settled principally due to of its connection with the river, and grew because of the proximity of the city of Philadelphia to the south. It is Fishtown’s geography which placed it on the map. Fishtown, however, sees itself as distinct from not only its neighboring communities but Philadelphia at large, and physical geography reinforces this feeling of separation. Fishtown’s roads are canted toward the river, as opposed to aligning with the center city grid system. Despite strong connections to the rest of the region through good public transit, difficult neighborhood street traffic patters insulate the neighborhood.



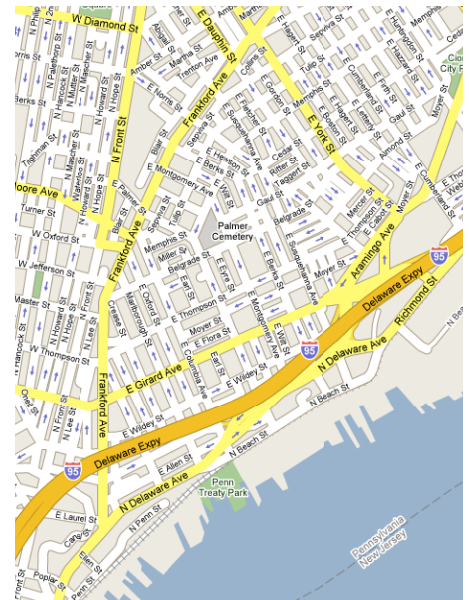
1777 Scull and Heap

Source: Philadelphia Historic Commission



Stranger's Guide to Kensington 1828

Source: www.kennethmilano.com



Google map of Fishtown 2006

Source: www.google.com/maps

**Social:**

In order to sustain the integrity of Fishtown, it is vital to recognize the fortitude and determination of the people who made its past and who will shape its future. Fishtown's strength stems from the community's pride and their sense of ownership. In the true sense of the word, Fishtown is a neighborhood. It is common for families to remain in Fishtown for generations. The activity in the street is constant; filled with school children and neighbors chatting, surveying the street from their stoops. It is precisely because of these strong social networks in Fishtown that the neighborhood has weathered the dramatic changes brought by the rise and fall of local industry.



Dancing in Penn Treaty Park  
Source: [www.fishtown.us.com](http://www.fishtown.us.com)



1920s candid photographs of Fishtown residents by John Keith  
Source: *Still Philadelphia*



## Historic:

Since the colonial era, Fishtown has been a place of productive ingenuity. Fishtown grew from a sleepy fishing village to an industrial powerhouse, this heritage continues to influence the neighborhood's future, and serves as a point of pride. This history was written by generations of working-class residents employed by local industries. Much like its social fabric, Fishtown's built environment has survived largely intact despite the enormous pressures of change. The physical remnants of the past serve as palpable reminders of the neighborhood's heritage.



Typical Fishtown rowhouses  
Source: David O'Malley

**Aesthetic:**

Fishtown is an intact neighborhood of rowhouses, public spaces and workplaces. Physically, the neighborhood stands as the living memory of its former industrial prowess. The neighborhood possesses a diverse mix of architectural styles that represent various periods of history. Several historically significant buildings can be found in the neighborhood, such as Frank Furness’ Kensington National Bank, the Kensington Soup Society building, and numerous churches. Residents often adorn their homes with various embellishments unique to Fishtown, including quilted aluminum flashing and address markers with a fish emblem. These reinforce the apparent sense of community pride as well unify the local architecture with common decorative threads.



Kensington National Bank  
Source: HABS



Allen Street door with “Fishtown flashing.”  
Source: Ashley Hahn



## METHODOLOGY

The initial process of the Fishtown Studio was to gain understanding of the neighborhood's current dynamics through the gathering and interpretation of historic research, mapping, ethnographic research and physical assessment. The second process was to conjecture how these dynamics will change in the future. We compared and contrasted sites with similarities; identified Fishtown's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; identified the policies that ought to define the future of Fishtown and determined what scenarios are possible for the future.

### Historic Research

We conducted historic research in order to determine what periods of significance greatest define Fishtown. We gathered primary and secondary sources from the Pennsylvania Historic Society, The Athaenum, Free Library, The Philadelphia Historic Commission and the Temple University Urban Archives and other area research facilities. From that data, we created bibliographies and literature reviews that evolved into a chronology. Historic images were collected in order to illustrate and orient us to the physical fabric of the neighborhood. We synthesized this data into a general historical narrative and a timeline of Fishtown's development. All of these projects contributed to a statement of significance.

### Base Mapping

We needed base maps to orient and familiarize ourselves with the shape and scope of the area. In order to do this we created a map containing street, hydrology, building and parcel data in GIS format so that the map could be manipulated and added to when we sorted and contributed data. To obtain GIS maps, shape file data was taken from the Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access System.

### Evolutionary diagrams

To show the physical development of Fishtown over time and show which periods of historic development most poignantly defined Fishtown's built environment, we compiled, sketched, compared and displayed older maps of the area in chronological order. This evolutionary mapping also included neighboring Kensington and Philadelphia to show Fishtown's relation to the rest of the city during historical development. Members of the mapping team drew pen, ink and marker maps focusing on predetermined periods of significance. Afterwards these maps were scanned and entered into GIS to show evolution in a more precise digital format.

### Building Survey

Determining the significance and status of the buildings and sites in Fishtown required an extensive building survey. Using our base maps and impressions of Fishtown from site visits and tours, significant study areas were determined for building assessment. These locations were: Marlborough Street, Delaware Avenue and the waterfront, workers housing along Mercer, Livingston streets and



Building survey data entry  
Source: Fon Wang

Susquehanna Street. We separated into teams to record architectural features, materials and conditions of these areas; this information was electronically entered into PDAs. Afterwards, the data was transferred to a unique Access Database. The Access Database was then attached to our GIS base maps. We were able to manipulate our data to create compelling stories about the important sites and unique attributes of our study areas.

## Comparables

To gain a greater sense of perspective on developing situations in Fishtown, we investigated places affected by similar circumstances and with similar attributes. We compared Fishtown to other sites based on three major themes poignant to Fishtown: the industrial landscape, waterfront development, and casino operation.

To address the industrial landscape, we chose the redevelopment proposal for the Battersea Power station in London, England. The plan focuses on the creative adaptive reuse of an historical site. Waterfront development comparables included Baltimore Harbor, Vancouver, Providence's waterfront reclamation projects, and Camden's waterfront. Baltimore Harbor was chosen for its lessons in the necessity of long-term planning and the nature of political, private and civic participation in development. We chose Vancouver as an example of how a city can foster successful and appropriate development if it makes special incentives for investment. Camden was an example of a formal waterfront plan with diverse activities and attractions focusing on mixed use development funded by public/private partnerships. We chose Detroit and Atlantic City to address the threat of casino development. Detroit was a lesson in the effects of specifics in game law, the way that operational agreements can be used to benefit the surrounding community and the integration and impact of casino on the economic development its the surrounding area.

## Ethnography

We sought to illuminate significant cultural values and meanings of Fishtown societies through ethnographic research. We completed this component of our project in five stages: observational mapping, expert interviews, individual interviews, surveys and mind mapping. We observed the patterns of movement in select areas in Fishtown centering on the streets surrounding Palmer Cemetery, the area near the Girard El station and Penn Treaty Park. We interviewed experts familiar with Fishtown through experience and/or study. The whole studio conducted individual interviews and surveys with Fishtowners on the street. We asked questions on development, riverfront transformations, casinos, and life living in Fishtown. In addition, we asked Fishtown residents to draw maps of their neighborhood and surrounding areas in order to create a picture of how people envision their neighborhood and the area's location within Philadelphia.

## SWOT Analysis and Statement of Significance

As an in class exercise, we identified the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats present in Fishtown. We determined that the waterfront, sense of history and community pride as major strengths; inaction from a dysfunctional city government, eroded economic base and lack of desire to change as weaknesses; waterfront redevelopment, utilization of Penn Treaty Park and



Walking tour with Ken Milano  
Source: Ashley Hahn

restoration of the existing built fabric as opportunities; and the possibility of casino development, privatization of the waterfront and the lack of a control planning process as major threats to Fishtown. Our SWOT analysis combined with our historical research helped inform a short statement of the significance of Fishtown.

## **Policy**

Policies were formulated to provide recommendations for Fishtown in efforts to preserve historic fabric, neighborhood aesthetic, and community pride. Principally based on the character and resources presented by the neighborhood and explored in the SWOT analysis, suggestions were developed under the categories Preservation, Interpretation, Zoning, and Adaptive Re-use. Policies aim to value and sustain the quality of the neighborhood, involve community members and protect the scale of the built environment.

## **Scenario Building**

As a final exercise, we attempted to envision long-range visions of Fishtown's future. We chose scenarios that highlighted major variables and constants that will affect Fishtown's future. Contributing factors included the availability of energy for homes and cars and the degree of economic opportunity and nature of revitalization in the Philadelphia metropolitan area.

## **Final Report**

All of these projects and explorations were condensed into our mid-term and final reports that were critiqued by planning and preservation professionals and community organizations and members. Our Studio's findings and outputs tell a compelling story about the community's heritage and values and will hopefully contribute to future visions for Fishtown.

## FISHTOWN HISTORY

The trajectory of industrial and social life in Fishtown is intricately tied to the national trends and forces that have shaped the nation's economy and demographics at large. Before the American Revolution, industry in Philadelphia remained intimately tied to the British economy. With American independence came room for economic growth, and expanded opportunity. Fishtown's relationship to the Delaware River permitted the community to expand, based on its early success in fishing and shipbuilding. These early industries would be the foundation for later, more diverse industrial development, from textiles to metals, machine shops to brewing. Because of changes that accompanied industrialization, Fishtown transformed from a sleepy backwater north of Philadelphia, populated by a few wealthy landowners, into a powerful and largely self-sufficient industrial neighborhood, which slowly became surrounded by and part of Philadelphia. In the 19th Century industrialization exploded, fueled largely by immigrant labor. Industries diversified, and became more highly mechanized. The economy was buoyed by wartime growth spurts and weathered economic downturns. New populations become stable fixtures of American life. Suburbanization and loss of industry color the post-war years. Decline was slow; the fallout was big. Deindustrialization through World Wars I & II found Fishtown a skeleton of its former self through the middle of the twentieth century. Today, Fishtown is a neighborhood of rowhouses, interspersed with

Fishtown is a neighborhood of Kensington, in the near northeast part of Philadelphia. [Fig 1] It is a pie-shaped wedge, the boundaries of which are debated, though it is generally agreed that Fishtown is the area bounded by the Delaware River to the east, Frankford Avenue to the west, Girard Avenue to the south, and Norris Street to the north. [Fig 1] Fishtown has not always been called such, and the origin of this moniker is debated. The Lenape apparently knew part of this area as Shackamaxon. Swedes knew it as part of New Sweden. The English and their colonists alternately knew this area as part of Point No Point, Campington, Kensington or Northern Liberties. Regardless of the origin, during the 1820s the name Fishtown makes an appearance in city directories, likely because of the concentration of shad fisheries in the area. In name and, indeed, in origin Fishtown's existence is rooted in its connection with the Delaware River. Over time this relationship has certainly evolved, though the river consistently has been important to the neighborhood.



Fig. 1: Map of Fishtown  
Source: Eldra D. Walker



## LENI LENAPE + EARLY EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT (pre-1680s):

The native people who inhabited much of Philadelphia and the Fishtown region were the Leni Lenape. [Fig. 2] The Lenape Indians have a long history in the United States dating well before the 17th Century. Unfortunately, the history of these people lacks abundant literature and, perhaps partly due to this deficiency, much controversy surrounds existing scholarly research and graphic depictions of their interaction with European settlers.

The Lenape Indians who settled in the Philadelphia region were the Unami dialect speakers of the larger Indian tribe. The geographical extent of the Unami dialect extended from southeastern Pennsylvania to northern Delaware. Lenape borders were not sharply demarcated in the modern geographic and political sense.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the 17th century, the entire Lenape population is said to have been around 10,000. The Lenape settled along the Delaware River because of the benefits it offered their foraging lifestyle. Their riverside settlement is so important that occasionally this group was also called the River Indians or Delaware Indians.<sup>2</sup>

Like the early Europeans, the Lenape's direct relationship to the landscape was expressed in their collective choice to settle on the Delaware. The Lenape were foragers, living off of the land and, in the case of the Unami, the Delaware River. They fished the river heavily and even created tools from fish bone needles and mollusk shell blades. Dugout or bark canoes were their sole form of transportation. In general, however, the imprint of Lenape land use is no longer visible. The Lenape lived in houses called wigwams – large circular shaped and domed multifamily dwellings and covered in grass or bark with smoke holes in the roof. They also built longhouses, or multilevel platforms that functioned as seats, beds, and storage areas. Because the Lenape structures were light construction, no known physical traces exist. The Lenape did not have much value for property ownership unlike the early Dutch settlers in the Philadelphia.

It is likely that the earliest Lenape contact with Europeans was with Henry Hudson in 1609. This brought the Lenape into an early trading relationship with Europeans, which made them markedly dependant on non-native items such as guns and cloth and seriously altered their economy. The Lenape interacted and traded with the earliest European settlers in relative peace. From 1640 to 1660, the Lenape cash cropped maize grown inland, in economic response to Swedish settlement and their need for the grain.

When Dutch, Swedish and English settlement increased markedly through the middle decades of the 1600s along with expansion of the fur trade, new land pressures emerged and brought the settlers into conflict with the Lenape. At the same time, the Lenape population was substantially reduced because of disease and warfare. Despite this tension, Chief Tamarend signed a treaty of friendship with William Penn in the early 1680s.<sup>3</sup> The Lenape

1 Lenape scholar William Becker believes that they were organized in small bands, averaging 12 to 15 individuals in the Pennsylvania region, and estimates that the total population in Pennsylvania was likely about 360. Each of the small bands or villages was autonomous and had no political unity. Each village group has its own hereditary chief, who acted as a mediator, adviser, and hunt leader, but did not have coercive power. Status was based on age and gender. Women's tasks included growing and preparing food, caring for children, gathering firewood, and preparing skins. Men's duties consisted of hunting, fishing, trading, fighting, curing meat and fish, constructing houses and most tools, and serving as chiefs of their villages. Intermarriage was frequent among village groups, yet marriage in this society, like contemporary society, was not always successful and divorce was granted easily and frequently.

2 The Lenape were either known as coastal or interior people. Their diet and customs were contingent on where they lived.

3 Sources about this treaty are in conflict as to whether it was signed in 1681, 1682 or 1683.



Fig. 2: Lenape Chief  
Source: Library Company of Philadelphia

were being pushed westward, but Professor Daniel K. Richter, an expert on Early American History, believes that the Lenape did in fact live in peace with the settlers long after the treaty. Archaeology from the site of the National Constitution Center on Independence Mall suggests that up until the 1750s, the Lenape were still coming into the city to trade with the settlers.<sup>4</sup> Thus the Lenape were a real presence in early colonial Philadelphia. They continued to trade with Europeans in order to sustain economic stability, but by the early 18th Century the ongoing pressures of settlement caused a large number of Lenape to migrate to western Pennsylvania and Ohio.

In sum, we know that the Lenape Indians were the earliest inhabitants of the Fishtown region. However, we have no specific evidence about how they inhabited this particular site beyond their general patterns of living in small groups, trading with the settlers, and fishing on the Delaware River.

In the 1640s, Europeans began to settle Philadelphia proper; Swedes moved up-river from Delaware, and the Dutch came south from New York. The Swedish settlers were in possession of virtually all the waterfront and dominated the region. The most vigorous English settlement did not occur until William Penn received a charter from Charles II in March 1681. Penn enlisted his cousin, William Markham, with the task of initiating government and surveying the grounds in Philadelphia. For this work, Markham solicited the help of Thomas Fairman as his assistant. Fairman becomes central to the early English settlement in Fishtown. His wife was one of the first landholders in Fishtown, and the Fairmans routinely hosted new settlers just after arrival.

Though the exact year is debated, between 1681-1683 William Penn signed a treaty with the Lenape and thence began to build Philadelphia between the Delaware and the Schuylkill rivers. It has been widely held that the Lenape-Penn treaty was signed under a large elm tree on the banks of the Delaware, north of the area that Penn would lay out as the city of Philadelphia. The Treaty Elm is depicted in paintings and prints, and the land around it was memorialized to celebrate the treaty in the 1820s. [Fig. 3] The importance of the Treaty Elm has emerged as a significant part of Fishtown mythology, and links local history in a meaningful way to the origins of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania at large.



Fig. 3: Penn Treaty

Source: Benjamin West painting  
Library Company of Philadelphia

## COLONIAL ERA (1680s-1770s):

During the colonial era, the land surrounding Philadelphia was divided into large tracts. These tracts were purchased by prominent families, often as part of landownership within the city itself. The area north-east of Philadelphia, above Northern Liberties, then known as the Shackamaxon land tract, was held by very few people. Two names appear on a 1687 map as proprietor of large portions of the land which would become Kensington, one was Thomas Fairman.

In 1678, Thomas Fairman's wife, Elizabeth, purchased roughly 600 acres of land north of the city from a Swedish settler, close to the river. Fairman eventually built a house on what would become Beach Street in Fishtown, near the Treaty Elm on the Delaware. After the Fairmans died their three sons divided up the

4 Personal Interview with Daniel K. Richter by Ellen Buckley, 18 October 2006.



estate; their property divisions became the roads Shackamaxon, Columbia, Susquehanna and Norris.<sup>5</sup>

Around 1710, Anthony Palmer, an English sea captain, purchased part of the Shackamaxon land tract. His land boundaries extended from present-day Frankford Avenue to the west and the river to the east; from Norris in the north to Columbia in the south. Palmer is credited with naming this area Kensington, and was the region's first land-speculator. During the 1730s Palmer named streets and subdivided his land into plots, and sold them to wealthy merchants and families, a common tactic employed in the Philadelphia hinterland as large estates were split up for development of progressively smaller parcels. [Fig. 4] With the money he made from the subdivisions, Palmer bought the former Fairman house. [Fig. 5] Today Palmer is remembered by a street and cemetery in his name. The former family burial ground was granted to the people of the area in 1749 by Palmer's daughter, and is still in use by Fishtown residents.

“As Philadelphia grew, no part of the city would exceed the bank of the Delaware River in value.”<sup>6</sup> The Delaware waterfront of central Philadelphia is not a large expanse. Consequently, it developed quickly so waterfront growth expanded north and south of center city. This was certainly true in Fishtown. The early growth of Fishtown happened in tandem with the entire city's waterfront development and would even help fuel the construction of his new city to the south. In 1683, Penn established a brick factory along the Coaquannock Creek to help satisfy Philadelphia's demand for building supplies. This was the first of many industrial uses that would take hold along the Delaware north of the city grid.

The Delaware riverfront became populated with new industries related to the water, such as large shipyards, rope walks, and fishing. By the early 1700s, four shipyards had been established in Philadelphia. The Fishtown waterfront was already a prosperous center of shad fishing, a relationship to the river that extended from the Lenape until the early 1900s. But Fishtown was considered a village distinct from Philadelphia; it was a tight-knit community of fisherman and shipbuilders, where English settlers were already mixing with Germans and Scotch-Irish who were arriving in significant numbers.<sup>7</sup>

Kensington's early growth was not only a result of the opportunities presented by the river. It also occurred because of its proximity to three main



Fig. 4: Palmer Subdivision Map  
Source:



*Governor Palmer's Residence at Kensington - Painted by Tudy Elm - 1797-8*

Fig. 5: Fairman/Palmer House  
Source: Thomas Birch View  
Athenaeum

5 Milano, Keneth

6 Nash, Gary. "City Planning and Political Tension in the Seventeenth Century: The Case of Philadelphia." Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society, ns 112, 1 (Feb. 15, 1968), p. 65.

7 From 1726-1755 about 40,000 German immigrants arrived to Philadelphia, and some 30,000 Scots-Irish arrived to Pennsylvania, many of whom found their way to Kensington. Many of these immigrants found their way to the Kensington area where they lived and worked along the waterfront and, later, in the textile factories.

roads due north: Germantown Pike, Old York Road and Frankford Road. These roads, in addition to the waterfront, indicate that the area was highly trafficked. It is little surprise, then, that during the American Revolution, Fishtown had strategic importance to the British who occupied Kensington with the help of a brigade of local Tories. The British torched estates of revolutionaries and also dammed the Coaquannock Creek, the natural boundary just south of Fishtown, to cut off northerly routes out of Philadelphia. It was only possible to enter the area from Philadelphia by a long causeway over the marshy creek land.

## EARLY REPUBLIC (1780s-1830s):

On the eve of revolution, Philadelphia was one of the most prosperous cities in the American colonies. In Fishtown, a new diversity of industries began to recede from the riverfront. Here, as in the rest of Philadelphia, the looming war was intertwined with economics. In 1774, John Hewson moved to Fishtown from England and opened his calico printing factory at the intersection of Beach and Laurel streets. Hewson quickly became a highly vocal revolutionary, agitated his workers to arms, and after escaping British imprisonment during the war was revered as a local hero. After the revolution, Philadelphia's growth was explosive and Fishtown was no exception.

In the early days of the Republic, Philadelphia was a boomtown; a national hotbed of innovation and culture, full of entrepreneurial spirit. But economic flux and enormous population change were a mixed blessing for the city. With rapid growth came instability that, in Philadelphia, manifested as social stratification, ethnic conflict, and industrial competition. This was also a time when institutional growth and the public realm were emerging, as the entire city was expanding. In the 1820s, Kensington became recognized as its own political district. Through the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a hospital, churches, banks, markets, and fire companies were established in the district to support growth in population and industry. In Kensington, as in Philadelphia at large, a historical consciousness was emerging; in 1827 Penn Treaty Monument was erected by the Treaty Elm on land that would become Penn Treaty Park in 1893. [Fig. 6]



Fig. 6: Penn Treaty Monument  
Source: Thomas Birch painting  
Athenaeum

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Fishtown's traditional waterfront industries continued to grow, as did the trade infrastructure of the district. In 1808 the first of many fish smokehouses was established in Fishtown. Men fished for shad and women operated the fish smokehouses that lined the waterfront, and brought the fish to market. The women of Fishtown were hailed for being strong, tough, and as seaworthy as the men. Fishing, however, became stigmatized as rustic when industrial growth began to take off in Fishtown, which happened steadily in the days after the revolution. By the 1820s, Dyottville Glassworks had already opened at Richmond and Dyott streets, and would remain there until the late-19<sup>th</sup> century.

Pollution from industries ultimately resulted in the disappearance of the shad. Industrial density along the waterfront led people to a relationship with the river based on work and trade; The river had become another cog in the industrial process. But this is not to dismiss it. The river was critical as a component of larger transportation networks, which at this time were expanding and powerfully booted



Fishtown's growth. Piers were built on the Delaware riverfront to serve trade and transportation purposes. These piers became connected with rail networks by the 1840s via the Pennsylvania and Reading Railroad companies. The first streetcar service in Philadelphia in the 1850s also helped Kensington connect with other areas of the newly consolidated city, and helped accommodate the growing population.

From 1800-1850 the population of Philadelphia ballooned from 81,000 to 408,000, and the population increase in center city pushed the poorer population to cheaper housing in newly settled suburban districts such as Kensington and Northern Liberties. Kensington became a haven for native and foreign born wage earners<sup>8</sup>, while Northern Liberties was more well-to-do. In Kensington, the population grew enormously; from 7,118 in 1820, to 13,326 in 1830, to 22,314 in 1840. This early influx of immigrants, predominately Irish, settled in both working class as well as more prosperous areas in Kensington, making it a neighborhood of mixed classes. African Americans were present in Fishtown during this time, but were slowly driven out over time due to an emerging anti-African American movement in the city of Philadelphia due to a number of factors, including job competition. By 1830, African Americans had no place in the solidifying social structure that would dominate even until the present.

The tension felt between different groups in Kensington, and indeed Philadelphia on the whole, had also permeated into the rapidly industrializing economy. Social stratification was most certainly felt in Fishtown. Philadelphia's laborers were already organizing. In 1835 the nation's first general strike took place in Philadelphia. Beyond poor working conditions, employment was also fickle. The seasonality of shipbuilding left many unemployed during winter months. By the 1840s institutions like the Kensington Soup Society were established to help serve the needs of the unemployed.

## INDUSTRIAL BOOM (1830s-1890s):

During the industrial heyday of Fishtown the pace of change was incredibly quick, more industries and more immigrants brought enormous growth to the neighborhood.

Many of the notable new operations in Kensington were largely related to textiles, metals, machine parts, coal, and lumber yards. More piers extended into the Delaware, and many manufactures were linked to rail and ship transportation by an elaborate infrastructure network. New additions along Beach Street in the 1830's were Wainright & Gillingham's lumber mill, Reaney and Neafie Penn Steam Engine & Boiler Works (later Neafie & Levy Ship and Engine Building Co.) [Fig. 7], and Bancroft & Sellers which made machine tools and parts, as well as several coal wharves. But, perhaps most importantly was Cramp's Shipyard.

William Cramp opened his shipyard in 1830 at the base of Otis Street (now East Susquehanna Ave), and assemblage took place near the base of Palmer Street. Fishtown's Delaware riverfront proved ideal early on for shipbuilding, and this industry would be active until the mid 20th century. Cramp's

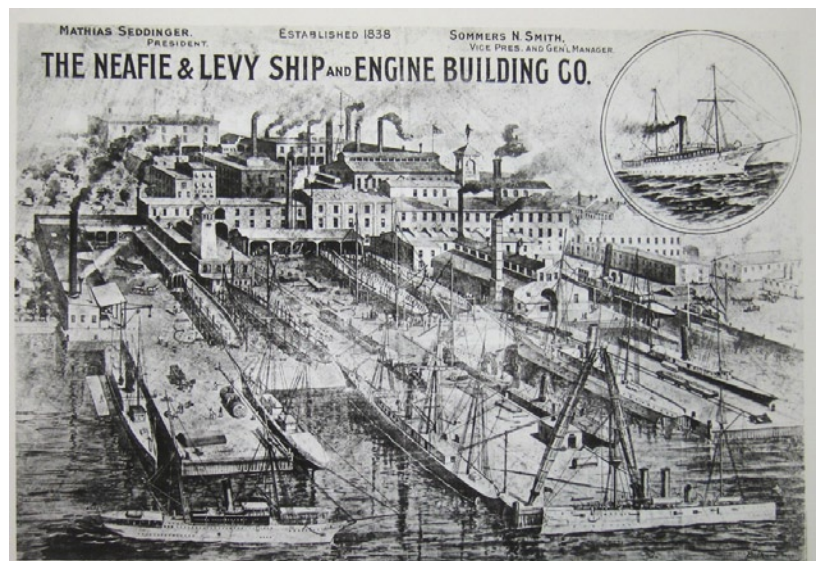


Fig. 7: Neafie & Levy Shipyards  
Source: PECO Archives

8 Laurie, 10

facilities were enormous and employed a small army of people in the neighborhood. Importantly, Cramp's was able to adapt over time to modernizing needs, processes and materials. The company built both sail and steam ships for domestic and foreign patrons, specializing in war-ships for the United States and South America. Cramp's enjoyed great prosperity post Civil War and expanded operations, purchasing more of the waterfront in Kensington in the 1870s. Their magnitude is not to be underestimated. From 1872-1902, records indicate an increase in Cramp's annual revenue from \$500,000 to \$5,000,000 and an increase in property value from roughly \$500,000 to \$10,000,000.<sup>9</sup> But Cramp's operations slackened into the 20th Century, and the shipyard closed after World War I, only to reopen briefly during World War II. [Fig. 8]



Fig. 8: Cramp Shipyards  
Source:

While the shipbuilding industry was highly successful, the textile industry dominated the neighborhood by the 1840s, peaking in the 1890s and flourishing well into the 20th century. In Kensington textiles were king, by the second quarter of the 19th century, the largest concentration of Philadelphia's handloom weavers lived and worked in Kensington. Carpet making was a particularly large part of Kensington's early textile economy. The 1840 potato blight brought thousands of Irish immigrants to Philadelphia, many of whom relocated to Kensington, and hundreds entered the handloom business.<sup>10</sup> Property ownership among handloom workers was low, though often people worked at home.<sup>11</sup> Before the textile industry's processes became highly mechanized it was common for different stages of production, everything from fiber preparation to weaving, to be done in people's homes. The emergence of a factory system between the years of 1830-1850 replaced the cottage industry of weavers, disrupting the established labor structure of the community with the shift from home production to factory production.<sup>12</sup> But this was not without great resistance.

Hand-loom weavers became the vanguard of the labor movement by the early 1840s. Owners of their own looms and working in their own houses, they resisted the mechanization of the textile industry. When employers drove their wages further down in 1842, which left them with sixty cents for a fourteen-hour day at the loom, they were faced with what the Public Ledger called 'the awful doctrine of 'blood or bread.'" In this desperate situation they struck and rioted. For six months, weavers in Kensington quit their looms, attacking weavers who would not join them and reputing the sheriff's posse in the 1842 battle at the Nanny Goat Market.<sup>13</sup>

Kensington would become the most prominent textile district in the region with the introduction of steam powered machinery. As more highly-mechanized production took off in Fishtown during in the 1850s, the industry also diversified; hosiery mills took their places next to carpet factories. Children of Kensington held full-time jobs in textile factories as early as 9 years old, bringing in a large percentage

9 1830 Cramp's Shipyard. Pg. 3.

10 McLeod, 97, 100

11 Ibid, 101

12 Kensington History Stories and Memories.

13 Nash, Gary B. First City. University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2002. P. 164.



of a family's income.<sup>14</sup> Child labor remained prevalent well into the 20th century despite child labor laws and protests. [Fig. 9]

In the second quarter of the 19th century the intense combined pressures of immigration, industrialization, and social unrest led to riots. Kensington's weavers rioted in 1828 because a night watchman, Stephen Heimer, called an Irish weaver by a racial epithet and was subsequently killed.

In May of 1844 tensions boiled over again; the Bible Riots erupted in the streets of Kensington. [Fig. 10] Protestant revivalism had manifested in the city. Native and Irish Protestants "saw the Irish Catholics as diseased, crime-prone, uneducable, intemperate and superstitious papists."<sup>15</sup> Protestants were landed and well established in the community, while Catholics were still new. The hostilities between the Catholics and militant Protestants came to a head, nominally over the issue of using different Bibles for prayer in schools.<sup>16</sup> In actuality Protestants were angry about cheap immigrant labor. The riot began when shots fired from the Irish Hibernia Hose Company firehouse killed George Shiffler who was at a nativist rally. The next day, after another, more passionate nativist rally, a Protestant mob burned the Hibernia Hose Company's firehouse down and then torched the St. Michael's and St. Augustine Catholic churches along with the homes of Catholic families. "A pitched battle took place near the Nanny Goat Market, where handloom weavers had battled the Philadelphia militia just fifteen months before. The Protestant-Catholic battling went on for three days before the Philadelphia First Brigade restored order."<sup>17</sup>

In Kensington social tensions during this period were mostly tied to an economic downturn, which by the late 1840s was over. By the 1850s, more placid relations were on the horizon. Though the end of the century would see even more labor disputes in Kensington, as textile and garment workers were heavily unionized, by comparison Philadelphia's struggle was mild. One reason Philadelphia did not have as much labor agitation as other major industrial cities during the end of the 19th century, was in part attributed to the low cost of row houses. These "factory-based urban villages... each with its own markets, shops,

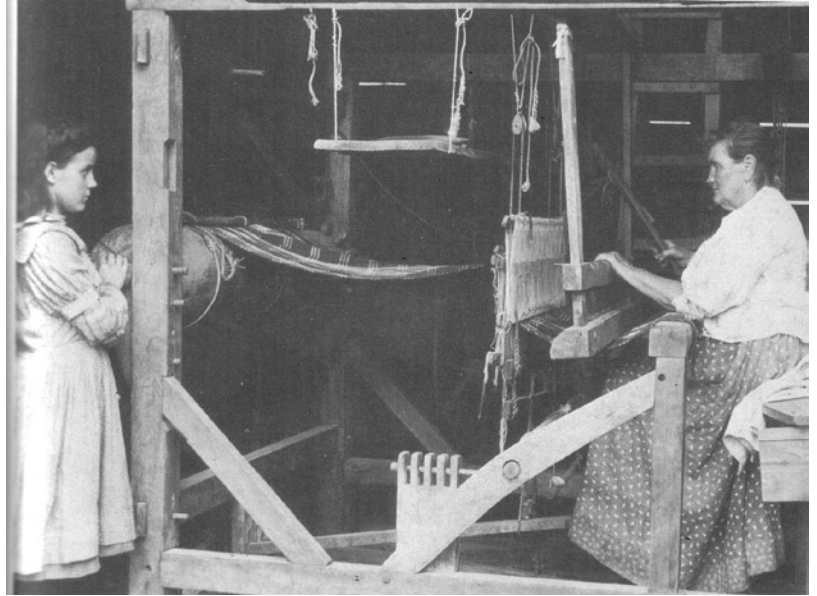


Fig. 9: Early 20th century handweavers in Kensington  
Source: *Still Philadelphia*

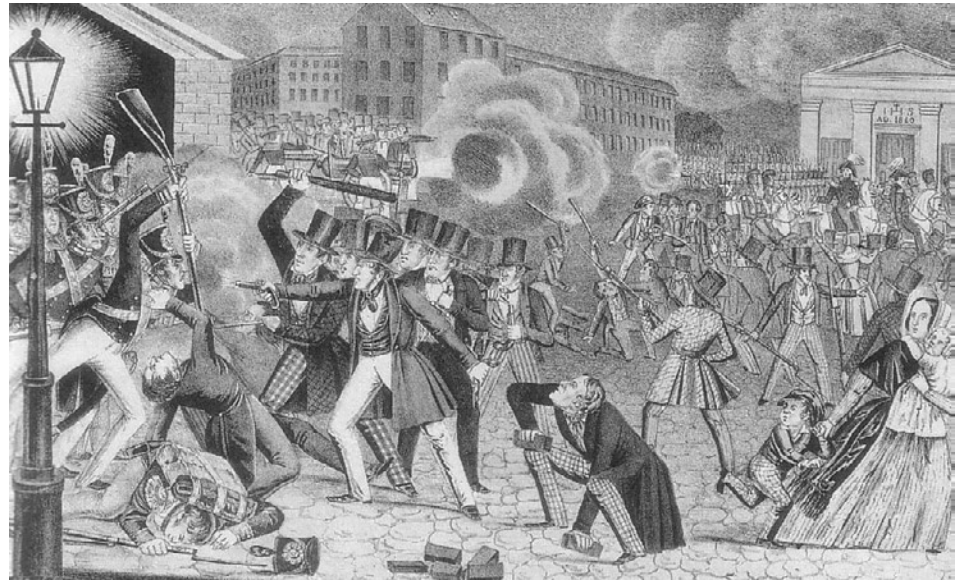


Fig. 10: "The City of Brotherly Love," 1844 Riots  
Source: *First City*

14 Seder, Jane. *Voices of Kensington*. Ardmore, PA: Whitmore Publishing Co., 1982.

15 Nash (2002). 170.

16 Feldberg, Michael. *The Philadelphia Riots of 1844, A Study of Ethnic Conflict*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1975.

17 Nash (2002), 173



business district, and flavorful identity” were self-sufficient.<sup>18</sup>

After the Civil War, Philadelphia was an “industrial giant,”<sup>19</sup> with its industries centered on iron, steel, coal and oil. “The impact of this explosion of industry and technology almost obliterated Penn’s green country town, the red-brick cultural capital, in a smog of steam and smoke, of endless gridirons of workers’ housing, of railroad and factories, freight yards and warehouses. It was Philadelphia’s Iron Age.”<sup>20</sup> Two giants of this Iron Age were certainly Cramp’s Shipyard and Baldwin’s Locomotives located in Kensington. During the Civil War, Cramp’s made the U.S.S. New Ironsides, the Union Navy’s largest vessel, and afterward built the doomed U.S.S. Maine, which was sunk in Cuba and used as the excuse to being the Spanish-American War. Baldwin had made a fortune due to the intense demands for rail transport and equipment during the war. Both firms expanded their operations greatly after the war, mostly for foreign export. Just north of Cramp’s operation were the Port Richmond Coal Wharves, a huge complex of docks for coal barges that would load coal onto railcars for transport. In large part the coal that fueled most industry throughout the region at the time passed through this complex.

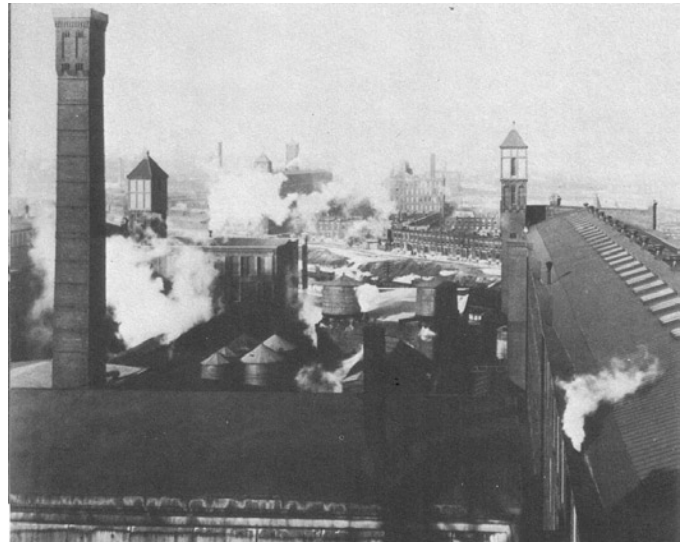


Fig. 11: Bromley factory in Kensington .  
Note the scale of the factory in relation to the rowhouses behind.  
Source: *Still Philadelphia*

By the 1870s an industrial census listed 213 industries in Fishtown, ranging from baseballs to elevators, distilleries to wrought iron. The plentitude of industries made the district a densely packed mixture of land uses. [Fig. 11] And in these days before zoning, huge factories—and all of their hazards—could abut schools or homes. This was certainly the pattern of growth throughout Fishtown and the late decades of the 19th century found Philadelphia in the peak of its industrial lifespan. At the end of the century the local economy was on the rise after two economic depressions, which Philadelphia survived well, with most people still employed locally.

## 20th CENTURY:

Kensington’s economy was on the upswing at the turn of the 20th century.<sup>21</sup> Strong industries and relatively affordable housing continued to attract immigrants.<sup>22</sup> Philadelphia was the textile capital of the nation, and by 1904 Philadelphia’s textile industry employed 35% of the city’s workers.<sup>23</sup> In Kensington, the percentage of textile employees was likely even larger. “Although the city continued to be the nation’s leading hat and carpet manufacturer, and some industries (notably ready-made clothing) showed rapid growth after the turn of the century, there was an ominous decline in the rate of industrial growth”<sup>24</sup> Philadelphia lagged behind national industrial growth averages.

Households commonly were composed of a nuclear family as well as boarders who helped augment family income with rents. “As a rule, the children in

18 Ibid. 287.

19 Weigly, Russell. *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*. WW Norton & Co. 1982., 471.

20 Ibid. 471

21 Scranton Philip and Walter Licht. *Work Sights: Industrial Philadelphia, 1890 – 1950*. (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 1986), 65.

22 Ibid. 27.

23 Weigly, Russell. *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*. WW Norton & Co. 1982., 471.

24 Abernethy, Lloyd M. *Progressivism 1905-1919*. 533

a Kensington mill worker's family [became] wage-earners as soon as they [arrived] at the legal working age."<sup>25</sup> Out of a 23 family study conducted between 1913 and 1914 only five of the families had only one wage earner, two families depended upon one wage earner and boarders, and fourteen of the families had between two and four wage earners, and in some cases boarders as well.<sup>26</sup> Income was typically turned over to the mother of the family who would then parse out pocket money to the wage earners for their own personal use, but the majority of the income would go to running the household.<sup>27</sup>

Labor conflicts continued in Fishtown, as they had since the 1840s. In 1903 Mother Jones' Children's Crusade March left from Kensington to march to the vacation home of the President Roosevelt in Oyster Bay, New York in protest over child labor.<sup>28</sup> The march was unsuccessful. Although some of the group did make it to their final destination they never met with the president. Despite the march's failure child labor issues remained important in the beginning of the century.<sup>29</sup> Labor issues were a consideration for everyone in the early 1900s, not just the young. The 1910s and 1920s were rife with strikes and sit-downs for fair working conditions and better hours. In the 1930s successful strikes resulted in unionization of textile plants 100 years after labor organizing took off in Philadelphia.

Mill and factory owners considered Kensington to be their neighborhood as well.<sup>30</sup> So when business began to decline in the 1920s the industries tried to stay in the neighborhood. "The people of Kensington came to rely on factory work, and when the textile industry began its decline in the 1920s and 30s, followed by the depression, they suffered more economic distress than any other community in Philadelphia. The energy and economic strength of the community were in deep decline after World War II."<sup>31</sup>

Kensington's population dropped from 155,347 in 1920 to 98,598 only forty years later in 1960.<sup>32</sup> The population decrease was compounded by several factors. The decline of industry meant that there were fewer jobs, and although there was a spike in manufacturing during WWII, it did not last. Production never returned to its glory days in Fishtown. The men that returned from WWII were welcomed by a changed world. The neighborhood was not the superpower it once was; boys who may hardly have left Fishtown before had been around the world, and were presented with opportunities for higher education and homes in the suburbs.<sup>33</sup>

During this era of deindustrialization, Fishtown's relationship to the Delaware River shifted again. The riverfront uses still included connections to transportation, energy, and development, but very differently than they had a century before. For the previous century, fuel depots for coal were located along Fishtown's Delaware waterfront. Anthracite was transported by barge from coal regions to the north and west of the city to fuel the pace of growing industry. Coal remained important into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but now fueled a new electric generation station in Fishtown. In the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Philadelphia

25 Little, Esther Louise and William Joseph Henry Cotton. "Budgets of Families and Individuals of Kensington, Philadelphia." (PhD Diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1920), 145.

26 Ibid. 10-11.

27 Ibid. 28.

28 Silcox, Harry C. Kensington History: Stories and Memories. Co-Editors Jamie Catrambone and Harry C. Silcox. Brighton Press Inc., Philadelphia, 1996.33.

29 Ibid.33.

30 Scranton Philip and Walter Licht. Work Sights: Industrial Philadelphia, 1890 – 1950, 65.

31 Ibid. 35.

32 Binzen, Peter. Whitetown, U.S.A.. Randomhouse, New York, 1970.

33 Silcox, Harry C. Kensington History: Stories and Memories.

Electric Company was expanding its operations. By 1920 a power generating station opened on the Delaware Riverfront, on the site of the former Neafie shipyard, to help fuel the needs of industry as well as residences. [Fig. 12]

In the first half of the 20th century, transportation improvements connected the Fishtown neighborhood with the rest of Philadelphia and beyond. Trolley service ran along Girard, the Frankford Elevated Line opened in 1922 and was ultimately connected to the Market Street Line. These improvements provided easy access to center city and made commuting more feasible. During the 1950s and 1960s Interstate 95 was built through eastern Philadelphia along the Delaware River. The elevated highway interrupts the connection of the community to the water but allows for a visual connection to the water below the highway. The interstate made truck transport easier for shipping and allowed for greater mobility of the population.



Fig. 12:PECO plant.  
Source: Ellen Buckley

Moreover, the nature of industrial life was changing. Despite the enormous industrial infrastructure of the neighborhood, Fishtown's industries could not adapt to the reorganization and relocation of the industrial economy on a national and international scale. Textile production was moving south, mills were closing, and little was replacing the dying industries that had essentially built Fishtown. On the waterfront alone, the industrial landscape of Fishtown is but a skeleton of its former self. But this process was slow. In 1988 American National announced its plan to close the American Can Factory at Allen and Palmer streets, where it had stood since 1911, due to inefficient production.<sup>34</sup>

Industrial decline also brought the realities of on-site pollution to the fore, which makes the task of redevelopment more difficult. Fishtown's industrial history has contributed to many environmental problems, and has resulted in sporadic development in the latter half of the century as many parcels have been purchased, redeveloped, or demolished. While industrial sites are the most obvious environmentally damaged sites, water pollution (partially as a result of former industry) also continues to pose problems. In the 1980s the Delaware River was found to have pollution hot spots, and an area from Fishtown to Tacony was identified as a region "where there may be human health concerns."<sup>35</sup> The remaining industry continues to take its toll on Fishtown's ecosystem. Exelon Generation Co. LLC agreed to pay a \$20,000 penalty to settle a complaint about excess particulate emissions from the Delaware Generating Station.

Next to the power station is the lone public space on Fishtown's Delaware waterfront, Penn Treaty Park, the memorial park of William Penn's treaty with the Lenape. As with other public spaces in the neighborhood, the park's popularity has

<sup>34</sup> Thompson, Gary. Workers React to Can Plant Closing. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. June 3, 1988. The factory is now an office building.

<sup>35</sup> Smith, Ramona. Cooking up a Cleanup of River's Toxic Soup. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. June 29, 1992.



been uneven. During the excitement around the 1976 Bicentennial, likely because of the site's historical significance, the park was expanded and improved. Again in the 1980s the park expanded with the acquisition of adjacent former industrial properties, now comprising 8.6 acres on the riverfront. Ironically, the park would serve as a temporary 1986 trash dumpsite when 13,200 municipal workers struck.<sup>36</sup> Today the park is in a period of relative popularity, even boasting a friends group who cares for it.

Vacant and underused industrial properties pepper Fishtown, as a skeletal memory of its former prowess as a manufacturing hub. In particular, the job of waterfront redevelopment has been an issue of both progress and discontent in Fishtown. Mayor John Street's inaugural address in 2004 focused attention on riverfront development, and despite subsequent planning initiatives for a series of parks and a trail, little has transpired. Forthcoming casino developments promise to materially change the course of reclamation of industrial sites along Fishtown's waterfront—the former Jack Frost Sugar Refinery and Cramp's Shipyards—potentially altering the neighborhood's future access to the river. [Fig. 13] While the casino issue has been polarizing, there is public excitement about the possibility of thoughtful riverfront development. This has reinvigorated the conversation about Fishtown's, and indeed Philadelphia's, potential waterfront rebirth. Today Fishtown is poised for change, but how it will transform remains uncertain.



Fig. 13: Jack Frost Demo  
Source: Associated Press

<sup>36</sup> Clark, Robin. At Sites, Trash Entrepreneurs and Growing Piles. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. July 10, 1986.

## EVOLUTIONARY DIAGRAMS

Evolutionary diagrams may be used to visualize the physical development of Fishtown. In order to illustrate the complete story of the built fabric, maps that span from pre-settlement to present-day were created. These maps were based on a variety of sources, including: historical maps, historic aerial photographs, and digital files from Pennsylvania Spatial Data Access. Using these sources as background data, and extracting the pertinent information for each time period, the final maps were created in GIS (Geographical Information Systems). Salient points for each time period are outlined on the following maps.

### *Pre-Settlement*

- o *Lenape occupation of the land - scattered settlement*
- o *Lenape relied upon the river for fishing*
- o *Future settlement occurred between Gunners Run and Cohocksink Creek*



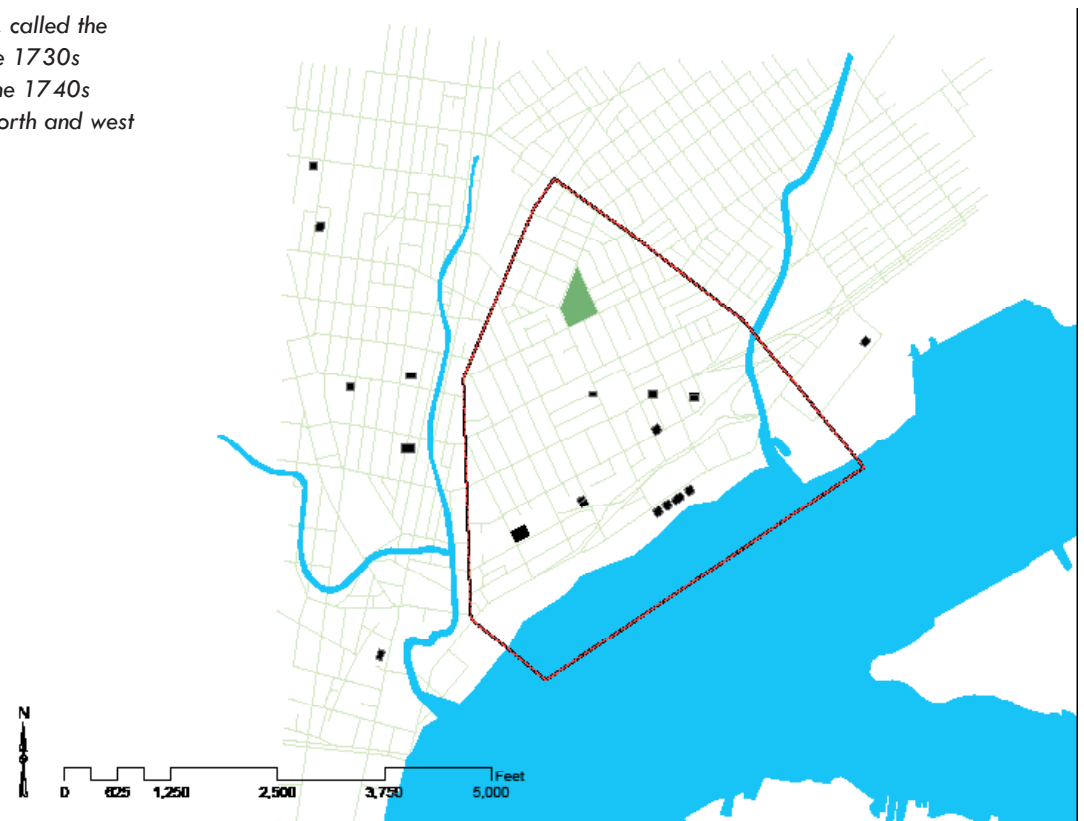
### 1687

- o Establishment of the first European settlers
- o Michael Neelson owned the plot of land close to Cohocksink Creek
- o Thomas Fairman, William Penn's surveyor, owned the plot north of Neelson



### 1752

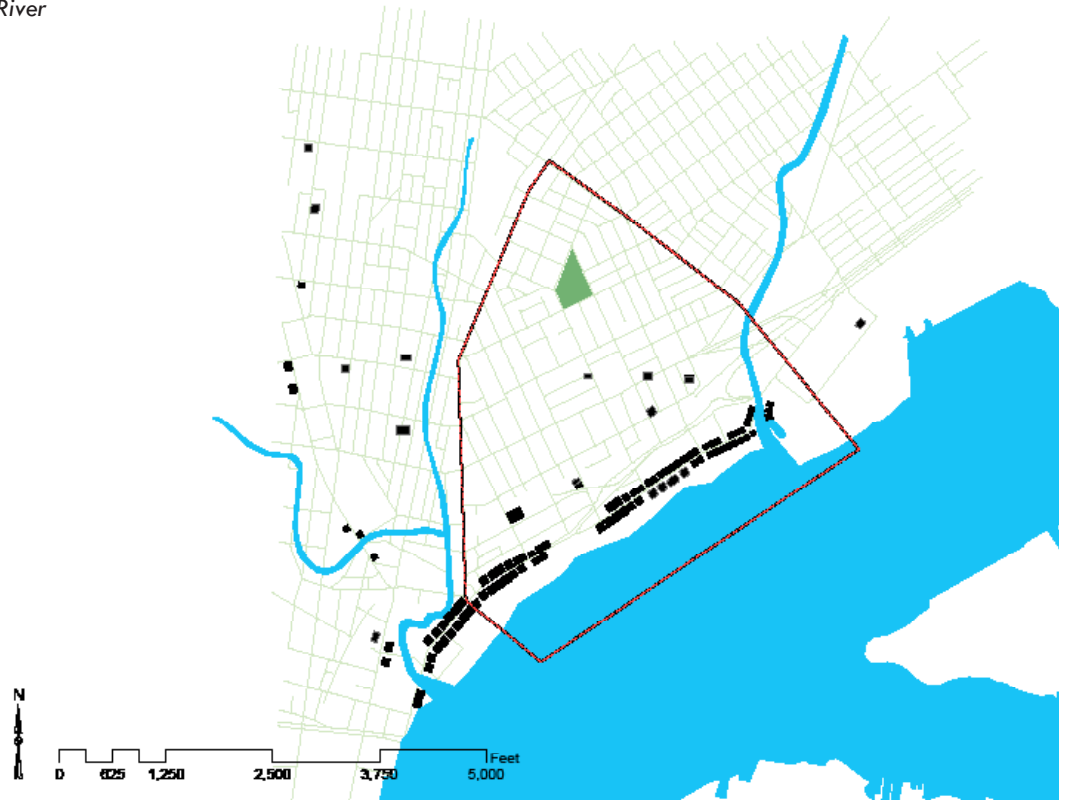
- o First formal planning of the area, called the Palmer Tracts, was in place by the 1730s
- o Palmer Cemetery established in the 1740s
- o Country estates still exist to the north and west





1777

- o Major growth along the Delaware River
- o Increased reliance on the river



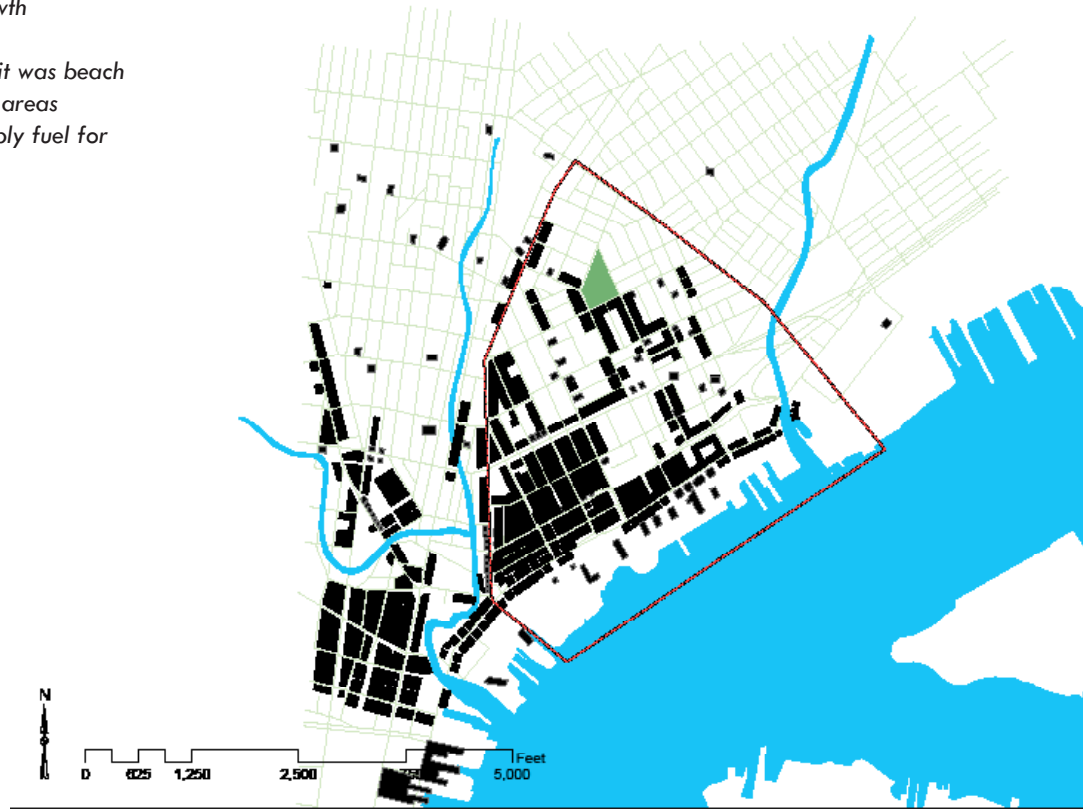
1796

- o Fishtown's center is built out
- o Docks emerge along the water



### 1828

- o Industrialization spurs rapid growth
- o Increased building construction
- o Waterfront was usable because it was beach rather than marshland unlike other areas
- o Fishtown served as a port to supply fuel for industry and trade



### 1840

- o Continuation of building and growth



### 1895

- o Stabilization of the growth that is characteristic of industrialization
- o Fishtown is, for the most part, fully built out



### 1921

- o Still more growth





1950

o Fishtown before the intervention of I-95



1985

o After the intervention of I-95  
o Demolition of buildings along I-95 corridor



## 2006

- o Present situation
- o Waterfront has generally been abandoned
- o Development on the river has changed to be much less economic-based (if at all)
- o However, economic potential exists with the impending casino and high-rise development



## BUILDING SURVEY

In order to gain a better understanding of the built environment of Fishtown, studio participants conducted a building survey. It was hoped that this survey would yield information about the building types represented in Fishtown, the condition of those buildings, and the degree of survival of historic fabric. Due to the time constraints of the studio, it was not possible for the studio participants to survey the entire neighborhood. Therefore, the first task was to choose what areas should be surveyed.

### Survey Methodology:

Four areas were chosen in an effort to survey a representative slice of Fishtown, with special attention to areas of historical significance. The first area was Marlborough Street. The studio felt that Marlborough Street would be representative of the neighborhood as a whole. Marlborough Street seemed to offer a wide variety of housing types from different periods of architectural significance. The second area we decided to address was the riverfront. It was felt that the riverfront and the impact of I-95 could not be ignored because of their dominant presence in the neighborhood and the current pressures for redevelopment. Thirdly, we looked at the ring of buildings surrounding Palmer cemetery. Palmer cemetery has been a constant feature of the neighborhood, and is one of the most significant historic features in Fishtown. The studio felt that it was important to understand the context of the cemetery. Finally, an area around Susquehanna street was chosen because it appeared to represent a form of housing not found elsewhere in Fishtown. The houses in this area are smaller and are very uniform, suggesting that this area may have been built as worker's housing. (See Appendix D, Figure 1: Survey Area)

The most crucial and difficult part of a building survey is probably the choice of survey parameters. We attempted to tailor our survey to answer questions we had about the people and buildings of Fishtown and to test some early assumptions and observations.

Participants of the building survey felt that to efficiently utilize time and survey information it was necessary to compile the information in an electronic database. Filling out forms by hand and converting paper records to digital form is a tedious and error-prone task. The survey team was able to avoid this step by using handheld computers lent by the Preservation Alliance of Philadelphia for initial data collection in the field. Before entering the field, the team created a unique database entry system and downloaded the form to each hand held computer. This encouraged all surveyors to use consistent terminology, since most needed values were provided as drop-down menus. Along with drop down menus, text areas were provided where surveyors could record notes and observations.

The end product of the survey was a series of maps showing the information collected. These maps were created using ESRI's ArcMap software. ArcMap is a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) application which allows data to be easily represented in a map. There were some problems mapping the information in GIS. To display information on GIS maps it is necessary to



join database information to spatial information based on street address. Every attempt at joining the database information with the spatial information resulted in some addresses being skipped for reasons that could not be determined. A larger problem resulted from the spatial data which made up the map. We utilized GIS files provided by the city of Philadelphia. Unfortunately, most parcels along the river lacked any address information in these files. This made it impossible to map information about the riverfront without manually linking database records to spatial files.

The survey work was done over two days by five teams of two surveyors. Each building surveyed was photographed with a digital camera at least once.

Once surveying was complete, it was relatively easy to merge all of the survey information from the hand held computers into one database.

## **Survey Considerations:**

Our survey was concerned with three main issues; physical condition of buildings, architectural style of buildings, and intactness of historic fabric. It is important to note that physical condition was synonymous with functional condition. Physical condition did not take into account the historical or architectural aspects of buildings. Other parameters allowed assessment of historical intactness and architectural characteristics. (See Appendix D, Figure 2: Conditions Examples)

Architectural style and historical intactness were evaluated by the results of a series of questions which would yield clear answers. Little stress was put on the task of characterizing a building's style or significance. Rather, the survey asked about material types, originality of specific building parts, and specific architectural attributes such as roof shape.

## **SURVEY CONCLUSIONS:**

Several useful conclusions were drawn from the survey data.

It was found that most of the buildings surveyed were in good to excellent condition. The overall condition of buildings in Fishtown indicates a consistent level of maintenance throughout the neighborhood. The exception was commercial and industrial buildings. These buildings tended to be in poor condition and many were abandoned. This was particularly prevalent along the riverfront. (See Appendix D, Figure 3: Condition Map)

It was found that most buildings had experienced significant loss of historical fabric and original architectural detail. The buildings which retain the most historical fabric or original detailing tended to be in the worst condition and were often vacant. Maintenance or modification of Fishtown buildings usually results in the replacement or covering of original materials or assemblies with modern substitutes that change the appearance and character of the building. This use of modern, affordable materials, such as vinyl siding, may be influenced by economics. The cost and difficulty in finding appropriate replacement materials and labor for historic buildings is challenging for any owner of a historic building. As a result, a large percentage of original historic fabric and detailing has been lost, leading one to assume that the retention of such fabric is not a priority for Fishtowners.

The use of modern materials is exemplified by the prevalence of vinyl or aluminum replacement windows. Only a handful of buildings surveyed retained their original wood windows or equivalent replacements. (See Appendix D, Figure 4: Map of Window Types)

In addition to replacement of original fabric, the character of Fishtown continues to be altered by creative changes made to the built fabric. Fishtown has evolved a new and eclectic character as a result. In some cases, unusual materials result in a new aesthetic. The metal flashing used around doors and windows is an example of this. While metal flashing is not a historically appropriate replacement material, it is installed in ways which respond to the original detailing of the buildings and which show care and attention to aesthetics. This is only one example of modifications which change the aesthetic of the neighborhood. In the most extreme cases, houses are modified extensively to claim a historical style which they did not originally possess. (See images at right)

In many cases, original building materials or detailing may have been intact, but was concealed by modern materials. The prevalence of these materials was far less than expected. Most brick facades were intact and relatively well-maintained. Many rowhomes had vinyl or aluminum siding covering the original cornices. In other cases, window and door frames were covered with metal flashing. Some brick buildings were covered with vinyl, aluminum, or perma-stone. While the intention of the repairs may be to mitigate deterioration of original fabric, it is important to note that by capping natural materials, the deterioration is often accelerated. Natural materials that are not permitted to breathe hold moisture and support decay. (See Appendix D, Figure 5: Map of Wall Materials)

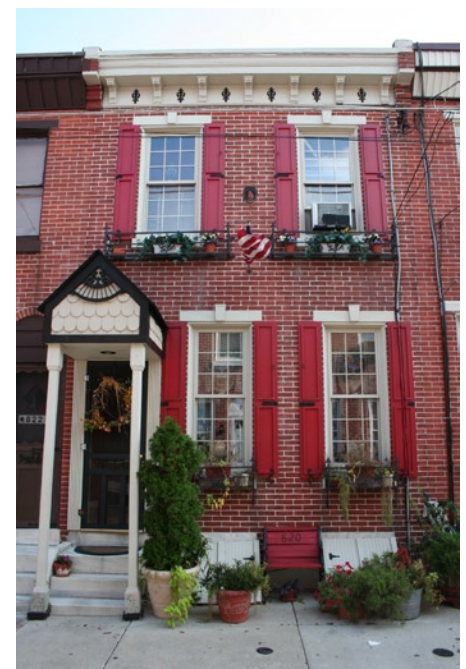
The predominant building type throughout our survey area was the rowhouse. Rowhouses from various periods exist. The oldest are likely the two story rowhouses with roof dormers. Later, three-story rowhouses predominated. In the area identified as probable workers' housing, small two-story rowhouses predominated. Some semi-detached twin homes were found. These likely preceded the rowhouses. Industrial buildings fell into two categories. Older buildings utilized masonry bearing walls with wooden beams and cast iron columns. Newer buildings tended to be simply constructed one-story warehouses with concrete masonry unit bearing walls with little fenestration. (See Appendix D, Figure 6: Typical Building Types)

## LESSONS LEARNED

After completing the survey process several lessons were learned about how the survey process could have been more effective. The first problem was a lack of clarity among survey teams about how to evaluate buildings. A few questions we asked, such as condition of building, were value judgment questions and before entering the field we could have been clearer in our judgment criteria. This problem was partially anticipated, but was not fully solved.

A second problem was the fact that the survey criteria were more relevant to residential buildings than to industrial and commercial buildings. This might have been remedied by having separate forms or sections of forms for the latter types of buildings.

Finally, there were some questions that were not asked which should have been. For example, it would have been very useful to ask whether original building cornices were present, absent, or covered and possibly present. Prior to entering the field we did not anticipate the prevalence of such architectural features.



Modifications to Fishtown structures reflect individual taste and enhance neighborhood feel.

Source: David O'Malley, 2006

## ETHNOGRAPHY

### Introduction

Ethnography is the branch of anthropology that provides scientific descriptions of individual human societies, carrying out studies that seek to illuminate significant cultural values and draw out specific meanings. In order to gain a better understanding of the people of Fishtown, beyond casual observations and hearsay, the studio conducted limited ethnographic research. The methodology followed was derived from the R.E.A.P. (Rapid Ethnographic Assessment Procedures) method that is widely used by the National Park Service in its ethnographic research. Due to time constraints the studio focused on two components of the REAP process: behavioral mapping and surveys. The total time devoted to gathering data was five weeks, followed by four weeks devoted to analyzing the data in order to draw out patterns and correlations that would allow us to make informed statements about the way people in Fishtown feel about their neighborhood and how they use it. The results of these two processes, which are discussed in this report, allowed us to better understand the social values of the neighborhood, land use patterns, and what specific neighborhood concerns our individual projects should address.

### Behavioral Mapping

#### Behavioral Mapping Methodology

After preliminary analysis of Fishtown as a whole, our team observed six locations of interest within the neighborhood over a period of approximately three weeks in October 2006. Figure 1 shows the six locations where behavioral patterns were observed. Each location was chosen because of its relative proximity to areas of interest, their known uses, and because of information we had learned about them. We decided to observe activity in two green spaces, Palmer Cemetery and Penn Treaty Park. We also observed the area below two I-95 overpasses: at Columbia Avenue and Marlborough Street, to learn more about pedestrian access to the waterfront. To better understand how streets and sidewalks are being used in Fishtown, we observed the intersection of Girard and Marlborough Streets, and Marlborough Street between Belgrade and Thompson.

Since we had such a large group observing, we were able to have several perspectives on the patterns of behavior in Fishtown. We tried to observe each site on weekdays and weekends and throughout the day during the morning, afternoon, and the evening. After the observations were completed, composite maps were created to show trends and patterns of behavior. The composite

Map of Fishtown showing Behavioral Mapping Locations

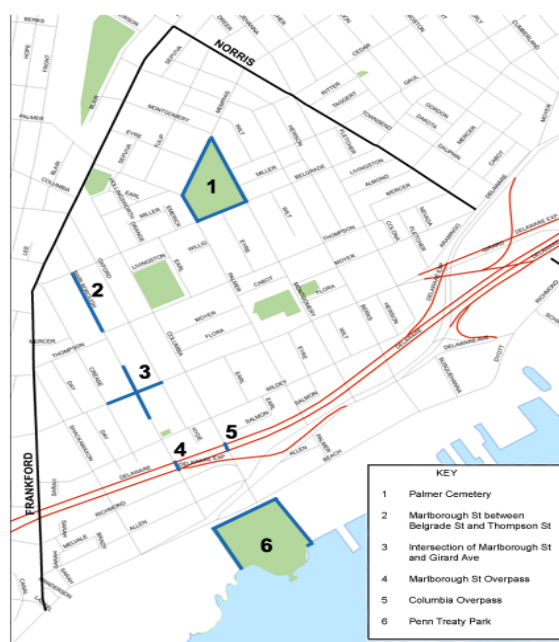


Figure 1: Behavioral Mapping  
Source: Eldra Walker



maps are located in Appendix D.

### **Palmer Cemetery**

We did not observe many residents or visitors utilizing Palmer Cemetery. During our observations, there was no noted use of the cemetery in the traditional sense, even though a man was spotted sitting and smoking inside the gates of the cemetery. The gates were open, yet there was no pedestrian traffic into the cemetery. Outside of the cemetery, there was some pedestrian and vehicular traffic. One observer noted that SEPTA buses drove past. In addition, children in their school uniforms walked past the cemetery at the end of their school day. Also, there are small businesses on various corners surrounding the cemetery. It is also important to note that one of the businesses, a hair salon, keeps the key to the cemetery's gates.

Even though we did not see the cemetery actually engaged in the traditional use of a cemetery, we observed that there is activity around the cemetery. While there was no obvious display of the use of the cemetery, one could observe that it has a place in the community simply because its access is in the care of the surrounding local businesses.

### **Columbia Overpass**

Our observations showed that the area below this overpass is used as a thoroughfare for traffic from the direction of Girard towards Delaware Avenue and Penn Treaty Park, which was the expected observation. There were people walking their dogs under the overpass and pedestrians walking both towards Girard Avenue and towards Delaware Avenue. In addition to this public use, people took advantage of the shade provided by the overpass, as two people were seen taking afternoon naps in their car.

### **Marlborough Overpass**

There was almost no traffic in either direction in the morning. Although vehicular and pedestrian traffic increased in the afternoon, there was never a steady flow. Many people who walked under the overpass, either by foot, on bike, or car turned onto Marlborough Street from Richmond Street. In the afternoon, Metropolitan Bakery employees gathered on the corner of Wildey and Marlborough, down the street from the overpass.

### **Girard Avenue and Marlborough Street**

Our observations of the Girard and Marlborough intersection support the idea that the intersection of these two streets comprises a major intersection in Fishtown. We observed a number of patterns of use. One pattern was the various types of traffic, such as car, people-power, public transportation, and industrial traffic. Cars were being parked and unloaded with goods, in addition to transporting people towards or away from the direction of Center City. Large trucks, or as the observer noted them as "REALLY big" trucks, passed through this major intersection carrying various materials, such as concrete, lumber, and building supplies. At various times of day there was heavy pedestrian traffic and moderate bicycle use. People walked in and out of the local businesses within these blocks, turned down side streets, walked their dogs, or crossed busy Girard Avenue completely disregarding the designated crosswalks. Despite the lack of benches or bus stops, public transportation has a major presence at this intersection. The trolley traveled up and down Girard Avenue rather frequently. During one half hour observation period on a Thursday

afternoon, six trolleys navigated through the busy intersection.

While people traverse the streets going in various directions, there are several things happening among them. The people observed were diverse, representing different racial groups and a range of ages. With the background of movement, there was a current of various activities. Pedestrians shop, stopping into several businesses. Others stop by the local Chinese steakhouse for a meal, or stand outside the pizza place. They carry their heavy bags of clothes in and out of the Laundromat or cart their groceries to their homes. One person, pushing a cart, was seen rummaging through the trash.

Girard and Marlborough is a place for social engagement. Some people sit on the stoops of businesses and “people watch,” while others gather on corners for conversation. A couple argues and smokes cigarettes while down the block another couple laughs and embraces. A group of boys play basketball in a vacant lot, children are heard, though not seen, laughing from somewhere around the corner, and all the while “World” music can be heard wafting out of an apartment above the local tavern. There is the mix of people using this intersection as a route, but it is also a place for local business patronage, and various levels of social interaction.

### **Marlborough Street between Belgrade and Thompson**

Marlborough Street is a residential thoroughfare and this is reflected in the patterns of behavior observed on the block. The flow of cars traveling down this block increased as it got later in the day, indicating that people were arriving home from work by car. People were busy with the activities related to taking care of their homes. The residents were taking out their trash, checking their mailboxes, and putting items in their cars. The block was also filled with Halloween decorations. Children were seen playing in backyards, front yards, and lots. Adults watched from their stoops or gathered and talked at the corner of Thompson and Marlborough.

### **Penn Treaty Park**

The parking lot at the park is heavily utilized. The lot was close to full at all times of the day and night. Many times people were observed just sitting in their cars and many never got out. The park itself also was in use at all times of day and evening and observers noted the racial diversity of park users. Park users were observed driving to the park to eat their lunch or to play with their children. Some park users walked or biked to the park. There was evidence of homeless people sleeping in the shaded part of the park near the William Penn statue. Sometimes the homeless were on the benches, other times there were clothes and trash around the benches. People come to the park in groups and by themselves, some walked aimlessly while others sat on benches, or watched children play. The picnic tables and benches are used by people of all ages. Many people brought their dogs to the park to run around without their leashes. One observer noted two people fishing in the river. Penn Treaty Park is a heavily used by a range of people for a range of activities.

## **Ethnographic Survey**

### **Survey Methodology**

The goal of survey portion of our analysis was to gather qualitative data that could inform other aspects of our research. The survey was not carried out a sufficient number of times in order for its result to reflect a true cross section of Fishtown, but it does provide a solid base for further analysis and sheds light onto some

very interesting aspects of the culture of Fishtown. Our survey, which is included in Appendix E, included multiple choice questions and open-ended questions. Performing our survey, we approached random individuals along Girard Avenue and Marlborough streets. Our behavioral mapping led us to pinpoint this section as a heavily used corridor, which would allow us to contact the widest range of people. The survey was comprised of ten multiple part questions, which took approximately 7 minutes to complete. Most of the questions were multiple-choice, yet there were several open-ended questions that would allow the respondent to give an answer in their own words. The respondents were allowed to see the survey and the surveyor's writing as the survey progressed. Over a two-week period in November 2006, our team interviewed forty-nine people. Thirty-one of those interviewed were residents of Fishtown, while the rest were visiting the neighborhood for various reasons.

### Respondent Information

Table 1 presents the demographic data of our survey's respondents. The table shows the length of the respondents' residency with their race, ethnic affiliation, sex and age group as variables. The respondents could be first separated into two groups, Non-Residents and Residents. The residents group is represented by the columns, depending on their length of residency in Fishtown: "2 Years or less," "10 to 20 years," and "21 or more years." For the data interpretation respondents who have lived in Fishtown for "2 Years or less" will be called newcomers and those who lived in the neighborhood for 10 years or more will be considered longtime Fishtowners.

Generally, our respondents categorized themselves as white and as a "young adult" or older. The non-residents and newcomers who were interviewed were more diverse in race and ethnic groupings. As you move across the length of residency from non-resident to longtime Fishtowner, the respondents tended to be older as well. The non-resident respondents and newcomers were mostly "young adults" while the longtime Fishtowners were "middle age" or "elderly." While the respondents who were non-resident or Fishtown newcomers, were overwhelming male, the longtime Fishtown respondents were mostly women.

### Data Interpretation

When interpreting our data, we were careful not to make generalizations about all Fishtown residents. Since this was a qualitative study, our goal was to determine processes, values, or connections, not necessarily population trends that could be best highlighted using statistical analyses. To conduct a survey with data that had a level of precision, we should have interviewed at least 365 Fishtown residents.<sup>1</sup> However, when comparing the total population data for Fishtown with the resident data from our survey, the racial makeup is similar. Figure 2 contains two pie charts that compare the racial composition of Fishtown with the respondents of our survey.

Resident Demographic Data				
VARIABLE	LENGTH OF RESIDENCY			
	Non-Resident	2 years or less	10 to 20 years	21 years or more
<b>RACE</b>				
African-American	33.3%	16.7%	--	--
Hispanic	--	8.3%	--	--
White	66.7%	75.0%	100.0%	100.0%
<b>ETHNICITY</b>				
African American	25.0%	20.0%	--	--
American	31.3%	40.0%	20.0%	28.6%
East Asian	--	--	--	--
Eastern European	--	--	20.0%	--
Irish	18.8%	--	20.0%	57.1%
Middle Eastern	--	--	--	--
Polish	12.5%	--	40.0%	--
Other	12.5%	40.0%	--	14.3%
<b>SEX</b>				
Male	77.8%	75.0%	42.9%	25.0%
Female	22.2%	25.0%	57.1%	75.0%
<b>AGE</b>				
Youth	--	--	--	--
Teenager	--	--	--	--
Young Adult	61.1%	66.7%	28.6%	33.3%
Middle Age	22.2%	33.3%	57.1%	16.7%
Elderly	16.7%	--	14.3%	50.0%
<b>Number of Respondents</b>				
	18	12	7	12

\* The columns in the "Ethnicity" section do not add up to 100% because some respondents did not answer this question.

Table 1  
Source: Eldra Walker

Comparison of Racial Composition of Fishtown Residents and Survey Respondents who are Residents

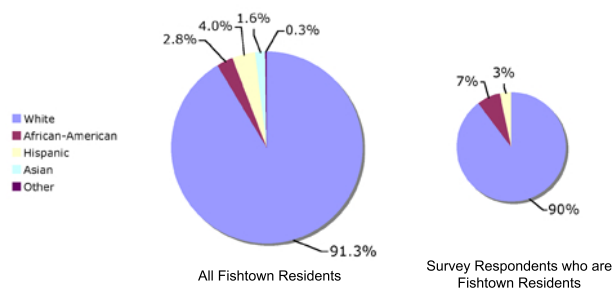


Figure 2  
Source: Eldra Walker

<sup>1</sup> The sample size of 365 was calculated using a 95% confidence level, with a 5% margin of error, and a total population of 7,303, which was determined from the 2000 U.S. Census. The sample size was calculated using a "Sample Size Calculator" at iSixSigma.com



It is important to understand that the findings from our survey cannot be used to generalize for the entire neighborhood of Fishtown. Even though, the racial demographics of the respondents we contacted were relatively similar racial demographics of the Fishtown population in our survey. As a qualitative study, it is important to consider the respondents' answers and how those answers reflect on what they value and their perception of several aspects of their neighborhood. While we cannot generalize for all of Fishtown, information obtained from our survey adds texture to the other portions of our work, gives us insight to how residents may feel about various aspects of Fishtown, and could highlight areas of future study.

### **The Lure of Fishtown**

From our interviews, we learned what our respondents valued in Fishtown and what they would share with others who were experiencing the place for the first time. The information we gained was varied and ranged from admonishments to the visitor, such as “be careful” to the vague answer that Fishtown is “great.”

From our interviews, we found that there were two themes that described the way our respondents felt about Fishtown. One theme is encapsulated in the physical characteristics of the neighborhood, while the other is captured in the social and intangible characteristics of the place.

When describing Fishtown to us, the answers varied among the various respondents and there were not any distinct values that could be attributed to one group of respondents. Of our respondents, a few non-residents and longtime Fishtowners felt that Fishtown was “dirty” or “filthy” and struggled with issues like “drugs” and crime. However, most of the respondents saw beyond the physical descriptors and felt that Fishtown was “unique” or “weird.” One theme was that Fishtown is a “cozy,” “close-knit,” “working-class” community. Longtime Fishtowner respondents felt that their neighborhood was “recovering” and was a place of “revitalization”, a place where it was “not isolated” as it might appear.

When focusing on the built environment and physical features of the neighborhood, there were differences in what the different respondent groups felt was important to the neighborhood. Our non-residents loved the small businesses along the busy corridor of Girard Avenue, particularly the coffee shops and local bars. One retired non-resident would advise a Fishtown visitor to enjoy the “diner that he eats at” on Girard Avenue. Some of the non-residents noted the significance of Fishtown's green spaces, such as Penn Treaty Park and Palmer Cemetery.

While the non-residents valued the businesses along Girard Ave, most of the newcomer and longtime resident respondents valued Fishtown's green spaces. During the survey, several of the respondents stated that they would take a Fishtown visitor to “Penn Treaty Park,” or “Palmer Cemetery.” One young woman felt that the gardens planted in empty lots were valuable. Newcomers also valued the busy corridor of Frankford Avenue.

Other longtime Fishtowners perceived the neighborhood as “great” or more specifically as a “wonderful place to live.” Focusing more on its spatial arrangement, long-time Fishtowners described their neighborhood, paradoxically, as “small, close, and expanding.” A retired Fishtowner, who had lived in the neighborhood for fifty years, labeled the place as going through a process of “revitalization.” There was a great range in the perceptions of the place among longtime Fishtowners. Each answer was provocative and could have been followed

up with questions to better understand their perception of the place.

Most of the newcomers were attracted to Fishtown because of its affordable rents and reasonably priced homes and, like the longtime residents, had varied perceptions of the neighborhood. Some of the respondents focused on intangible characteristics of Fishtown and described it as “weird,” “unusual,” and “unique.” Other, newcomers focused on a more descriptive, yet still intangible, aspect of the place by using labels such as “community,” “neighborhood,” or “working class.”

For the Longtime Fishtown residents, there are certain local places which hold value for them. Places of worship were highly valued by some longtime Fishtowners. A real estate appraiser, who has lived in Fishtown for ten years, would direct visitors to her church on “5<sup>th</sup> and Girard.

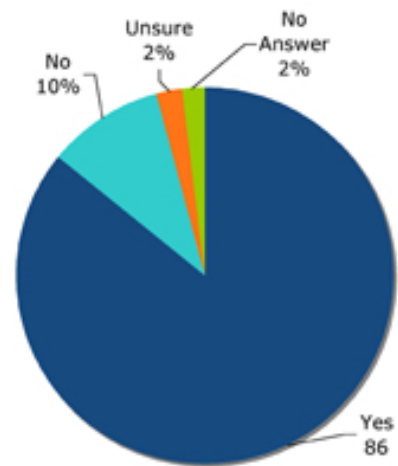
Long-time residents felt that some of the local businesses personify the character of the neighborhood, such as the local bar Johnny Brenda’s. Public spaces within the neighborhood also define the place. One interviewer was simply told to “walk around the neighborhood and just look” as if seeing the place was all that was necessary to experience the place. The public spaces of Fishtown are also important to understanding its meaning, since longtime residents pointed out the importance of “Penn Treaty Park,” “Palmer Cemetery,” and “the smaller streets.” The small businesses, outdoor spaces, places of worship, and the streets of the neighborhood themselves are important to experiencing Fishtown. New residents had similar views to those of the longtime residents. The newcomers echoed the importance of the outdoor public spaces, bars, and small local streets.

### Perception and Preservation of Historic Character

We wanted to learn the perceptions of Fishtown residents and visitors towards the historic character of the neighborhood and try to understand what they found to be historic about the place. Figure 3 shows the results that the majority of our respondents felt there were historic aspects to Fishtown. We then asked our respondents a multiple choice question where they could choose from a list of what they felt was historic about Fishtown.<sup>2</sup> When reviewing the answer for this question, it was apparent that most of the respondents felt that “homes/old buildings” of Fishtown were historic. However, several respondents felt that “everything” about Fishtown was historic. So, it is obvious that our respondents felt that Fishtown has historical value, but there is not one direct source of that value.

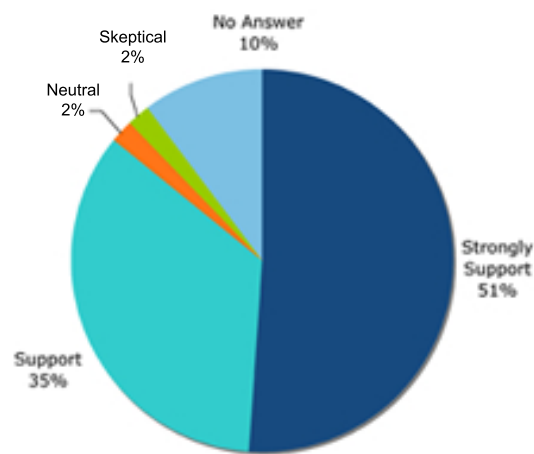
As preservationists, we were interested in how Fishtowners felt about preservation and what they thought should be preserved in the neighborhood. Figure 4 shows that most of our respondents would support preserving the history of Fishtown. More specifically, the majority of the respondents would “Strongly Support” preserving the history of Fishtown.

Our respondents valued the intangible qualities of the neighborhood. Visitors, newcomers as well as longtime Fishtowners valued the community created within the neighborhood. An African-American mortgage broker, who works in Fishtown, wanted to see that “the compassion in the neighborhood” is preserved. A young woman, who had recently moved to Fishtown, wanted to preserve “the



Responses to the question: “Is there anything historic about Fishtown?”

Figure 3  
Source: Eldra Walker



Responses to the question: What would you think of efforts to try and preserve parts of Fishtown?

Figure 4  
Source: Eldra Walker

<sup>2</sup> We asked them what they thought was historic in Fishtown. They were given several answers to choose from or they could provide their own answer. The options that we gave them to choose from for this question were: “Homes/Old Buildings; Penn’s Treaty with the Indians; Industry/Factory; Palmer Cemetery; Boating Industry; Other, please list.”

neighborhood feel.” An out of state visitor, who was in town to visit family and friends, wanted Fishtown to “stay a place for families.” Our respondents valued the collective spirit created by the people who live in the neighborhood, which creates a sense of community. This idea of preserving the sense of community was repeated within the various groups of our study. A further path of study would be to ask: “What creates that sense of the neighborhood and how can sense be preserved?”

Another theme was that some respondents wanted to see the physical components of Fishtown preserved. An artist, who was visiting the neighborhood felt that the “same aesthetic language” of the neighborhood should be preserved, while a bar owner in Fishtown wanted to see that the “small human scale buildings” were important understanding Fishtown’s history. The built environment reinforces the neighborhood feel of Fishtown.

	Development	Waterfront Development	Casino Development
Positive	79.6%	38.8%	24.5%
Negative	14.3%	51.0%	65.3%
No Answer	6.1%	10.2%	10.2%

Table 2  
Source: Eldra Walker

### Perception of Change and Short-term Development

It was important to our team to understand how Fishtowners felt about change and pending development within the neighborhood. Table 2 shows how our respondents perceived development within Fishtown. We found that our respondents felt that overall development in the neighborhood would have positive outcomes for Fishtown. When we inquired about development along the waterfront, our respondents generally felt that it would be negative. However, there was a strong amount of respondents who thought that waterfront development would be positive. In addition, a portion of the respondents chose not to answer this question, when considering this possibility we can see that the overall perception of Waterfront development is mixed. Our respondents perceived Casino development, however, as having potential negative effects on the neighborhood.

According to our survey, the most positive aspect of development along the waterfront would provide the residents and visitors to Fishtown with “more things to do.” The greatest cause for concern among those respondents concerned with potential development was that there would be “decreased access to the waterfront” and an influx of “non-Fishtowners.” Concerned about potential development, a driver, who was making deliveries in Fishtown, felt that development could “take away from the neighborhoodness.”

With development comes conversation about positive and negative aspects of gentrification. Our survey allowed us to better understand the perspective that Fishtown visitors and residents had towards gentrification. To discuss gentrification, we asked the respondents about their views on increased property values, changing demographics, and the effects of change in the neighborhood.

Most respondents felt that increased property values would benefit the current residents of Fishtown. However a large number of the individuals surveyed felt the opposite. While we anticipated straight-forward “yes” or “no” answers, several respondents gave their answers with words of caution. One Fishtown visitor explained that increasing property values is a “double-edged sword.” Another respondent, who grew up in Fishtown, was ambivalent when answer the question



and stated that it was “complicated.”

Our respondents were very clear about what the perceived change in demographics. While most respondents felt that traditional Fishtowners were either “multiple generations of families or “older people,” we found that the respondents felt that the new people moving into Fishtown were primarily “young single people.” Our respondents felt that life in Fishtown was changing.

Furthering the questioning about gentrification, we asked our respondents about displacement. We wanted to know whether they felt that residents were being forced out of Fishtown. From the survey, we found that nearly 80% of the respondents believed that Fishtown would have to change or grow in some way to accommodate an influx of new people. When asked if new development would make it difficult for residents to stay in Fishtown, 60% of the respondents felt that it would be difficult. Interestingly, one longtime resident felt that development would not displace residents because those residents own their homes.

## **Long-term Vision for Fishtown**

Another objective of our research was to gain an understanding of what our respondents envision for the future of Fishtown. Respondents would like to see economic development, community development, and improvements to the quality of life in Fishtown.

Most of the respondents were concerned with improving the economic development of Fishtown. We asked what they would like to see improved in the neighborhood in the next 10 and 20 years. In response to our question, respondents wanted to see more businesses and “better economic opportunities” in Fishtown. They also wanted more jobs and shopping opportunities. Respondents also want to see the development of Fishtown’s infrastructure. They want more housing and specifically more “affordable but livable homes,” more recreational space, hospitals, schools and rehabilitation of older homes.

Respondents also wanted to see improvements in the quality of life in Fishtown. A longtime Fishtowner hopes to see a “balance between the old and the new but keep the underlining feeling.” There is the sentiment of a desire building on the core values that are already a part of the neighborhood. Several respondents want to see reductions in drug usage and overall crime. Respondents also want improved relationships between the older residents and the Fishtown newcomers.

## SWOT

A SWOT (strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats) analysis was performed for the Fishtown Studio project. This process marks the beginning of an effort to synthesize all that has been learned to date by the Studio about the history of Fishtown, its current situation, and the forces that will affect this neighborhood's future. What follows is a summary of the most significant strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats as identified by students of the HSPV 701 Studio on October 16, 2006. (See appendix for full SWOT brainstorming results )

### I. Strengths:

*The waterfront, local traditions, historic fabric, and community pride were prioritized as Fishtown's most significant strengths.*

The SWOT analysis identified Fishtown's waterfront as one of its most important strengths. As its name suggests, Fishtown's identity is grounded in its roots as a fishing town along the banks of the Delaware River. In addition to fishing, the waterfront was the source of much of Fishtown's industry. Yet current and historic evidence demonstrates that the water was not only a driving force behind commerce, but also a source of recreation and a focus of everyday life. A 1912 map from the Philadelphia Department of Wharves, docks and ferries shows a recreation pier and ferry terminal along Fishtown's waterfront which, in addition to Penn Treaty Park, provides evidence of the importance of the water as a source of recreation. While currently underutilized and under threat by potential casino development and other insensitive uses (discussed more in sections III and IV), the waterfront is a significant strength for Fishtown. It is a source of rich history and is an integral part of the community's character.



Penn Treaty Park

Source: [www.fishtown.us.com](http://www.fishtown.us.com)

Fishtown's history and local traditions and historic fabric were also identified as one of the community's greatest strengths. The neighborhood's documented history dates to the earliest days of European settlement in southeastern Pennsylvania. William Penn purportedly signed a treaty with the Lenape Indian Tribe on the site of Penn Treaty Park on the shores of the Delaware River, at the heart of Fishtown's waterfront. Fishtown also boasts a proud working-class heritage, steeped in shipbuilding, metal working, coal, lumber, textile and other manufacturing trades.

The community was historically home to many immigrants as is evident along Frankford Avenue, where homes once inhabited by Scottish- Irish waterfront laborers still exist. Additionally, with the advent of industrialization booming in the country in the 1830's, warehouses and available jobs continued to attract newcomers from overseas. The built environment prospered in the melting pot of immigration,

consisting of churches of various denomination and clusters of houses of unique construction types and sizes.

Fishtown developed as a distinct self sustaining neighborhood with shops and retail located adjacent to homes, and a booming industrial area supplying jobs. Though mass transit connected the neighborhood to center city Philadelphia and points beyond, most residents could find what they needed right outside their door. The majority of the built environment in Fishtown, like many other neighborhoods of Philadelphia, consists of continuous blocks of row homes, nearly all of two or three stories. This is exemplified by Marlborough Street which features row homes that are believed to date from the late 18<sup>th</sup> Century to the present.



Palmer Cemetery

Source: [www.fishtown.us.com](http://www.fishtown.us.com)

Fishtown is also home to larger scale works of significance, such as Frank Furness' Kensington National Bank (1877), the Philadelphia Electric Company's Delaware Station (1919), The George Chandler School (1907), The Kensington Methodist Episcopal Church (1853), Kensington Soup Society (1870), and other notable buildings such as the Yards Brewing Company Building. The historically significant Palmer Cemetery, located in the heart of Fishtown, dates to 1732 when Anthony Palmer sold the plots known as the Shackamaxon land tract. The land survives as a burial ground today. These resources, along with many others, make the neighborhood eligible for listing as a National Register Historic District. This designation could be made based on criteria A (Fishtown is an important industrial community of Philadelphia) and criteria C (Fishtown is an intact working class neighborhood.).

Many Fishtowners today come from families that have lived in the area for multiple generations. This continuous connection with the place undoubtedly helps create a strong sense of community pride. Homes adorned with fish plaques, public art incorporating fish, and community gardens speak to a sense of community identity and dignity. Interviews with Fishtown's residents, published in the 1980's by the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, reveal that neighbors regard each other as family. If there is tragedy or illness in one household, it is not uncommon for the whole neighborhood to lend a hand.

There is also a sense of pride in the toughness or grittiness embedded in the community. Whitetown U.S.A by Peter Binzen<sup>1</sup> posits that higher education was often disregarded as useless when the youth of the neighborhood could be doing "real" work. This "real" work – performed mostly in factories -- was the backbone of what made America the industrial giant of the world, and was and is a source of great pride for the community.<sup>2</sup>



Kensington Methodist Church  
"Old Brick Church"

Source: David O'Malley

1 Binzen, Peter. *Whitetown USA*. Toronto: Random House. 1970.

2 "What's in a name? In Kensington, a lot" *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Sunday September 20, 1981. 1-B.



## II. Weaknesses:

*Poor planning (zoning), eroded economic base, fear of change, and a dysfunctional city government were prioritized as the most significant weaknesses.*

Of the weaknesses identified for Fishtown, poor planning and a dysfunctional city government together received the largest number of votes. While these problems are not specific to Fishtown, but to the entire city of Philadelphia, they must be acknowledged as strong influences on the future and preservation potentials of Fishtown. A 2004 report from the Building Industry Association of Philadelphia focused on the difficulties associated with the city's planning process, noting that "Philadelphia's current development review process is unpredictable and cumbersome, involving up to 14 city departments, agencies and boards."<sup>3</sup>

The existing zoning code, which has been revised multiple times, is widely acknowledged to be unclear and difficult to apply. There are also complaints that the zoning code is outdated, no longer reflects current conditions of neighborhoods, and does not guide development appropriately. Matters are made worse by the City's process for issuing variances for zoning.

All zoning variances are issued by the Zoning Board of Adjustments, a politically appointed body. Decisions often appear arbitrary, with politics playing a more significant role than application of the (albeit poorly constructed) code. There is also a lack of clarity about the role of neighborhoods in the ZBA's process in approving developments that will profoundly impact the local community. While the current administration encourages developer consultation with a local zoning committee, often established by a neighborhood association (in Fishtown, the FNA), this is not a required component of the process.

Inga Saffron, The Philadelphia Inquirer's architectural critic, describes the planning process in a recent article, "Right now, the zoning board does as it pleases, frequently ignoring the informed opinions of planning staff. The problem goes deeper than that, however. City planners routinely turn out "guidelines" ... Unless a councilperson takes an interest and gets the guidelines turned into law through a council bill, those guidelines guide absolutely nobody."<sup>4</sup> Saffron continues to describe the planning process along the waterfront, where one property is denied a zoning variance for the same reason a variance is granted upstream.

There is limited ability to deal with these complexities at the neighborhood level. Fishtown's current zoning committee seems understandably ill-equipped to deal with the difficulties presented by the development review process. While the zoning committee is struggling to better define its role in the development process, the committee is very likely to face an increasing number of complex projects. It faces significant challenges given the mechanical and political complexities of the planning process, and limited recognition of the neighborhood review process at the Zoning Board Administration.

The poor planning process is exacerbated by the City's ineffectual approach to the redevelopment of distressed areas. Mayor Street's "Neighborhood Transformation Initiatives" is based on several tenets, including a participatory

<sup>3</sup> Building Industry Association of Philadelphia, "If We Fix it, They Will Come." Philadelphia: Building Industry Association of Philadelphia, 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Saffron, Inga. "Improving the Planning Commission." Skyline Online. Sept 21, 2006.



planning process, blight elimination [read demolition] and blight prevention. The program has proved controversial among many in the preservation community because of its emphasis on demolition.

Questionable tactics aside, the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative does not appear to provide a targeted and systematic approach to neighborhood change. Though clearly not as distressed as other areas of North Philadelphia, Fishtown is in need of economic revitalization. However, Fishtown is not designated as a NTI neighborhood. The lack of attention from the city of Philadelphia means that the complex and difficult goal of revitalization is essentially left in the hands of neighborhood groups – an overwhelming task for even the most capable community organizations. As a result, there are multiple empty lots, and vacant commercial and residential buildings awaiting redevelopment.

At the core of a need for redevelopment in Fishtown's is an eroded economic base. This was selected as the second most significant “weakness” facing Fishtown.. While Fishtown was one of the principle manufacturing centers in Philadelphia, shifts in the national and global economy in past decades have eliminated most of the well-paying manufacturing jobs that once supported Fishtown's middle-class. Many factories are now abandoned, and little industry exists in the community today. The poverty level in Fishtown reflects these difficulties. Approximately 28% of individuals live below the poverty level, compared to 22% in the entire city of Philadelphia, and 12% nationally.<sup>5</sup>

Low educational attainment compounds the issue, making it difficult for local workers to transition into other sectors of the economy. According to the US Census, approximately 80% of people complete high school, and 24% obtain bachelors degrees. In the 19125 zip code, which encompasses Fishtown, approximately 57% finish high school, while only 8% receive their bachelors degrees. City-wide, 72% of Philadelphians finish high school, while 18% obtain college degrees.

Finally, fear of change was identified as a significant weakness. As noted above, Fishtown has a proud working-class history, and there is a sense that Fishtown “takes care of its own.” There are concerns, however, about an influx of new people into the community, who perhaps do not share blue-collar roots and values, and have driven up property values. Today, a sense of separation between old timers and new comers is prevalent. Those who have lived and worked in the neighborhood all their lives are proud of their neighborhood and are hesitant to support change that the new comers may bring to the community. As has also been noted, some of these fears may also stem from racial tensions that have historically existed in the community.

### **III. Opportunities:**

*The waterfront, preservation of existing historic fabric, adaptive reuse, and Penn Treaty Park were prioritized as the most significant opportunities.*

Nearly every member of the Studio selected the waterfront as a major opportunity in Fishtown. The Studio's decision to focus much of its efforts on the waterfront area reflects a belief in the potential of the waterfront to drive positive change in the

<sup>5</sup> American Fact Finder. Available at: <http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html>

neighborhood. As explained in Section I, the waterfront holds an important place in Fishtown’s history, and likely holds a very important place in its future.

Examples of waterfront transformations have been studied, such as those of Baltimore, MD and Camden, NJ, to learn how these projects may inform recommendations for Fishtown. (see comparables chapter ?) As in Camden and Baltimore, Fishtown’s waterfront presents an opportunity to reconnect residents to this historically important resource, and an opportunity for improved recreation, commerce, and new housing. Resources such as the Penn Treaty Park and the potential adaptive reuse of the Delaware River Power Station were identified as opportunities for positive development. .

These and other sites for potential adaptive reuse and the preservation of existing historic fabric were also identified as significant opportunities for Fishtown. As mentioned in Section I, many historic structures in good condition remain in Fishtown. While many of these structures are currently vacant or underutilized, there is tremendous potential to adapt these buildings to a variety of uses – including housing, commercial space, and industrial uses. Specifically, these historic buildings could provide excellent incubator space for businesses of all types, and provide good source of low and moderate income housing. The Delaware River Power Station, for example, was built in 1919 and is now mostly vacant. It’s location along the river makes for prime re-use potential. Numerous other buildings, including row homes, factories, and commercial spaces also present significant opportunity for reuse and revitalization.

Finally, Penn Treaty Park, located along the shores of the Delaware River, was also identified as an opportunity for Fishtown. While currently underutilized, the park presents an opportunity to create a recreation space that draws more visitors, and better connects the people of Fishtown to the river. As the site is reportedly the site of William Penn’s treating signing with the Lenape, the historical significance of the park also has the potential to draw visitors from throughout the region.

It is worth noting that the development of casinos along Fishtown’s waterfront was *not* identified as a potential opportunity. Instead, potential casino development was selected as the most significant threat to Fishtown. This issue is discussed further in the following section.

## IV. Threats:

*Casino development, insensitive development, lack of control over planning, and possible privatization of Waterfront were named as the most significant threats.*

The Pennsylvania State Legislature has authorized 14 gaming facilities statewide, including two facilities in Philadelphia. There are currently five bidders for these two slots, including Pinnacle Entertainment and Sugar House. If selected, both Pinnacle and Sugar House propose to construct a casino in Fishtown, along the shores of the Delaware River. According to Pinnacle’s website, their casino would include “...approximately 3,000 slot machines; 3,000 parking spaces; five restaurants and a food court; a multiplex movie theater; an expansive, outdoor, waterfront reflection pool that becomes an ice skating rink in winter; and 36,000 square feet of retail and entertainment outlets.” The website notes “that eventually, the property

could be expanded to include a hotel tower and as many as 5,000 slot machines.”<sup>6</sup> Less information is available on Sugar House’s website, though it announces with confidence that “SugarHouse Casino is Coming the Delaware Waterfront!” It promises “pure fun”, in addition to job creation and award winning design of the casino and hotel facility.<sup>7</sup>

The proposed development has raised alarm among many in Fishtown, and the studio selected the proposed locations of a casino in Fishtown as one of the major threat facing the community – in fact, nearly every student chose this as a potential threat. Examples of other casinos have been studied, including those in Detroit and Atlantic City. Concerns have been expressed about the island-like nature of these facilities, which close themselves off to the surrounding community. Unlike other sorts of development, casinos often do not spur additional development, since they are designed to provide an all-inclusive experience for visitors. Furthermore, the project will not create high-wage jobs in an area that could be potentially put to better use.

The development of the casino would likely close off the waterfront to residents and visitors who don’t wish to support or take part in gambling or related activities. The studio elected this privatization of the waterfront as a major concern, whether the result of a casino development or other developments that limit access to the waterfront.

This is closely related to a lack of control over planning and development in Fishtown. The Fishtown real estate market has been heating up in recent years, and there are pressures for new development in the area. Already, there is evidence of insensitive development, and more is proposed. Petco Developers and Bower Lewis Thrower Architects (authors of the boat shaped condominiums further down the river) have proposed two monolithic 36 story towers of condominiums between Penn and Ellen streets along the banks of the Delaware River. These high rises induce private property along the waterfront and obstruct the view shed as well as access to the rivers’ edge. Currently there are no commercial or retail resources incorporated into the street level scheme; there is nothing contributing to the neighborhood with these developments.

Other examples of existing insensitive development can be found interwoven in the built fabric of the neighborhoods. It is not uncommon to experience a residential block lined tidily with 19<sup>th</sup> century row houses abruptly interrupted by new construction announced with setbacks and curb cuts for driveways and garages. The construction of these houses is typically wood frame with brick veneer with vinyl windows built for speed and economy. The complexities and inequities of the development process make it difficult to ensure quality design, and present a continued threat to Fishtown.

Despite the bad and the ugly, there has been sensitive and innovative construction such as the Rag Flats by the architecture firm of Onion Flats. The Rag Flats have introduced opportunity for the implementation of architectural ideology in terms of aesthetics, owner friendliness, and environmentally conscious construction. The multi-occupant condominiums reflect the scale and rhythm



Snout House  
Source: Fon Wang

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.pnkinc.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.sugarhousecasino.com/home/>

of the surrounding fabric clad in contemporary material respecting its historic neighbors by being distinctly different. Additionally, adaptive reuse projects such as the Bambi Galleries and the Frankford Bike shops have proven that old buildings can be successfully revitalized.

Part and parcel to increased interest in development is an increase in real estate prices – particularly rising home prices. This was also identified as a major threat to Fishtown. During the last five years, home values in Northern Liberties and Fishtown have increased approximately 400%, from median home values of \$50,500 in 2001 to \$249,900 in 2006.<sup>8</sup> Rising real estate values threaten to undermine the very core of Fishtown as a middle-class community with moderately priced home and high levels of home-ownership. There are concerns that current residents will be driven out by high property taxes, and that local potential homeowners – e.g. people who have grown up in the area and want to live near their families – will be unable to do so.

## Conclusion

The strategic concerns of the studio focus on managing change. Development and change are integral in keeping a neighborhood alive, however the success of the neighborhood is dependent on the pace and type of change. The SWOT analysis is utilized as a tool to help prioritize concerns, set objectives, and develop strategies. In conjunction with the SWOT analysis, historic research, ethnographic studies, and public opinion will serve as a base to identify the perceived values of the site. Securing stakeholder participation in this process will be essential to ensure support of the Studio's final project, and maintain the sense of place of the site. Evoking a sense of place is essential for Fishtown which prides itself in its "grit" and hardiness.

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<sup>8</sup> [http://www.trulia.com/real\\_estate/Northern\\_Liberties-\\_Fishtown-Philadelphia/5807/](http://www.trulia.com/real_estate/Northern_Liberties-_Fishtown-Philadelphia/5807/)



## COMPARABLES

As unique as each city is, certain reoccurring themes within United States urban history have led to similarities in the strategies used for redevelopment. In the case of Fishtown, industrial, waterfront, and casino development were all recognized as critical to the future of the community.

For the purpose of placing Fishtown into a larger context, case studies were used as a way to understand how other places have confronted similar development pressures. Camden, New Jersey and the Battersea Power Plant, London, UK, were chosen to look at methods used to revitalize defunct industrial waterfronts in a new economy. Providence, Rhode Island, Baltimore, Maryland, and Vancouver, British Columbia in Canada were selected as examples of cities that attempted to use their waterfronts as the central focus of a wider urban renewal plan. Finally, Atlantic City, New Jersey and Detroit, Michigan were identified as two very different approaches to casino development as a way to spur development.

## Industrial Development

### Camden, New Jersey

Camden's location on the Delaware River has been one of its most important features since the city's birth. Beginning in 1688 with the issuance of the first ferry license, the pulse of Camden has revolved around the waterfront. Throughout the early 20th century Camden was a booming industrial town home to such companies as RCA, Campbell's Soup and the New York Shipbuilding Corporation, at one time the largest in the world.

Following World War II, Camden was devastated by deindustrialization. The formerly prosperous industrial base dwindled, leading to the flight of Camden's middle class residents. Between 1950 and 1970 over half of Camden's industrial jobs were lost, causing widespread abandonment and a steadily declining tax base.

With the city hemorrhaging jobs and residents, the 1980s was a bleak time for Camden. Although it was obvious that the city needed reinvestment, private funding and development was too risky in a city considered forsaken and beyond hope. As a catalyst for redevelopment, the state began to invest in the city, namely the central waterfront. Former industrial lands that were no longer in use became the target for redevelopment. The State Aquarium of New Jersey in 1992 marked the beginning of increased government participation and spending in an effort to market Camden's waterfront.

Public/private partnerships were critical to the Camden's waterfront revitalization. The Cooper's Ferry Development Association (CFDA) is the non-profit agency mandated to implement redevelopment projects within the city of Camden. Throughout the 1990s CFDA assisted numerous projects including the Tweeter Center, Camden Children's Garden and Campbell's Field.



Campbell's Field

Source: [www.minorleagueballparks.com](http://www.minorleagueballparks.com)

In 2004 the city created the Central Waterfront Redevelopment Plan as a strategy to control and guide the revitalization of the waterfront. The plan called for improvements in infrastructure, public access to the waterfront, environmental remediation as well as commercial, residential and entertainment development.

Proposed projects include both private and publicly funded undertakings. The firm of Steiner and Associates has been designated as master developer for the Central Waterfront and has nearly \$750 million worth of projects underway. Additional investment includes \$500 million at Cooper's Crossing for retail, restaurants, housing and hotels. Dranoff Properties is following its highly successful conversion of the "Nipper" building with the Radio Lofts, a former RCA factory. New commercial activity includes the Ferry Terminal Building, an 11 story, \$20 million investment to serve as headquarters for the Susquehanna Patriot Bank. Public funding continues to play a vital role in transportation improvements such as the RiverLink ferry terminal and an aerial tram service between the waterfront and Penn's Landing in Philadelphia.

Many parallels may be drawn between the Camden and Fishtown waterfronts. Both served as industrial centers that were negatively impacted by the de-industrialization of America. Although the sites differ in scale, the redevelopment plan implemented by Camden could serve as an example for Fishtown, particularly in regards to public private partnerships.

### **Battersea Power Plant, London, UK**

Battersea Power Station was designed by Sir Giles Gilbert Scott, the same architect responsible for the Tate Modern Museum. It occupies 38 acres and approximately 400 meters of prime waterfront real estate. The plant began operating in 1933 and remained in use until 1982. Currently the building is without a roof and has been deemed structurally unsound. Recent adaptive reuse plans provide a hotel, conference center, office and exhibition space, apartments, movie theater, and other cultural amenities. Additionally, improved connections to the surrounding area have been proposed, including a pedestrian bridge to the Pimlico neighborhood across the Thames River and a dock to the Thames commuter ferry line.

The renovation of the Battersea Power Station would create and bring new life to a historically important industrial building. The plant is Grade Two Listed on England's historic register based on its contribution to England's architectural and historical heritage. The promise of renovation has already spurred improvement in the immediate area, such as the recent opening of a large condominium project adjacent to the park.

Though abandoned industrial sites often face demolition, they have the potential to serve as focal points for community revitalization. The PECO Plant along the Fishtown waterfront has the potential to become a neighborhood amenity, due to its square footage, location, and historic value. A plan as ambitious as the Battersea site may not be appropriate for a city the size of Philadelphia, however it is a useful example of the possibility of rethinking industrial ruins as contributing factors to our communities rather than eyesores.



**Battersea Power Plant**  
Source Tagishsimon

## Waterfront Development

### Providence, Rhode Island

During the 19th century, Providence was an industrial town producing such items as base metals, machinery, jewelry, and cotton.<sup>1</sup> The 20th century experienced a steady decline in industry due to the Depression strikes and migration of production south. Providence was left as what has been described as a rundown, past-its-prime, dreary wasteland.<sup>2,3</sup>

The construction of I-95 and I-195 in the 1960s and '70s was the first substantial change to downtown Providence since the 19th century implementation of the railroad. Not only did interstate construction obliterate dozens of city blocks, it literally buried the waterways downtown under miles of highway and parking. The new roadways dramatically divided the downtown and spawned substantial economic depression within the city proper. Many businesses that had flourished for decades in the downtown commercial district closed their doors as a result of competing suburban shopping malls that were now easily accessible.

The transition from commerce and industry to the city's outlying suburban communities resulted in an economic regression and an underutilized city center, with an increasing number of vacancies along the waterfront and throughout the downtown area. Between the years of 1960 and 2000, Providence had been subject to five urban redevelopment plans, all attempted to alleviate commercial and industrial decline and to address the impact of the highway system.

The first proposal, the College Hill plan of 1959, was the first urban redevelopment plan to implement historic preservation. Colonial-era houses and 19th century warehouses were viewed as resources and an overall sensitivity to historic fabric was displayed in the plan.<sup>4</sup> Former mayor Vincent Cianci organized the Department of Planning and Development, the committee responsible for the creation of Providence Place Mall, the Arts and Entertainment District, and the Capitol Center/River Relocation Project, which called for more open space, rerouting and beautification of the waterfront.<sup>5</sup> The redirection of the Providence River allowed for the 1994 building of Waterplace Park and Riverwalk, situated at the foot of State Capitol Hill. The parks are host to free concerts, festivals and events. Tax incentives are offered to local artists that produce public art works for display in the city's park system.

One criticism is the fact that large amounts of money and attention have been paid to the College Hill Community, which appears to be a prosperous neighborhood on its own.<sup>6</sup> Some have questioned why the focus has not shifted to other parts of the city. Several neighborhoods have organized community



Providence FireWalk  
Source Richard Benjamin

1 Rising Sun Mills. *Industrial Heritage*. [www.risingsunmills.com/history/heritage.php](http://www.risingsunmills.com/history/heritage.php). Accessed Oct. 15, 2006.

2 Brenner, Brian. *Providence Showcases Engineering Contributions*. *Civil Engineering Practice, Journal of the Boston Society of Civil Engineers*, Section/ASCE. 2002.

3 Ryan, Brent D. *Incomplete and Incremental Plan Implementation in Downtown Providence, Rhode Island, 1960-2000*. *Journal of Planning History*. Vol.5 No.1, February 2006, 34-64.

4 *Ibid.*

5 O'Brien, Michael, Jennifer Ferencko, and Elizabeth Downey. *Urban Development in Downtown Providence*. <http://www.providence.edu/polisci/students/redevelopment/downtown.htm>. Accessed October, 13, 2006.

6 *Ibid.*

associations in an effort to direct some of the benefits of the plan towards their neighborhoods. Only very recently have city officials broadened their considerations.

In response to the area formerly segregated by I-95, West End Arts District has been established, with attention given to retail spaces and tax incentives offered to area artists. Rerouting of I-95 is currently underway, moving the highway south and resolving the detachment between downtown and the neighboring Jewelry District community to the south.

Better access and utilization of the Fishtown waterfront will require a comprehensive and feasible plan, implementation and subsequent management. Fishtown might also consider taking full advantage of their artist community, extending public art works beyond Girard and Frankford avenues, and directing talents toward the river. One of Providence's greatest successes lies in the variety of events held in their open spaces year round; Penn Treaty Park could serve as an appropriate and attractive venue.

### **Baltimore, Maryland**

The city of Baltimore developed as a port, situated on the Chesapeake Bay. The bay's central location on the Eastern Seaboard, as well as its deep penetration inland made it an important center for trade in the early part of American history.

Like many industrial cities in the United States, population in the urban center declined as troops returning home from World War II moved their families to the suburbs. "Salvation came through the efforts of a group of business leaders and public officials, who in the late 1950s formed the Greater Baltimore Committee. With both city and federal funding, the committee hired the Philadelphia planning firm of Wallace McHarg Roberts & Todd to prepare a master plan for the old downtown (renamed Charles Center) which was completed in 1963. A year later, the firm created a second master plan, this time for the Inner Harbor."<sup>7</sup>



Baltimore's Inner Harbor  
Source [www.43places.com](http://www.43places.com)

The Inner Harbor's rehabilitation required the co-operation of the municipality, civic groups, and businesses. The design called for a multi-phased, 30-year plan that today offers the residents of Baltimore with housing, retail, business, and recreation spaces.

By all accounts the renovation of the Inner Harbor has been deemed successful. According to the Baltimore Development Corporation, seven million people visited the Inner Harbor in 1990 and spent over \$800 million. Charles Center and the Inner Harbor together generate approximately \$30 million a year in real estate tax revenues and have produced 30,000 new jobs."<sup>8</sup> This success has spread to the surrounding neighborhoods, influencing revitalization and enlivening the nightlife.<sup>9</sup> Marc Weiss and Daniel Rosan point out in a report for the Center for National Policy that the "Inner Harbor is now a major regional and national destination with over 13 million visitors in 1998. More than 525,000 people attended over 500 conventions in Baltimore during 1998."<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Kelly, Brian and Lewis Roger K. What's Right (and Wrong) About the Inner Harbor. *Planning*. 58, 4(April 1992):29.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.30.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.30.

<sup>10</sup> Weiss, Marc A. and Daniel E. Rosan. "Baltimore Economic Growth Strategy". Center



New design has been added along the waterfront, such as Baltimore's World Trade Center and the aquarium, and adaptive reuse was applied in the case of the power plant that has been recycled for retail space. Unfortunately, many of the preexisting structures were lost in the 1960s. "The Inner Harbor shows the effects of a noncontextual approach. Although the site was crucial to the development of early Baltimore, today's visitors get little sense of this impressive past."<sup>11</sup> Kelly also points out that, "Despite the throngs of pedestrians, one feels a sense of isolation at the Inner Harbor, and part of the reason for that is the parceling of land for specific uses. As in the suburbs, and unlike the traditional urban experience, one must commute to the harbor to participate in its activities."<sup>12</sup>

Valuable lessons can be learned from the development of Baltimore's Inner Harbor. It is important to recognize that a comprehensive plan was implemented before any type of development began. Baltimore's plan has been highly successful due to its mixed-use nature and its consideration of community members while working with both developers and city officials. However, Baltimore's plan neglected its history and historic fabric, an important lesson in the need to protect the built environment.

### Vancouver, British Columbia

In 1990, the city of Vancouver underwent dramatic redevelopment and quickly became a point of reference for many North American cities. Located in British Columbia, Canada's third largest city is situated on a small peninsula 20 miles north of the US border.<sup>13</sup> Though Vancouver was founded in 1792, significant population increase and industrial development did not arrive until the 1856 discovery of gold in British Columbia.<sup>14</sup>

By the 1960's, declining industry had left the city with a dilemma: how to revitalize the urban core? Limited access to the city center and constrained site potential dictated high-rise and high-density development.<sup>15</sup> In the 1960's Larry Beasley, Vancouver Director of Current Planning, rejected a massive urban redevelopment plan calling for a freeway, office towers, and commercial buildings to replace the aging stock of industrial buildings throughout the downtown core.<sup>16</sup> While the plan was abandoned, the city recognized the need for sensitive yet effective planning. The idea was to bring people closer to the jobs available downtown in the hopes of creating a market that would sustain the area's waning retail sector.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1980's, growth in the city was at a standstill, and due to a significant for National Policy, Washington, DC, October 10, 1999. FINAL DRAFT.

11 Kelly, Brian and Lewis Roger K. What's Right (and Wrong) About the Inner Harbor. *Planning*. 58, 4(April 1992):31.

12 Ibid.31.

13 Larry, Beasley. American Planning Association's Zoning News April 2000 (Reprinted by permission) "Living First in Downtown Vancouver" City of Vancouver Website. <<http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/COMMSVCS/currentplanning/living.htm>>

14 Davis, Chuck. "The History of Metropolitan Vancouver." 2004. <<http://www.vancouverhistory.ca/chronology1991.htm>>

15 City of Vancouver Website. "Current Planning." <<http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/COMMSVCS/currentplanning/living.htm>>

16 Mitham, Peter. "Housing: South by Northwest: Vancouver Sets the Tone for U.S. Downtowns." *The Next American City*. Issue 9: Segregation & Integration, November 2005. <[http://www.americancity.org/article.php?id\\_article=145](http://www.americancity.org/article.php?id_article=145)>

17 Mitham, Peter. "Housing: South by Northwest..."



Vancouver Highrises  
Source [www.rene-witte.net](http://www.rene-witte.net)

lack in residential sites, housing stock was declining while square footage per person was increasing.<sup>18</sup> Based on the “Living First” downtown growth strategy, Vancouver’s council took bold, definitive action in adopting a new Central Area Plan in 1991.<sup>19</sup> Over eight million square feet of excess commercial office space were converted to allow for residential development, old rail yards along the waterfronts were labeled for housing, and an aggressive planning effort commenced.<sup>20</sup>

Well thought out, and incredibly specific, the plan established zoning districts detailing permitted use and regulations including site area, height, area of transparent surface, building depth, and external design.<sup>21</sup> Relying on traditional relationships between the street, sidewalk, and building wall, design guidelines were created to define both the perceived and actual scale of development.<sup>22</sup>

One key component to the zoning was that commuter access was limited in the downtown area. By eliminating freeways from the city core, public transportation (such as the SkyTrain light rail system, buses, passenger ferries, and commuter rail) has been able to take priority for space and funding.<sup>23</sup>

Today the city’s innovative plan is revered as a success and an example to many communities. With 560,000 people in Vancouver, nearly 100,000 of them reside on the less than five square miles of the downtown peninsula. Whereas population in the Central Area was 40,000 in the 80’s, it is expected to reach 90,000 by 2015.<sup>24</sup>

One concern with Vancouver is that, although the downtown has been successfully transformed into an attractive place to live, it runs the risk of ceasing to serve the other purposes that downtowns traditionally serve. No major office buildings have been built in this century and the amount of land for new commercial development is almost non-existent. The city suffers from a substantial reverse commuter population, and demographers predict that by 2020 more people could be commuting out of downtown than into it.<sup>25</sup>

Vancouver has set the precedent for careful waterfront development, with its lack of freeways and pedestrian friendly planning a particularly unique and successful component. However, the lack of commercial development currently threatening the city can also serve as a reminder that a comprehensive vision is necessary in order for any revitalization plan to be successful.

## Casino Development

### Atlantic City

Starting in the late 1800s, Atlantic City was a major beach resort and tourist destination for working class people from the Philadelphia region. Today, it is still a major tourist area, but for a much different reason: gambling.

18 City of Vancouver Website. “Current Planning.”

19 City of Vancouver Website. “Current Planning.”

20 City of Vancouver Website. “Current Planning.”

21 City of Vancouver Website. “Community Services: By-Laws, Policies and Guidelines.”

October 04, 2006. <<http://www.city.vancouver.bc.ca/COMMSVCS/BYLAWS/zoning/zon&dev.htm>>

22 City of Vancouver Website. “Current Planning.”

23 City of Vancouver Website. “Current Planning.”

24 City of Vancouver Website. “Current Planning.”

25 Ehrenhalt, Alan. “Extreme Makeover...”

In 1976, the residents of the state of New Jersey voted in favor of allowing gambling but only in an area limited to Atlantic City. By 1978, Atlantic City’s first casino – Resorts International – opened on the boardwalk.

A 28 year history of gambling has delivered both success and failure to Atlantic City. Some argue that, although the “casino industry spurred a dramatic revival of Atlantic City’s tourist trade...[the numbers] must be taken with the caveat that many of these ‘tourists’ never leave the confines of ‘their’ casino resort.”<sup>26</sup> Another important fact to consider is that Atlantic City only makes a 19% profit off of non-gaming spending in comparison to Las Vegas, which generates approximately half of its revenue from non-gaming tourist spending.<sup>27</sup>

While a place like Las Vegas has invested heavily in services such as fine dining and high-end retail to keep the tourists spending, Atlantic City is just beginning to look beyond its boardwalk and “island” like casino resorts for opportunities to generate non-gaming profit. A new outlet store development has created a quaint “main street”-like feel in the heart of downtown Atlantic City.



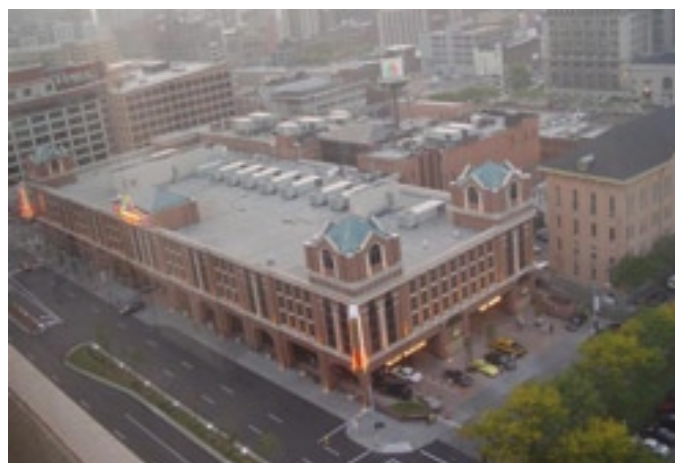
Atlantic City Casinos  
Source www.resortac.com

Though gaming revenue from Atlantic City’s casinos has contributed directly to some improvements to the surrounding community such as employment, subsidized housing projects, and programs for seniors, the impact has not been successful enough to erase signs of poverty and blight that lie just on the other side of the boardwalk. Using Atlantic City as an example, it is reasonable to question if Fishtown will benefit from a casino within their community.

### Detroit, Michigan

In the late 1990s, Detroit’s Mayor Dennis Archer saw the development of casinos in the city as a way to fend off the grim reality of the city’s insolvency, provide jobs, and invest in public amenities. At the time, Michigan already had 17 casinos, all of which are entirely owned by Indian tribes. The Motor City Casino, MGM Grand Detroit, and the Greektown Casino were licensed in 1999 and 2000 by Michigan state law to open in the City of Detroit.

Unlike Philadelphia, Detroit had some say in the debate over casino siting. Detroit’s focus was using casinos as a redevelopment engine and a means to eliminating blight. There was great debate over siting and potential clustering. A 60-acre site – near downtown, with easy accessibility and visibility—on the Detroit River would have allowed the clustering of all three casinos. Overall, there was a reasonable amount of public support for a waterfront revitalization effort, but land assembly and lawsuits prevented this option. In the delay, the casinos were allowed to locate in “temporary” locations in three different places in central Detroit. Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick later negotiated an agreement with the casinos to stay in their three different locations throughout central Detroit, and permitted expansions of these facilities.



Greektown Casino  
Source www.pbbase.com

<sup>26</sup> Schwartz, David. “Atlantic City, New Jersey.” Center for Gaming Research. <www.gaming.unlv.edu>

<sup>27</sup> Schwartz, David. “Atlantic City, New Jersey.” Center for Gaming Research. <www.gaming.unlv.edu>

Overall the casinos have been profitable, and Detroit has become quite addicted to its new revenue source. Still the locations around the MGM Grand and Motor City Casino remain underdeveloped and have generated little spin-off business. MGM Grand is in a former IRS building and suffers from bad traffic patterns around it. Motor City Casino sits in an area in need of redevelopment on the outskirts of downtown. On a panel in 2005, Gary Hack said the MGM Grand isn't attracting enough gamblers. "Everyone comes by car, and the building is surrounded by parking lots," he said. "It's an island that adds nothing and gains nothing from its surroundings."<sup>28</sup>

By contrast the Greektown Casino is in an already busy neighborhood and is more physically integrated with its surroundings. Still, it has generated little revitalization in the area short of restaurant patronage. Its operators chose to develop fewer amenities inside the facility and offer patrons to take comped meals at neighborhood restaurants. (An important point for Philadelphia to learn from.) They also took advantage of adjacent parking garages instead of building a new one. The casino is close to light rail, the Tigers ballpark and shopping.

Since the casinos did not end up along the waterfront, a plan was unveiled in 2002 to redevelop the East side of the Detroit River, planned and financed through public-private partnerships.

Mixed-use and condo developments have been approved in conjunction with a new RiverWalk (a waterfront promenade) on the East side of the river. The project represents the reclamation of a formerly abandoned industrial waterfront with new uses. Shops, restaurants, and public parks will line the walk. The price point for many of the riverfront condos is beyond the reach of many in Detroit, but developers are hoping they will attract middle class residents with amenities and high quality housing. The entire RiverWalk is expected to be finished in 2008.

What can Philadelphia learn from Detroit? To begin with, the reclamation of a formerly industrial waterfront is possible. Through thoughtful planning developers can build their mixed-use towers, allow public access to the river and provide adequate public spaces. Second, dependence on casino revenue does not beget different creative solutions to urban blight and insolvency. Finally, loss of local control over hiring, design, site selection and operational decisions results in inadequate facilities. This point is critical in making sure that the community - not just the casino operators - gain from the addition of casinos to their neighborhood.

## Conclusion

Through these case studies, the current redevelopment issues facing Fishtown can be looked at within a broader context. While the scales and details of the cases may differ from Fishtown, it is helpful to understand what other communities have done in the face of similar urban development challenges. It is equally important to see where outcomes have been more or less successful, as a way to raise important questions and to set up relevant scenarios while moving ahead with ideas for how Fishtown can manage the imminent change along their Waterfront.

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<sup>28</sup> Schaffer, Gwen. "Risky Business." *Philadelphia Weekly*. Feb. 9, 2005. [www.philadelphiaweekly.com/view.php?id=8915](http://www.philadelphiaweekly.com/view.php?id=8915)



## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides policy recommendations based on the Studio's SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis, and other elements of the studio, such as the ethnography study and the building survey. While these policies are not comprehensive, it is hoped that they will provide a general framework for preserving Fishtown's unique character and fostering the revitalization of this remarkable neighborhood.

### Preservation

The Fishtown neighborhood retains a great amount of historic fabric. While the majority of Fishtown's industrial infrastructure no longer remains, the housing stock endures as a link to the past. Although the building stock is a defining characteristic of Fishtown, little has been done to preserve this resource. The previous decades of economic decline and disinvestment within the neighborhood have led to building abandonment and architecturally insensitive repairs to the building fabric.

While the neighborhood is considered historic by its residents and a portion of it has been determined eligible for listing as a district on the National Register of Historic Places, only spot protection is currently afforded, and there is no coherent preservation policy. Protection is limited to buildings listed individually on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places or those being rehabilitated with federal funding.

The city of Philadelphia has two ordinances enacted to protect neighborhoods. The Historic Preservation Ordinance (HPO) provides the opportunity to list a neighborhood as a historic district. Once a historic district is established, all rehabilitation and new construction is regulated by the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC). All work must be appropriate to the character of the neighborhood as determined by the PHC.<sup>1</sup> The process to become a historic district is costly as all buildings within the boundaries must be surveyed.

An alternative to the HPO is the Neighborhood Conservation District (NCD). Although a new tool in Philadelphia, NCD's have been established throughout the country and provide a more flexible regulation of rehabilitation and new building projects. Whereas the HPO is a zoning overlay regulated under the auspices of the Historical Commission, the NCD program is administered by the Planning Commission. Under the enabling legislation of the Neighborhood Conservation District, each neighborhood creates design guidelines tailored to its needs. Unlike a historic district, an NCD does not strictly regulate all changes; rather it regulates only certain features such as fenestration percentage, siding material and setbacks.

The regulations of a conservation district will help protect the Fishtown neighborhood against historically insensitive repairs, demolition and infill development. Although change is occurring within the neighborhood, Fishtown's aesthetic character must be protected through coherent preservation planning. The

<sup>1</sup> Philadelphia Preservation Ordinance and appropriateness conditions available at: <http://www.phila.gov/historical/pdf/ordinance/ordinance.pdf>

following recommendations are offered as a means to preserve the built heritage of Fishtown.

## **P1. Preserve the aesthetic and historic character of Fishtown.**

- **P1a: Establish a Neighborhood Conservation District, known as the Fishtown Conservation District, to prevent insensitive rehabilitation and ensure that new development complements the built heritage and aesthetic of Fishtown.**  
*The community must work with the Fishtown Neighbors Association (FNA) and the Philadelphia Planning Board to develop guidelines that protect the built fabric within Fishtown. Efforts should be made to preserve the historic character of existing fabric while regulating the design of infill development.*
- **P1b: Preserve historically and culturally significant structures through listing individual buildings on the Philadelphia and National Register of Historic Places.** *Individual structures listed on the Philadelphia Register receive a high level of protection with all changes requiring a statement of appropriateness from the Philadelphia Historical Commission.*
- **P1c: Ensure that federally funded projects on contributing buildings within the National Register eligible district are rehabilitated to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards.** *All federally funding projects on contributing buildings within an eligible National Register historic district must complete Section 106 review of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966.<sup>2</sup>*
- **P1d: Work with developers to rehabilitate National Register listed properties utilizing Investment Tax Credits.** *The investment tax credit is a 20% tax credit for approved rehabilitation expenditures on National Register listed buildings. These credits are meant to offset the expense of rehabilitating a historic building. To qualify for the credits, the building must be income producing and the rehabilitation must meet the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation.<sup>3</sup>*

## **P2. Provide technical assistance to facilitate historically sensitive repairs undertaken by Fishtown residents.**

- **P2a: Partner with the Fairmount Park Trust for Historic Preservation and the Philadelphia Preservation Alliance to hold community workshops to educate residents about historically**

<sup>2</sup> Section 106 of the NHPA guidelines available at:

<http://www.achp.gov/citizensguide.pdf>

SOI Regulations available at:

[http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/rehab/rehab\\_index.htm](http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/tps/standguide/rehab/rehab_index.htm)

<sup>3</sup> Investment Tax Credit Program details available at:

<http://www.cr.nps.gov/hps/TPS/tax/>

**sensitive repair techniques.**

- **P2b: Make available a list of contractors who perform historically sensitive repairs.** *Although residents may wish to rehabilitate their homes in a sensitive manner, they may not always have enough information to find contractors to do the work. Contractors within the neighborhood should have these skills to offer local expertise and so employment can be maintained within the community.*

## Interpretation

Although it is recognized that Fishtown is a historic neighborhood, historical information about the area is not readily apparent or easily accessible. Information is scattered at depositories such as the Free Public Library and the Historical Society of Philadelphia, making research for residents difficult and costly. The neighborhood lacks historical signage and fails to convey a sense of history beyond visual identification. SWOT analysis determined the history of Fishtown to be one of the neighborhood's strengths, but education and dissemination is not articulated. In order to take advantage of the neighborhood's history and educate both Fishtown residents and visitors, a community focused plan for historical interpretation is necessary.

### **11. Create the Fishtown Society (FS) to organize neighborhood preservation efforts and provide stewardship for local historical resources.**

- **11a: Serve as coordinating body for all preservation policy.** *Policies P1: to preserve the aesthetic and historic character of the neighborhood and P2: to provide technical assistance for repairs are to be organized and run by the Fishtown Society.*
- **11b: Provide a central location to collect historical information, offer community outreach and provide museum-like displays.**
- **11b: Create outreach programs to teach community about its history and important architectural features.** *Education initiatives within the local schools are needed to foster a greater sense of place for residents and a greater understanding of Fishtown for outsiders. While sense of place and community are strengths of Fishtown, a greater understanding of the neighborhood's history is needed. With waterfront development and community change inevitable, the vanishing fabric and invisible history must be communicated otherwise Fishtown's identity will fade.*
- **11c: Document individual sites of importance throughout community.** *The Fishtown Society should research these individual*

sites and create interpretation and a central inventory within the community.

- **11e: Coordinate effort to historically designate individual buildings.** *Although any individual can designate buildings for the Philadelphia or National Register, a coordinated effort should be organized by the Fishtown Society. Brochures and workshops should be developed to provide neighborhood residents the skills needed to designate a building.*
- **11f: Provide walking tours to connect history and place.**
- **11g: Use photographs and historical documents to tell the story of Fishtown.** *Much of Fishtown, specifically the waterfront, has undergone tremendous change during the recent past. Displays utilizing archival sources should be used to convey the history of the neighborhood.*
- **11h: Create a “living history” of Fishtown through audio recordings of residents.** *Akin to NPR’s StoryCorps, provide residents the opportunity to give first-hand accounts of living in Fishtown. It is essential to understand the importance of the neighborhood from resident’s perspective, as their memories and points of significance may differ from those already documented.*
- **11i: Help families research their genealogy and connection to the neighborhood.**
- **11j: Administer yearly awards for high quality preservation projects.** *In order to encourage historically sensitive rehabilitations, the Fishtown Society should recognize high quality projects. These projects can be utilized as examples for other resident’s to follow.*
- **11k: Work with the Philadelphia Preservation Alliance to provide funding for historically sensitive rehabilitations.** *One of the greatest obstacles of historic preservation is the perceived cost involved with sensitive rehabilitation. The Preservation Alliance has instituted a program that provides bridge funding between the cost of typical rehabilitation and that which meets the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards. The Fishtown Society should coordinate with the Preservation Alliance to extend this program to building rehabilitations in Fishtown.*

**12. Under the guidance of the Fishtown Preservation Society and Philadelphia Historical Commission, install informational signage**



throughout the neighborhood to reconnect the community to its history.

- **I2a: Provide a cohesive system of signs and placards denoting historic locations throughout Fishtown.** *Currently there is little signage denoting the historical significance of the neighborhood. Signs and placards featuring history and photographs should be placed at designated spots throughout the neighborhood. Placards should be placed at significant spots such as the historic location of Dyottsville and Cramp Shipyard.*
- **I2b: Install signage at Palmer Cemetery indicating its primacy within the neighborhood and historical significance.** *As one of the most significant placeholder within the community, Palmer Cemetery needs signage to tell its story, specifically its historic connection to Anthony Palmer and importance as a center of the Fishtown neighborhood.*
- **I2c: Create light pole flags celebrating the history and culture of Fishtown.**
- **I2d: Involve artist community in creation of visually stimulating informational signage.** *With the newly established Frankford Arts Corridor and locally crafted benches and bicycle racks, the new signage should be engaging, informative and artfully designed. Signs that are creative are more likely to catch the glance of passing pedestrians.*

## Zoning

Philadelphia’s existing zoning code, which was first codified in the 1960s, has been modified hundreds of times in the last 40 years. As the Building Industry Association of Philadelphia notes, “these amendments have produced an unduly complex and incoherent 624-page set of regulations that only experts can understand—and even they often disagree on their meaning.”<sup>4</sup> Additionally, zoning designations often do not reflect current or desired uses in neighborhoods, and as such, variances are often required for proposed development.

Variances are issued by the Zoning Board of Adjustments, a politically appointed body that has been the subject of much criticism for its lack of expertise in planning and its politically motivated decision making. This has resulted in the approval of numerous poorly planned and undesirable developments throughout the City. For example, as has been noted elsewhere in this report, two 36-story? condominium towers have been constructed in nearby Northern Liberties, and dominate the view to the southwest from Fishtown’s waterfront. These towers are insensitive to the historic scale of the riverfront, and are unconnected to the rest of the neighborhood.

Under the existing code, local residents who will be most directly affected

4 Building Industry Association of Philadelphia. “If We Build it, They Will Come.”  
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by developments have little role in the review process. Neighborhood associations, such as the Fishtown Neighbors Association (FNA), do not have a statutory right to review local development. While the current administration encourages developer consultation with a local zoning committee, often established by a neighborhood association, this right of review is not guaranteed under the law. Furthermore, noticing requirements for development are very limited, and exacerbate the problem; even when a proposed use is large in scale and will have tremendous impact on the neighborhood, developers need only post signs on the subject property for a set period of time. Other jurisdictions require direct notice to neighbors and businesses through the mail, informing local residents of the proposed use, and time and date of the public hearing at which decisions will be made.

The Fishtown Zoning Committee is part of the Fishtown Neighborhood Association (FNA), and is currently in the process of reconfiguring its guidelines and review process. The City of Philadelphia has also committed to re-writing its zoning code in the near term. In light of the re-organization of the Zoning Review Committee and anticipated changes to the zoning code, the following recommendations are offered for the FNA's consideration.

## **Z1. Strengthen existing development review process to better satisfy community goals.**

- **Z1a: The Fishtown Neighborhood Association should include design professionals on the Zoning Review Committee (FZRC).** *The Committee should be composed of members with design backgrounds, as well as those who do not have design backgrounds. Because design review can involve numerous complex construction drawings and plans, inclusion of a minimum of two members with design background on the FZRC would improve the review process.*
- **Z1b: The FZRC should work closely with city councilmember(s) and the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA) on zoning related matters.** *The FZRC should become Fishtown's principal "player" and advocate in the development game.*
- **Z1c: The FZRC should take the lead role in developing design guidelines for Fishtown.** *These guidelines will provide a standard of design that can be used to evaluate proposed development. The process for developing such guidelines must include extensive community input to ensure that the document reflects the values of the community with regard to the built environment.*
- **Z1d: The FZRC should encourage wider community participation in zoning review by requiring developers to notify affected residents of proposed development.** *Property Owners within 500 to 1000 feet of any proposed project undergoing ZBA review must be provided written notice of the proposed development, and the date and time of a public hearing at which they will have the opportunity to voice their support or concern about the development.*
- **Z1e: The FZRC, along with the Fishtown Neighbors Association**

**and area business groups, should lobby for a statutory right of review for community organizations.** *The statutory right of review will ensure that development is in keeping with the character of Fishtown, and will provide a legal basis to prevent or contest undesirable or insensitive uses and design in the neighborhood.*

- **Z1f: The FZRC should take the lead role in creating a conservation district zoning overlay in Fishtown.** *The conservation district will play a key role in ensuring that new construction conforms to the character of the existing neighborhood, and that the existing character of the neighborhood is maintained.*
- **Z1g: The FZRC should identify and work with the City Planning Commission to rezone areas where existing zoning is likely to undesirably change Fishtown’s character. The FZRC should identify zoning that also does not reflect current uses, and work with its City Councilperson to re-map the neighborhood.** *This re-zoning would entail down-zoning areas to retain neighborhood character, and up-zoning area where more intense use is desirable. Re-mapping would update the zoning map to reflect actual and desired uses.*

## Adaptive Reuse

Fishtown’s existing building stock is one of its most significant assets. In addition to a number of historically significant works, the neighborhood is home to a wide variety of vernacular buildings that reflect the neighborhood’s rich history and unique character. These buildings can play a pivotal role in the revitalization of Fishtown’s commercial corridors, its waterfront, and its residential neighborhoods.

As Donovan Rypkema of Place Economics notes, the redevelopment of historic buildings is an “ideal economic development strategy for attracting and retaining small businesses.”<sup>5</sup> Because rental rates in historic buildings tend to be more affordable than those in newly constructed buildings and the configuration of historic buildings tends to match the space needs of new businesses, these buildings are “excellent incubators” for small businesses. Small businesses account for a large percentage of new jobs created in the United States, and can be an important source of employment in Fishtown.

Reuse of Fishtown’s existing buildings can also be an important means of improving the overall quality of life in the neighborhood. For example, re-use of existing buildings may help bring much needed retail services to the neighborhood. An ethnographic study of the neighborhood found that lack of basic services, such as grocery stores and pharmacies, are a concern to neighborhood residents. Additionally, because Fishtown was developed in a traditional city grid plan, re-use of existing buildings will preserve the “walkability” and neighborhood feeling of Fishtown.

Finally, the best way to ensure the preservation of Fishtown’s history as it expressed in the built environment is through the continued use of its buildings.

5 Rypkema, Donovan. “The Economics of Historic Preservation: A community Leader’s Guide” National Trust for Historic Preservation, Washington, D.C. 1994. pg. 25

The following recommendations are offered as a means to harness the economic development potential of Fishtown's existing building stock, and to help preserve the neighborhood's history.

**AR1. Encourage reuse of existing commercial, industrial and residential buildings.**

- **AR1a: New Kensington Community Development Corporation (NKCDC) and the Fishtown Business Association should work with the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation (PIDC) to identify and encourage reuse of existing industrial sites, with a high priority placed on those along the waterfront.** *The community must take full advantage of the tax advantages and favorable financing available through the PIDC to developers who revitalize Philadelphia's abandoned industrial buildings.*
- **AR1b: The reuse of the PECO energy plant along the Delaware River should be the cornerstone of the reinvestment in the waterfront, and revitalization of abandoned industrial sites.** *Retail, recreation, residential, and office uses should be encouraged in the adaptive reuse of the PECO building and surrounding area. The rehabilitation of the PECO plant must be part of a larger redevelopment scheme that better connects Penn Treaty Park to the surrounding area, provides improved accessibility to the waterfront from Fishtown neighborhoods, and makes the waterfront the focus of recreation, entertainment, and retail in Fishtown.*
- **AR1c: NKCDC and the Fishtown Business Association should work with the city of Philadelphia and the state of Pennsylvania to increase the number of Keystone Opportunity Zones in Fishtown.** *Keystone Opportunity Zones are an important means of attracting investment in the community, since they provide significant tax advantages for new development. Mixed-use development (residential, retail and office development) should be encouraged on these sites.*
- **AR1d: NKCDC, The Girard Avenue Coalition, Fishtown Neighborhood Association, and the newly created Fishtown Business Association should advance investment in commercial properties along Frankford and Girard Avenues through adoption of the National Trust for Historic Preservation's Main Street Strategy.** *This strategy combines historic preservation with economic redevelopment to create vibrant, healthy commercial corridors in historic areas. Special emphasis should be placed on developing needed retail and commercial services in Fishtown, such as grocer, pharmacy, and other services.*
- **AR1e: In cooperation with the neighborhood's City**



**Councilperson and state and federal representatives, the NKCDC, Girard Avenue Coalition, Fishtown Neighborhood Association, and Fishtown Business Association should pursue funding for brownfield identification and clean up in Fishtown, with an emphasis on the waterfront areas and the commercial corridors.** *Remediation of brownfield sites is an important step in encouraging investment in contaminated sites, and improves the health and safety of the surrounding community.*

## Waterfront Development

Fishtown's waterfront has played a crucial role in its history, and must play a vital part in the neighborhood's future redevelopment. As discussed throughout the report, the waterfront is currently jeopardized by insensitive uses, such as skyscraper condominiums, proposed casinos, and other development out of character with its historic use. A clear vision of the waterfront must be developed and articulated, and community organizations must pursue partnerships that can make this vision a reality.

**W1. Aggressively develop the waterfront, while balancing private and public benefits; make the Fishtown waterfront an active, inclusive, and lively place that reflects the central role of the waterfront in the community's history.**

- **W1a: The PECO plant must be a keystone waterfront redevelopment.** *Because of its location along the waterfront and next to Penn Treaty Park, the PECO plant is of primary importance in the redevelopment of the waterfront. NKCDC, the Fishtown Neighborhood Association, Fishtown Business Association and Neighbors Allied for the Best Waterfront should make the redevelopment of the PECO site their first reuse priority.*
- **W1b: Mixed use should be promoted along the waterfront.** *A good mix of uses along waterfront should be encouraged, including residential, commercial and recreational development.*
- **W1c: Public access to the waterfront must be improved.** *Connections from Fishtown's residential neighborhood to the waterfront must be improved to encourage pedestrian access to the waterfront. Improvements should be targeted to Columbia Avenue, Frankford Avenue, Marlborough Street, Palmer Street, and Shackamaxon Street. For those streets that intersect I-95, the underpasses should be a focus for revitalization. Fishtown's waterfront should also be connected to areas north and south of the river through a walking and biking path that lines the Delaware River.*
- **W1d: Appropriate density of development should be encouraged along the waterfront.** *It is recommended that the waterfront area be zoned RC-2. This would permit limited residential uses and a*

variety of commercial uses. It is expected, however, that potential developers could negotiate with the City for higher FAR (floor-to-area ratios), building heights, etc.

- **W1e: The Delaware River Basin Commission, the NKCDC, Fishtown Neighborhood Association, and Neighbors Allied for the Best Waterfront should cooperatively identify needs and strategies for the clean up of the Delaware River.** *In addition to the environmental benefits of cleaner water, remediation of pollution in the river will make the waterfront a more enjoyable place for residents, and will help promote a vibrant and lively space.*
- **W1f: NKCDC, Girard Avenue Coalition, Fishtown Neighborhood Association, Fishtown Business Association, and Neighbors Allied for the Best Riverfront should endorse the City of Philadelphia’s visioning process for riverfront development.** *This process is intended to develop a cohesive community vision for the Delaware waterfront. These community groups should actively participate in the planning process to ensure that Fishtown’s vision for the future is incorporated into the plan.*

**W2. The location of a casino along Fishtown’s waterfront should be opposed. In the event that a casino or casinos are approved and located in Fishtown, the following policies are recommended.** Neighbors Allied for the Best Riverfront notes that the City of Philadelphia and Fishtown have little or no opportunity to plan or oversee the casino development, and have not been given the time to study the project in order to ensure that negative impacts on the neighborhood can be mitigated, such as traffic and noise. While casino operators insist that the casinos will generate local jobs for the community, these jobs are likely to be low-paying. An alternate use of the waterfront, which brings higher paying jobs and more community benefits, would be preferred. However, this report acknowledges the likelihood of casino development, and as such offers policy recommendations aimed at reducing the negative effects of casino development.

- **W2a: A Community Benefits Agreement should be completed once the final project design is provided, and impacts associated with project are clear.** Community benefits might include:
  - *Casino developer will guarantee a movie theater, waterfront access, and other non-gambling related recreational activities.*
  - *Casino developer will offer job training assistance that will be geared towards helping community members qualify for and secure casino jobs.*
  - *For the first ten years of operation, the casino developer will provide funding for job training activities in the community. The flat annual payment will be set at \$500,000 in the first year*

*of operation, and indexed to the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in subsequent years.*

- *Casino developer will provide social services and addiction counseling funding for the term of the use of the facility as a casino. The annual payment will be set at \$250,000 in the first year of operation, and indexed to the CPI in subsequent years.*
- *For the first ten years of operation, Casino developer will provide funding for clean up and improvements to the Delaware River. Payments will be set at \$250,000 in the first year of operation, and indexed to the CPI in future years.*
- **W2b: In addition to a community benefits agreement, an impact mitigation agreement should also be required for the cost of infrastructure disturbances and improvements.** *Funds should be specifically earmarked for infrastructure upgrades and improvements to the Fishtown area, where impacts of Casino will be felt most dramatically.*
- **W2c: The Fishtown Zoning Committee should insist on the right to review and approve proposed design of casino project.** *Local review of the casino development is essential to ensure that the design addresses the community's needs and concerns.*

## Community Concerns

The Fishtown community has endured over fifty years of deindustrialization yet retains a stable community while others in Philadelphia have been abandoned. Although some may consider the neighborhood insular, residents have not left the neighborhood en masse; instead generations of families continue to live within walking distance of each other. As the Philadelphia real estate market blossomed in the early 2000s, the demand for center city housing rose, eventually spreading outward to Northern Liberties, and currently Fishtown. The demand for housing in Fishtown has increased the price of housing dramatically, with a similar rise in taxes to follow. Unfortunately for current residents who may be aged, income restricted or lower-income, the gentrification of Fishtown may force them to move to other communities. Although renters are hurt the most by gentrification, the majority of homes in Fishtown are owner-occupied, therefore the majority of residents affected will be homeowners. Local businesses are also affected as property owners increase their rates due to increased taxes and the premium prices that could be charged if that commercial property was converted to residential.

Although housing is a major community concern, there are additional quality of life concerns that must be addressed. Developed as a densely packed workers community, Fishtown lacks green space. That which is available is underutilized and must be improved to better address the community's needs. The following recommendations are offered as a means to address community concerns within Fishtown.

**CC1. Protect low-income and long-term residents from the ill effects of gentrification while allowing the community to enjoy its benefits.**

- **CC1a: Work with Fishtown’s city councilman to enact legislation providing tax relief to groups negatively affected by gentrification.** *Although city council has the ability to provide tax relief for those negatively affected by gentrification, a consensus has not been reached as to how the program will be operated or who will be included. The NKCDC and FNA should work with the councilman to determine who is most hurt by gentrification within Fishtown and be advocates for this bill.*
- **CC1b: NKCDC should work in conjunction with other Philadelphia CDCs to lobby the city to create a two-tier system of taxation.** *By taxing land value and improvements separately the cost of holding property below its highest and best use increases. Currently, property tax within Philadelphia is weighted heavily on the capitalization of improvements, therefore holding a property vacant or allowing a building to deteriorate keeps the tax levy at a minimum. The two-tier tax system could reduce speculation by raising holding costs, thus encouraging a better use as improvements would no longer cause a great increase in tax incidence.*

**CC2. Protect local businesses from being displaced due to increased rent as a result of gentrification.**

- **CC2a: The NKCDC should work with the City to provide incentives for property owners to maintain affordable commercial space within Fishtown.** *In order to keep Fishtown a productive community, affordable commercial space is needed for local businesses. NKCDC should work with the city and other Philadelphia CDC’s to create policy that encourages owners to retain commercial space for local businesses.*
- **CC2b: The NKCDC should help businesses purchase the property in which they are located or purchase properties that can be rented to local companies at an affordable price.** *When possible, NKCDC should purchase commercial and retail space within the community to preserve this space for local businesses and entrepreneurs. Affordable local space is needed, otherwise Fishtown will only serve as a bedroom community, offering no exportable products. Service jobs alone cannot support the community.*

**CC3. Coordinate with the Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections (L&I) to discourage speculation.**



- **CC3a: Ensure buildings are maintained to code. Abandoned buildings lead to property value loss and foster the sense that a neighborhood is unsafe and unattractive.** *The Fishtown Neighbors Association should establish a committee on building maintenance to provide residents a platform to express concerns. Community involvement in neighborhood monitoring is essential as L&I is not equipped to inspect every property.*
- **CC3b: Prevent landlords from allowing buildings to deteriorate.** *Land owners who only wish to profit off property speculation will allow a property to languish until the property's price has risen sufficiently. The neighborhood must actively participate in identifying buildings and properties that do appear to have code violations. By ensuring buildings meet code, speculators cannot merely sit on a property and allow it to deteriorate. While speculation cannot nor should not be outlawed, its negative effects can be minimized by enforcing the building code.*
- **CC3c: Utilize the NKCDC as an intermediary for Fishtown residents to contact L&I regarding neighborhood maintenance issues.** *While L&I is perpetually understaffed and overworked, it is paramount to preventing the physical decline of the neighborhood. The NKCDC should be utilized to voice concerns to L&I. As a recognized corporation, NKCDC has a greater ability to influence L&I and can contact the local councilman for additional leverage.*

**CC4. Work with the City and the Neighborhood Transformation Initiative (NTI) to increase private/public partnerships and attract retail services needed within the Fishtown community.**

**CC5. Create a Fishtown Community Credit Union (FCCU) with services tailored to the community.**

- **CC5a: Provide a source of funding solely for the benefit of the community.** *Although the neighborhood does have private banking service, these institutions are not individually accountable to the neighborhood. With the FCCU each member has a vote, and the union's vested interest is in benefiting the community.*
- **CC5b: Supply low-interest loans for construction activities and business start-ups.** *Encourage entrepreneurialism and investment within Fishtown by providing capital for local businesses.*

**CC6. Improve access to and amenities within Penn Treaty Park.**

- **CC6a: Provide signage within Fishtown to direct community members to the park.** *With the construction of Interstate*

95, pedestrian travel to the park was forced into unwelcoming underpasses. Throughout the community there should be signs indicating the direction to the river and Penn Treaty Park. Although access is currently limited, signage would make it easier for residents to get to the park.

- **CC6b: Encourage use of the park for community events and picnics.**
- **CC6c: Install placards along the Delaware River displaying historical photographs and telling the story of the Shad and the industrialization of the waterfront.**
- **CC6d: Re-landscape the park, providing more appropriate seating and open space.** *Although there is seating available on the walking path and adjacent to the playground, more seating options should be available throughout the park. A portion of the park should utilize picnic benches to expand the park's range of users.*
- **CC6e: Reintroduce Shad bushes and native plant species into the park.** *The Shad bushes' bloom historically indicated the running of the Shad up the Delaware River. Reintroducing native vegetation restores the park to its natural historic setting.*
- **CC6f: Construct a fishing pier to allow visitors better access to the water.**
- **CC6g: Provide opportunities for neighborhood residents to rediscover the park such as "learn to fish" and other initiatives.** *There is currently a disconnect between the majority of the neighborhood and Penn Treaty Park. In the summer months there should be programs that encourage the use of the park. Summer programs for children should be initiated and run by either the Fairmount Park Service or through the FNA with grants provided by the city. Trips to the park should be coordinated at locations throughout the neighborhood, with program coordinators either walking kids to the park or providing transportation.*

**CC7. Identify community's recreational needs within the neighborhood.**

- **CC7a: Create additional sports fields to serve organized sporting activities.** *Prior to complete redevelopment of vacant land, parcels large enough to accommodate sports fields should be purchased by the city or non-profit organization and developed to serve the community.*
- **CC7b: Utilize pocket parks as playgrounds and other community orientated spaces.** *Pocket parks should have specific plans to satisfy community needs. Although some should be left as open green spaces, other pocket parks should have playground equipment, community gardens or other open space desired by the community.*

- **CC7c: Create a fenced dog park that provides open green space for Fishtown residents to exercise their pets.** *Although Penn Treaty Park is utilized as a dog park, it is not fenced and does not protect visitors and the green space from the dogs. The NKCDC should create a dog park utilizing its existing green space program.*

## CONCLUSION

The approach to the preservation of Fishtown has focused on identifying the values embodied by this community and its inhabitants. Distinguishing and more importantly understanding the fundamental values that define this neighborhood, shaped by its early colonial and industrial history and evolving into the unique and tenacious community perceived today, has informed our considerations and recommendations for Fishtown.

Changes can be most appropriately managed through the implementation of several policies formulated in conjunction with the deliberation and judicious involvement of the community. Fishtown's unconventional aesthetic would be preserved through the listing of individual buildings along with the creation of a Neighborhood Conservation District employed by a series of design guidelines that reflect the values and climate of the neighborhood. Establishment of a community organization devoted to the preservation of Fishtown would serve as a repository for historical documents, advocate for the protection of the built environment and disseminate information to residents and visitors on the history, stewardship and encouragement of neighborhood preservation. Reclamation of the waterfront, capitalization on adaptive-reuse potential and community participation in planning processes are ways in which Fishtowners can maintain the distinctiveness of their home.

As the neighborhood continues to evolve, facing future challenges such as the potential introduction of a casino, insensitive riverfront development, or the influx of new-comers, the principle objective is to provide suggestions on how this community can manage and promote strategic change. Fostering Fishtown's longstanding civic and community pride may be strengthened and invigorated by the retention of its historic fabric, preserving the neighborhood's unequivocal character through maintaining its physical integrity as well as bolstering the communal morale of its residents.

