



Green2015

An Action Plan for the First 500 Acres

by PennPraxis

for Philadelphia Parks and Recreation

supported by the William Penn and Lenfest Foundations

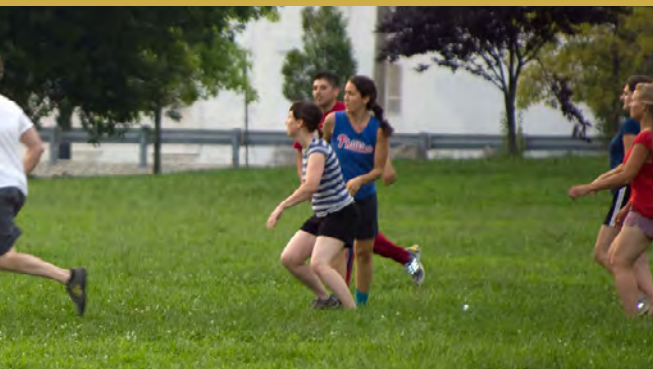
CREATING PARKS FROM VACANT AND UNDERUSED LAND

The goal of Green2015 is to unite city government and neighborhood residents to transform 500 acres of empty or underused land in Philadelphia into parks for neighbors to enjoy by 2015. As we all know, vacant lots hurt our communities. Transforming these empty spaces into parks and green places creates important new opportunities for kids to play and neighbors to gather.

Most of the land that can be greened is already publicly owned and therefore requires no money to acquire. The planning, implementation, and maintenance of these parks will be a collaborative effort among many partners, including neighbors, businesses, nonprofit organizations, developers, and the city.

In the past, greening has been a successful strategy for addressing everything from blight removal to water quality in Philadelphia. Green2015 shows how parks can again be used to improve our city and neighborhoods.





What's Your Park?

What park do you visit regularly when you want to walk your dog, play with your child, or sit on a bench and watch the world go by? Chances are that your park plays many roles to help your neighborhood. In addition to their many recreational uses, parks help manage stormwater runoff, provide healthy habitats for local plant and animal species, remove greenhouse gases, and offer land to plant fresh food. But in Philadelphia today, over 200,000 residents can't answer the question "What's your park?" because they have no parks in their neighborhoods. Green2015 is necessary to ensure that every resident has fair and equal access to a park.

Green2015 will only succeed, however, if it creates parks that are clean, safe, and ready to use. The new Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation (PPR) has made "clean, safe, and ready to use" a priority and is committed to achieving these standards for existing and new park spaces. PPR is studying ways to manage costs, involve community members, and ensure long-term maintenance. Solutions will include new ways to generate maintenance revenue and new park designs that are easier to maintain. PPR will be working with community members every step of the way as new opportunities for city parks are identified.

PRIORITIES FOR NEW PARKS

Greenworks Philadelphia, Mayor Michael Nutter's sustainability plan, prioritizes new parks for neighborhoods that have little or no access to parks or green space. **There are currently more than 200,000 Philadelphians, about 1 in 8 residents, who do not live within a 10-minute walk of a public green space.** New parks on formerly vacant land will transform neighborhoods, create jobs, help reduce crime, and provide access to fresh food. Access to parks is essential to the health of every community across the city.

CREATING ACCESS

About 202,000 Philadelphians do not live within walking distance of a park, which represents about 12 percent of the city's total population. This is comparable to about 65 percent of Pittsburgh's total population. Leaving this many citizens without access to park space is like leaving the entire cities of Allentown and Erie combined without access to parks. If you added the populations of Harrisburg, Lancaster, and Reading together, you would still have fewer residents than the number of Philadelphians who do not currently have access to parks within walking distance of their homes.

ADDING JOBS AND ECONOMIC VALUE

Parks add value to public investment, increase property values, and improve the local economy by attracting

businesses, residents, and tourists. As a result of the Philadelphia Water Department's Green City, Clean Waters program, which will utilize green infrastructure around the city to better manage stormwater, an average of **250 people will be employed with green jobs annually.**¹

ENGAGING PARTNERS

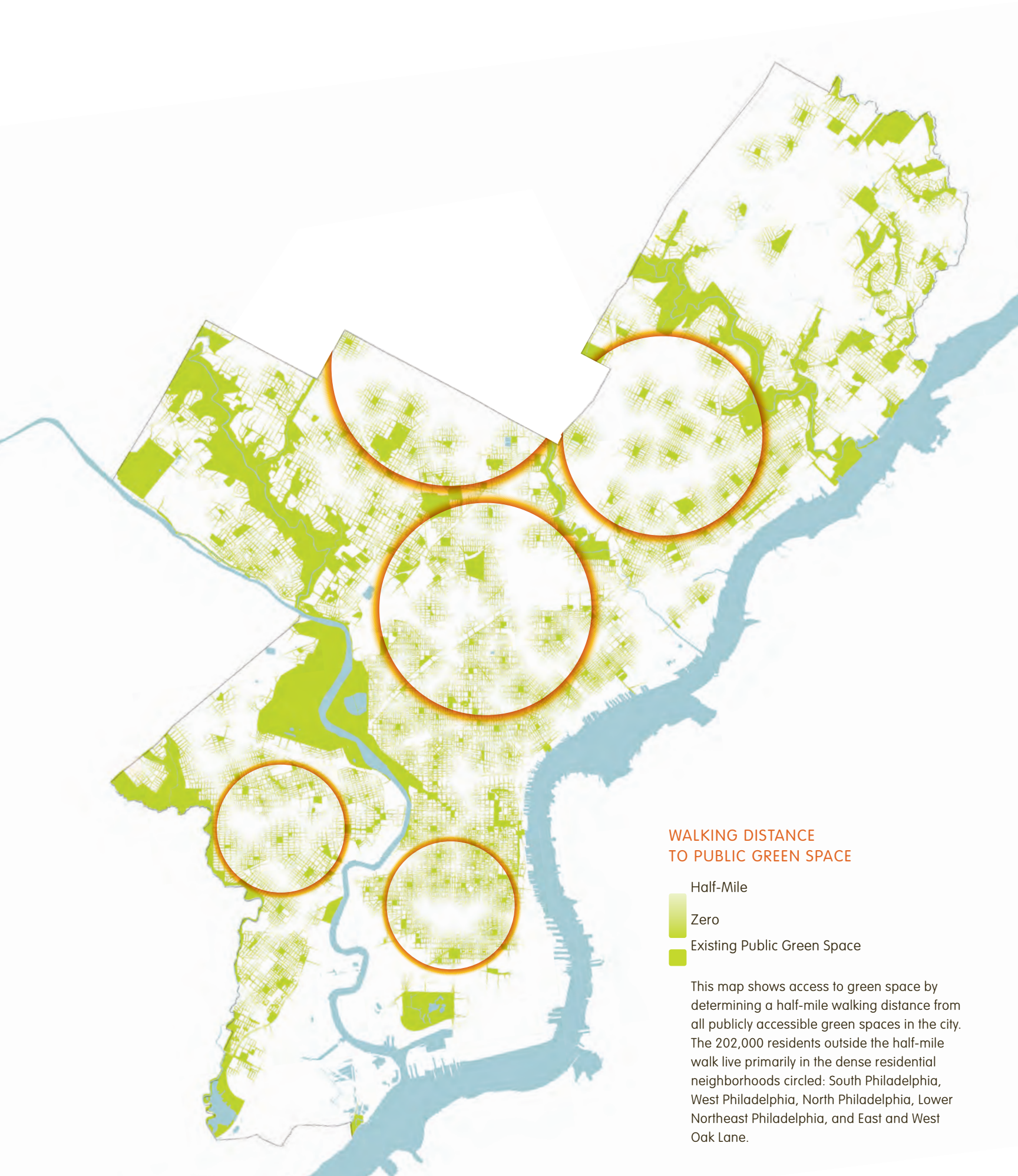
Many city agencies, nonprofit organizations, and private companies, as well as thousands of citizens, are already helping to create new green spaces in Philadelphia. In 2007, the extensive network of **volunteer and friends groups in Philadelphia contributed more than 229,000 hours of volunteer labor** working on green space, valued at \$8.6 million.² This collaboration of government, citizens, and the private sector makes it possible to give more Philadelphia residents the chance to enjoy parks.

IMPROVING HEALTH

Green space improves our overall health, reduces health-care costs, improves air quality, and saves lives. The new green stormwater infrastructure created through Green City, Clean Waters, to which Green2015's acreage will contribute, will improve air quality sufficiently to reduce the number of premature deaths in the city by an average of one to two annually, prevent about 20 asthma attacks per year, and reduce work loss or school absences by up to 250 days per year.³

PROTECTING AND RESTORING NATURE

Green space saves money by catching stormwater runoff and managing flood waters, reduces deaths caused by excessive heat, protects our drinking water, saves energy, and helps reduce the impact of climate change. Implementing the *Green City, Clean Waters* plan will produce a citywide green stormwater infrastructure network, of which Green2015's acreage are an important part. This will result in up to 1.5 billion pounds of carbon dioxide emissions avoided or absorbed over the next 40 years, the equivalent of removing close to 3,400 vehicles from Philadelphia's roadways each year.⁴



**WALKING DISTANCE
TO PUBLIC GREEN SPACE**

- Half-Mile
- Zero
- Existing Public Green Space

This map shows access to green space by determining a half-mile walking distance from all publicly accessible green spaces in the city. The 202,000 residents outside the half-mile walk live primarily in the dense residential neighborhoods circled: South Philadelphia, West Philadelphia, North Philadelphia, Lower Northeast Philadelphia, and East and West Oak Lane.

OPPORTUNITY SITES

Our top opportunities for transforming underused land into new city parks exist at recreation centers and on underutilized, publicly owned land. These public sites exist in every neighborhood across the city, and in many cases they are not living up to their full potential as vibrant centers for community use.

Within the parts of the city that do not have easy access to parks, **there are 62 acres of paved recreation centers and underused PPR land, and greening these will serve an average of 1,100 residents per new acre of park.** In these same areas, **there are 426 acres of schoolyards under the jurisdiction of the Philadelphia School District,** and greening each of these acres will serve an average of 260 residents per new acre of park. **The total student population at these schools is over 36,200 children.**

As there are about 10,000 vacant properties in the city's inventory, sites must be selected that meet a certain number of criteria to ensure that these parcels are transformed into successful parks. For example, sites must be at least one-quarter acre in size; this minimum area helps ensure that there is enough space both to catch stormwater and to serve as a recreation amenity for neighbors.⁵ There are about 558 acres of publicly owned vacant sites that are one-quarter acre in size and that are located in neighborhoods that currently lack walkable access to green

space. However, one-quarter acre is just a minimum; in reality, PPR should prioritize sites that are larger. **A full list of indicators for selecting sites for future parks can be found on page 52 of the full report.**

The Green2015 mandate for more parkland also encourages the private sector to create new green places. As of July 2010 data, the total amount of vacant land in Philadelphia is 4,100 acres, over three times the size of Center City, so plenty of land is available to ensure that all residents are within easy walking distance of a park.⁶

As a part of the process of creating *Green2015*, over 200 residents in summer 2010 participated in public forums, and their input played a central role in determining the plan's recommendations. The plan also builds on input received from thousands of others during earlier park-planning projects. The community principles that resulted help shape the citywide green vision embodied in this plan:

COMPLETE THE SYSTEM

First, serve neighborhoods with less green space, providing parks within a reasonable walking distance of all city residents.

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Create parks that enhance people's relationships and create stronger communities. Community members must work together and with PPR to make certain that their parks remain clean and safe.

THERE'S GOLD IN GREEN

Identify future green spaces that will act as catalysts for the revitalization of underutilized industrial sites, vacant land, and their surrounding communities.

LOOK BEYOND THE BEND

Any new green space created for 2015 must meet the city's long-term vision for open space.

PROTECT RESOURCES

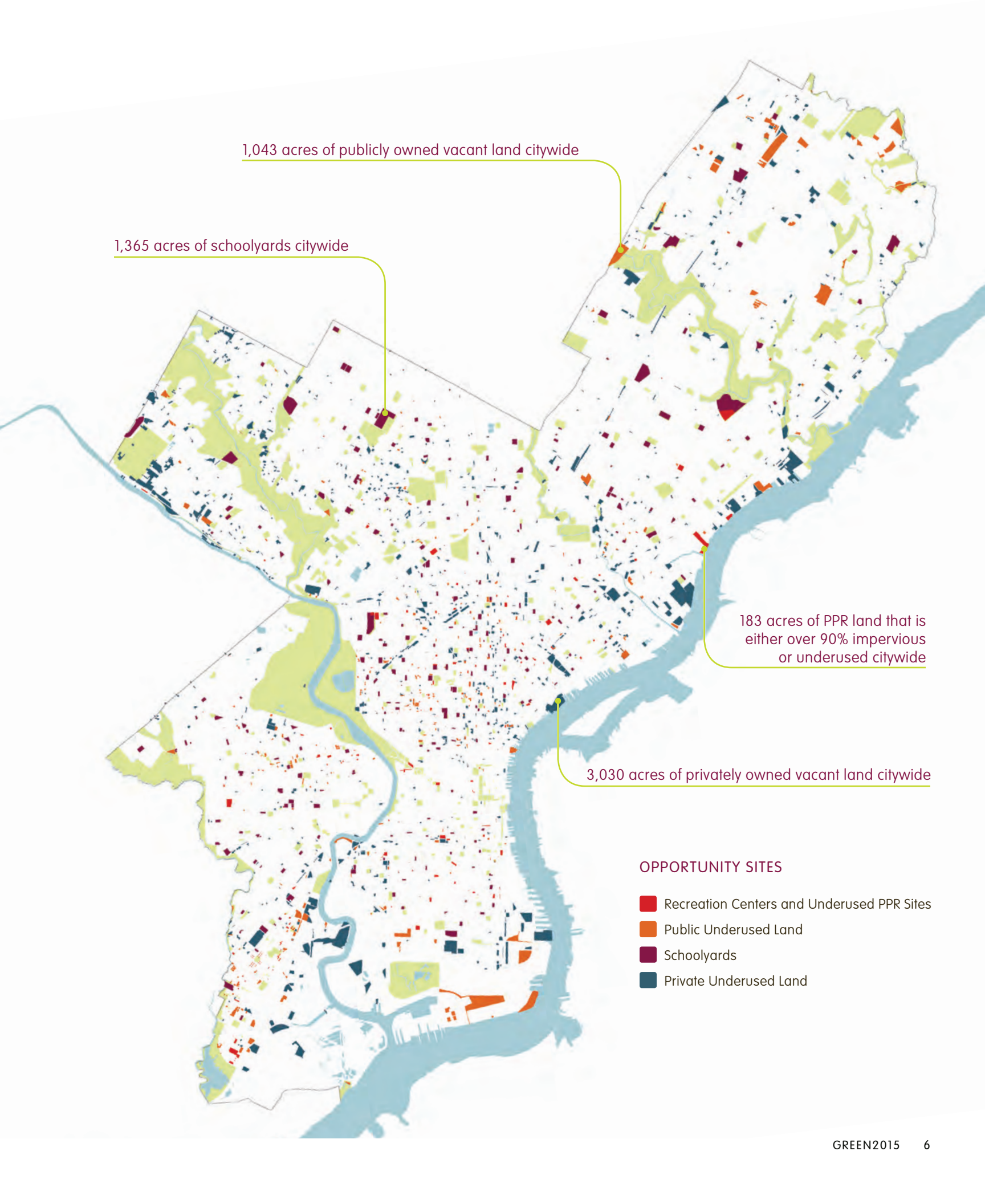
Any new green space should provide a multitude of benefits for city residents.

RESPECT DIVERSITY

Create diverse and multifunctional spaces for changing age groups, recreation types, and animal habitats.

INVESTMENT YIELDS DIVIDENDS

Raise the funds necessary to acquire, design, implement, and maintain new city parks.



1,043 acres of publicly owned vacant land citywide

1,365 acres of schoolyards citywide

183 acres of PPR land that is either over 90% impervious or underused citywide

3,030 acres of privately owned vacant land citywide

OPPORTUNITY SITES

- Red square: Recreation Centers and Underused PPR Sites
- Orange square: Public Underused Land
- Purple square: Schoolyards
- Dark blue square: Private Underused Land

HOW WE GET TO 500 ACRES

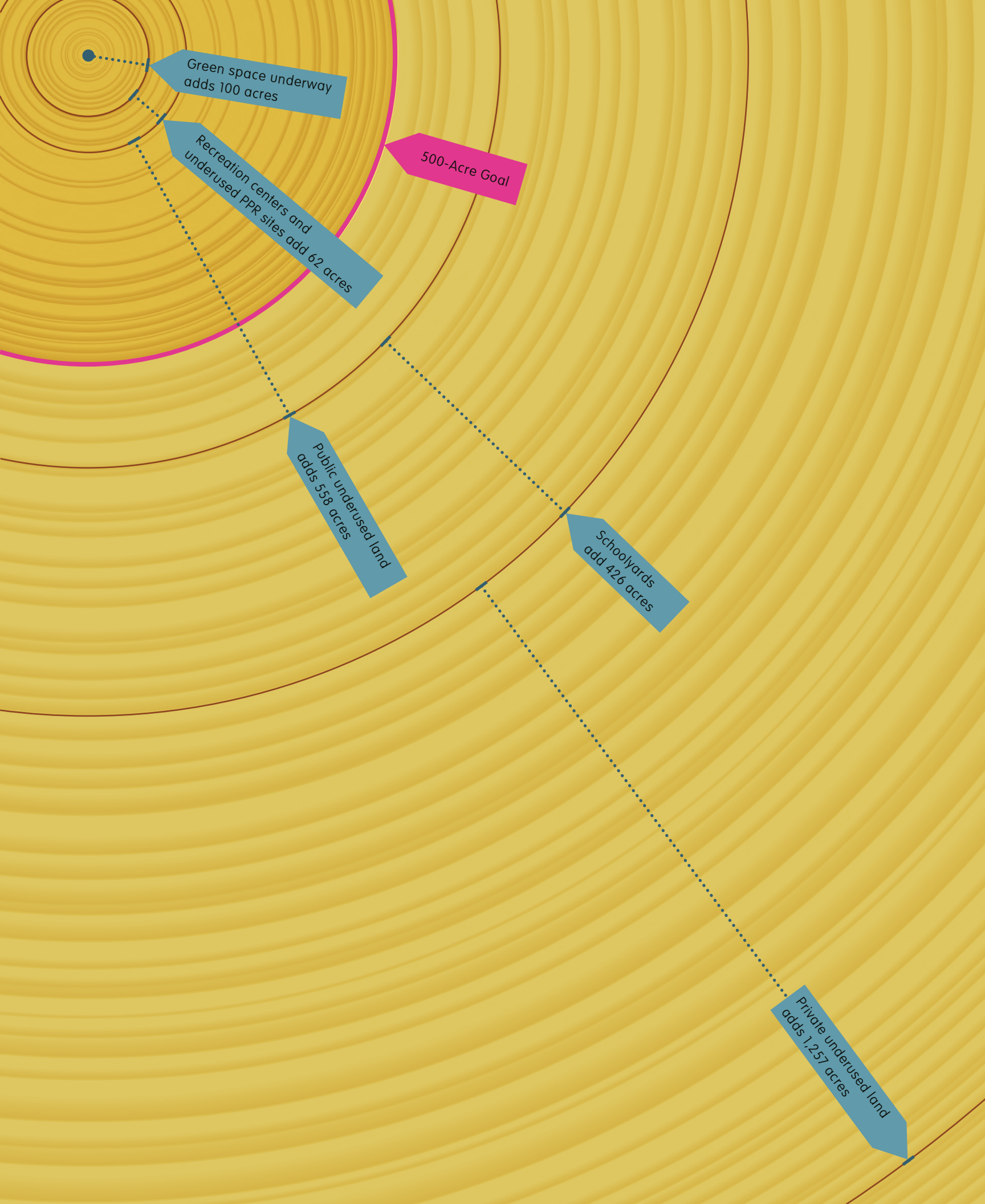
There are tens of thousands of underused parcels in Philadelphia. *Green2015* presents the results of a thoughtful approach to identifying 500 acres of land from these opportunity sites, many of which are currently harming Philadelphia's neighborhoods and costing taxpayers millions of dollars. Making some of that land into new city park space helps **remove blight, provides children and families with places to play, reduces basement flooding, and raises property values.**

The city is already well on its way to achieving the Green2015 goal. **Since Mayor Nutter took office in 2008, 100 acres have been added** to the city's green landscape, almost half of which will not or did not cost the city anything in acquisition and construction costs. If this trend continues, about 200 of the 500 acres will be added by the private sector by 2015, and the city, with various partners, will create and maintain the remaining parks through existing capital funds, innovative design solutions, and partnerships with communities and other stakeholders. These sorts of **partnerships will help add new park space to improve lives, revitalize neighborhoods, and build a better city at an affordable cost.**

PARTNER AND COLLABORATE

Creative partnerships and collaborations between the public and private sectors are already in place to achieve the goals of Green2015, including these:

- Philadelphia Water Department's Green City, Clean Waters;
- Philadelphia Department of Public Health's Get Healthy Philly;
- School District of Philadelphia's new facilities master plan;
- Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation's new focus on using green amenities to draw business and jobs to the city;
- The Philadelphia Managing Director's Office and Finance Director's Office, which include the creation of parks in their citywide strategy for managing vacant land; and
- Temple University, University of Pennsylvania, and Drexel University, which are adding new green spaces as a part of their campus expansions.



Green space underway
adds 100 acres

Recreation centers and
underused PPR sites add 62 acres

500-Acre Goal

Public underused land
adds 558 acres

Schoolyards
add 426 acres

Private underused land
adds 1,257 acres

WHAT WE CAN DO TODAY

These are some of the actions that the Philadelphia Department of Parks and Recreation can take:

- Partner with the Philadelphia Water Department's Green City, Clean Waters initiative to increase the amount of public green space in order to better manage stormwater.
- **Transform one or two recreation centers** as a demonstration project to test low-maintenance design ideas and sustainable-design practices.
- Coordinate the policy initiatives of PPR, the School District of Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Water Department, and the Philadelphia Department of Public Health to **green schoolyards and make them assets for students and neighborhoods**. This could allow schools to gain funding associated with Green City, Clean Waters and Get Healthy Philly—a measure that by itself could dramatically improve the greening of Philadelphia. One outcome of this coordination of efforts could be the creation of a list of potential demonstration sites that address the issues of access, healthy living, and stormwater management.
- Reduce the impediments to transforming schoolyards into parks. Work with the nonprofit community to help implement a citywide schoolyard greening program, building on successful pilot projects in Philadelphia as well as national programs.

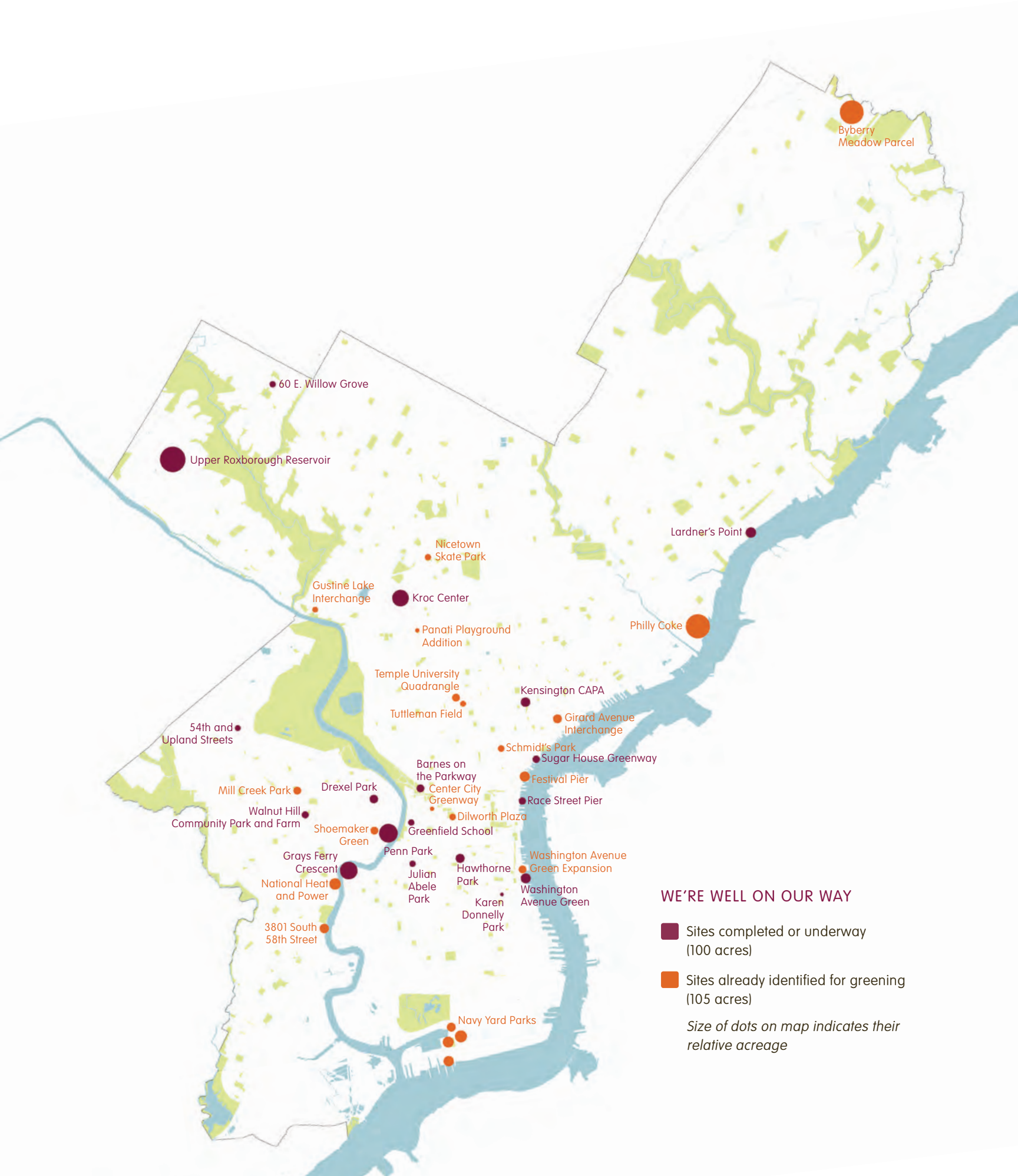
- Partner with the Managing Director's Office and the Finance Director's Office and their vacant land task force to create a streamlined process for identifying and **transforming public vacant land into public parks** and green spaces.
- Work with the Mayor's Office of Sustainability to create a database to track the progress of parks projects and identify priority sites for green space.
- Meet with the upper management of all public agencies that own land to discuss the free or low-cost transfer of publicly owned vacant land for the purpose of creating new city parks.
- Work with the Philadelphia Industrial Development Corporation to open its park spaces in the Navy Yard to the public for longer hours, and identify other PIDC-managed places in the city where park space can help support economic development.
- Coordinate with the Philadelphia Water Department and **private land-owners who have expressed interest in greening their parcels** to manage stormwater, thereby reducing their stormwater-management fees.
- Work with Philadelphia International Airport to ensure that public access is granted on a portion of the 82 acres of compensatory wetland sites in Philadelphia required as a part of its runway expansion plan.

- **Create a "rail corridor watch list"** with the Mayor's Office of Transportation, the city's Law Department, and Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission that identifies rail corridors. With this watch list, whenever a site becomes available for sale or donation, the city will be able to coordinate a purchase or an easement for a walking and biking trail. This starts us down the path of achieving the long-term goal of a connected network of green trails.

- Work with Neighborhood Gardens Association, Natural Lands Trust, and Trust for Public Land to identify possible areas in which to implement Green2015 where they would be most useful for PPR.

Citizens can help by taking part in these actions:

- Coordinate with PPR to **outline the specific needs of Friends of Parks groups** and form an agreement with PPR so that citizens can receive support and training in how to improve and maintain their parks.
- Encourage large landowners to dedicate a portion of their lands for new park space.
- **Work with state and local elected officials** to protect existing public parks and to gain funding for the expansion and maintenance of existing spaces.
- **Bring existing neighborhood plans to PPR** to identify what parcels in each neighborhood would be best used as park space (based on the criteria on page 52) and could be created by 2015. Coordinate these efforts with the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's district plans as they get underway.
- **Identify vacant land** that poses a public nuisance and a potential nonprofit conservator to gain control of the land and create a future park under the Pennsylvania Abandoned and Blighted Property Conservatorship Act.



WE'RE WELL ON OUR WAY

■ Sites completed or underway (100 acres)

■ Sites already identified for greening (105 acres)

Size of dots on map indicates their relative acreage

BEYOND 2015

The 500 acres of park space that will be added by 2015 within the city limits represents a great start to the city's transformation into a green city. The map at right, described in fuller detail in the full report, shows **a vision for a greener Philadelphia that is tied to the city's 25-year comprehensive plan**. Each feature on the map represents a proposed green trail designed to connect our parks to neighborhoods citywide. Connecting Philadelphians to parks is the path to a healthier and more competitive Philadelphia in the 21st century. **Green2015 is a smart road map to a green Philadelphia**. It updates the meaning of "park space" for the 21st century and rethinks the future of Philadelphia's park system.

RIVERS AND CREEKS

Complete all watershed parks and river trails to ensure continued public access for pedestrians and cyclists.

HISTORIC STREAMS

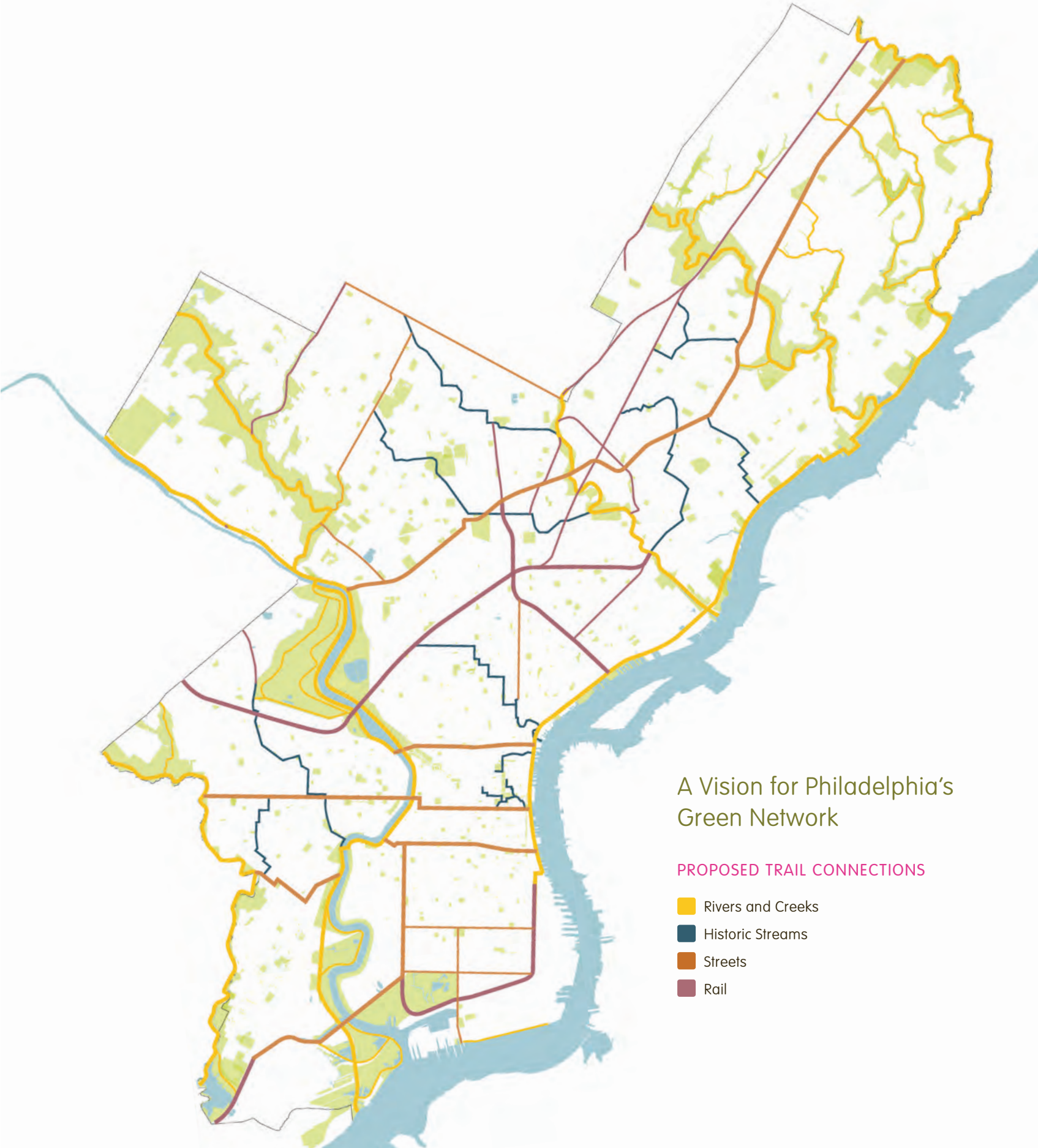
Create small-scale bicycle and pedestrian corridors following the course of a historic stream. "Creek walks" typically connect multiple streets with coherent streetscape, signage, and where possible a separated bike path.

STREETS

Provide on-grade bicycle and pedestrian routes to existing parks following a street right of way, with varying levels of separation depending on the width of the roadway.

RAIL

Use existing rail corridors (some active, some vacated) to create major, separated bicycle and pedestrian connections that link citizens to existing waterfront parks and that contain significant planting.



A Vision for Philadelphia's Green Network

PROPOSED TRAIL CONNECTIONS

- Rivers and Creeks
- Historic Streams
- Streets
- Rail

ENDNOTES

1. *Green City, Clean Waters: The City of Philadelphia's Program for Combined Sewer Overflow Control*, Philadelphia Water Department (September 1, 2009).
2. *Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System*, The Trust for Public Land Center for City Park Excellence, 2003, http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=22879&folder_id=3208
3. *Green City, Clean Waters*.
4. Ibid.
5. The Water Department identifies its "priority" sites as those with a minimum drainage area of 9,000 square feet, made up from the impervious site cover and adjacent streets, appropriate topography and site drainage, and adjacent infrastructure to be used for overflow. The site must be able to provide one-tenth of the drainage area for stormwater-management purposes. Smaller sites would be considered on a case-by-case basis.
6. Vacant land data courtesy of Philadelphia City Planning Commission (September 16, 2010).

PHOTO CITATIONS

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All of the photographs in this document were taken by PennPraxis staff Andrew Goodman, Michael Miller, Harris Steinberg, and Maria Tranguch, with the following exceptions:

- "Tom the Gardener." Photograph. Tony the Misfit. Available from flickr: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/tonythemisfit/3495664861/>. Accessed 8 November 2010.
- "Carroll Park kids running" and "carroll-park-cit-bank 064." Photographs. Philadelphia Green Collection, courtesy of Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. (Reproduced with Permission)
- "Penn Treaty Park Frisbee." Photograph. Penn Treaty Park Collection, courtesy of New Kensington Community Development Corporation. (Reproduced with Permission)

